Pat Brassington

WORK IN PROGRESS #4

Guest Curator Helen McDonald

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Visual art is, by definition, about looking. But it is surprising how infrequently the deeper, psychic activities propelling the act of looking are addressed explicitly in art. The sensual, the sublime and the sexual are acknowledged as part of art’s content, but evasively, as if such qualities were independent of a viewer’s engagement with a work of art. Pat Brassington’s art, however, leaves us little choice but to admit that what Karen Burns calls ‘prohibited thoughts’ proliferate in art galleries. Looking at Brassington’s work, there is no denying the impact of the Freudian century on the ways that we understand our relationship with art. Now, asking how we see directs us away from empirical observation towards the psychic drives of perception.

This exhibition reminds us that the work of contemporary artists is deeply embedded in the history of ideas; another legacy of the twentieth century, whose art oscillated continuously between the poles of the retinal and the intellectual. It does so, most obviously, on the basis of the striking impact of Pat Brassington’s images. But the careful, challenging responses developed by Helen McDonald and Karen Burns in their catalogue essays are also evidence of the importance of an art engaged with the history of ideas. We are grateful for Helen McDonald’s contributions throughout the project, as guest curator. And we thank Pat Brassington for the enthusiasm and generosity that she has brought to the exhibition.
Imagine you are a lost child who catches sight of her mother in the distance, or a woman gazing at the body of her lover. When there is threat or temptation, you need to believe the evidence of your eyes. This instinct affects the way you look at art or photography, the signs and symbols that stand for what is real. Later you might think visual images are treacherous, that all along they’ve led you astray. But if you ponder upon the stuff of illusion you find humour, magic and invention. This is where Pat Brassington’s art begins. It takes the seductiveness and assurance of visual images as its premise, then joins in the game of enchantment.

Brassington’s early works, $1 + 1 = 3$, 1983 (cat. 39, fig. 1), evoke the anxieties of domestic lives, of bodies in cramped suburban spaces and tense family relationships. They assume the form of casual snapshots – not the ones you find included in the family album, but those that were discarded because the moment was not right. Someone wandered out of shot perhaps, or there is no face to focus on, no event to remember. This is not to say that the scenes are accidental, for each is fixed and meticulously staged. The camera points towards the ground from a voyeuristic angle, as though set to seize upon something hidden or secret. One shot could have been taken by a spying neighbour looking over the backyard fence, another by a lecherous uncle from the dinner table. Doubts can grow into phobic narratives. Even the dog’s legs arouse suspicion as though the body they are attached to were dead. Did the dog crawl there to die, or was its corpse dragged from somewhere else and hidden behind the couch from the rest of the family?

Another sequence in this series traces a lover’s gaze perhaps, or that of a guilty child hiding behind a wardrobe in her father’s bedroom. The body is truncated only partially in shot, sharply delineated from its surroundings, or suddenly dissolved into shadow. With Freud on our minds we can see sex even in the design. Erect forms of light, textured surfaces and dark spaces are subtly and strategically placed, enhanced by the tonal effects of black and white film. They are reminiscent of early horror movies shot through with paranoia and desire. But unlike cinema their absolute stillness underscores the formal discipline and careful arrangement that aim to contain these unruly forces.

Incongruity is another means by which Brassington’s art tricks us into strangeness. Jumbling genres in the 1980s she collected a mixture of images including photographs, postcards, art books, medical textbooks and horror movie stills, then selected and arranged them in witty sequence. She adopted the practice of ‘appropriation’ to review Surrealist art: the punning eroticism that Surrealists found in ideas about love, and their strategies for subverting art norms. In Untitled, from the series Memory au rebours, 1987 (cat. 38), there is a suited man with a pumpkin for a head, a ball held to a wall, a hand holding a large toy eyeball and a small fish dangling in front of an open mouth. The surprise provoked by this placing side by side of images of body parts and orifice taken from their former contexts comes as a reflex that at worst turns to convulsions of gagging. The sequence functions as a sort of visual sentence, which is not logical, but makes affective bodily sense.
There is humour too in Brassington’s sequences. An errant tongue in a child’s face dressed up with a smart scarf rolls like the ball in the image next to it towards the trumpet of a daffodil in the third (1989–90, cat. 37). Here the body asserts its presence through allegory and association and you have to smile at its cunning purpose. The repetition of culturally significant body parts such as eyes, tongues and hands confuses differences between other body parts, art genres and living species while highlighting the specificity of each. It is at these points of difficulty in differentiation that Brassington’s art achieves an illusion of stunning uncomfortable accuracy.

