Contested objects: Redeploying commonplace objects to create new insights into notions of territoriality

A Project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Identifying with the field of sculptural practice this project explores the potential of commonplace objects to unfold and communicate understandings of territoriality. Territoriality is the behavioural manner of making claim to and defending of territory or ideas and is an influencing factor in many forms of human interaction and endeavour, as space and concepts are constantly negotiated and redefined. Drawing on the research of social geography, anthropology and sociology this project explores the defining characteristics of territoriality that pertain to the individual and a wider societal context.

Primarily concerned with objects this project references the long history of objects that runs parallel to the history of humans. Despite thousands of years of development and civilisation the need and use of some objects may be unchanged to the way our early ancestors used defence and offence in the implementing of territoriality. In contemporary forms of human endeavour like sport, the bat used in defence and offence has as its distant antecedents the most basic of implements like the caveman’s club. This relationship through history and the potential for an object to be used and misused are key to their development and highlight the transformational potential of objects as material and subjects within this project.

Exploring the commonplace necessitates the consideration of mass-production, distribution and consumption of objects as globalisation that has provided a proliferation of choice. The profusion of objects manifests a familiarity of utility that is common experience and promotes to a greater understanding the language of commonplace objects. These collective relationships to commonplace objects are further explored through historical and contemporary examples of artists that use pre-existing objects and explore the language of objects.

Commonplace objects are repositories of meaning with associated historical, cultural, social, and functional information that can be understood as shared knowledge. They can also be customised and individualised with additional personal information further embedding our personal experience, narrative and knowledge. This creative project uses the reconfiguration and redeployment of commonplace objects to explore and provide insights into territoriality through a series of sculptures that represent and communicate characteristics of territoriality through the parameters of conflict, sport and commemoration. These subthemes are the basis for articulating and extending conventional notions of territoriality to create new insights and mediate a greater understanding of its influence.

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Within the natural world, territoriality is fundamental to life. By establishing identity and a sense of place, territoriality defines and ensures the instinct to survive and prosper. It is arguably an important factor in influencing many forms of human interaction and endeavour, as the space of personal and social identity and territory is constantly being negotiated and redefined. A personal sense of territoriality is affected by relationships to complex societal notions of territoriality that manifest at local and national levels and are, in turn, affected by the impact of globalisation and international socio-political factors.

These different influences can be considered and mediated through our interactions and associations with the objects we possess and use. As humans we surround ourselves with objects. Used in almost all aspects of our life, they form an integral part of what we do and who we are. We depend on the utility and the familiarity of commonplace objects in our daily existence at home, work, leisure and recreation. The interdependency between objects and humans makes the former an integral consideration when thinking of human endeavour and, specifically, how objects can be used to define, interpret and enforce territoriality.

In this project, I investigate ways that a sculptural art practice can explore human relationships to territoriality through the thematic paradigms of territory, conflict and sport. I focus on the relationship between defence and offence in the delineation of territory through personal domestic space, the contested territories of armed conflict and the competitive territory of sport. I explore ways that commonplace objects may be reconfigured and redeployed to communicate and represent concepts of territory, conflict and sport in order to articulate and extend conventional notions of territoriality. I do this by developing and extending our associations to it in order to communicate a greater understanding of its influence at a more personal and individual level.

Social geographer Robert Sack’s book Human Territoriality is recognised as the most significant discussion of the topic of territoriality (Delaney 2008, p. 70). Sack defines territoriality as individual or group influence over others by the assertion of control over a geographical area (Sack 1986, p. 19). In addition to Sack’s attentiveness to the geographical context, I am equally interested in exploring territoriality in the sense of creating and defending other associated forms of territory as in an idea or sphere of thought.

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall introduced the concept of Proxemics, the categorisation and study of non-verbal communication regarding human occupation of space. He categorised space into various categories of personal space and territory (Hall 1966). For him, personal space is the immediate space that surrounds us, beginning with the intimate space of thought and body personal space that interacts with social and public space. Hall (1996) defines territoriality as the behaviour of an animal or person in laying claim to and defending body territory, home territory, interactional territory and public territory. Whilst his classification of space utilisation acts as a guiding point of reference in this project when considering the personal and public within territoriality, I do not completely adhere to his categories and specifics of distances to define these spaces.

1 In this dissertation I use the English/Australian spelling of offence – the act of attacking or taking the offensive. In some literature offence is represented with the American variation in spelling - offense.
In order to understand our connections to objects, I look to the writing of Erving Goffman who discusses the way objects can indicate or reinforce identity particularly within the domestic or home territorial space (Riggins 1990, p. 340). This is especially relevant to the type of objects chosen and their relationships to their location within the domestic space. I draw on the work of sociologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton who suggest we are a reflection of the objects that we make and choose to interact with and that ‘objects also make and use their makers and users’ (Csikszentmihalyi and Halton 1981, p. 1).

The history of objects cannot be detached from the history of humans; we are reliant on them as much as they are on us. This research builds on the continuing relationship between humans and their objects. Following Hannah Arendt’s concept of Homo Faber or man as maker, I respond to the history and development of objects and, in particular, tools and implements that ensured the advancement of Homo sapiens and the direct lineage to modern humans. Henri Bergson (2012) suggests that creating artificial objects, particularly tools to make tools, was a defining feature of intelligence in early humans. The human ability to consider and reflect on the antecedents of an object is an integral part of the development of new and improved versions and innovative uses. I make a connection between this evolution of objects and the development of an artwork through the conceptual and physical development as well as making processes of sculptural practice.

The importance of reflecting on an object’s antecedents is extended from Jean Baudrillard (2005) who suggests that an object without antecedent is ‘unthinkable’. Neil Cummings elaborates on Baudrillard’s discussion of antecedents, paraphrasing John Donne’s famous line ‘no man is an island’ by suggesting that ‘no object is an island’ (Cummings 1993). I use these related ideas of Baudrillard and Cummings to examine the history and development of a plastic bucket, an archetypal commonplace object, which was central to the early development of this project. Although a simple object in terms of utility and appearance, the plastic bucket is an example of the highly developed and complicated system of global production and distribution, and I use it as a means to discuss how, as commodities, objects have become commonplace and integral to our lives.

Mass production and globalisation have made all types of commodities available across the world in what Steven Holt Skov calls the ‘the grand profusion of things’. He suggests the choice can be paralysing and poses the question: ‘how do we make sense of it?’ (Holt Skov and Skov Holt 2008, p. 27). My research responds to this question by exploring how mass-produced and commonplace objects can be used to communicate and create a personalised identity for individuals whilst also creating a shared common social experience. I am interested to see if an object can both define territoriality for the individual and transcend territoriality for the societal group.

Objects have the potential to be repositories of meaning and communicators of narrative; they can be used to tell stories, proffer ideas, enact memory and communicate about the world. The artist Richard Wentworth suggests objects are powerful vehicles for visual communication (Wentworth 1998). He is a
keen observer of objects and improvised function. His artwork and way of seeing the world have had an influence on this project, particularly his photographic series *Making Do and Getting By* that documents innovative ways of solving simple problems and proposes interesting alternate ways to utilise objects. Artist and curator Colin Painter writes on the use and misuse of objects and suggests ‘we give objects many meanings not intended by their makers. In fact, the things we own have an amalgamation of meanings’ (Painter 1999, p. 5).

The source objects in this project have been developed over generations, innovated by technological advancements in materials, refined by production processes and, importantly, customised by individuals. In his influential text *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau discusses the way we individualise mass culture by altering things ranging from utilitarian objects to street plans, to rituals, laws and language, in order to make them our own (De Certeau 1984). Exploring the ways in which commonplace objects can be individualised and utilised symbolically and tactically is central to my project.

In ‘Objects, Others, and Us [The Refabrication of Things]’, Bill Brown uses the terms ‘redeploying, refabricating and recirculating’ to describe artist Brian Jungen’s ‘artistic redistribution of consumerist object culture’ (Brown 2010, p. 194). Prior to reading Brown’s writing on Jungen, I had been using the term ‘redeployment’ as a way of describing and articulating the process of reusing or referencing commonplace objects in the making of sculpture. For me, redeployment best acknowledges the existing meaning embedded in or attached to an object and articulates the physical and conceptual sculptural process of reusing them in or as artworks.

Using objects as a way of making a connection between people is explored through the concept of the *intermediary* as articulated by Roland Barthes (2007). Writing about a sporting contest, Barthes describes the players as not actually confronting each other directly, but as having an intermediary that comes between them. The intermediary is the ball or puck that becomes or acts as a symbol of things, which is analogous to the way I use objects within the creative research to explore the contrasts and comparisons of offence and defence within territoriality and as symbolic representatives of the objects that operate between the artist and the viewer. Exploring the notion of the intermediary, I use a basketball in a series of artworks to consider the proposition that not only is a basketball a commonplace sporting object, but it is also an example of a commonplace contemporary art object. Some objects are so recognisable and imbued with history and connected images that they become symbols and signs. Using such objects, in effect, references other uses of those types of objects. In this regard, I explore and contextualise the basketball as both a commonplace and an intermediary object by making connections to key works by the contemporary artists Paul Pfeiffer and Jeff Koons.

The use of the Readymade is a key trope in the history of art as artists have made use of existing objects – specifically commonplace objects – as both subject and material. Beginning with Marcel Duchamp and his subversive innovation of the Readymade, artists have continued to use mass-produced commonplace objects to make sense of the world, continually finding new ways that objects can be used to communicate. My project references works by iconic historical artists Pablo Picasso and Marcel
Duchamp but mainly focuses on contextualising my work within the field of contemporary artists who utilise objects in a wide range of ways. As such, the references are not limited to those from the field of sculptural object making, but also include artwork using photography, video and installation. Some artists use objects as the subject such as Shaun Gladwell and Paul Pfeiffer, or as the physical material such as Marepe and Tara Donovan, but most I reference are concerned with objects as both subject and material such as Maurizio Cattelan, Brian Jungen, Jeff Koons, David Mach, Damian Ortega, Simon Starling and Richard Wentworth.

The artist Simon Starling provides a reference point for my project in regard to the issue of global production, and contrasting the themes of mass manufacture and handcrafted production. A careful consideration of Starling’s artwork Work, Made-ready from 1997 provided some useful clarity regarding the physical transformative qualities of object sculpture especially when conveyed through the material and sociological content.

For the purpose of this project, I make a distinction between the terms ‘commonplace’ and ‘everyday’. By using commonplace to describe the objects relevant to this project, I place importance on the type of relationship humans have to objects and emphasise the proliferation of these objects in contemporary life. Although the regularity of use of these objects is a factor, it is their familiarity to us that makes them commonplace and relevant to this project. Commonplace, when used as a descriptor, can be seen as having negative associations. However, I believe that synonyms such as uninteresting, mundane and unremarkable are misleading because I consider the commonplace to be both familiar and well-known. This familiarity is an important conduit to the possibility of a shared experience, whereby a common or shared understanding of objects aids in enabling better communication of an artwork to a viewer. Conversely, this familiarity can also be explored through intervention or subversion to create an artwork that offers the viewer an unexpected use of materials or unfamiliar object combinations.

In the development of this project, the commonplace objects I became most interested in were active objects such as tools, implements and forms of sporting equipment. These are objects that people can strongly relate to through actual experience or observation and they have the potential to be used and misused in different ways. The flexibility in utility or function of these objects also means the meaning or physicality associated with them can be easily reassigned, reinterpreted and redeployed. Objects such as sporting bats and sticks are designed to fulfil both the action of defence and offence in competition. I am interested in the potential for such objects to be adapted in other situations and forms of territoriality.

In human endeavour, the most conspicuous and familiar exemplars of territoriality are arguably found in sport and war\(^2\). These states of contestation have shaped modern\(^3\) history over the last 100 years and continue to define and influence ideas of identity and territory for individuals, groups and nations.

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\(^2\) I use the term ‘war’ to describe a range of historical and contemporary armed conflicts. In some instances, war may not have been officially declared between nations such as the so-called ‘War on Terror’ military campaign.

\(^3\) In this project, I draw on historical references from the First World War to the present day.
Although sport and war manifest with very different levels of intensity and consequence, they share fundamental ideas and drivers of defence and offence that can be discussed in terms of territoriality.

Our very earliest ancestors developed and used tools and weapons to ensure their continued existence by asserting territoriality through different modes of offence and defence. Arendt suggests that implements are always needed for violence, indicating that warfare encourages advances and revolutions in technology and, in particular, toolmaking [Arendt 1970, p. 4]. Despite the hundred thousand or so years of human development and civilisation, the primal urge to wield a stick in offence and defence is still evident in base human responses to particular situations. I suggest that the reasons we make and use objects have not changed all that much from the motivations of our early ancestors. I explore the sinister potential of objects such as bats – that is, wooden tool handles that have a strong connection to the body and closely resemble a basic wooden ‘caveman’ club. Psychologists Nick Neave and Sandy Wolfson suggest that territoriality, or the imperative to defend one’s position and space, plays an important part in the so-called home ground advantage of sport (Neave and Wolfson 2003). I extend this idea by exploring the importance of territoriality as an individual experience through a series of works that define this project. By using objects from sport and the domestic space, these works articulate an individual or personal response to territoriality by investigating objects and attitudes that can be both defensive and offensive. These objects extend the physical territory of the body and can be used to defend spatial claims.

To explore the physicality of territoriality, I focus on commonplace objects that have a specific relationship or connection to the human body. This connection is referenced in the way the object is either used as intended or used in an unintended or unexpected way. The intended function of the objects is activated, articulated or animated by the body, either by holding them in the hand such as tools and sporting implements or worn on the head like a helmet. This physical, bodily relationship is very important as it establishes a direct connection to a shared human experience that can be communicated through the artwork. I discuss the artwork of Australian artist Shaun Gladwell who uses the motif of the helmet in a series of works that explore the identity of the individual and sense of nationhood in a combat zone. The connection between an individual and the larger group or nation is important across many aspects of this project as it ranges from a single object and its relation to an individual in the domestic space through to a mass-produced and mass-consumed object that relates to nationhood on a global scale of reference.

Actual and implied performativity are strategies that the artist Erwin Wurm uses in his One Minute Sculptures and they are also relevant to this project. These artworks usually take the form of a series of simple objects and written instructions or suggestions for how to utilise an array of objects. The viewer is thereby invited to participate in the work and to activate the objects in order to complete the work within the allotted time of one minute. I consider such participation and temporary occupation of an artwork as ways to confer a kind of transitory ownership to the viewer. Although I do not intend for my works to offer a direct interactive experience of direct physical contact, I do explore an implied performativity through an empathetic viewer observation based on the familiarity of prior experience.
Familiar objects such as sporting implements are understandable even if a person may not have previously used the particular object. According to Nicholas Bourriaud, ‘to use an object is necessarily to interpret it’ (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 24). Although I agree with Bourriaud in that to fully understand or interpret an object, it might be necessary or indeed better to have used it, nonetheless, I consider it possible to understand an object through observation and not necessarily via direct experience. The understanding of an object without having actually used is described by Theodor Lipps as a form of empathy and ‘is not a sensation in one’s body, but feeling something, namely, oneself, into the aesthetic object’ (Rader 1960, p. 381).

In Chapter 1 – The Commonplace Object, I discuss and analyse works by two artists from very different time periods. I have chosen a work by Pablo Picasso influential for its ability to consolidate thinking around recognising connections between objects and selecting and combining two things to make a new object whilst retaining the identity of the original objects. I have also selected a work and its accompanying artist statement by the contemporary artist Mark Manders that extend the consideration of combinations of commonplace objects and the importance of objects’ antecedents in their development.

I use the plastic bucket as a case study of an archetypal commonplace object to unfold some of the historical, social and personal relationships that are associated with objects and form our connection with them. By considering the bucket as subject and material, I discuss some of the broader issues that are relevant and inform the use of commonplace objects within this project such as globalisation and mass production that have ensured the increased proliferation of objects in the world. I then contextualise a series of my own works including a bucket work that has been informed by global distribution and personal territoriality.

In Chapter 2 – Objects of Personal Territory, I define the term ‘territoriality’ and examine the relationship of defence and offence within concepts of territory. I articulate how territoriality relates to possession and control through notions of physical and conceptual territory. From a territory common to all, the domestic territory, I build on Goffman’s focus on the presentation of domestic objects as a reflection of self. The power of the object to define territory and, in particular, the domestic or home space is tested in my work Burglar sticks Defence/Offence (2009) that directly addresses issues of personal territoriality. This work employs the redeployment of commonplace objects that draws on each object’s antecedents and the potential of an object to be used for both defence and offence, which is an important consideration throughout this project.

In Chapter 3 – Objects of Conflict, I discuss objects that embody ideas of conflict to test, show and enable territoriality. As the consequence of intense competition for the possession or control of local territory, conflict introduces aspects of territoriality that encompasses war and nationhood. Objects that reference these spheres of human endeavour are engendered with an added importance. Although such loaded meaning can be difficult to utilise and directly reference, nonetheless, it can be investigated when placed in relationship with something more understandable and commonplace. The medium of sculpture makes these types of objects and complex relationships physically possible. A series of
works Helmet Hybrid Series (2009) that grapples with material and conceptual difficulty is discussed and considered in relationship to selected works by the artist Shaun Gladwell. The iconic and ironic Readymades of Marcel Duchamp are discussed as important influences on the development of some of my works related to notions of contested territory.

In Chapter 4 – Objects of Competition and Commemoration, I introduce sport in relation to territoriality by addressing some of the works that use the motifs and objects of sport and its competitive context. In this chapter, I also explore aspects that symbolise the motivations and outcomes of competition in both sport and conflict by specifically looking at the significance of markers that represent triumph and loss. The desire to achieve a goal and attain a prize is motivation and incentive for a contest and I examine the object symbols of victory and defeat, particularly representations of the trophy and honour board. In a series of works titled Trophy Life (2011), I redeploy existing trophy figurines into new contexts alongside unexpected additional objects in order to explore a figurative and narrative element that accesses broader social, political and historical contexts related to territoriality.

Based on sculptural practice, this research builds on a field of knowledge related to objects and our relationships to them. By referencing the history and development of objects, I discuss the making and the antecedents of key objects fundamental to this project. I explore ways that objects can be used to communicate meaning, represent action and reference identity, and test the ways objects can be used to reference human relationships vis-à-vis the key themes of territory and conflict to create new insights into territoriality.
I start this chapter by referring to two artworks made from commonplace objects that are relevant to the way I approach such objects in my practice and this project. The first artwork represents the transformational potential of objects and the second highlights the importance of an object’s relationship to its antecedents in its development and use. Both the transformational possibilities and role of antecedents play a significant part in the consideration of objects as a subject and as material for this dissertation and creative project.

The first artwork I consider is the sculpture *Bull’s Head* (Figure 1) made in 1942 by Pablo Picasso who was at the forefront of artists using innovative and non-traditional materials at the early part of the twentieth century. *Bull’s Head* is often used as an example of assemblage even though Jean Dubuffet did not devise the term ‘assemblage’ until 1953. Following on from Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades and Picasso’s earlier collage works, it can nonetheless be considered a prototypical example of sculptural assemblage. *Bull’s Head* combines individual commonplace objects, namely, a bike seat and handlebars to create a third new object that physically represents a simplified bull’s head.

According to writer Elizabeth Cowling, Picasso immediately recognised the connection between the bike seat and the handlebars from a pile of objects, and saw them as a bull’s head. She suggests he liked the idea that a future viewer, perhaps a cyclist, would see the object in a rubbish tip and recognise it as a saddle and handlebars creating a ‘double metamorphosis’ (Cowling and Golding 1994, p. 274). The double metamorphosis that Picasso suggests is a further extension of his ability to see the potential for all objects to be used for the purposes of art making including his own artworks. In conversation with Brassai, Picasso describes the process of making *Bull’s Head*:

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4 Picasso was included in the major exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in 1961 which brought the term assemblage into the public consciousness with over 140 international artists taking part including Picasso, Duchamp, Braque, Cornell and Rauschenberg (Cooper, 2009).

5 After transforming the original saddle and handlebars into the *Bull’s Head* in 1942, Picasso made his own transformation of the artwork in 1943 by producing bronze versions of *Bull’s Head*. In some respects, this diminishes the power of the original assemblage as a stand-alone construction, but, conversely, it also enhances the aura and importance of the original artwork.

6 Brassai was the pseudonym of photographer Gyula Halász. He photographed many artists in Paris in the early part of the twentieth century including Picasso, Matisse, Giacometti and Dali.
Guess how I made that bull’s head? One day, in a pile of objects all jumbled up together. I found an old bicycle seat right next to a rusty set of handlebars. In a flash, they joined together in my head. The idea of the Bull’s Head came to me before I had a chance to think. All I did was weld them together. The marvellous thing about bronze is that it can give the most heterogeneous objects such unity that it’s sometimes difficult to identify the elements that compose it. But that’s also a danger: if you were to see only the bull’s head and not the bicycle seat and handlebars that form it, the sculpture would lose some of its impact (cited in Todd 2002, p. 61).

