

The Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn Gift

Suitcase Kits

Remembering the delights of handling works of art when he was a boy, Jim Wolfensohn, President of the Word Bank group, donated funds to the National Gallery of Australia in 1988 to purchase museum-quality artworks for the enjoyment of children throughout Australia. Wolfensohn's wish for people to experience and handle art has materialised in the form of two suitcases that travel all over Australia as The Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn Gift Travelling Exhibitions. The suitcases primarily tour to schools, however, they also travel to a diverse range of organisations including nursing homes, libraries and community centres. In this unique program, children and people with special needs are able to engage with the works of art, responding to the natural impulse to touch and experience the full measure of an object, uniquely presented in its travelling case.

Conceived as a pair of suitcases, the red case entitled *Myths and rituals* is filled with works that draw upon beliefs and symbols from different countries around the world – India, China, Africa and Australia. These exotic and curious works range from a ceremonial teapot to an Ankus (elephant goad) and are created out of a range of media, including bronze, wood and pearl shell. Works featured in the yellow case *Form, space, design*, present a mixture, of concepts that show great humour and originality: Neil Roberts' small bronze sculpture *The space inside my fist* captures just that – the invisible space between the fingers and palm when made into a fist – which remains as mere air or 'a memory' when the hand is unfurled; Ian Howard's darkly comedic *The arms of the people* highlight's the artist's concerns about war; other curious items include Mary Oliver's music sticks and David Wallace's bush toys of stockmen on horses from Santa Teresa near Alice Springs. The provocative conjunction of formal elements are captured in John Edgar's stones with glass



Tully Hansen with *Digestion Haiku*
Photograph *The Mercury*, Hobart

intrusions, melding together opaque and translucent forms; while Richard Byrnes bronze *Digestion Haiku* draws together the familiar forms of a tap, teeth, fish bones among others.

The two suitcases have generated such widespread support from schools and community groups across Australia that, in 2003, the Wolfensohn Foundation generously provided an additional donation for the development of a third suitcase kit. This suitcase, *Technology*, showcases the works of six contemporary Australian artists and designers, who focus on function, innovative design and construction. *Technology* includes Lionel Bawden's lateral pencil constructions to create a multifaceted brain; Matthew

Harding's exquisitely carved, heart-shaped pill box; Cinnamon Lee's playful palm light, Karl Millard's animated metallic pepper grinder; Gilbert Riedelbauch's elliptic bowl made using rapid-prototyped composite nylon and Aaron Robinson's coloured resin wearables held together by magnets. By employing a wealth of skills and ideas, the artists have created irresistible works of art that compel people to explore the objects, and share the experience with one another.

The Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn Gift has been enjoyed by literally thousands of children and adults in remote, regional and metropolitan centres throughout Australia. A truly unique experience, it is a program that is at the heart of the National Gallery of Australia's Travelling Exhibitions program.

Melanie Douglas Project Officer, Travelling Exhibitions

For further information on the Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn Gift please contact Melanie Douglas phone 02 6240 6432 or fax 02 6240 6560; or visit www.nga.gov.au/Suitcase/Index.htm



(left to right) Blue case *Technology* Lionel Bawden *Brain Coral* 2003 Staedtler pencils, araldite and linseed oil and Inralac Red case *Myths and Rituals* Artist unknown *Seated Ganesha* Sri Lanka 9–10th century lost wax cast bronze Yellow case *Form, Space, Design* John Edgar *Red Eye* 1993 Greywacke stone, and jasper John Edgar *Light Stone* 1993 Greywacke stone and glass Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn Gift: Education Lending Collection National Gallery of Australia