

THE IDEAL

Archetype, perfection, measurement, museum

The Ideal is the model from which all others take their measure. From the model kilogram to the role model, the model stands in perfect relation to all the subsequent, imperfect, versions that follow its example. The platonic state of the ideal model (a tautology) gives it a motivational force – both moral and practical. It mobilises aspiration, demands imitation, but resists exact replication. Our experience of the ideal model is one of striving or reaching towards.

Like all models, *The Ideal* has an ambivalent relationship to reality. Whilst it certainly exists in circumscribed and controlled conditions (the airbrushed front page, the laboratory, the manifesto, the architect's studio) it cannot survive outside of these small, perfect worlds. The museum and the 'white cube' of the gallery are themselves such small worlds – idealising spaces, where civic comportment can be modelled, or new social models trialled.



Matchstick boat made for lawyer Andrea Durbach by prisoners on death row. Photo: Museum of Australian Democracy.

BELIEF

Talisman, magical object, world view

Models crystallise beliefs about how things work and therefore shape human relationships to the world. Mental models determine the kinds of information or evidence we pay attention to. Social, political and religious models can fundamentally influence a sense of legitimate knowledge and action. Theoretical models of complex phenomena (such as consciousness or particle physics) affect how we understand ourselves and the systems and ecologies around us.

Belief includes magical objects, such as voodoo dolls, talismans and lucky charms, that are invested with power to act in the world.

Models are usually thought of as non-linguistic entities, but language itself can be seen as a model for a society or a belief system. Language encodes world views, shaping what can be imagined through what can be said.

Models of belief are often invisible whilst we continue to believe in them. When they are supplanted or fall from favour, they can become absurdities and even embarrassments. Wars are fought over such models – in lecture halls, the press and on battlefields.

Palle Nielsen, *Modellen – En modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle* [The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society], 1968, exhibition documentation, Stockholm, Sweden, October 1968. MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Gift of the artist © Palle Nielsen, Viscopy, 2017.

BECOMING

Maquette, prototype, utopia, manifesto

Models play a crucial role in many creative processes such as design, engineering, theatre, architecture and sculpture. As drafts of new ideas, models are causeways between imagination and reality, they are things that bring other things into being. This gives them a distinct temporal trajectory as objects that herald and shape the future. It also gives them a seasaw ontology, as the pivot between productive contradictions such as fluid and fixed, material and immaterial, flexible and concrete.

Models of things-to-come can be about the discovery of the future (finding form). They can also be about persuasion and rhetoric – created to win over a client (presentation models) or an entire society (manifestos and utopias). Social, economic and political models intersect with *Belief*, *Proof*, and *The Ideal*, and are always in the process of becoming.

Peter Hennessey, *Overlooked (Streetview capture apparatus)*, 2014, plywood, ABS plastic, 190 x 145 x 145 cm. Courtesy the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne. Photo: Andrew Curtis.



Richard Braddish, *Sydney's tallest buildings 1:1000* (detail). Courtesy the maker and the City of Sydney.
Esme Timbery, *Shellwork Sydney Opera House*, 2002. Collection of Sydney Opera House Trust. © the artist, licensed by Viscopy.



SCALE

Micro, macro, 1:1, big data

Scale is a crucial element of model making, with ratios fixing the relation of model:target system. Small scale models create miniature worlds, and turn us into gods and giants. The lure of the miniature is well theorised. Its ability to concentrate significance makes the tiniest of details (the miniscule iron in the dolls-house kitchen) fascinating in inverse proportion to its size. Since the invention of microscopy, our ability to magnify has been as compelling as our ability to shrink.

The crucial measurement here is the human being. Models bring both the macro and the micro – the extremely large and extremely small – within the reach of human perception and manipulation. We delight similarly in the grasp-ability of ball and stick atomic models and mechanical solar systems.

Data and agent-based models translate micro-behaviour (such as choosing a house) to macro-consequences (such as increasingly segregated communities) with human-scale impact. Here the complexity and opacity of the model, and the assumptions it encodes, coupled with the enormity of big data, create what we might think of as the anti-model – a powerful tool that renders data operable for far-reaching decisions, but un-graspable by those whose lives it affects.

