

fiona hall: force field

EDUCATION KIT



Fiona Hall *Cell Culture* 2001-02 (detail) glass beads, silver wire, Tupperware, vitrine vitrine: 157 x 247 x 90 cm
South Australian Government Grant 2002, Art Gallery of South Australia
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia © the artist

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
6 March – 1 June 2008

City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand
12 July – 1 October 2008

Christchurch City Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, New Zealand
4 December 2008 – 1 March 2009

fiona hall: force field

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Ways to use this kit	3
Curriculum Connections (includes Postmodernism Focus)	4
Exhibition Overview	6
Curatorial Intention: Key Themes	7
Artwork Analysis with Image, Curatorial or Artist Practice, Focus Questions and Activities	
• Artwork Analysis 1: <i>Amazonical</i> (2007)	10
• Artwork Analysis 2: <i>Mourning Chorus</i> (2007–08)	13
Secondary Case Study: MCA Collection in Context – <i>The Price is Right</i> (1994)	17
Two Post-visit Practical Activities for Primary Level	
• Activity 1: Soap Carving: Hybrid Creatures	18
• Activity 2: Metal Embossing	20
Post-visit Practical Activity for Secondary Level	
• Darkroom Photography Exercise: Photograms	21
Additional Teaching and Learning Suggestions – Focus Questions and Activities	
• Primary Level	22
• Secondary Level	23
Glossary	26
Further reading and research	27
Evaluation Questionnaire: MCA Education Kits	28
Acknowledgements	29

fiona hall: force field

INTRODUCTION

This online Education Kit has been produced by the Museum of Contemporary Art to support the exhibition *Fiona Hall: Force Field* in Sydney and during the exhibition tour to New Zealand. *Fiona Hall: Force Field* was organised and toured by the MCA in partnership with City Gallery Wellington.

Fiona Hall: Force Field is a major survey of work by Australian artist Fiona Hall, bringing together photographs, videos and sculptural installations encompassing thirty years of practice.

This kit offers an insight into Hall's work and artistic practice, which explores the intersection of nature and culture. Key works in the exhibition are examined to provide background information about the work, themes, connections and concerns in Hall's art.

A special feature is a focus on post-visit practical art activities for primary and secondary level.

Please note: This exhibition contains artworks featuring nudity and sexual imagery. Some works may not be suitable for younger audiences, especially Primary students. MCA Learning recommends that teachers should preview the exhibition before bringing classes, or contact MCA Learning for further information at the booking stages.

WAYS TO USE THIS KIT

This resource is intended for use by teachers and students of Primary and Secondary classes, as well as a general guide for Tertiary and community arts audiences.

The material in this kit is designed for students of Visual Arts and Photographic & Digital Media, but is also relevant for the study of English, especially for the study of Visual Literacy and History.

The kit can be utilised by education groups engaging directly with the works during the class excursion as well as individual study and research. The images, activities and ideas can assist with pre-visit preparation and during the gallery visit, and to develop post-visit activities.

The material is intended to complement the information provided in the exhibition publication, exhibition room brochure, SKETCH (a resource written by the artist for 8 – 14 year olds) and SKETCH Junior for younger audiences, *MCA Artist's Voice* and the exhibition wall texts.

Teachers are advised to adapt these activities to suit their students' needs or to integrate areas of this resource into existing classroom units of study. Focus questions and activities are included to stimulate discussion and critical thinking by students, and to lead to a deeper investigation of the issues raised by Fiona Hall.

Key terms are defined in the glossary at the end of this kit. A guide to additional reading and resources has been provided to assist with further study.

fiona hall: force field

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Teachers are encouraged to adapt syllabus links from the list below to suit the system of their school's state or their country. Use these suggestions as a starter for planning, or talk to MCA Learning staff for further ideas.

For senior students in New South Wales, *Fiona Hall: Force Field* is an ideal context to develop Case Studies, investigating Artist's Practice or Curatorial Practice and looking at approaches to photography, sculpture and installation. The study of the exhibition in the Museum environment during the class visit to the MCA provides a valuable opportunity to look at the Conceptual Framework, and study the Frames through engaging with the works of art, or to look at the development of a Body of Work.

Fiona Hall's research approaches, range of historical and contemporary sources, and connections to global and intimate themes means the exhibition is an excellent opportunity for the study of the Postmodern Frame.

See the Focus Questions and Activities sections for further syllabus-linked teaching and learning ideas.

Visual Arts/Creative Arts

- The role of the Contemporary Museum
- Working in series, developing a Body of Work
- Postmodernism (see below for further details)
- Conceptual Framework—Artist, Artwork, Audience, World
- Exposure to a range of artistic practice
- Diversity of media and techniques
- Art and politics, art and current events
- Artist's Practice
- Identity and self
- Art History, Art Criticism
- The role of the body in contemporary art practice

- Feminist perspectives
- Appropriation and recontextualisation
- Art and politics, art and current events, art and personal histories
- Narrative in art
- Critiquing the Role of the Museum (Historical and Contemporary)

Postmodernism Focus:

Fiona Hall: Force Field connects to the HSC Visual Art Postmodern Frame through:

- The Body / Gender politics
- Postcolonialism/Colonial history
- The domestic and the everyday
- Politics, Consumer culture, Global trade
- Collaboration
- Appropriation and recontextualisation
- Language and text
- Fluidity, multiple readings and interconnectedness (the exhibition title *Force Field* refers to overlapping energies and ideas)
- Examining and critiquing systems of trade and exchange
- Humour and irony
- Critique of museums and museological display, especially the impulse to systematise and classify
- Art which pushes or crosses boundaries and territories
- Art which is challenging and provocative

English

- Analysing Visual Texts
- Oral and research skills
- Response to visual stimuli
- Creative writing and response
- Critical essays and reviews

