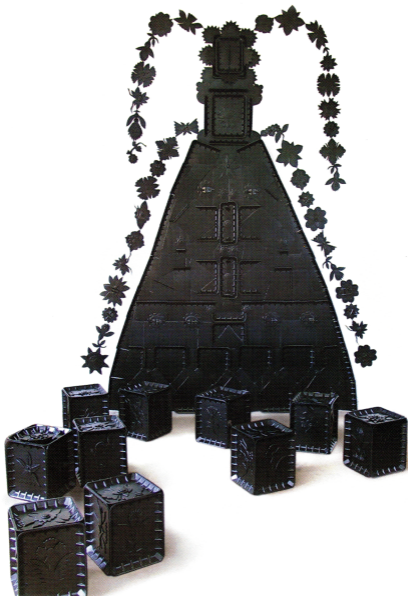


the  
cameo project

andrea gardner

prime

5 june – 18 july 2004



then came the bull, and you  
know who that was don't you?

## ferdinand

Ferdinand is the story of the little Spanish bull. A loner, Ferdinand prefers to smell the flowers and spend time in his favourite spot underneath the cork tree. His worried mother tried to encourage him to skip and butt his head like the other little bulls but alas Ferdinand prefers to sit and contemplate. One day a group of talent scouts come to find the biggest, bravest bull to take back to the bull fights in Madrid. Unfortunately this visit coincided with Ferdinand's bottom having a close encounter with a bee which sent him into an ill fated frenzy of snorting and cavorting and he was thus selected to go to Madrid to be brave and fight. Ferdinand performs terribly and gets sent home....

In a perfect world perhaps this would be the case – prime meat would be left to spend time smelling flowers. Instead we live in a world where daily we hunt our food served up on black meat trays, chilled, weighed, sliced, diced and slaughtered for our convenience. The blind force of the supermarket has divorced us from the reality that these trays are the final resting place for the temporal flesh of animal.

It is strange that these trays frame the flesh so to speak, they make it safe, we trust the use by dates on the glad wrapped window, that the meat is fresh, fat free and prime. It is ironic that something that was once so alive is placed on something so toxic and deadly to our environment, cooked up out of petro-chemicals, a material that never biodegrades.

However, it can be tainted with the scent of flesh seeping in, sometimes rendering the product unusable even after soaking in water and drying in the sun. Enough you might say of all this bloody meat talk but it is hard to avoid it when it is at the very essence of why these trays exist.

Andrea Gardner first encountered meat trays as an art material when school cooks began giving her stacks as paint palettes for her art students. It wasn't until she had a discussion with another artist about making work out of recycled materials

that the ever-increasing black piles were viewed in a different light. Gardner began working with the trays in her own work and what followed was an engaging series dramatically different from previous work.

Previously Gardner had been working with clay, hand building mythical scenes and creatures, dreams twisted in on themselves with body parts and natural objects curiously morphed. Indian ink drawings on roller blinds. Both materials require a transformation of the raw material into form, shaping clay and conjuring ink into line and shape on the flat plane. In contrast the meat tray works require a different kind of conjuring, some are merely minimalist constructions – stacks, boxes, geometric patterns and designs but most have a narrative, a character. Usually this story emerges in silhouette, Ferdinand sitting atop a large black droplet, slipping into an orderly stack on the floor.

The silhouette had its zenith from the mid-18th to the middle of the 19th centuries as an inexpensive alternative to portraiture: the essence of a personality with a minimum of detail. Gardner's work does this also. The meat tray works are faceless, with no direct point of contact, only a filling in of the gaps, the thread of the tail / tale.

Although the meat trays are a departure, there are common threads that vein throughout Gardner's work. A passion for drawing, the black mark on paper, black the atrophy of white. The meat tray works are all heavy with the connotations of what black means; the gothic, the shadow, the dark night, evil, the monument. Gardner admits an interest in the macabre as a common strand. Early work used human hair to draw and make images with. Hair was used during Victorian times in locketts, or as bouquets, a symbol of something eternal – fashioning the body into something it is not. Paper cutting – another Victorian past time and the intricate leatherwork rosettes of saddles are also referenced. While making obvious connections to the reality of meat trays, Gardner also pays homage to the unseen domestic craft of Victorian women.

Prime formerly called *Rosette* had its origins in a work called *The Butcher's Wife*. Over time this form became headless and all that is left is the silhouette of a frock erupting rosettes whilst toy like boxes stand sentinel in the foreground. Other works feature plastic bear noses dotted on the surface, smelling us or themselves; others are invaded by plastic eyes suggesting swarms of bugs hovering over fresh meat. It is unsettling, Gardner's gift of vision to the silhouette – an art form that is formally blind.

Greg Donson



# andrea gardner

Andrea Gardner was born in California and completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and a Master of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of Iowa.

She has lived in numerous places including Montana, New York City, Rome, Italy and since 1995 has lived in Wanganui, New Zealand.

While in New York City she worked primarily with hair as a sculptural and drawing material, with recent work including large charcoal drawings, marker drawings on window blinds, terracotta clay sculpture, wool cut-outs on hanging blankets and sculpture made from found white crockery.

Andrea shows regularly and her work is held in the collections of the Dowse Art Museum, the Sarjeant Gallery and Te Papa.



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