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DROSS: AN EXHIBITION

Scott Eady

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The word dross conjures images of waste: objects of low value, poor quality or simply the unwanted. Its origins lie in the Old English *drōs*, meaning “scum on molten metal,” a residue to be discarded. My exhibition, *Dross*, held at Olga Gallery in Dunedin, explores this notion of cultural residue, using discarded materials to reflect on how value, history and identity sediment over time.¹ It asks what we choose to preserve, what we leave behind and who gets to decide what constitutes culture or legacy. In this body of work, things deemed undesirable or outcast, fragments of urban life, packaging materials and cast-offs are cast in bronze. This transformation lends permanence to the ephemeral, turning detritus into art, the ordinary into the extraordinary.

My interest in the overlooked began with the habit of keeping my head down. During a residency in Vladivostok in 2016, I spent hours walking the city and its shores, my gaze trained on the ground. The streets were cracked and potholed, the result of local corruption. Smiling at strangers was discouraged and so I kept my focus low. What I noticed instead were the layers of waste, broken infrastructure and graffiti that marked the cityscape. Through this dross, through what was broken, neglected and disordered, I came to understand something more enduring about the place: its culture, its politics, its history.



Figure 1. Scott Eady, *Air Filter (Vladivostok)*, 2016 – 2025, photographic print on Hahnemuhle paper.

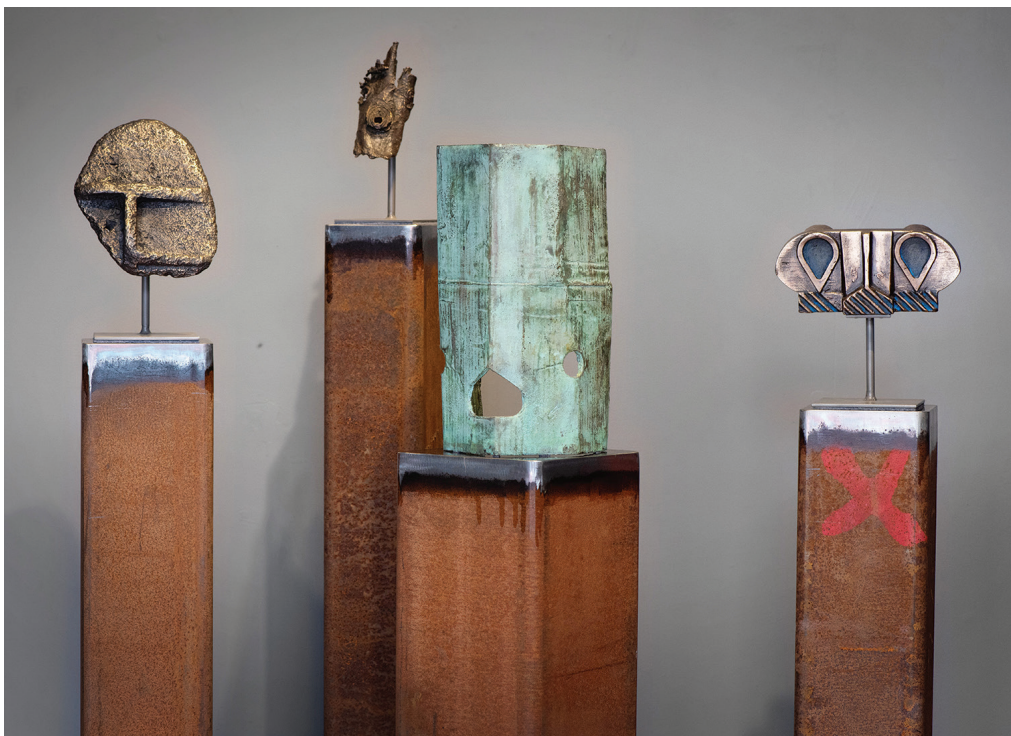


Figure 2. Scott Eady, Left to right: *Untitled (Wickliffe Street)*, 2025, bronze, steel; *Untitled (Cavell Street)*, 2025, bronze, steel. *Untitled (Otaki Street)*, 2025, bronze steel; *Untitled (Riego Street)*, 2025, bronze, steel. Photograph: Justin Spiers.

The process of making and encountering art is often rooted in a kind of looking that seeks recognition in the unfamiliar. Pareidolia is the human tendency to perceive meaningful images in abstract or random forms. It operates not only in our daily lives but is also fundamental to how artists select, shape and interpret materials. In *Dross*, the five untitled sculptures offer such moments: glimpses of figures or forms that might resemble something ancient or animate. This instinctive search for meaning is what first drew me to these discarded objects. But more than that, pareidolia is a mechanism through which artworks function: artists see significance where others might see chaos and invite viewers to do the same.

