

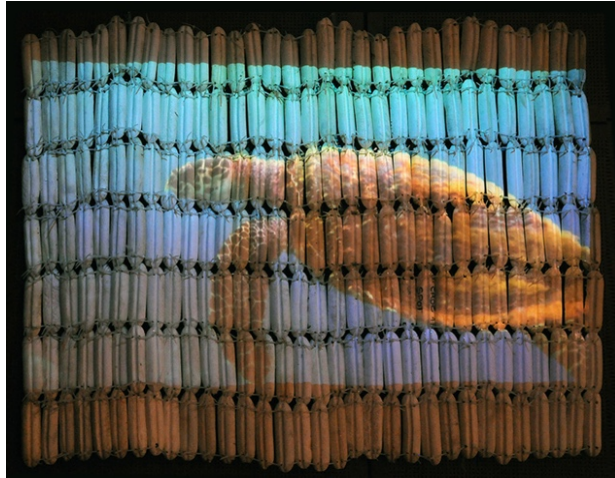
Fact or Fiction?

Priya and Zander

investigate links between
plastic at the Art Gallery
and in the
Great Barrier Reef

Robyn Glade-Wright and Barbara Dover





Barbara Dover *Undercurrent* 2019
Video, found plastic floats collected from far north
Queensland beaches. 150 x 190 x 5 cm



Robyn Glade-Wright *Inflated* 2017
Found plastic floats collected from far north
Queensland beaches, wire, solar lights.
125 x 100 x 50 cm

When Priya and Zander visited an Art Gallery in Queensland, they found curious works of art about the effects of plastic pollution on sea animals who live on the Great Barrier Reef. They decided to undertake a fact-finding mission to investigate if these works were fact or fiction. Were these two artists' works tall stories or do they relate to our world?

Barbara Dover's video, *Undercurrent*, mesmerised Priya and Zander. In the video, turtles appeared to swim in a plastic world. The video was projected onto a screen made with discarded plastic floats which were once used in fishing nets, and that had washed up on beaches in far north Queensland. The title of the video *Undercurrent* has a menacing tone. What did it mean? Was it fact or was it fiction?

A clue was found in Robyn Glade-Wright's work *Inflated* where they found a turtle with an abdomen full of the same discarded plastic fishing floats. The label for this work stated: "When turtles eat plastic, they produce gas in an effort to digest the plastic. The gas makes the turtles float to the surface of the sea. The gas also means the turtles cannot dive down into the water to find food, so they starve to death. These poor turtles bake in the sun as they die". Priya and Zander were disturbed by the impact of plastic pollution on turtles. They thought the facts about plastic in the sea outweighed the fiction.



Robyn Glade-Wright *Dump* 2018
Found plastic debris washed up on far north
Queensland beaches, palm seed cases, paint.
90 x 90 x 12 cm



Robyn Glade-Wright *Catch of the Day* 2017
Plastic waste found on far north Queensland
beaches, wire, solar lights. 175 x 60 x 30 cm



In the work of art *Dump*, palm tree seed pods were painted to look like boats. They appeared to be ferrying plastic rubbish to the sea. Priya and Zander knew that people illegally dumped plastic in the bush and at sea. They also knew that plastic discarded on land can be blown into drains where it is washed into rivers and carried to the sea. A whopping 70% of the plastic in the sea is deposited by rivers. What they didn't know is that by the year 2050, the weight of plastic in the ocean will be greater than the weight of all sea creatures. Priya and Zander wondered what age they would be in 2050, and if they could stop the deluge of plastic going into the sea.

Catch of the Day, was a big transparent fish with plastic rubbish in the intestines and the stomach. The motivation for this work was the death of a whale in Queensland. An autopsy found that the whale had six metres of plastic in her stomach which caused her death. Priya and Zander concluded that, as this work represented an actual event – a sea creature dying after eating plastic – this work represented a fact.

Plasticene Hatchlings, was a bale or nest of baby turtles made from plastic rubbish collected on the far north Queensland beaches. In a spirit of being detectives, Priya and Zander determined to find out “Why was this so?” They discovered that sea animals and birds, when seeking out food, cannot distinguish plastic from their food. As a result, plastic pollution has contaminated around 600 species of marine organisms including 100% of turtles, 90% of marine bird species, 59% of whales, and 36% of seals. People also have trouble recognising plastic in their food as microplastics are less than half a millimetre in diameter and cannot be seen without a magnifying glass.

Humans consume the equivalent weight of a credit card each week in the form of microplastics. This was suggested in a work of art that resembled Andy Warhol’s famous *Campbell's Soup Cans* 1962. However, these soup cans list the microplastic content in the soup. Microplastics can cross the blood brain barrier, therefore plastic is being incorporated into our body. Priya and Zander concluded that the consumption of plastics by both animals and humans is a perturbing fact underlying the creation of these works of art.



Barbara Dover *Plasticene Hatchlings* 2018
Found hard hats, plastic debris washed up on far north Queensland beaches, nylon, tape. 20 x 20 x 40 cm



Robyn Glade-Wright *Lampton's Soup*
Detail 2019 12 Digital images.
Each 20 x 25 cm



Barbara Dover *Decoy* 2018
Found squid hooks found on far north
Queensland beaches, metal, glue.
30 x 30 x 25 cm



Barbara Dover *Plasticky Sea Urchin* 2018
Found plastic packaging tags washed up on various far north
Queensland beaches, metal frame, glue.
55 x 30 x 55 cm

Decoy is a work of art that Priya and Zander loved. It was made from discarded squid hooks that had been floating in the sea before being washed up on the beach. The work made them aware of the horror of spiky squid hooks in the sea. It would be awful to swim into if you were a sea animal. Another great work was *Plasticky Sea Urchin* where plastic rubbish suggested the sea animal was made of plastic.

