

Objects to Live By / The Art of John Meade

A NETS Victoria touring exhibition / Curated by Zara Stanhope





Front cover:
Double Pin with Heidi Plait 2008
 polyester resin, fibre-glass, pigment, calcium carbonate,
 industrial plastic bristle, stainless steel & concrete
 Photo: KristinWursthorn

This page:
Dreamer 2004
 synthetic polymer paint, Glad Wrap and theatre lights
 window frontage, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces,
 Melbourne, as part of the Midsumma Festival
 Photo: Andrew Trevilian

TOUR ITINERARY

Venues and dates

Latrobe Regional Gallery,
Morwell (Vic)
6 February - 4 April 2010

Academy Gallery
Launceston (TAS)
16 April - 28 May 2010

Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery
Swan Hill (Vic)
16 July - 29 August 2010

Perth Institute of Contemporary Art
Perth (WA)
11 September - 24 October 2010

Orange Regional Gallery
Orange (NSW)
11 March - 24 April 2011

Tamworth Regional Gallery
Tamworth (NSW)
14 May - 25 June 2011



Black Light 2003
silicon rubber and pigment
Private Collection, Los Angeles

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Video still from *Propulsion* 2001
2 screen video transferred to DVD

ABOUT THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This education resource is intended for use as a starting point to generate discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to *Objects to Live By/The Art of John Meade*. It is designed to be used in conjunction with information provided in the exhibition catalogue, gallery wall texts and on the NETS Victoria website <www.netsvictoria.org.au>. The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition, suggested points for discussion, practical activities for junior and senior students, definitions of key terms and references for further research. Teachers may select relevant aspects of this resource to tailor their own response sheet for use in the exhibition. Throughout this document, names of relevant artists, designers and filmmakers have been highlighted to indicate potential starting points for research.

PRE-VIEWING PLANNING

Before visiting *Objects to Live By/The Art of John Meade* it is suggested that you contact gallery staff to determine the following:

- Opening hours, transport and parking options, cloakroom facilities and admission fees.
- Suitability of content for the year level you intend to bring.
- Staff availability for introductory talks and tours.
- Education and Public Programs such as artist talks that coincide with the exhibition.

CURRICULUM LINKS AND CONNECTIONS

This exhibition is touring nationally therefore teachers are encouraged to adapt the curriculum links given below to suit the relevant state curricula.

Use this list to generate ideas, activities and points for discussion, and where possible contact your local gallery for other ideas and suggestions.

VISUAL/CREATIVE/STUDIO ARTS

- Artist's practice, ideas and inspiration.
- Responding to artworks: formal analysis and interpreting meanings and messages.
- Exploring psychological symbolism expressed in artworks.
- Exploring possibilities for materials, processes and techniques.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN

- Exploring the influence of graphic and industrial design on visual artists and vice versa.
- Understanding principles of design such as balance, form, scale, focal point.

DRAMA AND DANCE

- Exploring character development in response to artworks.
- Exploring the body form in space and its relationship to other forms.
- The influence of contemporary dance on other art forms.
- Developing a physical response to line, form, colour etc.

ENGLISH AND MEDIA STUDIES

- Exploring narrative and character development in response to artworks.
- Using artworks as a starting point for poetic composition.
- Observing formal and historical relationships between film, design and visual art.
- Exploring the psychology of image and film making.

Throughout this resource key words are highlighted in **Pink** and suggested artists to study in **Blue**.

Objects to Live By/The Art of John Meade is the first major survey, spanning fifteen years of practice, of this sculptor whose work is at the forefront of contemporary art practice. Meade's work is concerned primarily with form and object, and in this sense his practice is traditional, yet he successfully blends formal references to the incidental objects of contemporary culture, and to the fluid elegance of modernist, figurative sculpture.

He explores the cool language of design, and the erotic charge of spatial intimacy; the smooth surfaces of industrial production, which is present in the traditional practice of the artist as maker. The engagement of these dualisms creates dynamism and humour within the work, and provides a wealth of references to explore with students.

Some of the key ideas and images explored in the exhibition can be used as starting points for learning activities. These can be developed according to the year level and interests of your students. The human body serves as an overarching theme to which all these themes can be related back.

Consider the following possibilities:

- The Ideal and Real
- Desire and Consumption
- Beauty, Fullness and Form
- The Unconscious and the Fetish
- The Monstrous – Transformation and Redemption
- Materials, Processes and Techniques

JOHN MEADE, ARTIST

John Meade has been exhibiting extensively in Australia since 1994. He was born in 1956 in Ballarat and now works from his Melbourne studio at the historic Gasworks Arts Park, Albert Park.

Before he began his sculpture practice, he explored various disciplines that have informed his subsequent work and provided a breadth and accessibility to his oeuvre. He has worked as a window dresser (1), has studied Sogetsu Ikebana – the Japanese art of flower arranging, and had an early career in dance, studying in Sydney, and performing in a number of productions. These explorations demonstrate Meade's concern with balance, rhythm and spatial relationships.

Meade has participated in a number of important group exhibitions in recent years such as *21st Century Modern*, 2006 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia; *This was the future...Australian Sculpture of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and Today*, Heide Museum of Modern Art (2003); *Orifice*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (2003); and *Plastic Fantastic*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (1997).

John Meade is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

ZARA STANHOPE, EXHIBITION CURATOR

Zara Stanhope is a highly regarded and prolific curator, writer and editor. She studied Art History at the University of Reading and the Courtauld Institute in the United Kingdom, before being appointed Assistant Director of Monash University Gallery in Melbourne.

In recent years she has served as Deputy Director and Senior Curator at Heide Museum of Modern Art, and inaugural Director of the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Stanhope is Chair of *unProjects*, the publisher of *un Magazine*; Chair of Platform Artists Group Inc. in Melbourne and is on the Board of the National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria.

