

# PATRICIA PICCININI

# CURIOUS AFFECTION

## ON TOUR

SECONDARY  
STUDENT RESOURCE



### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Patricia Piccinini has exhibited extensively around the world. She represented Australia at the 2003 Venice Biennale, created the inflatable sculpture *Skywhale* for the Centenary of Canberra in 2013, and drew over a million visitors to her touring exhibition in Brazil in 2016.

Known for her imaginative, and incredibly lifelike, hybrid creatures, Piccinini uses sculpture, installation, video and sound to realise a fantastic and compassionate vision of the world, inspired by nature, science, art history and mythology.

### ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

'Patricia Piccinini: Curious Affection on Tour' invites us into an alternative world where nature and technology, humans and animals, fact and fiction mix and intermingle in ways that are both strange and wonderful. This touring exhibition surveys some of the artist's most recognisable sculptures of the past ten years, together with photographic and video works, and culminates in an immersive multisensory environment.

### CONCEPTS

*'My work is never about one thing alone, it is always about a relationship, a family or an ecosystem. Even when a creature is alone there is a relationship with the viewer.'*

*This is a world where things mix and intermingle, where nothing stays in its place. It is a world where animal, plant, machine and human unite and commingle. We have to ask ourselves, if it is so hard to figure out where one thing starts and another ends, can we really continue to believe in the barriers that separate us. Connection and empathy are at the heart of my practice, and at the heart of this exhibition.'*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Patricia Piccinini, in conversation with Peter McKay, Melbourne, 2018.



## KEY THEMES



### FABULATION

Expanding on the genre of the fable — a moralistic short story often featuring animals — the term fabulation in the context of the exhibition weaves together the magical and the real, and, in so doing, opens up a discussion about how we shape our society, for better and for worse. We can think about fabulation by looking at two groups of works. The first group explores the non-human as represented through uncanny sculptures and video, while the second group of youthful and surreal depictions reveals the playful exchange between children and creatures. These forms stem from a mix of personal experience, research or fables, but all reveal the artist's interest in allowing viewers to witness imagined realities that tap into the fundamental questions of our time.



### EMPATHY

Seeing the world from another person's point of view is regarded by many scientists as a distinctly human trait; however, behavioural scientist Frans de Waal disputes this notion, based on his experiments observing primates and elephants.<sup>2</sup> De Waal argues that animals are moral beings as they exhibit a willingness to sacrifice their own interests to support other animals. Piccinini's works question if humans are the only empathetic or altruistic species, particularly those works that represent relationships between species, and those that explore trans-species fusions involving human, animal, organic and the artificial.

<sup>2</sup> Frans de Waal, 'Moral behaviour in animals', TED, November 2011, <[https://www.ted.com/talks/frans\\_de\\_waal\\_do\\_animals\\_have\\_morals](https://www.ted.com/talks/frans_de_waal_do_animals_have_morals)>, viewed January 2020.



### WONDERMENT

Piccinini enables audiences to imagine possible futures both through single artworks, but also through immersive worlds that tap into the miraculous nature of existence. Using highly sensory elements, *The Couple* and *The Field* draw audiences into an artificial reality — an alternative world. This strategy presents an elevated experience of what it means to be connected to the world through the senses. Piccinini creates moments for visitors to wonder at the remarkable fact that life exists, and to consider the responsibilities of the individual and the capacity of the collective to shape the world for the better.



# BEFORE YOUR VISIT

## RESEARCH AND MAKE CONNECTIONS

Explore the key themes of fabulation, empathy and wonderment by researching one or more of the following combinations of artworks and influences:



### SCULPTURE

- Louise Bourgeois's spider sculptures in relation to *Heaven bound* 2002; see Elizabeth Manchester, 'Louise Bourgeois: Maman 1999', Tate, December 2009, <[tate.org.uk/art/artworks/louise-bourgeois-maman-t12625](http://tate.org.uk/art/artworks/louise-bourgeois-maman-t12625)>, viewed January 2020.
- Berlinde De Bruyckere's faceless sculptures in relation to *Heaven bound* 2002; see 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Saatchi Gallery, <[saatchigallery.com/artists/berlinde\\_debruyckere.htm](http://saatchigallery.com/artists/berlinde_debruyckere.htm)>, viewed January 2020.