SIMULACRA

Virtual, copy, fiction, diorama

From the immateriality of computer games to the misdirecting materiality of wax apples, simulacra bring together the great diversity of stand-ins, copies, fictions, and fakes. Models that mimic the things they represent have a beguiling ontology and varying status with regards to *The Ideal* – they may be a pale imitation of the original, or appear more vibrant and attractive than the thing itself.

Exquisite natural history models, such as Dr Auzoux's papier mache flora, are some of the most celebrated of such objects. These examples of artful science exhibit the aesthetic excess inherent in models – where beauty often exceeds utility.

The future of the model is arguably in the virtual realm of computer simulations. Escaping the limitations of the physical world, such models effectively dematerialise us, so that model and avatar can exist in the same scaleless plane.

The precursors of contemporary virtual environments are the three dimensional fictions of panoramas, dioramas and stage sets. These model worlds offer bounded arenas in which world-views can be staged. Of all of these forms, World's Fairs are perhaps the pre-eminent 'working models of the world' – in which real things (from industrial inventions, to produce, to human beings) become models of themselves, dramatising global flows of trade and power.

PROOF

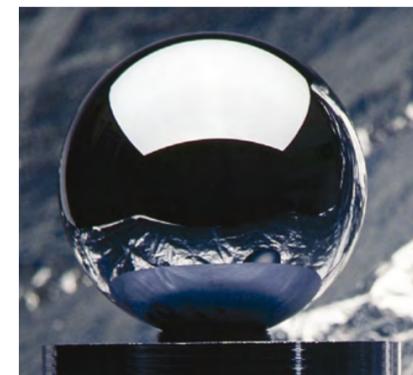
Mathematics, law, forensics, rhetoric

Models give form to truth, or help us find truth through form. As forensic architect Eyal Weizman points out, this is the case in both law and science, where truth is measured as probability and models are created to represent the most likely version of reality.

It is also the case in disciplines where one measure of truth is *beauty* – such as art and mathematics. In this way models support both generative and forensic processes. They can offer 'proof of concept' for a theorem or a creative instinct, they can demonstrate the feasibility of a bridge or, as Weizman suggests, be called as witnesses in courts of law.

The line between *Proof* and *Prediction* depends on different models of truth and thresholds of uncertainty. This line is often called into question to destabilise truths (such as man-made climate change) that are unthinkable within certain models of *Belief*.

Silicon sphere from the Avagadro Project, an international effort to redefine the kilogram by its atomic properties. Courtesy the CSIRO.



Corinne May Botz, *Kitchen (from afar)*, 2004. C-print, edition of six, 2 APs, from *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* series on the forensic models of Frances Glessner Lee. Courtesy the artist and Benrubi Gallery.

MASTERY

Toys, hobbies, teaching, demonstration

Models help us to gain power and control over a small part of the world. This potential for mastery may be part of structured learning (such as scientific demonstration models), or play (such as dolls houses or construction toys). Such models allow their users to act out scenarios (playing shop or conducting a surgical procedure), creating simplified fictional arenas in which to develop expertise that can be applied in the real world.

Models simplify parts of the world in many ways including scale, idealisation and analogy. Analogical models allow us to grasp something complex through a stand-in (like hydraulics for economic systems in the famous Moniac). All of these forms of simplification imply distortion, which is the price of the insights that models afford.

Mastery also refers to the dynamics of power, desire and ownership at work in the world of hobby models – from train sets to matchstick buildings – where makers painstakingly create their own miniaturised versions of beloved things: demonstrating their devotion with the skill and attention of their modelling. In these perfect small worlds *Mastery* slips over into *The Ideal*.

