

Hands On

For most of us, when we think of art, we think of traditional mediums like painting, sculpture, drawing, photography and print making. In recent decades, video art, installations, ephemeral works, sound works, text works, light works, performance pieces and innumerable combinations of these methods and materials have been added to the mix.

Works of art bear witness to and indeed provide evidence of the circumstances in which artists find themselves and are a reflection of their preoccupations. The method by which an artwork is made can be equally as important, and is often a reflection of the idea itself.

In this era of rapid technological advancement, ironically an increasing number of artists are electing to engage in modes of production more commonly associated with home crafts, which can be described as methods of making things for the domestic environment with a utilitarian or decorative purpose for which no specialist, tertiary or technical training is required.

Hands On incorporates a rich variety of materials; including recycled plastics, rubber tubing, yarn, human hair, leather, recycled textiles, shredded telephone books, doilies, cane toad skins, handkerchiefs and natural grasses. From knitting and leather craft to tapestry and weaving, an array of unlikely or even denigrated methods are used with great skill, and often wit, to produce works of depth, meaning

and cultural relevance. There is humility in the painstaking and often laborious production of many of these works, resulting in an almost monastic quality. A conceptual depth and rigor is present, minus the flamboyant expressive gestures often associated with painting, drawing and sculpture.

Hands On is conceived as tribute to the richness, variety and the significant underlying concepts of artists who have consistently utilised home crafts in their professional practice. It surveys works from artists whose work has come to my attention over the years from local and regional emerging artists to well known artists with international reputations. While many of these artists also utilise other modes of production such as video, performance and digital media, this exhibition focuses solely on their *Hands On* approach, and their rationale behind doing so.

What drives this type of engagement? Rather than provide a long-winded essay about outmoded art/craft debates and viewpoints, I feel that relying on the intention of the makers and the context of these works provides a sufficient response. Each artist has their own story to tell and the answers to this are as diverse as the works they produce.

Cash Brown
Curator, *Hands On*