

Works with a sense of majesty

Art

Sasha Grishin

DAVID Jenz and Wendy Teakel: *Space Between*. Strathnairn Arts, Woolshed Gallery, 90 Stockdill Drive, Holt. Until June 5. strathnairn.com.au.

Wendy Teakel and David Jenz are two sculptors living on the outskirts of Canberra who employ unconventional materials in their art and have rather different philosophies of sculpture.

Peter Haynes, who has curated this exhibition, states that his goal in this exhibition is to expose "different ways of thinking and making through the use of similar materials".

Teakel is an artist who I think of as a gatherer and arranger, rather than primarily a fabricator.

Her mother was a florist, and in Teakel's impoverished childhood in the Riverina, beautifully arranged bunches of flowers were the spark of magic that transformed the banality of her surrounding life.

In this exhibition, Teakel has a series of found river stones suspended on a steel wire or steel armatures reminiscent of the country watermills.

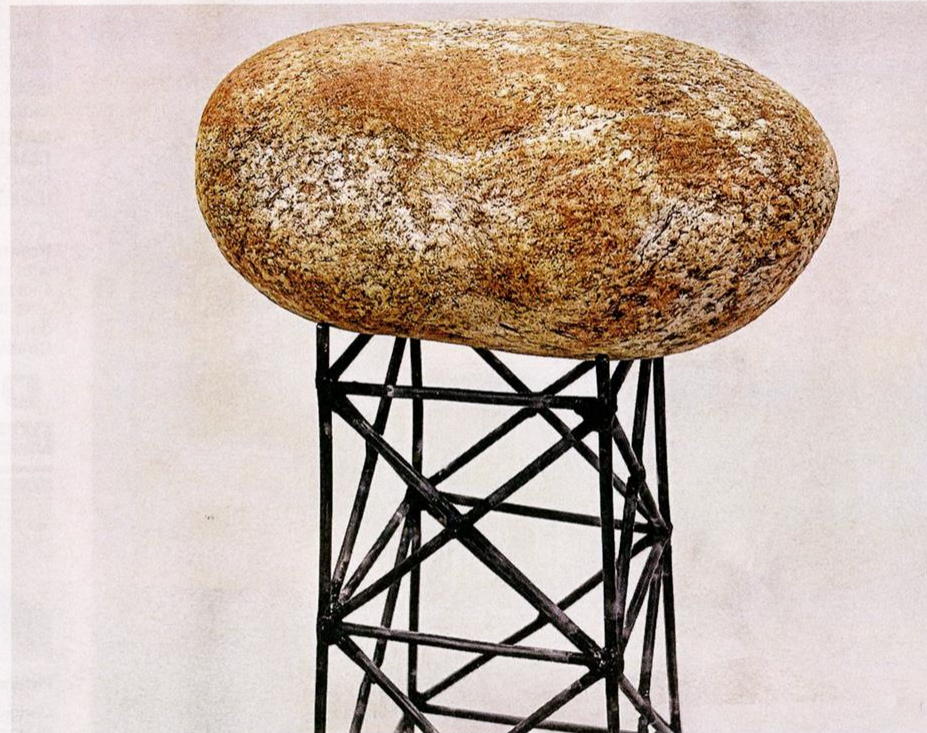
With evocative titles such as "Home Ground", "Reservoir", "Resource", "Depot", "Surplus" and "Holding Air", they become tantalising enigmatic objects.

Although the materials may have been "discovered"

within the environment, these objects are certainly not random readymades transformed by the artist's will by being placed within a gallery setting.

Once selected, the objects are painstakingly crafted to give these miniatures a solemn sense of presence.

They are quirky improbable inventions that possess an intricacy and permanence.



Wendy Teakel, *Resource* (detail), 2021. Picture: Supplied

The natural river stones seem to defy gravity as they are perched on their framework.

These three-dimensional miniatures in this exhibition are supplemented by her acrylic paintings with pokerwork usually on wood (birch panel) or plywood or simply on paper.

There is an intricacy, yet whimsicality in these creations with their restricted

colour palette.

It is an unusual technique that embraces an ornamental and two-dimensional aspect and, as a viewer, you are gradually seduced and drawn into the strange world of these creations.

In contrast, Jenz I think of as essentially a fabricator - the maker of improbable, slightly surreal immaculate creations or installed environments.

Although Jenz's "Vector" may have at its centre a river stone, it has been transformed into some sort of spikey flower or insect, slightly threatening for the viewer.

The steel "petals" appear to grow out of the stone and there is a deliberate play between the warm ochre of the rounded stone and the sharp black spikes of the steel.

If with Teakel there is a

strong associative frame of reference and I am drawn into a daydream of sweeping farming properties with these improbable water towers scattered within the landscape, Jenz's curious creations are suggestive of fantastic triffids - carnivorous plants that inhabit nightmares.

The biggest surprise for me at this exhibition were the monumental pencil drawings by Jenz, *Fissure* and *Fold*.

Each measuring almost three metres by over a metre, they have a bold dramatic grandeur and appear to burst beyond the size limits of the Strathnairn woolshed.

I do not recall having seen his drawings before and found myself captivated by their scale, boldness and presence. Their compositional simplicity only serves to enhance their sense of drama.

The woolshed as an exhibiting space does have its restrictions for the presentation of artwork, but also, for these rural artists, it does provide a sense of authenticity.

The exhibition here appears "grounded" in the environment from which it was born with its sense of beauty and majesty.

As suburbia increasingly encroaches on this rural slice of Canberra's history, this exhibition reasserts our need to preserve our past so that we can guarantee our future.