Brassington’s art processes parallel a Freudian narrative of the infant’s progress towards identity and in the early 1990s she developed this analogy through new methods of framing and production. In This is not a lovesong, 1991 (cat. 34), a white mount separates the image of a strong stubbled chin of ambiguous gender from an image above it of diaphanous rays and shadows. The upper image is positioned where the nose would be situated if it were a realist portrait so that the strip of mounting appears to gag the mouth and prevent breathing. Identity is asserted and denied, at once underscoring ambiguity and physical discomfort. In Untitled III, 1995 (cat. 30), mirror images of a woman’s face viewed from behind, with the body below dissolving into formlessness under water, are joined like Siamese twins in the womb.

The theme of wetness gains intensity in The pond series, 1995 (cat. 27, fig. 9), and In the pines, 1995 (cat. 31, fig. 4), in which Brassington immersed ‘found’ objects and an old photograph in water before (re)photographing and framing them. In the pines displays a photograph of a distant female relative, but the head and feet have sunk into obscurity, leaving a melancholy apparition with arms and hands clasped before a pretty dress. A gold frame memorialises this absent maternal body. By contrast The pond’s separately framed images of floating uterine-like things and a sodden vulva-shaped hat announce the return of the repressed. In Rising damp, 1995 (cat. 28, fig. 6), another form of dank femininity seeps into remnants of intimate daily life when a merciless raid on the laundry basket abruptly uncovers them. Thirty or more photographs of stained old-fashioned women’s underwear that was compressed under glass are systematically arranged in an elegant grid-shaped wall-hanging. A rigorous formalism thus urges the spectator to chart the mouldy progress of abjection.

The first person singular, which is not necessarily the artist, arrives in Brassington’s oeuvre with the title In my mother’s house, 1994 (cat. 32). The series includes four images: a wallpapered bedroom, a portrait of a distracted girl, part of a pillow and a medical photograph of someone (the same girl?) with thyroid disease. Outdoing the phallic neck in Man Ray’s Anatomies series, the bulbous swellings look like built-in testicles. If this representation of physical illness is a metaphor for abnormal sexuality, its relationship to the other objects in the series and to the inferred architectural context of the mother’s house is metonymic. As a part that represents the whole, it is a deformed member of a dysfunctional family. This is foreshadowed perhaps by the horror that emanates from In my father’s house, 1992 (cat. 33), a Gothic nightmare rivalling the Surrealism of André Kertész. Three life-sized doors open onto floor-lit black and white collages of larger than life-sized partial figures: a rear view of a giant naked woman, a girl in Victorian dress flying forward and a looming naked back that stubbornly prevents entry or identification. Considering the title of this series, the lurid image of an erect red tongue pasted over the rippling surface of the back drives home the dread of incest and child abuse.
Art writers have responded to the above works differently, interpreting them as a bleak vision of the future, a feminist rite of passage or the expression of a sort of failure to articulate extremes of passion and pain. It is inevitable that the commentaries interpret the psyche of the artist or culture to some extent, for Brassington’s talent stems from her unique sensitivity to the subjective uncertainties that surround visual images. As I have attempted to show, this talent becomes manifest when she turns sensitivities into artistic strengths. By playing the conjurer, Brassington involves the spectator in the game of visual seduction while subtly taking charge, marshalling lines, softening surfaces, distorting forms and shifting boundaries. In this way she enjoys our participation in the game, but remains inscrutable and aloof. Her tricky Freudian scenarios do not add up to a coherent pathology and the components of her half-told stories are constantly disassembled and reprocessed through different materials, media, physical contexts and locations. No biography is evident in the work, no authorial intention is obvious and no performing body takes centre stage.

