

Francis Upritchard Jealous Saboteurs

**Education resource
for schools**



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Francis Upritchard

Jealous Saboteurs

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Francis Upritchard: Jealous Saboteurs is a joint project by City Gallery Wellington and Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne. This resource was developed by Educators Claire Hopkins and Helen Lloyd (City Gallery) and Melissa Bedford (MUMA).

Francis Upritchard

***Sun Worship (detail)* 2013**

Modelling material, foil, wire, paint, cloth.

Collection of Simon Robertson. Image courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry, London.



About this resource

This resource contains information about selected works in the show, along with discussion questions and classroom activity ideas. It is designed to be used in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition, or as a stand-alone resource. It contains ideas for pre and post-visit activities. The discussion questions and resources can be adapted by teachers to suit primary and secondary level students.

About this exhibition

Jealous Saboteurs surveys twenty years of work by London-based, New-Zealand-born artist Francis Upritchard. The show ranges from model landscapes she made at art school to her recent figurative sculptures. It includes faux-Egyptian and faux-Maori artefacts, collections of talismans and totems, sloths and monkeys made from discarded fur coats, and curious arrangements of figures on furniture. Upritchard borrows from anthropology and museology, folklore and counterculture, from a diversity of art and craft traditions. Her work blurs the lines between the ancient, the current and the futuristic.

About the artist

Upritchard was born in 1976 in New Plymouth. A graduate of Christchurch's Ilam School of Fine Arts, she moved to London in 1998, where she became one of New Zealand's most successful international artists. She maintains a close relationship with New Zealand, returning regularly to make work and exhibit.

She is known for exhibitions combining figures, objects and furniture. These include collaborative installations with her husband Italian furniture designer Martino Gamper and German-born, New Zealand-based jeweller Karl Fritsch. Upritchard won the Walters Prize in 2006 and represented New Zealand in the Venice Biennale in 2009, with arrangements of figures on large tables of her own design. The tables implied spacious landscapes across which the figures interacted.

Upritchard has rarely exhibited in Australia. In 2008, her exhibition *Rainwob II* was presented at Artspace, Sydney and Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne. In that year Charlotte Day included her into the TarraWarra Biennial, *Lost and Found: An Archaeology of the Present*. She has had other major solo exhibitions at Vienna Secession in 2009, Nottingham Contemporary in 2012, Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Centre in 2012, MIMOCA in Kagawa, Japan, in 2013, and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in 2014.

Artist quotes in this resource were taken from Francis Upritchard's conversation with MUMA Director Charlotte Day, and her interview on ABC Radio National Books and Arts.



Land Table 1997

Francis Upritchard

Land Table 1997

Found card table, papier mâché, buttons,
LEDS, batteries. Photo Mark Tantrum.

***Land Table* 1997**

‘There are some works in the exhibition that I’ve never exhibited. There’s a work on a card table. It’s a landscape with little buttons. You can push a button that will make a LED light on top of a volcano. Push another button and the volcano will light up inside. I went to art school in New Zealand. I was making landscape work which you do in New Zealand. It’s a very strong landscape. New Zealand art has been connected to the land. Living in England, I moved away from the landscape and made more work about animals and humans’ —**Francis Upritchard**

Discussion

Look carefully at *Land Table* and describe what you see.

What materials and techniques have been used to create this sculpture?

Comment on Upritchard’s use of the table. Is the table part of the work? Is it more or less important than the paper-maché landscape? Why do you think the artist chose to mount her model on a card table?

Find other examples of Upritchard’s work where an item of furniture is used as an integral part of the sculpture. Compare them with *Land Table*.

Pre-and-post-visit classroom activities

Create a miniature landscape. Upritchard’s paper maché model recalls the hills and valleys of the New Zealand landscape where she spent her childhood. Create a model landscape showing a place that is special to you. Create the form of the land with scrunched up newspaper and masking tape, then layer paper maché over the top and paint when dry. Use a found object to contain or support the model.

Design an interactive sculpture. Like an old-fashioned museum diorama, *Land Table* is interactive. It has buttons to press, which light up the volcanoes. If you built a landscape sculpture with an interactive quality, what would you want it to do? How would you make it work?

Research New Zealand regionalist landscapes. Upritchard describes this work as belonging to a New Zealand art history that is ‘connected to the land’. She has made other landscape sculptures that relate to the work of Colin McCahon. Compare this sculpture to regionalist landscapes by McCahon and Rita Angus. What similarities can you see? How do they differ?



Traveller's Collection 2003

Francis Upritchard
Traveller's Collection 2003
Mixed media. Collection of the Saatchi Gallery,
London. Photo Christian Capurro.

