



PATRICIA PICCININI

Education Resource

INTRODUCTION



The exhibition *PATRICIA PICCININI: Once upon a time...* introduces an exciting world where we are able to discover many fantastical creatures in unusual settings.

Piccinini's sculpture, installation, video work, photography and drawing, transport us to strange locations that are nevertheless eerily familiar.

The exhibition is drawn primarily from private collections, and also includes new works created by the artist and seen for the first time at the Art Gallery of South Australia. The works span the artist's career to date.

Piccinini invites us to think about our place within a time when biotechnology and digital technologies are challenging the boundaries of humanity. Confronting us with her seemingly grotesque hybrid beings and anthropomorphic machines, she invites us to find beauty in a world that can never be perfect.

In the exhibition book, curator Jane Messenger comments:

In recent years ... Piccinini's critique has expanded to include an investigation of evolutionary biology and how the machine – that invention that now dominates contemporary society – may, by developing animalistic patterns of behaviour, become a sentient and autonomous being. Although her work is primarily full of hope ... it does contain dark undercurrents.

These undercurrents concern new technologies, scientific manipulations, the customising of life. We are led to consider how we will respond to and manage the outcomes of bio-technological advances.

TEACHERS' NOTES

This education resource has been prepared by Education Services to support the exhibition *PATRICIA PICCININI: Once upon a time...* and is intended as a guide to assist teachers of primary and secondary students in generating ideas and guiding learning before, during, and following a visit to the exhibition.

The resource can be adapted for different contexts and year levels. It has been designed to integrate with the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework, with particular focus on Learning areas.

It links most directly to:

- Arts – Visual Arts: 'Arts in context' and 'Arts analysis and response'
- Society and Environment: 'Place, space and environment'
- Science: 'Earth and space' and 'Living systems'

The aim of this resource is to offer insights into Piccinini's practice, works of art, and major themes. It is intended as a starting point for generating ideas, for encouraging student research, and as a basis for discussion during and following exhibition visits. The resource introduces key works of art, provides background information on the artist, and offers questions and suggested activities.

This resource can be used in a variety of ways, both for student groups, as well as for individual study and research. The material is intended to complement the information provided in the exhibition book, *PATRICIA PICCININI: Once upon a time...*

Teachers are invited to adapt the resource to suit their students' needs, or select and integrate sections into existing units of study.

Pre-visit learning

- Download the education resource and view this prior to visiting. www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/learning
- Ask questions: What do students already know about contemporary artistic practice in Australia? What do I want students to experience, appreciate, and learn as a result of this visit?
- Encourage research and discussion on the exhibiting artist, including her use of a team of specialists at Drome studio, Melbourne: modellers, cast makers, spray painters, hair punchers, editors, and video and production workers to complete her works.
- Visit Patricia Piccinini's website www.patriciapiccinini.net and explore other works.

Key terms in bold are defined in the Glossary at the end of this resource, where ideas for post-visit learning are also included.

Learning at the exhibition

As students view the exhibition, they are encouraged to think creatively, and take nothing for granted. The following themes and concepts integral to Piccinini's work might provide the basis for student discussion:

- care and responsibility toward what we create (or destroy)
- the blurring of boundaries between science, technology and humanity, particularly between humans and machines
- what it means to be human (or family) in a world in which boundaries are blurred: our place at this time – and in the future
- the possibilities (and drawbacks) of biotechnology
- our relationship to the environment, to the natural and the artificial
- consumerism in contemporary society
- life and death, and ideas of salvation and sacrifice
- identity (and what we identify with)
- how we manage / respond to difference and change
- contemporary art practice, and how advances in science and technology have created new possibilities for artists.



ALOFT

This large scale work (it weighs 100 kgs!) looks real, but it's not something we would find in our real world. The artist imagines different worlds in which we will recognise some things, but not others.

Similar to other sculptures in the exhibition, *Aloft* is constructed from a wide range of materials including fibreglass, felted human hair and wool, steel cable, silicon, horse hair, clothing, and electronic motors.

Here a young boy is peeping over the edge of a large, bulging egg sack, suspended from the centre of a web. The boy seems curious and untroubled – comfortable as he looks at the world beneath him, relaxed in his surroundings, however strange these may seem to us.

This hairy egg sack has been fashioned from human hair. Many hairdressers and volunteers in Melbourne were involved in collecting and sorting the quarter of a tonne of hair required for the work! Human hair has also been used in *Newborn*, *The long awaited*, *The young family*, and several other works.

Questions and activities

Primary

- On the way down the stairs, what do you see? At the bottom of the stairs, look up at *Aloft*. How does it look different from this view?
- Why do you think the boy has climbed in, and is now peeping over the edge? Has he been exploring?
- What is going on inside the sack? Have the grubs been hibernating in this nest? What might finally emerge?
- How do you feel about these imaginary grubs building a home in our Gallery?