Given her acute responsiveness to visual images, then, why does Brassington choose to play the seducer? Perhaps it is not so much the power to seduce us that she desires as the power to divert our attention from her or from the obsessive quest for identity in which visual images involve us, and through which advertising in particular has become the commercial front of global capitalism. Resistance to this and to more intimate abuses of power could be a point of departure for Brassington’s enactment of a subtle thickly disguised antipathy to being seduced, an aversion that drives the art’s processes and orders its forms. Never acted out in a violent or obvious way, or directed at any person, it is a defensive type of hostility that is intelligent, witty and even gentle.

In the second half of the 1990s the mood of Brassington’s art seems to lighten. She abandoned her practice of regulating visual sense through syntax and multiple framing, and turned her attention to building up the affective potential of singular visual forms within individual frames. Advances in digital photography such as Photoshop assisted her in this project, as did the introduction of colour to her art. Morphing replaced techniques of collage as she reconfigured old photographs plus new ones that were taken especially for the purpose. The resulting synthetic forms are loosely connected to the artist’s earlier Freudian constructions, but have now become seamless figures of fantasy. As a gallery of weird pin-ups of truncated torsos, mannequins and dolls, interspersed with ungainly pairs of legs and feet, they evoke an uncanny post-human reality.

Artificiality is introduced in *The frog*, 1997 (cat. 24, cover image), for instance, with a superimposed line of soft orange breath issuing from the mouth of one half of the Siamese twins referred to above. The former watery context suggests blood or bile, but the orange pixilated surface evokes an ethereal dryness that takes us from the womb to a lighter more open spatio-temporal realm. The image is reminiscent of the wind-blowing cherubs on old maps or Walter Benjamin’s angel of history who is compelled backwards towards the future. I am reminded too of Botticelli’s Flora spewing forth an arc of flowers that shower down to inseminate the Earth in spring – and yet *The frog* seems strangely sterile. A watery theme is also present in *First wet*, 2001 (cat. 14), in which a stiff-legged doll wearing a mask and snorkel resembles a foetus *in utero*, a child on the beach, a robot or an astronaut. Each of these digital prints functions as a discreet image in its own right making connections not only in the mind of the viewer, but with other images in the artist’s oeuvre and the history of western art across genres through virtual space and real space.

As hybrid identities, Brassington’s digitally produced figures do not invoke the Oedipal family of psychoanalysis, but are parts in a set of material relations in which memory is always implicated. As a totality of images, there is not a common feature that underpins them, but a set of resemblances that is shared by the ‘family’ as a whole. In fact Brassington invites this perspective on her work in *Fragments of from memory*, 1992–2002 (cat. 1, fig. 2), in which bits and pieces that relate to her other works were collected, added and subtracted over time and displayed and redisplayed as a sort of family group-portrait. New connections bring images of once unrelated objects into close proximity with one another. This oddness is reiterated in the imagery of the digital prints in which tensions between the component parts cause discomfort verging on revulsion. In *Drink me*, 1997 (cat. 25), *Sago child*, 1999 (cat. 21) and *Wool*, 1998 (cat. 23), for example, partial images of a woman and children come close to something repugnant: a garish gnome at the foot of the woman’s dress, a shaft of blue light in a child’s navel and a crinkled surface in place of a tongue.
Like a sphinx, psychoanalysis rears its sublime but terrible head whenever a certain riddle — in this instance Pat Brassington's work — presents itself. Most of us know Sophocles’ monstrous sphinx, a hybrid creature and riddle poser who destroys unsuccessful respondents until the day she is vanquished by the youthful Oedipus. The play Oedipus Rex was one of Sigmund Freud's most significant cultural finds. Amongst other things psychoanalysis was a memorial to western textual culture. Freud ransacked the Oedipus grave only to uncover a potent psychoanalytic tale in the story of a young man fated to marry his mother and kill his father. The Oedipus complex entombs a key Freudian model and remains the nub of popular jokes. The Oedipus text is rich and discloses a number of psychoanalytic treasures. One more gleaming object from this play is usefully unearthed and examined in order to sift through Pat Brassington's work. This is the artefact known as prohibition.