Traveller's Collection 2003

'For me art is primarily about making something that isn't exactly beautiful, but when you look at it, the meaning and the form intertwine. There is not a strict narrative to *Travellers Collection*. It is a play on the canopic jars from Ancient Egypt used when they mummified someone. It was extremely important to the Egyptians that some important organs were taken out of the body and put into very specific vessels with very specific meanings. Mistranslation is interesting to me and these works create a feeling of Ancient Egypt but without their original purpose. To make the urns I bought this second-hand German pottery at flea markets and then made the heads for each piece with air-drying clay. My canopic jars are meaningless shells – there is no actual body. They are spiritually bereft and that's something that the tourist objects on the bottom shelf relate to as well. This collection of souvenirs actually belonged to my ex-boyfriend's grandmother. This work is called *Travellers Collection* because she was an avid traveller and it's an homage to her.'

—Francis Upritchard

Discussion

Describe the sculptural forms displayed on each of the three shelves within *Traveller's Collection*. What do we associate with these kinds of objects?

How does *Traveller's Collection* mistranslate the burial practices of ancient Egypt?

Discuss the materials, techniques and processes that Upritchard used to create this work.

How has Upritchard included and augmented found objects within *Traveller's Collection*? Research some examples of canopic jars from ancient Egypt. What do they symbolise?

Compare and contrast these historic objects with the contemporary sculptures created by Upritchard.

Pre-and-post-visit classroom activities

Make a mummy sculpture. Make a figure out of armature wire and wrap it in strips of fabric.

Create a canopic jar sculpture. Research the Gods of ancient Egypt and the kinds of animals that represented them. Bring in a ceramic vessel from home that you can use as a found object in your own artwork. Sculpt an animal lid for your vessel using air-drying clay and paint it to replicate the surface decoration that already exists on your found object. Create a class installation by displaying the sculptures together.

Create an artwork inspired by a museum artefact. Upritchard finds inspiration in visiting museums and galleries. Research your local museum and investigate the type of objects they display and collect. Choose an object from your research as inspiration for your own work.

Research anthropomorphised art. Cultures have anthropomorphised animals since ancient times. Search online and at your local library to find some examples of historical and contemporary works where artists have projected a human personality onto animals.



Jealous Saboteurs 2005

Francis Upritchard
Jealous Saboteurs 2005

Hockey sticks, plastic, modelling materials. Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Patrons of the Auckland Art Gallery, 2006. Photo Jennifer French.

***Jealous Saboteurs* 2005**

‘*Jealous Saboteurs* is a group of second-hand hockey sticks. A hockey stick is a kind of a tool. They’ve got a lot of character and you can imagine who held them. Some people have scrawled their names on and there are different colours, different textures. I cut the blades in half making mouths and added teeth, so they end up looking like crocodiles. I tried to make each stick look like a different person in the tribe had made it.’ —**Francis Upritchard**

Discussion

Look carefully at *Jealous Saboteurs* and describe what you see.

What materials and techniques have been used to create this sculpture?

Which sticks share features? How has the artist displayed the sticks? What does the mode of display suggest?

Imagine these as artefacts from an ancient past or distant future and speculate about the tribe or culture that created them. What is the purpose of these objects? Are they trophies or tools?

What do the words ‘jealous’ and ‘saboteur’ mean? How does the title affect your interpretation of the work?

Pre-and-post-visit classroom activities

Create a piece of found object art. Visit your local recycling station or second-hand store, or look at home or school for a discarded object to use. Alter the object to transform it into a creature. Things to try: cut, bend or twist your object to alter its shape. Add other features, such as hair, eyes, horns, nose, tail, teeth, claws, scales, fins, wings. Create features from a variety of materials, such as coloured paper, plastic bags, beads, bottle tops, seeds, fabric, tape, ribbon, thread, paper, wire, pipe cleaners, and twigs. When adding features, use different techniques, such as stitching, gluing, tying, wrapping, knotting, taping, nailing, stapling. Give your creature a name. Write a character description for your creature.

Create an imagined artefact. Make an artefact from the past and an artefact from the future, imagining things that people from past and future civilizations might use or wear. To make your artefact, incorporate and modify found objects, or, model and paint air-drying clay. Create a museum in your classroom to display the objects, with descriptive labels to accompany each piece.

Research found object art (Object trouvé). Compare and contrast *Jealous Saboteurs* with historical and contemporary artworks, such as Pablo Picasso, *Tête de taureau*, (*Bull’s Head*), (1942), or Fiona Hall, *Mourning Chorus*, (2007).



Brown Sloth Creature 2005

Francis Upritchard

Brown Sloth Creature 2005

Fur, leather, modelling material, wire, rings.

Photo Christian Capurro.

***Brown Sloth Creature* 2005**

'In New Zealand, we don't have any native mammals, and I was always really curious about things that we didn't have in New Zealand, about the outside world. Sloths are interesting because they're something that hasn't evolved that much. They're very old world. I suppose we have a sense of how we've evolved, and how our civilisation has this linear path, but some things don't fit into that. There's a very famous walrus in a museum in London. The scientists who took it back to Britain gave it to a taxidermist who didn't know anything about walruses, and he just kept on stuffing it until it looked like a balloon, with these little flippers. I liked the idea of not really knowing anything about sloths, and making them anyway. People pretending they've seen creatures they haven't'. —**Francis Upritchard**

Discussion

Look carefully at *Brown Sloth Creature* and describe what you see.

