

Appearances can be mesmerising in the art of Louise Weaver

By [Kerrie O'Brien](#)

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A vibrant red, life-sized polar bear stands on an island, a pretty teepee made from branches behind it. The bear's legs and stance seem vaguely human and it gazes ahead as though waiting for something. Created by Melbourne-based artist Louise Weaver, this quirky, dystopian artwork reflects something of her alternate take on the universe.

It's the largest of a dozen such sculptures in a retrospective exhibition at Buxton Contemporary called *Between Appearances: the Art of Louise Weaver*. Curated by Melissa Keys, the show includes works from the past 30 years, as well as new artworks, many created in the past six months, thanks to a grant from the Australia Council.



Installation view, *Between Appearances: the art of Louise Weaver*, with 'Taking a chance on love' 2003 (detail) at Buxton Contemporary, The University of Melbourne. CHRISTIAN CAPURRO

Called *Talking a chance on love*, the stunning polar bear piece won the Cicely and Colin Rigg Contemporary Design Award at the NGV in 2003. It has Issey Miyake blossoms attached to the teepee (reclaimed from an evening bag) and uses an array of materials to create an otherworldly reality that's at once beautiful yet disturbing.

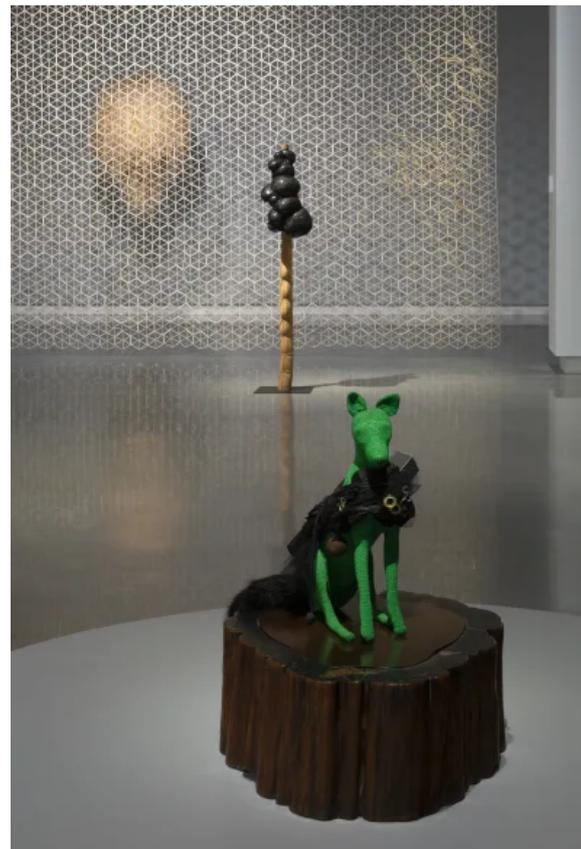
Weaver says the piece speaks to a greening of the environment: she uses red as an optical illusion, playing with the idea that when you stare at something for a long time, then close your eyes, it becomes green. The red could also be a signifier of passionate love, or a violent, bloody red.

"It's an arrangement, an island perhaps, where the animals have developed by a different course, these current forms covered in crochet, skins that have been created over the forms themselves – they're the forms taxidermists might use to make facsimiles of once living animals," she says.

Weaver has been using some of these materials and techniques since the early 1990s. *Oracle fox* is a luminescent green, with disconcerting disembodied glass eyes and draped with sashes – suggesting award-winning status – fashioned from a *Commes des Garçons* blouse.

From a very early age, growing up in Victoria's western district, Weaver loved learning through doing. Remarkably, some of her high school creations are intact and on display; her parents recognised early on that she was destined to be an artist so kept a few pieces, including one made when she was 14.

Weaver has exhibited a few times in Victoria but the revelation in this show is the diversity of media she employs, often using craft techniques. There's sculpture, painting, drawing, collage, needlecraft and crochet, as well as papier mache and hand-crafted furniture; even eggshells make an appearance.



