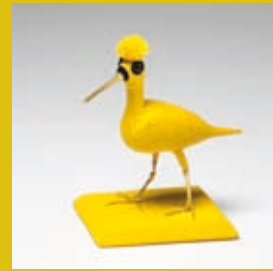


# Curious Colony

A twenty first century Wunderkammer

EDUCATION RESOURCE



...from the *Colonial* to the CONTEMPORARY world

NEWCASTLE REGION ART GALLERY

## About this education resource

This education resource has been created to complement and enhance the active involvement of students in the study and exploration of *CURIOUS COLONY A twenty first century Wunderkammer*.

The resource brings together the work of colonial artists, RICHARD (TR) BROWNE, JOHN LEWIN, JOSEPH LYCETT, WALTER PRESTON and JAMES WALLIS in juxtaposition with contemporary artists, DANIE MELLOR, JOAN ROSS, SARAH SMUTS-KENNEDY and LOUISE WEAVER. The resource text is intended for teachers to adapt for their students. The colour images provided can be used in the classroom. This printable resource is design to be used in collaboration with the interactive PDF which can be used as a slide show in the classroom to introduce the works, explore links and further explain artmaking activities. Both resource activities and tasks are aimed at stages 3 and 4 and address the following outcomes:

### Stage 3

Human Society&Its Environment  
CCS3. CUS3.3, CUS3.4, ENS3.6

Creative Arts

VAS3.1, VAS3.2, VAS3.3, VAS3.4

### Stage 4

Visual Arts

4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10

History

4.1,.4.2,4.3



## About the exhibition

While this exhibition marks the two hundred year anniversary of Lachlan Macquarie's governorship of New South Wales, through the display of works of art and artefacts made during the Macquarie period, it also references ideas that date back to Renaissance Europe. The *Wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosity is an abiding motif in the exhibition, which will feature colonial oil paintings, drawings, engravings, books and artefacts juxtaposed with contemporary photography, sculpture, new media and installation.

Newcastle Region Art Gallery will be transformed into a twenty first century room of wonders where colonial curiosities jostle contemporary art.

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**Lewin**

### **John Lewin**

The perspective offered by John Lewin's watercolour is highly unusual – the artist is grounded on the bank of the river, feet in the sand, watching the HMS Lady Nelson round Coal Island, now known as Nobbys.

While the work is dated 11 December 1807, there is no evidence that Lewin was in Newcastle that year. He made the trip to Coal River six years earlier in 1801, under the command of Governor King, with Lieutenants James Grant and William Paterson, French engineer Francis Barallier and a team that included several sawyers and a mining expert. Coal, the country's first and, it seems, most enduring export, was extracted from the headland in that same year.

### **Sarah Smuts-Kennedy**

More than 200 years after Lewin's visit, contemporary artist Sarah Smuts-Kennedy made her first visit to Newcastle and was struck by the sight of massive coal ships cutting across the city on their way out to sea. This experience generated a new sculptural installation, titled *Pyramid scheme* 2009, where chunks of coal, some gilded and some not, adorn ornate plinths made from synthetic clay.



**Smuts-Kennedy**

Smuts-Kennedy's trophies are reminiscent of the treasures found in Renaissance *Wunderkammern*, where objects from the natural world would be adorned or grafted onto elaborate handmade artefacts. In *Pyramid scheme*, the precious coal and hand-moulded plinths, which resemble ivory or carved coral, recall the baroque taste for art that tries to trump nature and as such offers an allegory of human folly.

### **Making Activity: Clay Trophy**

Sarah Smuts-Kennedy has created an ironic statement by placing a lump of coal on a pedestal. Brainstorm what resources you think Newcastle should be putting on a pedestal. Create clay trophies of your idea. You could use air dry clay for this. Display them in clusters as a class and invite people to view the exhibit.

*Resources: clay or air clay (DAS), glaze or paint.*

### **Exploring History**

In 1821 Governor Macquarie conceived of a plan to join Coal Island (creating Nobbys Headland) with the mainland by building a pier - starting at both ends and working towards the middle. The traditional owners of the land, the Awabakal people, have a legend about Nobbys. Research this legend, discovering the story and the original names for this area. How do you think the transition of these landmarks could have affected the Awabakal people and their legend?

### **Enquiring**

*Pyramid scheme*, 2009, is Sarah Smuts-Kennedy's response to seeing coal ships in Newcastle harbour. Smuts-Kennedy mounts gilded and ungilded coal on a pedestal. What do you think she is trying to draw our attention to by displaying the coal in this way?



