

# Gallery Guide 1989

## TRICK RECYCLISTS

For some people contemporary art is a load of rubbish. And for some artists, it really *is* a load of rubbish. Many of them are now taking for their raw materials what others have thrown away. MADELEINE MARSH met three Londoners who are building obsolescence into something beautiful

Photograph by Mark Laurence

There is a growing movement of artists working with 20th-century waste: tin cans, glass bottles, the rejects and leftovers of our avidly consuming society. Many of them belong to the *Blue Peter* generation – brought up on Valerie Singleton's transformations of wire coathangers and old Squeezy bottles. However, unlike Val, the 'Recycled Artists' don't feel it necessary to hide their materials behind sticky-backed plastic. For them, the unadorned waste is an intrinsic part of their creations.

Recycling artists seem to fall into two

looks just like salami,' grins Carrington, who modelled her own heads from mortadello, the Italian horse meat sausage, whose name, literally translated, means 'dead donkey'. Thus, in one work, she captures the idea of the horse as heroic animal, sculptural theme, and human lunch.

Though Carrington's sculptures are made from junk, there is nothing throw-away about her commitment. Objects are modelled with passionate thought and painstaking care: 'I'm quite obsessive about the way I make

Recycling artists seem to fall into two major categories. Some use junk mainly because they like it; others employ it to make a more specific environmental statement. But there's little doubt that both have been motivated in part by the growth in Green politics.

### ANN CARRINGTON

Ann Carrington's fascination with junk began when she was studying sculpture at the Royal College of Art which, she discovered, shares the same rubbish tips as the Natural History and the Science Museums. 'You would never believe what they throw away,' she says greedily. 'Plastic dinosaurs, old skulls, it was really wonderful.' She became increasingly interested in the various ways that apparent rubbish could be interpreted. 'In Africa they make suitcases out of old tin cans, in India they weave necklaces out of milk-bottle tops. I want to capture the spirit with which non-industrialised societies assimilate junk into new forms.'

Carrington's lively and witty sculptures turn mundane objects on their heads, making you look at them afresh. The materials she uses are as much part of the narrative as the subject she portrays. A rug is made from flattened shoes sewn together in the shape of a crocodile. 'It's a parody of India and the British Raj,' she explains, 'where the crocodile is a symbol of the hunt. To make a rug from shoes, shoes walking on shoes, the hide comes full circle.'

Her work is full of visual and verbal puns. Two giant horses' heads, sealed with resin, are based on a pair of red granite Roman sculptures at the British Museum. 'That red granite

quite obsessive about the way I make things,' admits Carrington, who will spend months working on a single piece. 'My next plan is to make a human skeleton out of Twiglets,' she says enthusiastically. 'Don't you think they look just like bones?'

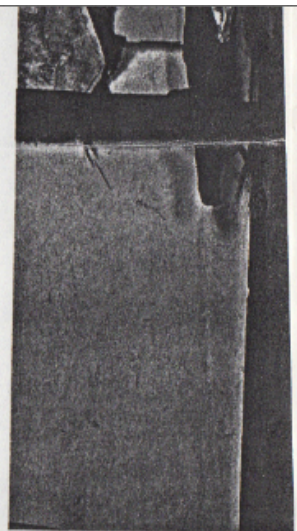
### VICKY HAWKINS

Vicky Hawkins doesn't just concentrate on 20th-century waste: she uses things that even the Romans didn't want. Hawkins finds most of her materials on the banks of the Thames – shards of old pottery, glass, bones, bits and pieces thrown away by generations of Londoners.

Hawkins transforms these disparate objects into beautiful works of decorative art, creating mirrors, picture frames and jewellery. She makes bracelets, using discarded tin cans as a base ('Baked bean tins are a perfect size for the wrist'), and applying to their surface pieces of Roman earthenware, fragments of 18th-century willow-pattern, the stems of Victorian clay pipes and pictures culled from engravings and magazines. Vicky researches much of the pottery she finds, and a single bracelet can incorporate the results of centuries of craftsmanship. 'All of these pieces were made and designed by living artists. I am carrying on their traditions, and each bracelet – well, it's like a little bit of our history.'

### JANETTE SWIFT

Janette Swift turned to recycled art from a sense of concern and frustration at what was happening to the environment. 'I got really angry – angry at the waste and pollution, and angry at



myself for not doing anything.'

She lives in a completely recycled room, where everything from furniture to pictures has been rescued from skips and rubbish dumps. 'I just love tack,' she says, fondly patting a golden plastic elephant. Janette is the founding force behind Reactivart, a group of 30 artists and designers using recycled materials, whose aim is 'to encourage environmental awareness through their work'. The group plans to exhibit at galleries and schools throughout Britain, and shows will include practical information on recycl-

