

Fiona Hall

Afraid Cascade



Afraid Cascade, 2020, oil paint on aluminum drink cans, 30 x 33.5 cm

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery
6–28 March 2020

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, 8 Soudan Lane, Paddington 2021, Australia

ARTIST PROFILE

Claire Healy
Sean Cordeiro

PUNK FRICTION

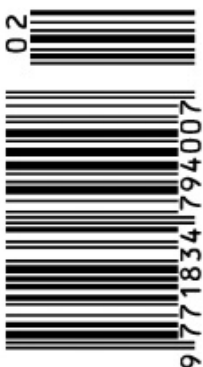
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image detail Abdul Abdullah, Australia, born 1986, *Understudy*, 2019, mixed media, dimensions variable; Courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery.



Untitled (Banks head), 2009, acrylic on canvas, 64 x 120 cm. Estate of Roy Jackson

Roy Jackson

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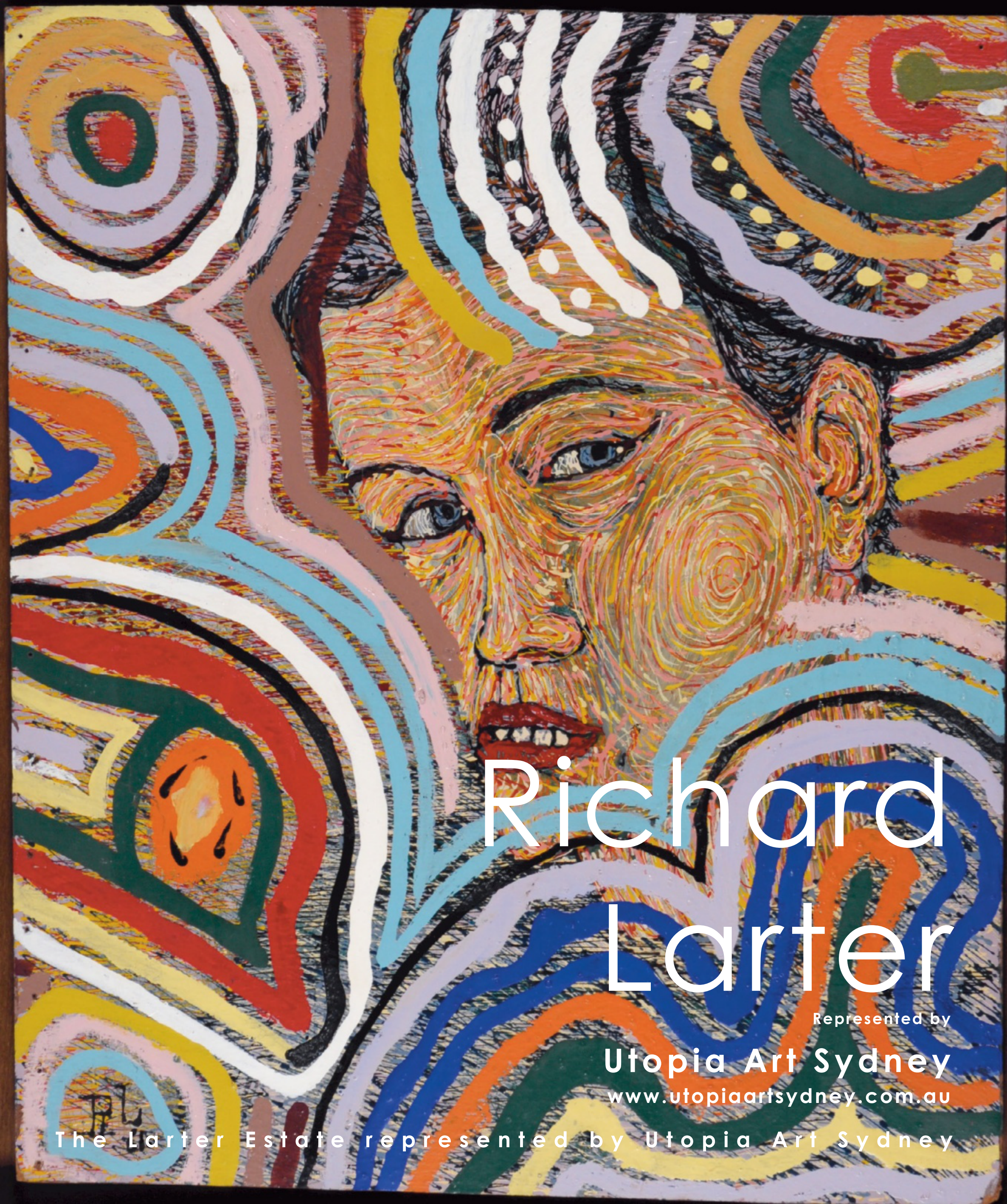
DRAWINGS

1–26 APRIL 2020



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An abstract portrait of Richard Larter, featuring a central face rendered in a textured, painterly style. The face has blue eyes and red lips. The background is a dense, swirling composition of various colors including yellow, orange, red, blue, green, and white, with thick, expressive brushstrokes and wavy lines. The overall effect is one of intense energy and emotional depth.

Richard Larter

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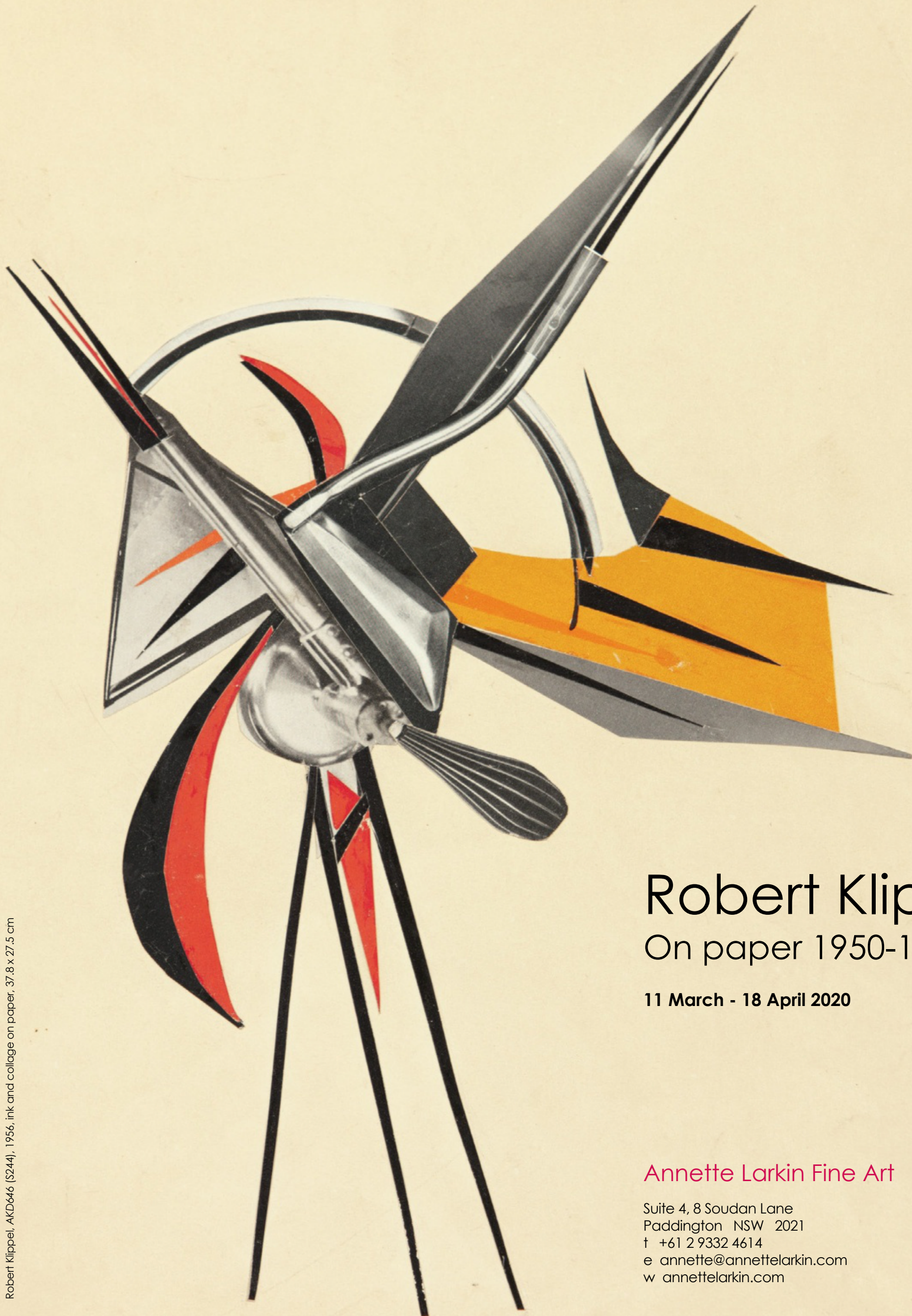


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Matt Bromhead, *Hanging Cares #2*, 2019
aluminium, clay, plaster, rope, timber, twine, 32 x 17 x 49cm

Robert Klippel, AKD646 (S244), 1956, ink and collage on paper, 37.8 x 27.5 cm



Robert Klippel

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PAT BRASSINGTON, *FLUSHED*, 2019, PIGMENT PRINT, 75 X 75 CM.
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Ann Thomson, *Chasing Summer*, 153 x 122cm, acrylic and collage on linen (2019)



ANN THOMSON | AIR AND SPACE

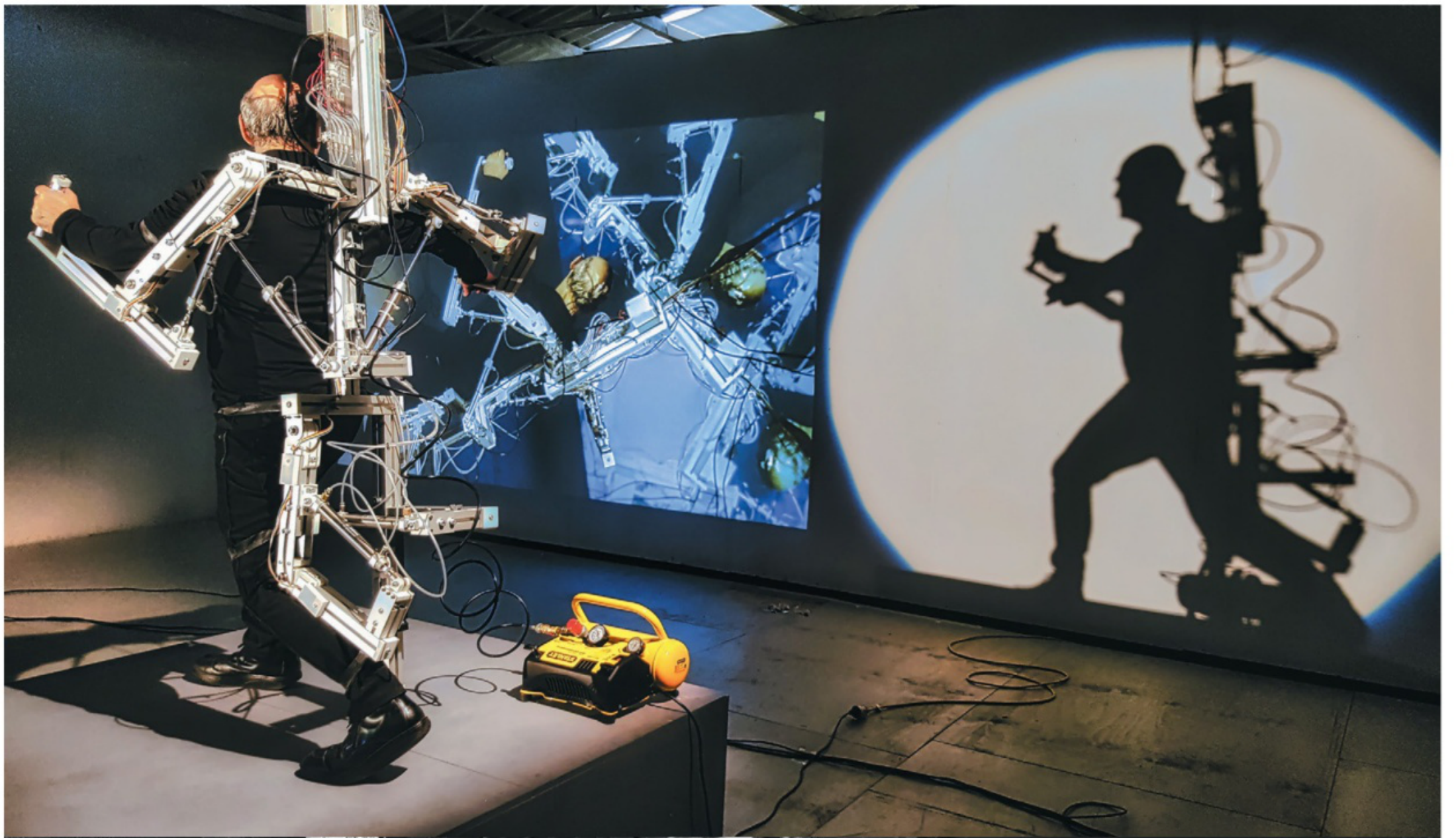
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6 – 28 March 2020

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Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy photograph by Saskia Wilson
Story page 60

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Language II, acrylic on linen, 137 x 152 cm and assorted stoneware ceramics



KATE DORROUGH
River Language

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Editor's Note

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No one who saw Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro's *Life Span* installation in The Ludoteca Castello, Venice, for La Biennale di Venezia, in 2009 has ever forgotten it: a huge black rectangular solid block made from 175,218 VHS video cassettes (weighing ninety tonnes) below a fresco in a twelfth century chapel of a deconsecrated former nunnery. A poetic representation of the 1975 human lifespan average of 60.1 years, the experience of *Life Span* surpassed that of every other memento mori. Outside the chapel, the summer's warmth was full of life's energy. Inside, the black crypt seemed to ignite anxiety for a life needing to be lived; not wasted. Anyone familiar with the content of the videos would probably get Claire and Sean's critical humour. *Life Span* is one of the big ideas I discuss with both artists, in what is *Artist Profile's* fiftieth issue; and the magazine's first cover featuring collaborating artists.

Perhaps more than any other issue of *Artist Profile*, the studio – as a relatively early modernist space for study and production – is highlighted. From our first issue, the studio has always been the crux of *Artist Profile's* visual and textual critique. Without any specific intent on our part, the significance of the studio appears in the conversations with the cover artists and other featured artists including Robin White, Stelarc and Brendan Huntley. They describe varying instances where the spatial dynamic of the studio has changed slightly or severely their art making processes.

Reaching fifty for any human today can be realistically regarded as a halfway mark. Erin McFadyen's essay 'Burning Bright: Art for the next 50 years' considers the next five decades through the works of the late

William Blake. Other articles in this issue reflect on the legacies of artists Robert Klippel, Laurie Nilsen, Joseph Beuys, Peter Kingston and John Conomos.

To celebrate our fiftieth issue, we have commissioned artist Mai Nguyen-Long to make a 100 woodblock prints inspired by the Đông Hồ genre, which we'll offer to the first 100 people who take a two-year subscription (valid from 27 February 2020). Đông Hồ images are often satirical coded critiques of society. Nguyen-Long's print *Rat Wedding II* depicts a rat making a fish offering to a cat – a tacit critique of power structures. This act of referencing is about overcoming fear, reviving heritage, and connectivity. It's also an acknowledgement that 2020 is the year of the Rat (see p. 139).

An unavoidable aspect of the fiftieth issue was the devastating fires across Australia. In Saskia Wilson's photographs of Claire and Sean, the shoot – taken on film – was a few days after the summer fires in which the artists' Blackheath home and studio narrowly survived, only by a shift in the wind. Saskia has captured Claire and Sean in this smoky aftermath; everything seen through a strange haze.

Visual artists have always been at the forefront of the environment movement, not only through their art, but their activism and, as we've seen recently, through fundraising efforts, with creative workers in other art forms collaborating to help re-establish communities and rehabilitate the bush and its inhabitants. *Artist Profile* acknowledges and respects the energy and commitment of these efforts, which have united us globally. ■

Kon Gouriotis
Editor

Artist Profile acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional owners of the land on which we work.

Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy
outside their studio in the Blue
Mountains, photograph by
Saskia Wilson

Story page 60

BURNING BRIGHT

ART FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Story
ERIN MCFADYEN

Writing after the death of Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol declared that ‘people will be discussing new beauty in Beuys as long as there are people.’ That was forty-four years ago, and Warhol’s faith in his friend remains as affecting as the beauty in Beuys today. In 2020, unexpectedly, I find a future-tensed faith in an artist who made room for new beauty in the imagery of our collective past.

In fifty years, it will be more important than ever to look at, and to make like, Blake. Leaning, or maybe more careering, over the pages of an open book; back curving into an inhumanly long, sinuous neck; the one eye we can see dark in a field of barely-tinted chalky wash that fills not just our reader’s face, but their companions’ clothes, the fence behind them, even the sky behind that fence, on and on. This is how one of the two youthful figures in William Blake’s *Age Teaching Youth* (1785–90) sits. But what are we doing looking at such (seemingly) long-gone work on the eve of the twenty-first century’s third decade? I’m here thinking precisely about age teaching youth. I’m thinking about the future – so far as we can consider one, at the moment – that is embedded in, and made possible only by, the past.

There is something uneasy, today, in the suggestion that we might turn to the past with anything other than the diagnostic suspicion of the critical gaze. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has it, a ‘paranoid reading’ of our culture has come to be synonymous with the practice of reading (by which she means also of discussing, of thinking, of art-making) itself. To Sedgwick’s understanding, this paranoid practice of cold, suspicious critique

emerged in the late twentieth century from the feeling that to blindly trust the ideas culture hands us down is to risk being duped into accepting a story that doesn’t fit our actual interests. It’s certainly, and usefully, this kind of critique that underpins much contemporary art practice.

Reading the Tate’s Blake show (11 September 2019 to 2 February 2020) with this critical spirit, we can see how Blake’s work can be – and has been – mobilised to support a narrative of nationhood for Britain that delivers a special sting when I’m in the show, a week after the December election confirmed that Brexit would indeed be happening, and quickly. The Tate acknowledges Blake’s embeddedness in empire and nation, yet this does feel somewhat halfhearted; here he is, the canonical man, in a gallery built to consolidate British national narratives.

But Blake also offers us a model of how we might turn to our cultural history (including his own work as it appears to us now) with a *utopian* feeling: a sensibility that allows us to see the seeds for a radically reimagined future sown in the material specificities of the past. José Esteban Muñoz theorises this feeling as an *astonishment* that ‘helps one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see ... wish-landscapes in painting and poetry.’ To understand Blake as simply reinscribing tradition is to ignore the astonishment of his vision, and the brashness of his utopian imagination.

Biblical figures turn their faces toward us throughout the show; official religion offered Blake an inheritance so visually rich as to permeate the artist’s work for

the whole course of his creative life. But Biblical faces also turn themselves away from us, obliquely, here. In a seaside Eden, washed out in blues and tender, bashful pinks, Adam and Eve kiss under a crescent moon. A host of angels descend on the manger, but here they’ve come in fancy dress, looking like a Vitalist clump of tessellating musculature before their time. Blake’s first innovation, I think, is the absolute bodily ecstasy with which he renders scenes of faith, and mythological imagery: there are muscles everywhere, erotic shadows under everything, an attitude that celebrates convention for providing the structural basis for its own revision. Age teaches the young, and the young metabolise their lesson into something quite other.

Then we launch into Blake’s more radical departures – his thrillingly impenetrable, keyless self-made mythology. Here we have *The Night of Enitharmon’s Joy* (1795), with heaping bodies looking like they’re in the later stages of somebody’s warehouse party, an owl staring out at us obscure and frightening, and something reptilian lurking between these two. Then we get Albion, stood atop a rock and emanating light like an angel, thrilling because he isn’t (quite) one himself. Blake’s sensibility here is akin to Frank O’Hara’s in *Having a Coke with You* (1960), which for Muñoz exemplifies astonished, historically embedded utopianism. O’Hara looks to art history and prises open in it a space for his own, new, specific joy: ‘I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the

01 William Blake, *Age Teaching Youth*, c.1785-90, ink and watercolour on paper, 10.8 x 8 cm, Tate







world / except possibly for the *Polish Rider* occasionally and anyway it's in the Frick / which thank heaven you haven't gone to yet so we can go together / the first time...'

What I want to say about Blake by way of thinking how art might push through to the future (despite the dissolution of our federal arts department, the threatening scarcity of arts funding, and the precarity of arts work) is that his utopian sensibility – his astonishment along the rifts he prises apart in his own cultural inheritance – can be useful to us now too. I find myself thinking that a resurgence of religious art – of a Blakean sort, immersed in tradition without obediently repeating it, or asking for *assent* from its audience – may be the kind of work that could represent a useful departure from the suspicious, diagnostic treatment of cultural history that has characterised the twenty-first century so far.

