

Plastic Fantastic

Artist Sarah Goffman and her love for the discarded.

It is difficult to know what to expect when entering the super-bright, lime green doorway at Art Camp, the current base for resident artist, Sarah Goffman.

It is a small studio but there is a lot going on and it's mostly plastic: boxes of plastic containers carried back from Japan; painted plastic bottles transformed into blue and white Chinese porcelain replicas and an elaborately hand-engraved old plastic chair on a cardboard platform. A delicate sculpture, made entirely of pins sits on a table with a stack of small paintings depicting labels along with a plastic doughnut box adorned with miniature drawings – detailed reproductions of Piranesi architectural features. Overhead a clothesline with plastic bags pegged like flags crosses the studio.

Sarah describes her two year residency at Art Camp (an initiative involving Marrickville Council, Arts NSW and the Community Building Partnership Programme) as a privilege, providing a sanctuary where thoughts and actions can evolve.

“This space equals total mental health – especially for an artist in an expensive city with so few affordable spaces. There are many vacant properties that Councils could easily replenish areas and lease to artists.”

Sarah has exhibited her mixed media works and installations in solo and group



Image Sarah Goffman in her studio at Art Camp by Sam Jackie



Kyoto Copy at Casula 2012, courtesy of Sarah Goffman

“I like to give my attention to that which is thrown away - it has a language all of its own, pre-owned and discarded, it comes with a story. I love that it's free and can be re-used to create a narrative.” ”

shows across Australia (including the MCA) and internationally. Being awarded a residency in Tokyo in 2009 has given Sarah's work a strong connection with Japan.

But for now Sarah sits on the wide studio window seat with her beautiful rescue dog, Takara (named after her favourite Japanese tippie). She polishes a plastic water cooler bottle but isn't sure yet what it will become - happy for the moment to

admire its shiny simple form. Perhaps Sarah's appreciation for discarded objects goes back to New York where she grew up watching vacant lots being transformed into beautiful sites by artists working with found materials. Sarah describes it as a pleasure - almost a duty - to work with objects other people discard.

Although she cares deeply about the environment and consumerism, Sarah's work is more cheekily subversive than eco assertive. She enjoys the process of taking an object away from its manufactured purpose - polishing, embellishing and rearranging them to the point of plastic-fantastic trickery demanding a close look to identify original forms.

Much of Sarah's work is also transitory. She recycles pieces, converting and re-engaging them for future exhibitions.



Plastic Arts 2009, courtesy of Mike Myers

“Although there are aspects of my work that are traditionally collectable I enjoy the liberation of not being held to ‘permanence’ in all matters, it gives me the freedom to amend and adapt the work.”

In contrast to the small works in her studio, Sarah's site-specific installations achieve an impressive scale and significance.

“There have been so many occasions where the work I have envisaged has tied in to the physicality or history of a space. I feel I am working intuitively and there is a strange universal reciprocity... sounds airy-fairy I know, but there it is, it's magic!”

She nominates her ‘Trashcan Dreams’ installation at the Performance Space (Carriageworks, Sydney, 2010) as a career highlight. Incorporating dance, Sarah transformed the space with vast

quantities of plastic (collected over 10 years) to construct plastic ‘stained glass’ filling huge arched windows, a massive patchwork of plastic bags falling from ceiling to floor and a Kyoto Ikebana structure made entirely of plastic.

It will be another busy year for Sarah as she prepares for a show in Manila, another in Artspace and a large solo show at Penrith Regional Gallery in December.

Sarah laughs as she happily describes herself as a Garbologist, but surely Plastic Alchemist is a more accurate title for an artist who cleverly transforms and challenges the value, place and perception of otherwise discarded objects. ■

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Words Sam Mackie
Cover image ‘Trashcan Dreams’ installation, at The Performance Space, Carriageworks, courtesy of Garth Knight



Plastic Arts 2009, courtesy of Mike Myers