

# ANTENNAE

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## Diary

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## Art

**Elisabeth Condon – *This Land Was Made for You and Me***

Review by **Rachelle Johnston**

Grantpirrie Gallery

Sydney-Australia

5 March – 28 March 2009



Rothwell - Bird of Exotopos 2009

*Exotopos* is a fantastical exploration of the consequences of human intervention into the natural world. Caroline Rothwell's curious assortment of metal-filled "fabric" sculptures forces us to enter a surreal alternate reality in which incompatible animal species mingle freely and extinct forms take on new life. More than aesthetic representations of hypothesized cross-breedings among species, the hybrids of *Exotopos* are highly imaginative creatures that entice the eye and lead us to contemplate the possibility of their future existence in our world.

Rothwell's unique technique and interesting choice of materials exacerbate the perplexing quality of her work. She forms her sculptures by pouring molten metal into pre-stitched and shaped fabric moulds. This technique contributes to the dynamic conflicts that exist in Rothwell's fictive realm. On the one hand, her sculptures appear to be soft and light, for the nickel-plated Britannia metal infused with the texture of hand-stitched fabric gives Rothwell's individual forms the look of stuffed toys. Yet the fusion of molten metal with zoomorphic silhouettes lends the sculptures a rustic solidity that grounds them in this world. *Creature of Exotopos* captures the eye with its playful metallic translucidity, yet bewilders the senses as closer inspection reveals its unbending, toxic form.



Rothwell - Creature of Exotopos 2009

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The ambiguous form of her hybrids forces the viewer to experience her alternate universe as an extension of our everyday world. This method of unveiling establishes a duality in *Exotopos* between the fantastical and the real, and the familiar and the unerring. *Bird of Exotopos* exemplifies the intricacy, precise construction, and aesthetic appeal of Rothwell's art. At the same time, however, the sharpened beak and exaggerated wings of the bird in flight give the work a disturbing quality that hints at genetic manipulation.

Equally challenging is Elisabeth Condon's *This Land Was Made for You and Me*, also showing at Grantpirrie Gallery. An explosion of vivid colour and geometric layering with forms derived from traditional Chinese painting, Condon's art appears to be as much about the process of painting as it is about the fictive natural wonderland that her work establishes. Both *Exotopos* and *This Land Was Made for You and Me* call into question the notion of a natural landscape, forcing us to psychologically consider the ramifications of human intervention into that space.

Rothwell does not state outright the meaning behind her otherworldly exploration. The shifting perception of form provoked by her sculptures is perhaps a commentary on the feasibility of her science-fictional hypotheses. Alternatively, the happy existence of hybrids and extinct forms in Rothwell's imaginary realm could function as a reminder of the devastating consequences of environmental delinquency. This issue will certainly come to the fore in September when Rothwell's three bronze *Tygers* go to the Economist Plaza in London; the very place where the colonisation of Australia began, leading ultimately to the extinction of the Tasmanian Tiger. Perplexing and hauntingly beautiful, Rothwell's creatures are fantastical and intriguing, yet one is left to wonder whether they ever really could function outside of *Exotopos*.



Condon - This Land