“ Blake knelt down to his cultural past and rose with a radical vision for the future ”

I mean 'religious art' very much to say art that is radical and that departs from a status quo, which looks in astonishment on the past and reads it as a map to the future. I think this revolutionary affect of astonishment is what Blake gives audiences within and without the gallery, as I see the tiger burning bright, a glint in its eye, on an endless iteration of pages. Blake knelt down to his cultural past and rose with an utterly radical, materially specific vision for the future. It's this attitude that I think artists, in our contemporary moment of suspicious critique, political disillusionment and disavowal, can

usefully take to picture a more coherent future. It may be this aesthetic attitude which can deliver us a world that we can still tolerate in fifty years' time. ■

02 William Blake, 'Europe, Plate' i: Frontispiece, *The Ancient of Days*, 1827, etching, ink and watercolour on paper, 23.2 x 12 cm, The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

03 William Blake, *The Night of Enitharmon's Joy* (formerly called 'Hecate'), c.1795, colour print, ink, tempera and watercolour on paper, 43.9 x 58.1 cm, Tate



ZOE GREY

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millie's collection, 2020, mixed media, collage on canvas, 120 x 104 cm



VERONICA CAY

*the games that play us
and dancing on the moon*

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Anoma Wijewardene, *He from she, this from that, life from death*, 2019, watercolour on paper, 24 x 32.5 cm

Anoma Wijewardene

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Pears in the Centre, 1989

Grace Cossington Smith Gallery

1 to 28 May 2020

Margaret Woodward

Works from the studio

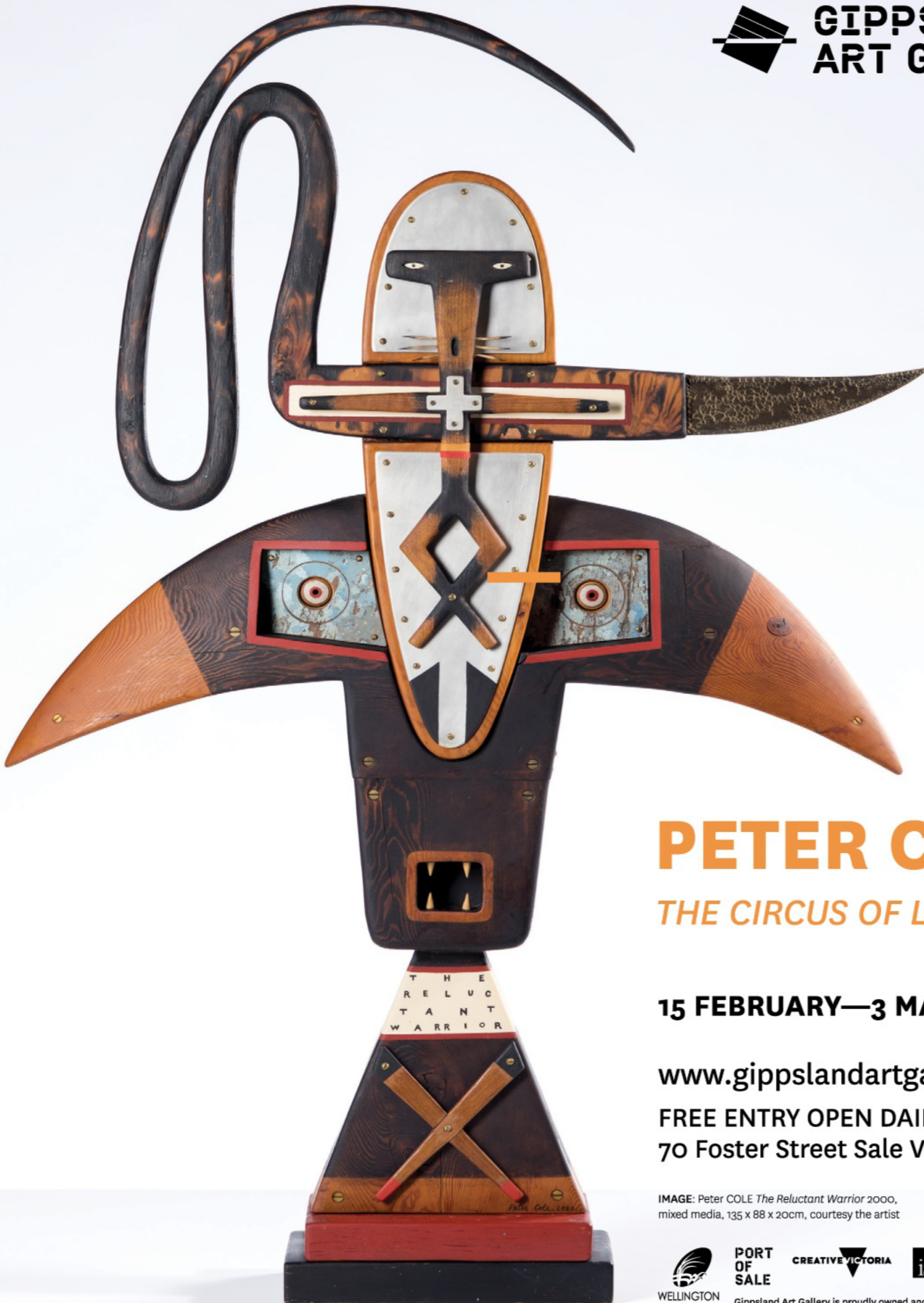


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IMAGE: Peter COLE *The Reluctant Warrior* 2000,
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Bessie Davidson. *Lecture au jardin*. Oil on wood. The Max and Nola Tegal Collection © AGSA
Sally Smart. Image still from *Paris Performance: Twilight* with dancers Deanne Butterworth and Jo Lloyd, 2019. Photograph: Jeff Busby



Dress Rehearsal, 2020, Oil on canvas, 91cm x 91cm

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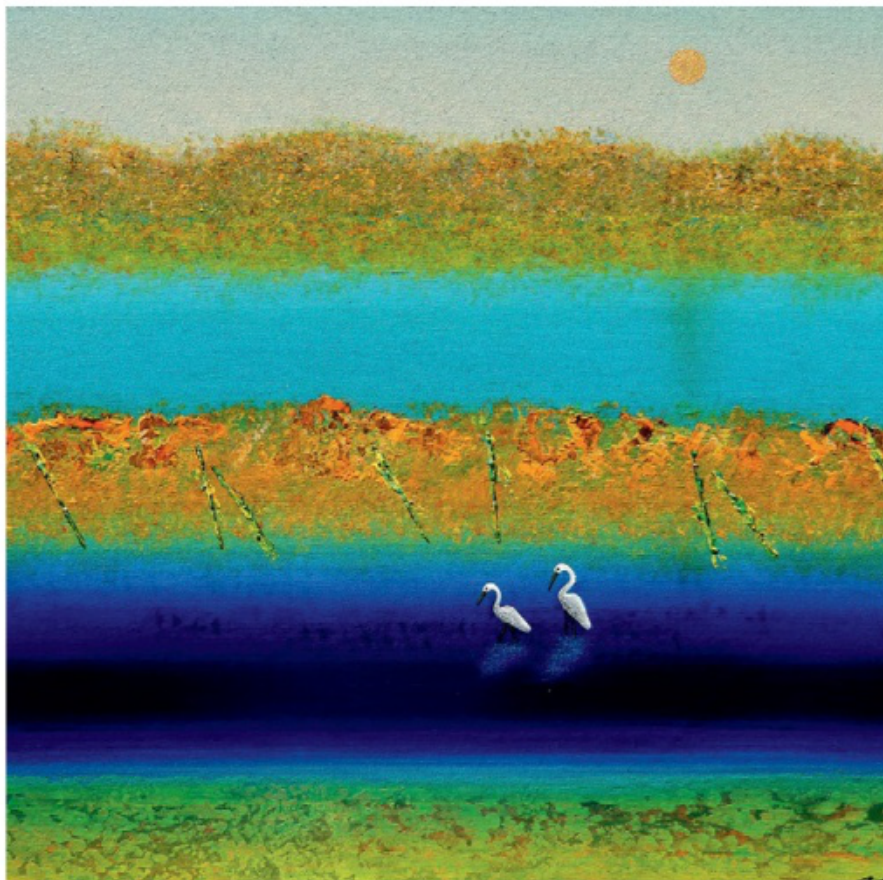
Bec Juniper, 'Rangelands Ephemeral Blue' 2020 [detail], Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 120 cm



Johnny Romeo, BURN DOWN THE DISCO

21 MARCH - 12 APRIL, SUBIACO

Johnny Romeo, 'Great Young Brave' 2020, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 153 x 153 cm



Peter Coad, VISIBLE SILENCE

29 FEBRUARY - 29 MARCH, MANDOON ESTATE

Peter Coad, 'Waterpath' 2020 [detail], Mixed media on canvas, 90 x 120 cm



Alan Muller, DERBARL YERRIGAN SWAN RIVER:

Paintings 2010 - 2020 & New River Drawings

18 APRIL - 10 MAY, SUBIACO

Alan Muller, 'Night Rain on Derbarl Yerrigan II' 2020 [detail], Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 120 cm

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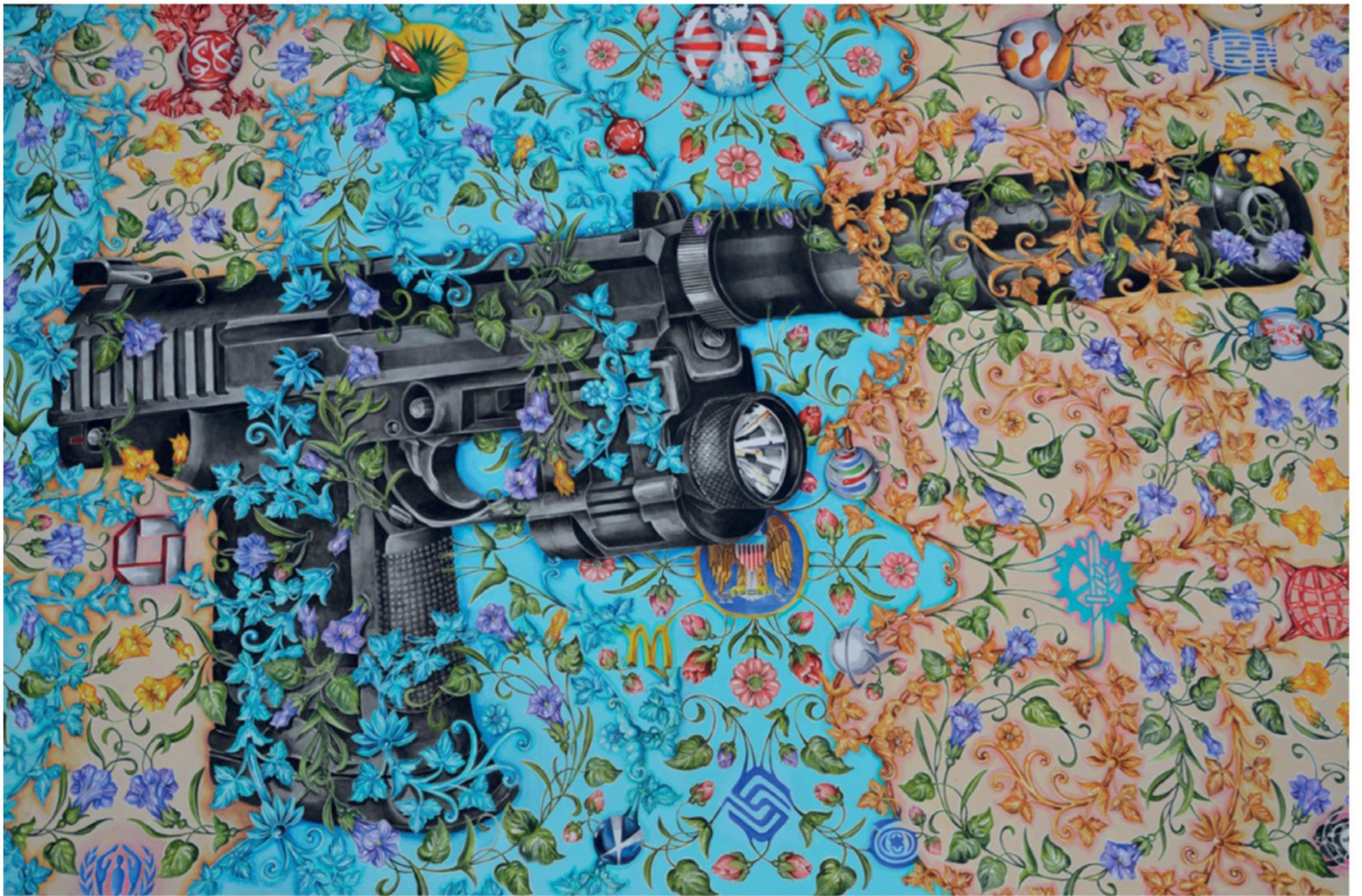
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7 MARCH - 17 MAY

image: *The Law (Heckler and Koch)*, 2013-2014, watercolour and white gouache on paper, 114 x 212.5cm

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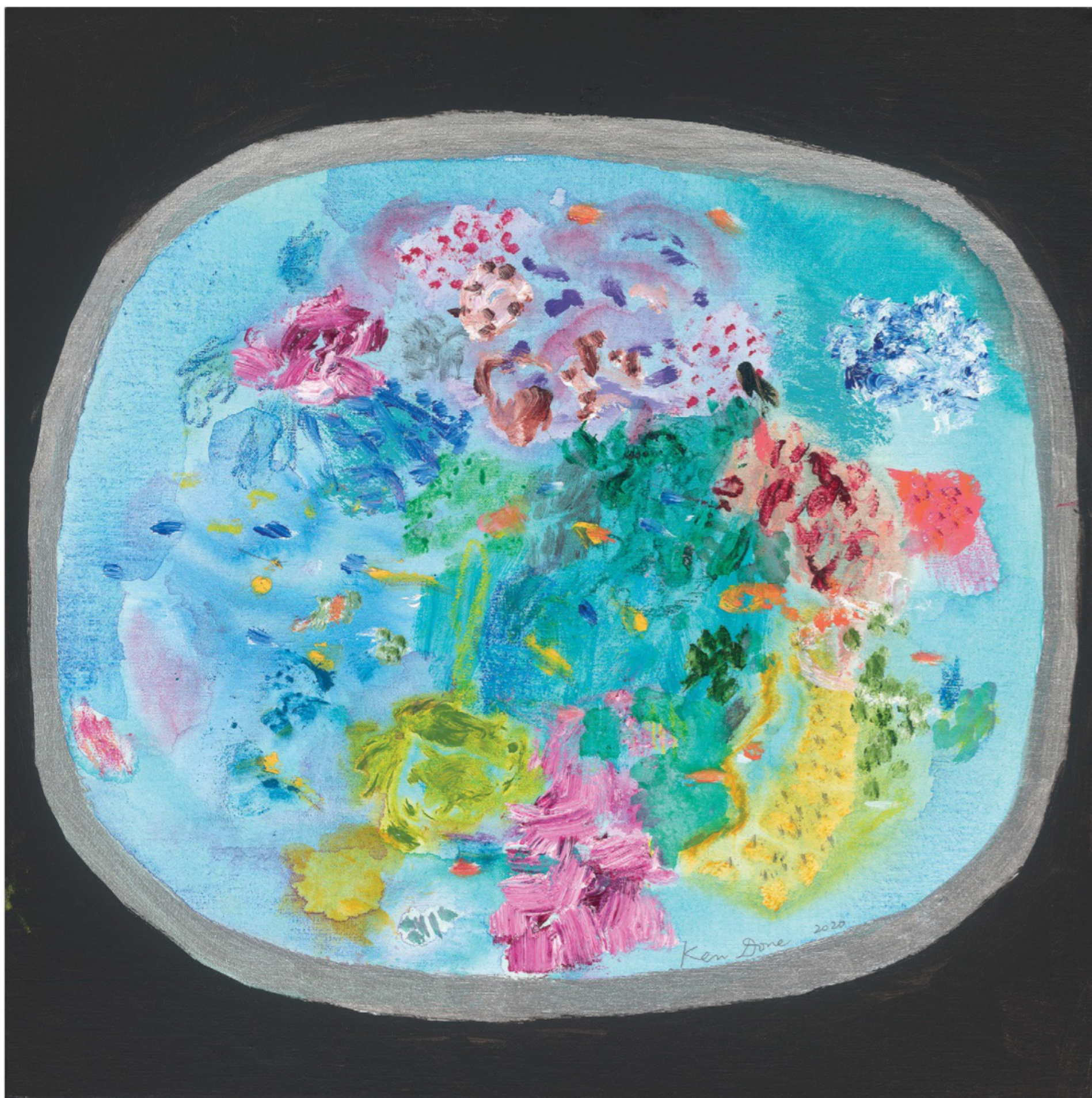
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Mask II, 2020, acrylic and oil crayon on linen, 50 x 50cm.



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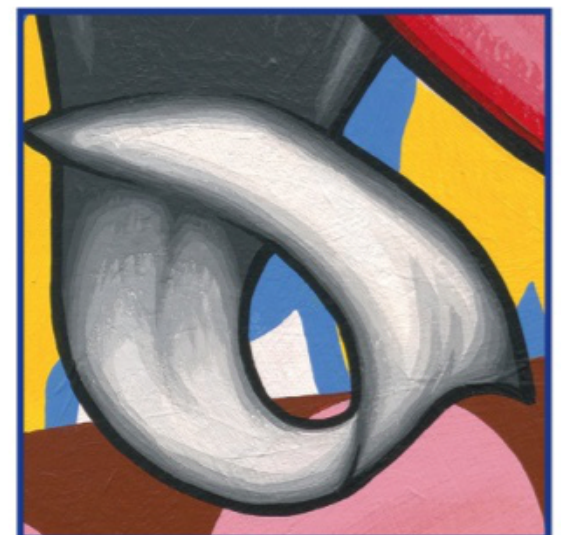
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Megan Cope, *The Black Napoleon (Eulope)*, 2019, French Connections HR
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Jimmy J Thaiday, Erub Arts, CIAF 2019, Photograph: Kerry Trapnell



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2018 WINNER Marcus Callum, Meg (detail), oil on linen, 76 x 102cm



SHE

Thursday 27 February to Saturday 4 April

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SHE features and celebrates the works of female Australian artists. In this exhibition, set to coincide with International Women's Day, eight artists from across Australia explore the responsibilities, challenges and joys that come with being a female artist in Australia. The exhibiting artists are Deanne Gilson, Alana Hunt, Vonda Keji, Lily Mae Martin, Kumantjayi Nangala, Tiffany Parbs, Nyaruot Ruth Ruach and Tai Snaith.

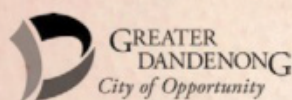
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Tiffany Parbs, bake 2008, sunburn, giclee print, 330 x 470 x 35mm, photography by Terence Bogue



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Ron McBurnie and Euan Macleod working *en plein air* at the Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre.

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Image: PAUL DAVIES *Everything Loose Will Land in LA Double Golden Gully*
6 2017, UV cured ink and acrylic on canvas, 183 x 122 cm. Private collection.
Courtesy of the artist and Olsen Gallery



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Kat Shapiro Wood
In Between Days

MULLUMBIMBY-BASED ARTIST KAT SHAPIRO WOOD ENGAGES WITH THE ANCIENT MEDIUM OF ENCAUSTIC, CREATING WORKS THAT TRANSCEND THE SPACE BETWEEN TWO AND THREE DIMENSIONALITY TO REVEAL THE INHERENT NATURE OF MATERIALS AND EXPERIENCE. HER PROCESS REQUIRES INTENSE PREPARATION AND CONTROL, BUT ALSO A WILLINGNESS TO SURRENDER TO THE MEDIUM.

Story
**SEBASTIAN
GOLDSPINK**



02

Synaesthesia is a catch-all term for an intriguing group of broad sensory phenomena where subjects perceive external elements through multiple senses. Colours are heard, sounds are felt in different parts of the body and numbers are processed as shapes. For people who experience forms of this condition, dubbed ‘synesthetes’, the external is processed in a fundamentally different way. It is a world of inherent duality.

Kat Shapiro Wood’s practice is centred around the medium of encaustic (beeswax and natural resin), and crosses the disciplines of painting, sculpture and ceramics. Her work has often had an

element of abstract mark-making piercing deep, rich surfaces built up through layers of wax, and has evolved over time to be more and more minimal. Shapiro Wood’s practice is at once unified and dissonant, forged out of an attempt to express emotion and memory of place through making. This desire to encase the emotive or spatial in a physical rendering reflects elements of the synesthetic condition. What does grief look like as a form? What colour is love? What is the essence of a particular space? Her journey as an artist is defined by this duality – an attempt to control and order whilst simultaneously letting go. ‘I love playing with relationships and that dynamic place of uncertainty

at the edge of balance where there’s a quickening, a pleasurable tension,’ reflects the artist.

Shapiro Wood recounts a moment of revelation during her time at the National Art School in 2005 when she saw a Jenny Sages solo exhibition, ‘A process of walking,’ at Sydney’s King Street Gallery on Burton Street (now William Street). She was struck by the work and intrigued by its use of encaustic as a medium. She states, ‘There was no one around me working in

01 Kat Shapiro Wood, photograph Michelle Eabry

02 *Untitled (Timbre)*, 2019, encaustic on board, 32 x 24 cm



03 *Untitled (Surrender)*, 2018,
encaustic on found drop
sheet, 150.5 x 132 cm

*“ For me it’s like cooking or using
a recipe, it’s alchemy ”*

the medium, so I had to work it out myself, which, in the process of problem solving and experimentation, actually took me in directions I may not have found otherwise. The exciting thing was that it opened up a whole realm of visual language that felt like quite an epiphany.'

Encaustic painting is a process of adding pigments to wax to create a medium. It is a labour intensive and disciplined method developed by the ancient Greeks. The nature of the medium involves an organised studio environment that might resemble a production line in a commercial kitchen. Works are built up through layers of hot pigmented wax, burned in, scraped back with a razor blade, burned in again, and so on. It is a process that requires intense preparation, testing, timing and control, but also a willingness to surrender to the material. These paradoxical elements drew Shapiro Wood to the medium – 'for me it's like cooking or using a recipe, it's alchemy.' Since this early exposure to encaustic, the artist has expanded its use beyond two dimensional works into ceramics and sculptural assemblages. 'I am intensely interested in space whether that be sculptural or looking at something like depth in painting, my work always seems to occupy this space somewhere between the two and three dimensional,' she comments.

