

**EDUCATION RESOURCE KIT**  
A CASE STUDY

# **FIONA HALL**



**MACQUARIE  
LAKE  
CITY  
ART  
GALLERY**



## INTRODUCTION

*Written by Helen Willis and published by Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery (LMCAG), this education kit is designed to assist senior secondary Visual Arts teachers and students in the preparation, appreciation and understanding of the case study component of the HSC syllabus. LMCAG is proud to support educators and students in the community with an ongoing series of case studies as they relate to the gallery's exhibition program. This education kit is available in hard copy directly from the gallery or online at [www.artgallery.lakemac.com.au/learn/schools](http://www.artgallery.lakemac.com.au/learn/schools).*

## A CASE STUDY

*A series of case studies (a minimum of FIVE) should be undertaken with students in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) course.*

*The selection of content for the case study should relate to various aspects of critical and historical investigations, taking into account practice, the conceptual framework and the frames. Emphasis may be given to a particular aspect of content although all should remain in play.*

*Case studies should be 4–10 hours in duration in the HSC course.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

cover:  
*Breathing in the Afterlife*  
2009/2011  
aluminium, video  
21 × 21cm  
Edition of 5  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9  
Gallery, Sydney  
© Fiona Hall

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## THE ARTIST

'I live in the late twentieth century and this is my subject matter and what influences my work. I'm informed every day by switching on the evening news, by looking at the newspaper, by reading current art magazines, by observing events around me – I think my work reflects this, and it therefore has a contemporary presence. I certainly hope it does.'<sup>1</sup>

With a career spanning four decades, Fiona Hall is one of Australia's most celebrated and innovative contemporary artists. She came to prominence as a photographer in the 1970s, and in the 1980s extended her creative practice to embrace a diverse range of art forms including sculpture, painting, installation, garden design, and video. Since the 1990s, Hall has adopted new creative forms and directed her attention to making sense of modern life.<sup>2</sup>



left:

*Take No Prisoners* 2013  
bark cloth with earth pigments  
and plant dyes  
230 x 240cm  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9  
Gallery, Sydney  
© Fiona Hall

above:

Fiona Hall in front of the National  
Gallery of Australia's *Paradisus*  
*Terrestris* 1989–90  
© Fiona Hall

In part, Hall's art echoes the workings of the natural world and the processes of adaptation and interaction. Humans are drawn into the equally supportive and competitive relationships between species – insects, plants, marine organisms. Hall addresses the relationships between nature and culture by transforming everyday materials and objects into complex artworks. In doing so, she reminds us that we are all intertwined within the complex and fragile web of the natural world. As the artist says, 'There is a strong mingling of nature and non-nature. For most of us living in a world of manufactured products we tend to think that we are looking out at nature and forget that we are nature.'<sup>3</sup>

Hall's practice extends to embrace environmental politics.<sup>4</sup> Damage to delicate habitats through commercial and political expediency is current news, yet Hall has made works highlighting these issues since the 1970s through her exhibition practice as well as major public commissions and projects that have increasingly engaged with themes of ecology, history and the effects of globalisation.<sup>5</sup>

Although dealing with important and difficult environmental, cultural and sometimes political issues, Hall has developed a remarkably delicate aesthetic based on skill,

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research and knowledge. Her artwork is informed by the research of scientists and historians, with whom she closely associates, and reveals layers of meaning about the impact of humanity on the natural environment, particularly the after-effects of colonialism and global trade.<sup>6</sup>

Hall, born in 1953, grew up in the southern suburbs of Sydney where her family, particularly her mother Ruby Payne-Scott, an Australian pioneer in radio astronomy, encouraged a strong interest in science. Being so close to bushland, the family often bushwalked and camped, particularly in the nearby national park, also instilling an appreciation and passion for the natural environment in Hall. This passion informed the artist's early photographic works and continues to inform her current practice with growing intensity.

Hall's mother also took her to art galleries and museums. It was a 1967 visit to see the landmark exhibition *Two Decades of American Painting* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales which left a lasting impression on a 14-year-old Hall.

It was during her last years of high school that Hall decided to become an artist. She made contact with experimental art circles, and was exposed to radical and new ways of seeing art, especially photography.

Hall went on to study at the National Art School (then East Sydney Technical College) from 1972 and although her awarded diploma was in painting, she became more interested in sculpture and experimental photography.

On graduating in 1975, she exhibited work as a part of *Six Australian Women Photographers* at the National Gallery of Victoria and Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, after which she relocated to Europe, with London as her base. While in London, Hall worked as an assistant to English photographer Fay Goodwin and spent much of her spare time in libraries, galleries and museums. In 1977, she held her first solo exhibition at London's Creative Camera Gallery.

Between 1978–1982, Hall studied at the Visual Arts Workshop in New York, a component of which was an artist residency, for which she returned to Australia to complete in Hobart. She completed her Master of Fine Arts (Photography) in New York in 1982.

In 1983 Hall took up the position of Lecturer in Photo Studies at the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia, Adelaide, and during the ten years she taught there built up a strong profile and art practice.

Fiona Hall's work is represented in every major public art collection in Australia, including: the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; and the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, among others.

She exhibits regularly nationally and internationally with recent solo exhibitions including: *All the King's Men*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2016); *Fiona Hall: Big Game Hunting* at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne (2013); a major survey exhibition, *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, held by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2008) in partnership with City Gallery, Wellington, New

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Zealand, which toured to Christchurch Art Gallery, New Zealand and Newcastle Art Gallery, NSW, Australia; and the retrospective exhibition, *The Art of Fiona Hall* at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, which toured to the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (both 2005).

Throughout her career, Hall's work has been included in over 200 solo and group exhibitions in national, state, regional and international venues and her work is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney. Some exhibitions over the past two decades include: *DOCUMENTA 13* (2012), Kassel, Germany (2012); *The Third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*, Moscow (2009); *The Biennale of Sydney* (2000 and 2010); *Fieldwork: Australian Art 1968–2002* at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2002); and *Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (1997). Hall also represented Australia at the *56th Venice Biennale* (2015) Italy, with *Wrong Way Time*, which was exhibited in the next year at the National Gallery of Australia.

Hall was the recipient of the prestigious *Contemporaria 5* Art Prize in 1997 and in 1999 won the Clemenger Art Award at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. In 2012, she received the Australia Council Visual Arts Laureate Award, which acknowledged her outstanding contribution to the development of Australian art, and in 2013 was awarded the Order of Australia for service to the Visual Arts.

She has also completed a number of important public commissions, for example: *Folly for Mrs Macquarie*, 2000, Sydney Sculpture Walk, Royal Botanic Gardens; *Fern Garden*, 1998, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and *Occupied Territory*, 1995, commissioned for the opening of the Museum of Sydney.<sup>7</sup>



1. Max, Pam, (Ed), Fiona Hall quoted, *Visual Instincts: Contemporary Australian Photography*, AGPS Press, Canberra, 1989, p. 14.
2. Fiona Hall, *56th Venice Biennale 2015*, Australia Council for the Arts, [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p...](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p...)
3. Fiona Hall quoted in Deborah Hart, 'Fertile Interaction', *Art and Australia*, vol. 36 no. 2, 1998, p. 204.
4. Fiona Hall, *56th Venice Biennale 2015*, Australia Council for the Arts, [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p)
5. *ibid.*
6. Hanna, Michelle, 'Fiona Hall wins prestigious art prize', SBS News, 26 August 2013, [www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2011/09/16/fiona-hall-wins-prestigious-art-prize](http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2011/09/16/fiona-hall-wins-prestigious-art-prize)
7. Fiona Hall, *56th Venice Biennale 2015*, Australia Council for the Arts, [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p)

# PRACTICE

*Students... learn that practice refers to the social structures, positions, actions and sequences that affect choices, perceptions, directions, ways of working and views of those involved in the visual arts. Students learn that the nature of practice involves the inculcation of beliefs, actions and ideas over time.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

## CONCEPTUAL PRACTICE

'In my art I am finding ways of bringing together the astounding, magical, uplifting world with the very sobering realisation that we are putting that world in peril.'<sup>1</sup>

At the centre of Fiona Hall's work is the connection between nature and culture. Over the past four decades, her art practice has focused on the natural world, and in more recent years, has come to reflect an increasing concern at the impact of humans on nature – the intersecting spheres of power, politics and the environment. Through her attention to detail and historical and scientific references, Hall blurs creative lines in an attempt to construct relationships with mythology, history and humankind's relationship with nature, while reflecting the friction in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Hall's artwork is also shaped by the histories of colonisation, systems of knowledge, and the principles of consumption. Her sources range from the global to the domestic, drawing upon literature, politics, finance, media, science, sexuality and gardening. Despite her views, however, Hall's work is not 'political art' but rather a practice informed by the surroundings of our planet. Her art absorbs and reflects the multiple currents in the world today.<sup>3</sup>

Her art encourages us to look beyond its rich surfaces and creative intricacy to discover greater meaning in her statements about our world. Hall draws on both historical and contemporary perspectives and her own life experiences, to inform her work and reveal a more complex world. As Hall's focus is the point where humans and nature meet, as represented through history and mythology, she juxtaposes forgotten knowledge with features of contemporary life. She is also concerned with the state of the world and our need to take responsibility. Her artworks therefore often carry strong social and political messages.

