

# McGRATH

THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE

## Sustainable styling

The new design ethos  
—living with the future in mind

## Creating memories

The craft of transforming bygone  
relics to memorable works of art

# Putting the pieces together

Distant memories and tales of our shifting social landscape are meticulously woven into the artwork of Tanya Stubbles.

Words Gabrielle Bates | Images [imageination.tv](http://imageination.tv)

Australian culture is slippery to define these days. Many things we associate with it are changing at a rapid rate. That doesn't stop independent artist Tanya Stubbles from excavating and bringing to light the bygone icons that lie buried in our social landscape and psyche. Old farm machinery, car parts, golf clubs, pianos pieces, bowling club paraphernalia, tools and even rusty screws show up in her richly textured and tactile assemblages. Each one carries a story and can unlock our deepest memories.

The connection between objects and memory is no coincidence. Tanya intentionally uses sentimental or nostalgic materials to trigger our subconscious mind. With great sensitivity and crafting she assembles all manner of natural and found ephemera into abstract wall pieces or installations. The results have powerful resonance. "People are instantly reminded of the past, especially their childhood," Tanya says.

Referencing Australian history, geography and nature, her artworks are essentially inspired by stories told by the many people she encounters on field trips to central western New South Wales. Tanya loves a yarn. "Connecting with people and their past is one of the best parts of my practice," she says. "The art of storytelling is becoming lost. When people see their tales present in my work, a sense of ownership occurs. I'm





just a channel. My art is not about me, it's about the people and their stories."

Through an intricate process of experimentation and construction, Tanya generates series of works with titles such as 'Bowling Club', 'Acacia', 'Car' or 'Alchemy'. While each series is quite different, they remain fundamentally connected to her rural roots.

Tanya grew up on a goat farm in the hilly area of Cambewarra, NSW. Both her mother and grandmother held expert knowledge of textiles and design, including the spinning, weaving, knitting and natural dyeing of wool. Tanya learned these crafts at an early age and it's easy to see their influence in her work today. Whether she is experimenting with pigments from acacia blossoms or pushing car parts together, a perceptive interweaving of design, structure and colour is applied.

In 2008 Tanya undertook a residency at Bundanon, the home of the late artist, Arthur Boyd. Arriving without materials, tools or a specific plan, she explored

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the Shoalhaven property in search of inspiration. As it happened, the acacia trees (aka wattle) were in flower. Tanya gathered large quantities of the delicate blossoms and conducted experiments such as making paint from the golden pigments. "It was beautiful work to do. I had previously been working with



metal but this was so soft, gentle and joyous. The experience reminded me of my Nanna and her natural dyes."

Conversely, Tanya's latest series is dedicated to Australian car culture. She utilises everything from logos and chrome fenders to explore the essential language and history of our most beloved vehicle. The works are reminiscent of car shows, drag races and brand politics. While developing the series Tanya encountered the intense passion that people have for the sport, precision design and maintenance of their cars. "It's a really big deal," she says. "Cars are built for class and style. People regard them as an extension of their personality or identity."

Demand for Tanya's art is gathering momentum. It's a great affirmation for one who has demonstrated such commitment and determination. Living as a full time artist in Australia

is not easy and if you add being a mother of four children, you get a sense of just how dedicated she is. "I'm a risk-taker. I like to challenge myself and go out of my comfort zone. My role is to make people think outside of their comfort zone too."

Among other awards, Tanya's work has been included in the prestigious 2008 Wynne prize. Recently a major work from the 'Acacia Series' has been secured for the Art Bank collection. Her pieces can be regularly seen at Poliform furniture gallery in Surry Hills and she will exhibit her latest creations with Rex-Livingston Projects in Surry Hills from 14 July 2011. ■

[tanyastubbles.com.au](http://tanyastubbles.com.au)