Secondary

- What are the various elements which make up this work of art? Does your reaction to the work change as you move around and past the work? Does a change in perspective influence your interpretation of the work, or add to a developing narrative?
- Does this strange organic form seem at odds with its environment?
- This work refers to the idea that it is the right of humans to go into the environment of other species and take (or destroy) what they want. Does it seem different when an imagined species invades our Gallery? Discuss.



THE YOUNG FAMILY

This work was inspired by scientists' plans to begin breeding genetically-modified pigs to provide replacement organs and insulin-producing cells for humans, thus alleviating shortages of human organs for transplant, and treating diabetes. The work is not about whether such practices are right or wrong, but rather whether society will accept the outcomes of these developments.

The artist has commented: 'For me, *The young family* is about the ethical implications of creating new life to serve humans, and also about the interaction between emotion and rationality when thinking about these "creation" issues.'

This young family has been created by 'mixing' together two or more genetically different animals. They are chimeras. What animals are you reminded of when you look closely? The mother is shown suckling two babies. She seems exhausted and sad. Her gaze is vacant. The playful pup is in a pose very like one in which babies are often seen, lying on their backs, playing with their toes. Is the artist perhaps suggesting that there is not a great distance between animals and humans? Despite the fact that these are creatures imagined by the artist, *The young family* looks very real.

Questions and activities

Primary

- Look at the expression on the mother's face. What does this expression suggest she might be thinking and feeling?
- Find out about the range of human organs which are able to be transplanted.
- Discuss in class whether you think organ donation and transplantation are good ideas?

Secondary

- The artist has commented:
I am interested in the kind of ways that we look at the many ethical issues that surround medical technologies. There are two kinds of people who are thinking about these issues; those who are objective observers and those that are actually affected by the issues, such as somebody who has a family member who is affected by a disease. These are two different viewpoints...

Public Lecture – Tokyo Art University 2003

How does this work make you feel about advancements in medical technology?

- What is the nature of our relationship with animals? We use animals as 'machines' that produce eggs, milk, meat and now, body parts for humans. Are we exploiting animals for our own gain? Have scientists over-stepped the mark? What are your views?
- Later, research the work and writings of the ethicist / philosopher Peter Singer on animals and pain.

BIG MOTHER

(illustrated next page) The inspiration for this work arose from the artist hearing a true story about a female baboon whose baby had died while still nursing. The baboon, overwhelmed by grief, abducted a human child as a substitute. The child was later recovered unharmed.

The artist has created *Big Mother* with many characteristics of a baboon. She is nearly two metres high, and stands tall and upright, just as we do. She is gently holds and feeds a human baby, a protecting, nurturing and loving action which shows that humans and animals care for their young in similar ways. The baby is obviously calm and relaxed: notice the position of its hand, resting against *Big Mother's* breast.

When looking at the work we can imagine different stories: Is this mother a specially engineered primate who has been bred to be a wet nurse? Is she some kind of helper, carer or babysitter?

Questions and activities

Primary

- Why is *Big Mother* so sad?
- If *Big Mother* could talk, what do you think she would say to you about being a mother?
- What is your first impression on looking at this sculpture? Does your impression change as you walk around the sculpture and examine it more closely?
- Why has the artist included bags in the work? What might be in the bags?

Secondary

- Piccinini's sculptures have been described as 'terrifying and awe-inspiring, repulsive and alluring . . .'
(Messenger, exhibition book)
This comment suggests that we might have a mixed response to Piccinini's work. What were your responses to *Big Mother*?
- The artist is interested in notions of family. Discuss in class your interpretation of family, or what constitutes a family in contemporary – or future – society?
- How does this particular depiction of 'nurturing,' both physical and emotional, question what it is to be human?





THE STAGS

This sculptural work cleverly mixes the appearance and features of animal and machine. It combines the shape of the popular Italian motor scooter, the Vespa, and the muscular form of a male deer, a stag. A **hybrid** form is created.

The artist has 'imagined' two scooters behaving as animals – as stags fighting, perhaps over territory, or females, as animals do in the wild. There is a remarkable sense of movement achieved in the sculpture, with the shiny sinuous bodies seeming to twist and writhe. One stag is clearly dominant, the other appearing almost to cringe in defeat. The defeated stag looks bewildered – look closely at its 'dial'! The work raises issues about what is natural, and what is mechanical, and about power and hierarchies in groups or communities. Who will survive: the fittest, the strongest, those bred for particular conditions?

The work also reflects another of Piccinini's favourite themes: consumerism. In Italy, Vespas are seen as symbolic of style and class. They are very desirable, even though not always practical.

