



SARAH CONTOS

Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye, 2016

screen-print on linen, canvas and lamé, digital printed fabrics and various found fabrics, PVC, poly-fil, glass, ceramic and plastic beads, thread, artists' gloves
610 x 330 x 25cm

Gift of the James & Diana Ramsay Foundation for the 2017 Ramsay Art Prize



Sarah Contos works across collage, sculpture and installation and references popular culture and art history. In *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye*, the artist brings together the personal fragments of her practice from the last four years, resulting in a colossal quilt that she describes as her most ambitious work to date. Previous works of art and exhibition histories are captured in this textile time capsule, making it a self-initiated retrospective of her career.

Contos trained in stage and costume design as well as in fine arts. She has been included in group and solo exhibitions and in 2016 produced *Sincerely Yours* in collaboration with Australian fashion house Romance Was Born. Among other accolades Contos was awarded the 4A Beijing Residency in 2013 and was the recipient of the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship (Sculpture) in 2011.



image top: Installation view, Ramsay Art Prize 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia. Sarah Contos, *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye*, 2016, screen-print on linen, canvas and lamé, digital printed fabrics and various found fabrics, PVC, poly-fil, glass, ceramic and plastic beads, thread, artists' gloves, 610 x 330 x 25cm; Gift of the James & Diana Ramsay Foundation for the 2017 Ramsay Art Prize.
image bottom: Sarah Contos

Responding

- ▶ Based on your observations and before looking at the wall label, invent a title for this work of art.
- ▶ To understand a work of art or learn more about the artist who made it, we need to look for clues. Look closely at *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye* for one minute. Make a list of all the things you can see. What do these items tell you about the artist? Based on your list, write a small profile on Sarah Contos.
- ▶ Craft practices have traditionally been associated with women artists. What behaviours or symbols do we associate with being male or female? If you could eliminate any stereotype, which would it be?
- ▶ The definition of decorative art is 'art concerned primarily with the creation of useful items such as furniture, ceramics or textiles'. Would you classify Contos' quilt as decorative art? Where would be the best place to display this work of art? Compare this work with other textiles in the collection.
 - Morris & Company
 - Rebecca King, *Quilt [crazy patchwork]*, c.1890-95
 - Jane Judd (née Digby), *Quilt [broderie Perse]*, early 19th century
 - Romance was Born, manufacturer; Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales, designers, *Quilted sleep jacket-chantilly*, 2016



image: Installation view, Melrose Wing, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.
front: Romance Was Born, manufacturer; Anna Plunkett, designer, Australia, born 1981; Luke Sales, designer, Australia, born 1982, *Quilted sleep jacket-chantilly* from *Whispering Angel* Resort 2017 Collection, 2016, Darlinghurst, New South Wales, silk satin; Gift of an anonymous donor through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2016, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
back: Cami James, Australia, born Adelaide 1986; Nadia Napreychikov, Australia, born Moscow 1987, *Discount Univer\$e, Jacket, Bodysuit and boots* from *Sin is In* 2016 Runway Collection, 2016, Melbourne, satin, synthetic, leather, metal, plastic; Gift of an anonymous donor through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2016, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

