

# PATRICIA PICCININI



Patricia Piccinini, *The Young Family*, 2002-2003 (detail). Silicone, acrylic, plywood, human hair, leather, timber. 85 x 150 x 120cm approx. Photography by Graham Baring. Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno and Roslyn Oxley9 Galleries.

# PATRICIA PICCININI

Born 1965, Freetown, Sierra Leone  
Lives and works in Melbourne

*“What my practice is really about is the changing definition of what we consider natural and what we consider artificial. So, what I’m interested in are the things that move this definition around and often they are things like innovations in medical technology”*

Patricia Piccinini is an internationally acclaimed artist who works with a variety of media including video, sound and digital prints. Best known for her hyper-realistic sculptural installations featuring strange hybrid creatures, Piccinini examines the connections between science and nature, art and the environment.

Repulsive and yet simultaneously endearing, these confronting figures challenge audiences to question what it means to be human in an age of rapid biomedical advancement and to think about the social and ethical implications of future medical developments.



## THE YOUNG FAMILY

The artist described her artwork in an interview in 2008:

*“This work is called *The Young Family* and it’s about growing human organs in other species. So here we have a creature that’s been supposedly made, created to make replacement organs for humans. But what she is doing is nurturing her children and if you look into her eyes you can kinda see that she is thinking and we are left to wonder: What is she thinking about? In some ways we feel close to her, and so when it comes to make decisions about whether it’s a good thing or a bad thing to grow human organs in another species, it’s very difficult to make a decision about it when you’re confronted with this very highly charged situation.*”

*Sometimes people look at her and think, ‘Oh she’s really quite grotesque,’ but I think they think that because they can see themselves - we see ourselves in her - and yet we don’t like to think of ourselves looking like this, we don’t like to think of ourselves as animal-like; and that is what is repelling. But, in fact, what she is saying is that we are all derived from the same genetic material; she is related to us.”*



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## COLLABORATION

Piccinini's practice involves collaboration; she acts as director with a team of highly skilled specialists, including model makers, animatronics engineers, automotive detailers and 3D animators. Piccinini begins by exploring ideas as drawings and watercolours, which are worked up into wax, clay or digital models. These are developed with her team to create the final works.

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*"I conceive the work and then bring together the pieces. If I didn't have great people working on the projects, it wouldn't work. I don't want the ideas to be limited by what I can physically do. The ideas come first. "*