Questions and activities

Primary

- In the world the artist imagines, the boundaries between machine and animal become increasingly blurred. Imagine what would happen in our world if machines became 'human'! Talk about this possibility with a classmate.
- Choose a machine from your home or shed, and show in a drawing how it could become 'human'.

Secondary

- Create a series of photographic images of mechanical objects and using a computer program, imagine and animate your favourite image as an animal.
- Research developments in medical science / technology where new mechanical interventions and attachments are improving the lives of sick or disabled people.
- The fact that the machines in this work are free to be autonomous, and interact as they wish, brings an onerous tone to a seemingly 'bright' work. They take on a life of their own. Discuss how developments in technology may have both a 'bright' and a dark side.



TRUCK BABIES

These sculptures have been created as the 'babies' of large (adult!) road trucks, remembered by Piccinini after a road trip in America during which she drove from New Orleans to Niagara Falls. With their rounded forms, prominent bottoms and little wheels they are very appealing, unlike their large and noisy 'parents' which thunder past us on vast highways. The colours the artist has used 'humanise' the truck babies: baby pink for girls and baby blue for boys. We think 'How cute!'

This work is about how it is now possible to see machines in terms of animals. It is about how we might talk to our computers, and also think that our car has a personality. In this new world, the Truck babies need the Big sisters, Tokyo girls who are technologically savvy, to help them lead a fulfilling life.

This is another work in which Piccinini explores the theme of families, and offspring. She is also interested in how, particularly as consumers, we respond to objects which are 'cute', as opposed to those which are less visually appealing. She has commented on her website: 'I am fascinated by the variety, complexity, beauty and seduction of consumerism'.

In contemporary culture consumers crave the stylish and colourful; the shiny; the latest models, with glossy surfaces and shiny chrome. And we can be easily seduced by fads. The accompanying video work focuses on young women deemed by Piccinini to be perfect consumers for the truck babies.



CAR NUGGETS GL

Other works here have an 'auto' or car focus. *Heart Breaker* and *Blaze* are from the *Car nuggets GL* series. These fibreglass sculptures represent cars which have been transformed, or compressed, as if distilled down to their essence. Is this a kind of minimalism?

These moulded forms with their fluid, shiny surfaces are instantly appealing, like the *Team WAF* helmets. They remind us of gleaming, newly-manufactured and polished cars that are objects of desire for consumers.





TEAM WAF (PRECAUTIONS)

The 'helmets' look very appealing – bright colours and designs, shiny, and we might be very tempted to want one. But look at the unusual shapes: Are they useful or practical objects? Would they protect us, as a helmet should? If not us, who? What kind of head have they been made for? They have obviously been designed for strange, non-human heads. For future beings? These heads may be 'different' or even 'disabled,' but still need the helmets to drive fast cars.

The title of the work suggests a group, like a family, perhaps a family of bikes, or bike racers. And these helmets are further humanised or individualised in their names / labels: *Hornet*, *Transfuser*, *Offspring* (this last 'name' reminiscent of the *Truck babies* ...) What do these names suggest to you?

Questions and activities

Primary

- Look at the photograph *Mountain* nearby. Is this perhaps the land the *Truck babies* originated in?
- Why has the artist used the word 'nuggets' for her sculptures? What other things do you know that are described as nuggets?
- Using plasticine, make a 'baby' model of a familiar machine or appliance. What would you do to make your model appeal to a consumer?

Secondary

- What do you think *Truck babies* and *Team WAF* and the car nuggets have in common?
- Patricia Piccinini has described *Truck babies* as 'a cute work, full of humour, but at the same time quite serious. It asks questions about the "nature" of contemporary society – and the increasingly strange and confused relationship between what we see as "natural" and "artificial"'. What is your response to *Truck babies*?



GAME BOYS ADVANCED

In this sculpture we see two boys who look like twins. They are focused on a hand-held computer game – ‘Game Boy’. But on closer look it seems that they are not boys at all. They have loose, blemished skin, wrinkled eyes – and ear hair! These are characteristics of a much older person. The work draws on Piccinini’s interest in **evolution, genetic engineering**, and technology.

The boys have been **cloned**. The idea for this work came from developments in the cloning of genes. Piccinini is interested in the promise of genetic engineering, but acknowledges in her work that it can have bad outcomes as well as good. What will become of the unexpected or undesirable outcomes, Piccinini has asked? ‘Will we love the failures of new technologies as much as we love the successes?’

The first cloned mammal was Dolly, a sheep cloned from a mammary cell of an adult ewe, in Scotland in 1996. There was a good deal of interest in this development, and much controversy. Dolly aged prematurely and did not live as long as expected, and this was possibly because she was cloned from a ewe already six years old. The unnatural environment in which Dolly was raised may also have contributed to her early death.