**John Lewin** *Nobby Island from Coal River 1807*, watercolour on paper, 33.2 x 43.7 cm, Purchased 1964, Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection





**Sarah Smuts-Kennedy** *Pyramid Scheme* 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable, Purchased 2009 and gifted by the artist, Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection  
courtesy the artist and Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne

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**Lycett**

### **Joseph Lycett**

In *The Sugar Loaf Mountain, near Newcastle, New South Wales 1824* Lake Macquarie, known in the early 19th century as Reeds' Mistake, sprawls out before Mount Sugarloaf. Home to the supernatural spirit Puttikan, Mount Sugarloaf is a sacred site for the Awabakal people. A group of Aborigines is shown in the foreground, including a mother and child. They are juxtaposed by the gesticulating European gentry in the middle ground.

In many of Lycett's paintings and etchings, self-conscious settlers pervade the middle ground, more often than not announcing their ownership of a piece of land, waterway or mountain. Lycett often employs a coupling effect, where the humans and animals populate this new world two by two, as though from the biblical ark.



**Ross**

### **Joan Ross**

Sydney-based artist Joan Ross has, with the assistance of new media artist Ben Butler, created a contemporary installation inspired by Lycett's trademark picturesque tableaux. In the installation, which includes animation and sculpture, Ross has extracted and combined the figures, flora, fauna and landscape elements found in Lycett's work to comment on our paranoid surveillance and demarcation of public space. In Ross's tableau, birds, animals and figures all wear high visibility protective clothing. No longer worn only by emergency services, 'hi-vis' clothing has become an epidemic, according to Ross, and a visual sign of the increasing legalisation and ultimately colonisation of nature. With humour and charm, Ross reminds us that curiosity is first and foremost a visual impulse, one that is tied to the desire for possession and control.

### **Making Activity: Tableau**

The Joseph Lycett work shown is a hand coloured etching. This was the only way to reproduce a coloured work in 1824.

Create a collage using a photocopy of Lycett's work as the background. Consider Joan Ross's contemporary work of art, use this as inspiration and add photocopies of students photographed in the schoolyard and place them into Lycett's landscape. Colour the work using watercolour. Choose colours to create a sense of wonder or curiosity about the modern figures placed in the colonial landscape.

*Resources: Photocopies of Joseph Lycett's landscape, photocopies of images of students in the schoolyard, watercolours, glue, and scissors*

### **Exploring**

Look at Lycett's colonial work of art. Notice the figures and animals. Now look at Ross's contemporary work and examine the people in it. Describe how both Lycett and Ross's figures give clues to when the work was created. How can you tell from the figures what historical period they belong to?

How many differences can you spot between the two works?

### **Enquiring**

Lycett was a convict artist and his paintings are seen both as works of art and rare historical documents illustrating aspects of colonial life. As a convict, governing officials would have commissioned Lycett's paintings. Artists are still commissioned to produce works of art today. Joan Ross was commissioned by NRAG to create a work in response to Lycett's paintings. What role do you think commissioned works of art have in our society and why might an organisation like NRAG commission artists to make art?





