

# Shed Assemblage: an Anna Rowbury installation

Review by Varia Karipoff

We enter the dimly lit gallery space; the light has the effect of inviting quiet reverence, akin to being in a room housing light-sensitive antiquities, or perhaps, a place of worship. Black netting suggests walls and a roof, and encloses a space which we gradually recognise as a shed by the objects assembled within it. The netting acts like a fragile, shifting, impermanent membrane – this is the physically recreated memory of the artist's experience of rural sheds. The tools, hooks, gates, buckets and small creatures among dry leaves could be the refuse in any half-forgotten work space, but here they are deliberately cast together, constructed from ceramics or selected found objects.

Emerging artist Anna Rowbury has previously dealt in what could be considered 19th century concerns. Chief among these are rural life and pastoral themes, more associated with our colonial past than with contemporary art (*Cow's Eye View* and *Sorrow to the Shepherds, Woe unto the Birds*). Rowbury recasts these long celebrated, traditional themes – ceramic cow busts appear as white-washed bone with the pink tinge of a newborn; they are death and life at once. They express an uncomfortable reality for urban dwellers – the harshness of rural life, but also our tendency to idealise nature. As such, Rowbury's works tend to ambiguously recall both nostalgia and softness and death and decay. Her experience of the western Victorian coast, where she formerly lived, is a fertile ground for her forays into memory and imagination.

Coming from a background in painting, Rowbury (who went on to study Fine Arts (Ceramics) at RMIT) approaches her installations with the eye of a painter. Indeed, paintings have accompanied her ceramic works and she has collaborated with her mother, painter Josephine Rowbury. Anna Rowbury is above all, "interested in the processes of 'making'". Using paperclay, raku and porcelain, she constructs objects or creatures as solid forms before cutting them through and hollowing them out. Rowbury employs a multi-layered approach to achieving the desired surface look in her clay works. "I colour the clay with stains. I love slip decoration and the layering of engobes." In some cases she will do multiple firings to bring out decorative layers, including using final touches of lustre and oxides. Whilst there is a focus on the craftsmanship of an object that she creates, more broadly Rowbury interrogates the spaces where making takes place. Her installation, *Just Like Home* (2012), a series of ceramic moths stitched into breezy muslin, evoked the mood in these spaces of making. These spaces are an intermediary "between 'outside' and the house proper", and a place where unfinished projects rest (or gather dust) and where insects find shelter and are trapped. In *Shed Assemblage*, a ceramic moth rests atop discarded fur, its fat little body painted in the hue of human skin, and the rough work surface of the table adding further contrast to the textures. Rowbury emphasises the importance of this surface patina and the colour of the objects, to evoke a shred of memory or perhaps a more visceral response. "I display the forms off the usual plinth. I like to see my work in relationship to other elements that have their own story – surface patina, colour, sympathetic shape – and they talk to my piece."



**Anna Rowbury**, *Shed Assemblage*, installation, 2013, aluminium structure, netting, ceramic, found objects, sound loop  
h.300cm, w.247cm, d.215cm; photos: Jeremy Dillon

Moths, crafted from various clays, are a recurring image in Rowbury's work; they are emblematic of her themes and a source of reference for her colour palette. Their subtle, dusty colouring (the nudes, pinks, browns that Rowbury draws from) is at odds with their gaudy, flitty daytime cousins. It is their association with decay and transformation that speak volumes in Rowbury's work. Moths are shrouded creatures of night; it is only on closer inspection that their wings reveal patterns or, indeed, a quiet kind of beauty. The artist asks that we reconsider the notion that moths destroy an object by consuming fabric; she suggests that they instead alter it, imbuing it with age and use. Similarly, Rowbury creates spaces and environments where a shifting mood prevails as though the internal climate of her work is overcast with breaks of sun. Though enigmatic about her work, one gets the sense that the art of making is both as accidental as the leaves that blow into a shed, and deliberate as a painstakingly sculpted trowel or moth.

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**www.annarowbury.com**  
**<http://vimeo.com/70008444>**  
**Craft, Flinders Lane, Melbourne**  
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