Shapiro Wood's minimalism and mark-making relate back to another revelatory moment in art school when lecturer and artist Lynne Eastaway exposed her to the work of Canadian painter Agnes Martin. In Martin, the artist found a freedom in repetitive mark-making and reduction. She used Martin's grid as a starting point for abstraction. Shapiro Wood describes the core of her practice as being about 'working within formal parameters coupled with a visceral and intuitive process aimed at revealing emotive states.' This repetition of marks gave her a freedom in the consistency of the line; a freedom that allowed for an exploration of the emotional through a simultaneously mindful and mindless process.



04

In the recent group exhibition 'True Nature' at Sydney's Chalk Horse Gallery, Shapiro Wood presented a series of paintings emblematic of her ongoing investigation into the undefined space between studio and presentation. Her work (*Untitled*) *Unfurl* (2019) encapsulates what draws the artist to her prime medium: 'the potential in refinement of the surface, the depth, the edges, the subtlety of the colour but also the fact that something can be raw and polished at the same time.' *Untitled* (*Unfurl*) is her largest work to date in this method. Shapiro Wood is keenly focused on the physical requirements of the ply surface and the need to brace its back with hardwood to prevent it from warping under the stresses of hot, liquid wax. Artist and Chalk Horse Director Jasper Knight picks up on the beauty of this preparation 'I love Kat's attention to detail and process, and in particular the way she prepares her surfaces – those incredible polished edges holding the encaustic painting.' The preparation of the object seemingly unseparated from its final form, procedure both hidden and revealed.

In contrast, Shapiro Wood's work *Untitled* (*Surrender*) (2019) from the

same exhibition unravels the need for a meticulously prepared board surface through use of a found drop sheet saturated with encaustic. The title reflects her process of being drawn to the object and the puzzle of working out how to use it through the lens of the medium.

Currently the artist is working towards a solo presentation at Chalk Horse in April and continues to explore the physical nature of her process, 'I approach painting like I'm making objects, there's a physicality to this type of painting.' Her work operates in between spaces and forms, defined by uncertainty – a position the artist clearly relishes. ■

 @katshapirowood

EXHIBITION

'Gravitations'
30 April to 23 May 2020
Chalk Horse, Sydney

04 *Conversations Between Clay and Hope (1)*, 2016, Limoges
porcelain, stoneware clays, found objects, dimensions variable;
height approx. 12 cm

Courtesy the artist and Chalk Horse, Sydney



Kate Baker

Moving into the sublime



57

02

Story
KATHLEEN LINN

INCORPORATING GLASS PROCESSES WITH PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE MOVING IMAGE, KATE BAKER CREATES DEEPLY INTROSPECTIVE AND HIGHLY EMOTIONAL WORK THAT TOUCHES THE TRANSCENDENT, ETHEREAL REALM OF RAW HUMAN EMOTION.

01 *Within Matter #3*, 2020, UV flatbed digitally print on toughened glass, mounted on mild steel, 110 x 130 x 85 cm

02 Kate Baker in her Sydney studio, 2020



“ Glass has
had its own
silo of many
years ”

03

58

What attracted you to glass?

Its refraction of light, the fact that it's a sculptural material that is malleable; it is a liquid and you can melt it. I was very, very drawn to glass – it seemed quite exotic.

I had already been studying photography, sculpture and printmaking at the Canberra School of Art before I embarked on the glass workshop there. Back then (mid to late 1990s) it was an exclusive program of only four or five students a year, but I took a chance. Within a month or two I realised that this material does anything!

I'm interested in the ways you bring skills across various mediums to your work with glass.

After art school, whilst I was seduced by glass I was already quite involved with other mediums and I wanted to bring everything along with me. Glass, as a material within contemporary art, was still largely un-pioneered and I was curious about interrelating it with other mediums both sculpturally and on an image-based level. My first real step was to layer imagery

inside glass by screenprinting onto layers of glass and cutting images onto the surface.

I have worked a lot with kiln glass processes. This begins with a sheet of glass that is flattened in the kiln, onto which I screenprint high-fire enamels. The enamels are fired onto the inside layers of the glass and then these are fused together, so the images are essentially melted inside the layers of glass. This gives depth to the images. I then work the surface as well. I now also work across processes including digital printing onto aluminium and mirror, and light sensitive sandblasting. As technologies change, I keep developing my processes, which is really exciting.

Your work often incorporates the human form in emotive and contemplative ways, such as the series *Within Matter* (2018). Can you talk about your choice of subject matter and how this integrates into the processes you use with glass?

Within Matter looks at spiritual or ethereal experience happening in the physical realm, or somewhere between the physical world and maybe the metaphorical world.

That it is actually in matter and able to be captured through matter – the spiritual isn't separate from our real experience.

Photography has been a starting point for my work for a long time, but I don't spend an enormous amount of time at that end of the work. I tend to spend more time working with the imagery and how that relates to the material it's being integrated with. In *Within Matter* the subject was photographed through quite a dirty pane of glass. This imagery is abstracted further through screenprinting processes and layering or surface texture. It is often a fine line between how much of the abstraction belongs at the photographic end of the process and how much belongs in the development of the work.

I'm interested in the space between abstraction and reduction of the human form down to an emotional essence – the emotional space that resides somewhere

03 *Pulse*, 2019, single-channel digital video, sound, kiln formed glass, 180 cm diameter, video and sound produced by doeanddoe studio featuring performance by Leeanna Walsman, installation view, photograph Brendan McGeachie



04

between the literal and the complete absence of that. It is a very emotional, very raw, visceral space.

***Pulse* (2019) marks the first time you worked with the moving image – can you tell me about this direction in your work?**

Pulse is very much about the heartbeat of being alive, the complexity and all the intense layering that is part of this. We aren't two-dimensional; we are complicated beings.

When I started my PhD at the Australian National University in 2017 I really wanted to get my work off the wall. I missed the sculptural aspect and fluidity of glass. *Pulse* consists of 100 kiln fired glass forms. Created from life drawing studies, these water jet cut pieces are slumped in the kiln – they are quite abstract but reference the human body. They're suspended and projected through, so the sculpture works like a ball and the projection is inside the sculpture. A friend of mine is a video artist (Su-An Ng) and she assisted with the video production side, and I asked a professional

actor (Leeanna Walsman) to perform in the work. The sculpture is like a cell, and she is stuck in there. It is a metaphor for being stuck in your head. She goes through a complex range of emotional experiences over the ten-minutes of the work.

How do you feel glass-based art is received more broadly within contemporary art?

Glass has had its own silo of many years. It has its own movement and galleries, and a certain genre goes along with that which is derived from tradition. It's a pioneering material that doesn't have a big history in contemporary art so there are ways to do things that have never been done before. I did have to rail against the grain early on as there weren't that many other artists working with glass in an experimental way at that time. I had to push in my own direction, but being in a pioneering space is exciting. Although glass does have its own world, it is just a material and it has been an exciting material to bust out of the water a bit – but you have to be quite determined with it!



05

What are you excited about?

My 'Sublimate' exhibition at Finkelstein Gallery (Melbourne). Sublimation is a process where a material turns from a solid to a gas, missing the liquid state – but here the title is a poetic reference to my work moving into the sublime. It is an active process. It's about that magic between states of matter transitioning, but you aren't really able to put your finger on it.

I also have my first international museum solo exhibition at Shanghai Museum of Glass in April 2021. I'm excited to use this opportunity to develop my video work to the next level. ■

 @katebakerart

katebaker.com.au

EXHIBITION

'Sublimate'

Until 19 March 2020

Finkelstein Gallery, Melbourne

04 *Lena on the Tramp*, 2018, digitally and hand printed silver mirror, 180 x 160 x 27 cm, winner of the 2018 Hindmarsh Prize, photograph Brendan McGeachie

05 *Between Intimacy and Trespass #1* (detail), 2019, digitally and hand printed silver mirror, 100 x 120 x 3 cm

Courtesy the artist and Finkelstein Gallery, Melbourne



Punk Friction

Claire Healy & Sean Cordeiro

Story
KON GOURIOTIS

Photography
SASKIA WILSON



CLAIRE HEALY AND SEAN CORDEIRO HAVE, FOR TWENTY YEARS, AMBUSHED GLOBAL NOTIONS OF NORMALITY TO MAKE SCULPTURES AND INSTALLATIONS EXPOSING THE ONGOING ASSAULT ON NATURE FROM EXCESSIVE HUMAN DESIGN. THEIR BELIEF IN OBJECTS ESTABLISHED THEIR FAME.



01

What lead to building your new studio?

Claire: Having the luxury of being able to ponder, rather than have a concept in mind or making the work for a particular site. To have an object within a space to crash your big toe into or fall over; just go towards something with a gut feeling rather than the brain. There were many little things we had to consider or hadn't heard of. With the help of YouTube, we navigated our way around making this studio.

Sean: Yeah, most of our work has been about demolition and inquiries into architecture. So, it's fitting to actually build a studio to understand what goes into making a building.

I read your first project together was in a Greek Orthodox Church.

S: The hall attached to the Church ...

C: We had an opportunity to use Kudos Gallery for *Location to Die For* (2001).

S: I was living at Imperial Slacks at a time when the whole of Sydney was in pre-Olympics renovation phase.

C: ... Like a warzone.

S: A lot of old-school people that lived around Paddington and Redfern were moving out and new people were moving in. It sounded like war, and the movement of people was like war. We decided that we wanted to make a work that riffed on that movement, and also to play with the idea of real estate. We made fake real estate ads for the gallery. A big 'for sale' sign outside. Art and real estate punters came to check out the gallery because they thought it was for sale. Inside, the gallery was mapped out as a house, with sandbags and war sounds.

C: It was really fun. There was a number to call for interest in the property. The answering machine had every war sound you could imagine.

S: And people still left messages on it.

C: And came to the opening interested in the property.

S: There were phrases like 'New York Style Loft Apartment.'

C: Lots of 'capitalised' poster words.

S: I have a friend who's a civil war recreationalist. He brought all his Unionist mates and they did full on drills in the gallery. It was the most fun opening we've ever had.

The perimeter of the sculptures and installations, is that determined before the process of construction or during construction?

C: Both. We've always embarked on projects thinking about what it feels like being in that space. With the *Cordial Home Project* (2003), we planned to sort all the materials of the demolished house into separate polypropylene bags. We didn't expect the architecture of Artspace (Sydney) to change the space and materiality of what we were working with. Suddenly there was no need to cover the house materials. Whereas *Life Span* (2009) in Venice, the perimeter of the chapel fresco ceiling (The Ludoteca, Castello) is how the monolithic block of VHS cassettes' actual size began.

S: *Tower of Power* (2019) at Sydney Contemporary was quite funny. Scaffolding sizes are completely different between what is safe for a building site and safe for the public. It was originally going to be 2.4 x 2.4 metres high.

C: We had to make the tower six metres higher to widen it.

S: Everything was scaled up, from something that was a small fun tower to a monstrosity. Some dealers were fine with the size, while

01 *We Hunt Mammoth*, 2015, 121 bagged components (entire Honda) in jute and bamboo using traditional Japanese method for packaging, dimensions variable

02 *Tower of Power*, 2019, Bondor panel, scaffolding, lighting, mobile phone charging ports, binoculars, 7965 x 4100 x 6500 cm, site-specific installation; Sydney Contemporary 2019, Carriageworks, photograph Zan Wimberley



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03

others said, 'You basically sabotaged my stand.' Of course, we wanted to make an artwork, but we didn't want to piss everyone off. Although it looked like we were doing this really big punk move, it was supposed to be a small punk move.

C: The concept was questioning the act of viewing; what the punter does at an art fair. We've been to art fairs and watched people looking at their phones not the artwork. We thought this would be an opportunity for a charging station at the top of a castle, to look at the art works from afar while charging the phone.

S: We also wanted to evoke medieval warfare, position and sights, like Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. That 1980s thing, where warfare philosophy is translated onto business practices, and onto an art fair.

I'm getting the impression you're both seeking friction from the sculptures and installations.

S: Friction is a good word. As artists we observe the world. We are not comfortable with it, we're still trying to make sense of it. Maybe our perception doesn't quite fit with how things are. There's friction, in that we either don't get how things are working, or we're trying to work through it, or we're actively opposed to how things are working.

C: It's true. A lot of our work has been looking at how systems fail upon meeting another system. In *Par Avion* (2011–12) we went to the post office and got the maximum dimensions of the width, height and girth to send via airmail. Then we cut an airplane up according to those dimensions, trying to grasp this friction within systems that don't marry up to each other.

With all the sculptures and installations, is there an ideal distance for audiences?

C: It's really nice when the viewer becomes a part of the work, or forget they're looking at the work, or there's a question about if it is an artwork they're looking at, or is my position within the space something that is the work?

S: We like playing with making things too big for a space. Then you're incorporating a reality within the space and the relationship to that object is heightened.

C: But not just the space or scale. We like our audience to consider where they are in a moment of time. Dependent on the object we're using, it might be familiar to their everyday, to consider their history or geography.

Are you researching more than one project from the Bangkok trip?

S: Yeah, we're part of this network called 'Shadow Places.'

C: Shadowplaces.net; it's a network of artists, activists, writers, academics that are looking at shadow places in the time of Anthropocene and climate change.

S: We saw the 'Bangkok boneyard', a kind of airplane graveyard within a suburb of Bangkok, that has become this hipster tourist attraction. Usually airplane graveyards are in very arid places like Arizona. We're interested in this idea of international Instagram generations flying into Bangkok, to photograph themselves in mouldering airplanes.

C: We took a crew to shoot footage of these tourists filming themselves for social media. People totally made up with beautiful clothing – these girls taking articles of clothing off and looking quite

sexy. Everybody becoming the star of their own movie or marketing their own lifestyle.

S: The idea of a ruin should be centuries or millennia old, now ruins are formed within years and decades.

C: We're also looking at vehicles of flight; planes and kites, the massive industry of transporting objects and humans across the globe.

It appears transitivity is important, relationship between the subject and the object. How much knowledge of the subject is needed for the construction of the object?

S: When we did *Self Storage* (2006), for the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW), we made a basic greenhouse filled with personal objects stored at my parent's garage.

C: ... We were living overseas.

S: If someone looked at *Self Storage*, they would've asked, 'What's going on?' because it's opaque in terms of subject and objects. Is it impossible to convey without the blurb? The AGNSW is a repository of culture and culturally significant objects, for us it was a fun punk theme: housing our culturally insignificant objects within the institution.

C: I find it problematic when the work needs an essay to convey what you're looking at.

S: But then how can you avoid that without being really didactic within the work? It's always this head-trip to make something a bit opaque, 'what's going on?'; whether that's an issue or whether it's part of the experience of the artwork. For instance, our kites with Japanese Kanji on helicopter or plane parts. At a glance, it's a kite with some Kanji on it, but once you learn about it, you know this Kanji is about the Yasuda clan Zaibatsu. And the helicopters or planes that were used by the Australian military in the Vietnam War. A fight between Communism and Capitalism. What does that represent? What company did this Zaibatsu own, and how does it relate to our lives? Something that started out as quite an exotic experience becomes an experience consumed within our lives.

The pathos throughout your work is always sprinkled with ironic humour.

S: Sure. I was telling a workmate about a work that we're making. She said, 'when is your generation going to get over irony?'

C: They haven't yet, have they?

S: It's a coping mechanism. Doesn't Australia rely a lot on irony?

C: It's not necessarily read like that. In Germany, a lot of our ironic humour was just lost.

S: I am thinking of *We Hunt Mammoth* (2015), this idea of 'do you own your objects or do objects own you?' How do we get use to their ubiquity? We see cars all the time, they're so strange and massive, basically megafauna. If I was to walk down the street and had never seen a car before, what would I think? You hear about First Nation people, their first time seeing a car, like in that TV series *Bush Mechanics*. What a strange thing. These people are still alive, you can meet them. *We Hunt Mammoth* questions what are these massive



"A lot of our work, without sounding too cheesy, is trying to get an understanding of the truth"





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- 05** *Par Avion*, 2011, 70 cut pieces from a Cessna 172 airplane, gaffer tape, postage paraphernalia, 530 x 1160 cm (overall), installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2012
- 06** *The Pilgrims* (still), 2020, single channel High Definition video, 16:9, colour, sound
- 07** *The Cordial Home Project*, 2003, entire house, dimensions variable, photograph Liz Ham
- 08** *Life Span*, 2009, 175,218 VHS video cassettes, dimensions variable, installation view, 'Once, Removed', 53rd, Venice Biennale, Venice, photograph Ella Condon

Courtesy the artists and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

" Our practices are very much like dumb knowledge "

two-ton cars doing carrying a person weighing 120 kilos.

C: ... Or half that. It's become quite normal.

S: Trying to shift that normal, dissecting a car, bringing it back to a pre-industrial period, to think about what that object represents.

C: Using traditional Japanese method of packaging, almost macramé, the car has become this beast hung by a butcher.

S: This ridiculous notion creates the humour.

C: A lot of our work, without sounding too cheesy, is trying to get an understanding of the truth. *Life Span* was a representation of a human's life in VHS cassettes. When it came to using ninety tonnes of VHS materials, we were asked by the Australia Council if we could just make a façade, a smoke and mirror of the whole thing so that it looked like what it wasn't. No. Sean and I always err on the side of what the object is ...

S: It's a personal journey. The viewer can't tell whether it's smoke and mirror or not. But Claire and I know. It was a weird experience to think about *Life Span* as a memento mori. To think about your own lives ticking by: 'My god, is that it?'

What about the irony in *Cloud Nation* (2018) at Green Square Library?

S: *Cloud Nation* is a lot less ironic than our other works. At an early stage we were thinking about the idea of planes, about immigration and how there's this mythologisation about First Fleet people. Whereas if your family arrived on an airplane, there's nothing to it. In Green Square they're building a new suburb. Most people that are going to live in that suburb will be Asian Australians. And it's so close to the airport. They will have a different kind of mythology.

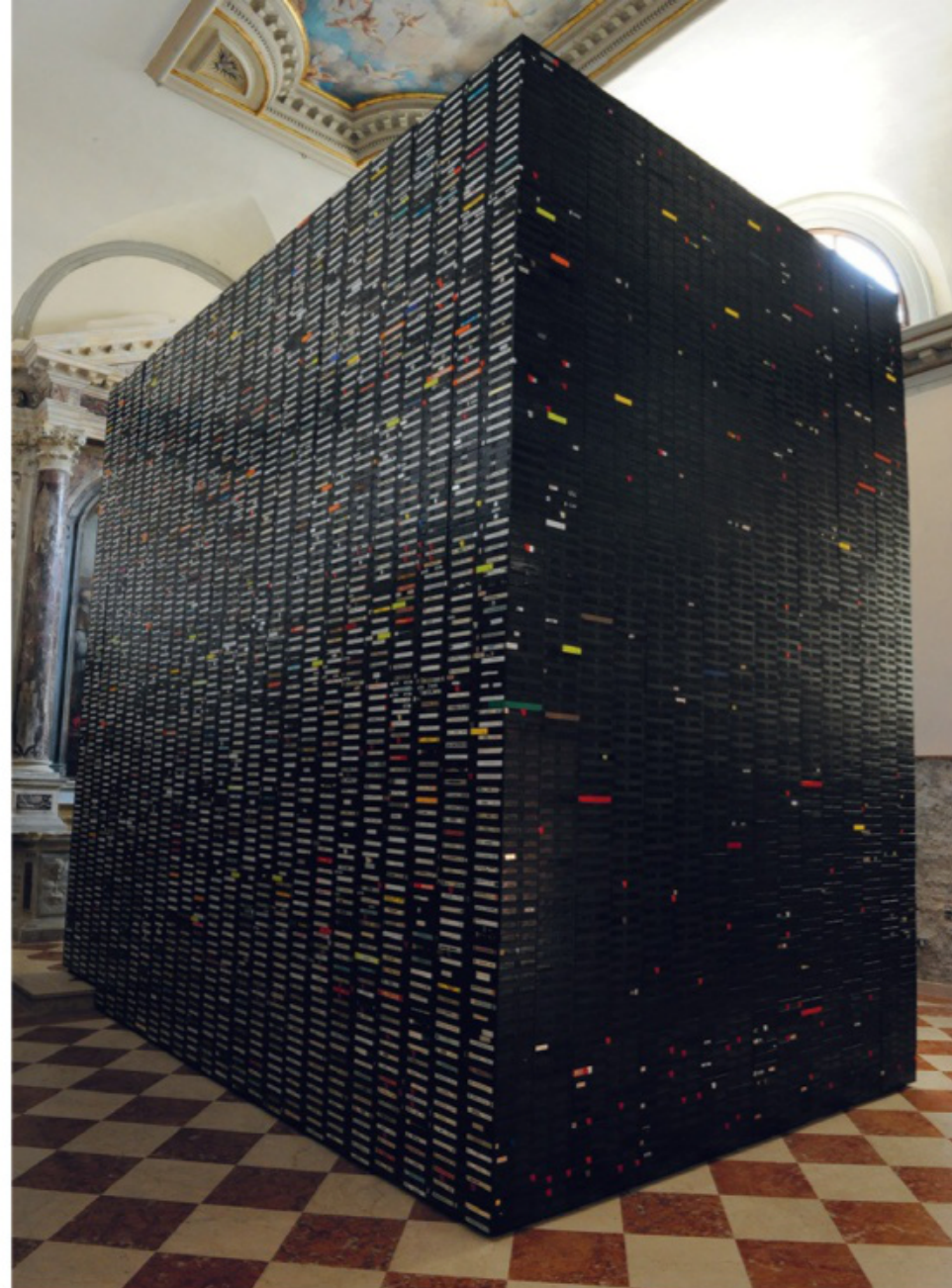
C: *Cloud Nation* took six years to create. There were other ironies that came up on that journey. We were asked quite a few times to make the plane smaller. With a found object it's not possible to make it smaller. So we clipped the wings.

