



ABOVE Susan Ryman *Collecting identity* exhibition installation view, the University Gallery

SUSAN RYMAN

Collecting Identity

PhD (Natural History Illustration) EXHIBITION 5 – 22 March 2014



I walked into my grandmother's kitchen, the larger of two in the big old house in Marrickville. She had always lived with us – or we with her.

There was an array of utensils, cups and plates on the sink. Some were washed and stacked; others awaited their morning wash by her. They sat, suspended by the energy of her life. I was transfixed.

They were no longer just objects, but now loaded with meaning as her belongings, a testament of her life, which soon disappeared.

She had suffered a stroke in the early hours of that morning and never returned to her kitchen.

..... such is my life-long obsession with the stories that objects and images from everyday life can tell.

RECOLLECTION FROM THE ARTIST, AGE 17, 1972



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OPEN Wednesdays – Fridays 10am – 5pm, Saturdays 12 – 4pm or by appointment



The French artist Louise Bourgeois has created many works in her practice that amplify her claim that if life has any meaning it is through memory...and our senses. In turn, it is generally acknowledged that art appreciation is a subjective experience, often affected by personal memory.

In thinking about memory, a particularly practical example, which is close to home for me, comes from Clive James – the ex-patriate Australian author and broadcaster. In the second volume of his memoirs, *Falling Towards England*¹, James says; *When I hold my hands as if in prayer and roll a pencil between them, I can smell the plasticine snakes I made in Class 1B at Kogarah Infants' School.* My own recollection is that of the smell on my hands of the little red-brown house shaped rubber slipped onto the end of the pencil.

As quoted in my own recollection, memories largely seem to be fragments from the past, awakened by the senses and reconfigured by our present perception. Such fragments are often brought to the surface when viewing visual art, no matter how banal the subject might seem to be.

The research I have undertaken has sought to test and expand on this basic knowledge by observing, understanding and recording the multiple meanings that can emerge from one artwork over time. In performing this research into people's shifting perceptions and meaning assignation, a better understanding of the meaning-making function of art and its broader relevance as a cultural catalyst for the expression of personal interpretations has evolved.

Collecting Identity is presented in three parts in order to reflect the research undertaken throughout this doctorate. Firstly, *Stories without words*, which are the multi-panelled artworks fundamental to both my practice and the development of the *Flashcards*. Secondly, all of the original *Flashcards* alongside a boxed published set such as those used for testing, and finally all 20 *PINcard games*, representing the survey, and its findings, each participant being identified by age, gender and discipline.

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¹ Clive James, 'Preface', *Falling Towards England*, (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd); 1985.



FRONT COVER

Susan Ryman
the *Flashcards* (detail) 2008 – 2012
coloured pencil, ink, gouache on rag paper, varnished
432 units each 120mm x 105mm
overall dimensions 1080mm x 5040mm
photograph by Roger Hanley

OPPOSITE PAGE

Susan Ryman
3 *Flashcards* 2008 – 2012
coloured pencil, ink, gouache on rag paper, varnished
each 120mm x 105mm

ABOVE

Susan Ryman
Stories without words – Hanging in the balance (panel 3) 2009
coloured pencil on fabiano paper, varnished
500mm x 700mm

LEFT

Susan Ryman
Stories without words – Fish tales (detail) 2009
coloured pencil and gouache on fabiano paper, varnished
40 panels: each 175mm x 500mm
detail from photograph by Roger Hanley