



PRETTY AIR AND USEFUL THINGS

DAN BELL | SANNÉ MESTROM | ALEX VIVIAN

Professor Shane Murray, Chair, and Max Delany, Director, MUMA, cordially invite you to the opening of *Pretty Air and Useful Things*.

Focussing on invisible forces, transgressive processes, and anarchic approaches to materials in sculptural practice, *Pretty Air and Useful Things* invokes the magnetism and friction of objects, and our relationship to them. Featuring artists Dan Bell, Sanné Mestrom and Alex Vivian, *Pretty Air and Useful Things* presents

sculptural and installation works that reference the body through form, clothing, stains or scent; and the utilitarian via elements of design and commodity. In the spaces between are processes of speculation, transference, fermentation, connection, function and distortion. Using a combination of found, adapted and handmade materials, the intangible, perhaps mystical, qualities of objects are suggested.

Curator: Rosemary Forde

EXHIBITION DATES
19 July – 22 September 2012

OPENING FUNCTION
SATURDAY 21 JULY 2012
3PM–5PM

Monash University Museum of Art
Caulfield Campus

PUBLIC PROGRAMS
Tuesday 31 July, 1–2pm

Dan Bell, Sanné Mestrom
and Alex Vivian in conversation
with Rosemary Forde

Monash University Museum of Art,
Caulfield Campus

Free event

For further details and additional
public programs see
www.monash.edu.au/muma/events

MONASH UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART
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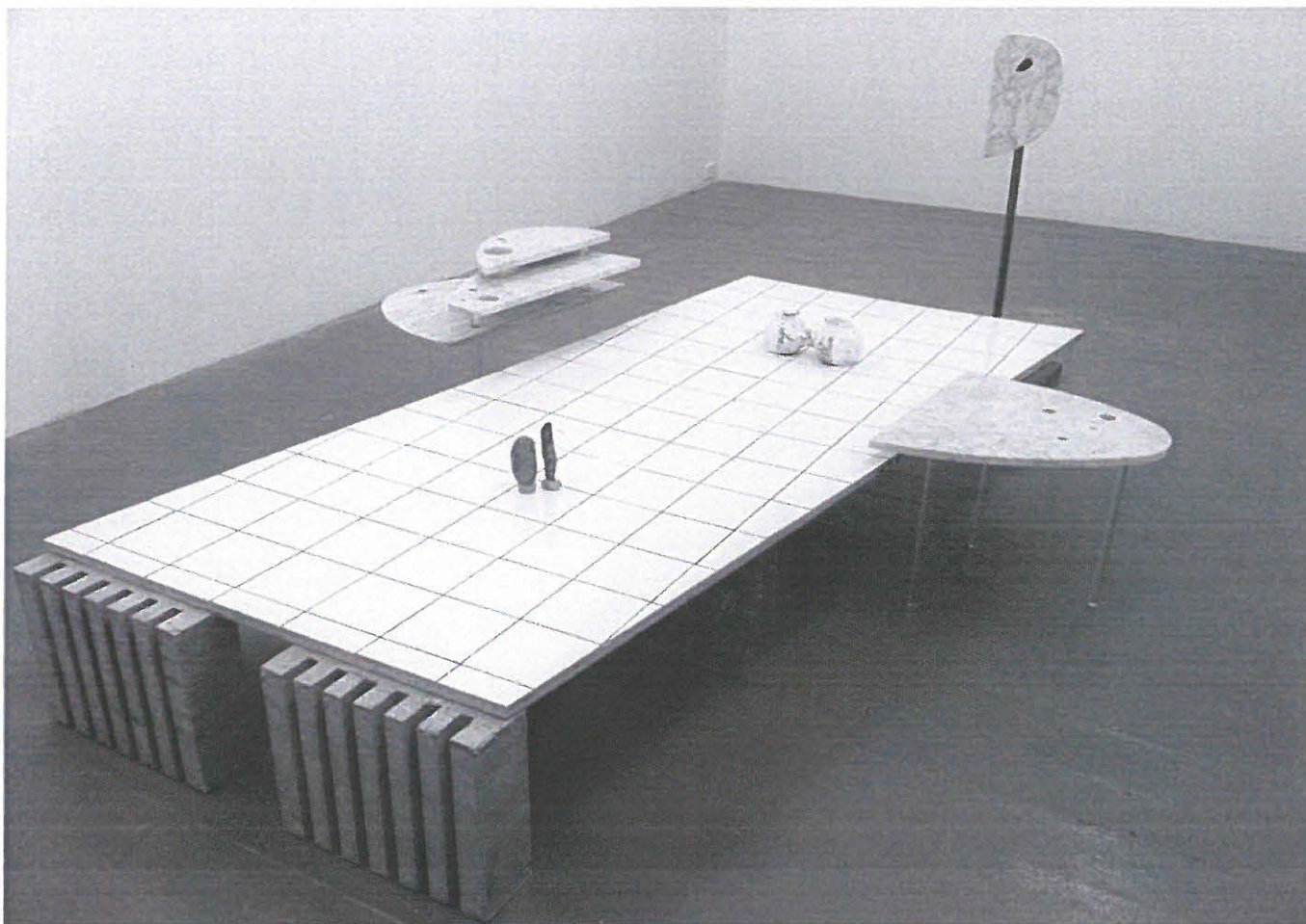
19 JULY – 22 SEPTEMBER 2012
CURATOR: ROSEMARY FORDE

