

rivus  
23rd biennale of sydney  
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# 50 years of New Materials

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Jessie French, A Sea at the Table, 2021, from the series 'Algae bioplastic tableware', algaebased bioplastic developed by the artist, dimensions variable. Installation view for A Sea at the Table (2021) at Other Matter Studio, Melbourne. Supported by the City of Melbourne's Creative Spaces program and BASF. Courtesy of the artist. Copyright © Jessie French and The Design Files. Photograph: Amelia Stanwix.

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# Introduction

This archival resource has been created to help learners and educators engage with distinct art making methods that are integral to the 23rd Biennale of Sydney, rīvus and across our 50-year history of delivering cutting-edge exhibitions in Australia. It is part of a larger project Liquid Languages that features participant videos, active exercises and archival PowerPoints that encourages learners to engage deeply with their local context and to map the water stories of their local environments.

50-years of New Materials charts the shifts and developments in approaches to art making across time, geography and space and aims to expand students’ understanding of what New Materials can be. The resource also demonstrate to learners and educators the diverse ways themes such as Found Material, Sound, Mapping, Words and New Materials have been dealt with by artists and creative practitioners and intends to inspire new methods of making and reflection in formal and informal classrooms.

50-years of New Materials is available for free download on the Biennale of Sydney’s website, and may be used to support a school visit to the exhibition, as a stand-alone tool or in learners and educators participation in our larger education project Liquid Languages. Educators are encouraged to adapt questions, focused artists and supporting activities to suit the interests and needs of the learner and to integrate this resource into other areas of study.

How can we create  
'New Materials' to  
make art with?

Things to consider



# 9th Biennale of Sydney (1992-93)

## Orlan

Born 1947 in Saint Etienne, France

Lives and works in Paris, France and Los Angeles, USA

Orlan is a feminist artists who works at the juncture of multimedia and performance using her body as material – a site for social action and reaction. She is most known for her radical performances where she undertakes plastic surgery to change her appearance. Through her practice, Orlan celebrates the possibility of blurring the boundaries between art and life. For the Biennale of Sydney, she created video installation with four monitors in the ceiling which will show the process of her transformation. Alongside the video installation, reliquaries from her operations were displayed. Additionally, a forum on ABC Radio National took place where ideas and issues raised in the work were discussed with a surgeon, a psychiatrist and a feminist theorist.



Orlan, *Untitled*, 1992, video installation. Installation view of the 9th Biennale of Sydney (1992-1993)





Orlan, *Untitled*, 1992, video installation. Installation view of the 9th Biennale of Sydney (1992-1993).



Why is it important  
to create 'New  
Materials' for the  
world?

Things to consider



# 15th Biennale of Sydney (2006)

## Julie Gough

Born 1965 in Melbourne, Australia

Lives and works in Hobart, Australia

Unsettledness is palpable in Julie Gough's work, as she oscillates between uncovering scars of violent encounter in Australia's wrongly-commenced national history and rendering tangible her memory of and longing for the she-oak and tea-tree country of coastal north-east Tasmania: her spiritual mainspring. At the core of much of Julie Gough's practice is a deep sense of disquiet, occasioned by the realisation that Australia is still enmeshed in dialogues of invasion, control and silencing. Gough teases out instances of historical deception and injustice, located in place, time and actuality, and renders them as three-dimensional installations that stand up and face the viewer. Alternatively, constructions of weathered driftwood, abalone shell, bull kelp, or tea-tree reveal her Tasmanian identity: multiple organic forms cast silent shadows of beauty and truth.



Julie Gough, *Craft for floating Home*, 1992, installation with cuttlefish, pumice, coconuts, manila rope, etc.  
Installation view of the 15th Biennale of Sydney (2006) at location TBC.



# 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014)

**Mikala Dwyer**

Born 1959 in Sydney, Australia

Lives and works in Sydney, Australia

Mikala Dwyer sculpts air. She wrestles emptiness into forms; heating transparent, acrylic material to produce a kind of exoskeleton, which she bulks, pushes and humps into misshapen, body-memory masses. Her sculptures seem weightless, yet fill space with the trace of the effort that has created them. Created especially for the Naval Store 2 building in the Docks Precinct on Cockatoo Island, squeezed in-between the building's steel upright pillars, Dwyer's Large and lumpy *The Hollows*, 2014, fights for its own space, and occupies it in an act of bravura. Her shapes may seem fragile because of their transparency, but they are, like the methodology that has made them, strong, resilient and prepared to risk seeming Impermanent in the face of immutable architecture.