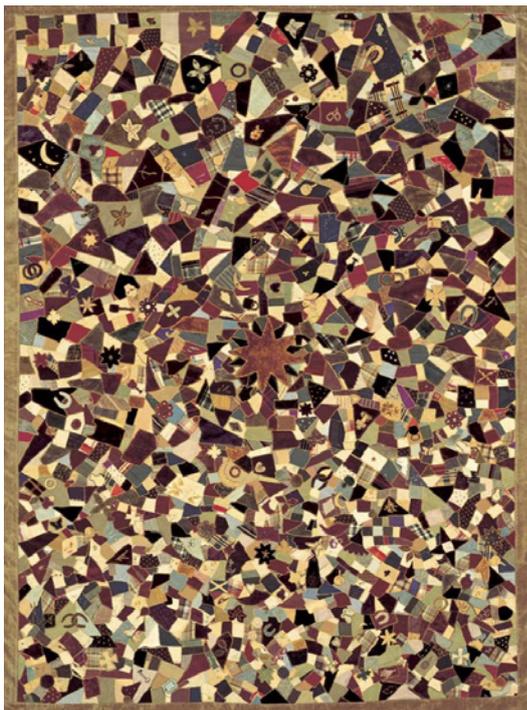


image: Rebecca King, Australia, 1859–1915, *Quilt [crazy patchwork]*, c.1890-95, Georgetown, South Australia, silk, cotton, 202.5 x 268.0 cm; Gift of Dr A W Wall 1972, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide



image detail: Morris & Company, London, Britain, 1861–1940, William Morris, designer, Britain, 1834–1896, *Evenlode curtain*, c.1925, designed 1883, London, indigo discharge & colour wood-block print on cotton, 248.0 x 70.0 cm (display); Gift of William & Lili Manos 1991, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Making

- ▶ Sarah Contos describes her work as a snapshot in time offered as a future memory. Create your own collage that illustrates the past month of your life. Consider including a combination of drawings, objects and fabrics that link to your personal story, or to put it simply - what makes you, you?
- ▶ Does your school have a time capsule? Investigate the type of items that were placed inside. Create your own class time capsule to be opened before you leave for high school. Consider including items that capture this point in time; such as drawings, letters, newspaper articles or photographs.
- ▶ Contos draws inspiration from characters in films, books and history. Create a class quilt using a person from history as inspiration. Each member of the class will illustrate a part of that person's story using recycled mixed media. Stitch each student's work of art together to create a large collaborative visual narrative that depicts significant moments in this figure's life.
TIP: You may like to stitch paper instead of fabric or embellish your piece with three-dimensional elements like Contos.
- ▶ Design the bed that *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye* would belong on. Imagine the shape of the bed head, its size and the materials you would use. Imagine if the bed had special powers - what would they be and why? Describe how it would feel to be asleep in the bed wrapped in Contos' quilt.
- ▶ *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye* is a personal work of art made entirely by hand, honouring the traditions of quilt making – an act of love that is often exchanged between loved ones. Using recycled fabrics create a segment of a quilt that you will give to someone important in your life. Your quilt square may be a portrait of that person and their interests.

THINK AND DISCUSS

What technique or tradition would you like to see make a comeback?



image detail: Sarah Contos, *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye*, 2016, screen-print on linen, canvas and lamé, digital printed fabrics and various found fabrics, PVC, poly-fil, glass, ceramic and plastic beads, thread, artists' gloves, 610 x 330 x 25cm; Gift of the James & Diana Ramsay Foundation for the 2017 Ramsay Art Prize

Responding

- ▶ The boundary between craft and art has long been challenged. After viewing Contos' winning work, locate other works in the permanent collection that may blur the line between art and craft. How do we tell the difference between a textile work that is art and one that is craft?
- ▶ There has been a resurgence of late in the use of craft techniques by both male and female contemporary artists. Compare Contos' work with another artist from the list below who utilise textiles. What key themes are being explored and how have these been communicated to the audience? How does their choice of media connect to their conceptual framework?
 - Nick Cave - Julia Robinson
 - Tracey Emin - Rosemarie Trockel
 - Grayson Perry - Sera Waters
- ▶ After viewing *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye*, wander through the permanent collection. You may notice that some works of art are hung thematically or chronologically. Select a location where you think the Gallery should next display Contos' work. Consider other works of art nearby in terms of their themes, techniques or era. Take a photograph of this location. Once you're back in the classroom create a mock-up of your new display. Explain your curatorial decision about placing the work in its new position.
- ▶ The Australian fashion house Romance Was Born worked with Sarah Contos to produce the *Sincerely Yours* collection. Look at some of the garments in this collection online. Select a garment that displays Contos' influence. Explain your selection by comparing this garment to Contos' winning work. Discuss how the materials and visual elements are consistent with Contos' art practice.

