

Pentaptych perspective

Miegunyah Student Project Award 2022

Chelsea Coon

Introduction

I am an artist and writer who works across performance, photography, sculpture, installation, video, painting, and text. For the Miegunyah Student Project Award 2022, I proposed a multidisciplinary series of performative photographs entitled *Pentaptych perspective* (2022) that each depict compositions created in response to the key interests of Russell Grimwade. This project utilises my principal discipline of performance art as the methodology of the project and will reflect the intersection between material and visual culture collections as well as the diversity of academic disciplines at the University of Melbourne.

In addition, the photographs were developed in accordance with research conducted on select collection pieces including crystal and glassware decorative artworks as well as consultation of select rare books from the varied Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Collection within the University's Art Collection.

Project Description

My practice-led, performance-based photographic project entitled *Pentaptych perspective* (2022) comprises of five archival photographic prints that each articulate a particular relationship between the Collection objects, space, and my body. Each photograph depicts a distinct thematic category inspired by the key interests of Russell Grimwade as he was a:

1. **Collector**
2. **Industrialist**
3. **Chemist**
4. **Botanist**
5. **Historophile**

The intended focus of this multidisciplinary project from the onset was to produce a performance-based photographic series conceptually inspired by and produced with pieces in the Collection as I believe there is an inextricable link between Grimwade's interests and what objects are in the collection. Of this, *Pentaptych perspective* draws on the historical and symbolically weighted material of gestures as well as the materiality of crystal, glass, and book fibres. The photographic compositions each loosely reference poses and weighting seen in early still life and portraiture artworks.

In these compositions every detail matters. For instance, the placement of the hands, stance of the body, the presence or absence of objects, all importantly tell a narrative about the person, place, or object. The collection materials possess transtemporal qualities as glass is forever fluid and unfixated; while books may physically decay over time, the ideas inside can endure.

Process & composition

The objects from the collection were accessed on site. During my time with this firsthand interaction with the primary source material of the Collection objects, I created photographic and hand drawn ink sketches, that were utilised to develop the final composition of my photographic series *Pentaptych perspective* were taken on-site at the Tullamarine Potter Store, as well as The University of Melbourne Parkville campus sites of University House and the Baillieu Library.

I first conceived the project photographs would compositionally be developed in accordance with the five core collection themes, and would include my performing body, plinths, and props. As the project developed through practice, I became interested in the challenge of representing each of the core interests of the collection with a single gesture. The question I developed the photographic sketches around was: how much information is required gesturally to communicate or allude to the five distinct core interests of Russell Grimwade?

I realised that the core interests are inextricably interconnected. The gestural exercises I conducted, i.e., test shots performed to camera, coincided with information that had become clear from accessing objects within the collection itself.

Practice-led

My question was: is it possible to use props and performed gestures in a photographic composition that poetically suggest an interest or thematic without blatantly, or over dramatically spell it out? Simply put, how much information is required to convey the idea?

Trying to solve this question was like a riddle. For instance, how do you convey “collection” is in a photographic composition that only uses the body, a book, a glasswork, and the space? (Instead of literally bringing tons and tons of pieces in? This thought led to the next question: literally what it means to *collect*? Importantly, to collect is a noun, and a collection is an assemblage. So, this meant for my project I was developing five 5 photographic compositions that are collections, from the collection, of collected objects.

Compositionally I had more questions. Firstly, how do you suggestion “botanist” in a photographic composite that only uses the body, a book, a glasswork, and the space without getting so literal and filling the composition without plants?

Furthermore, what performed gesture alongside a composition of objects could stand for “historian”? History, among many definitions and points, means to examine past in the present. Compositionally in the context of performative photographs, I began to test the question: what about a body gesture that suggests this “history”? Could this be conveyed by a specific gaze, such as looking in a direction that could suggest I am looking back in time, but is complicated as my body could face centre (present) - hand/ finger pointing in the future? Is this enough information visually to conceptually communicate “historian”, or is more needed?

Outcomes

The intended outcome is a five photograph pentptych series which I will develop, install, perform, and photograph with Collection pieces. Additionally, I will compose a written summary report, deliver the concluding oral presentation at the Grainger Museum (University of Melbourne, Parkville), and digitally format the components of my project for the University’s website. *Pentptych perspective* addresses time, space, the body, and offers a way to look at and feel the enduring histories contained in certain objects as well as their collections.

The selection of materials and scheduling included researching and identifying an official selection of specific glassware and books aligned with the five core thematic collection interests of Russel Grimwade. I lead this project with a practice-led approach and was in

conversation with the University's Art Collections team regarding availability of specific requests when the project commenced. Their knowledge and expertise of the collection and ongoing feedback helped to direct my queries to specific collection objects, articles, and more. I am grateful for this collaborative relationship dynamic as it ensured that the project had the support it required and stayed on schedule for completion in a tight timeframe.

Acknowledgement

The experience working in an interdisciplinary context with the 'Miegunyah' material and visual culture collection will provide me with the opportunity to use this project to challenge myself to conceive of presentation that has multiple modes of distribution for a range of audiences which clearly articulates the specific research aim. Further, I utilised the print and digital resources on The Russell and Mab Grimwade 'Miegunyah' Collection to structure my research proposal for a project that utilises performance art prior to my engagement with the Collection.

Grimwade Student Award – Collection Objects Works Consulted list

Research with books to develop my photographic and artist book compositions around Grimwade's key interests (works consulted):

Works I developed in response include: Artist book and photograph set (5/5 - Digital colour prints on A3 paper).

