



CHRISTINE ATKINS

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SEARCHING FOR HOME

24 August - 30 September 2012
Mundaring Arts Centre

Home is Where the Heart is

Every time I see the movie, I can't help shedding a tear when Dorothy (aka Judy Garland) says; "There's no place like home." After her wonderful adventure in the colourful Land of Oz, she was happy to turn away from her new found friends and the beautiful Emerald City to go back to the drab, black and white farm in Kansas. Why? Because it was 'home', where her heart was, with the people she loved.

Most of us have a place we call home, be it a modern flat in the city or a cosy house in a leafy suburb. It can be a cabin on a boat, a bench under a tree in the park, or a caravan hitched to the car somewhere in the 'outback'. Home is where we can relax and be ourselves. It is where we feel safe; a place we can freely leave and happily return to; a personal sanctuary.

In her exhibition *Searching for Home*, Christine Atkins examines the concept of 'home' in both a physical and metaphorical manner. Employing birds, which are free to fly about at random, and trees that are rooted in one place, Atkins suggests the growing, the changes, and migrations in nature and life. It may sound a bit heavy to contemplate but there is nothing to worry about. Atkins' charming and well-composed sculptures are constructed of reclaimed wood, weeds, grasses, felted fabric and stitching. Her charming and well-constructed exhibits will broaden your mind and lighten your heart.

Here we find large, embroidered trees hanging on the wall and small felted houses, sitting on wagons pulled by carved wooden birds on wheels. Other trees ride proudly in well carved, pod-shaped wooden boats. One example is *Greener Grass* which involves a simple, yet charming carved bird with wheels for feet, an embroidered leafy tree growing from his tail feathers and a little felted house, complete with a

flower garden, on his back. Then there is *Before Beginning Your Journey*, where a carved bird carries his nest on his back, as he stands on a small wheeled cart. The cart is linked to a plot of land, composed of an old upturned wooden scrub brush, which hosts a small house sitting under a good sized, leafy tree. And *Beginnings* is a delightful 'chorus line' composed of perky red flowers growing up from heart-shaped seeds, each sending down delicate roots. And my favourite has to be *Journey Home*, where a decorative, carved wooden boat carries an embroidery tree; roots, trunk, limbs, leaves and all. Sitting proudly between the branches is a small embroidered, house with a welcoming ladder for friends who want to visit.

Atkins work bridges the gap between sculptural and textile practice and by doing so, she enhances each art form. But the best part of all her work is how each exhibit is well thought out, excellently crafted and approachable by all.

Most homes are full of simple treasures, happy memories, comfort, and love. Christine Atkins has found her 'home' in her art work. Best of all, her charming sculptures invite us into her world of whimsy, warmth and wonder.

Judith McGrath

Judith McGrath is one of Western Australia's most highly regarded arts writers. Judith is devoted to providing a platform to engage in critical cultural dialogue to support and challenge WA's visual art community. As editor of *Art Seen in Western Australia* since November 1998 she has added enormously to the enhancement of debate about art produced all over the State.

Arts, Health and Homelessness

The Arts and creativity have long been associated with the power of healing. In traditional societies art was used to heal people and the world around them. Music and dance was central to daily ritual and used to influence hunting, fertility, and crops. Art and music was also used by healers to connect to inner healing spirits and was an important force for traditional medicine.

Modern medicine calls for treatments that are scientifically proven, and art and healing has found its place in the field of psychology and psychiatry. Art Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses images to explore and express emotions, thoughts, memories and ideas; and is well established as a gentle approach to addressing psychological problems and promoting well being.

More recently it seems that the Arts are returning to their traditional roots. Health and Community Arts movements are positioning the Arts in the wider context of improving the health and wellbeing of people and the communities they live in. In this broader context people creating 'together' builds social cohesion and connection, and an increased sense of belonging and community.

Art provides a universal response to increasing concerns about the deterioration of community. Despite strong economic growth in Australia, there are increased rates of inequity and disadvantage. People are no more happier and healthier and the gap between the rich and poor is widening. It is now well established that inequities within societies are the greatest threat to our health and wellbeing.

Homelessness is one indicator of the poor health of our society. Each day nearly 1 in every 200 Australians are homeless and it is estimated that 75% of these people experience some form of mental illness. Homelessness is strongly linked to the breakdown of families, violence and sexual assault; unemployment and substance abuse. Sadly 23% of Australia's homeless are children.

These statistics are striking against the vision of the Australia, the sun-baked land of opportunity that many of us call home. Art has the power to change lives, it gives rise to the unseen and unheard stories from the margins of society and provides a place for spiritual healing within our hearts and mind and in our community.

Meagan Shand

(BSc Health Promotion, Master of Social Science Candidate)

References Homelessness Australia Fact Sheets. (2006).
Available from <http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/site/issues.php>

Meagan Shand (BSc. Health Promotion) has been committed to promoting health and wellbeing in Western Australia for over 30 years. Awarded a Centenary Medal of Australia 2001 and a Making a Difference Award in 2003, she is well known for her leadership and innovation. Currently Meagan is completing a Masters research project studying mental health and art, which included the publication of Sharing the Journey - a community art resource for building resilience.

