

left: Ari Athans, *Choice Tapestries*, 1997. Photo: Paul Gosney Photography

below: Arthur Koutoulas, *Neolounge*, 1997. Photo: Paul Gosney Photography

## PROJECT: OBJECT

TATIANA PENTES REPORTS ON AN INSTALLATION BY ARI ATHANS & ARTHUR KOUTOULAS AT THE PERFORMANCE SPACE STUDIO GALLERY, SYDNEY—AN ART EVENT OF THE GREEK FESTIVAL OF SYDNEY, 17 MARCH–28 MARCH 1997.

**“What does the future hold [for material culture]? Will it be based on current realities and predictions of overseas trends? Or do we need to engage in a visual and tangible dialogue in order to evolve?”** Arthur Koutoulas

**“With the transmigration of cultures, objects and their rituals change with each generation to create a new ‘culture’.”** Ari Athans

αυστραλεζα! ... (Australiza, the Greek noun for ‘Australian woman’) declares one of Ari Athans’ *Name Tags*. ‘Australian Woman’, in colloquial slang has the derogatory connotation of ‘loose woman’, exactly what your Greek father didn’t want you to be. Banal expressions littering Athans’ early years have been carved out of stainless steel plates—metaphoric slips of the tongue and words muttered under the breath. These ‘labels’ form part of the collaborative installation by jewellery-object designer Ari Athans and industrial designer Arthur Koutoulas at The Performance Space Studio Gallery, as part of the Greek Festival of Sydney. An exploration of the contradictions that exist in the object-user relationship, Athans and Koutoulas’ *Project: Object* draws from the Australian Greek experience: Athans is influenced by the hybridity of emigre domestic objects, and simultaneously frozen personal artefacts of Mediterranean ‘home’, and Koutoulas by creating a prototype for the future.

Entering the gallery space, one is confronted by Koutoulas’ prototype for the future—*Neolounge*. In keeping with his environmental and social concerns, *Neolounge* is a comic glorification of the cult of speed. Influenced by the Ottoman ‘Pasha’ lounge—where the patriarch would sit and hold court with his ten wives, its government grey suggests an impersonal bureaucratic waiting room, where the client waits to be categorised under one of Athans’ *Name Tags*. Obscuring the chair, the bed and the table, prototypic objects of utility, from any clear definition of form, function or social significance, the viewer is

provoked to consider the ergonomic realities of designing furniture. *Neolounge*’s dynamic lines of force and interpenetration of planes evoke the noises of the modern industrialised world, collapsing the interior of the automobile out into a silent futuristic low lying animal. Koutoulas states that he was inspired by the ironic commentary of an Aboriginal elder on the Western architectural sensibility: “You white men... you build walls, floors, ceilings and contain yourselves in these environments. Then you put holes in the walls to let the world in and you call them windows!”. In this way Koutoulas gestures towards the depersonalisation of objects in order to invent a material culture.

Athans has realised her interest in the symbolism of objects, jewellery and rituals of transmigrant cultures in *Choice Tapestries*, *Basil Propagator* and *Think Tank*. Miniature tapestries of stainless steel plate, steel woven mesh, nylon and sterling silver depict icons of contemporary urban fringe society—the *Kafe*; *Disco*; *Bright spark*; *Trademark*; and *Spring cleaning*. The *Basil Propagator*, a series of glass test tubes filled with water containing basil clippings, resembles the propagation of basil on many Greek families’ window sills. *Think Tank*, fabricated from concrete, glass, and stainless steel—for praying, thinking, dreaming and meditating—fills the gallery space with the soft flavour of incense, the kind burned by the priests in the Greek Orthodox Church, or in home altars.

It would be difficult to consider the production of these finely crafted sculptural works without the essential foundation of both artists in industrial and jewellery design. However, both have transmigrated the boundaries between and across their discrete practises, exploring the possibilities and limits of their respective fields. Signs of ‘home’, that every emigre grows up with as ‘outside’ Australia, are fused with familiar urban, domestic and ritualistic objects, to conjure in the gallery space the blurring of the utilitarian and the symbolic.

**Tatiana Pentes** is a freelance writer and multimedia producer. She is currently developing an interactive CD-Rom title exploring the Jazz world of Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s. Her last article for *Object* (Issue 2/1995) explored a proliferation of Goddess imagery in contemporary ceramic art.

Bronwyn Kemp, detail of *An Installation*, at the Jam Factory, Adelaide, January–March 1997. Photo: Michael Klivanik.



