

THE ART OF FIONA HALL



Media Kit

Queensland Art Gallery 19 March – 5 June 2005

Art Gallery of South Australia 8 July – 11 September 2005

QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY



Queensland
Government
Arts Queensland

Understorey (detail) 1999–2004

Glass beads, silver-wire, rubber bath plugs, plastic shower-rose, boar's teeth

170 x 140 x 75cm installed

Collection: The artist

Courtesy: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

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Opening hours

Monday to Friday 10.00am – 5.00pm
Saturday and Sunday 9.00am – 5.00pm
Closed Good Friday
Open Anzac Day 12.00 noon – 5.00pm

Introduction to the exhibition

Fiona Hall is one of Australia's leading contemporary artists.

With a career spanning more than three decades, Hall's work speaks of the artist's insatiable curiosity about the world. The works range from photographs, intricately carved sardine tins and vibrant beaded sculptures, to precise botanical illustrations on bank notes.

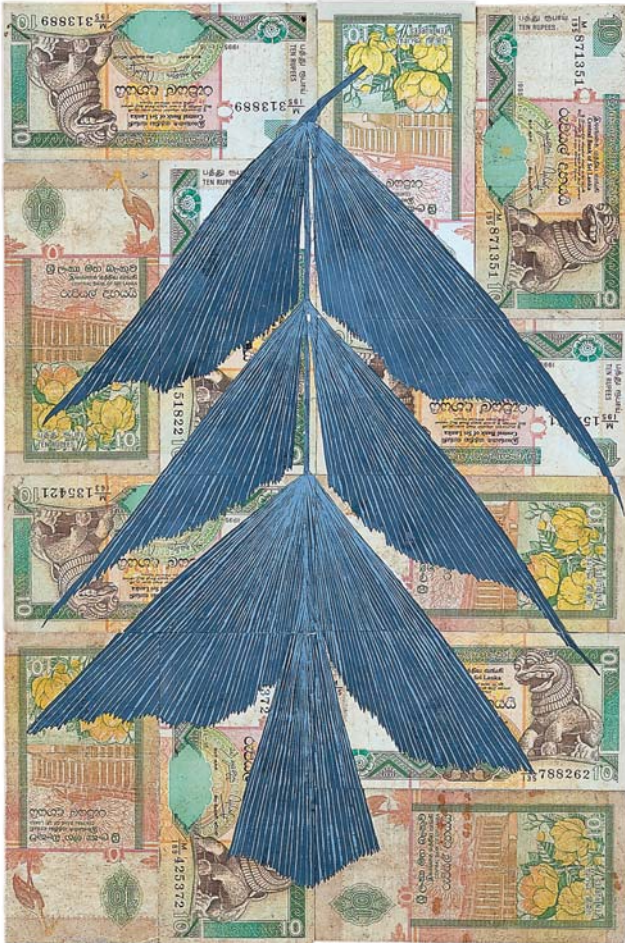
Hall brings wit, passion and knowledge to her work.

'The Art of Fiona Hall' is the first major survey of the artist's work in more than a decade.

Organised by the Queensland Art Gallery, the exhibition features major sculptures such as Hall's series 'Paradisus terrestris' 1999 and two major new works, *Understorey* 1999–2004 and *Tender* 2003–05, which have never before been exhibited.

Following its showing in Brisbane, the Queensland Art Gallery will tour the exhibition to the Art Gallery of South Australia from 8 July to 11 September 2005.

A major monograph, written by Julie Ewington, Head of Australian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, and published by Piper Press, is available from the Gallery Store or online at <www.australianartbooks.com.au>.



Leaf litter (detail) 1999–2003
Caryota urens; kitul palm/fishtail palm
 Bank notes, gouache (183 components)
 36.0 x 23.9
 Collection: National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra

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Artist profile

Born in 1953 in Sydney, Fiona Hall has lived and worked in Adelaide since 1983.

After studying painting in Sydney, Hall lived in London from 1977 to 1978 and worked as an assistant to British photographer Fay Godwin. From London, Hall moved to the USA to do a Master of Fine Arts (Photography) at the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, completing it in 1982.

Hall has undertaken many residencies in Australia, including one at Brisbane's Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens in 1998. Her ongoing interest in the history of plants and plant classifications found fresh energy in 1999, through annual residencies at Lunuganga, a garden estate in Sri Lanka.