Another new project you're both working on is for Japan later in the year?

C: It's really exciting, the Oku-Noto Triennale, taking place in a fishing villiage on the west coast of Japan in September this year. We've proposed to create a massive moon inside a domestic space. For fishermen the moon dictates how they work with the ocean. It's a controlling factor in all our daily lives. We hope to create an uncanny situation: force of nature has entered the human space.

Does literature play an important part in sculptures and installations?

C: In different ways – Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Luigi Barzini's *From Peking to Paris*; the idea of this liberated individual and this quest for freedom.



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S: I think we're inspired by what we read, but not all our practice is informed by literature or specifically within any particular philosophy.

C: ... Although we have been interested in (Paul) Virilio and (Henry David) Thoreau.

S: Oh yeah! There's a quote from Thoreau which sums up a lot of how we navigate things: 'which would have advanced the most at the end of a month – the boy who had made his own jackknife from the ore which he had dug and smelted, reading as much as would be necessary for this, or the boy who had attended the lectures on metallurgy at the Institute in the meanwhile, and had received a Rodgers penknife from his father? Which would be most likely to cut his fingers?' Our practices are very much like dumb knowledge, experiencing rather than just reading about it. It's ironic that I'm quoting a book to illustrate the idea. ■

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EXHIBITIONS

June 2020
YUI-PORT, Niigata City Center for Creative Arts, Japan

September 2020
Suzu 2020: Oku-Noto Triennale, Japan

December 2020
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Robin WHITE

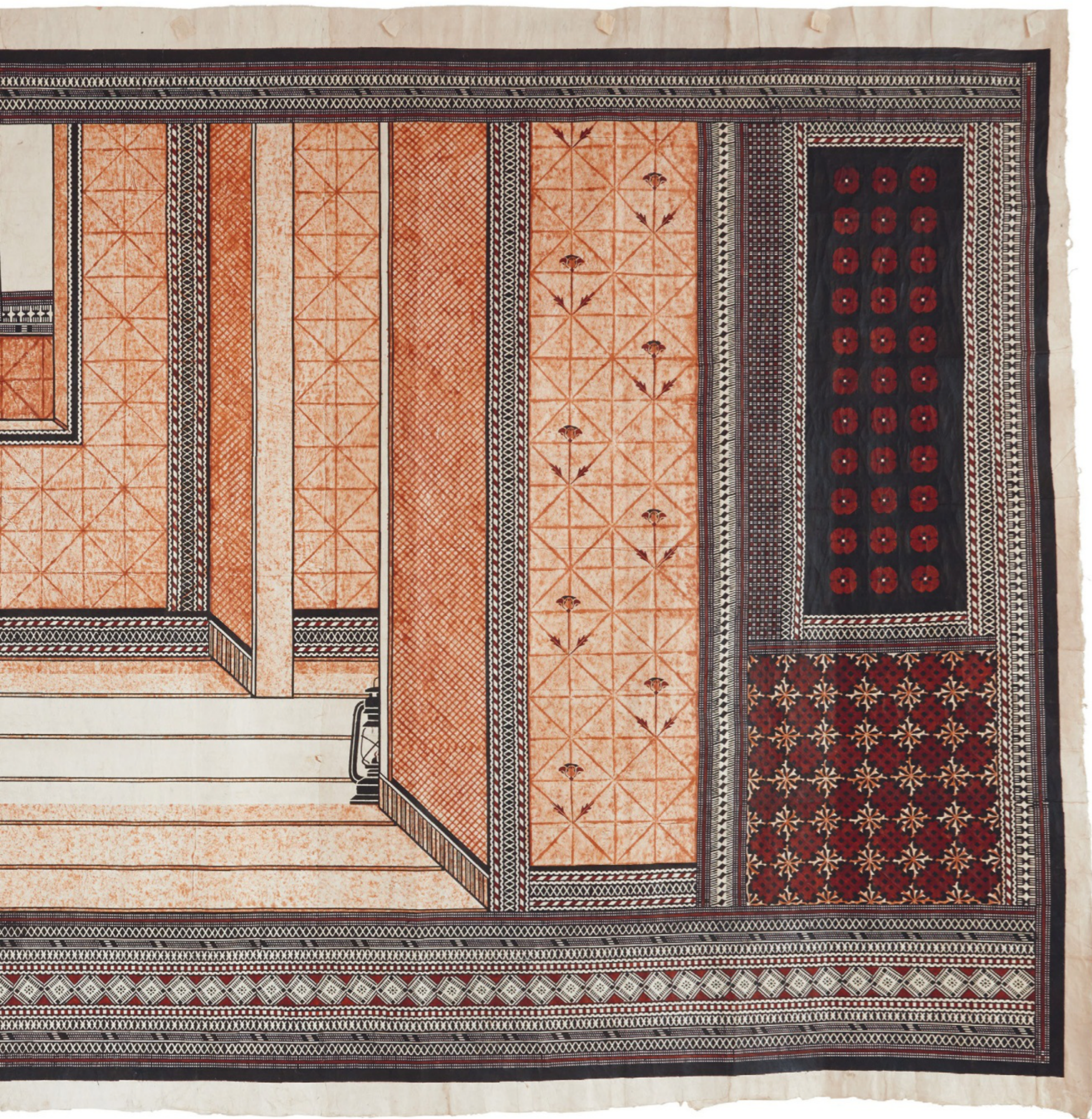
Full Circle

70

Story **KIRSTY BAKER**

01 *Hear the Voice*, 2017, barkcloth,
earth pigments, natural dye,
210 x 330 cm







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Robin White (Ngāti Awa) first came to prominence in the 1970s with her distinctive figurative representations of the landscapes and people of New Zealand. The clarity and figurative concentration of her paintings from this period, such as 1974's *Fish and Chips Maketu*, translate the local specificity of an apparently mundane subject into something both talismanic and joyful. Since then, White's practice has evolved as she has lived and travelled throughout the Pacific. In 1982 the artist moved to Kiribati, where she lived for seventeen years, leading her to experiment with a range of new media and techniques and, perhaps most significantly, opening the door to collaboration. Since moving back to New Zealand, the evolution of this collaborative mode of working has allowed White to foster a rich range of reciprocal relationships, expanding both the material and cultural parameters of her work.

It's clear that place has played a crucial role in the evolution of your practice ...

Well, place isn't just a physical thing. It's also the social context, it's

the people that I'm engaging with in that particular place – their way of life, their environment.

It strikes me that you don't take those things lightly; there's a long-term development of a relationship to a place and to its social and cultural context.

Yes, that's true. Also a familiarity with its physical features. The place provides a visual vocabulary for addressing wider concerns, broader themes. An example would be the last woodcut series I did in Kiribati, *The fisherman loses his way* (1995). It's very distinctly created within that atoll environment. You can tell from the imagery, but the theme is universal. That notion of a process of advance and growth running side by side with a process of disruption and decline within a society.

Can you talk a little about the voyage you made to the Kermadec Islands in 2011?

It was a very interesting experience for me, although I was a little uncertain to start with. I'd spent all those years living and working



“ Place isn’t just a physical thing. It’s also the social context, it’s the people ”

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at a distance from the western art scene, so I was wondering how I’d manage sharing an adventure at such close quarters with my artist contemporaries from New Zealand, and one from Australia. I also had some concerns about the time frame for making work. The voyage took about three days to get to Raoul Island. We had a couple of nights on Raoul Island and then back on the ship and about the same amount of time on to Tonga, because the ship had duties out in the Pacific. They weren’t going to bring us back to New Zealand and that suited me very well because I’d made contact earlier in the year with a young Tongan woman whom I had met at a Bahá’i summer school and it was a chance to catch up with her again.

And that was Ruha Fifita, who you went on to collaborate with in a number of projects, including 2015’s *Ko e Hala Hangatonu: The Straight Path?*

Yes, and I was so impressed with this young woman. When we first met, I’d spent time conversing with her and I could tell from the way she spoke that we had a lot in common. She was twenty at the time, and I was in my sixties. I asked her if she would be interested in working with me and she said she would love to, and so being dropped off in Tonga was a wonderful opportunity to continue those conversations.

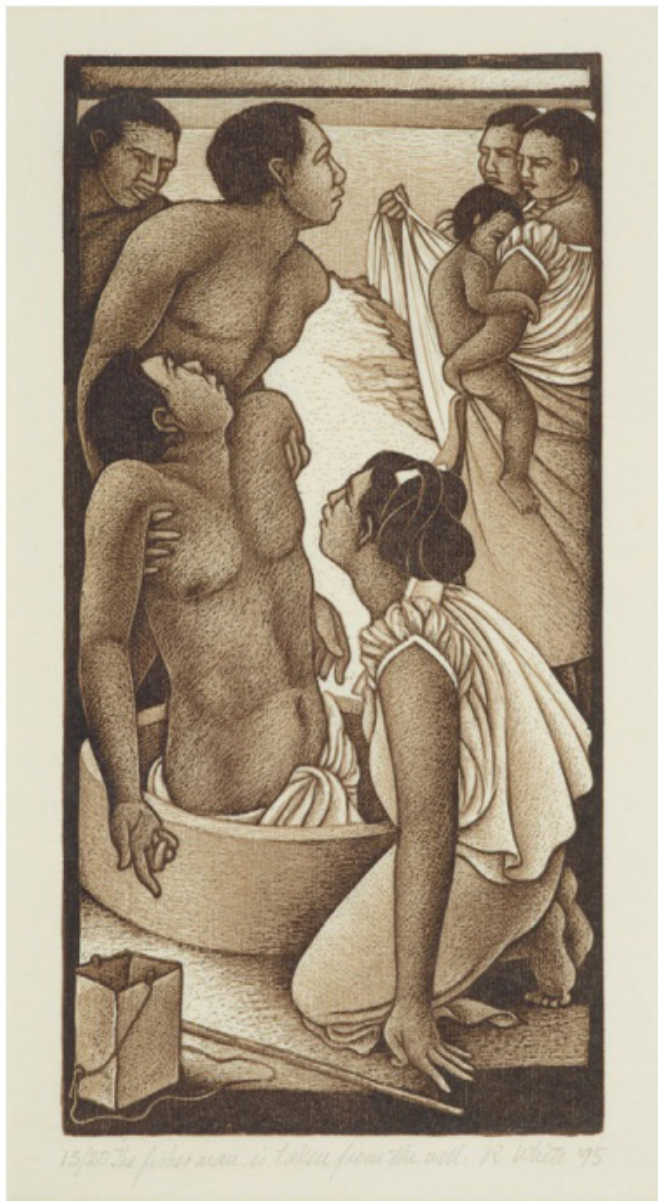
That seems to have begun a rich working relationship for you. There’s something powerful in a mode of working contingent upon human connection and reciprocity, especially across cultural and inter-generational lines. The conversations that unfold are quite rare ...

And so much fun. Actually, the first experience I had working collaboratively was in Kiribati. I was propelled into doing it because I’d lost everything in a fire that destroyed our house and my studio. I just simply had to work with what was locally available. It was an obvious decision to work with my I-Kiribati friends, on their terms and with their skills, putting their skills together with the ideas that I had. I needed them, and they enjoyed the adventure of the process, breaking away from their set ways of doing things and learning different ways of making imagery and so on. That experience was mutually very helpful and immensely enjoyable. So I came back to New Zealand after that

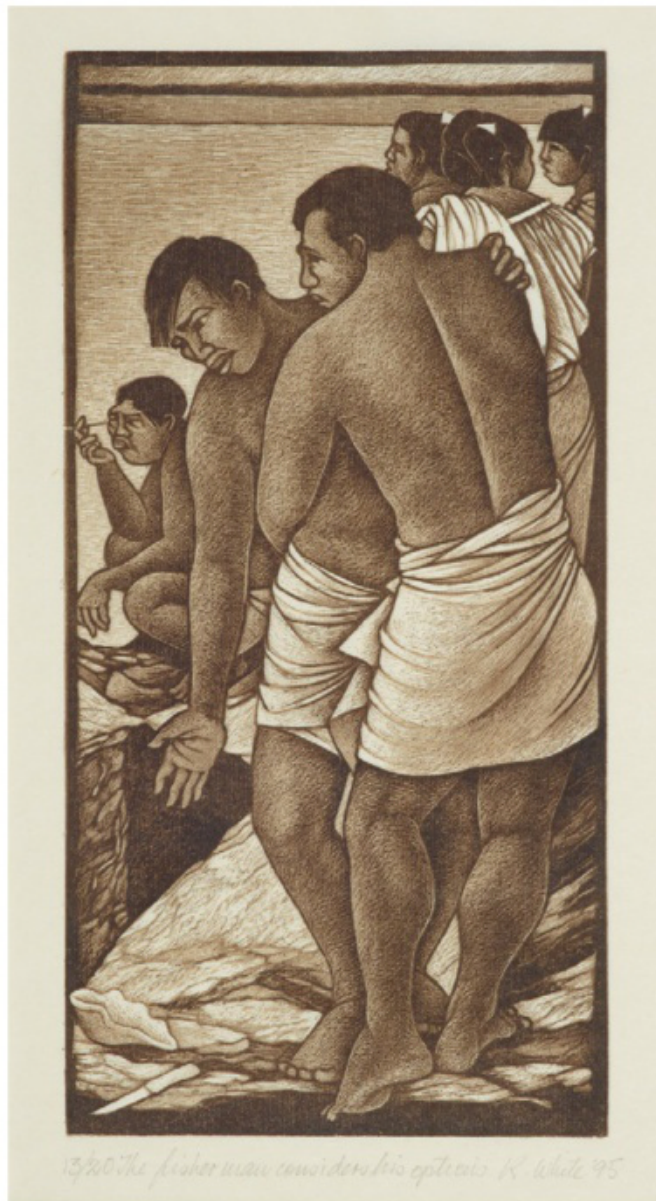
02 *Mere and Siulolovao*, 1978, screenprint, artist’s proof, 62 x 38.5 cm, Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, gifted by Robin White, 2000

03 *Morris commercial, Hokianga*, 1978, screenprint, 70.1 x 52.1 cm, purchased from Bosshards Galleries, Dunedin, Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

04 *Before, Between and Beyond All Things*, 2019, made in collaboration with Ogawa Taeko, Yoshishige Tanaka and Kentaro San, natural dyes and pigments, acrylic paint, Japanese ink on barkcloth and Flax paper, dimensions variable, photograph Russell Kleyn



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collaborative project and I was looking for opportunities to carry on working in that manner in the Pacific.

Your most recent collaboration also stretches across the Pacific, and resulted in the exhibition ‘The Day The Sun Came Down To Earth,’ at Wellington’s McLeavey Gallery in late 2019. How did you find the experience of developing a collaborative relationship in a Japanese context?

That was wonderful! Six of the paintings that I made with Ogawa Taeko – actually it was two triptychs, so two sets of three – the overall title for them was *The day the sun came down to earth*, which was a reference to the Atom bomb in Hiroshima. Three of those works were on bark cloth from Fiji and three were on paper, and they each convey a very different atmosphere. One set of works is very hopeful, the other is pretty dark. The words that Taeko san has painted have come from the *hibakusha* – the survivors of the atom bomb whom she worked with back in the 1980s.



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- 05 *The fisherman is taken from the well*, 1995, from the series 'The fisherman loses his way', woodcut, 28 x 14 cm (image), collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- 06 *The fisherman considers his options*, 1995, from the series 'The fisherman loses his way', woodcut, 28 x 14 cm (image), collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- 07 *The fisherman shows us his wound*, 1995, from the series 'The fisherman loses his way', woodcut, 28 x 14 cm (image), collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- 08 *Harbour Cone from Hooper's Inlet*, 1975, screenprint, artist's proof, 41 cm (circle), deposited 1984, Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

“ I’d always wanted to go to Hiroshima to address those ghosts ”



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That's incredible – so all of the imagery was created by you, and the calligraphy which has been overlaid was created by Taeko?

Yes. I created the architectural spaces that I invited Taeko to inhabit with her words. The *hibakusha* she had worked with were adults who, at the time of the bomb, were children and they had not been able to go back to school, so they were illiterate, and she was teaching them how to read and write. She was deeply moved by their stories and their passion for writing, and that influenced her approach to calligraphy. Taeko was trained in the Kyoto University School of Calligraphy, but she sort of moved away from – out of – that traditional mode and set herself free from the constraints of tradition in order to bring that passion to the way she works. Which has made her an outsider in a sense, you know, she's broken the rules ...

It must be such a privilege to invite people like Taeko into collaborative conversation. Is that a relationship that you'd envisage developing in the future?

I hope so, yes. And the thing about Japan, it all ties in with place as well, the significance of places in my life. Japan is a place that has been on my radar for many years. My father was a member of



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the New Zealand Peace Council and used to take me to meetings when I was a kid, in Auckland in the 1950s. I saw a film about the bombing of Hiroshima when I was only about eleven years old, and that's when my nuclear nightmares started. So I'd always wanted to go to Hiroshima and address those ghosts. And I also wanted to view the Hiroshima panels painted by Toshi and Iri Maruki. My parents had taken me to see those paintings in 1959 when they were exhibited at the Auckland Art Gallery, but I had been too scared to look at them. So I finally got to see them.

That's a remarkable full circle story! ▣

09 *On Pratt Street They Pray for Miracles*, 2017, barkcloth, earth pigments, natural dye, 100 x 72 cm

10 *The Fisherman Returns to Banaras*, 2017, barkcloth, earth pigments, natural dye, 100 x 72 cm

Courtesy the artist, McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, Two Rooms, Auckland, Hocken Collections, University of Otago, Dunedin and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington



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So it goes Peter Booth



01

Story
ASHLEY
CRAWFORD

THE 'DARK EDGE' OF PETER BOOTH'S APOCALYPTIC PAINTINGS ECHOES THE DARK EDGE OF THE ARTIST'S LIFE AND, INDEED, OF THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.



‘A lot of humans forget we are organic entities, the same as every other creature on the planet, and we’ve only been here for a short time. I am very pessimistic about the plight of human beings. We don’t learn much, I mean, we’ve been wreaking havoc as they did in the Middle Ages. We also have bigger weapons. One thing I am not pessimistic about is the ability of nature to heal itself.’

Peter Booth made this comment in a conversation we had in his sunny St Kilda backyard in November 2003, a time before climate change was claiming front pages and news specials on the television. It was the eve of his massive retrospective at the Ian

Potter Centre at the National Gallery of Victoria entitled ‘Peter Booth: Human/Nature,’ which showcased 230 of his paintings and received rave reviews.

Talking to Booth seventeen years later, the artist simply says: ‘it’s just getting worse.’

It had always been easy to read Booth’s apocalyptic imagery as throwbacks to medieval times, an heir to the dark visions of Bosch and Breughel, a form of morbid surrealism. But seventeen years later, as we see seared animals crawl out of the charred remains of forests throughout Australia, Indonesia and California, and as we



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- 01 *Painting (brown road stones trees)*, 2007, oil on linen, 121.9 x 243.8 cm
- 02 *Painting (heads)*, 2018, oil on linen, 152.5 x 243.84 cm
- 03 *Painting (landscape palm and vine leaves)*, 2018, oil on linen, 182.9 x 121.9 cm, private collection, Melbourne



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watch the seas become waste-dumps of plastic, and as we witness the dark antics of the leaders of the Western world abuse their powers, one has to wonder just how prescient Mr. Booth has been.

Booth was known as an abstractionist early in his career and his bold, black paintings were featured in 'The Field' at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968 – a show devoted to minimalist painting. Of course, this was a deceptive, simplistic reading of Booth's work. If anything, those paintings were terrifyingly accurate. Physical depictions of deep nightmares of Stygian doorways to suffocating eternal blackness created mortal and moral black holes in gallery walls, sucking in the light. They were the extreme opposite of Booth's peer (and friend) in 'The Field' Robert Hunter, whose complex, gridded patterns in white could have been read as portals into the afterlife. Booth and Hunter were the black and white of the time; equally powerful and neither,



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“Booth reminds us that painting is not dead”

strictly speaking, minimalist abstractionists. Two nuggety blokes wrestling with the void.

Booth hasn't changed a great deal over the years and still lusts after his cigars. In 2019 he carried off a blockbuster exhibition at Milani Gallery in Brisbane, which had viewers in awe. 'It went well,' he says modestly. 'They put us up at this beaut hotel on Brisbane's Southbank called Emporium. The lift was amazing – the walls would light up with videos like a giant shark coming at you! The first time I got on the lift, a young fella I thought I recognised got in and I said; 'are you Ben Quilty?' He said he was, and I introduced myself and he was extraordinarily flattering and came to see my show!'

Speaking to Booth while the bushfires still smoulder in some parts and hailstones the size of cricket balls hail down on others seems particularly apt. However, he points out that even his earliest work stems from childhood memories. 'I grew up in Sheffield in England which was heavily bombed as the Germans were trying to close down the steel mills there. That's where the early figurative subjects come from. My work has always had a dark edge, but so's my life ... I had two brothers who both committed suicide, so I think making art has acted as a form of therapy. It's always either the figure or the landscape, but the desolation in them links them all.'

Desolate, yet bleakly beautiful – as his friend and fellow painter Gareth Sansom points out. 'Peter Booth, nearing eighty, is Australia's greatest living painter,' comments Sansom. 'In 1968 in 'The Field' exhibition ... he displayed an uncanny understanding of what the curators were trying to do when he put together his minimal abstract painting, which remains – with Robert Hunter's contribution – the highlight of that exhibition. But Booth was always a masterful academic draftsman, as his still life studies earlier proved when a student at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School (the Gallery School) with teacher John Brack; so his dramatic figurative moves at Pinacotheca Gallery in 1979 shouldn't have surprised anyone. But they did – nightmare fantasies conducted in gloomy hellish night-scapes which were not for the faint-hearted.'

