



“**I** think the first time we all realised we had something that described the historical experience in a unified way was when we had the photos and were able to place each finished and resolved piece next to something peculiarly similar,” say Lou Weis. “Even though all the typologies and the approaches of each of the designers is quite different, I feel we’ve achieved a harmonious response to those particularly difficult first decades.”

Melbourne-based Weis is co-founder (with Vincent Aiello) and creative director of Broached Commissions, an annual international design collaboration that takes an event or period in Australian history as inspiration for a collection. The inaugural Broached Colonial collection

references the period 1788 to 1840, a time when the industrial revolution was migrating from Britain to Australia. “What we’re most focused on,” says Weiss, “is what happens to design when it moves; when it migrates to Australia? How it’s changed by conditions, expertise, sensibility and climate.”

Broached has three founding permanent designers: Trent Jansen, Adam Goodrum and Charles Wilson. Once the historical event has been settled upon, a curator and three guest designers join the exercise. This year, Max

designers; they have an intuitive response to what they are being exposed to. [On the other hand], Max, Trent and Kim have to tell you the story before they can design it.”

The result is a collection of domestic items that are at once strange and oddly familiar, in a way that echoes the first settlers’ response to the country, as curator John McPhee’s ‘brief’ on the applied arts of the colonial period makes clear. In his curatorial essay – which set the historical context for a two-year research and development process – McPhee writes of the ‘weirdness’ of this land for the European sensibility. He notes the timber sent back to England to be assessed for potential use; the first attempts at the local manufacture of silverware (a silver dog collar as a prize for a rat-killing competition, no less); furniture made by convict craftsmen in the gothic revival style; and the folk and popular arts tradition that existed among women and men unschooled in design principles.

The project literature cites an Australian ‘make-do’ sensibility that results “in a determinedly simple and rustic, repurposed aesthetic” that has persisted from the colonial period into present day design practices and the national psyche. The project will take on the Victorian era in 2012 and the period of World War I in the following year .

Weis initially worked in urban environments with architects, and describes himself as a scriptwriter ‘designing’ a story to which others respond in form. “It is a way of giving a designer a huge hook to hang on to ... Designers differ from artists in that they require a brief in order to function; they are fired by and inspired by the constraints of a brief. Initially uncertain ... they found their methodologies in one way or another were mirrored by the etymologies of the period. And they were able to apply their unique way of approaching design to the period.” www.broachedcommissions.com ■



Two views of Lucy McRae’s *Prickly Light*. Wood and