

CHRISTINE HELLYAR

[b.1947 New Zealand]

A Thought Cupboard – Mixing 1983

Mixed media
1030 x 910 x 320 mm
Prov: The artist; whence DPAG, 2000.

The artist as collector, recycler and natural historian, Christine Hellyar has never subscribed to the idea that sculptures should be grand, stand-alone and singular objects. The very word 'sculpture' seems inadequate to describe many of her works, which look like implements and artefacts imported into the art gallery from some other time and place.

Whether in her trays full of mysterious implements or her well-known latex-embellished 'aprons', Hellyar evokes the needs and capabilities of bodies without representing them directly. In this 'thought cupboard', a cabinet stands for the storehouse that is the human body. Each of its three shelves illustrates a different bodily function – tasting, smelling and touching. Rather than simply illustrating 'ecological' themes with conventional sculptural materials, Hellyar uses resonant physical fragments – chunks of pumice, egg shells – to draw attention outward from the object to the larger balances of culture and nature.

With its beautifully weathered natural forms, Hellyar's bodily storehouse reminds us of the vast cycles of change and transformation that govern the life of things. But it also marks the distance between those cycles and the experience of contemporary gallery-goers, as we peer in through glass at objects whose names and functions we scarcely recognise. [JP]

