

SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

Kate Newby

A rock in this pocket., 2018, on Cockatoo Island. See also *I'm actually weirdly exciting*, 2018, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales

21st Biennale

of Sydney



Two aspirins a vitamin C tablet and some baking soda, 2015 (detail)
bricks, pennies, coins, silver, porcelain stones, aluminium, glass
Courtesy the artist and Michael Lett, Auckland
Photograph: Fredrik Nilson

For her new site-specific work at Cockatoo Island, Kate Newby has modified approximately 900 house bricks. The bricks are laid as a large flat surface, replacing a section of the enclosed courtyard of Cockatoo Island's Convict Precinct. Newby's response to this environment is also to embed the bricks with small objects and inscribed markings.

By working with the everyday, and moving from the large scale of architectural space to small objects and marks made by hand in the bricks, Newby asks us to look closely at details and intimate and commonplace objects, as well as the spaces we take for granted. This play between large and small, and inside and outside, is extended through the 'building blocks' of architecture, and against the conventions of the traditional exhibition space.

Titled *A rock in this pocket.*, the work asks us to look at the familiar differently; at ordinary spaces, not just objects designated as art and framed by the cultural institutions and traditional forms. This is emphasised by its location at a historical site on Cockatoo Island, rather than a gallery space.

Questions for Discussion

1. What small keepsakes do you have from your childhood?
2. What do they mean to you? How do they remind you of other important times?
3. Can you imagine that other people have kept – or lost – similar things?
4. How might you express these personal stories visually?

Reference Points

Personal histories, and the ideas and practices of collection, inform Newby's work. She is also very aware of the conventions of display that the art market and museums use to frame art and give meaning to art objects. By asking us to look at these systems differently, her work breaks down the barriers between artwork and audience, inviting us to have a very personal experience of her commentary on everyday life. She brings the artwork to us, rather than reproducing the conventions of gallery spaces. At the same time, she is responding to a site and entering into dialogue with specific histories, aspects of society and the meanings of architecture and space.

Her work can be considered alongside other approaches artists have used to comment on institutions and society. Some such artists include previous participants in Biennale of Sydney exhibitions, listed here alongside the years of their inclusion: Arman (1979, 1990), Joseph Beuys (1976, 1979, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1992, 2008), Marcel Broodthaers (1979, 1990), Daniel Buren (1979), Marcel Duchamp (1988, 1990, 2008), Julie Gough (2006), Renata Lucas (2008) and Annette Messager (1979, 1984, 1990).

Practices and Processes

To explore these kinds of processes you will need a personal or shared group collection of objects to work from, and a variety of materials. If you work as a group, you can approximate the scale of Newby's work in the studio or classroom and see the way scale changes the impact of the work. Newby is directing us to think about things outside the museum space, so consider how you might translate that into your own studio and presentation context.

Drawing

Create a set of drawings of small objects; they might be things you have in your pocket, your bag, or things from your home. Use the same materials, style and scale to develop the work as a series: you might develop fine tonal drawings, colour illustrations, or black-and-white graphic images. How does the style of the drawing help define the meaning implied by the work? Do the drawings

feel like they are from a previous time? Or do they look like contemporary advertising or publications?

Photography

Photography is a great way to give importance to details. How close up can you photograph your objects before they become hard to see? Do they become abstract fragments? What is the tension between abstraction and the recognition of the content of the image? You may need a camera rather than a camera phone to take close-up photographs. You could crop them even further on your computer. Print a selection the same size and present them as a collection.

Sculpture

In drawing and photographing the objects, you can make a two-dimensional interpretation of your collection. With clay, make a collection of three-dimensional copies, including making multiples of each object. How

does the work change by increasing the number of elements in your collection? If you arrange them in a grid, do they begin to echo museum conventions? How else could you present them?

