



LEO LOOMANS AND PETER VANDERMARK

DOUBLE DUTCH

04.04.25 – 20.04.25

Double Dutch is a language that is slippery and strange. It also refers to each artist's origins. Loomans was born in New Zealand to Dutch parents who migrated to escape their ruined homeland after the Second World War. Vandermark's father, a Methodist preacher, did the same, leaving the Netherlands to settle in Gippsland.

Leo Loomans graduated in sculpture at the National Art School in the late 1980s. He works primarily in welded steel and has exhibited widely, including at King Street, Watters Gallery and Sculpture by the Sea. In 2023 he was included in *FLUENT: Ms N. Marawili & Leo Loomans*, a major show at the Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, curated by Terence Maloon.

Peter Vandermark graduated from the ANU School of Art in 1989. He has exhibited widely, and his works are in major collections including the National Gallery of Australia, ACT Legislative Assembly, Australian National University and the Canberra Museum and Gallery. Vandermark's sculpture has been included in the Canberra Art Biennial (formerly Contour 556) in 2016, 2020 and 2022. He worked as a studio assistant to Rosalie Gascoigne for many years.

Loomans and Vandermark are both based in Canberra, ACT, Australia.

EXHIBITION ESSAY *A poetry in assemblage* by Hetty Gascoigne is appended to the catalogue.

