

Fantasy. A necessary ingredient in living.

*I came lately on a land
There it was strange and unknown.
Now listen well, for 'tis wondrous trueⁱ*

The diminutive world of Pip & Pop is vivid. It is strange, unknown and impermanent. Satiated with coloured sugary mountains, crystalline valleys and meandering glittery pathways, this world draws you in and transports you to whimsical paradise, a temporary pleasure zone inspired by the ancient craft of storytelling sourced from an eclectic mix of children's literature, local folklore, video games and Buddhism. Pip & Pop present a hyper-Zen garden for the 21st century.

Born in Perth (Australia) in 1972, Pip & Pop is the pseudonym for the artist Tanya Schultz, a multi-disciplinary producer. Tanya's practice embodies both independent and collaborative processes across varying disciplines including installation, painting, wall-works and sculpture. Many of these works examine ideas of abundance, temporary pleasure and utopian dreams that arise from within a contemporary culture of mass consumption. Pip & Pop explore mythical landscapes and document a potential journey in the revitalized museum diorama format.

Concepts of abundance and fleeting pleasures are embodied in the Pip & Pop favoured 16th century French medieval legend *The Land of Cockaigne*. A poem that tells of a promised land of lives lived in luxury and pleasures are always at hand. A land made entirely of food, where people can have all that they desire and escape the realities of harsh peasant lives in medieval Europe. Here people live in harmony, their houses are made of barley sugar and cakes and the streets are paved with cheese and pastry. Versions of this tale exist throughout Europe and such is the fascination with this world of make-believe it has captured the imagination of writers for the last five centuries. Constant has been the desire for people to find an escape from their current worlds into such a land as Cockaigne. Pieter Bruegel's oil painting *Luilekkerland (1567)* captures the ugly aftermath of excessive consumption as men and woman lay all over the land of Cockaigne with their stomachs bulging.

Pip & Pop's playful use of scale is a tool to draw the audience further into this fantasy. The diminutive pathways and mountains shrink the audience to a size able to be absorbed into a rainbow candy coloured land akin to the early 19th century fairytales of C.S Lewis' *Alice in Wonderland*, Brothers Grimms' (*Hansel and Gretel*) or mid 20th century Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. In such legendary fables, the story is altered as the characters begin ingesting and regurgitating sweet foods. In each story, the main characters fate is sealed by the type and amount of food they choose to consume or ignore. This reoccurring and universal moral tale has been presented in childhood stories throughout the centuries. Like the stories of Wonderland's Alice who drinks and eats to change her size depending on circumstance, Pip & Pop offer fantasy to their audiences who are confronted with a miniature fluorescent landscape, an elevated feeling of happiness and the promise of a sweet new world.

With sugar sometimes totaling 600 kilograms and 3000 kilograms of sand in her installations, Pip & Pop is inspired by excess and the mantra 'more is more'. These two essential earthly materials visually explore the idea of a utopian paradise reflected on throughout history while simultaneously bringing it into the 21st century dictated by temporary pleasures

experienced through our material culture. Sugar used as a metaphor for consumerism and to represent human desire that over the last century evolved from “special treat” foods to staples of everyday modern diets, reflective of society’s more widespread desire for instant gratification and habitual nature to consume to excess.

Artists have always sought to express that other point of view, an alternative path to navigate the reality of domestic life and increasingly digitized daily events. There is a long history for depicting the landscape and commemorating journeys and the search of utopian worlds and imagined lands. Historically artists have depicted triumphant images of successful journeys to frontier lands, of failed journeys homeward, of personal and spiritual journeys.

Utopia as a concept was first explored by the 16th century British Renaissance humanist and social philosopher Thomas More, who offered it is an ideal, imaginary yet unreachable island nation. This ideal land is based on a grandiose social ideal that places emphasis on the collective rather than individual, tolerates equality, acknowledges difference yet continues to be elusive and unreachable but forever sought after by artists and optimists alike. Pip & Pop continues this explorative search and integrates utopian ideals with her research of Buddhist teachings, meditations and coloured mandalas.

The beloved storyteller Dr Suess imparts that *fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living*. It's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope. The saying emerges out of the properties of a telescope and that when one wants to see something far away they may peer through a telescope, which when used correctly magnifies the distant object and makes it bigger and clearer. But if one peers into the wrong end it actually makes the object appear even farther away and too tiny to see. It is from this miniaturized viewpoint that we see the world of Pip & Pop. The intricate landscape installations are captivating in the transformation of everyday materials into a hyper-real/ hyper-coloured mythical land, providing a space for reimagining. Look more closely and you can see a whole new world, a veritable playground for the senses.

