



FAMILY SURPLUS

The art of disentangling the stuff
we leave behind

Berenice Carrington

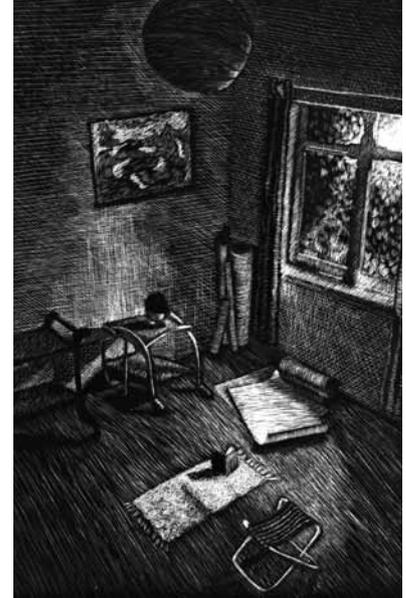
UNCONVENTIONAL CREATIVE ACTS

MY MOTHER MOVED OUT OF HER HOUSE ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO. THINGS THAT COULDN'T BE TAKEN AWAY AS EACH OF US MOVED ON ENDED UP A HOARD OF LIVES LEFT BEHIND. *FAMILY SURPLUS* IS A WORK IN PROGRESS IN WHICH I BECOME AN ETHNOGRAPHER OF MY SOCIAL WORLD AND OF MY PRACTICE AS AN ARTIST. ART AND ETHNOGRAPHY BOTH REQUIRE AN "INSIDER'S" PERSPECTIVE. THESE PRACTICES SHARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SLOW AND CONSIDERED IMMERSION. THE METHODOLOGY OF ETHNOGRAPHY PROVIDES THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR *FAMILY SURPLUS*.

Top: *Back Bedroom*, 2010, 15 x 10 cm;
Bottom left to right: *Dining Room*,
2010, 10 x 16.5 cm, *Study for Reservoir*,
2010, 10 x 16.5cm. All three works:
scraperboard.

Kurt Schwitters spent years transforming his home into an art installation'. With a compulsion later echoed by the character Roy Neary in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*ⁱⁱ, Schwitters' construction gathered together found objects, purloined hair from his friends, and body fluids into a geometrical mountain scape which took over his entire home; "Merzbau".

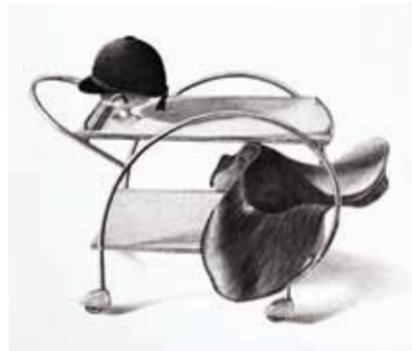
Schwitters' intention was to collapse the boundary between art and life. In his space the viewer's experience of creative expression would be transposed to a new level beyond that which could be experienced in a conventional art gallery. Neary is compelled to get the landscape implanted in his head outside of his body. Made real in this way, he discovers that such a mountain exists and makes his way there. Schwitters' and Neary's conceptual and



cognitive adventures start in their lounge rooms; what beginnings are there in my mother's house?

During my first six weeks at the house I photographed things as I found them. In the studio I produced a series of small and delicate studies of what I'd seen. The seven scraperboard drawings initiated the frame of reference between the Prospect studio and the house.





Top: *As It Was*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 114 x 147 cm. Left: *Assemblage for You Can't Take It With You*, 2011, dimensions variable. Right: *Fidelity Of A Subject*, 2011 charcoal on paper, 114 x 134.5 cm.



My younger sister Rachel's dog, Hamish used to collect a piece of clothing from everyone in the house and make a nest. He didn't like being alone there during the day. I have been infected with a similar loneliness at times in the house.

Fidelity of a subject is the first arrangement of objects that I made at the house. The riding hat and saddle belong to Rachel.

