
Iconism, Narrative and Contemporary Mythology in Design – Creating a New Perceptual Category.

Helmut Lueckenhausen

INSIDE COVER

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Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Swinburne University of Technology,
December, 2005

Methodology and Structure

This PhD has been undertaken, and is presented, according to the Swinburne University of Technology policy for the conduct of PhDs which acknowledges:

- (a) Design as a discipline in its own right in which the designed object per se is credited as the embodiment of research. The works are the primary content of the thesis in the first instance, and
- (b) The value of utilizing new digital media to present and articulate such designed objects.

The works are installed in several states in Australia and in several overseas locations. As they cannot be assembled in one venue this submission is being made using a DVD, in keeping with (b) above. The DVD contains images of the work, both isolated and in situ as appropriate, as well as three-dimensional digital models of some works, presenting them in the round.

This represents a comprehensive and virtual exhibition of the creative thesis.

34 works in 18 sets are grouped within 4 categories as described in the Abstract.

Accompanying the DVD is an illustrated hard copy exegesis. The exegesis supports the work by:

- giving it an historical and theoretical context,
- describing the narrative within which the works sit, and,
- by concluding with the specifics of the claim.

The DVD and the exegesis have been designed for simultaneous access. The reader/observer has the option of viewing the works on the DVD while, at the same time, reading the hard copy text. However they are structured to allow for separate access if desired.

Abstract

Iconism, Narrative and Contemporary
Mythology in Design – Creating a Perceptual
Cognitive Category.

In this thesis 34 design works are grouped in 18 sets.
The sets are presented in four categories.

The first category, *Commercial / Political*, includes
exhibition and display cases, reception desks and
furniture installed in commercial and corporate spaces.

The second category, *Sacred (Judaica)*, includes works
created for religious ceremony.

The third category, *Collection*, includes works made
for curated exhibitions, some of which are themselves,
display cabinets.

The fourth category, *Domestic*, includes works
intended for domestic use and display.

The exegesis traces the part that the *Wunderkammer*
(the Cabinet of Curiosity), the collections cabinet
that became popular in the 16th and 17th centuries,
made to the development of modern understandings
of how objects are categorized. The relationship and
the tensions that exist between the categories of art,
craft and design in contemporary creative practice are
linked to the discourses of which the *Wunderkammer*
was a formative part. The need human beings have
exhibited throughout history to create pattern, indeed
to see the world as part of a *grand pattern*, is linked to
the continuing human propensity for categorization.
It is further linked to strategies for inclusion, or
exclusion, evident in creative practice.

The 34 design works operate within a visual narrative
connected with each of the four categories. The works
in their own right, reflected in the exegesis, tell a range
of political, social, commercial, religious, institutional

and personal stories. They pick up on various historical
and mythological references to create new narratives
shared by the designer/creator and the client/collector
as well as the third-party observer. They blend use-
function, that is, the capacity to do the work for
which they were designed, with the equally important
function of contributing to the cultural and spiritual
experiences of the people who interact with them.

The capacity for these works to operate as visual
narrative – as three-dimensional stories – a concept
well understood in the visual arts, is then located
within the domain of cognitive psychology.
An essentially Darwinian model of human behaviour
is touched on sufficiently to suggest that this paradigm
for seeing the perceptual as the dominant form of
knowledge, linked to the classical Greek concept of
aesthesis, offers a psychological explanation for how
visual narrative works. Further, this thesis concludes
that a perceptual-cognitive category now exists that
has fused several categories, including furniture,
art, mythology and a unique iconography into a
prototypical brand that people recognize as a
Helmut Lueckenhausen.

Acknowledgements

In respect of the production of the works I wish to acknowledge Ian Higgs a maker/journeyman of extraordinary skill who has worked closely with me in the production of much of it for many years. Bruce Edwards, my old friend, has also provided sound advice and expertise and has been a constant sounding board throughout the whole of my career. Ray Kinnane and Lynette Zeeng have been unstintingly generous with their time and skill in the recording of the works.

Professor Sue Rowley, who was previously at Wollongong University, helped to start me on my PhD journey. I'm grateful to Professor Allan Whitfield my supervisor at Swinburne for his kindly scepticism and for continuing the venerable academic tradition of introducing new lines of enquiry. I am particularly grateful to Professor Barbara van Ernst, my other supervisor, for expertise and generosity well above and beyond that which could reasonably be expected.

My colleagues in the Design Centre, Professor Roger Simpson and Nicki Lee have contributed their expertise in the realization of the DVD of works and the hard copy. The students who have assisted in the photography, typography, design and production of the vehicle for submission include; for the DVD: David Be, Kiki Lauda and Bowen Jessup. For the Exegesis: Jose Burgos, Aleksandra Antonijevic, Carlo Maristela and Lucas Nieuwenhuys.

Amongst my friends and associates who have formed a nucleus of professional discourse of the highest order and who therefore set a standard to which I am constantly challenged to aspire, I also include Jane Burns, Robert Bell, Eugenie Bell and Marion Marshall.

The two people who better than anyone else in my life have established that fine balance between unconditional support and unsentimental honesty are my wife Gillian and my daughter Isolde.

To you all, my love and heartfelt thanks.

Helmut

Declaration

I, Helmut Lueckenhausen, the author of this thesis,
declare:

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted
for the award of any other Degree or Diploma.

To the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no
material previously published or written by another
person except where due reference has been made in
the text of the thesis.

None of the work is based on joint research or
publications.

Signed,

Helmut Lueckenhausen

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The DVD

The accompanying DVD includes 34 works in 18 sets that are grouped in 4 categories.

Commercial / Political

1. The Whole Truth: Display Cabinets
(Australian Meat Industry Employees Union [AMIEU])
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Silky Oak, Silver Ash, Silver Ash Veneer, Powder Coated Steel, Glass,
Low Voltage lighting, Granite Niche Location
2. On Edge: Guarded Display Cabinet (AMIEU)
Ziggurat Display Cabinet
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3. Against Innocence: Guardian Desks 1 and 2 (AMIEU)
Two Articulated Desks. One Three-part and One Two-part
Silky Oak, Silky Oak Veneer, Silver Ash, Silver Ash Veneer, Stainless Steel,
Duraloid work surfaces
4. Nigel and Rupert Help Too: Guardian Tables (AMIEU)
Low Side Tables
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Deconstructed and Redesigned/Remade into:

Stage 2: Desk 1

(Crafts Council of Australia, Canberra)

Stage 2: Desk 2

(Cooperative Research Centre, Wood Innovations, Creswick, Victoria)

Silver Ash, Silver Ash Veneer, Brush Box Veneer, Gombiere,

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Appendices

Appended are articles from magazines, journals and catalogues in which some of the works in this submission, and some works not included, are discussed.

- Appendix I. R. Bell, *Transformations: The Language of Craft*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2005. Introduction pp. vi – viii.
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- Appendix II. R. Bell, 'Transformations: The Language of Craft', *Craft Arts International*, No. 65, 2005, pp. 62-66.

- Appendix III. R. Bell, *Material Culture: Aspects of Contemporary Australian Craft and Design*, National Gallery of Australia, 2002.
- Appendix IV. K. Fitzpatrick, Catalogue for the Exhibition, *Against the Grain*, Brisbane City Council, Brisbane, 2000.
- Appendix V. J. Smith, 'Wunderkabinets, On the Shelves of Memory and in the Temples of the Wardrobe', *Object*, No 3, 1999, p. 49.
- Appendix VI. K. Murray, 'The Cabinet of Helmut Lueckenhausen', *Craft Victoria*, 29, 1999, pp. 17-19.
- Appendix VII. H. Quinn, 'Helmut Lueckenhausen: From the Cabinet of Curiosity', *Australian Wood Review*, No 22, March 1999, pp. 65-66.
- Appendix VIII. M. Bogle, 'The Chicago Fifteen, Contemporary Australian Furniture', *SOFA Chicago Exposition Catalogue*, 1996, pp. 14-19.
- Appendix IX. K. Murray, Catalogue for *Symmetry, Crafts Meet Kindred Trades and Professions*, Australian Exhibitions Touring Agency, 1994. Woodworking/Surgery, pp. 22-23. Helmut Lueckenhausen, pp. 26-27.
- Appendix X. R. Nathan, Helmut Lueckenhausen: 'Design is Art that Makes Itself Useful', *Australian Wood Review*, No 3, October 1993, pp. 52-54.
- Appendix XI. A. Griffiths, 'Boutique Office Building', *Design Ink*, No 13, July 1993, pp. 30-33.

CHAPTER

1

Historical & Theoretical Context

At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st Century the social, political and environmental circumstances of Western Modernity include certain understandings of how material culture is categorized. These understandings have been inherited from the broader history of western culture, traced through the enlightenment and the industrial revolution, to the present. They manifest in the trades and professions, in the arts, in industry, in all manner of productive practices, and in the products and artifacts themselves. An understanding of how this came to be will help us to more clearly understand our natural and built environment and how we place, or recognize ourselves and our objects within it.

Order and the *Wunderkammer*

The history of the attempt in Western culture to make sense of the material world includes the Cabinets of Curiosities, particularly those of 16th and 17th Century Europe. Known in the German-speaking world as the *Wunderkammer*, for some reason the evocative word *Wunder* is most often reduced in English to the slightly puritan sounding *curiosity*. I prefer to reflect the appreciation of the marvelous by calling them the Cabinets of Wonder.

Some of the primal motivation for making and collecting cultural artifacts – production and consumption – can be read into these historical collections. For the contemporary designer/maker concerned with both the privileged object for exhibition and the paraphernalia of exhibition design, the *Wunderkammer* represents a mannered, philosophical context that underlies how we think about the categorization and display of collections even today. Contemporary theories often include

a challenge to long-held beliefs about the nature of human endeavour, of object, and not least the scientific rationalism that has underpinned at least four centuries of institutional classification and presentation. A vigorous dialogue that foreshadowed that challenge accompanied these early collections.

The maker and collector shared the need to claim a place in the world order. For the collector, being socially and often politically advantaged, that meant a pre-eminent place. Designers and makers today, whatever the complex and perhaps imperfectly understood implications of their social, philosophical and cultural parameters may be, see their objects as markers of physical and intellectual space. Then as now, making, and in turn decorating, allowed individuals to personalize object and structure to give themselves and their social group an anchor in what could often be an alienating environment. The owner of the *Wunderkammer*, the powerful (or at least power seeking) collector shared this primal human need to structure, organize and thereby increase his/her understanding of the world.

In *Naturalia and artefacta*, Dagmar Eichberger affirms that “By arranging and ordering those remnants of the real world, the collector defines man’s place in the universe according to his own set of values and beliefs.”¹ Categorization and cataloguing evolved to focus the collections on a range of purposes. Ranging from facilitating enjoyment of the bizarre and theatrical for their own sake to providing various models of artistic, philosophic and technological usefulness, the Cabinets occasioned dialogue which was as wide ranging and sometimes as divisive as the art/craft/design debate has been in more recent times.

In the service of the new rationality of the 17th Century, the Cabinet, or as the British Royal Society eventually termed its own collection, *The Repository*, was to help in the development of a new taxonomy based on the idea of a supreme order of nature.² The attempt to bond science and art, religion and knowledge, power and service (including that of object production), and not least, economics, into a *grand pattern* positioned natural science in two, initially opposing camps. The new science was first enlisted within the spiritual objectives of unknowable divine intention and eventually came to be lined up in opposition to it. The early church had a stake in building a linear, chronological view of history, a calendar of cause and effect that legitimated the continuum from the Old to the New Testament, from Genesis to the day of resurrection and atonement. It was thereby able to place itself and its authority firmly into the equation, the final, longed-for result of which, redemption and release from the bonds of original sin, would not be realizable without the intercession of the Church and its agents. Not all cultures, even in modern times share this view of history unrolling itself like a hall carpet. Thus the development of a phenomenological point of view, that of present consciousness having been influenced by the past, when linked with the new science based on evidence, ironically undermined church dogma as much as it was originally enlisted to support it. The *grand design* was to become no less of a holy grail to the new religion of natural science than it had been to the old one of faith.

The litany for the *grand design* was the new rational language being developed in conjunction with the serious collections such as that of the Royal Society. It is telling how readily one can bridge almost three centuries between botanist Nehemiah Grew, who in

1681 published a catalogue of the Society's collection, the implied aim of which was the systematic reform of knowledge,³ and Herbert Simon who wrote in *The Sciences of the Artificial*, in 1968: "the proper study of mankind is the science of design, not only as the professional component of a technical education but as a core discipline for every liberally educated man."⁴ Here, I deliberately link design as in the universal sense of the *grand design*, with design in the more prosaic sense of creating a plan for a product. One suggestion contained in that link goes to the potential for any act of creation, no matter where it sits in the continuum of the infinities, the design of a cup or of a city, to be a building block in our social narrative. Another is that in the so-called realms of the natural and the artificial, the agency of human beings makes the artificial nothing less than the natural at one remove.

An extended range of categories devised and employed by collectors and early curators, collectively fit within the three primary divisions of *naturalia*, *exotica* and *artefacta*. Curiosity and wonder combined to encourage the collection of everything that was rare and new and, in the best circumstances, enlightening about the natural world. *Naturalia* encompassed specimens of rare plants, minerals and animals in what was supposed to be as unadulterated a form as it was practical to maintain. The ethnographic material of the category *exotica*, all manner of artifacts from other cultures, had a more complicated set of attractions for the collector – especially royalty and the politically powerful. The symbolic value of possessing the objects and icons of exotic societies could be interpreted as a morally, spiritually and racially superior authority having received tribute. If not actually setting the scene for colonialism, this phenomenon is at least an illustration of the values through which it was

rationalized. Susan Stewart, referring to contemporary collectibles in her *Objects of Desire*, claims:

“...the authenticity of the exotic object arises not in the conditions authored by the primitive culture itself but from the analogy between the primitive/exotic and the origin of the possessor... Such objects... allow the tourist to appropriate, consume, and thereby ‘tame’ the cultural other.”⁵

The establishment of power over that which is held in symbolic or totem form is an historical phenomenon with which we are familiar, from examples such as the tributes paid to the Egyptian Pharaoh, through to the new year or birthday gift offered to the British monarch. Similarly, the shift from the desire of the rationalist to define man’s place in the universe on the one hand, to the implications of having power over others, touches on some of the issues which are still paramount to the way objects work within private and state collections today. In fact it probably has implications not only for the way objects, but consequently also the way people associated with them, are ordered within official spaces. That is why the subject has some currency amongst contemporary architecture and design commentators such as Suzie Attiwill who agrees with many students of museology that:

“Objects may be changed but essentially museums continue to work from the same premise – as collecting and framing instruments based on scientific rationalism and Cartesian perspectivalism. Their position as authoritative representations of culture, and as containers of true knowledge and the real, seems as solid and irrefutable as the classical facades that confront the museum visitor. Their position is supported by the logical sequence of evolution and the removal of time’s destructive potential.”⁶

At a further remove, one could extend this train of thought to the cultural colonialism of 20th Century

Internationalism. The advantaging of a particular (in this case Eurocentric) style and philosophy requires a similar, and consequential, disadvantaging of those away from the centre. Nikolaus Pevsner, in his *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, could not have “...established a Kantian category for the sublime, which he equated with the Modern Movement,”⁷ unless he was also able to advocate for the defeat of criminalism, of unchecked liberalism, and for what he believed to be the “inevitable disempowering of all other philosophies by the force of righteous evolution.”⁸ Thus empowerment is demonstrated to be a relative term, measurable only against consequential disempowerment elsewhere, and we begin to recognize the links between order and power.

The third major category of the *Wunderkammer*, *artefacta*, is that in which material and human skill are linked, both needing to be extraordinary enough to elicit wonder and therefore to be deserving of preferment. The same considerations about the status of the material within the finished work, which occupies the minds of some contemporary craftspeople and, to a somewhat lesser extent, designers, were employed by collectors for their cabinets. The same fine line between ceremonial or symbolic functionalism and actual primary use value that causes contemporary craft to be shifted continually between the art and design camps, existed then between what was discovered (*naturalia*), and a whole new generation of pieces, each attempting to outdo the other and being created specifically for the collection (*artefacta*). For one thing, materials rich in mythology gradually came to be classified more realistically and scientifically. For example the unicorn horn was identified as coming from the narwhal;⁹ and as rare materials became more or less common, such as porcelain, they were moved up and down the scale according to their altered capacity to

induce wonder. For another, the whole purpose and terminology of the collections themselves changed according to time, to place, and to the vagaries of opinion. The *Wunderkammer* at various times evolved into the *Kunstkammer* (art cabinet) or *Schatzkammer* (treasure cabinet). Where collectors preferred one type of collection to another, or when they classified their collections into two or more of these categories it could be difficult to decide into which the item of artefacta belonged.¹⁰ It is worth noting the parallels with the contemporary arguments between modernists advocating clear concepts of truth and those in favour of the less distinct relativism of some of the *Postmodernisms*.

The status of artefacta (with which the later word art is associated) increased rapidly as illustrated by the relatively short period between the establishment of Peter the Great's pre-eminent *Wunderkammer* in the 17th Century, and the building of the Hermitage, Catherine the Great's *Kunstkammer* of the 18th Century.¹¹ Catherine's attitude also reflected the doubts some commentators had from the earliest days of the cabinets about the claims for an overarching taxonomy and her thoughts prefigured some 20th Century doubts. Oleg Neverov, in tracing the history and fate of Peter's *Kunstkammer* reports that:

"Although an eager collector of works of art, Catherine evidently had no sympathy for the 'universal' type of Museum, which seemed to her an anachronism. She apparently said of Grogory Orlov's addiction to this kind of museum, 'I often quarreled with him about his wish to enclose Nature in a Cabinet – even a huge palace could not hold her.'¹²

Catherine was not the only one with doubts about the ability of a cabinet to contain any more than highly selective fragments and it is worth noting that while the classic developments in collection and museological theory of the 18th and 19th Century are

often linked to Cartesian principles, it was Descartes himself who "...disliked the whole business of curiosity."¹³ The point to be made is not only that objects classified and presented in this manner are removed from the greater context of their operational environment, but also that this is the same viewing of the object in isolation from all its sites of interaction that contemporary design theorists consider problematic. Much contemporary dialogue deals with attempting to understand the whole raft of complex sociological structures within which the designed object is needed, desired, conceived, evolved, produced and recognized.

A consequent danger sometimes cited is that the boundaries of our perception may become so undefined, our understanding so generously all-encompassing through this type of analysis that we will drown in a relativist blancmange, unable to form a useful language with specific standards of value. With so many confusing and overlapping values, what criteria for assessment, for criticism, what parameters for curating, what anchors for teaching and training remain to us? We are left with some further related questions. Within the new and developing disciplines of integrative thinking, what signposts to the understanding of Western material culture, its categories and its taxonomies, has the empirical tradition of which the *Wunderkammer* is a part, bequeathed to us? With what understanding of our built environment, and the place each of us establishes within that environment, does that tradition leave us?

Wonder Continued

As the west moved towards the enlightenment and the broader acceptance of scientific rationality, periodic attempts to explain the material world in rational terms not only threatened deep spiritual beliefs but

also the comforting sense of mystery that accompanied them. In some respects the fear of that loss remains an issue in modern industrial cultures. Many subsequent developments and phases, for example the Pre Raphaelites or the proponents of the Arts and Crafts Movement of the 19th Century or those of the craft revivalism of the second half of the 20th Century, have included attempts to reconnect with what were thought to be endangered verities.

In the digital age technology is, more than ever before, associated with the pathway to, and the machinery of, the rational, industrial reality of Modernity. Unfavourable theories on the nature of crafts practices relegate their *raison d'être* to history. Contemporary production technologies and the aesthetic of Modernity have replaced them and consequently deny them a genuinely modern reason for being. The classic catch phrases of the Arts and Crafts movement, such as *truth to materials* with which generations of craftspeople have equated simplicity of form and the inclusion of technique as part of the aesthetic image, are contrasted with alternative dogmas about contemporary relevance and the new primacy of an industrial, high-tech aesthetic. These two philosophical models, often pitted against each other by uncompromising adherents, leave us with a conundrum. How is it that in the continuum of creative practices, the wonder evoked by an object seen within the values of one practice, degenerates into contempt of it in another?

To begin with, we have the primal wonder of the act of creating. Whatever else one might understand as being central to understanding the *artificial*, whether it be the context and narrative within which the created form sits, the many sites of interaction with it, or the accelerating network of associations which develop from it, nothing is as wonderful as its coming about. For this reason, the fears of commentators during the

dawning of the enlightenment, and periodically since, that wonder that is allowed to degenerate into curiosity will beget the mundane have not been realized. In the arts, as in science, every answer presents a new raft of questions and wonder retains the potential to beget even greater wonder. The history of men's and women's celebration of the sheer magical existence of the previously unimagined and the evolution of curiosity into a quest for understanding is part of the very core of our social and material culture.

The *Wunderkammer* was a key development in the evolution of wonder into a system of categorization and taxonomies across the three major aspects of a culture – art, technology and science. The contemporary categories of creative practice in Western, particularly Anglo-Celtic, culture into which my works fit have been inherited from that tradition.

Categories of Creative Practice

Creative practice, including my work, does not always fit easily into the common categories broadly labeled: design, art and craft. However the observers, critics, commentators, curators, theorists and educators who make assessment of the work come mainly from one or more of these key areas. I began the practice-based enquiry for this submission after the art-craft debate that was very active in the 70s and 80s was almost over but while the design-craft debate was still current. These debates centred on the nature of creative practices and the desire to determine which had the most contemporary relevance. In respect of art and craft they were also concerned about which should be prioritized for support by the academy and through the public funding gift, especially the Australia Council for the Arts. They thus become part of the larger story of our material culture along with science and technology.

Contemporary critical dialogue about the location of art, craft and design in material culture highlights varying understandings of the relationship between them. In Anglo-Celtic culture, possibly more than European, and certainly more than Eastern culture, that understanding often presents as one of oppositional camps. Core aspects of art, craft and design are particular to each practice; they are not one and the same thing. There is considerable overlap however. In this submission I favour the view that they sit within a continuum that offers opportunity for the establishment of new sub-categories rooted in all three.

Design and Craft

Designers, or more commonly design theorists and commentators, are often reluctant to recognize craft as having a legitimately ongoing place in our material culture. One reason may be that the relatively recent development of a theoretical and critical study of the field of design has not yet been able to identify the complex inter-relationship design has with other paradigms of making. The result is a propensity by designers to show not just dislike of craft, but contempt. To designers, now and tomorrow can be everything. On the other hand, the crafts have, from time to time, been predicated on challenging aspects of Modernity, either consciously or by implication through their work practices, so they can be seen to manifest as being unhelpfully dismissive of technology, even exhibiting a counter-culture luddism. Modernity, in the sense of being the eventual inheritor of the enlightenment, is easily associated with *reason* – the intellect and therefore as the *stuff* of design. In the same discourse arts, and particularly crafts, practice may be associated with the emotions, an association that can be taken to mean lack of *reason*. In this submission it is contended that more inclusive manifestations of the way human beings question their world can be identified,

providing a reaffirmation of both traditional and contemporary anchors.

Design discourse revolves around several understandings of the word. One is of design as object. Paradoxically, in that respect design is similar to craft; both fields are given to presenting themselves through an aesthetic, and both fields develop cultures unsympathetic to alternative looks. The use of the word *designer* as a label for a particular category of object asks us to accept the problematic idea that both designer and non-designer objects can exist, suggesting fixed, or at least recognizable, boundaries between them. Another common understanding is of a process-oriented model of design as problem solving. Design in this sense of the word is presented as a method – i.e. identify the problem, research the field, develop a range of preferred solutions and finally, present those solutions in a form intelligible to the client. The vocabulary of the method includes identification, analysis, synthesis and presentation but is in any case, predicated on describing a system of universal, linear, logic.