Photographic & Digital Media; Time-based Arts

- Allusions to popular culture including film
- The photographic portrait
- The place of photography in the canon of art and art history
- Photography as documentation – truth and artifice

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- The moving image – video and installation
- Multimedia presentations

Australian History

- Post colonialism, colonialism and contact

Society and Environment

- Visual arts as a reflection of contemporary culture
- Visual arts as a reflection of cultural or personal identity
- Ecology – plants, animals and ecological processes of Australia and other countries

ESL/NESB/CALD

- Developing a visual arts vocabulary list
- Written and oral responses
- Cultural identity and issues in the visual arts
- Australian culture and history

MCA EDUCATION PROGRAMS

To book a group visit to the MCA to view *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, or for information on education programs and services linked to this exhibition please contact MCA Learning education@mca.com.au 02 9245 2484 or www.mca.com.au/education

PUBLICATION

Fiona Hall: Force Field

This new 96 page publication, co-published by City Gallery Wellington and Museum of Contemporary Art, features essays by Vivienne Webb (MCA) and Greg O'Brien (City Gallery Wellington), an interview with the artist and Paula Savage (City Gallery Wellington) and full colour plates.

Available from MCA Store, RRP \$39.95/MCA Members \$31.96



Fiona Hall in Guyana, 2007

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EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Fiona Hall: Force Field

At the core of Fiona Hall's work is the intersection of nature and culture. Over the past four decades her art has focussed on the natural world—its complex processes as well as its wonders—and in recent years has reflected an increasing concern at the impact of humans upon it.

Like a 'force field' of conflicting energies, Hall's art is shaped by the histories of colonisation, systems of knowledge, and the ethics of consumption. Her sources range from the historical to the contemporary, and from the global to the domestic, drawing upon literature, politics, finance, media, science, sexuality, gardening and metaphysics. Her art negotiates the boundaries between competing interests and exerts a subtle yet precise engagement with them.

This exhibition presents an in-depth survey of works from the 1970s to the present. Born in Sydney and based in Adelaide, Hall began working with photography but has extended into diverse media including sculpture, installation, moving image and garden design. Her work is characterised by its use of ordinary objects and materials, which are transformed into complex and allusive art works.

The exhibition is divided into zones where works from different phases of Hall's career are brought together. The works in this gallery date from the 1980s and 1990s and explore aspects of the domestic realm and consumption. The adjacent section revolves around ideas of the body. Another selection on this level reflects upon connections between various life forms, while at the centre of the exhibition is a group of works that explore humanity's relationship to nature and our concepts of Paradise. The mezzanine level features works largely from

the last decade that chart the overlapping territories of power, politics and the environment. Some reflect Hall's recent interest in camouflage—defence patterns taken from nature and adapted for military purposes. Others weave together narratives of global trade and colonial history, of enlightenment and exploitation.

Fiona Hall: Force Field aims to reveal a kind of archaeological layering of the artist's formal and conceptual concerns, as well as continuities in her practice over time. Not only is her work remarkable for the consistency of its ideas and interests, but also for its relentless pursuit of new artistic possibilities and its capacity to engage with shifting social and environmental conditions.¹



Holdfast (Macrocystis angustifolia) 2007
tin, aluminium 27.5 x 27.2 x 2 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia
© the artist

¹ MCA introductory wall text, 2008

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CURATORIAL INTENTIONS: KEY THEMES

Fiona Hall: Force Field is curated into six different thematic 'chapters' or 'zones' where works from different phases of the artist's career are brought together in a gallery space.

Presenting her art in this way reveals the diversity yet consistency across her earlier and recent practice. This allows the audience to discover a kind of archaeological layering of her formal and conceptual concerns and to trace the artist's artistic development or re-investigations. Not only is Hall's work remarkable for the continuity of her ideas and interests, but also for its restless pursuit of new artistic possibilities and its capacity to re-engage with shifting social and environmental issues.

Focus Questions:

- Suggest three alternative themes to curate Fiona Hall's works into.
- Which other works by Fiona Hall could fit into some of these themes?
- Make a list of works which cross between themes. Which is the work or series of works which connects to the most themes?
- Investigate other ways you could curate Fiona Hall's artworks. For example: chronologically, by media or by method and materials. Make an illustrated exhibition floorplan and curatorial statement to support your ideas.
- Interview a member of your class or a member of the public to discover their response to this curatorial concept.

1. Domestic/Consumption

The exhibition opens with a suite of works dating from the 1980s and 1990s that explore ideas of the domestic realm. While 'home is where the heart is', it is also a zone in which the material, emotional and spiritual aspects of life jostle, clash and sometimes achieve a tentative equilibrium. The ethics and politics of daily life take shape through the forms of familiar household items – everyday, throw-away materials reflecting the many decisions and rituals of consumption.

Featured works:

The price is right (1994)
Medicine bundle for the non-born child (1994)
Give a dog a bone (1996)
The Social Fabric (1996)

2. Symbiosis/Interrelations

Another grouping of works explores connections between diverse life forms. Alert to the extraordinary capabilities of animals and plant life, their precise adaptations and intricate interaction, Hall's art frequently echoes the workings of the natural world and the processes of adaptation and interaction she observes there. Humans are drawn into the mutually supportive and, at times, competitive relationships between species: insects; plants; marine organisms. We are not external to, but enmeshed within the complex and delicate web of the natural world.

Featured works:

Holdfast (Macrocystis angustifolia) (2007)
Dead in the water (1999)
Insectivorous (2006)
Castles in the air of the cave dwellers (2007)
Amazonical (2007)

3. Body

Both early and recent works reflect Hall's alertness to the body not only as something sexual, vulnerable and a part of 'nature', but also as a political and complex entity. The

fiona hall: force field

body is a site shaped by influences and concepts from the surrounding world, including the media, morality, science and religion. Yet the physical form also embodies a sensual, experiential knowledge and this disjunction provides a dynamic within Hall's work. Witty, playful and even shocking, these creations tease and provoke our sense of privacy and propriety.