There were many influences on Hall's early work. For example, in 1978 London, Hall saw the landmark exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*. The art of the Surrealists appealed to her, as did the dense images and engravings of artists such as Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Durer and William Blake, which inspired the Surrealists. She went on to appropriate some of these effects through photocopy techniques, to inform and construct in her tableaux works.<sup>2</sup>

Literature and science were also major early stimuli, with emphasis on natural history and botany. In the early 1980s, European literature strongly informed Hall's attempt to understand the world. At the same time, she also became interested in the visual intricacy of medieval art and Christian texts, alongside ancient philosophy. Her research resulted in works that dealt with order and chaos, good and evil.

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Hall also recognised Aboriginal, Oceanic and African art forms as originating from broader cultural viewpoints and not as limited in their focus as many forms of contemporary art. In recent years, she has found motivation by travelling throughout Australia, Sri Lanka, Guyana and New Zealand, where she has created significant new works that draw on natural and human histories. Science, the role of the collector, and methods of display in museums are other elements informing Hall's artmaking practice. She plays with the idea of displacement – of bringing into the art gallery or the museum unfamiliar materials and forms that break with artwork traditions. This aspect of her artwork challenges audiences to reconsider materials and techniques and their significance to cultural practices. Her fascination with museum practice extends to the process by which things in the natural world are named, and how institutions categorise that knowledge. Hall's artwork titles, and how she uses plant species as symbols in the artworks, also encourage the audience to view her work differently.<sup>5</sup> In the *Force Field* exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney, 2008), which was a survey of her work from the 1970s to 2008, Hall's artwork was organised by series ranging from the intimate to the global.<sup>6</sup> In summary, they were:



*Medicine bundle for the non-born child* 1993–94  
aluminium, rubber, plastic  
layette comprising matinee  
jacket: 27.5 x 47.5 x 10cm,  
bootees: 7 x 5 x 8.5cm and  
bonnet: 13 x 13 x 6cm; rattle:  
32 x 8.5 x 6cm; six pack of  
baby bottles: 17 x 20 x 13cm  
Purchased 2000, Queensland  
Art Gallery Foundation Grant  
Collection Queensland Art  
Gallery, Brisbane  
© Fiona Hall

### Consumption

*Representing the ethics and values associated with domestic life; or objects and events of daily living that take shape through familiar household items; or everyday materials that reflect our many habits of consumption.*

*Medicine bundle for the non-born child* (1993–94) consists of baby clothes carefully knitted from shredded strips of aluminium cut from Coca-Cola cans, a harsh

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material for a baby's delicate skin. The conventional purpose of the layette – to provide comfort for a newborn child – is challenged by the materials from which it has been made.

This work addresses the concept of nurturing in a consumer society, referencing Coca-Cola as a symbol of plant degradation and global capitalism. Hall researched the history of the cocoa leaf and cola nut (both of which were used in the original formula of Coca-Cola), and learnt that these plants were used as a form of contraceptive in developing countries and were traditionally carried in medicine bundles for use in religious rituals.<sup>7</sup>

### Symbiosis

*Representing connections between diverse life forms – animal, insect, plant and human.*

In these works, Hall observes the workings of the natural world and processes of interaction; humans are drawn into relationships between other species such as insects, plants and marine organisms.

*Dead in the Water* (1999) consists of a vitrine cabinet similar to those in museums. Above an imaginary waterline, PVC piping, which is not a traditional art medium, has been intricately pierced with a pattern of holes. No longer resembling the 'masculine' material used by plumbers, it has been transformed into delicate, 'feminine' shapes. The theme of fragility continues beneath the waterline as the pipes change into root-like structures made of finely sewn glass beads. It is reminiscent of coral, yet also of beaded evening bags.

In this artwork Hall has continued the theme of exploring meaning through juxtaposition of opposites – nature versus humanity. There is a sense of ambiguity within the contrasting textures, encouraging the viewer to uncover deeper meanings.<sup>8</sup>

*Dead in the Water* 1999  
polyvinyl chloride, glass  
beads, silver wire, glass, wood  
and transparent synthetic  
polymer resin, vitrine  
106.2 × 128.1 × 128.2cm  
vitrine dimensions  
collection National Gallery of  
Victoria purchased, 1999  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9  
Gallery, Sydney  
© Fiona Hall

## PRACTICE



### Body

*Representing sensuality, privacy and morality as part of nature and culture.*

Within these artworks, Hall reflects an awareness of the body not only as sexual but also as part of nature. The 'body' is a space shaped by influences from the surrounding world including the media, science and religion. These works are witty and shocking, and challenge our sense of privacy and propriety.

*Scar Tissue* (2003–04) was one of several works made from videotape in which body parts and children's toys arise from video cases. Each object is knitted from obsolete videotape from war films such as *Apocalypse Now*. The black figures float eerily above the video cases, challenging Hollywood's glamorisation of war.<sup>9</sup>

### Paradise

*Humanity's relationship to nature and the Garden of Eden with links to religion, culture and science.*

The series *Paradisus Terrestris* (1998–2005), explores the human desire for harmony with nature as well as the concept of 'Paradise'.

In 1999, Hall achieved critical success with *Paradisus Terrestris* (2005), shown in the *Adelaide Biennial of Contemporary Art*. Inspiration for the series came from two disparate experiences. As a child while camping with her family, the artist recalled the sight of a sardine tin glittering in a pile of rubbish, a humble item seemingly transformed by the way it touched the earth. In 1999, Hall travelled to Sri Lanka where she immersed herself in the gardens of Lunuganga, the estate of architect Geoffrey Bawa. The lush gardens influenced the artist's choice of plants for *Paradisus Terrestris*.<sup>10</sup>

*Scar tissue* 2003–2004  
videotape  
vitrine dimensions:  
210 x 330 x 330cm  
collection MONA, Tasmania  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9  
Gallery, Sydney  
© Fiona Hall

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As a part the series, *Nelumbo nucifera*; *nelum (Sinhala)*; *thamereri (Tami)*; *lotus (1999)*, relates to the place people have in nature. To inform this work, Hall studied plant specimens, researching forms, botanic classifications, and their historical medicinal uses. Each piece is named according to the botanical, common and Aboriginal name for the plant. The type of sardine can used, with a key to unroll the lid, is no longer produced; and at the time, sardines were a cheap, commonplace form of food. The artist has transformed these everyday objects by adding elaborate plant forms that emerge from the top of the tin, implying an erotic view of the body. As with all of Hall's work, these sculptures have many layers of meaning.<sup>11</sup>

*Cell Culture (2001–02)* is part of a series of sculptures presented in a large glass display case. Hall has created a collection of unusual creatures and plants using Tupperware containers (plastic storage ware) as a structure to which she has attached beaded forms. The sculptures work together as a unit, the translucent white plastic complementing the delicate woven forms of glass beads. Hall has combined an old form of commercial currency, glass beads, with a modern commercial material, plastic containers, symbolising the natural world meeting the consumer world. The precious nature of the objects is emphasised by the method of display, suggestive of a museum specimen case.<sup>12</sup>

### Territory

*Representing territories of power, politics and the environment, the disappearance of species and the degradation of bio-systems.*

A number of Hall's works show these overlapping fields. Some reflect her interest in camouflage patterns that have penetrated our daily life through the media coverage of terrorism and war, these patterns are influenced by nature.



*Tender 2003–06* consists of birds' nests woven from shredded US dollar bills, each bearing the official declaration 'This note is legal tender'. The works draw on the relationship between the vulnerability of nature and economic life. To make *Tender*, Hall paid face value for thousands of US dollars and sliced them to weave the nests. As the US dollar is the most valued currency in Third World countries, this work suggests people hunting for the dollar like a bird scavenging for materials to build its nest. The artist is also commenting on one of the prices paid for capitalism – the destruction of the environment. In exhibition notes from the

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery exhibition *Cell Culture and Leaf Litter* in October 2002, Sydney, Fiona Hall challenges us with the question: 'Money doesn't grow on trees, or does it? Plants have played a crucial role in the history of colonisation and the development of world economies. But everything comes at a price, and now we are paying heavily for overtaxing the environment.'<sup>13</sup>

*Tender (detail) 2003–06*  
US dollars, wire and vitrines  
86 nests, approx.,  
ranging from 5 x 10cm (diam.)  
to 108 x 17 x 13cm;  
two vitrines (each comprising  
three parts): 220 x 360 x  
150cm (each); 220 x 360 x  
500cm (installed, variable)  
Purchased 2006.  
The Queensland Government's  
Gallery of Modern Art  
Acquisitions Fund  
collection Queensland  
Art Gallery, Brisbane  
© Fiona Hall

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*Mourning Chorus* (2007–08) is a work that refers to the demise of New Zealand's bird life. In this artwork, Hall brings together two properties of her practice – flora and fauna – represented here by found objects. The sculpture is a reference to the practice of collecting specimens – species once seen in nature are now only seen preserved (dead) in the museum. A representation of each of the 11 extinct or endangered bird species is fashioned out of a different disposable plastic chemical container and enlivened by carved resin beaks. The 'birds' are seen through patterns of native foliage etched across the glass panels of a coffin-shaped vitrine. Hall researched the extinct birds in museums and studied each skeleton to be able to recreate the beaks.<sup>14</sup>

*Tender* 2003–06  
US dollars, wire and vitrines  
86 nests, approx.,  
ranging from 5 x 10cm (diam.)  
to 108 x 17 x 13cm;  
two vitrines (each comprising  
three parts): 220 x 360 x  
150cm (each); 220 x 360 x  
500cm (installed, variable)  
Purchased 2006.  
The Queensland Government's  
Gallery of Modern Art  
Acquisitions Fund  
collection Queensland  
Art Gallery, Brisbane  
© Fiona Hall

*Mourning Chorus* 2007–8  
Resin, plastic bottles, lights  
and vinyl in vitrine  
217 x 157 x 88cm  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery,  
Sydney © Fiona Hall





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### Trade

*Representing global trade, finance and colonial history.*

Hall's work over the past decade with plants and banknotes and her exploration of issues related to consumption all link to earlier themes in her work, and blend together narratives of colonisation and exploitation.

