

JESS DARE

What Remains?





Journal Flowers 2019 (detail)
flameworked soda-lime glass
smallest 144 x 40 x 15 mm to largest 260 x 12 x 14 mm

What Remains?

To renew the old world — that is the collector's deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things. WALTER BENJAMIN

In *What Remains?* Jess Dare refers to botanical collections as a device through which she can explore the meanings associated with the compulsion to collect. In her interrogative title she invokes the poignant absence at the heart of this urge: the acknowledgement that what remains of the past is fragmentary, its survival contingent on chance.

It seems no accident then that so much of the work here is predicated on what is not there, or what is concealed. In *Yesterday's Garden* she turns her attention to roots, the parts of the plant that normally lie hidden from our gaze beneath the earth. They are presented to us here in the mode of specimens, separated from the plants of which they were once a part and re-imagined in fragile filaments of glass. Their colouration is monochrome and ashy, as though they might momentarily collapse into piles of fine dust.

In another work, *Ties*, she lovingly replicates in powder-coated brass the plant ties that hang suspended from the trellises of her empty winter garden, their twisted shapes invoking the forms of the absent plants they once supported. Viewed collectively, these little knots are strangely eloquent, like an alphabet for some sort of vegetal language struggling to come into being.

In these works, absence operates to articulate the tension between order and disorder, between meaning and meaninglessness that lies at the heart of every collection.

In her most direct reference to the botanical collection, *Journal Flowers*, Jess explores the impetus to collect further. Here she recreates in flameworked glass the evidence of her own botanising tendencies: specimens plucked from the living source as she encounters them in her daily life, or in her travels, taped into the pages of her artist's journals. She presents them to us, arranged the length of a long table on a sheet of paper. This arrangement suggests contingency, a temporariness which both refers to the way in which the meaning of collections are never fixed, and the openendedness of the activity of collecting, which only has its end when the collector stops.

If absence and the fragment are part of the lexicon of Jess's work, she does not deploy either in the service of empty nostalgia. Rather, she is engaged in what Walter Benjamin refers to as *renewal* in the quote that opens this essay. Renewal has nothing to do with nostalgic re-creations of the past, but is rather an activity that acknowledges that the past lives in a dynamic relationship with the present.



Ties 2019 (detail)
powder-coated brass
smallest 40 x 20 x 16mm to largest x 114 x 45 x 15mm

In *Making Time*, Jess works with the collection she has made from the little offerings of seedpods, sticks, gum nuts and other plant forms that her small son has brought to her over time. 'Children can accomplish the renewal of existence in a hundred unfailing ways', Benjamin observes, and then goes on to list some of them: collecting, painting, cutting out figures, touching things, giving them names. Benjamin would say that in Banjo's offerings we can see a toddler's first attempts to come to know the world. He 'renews existence' through reordering the world's fragments afresh, investing it with his own subjectivity and understanding.

In *Making Time*, Jess exercises her own act of renewal over Banjo's random botanising by remaking each small gift, reducing them to their most basic forms, as though she is imagining in three dimensions the kind of drawing he himself might make of them. In doing this, she is at once echoing her son's attempts to know the world and gesturing to that other meaning of renewal that we associate with the botanical world: the promise of life to come.

The resonances of this work's title are rich: a wry acknowledgement of the impact of children on our time, certainly, but also a reference to the time of making. Jess's processes are labour-intensive, demanding and prone to failure. A trip to the powder coater may lay waste to days of work because a new colour failed; hours of meticulous frameworking may be undone by a few errant degrees in the kiln, or even a moment of careless handling.

The objects in this exhibition, then, mirror the fates of the objects in collections: they are here because they have survived. But perhaps the real meaning of this work lies in the time Jess has invested in their making and remaking: for in this slow span of time we might read an analogy for the time it takes for a plant to grow, or a collection to come into being. And, lost in the space of reverie this time affords her, Jess bends her head over her bench, shaping and reshaping the fragments of her world so she can know it anew.

ANNE BRENNAN
Canberra 2019

REFERENCE

Walter Benjamin *Unpacking My Library* in *Illuminations*
Edited by Hannah Arendt, translation Harry Zohn
New York: Schocken, 1968



Making Time 2019
powder-coated brass, archival wax
smallest 22 x 18 x 11 mm to largest 320 x 20 x 20 mm
opposite: Banjo's found objects



Slipping Away 2019
powder-coated brass, archival wax
smallest 96 x 33 x 33 mm to largest 980 x 82 x 0.3 mm



Journal Flowers 2019 (detail)
framed soda-lime glass
largest 175 x 40 x 15 mm



Journal Flowers 2019 (detail)
framed soda-lime glass
largest 171 x 24 x 16 mm



ARTIST STATEMENT

Fallen, wilted, pressed, dried remnants,
mementos found, collected and kept...