Featured works:

Pupa (2005)
Syntax of flowers (1992)
Scar Tissue (2003–04)
Manly Beach (1985)
Collaroy Beach (Eko and Max Pam) (1985)
Words (1990)
Morality dolls – the seven deadly sins (1984)

4. Paradise / Nature

At the centre of the exhibition is a group of works that explore humanity's relationship to nature and concepts of Paradise. Several series of works revolve around humanity's age-old desire for harmony with nature and for a return to the Garden of Eden. In Hall's art, conflicting systems for understanding and controlling the natural world compete for our attention. Botanical Latin, vernacular and indigenous languages propose competing frameworks for knowing and classifying the biodiversity around us. Although nature is central to culture, religion and science, it is ultimately owned and contained by none.

Featured works:

Paradisus Terrestris (1998–2005)
Occupied Territory (1995)
Cell Culture (2001–02)
Paradise (1984)

5. Territory

A number of works chart the overlapping territories of power, politics and the environment. Some reflect the artist's recent interest in camouflage–defence patterns taken from nature and adapted for military purposes, which has infiltrated our daily lives through media reportage of terrorism and

warfare. Several works are dedicated to the disappearance of species and the degradation of bio-systems. Through mapping the convergence of human and nature, Hall reflects upon what we have lost already and what we still stand to lose.

Featured works:

Mourning Chorus (2007–08)
Tender (2003–05)
Amnesiac's Cartography (Narrow Road, Deep Chasm) (2007)
Mire (2005)
Breeding Ground (2007)
Stronghold (2008)
Leura, New South Wales (1974)

6. Trade

This section includes works from the last decade of Hall's practice which weave together narratives of global trade and colonial history, of enlightenment and exploitation. This room is encircled by the sweeping scope of Hall's ongoing major work *When my boat comes in* (2002–) which presents an extended meditation on the interrelation of plants and human activity. This work and others within this space incorporate banknotes and evoke the value we attribute to plants and their role in the flow of finance. The global scale of the currencies is nevertheless tied to individual desire and consumption and loops back to connect with other threads drawn out within the exhibition.²

Featured works:

When my boat comes in (2002–)
Cash Crop (1998)
Understorey (1999–2004)

² *Fiona Hall: Force Field* room brochure, Vivienne Webb, Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Gregory O'Brien, Senior Curator, City Gallery Wellington, 2008

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Fiona Hall *Cash Crop* 1998
soap, gouache on banknotes, labels, vitrine
vitrine: 132 x 130 x 160cm
Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney – Contemporary Collection Benefactors Program 2000
© the artist

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ARTWORK ANALYSIS 1
Amazonical 2007



Fiona Hall *Amazonical* 2007 (stills)
video 12:25 minutes
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia
© the artist

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ARTWORK ANALYSIS

Amazonical 2007

video

12:25 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9
Gallery, Sydney, Australia

Curator's Quote

'Viewing Fiona Hall's work is like entering a lush garden full of fertile materials, wondrous invention and surprising, even shocking creations. Strange creatures capture the imagination and a mass of intricate detail rewards intense scrutiny. Yet the designing intellect and hand of the gardener are everywhere evident and beneath the wild profusion there lies an intriguing sense of order.'³

Artwork Information/ Artist's Intention

Amazonical was filmed in September 2007 on an expedition to Guyana with staff from the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, following in the footsteps of Richard and Robert Schomburgk who carried out extensive natural history, ethnographic and surveying work in British Guyana in the 1830s. A specimen of the giant waterlily which they collected was sent to London and named *Victoria regia*, in honour of Queen Victoria.

Its exotic flowers and the massive size and unusual form of its leaves captured the Victorian imagination. The plant was grown in tropical hot-houses, where babies and young children were placed upon its leaves to be photographed. The ribbed under-structure of the leaves inspired architect Joseph Paxton, who was first to successfully flower the lily, in his design for the Crystal Palace, built for the Great Exhibition of London in 1851.

Now known botanically as *Victoria amazonica*, this giant waterlily has been found to possess another unusual characteristic: scientists have discovered that the flower, which opens at dusk, not only exudes an intense perfume to attract pollinating beetles, but raises its internal temperature considerably to entice them into its centre. Willing captives, they spend all night in an atmosphere which has been described as a 'nightclub for beetles'. They remain trapped inside all the next day, then are released at dusk, laden with pollen, to fly to another opening flower and repeat the process.

Fiona Hall, 2008

Materials and Methods: Technology

Amazonical is one of three video works in *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, as video is a newer medium for the artist. Fiona Hall uses video technology to create a studied, gentle, poetic mood. Long, panoramic views of the river are contrasted with detailed views of plants, birdlife and insects. There are no human voices, only sounds from the environment and the boat moving through the water. Fiona Hall used a hand-held camera to shoot footage from the side of a boat moving along the river.

This technique is reminiscent of both nature documentaries and home-movies, creating a sense of intimate connection with the landscape and tourist experiences of discovery, and placing the viewer in the boat along with the artist.

Artist's Practice

In September 2007 Fiona Hall participated in a voyage mounted by the Adelaide Botanic Gardens down the Rupununi River in Guyana, South America. This area of the Amazon basin is rich in biological diversity and during the expedition plant specimens were collected and prepared for the South Australian State Herbarium archive, Adelaide, along with seeds of specimens to be propagated and grown in the recently rebuilt tropical waterlily house, now known as the *Amazon Waterlily Pavilion*.

³ Vivienne Webb, 'Human Nature', *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, Museum of Contemporary Art (exh.cat.), 2008, p. 11

fiona hall: force field

The journey provided the artist with material for artworks on display in the exhibition *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, including the new video work *Amazonical* and the installation *Castles in the air of the cave dwellers*. Fiona Hall recorded the voyage in *Log: Journal of a River Voyage, Guyana 2007*. This video documentary demonstrates the artist's ongoing process of engaging with scientists and with research into the natural world.

