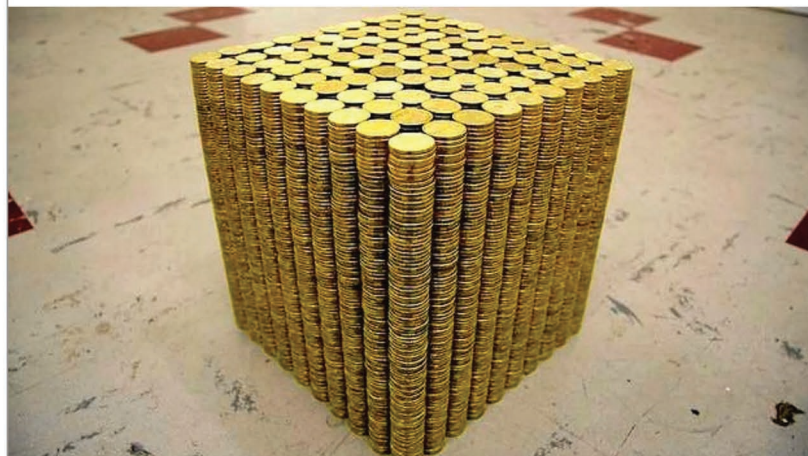


Artists strike gold with radical ideas

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Andrew Liversidge's golden cube, made up of dollar coins from 2009.

**Reinventing The Wheel:
The Readymade Century
Melbourne Festival/Monash Museum Of Art,
900 Dandenong Rd, Caulfield East
Until December 14**

This year, contemporary art turned 100. Some of the most radical artworks ever - pieces that reshaped the very definition of art - were created by Marcel Duchamp exactly one century ago. Two of them can be seen at Monash, *Bicycle wheel* from 1913 and the yet more minimal *Bottle rack* from the following year.

Named by Duchamp as ready-mades, they're objects of industrial manufacture in which the hand of the artist played no part or very little. The bicycle wheel is upended and mounted to a stool. Other readymades have curious titles and some are signed by a fictitious artist, like R. Mutt.

It seems poetic that the two ready-mades at Monash are not the original items from a century ago but reproductions. According to Duchamp, their peculiar virtue has little to do with their visual appearance. I personally think that a bicycle wheel is beautiful; but the aesthetic properties associated with its design are immaterial to its use in art. A ready-made is not like a sculpture. It's more like a word in language.

Called *Reinventing the Wheel: the Readymade Century*, the MUMA exhibition is a large show with big names and some memorable pieces covering the period from Duchamp to now. It usefully contrasts early ready-mades and recent examples of the genre.

One of the strongest pieces is a handsome golden cube made up of dollar coins from 2009. The artist, Andrew Liversidge, didn't personally mint the coins but borrowed them from the bank. The coins are individually a kind of ready-made but the artwork is the outcome of ingenious transformation. To call the creation a ready-made stretches the definition.

There are 100 stacks of 100 coins. Placing them all in their straight columns would have taken some time and patience; but above all, it's the inventive idea - almost a coup of mathematics - that reveals the intervention of the artist. The result is an archaic gilded temple of small change, a vault without an interior, a chamber that is solid with its own treasure, a storage of pure bullion that seems to weigh on the floor, as if tangibly stamping the awesome footprint of capital.

Evocative beyond its ready-made ingredients, the piece is best described as installation. Thanks to its scintillating visual appeal and uncanny cuteness, you could also call it sculpture. I could hardly take my eyes off this formidable edifice of cash; nor could I stop thinking of what \$10,000 might mean in any number of disparate contexts.

Both installation and the ready-made are capable of becoming iconic. Man Ray's *Gift* from 1921, a flat iron (irony?) with a line of tacks on its belly, symbolises unconscious domestic aggression and certainly qualifies as an icon, as do Christo & Jeanne-Claude's wrapped vistas.

Local artists also achieve iconic idea-painting, as with Lou Hubbard's *Stretch* from 2007, a pair of Planet Lamps in twisted intimacy, with overtones of erotic engagement that contrast sharply with the alienating double drinking fountain by Rob McLeish from 2010. Not only is the trough too low to drink from with any dignity but the faucets face towards one another and away from the opposing points of access, suggesting the antagonism of Barry Humphries' raging baroque melee of forks from 1958 called *Battle of the plate*.

Aleks Danko's bulging bag emblazoned with the title *Art stuffing* is iconic in a satirical way, with a keen nihilism that the same artist pursues at Sutton Gallery, where he signs a millet broom Tu u R Mutt, a dedication to the progenitor of the ready-made.

Both the ready-made and installation have nihilism in their DNA. It emerges in Martin Creed's piece of paper crumpled up into a ball. In a certain light, this volume made of thin sheet takes on planetary form but overwritten with a terrible sense of being screwed up.

Together with John Cage's *4'33"*, where the artist performs silence at the piano, these works look into the necessary emptiness, following millennia in which the role of artists was to fill up the void in canvas, space and sound. One hundred years have now proved that there's also joy in the void.

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Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle wheel*.