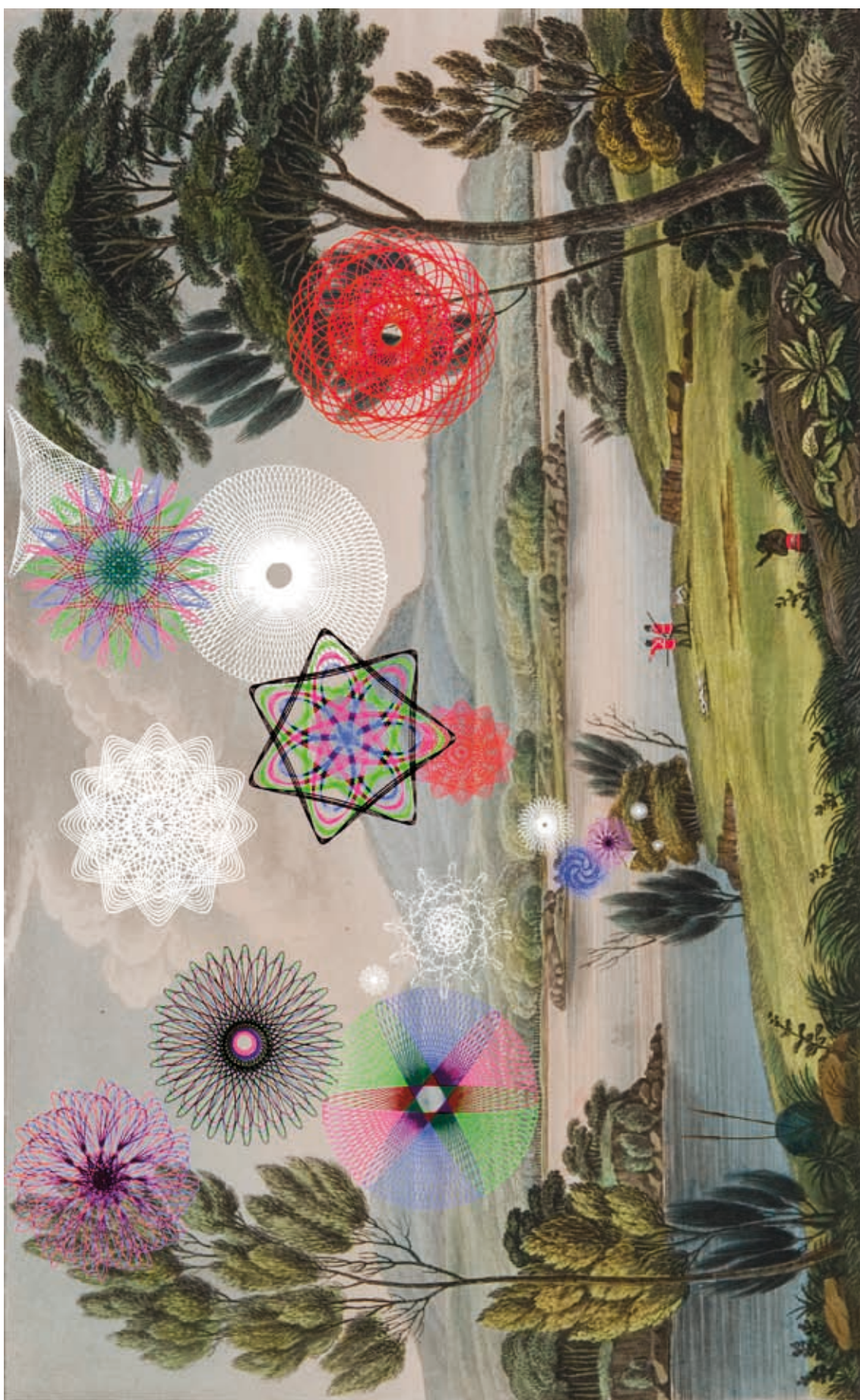
THE SUGAR LOAF MOUNTAIN,

*Near New South Wales.*

*London. Published 1817. By J. Storer, 22, St. Abbe Church Yard.*

**Joseph Lycett** *The Sugar Loaf mountain, near Newcastle, New South Wales, from Views in Australia 1824, hand coloured etching and aquatint on paper, image 17.1 x 27.1 cm, plate 23.0 x 32.0 cm, Purchased 1968, Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection*





**Joan Ross** *When I grow up I want to be a Forger* 2010, Animator: Ben Butler Sound: Sumugen Sivanesan, animator: Ben Butler, Sound: Sumugen Sivanesan, animation and video, edition 1/5, duration 3 minutes, Gift of the artist 2010, Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection courtesy the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney

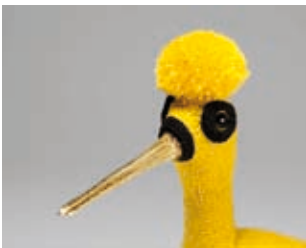
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Skottowe/Browne

#### Thomas Skottowe and Richard (TR) Browne

The 1813 *Skottowe Manuscript*, with watercolour paintings by convict artist Richard Browne and commentary by Commandant Thomas Skottowe, provides one of the earliest written accounts of the natural history of the Newcastle region. It is believed that Browne, sent to Newcastle as a place of secondary punishment after he had re-offended in Sydney, made the drawings from natural history specimens in Skottowe's own collection. This collection, however, would have been amassed not solely by Skottowe himself but through fieldwork carried out by local Aborigines and convict servants. Of course much of the motivation for creating the manuscript, and for the furious collecting of the colonial period in general, was the chance of finding a specimen that had never been described or illustrated (Skottowe believed himself to be the first 'possessor' of the regent bowerbird but ironically the bird had already been illustrated under another name in Lewin's *Birds of New Holland*).



Weaver

#### Louise Weaver

In *Golden Snipe* 2010 Louise Weaver breathes new life into a former museum trophy, cladding the specimen in golden yellow crochet and gilding its beak and feet with gold leaf. Because of its migratory nature, the bird is known as both the Australian and Japanese snipe, and was chosen by Weaver as a comment on the increasing significance of our connection with Asia and a reminder of our own migratory status. The bird also inhabits a littoral environment in both countries, and hence is a reminder of our significant relationship with, and dependence on, the coast.

