

s c a t t e r e d

barbara pierce



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Doesn't everyone have a few intricate rocks, delicate shells, or a small piece of driftwood that feels good to hold? These small treasures, of no other value than what they are, are loved and kept because they trigger memories - walks along the beach, climbing a rocky path to a look-out, or swimming in crystal-clear creeks, diving to collect a smooth pebble from the bottom.

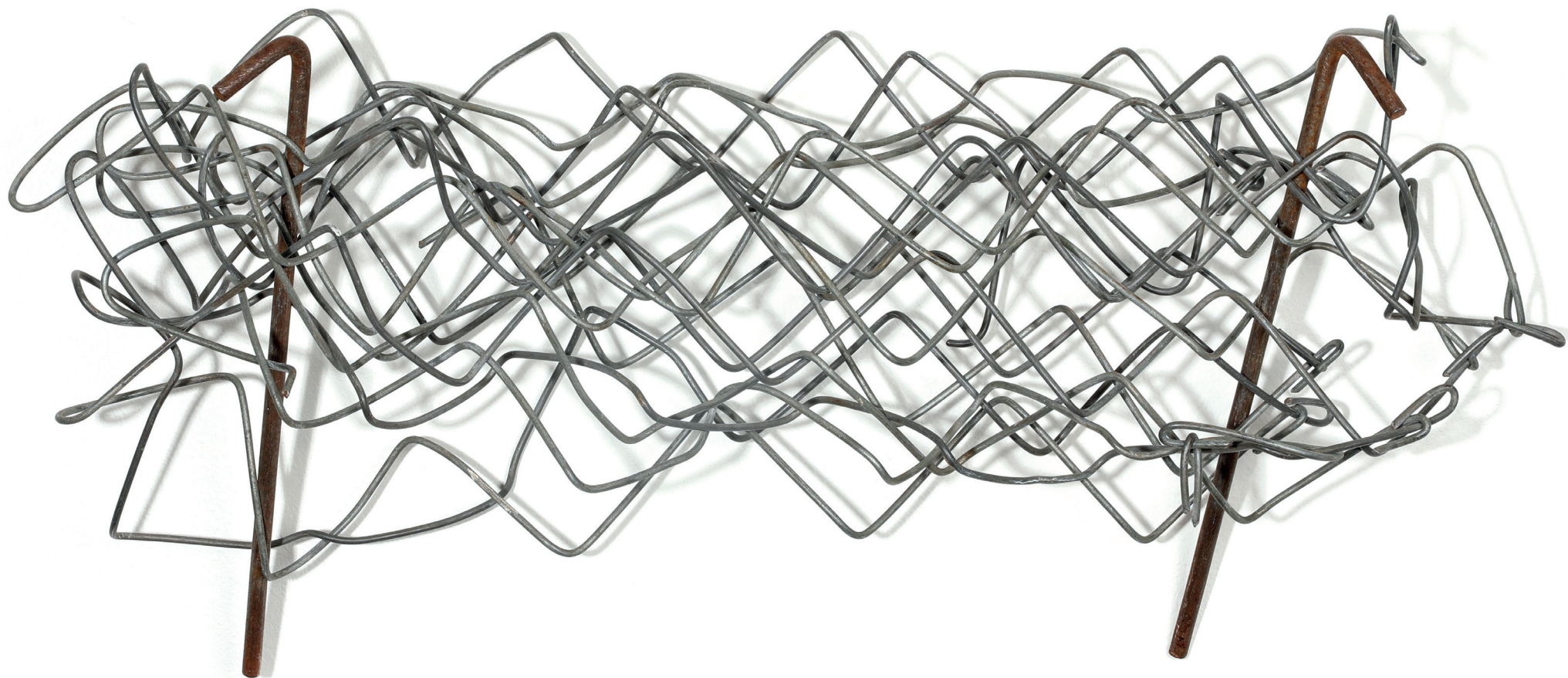


Barbara Pierce's studio tables and shelves are laden with such items, ready to be interrogated for their full mnemonic potential. Evident in all the artist's work is a love of the well-worn, forgotten or thrown-away, with which to construct complex layers of texture and naturally occurring colours, which become compelling forms, waiting to release their narratives. Talking with her in the studio, Barbara selects one of the many pieces on the tables and somehow, by invisible magic it becomes something of importance, something you want to know more about. Revelation after revelation, rolled out of our conversation. Layers of reference material co-exist within the work including treasured toys, coloured image scraps of a rug from a long-gone friend, chicken-wire salvaged from her backyard (a reminder of a forest shelter/ bird trap on Fair Isle), parts of loved furniture, her own artworks recycled, small pieces of linen or objects given to her by other artists or found on excursions. Some are tied together, bundled, wrapped, or stitched while other items seem to interlock naturally. All these are finding their way into the experimental layout of the vista on her studio wall.



