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Louise Haselton: *like cures like*

Louise Haselton is an artist who pays attention to the texture and shape of the world in order to translate the sensation of wonder into synonyms for experience. Fascinated by the push and pull between function and aesthetic, for over twenty-five years she has established a predominantly sculptural practice utilising materials collected according to an affinity to form, surface or perceived history. In *like cures like*, Haselton offers us opportunity to speculate on the communicative power of matter with an artist especially attuned to seeing our world in microcosm.

The expression *like cures like* borrows from Hippocrates's Law of Similars (in contemporary parlance it has strong associations with the practice of homeopathy) and refers to the idea that a little of what causes unease could in fact lead to balance. It is a neat reference to the way in which Haselton builds her works but the significance of it as an exhibition title extends beyond literal interpretation. Its palindromic nature is a clue to Haselton's democratic and wide-ranging material consideration. An abiding fascination with language and the way in which it can be broken down into component parts, reconstructed and folded, stems from Haselton's early tertiary studies in English literature, an interest that transcends the page. For her, even the conceptual has form—language is every bit as structural as the stones, shells and textiles that compose her physical sculptures.

Typical of the way in which words become three-dimensional in Haselton's hands, *Oxymoron 1-6*, 2001, is a series of screen prints on aluminum. Each features a pair of words gleaned from conversational English that should, if each were to be considered independently, cancel each other out. Loose fit. Small crowd. Almost exactly. Harnessing these contradictions she directs our attention to the way in which the words are hinged, pivoting to expose a gap through which we can slip to find a more expressive meaning. The series is one of nine works in *like cures like* that demonstrate the wit and quiet pragmatism that is woven through Haselton's practice. Spanning works produced at the tail end of her undergraduate studies in visual art (such as *Trickle*, 1993, a comically oversized cascade of papier-mâché droplets covered in feathers) to more recent material meditations on the coexistence of all things (*Seven pieces for Chauncey Gardner*, 2014), this concise selection is demonstrative of an artist who does not desire to transform but to respond to each thing that passes into her hands. It is a collaboration, of sorts, between artist and materials, requiring patience and a receptiveness to the distinct qualities of all matter.

This serves as a primer for the ambitious body of new work that *like cures like* rests on. Six sculptures respond to the scale of the Samstag Museum of Art's galleries, working the full volume of space—works hang from the double height ceiling and recline over metres. In a restrained lexicon of materials the most prominent might be the Mount Gambier limestone that the artist discovered forgotten in a decommissioned quarry. From the earth but bearing the marks of mechanical extraction, its inherent perversities (hard yet soft, a structural material that dissolves at the edges) it speaks to Haselton's interest in contradiction. *Neither improvement nor decline*, 2019, encapsulates this attitude perfectly. An assemblage with the artist's unmistakable phrasing, it consists of a spool of sisal resting on a stack of limestone and a shiny sharp triangle of blue mirrored Perspex. Though we bring a common understanding of rock as weighty and resolute, it is the brittle triangle balanced on the vertices that lends the composition stability, its geometry shoring the organic slope of the pile. Throughout the gallery materials are set in dialogue with each other in this way: deceptively fragile pyramids of white limestone on top of everlasting polystyrene (*Dance, sing or speak*, 2019); the unexpected visual weight of draped felt balancing the sweep of a palm frond cast in heavy bronze (*Vagabond*, 2019). The essential power of these conversations results from the artist's sensitivity to similarity rather than difference; for her lasting intrigue lies just behind the object, a sense of order or purpose hinted at rather than stated. The component parts of Haselton's idioms are married according to the affinities that reside beneath their contradictory surfaces.



*'One reads and rereads the words of the original text in order to penetrate through them to reach, to touch, the vision or experienced that prompted them'*¹.