#### Making Activity: *Yellow Bower*

The male regent bowerbird builds bowers and collects green objects for decoration. The bowers are always aligned North-South. These constructions can be simple ground clearings or elaborate structures built to attract female mates.

As a class, collect yellow objects from home (plastic bottle lids, pegs, rubber duckys, fabric, old toys etc.). Find a suitable place in the schoolyard to build a bower using sticks, leaves and grass. Make sure your bower is aligned North and South. Using yellow yarn like Louise Weaver, students can bind the found objects and sticks together, or as an extension learn finger knitting in the classroom. Bind the objects with knitting and add pom-poms to each object before placing them in the bower.

*Resources: compass, yellow yarn, found yellow objects, sticks.*

#### Exploring History

Traditionally, explorers to new regions or continents collect, name and identify any flora and fauna they encounter and by doing so stake a claim to the land and its resources (and hope for fame if the species is new or unusual). Browne/Skottowe's regent bowerbird is one such identifying painting (unfortunately for them Lewin beat them to discovering it). Weaver on the other hand creates something new from something that is already known and described. Both works could be seen to be about making sense of the world. How do you think the two works do this? Do they do more than just describe the specimens?

#### Enquiring

During the colonial era, men would have conducted most specimen collection. Weaver's work combines a classical museum specimen with what would be seen as traditional women's work - crochet. How does Weaver's use of traditional women's work change how we view this specimen?





**Richard (TR) Browne** *Select specimens from nature of the birds animals &c &c of New South Wales collected and arranged by Thomas Skottowe Esqr, the drawings by T R Browne NSW, Newcastle, New South Wales 1813, 29 watercolour drawings in leather-bound album, 31.0 x 20.0 cm, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW*



**Louise Weaver** *Golden Snipe* 2010  
hand crocheted lambswool over  
taxidermied Australian Snipe (*Gallinago  
hardwickii*), Australian red cedar (*Toona  
ciliata*) cotton perle crocheted thread, cotton  
embroidery thread, felt, gold leaf, 26.6 x  
22.5 x 16 cm

Photography by Mark Ashkanasy  
Les Renfrew bequest 2010  
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection  
courtesy the artist and Darren Knight  
Gallery, Sydney



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Preston/Wallis

### Preston/Wallis

The kangaroo – the marvellous macropod that captured European imaginations from first contact – is the subject of one of the 13 painted panels attributed to Joseph Lycett in the *Macquarie Collectors' Chest*. The scene depicted in the panel is revisited in an engraving subsequently made by convict Walter Preston, after drawings by Captain James Wallis. An engraver by trade, Preston was employed to engrave 12 etchings onto copper plates, mostly like taken from the stores of copper used to protect the keels of ships. The pair of kangaroos underscore Lycett and Wallis's eye for symmetry with the coupling of the kangaroos framed by the trees.



Mellor

### Danie Mellor

The kangaroo is a recurring motif in the work of contemporary artist Danie Mellor, who collides cultural references to signify his own mixed heritage and history. In *Dreaming beyond paradise (let sleeping giants lie)* 2008, a giant red kangaroo slumbers, a reference to the dreaming, the spiritual imagining that creates the world around him. In this case however, the landscape is radically transformed, while the 'willow pattern' motif refers to the popular style of ceramics made by Englishman Josiah Spode (adapted from Mandarin). With its anglicised oriental patterning and European-Aboriginal kangaroo, this work hints at the humorous displacements, the Chinese whispers, that occur across history.

### Making Activity: My Willow Pattern

Mellor has used a traditional willow pattern as the background of his work of art.

Using a paper plate and a blue pen create your own willow pattern that represents your family's history in Australia and place an Australian icon in the centre. Make sure you keep the design inside the rim of the plate.

Consider what Mellor's intentions were when he added a gold frame. Using impasto medium, add texture to the rim of the plate. Allow to dry and then paint the rim gold to frame your own work.

*Resources: paper plates, blue pen, impasto medium, gold paint, brushes.*

### Exploring History

*Kangaroos of NSW* is an engraving by Preston after drawings by Wallis (from an original painting by Lycett). From a historical perspective, why do you think works like this are significant (important)? What purpose do you think they may have served when sent back to the 'mother country', England?