This suggests that Picasso had intended for the final artwork or representation of the idea to be made in bronze. The celebrated assemblage that is a saddle and handlebar was a simple step in the process of achieving this aim. In some respects, the final material is less important as it does not change the aspect of the work I am most interested in, which is the way the two objects were combined. The handlebars and saddle not only retain their individuality as objects, but also intensify their identity while relating a new separate concept articulated through the innovative combination. Each of the three objects is still visible and able to be recognised and understood. Art critic Eric Gibson describes this as transparency, which is articulated through his description of the work:

Consisting as it does of only two elements, Bull’s Head is Picasso’s sparest sculpture. And is unique among his assemblages for its transparency. In most of them, the identity of the found objects, though not disguised, isn’t emphasised… In Bull’s Head, by contrast, there is no attempt to play down the real-world identity of the constituent parts. Indeed, the sculpture’s reductiveness and simplicity draw attention to them (Gibson 2011).

It is such simplicity and reductive ability of object sculpture particularly using reconfigured and redeployed objects that is most relevant to my project. By retaining the appearance and materiality of original objects that I use in my project, I can access and utilise the meaning and associations that they carry or contain. I discuss this in greater detail in specific sections related to my artwork later in this dissertation.

The second artwork I want to discuss is A Place Where My Thoughts Are Frozen Together (Figure 2) by the contemporary Dutch artist Mark Manders. This artwork and its accompanying artist statement articulates the function of antecedence in considering commonplace objects, which is highly relevant to this project. Manders attempts to make a physical connection between a human femur and a coffee cup, describing how ‘[t]hey often come very close to each other, and I just wanted to attach them with a third element’ (Manders, et al. 2007, p. 188). As a solution to join these apparently disparate objects, he used a carefully balanced sugar cube that is held by the gentle force of the femur and the cup pushing against it. Although I am responsive to his interesting and somewhat strange sculptural proposition, it was Manders’ artist statement that had greater resonance for me:

I thought it was interesting how the cup has gradually acquired a handle during its evolutionary process. If you think about the evolution of cups, it is a beautiful evolution. The first cups were human hands: folded together you could take the water with your two hands out of the river.
The next step [sic] were things like hollow pieces of wood or things with folded leaves, and so on. The last beautiful moment in the history of the cup was when it was given an ear. After that, nothing really interested with cups, just small variations. Many generations worked on it, and now you can say that the cup is finished in terms of evolution. (Manders, et al. 2007, p. 188)

In his statement, Manders distils thousands of years of cup development into a few sentences, reminding us to recognise and consider the cup’s antecedents. Cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard suggests that objects cannot be disconnected from the lineage of their antecedents:

> The serial nature of the most mundane of everyday objects, as of the most transcendent of rarities, is what nourishes the relationship of ownership and the possibility of passionate play: without seriality no such play would be conceivable, hence no possession – and hence, too, properly speaking, no object. A truly unique, absolute object, an object such that it has no antecedents and is no way dispersed in some series or other – such an object is unthinkable (Baudrillard 2005, p. 100).

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7 Although he suggests that the cup has ‘finished in terms of evolution’, since Manders made this statement in 2001 there has been the further development and proliferation of cups and mugs with lids to accommodate the need of a takeaway culture that requires hot drinks on the move.
Reflecting on Baudrillard’s statement that antecedents are integral to the understanding of objects including the development of a simple object like the cup, in conjunction with Manders’ statement helped me consider the antecedents of other objects. I was able to reflect on aspects of the development of the cup such as cupping one’s hands for a drink as a type of action that we obviously still perform. The antecedents for many objects, whether they are actions or other objects, may still be current and effective as the histories and development of objects crossover. Even though new methods or materials are continually being developed, some objects and the human interaction with them remain almost unchanged since early humans first started using objects.

An ideal commonplace object that reflects the transformational potential of objects and importance of antecedents is the ubiquitous plastic bucket. In this chapter, I focus on the plastic bucket as an archetypal commonplace object and reference it as subject and material to articulate some of the broader issues that inform this project. On a cursory consideration, the plastic bucket seems like a straightforward object with a simple form and an understandable function, but it is the result of a history of antecedents that informs its form, size and material. As an object in the world, it is the result of the complex mechanism of globalised technical development, production and distribution, and as a utilitarian object, the bucket has almost limitless possibilities. In a sculptural sense, the bucket has enormous potential as a subject and it is representative of a commonplace object in which many of its historical and material aspects can be referenced and investigated. As a mass-produced and widely used commonplace object, I consider that the ubiquity and familiarity of the plastic bucket exemplifies the way that commonplace objects can engender a common shared knowledge and experience. It is this relationship that I explore through all the works throughout this project.

As a container, the plastic bucket continues a lineage of various forms of portable containers used throughout history. Its antecedents are buckets and pails developed by necessity for a variety of tasks with materials at hand. As with similar commonplace objects throughout history, mankind created objects for living and working out of materials that were easily accessible such as leather, wood and metal. A contemporary plastic bucket directly relates to a leather bucket used to fight the Great Fire of London in 1666, to a wooden pail used to collect milk in the 18th century, to a galvanised iron fire bucket full of sand in a 1960s office block, to an adapted plastic container used to carry water from a well in a developing country. Whilst these examples are similar in size and form to contemporary plastic buckets, the antecedents of implements to carry water such as animal organs and dried vegetables like gourds are perhaps as old as human ingenuity. In Plastic: A toxic love story, Susan Freinkel suggests that,

When you consider how many eons humans have sought a reliable way to contain and carry water, it’s no surprise that buckets are among the first plastic objects to be embraced by traditional societies (Freinkel 2011, p. 37)
Comparing a Tudor bucket from 470 years ago such as a leather bucket from the ship the *Mary Rose* (Figure 3) to a contemporary plastic bucket (Figure 4) highlights the similarities in form and size. The materials may have evolved but the form and size of a bucket have not significantly changed given that the design is restricted by its functionality whereby a certain volume must be able to be carried with one hand.

Freinkel suggests that the plastic bucket is arguably the most important application of plastic ever (2011, p. 37). The development of the plastic bucket by the Italian company Kartell created significant advantages in terms of cheapness and speed of production. The structural properties of flexibility and lightness created a thin wall and allowed buckets to be stackable, thereby enabling packaging and transportation efficiencies. Mass production of the bucket ensured affordability and, combined with efficient global distribution, made an easily attainable product available to a large part of the world’s population. These virtues make the bucket almost universal and a perfect exemplar of a successful mass-produced commodified commonplace object.

With efficiencies of globalisation and mass production, commodities of all kinds are available almost everywhere through extensive distribution networks. Consumption of these objects is fuelled by easy access to endless visual imagery and information provided by the Internet. Industrial design academic Steven Skov Holt writes about the increased proliferation of information and of objects:

> There is more of everything in the twenty-first century: more information at our fingertips, and more ways to get at that information; more opportunities for entertainment and diversion; more chairs, and televisions, and plastic cups. In the past several decades, we have entered a period of late-stage capitalism, with goods, services, images, and choices so plentiful as to become a burden. Some people have become paralyzed by indecision. Amid the grand profusion of things of every conceivable size, shape, and attribute existing already in the world – in an economy of such overload and chronic over-production – how do we make sense of it? (Holt Skov and Skov Holt 2008, p. 27)

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8 The *Mary Rose* was part of King Henry the VIII’s English naval fleet. It sank in 1545, was rediscovered in 1971 and salvaged in 1982.
Over-production may be paralysing for some but I consider Holt’s question ‘how do we make sense of it’ as a call to arms. For an artist, ease of access to information and products provides huge advantages as an almost limitless choice and availability is liberating and allows for increased possibilities in materials, methods and subjects.

Curator Nicholas Bourriaud suggests that consumers are also part of the process of production and that ‘a product only becomes a real product in consumption’ (Bourriaud 2005, p. 23). As a consumer of commodities, I know that I am able to purchase plastic buckets close to my home in suburban Perth. My local supermarket carries a few but my nearest Bunnings Warehouse has a very extensive range of plastic buckets made in China, India, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand. Taking advantage of this wide range and accessibility places me in the chain of consumption and production before I have even used a bucket in an artwork. It highlighted for me the myriad possibilities inherent in the large-scale production of 10L plastic buckets made in a manufacturing plant in one country and then distributed around the world. The mass production of products such as plastic buckets is a highly mechanised and efficient example of production. Factories are capable of producing thousands of buckets per day and every bucket from the production line is almost identical in form with colour being the variable. The considerable journey of design, production and global distribution from a distant place of manufacture to my possession demonstrates the efficiencies of capitalism and globalisation. In considering my bucket I became interested in its potential destinations and possible uses by people from diverse global locations who might use the same type of object in either similar or different ways. I started to think that plastic buckets from one production line could be going to quite different global locations and it was conceivable that a red bucket available at my local Bunnings Warehouse was the next one off the production line after the bucket carried by the man in the image of the aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake in China (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Sichuan earthquake aftermath, China [May 2008]
This sort of image from daily news feeds provide representations of all forms of human endeavour from natural and manmade disaster, war, sport and human interest stories. News organisations represent these events taking place in distant territories and attempt to offer a sense of connectedness. I was interested to know if a depiction of a very familiar object being used as in the Sichuan image could encourage a greater empathy or understanding of his experience. Could something as simple as the shared experience of a commonplace object potentially help access larger issues or emotive concepts? Could a common experience of a commonplace object help transcend physical distance and territoriality?

I am aware that this is a tenuous proposition and increasing empathy through similar experience seems improbable and is perhaps somewhat condescending. I cannot ignore however the impact and heightened feeling I experienced when picking up a bucket in my domestic space after seeing an image like the photograph of the Sichuan aftermath. Guy Debord discusses the way images represent in *The Society of the Spectacle* and suggests,

> In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation... The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images. [Debord 1983, p. 7]

Through this research project, I attempt to discover if Debord’s statement about images can translate to objects and mediate ‘a social relation between people’ and connect different users through a common physical experience of the same commonplace object.

Artist Josiah McElheny suggests that in response to society’s dependence on mass manufacture and distance from production, artists have the opportunity and perhaps the responsibility to reclaim the territory of production. His *ArtForum* article ‘Readymade Resistance’ on art and forms of industrial production is both an historic account of the readymade and a challenge to artists:

> ... nearly all products now draw on the collective labor of large numbers of people... The message is that the individual can no longer be a producer of things except in highly circumscribed situations, and so artists must continually attempt to reclaim the territory of production or invent new relationships to it (2007, p. 327).

The artist Tina Roeder responds to McElheny’s statement by reclaiming the territory of production by questioning the value of materials and mass manufacture versus the handmade in her work *Bucket Vase* (*Figure 6*). Roeder subverts the cheapness and disposability of the plastic bucket by using the expensive and high quality materials of porcelain and silver. *Bucket Vase* is a visual trick that relies on the viewer’s familiarity with the plastic bucket. Her bucket has the appearance of a commonplace bucket but is a highly crafted object created using a laborious and very technical production process that contrasts with the mass-produced and cheap plastic bucket. The subterfuge is emphasised by the context documentation in (*Figure 7*) showing the installation and ‘normal’ use of a bucket in a florist.
The British artist Simon Starling directly responds to the complexity of production and global systems of production by focussing on the material and sociological content of objects. He investigates and uses the process of making or remaking to articulate the history and development of objects and their relationship to a global context. His sculpture Work, Made-ready, Kunsthalle Bern (Figure 8) is on first appearance the presentation of two iconic designer objects made from aluminium. In fact, they are a Charles Eames Aluminium Group chair remade using the metal from a Marin Sausalito bicycle and a Marin Sausalito bicycle remade using the metal from a Charles Eames Aluminium Group chair. The artwork demonstrates an exchange of materials and is the result of a very involved and technical method of production. During the process of aluminium exchange, the objects were, for a time, in between their original state and the new object. Dieter Roelstraete suggests,
... at some point during its destruction-cum-construction, there was neither a chair nor a bicycle: the moment when a perfect balance was reached, not just between the two value systems [high and low] that each object represents [Roelstraete et al. 2012, p. 124].

The new bicycle and chair have had their structure and materials completely transformed but initially look exactly as they did at the start of the project. The handmade Do-It-Yourself (DIY) sculptural process employed by Starling actually had a subtle effect on the objects. He writes, ‘[W]hat resulted were two handcrafted, degraded mutations of their former manufactured selves, scarred from their genetic transfer’ [cited in Roelstraete et al. 2012, p. 46].

Starling’s demonstration of a complete transformation is a form of recycling. An important property of plastic is its ability to be recyclable, which was not possible early in its development but is now more prevalent due to improvements in technical processes and increasing social awareness. Like Starling’s ‘new’ bicycle and chair, plastic degrades slightly with each recycling application but the possibility of being reused suggests that each bucket may have been a different object before it became a bucket and will be a different object again if recycled. Plastic buckets are the same grade of high-density polyethylene used in other plastic products such as milk crates, shampoo bottles, ice-cream containers and, interestingly, recycling bins. An object made from recycled materials can therefore carry not just the associated meaning of its antecedents through historical development, but also literally some of the actual physical thing it used to be from a more recent or immediate history. An object like a plastic bucket can also be considered via an acknowledgement of ancient history as the oil from which plastic is made was once living material from ancient forests millions of years ago. Although the appearance of the recent or ancient history may not be readily visible, these qualities add to the conceptual and material complexity of objects.

When engaging with sculptural practice and existing objects, it is important to consider historical and contemporary examples from the art world. Like objects themselves, subjects and materials have antecedents and the use of commonplace objects – presented as new or combined with other objects – can be traced back to the Readymades of Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp’s innovation of the Readymade questioned the whole notion of what could be considered art, as well as the artist’s role in the production and authorship of artworks. Although I acknowledge the impact that Duchamp’s Readymades had on the history of art, many of the questions that led Duchamp to construct his Readymades are now answered and accepted, and I do not seek in this project to address those issues in detail. Although I use existing objects, there are perhaps more differences than similarities when comparing Duchamp’s use of existing objects and mine in terms of artistic objectivity in object selection and making. In an interview with Joan Bakewell on BBC TV in 1966, Duchamp suggested that his aim was to be completely objective when selecting objects:

9 In the interview Duchamp was promoting his exhibition at the Tate in London and a series of authorised replica Readymades was made in the mid sixties during Duchamp’s resurgence as the conceptualists embraced and celebrated him.
My idea was to choose an object that wouldn’t attract me, either by its beauty or by its ugliness. To find a point of indifference in my looking at it, you see. You might say I found any number of those. But at the same time, not so much because it’s sort of difficult, after a while, when you look at something, it becomes very interesting and you can even like it. And the minute I liked it I would discard it (Bakewell 1968).

Duchamp’s indifference to objects is in complete contrast to the way I consider and look for objects that engender an empathetic response through shared experience and familiarity. I consider that this project extends the history of the Readymade by aiming to find subjective and objective connections to objects and the possibilities of meaning and utility that they represent.

Although it is generally accepted that artists do not have to be the actual maker of the artwork, I do thoroughly engage with the construction of the work where possible in this project. Many of the works are made from existing objects, however I am responsible for both their reconfiguration and the provision of additional physical context, and I discuss this process with reference to each of these artworks in subsequent chapters.

In addition to the Duchampian Readymade legacy, the term ‘found object’ is prevalent as an identifying category when working with existing objects. Derived from the French _objet trouvé_, the term ‘found object’ is popularly used to describe an already existing object that is reused in or as art (Gale 2009). However, in common use, I have always thought that the term is misleading and suggests a kind of accidental discovery of something in contrast to the careful consideration that might have gone into the search, selection and use of an object in the making of an artwork. The artist Richard Wentworth suggests,

> After a century of mass overproduction, terms like ‘found object’, or the exquisitely dignified _objet trouvé_ [art finds], are obsolete. Whoever first said ‘readymade’ was very clever, but it’s a long time since people discovered that you could dig with an antler – something serviceable, heraldic and mythic all rolled into one. Humans don’t change that much (Wentworth, et al. 1998, p. 7).

In this project, I do not use the term ‘found object’ to describe or categorise the existing objects that I utilise in my project and agree with Wentworth on its obsolescence and concur that humans have always used objects for different purposes.

Over the last 100 years since Duchamp’s first Readymades, many artists have used manufactured objects as the basis of artwork. Some have engaged with the history of the Readymade and directly responded to being part of the lineage of Duchamp’s influence, other artists have responded to the proliferation of objects as previously discussed in response to Steven Skov Holt’s ‘grand profusion of things’. Skov Holt describes artworks that have been derived from manufactured objects, especially those made through industrial mass production as _manufractured_ and something ‘that has been made not once but twice’ (Holt Skov and Skov Holt 2008, p. 21). He uses this observation to form the curatorial
theme and title for the exhibition *Manufractured: The conspicuous transformation of everyday objects*. For Skov Holt, the idea of manufactured artworks recognises the role or place of the artist within the repeated sequence of production and consumption. In regard to my project I think that the idea of being made not once but twice is an important consideration for the artist and also the viewer. I would like the original nature of the material or object to be visible and understood as evident in the artwork as in the example of Picasso’s *Bull’s Head* rather than hidden as in Starlings’s bicycle and chair. In the following chapters I discuss examples of my creative practice where the objects’ original utility and meaning are referenced or utilised.

In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau writes that we individualise mass culture, altering things from utilitarian objects to street plans to rituals, laws and language, in order to make them our own [De Certeau 1984]. As a further response to de Certeau, I also consider the objects, yet to be used, that are not individualised or customised. Whilst I transform and redeploy selected commonplace objects into artworks, other identical objects probably acquired at the same time and in the same place remain unused as spares or potential material. This state is a transitional or liminal zone and although it possesses a sort of anonymity, which is different to the way they might exist in a shop. Objects like the buckets wait in storage to be made into art or perform a different mundane purpose. One bucket is used in the laundry for soaking clothes, one as a water bowl for the dog; one is used by my children to make potions.

In an early response to my research into production, global distribution and consumption, the plastic bucket was one of the first objects I started to explore through studio research. I began a series of works based on wooden crates typically used for the storage, transportation and distribution of goods. These crates act as a layer of protection and are usually cubic in form, their size governed by the largest measures of height, width and breadth of the object or objects contained within. This creates a generic box shape that masks the identity and form of the objects inside. To counteract this I started to explore crates that were purpose-built around certain objects. I imagined that these crates would highlight the form and the immediate space of the objects.

The first object I tried was the plastic bucket and as I started to create the wooden form, I realised how closely it related to wooden bucket antecedents. As a combination of two historical versions of the bucket, it had a plastic waterproof interior and a wooden exterior. The work *Pale by Comparison* ([Figure 9]) is an 80-cent light blue plastic bucket encased by a built plywood container purposefully faceted and angled to respond to the bucket shape. The two buckets fit together and sit upon a shelf made from the same type of plywood. The shelf isolates them from the ground and is slightly closer to the viewer as if on display in a museological sense. Although on display, the bucket is still potentially active. The bucket handle is up and poised for utilitarian function in addition to asserting its role as art object.

I further explored the feature of a crate providing protection through a series of purpose-built crates for sporting equipment such as a boxing bag and a basketball backboard that played a crucial part in...
Figure 9 Bruce Slatter, *Pail by Comparison* (2007)
defence and offence within their normal sporting function. In addition to mimicking a faceted version of the boxing bag shape, I experimented with applying characteristics of the punching bag to the crate. I replicated the colour and used a drop hammer to beat and damage the surface of the crate and suspended it from the ceiling to create the work *Packs a Punch* (*Figure 10 and 11*).

In another crate work *Backboard* (*Figure 12*), I used the structure of the crate to delineate the parts of the object contained within to make its identity apparent through the external form. The painted white section bordered by black replicates the key part of the basketball backboard and territory of the basketball that is defended and attacked. As part of this crated series, I also experimented with crating a basketball and discuss this work in Chapter Four.

The introduction of a new understanding of commonplace objects as involving conflict and contested territory is evident in my work *Cue/Stool* (*Figure 13*). *Cue/Stool* is an amalgamation of two objects through sculptural intervention to create a new meaning. Each object has its own identity but one overlapping part or shared rung of the stool is created by the correspondingly similar diameter part of the pool cue. I think of this sculptural combination as a kind of Venn diagram of objects. The shared piece of wood is both cue and stool. For me this was a simple but exciting sculptural discovery. In a similar way to Starling, I imagined an object in flux and a section that could be both objects at once. The title *Cue/Stool* is a visual supplement to the physical object. Whilst simply stating the components, namely, cue and stool, the title also contains a ’/’ (forward slash) that emphasises the angle and form of the cue in the final sculpture. The forward slash keeps apart the words ’cue’ and ’stool’ but also keeps them together.
Chapter 1 - The Commonplace Object

Figure 11
Bruce Slatter, Packs a Punch (2007)

Figure 12
Bruce Slatter, Backboard (2007)
Figure 13 Bruce Slatter, Cue/Stool (2009)
Originally I had planned for the work to sit on the floor with the stool in an upright position that would cause the cue to float in the air parallel to the ground (Figure 14).

