

*amelia
pascoe:
on the
origin of
species*

A pushchair, a bicycle and a surfboard

MOST DAYS, I trundle on foot through the Mount Victoria tunnel—a 700 metre-long corridor linking the suburb of Hataitai with central Wellington. On a concrete walkway, three or four metres above the traffic, pedestrians like me make their dogged way, nearly all of them wearing headphones to cancel out the car engines below and the maniacal, recreational sounding of horns. The narrow walkway is also shared by skateboarders and cyclists.

Entering the tunnel from the city end one recent afternoon, I was forced to hug the side wall as a cyclist, coming from behind me, went by. Destined for the surf break at Lyall Bay, a few kilometres further down the road, the rider had the arms of his wet suit knotted around his neck (like a piggy-backing child) and a two metre surfboard clamped to a cumbersome, homemade bracket which extended from the side of his cycle frame.

Halfway through the tunnel he was confronted by a young woman coming from the opposite direction, pushing an occupied baby-carriage, the waterproof compartment of which was zipped up, bubble-like. With its wide cross-country axle and oversize wheels, the pushchair took up the entire width of the walkway. It was clear, even from where I was standing, that this vehicle and the surfboard-toting bicycle were not going to be able to get past each other.

I watched as events unfolded before me and afterwards made notes, as though I had witnessed

and was now recording a scientific experiment. The cyclist dismounted in front of the mother and child, the nose of his surfboard almost touching her pushchair. On account of traffic noise, no conversation between the two would have been possible.

At this point, something clicked and the tunnel itself seemed to start running things. Two pedestrians, a short distance behind the rider, swung alongside without so much as a word and—as if the whole thing had been choreographed—slowly, carefully lifted the bicycle, while the rider, also lifting, kept his hands on his precious surfboard. The rickety frame and surfboard went high above the carriage bubble. The airborne structure—which reminded me of a stick insect with one golden wing—lingered above the cellular baby-carriage for a few seconds as the impromptu crew adjusted their footing, shuffled forwards, and then put their unwieldy load down on the far side. I was left with the after image of this balletic, yet oddly technological, manoeuvre, and the short-lived, hybrid creature that had been manifest before me.

The surfer then remounted his bicycle and the mother continued on her way, nonplussed. In the wake of this encounter there was a tremor of communal well-being amongst those of us on the walkway—as if some subconscious, collective or otherworldly intelligence had resolved the situation for us. As the mother passed me, I noticed that her one-year-old, in his/her plastic cell, had slept through the whole encounter.

A tunnel, a test tube, a chain reaction

WHAT I HAD SEEN in the tunnel was a near-collision between unrelated entities. Not only in this instance but apropos its usage more generally, the Mount Victoria tunnel could be considered a test tube in which unlikely materials—sentient and otherwise—are brought together, shaken up, or made to act upon, or in relation to, each other.

With its linear nature and two-step choreography of random and planned events, the tunnel leads directly to Amelia Pascoe's series of sculptural objects, *On the Origin of Species*, a visual essay which comprises a linear arrangement of equidistant constructions which inhabit a tunnel-like space above the long, narrow table on which they are displayed. Her stated intention in *Origins* is that the constituent works follow 'a pseudo-scientific methodology adapting elements of evolutionary theory' while allowing, along the way, 'mutation events, divergent and convergent paths'.

Within each discreet item on her 'production line', Pascoe brings two or more seemingly unrelated elements into a scientifically-inclined but very personal and often lyrical intimacy. Part-way through the sequence, a spindly metal structure hovers above a pumice ball (*fig.9*). It is this work which first led me to the encounter I witnessed in the tunnel: Amelia's pumice boulder is a scale model or replica of the pushchair/cellular-form, and the skeletal metalwork placed upon it a version of the surfboard/bicycle hybrid. Like the drama that

unfolded in the tunnel, the process on the table top offers both a visual conundrum and then an example of problem-solving in action. At the centre of both encounters is a collision—figuratively speaking, a bump; or, literally, an almost-bump. In Amelia's terms, such an interruption (which introduces an unrelated element or concept) is a 'mutation event'—in human terms, it is a surprise. Amongst the many orchestrated and abrupt collisions in Amelia's art is that between science, the art of the jeweller and her current sculptural practice.

The sphere is a logical place to start, but let's not overstate the logic of this enterprise. The two spheres in *fig.1* are added to and adjusted over subsequent constructions, before vanishing from the sequence in *fig.7*. Following the evolutionary sequence, *fig.8* is a constructivist assemblage in which miniature girders perch atop a concrete block. By now, genetic engineering and molecular science (or any semblance of them) have been overtaken by the poetry of the inexplicable and the unforeseen.

