

PATRICIA PICCININI

CURIOUS AFFECTION

STUDENT RESOURCE

24 MARCH – 5 AUGUST 2018



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Sierra Leone, in West Africa, and raised in Italy and Australia, Patricia Piccinini has exhibited extensively around the world.

She represented Australia at the 2003 Venice Biennale, created the inflatable sculpture *Skywhale* for the Centenary of Canberra in 2013, and drew over a million visitors to her touring exhibition in Brazil in 2016. Known for her imaginative, and incredibly lifelike, hybrid creatures, Piccinini uses sculpture, installation, video and sound to realise a fantastic and compassionate vision of the world, inspired by nature, science, art history and mythology.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Occupying the entire ground floor of GOMA, 'Patricia Piccinini: Curious Affection' surveys some of the artist's most recognisable sculptures of the past ten years, together with a number of new commissions conceived especially for GOMA. The exhibition also features a large-scale inflatable sculpture suspended in GOMA's Long Gallery, and culminates in an immersive multisensory environment, complete with a field of 3000 flowers.

CONCEPTS

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

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

¹ Patricia Piccinini, in conversation with Peter McKay for 'Curious Affection', 2018



Patricia Piccinini / Australia b.1965 / *The Bond* 2016 / Silicone, fibreglass, human hair, clothing; edition of 3, 1 AP / Courtesy: The artist; Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco / © The artist

KEY THEMES



FABULATION

Expanding on the genre of the fable — a moralistic short story often featuring animals — the term fabulation in the context of 'Curious Affection' weaves

together the magical and the real, and, in so doing, opens up a discussion about how we shape our society, for better and for worse. We can think about fabulation looking at two groups of works located in Gallery 1.3. In the first two rooms, youthful and surreal depictions reveal the playful exchange between children and creatures, while at the other end of the space, the relationship between human and non-human is represented through a series of uncanny objects. These forms stem from a mix of personal experience, research or fables, but all reveal the artist's interest in allowing viewers to witness imagined realities that tap into the fundamental questions of our time.



EMPATHY

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

² Frans de Waal, 'Moral behaviour in animals', TED, November 2011, <https://www.ted.com/talks/frans_de_waal_do_animals_have_morals>, viewed January 2018.

WONDERMENT

Piccinini enables audiences to imagine possible futures both through single artworks, but also through immersive worlds that tap into the miraculous nature of existence. Using highly sensory elements, Gallery 1.1 draws audiences into an artificial reality — an alternative world. This strategy presents an elevated experience of what it means to be connected to the world through the senses. Piccinini creates moments for visitors to wonder at the remarkable fact that life exists, and to consider the responsibilities of the individual and the capacity of the collective to shape the world for the better.



BEFORE YOUR VISIT

RESEARCH AND MAKE CONNECTIONS

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



SCULPTURE

- Louise Bourgeois's spider sculptures in relation to *The Bond* 2016; see Elizabeth Manchester, 'Louise Bourgeois: Maman 1999', Tate, December 2009, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bourgeois-maman-t12625>>, viewed January 2018.
- Berlinde De Bruyckere's faceless sculptures in relation to *Atlas* 2012; see 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Saatchi Gallery, <http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/berlinde_debruyckere.htm>, viewed January 2018.

LITERATURE

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) in relation to *The Carrier* 2012
- Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) in relation to *Teenage Metamorphosis* 2017
- Kazuo Ishiguru's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) in relation to *Kindred* 2018



FILM

- *The Shape of Water* 2017 (director: Guillermo del Toro) in relation to *The Carrier* 2012
- *Okja* 2017 (director: Bong Joon-ho) in relation to *Bottom Feeder* 2009

MYTHOLOGY

- Chimeras in relation to *The Young Family* 2002
- Chimeras are creatures that are a mix of more than one animal. The name is drawn from Greek mythology, and refers to a fire-breathing beast with the head of a lion, a goat's body and a serpent for a tail.
- See Hannah Devlin, 'First human-pig 'chimera' created in milestone study', *Guardian*, 27 January 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/jan/26/first-human-pig-chimera-created-in-milestone-study>>, viewed January 2018.



MEDICAL SCIENCE

- CRISPR in relation to *Nature's Little Helpers* 2005
- CRISPR is a form of genetic engineering so precise it has been renamed 'genetic editing'. See Michael Specter, 'How the DNA revolution is changing us', *National Geographic Magazine*, August 2016, <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/08/dna-crispr-gene-editing-science-ethics/>>, viewed January 2018.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- Boston Dynamics' robots, such as *BigDog* and *Spot* 2008-2016 in relation to *The Struggle* 2017; see 'Changing your idea of what robots can do', 2018, *Boston Dynamics* <<https://www.bostondynamics.com/robots>>, viewed February 2018.



FEMINIST WRITING

- Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* 1984 in relation to *Big Mother* 2005; see Donna Haraway, 'A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century', in Anne C Herrmann and Abigail J Stewart (eds), *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., 1994, pp.424-57.

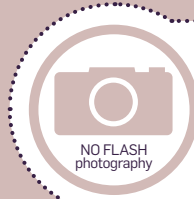
DURING YOUR VISIT

INVESTIGATE: FIND, ANALYSE, COMPARE AND CONNECT

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

FIRST LEVEL = SURFACE

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

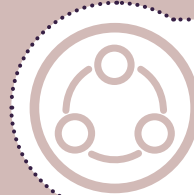


With a camera, **ZOOM IN + CAPTURE** a series of details from a range of surfaces (metallic, organic, skin) and materials (silicone, hair, chrome, rubber) on display in 'Curious Affection'.