Fiona Hall and Vivienne Webb, 2008

Key Themes

- Symbiosis
- The complex relationship between humanity and the natural world
- Knowledge and power: how understandings of nature have changed over time, from myth and fantasy to science and data
- The absurd wonder and intelligence of the natural world
- Colonialism: interpreting the world through Western systems of knowledge and categorisation. "Discovering" existing countries or ecosystems
- Threat, greed and seduction: conflict and desire surround access to precious resources, which often come from nature

Definition

Symbiosis: interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both.⁴

Focus Questions and Activities

Primary:

- What else can you see in the video apart from the *Victoria amazonica* waterlily?
- Complete a research project about the flora and fauna (plants and animals) of the Amazon basin, focussing on one plant or animal that particularly interests you. Find out where the plant or animal lives and what its special characteristics are. Make a collage using images of the plant or animal printed from the internet, or photocopied from books.
- Visit your local Botanic Gardens and observe the relationship between plants and insects. Make your observations into a storyboard of events.

Secondary:

- Compare and contrast *Amazonical* with two of Fiona Hall's other works using the Structural Frame.
- How does *Amazonical* raise issues related to power? Consider the Postmodern Frame and write an essay using three examples from the work to support your argument.
- Research a plant that has an interesting cultural association. This could be an introduced species now considered a weed, or a plant used in traditional ceremonies or rituals. Research its habitat and if possible, find a living example (but do not interfere with the plant if it is endangered, protected, or in a National Park or Botanical Garden). Alternatively, find an image in a botanical book. Create a series of detailed drawings of the plant in ink, pencil or charcoal. Find material related to its cultural associations, such as weed eradication information, or documentation of ceremonies or rituals. Create a collage using your drawing and material, considering how the placement of your material creates meaning, or narrative. Title your work and display it in your classroom or school.

⁴ Judy Pearsall (ed.), *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford University Press, 1998

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ARTWORK ANALYSIS 2 *Mourning Chorus* 2007–08



Fiona Hall *Mourning Chorus* (2007 – 08) resin, plastic, vitrine dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia © the artist. Photograph: Greg Weight



Fiona Hall *Mourning Chorus* (2007 – 08) (detail) resin, plastic, vitrine dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia © the artist

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ARTWORK ANALYSIS 2

Mourning Chorus 2007–08

resin, plastic, vitrine
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9
Gallery, Sydney, Australia

Curator's Quote

Fiona Hall's recent work *Mourning Chorus* (2007-08) refers to the demise of the once 'deafening' song of New Zealand's bird fauna. This work brings together characteristic aspects of Hall's practice; flora and fauna are represented by reworked found objects and an ironic reference is made to the museological practice of collecting specimens—species that were once seen in nature are now only seen dead in the museum.

Eleven extinct or endangered bird species are represented by disposable plastic chemical containers animated by carved and cast resin beaks. Bottles of toxic chemicals that eradicate insects, for example 'Beetle and Grub Killer' stand as a metaphor for the destruction of bird species and light up randomly as though flickering to life. All this is visible through the delicate vinyl patterns of native New Zealand plant foliage, spread across the glass panels. The complex circuit of wires below the coffin connects the birds to the earth, as though allowing the toxic liquid to drain into the ground, causing further destruction.

Mourning Chorus is a work born out of Hall's interest in the environment and humanity's impact on it. During an artist residency in New Zealand in 2006, she began to research the politics of bird extinction. Describing New Zealand "like a silent island"⁵, Hall recalled reading an entry dated 6 February 1770 from the diary of Joseph Banks, "*This morning I*

was awaked by the singing of the birds ashore... the numbers of them were certainly very great...their voices were certainly the [most] melodious wild musick I have ever heard, almost imitating small bells but with the most tuneable silver sound imaginable."⁶ The discrepancy between Banks' description of New Zealand and her own formed the conceptual framework for this artwork.

Isabel Finch, 2008

Research Information

Many Australian and New Zealand bird and plant species have evolved from a common ancestry, with shared origins from the time when both lands were part of the ancient, southern super continent known as Gondwana. However the subsequent post-Gondwanan development of New Zealand fauna took a very different path: an absence of native mammals and snakes enabled the continued evolution of unique bird species, many of them flightless and ground-nesting.

Waves of human migration over the past 900 years have disrupted this vulnerable ecosystem. The introduction of predatory animals such as rats, stoats and weasels has devastated the populations of numerous species. Land-clearance and the arrival of other environmental competitors such as possums and rabbits have hammered more nails into the coffin of the demise of New Zealand's birds.

Of the eleven bird species represented in *Mourning Chorus* nine are extinct, and two, the Kakapo and the Little Spotted Kiwi, are extinct in their native habitats but undergoing breeding programs on several of New Zealand's off-shore island sanctuaries which have been cleared of vermin. A number of the birds and all of the tree species represented in *Mourning Chorus* are closely

⁵ Discussions between Fiona Hall and Isabel Finch, unpublished, 24 March 2008.

⁶ Quoted in *The Future Eaters*, Tim Flannery, Grove Press, New York, 1994, p. 65.

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related through their Gondwanan ancestry to others native to Australia.

Fiona Hall, 2008

Artist's Practice

Fiona Hall spent time in New Zealand on Kapiti Island, situated off the south coast of the North Island. Kapiti Island is a nature reserve where rare and ancient New Zealand flora and fauna including endangered bird species are protected. Visitors numbers are limited and permission is usually granted for day visits. Hall was granted permission to stay on the island for a week to conduct her research.

