ARTISTS

Jayne Dyer has an extensive national and international exhibition and awards record. She has participated in curated touring exhibitions *Translucent text* (2007), *Drawing dust* (2003), *Skin culture* (1998–99), *Affinities* (1997) and *Oblique travellers* (1996–97) in Asia. Major solo exhibitions include *Words for pictures*, Hong Kong (2007), *Greyspace*, Osaka (2005), *Critical influence*, Sydney (1998) and *Site*, Beijing (1996). Grants include artist-in-residence, Lingnan University, Hong Kong (2007), FONAS Studio, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2005), NAS travelling scholarship, Hong Kong (2000), Art Gallery of NSW (1999), DFAT exhibition funding, CAFA, Beijing (1996), an Asialink/VACB residency, Beijing Art Academy (1995), and the Verdaccio Studio, Italy, Monash University (1993). Jayne was commissioned to produce *The reading room*, stage installations at Sydney Theatre for the 2006 and 2007 Sydney Writers Festivals. As Head of Public Programs at the National Art School, she received a Public Service Medal in 2005 for contributions to the arts and education. Jayne has an MA from RMIT University, Melbourne. She is represented by Uber Gallery, Melbourne.

Sue Pedley is an artist whose processed-based approach explores ways to experiment with different materials and their relationship to place, and to reformulate basic elements of time, light and space. Sue has a Master of Visual Art from COFA, and has also studied at Sydney College of the Arts; Stadelschule, Frankfurt, Germany; and the Tasmanian School of Art. She has undertaken studio residencies in London, France, Germany, Vietnam and Sri Lanka funded by the Australia Council and Asialink.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Blue Jay way*, Heide Museum of Modern Art and Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest (2007), *Sound of bamboo,* Artspace, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney (2002), *Sound of lotus*, Mori Gallery (2002) and *Quarrying memory*, Gallery 4A (2000). Sue represented Australia in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Japan (2006). Other recent group exhibitions include *Light sensitive*, National Gallery of Victoria (2007), *A matter of time*, 16th Tamworth Fibre Biennial (2004–06), and *First impressions*, National Gallery of Victoria (2003).

Susan Andrews was born in England and migrated to Australia with her family in 1966. She completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at City Art Institute (now College of Fine Arts, COFA) in 1984, a Postgraduate Diploma in Art Studies in 1985, and an MA Arts at UWS Nepean in 1997. Susan has been a lecturer in painting and drawing at the National Art School since 2000, and a part-time lecturer at COFA since 1997. From 2000 to 2002 Susan was a visiting artist within the Science Faculty at the University of NSW, where she collaborated with artist Isobel Johnston and various staff and students in projects dealing with art and science. This culminated in *Imagining science*, at the Tin Sheds, Sydney University (2002). Susan was included in *Intersections with art and science* at Ivan Dougherty Gallery (2001). She was awarded an Art Gallery of New South Wales, Denise Hickey Memorial Studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2000). Artist-in-residence awards include FONAS Studio, Cité Internationale des Arts (2005) and Bundanon Trust (2005). Susan is represented by Legge Gallery, Sydney.

Cover: *U'vla marina*
Sue Pedley
corn husks

HISTORIC HOUSES TRUST

SPARE ROOM

ELIZABETH BAY HOUSE

Published in association with the exhibition
Spare room at Elizabeth Bay House

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The Historic Houses Trust is a statutory authority of, and principally funded by, the NSW State Government. The Trust conserves, manages and interprets important properties and house museums in NSW for the education and enjoyment of the public. Properties of the Trust include: Elizabeth Bay House, Elizabeth Farm, Government House, Hyde Park Barracks Museum, Justice & Police Museum, Meroogal, Museum of Sydney *on the site of first Government House*, Rose Seidler House, Rouse Hill estate, Susannah Place Museum, The Mint and Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, and Vaucluse House.