Next thing you know, the base has mutated into a circular, porous boulder (*fig.9*). Then a torrent of yellow paint pours down a vertical brick (*fig.10*), followed shortly after by the arrival of a hexagonal structure (*fig.11*)—each thing simultaneously dislodging or enhancing or adding to the others. Objects are balanced upon, or they fall off, one another. On we go, further down this evolutionary chain, following the 'species' from its origin towards whatever awaits it. But how does this art project sit within Darwinian theory? Maybe what Amelia is proposing here is a further evolution of evolutionary

theory. Or is it a divergent path? Or a deliberate (artistic) misapplication?

Picking itself up off the table top a shadow becomes three-dimensional again (*fig.16*), its shape echoing a geographical outline, or a fragment of shoe. Its blackness is on loan from a Steinway piano. And then a clay sphere arrives from nowhere, comet-like, and parks itself alongside (*fig.17*).

Amelia's unfolding experiment privileges the precarious over the stable and fixed—an approach which, debatably, favours poetry over empiricism. (I know scientists who would argue this point, and all power to them.) Through all of this, the questions keep coming: Can anything in the universe ever conceivably be resolved? Or is irresolution the nature of reality—as it appears to be of art, particularly this art? Where does it end?

Pedestrians, planets, particles in space

AMELIA PASCOE began working as a jeweller in 2000, although there was a career in science earlier than that. With their arabesques and carefully calibrated structures, these recent works retain their connection to jewellery, in much the same way as a brooch clings to a person, clamped or clipped in place. At the same time, her scientific career also lingers—and these works manifest both those past endeavours, clamped to each other, and to her current work, like a surfboard bolted to a bicycle. In the shifting context of her artistic present, disparate sources combine to offer new directions and possibilities.

What questions we would put to these works, had they but voices to reply: Are we entering a realm of analogy or metaphor? To what extent is each object an end-product, or is it already turning into something else? What if Amelia told us the subject of her art-project was the spaces between these constructions—the pauses or intervals that allow each discreet thing the time and space to become the next thing? Are these constructions a breaking up or gathering in of their constituent parts? And where does this leave us, the viewers, or—if you consider these works as pieces of applied jewellery—the wearers? (As part of her process, she enacts another collision, placing these forms on her body to explore new formal relations and uncover further nuances.)

Mining, as it does, the overlapping territories of hardware store, science lab, jeweller's shop and artist's studio, Amelia Pascoe's *Origins* offers a sample of an imaginative life-in-progress—and a working model of her artistic practice more generally. In this tunnel of unexpected outcomes, we witness not only the collision of unlikely materials, but also the meeting of newly compatible elements and, ultimately, a kind of embrace. We are left to mull over the origin of various species—be they pedestrians, planets or particles in space—and where they might be going next.

GREGORY O'BRIEN

ALL IS FUNCTION,
ALL IS FORM, BUT THE
FRAGRANCE OF THEM IS
RHYTHM, THE LANGUAGE
OF THEM IS RHYTHM:
FOR RHYTHM IS THE
VERY WEDDING-MARCH
AND CEREMONIAL THAT
QUICKENS INTO SONG
THE UNISON OF FORM
AND FUNCTION, OR
THE DIRGE OF THEIR
FAREWELL, AS THEY MOVE
APART, AND PASS INTO
THE SILENT WATCHES OF
THAT WONDROUS NIGHT
WE CALL THE PAST.

LOUIS H. SULLIVAN



FIG. 1



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4



FIG. 5



FIG. 6



FIG. 7



FIG. 8



FIG. 9



FIG. 10



FIG. 11



FIG. 12



FIG. 13



FIG. 14

FORMS EMERGE FROM
FORMS, AND OTHERS
ARISE OR DESCEND FROM
THESE... THEY EXOSMOSE
AND ENDOSMOSE.
THEY SWAY AND SWIRL
AND MIX AND DRIFT
INTERMINABLY. THEY
SHAPE, THEY REFORM,
THEY DISSIPATE. THEY
RESPOND, CORRESPOND,
ATTRACT, REPEL,
COALESCE, DISAPPEAR,
REAPPEAR, MERGE AND
EMERGE...

LOUIS H. SULLIVAN



FIG. 15



FIG. 16



FIG. 17



AMELIA PASCOE was born in 1971 in Christchurch, New Zealand. Trained in the sciences, and with a long work history in science-based organisations, Amelia formally embarked on her artistic career in 2010. She graduated from Whitireia New Zealand in 2012 with a Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design majoring in contemporary jewellery, and with several awards under her belt. Since graduating, Amelia has had a number of solo shows in New Zealand, has participated in group shows nationally and internationally, and has work held in public and private collections. In 2013, Amelia undertook a six-week residency in Italy, with internationally renowned contemporary jeweller, Fabrizio Tridenti. Ruudt Peters, a pioneering Dutch jeweller, was her conspirator through *Handshake*—a professional development and exhibition programme for selected emerging New Zealand jewellers. Amelia is currently based in Wellington.