The discourse also touches on whether design is more appropriately aligned with the arts, as it traditionally has been in Australian universities, or with the sciences (i.e. technology), which is a growing tendency. As one begins to plot and credit many meanings for the word design, one has to deal with the overlap with a range of definitions capable of encompassing all or most of our built and manufactured environment. Buchanan and Margolin maintain that:

“Design is the conception and planning of the artificial, that broad domain of human made products which includes: material objects, visual and verbal communications, organized activities and services, and complex systems and environments for living, working, playing, and learning.”¹⁴

Design, in so far as we understand it as a discipline, is by nature mainstream. Both craft and art can manifest as social and/or political opposition, in fact the Fine Arts periodically make a virtue of it. However design is normally not engaged in the politics of opposition. Design carries undertones of organization, the establishment and maintenance of order, it having evolved as a practice relatively recently in the field, and through need. With a relatively embryonic philosophical and theoretical base adapted from that of the liberal and fine arts it is only now evolving a convincing academic framework. With design, as with craft, we are never quite sure if we are referring to a noun, a verb or an adjective. Are we referring to a product or service, a way of providing a product or service, or a way of describing a product or service? Design can be grafted on to so many disciplines, it is most often understood as part of the armoury, part of the practical application of intellectual property invested elsewhere. “Thus we have...”, as Richard Buchanan states in an essay entitled *Wicked Problems in Design Thinking*, “...the odd, recurring situation in which design is alternately regarded as “applied” natural science, “applied” social science, or “applied” fine art.”¹⁵

Art

The discourse surrounding the Fine Arts can present modern arts practice as a cycle. One point of the cycle is a battle where the forces of the academy are engaged by those of the *avant garde*. The *avant garde* in turn becomes the status quo and is challenged at a further point by the next *avant garde* and so on. Post-enlightenment art history illustrates repeating manifestations of a group or an individual at the edge glaring with anger, envy or contempt at a dominant centre. At the same time, some artists or groups have chosen to remain separate.

In the former, one camp eventually wins and suppresses the other. The latter, may be considered the determined *other*, finding meaning and validation in its essential difference. Today, the Fine Arts are much given to setting themselves up as the *other* per se – other to the banality of process, other to the drudgery of formalism, other to pedestrian and bourgeois thought. The arts exist within state and institutional systems within which the heresy of today is framed and presented in the academy of tomorrow. Categorization, leading either to inclusion or exclusion appears to be as much an aspect of creating a social system within the arts as it is in any other area of human endeavour. Validation is sometimes sought through rejection of the outsider *other*. It is possible to adopt a notional viewpoint from which any particular art form, any manifestation of material culture, any scientific pursuit is rejected – is left outside. Sculptors, for example, speak of their marginalization within the Fine Arts so even certain categories may divide against themselves into privileged or marginalized subsets. The validation of the safe and familiar, and the rejection of the *other*, through the invention or corruption of dogma are nicely reflected in the words of Isak Dinesen's Prioress.

“Ah,” said the Prioress with great energy, ‘Dr Sass ...maintained that in paradise, until the time of the fall, the whole world was flat, the back-curtain of the Lord, and that it was the Devil who invented the third dimension. Thus are the words ‘straight’, ‘square’, and ‘flat’ the words of noblemen, but the apple was an orb, and the sin of our first parents, the attempt at getting around God. I myself much prefer the art of painting to sculpture.”¹⁶

Wonder Reinvested – The Wunderkammer and Contemporary Practice

One aspect of the categorization of the *Wunderkammer* into the primary divisions of *naturalia*, *exotica* and *artefacta* that retains contemporary relevance, is that the need to categorize objects as being one or the other, i.e. in determining in what way they differed from one another, begged the complementary question of how they were related. “If nature speaks (*fraseggia*) through such metaphors...”, which Giuseppe Olmi reports as one major rationale contemporaries of the *Wunderkammer* offered for its existence, “...then the encyclopaedic collection, which is the sum of all possible metaphors, logically becomes the great metaphor of the world.”¹⁷ We recognize in hindsight that scientific and even philosophical enquiry represented only part of a rich tapestry of reasons for setting up collections, but at the very least, the enquiry set up a framework for considering object as metaphor, a context of the familiar against which to code the unfamiliar and celebrate and possibly preserve a sense of wonder.

Admiration and wonder of *naturalia* progressed, in many instances, into a preference for *artefacta* in which equally wondrous craft and skill overlaid the natural. Dagmar Eichberger, found that:

“It appears that some of these collectors did not treasure *naturalia* in the first place for their scientific value, that is as geological, zoological or biological specimens, but rather found pleasure in representations of controlled and ordered nature, which gave new meaning to these rarities. This could be achieved either by integrating them into a narrative context or by turning them into seemingly functional objects such as a scientific instrument or a containing vessel.”¹⁸

Thus human endeavour was placed inextricably into the equation and the centrality of the human being in the big picture – the *great metaphor*, was affirmed.

One of the premises forwarded in this chapter is an appreciation of the *Wunderkammer* in its capacity as a major historical agent for the development of scientific taxonomies and philosophical thought. The *Wunderkammer* is being posited as a model for the way contemporary Western material culture came to be mapped and how its primary categories are understood today. Consequently the opportunities and the tensions inherent in the way individuals and their work are required to fit within those categories can be better understood. Interestingly, we can easily identify a link between what we believe to have been an intent of the *Wunderkammer*, referred to by Eichberger as that of integrating nature, design, craft and skill into a narrative context, with both sides in the contemporary dialogue. The roots of the contemporary debate between postmodern theories of contextualization and relativism, and those of scientific rationalism (or absolutism?) go back at least that far.

Another parallel, one that relates to the value of studio crafts, i.e. objects specifically made for contemplation and exhibition, stems from a consequential development in the *Wunderkammer* story. As Impey says, “amongst items from the man-made world, those displaying feats of technical virtuosity proved so irresistible to the collector that specifically made pieces, often with no practical purpose, came to be produced specifically for the cabinet.”¹⁹ An argument occasionally mounted by critics and commentators against crafts made for the gallery space is that craft production is the historical genesis of product manufacture and should be left to die out. At the same time, it is argued, craft should not try to colonize the space of the Fine Arts by making pieces with no practical purpose. To even consider that argument

one needs to delineate between these two aspects of object/image making in a way which appears neither particularly useful, nor supported by the study of the history of Western art. We would need to accept that two discrete categories of objects should, and do, exist, one made with little respect for craft skills or conscious materiality and the other without iconographic or conceptual purpose. No such delineation was even thought of until relatively modern times. The contention contained in this submission is that idiosyncratic and individual narrative can exist across a variety of categories, none of which can be proven to deserve privilege.

The *grand design* as a system of, and for, order whether pursued with a theocentric or anthropocentric agenda, is usually made sense of as a continuum of determinate actions, themselves located within a system of interconnected disciplines. A core claim for *Internationalism* or *Modernism* – complementary terms for the defining movement of the early 20th Century – is its universality and the moral righteousness of its pursuit of the grand design. However, as the previous quote from Pevsner illustrates, the movement can involve the determined denial of the outsider or of an alternative object or narrative. Amongst advocates for contemporary, technological, *Modernity*, design/er is used as an adjective to refer to a privileged group of objects acceptable to a privileged group – themselves. In striving for contemporary validation, craft zigzags between paralleling itself with design and associating itself with artisanry and low technology, often rural, values. Arguably, an area the debate touches on too little, is the implication for our material culture of the promise of the *verb* craft, easily aligned with the *noun* form of design, in the sense of work, of skill – of doing. Susan Leigh Star, exploring the changing roles of craft skills and the diminishing place of materiality in the study of natural history claims:

“In some ways modern science can be seen as the push to erase individual, craft skill from the scientific workplace, to ensure that no idiosyncratic local, tacit, or personal knowledge leaks into the product. Anyone should be able to reproduce scientific results if they can afford the equipment and follow the recipe. Research findings that are purely personal or irreplicable are just not science.”²⁰

Craft as a noun, as a type of object positioned within the Fine Arts, or in the common ground between the arts and the sciences into which we may also fit design, may manifest as the unlike object. This argument contained in this submission is certainly not for the essential *otherness* of crafts per se, on the contrary it is intended to locate crafts practice with design in being regarded as applied natural science, applied social science, or applied fine art. However one suspects that if there were not some other factors that give the word craft continuing currency as a category, both it and the practice it describes would by now be purely historical, and an entirely academic phenomenon, as design theorists occasionally argue it should be, and which it demonstrably is not.

My claim for the works in this submission is that they, being partially rooted in crafts discourse, along with that of design and art, are an example of an individual, iconographic sub-category of object with a personal narrative that contains the capacity for eliciting *wonder*.

Rematerialization

The economic case for value adding to raw materials through design, creative production and innovation is generally well understood. Unfortunately, manifestations of *value robbing* can also exist. For example, the timber and wood products industry, and most manifestations of wood chipping, involve the translation of the precious natural into product, which,

for the most part, is ubiquitous and expendable. This is a good example of making the extraordinary ordinary, of robbing material and process of most of its potential to elicit wonder. Therefore an argument can be made for a strategy of qualitative re-materialization to be employed to complement that of quantitative de-materialization. It is a strategy not primarily centred on classic issues of preservation or conservation, on using less – although to some extent those outcomes would also be delivered – it is one of using material in a way that produces objects with provenance within a longer term, and lasting, narrative.

Conversely, a parallel discourse exists in which materiality as a prime anchor for human beings in their physical environment is questioned. The development of technologies is accelerating at such a rate that a public may have evolved for whom the primary satisfaction in the *artificial* environment is contemplation and expectation of the next development before having actually experienced the previous one. Virtual reality may be outstripping material reality in that technologies, materials and principles not yet invented are already obsolete in the popular imagination. Science fiction sometimes leapfrogs over science.

Nonetheless, human beings are located in a world that is centred on materiality – the physical. The challenge is to redirect the imagination back into, and to lift, the mundane. The challenge for contributors to contemporary material culture may be to re-invest the familiar with a narrative of wonder and material efficacy across the political, social and spiritual continuum.

Unlike Things – Outsider Objects and New Categories

The *Wunderkammer* tradition offers two, complementary, models. One is of the homogenizing, naturalizing, force that either subsumes the object into the dominant theme, or rejects it entirely and leaves it *outside*. For example, we can consider contemporary museological practice as a model for the creation of all kinds, and all levels, of constructs for material culture. Museum and gallery practice currently tends to reject the older, survey type of exhibition, which sometimes brought together an eclectic collection of the wonderful, for reasons including their being predicated on an outdated *modus operandi* of advantaging of the un-contextualized *hero* object. Thematic purpose and curatorial theme now tie many exhibitions into a manifesto, the purpose being to explain the object of wonder, the danger being that it will be explained away. The other model, perhaps more true to the traditional promise of eclectic collection, is of an enabling force that creates a space for the contemplation and protection of the unique, sometimes idiosyncratic object or category of objects and brings it/them *inside*.

The *Wunderkammer* systematized its contents by the very fact of its existence. No matter how diverse or seemingly unrelated the parts, the physical fact of their being brought together turned the furniture, in the first instance, and the system that developed from it in the second instance, into a rationalizing, and in many cases, a unifying structure. The *Wunderkammer* acted, as do the service parts of grammar within a long and complicated sentence, by giving the subject and object intelligible structure. Today we no longer look as much to a collection (a system) for a manifestation of truth, a firm set of values, any more than we look to written language for an immutable reflection of its subject. We may still, however, attempt to canvas an agreed

value based on an analysis of any overt or declared narrative within which an object sits, overlaid within any consequent meanings accrued by association or context. These values may not be absolute but they are at the very least a compass point for subsequent exploration. When all is said and done, we are still accustomed to looking to the fact of the object for proof of its worth.

Naturalia, *artefacta*, and the third primary category, *exotica*, formed into a system of categorization that also, perversely, threw up the uncategorizable. Then as now, the search for a pattern was only made possible by the complementary process of recognizing that some things elude the pattern. The negative manifestations of exclusion are familiar enough. For example, designers can often begin a process of self-identification by naming and rejecting those phenomena that can be most easily labeled as non-design. This tactic is easy to recognize in many manifestations of group identification, indeed of tribalism. Whether it is ethnic or aesthetic cleansing, if everything that is identifiable as essentially *other* can be excluded, what is left must belong. However the material culture mapping being contemplated here, which involves easing the distinction between the natural and the artificial and interfacing it with the exotic, is not only more likely to celebrate the marvelous, but also to look for it in the familiar. Creative practice that reflects on the categorization system evolved within the *Wunderkammer*, a system that allows for a sense of wonder at the nexus of the natural and the artificial, may well redefine the distinct, sometimes unforgiving, categories into which its products, iconography and narratives tend to be located.

In this submission it is suggested that part of the *Modern/Postmodern* discourse, that part which can be distilled into two, complementary, challenges – one of an overarching and inflexible notion tending towards absolutes, and the other, of a relativist, and therefore indistinct value set, might be addressed with a more inclusive model for contextualizing object. That model would allow unlike things, not only to exist, but also to play a part in our social narratives. Ultimately it is up to us to contextualize the paraphernalia of our environment, both natural and artificial and to make sense of objects as we fit them into our narratives and, where appropriate, ourselves into theirs. This allows for another, somewhat different role, into which the *Wunderkammer* and its descendant – the contemporary collection, may be cast – not so much as a metaphor for the grand design but as a vehicle for lots of particular, perhaps even contradictory designs. Furthermore, collection needs to be understood to encompass more than the formal gathering of objects through the agency of a collector or creator. It may also be extended to mean evolved groupings of prosaic, not only privileged, objects in all social contexts, both private and public.

Leaving aside, the possibly negative, control implications of classifying and stereotyping *exotica*, the sheer wonder that a seemingly infinite range of miscellany did and still can elicit is heightened by its being gathered and presented at close quarters. The bizarre and even the grotesque can find a place in the, sometimes perverse, democracy of the collection. In the 18th Century Frederick Ruysch created a series of tableaux made up of parts of deceased infants, which at once, fascinate and revolt contemporary observers. In a discussion on the varied and sometimes opposing rationale offered for maintaining a cabinet, William Schupbach remarked that while some scholars did not disguise their contempt for "... unrepresentative or trivial fragments of nature which

only wasted time...”, there were others, “...whose desire for certain knowledge was not so consuming as to kill their appreciation of the old, the fragmentary and the enigmatic.”²¹

The longing for the old is well understood, the phenomenon of collecting antiques and old bric a brac being an example of the desire human beings have to anchor themselves with the sureties and romance of the past. Similarly the theatricality of the bizarre has a long history of fascination for human beings; in fact that fascination is a primary aspect of the development of the *Wunderkammer*. So can a contemporary space for new idiosyncrasies be created and/or identified?

Most people’s homes and personal spaces are populated with an eclectic mix of objects sitting within a personal and/or family history and chosen within quite prosaic values of comfort and cultural recognition. In part, human beings are comfortable with what they know, and they know what they have experienced or that which has been bequeathed to them – memory being one of humanity’s anchors in a fast changing and sometimes alienating world. The challenge being proposed here, is that of creating a conceptual space for new works, or new categories of works, to become part of the “fragmentary and the enigmatic” landscape. When they are absorbed into any public or private environment, works such as those in this submission can take their place within a new critical mass and begin to layer further levels of meaning, through association with new people and events. They can be mitigated by, and in turn mitigate, the other components of their environment, with each core element having a story to tell, and in the process helping to establish the individual’s, or the group’s, iconographic history.

The challenge, addressed to some extent and in one instance, by this submission, is to explore the creation of new perceptual-cognitive²² categories, in the sense

of a new manifestation of categorical knowledge, that link the primal mythologies and narratives that underlie our contemporary culture with new personal or group narratives with which to give ourselves current identification and purpose – in every possible situation, from the *micro* personal and domestic through to the *macro* shared and public space.

Note

This chapter has been re-edited and partially rewritten from a version that was published during the candidacy:

H. Lueckenhausen, ‘Craft and Design in Museum History,’ in *Craft and Contemporary Theory*, ed S Rowley, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards NSW, 1997, pp. 29-42.

CHAPTER

2

Narrative Documentation of Design Works

My works in general, and the works in this submission specifically, represent a paradigm of creative practice that I am claiming is the result of several categories within that section of the spectrum of material culture in which I operate. These coalesce into what I would describe as a new perceptual-cognitive category. I will discuss the use of the particular term: *perceptual-cognitive*, further in the conclusion.

The works are described in four groups.

1. COMMERCIAL / POLITICAL
2. SACRED (JUDAICA)
3. COLLECTION
4. DOMESTIC

The four groups into which the documentation and presentation of the works have been ordered are not entirely discrete. A good deal of overlap exists between for example, private and public ritual or private and public collection. The groupings may best be seen as a convenient system for organizing this narrative – a mind map of sorts.

The perceptual-cognitive category is comprised of a number of conscious, and perhaps other, sub-conscious, considerations. The relationship between the designer/maker and the client/collector is predicated on a professional and *artistic* reputation that gives my works provenance and is therefore somewhat different to that which is more common between a designer and client in a typically commercial arrangement. All four groups are made up of works

that have a use *function* – that is, there is a physical job of work they need to do. That job is one of containment, protection and often display. Some are mannered investigations into functions similar to those of the *Wunderkammer*. Their use function extends to various manifestations of the space frame, i.e. the construction that orders physical space in the service of human beings, from grand architecture to miniature containers. However, the use function is not the only reason my work was chosen, nor does it cover the whole spectrum of functions required of it. The use function is taken as given, the capacity for the work to bring a personal narrative into a working relationship with the client/collector's historical or intended narrative, and thereby to create provenance is the key decider. This is equally true of individual/personal and collective/corporate narratives. The category I have established is predicated on this narrative being recognized as a function and therefore part of the *functionality* per se, not a separate aesthetic, or other, aspect of the work.

The narrative within which the works sit is primarily located in the fact and iconography of the works themselves, secondly in the circumstances surrounding their coming into being, thirdly in the meanings ascribed to them by the designer/maker, fourthly in the meanings understood and added to by the owner/collector and finally, by the critiques and commentary of experts in the field. This chapter will explore that narrative from the designer/maker's point of view and, where appropriate, the views of others.

Commercial / Political

Works 1-5 are part of an extensive interiors program for the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) building, Carlton, Melbourne, Australia.

The AMIEU project is a political phenomenon. It is an investment for the meat workers superannuation fund and a conscious, deliberate, statement of the recognition of the value of work and of workers. In her article *Boutique Office Building* in *Design Ink*, Anna Griffiths wrote,

“The Lygon Street building designed by Albert Genser and Associates is well scaled to its site, in a street which retains its nineteenth century profile and many of its original buildings. Built as national headquarters for the AMIEU and as an investment for its superannuation fund, it brings together two of union secretary Wally Curran’s apparently unrelated passions: the financial security of employees in an industry with a history of exploitation, and the arts.”²³

Wally Curran, the (then) Secretary of the AMIEU, maintained a career-long profile as a left of left union organizer and agitator yet controlled a huge superannuation investment portfolio. The AMIEU building celebrates the appropriateness of that fact – it is a typical Wally Curran, pugnacious, in your face, statement that “for the workers, only the best will do.” It not only celebrates the right of workers to a stake in capital as opposed to being locked in to classic confrontation with it, it appropriates the icons of capitalism and buys into its ego. What the building represents and how it came about was part of the conscious response I made with my work and with the projects I directed to other artists and artisans within a generously eclectic continuum sitting, none the less, within a coordinated master plan.

The building was designed to relate to the Trades Hall, a little further down Lygon St. and it was similarly designed to be authoritative and is therefore, also similarly, – patrician. My work was almost an afterthought, layered over the core concepts. In that respect, the whole project is eclectic and as consciously mannered as the neo-classic, Victorian Trades Hall. An interesting point here is that just as both classicism and high modernism can be cited as celebrating the public space while ignoring the domestic space, they are usually similarly overt in enfranchising power, advantage and authority. Here, post-modernism, including classic appropriation, is used to serve and celebrate workers, the class over whom, not by whom, power has been traditionally exercised. The building can be viewed as an example of the iconography of social conservatism and traditional power elites being turned back on its self.

Criticism included the term *Taj Mawally*, and came from within as well as without the union. The proselytizing role of the building and consequently that of my work was recognized and encouraged by the client.

It is also possible to interpret the conservative iconography of the building as a (subconscious) tendency to the historically complementary social conservatism evident in classic unionism and the traditions of the working class.

The conservatism of the building goes beyond its style, and even its political context, and extends to an old fashioned set of ideals: attention to detail, quality of materials and work-quality. In this context, it would be fair to say that it extends to a traditional, positive, work ethic that easily dovetails with the ‘protestant, working class,’ work ethic of my own background.

In this context, one can consider two sides of the skills coin:

- skill as artisanry – work – accessible to the layman. Work that celebrates high quality materials, particularly the materials with popular, traditional, even iconic appeal, such as those at the core of our social mythologies: wood, stone and iron/metal, and mastery of technique that lies easily within the framework of understanding of the layperson. This is the phenomenon most likely underlying the popularity of craft-based exhibitions in public spaces and the tendency for craft/skill-based creative work, wherever it sits, or identifies itself, in the craft – art continuum, to appeal to a greater, broader, constituency than the types of contemporary work where skill is downplayed.
- skill as distance – extraordinariness – the same qualities may paradoxically create a gulf which the viewer cannot envisage bridging. Therefore, while the conceptual framework may be within grasp of the viewer, the actual execution of the artifact is not, and its value is enhanced. Thus the capacity to invest the ordinary with wonder through skill.

The union, its offices and officers, agents, representatives and members are politicized and publicly positioned. It operates offensively, meaning not essentially defensively and often with a modus operandi of pre-emptive aggression, in the public sphere.

The AMIEU building works designed and/or managed by me were informed by four core themes. The themes, including the grids, some form of which almost always underpins my work, create a foundation of visual order that allows a disciplined, if generous, measure of decoration and narrative enrichment.

- a) A four squares within a four-square (Postmodern) grid.
- b) The bull's head icon.
- c) The guardian *protector*.
- d) Steps, stepping, staging, the ziggurat.

In the same article in *Design Ink*, Anna Griffiths further noted that:

“Designer Helmut Lueckenhausen was consulted when the building was already under way. His brief from Curran – to coordinate interior and exterior elements – enabled him to work with several artisans, craftspeople and manufacturers to create an ambience which is classy, restrained, but does not attempt to promote the simple and utilitarian building beyond its function and location. A furniture designer, known for both his attention to detail and his rather witty three-dimensional signatures, Lueckenhausen's stamp is clear, but his knowledge and respect for media and processes other than his own have enabled him to bring in and unify functional and decorative shapes and surfaces which, in different hands, could have been confusing; particularly in such small spaces. Lueckenhausen is also a former president of the Crafts Council of Australia, and he praises Curran as ‘a most generous client’, committed to quality and collaborative processes between design disciplines and practice. The risk though, with incorporating the work of several artists/craftspeople in small spaces, is visual confusion, where disparate elements compete for attention. Lueckenhausen had avoided this by maintaining control over the design of all the interior fittings, and also by limiting the interior materials to glass, brushed stainless steel and timber – silky oak and silver ash. Continuity is further maintained by the use of a varied four-square grid throughout the building, on the stone, timber and carpet floors and in other fittings.”²⁴

Announcing the Space – The Facade and the Iconic Lights

Frontage lights manifesting as stylized stainless steel bull's heads flank the entrance way. Evoking gargoyles they also reference the traditional symbols of animal husbandry, the cast iron animal heads flanking the interior wholesale bays in the Victorian era North Melbourne Meat Market building (later the Meat Market Craft Centre) and the rendered low relief animal forms in the façade of the Victoria Market, both in Melbourne. They are a mannered reference to the AMIEU and celebrate the type of representational iconography that occurs throughout the history of the development of medieval guilds into contemporary unions. Light is thrown up and down, rather than forward, which illuminates the granite with a backwash of light, highlighting the form – physically and metaphorically showing the way. The stylizing helps to bridge the history of this type of iconography to a contemporary application, the icon supplying the comfort factor of a recognizable visual anchor point and an introduction to the building and its social and political agendas. The bull's head, presenting its horns forward, also links to the guardian *protector* theme incorporated into several of the internal furniture forms, which, as with the medieval iconography it references, wards against evil intent – of which there is always plenty in industrial politics. The pair, flanking the entrance, announces and metaphorically protects the organization and the people with whom it has business – representing a bull, it is also a good symbol for an organization that means business and has a history of being able to look after its own. The fabricated sheet forms reflect the manner by which they were designed – through the agency of paper engineering – a field in which I worked for many years. The form is repeated on a smaller scale inside the foyer, flanking the showcases and the staircase, with the same intent of announcing and

protecting and continuing the proselytizing intent of the symbol. In these, the three main faces of the form are realized in opaque, white glass, allowing light to be thrown forward.