## KEMP’S INSTALLATION

WENDY WALKER TAKES A LOOK AT BRONWYN KEMP’S RETURN TO INSTALLATION: APTLY TITLED *AN INSTALLATION* AND SHOWN AT THE JAM FACTORY, ADELAIDE, JANUARY 31–16 MARCH 1997.

**‘Get out of that bed, and wash your face and hands. Well, you get in that kitchen and make some noise with the pots and pans.’** So went the opening lines of the 1954 Joe Turner hit *Shake, Rattle and Roll*. This song, with its sexist lyrics was to become an anthem for the newly emerging rock and roll movement. But the beat was the thing and it would be at least another decade before the lyrics caught up with the melody.

Bronwyn Kemp’s exhibition, *An Installation*, focuses on that era and in particular on the domestic history of her mother. Domestic issues have been a continuing theme in Kemp’s work. Forever engraved on my memory, is a mid-’80’s installation by Kemp, also at the Jam Factory, which featured live chooks disporting themselves chirpily on a number of ceramic tiles. My recollection of the tiles is hazy, but I shall never forget the incredulity and the smiles on the faces of

asia—australia cultural exchange from Makigawa's metal to Vu Dan Tan's front window

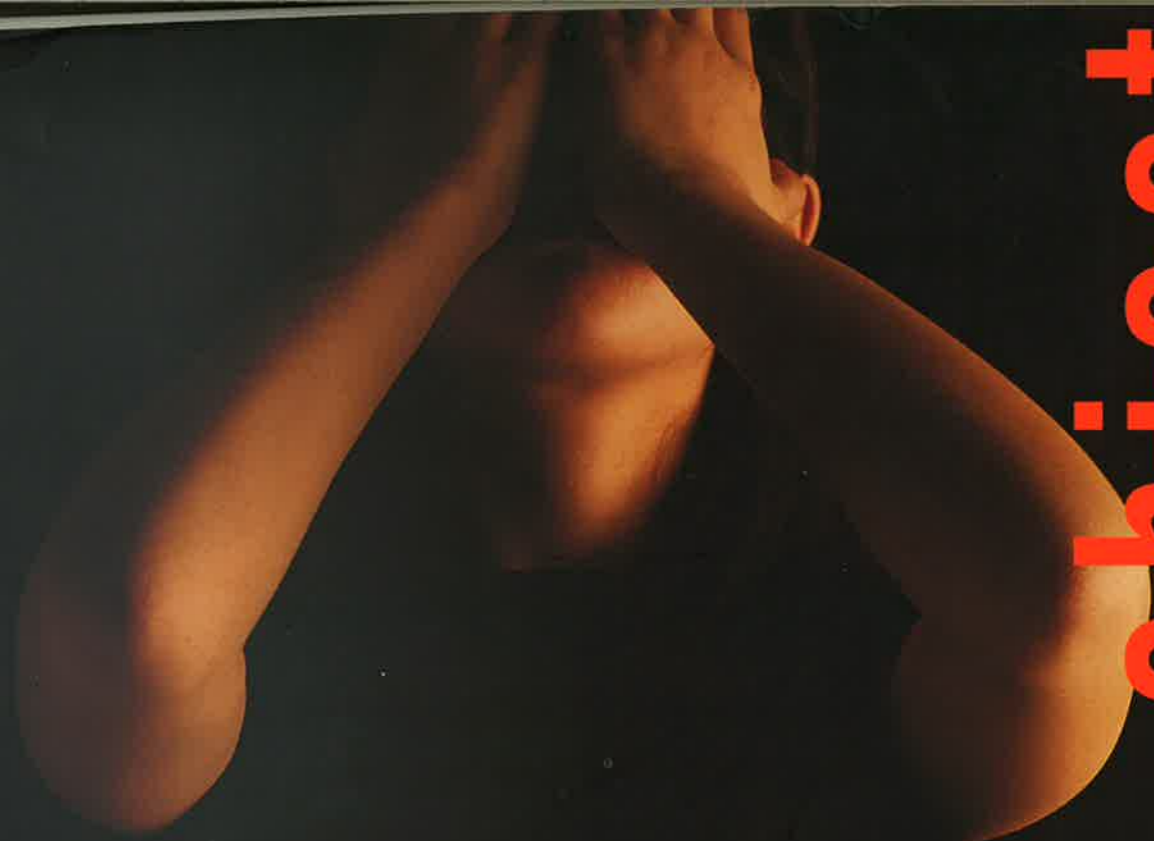
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