The artist also spent time at Te Papa Tongawera Museum of New Zealand, Wellington and Auckland Museum researching the extinct birds featured in *Mourning Chorus*. Hall looked at skeletons and archive material in order to accurately recreate each of the birds' beaks. She also visited the Australian Museum to conduct research for this work. Fiona Hall made the artwork during a residency at Auckland University.

Key Themes

- Territory
- The impact of humans on the environment
- Global interconnectedness of humans and plant and animal species
- Museology; how systems of knowledge and categorization impact on our understanding and use of the natural environment
- Colonialism
- Evolution

Definition

Museology: the science or practice of organising, arranging, and managing museums.⁷

⁷ Judy Pearsall (ed.), *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford University Press, 1998

Focus Questions and Activities

Primary:

- Complete a research project on Kapiti Island. Find out about the significance of the island in Maori history and contemporary culture; the impact of European arrivals on the island environment; the conservation work that has been completed, and the unique flora and fauna of the island (including the marine environment).
- Study this artwork in the gallery environment. With your classmates, write a list of all the different display effects you can see which add to the look of the artwork. For instance, the coffin-shaped cabinet, the room lighting, the colour and shape of the surrounding room.
- Using masking tape and recycled objects such as used and washed food cartons, old packaging, string, shredded paper, newspapers and magazines, or cardboard boxes, make a sculpture of one of the birds or plants that you learn about in your research project.

Secondary:

- Write an essay that explores the impact of colonialism on the environment in Australia. Compare and contrast Indigenous Australian uses and attitudes towards the land with colonial, European uses and attitudes. Use specific examples and include at least five references in your bibliography.
- Fiona Hall has used found material in this work. How does her use of found objects such as bottles of toxic cleaners contribute meaning to the work?
- Develop a sculpture using found or recycled materials that explores the relationship between humans and the natural world. Consider manipulating the found material in interesting ways, or exploiting the qualities of the object to communicate your ideas. You may

fiona hall: force field

include your own drawings, photographs or collage in your work. Document your processes in you VAPD and title your work. Present your work to your class with an explanation of your processes and ideas.

Further Reading and Resources on Kapiti Island and New Zealand birds

New Zealand Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai website,
<http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/PlaceProfile.aspx?id=35101>

Kapiti Island and Kapiti Marine Reserve
environmental education kit, available on the
New Zealand Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai website,
<http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/MultiPageDocumentTOC.aspx?id=42818>

'Online Collection' (search results for 'birds'),
Te Papa Tongawera Museum of New
Zealand website,
<http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Search.aspx?imagesonly=on&advanced=colCollectionType%3ABirds>



Fiona Hall *Mourning Chorus* (2007 – 08) (detail) resin, plastic, vitrine
dimensions variable Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery,
Sydney, Australia © the artist

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SECONDARY CASE STUDY: MCA COLLECTION IN CONTEXT

The Price is Right 1994



Polyethylene containers, ceramic plate, electrical components, dimensions variable
Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased 1995 © the artist photograph: Jenni Carter

The Price is Right is a major installation constructed from unassuming polyethylene 'Tupperware' containers. Sensor-activated lights flash Morse code from inside the opaque containers when viewers approach, cumulatively spelling out the sentence "I have the misfortune of not being a fool". The work's obscure Morse code message is a line appropriated from Charles Dickens' 1857 rags-to-riches tale *Little Dorrit*, a book which cautions against precisely the kind of "get rich quick" aspirations now promoted by television game shows, such as the one which gives the work its title.

Hall's use of common household items is characteristic of her practice, suggesting the consumerist ideals of middle class domesticity, such as the social activities of the 'Tupperware Party'. Hall imbues these domestic objects with unexpected beauty, elements of the fantastic and wry social commentary.

The Price is Right and *Give a Dog a Bone* (1996) are two works in *Force Field* from the MCA Collection. Acquired by the MCA in 1995, *The Price is Right* reflected the shift in the Museum's collecting focus towards major works by Australian artists. The collection of this work also extends the Museum's substantial body of light works and art of political comment.⁸

Focus Questions:

- How does Fiona Hall's use of domestic objects comment on consumer culture?
- Describe the process of transformation of the Tupperware objects, and the effect that this has on our reading of the work.
- This work can be displayed in various configurations. How would you choose to display it at the MCA or in another setting of your choice?
- Why do you think the artist shows the tangle of electric cords at the bottom of this work?

⁸ Vivienne Webb, *MCA Collection: New Acquisitions in Context*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2005, p.17

fiona hall: force field

TWO POST-VISIT PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES FOR PRIMARY LEVEL

ACTIVITY 1: Soap Carving: Hybrid Creatures



Soap carving examples. Photograph: Niomi Sands 2008

Length: 2-3 hours
Age group: Year 4-6

Using blocks of glycerine soap, food colouring, clay carving tools and toothpicks, students can safely and easily carve their own animal, domestic object or animal/object hybrid.

Students will draw inspiration from found domestic objects and nature to create creatures, looking at Fiona Hall's artwork as source material.

Materials:

- Clear glycerine soap: You can source soap from Sydney Essential Oils - \$63.80 for 5kgs (each carving is approx 250 grams).
- A selection of household kitchen items or garden tools.
- Images of Fiona Hall's work, images of botanical plants, other source images as required.
- Food colouring, kitchen scourer, cloths.

- Rubber gloves for each student.
- Toothpicks (1 packet)
- Clay carving and cutting tools.
- Tracing paper, white paper, pencils, black markers or textas.
- Beads, shells, cotton for decoration.