 **MONASH University**
Museum of Art

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Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 12–5pm

Dan Bell, *Channeling to free the hand
of chance 2a11 (detail)*
Courtesy of the artist



INTRODUCTION

Focussing on the invisible forces, transgressive processes, and anarchic approaches to materials in sculptural practice, *Pretty Air and Useful Things* invokes the magnetism and friction of objects, and our relationship to them. Featuring artists Dan Bell, Sanné Mestrom and Alex Vivian, *Pretty Air and Useful Things* presents sculptural and installation works that reference the body through form, clothing, stains or scent; and the utilitarian via elements of design and commodity. In the spaces between are processes of speculation, transference, fermentation, connection, function and distortion. Using a combination of found, adapted and handmade materials, the intangible, perhaps mystical, qualities of objects are suggested.

CATALOGUE

Pretty Air and Useful Things will be accompanied by a 16 page illustrated catalogue featuring texts by curator Rosemary Forde and Melbourne artist Kate Smith.

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MEDIA

For all media enquiries please contact Rosemary Forde on rosemary.forde@monash.edu

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

DAN BELL

Born in Canberra 1986, lives and works in Melbourne.

Dan Bell studied at the ANU School of Art and completed a Bachelor of Visual Art in 2006. Bell's object and installation work is informed by an anarchic approach to materials and his parallel practice as a jewellery maker. Referencing the visual language of commodified desire and lifestyle, Bell's work complicates notions of value.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Alluvial Atomiser*, Rice and Beans, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2011; *Pwdre slurr*, Y3K Gallery, Melbourne, 2010; *Tectonic Shivering*, TCB art inc., Melbourne, 2009; and *Sperlunking*, Hell Gallery, Melbourne, 2008.

Selected group exhibitions include: *Impossible Objects I*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2011; *Rock Solid*, Pieces of Eight, Melbourne, 2011; *Food Networks*, PSH Gallery, Rozelle, NSW, 2011; *Territorial Pissings*, Utopian Slumps, 2010; *De Tetr's Totems*, Sutton Project Space, Melbourne, 2010; *Verses Vs. Verses*, Rear View, Melbourne, 2009; *New World Records*, Sutton Gallery, 2009; *Informal Rituals*, TCB art inc., 2008; and *Getting it Done Last Minute*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, 2007.



SANNÉ MESTROM

Born in the Netherlands 1979, moved to New Zealand 1983, lives and works in Victoria.

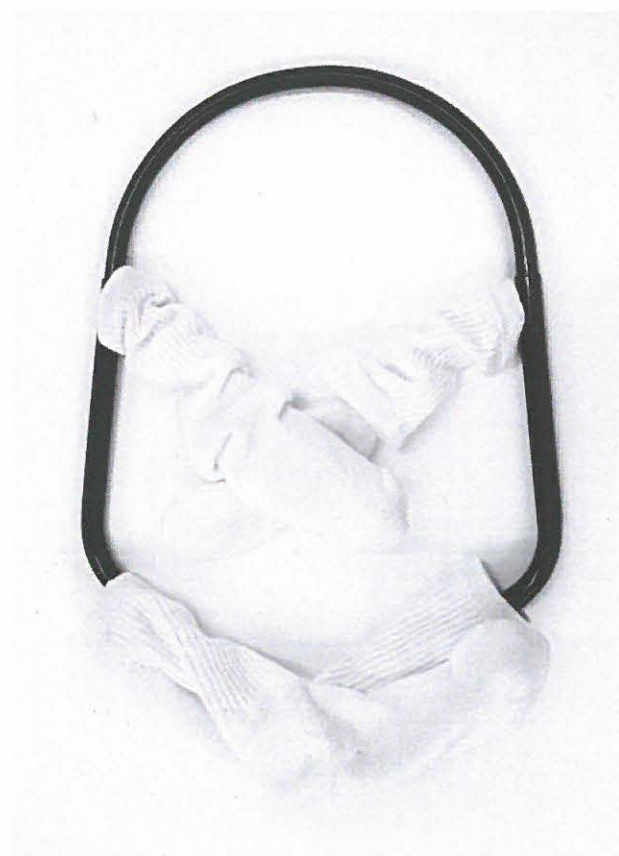
Mestrom holds a PhD in Fine Art (2008) and a Graduate Certificate in Public Art (2011), both from RMIT University. She was a studio artist at Gertrude Contemporary in 2010-11, and has also held residencies in Mexico City, 2010, and Seoul, South Korea, 2001.