She has curated numerous exhibitions including *Les Kossatz, The art of existence*, 2008, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne (Stanhope also co-authored the related monograph published by MacMillan Publishing); *Imagine... the creativity shaping our culture*, 2006, Heide Museum of Modern Art (Heide MoMA) which included sculptural work by Vera Moller and Michelle Nikou; *Anne-Marie May*, 2004, Heide MoMA; *This was the future, Australian sculpture of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and today*, 2003, Heide MoMA; *Multiplication: the multiple object in art*, 1997, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne.

She has written on sculpture by artists including Rebecca Cummins, Fernanda Gomez, Lorna Green, Peter Hennessey, Inge King, Robert Klippel, Nick Mangan, Sebastian di Mauro and Robert Owen.

In 2003 Stanhope included John Meade's work in *This was the future, Australian sculpture of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and today*. When his sculpture *Progeny* (2004-5) was included in the 2005 *Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture*, Stanhope proposed it for acquisition into the collection of Heide Museum of Modern Art.

STARTING POINTS

1. THE BODY'S POLARITIES

THE BODY'S POLARITIES

REPRESENTATION AND ABSTRACTION, THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

For tens of thousands of years, since humans first began painting on cave walls, we have been fascinated by representations of the human form. At various points in history artists have focused on the mechanics of how to render a 'true to life' image, and at other times we have created images of ourselves that are highly stylised or idealised. **Classical sculptors in ancient Greece** portrayed the human body in a realistic yet idealised way, showing athletic, muscled men and slender, beautiful women, similar to the representation of today's ideal bodies in contemporary advertising. This idealisation of the human body demonstrates how we use images of ourselves to create a vision of a better reality, or a better future where we are fitter and more beautiful and more successful, or more spiritually evolved.

Some artists have gone against this tradition by taking a 'warts and all' approach to representing the body (painters **Lucien Freud** and **Jenny Saville**). Surrealist artists have blended forms that remind us of our bodies, yet morph into other unnatural forms (**Salvador Dalí**, **James Gleeson**), and others have rendered the body by simplifying its shapes down to geometric curves, shapes and **biomorphic** forms (**Brancusi**, **Henri Moore**, **Jean Arp**). Some contemporary women artists, whose practice is aligned with feminism, have at times portrayed the body in a fractured way, featuring the less acceptable functions of the human body, and using their own bodies in their work (**Julie Rapp**, **Kiki Smith**) going against the tradition of the artist as hero.

John Meade's sculptures often include shapes and forms that remind us of human bodies. They reference the body, but don't quite allow us to feel comfortable about the nature of the form. In the work *Women in Love* (2005) we can clearly see this blending of figuration and abstraction which arrives "at forms belonging to the world, but able to take us beyond it." But where are they taking us? Not into the idealised world of advertising, or into an alarming space of disintegration, but to somewhere unknown which encompasses a more complex representation of ourselves including the vulnerability of realness (hair, fibre, tears, struggling forms) and the smooth curves and snowy white surfaces of pristine, abstract beauty.

Women in Love shows two forms that are locked together in what could be seen as an embrace, or a struggle of some kind. The image could be erotic, as the title suggests, but the smooth, cool surface of the work can also be read as giving a clinical, hospitalised feel to the sculpture. The forms of the 'bodies' seem boxy and muscular; in contrast to the way that women are usually portrayed.

The disjuncture between the title and the form itself begs the questions:

What is a woman? What is love?



Women in Love 2005
polyurethane, sand and enamel
Photo: Andrew Curtis



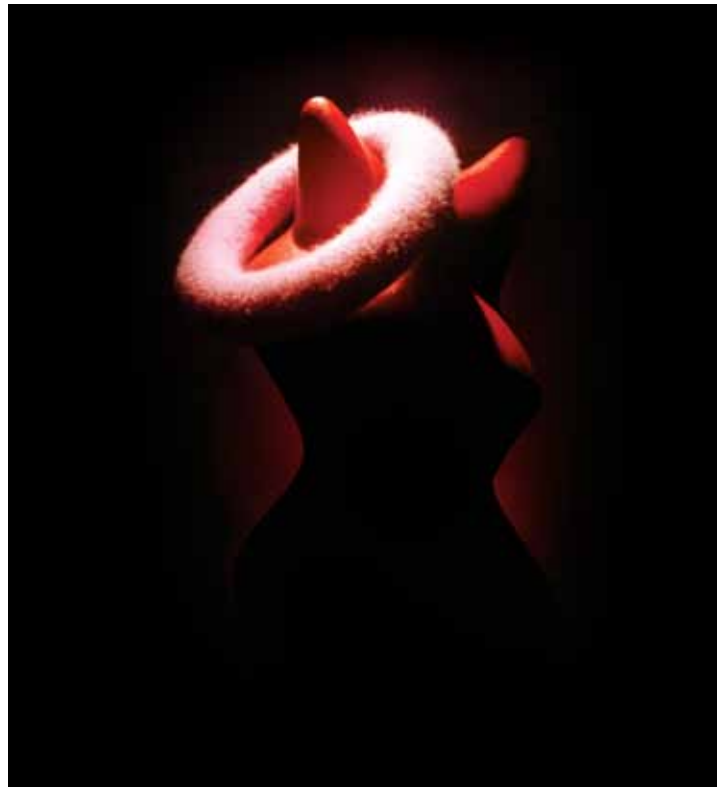
Impostor 1995
polyurethane and mohair
Private Collection, Melbourne
Photo: Kenneth Pleban

Impostor (1995) is a work that includes multiple forms.

A large central form is surrounded by soft hoops, and a harder version of the fluffy rings is hung at its top, giving the impression that someone has been playing a giant game of 'quoits'.

The central form resembles a female human with exaggerated and simplified shapes. A crescent shape sits where the head would be, suggesting horns.

The sculptural work of French artist [Jean Arp](#) (1886-1966) has been very influential to Meade's work, and is especially evident in *Impostor*. The furry, pink quoits give the work a cheeky, irreverent edge, and also provide a layer of narrative. Who has been playing? Why did they stop in the middle of their game?