The large floor installations are created in-situ. Pip & Pop judiciously ‘draws’ directly onto the gallery floor in sand and refined coloured sugars, only interrupting the time intensive process to position hand crafted objects and found materials into this landscape. The multitude of small forms are crafted in the studio beforehand from clay, plasticine and polystyrene, and integrated with detailed swirling sugar patterns created with hundreds of kilograms of coloured sugar poured through cake decorating funnels in a process akin to sand drawing. The detail is breathtaking. Fluorescent pathways and peepholes lead visitors through magical forests filled with strange flowers and animals; a cosmic universe (sometimes overlaid with commissioned soundtracks) mirrored onto a gallery floor with perhaps a crystals volcanic lake and reflective liquid pools. Glitter, paper, plastic plants and flowers, pigments, sand, sugar, sequins and meticulously made forms all combine to create a space for momentary retreat and self-exploration.

There is an element of the ‘WOW’ factorⁱⁱ with these installations. Wow for the fact that simple everyday materials (sugar/ pigments) are transformed into a wonderland. Wow for the consideration of time and techniques endured by the artist and also for the fragility and impermanence that is always present and becomes ‘it’s secret treasure, another aspect – beside material and colour – seeing the work a few steps from kitsch’.ⁱⁱⁱ

Pip & Pop's candied coloured installations have been assembled in Australia, Japan and Europe. Tanya is a collector, a contemporary hunter-gatherer of cultures, stories and kitsch objects. In each country, Pip & Pop research local myths and legends, scouring local discount shops, markets and storybooks for recognisable source materials to complete the latest project. The anthropological techniques of gathering a variety of localised cultural objects and myths and then reinterpreting these by incorporating them into the installation is a captivating cultural bricolage and documentation of the cultural landscape.

For the 3rd Kuandu Biennale, Pip & Pop examine stories from traditional and indigenous Taiwanese culture, as well as contemporary references such as animations and video games. Exploring the origins of Taiwanese folktales such as *Little Frog in the Well* and *Ban Pin Shan*, has provided Pip & Pop with a platform for exploring the idea of imaginary lands, other worlds, and tales of promise as expressed through Taiwan's multi-faceted culture. *Little Frog in the Well* is a timely warning for us to be mindful of events beyond what they see and hear in their own small world, acknowledging the danger of ignorance as the small frog in this story learned. These stories are embedded within the work in subtle ways and with hidden clues, not necessarily obvious to the initial glance. Pip & Pop present these traditional tales of natural phenomena and moral guidance in a fluorescent palette.^{iv}

Traditionally, the art of storytelling has been shared as a form of entertainment, education, cultural preservation and a means to instil moral values. In conveying particular events in words, images and sounds, the earliest forms of storytelling (legends, fables, fairytales, mythology) were primarily oral combined with physical expressions. Combining drawn imagery, music and dance, the stories slowly evolved, became revised and were recorded in various forms to ensure its longevity. Fact or fiction, these stories became localised myths and semi-truths that have endured through shifting languages and translations.

In Australia, traditionally the Aboriginal people painted symbols from stories onto cave walls as a way to assist future storytellers to remember the complex Dreamtime stories. Others carved into tree trunks and used ephemeral media such as sand to visually record stories. However, over time, stories, like ancient cultures evolve and become modified, resulting in their original meanings being altered and documented by various storytellers for varying purposes. Today, this is likely to be documented and shared digitally via YouTube or Facebook rather than through more traditional channels of spoken word or sand drawings. No matter the method, one fact remains, that as a society we are continually fascinated by each others' stories.

Pip & Pop's earlier floor-based ephemeral artwork (a collaboration with Nicole Andrijevic) *Under the Crystal Sky* (2009) explored traditional and pop-cultural references from Japan, in particular ideas of utopia explored through Buddhist philosophies of enlightenment, Shinto creation myths, video games, and a phrase adopted by Pip & Pop *happy capitalism*. This phrase celebrates the culture of mass consumption and embraces the after-effects that flow from the encompassing ecstasy of excessiveness. Pip & Pop teasingly encourage us to welcome the phenomenon with gleeful delight. *Under the Crystal Sky* drew parallels between notions of utopia and enlightenment and the promise and allure of material culture. Materials such as coloured sugar, confectionary, crystals, plastic objects and glitter were used to create a paradisiacal landscape from artificial means.

The influence of Japanese aesthetics is evident. Tanya has spent extended periods of time living and creating in Japan and is aesthetically drawn to the world of anime, video culture, landscape and ancient mythology. In 2010, she spent time perfecting traditional craft skills in *bonseki* (miniature landscapes) and *monkiri asobi* (a method of paper folding, to examine

and document the kawaii aesthetic (sweet/cute childlike aesthetic and hyper packaging). These skills have been transferred by Tanya in varying forms, from installations, photography and a series of *kaleidoscope paintings*. Decorative depictions of nature have a long history in traditional Japanese art. *For today's Japanese artists the depiction of nature is elliptical, and often takes the form of objects and installations that emphasize the physical and visual properties of materials*^v.