Mestrom's work with objects often involves invisible forces, references to art and cultural history, and explorations of the psychological or emotional significance attributed to objects. Her recent sculptural installations have included a mix of found objects, casts and copies, bringing the context and meaning of objects and materials into play.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *The Reclining Nude*, Chalk Horse, Sydney, 2012 and Studio 12, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 2011; *Shaker Peg*, Chalk Horse, 2010; *Things fall down. Sometimes we look up.*, Chalk Horse, 2009; and *Certain Sacrifices*, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne, 2008.

Selected group exhibitions include: *Figure & Ground*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2012; *OCTOPUS 11: The Matter of Air*, Gertrude Contemporary, 2011; *Social Sculpture*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney, 2011; *An ideal for living*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne, 2008; and *Standing on the shoulders of giants (with Kate Newby)*, Münster, Germany, 2007.

See also: www.mestrom.org



ALEX VIVIAN

Born in Melbourne 1981, lives and works in Melbourne.

Vivian studied at the Victorian College of the Arts and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Art in 2005. He was a studio artist at Gertrude Contemporary in 2010-11.

Alex Vivian makes installation works that typically involve domestic objects and items of clothing that, having been altered via transgressive processes, are removed from their original function. Whether installed in sprawling arrangements scattered throughout the exhibition space, or, as in more recent works, displayed as singular sculptural elements relying on the visual language of museum plinths, Vivian's work is steeped in references to the body.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Men's apparel, distressed*, Craft Victoria, 2012; *An oversized jacket, jeans that fit*, Hopkinson Cundy, Auckland, New Zealand, 2011; *A Face; falling beyond (Classic, plinth, socks)*, Studio 12, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 2011; and *Catcher/ tube socks. (Ewok, kyote, baby fred flinstone, scamp, Quix bunny in the rye.)*, Gambia Castle, Auckland, 2010.

Selected group exhibitions include: *Pulp tongue*, Sydney College of the Arts, 2011; *State of decay*, Chapman & Bailey, Melbourne, 2011; *One-Person Group Therapy*, BWA Awangarda Gallery, Wrocław, Poland, 2011; *Stolen Library*, Y3K Gallery, Melbourne, 2010; *Canadian Pharmacy*, Neon Parc, Melbourne, 2010; *'tastes self'* (with Kate Smith), Hell Gallery, Melbourne, 2009; *The Second (Fourth) Melbourne Biennial of Art*, TCB art inc., Melbourne, 2008; and the Joint Hassles project space, Melbourne Art Fair, 2008.

See also: www.stenchinnumbers.blogspot.com.au



PRETTY AIR AND USEFUL THINGS

The objects around us carry their own histories and biographies... Many objects begin as commodities, potential revenue; then become possessions, somehow useful, signifiers of their owner; later they are discarded or redefined in terms of an exchange – another owner, another context, another use, another meaning

Rosemary Forde

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

Pretty Air and Useful Things draws upon curator Rosemary Forde's interest in local contemporary sculptural practice. Sitting alongside art is a fascination with material culture and the many ways that people relate to things such as furniture, fashion, food, personal belongings and interior decor. This exhibition questions how the meanings and functions of art and everyday objects have the capacity to change over time as we relate to them in different ways.

Rosemary made numerous gallery visits to contemporary sculpture exhibitions as research for *Pretty Air and Useful Things*. She noticed many exhibitions presented work that appropriated ideas and images from design and fashion. She also observed a similar approach to materials: a prevailing

interest in reworking ready-made domestic objects and adapting found materials. Rosemary invited three emerging artists to participate in a group show at MUMA and *Pretty Air and Useful Things* evolved from there.

