



Linda Banazis, Penny Bovell, P. James Bryans, Susanna Castleden, Sue Codee, Cat Critch, Rebecca Dagnall, Jo Darbyshire, Mark Datodi, Annabel Dixon, Anna Dunnill, Eva Fernandez, Brendan Hibbert, Harry Hummerston, Little Design Horse, Clare McFarlane, Trevor6025/Emma McPike, Toogarr Morrison, Philippa Nikulinsky, Perdita Phillips, Gregory Pryor, Alex Spremberg, Marzena Topka, David Turley, Paul Uhlmann and Caitlin Yardley

# wallpaper

Each of the 26 artists in Wallpaper has customised a four-metre scroll of wallpaper (or paper of the same dimensions) to present a slice of their world. The 52cm width was set by the width of the wallpaper and the length was practically designed to fit the gallery hanging system. The artists were invited by myself and collaborator P James Bryans, who as an inspiration for the exhibition has also created one of the exhibits - the only one with three dimensional deer heads protruding from a screenprint, based on a vintage wallpaper design.

It has been a challenge for some and a welcome diversion from bigger projects for others. For some, it is a continuation of their work applied to a new surface and proportions, while for others the pattern of the wallpaper, or the wallpaper itself has been their inspiration. Susanna Castleden, for example, continues her exploration of mapping with blended colours using aerosol paint to suggest the colours and graduations on a map. She has added pins and texts to her damask wallpaper to emphasise the third dimension. Are those islands in that ocean? Marzena Topka, on the other hand, has subtly obscured her pattern by overpainting and reinstated it with a shift and a warp. Her piece is completely self-referential and is about material, in its essence. And yet, this is a continuation of her conceptual work. Eva Fernandez puts down her camera to inscribe a continuous line of text into the existing embossed ribbon design, which loops back and forth along the four-metre length of the wallpaper scroll.

For botanical artist Philippa Nikulinsky the wallpaper has become an elegant and uncluttered background on which to express her love of grasses (or to be more precise - weeds). The project has been a motivation to experiment - cutting around a fine drawing of a plant and collaging it onto paper. The result is her life-size grasses are dry and crunchy, with stalks jumping off the wall in a hyper-realistic fashion. So much landscape painting/drawing (and wallpaper as well) is created to satisfy our desire to bring nature indoors, offsetting our sense of dislocation from the natural world. Art, along with interior design and decoration, can create an environment that mimics nature, be it somewhat diminished.

Sadly few examples remain of those once coveted mural wallpapers transforming bathrooms into

scenic waterfalls, or sunset and palms wallpaper makeovers of dreary spaces.

Both Hummerston and Bryans live in houses that have had this treatment. Perdita Phillips has chosen to depict a famed Shinto painting of Nachi Waterfall based on the cascading dimensions of the wallpaper. It is said that people commonly weep in front of this painting, a Japanese National Treasure that expresses the sacredness of nature.

*The Weeper* is the title of Caitlin Yardley's piece. Was she weeping as she obsessively covered the scroll with tiny repetitive handwriting, or was it Mary Magdalene, her subject that wept? Richly emotional landscapes are also portrayed in the work of Paul Uhlmann and Cat Critch.

One of the ways we use the word wallpaper is to suggest something so bland it serves as an inconsequential background. Wallpaper is more commonly the background pattern for a computer screen than it is actually on our walls. But it was not always so and the politics of wallpaper design were greatly influenced by the machine age. Father of the Art and Craft Movement of the late 1800's, William Morris was best known as a designer of wallpapers and textiles, often based on observation of nature. His designs made use of simple forms without excessive ornamentation. In a reaction against the style of the time, a Morris design would use a flattened and pared-back natural motif without shading, so as not to mimic the real.

Victorian era critic John Ruskin and Morris concurred that a healthy society depended on skilled and creative workers who took pleasure in their craft, and not the machine. Meanwhile other thinkers championed mass production as a means towards an affordable, democratic art. Interestingly, Morris turned from design to focus on socialist propaganda.

And it is good to see some politics seeping into this exhibition with indigenous artist Toogarr Morrison's *Policy Cut Into Pieces*, environmental politics with Gregory Pryor's crying *Grevillea* snagged by a plastic bag, religious politics with David Turley's found bible pages so fondly embedded into the paper, and street politics rendered in drypoint by Trevor6025 and Emma McPike, imaging their half-day walk from suburban hotspot Carine to downtown Craigie.