This way of finding meaning in overlooked matter extends into the installation itself. For *Dross*, I used bronze to cast a fragment of concrete found on a local site, then placed it within an old, graffitied, decommissioned spray-painting booth that was destined for the skip. The booth's steel panels, once tools of utility, now read as surfaces dense with memory. Decades of illicit marks, layered with dust and spray paint, become sedimented signatures. Like school desk carvings or ancient cave drawings, each tag or scrawl suggests a specific human presence. Through these marks, one could imaginatively travel through time to meet their makers. Collectively, the panels memorialise an art school community, preserving not only its traces but its spirit. In its Olga Gallery configuration, *Untitled #1* was described by *Otago Daily Times* reviewer James Dignan as "a semicircle of graffitied panels which become the pulpit and stained-glass windows of a postmodern brutalist church."²

Often dismissed as vandalism and described as mindless dross, graffiti is loaded with urban narratives, resistance and identity. It transforms spray booth walls, streets and public surfaces into urgent, unsanctioned canvases that speak for the marginalised, the disenfranchised and the unruly. As such, graffiti operates both in defiance of and in dialogue with the art world. Like bronze sculpture, it raises questions about visibility, value and permanence. When



Figure 3. Scott Eady, *Untitled (DSA)*, 2025, steel, paint.

brought into a gallery setting, graffiti's associations complicate the work, confronting viewers with competing ideas of authorship, authority, and aesthetics. Who gets to decide what counts as art? What marks are preserved and what are erased?

This interplay between past and present, perception and memory, links to a broader lineage in the history of art. Like phantom limbs, connections to earlier eras persist even when the original context is lost. No artwork is created in a vacuum. Our understanding is shaped by what we have seen and experienced before, whether in museum collections, ethnographic artifacts, modernist sculpture or even the archaeological fragments that proliferate on social media. These sculptures cannot help but echo such associations. They might recall tribal totems, votive relics or the visual language of early twentieth-century abstraction filtered through contemporary eyes and sensibilities.

Bronze, the material of these works, deepens that connection to art history. Valued since antiquity for its strength and longevity, bronze has served as a preferred medium for weapons, tools, bells and sculpture. Today, it still carries a weight of tradition and permanence but also speaks to ecological concerns. With approximately 88% of its content being copper, bronze is remarkably sustainable; a metal infinitely recyclable and requiring no new mining were it not for the demands of clean energy. In a time when many art materials are fleeting or synthetic, bronze offers both durability and environmental responsibility. Its resistance to decay also makes it practical: bronze sculptures are surprisingly simple and cost-effective to conserve.

Illicit acts of vandalism are captured in the video work *Section 15*. In their glory days, the featured bronze sculptures, titled *Calciami! (Kick Me)*, were exhibited at the Palazzo Bembo near the Rialto Bridge in Venice, where thousands



Figure 4. Scott Eady, *Untitled (Bayfield Inlet)*, 2025, bronze, steel.

of art and architecture enthusiasts encountered them during the 2013 Venice Biennale. After their return to New Zealand, they were retired to pasture like Ferdinand the Bull, seemingly docile, harmless objects until they became unwittingly complicit in a 'Section 15 of the Crimes Act' smash-and-grab.³ The video documents the reactivation and recontextualisation of these once-static artworks as accomplices in a staged criminal act: captured in grainy surveillance footage, the sculptures are seen being used to violently shatter a glass door, their elegant bronze forms weaponised in a sudden, absurd act of destruction. This collision of art and crime invites questions about agency, value and the thin line between object and instrument, between cultural artefact and everyday detritus.

The sculptures in *Dross* draw on materials commonly found in the detritus of our urban and suburban environments: polystyrene packaging, pine bark, discarded demolition materials and corrugated cardboard. These humble, often overlooked fragments formed the original shapes that were later cast in bronze, their transformation both preserving and elevating the ordinary. Installed atop recycled, patinated steel plinths, once part of dismantled industrial structures, the sculptures maintain a dialogue between their refined final form and their unglamorous beginnings. This deliberate tension invites the viewer to navigate an interplay between perception and deception, expectation and critique. By repurposing the visual language of waste, *Dross* challenges aesthetic conventions and highlights a core concern of contemporary art: the ability to interrogate the material and cultural residue of late capitalism, and to find meaning and value within what society so readily discards.



Figure 5. Scott Eady, *Section 15*, 2025, 2 channel video, screen, plastic box, plinth.

Scott Eady is a senior lecturer in sculpture at the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic. His work has been exhibited internationally at prestigious events such as the Venice Biennale and the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea. His sculptures are part of significant national collections, including the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Dunedin Public Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, The Chartwell Collection at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, the University of Otago Ōtākou Whakaihū Waka, and international institutions such as the Artetage Museum of Modern Art, Vladivostok, Russia, and the New Zealand Honorary Consulate in Vladivostok. Eady has also completed prominent public commissions, including 'The Philanthropist's Stone' for the Wellington Sculpture Trust, 'Tātou Ahau' at Otago Polytechnic, and '7 Miles' at Caroline Freeman College, University of Otago.

Drawing upon a rich tapestry of personal encounters, shared experiences, and familial moments, Eady's practice examines the relationships between individuals and their environments, as well as the dynamics of synergistic experiences. His sculptures engage with the fragile, often fraught tension between societal structures and human connection, revealing underlying currents of vitality, humour, and empathy. Through this lens, Eady's work challenges perceptions, offering a thoughtful interrogation of how identity is shaped both personally and collectively.

1 Scott Eady, *Dross*, Olga, Dunedin, 29 February to 26 March 2025.

2 James Dignan, "Art Seen: March 3," *Otago Daily Times*, 13 March 2025.

3 See Aaron Lister, "Spit Me: Scott Eady," accessed 26 May 2025, <https://aaronlister.com/portfolio/spit-me-scott-eady/>.