The quote above is by John Berger, who wrote that effective literary translation (that is, the translation of 'texts concerning individual experience') between languages requires a return to the pre-verbal². I would argue similarly of Louise Haselton, a deft translator of sensation into the tangible. Animated by a curiosity as to how much we can know and how much we can articulate, her works speak of more than a literal transcription of material properties would reveal, however important a first step this is. She shows us texture and shape but it is in the gaps between them that we find new expressions. The objects in *like cures like* stand in front of something specific and universal. They are almost exactly an experience.

— **Gillian Brown, 2019**

1 John Berger, 'Writing is an offshoot of something deeper', *The Guardian*, 12 December 2014, retrieved 26 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/12/john-berger-writing-is-an-off-shoot-of-something-deeper>

2 *ibid*





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Image 1: Louise HASELTON, *Squarejeans*, 2019, denim jeans, mirrored Perspex, installation view, Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia.
Photo: Sam Noonan

Image 2: Louise HASELTON, *like cures like*, 2019, installation view, Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia.
Photo: Sam Noonan



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Image 3: Louise HASELTON, *Neither improvement nor decline*, 2019, Mt Gambier limestone, mirrored Perspex, sisal, dimensions variable, installation view, Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia. Photo: Sam Noonan

Image 4: Louise HASELTON, *Fence for friends*, 2019, Mt. Gambier limestone, powder coated steel, bronze, installation view, Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia. Photo: Sam Noonan

Louise Haselton: *like cures like*

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Galleries 1 & 2

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Samstag Museum of Art is delighted to
present a major exhibition by Louise Haselton,
one of South Australia's pre-eminent
contemporary artists and the feature artist
of the 2019 South Australian Living Artist
Festival (SALA).

Over twenty-five years, Haselton has
established a predominantly sculptural
practice in which no material is off-limits.
By exploring aesthetic connections between
seemingly disparate material vernaculars,
she offers glimpses of the curious inner life
of everyday and overlooked things. With a
distinctive intuition, Haselton's practice is
exemplary of an artist especially attuned to
the matter of our world.

Coinciding with the publication of the 2019
SALA monograph focused on Haselton,
Samstag is proud to direct timely and
important attention to an influential artist
at a pivotal moment in her career. Centred
on new work, *like cures like* is an exhibition
that draws together the enduring concerns
of Haselton's oeuvre — an opportunity to
speculate with the artist on the liveliness and
communicative power of inanimate objects,
and the invisible forces that bind and repel the
world around us.

A Samstag Museum of Art exhibition
presented for the 2019 SALA Festival.

Samstag Museum of Art Director: Erica Green
Curator: Gillian Brown
Associate Curator: Joanna Kitto
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Gallery Assistant: Sam Gold
Gallery Attendants: Teresa Buscuttil,
Callum Docherty, Sophie Green
Installation: John Axe, Ashleigh D'Antonio,
Peter Carroll, Emily Clinton, Daniel Tucker

Artist Acknowledgement

Thank you to the Samstag Museum of Art for
the opportunity to present this exhibition.
Special thanks to curator Gillian Brown for
initiating this project and for commitment
to all aspects of bringing it to fruition. Thank
you to the fantastic Samstag installation team,
John, Pete, Ash, Daniel and Emily. Thank you
to Linda Marie Walker, Wayne Phipps, Peter
Woodroffe, Kate Power, Wendy Fairclough
and in particular, Ben Leslie for assistance in
the production of artworks.

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special gratitude to Louise Haselton, without
whose dedication and ambitious vision this
exceptional project would not have been
possible. Our sincere thanks also go to the Art
Gallery of South Australia for the generous
loan of works to this exhibition, and to Martin
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Studios for their expertise and support.

Louise Haselton is represented by
GAGPROJECTS, Adelaide.

Cover image

Louise HASELTON, *Vagabond*, 2019, painted
steel, paper, saddlery felt, mirrored Perspex,
bronze, 21 x 226cm, dimensions variable,
installation view, Samstag Museum of Art,
University of South Australia. Photo: Sia Duff.

SALA