They had been carefully stored and protected for more than 20 years. Rachel has long since set up home elsewhere in Adelaide, while these beautiful things remained at our Mother's house. *Fidelity of a Subject* describes my perception of a kind of loyalty shown by Rachel towards her riding equipment.

You Cant Take It With You remakes my older sister Pascale from some things she left behind when she moved to London. We discard possessions, but they retain something of us within them too.

As It Was is a portrait of me. It is a metaphor about the strange status of artworks. I was ten years old in 1972 when the Tate Gallery in London purchased Anthony Caro's Equivalent VIII. The sculpture caused a furore because it was a rectangular arrangement of about 150 fireplace bricks in two layers. Ten years later I interviewed a blind sculptor for my Honours Thesis. She had been thrown out of the Tate for handling the bricks.



Left from the top: *Vulcan Bomber*, 2011; *Show Bag Alien*, 2011; *Prospective In-Law*, 2011; *Rubber Swim Cap*, 2011; *Dental Plate*, 2011. All five works, pastel on paper, 64 x 45 cm.



Reservoir is a scene that I found in the shed. A sheet of plastic has preserved the pram so that it can be a receptacle for rainwater. I reunited it with its' sun umbrella.

The deflated inflatables. *Vulcan Bomber* was found curled up among my brother Quentin's things in the shed. *Show Bag Alien* is something one of Rachel's children left in the shed. In a show of international relations, Quentin's future parents-in-law came from Denmark to Australia to get to know all of us. They brought us each a present. They gave *Prospective In-Law* to my mother.





My mother's sister, Barbara, visited for a while; she liked to swim at the North Adelaide Aquatic Centre. Barbara left behind her *Rubber Swim Cap*. The *Dental Plate* was found under the velour modular couch in the back bedroom. It used to be a part of the architecture of my mother's face, leading a hydrated life: at night in water and during the day in the mouth.

The feet are a product of my Year 10 art class. My mother kept them at the back door of her house. Cocooned in their *Nylon Oases*, these clay appendages ride out another day.



Left: *Nylon Oases*, 2011, ceramic and found objects, dimensions variable; Bottom: *George-ous*, 2011, redgum and found object 42 x 21 x 23 cm.

I remember when I was carving *Gorge-ous* when I was 15. I ran out of strength and stopped work. Trinny and Susannah rose to fame by instructing 'the woman on the street' on how to look her best. Cathy Brooks and I decided what it needed to wear for it to look its best.

I began this project with no particular artworks in mind. These drawings and assemblages tell the stories which have arisen from being a participant and an observer in the process of sifting through what was left behind.

Dr Berenice Carrington
Prospect Gallery, August 2011.

Front cover image: *You Can't Take It With You*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 114 x 149 cm. Right: *Family Circle*, 2011, heat and anthracite beads, power cord, dimensions variable.



7 August – 25 September 2011

1 Thomas Street

Nailsworth SA

T: 08 8342 8175

prospect.sa.gov.au

Tues 10.15am - 8.30pm

Wed - Fri 10.15am - 6.00pm

Sat 9.00am - 4.00pm

Sun 2.00pm - 5.00pm

ⁱKurt Schwitters worked on Merzbau between 1923 – 43. I learned about him at high school. For a good description of Merzbau try www.artsprite.com.

ⁱⁱA film by Steven Spielberg released in 1977 by Columbia Pictures.

I would like to thank Anne Carrington, my mother, for donating her house to me for 12 months and my whole family for their contributions to the process. This project has been conducted through the Artist in Residence Program of Prospect City Council; it has been a wonderful experience to which the Prospect Gallery and Librarian staff have contributed enormously. I am grateful to Belinda Stachowiak for keeping my website afloat. The interest and sensitivity shown by the community members who participated in my residency contributed significantly to my capacity to combine ethnography and art. Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Karen Bland for all of her editorial work, delicious meals and problem solving.

All photography by Michal Klivanek