

wyndham gallery art

# SUSTAIN



Susie Loach, Untitled – soap and pins 2013

Sustainability has become the latest buzz word. It is used in every kind of advertising to promote a 'green' image when often in reality it represents what is known as 'green washing'. Many companies these days claim sustainable practices as a marketing ploy, hoping to sell products to a public that would like to do the right things by the environment. Claiming that an item is made sustainably gives credibility that was once not associated with sales and marketing departments but now has become common place.

With the climate change reports of scientists becoming more and more alarming one has to find a way to avoid either bury ones head in the sand OR sink into despair.

**Art is the answer!**

Artists are often at the forefront of new ways of seeing the world. That is their contribution to society. They also point to dilemmas or raise concerns that are controversial, when the rest of us are engaged with day to day issues. There is now no denying that the climate is changing and more rapidly than was first thought even by the most radical environmentalists. Some of the impacts of this are the regularity of fires and floods that seem to dominate the news. I was out of the country when the last heat wave hit Australia and colleagues commented on the extreme heat as though it was an anomaly. I replied with a sigh that this it is what we are getting used to in Australia.

I am inspired by the generations coming behind me who are much more conscientious about their footprint on the planet. Taking containers to the shops to have them filled up isn't common place yet but the movement is growing. And some take the trouble to post back packaging to the producer if it isn't able to be recycled.

Recycling isn't the answer either. The current demand for recycling is struggling to be met. What will happen when the population reaches its predicted levels in the next 20 years. Using less is the next trend emerging amongst concerned people, but how does that work with the economy we have in place. Does using less mean lost jobs and warnings of recession?

Learning how to use what we have already created to make beautiful objects that bring delight and inspiration to the world could be a new economy. An arts led economy!

These artists are just a small collection of the many artists across the world who are grappling with these issues. Many of them are local and doing the thinking for us in our very own backyard.



Sean Diamond - *Sphere of Mars* – recycled automotive steel



Richard Rowlands - *Black Dog* – recycled cans

**Richard Rowlands** has been a long time hoarder and uses his found objects to make wondrous objects of delight. Often making works that encode the original purpose in the design, Richard says he creates

‘a ghost image to haunt and remind of past mistakes and memories’.

This is most haunting in the helmet made from broken brown bottle glass, *The War in my Head*. It is unmistakably an army helmet from the second world war and the illusions to the fragility of the human body are powerful as is the reference to the many returned soldiers who suffered from the ravages of alcoholism as a result of the terrors of war imprinted in their memories.

**Elizabeth Boustead** makes a work from the detritus that is created by packaging. She is selective in which packaging she chooses. Sometimes when she buys something she takes off the package and leaves it in the shop for the resale distributor to deal with, only taking home what she wants to use.

There is a growing movement in resale to offer a buyback scheme where companies take back your white goods at the end of their life and reuse the parts. Perhaps if we demand this policy of reusing rather than recycling, the life of objects would be extended and resources saved.



Elizabeth Boustead - *Flights of fantasy (detail)* – recycled polystyrene, paper and pen

**Sean Diamond's** work looks at both the creative opportunities of industrial waste and the sustainability or lack of it in the working life of the manufacturing industry. His beautiful spheres and egg shapes are made from discarded car parts. Using parts from an industry that is challenged by the prospect of peak oil, his objects have a life that may outlive the car industry as we know it.

‘They capture the last moments of automotive manufacturing in Australia, featuring scrap from companies like CMI Forge, a major foundry in Victoria, ceasing manufacture in October 2012.’

**Donna Racovalis** recycles books to make sculptures in the shapes of pencils. A lovely irony given the challenge to the hand written word by the keyboard. Will handwriting survive the digital age or become an artform in itself. Her works hang from the ceiling as though thrown in the air and captured in flight.



Donna Racovalis - *Rainbow of pencils – Hung up cycle – recycled books*

**Carol Rowlands** uses machine embroidery to describe an image of the recycling of recycling. *I Came Back* tells a lovely story of an old jumper that was thrown away by someone and then retrieved by someone else. One person's trash is another person's treasure. Opportunity shops are a great model for reusing and recycling. *Gossip* depicts an image of unsustainable populations with the houses complaining as they jostle for space.