In this work Piccinini is imagining future possibilities, although perhaps the possibilities are actually not too distant. It is interesting that the boys do not seem concerned about their situation. They are ageing prematurely, but they look quite content, absorbed in their game, just as we would expect young boys to be.

Questions and activities

Primary

- Would you like a scientist to be able to create another you? Think about whether you would change anything, and if you would, why?
- Do you feel sympathy for the boys – or something else?
- If you could ask the boys some questions, what would they be?

Secondary

- What do you think the artist has intended by using the word ‘advanced’ in the title?
- Find out more about cloning, and what scientists hope to achieve (or can already achieve). Discuss with classmates the ethical issues around cloning. Many argue that cloning and gene therapy are wrong, because they interfere with nature. What are your views?



SURROGATE

Surrogate was designed by the artist as one of her *Natures little helpers* series, biologically engineered to help the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat, endangered through drought, dingo attacks, and urban development. It nurtures wombat embryos in its pouches which run along its back. On close examination we see each wombat at a different stage of growth. Some are newborns, while others are almost ready to leave their pouch. The *Surrogate* must have patience and persistence, for its job is never done.

This imagined creature sits outside its custom-made blue leather tent, designed to offer protection from the weather, and because he has no fur or hair covering his skin. The tent might also provide safety against predators.

The artist looks to question the extent to which we will use biotechnology in our attempts to undo the damage we have done to the environment.

BOTTOM FEEDER

Bottom feeder is another of *Nature's little helpers*. This strange custom-designed creature, with a shark's head, human body and legs like a dog, has the task of devouring rubbish. It provides a cleaning service.

BODYGUARD

Bodyguard is another of the artist's creations for the *Nature's little helpers* series. *Bodyguard* was designed as a means for protecting the *Golden Helmeted Honeyeater*, an endangered bird found in Victoria. Very few of these birds are left in the wild because of habitat degradation caused by urban growth. The fierce-looking bodyguard is perched on a custom-made synthetic 'tree'. Its posture suggests that it is ready to repel both human and non-human threats. It has sharp fangs, a strong jaw, and powerful human-like hands. Its bulging eyes suggest that it is constantly alert.

With these three sculptures the artist is focusing on themes which interest her – the environment and evolution.



Questions and activities

Primary

- Do you find these sculptures frightening or confronting? Why? Or why not?
- Later, find out more about the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat which is the subject of *Surrogate*, and its natural environment. How are we managing to protect the remaining Northern Hairy-nosed Wombats?
- The artist has described the *Bottom feeder* creature as 'beautiful'. What do you think? Imagine how this creature might move to devour the rubbish!

Secondary

- *Surrogate* was inspired by an exhibition which looked at the use of cloning and ancient DNA to revive the Tasmanian tiger, an Australian marsupial wolf hunted to extinction in the early twentieth century. Should we be developing new life to save endangered species, such as the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat, when we still have no cure for cancer? What are your views?
- Recently, a well-known couple used a **surrogate** (referred to as a 'gestational carrier') to give birth to their child. What do you think? Is this where the future is headed?
- Later, design and create your own *Nature's little helper*. What would it do, or protect?

SANDMAN

This **installation** incorporates sculpture, moving image and photography.

Sandman grew out of Piccinini's interest in car culture, specifically the culture of panel vans which were very popular in Australia in the 1970s and 80s. The yellow car seen in the photographs is an example of the Sandman panel van. Panel vans achieved **iconic** status in Australia. Once identifiable as tradesmen's vans, they came to be associated with youth culture, symbolising a time of adolescent freedom – growing up and escaping to the beach with friends, travelling the coast with your surfboard. But as well as having a collective cultural meaning, panel vans were often individualised or 'customised' by their owners with elaborate artwork or slogans painted on the van body.

The installation features a number of themes found in Piccinini's works, including transition and transformation, and evolution. The yellow panel van in the photographs has fish-like 'gills' cut into the car body near the front wheels. There is a visual connection (or link) with the van and the girl in the video and photographs. Look closely and you will see that she has what look like gills on her neck. These are branchial arches, which in humans become parts of the throat and inner ear as a foetus develops. They are an evolutionary link back. In the young girl here, however, remnants of what would normally disappear remain.

The ideas of transformation and transition link the elements of the installation. It is a work in which we seem to be given diverse but linked pieces of information about these themes. The strange dark sculpture, rather sinister in shape, represents a panel van that has been transformed: it has morphed into an entirely new 'car' form, reminiscent of a deep sea creature. The yellow panel van perhaps prompts ideas of cultural transformation. It is now thirty or forty years since panel vans of this type were popular and widely acknowledged as symbols of our culture. They are now relics; things have moved on. And the adolescent girl will move on too: she will become an adult.

