



Precious Excess: compulsive acquisition

Moonah Arts Centre, show opening, Thursday 10th February 2022

Curated by:

Siobhan Marriott, Tasmania, Aus.

Exhibiting Artists:

Eleanor Murrell, UK.

Christie Torrington, New South Wales, Aus.

Tammy Law, Queensland, Aus.

Dawn Stewart Lookkin, New York, USA.

Siobhan Marriott, Tasmania, Aus.

Opening talk:

Lindsey Fidler, Social Researcher, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania.



Good evening, everyone. Welcome to Precious Excess and thank you for coming this evening. I'm Lindsey Fidler.

Before I start, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and continuing custodians of this never ceded land on which we stand. And to pay my respects to the elders, past, present and emerging amongst the palawa of lutruwita.

Most people understand how it feels to form a close attachment to an item. Photos that include grandparents, cousins or friends no longer with us. Dad's old chair where he used to watch TV. A gig ticket for that concert we'll never forget. We treasure the memories and stories beholden within these objects. We can form an attachment to these artifacts in a way that means they become our life companions – travelling with us through our ups and downs, our relationships, our homes. They become part of who we are and the stories we tell. We become their custodians.

For some of these items, we seem willing to understand what's led to their elevated status as precious pieces that need protection, custodianship, reverence even.

I've recently finished reading a fascinating book – Nina Simone's Gum. It's about a piece of discarded chewing gum that Australian musician Warren Ellis took from the side of Ms Simone's piano after a concert at London's Royal Festival Hall. This piece of gum was then carried around the world by Warren for a number of years, for fear he might fail in his custodial duties. He finally relinquished custody to the Royal Danish Library, for it to be



reverentially placed on an altar and receive the collective attention it deserved. In this process of transferring custody, a number of world class, hand selected artisans were voluntarily swept into the collective reverence for this piece of gum: casts were made in case of damage, it's custodianship not transferred by post, or even by courier, but by a series of face to face global hand offs.

Reflecting on why she would make late night trips back to the museum, in fear someone might have stolen the gum, the Library's Head of Exhibitions said, *"The experience of an artifact is most of all shaped by what we ourselves are bringing to the space. The stories that we project onto the object make it glow and become of great importance."*

But we don't extend this shared value to everyone's precious artifacts. People living with hoarding behaviour and their families are more often judged than understood. We judge people with such collections, unless they have the space to keep them hidden and 'orderly', or there is a collective public gravitas for them to be revered and received as culturally significant artifacts, like Nina Simone's gum. We choose not to engage with the stories behind the collections of families living with hoarding behaviour that have transformed their artefacts into life companions. We choose not to recognise their attachment to these precious items, their desire to accumulate more, or their struggle to discard. And through these reactions, we can ostracise people – often whole families – through stigmatising their very being.



Hoarding behaviour involves challenges with acquiring, sorting or discarding items or animals. A key feature of the disorder is emotional attachment to items that others would see as not valuable. This leads to significant emotional struggle in thinking about or actually discarding items. Understanding this attachment and how it may have developed is crucial to understanding how to support a person to sort and discard.

Two years ago, I began a journey into a space previously unknown to me. I have been privileged to have had adult children of hoarders share their experiences with me, as part of a research and advocacy project I've undertaken for Anglicare Tasmania – Treasured Lives. We wanted to help shift public understanding of hoarding, understand the experiences of Tasmanian families living with hoarding and recommend supports to enable those families to lead full lives. At the moment, despite hoarding behaviour being a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, often prompted by underlying trauma, loss, grief and co-present with other mental health challenges, there are no specialist Tasmanian services to support families.

Many families and carers I spoke with had not shared their experiences with anyone else. Their priorities were clearly to honor the dignity and stories entrusted to them by their relatives. And they did that eloquently in a way that can shape Tasmania's decision makers' and service providers' understanding of hoarding behaviour and the support services families need.



Now I feel that I share a tiny piece of the custodianship of this important, complex community issue – How can we, as a community, better understand what it is to live with hoarding behaviour? How can we positively engage with and support families?

Now, because of these astounding artists, you have the opportunity to address those questions for yourselves. Siobhan Marriott’s meditative zines, which draw on her extensive exploration into hoarding support materials and family artifacts. D. Stewart Lookin’s statement embroideries drawn from precious family fabric collections. Tammy Law’s, Eleanor Murrell’s and Christie Torrington’s compelling photo-montages and collages, referencing their families’ past and present beings, all provide you with an opportunity to immerse yourself within the human stories of living with hoarding behaviour. They invite you to nurture an emotional connection to the experience of living with hoarding behaviours. And to prompt conversations amongst yourselves and in your communities. They are handing over some of the custodianship to you – to change the conversation about how we see, how we treat and how we support our families who are living with hoarding behaviours.

Lindsey Fidler, Social Researcher, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania

[Treasured Lives](#)