



transitions

HELEN BODYCOMB
RACHEL BREMNER
KATE BUTLER
CAITLIN HUGHES
PAMELA IRVING

Craft ACT Craft + Design Centre
22 March – 5 May 2018



Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre is supported by the ACT Government, the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy – an initiative of the Australian State and Territory Governments, and the Australia Council for the Arts – the Australian Government’s arts funding and advisory body.

CRAFT ACT CRAFT + DESIGN CENTRE

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Saturdays 12–4pm

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All photographs are by Brenton McGeachie unless otherwise credited.

Cover Image Details: Helen Bodycomb, *The Material and the Immaterial*, 2018, detail. Mixed media, dimensions variable.



The Sum of Parts

Kate Nixon

ESSAY FOR TRANSITIONS, CRAFT ACT 22 MARCH – 5 MAY 2018

The winter of 2013 was when it happened to me. Like any good romance, there was conflict, resistance and tension. But my fate was sealed and by the end of a week with the American experimental glass duo of John Drury and Robbie Miller, I was in love with mosaic.

Such is the seductive quality of mosaic that has captured the imaginations of patrons and artists for centuries. Mosaics have a long history, stretching back to the 3rd millennium BC. Admired by the ancient Greeks and the Romans after them, the appeal of mosaic has transcended religions, adorning synagogues, mosques and cathedrals throughout history and across continents.

Once a sign of power and wealth, mosaics fell out of favour during the renaissance. With the division between fine art and craft firmly established, mosaic found itself on the wrong side of the divide, relegated to the unfortunate status of ‘women’s handicraft’ or ‘outsider art’. Sentimental and decorative, mosaic wasn’t the stuff of serious artists.

As with many traditional crafts, the twenty-first century has seen a global resurgence in the popularity and recognition of mosaic art, as artists challenge traditional hierarchies and digital communities democratise the cultural landscape. With the highly publicised completion of New York’s Second Avenue Subway featuring mosaic work by artists including Chuck Close and Vik Muniz, mosaic is not unfamiliar to the establishment. Mosaic processes have also been embraced by street artists such as Invader’s video-game inspired mosaic graffiti and Jim Bachor’s pothole mosaics. Simultaneously, the hobbyist community has exploded with online forums, Facebook groups and YouTube channels sharing how-to mosaic projects for enthusiastic suburbanites.

This tensions between high and low, art and craft are nothing new, but it seems mosaic has been particularly dogged by these labels. TRANSITIONS, turns these assumptions on their head; a very exciting prospect in the contemporary resurgence of this art form.



Like all crafts, there is a history and technical language embedded in mosaic construction. All five artists have been trained in traditional mosaic techniques and this strong craftsmanship and the enjoyment of the physical process of mosaic is evident in the work. However, each of the artists also challenges what we think of traditional mosaic from subject matter to material.

The most striking example of this is Helen Bodycomb's *The Material and the Immaterial*. This 'deconstructed' mosaic challenges preconceptions about what constitutes a mosaic. Combining a range of conventional and unconventional materials from marble tesserae and slate, to fun fur, cardboard and plastic, Bodycomb plays on notions of permanence and impermanence, boundaries and value.

There is a certain musicality evident in many of the works, from the ascending and descending tones of Bodycomb's piece to the curious dancing character of Pamela Irving's *Mr Hanky Panky*. The work that is the most strongly informed by music is Rachel Bremner's. A professional violinist in a previous life, Bremner

explores transitions between harmonic and inharmonic states. Playing with the boundaries between the visual and the musical, Bremner's work shares similarities with musical improvisations, expressing both a joy and experimentation in the process, as well as a discipline in the practice and execution.

Similarly, the dramatic work of Caitlin Hughes references a more symbolic realm or inner dialogue. Her *Weapons of the Mind* series, rendered in glossy black smalti, evoke ceremonial objects, hieroglyphs or symbolic codes. There is a cathartic quality to the objects, released through their creation, giving form to the invisible.

One of the inherent qualities of mosaic is its unique dimensionality. Most mosaics are neither 2d or 3d, they exist in their own state of transition where they are both surface and form.

Kate Butler's *On (the) Edge* series deftly exploits this quality. From a distance the forms appear soft, like velvet or felt, but closer inspection reveals aggressive surfaces with sharp shards of slate and smalti. A play



on words, Butler's *On (the) Edge* series speaks of the sharp textural use of the tesserae, while alluding to the political uncertainty and social inequality that seems to be propelling us towards some unknown precipice.