Carol Rowlands – *Gossip* – acrylic on canvas

**Vicki Kinai** weaves in the tradition of her mother and grandmother before her. She comes from Pitwa, which is located Southeast of Mt. Hagen town in Papua New Guinea and lives in Point Cook where she conducts *Billum* making workshops. Billums come from an age old tradition of weaving bags from natural fibers, now transformed in a modern context, using all kinds of recycled material. She hopes for the day when people take their food home in hand made billums rather than plastic bags. Her work *First Contact* is a dress made in the technique of a Billum and tells the story of her Grandmothers first meeting with a white person in a village in a remote part of Papua New Guinea in the 1940's. She has recreated the dress from the description of her Grandmother as she recounted the story to Vicki.



Vicki Kinai – Bilum – twisted wool 2013



Kui Taukilo (Copyright Lisa Hilli)

**Kui Taukilo** was also taught to weave by her mother and a multitude of Aunties. She adapts those traditional techniques to create work that responds to her contemporary lifestyle. She is working on the creation of an entire life sized kitchen woven from natural materials.

The shapes of tea pots and frying pans are softened by the materials they are made from and contrast with the hard metal of their traditions. She also makes beautiful jewelry, small versions of the shapes of the Vaka which is the traditional island canoe.





Gaye Naismith – A Trio of Pouff's – recycled dressing gowns

**Gaye Naismith** recycles woolen clothes, doing what most of us avoid, throwing woolen jumpers in the washing machine to turn them into felt. Using old blankets and men's dressing gowns she has made what used to be called Poufs and are now more commonly known as ottoman's. Gaye's use of recycled materials is part of a fledgling movement in the fashion industry to create ethically sound products that are not made in sweat shops for subsistence wages. It asks you to ponder the cheap prices of clothing and how the manufacturer has been able to produce clothes so cheaply. As the age old adage goes – *nothing comes for free!*



Shona Te Hau - *Korowai (Cloak) - flax*

**Shona Te Hau** is another weaver who uses traditional materials and techniques to make contemporary items. Her beautiful piece *KOROWAI (Cloak)* is a traditional cloak used for ceremony as well as a very effective raincoat that she has used when caught in a rainstorm in the bush. Her skill as a weaver is evident in the way she can manipulate natural fibers into all kinds of shapes including flowers that could be mistaken for the English Rose.

**Fono McCarthy** has captured a glimpse of a much bigger work as a photographic print on canvas. The photograph shows just three of 500 pieces of a work that represent the philosophy of his Samoan heritage. Pacific Island cultures are all very aware of the impact of climate change as their Island lifestyle is threatened by rising sea levels. Tuvalu is already considering relocation of their entire population as a result. This means that these cultures will be the first to lose their homes, their lands and to a certain extent their cultural ties to that land, this time not at the hands of colonisers but sadly as a result of western excess that they have not been responsible for. Most of those cultures live sustainably and have always done so. Perhaps we can learn from them as the waters lap at the door.



Fono McCarthy – Amataga - Beginning - Digital print on canvas

**Marni Smallwood** represents the generation who will have to deal with these issues more directly. She is thirteen years old and her photographs call for a more hopeful view of the future while at the same time challenging the viewer with bleak imagery.



Marni Smallwood – Tasmania and Cave – digital print on canvas

**Susie Loach's** poetic use of discarded soaps (see front cover) is echoed in her artists statement. Seeing jewel like objects in the remnants of countless showers is what an artist does best. Perhaps this way of seeing the world will be more valued as the difficulties of living a sustainable life become more evident. Shopping therapy will be replaced by a creative moment.



Chol Deng Akuok – *Untitled* - Oil on canvas

**Chol Deng Akuok** has probably the most relevant work in the show related to the difficulties faced in trying to live sustainably. His painting depicts women from his village in South Sudan grinding grain for their daily food, a regular practice still for his people in his country of origin. This work is very hard yet he points out that the alternative, which is a mechanized process, also raises both health and environmental concerns due to the use of oil products in running the motors.



Grace Vanilau – *Come Forth* – Jandals (thongs) and rafia

**Grace Vanilau** has remodeled the strap of Jandel's known in Australia as Thongs, into flying creatures that reference both birds and humans. They take off across the wall with heads like suns and remind us of the legend of Icarus who flew too close to the sun and his wings were burned. Grace alludes to the human spirit and her own families struggle to survive, yet somehow the human struggle to survive comes through in the context of Climate change.

All these artists in their own way refer to the complex problem of sustainability and contribute both humor and moments of serious contemplation for the audience in this exhibition.

Dr. Megan Evans  
Visual Arts Curator