Entering the Space – The Grid and the Foyer

The square grid, reflected in various applications throughout the building is announced with slumped glass inserts into the doors and the window over the doors. The basic grid is a square divided into four with a smaller, darker, in this case – blue, square in the inside corner of each. Each of these blue squares has been cast with a low relief version of the bull's head. The same blue casting is set into the fence fronting the now glassed in square to the front of the gallery and to the left of the facade with the entrance doors, the translucent glass creating jewel-like touches. The doors open onto a foyer of humble proportions but fitted with rich finishes, somewhat like a jewel box or Cabinet of Curiosity in itself. I addressed the *fullness*, not by the more usual strategy of eschewing further decoration, which, apart from my own preferences, was never an option in this project, but by harnessing it into visual play with a series of *trompe l'oeil* installations calculated to stretch the space visually.

The first of these, over the slightly more generous headspace immediately inside the doors is a large light in the form of a shallow inverted pyramid divided into the graphic illusion of a coffered ceiling, referencing classic ceilings such as that of the Pantheon in Rome. The grid of powder-coated framework supporting the translucent panels has been designed with a forced perspective to create the illusion of the proportions of an actual pyramid. At the top is a transparency of a cloudy sky, again, referencing the centre hole in the dome of the Pantheon. The immediate visual effect

is that of having greater headspace and a feeling of light and openness in what is actually a ground floor location in a building with several floors above.

However, a more complex narrative underpins the theatrical *trickery* – the *trompe l'oeil*. The whole building is predicated on neo classicism, via post-modern referencing, which in Australia necessarily occurs at several removes. It's a reference to a reference to a neo classic revival continuum that spans several millennia, countries and cultures. The references constantly fold in on one another until it becomes a mix of role playing, politicking, posturing and, not least, glorious theatricality. The Masonic heritage of appropriating the icons of Egyptology and marrying them to medieval symbols of work to create an imagined past and to invest the *brotherhood* with contemporary authority sits teasingly, although it is certainly not meant unkindly, behind this work and its positioning over the ceremonial entrance to the building and its *raison d'être*.

The second is the expanding grid on which the granite floor is constructed, which I designed in collaboration with a colleague. In the centre of the floor the small, darker, square inserts, which sit elsewhere in the application of this grid in the inner corners of the four-squares, are enlarged. As the grid moves to the edges of the space they gradually diminish. The effect is to draw the eye from the richly embellished and furnished edges of the space in to the centre. In a sense it uses shape, contrast and the grid to create a visual hierarchy and a reading protocol in a way that is similar to contemporary typographic design. The eye is managed and the sight lines are mannered.

The third is the classical *trompe l'oeil* on the ceiling in front of the lifts that further references the coffering in the Pantheon and utilizes the traditional *trompe l'oeil* strategy of creating the illusion of there being more space than there actually is.

The interior program extends to the Queensland Silky Oak newel posts, inserting slivers of warmth into the steel and stone interior (see the notes on material choice for The Whole Truth display cases, below) repeated in the posts supporting the slumped glass directory and in the gallery signage, which picks up the square grid theme.

The Grid and the Gallery

The light fittings on the low ceiling in the exhibition gallery, which now sits behind the café, continue the application of squares of slumped glass framed in stainless steel with blue, inner corner, inserts – this time horizontally, to diffuse the light. Close observation of the parquet floor identifies another manifestation of the same grid system. The capacity for a subtly unifying grid, sitting like a subconscious common denominator underneath a rich mix of materials, finishes and decorative effects to create balance and order, where the same elements without that foundation could create visual chaos, is a strategy which is the key to much of my work. Strongly evocative decorative elements sitting within conscious narratives can, and do, operate within a system of order. In this context the work stands in direct opposition to the theory of decoration as visual degeneracy as promulgated in early high Modernism.

The Offices

The carpet design utilizes the grid, with clusters of four groups of four-squares, which then increase in further multipliers, ad infinitum. The carpet carries throughout the building.

In the same article in Design Ink, Anna Griffiths further noted that:

“The office fittings further contrast the formality of the foyer with extensive use of curves in the glass tile partitions and timber reception desks. While these are designed primarily to suit their function, Lueckenhausen has incorporated elements of his witty signature shapes in the detailing, in statements which imply that form follows function, but can admit a little levity too. The curved grid of the Ozone divider tiles (which allow for light to flow freely about the space) is continued into timber display boxes for ceramics, forming an effective and welcoming entrance for both workers and visitors.”²⁵

Work 1

The Whole Truth: Display Cabinets
(AMIEU)

Two Three-doored, and
One Two-doored, Cabinets
Silky Oak, Silver Ash, Silver Ash Veneer, Powder
Coated Steel, Glass, Low Voltage lighting,
Granite Niche Location



The changing nature of exhibition over of the Twentieth Century, particularly the second half, saw the development of a new age of curatorial policy in museums and galleries, particularly in the developed world. The pure wonder of the enshrined and privileged object gave way to a contextualized history and continuum theory where every experience, every object makes complete sense only if understood within its context. Today, the curatorial practices, the display protocols and strategies of museums and galleries are most often geared to understanding works within a social narrative and in the company of related manifestations of material culture – including popular culture.

Contemporary discourse tracks back and forth along the continuum between the pursuit of absolute, or at least primal, truths, and the relativism of Postmodernism – it being currently fashionable to track in opposition to the latter. However, for the work of a designer in the genre being represented in this submission, the development of Postmodernism, perhaps, to defuse the argument, it would be better to use another term such as *after-modernism*, allows for a layering of a range of personal symbols and meanings that has developed into a recognizably personal language. I have been able to develop a personal category of object for which I can now claim, both critical purchase and provenance. Historical and



contemporary contexts, words and images such as *Teraph*, *Sphinx* and *Wunderkammer* became anchors gleaned from my reading and extended into my iconography and narrative vocabulary. Sometimes this occurred symbiotically as threads of my world moved together naturally and sometimes these images resulted from a mannered search.

“The ‘whole’ of the truth lies in the presentation; therefore the expression should be studied in the interest of veracity. This is the only morality of ‘art’ apart from ‘subject’.”²⁶

The truth being available via the presentation provides a workable metaphor for the display cabinet. The perennial conversation about what truth is and how it may, or should, be pursued can be extended through this quote if one is of a mind but I used it principally for the suggestion it contains that irrespective of the morality of the subject, the method of presentation contributes to its veracity. If one accepts the transfer of that idea to the presentation of objects, one could suggest that exhibition paraphernalia may bridge the exhibited object and the viewer. A visually proactive role for the cabinet may then be considered. My insistence on doing precisely that within the development and promulgation of a perceptual-cognitive category unique to, including, and made manifest by, my work places these cabinets into the central argument of this thesis.

The three cabinets are comprised of three core elements, the granite niche, steel, glass and lighting creating a floating space, and the silky oak pillars and doors creating a picture frame.

The other element informing the design was the nature of the collection for which the cabinets were intended, an eclectic collection of contemporary ceramics, a survey collection not based on a curatorial

theme. Again, I exploited the idea that the cabinets are intended to give the works a relational context.

The key elements of the design include:

- The Niche

The rich and darkly formal foyer in grey granite with stainless steel highlights has, of itself, a grotto like quality. Three further niches are let into the walls. The end niche, facing the entrance is flanked by two stainless steel pillars, all of which recalls classical allusions to temples, statuary niches and has overtones of veneration and even worship.

The exhibition space, as does the classic museum, allows for the veneration of the privileged artwork in the same way as the temple does for the idol. Again, this touches on the paradox of the ordinary, in the better sense, being given access to the extraordinary.

The Georgian (and that of later periods) garden grotto and landscape/architectural folly also comes to mind. The *Taj Mawally* criticisms certainly were intended to allude to a modern architectural folly. One could interpret the space of the foyer as working at the intersection between a scaled down grand formality, that is, scaled down in respect of actual physical size, and the theatre and playful aspects of the grand folly with a rich mix of *faux* embellishments, greatly removed from High-Modern purism.

The reason for the AMIEU having a collection of contemporary, often conceptual ceramics also has more to do with the idiosyncratic vision of Wally Curran than a shared interest amongst the meat workers. Quite to the contrary, a number of good-natured stories abound about some of Wally’s tactics in forcing this interest on to the organization and some of its members. The best-known argument is the use of the

arts to improve the quality of life of members of the union, however the nature of the collection and its sometimes – incongruous context adds some richness to the folly image.

- The (Cabinet) Space

The volume of available space is maximized through the use of glass and minimal internal structure. Low lighting in the foyer and strong, low voltage, spot lighting on the displayed objects makes them glow. As always with presentation and display, light is a key. The strong presence of the architecture and the Silky Oak picture framing, including the columns, of the cases do not interfere with the viewer being drawn into direct visual contact with the displayed objects.

- The Frame

The granites and steel had been committed to by the architect and client before I was commissioned to do my part, as had the niches – although I arrived in time to design the floor pattern in collaboration with a colleague. A key remaining functional requirement was the security of the collection in a public area.

The silky Oak columns and the ‘floating’ doors (security panels) make a number of contributions to the viewer’s/visitor’s experience of the collection and of the architectural space.

The material intercedes between stone, steel and glass on the one hand and steel, glass and ceramics on the other. Colour, texture and, not least, all the historical and cultural associations of one of the primal icons of human material experience – timber – are evoked. While it is possible to wax a little too *flowery* about this aspect of materiality, in this case, where a mannered,

post-modern, neo-classical context was created with specific, political intent by the client, my specification of further materials throughout the project was consciously done. The rich, warm, evocative reds brought out of Silky Oak in this context and in this lighting place the cases as an, albeit happy, intrusion into the space rather than make them an extension of it. Again, in the spirit of the *Teraphim*, benign deities have insinuated themselves into the nooks and crevices of the built space. Wood has insinuated itself into gaps in the stone, the organic into the inorganic.

The post-modern columns further reflect, or mimic, that which is already a *neo affectation* of the building itself. They are not structural although they create a formal, shrine-like picture framing and lend an air of authority to the space in the cases and to the collection. The work doesn’t entirely speak for itself, it speaks within the grammar, which the cases announce – formality, reverence, and privilege of focus and place.

There can be little question that the theatre of the presentation gives the work a sense of drama, even if it is melodrama, which makes the whole considerably greater than the sum of the parts – meaning the ceramic collection itself. One could argue that the language of the cases contributes the link between reverence for a body of work that it may or may not deserve, if any such thing as a neutral set of criteria could be established, and a consciously mannered appreciation for the fact of it, and for the experience of it, in keeping with the political agenda of the whole building.

Work 2

On Edge: Guarded Display Cabinet
(AMIEU)

Ziggurat Display Cabinet
Silky Oak, Silky Oak Veneer, Silver Ash,
Silver Ash Veneer, Glass



Before one comes to the offices, on all levels one travels through the lift foyer, either from the staircase or the lifts. The upstairs foyer, which gives on to the two AMIEU related offices that contain the Guardian Desks, has a curved, glass partition wall giving on to a display cabinet – *On Edge*. The visitor passes by this cabinet so, in fact, sees it before the desk/s. However, in a sense the foyer is a precursor, even an anti-climax to entering the designated spaces. Within a story about the dynamics of the space, this is still the field before the gate, guarded but not yet within the *keep*.

The title *On Edge* alludes to a number of supporting images within the narrative including:

- being on edge, in the sense of nervous tension, alertness, dealing with fear or doubt,
- being to one side, alluding to asymmetry,
- being *at the edge*, on the border, the line between one state and another – political, geographic – outside of the centre etc.,
- being to *one side* in the sense of a temple guardian.

The security required of a display case in a semi-guarded area proved a nice link between use function and the story that was developing with this suite of works. I also linked this cabinet with two, possibly three – a, c and d, of the four building themes :

- a) A four-squares within a four-square (postmodern) grid.

The most tenuous of the theme connections but touched on by the square grid on which the cabinet is based – although not actually the four-squares within four-squares grid. The square grid of the glass panels in the curved partition wall is precisely extended into the grid of the cabinet. The four-squares

grid proper is reflected in the carpet pattern.

- c) The guardian *protector*.

The curved, abstracted *Zoomorphic* guardian form used in the *Guardian Desks* and in the individual small tables in the offices is included here. This time it sits within the cabinet, low to the ground and centre, squatting as would a shepherd dog, watching and alert. Again – this extends the field before the gate analogy and it's not too hard to develop the image of a small but alert outrider manifestation of the guardian keeping watch on his/her charges.

- d) Steps, stepping, staging, the ziggurat.

The grid extends into a ziggurat that not only extends the pattern off the two-dimensional and into the space but also steps it down to the floor. The eye is drawn from one dimension to another and from one plane to another.

On Edge is one of the four major and one minor display cabinets in this project. As such they are obliged to deal with the relationship between the displayed object and the display furniture. They were designed and made in parallel with my growing interest in the *Wunderkammer* theme and my consequent reading at the edges of

museology

(See the section: Historical and Theoretical Context – the *Wunderkammer*).

I had studied and worked in exhibition design during my undergraduate course, and after, and had learned, and worked with, the standard maxims about the need to ensure that the exhibition paraphernalia does not get between the exhibited object and the viewer.

Over time however, a number of contrary considerations made themselves evident to me. These included:

- my continuing fascination with the exhibition spaces that grew out of the museology of the nineteenth century – including nostalgia for the Victorian museums and the formal collections, cases, dioramas and taxidermy specimens associated with them. The old State Museum of Victoria in Swanston St. Melbourne is a (for me, formative) case in point,
- the idea that the role of the exhibition cabinet might be reconsidered. Rather than getting in the way, it might act in partnership with the displayed objects as one strategy in their contextualization. I chose to consider the cabinet as part of the grammar of the communication,
- the inherent difficulty of enfranchising professional ability and skill within a system requiring it to be invisible. The challenge is to understand at what point the cabinet becomes part of the display. If the cabinet, and its designer, were required to be invisible, why would the continuum of context therefore not require the room or the building to become anonymous? This leads to a hierarchy in which some objects/structures, and therefore some professions, are privileged over others.

- therefore, that the manifestations of the relationship between objects and the spaces within which they are located are many and varied.

On Edge has three cabinet spaces with lockable glass doors. The ziggurat provides a number of usable surfaces and the guardian form, another, larger, surface. This form is related to the *Nigel and Rupert Help Too* tables, and inserts their character into this work, as in fact, they do into the whole AMIEU installation. Displayed objects can be locked behind glass or presented for touch. The ceramics to be displayed, themselves functional containers, are contained and/or presented in the cabinet, which is itself contained by the architectural space. The viewer moves through all the spaces, either physically or visually and the whole phenomenon is a continuum of people moving through space via the elements of design.

The cabinet not only bridges one dimension with another and one plane with another but also explores the links and the breaks between the external and the internal. It becomes part of the continuum of containment and the delineation and categorization of space that is central to the experience of the built environment.

The complementary tension between these elements is commented on by the choice and placement of the materials. The guardian form is separated from the cabinet by the use of a contrasting timber, Silky Oak, which is common to all the related guardian forms in this body of works. A material and subliminal link is reintroduced for the viewer however by using Silky Oak in the inner lining of one of the glass fronted sections, whereas the body of the cabinet is Silver Ash, and having the rear part of the guardian form made in Silver Ash, whereas the front is Silky Oak. In other works it is the continuity of the line, or the relative placement of form that is used to link the *Zoomorphic* with the geometric elements. However in all cases a

Work 3

Against Innocence: Guardian Desks 1 and 2
(AMIEU).

Two Articulated Desks.
One Three-part and One Two-part.
Silky Oak, Silky Oak Veneer, Silver Ash,
Silver Ash Veneer, Stainless Steel,
Duraloid work surfaces.



“Innocence always calls mutely for protection, when we would be much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm.”²⁷

These desks are totally functionally integrated, by which I mean their function as work stations, including all aspects of contemporary office technology, sits within the narrative of the building and the culture of its occupier. Neither aspect is privileged.

The need for a screened work corral matches the guardian concept. The section immediately facing the visitor combines the complementary images of a barrier (protective guardianship) and welcomer (the guardian doorman). If the whole structure (Desk 1) is visualized as a vessel, the corral is also the figurehead/prow – the leading edge. This latter image also introduces the possibility of its interpretation as being offensive.

The image of the leading corral (Desk 1) therefore has three manifestations – that of welcome, that of protection and that of attack. The potential, and the promise, is of all three – a warning or a comfort depending on who is involved and with what issue. It was while thinking of those interpretations in the light of the overtly, proactive political mission of the client, and therefore the building, that I came across the Graham Greene extract. I was attracted to the fit of these twin ideas: the protection of the innocent and the contempt for innocence, with a proactive union and its symbols. While the culture of the MIEU is one of dealing with exploitation, it is not one of being patient with the idea of innocence.

All of these undercurrents notwithstanding, the lines of the desk (Desk 1) recede into the space, as with a forced perspective stage set, stepping the viewer/visitor

into the space. Reception is still the principal function. The visitor is drawn to the long counter-like centre section from which point the people at any of the three work stations in the desk can be engaged with. The smaller, distant corral, turned back to face the visitor in part echo of the leading corral is lower, softer and as the third and lowest element, draws the eye into the space. It also visually anchors the far end of the floating horizontal.

The second desk has a slightly different dynamic. It has the corral facing the waiting area but the visitor moves along the horizontal from an entrance door by the stern. It doesn't have a second corral; the counter butts the wall by the entrance. While it works in space management and pure design terms it does not present the same image of authority nor of the capacity for confrontation that the Desk 1 does. At the same time Desk 2 is not present as the guardian of an overtly political space so much as the *doorman* to the superannuation fund service office.

The guardian elements of the imagery of the desks carry the *Teraph* themes forward. The *Teraph*, or household, kitchen or hearth god is a benign visitor/protector theme that I have incorporated in much of my exhibition work. The *Teraphim* (plural) were objects of “reverence and means of divination among the ancient Hebrews and kindred peoples.”²⁸ This involves a dynamic tension being set up between sections of the work containing *Zoomorphic* references, adding to a suggestion of animation, usually arrival, and other sections of the work suggesting inanimate, usually geometric, *Architectonic* forms. The two types of forms are always complementary i.e. different but relating. The overarching theme is reconciliation and of benign guardianship.

The Guardian Desks resulted from a conscious consideration of the balance/tension that can be

inferred between the benign visitor and the assertive, possibly even aggressive, defender – a kind of Herman Hesse Steppenwolf duality (hence the Graham Greene reference). In previous works I had privileged the former, although I have noted that the physical context and mode of presentation can change how the works are seen, even by me. When two works designed and made to explore the intersection between the *winged*

visitor and domestic furniture, were installed in an exhibition in the Art Gallery of Western Australia, in the *hero* position on plinths, they could be seen to take on a slightly more sinister aspect which illustrated that, albeit unconscious, duality. Installed later in a living room, their shelves and surfaces inhabited by carved animal forms and small art works, they returned to their more benign character.



Against Innocence: Guardian Desk 2
(AMIEU)

In the *Teraph* works, a *Zoomorphic*, animal-like, element in markedly different material, finish and line is usually perched on a geometric, polychrome form. The Guardian Desks have greatly abstracted *Zoomorphic* references and they carry (support) the other major element. They still sit on another material, in this case stainless steel, but not on the larger form as before. This is a conscious change of dynamic between the two and is meant to put the *Zoomorphic* element into an active relationship with the other. It now does not merely present as a benign visitor but is load carrying – both in the physical and the metaphoric sense. In respect of size, volume and space, as well as pure design, this also allows for greater flexibility and more combinations – a greater range of relationships between the parts.

Work 4

Nigel and Rupert Help Too: Guardian Tables
(AMIEU)

Low Side Tables
Silky Oak, Silky Oak Veneer, Silver Ash, Silver
Ash Veneer, Stainless Steel



The tables – at their most prosaic, low side tables – along with the guardian forms in *On Edge* pick up on the same narrative, as do the work corrals of the *Against Innocence* desks. They have three manifestations – that of welcome, that of protection and that of attack. The potential, and the promise, is of all three – a warning or a comfort depending on who is involved and with what issue.

As with the similar form in *On Edge* it exhibits the quality of squatting as would a Shepherd dog, watching and alert. As stated before – this extends the field before the gate analogy and it's not too hard to develop the image of a small but alert *outrider* manifestation of the guardian keeping watch on his/ her charges.

The Nigel and Rupert Help Too tables involve three, finely articulated, intersecting forms with the *Zoomorphic*, Silky Oak element intersecting with the Silver Ash table as well as being perched, *Teraph* like, on its Silver Ash podium. The curved *Zoomorphic* form is offset for increased tension and animation reminiscent of a dog turning its attention to one side.

An essence of caricature and humour usually works itself into the narrative of the objects I make, which introduces a check to the danger of the work taking itself too seriously. They have their serious side but they, in common with so much of my work, have a humorous / self-deprecatory side as well. In this case this might also be a factor of relative scale. Sitting near the guardian desks in both offices, their relatively small size in the shadow of the imposing desks robs them a little of their gravitas. That is what led me to the cute title with the suggestion of “look at me, I’m helping too” – and of course they do, literally as well as metaphorically.

Work 5

Modest Truth
(AMIEU)

Divider with Shelves and Window
Silky Oak, Silky Oak Veneer, Silver Ash, Silver
Ash Veneer



The imperatives of application, needs driven, which often means client driven, design, can present challenges to the development of a personal creative vision and narrative. Just as often, it can throw up opportunity. Within a coordinated series of works being created from a project toolbox, the left of field challenge can sometimes occasion a sweet, if humble, addition.

A poorly planned square-section support column inside the entrance to the AMIEU office, too close to the wall to allow passage but too far to avoid the appearance of a misplaced object, offered the opportunity for a modest addition to the suite of display furniture to be realized.

The title *Modest Truth* puns on the truth to purpose ideology that celebrates a reductive aesthetic which most of my work eschews. A Queensland Silver Ash vertical panel spanning the gap supports four Queensland Silky Oak cubes arranged vertically with the top and two bottom cubes extending into the room and the second cube from the top extending towards the doorway. The latter cube opens through the vertical panel providing a window and the capacity to view the object displayed from both sides. In that respect, the window foreshadows the peek windows in *Works 11 and 13*, which play with the theme of stealing glances at the precious and semi-hidden – an affectation suited to the well-protected collection of treasures and wonders concept that sits behind the *Wunderkammer* or *Schatzkabinett* idea. In the same way we can steal a glance, not only at the displayed object, but also past it into the space we are about to, or at least may long to, enter. The cubes protruding to either side build on an inside/outside, either side of a barrier, image with the peek window offering a glimpse of what is otherwise hidden – a siren call to the voyeur within most of us.

