

Carolyn Eskdale: Memory Horizon
30 June to 27 September 2020

VCE Studio Arts



Memory Horizon, installation view
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Photograph: Christian Capurro

This education resource is designed to support students of VCE Studio Arts:

Unit 3, Outcome 3

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to examine the practice of at least two artists, with reference to two artworks by each artist, referencing the different historical and cultural context of each artwork.

Key knowledge

- art practices related to artworks in more than one historical and/or cultural context
- artworks from different historical and/or cultural contexts that reflect the artists' interpretations of subject matter and influences
- the use of art elements and art principles to demonstrate aesthetic qualities and communicate ideas and meaning
- the materials, techniques and processes used in the production of the artworks
- a range of recognised historical and contemporary artworks.

Key skills

- analyse ways in which artworks reflect artists' interpretations of subject matter, influences, cultural and historical contexts and the communication of ideas and meanings
- analyse and discuss ways in which artists use materials, techniques and processes
- analyse the ways in which artists use art elements and art principles to demonstrate aesthetic qualities
- research and discuss art practices in relation to particular recognised historical and contemporary artworks.

Unit 4, Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to compare the methods used by artists and considerations of curators in the preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in at least two different exhibitions.

Key knowledge

- the methods and intentions of public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, university art galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, outdoor spaces and online galleries in exhibiting artworks
- the curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions
- the methods used by and considerations of artists and curators working in galleries in conservation of artworks, including lighting, temperature, storage, transportation and presentation of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study

Key skills

- identify and describe the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study
- describe and compare the methods of and intentions in exhibiting artworks in public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, university art galleries and museums, outdoor spaces and online galleries, which have been visited in the year of study
- analyse how specific artworks are presented in different exhibitions and demonstrate an understanding of the artists' and gallery curators' intentions
- analyse and evaluate curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and presenting specific artworks for display
- analyse and evaluate methods and considerations involved in the conservation of specific artworks related to exhibitions visited in the current year of study

Heide Modern

In 1964, the Reeds commissioned David McGlashan of McGlashan and Everist Architects to design and build a new house suitable for showcasing their art collection, their design brief describing it as a 'gallery to live in.' Constructed from 1964 to 1967 using only four basic materials—Mount Gambier limestone, terrazzo-topped concrete, timber, and glass—the house is formed from a series of geometric spaces for sitting, sleeping, eating and displaying artworks. The construction is simple and modular, the design modernist: there are no architraves, skirtings, cornices, plaster or wall tiles. Today Heide Modern is used as an exhibition space, and appeals strongly to contemporary artists who often explore ways in which to respond to its sculptural architectural forms, limited palette of materials and domestic ambience.

Because Heide Modern is a heritage-listed building, minimal alterations can be made. While this preserves the look and feel of the space, it also limits the types of artworks and installations that can be presented, due to restrictions on scale, weight, wall fixtures, lighting requirements etc.

Artist Biography

A Melbourne-based artist with more than thirty years' experience Carolyn Eskdale has a multi-disciplinary practice encompassing drawing, photography, sculpture, and intervention. She works in tension with specific sites as a context and reference and engages with processes of transformation and reconstruction of actual, remembered and imagined actions, objects, and architectures. Since 1995 Eskdale has created an ongoing series of installations and residencies in relation to domestic interiors. Her works feature a systematic use of transference of surface and relations of space and form, achieved through the trace of hand from one surface to another. This represents a formal mechanism or language that enables a reconstruction of material memory.

Carolyn Eskdale exhibits nationally and internationally. Her room works have been commissioned for major exhibitions including Claustrophobia IKON Gallery, Birmingham UK (1998), *All This and Heaven Too Adelaide*, the Biennale of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia (1998), and *On Reason and Emotion*, the Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of NSW (2004).

Recent exhibitions include *Australian Artists and Louise Bourgeois*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne (2013), *The Material Turn*, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, University of Melbourne, Melbourne (2015), *Infrastructuralism*, Latrobe Art Institute, Bendigo (2018) and her solo project *Memory Horizon*, Heide Modern, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne (2020).

Eskdale was co-founder and co-director of ARI Temple Studio, Prahran (1991-2000) and is represented by Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne. She lectures in the School of Art, RMIT University, Melbourne and Hong Kong.

Curator Biography

Lesley Harding is Artistic Director at Heide Museum of Modern Art. She previously worked as a curator at Heide, Arts Centre Melbourne and the National Art School, Sydney, and has curated over fifty exhibitions since 1995. Recent major exhibition projects include *An Idea Needing to be Made: Contemporary Ceramics* (2019), *Call of the Avant-Garde: Constructivism and Australian Art* (2017) and *O'Keeffe, Preston, Cossington Smith: Making Modernism* (2016).

