

A CONSPICUOUS OBJECT | THE MAITLAND HOSPITAL

Image: detail of exhibition installation featuring works by Susan O'Doherty, Catherine Neilson, Linda Greedy and Adrian Lockhart



CONSIDER, RESPOND, DECODE, ANALYSE, IMAGINE

THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE focuses on five artists whose artworks feature in the exhibition, *A Conspicuous Object | The Maitland Hospital*. The questions and prompts can be used to initiate discussions within the classroom, as stimulus for making and exploring activities or to accompany you when you visit the Gallery. They may also be used to develop units of work. The exhibition website <https://aconspicuousobject.com.au/> could also be accessed for this purpose. We encourage you and the gallery's young visitors to engage with the exhibition, consider multiple perspectives and explore the artworks and their varying intentions.

A CONSPICUOUS OBJECT

With a one hundred and seventy five year history, Maitland Hospital is in the final stages of relocating to a new site. To acknowledge the significant role that the Maitland Hospital has played in the Hunter community, the exhibition *A Conspicuous Object – The Maitland Hospital* invites ten artists to respond to the Hospital's history, its stories and the memories of patients, staff, visitors and volunteers. Each artist has responded to the hospital in a different way with a different perspective and experience.

CONSIDER



Still from *First light last light*, 2021
Oliver Harlan
video animation duration 6:56

First light last light is a video animation by Oliver Harlan, exploring the interrelationship between human consciousness and place. The layered animation has been delicately crafted using archival images of the old Maitland Hospital. The work questions where memories are held... did the hospital hold on to any memories for itself? Is the hospital a living thing? Is it breathing? Does it have a pulse? With all the life that has passed through its halls, the new life awakened in its beds, the lives drawn to an end, what has the hospital held on to - memories, experiences, consciousness?

The video flickers and light flashes briefly before the viewer. Where is it coming from?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are memories?

How do we remember?

Where are memories stored?

How do we replay our memories?

Do the details change?

Do places hold memories?

EXTENSION

How has the artist created meaning through image and video manipulation?

RESPOND

Anita Johnson rescues found objects: furniture, equipment, oddities left behind. She re-purposes and re-assembles them to create artworks, exploring ideas around separation and repair: experiences often intertwined with hospital admission.

The artworks I have made began with objects I salvaged from the storerooms of the hospital. I have incorporated these found objects with sensory things such as the smell of cloves, the sounds of the hospital, and the soft textures of textiles. This is my response to the way that clinical places heighten all the senses and embed themselves deep in our psyche.

In the works I focus on patients' experiences of being cared for in the hospital, their longing for home, their desire for mobility, and the capacity for care and healing that lies in the touch of the human hand.

Hospitals may be scary and foreboding places at times, but they are also places where, day-in and day-out, ordinary people care for strangers with such tenderness and empathy. It is this that makes hospitals extraordinary.

Anita Johnson, 2021

WHICH segments of Johnson's work remind us of home?
How does the artist represent comfort?

IDENTIFY elements of juxtaposition.
How does Johnson challenge the function of objects / furniture?

DESCRIBE how and why her work evokes a physical response from the viewer.

Are you enticed to touch it?

What is it about the work that makes us want to feel the textures, have a sensory experience?

Is the work tactile?

How does the work conjure memories within the audience?

EXPLORE the 'living' element of the work.
Is it alive and/or was it once alive?



Anita Johnson
Top - Left - Right
Holding up and holding on, 2020
salvaged objects, felt and cloves
163 x 48 x 15 cm

Chair body / Body chair, 2021
collected chair segment and silk
118 x 55 x 29 cm

Bottom
On the cusp of a breath, 2021
collected stretcher and hospital pillows, printed linen,
bronze, and possum skin
188 x 48 x 32 cm

EXTENSION:

Discuss the essence of Australiana evident in Johnson's work. Does the work conjure memories within the audience?

DECODE

I am Wonnarua. I am a proud nurse practitioner and a very proud artist. I was taught by my father, Les Elvin, a Wonnarua artist who was Australia's National NAIDOC artist of the year in 2008. I was privileged and honoured to learn the techniques, symbolism and iconography of Aboriginal art from my father. This is a language, a communication tool...

My painting captures the importance of the old Maitland Hospital to women, especially Aboriginal women, for birthing. In the centre you can see a woman of knowledge and experience, an elder, helping a woman during birthing at the hospital. I had my daughter at this hospital and I felt I was in expert care. At the top right is Maitland and at the very top right is the location of the new hospital. The other locations surrounding the old hospital site are other areas that are linked with birthing to the hospital. The Hunter River can be seen winding through this beautiful country and the many green areas pay homage to flat lands, wooded areas, farming, hills with wattle. The river is also life.

Lesley Salem, 2021

VIEW the work of Lesley Salem.

HOW does Lesley visually describe this part of Wonnarua Country that now has a European approach to living built upon it?

CONSIDER how viewers could navigate the imagery and symbolism within Lesley's painting. Now consider a patient who is navigating the interior organisation and signage of a hospital. Compare and contrast the two experiences.



Birthing at Maitland Hospital, 2021
Lesley Salem
acrylic on canvas

ANALYSE



Face-lifts, re-builds, additions and adaptations, (detail)
Peter O'Doherty
acrylic on canvas

Peter O'Doherty's paintings investigate the built environment, in particular the vernacular of the old Maitland Hospital. When asked to contribute to *A Conspicuous Object*, O'Doherty drew inspiration from the architectural and historical layering of the built forms of the hospital.

My paintings are a response to the way Maitland Hospital has undergone facelifts, rebuilds, additions and adaptations over the years to cater for the growing population in the region. To highlight the eclectic mix of architectural styles, I've painted different angles and aspects, using light and shadows focusing on geometric facades, walls and windows, entrances, rear service driveways, roof tops, awnings, fire stairs and balconies."

Peter O'Doherty, 2021

LOOK at O'Doherty's paintings.

To what extent is architecture evidence of time and place? How has O'Doherty created mood or feeling within his work?

IMAGINE that you are describing O'Doherty's work to a friend who hasn't seen it.

List 10 words you would use to describe it.

There aren't any people in O'Doherty's paintings.

Is this significant?

Does the absence of people contribute to how the audience responds to the work?

EXTENSION Sketch one of O'Doherty's works in pencil. Include a person or multiple people in the scene.

IMAGINE



It all takes place in the garden, 2021 (detail)
G. W. Bot
sand, bronze, found objects, printmaking

In summation, 'A Conspicuous Object | The Maitland Hospital', for me, is an exhibition about a place that was born, is dying, and is being resurrected elsewhere. It is an exhibition of a rite of passage.

G.W. Bot, 2021

IMAGINE that you are an art critic

WRITE a critical review of the exhibition
A Conspicuous Object.

CONSIDER G.W. Bot's quote and include
it in your review.

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