In 1998, Hall's interest in botany saw her continue her studies as artist-in-residence at the Botanic Gardens in Brisbane, an experience that formed the background to the work *Cash Crop*.<sup>15</sup> This installation of carved soap and banknotes painted with botanical drawings of leaves explores issues linking colonisation and economic activity. Hall has finely carved coloured soap to represent fruit and vegetables. The pieces are arranged on the shelves of a vitrine according to size – smallest to largest. They are each labelled with terms that relate to economic activity, such as the peanut as 'Tax Return'; a runner bean, 'Venture Capital'; a grape 'Liquid Asset'; and a lotus 'Share Market Float', imbuing the artwork with political meaning. Economic activity is further referenced by the banknotes, illustrated with botanical specimens, covering the vitrine's floor.

In 1999, Hall commenced an Asialink residency in Sri Lanka where she conceived the *Leaf Litter* series (2000–02). The work consists of nearly 200 individual leaf images painted in gouache onto the banknotes of each leaf's country of origin, with the title of each work reflecting its botanical classification.

left:  
*Cynara scolymus – Globe  
artichoke (Spanish currency)*  
2000–2002  
from *Leaf Litter*  
drawing in brush and gouache  
sheet and image  
66.7 x 38.9cm  
National Gallery of  
Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 2003  
© Fiona Hall

right:  
*Cash Crop* 1998–99 (detail)  
carved soap, painted  
banknotes, vitrine  
vitrine dimensions:  
115 x 130 x 55 cm  
collection Art Gallery of New  
South Wales, Sydney  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9  
Gallery, Sydney  
© Fiona Hall



## PRACTICE

Botanical illustration is a specialised field of scientific documentation and Hall has become highly skilled in this traditional genre. All the leaves are painted in black and white, resembling 19th-century engravings, although skeletal versions. Hall has paired plants and banknotes carefully, playing with historical and political connections. Most of the banknotes are now obsolete due to changing currencies or shifting national boundaries.

Understanding the connection between the natural world and social life has become crucial to the artist's works. Plants have played an important role in the history of colonisation and world economies and Hall has commented on the price paid for overtaxing the environment; *Leaf Litter* has developed these concerns into a work with global significance.<sup>16</sup>

A 2011 visit with scientists and conservationists to New Zealand's Kermadec Trench, a haven for threatened marine species and deep-sea organisms and a target for mining companies, was another source of inspiration for Fiona Hall. It was on this trip that she began working with barkcloth (*tapa*), a material used by the Tongan woman of the region. Her concern with the natural world and the perilous state of various species is ongoing. Her *DOCUMENTA (13)* project *Fall Prey* presented a series of trophied species on the International Union for Conservation's Red List. Each animal was constructed from the camouflage military defence uniform from its country of origin, torn up and reshaped.

While the fragility of the environment is a continuing theme, she has also explored other issues through her practice – colonisation, economic corruption, geopolitics, and human frailty in the face of war.<sup>17</sup>

In 2014, Hall spent time with the Tjanpi Desert Weavers of Central Australia, and collaborated on a series of sculptures woven from local grasses with 12 Aboriginal women artists. The resulting work, *Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time)*, featured in *Wrong Way Time*, in the *56th Venice Biennale (2015)* and depicted endangered Australian desert species and feral cats. Women from the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara lands have a long history of making animals interwoven from local grasses and other materials. Both the Tjanpi weavers and Fiona Hall shared this mastery of weaving, and this mutual skill helped inform the collaboration. The Tjanpi weavers harvested tjanpi (grass) and Hall supplied printed camouflage fabric; the artists used each other's fibres and also added in other found materials to create the final group work. Hall, as a non-Aboriginal Australian, brought her own thoughts about the impacts of colonisation on the environment and the animals that inhabit it.<sup>18</sup>

*Wrong Way Time* received international acclaim. It was a huge installation that brought together many of Hall's works from between 2003 and 2015 unified by the theme of 'a world out of joint' heading for disaster. The peculiarities of human nature, combined with her ongoing engagement with the environment and things 'counter and strange', inspired a multi-layered examination of intersecting concerns. Hall transformed everyday objects to address a range of contemporary issues such as post-colonialism, consumerism, war and natural history. Conceived as a single work, *Wrong Way Time* contained a complex assortment of objects: found, constructed, cast, woven, knitted, natural, handmade and hi-tech.<sup>19</sup>

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In the Venice installation she combined a seemingly random assortment of objects, drawings on banknotes, painted clocks, reconstructed military garments and natural forms. At the centre of the exhibition was *All The King's Men*, 20 spirit-like forms that appeared to float in space. They represent foot soldiers, their heads consisting of shredded camouflage fabric taken from various armies, knitted together with a painstaking workmanship common to Hall's work. Sewn into the masks and the bodies were hanging strips of camouflage and found objects that included boxing gloves, dice and billiard balls, the life that was lived beneath the uniforms. Another two works, her Aboriginal collaborative work *Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time)* and *Manuhiri (Travellers)*, registered the impact of colonisation and capitalism on the environment; her passion can be felt in these works that respond to our role in environmental demise.<sup>20</sup> Hall commented, 'I suspect I am not alone in thinking that many people are quite troubled by the madness and badness and sadnesses of the world. What can I say: the world has given me a lot of material to work with.'<sup>21</sup>



1. Hall, Fiona, *Fiona Hall: Force Field catalogue*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2007, p.46.
2. Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p.57.
3. Michael, Linda (ed), *Fiona Hall: Wrong Way Time – ARTEXT*, Australia Council for the Visual Arts 11-12, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005.
4. McLisky, Justine, *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, Education Kit, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2008.
5. Israel, Glenis, *Senior Artwise Visual Arts 11-12*, 2nd Edition, Jacaranda plus, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, Visual Arts 11-12, Milton, Queensland, 2010, p.14.
6. *ibid.* p.16
7. *The Art of Fiona Hall*, Education Resource, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2005, [artsattrinity.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/2/3/13237039/fiona\\_hall\\_edkit.pdf](https://artsattrinity.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/2/3/13237039/fiona_hall_edkit.pdf)
8. Israel, Glenis, *Senior Artwise Visual Arts 11-12*, 2nd Edition, Jacaranda plus, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd. Milton, Queensland, 2010, p.10.
9. Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p.140.
10. Fiona Hall, *56th Venice Biennale 2015*, Australia Council for the Arts, (Fiona Hall- background), [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p...](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/.../fiona-hall-background-55389102e3994.p...)
11. Israel, Glenis, *Senior Artwise Visual Arts 11-12*, 2nd Edition, Jacaranda plus, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd. Milton, Queensland, 2010, p. 12.
12. *ibid.* p.13
13. *ibid.* p. 9.
14. McLisky, Justine, *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, Education Kit, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2008.
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16. Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 170.
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## PRACTICE

### MATERIAL PRACTICE

#### Materials and Forms

'As soon as you make a work it becomes history. That is something I am aware of. The media I use seem to have their time and then they go very rapidly. Videotape is now obsolete. Within a few years of my first sardine tins in the early 1990s, the tins with the old-style keys were replaced with ring-pull tins. Banknotes are being replaced increasingly by plastic transactions.'<sup>1</sup>

Fiona Hall has used a great range of materials, forms and processes over time. Since her original training as a painter, she has expanded her practice to include installation, sculpture and video. Her works can be admired on a purely visual level for their delicacy of skill and use of materials, but she also shows evidence of thorough research into social and environmental concerns. The extent of her art practice makes it crucial to examine a range of work to appreciate her control over different media and concerns.

From her 1970s black-and-white photographs to her precisely constructed installations and sculptures of the 1990s, Hall's evolving practice is motivated by a need to understand the world around her.

Materiality has played a large part in Hall's concepts as she works with objects in unorthodox ways. Her artmaking skills are highly accomplished and she has mastered multiple practices including photography, beading, weaving, installation, painting, collage and others.

