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Australasian Art & Culture

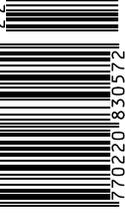


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# Lisa Paulsen

Lisa Paulsen's bold, highly contemporary collection is a love letter to Australian and New Zealand contemporary art.

WRITTEN *by* KIRSTY SIER

When asked, Lisa Paulsen will struggle to pin down her artistic tastes. Like many collectors, the Sydney-based devotee started buying works on the advice of an art consultant but, since she returned to Australia in the mid-1990s after several years living in Singapore, she's been doing things her own way. Although her collection includes as many objects and sculptures as it does canvases and photographs – not to mention a careful balance between big and small hitters in the art world – it is as eclectic as it is narrative-driven. Specifically, the narrative thread she has been cultivating for over two decades has been a preoccupation with contemporary Australian and New Zealand artists, whom she sees as more than capable of holding their own on the world stage. This broad yet targeted focus has steered her well. Paulsen has previously worked for the AGNSW, served three terms on the board of the MCA and twice

been involved with the Australian contingent at the Venice Biennale, as well as supporting various other arts organisations. As *VAULT* discovers, this participation in the Australian art community has only fuelled Paulsen's appetite for bigger things – in both the literal and figurative senses.

**You've previously described yourself as a "self-taught collector". Where did you begin?**

I've got quite eclectic taste, and I also respond very much to my surroundings. I am always very influenced, if I'm in a certain country, by what I see. For instance, if you're in Asia you see Asian porcelain, and if you're in Norway you notice Swedish furniture, and all that kind of thing. I started seriously collecting contemporary Australian art when we moved back to Sydney [from Singapore] – which was a move home for me – in the mid-'90s.



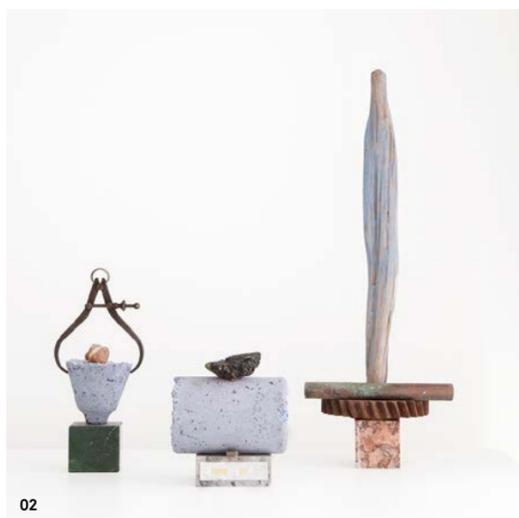
Seated: Lisa Paulsen  
DANIEL BOYD  
*Untitled, 2014*  
Photo: Penny Clay



01



03



02



04

**At first, you made purchases on the advice of an art consultant. Does anyone influence your decision-making now?**

I'm quite influenced by what I see now with public art. It draws your attention to art on a larger scale, and it makes you think very carefully about what you want to do with your own collection: whether you want to sort of buy smaller-scale domestic items that you can always hang on your living room wall, or if you actually want to try to think about whether you want to try to do one or two things that are a bit monumental. I would love to do a major statement piece. I've been thinking about it for a long time, but I'm still trying to work it out.

Over the years I'd have to say that there's been one person that has influenced me that's a bit of an outsider: Peter Fay. I don't see him very much anymore because he's living in Tasmania, but I learned such a lot from him, and he opened my eyes to incorporating outsider art. I wouldn't say I have a vast collection of outsider art, but I have little touches of it throughout my collection. I do like some really slick things, but I also don't mind when things are a little bit messy.

**How would you describe your personal taste?**

I like artworks that have really strong political messages; that make you feel stirred. For instance, I've got [one of] Tony Garifalakis's [Queen of England] works. I think that's an interesting work, but it has to be beautiful too. You can see the beautiful mauve outfit and the lustrous pearls and the gorgeous diamonds – it's a really lovely thing to look at, but it's also interesting to think, well, what is the artist thinking of when he makes those portraits? I don't have very much of that sort of art, but I'm drawn to it if they also have the aesthetic qualities that I relate to.

**Much of your collection is contemporary Australian art. Do you ever make exceptions for overseas artists?**

I do have some works by international artists in my collection, but I'm moving away from that to focus on Australian and New Zealand artists. I really believe in a lot of New Zealand artists, such as the fabulous things that New Zealanders have done at the Venice Biennale, and it seems silly to exclude them. I want to develop a stronger narrative in my collection, and that's the thread I've decided to focus on. For a while, I thought to myself, "What story are you trying to tell?" We have a lot of visitors that come from overseas, and it's quite nice to think that visitors will get that surprise.

**Do you regularly change up the way pieces are displayed in your home?**

Not here so much. I used to do that more and more [in Mosman], but I can have fun in other ways. I like to find works that find a friend in my collection. I have a little Huseyin Sami work that I bought that specifically because I wanted to pair it with a Susan Norrie painting that I've got upstairs. Then I saw that work – I loved it on its own, but I knew exactly where



I wanted that to cuddle into. I like pairing together works that really enhance each other; I like to make these little associations and then I think, "Oh well, only I thought of that!"

**Is there a conscious balance for you between acquiring big-name artists and lesser-known works?**

Oh, yes. I really like doing that; I think it's really fun. I'm absolutely thrilled if I can highlight the work of a young artist and a perfect example of that is Rebecca Gallo. I bought three little works of hers from her group show at Darren Knight [Gallery], and I think they work brilliantly in my collection.

**Often some kind of relationship forms between an artist and their collectors. Have you found this to be the case with your acquisitions?**

That's funny you should say that because I'm just about to have some works exhibited in a show at Penrith Regional Gallery. It's a show curated by Michael Do, who works [as assistant curator] at 4A [Centre for Contemporary Asian Art]. Michael is doing a show on five collectors and five artists. The artist I'm associated with is Patrick Hartigan. I've got quite a few of Patrick's works, and it's a nice little segue into your question about who I've been influenced by, because Peter Fay actually introduced me to Patrick Hartigan. Now, I'm showing my works of Patrick's in this show in Penrith.

**The rise of online art sales has made it easier to purchase art from anywhere. Do you prefer to see a piece before you buy it?**

Absolutely. I'm very nervous about [buying something before I see it]. I mean, if you know an artist's work, I've done that before. I can show you a Daniel Boyd I bought where I purchased it only having seen the online image, and I was really rewarded for that leap of faith – but sometimes you're not. You can be really lucky, but you can also be unlucky. Sometimes things can look a little different in reality. **V**

Lisa Paulsen is a Melbourne Art Fair ambassador.

Above  
JON CAMPBELL  
*Fuck That*, 2014

02 REBECCA GALLO  
*Small Wins*, 2017

04 JIAXIN NONG  
*Untitled*, 2017

KATE SMITH  
LIAM BENSON

SUAN NORRIE  
Collection of  
gouaches, 2017

Opposite  
01 MIKALA DWYER  
*Wall Necklace*, 2013

03 TONY GARIFALAKIS  
*Untitled #2*  
(from *Mob Rule* series)

ALEXANDRA STANDEN  
Ceramic works

SILLY GUBBA, 2014  
JAMES TYLOR  
*The Village*, 2016

Photos: Penny Clay