Through testing of possibilities, I came to the conclusion that the cue should be in position, leaning against the wall as if waiting for a player to have their next go in the game. This created a tension of the balancing objects and makes the objects appear as if frozen in time, as if the objects were stopped for a moment in the midst of a bar fight.

The transformation of an object in such a way that it can represent a different object or idea while retaining its original identity as previously discussed in regard to Picasso’s Bull’s Head is also apparent in the work of Canadian artist Brian Jungen. His artwork Cetology (Figure 15) is a full-scale whale skeleton, made from the generic white stackable plastic chairs known as Monobloc chairs.

The Monobloc chair and the bucket have many commonalities; they share the qualities of being plastic, mass-produced, relatively cheap, universal and utilitarian. Like the bucket, the chair is another example of an archetypal commonplace object. The writer Bill Brown describes the white plastic chairs as a ‘globally ubiquitous object’ (2010, p. 195) and references the journalist Alice Rawsthorn who describes the familiarity and proliferation of the Monobloc chairs:

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10 The white stackable plastic chairs known as Monobloc are made in one piece of injection-moulded polypropylene.
11 The bucket was in mass production before the successful fabrication of the single piece plastic chair had been technically mastered.
Just think about how many there are in schools, bars, hospitals, parks, beaches, sports stadiums and retirement homes. And how often they appear as props in global dramas. Floating in the debris of the tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. Seating thousands of people at Cuban political rallies. Lurking in the hideout where Saddam Hussein was captured, and in Abu Ghraib prison (Rawsthorn cited in Brown, 2007, p. 195).

So prevalent are these chairs, they could be considered to be what writer Georges Perec called the *infra-ordinary*, that is objects that ‘occupy the sphere of daily existence that lies beneath notice or comment’ (Perec 1997, p. 206). Although I agree with Perec that these sorts of commonplace objects may sometimes be overlooked objects of daily life, nonetheless, I would argue that all objects, no matter how ordinary, have the potential to be lifted out of the infra-ordinary and developed into the extraordinary.

The writer Ethan Zuckerman describes the Monobloc white plastic chair as being a ‘context free object’. He writes,

> Virtually every object suggests a time and a place. The Monobloc is one of the few objects I can think of that is free of any specific context. Seeing a white plastic chair in a photograph offers you no clues about where or when you are [sic] (Zuckerman 2011).

In the same way that Picasso’s *Bull’s Head* is still a saddle and handlebar, Jungen’s whale skeleton is also still an assemblage of chairs as each constituent part retains its identity and recognisability for the viewer as in *(Figure 16).* Brown describes *Cetology* as,
... neither one thing nor the other, which is to say, by my light, that their thingness emerges from a kind of oscillation: neither plastic chairs nor whale skeleton, yet both skeleton and chairs [Brown 2010, p. 207].

Brown uses the terms ‘redeploying, refabricating and recirculating’ to describe Jungen’s ‘artistic redistribution of consumerist object culture’ (Brown 2010, p. 194). Some of the sculptural methods I have used in creating the artwork in this project can also be described as refabrication and the insertion of those artworks into the public or private space is a form of recirculation. The word I most identify with, out of the three used by Brown, is ‘redeployment’. In fact, I had been using the term to describe my process of reusing or referencing commonplace objects before I had read Brown’s writing on Jungen. For me, redeployment is an acknowledgement of the antecedents of an object and the existing meanings of an object, however it also articulates the physical and conceptual sculptural transformation of repurposing an object into an artwork.
Territoriality connects individuals and groups to territory and reinforces identity. In this chapter, I explore territoriality through interpretations and representations of personal space and territory including the domestic space and the shared social territory that is public space. In his influential book *Human Territoriality*, social geographer Robert Sack defines territoriality as ‘[t]he attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area’ (1986, p. 19). Sack’s description of territoriality directly references geographical space much like other generic definitions of territory. For the purposes of this project, however, I extend the definition of territoriality beyond physical space or ‘geographical area’ to also consider conceptual aspects of territory such as spheres of ideas, thoughts or gestures (Oxford 1990). That said, the physical space of animals and humans has an integral influence on living, relationships and interactions. Although research had been undertaken regarding the distances animals keep between themselves and other animals, such as that by biologist Heini Hediger, it was Edward Hall who conceived the term and developed the field of proxemics to categorise and study nonverbal communications to refer to the ways humans interact and use space. According to Hall, there are two categories of space – personal space and territory. Personal space is the physicality of the body’s immediate space that surrounds its intimate space where personal or internalised ideas and thoughts exist. Territory is the space or area that a person may ‘lay claim to’ and defend (Hall 1959, p. 187) and this urge or need to protect one’s own place is a very important influencing factor in this project.

In proxemics theory, Hall identifies four subcategories of territory that work in conjunction with his categories of personal space: body territory, home territory, interactional territory and public territory. He provides specific dimensions and distances to delineate his categories of personal space as illustrated in (Figure 17), which I find useful for my own investigations into territoriality. Hall’s delineations of space are important when considering human interaction with space and objects in terms of drawing attention to the originating space of the objects used, the space or territory that they reference or represent, and the space in which the subsequent artworks may occupy during and after exhibition.

The crossovers and interactive spaces that exist between Hall’s proxemics categories create in-between or liminal spaces where a threshold creates a heightened overlap of both spaces. For example, the domestic space is a personal space that can also be a place for interaction with a social space. Domestic territory is an important location for the display of objects to others in that they present an idea of the self. In his essay ‘The power of things: The role of domestic objects in the presentation of self’, Erving Goffman suggests that domestic objects are doubly important for the relationship between the self and society:

While on the one hand selective display of domestic objects establishes and reinforces personal identity, on the other hand, the living room, the exterior of the house, and the yard are part of the “front stage” of social interaction where messages about the self are presented to the public (cited in Riggins 1990, p. 341).
Goffman’s statement became an important consideration in terms of object usage in this project especially in the different stages of the development and resolution of artworks. Firstly, I considered domestic space in relation to the selection of objects for use as Readymades or potential art objects that originally have a place or role as implements, tools and/or sporting equipment within the home. The relationship of these potential implements to other objects, their visibility and location in various rooms and their frequency of use all become part of this consideration. Secondly, domestic space was important during the production of the artwork in a home studio and through regular testing and consideration of the artworks in process. Thirdly, the domestic space became a space for reflection once the artwork was resolved as well as before and after exhibition. Most of the artworks produced for this project were intended for exhibitions in white-walled neutral gallery spaces, but in a sense, the identity of the artwork is completed or best represented when returned to the domestic space. Given that the artworks are predominately made with commonplace objects, they are ‘at home’ and fit in with that setting. They are distinguished only by their designation as art and surrounded by other more mundane commonplace objects.
Domestic life fosters a sense of familiarity made up of interactions with objects and people through regular actions. This ongoing experience, surrounded by the familial develops shared understanding and collective memory. These ideas were first put forward by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925, who proposes the social construction of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992). Halbwach relates the importance of a shared social and cultural experience of things in a local context to the experiences of a specific region and social class. At the same time, however, I would maintain that the domestic space offers many objects that transcend the specific social narrative and instead pick up on the truly global understandings of objects thus ultimately enabling the recognition of crucial commonalities.

The domestic space contains and protects personal space and acts as a place of comfort where domestic actions and interactions occur in private. The domestic space is a territory that operates like an embassy on foreign land with its particular history, traditions and rules. As articulated by Hall through his category of home territory, the domestic space is personal space and an expression of intimate space extending from the immediate space of the body. Protecting personal space and domestic territory is a consideration extending from fundamental ideas of self-preservation and survival, and I explore this through a series of works that focusses on personal territoriality.

Self-preservation could be seen as the most basic instinct that humans share with all organisms. The 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes suggested that self-preservation is a fundamental and universal right and provided a foundation for all philosophy:

> The right of nature, which writers commonly call Jus Naturale, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life: and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto (Hobbes 2010, p. 72).

It could be argued that all possession or control of territory has the potential to be contested therefore the establishing and enforcing of territoriality may occur through a mixture of defensive and offensive preparedness or action. I was especially interested in self-preservation and its role in territoriality, particularly in regard to defence of the home space.

When considering territory, it is the aspects that influence or modify human behaviour that are influential in this project. One of the factors important in a sporting context and with ramifications off the field is the notion of home ground advantage. Researchers from Northumbria University in Britain, Nick Neave and Sandy Wolfson have researched the reasons for better or improved home team performance and for visiting teams being adversely affected. Several important factors are considered in their study including the enthusiasm shown by the home crowd, the home team’s familiarity with the ground, referee bias and effect of travel on visiting teams (Neave and Wolfson 2003, p. 269). These effects are fairly straightforward and can be easily understood by a sports enthusiast. However, Neave and Wolfson suggest that a feeling of territoriality experienced by the home team requires more consideration as an influencing factor in the sporting advantage of playing at home. They define territoriality as the
protective response to an invasion of one’s perceived territory and their findings concluded that a home team exhibits this protective response, demonstrated by increased levels of testosterone; this had a direct correlation to territoriality and aggressiveness as found in other animals.

I use the term ‘Burglar Sticks’ to describe commonplace objects that are kept in the house, usually out of sight under the bed for the purposes of self-defence against an intruder or burglar. Burglar Sticks are usually some kind of sporting implement like a baseball bat, cricket bat or a DIY (do-it-yourself)/garden implement or material like an axe handle or length of pipe. Sporting implements such as cricket bats and hockey sticks are already designated as items to be used in sporting defence and offence and therefore are implements of territoriality. Considering them as weapons to be used in defence and offence relates them to sticks or clubs used by early humans in establishing territoriality. Our very earliest ancestors developed and used such tools and weapons to ensure their continued existence by establishing territoriality. Hannah Arendt suggests that implements are always needed for violence, indicating that warfare encourages advances and revolutions in technology and, in particular, toolmaking:

> Violence – as distinct from power, force, or strength – always needs implements ... the revolution of technology, a revolution in toolmaking, was especially marked in warfare (Arendt 1970, p. 4).

Despite civilisation and the rule of law, the primal urge to wield a stick in offence and/or defence is still evident in base human responses to the fight for survival and territoriality. In the development of human society over a hundred thousand years, the reasons we use these types of objects have not changed all that much from the motivations and methods of our early ancestors. This is evident in a 2007 British research survey by the insurance company Cornhill Direct that found that one in three of the 4000 people interviewed keep some sort of makeshift weapon near their bed to protect against intruders:

> Householders confessed to putting items such as golf clubs, cricket bats and heavy torches within reach for self-defence from burglars, researchers found, and more than half said they were prepared to use them (Siddique 2007).

Informal conversations with several friends and family members suggest that the British statistics were perhaps slightly conservative. When I asked them about having a self-defence weapon, they instantly knew what I was referring to and provided their own examples. Although nobody had actually needed to confront an intruder, many talked about walking through the house at night holding their self-defence weapons in response to a strange noise or perceived threat. In reality, the threat of an intruder or home invasion is very minimal, and the need or potential use for a self-defence weapon unwarranted. The Australian Institute of Criminology finds that

> …concerns about the incidence of ‘home invasions’ in Australia belie the fact that most prospective burglars seek to minimise the risk that they will be detected in the course of an offence, and seek to avoid confronting a victim (Grabowsky 1995).

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12 The term evolved from a share house in the early 1990s whilst an undergraduate art student where a cricket bat stored in the lounge room was referred to as the anti-burglar stick or burglar stick.
I suggest that a single implement such as the baseball bat seen in the context of the domestic space (Figure 18) has a potentiality that transcends mere sporting utility. For me, the bat has a metonymic quality and is representative of opposing positions, at once suggestive of possible menace and an object of defence against potential threat. I wondered if by amassing a series of these implements of different types and representative of different commonplace objects and materials I could extenuate or increase this feeling.

I collected a selection of these types of objects from various sporting codes as well as DIY implements and materials that were all similar in length and able to be held in one or both hands and swung. Sporting implements such as bats (cricket and baseball) are commonplace and close at hand or easily attained. They are designed to fit in the hand and be swung at another object like a ball. Their design and utility for sport lend themselves to an easily attained maximum efficiency of force. All of them have a similar feeling in the action that extends the power of the physical act in a way that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton recognise:

Because of their physical structure, objects lend themselves to the expression of raw physical power. From the spear to the airplane, they can act as levers that increase a person’s strength or speed – his or her kinetic energy (Csikszentmihalyi and Halton 1981, p. 27).
In my work *Burglar Sticks - Defence and Offence* (Figure 19), I was interested to see if the reference to sporting territoriality was transferrable to represent defence and offence off the field in a domestic setting. In order to present the collection and give them an intentionally organised method of display, I explored the idea of placing them in a display cabinet. My selected Burglar Sticks were housed in a large wood and glass cabinet that I made to display the objects in a method similar to visible storage\(^\text{13}\) used in museological contexts. I wanted it to function in the same way as a gun cabinet that presents the contents for display as important collectables whilst also keeping them secure. I also wanted the cabinet to have this association to emphasise that the contents had a potential danger. These sorts of cabinets are more prevalent in regional areas and in countries where guns and hunting are a way of life. Although a viewer may not have direct experience with such cabinets, there is, I believe, a certain common understanding or visual recognition through the genre of the Western in American and Australian film and television. Depictions of the American Wild West colonial frontier in the films of Sergio Leone\(^\text{14}\) and television series like *Bonanza*, or Australian representations of early life on the land like *The Man from Snowy River*, all feature guns and gun cabinets as central to the preservation of life in hostile new worlds.

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\(^\text{13}\) ‘Visible storage’ is a term used to describe museological display where an artefact or group of artefacts are at once in storage and also on display. It is mainly used as a way to increase access to collections in museums where space for extensive display may be restricted (Bohlen 2001).

\(^\text{14}\) Italian film director Sergio Leone was an exponent of the spaghetti western genre with films such as *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, Bad and the Ugly*, all starring Clint Eastwood.
To emphasise this connection, I deliberately referenced an amalgamation of traditional colonial styles in the design of the cabinet. By imagining it as a handmade or bespoke piece of furniture, the cabinet assumes an increased significance much like an heirloom that has been handed down through the generations. The styling suggests an older history than the contents intimate and although the interior shelving is custom-built for the burglar sticks, the cabinet could, on initial view, appear to be adapted from an existing gun cabinet. The colonial signification is further evident in the sporting implements themselves such as the cricket bat, which is representative of cricket, a colonising strategy used throughout the British Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries.

It was important that I constructed the cabinet out of solid wood to follow a tradition of cabinets through the ages. I originally considered the Western Australian timber Jarrah that has a very dark red colour but decided against this as it is an ancient tree from old growth forests. I decided to use the sustainable timber Tasmanian Oak as an alternative, which although a hard wood, is not actually an oak. This subtle misnomer suggests the timber has a connection to the history and use of oak trees in furniture, especially to the prized and ancient English oaks. This link to status is one of the reasons I chose Tasmanian Oak and the fact that the timber has a pinkish colouring that gives it an almost fleshlike quality. I wanted the cabinet to subtly suggest an almost corporeal feeling as an extension of or reference to the human body. This connection to body was further extenuated by the reflective quality of the large glass doors. Viewers of the work cannot avoid seeing their reflection, thus creating a relationship between their image and the burglar sticks. This relationship of the viewer and the objects is aptly described in Rosalind Krauss’ description of sculpture: ‘Sculpture is a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing’ (1981, p. 5). In the case of Burglar Sticks, the viewer is in motion when they approach the work and then perhaps still when viewing the static implements while also perhaps imagining them in motion or action as the title Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence suggests.

Although sporting relationships to territoriosity are discussed in further detail in Chapter Four, it is relevant at this juncture to mention some additional observations in regard to the sporting implements that I used in the cabinet. Sporting implements such as cricket bats are often given a brand name that suggests power and impact. They are labelled with a desirable sporting characteristic or noise such as Kaboom, the name of a contemporary cricket bat. Names such as Excalibur suggest a connection between sporting use and the names or attributes of weaponry, as if the objectives of armed conflict might translate to sporting prowess. This link is best exemplified in the Combat, a cricket bat endorsed by the Australian cricketer Dennis Lillee in 1979. The Combat bats were made of aluminium and exploited (or combatted) an oversight in cricket laws that up till that point had designated the sizes of cricket bats but not actually specified what material a cricket bat should be made from.

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15 Tasmanian Oak is a trade name referring to various forms of hardwood Eucalyptus trees. If sourced from Tasmania, it comes from three types of trees: Mountain Ash (Eucalyptus Regnans), Messmate (Eucalyptus Obliqua) and Alpine Ash or Woollybutt (Eucalyptus Delegatensis). The timber is now grown in plantations to satisfy the demand of what is now considered as heritage wood.

16 The Combat bats were made of aluminium and exploited (or combatted) an oversight in cricket laws that up till that point had designated the sizes of cricket bats but not actually specified what material a cricket bat should be made from.
In collecting the implements for the Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence cabinet, I found a wooden hockey stick with the brand name Predator, a descriptive and scientific category in the animal world but when considered in regard to humans has a menacing connotation. I placed the Predator hockey stick as the central implement hidden behind the edges of the two doors so the branding was not immediately obvious and hoped an inquisitive viewer might get close enough to peer in and see the Predator label thereby furthering the defensive and offensive connotations and suggestions of the other implements.

The potential menace a commonplace object may hold can be determined by what Sigmund Freud termed unheimlich or uncanny (Freud, 2003). These objects relate directly to the nature of something being ‘uncanny’, which creates both an attraction and repulsion to something. Freud concludes the uncanny is a mild anxiety or unease that arises when the familiar suddenly appears strange, thus triggering for me the idea of making inanimate objects appear to be animated – or in the case of Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence, potentially animated. The sorts of implements in the cabinet do have a sinister association and are used as weapons, and to intimidate and harm. An Internet search provides many examples of commonplace objects like sporting implements and tools used as weapons in murders or assaults. As commonplace and familiar objects, they are easily available to be used for criminal intent. When I purchased the baseball bat (the only item in the cabinet I purchased as new), the shop assistant upon hearing the idea for the cabinet showed me the range of smaller children’s bats. He gleefully reported, ‘These are for children but can be easily swung with one hand by an adult. They are the ones the bikies17 buy.’

17 Bikies is a colloquial term for members of an outlaw motorcycle club.
Figure 21 Bruce Slatter, Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence (In my domestic space)
As previously outlined, the cabinet has a distinctly menacing presence in the domestic space, as seen in (Figure 21) as opposed to the gallery context. During the construction of this piece, I considered whether it should be actually full of implements, whether when full it might only give the impression of a museological collection and a sealed hermetic container rather than a working cupboard that is opened regularly and the contents used. To explore this I tried presenting the cabinet with one implement missing as if it was actually being used in the action of defence and/or offence. Contrary to what I imagined, the cabinet looked even more like a collection with an implement still waiting to be added to the line up.

The artist Simon Pericich explores the use of commonplace objects as weapons in his 2008 series when they come we will be ready (Figure 22), described by the Australian writer and critic Ashley Crawford as, …

*... the arsenal of desperation. It is savagery replete. A domestic iron becomes a post-medieval mace. The steel shaft of a vacuum cleaner is topped with an open Stanley knife, a guitar fret has been lopped and attached to a clothes hanger to be reborn as a crossbow. This is the weaponry of the damned, the stranded. When they come is sculptural paranoia in extremis [Crawford 2008]*.
The weapons by Pericich are based on combinations of household objects and have a homemade quality akin to an implement made with very limited resources like a prison shiv\(^\text{18}\). They have the appearance of props from an apocalyptic horror film even though they are installed with a careful and ordered arrangement. The ‘savagery’ Crawford describes is not limited to the potential of their possible use, but is also evident in their manufacture and appearance. In contrast to Pericich’s works, the objects I selected for the Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence cabinet are unadorned and unworked, remaining unchanged from their previous incarnations as commonplace implements. By presenting the objects in their original state, I hope to direct the viewer to consider the careful design and construction of the cabinet and the meticulous placement of each individual object. The careful craftsmanship of the cabinet is important to my working methodology and serves to highlight the contrast between the basic objects contained within it and the harmful action that might result from their use.

While researching gun cabinets for the construction of my burglar stick cabinet, I became acutely aware of the connection between guns and hunting, highlighted by the many examples of animal head trophies, collected and mounted as souvenirs of the kill. Humankind has long used the possession and collecting of animal heads as trophies that represent power and domination and demonstrate control over territory.

Artists such as David Mach have further explored trophies as indicators of status. Through a series of trophy works in the early 1990s that combined trophy heads of exotic animals with household objects, Mach provides a critical response to the excesses of middle class aspiration, which he emphasises in The Trophy Room (Figure 23), an installation at Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw in 1993. Paul Bonaventura describes Mach’s series of works as ‘double-trophies’ in that they combine the ‘perversely-coupled rewards of money and position, the creature comforts to which we all aspire. These are the tokens by which we measure our status and success’ (Mach 1995, pp. 13-14). Mach’s two works No Hiding Place (Figure 24) and All Mod Cons (Figure 25) exemplify this idea.