TERMS

REPRESENTATION: when an image represents something in a realistic, recognisable way

ABSTRACTION: when an image seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, forms, colours and textures

BIOMORPHIC: an adjective to describe a decorative form or object based on or resembling a living organism

QUOITS: a game consisting of aiming and throwing metal or rubber rings over an upright peg

Impostor 1995 (detail)
polyurethane and mohair
Private Collection, Melbourne
Photo: Kenneth Pleban

IN THE GALLERY

- Can you see shapes in some of John Meade's sculptures that remind you of your body? Are there any arms? Legs? Bottoms? Can you see any faces?
- In the sculpture *Impostor*, why do you think John Meade has used certain colours? Why are the hoops pink?
- Can you find any other sculptures in the exhibition that use similar colours? Do you think *Impostor* looks like a person, or an animal, or both?

IN CLASS

- Research the game of 'quoits'. Where and when was it played, and by whom?
- Draw some simple **biomorphic** shapes onto coloured card. Cut them out and put them together in a collage so that they remind you of a human body. Can you think of a way to turn your collage into a three-dimensional sculpture? Could you make it with clay, or paper-mache? Could you use found objects?
- Draw a realistic picture of someone in your class. Use that drawing to make a second drawing that is an idealised version of your friend. You can think of your drawing as an avatar. Where does the word avatar originate? See if you can find out.
- Look at some pictures of **classical Greek sculpture**. Describe the shapes, colours and textures that you see. Find two things that are similar to John Meade's sculptures, and then find two things that are different.

IN THE GALLERY

- Look at the works in the exhibition and identify which ones are most like a human form. What percentage of the works in the exhibition reference or represent the body in some way? You will need to develop your own criteria to assess the works for this human-like quality.
- In the gallery, or from a photograph, draw one of John Meade's sculptures that appeal to you. As you explore the textures, shapes and lines of the sculpture in your drawing, ask yourself 'if this sculpture were a person, what sort of characteristics would it have?' Write them down. What would this person look like? Work onto your existing drawing, or make a new drawing to represent the character in a more human form.

IN CLASS

- Research the way that the body has been represented in art throughout history. Make a study of three different times and places, or styles and compare the way that the body was represented in each one. What are the formal qualities of the style? How are line, tone, colour, form, shape and texture used? Is it realistic or idealised? Is it representational or abstract? What does it tell you about the identity of the culture or artists that you are studying? What are they saying about themselves?
- Research the life and work of Surrealist artist [Dorothea Tanning](#). Look at her soft sculptures from the 1970s. Compare her work to John Meade's sculptures. What do they have in common? What is different?

STARTING POINTS

2. DESIRE AND CONSUMPTION

DESIRE AND CONSUMPTION

John Meade has acknowledged that he is “a product of the age that I was born into (1956): a time of post war optimism and the rise of **secular humanism**, the birth of television in Australia, atomic age design, rock music ...” (2)

Through the use of smooth clean lines, hard surfaces, rounded forms and bright colours, Meade’s work evokes the world of graphic, interior and product design. Design aesthetics from the 1950s and 60s still heavily influence today’s contemporary design, as demonstrated in the work of designers **Marc Newson** and **Phillippe Stark**.

Consumerism evolved in the first half of the twentieth century as a response to a new era. Following the Industrial Revolution, for the first time in history, there was a mass of affordable products flooding the market, which outstripped demand several times over. The idea of people working less and having more leisure time was perceived as a threat to the fabric of society, leading to laziness and, more seriously, political and social activism. Rather than reducing production and working hours, industry set about creating increased desire for new products through the medium of advertising.

“Department store merchant Edward Filene, a spokesperson for industrialists in the 1920s and 30s, spoke frankly about the need for social planning in order to create a consumer culture where industry could “sell to the masses all that it employs the masses to create” and the need for education to train the masses to be consumers in a world of mass production. He argued that consumer culture could unify the nation and, through education, social change could be limited to changes in the commodities that industry produced.” (3)

The aesthetics of design and advertising were central to this project, and new forms of industrial production, new materials and new forms of media (e.g. television) allowed for an explosion of design that came to symbolise hope for the future. Many of the new products were designed for domestic use focussing attention on the home environment as an expression of identity. In Australia **Grant Featherstone** designed the Featherstone Sound Chairs for the 1967 Expo and in 1965 **Robert Klippel** created his famous Boomerang coffee table (4). In 1968 **Stanley Kubrick** made the film 2001: A Space Odyssey, which featured futuristic costumes and furnishings designed by Anthony Masters, Harry Lange and Ernest Archer.

For the commercial world to operate, the consumer must be **seduced** by objects and images (or the idea of them), In order to stimulate a desire to buy or own. Clean curved lines can be reminiscent of perfect organic forms (no lumps, bumps or fuzz), and shiny hard surfaces are comfortingly hygienic. Meade’s sculptures employ these qualities in a certain **androgynous** sensuality that is very alluring. This appealing, sensual quality is also found in works such as *Climbing Holds* and *Propulsion* that refer to muscularity and endurance.

In 1996 John Meade and fellow artist **Christopher Langton** created an installation in the front gallery, which was formerly an old shop front, at 200 Gertrude Street (now known as Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces) in Melbourne.

The exhibition was titled *Tour de Force* and provided an opportunity for the artists to explore their shared concern with the aesthetic qualities that have been referred to as ‘Plastic Fantastic’, a term first coined with the use of plastic in consumer goods in the 1960s, when Meade and Langton were growing up. This Space Age style included flat bright colours, shiny surfaces, and curved, globular forms. The artists also made playful use of light fittings, moving forms and inflatable balloons.

Following pages 16 & 17:
John Meade and Christopher Langton
Tour de Force (detail) 1996
mixed media
200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
Photo: Andrew Curtis





200 GERTRUDE ST

Tuesday - Friday 10:00am - 5:00pm
Saturday 10:00am - 2:00pm
Tel. 409-1400

Sponsored by
Wickham Foundation for the Arts
Winnipeg Arts Board of the Winnipeg Council

TERMS

SECULAR HUMANISM: a non-religious view of humanity as a fundamentally curious, rational and compassionate species

SEDUCE: to powerfully attract, entice, lure, tempt, sometimes in a gradual way

ANDROGYNOUS: neither male nor female, a combination of the two

JUNIOR IN THE GALLERY

- In the exhibition find a sculpture that reminds you of something you might have at home. What is the title of the sculpture? When was it made? What materials is it made from? Draw the sculpture and write down what you have discovered about it. What do you think the title means?
- Explore the way that John Meade has used colour in his work. Make a note of the colours in each sculpture. Describe them. Are they light or dark? Dull or bright? Is there a particular colour or colour scheme that Meade often uses? Can you describe the overall colour in the exhibition?