Spare room continues a distinguished series of contemporary art-based exhibitions at Elizabeth Bay House that has included Fiona Hall's *Paradisus terrestris* series (1990); *Cyclopaedia* by Fiona Macdonald (1990); *Artists in the house!* curated by Michael Goldberg (1997); *Magical Golland* by Alison Clouston (2001); *Cabinet of curiosities* by Robyn Stacey (2002); and *Ten[d]ancy*, curated by Sally Breen and Tania Doropoulos (2006). Part of Tracey Moffat's *Laudanum* series was filmed at Elizabeth Bay House in 1998.

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Right: *Under my thumb*
Susan Andrews
pigmented cast wax thimbles

SPARE ROOM

INSTALLATIONS BY
JAYNE DYER, SUE PEDLEY AND SUSAN ANDREWS

Museums are significant sites of inspiration for artists who see the legacy of the past in contemporary life. Places such as Elizabeth Bay House played a role in the colonial project of imperial powers during the 18th and 19th centuries and have now become places for engagements with its legacy. In that sense, we are now looking 'beyond the mausoleum' towards a more revelatory idea of the museum as a site for new ways of thinking and imagining life in the past; as a site for revealing how knowledge is created. Elizabeth Bay House is an artefact, a container for collections of cultural material and intangible cultural baggage, and a museum. Its impact is evident beyond the actual site and period in which it originated, as we see in *Spare room* and the installations of Sydney artists Jayne Dyer, Sue Pedley and Susan Andrews.

The artists have found conflicting voices in the history of Elizabeth Bay House. These voices include the 19th-century gentility of the Macleay family, the muted voices of the Macleay servants, and now its museum voice. The installations respond to visual relationships between the landscape and the house, containment and the taxonomy of people and collections, the textiles of domestic life, and the significance of Elizabeth Bay House as a site of knowledge creation for and about the colony.

It is worth recounting a brief history of the house before considering the installations. Alexander Macleay arrived in Sydney with his wife and six daughters in 1826 to take up the post of Colonial Secretary of New South Wales. Macleay was retired from the British civil service and had been a member of leading British scientific bodies, the Linnean Society of London (of which he was Secretary, 1798–1825) and the Royal Society. Macleay brought one of the largest insect collections in Europe to Sydney and had extensive interests in botany and horticulture.

Macleay took possession of 54 acres at Elizabeth Bay in 1826 and began to develop it, at great expense, as a landscape garden with vistas across Sydney Harbour. Construction of the house began in 1835 under the fashionable architect John Verge. It is a superb example of a Greek Revival villa whose interiors are notable for their detailing, particularly the quality of the cedar joinery, plaster and stonework. The saloon, with its elegant cantilevered stair, is regarded as the finest interior in Australian colonial architecture. In 1839, Alexander and Eliza Macleay moved into the incomplete house with their eldest son, William Sharp Macleay, and unmarried daughter, Kennethina. Their eldest daughter, Fanny, who had been her father's assistant, illustrator of botanical specimens and William Sharp Macleay's correspondent on the building of the house, had died in 1836.

Macleay lost his position as Colonial Secretary in 1837 and in the Depression of the early 1840s faced financial ruin. In 1845 William Sharp Macleay assumed ownership of the house in return for part payment of his father's debts. In the rift that followed Alexander and Eliza Macleay moved out of the house. William lived there alone until his death in 1865. Both he and the next resident, his cousin William John Macleay, added to the Macleay natural history collections. These were presented to the University of Sydney with an endowment for the Macleay Museum in 1888. In 1911 the Macleay family sold Elizabeth Bay House.[1]

The significance of the site as central to a particular knowledge of the colony is the focus of Jayne Dyer's installation. Rows of books are suspended in and partially block the doorway between the drawing room and the library. Dyer is responding to the work and life of the one of the Macleays: the collector and ambitious taxonomist William Sharp Macleay, who developed a highly artificial classification system that became known as the circular

or quinary system. This proposed that at any level of taxonomy, groups could be linked by a series of affinities into a circle of five elements, and the elements of one circle could be linked by analogy to the five elements of another circle. The system was for a time very influential in England (before Charles Darwin), when it was generally believed that species were fixed in their form and that the affinity of forms in the pattern of Nature was a reflection of the wisdom and order of God.[2]

William Sharp Macleay's quinary system is an example of aesthetics rather than strict empirical science underpinning collecting. To Dyer it is a lost form of knowledge. This seems contrary to the basis upon which systems of categorisation later developed to rationally order the natural world.