### LITERATURE

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) in relation to *The Bedroom, 10.30pm* (from 'The Fitzroy Series') 2011
- Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) in relation to *Teenage Metamorphosis* 2017
- Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) in relation to *Bedroom, 10.30pm* (from 'The Fitzroy Series') 2011



### FILM

- *The Shape of Water* 2017 (director: Guillermo del Toro) in relation to *Psychotourism* 1996
- *Okja* 2017 (director: Bong Joon-ho) in relation to *Teenage Metamorphosis* 2017

### MYTHOLOGY

- Chimeras in relation to *The Couple* 2018

Chimeras are creatures that are a mix of more than one animal. The name is drawn from Greek mythology, and refers to a fire-breathing beast with the head of a lion, a goat's body and a serpent for a tail.

See Hannah Devlin, 'First human-pig "chimera" created in milestone study', *Guardian*, 27 January 2017, <[theguardian.com/science/2017/jan/26/first-human-pig-chimera-created-in-milestone-study](http://theguardian.com/science/2017/jan/26/first-human-pig-chimera-created-in-milestone-study)>, viewed January 2020.



### MEDICAL SCIENCE

- CRISPR in relation to *Alley, 11.15am* (from 'The Fitzroy Series') 2011  
CRISPR is a form of genetic engineering so precise it has been renamed 'genetic editing'.  
See Michael Specter, 'How the DNA revolution is changing us', *National Geographic Magazine*, August 2016, <[nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/08/dna-crispr-gene-editing-science-ethics/](http://nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/08/dna-crispr-gene-editing-science-ethics/)>, viewed January 2020.

### DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- Boston Dynamics' robots, such as *BigDog* and *Spot* 2008–16 in relation to *The stags* 2008; see 'Changing your idea of what robots can do', 2018, *Boston Dynamics* <[bostondynamics.com/robots](http://bostondynamics.com/robots)>, viewed February 2020.



### FEMINIST WRITING

- Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* 1984 in relation to *Teenage Metamorphosis* 2017; see Donna Haraway, 'A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century', in Anne C Herrmann and Abigail J Stewart (eds), *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., 1994, pp.424–57.

# DURING YOUR VISIT

## INVESTIGATE: FIND, ANALYSE, COMPARE AND CONNECT

Patricia Piccinini wants people to engage with her work on three levels:

### FIRST LEVEL = SURFACE

Piccinini collaborates with specialist makers and artists in her studio to create her meticulously crafted works. She pays close attention to the surface of the sculptures and objects she creates. The pursuit of verisimilitude\* is an essential component of Piccinini's practice in that it creates a sense of wonder and spectacle for audiences.



With a camera, **ZOOM IN + CAPTURE** a series of details from a range of surfaces (metallic, organic, skin) and materials (silicone, hair, chrome, rubber) on display in the exhibition.

\*an appearance of truth or reality

### SECOND LEVEL = ETHICS

Piccinini's artworks invite audiences to ask profound and complex questions that don't have straightforward (right or wrong) answers. These questions arise from the depiction of relationships which blur the lines between nature, humanity, technology, artificiality and machines. It is through these relationships that Piccinini invites audiences to consider questions of morality and ethics.



**EXTRAPOLATE** from an analysis of relationships to formulate questions. For example, *Bedroom, 10.30pm* (from 'The Fitzroy Series') 2011, followed by *Alley, 11.15am* (from 'The Fitzroy Series') 2011 = a hybrid (part human, part artificial) with children. How does your initial reaction to *Bedroom, 10.30pm* change when you see the *Alley, 11.15am*?



**IDENTIFY + LIST** sculptures depicting a relationship between two or more species, including those that merge multiple species/technologies into one form. Use the following table as a guide.

NATURE			TECHNOLOGY	
Human	Creature	Environment	Creature	Machines
Bodies	Organic	Artificial	Bodies	

### THIRD LEVEL = LOVE

Piccinini refers to the third level as the 'ultimate' level. This is the deepest level, where questions about surface (first level) and ethics (second level) give way to a meditation on the human condition. It is at this level that love and agency become the most powerful tools in navigating the risks and responsibilities that come with the ever-increasing degree of control humanity has over the natural world. Although this level may be difficult to reach for some, in many ways, it is the most straightforward. The bond between a mother and a child, the companionship of an animal, or the comfort offered by a carer are universal connections, and they are also undeniably powerful relationships in the face of uncertain futures.



**FIND + DRAW** representations of love, intimacy, trust, care and protection. Consider how you frame/crop your drawings to emphasise the relationships depicted by the artist (between human and creature, the sculpture and the viewer, etc.). Pay particular attention to gaze, facial expressions and body language.

# AFTER YOUR VISIT

## RE-EVALUATE: SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES, CREATE, CONCLUDE AND REFLECT

Select one of the key themes (fabulation, empathy, wonderment) and revisit two or three works from the exhibition that relate to your chosen theme.

