

Warwick Freeman

b.1953

Self-taught

Warwick Freeman's *Dead Set II* is an elegant circle of death, created from oxidised silver caps and various animal parts. In Freeman's own words, *Dead Set II* "broadly includes everything (dead) that has crossed my path over a three year collecting period. It's made from the parts of any animal I could find while on the road, the beach, the sea, farmyard or in the backyard". Demonstrating a sophisticated use for road kill, it's no accident that Freeman's work is shaped like a target.

Despite being hung on the wall like a relief sculpture, *Dead Set II* is actually jewellery – each individual animal part is a pendant and can be worn. The work is about the particular jewellery tradition of the amulet, one of the oldest forms of adornment in human history. Amulets were made from parts of the animal most feared – often teeth or claws – in the belief that this would offer protection from its terrible and deadly power.

The capped animal part is not just something that belongs to our ancient past. Freeman noted: "In my time in the 1970s as a jobbing jeweller in a manufacturing workshop in Auckland, one of my weekly tasks was to cap, in gold or silver, for various customers, the teeth of sharks and the tusks of wild pigs".

Just like the amulets that Freeman made for his shark-wrestling and pig-hunting clients, *Dead Set II* proclaims a triumph over nature, taking the sting out of nature's ability to bite back. But, like all amulets, it also brings to mind the very thing it seeks to overcome. Looking at *Dead Set II* is to see the aggressive power of nature – to confront the weapons with which even the most seemingly innocent animal is endowed. Then again, *Dead Set II* includes a lot of species that aren't to be feared, such as chickens, hedgehogs, albatrosses and sheep. Perhaps Freeman is making a joke, a nod and wink to the audience about the lack of deadly creatures in Aotearoa? However, this is matched by an awareness of new dangers: mad cow disease, bird flu. Seen that way, the cow horn and sparrow beak represent something more sinister than first appearances suggest.

The cap is a jewellery device that, along with the claw (metal clasps that hold objects, usually precious stones, in place), has a rich history in 19th century Pākehā culture. Caps and claws were used to display the spoils of colonialism – Māori greenstone ornaments, or the beaks of native (and soon to be extinct) birds. These were worn as brooches, or hung from gold or silver chains on the waistcoat of the wealthy settler gentleman. It says a lot about historical attitudes to nature; about our sometimes poor connection to the environment in which we live. *Dead Set II* is a witty memorial to our natural environment, which has had a hard time with the arrival of humans. And it leaves us wondering: when might nature bite back?

Damian Skinner

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Books:

Skinner, D. (2007). *Claw Of The Uncanny: Identity Politics In The Jewellery Of Warwick Freeman, Peter Mckay, Lisa Walker And Jason Hall*.
 Skinner, D. (2004). *Given: Jewellery By Warwick Freeman*, Auckland: Starform Press.