To further explore the symbols and indicators of territoriality – and, in particular, the idea of demarcating territory – I began a series of works based on deer antlers. In both the animal and human world, antlers are representative of power and dominance. For deer, antlers are a physical embodiment of territoriality and are part symbol and part tool; large antlers usually correlate strength and virility with a sense of increased dominance thus helping to maintain a stag’s domain and ensuring mating opportunities. A large set of antlers can act as a highly visible physical deterrent to encroachment by a rival and can negate the need for conflict. However, when a stag’s territoriality is threatened and conflict becomes necessary, it will use its antlers as a weapon against the challenger in a violent tussle of power for possession of territory. For hunters, however, antlers become representative of humankind’s apparent domination over nature and territory. To bring home such evidence as a souvenir of the kill demonstrates an ability to triumph over the animal and control of nature. The antlers function as prizes signalling a ‘successful’ hunt; as souvenirs they memorialise the death of the animal and as trophies on display they immortalise the life of the hunter.

\(^\text{18}\) A shiv – or shank (in the USA) – is an improvised prison weapon, often a blade, made from materials at hand.
(Figure 23) David Mach, The Trophy Room (1993)

(Figure 24) David Mach, No Hiding Place (1990)

(Figure 25) David Mach, All Mod Cons (1990)
A set of antlers could be seen as an unlikely object in an Australian context especially in Perth, Western Australia, which is in a sense the geographical opposite of a Northern Hemisphere mountain and natural environment of an antler-bearing animal. I have, however, always been interested in antlers. My family emigrated from England to Perth, Western Australia in the last months of the 1970s just a few months before my 9th birthday. Emigration meant that we could only bring certain objects and possessions and I insisted on bringing an old biscuit tin my grandfather gave me (Figure 26). The image on the front is a simplified image of a Scottish scene showing a stag in a pose that directly references the classic painting by Sir Edwin Landseer, *Monarch of the Glen*, from 1851 (Figure 27).

Although we were not from Scotland, this tin came to represent the place we had left behind and the deer and antlers developed into a key visual memory of childhood. Over the years since I have collected physical representations of antlers that vary from postcards to bottle tops, to a children’s toy, to small antler like twigs. As a collection, these artefacts have a physical quality so much more tangible than an instantly generated photographic assortment from an image search on the Internet. My personal collection became an invaluable set of references for the series of antler artworks I developed in this project.

Another influential reference for this series was in the form of a statement by artist Richard Wentworth in conversation with curator Roger Malbert that I have already cited in the previous chapter:

> Whoever first said ‘readymade’ was very clever, but it’s a long time since people discovered that you could dig with an antler – something serviceable, heraldic and mythic all rolled into one. Humans don’t change that much (Wentworth et al. 1998, p. 7).
Wentworth recognises that humans have been using objects such as antlers in innovative ways since time immemorial and his statement has a particular resonance with this project. During the development of this series of works, I was aware of the proliferation of antlers in Australian popular culture and advertising (Figures 28 - 31). I was probably more aware of these references while working on the series but it seemed that things like taxidermy had become more fashionable and visible as part of mainstream interior design. I was initially concerned that by using antlers as a subject the work would be seen as simply responding to the latest trend, but reflecting on my childhood collection and Wentworth’s statement, I realised that antlers have always been used in many ways, not just as tools and weapons, but also as objects with symbolic power, and that antlers will endure beyond fashionable trends. The fact that objects like antlers have re-entered the mainstream supports my point about their ongoing importance and influence.
In the studio I began focussing on antlers in regards to ideas of demarcation and territory. The first iteration of sculpted antlers was constructed from forged steel star pickets. A star picket is one of the implements represented in the *Burglar Sticks: Defence/Defence* cabinet and they are usually used to demarcate territory within a landscape. A star picket can literally stake a claim by rupturing the earth. In the same way as a flag pole operates, the picket literally connects the symbolic to the actual. I wanted to make a physical and conceptual connection between star pickets and antlers, and I imagined they operated metaphorically in a similar way. When combined with rope, wire, mesh or bunting, the star pickets keep pedestrian or animal traffic in or out of a particular space as seen in (Figure 32).

In *Territory Marker* (Figure 33), I drew upon considerations of Picasso’s *Bull’s Head* and Jungen’s *Cetology* as discussed in Chapter One to transform one object into another form, redeploying the original object into a new context. By using star pickets to create a set of antlers, I created a new form that retained the qualities and meaning of the original material and object.

I used a blacksmith forge, hammer and anvil to manipulate and shape the star pickets, leaving evidence of fabrication that helped contribute to a more organic and animal-like quality. The forging process meant heating the star pickets to a high and even temperature, which caused an interesting material transformation, changing the dark metal of the star pickets to a lighter bluish hue similar to the matt finish of gunmetal colour (Figure 34).

To further emphasise the trophy-like quality of the antlers, I mounted them together on a central steel shield shape to mimic the wooden shield of a traditional antler trophy setting (Figure 35). The shield motif has connections to medieval family shields or crests that often depicted animals and communicated symbols of wealth and strength. Academic Meredith Lillich suggests that,

> A Gothic coat of arms was never an idle decoration nor was it an abstruse hermetic talisman to its owner. Quite the reverse: it was his unequivocal identifying label, his mark (Lillich 1991).
I exhibited *Territory Marker* in a solo exhibition *Usage*\(^19\) together with a series of other works that I discuss later on in this dissertation. After testing the height and spacing of the work in the studio, I installed the work centrally at one end of the gallery space at eye level with the main part of the antlers hung above head height as if in a great hall of castle or above the fireplace in a hunting lodge. The install documentation (*Figure 36*) gives a sense of the viewer experience where each individual work contributes to the overall body of work. My intention was that the viewer made the connection between the star picket in the cabinet and star pickets used in the antlers.

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\(^{19}\) *Usage* was held at Galerie Düsseldorf, Mosman Park, WA in 2009
However, reflecting on the documentation of the individual artworks in the exhibition highlighted a particular issue regarding the antlers. In the photographs, the antlers seemed thin and elongated and although this wasn’t evident in the space, it did make me consider altering them after the exhibition. To this end, I reduced the length of the antlers and twisted them forward to enhance their three-dimensional form and better mimic the thrust of a real set of antlers. This process led me to consider other possibilities to emphasise a sense of territory and whether the action or use of antlers could be further explored in regard to defence and attack. To test this I made further connections to ideas of sporting territoriality and considered the structure of the antlers as a support for other objects. I used collage to test different types of sporting balls from different sporting codes and welded small metal pins on the ends of the antlers to hold the balls. I tested the new version in the domestic context of my kitchen as an exploration of trophy display (Figure 37).

The new work *Gaining Territory* (2011) (Figure 38) was exhibited the exhibition *From There to Here and In-between* at Project Space at RMIT. I intended that the sporting balls would add to the antlers’ emphasis on defence and offence and direct the work towards sporting terms and metaphors such as

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20 The exhibition *From There to Here and In-between* was a research collaboration with Susanna Castleden, Nicole Slatter and Paul Uhlmann, 27th May to 16th June 2011 held at Project Space/ Spare Room at RMIT.
Chapter 2 - Objects of Personal Territory

Figure 37 Bruce Slatter, *Gaining Territory* installed in the domestic space (2011)

(Figure 38) Bruce Slatter, *Gaining Territory* (2011)
Figure 39
Bruce Slatter, 
Rut Fork (2009)
'running with the ball', 'holding the ball' and 'keep one’s eye on the ball'. The balls also appear as if collected and preserved in action in the manner of sporting souvenirs. Following some sporting matches, equipment from the game is ‘souvenired’ by the players and given to the best player or perhaps a player on debut. This is particularly evident in cricket where the stumps or the balls are taken for this explicit purpose, sometimes becoming memorabilia as objects imbued with history.

The work *Rut fork* (*Figure 39*) developed in the studio after testing the possibilities of commonplace objects and implements to physically imply territoriality through defence and attack. In an example of studio performativity, I experimented with the physicality of a garden fork by holding it in my hands in front of an imaginary foe. In considering it as a potential weapon, I was reminded of the Home Guard21 in Britain during World War II who, due to armament shortages, armed themselves with garden and farm implements in order to potentially repel the invading German Army. I considered that the idea of defending one’s own territory with an implement might create a sort of embodied animal strength.

The British artist Marcus Coates investigates the complex relationship between humans and nature in his practice based on performance and photography. In his photographic work *Duvet Den* (*Figure 40*), Coates suggests that wild nature is influencing or gradually taking over the domestic space. In *Journey To The Lower World* (2004) (*Figure 41*), Coates wears a deer pelt and antlers to physically and psychologically embody the spirit of the deer. In a shamanistic performance, he makes ‘contact’ with the ‘lower world’ to convey messages and interpretations of contemporary social issues.

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21  The Home Guard were the ‘last line of defence against German invasion’ and made up of ‘men above or below the age of conscription and those unfit or ineligible for front line service’ [The Imperial War Museum 2015].
Reflecting on both works by Coates, I explored other ways to include a more direct reference to the body in relationship to my artworks. In Postproduction, Nicholas Bourriaud says that ‘to use an object is necessarily to interpret it’ (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 13) and, by extension, I consider that to interpret an object is to understand it. The use, interpretation and understanding of commonplace objects is often experienced and once experienced is easily remembered. These sorts of personal experiences of objects combine with observations of other users and help to construct knowledge and comprehension of an object like a bucket and some of the potential it can literally hold. It is precisely this amassed and shared familiarity and experience that I consider when contemplating a commonplace object as a potential art object. In this project, I want to encourage the viewer to access their existing knowledge of an object and to place that object within their spatial and conceptual world in order to respond to it in the new art context.

The artist Erwin Wurm explores interaction and performativity with commonplace objects in his series One Minute Sculptures. In the many versions of the series, the audience participates by following instructions to activate certain objects, often with their body, for a period of a minute. Pictured in (Figure 42) is an example of a viewer interacting with two buckets – standing in one bucket with another bucket placed over her head for a period of one minute. Such interaction follows the instructions for the work as Wurm intended but I think it is also worth considering other ways of experiencing his work. As objects, the buckets can be viewed simply as buckets and when Wurm’s instructions are not followed the interaction remains a predominately visual experience. Another type of viewer experience can be seen in (Figure 43), which involves observing another person engaged in the interaction. Reflecting on these three different ways of interacting with and experiencing Wurm’s One Minute Sculptures helped me consider the role of participation or implied performativity in my work.
As a further development of the antler investigations, I constructed a new set of antlers from cardboard thus enabling me to use more realistic proportions of actual antlers than the previous star picket antlers. I covered the antlers in a repurposed hand knitted scarf as an experiment in a play on creature comforts and the absurd suggestion that a set of antlers need to be kept warm (Figure 44).

I had initially considered using a scarf from a specific sporting club to enhance a sense of territoriality but thought this would create an immediate and obvious reaction to the well-known colours or alternatively might not elicit any response at all. I decided that a hand knitted multi-coloured scarf (Figure 45) could reference a wider range of sporting and non-sporting contexts.

When installed in the Usage exhibition, I purposely installed the Antler Cosy artwork at head height as an invitation for interaction. I do not include instructions in the manner of Wurm and, without prompting, a few early visitors to the exhibition stood in the appropriate spot with their head between the antlers. This led to more viewers interacting with the work, and they were encouraged and photographed by the gallery director.
Interestingly, of the documented participants, men were by far the majority. Although I do not suggest in any way that this was an organised experiment, there remained a perception the interaction was dominated by male viewers or ‘stags’ (Figures 46 - 49). The connection of domesticity as represented by the cosy to the previously discussed importance of antlers in establishing territoriality worked well as a strategic participatory device.

A similar but more convincing viewer interaction with antlers was achieved through the photographic documentation of Gaining Territory. As opposed to the detached Antler Cosy viewer interaction, it was possible to position the viewer in front of this work so that the antlers actually appear to be attached to the viewer. Such interaction as shown in (Figure 50) with Robbie posing in front of the antlers gives the work another level of reading and reaffirms the intended humour.

The inclusion of the viewer in the work via the use of controlled installation is explored by Mexican artist Damian Ortega in his work Controller of the Universe (Figure 51). His installation is a frozen ‘explosion’ of suspended commonplace objects in the form of tools and implements. Viewers experience the work by positioning themselves within the space and in different relationships to the ‘explosion’. Depending on this placement, the implements can be perceived as either converging towards or diverging from the viewer thus creating a contrasting experience of the work (Figure 52).

Figure 45 Bruce Slatter, Antler Cosy (Detail) (2009)
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Figure 46 Bevan with Antler Cosy

Figure 47 Simon with Antler Cosy

Figure 48 Mark with Antler Cosy

Figure 49 Andrew with Antler Cosy
Figure 50  Bruce Slatter, Robbie with Gaining Territory, Project Space / Spare Room [2011]

Figure 51  Damian Ortega, Controller of the Universe [2007]

Figure 52  Damian Ortega, Controller of the Universe [2007]
A more literal use of an implement along with the use of a violent act to actually shape the domestic space can be seen in the Do Hit Chair by Marijn van der Poll (Figures 53 and 54) for the Droog Design collective from Holland. The ‘chair’ comes as a steel box and sledgehammer that challenges the viewer or buyer to be the co-designer by shaping the box into the form of a chair by actively bludgeoning the box.

The context of territoriality and the direct connection of implements to the physicality of the human body can suggest the possibility of interaction as in van der Poll’s Do Hit Chair. Although I do not specifically intend for my artworks to be physically interacted with in this manner beyond the visual and conceptual reading, the commonplace objects I have used and redeployed in many of the artworks in this project do have an implied performativity. Apart from the types of participation with the antler-based works previously discussed, I have not deliberately set up audience interactions like Wurm but I do intend my objects to act as a reminder of previous experience or be suggestive of possible imagined use. This use is inherent in the repurposed and redeployed implements as well as the referenced and constructed antlers emphasising the objects used in their making. All the artworks discussed in this chapter are ultimately concerned with the demarcation and protection of territory.
In this chapter, I explore territoriality in relationship to conflict and, in particular, armed conflict, which can be considered the extreme consequence of forcing or reinforcing territoriality. I do not intend to address the causes of international conflict nor propose solutions. Instead I draw on historical and contemporary examples of armed conflict to explore territoriality through my focus on commonplace objects in an attempt to make a personal or individual connection to something as significant as war, which for a distant observer can be a relatively abstract experience.

The regular relationship we have with objects might make them commonplace and perhaps ordinary but even the most familiar and apparently benign object can take on new meanings and associations formed by external events contributing significantly to how they are regarded. Global issues and events such as war, politics, the environment, poverty and disasters are communicated through the media in its various forms (TV, newspaper, Internet, mobile phone, public screens, etc.) and can influence our everyday and domestic experience.

An example of how events can alter the meanings of an object can be articulated in how I respond to a simple hessian bag. My understanding of and response to a hessian bag has changed forever since the publication of images showing the torture and prisoner abuse of hooded Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison by United States Army personnel during the Iraq war in 2004. In his book The Abu Ghraib Effect, academic Stephen Eisenman describes the hoods used in Abu Ghraib as,

... made of jute, used by the US military to disorient, objectify and torture an inmate; it recalls dunces’ caps once used to punish schoolchildren, the hoods worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan and subsequent American racist organizations, and the hoods worn both by executioners and their victims (Eisenman 2007, p. 13).

Before Abu Ghraib, I already had a sense that hessian bags related to important or momentous occasions and that they were objects with serious connotations. For me, the hessian bag was connected to defensive and protective measures during times of armed conflict or natural disaster. I was familiar with images of them being filled with sand to make defensive walls to protect houses threatened with rising floodwaters or to bolster military positions. However, after Abu Ghraib, hessian bags have an even more serious visual and political power and now provide an enduring connection to human rights abuse and aggressive American imperialism. After the Abu Ghraib photos were released, Gerry Adams, then President of Sinn Fein wrote in The Guardian newspaper that he had been subjected to the same kind of torture and abuse that included the use of the hessian bag by the British army in the 1970s (Adams 2004). I am interested in how from a global to a domestic level socio-political events such as the Abu Ghraib torture form our shared knowledge and understanding of the world, and have the capacity to build on and even complicate existing meanings of commonplace objects.

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Eisenman references the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as ‘specifically identifying hooding – generally with hessian (jute, burlap) bags – as a practice used extensively at Abu Ghraib, as well as at Guantanamo Bay and at the Bagram Collection Point on the Bagram Air Base, near Charikar in Parwan, Afghanistan’ (Eisenman 2007, p. 25).
During the Egyptian anti-government protests in the so-called Arab Spring of November 2011, protesters used commonplace found objects and detritus as improvised armour to protect themselves during violent clashes with government troops in Tahrir Square, Cairo. This innovative use of objects is exemplified in the news reportage as shown in (Figures 55 and 56). The protesters had used commonplace objects and, specifically, plastic buckets as helmets in a dangerous conflict situation. This improvisation of a simple object in a complicated and life-endangering situation reinforced the potential of commonplace objects and represented an important consolidation of ideation within this project. In Helmet Hybrids Series (2009), I attempted to link military helmets involved in conflict to commonplace sporting and construction helmets. The improvised head protection with buckets by the Tahrir Square protesters is an example of an object operating contrary to its intended utilisation. The buckets used by the protesters were henceforth linked by association, for me, to all buckets and their relevance to this project was affirmed when I saw this commonplace object being simultaneously used as an object of self-preservation and extension of personal territory.

Figure 55
An Egyptian anti-government protester uses a bucket as a helmet during clashes in Cairo’s Tahrir square, Egypt (2011)
Armed conflict can exist on very different levels, ranging from individuals with simple weapons like sticks to the complexity and enormity of World War. At each of these extremes, individuals, groups and nations are engaging in a state of territoriality either through self-preservation or state sanctioned military deployment. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes suggested in his seminal political discourse *Leviathan* that conflict can be seen as a consequence of intense competition (Hobbes 2010, p. 56). Published in 1651 at the end of the English Civil War (1642 – 51) after a nine-year period of dramatic political uncertainty and transformation, *Leviathan* argued for rule by an absolute sovereign to ensure society is protected from a state of warring anarchy. Even though *Leviathan* was written 363 years ago, it remains relevant to the contemporary world and although Australia is not in a state of warring anarchy, armed conflict is still very much a part of its contemporary consciousness as the Australian Defence Force is currently participating in overseas deployments in different conflict zones. The emphasis Hobbes determines for a sovereign could be interpreted in a contemporary sense as a central Federal government protecting its citizens and its territory. On the international stage, the United Nations (U.N.) through the auspices of the U.N. Security Council is mandated to perform the role of protecting against global conflict through peace keeping and political lobbying, although the territorial interests of its own member states paradoxically often stymie the U.N.’s attempts at global policing.
Declarations of territoriality have always been part of human history as borders and possession of resources are disputed and fought over. This is still evident in contemporary international relations; from democratically elected governments, to despotic regimes and terrorist organisations, asserting territorial claims is part of exerting control and declaring identity and nationhood. For a political leader, making statements of territoriality can manifest as *us* against *them* thus asserting a sense of nationalism and placing the state against individuals or groups seeking to undermine or harm its integrity. This was exemplified last year by Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s suggestion that ‘[w]hen it comes to counter terrorism, everyone needs to be a part of Team Australia’ (Abbott 2014). Prime Minister Abbott’s phrasing was reminiscent of a statement by the President of the United States of America George W. Bush in his address to Congress on the 20th of September 2001: ‘Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists’ [Bush 2001]. President Bush was making a call to arms in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre. This speech was a precursor to military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan beginning the so-called War on Terror* led by American, British and Australian military personnel, which lasted over ten years. While these military actions have been scaled back in recent years, the international presence is still evident in the Middle East where the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) has reignited a fight for territory and ongoing declarations of territoriality.

During the War on Terror, the photographic and televisual imagery used in news reportage presented a heightened visual representation of military operations. As military and local casualty numbers rose, the military campaigns often received even greater representation through all forms of the media. Media depictions of the participating multinational force including the Australian Defence Force (ADF) reinforced that Australia was at war. Through the increased media depiction of war, I started to notice the increased proliferation of military helmets presented through the daily newspaper and nightly news reports. The helmets were predominately used in military operations but were also evident in non-military uses by police. The following examples from 2009 to 2010 demonstrate the abundance of newsworthy imagery (Figures 57-64).

The depiction of helmets in the mainstream media emphasised the importance of helmets within these zones of conflict. Even though as objects they have a simple form, their potential for protection highlighted the connection to the individual thus providing a personal context for their use. The helmets came to be more than physically attached to the soldiers, rather they functioned as an extension of their body and their individual territory. The proliferation I observed started to have two effects: firstly, the helmets became directly representative of soldiers; and, secondly, military helmets had through this increased exposure started to become commonplace.

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23 This Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People was delivered by President Bush nine days after the attacks on Washington and the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001.

24 The War on Terror (also known as the Global War on Terrorism) describes the international multinational military action in response to terrorism and started after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in September 11, 2001.