Steps:

- Students view the *Fiona Hall: Force Field* exhibition for inspiration.
- Back in the classroom or in the museum workshop space, students discuss and draw up their ideas for soap carving.
- Kitchen utensils, animal and plant photocopies are available to assist student to create their creatures.
- The concept is that everyday objects are given legs, wings, arms, legs or claws to transform them into creatures. Students should do at least 3 drawings to develop their ideas.
- The teacher or tutor sections up the large block of soap into smaller blocks for each student using a palette knife or other wide knife.
- Once an idea is selected, the final drawing is outlined in black texta on white paper to the size of the small block of soap.
- Drawings are transferred to soap by tracing the drawing with a pencil into the surface of the soap, some elements may be traced separately.
- Students carve each element using clay carving tools. Use a knife to chop out basic outline, then carve and refine using clay tools.
- Cut the main sections separately for later assemblage.
- Each finished element is polished using a kitchen scourer and cloths.
- Elements are coloured by painting on food colouring on to the surface. Students should wear rubber gloves for this stage.
- Additional decoration like small beads, shells, or cotton can be added by pushing into the surface.
- Sculptures are then assembled using toothpicks.

fiona hall: force field

- Sculptures can be installed onto upturned plastic plates or squares of cardboard as a 'plinth'.



Sectioning the soap. Photograph: Justine McLisky, 2008



Sections ready to join by toothpick. Photograph: Justine McLisky, 2008



Painting the carving with food colouring. Photograph: Justine McLisky, 2008



Bird/camera hybrid soap carving. Photograph: Justine McLisky, 2008

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PRIMARY ACTIVITY 2

Metal Embossing

Length: 1 – 2 hours

Age group: Years 3 – 6 (This activity can also be adapted to suit Secondary students).

After drawing plant or vegetable forms inspired by Fiona Hall, students emboss their design into metal “shim”, resulting in an elaborate and decorative artwork.

Materials:

- Embossing aluminium shim. Aluminium shim in 5 different colours is available from S&S Supplies from \$17.49 for a one metre sheet or \$14.50 for a pack of five A4 sheets.
- Clay tools, pens, ice cream sticks, embossing tools or other objects such as spoons or dental tools.
- Paper and pencils.
- Plants or images of plants.

Steps:

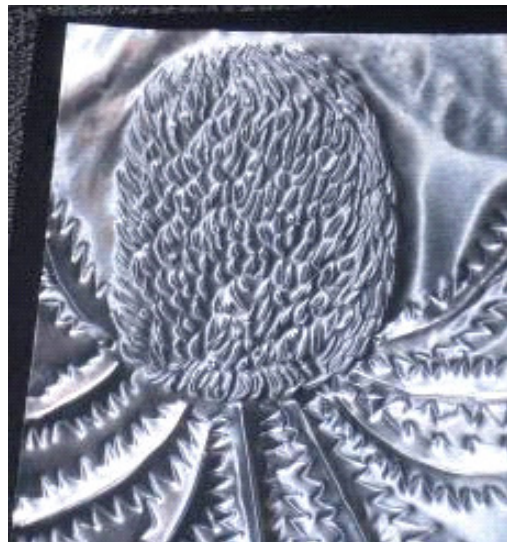
- After viewing *Fiona Hall: Force Field*, students can either draw directly from the plant forms in her work or draw from collected plants (such as ferns and leaves) or from photocopies of botanical drawings.
- Students should experiment with composition in their drawings: overlapping forms, making some forms touch the edges etc. The more detail in the drawings—shading, patterning, dotting, cross-hatching— the better.
- Students select their favourite drawing and re-draw in darker pencil or pen.
- Teacher to place one pre-cut piece of embossing metal (shim) in front of each student. Each table should have a selection of clay tools, pens, pencils or embossing tools.
- Students trace their drawing onto the back of the metal and use the tools to

make marks or rubbings through the back of the metal.

- Frequent turning to look at the other side of the metal will help students see which marks look best.
- Sharp edges can be rolled back around a pencil for safety.



Embossing the drawing design into the metal surface. Photograph: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008



Child's completed artwork. Photograph: Justine McLisky 2008

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POST-VISIT PRACTICAL ACTIVITY FOR SECONDARY LEVEL

Darkroom Photography Exercise: Text and Nature Photograms

Length: 2-3 hours
Age group: Year 9-12

Drawing on Fiona Hall's themes of trade, currency and geographical history and her photographic practice, students will create their own unique artworks that express a feeling of place.

Students will develop these ideas through a series of photogram images. They will design a personal motif based on a botanical specimen they locate within the school or museum grounds, and use this as the basis of their thematic investigation into identity, place and formal composition.

Materials:

- Letraset or other text (you can photocopy text, letters or headlines onto clear plastic if you cannot find Letraset)
- Plants and flowers collected outside.
- Other objects such as jewellery or coins which have personal significance for the students.
- Glass plates to keep the objects flat.

Method:

- Students to participate in a viewing of *Fiona Hall: Force Field*. A particular focus is the works in the 'Paradise', 'Territory' and 'Trade' zones, looking at Hall's composition and weaving together of materials and ideas.
- Students to collect a range of plants and flowers from your garden or the school grounds (make sure you are allowed to do this).

- Students to contribute up to three other objects which have personal significance to them.
- In the darkroom, under a safe light, Students to layer objects and plant materials onto 5x7 photographic paper. Students must use at least one source of text or Letraset for each composition.
- Once a composition is developed, students can put the glass plate over the top to keep their arrangement flat.
- Students to make photograms of their compositions using the enlarger as a light source, and develop these in the provided chemicals.
- Students to produce at least ten photograms each. These can be displayed around the classroom in a series, or overlaid onto each other in a similar composition to Fiona Hall's *When my boat comes in* (2002–)



Student examples of photograms, MCA Bella Workshop April 2008.

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ADDITIONAL TEACHING AND LEARNING SUGGESTIONS - FOCUS QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

PRIMARY LEVEL

Pre-visit

Google the artist's name. In small groups write a word list about the artist and her work.

Where was the artist born? Which countries has Fiona Hall travelled to and worked in? Locate these on a map or a globe.

What is an installation? Devise a definition as a class and write this on the blackboard.