The title of the exhibition *Pretty Air and Useful Things* draws upon a quote by the famous modernist writer/ art patron Gertrude Stein who said 'sculpture is made with two instruments and some supports and pretty air' (1921). Stein's notion of 'pretty air' might refer to the space around and between sculptural objects, and the position of the viewer in relation to the art. Rosemary sees parallels between how people relate to everyday objects and art objects. Like objects from our everyday lives, the meaning and value of artworks is not fixed, but connected to our emotions.

ARTISTS AND ARTWORK

DAN BELL

Dan Bell both emulates and critiques the aesthetic language of luxury goods within his installations. Bell's artwork *100% off* 2012 is reminiscent of visual merchandising display as he contemplates the magnetism of the Chanel brand. In making this piece, two fake Chanel scarves were stolen from a discount store and the (less fake looking) silk version was delicately burnt to create thousands of subtle perforations within the fabric. Bell sees this performative process as a questioning of the value of these goods and uncovering the hierarchies that exist between real and fake versions of something. For most people luxury commodities are objects that are experienced as fantasy not reality. To Bell, the invisible aura of luxury brands are visual representations of aspiration and desire that act as a gateway into an opulent yet unobtainable lifestyle.

In another work, *Condensense* 2012, Bell presents kimchi, a fermenting cabbage dish which is a staple of the Korean diet, in transparent vessels. Throughout the exhibition the cabbage transforms from humble raw ingredient into the popular Korean condiment. The slow fermentation is imperceptible at any given moment but Bell views it as a form of alchemy. This low-key artwork deliberately contrasts the idea of enhancing basic resources with *100% off*, a piece that speaks purely in the language of excess and instant gratification.



Dan Bell, *Condensense* 2012 (detail), courtesy of the artist. Photo: John Brash



Sanné Mestrom, *Muse 1, Muse 2* 2012, courtesy of the artist and Utopian Slumps (installation view). Photo: John Brash

SANNÉ MESTROM

Sanné Mestrom relates her sculptural pieces to the canon of modern art and design from the first half of the 20th century, but gives her work a contemporary twist. In *Muse 1, Muse 2* 2012 a pair of marble heads loosely based on Brancusi's sleeping muses have been carved using traditional techniques and then brought into the present through a gently humorous intervention – two cartoon smiley faces that have been lightly carved onto the surface of the heads.

Mestrom's artwork suggests a flow of art into everyday life and vice versa. In *Travellers* 2012 Mestrom has altered a pair of art-deco style tea-cups and saucers which she found in an op-shop. By lightly spray-painting these objects, Mestrom liberates these discarded domestic objects from utility and transforms them into art.

In *Grosenberg* 2012 Mestrom samples modernism with what she describes as a 'sense of fun'. To signal her new approach, the title of the work, *Grosenberg* is a combination of two opposing modernist art critics, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. The artwork itself appears at first glance to be a modernist coffee table, but the hand-cast bronze vessels cutting through the marble surface teeter between utility and non-utility. Through her strategy of appropriating and reframing the history of art and design, Mestrom confounds our existing relationship with modernism. She takes the things that modernists devoted their lives to and presents them with a sense of irony. In doing so she opens up questions about the way contemporary artists exploit stylistic influences and play with notions of originality.

ALEX VIVIAN

Alex Vivian's art practice is based on deliberate acts of alteration which he performs on objects and clothing. In his wall drawing *People were here (again)... presence, etc. Can you smell them?* 2012, Vivian uses a pair of second hand jeans to create an artwork. The jeans are removed from their normal function as a fashion item and rubbed across the white wall of the gallery to create marks. The resulting artwork is a subtle blue pattern tracing the movement of the jeans. This artwork experiments with the possibility of transference between objects and their surroundings. It was inspired by the artist's memories of the scuffmarks that sometimes appear during crowded exhibition openings when people lean and move against the walls during conversation. Evoking a sense of the body and movement is a major intention within Vivian's work and a type of body language is implied by the marks.

In *Vaseline setting (use body butter next time)* 2012 Vivian attached a clear pane of glass to a plinth and then placed a cube adorned with in Gauguin fabric onto the plinth. The glass has been smeared with a thick layer of Vaseline through which Gauguin's Tahitian nudes appear in impressionistic soft-focus.