Lesley has also written a number of books on Australian art and social history, including *Margaret Preston: Recipes for Food and Art* (2016), and *Modern Love: The Lives of John and Sunday Reed* (2015) with Kendrah Morgan, which was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for non-fiction. Her most recent book, *Mirka and Georges: A Culinary Affair* (2018, also with Kendrah Morgan), explores the lives of two central and beloved figures in the cultural and culinary life of Australia.

Carolyn Eskdale: Memory Horizon

Access the exhibition in VR here:

<https://rmit.websharecloud.com/?v=pv&t=p:default,c:panoramaview,h:f,m:f&pv=pv1&pv1=vt:p,u:18108e29-81c1-4f3f-86f8-2da17306086b,cf:60.80,dh:f,st:f,p:2.14516,t:-0.46101&p=p:carolyn-eskdale-memory-horizon>

Wall text



Memory Horizon, installation view
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Photograph: Christian Capurro

Carolyn Eskdale's installations trace the way we physically and psychically inhabit the world, creating a dialogue between the body's senses and the mind's view. In *Memory Horizon* she presents new work that responds to the modernist architecture of the former residence, Heide Modern, and re-presents the house as its own cast object.

After 'inhabiting' the building in solitude for several months making ephemeral structures from cardboard in each of the rooms, Eskdale has developed a sculptural language of motifs and forms specific to its character and history.

The exhibition presents photographs of her temporary in-situ works in conversation with new sculptures and insertions that activate or obscure access to the spaces, altering visitors' experiences of them. In layering past procedures and present conditions,

Eskdale explores the interstices between private and public life and the overlap between the studio and the gallery.

The title of the exhibition, *Memory Horizon*, plays on the phrase 'event horizon'—a term that refers to the boundary that straddles diverse pasts and possible futures.

An interview with the artist

How do you begin working on an artwork? Do you start with a concept or consider materials and processes in the initial stages?

CE The conceptual development of my work evolves organically and materials and the processes of working with them often lead me in certain directions in the studio at the same time. The vocabulary of materials and processes from which I can draw evolves over time, as do my conceptual drives. In the case of work that is site specific, i.e. in relation a particular place, the influence of the history, experience and material nature of that site also leads the work.

Do you undertake all stages of the making process yourself, or do you work with other artists or industries?

CE There are some stages of the making process where it's a two-person job, so I may have an assistant assist me and sometimes my partner, who is also an artist, will help me. In this particular exhibition the fabricated structures such as the table and chairs in the kitchen and the steel rods in the *conversation pit* were made at a local steel fabricator and the upholstery was done professionally. Wax objects were cast into white bronze and aluminium at a foundry.

Your exhibition also includes photo documentation of your tests and trials made in the space during your development process. Could you describe one of these?

CE This Mediation Photowork captures an improvised cardboard construction in the *conversation pit* which was installed back into the space on the back wall in reference to the past action.



Carolyn Eskdale
Mediation Photowork, 2019
digital print on rag paper, mounted on
aluminium
80 x 80 cm
Courtesy: the artist



Conversation Pit Object
Memory Horizon, installation view
 Heide Museum of Modern Art
 Photograph: Christian Capurro

And the final work installed in the Conversation Pit?

The thin steel rods run from one side of the space to another, delineating the space between the backs and bases of the absent woven furnishings, running underneath the woven floor covering, and then up into the base and back wall of the fireplace. The scale of the rods are in reference to the bespoke fire grate that usually occupies the hearth; which, along with the woven woollen furnishings, are a signature feature of this room. As gallery visitors step down into the room they experience the peripheral rhythms of the rods to the left and the right as they sense that same rhythm as a subtle ridge under foot. The effect of which is to unsettle the visitor; they witness the stripping back of the space and sense a subtle instability in their feet, the delineations becoming a physical and visual experience.

Did you follow your usual making processes for this exhibition?

In this exhibition I drew upon the deep history of my creative vocabularies, ranging across disciplines that I have at my disposal. Engaging sculptural and spatial practices, drawing, painting, and photography. I do not usually engage all of these disciplines in the one exhibition.

Can you elaborate on how works in this exhibition are site-specific to Heide Modern, considering both interior and exterior spaces?

The works developed for this house were made in direct response to my experience of the Heide Modern architecture and archival collections. Over an extended period of time I visited the house on Mondays when it was closed, which I refer to as an 'inhabitation process'. During this time I focused on the experience of being in the architecture, tuning in to the rhythms of my movement and the relationships of scale and proportion in relation to my body. I observed the limestone mass of the building, its openings and voids, the surfaces and textures and the rhythms of light at different times of day; a 'psycho-geography'. I made hand-held works from wax as I walked the

spaces and constructed ephemeral cardboard constructions directly into the spaces and photographed them.