The Artist's Narrative

How does the artist craft themselves into their work, while maintaining a language of symbols and meanings that are recognizable and resonant for others? How is one's own unique story expressed, shaped by particular life experiences, within the context of the broader human narrative?

The work of Christine Atkins draws from the collective unconscious, and as such is widely accessible to its viewers. The universal symbols she engages resonate with us deeply. We innately understand the meanings held within such images as the tree of life, the boat, and the house. Across religious faiths and cultures, these symbols have helped us over millennia to tell our shared human stories.

Narratives of journey and 'home' are recurrent themes in Atkins' art practice. The struggle between the place of connectedness, the sense of one's roots, and the quest for exploration and movement from this safe harbour, is illustrated by way of these familiar images. The representation of the house, which is sprouting wings, conveys this tension well. The tree of life, a familiar motif, speaks of the psychic journey from a place of darkness within the earth and housed in the seed, to the reaching and growing limbs expanding towards the heavens.

The personal story this artist is telling however, is one that does not take for granted any of our cosy notions of home and belonging, or an easy and transformative passage through life. This journey may be towards a feeling of 'home', which one may never have experienced. The quest for refuge and safety may be an endless one. The wheels may have stopped turning, the keys to doors long lost.

The mark of the artist's own hand is visible by way of the meticulous crafting of these art pieces. Atkins has stitched herself almost literally into these works, with care and time. The unique process of making which she has developed, serves to bring her own story to the fore, and leaves us with a sense of her clear intention. There seems to be a feeling of reassurance, made apparent by the solidity and concreteness of forms. The tree taking root in an old weathered brush or on a bird's tail feathers may suggest that succour and support may be found in the most unlikely places.

Atkins carves a possible path for all of us with these works, through our darkest moments, and reflecting our dreams and hopes. She offers a sense of optimism, while fully aware that for some this might coexist with experiences of ongoing struggle and defeat. The works also indicate the intuitive path the artist is taking herself, as she continues to explore these fundamentally human matters.

Kate Campbell-Pope

With an extensive exhibiting career extending across regional and urban galleries throughout Australia, Kate has been active in showing her work in a significant number of group exhibitions. Her work explores various mediums, with an emphasis on textiles and sculpture. Kate has received a number of public art commissions for sculptural works and her work is represented in various private and public art collections including those of the Art Gallery of WA, King Edward Memorial Hospital and the City of Tamworth Collection in New South Wales.

Searching for Home

The story intertwined, the experience of finding home, sheltering and moving forward are collective for many, but not for all. Taking for granted our literal and symbolic sense of home. A physical house to keep us sheltered from the elements and a home to meet to our emotional needs. Some will never find home, either physical or metaphorical, a place to protect and keep safe. For some it may not be the lack of physical shelter which brings distress, instead it is an internal force. A mind which brings insecurity and darkness. How can people feel safe within themselves or feel connected to the world or community, when they do not have a sense of safety within?

With time, personal experiences shift and change. The journey moves on, different perspectives evolve. Since beginning the search for home the story has deepened and transformed, new narratives have evolved and a cycle completed. These works began with the notion of "Finding Home", a personal yet collective experience. A place of "Shelter" to physically protect us from the elements and a place to gather ourselves. Home as a place to feel content, to be comfortable within our own body and mind and to feel connected to the world and to community.

With time, having sheltered in this place of comfort, we begin to feel the need to step outside. We lose the sense of contentment we have worked hard to build and start to crave for more. We want to "Search for the Sweetest Flower". New learning's, new challenges, new beginnings. We want to travel new landscapes both internal and external, discover new terrain that forces us to look at the world in new ways. A chance to experience that childlike awe of discovery, a drive to keep us inspired, alive and connected, yet remembering that we always are "Taking Home" with us. We carry the memories and experiences that have shaped who we are.

Christine Atkins



Taking Home (detail)
Thread & found objects
25cm x 59cm x 10cm
\$425



Before Beginning Your Journey
"before beginning your journey pack all that is precious"
Thread, timber & found objects
42cm x 50cm x 10cm
\$520



Begin...

"begin with one step and just one bite"

Thread, timber & found objects

40cm x 51cm x 10cm

\$520



Where the Shadow is Long
"go to where the shadow of your house is long"
Thread, timber & found objects
30cm x 32cm x 15cm
\$420



Beginnings

Thread & timber

12cm x 46cm x 2.5cm each

\$125 each



Greener Grass
"the grass is sometimes greener"
Thread & timber
90cm x 140cm x 10cm
\$480



Sweetest Flower

"a little bird leaves his nest seeking the sweetest flower"

Thread, timber & found objects

52cm x 66cm x 8cm

\$480



On Top of the Hill

"once upon a time, on top of the hill lived a tall & beautiful yet aloof house"