IN CLASS

- In the 1950s advertising encouraged people to buy lots of products, and everybody agreed that this was a positive thing for the community. Do you think that this is still true today? If not, how have things changed? Discuss this with your classmates.
- In the 1950s things like dish-washing machines and vacuum cleaners were new and exciting. They made housework a lot easier. Use recycled plastic materials to make a sculpture of a product that was new in the 1950s; you could make one by yourself, or create a team to work on one together. Think about how you can use reflective surfaces and bright colours to make your sculpture attractive.
- Choose an object that you can find at home or in school for example a computer, phone, couch, a basketball, a bookshelf. Make a realistic drawing of the object that you have chosen, then make a second drawing of a distorted version of your object. You could make certain parts bigger or smaller, or change some of the shapes and leave some as they are. Use bright colours to make the object stand out.

IN THE GALLERY

- Discuss the purpose of referencing domestic and commercial products in a fine art context? What meanings and messages is the artist trying to convey?
- Make a formal analysis the work *Low Brush* (1996). What formal qualities does the work have, including colour, shape, line, and space? What materials have been used? What are the aesthetic qualities of the work?

IN CLASS

- Research the work of Australian artist [Christopher Langton](#), who worked with John Meade on the *Tour de Force* exhibition. What are the similarities between the two artists? What are the differences? Think about the materials they use, the way that they work, the ideas and images they explore, the different galleries that they have exhibited in, their cultural background.
- View scenes from [Stanley Kubrick's](#) 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Kubrick was looking thirty years into the future, but now 2001 is almost a decade ago. Did the film get any of its predictions correct in terms of technology and design? Do you think this film has influenced artists and designers from the 1970s to today? How? What are the science fiction films of today that could be influencing art and design? What other things influence graphic and product design?
- Elizabeth Grosz is an Australian philosopher who has commented extensively on contemporary art. She talks here in an interview with Julie Copeland about the fundamental seductiveness of art.

*"Darwin talks about two fundamental processes that regulate all of life; one is natural selection and the other is sexual selection. Natural selection is about survival, and sexual selection, for him, is largely about reproduction or about sexual seduction. And what I think is the origin of art, basically, is that impulse to seduction. So it's something really fundamentally sexual about art, about all of the arts, even though they're very **sublimated**. What art is about is about the constricting of the materials, so the materials then become aestheticised or pleasurable. The pleasure of those materials has to do with the intensification of the body. So this impulse to art is to not make oneself seductive but to make oneself intense, and in the process to circulate some of that **eros** that would otherwise go into sexuality.*

... it's not about our ability to understand or conceptualise something. Although, of course, understanding may be a by-product, it's about feeling something intensely, and as a result of that, there may be the by-product of a kind of understanding. So I think what's radical about what I'm saying is that art isn't primarily or solely conceptual, that what it represents is the most animal part of us rather than the most human part of us. Frankly, I find that really refreshing, in a way, that it's not man's nobility that produces art, it's man's animality that produces art, and that's what makes it of potential interest everywhere." (5)

- Do you agree with Elizabeth Grosz? Is making art part of being an animal, or is it an indicator of our difference from animals? Do you think that products are made to look 'sexy' and therefore desirable? How do you make something that is fundamentally unnecessary, desirable?

TERMS

SUBLIMATE: Divert or modify and instinctual impulse into a culturally higher or socially more acceptable activity.

EROS: Freud used this term to refer to the life-energy that drives us to seek pleasure and reproduce. Eros is the name for the Greek god of love.

STARTING POINTS

3. BEAUTY, FULLNESS AND FORM

BEAUTY, FULLNESS AND FORM

Curvature and fullness have been used in art to express abundance and femininity for thousands of years. *Venus of Willendorf* is a small stone sculpture created over twenty thousand years ago that accentuates the roundness of breasts, belly and buttocks in the female form. The head and feet are small and simplified to focus attention on the round body.

Roundness and paleness remind us of an egg, a fundamental symbol of creative life force and quiet, still potential. The Easter Egg is a symbol of new life. A Japanese creation myth likens the **Primordial Chaos** to an egg containing the germs of creation. Eggs also appear as symbols in many other cultures.

During the twentieth century sculptors began to reduce figures and forms to simple curves and shapes. In the 1950s and 60s the English sculptor **Henry Moore** created elegant, beautiful forms – human figures with small heads and large bodies. He contrasted full, round forms with **negative spaces** that were of equal importance to the body of the sculpture itself. This use of curves and negative space can be seen in several of John Meade's sculptures including *Women in Love*, *Climbing Holds* and *Bad Infinity*.

Before Henry Moore, from the 1900s through to the 1930s, **Constantin Brancusi**, a Romanian sculptor, simplified the human figure even further to round and rectangular forms – he too was captivated by **ovoid** or egg-shaped forms.

This poem published in 1925, by Romanian poet Ion Barbu, was found in a book about the work of Brancusi. Notice how the poet contrasts barrenness and fertility, weddings and funerals:

The **Dogmatic** Egg

The barren egg has now become
The food of saddened peoples
But the egg of life is the **fecund** source
Of inward solitary knowing.

Self-contained like the world of old,
Trembling within its crystal,
On its **nuptial** couch and **catfalque**.

For all creation unleashes crime.
Weddings are holy, origin **sublime**.

