

2009 Unleashed



Hand  
Made  
Strange

**artisan**  
idea • skill • product

Hannah Cripps

Shane Brazier

Helen Rogers

Elizabeth Willing

Catherine Sagin

Mila Vasikic

# 2009 Unleashed

## Hand Made Strange

**artisan**

*5 February - 4 April 2009*

**Artisan's 2009 *Unleashed*** exhibition **Hand Made Strange**, focuses on graduate and emerging artists who manipulate the vocabularies of craft, design, and a wider object culture. As to what this title might describe, **Hand Made Strange** seeks to recognise the artist's ability to *make strange*, or de-familiarise the common and unassuming object.

Through group exhibition, a range of methods are explored by which practitioners twist and alter the way we see the things around us. Writer Vanessa Joan Müller describes the ability of artists to create a radical "other world" with only "a tiny step away from the existing world."<sup>1</sup>

Within **Hand Made Strange** we see this sentiment accomplished in the work of six emerging artists, all of whom hold the astute ability to push perceptively mundane things into new shapes, and toward new meanings.



# HANNAH CRIPPS

*Office Virus, 2008*

Dimensions variable

Stationary, polystyrene balls and office equipment

Image courtesy of USQ

The hand crafted spheres that occupy Hannah Cripps' installation *Office Virus* could be described as 'pretty'. Certainly as objects they are not hard to look upon and enjoy. Each is individually constructed from items of stationary, inserted into the surface of a common hobby-craft polystyrene ball. However, beyond the unanticipated aesthetic dimension of these items, Cripps also intends social commentary. Observing the pressures of today's material culture, within *Office Virus* Cripps participates as the obsessive consumer, highlighting the excesses of a throw away culture. She achieves this not through blatant opposition, but by becoming a truly accomplished accumulator, and by inviting the viewer to participate

through their own misplaced appreciation of excess. For this installation Cripps uses the office setting as a symbol of the everyday. And true to the title, these crafted objects spread throughout in a viral manner. The term 'office virus' might ordinarily invoke reference to the computer virus, something potentially destructive to commerce and financial stability. Cripps visualised this as a bright and colorful starburst, emerging from the filing cabinet in the form of clustered glue sticks. Here the artist locates an imaginative quality amongst everyday products (without overstating her intentions), and successfully transforms the common character of these materials into something new.





56  
+43  
\$99

Meeting  
12pm  
today

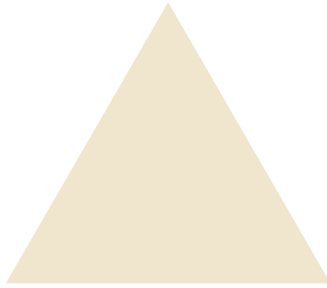
# SHANE BRAZIER

*Trophy Star, 2008*

380 x 220 x 240mm

Assorted trophy pieces

Image courtesy of the artist



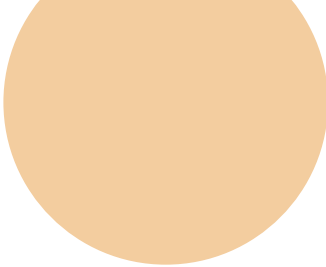
If industrialisation is often blamed for the demise of craft, similarly to Hannah Cripps, artist Shane Brazier utilises the mass produced, recoding ordinary items pulled straight from the racks of shops and outlet stores. The work *Trophy Stars* featured within **Hand Made Strange** is made from pieces of acrylic trophy ornament. Hung from the ceiling to 'float' as a large golden orb, the figures that constitute *Trophy Stars* range from tennis players right through to the clasped hands of an arm-wrestling duo. While potentially amassing into something epic, instead the weight of achievement seemingly represented by so many trophies quickly dissipates into a mass of shiny plastic. Like some kind of totem ball or kitsch shrine

dedicated to overachievement, we are forced to fill these empty shiny objects with our own sentiment (or not). Cultural theorist Raymond Williams noted that a culture has two aspects. First are "the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to recognise", and second, "the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested."<sup>2</sup>

Brazier, a keen observer of Australian social attitudes and cultural traits, reacts to his surrounds with wit and also a subtle note of celebration. Made within a country that commemorates its sporting achievements with both fervor and dedication, *Trophy Stars* is an exquisite tribute to the banal tokenism of the trophy.







# HELEN ROGERS

*Untitled, 2008*

330 x 1500mm

Nylon stocking, table tennis balls

Image courtesy of Live Image, QCA, Griffith University

It could be said that the mark of a good metaphor is its aversion to a precise and literal relationship to meaning. This might prove difficult for an artist using nylon stockings and table tennis balls. Loaded with potential associations, Rogers' everyday materials have histories as objects of utility, but also histories as containers of metaphor. Within art, literature and film, the stocking is often treated as a fetishistic or sensual item of clothing, an item that implies a feminine sexuality. The stocking also has the ability to communicate a sense of what is hidden and revealed in the same instance. Even with this weight

of association and despite these materials assuming so many casual connections to the world itself, Rogers manages to transform the everyday through the simple manipulation of two objects coupled with the clever use of exhibition space. Spanning a gap between gallery walls, *Untitled* takes on a physicality that is strangely animal or even alien-like. Of course this is just one of many possible readings, and the description of an allegory has none the power of the allegory it describes. Rogers intentionally withholds from defining the textual content of her materials in order to engage the participatory mind in all the ways that she can.






