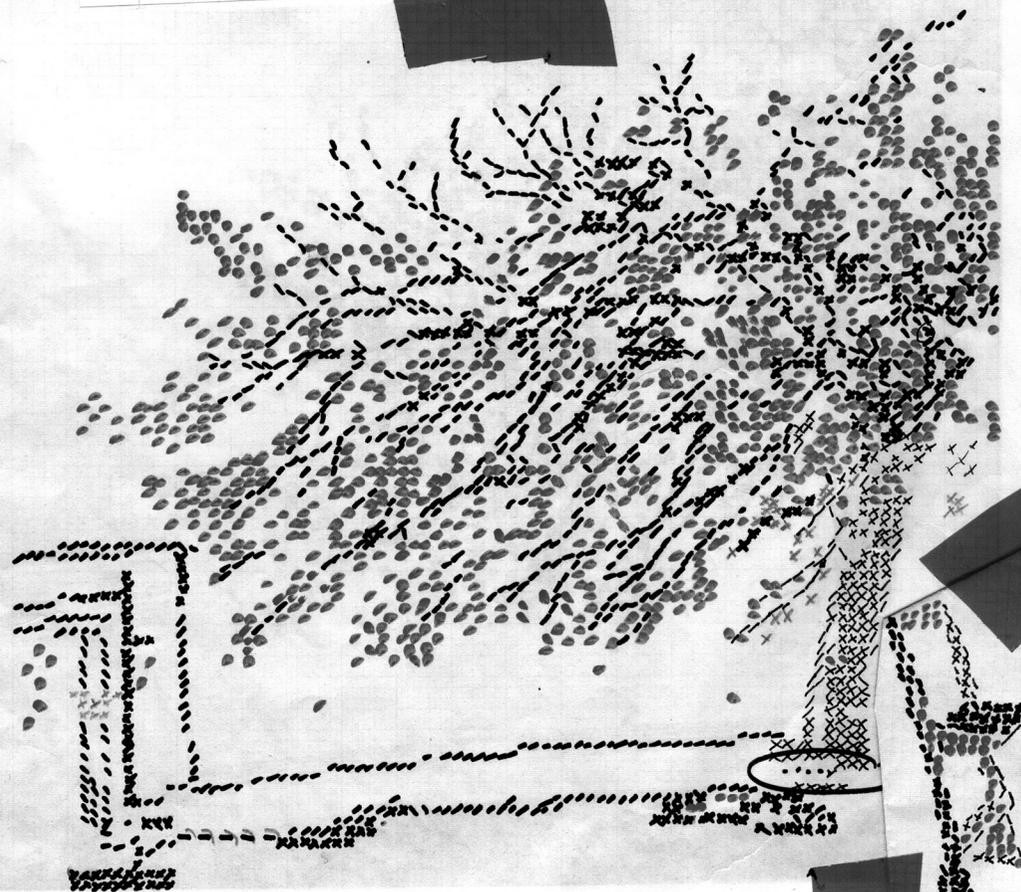


The garden is full of
furniture so the house is
full of plants.

An imaginary interview.

www.chhwo



X 130.

Katherine Huang

Studio 12 / Emerging Writers Program

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Katherine Huang

24 November – 16 December 2006

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This catalogue has been produced as a part of Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces' and Express Media's Emerging Writers Program, and is the sixth in the series. The Emerging Writers Program pairs four young writers each with an experienced mentor, and culminates in the production of a catalogue essay for Gertrude's Studio 12 exhibition program, and an independent exhibition review for Artlink magazine.

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Catalogue Design: Danny Lacy
Print Production: Econoprint

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Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments, and is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

GERTRUDE
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ARTS
VICTORIA



“I wish I could say that I’ll be able to tell you what I am going to be doing for the show. Ideas come up through living and talking and getting comfortable with people and things. This might not happen before Monday.” Katherine Huang

Before Monday

In Katherine Huang’s studio, there is a wooden frame with a stretch of pink plastic mesh hanging loosely from it that looks like saggy skin or a bag for holding fruit. Propped against the wall next to it is the longest skateboard I have ever seen. The work you see before you now is just coming to life.

On the far wall, there are stairs leading up to a high window. When Huang moved in, she couldn’t see out the window, so she made the steps to create a better vantage point. But it’s also a gift to her window, and like her other fervent interactions with dormant objects, it’s an attempt to realise its potential.

At three years old, Huang’s father performed a little magic. My father put a coin atop a scrap of paper; he traced a circle and made a face out of it. Even now, when the artist uses a circular object in an assemblage, she traces an imaginary line around it with her eye and pictures it in various locations.

Huang’s assemblages are neither arbitrary placements of objects nor planned constructions. Rather, they evolve out of a process of living – talking, walking, watching and listening – and then beginning.

She works by moving objects around and around and around until they feel active, as parts and as a whole. Unfolding spontaneously and involving seemingly unrelated elements, the process is like automatic writing, only with objects. The items Huang now works with are given to her by friends and family. This new-found passivity in simply receiving, rather than choosing objects – à la the Duchampian tradition – reveals a deep trust in the process that ensues, and willingly debunks the notion of “artist as creator”.

But once these orphan objects (lets face it, these things are disused pieces of plastic – neither valuable, loved or claimed) are placed in her care, she does start taking action. Huang intuits each article’s aesthetic, geographic, functional, psychological, and poetic possibilities. The objects are pure and simple in use and design, and made from materials like wood, plastic, and paper. Hoses, chairs, cups, shoes, pictures, Perspex and toys are in bright primary colours, while beams of timber, shower-caps, and pieces of metal go au natural. Their uncomplicated nature allows us to see them for what they are, or project our own fantasies as to what they could be. Often, the resulting work looks like a family portrait. Represented by gender and age-specific objects like skateboards and baby spoons, the members jostle and vie for visual prominence and independence despite being inextricable from the whole.

Huang has been working with objects in this way for years. Her untitled work in this year’s *Primavera* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, reached a new level of abstraction. A big plastic yellow toy moon at the right of a long shelf was a clear enough signifier of ‘the’ moon, while giant clear plastic circles beside it could have been molecules, mist or planets. But in the centre of the

room was a construction made from rough planks of wood, beneath which sat a beaded picture of a tree and above which a chair was balanced. Both indoors and out, a little scrawl on a nearby drawing confirmed: the garden is full of furniture so the house is full of plants.

Huang’s recent travels to Taipei and Fraser Island have stimulated her curiosity about simple structures like shacks, transforming the research laboratory look of her early work into a style of architectural kindergarten. *Shower*, a recent work, looks like a makeshift Swiss Family Robinson style dwelling, in which a new science – of play – is enacted. In an age of both fascist functionality and throwaway consumerism, she reminds us of play’s only necessary components: time and imagination.

Viewing Huang’s installations, we need to stand from every angle, and trace relations between the objects. This may take time. Now try to see it as a whole that represents a wider geography (a cityscape, an island, an interior, an exterior).

The work you see before you now is just coming to life.

Kate Just

Image credit: Katherine Huang, drawing on paper, 2003