'Fast-forward to Milani Gallery last June, which saw Booth at the peak of his powers with especially the two major paintings, *Painting (brown road stones trees)* (2007) and *Painting (heads)* (2018),' Sansom recalls. 'Both these paintings have subtle menace slowly revealed; in other words, fraught with possibilities. He puts his paint down with a palette knife and he keeps it simple, avoiding the histrionic theatrics which so often lead showy younger artists astray. Booth reminds us that painting is not dead!'

Indeed, but that is no surprise. Even harking back to 1986, when Booth had his first New York solo show at the CDS Gallery, *New*



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York Times critic Michael Brenson stated, 'Booth is a visionary artist obsessed with superstition, transformation and light. His work is a mixture of the apocalyptic Australia of 'On the Beach' and the vast Australia that remains one of the last standing invitations to dream.'

The sense of the apocalyptic remains. Yet, even in 2020, Booth injects a flash of hope into the proceedings when, post-human, the occasional flash of verdant green nudges through the ash-stained snow.

Booth has always been prescient, but his latest works – with their angst-ridden refugees and blasted landscapes – seem, rather unfortunately, almost literal illustrations of our current news cycle. But Booth, chomping down on his inevitable Cuban cigar, simply quotes one of his favourite books, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, with the wry and fatalistic statement: 'So it goes...' ■

@peterbooth.art

04 *Painting (ladder and wall)*, 2008, oil on linen, 152.34 x 213.36 cm, private collection, Melbourne

05 *Drawing (Cyclops eating leg)*, 1982, pastel, 20 x 18 cm (sheet), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of the Rudy Komon Fund, Governor, 1985

06 *Painting*, 1977, oil on canvas, 182.5 x 304 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, gift of the artist in memory of Les Hawkins, 1978

07 *Untitled*, 1971, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 245 x 184.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane





This Vast Universe

Brendan Huntley

Story ELLI WALSH

BRENDAN HUNTLEY CREATES CERAMIC SCULPTURES AND PAINTINGS THAT SEEK TO CONJURE 'PLACES A PERSON COULD ESCAPE TO.' PLAYING WITH SURFACE, SUBJECT AND SYMBOLISM, THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY MELBOURNE ARTIST PUSHES HIS PRACTICE INTO NEW COSMIC TERRAIN.



Your Mum and Dad are artists – did you grow up knowing you'd follow this path?

Yes, it was the only way for me. My parents made their living making pots and selling them at craft markets and teaching pottery, sculpture and painting. Every year they'd have an exhibition of their higher-end pieces. They would turn the whole house into an exhibition space. Furniture moved out, paintings and drawings hung, and tables covered with linen, adorned with their pottery and sculptures. When I turned eleven I was given my own space to exhibit during one of those shows, which was a big deal for me. I got to hang my work alongside my parents' and have their friends and supporters come and see it and collect it. I would continue to do this up until I was about fifteen ... when I got into graffiti and my focus was diverted.

As the frontman of garage punk band Eddy Current Suppression Ring, you've described a freedom and wildness felt whilst performing in the band. Is there a similar sense of escapism in your art practice?

It's a different kind of escape. Being the singer and lyricist, I'm able to feed off the crowd or other members of the band. Whereas in the studio, it's a more solitary freedom. When things are really cooking, coming together, and it's feeling good, there is a certain

pull and charge that can take over my consciousness – as though I'm on another plane or in a form of deep meditation. I can go for hours before I realise I've forgotten to eat lunch and the tea's gone cold! I think any form of creation opens up the mind to venture into other realms.

Expressing ideas in music – through lyrics and vocals – is vastly different to the ways your paintings and sculptures silently materialise ideas.

One of the great things about making visual art is you don't have to explain it in words. Even if I'm dealing with darker or more challenging subject matter, I'm creating my work from a place of love and I think if I've done my job well, it should be able to exist and excite simply as a form or image, leaving it open for others to interpret as they choose. In an ideal world, be it through my lyrics or art, I'd like to imagine everybody getting down on the dance floor, even beings from outer space.

01 *Bent necks and glitter, specks (shooting star)*, 2019, glaze, underglaze, enamel, slip, bog, white raku, stoneware on form-ply dolly, 130 x 102 x 102 cm

02 Brendan Huntley, 2018, photograph Mia Mala McDonald

03 *Untitled (bright sunshiny day)*, 2018-19, patinated, polished bronze and oil paint, 70 x 61 x 7 cm, unique

04 *Untitled (primordial soup)*, 2018, glaze, slip, enamel, bog, stoneware, raku, formply, steel and wheels, 126 x 72 x 72 cm, installation view, 'Sky Light Mind' 2018, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne





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In recent years you've shifted to larger format ceramic works. What prompted this change?

After painting and sculpting heads for so long and then busts for another couple of years, I started looking outwards, beyond the human form towards landscapes or spiritual places a person could escape to. This opened up the playing field for new colour palettes and larger scale. The first large works were loosely based on drawings of hikes and camping missions my partner Ellen and I were going on. To me they also resembled elements found in outer space – like stars, planets, nebulae; the way nature can appear so alien. Or, alternatively, the way nature can resemble things that could be made in a machine.

At around the same time as the works were getting bigger, I was lucky to catch wind of a huge kiln that was for sale through a friend of a friend. It took a lot of work, assistance and energy, but



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I managed to install it in my Frankston studio. The door is wide and the main loading dock is on a dolly so I can wheel it in and out and load it far more easily than I could with my last kiln. It was a real game changer. In saying that, I've been feeling the urge to go smaller lately. It always ebbs and flows.

I'm interested in the materials you use for the stamping in your clay sculptures.

A lot of the materials I use have been in our family for many years. Stamps, rocks, carved sticks, pen lids, old tools, kitchen utensils, op shop toys, things we've all found or crafted over time. I incorporate these stamping tools into my work – it's my way of hinting at my past and also the beauty of craft and industry. On a more conceptual side, to me the repetitive stamping patterns represent our physical building blocks. Like a patchwork quilt of genetic material.

*" I like to imagine
that art can
look out for you,
bring you joy or
protection "*



Speaking of patchwork quilt, the imprints on works such as *Untitled (primordial soup)* (2018) resemble a vintage blanket, creating dialogue between soft and hard. This dualistic aspect can be seen in many of your recent sculptures, as they're in two parts. What inspired this approach?

I've always been interested in the contrast between two opposing forces. Soft and hard, organic and machine, chaos and balance etc. I find I'm constantly searching for that satisfying meeting place of the two. When brought together there's something in the unity that creates a kind of peace.

Tell me about the eye motif in your latest paintings ...

They're the windows to what's inside and out. Eyes have always played an important role in my work. I like to imagine that art (and or particular objects) can look out for you, bring you joy or protection – mainly from one's own anxieties.

You recently became a father – how has this impacted your practice?!

Well, in the lead up to his birth I found myself thinking more and more about who we are as humans and why we are here and how minute we are in the bigger scheme of things, in this vast universe. And that's lead me to the work that's been happening this last year or so – shooting stars, comets, suns and moons.

For my last show in Sydney at Martin Browne Contemporary I made a sculpture that I titled *the moon that became a sun* but in actual fact, it isn't sure if it's a moon or a sun but it's happy either

way. It has the freedom to be viewed as both or either, be it about gender, sex, life, craft or art. I feel as humans we can sometimes box ourselves in with titles and preconceived notions. Looking back at that work, it was a celebration of life and the openness that I hope can flow through my child for the rest of his life, and all people for that matter.

What's your favourite thing you've ever made, art or otherwise?!

Well right now, in a collaborative sense, even though I didn't do the hard work, I gotta say experiencing our child come into this world has really blown my mind ... it's like watching a small universe slowly explode before my eyes. ■

@brendanhuntley
brendanhuntley.com

05 *the moon that became a sun (transformation)*, 2019, glaze, underglaze, slip, terracotta, stoneware, enamel, bog, silicon, brushed chrome aluminium and steel beams, 240 x 300 x 50 cm

06 *Untitled (schism bay)*, 2017, oil on linen, 150 x 102 cm

07 *Untitled*, 2018-19, glaze, porcelain, stoneware, 16 x 12 x 12 cm

08 *Untitled*, 2018, glaze, porcelain, terracotta, 20 x 12 x 12 cm

Courtesy the artist, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne, and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

Stella



rc.

Story
JULIANNE
PIERCE

*" Art is more about affect
than information, you arrive
at your ideas intuitively "*



AFTER MANY YEARS SPENT OVERSEAS, PURSUING OPPORTUNITIES TO SUSTAIN HIS PRACTICE, RENOWNED INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST STELARC IS NOW LIVING BACK IN HIS HOMETOWN OF MELBOURNE. IT IS A BUSY TIME AS HE PREPARES A MAJOR NEW INSTALLATION *RECLINING STICK MAN* FOR THE 2020 ADELAIDE BIENNIAL, IN WHAT IS HIS FIRST EVER AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION.



03

01 Stelarc, Perth Artists 2017, photograph Peter Cheng

02 *Ear on Arm Casts*, 2011, life size casts of the ear on the artist's arm in glass, aluminium and bronze, dimensions variable, photograph Johnny Brash

03 *StickMan*, 2018, 5-hour performance, performance still, 'HyperPrometheus,' Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, 2018, photograph Steven Aaron Hughes

04 *Reclining StickMan*, 2020, studio image; work in progress, photograph Leigh Robb

05 *Reclining StickMan*, 2020, studio image; work in progress, photograph the artist



04



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Stelarc was born in Cyprus in 1946, immigrating to Victoria as a young child with his family in the 1950s. His parents had no formal education, with his father having many jobs including being taxi driver, mechanic, tailor and eventually owning a vineyard. One of five children, Stelarc was the only child to pursue a career in the arts and attributes that to a high school teacher, Lloyd Jones, and an art school lecturer, Ken Scarlet. Studying in the 1960s, his influences were John Cage, Japanese Butoh, Andy Warhol, Marshall McLuhan and, in particular, the Conceptual Art practices emerging at the time.

He says, 'I was majoring in sculpture, but then moved to performance, when I developed an interest in the body as an evolutionary architecture.' This was the beginning of his life-long investigation of the physical body as artwork, or what he calls, 'the biological apparatus that operates, interacts and becomes aware in the world.'



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Following art school, he moved to Japan in 1970 and was increasingly influenced by elements of Japanese culture which investigate heightened and transformative states of being. He cites Sumo Wrestling, Butoh dance and Japanese Robotics as systems which, he says, 'explore very different types of bodily constructs.'

Butoh – which emerged in Japan after the Second World War – is what Stelarc calls, 'a post catastrophic body dance performed in insect and animal-like ways, with minimal and micro movements and contorted facial expressions, it generates a bodily ambivalence, anxiety and uncertainty.' He was also informed by the Gutai group, who similarly emerged in post-war Japan exploring relationships between body, matter, time, and space.

This Japanese exploration of states of being and physical limitations propelled Stelarc to interrogate the limits of his own body and physicality. From 1976 to 1988 he completed twenty-six body suspension performances with hooks into the skin. These are works which attracted much attention, both as live events and as video and photographic documentation of him suspended high above city streets, over crashing waves or in gallery spaces.

Stelarc describes this significant body of work as almost accidental, stating, 'art is more about affect than information, you arrive at your ideas intuitively.' Though he originally thought he would only do one suspension, Stelarc 'would then think about the body in different positions, or in a remote location or alternative situations, that would generate different and unexpected possibilities to actualise.'

It is hard to comprehend how Stelarc overcomes the pain factor and mental strain of these suspension works and he does admit that some elements are challenging, commenting 'when I was suspended sixty metres above the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, I had to initially close my eyes because I'm scared of heights. All I could hear was the whirring of the crane motor, the whooshing of the wind and the creaking of the skin.'

Over his significant career spanning more than fifty years, Stelarc has become renowned for his endurance and often extreme performances and live actions. Whilst the body is almost always central to these events, it is often sound and audio that are the driving elements behind his work. The artist explains, 'with a desire to incorporate sound in the performances, the idea to amplify body signals such as brainwaves, heartbeat, blood-flow and muscle signals resulted in a cacophony of sounds. The performance began when the body was switched and ended when the body was switched off.'

Stelarc is compelled to not only explore the limits of the body, but also its internal world – the visceral components that lie beneath skin and sinew. For the Fifth Australian Sculpture Triennial in 1993 Stelarc worked with a jeweller, a micro-surgery instrument maker and a musician to create an internal sculpture for the stomach. This elegant object made from biocompatible gold, silver and stainless steel was inserted down the esophagus into the inflated stomach. The sculpture opened and closed, extended and retracted, had a flashing light and a beeping sound. 'A sculpture

“ There are sounds of compressed air, muscles expanding and compressing, exhausting and extending ... ”



07

not for a public space but for a private, physiological space.’ The theme of the triennial was site-specific works.

This ambitious project was, as with his *Ear On Arm* surgeries, however, thwarted by medical risks and complications. Stelarc stoically comments, ‘I have generally made a career out of being a failure, nothing turns out the way that I plan or would have hoped. Having said that, it is the slippage between the intention and the actual outcome that makes the artwork surprising and interesting.’

Many would refute that Stelarc is a failure; in fact he has achieved significant success, especially internationally where he has been supported through residencies and projects in research and academic environments. He admits that he has had to be opportunistic to maintain his practice, and seek collaborators, funders and supporters. He has received limited arts and institutional funding support and awards in Australia, but has mainly lived and worked overseas.

In 1997 he was appointed Honorary Professor of Art and Robotics at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh. He was Artist in Residence for Hamburg City in 1997 and Principal Research Fellow in the Performance Arts Digital Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University, UK, from 2003 to 2007. In 2002 the artist was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws by Monash University, and the Ars Electronica Hybrid Arts Prize, Austria, in 2010. Stelarc received the Australia Council’s Emerging and Experimental Arts Award in 2015, and in 2016 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the Ionian University, Corfu. These examples of Stelarc’s national and international recognition reveal his profound impact on interdisciplinary performance practice and media arts worldwide.

He is pleased now to be back in Australia and delighted to receive the Adelaide Biennial commission to produce a new large-scale installation. To be presented at the Art Gallery of South Australia,

Reclining StickMan is a nine metre interactive sculpture that is manipulated by the audience using a touch-screen 3D model.

Stelarc describes the installation as, ‘literally a monstrously scaled-up and amplified stick figure, made of aluminium and animated by bundles of pneumatic rubber muscles. There are sounds of compressed air, muscles expanding and compressing, exhausting and extending, which register the anatomical-like bending of the limbs.’ The audience can access and animate the figure virtually and remotely.

Stelarc will perform in the installation for five continuous hours where his body is attached to the large stick figure – ‘a kind of contemporary pieta of a small body attached to a large robot.’ Pneumatic joysticks will allow the artist to insert his own choreography, whilst the *Reclining StickMan* will be manipulated by the audience in the gallery and also by a remote audience as the project is streamed live for interaction twenty-four hours a day.

Whilst *Reclining StickMan* is a new work, for Stelarc it is the next iteration in an ongoing interrogation of the parameters of the physical and robotic body. ‘Each artist has to find their own direction then persist in their practice, obsessively elaborating on their actions’, he says, ‘that’s what makes art interesting.’ ■

@stelarcstelarc
stelarc.org

EXHIBITION

2020 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Monster Theatres
29 February to 8 June 2020

Reclining StickMan will be performed on 29 February and 3 April 2020
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

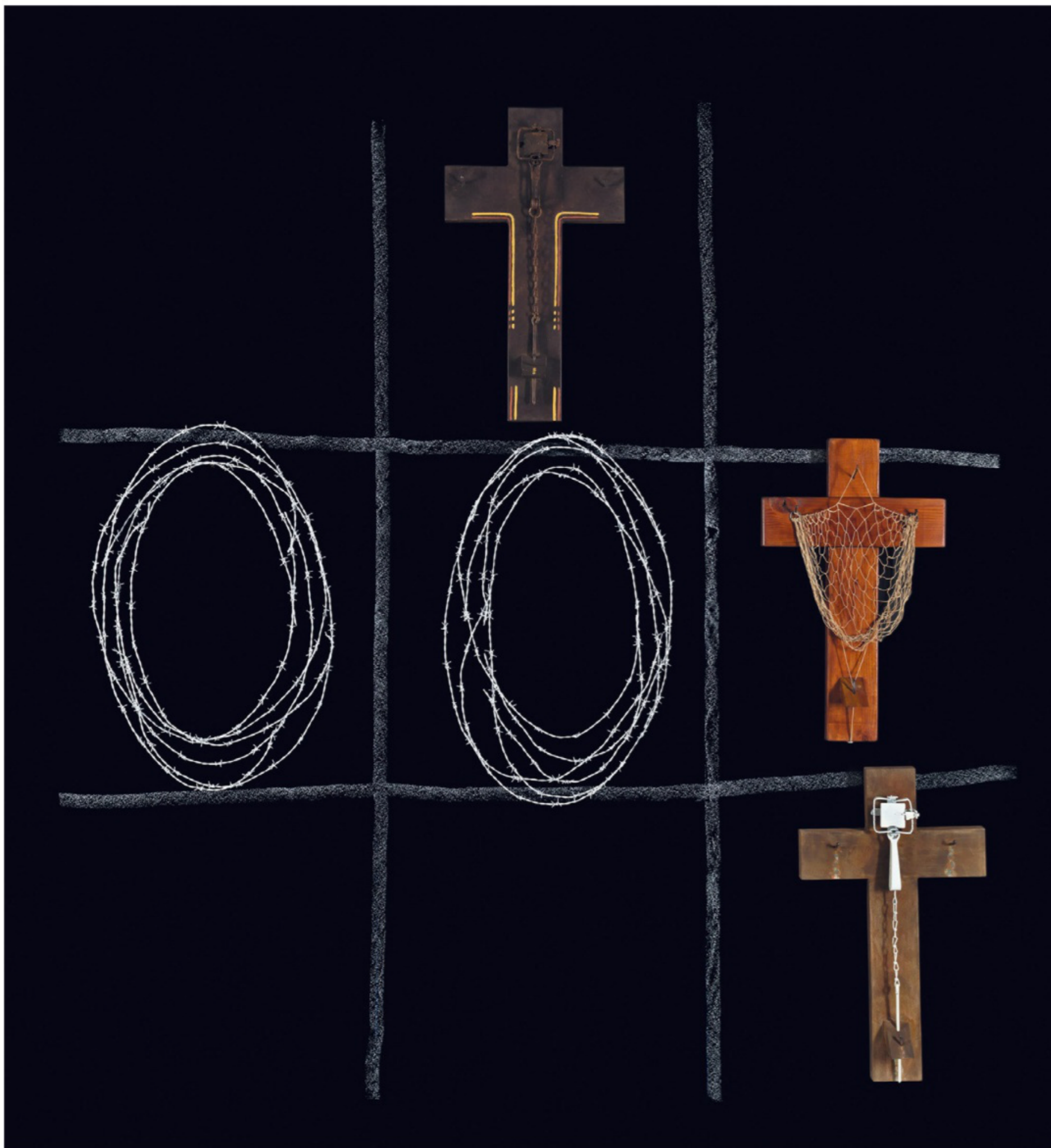
06 *Ear on Arm Suspension*, 2012, sculpture and performance, performance still, Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne, 2012, photograph Polixeni Papapetrou

07 *Stomach Sculpture*, 1993, sculpture inserted into the artist’s inflated stomach, performance still, Fifth Australian Sculpture Triennale, NGV, 1993, photograph Anthony Figallo Stelarc
Courtesy the artist and Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne



Laurie Nilsen

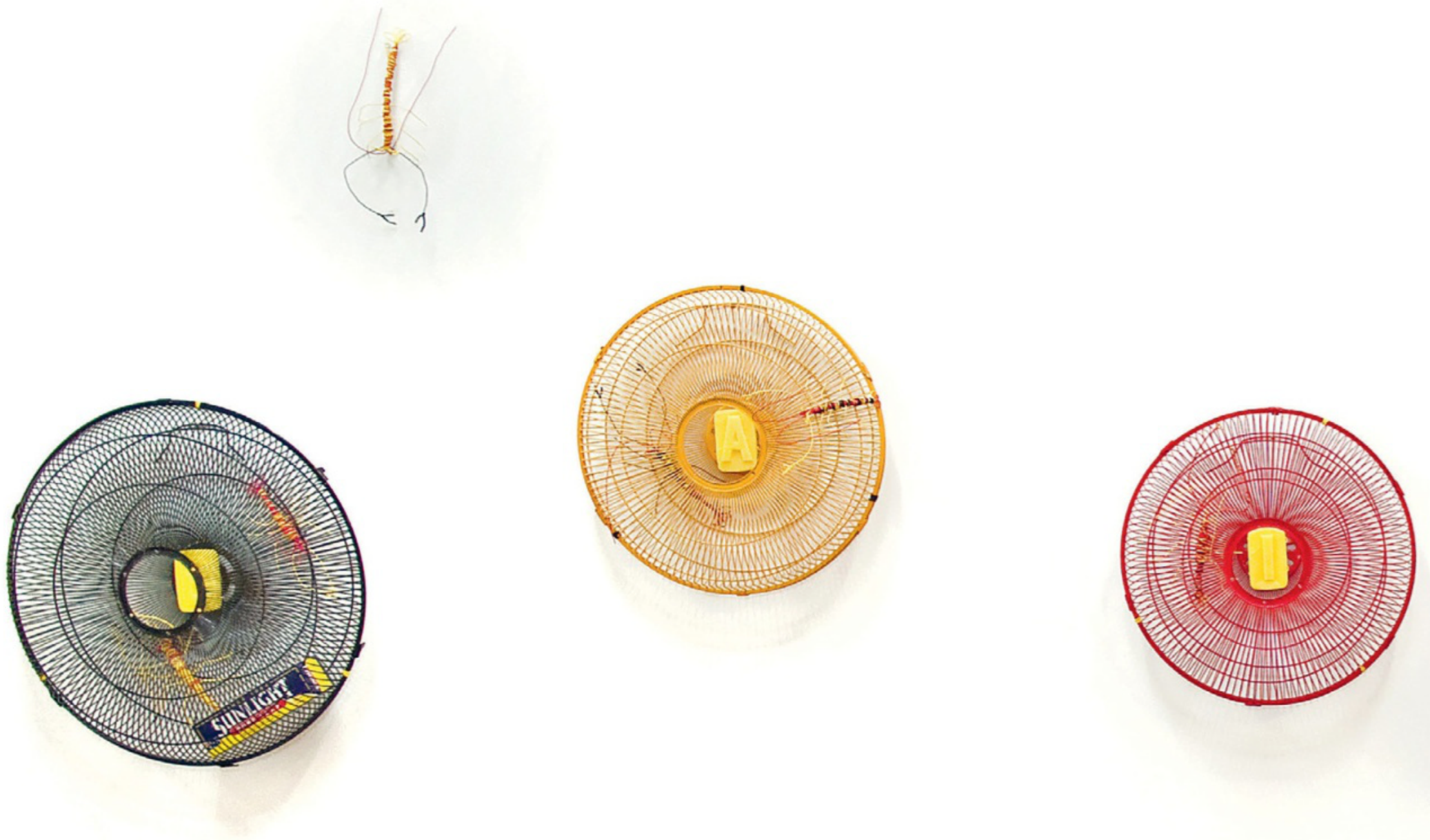
'She's been good to me, Pauline'



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The eldest of thirteen children, Laurie Nilsen was born in 1953 and grew up in a tent in the public camping reserve on the banks of Bungil Creek, Roma, south-west Queensland. As a teenager he moved to Brisbane to pursue a career as a jockey. He then established himself as commercial artist and printer, before completing a Bachelor of Arts and securing a successful career as professional artist. Nilsen was a co-founder of Fireworks Gallery and a founding member of the Campfire Group of Artists and proppaNOW Artists Collective. For over twenty-five years he has been a lecturer in the Bachelor of Contemporary Australian Indigenous Arts course at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. In his own words, Nilsen tells Michael Aird about his life and career.