Discuss what you think a 'Force Field' could be. What could the connection be with Fiona Hall?

Currency is a key theme in this exhibition. Discuss and compare different kinds of money. If students are from other cultures, they can bring in currency from their country.

Research some native plants or animals. Talk to the science teacher if you need assistance.

Make an illustrated timeline of key works in *Fiona Hall: Force Field*.

In the gallery

Find two works which are made from domestic objects. Write down the title, date, media (materials) of the works. What are the differences between the works?

Look at how Fiona Hall transforms materials in her artwork. Locate and draw works which use these processes: knitting, cutting, beading, weaving.

Describe two different ways Fiona Hall has manipulated the materials of aluminium and money.

Write a list of all the animals Fiona Hall has featured in her works.

How many different kinds of currency can you identify in *When my boat comes in* (2002–). Look very closely—what do all these banknotes have in common? (The artwork title gives you a clue.)

Find the video *Stronghold* (2008). Why do you think the artist wanted the work to be placed in the wall? What was your reaction when you saw the tarantula? Watch how other people react when they see this work.

Did you know that spider web is one of the thinnest and strongest threads in existence? Design and draw an artwork you could make with spider web. Think of an interesting way you could install this artwork—would it be inside the walls, in a corner or in a cabinet?

Select one item in *Dead in the water* (1999). Use white pencil to draw the "above" and "below the water" views on two sheets of black paper. Use the pencil to try to capture the surface detail of the objects, and leave areas of black paper to show the negative spaces.



Drawing *Dead in the Water* (1999). MCA School Holiday Programs, April 2008 Photograph: Justine McLisky

fiona hall: force field

Post-visit

Artwork titles are very important to Fiona Hall. Sometimes they are puns or refer to the underlying meaning of the artwork. Use a dictionary to find the definitions of some titles such as *Understorey*, *Holdfast* or *Amnesiac's Cartography*. If you could re-title one of these works, what would you call it and why?

Using recycled shredded paper, experiment with different weaving techniques to make birds' nests. Research one endangered bird and try to replicate the bird's nest-making techniques. Hang the nests from the ceiling of the classroom.

Design your own currency. Which country would it be for? You could invent a country, or make it for another planet, or for your school or suburb. What is the value? Who or what will be on the front? What you can buy?

Fiona Hall is interested in the transformation of objects. She uses Tupperware in several different artworks and turns it into different objects of things. Study her use of this material in *Cell Culture* (2001–02), *Give a dog a bone* (1996) and *Understorey* (1999–2004). Select one household object and brainstorm as a group how many different things you could turn it into. Draw your ideas.

Make some rubbings of leaves and plants using soft pencil or crayon. Make a layered collage with your rubbings.

Using the resources in this kit, make a soap carving and try metal embossing. Display your artworks in your classroom and write a label with your artist's statement.

Construct a sculptural work using three of Fiona Hall's materials and methods. Install this in a natural setting, perhaps in your school grounds or in your garden.

SECONDARY LEVEL

Pre-visit

Define some differences between sculpture and installation. Write your personal definition in your VAPD.

Research Fiona Hall's background. Do you think her family and her upbringing could have influenced her practice? Why?

Identify and discuss some global issues facing our world today. For instance, globalisation, environmental issues such as greenhouse gases, world trade, changing territories or war. Research a Fiona Hall artwork which connects to one of these issues.

Identify and research the six thematic areas that *Fiona Hall: Force Field* is divided into by the curatorial team. Quickly brainstorm with a partner three words and images which you associate with these words. Using your knowledge of Fiona Hall's practice, which of her works would you put into each category and why?

In the gallery

"In the so-called developing world there's a great use of recycled materials, especially tin, for kitchen utensils...I do identify with the impetus that materials can actually have another life and an aesthetic spark beyond the initial advertising that the company has devised with logos and so on".⁹ In the 'Consumption' section of the exhibition, write a short paragraph in your VAPD describing how Fiona Hall manipulates and transforms everyday materials to explore issues of consumer culture. Make some thumbnail sketches showing a close-up of the processes.

Locate the works which are housed in museum-style vitrines (cabinets). Why do you

⁹ Fiona Hall quoted in "Magic under the surface" *The Australian*, Friday 7 March 2008

fiona hall: force field

think the artist selected a cabinet to contain these particular works? What is the effect that looking into the cabinets has on the audience? Analyse how Fiona Hall uses this display to critique or raise questions about how museums classify and display objects or artefacts.

How do Fiona Hall's works comment on or critique history and language? Write down the different ways you can identify that the artist uses text and signage in or on her works. Copy the different fonts you can see.

Select two works and analyse how these works connect with the Postmodern Frame. What are some postmodern characteristics of Fiona Hall's work? Describe the postmodern strategies behind her use of irony, appropriation and humour?

Locate and investigate *Breeding Ground* (2007). These beehives are painted with different army camouflage patterns and installed underneath the stairs leading to the MCA's Level 3 galleries. Why do you think the artist wanted the work installed here? What is the effect on the audience? Where else could this work be installed to emphasise the camouflage element of the work? Which other works have been placed in unusual or unexpected places?

Post-visit

What are some continuing effects of colonisation on countries such as Australia, New Zealand or Sri Lanka? Describe some lasting effects on these countries' national identity, such as language, education or environment.

Discuss the relationship between Fiona Hall's artwork and the audience. Who do you think are the different audiences who would experience this exhibition?

"I think I subscribe to the idea that all art is political, in its broader sense....but I wouldn't classify myself as a protest artist as that's a

very narrow area."¹⁰ How do you think aesthetics and politics are connected in Fiona Hall's work? Would you describe her as a political artist? Why or why not?"

Research camouflage patterns in nature and in human use. Select three different camouflage patterns and make a series of paintings or sculptural installations which explore ideas of journey, invasion and territory.