There is a melancholy feeling to the work. The girl's physical difference may mean that she feels isolated, and alienated, that she doesn't belong. These feelings are often associated with adolescence. Another theme important to Piccinini is evident here – the idea of belonging, of being part of a family.

Swimming out to sea looks like hard work for the girl. As she sinks the scene is serene – unlike the grey and stormy world on the surface – though what happens to her remains ambiguous.

Questions and Activities

Primary

- Which of the elements of the installation most appealed to you – the car sculpture, the photographs or the video? Why?
- Using plasticine, create a sculpture that is your own 're-working' of your favourite car.
- Create a design which you would use to 'customise' your own car.
- What does the giant sea creature that swims past the girl in the film remind you of?

Secondary

- The yellow Sandman has the word 'Xanadu' written across the back. What meanings / associations does this word have? How might these associations be relevant to this installation?
- What roles do the objects which become 'icons' play in our culture?
- Create a 'photographic tableau' on the theme of adolescence and freedom.
- Compare and contrast *Sandman* with another installation in the exhibition, *Perhaps the world is fine tonight*, in terms of themes and cultural references.





STILL LIFE WITH STEM CELLS

In this work we see a little girl on the floor playing with strange flesh-like lumps, of various shapes. These lumps look like living tissue, and show human characteristics such as mottled skin, fine hair, and veins. The title of the work suggests that these lumps were created in a laboratory from stem cells. These are cells that are able to be transformed into any other kind of cell in the human body, such as skin, heart, kidney, lung, or brain cells. They are very important for medical research. They offer the potential of cures for diseases, and a life free of sickness.

The **bio-technologies** that are of interest to the artist were unimaginable even twenty years ago, but are now widely used. With advances in medical research and technologies, the possibilities suggested by stem cells are limitless.

This work comments on how new technologies are absorbed, and how they become quickly normalised in contemporary society. It also presents a scenario where what we might receive from these technologies might not be what we expect. Would this necessarily be a bad thing?

Curator Jane Messenger comments: 'the ability to grow human bodily matter in a laboratory is changing how we think about the body and its limitations, as component parts can be manufactured, repaired and replaced in a way analogous to a car being serviced'.

If parts of our bodies can be replaced, will we think differently about life and death?

Questions and activities

Primary

- Describe the girl's interaction with the stem cell lumps.
- What is similar and what is different about each of these stem cell lumps?
- At school make your own sculpture of a stem cell lump with playdough or plasticine. What disease would you choose to cure with your lump?

Secondary

- What are your views on stem cell research?
- Does reflecting on the work *Still life with stem cells* also encourage questions on life and death? Use this as a theme for an essay.
- In Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (first published in 1818) 'human' life is created in a laboratory. But the creation is deformed, and so is rejected, experiences only misery and despair, and finally turns against his creator. How might this centuries-old scenario have implications today?



PERHAPS THE WORLD IS FINE TONIGHT

This work is a **diorama**, a three-dimensional scene combining a sculpted human figure, stuffed animals prepared by a taxidermist, and an imaginary creature in a night-time setting. Here the past, present and future seem to collide. The atmosphere/environment is gloomy, and a bit scary!

The artist describes the work as 'dream like'. 'When you dream, things seem to make sense at the time but when you think about them later they are harder to understand.' And after a dream you might feel a sense of calm; at other times you might feel unease. So it is with this work of art.

There are many interesting details in this diorama. Despite the dark, threatening surroundings, a young girl sleeps peacefully on a rock. She is shown in the yoga position known as the Balasana, or 'Child's Pose'. A number of Tasmanian devils lurk in the shadows. Can you see them? Above the girl hover two wedge-tailed eagles carrying a strange looking sack. Does it hold new life? Or does it pose a threat? Is something being delivered, or carried away? In *Perhaps the world is fine tonight* the artist suggests a 'peaceful and equal' relationship between humans and animals.

Questions and activities

Primary

- What was your reaction when you first entered the diorama? Describe how your feelings were influenced by the colours? Is this imagined landscape a bit like a dream world?
- What do you think the artist might want you to think about, or feel, when you experience this work?
- Create a story beginning with the title of the exhibition 'Once upon a time...'
- Imagine yourself in this place with these creatures. The girl is resting. Might she have travelled a long way to this strange land? What do you think might happen next?

Secondary

- Discuss with a friend what you feel might connect the various elements in the diorama – the girl, the Tasmanian devils, the eagles, the sack, and the dark environment.
- Consider the title of the work. Do you think the world shown here is 'fine' or not? Explain why?
- How has the artist used various elements, including colour and sound, to engage us?