25 The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is an extremist group attempting to establish a Caliphate across the Middle East and the world.
In an attempt to articulate what I observed as an increasing militarisation in society, I started to reconsider all forms of helmets. I found that this was a way of connecting what was happening in distant war zones across the world and the everyday experience of life here. Through an exploration of a military helmet, I could explore the way objects can connect to actions and territories that are at a remove and distant from regular experience. I wanted to suggest through a combination of commonplace objects that a construction worker or cricketer putting on their hardhat or helmet after seeing a picture in the media of a helmeted soldier in Afghanistan could possibly have a stronger connection to the experience of the soldier in the same way that I had considered the bucket. Although difficult to measure, I wanted to test if the common physical properties of objects can be used through artwork to communicate a shared meaning and narrative and whether this could create a better empathetic understanding of conflict, which is a somewhat abstract experience that is difficult and perhaps impossible to comprehend for a distant viewer. The writer Susan Sontag suggests,
All works of art are founded on a certain distance from the lived reality which is represented. This “distance” is, by definition, inhuman or impersonal to a certain degree; for in order to appear to us as art, the work must restrict sentimental intervention and emotional participation, which are functions of “closeness”. It is the degree and manipulating of this distance, the conventions of distance, which constitute the style of the work. In the final analysis, “style” is art. And art is nothing more or less than various modes of stylised, dehumanised representation (Sontag 1988, p. 30).

In opposition to Sontag’s suggestion, I wanted to create a relationship between the represented and the artwork that reduced or overcame the ‘distance’, to actually increase the ‘emotional participation’ instead. While I realise the emotive involvement of a viewer or audience may not be directly measurable, I believe that through art it can still be a valid aim.

The ideas and development for the helmet series started to manifest as I gathered information and images of helmets from the military conflict and from research into forms of self-protection within human endeavour like sport and industry. The helmet provides its wearer with a common protective function at work, sport and recreation in much the same way that a military helmet is used in militarised operations during global conflict. The need for each helmet corresponds to the necessity of the situation and potential hazard or consequence. Although a bike helmet and a military helmet are designed to protect from danger and save the wearer from injury, the Kevlar military assault helmet arguably encounters a substantively different possibility of danger and consequence. By comparing these types of helmets, I wanted to emphasise a relationship between the commonplace known helmet and the unknown military helmet.
All helmets provide protection against some kind of impact; they are designed to best achieve the balance between maximum protection whilst allowing for maximum movement and the widest peripheral vision. Sporting helmets protect against projectiles, whether it be a cricket ball or a baseball, and also against falls, crashes or collisions in bicycle and motocross sports. Construction helmets guard against falling materials on a building site. Military helmets also protect against projectiles, like bullets or shrapnel. They also carry a layer of camouflage to further aid in the protection of the soldier by obscuring their outline and body mass against the context of the landscape.

I wanted to try and test my observations of the increased visual prominence of the military in day-to-day life by testing the taking over of a commonplace object like a helmet by something akin to its form but with a much more dangerous type of utility. The works that make up the Helmet Hybrids Series (2009) (Figure 65) combine two different types of helmet, commonplace helmets and military helmets. The commonplace objects are protective helmets from sport, recreational pursuits and hardhats from the construction industry. Instead of just attaching a military helmet to a sporting or industrial helmet, I wanted both helmets to be melded into each other. The military helmet needed to be fused and physically embedded as a metaphor for the visual and emotive qualities of conflict enmeshed within the consciousness of society. To achieve this I made a mould of a standard issue US military helmet used currently by the US and Australian armies and by Police Special Operations Units. I inserted a sporting or industrial helmet into this rubber mould before pouring in the polyurethane plastic, which filled the helmet mould and incorporated the form of the inserted helmet.
Figure 66 Bruce Slatter, Helmet Hybrid - Motorcross/Military Helmet (2009) Digital Camouflage

Figure 67 Bruce Slatter, Helmet Hybrid - Construction/Military Helmet (2009) Desert Camouflage
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Figure 68 Bruce Slatter, Helmet Hybrid - Cricket/Military Helmet [2009] Aussie Camouflage

Figure 69 Bruce Slatter, Helmet Hybrid - Bicycle/Military Helmet [2009] Forest Camouflage
In military use, helmets have an added fabric covering with camouflage particular to the landscape of the conflict or operation. I chose different types of camouflage utilising clothing from surplus stores and had fabric covers made for each of the hybrids. Each camouflage relates to the particular use of the sporting, work or recreational helmet underneath. For the Motocross helmet, it is a digital camouflage (Figure 66) and the Construction helmet uses Desert camouflage (Figure 67). The Cricket helmet uses Aussie camouflage (Figure 68) and the first bicycle helmet a forest camouflage (Figure 69) with the second Bicycle helmet using a Grassland camouflage (Figure 70).

The Hybrid Helmets form a cluster on a waist-high table and although displayed as static objects, they appear to have the potential for future use. The series was exhibited in the same space as Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence and can be seen in the reflection of the cabinet doors (Figure 71). This created a tension between interpretations of the commonplace objects as weapon-like and offensive and as protective and defensive.

Australian artist Shaun Gladwell has used military helmets as a way of representing soldiers and the literal headspace of military experience. His art practice is based on modes of participation, investigating different human endeavours like skateboarding and BMX riding. These sports may be normally associated with youth culture but he investigates these pursuits as important localised and contemporary forms of sporting activity that deserve recognition and representation. Gladwell’s video
works often depict him as the main participant, placing the viewer and audience as a witness to the physicality of the action. In October 2009, Gladwell spent time in Afghanistan and the Middle East as an official war artist embedded with the Australian Defence Force (ADF). His two-week ‘residency’ allowed Gladwell to represent his direct experience using photography and video on location. This was the first time video had been used as part of the official war artist scheme and the documentary style footage further increases a sense of realism in the work. His imagery focuses on the heads and helmets as a way of making a direct connection to the soldiers and their military experience in a conflict zone.

Gladwell’s series *Behind Point of View* (Figure 72) focuses on the helmet as a central motif, highlighting the soldier’s view by photographing them from behind. This view presents the soldier’s view including that of the landscape and equipment, and establishes their context. By using this viewpoint, Gladwell places the viewer in a position to observe what the soldiers see. This view also disguises the identity of the serving soldier, which is a necessary precaution when documenting soldiers in a war zone and, in turn, suggests one soldier can represent all soldiers.

After he returned to Australia, Gladwell continued to represent his experience through a series of paintings. He reflects on the helmet when talking about his work for the exhibition *AFGHANISTAN*:

They have this direct connection to a soldier’s body. They’re a piece of technology that is the last stand in protecting a major organ. If everything else goes [sic], but if you can support the brain – in the skull protected by the helmet – at least that’s something (Gladwell 2013).

*My Helmet Hybrid series* aimed to highlight increased military action by reflecting the amplified visual presence of helmets in the media. The fact that the helmets had seemingly become commonplace objects supported my broader research aims and I was able to create an empathetic connection between different experiences of a similar commonplace object.
Although the *Helmet Hybrids* series may refer to the potential hazard of conflict and war, I was interested in making a work that more directly related to the actual consequences of conflict and war by using commonplace objects to refer to a potential sense of the futility of war and to make a work about implied loss of life. At first this idea seemed not just a difficult task, but also perhaps an unwise one, as the topic is just too provocative, in the sense that any direct reference to death would be regarded as contentious and problematic. In my opinion official war artists such as Jon Cattapan, Peter Churcher and Shaun Gladwell did not directly address the death of soldiers as part of their responses. Each of these artists chose to depict military personnel in documentary-type celebrations of their existence in the conflict zone amongst their equipment and the landscape. I consider that only Ben Quilty has touched on the results of military experience in his portraits of returned soldiers but, even then, he has not directly referenced loss of life. Despite this, I did think it was possible to address the topic and attempting a sculpture that uses the shared experience of a commonplace object could be a way to refer to the loss of life and tragic consequence of armed conflict.

During my research into helmets and representations of the Australian Defence Force, I also considered the term ‘digger’ as it was often referenced in the media at the time of the Iraq War. The term has...
been used to describe the men and women of the Australian Defence Force for at least a hundred years and was popularised during the First World War. Historian Tim Lycett traces the term back to Brigadier-General James Cannan who in 1916 complimented the Western Australian 44th Battalion on their prowess in digging defensive trenches in a training exercise (Lycett 2012). The other battalions taking part in the exercise used the term ‘digger’ as derogatory but it soon spread throughout the whole Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and eventually became synonymous with ‘cobber’ or ‘mate’. As the 44th Battalion were from Western Australia (WA), it was suggested that many of the soldiers had gained their digging experience after working in the WA mining industry. The term ‘digger’ is still in common use, particularly in the media to refer to serving Australian soldiers or as a term of endearment to describe Australian veterans especially during Anzac Day celebrations.

As a result of this research, I made a literal connection between the term ‘digger’ and the most commonplace object for digging, namely, a spade. A photographic image of Chinese soldiers taken during the aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake (Figure 73) helped me consider the shared experience of the spade’s utility.

My sculptural reinterpretation of the spade started by extending its form from a single-person implement to a tool that suggested coordination by more than one person. The first joining of two spades created a two-handled implement with a wide blade similar to a shovel (Figure 74). This new implement implied more than the general shared experience of using a spade; instead, more specifically, it suggested the experience of a shared action where two users would need to coordinate their movements and collaborate to achieve an outcome. Initially this was to imply a connection between digger and the term ‘mate’, as if lending someone a hand was a cooperative demonstration of the Australian sense of mateship.
Once constructed the double-width shovel-like spade made an immediate connection and reference to Marcel Duchamp’s work *In Advance of a Broken Arm* of 1915. Although his work is a snow shovel recontextualised as an artwork, it bears a similarity to the double spade through its form. The similarity is further enhanced by the coincidence of the year 1915 as both the origin of the word ‘digger’ and the date of Duchamp’s first New York Readymade after he moved from Paris in 1915. One of his iconic Readymade artworks, *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (*Figure 75*) suggests a connection between the object’s associated function as a shovel to remove snow and ice, and a potential accidental slip, thus resulting in a broken arm.

My two-person diggers are, likewise, suggestive of performative possibilities. They are like absurd and impractical props that recall Francis Alÿs’ action *When Faith Moves Mountains* (*Figure 76*) involving 500 participants using shovels to ‘move’ a sand dune and serving as a Sisyphean example of digging towards an ultimately futile end.
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Figure 75
Marcel Duchamp,
*In Advance of a Broken Arm*
[Duchamp 1964 (4th version after lost original November 1915)]

Figure 76
Francis Alÿs,
*When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002)
I considered that the comedic distraction of unworkability might work in opposition to the serious reference to the loss of life from armed conflict and instead imagined that, like Duchamp’s *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, the two-handed spade could imply interaction and a possible resultant outcome.

The next sculptural iteration was a combination of two two-person diggers to make a four-person spade (*Figure 77*), which could stand up on its own thus creating an unnerving balance and giving the object a definite presence in space.

From this development, I proceeded to keep joining more spades to create a circular form and never-ending spade face. The fixing mechanism is hidden and the spades appear to be balanced, holding each other up as if in a frozen moment. From the original spade designed for use by a single person, my new final object proposed team-based utility. The new object titled *In Advance of the Broken Army* (*Figure 78*) stands in space suggesting its potential to dig a large hole through the coordinated effort of twelve users for the twelve spades. I considered connections to other societal uses of twelve participants such as twelve jurors, the twelve apostles in Christianity and twelve cricketers to make up a team. This perfect circle suggests teamwork and a common goal to which all users contribute. If used, an initial incision can be made into the earth but, for the ground to be lifted up, each spade would have to be levered back and the tool broken apart.
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Figure 78 Bruce Slatter, In Advance of the Broken Army (2009)
As I have previously discussed, the Readymades of Duchamp are influential to this project and to many artists who have worked or continue to work with already-produced objects. Duchamp’s choice of artwork titles is another important point when considering the impact of the work. His clever use of language – and, in particular, his use of puns – was a significant feature of his practice and legacy. Art historian David Joselit suggests Duchamp considered words and language as another type of Readymade and that the significance of Duchamp’s ‘use of the Readymade strategy is the equivalence they establish between things and words’ (Joselit in Cummings, 1993, p. 56).

I consider titles as a very important aspect of my practice. After the visual scrutiny of an artwork, they are often the first thing considered by a viewer in order to make sense of the work. Like Duchamp, I make use of puns and often utilise humour as a strategy of communication to mediate or present difficult ideas. Psychologist Keith Mills makes a distinction between ‘descriptive’ and ‘elaborative’ titles, using the term ‘elaboration effect’ to describe his findings that ‘aesthetic experiences were greater for the artworks when placed with elaborative titles than with descriptive titles’ (Millis 2001, p. 320).

The word play in my title *In Advance of the Broken Army* literally extends Duchamp’s title *In Advance of the Broken Arm* and introduces a reference to the consequence of war. I consider this as a redeployment of Duchamp’s title that is referential and deferential to his work while elaborating a new meaning. Unfortunately, a broken army on either side of a conflict magnifies the necessity of graves and mass burials. I wanted the absurdity of the object to be balanced by the sombre quality of twelve almost bowed implements. Reading recent articles in the lead up to the Gallipoli centenary reminded me that of the over 60,000 Australian soldiers killed in World War I, only the body of one, Major-General William Throsby Bridges, was returned to be buried in Australia (Kelly 2015, p. 28). Although armed conflict may often be fought on a large scale involving and affecting many people in a common cause, a shared experience such as war is always made up of individuals with personal experiences of territoriality.

Both examples of sculptural investigation articulated in this chapter are concerned with the physicality of implied personal participation through the redeployment of commonplace objects. Both the *Helmet Hybrids Series* and *In Advance of the Broken Army* are intended to connect personal experiences of territoriality to the distant global territoriality exemplified by a nation involved in armed combat. The military helmets of a military force on foreign soil as exemplified by the ADF in Afghanistan and Iraq and as referenced in my work *Helmet Hybrids* are representative of a temporary occupation of territory. As mobile and wearable objects whose primary utility is the protection of life, helmets are fundamental to individual territoriality and are an extension of personal space. The spades in *In Advance of the Broken Army* extend the solemn link to the consequence of armed conflict and suggest the difficulty and ineffectuality of forcing and enforcing territoriality.
In this chapter, I explore territoriosity through the framework of sport, a subject that continues to play an integral role in my art practice and forms an important thematic driver for this project. In the two previous chapters, *Objects of Personal Territory* and *Objects of Conflict*, I have discussed sporting references that are evident in a number of my artworks particularly *Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence* and the *Helmet Hybrid Series*. Both of these artworks investigate the potential of commonplace sporting objects to be used in on and off-field endeavour that, in turn, suggests the connections between sporting equipment and conflict and, in particular, violence or danger. In this chapter, I further explore sport as a subtheme in the discussion of territoriosity thus highlighting its importance in society and its influence on Australian national identity. I also explore objects that symbolise the motivations and outcomes of competition and territoriosity in both sport and conflict by investigating the sense of triumph and loss.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Hall (1966) suggests that territoriosity is behaviour related to ‘laying claim to’ and ‘defending’. These fundamental forms of human endeavour are evident in sport where the action of defending or attacking a physical position, whether on a sporting area or in a race, is the basis of competition. Sport can be defined as an organised competitive activity (Holowchak 2002) and, as such, it serves as a microcosm of many forms of human endeavour and experience related to, and representing, territoriosity.

Sport has a wide popular appeal and arguably most Australians, even those with limited or no interest, would have an understanding of its importance in the national consciousness. In his seminal book *The Lucky Country*, Donald Horne described Australia’s fascination with sport:

> Sport to many Australians is life and the rest a shadow... To play sport, or watch others play, and to read and talk about it is to uphold the nation and build its character. Australia’s success at competitive international sport is considered an important part of its foreign policy (Horne 1967, p. 40).

Although written in the mid sixties, Horne’s description still has relevance today. Contemporary political leaders associate themselves with sport and sporting success, particularly in order to achieve positive publicity and a connection to the public they seek to represent. Sport played an important role in the 2014 visit of an Australian Federal Government delegation to India led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Former Australian test cricketers Adam Gilchrist and Brett Lee formed part of the delegation and were photographed with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The memorandum of understanding in sport that was signed between India and Australia may have justified the involvement of Gilchrist and Lee but their presence also demonstrated commonalities between India and Australia and positively influenced other negotiations such as the signing of a uranium export deal.

Sociologist Barry Smart suggests that nearing the end of the twentieth century, the combination of professional sport, the world’s media and the availability of corporate sponsorship has created a triumvirate of mutual profit (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007). The willingness of viewer or spectator engagement has, likewise, created consumers eager to purchase the commodities associated with
sport, including equipment, apparel and merchandise. This combination of factors has led to the almost complete globalisation of sport that we experience in the contemporary world.

Writing in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2006, Kofi Annan the then Secretary General of the UN states somewhat jealously how the football governing body FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) has even more potential influence across the globe than the United Nations:

> The World Cup makes us at the UN green with envy. As the pinnacle of the only truly global game, played in every country by every race and religion, it is one of the few phenomena as universal as the UN. You could say it’s more universal. FIFA has 207 members; we have only 191 (Annan 2006).

Sport has a similar familiarity of experience and proliferation of participation, which makes sporting equipment recognisable and commonplace in the same way as the Monobloc chair and the plastic bucket as discussed in Chapter One. In sculptural terms, sporting equipment conveys embedded meanings in terms of memory and history at a conceptual level as well as physical, material understanding of the objects themselves at a base level. Holding a cricket bat or baseball bat is a simple thing yet the act is also infinitely laden with potential connections. Sporting objects provide a familiar everyday reference point that can hold both individual and shared or collective knowledge and reflect broader associations with global concerns. The sporting implements can be representative of sport and of human endeavour. A cricket bat or hockey stick can signify the sport and the specific narrative of a particular sporting moment or famous game. These objects are in a sense democratising objects that can be utilised in differing versions of the game at many levels and in many places.

Sport can be representative of human effort and collective endeavour and has diverse elements of striving for achievement, overcoming the odds, winning and losing, hope and expectation, tragedy and disappointment. Sport has complex dynamics of individuals competing against individuals and teams competing against teams. Within team sports, individuals contribute to a team’s effort to strive against the opposition. In some sports, attack and defence, and gaining or ceding territory, can be observed in the nature of possession (of the ball or puck) and by the territory occupied since many sports have fields and pitches that are divided into two equal halves. There is an uneasy balance between defence and offence and a shift can happen instantly, dramatically changing the game and the fortunes of either side. The ability of an object to hold these divergent potentialities is exemplified in a cricket bat. The bat is used to defend and attack, making it possible to change between either state for each new ball bowled or even during the playing of one type of shot to another.

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26 In the English speaking world, FIFA is called the International Federation of Association Football
As established in previous chapters, my work seeks to build on the knowledge connected to an object including its antecedent history and its transformational and representative possibilities. Some of the objects used in this project are commonplace objects derived from actual sporting competition. They carry the markings of use and play, caused through human interaction. Most of the audience of this work will have had a direct experience of offence and defence through participation or spectatorship. This prior experience and knowledge means that the audience is able to have a direct connection to the objects.

Sporting objects are tools in the activity of sport and represent use and participation. For this reason, they become rich signifiers of sport as evidenced by terms that are associated with sport such as practice, dedication, effort, struggle, competition and achievement. As objects, I consider them to be undeniably commonplace. They are mostly familiar to us and we understand a little of what they do and how they are used even if we have never played the sport before. A useful attribute of sport in extending scope for the sculptural object to mediate relationships is the high level of participation either through playing the sport or supporting and following the sport. At each level of playing the sport, whether professional, amateur or casual, players use the same kind of equipment, techniques and rules. For example, kicking a ball at the park, regardless of whether it is a soccer ball or Australian Rules football (AFL), mimics the kicking as seen at the World Cup football or the AFL game. Sport is able to accommodate a huge variation of skill levels from professional and competitive games to backyard social activity and a participant at any level can still feel linked to the pinnacle of the sport.

In his poetic treatise on sport, Roland Barthes suggests that a ball acts as an intermediary between teams and is symbolic of the competition:

> And then, in sport, a man does not confront man directly. There enters between them an intermediary, a stake, a machine, a puck, or a ball. And this thing is the very symbol of things: it is in order to possess it, to master it. That one is strong, adroit, courageous (Barthes 2007, p. 59).

This simple observation by Barthes has resonated with me throughout this project and I extend the notion of the intermediary to encompass other commonplace objects within this project in symbolic terms whereby the artwork acts as physical mediation between the artist and the viewer. The ball as intermediary can be observed in an American context through a 100-year-old baseball tradition known as the ceremonial first pitch. The baseball season and the World Series finals are officially started with a ceremonial first pitch thrown by the President of the United States (Figures 79-81).

