

UPENDING | MENDING

Temporary assembly amidst change

Fires, floods and bugs sweep the country and creatives are exhorted to recover, to build resilience, to resume our collective progress into the future. Are we there yet? And where is that, anyway? The University of Canberra's Faculty of Arts and Design annual exhibition presents diverse creative responses to the inspiration, and provocation, of the theme **Upending | Mending**. The vertical bar separating our key terms has various uses in mathematics, computing and typography. For us it works to separate and connect the terms in an unsettled relationship: mending is questioned and queered; upending is settled, but only for a time.

We called for works that creatively responded to ideas of care and repair, and many of our contributors are directly engaged with personal and community projects that work to mend themselves and their worlds. Monica Andrew's banner *Leaves* directly engages with our broken fashion industry by turning one year's post-Christmas leavings into an item of lasting relevance and beauty. HK Plum's intimate exploration of self, value and worth, *I, too, am used to being broken*, fuses and re-fuses a 'neoclassical' vessel with a contemporary take on kintsugi. Caren Florance's artist book *DisRemembering* literally upends letterpress type blocks to explore ambiguous spaces of willing unknowing in relation to her family's history of dementia.

Place-based restoration runs through these works as one connecting theme. Bethaney Turner's *Grounded care* hews close to home and hand with her

installation of glass jars that bring domestic and scientific spaces and practices together as a way of caring for the soils that sustain all life. In *Reputational repair – Canberra’s bogan suburb*, Louise Curham’s sensitive and tentative silver-gelatin pinhole and cyanotype prints engage with her community’s ongoing processes of change. In *Making and breaking homes*, Katie Hayne’s doors salvaged from Canberra’s demolished Northbourne Public Housing Flats and Currong Towers act as mnemonic devices for those heritage housing precincts and the stories of the displaced residents. Rhonda Ayliffe’s installation *as small as a world as large as a stone* adopts the archetypal shape of ‘home’, visible even in ruins, as vestige and chronicle of her community’s recovery following a devastating firestorm.

It is no coincidence that creative responses flourish where damage is great. What are our obligations to these works and the places they represent?

Other projects actively cultivate the appreciation of beauty in places we haven’t typically sought it. Kirsten Wehner’s collaboration with residents of Weston Creek invites them, and us, to see the beauty of this hard-used space, where remembered, present or imagined perceptions of beauty are key to stimulating and sustaining practices of care. Similarly, Kerry Martin’s work is motivated by a reparative aesthetic, drawing on the rich textile traditions of the Catholic Church to hold a viewer’s attention on the difficult subjects she explores. Textile works need not be soft and yielding; the crisp, machined lines of Dianne Firth’s *Intersection* displace handwork, even as stitching is offered as a literal and metaphorical action for mending relationships.

Other works upend any rush to repair that may paper over damage that needs to be dwelt with. John Dahlsen’s mapping of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch recuperates unlovely materials – found plastics collected from Australian



Image by Gemma Fischer
Photography

coastlines – into engaging formal patterns. We are invited to contemplate both the rapid accumulation of microplastics in our oceans as well as John’s acts of restoration when he picks up the tiny pieces. Plastic is the vital force motivating Max Maxwell and Sam Tomkins’ *Empathetic plasticity*, where their custom robotic 3D printing technique repositions plastic waste as an intricate, articulate and reconfigurable resource capable of giving damaged objects a second life.

A number of pieces extend engagement beyond visible experiences with invitations to listen and participate in other ways. Ross McLennan has created sonic interpretations of six **Upending | Mending** works that animate them anew. Accessed via QR codes, these artefacts extend access and represent new collaborations that may flourish beyond our temporary assembly. One of these collaborations combines Ross’s sonic interpretation with Claire Rosslyn Wilson’s videopoem *Women’s work*, which explores the dynamics of disentanglement between a mother and her growing child, echoed in the material traces of disposable childhood toys. Also interpreted by Ross, Vahri McKenzie’s COVID-mediated participatory artwork *Zoognosis* splices donated audio with discarded gloves and taxidermied bird wings into a temporary assemblage that adopts uncomfortable, even unlawful, forms. Jen Webb, John White and Paul Hetherington upend notions of book restoration to resist returns to a flawed ‘normal’, instead inviting viewers to consider, and contribute to, possibilities for transformation. Ben Ennis Butler’s throw-away ‘receipt’ corresponding to a

visitor's input of their personal urban address brings home the costs of our engagements with domestic landscapes in this creative response to encoded digital data.

Finally, UK Frederick's one-woman 'disassembly line' inverts mass-produced efficiency to participate in the mutability of meaning and value in a performance installation. Like the creative practices and practitioners represented in **Upending | Mending**, this work will transform over the course of the exhibition. Change is the only constant – a truism that only sharpens the urgency of our obligation, implication, and participation in the world.

Our artists, designers and creative educators bring together a variety of approaches to their practice – recuperating found materials, collaborating with communities, using art to focus attention on ugly matters – but share a sense that creative expression is central to their ways of reflecting, repairing, and questioning the world. This collection mends and upends, often together, with slow-going practices of repair keeping company with exuberant explorations of breaking and unmaking.

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