EULOGY

When a platypus specimen from Australia first reached London in 1799, it was believed to be a hoax because experts could not make sense of a creature with a duckbill, webbed feet and beaver tail. It seemed an impossibility.

In one of Piccinini's most recent works, *Eulogy*, the creature cradled in a man's hands appears to be another impossibility, one of the artist's chimeras. But it is in fact a replica of a highly-evolved fish, whose flesh is a gelatinous mass that allows it to survive at depths of high pressure. The blob fish is now facing extinction however, due to deep-sea fishing. In this work, Piccinini reminds us that evolution is both complex and fragile.

In her works Piccinini alerts us to the richness and magnificence of **biodiversity**, also demonstrating how our actions have a direct and immediate effect on the world in which we live.

In *Eulogy*, the artist draws our attention to the weird and the wonderful in Nature. We understand that her hybrid creatures, such as the *Bottom feeder* (designed with specialist functions to clean our environment) no longer seem so remote or improbable.

Questions and activities

Primary

- Why might the artist have given the work this title?
- Why do you think the man is on his knees? Is he perhaps trying to save this fish, or is he perhaps about to bury it?
- What could save the blob fish from extinction?

Secondary

- What was your initial reaction on seeing the blob fish? Did it seem real, or something imagined by the artist?
- The production of Piccinini's work requires a studio of technicians who are credited for the modelling, rendering, editing, video and production work that they carry out. The studio is called Drome.

'I tell people straight out that I conceive the work and then bring together the pieces. How do people perceive that? I don't know, and it doesn't interest me. If I didn't have great people working on the projects, it wouldn't work. I don't want the ideas to be limited by what I can physically do. The ideas come first.'

Discuss the materials and processes that have been used by the technicians at the Drome studio to create this work.

- The artist's style has been described as **hyperreal**. Later, research this term, and also the works produced by artists Ron Mueck, and Duane Hanson.
- View Hanson's work *Woman with a laundry basket* in gallery 16. Compare and contrast the use of materials and processes in Piccinini's *Eulogy* with this work by Hanson.





THE LONG AWAITED

This sculpture may at first seem confronting and disturbing: it's an unusual sight. A young boy, seated on a bench (notice that his feet don't quite reach the ground) is curled over the shoulder of a large, strange-looking, very fleshy creature (one of the artist's 'hybrids?') who looks part gentle old grandmother, and part Dugong!

The two figures are apparently asleep, and as we look closely we see that they look very relaxed snuggled up together. There is something tender about their relationship – but something unexpected also. In the 'usual' order of things, we would expect to see the older being (whether human or animal) caring for the younger; but in this work the order seems to be reversed. Who is doing the caring for, or protecting, here? Look at the position of the boy's hands for a clue.

Is the artist looking forward to a time when we are all able to embrace, or at least be comfortable with, the different or unusual – and to co-exist? Children, of course, are best at accommodating difference, and this may be why Piccinini so often includes children in her works. Do you think trust and innocence go together?

Questions and activities

Primary

- What is your response to this unusual scene? What do you think is the significance of the title? Discuss your views with a classmate.
- The work is amazingly real, largely because the two figures look so real. How has the artist suggested a youthfulness and innocence in the boy, and suggested great age in the reclining figure?
- The reclining figure has also been described as a 'mer-creature'. What do you think this means? Do you agree with this description?

Secondary

- 'Piccinini creates extraordinary sympathy between two lives that are united by the smallest of genetic similarities and divided by much more'.
(J. Engberg: *Patricia Piccinini's Uprising Revolution*, exhibition catalogue essay, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 2009)
- Discuss the ways in which Piccinini has achieved this suggestion of sympathy or 'togetherness' in *The long awaited*.
- Caring and nurturing are common themes in Piccinini's work. Compare and contrast other works in the exhibition which embrace these themes.



THE OFFERING

Piccinini has created an offering that you are invited to touch and hold, as you would a baby.

The artist's intention is to prompt us to care about it, even though it is very different to us. One of Piccinini's beliefs is that we have a responsibility to care for all creatures, including those we create.

- Do you agree?
- Why do you think Piccinini wants this work of art to be held?
- Describe your feeling of being able to interact with *The offering*.