The variety of her media from the early 1990s is remarkable. The sardine cans used in *Paradisus terrestris* were the first in a range of non-traditional materials that included knitted metals, fabrics, images from mail order catalogues, soap, cardboard boxes, punctured plumbing tubes, beads, hardware items, animal bones, gardens, mass-produced snow domes, banknotes, and language as botanical classification. The majority of these materials are drawn from everyday life and the stuff of amateur craft and hobbies. The contrast between the original material and the way Hall uses it is crucial; her unexpected handling of media makes us question traditional ways of using things. She matches raw materials with issues such as the reassessment of colonisation, the rights of Indigenous Australians and Native Title, consumer society, environmental pollution and genetic experimentation.<sup>2</sup>

A strong element of Hall's work is her transformation of disposable objects such as sardine cans and videotape, as well as consumer objects such as banknotes, into metaphors for life issues where material and concept merge. Whilst these everyday objects are transformed by Hall into items of complex beauty, they exceed their functional and aesthetic purposes by offering different ways of looking at the world.<sup>3</sup> 'I tend to choose materials already loaded with meaning ... Having selected a medium, I then devise a way to make it take on the forms I want, so my work usually ends up looking highly crafted.'<sup>4</sup>

Once Hall adopts a new material or technique, she uses it over a range of subjects. She also doesn't use preparatory drawings but starts from first-hand observations by directly modelling, carving, sewing and assembling discarded items of consumer culture into new objects.<sup>5</sup> Her work is not feminist, but her choice and use of materials such as beads, soap and Tupperware have feminine connections, or

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she uses traditional female pursuits such as knitting and weaving.<sup>6</sup> 'My work is not strictly feminist, but I think my use of materials is increasingly female in many ways. Probably I have been drawn to working not just with ideas but with materials that start, quite literally, at home.'<sup>7</sup>

Although Hall uses traditional craft techniques, she extends these practices by inventing new ways of doing things such as knitting videotape and strips of aluminium can; by linking unusual materials, techniques and concepts she confronts an audience, making us see the odd juxtapositions of her material and intellectual combinations.<sup>8</sup>

Her works are labour intensive with her attention to detail and precise craftsmanship evident in fine beadwork, delicate gouache painting, soap carving and the cutting and manipulation of aluminium.<sup>9</sup> 'Coca-Cola cans, sardine cans, bits of paper and discarded objects have been used frequently in my work over the years. You can make something look very delicate and extremely rich out of what otherwise would be a discarded item – this is one of the things I like about working with "used" materials.'<sup>10</sup> Military camouflage uniforms, driftwood, cuckoo clocks, sardine cans and international currency are some of the other materials that she has used which are then repurposed into politically charged objects.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike some contemporary artists who collaborate with specialists such as metal fabricators or master printers to produce artwork or who employ assistants, Hall makes all her own work and doesn't employ assistants. This process allows her to make spontaneous decisions as her artworks evolve from her initial ideas and chosen materials. Apart from the freedom to alter a work during production, she finds it satisfying to become highly proficient in a skill.<sup>12</sup> 'I tend to be one of those types who still make their work pretty much themselves,' she said. 'I've never thought you could just hand an idea over to someone else, this is speaking personally, and have them put the same emotive qualities into the work that you want...If that potency is not in the work you can't kid yourself. It's just not there.'<sup>13</sup>

Hall calls herself a 'museum junkie'. Consistent with her observation of the human instinct to understand the world is her expression of our need to collect, store, organise and preserve it. Since making *Occupied Territory* in 1995, Hall has placed many of her works inside vitrines. Based on 19th-century museum display, these cases provide cultural as well as physical frames. Inside these deliberately old-fashioned vitrines, works address the relationship between anthropology, science and museums in connection with colonialism.<sup>14</sup>

In these works, Hall draws on the concept of the Wunderkammer (German for 'wonder chamber'), or cabinet of curiosities, originating in Renaissance Europe and becoming popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. She fills her vitrines with a diverse range of finely crafted sculptures, weavings and collections of manipulated readymade objects.<sup>15</sup> Hall comments on the Wunderkammer as being a product of the curiosity of colonialism, evolving from a desire to understand a new world and to possess the rare. Her works closely reflect wonder cabinets of old: a personal microcosm of the world's declining diversity displayed in rooms marking the wealth and interests of their owners. These early Wunderkammern predated scientific classification and combined items drawn from nature and culture.<sup>16</sup>

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'I'm not talking here about art galleries or art museums,' says the artist, 'but other kinds of museums: museums of natural history that were set up two or three centuries ago ... where objects from the world outside the confines of the museum were isolated from their original context, chosen not just for their informational value but also just because they were beautiful, or strange or quirky. The Wunderkammer puts a particular kind of spin on our relationship with the world and how we decipher it, and how we choose to categorise it and then display it.'<sup>17</sup>



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2. Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 126.
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6. Israel, Glenis, *Senior Artwise Visual Arts 11-12*, 2nd Edition, Jacaranda Plus, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd. Milton, Queensland 2010, p. 15.
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16. Freak, Elle, 'Fiona Hall: out of my tree, Fiona Hall at the 56th Venice Biennale', *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture Broadsheet 44\_1*, 2015.
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## PRACTICE

### ARTIST'S TECHNIQUES AND PROCESSES

Fiona Hall's materials and processes are unconventional. Although trained in painting, she began her practice with photography and extended into diverse media including sculpture, installation, moving image and garden design. The unusual techniques employed by Hall such as soap carving, beading, embossing, and knitting all involve elaborate attention to detail. Her ability to master such varied techniques and processes to explore issues and concepts has made her a trailblazer in the contemporary artworld.

#### Photography

The link between materials and messages is strong in many of her works. Her background in painting and photography connects to developments in her sculptural practice since the 1990s.

Hall explored photography using a large format *view camera*, an apparatus from the 19th century, with which she photographed people at beaches, and constructed her own landscapes and domestic images. Making the 'depicted look more realistic than the actual' was a common outcome of her photography up until the mid-1990s.<sup>1</sup>

In 1980, Hall's work underwent a shift when she began manipulating photographs, with images becoming increasingly hybrid. Manipulated photography had begun to challenge the realistic nature of photography, influencing Hall to move from a Modernist approach to Postmodern experimentation – from documented images taken in the field, to more experimental collages, to resolved images of engineered subject matter. Constructions made in the studio became more prevalent as her artworks evolved from experimental composite collages and photomontage, including reproductions of historical artworks, postcards and drawings, to resolved images of the molded constructions using the Polaroid camera and method.

Using artworks by masters such as Botticelli, Jan van Eyck, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Matisse, Mondrian and Hokusai as inspiration, Hall made a set of constructed photographs. She transformed famous artworks by arranging small tableaux from found objects and images and recording them with a large format camera. These artworks marked Hall's break with 'straight photography' and signalled her direction for the next decade – linking painting and the use of found objects. The *Reconstructed Paintings* series illustrates how the artist makes connections between historical images and contemporary life such as *The Marriage of the Arnolfini, after Jan van Eyck* (1980) and *Starry Night after van Gogh* (1981). The earlier artwork combines visual references restructured to form an altered perspective, not only within Hall's work, but also with reference to the 'original' artwork. *The Marriage of the Arnolfini, after van Eyck* is understandable not only as a 'reproduction' but also as a Postmodern interpretation, as the original van Eyck painting derives its symbolism from Renaissance history.<sup>2</sup>

Hall was invited in 1985 to work with a large-scale Polaroid camera; here she created and photographed table-top 'sets' comprising metal figures sculpted from soft drink cans and other materials including textiles, wire, painted images, drawings and photocopies. The photographs were images of three-dimensional scenes she had intricately crafted, using plastic, paint, and found objects. In the

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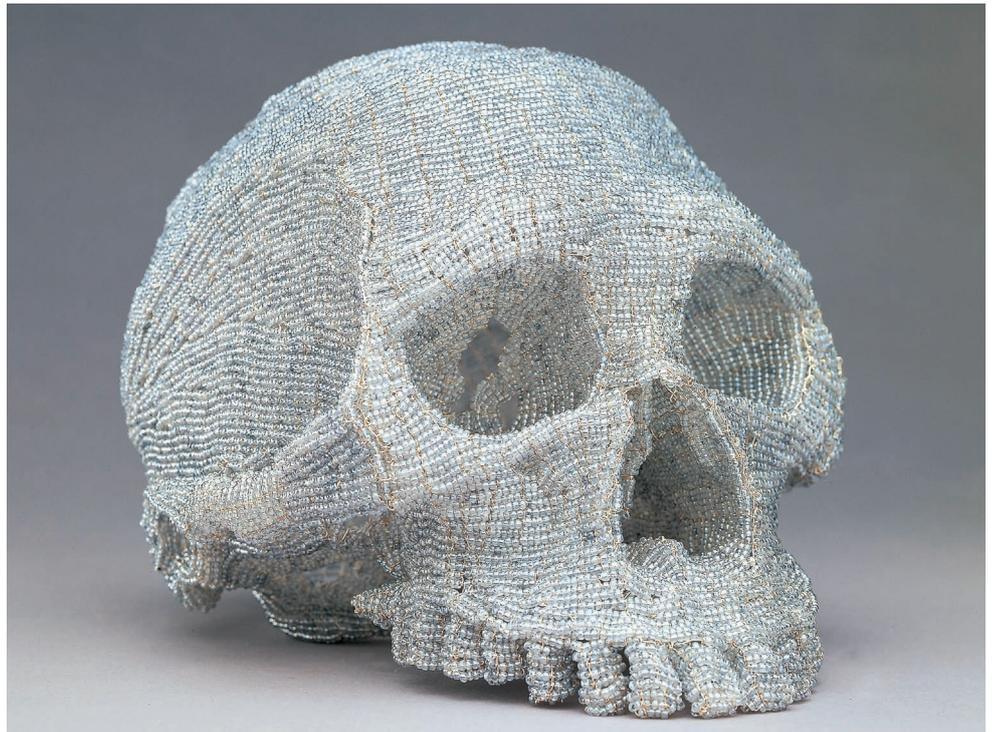
## PRACTICE

*Words* series (1989–90) Hall cut and moulded figures from soft drink cans and placed them in a configuration of letters to make 'word plays'. The artist created a background surface using found objects that were unified with expressive brushstrokes, which were then photographed using the large format Polaroid camera.