The final body of work in TRANSITIONS belongs to Pamela Irving. Irving's wickedly funny *Mr Hanky Panky & His Seven Deadly Sins* series cleverly utilises humour as an entry point into a pertinent political work. In an era of Weinsteins and Trumps, Irving's loveable larrikin, Mr Hanky Panky, takes on a more ominous tone. Irving's delightfully subversive play with materials, stereotypes and traditions delivers a resonant commentary on contemporary life, in a world facing significant change.

Transitions are not always easy. This exhibition of contemporary Australian mosaic presents an exciting glimpse of a dynamic craft that is in the process of challenging conventions and reinventing itself. I am excited by the prospect of disrupting traditional attitudes to mosaic and bringing this nuanced art form to new audiences. And who knows, we may even witness the beginning of some new love affairs.

Kate Nixon is the President AUSglass and a mosaic enthusiast

Glossary

Smalti coloured glass used in mosaic (the plural of *smalto*)

Tesserae a small block of stone, tile, glass, or other material used in the construction of a mosaic.

Images, left to right:

Kate Butler, *On (the) Edge #6*, 2017. slate roof tiles, smalti, schist on hand-formed substrate.

Caitlin Hughes, *Rumination*, 2018. Smalti, slate, oro, basalt on fibreglass and cement substrate.

Rachel Bremner, *Motherhood*, 2017. Marble, rock slice, shells.

Pamela Irving, *Greed*, 2017/18. Gold bitcoins, ceramic, porcelain, cement board.



Helen Bodycomb, *The Material and the Immaterial*, 2018. Mixed media, 6 x 2.8m.





Caitlin Hughes.

Left to right: *Losing Touch*, 2018. Smalti, marble, cinca, oro, slate on hanging sculptural form, high density foam, steel mesh, fibreglass and cement. *Blame*, 2018. Smalti, slate, oro on fibreglass and cement substrate. *Catastrophic Thinking*, 2018. Smalti, oro, cinca on fibreglass and cement substrate. *Self Sabotage*, 2018. Smalti, slate, litovi, oro on fibreglass and cement substrate. *Old Wounds*, 2018. Smalti, slate, oro, basalt on fibreglass and cement substrate.





Kate Butler.

Above: Remember Paris? 2017. Unglazed porcelain, vitreous glass, tinted mortar on hand-formed substrate. Right, top: *On (the) Edge* series. Details on pp. 18-19.

Right, middle: *On (the) Edge* #9, 2018. Slate roof tiles on hand-formed substrate. Right, bottom: *On (the) Edge* #10, 2018. Slate roof tiles, smalti on hand-formed substrate.





Rachel Bremner.
Above: *Shifting*, 2017. Marble. Left: *Germination*, 2017. High density polystyrene, marble, cement, oxide. Right: *Sanctum*, 2017. Marble, obsidian.





Pamela Irving, *Mr hanky Panky & his Seven Deadly Sins*, 2017/18. Whole series at top (details on p. 18-19). Above, *Gluttony*, 2017/18. Ceramic, cement board, vitreous tiles, marble, dollhouse figures, doll parts. Right: *Pride*, 2017/18. Ceramic, marble, iPhone6, millifiore, cement board.





HELEN BODYCOMB, a mid-career artist, holds post-graduate qualifications in Fine Art (Victoria College and Monash University). She has been a full-time artist for more than 25 years, practicing primarily in mosaic and sculpture. In 2001 Helen was an artist-in-residence at La Scuola di Mosaicisti del Friuli, in Spilimbergo, Italy, mentored by Maestro Giulio Candussio. Since that time Helen has been a leading teacher of technique-based mosaics in Australia and has three times been an instructor and presenter at SAMA (Society of American Mosaic Artists) conferences in the USA. Helen is currently a full-time student with La Trobe University, doing a PhD through practice-led research. Her research topic is titled *The Material and The Immaterial* and is an exploration of *memento mori* (remember death) in the application of classical mosaic principles in contemporary works. www.helenbodycomb.com

The Material and The Immaterial #2 is literally an exploded mosaic, in which tesserae of varying textural intensity free-range across the exhibition space. The second iteration of this idea, the work is essentially an improvised mixed media geometric wall drawing

comprising an installation of several hundred tesserae ranging across several walls. One of my key intentions, particularly within the context of this as a mosaic exhibition, was to debunk some of the core accepted conventions of mosaic, beginning with the assumption that mosaics are, if not by definition then by nature, permanent, object-based works. Traditionally mosaics are made from hard materials such as glass or stone, the tesserae usually bound together using cementitious adhesive systems, hence their permanence. However, the materials used in this work are of variable impermanence: plastic, paper, cardboard, woollen felt, slate, fake fur and marble.