Story **MICHAEL AIRD** Photography **MICK RICHARDS**



In the 1980s I would have been the only Aboriginal commercial artist in Queensland. It was a time when Aboriginal Departments and organisations were starting up and I was picking up the work designing logos. I worked in the Aboriginal Education Unit, based in Inala, which was an independent unit within State Education. I built it up from working with a little print machine, to a full-on publication unit. We could print, collate, book-bind; we could do everything. I was illustrating books from all over Queensland, in particular the Aboriginal community schools. We were not supposed to be returning a profit, but I was pouring the money back into the business and that is how I built it up. I employed four staff and they were getting paid from the revenue that we were raising. It was a pretty good little unit. That was until GoPrint, the government printer, put a stop to us getting all this printing work.

I moved to Victoria in 1988. I thought here is a chance to spend some time getting serious about my art. One day I went for a wander about the bush and there was this art college I didn't know existed. It was part of the Gippsland Institute and is now within Monash University. I walked around and talked to a couple of lecturers and students, and thought that I wouldn't mind using this place for a while. I had an interview and they said I could get my Bachelor of Arts in two years, as I already had a Certificate in Commercial Illustration. I enrolled and had access to some great lecturers and printmakers. In 1990 I walked away with a BA. I've never been worried about bits of paper, but I am really glad I did that.

In 1989 I was up from Victoria on holidays visiting family in Roma, when Marshall Bell and Michael Eather came and met with me. They told me about the 'Balance' exhibition that they

were planning for the Queensland Art Gallery. I said I had a little artwork and they were interested. I made these axe-heads while I had access to the foundry at the college at Gippsland. That was the first time I cast in metal. If you look at that work, there is a traditional axe-head one side and drawing in the background of some scar-trees, significant sites. On the other side is the European axe and a drawing of the devastation that the European axe has done, in clearing land. It is only a small piece, but politically loaded. When Michael Eather saw it, he decided it would be a good piece for the 'Balance' exhibition.

That was the start of a really good relationship with both of them. It was funny when I took Eather down to Bungil Creek and showed him where I grew up in the camping ground. He said, 'we have a lot in common, we should catch-up and go camping.' I said, 'why would I want to go camping; I just showed you where I spent fifteen years camped in a tent!' Marshall and me, we never crossed paths when we were young. Him and his brother Richard lived up the road in Mitchell, which is only eighty kilometres away.

I helped organise the artist conference in Yarrabah in 1992. Michael Eather, Richard Bell and especially Marshall Bell did a lot of work to organise that conference. Lots of things came out of it, and one of them was the discussion to start a Bachelor of Indigenous Visual Arts at the Queensland College of Art (QCA). When the

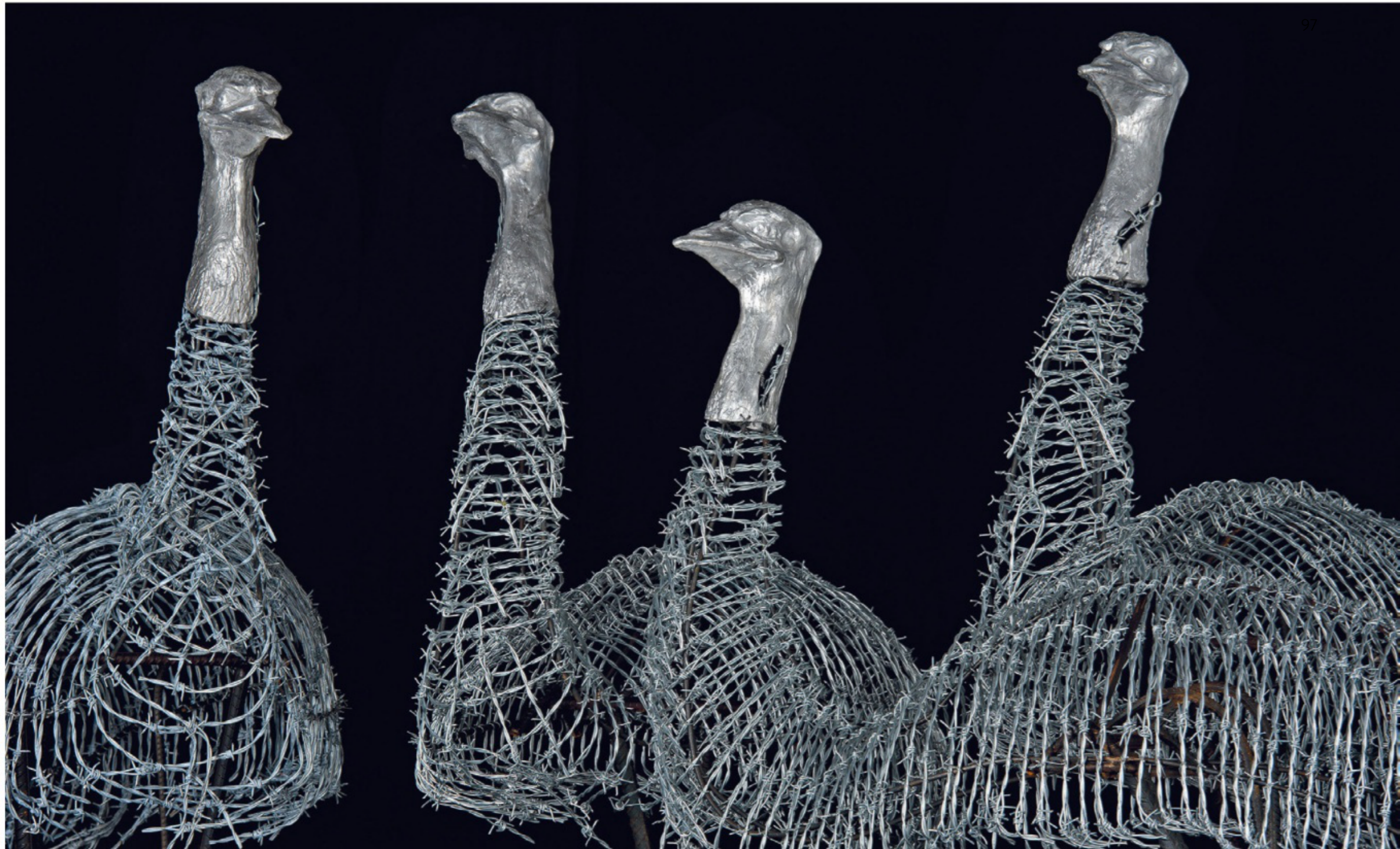
01 *Unfinished games II*, 2013, timber, steel, barbed wire, black board paint and chalk, 300 x 500 x 15 cm

02 *Baited*, 2010, 6 fan covers, electrical wire and sunlight soap, dimensions variable

03 *Barbed wire Emus*, 2013, aluminium, steel and barbed wire, dimensions variable



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04

" I started to use barbed wire for political works ... It was all about the hierarchy of how Pauline sees the world and Aboriginal people "



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course started, my Bachelor of Arts placed me in a prime position to become a lecturer. I ended up teaching at QCA for twenty-five years. When you have a set of skills, you have something to pass on. We all have a duty to do that. It is good to be able to pass that knowledge on. Some of the old skills, you cannot learn anymore.

In 1993 Marshall Bell and I had taken a show to Finland. Before leaving we had organised a prisoner's exhibition at a gallery called Space Plentitude, in George Street (Brisbane). We were all looking forward to that. It was our first big exhibition working with a broad range of community members. It was much bigger than the small exhibition space we had been using at the Spring Hill Baths (Queensland). It was really hard, trying to work with four or five different prisons who all had different rules and regulations. When we got back from overseas we met with Steve Alderton, who worked at Space Plentitude. He told us the bad news, that the gallery committee had disbanded and the show couldn't happen. We were worried about the fifty or more artists that were going to

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be really disappointed. But then Steve said that he has the keys to the building – we could put the power back on and have the show. So we did; we went ahead. It was a big community turn-out.

After the show we were all pleased with how everything went. Then we decided to stay in the gallery. The landlord lived in Singapore so we found his bank account details and just managed to find enough money to pay the rent, we were there for a few months before we let him know he had new tenants. So that's how Fireworks Gallery started. It started by default.

A lot my art is about real life stuff. I first discussed Pauline Hanson in a 1997 show called 'Black Humour,' soon after Pauline came on the political scene. I started to use barbed wire as medium for political works, when I made the Pauline Hanson fish. It was all about the hierarchy of how Pauline sees the world and Aboriginal people, with herself at the top. So the fish got less ugly as you went down. Pauline, she just keeps going forever. Just when you think she has run out of ammunition; she will come up with another one of her really dumb comments that she is really good at. Then I might get a bit more mileage out of her. She's been good to me, Pauline, over twenty years of producing art about her.

I have made about thirty barbed-wire emus, so I have lost track of where they have all ended up. Emus are near and dear to me; they are my totem. I grew up seeing them perish the way they do. There is not a lot you can do about it. It's just the way it is. They are awkward. A kangaroo or a wallaby can either jump over or crawl under a barbed wire fence. But poor-old emu, they can smell the water and all they want to do is get a drink. They will pace up and down that fence for days trying to get through, then they make the fateful decision to step through the top two rungs, because that is the height they are. As they trip through, their leg gets caught. The more they struggle the tighter it gets. They always get hung up by one leg. I came across thirty in a fence once, fifteen were dead and fifteen I had to be put out of their misery. I didn't have a rifle that day, I used to carry a little 22, just to shoot some bush-tucker. I had to go and cut a good stick from a sapling and go along and put them out of their misery. It was the right thing to do as they would have just lay there for another day or two and died a horrible death.

When I graduated, my boss used to take delight in telling the station owners that I had just finished my Bachelor of Arts degree. I had a reputation of being a good axe-man, but they would say, 'did you go get a degree so you could come out here and swing an



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axe?' It has taken me a long time to get to where I am now, with my whole income generated from art. I wear different hats, and one of those hats is lecturing. Some of it is commissioned work, but all art related. It is a good position to be in. Heaps of times I have considered giving up art and getting a boring job. That is what I used to do at different times, drop out and go get a job in construction, 'cause that always pays so well. It would not take me long to pay my credit card off, so I could come back and do art again. I always knew I would be back doing art.

I love the art industry. I love the people. It is one of those industries where there are not many arseholes. In the art world, you get some weird people of course, but it is not like some industries where they will cut your throat. Most people are pretty good. You don't set out to be an artist and make a living out of it. It is just something you like to do, and with people you like to work with. If it gets to a point where you can make a living out of it, well that's a bonus. The primary thing is that we love doing it, and that is why we do it. ■

 @nilsendesign

EXHIBITION

'One Day at a Time'
Until 21 March 2020
Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane

04 *Once were fishermen I*, 2014, mixed media, 75 x 219 x 75 cm

05 Campfire Group artists, *Fish & Chips* (detail – *Canned Ideologies*), 1997-98, canned foods, printed labels, dimensions variable, National Museum of Australia collection

06 *There goes my neighbourhood III*, 2007, pastel and acrylic on canvas, 180 x 150 cm

07 *Two axes*, 1989, bronze, timber, string and mixed media, 30 x 40 x 5 cm, Queensland Museum collection

Courtesy the artist and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane

Madeleine Kelly

CAN U DIG IT?

Story
KIM GUTHRIE

Photography
ANNA KUČERA



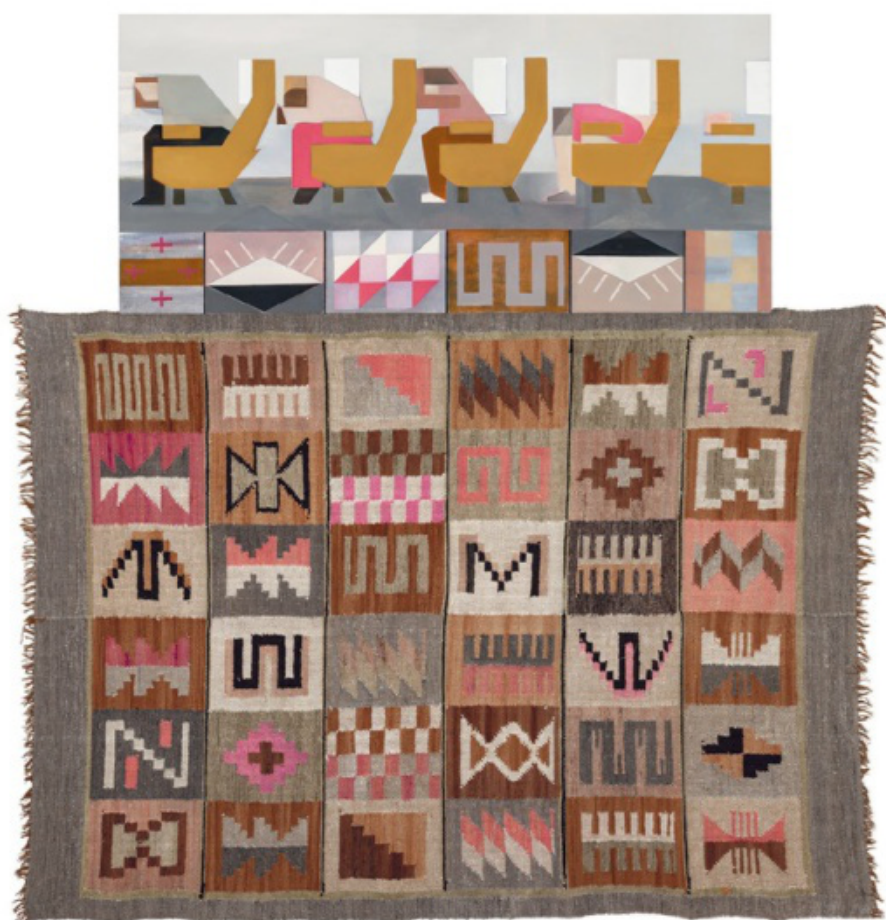


AN INTIMIDATING INTELLECT, MADELEINE KELLY FLIRTS WITH POVERTY OF MEANS, INVESTIGATES THE MIRACULOUS COMPLEXITY OF BACK-TO-BASICS COLOUR AND LIGHT THEORY, AND EXAMINES 'THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL METAPHOR AS AN IMAGE-LADEN AND MUTABLE TERRAIN.'



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Art is a fascinating thing. What is it? Is it man explaining to others what he sees, how he feels, his truth, his place in the cosmos? It can be. *Can U Dig It?* immediately popped into my head when I was looking at Madeleine Kelly's densely populated and challenging oeuvre. It's a track by Pop Will Eat Itself – an independent British genre-ambiguous band, mixing industrial, dance, hip hop, techno and hard rock styles; a sampler of cool pop culture, a swirling archeology of references. To a student of the visual arts, Kelly's work is a veritable feast. There's a palpable intellectual rigor at work here, which isn't surprising given she's an academic with a PhD currently lecturing in painting at The University of Sydney.

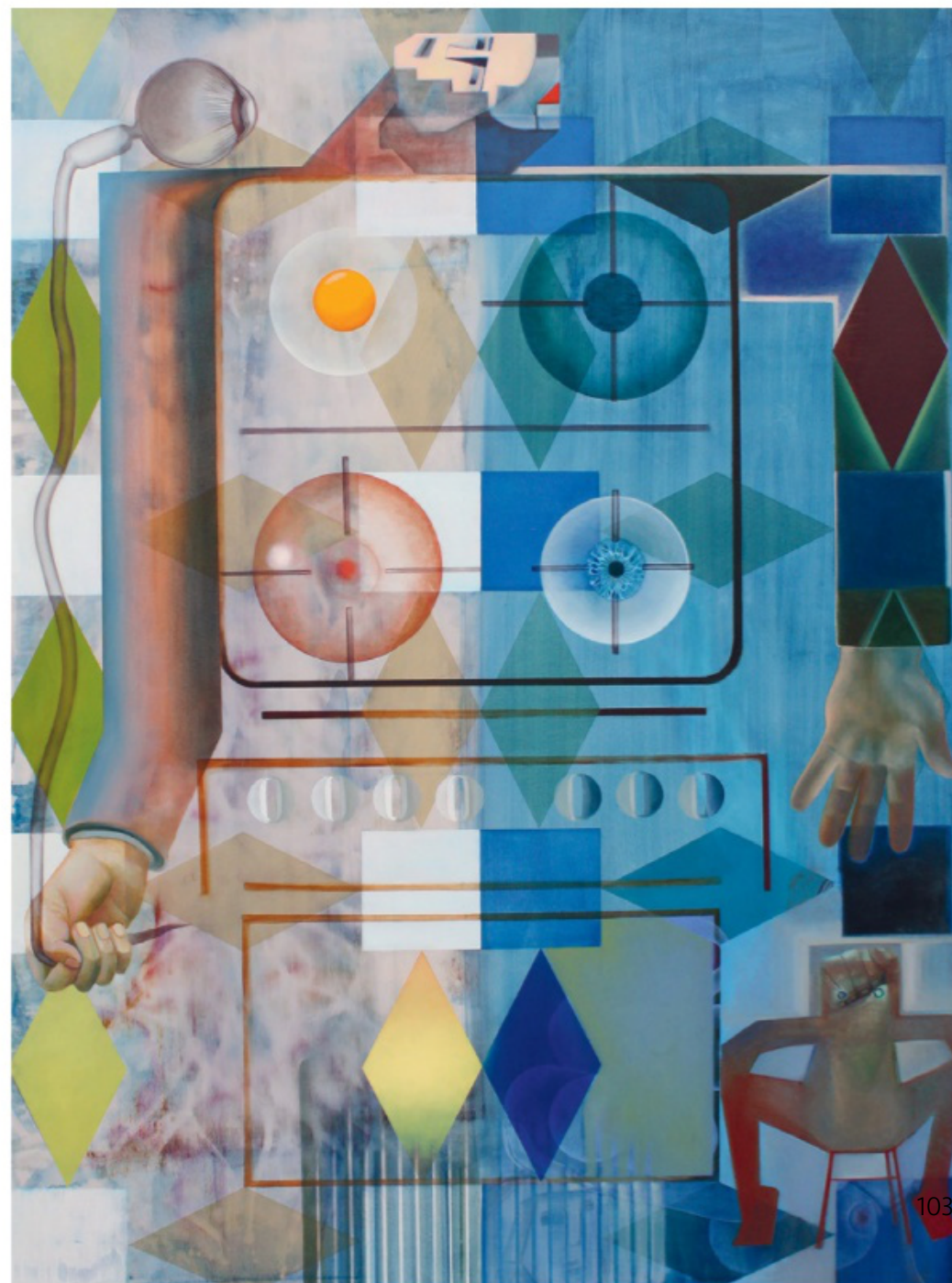
Kelly's left wing Catholic academic parents met while studying at Harvard University Boston, Massachusetts. She was born in Freising, Bavaria, while her Australian-born plant biochemist father and Peruvian-born, Spanish/English interpreter mother



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were living and working there. Kelly arrived in Australia in 1980 and studied Fine Art at the Queensland College of Art in 1999, where she gained a practice-led PhD in 2013.

