

## EXHIBITION TEXT

### *Working Models*

by Ingrid Periz

In the architectural design process working models are used to check the proportion, volume and shape of works whose final form is still being determined. At once representational and provisional, working models are also tools for they enable a further thinking through or refinement of a drawn-up structure. Rose Nolan's working models borrow their namesakes' sense of possibility but are fully independent entities whose titles come only after they are completed. No plan or drawing brings them forth, instead their starting point is the potential Nolan sees in found packaging, the too-readily discarded miracles of folded cardboard and moulded plastics along with the unconscious humour of any brand's printed verbal address.

Nolan fuses a longstanding interest in architecture with a playful, hands-on inventiveness in these transformations. As boxes are stuck together and refashioned, striped waxed straws become covered walkways linking cardboard silos, a stack of tea packets grows into a tower, and a blister pack reveals itself as serried skylights. Nolan treats her found material here as ready-mades, just as she has long done with overheard phrases or found text in other areas of her practice like *Word Work*. Combining addition and excision, the *Working Models* nod to collage and assemblage but Nolan's procedure is arguably her own. Their materials—familiar, often humble stuff otherwise destined for the bin-- work against any sense of architectural authority, just as this domestic familiarity deflates any possible monumentality.

The earliest iterations of the *Working Models* were largely all white, acknowledging the canonical precept that linked the identity of modernist architecture to the whiteness of its surfaces, as architectural historian Mark Wigley has put it. Highlighted by careful use of black and the tiniest hints of colour, Nolan's *Working Models*' white was rarely Ripolin pure white, modernist architecture's paint of choice. Variations in white cardboard, the stripes of revealed barcodes, shaded apertures, and painted, whited-out labels gave variety to an essentially monochromatic palette. Colour announces itself in the more recent *Working Models*. *Adobe House* rhymes cardboard's woody brown with the look of dried mud, *CHAPEL* sings resplendent in red and pink, while other works are grounded on coloured bases. Many of these colours are new in Rose Nolan's palette—the warm flesh of wooden cheese containers, cosmetic box coral, Adidas blue—and having been found, and retained, they become in the *Working Models* Rose Nolan's own. Just as any building is a

“portrait” of its designer, the Working Models, “portraits” of never-to-be-built buildings, are portraits too of Rose Nolan, artist and consumer.

Like colour, found text comes into its own too, occasionally in glorious silliness - FUN INFUSER; seriously, Durable; sustainable, simple, stylish. An interest in address—who’s saying what to whom—is a recurring feature of Nolan’s practice, as is the artist’s regular categorization of varieties of work. The earliest Working Models were shown as Homework in 2005; they can also be seen as little versions of her photographic series Big Still Lives, where modernist buildings were seen in scaled-up sculptural terms, and equally, given their occasional hints of label, warning and instruction, as tiny incarnations of Word Work.

Rose Nolan does not yet have an Art Work category but there’s no end of art in the Working Models. Shape-shifting Picasso lurks in CHAPEL, at once avian and reptilian and sporting a bumpy spine of women’s faces, while a number of Working Models give three-dimensional form to the expanded planarity of analytical Cubism. Fold marks retained on two-dimensional cardboard surfaces suggest the possibility of spatiality. House of the Year, a square box fractured through the addition of other boxes, framed apertures and cut vertices, is a little Cubist cube pleading “unbox me” on blue. In Signature Style the wrap-around text works like a printed pattern, a bit of papier collé which, at some angles, disturbs any sense of three-dimensionality. And New Age / Care Facility recycles one of synthetic Cubism’s principal motifs—the wine bottle - here a real half-bottle plastic sleeve—making a work that gives the look of typically flat late Cubism a three-dimensional form. Other Working Models quote art directly, incorporating the soft mauve minimalism of Robert Rauschenberg, Stephen Bram’s fractured patterns and Alvar Aalto’s encircling greens—images of art works and paper collé, treated as elements of the real.

The boxes used here have held, among other things, laundry detergent, vegan doughnuts, hot coffee (and coffee cups), Chanel, Marimekko, Apple products, work boots, running shoes, and wine, both fancy French and cheap, a gamut of staples, consumer durables and luxuries. Rose Nolan tells me that sometimes she likes the box more than what’s in it, fully aware that packaging is as much ad as branding. Her transformations might well suspend that mysterious appeal Marx called commodity fetishism by subverting the boxes’ purpose and address; the appeal of the Working Models is however all their own.

# ANNA SCHWARTZ GALLERY

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## ABOUT ANNA SCHWARTZ GALLERY:

ANNA SCHWARTZ GALLERY is a contemporary art gallery in Australia which has been owned and operated by founder Anna Schwartz since 1986. Established in Melbourne, Anna Schwartz Gallery has identified and cultivated the careers of visionary artists from Australia and internationally. The gallery represents over thirty multi-generational artists and works on individual projects with artists and curators globally. Anna Schwartz Gallery distinguishes itself for its uncompromising conceptual position and contribution to culture spanning visual art, music and publishing, under the imprint SCHWARTZCITY. [annaschwartzgallery.com](http://annaschwartzgallery.com)

## ABOUT ROSE NOLAN:

Rose Nolan works across painting, installation, sculpture, photography, prints and book production. Her practice regularly oscillates between the intimate and the monumental, often informed by a strong interest in architecture, interior and graphic design – combining formal concerns with the legacies of modernism. Nolan’s practice is known for its attention to the formal and linguistic qualities of words, using language to transform architectural space. By making language concrete, meaning is asserted.

Nolan typically employs a radically reduced palette of red and white, and simple utilitarian materials and methods, in an exploration of personal, playful and often self-effacing narratives. Each work describes a concern for economy; a desire to be responsive to site; an interest in seriality and repetition; and the importance of language, interactivity, and the experience of the viewer.

Nolan’s works are held in important public collections, including: the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne; and Monash University Museum of Art.

Public collections include: NGA Canberra; NGV, Melbourne; AGNSW, Sydney; AGSA, Adelaide; MCA, Sydney; Heide MOMA, Melbourne; and Monash University Museum of Art.

Urban art commissions include ‘Screen Works – ENOUGH-NOW/EVEN/MORE-SO’, Queen Victoria Market, City of Melbourne (2021); ‘GIVE OR TAKE’, Monash University Library Caulfield Campus (2017); ‘A Big Word – HELLO’ (The Hello House in collaboration with OOF! Architecture), Melbourne (2014); ‘It’s Okay to Be Alright’, Melbourne Art Trams (2013) and ‘It’s Hard to See What This All Means’, Site One, Docklands, Melbourne (2006).

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