1. Collector

Theme: art

Phillipps, L. March (Lisle March), 1863-

1917 Form and colour / by Lisle March Phillipps. London : Duckworth, 1915. 1915 xv, 294 p. ; 23 cm.

701.8 PHIL

2. Industrialist

Theme: Economics

Ely, Richard Theodore, 1854-1943. Elementary principles of economics : together with a short sketch of economic history / by Richard T. Ely and George Ray Wicker. New York : Macmillan, 1911. 1911 xi, 388 p. ; 19 cm.

330 ELY

3. Chemist

Theme: Science

Fuller, Thomas, 1654-1734.

Pharmacopœia extemporanea, or, A body of medicines, containing a thousand select prescripts answering most intentions of cure : to which are added useful scholia, a

catalogue of remedies, and copious index for the assistance of young physicians / by Thomas Fuller. London :

Printed for W. Innys, 1714. 1714 [18], 13, [1], 512, [32] p. ; 20 cm.

615.1142 FULL

Grimwade, Russell, Sir, 1879-1955. [Chemistry lecture notes] [manuscript] / [Russell Grimwade]. 1899-1901.

1899-1901 3 v. ; 24 cm.

540 GRIM : v.1 1899

4. Botanist

Theme: Botany

Sulman, A. E. (Annie E.) Australian wild flowers / photographed by A.E. Sulman. Sydney : Angus & Robertson, [191-?] (Sydney : Edward Lee) 191 60 p. of plates : ill. ; 22 cm.

582.130994 SULM

5. Historophile

Theme: Exploration,

Cook Anderson, George William.

A new, authentic, and complete collection of voyages round the world, undertaken and performed by royal authority. Containing a new, authentic, entertaining, instructive, full, and complete historical account of Captain Cook's first, second, third, and last voyages, undertaken by order of His present Majesty, for making new discoveries in geography, navigation, astronomy, &c. in the Southern and Northern Hemispheres, &c., &c., &c. To which will be added, complete and genuine narratives of other voyages of discovery round the world, &c. The whole of these voyages of Capt. James Cook, &c., being newly written by the editors from the authentic journals of several principal officers and other gentlemen under the immediate direction of George William Anderson, Esq., assisted by a principal officer who sailed in the Resolution sloop, and by other gentlemen of the Royal Navy. London, Printed by A. Hogg [1786?] 1786 655 p. maps, plates, ports. 39 cm.

910.41 ANDE

Theme: Reference

The handy reference atlas of the world.

Edinburgh : J. Bartholomew & Son, the Geographical

Institute, 1923. 1923 66, 223, 171 p. : ill., col. maps; 19 cm.

912 HAND

Research with glassware objects to develop my photographic and artist book compositions around Grimwade's key interests (works consulted):

Works I developed in response include Photograph set (5/5 - Digital colour prints on A3 paper) and artist book.

Glassware 1: 200. DOOR STOP Ovoid shape in green glass enclosing two tiered flowers with air-bubble centres rising from a flower pot. English c. 1840 9 cm. The gift of Gilbert & Florence Vasey.

Glassware 2: Pair of Georgian wineglasses [c. 1760]. English. Glass (enamel twist stem). 13.7 x 6.9 cm (diam.) (wine glass 1). 13.2 x 7.0 cm (diam.) (wine glass 2). Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973. 1973.0434.001.006

Glassware 3: Paperweight [c. 1850]. French (Baccarat) (manufacturer). Glass. 4.8 x 6.5 cm (diam.). Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973. 1973.0597.000.000

Glassware 4: Paperweight [early 20th century]. Bohemian/Czechoslovakian (Baccarat) (manufacturer). Glass. 7.5 x 9.0 cm (diam.). Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973.1973.0597.000.000

Glassware 5: Decanter jug [c.1880-1900]. English. Amber glass. 24.3 x 10.9 cm (diam.). Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973.1973.0601.000.000

Bibliography

Alisa Bunbury, ed. *Pride of Place: Exploring the Grimwade Collection*, The Miegunyah Press, 2020.

John Poynter, Russell Grimwade, The Miegunyah Press, 1967.

Encyclopedia of Australian Science: <http://www.eoas.info/biogs/P002563b.htm>

Grimwade Collection overview <https://art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/collection/the-russell-mab-grimwade-miegunyah-collection/>

Art collection search (in the Advanced Search function in the Credit line field, choose 'Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest' on <http://storeroom.its.unimelb.edu.au/ipm/>

Debbie Robinson, Russell Grimwade's Appreciation of Glass: A Matter of Art, Science and Industry. University of Melbourne Collections, Issue 22, June 2018.

Artist Biography

Chelsea Coon (b. 1989 United States) is an artist and writer whose work focuses on the shifting interconnections of the body, time, and space. She utilises endurance to reconsider limits of the body primarily through performance as well as installation, sculpture, painting, photography, video, and text. She has exhibited internationally in festivals, biennales, and galleries in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East. She received her BFA at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (2012), MFA at Tufts University (2014), and a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Theatre, Performance and Contemporary Live Arts at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Scuola Teatro Dimitri, Switzerland (2015). Recent writings included her essay 'You Always Hurt the One You Love: Transference, Pain, Endurance' in *Rated RX: Sheree Rose with and after Bob Flanagan* (Ohio State University Press, 2020). She is a recipient of the Yousuf Karsh Prize in Photography (2013), Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant (2015), and the Australian Research Training Program Scholarship (2019-2022). Coon is a PhD candidate in practice-led research at the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne. She lives and works in Naarm/Melbourne, Australia.