In 1997, Hall was the recipient of the inaugural Contempora 5 Art Prize and, in 1999, the Lowenstein Sharp Arts 21 Fellowship.

She has exhibited widely, including in the Queensland Art Gallery's 'The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art' in 1996, and is represented in every major public art collection in Australia.

Biography

- Born 1953 Sydney, NSW. Currently lives and works in Adelaide, South Australia.
- 1972–75 East Sydney Technical College, (Diploma of Painting).
- 1978–82 Master of Fine Arts (Photography), Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York.
- 1983–2002 Lecturer, Photostudies, South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia, Adelaide.
- 1986 Solo exhibition, 'III III II: A Survey of Twelve Years Work', Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.
- 1989 Solo exhibition, 'Illustrations to the Divine Comedy', Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney (touring exhibition).
- 1990 Group exhibition, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art.
- 1992–94 Solo exhibition, 'The Garden of Earthly Delights', National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (travelling to Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart, Perth and Brisbane).
- 1994 Group exhibition, 'Biodata', Contemporary Art Centre, South Australia (as part of the Adelaide Art Festival).
- 1996 Group exhibition, 'The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.
- 1996–98 *Fern garden*, commission by the National Gallery of Australia.
- 1997 Creative Arts Fellow, Canberra School of Art, Australian National University.
- 1998 Artist in residence, Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens, Brisbane, and solo exhibition, 'Cash Crop', Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane.
- 1999 Artist in residence, Lunuganga, Sri Lanka; solo exhibition, 'A Transit through Paradise', Gallery 706, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- 2000 *A folly for Mrs Macquarie*, public art commission for the City of Sydney.
Group exhibition, 'Biennale of Sydney'.
- 2002 Group exhibition, 'Converge: Where Art and Science Meet', Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia.
- 2003–04 Group exhibition, 'Face Up: Contemporary Art from Australia', Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany.
- 2004 Group exhibition, 'Living Together is Easy', Art Tower Mito, Japan and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

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Selection of key works

Understorey 1999–2004

Hall's major beaded sculpture, *Understorey* 1999–2004, has not previously been exhibited. The title derives from the botanical term for the crucial layer of vegetation that lies underneath the tallest trees in a forest, a layer which keeps the delicate balance necessary to sustain the life of the forest.

The beauty of Sri Lanka's abundant plant life is embodied in the hand-beaded flowers and fruits. Strangely exotic and fashioned in exaggerated colours, these forms include the magnificent flower of the cannonball tree, the flamboyant hibiscus, the luscious fruit of the mango tree and a long, bulbous seed pod — all plants from the garden at Lunuganga, Sri Lanka. These blooms and fruits, which are slightly larger-than-life-size versions, reflect the vivid beauty of the great garden; however, Hall also combines them with signs of death and decay. A number of human body parts — a pale pink brain, a silvery human skull and several long thigh bones — also feature in the work.

Understorey is an intensely coded sculptural installation in vibrant salmon pink, lively orange, deep blood red and the acidic greens of tropical camouflage. The work can be read as a tropical *memento mori*, exploring the struggles over life and death in many contemporary postcolonial societies. Exquisitely crafted from glass seed beads, it literally knots together beauty and death.



Understorey (detail) 1999–2004
Glass beads, silver wire
170 x 140 x 75cm installed
Collection: The artist
Courtesy: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

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Tender 2003–05

Tender 2003–05 considers the complex relationship between nature and human systems of trade. The work consists of several dozen 'bird nests', fashioned from shredded American one-dollar bills, the most desired currency in Third World countries.

This work makes a timely commentary on the effects of modernisation, as the advance of capitalism and the spread of deforestation is depriving many birds, animals, and indeed people, of their own environments. It explores the natural cycle of growth and decay, and the inevitable impact of global trade.

Tender (detail) 2003–05
 US dollars
 Dimensions variable
 Collection: The artist
 Courtesy: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

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Ficus religiosa; *bo-gahal* (Sinhala); *aresu* (Tamil); bo tree
 'Paradisus terrestris'
 (Sri Lankan series) 1999
 Aluminium tin
 36 x 18 x 4cm
 Collection: The artist
 Courtesy: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
 Photograph: Natasha Harth

'Paradisus terrestris'

Hall has produced three distinct 'Paradisus terrestris' suites since the late 1980s, each of which consist of botanical specimens fashioned from tin and sprouting atop recycled sardine cans. Exposed in the partially opened cans are embossed, naked (often erogenous) body parts and playfully erotic scenes.