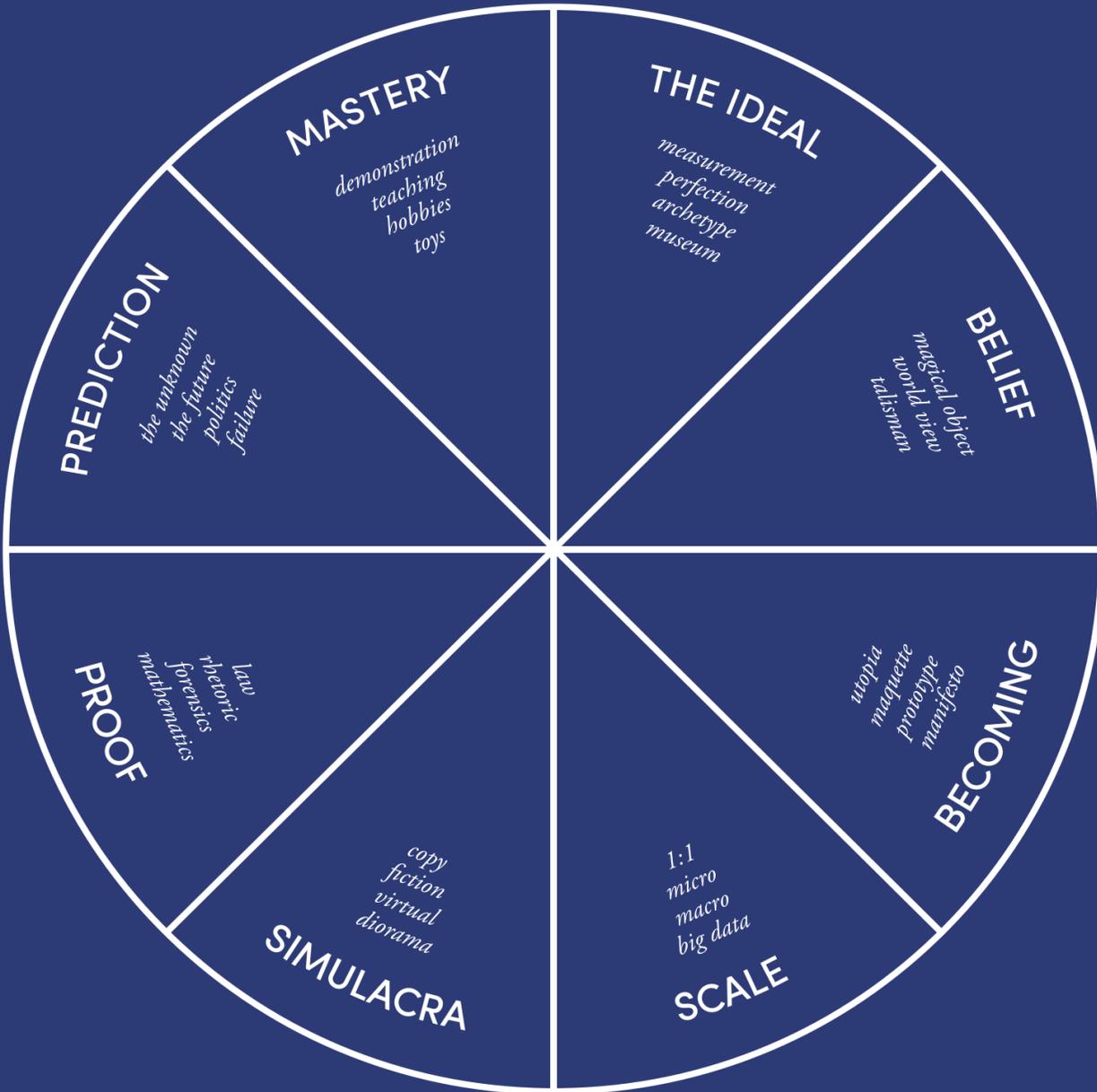
Model apple, *Moss Incomparable*, wax, modelled at Sydney Technical College, probably painted by Charles Toms, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 1900. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. Photo: Nitsa Yioupros.



A WORKING MODEL OF THE WORLD

5 May–22 July 2017





INTRODUCTION

A Working Model of the World explores the practical, philosophical and symbolic work that models do for us, and asks how we use models to contemplate, experiment, invent and teach. It explores the losses and gains that flow from the way models isolate one part of the complexity of the world.