Invited to participate in 2010 Aichi Triennale *Arts and Cities*, Tanya undertook a two-week installation for a large-scale ephemeral installation titled **Happy Sky Dream** (2010). Inspired by Ainu folk tales and Shinto creation myths, with a cornucopia of materials gleaned from local craft, thrift and cake shops reflected this enduring affinity with *kawaii*, expressed in objects exploring playfulness, brash in colour and saccharine sweet images of anthropomorphic animals, such as the familiar Hello Kitty. Most of these materials were purchased in local craft and thrift stores on a super-shopping spree. Detailed patterns and landscape forms were created with hundreds of kilograms of brightly coloured sugar poured through tiny cake decorating funnels.

Pip & Pop continue to find synergy with the writings of Japanese critic Midori Matsui who speaks of current a wave of contemporary artists whose practice focuses on the transformation of inexpensive everyday materials, and the invention of new uses for forgotten places and things, through a child-like imagination. We know that transforming the everyday is not new in art, however it is the overlay of immediacy and consumer culture that provides a slight twist. The *kawaii* (cute) childlike aesthetic of excess and bright packaging materials, games, the aesthetics of Japanese pop culture continue in their influence. In pursuing the Japanese concept of *kawaii* and Japanese culture, the built sugary environments of Pip & Pop, begin to reflect a 3D version of popular video games or storybooks. One example is *Beautiful Katamari*, the cult Japanese video game. Upon invitation from the King, players have to roll a ball of adhesive material (katamari) through mythical lands collecting objects (animals, trees, cars, people) along the way. The aim is to increase the size of the ball so it is large enough to be presented to the King of All Cosmos, who has the strength to hurl it into the sky thus creating a beautiful new world. And so the game continues. In this world, a large amount of 'excess' materials can easily be removed without effecting everyday lives, in fact enough to generate a whole new existence.

Cute is the kind of thing we tend to accept as universal and Pip & Pop skilfully seek out the local versions of kawaii. Toys with exaggerated feature like big ears and eyes, size and colour also play a central role in defining cute. Trees and rivers coloured in implausible hot pinks or green deer render the work fantastical. We widely acknowledge that certain colours alter our emotional state and effect reactions. Colour can raise blood pressure, calm nerves or cause eyestrain and instruct you to go or stop. In Western culture white can represent purity and innocence but is seen as a symbol of mourning in many Eastern countries. While the volume and intensity of the fluorescent colours found in the works of Pip & Pop channel the cyber world and remind us of childhood fairytales long forgotten.

Nature in all its real and imagined forms is an eternal source of artistic inspiration.

'Why is it, then, instead of being distinct from one another, that the forms of life often take the same forms as the natural world beyond the limits of the living? Spirals, lattices, tessellations, undulations, waves and crystalline forms are all found in living cells, both creatures and plants, but also in clouds, sand dunes, storms, rocks, even the arrangement of the planets and the stars'^{vi}

Patterning in contemporary art is frequently undermined as merely a decorative pursuit verging on and demeaned as craft, devoid of meaning and depth of practice. In contrast, to discern patterns in complex and apparently chaotic or unpredictable phenomena has been at the very heart of scientific philosophy, and never more so than in the last two decades.^{vii} Despite this thought, we can not deny there is a current resurgence of pattern and repetition in contemporary art practice. Perhaps a manifestation of diverse cultural inputs, attributed to the ease of information exchange through digital technologies and international travel.

For Australian Indigenous artists, cultural knowledge, ownership of land and layers of metaphor and meaning are often encoded in abstract geometric patterns. These patterns and related stories are handed down and interpreted through the generations. The patterns and symbols are an essential part of a long artistic tradition and remain the visual form to retain and record significant information. Historically Aboriginal people travelled vast distances and these markings also helped identify tribes, record the passing of time and changing landscapes. Sand painting and body painting ceremonies kept the symbols alive and remembered. Later, these symbols were transformed into a more permanent form using on canvas but the meanings behind the symbols remains the same.

