

Unlikely, curious and immaculate

Visual art

Sasha Grishin

PETER Vandermark: Bricolage. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Closes March 18.

Although Peter Vandermark is a highly respected Canberra-based artist, his exhibitions in the national capital have been few and far between with only a couple of solo shows over the past decade.

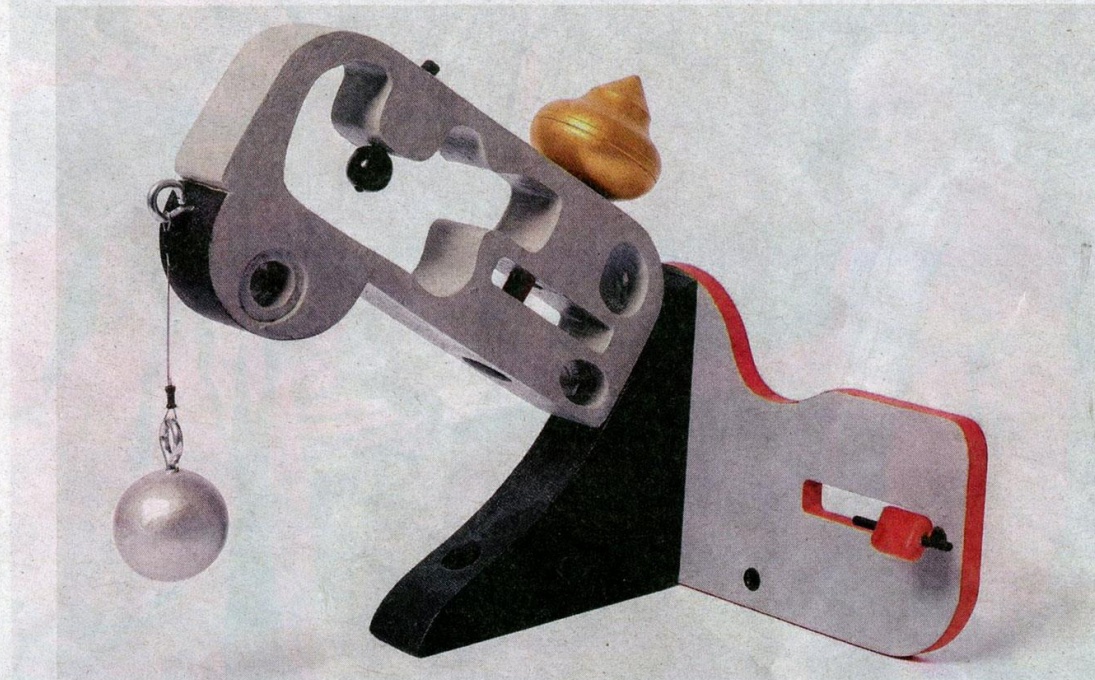
His sculptures are immaculate, he gives a high gloss finish to his most unlikely and at times ridiculous creations that at first glance appear to have stepped out of the pages of an upmarket design magazine.

The title of the exhibition, *Bricolage*, illustrates the artist's habit of creating his sculptures from a broad range of objects, things at hand drawn from across the cultural spectrum, recrafting and recombining them to create something new. I am always reminded that the French verb "bricoler" means "to tinker", so we are dealing with a form of DIY art.

Vandermark did spend about a decade as a studio assistant to Rosalie Gascoigne, one of Australia's most acclaimed artists. However, Gascoigne rearranged her found objects to create new realities; Vandermark recrafts his found source materials, giving them a completely new identity.

It is only when the analytical mind kicks in that you start to pull apart the newly created sculptures to discover some of the components, such as a plastic chair, bits of timber, a plastic funnel, electric cables, bits of fabric and scrap metal.

All of these disparate elements have been lovingly and seamlessly combined, painted and brought to a high degree of finish. The newly created objects are unexpected, cerebral creations, witty and possibly alluding to other traditions in art including Russian Constructivism, Man Ray, Duchamp and various kinetic sculptures. However, the exhibition when seen as a whole, also evokes a feeling of unease and even a note of the uncanny.



Peter Vandermark, Wrecking ball

When we recognise the composite elements in these sculptures, there is a certain 'déjà vu', however they have been metamorphosed into a new and unexpected state while somehow retaining elements from their past experience.

I am reminded of the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who speaks of the *bricoleur* as possessing the "savage mind" that puts pre-existing objects together in new ways, always making do with whatever is at hand. Somehow, this bricoleur creates new mythological narratives for contemporary society.

A beauty of Vandermark's work is that it is completely non-prescriptive - even the titles

are a bit minimal and generally suggestive of an orientation. Most of the pieces are fairly small table sculptures, including the two outstanding pieces, "Plug #1" and "Plug #2", where there is an intricate complexity with suspended objects possibly ready to plug openings. They appear like small, beautifully designed machines that are somewhat absurd in their seemingly intended function. The brilliant high gloss painted finish and the careful balancing of shapes gives these miniature creations (roughly 35cm high) a certain grandeur and permanence.

In another piece, "Wrecking ball", where the pun implied in the title is fairly apparent in this toy-like construction, enamel paint

has been employed to accentuate the metallic properties of the surfaces. Something absurd is played out with tongue-in-cheek solemnity. This is a wrecking ball of dreams and lofty ambitions and is designed to bring the viewer down to earth.

Vandermark presents a mature and striking exhibition that successfully questions our assumptions about existing realities and suggests alternative mythologies through which we can start to make sense of our world.

While it is very accessible and pleasing to the eye, it is also quite a tough exhibition that challenges the safe complacency that prevails in our world.