What Remains?

A fallen blossom from a tree, wilting on the soil below. Flowers collected on a journey and pressed between the pages of a notebook. A garden tie dangling from a trellis, once training a thriving beanstalk. A nut, a pod, a twig, a branch, curiosities gifted by my son, collected, kept and remade in brass, a memory to revisit time and again. Traces of what was once, but is no longer.

This exhibition is about family, memory, collecting, connection, remembering and preserving. I am interested in what happens to things through their life, my life. How plants grow and wither and reference our own mortality. How we remember, what we remember. The things we collect, keep and record. My grandfather, Dean Hosking, kept journals; recording daily rainfall, plants that he bought, notes on how to maintain his garden tools, the ordinary everyday, practical, methodical and all meticulously penned in his flowing looped cursive.

Planted After my grandfather passed away we found piles of venetian blinds stacked, resting against the shed wall. Everything was meticulously ordered in the garden shed and whilst they were orderly the blinds seemed out of place. Grandpa was resourceful, frugal, meticulous and clever; he would cut the aluminium strips into tags to label all the plants he was propagating or had just planted.

Journal Flowers These delicate glass flowers just beginning to wilt, to flatten on the page of a journal tell a story of how I collect and press flowers between the pages of my journals when I travel, to remind me of a place, a journey, a link to a moment, to later return to, collected and kept.

Ties Hanging from the trellis after the broad beans have long been removed. Securing a young tree unable yet to stand on its own. Tethered to the stems of new plants with a label reminding me how often to water and the name of my latest acquisition, sometimes bent and gnarled, trampled in to the soil. A reminder of what was once there or sometimes what is still to come. Made from brass sheet and drawn wire, pressed, soldered, bent, twisted, powder-coated, sanded and repeated over and over. This collection of ties represents my relationship with the garden, the practice of gardening and working with your hands passed down through generations. Repetition. Tradition.

With curious wonder I keep the gum nuts, Billy Buttons, sticks, seedpods... things my son picks up and hands to me like treasures. *Making Time* is a series exploring making permanent and impermanent, crafting in brass the essence of these little treasures, an exchange between mother and son. A treasure to keep and hold, long after the moment has gone and the memory has faded.

Slipping Away Each time you recall a memory you are recreating it, subconsciously changing it, embellishing or reducing it. This wattle spray slowly wilting and distorting, represents various states of transition, fading, slipping from consciousness, impermanence, and the inability to hold on to a memory.

Yesterday's Garden To consider what remains, you must also consider what does not? A collection of delicate, fragile roots, plucked from the soil, wilting, drying out in the sun, a severed stem, the absence of a plant that was once full of life.

JESS DARE
October 2019

ANNE BRENNAN is an artist and writer. She is currently honorary visiting fellow at the Centre for Art History and Art Theory at the Australian National University School of Art and Design.

JESS DARE born Adelaide, South Australia 1982, lives and works in Adelaide.

Contemporary jeweller Jess Dare completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts specialising in Jewellery at the Adelaide Centre for the Arts TAFESA in 2006.

Practicing frameworking for over 10 years having been taught by local and international glass artists, glass now forms an integral part of her practice.

Jess joined Gray Street Workshop (established in 1985) as an access tenant in 2007 and in 2010 became a partner of the workshop, joining Catherine Truman and Sue Lorraine in continuing its legacy and shaping its future.

Jess exhibits nationally and internationally and is represented in major national collections including the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of South Australia and the National Glass Collection.

Jess has undertaken international residencies researching floral culture in Thailand (2014) and China (2015).

In 2016/17 she worked closely with Professor Richard Johnson creating a permanent memorial in Martin Place, Sydney, symbolising the sea of flowers laid by thousands of people following the December 2014 Martin Place siege.

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THE NATIONAL

Jess Dare *What Remains?*
11 November to 7 December 2019

The National

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Essay

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Design

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With heartfelt thanks to ...
Marcus and Banjo Ramsay,
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support and encouragement,
challenging me to bring glass
to New Zealand.

cover image

Slipping Away 2019 (detail)
powder-coated brass, archival wax
980 x 82 x 0.3 mm

right

Making Time 2019
exchange between Jess and her son Banjo
powder-coated brass, archival wax
photograph by Marcus Ramsay