It is also modest in its iconography, picking up on the square grid and the cabinets in *On Edge* but not including a *Zoomorphic* element, already well represented in the space by *Against Innocence* and *Nigel and Rupert Help Too*.

Work 6

Heimdall:
Guardian Desks, Stages 1 and 2

Three Reception Desks

Deconstructed and Redesigned/Remade into:

Stage 1: Desk 1
Crafts Council of Australia, Surry Hills Sydney
Silver Ash, Silver Ash Veneer, Solid Core
Laminate, Anodized Aluminium

Stage 2: Desk 2
Cooperative Research Centre, Wood
Innovations, Creswick, Victoria
Silver Ash, Silver Ash Veneer, Brush Box Veneer,
Gombiere, Anodized Aluminium, Trolley Castors



Stage 1: Desk 1

“We hear too of *Heimdall*, who was called the white god, and was said to be the son of nine maidens. His dwelling was beside the rainbow bridge, for he acted as the gods’ warden, guarding heaven from the frost-giants. He could see for an immense distance, while his ears were sharp enough to catch the sound of the grass growing on earth, and wool on sheep.”²⁹

A significant part of the personal language into which the iconography and narrative of my work is placed – the perceptual-cognitive category which I argue is exclusive to me, entails the re-manifestation of an historical continuum of mythologies into my, now contemporary, category of work. *Teraphim*-winged hearth gods at the humble end of the spectrum, Norse gods and other heroic manifestations at the other end, that are part of the history of men’s and women’s longing for cultural and spiritual anchors, become metaphors for challenge and opportunity – a tangible link between both past and current imperatives for human beings and the environment they construct. This theme sits across the four categories of spaces – Commercial/Political, Sacred, Public and Domestic, into which I have ordered the works created during this candidacy. In the section on Public works I will presume grander claims, invoking *public* gods within curated exhibitions and public galleries, work which claims validation of the eclectic, the celebratory, the theatrical and the significance of the stories I tell, within the academy. However that claim needs to be extended to some of the works in each of the categories. The work in public collections is not, of itself, more meaningful, nor more forceful in its iconography than that in offices or client’s homes. On the contrary, the capacity for my narratives, humble and/or grand, to embody meaning in various contexts is one of my core claims.

The *Heimdall* character of Norse myth captures a sense of duality related to the twin ideas of protection of the

innocent and contempt for innocence of the Graham Greene quote which sits behind the title of *Work 3*, albeit innocence, being always in the eye of the beholder, would certainly be mediated by the heroic tribalism of the characters inhabiting Norse myth. The workable parallel is therefore that of a functioning duality – welcome/invitation and protection/warning. This is the same duality of submission to, and projection of, power with which we are familiar in discussions on the role of the conventional corporate power desk.

A reception desk, by definition, is a tool for bridging the visitor to the identity and the functions of the organization for which the desk is a ‘gateway.’ This work was made specifically for Crafts Australia, the then peak body for the development, promotion and presentation of Australian craft practitioners and their work domestically and internationally. At one time or another many of those who were prominent on the National crafts and/or arts stage and many of those who were leading figures on the international stage, would approach this desk and expect it, subconsciously at least, to speak to them of the organization and the discipline with which they were dealing. This is both the challenge and the promise with which one is confronted with the design of works, the function of which includes being territorial markers.

A Federal arts organization working within a culture predicated on valuing the designed and made artwork and prepared to negotiate a brief that privileges coming at the work from that direction, enables the designer maker to prioritize investing the work with appropriate iconography. For once, the role of narrative sits foremost in the client’s mind and s/he is absolutely conscious of it. If, for the designer maker, it is not exactly taking coals to Newcastle it is certainly telling Newcastle how coal should look and be used. More often than not, a client cannot articulate his/her

desire to be associated with an affirming, cultural and/or professional narrative – a kind of personalized icon – but I have learnt to distil that desire from the language used. For example – “I want something of which I can be proud,” or “I want something that reflects me and who I am.” Naturally, as the creator, I usually want my pieces to reinforce the category of work that I have spent my career establishing and which I am identifying and laying claim to in this submission, so the task begins with answering the question: what can the intersection of the client’s needs and wants, something that is not always immediately or easily identified, and my iconography offer? My lay clients, whether commissioning direct or buying my work through a gallery, are only marginally interested in its use *function*. The narrative and iconography with which they wish to identify, even if only vicariously as owner/consumers, is their key interest, whether they can articulate that or not. Usually it is not, but in this case, the informed professional clients at Craft Australia could.

Heimdall is a good example of my contention that all the attendant aspects of a usable item are other, complementary, categories of function. Sometimes the words aesthetics, design, even artistic, are taken to mean a kind of decorative overlay placed over the primary functional engineering of an object. Function and aesthetics, and in this context, sometimes the word design is used, are taken to be aspects that accrue separately to objects and environments. That is a misunderstanding of the way human beings live with and value the physical objects and markers of the environments they create. Were that true, national, cultural, social, gender and every other sort of preference could be reduced to a common denominator of visual reductivism in a way that has demonstrably never been the case, anywhere in history. Even the completely mannered, reductive social and philosophical agenda of early *High Modernism*,

hitched as it was to the uniformity required by the manufacturing and technological requirements of industrialization and mass production never became all pervading – not even in the West. In my experience working on teams responsible for creating built environments, the public has never lost its, arguably primal, inclination to personalize, and decorate its spaces, often to the frustration of architects, designers and planners with a strong political/social agenda for doing otherwise. Form may follow function but what constitutes a satisfyingly inclusive definition of function remains the question. The title *Heimdall* presented me with a beautiful metaphor of both a bridge and a watcher at the bridge. Both images summon a rich armoury of actions and functions to complement the prosaic work surface.

The primary device in this work is a system of two, three-leaved Queensland Silver Ash screens with expressed, anodized blue and red aluminium joining plates. Each set presents on three planes with an undulating upper horizon. Five screens are flat and one is curved with the two outer screens manifesting with a curved end line diminishing to the bottom and with a heavily stylized suggestion of wings at the upper corners. One of my core leitmotifs, a *Zoomorphic* form originally adapted from a Jacaranda seedpod but which later developed into a lip form sits at the top of one of the inner screens and joins the wings in making an understated reference to *Zoomorphic* movement, presence, and importantly, personality.

The articulated screens, dynamic and visually animated, call up images of Japanese screens, theatre sets – with the abstract representation one is accustomed to associating with the traditional presidium arch set up of live theatre, and corrals (as in *Work 3*), with all the attendant imagery of protecting, hiding, guarding, keeping in or simply protecting modesty. They serve the symbolic guardian function,

combining a barrier – an inanimate image – with an animate *Zoomorphic* guard within the one element, while opening at the centre to symbolize the potential for ingress. The way the worker at reception and the received visitor necessarily engage through this gateway gives immediate physical expression to the working metaphor. The creative tension on which this work depends is again, that of the position of this desk being the, line in the sand, the point at which the duality of being kept out and of being invited in, is explored.

The anodized aluminium joining plates result from a conscious plan to create a decorative pattern of jewel-like inclusions, even calling up images of stars in the heavens, intended to overtly express the construction/deconstruction elements of the engineering – in the way some theatre celebrates rather than hides the mechanics of scene construction and change. They do, in fact, function exactly as they appear to. I did not intend however, for this design element to be a further nod to the *truth to materials* idiom that became such a large part of the post-industrial crafts revival of the Nineteenth Century and which retains its adherents to this day but which has never been part of my iconography. The imagery was conscious within, and particular to, the theatre set narrative of this work.

In keeping with many of the works in this submission, this work also explores a complementary, always benignly resolved, tension between opposites. Natural material and synthetic material. Natural colours and synthetic colours. Natural textures and artificial textures. *Zoomorphic*, curvilinear forms and pure geometry. Vertical planes and horizontal surfaces. In this series of works the *Zoomorphic* either perches on the constructed, geometric form or conversely, supports it in Atlas fashion. One always supports or elevates the other, the metaphorical as well as the physical function depending on symbiosis. The image

is one of creative, not destructive tension and draws heavily on a reconciliation theme. The opposites are always reconciled and the narrative depends on that reconciliation being recognized as a factor in the success of the work.

In *Heimdall Stage 1*, the work surface intersects the screens, a floating black top suggesting an infinite plane – the L shaped outline of which, partially due to the light-absorbing black, is arbitrary and can easily be imagined to extend to other screens, rather like a vast plane of black cloud intersecting even more mountains, into the distance and off stage, as though in a Chinese painting. The screens, invoking a stylized theatrical landscape, sit back from the leading edge; the design strategy thereby utilizing, again in stage-like manner, a forced perspective giving the impression of greater depth, and consequently size, than is actually the case.

Heimdall operates within the total package on which my category of furniture is predicated, the easy continuum of use function through to all the other iconographic, social and cultural aspects of what constitutes the functional relationship that can occur between people and the objects in their built environment. As a consequence, the operational functionality of works with overt iconographic presence can be surprising to some people as can, in other cases, the elaborate, decorative narrative in works where a prosaic functional minimalism might have been expected. Making the work usable involves the application of classic design tools such as ergonomics, i.e. human factors engineering – the science and art of making usable items that relate well to the physical characteristics and dimensions of human beings. Adequate work surface at the correct ergonomic height, access for electronics and storage are included as appropriate. In *Heimdall*, marginally more

Awaiting image from
NGA



Stage 2: Desk 1

Stage 2: Desk 2

a reception point than an office desk, the requirement for work systems was somewhat less than in Work 3, which required extensive internal wiring.

My design methods also rely heavily on the meticulous refining of the proportions and dimensions in my works and alluding, where it is not too reductive, to tools such as the golden mean – a classic system of relative proportions developed from systems identified in biology and organic science.

Craft Australia was recently restructured into a national lobby and intelligence organization for contemporary crafts and as the gateway for the coordination of projects through a variety of other national and state agencies and the office was moved from Sydney to smaller premises in Canberra. The new reception space was configured differently to, and was smaller than that in, Sydney. The work, within a relatively short life span, was therefore required to metamorphose into a new configuration.

This touched on an issue that has been raised before in respect of my work in commercial spaces. My works are highly iconographic and have the provenance associated with art works. They are initially very expensive and several have resold with accrued value during my working life. The presence of associated works in the NGA and the State Galleries of each State and Territory (except for SA) contributes to their provenance and lasting monetary value. Commercial spaces, even though often lavishly and expensively fitted out, do not usually have provenance and are subject to periodic refits by interior designers and architects. Retired furniture and fittings are usually consigned to the dumpster, something that is, happily, not in question with my work. For example, in one case a work was on sold to a private collector relatively quickly, in another case a reception desk, replaced with a larger fitted reception area, waits in temporary, and so far honourable, retreat. In this case, with the owner

unwilling to give up the work, I reconfigured it into a second-stage pair of desks, with the slightly smaller of the two being installed in the new Canberra office.

The screens were maintained in Toto and the work surfaces were redesigned and rebuilt, this time in Brush Box Veneer with a protective working-edge inlay of Gombiere, a hard, ebony-like material. The *Heimdall: Stage 2*, desks incorporate the screens from both ends of Stage 1, with the addition of a *Zoomorphic* lip form into the side where there was not one before. *Stage 2, Desk, 1* also utilizes the drawer unit and paper shelves from the original configuration. For *Stage 2, Desk 2*, I added a trolley unit on casters in Brush Box Veneer opening at the top and on three sides to act as a storage caddy.

The sense of an intersecting floating plane, or cloud, has been maintained to some extent although there is now a stronger sense of an offset cantilever with the work surfaces and the extra legs required by the reconfiguration giving the desks an increased, grounded and *Architectonic* quality. The theme of reconciled opposites continues with a creative tension between the dark horizontal planes, intersected by the vertical screens. The sight lines now extend through the respective ends of the desks, which is particularly suited to the Canberra installation where the protective screen faces the entrance and the open surface leads into the office.

Heimdall: Stage 2, Desk 2 has become the reception point for the Cooperative Research Centre, Wood Innovations (CRCWI), in its Creswick, Victoria location. The CRCWI has a mandate to develop scientific research outcomes into microwave and chemical manipulation of hardwoods and softwoods with procedures for improving the quality and characteristics of timber, with specific opportunities for Australian timbers. The design program of the

CRCWI is predicated on product development and showcasing as well as identifying and developing research and development parameters and product-specific challenges in parallel with the scientific research. This CRC is unique amongst its kind in the way design is integrated with the science and for the most part, it calls up the industrial, applied, commercial end of the design spectrum as a natural partner to technology, manufacture and the commercialization of intellectual property.

A significant component of the project involves education, technology transfer and marketing of the outcomes with a view to commercializing the research outcomes. The CRC is frequently presented at trade and industry fairs and exhibitions and in publications in order to market its technologies for value adding and wealth creation in the timber industries. The CRCWI has identified work with provenance and a strong iconography (described as the 'wow factor'), such as mine, as an opportunity to garner attention. *Heimdall: Stage 2, Desk 2*, has been utilized in exhibitions and publications in Australia and Japan, along with other creative and/or commercial design works to communicate a sense of extraordinariness and to be a lighthouse to attract critical and commercial attention. Art in the service of industry.

Now installed in the CRCWI Creswick office, it fulfills its primary mission as does *Desk 1* in Canberra and as did the original from which they were adapted – that of, as previously stated, bridging the visitor to the identity and the functions of the organization for which the desk is a *gateway*.

Sacred (Judaica)

Works 7 and 8 were created for exhibitions of Judaica organized and created by the Jewish Museum of Australia, Gandel Centre of Judaica, Alma Rd., St. Kilda, Melbourne, Australia.

A prayer in Jewish worship reminds the congregation:

“And this is the law which Moses set before the Children of Israel, according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses. It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and all who cling to it find happiness. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.”³⁰

The two exhibitions, *Australian Contemporary Design in Jewish Ceremony* and *Blessed be the Work: Australian Contemporary Design in Jewish Ceremony II*, were conceived to promote the broad brief and values of the Jewish Museum of Australia – to foster the continued development of a contemporary, Australian version of the culture of Judaism. The Museum is not, as are many others in the country which claims to have the largest number of Holocaust survivors amongst its population, a Holocaust Museum. These two exhibitions were primarily concerned with the future of an Australian take on Judaica. They were concerned with continuing the tradition of creating the symbols and tools with which to build a Jewish social and spiritual future.

In the first instance an opportunity of this kind, for a designer intent on building a generic category of work predicated on the development of an iconography rich in narrative, appears to be a godsend. Thereafter, the magnitude of working within the primal, historically foundational tradition of Judeo Christianity becomes evident. Also, the sense in which creative individuality and invention hazards becoming monumental

presumption is never so palpable as when working within the legacy of the Jewish Diaspora experience.

In her article on the second of the exhibitions, Dr. Helen Light, Director of the Jewish Museum of Australia wrote:

“What all Judaica has in common is that, like in the Biblical desert, it has been created in accordance with the injunction of ‘hiddur mitzvah’, that is, imbuing the ritual object with beauty, enhancing the performance of the ceremony... Throughout the centuries of Jewish history, ritual objects have evolved for synagogue worship and for the home, for special festivities, life cycle events or for marking appreciation of life’s daily blessings of food, shelter, health and nature. ...the aesthetics and iconography of an object is often a clear reflection of that of its country of origin... Further, the materials used and the methods of manufacture are generally a product of the industrial sophistication of the society in which the ritual object originated. These objects bind us together in our beliefs and our origins and simultaneously reflect our various and personal histories and memories.”³¹

These criteria, readily appreciated and taken into account when applied to religious iconography are not so different from those which are contained in the narratives I have documented for all the works in this submission, sacred and profane. In the section on *Work 6*, where I referred to the validation important public collections can bestow on the conceptual power of works contained in them, I noted that the claim needs to be extended to some of the works in each of the categories. The work in public collections is not, of itself, more meaningful, nor more forceful in its iconography that that in offices or client’s homes. On the contrary, the capacity for my narratives, humble and/or grand, to embody meaning in various contexts is one of my core claims.”

Here again, one needs to consider that all manner of objects within the built environment, no matter how humble, may be invested with ritual significance – firstly where a generic category of works has a planned and overtly articulated narrative such as mine does and subsequently by the owners and users who are free to layer any number of further meanings and ritual understandings on to them, either by intent or by accrued tradition.

Nonetheless, *Works 7 and 8* sit near the top of the pantheon of constructed objects within the Jewish tradition. While the first commandment makes it clear that respect for these objects must never cross into idolatry, they accrue massive respect within Jewish worship as being closest to the *Torah*, Judaism's most sacred text. That reverence extends to a hierarchy of sacred objects, a tradition exists that the objects closest to the *Sefer Torah* in the religious ritual cannot be traded down. That means, for example, a set of pews may be sold to finance an Ark, but not the reverse. The *Sefer Torah* is subject to ritualized behaviour in how it is made, handled, housed, celebrated and finally, disposed of. A worn out *Torah* is buried with the same reverence as though it were a human being.

As Dr. Helen Light noted in a catalogue essay on an exhibition on the *Torah*:

“The *Torah* is written on a parchment made from the skin of an animal killed in the ritual manner...The scribe (Sofer), who must be a man of learning and piety...before writing the name of God...repeats “I am writing in the name of God for the holiness of his name”...Because of the centrality of the *Torah* in Jewish worship, and the reverence on which it is held, the adornment of the *Torah* scroll is usually very decorative and beautiful in keeping with the Talmudic injunction of *hiddur mitzvah*, “enhancing the ritual art.”³²

The word *Ashkenaz* came to be associated by the second millennium of the Christian era with Germany or German speaking lands. In modern times, the adjective ‘*Ashkenazi*’ has come to refer to most Jewry, particularly North-Western European, the peoples who later extended into Eastern Europe and the traditions of whom are most familiar to us in the English speaking world particularly through the New World Diaspora and influential contemporary communities such as that in New York. *Sephardi* refers to those of Spanish and Portuguese descent and those whose communities spread into Muslim societies such as the Ottoman Empire and Northern Africa. The two works in this section relate to both historical/religious traditions – one each.

Work 7

Tiq: Sephardic Torah Case
(Jewish Museum of Australia)

Queensland Blackwood, Queensland Blackwood
Veneer, Tasmanian Blackwood Veneer, MDF,
Black Chromed Brass Fittings



In the *Ashkenaz* tradition the *Sefer Torah* is protected within an embroidered textile covering and hung about with ornaments that include breastplates and a crown and is topped by finials usually in the form of stylized fruit. In Sephardi communities an upright cylindrical or polygonal case of wood or metal called a *Tiq* (I've sometimes seen it spelled *Tik*) houses and facilitates the reading of the *Torah*. The *Tiq* also has finials at the top of the case.

Jewish tradition shares the *tree of life* imagery with many cultures and faiths. It occurs so often in the religious and mythical writings of various cultures that it can be understood to be one of the primal creation symbols of humankind. Working as I have, so often, with wood and within an ancient lineage of understanding it to be, along with metal and stone, one of the foundational materials of the natural world and its ancient mythologies, the coming together of these threads seemed almost ordained.

For the most part, having come to the use of wood from a designer's perspective; that is, it was the most promising material for the imagery I was planning and for the technologies available to me, I did not buy in to the crafts revival religiosity of natural materials, anymore than I did into the other woody manifestations such as the *truth to material* culture of looking in to the natural forms for inspiration or the overt celebration of the joinery. I have always treated the material as an agent of, and not a guide to, my imagery. Nonetheless, wood does have inherent qualities that must be taken into account for even the most practical, mechanical reasons and one does eventually become familiar with its common, or species-specific opportunities and limitations.

Iconography is a language that, like all languages works within an evolved, common framework within a culture, or sometimes across cultures, so any narrative insensitive to that would effectively be silent – just

as the works of the ancients became silent when the meanings of their symbols were forgotten or when the evocative symbols of medieval and Renaissance art retreat into decorative affectations in the sight of those who have lost the code. Some symbols however are so primal, and touch our cultural memory in such a profound and perpetually reinforced way that their currency never seems to be entirely lost. We can always grasp for some distant memory, some sense of, even if vague, familiarity that invokes a sense of recognition, something sometimes referred to as *a race memory*.

Of course it doesn't require Buddhist enlightenment to understand the link between trees, wood, growing and life. How the generative and seasonally regenerative qualities of plant life, and the construction and fuel use of the material links with the great age and scale of trees, as seen by people with a relatively short lifespan came to add up to a metaphor for creation is easy to understand. What is interesting is that the image remains as evocative in today's developed post-industrial societies as it does.

Many years ago I made a work for the International Year of the Tree. I fashioned a freestanding bench top jewellery case in solid Huon Pine with a consciously mythic theme that had been seeded through reading Tolkein, from whom I adopted the title. The trunk form opened to present carved shelves and each branch ended with a lidded seedpod trinket container. The work was so critically successful that I count it as a major leaping-off point for that particular phase of my career, strongly located for some years after that in contemporary crafts practice. Although my iconography has changed – I like to think matured – considerably, it remains seminal in my professional development and I don't wince when I look back at it, which is not true of all of my works of that period. I now believe it to be foundational in the development of the perceptual-cognitive category I have gone on to

develop. I had that work very much in mind when many years later, I began work on the Tiq. Both, in their respective, even though iconographically different, ways, manifest as tree forms.

In Tolkien's fictional creation myth, he picked up on existing mythologies, linking all of his imaginative social constructs, languages and legends back to his academic studies. Actual Norse, and other, myths and legends and languages seeded his imagination. In a way he created his own, now world-famous, cognitive category in literature. In that creation story the two trees of *Valinor* are *Telperion* and *Laurelin*, the Silver Tree and the Gold Tree. They were destroyed but their last flower and fruit were made into the Moon and the Sun and so manifested as sources of light. I adopted *Telperion*, the flowering silver tree of night, as the title to my work. Tolkien wrote:

“Yet even as hope failed...Telperion bore at last upon a leafless bough one great flower of silver...”³³

One can see how Tolkien's work presents another chapter in the tree of life continuum of mythic stories – for him, as he avowed and as can be gleaned from his work, it had a powerful spiritual, Roman Catholic significance.

In a Tiq, the vertical rollers around which the *Torah* is scrolled are each called an *Etz Hayim*, or Tree of Life a phrase used to describe the *Torah* in Jewish liturgy as can be seen in the prayer at the beginning of this section. The function of the rollers, to hold, and help present the *Torah*, or at least the reading for that day, to the congregation, allows for the perfect realization of the core metaphor into a physical act. In many ancient Tiqs, as well as in the *Ashkenaz* tradition, the rollers are topped with finials in the form of fruit. Tolkien's silver flower of Telperion is often realized in the Jewish context as stylized *Rimmonim* – pomegranates and sometimes *Tapuchim* – apples.

The fruit of the Tree of Life presents an evocative and crystal clear symbol to the congregation, it is the fruit and the crowning glory of the word of God.

For me, this was evocative of the double-edged sword of promise and threat that is part of the genesis story and that of the fall of man. It may even be one of the most seminal manifestations of the duality that has evolved into the Judeo-Christian tradition. Irrespective of one's own faith, or otherwise, this is one of the seminal stories in our Western way of knowing ourselves, of our social mythology. It pitches the promise of knowledge against the pain of knowing. As manifested in the principles behind keeping secret the *holy of holies* in the temple, and in warnings not to look upon the contents of the Ark, the catastrophic price of seeing what one should not see, knowing what one should not know, kept the Western world in thrall until the enlightenment, and keeps many in thrall to this day. That is why I chose to portray apples – a symbol with currency in my own traditions.

