



landscape paintings and English decorative arts. Today these works are of low financial value, have little interpretive value and in the case of the decorative arts, were mass-produced. Today the Gallery is revered for its impressive collection of Australian art and has a collection policy that is focused only on Australian art, so what is the role of these works that were collected early in the Gallery's history? What is their value to the Gallery? What is the role of the artist in giving these works a new context?

Emery's complex installation poses more questions than it answers. What are the lessons that we can learn from animals and how can we value them in their natural environment? What does collecting in a gallery context look like in a world of constrained resources? What are the distinctions between fine art and craft? What human qualities do we impose on animals?

The bestiary functioned as a moral compass and used animals as allegories of human virtues and vices to act as moral exemplars. Today, both art and gold are valued as luxury assets associated with markets that often promote unethical behaviour, depletion of the natural world, commodification and elitism. Emery has said:

I think people project a lot onto animals. They are still beasts of burden, although now they carry all our anxieties about companionship, family, environmental fragility, diet, nutrition and ethics.²

If we turn the projection around, what can we learn from Emery's installation, what moral lessons can his bestiary of imaginative creatures provide us? How can we be transformed?

NOTES

1. Inga Walton 2017, *Creatures Great & Small: Animal Kingdom*, Trouble, viewed 1 October 2019, <<http://www.troublemag.com/creatures-great-small/>>.
2. Gemma Jones 2018, *Craft cubed: Interview with Troy Emery*, Craft Victoria, viewed 1 October 2019, <<https://www.craft.org.au/maker-interviews/2018/6/27/craft-cubed-troy-emery>>.

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Troy Emery

Australia, born 1981

red headed runt 2019

polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins

red headed pink ringed silver beast 2019

polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins

collection of the artist

ART GALLERY OF BALLARAT

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cover image:
Installation view of Troy Emery's *After the gold rush*, Art Gallery of Ballarat

Troy Emery is represented by
Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

BLUE PYRENEES
estate

CITY OF
BALLARAT

CREATIVE VICTORIA

TROY EMERY After the gold rush

9 November 2019–
9 February 2020



TROY EMERY

After the gold rush

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Essay by Louise Tegart,
Director, Art Gallery of Ballarat



Bestiaries, manuscripts containing a collection of richly decorated images and descriptions of animals, first started appearing in medieval Europe in the 12th century. These early natural history encyclopedias, lavishly decorated with gold, contained stories of animals which helped readers in the Middle Ages to make sense of the living world. They were intended as both an illustration of natural history, by analysing the natural world, and as a series of moral and religious lessons which revealed divine truths. In the medieval world, humans were felt to be within nature but apart from it.

In addition to providing intriguing interpretations of known animals, bestiaries offered tales about bizarre creatures and mythical monsters. The bestiary was a place where the lamb could lie down with the lion and the dragon could interact with the unicorn. It contained scenes that would never occur in the real world, where animals from different parts of the world or imagination came together to create a new world and be transformed.

An intriguing and significant feature of the bestiary was that animals literally formed the book, as they provided the surface upon which the words and images were drawn. The pages of the book were made of vellum or parchment, a material made from sheep, cow or goat skin.

The conundrum of the bestiary, which both celebrated animals and used them as a material, is a powerful mechanism for considering the work of artist Troy Emery. In his two-part installation at the Art Gallery of Ballarat *After the gold rush*, he has created a multifaceted exhibition, incorporating decorative arts and paintings from the Gallery's collection together with his own creations, that functions as a contemporary bestiary: a collection of animals, both real and imagined, and a conveyor of moral questions.

Emery creates sculptures employing the foam forms used in taxidermy combined with haberdashery materials such as pom poms and fringing. He refers to his sculptures as 'fake taxidermy' because they echo the process of taxidermy without using real animals and function as decorative objects. His sculptures straddle definitions between art and craft and through them he questions human relationships with animals. He proposes that

Taxidermy animals are like artworks. They are sculptures, crafted objects, with abstracted meanings, framed and exhibited.

The pathos comes from acknowledging that these decorative objects, whether decorating a hunting lodge or a museum diorama, were once living things.¹

In the first room of *After the gold rush*, Emery has created an altar of gold creatures using the taxidermy forms of animals such as mountain lions, bobcats, foxes and leopards. By covering them with a new skin of gold fringing, he transforms these animals into something else – mythical, unrecognisable creatures that no longer hold the qualities of the original animal. These bizarre decorative forms sit within a golden room, a 'field of gold' peppered with artworks from the Gallery's collection. These include watercolours by gold-rush documenter ST Gill showing the 'Unlucky digger that never returned' alongside Eugene von Guérard's painting *That's the styl Mary* of a digger discovering a large gold nugget underground. These works portray the positive and negative aspects of the gold rush and the stark contrast between reality and fantasy: what the early settlers of Ballarat hoped the gold rush would bring them.

The gold rush refers to a specific period in Ballarat's history between 1854 and the 1880s when the discovery of gold brought floods of new settlers and a striking city was built in an impressively



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Troy Emery
Australia, born 1981
silver friend
2019
polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins
collection of the artist

Staffordshire Potteries
England
Pair of spaniels
circa 1875
glazed earthenware
Gift of Mrs Beryl Russell and the late Major
Phillip Russell, 1980
Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat

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Installation view of Troy Emery's *After the gold rush*, Art Gallery of Ballarat

'The conundrum of the bestiary, which both celebrated animals and used them as a material, is a powerful mechanism for considering the work of artist Troy Emery.'

short amount of time on the back of the find. To rush is to cause or force something too quickly with little thought, attention or to progress with speed or impetuosity. It also refers to the physical reaction, or rush, that is the immediate pleasurable feeling produced by drugs. The gold rush in Ballarat embodies both these meanings.

In the second part of the installation, Emery has juxtaposed his work with decorative arts from the Gallery's collection. Comprising a mix of English Staffordshire pottery, a bilby-topped pot by the Hermannsburg potters in Central Australia and a 1930s Australian Melrose ceramic planter featuring possums, these cases of objects compose an impossible image where species from different parts of the world coexist in peace and harmony in a manner that recalls the bestiary. In this context, Emery's sculptures become purely decorative, divorced from their animal origins.

Established in 1884, the Art Gallery of Ballarat was born from the riches of the gold rush and the collection's early development charts the interests of early citizens of Ballarat – European



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Installation view of decorative arts from the Gallery's collection