Between 1985 and 1991 Hall produced several series of Polaroid photographs using integrated relief sculptural figures, the first based on the *Seven Deadly Sins*.<sup>3</sup> Her large-scale Polaroid photographs of the mid-1990s explored a range of subjects, interests such as the nature of consumerism, the 'great books of literature' and the conventions of photography and how to document reality.<sup>4</sup>

### Beading

Many of Hall's sculptural works were made by constructing three-dimensional shapes from wire which were then threaded with hundreds of minute white glass beads; a technique which becomes highly complex when using camouflage patterns and coloured beads.



left:  
*The marriage of the Arnolfini,*  
after van Eyck 1980  
type C photograph  
28 x 35.5 cm  
Purchased 1984  
collection Art Gallery of  
New South Wales, Sydney  
Photo: AGNSW  
© Fiona Hall

right:  
*Understorey* (detail) 1999–2004  
glass beads, silver wire,  
rubber, boar's teeth,  
176 x 150 x 87cm vitrine  
private collection, Sydney  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9  
Gallery, Sydney  
© Fiona Hall

Some pieces are constructed entirely of wire and beads whilst others incorporate found objects such as Tupperware containers. Her first bead artwork *Occupied Territory* (1995) came about from her engagement with the site of the first Government House in Sydney, currently the Museum of Sydney. Her research for this commission led her to using beads and nails, which were used by early European explorers for trade with Aboriginal and Māori peoples.<sup>5</sup>

### Soap Carving

*The Sabine Woman* (1997), *Cash Crop* (1998–99) and *Give a Dog a Bone* (1996) all feature objects carved from soap. This material fascinated Hall, as it is both cleansing and fragile, but in her hands it becomes protected and stable, pointing to its use as a commodity.

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### Embossing

Hall began making sculptural figures in the 1980s from aluminium for use in her Polaroid photographs; this method is known as repoussé and is usually used as a jewellery technique. The series *Paradisus terrestris* (1989–1999) was created through embossing and cutting thin sheet aluminium and sardine tins. By applying pressure to the underside of the metal sheet with various tools, Hall has made a variety of textures suggestive of the surface of skin, bodies and plants; the outlines of the plants are painstakingly cut, providing intricate silhouettes.

### Knitting

Knitting is a craft technique traditionally associated with women and the domestic realm. Hall employed this craft in *Medicine bundle for the non-born child* (1994) and *Scar Tissue* (2003–2004) with unsettling effects. By knitting with shredded Coca-Cola cans or videotape from violent movies, she transformed this technique from its origins as a comforting craft into a construction method associated with pain.

### Processes

Hall has devoted much of her time to research, which has resulted in her nomadic life. She has travelled to countries that share with Australia a British colonial past such as India, Sri Lanka and Tonga, studying aspects of these countries; natural environments both in the field and in natural history museums. She has also spent time investigating New Zealand's Kapiti Island where rare and ancient flora and fauna are protected.<sup>6</sup>

### Found Objects

One of Hall's key processes is that of *bricolage*, where she improvises with materials at hand. Using aluminium sardine tins, American dollar bills, other foreign banknotes, old clocks, model aeroplanes and ships, damaged books, driftwood, mobile phones, camouflage military garments, credit cards, bones and perfume bottles, she creates alternative forms. The French term *bricolage* comes from the verb *bricoler* (to tinker), which characterises her working methods. Hall recontextualises objects from everyday life by shredding metal cans for weaving, slicing American dollar bills and knitting military camouflage fatigues to create the masks that made up *All The King's Men*. She also entangles bones, horns, teeth and other found objects into the artwork.<sup>7</sup>



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# THE FRAMES

*Students learn that practice refers to the social structures, positions, actions and sequences that affect choices, perceptions, directions, ways of working and views of those involved in the visual arts. Students learn that the nature of practice involves the inculcation of beliefs, actions and ideas over time.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

## ARTWORK ANALYSIS USING THE FRAMES

### Structural Frame

*...students... consider how artworks can be read and their meaning understood in terms of how specific symbols refer to the world. Students... study how visual information is transmitted in artworks, how the formal and organisational relationships in a work mean certain things and how the visual arts can operate as a visual language at a certain time and over time.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

Through investigating themes, concepts, materials and techniques in Hall's work, students can understand how art communicates as a visual language. Symbolism, metaphors and materials combine to convey connected ideas and political messages about the environment.<sup>1</sup>

The stimulus for Hall's *Paradisus Terrestris* series came from her passion for gardens and botany, using the 'Garden of Eden' as a starting point. She also incorporated interests in the human body and sexuality and used Christian mythology to investigate the human form. The title *Paradisus Terrestris* – Paradise on earth – comes from the original work on gardens as a source of pleasure, John Parkinson's *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* (1629).

Botanical illustrations, *Paradisus Terrestris* was also an historical term used in describing colonial decorative arts by 19th-century artisans, for example gold and silversmiths, mostly European immigrants, for whom Australian nature provided a wide range of new forms.

The series, made from sardine tins and aluminium cans, was created over a 15-year period from 1989–1996. In this series, she continued her practice of working with and transforming found objects, many from the domestic sphere including recycled aluminium. The sculptures show delicate, finely wrought construction and erotic details. 'The sardine cans came out of a feeling about the way plants grow, the delicacy, the individuality of every living thing, the process of it, the being alive – and how you can translate all those feelings into whatever your own medium is.'<sup>2</sup>

The lid of each sardine tin has been wound down to reveal embossed depictions of the human form. Botanical representations of flora seem to grow from the tops of each tin, making an interconnection between the plant and the body. The relationship humans have with the natural world is symbolised through concepts of

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fertility and reproduction, growth and natural cycles. Hall has worked through three distinct systems – sex, botany and language – rendering them together in each work. Botany (or ‘paradise’) is represented by the delicate renderings of trees, flowers and fruits. Worldly things (or ‘terrestris’) are represented by distinct erotic forms, while language is represented by botanical labels beneath each artwork designating Latin biological classification and English.<sup>3</sup>

In *Paradisus Terrestris entitled* (1996) each sardine can is left virtually intact but with the lid partially rolled down to reveal an erotic image impressed into aluminium. Desire, found in the Garden of Eden, is given structure in the erotic scenes, distinguishing the human species from plants, while acknowledging the natural reproduction in both species. In humans, the expression of sexuality is often forbidden, reflected in the artwork by the partial framing of the erotic scene as though the viewer is peering through an opening. By cropping the image, the erotica is controlled inside the frame, while the plants are free to wander.

The small scale and the meticulous forms of the foliage create a strong sense of intimacy.<sup>4</sup> Hall chose plants with symbolic references to Paradise and combined the elements of plants and bodies, nature and humanity. In rendering botanical details and by using labels with the biological classification followed by the common name, Hall makes reference to the 18th-century European obsession with naming plants.<sup>5</sup>

For over two decades female sexuality has been a key aspect of Hall’s imagery, often representing femininity through floral images; another influence was the 18th-century discovery that plants multiplied sexually. In *Paradisus Terrestris* the body acts as a container for the plant forms symbolising females as sensual entities who contribute to humanity, but also intimates the associations connecting flowers and plants with sexual desire.

In this series, Hall’s use of Aboriginal names, in association with Latin and common plant names in labelling the artworks, refers to colonial appropriation of land and signifies concepts of ownership and post-colonialism. *Paradisus Terrestris entitled* was created in response to the Wik decision (1993) on Native Title and addresses the colonising of Australia by Europeans and the application of their naming systems to native flora and fauna. The plants depicted are Australian natives and an Indigenous name for each plant is included in the title, giving the Aboriginal voice equal say.

Sardine cans are a constant motif, providing a frame for each image with their organic, circular shape creating uniformity and harmony. Crowning each is a delicate rendering of a plant from a second sardine can uniting the two elements, while the repetition of the plant form is a key unifying element. Together they become a collection, in the same way naturalists would have collected and displayed exotic specimens. The naked metal is left unadorned except for the embossed shine creating contrast. The lack of colour is also fundamental to Hall as she feels colour overshadows the integrity of her works. The texture of the sharp tin that the leaves and body segments are constructed from signifies pleasure and pain.

## THE FRAMES

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2. Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p.107.
3. *ibid.* p. 101.
4. Thompson, Karen, *Fiona Hall*, Analysis of a specific work, *Paradisus Terrestris Entitled 1996*, 2005, [https://melbournejeweller.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/karenthompson\\_y2s1\\_theory1\\_fionahall1.pdf](https://melbournejeweller.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/karenthompson_y2s1_theory1_fionahall1.pdf)
5. *ibid.*

### Cultural Frame

*.... students ... consider how notions of cultural identity can inform the production of artworks. Students may study differing cultural attitudes towards the visual arts and the effects of scientific and technological innovation, politics and economics. They may study concepts of social and cultural identity (e.g. gender, Indigenous, regional, national, modern, contemporary etc.) on artistic practices in particular places at a certain time and over time.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

Fiona Hall's strong environmental convictions support and inform her art practice. Her works comment on environmental matters such as deforestation, ecology, the vulnerability of living things and the subsequent extinction of species, as well as the collection and classification of natural history.