From *Joc Secund* (6)



Sunday Devotional 2007
polyester resin, calcium carbonate, pigment and
concrete
Photo: Andrew Curtis

Meade has also been drawn, not only to curved forms in Modernist sculpture, but also to round, white, globular forms in the cartoon characters of his childhood. These include *Casper the friendly ghost*, *Swee' Pea* – Popeye and Olive Oyl's baby, and the *Michelin Man*. The beautiful and comforting resonances of round, pale forms transcend boundaries of fine art and popular culture.



TERMS

DOGMATIC: inclined to lay down principles as incontrovertibly true

PRIMORDIAL CHAOS: formless matter supposed to have existed before the creation of the universe

NEGATIVE SPACES: the shapes made by spaces that are enclosed by forms

OVOID: a three-dimensional version of an oval shape, like an egg

FECUND: fertile, able to produce offspring or new growth

NUPTIAL: related to marriage or weddings

CATAFALQUE: a decorated wooden framework supporting the coffin of a distinguished person during a funeral or while lying in state.

SUBLIME: awe inspiring, of great beauty, or moral or spiritual purity



Previous Page:
Nighttime #2 1997
 vacuum formed ABS plastic
 Photo: Kenneth Pleban

This page:
Nighttime #2 (detail) 1997
 vacuum formed ABS plastic
 Photo: Kenneth Pleban

IN THE GALLERY

- John Meade used images of cartoon characters from his childhood to inspire him. Can you think of any other cartoon characters or characters from films or TV that are big and blobby? Invent your own cartoon character that is big and round and white. What are they made from? What characteristics do they have? Are they friendly or scary?

IN CLASS

- Research the history of the *Venus of Willendorf* statue. Where was she found? By whom? Imagine that it was you who found the statue, what did it feel like? Write a fictional story about it, using your research. Describe your surroundings? What adventures did you have along the way? How did you get to be the person that found her? Read some of the stories out in class.

- Often students make paper-mache heads by forming strips of newspaper over a balloon. Try using the same technique, but keep the layers quite thin so you can cut them with scissors. When the balloon head is dry, cut it into 3 or more pieces and re-arrange them to make a beautiful abstract form. You can make as many balloon heads as you like. Try using curved lines to cut your pieces. You can staple or glue them together, or use more paper-mache strips to attach them. You could attach them to an underlying structure like a cardboard box, or piece of stiff wire. In sculpture this is called an **armature**. Paint your sculpture with one colour only to emphasise the shape.

IN THE GALLERY

- Look at John Meade's work *Nighttime #2* (1997). What are the most significant elements and principles of art that are used in this work. Pick three and describe how they are utilised. How is the work placed in the gallery space? What other works are around the work? Why did the curator or exhibition designer decide to arrange the space the way they did? What ideas or feelings do you think Meade is expressing with this work? Is he successful?
- Draw the shapes of all the interesting **negative spaces** that you can find in the exhibition. At school use these shapes to create a three or two-dimensional artwork. You can turn the negative space that you have drawn into a positive shape, or you can draw the negative space and create an alternative positive shape to go around it.

IN CLASS

- Research the egg as a symbol in a variety of cultures. Where does it occur? Do different cultures interpret the symbol differently? How? Are there similarities? What are they?
- Compare and contrast the works of **Constantin Brancusi** and **Henry Moore**. What events in the early twentieth century do you think might have influenced the work of Brancusi?
- Cut a gentle curve through a piece of card and, and use it as a stencil. Repeat the curve design across a large piece of paper. You can use a stipple brush, or an air-brush or an aerosol. Always use an aerosol with a mask, adequate ventilation, and preferably outdoors. Make a large two-dimensional work – you can use a number of different stencils, or just one. You can make your work a representation of something, like a human or animal form, or you can enjoy the rhythms created by the repetition of the curve. What does the image remind you of? How could you extend these forms into different materials or images?

TERMS

ARMATURE: underlying structure of a sculpture, providing strength and support

ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF ART: the elements of art are line, tone, shape, colour, texture, form and space; the principles of art are balance, harmony, pattern/rhythm, emphasis, movement, proportion, unity.

STARTING POINTS

4. PSYCHOLOGY, THE UNCONCIOUS AND FETISH

PSYCHOLOGY, THE UNCONCIOUS AND FETISH

Sigmund Freud developed the study of psychology in the 19th century. He coined the term 'the **Unconscious**' which means the part of the mind that is inaccessible to the conscious mind but that affects behaviour and emotions. Images are thought to arise from the unconscious mind in the form of dreams and automatic association.

Freud treated his patients by analysing their dreams and using 'free association' where the patient says whatever first comes into his head in response to words given by the analyst (7). Freud's ideas were used extensively by **the Surrealists** in the first half of the twentieth century to inform practices such as automatic writing, and blending or morphing unexpected images and objects together in paintings and sculpture, making their own free associations and drawing on their dreams for inspiration.

Many images from our unconscious minds are thought to have their origin in childhood and infancy and relate to our earliest fears and desires. Freud talked about the '**fetish**', which is an object to which we attach particular significance.

Freud suggested that patients whose sexual maturity had been interrupted in some way might use objects, such as fur or shoes, as replacements for real human relationships, projecting sexual feelings onto these objects (8).

An earlier meaning for the word **fetish** relates to magical and shamanic rituals,

John Meade's work has been influenced by **Surrealism**, particularly by **Hans Bellmer**, the German Surrealist who made life-sized disjointed dolls in the mid 1930s and photographed them in awkward poses.

Dolls and toys have often been used in horror movies to symbolise corrupted innocence. It is easy to imagine that a doll might lead a secret life perhaps played out under cover of night. In this way we project human emotions onto dolls, or use dolls to play out our own unacceptable feelings.

Meade does not create dolls in the same way that Hans Bellmer did, however he combines forms that suggest the body, with hair, to create a suggestion of a doll.

This can be seen in the *Double Pin with Heidi Plait* (2008), *Self Portrait as Mary Magdalene* (2003–09) and *Psychopomp* (2009).

The form for *Double Pin with Heidi Plait* was based on a bowling pin, but by making it symmetrical Meade has given it an accentuated 'waist'.

