

A FORMAL FOCUS – MATERIALS AND PROCESSES

I can't paint, I can't draw and I can't weld, but I can see an empty space and I know what to put in it.

Graeme Sturgeon, *Australian Sculpture Now: Second Australian sculpture triennial* (exh. cat.), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1984, p. 34

... usually, I start from how interesting the material is ... what its suggestions are, why I like it, am I remembering something? ... does this remind me of anything? ... And as I work it usually hardens into something, usually ...

Ewen McDonald, 'Rosalie Gascoigne: An introduction', interview transcript, 1998, pp. 4–5, RG Archive

My concerns are as much with my materials as with the work I make of it. They both have to satisfy me ... I look for things that have been somewhere, done something. Second-hand materials aren't deliberate; they have had sun and wind on them ...

Public Programs Department, Art Gallery of New South Wales, *Material as Landscape, Rosalie Gascoigne Education Kit*, 1997

Rosalie Gascoigne used both natural (grass, bones, feathers, shells) and man-made materials in her assemblages and installations. Her art practice is often strongly identified with materials such as enamel ware, wooden soft-drink crates, corrugated iron, retro-reflective road signs, linoleum and builder's form board, which she used to create distinctive series of works. Gascoigne was not interested in new materials, preferring weathered and worn materials that reveal the effects of nature, time and use.

The assemblages Gascoigne became well known for early in her career, including *The colonel's lady*, 1976, often included domestic objects arranged in box-like structures. The selection and arrangement of objects in these early works suggests a narrative or story. While Gascoigne continued to use boxes to order and contain her assemblages until the early 1980s, installations and wall-based works became an increasingly important part of her practice. Her work also gradually became more austere and abstract, often incorporating repeated variations of only one or two materials.

Travelling around the countryside collecting materials was integral to Gascoigne's art practice. Materials were stored in her home/studio, where they became part of her environment until the time came for them to be used.

Gascoigne worked intuitively with no preliminary drawings or plans. Her ideas, and the processes used to make each artwork, were inspired and determined by the look and feel of particular materials, and the visual and emotional associations they suggested. Depending on the materials used, many hundreds of hours would be spent on the labour intensive work of cutting, tearing, bending, scrubbing, sorting, grouping, arranging until the 'right' idea and visual effect crystallised. The process of transforming found materials into artworks was one of making the mood, experience and sensation of landscape visible.

In *Crop 2*, 1982, an irregular rectangular mass made up of hundreds of vertical, dry salsify stalks, sits gently on a sheet of old galvanised iron. A delicate, slightly bent, horizontal sheet of wire mesh sits over the top, containing and framing the salsify heads. The juxtaposition of natural and man-made materials in *Crop 2* and the contrasting forms, lines and textures in these materials, suggest the dynamic interplay between nature and culture, and growth and containment in the rural landscape.

Monaro, 1989, is one of many works that Gascoigne created from painted, wooden Schweppes soft-drink crates. These storage crates were once commonly found discarded in the Australian environment. In 1978 Gascoigne chanced upon a large supply of these crates, which provided her with material for her art for the next twenty years. In *Monaro* the wooden slats of the crates have been cut with a bandsaw she acquired in 1988, into thin, uneven slivers. The rhythmic patterns in the arrangement of these slivers across the four panels suggest a horizontal sweep of landscape. Tonal variations, created by clusters of fragmented text, allude to gentle undulations in the landscape or transient shadows and breezes playing across the countryside.

I like the gold of the Schweppes boxes. I think that gold is one of the classical colours. I don't care if it has got Schweppes written all over it, people seem to think I care. I don't care! I just like the black and yellow. When I started I had lots of off-cuts, little pieces too good to throw away. So I started joining them up in a sort of way, walking around them, adding a few more. I soon had a 6 x 4 foot panel. In the end I realised that I needed to have four panels to say what I wanted to say. As it grew so did I. I kept thinking of the Monaro grasslands, and I thought of David Campbell saying 'the Monaro rolls on to the sea'.

Graeme Sullivan, *Seeing Australia – Views of artists and art writers*, Piper Press, Annandale, New South Wales, 1994, p. 19

Questions and Activities

Create a table like the one below. In the first column, make a list of the different materials used by Gascoigne. In the second column, list descriptive words or phrases that relate to the visual appearance of these materials in Gascoigne’s work.

Wood	Worn, bleached, warped, pale blond, slivered, decayed
Corrugated tin	Buckled, bent, rippling, rusted, scrubbed, scarred
Paint	Blistered, flaking, peeling, scorched

Compare and contrast an artwork by Gascoigne with the work of another artist who works in assemblage or installation and/or with found materials (e.g. Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Cornell, Louise Nevelson, Louise Bourgeois, Rebecca Horn, John Davis, Colin Lanceley, Lorraine Connelly-Northey).

- Describe the materials and processes used by each artist to create the work.
- What visual qualities, feelings or ideas are associated with the materials and processes used in each work?
- What are the key similarities and differences between the works of these two artists?
- What reasons can you suggest for the similarities and differences you find (e.g. personal background, social/cultural context).

(clock wise from top left)

The colonel's lady 1976
wood, metal, collage, found objects
39.1 x 59.7 x 8.8 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased, 1976 (76.583)
Photo: Courtesy National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Crop 2 1982
Salsify (*Tragopogon porrifolius*), galvanised wire, corrugated iron
36.0 x 126.0 x 90.0 cm
Gascoigne Family Collection, Canberra
Photo: Brenton McGeachie

Monaro 1989
synthetic polymer paint on wood on plywood
(a-d) 131.0 x 457.4 cm (overall)
State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Purchased, 1989 (1989/0277.awd)
Photo: Courtesy Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