She also makes observations about political and social issues such as colonialism, global trade and world economics. In the early 1990s, Hall became aware of the first Gulf War and how armed warfare affected the world. This had a strong influence on her and instigated a new engagement with current events. This interest in international politics led to Hall being engaged in local developments, such as the Mabo decision (1992).<sup>1</sup>

Since 1999, she has undertaken artist residencies in Sri Lanka, a country of strong cross-cultural encounters. Working there became a watershed experience for Hall as she became more aware of broader political concerns. Through botanical research she became aware of the impact of colonial settlement and global trade on past and present indigenous cultures. She began to focus her attention on both local and global conflicts, and how colonial history had impacted many places including the Middle East. Her Sri Lankan works refer to the island's history of colonisation, cultural diversity and political strife.<sup>2</sup>

By the early 2000s, Hall had formed new themes based on current issues and explored other materials entrenching her practice in the contemporary world. She collected images and materials from daily research and observations, which steered her towards making artwork more entwined in Australian life and its connection to the wider world.<sup>3</sup> Hall's growing awareness of Australian Aboriginal peoples and culture, as well as other global cultures, led her to explore and expose issues through her artworks.

As a practitioner, Hall is both a collector-scientist on the side of culture and objectivity, and an artist-animist on the side of nature and subjectivity. While science expands our knowledge of the world through the study of living organisms, animism focuses on our connection to the natural world. Hall aims to move beyond this separation and closer to the relationships humans have with animals

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in Aboriginal culture. Hall is drawn to the art of indigenous cultures, including Aboriginal and African cultures.<sup>4</sup>

*Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time)* is a collaborative work between Hall and the Tjanpi Desert Weavers and was included in the 56th Venice Biennale (2015) exhibition *Wrong Way Time*.

It consisted of works made by Hall and 12 women from the Central and Western Desert region of Australia as part of a project commissioned for the 2014 TarraWarra Biennial, Victoria. Hall approached the group, who had a history of making animals from local grasses and other materials, to collaborate on a work based on endangered or extinct animals from the desert region.



The Aboriginal women drew on their intimate relationships with animals that is embedded in the interrelatedness of people, place, story and ancestral experience, and their knowledge of hunting, tracks and animal behaviour including that of the predatory feral cat. At an artists' camp the women collected local tjanpi (locally harvested wild grasses) and Hall introduced camouflage fabric from military uniforms, which was subsequently woven into some of the animals. The camouflage fabric symbolised the agony of the Aboriginal people in what they saw as their suffering under colonial rule, and extended Hall's explorations into the effects of colonisation. The women used each other's materials as well as incorporating found objects to create animals which were inspired by the plight of endangered species.<sup>5</sup>

Front LR: Niningka Lewis,  
Yangi Yangi Fox, Roma Butler,  
Molly Miller, Rene Kulitja,  
Sandra Peterman  
Back LR: Fiona Hall,  
Mary Pan, Nyanu Watson,  
Angaliya Nelson at a  
Tjanpi artist camp 2014.  
Image by Jo Foster.  
© Tjanpi Desert Weavers,  
NPY Women's  
Council and Fiona Hall

1. Ewington, Julie, 2005. *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 126.
2. *ibid.*, p. 155.
3. *ibid.*, p. 150.
4. Freak, Elle, 'Out of my tree: Fiona Hall at the 56th Venice Biennale', *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture broadsheet*, 44\_1, 2015.
5. 'Tjanpi at the 2015 Venice Biennale', NPY Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation, <https://www.npywc.org.au/tjanpi-at-the-2015-venice-biennale/>.

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### Subjective Frame

... students ...develop personal responses to artists and artworks that are highly significant to them. They can explore artworks as expressive and unique objects, develop notions of individual styles, and interpret the work and the influence of those artists who are of great personal interest to them

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

Although Fiona Hall's works have their basis in historical and scientific research, her art also plays with our emotions – fear and guilt, desire and pleasure. She uses strategies such as wit, humour and surprise to stir reactions.<sup>1</sup> Her works encourage us to look beyond their delicate beauty and sensuous surfaces to discover meaning – they are exquisite, intricately detailed, imaginative creations that make powerful statements. Sexuality, colonialism and society's relationships with nature are continuing themes in her compelling and sensitive works.

Images in which the beautiful and bizarre merge in highly charged, emotive objects confront the viewer. Hall draws the audience in through the appeal of her meticulously crafted works, an attraction that sits in awkward tension with the disturbing truths conveyed. Emotional levels are enhanced by analytical content as Hall uses the beauty of her work as a lure.<sup>2</sup> For example, the use of knitting in some of the artworks such as *Medicine bundle for the non-born child* (1993–94) is an emotive device that conjures associations of caring and nurturing, qualities associated with motherly love; however, the nature of materials used belies the comfort.<sup>3</sup>

The artist provokes us through her use of familiar elements and the ability to make close-up views of minuscule things and relate them to global issues – her capability in combining intimacy with her overall vision forming the basis of her communication.

Hall's art is also intertwined in the mood of Australian life and with her use of everyday materials and domestic practices; the viewer is caught in the same network of ideas, memories and emotions that inspires the artist herself.<sup>2</sup>

1. Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p.25.

2. Were, Virginia, 'Beyond Logic', *Art News New Zealand*, Flying Visit, Spring 2013, <http://www.artnews.co.nz/spring-2013/> www.artnews.co.nz/spring-2013-flying-visit/

3. Glade-Wright, *Visual Content*, Chapter 4, 2006, p. 57. [eprints.utas.edu.au/1058/6/6\\_Ch\\_4\\_Visual\\_Context.pdf](http://eprints.utas.edu.au/1058/6/6_Ch_4_Visual_Context.pdf)

4. Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005, p.150.

## THE FRAMES

### Postmodern Frame

*...students ...question practice in art and the generally accepted classifications of artists, artworks, movements and styles. They can identify inconsistencies in what is written. They can re-evaluate notions of the artistic genius and the masterpiece, and study influences and chronologies to reveal power relations, disjunctions and hidden assumptions.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

Fiona Hall challenges traditional perceptions of art in approach, techniques and practice by breaking down barriers. In doing so, she changes the way the audience interacts with the art object, allowing for individual interpretations. As with some other Postmodern artists she conveys issues related to the environment, including the damage created by humans, forcing the audience to consider contemporary issues of sustainability and our negligence in regard to the preservation of natural resources.

She has long been interested in human classifications and our attempts to create order out of chaos – her works reflect an extensive knowledge of natural history and botany through which she demonstrates a Postmodern preoccupation with systems of display. This is demonstrated in Western culture through museums and museological exhibits.

Over the past 10 years, Hall has conducted a thorough examination of the settlement, cultivation and colonisation of Australia. Her perspective has been extended through residencies in other countries to engage with larger, shared post-colonial issues. A key theme connecting her work is the exploration of memory and loss, and the retrieval of forgotten knowledge systems; these themes remained constant from the personal works of the 1980s to the political works of the 1990s onwards.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian political climate from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s embraced a serious assessment of our European heritage. Australia's place within a regional Asian context was given greater emphasis than the traditional British and European associations of the past, and active campaigning of Aboriginal land rights and reconciliation was pursued. Issues of national identity were questioned from a new post-colonial perspective.

Alongside this cultural debate, Hall's practice expanded and her topics became more public and political, combining ecological and post-colonial concerns that pushed artistic boundaries. These explorations of post-colonial and ecological concepts branched into two areas. The first reflected Australia's diminishing ecological diversity since European settlement and acknowledged the marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their knowledge systems through the retrieval of Indigenous naming systems for native plants. The second concerned Australia's European colonial history shared with other Asian countries.<sup>2</sup>

Hall's use of non-traditional media, methods of display and the way her art challenges and provokes, while also incorporating humour and irony, makes some of her work Postmodern. She questions artistic conventions through her re-use of

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domestic materials such as sardine tins, soap and plumbing pipes. The artist's use of materials as metaphors, and the way in which she draws together stylistic and conceptual interrelationships, test the traditional notion of the role of the artist in society.<sup>3</sup>

Hall also turns her attentions to the everyday, and a direct investigation of contemporary life, choosing common procedures and industrial materials over conventional art media. Her thoughts on the larger world of political concerns began to intersect with her manipulation of household and disposable materials. Her wider sphere had been focused on world politics and international trade, but she concentrated on the domestic domain and mass-produced popular household objects and feminine cultural practices. These included forms such as knitting, beading, botanical illustration, gardening and snow domes.<sup>4</sup>

She reversed established orders by bringing obsolete household materials and forbidden subjects to the fore. Her materials and handworked processes, whether stitching, beading or carving, and the use of craft skills associated with the feminine uncovered preconceived conventions.<sup>5</sup>

The artist used Postmodern concepts in her appropriated works from the mid-1980s, in which she recontextualised images with a strong mixture of historical references. Many of these works were based on visual images and concepts from Medieval and early Renaissance art. By having access to a wider range of images than previous generations of artists, Hall is able to borrow widely from many sources,<sup>6</sup> but she is not attracted by mass media images; rather she relies on research for her inspiration and concepts.

The 1990s saw her pursue installation and site-specific formats, moving from a photographic to a hybrid sculptural practice, to express her analysis of contemporary social, historical and environmental issues.