Self Portrait as Mary Magdalene uses real human hair – a common feature of a ritual fetish. This work was inspired by many different images from Renaissance Art to Horror films (9), and most notably a doll that Meade found in New York similar to a Barbie doll, except that it had no facial features, just ears, and outstretched hands like those in Meade's sculpture.

Other artists to study: [Meret Oppenheim](#)

TERMS

PSYCHOLOGY: the scientific study of the human mind and its functions

UNCONSCIOUS: the part of the mind that is inaccessible to the conscious mind but that affects behaviour and emotions

FETISH: the transference of sexual desire onto an inanimate object, or an inanimate object supposed to have magical powers.

IN THE GALLERY

- Dolls appear in many artworks. What makes John Meade's work *Double Pin with Heidi Plait*, look like a doll? If you took away the plait would it still look like one?
- How would it change the feeling of the sculpture if the plait was a different colour?
- If you met Meade's sculpture *Self Portrait as Mary Magdalene* in a dream, what do you think it would do? Would it speak to you? What would it say?

IN CLASS

- Look at the painting *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* by [Dorothea Tanning](#) painted in 1943. Tanning was Surrealist artist, and is still alive today, turning 100 years old this year. The title is in German – find out what it means.
- The image looks like it could be from a dream. Imagine you are dreaming the dream. What happened before this moment? What will happen next? Can you interpret the dream?
- *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* is the title of a piece of music by a very famous composer. Find out when it was composed. Why do you think Tanning used this title?



This page:
Double Pin with Heidi Plait 2008 (detail)
 polyester resin, fibre-glass, pigment, calcium carbonate,
 industrial plastic bristle, stainless steel & concrete
 Photo: Kristin Wursthorn

Next page:
Black Duo:
Nude with Pitchfork 2002
Self Portrait as Mary Magdalene 2003-2009
 polyester resin and pigment
 human hair, Reducit, polyester resin, bamboo, wood
 Photo: Peter Matra

IN CLASS

- Choose one of John Meade's sculptures and analyse it as if you were a psychoanalyst. What are the unconscious motivations that are expressed in the sculpture?
- Compare the way that [Cindy Sherman](#) has referenced [Hans Bellmer's](#) work, with the way that John Meade has been influenced by him. How have these two contemporary artists drawn on Bellmer's ideas differently?
- Although most of Meade's sculptures could be said to be blind, the work *Mobile Eye* is a giant floating eye. [Salvador Dali](#), arguably the most famous Surrealist painter and designer, used the motif of the eye in his designs for a dream sequence in the film *Spellbound* made in 1945 by [Alfred Hitchcock](#).

You can find this sequence on www.youtube.com. What techniques have Dali and Hitchcock used to create a dream-like feel. Apply the same criteria that you would if you were analysing an artwork: look at how lighting has been used to create tone; how has the camera framed the scene? Are their strong lines – diagonals, verticals and horizontals? How have shape, rhythm, repetition, movement been used?



STARTING POINTS

5. THE MONSTROUS - TRANSFORMATION AND REDEMPTION

THE MONSTROUS - TRANSFORMATIONS AND REDEMPTION

Many of John Meade's sculptures have a figurative or human feel, however they also seem to be 'outsiders'. The title of the work *Impostor* suggests that this form is like cuckoo in a nest, out of place, pretending to be something or someone else. The notion of an impostor is often used in science fiction films where aliens possess human form to take over the Earth. Meade's sculptures possess limbs, torsos and heads, but never faces. This featurelessness gives them a disturbing, menacing quality. They seem to be silent and blind.

Mean Yellow (small version 1997; large version 2000) comprises a large sphere covered in yellow plastic hair-like strands. The long strands of plastic suggest that the sphere may symbolise a floating head without a body. Disembodied heads or floating orbs often appear as supernatural or alien entities in films and television. The use of the word mean in the title is ambiguous: firstly it could suggest average or medium and possibly refer to the shade of yellow used in the work; it could imply that the sculpture itself is cruel and spiteful, or in slang 'mean' can be used to indicate excellence.

In *Self-Portrait as Mary Magdalene*, Meade has fused several images from popular culture. The image is similar to Cousin Itt, the character from the 1960s TV series *The Addams Family* that was made into a full-length movie in 1991. Cousin Itt is a mysterious short being whose entire body is covered with, or possibly made from, hair. He speaks in an incomprehensible high-pitched language and wears sunglasses, a hat and gloves. Meade has also cited the Japanese horror film *Ringu* or *Ring* based on a Japanese ghost story. In the story a ghost appears in the form of a young woman with long black hair covering her face. 'She is a spirit who has died in the grip of intense emotions, a 'returning soul' with unfinished business who holds a grudge against the living.' (10)

The title of the work references a wood carving produced c. 1453-55 by Renaissance artist [Donatello](#). The work is called *Penitent Magdalene* and shows Mary Magdalene returning from the wilderness after a period of fasting to redeem her sins. She is haggard, emaciated and clothed only in her own hair. Meade created this sculpture somewhat in response to feelings of powerlessness and despair at the unfolding of events in the Middle East after the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York in September 2001. He identified with Mary Magdalene's silent suffering.

Often we invent or create monsters or creatures to express the aspects of ourselves and our emotions that we find difficult to deal with, hence monsters are outsiders, or outcast. But they can also inspire pity and affection, if they are not too malevolent, for example the Beast in the Beauty and the Beast fairytale. Beauty has to accept the Beast for who he really is, even though he is physically repellent to her, in order that both of them can be redeemed.

Other artists to study: [Charles Ray](#), [Matthew Barney](#)



IN THE GALLERY

- Look at John Meade's sculpture *Mean Yellow*. Why do you think the artist has used the word 'mean' in the title?
- How does the sculpture make you feel? Is it friendly or frightening, or both?
- Can you think of other creatures or characters that can be funny and sinister at the same time?
- What materials has the artist used to create the sculpture? How do you think the long strands are attached?

IN CLASS

- Look at a picture of Donatello's sculpture *Penitent Magdalene*. How is she feeling? Discuss this in class. How would it feel to see someone walking down the street like this? Would you be scared? Would you feel sorry for her? Would you avoid her?
- Read the story *Beauty and the Beast* in class. Think about an aspect of yourself that you find difficult – if you had a beast, what would it look like? How would it talk and behave? Would you be able to accept and love it one day?



