

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

From a mechanics soup to a seamstress' mixed sandwiches, there is no doubt Ruth Dowes' Lunch for the Trades serves up a meal for all tastes.

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INTERVIEW BY TANYA BIRD

Images courtesy of Ruth Dowes

**Where did your interest in the materials used by tradesmen stem from?** I have always admired the diversity and very particular skills of the trades. My partner is an industrial designer and has a keen awareness of techniques and the broad range of materials used by tradespeople. We enjoy looking closely into specialised retail and wholesale stores. Sadly many trades are diminishing in Australia so it is hard to access many materials such as those used by shoe and broom makers.

**Your exhibition is highly different, what is the kind of feedback you hear regarding it?** I have been delighted by the response I have had to this exhibition. Having compiled the works into a cafeteria style setting within a gallery environment makes it very accessible. Kids love to guess what the meals are and are curious about the materials, many of which they probably have not observed before and certainly not in a sculptural context. Adults are interested in the unusual compilation of materials and obsessive detail. They also enjoy the humour and the play with language.

**How would you describe your exhibition?** This exhibition is a tribute to those who work in the trades and is a recognition of talents and expertise undervalued in our society. Each meal assemblage employs the specific materials of a particular trade. There is a huge diversity and unexpected beauty in these materials, which can transcend their utilitarian function.

**Do you think the food element adds further appeal to your exhibition?** Food has become another range of consumable products. We live in an age of food creation, artificial enhancement and uniquely personalised meals for every physical type, health condition, lifestyle or profession. Our obsession with food as entertainment has led to the creation of meals tailor made to satisfy our increasing demands for visual excitement, novelty value and infinite choice.

**How do you see beauty in something that others would throw away or disregard?** Look closely at objects, ponder on the beauty of the materials and how they were made and then think about the massive over consumption on this planet. I very seldom see materials as waste. The pleasure in my creative life is to recreate ideas out of unexpected parts.

**What do you love most about art?** I love looking into nature and the developed world and being stimulated with ideas. I also love to see other sculptural works in the gallery and outdoor environment and thinking about the methods used to achieve their works.

Lunch for Trades will be on show at the Cairns Regional Gallery from July 9 to August 29. **CL**