Analyse each of the artworks using the activities outlined in the three levels (surface, ethics, love) from the 'during your visit' section of this resource.

Use the table below to define a focus for a creative response to the exhibition:

	<b>SURFACE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Materials</li> <li>• Processes</li> </ul>	<b>ETHICS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Speculate</li> </ul>	<b>LOVE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning</li> <li>• Purpose</li> </ul>
FABULATION	If I can make it, then it becomes real. If it exists, it's real.	If it can be made, that doesn't mean it should be.	Fables are full of imagined beasts with kind souls.
EMPATHY	If it's real enough, then it has a life and feelings to share.	When is empathy essential? When is empathy dangerous?	Why care for the welfare of people you have never met and never will?
WONDERMENT	What is beyond real is full of wonder.	Instead of fearing the other, wonder at the chance to live.	What role will love play in an advanced world?

## SUGGESTED MAKING ACTIVITIES



### DRAW

Compose an illustration that merges still-life objects, such as clothing, jewellery and shoes, with figurative details, such as hair, limbs and fingers.



### SCULPT

Experiment with rolling clay to create tiles with smooth and rough surfaces.

Use a metallic glaze to give the tiles a machine-like aesthetic.

Use fine clay or paper clay to create a series of small organic forms. Create grooves or poke holes through the forms that could hold found objects or through which you could weave/loop textiles (cloth, twine, fishing line).



### PAINT

Use paint and mixed media to build up an area that resembles the skin or surface of an organism (human, animal, plant). Experiment with wet media (paint, silicone, wax) and additives (texture paste, glue, flow medium) by dripping, pouring or squeezing.



### WEAVE

Research the anatomy of mammals and experiment with weaving cotton, wool or fishing line through holes in a piece of leather, silicone or fabric to imitate different types of hair or fur.



### COMBINE

Use the inspiration of some of these making activities to design an imagined being.

Your imagined being should conjure a sense of wonderment as well as inspire empathy in viewers.



P1 Patricia Piccinini / Photograph: Phoebe Powell

**Patricia Piccinini, Australia b.1965**

- P1. P3 *The Couple (detail)* 2018 / Silicone, fibreglass, hair, cotton, tent, found objects, ed. 1/3 (+ 1 A.P.) / 204 x 270 x 270 cm (approx.); figures: 42 x 168 x 65cm / The Taylor Family Collection. Purchased 2018 with funds from Paul, Sue and Kate Taylor through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation
- P1. P3 *Alley 11.15am* (from 'The Fitzroy Series') (detail) 2011 / Type C photograph, ed. 1/4 / 100 x 160cm / The James C. Sourris AM Collection. Purchased 2011 with funds from James C. Sourris AM through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation
- P2 *The gathering* (still, detail) 2007 / Digital Betacam and DVD formats: 16:9 PAL, 3:00 minutes, sound, colour, ed. 3/6 / Purchased 2009. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant
- P2. P3 *The stags* 2008 / Fibreglass, automotive paint, leather, steel, plastic, tyres / Two pieces: 177 x 183 x 102cm and 147 x 90 x 101cm; 196 x 224 x 167cm (installed, variable) / Purchased 2009 with funds from the Estate of Lawrence F King in memory of the late Mr and Mrs SW King through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation and the Queensland Government's Gallery of Modern Art Acquisitions Fund
- P2. P3 *Teenage Metamorphosis* 2017 / Silicone, fibreglass, human hair, found objects / 25 x 71 x 52cm / Purchased 2018. Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation
- P2 *The Field (planting)* (detail) 2018 / 200 objects: ABS and PPE plastic / 100 x 25 x 10cm (each, approx.); installed dimensions variable / Gift of the artist through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2020. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program
- P3 *Heaven bound* 2002 / Automotive paint on fibreglass / 91.5 x 95 x 90cm / Purchased 2003. The Queensland Government's special Centenary Fund
- P3. P4 *Bedroom, 10.30pm* (from 'The Fitzroy Series') (detail) 2011 / Type C photograph, ed. 3/4 / 100 x 160cm / The James C. Sourris AM Collection. Purchased 2011 with funds from James C. Sourris AM through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation
- P3. P6 *Psychotourism* (from 'The Mutant Genome Project' series) (detail) 1996 / Type C photograph (Digiprint), ed. of 6 / 120.7 x 258.6cm / Purchased 1998. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant

All works are from the Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art.  
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