# ELIZABETH WILLING

*tip of the icing berg, 2008*

100 x 100 x 80mm


Icing sugar, artificial nails, x-rays

Image courtesy of the artist



The artists within **Hand Made Strange** understand that they live in a world where meaning is created. And they appreciate that everything, no matter how base, is available for continual re-evaluation. Elizabeth Willing is an artist who revels in the baseness of resources. Choosing to integrate the ephemeral limitations of a range of formless foodstuffs into her practice, Willing experiments with the mixed modes of reception that food can evoke. At times combining the edible with the inedible or repulsive, her work invites us into an unfamiliar relationship with something we are used to controlling. Within *tip of the icing berg*, artificial fingernails

are pushed like scales into the surface of white marzipan icing. For the work *birth of a new star*, metal putty oozes from the end of a cake decorator. We luxuriate in the richness of these materials and the care put into their making, as easily as we are repelled by their visceral and uncontrollable qualities. As part of visual culture, food is often not considered to be 'authored', not in the way that painting, photography or sculpture might be. Treated as incidental, food is rarely interpreted for its aesthetic qualities, and even more rarely for its textual qualities. Willing explores the traditions of food, its overuse, misuse, emotional appeal and its connection to the feminine and the domestic.







# CATHERINE SAGIN

*Evert*, 2008

Dimensions variable


*Besta* caster wheel, *Evert* waste bin

Image courtesy of the artist

Artist Catherine Sagin finds hidden opportunities amongst the structural and functional qualities of IKEA furnishings. Responding to the particularities of this popular conglomerate, she approaches carefully designed products with a willingness to misinterpret and the intent to hybridise. Within the work *Evert*, Sagin maintains the slick modern design of her materials. 'Undoing' the utilitarian and rendering it less serviceable, the work is composed of a *Besta* castor wheel drilled to the base of a black *Evert* waste bin. Both of these are products of the famously exhaustive IKEA design process, and both (on their own) are achievements of simplicity, efficiency and economy. Yet once combined by Sagin, a disjuncture from common sense is materialised in showroom quantities.

It is perhaps amusing, as the act of adding a wheel could be the most obvious way that an amateur

designer might improve something that already exists in the world. The wheel is arguably the single most important invention of all time, and adding one to something is historically understood as a progressive and positive thing. One could assume the genius that invented luggage with wheels was met with the highest of design accolades. However, in the case of *Evert*, a manipulation of the structural qualities of two alternate IKEA products creates a function-less furnishing that is as ridiculous as it is unassuming. For Sagin, design becomes a rhetorical language that can be used to reinterpret our occupation with ease, comfort, functionality and all the other mothers of invention. Through a process of selection and subtle manipulation, Sagin consciously disrupts our habitual engagement with furniture, challenging the austerity of modern design aesthetics through humorous intervention.







# MILA VASIKIC

## *Common House* (detail), 2008

110 x 140 x 60mm

Tally Ho packaging, peppermint tea wrapper, tampon packaging, Winfield

Blue cigarette box, Longbeach Mild cigarette box, paper plate,


packing box, hemming tape

Image courtesy of the artist

The principles and conventions of design also become an important point of departure within the work of Mila Vasikic. A recent architecture graduate from the University of Queensland, Vasikic explores the capacity of the scale model in her carefully constructed sculptural series *Common House*. Sourcing everyday materials such as cardboard tea boxes, hemming tape and rubber cutting matt, Vasikic's architectural models are cleverly composed with an appreciation for the formal attributes of common things. The blue grid patterned packaging of a tampon box becomes the exterior stone cladding of a town house in one model, as the inner lining of a cigarette packet is recognised to be a suitable stand-in for steel roofing. At times reminiscent of an early cubist collage approach to image making, Vasikic transforms this bric-a-brac physically, directly referencing real

life textures and architectural form in the process.

Perhaps within a professional architectural context, the use of these kinds of materials (essentially rubbish) might be seen as proletarian or aligned with childlike craft. However, Vasikic brings to our attention the latent symbolic potential of these materials, a potential that does not exist within standardised cardboard, ply or foam. Within model #1, Vasikic constructs a scale model corner shop using objects that also contain inherent scale. Plastic rulers, measuring tape and grid paper are just some of the items used in this flexible play on form and function. *Common House* #1 therefore becomes self referential as a scale model, reminding us of the models intended purpose to communicate spatial ideas, and doing so through the use of other items with similar abilities.





### Camomile

A combination of camomile with the refreshing taste of spearmint.



BREAST STRUCTURE  
over tea  
minutes,  
Serve with

Camomile (35%), Sp  
Blackberry Leaves,

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When approaching the bits and pieces of this world, the artists within **Hand Made Strange** dedicate themselves to generating an individual, active mode of engagement. Whether making objects under the banner of artist, designer or craftsperson, each successfully finds new potential amongst common things, and approaches their material of choice with a willingness to reinterpret. As a result we are challenged to broaden the way we attribute value within the fields of craft and design, and concurrently the way we understand a world full of seemingly dispensable things. Some works are elusive and difficult to categorise. This is largely because they derive from objects that ordinarily demand so little of our attention. Our custom to assume understanding and control over the common materials of the home, the shop and the workplace, becomes disadvantageous. To best appreciate these works, we must attempt to question things that previously we've regarded as certain, and like the artists within **Hand Made Strange**, see the world as strange in order to know it better.

Tim Woodward, Curator  
**Hand Made Strange**  
artisan

#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>. Müller, Vanessa Joan, *ADORNO: The Possibility of the Impossible*, Lukas & Sternberg, 2003

<sup>2</sup>. Williams, Raymond, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, London: Verso, 1989

Inside Front Cover Image: Hannah Cripps, *Pinned Down* (detail), pins and polystyrene ball, 110 x 110mm, image courtesy of USQ.

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TUES-FRI 10:30AM - 5:30PM SAT 10:00AM - 4:00PM

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