

## Disturbing the Familiar

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For most people, daily life is constructed of habitual actions, repeated conversations and small journeys, patterns of behaviour woven around ourselves day after day to form the web of our material existence. An extension of the psychological cocoon we begin building as small children, incorporating our way of forgetting or remembering experiences, as well as our response to secrets, lies and traumatic memories. To conceal these painful realities we often create protective fictions for self-preservation, veils of denial and deception buried deep in our subconscious.

Greer Honeywill's artworks represent distillations of these ideas, linking her interests in the form and psychological dimensions of architecture and domesticity with notions of constraint and repressed emotion. Her work explores the tension between the surface and the shadow of everyday life, from the patterns of light and dark cast by urban architecture to the unspoken secrets we each conceal. Our earliest memories are often connected to our experiences of home and the domestic environment, and it is unsurprising that this also forms the site for our earliest experiences of trauma.

Honeywill's found objects are eloquent mechanisms with which to explore these ideas. Scavenged second-hand kitchenware, toys and other domestic objects suggest narratives of their previous use and carry echoes of the viewer's own past. The collective memories embodied within these objects become potent materials for Honeywill who understands their power to generate associations with childhood and home for many viewers. Presenting these objects alongside elements that hint at a lurking menace, Honeywill provokes a disturbing sense of apprehension by tapping into our collective unconscious and secret fears.

According to Freudian psychology, a particular kind of fear, a creeping dread, is generated when something, which has been familiar becomes alien or unfamiliar. Freud's *Uncanny* - in German *unheimlich* - is literally translated as 'un-homelike' and carries strong associations with the domestic environment. *Heimlich* has two quite different connotations: the familiar and agreeable on the one hand, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept from view. The *un-heimlich* or negative response occurs when doubt arises in relation to our memories of the

familiar, or when a taboo (or concealed transgression) is suggested. It is in this space of uncertainty that Honeywill's artworks operate to disturb and unsettle the viewer.

*Peep* (2012) brings together the two seemingly incompatible conceptions of Freud's *Uncanny*; that of the positive sense of the familiar and safe home environment, and the negative sense of the hidden, secret and furtive. The charming proportions and façade of the 1950s doll's house conjure notions of the ideal home; comfortable, harmonious and functional. Like curious passers-by, our gaze is drawn irresistibly to the interior through the uncovered windows. The shadowy spaces are empty but eerily illuminated, suggesting something hidden from view and shifting the viewer from a position of comfortable recognition to an unsettled anxiety. As with much of Honeywill's work, the presence of the body is represented indirectly, through allusion, coded references, or in this case through light.

In *Evidence* (2003-2012), a small chair is placed at a distance from a white padded table. Scattered beneath the table lie cake tins, frying pans and other kitchen utensils from which emerge beautifully crafted wooden forms. Each resembles a whimsical architectural model or perhaps a tiny modernist birdcage, and the arrangement conjures memories of childhood play and the early fascination with domestic objects. The seductiveness of Honeywill's objects draw the viewer into a relationship with the work in which their own childhood memories are activated. The power of this work comes partly from its scale which imitates the mother/child relationship, but also from the way in which the familiar is reinvented as the unfamiliar. The padded table's soft allure is suggestive of the comfort and security of the home environment, but also the padded cell. The sharpness of the objects beneath the table, which at first have the benign appeal of toys, become more menacing as the viewer more closely identifies themselves within the work. By making these objects strange, the cosiness of the familiar and homely is transformed into something more disturbing, evoking a psychological environment of superficial control and repressed emotion.

Honeywill's installations are often beguiling constructions which seduce the viewer into closer engagement. Since 2005 the artist has worked extensively with found birdcages, beginning with the exhibition *She Had Many Offers of Marriage* (Castlemaine State Festival, Post Office Installation Series, 2005), through to the most recent iteration, *Arcadia* (2012). Laden with the symbolism of desire and imprisoned beauty, the birdcage works have previously projected narratives of love, loss, freedom and containment as in *Architecture of the Heart #1-#3* (2008-2012).

With *Arcadia* (2012), the artist has taken this ongoing project in a new direction. Deconstructing the cages, Honeywill has reconfigured their two-dimensional components into a six metre long assemblage resembling an urban cityscape. Dramatically lit, the work shifts between the material object and its shadow. Videos of reflections captured by small birdcage mirrors, swaying and turning in the breeze, reverse the gaze from within the cage back out at the viewer. Ethereal vocals, sometimes barely audible, add to the indistinct suggestions of what lies beyond. *Arcadia's* architectural references, haunting sound and shadowy dimensions construct an unconventional interpretation of the traditional Arcadian concept. Instead of an idyllic, pastoral paradise, contemporary Arcadia for the artist incorporates the possibility of 'the scribbled, hidden beauty within the built form of busy cities, streetscapes and alleys in which concealment and revelation are both possible'.

In *Secrets (and lies)* (2010- ), Honeywill shifts to a more personal, rather than collective, psychological focus. Enclosed within a booth, visitors can sit and listen to the often-harrowing secrets (or possibly lies) which have been donated to the artist since she began this work. Visitors are also encouraged to unburden themselves by contributing their own personal confession as an anonymous note placed in a locked box within the exhibition. The bravest of these are subsequently recorded using an actor's voice and added to the ever changing *Secrets (and lies)* sound loop.

*Veiled* brings together works spanning many years of Honeywill's practice which reflect the artist's exploration of the interconnectedness of architecture and domesticity with our deepest unconscious and patterns of behaviour. While in the past she has drawn the audience to her storytelling with a balance of theatrical humour, optimism and darkness, her recent expansion into territory of literal disclosure brings new insights into the darker psychological aspects and layers of meaning that live below the manicured surfaces of her works. By presenting the works together in this way, Honeywill offers us all opportunities for revelation about that which we conceal personally, and encourages a reflection, and perhaps shedding, of the veils of memory and perception that mediate our lives.

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