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Leo Loomans



1. ***Mendel as metaphor***, 2025

clear enamel on steel

21 x 19 x 23 cm

\$800



2. ***Kurangaitu (at Hatupatu's Rock)***, 2025

painted steel

39.5 x 20.5 x 33 cm

\$1500



3. ***Time and Joy***, 2025

painted steel

44 x 22 x 30.5 cm

\$1500



4. ***Theory and practice***, 2025

painted steel

37.5 x 20 x 34.5 cm

\$900



5. *Town birds*, 2025

painted steel

29 x 22 x 32 cm

\$900



6. *Ruff*, 2025

clear enamel on steel

28 x 19.5 x 17 cm

\$900



7. ***Sculpture in pink***, 2025

painted steel

51 x 67 x 41 cm

\$3000



8. ***Curiosity***, 2025

painted steel

41 x 13 x 52 cm

\$1500

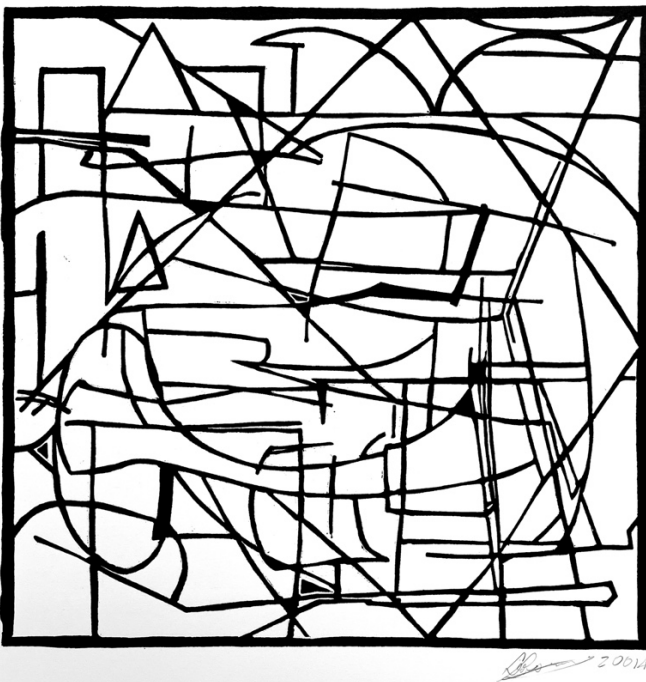


9. *Untitled*, 2006

Linocut

30 x 60 cm

POA



10. *Untitled*, 2014

linocut

29 x 29 cm

POA



11. **Untitled**, 2004

linocut

26.5 x 23.5 cm

POA

PETER VANDERMARK



1. **Generator**, 2024-25

mixed media and found objects

590 x 450 x 590 cm

\$800



2. ***Mood sympathizer***, 2024-25

mixed media and found objects

1730 x 310 x 265 cm

\$800

***Stay*, *Bust* and *Space Junk* series, 2024-25**

soft toys, belts, non-slip floor paint, pins, chain, wire, mixed media

various dimensions

\$700 each



3. *Stay* #7



4. *Stay* #3



5. *Stay #6*

6. *Stay gold*



7. *Stay #4*

8. *Stay #2*



9. *Bust #1*

10. *Bust #2*



11. *Space Junk #8*



12. *Space Junk #3*



13. *Space Junk #9*



14. *Space Junk #7*



15. *Space Junk #6*



16. *Space Junk #2*

A poetry in assemblage

by Hetty Gascoigne

The work of Leo Loomans, when exhibited alongside that of Nonggirra Marawili at the Drill Hall Gallery in 2023, inspired a beautiful essay by curator Terrence Maloon.¹ For Maloon, Loomans's gestural steel constructions are akin to language. Their joints and struts, like words and syntax, phrases and paragraphs, shape a visual dialogue with their creator that is equivalent to poetry. Between the works of Loomans and Peter Vandermark, language proves useful. Their sculptures hum together in a conversation alive with wit and a startling candour. Meaning often tantalises, as their art slips and morphs through ongoing exchange, refusing to settle in place. Loomans's sculptures arch and glide in an alchemical poetry of space and line that depends on and defies their steel construction. Vandermark brings the reality of his materials into a Shakespearean play of meanings where double-entendres unfold out of commonplace objects like puns off a quick-witted tongue.

Vandermark's *Stay* series presents a suite of unsettlingly anthropomorphic works. Repurposed soft toys and cushions are bound in belts, dunked in gritted concrete paint and industrial black, pierced with pearlescent pins, and tethered to a range of geometric forms in wood and steel. What unfolds is uncanny, stirring the senses with a peculiar strength and repulsion, demanding attention. The materials retain their former selves as soft memory, memory that is re-shaped through a metamorphosis of textures to meet a new and harsh reality. These objects occupy an impossible position – two sides of an opposing dynamic. They are soft and rigid, yielding and resistant, comforting and full of pain, imbued with a childhood innocence that is disconcertingly sexualised. This bipolarity extends across the tethering chain, the animalistic form strains against the geometric in a stand-off between organic and artificial. The fact that my iPhone identifies photos of the *Stay* series as images of dogs is suggestive. These works produce a trepidation such as infuses the human relationship to artificial intelligence. Yet there is nothing virtual here. Any suggestion of machinery leans towards the analogue rather than the cybernetic. What anchors these works most securely to earth is their textures and their objecthood. They have an innate corporality that defies virtual experience. This is their animating force. These are objects one wants to touch, explore their surfaces, feel the weight of them, and then maybe know them. Vandermark uses texture to ignite our sense memory and in doing so brings his sculptures to life.

While Vandermark's works are full of a magnetic texture that pulls the viewer around them to explore their objecthood, Loomans's engage with a play of air, space, metal – sketching in steel a series of windows, pockets of air that push in and out of light and shade. Their participation with space unites them with their physical surroundings. As the light changes so do they, shifting with the progression of time in an ongoing dance with their environment. Here steel, mined from the earth, chemically manipulated and put to work, is returned to

¹ Maloon, T., 'Fluent', *Fluent: Nonggirra Marawili Leo Loomans*, Drill Hall Gallery: Canberra, Feb. 2023.

nature in sculptures that appear to grow from the land. Loomans says about the base of a sculpture, it should never be simply a platform but “part of them, like your legs are part of you.”² Watching Loomans converse is to witness a body alive with gesture. His sculptures are infused with this physicality. Just as our anatomy is the product of an ongoing evolution so too have Loomans’ materials – bits and pieces of discarded industrial and farming machinery – evolved in response to their shifting circumstances. The scratches and grooves, jagged edges and dimpled surfaces in these works lay bare their history. The modernist sculptures’ dictum – ‘truth to materials’ – was something that was instilled into Loomans through intuitive sculptural play, as practiced under Ian McKay at the National Art School from the late 1980s. McKay encouraged his students to allow the “innate qualities of their materials” to dictate their “sculptural language and generate the deepest meaning.” In this respect Loomans’s work is, as artist Michael Snape notes, “a living extension of that tradition.”³