'It would seem that eyes can live without hearts (*Oracle Fox*)' 2005; *Bird Hide*, 2011, hangs in the background. Buxton Contemporary. CHRISTIAN CAPURRO





Louise Weaver with Bird Hide at Buxton Contemporary. WAYNE TAYLOR

Bird Hide, 2011, a stunning piece hung from the ceiling, is made of paper and string. Weaver likes to explore how humble materials can be transformed. "They're not luxurious materials, paper and string, but the luxurious element is time. Time that I've committed to and invested in making a work of art; something that I feel very fortunate in being able to do. It's a gift to me as well as a gift to the world, an audience." *Bird Hide's* hanging panels were laboriously crafted out of Japanese paper. "It took 18 months of working 12 hours a day," she says.

Weaver is also interested in exploring what's possible in terms of scale, as well as how materials behave. "I make things in a very small scale in my home; [they're] made in components, each element is fitted together."



Louise Weaver's The skin of dreams in the foreground, with Cradling on the left, at Buxton Contemporary. CHRISTIAN CAPURRO

A lot of her work has to do with the natural world, art and art history – in particular surrealist objects and practice – as well as science, design, pop culture and culture more generally. They're all influences, she says.

Archaeology and mythology are among the many themes explored, directly and indirectly. Pointing out a papier mache piece called *Ajax*, she says it's about both the Ancient Greek hero and the cleaning product. "There's an edge of humour in many of my works, which may be too oblique for some people but I think it's important not to take yourself too seriously," she says.

Photographs she took of sculptures when travelling overseas have been transformed and made her own. *Roma I* and *Roma II*, 1993-94, were photocopied, then hand-embroidered through the eyes with sequins. "They become like ocular devices, the eyes, transforming them through time and space into other realms."

These pieces, like several other works, are a commentary on the universality of the human experience. "I feel just as connected to people thousands of years before me – and also through to the future – as I do to [people] right now," she says. "We're not so different from our predecessors, even though we have so many things through technology ... In reality, I think we're fundamentally the same."

For the past six years Weaver has been developing new works, "loosely termed" paintings, she says, using paint as material and matter. A centrepiece at Buxton Contemporary is a six-metre-square piece called *Cradling*, which she created for the show. Stretched over museum-weight cedar stretchers, it stands in the middle of the upstairs gallery, the back of the work and its engineering laid bare.

While the title references the act of holding something gently, it also refers to a conservation technique used in the late 1800s to preserve paintings so they wouldn't warp. In fact, it did the opposite and caused more damage. "My idea was to play with that in terms of language and meaning, through psychological meaning and the idea of nurturing one's practice," she says.

The painting itself creates the illusion of falling water. It was made off the surface entirely; the paint was taken off and used as collage and then reapplied. She aimed to reinterpret the traditional practice by reversing it entirely.

"It's to do with mirroring, our chemical ideas of iridescence and reflective surfaces, in terms of the painting itself and behaviours, as much as paint can have a behaviour."



Louise Weaver Galah (Wild Ribbons instead of sleep) 2007–08, hand crocheted lambswool over taxidermied Galah (*Eulophus roseicapillus*), grey boxwood, MDF. From the Michael Buxton Collection COURTESY OF DARREN KNIGHT GALLERY

Weaver has no reservations about jumping from one medium to another. “For me, it’s a logical progression in thought and expression. I love to discover new things every day in the studio, I think that’s what keeps me motivated – if you do the same things all the time of course you’ll run out of energy.”

The exhibition, over two floors of the gallery, is like several shows in one, an impressive overview of a lifetime dedicated to creating art, as well as challenging preconceptions about what art is and can be.

Seeing all her work together has been quite emotional for Weaver, far more so than she expected. "You find yourself reliving your life through your own chapters, your moments, your own history. Which I don't think as an artist you ever think you need to be prepared for."

***Between appearances: the art of Louise Weaver* is at Buxton Contemporary until February 9, 2020.**



Kerrie O'Brien



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