**Thelma John, Gallery Central**

# wallpaper

When I was 11 my mother bravely allowed me to redecorate my bedroom. I ruthlessly replaced a carefully chosen and beautifully subtle wallpaper in which butterflies drifted across expanses of white space with an altogether more psychedelic option – a deep red, micro geometric pattern paired with a broad overscale quasi-oriental border dominated by floral and fan motifs. It was the 70's and whatever others in the family may have thought at the time, I lay in bed cocooned by intense colour and rhythmic pattern deeply satisfied with my selection.

Thinking about this exhibition has prompted other wallpaper recollections generally drawn from the domestic environments of family and friends in which the unambiguously decorative character of wallpaper was always welcome. I remember the kitsch but appealing poodles in my grandparents' bathroom, a large and intriguing black and white frieze depicting the Thames in the 18th century, clamorous, flocked fleur-de-lis motifs travelling the length of hallways, a red and gold Chinoiserie paper in a beautiful large dining room and the matte French papers created by skilled pattern designers in which remarkable colour combinations cleverly complemented abstracted natural forms.

Significantly many of these memories are situated in childhood and adolescence as the later years of the 20th century post Memphis design saw a retreat (even within the domestic context) of pattern, motif and ornament. Minimalist and high tech environments dominated by concrete floors, stone walls, stainless steel, glass and rectilinear furniture and the general corporatisation of the domestic environment did not invite the application of surface decoration, particularly idealised expressions of the natural world. The mass produced highly decorative surface seemed quaint and passé.

I also recall scathing remarks about wallpaper from fellow designers during this period who were perhaps (understandably) responding to the less aesthetically evolved associations that some wallpapers evoked.

Perhaps at this time within the hierarchy of powerful architectural statements and fine art and sculpture, wallpaper was just too exuberant and playful, too domestic and feminine and too authored. In this exhibition the conversation about the relative status of the fine and decorative arts continues as the mass produced industrial product initially created by an anonymous designer is transformed via an intervention by another artist or designer thereby creating a unique product now elevated to the status of 'art work'.

Recent years in interior and product design have witnessed the return of a softer, more eclectic and personal approach. In terms of content this includes a heightened interest in the fragility of the natural world and in technical terms, an interest in pattern and texture as well the incorporation of text and digital and graphic elements into wall covering designs. Retail and hospitality contexts in particular have been enlivened by wallpapers and textiles that celebrate the decorative utility of repetition, movement and colour.

From the point of view of a design educator, an exercise inviting students to design a wallpaper would be a very satisfying way to draw in all the elements. Students could be invited to think about why humans have historically sought to relieve bare walls with painted decoration and to consider the interaction between wall coverings and space. They could then be encouraged to explore context, narrative, image, abstraction and stylisation, the flattening of form, line, scale, rhythm and repetition, texture, colour, negative space, materials and processes and the opportunity for technological innovation.

Bringing them to this exhibition would be a wonderful place to begin.

**Julie Hobbs MDIA**

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Curated by Thelma John and P. James Bryans

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# wallpaper

1. **David Turley**  
*Second-hand Belief*
2. **Gregory Pryor**  
*Grevillea nematophylla (pillow of wind)*
3. **Jo Darbyshire**  
*Boat People*
4. **Rebecca Dagnall**  
*Nostalgia and Reproduction 1926-2007*
5. **Penny Bovell**  
*Accumulation*
6. **Emma McPike & Trevor602**  
*Carine to Craigie in Half a Day*
7. **Brendan Hibbert**  
*Dr Matze invented the colour yellow*
8. **Sue Codee**  
*Man, Woman and Child*
9. **Marzena Topka**  
*Hamster*
10. **Perdita Phillips**  
*Nachi Waterfall (tourist version)*
11. **Toogarr Morrison**  
*Policy cut into pieces*
12. **Linda Banazis**  
*Some Body Spaces*
13. **Eva Fernandez**  
*Writing on the Wall*
14. **Annabel Dixon**  
*CentreFold(s)*
15. **Little Design Horse**  
*Free Fall*
16. **Harry Hummerston**  
*Untitled*
17. **P James Bryans**  
*Fieldcolour With Deer Heads*
18. **Mark Datodi**  
*Silhouette*
19. **Cat Critch**  
*Oh! Brigitte...*
20. **Clare McFarlane**  
*Whispering to the Universe*
21. **Susanna Castleden**  
*Journeys to the Island of Absolon*
22. **Caitlin Yardley**  
*The Weeper*
23. **Philippa Nikulinsky**  
*Grass*
24. **Alex Spremberg**  
*always more steps*
25. **Paul Uhlmann**  
*anima mundi*
26. **Anna Dunnill**  
*INSIDE/UNDERNEATH*