Her work embodies a cornucopia of diverse references, which is as engaging as it is thrilling to unearth. Prominent among these are the Mexican muralists who share a political and social message referencing their heritage; the indigenous tribal arts of Central America. Early twentieth century modernism also looms large in her output, including Orphism or Orphic Cubism, an art movement founded in France (the most notable artist proponents of Orphism were husband and wife Sonia and Robert Delaunay, and the painter František Kupka). A further examination of colour theory comes from the Bauhaus in Germany – especially the work of Josef Albers, whose wife Anni Albers elevated the traditional craft of rug making to the status of a fine art, inspired in part by Andean rug design. The use of non-traditional art materials championed by the Arte Povera movement and Dadaists is also at play in Kelly's work, which engages with the formal, environmental and social concerns present in many of these movements.



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The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Kelly's biochemist father specialised in plant photosynthesis. Carbon dioxide, water and light are all needed for photosynthesis to take place. In her own teaching Kelly has extracted pigments from plant petals in an exercise with students. Light and pigmentation are major obsessions in her practice; how it affects the ways we see colour. She cannily weaves experiments into her teaching program that holistically inform her personal practice.

From the exhibition 'SPIN OUT, SPUN IN' at Brisbane's Milani Gallery in 2019, the kinetic work *Mama Oculo* (2019) takes us back to the basics of art education. Kelly subverted an amusing medley of sophisticated colour theory-dense fine art with the mundane by co-opting the colour wheel and applying this instructional diagram from her teaching work. She animated circular elements of segmented colour into an unnerving grid

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- 01 *Me and my rhythm box*, 2019, oil and acrylic on polyester, 111.5 x 152 cm
 - 02 *The Passengers*, 2019, oil on canvas and wool textile from Peru, 168 x 160 cm (overall)
 - 03 *Axis of dream*, 2019, oil on polyester, 152 x 111.5 cm
 - 04 *Allowable forms and unconscious facts*, 2018, acrylic and oil on polyester, 137 x 101 cm



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*“ The harmonic vibration and wailing sound suggests
humanity’s low blow on natural systems ”*

of spinning discs transmuted into a hypnotic programmed stop/start mechanism of individual mixer discs whirring in a programmed hue cycle of cosmic effects; a heavily disoriented academic phantasmagoria of generative hi-fi pigment and light. Kelly points out that, 'Mama Occló, a fertility goddess, taught women the art of spinning thread. Her magical pre-modern origin reflects the generative revolutions of the structure. In this work, light is a metaphoric thread of vibrant transitions reflected from spinning different parts of the coloured spectrum, yet the harmonic vibration and wailing sound suggests humanity's low blow on natural systems. This work also finds precedents in recent projects with similar rotating disks by Tobias Rehberger and Olafur Eliasson, and references Marcel Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* (1926) and *Rotoreliefs* (1935), and Sonia and Robert Delaunay's vibrant Orphic compositions.'

Kelly shakes down the past to inform the current zeitgeist, excavating, adapting and adopting discoveries, moving them forward incrementally. She samples and mixes her own cultural history with formal and academic concerns to produce images that are new yet somehow familiar.

In her ongoing *Bird Projects* (2014–19), the artist takes a generic object as an armature and a geographic location: the humble milk carton. She then applies encaustic colour and samples forms from endemic bird species in a cut-up Cubist rap, breakdancing across the floor of the gallery space. Kelly explains, 'I have subjected the birds' bodies to expressionist distortions – they are squeezed or trapped into the rectilinear architecture of milk cartons. They become artefactual hybrids – half animal, half cultural object, severed into the language of minimal colour abstraction.'

We are all passengers in life; an idea that's been mined in all of the arts. Kelly's assemblage *The Passengers* (2019) – from the exhibition 'What the Centre Cannot Hold' at Ipswich Art Gallery – is constructed from a painting on canvas oddly combined with a Peruvian rug. The stretched canvas depicts a cut-away view of an aircraft fuselage, and seated within it are abstracted pictogram airline passengers – calling to mind the didactic instructional cards stowed in the seat pockets of passenger planes. Are the passengers in the brace-position or asleep? Is the plane about to crash? Either way, it's ominous. The viewer is trapped in the claustrophobic nightmare of a long-haul flight. The grid of characters arranged in orderly rows juxtaposes the naturally pigmented Peruvian rug, whose motifs traditionally serve a similar instructional purpose. About *The Passengers*, Kelly comments, 'I'm intrigued by the logic of textiles – or myth – the way that inversions, oppositions and reversals of the same symbols often create a kind of syntax. I am inspired by the way abstract symbols create meaning and compositional logic, through their interconnecting patterns and sometimes typological imagery ... I often feel a sense of not always being in



control of humanity's fate, and being up high in an airplane is a vulnerable place to be; one where we must relinquish control.'

Maybe art is a personal archeological dig. A rabbit-hole down into the deepest depths of the self and the art world, picking apart and re-evaluating past discoveries and personal history – an enquiry into art's very materiality, the stuff of its construction – in order to reveal or understand something else. ■

@madeleine_kelly
madeleinekelly.com.au

EXHIBITION

'Madeleine Kelly: Open Studio'

30 May to 5 October 2020

Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

05-06 *Mama Occló*, 2019, acrylic on polyester, aluminium composite, board, stepper motors, 179.4 x 184 cm, 2 parts, technical advisor: John Tonkin

Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane



Story
LUKE
SCIBERRAS



Peter Kingston
Take it or leave it



02

THERE ARE 'ISMS', MOVEMENTS AND 'SCHOOLS-OF' IN THE ARTISTIC VOCABULARY THAT, OVER TIME AND WITH COMPELLING EVIDENCE, END UP STICKING LIKE GLUE. ONE OF THESE MAY AS WELL BE 'KINGO.'

The eye, the aesthetic lens of artists, has made an indelible impression upon our everyday.

A motorway overpass is very Jeffrey Smart, a hillside of saplings is rather Fred Williams, a backlit side-table covered in flowers is just so 'Olley.' So too, the glisten on Sydney's magnificent harbour with, for example, a retreating ferry is entirely 'Kingo.'

Such is the tenacity of Peter Kingston's drive that he has realised countless expressions of Luna Park, tug boats, mists, seasons and crepuscular rays of light, rope throwers on Circular Quay, vintage trains, the Phantom, Superman ... the list goes on. Many of these have come to remind us not only of our own quaint past but (very cleverly) of his. We are lassoed into the wonderful world of 'Kingo.'

Take it or leave it, there is an uncompromising focus and a singular edge to these works – in whichever form they take. Though he leads us back toward his favourites among vintage popular culture, one couldn't really class Kingston as a Pop artist; his work is too unique, too nuanced for that. Moreover his work has a memory of its own – charcoal is lost and found, paint is applied and removed, a shadow or pentimento exists to always remind us that there's a back-story, creating a slight imperfection around the image that leaves most of Kingston's work far from slick.

The tone running through Kingston's art has a nostalgic command which is at once an invitation and an instruction. It is 'Remember this?' or 'Remember this!!' – be sure to savour, to share and to make an expression of something and you make it last a little longer. One of the artist's most basic urges is to share a story or a moment through an image, and that urge is seen no more keenly than in the huge body of work by Peter Kingston. The things in life that are most fleeting, in peril or whimsical, are paradoxically Kingston's strongest and recurring motif.

Weatherboard houses at Hill End, tearooms in India, wharves, cinemas doomed to the wrecking ball, childhood memories and indeed a sense of humour in itself are some of the endangered species Kingston has salvaged with the scratch and smudge of his distinctive painterly salutes. Kingston's restless hand etches, spills, articulates and smears the most iconic and the most ephemeral, giving us a glimpse into the world of the artist – a born artist.

Kingo is an incessant witness to some of the views, surfaces and details which might easily be overlooked by those of us with not such a honed sensibility. Along with the unmistakable appeal of Kingston's sentimental inflections comes a lifetime of absolutely fearless campaigns to champion his heroes and to fight the good fight against those who threaten that which he holds dear. This by



03

"The artist's most basic urge is to share a story or a moment through an image"

-
- 01 *Passing ferries*, 1999, oil on canvas, 180.5 x 360 cm
 - 02 *Nightfall, Cremorne Point*, 2004, oil on canvas, 130 x 236 cm
 - 03 *Sydney Queen changes course*, 1995, oil on canvas, 184 x 240 cm
 - 04 *Study for 'Big Saturday'*, 1993 oil on canvas, 65 x 86 cm



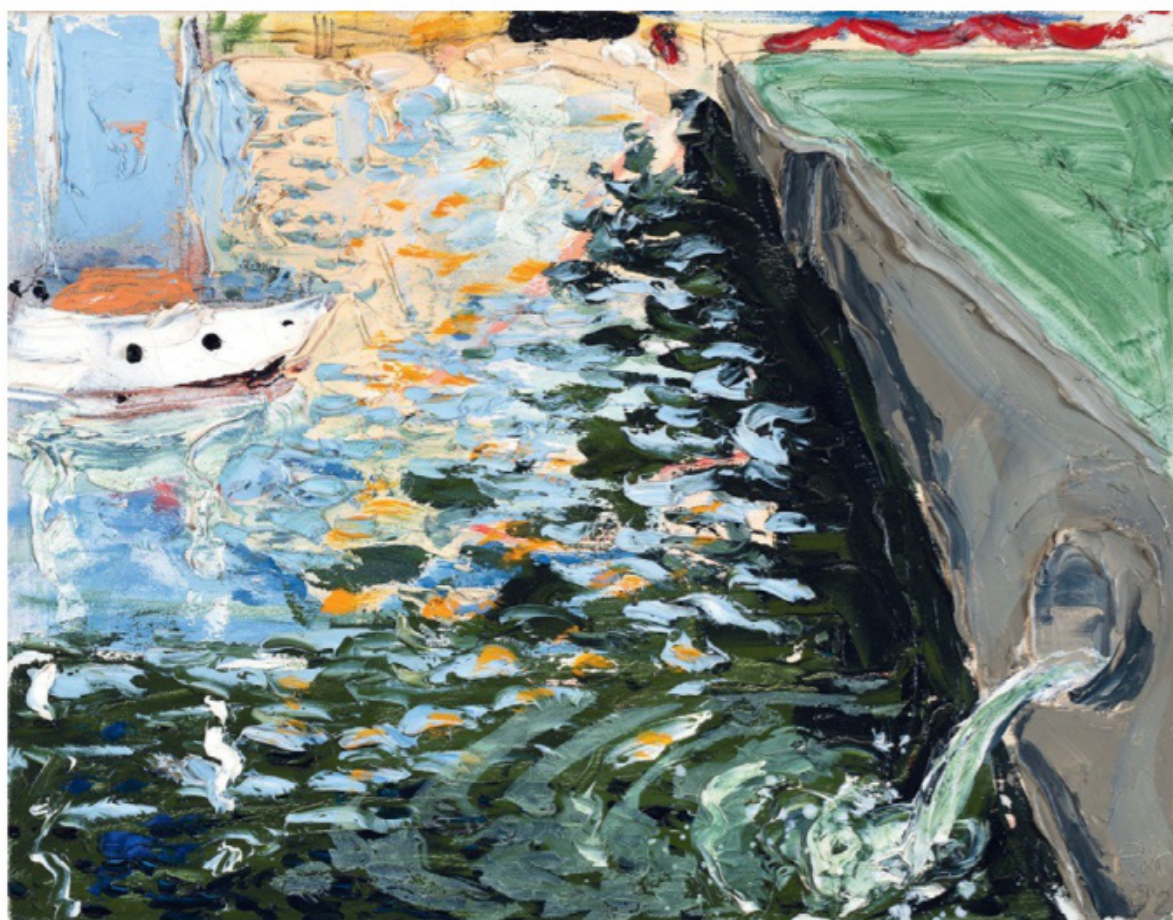
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“ Kingston’s work is obsessive and compulsive ”



08

no means comes from the consternation of a man of a certain age; it is in his every fibre, as shown in his earliest satirical cartoons for the University of NSW student newspaper *Tharunka*, and later *OZ* magazines in the 1960s.

He is one of the very few artists who embeds a political or wry tone into almost every work he makes, however tacit or overt. In his own way he staunchly protects everything he stands for, everything that made him the child he was and the man he is. The iron fist that hides beneath Kingo’s velvet glove is quite possibly that swung by Popeye’s Bluto, wielding a formidable ‘thwack’ and at once comically gritting his teeth.

By its very nature, Kingston’s work is obsessive and compulsive. This polymath’s home of almost fifty years in Lavender Bay has become a series of studios devoted to his various media. One small room overlooking the bay and bridge through paint-splattered windows is for his elaborately hand-coloured linocuts; another larger room drizzled with countless layers of beautifully coloured paint is for large paintings, which in themselves are like portholes seeing the harbour from his own three storey Edwardian ship. An entire area of the house is converted into his own cinema to share our delights and woes through the curtains of the ‘King’s Theatre.’ Bronze sculptures, plaster casts, charcoals, etchings, enormous pop-art chess sets, Luna Park memorabilia – few houses on the harbour are used in this way anymore, where the creative urge leaves scarcely any room for repose or interior design.



09

Rather, this is the place of the industrious artist at work, and his reverie. Just like Robert Klippel at Birchgrove, Martin Sharp at Bellevue Hill and his neighbour of many years Brett Whiteley.

Peter Kingston is a voyager, making entirely his own the world he paints – split through the unique prism that is his paint-splattered Sydney home with the light of the harbour forever bouncing in through the windows and dancing around on the ceiling. ■

EXHIBITIONS

‘First Light: the art of Peter Kingston’
28 March to 3 May 2020
S.H Ervin Gallery, Sydney

Works on paper
8 to 25 October 2020
Australian Galleries, Sydney

BOOK

Peter Kingston: Paintings and Drawings
By Barry Pearce
The Beagle Press, 2019
Australian Galleries, Sydney and Melbourne

- 05 *Jumping not Biting, Wallaby Rock, Sofala*, 1991, oil on paper, 92 x 120 cm
- 06 *The View from Mandy’s Day Bed, Hill End*, 1999, charcoal on paper, 56.5 x 76.3 cm
- 07 *Drain*, 1992, oil on canvas, 37 x 50 cm
- 08 *‘Nearer my God to Thee,’ Pier 6/7 Walsh Bay*, 1989, charcoal and gouache on paper, 125 x 97 cm
- 09 Peter Kingston at Lavender Bay, 2019, photograph Greg Weight

Courtesy the artist and Australian Galleries, Sydney and Melbourne

wak

Rosina

Gunjarrwanga

Story
LOUISE
MARTIN-CHEW

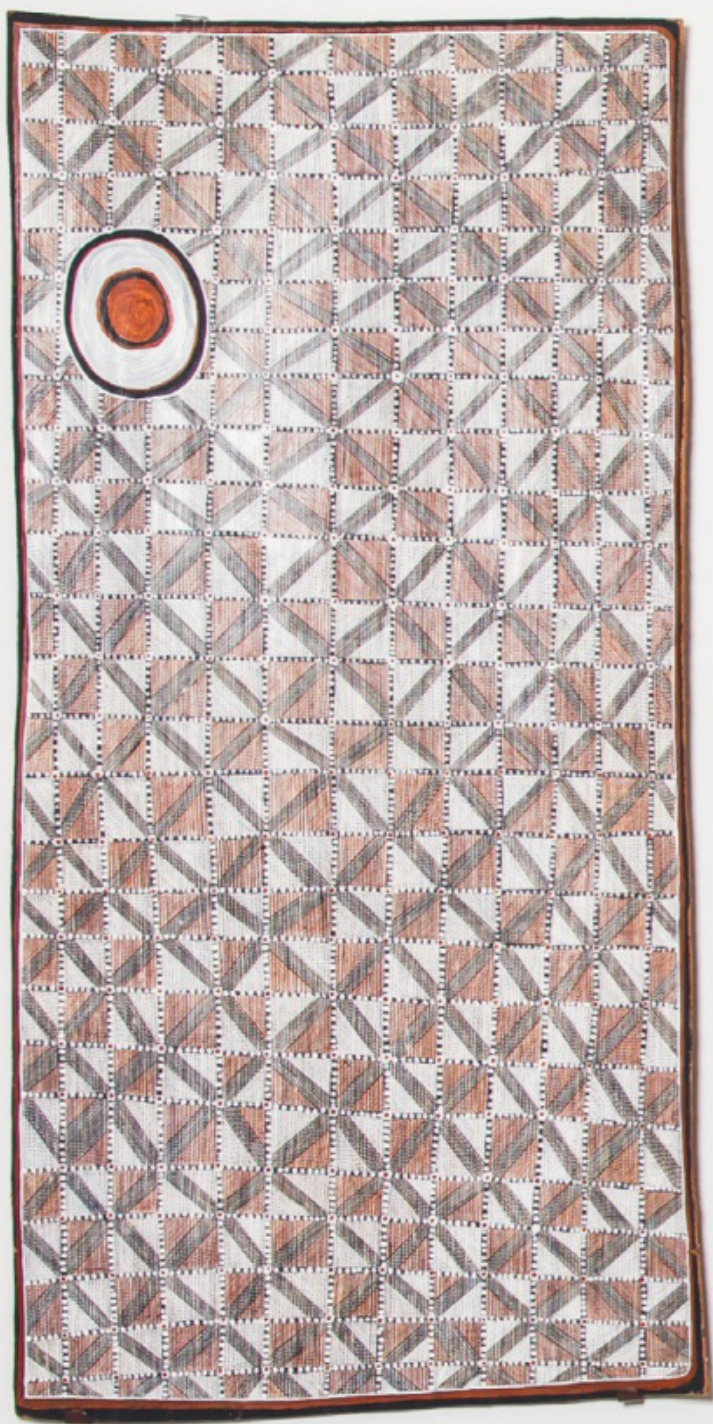
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THE INCLUSION OF ROSINA GUNJARRWANGA'S BARK PAINTINGS IN THE 'PRIMAVERA 2019: YOUNG AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS' EXHIBITION AT SYDNEY'S MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART AUSTRALIA (MCA) WAS A TRULY INTIMATE ENCOUNTER WITH THE ARTIST'S COUNTRY, AND IT HAD THE LOCAL ART WORLD TALKING.

*R*osina Gunjarrwanga (born in Darwin, 1988) is related to many significant artists, including her mother Belinj Susan Marawarr and the renowned Balang John Mawurndjul AM. The catalogue essay for 'Primavera,' prepared by Maningrida Arts & Culture, noted, 'the message behind these quiet works is loud: this Country was not ceded.' Gunjarrwanga uses the cross-hatching technique of rarrk and a palette of black, white and red, to express the power in her language, her responsibilities for country and her daily experience.

Gunjarrwanga lives in Maningrida, a place that Kuniŋjku people from the west of Maningrida refer to as Manawukan. Her bark paintings and burial poles, made using the rarrk technique, are imbued with presence and dignity. In their execution, their depths and quiet confidence, they reflect the culture that comes to her through centuries of connection to particular places in the Kuniŋjku clan estates. Their political force is visible in their quiet strength.





“ She practises her culture in spite of everything, following something bigger, longer, broader and older ”







Maningrida is home to Ndjébbana-speaking Kunibidji people and is in the centre of Arnhem Land, some eight hours drive from Darwin. There are twelve different language groups resident in the area (Gunjarrwanga is from the Kuninjku language group), and contemporary artists have continued to use materials, like bark and ochre, that are available locally.

The selection of Gunjarrwanga's works for 'Primavera' at the MCA – all titled *Wak* – honours her connections to other important artists. Through a translator, the artist explained, '*Wak* (crow) is from Kurrurldul. We call it *Djimarr*. That's my mother's country. I've been painting by myself now, my own way. My mother Belinj Susan Marawarr paints only black and white but I paint black, white and red.'

Gunjarrwanga's understanding of the totemic designs she paints – mainly *wak* (crow) and *mandjabu* (fish-trap) – began the day she was born, with knowledge of country often not understood by outsiders. For artists from the Maningrida region in the Northern Territory, family and place are intrinsic and the complexity of the connections reflected in the work are not easily translated.

The artist's work has been exhibited since 2009. Significant exhibitions to which she has contributed include 'Mardayin' at Art Kelch, Frieberg, Germany, 'Tarnanthi' in South Australia and 'Barring-bul (Many Walks)' at the University of Melbourne (all 2018), as well as 'White Ochre' at FORM in Perth (2017).

She grew up on her mother's country called Mumeka although she is also connected by her father to the outstation Kakodbebuldi. She said, 'I was learning from when young, watching my mother, and started painting myself when I was about fifteen years old. My father, Joshua Djununwanga, passed away in 2007. He was also a painter. He painted his dreaming (*djang*) of the *djati* (frog) and *yawkyawk* (female water spirit). He taught me as

01 Rosina Gunjarrwanga, 2019, photograph Anna Kučera

02 Rosina Gunjarrwanga with her works in 'Primavera 2019: Young Australian Artists,' Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2019, photograph Anna Kučera

03 *Wak*, 2018, earth pigments on Stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*)

Courtesy the artist, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney and Maningrida Arts & Culture, NT

well, but I learned more from my mother, and paint my *djungkay* stories.’ The dreaming that she expresses in her work is known as *djang*, defined as ‘an ongoing, eternal, life-giving transformative power that accounts for every aspect of existence. It also refers to the creation ancestor, the country where spirit resides, and to ceremonial designs and songs that represent that being. It is what powers our art.’

Gunjarrwanga’s stories include the *wak* and *mandjabu*. She is *djungkay* for her mother’s country and *djang*. Susan Marawarr said, ‘my daughter, she can take my place for me. Gunjarrwanga can do other totems and deities such as *djati* (frog), and *yawkyawk* (mermaid), but comments, ‘I don’t want to, I choose to do it my mother’s way.’

Her process sees her harvesting bark for paintings in the wet season and for *lorrkon* (hollow log) in the dry season in Kuninjku country. She collects ochres from there as well. Her rarrk is made using *manyilk* – sedge grass that is separated into fine strands. Bark is harvested and left to flatten on a hard surface using logs to weigh it down. When the bark is ready to use, she paints an underlayer of white and then marks the rarrk with colour. She said, ‘I can make rarrk with line, or cross, or diamond, or add bands – they are my choice.’