A period of translation occurred to and from my studio and Heide. The works were installed as an experience for the viewer both within and moving into the house; to lead the viewer through a particular experience in relation to the architecture. The exhibition commences on the terrazzo landing, with *Entrance Object*, which aligns with George Baldessin's *Mary Magdalene*; a bronze sculpture positioned close to the building's entrance.



Memory Horizon, installation view
Detail of *Entrance Object*
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Photograph: Christian Capurro

Conceptually, what prompted your interest in exploring memory and have you worked with this idea previously?

I have worked for many years in relation to material experience, the body and memory. In this particular project I worked with the historical memory of the building; the viewers' (potential) prior experience and their actual experience. The material processes I engaged with embody before and after, past, present and future.

How do the performative elements of your work contribute meaning to the physical art works?

The past performative is made present as a trace of particular actions through casting, photography and an archival object in process.

Could you elaborate on your answer, with reference to *Dialogue Pressing Object* in the Heide Modern kitchen in terms of how it was and continues to be created?

Dialogue Pressing Object, exhibited in Heide Modern's kitchen, is a work that is intended to be operational as a live element throughout the life of the exhibition. The work is live because it is in the process of being made through its performance. It is intended that two people sit at either end of the table and *work* together from their ends to meet in the centre, to form a continuous surface of plasticine. The sessions take place over a number of weeks, out of hours, when the gallery is closed and

viewers may observe the change, or a moment in that process in time. Viewers experiences this work as an archived object under an acrylic cover on the table.

It is intended that a series of dialogue pressings will occur throughout the exhibition, commencing with the artist and a fellow artist and then followed by other couples. As each pressing is completed, it is photographed and a mould is taken, before the surface is scraped back to be then reused for the following pressing. The work becomes an archival series of photographic works and cast objects.

Could you explain in similar detail how you constructed another work in the show?

At the entrance to the building there are four steel posts standing at hip-height that lead the public into the building, marking a transition point from outside to inside.

I was interested in the elaboration of the handrails throughout the gallery interior, which seemed to be echoed at the entrance by the glass panels on either side of the landing, establishing a horizontal line at hip-height throughout the house. Presumably these were installed when the house was established as a public gallery. At times, these handrails blocked access and vision, at other times they led and assisted.

During my experience of my inhabitation of the house, I habitually walked around from room to room with wax in my hands, forming it as I walked. This process was carried over from earlier works in other onsite projects. With this in mind, I decided to stand at the entrance of the building and form two-handed objects in situ, at four equidistant points. I wanted to engage the touch of myself and the viewer in an object at those same points. To raise the object up to the height that would allow interaction, I loosely incorporated the form of an existing pair of portable bollards that were stored in the en-suite bathroom upstairs in Heide Modern.

The wax objects were cast in white bronze. I made a test bollard prior to the casting to see how the form would sit on top, to test the scale and the height etc.

Do you ever re-use any of your materials in future exhibitions?

I certainly carry the influence of one project into another, as a spatial reference and at times using similar materials if I wish to engage a particular response.

How is/was the work being accessed by public audiences and invigilated and maintained by museum staff?

It is an exhibition that in many ways poses the question of touch. The entrance work is accessible and able to be touched; it sits in a public realm. The works in the interior of the building pose a more difficult problem; although we may want to touch them, you are not invited to touch. *Dialogue Pressing Object* in the kitchen is actively covered with an acrylic box to prevent touching and changing the surface of the work. *Lounge Object* is not to be touched and is invigilated by Heide staff to ensure this. The work is intentionally structurally fragile against the weightiness of the limestone architecture. Screened areas are installed to allow the gaze but not entry into particular spaces.

Could you describe two of your artworks with reference to any prominent use of art elements and principles?

Dialogue Pressing Object is an extension of series of dialogue pressings that originated during a residency project in a private apartment work in 2015. The work is performative; the action occurs privately over time, 'out of hours', and is witnessed progressively by the viewer as a sculptural/ furniture object in what was the original kitchen of Heide Modern. The work is comprised of both the furniture and the plasticine pressing. The design of the furniture directly references the original furniture

design of the house, which I have further improvised to make a work-station scaled to my body and to facilitate the task of producing a material surface. The current surface, *in isolation*, was and is incomplete.

Lounge Object is a sculptural installation work, formed by an open screen-like modular structure with sculptural, buttress-like support structures, and a thin rubber and dusted ash covering. This work will continue to change colour during the time that it is exposed to daylight, gradually becoming warmer in colour.

How did you use the element of *line* in *Lounge Object*?

The timber screen structure is fine and linear and, in my mind, more like a drawing in space than an attempt at being an actual functional structure. The polyurethane is skin-like, almost bodily, imperfect, fragile. I was seeking to create a fragile architectural structure in tension with the relative sureness, stability and opacity of the stonework of the house. The structure is propped and held in balance by timber braces that are weighted by cast aluminium sculptural forms on the floor. The asymmetry of the work alludes to it being in the process of being built or unbuilt; open to change.