Found bible pages on wallpaper  
courtesy Lister Gallery

oil on wall paper  
courtesy Johnston Gallery

oil on wallpaper  
exhibits with Turner Galleries

pigment print on wallpaper  
block print with acrylic on wall paper

drypoint, screenprint, ink on wall paper  
courtesy of www.undenk.com  
4 colour digital print in wall paper

cut wallpaper  
courtesy Galerie Dusseldorf  
acrylic on wallpaper

ink on back of wallpaper

mixed media

ink, collage, dry pigment on wallpaper

ink on wallpaper

uv ink digitally printed on paper

decal on wallpaper

acrylic on wallpaper

screenprint on wood and wallpaper

mixed media

screenprint ink on wallpaper  
exhibits with Turner Galleries  
acrylic on paper and wallpaper  
courtesy Galerie Dusseldorf  
spray paint, pins & paper on wallpaper

pencil on wallpaper

watercolour on handmade mulberry paper, archival tape on wallpaper

courtesy Galerie Dusseldorf  
acrylic on wallpaper  
courtesy Gallery East  
acrylic on wallpaper

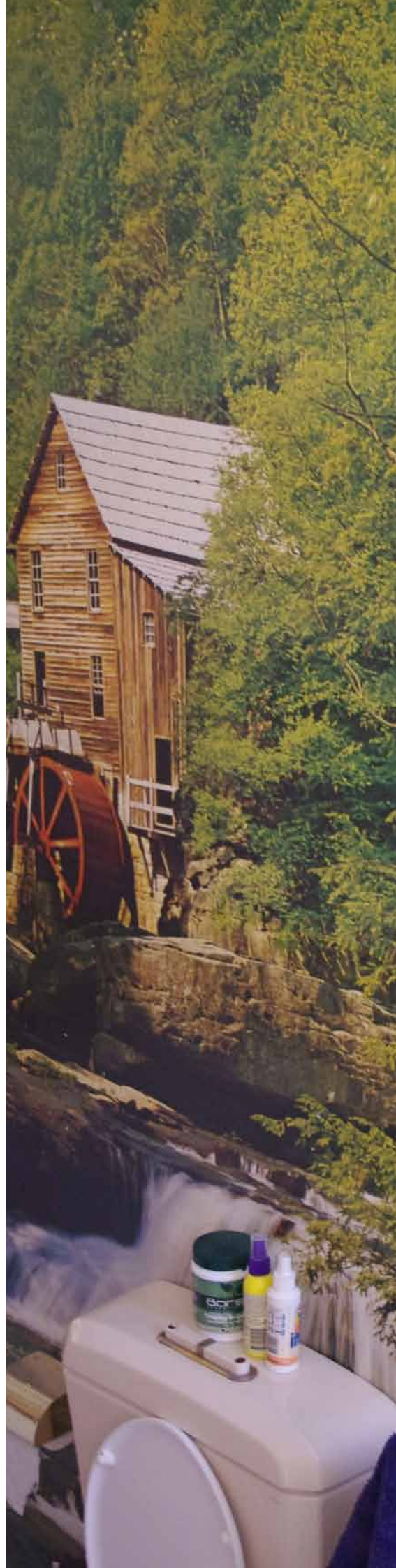
mixed media

Furniture by Guy Eddington (Library and Listen) and Michael Blake (coffee table and drawers)



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images front (l-r): Harry Hummerston, Jo Darbyshire, Alex Spremberg, Annabel Dixon; back: P. James Bryans, artist unknown (photo: Harry Hummerston), Eva Fernandez