In the exhibition, the final version of this landscape will stretch out to challenge traditional boundaries of landscape. Yet in constructing such a landscape, the artist goes through the same motions as a painter would; setting up the composition, creating movement, letting the objects push, pull and slide across the picture plane, creating adventurous journeys for the eye, or places to rest and contemplate. Interpreting this scattered landscape as the artist's private memory palace - a vista of personal nostalgia - would deprive the viewer of the profound conceptual depths of this work.

The art of using 'found objects' has been around in Western culture for over a century when the Dada movement - in the visual and literary arts - emerged as a response to the horrors of the first world war. The Dada artists intended to mock everything that was worthwhile, and shock their audience. From Dada, via Cubist artists - who used 'objet's trouvés' in their collages and assemblages - to Surrealism, which not only added the element of chance, but also a search for meaning, inspired by Sigmund Freud's notion of the unconscious. Fluxus and the Conceptual Art movement further blurred the lines between fine art and the everyday, inviting the viewer to see further than immediate appearances.





This brings us to the present, to the now all-encompassing rich and varied use of found objects as signifiers for something which lies beyond denotative appearances. Now, over a hundred years after Dada, Pierce likewise responds to the horrors and devastation of the numerous conflicts and destructions in today's world.

Strongly affected by media reports of war zones, Pierce became acutely aware of the basic human needs of food, water, and shelter. The character of the work-in-progress was influenced by images with tall buildings - collapsed like overfull sandwiches with their contents forced out; and simultaneously showing people - now homeless - scratching around, bundling up a few scattered remnants of their destroyed habitats.



The actions of bundling up scraps and the compression of once-comfortable homes into a concertina of floors became part of the vocabulary of this artwork. Tying knots and wrapping objects with different kinds of cord or binding material to hold things together became a symbolic gesture; using folds to collapse, hide content and reveal individual narratives. The lengths of some of these link to the measurement of an aspect of Pierce's own house (e.g. the perimeter of a window or the length of a corridor).



Looking at the landscape emerging on her studio wall, Pierce mentioned that from an early age she was interested in museum displays of fragments of civilisations past including archaeological treasures, potshards, stone tools, tablets of script. She reflects: "that will be us one day."

It is said that art is there to make the viewer more aware. In this case, these intriguing tactile objects, often with recognisable elements, invite us to look further, to go beyond the moment of recognition, to not only enjoy the rich textural experience, but to stay with it and to let the imagination run wild.

- Dr. Anneke C. Silver, July 2025



umbrella studio contemporary arts

408 Flinders St, Gurambilbarra / Townsville, QLD | 07 4772 7109 | Tues-Fri 9am-5pm
Sat-Sun 9am-1pm | Closed Mon + public hols | www.umbrella.org.au/scattered

Images: Barbara Pierce, *Scattered* (detail), 2024-25, Found objects and materials, canvas, timber, cartridge paper, plaster, digital image on Hahnemühle paper, synthetic cord, thread and acrylic paint, Variable dimensions. **Photographs:** Amanda Galea.

Umbrella respectfully acknowledges the Wulgurukaba of Gurambilbarra and Yunbenun and our region's surrounding groups - Bindal, Gugu Badhan, Nywaigi, Warrgamay, Bandjin and Gudjal - as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, share and celebrate local creative practice. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia. They have never ceded sovereignty and remain strong in their enduring connection to land and Culture. | *Umbrella is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland, part of the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, and by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, state and territory governments. Umbrella is supported by the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and receives funding from Creative Australia through the Australian Cultural Fund. Townsville City Council is a funding partner of Umbrella's program.*



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