Even with their new lick of paint, a recent addition to Loomans’s practice, his sculptures not only remain true to this early lesson, they extend it. The product of an equal discussion between man and steel, they take shape through exchange, one part bending to the will of the other, others soaring in agreement, some snagging in resistance. The conversation plays out in a series of twisting adjustments and smooth extensions, each section a response to that which came before. In some, such as *Town birds*, the materials take the lead. Loomans says he did not immediately realise he had created a sculpture about birds, the subject came sneaking upon the work in an unpredictable series of hops and dives until a crested head appeared out of the gnarled old steel and declared itself finished. In other works, such as *Mendel (as metaphor)*, Loomans’s preoccupation persisted. Here he reimagines the Austrian biologist Gregor Mendel pondering a piece of corn (perhaps?) under a weathered hat the angle of which manages to conjure a sense of thoughtful contemplation, while his famous pea plants sprout in the background. It is a joy to follow the stories alive in these works, to track their twisting growth, to fill the gaps with our own musings, and in doing so carry on the conversation that animates them, harnessing consciousness to steel. Rather than the double-entendre of Vandermark’s sculptures, in which materials take on a multitude of references and meaning shimmers in and out of focus, it is the things left unsaid, the gaps between the swaying steel lines, that wonderfully illuminate Loomans’s work.

In their individual ways, Loomans and Vandermark carry forward a conversation that began with the advent of modernism. Vandermark is a self-proclaimed “bower bird”, part of “an ongoing history” which he “refer(s) to, borrow(s) from, extrapolate(s) within (his) practice.”⁴ For over three decades (1993-2024) he worked, hands-on, with the collection at the National Gallery of Australia. The experience of handling reverberates through the art he produces. Vandermark’s oeuvre exists in a lineage of artists – Marcel Duchamp, Eve Hesse, Claes Oldenburg,

² Loomans, L., in conversation with the author, Strathnairn, Canberra, 25 Feb. 2025.

³ Snape, M., ‘Leo Loomans, Sculptor’, *Michael Snape*, <https://www.michaelsnape.com/sydney-school-of-sculpture-blog/2022/8/31/ccy7bed8vt0o05nr2mhn8anrsmqsav>, Acc: 6 March, 2025.

⁴ Vandermark, P., ‘Creative Space: a conversation with Peter Vandermark’, *Strathnairn Arts*, <https://www.strathnairn.com.au/news/in-conversation-with-peter-vandermark>, Acc. 10 March, 2025.

Joseph Beuys – that have used unconventional materials to challenge the nature of art and, by extension, society. In *Mood Sympathiser* Vandermark repurposes a baby bath seat, a vacuum cleaner hose, a pair of plastic funnels, a scoop, and a barred vent cover into a piece of functionless machinery, a readymade of our time. Its title recalls the onslaught of technology endlessly promising to improve our lives, offering a quick fix to all that ails in the 21st Century. With a machine to provide emotional support who needs human connection? We catch a glimpse of our obsolescence in the face of such innovation.

The message ignited by Vandermark's *Generator* carries this further. The timer rigged to one side of the boxy creation reads five minutes to midnight, pointing to the dooms-day consequence of humanity's reliance on technology and the byproducts of this questionable habit – the detritus of outdated tech rotting our planet, the fumes of its manufactory burning the atmosphere. Here Vandermark takes up Duchamp's torch and runs with it, bringing the result of the Industrial Revolution to its ultimate conclusion. If art's purpose is to reveal the human condition, then Vandermark certainly fits in. The effect is not all doom and gloom. Here the worst of humanity is exposed with wit and warmth, suggesting an underlying belief in the power of humankind to rectify its mistakes. There is a joyful innocence and humour in the banality of his chosen materials. These arrangements of reimagined commonplace objects rekindle the boundless possibilities activated by childhood play. With a visual tickle Vandermark's sculptures expose humanity's seedy underbelly and its flip side – our capacity to imagine, to envision endless possibilities even in the most mundane objects, to hope.