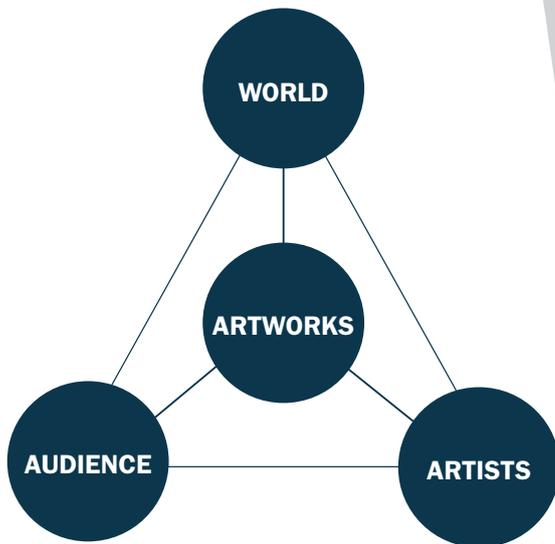


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# THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework provides a model for understanding the agencies in the artworld – the artist, artwork, world and audience, and the relationships between them.

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012



## WORLD

(also refer to Cultural and Postmodern Frames and Conceptual Practice)  
**How interests in the world are represented in art**, for example, art as a representation of experience, class, ideology, age, events of significance.

Fiona Hall's world is a contemporary one under threat by the actions of humanity. Her overriding interest is the complex relationship between humans and the natural world; her works have addressed colonialism, consumerism, globalisation, ecology, natural history and the environment. She explores issues related to social and economic history and botany.<sup>1</sup> By examining the boundaries between the natural and the man-made worlds she reflects on issues of taxonomy, collection, endangerment and extinction. 'I think I subscribe to the idea that all art is political, in the broader sense, it's part of its time, even if it's an abstract narrow area, protest art. But a lot of my recent work touches on environmental politics although I try to get beyond the purely political.'<sup>2</sup>

**Artworld:** As part of her Postmodern practice Hall incorporates non-traditional materials and found objects in her works. In *Fall Prey* (2012) for example, Hall presents a menagerie of 'trophies' of species on the International Union for

## ARTIST

(also refer to Cultural Frame and Conceptual Practice)

**The role of the artist:** the who, what, how, and why. The concept of the artist encompasses practitioners such as artists, craftspeople, designers and architects. The artist can be thought of as an individual or as a group, school, movement, etc.

Throughout her career, Hall has dealt with some of the most complex issues facing society. Her art practice encourages a re-examination of consumerist behaviour and trends that impact on society. Her interdisciplinary practice also tackles environmental degradation, capitalism and political conflict,

## AUDIENCE

(also refer to Subjective Frame and Conceptual Practice)

**The role and value of the audience** as a body of critical consumers. The concept of the audience includes art critics and art historians as well as teachers, students, entrepreneurs, patrons and other members of the public. Audiences for works change over time and bring different meanings to artworks, artists and interpretations of the world.

Fiona Hall challenges traditional perceptions of art in approach, techniques and practice by breaking down barriers; in doing so, she also changes the way an audience connects and interacts with the art object, allowing for individual interpretations and different meanings to be perceived. She makes artworks that are appealing and confronting, encouraging the viewer to unravel layers of beauty, political overtones and serious concepts. Her work reflects a preoccupation with systems of display, often playing with different methods to categorise arrangements; her installations are grouped to capture layers of conceptual concerns. By using everyday found objects, she encourages the

viewer to feel a sense of connection to the work and to grasp the striking transformation of the materials into the complex artworks they have become. Hall's works can be admired purely on an aesthetic level for the meticulous craftsmanship and skill, yet they also encourage us to find significance behind the delicate forms. This desire to closely focus on the virtuosity and bizarreness of Hall's technical processes leads viewers to an intimate contemplation.<sup>1</sup> Her works provoke and confront on emotional and intellectual levels with wit and meaning and by mixing systems of thought such as science, history, religion, botany and commerce she opens new ways of thinking about the world. Hall challenges her audiences to interpret the artworks based on their own personal experiences and knowledge. 56th Venice Biennale (2015) curator Linda Michael says, Fiona Hall 'attracts diverse audiences because her works are so obviously "deeply felt". Also the fact that she makes these extraordinary objects by hand; and that always draws people in. Her work has always been popular because of its human scale; also because she responds to the world around her. I don't think it is an intellectual engagement as much as an instinctive one.'<sup>2</sup>

Conservation's 'Red List'. She is mindful of the thousands of animals and plants that are under threat of extinction across the world and constructs these forms from the camouflage military defence uniforms of the creatures' nations of origin. Camouflage, in Hall's words, 'a symbol of our time that transforms the patterns of nature into the fabric of conflict and hostility'. These works are adorned with remnants of contemporary culture, from energy drink cans to 'Hello Kitty' chopsticks. Hall's use of these elements reminds us of the practice in developing countries of using recycled materials, while also engaging them as symbols of the consumerism that has wrought devastation on the natural habitats of countless species.<sup>3</sup> She endeavours to merge science, nature and spirituality to show us new ways of looking at the world.

1. Morgan, Kendrah (curator), *Big Game Hunting*, Education Resource, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2013, [https://www.heide.com.au/sites/default/files/HeideEdResource\\_Fiona%20Hall\\_BigGameHunting\\_Final%20online.pdf](https://www.heide.com.au/sites/default/files/HeideEdResource_Fiona%20Hall_BigGameHunting_Final%20online.pdf)
2. Michael, Linda, (ed.) 'Fiona Hall: Wrong Way Time', ARTEXT, Australia Council for the Arts, Piper Press, 2015, <http://www.artext.it/56-biennale/Fiona-Hall-Wrong-Way-Time.pdf>
3. Dickie, Anna, 'A Conversation with Fiona Hall', *Ocula Magazine*, Adelaide, 6 April 2015, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/fiona-hall/#!>

and links them in a range of works that evoke humanity's concern over the state of contemporary life.<sup>1</sup>

Much of Hall's work has political undertones but her approach is such that she hopes to encourage the viewer to become more aware of current issues and their own ability to affect some sort of change. 'I would say it is probably more about engendering a sense of recognition. We are all captive to the time we live in and experience. I guess I would like people to recognise, in a sense, that despite diversity we really are connected. If we live in denial of those connections then the world really is a gloomy place.

'One thing my work does in terms of a strategy is that, like nature – which is all about strategising and seeming to be playful and gleeful – it sets out a disarming kind of methodology where people are drawn into something by certain hooks in the work and then they find themselves responding. It is about presenting a state of affairs on multiple fronts, rather than a show that is about dogma of one kind or another.

'I don't think an artist can change the world with their work, but I do think artists are game changers. I think artists are like litmus paper, not just visual artists. Actually artists and scientists both are like litmus paper—they give a sense of where things are.'<sup>2</sup>

2. Michael, Linda, (ed.) 'Fiona Hall: Wrong Way Time', ARTEXT, Australia Council for the Arts, Piper Press, 2015, <http://www.artext.it/56-biennale/Fiona-Hall-Wrong-Way-Time.pdf>
3. Dickie, Anna, 'A Conversation with Fiona Hall', Fiona Hall discussing her works for the 56th Venice Biennale, (2015) quoted from *Ocula Magazine*, Adelaide, 6 April 2015.

'The complex and labour-intensive artworks made by Fiona Hall arouse incredulity in the viewer...the intensity of Hall's making is never about craft, rather that she invents new ways of doing things, of combining materials and techniques in order to strike the viewer with a freshness that will make them see afresh the combinations and juxtapositions of material and intellectual languages that she combines.'<sup>3</sup>

Hall argues that although contemporary art can't change the face of the planet, it should be challenging and encourage the viewer to think about issues they haven't considered before, possibly resulting in a change of attitude. She believes that displaying work to a wider audience through a diverse range of outlets. She attempts to bring her work in contexts outside of the art gallery situation is desirable and that a venue such as a natural history museum would be a stimulating alternative.<sup>4</sup>

1. Israel, Glenis, *Senior Artwise Visual Arts 11-12, 2nd Edition*, Jacaranda plus, p. 21.
2. Stephens, Andrew, *Venice Biennale brings Fiona Hall face to face with the enemy*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27th February, 2015
3. Radock, Stephanie, 'Fiona Hall', *Artlink*, vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 48, 51.
4. Fiona Hall, *Contempora*, Education Resource, National Gallery Victoria.

## ARTWORK

(also refer to Structural Frame and Material Practice)

**Artworks as real objects**, as material, physical and virtual objects. The concept of artworks includes art, craft and design as two- and three-dimensional works (including architecture), and time-based works. Artworks also exist as representations of ideas that reflect such things as personal responses, cultural views, symbolic interpretations and critical reinterpretations of other ideas.

Over a four-decade career, Fiona Hall has made artworks encompassing a wide range of materials and forms as she searches the world for ideas and images. Engaged in contemporary life, she often addresses topical issues through old imagery. The variety of materials she uses is exceptional, but she draws together the constantly changing physical character of the objects by working in series, by making unified collections of variations on the same object.