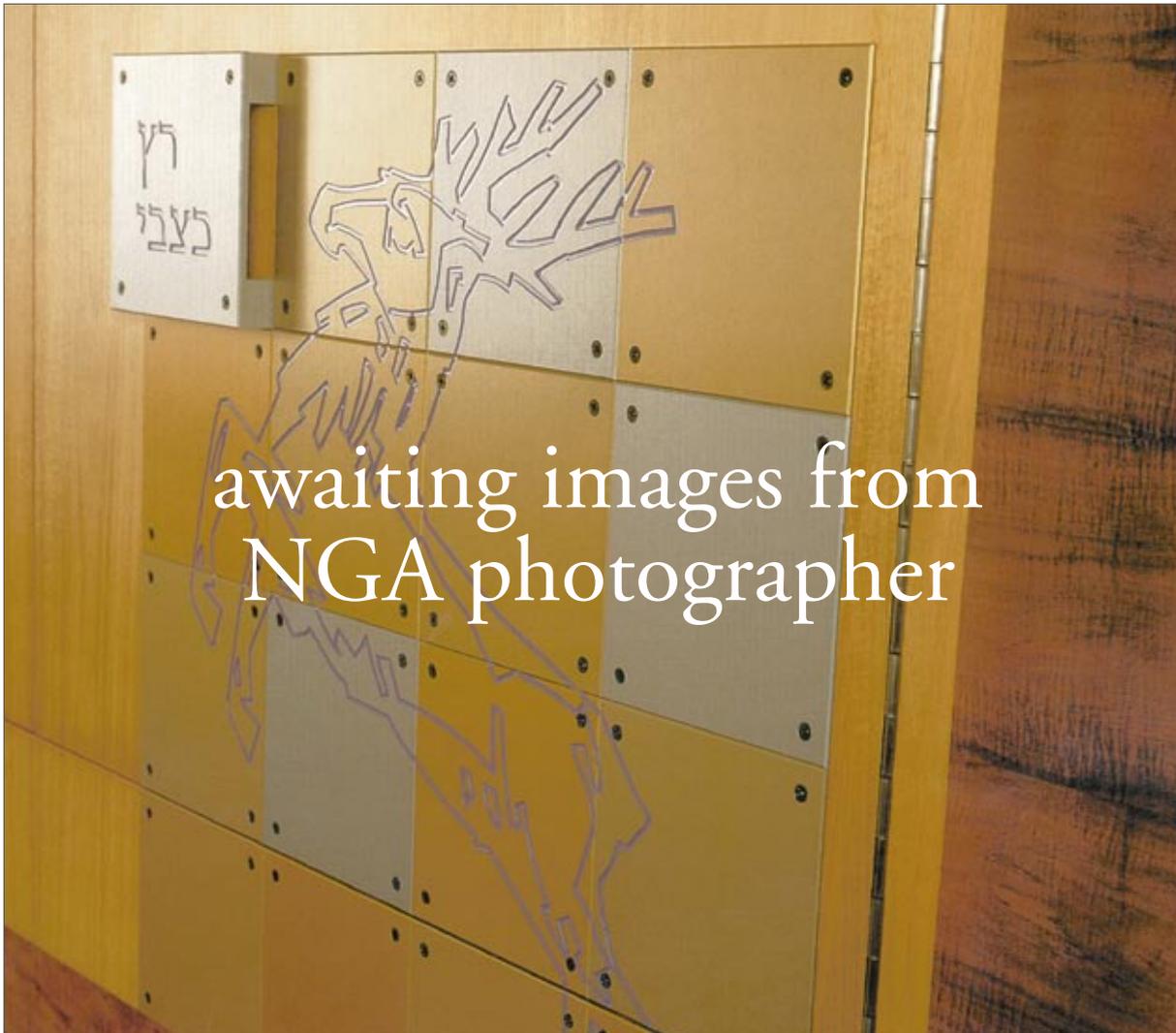
The Tiq was made with Queensland Blackwood on the outside and Tasmanian Blackwood on the inside, an Australian timber of the Acacia family as prescribed for the Ark of the Covenant. The *trunk* of the tree has twelve facets with the grain presented in a herringbone pattern. The twelve sides represent the twelve tribes described in scripture and the *canopy* is realized as a cone with leaves abstracted into a triangulation that presents as a series of concentric Stars of David in plan. The patterns therefore pick up on and represent some of the secondary symbols in Jewish iconography.

In keeping with the aspects of finish and detailing inherent in all of the works in this submission the hinges and the locking catch were designed and fabricated in brass and finished in black chrome (See “The inside is as the outside,” in *Work 8*).

Work 8

Ark of the Law: Aron Hakodesh,
(National Gallery of Australia, Canberra [NGA])

Blackwood (Acacia), Blackwood Veneer.
Blackwood Veneer and
Aluminium Finials (Crowns).
Anodized, Engraved and Paint-filled Aluminium
Plates (Tiles)



Synagogues often have a broad physical layout, resembling the Christian churches of the less hierarchical protestant traditions such as the Methodists. The spaces in these synagogues express a sense of being built to accommodate a community of scholars, a *sacred parliament* gathered in a learned and discursive, as well as a worshipful, tradition. The main focus is always the Ark of the Law – Aron Hakodesh in *Ashkenazi* synagogues and Hechal in the Sephardi versions, where the *Torah* are kept. The traditions and some of the iconography have been inherited from the original Ark or chest that housed the Tablets of the Ten Commandments.

“Bezalel then made the Ark, a chest of acacia-wood, two and a half cubits long, one cubit and a half wide, and one cubit and a half high. He overlaid it with pure gold both inside and out and put a band of gold all round it.” Exodus, 37:1-2. 34

This Ark of the Law is comprised of an amalgam of personal and Jewish ritual symbolism, and a variety of material and design strategies.

In this work, the reconciliation/duality theme is expressed through the lighter cabinet form, the space that is to house the *Sefer Torah*, and, symbolically, to host the *Torah* itself, being held aloft by the cradle/stand form. The holding aloft becomes a paraphrasing of the procession of the Torah through the congregation. Although neither of the main components has an overtly *Zoomorphic* quality, the sense of one part being cradled, protected and elevated in veneration by the other is a conscious element of the design. It also references a phenomenon common to most forms of worship including the elevation and procession of icons in various religions and holy places such as the Elevation of the Host in the Roman Catholic mass. Again, as with the tree of life, the basic

action scripting for the veneration by the congregation, can be seen to draw on ancient practices that exist across many cultures and faiths and presents its own logic in the design of the configuration of this work.

As with the Tiq, I used Blackwood (Acacia), an Australian indigenous relative of the wood specified in Exodus to re-enact scripture and to give a specifically contemporary Australian, context to this ancient tradition, particularly in keeping with the Jewish Museum’s mission of bridging the past into a living future. The veneers were also chosen to emphasize the theme of complementary duality. The cradle/stand utilizes a deeply toned veneer with a dark pattern suggestive of fiddle-back. The main cabinet uses veneers cut from quarter-sawn timber that was bleached to heighten the contrast between its golden glow and the bronze tones of the cradle/stand.

An underlying grid governing the dimensions of the parts and the placement of the veneers gives the work a formal order that ties the various parts into a functioning whole. One can conjure a sense of sacredness out of the geometry, the mathematics, the formula, which neatly reflects the primal sacredness of the contents of the Ark.

As Robert Bell, Senior Curator Decorative Arts and Design National Gallery of Australia noted:

“Its overall design, based on a precise mathematical system of grids, reflects the formal order implicit in the sacred contents that it was designed to contain and the symbolic function it was intended to serve. As any cabinet can conceal or reveal its contents, so too can this Ark suggest the possibility of order, the continuity of tradition and the world of the spirit.”³⁵

The square is the basic unit that is utilized in all of the components, as can be seen in:

- the overall dimensions of the work and the placement of the various elements within the work,
- the grid of the anodized aluminium tiles,
- the widths of the veneer panels,
- the dimension and cubic volume of the voids,
- the dimension and cubic volume of the crowns.

Cubic voids in the ends of the cradle/stand allow them to be resolved as four abstracted columns, topped by a cubic prism of triangles representing crowns in a geometrically discreet form, which frequently figure in historical *Torah* decorations and Arks of the Law, adding authority and majesty.

The face of the Ark presents in a postmodern four-square grid similar to one of the core themes in the AMIEU project. The face is divided into a grid of one hundred squares and the sixteen squares in each corner are inset with anodized aluminium plates, the gold and silver tones of which reference the precious metals ordained for the construction of the Ark of the Covenant. Each set of sixteen tiles has a paint filled linear engraving derived from, Ethics of the Fathers (Pirke Avot) 5,31: Strong as a leopard, swift as an eagle, fleet as a deer, heroic as a lion. Powerful and poetic classical imagery faces the congregation and speaks to the authority of the contents of the Ark with metaphors of nature.

The inside faces of the doors are inset with aluminium tiles of the same size, engraved with the Ten Commandments in Hebrew, two tiles and five of the Commandments on each door. When the doors are opened to bring the *Torah* forth, the congregation is also presented with the Commandments. A final tile set into the back face of the inside of the Ark contains

the Hebrew inscription: *The inside is as the outside*. In the sacred sense this refers to an admonition that worthiness should not only be found in outward show but also in inward, sincere belief. It also refers to the primal supremacy of the *Torah* requiring the inside of the Ark to be no less venerated than its presentation – what really counts is what’s on the inside, the meaning of the law. In the profane sense it is also a conceit, which I maintain in all of these works, that qualitatively they are no less finished and no less presentable inside, underneath or around the back. Where possible I arrange for exhibition pieces to be free standing to evidence that point.

Jason Smith, Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Victoria wrote about this work,

“Standing before his ‘Ark’, one cannot help but be awed by the precision of Lueckenhausen’s detailing and finishes. It is this very precision that, paradoxically, enables Lueckenhausen’s objects to transcend their technical virtuosity and materiality. For instance, the book-matching of the timber veneer at the base of the ‘Ark’ results in a series of three concentric rings that echo the incorporeal world that scriptures suggest is the final destination of the soul.

Lueckenhausen’s ‘Ark of the Law’ is an extraordinary work of contemporary design that must somehow and somewhere take its rightful place in the Synagogue. Seen in the context of the exhibition for which it was made, however, the ‘Ark’ stood amongst other items of Judaica as an object of potential function. The emptiness of the ‘Ark’ indicated its promise – as a home; the temple of the holy world; the guiding principles on which the spiritual and daily lives of so many people are based. What is inside exists outside.”³⁶

While I was considering all the design and religious implications of working on this piece I maintained a correspondence and had a continuing conversation with Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky who had been the President of the Jewish Museum of Australia and who was the principal adviser for both exhibitions. I had read that where a *Sefer Torah* was located in a house, the room in which the Ark stands becomes practically a Synagogue – the *Torah* may not be housed inappropriately, nor must an Ark be used for anything other than housing it. I wanted to identify the intellectual and spiritual space between an inanimate object – a cupboard – and one with a sacred function. I wrote to him,

“I have one more question – at what point between intent and realization do you believe an ark becomes an ark? I read that it is not permissible to use an ark for any lesser purpose. So what is the essential, primal difference between an ark and a cupboard? Is it once it has been put to that use, once it has contained the *Torah*, that it cannot ever become anything else, or the very fact that it was conceived and intended as such?

I would imagine that you could decide, for whatever reason, to use a wardrobe as an ark. Is it at that point of first use that it attains that significance which won't allow it to return to being a wardrobe? I wonder if the symbolic elements made the difference – but then, I would imagine that there is no absolute reason why one wouldn't affix the tablets of the law to a domestic object. After all, nothing, no matter how mean, is outside that law. The only conclusion I can come to is that it is either connected with intent, or the physical proximity of the *Torah*. Is that right?”

From memory, because he answered over the phone, the ritualized manner in which a *Sefer Torah* is brought about, maintained and used, and finally buried and the fact that proximity to the *Torah* establishes the position of any object in the value hierarchy in a Synagogue, the physical issues were of primary importance. For me, a key issue is that with this piece as with any piece in any of the categories covered in this presentation, the line between an inanimate object and a living icon with a proactive place in the ritual of living may be a very fine one in discourse but is nonetheless powerful in practice. I maintain that a reductive functional objectivity is simply not possible for human beings existing within complex cultural frameworks. The proof is all around us, people simply don't live like that. The investment of belief, memory and hope, is all.

Collection

“First, the collecting of a most perfect and general library, wherein whosoever the wit of man hath heretofore committed to books of worth... may be made contributory to your wisdom. Next, a spacious, wonderful garden, wherein whatsoever plant the sun of divers climate, or the earth out of divers moulds, either wild or by the culture of man brought forth, may be...set and cherished: this garden to be built about with rooms to stable in all rare beasts and to cage in all rare birds; with two lakes adjoining, the one of fresh water, the other of salt, for like variety of fishes. And so you may have in small compass a model of the universal nature made private. The third, a goodly, huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine has made rare in stuff, form or motion; whatsoever singularity, chance, and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever Nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included. The fourth such a still-house, so furnished with mills, instruments, furnaces, and vessels as may be a palace fit for a philosopher’s stone.”³⁷

Bacon’s early description of what a gentleman needs to order his life, and secure his status, was given towards the end of the Tudor era, the last great English medieval dynasty, and at the dawn of a new era of scientific rationalism of which he was one of the heralds.

“Francis Bacon, whose aim it was to revolutionize the scientific study of nature, famously told his uncle, Lord Burghley, in 1552, “I have taken all knowledge to be my province”.”³⁸

Bacon not only articulated the original *raison d’être* of the *Wunderkammer* “And so you may have in small compass a model of the universal nature made private,” he also hinted at the development of the taxonomies, based in science, which were to radically

change the ways men and women understood their world and which would lead to the enlightenment: “whatsoever Nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included.” While in that era, even for Bacon, nature was a euphemism for the divine scheme; the eventual result would be a *nature* of science. (see the Chapter on Historical and Theoretical Context).

The works in this section sit within the tradition of collecting and displaying the wonderful – in the sense of that which elicits wonder – a tradition that accelerated, via the *Wunderkammer*, into our contemporary categories and taxonomies, and therefore our understanding, of things: exotic, natural and artificed. They consciously address the ritual of collecting and the performance of display, allowing for the whisper of the almost silent, domestic gesture, the broadcasting of the assertive public statement, and all of the many stages in between.

Work 9 was created within a curated traveling-exhibition project predicated on exploring conceptual linkages between crafts and kindred trades – in the case of my work – between woodcraft and surgery. In the symbiotic relationship that exists between the container and the contained, the exhibition case and the exhibited object, *Work 9* represents the object.

Works 10, 11 and 13 represent the container, exhibition-case side of that duality.

Work 12 is a series, or set, of small, lidded containers that were designed to fit into the grid and the display space of the cabinets in *Work 11*, in an installation in the gallery where they were first exhibited. They are consequently both containers and contained so they operate within the fluid continuum I touched on in the narrative on *Works 1 and 2* – the infinite expansion or contraction of spaces within spaces,

objects within objects.

Because *Works 1, 2 and 5* are so particularly located within the structure and the politics of the AMIEU project, I have included them in Category 1: Commercial/Political. The exhibition narrative within which they sit is nonetheless linked to that within which the works of this category: Collection, also sit. For all of these works centred on housing and displaying collections, my earlier comments hold true: “The truth being available via the presentation provides a workable metaphor for the display cabinet. ...If one accepts the transfer of that idea to the presentation of objects, one could suggest that exhibition paraphernalia may bridge the exhibited object and the viewer. A visually proactive role for the cabinet may then be considered. My insistence on doing precisely that within the development and promulgation of a perceptual-cognitive category unique to, including and made manifest by my work, places these cabinets into the central argument of this thesis.”

Work 9

Aus der Wunderkammer:
From the Cabinet of Wonders
(Artist's Collection)
A Pair of Matched (Conjoined) Containers

Accompanied by Specimens
Preserved in Olive Oil.
Huon Pine, MDF, Precatalysed Lacquer,
Specimen Jars



Symmetry, Crafts Meet Kindred Trades and Professions, was a project resulting from the collaboration between Kevin Murray, at that time, a freelance writer and curator, Craft Victoria and the Australian Exhibitions Touring Agency. It was funded by the Australia Council and various other fellowships and organizations which gave the project immediate kudos. It drew together ten crafts practitioners and set them to making works that explored the ground between four categories of crafts practice and four trades and professions, which Kevin Murray had determined could be considered kindred.

The couplings were: Jewellery and Dentistry, Weaving and Journalism, Glass and Jazz, and Woodwork and Surgery. The latter, by virtue of the imagery of cutting, dissecting, repairing, reconstructing etc. had the greater capacity of the four to cause people to grit their teeth. As Kevin Murray wrote,

“The picture of orthopaedic surgeons using Black & Decker drills seems like a macabre joke, yet we live in a world where it is occasionally necessary to treat the human body as though it were a broken bit of furniture. Today, when surgeons speak of the ‘carpentry side’ of their professions, they allude to an inheritance of manual skills. It is this digital dexterity which ironically kept surgery subservient to the more intellectual work of the physicians until the late Eighteenth Century...for Helmut Lueckenhausen ... the particular use of Huon Pine grants solid timber the kind of sacred fragility normally associated with human flesh.”³⁹

I wasn't completely convinced about the validity of the linkages per se but the *Wunderkammer* research had identified an interesting tangent – taxidermy, a craft that had played a primary role in the development of the art and science of collecting animal, fish and bird specimens. Taxidermy subsequently became one of the contributing agents in the evolution of the ‘*Wunderkammer*’ into the natural history museum of

the enlightenment and beyond. It presented a possible missing link between surgery and woodcraft that allowed me to steer the work, albeit via Kevin Murray's parallel framework, into my developing narrative. I wrote to him:

“I recall having visited an acquaintance of mine, a taxidermist, who was also a carver of Netsuke – wooden miniatures. An obsessive collector and classifier, he housed an extensive array of curiosities, most of which were animal tissue and all of which related to the traditional natural sciences in his treasure-filled workshop at the end of his garden.

Rack upon rack of ivory and bone carvings sat near boxes and cupboards full of twisted root and branch forms, which in turn complemented a spare parts inventory of feathers, bird skins and jars of preserved animals and animal parts. After a while his wife brought a tray of coffee through the garden, past a fernery, past aviaries stocked with living birds and reminded him that the house was full of visitors, relatives and children. During the visit it occurred to me that my acquaintance sat like a benign comptroller amongst all the paraphernalia of his world – house, garden, people, live birds in cages and dead birds in boxes. He was able to fish admire a possum embryo in a jar, take an ivory toothbrush out of a drawer and show me a netsuke he had carved from a root while delivering an unbroken commentary. He made no distinction between any of the raw material of his craft, nor was there, it seemed to me, much of a break between his craft and his extended professional and domestic life.”

It occurred to me at the time that I was witnessing a paradox where wonder and routine objectification were being smoothed into an unbroken storyline.

The linking of the cutting and manipulation of animal, most particularly human, tissue with the decorative arts aspect of crafts practice, which appears to our modern eyes to be unconscionable, even

improbable, appears slightly less so when we become familiar with the work of Frederick Ruysch (1638-1731). Stephen Jay Gould wrote about his routine use of human body parts in decorative installations and tableau:

“He made exquisite and elegant displays of material that many people today might regard as gruesome – entire fetuses and neonates, body parts, organs with their vascular systems beautifully injected – all preserved in alcohol and placed in glass jars... For the consummate craftsman Ruysch... the bizarre found ideal expression in the tradition of collecting then current – the ‘*Wunderkammer*’, with its emphasis on the exotic, and its keen understanding that fascination often arises from fear.”⁴⁰

The use of human body parts as crafted, decorative items, albeit post-mortem, by Ruysch and his contemporaries is not unique to that time or that culture; the other practices that spring to mind, for example, those that originate from exotic, *primitive* cultures such as making trophies from body parts, do not seem any less macabre from our contemporary viewpoint. Perhaps the growing practice of body manipulation: tattooing, piercing, decorative scarring and even decorative skin implanting in various manifestations of the new, urban tribalism has the potential to mitigate our revulsion through increasing familiarity with the utilization of living tissue as a site for decoration. The word decoration may be the key to why the surgery/woodcraft analogy appeared at least forced and at most macabre to many viewers and commentators. The saw-bones and wood saw analogy is not difficult to grasp but the decorative display quality inherent in crafts practice is not so readily transferable to human tissue, perhaps particularly post-mortem, and may be where most people prefer to draw the line, leaving them disinclined to pursue the thought any further.

Jenny Zimmer wrote in a critique of the exhibition in her craft column in the Melbourne Age, 5 July 1994, “The exhibition also highlights the gulf between work made with aesthetic intention and that which must solve a practical problem and do the job.” It was not, and is not, uncommon to make that distinction although I have offered another view, that it is, as I have previously written, my contention that all the attendant aspects of a usable item are other, complementary, categories of function, and that the gulf is actually much more of a blurred line.

In *Aus der Wunderkammer* I made and grouped four works that Peter Timms in his critique in his column in the Herald Sun, Age, 5 July 1994, took to be “...the coolest and most elegant joke in the show. Not only are his little Huon Pine cabinets rather anthropomorphic, they are accompanied by little timber objects pickled like body parts in a jar.” He was right in so far as I did draw a number of conceptual threads together in what might be interpreted as black humour.

In this work I married the duality theme – the theme that manifests as a complementary relationship of opposites in most of the works in this submission – with images of specimens. Two *Zoomorphic* forms perch on geometric lacquered cubes. The *Zoomorphic* forms have lids opening on to interior spaces and the cubes are a simple carcass and drawer configuration. In that respect they are quite benign and fit the pattern of other pairs or groupings of containers such as, for example, *Work 17*.

The point of intersection of the base cube and the *creature* is a perfect square, creating a comfortable marriage of the two forms. Visually, the cubic form gradually metamorphoses into the *Zoomorphic* form, which curves back and resolves as a smaller square, tinted green, on a vertical plane exactly one quarter of the dimension of the cube – the geometrical

underpinning being present as always. The Huon Pine forms are identical and exhibited back to back, in alignment, with the green tinted square surfaces facing one another. The works are aligned so that the void between the squares is a perfect cube. The image is of conjoined, identical twins that have been surgically separated. The green represents the site of the *cut*.

They are joined in the group by two, less well-formed, smaller Huon Pine creatures preserved in jars. The preserved specimens are conscious representations of fetuses of the same family of creatures. This reference, harking back to the Ruysch examples, creates a slightly gruesome grouping with several cross references to various forms of surgical intervention and the storage of biological specimens. The preserved specimens are also the only works in all four categories that do not have an accompanying use *function*. They are, if anything, iconographic and narrative extensions of the two fully formed works and despite my earlier reservations it may be that Kevin Murray is right when he asserts that “the particular use of Huon Pine grants solid timber the kind of sacred fragility normally associated with human flesh.”⁴¹ The use of the lip form, one of my signature marks, has probably never taken on as representational, nor as poignant a role as it does here, in the silenced, objectified flesh of the specimen.

The *Aus der Wunderkammer* (Out of the Cabinet of Wonders) group, as the name suggests, references *Naturalia*, the collection category that, as I previously wrote, encompassed specimens of rare plants, minerals and animals in what was supposed to be as unadulterated a form as was practical to maintain. Of course part of the joke, if it is one, is that the work is actually an example of *Artefacta*, that in which material and human skill are linked, both needing to

be extraordinary enough to elicit wonder and therefore deserving of preferment.