This moment marks the beginning of the most popular of American sports and is widely broadcast. The sporting action of pitching a baseball connects the President to the significant impact and popularity of baseball within American life. Following Barthes, the ball is symbolic and the mastery of it suggests strength and courage.
Figure 79: U.S. President George Bush Snr (1989)

Figure 80: U.S. President George W Bush (2001)

Figure 81: U.S. President Barack Obama (2009)
Csikszentmihalyi and Halton suggest that a ball is... one of the earliest objects with which children in many cultures are confronted. Basically, a ball has a vocabulary limited to only four expressions: it can rest, fly, roll, or bounce (Csikszentmihalyi and Halton 1981, p. 91).

In responding to the four expressions of a ball suggested by Csikszentmihalyi and Halton, I further explored the notion of the intermediary through a sculptural work that formed part of a series of purpose-built crated works discussed in Chapter One. I used a basketball to test the ways an object can mediate the relationship between defence and offence. I wanted to see if I could combine a crate and a basketball and attempt to give each object an equal identity and, by constraining its purpose, I hoped to question its identity and power. The resultant sculpture *Ball* (Figure 82) creates an uneasy and competitive balance between the two objects. Although the crate seems to restrict the basketball through its cubic squareness and it is anchored to the wall, nonetheless, this might only be a tentative and temporary stasis. The rigid restriction seems to amplify its freedom and movement as if the basketball may at any stage expand out of the crate and carry on moving or indeed ‘fly, roll, or bounce’.

Using a basketball as subject matter and sculptural material highlighted a consideration for me regarding commonplace objects. As a sporting object, I was satisfied that the familiarity of a basketball fulfilled the definition of commonplace but I realised that it also has a commonplace currency as an object used in art. For an art viewer, a familiar object such as a basketball carries as part of its embedded narrative references to other examples of basketballs particularly those used in art.

*Figure 82 Bruce Slatter, Ball* (2007)
Nicolas Bourriaud suggests in *Postproduction* that an artwork is part of an interconnected web of elements, connecting antecedents and ‘preceding narratives’ with future iterations and object possibilities:

… the artwork functions as the temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives. Each exhibition encloses within it the script of another; each work may be inserted into different programs and used for multiple scenarios. The artwork is no longer an end point but a simple moment in an infinite chain of contributions (Bourriaud 2005, pp. 19-20).

In this project, the basketballs used in the artworks *Ball*, *Gaining Territory* and the *Helmet Hybrid Series (Basketball/Military)* manifest a clear connection to one another when placed in the same exhibition space. As a familiar object, the basketballs also relate to other basketballs, creating a visual or experiential reminder and further extending the commonplace. This extension connects my basketballs to basketballs used by other artists in contemporary art and to non-artwork or normal basketballs.

The artist Paul Pfeiffer uses a basketball as a focus in his work *John 3:16* (*Figure 83*) in which he combined 5000 video stills from different basketball games to centre the basketball within the screen. As the video progresses, the ball remains static while the background context of basketballers, court and crowd move around it. Curator Katy Siegal likens Pfeiffer’s centralising of the basketball to Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* in symbolising man as the centre of the universe (Siegal in Pfeiffer, et al. 2009).

*Figure 83*
Paul Pfeiffer,
*John 3:16*
(1999)

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27 John 3:16 is an often referenced biblical quote – ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’. Pfeiffer uses this quote about eternity to refer to the ‘promise of digital images’: ‘In a way, the medium itself represents a kind of promise that almost has spiritual overtones’ (cited in Museum 2015).
Siegal also makes a direct connection between Pfeiffer’s work and the Jeff Koons sculptures of basketballs in aquariums. Koons uses the basketball as object and as representative of the extended sphere of the sport with its globalised corporate structure. His series of Equilibrium works transforms a relatively commonplace object, the basketball, into an iconic object that represents the whole sport. Koons intimates that the basketballs, which are suspended in clear liquid, are symbolic of life, thus suggesting to the viewer that they are inflated. He sets up the connection between air and breath. He describes Two Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Spalding Dr. J Silver Series, Wilson Aggressor) from 1985 in this way:

> What we’re looking at is a Three Ball 50/50 Tank from 1985. You know, the reason that I used a basketball over another object is really probably for the purity of it, that it’s an inflatable, it relates to our human experience of to be alive we have to breathe. If the ball would be deflated, it would be a symbol of death. But it’s inflated, so it’s a symbol of life (Koons 2011).

Koons suggests that the basketballs that are suspended in clear liquid are symbolic of life, and makes the connection between air and breath. The exact materials and make up of the work are listed in detail for prospective buyers in the 2011 Christie’s Lot notes for an auction of another Basketball vitrine Three Ball 50/50 Tank (Two Dr. J. Silver Series, One Wilson Supershoot) (Figure 84) that is also from 1985:

\[ \text{Figure 84} \\
\text{Jeff Koons,} \\
\text{Three Ball 50/50 Tank} \\
\text{(Two Dr. J. Silver Series,} \\
\text{One Wilson Supershoot)} \\
\text{(1985)} \]
Eventually, Koons developed a deceptively simple system: the tank in Two Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Spalding Dr. J Silver Series, Wilson Aggressor) is mostly filled with water mixed with pure sodium chloride, or salt; the balls themselves are filled with distilled water. This means that the balls are essentially floating on the salt water that dominates the lower portion of the tank while the lighter distilled water lies above. Because they are in the water, the balls are sometimes able to move according to external conditions, a factor that adds a sense of life to the works (Christie’s 2011).

In reality, the balls are actually filled with distilled water in order to achieve the 50/50 flotation that would indicate equilibrium. The use of human breath to symbolise life that Koons suggests is actually a magic trick solved by chemistry and physics.

As part of my investigation into military helmets as discussed in Chapter Three, I tried combining a basketball and a helmet to create a military and sport Helmet Hybrid (Figure 85). My idea was to test the idea of a ball representing something closer to the sense of life in a similar way to Koons. I left the camouflage covering off the helmet cast, as there was a transparent section near the temple region of the helmet where the basketball was very close to the surface, creating a perceptible weak or sensitive point similar to a human head.
The work also served to emphasise the connection between two different forms of American imperialism, namely, American military force and the sport of basketball. I furthered the American connection by combining a ten-pin bowling ball with a helmet (Figure 86). The bowling ball had the name Assassin etched into the surface and helped to reinforce the sense of military intent and sporting precision.

The two most conspicuous and familiar exemplars of territoriality in human experience are arguably sport and war. In his often-quoted comment on sport and war, Orwell suggests they had much in common:

> Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting [Orwell 1945].

The connection between sport and armed conflict has an established history within Australia and is connected to ideas of nationhood and nationalism. Baron de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic games, recognised the connection between sporting ability and fighting ability. According to sociologist Christopher Hill, de Coubertin’s motivation in reviving the classical Olympic Games as a modern sporting competition was that ‘sport promoted physical health, which was essential if nations were to win wars’ (Hill 1996, p. 6). The Olympic creed still reflects this intention:
The most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the fight; the essential thing is not to have won, but to have fought well (The Olympic Museum 2007).

The political theorist Chris Rumford suggests that,

... sport is often seen as reinforcing national identification; the biggest championships are competed for by national teams, or are organized in such a way that individuals represent their nation states (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007, p. 95).

National sporting teams represent countries in a similar way that soldiers and other armed forces on overseas deployment represent the nation. The Australian War Memorial makes the link between sport and war and identity and nationhood:

What it means to be Australian is no easy thing to define. But clearly two strong factors in our national identity are sport and war. Throughout the nation’s history both have featured strongly. Qualities we associate with both sport and war — courage, teamwork, leadership, physical prowess, mateship, loyalty — are readily seen to be fundamental part of the “Australian identity”. Sport has helped shape Australians who have gone to war. And war has helped to shape Australian sport. Both activities have determined not just how Australians see themselves, but how the world sees them (Australian War Memorial 2006).

During the years of the First World War (WWI), Australians were encouraged to join up by enlistment campaigns that often linked sport and war as an incentive. The 1917 Sportsman’s recruiting campaign invited potential soldiers to “Enlist in the sportsman’s thousand. Show the enemy what Australian sporting men can do” (Unknown 1917). The poster (Figure 87) features Lieutenant Albert Jacka, the first winner of the Victoria Cross in WW I whose success as a soldier was attributed to his experience as a boxer before the war. The publisher of this poster, the Sportsmen’s Committee of the State Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, specifically targeted this connection between the skills of a sportsman and the suitability of translating these skills to being a successful soldier. The poster depicts sportsmen from different codes as possible recruits. From the background to the foreground, the types of sportsmen represented include a tennis player, a cricketer, a rugby player, a footballer and a rower. The final two before the soldier are a shooter and a golfer with their outdoor tweeds resembling the military uniform of the final and largest figure, namely, the soldier and Victoria Cross recipient Albert Jacka. The various sporting implements – the bat, lacrosse stick, golf clubs and shotgun – all reference the gun used by the soldier. The poster suggests that the commonplace implements of defence and offence in sporting territoriality are almost interchangeable with the military weapon. The by-line at the bottom of the poster “SHOW THE ENEMY WHAT AUSTRALIAN SPORTING MEN CAN DO” exemplifies the perception that sporting skill and experience can also be used in battle and war.
Figure 87: Sportsman’s thousand poster (1917)
A connection between sport and war was also developed by Britain in WWI and is exemplified by one particular story relating to the innovative use of sporting equipment. On 1st July 1916, the first day of the battle of the Somme, the 8th Battalion East Surrey Regiment of the British Army were ready to advance. Their commander Captain Wilfred Percy ‘Billie’ Nevill had purchased four footballs in England and brought them to the field of war with the intent of encouraging his troops to kick them forward as they charged towards the enemy lines. Captain Nevill led the charge and although he was shot and killed in the early stages of the advance, his plan worked; the footballs were an added incentive and the line was taken. Two of the footballs were reclaimed (one from the enemy trench) and exist in museum collections as reminders of a somewhat reckless but inspiring use of a commonplace object as incentive (Figure 88).

In considering sport as a theme, it is necessary to articulate a definition that distinguishes it from games and other recreational activity. Jim Parry defines sports as,

.. rule-governed competitions wherein physical abilities are contested. They are more formal, serious, competitive, organised and institutionalised than the games from which they sprang (Holowchak 2002, p. 250).

28 I use the international definition of football as synonymous with soccer.
Many contemporary sports developed from early antecedents that were games or pursuits specific to places and peoples. For the purposes of my project, I am interested in sporting activity outside or on the fringes of the strict definition of sport as an ‘institutionalised’ activity. In this project, I have found games – especially those specific to a particular household or groups of people – useful in terms of investigating the redeployment of commonplace objects vis-à-vis the notion of territoriality. Domestic based games developed according to need and opportunity with invented rules that are perhaps governed by space or equipment restrictions. Although they might not be classified as official sports, they have all the attributes that fit into the definition of competition. The backyard and the street are locations for these games and sports as they mimic and respond to understandings of the proper or real game or sport. These games are often customised to use the surrounding features of the space and to dictate rules or the practicalities of how the game is to be played. These games have their own home ground rules and make use of the restrictions in the available space and the limitations of any given equipment.

In order to consider the way sport can be interpreted and played in a domestic setting using commonplace objects, I wanted to make a work that responded to a DIY localised version of sporting endeavour. Rather than reference a known game, I decided to suggest a new game by using a known sporting motif on a familiar object. I wanted to use an object with a strong connection to the domestic and an object common to almost all homes and prevalent across Australia and the world. After considering the street as a location for sport and games and as an extension of the domestic space, I decided to explore the potential of two-wheeled, 200 litre, mobile garbage bins (MGB) or, as they are more commonly known, wheelie bins.

The ubiquitous wheelie bins used in suburbia across Australia for domestic rubbish and recycling have a level of familiarity comparable to the plastic bucket and the Monobloc chair. The wheelie bin, like its predecessor the rubbish bin, is sometimes redeployed within street or backyard games and, in the hands of the resourceful, become temporary goal posts, racing vehicles or cricket wickets (Figures 89-91).
Observing the use of wheelie bins as cricket wickets, either as the whole bin or with cricket wickets drawn on the front, helped me consider targets as a potential motif. I thought that applying a target from a sport like archery or shooting to a wheelie bin would suggest a game that connotes danger and potential violence and the practice of suburban territoriality.

Although the wheelie bin is a commonplace object familiar to the viewer, archery is somewhat of an uncommon sport. Archery is a sporting activity that has survived and developed from an historical era when the use of a bow and arrow was as much about hunting and war as sport. It has an almost mythical quality that is further perpetuated by depictions of the historical/fictional character Robin Hood. Film and television versions of the Robin Hood story always depict the competition in which he demonstrates his great skill. He wins the archery competition by overcoming an almost impossible task with a classic example of one-upmanship. With his final shot, his arrow splits his opponent’s arrow that was previously lodged in the target’s very central point or bull’s eye. In terms of territoriality, Robin Hood proves that his opponent’s arrow was only temporarily occupying the bull’s eye and that victory is never permanent. A narrative like this, whether fictional or historical, is relatively common knowledge and transfers across time and culture. Furthermore, it contributes to information we use to interpret and read physical objects as discussed before in relation to a basketball.

Through studio research I discovered that rather than applying the archery target on a wheelie bin I could actually transform the different coloured bins available using the commonplace object itself as the only material used. I tested this concept on a small scale by cutting decreasing concentric circles out of different coloured buckets in what became a work in its own right, *Bucket Target* (Figure 92).

The six bins of *Street Archery (Domestic Sports series)* (Figure 93) are also stacked one inside the other and at the front reveal a series of concentric rings cut right through each surface. These circles decrease in size and depict an accurate (in terms of colour and scale) representation of an archery target. Starting from the centre, they are coloured red, yellow, blue, black, white, with green (a regular bin colour) as the outside or background. The target form is a motif designed to focus the player or participant on the very centre of the concentric circles and works as a very simple device – the closer the arrow or bullet is to the centre, the higher the score. The viewer of the artwork is also hopefully drawn to the target in the same way thus suggesting the domestic practising of a much more dangerous sporting pursuit with potentially deadly consequences.

Brian Jungen has used wheelie bins in his sculpture *Carapace* (Figure 94) from 2009, transforming them into a giant animal or crustacean outer shell by stacking the bins. This process is similar to the method of constructing *Street Archery (Domestic Sports series)* to create a reinforced structure.
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Figure 92 Bruce Slatter, *Bucket Target* (2011)

Figure 93 Bruce Slatter, *Street Archery* *(Domestic Sports Series)* (2011)

Figure 94 Brian Jungen, *Carapace* (2009-2011)
Figure 95 The Gallery building rubbish bin reflected in the window of RMIT Project Space/Spare Room with Street Archery (Domestic Sports Series) in the gallery space.

Figure 96 Bruce Slatter, Street Archery (Domestic Sports Series) in context with household bins
I have exhibited *Street Archery (Domestic Sports Series)* within a gallery context. On the first occasion, it formed part of a group exhibition *From There to Here and In-between* held at the RMIT Project Space/Spare Room. During the exhibition, the normal bins from the gallery building were placed outside the front window of the gallery on the day of local rubbish collection and were visible from the position of the artwork wheelie bins. I am not sure if viewers noticed the connection but it highlighted a problem that affected the work in the gallery space. I had expected the bins to create a disjunct relationship to the other works in the show that were primarily more conventional works of painting and print. The bins are large, brightly coloured and made of things that are usually kept out of sight in the domestic space due to their unsightly aesthetic and their permanent aroma and they are not usually found indoors. Situating the work in the gallery had removed the original context for the work. The visual connection between the art bins inside and the actual bins outside provided a much-needed context for the work. The documentation images below from outside the gallery places the red normal bin right next to the artwork bin. On reflection, I think the work may have worked better on the pavement directly outside the gallery window or given a context such as in the photograph where a relationship is created between the artwork and familiar rubbish bins (Figures 95 and 96).

In the contemporary art world, especially in Australia, territoriality is arguably evident in the many national and state based art prizes or awards. The Basil Sellers Art Prize is one such art prize and is of particular relevance to this project as it focuses on the theme of sport. The prize has been held biannually since the inaugural exhibition in 2008 and attracts hundreds of entries from artists across Australia thus confirming an interest in sport as a theme for many artists. The exhibition of the shortlisted artists is held at the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne. Dr Chris McAuliffe, former Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art from 2000 to 2013, says that statistics from entries to the Basil Sellers Art Prize show that hundreds of artists in Australia are working on the theme of sport as a core part of their practice (and not just for the art prize) (McAuliffe 2014).

*Lounge Room Optimism* (Figure 97) is an honour board containing my imagined future winners of the Basil Sellers Art Prize until 2056. The work uses the stylistic conventions of a sporting honour board with a dark red aged wooden surface and hand painted gold lettering. Such honour boards normally record and celebrate triumph and achievement and they are very similar to honour boards used in military memorials as both forms of honour boards provide a sense of commemoration and remembrance. In the same way trophies from major sporting competitions list the winner’s names, honour boards provide a lineage of triumph for sporting winners and a commemorative listing of soldiers who lost their lives in military campaigns.

Traditionally honour boards have a similar form whether they are celebrating the list of winners or listing the fallen soldiers from one of the World Wars (Figures 98 and 99).

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29 *From There to Here and In-between* was an exhibition involving Paul Uhlmann, Nicole Slatter, Susanna Castleden and Bruce Slatter held at the RMIT Project Space/Spare Room at RMIT University in Melbourne. The exhibition was held from Friday 27th of May till the 16th of June 2011.
Figure 97 Bruce Slatter, Lounge Room Optimism (2011)

Figure 98 Caversham Honour Board

Figure 99 Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club Honour Board
Around the time of producing my work, Daniel Crooks from Victoria had won the prize in 2008, and Pilar Matar-Dupont and Tarryn Gill from Western Australia won the prize in 2010. I imagined it was technically – and very optimistically – possible that Western Australian artists could keep winning the prize into the future. The rivalry between the Australian states is very evident in sport and particularly in the Australian Football League (AFL), cricket, basketball, soccer and netball where state based teams compete in national competitions. Using a redeployed coffee table, I wanted *Lounge Room Optimism* to explore the domestic based hopes and dreams of winning in the manner of sport whilst actually establishing a state based territoriality in art. Although the suggested outcome listed is highly improbable, it has a form of optimism characteristic of the most positive sports fan.

The artwork *Lounge Room Optimism* led to me to consider another example of an artwork that physically records loss and serves as a declaration of failed territoriality. In his work *Untitled (1999)* (*Figure 100*), Maurizio Cattelan explores the emotion connected to sport especially in regard to a shared experience of loss through a large granite slab that lists all the defeats of the England national football team. The wall has characteristics of a wall of remembrance that lists the soldiers who had died in war such as the *Vietnam Memorial* in Washington designed by Maya Lin and the less well-known artwork by Chris Burden *The Other Vietnam Memorial*. On Cattelan’s memorial, each sporting loss is recorded with the opposing country and the score. Each line cut into the rock surface emphasises the importance of the information etched into the collective memory. While winning teams are celebrated, it is the losses and missed opportunities that often cut more deeply into our consciousness. Cattelan describes the work as ‘a piece which talks about pride, missed opportunities and death, in a certain way’ (cited in Spector, et al. 2000, p. 12).

*Figure 100*
Maurizio Cattelan,
*Untitled (1999)*
The early part of this chapter addresses sport as a collective endeavour that can encourage a shared experience through the familiarity of sporting equipment, participation in the game or as a follower and enthusiast. This shared experience of sport is predicated on the focus of players, participants and supporters on the contest and the striving for triumph. In ball sports, the focus is on possession of the ball and the territory of the pitch through the flux of defence and offence, and successfully demonstrating territoriality. In some forms of human endeavour, the symbols of domination and achievement in victory may rely on a symbolic action like the raising of a flag after conquest. In this project, I focus more specifically on object related manifestations of triumph such as trophies and honour boards.

In organised sport, individuals and teams compete to win the game, match or competition, driven by the possibility of winning the title and the associated symbols of victory. Psychologist Robert Vallerand suggests that extrinsic motivation means that participants ‘may partake in sport in order to derive tangible benefits such as material (e.g. trophies) or social (e.g. prestige) rewards’ (Vallerand and Losier 1999, p. 143). According to Csikszentmihalyi and Halton, trophies are symbols that represent and they operate like other societal symbols; trophies represent achievement, wedding rings represent attachment and crucifixes religion. Sporting trophies are displays of dominance over an opposition and are designed to be on show. Individuals, teams and sporting clubs display trophies as commemorations of achievement and as the record of a place in history. For an individual, they are autobiographical status symbols demonstrating success to friends and family and to themselves. A trophy ‘tells of its winner’s prowess and the family’s pride in displaying it’ (Csikszentmihalyi and Halton 1981, p. 20).

Following on from the implied and actual performative characteristics in works discussed in Chapters Two, I continued my research into sculptural objects as mediators to broader themes with an emphasis on a more overt representation of the human form. The series of sculptures Trophy Life investigates human endeavour through the adaptation and redeployment of purchased trophy figurines normally used for regular sporting and recreational trophies. This new inclusion and representation of a human presence enhanced the connection to and the possibility of creating a more specific narrative. Previously the objects in my project were real object scale and encouraged the viewer as potential participant while the reduction in scale of the trophy figures introduced the viewer as primarily a spectator or witness as well as an imagined participant.