In the opening pages of Oedipus Rex prohibition seems an unlikely topic since Oedipus's curse is stated in the prologue. However the drama operates by mechanisms of suppression and secrecy. The script calibrates an ever-closing gap between the prophecy's declaration and its enactment. Information is withheld, language works through ellipsis and allusion and many characters declaim only to announce prohibitions around speaking. Few communicate directly. The difference between speech as mere sound and speech as an echo of truth emerges as something insists on being said. Unwanted information persists in its journey from the shadows into visibility.

It was Lacan, one of those dead fathers, who famously observed that the unconscious is structured like a language. This comparison was one strategy for mapping continuities between 'the seeming disorder of symptoms or dreams and the normal language through which we recognise each other.' (This is of course a populist perversion of his complex enunciations about signification and the signifying chain. But to speak in translation here.) Psychoanalysis directs our attention away from the marbled surface of speech to its fractures: to symptoms, slips of the tongue and dreams. In this friction we trace what insists on being spoken against what is allowed to be said.

Like the spectators and readers of Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex, we come to the main event knowing the narrative's silhouette in advance: Brassington, art theory, the return of the repressed, the perverse, the abject, the fetish. The work's emergence from a decade of Anglo-feminism alchemically infused by critical French theory remains an inescapable point of origin. And yet relations between Brassington's work and that thing called Psychoanalysis can be imagined differently in order to discover something unseen. In order to retell this tale some art and dramatic import must lie in the telling.

Jane Gallop once observed, 'a “solved” riddle is the reduction of heterogeneous material to logic, to the homogeneity of logical thought, which produces a blind spot, the inability to see the otherness that gets lost in the reduction. Only the unsolved riddle, the process of riddle work before its final completion, is a confrontation with otherness.' Art hovers in the unsolved riddle.
The power of Brassington’s images is tacked to this elemental structure: how to speak what cannot be spoken, how the unsaid emerges. As illustrations of bits and pieces or key terms of psychoanalytic theory the works fail triumphantly. And so should they. Brassington’s images escape the riddle solvers. Like air warped by heat these representations fluctuate and waver. The view undulates and the horizon line shifts anew. These prints and pieces of paper slide from beneath the template. They may lightly register the marks of their readers; spectators scanning the works in order to sift terms such as ‘the fetish’ through a fine mesh at particular historical moments, but the registration marks also grow faint or are pressed over with new markings.

Prohibition’s ground is riven with fracture lines, slips and crevices. According to certain readings feminist theory may be Brassington’s ground, but Brassington’s illusions perforate this territory, fissuring the movement of feminist theory into orthodoxy. In Brassington’s work Untitled from the series 1 + 1 = 3, 1983 (cat. 39, fig. 1) the body of an unknown, unidentified male torso is photographed in intimate close-up and cropped so that flesh and muscle become a landscape. The image’s date and subject matter invoke Laura Mulvey’s key 1975 formulation of male spectatorship and cinematic vision. Late 1970s and early ‘80s feminist visual theory froze and exposed the codes structuring spectatorship: voyeurism, scopophilia, a pleasure in looking, a system organising the male as purveyor of the gaze and the female as passive object. In 1983 Brassington appears to have reversed these codes. Here the headless male body is potentially objectified, exposed and trapped for our visual speculation.

A man’s body is caught in a series of shots. A halo incidentally lights its edges. The man’s body is almost out of frame. Glimpsed on the periphery of vision as a half-captured, half-seen image, the torso hovers as a phantasm. Fleeting and on the move it cannot be fixed. It cannot be steadied, stabilised, examined and dissected. Images flutter like moving butterflies.

The subject seems to insistently escape the camera. Who wields the camera haunting, tracking this artist’s model or lover? In a later addendum to her famous 1975 essay, Mulvey reminds us that her work analysed the ‘masculinisation of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real-life movie goer’. Modern image culture invests looking with pleasure. This pleasure is partly bound up with voyeuristic separation, with scopophilia: the pleasure of using another person visually as an object of sexual stimulation. ‘Masculinist’ like the term ‘patriarchy’ is not a code word for men but describes a system of relations that may or may not produce certain gender positions. This insight is significant and it raises unsettling questions.

Brassington’s work does not condemn a certain model of male spectatorship. 1 + 1 = 3 suggests that we are all deeply enmeshed in this desire, a desire intensified, realised and activated by visual technologies. The famed discomfort aroused by Brassington’s images may arise from the pleasure and unease when viewers – feminists and women included – occupy the voyeur’s seat. Perhaps this feeling is a prohibited topic. Brassington’s work breaks comfortable assumptions about vision, desire and gender orthodoxies.

