

UQ ART MUSEUM

PATRICIA PICCININI



The University of Queensland
Art Museum
University Drive, St Lucia
www.artmuseum.uq.edu.au
07 3365 3046
Open daily 10.00 am – 4.00 pm
FREE ENTRY

Cover image:
Patricia Piccinini
The gathering (stills) 2007
DVD, 16:9 PAL Stereo
3 Minute loop
Courtesy of the artist, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and
Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne, and Yvon Lambert, New York

JULIUS CRICUS PROVIDER NUMBER 000028

INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

PATRICIA PICCININI

Born 1965 Freetown, Sierra Leone. Lives and works in Melbourne

Patricia Piccinini reinvents the Gothic tradition to create a type of techno-Gothic environment, in which science and technology generate fear and dread. In her video *The gathering* 2007, Piccinini chooses a suburban home rather than a castle or even a science laboratory to play out her Gothic drama. She chooses what at first seems like an unremarkable middle-class home set in the suburbs, complete with the sounds of cicadas and barking dogs. However, the video's opening vignettes, which focus on such everyday details as the staircase, the curtains and light fittings, generate suspense and a feeling of impending doom. She chooses the familiar to explore the unfamiliar. As the scenes unfold we ask ourselves: 'Who lives in the house and where have they gone?' 'Why are all the lights still on?' 'Where is that music coming from?'

A young girl is lying on the carpet in one of the rooms. At first we are unsure whether she is alive. While her twitching and breathing soon reassure us, there remains something disquieting about a child sleeping on the floor in an empty house. Gradually, seven small marsupials emerge from behind curtains and under beds and surround her. Might they have come from the bush nearby the house? Piccinini provides no

answer. Resembling diminutive wombats, the creatures press alarmingly close to the child, who remains oblivious in her slumber. In a filmic crescendo, one of the creatures displays its slimy pink embryos, which emerge momentarily from its pouch. The video finishes unexpectedly with a final vignette that focuses on an Indian wall decoration. This idyllic scene of a man and woman appears far removed from the nightmarish strangeness of the preceding events.

Piccinini's *The gathering* exemplifies the notion of the 'uncanny', first discussed by Sigmund Freud in 1919. Freud linked the uncanny specifically to the home. The German word for uncanny is *das Unheimlich* which translates as 'unhomely', hence for Freud the uncanny was experienced when the home or something familiar is rendered unhomely and unfamiliar. Curious marsupials invading the private world of the home in *The gathering* could be read as a warning, a cautionary tale about seemingly benign scientific explorations in the name of progress. Piccinini refuses to provide a single reading of her work. In all of her artwork – drawing, sculpture, photography or video – her creatures are at once menacing and protective, vile and enchanting.

Activities

- Do the creatures in *The gathering* remind you of anything? Are they native animals or introduced species? Brainstorm the possibilities. Create an artwork where you draw or collage together the features of your favourite native animals to create new hybrid creatures.
- *The gathering* is also the title of a book, a suspense film and a Heavy Metal band. Why do you think Piccinini has chosen this title for her video work? What does this title suggest and why? In small groups create a caption for the artwork explaining the significance of the title to audiences.
- Create a series of artworks where you make your own home 'unhomely'. You could use photography or video. How does the choice of camera angle, composition and subject impact on the mood of the work?
- Mary Shelley's book *Frankenstein* 1818 is often cited as an influence on Piccinini. Retell the story of *Frankenstein* in your own words. Why do you think Piccinini is drawn to this tale? Recall other stories or films depicting scientists and their creations. What do these all have in common?
- Surrealism is said to have revived Gothic tendencies in art. The opening vignettes of *The gathering* resemble Surrealist paintings by artists Pierre Roy and Dorothea Tanning. Research their work and locate examples that remind you of scenes in *The gathering*.
- Visit Patricia Piccinini's website www.patriciapiccinini.net. How does her work included in *neo goth: back in black* compare with her other work? What are her abiding concerns and interests? Have a discussion where you look at several examples of her work in detail.



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