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THE TRANSMOGRIFIER COLLECTION

New furniture by Katy Wallace



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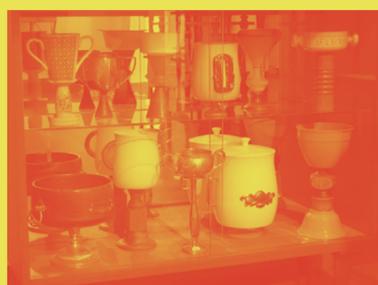
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14



57



10



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List of works

- 1. 3rd Hand Drawers
- 2. Companion Table
- 3. Nut & Raisin Celebration
- 4. Nut & Raisin Tree
- 6. School Chair Upgrade – Cherry

- 7. Downsize Table
- 8. School Chair Upgrade – Oak
- 10. Someone Else's Chair
- 11. Banana Stool
- 12. Pot 'o' Gold
- 13. Trinket Keeper
- 14. Nice Drawers
- 15. Hostess Table

- 16. Duncan's Cabinet
- 17. Knick Knack Ziggerat
- 18. Fruit Apartment
- 19. Mothership Lampshade
- 20. Chiffon Dream
- 21. Lost Dog Table – small
- 22. Lost Dog Table – medium
- 23. Cerise Bloom

- 24. Wood Trolley
- 25. Nana's Tea Trolley
- 28. Nested Table
- 29. Fancy Coat Stand
- 35. Endless Column
- 36. Gossip Chair
- 37. Long Stander
- 39. Feathered Gourd – Ben Alley

- 46. Clothes Safe
- 48. Lilly Glassware Platter
- 49. Satchel Readymade Stool
- 50. Arthur Toye Readymade Table
- 51. Barry's Kidney Table
- 57. Trophy Cabinet incl. 11x Salvation Trophies
- 59. Lamp Diagram

- 61. Lecturn
- 62. Independent Tray – Square
- 64. Independent Tray – Channel
- 65. Independent Tray – Rectangle
- 67. Feathered Gourd – Dorothy
- 68. Twin Share Side Table
- 70. Feathered Flask
- 71. Soft Drawers

- 72. My Curvese
- 73. Companion
- 76. Tropical Island
- 78. Minor Shit Collector.
- 79. Shit Collector
- 80. My Curvese 2 (as is where is)

Selected works illustrated

THE TRANSMOGRIFIER COLLECTION BY KATY WALLACE

Katy Wallace's mode of practice — her engine — is a human machine in an age of intense mechanisation. Amidst rapidly accelerating technologies, her machine processes slowly, working downwards, through the rubble and refuse that progress has left behind.

In this exhibition Katy Wallace presents her practice, not as a process with a beginning, middle and end, but as a machine that she operates; flicking a switch, pulling a lever, turning the dial, just so. In *The Transmogrifier Collection*, making is conceived as the transformation of objects; production is subtraction, addition, multiplication and division.

Filling the Objectspace main gallery are items of domestic furniture, at once familiar and strange. 70s side tables stretch skywards in an endless stack. Snack dishes have been fixed to a hat stand like leaves on a tree. And walking sticks substitute legs on a vintage chair. The collection of objects form a strange second hand store, where the broken have been fixed, the vestigial repurposed, or where the original object has altered almost entirely.

To transmogrify is to change something in appearance or form, especially in a way that is strange, humorous or, as some definitions note, grotesque. While we might think of the grotesque as that which is ugly, obscene or disturbing it is better understood, and useful in this instance, to think about the grotesque as an immense variety of motifs and figures, which all contain “doubleness, hybridity and metamorphosis,”ⁱ and that the disturbance and power of the grotesque resides in these qualities. These three characteristics of the grotesque aptly describe Wallace's exhibition.

The pieces in this *The Transmogrifier Collection* were once discarded; abandoned by their owners, deemed obsolete or consigned to second hand shops. Wallace's treatment of each piece, whether it is a simple scraping back of layers or a more drastic structural reconfiguration, maintains an echo of the objects' past lives. In this sense she performs a balancing act of duality; honouring the past while looking to the future.

Beyond the understanding of the grotesque as an aesthetic category it has also been considered a crucial experience used to conceptualise alterity and change.ⁱⁱ Without visualising difference it can be hard to imagine transformation, let alone revolution. At the heart of Katy Wallace's practice is a deep interest in re-cycled or up-cycled design and an identification with the DIY culture that is ubiquitous in New Zealand. The doubleness and hybridity of the objects in *The Transmogrifier Collection* signal the possibilities of change that, increasingly, we locate in the practices of recycling, reusing and reducing, and historically as New Zealanders, in making do with what is at hand. In the face of impending environmental catastrophe designers are placing more value on processes, materials and indeed, an entire methodology and ethos for working, that strive to lessen the impact that we make on the world we live in.

Katy Wallace's source material is other's work and other's waste; detritus. As such she abandons traditional notions of authorship, of the designer-author or the designer-auteur. Instead, Wallace's practice positions making as a collaborative process, although her collaborators are less the specific makers of the furniture she repurposes and the trash that these items become when they are abandoned. But what particular trash. On examining the pieces in *The Transmogrifier Collection*, it is clear that for the most part it is certain types of objects that have been selected for transformation. These pieces are a particular type of antipodean retro, vintage and kitsch; vaguely familiar to most New Zealanders. You probably know someone who owned a kidney bean shaped coffee table, at some point. As such these objects are at once idiosyncratic and generic; a doubleness that is sly, a little confusing and a little humorous. Martino Gamper talks about how design can function as a sort of living anthropology. *The Transmogrifier Collection* functions in this way: illuminating particular threads in the domestic design histories of this country. Speaking of his *100 Chairs in 100 Days* project, Gamper hopes that his “chairs can illustrate — and celebrate — the geographical, historical and human resonance of design: what can they tell us about their place of origin or their previous sociological context and even their previous owners? For me, the stories behind the chairs are as important as their style or even their function.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This ‘human resonance of design’ in Gamper's statement complicates Wallace's ‘machine.’ The making of Wallace's work may not start from scratch exactly, it may be more ‘post-production’ but it is definitely not the cold hardness or the reliable and predictable work of a machine. Katy Wallace's mode of practice — her engine — is a human machine in an age of intense mechanisation. Amidst rapidly accelerating technologies, her machine processes slowly, working downwards, through the rubble and refuse that progress has left behind. Using *The Transmogrifier Machine* as a metaphor for her unique practice, Katy Wallace's work is a complex example of the direction of contemporary craft today; interdisciplinary, innovative, collaborative and highly engaged in the problems and concerns of our moment.

HENRY DAVIDSON

Henry Davidson worked at Objectspace in 2014 as Curator. He is currently the 2014/2015 Curatorial Assistant at Artspace.

ⁱ
Rémi Astruc, *Rémi Astruc, le renouveau du grotesque dans le roman du XX siècle: essai d'anthropologie littéraire*. Classics Garnier: Paris, 2010.

ⁱⁱ
Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ
www.martinogamper.com/project/a-100-chairs-in-a-100-days/
(Accessed 23/12/2014)

Katy Wallace runs the *Transmogrifier Machine* from her studio in Gisborne. Its progress can be followed on www.facebook.com/TheTransmogrifierMachine or www.katywallace.co.nz

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