CAPTIONS



The stags, 2008
fibreglass, automotive paint, leather, steel, plastic, rubber tyres
196.0 x 224.0 x 167.0 cm (overall)
Purchased 2009
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
photographer: Graham Baring



Truck babies, 1999
fibreglass, automotive paint, plastic, steel, wood, truck parts
120.0 x 184.0 x 88.0 cm (each)
installation dimensions variable
Lyon Collection, Lyon Housemuseum



Radial
2005
fibreglass, automotive paint, stainless steel
70.0 x 60.0 x 21.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist
photographer: Graham Baring



Heart breaker
from the series *Car nuggets GL*, 2002
fibreglass, automotive paint
95.0 x 70.0 x 70.0 cm
Newcastle Region Art Gallery, New South Wales
photographer: Dean Beletich



Aloft (installation Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth), 2010
fibreglass, felted human hair and wool, steel cable, silicon, human hair, horse hair, clothing, electronic motors, 1290.0 x 1510.0 x 7500.0 cm (installation dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist
photographer: Bo Wong



Blaze
from the series *Car nuggets GL* 2004
fibreglass, automotive paint
90.0 x 80.0 x 80.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist



The young family, 2002–03
silicon, acrylic, human hair; leather; timber; 80.0 x 150.0 x 110.0 cm
R.H.S. Abbott Bequest Fund 2003
Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
photographer: Graham Baring



Team WAF: Offspring
2003
fibreglass, polycarbonate, automotive paint, 45.0 x 36.0 x 25.0 cm
Collection of Dr Dick Quan
photographer: Jenni Carter



Big Mother, 2005
silicon, fibreglass, leather; human hair
173.0 x 103.0 x 78.0 cm
Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Contemporary Collectors, S. Angelakis, John Ayers, Candy Bennett, Cherise Conrick, James Darling AM and Lesley Forwood, Rick Frolich, Frances Gerard, Patricia Grattan French, Stephanie Grose, Gryphon Partners Advisory, Janet Hayes, Ulrike Klein, Edwina Lehmann, Ian Little, David and Pam McKee, Dr Peter McEvoy, Hugo and Brooke Michell, Jane Michell, Paul Taliangis, Michael and Tracey Whiting and anonymous donors 2010
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
photographer: Saul Steed



Team WAF: Transfuser
2003
fibreglass, polycarbonate, automotive paint, 40.0 x 29.0 x 26.0 cm
Private collection



Game boys advanced, 2002
silicon, polyurethane, fibreglass, clothing, human hair
131.0 x 69.0 x 35.0 cm
Michael Buxton Collection
photographer: Graham Baring



Surrogate (for the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat) from the series *Nature's little helpers*, 2005
silicon, fibreglass, leather, plywood, human hair
106.0 x 180.0 x 302.0 cm (overall)
Courtesy of the artist
photographer: Graham Baring



Perhaps the world is fine tonight, 2009
diorama: silicon, fibreglass, clothing, human and animal hair, taxidermied Tasmanian devils and Wedge-tailed Eagles, timber, polyurethane, rocks, native vegetation, synthetic polymer paint, 327.0 x 848.0 x 648.0 cm (installed)
Detached Cultural Organisation, Hobart
Tasmanian devils and Wedge-tailed Eagles collection of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
photographer: Simon Cuthbert



Bottom feeder
2009
silicon, fibreglass, animal fur
66.0 x 45.0 x 40.0 cm
Collection of Julian and Stephanie Grose
photographer: Simon Cuthbert



Eulogy
2011
silicon, fibreglass, human hair, clothing
110.0 x 65.0 x 60.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist
photographer: Graham Baring



Bodyguard (for the Golden Helmeted Honeyeater) from the series *Nature's little helpers*, 2004
silicon, fibreglass, leather, plywood, human and animal hair
150.0 x 68.0 x 55.0 cm
Michael Buxton Collection
photographer: Greg Weight



The long awaited, 2008
silicon, fibreglass, human hair, plywood, leather, clothing, 92.0 x 151.0 x 81.0 cm
Detached Cultural Organisation, Hobart
photographer: Graham Baring



The offering, 2009
silicon, fox fur, New Zealand feral possum pelt
15.0 x 20.0 x 28.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Sandman (installation view of *Sandman* exhibition, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2002)

Destroy, from the series *Sandman*, 2002
type C photograph, 103.5 x 184.5 cm (image)
Lyon Collection, Lyon Housemuseum

Sandman (sculpture), 2002
steel, polystyrene, epoxy resin, polyester, fibreglass, automotive paint
261.0 x 319.0 x 340.0 cm
Lyon Collection, Lyon Housemuseum

Sandman (video projection)
2002 16 mm film transferred to HD video with 5.1 audio, 4.10 mins
Lyon Collection, Lyon Housemuseum
Photographer: NGV Photographic Services

