



< It is that the story they wish to narrate must be an understanding of their world, through the art of now. Contemporary practice is understood to be the art of this very day, going back 20 years or a generation. Collectors use the art of right now to illustrate the spirit of the times.

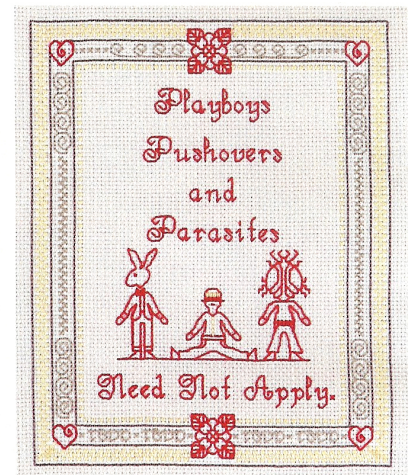
Contemporary art has always been a tool used by artists and collectors to make sense of our complex and multifaceted world. Contemporary Australian art, as such, is not a single voice but a multitude of voices, opinions and abilities that range right across painting, sculpture, multimedia, installation, street art, ceramics, weaving, sound art, film and so on, all visually chattering away at the same time.

The trick for many collectors of contemporary Australian art is to gather the threads of a whole swag of artists and weave all these visually different individuals into a cogent art collection that helps you to explain your world. Sounds highfalutin, as some things are, but collecting is also immensely fun, and I assure you no bones get broken.

The best contemporary work is by artists who can describe the world in the first person: this is my life, this is my set of experiences, this is how I see things. When building up a contemporary art collection, the collector is, in fact, taking 25 or 30 artists-cum-individuals, such as Adam Cullen, Danie Mellor, Kim Buck, Nathan Taylor, Joseph McGlennon and Regina Pilawuk Wilson – who all describe their world in the first person – and weaving those individual art threads into some sort of larger visual fabric that shows what our society looks like.

Paintings just hanging on the wall are so old hat. Stack them on the floor against the wall, as people do in many a stately home (we look at art, we do not worship it). Build a display shelf about half a metre off the floor and rotate paintings on it at your whim.

Hang a mass of paintings and artworks across the wall from top to bottom – a new take on the mid-19th-century salon hang. Place the socially aware Silke Raetze hand-stitched *Playboys* tapestry series higher up the wall, so that the kiddies need



to be tall and old enough to clock their meaning and, by then, be way too embarrassed by their parents to ask, “How did you actually meet?” Use your big-as-a-wall HD TV to explore the multimedia works of Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont.

Sculpture can act as a welcome piece by the door, on the floor or suspended from above. Place it in difficult-to-use corners, or use your dining table as a plinth. At the moment I have a dozen high-glazed ceramic Gregor Kregar sheep running across the table heading for an abyss. Some sculpture is meant to be outdoors, so take it there, poolside or scattered around the garden.

It’s all about activating the home environment in diverse ways, crossing over textures, materials and spatial relationships between artworks. Be brave and do not let your surroundings get stagnant.

Combine acquiring art with, if possible, meeting artists at exhibition openings. Turn your art-collecting journey into a conversation with artists about the directions their art is taking you in. You will learn and may even make some new friends. For when artists are on their best exhibition behaviour, few will bite. At the very least, I can guarantee no broken bones. MICHAEL REID

KANGAROO STUDY #4 (2010), TOP LEFT, BY JOSEPH MCGLENNON, IMAGINES THE AUSTRALIAN NATIVE ANIMAL IN A EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE. INDIGENOUS ARTIST DANIE MELLOR'S INSTALLATION *EXOTIC LIES AND SACRED TIES* (2008), TOP RIGHT, COMBINES DRAWING AND SCULPTURE. THE BLACKBEAN-WOOD KOKOSO CABINET (2010), ABOVE LEFT, BY KHAI LIEW, IS IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA. THE CROSS-STITCH *PLAYBOYS* (2010), ABOVE, BY SILKE RAETZE IS PART OF A SERIES INSPIRED BY THE ARTIST'S EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE DATING AND FEATURES ONE OF HER "DO NOT REPLY" CRITERIA LISTS.