### Enquiring

The kangaroo is seen as a particularly Australian animal - unique and fascinating to the first colonial settlers. Danie Mellor in his work combines all the cultures that make up his heritage. One recurring symbol in his works of art is the kangaroo.

What do you think the kangaroo symbolises for Mellor?

Why do you think he has chosen to place it over a willow pattern?

What do you think the work of art is about?

Imagine you are the artist and write an artist statement.





**James Wallis/Walter Preston** *Kangaroos of New South Wales, view from Seven-Mile Hill near Newcastle, NSW 1820*  
etching on paper, image 18.6 x 26.8 cm, plate 24.0 x 35.2 cm, Purchased 1968, Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection





**Danie Mellor** *Dreaming beyond paradise (let sleeping giants lie)* 2008

mixed media on paper, 60.0 x 75.0 cm

Purchased by Newcastle Region Art Gallery  
Foundation and the Gil Docking Drawing  
Fund 2008

Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection  
courtesy the artist and Caruana and Reid  
Fine Art, Sydney

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Gould

#### William Buelow Gould

William Buelow Gould was transported to Hobart in 1827 for the offence of stealing clothes. After committing further offences, he was sentenced to Macquarie Harbour, a place of secondary punishment on the west coast of Tasmania.

*Flowers and fruit* c1840 clearly shows the influence of the 17th-century Dutch still-life tradition, where flowers and fruit provide both decorative display and symbol of the brevity of life. Many art historians have speculated on Gould's possible use of wax fruit and flowers in his compositions given the range of botanical specimens in his paintings. In this painting for example, the Jacobean lily, known to have only a ten-day flowering cycle, blooms alongside out-of-season fruit and flowers. The painting also suggests the demand and enthusiasm in Tasmania for European species, driven by nostalgia and homesickness.



Stacey

#### Robyn Stacey

Alexander Macleay's colonial collection of bulbous plants has provided Robyn Stacey with the inspiration for *Bombe (Cape bulbs)* 2009. Macleay had a particular penchant for bulbous plants from the Cape of Good Hope, and bulbs also featured prominently in the large collection of plants that his son William Sharp Macleay brought to Australia in 1839. The Macleay gardens were once world famous not only for their native Australian plants but also for the exotics imported from China, India, South America and the Cape of Good Hope. The title of the work (*Bombe*) refers to the baroque styled vase, which rests on an example of Australian red cedar furniture from around 1820.

#### Making Activity: Still Life: Flowers and Fruit

Both Gould as a colonial convict artist and Stacey as a contemporary artist have depicted still lifes. The flowers used as a model by Gould were most likely wax flowers and fruit as most of the flowers depicted would not be in bloom or even available at that time in Australia.

In the classroom, set up a flower and fruit still life. Recreate the still life using both photographs and traditional painting techniques. Discuss the different methods used and how painting has changed in contemporary time compared to Gould's day.

*Resources: fresh or artificial flowers and fruit, paint, paper, brushes and digital cameras.*

#### Exploring

*Flowers and Fruit* by Gould is a painting showing the influence of the Dutch still life tradition where each flower or fruit contained its own significance (meaning). Despite this painting being made in Australia it shows no Australian species. Why do you think Gould has chosen to depict non-native species? What do you think the significance of each flower and fruit would have been?

#### Enquiring

Both the work of Gould and Stacey depict floral arrangements or still lifes. How do the different mediums convey different feelings in the two works? Do you think one is more effective than the other? Why?





**William Buelow Gould** *Flowers and fruit* c 1840  
oil on canvas, 37.2 x 30.6 cm  
Purchased 1961  
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection

**Robyn Stacey *Bombe***  
(*Cape Bulbs*) 2009  
Type C print, 120.0 x  
150.5cm, edition 2/5  
Purchased in memory  
of Warwick Smithson  
with funds from the  
Smithson family 2010  
Newcastle Region Art  
Gallery collection  
courtesy the artist and  
Stills Gallery, Sydney





## Glossary

### Colony

a group of people who leave their native country to form in a new land a settlement subject to, or connected with, the parent nation. The word colony can also describe the place of settlement

### Contemporary

of the present time

### Impasto

a thick paint medium used for texture

### Tableau

a representation of a picture, statue, scene, etc., by one or more persons suitably costumed and posed

### Type C print

Chromogenic color prints are full-color photographic prints

These prints may be produced from an original which is a color negative, slide, or digital image

### Willow Pattern

a decorative design in English ceramics, depicting chiefly a willow tree, small bridge, and two birds, derived from Chinese sources and introduced in approximately 1780: often executed in blue and white but sometimes in red and white



## Acknowledgements

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