*an appearance of truth or reality

SECOND LEVEL = ETHICS

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



EXTRAPOLATE from an analysis of relationships to formulate an ethical question. For example, *The Bond* 2016 = adult female (human) holding a hybrid boy (part human, part artificial). How does genetic modification affect parenting?

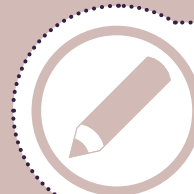


IDENTIFY + LIST sculptures depicting a relationship between two or more species, including those that merge multiple species/technologies into one form. Use the following table as a guide.

| NATURE | | | TECHNOLOGY | |
|--------|----------|-------------|------------|----------|
| Human | Creature | Environment | Creature | Machines |
| Bodies | Organic | Artificial | Bodies | |

THIRD LEVEL = LOVE

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



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

AFTER YOUR VISIT

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

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

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

Use the table below to define a focus for a creative response to 'Curious Affection':

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



SUGGESTED MAKING ACTIVITIES



DRAW

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



SCULPT

Experiment with rolling clay to create tiles with smooth and rough surfaces. Use a metallic glaze to give the tiles a machine-like aesthetic.

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



PAINT

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



WEAVE

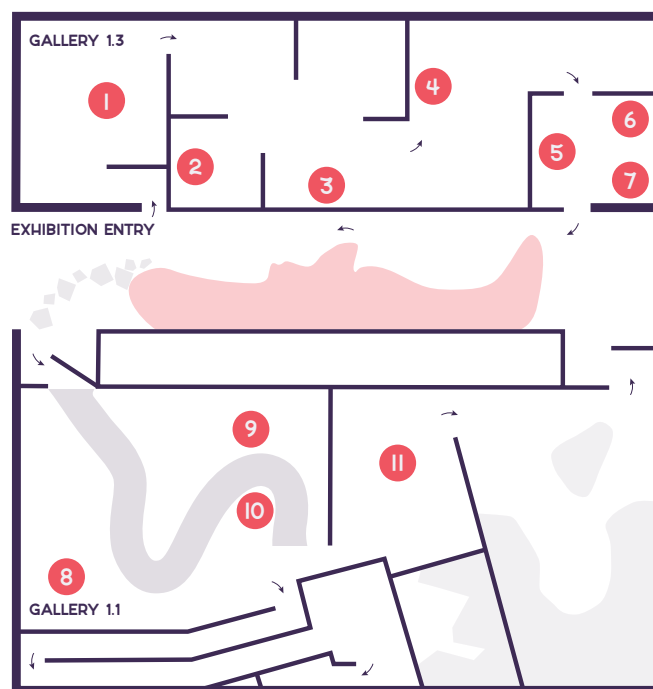
Research the anatomy of mammals and experiment with weaving cotton, wool or fishing line through holes in a piece of leather, silicone or fabric to imitate different types of hair or fur.



COMBINE

Use the inspiration of some of these making activities to design an imagined being. Your imagined being should conjure a sense of wonderment as well as inspire empathy in viewers.

- 1 BIG MOTHER 2005
- 2 THE YOUNG FAMILY 2002
- 3 NATURE'S LITTLE HELPERS-THUNDERDOME 2005
NATURE'S LITTLE HELPERS-DOMAIN 2005
- 4 ATLAS 2012
- 5 BOTTOM FEEDER 2009
- 6 PRONE 2011
- 7 THE CARRIER 2012
- 8 KINDRED 2018
- 9 THE BOND 2016
- 10 TEENAGE METAMORPHOSIS 2017
- II THE STRUGGLE 2017



Artwork layout may be subject to change.

PATRICIA PICCININI: CURIOUS AFFECTION

PRINCIPAL BENEFACTOR



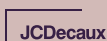
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This resource has been developed by QAGOMA Learning Staff and Peter McKay, Curator, Contemporary Australian Art, QAGOMA.



Patricia Piccinini Australia b.1965

- P2. P3** *The Young Family* 2002 / Silicone, polyurethane, leather, plywood, human hair / 80 x 150 x 110cm / Collection: Bendigo Art Gallery, Vic.
- P2** *Bottom Feeder* 2009 / Silicone, fibreglass, steel, fox fur / 45 x 40 x 66cm
- P3** *The Bond* 2016 / Silicone, fibreglass, human hair, clothing / 162 x 56 x 50cm
- P3** *Teenage Metamorphosis* 2017 / Silicone, fibreglass, human hair, found objects / 25 x 71 x 52cm
- P3** *The Carrier* 2012 / Silicone, fibreglass, human hair, animal fur / 170 x 115 x 75cm / Lyons Collection Melbourne
- P3** *Thunderdome* (It is possible that these two females are attracted to the noise and smell of the drag racing.) (from the series 'Nature's Little Helpers') 2005 / Digital C-type photograph / 80 x 160cm
- P3** *The Struggle* 2017 / Fibreglass, automotive paint, leather, steel, plastic, tyres / 200 x 240 x 120cm
- P3. P5** *Big Mother* 2005 / Silicone, fibreglass, polyurethane, leather, human hair / 175cm (high) / Collection: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
- P4** *Domain* (While the alpha male does maintain a strong hierarchy, juveniles are free to playfully interact.) (from the series 'Nature's Little Helpers') 2005 / Digital C-type photograph / 80 x 160cm
- P4** *Prone* 2011 / Silicone, fibreglass, human hair, felt, ed.1/3 / 23 x 60 x 60cm

All works are in the collection of the artist unless otherwise indicated. © Patricia Piccinini. Courtesy: The artist; Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco