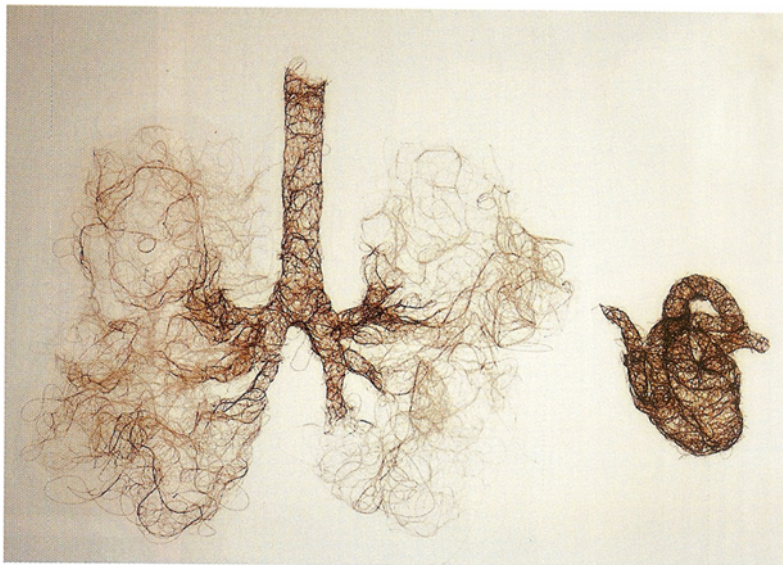


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HANDSON

Story Owen Craven.

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ART MAKING IS, by all accounts, a hands on task. It involves the creation of something from nothing. A collection of ideas and thoughts being expressed by physical objects brought together, engaged with and manipulated. Whether a painter distilling ideas through the stroke of brush—the application of pigment on canvas—or a photographer capturing an instant in time, an artist's life is about the physical engagement with their chosen medium. And while there is a long history and convention of the art making practice, recent decades have shown ingenuity with artists embarking on projects that engage with new tools and mediums.

It is difficult to define why artists are engaging in new forms of expression because the list of new media and tools being used is a wild, wielding array. From Brook Andrew's recent *The Cell* (2010) at the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation—a large scale, inflatable jumping castle like room—to the medicinal garden for ailing plants created by Janet Laurence's for the 17th Biennale of Sydney this year. Laurence constructed a green house in which she cared for living but sick plants throughout the three months of the large scale, public exhibition. These are just two examples of artists engaging with new media and on a reasonably large scale but what is it that drives this engagement?

An exhibition at the Hazelhurst Regional Art Gallery (HRAG) this summer will explore this very theme. *Hands On*, curated by Cash Brown, brings together an exhibit of works by contemporary artists whose use of handcrafts as their mode of expression subvert previous notions of art making tools and materials. With artists like Leah Emery painting through needlepoint to Helen Pynor's knitted human hair, the audience will be invited to question the role these materials play in society and in the practice of contemporary art making.

Brown has observed the trend "towards home based craft in many

practices" but why is yet to be deciphered. Artists are known for the resourcefulness and need to live within their means—is this a response to tighter economic times? Is this simply that in our 'post post-modern' era the meaning once associated with materials and tools used no longer burden the overall concept of the artwork? Perhaps, rather simply, these once unconventional methods are now valued for the aesthetic worth and judged on the skill of their execution as artists explore further afield.

With artworks installed by over 30 Australian artists engaging with new media and handcraft objects, *Hands On* will survey and examine not only the artists' voice but the motivations behind the development of these once less than conventional mediums in the fine art arena. It will examine the validity of the objects, their craft and the ability to create a voice, meaning and message. With exhibiting artists includes Dani Marti, Newell Harry, Silke Raetze, Alan Jones, Minka Gillian and Annie Aitken, amongst others, *Hands On* will be a show about how objects that were nothing, became something. ■

EXHIBITION
Hands On
 4 Dec 2010 to 29 Jan 2011
 Hazelhurst Regional Art Gallery
www.hazelhurst.com.au

01 Images: Minka Gillian, *Striped Green* (detail), 2010, polyester mono filament and Perspex stand, 107 x 26 x 28cm

02 Helen Pynor, *Untitled* (heart lungs), 2007, knitted human hair, 25 x 40 x 15cm, private collection, image courtesy the artist and Dominic Mersch Gallery, Sydney