Edward Colless, 'Mikala Dwyer', *Face Up: Contemporary Art From Australia*, Exh. Cat. Museum of the Present, National Galerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. 2003, p. 72

Mikala Dwyer's installations are like playgrounds; at least playgrounds for an alien species, or for some fantastic mutation of the human race. They're fun, and funny, if in an unnatural and unearthly way. Their cubbyhouse architecture is fabricated from the joyous and uninhibited antics of bits and pieces of urban humdrum, abducted from their commonplace duties and let loose in a world as free from prosaic regulations – and as animated with adventure – as the land of Oz, Wonderland, or the spirit world in Hayao Miyazaki's celebrated movie, ›Spirited Away‹ (2002).

This is a world inspired by the sort of wicked humour that prompts poltergeists to hurl crockery across dining rooms or suspend furniture in mid-air. It is a world operating on the mischief one suspects otherwise respectfully inanimate objects get up to when no one is around to supervise them. It is a world undone by the cheeky magic of gremlins and put back together like crazy paving by an interior designer tripping on ecstasy. It is a circus; a theme park inversion of the business of existence. It is, in other words, a mode of enchantment.

Take, for example, the strange, amputated ducting that has increasingly become what the artist calls the 'baseline' in her installations. These long, floppy, grey-brown tubes could be rolls of modelling clay, idly squeezed out of some giant infant's hands and lined up neatly in rows after an art class in the nursery. They are primal, fundamental, even excremental forms of art.

And this is fertile matter, too, sprouting – wherever there is an opportunity (an incision in its skin) – weird shoots and weeds. Some of these resemble erectile, spindly, Giacometti-like stalks, pushing blindly upward the way stalagmites do in their dark caves. Others, even more stunted or withered, seem to sprout or blossom in wispy fabric hoods that look like cartoon ghosts or petrified clouds. Dwyer, in fact, calls these root systems her 'ghost gardens'. They are places where "dead thoughts," she says, "come in and go out." Dwyer's ghost gardens are airless and sunless nurseries for halfformed, malformed, insubstantial, aborted or amputated images that rebelliously defy the natural selection of reason, or of the reality principle that would weed them out.

These ghosts make up the endless, doodle-like 'architecture' of Dwyer's installations: in flimsy, fragile, transparent or pearlescent plastic chambers that she describes variously as caves, pods or clouds. "I see them as floating houses," she continues, adding another dimension to their shape-shifting, "like homes for thought." Perhaps, too, they are like thought balloons in a comic strip: those frail bubbles that materialise with an idea. If, in Dwyer's work, these thought bubbles seem empty, it's not to suggest they are thoughtless. Ideas are not a content, but are expressed through the twisting, collapsing and flexing of the volumes themselves.

Dwyer works the material exactly in this way, as a fluid type of thought expressed from her body's movements. Applying the heat gun to a sheet of plastic, she bends it, folds and welds it onto itself in free form. "When I'm working in the studio it must look like a weird wrestling match, determined by what I can reach and hold onto at the time; a balancing act while doing heat seals, trying not to burn your own hair off. That much of it seems real. But it's also like drawing in air – it's all mistakes. Like chasing your shadow, believing your shadow to be something real."

Mistakes like that may also be called flights of the imagination. Dwyer's installations may be machines for that kind of fantastic flight.