The first suite, 'Paradisus terrestris' (1989–90), featured plants whose names made reference to paradise, such as the grapefruit (*Citrus paradise*) and the bird of paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*). The allusion to paradise recalls the story of the Garden of Eden and its inhabitant's original, naked innocence which was corrupted by sin. The naked bodies inside Hall's tin can peepholes are an 'earthly' juxtaposition to the floral paradise.

'Paradisus terrestris entitled' (1996 and 1999) focused on native Australian flora and was produced in response to the Mabo/Wik Native Title Claims. The titles of the works not only include the English and Latin botanical names of the plants but also those of Indigenous Australian communities. The artist references the indigenous name as an assertion of ownership.

In 1999, as an artist-in-residence at Lunuganga, a magnificent garden estate in Sri Lanka, Hall created the third series of 'Paradisus terrestris'. In this suite Hall used golden sardine cans for sacred or significant plants, such as the temple flower (frangipani) or lotus, and emphasised the unique knowledge structures inherent to each language.

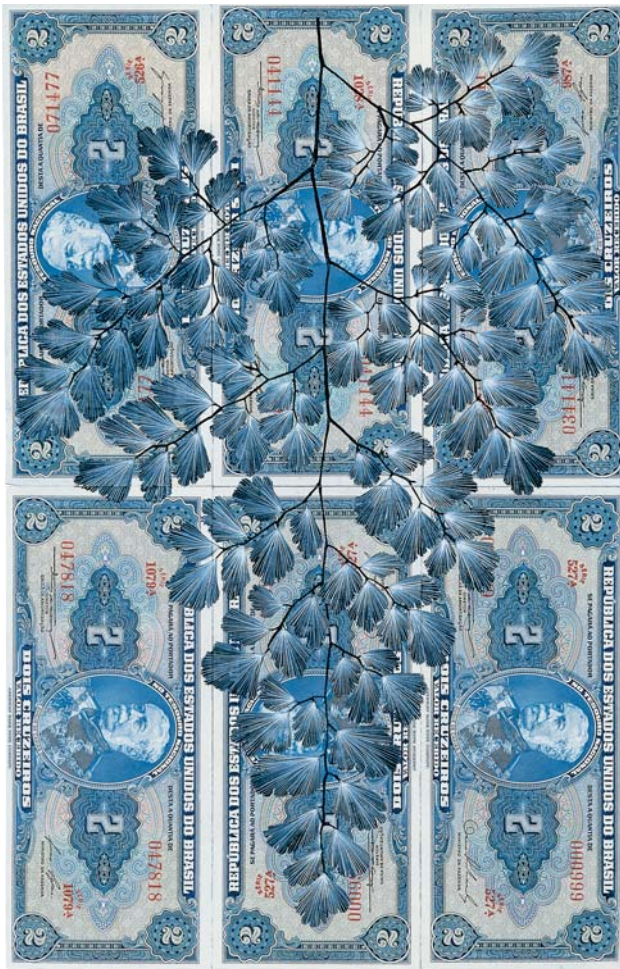
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Leaf litter 1999–2003

The detailed installation *Leaf litter* 1999–2003 began during Hall’s first residency in Sri Lanka and consists of 183 individual leaves painted on groups of bank notes. As in the ‘Paradisus terrestris’ series, this work considers three vernaculars: botanical illustration, botanical naming systems and currency designs. Each of the individual components is coded with images, colours, graphic styles, watermarks, languages and monetary symbols, and is named by both Linnaean and local botanical classifications.

Hall has matched plants and notes carefully, playing with historical and political associations. What seems at first to be straightforward documentation of plants in *Leaf litter* becomes increasingly more complex. Cultural preoccupations specific to certain countries are contrasted against similarities between selected plants. Hall works the tensions between macrocosm and microcosm. Extending approximately twelve metres in length and about two metres in height, the work contains a wealth of codes, contiguities, ambiguities, confluences, contradictions and serendipitous intersections. It is the largest and most encyclopaedic of Hall’s works to date and, paradoxically, the most understated.