A Huon Pine is one of the most ancient living things in the world, the fine grain records thousands of years of growing history and the material deserves a place in the pantheon of *Naturalia* of itself. Among Australian crafts practitioners, woodworkers and timber aficionados Huon Pine, more than other timber, is accorded almost heroic status within a local mythology that brings the ancient tree of life stories to mind. The *Wunderkammer* tradition may be the perfect context for a specimen of the *Naturalia* category, as were the great mythic icons of other ages, both real (actual materials not, at that time, understood) and imagined (the horn of the unicorn). In his article, *The Cabinet of Helmut Lueckenhausen*, Kevin Murray discusses the politics of conservation in an anthropomorphic guise,

“How should we take this elevation of timber to the status of organic flesh?... Green activists are becoming increasingly committed to their defence of forests, chaining themselves to trees.... As green politics moves in this direction, we open up some of the mysteries on which the ‘*Wunderkammer*’ thrives. The ‘*Wunderkammer*’ is a promiscuous knowledge system, filled with monsters. Slippage between human and animal is one of the key monstrosities... The metaphor of Parliament has occasionally been involved to describe the way forces in nature can congregate to determine certain outcomes... Recently, however, the parliamentary metaphor has been taken seriously for its ethical powers. Sociologist Bruno Latour is a vocal advocate of this extension of franchise. He champions a ‘parliament of things’ that would give voice to the myriad of devices invented to speak for nature... It is in such a transition that Helmut Lueckenhausen’s designs might participate. In a literal sense, the lips on his boxes imply a speaking presence. Beyond that, the hybrid forms he has constructed encourage exogamous connections

across species' boundaries. This is the kind of furniture that we might well choose to decorate our minds in the future." ⁴²

Kevin Murray slips easily from discussion of the politics and sociology of material, to its conversion, through design and artisanry, into iconographic object. Creative skill is the 'surgery' that brings about the new embodiment. Thus we have two stages in a continuum – unique material to materialization of the idea – which themselves sit within "the infinite expansion or contraction of spaces within spaces, objects within objects." This wouldn't be news to a junior high school science student, who would recognize this as being a conventional paradigm for understanding the universe, yet it can be lost sight of in the acute attention paid to the disconnected object under the maker's, or the critic's gaze. All of the iconography, the intended and accrued meaning, the intellectual claims and the honed skills of the artisan which are present in *Aus der Wunderkammer* therefore lead naturally into the next level of context, the cabinet or vitrine which contains and interacts with them.

Work 10

Das Wunderkabinett 1
(Private Collection, USA)

An Intersecting Display Cabinet With Drawers
Silky Oak, Silky Oak Veneer, Silver Ash, Silver
Ash Veneer, Glass, Sterling Silver Keys



Work 11

Das Wunderkabinett 2 and 3
(NGA)

A Pair of Intersecting Display Cabinets With
Peek Windows
Silky Oak, Silky Oak Veneer, Silver Ash, Silver
Ash Veneer, Glass, Sterling Silver Keys



The Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art (SOFA) fairs are major fixtures in the crafts retail calendar in the United States. The work is presented to the collecting public by the dealers and galleries, by whom the artists and crafts practitioners are represented. Studio Crafts – work made with the intention of crossing the boundaries between traditional, functional crafts practice and artistic statement – are the primary concern of SOFA, which is part of a huge marketing and collecting circuit, which places the USA at the forefront in this genre. Studio Furniture is the term used in the USA for my category of work, particularly the works destined for public exhibition. SOFA also presents invited international survey exhibitions and in 1996 Australia was invited to present a Studio Furniture exhibition through the joint offices of Craft Australia and Steven Joyce's Despard Gallery in Hobart. The show was titled *The Chicago Fifteen, Contemporary Australian Furniture*. I was one of the invited designer makers and I chose to use the opportunity as a vehicle to continue my investigation into the display cabinet form.

As the first public presentation of *Das Wunderkabinett 1* was to be in a curated exhibition representing Australian Studio Furniture in the United States I knew that the narrative in which it was to sit would need to tell the American audience something of Australia, something about Australian timbers and to undertake that most difficult of tasks for a work from a hybrid multicultural – say something about Australian design and craft per se. It would naturally also be required to play its part in telling my story and further validating my iconography.

I didn't take Jenny Zimmer's comment on the gulf which exists between "...work made with aesthetic intention and that which must solve a practical problem and do the job," to be an example of the knee jerk opposition to the concept of work which

could have both a crafts heritage and artistic intentions because she was known, through her writing, to think otherwise. However that is an opinion that was a frequently expressed by fine arts critics, particularly during the 1980s when the public discourse centred on what has since come to be disparagingly known as the arts crafts debate. At that time, significant public funding via the Australia Council, the arts funding body through which the Australian Federal Government channels some of its arts funding, was available to crafts practitioners, a situation about which many representatives of the Fine Arts were openly critical. The argument ran that only conceptual work with the potential to engage the social and philosophical issues of the day should be granted public funding, not functional crafts which were held to be essentially utilitarian handiwork. An interesting side argument put by the Fine Arts lobby was that because crafts practice had the capacity to become self-sustaining, it did not have a creditable claim on public funding. In other words only financially unsustainable practice did.

During this period I was President of Craft Victoria, President of Craft Australia, Deputy Vice President of the World Crafts Council (WCC) Asia, and Honourary Secretary of the WCC respectively and I spent more than a decade of my life lobbying and dealing with Governments and the arts community. The role of crafts practice and its claim on public funding in a developed, Western culture was ever at the forefront of my thinking and my activities. The arts crafts debate is now considered to be passé and, in fact, the Fine Arts lobby has been essentially successful in reclaiming most of the available funding.

Das Wunderkabinett 1 is, in and of itself, a conscious affirmation that these works cannot reasonably have their remit limited to handiwork. However it, and others of my works, is not predicated on making a

defensive argument. My contention that the point as argued in the submission is proven, that I have formed a categorical identity in which all the categories into which my work fits have integrated into a new, arguably unique category is evidenced in part by the fact that they are represented in the National and in State collections. The NGA collection in particular, which includes the *Das Wunderkabinett 2 and 3* pair, is not a survey collection. NGA collection policy is predicated on acquiring a body of works created by a select group of artists/practitioners in order that it forms part of the National estate – a history of evidences by which Australia can know itself. In that respect these works have been granted the status of collected and exhibited object.

That notwithstanding, the work was also conceived as a vehicle for housing and celebrating a domestic collection and it was scaled accordingly. It was designed to allow its overt iconography, and its narrative, to celebrate an interactive relationship with its contents and not to be in mute subservience to them. In keeping with other display cases and exhibition furniture included in this presentation, the work is assertive in its status as a bridge between the exhibited object and the viewer. In the case of this work, the assertion is even stronger as the other side of its dual role, to be the collected item itself, has been realized. That is another of the essential dualities inherent in my works, which may manifest as both container and contained, the enabling agent and, at the same time, the enabled object. This relationship becomes even more multifaceted when one considers the competing elements and tensions existing within the three works themselves.

Again, in keeping with the thematic thread linking the works in this submission, *Das Wunderkabinett 1, 2 and 3* utilize a dynamic tension being set up between sections of the work containing *Zoomorphic* references,

adding to a suggestion of animation, usually arrival, and other sections of the work suggesting inanimate, usually geometric, *Architectonic forms*. Here they are realized somewhat differently however. Kevin Murray commented that “slippage between human and animal is one of the key monstrosities” but slippage between animal and artificial can’t be far behind, although I do not intend monstrosity so much as a touch of structural perversion. As in the *Heimdall* screens, where, as previously described, a barrier, an inanimate image, combines with an animate (*Zoomorphic*) guard within the one element, the gridded, glazed, Queensland Silk Oak cabinets, quite *Architectonic* at the top, are supported on and animated by elegant *Zoomorphic* legs. They become architectural centaurs. They intersect the Queensland Silver Ash tower forms at a dynamic, oblique angle, as though a force is suddenly halted at the precise second where it slices through another. Like living tissue from different species they have now grown together and have become, not twins rejoined, but different species spliced together as though in some surreal medical experiment. Unlike most of the *Teraph* like combinations in these works, neither is supporting or holding up the other, they have a much more equal and dynamic and, a now forever shared, relationship. It’s not my intention to play up the horror too overtly, the comfortable woodiness and familiar skilled-crafts context mitigates against that in any case, but to create a slight tension, a sense of mature unease that is perhaps a touch less benign than in most of the works destined for domestic placement.

Das Wunderkabinett 1 has two drawer units in the tower, one of which is another grafting of a *Zoomorphic* form into its fabric. A version of the *Teraph*, or household, kitchen or hearth god, the benign visitor/protector, sits at the bottom left and provides the third element in the cast of participants. Within the narrative of the work it recalls the duality that provides

the tension in many of my compositions, in this case suggesting the possibility of a parasite as much as a visitor – although clearly one that lives symbiotically with its host. It also recalls the fascination/horror duality of the Ruysch specimens.

Tiny peek windows have been installed into the towers of the *Das Wunderkabinett 2 and 3* pair. Whereas the centaur form is glazed to display its contents, the tower – strong, vertical, inanimate and largely opaque keeps its door closed and its secrets to itself. This represents another conscious duality woven into these works, on the one hand showing, telling, exhibiting and celebrating the contents and on the other hand, protecting, keeping safe and hiding them. The peek windows are the little gaps, the means of quick, controlled, voyeuristic glimpses that tease the viewer with a hint of something worth seeing. They are metaphors of promise and reference the historical promise of the *Wunderkammer* – that wonders are to be found contained herein.

Except for the placement of the peek windows, the two cabinets in *Work 11* are identical. While they are capable of operating independently I intended for them to be (and they were) installed in an open space, end to end, with the towers at opposite ends. The distance between them was to be the same as the end is wide, creating a cubic void of space between them. As with *Work 9, Aus der Wunderkammer*, the concept was to suggest identical twins, perhaps also having been separated. In plan, the angles at which the towers are set to the glazed cases, creating a clockwise dynamic, allow the installation to manifest as an infinity symbol. The placement of these cabinets, as with the works to be placed in them, becomes part of the changeable theatre that allows us to order and reorder our environment. The smallest change anywhere changes everything.

Purpose designed silver keys lock the doors, including those at the ends of the centaurs in *Das Wunderkabinett 2 and 3*.

Michael Bogle wrote:

“...the work of Helmut Lueckenhausen seems to summarize many of the issues present in contemporary Australian design and making... As a designer, he is a Citizen of the World. His conceptual work is so powerful that the issues of artisanry are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the work. The objects are presented as philosophical critique and comment on furniture, past as well as present. The skills required to produce the work are not the issue but merely means to an end. This mastery is liberating.

The iconography of Lueckenhausen’s furniture has always been difficult but this leads the observer to speculation and the enjoyment that this affords. His titles, however mysterious, hint at mythological archetypes and encourage the sense of wonder...

As suggested by his SOFA work, Lueckenhausen has often worked with architects and he has said that his pieces can aesthetically support decorative elements because underneath there is a very structural geometry. This is especially evident in the “Wunderkabinett” in Chicago.

Lueckenhausen’s work draws together many of the themes found amongst the Chicago 15. There is acknowledgment of the importance of ideas; the act of making is suppressed when it might intrude on the themes presented...and finally, in the midst of High Seriousness, there remains an element of whimsy or perhaps even satire.”⁴³

At the height of the conceptual arts movement, dematerialization and/or deskilling were sometimes argued to be necessary strategies in the distilling of

meaning. A preoccupation with skill was taken as a denial of the paramount importance of concept. Some fine artists went further, claiming that what we have traditionally considered to be art is actually the corpse left after the essential art experience, the process, has been completed. The experience of the moment is all. The essential argument boiled down to: technique glorifies matter and denies, or at least obfuscates, idea.

The proposal that, mastery is liberating, turns the argument the other way around. It suggests that the quality of the artisanry will make room for the concept – if it is good enough it won't be an issue and it will, in a sense, get out of the way. In well-resolved work, operating within a mature narrative, it is not a question of the concept being overshadowed or denied by skill but rather being facilitated by it.

The works in this submission are an embodiment of the argument that skill and artisanry are to a creative work, what vocabulary, syntax and grammar are to spoken and written language, they are the means by which concept, or the idea, can be eloquently expressed. It is possible to speak well without having very much to say, just as it is possible to invest the ordinary with wonder through skill, but I'm making a much more comprehensive claim for this work, skill is only part of the package.

Work 12

Die Wunderkinder
(Private Collections, Germany, Australia,
Artist's Collection)

Treasure Boxes (Originally Installed in
Wunderkabinett 2 and 3)
Huon Pine, Anodized Aluminium



“Perhaps the supreme irony...is that...these works will mostly be mediated through vitrines – the artist’s box is shown in yet another ‘box’, in a larger rectangle or cube within the ‘house’ that is the art centre, gallery or museum: ⁴⁴

It is in part that which Alexandra Noble calls ‘irony’, that I set out to explore in *Work 12*.

A series, or set, of small, lidded containers, *Die Wunderkinder* is designed to fit within the square grid of the centaur form in the cabinets of *Work 11*. It was first installed in the cabinets in an exhibition titled *Australian Decorative Arts Survey 2000*, at Lauraine Diggings Fine Art in Melbourne. For my part it is less an irony and more a way of looking at how the constructed environment can be mediated within a particular take on the design and utilization of space – what I have previously called the infinite expansion or contraction of spaces within spaces, objects within objects. Or on another, perhaps more prosaic level, it highlights again one of the essential dualities inherent in my works, which may manifest as both container and contained, the enabling agent and, at the same time, the enabled object.

The bases are assembled from fabricated anodized aluminium sheet using rubber O-rings as fasteners. The imagery is of mechanical/technical construction on which, in the *Teraph* tradition, the *Zoomorphic* Huon Pine characters are perched. The detail is paired down with the inclusion of my signature lip form being the only overtly *Zoomorphic* element.

In the geometry of the installation, the square of the base of each *Wunderkind* (singular) sits within the square of the grid of the cabinet, and the section of the Huon Pine cylinder of each *Wunderkind* is a circle centred on the square, which manifests as a glass pane. Exactly ten of them could fit within one of the cabinets. They give the impression when installed,

of being soldiers or attendants, patiently and mutely being transported to their designated roles in some mythic fable. Again that good/bad, protect/attack duality inserts itself into the narrative, a tension that is not entirely mitigated by the marionette-like cuteness of *Die Wunderkinder*. It might, in fact, be that very massed cuteness that is unnerving. The dark side of that duality draws on long threads of undercurrent myth, such as that of Pandora opening a forbidden container and releasing the *spites* to unleash sin and suffering on the world. The draw of the forbidden container was too much for her to resist, perhaps like the apple in Eden.

They also work as somewhat more benign individual pieces, which is exactly what they currently are, installed in several houses in two countries. The geometry works as well within each work as it does locating the work into the grid of the cabinet. Individually they recall the minor hearth god imagery of the *Teraph*, the sinister side to their sweetness less evident when alone. In that capacity they could as well fit into the Domestic category of the works in this submission.

The title is a play on words. *Wunderkind* is a German word for a prodigy or a child genius. The word also allows for the image of the Child of Wonder as in born of, or for, wonder. On yet another level, having been designed to be installed in the *Wunderkabinett 2 and 3* cabinets, they are the conceptual children of those works and exist within the family of all of those works, which extend from my research into the *Wunderkammer*.

Work 13

Das Schatzkabinett
(Chancellery, Swinburne University of
Technology, Melbourne)

An Architectonic Display Cabinet With Glass
Top and Peek Windows
Brush Box Veneer, Aluminium, Glass



The reception area in the Chancellery at Swinburne University of Technology is the practical, as well as the ritual, gateway into the University's governance. As a whole, with a vocational training history, somewhat removed from the neo Oxbridge colonial imprint favoured at the time of the establishment of the older Universities, Swinburne does not have an extensive culture of pomp. The Chancellery office suite, even though it's relatively new, is quite unassumingly turned out with only a few icons of its purpose, its power, and its heightened mission on display. The style is middle-level, corporate office *Moderne* with humble proportions; some quality touches in unassuming but good quality furniture, and is comprehensively fitted out with the requisite contemporary technologies. The signal proffered is one of an organization that is not carried away with itself. I was responsible for the installation of the three objects/art works which do add a sense of place and which announce the University to its visitors.

A beautiful tapestry adapted from a typography-based graphic illustration utilizing a quote from Cicero, *Arbores Multas Serit Agricola Quarum Multas Fructus Non Adspiciet* – The farmer may plant many trees from which he'll not reap the fruit, lends an air of classic and overt academe not seen much elsewhere in the suite. It was designed by Tony Ward, a lecturer from the Faculty of Design and was also the product of my persuading the founder and Director of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop who wanted, in the Workshop's more usual manner, to base the commission on a painting. I was determined to utilize a key capacity of one of the University's centres of excellence in the imagery of one of the few ceremonial icons it had. I am of the opinion that graphic illustration is a more appropriate precursor to tapestry design in any case, copying paintings always seemed a bit unimaginative to me.

The second notable item is a large slumped-glass screen manufactured by Ozone, mounted on two stainless steel, floor to ceiling poles in the centre on which a University crest, also slumped, clear glass, has been mounted. The crest is a reworking by the Royal College of Heraldry of George Swinburne's, (the University's founder's) family crest. I organized the screen to interrupt a line of sight with which one was faced on entering the space – across reception, through large unadorned windows, across a square and directly on to an unattractive building opposite. The use of clear glass, made translucent only by the texture produced by the slumping process, minimized the loss of light in what is quite a white, bright interior – while arresting the eye, establishing a sense of authority and then directing the gaze back into the room.

Das Schatzkabinett is currently the only other iconic work in the area. The Vice Chancellor of that time, Professor Iain Wallace, commissioned me to design and supply the cabinet and gave me his blessing to engage with the project in the context of the narrative I was developing for my PhD. In truth that wasn't hard, it fitted perfectly.

I had already designed the University's ceremonial suite comprising the Mace, the Mace stand and the Chancellor's chair – all used in graduation ceremonies – and had walked the fine line between needing to draw on an ancient history and ancient protocols on the one hand, and representing the contemporary realities of a recently promulgated university on the other. The iconography of the Chancellor's suite, draws on some of the themes incorporated into the crest so it necessarily reflects a traditional, ceremonial quality. The University academic community is familiar with the protocols for deploying the Mace and with its overt symbolism of power and authority. The Mace remains a potent ceremonial device in Parliaments, the Church and in Universities throughout the world.

The organizational ritual within which the modestly scaled *Schatzkabinett* operates is more subtle – in fact it is probably not recognized by some, or at least not consciously, but it is significant nonetheless.

Central to the narrative of *Das Schatzkabinett* is the nature and status of the gifts it contains and celebrates, or conversely retires into discreet storage: official gifts given by the University's international visitors. They have a political core function, overtly branding the organization on behalf of which the memento has been presented. They represent a visible affirmation of whatever the accommodation between the two organizations, the giving and the receiving institution, have made. Having come from differing cultures, embodied with vastly differing aesthetics they make a riotous collection that it is challenging to order. Many of the pieces make a difficult transition from the decorative traditions of one culture to another. Some are vulgar in any context. Some are expensive while many have little value outside of their ceremonial function. However, here is a case in point where the intended, ceremonial meaning of an object is paramount and somehow, it must be accommodated.

One especially needs to understand the potency of this symbolism in other cultures, and to visitors from those cultures, especially given the internationalization mission of the university and its many multinational and multicultural operational manifestations. Even in contemporary times, ritual in Chinese culture for example, threads back in an unbroken line to pre-history. In discussing the roots of Chinese/Asian ritualized behaviour, Rayne Kruger wrote:

“The subject of ritual reaches to the core of Chinese civilization... the supreme primordial force kept the universe together by maintaining order... Good behaviour was consistent with the harmonizing of human society in tune with heavenly spheres...”⁴⁵

To think of this as overblown historicity in the context of a collection of plaques, clocks and multi-coloured ceramics is forgivable but it is also to miss the point. The object itself simply does not matter – except for any badging or marking that records the giver – the implicit messages it carries with it are everything. Neither is ritual only important for macro issues, it permeates all levels of daily life. The act of bringing and giving the token is the point. The same attitudes can be seen in other cultures that grew from, or at least were hugely influenced by, Chinese culture. In Japan for instance, gift giving evolved into a complex set of ritualistic behaviours that to Westerners often seem out of proportion with the gift, or the occasion. There is probably no culture in the world where ritualized behaviour does not play some part in the realization of the social contracts that govern how people behave and interact even where some of the behaviours have, as in our culture, retreated into the subconscious. The University is obliged to appreciate that it is not receiving trinkets but symbols of a pact having been made between *clans*, within a tradition of rituals that governs a multitude of aspects of every day life and where, certainly in the past, those clans may have offered the only surety there was. It needs to understand the potency that these rituals have for the people with whom it increasingly deals and that they may be nonplussed with a connection being drawn between the icons that are exchanged and Western notions of beauty or value.

The chapter Historical and Theoretical Context, touched on the capacity for the *Wunderkammer* to be an enabling force which creates a space for the contemplation, and protection of the unlike object – the *other*. The temptation with many of these gifts is to dismiss them as *schlock* – which, disconnected from their ceremonial purpose, most of them are. The challenge for works such as *Schatzkabinett* is to tie them together into some semblance of visual order

and to bridge the collection into the necessary, in this case, Chancellery, environment. This purpose is served, only in part through the show or hide duality of a cabinet with both privileged and secret spaces. It also needs to be served by visually ordering, in fact managing a riot of disparate shapes and forms.

After the *Wunderkammer* – the Cabinet of Curiosity came the *Kunstkammer*, the art collection. The *Schatzkammer*, German for treasure chamber, is a related term. *Kammer* actually means chamber while *Kabinett* has the same meaning as the English, cabinet. The treasures in this case are those of diplomacy.

A number of further design themes underpin *Das Schatzkabinett* and contribute to the narrative within which it works. As with the Ark of the Law, and unlike most other works in this submission, neither of the main components has an overtly *Zoomorphic* quality. This time the two intersecting forms are both *Architectonic* with the aluminium, glass topped inner form piercing vertically through the brush box cabinet. The forms are angled to one another with the top protruding at one end and receding into the brush box cabinet at the other. The inner form not only pierces, it also suspends the outer.

The *Architectonic* nature and positioning of the forms, with the windows in its horizontal faces, results in the narrative of *Das Schatzkabinett* recalling the image of a miniature medium-rise building. Viewing it is like viewing an apartment building writ small, a panorama of different stories, diverse relationships and groupings and diverse meanings with ultimately, differing degrees of importance to the viewer. The arrangement suggests a *theatre* of objects where the displayed items alternately group or separate and tell their various stories and make their various diplomatic claims like characters on stage.

Das Schatzkabinett is designed and constructed on a square grid. The dimensions and placement of the peek windows are aligned to the grid.

The cabinet utilizes the hide and show duality also deployed in *works 10 and 11*, on the one hand showing, telling, exhibiting and celebrating the contents and on the other hand, protecting, keeping safe and hiding them. Again, as within those works, the peek windows are the little gaps, the means of quick, controlled, voyeuristic glimpses that tease the viewer with a hint of something worth seeing. They are metaphors of promise and reference the historical promise of the *Wunderkammer* – that wonders are to be found contained herein. Between the big, counter-top show window and the peek windows of varying sizes, the work offers a hierarchy of first view – a massing of items which creates a sense of context and critical mass, and second to subsequent views that offer a privileged framing of some select items. While *Das Schatzkabinett* speaks of itself as a *community* or a *theatre* of objects with the capacity to include unlike objects in its story, its hide and show duality is heightened by a parallel capacity to also keep some things entirely hidden – to keep the embarrassing, the shameful, and in the end, that which is not valued out of sight and out of mind.