RACHEL BREMNER has a Master in Music from the University of Tasmania, and learned mosaic techniques by attending the Ravenna Mosaic School, Italy and the Chicago Mosaic School in the US. An early-career artist, she has exhibited nationally and internationally, and in 2010 and 2011 won first prize in the MAANZ (Mosaic Association of Australia and New Zealand) National Exhibition. She uses traditional mosaic materials of stone and smalti and hand-cuts all material with Italian and Japanese tools. She lives in Tasmania, and teaches classes

at the Sturt Craft School and at the Hughes Studio in the Blue Mountains, NSW.

www.rachelbremner.com

My work is largely process driven and improvisatory, rarely fitting any preordained plan or image. I attempt to invest in my pieces the emotions born as a result of sights, sounds, events, all sensory input. A strong impulse in my art life is about stretching the limits of mosaic as an artistic expression in its own right.

KATE BUTLER is an early career mosaic artist whose work conveys her concerns about unprecedented levels of environmental, economic, cultural and social transformation. She studied mosaic techniques with Emma Biggs (UK), Verdiano Marzi (USA), Carolina Zanelli (Italy), Arianna Gallo (Italy) and Toyoharu Kii (Australia). She holds Masters degrees in Evaluation and Women's Studies. Her work has been exhibited in Australia, USA and Italy.

www.katebutlermosaics.com

For the last few years I have drawn inspiration from the flowing, interconnected layers of eco systems, and how changes or conflict in any one layer ripple throughout subsequent ones. In creating this work, I've been captivated by the processes of creating mosaic patterns through the interplay of texture, light and shadow that allude to the fragility of eco systems. My more recent work has continued with a focus on environmental themes together with an investigation of how ultra-right wing politicians are reshaping our collective memories of the past to generate fear, hatred and divisions in communities. My choice of materials and cutting and laying techniques is also informed by a continuous search for different ways of conveying moments of juxtaposition. In both a material sense and its significance or connotation to an idea.

CAITLIN HUGHES has a Bachelor of Fine Art (Sculpture) from the National Art School and a Master of Teaching (Visual Arts) from the University of Sydney. She is an early career artist working in a fusion of contemporary mosaic predominantly applied to sculptural form. Originally a secondary school teacher, she now directs Hughes Studio – School of Visual Art and Mosaic, in the Blue Mountains NSW. Caitlin has exhibited in national and international juried exhibitions. She is a member of MAANZ, SAMA, NAVA (National Association for the Visual Arts), and AIMC (L'Associazione Internazionale Mosaicisti Contemporanei / International Association of Contemporary Mosaicists).

www.caitlinhughesmosaics.com.au

My work holds narratives of journey and transformation. In 2013 a severe bushfire ravaged my community. In a matter of an hour we lost our family home, places of businesses and my studio. During the long passage of recovery I experienced and witnessed the trauma of individuals, the community and environment as well their varied resilience and capacity to regenerate and move through their experience. I was fortunate to have my art practice as a modality to help process my experience. From this event the themes that emerged in my work have been - journey through memory and its clarity and ambiguity, journey through trauma and its impact on a cellular level, and transformation from destruction to regeneration in the natural environment. Fire as a focus is somewhat exhausted, however the theme of journey has endured now taking the form of a less personal and more universal approach to the passage through human emotion.

PAMELA IRVING has a Bachelor of Education (Art/Craft) and Master of Arts from the University of Melbourne. She is a mid-career artist and has worked full time as an artist since 1982. Her work is represented in public and private collections throughout Australia, Italy, Russia, China and the USA. She is a past Vice President of MAANZ. She is also a Faculty Member of the Chicago Mosaic School and active member of the AIMC. She has presented at International Mosaic Symposiums in Turkey, Cyprus, Italy, Vienna, USA and Australia and was the keynote speaker in 2011 for SAMA in Austin, Texas. Her works have been included in many significant international mosaics exhibitions in USA, Japan, Australia and Italy.

www.pamelairving.com.au

Mr Hanky Panky is a naughty character inhabiting my imagined world. This time, his vices are the Seven Deadly Sins. Sometimes he transitions to sin as his deadly self; at other times, he characterises the sins of others. He is a satirical fellow holding a mirror to the world. As 'Gluttony' he consumes all that is bad for us – from M+Ms, to Coke, to Starbuck's Frappuccinos. In 'Wrath' he holds Kim Jong-Un to his right and Trump to his left, wondering: 'who has the biggest button?' In 'Greed' he covets a dozen bitcoins, oh so 2017! As 'Envy' he is never satisfied with his lot. His constant selfies reflect his 'Pride'. His sleepy laziness displays 'Sloth'; and as 'Lust' Mr Hanky Panky does some public wanking with his oversized member. Mr Hanky Panky may be a real sinner... or perhaps he's just an ordinary chap living in the 21st century, doing what everyone else is doing?

