

ESSAY BY  
VERA MEY

PORTRAIT BY  
DR. LISA ANDERSON



## HABITAT

CLAIRE HEALY &  
SEAN CORDEIRO

Their collaborative practice brings together ideas of home, movement and destruction. Healy and Cordeiro create sculpture and installation works that reuse, reform and contain the everyday consumables and detritus of modern life.

Their Solo exhibitions include a survey exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney 2012, *Are we there Yet?* at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington DC 2011, *PREMS* at La bfi 5, Lyon 2009, *The Paper Trail* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2007, *flatpack* at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin 2006.

Their work has been included in numerous group exhibitions in Australia, Belgium, China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Switzerland, Turkey, Taiwan and United Kingdom and the United States. Healy and Cordeiro's installation *Life Span* was part of the Australian representation at the 53RD Venice Biennale. They have also participated in the Setouchi and Auckland Triennials.

Perhaps one of the greatest forms of human control is expressed through the relationship our built environment has with nature. The homeowner or leader of the household sits as controller of their own constructed universe, whether that be a society, nation or suburban home; various philosophies, particularly the Confucian tradition, cite man as the centralising force within this microcosm.

As children we are introduced to controlling situations around through games and play-acting as the key manipulator or Wizard of Oz hiding behind the curtain. Simulacrum of control and order through playing "house" where you pretend to live adult lives, or board games like *The Game of Life* evolve into situations of empire building through virtual flora with games like *Civilization* or *The Sims*. In these simulations the gamer acts in a God-like way, a looming omniscient presence, attaining resources to build situations and fabricate environments. Gaming bloggers note how the dissolution between this constructed virtual world and the way it permeates actual real life is a concern: hopes, feelings and desires end up being shaped by these gestures of immediate control through a virtual or physically simulated interface. It's like we learn through these games to be in the world without realising that the distance between the simulation and actual situation is not that far. How far is playing or pretending "house" that different to having to do it for real (aside from using credit cards)? Considering money or credit is also a virtual substance used to further fuel our material lives, this adds to the irony of our engagements with fabricated and real environments.

"And I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue." Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (1996)

Perhaps there is nothing closer to signs of zombie apocalypse than encountering IKEA on a Sunday afternoon within any IKEA location around the globe. Hordes of people wander in a procession down aisles, looking at what flat pack lives are on offer for their kitted living in the kitted happiness of their kitted culture. Magazines and furniture catalogues sell not objects but lifestyles. We consume these things, these hopes and desires. Any attempt at personalisation is only within parameters of what is already designed, catalogued and on offer.

The incompatibility of design that is produced, bought, sold, distributed and riffed elsewhere means that you can have a Scandinavian-style bedroom somewhere where there isn't a Scandinavian-style environment, climate or ideology. The uncanny aspect of this type of consumerism is that it permeates our habitual rituals right down to infiltrating our desires. For example, despite the absurdity of having a picnic in the equatorial tropics, where outdoor temperatures are so intense it infiltrates standard food hygiene levels as well as leisurely comfort, picnicking is still on offer as something attractive to do on the weekend. Before you realise it, you want to have a picnic too. Mall and indoor culture has so affected our ritual of living where being somewhere air-conditioned is the only way we feel we can survive and feel comfortable.

What drives this insistence on living in certain contexts where we can transport and import our habitat and habits pretty much anywhere, anytime? Perhaps *Habitat* can be seen as a reflection on the naturalisation of our modified civility and provides a comment on our attempts to relearn a supposedly instinctual connection to the natural world. Cordeiro and Healy's sculptures remind us of this tension between the wild and the playful when we are so immersed in how the opposite has happened. We even construct the need to relearn, lose control and be children again- even if it's just a fabrication- it looks and feels real anyway.

cover; Lion  
Lego, IKEA foot stool,  
IKEA glass cup & saucer  
103 X 110 X 60 CM / 2014

left top; Penguin  
Lego, IKEA foot stool,  
IKEA glass cup & saucer  
103 X 110 X 60 CM / 2014

left bottom; Deer  
Lego, IKEA foot stool,  
IKEA glass cup & saucer  
103 X 110 X 60 CM / 2014



right top; octopus  
Lego, IKEA foot stool,  
IKEA glass cup & saucer  
103 X 110 X 60 CM / 2014

right middle; Chimp  
Lego, IKEA foot stool,  
IKEA glass cup & saucer  
103 X 110 X 60 CM / 2014

right bottom; Seal  
Lego, IKEA foot stool,  
IKEA glass cup & saucer  
103 X 110 X 60 CM / 2014