Psychoanalysis famously attributes sexual motives to apparently non-sexual behaviour. Brassington’s techniques of association remind us, even as we try to forget, that objects and experience are always already insistently sexualised. In the sequence Untitled from the series Memory au rebours, 1989–90 (cat. 35, fig. 8), three images are proffered: a mannequin’s lower back and upturned buttocks, a glossy millipede and a doll’s slightly parted lips in profile portrait. Brassington crops all three objects and insists on our intimate visual relationship to these things. Framing and juxtaposition operate with a sharp-eyed cruelty. Thus the hard, glossy surface of the coiled millipede loses its insect like qualities transmuting into a hose/enema/sexual instrument. The part-opened mouth and pliant lips of the doll seen in profile suggest it may be ready to speak (a gag on the talking cure) or insist on the mouth as sexual orifice. These images of pliant openings and a glossy member suggest sexual rituals of domination and compliance.

Sex and sexuality are imbricated in power relations. This triangle is erotic. Sex often involves gestures and genres of dominance, submission, the giving over of power and the social stylisation of sex into a repertoire of poses and roles where the participants shuttle between their own performance, their interpretation of the role bestowed or chosen for them and the power relations entailed in the role playing. Being an advocate of feminist theory does not allow one to easily escape the triangle. The Power in desire unsettles us all.
Brassington’s works insistently provoke me. I become an unwilling explorer, descending into those crevices, tracing the fracture lines with invisible fingers, hearing the land rend away from itself. In this landscape, a wind haunted desert of the imagination, I consistently wonder whether my thoughts expose my own perversity, some form of abnormality.

In this desert I comfort myself with family snapshot memories of ordinary life. But I’ve taken the wrong set with me. I’ve taken a Brassington set and these ordinary domestic snapshots and familial rituals are infused with sinister import. In Untitled VII, 1980–2002 (cat. 8, fig. 10), a young girl stands against the wall. The image evokes a specific family ritual and memory of mine: height measurement. But the marking tape or pencil line that stencils the child’s imprint against the wall has become a series of bonds, straightening a set of horizontal lines up over the child’s legs, torso and head. A neat aesthetic order of taped lines sticks the body to the wall and cauterises, incises, traces this child with geometry. Most disturbingly the tape covers her mouth and her eyes are voluntarily closed. I assume this because her eyes aren’t taped over. But on second thoughts some other force may be directing their closure. Questions whirl upward. Is it a childish game? Is she complicit in a more sinister activity? Someone else has tied her up but who is this? The ties that bind us. Are the bonds the result of disturbed parents or other adults? Murderous parents inhabit oedipal foundation stories. Oedipus was dispatched by his parents who wanted him to die in the wilderness. Even if the girl’s bondage and closed eyes are the product of childish games, these reverberate with potential violence, with sexual exploration and children’s imbrication in rituals of exclusion enacted against other children.

Psychoanalysis insists on the sexualised nature of children’s early experience. Together with sex education pedagogy it must be one of the few domains in which this conjunction (children and sexuality) is permissible. We may skirt the confrontation by focusing on theoretical models such as a child’s acquisition of sexual identity as gender. But there is something insidiously sexual in many of Brassington’s images. Like a sparking, snaking downed power line, her voltage derives from an unpredictable trajectory. Are they only a critique of patriarchal norms or a revelation of the sexual sedimentation of everyday life or do they snake through more electric territory? What if they illuminate in some occasional high-powered flash topics such as sexuality’s threshold, that moment when adolescent sexuality becomes evanescent, when children give way to ‘adult’ behaviours or children experiment sexually with other children or explore their own bodies, when adolescents begin to recognise and exercise their sexual power?