Like Vandermark, Loomans's art bends time, calling forth modernist developments that favoured the reimagining of preexisting objects. Loomans's ability to set scrap metal soaring hinges on the technical wizardry of Spanish sculptor Julio González, who, in collaboration with Pablo Picasso between 1929 and 1931, adopted industrial construction methods into the creation of their metal sculptures. This signalled a turning point in three-dimensional representation. The traditional moulding process gave way to the magic of the welder's wand where space and air reigned supreme over mass and volume. Loomans has mastered the use of space as a positive force. His works are testament to González who proclaimed sculptural forms are created in "the marriage between matter and space ... obtained or suggested by established points or perforations ... they become confounded, inseparable from each other like body and spirit."⁵ González termed this 'drawing in space'.

With this in mind, we can consider the creation of Loomans's sculptures as the stringing together of certain points, akin to aligning celestial groupings. The innate qualities of his materials form one constant in the shifting constellations of his oeuvre. In *Time and Joy* Loomans introduces himself as another. The creation of this swirling blue sculpture was a process of self-exploration by which an internal world was to take external form. One feels the weight of this endeavour in the stooped figure that emerges, molten and buckling, halfway up the work's

⁵ Gonzalez, J. 'Picasso sculpteur et les cathédrales', written in 1931, published in *Cahiers d'Art*, 1936.

elevation. Stretching from its grasp is one straight line of steel, strong and delicate, proud and determined, a beautiful counterpoint to the eddy of movement that animates the rest of the sculpture. Loomans found the process revealing. Taken aback by the work he admits “I learnt something new.”⁶ A desire to reveal hidden truths has long stood behind the human practice of star gazing. Connecting the luminous dots into symbols, infusing those symbols with meaning is an attempt to connect humanity to something larger, to see it as a story and thus to understand it.

There is a mythology alive in Loomans’s works that reverberates deep into our collective consciousness. Perhaps it is the intuitive nature of his process, in which content bubbles to the surface through the suggestion of half-imagined forms, that lends his work such deeply resonating connectivity. In *Kurangaitu (at Hatupatu’s rock)* Loomans’s poetic and open-ended play with materials released an object of childhood captivity.

“In New Zealand, on occasional family drives, I searched out for a large split rock by the highway south of my hometown, Tokoroa. It sparked childhood discussion of how Hatupatu narrowly escaped a hunting party by hiding in the rock. At the time I accepted the story as an actual event. It was only decades later in Australia that I discovered it was a Māori myth ... In my sculpture I found the Māori myth suggested to me by the particular form of that work ... What excited me in making this sculpture was how its evolving imagery brought me straight back to the excitement of three or four small kids in the back of the speeding station wagon trying to figure this story out. With the principal form of the sculpture already there, I called my childhood friend in New Zealand to learn what he knew (of the myth), before completing the sculpture on its own terms. I was thrilled to realise I'd practically captured the actual Māori myth intuitively, just a little adjustment was needed to complete the work.”⁷

In the process Loomans manages to harness the fundamental power of storytelling – it’s ability to live inside us, to bloom through human intuition – something that far surpasses anything pure information can achieve. Here, as in all his work, one feels an unconsciousness in action. Jungian archetypes come forth out of the steel in a Surrealist automatism. There is a similar quality to Vandermark’s work where amongst the playful assemblage of everyday objects something unexpected is born. In the work of both artists a scattered selection of objects are united, given voice. What surfaces between artist and materials is akin to the productive conversation that modernist philosopher Hannah Arendt argued is the cornerstone of true creativity. For her, creativity cannot be planned, it must blossom between things. It is only through open-ended discussion over a dividing gap that something true can be revealed. What is unveiled between the visually contrasting sculptures of Loomans and Vandermark is the mysterious poetry of assemblage and de-assemblage.

⁶ Loomans, L. *Op. cit.*

⁷ Loomans, L., in an email to the author, 23 and 25 March 2025.