The artists in the exhibition interrogate the role of models in human experience and deploy techniques and forms of model-making in their work. Alongside the artworks are emblematic and evocative models borrowed from public, private and research collections. This eclectic combination invites a conversation between different forms of material thinking from many disciplines.

Models create small worlds, but the universe of the model – as concept and tool – is infinite. To get traction on this expansive field we offer eight ways of thinking about model experiences, represented as segments in a wheel. These eight angles emphasise ‘model’ as a verb, and show that modelling is an activity that unifies all human beings – from children rolling dough to ecologists predicting rising sea-levels. Our model of the model also emphasises reciprocity – the way that we model models and they, in turn, model us.

Curated by **Dr Lizzie Muller** and **Holly Williams**

PARTICIPANTS

Artists

- Brook Andrew
- Corinne May Botz
- Ian Burns
- caraballo-farman
- Maria Fernanda Cardoso
- Kate Dunn
- David Eastwood
- Emily Floyd
- Andrea Fraser
- Glen Hayward
- Peter Hennessey
- Jo Law
- Tony Mott
- Palle Nielsen
- Kenzee Patterson
- Sascha Pohflepp & Chris Woebken
- Esme Timbery



Cover image: Kenzee Patterson, *Money Spinner*, 2016, fibreglass reinforced thermoset polyester resin, pigmented (found object) Edition of 2 + 1 AP (with variations) 94 cm diameter x 53 cm. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney. Photo: Alex Reznick.

Lenders

- Casula Powerhouse
- CSIRO
- City of Sydney
- Andrea Durbach
- Durbach Block Jagers
- Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona
- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences
- Private and Corporate Collections
- Sydney Opera House
- University of Sydney

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Kesh Letterpress

Block printing workshop
Monday 8th May, 10am–1pm

Artist **Emily Floyd** and **Michael Kempson** of Cicada Press lead a workshop to create original prints using Floyd’s specially created typeface for Ursula K. Le Guin’s invented Kesh alphabet.

Curators’ Floor Talk

Thursday 11th May, 4pm–4.45pm

Join **Dr Lizzie Muller** and **Holly Williams** to discuss the ideas in the exhibition.

Modelling Knowledge: University Galleries as Spaces to Think

Thursday 11th May, 5pm–6pm

A keynote lecture by **Prof. Radhika Subramaniam**, Director/Chief Curator, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, Parsons School of Design/The New School, New York.

A Working Model of the World is a collaboration between UNSW Galleries and the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center. This talk explores the role of university galleries in the research and cultural landscape.

See website for details and bookings
workingmodeloftheworld.com

The Future of the Model

A keynote lecture followed by immersive screenings at the EPICentre
Thursday 8th June, 5pm–7pm

This lecture by **Prof. Sarah Kenderdine** takes you on a journey into the future of museums where digital models are changing our understanding of aura, authenticity and authorship and even changing age-old models of experience itself.

Followed by screenings of a diverse range of immersive virtual models at the Expanded Perception and Interaction Centre (EPICentre).

How We Teach and Learn with Models

Thursday 20th July, 9am–1pm

A fast-paced forum exploring three-dimensional thinking in teaching and learning. Inspiring teachers from across UNSW will show how they use models to investigate and communicate ideas with students. Chaired by **Dr Katrina Simon**, UNSW Faculty of the Built Environment and **Dr Lizzie Muller**, UNSW Art & Design.

Reworking the Model

Multiple events. See website for details

Alternate readings of *A Working Model of the World* from feminist perspectives, including performance tours of the exhibition, and a hands-on ‘makers’ workshop, helping Barbies speak their minds with interactive voice-box technologies. A curatorial studio led by **Dr Zanny Begg** (UNSW Art and Design) with students from the Master of Curating and Cultural Leadership.

A WORKING MODEL OF THE WORLD

A touring exhibition curated by Dr Lizzie Muller and Holly Williams

UNSW Galleries,
Sydney, Australia,
5 May–22 July 2017

Sheila C. Johnson Design Center (SJDC),
Parsons School of Design/The New School, New York, USA
29 September–13 December 2017

Visit the project website workingmodeloftheworld.com



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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