A library is a repository of accumulated facts, hypotheses and conjecture. For Dyer, the library presents a strange disjuncture. When built in 1839, it was the largest room in the house. Stripped bare of its 4000 volumes (in 1845), it is a shell of Alexander Macleay's obsession with literature and natural history. Dyer uses the books as structures rather than as objects or compilations of text. The books partially blocking the view to the drawing room and the bay beyond infer that their contents may also be restrictive. The collection of books is also symbolic of the house because it represents the transportation of a system of knowledge for the colony, held in a single house that is now a public institution. The house is the site of encyclopaedic ordering of the colony. Dyer's books appear as homage, yet unidentifiable, their spines blackened to conceal the titles, also providing a funereal reference to lost or forgotten books.

What remains of Alexander's collection of butterflies and moths is secured in specially fitted cabinets originally owned by Macleay and on loan to Elizabeth Bay House from the Macleay Museum. Dyer is

JAYNE DYER

Above: *The library of forgetting*
suspended reference texts, spines reversed

Right: *The library of forgetting*
laminated butterflies and moths

Above: *U'vla marina*
seaweed, sponges and cuttlefish

Left: *U'vla marina*
oyster shells

SUE PEDLEY

curious about the only closed door in the library. In 1841 the scientist J D Hooker, visiting the house, noticed a distinct 'smell of camphor and specimens' emanating from the preparation room.[2] The doorway to this room, slightly ajar, reveals a later brick wall blocking its entrance. Butterflies escape *en masse* through the opening from the former preparation room. They swarm, attaching themselves to furniture and the floor, appearing as a menacing presence in the room.

Like many artists, Dyer is also a collector. She has collected books published between 1835 and 2007, selecting titles to reflect the different uses of the house. Upstairs, unlike the nameless books downstairs, her constructions operate as an open-ended 'linguistic' production – in a state of flux, literally spilling out of the doorway, pointing towards an understanding of a narrative, but recognising that responses are momentary and individual.

As we wander around upstairs we notice that the view from the north-facing room is dislocated by Sue Pedley's cyanotype, reproducing and mimicking the light and shadows coming through the windows. Cyanotypes, a 19th-century photographic process used for creating architectural blueprints and later used for natural history recording, are here a reminder both of the technical history of photographic records and of our contemporary view from this house and the history that frames that view. Referencing the landscape beyond the windows, Pedley's cyanotype recalls William Henry Fox Talbot's early experiments in photography, using writing paper soaked first in sodium chloride and then sodium nitrate to create salt print images of a leaf, a feather and a piece of lace. These experiments led to the creation of Fox Talbot's first photograph, an oriel window at Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire, in 1835.[3] Pedley's cyanotype makes strange a common view that has been a reference

point for displacement and place-making in 19th-century Australia.

A relatively common activity in the interior of the house also attracts Pedley's eye. On a visit to Elizabeth Bay House she witnessed a guide pulling up a corner of the bedding from the principal bedroom's four-poster to show three mattresses; one stuffed with straw, one with horsehair and the top one with goose feathers. These have been meticulously recreated by the Historic Houses Trust following the instructions of the early 19th century domestic taxonomist John Claudius Loudon:

> The common mattress is formed by stuffing a canvass case with flocks, wool, baked horse-hair, sea grass, technically called *U'vla marina*, or any other articles which when put together form an elastic body, and afterwards quilting it down and covering with a description of cloth called ticken.[4]

The bed in the 19th century was as important a status symbol as it had been in medieval times. Comfort corresponded to one's wealth. Servants re-arranged the bedding on a daily basis. By way of contrast, William Sharp Macleay's manservant was provided with a humble wool flock mattress on his voyage to Sydney in 1839 and a similar mattress has been recreated for the maid's room. With insufficient care, a wool flock mattress would quickly mould itself to the steel straps supporting the bedding.