In Akimbo, 1996 (cat. 26), Brassington punctures our cozy social strictures. We have come to expect this from her but she manages to make us gasp once more. She offers us a close-up vision of silky crisp satin taffeta, so close you can hear the swish of stiff fabric against thigh. This dress does not hug the body but draws attention to the body beneath. Arms literally akimbo, a young girl’s or young woman’s body executes a dense choreography of pirouette. This lovely feminine vision is reinforced by one of the major signs of the feminine. The dress is split a little, a rent perhaps; no maybe it is a strategically positioned gash. Why do we feel some friction between the dress and the gash? They should function in a chain of feminine signs. The feminine and pleasure itself are stitched into a demure dress, stitched into an acceptable social form surely stripped of sexual overtones. And yet the swollen dress, the outstretched arms, the sound of taffeta against skin signal a sexual address. The cloth sounds, fabric on skin creates small tremors, a rippling of the surface.

What is displayed in this sweet feminine image? What pleasure lurks here? The image activates our own mechanisms of repression as we struggle to not see the implications of the image, to see the gash but not follow it through, not tracing the folds where innocence and sexuality are conjoined. Is she holding her skirts out or about to lift them up? Does she confront us with the contradictory desires held in all of these layers: that moment in time as a young woman when you exercise your sexual power and still reserve the right as you should to refuse to be only a sexualised being? These images release such contradictions. Brassington’s cloth and rent fabric release our unease as we shuttle between what we should say and what throbs in our own heads.

Brassington the seamstress cuts a lyrical, seductive and familiar social fabric only to fray the conventional seams, stitching images of young girls into a beautiful aestheticism. In The frog, 1997 (cat. 24, cover image), a young woman’s/girl’s eyes are closed in an ordinary moment of exhalation. Her gestures denote concentration; her slightly crossed fingers (a little web-like), the thin tongue of breath turned into flame or smoke, the normally invisible breath (in average temperature conditions) is captured here. The title re-frames the photographed girl, gives her an uglier point of comparison, sending us scuttling for her weird amphibian affinities. Children’s alterity, their monstrous potential carves up lyrical and conventional aesthetics. Brassington’s steady, flint-eyed gaze is like a graffiti artist combing the platitude of mass-produced images and stealing in to wilfully deform them, liberating another meaning awaiting release.
Brassington insistently juxtaposes life's visual surface and the tremors bulging beneath. The disease jostling within the familiar is suggested by the work *In my mother's house*, 1994 (cat. 32). At first the title and image conjure the strictures of domesticity. But this parental domain is gendered, and maternity may be a code word for feminism. If so, mothers have something to answer for.

Four separate images are organised into a sequence. The first image presents a claustrophobic, dimly lit room densely patterned with ornamented wallpaper and is followed by a portrait shot of a young girl's face. A cropped image of a pillow is next in the sequence followed by another portrait. The two portraits' conventions – black and white film, antiquated clothing and the exposure of a goitered throat in one image – evoke the medical portraits of nineteenth-century psychoanalysis. In Brassington's wondrous comparison details from one image reverberate in another through the alchemy of association. Thus after viewing the goitres in the girl's exposed throat we notice the lumps in the patterned pillow. These things press from inside and pressurfise the surface of things. The photographed women are mute of course, blank-faced or with throat not mouth exposed. Conventionally women spoke for psychoanalysis in the voices of hysterics or madwomen. Brassington's sequence presses insistently against the strictures I may want to impose. I find myself caught between telling a straightforward feminist tale and pondering the less safe route the work offers me. Is it a straightforward feminist critique of domestic claustrophobia and repression or is it a critique of the strictures surrounding Woman, remembering that an archaeology of that sign has been constructed by feminism as well as psychoanalysis? Perhaps we have forgotten the demonic Mothers (Sylvia Plath's and Nancy Friday's), a target in young women's sniper sights as they analysed the maternal role in structures of oppression. It is not always easy to say this.

These are some of the prohibited thoughts that Brassington's work releases in me. The attempt to tell, the movements of enunciation generate Brassington's realm of allusion. She returns us, like Oedipus, to that domain of ellipsis: the gap between the marbled surface and its fractures. Watching Brassington's images helps me imagine another life for the Sphinx, an earlier life before she was bidden to act as patriarchy's monster. She once inhabited a realm of fleeting desert winds, watching tracks in the sand, observing the sedimentation of objects beneath dunes. Here in this watching, waiting life there is plenty of time to dream up riddles and soar in the imaginative currents of suggestive possibility.