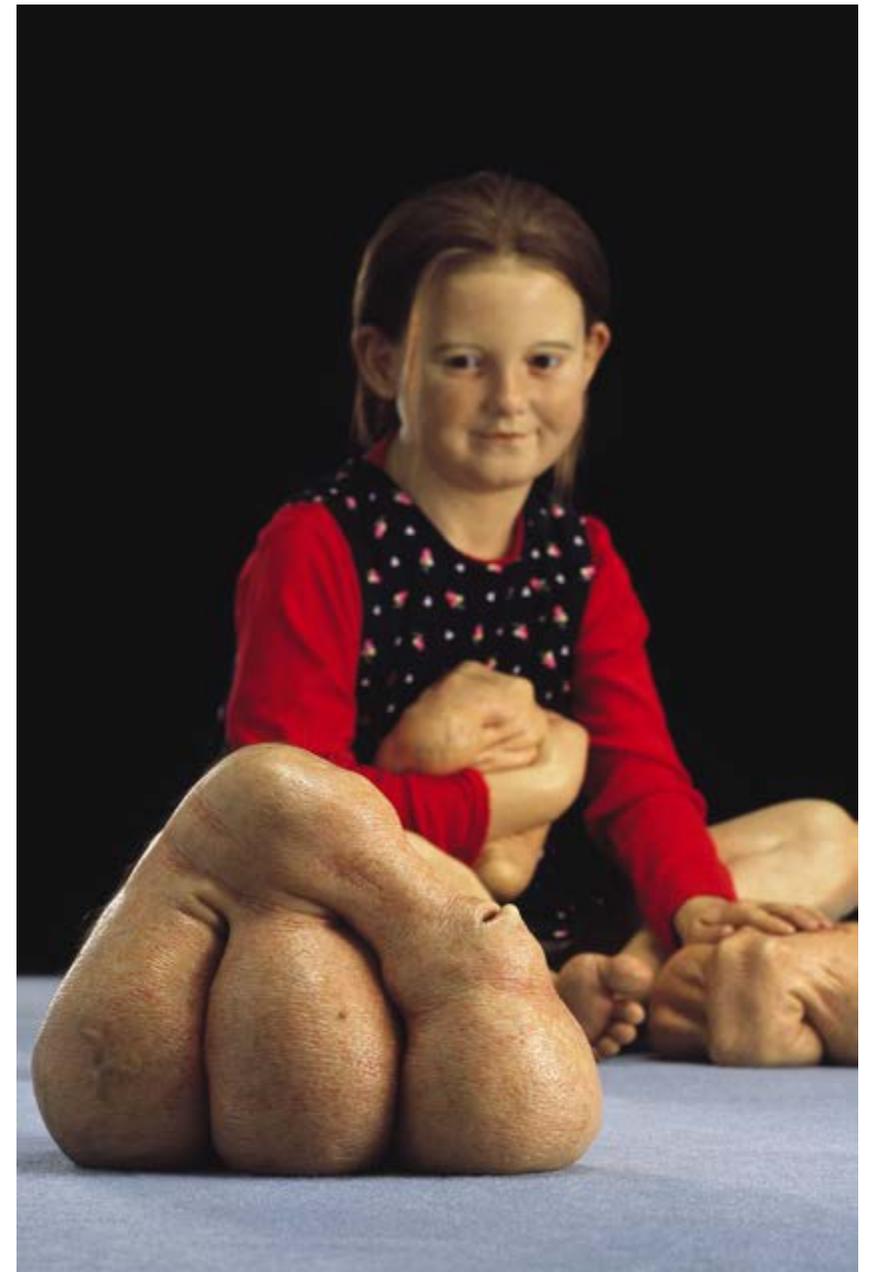


## ***STILL LIFE WITH STEM CELLS***

Stem cells can be transformed into any other kind of cell in the human body, such as skin, heart, kidney, lung or brain cells. Advocates of stem cell research say they offer hope for potential cures for diseases, and a life without illness. Current research into stem cells is regarded as controversial because of the way the stem cells are gathered and manipulated, as well as their potential to question what it means to be an ethical human.

Many of Piccinini's sculptural installations of mutant creatures also include a human presence. In *Still Life With Stem Cells* a young girl sits on the floor, playing with flesh-coloured lumps. The girl's smile and playful interaction with the family of stem cells shows she is not repelled by their strangeness.

Instead, the little girl displays a positive emotional connection with loving affection. Away from the laboratory, in a more naturalistic human setting, Piccinini poses future emotional and social implications. She says: *"It is not really science itself that I am interested in, as much as how it impacts on people."*



Patricia Piccinini, *Still Life With Stem Cells*, 2002 (detail)  
Silicone, acrylic, human hair, clothing, carpet, Installation dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno and Roslyn Oxley9 Galleries

# ACTIVITIES



## DISCUSS

Piccinini says she is interested in “relationships between humans and animals, between animals and machines, between humans and the environment.” Select an artwork by Piccinini and discuss how her work explores these themes.

What is the nature of our relationship with animals? Do we exploit animals for our own purposes? Has science gone too far? What do you think?

*Consider this statement by the artist: “I think the work depends on it looking as lifelike as possible. I mean, I could make these works out of papier-mâché and they would still be about the same idea but they would be a bad vehicle for that idea, to express it. I think these works need to present a situation that is kind-of believable...”*

Does the realism of Piccinini’s sculpture affect your reaction to it? Why?



## CREATE

What will humans look like in 2000 years’ time? Thinking about possible changes in our environment and technology, create a drawing or animation of your future human.

Make an artwork that responds to a current ethical issue. How do you want people react to your work?

“I don’t want the ideas to be limited by what I can physically do. The ideas come first.” What kinds of specialists would you collaborate with to make an ambitious artwork of your own?



# ACTIVITIES – WATCH, READ, LEARN

## WATCH

- Interview for (tender) Creatures exhibition at the Artium, Spain, 2008  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7ikHI8gX4Y>
- Talking about hyper-realism in her work:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZHVVMWmncA>

## READ

- Artist Statements  
<http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/writing/51/151/32> Curator Linda Michael's essay  
<http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/writing/27/151/32>
- Huffington Post Review  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/spread-artculture/patricia-piccininis-world\\_b\\_768113](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/spread-artculture/patricia-piccininis-world_b_768113)

## LEARN

- Evolution Interpretative Resource  
<http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/education/documents/TMAG-Piccinini-EVOLUTION-interpretive-resource.pdf>
- *Once upon a time*, Education Resource  
[http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Learning/docs/Online\\_Resources/Piccinini\\_online\\_resource.pdf](http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Learning/docs/Online_Resources/Piccinini_online_resource.pdf)

