

Re-inventing the System: On Making *The Distiller*

Mish Meijers and Tricky Walsh

in themaking

About the artwork

Title: 'The Distiller'

Date: 2013

Dimensions: Variable

Materials: Wood, Metal, Acrylic, Glass, Paint, Optic Fibre Cable

'The Distiller' was commissioned through the Tasmanian Government's Art Site Scheme for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) Redevelopment Stage 1 in 2012. It is a site-specific work that combines references to large-scale museum practices of display with organic structures and forms. By day, the work is lit by daylight, but at night it lights up via optic fibre cables built into its structure. 'The Distiller' is permanently installed at TMAG.

About the artists

Mish Meijers and Tricky Walsh have been collaborating for the past eight years on large scale projects and installations. Many of their collaborative works have revolved around their fictional creation 'The Collector: Henri Papin', but they have also participated in other installation and group projects notably, 'The Holy Trinity.' 'The Distiller' is their first collaboration on a permanent public work.

Mish's solo practice is based in sculpture and explores processes that set one material against another. She disrupts the perceived worth or significance of her objects through references to popular culture, gender and functionality. Her installations consist of sculptural

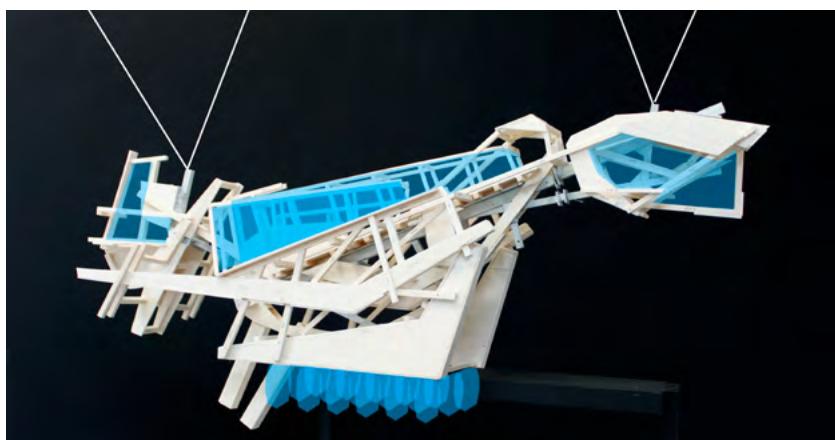
tableaux but she also creates two-dimensional works through drawing, painting and other methods and mediums.

Tricky's solo practice is concerned with the conceptual relationships between of mysticism and scientific reasoning. Architectural in nature, and broadly spatial in practice, her work focuses on concepts and devices that allow for the development of both physical and philosophical systems of discovery and invention. Although her work is largely installation and sculpture-based, she also creates paintings and comics.

Quotes:

Tricky: "...we started working together because artists quite often work in isolation, and you know... it's kinda tough if you don't have a constant stream of opportunities or exhibitions... so we made up this whole other stream of practice to just keep working ..."

Mish: "...ultimately you can be the writer or the director to a point, and then the artwork tells you what it wants..."



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Student response

1. Inspiration and key ideas – making connections

Some of the key ideas in 'The Distiller' relate to distilling or re-inventing systems of museum collection and display.

- Why do you think Mish and Tricky called their work 'The Distiller'? What is it distilling?
- What do the words 'distill' and 're-invent' evoke for you? Can you relate them to your own process or your artwork?

2. Development – processing ideas and concepts

Mish says they wanted 'The Distiller' to be 'a little bit of a dinosaur, a little bit of a machine' and to keep its meaning 'shifting and ambiguous'.

- Which formal elements of 'The Distiller' create this sense of 'part-dinosaur/part-machine'?
- What ideas are you bringing together in your artwork? How are you manipulating formal elements to express your ideas?

3. Research – historical and contemporary influences

Mish and Tricky identify the old photographs of wooden frameworks in the American Museum of Natural History as influences for 'The Distiller'.

- What elements of 'The Distiller' reflect the influence of these photographs?
- What is a key object or image that has influenced your work? Why is it an important reference for you?

4. Making – experimenting, testing and problem-solving

Mish says she chose to make abstract forms for the glass vessels in 'The Distiller', rather than representing or using 'real' specimens or objects.

- How has Mish 'abstracted' objects from museum collections? What difference would it make if she used 'real' objects?
- What techniques are you exploring in your work? How do they help you create different meanings and effects?

5. Refining your work – exhibiting and reflecting

Mish and Tricky encounter some problems when installing their work in the museum. On reflection, they say 'sometimes when you fail you learn the most'.

- Outline Mish and Tricky's installation problems and how they resolved them.
- Identify some of the problems or failures you have encountered in your studio practice and explain what you have learnt from them.



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