7 Foucault's observation is pertinent here. 'Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.' See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, Penguin Books, London, 1990, p. 48.
cat. 36 (detail), fig. 11
Biography

Selected solo exhibitions

2001 *Gentle*, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
1997 *Default Blue*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
1996 *This is not a love song*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
1993 *Incorporeal 2: Brassington: Book of Jonah*, 1932 (scenography by David McDowell and Edward Colless), The Basement, Hobart
1991 *Maybe you've seen it all before*, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

Things will tell you their names, 24hr Art – Northern Territory Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin
1989 *Pat Brassington*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart and Cockatoo Gallery, Launceston
1988 *Memory: Au Rebours*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
1987 *Eight Easy Pieces*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney and Praxis Contemporary Art Space, Perth
1986 *Eight Easy Pieces*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart

Selected group exhibitions

2002 *Photographica Australis*, ARCO, Sala de Exposiciones del Canal de Isabel II, Madrid, Spain
2001 *Poets and Painters*, Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart

The Lightness of Being: Contemporary Photographic Art from Australia, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne

Australian Paper Art Awards 2001, George Adams Gallery, Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne


The Lightness of Being: Contemporary Photographic Art from Australia, Neue Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin and touring to Dresden, Dusseldorf and Stuttgart, Germany

World Without End: Photography and the 20th Century, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

1998 *Telling Tales*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney and Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria

Shell Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Art Centre

*Respond Red or Blue*, Royal Melbourne Hospital

1997 *The Enigmatic Object: Photography and the Uncanny*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Shell Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Art Centre

*Geelong Print Prize*, Geelong Art Gallery

*Launch*, Stills Gallery, Sydney

1996 *Hobart City Art Prize*, Carnegie Gallery, Hobart

Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography!, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

1995 *Bad Light*, Bond Store, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart; Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne

Art, Gender, Identity: *Works by Women Artists from the Permanent Collection*, Devonport Gallery and Arts Centre

Colonial parasites to Contemporary Profession, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

*Home Body*, Macquarie House, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston and Carnegie Gallery, Hobart

(with Geoff Parr) *Home Made*, Plimsoll Gallery, Centre for the Arts, University of Tasmania, Hobart

Photographing Architecture: Spatiality, Ideology and the Body, University Gallery, University of Tasmania, Launceston


The Aberrant Object: *Women, Dada and Surrealism*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne

*True Stories*, Artspace, Sydney

1992 *Blink*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide

*Camera Obscura*, 24hr Art – Northern Territory Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin

*Psichosoma*, Plimsoll Gallery, Centre for the Arts, University of Tasmania, Hobart

Medium Density: *New Works from the Drawings and Photography Collections*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra

1991 *Ooze: Six Tasmanian Artists*, Roar 2 Gallery, Melbourne; Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart; University Gallery, University of Tasmania, Launceston

Fragmentation and Fabrication: *Recent Australian Photography*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Frames of Reference: *Aspects of Feminist Art*, a Dissonance Project organised by Artspace, Sydney

Heterogeneity/Herterogeneity, a Dissonance Project, Campbelltown City Art Gallery

1990 *Add Magic*, a National Billboard Project organised by the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney

*42 Degrees South*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart and toured Australia and New Zealand

1989 *Australian Perspectives*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

*Tableaux Mourant: Photography and Death*, Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart

(with Geoff Parr) *Metro Mariva*, ARX ‘89, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts

1988 *Landfall*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart

1987 *Photogenics: Works from the University Collection*, Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart

Feminist Narratives, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne

Fabrications: *Recent Contemporary Art from Tasmania*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart and George Paton Gallery

1982 *North Hobart Photographic Gallery* The Michele, Pat, Kaye and Wayne Show, Tasmanian School of Art Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart
Bibliography

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- Colless, E, 'At the edge of the world', Art and Australia, vol. 30, no. 4, 1993.
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Books
- Colless, E, 'Pat Brassington', The Error of My Ways, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1996.

Exhibition catalogues
- Colless, E, This is not a love song, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, 1996.