Using trophy figurines allowed for imaginative possibilities and the exploration of the relationship between the miniature participant and potential objects. The figures used in Trophy Life are mass-produced shiny gold figures that are frozen in motion, mimicking a crucial action from various sporting codes. The baseball figure is about to swing the bat, the boxer is in mid-bout and the cricketing bowler is about to release the ball. Susan Stewart writes about the ability of the miniature to both capture a particular moment but also represent other moment:

The miniature offers a world clearly limited in space but frozen and thereby both particularized and generalized in time – particularized in that the miniature concentrates upon the single instance and not upon the abstract rule, but generalized in that instance comes to transcend, to stand for, a spectrum of other instances (Stewart 1993, p. 48).
The smaller scale and the prefabricated elements of *Trophy Life* enabled a more expansive testing of scenarios and repurposing of objects and ideas relating to human endeavour and territoruality. Although the original figurines were designed to represent achievement in sport and associated endeavour, through this series I was able to redeploy them to further explore some of the key aspects of this project.

A selection of the trophy series is pictured below. *Ball Boy* (*Figure 101*) explores personal space by making it physically solid as a defensive form. *Marital Arts* (*Figure 102*) and *The Duel* (*Figure 103*) explore personal space as the negotiation of territoriosity between two people. *Stance* (*Figures 104 and 105*) explores antlers as part trophy and part extension of the human body. *Costume* (*Figure 106*) suggests alternative uses for the commonplace wheelie bin. *Hidey Hole* (*Figure 107*) and *Sun in your eyes* (*Figure 108*) investigate the ball as intermediary and ‘symbol’ between a participant and an object or action.
Figure 104 Bruce Slatter, Stance [2011]

Figure 105 Bruce Slatter, Stance [Detail] [2011]

Figure 106 Bruce Slatter, Costume [2011]

Figure 107 Bruce Slatter, Hiding Hole [2011]
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Figure 108 Bruce Slatter, *Sun in Your Eyes* (2011)

Figures 109 - 112
Bruce Slatter, *Trophy Life Series* (Exhibition)
Each new trophy is able to function independently, contained within its own scenario, but each also contributes to the series as a whole when exhibited. The 46 individual works were spread out evenly over four tables in the centre of the gallery space\(^{30}\) (Figures 109-112). Each table became a scenario in itself as the works related to each other, where connections were made through the similar figures in different situations or through the scale and colour. Working at a reduced scale afforded the opportunity to test and experiment with different scenarios and try things that in actual scale would not be possible.

Following the *Trophy Life* series, I further extended the relationships evident in the exhibition installation through a series of trophy inspired tableaux works: *Precipice* (2011) (Figure 113), *Tournament* (2011) (Figure 114) and *Expedition Recollection* (2014) (Figures 115 - 117). Each of these works explored aspects of territoriality but they were not primarily focussed on the redeployment of the commonplace object.

Trophies are records of achievement and endeavour and autobiographical status symbols. Sporting trophies of major sporting competitions like Wimbledon\(^{31}\) tennis, the PGA\(^{32}\) golf championship and cricket’s Ashes\(^{33}\) are well-known objects associated with triumph and literally carry their own history with the names of past winners etched into their surfaces. In these examples, even though the winners

\(^{30}\) The series was exhibited at Galerie Düsseldorf in Mosman Park (28th August – 25th September, 2011).

\(^{31}\) Wimbledon or The Championships is an annual grass tennis competition played at the All England Club in London that forms one of the four Major or Grand Slam tennis tournaments. The trophy presented to the winner of the Gentlemen’s Singles Champion is inscribed with ‘All England Lawn Tennis Club Single Championship of the World’.

\(^{32}\) The PGA (Professional Golfers Association of America) Championship is one of the ‘Majors’ of international golf and the triumphant player receives the Wanamaker Trophy.

\(^{33}\) The Ashes are a series of Test cricket matches played between Australia and England every two years. The Ashes also refer to the historic ‘trophy’ created in 1882 after Australia beat England to record their first triumph in England. English cricket was said to have died and the ashes of a burnt cricket bail were placed in an urn to be taken to Australia. The actual urn is not an official trophy but is symbolic of the Ashes competition. The official trophy is made from crystal and is a large-scale version of the actual urn.

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*Figure 113* Bruce Slatter, *Precipice* (2011)  
*Figure 114* Bruce Slatter, *Tournament* (2011)
are presented with the actual historical trophy, they are subsequently given a copy of the trophy to keep so that the original can be imbued with many years of glory.

As an extension of the investigation into trophies, I wanted to attempt to create a link between an object that is a unique and symbolic of triumph and mass-produced commonplace objects. I attempted the redeployment of commonplace objects in an exploration of imagined success through a self-engineered version of an actual sporting trophy. After researching potential trophies, I chose the Wanamaker Trophy from The PGA Golf Championship (Figure 118), which I consider an archetypal trophy, as a point of reference.
I decided that the Wanamaker Trophy would be related to antecedents of commonplace objects that might be found in the domestic space. Even though the material and intention of the trophy was different, the physical qualities of polished silver metal containers were sufficiently similar to household objects. The work *Kitchen Optimism* (*Figure 119*) is made from existing objects that were once possessions and utilitarian objects from my domestic space. The trophy combines saucepans; cake tins, strainers, bowls and other metal kitchen tools; although their form is still recognisable, their intended function is subverted.

By mimicking the Wanamaker Trophy, *Kitchen Optimism* acts as homage via fandom\(^{34}\) and attempts to bring global competition to the domestic space and make it physically tangible. Whilst earlier works have attempted to suggest a shared experience from a shared object, *Kitchen Optimism* uses commonplace objects to create a single unique object. Winning the actual PGA Championship trophy is only experienced by a very select few, which makes it more special and more desirable. Using objects from around the house for a DIY version of an unwinnable trophy is perhaps a touch sentimental. I intend *Kitchen Optimism* (*Figure 120*) to be a declaration of territoriality through the claiming of unfilled potential and as a representation of aspiration and optimism.

\(^{34}\) Fandom is the state or action of being a fan. Fan is an abbreviation of fanatic (Oxford 1990)
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Figure 119
Bruce Slatter, *Kitchen Optimism* (2014)
(production shot with domestic context)

Figure 120
Bruce Slatter, *Kitchen Optimism* (2014)
The final artworks I will discuss in this dissertation draw together some of the themes presented in the previous chapters. I do not present them as solutions to my project or as über works but they do combine my interests in the commonplace, globalisation and territoriality. They could also be discussed with reference to each of the themes of territory, conflict, competition and commemoration that I have investigated throughout this project. The first artwork *Souvenir Trophy* (Figure 121) is part of the trophy series that aims to reposition and challenge ideas of territoriality using commonplace objects.

The artwork *Souvenir Trophy* is made from wooden artefacts, specifically the type usually brought home as souvenirs from travels to South East Asia or the South Pacific. Some of the artefacts used in *Souvenir Trophy* are functional wooden bowls and some are decorative wooden keepsakes made from different types of rainforest timber. Susan Stewart suggests that the...

... capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience is, in fact, exemplified by the souvenir. The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative (Stewart 1993, p. 135).

Souvenirs made from local timber means a visitor is actually taking part of the physical place away with them and carrying the authentic experience that Stewart suggests. Unlike the objects for *Kitchen Optimism* that came from the domestic space, the artefacts in *Souvenir Trophy* were all collected or rescued from secondhand shops where they had been donated or abandoned. By purchasing these second hand objects, I realise that I am directly part of the chain of demand that brought these objects into existence. Nevertheless, I hope that my consumption, production and redeployment of the objects as a new artwork give the objects a new purpose and combat the post-colonial melancholy or guilt of the tourist. Susan Stewart further suggests that:

The exotic object represents distance appropriated; it is symptomatic of the more general cultural imperialism that is tourism’s stock in trade. To have a souvenir of the exotic is to possess both a specimen and a trophy; on the one hand, the object must be marked as exterior and foreign, on the other hand it must be marked as arising directly out of an immediate experience of its possessor. It is thus placed within an intimate distance; space is transformed into interiority, into “personal” space, just as time is transformed into interiority in the case of the antique object (Stewart 1993, p. 147).
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I hope that the new objects provide a somewhat redemptive positivity for the felled timber and original source material. *Souvenir Trophy* endeavours to bring these discarded objects back to life and to champion and celebrate their place in the world. The work combines ideas related to antecedence of objects, domestic and foreign territory, and ownership as well as the trophy motif that started in the antler series. The work attempts to encourage an empathy connecting the viewer to past ownership, place and colonial histories.

The final artwork *Trigger Happy; Grime Stoppers* (*Figure 122*) uses confiscated and redundant rifle butts to draw parallels between the measure and use of force and aggression in two quite differing spaces, that of the domestic space and the criminal underworld. The orientation of the final standing gun butts on a shelf is trophy-like. The area of carved domestic trigger reveals a new surface of timber while retaining the worn and history filled gun butt as a base.

Each gun, like each different spray bottle, has a slightly varied shape and qualities giving each an individual character. While most people have some physical connection to the use of a spray bottle, the violence of a gun is a lesser-known experience. The potential to kill or wipe out the enemy is flippantly attached to the rhetoric surrounding fighting household grime and pests.

The focus on the handle of the objects employs the actual and implied performativity discussed in chapter 2, and like the sporting bats and gardening implements of *Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence* (*Figure 19*) they conflate two possible usages. The ergonomic relationship to the human body through the manipulation of the idea of ‘handle’ and ‘trigger’ attempts to create an empathetic connection through the handcrafted material. They are at once the material object of domestic and global territory and a representation of the defence and offence evident in territority.
Guided by creative practice and reflecting on the discoveries made through each series of works created for this project, the emphasis of territoriality has developed over the duration of my research from the humble domestic object and domestic space as a site of personal territory from which to see and interpret the world, to a broader consideration and focus. As the studio investigation progressed, the potentiality of objects in domestic space developed to include commonplace objects that could explore territoriality through a much wider range of spaces, situations and types of human endeavour. Although the domestic space continues to feature as an important site for consideration, collection, construction and exhibition, the broadening of emphasis towards commonplace objects as outlined in chapter one extended connections to global reference. Through the worldwide mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption, commonplace objects have a familiarity and relevance to a large and diverse group of users encouraging potential for effective communication through sculptural production.

Through the collection, consideration and usage of commonplace objects for studio based research I recognised that I place an emphasis on the selection of particular commonplace objects based on three drivers; firstly the ability for the object to be related to in a personal way, secondly that the resulting artwork needed to have a clear lineage of antecedence and thirdly that territoriality be inherent in the physicality and history of the objects.

My personal connections to commonplace objects are predicated on direct relationships, as many of the objects that I use or have used for their original intended utility are in my possession. This prior experience combines with the second driver of antecedence that plays an important part in the finished artwork to engage the viewer in shifts in understandings of the object. Although we do not always consider the history and development of an object every time we use it, we may be aware of it. The potential in the transformation of objects for them to carry history and meaning was paramount when considering, choosing and reconfiguring a commonplace object as an art object. By retaining the appearance and materiality of original objects in the artworks I hope to use and disrupt the meanings and associations that they carry or contain. For example the Helmet Hybrids series made through a personal connection to a wearable object that explore the relationship one helmet has to all other helmets. The somewhat awkward confluence of the two helmet combinations arranged with the other hybrids, destabilizes known and familiar relationships to the object and our understandings and questionings of both personal and global territory.

The third driver of the artwork is its connection to territoriality inherent in the physical use and meaning of the object often enacted through defence and offence. This last factor is particularly important as a focus to communicate real evidence of use in order to promote connections to common or shared experience. Artworks such as Territory Marker are both the material of territory as well as the representation of defence and offence, probing the sensorial connection to material as communicator as well as the connected conceptual and accumulated knowledge.
Implied participation and usage is accentuated in the sculpture *Burglar Sticks: Defence/Offence*, using a disquieting unification of sporting bats and garden tools within the constructed cabinet to create a combination of objects and suggestion of narrative to contrast domestic, sporting and urban territoriality.

I have explored notions of territoriality and the subthemes of identity and territory through the linked notions of conflict and sport by selecting, customising, individualising and redeploying commonplace objects through various techniques of sculptural practice. The familiarity afforded by the commonplace empowers us to navigate and negotiate territoriality and its interconnected subsections of identity and territory in new ways, providing new insights into ways that commonplace objects can define, interpret and enforce territoriality. This project contributes to the field of sculpture by extending the use of pre-existing objects as both *material* and *subject*, and extends the lineage of the Readymade by finding subjective and objective connections to objects to extend the meanings and utility that they represent.

In reflecting on this project I also consider the identity and territory of the artworks themselves as new objects deployed into the world. Many of the artworks produced for this project were at some stage exhibited in a white walled neutral gallery space as they are for the examination of this project. For the duration of the exhibition they provided an art experience for the viewer but further to this, a different sense of identity of the artwork occurs when taken from the gallery and returned to the territory of the commonplace such as domestic space. I am cognisant of the potential ongoing existence of these artworks after the gallery iteration; acknowledging that they may well outlive my lifetime. Their long-term future is to a certain extent out of my control. In the cycle of production and consumption I imagine that some of these artworks may continue indefinitely and some may not and their individual object components may one day be dismantled and divided. The constituent parts may either be returned to their original intended function or perhaps further customised into new uses and further embodiments of territoriality. In musing on the contested object and the insight that the sculptural object has to the contemporary relationship to territoriality, I consider the new objects I have made as a mixture of identity and territory that have developed a territoriality of their own.

By way of a concluding statement I return to the academic Bill Brown who suggests that, ‘objects mediate our sense of ourselves (as individuals and as collectivities) and our sense of others’ (Brown 2010 p. 187). Brown’s assertion that objects mediate individually and collectively, confirm the ability of the physical encounter with commonplace objects to mediate our sense of self and our relation to time and space. The object sculptures made over the duration of this project access the innate and undeniable need to negotiate the world from domestic to global through ideas of territoriality.

I contend that the complexities found in human endeavour when considered through object sculpture have a contiguity that extends commonplace objects providing a complex slippage enabling new considerations of territoriality. This, at a time when every facet of daily existence can be aligned with identity and territory, provides an individual and collective understanding of commonplace objects in the world.


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Solo exhibition invitation

BRUCE SLATTER

USAGE

Opening Sunday 10th May 2009 3 - 6 pm (gallery opens from 2pm)

GALERIE DÜSSELDORF

Exhibition dates: 10 May - 7 June 2009

Cover Image: "Cue/Stool" 2009 - Dimensions Variable - Materials: Cue, Stool

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Director: Magda - Douglas Shewar galerie@duesseldorf.com.au email: gd@dssxduesseldorf.com.au
Bruce Slatter: *WAY, SHAPE OR FORM* - Galerie Düsseldorf, August, 2007
Solo exhibition invitation
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From There to Here and In-between, Project Space/Spare Room, RMIT University, Melbourne (2011) Group Exhibition Catalogue, front and back
Nomadology: The spirit of movement, reminding us that everything desires a pathway, a hunter, forager or searcher might chart their wanderings always in (this) place. Seemingly eclectic, Slatter’s work identifies resourcefulness as a language that stimulates uneasy and therefore understanding, and in this sense resourcefulness becomes a way of charting the language of things. However, this is not a self-sustaining ground—nomadology is not about being where you are, to understand where we are and where we are going. In the most comfortable and affordable of paradigms, honing economic strategies defines our relationship to place. We go, memories are hardly trustworthy but desire remains un-interrupted constancy. Times change, trends come and go, but the social realm. ... critical work is made to fare on interstitial ground—critical strategies must be developed within a range of diversely occupied territories where the temptation to grant any single terri-tory transcendent status is continually resisted.

Nicole Slatter’s psychosomatic response to absence charts a different strategy, one that utilises physical memory to become and records the residual act of cultural memory, affecting a sense of individual loss that brings De Chirico’s metaphysical spaces to mind. Slatter reminds us that loss acts as an incredibly important aggregator to consume. Paul Uhlmann’s subliminal renderings of caught time are evocative dwelling points. Reacquainting us with Fra Angelico and Giotto, Uhlmann collapses history by allowing light and the cycles of nature to be held in soft, contemplative spaces. Whereas these figures from history desire transcendence from earthly matters, Uhlmann paradoxically focuses our gaze on the sky to consider the all encompassing, interconnectedness of our being. His work locates stigmatic strategies by poetically acknowledging that through breathing you are already and always in (this) place.

Bruce Slatter’s objects demand space, in the same way a hunter, forager or searcher might chart their wanderings through “successful encounters”. Seemingly eclectic, Slatter’s work adopts a type of psycho-geography, emulating if not capturing mapping of idiosyncratic pathways... From There to Here and In-between...
In Advance of the Broken Army, 2009.
Wood and steel, 102 x 73 x 72 cm.

Steel and wood, 123 x 67 x 28 cm.

Territory Marker, 2009.
Steel and star pickets, 88 x 165 x 43 cm.

Usage Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 10th May – 7th June, 2009
BRUCE SLATTER: MULTIPURPOSE EVOLUTIONISM

Bruce Slatter is a Perth artist who is interested in objects. That phrase, ‘interested in objects’, sounds cagey and indeterminate, even banal. Yet it is a perfectly accurate descriptor and its banality belies a good deal of complexity. To put it even more schematically, Slatter’s making of, use of and reuse of three-dimensional objects revolves around the physical articulation of the pivot point of meaning and non-meaning. His work resides there and, on occasion, tips a little either way before resuming balance and, in doing so, says (mutely) much about the fitful and highly-loaded evolutionary aspects of visual culture.

For me, this is definitely what emerged most strongly from Slatter’s exhibition Usage, which he staged at Galerie Düsseldorf in Mosman Park. The show and these associations remain in my mind, obviously, because it was his most recent outing but also because it holds the traces of his other exhibitions ‘amongst’ it too. I remember walking through Usage and sensing work by Slatter not actually in the space. Unsurprisingly, therefore, my memory of Usage as Usage is not the same as the documentation I am looking at now. I remember all the works, but the layout and connections differ… and there are those ghost works… and my memory is full of the angle of my head that made the body of work a different (personalized and intimate) body of work. Considering it now is an act of extraction and immersion, into the body of memory and the body of the present work of the past.

That sounds embarrassingly precious; all shows are remembered like this. However, it feels apt to acknowledge it in this instance because the ghosted material connectedness (as a form of imaginative physical lineage) defines Slatter’s practice as a whole, and Usage in particular; these traces complicate the reception of the work as much as they point to its ‘essence’ (really). I am largely ignorant about biological theory (and so the analogy might not stand examination) but would like to posit nonetheless that to me it feels like the ghost-traces of other objects are in the DNA of the works and that these linkages are what the work is about. That is standard art historical fare too, I suppose, with each work being formed from the spirit and shape of another, nothing ever standing fully first, fully present, everything preceded and pre-thought and pre-remembered as well, no doubt. Slatter’s works in Usage show how this lineage is forced, forged, into the individual object; the static action of this art-biological-time-force is the work itself.

So, on an abstract level, the works in Usage are evolutionary (again, as far as I understand, or misunderstand, that term). Some examples will hopefully clarify the point. The knitted Antler Cosy that hung from the ceiling allowed visitors to pose inside (or between) and allowed them to become quasi-moose (or deer?) for a while, their species order pitching into a momentarily different realm. The idea behind it is that the hanging protrusions are aberrant aesthetic growths that alter what an original form and pitch it to a proposed future where we wonder (from the present) whether will the form stick, or whether the mutation will die away. The Rut Fork tells this story too, as the garden fork has grown its own antler, a move which establishes the fork as part tool, part animal. Cue/Stool acts similarly, blending exactly what the title suggests but in such a way for the juncture to appear violent and forced, a product of extreme bar-room conflict specifically, and extreme force generally.
In the series of helmet-hybrids - that combine sports and military helmets - the tensions are even more obvious. The physics of sport and battle are unified, both being about the defence of the body against harm. Underlying this is, I believe, a fight for existence. Expanding on this idea, the implied stakes are long term survival not just of the object, but of the form, or better type, itself. This is alluded to in Burglar Sticks (Defence/Offence), a series of hand-held weapons for self defence against home invaders displayed in a trophy cabinet. Presented in this manner they get at the notion that security (the maintenance of the unbroken home and self) is a prize, something to be fought for and ‘won’. The work Territory Marker opens this out also. It is an antler trophy made from star pickets that unites the two territorial markers – picket for humans, antlers for animals. Their combination creates an object which holds inclusion and exclusion in its being and hinting at the mortal dependency of it all.