Alex Vivian, *Vaseline setting (use body butter next time)* 2012 (detail), courtesy of the artist. Photo: John Brash



QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

1. Describe how each of the three exhibiting artists has appropriated the imagery of other artists and/or designers within their artwork.
2. Discuss the inclusion of readymade and found objects in this exhibition.
3. Choose one of the artworks in the exhibition to examine in detail:
 - a. Name of the artist
 - b. Title of the artwork
 - c. Materials and techniques used to create the work
 - d. What do you think inspired and/or influenced the artist to create this artwork?
 - e. What ideas and meanings do you think the artist is intending to communicate through this work? How is this achieved?
 - f. How has the artist used formal art elements in their artworks to enhance the communication of their ideas? Discuss at least two elements.
4. How have the sculptures been installed in the museum? Describe the arrangement of the artworks.
5. How have physical and conceptual relationships been established between artworks within the gallery space? What do you think the curator Rosemary Forde would have considered when designing the exhibition and presenting the artworks?
6. Do you think the exhibition works effectively within the museum environment? Why/Why not?

USEFUL DEFINITIONS FOR THE ART CLASSROOM INSTALLATION

Three-dimensional artworks that are often site-specific and designed to transform the perception of an interior space by implicating art, architecture and the viewer.

READYMADE

An everyday object selected and designated as art. This term was coined by the French artist Marcel Duchamp in 1913.

FOUND OBJECT

An everyday object that was not originally intended as art but becomes part of an artwork when found and sometimes adapted by an artist.

APPROPRIATION

The use of borrowed elements in the creation of a new artwork. Appropriation includes recycling or sampling any aspects of visual culture to make a new artwork.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

MUMMA website: www.monash.edu.au/muma/exhibitions/upcoming/pretty-air-useful-things.html

Sanné Mestrom's website: www.mestrom.org/

www.utopianslumps.com/ – see Sanné Mestrom under 'Artists'

Alex Vivian's blog: stenchinnumbers.blogspot.com.au/

Robert Nelson's review in The Age: www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/displays-that-risk-blowin-in-the-wind-20120904-25cfk.html

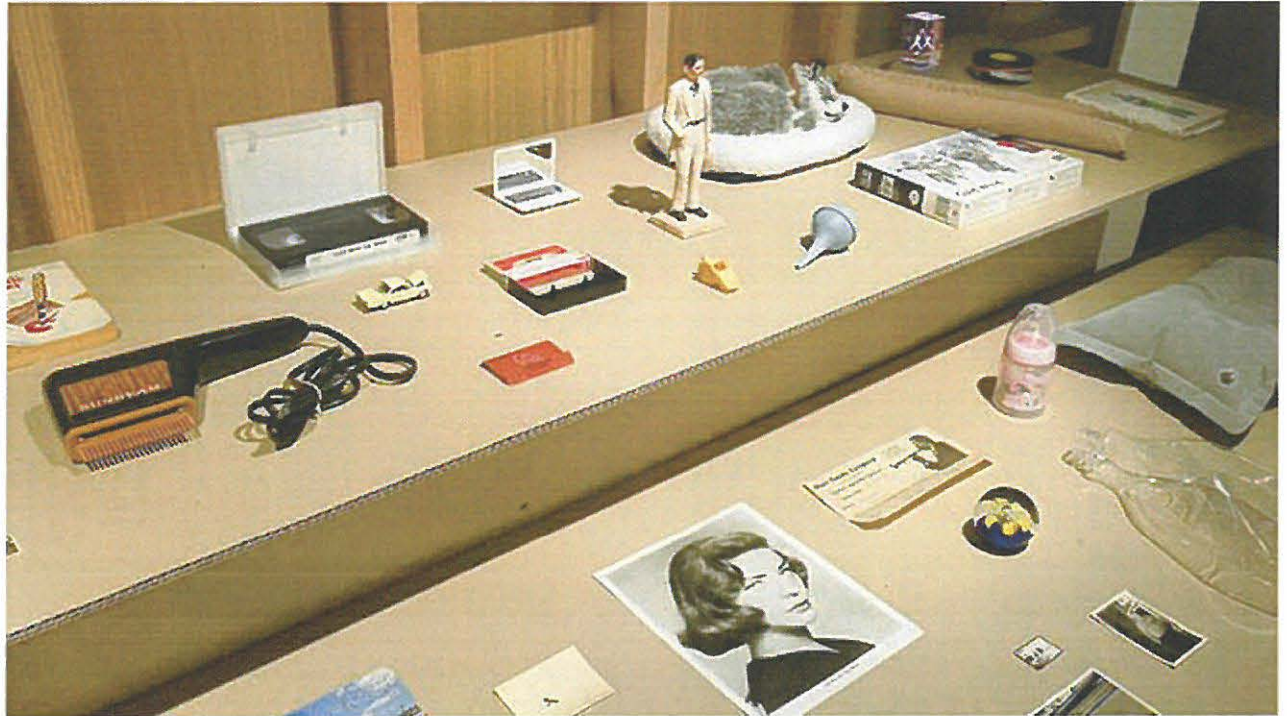
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Date _____