Lounge Object
Memory Horizon, installation view
 Heide Museum of Modern Art
 Photograph: Christian Capurro

Which artists have inspired you and influenced your practice?

Designer/Architect Eileen Gray, Anni Albers, Gordon Matter-Clarke, Kurt Schwitters and Lygia Clarke.

Is your work ever sold?

Yes, predominantly my two dimensional works, including drawings, paintings and photographs and the small-scale sculptural objects. I have commercial representation with Sarah Scout Presents Gallery in Melbourne. As my work is often site-specific, the perception may be that artworks can only operate in those contexts. I think that this is not always the case and that works can translate to other contexts, and in so doing carry the imprint of the originating site with them.

How has the temporary closure of galleries due to the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your practice?

In the current context it has been disappointing to have worked on a major project and have it closed down. But having said that, it is also an opportunity to reconsider the project in this time; in this context, which has extended my thinking about some works. The *Dialogue Pressing Object* in the kitchen will develop differently now, in that the conversations that resume once the gallery reopens will take place in a different

cultural environment and awareness. The social distance between the makers is called into question by our current government restrictions. Perhaps we will think about inhabitation of domestic space differently now.

Do you have any other shows coming up that students could look out for?

I am represented by Sarah Scout Presents Gallery in Melbourne, where I will have a solo exhibition sometime in mid-2021.



Memory Horizon, installation view
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Photograph: Christian Capurro

Presentation and Conservation

We talked to Heide Exhibitions Manager, Julia Powles, about her role in installing and maintaining Carolyn Eskdale's *Memory Horizon*, given that the exhibition has now been impacted twice by temporary gallery closures.

JP Although Carolyn uses a great variety of materials, such as bronze, iron, textiles, cardboard, latex, rubber, wax, and polyurethane, they are actually all very stable, requiring no additional conservation measures during closure. In fact the artworks were possibly safer as there were no visitors who could accidentally bump into them or give them an inquisitive poke.

During the initial consultative process with Carolyn we asked her to identify any artworks which may need additional care, however she felt that all the materials used were inherently stable in the museum environment.

Otherwise we maintained a weekly check of the artworks as per usual, cleaning as appropriate and paying close attention to the materials themselves for signs of change. Without invigilators and gallery staff in the exhibition on a daily basis I was concerned that any changes in condition would be overlooked.

The overall rule with artworks is to handle them as little as possible. With this in mind artworks are checked for dust, which is removed with a soft Hake brush and fingerprints are removed from display cases with an appropriate cleaner and soft cloth.



Memory Horizon, installation view
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Photograph: Christian Capurro

Questions for students

1. Eskdale described her process in creating *Dialogue Pressing Object* in the Heide Modern kitchen.
How has she used the Art Elements of tone, colour, texture, light and time?
How has she used the Art Principles of rhythm, repetition and scale?
In your answers, describe her formal use of the elements and principles and discuss what effect they have on viewers with regard to how they might interpret meaning in the work.

2. How has Eskdale utilised the Art Elements of line, texture, light, colour, time and form and the Art Principles of space, repetition, balance, scale and proportion in *Lounge Object*? What effect do these have on viewers and how they might engage with the work and derive meaning from this engagement?

3. How would you describe the way the formal elements in Eskdale's work are linked to her conceptual concerns?

4. Eskdale describes the following artists and architects as influential to her practice:

- Designer/Architect Eileen Gray
- Anni Albers
- Gordon Matter-Clarke
- Kurt Schwitters
- Lygia Clarke.

Choose two people from this list and conduct research to find examples where their work may have impacted Eskdale's with regard to her thematic concerns and/or use of materials and processes.

5. Eskdale's *Dialogue Pressing Object* in the Heide Modern kitchen are interactive works focusing on the social elements of conversation. How do you think the ideas of social or physical distancing might impact this work?

From Carolyn Eskdale's Visual Diary



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Carolyn Eskdale Studio Test: testing and experimenting with *Lounge Object* and installation.

Materials include: cedar framework, polyurethane sheet, ash and timber props, cast aluminium object.



© Carolyn Eskdale

Carolyn Eskdale: first session of out-of-hours' onsite action in progress for *Dialogue Pressing Object*. Pictured: Carolyn Eskdale (foreground) and fellow artist Kate Ellis. Materials: plasticine, chromed steel, limestone marble, upholstered fabric Hallingdal by Kvadrat 460760–220.



© Carolyn Eskdale

Carolyn Eskdale Studio Test: testing and experimenting with *Laundry Object* and installation.

Materials: Mount Gambier limestone blocks from the dismantled Heide Modern carport, latex sheet, and timber props.

Carolyn Eskdale's selected bibliography

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