Domestic

Dominant contemporary design mores enshrine principles of simplicity and understatement and describe the works approved of and celebrated within those mores with terms such as having clean lines and being uncluttered. The development of the *International Style* or *Modernism* through the agency of seminal movements such as the German Bauhaus during the first half of the Twentieth Century included the taking on of a quasi-religious mission by many of its proponents. The sentiment contained in Mies van der Rohe's now famous dictum "less is more" was extended by other key proponents of the *New Internationalism* such as Adolph Loos, into a philosophy which equated decoration with moral degeneracy which threatened contemporary society. He, also famously, declared: "Dekorazion ist Scheisse" – decoration is shit. Within the design community – designers, educators, writers, curators, critics and their fellow travelers – the core values of honesty and simplicity, manifesting as understatement, remain paramount.

In the visual arts and the built environment, the late Twentieth Century development: *Post-modernism*, created a new space for eclecticism, celebration and visual theatre. As a movement, *Post-modernism* is currently suffering some reverses and is under attack, being charged with being too relativist as a philosophy, having eschewed belief in an absolute canon of truth and beauty, and being too much of an undisciplined pastiche as an aesthetic movement.

Both movements, or as some commentators have described them, these two, chronologically linear aspects of the one movement, are located in the values and practices of the social, economic and political powerbrokers in Western or Western-influenced societies. The design community is both a manifestation of, and a toolbox for, that phenomenon.

Interestingly, design and industrial production was seen by some of the early champions of *Modernism* as a force for social good and equality – a means by the agency of which the everyman could access a quality environment and improve his/her life. This was left wing *Modernism*, an honourable mission that is still cited in the context of the search for truth and beauty, and positive social development by its supporters today. However some of its developments, such as that of *Italian Futurism*, which were enlisted in the service of Fascism before the Second World War, became decidedly right wing. Furthermore, the worst and most alienating manifestations of contemporary urban development are sometimes cited as examples of *Modernism* in the hands of an uncaring power elite. Fritz Lang's early film 'Metropolis' has become a popular icon for this attitude.

Either extreme involved concepts of social modeling, and yet it is notable, perhaps even miraculous, or depending on one's point of view – disheartening, that the aesthetic values lived and celebrated by most members of the public, the essential *everyman*, remain apart. The average person simply does not order his/her environment on the basis of an abstract theory of beauty and structure or the development of theories of social good. The sparse and minimally modulated interior of the architectural and interior design magazine is actually a minority phenomenon. In the chapter Historical and Theoretical Context, I noted that most people's homes are populated with an eclectic mix of objects sitting within a personal and/or family history and chosen within quite prosaic values of comfort and cultural recognition. Human beings are comfortable with what they know, and they know what they have experienced or that which has been bequeathed to them – memory is one of humanity's anchors in a fast changing and sometimes alienating world. Domestic culture, as does *Culture*

writ large, evolves naturally and cannot be ordained or easily manipulated into an agenda.

On a more prosaic level, nor do most people have recourse to an interior decorating movement where poseurs sell their illusions of domestic themes and totally integrated *looks* to gullible homeowners. The idea of subjugating one's living environment, populated by icons of a past and continually evolving personal and family history, to a completely disconnected and irrelevant interior theme park is not only problematic, it actually misunderstands the key role of the domestic environment as a meaningful personal space. I claim to create works which are conceived within, and which bring with them, a rich narrative. When they are absorbed into any public or private environment they take their place within a new critical mass and begin to attract new levels of meaning, usually by association with people and events. They are mitigated by, and in turn mitigate, the other components of their environment. How absurd would it be to dislocate the patina of personal and family meaning that accrues to the domestic environment in which each core element has a story to tell, the passing through by attendant ephemera notwithstanding, and in the process, to negate one's own iconographic history? We can measure the difference between a themed space and our personal spaces by comparing, for example, our connection with good hotel rooms to that of our homes.

I discussed my theories on the categories that help to explain how we see and respond to objects and the various manifestations of our built domestic and extended environment in various forums and publications while working on this submission, including in a catalogue essay for an international woodcraft exhibition entitled *Surface and Form*, mounted in 2002 by Craftwest, WA. The categories include:

- Objects as Romance

Romances are stories; romance is the celebration of the poetry and the magic contained within the story. The attraction most people have for crafted items in 'historically comfortable' and sometimes iconographic materials continually withstands contemporary polemic about the dangers of being captured by the past. Continuing from the times of Ruskin and Morris, periodic craft revivals have reflected concurrent socio-political developments, with issues of mystery, spirituality and myth encouraging a, sometimes rural, nature-based iconography.

This is our most primal response, shared equally by crafts practitioners and their clients; it taps into an ancient, mythological value-system in which trees are one of the archetypes of creation. In this context wood, its smell, texture, colours and its patterns is as often the genesis for creating work, as is function or pure design.

It is in the work resulting from this response that the social upheavals of the 1960s and early 1970s, involving a move to the left in popular politics, with a redefinition of the values of work, domestic life and national endeavour, can be most clearly seen. For many craftspeople, this revival of the ideals of William Morris' Nineteenth Century Arts and Crafts Movement reaffirmed the ideal that beauty results from an accord between the constructed object and the forms in nature

- Objects as Material Icon

Jarrah in Western Australia, and Huon Pine in Tasmania, are as close to being worshipped in their respective states of origin, as it is possible for a material to be in this day and age. The ancient archetypes of tree-spirits and the tree of life are reaffirmed in a modern context. Conservation and preservation are linked to economic arguments for value adding through design in the low usage and high yield methods of the small woodworker. The promotion of the unique object fashioned from rare material and housed in the gallery-sanctuary closes the circle.

Again, in the chapter Historical and Theoretical Context, I noted that certain manifestations of logging, and most manifestations of wood chipping involve the translation of the precious natural into ubiquitous and sometimes easily expendable product, diminishing the extraordinary to the ordinary. Creating niche objects via design and skill can offer a qualitative alternative to getting the most product out of the material. One object with integrity and provenance may be more worthy than a greater number of products challenged by ubiquity and a short life cycle. Designers today understand the principles of dematerialisation – making do with less. Craftspeople can also do their bit with righteous re-materialisation – making sure that what is made is both worthy and long lasting.

- Iconic Objects as Work

In an article for Craft Victoria published in 1994, entitled *Words and Work*, I recounted:

“An American friend once told me of an experience she had in the days when she was a jeweler presenting her work at a fair. An ‘older’ couple had been moving slowly along the aisle, the wife in particular showing appreciation of everything she saw. My friend heard her ask her husband something to the effect of “look at all this fantastic work, how on earth do they manage to do all of this?” “It’s easy”, the husband explained, “they don’t work”. The primary status of these objects as ‘work’, as the products of an industry, had eluded him. The range of definitions of industry in my copy of the Shorter Oxford, cite “intelligence, ingenuity, dexterity and diligence as well as systematic work or labour and habitual employment.”

Items in the domestic built environment are able to bridge one off and batch production, inherent or associated meaning and pragmatic functionalism and – not least, poetry and bread and butter. It is not that any one object needs to address all of these things but that a multiplicity of related imperatives is allowed for.

In respect of reaction to items created through crafts practice, Jim Falk, agrees that:

“...the separatist character of that movement”
... (the movement opposed to seeing a link between honest production work and work with artistic and iconic intent)... – the attempt to divorce action from market and dominant social relations – also greatly limits its potential”. The central issue for us is to establish linkage and to understand that” ...an approach in which craft practitioners seek to blend and shape their skills, and more importantly their values, with

practitioners based in art, science, technology and the market who are seeking to accept this contemporary challenge, could make a real contribution towards producing the changes which are needed.”⁴⁶

In this pragmatic response, wood, while being used as the primary material, and having its physical attributes exploited, both in regard to design, local availability and market acceptance, is not used exclusively, nor with excessive reverence. Other materials are combined with it as appropriate and it is a means rather than an end in itself.

- Objects as Art

I share the desire of many makers to be able to rationalise their work within a dialogue understood

by art schools, universities and most particularly the art gallery circuit – a goal that offers both opportunity and threat. The desire to see the work as three-dimensional pictures, as narrative having abstract meaning, leads to the attempted elevation of the status of works to that of symbolic object. This response values exclusivity and uniqueness and is aimed at obtaining the status and financial return, sometimes to be found in that sector.

I am one of a relatively small number of designer/makers who has been able to make a critical success of exploring furniture and woodwork as cultural artefact, creating a perceptual-cognitive category that functions as a brand. The paradox inherent in that strategy is that while I have always consciously promoted the role of artefact in domestic/social ceremony it is, in some cases, the status my work is given through being in public collections, that gives me the entree to the domestic spaces in which to prove the capacity of my work to do that.

- Objects as Design

Design can be added to traditional aspects of craft as an aesthetic philosophy, a problem solving and production methodology, and a system of marketing, of selling, of contemporary identification or a pathway to continuing social and economic relevance.

Designers are trained to be process oriented, with the individual, creative star currently losing favour to the team player who can be involved in the whole management and organisational continuum. The crafts are still very much anchored in material and process and may also still be most readily identified with the individual maker. This is at once their strength and their weakness. It can manifest in an obsession with traditional attitudes to material and technique but it can also result in creative and technological developments, which only a mastery of the material will allow.

Most important in this context is the understanding of the home as a sanctuary – the space, in some cases the last, or only, place, in which the primacy of the occupant's world and his/her place in it is unchallenged. The perceptual-cognitive category which I have developed includes a strong emphasis on work made for domestic or personal space, work that explores the relationship between people and the objects they gather about themselves to mark and to protect their environment – and which includes a

place for the decorative elements to which people are attracted as a form of benign, personal graffiti.

Works 14 and 16 have been shown in public exhibitions and are now installed in domestic locations. They have performed respectively as objects for exhibition and as objects for use and domestic ritual.

Work 15 was made for domestic installation only.

Work 17 has been exhibited extensively in Australia, Korea and Germany even though it was conceived, and has been scaled, for domestic use.

Work 18 has been exhibited in Australia and Germany. It is scaled for domestic installation but works within a narrative of ceremonial bowls, other examples of which are in institutional collections.

Work 14

Sphinx 1 Series:
A Pair of Guardian Cabinets
(Private Collection, Melbourne)

Queensland Silver Ash, Ebonized Mahogany



Work 15

Sphinx 2 Series:
A Pair of Guardian Book Shelves
(Private Collection, Melbourne)

Huon Pine, Ebonized Mahogany



It was in conceiving works for the domestic space within a narrative of guardianship, that references ancient traditions still active in many cultures, where deities at the relatively humble end of the pantheon are integrated, almost unremarkably, into the furniture, the pots and pans of domestic life that I developed an interest in harnessing the *Teraph* theme. As previously stated in this submission, the *Teraph*, or household, kitchen or hearth god is a benign visitor/protector theme that I have incorporated in much of my... work... This involves a dynamic tension being set up between sections of the work containing *Zoomorphic* references, adding to a suggestion of animation, usually arrival, and other sections of the work suggesting inanimate, usually geometric, *Architectonic* forms. The two types of forms are always complementary i.e. different but relating. The overarching theme is reconciliation and of benign guardianship.

The image/narrative is one of a relatively easy relationship between the visitor, which has taken up residence and the constructed *Architectonic* element that hosts it. Structurally that relationship is realized through the two elements, while being made in different timbers (Silver Ash and Mahogany) with contrasting colours/finishes (ebonized and natural), having a comfortable, symbiotic fit – the deities have insinuated themselves into the nooks and crevices of the built space with a sense of belonging, rather than threat. The design allows for a gentle metamorphosis of form, matching perfectly at the point of intersection, to represent intent and belonging rather than threat and invasion.

At the same time the creative tension that this configuration creates is part of the theatre I intend the works to introduce into their environment. What is benign and protective for the resident may conversely represent a warning to the intruder. As with other works in this presentation, such as *Work 3 – Against Innocence*, the Sphinx series combines the complementary images of a barrier (protective guardianship) and welcomer, the guardian doorman.

It is that image which attracted me to melding the *Teraph* iconography with that of the Sphinx, an image that presents as the *watcher through the ages* but with

an undercurrent of threat. The Sphinx of Greek myth guarded the road to Thebes and punished those unable to answer a riddle with instant death. The rich creative tension this duality contributes to my narrative notwithstanding, in keeping with the domestic location for which these works were created, I intended for these works to edge towards the protective and so referenced the Egyptian ram-headed Sphinxes at the Great Temple of Amon-Ra at Karnak, near Thebes. As do the ram-headed Sphinxes, the *Sphinx 1 Series* cabinets, line up in a processional configuration presenting to the front – regular, mute, and watching.

Perhaps the best-known Sphinx image is that of the great Sphinx that watches over the Pyramids of Mycerinus, Chefren and Cheops at Giza; an example of the man/animal combination, the idea of which has fascinated peoples of many cultures throughout the ages, and which manifests in many forms and in many mythologies. An undercurrent of this crossover – man/animal, animal/construction – the melding of the unlike into an unexpected, sometimes macabre but functioning fusion, runs through much of my work in this submission. As Kevin Murray wrote in connection with my *Wunderkabinett* works: “slippage between human and animal is one of the key monstrosities;” my intention being to tame the monstrous to domestic service.

The Sphinx 1 Series is comprised of closed cabinets – protective, encompassing and holding safe. They represent a dual guardianship; inward: watching over the objects they contain, as well as outward: watching over the space in which they sit.

The Sphinx 2 Series. Is open and inviting. The lip form at top and bottom invokes a further image of the holding of the archetype of the book – knowledge, history, and human narrative in print and image – within its grasp, within its open mouth. In the tradition of the Wunderkammer, holding the works of god and man, they are prosaically, book shelves but more poetically, a book repository. The Egyptian theme in this context can also be stretched to recall the Library of Alexandria – a wistful image that invokes the distance between living and lost narratives.

Work 16

Toth 2: Guardian Table
(Private Collection, Melbourne)

Hall Table
Huon Pine, MDF, Precatalysed Lacquer



With this work, as with the Sphinx series, as well as utilizing the imagery of the *Zoomorphic* visitor alighting on a manifestation of the constructed environment, I also referenced the mythology of various Egyptian cosmogonies to further develop an eclectic, theatrical narrative. The attributes of the Egyptian god Thoth provided a rich imagery and therefore, a good title. Veronica Ions wrote that:

“The sun god Ra abdicated his position as ruler of the world in favour of the moon god Thoth, who brought light back to mankind. This was how the Egyptians explained the daily disappearance of the sun in the evening and its replacement by the moon.”⁴⁷

“He (Osiris) was helped... by his scribe Thoth, who invented arts and sciences and gave names to things.”⁴⁸

“The silver boat which bore his white disc (moon) across the heavens was also used to convey the souls of the dead to the afterlife.”⁴⁹

The imagery that was most evocative and immediately useful to my narrative, included:

- The Moon

The great formative mythologies of creation that sit behind all cultures have common elements, even where there is little or no known historical link between those cultures. The way human beings have constructed background mythologies that both posit the *big picture* and a role for them in that picture is what attracts me to making a link between the characters in these mythologies and my works. It is not so much a matter of being overly fascinated with any particular culture or its forms, although Egyptology does hold enduring fascination for us in the West, but more about creating an active link between some of humankind’s most enduring stories and my contemporary narratives – valid even, as I have argued, in humble and domestic contexts.

Thoth’s association with the Moon, the other giver of light – therefore of direction, and of hope in an otherwise dark and foreboding firmament – is one of many personifications, expressed in many mythologies, of a bulwark against nothingness and fear. It recalled for me, Tolkien’s *Telperion*, the tree of night, the last silver flowering of which produced the moon, which I have previously referenced within another great and ancient archetype, the tree of life. Thus, even in the most humble of circumstances, *Thoth 2* can, at least metaphorically, light the way across the domestic threshold and keep darkness at bay.

- The scribe

As the scribe who, amongst other tasks, recorded the results of the dead being judged in the underworld for their life's deeds by having their hearts weighed against a feather, Thoth gave names to things. He was thus the taxonomer the classifier in many Egyptian cosmogonies. Again this is a personification of a force conjured to satisfy a primal need in humankind to know their circumstances and consequently to have some kind of knowing of themselves. This is the same need that drove the formation of taxonomies out of the *Wunderkammer* collections, the tradition referenced in others of my works in this submission. The use of the title for this work links a simple piece of furniture into a continuing domestic narrative of knowing and affirming one's self, even if in retreat.

- The daily traveler

I thought the sense in which the passage of time is represented in these cosmogonies, with one deity traversing the heavens as the sun during the day and another as the moon at night was also an image easily appropriated to items deployed for the daily ritual and routine of domestic life.

Thoth 2 was conceived and deployed as a hall table immediately facing the front door opening onto a formal entrance hall and therefore the first symbol of the house seen by visitors. Furniture deployed in this way takes on an altar-like quality not unlike a lay version of a domestic shrine. As with the front room in the middle class domestic layout, it is part of that section of the house meant to interface with outsiders – in fact it is part of the *front*, the formal image the owner wants to present, behind which lie the intimate and more private family spaces. As with other works in this submission it faces the visitor and combines the complementary images of a barrier (protective guardianship) and welcomer (the guardian doorman).

Also, as with many of the works in this submission, the reconciliation theme of different, sometimes opposite, elements combining into a resolved whole, underpins the work.

The stand references Egyptian Third Kingdom temple architecture, sloping from a wide base to a narrower top with (statuary) recesses in the side faces. It has a formal, geometric structure and is finished in highly articulated polychromatic lacquers. The image is of a fixed, inanimate structure.

The sphinx-like *Zoomorphic* creature, with wings spread, sits astride the stand. The fit is comfortable and solid but not fixed – it exudes the tension of temporary presence, suggesting it can take off at any minute – unlike the grafted insertion of the *Sphinx* series or

the surgical fusion of the *Wunderkabinett*. The image of a protective domestic deity that routinely comes and goes is nicely reflected in the daily cycle of Thoth traversing the heavens with the moon – times passes but always with the promise of return and another day.

The material: The Huon Pine of the *Zoomorphic* form, which as previously cited, Kevin Murray discussed in the context of “...this elevation of timber to the status of organic flesh,” forges a duality with the contemporary material of the *Architectonic* stand – Medium Density Fibreboard with its background technology and chemistry.

Work 17

Andvari
(Private Collection Germany, Artist's Collection)

Twin Treasure Boxes
Huon Pine, MDF, Precatalysed Lacquer



Norse mythology is another goldmine for the primal images and stories bequeathed to us via Germanic culture and language, of which English is a part. It also provides the roots for Tolkien's invented mythology and the perceptual-cognitive category he established in literature, which I have also referenced in my work. His ring of power in the Ring Trilogy is connected, either directly or indirectly – I do not know which, to the rings of power created by the dwarfs and held by the Rhinemaidens in Norse mythology, also referenced by many other artists – Wagner's Ring Cycle being amongst the best known.

'...Loki had to catch the dwarf Andvari, who was hiding in the shape of a fish, and make him give up the great golden treasure he was known to possess. The dwarf tried hard to hold on to a little golden ring, which he said would help him to become rich again, but which would bring destruction on all who possessed it.'⁵⁰

Again the *Andvari* pair operates within the core theme of duality and reconciliation of the unlike: Huon Pine (organic flesh) *Zoomorphic* characters melding with geometric, MDF, forms with a chromatic finish. *Andvari* do not have wings or feet however, the *Zoomorphic* in this case appears permanently melded with, or growing out of, the *Architectonic*.

In the light of the various political and ritual functions I ascribe to my works, the *Andvari* pair embodies another of my sub-themes. They embody an essence of caricature and humour that usually works itself into the narrative of the objects I make, which introduces a check to the danger of the work taking itself too seriously. They have their serious side but they, in common with so much of my work, have a humorous/self-deprecatory side as well. This pair appears joyous and the upper part of the *Zoomorphic* section suggests animation, almost as if they are speaking. As manifestations of a domestic deity they suggest a

possible parallel to the *laughing Buddha* rather than his more solemn, introspective incarnations.

As a matched pair, with the prosaic quality of 'bookends', they also recall the imagery of a temple guardian pair, the guardians of the left and right. As twins, they are perhaps less macabre than the matched pair of 'Aus der *Wunderkammer*', however I am always conscious of a potential duality. As with *Die Wunderkinder*, an undercurrent of a "...good/bad, protect/attack duality inserts itself into the narrative, a tension which is not entirely mitigated by...their...marionette-like 'cuteness'...It might, in fact, be that very... 'cuteness' which is unnerving. The dark side of that duality draws on long threads of undercurrent myth, such as that of Pandora opening a forbidden container and releasing the 'spites' to unleash sin and suffering on the world. The draw of the forbidden container was too much for her to resist, perhaps like the apple in Eden." Here *Andvari* sit laughing and appear benign but their bottom half hold secrets fast and we are not to know how benign or otherwise (as with *Andvari's* little golden ring) they may be.

Work 18

Yet Another Heir:
Ceremonial Bowl
(Private Collection, Germany)

Huon Pine, Mahogany, Aluminium



As with the Huon Pine *Zoomorphic* creature that is the upper section of *Thoth 2*, in the case of this small, tabletop ceremonial bowl, a winged creature has landed on whatever surface presents itself. Where the larger *Teraph* or *Sphinx* works come with an integrated *Architectonic* component, this work interacts with the furniture on which it is placed. Therefore, also as with the upper section of *Thoth 2*, it is not fixed – it exudes the tension of temporary presence, suggesting it can take off at any minute.

Yet Another Heir sits within a *Ceremonial Bowl* category in my work. This category works within the narrative of containing, of being an agent for presentation and making a votive offering. Larger manifestations of this category have found their way into similar installations, both domestic and commercial, as that in which *Thoth 2* sits – as the formal welcoming icon on an office reception area or in the entrance hallway of a home. *Yet Another Heir* can be placed anywhere and at its most prosaic this work could contain fruit, eggs or some collection of decorative objects. At its most poetic it manifests as a domestic reliquary.

At various times I have made conscious reference to a kind of rematerialization rather than a dematerialization conservation strategy in my work, as do crafts practitioners who validate the use of a precious material resource by turning it into a work with long-term provenance (see the section on Historical and Theoretical Context). Here the image of precious *organic flesh* resurrected as, in this case domestic, object with long-term provenance rather than manifesting as part of the ephemera of most contemporary domestic objects with a use by date, suggested a number of icons of re-birth or re-validation including that of the mythological phoenix. Hence the title, taken from Shakespeare:

“Nor shall this peace sleep with her: but as when
the bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,
Her ashes new create another heir, As great in
admiration as herself;”⁵¹

Yet Another Heir works within a narrative of change, reinvention, constant reconfiguration, change of location and most of all, revalidation. Thus – Another Heir, Yet Another Heir, etc.

The work was initially made for an invited exhibition of works titled (by the naff pun) ‘Crate Expectations’ and mounted by the Tweed River Regional Art Gallery. Each exhibitor was given a plastic crate into which the work was required to fit, ‘Yet Another Heir’ therefore has demountable, machined, and glass bead blasted, aluminium legs. In respect of ‘Wunderkabinett 1, 2 and 3,’ I noted that Kevin Murray (had) commented that “slippage between human and animal is one of the key monstrosities” but slippage between animal and artificial can’t be far behind, although I do not intend monstrosity so much as a touch of ‘structural perversion.’” Here the image can be extended to that of prosthetic legs fitted to the ‘living flesh’ of Huon Pine, closing if one has a mind, the loop back to the ‘Symmetry’ inherent in manipulation of the material.

