

Wrapped attention

ANDREW NICHOLLS
has, for some time,
traced the activities
of a group of
Western Australian
sculptors working in
humble materials.
Olga Cironis is one
of them.

Today I Am What You Want Me To Be
16 April–15 May 2010
Turner Galleries
Perth

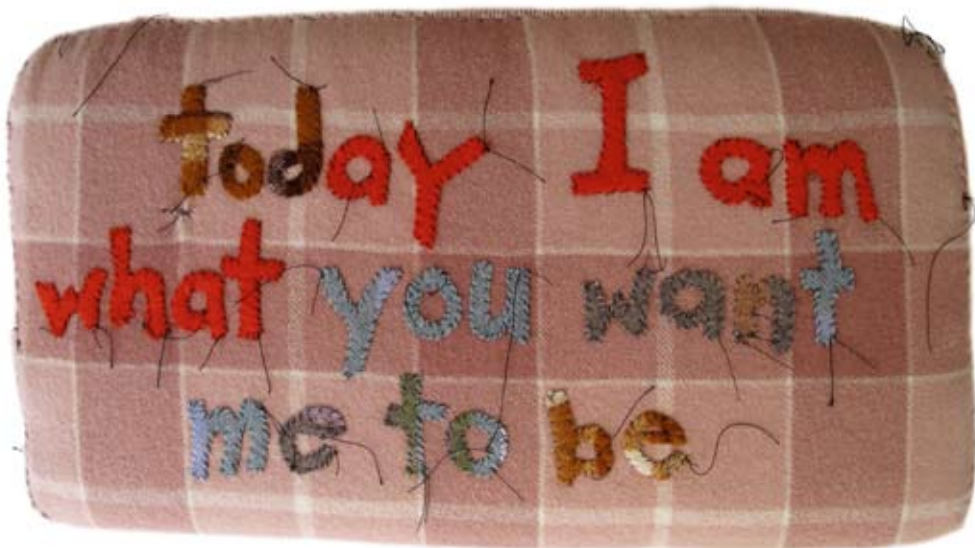
Sculpture is currently enjoying a heyday in Western Australia via the practices of numerous women whose work, though thematically diverse, draws shared inspiration from the use of recycled materials. This group includes Susan Flavell (who appeared in *aAR*'s Issues 4 and 15), who uses cardboard; Nalda Searles (in *aAR* Issues 5 and 19), who employs native fibre; and Cecile Williams (*aAR* Issue 22), who has most recently turned to found plastic.

Olga Cironis is another maker drawn to the non-heroic nature of such materials. Much of her inspiration derives from her experience as an immigrant (she travelled to Australia at an early age from Czechoslovakia, with her refugee parents), and the materiality of her work powerfully resonates with a sense of disenfranchised identity.

For several years now, Cironis has been working with second-hand woollen blankets, playing on their conflicting associations: warmth, security and intimacy on the one hand, abjection and corporeality on the other. "... blankets keep one warm and at the same time receive bodily fluids and hairs like a lover", she states. "Blankets smell of people, they are stained, torn, burned and pierced to reveal holes over time ...". Painstakingly hand-stitched tightly around a variety of familiar objects, they function as both a protective covering and a sort of embalming.

Cironis has exhibited a number of these wrapped objects over recent years, including domestic furniture, a herd of hybrid animal forms based on her young daughter's drawings and, most impressively, an entire tree at the Fremantle Arts Centre in 2007. Audience participation plays a crucial role — her misfit animals had built-in handles to encourage viewers to move them about, continually restructuring the installation, while at Fremantle Arts Centre the audience had to clamber through the tree in order to move down the gallery hallway, thereby snapping the wrapped branches and twigs to slowly degrade its form over the exhibition's run.

For her current solo show at Turner Galleries, Cironis has pushed the series to monumental scale, completely covering the gallery's huge moveable wall — a nine-and-a-half-metre-long room divider — in blankets embroidered with a selection of misogynistic phrases. The use of terms such as 'whore', 'bitch', 'slut', and 'cougar' reasserts the violence implicit in such labels, many of which have become almost prosaic in contemporary society, but that for Cironis are vividly aggressive, "As a migrant, these words are really literal for me ... sometimes you have to build a really thick wall to protect yourself from such stupidity." A blanket-wrapped easy chair and footstool are placed in the ideal position from which to view the wall and absorb the embroidered text, the stool emblazoned with the exhibition title: *Today I am what you want me to be*. In restating the machinations of misogyny without criticism or comment, Cironis's wall forms a literal manifestation of this seething ironic catchphrase. The installation makes for a compelling meditation.



Above: Olga Cironis, **Today I Am What You Want Me To Be**, 2010, installation detail (footstool found on the street), 75 x 40cm. Photograph Olga Cironis.

Below: Olga Cironis, **Behind Each Look**, 2008, fallen eucalyptus tree, woollen blankets, thread, Dimensions: 4 x 2m. Photograph B Shaylor.