Thread, timber & found objects

38cm x 45cm x 8cm

\$420



Shelter
Thread & Guildford grass
90cm x 137cm x 9cm
\$1,750



Stories

"listen to the strange stories about how they built their houses only to grow wings"

Thread, timber & found objects

50cm x 70cm x 20cm

\$800



Little Bird Gathering

"under the shadow of a tree, a little bird sat gathering his wings"

Thread & timber

50cm x 68cm x 19cm

\$800



Whispers

"the tree whispered, stop and see the beauty of your journey before you fly again"

Thread & timber

49cm x 70cm x 20cm

\$800



Taking Home
Thread & found objects
170cm x 59cm x 10cm
\$425 each



Taking Home (detail)
Thread & found objects
25cm x 59cm x 10cm
\$425



Finding Home

"Leaves rustling, standing tall, after a storm. Wanting to find home. Quiet the beating heart, move in silence to hear, the trees whispering song guide you home. Graceful in the wind, growing strong"

Thread & found objects

104cm x 180cm x 24cm

\$2,200



Nesting
Thread & felt
9cm x 25cm x 4cm each
\$125 each



Journey Home

"Whispers of a shadowy rebirth, the tree grows in silence. Feeding by the hidden stream under its roots. Fluid, soft and yielding. A vessel supporting it's journey. Drifting in timelessness, going within. A new seed developing, the call coming. The tree has begun its journey to return home"

Thread, timber & cast bronze

100cm x 105cm x 23cm

\$2,200

Christine Atkins: Biography



Born in Western Australia Christine Atkins has a strong affiliation to the Australian landscape, returning home to Western Australia 15 years ago after extensive Australian and overseas travel. While undertaking university studies in psychology Atkins became interested in the use of art for therapy and undertook her Masters in Art Therapy, graduating in 2000.

Childhood camping trips and her work as an art therapist have greatly shaped her work with an emphasis on the environmental, human experiences and the interplay between the two. With a strong connection to the environment Atkins uses materials closely connected to the natural world, utilising a range of processes to deeply explore personal and collective experiences.

Atkins considers herself an emerging artist, but her works can be found in public and corporate collections in Western Australia and her work has been selected for touring exhibitions both in Australia and overseas. Since 2005 Atkins has been the recipient of several awards including the Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize in 2009 for her Botanica series in the Sculpture and Objects category.

Christine Atkins is currently represented by Gallery East. www.galleryeast.com.au

Christine Atkins

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Education

Master of Arts (Art Therapy) Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley, Western Australia, 2003.

Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Murdoch University, Western Australia, 2000.

Exhibitions

- 2012 Constructing Nature, Gallery East, WA solo exhibition
- 2011 Art Melbourne, Selected Start Artist, Royal Exhibition Building, Carlton, Victoria
- 2009-11 Pfaff, Selected artist Touring Exhibition, London, France, Netherlands
- 2008-10 Momentum- 18th Tamworth fibre textile biennial, Selected artist touring exhibition
- 2010 Toorak Sculpture Awards, Melbourne
- 2007 Reflections of WA, Heathcote Museum and Gallery, Melville
- 2006 Multiple Threads, Royal George Gallery, Fremantle
- 2006 Contemporary Threads, Heathcote Museum and Gallery, Melville

Awards

- 2010 Judged as Outstanding in Fibre Design for Australia and New Zealand in 2010 by a panel of four judges brought together by Dragon Design and TAFTA (The Australian Forum for Textile Arts Ltd)
- 2010 Pfaff Textile Competition- Highly commended, London, UK
- 2010 Toorak Sculpture Awards- Finalist, Melbourne Victoria
- 2009 Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize- Winner Sculpture, SA Museum SA
- 2008 Stanthorpe Art Prize- Finalist, Stanthorpe Gallery Queensland
- 2006 Mandurah Art Awards- Celebrating Place- Winner Textiles, WA
- 2005 Melville City Council- Winner Textiles, WA

Publications /Reviews

- 2011 Textile Fibre Forum No 101 – Fibre Design Book
- 2010 Pfaff – Landscape let us travel; Catalogue
- 2010 Momentum- 18th Tamworth fibre textile biennial; Catalogue
- 2008 Embroidery September/ October 2008- Dreamtime down under- Markers in Profile
- 2008 Textile Fibre Forum No 90 2008- Christine Atkins- Captured in Stitch by Glenys Mann
- 2005 Art Collection- Fibre, City of Melville Art Collection Catalogue

Collections

City of Melville Art Collection- Western Australia; National Lifestyle Villages Corporate Art Collection- Western Australia; Southern Health Art Collection- Victoria; Edith Cowan University- Western Australia

About Mundaring Arts Centre

In 1979 a vision for an arts centre in the hills came to fruition with the establishment of the Mundaring Arts Centre. Our aim is to contribute to the cultural life of our region by nurturing creative potential, supporting artists and encouraging people of all ages and background to actively engage with the arts.

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Gallery Hours:
Weekdays: 10 am – 5 pm
Weekends: 11 am – 3 pm
Public Holidays: Closed

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