Works 14–18 spark historical and iconographic memories that invigorate the work with theatre, drama and a certain amount of, even if domestically scaled, spectacle that offers the owner the ability to work their story into his/her own environmental narrative. Their narrative tension also relies on the frisson added by the occasional undercurrent of what is, at least challenge or, at most threat. Either way, by their very nature, objects such as these, which have a use *function* as well as a *decorative function*, invite the user into the story so that the owner is not merely a passive spectator but joins the works in periodically acting out a domestic ritual. The physical relationship that

necessarily exists between people and the functional objects with which they enjoy interacting gives the works a potency that further diminishes the barren concept of functional objects being merely handiwork. Here is manifest the sense of objects as romance – the celebration of the poetry and the magic contained within the story. It is that story that usually makes up the greater part of my discussion with the collector/client. The owners of *The Sphinx 1 and 2 Series*, for example, engaged in a dialogue of celebration, anticipation and continually renewed realization in the journey of ownership. Thereafter they have enjoyed the ritual of living with the works and inviting family and friends into that journey. How they employ, touch and live with these works, and with the objects, which the works in turn contain and the use of which they facilitate, – in the one case recorded music, in the other books – is the measure of importance the owners attribute to them. That is the point at which that primal act of creation, which is not given to everyone, makes the transition into, and impacts on, the lives of other people.

CHAPTER

3

Conclusion

A recurrent theme within which the works described in the chapter: Narrative Documentation of Design Works sit is that of a rich narrative giving the works both personal/public and historical/contemporary location and purpose. As I concluded in the chapter on Historical and Theoretical Context, a key challenge for me has been the development of an individual category of work that allows for some of the primal mythologies and narratives of our history to be linked with new and relevant personal or group narratives in various situations; in the *micro* personal and domestic as much as in the *macro* shared and public. The challenge has been to contribute to the creation of a conceptual space for new works, or new categories of works, created to contribute to an eclectic landscape. When they are melded into any public or private environment, the works of artists crafts practitioners or designers, such as those in this submission, can take their place within a new critical mass. They can begin to accrue further levels of meaning through association with new people and events. They can be mitigated by, and in turn mitigate, the other components of their environment, with each core element having a story to tell.

My educational background and a great deal of my professional practice have been grounded in design. Some of my work – that which I have produced as a studio furniture designer/maker – has overlapped with crafts practice, which in turn has overlapped with arts practice. I spent years on a variety of State, National and International arts related bodies steeped in the values, discourse and the politics of creative practice. For most of my working life I have been involved with design education engaged in all levels of scholarship and many levels of University management. I have

paralleled my practice with writing, commenting on and critiquing the field, and occasionally, curating exhibitions. Therefore my values are deeply rooted in the discourse surrounding these fields and my vocabulary stems naturally from their related paradigms.

Naturally we tend to speak from the base of our understandings, we frame questions and answers within whatever frames of reference are available to us. For example, our contemporary understandings of ourselves, and the social and cultural context in which we exist, have roots that go back the formative mythologies of our history and to some of the iconography associated with the expression of those mythologies in ancient times. Similarly, the *Wunderkammer*, which came into prominence at the end of the middle ages and which, I have argued, was a later, major staging post in the journey of humankind towards the enlightenment and modernity, is an example of how the taxonomies which influence the way we see, the way we know, and the way we speak of the world today were seeded. In this submission I have framed the theoretical context and narratives of my works within a discourse that uses these foundations, amongst others.

At the same time this inquiry has brought me into contact with parallel discourses and parallel perspectives that have impressed me as having the capacity to frame my endeavour and that of others like me – in fact when writ large, of all of us, and all we do – in a different vocabulary, although within a complementary narrative. Modernity and the continuing development of scientific knowledge give us continually evolving insights. Throughout this document I have cautiously referred to one perspective that I believe has the potential to contribute to

new layers of understanding of my narrative and to contribute new insights for me – a perspective alluded to in the occasional reference by me of my work sitting within a new and individual *perceptual-cognitive* category.

As the concluding chapter of this document, and within the current phase of my personal development, I intend to briefly describe my interest in this alternative paradigm, this complementary pathway to understanding what actually happens psychologically in the establishment by human beings of foundations for *knowing*, for seeing and interpreting the world around them, and for placing themselves and their material anchors into it. I conclude the written section of this submission in the spirit of research enquiry in which it is customary to identify future avenues of research and to speculate on the way forward.

This line of thought begins to bridge the narrative and the conceptual foundations for my domain with another, one that derives initially from cognitive psychology. What appeals to me about this domain is that it deals with inquiry into how the brain functions and how the ways human beings see, *know*, *understand* and *categorize* may have evolved. It bookends my conceptual and experiential narrative – which stretches from the development of ancient, formative mythologies through to 21st Century material culture – with a premise for the primal *psychology* of human experience.

In the chapter Historical and Theoretical Context I wrote about the *Wunderkammer*, and the English version of it, the *Repository*, being significant staging posts in the development of the idea of the *grand pattern* – an idea which itself resulted from the quest for enlightenment and the desire of those with inquisitive minds for clearer paradigms for knowing themselves. In my current line of thinking, cognitive psychology is not a threat to the *romance* of the

narratives of material culture any more than the *Wunderkammer* or other periodic manifestations of attempts throughout history to explain the material world in rational terms destroyed wonder as a human experience. Naturally as a designer/crafts practitioner/artist/educator I may not be able to fully articulate the nuances of the field but my intention is to try to explore where its overlap with mine may give new insights and identify new pathways for enquiry – and ultimately interrogate, and supplement, my understanding of how visual narratives work.

The domain of cognitive psychology on which I am touching refers particularly to the work of Eleanor Rosch 52 and her collaborators on categorisation 53. This seminal work dealing with the most elemental of mental functions unravelled how we recognize objects in the world around us; in effect, how the brain recognizes, for example, that the thing before us is a chair and not a dog, and further, that the chair is traditional, as distinct from modern. The number of levels of categorisation depends upon the knowledge and expertise that the brain engaged in the categorisation has taken up. As such, an informed brain can differentiate even within an arcane category such as Art Nouveau furniture. It can differentiate between the early and late period, between French and Scottish styles.

More recently a confluence of disciplines around an essentially *Darwinian model of human behaviour* has joined forces. These come from such fields as cognitive neuroscience 54 and genetics 55. They regard all aspects of human behaviour as having an evolutionary basis; in other words, our understanding, our emotions, and in the event, the intellectual structures we devise to give ourselves the means of operating in the world. In this context, our creative actions, including the artefacts that we design, and the method in which we deploy them, can consequently be seen

as extensions of a primary, *Darwinian*, strategy for survival. Within this paradigm it is possible to deliver insights into the philosophy of aesthetics – a massive discourse in its own right. However, for the sake of the point being discussed here, it is sufficient to note that I refer not only to the word as it was coined and understood by Baumgarten in 1735, as a reference to a new theory of art and to “the philosophical pursuit of laws pertaining to art”⁵⁶ but also in its earlier classical Greek sense of sensory-perceptual knowledge (aesthêsis), as distinct from intellectual/linguistic knowledge (noêsis).⁵⁷ Of particular interest to me, and pertinent to this submission, is the insights this affords as to how visual narratives, *three-dimensional stories*, actually work.

This paradigm stresses the evolutionary forces that led to our survival as a species. It traces our hominid ancestry back approximately 5 million years (as distinct from the 10,000 years or so of recorded history currently popular). It traces the acquisition of complex languages to approximately 100,000 years ago, and our settled non-nomadic existence to a mere 10,000 years ago.⁵⁸

Importantly, it sees the perceptual as *the* dominant form of knowledge, recognizing language-based knowledge as being a relatively recent manifestation of human development. In so doing, it questions the understanding of a language-based rationale being at the core of our primal understanding of, and responses to, all the aspects of our environment. This phenomenon has the potential to add a layer of cognitive science over the liberal arts concept of a *visual language*, as it is understood by visual artists, crafts practitioners and designers. What this suggests is that the *intuitive* part of arts practice and appreciation, which is alluded to so often by creative practitioners themselves, may be able to be grounded in a cognitive

psychology paradigm. Similarly the *intuitive* or subconscious process of appreciation, where the client or viewer experiences a response for which a rationale cannot easily be articulated may be seen as an aspect of that same paradigm. An interesting parallel question is whether that challenges the hegemony of language based contemporary theory as a prime construct for the experience of, and response to, creative practice. That would suggest the roots of narrative lie in perceptual knowledge, in which case *the picture* is (not only) *worth a thousand words*, it tells an extended suite of stories long before the words can be formulated.

As well as regarding the visual/perceptual as a primary domain of human knowledge, this aspect of cognitive psychology recognizes the function of *categorisation* as a core response made by human beings to the stimuli with which they are confronted. Allan Whitfield maintains that:

“A fundamental tenet of this perspective is that categorization is one of the basic functions of life – one of the elemental ways in which we form meaning. Categorization involves grouping objects together as similar and distinguishing them from other objects. It further involves being able to identify new objects that we have not seen before, and assigning them to a category... In doing so we also extend our category structure – we expand it and articulate further connections, i.e. we therefore ‘understand’ more.”⁵⁹

So the process of categorization includes separating the similar from the different. We make sense of the world, and make it manageable, by constructing categories into which we put items that are similar. Some of the categories are so important to our existence that they appear to be instinctual, *wired in* to the brain, as with our notion of what constitutes an attractive face 60 – the rest we learn from experience. The propensity to create this category structure is embedded in our

natures as human beings. Something motivates us, from childhood on, to acquire and elaborate systems for categorization. Whitfield maintains that the motivation is pleasure, and that this comes from mid-brain emotional centres that are activated during the process of articulating categories. It is for this reason that children learn, otherwise, it is suggested, why would they bother? The picture of a child sitting on the floor sorting toys, building blocks or parts of a puzzle into patterns and categories strikes a familiar chord in this context. Similarly, stamp and coin collecting are further examples extending through the juvenile into the adult period.

The very act of collecting can be seen as an extension of this genetic predisposition. Thus the *Wunderkammer* is a late medieval manifestation of the human need to create order through pattern, still manifest in the modern pursuit of classificatory / logical systems within science – and within material culture per se. An excellent example is the telephone directory. There is perhaps no more ubiquitous classificatory system in modern life than the telephone directory – though the Internet is making headway, using those same systems of knowledge classification with which our brains are so comfortable. It is tempting to speculate that the urge to *match* the curtains with the carpet, to *match* the shirt with the suit, to *match* the colour of the toothbrush holder with that of the bathroom cabinet, are further expressions of this wired-in predisposition to create classificatory order. It is interesting that we seem to like things that *match*.⁶¹ We seem to have a predisposition for pattern.

As I noted in the chapter: Historical and Theoretical Context, on the pathway to *Modernity*, the *Wunderkammer* manifested as a stage in the development of an early rationale for the categorization of objects across all categories of material culture.

Categorization and cataloguing evolved to focus the collections on a range of purposes and to define each of the objects in the collection within those purposes. Similarly, in that chapter I discussed the human tendency to classify by the separation of the similar from the different. The search for a pattern was only made possible by the complementary process of recognizing that some things elude the pattern. If everything that is identifiable as essentially other can be excluded, what is left must belong.

A great deal is known about how cognitive categories are internally structured and differentiated from one another – and the early work of Rosch and her collaborators is instrumental in this. We recognize objects by matching the features of things in the external world against the features that we have stored within our cognitive categories. This is an aspect of classical Darwinism, our ancestors having evolved the capacity to do this at microsecond speed in order to survive on the savannah. A prototype contains the most typical features of that category. For example, the most prototypic features of our bird category are likely to be *feathers* and *fly*. Legs and wings would not differentiate as well. Having made the match between external features and stored prototypes, then memory systems are triggered that provide stored information about the external object that we have recognized. After all, there is not much point in recognizing something without knowing what that something does. Without this additional capacity our ancestors would have been eaten.⁶²

The brain is predisposed towards perceptual-cognitive organization of the external world. Inevitably, this latent predisposition was carried through into the social and tribal milieu that we created, and into the objects embedded in it. As a species we cognize meaning in natural (*naturalia*) and social-designed

(*exotica and artefacta*) objects. Furthermore, we are remarkably adept at cross-categorical referencing of such objects. For example, one of my earliest works, a cradle, is simultaneously a useful piece of furniture, a sculptural object with an exhibition provenance, a utilization of the natural forms in the seed pod I referenced, the place where my baby daughter slept and now, a family heirloom. Human beings have evolved into experts at constructing multifaceted categorical identities.

In this context it appears that my own work exploits this latent predisposition towards categorical learning. It does so by providing an interplay on the theme of categorical identity. There appear to be four distinct categories present within the work, and these operate at two levels of salience. At the higher level of salience are the basic level categories of *furniture/functional objects* and *sculpture/artistic object*. In processing the work the brain accesses both. At a secondary level we access a third category of *myth, metaphor* – and a kind of historical conceptualism. The fourth, *synthetic*, category operates on the level of an iconographic personal style.

So, we have what might be called a plot and a sub-plot. In combination, they create a categorical incongruity that we (our brains) are challenged to unravel and incorporate into our category structures. The skill of the work is not in having four distinct categories. After all, putting four categories into a piece of work may be neither unique nor sufficient to be able to claim the establishment of a new perceptual-cognitive category. Rather, the skill is in so integrating the four that they do fuse into what *is* apparently a new category. Although we can witness the outcome, exactly how this is achieved within the brain is not known. What is clear, however, is that in order to do this we tap into the brain's propensity to construct categorical meaning.

In this sense the fusion creates a new categorical entity and, by implication, *new categorical knowledge*. This is not linguistic knowledge; rather, it is *perceptual-cognitive* knowledge.

Furniture/Functional Object

This is the primary, and possibly the most immediately identifiable category. Everything I have ever designed and made has a primary use function, whether or not that use function is the reason for it having been bought/collected. On one level the measure for a functional object is precisely what the word suggests – does it do a job of work? Products in this category are manifestations of all the processes connected with design – problem solving and idea generation, project management, production, materials analysis, technology, distribution, marketing, selling, installation and use. On another level, a much richer and more comprehensive idea of function can be brought to bear on objects which *function* within our personal stories. At its most extreme, and where all else is equal, reductive functionalism might logically result in one common design for any task – for any situation. The geometric reductionism of pure high *Modernism* is an aesthetic on its way to that extreme. However all else is never equal. Socio-economic, cultural, spiritual and national variations (amongst others) insist on a complementary range of iconographic differences manifesting in the products destined to service those variations. Our concepts of taste and consumer choice, even if we recognize that they are clustered through one form or another of group identity, are predicated on those differences.

The entire continuum of my work, from that concentrated at the most explicit use function end, such as in corporate and commercial installations, to that at the most esoteric and conceptually theatrical end, such as that conceived within a curatorial narrative for exhibition, is predicated on that richer concept of function. That is why the category integrates so smoothly into the other at the higher level of salience, *sculpture/artistic* object.

Sculpture/Artistic Object

Studio Furniture, as it is known in the USA, is consciously geared to being artistic object. Narrative and conceptual content are layered over function. In Australia the term Designer/Maker is sometimes used to meld the concerns of the designer with those of the crafts practitioner, into one complementary descriptor. As I noted in the Chapter: Historical and Theoretical Context, the work included in the submission is evidence that Design, Art and Craft can form part of a continuum that offers the opportunity for the establishment of a new sub-category rooted in all three.

The characteristics of this category include the works being unique, or at the most, either a limited edition, or a related group of items. This provides part of their provenance, destined for exhibition in galleries of note, they are assumed to be successful if they gain in value as their creator gains in reputation and if they are collected by regional, state or national galleries and are subsumed into the national estate. Works in domestic collections also gain in value by virtue of the public reputation the designer/maker earns through peer review and by being included in significant collections. They may also gain private value as a result of a patina of meaning continually accruing for the owner, possibly even becoming heirlooms.

The works included in this submission manifest as three-dimensional pictures, they communicate abstract meaning and can be read as symbolic object. That manifestation provides the intersection between this category, and that of *myth, metaphor and historical conceptualism*.

Myth/Metaphor

Human beings created myths in order to make sense of the world within their, usually limited, frames of reference. The capacity for imagination and abstract thought, which we believe is only given to humans, can manifest as a burden and bring with it the fear of the unknown. Myths gave pattern to existence and allowed people to locate themselves within that pattern, in effect to anchor themselves in an otherwise unfathomable eternity. Inevitably, in periods of history where logic and rationality became the dominant methodologies for inquiry and understanding, faith in the emotional and ritualistic waned proportionately.

Plato (c. 427-347 BCE) and Aristotle (c. 384-322 BCE) argued for a philosophical understanding of the world, which privileged *logos* (logic) over *mythos* (myth).⁶³ However even at this seminal time in the development of Western thought, logic and myth were not totally separated. As Karen Armstrong has noted in her book, *A Short History of Myth*:

“...philosophers continued to use myth, either seeing it as the primitive forerunner of rational thought or regarding it as indispensable to religious discourse...despite the monumental achievements of Greek rationalism during the Axial Age, it had no effect on Greek Religion. Greeks continued to sacrifice to the Gods, take part in the Eleusinian mysteries and celebrate their festivals until the 6th Century of the Common Era, when this pagan religion was forcibly suppressed by the Emperor Justinian and replaced by the *mythos* of Christianity.”⁶⁴

In a more recent timeframe, the Industrial Revolution and the development of technologies rooted in scientific enquiry saw the culmination of a trajectory towards *Modernity* in the West, which began at the end of the Middle Ages. Again, and this time in an arguably more encompassing manner, *logos* triumphed over . The *Enlightenment* in Western civilization saw

the suppression of mythology as a widely utilized strategy for the creation of social anchors. As I stated in the chapter Historical and Theoretical Context, the attempt to bond science and art, religion and knowledge, power and service (including that of production), and not least economics, into a *grand pattern*, in which the *Wunderkammer* of the 16th and 17th Centuries played an integral role, resulted in natural science overwhelming the prior emphasis on spirituality and religiosity.

Karen Armstrong uses a line from *The Waste Land*, T.S. Elliot’s 1922 seminal poem on what he considered to be the sterility and alienation of that era in the West: “These fragments I have shored against my ruins”, to suggest that “it has been writers and artists, rather than religious leaders, who have stepped into the vacuum and attempted to reacquaint us with the mythological wisdom of the past.”⁶⁵

In my work I have sometimes consciously referenced the icons and therefore also the narratives of primal myths of the past. I have done that in the belief that there is a place in our material culture for icons that connect past narratives, where they contain some ongoing resonance, with contemporary relevance. I make a distinction between the celebration of story and the use of visual metaphor, and religiosity. Both may be present but not necessarily. Armstrong attempts to reconcile two opposites: the idea that “...myth could never be approached in a purely profane setting”, with the alternative example of a reader being meditatively absorbed into a novel – which can be read anywhere, without ritual. She concludes that it may well be the role of artists and creative writers to bring fresh insights to our world.⁶⁶ The categorization of the works in this submission into four groups: Commercial/Political, Sacred (Judaica), Collection and Domestic, is aimed at describing a continuum of settings over which myth

may be approached as one of the informing elements. Not mythologies in the sense of lies, or even of fiction, but mythologies as in metaphorical narratives.

To the observer, the *mythos* of the sacred, as in the Judaica, offers perhaps the least controversial setting for accepting the role of iconography designed and made for ritual. The public art collection, manifesting as it most often has in a large state supported architectural edifice, until recent times with strong classical undertones, has its own kind of quasi *religiosity*. The reverence with which state validated *hero* art is traditionally treated allows a relatively easy link with *mythos* to be made. I have also demonstrated how the Commercial/Political can also be seen as a site for elements of the built environment to operate as metaphor and how my work is located within the metaphorical narratives exploited by the organizations within which it sits.

Importantly, I maintain that the domestic ritual of homemaking, the assembling of a narrative of personal and social space, also sits within a sort of contemporary mythology – a *story* about self. As I noted in the chapter: Narrative Documentation of Design Works: most important in this context is the understanding of the home as a sanctuary – the space, in some cases the last, or only, place, in which the primacy of the occupant's world and his/her place in it is unchallenged. The perceptual-cognitive category which I have developed includes a strong emphasis on work made for domestic or personal space, work that explores the relationship between people and the objects they gather about themselves to mark and to protect their environment – and which includes a place for the decorative elements to which people are attracted as a form of benign, personal graffiti.

Iconographic Synthesis

By synthetic I mean the category in which a range of iconography specific to me and to my work, and recognized as such by my peers and those who are interested in this field, has been synthesized.

In this submission I have referred to the *reconciliation of the unlike*, in the sense of a whole category of work looking for its place in the continuum of material culture. Many of the individual works represent a narrative of reconciliation in themselves, presenting as a dynamic tension between *Zoomorphic* references, and *inanimate*, usually geometric, *Architectonic* forms. Strategies for creating narrative tension include reconciling opposites through a comfortable, highly articulated transition. These include blending geometric with curvilinear, often zoomorphic, form; and natural timber colours and textures with highly finished surfaces in saturated colour. A sense of movement: immediately past or imminent, is usually suggested in juxtaposition to, or fused with a rooted, inanimate, architectonic stillness.

These works sit in a continuum from humour to monstrosity. Artisanry, minute attention to detail and high levels of finish draw them back from the edge of the macabre and reconcile them to the observer. Craft skill and a comfortable *materiality* blend with the sometimes dramatic, sometimes coy, narrative to insinuate themselves into the viewer's attention span, and into the owner/collector's own story.

A New Category

One measure of the existence of this new knowledge is whether a new category actually forms. Interestingly, a perceptual-cognitive category now exists that contains the prototypic features of the work. I know that this is how people recognize a *Helmut Lueckenhausen*. Adding to the body of published critique that testifies to the peer recognition of a new, fused, categorical entity, Jason Smith listed a number of categorical components including craft, art, philosophy and aesthetics, and wrote of the work:

‘In thinking about some of the recent works of Helmut Lueckenhausen, I have been meditating on concepts of emptiness and fullness. And certainly in an open ended way...for how they trigger philosophical enquiry into the relation of the self to the interior and exterior world; to our needs and desires to structure and order the environment of which we are a part or that we find imposed on us. Lueckenhausen’s cabinets connect strongly with humanist philosophies and evoke essential human experiences integrating with current discourses centred on the theories and aesthetics of object design and art-craft definitions, histories and interactions.’⁶⁷

Importantly, in recognizing the psychological foundations for sensory perceptual knowledge (aesth sis), the cognitive psychology paradigm actually underpins and enriches the concept of a PhD by project. It is a paradigm that allows for a renewed understanding of how the *voice* of the artist, the craftsperson, the designer, is heard through creative work. It also provides the conceptual basis for the sensory perceptual knowledge, expressed initially through the creative practitioner’s visual narratives, to be mediated by that of the user as the work accrues a patina of meaning by association and attribution. Most importantly, this paradigm allows that while the work can be further complemented by the written word, and in the context of a PhD appropriately so,

it recognizes the perceptual as the dominant form of knowledge. The implications for understanding and appropriately validating creative practice are significant. The implications of this paradigm for research into, and through, creative practice, and the capacity for a body of knowledge to be identified and documented through visual communication are even more significant. This offers a challenge for further consideration of, and research into, the manner in which the performing and visual arts and design work within a Darwinian model for human behaviour.

The propensity for human beings to categorize, to sort the world into manageable groupings, in fact to create patterns is illustrated through the development of the *Wunderkammer*; an early tool for categorization and enquiry. With what is known now about the way human beings establish perceptual knowledge, we have an enhanced understanding with which to fit the *Wunderkammer* into a history of documentation that pre-dated, and then seeded, the development of scientific taxonomies in the West. It also seeded the evolution of our particularly Western, and within that, probably even particularly Anglo-Celtic, categorizations for professional practice. In our culture these categories have been too little credited with being part of a whole, as opposed to the German dictum, for example, that a modern culture is made up of a conscious combination of *Kunst, Wissenschaft* and *Technik* – Art, Science and Technology. The solution may be not so much to run all of our categories in together and so make them meaningless but to recognize new combinations, new perceptual cognitive sub-categories when they are formed.

In the case of the works that go to make up this submission, I have shown that they can and do work in their own right, providing a narrative framework for the life experiences of the owner, the collector, the user and the observer – as well as for the designer/maker.

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Conclusion

