

# Patricia Piccinini



“... the era when ‘bios/zoe meets and merges with ‘techne.’”  
- Braidotti

# Biography

- Born in 1965 (56 yrs) in Sierra Leone
- Moved to Australia at 7 yrs
- BA in Economic History at Australian National University ('88)
- BAFA in Painting at Victorian College of the Arts ('91)
- Artwork focuses on the relationship among technology and bios/zoe
  - Aims to provoke questions and empathy
  - Uses silicone, fiberglass, human hair, 3D printing, hand-painting, etc.

The Long Awaited (2008)



P. Piccinini next to "The Bond" (2016)

# Plasticology (1997)

Plasticology, 1997  
DVD video and interactive  
installation  
dimension variable



# Do Boundaries Exist Between Bios/Zoe and Techne?

- *Children of Time* (Tchaikovsky): Even by building civilizations, the spiders “have made a virtue of the unnatural” (362). If cities and the conquering of ants are praised, then why not other “unnatural” structures.
- *From Genetic Perspective to Biohistory* (Stafford): The ingestion of GMOs shows that we’re already not a pure and “natural” species (378).
- *The Bizarre Silicone World of Patricia Piccinini* (NYT): “Right now, in China, they’re creating genetically modified lamb that produces a kind of healthier fat found in oily fish like salmon. If it makes our life better, it seems self-evident that this kind of thing is O.K. But I’m wondering whether that’s really a good enough reason to change nature. The lamb can’t ask these questions, so we have to.”

## The Foundling (2008)



“It doesn't really fit in the capsule, and it doesn't really have a place to belong.”

Foundling, 2008  
silicone, human hair, polyester, nylon, wool, plastic  
66cm x 41cm x 37cm (26in x 16in X 14in)

“these huge eyes that ask to be loved.”



# Where Does “Unnatural” Life Fit In?

When should we utilize the “unnatural” (such as gene therapy) to “fix the abnormal” (such as cleft palettes), and when shouldn’t we?

- “The ‘beauty’ or ‘ugliness’ of these creatures depends very much on what notion of normality you believe in” ([Braidotti & Piccinini, \*Your Place is My Place\*](#))
  - “Cultural practices produce what is experienced as ‘the natural’” (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 1)



Eulogy, 2011  
silicone, fibreglass, human hair,  
clothing  
110cm x 65cm x 60cm

# Skywhale (2013 - still in flight)

- Commissioned for the centenary celebration of Canberra
- “My question is what if evolution went a different way and instead of going back into the sea, from which they came originally, they went into the air and we evolved a nature that could fly instead of swim.”
  - [Australian Broadcasting Company](#) article



Hot air balloon, 112 ft high and 75 ft long

# On Becoming Anti-Androcentric

Piccinini still tries to appeal to our sense of sight, giving her creatures traditionally “cute” characteristics that will make us feel empathy for them.

- One recurring example thus far: big eyes, soft features (implying vulnerability)

They are still “the other,” but maybe not “*as other*” as a terrifying spider.

- How does this relate to the idea of Braidotti’s “becoming-insect”?
- Is it easier to “become foundling/skywhale” than it is to “become insect”?
  - What takes the place of “cuteness” for empathy to remain for the insect? What do we need to “become insect”? Do we really need to be infected by a nanovirus to see spiders as kin (Children of Time)?



## Cleaner (2019)



Cleaner, 2019

Fibreglass, auto paint, silicone, human hair

30cm x 70cm x 90cm (12in x 27in X 35in)

“A creature genetically engineered to solve a life-threatening situation it faces due to human-made pollution in the oceans.”

# Connection to Xenobots?

- The idea of kinship versus ownership (Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 102)
  - With ownership, humanity controls “the other,” and will panic if the other develops its own desires.
  - With kinship, humanity realizes that it is in a relationship with the other, and thus, both parties should be aware of and respect each party’s power. Together, they can act in an assemblage to create a sustainable environment.
  
- The idea of responsibility and blame (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 28)
  - If we own Xenobots and Cleaner(s), then we want them to take the responsibility of its mistakes; we use them as a tool. The blame is still on us (for creating the mistake in the first place), but it is mitigated.
  - If we share responsibility (as an assemblage), we also share the blame. Where does “fairness” come into play?
  
- This creature may become a “disposable body,” the “farming ground” for ocean vacuums (Braidotti, 132).
  - How does their existence “[provide] the grounds for their becoming also the active subjects processes of transformation and active empowerment?” (Braidotti, 132)

# Conclusion: Questions to Ponder

When bios/zoe merges with techne...

- What is the natural in our contemporary setting?
- How do we ensure that the minorities/the other are not being exploited by the dominant majority?
  - How does the relationship change when we think about ownership v. kinship?
- Should rapidly-evolving techne fix every “abnormality” or difference?

Author’s Note: The yellow text are links to the artwork or article.