Awards
- Australian Paper Art Award, Melbourne, 2001
- Acquisitive Works on Paper Award, Geelong Art Gallery, 1997
- Maude Vizard-Wholohan Art Prize Purchase Award, Art Gallery of South Australia, 1990
- Shell Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Arts Centre, 1997
- Visual Arts/Craft Board professional development grant, 1994
- Visual Arts/Craft Board project grant, 1989

Collections
- Artbank, Sydney
- Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
- Burnie Regional Gallery
- Devonport Gallery and Art Centre
- Fremantle Arts Centre
- Geelong Art Gallery
- Monash University, Melbourne
- National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
- Sydney University of Technology
- Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
- University of the Northern Territory, Darwin
- University of Tasmania, Hobart
List of works in the exhibition

A reduced group of work will be exhibited at Carnegie Gallery, Hobart.
Dimensions of work are given in centimetres; height precedes width precedes depth.

Pat Brassington is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney.

Pat Brassington acknowledges the assistance of DARF (Digital Art Research Facility), the Tasmanian School of Art, the University of Tasmania.
12 Boucher 2001
digital print
60 x 43 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

13 Fig. 5, p. 9
Dear hearts 2001
digital print
65 x 39 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

14 First wet 2001
digital print
74 x 54 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

15 Fig. 3, p. 7
Twins 2001
digital print
69 x 55 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

16 Lunch 2000
digital print
70 x 36.6 cm (image)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Collection Benefactors’ Program 2000

17 The flea 2000
digital print
70 x 46 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

18 Fig. 7, p. 11
October 2000
digital print
70 x 49 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

19 Camera 2000
digital print
65 x 46 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

20 Feeding time 1999
digital print
67.9 x 35.5 cm (image)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Purchased with funds provided by Rowan Ross and Annie Bleakley-Ross, Sydney 2000

21 Sago child 1999
digital print
69.7 x 50.3 cm (image)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Collection Benefactors’ Program 2000

22 Small thing 1998
digital print
68 x 48.5 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

23 Wool 1998
digital print
72 x 58.2 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

24 Cover image
The frog 1997
digital print
80.8 x 70.3 cm (image)
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. Purchased 1998. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant

25 Drink me 1997
digital print
100 x 80 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

26 Akimbo 1996
digital print
115 x 80 cm (image)
Private collection

27 The pond 1996
overall dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

28 I Wet wear
silver gelatin photograph
42 x 28 cm (image)

29 II Tight thread
silver gelatin photograph
42 x 28 cm (image)

30 Untitled III 1995
silver gelatin photographs
diptych, each 50.3 x 40.4 cm (image)
Queensland Art Gallery Collection Purchased 1998. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant

31 Fig. 4, p. 8
In the pines 1995
digital print
78 x 50 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

32 In my mother’s house 1994
silver gelatin photographs
4 in series, each 52 x 35.5 cm (image)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Purchased 1996

33 In my father’s house 1992
doors, photographs, strip lighting overall 230 x 800 cm
Courtesy the artist

34 This is not a love song 1991
black and white photographs
diptych, each 34 x 25 cm
Courtesy the artist

35 Fig. 8 (detail), p. 16
Untitled from the series
Memory au rebours 1989–90
silver gelatin photographs
3 in sequence, each 61.2 x 51.4 cm (image): overall 180 x 210 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

36 Fig. 11 (detail), p. 19
Untitled from the series
Memory au rebours 1989–90
silver gelatin photographs
3 in sequence, each 70 x 60 cm (image)
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

37 Untitled from the series
Memory au rebours 1989–90
silver gelatin photographs
3 in sequence, each 47 x 37 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

38 Untitled from the series
Memory au rebours 1987
silver gelatin photographs
4 in sequence, each 75 x 56 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist

39 Fig. 1 (detail), p. 6
Untitled 1–9 from the series
1 + 1 = 3 1983
silver gelatin photographs
9 in series, each 18 x 28 cm (image)
Courtesy the artist
Curator’s acknowledgments

Helen McDonald is grateful to Pat Brassington for the privilege of working with her, and to Chris McAuliffe for his invitation to curate this show. She wishes to thank also Karen Burns for her superb catalogue essay, and the wonderful Bala Starr and Joanna Bosse for their curatorial expertise and generosity. In addition, the skilled assistance of Kate Scott, Tim McMonagle and Henry Gaughan is greatly appreciated.
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