Previous page:
Mean Yellow 1997
 industrial plastic bristle
 Photo: Christopher Snee

This page:
Mean Yellow 2000
 In the grounds of Heide Museum of Modern Art in 2003
 Photo: Andrew Trevillian

IN THE GALLERY

- Reflect on how John Meade uses scale to create drama or unease in some of his sculptures. Start with *Impostor*, and then make a comparison with another work.
- Watch the film of John Meade in conversation with exhibition curator Zara Stanhope. How do his public sculptures differ in scale from those in the gallery? Imagine how you would feel walking next to the public sculpture *Aqualung*?
- In the work *Self Portrait as Mary Magdalene*, identify how the artist has used formal elements such as colour, scale, form, shape to create an emotional impact. What is that impact? Is the figure threatening or melancholic or humorous? How is this impression created?

IN CLASS

- Research the work of [Charles Ray](#), and compare how he uses scale in a different way to John Meade, to create eeriness in his sculptures.
- Consider how you might create a character or monster that can express your more difficult feelings. Begin by writing down some feelings in a journal, then make some drawings, gradually developing a creature. Find some inspiration from films that you might have seen. See if you can bring sinister humour into your work, for example the McDonalds 'Hamburgler' is funny but also creepy. Maybe your monster will be melancholic.
- Make a three-dimensional version of your monster.
- Research the locations of and visit sculptures by John Meade which are displayed in public spaces.

STARTING POINTS

6. MATERIALS, PROCESSES AND TECHNIQUES

MATERIALS, PROCESSES AND TECHNIQUES - SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

John Meade's art gathers inspiration from a wide variety of sources: from popular culture, cartoons, films, graphic and product design, to Renaissance and Modernist sculpture, to his own dreams, experiences and emotions. He approaches the gathering of ideas rather like a bowerbird collects objects that are shiny and attractive that it finds in its environment.

"As a sculptor the things in my path include the thoughts and images that come to mind as much as the objects that I chance upon. The combination of these elements is usually set against a wider context of things that are unfolding in the world around me." [11]

Self Portrait as Mary Magdalene is a good example of this approach. This work was produced in New York when Meade was undertaking study at New York University. He drew on images and materials that he found in his immediate environment – a old doll, real hair that could be purchased in a beauty parlour supply store – and combined these with his fascination with Donatello's sculpture *The Penitent Magdalene*, and his personal response to the so-called 'War on Terror' which became a feature of the first decade of the 21st century. This complex combination of influences flowed together to create the eerie figure of Meade's self portrait.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY – WORKING HANDS ON

The hard, smooth surfaces of Meade's work give the superficial appearance of being produced through industrial processes, a method of working that many contemporary sculptors and artists use. However Meade makes all his own work in his studio, and creates flawless surfaces through labourious hand rendering. Meade intends that the action of the hand "brings a sort of warmth to the form, warmth that emanates from within, not just from the surface." [12]

The processes that Meade uses are those of traditional sculpture such as casting, carving and shaping. When it comes to materials he utilises many different contemporary compounds such as resins, fibreglass and stone. He also mixes his own combinations of these materials to achieve the exact texture and colour that he requires. To create the hands and feet for *Self Portrait as Mary Magdalene*, he made casts of his own hands and feet, and used a new product that shrinks as it dries, to pour into his moulds.

When creating large scale public sculpture Meade often chooses materials more commonly used in heavy industry, such as cement, concrete and steel. These sculptures are constructed to last a long time and must withstand environmental pressures such as rain, wind, sun and vandalism.

"I don't have an overarching formal project that would determine the process of production in advance. Instead, I like to improvise with materials and see where they take me. As a material producer I am always looking for something to use and perhaps something that will use me. This looking activates an exploratory relationship with the world of objects and it is therefore part of my daily experience". [13]

PLACEMENT OF WORKS IN SPACE

John Meade's background in dance, his study of Ikebana, and his professional experiences in retail display inform the placement of his works in gallery spaces, and their placement in relationship to one another. They have direct relationships with one another, but they defy the term **installation**. They are rarely **site specific** in the way that installations usually are, and they remain focused on the object rather than the space itself. His works form what can be described as **ensembles**, or **tableaux**, terms often used in a theatrical context.

"The sculpture that I now make tends to carry with it these earlier experiences. But the experiences themselves don't interest me as much as the facility that each experience points to: namely, a capacity that I have for the placement and presentation of objects in space and also the capacity to use my body as a measure against other objects in that space."

In the first exhibition of *Impostor*, Meade consciously set about constructing his sculptures in a basement gallery space to give the impression that they had been 'caught in the act':

"In this space was a scenario involving a couple of sculptures involved in some sort of back room meet. One sculpture was a small version of the other, and it was watching the scene from behind an H-beam. It was a primal scene but the action was frozen as if everything had stopped at the moment the viewer entered the room – the protagonists in the scene were trapped in the glare of the viewers gaze." (14)

Meade has produced a number of site specific public sculptures. These pieces are designed with their final placing and how the public will interact with them in mind.

MOTION AND MOVEMENT IN MEADE'S WORK

Movement can be seen in Meade's sculptures even if they are physically static: the twisting forms of *Bad Infinity* (2009), and elegant trajectory of flower-like forms in *Objects and Protestations* (2003) and the squirming, stretching *Nude with Pitchfork* (2002).

Meade extends this exploration of movement by suspending some of his works. This is especially evident in *Mobile Eye* (1999), in which flat forms are suspended together in the form of a mobile.

Artist **Alexander Calder** used this technique in the 1930s and 1940s to create brightly coloured abstract mobiles. When forms are free to float in suspension, the slowly changing angles of the flat shapes create new forms and new relationships. Artists **Naum Gabo** (1890-1977) and his brother **Antoine Pevsner** (1886-1962) coined the term '**kinetic art**' in relation to Alexander Calder's work.

