

❁ GARDENESQUE ❁

Louise Saxton & Carole Wilson



Cover Images

Louise Saxton
The
Haberdasher's
Garden

2003–2004
(Installation detail)
Hand-cut wallpaper
embossed onto
Unryushi and
rag papers

Carole Wilson
Carpet
Rose–2004

(Installation detail)
Wool carpet

← **Louise Saxton**
Palmette &
Crane–2003

Hand-cut wallpaper
embossed onto
Unryushi and
rag papers
100 x 53cm

GARDENESQUE

Recent expressions of the legendary quest for home ownership in Australia, such as the enthusiasm for Do It Yourself and the real-estate boom, have heightened the desire to produce an Australian-styled home. But renovation methods as they are exemplified in the media generally involve the wholesale eradication of the old to make way for the fashionable new. Carole Wilson and Louise Saxton suggest instead that we consider the past and allow it to yield unexpected possibilities, as it has for them in the works of this exhibition.

It was house restoration on the part of Carole Wilson, and both women's satisfaction in re-using materials for utilitarian domestic purposes that led them to explore the visual and intellectual potential in the patterned decoration of period houses and in second-hand domestic objects – sources that have taken a secondary position as materials for contemporary art. 'Something beautiful' is formed from the visual elements extant in what might have been jettisoned: cracked plaster, worn floors, decrepit fencing, pieces of china, glass, linoleum, faded lace curtains, a lost button, a tattered collar, a broken buckle, forgotten bulbs.

There is in these objects, they argue, the redolent historical dimension but also a hidden quality: the unknown lives that aged along with the decoration that is their only residuum.² With the new assemblages comes an anthropological reconstruction of dwellings, their inhabitants and their time, that is here expressed indirectly. It is not the elements of the house, the wardrobe and garden that are appropriated but a reinterpretation of them in different and disparate materials. There is an interest in the way the garden is incorporated into the house: in the wallpaper, the curtains, wooden features and on bathroom tiles.

An artist's lexicon however, is not expressed as a spontaneous whole and these images have travelled a circuitous route. They have not only touched the original residents and possessors of the decorative objects, but have emerged from the experiences of their art creators to arrive at their current incarnations. For Carole Wilson the work of remaking a house gave rise to a new mantra: copse, spinney, wold, fell, fen, dale – the words of the English countryside; corbel, transom, mullion and quoin, now largely outdated building terms.³ These 'texts' function as if used in meditation, moving in and out of the silent mind. They are reminiscent of those seen in an earlier phase when Wilson explored the possibilities of fusing Hindu and Buddhist symbolism with contemporary methodologies. Then, the idiom of eastern philosophy; now, these words, still from an old language, place themselves in and out of view from behind cast-

iron lace. Wilson's displaced contemplation parallels other foreign contexts. For Saxton part of the pleasure is the coincidence of patterned geometry that appears in the floral designs of Islamic cultures as well as in those of European and Japanese quilting traditions.⁴ To Carole Wilson's surprise and satisfaction her research revealed that the shapes of mid-nineteenth century Australian garden-designs followed a similar configuration to those of iron lacework, and that these were analogous again to certain Hindu yantras.⁵

Nostalgia is key to Louise Saxton's reconfigured, stencilled furniture. Like Wilson's her material is similarly transplanted, as she fashions a new surface by placing another wall-papered veil over the existing multilayered experience of her picture plane. Taking her back a generation is her mother's interest in traditional women's craft, the results of which, such as embroidery, knitting, appliqué, quilting and lace-making were an everyday part of family life.⁶ Saxton does not simply romanticise and idealise a lost time, but retrieves such forgotten modes of representation,⁷ including Art Deco and Ottoman ornamentation, Austrian lace making and the styling of Australian fashion accessories from the 1950s,⁸ all of which are revived by their assimilation into a current framework. Here, like old marks in a house, narratives are insinuated but remain half-told. There are momentary revelations, like the snapshot vignettes captured through a window at night with the curtains half-drawn.

But the route taken by sentiment in the work of both is oblique. Reference is made to memories from an earlier time of their own lives, while their materials derive from the nostalgia of people who attempted to resituate themselves in a yet earlier, remembered place.

Wilson's floral Axminster carpet is reworked in the form of a plaster ceiling-rose that is now sited on a wall. Cast ironwork, initially a British craft becomes Australian twice over: first in the mid-nineteenth century when its popularity led to it being widely used, and when patterns were much more flamboyant than in their land of origin.⁹ In Wilson's work, where they live a second time, the balustrades of a balcony shroud the names of plants, historic building terms and the nomenclature of ecclesiastical buildings. Saxton's Austrian floral lace collar design is re-sited on 1960s 'flower-power' wallpaper which is then backed by translucent Japanese Unryushi paper whose colour and culture is then disclosed throughout the work.¹⁰

Wilson's investigations led her home with the discovery that Ballarat had a thriving ironworks industry in the 1880s producing

Carole Wilson →
Top

Pocock-2004

Middle

Chantilly-2004

Bottom

Hillsbury-2004

All works
46 x 23 cm
Acrylic paint
on cotton canvas



designs specific to the region, that is her place of residence.¹¹
Louise Saxton brings together the strands of many house-moves -
extracts of previous experiences that create a new garden-home.

Traudi Allen—writer and art historian

ENDNOTES

- 1 Telephone interview with Louise Saxton, 13/04/04
- 2 The remainder of a deceased person's estate after debts have been paid and bequests distributed.
- 3 Interview with Carole Wilson, Warrandyte, 04/02/04
- 4 Telephone interview with Louise Saxton, 13/04/04
- 5 Interview with Carole Wilson, Warrandyte, 04/02/04
- 6 Telephone interview with Louise Saxton, 13/04/04
- 7 Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies, eds. Tom Lutz and Sean Scanlan (University of Iowa) suggest that Frederic Jameson's contention that nostalgia represents a crisis of history may be taken a step further to represent a crisis of aesthetics. www.english.upenn.edu/CFP/archive/2004-02/0052.html
- 8 Telephone interview with Louise Saxton, 13/04/04
- 9 Evans, Ian, *The Australian Home*, Flannel Flower Press, Sydney, 1983, p. 61
- 10 Telephone interview with Louise Saxton, 14/04/04
- 11 Letter from Carole Wilson, 23/03/04

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THE MARS GALLERY

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Telephone: 03 5320 5858



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