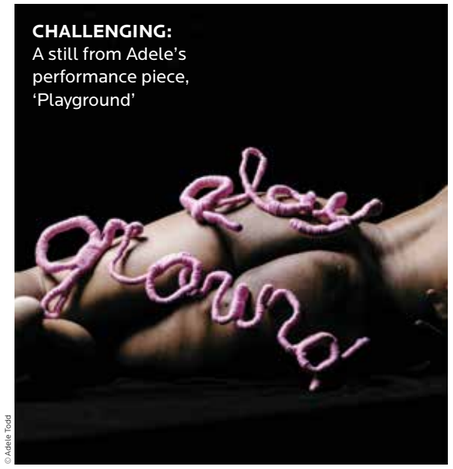


CHALLENGING: A still from Adele's performance piece, 'Playground'

© Adele Todd

What are you working on now?

I have been experimenting with what I call 'dimensional embroidery', using wire, wadding and thread to create sculptural detailing where the thread is no longer on fabric but exposed as itself. I like the fact that it's this delicate thread but the thread is weighty because of the colour and form it takes. This body of work is about female sexuality and I call it 'Stain' because, despite women's liberation, we still are living with lots of stereotypes. I'm looking at where that behaviour comes from, particularly as it relates to my island. And I chose to do so using language, because using typical imagery of the female body would just be stoking the stereotypes.

Is it important for you to challenge the audience?

People look at my work and they are warmed by it because it's embroidery and then, when they see what it's about, they feel tricked. I think that is successful because I want to move my nation, I want people to look at the work and feel it resonating with them. We are an island of people who like to cover up things. We are enrapt by hearing negative news stories that bombard us, so we are very anxiety filled as a nation. But our writers and our artists are in a place where confronting these difficult issues seems too close to the surface, too scary.

How important is it for you to get a story or message across?

I did my first solo show, which was called 'A Visual Narrative on Domestic Violence', because I got really angry about the way women were being treated in Trinidad. I never wanted to have a show until I felt I had something to say and with that I had something to say. One of our senators, Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, wrote in every newspaper on the island that the show was something the whole nation needed to see. That tells me that what artists do is important.

FOCUS

A valuable history

From a spotted dog gift item to a poppy from WWI, how the story behind an object can increase its value. By **Samantha Whitaker**

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. From the moment we're born, we collect stories, and things to remind us of those stories. Often our most treasured possessions are not the most expensive things we own, but those that help to recall a person or a particular moment in time. Photographs are an obvious example, but it might also be a soft toy, a graduation certificate or your child's first drawing.

In the case of American journalist Rob Walker, it was breaking a souvenir coffee mug from a special holiday with his wife that made him realise how valuable the item was to him because of its story. This got him thinking, and with his friend and fellow writer Joshua Glenn, he devised an anthropological experiment, entitled Significant Objects, to test whether invented stories about seemingly worthless objects could increase their value. They bought 100 trinkets for a total of US$128.74 and recruited a team of creative writers to invent short stories about them, ranging from letters, memoirs and diary entries to operating instructions and public notices. Then they put each object up for auction on eBay, along with the story as its description (plus a disclaimer about its true provenance).

Most of the items had been bought for a dollar, but some sold for more than US$100, raising a total of US$3,612.51 – a mark up of more than 2,700%, which went to the storywriters. The bestseller was a Russian figurine of St Vralkomir, bought for $3, which, together with a story by American author Doug Dorst, sold for $193.50. "The original project was successful almost immediately: from the first auction, we demonstrated that the stories added measurable economic value to objects," explains Walker. One of his favourites was a spotted dog figurine with Curtis Sittenfeld's simple but powerful short story about choosing between two potential husbands.



© https://www.flickr.com/photos/ninian_reid/ 'Ninian Reid, Antiques Roadshow, Scone, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/'

LIFE STORY: Justin Croft evaluates a 15th-century locket book, revealing Perth local history of the time, on BBC One's *Antiques Roadshow* in Scone



ADDED VALUE: St Vralkomir was bought for $3 and sold, with a short story, for $193.50; and (right) Significant Object's spotted dog figurine was auctioned with Curtis Sittenfeld's short story



A second phase of the project saw another 100 objects sold in two rounds, raising a total of US$4,351.50, this time for literary-related charities. There was even a mystery object, only revealed at the end of the auction, which they bought for 99¢ and sold for US$103.50.

Walker and Glenn have since published a book of their 100 favourite stories from the project, proving that these have a value of their own. "The bidding is long over, but the stories are still out there being read and clearly have taken on a life beyond our original experiment," says Walker. Of course, in this project there was an element of novelty involved, a sense of being part of something new and exciting. But these items will forever prompt the retelling of the story of their origin – both true and fictional.

This sense of originality and individuality is increasingly what we're craving, according to Ambra Medda, co-creator and Creative Director of L'ArcoBaleno (www.larcobaleno.com), an online marketplace that brings together extraordinary design from around the world. "Every object contains a story, but some are more meaningful and more valuable than others," she says. "Because we're inundated with the generic and the virtual, we increasingly want to surround ourselves with special objects that have been made by hand, showing a human touch and spirit at work."

Amy Brenan, an auctioneer and valuer at Duke's, agrees. In fact, she believes the provenance or history of an object can be more valuable than the item alone. "Sometimes, the idea that a famous person has touched or used an object is as intriguing as the object itself – and some people spend a lot of money buying into these stories," she says.

Last year, Duke's sold some medical notes relating to Lord Lucan, whose fate still remains a mystery. Written by Dr John Watson, they detail the treatment Lord Lucan received following a speedboat accident in September 1963, in which he broke his nose. "We didn't really know how to price them," explains Brenan. "We put £150-£200, but they sold for several thousands of pounds. It's a great example of where a thing – in this case a piece of paper – is only valuable because it details something quite personal about someone very famous." Importantly, the medical card could be crucial in identifying someone thought to be Lord Lucan, which adds the possibility of a future story to its worth.

> *'Story hunters' have obsessions about a person or event*

Brenan calls those who buy items such as these 'story hunters'. They have obsessions about a person or event and collect ephemera – paperwork, letters, clothing etc – in order to feel a connection. "These items are not the type of things a normal antiques collector will go for," she explains. "They appeal to a very specific type of person, and these people spend a lot of money on their obsessions. They want the story."

However, there doesn't have to be a celebrity involved to generate a profitable story. Brenan recalls stumbling upon an ancient Egyptian canopic jar while doing a valuation at a home in Dorset. The family had inherited the jar, had no idea what it was and were happily using it as a flowerpot. Despite being thousands of years old, canopic jars are not as rare as you might imagine, and they seldom make more than £300. This one wasn't in particularly good condition, but Duke's used the press to publicise the tale of its discovery – the unknown treasure in the garden – and it sold for more than £2,000. Further proof of the economic value of a good story.

If you think you might have a hidden treasure or an object with a story to tell, come to Over-Seas House London on 15 October for ROSL's free valuation day with Duke's Auctioneers. See page 34 for more details.

Samantha Whitaker is a Sub-Editor at Sunday Publishing and was previously Deputy Editor of Overseas*.*



AUTHENTIC: The only verified poppy from the battlefields of WWI, sold by Duke's at auction for more than £6,000