Mikala Dwyer, *The Hollows*, 2014, plastic and air, dimensions variable. Installation view of the 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014) at Cockatoo Island. Courtesy the artist; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne. Photograph: Tai Spruyt





Mikala Dwyer, *The Hollows*, 2014, plastic and air, dimensions variable. Installation view of the 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014) at Cockatoo Island. Courtesy the artist; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne. Photograph: Tai Spruyt



How might the creation  
of ‘New Materials’  
change the way we  
interact with our  
environment and each  
other?

Things to consider



# 23rd Biennale of Sydney (2022)

## Living Seawalls

Established in 2018 in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia

Living Seawalls is revolutionising the way we build in our oceans and the result of more than 20 years of scientific research into the unique ecology of natural shorelines and artificial structures. Through innovative design that combines ecological and engineering expertise with visual aesthetics, we have developed an adaptable and affordable mechanism of bringing marine life back to coastal developments in the most urbanised places in the world. Living Seawalls is a flagship programme of the Sydney Institute of Marine Science and is a collaboration between marine ecologists from UNSW and Macquarie University, and industrial designer Alex Goad of Reef Design Lab.



Living Seawalls, *Rockpool panel* (detail) with barnacles, oysters & seaweed, 2019. Installation at Sawmillers Reserve, Sydney. Photograph: Leah Wood. Copyright © Leah Wood





Living Seawalls, *Panels with oysters*, 2021. Installation at Sawmillers Reserve, Sydney. Photograph: Aria Lee. Copyright © Aria Lee



# 23rd Biennale of Sydney (2022)

## Jessie French

Born 1959 in Sydney, Australia

Lives and works in Sydney, Australia

Jessie French explores speculative futures through algae-based bioplastic and water based ecologies. Housed within an ethos of consumption, sustainability and regeneration, her practice invites others to engage with the possibilities of a post petrochemical world. Through experimenting with other materials, she explores the potential of closed-loop systems of (re)use and conscious consumption and interaction with objects. In 2020, French founded OTHER MATTER, an experimental design studio working with algae-based bioplastics which engages others in the possibilities of new materials through objects, experiences and futures. *Algae* (2021) from the series 'Transparent two-tone microalgae bowl' is an example of French's algae based bioplastic using whole microalgae pigment.



Jessie French, *Algae*, 2021, from the series 'Transparent two-tone microalgae bowl', Algaebased bioplastic developed by the artist, whole microalgae pigment: *Athrospira platensis*, 5 x 14.5 cm. Supported by Art director: Thalia Economo. Courtesy of the artist. Copyright © Jessie French. Photograph: Pier Carthew.





Jessie French, A Sea at the Table, 2021, from the series 'Algae bioplastic tableware', algaebased bioplastic developed by the artist, dimensions variable. Installation view for A Sea at the Table (2021) at Other Matter Studio, Melbourne. Supported by the City of Melbourne's Creative Spaces program and BASF. Courtesy of the artist. Copyright © Jessie French and The Design Files. Photograph: Amelia Stanwix.



Installation view for A Sea at the Table (2021) at Other Matter Studio, Melbourne. Courtesy Jessie French and Fluff Corp. Photograph: Amelia Stanwix.



# Activity | Micro Worlds

This activity invites us to each reflect on our relationships with other species and to create imaginative habitats for species to thrive. Consider the work of Living Sea Walls (2022) and Jessie French (2022) as a rich jumping off point to commence the design process.

1. Select a species that is small and lives in the ocean. Consider how the works of Living Sea Walls and Jessie French could be reimaged as places and spaces for animals to live safely.
2. Using natural materials create an ideal habitat for your selected species. Consider how this species exists in the world and try and base your design on these observations. Does it enjoy light? Heat? Small spaces? Damp edges? How can you embed these into your creation?
3. Draw or build your Micro World. Think of this as a prototype!
4. Display all prototype around the learning space. Each take turns guessing who and what each Micro World can be built for.
5. Reflect upon what you have learnt about tiny creature in our waters based on their new and sustainable homes.