Making

- ▶ Contos' process for art making begins with her looking at absolutely everything – scanning science magazines, viewing films or gazing out the window to catch the gesture of a stranger on the street. Spend a week like a bowerbird. Collect magazine or newspaper clippings, objects, fabric and recycled materials. Take photographs and complete a series of spontaneous sketches of people you see and places you visit. Work out any relationships between the items collected and create a cohesive work of art. Write a statement explaining the decisions you made about your work.
- ▶ Notions of the self and identity underpin each body of work Contos makes. She is sometimes inspired by characters from film, literature or history and notes that she is drawn to characters that share similar attributes. Consider a person, either fictional, someone in popular culture or a public figure by whom you are inspired. What are the characteristics that make you admire them? Create a tribute to that person using mixed media.
- ▶ *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye* appears as a functional work of art due its the soft and inviting textures and its potential to be used as a quilt. Transform a functional piece of clothing into a wearable work of art.
- ▶ *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye* was the result of a period of personal struggle and change for the artist. Reflect on a current social, environmental or political issue. Without using text, design a poster or create a screen-print that responds to this time or event.

KEY WORDS

Craft	Embellish	Form	Gender	Pattern	Screenprinting
Decorative arts	Feminism	Function	Garment	Retrospective	Textiles

Resources

Art Almanac – Sarah Contos <http://bit.ly/2rtvctx>

Sarah Contos <http://bit.ly/2rBWnC3>

TATE: When is craft an art? <http://bit.ly/2syrDae>

Romance Was Born – *Sincerely Yours* <http://bit.ly/2rC2Pt7>

Historical Connections

The Arts and Craft movement in the United Kingdom in the mid-19th century emerged due to concerns about the quality of design and decoration because of machine production. William Morris was a leading member of this movement and was well known for his pattern designs for fabric and wallpapers.

'Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.'
– William Morris

Fast forward to the early 20th century – Roger Fry, one of the founders of Omega Workshops Ltd in the United Kingdom, was an important figure in raising awareness about modernism and design. Fry aimed to dissolve the division between decorative and fine arts and provide additional income for his artist friends including Vanessa Bell, an English artist and sister of author Virginia Woolf who produced fabric designs for Omega. Textiles had a reputation for being considered craft rather than art, and they were often associated with women artisans and consequently considered inferior to the fine arts. As contemporary artists continue to incorporate craft traditions in their practice, we are encouraged to re-evaluate historical female artists who were, at the time, undervalued when compared to male artists.

- ▶ Investigate the work of Vanessa Bell. Bell once stated that her textile work was an extension of her paintings. What do you think she meant by this and what similarities can you identify between her textile designs and her paintings? As a starting point compare *Pair of Pyjamas in Maud design*, 1918 and *Bedroom, Gordon Square*, 1912, in the Gallery's collection.
- ▶ Write a response to the following statement: *'Progressive artists Vanessa Bell and Sarah Contos challenge ideas about gender and renegotiate the borders between fine and decorative arts.'*
- ▶ In your research, did you discover any other female artists who were pioneers for women's rights? Share your findings with your class.



image and image detail: Omega Workshops, Bloomsbury, London, Britain, 1913–1920, Vanessa Bell, designer, fabric and garment, Britain, 1879–1961, *Pair of Pyjamas in Maud design*, 1918, fabric designed 1913, Bloomsbury, London, printed linen, 105.4 cm (trousers, outer leg); South Australian Government Grant 1984, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide © Estate of Vanessa Bell courtesy of Henrietta Garnett



image: Vanessa Bell, Britain, 1879–1961, *Bedroom, Gordon Square*, 1912, Bloomsbury, London, oil on canvas, 56.3 × 46.2 cm; South Australian Government Grant 1984, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide © Estate of Vanessa Bell courtesy of Henrietta Garnett

**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

The Art Gallery of South Australia holds the most comprehensive collection of Morris & Company furnishings outside of the United Kingdom.