Pip & Pop's curiosity in producing patterns and symbols draw more from Eastern than Western cultural traditions. Profoundly influenced by the detailed and measured construction of Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas that when completed, act as a tool for gaining wisdom and compassion and are believed to have purification and healing powers. The sands are brightly coloured for the sole purpose of providing joy to the Gods and the construction typically a tightly balanced, circular but geometric composition wherein deities are believed to reside. Central to the mandala purpose is to guide individuals along the path to enlightenment and according to Buddhist scripture; mandalas transmit positive energies to the environment and to the viewer. The sand mandalas are commonly swept away after extended meditation and poured into flowing water, symbolising impermanence and constant recreation of the world as one of the main Buddhism doctrines. The similarities of the transformative, coloured, ephemeral and immersive life of a mandala and the artwork of Pip & Pop are obvious. The wonderland of Pip & Pop invites us to acknowledge a wider world of possibilities, if only for a brief moment.

The ephemeral nature of the Pip & Pop installations adds to the heightened sense of child-like awe experienced. That wow factor attributed for the extended period of installing and funneling sand for what may be an exhibition for a similar length of time. If one breathes too hard and leans too close, this paradise becomes disturbed and forever altered as the sand moves. Pip & Pop warns that the "installations often elicit a visceral response in viewers and they tell us of their urges to touch or taste the work...we hope they don't." If this does occur then the artwork is disrupted. Like the warnings disguised in children's narratives, there is also an element of implied danger about over indulging and living only for momentary pleasures. It is a bittersweet moment when one realises the fragility of illusions created have an inevitable end.

In the German *Kuenstlerhaus Dortmund* installation, *Paradise is Elsewhere* (2009), Pip & Pop linked the tradition of sand paintings and ritualised sand mandalas. Pip & Pop saw it as a reference to the Buddhist concept of the world's vicissitude – change in fortune or circumstance. Within the artwork, the Buddhist meditation, what was originally meant to achieve the Nirwana state where you are freed of any longings, comes to a crisis among our

contemporary consumer society where we are continually enticed to partake in consumption on a grand scale.

More recently at Kunstverein Ludwigsburg in Germany Pip & Pop installed *Bing bong, big bang* (2011) a large installation almost filling the gallery with a landscape of coloured sugar, sand, artificial plants and hand-made objects. *Bing Bong, Big Bang* was part of an exhibition series titled 'On the Edge of Sculpture' curated by Marko Schacher. As with other Pip & Pop works, materials and references of the local area were explored for the installation. In this particular work, thousands of German sweets were purchased from a local distributor to use as part of the artificial landscape. From fluorescent yellow marshmallow lemons to blue licorice worms, these sweets were used with other materials to become landscape elements like mushrooms and plants. The work also drew on baroque patterning styles seen in the historic Ludwigsburg Castle and decorative ceramic forms found in local flea markets.

In the Australian exhibition *Zen to Kawaii: The Japanese Affect* Pip & Pop exhibited documentation of the installation. *Echo from a Cherry Cloud (I and II)* (2010) are two large-scale photographic prints that document an ephemeral installation of artificial and sweet materials that was created specifically to be photographed. Pip & Pop generate a form of archive or memory of a work that was never seen by the public and plays with the viewers' perceptions and sense of scale.

The diminutive world of Pip & Pop is vivid. It is strange, it is unknown and it is impermanent. It is bright enticing, tactile and inviting. It oozes blissful abundance. The artwork of Pip & Pop doesn't just teeter on the brink of excess it swallows it whole. It pushes social limitations and acts as a reminder of the shifting boundaries shared between abundance and excess, temporality and fragility of our existence. It is a moral tale of excess and mass consumption, a warning to those of us who enjoy our contemporary lives in all its consumer glory. It is also a cautionary reminder to embrace the wider unknown world, unseen and foreign, so that like the little frog in the well, we will see for ourselves if the world is bigger, brighter and richer for ourselves. Pip & Pop provide that other point of view.

Sarah Bond, Curator

ⁱ *The Land of Cokaygne* (English translation), <http://www.thegoldendream.com/landofcokaygne.htm>, accessed 29 June, 2012. An ongoing inspiration for the work of Pip & Pop, this old French poem from the thirteenth century, *Le Fabliau de Cocagne*, offers a description of Cokaygne with houses made of food and rivers of milk and beer.

ⁱⁱ Marco Schacher, *Pip & Pop – Oases of Fantasy*, Kunstverein Ludwigsburg/GER (2011)

ⁱⁱⁱ An Seebach *We can hold the Sun!* catalogue essay (2011)

^{iv} Email conversation with artist 28/6/2012

^v Melissa Chiu & Benjamin Genocchio, *Urban Nature: Imaginary Cities (Contemporary Asian Art)*, 2010, p.200

^{vi} David Rothenberg *Survival of the Beautiful: Art, Science, and Evolution*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2011, p.51

^{vii} Margot Osborne, 'Pattern and Complexity in art and nature', *Artlink*, vol 32 #1, 2012, pp. 18-21.