



Christine Hellyar born 1947

Like a backyard archaeologist, Christine Hellyar presents a variety of intriguing artefacts and objects in *Tool Trays*. While the presentation owes a debt to museum classification and display systems, the work also subtly undermines such practices.

By placing the work directly on the floor, Hellyar challenges the customary eye-level presentation in museums. She introduces an informality more reminiscent of an archaeological dig, creating a tension with the very precise arrangement of the objects. Each of the 14 trays have evocative names such as *Bird Stones for Brides*, *Birds of a Feather Flock*, *Women's Grubbers*, *Moth Rocks on Sticks*, *Moth Rocks not on Sticks*. The titles are both meaningful and meaningless – they are outside the realm of known terms, but it is easy to imagine the purpose and usages of the tools they describe. Hellyar does not impose a narrative, but rather invites viewers to invent their own understanding of an unknown people, place and time.

Sink and Swim also adopts the gallery floor. A school of latex and lead flounder journey towards a cluster of mangrove pods, transforming the surface into a seabed. The very realistic forms of the fish are made by life casting, where a mould is formed around the actual body of a fish. Hellyar has used this technique, combined with her signature latex rubber, for many years. The process replicates the look and feel of flesh, capturing the finest details. However, these casts are deliberately left imperfectly finished and they maintain an otherworldly quality reminiscent of fossils, of time stopped still. The title plays on the physical properties of the materials and their ability to sink or swim. Yet as the title also hints, there is something ominous in the imagery. Are the fish dead or alive? Have they sunk or are they swimming? JDL

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Sink and Swim 1987 (detail)

lead and latex
dimensions variable
purchased 1987

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Tool Trays 1982

mixed media
45 x 800 x 2800 mm
gift of the Friends of the
Auckland Art Gallery 1982