What materials and techniques have been used to create this sculpture?

What does this pose or posture suggest to you?

What do you notice about its hands? How do you think they were made?

Its fingers have been adorned with rings. How does that affect your reading of the work? These rings were made by Karl Fritsch, a jeweller who modifies existing pieces of jewellery to create something new. Why do you think Upritchard chose to collaborate with this artist?

Pre-and-post-visit classroom activities

Draw something you haven't seen. Find an image of an animal then carefully describe it to a partner without naming it. Have your partner draw from your description then compare the drawing to the original. What was missing from your description? How has the creature become mistranslated?

Write a short story. Upritchard often invites fiction authors to write about her work. Read some examples such as, *The Thinker* by Deborah Levey, *A Hand of Cards: The Mountebank* by Ali Smith, or *All Souls Day* by David Mitchell. Use this sculpture as a starting point for your own piece of creative writing. Imagine how this creature got its rings.

Research Upritchard's collaborations with other artists and craftspeople. Search online to find out about the collaborative installations Upritchard has created with her partner Italian furniture designer Martino Gamper and German-born, New Zealand-based jeweller Karl Fritsch. They called their supergroup *Gesumptkunsthandwerk*, suggesting a marriage of art, craft and design. Comment on the way they work together.



Francis Upritchard

Tourist 2012

Modelling material, foil, wire, paint, cloth. Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, gift of the patrons of the Auckland Art Gallery, 2013. Photo Kate MacGarry, London

***Tourist* 2012**

‘When I first started making figurative sculptures I was looking at carved wooden sculptures from medieval Germany and tried to make something that approximated that tradition. Then I thought “How can I move my sculptures away from the past and make them feel futuristic?”, so I added some colour. I think it’s important the sculptures don’t seem really pristine and I prefer texture and depth. I really love the way you can see light and translucence underneath. It’s almost like the colour and pattern on the skin is a projection onto the character. There are no pupils in any of my figures. The eyes are always closed, covered or facing downwards. The eyes are the window to the soul, but my sculptures have no soul, they are kind of like zombies. The skin is made from Sculpey that is applied over a welded metal armature, which is then baked in an oven and painted. For the clothing I collect fabrics and keep them until it makes sense how I’m going to use them. I recently met an amazing weaver from New Zealand, and she made these woollen textiles for me, and the fabric layer underneath is some silk that I bought from a charity shop. I like to mix the found and the new. The steel plinths are designed by my husband Martino Gamper. They have a very strong, rationalist and masculine feel which I think is very good for my works because it emphasises their lightness.’

—Francis Upritchard

Discussion

What can we speculate about the character of the *Tourist* through his or her body language, facial expression, clothing and accoutrements?

Look carefully at *Tourist*. Imagine yourself embodying its character. How might they be feeling?

Describe how Upritchard has used colour in the work.

What is an archetype? Does Upritchard’s sculpture depict an archetypical tourist?

Pre-and-post-visit classroom activities

Research Medieval German sculpture. Use the internet to investigate historical examples of figurative German wooden sculptures from the medieval period. Compare and contrast historic artworks with examples of contemporary figurative sculpture by Francis Upritchard.

Produce a small scale mixed-media sculpture. Use wire, polymer clay such as Sculpey and found textiles inspired by the figurative sculptures of Francis Upritchard. Consider the posture, gestures and expression. Use watercolour to paint its skin. Design and make your own plinth to display it.

Examine art and craft distinctions. Consider how Upritchard integrates art and craft practices within a selected example of her work.

Glossary

Anthropomorphise – to ascribe human characteristics or qualities to an animal or object.

Archetype – a typical example.

Armature – a framework around which a sculpture is built to provide structure and stability.

Artefact – a cultural remnant.

Canopic Jar – Ancient Egyptian vessels used during the mummification process, to store and preserve the organs of their owner for the afterlife.

Figurative sculpture – sculptures that represent human bodies.

Found object or readymade – an everyday thing presented as art.

Plinth – a base to support or display a sculpture.

Sculpey – a type of polymer modelling clay that hardens on baking.

Further information

Art Critic Robert Nelson's exhibition review for *Francis Upritchard: Jealous Saboteurs*.

<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/jealous-saboteurs-review-francis-upritchards-forlorn-figures-test-our-empathy-20160223-gn0dpe.html>

ABC Radio National Books and Arts podcast of Upritchard interviewed about the exhibition.

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/francis-upritchard/7163800>

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Francis Upritchard

Yellow and Black Gown (detail) 2012

Modelling material, foil, wire, paint, cloth.

Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Patrons of the Auckland Art Gallery, 2013. Photo Kate MacGarry, London