Image: The artists on opening night, at Craft ACT. Left to right: Helen Bodycomb, Kate Butler, Pamela Irving, Caitlin Hughes, Rachel Bremner. Photo by sftPhotography.

List of works



1. Kate Butler
Remember Paris? (2017)
Unglazed porcelain, vitreous glass, tinted mortar on hand formed substrate
\$6,500



2. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #1 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti on hand formed substrate
\$900



3. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #2 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti on hand formed substrate
\$750



4. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #3 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti, schist on hand formed substrate
\$750



5. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #4 (2017)
Slate roof tiles on hand formed substrate
\$600



6. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #5 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti, schist on hand formed substrate
\$600



7. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #6 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti, schist on hand formed substrate
\$900



8. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #7 (2018)
Slate roof tiles, smalti on hand formed substrate
\$600



9. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #8 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti on hand formed substrate
\$900



10. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #9 (2018)
Slate roof tiles on hand formed substrate
\$600



11. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #10 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti on hand formed substrate
\$600



12. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #11 (2017)
Slate roof tiles, smalti on hand formed substrate
\$600



13. Kate Butler
On (The) Edge #12 (2017)
Slate roof tiles on hand formed substrate
\$450



14. Pamela Irving
Mr Hanky Panky & His Seven Deadly Sins (2017/ 2018)
Cement board, china, porcelain, doll parts
\$4800



15. Pamela Irving
Sloth (2017/ 2018)
Ceramic, porcelain, cement board, millifiore
\$4800



16. Pamela Irving
Gluttony (2017/ 2018)
Ceramic, cement board, vitreous tiles, marble, dollhouse figures, doll parts
\$4800



17. Pamela Irving
Greed (2017/ 2018)
Gold bitcoins, ceramic, porcelain, cement board
\$4800



18. Pamela Irving
Pride (2017/ 2018)
Ceramic, marble, iphone6, millifiore, cement board
\$4800



19. Pamela Irving
Wrath (2017/2018)
Ceramic figures, ceramic, plastic, doll parts, cement board
\$4800



20. Pamela Irving
Envy (2017/2018)
Ceramic, porcelain, millifiore, cement board, doll parts
\$4800



21. Pamela Irving
Lust (2017/2018)
Ceramic, dollparts, cement board, porcelain, millifiore
\$4800



22. Helen Bodycomb
The Material And The Immaterial (2018)
Mixed media
POA



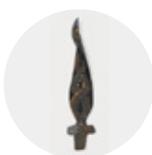
23. Caitlin Hughes
Losing Touch (2018)
Smalti, marble, cinca, oro, slate on hanging sculptural form, high density foam, steel mesh, fibreglass and cement
\$3000



24. Caitlin Hughes
Old Wounds (2018)
Smalti, slate, oro, basalt on fibreglass and cement substrate
\$920



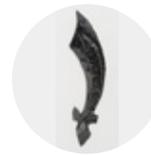
25. Caitlin Hughes
Morphing Memories (2018)
Smalti, litovi, oro, on fibreglass and cement substrate
\$920



26. Caitlin Hughes
Twisted Truths (2018)
Smalti, slate, oro, basalt on fibreglass and cement substrate
\$1150



27. Caitlin Hughes
Ruminaton (2018)
Smalti, slate, oro, basalt on fibreglass and cement substrate
\$1150



28. Caitlin Hughes
Blame (2018)
Smalti, slate, oro, on fibreglass and cement substrate
\$1500



29. Caitlin Hughes
Catastrophic Thinking (2018)
Smalti, oro, cinca on fibreglass and cement substrate
\$1150



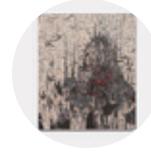
30. Caitlin Hughes
Self Sabotage (2018)
Smalti, slate, litovi, oro of fibreglass and cement substrate
\$1150



31. Rachel Bremner
Germination (2017)
High density polystyrene, marble, cement, oxide
\$4000



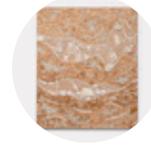
32. Rachel Bremner
Pie Jesu (2017)
Marble, smalti
\$2200



33. Rachel Bremner
Climbing My Mountain (2017)
Marble, smalti
\$4500



34. Rachel Bremner
Sanctum (2017)
Marble, obsidian
\$4500



35. Rachel Bremner
Shifting (2017)
Marble
\$4500



36. Rachel Bremner
Motherhood (2017)
Marble, rock slice, shells
\$4500



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