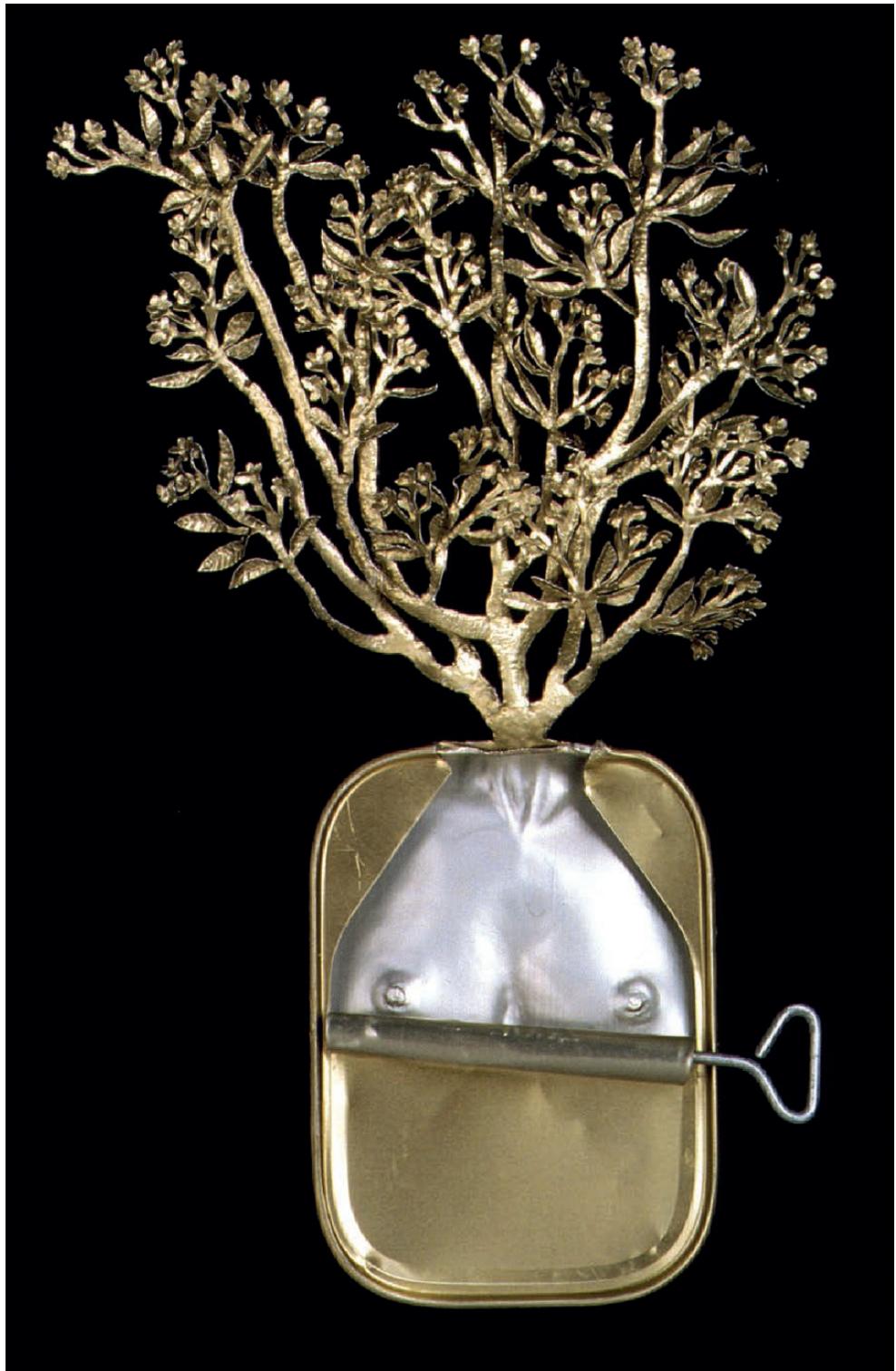
Hall makes artworks that reconstruct society and history and takes an outspoken view of the consequences of greed on an industrial scale and colonisation on a global scale. The extensive historical, botanical and zoological research, fundamental to her work, creates a conceptual link between art galleries and natural history museums, which did not exist a couple of centuries ago.<sup>1</sup>

In discussing the *56th Venice Biennale* in 2015, Fiona Hall commented: 'A fair component of my work is small, and at times quite fragile, and I am a self-prescribed "museum junkie" – not strictly of art museums, but all sorts of other museums – so that is something that has informed my work. My work covers a broad spectrum of different mediums. I hope the different works will all interconnect and relate to each other in some way, so the installation is not a set of disparate works, although there is an intended disparity as you often find in some of the stranger museums. There is often a real disparity between [the objects] in a museum, but it all sort of connects.'<sup>2</sup>

When Hall was asked whether her stimulus to create was based firstly on concept or material, she replied: 'It varies. As you go through life you find you have some sort of history about the way you work, which can be focused on material or on subject matter and you realise a lot about your own predilections and also your own abilities.

I have a history of working in photography, and for a number of years I studied painting. I am all over the place in many ways in my use of materials. But that has an advantage. I like the versatility of using a range of materials. But I wouldn't use the material unless it was appropriate for a work. Generally the material carries the evidence of its own history, which it brings to the work – that is an important part of the work.'<sup>3</sup>

1. Morrell, Timothy, *The Art of Fiona Hall*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, 2005.
2. Dickie, Anna, 'A Conversation with Fiona Hall', Fiona Hall discussing her works for the 56th Venice Biennale', quoted from *Ocula Magazine*, Adelaide, 6th April 2015.



*Plumeria acutifolia, araliya*  
(Sinhala); *maliya poo* (Tamil),  
*frangipani/temple tree* 1999  
from *Paradisus terrestris*  
(Sri Lankan series)  
aluminium and steel  
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9  
Gallery, Sydney  
© Fiona Hall

## PREVIOUS HSC EXAMINATION QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO THIS CASE STUDY

### Practice

- 1 Investigate the ways in which artists develop connections between art and society in their practice. In your answer, refer to specific artists and artworks.
- 2 Analyse the relationship between conceptual practice and material practice. In your answer you may refer to artists and/or art critics and/or art historians.
- 3 Examine how interpretations and understanding of practice often determine perceptions of what is precious in art. In your answer refer to the particular practices of artists.
- 4 Art is not only made with your hands. With reference to this statement, discuss the significance of conceptual practice to artmaking. Refer to a range of examples in your answer.
- 5 How do contemporary artists redefine the boundaries of artmaking practice?

### Frames

- 1 Investigate ways in which artists have created a visual language to reveal what is invisible to others. In your answer you may refer to specific artists and/or art critics and/or art historians.
- 2 How and why do artists express ideas in non-representational ways? In your answer refer to specific examples.
- 3 Analyse how artworks represent and document cultural histories.
- 4 Explain why artists use recontextualisation when making art. In your answer, refer to a range of examples.
- 5 Most artists have critical and productive relationships with their culture. Explore this statement with reference to a range of examples where these relationships are demonstrated.
- 6 Meaning is rarely obvious. Meaning has to be made. Discuss this statement with reference to different interpretations of art and a range of artworks.

### Conceptual Framework

- 1 How do artists offer different interpretations of the world in their artworks? In your answer, refer to specific artists and artworks.
- 2 Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. (Banksy, artist) With reference to this quotation, examine how art can be a social commentary in response to world events and/or issues.
- 3 Art is not what you see, but what you make others see... (Edgar Degas) Examine this statement with reference to a range of examples.

# GLOSSARY

<b>appropriation</b>	Refers to the use of borrowed elements in the creation of new work. In Postmodernism, this term refers to the way artists take visual elements from other sources and recontextualise these elements in ways that create new meanings from the old.
<b>bricolage</b>	Construction or creation from a diverse range of available things. French for 'to tinker'.
<b>ecology</b>	The interrelationships of organisms in the environment
<b>displacement</b>	The replacing of one thing by another, being removed from one's place. The concept of bringing into the art gallery or museum unfamiliar materials and forms that break art traditions,
<b>filigree</b>	Highly detailed ornamentation or pattern, often found in wire jewellery.
<b>gouache</b>	An opaque, quick-drying watercolour paint.
<b>hybrid</b>	Something that is made up of different elements, of mixed origin or composition that adds variety or complexity to a system. In science, a hybrid is the offspring of genetically dissimilar plants or animals, especially produced by breeding different varieties or species.
<b>museology</b>	The science or practice of organising, arranging, and managing museums.
<b>Postmodernism</b>	A late 20th-century style and concept in the arts. Typical features include a deliberate mixing of styles and media, use of earlier styles and conventions, and the incorporation of images relating to the consumerism and mass communication of society.
<b>repoussé</b>	A process of creating an image or pattern in relief, usually in metal, through hammering or pressing through the back of the object.
<b>tableaux</b>	A still scene arranged in painting or photography.
<b>taxonomy</b>	The branch of science concerned with classification, specifically organisms
<b>vitrine</b>	A display cabinet or case made from glass or Perspex used in museums and art galleries.
<b>Wunderkammer</b>	A place where a collection of curiosities and rarities is exhibited. German for wonder chamber.

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**Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery**  
First Street Booragul NSW 2284  
Box 1906 Hunter Region Mail Centre  
NSW 2310  
T: +61 (0)2 4921 0382  
F: +61 (0)2 4920 1329  
E: [artgallery@lakemac.nsw.gov.au](mailto:artgallery@lakemac.nsw.gov.au)  
W: [artgallery.lakemac.com.au](http://artgallery.lakemac.com.au)