Priya and Zander liked art galleries because of the special kind of experiences the works of art can generate. For example works of art might engender a feeling of connection with the world and, at the same time, a recognition that world is greater than oneself. Works of art can also inspire you to create new art.

In their assessment, Priya and Zander decided that *Decoy* and the *Plasticky Sea Urchin* are imaginary objects rather than representations of actual animals. Most importantly, however, these works of art made them reflect on the impact of plastics upon the sea life. To this end, the question regarding: is it fact or fiction? started to appear some what limited.

In the sea, small particles of plastic form an underwater smog that is similar to fog on land. Small pieces of plastic can be found throughout the oceans and they are incorporated in sea-ice in polar regions. This fact was evident in the work of art titled *Arctic Chill*. The ice in the work appears to be made with polluted water. The suggestion that we are drinking this water is alarming.

A concerning 83% of drinking water worldwide is contaminated with 9 to 12 microplastics particles per litre. The contamination rate in water in plastic bottles is higher than tap water. Bottled water contains 118 to 4000 microplastics particles per litre. People around the globe buy one million plastic bottles each minute. The manufacture of plastic bottles uses crude oil and generates green house gases that contribute to global warming.

Priya and Zander were amazed that sea-ice is now polluted. They started to consider the extent of the changes to the natural environment due to human actions. They also valued how works of art relate to the real world and yet they do so in an imaginative form that presents factual information in a thoughtful way.



Barbara Dover *Arctic Chill* Detail 2018
Found plastic debris (underwater smog) washed up on far north Queensland beaches, resin, drinking glasses. 7 x 20 x variable cm



Barbara Dover *Arctic Chill* 2018
Found plastic debris (underwater smog) washed up on far north Queensland beaches, resin, drinking glasses. 7 x 20 x variable cm



Robyn Glade-Wright *Plastic Time* 2018
Glass vases, found plastic debris washed up on far
north Queensland beaches, nylon, glue. 54 x 13 x 13 cm

The piece, *Plastic Time*, was ominous, suggesting that plastic was continuing to pollute the air, land and sea. Priya and Zander knew that plastic is made from crude oil. It takes millions of years for crude oil to form in the ground. Oil is pumped from the ground and shipped or piped to refineries in a few days. It takes another few days to transport the refined oil to factories and to make plastic items such as plastic knives and forks.

When we use plastic items once and throw them away, they do not decompose, but break up into smaller pieces over 500 to 1000 years. This means that most of the plastic that has ever been made still exists. Only 12 % of plastic has been recycled. Priya and Zander reflected on the plastic timeline. Oil takes a million years to form. In a few weeks, plastic items can be made. In the case of single use plastic like straws, cutlery and bags, the plastic will exist in the world as pollution for another 1000 years. They thought about options for recycling plastic and the need for new forms of plastic that decompose.



Robyn Glade-Wright *Over - Consumption* 2019
Cardboard, bamboo, vegetation, paint, glue.
270 x 80 x 100 cm

The final piece Priya and Zander viewed was *Over-consumption*. In this piece, a large container tanker appears to be cruising above a dead coral reef. Plastic harbours germs that can kill reef corals. The warming planet, along with cyclones and infestations by crown of thorns starfish has resulted in coral death and coral beaching of 30% of the Great Barrier Reef. Priya and Zander imagined that global manufacturing and consumption were implicated in the urgent problems of climate change and environmental pollution.

Priya and Zander also considered their fact-finding mission in relation to art. They decided that works of art do not have to be real or factual to hold meaning that informs our experience of life. They concluded that works of art can be considered as props in an important imaginative realm. The value in engaging in this inventive realm and, in viewing art, is the way in which art coerces us to consider our thoughts, feelings and the future. In fact, works of art can be of great benefit to us, particularly in these troubling times. Change is required if we are to protect the earth's delicate systems and the plants and animals that depend on them for their survival.

Barbara Dover & Robyn Glade-Wright are exhibiting in the following venues:

Artspace Mackay: 24 January – 5 April 2020.

Call 4961 9779 or email: artspace@mackay.qld.gov.au to arrange a school visit.

Hervey Bay Regional Gallery: 1 May – 7 June 2020.

Call 4197 4206 or email: regionalgallery@frasercoast.qld.gov.au to arrange a school visit.

KickArts Contemporary Art Cairns: 6 August – 26 September 2020.

Call 4050 9494 or email: administration@kickarts.org.au to arrange a school visit.

Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts Townsville: 13 October – 15 November 2020.

Call 4772 7109 or email: office@umbrella.org.au to arrange a school visit.



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Barbara Dover

Practicing artist: Barbara's work investigates our relationship with animals and, more broadly, the natural world, at the intersection of aesthetics and ethics. Her multidisciplinary contemporary art practice examines the familiarities and intricacies of human-animal relations within the understanding of animals as sentient individuals whose moral status, interests and lives matter.

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Associate Professor Robyn Glade-Wright

Practicing artist and arts educator : Robyn Glade-Wright seeks to create a sense of disquiet in her works of art to engender reflection about the kind of life (and death) we impose on sentient creatures. Glade-Wright's works of art respond to the ecological crisis of the Anthropocene in a form that conflates beauty and dread, and allure and anxiety to provoke contemplation of these terms in an effort to foster a sustainable future for life on this small planet.

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