September 5, 2012

Robert Nelson



The Museum of Air by Patrick Pound is witty if not profound. *Photo: John Brash*

PRETTY AIR AND USEFUL THINGS; LIQUID ARCHIVE

Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), 900 Dandenong Road, Caulfield East, until September 22

A PAIR of Chanel scarves hang in decorative state at the entrance to an intimate exhibition at MUMA. The flamboyant silk dangles on brackets that also support stanchion ropes, as in a posh hotel, museum or department store.

This ensemble by Dan Bell, *100% off*, is both institutional and personal. Silver clasps, golden volutes and rope literally hang together, evoking old-world authority and private luxury. But the title undermines any celebratory grandeur that the snooty accoutrements signify. On the one hand, "100% off" means that the ideology of branded pride is rotten. On the other, it proposes that the artefacts are stolen, a perfect discount, that infinite reduction which is theft. And both could apply: the crime adds contempt to the critique.

Give some artists enough rope and they'll hang themselves. But then just because the label says the goods are filched, it doesn't necessarily mean they are. The confession could be a lie, as in the paradox: "this sentence is wrong", which is wrong even if it's right.

The reason *100% off* is powerful is not that it defies the law but that it brings a hypothetical proposition to an alarming immediacy: how does the aesthetic change if the ingredients are illegitimate?

Curated by Rosemary Forde, *Pretty air and useful things* is a lively show, with similarly propositional works by Sanne Mestrom and Alex Vivian. A cube upholstered in Gauguin fabric, a human torso bottle with a spoon stuck down the neck are among Vivian's inventions; and Mestrom comes up with strange pairings of objects that seem to be in monumental conversations. Alongside this fascinating show is a more ambitious exhibition, *Liquid Archive*. In a catalogue essay, curator Geraldine Barlow explains the meaning of archives, their development and fragility, and how artists engage with them.

Though sophisticated, the exhibition handles unfavourable subject matter. Archives are either neutral - in which case they're boring - or they're set up for some curious or contestable purpose, in which case the interest is seldom in the archive itself but defaults to the politics around it.

An artwork that handles archival logic could be interesting; but because the interest arises somewhere between the information bank and its historical objective, the work is pinched by divided subject matter and therefore carries an unwieldy expression.

To interpret the works, I depended upon Barlow's essay. Fortunately, it's a good essay (definitely one for the archive) but I felt inadequate and helpless in front of the objects, images and videos.

On occasion, the title delivered the artwork from obscurity. A joyful example is Patrick Pound's collection of paraphernalia, from musical instrument to Ventolin. The assortment of heterogeneous objects is endearingly called *The Museum of Air* and it all relates to breath or atmosphere. The idea is phenomenologically witty, if less than profound.

Even with the titles, many other works require a knowledge of the background, which gratefully Barlow supplies. But once you've understood the circumstance, you don't need the artwork. The art becomes redundant, adding only a layer of audio-visual pomposity.

Highlighting this problem, a scintillating catalogue essay by Canadian Julie Louise Bacon throws up priceless intuitions about archives which are unmatched by the art. In an epoch where half our conversations are archived, Bacon's ideas are strikingly relevant: the inclusiveness and ubiquity of archives are limiting, like the publicity of the private. Her ideas of "the dream-reason of time", the defining role of search modes and "a hide-and-seek game where nobody comes to look" are way ahead of the artworks.

Unless in direct homage, as with Leah King-Smith, the closer we get to archival material the more withering the result, as with reportage from the Hindenburg disaster. To the strained historical sound track, Kit Wise places sparse words on a black screen. Alas, the historical background is interesting in a way the artwork isn't. I get a sinking airship feeling that archives are more rewarding for writers than for artists.

robert.nelson@monash.edu

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/displays-that-risk-blowin-in-the-wind-20120904-25cfk.html#ixzz2JRczqfjV>

Displays that risk blowin' in the wind

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