GLOSSARY

biodiversity	the variety of all living things; the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genetic information they contain and the ecosystems they form. Biodiversity is usually explored at three levels – genetic diversity, species diversity and ecosystem diversity. These three levels work together to create the complexity of life on Earth.
bio-technology	involves the use of living organisms and bioprocesses in engineering, technology and medicine. It includes genetic engineering as well as cell- and tissue culture technologies. The concept covers a wide range of procedures for modifying living organisms according to human purposes – domestication of animals, cultivation of plants, and 'improvements' to these through breeding programs that employ artificial selection and hybridization.
chimera	1. in mythology, a grotesque monster; 2. in science, an organism composed of two or more genetically distinct materials; 3. an artificially-produced creature having elements of several species
clone	any organism whose genetic information is identical to that of a 'parent organism' from which it was created
diorama	a large 3-dimensional painted scene
evolution	a process of formation or growth; the continuous genetic adaptation of organisms or species to the environment
genetic engineering	the scientific manipulation of genes in order to control the characteristics of offspring
hybrid	the 'offspring' of two animals or plants (or machines or cars) of different breeds; a mixture
hyperreal / hyperrealism	a genre of painting and sculpture resembling a high-resolution photograph
icon / iconic	an object (or practice) which becomes so closely associated with something that it comes to be seen as a symbol or representation of it
installation	an artistic genre of site-specific, three-dimensional works designed to transform a viewer's perception of a space
surrogate	a substitute; one person or things which acts for another

POST-VISIT LEARNING

Students might be encouraged to respond to the following in discussion or writing:

- What were your first impressions of the exhibition? Did these impressions change after further discussion with other students / teachers?
- What key words would you use to describe the exhibition? How would you describe it to a friend who has not been able to visit the Gallery with you?
- Write a media release (TV, newspaper or radio) for the exhibition.
- Consider a work from the exhibition which you feel demonstrates the idea that both art and science are about imagining and developing new ideas.
- Discuss the role of art galleries in showing contemporary works of art which may challenge our perception of what we understand 'art' to be.
- Which work of art by Piccinini did you enjoy / connect to most, and why?
- Describe to a friend the work which had most impact on you. Explain why this work had the affect it did.
- If you could meet the artist, what questions would you ask about her work, and the creative process?
- The following is an excerpt from a public lecture given by Patricia Piccinini, at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music on 8 December 2003:

Q: What does art mean to you?

PP: What's the meaning of life? I think art is a reflection of the culture that we live in, and that art and artists are crucial for our society to go forward.

Discuss Patricia Piccinini's response in light of your own views or understanding of what art means.

- John McDonald, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17–18 September 2005: Patricia Piccinini's works are 'science fiction vignettes plucked from some imaginary movie set.' Does this opinion reflect your own view? Do Piccinini's works have something in common with sci-fi writings or film?

School bookings and exhibition information

- Student admission to this exhibition is free.
- Facilitated student workshop information is online: www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/learning/piccinini
- All group bookings online: www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/learning
tel: 8207 7033, fax 8207 7070 email: agsa.education@saugov.sa.gov.au

Scheduled guided sessions

Guided sessions may be booked through Education Services, and are provided by the DECS Education Manager and / or volunteer Education Guides. These introductory sessions are approximately forty-five minutes duration. Guided session students will be encouraged to connect the underlying themes and concepts of the exhibition with the works of art viewed.

Visiting the Gallery

- As bag storage space is limited it is advisable for students, if possible, to leave bags and personal items at school, or on the bus.
- Any items brought into the Gallery can be left in a small storage room. Access to the room is via the Information Desk at the rear of the Gallery.
- Food and drink cannot be consumed in the Gallery.
- Photography is not permitted in this exhibition.
- Pencils and clipboards are required if students are to complete written tasks during their viewing of the exhibition.

Recommendations

Prior to the Gallery visit teachers and carers should brief students about:

- appropriate behaviour, particularly walking carefully within the exhibition space, and looking without touching. Please note that only one work in the exhibition can be touched (gently, with adult supervision): *The offering*
- listening carefully to instructions and information presented.
- remaining with their group, unless given instruction to move away for a specific activity.
- using quiet voices in the exhibition space.

Accessibility

Wheelchairs are available from the Cloaking Desk in the Atrium. Visitors using wheelchairs can navigate the Gallery via lifts and ramps. If you seek further clarification about these procedures please phone Security on 8207 7023. If special assistance is required during a visit, please ask the nearest Security Officer. There is a toilet for visitors with special needs next to the Cloaking Desk.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following have been used in the preparation of this education resource:

PATRICIA PICCININI: Once upon a time . . ., Art Gallery of South Australia, Jane Messenger, 2011

Patricia Piccinini EVOLUTION, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Juliana Engberg and Patricia Piccinini, 2009

Patricia Piccinini: RELATIVITY, Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2010

Patricia Piccinini, Wellington City Gallery 'In another life', exhib. cat., Wellington, New Zealand, 2006

Patricia Piccinini's website www.patriciapiccinini.net



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