Leaf litter (detail) 1999–2003
Adiantum raddianum; maidenhair fern
 Bank notes, gouache (183 components)
 31.2 x 20.0
 Collection: National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra

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‘The price is right’ series (1994)

Hall’s large Polaroid photographs, from the ‘The price is right’ series (1994), present everyday consumer items, encouraging us to consider our role as consumers. Mobile telephones, pills, and Coca-Cola are placed alongside other familiar ‘symbols’ to comment on society’s increasing devotion to items of convenience.

The title of the series is drawn from the popular Australian television game show, in which contestants are rewarded for their knowledge of the value of consumer goods.

Polaroid photography is crucial to these works as the glossy, flat surfaces mimic the look of advertising images and mail-order catalogues. The size of the works also contributes to this effect, making the detail of the objects completely clear and enticing.

The real thing is a Polaroid photograph of a pressed can sculpture of a Buddhist holy man, photographed from both sides and branded with the Coca-Cola logo. The ‘t’ however, is cut from ‘Diet’ to leave ‘Die Coke’.

Untitled (Y fronts and mop)
 (from ‘The price is right’ series) (detail) 1994
 Polaroid photographs
 Diptych: each sheet 56 x 76cm
 Collection: The artist
 Courtesy: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

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Medicine bundle for the non-born child
1993–94

Medicine bundle for the non-born child 1993–94 consists of an intriguing baby’s layette, complete with matinee jacket, booties, bonnet and rattle, knitted from recycled aluminium Coca-Cola cans and a six pack of baby bottles.

Like the Coca-Cola cans in ‘The price is right’ series, Hall transforms them into objects that would not typically be associated with the product, making reference to the effects of multinational companies and consumerism on both global and local economies and communities.

The curious disjunctions that Hall sets up in the work are compelling: the purpose of a layette (to provide comfort and sustenance for a newborn child) is contrasted against the blade-like strips of aluminium; the careful, maternal act of knitting the jacket, booties, bonnet and layette is now infused with a sense of danger; and the rich local histories of the coca and cola plants are overshadowed by what the global Coca-Cola enterprise has come to signify.

Medicine bundle for the non-born child
1993–94

Aluminium, rubber, plastic
Layette comprising matinee jacket: 27.5 x 47.5 x 10cm, booties: 7 x 5 x 8.5cm and bonnet: 13 x 13 x 6cm; rattle: 32 x 8.5 x 6cm; six pack of baby bottles: 17 x 20 x 13cm
Purchased 2000. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

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Public Programs

The following programs will be presented in association with 'The Art of Fiona Hall'. For further information on any of these programs please telephone (07) 3840 7255 or visit <www.qag.qld.gov.au>. All programs are free of charge unless otherwise stated.

Wake up to art!

9.00am Sunday, 20 March

Julie Ewington, Head of Australian Art, will present a talk on the exhibition. Bookings required. Telephone (07) 3840 7278 during office hours.

Artist talk

10.30am Wednesday, 6 April

Presented by Fiona Hall. No bookings necessary, however, seating is limited.
Lecture Theatre

'Material Worlds: A Forum on Object-making in Contemporary Art'

12 noon – 5.00pm Saturday, 9 April

The prevalence of object-making in contemporary art is discussed by national and local speakers, including Fiona Hall and Kevin Murray, Director, Craft Victoria. This forum is presented as part of the Gallery's New Wave Program for tertiary students. Tickets: \$10/5 concessions, including lunch. Bookings are essential by 5 April. Telephone (07) 3840 7255 during office hours. Lecture Theatre

Floortalk

10.30am Wednesday, 13 April

Exhibition floortalk presented by Holly Arden, Curatorial Assistant, Contemporary Australian Art. No bookings necessary.
Gallery 4

Lecture

10.30am Wednesday, 4 May

Exhibition lecture presented by Julie Ewington, Head of Australian Art, and curator of the exhibition. No bookings necessary, however, seating is limited. Lecture Theatre

For additional information, interviews with the artist or images please contact:

Amelia Gundelach, Media Coordinator, Queensland Art Gallery

Telephone: (07) 3840 7162 or 0404 994 985

Email: amelia.gundelach@qag.qld.gov.au

Acknowledgements

Sections of this kit have been derived from *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Sydney, 2005 written by Julie Ewington, Head of Australian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, and content developed by staff of the Gallery's Marketing and Communications, and Access, Education and Regional Services departments.

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