Though some of the other works in the show, the large tool for instance, sit within a slightly different trajectory, this is the essence of Slatter’s Usage project. Its taut combination of forms transposes the biological realm of evolutionary survival to the aesthetic pitch and turn of art historical processes. It is about what holds and what doesn’t, and is thereby an oblique and creative object-take on the significance of style too. And these are given serious stakes, as noted, that of life and death. The shifting of forms matters, and objects, people, life forms can be left behind, or stand out as freaks whose mutations are unaccepted and unconfirmed by social and natural evolution. It somehow points to the risk of creation itself: that one is mutating with no real safety net, that one could fall or stand out and the failure of that form might be unbearable.

What Usages also does, of course, is to foreground the very structure of art as being defined by change. It is not closure or the finish of a work (conceptually or physically), but an ongoingness that keeps the spirit of making alive. In Slatter’s instance, this spirit comes from the sphere of the workshop, as is made obvious by the references to tools in general. The workshop is the domain of ‘tooling around’ and, here, hints at utility gone awry; the awry is the possibility for new developments, accidents that might change physical destinies, given time.

Now, all of this is kind of strange to me. When I first saw the show I didn’t think these things. My mind was vibing on a kind of Duchampian rusticity, a pragmatism, a scattering of objects from a pool room torn apart by a cyclone of energetic-something and deposited in the gallery. My body was fixed on forces and juxtapositions of an almost graphic kind in the white gallery space. Reflecting on these, with the traces of objects past, with my mind finding connections between them as figurative evolutionary mutations, I feel that these quietly cyclonic pulsations revealed a subconscious awareness of the trauma of art practice and culture at large. This trauma is what the work ultimately embodies. The objects of Usage are about, therefore, a radical incompleteness and the tense awareness of the biological roots of art practice in maintaining this uncomfortable state of being.

Dr. Robert Cook  
Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Photography and Design,  
Art Gallery of Western Australia
Cue/Stool, 2009.
Pool cue and stool, dimensions variable.

Sweet Spot, 1991.
Wood, 3 elements, dimensions variable.

Barricade, 2008
Mixed media, dimensions variable.

Usage Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 10th May – 7th June, 2009
Mixed media, dimensions variable.

Helmet Hybrids, 2009.
Mixed media, dimensions variable.

Usage Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 10th May – 7th June, 2009
Usage (Exhibition View), 2009.
Galerie Düsseldorf.

You Tool, 2008.
Mixed media, 18.5 x 20 x 105 cm (closed), dimensions variable.

Usage Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 10th May – 7th June, 2009
Usage: Galerie Düsseldorf (10 May - 7 June 2009)
9 Glyde Street Mosman Park Western Australia 6012

Photography: Robert Frith (Acorn Photo Agency)
Essay: Dr. Robert Cook (Art Gallery of Western Australia)
Catalogue: Daniel Bourke & Clare Wohlnick (BENCHPRESS)

Front Cover: Burglar Sticks (Defence/ Offence), 2009.
Tasmanian Oak and found objects, 129 x 148 x 20 cm.

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Mixed media, dimensions variable.
Trophy Life

The official Guinness World record for gluggling – a form of underwater juggling – was set in 2002, at Kelly Tarlton’s Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World in Auckland, New Zealand by Ashrita Furman, a forty-eight year old native of Queens, New York. Not only did Mr. Furman gluggle for almost a full hour, he was also responsible for the invention of the sport and is, most probably, its sole practitioner. Mr. Furman has also set the Guinness world record for simultaneously balancing the most eggs on end (888), the longest distance run on a pair of stilts (8 kilometres), and the world’s longest pencil (23 meters). In fact, Mr. Furman holds the Guinness world record for the most Guinness world records (387 set since 1979, 135 of which are still unbroken).

There are those who may sneer at the achievements of Ashrita Furman, that may question whether being the world champion at skipping rope whilst on a pogo stick is really something to be proud of, but honestly, isn’t there something quite heartening in knowing that an institution like the Guinness world records exists? The vast majority of us are never likely to make that pivotal contribution to medical science, or (go on, you can finally admit it to yourself) bring peace to the Middle East, but that’s not to say that we won’t achieve something. Every day of the week, some driven, tenacious lunatic realises his or her own obscure, idiosyncratic dream, whether it be single-handedly circumnavigating the globe in a zero-carbon-emitting dirigible or cooking the world’s biggest frittata.
And though these eccentric triumphs may be somewhat lacking in utility and common sense, it is impossible to deny the immense expenditure of effort, the sacrifice and commitment required, and their unique personal significance. Do these things not deserve their own special recognition?

These are the thoughts that are prompted by Bruce Slatter’s new exhibition, Trophy Life. A panoply of meticulously crafted, miniature sculptures fills the main exhibition space of Galerie Düsseldorf, resembling the overflowing abundance of some manic high-achiever’s trophy cabinet. These are not, however, your typical awards. In form and scale they may resemble the prizes conferred upon the very best junior basket ballers or competitive skeet shooters, but these trophies have an almost hallucinogenic strangeness about them. Like occult merit badges bestowed by a secret order of Boy Scouts, Slatter’s statuettes seem to celebrate some of life’s stranger accomplishments: what, for instance, is being commemorated by the man playing golf with a pair of antlers? Or the individual hefting a tethered bison? Perhaps, like the Guinness world records, Slatter’s trophies implicitly celebrate the bizarre endeavors of the crackpot that lurks within us all. From the eccentric athlete to the back-shed-tinkerer, those otherwise unexceptional men and women who, either through deranged design or via some quirk of fate, are prodigiously skilled in their own, entirely unique sphere can at last receive their due recognition.

After all, the trophy is an essentially egalitarian form; they are monuments on a domestic scale. Though they may mimic the appearance of grand commemorative statues their diminutive size is vastly more appropriate for celebrating victory in a round-robin bowling tournament, than it would be for memorializing victory in, say, Balaclava or the Ardenne. This particular reading of Slatter’s work, however, fails to acknowledge one of the chief components of his practice: that is, a charming and vital sense of humour. There is no Academy Award (AKA Oscar, perhaps the world’s most famous trophy) for comedy and oftentimes the fundamental, integral funniness of a work of art goes unacknowledged by critics and catalogue essayists, simply, I believe, because humour is so difficult to describe and its function so difficult to define. A joke is a delicate, precious thing and few can withstand close scrutiny; nothing kills a gag quicker than attempting to explain how and why it works. But nonetheless, Bruce Slatter, like Ashrita Furman, invests deeply in absurdity. Many of the works in Trophy Life operate as visual puns; elements that hover on the fringes of familiarity are thrust into surprising new juxtapositions with amusing results. Easily recognisable model-shop figurines are detoured, shifted into fresh, comical postures, and, via a process of tangential association, given new, unexpected meanings.

But don’t mistake Slatter’s visual/verbal games for cheap laughs though; the humour is often piquant and rich with evocative connotations. For instance, the gray, unpainted figurines that feature in a number of the Trophy Life sculptures are reminiscent, for me at least, of the statuary of Communist, totalitarian states. And the roughly hewn concrete plinths upon which they are mounted are suggestive of the rubble of the Berlin Wall or the crumbling, shattered infrastructure of ruined, WWII-era Stalingrad. These monoliths in miniature are a witty inversion of Soviet Russia’s practice of erecting immense bronze monuments to the idealised everyman worker, such as Alexy Stakhanov, a miner at the Tsentralnaya-Irmino coal mine in Kadiievka, who in 1935 set a record for excavating the greatest volume of coal (102 tonnes in 5 hours and 45 minutes). These allusions to serious themes provide a counterpoint to Slatter’s humour and imbue it with a sense of resonance. The artist’s clear devotion to his craft, the level of sheer, meticulous skill with which each of these miniature sculptural jokes are executed, redeems the inherent absurdity of his work (if such a thing needs redeeming), while simultaneously reinforcing it. The mysterious, beguiling disjunctions Slatter gives form to elide accustomed associations and meanings, throwing up startling and amusing new notions. Who knows, given the right inspiration we may soon see some dedicated individual set a new record for Bison lifting, or antler golf!

Andrew Purvis, 2011

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Andrew Purvis, 2011

Base Camp

Acrylic on wood
23 x 30 x 8 cm

Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011

145
Bird Beater

Enamel on acrylic, wood
19 x 17 x 6 cm

Bird Brain

Enamel on acrylic, wood
8 x 13 x 20 cm

Bison Racing

Enamel on acrylic, concrete, string
32 x 11 x 10 cm

Boulder Holder

Enamel on acrylic, wood, concrete
14 x 18 x 16 cm

_Trophy Life_ Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011
Business Structure
Enamel on acrylic, wood
14 x 25 x 14 cm

Catch
Enamel on acrylic, concrete, string
28 x 15 x 11 cm

Coaching Box
Enamel on acrylic, wood, paper and string
17 x 13 x 14 cm

Costume
Enamel on acrylic, concrete, plastic, paper, string
38 x 20 x 19 cm

Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011
Death by a Thousand Cuts
Enamel on acrylic, wood, concrete, plastic
21 x 23 x 30 cm

Diagram
Table tennis balls, pipe
25 x 25 x 10 cm

Dive
Enamel on acrylic, concrete
25 x 18 x 15 cm

Doing your Block
Enamel on acrylic, wood
15 x 24 x 15 cm

Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011
Dolphin Trick
Enamel on acrylic, concrete
20 x 15 x 6 cm

Field Event
Enamel on acrylic, wood, metal
15 x 24 x 15 cm

Hiding Hole
Enamel on acrylic, wood
50 x 15 x 15 cm

High Ground
Enamel on plastic, wood
22 x 28 x 11 cm

Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011
**Hunt**
Enamel on acrylic, wood
24 x 16 x 7 cm

**Hurdling**
Enamel on acrylic, wood, metal
18 x 10 x 10 cm

**Ice Queen**
Enamel on acrylic, wood
17 x 18 x 10 cm

**Laden**
Enamel on acrylic, wood, concrete, string
17 x 12 x 10 cm

*Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011*
Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011

Left, Right, Right, Upper-Cut
Enamel on acrylic, wood, rubber
14 x 12 x 17 cm

Locking Horns
Enamel on acrylic, concrete, plastic
28 x 10 x 18 cm

Loggerheads
Enamel on acrylic, wood
21 x 12 x 12 cm

Lollipop Man
Enamel on acrylic, wood, table tennis ball
17 x 15 x 10 cm
Marital Arts
Enamel on acrylic, wood
18 x 24 x 5.5 cm

Moon Monument
Enamel on acrylic, wood, golf ball
13 x 11 x 11 cm

Mr. and Mrs. Brown
Enamel on acrylic, concrete
30 x 12 x 10

Orange Cloud
Enamel on acrylic, wood, table tennis balls
50 x 16 x 22 cm

Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011
Appendix

**Orrery Storage**
Foam, wood, mouse ball, golf ball, lead ball, rubber ball, table tennis ball, metal staples
24 x 13 x 13 cm

**Perch**
Enamel on acrylic, wood
29 x 9 x 13 cm

**Sharp Jab**
Enamel on acrylic, concrete, plastic
21 x 24 x 14 cm

**Shed Billboard**
Acrylic on wood, map pins
14 x 25 x 14 cm

*Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011*
Small Stock Pile
Enamel on acrylic, wood
13 x 15 x 11 cm

Stance
Enamel on acrylic, wood, concrete, brass
44 x 28 x 14 cm

Sun in Your Eyes
Enamel on acrylic, concrete, table tennis ball
51 x 10 x 10 cm

The Business
Enamel on acrylic, acrylic on wood
27 x 14 x 9 cm

Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011
The Duel
Enamel on acrylic, wood, brass
14 x 60 x 6 cm

Trophy Fish
Enamel on acrylic, wood, steel, string
32 x 10 x 10 cm

Under Wraps
Enamel on acrylic, wood, plastic
33 x 13 x 10 cm

Unfinished target
Acrylic on wood
25 x 20 x 15 cm

Trophy Life Catalogue, Galerie Düsseldorf, 28th August – 25th September, 2011
Walking into it
Enamel on acrylic, wood, plaster
18 x 11 x 26 cm

Wood Storage
Acrylic on wood, plastic, wood
25 x 10 x 10 cm

Yellow Bin
Enamel on acrylic, concrete, plastic
34 x 12 x 10cm

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IN THE TROPHY ROOM

The cabin sits high on the north slope of the mountain, just above the treeline. In the summer months, it remains relatively isolated from the intrusion of impudent foreign journalists and the aggrieved widows who come, beating their breasts and rending their dowdy, cheap garments, demanding to know the whereabouts of men whose names he never bothered to learn, much less remember.

He spends his days with axe in hand, chopping firewood. At night, he sits by the hearth. Turning the wood over in his hands, it takes shape seemingly without conscious thought. It is always the same familiar visage, the face that once adorned the capital building and loomed sternly at the front of every classroom. Now, these pictures have been turned to face the wall and the monuments intended to last a thousand years, have been torn down, toppled from their high pedestals, with nothing more than a few chains tethered to the back of a shit-spattered old tractor.

His rooms are filled with these small objects. They line the walls and cluster on shelves and windowsills. Their pupil-less eyes stare blankly into the middle distance, chins lifted proudly. They remind him of former glories, the heady thrill of absolute power, but they speak of loss too and of things buried. His monuments may be smashed, the concrete mouldering and moss-covered in a field somewhere, but here, in his trophy room, the past lives on.

Tropaeum is a Latin word, meaning a monument erected to commemorate a great victory. Through the gradual process of etymological evolution, the word has morphed into its familiar, more prosaic derivative: ‘trophy’. All the same connotations are there, though the scale has changed. Where grand, commemorative structures might commemorate the vanquishing of some distant, remembered foe, the trophy celebrates more mundane achievements, third place in a round-ribbon hotdog eating contest, for instance, or perhaps a hard fought triumph in the hockey rink.

IN THE TROPHY ROOM

Curated by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah and Andrew Purvis
There are, of course, monuments to the everyman. Philadelphia has a ten-foot bronze of Rocky Balboa, the lightweight, date-witted palooka who took Apollo Creed to a 15 round split-decision in Sylvester Stallone’s titular 1976 film. Not to be outdone, Detroit is planning to unveil a monument to bionic law-enforcement officer, RoboCop, later this year. And in 1935, the Soviets immortalised Alexy Stakhanov, a miner at the Tsentralnaya-Irmino coal mine in Kadievka, who set the record for excavating the greatest volume of coal in a single shift. But these are average joes who have ascended, either through dint of hard-work, obstinate fortitude, or cutting edge cybernetics; they have been elevated above their everyman peers.

In this sense, the trophy can be seen as an aspirational form; it celebrates the ordinary, in the hope that it may one day be recognised as exceptional. Bruce Slater’s *Kitchen Optimism* (2014) evokes the idle pipe dreams of every amateur golfer tethered to reality by humdrum chores. Assembled from an assortment of well-used pots, pans, cake-tins and topped with a shiny juicer, this sculpture mimics the trophy form, but wryly undercuts the implied sense of glory and esteem, leaving the tell-tale pot handles protruding from the back. Here, the trophy is not merely a monument reduced to domestic scale, but one cobbled together from the components of domesticity itself.

Paul Caporn’s *Awarded to a Future That Didn’t Happen* (2014) stands like a cenotaph to late-60s style. The prestige letterbox – that self-awarded badge of success and the envy of all your neighbours – is here transformed into the housing for a miniature diorama. Back in the day, this piece of lawn sculpture was intended to be emblematic of its owners’ good taste; now it has a distinct air of pathos. It stands like the crumbled statue of Ozymandias, a relic that testifies to the hubris and questionable design choices of long ago. But there’s a sense of affectionate nostalgia there too, conjuring twilight memories of riding a BMX through the suburban streets of Spearwood or Palmyra.

Josh Webb’s *Swiss Brutalism* (2014), like Caporn’s sculpture, has its roots in the history of architectural design, albeit of a rather less homely variety. The work was conceived on a residency in Basel, during which time the artist was immersed in Swiss brutalist architecture, the work of Peter Behrens, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. These influences do not manifest in any obvious fashion, but rather they come out through a series of beguiling juxtapositions. The vintage 1989 Allorgan radio, a disposable, technologically obsolete artifact of cultural detritus, is elevated on its own iridescent pedestal, Tropaeum Catalogue, Fremantle arts Centre, May – July 2014. Curated by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah and Andrew Purvis.
Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, Ball (2014)
Curved jelutong
40 x 20 x 20 cm

Stuart Elliott, The Lair of the Despot (2014)
Wood, ply and particle wood, cold resin, acrylic sheet, acrylic paint, enamel paint and air varnish
83 x 29 x 33 cm

Josh Webb, Swed Brutakon (2014)
Tetrahydric structure, acrylic piece, 1989 Allorgan radio playing Le Corbusier’s favourite song (Metastasis: dialectic transformations by Iannis Xenakis).
27 x 14 x 28 cm

A lightweight but sturdy tetrahydric structure. It plays Le Corbusier’s favourite song, Metastasis (1953–54), a composition by his collaborator, the music theorist Iannis Xenakis, which was in turn influenced by Einstein’s theories on time and Le Corbusier’s own mathematical theories. For all these rich allusions, the work is equally informed by the simple play of colours and an unabashed adoration of good design.

All trophies imply a narrative. They each speak of some contest fought and won. Both Wanda Gillespie and Stuart Elliott use fiction as a material in their sculptures. Gillespie’s In Search of Hope (2014) is purported to be a relic from the ancient civilisation of Gondwanaland, a lost Antarctic kingdom revealed by the retreating polar ice caps. The archaeological artefact is a talisman, capable of invoking fleeting moments with a sense of permanence. Gillespie’s totemistic efforts is a tumbling fragment of a more expansive ambition, hinting at a grand narrative. It speaks of a vanished race of mmimstrels, animist wood-carvers, their arcane spiritual practices ensnared by the enigmatic vision of the retreating ice caps. In a similar vein, Elliott’s The Lair of the Despot (2014) is an example of his ‘fakeological’ practice, a portmanteau notion of ‘fakery’ and ‘archaeology’, which allows the artist to produce strangely familiar, but ultimately alien artefacts that bear a human behaviours and relationships from the real world. The Lair of the Despot can be read as a microcosmic embodiment of the metaphor of regime change. The diminutive edifice embodies all the failings of a brutal, self-aggrandizing, totalitarian regime. It stands as a dark inversion of the trophy, a sculpture that tells a tale of tyranny and eventual overthrow (note the ruptured vent at the monolith’s base: the revolutionaries have stormed the palace!). Like the commemorative statuette of a golfer, suspended in mid-swing, these works are microcosmic embodiments of other (imagined) events, but unlike your typical trophy, they allude to richer narratives.

Like Elliott, Casey Ayres’ work runs counter to the notions of uncomplicated achievement typically associated with the trophy. Real Men Smoke Eagers (2014) shows us a grim image of a model car, set dormant to ones that may be found atop an old racing prize, with a black hosepipe snaking from the exhaust to the window. Ayres co-opts the iconography of Australian automotive culture—the title is a reference to an old tire ad, where the product was promoted on the basis of its suitability for burnouts—in order to enshrine the fragile façade of masculine strength and resilience and comment on the romanticisation of self-destruction. The adult human teeth, hidden
The works of Therese Howard and Abdul-Rahman Abdullah acknowledge the trophy’s perennial association with sporting endeavours, but each imbue their pieces with a sense of satire and irony. Abdullah’s Ball (2014) recreates a floor-to-ceiling punching bag in carved jelutong wood. The apparatus is familiar from the boxing gym, but it makes for a strange trophy. Held in place by an elastic tether, the ball springs back from every blow, fresh and undefeated. There is a sense of futility here; the trophy can, ultimately, never be awarded.

Howard’s W.A. - the ba ba Boom State (2014), like Abdullah’s Ball, plays games with the accustomed boundaries that demarcate the art object from the plinth on which it rests. A fragile papier-mâché replica of the America’s Cup teeters atop an enormous spring, which emerges from an open cut mine dug into the centre of the support. The surface of the sculpture is decoupaged with newspaper clippings that refer to Western Australia’s legendary mining ‘boom’. This work draws a parallel between the twin explosions of affluence that followed in the wake of both the 1987 yachting tournament in Fremantle and the ongoing exploitation of the state’s mineral wealth. Yet, unlike most sporting trophies, Howard’s sculpture acknowledges the ‘troy’. The swinging spring suggests the precarious financial situation that those least fortunate members of the community face. Howard’s work is a result of her two-speed economy in Western Australia, where a select few enjoy the spoils of victory while those less fortunate often feel the sting of defeat.

Sport, for Abdullah and Howard, is not an untainted, ceaseless victory parade; their works recognise that for every win there must be a loss.

- Andrew Purvis

The mass-manufactured trophy, handed out at sports carnivals and go-karting tracks, may seem, at first glance, a rather absurd object. Its kitsch, electroplated veneer conceals a cheap plastic core. And its emulation of the monumental form can suggest a pretentious, almost hubristic sense of self-importance. But the trophy is a celebration of the individual, rather than the masses and, as such, this small object can be invested with huge fetishistic power. It can summon up nostalgic memories, both for good and ill. So don’t dismiss it, sitting quietly there on the sideboard, it speaks of things you might not fully understand. Perhaps you have to have won one in order to really get it.

- Andrew Purvis

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