Teachers can adapt the Metal Embossing activity in this kit to suit Secondary students, and extend it to relate to Fiona Hall's *Paradisus Terrestris* series. Students can use scissors to extend the flat relief works into filigreed works which stand on a plinth by cutting, folding and arranging the edges of the piece to make this a three-dimensional sculptural object. Students can extend the repoussé technique by working through the back of the metal to make works which are highly modelled.



Student example of metal embossing and filigree sculpture, MCA 2008

¹⁰ Fiona Hall quoted in "Magic under the surface" *The Australian*, Friday 7 March 2008

fiona hall: force field



Fiona Hall *Tender* (details) 2003 – 05 US dollars, wire, vitrines 220 x 360 x 150 cm (installed, approx.) Collection: Queensland Art Gallery © the artist

fiona hall: force field

GLOSSARY

Appropriation

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.

Camouflage

A kind of visual subterfuge used to hide or disguise the presence of something.

Curator

The person responsible for the care, collection, interpretation and display of artworks, or objects, in a museum or gallery. The term is also used in parks and zoos. Curators in contemporary museums organise exhibitions, liaise with the artists directly, write catalogues and labels and work with other departments in the museum to arrange installations and public projects, as well as exhibitions in the gallery spaces.

Discourse

Written or spoken communication or debate. In art, discourse means the conversation that is occurring around theories and ideas about artworks and culture.

Filigree

Highly detailed ornamentation or pattern, often found in wire jewellery.

Gaze

To look or see with fixed intention. The gaze is a term used in art history and theory referring to the relationship between the viewer and the subject, suggesting a position of power by the viewer over subject.

Gouache

An opaque, quick-drying watercolour paint.

Hybrid

Something that is made up of different elements, suggesting a fluidity or multiplicity.

Manipulation

In art, this term refers to the way an artist handles their materials in the course of producing a work. It can also refer to the way an image is changed using a computer program such as photoshop to alter an image.

New Media

An artform or art style which utilises new media technologies, such as the internet, digital film, computers, and other non-traditional media.

Oeuvre

The collective work of an artist, with regard to characteristics of style in their practice over the years.

Physicality

Of or relating to the body. In art this often refers to the way an artist uses their body in making the work as well as the physical presence of the work in a space in relation to the viewer.

Point of view

A position from which something is observed or considered, and the direction of the viewer's gaze. In photography and film, point of view (or POV) refers to positioning of the camera in relationship to the viewer.

Postmodernism

A late 20th century style and concept in the arts, architecture and criticism. Typical features include a deliberate mixing of styles and media, self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, and the incorporation of images relating to the consumerism and mass communication of society.

Repoussé

A process of creating an image or pattern in relief, usually in metal, through hammering or pressing through the back of the object.

Sequence

Related events, items or images which follow each other in a particular order in a set or

fiona hall: force field

group. A sequence can be incorporated into a series, but not the other way around.

Series

A set, number or sequence of things, events or images of a similar or related nature which come after each other in succession.

Symbolism

A visual picture or image or emblem that represents or describes something else by association, resemblance or convention.

Tableau (plural: tableaux)

A still scene arranged in painting, photography or theatre.

Type C photograph

A photograph printed from a negative (the developed film that contains a reversed tone image of the original scene).

VAPD

Visual Arts Process Diary, used by NSW Visual Arts students to record ideas.

Vitrine

A display cabinet or case made from glass or perspex used in museums and art galleries.

FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH

Exhibition resources

Fiona Hall: Force Field exhibition publication, Museum of Contemporary Art and City Gallery Wellington, 2008

SKETCH Activity Journal by Contemporary Artists Fiona Hall: Force Field for 8 – 14 year olds

SKETCH Junior for 5 – 8 year olds

MCA Artist's Voice DVD

Selected further reading

Ewington, Julie, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005

Ewington, Julie and Fiona Hall, 'The Unnatural Art of Fiona Hall', *Object* 46, May 2005, p.28.

Hart, Deborah, 'Fertile Interactions – Fiona Hall's Garden', *Art and Australia*, vol.36, no.2, Summer 1998, p.202.

Raffel, Shunaya, *Fiona Hall: A Transit Through Paradise*, The Asialink Centre, University of Melbourne, 1999

Stephen, Ann, 'Taking Cuttings: Fiona Hall's *Paradisus Terrestris*', in Juliana Engberg (ed.), *Colonial Post Colonial*, Bulleen: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 1996.

Online resources

www.mca.com.au

www.qag.qld.gov.au/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/2005/fiona_hall

www.roslynxley9.com.au/artist/17/Fiona_Hall

fiona hall: force field

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE: MCA EDUCATION KITS

Please give us your feedback on MCA Learning's exhibition-linked resource for *Fiona Hall: Force Field*. The Museum of Contemporary Art appreciates your time and input.

Are you a teacher, tutor or lecturer? Yes No

If so, what is your subject area/sector? _____

Your name (optional) and institution: _____

How did you hear about this Education Kit?

MCA website MCA Learning Youth + Schools program brochure Word of mouth Other (please state) _____

How did you access this kit?

Online at www.mca.com.au In a teacher pack from MCA Learning Other (please state)

How did you use this resource?

Personal study Before gallery visit During gallery visit Post-visit
 As Distance Education support Other (please state) _____

How useful did you find this education kit to support your exhibition visit or your classroom learning?

What was the most useful or relevant section/s of the kit?

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Thank you for your comments. Please fax this page to MCA Learning on 02 9252 4062 or email your comments to education@mca.com.au

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Fiona Hall: Force Field

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
6 March – 1 June 2008

City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand
12 July – 1 October 2008

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu,
New Zealand
4 December 2008 – 1 March 2009

Exhibition curated by Vivienne Webb, Gregory O'Brien and Paula Savage.

Exhibition organised and toured by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand.



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