FIG. 18

EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 2016 *Handshake3*, two-year professional development and exhibition programme
Vito Bila (Australia) workshop, Auckland, NZ
Hilde de Decker (Belgium) masterclass, Wellington, NZ
- 2015 David Clarke (UK) workshop, Auckland, NZ
Peter Bauhuis (Germany) workshop, Auckland, NZ
Benjamin Lignel (France) masterclass, Wellington, NZ
- 2014 *Handshake2*, two-year professional development and exhibition programme
Ruudt Peters workshop, Netherlands
- 2013 Fabrizio Tridenti residency, Italy
- 2012 Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design, Whitireia New Zealand
- 1995 Master of Science, Otago University
- 1991 Bachelor of Science, Canterbury University

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Principia III*, Bowen Galleries, Wellington, NZ
- 2014 *Principia II*, The National, Christchurch, NZ
Principia, Bowen Galleries, Wellington, NZ
- 2013 *A Journey in D*, Masterworks Gallery, THINKspace, Auckland, NZ
- 2012 *A Lure of the Elusive*, Thistle Hall, Wellington, NZ
- 2011 *Capture*, Photospace, Wellington, NZ
Shadowlands, Photospace, Wellington, NZ

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Handshake3*, Dowse Art Museum, Wellington, NZ (scheduled for August)
- 2016 *Handshake3*, Platina gallery, Sweden
Handshake3, Objectspace, Auckland, NZ
Specials: Handshake alumni show, Einsaulensaal, Munich, Germany
- 2015 *Handshake2*, Pah Homestead, Auckland, NZ
Handshake2: Mentors + Mentees, Avid Gallery, Wellington, NZ
Carousel, Radiant Pavilion, Melbourne, Australia
Occupy Crossley Street, Radiant Pavilion, Melbourne, Australia
Handshake2, Stanley Street Gallery, Sydney, Australia
Occupy Anna, Anna Miles Gallery, Auckland, NZ
Wunderruma, Auckland Art Gallery, NZ
The bold and the beautiful, Dowse Art Museum, Wellington, NZ
F.O.U.N.D., Objectspace, Auckland, NZ

AWARDS

- 2013 Creative NZ Quick Response Grant (Fabrizio Tridenti residency)
- 2012 Masterworks Gallery Supreme Graduate Award
- 2011 Jewellery Manufacturers Federation Award of Excellence
- 2010 *Julie Obren Scholarship*, Porirua Community Arts Council

COLLECTIONS

Dowse Art Museum
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
Wrightmann Collection

GALLERIES

The National, Christchurch, NZ
Bowen Galleries, Wellington, NZ
Anna Miles Gallery, Auckland, NZ

LIST OF WORKS

- FIG. 1 #0004. Object. Polystyrene, 95 x 55 x 55mm
FIG. 2 #0005. Object. Polystyrene, brass,
215 x 45 x 45mm
FIG. 3 #0006. Object. Polystyrene, rubber,
350 x 230 x 55mm
FIG. 4 #0026. Object. Polystyrene, wooden skewers,
220 x 95 x 85mm
FIG. 5 #0030. Object. Polystyrene, paper, pins, tape,
plasticine, 80 x 55 x 55mm
FIG. 6 #0032. Object. Cardboard, polystyrene,
140 x 55 x 55mm
FIG. 7 #0033. Object. Cardboard, 125 x 125 x 75mm
FIG. 8 #0040. Object. Hebel, brass,
210 x 165 x 140mm
FIG. 9 #0042. Object. Hebel, brass, steel,
135 x 105 x 120mm
FIG. 10 #0045. Object. Hebel, paint, 210 x 160 x 150mm
FIG. 11 #0044. Object. Hebel, aluminium, sterling silver,
brass, 120 x 130 x 120mm
FIG. 12 #0054. Object. Aluminium, hebel, cardboard,
steel, 340 x 130 x 110mm
FIG. 13 #0053. Object. Hebel, brass, aluminium, steel,
220 x 110 x 140mm
FIG. 14 #0055. Object. Hebel, aluminium, clay,
80 x 40 x 270mm
FIG. 15 #0062. Object. Aluminium, paint,
220 x 110 x 1.3mm
FIG. 16 #0063. Object. Aluminium, paint,
210 x 65 x 32mm
FIG. 17 #0068. Face piece. Aluminium, paint, polymer
clay, sterling silver, 215 x 120 x 60mm
FIG. 18 #0069. Foot piece. Aluminium, paint, sterling
silver, 120 x 95 x 95mm

GREGORY O'BRIEN curated exhibitions at City Gallery Wellington between 1997 and 2009. He participated in the *Kermadec* art project, 2011–16, as a writer, artist and curator. As Stout Memorial Fellow at Victoria University of Wellington 2015–16, he is completing a book about the environment and the imagination.

SARAH MAXEY is an award-winning graphic designer based in Wellington. She is currently working on her Masters at Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury.

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