

Collide & Divide: The Power of Hybrid Practice



Specialisation is a tightrope in many fields – stay too general and you won't master any skill but specialise too much and you might get stuck in a rut. A new exhibition at Craft ACT by eleven emerging JamFactory associates groups artists across disciplines to spark creativity and create unexpected results through hybrid practice. The resulting exhibition, called *Collide + Divide*, shows the work of five groups of two or three makers from across JamFactory's four studios – ceramics, glass, furniture, and jewellery and metal.

The exhibition also has a conceptual framework, asking each group to respond to the theme 'bodies holding bodies'. Examples of how this might inspire the work include questions like: how the maker's hands and body act as a tool to create objects, or how these objects can be held by a body (for example, the hand) or can hold a body (for example, as a piece of furniture holds a body). The results are remarkable in their creativity and originality.

Group One's Sam Gold and Francesca Sykes have combined a sculptural approach to ceramics (Sam) with a furniture-maker's skill (Francesca) in a series of three works that embraces the natural beauty of wood, blacked using the Japanese shou sugi ban technique, combined with a white clay half-sphere shape whose pitted surface reveals light from within. The work responds to the theme 'bodies holding bodies' by exploring how hands can shape clay, and also how timber can shape the body: "Just as the hard wooden surface of a chair stamps an outline into exposed skin, so too can skin make impressions in the soft surface of clay," says the artists' statement. Another aspect of the work that ties together the two contrasting disciplines is the use of fire – on one hand to blacken the wood and on the other to fire the clay.



Group Two's David Liu and Mirjana Dobson have combined their respective skills to create the *Orbicella Hall Table*. Like Sam and Francesca, this group has combined timber and ceramics, with David's furniture skills meeting Mirjana's ceramics expertise. Both David and Mirjana have practices inspired by nature, with David's work communicating a sense of calm found in the natural world, and Mirjana's work inspired by the complex ecology of underwater reefs. Their combined piece is a hall table whose minimal timber frame is inlaid with stoneware pitted with repetitive marks inspired by the *Orbicella*, a stony coral made of rounded domes.

Polly Dymond and Duncan Young from Group Three have also created a furniture piece – this time combining Polly's skills in jewellery and metal with Duncan's furniture experience. The resulting works are the *Collide* stool and *Divide* bench, both of which feature copper-frames and woven seats. Here, Polly's expertise in metal can be seen in the luxe brushed copper frame, which has an aged green patina created by oxidation through the application of sea water from Willunga beach, south of Adelaide. Meanwhile, Polly's passion for designing with recycled materials has resulted in a woven seat made with reused hospital oxygen tubing. The combination here is not as simple as adding a metal piece to a furniture piece – the makers have built on their expertise and created something totally new.



Group Four is the only group with three makers – they are ceramicist Eloise White, jeweller Daria Fox and glass artist Alexandra Hirst – and the resulting work is a marriage of three distinct materials. *Soma* is a pendant light with three elements, all in black, that perfectly balance each other. At the top is Daria's contribution, a jeweller who has used an enamelling technique to create a cupped disc with subtle surface decorations. Next is Eloise's ceramic piece, an egg-shaped smooth object that is reminiscent of a river stone, and lastly is a glass shade by Alexandra in rippling black glass. All together they create a subtle sense of rhythm as geometric shapes that evolve along the pendant's cord.



And Group Five is Erin Daniell and Bailey Donovan, with expertise in jewellery and glass respectively. Their combined series of works is called *Common Thread* and consists of a pairing of bronze rings and blown glass vessels in sea green. Here the theme 'bodies holding bodies' can be seen in the way the ring sits on the finger and in the touch of the hand on the vessels. In the artists' statement, Erin and Bailey describe the works as nostalgic keepsakes: "Each colour and pattern combination is chosen to elevate and embrace the domestic." The pieces are paired together so that the rings become a lid for the vessels, or they can be used separately as jewellery pieces. Both artists also stress that the techniques used – lost wax casting and glass blowing – are traditional, "evoking a reverence for the past", but used to create completely contemporary designs.

None of us is an island and staying within our specialist silos can only lead to stagnation. That's why projects like this, that actively encourage individuals to come together and cross-pollinate ideas, materials and techniques, are so valuable. When Andy Warhol teamed up with Jean-Michel Basquiat in the 1980s, the two artists created 150 joint works over a two-year period. Basquiat recalled that Warhol "would put something very concrete or recognisable, like a newspaper headline or a product logo and then I would sort of deface it" (Quoted on [Artsy](#)). The results are legendary, pushing the creativity of both artists, and the collaboration has now been dramatised in a new play and an upcoming film. Similarly, *Collide + Divide* is an exhibition that proves the power of opening up your creative vulnerability to another person. As for working across craft disciplines, it also proves that the risk of a hybrid practice can bear incredible fruits.

Essay by Penny Craswell