Early in 2007 Pedley visited the Tasmanian north coast, where she had spent part of her childhood, and collected detritus from the sea strewn on a local beach – sponges, weed, and fragile remnants of clothing encrusted with molluscs. These inspired her 'bedding', offering layered, poetic references to colonisation, an imported class system, and 19th century journeys of migration and scientific exploration. Pedley fuses and recycles

SUSAN ANDREWS

Above: *Under my thumb*
muslim, acrylic paint, pigment, silk thread, pins and cast wax thimbles

Left: *Head to toe*
muslim, acrylic paint, pigment and silk thread

different places, several cultures, and suggests that there is a link between lives here at the house and elsewhere.

Pedley replaced the traditional bedding with a high mound of oyster shells for the Macleays' bed, and a collection of seaweed and sponges for Kennethina's bed. The mattress in the maid's room is replaced by the drying husks of corn, a reference to Pedley's convict and farming predecessors. She also draws on oyster-eating and corn-growing references from Kate Grenville's novel *The secret river,* set in the first years of the 19th century.[5] The livelihoods of recent arrivals William Thornhill and his family depend on the corn they struggle to grow on the banks of the Hawkesbury River, to be milled and baked as dry cornbread. They fail to recognise the food sources and significant places of the indigenous Australians living around them. Pedley and Grenville imagine the journey of settler cultures, both geographically and culturally.

Susan Andrews's cellar installation recalls her enduring a six-week journey by ship as a migrant to Australia. In an upstairs room she alludes to the journey using fabric that reveals contact with the past. Hanging in this space is a piece measuring approximately '6 feet square', which was about the area of a single berth aboard the transport ships in the 19th century. The discoloured and soiled hanging is divided roughly into the width of a shared sleeping 'cot' aboard ship. Stitches map the personal space where sleeping bodies would lie. The fabric, layered and hung in the light of windows upstairs shows traces of personal encroachment that were unavoidable in confined spaces.

'They dress too with the utmost attention to uniformity' wrote George Boyes of the Macleay daughters in 1826, describing somewhat maliciously the women varying in age from their teens to their 40s clothed in the same pattern of dress made with an inappropriate gauzy material.[6] By careful tending of their time the Macleay women almost certainly made their own undergarments, hemmed sheets and made soft furnishings. This was most likely a result of their father's precarious financial position but no doubt also reflected Protestant values of thrift.

One of the least visible rooms in the house is the linen closet. This is an incidental space, a crossover point between the Macleay women and their servants. It was ordered and contained the laundered linen, the stains of everyday use no longer discernible. Andrews's installations use evocative scents, book pages made from muslin, wax and chocolate thimbles, garish feather pincushions, and silk thread. The proximity of the linen closet to the morning room is indicative of the Macleay women's daily routine, taken up with 'plain work' or the supervision of servants' care of linen. In contrast, Sarah Wentworth of Vaucluse House, who enjoyed tremendous wealth but was excluded from colonial society as a fallen woman, employed needlewomen.

There was a division of labour within the Macleay family. Fanny Macleay undertook natural history illustration for her father and brother and their gentlemen scientist correspondents in various parts of the world. Kennethina Macleay was her mother's helper and involved in plain sewing. The installations in *Spare room* reflect this history of order and classification and make strange the everyday views from within a house that now stands as both an artefact a museum.

The artists have been drawn to the less public aspects of occupancy in Elizabeth Bay House, what they describe as the 'spare room'. They uncover its everyday life, and in that process reveal the workings of the house as both a home and a place of collecting and associated scholarship. In *Spare room*, the artists engage with the associated histories of the site, its occupants and staff, and the related material culture, to reveal not only the legacy of imperial collecting practices, but another view of the house and how it has attained its significance. We see in *Spare room* a contemporary response to the history of collecting in Australia and the daily lives and spaces of those who produced that history.

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Right: *The reading room*
Jayne Dyer
selected texts and periodicals, 1835–2007