TERMS

INSTALLATION: an artwork that is comprised of different elements in relation to each other. It can include objects, sound, lighting effects, video.

SITE SPECIFIC: something that is created for a particular space or place.

TABLEAUX: a group of models or motionless people representing a scene from a story or from history
ensemble: a group of items viewed as a whole rather than individually; a group of musicians, actors or dancers who perform together

KINETIC ART: a form of art that depends of movement for its effect.

IN THE GALLERY

- Draw a circle on a piece of paper approximately 10cms diameter – a size that fits nicely on your sheet. Put a dot right in the middle of the circle.
- Use your circle to create a pie chart that shows which are the most important elements of art in one of John Meade's artworks. For the most important element make a big piece of pie – if you think two or three elements are equally important you will need to make those slices the same size. Your pie does not have to include all the elements of art, some may not be relevant. You can start with *Mobile Eye*, and do a second pie chart if you have time.
- Write a sentence to describe the elements in your three biggest slices.
- Meade uses a mobile to create motion in his work. In what other ways has motion been created in his work?





Previous page:
Show Business 2009
 installation view Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
 Left to right: *Double Pin with Heidi Plait* 2008, *Sabrina*
 2009, *Psychopomp* 2009, *Bad Infinity* 2009
 Photo: Andrew Curtis

This page:
Acqualung 2006
 fibreglass reinforced concrete, pigment and steel
 Photo: Kristin Wusthorn

IN THE GALLERY

- Make a sketch of the floor plan of the exhibition. How have the works been grouped together? Is the audience 'guided' through the exhibition in a logical flowing way? How has this been done? Are the works placed in chronological order?
- Write some notes to describe how the exhibition has been marketed. Where is the signage placed? Are there catalogues for sale? Has the gallery organised any public events to coincide with the exhibition? Ask gallery staff for information if necessary.

IN CLASS

- In his interview with Zara Stanhope for the exhibition catalogue John Meade refers to the work of choreographers [Martha Graham](#) and Michael Clark. What elements of the work of these choreographers do you think have influenced John Meade's work?
- Research the kinetic sculptures of New Zealand artist and designer, [Len Lye](#). How has he used motion in his sculptures? There is an excellent clip of his work on www.youtube.com. Search for 'Len Lye Kinetic Sculptures'.
- Create an installation that suspension to create movement. For inspiration look at the work of Swiss artists Gerda Steiner and Jorg Lenzlinger, who they created an installation for the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne in 2009.
- Experiment with casting techniques to create body parts. Take a piece of clay and make an impression in it with your hand or fist. You will have to make sure that you can remove your hand without destroying the mould. Pour plaster into the mould.

When it has hardened and cooled down you can easily peel away the clay to reveal the form. Try different types of clay, how does and oil-based clay like Plasticene work? Maybe you can combine the forms you create to make a new and/or abstracted form. You can also use plaster bandage (Modroc) to make a mould.

ENDNOTES - USEFUL WEBSITES

USEFUL WEBSITES

<http://www.suttongallery.com.au/>

THE BODY'S POLARITIES: ABSTRACTION AND REPRESENTATION

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/A/arp.html>

http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_bio_8.html

DOROTHEA TANNING

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgroupid=999999961&artistid=2024&page=1>

<http://dorotheatanning.org/>

DESIRE AND CONSUMPTION

Stanley Kubric 2001 1968 <http://www.wetcircuit.com/2007/04/02/2001-a-space-odyssey/>

<http://theinvisibleagent.wordpress.com/2009/06/25/vintage-stewardesses-of-the-jet-age/>

<http://www.marc-newson.com/>

<http://www.starck.com/>

BEAUTY, FULLNESS AND FORM

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/B/brancusi.html#images>

<http://www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk/>

PSYCHOLOGY, THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE FETISH

<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/surrealism/>

THE MONSTROUS – TRANSFORMATION AND REDEMPTION

<http://www.regenprojects.com/artists/charles-ray/>

www.gladstonegallery.com/barney.asp

MATERIALS, PROCESSES AND TECHNIQUES

<http://calder.org/home>

<http://www.accaonline.org.au/GerdaSteinerJorgLenzlinger>

www.govettbrewster.com/LenLye/work/sculpture/

ENDNOTES - REFERENCES

REFERENCES:

- (1) Stephen Zagala, 'The Life of Forms', *Objects to Live By/ The Art of John Meade*, catalogue essay, NETS Victoria 2010.
- (2) 'John Meade in conversation with the exhibition curator', *Objects to Live By/ The Art of John Meade* catalogue, NETS Victoria 2010, pp. 11–18.
- (3) Sharon Beder, 'Consumerism – an Historical Perspective', *Pacific Ecologist* 9, Spring 2004, pp. 42-48.
- (4) Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara, Philip Goad, *Modern Times – the untold story of Modernism in Australia*, The Miegunyah Press, 2008 pp. 34,183-188.
- (5) Elizabeth Grosz, interview with Julie Copeland, ABC Radio National, *Sunday Morning* 14/08/2005 <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/sunmorn/stories/s1435592.htm>
- (6) Radu Varia, *Brancusi*, Rizzoli International Publications, 1986 p. 163.
- (7) Maggie Hyde and Michael McGuinness, *Introducing Jung*, Icon Books, 1992, pp. 20–21.
- (8) Richard Appignanesi and Oscar Zarate, *Introducing Freud*, Icon Books, 1992, pp. 96–97.
- (9) Johanna Fahey, *Incident in the Museum* catalogue essay, Monash University Museum of Art, 2004.
- (10) Johanna Fahey, *ibid.*
- (11) John Meade, Interview with Stephen Zagala, Sutton Gallery 2005.
- (12) John Meade, Interview with Zara Stanhope, *op cit.*
- (13) John Meade, Interview with Stephen Zagala, *op cit.*
- (14) John Meade, Interview with Zara Stanhope, *op cit.*

Please note: Websites have been gathered from various sources and the listing of them does not mean an endorsement by NETS Victoria.

Teachers: Although we check each site before listing, please ensure you have thoroughly checked any site before distributing to your students.



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