While Gunjarrwanga works from her house in Maningrida she also travels regularly to her outstation and to Gunbalanya. She has custodianship roles in each of these places. When she moves from place to place, she takes her paintings with her – the *dolobbo bim* (bark painting) and *lorrkon* (hollow log), wrapped in a sheet in the back of her car. *Wak and Kun-madj (dilly bag)* (2019), a hollow log coffin decorated with motifs expressed in the rarrk technique, uses the crow design traditionally part of the sacred Mardayin ceremony (a ceremony now rarely practised in Arnhem Land) and the dilly bag, an object of both practical use and a totemic object that relates to particular local sites. Drawing together these two totems, Gunjarrwanga invokes the stories attached to the landscape.

Her generation is all too aware of the importance of their paintings; their role in carrying forward traditions and culture. When Gunjarrwanga went to Sydney for the ‘Primavera’ exhibition, Ngarridj Derek Carter (Cultural Liaison at the Maningrida Arts & Culture art centre) said, ‘It was the first time for my cousin (Kenan Namunjdja) and my daughter (Rosina Gunjarrwanga). (These are classificatory kinship relationships.) They went because they are new (artists), they are the future coming up, because old people are getting old now. They enjoy painting, taking over, country to country, making culture strong. They like to go to the cities to show our culture. They keep strong the culture. Because old people pass away. They’ll have to put more story for young people, get more story, put story for our dreamings, because old people gave us the story and we need to put it down when we are young. It was good when we went to Sydney and Bangardidjan (Rosina’s skin name), she was enjoying being part of the exhibition.’

“ Her generation
is all too aware of
the importance
of their paintings;
their role in carrying
forward traditions
and culture ”

As noted in the ‘Primavera’ catalogue, Gunjarrwanga’s ‘clan estate remains intact. She practises her culture in spite of everything, speaking her language, following something bigger, longer, broader and older and invoking the same alchemy that Mawurndjul expounds; she channels and frames her designs in a work, on the wall, contained for you, for us, to view.’

Chloe Gibbon, art centre manager at Maningrida Arts & Culture, explains that in Maningrida, ‘learning about totemic designs starts the day you are born; so innate is the knowledge. When you ask artists about their work, family comes into it as does place. It is not bounded in that sense of practice being separate. What is important is that her art is connected to all aspects of her identity. And the history at Maningrida Arts & Culture.’

Two of Gunjarrwanga’s bark paintings were shown at ‘Primavera,’ one from 2016 and the other 2019. They describe the developing dynamic in her work. The later bark is bolder, its shapes larger, and features three circles holding its centre. *Wak* has been interpreted by other earlier artists but, as ‘Primavera’ curator Mitch Cairns noted, Gunjarrwanga has not seen this design in its original ceremonial form; ‘she lays it down line by line, square by square, grid by grid as a new design, each time layered from memories, teachings and other places in her mind.’ Characterised by her vibrant aesthetic and intense mark-making, Gunjarrwanga’s work is expressive of and guards her culture, future proofing the longevity of Kuninjku traditions. ■

Information for this article was sourced from the essay on Rosina Gunjarrwanga by Maningrida Arts & Culture in the ‘Primavera 2019: Young Australian Artists’ exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2019. Thanks to Kela Charlie Nangukwirrk (Gunjarrwanga’s father in-law), Chloe Gibbon and Ngarridj Derek Carter, Maningrida Arts & Culture, for facilitating an interview with the artist. Thanks also to Maningrida Arts & Culture for checking details in this story.



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John Conomos

The Master Riddler

Story **CATHERINE PAYNE**

ARTIST, COLLABORATOR, THINKER AND PROVOCATEUR, JOHN CONOMOS IS THE UNDISPUTED GODFATHER OF INTERTEXTUAL MEDIA THEORY AND PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIA. HE IS A TRAWLER OF IDEAS. A NIGHT WALKER AND ORATOR OF THE POSTMODERN CULTURAL AND DIGITAL LANDSCAPE. A COLLAGIST AND PERFORMER. A CONJUROR AND MAGICIAN OF WORDS AND IMAGES.

In the Aegean archipelago, islands call to you. A luminous pulse in the gathering twilight encircled in an aqua sea. Long after they dissolve into distant light-flicker, they return to hover inside, as afterimage. In memory, they ignite an impossible yearning. A call to return. The tiny Greek island of Kythera, as ancestral home, has exerted its influence a world away on prolific artist and writer John Conomos.

Conomos was born in Grafton (NSW) in 1947, a child of Kytheran émigré parents brought together by the 'letter-chain mode of migration' in Australia. His art practice is a crucible of mixed media, from single channel video and radiophonic works to hybrid forms of video art and documentary, installation, photomedia and photoperformance.

Labyrinthian and mercurial, Conomos' works traverse the big themes: memory, time, cultural amnesia, the Greek diaspora, identity, aesthetic and cultural erasure, and the question of home. His trade route is circumlocutory, bound by the outer limits of avant-garde cinema, art and literature. Swept by the currents of poststructuralist discourse. Forged in French new wave cinema and distilled by French film critic Alexandre Astruc's concept of cinema as a *camera stylo*; a form of writing in images and sounds.

The process of subduction and erasure is an essential part of Conomos' explorations, and his six edited books with Brad Buckley (2001–2020) – the most recent being *A Companion to Curation* (2020) – provide a call to action to the art world to consider the

ethics and economics of the art market. Perhaps it's the island's influence; its history of invasion, capture and erasure by the intertidal movements of cultures from Antiquity to the present.

Growing up in the family milk bar in the Sydney working class suburb of Tempe during the 1950s provided Conomos a camera obscura for Anglo and Greek-Australian culture. It also meant encountering the theatre of culture, repression and the instinct to self-censor. 'It's hard' he says, 'to be a deep-sea diver in the age of ice-skating.' In a bicultural world, intimate, personal things were kept secret. As a ten-year old, witnessing the effect of his father's death on his mother marked a retreat into silence, books, ideas and late-night movies. This continued into adulthood and his early career as a librarian. In his books the *Kythera Conversations* (2010) and *Antikythera Conversations* (2010) Conomos describes how, 'becoming an artist, writer and educator, over the years, enabled him to find his speaking voice again.'

Since the 1980s Conomos has been at the forefront of new media theory and practice. He has contributed to multiple Australian and international journals, and has been acknowledged with a fellowship from the Australia Council and a Global Greek Award (Hellenic Ministry for the Arts and Culture) for his contribution to the visual arts and the Greek diaspora. His works have been shown in New York, Hong Kong, Berlin and London's Tate Modern.



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More than any other, he has given voice to the world of intermedia, developing a unique mode of the audio-visual essay.

The essay form enables connections. Conomos draws on ‘a radical notion of personal cinema’ to entwine autobiographical images, sounds and spatial configurations, forging a vision that is attentive ‘to life’s mysteries and nuances.’

Finding a resonant voice in the twenty-first century, on a planet Conomos describes as ‘increasingly morphing into a panopticon of shattered dreams,’ calls for the ability to navigate the tidal pools of ‘unbridled consumerism, global poverty and as yet uncharted weather patterns in human history.’ It also requires the ability to stand alone, to find what French philosopher Michel Serres calls the ‘Northwest Passage,’ and work ‘in the passage between indifference and silence.’ For Conomos, who draws on Serres’ metaphors of shipwreck and survival, knowledge of cultural geographies provides inroads for new ways of bringing people together. Rather than separation, Conomos calls for unity, and connection.

In Kythera, many of the beaches are unreachable by roads and an ideal nest for Barbary pirates, a people of whom Conomos claims to be a descendant. The hazardous craggy rocks and inlets provide a resting place for shipwrecks – a theme Conomos returns to in the work *Shipwreck* (2011), with its vitrine table of cultural tools from a shepherd’s crook to a magnifying glass. The knotted and streaked irregularities in the island’s geology of limestone, marble and sedimentary rock are folded into its surface like a walnut by the push-pull of seismic forces and earthquakes, as the island

“ It’s hard to be a deep-sea diver in the age of ice-skating ”

clings perilously close to fault lines in the Mediterranean plate. Feeling this presence of larger forces acting on the small provide cues for seeing the world in new ways.

Conomos’ artworks are a layered excavation into family and cultural identity. His early autobiographical video and installation, *Autumn Song* (1996), ‘is about my father, my uncle and me,’ he says. Its title, drawn from the French poet Charles Baudelaire’s poem about the need for human vigilance and protection of the senses, is a journey into his bitter-sweet Kytheran heritage.

Autumn Song is interwoven with Conomos’ unique biofictional performances. It includes enactments from family stories: from card playing in the village to his Uncle Manolis’ suicide by jumping down a well, after the loss of his wife. It is also an homage to the artists who have contributed to Kythera’s mythic presence in the world’s imagination, such as Claude Debussy, Charles Baudelaire, Jean-Antoine Watteau, and filmmaker Theodoros Angelopoulos.

03 John Conomos in his library, 2013, photograph Rowan Conroy

04 *The Spiral of Time* (still), 2013, HD video, black and white, sound, 4 min 56 sec

05 *Lake George (After Mark Rothko)* (still), 2007, Mini-DV video, 24 min





06



07

" He is an archivist and bowerbird, often inspired by the glimpse of a photograph "

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08

In the last thirty years, Conomos has soaked himself in the literary expression of the film and video essay form, which has become ‘a very personal form of creation.’ He says, ‘It allows you to think in a zigzag fashion ... you question the linearity of the world by entering the world through the back door.’ This back door world is also one of reapproaching what is submerged.

Loss and family tragedy are signposts of Conomos’ major works, from the lyrical *Autumn Song* (1996) to the poignant beauty of *Girl from the Sea* (2018), where he attempts to come to terms with the loss of both his father and mother, respectively, and his home and heritage.

In an interview in the 1990s, prior to making *Autumn Song*, Conomos spoke about his fear of intimacy. Loss is held at a distance in the work, through vaudevillian performances and a collage-like composition of images, voice and sound.

In contrast, *Girl from the Sea* is a deeply intimate, moving and subtle homage to his mother. It is about the impossibility of memory as reconciliation for loss, by way of reference to Marguerite Duras and Roland Barthes. The work combines Conomos’ elliptical voice-over with the sweeping passage of a camera tracking through his empty family home. It captures the textures and spatiality of the home as metaphor for his grief, rendered through diaphanous curtains, family photographs, an embroidered tablecloth and lemon trees in the garden.

Girl from the Sea is part of a move towards increasing minimalism in Conomos’ repertoire since 2013, with its fusion of incantatory voice, the cinematics of the long take and the sounds of the sea. This enables the artist to magnify his desire to ‘see the world from an obscured angle.’

As an insomniac, much of Conomos’ work is done at night. While others sleep, he percolates ideas in his ‘minds-eye.’ Concepts that recur (the pulse of the island) are materialised into new artworks. He is an archivist and bowerbird, often inspired by the glimpse of a photograph. A photo of Spanish painter Joan Miró drawing in the sand became the impetus for his performance in *Miro on the Beach* (2014), while a black and white photograph of author Elias Canetti sitting on a park bench by Bill Brandt inspired *The Absent Sea* (2014) and *The Nocturnal Bench* (2013). More recently, an obscure description of Franz Kafka’s visits to the cinemas in Prague drives the concept for his upcoming video essay on Kafka.

Conomos takes these tiny everyday moments from artists’ and writers’ lives, bringing them to life and into the public eye again. They are part of the memory landscape of the work. Its familial and cultural genealogy. He captures not the grand statements of late ninetieth and twentieth century giants such as Kafka, Orson Welles, or Canetti, but their everyday acts.



09

The video essays and installations by Conomos are a mine of intertextual references, composed layer upon layer like a great cosmic dig. The direct family line and the cultural family are unified in the space of the installation. No one viewer can see all the cues, or the spiral of references linking these works. Yet nothing is hidden. All is laid out in riddle form with Conomos greeting us sphinx-like at the crossroads. He is the master riddler. The jokes and puns embedded in the works point not just to an interior, but also to the outside world. We are reminded that we’re part of a great chain of being that doesn’t stop with us, and a continuum extended through time and space from the magnifying glass to the cosmos. ■

johnconomos.com

06 *The Girl From the Sea* (still), 2018, HD video, sound, 16 min 20 sec

07 *Miro on the Beach* (still), 2014, HD video, 7 min 20 sec

08 *The Nocturnal Bench* (still), 2013, HD Video, 5 min 48 sec

09 *Autumn Song* (stills), 1998, SP Beta video, 23 min

Courtesy the artist



Anna Louise Richardson,
2015, *Dream Horse*, charcoal,
conté and gold leaf on cement
fibreboard, 70 x 100 cm

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Insight

LOOK WHAT IS COMING TO SERENE IN SEPTEMBER

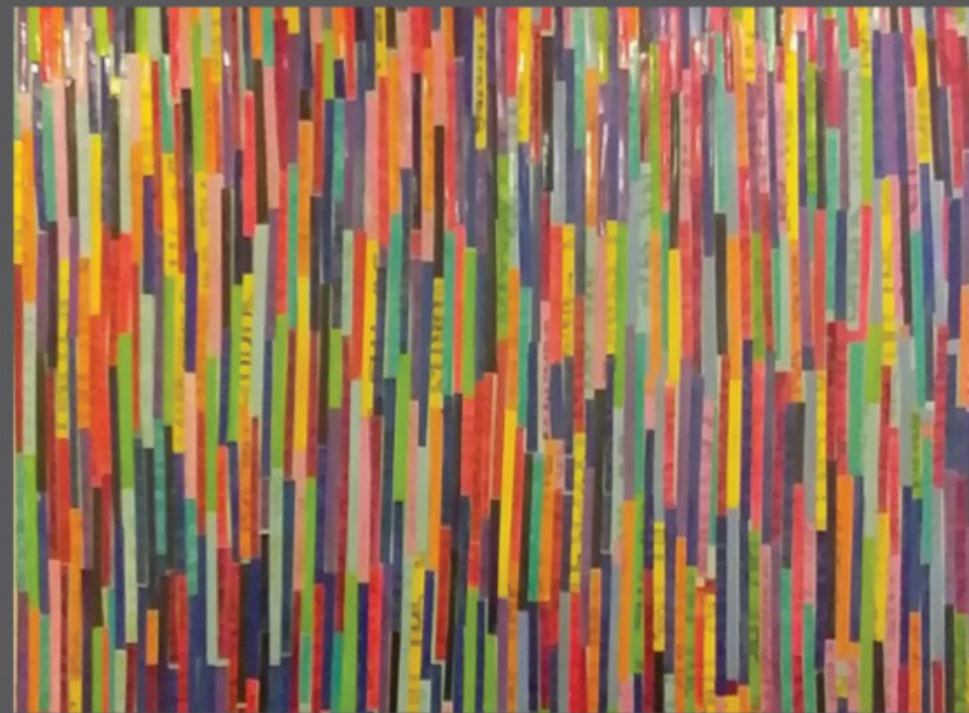
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— Process Anna Carey

FOR THE LOS ANGELES-BASED AUSTRALIAN ARTIST ANNA CAREY, ARCHITECTURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY SERVE AS PARTIAL MEANS TO AN END; TO CREATE AN IMAGINATIVE REALM FOR THE VIEWER TO DRIFT BETWEEN MEMORY AND DAYDREAMS AND REFLECT ON SPACE AND PLACE.



My art making process involves constructing miniature fictive spaces based on familiar architecture that I photograph and film. The camera lens magnifies the model and reveals that the photograph has been constructed with a handmade materialised object. At first glance this disorients the viewer, however dwelling longer the miniature encourages a moment of stillness for one to *be* with the space.

The spaces I create stem from my childhood memories of my hometown, the Gold Coast. When I encounter familiar spaces, fragmented memories and imaginations flood my new experience. The work mines this fleeting moment in my mind from which the models are then built. In turn, I create a space of the imagination where I inhabit my daydreams and the viewer can inhabit theirs.

The style of architecture from the Gold Coast that is embedded in my memory includes a vernacular mix of holiday shacks, high-rises, roadside motels and suburban homes. The city and its architecture were built on notions of leisure, fantasy, escape and change,





02

looking to places in America for architectural inspiration. This style of architecture emerged and developed rapidly in the United States, especially in the automotive orientated cities of Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Miami. Early in my practice I was depicting the architecture of the Gold Coast to represent the fluid city and gain a sense of place. Though, for my recent work, I expanded my research to the cities it copied and travelled to America, where I later relocated to reflect on this style of strip city from a global perspective.

Since traveling to America my work has developed to represent a more global generic architectural style. This can be

seen in the series *Stardust* (2015), which consists of a suite of ten images of Stardust motels in different parts of America and Australia. To create the works, I sourced images on the internet through vintage postcards and then revisited them through Google Maps. The works exist in both 'then' and 'now' versions to show how the buildings have changed over time. The series uses international examples of Stardust motels to exemplify the world-wide homogeneity of a style of architecture in distant yet connected contemporary cultures. In addition, presenting a set of similar motels also provides an opportunity to identify minute details and idiosyncrasies particular to place.

This notion of place that emerges through generic architecture is further explored in the series *In Search of Rainbows* (2017), which consists of interior spaces dominated by a single colour – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple and pink – similar to the rainbow spectrum. Employing Google Maps, I used the online data for colour-mapping and geo-tagged colour clusters to identify dominant colour across the world. The work explores the connection between place, space, memory

01 Anna Carey in her studio, 2020

02 *Lost in Paradise*, 2019, Giclee print, 125 x 84 cm



03

“Transcending the generic everyday into a dream state of dislocation invites people to identify difference and indifference”



05



04

and colour, and its ability to evoke a sensory rush. I merge research, lived experience and global dream memory to form a place that could be anywhere.

Global memory and architecture is brought together in my recent work *Lost in Paradise* (2019). The work is based on familiar streets in world-wide cities and shows an eclectic culture clash of styles, designs and signage. This international generic style is also the foundation for my upcoming show ‘Faraway’ in March at Artereal Gallery in Sydney, after I undertook the NG Creative Residency in Provence, France. The new series mixes vernacular and international styles to

create a blurred state of fantasy one can experience when transiting between omnipresent places in the world.

By drawing from international generic spaces, I aim for others to inhabit the daydreams ‘housed’ within them. Accessing this dream realm allows people to have their own authentic experience with a space that is mass produced and typically understood as ‘inauthentic.’ Transcending the homogeneity of the everyday into a dream state of dislocation invites people to identify difference and indifference and therefore reconnect with themselves and *place* themselves in the world. ■

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EXHIBITION

‘Faraway’

4 to 28 March 2020

Artereal Gallery, Sydney

03 666 East Foothill Boulevard, Azusa...then, 2015, Giclee print, 70 x 105 cm, from the series ‘Stardust’

04 666 East Foothill Boulevard, Azusa...now, 2015, Giclee print, 70 x 105 cm, from the series ‘Stardust’

05 Pink Flamingo, 2017, Giclee print, 130 x 86 cm, from the series ‘In Search of Rainbows’

Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Artereal Gallery, Sydney



— Process Zoë Croggon

ZOË CROGGON DISCUSSES HER ARTISTIC PROCESS AS A RECKONING OF DIVISIONS. THROUGH THE LENS OF YUKIO MISHIMA AND ELENA FERRANTE, SHE EXAMINES THE PRACTICE OF COLLAGE AS A WAY OF FINDING ORDER IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD.

From the onset of puberty I have suffered from chronic migraines. The word migraine comes from the Greek ‘hemi-krania’, or half skull, referring to pain on one side of the head. This conception of the half, the halving of the body that migraine inflicts, became a fixation for me throughout my adolescence.

What was the relationship between the left deltoid and the right ocular migraine? Did pain incline to my right side because I was right-handed even though the left hemisphere of the brain controls the right hand? In his book *Migraine: Understanding a Common Disorder*, Oliver Sacks wrote that ‘migraine gathers identity from stage to stage, for it starts as a reflex, but can become a creation.’ I developed a pronounced laterality toward my right side, neatly portioning my body to better conceive of it, like segments of an orange.

Japanese author Yukio Mishima was obsessed with the distinction between the body and mind. Mishima’s aim was to equate the interior and exterior selves, ‘to seek a kind of platonic ideal that would make it possible to put the flesh and words on the same footing’ (*Sun and Steel*, 1968). He carved his days in half by bodybuilding during the day and writing at night; sun and moon, body and mind.

In 2017 I created a series of collages informed by Mishima’s life and work. I wanted to use the comparative possibilities of collage to rethink the binaries between mind/body, masculine/feminine, order/disorder and reality/representation. Collage can often be seen as a violation, an invasion, but it is also a means of cohesion. As a form it is able to synthesise disparate elements, creating a plane where contrasts can exist simultaneously in a new harmony.

In one of my works from this series, *Eros + Thanatos*, the feminised body appears as an incision – precisely, and almost covertly. In his bizarre manifesto, *Sun and Steel*, Mishima describes his efforts to stamp out what he considered his weak, feminised self, sculpting in its place an Apollonian, masculinised self that was both singular and universal. Mishima felt very strongly the conflict of binaries, and was fixated on wrenching the self into a desired shape. Is it possible to slice and section the self, discarding what is no longer needed?

In 1970 Mishima committed seppuku, Japanese ritual suicide by disembowelment, after staging a nationalist coup against the Japanese government. This was his final act of division; halving the physical body while brutally silencing the mind, annihilating both the flesh and the word.

“ It is a rupturing of the whole, a collapse of the framework, a splintering migraine ”





03

Yet when we talk about division we are also talking about cohesion. A lot of my work springs from a fascination with distinction, and the potential of dissolving the borders that we use to harness and comprehend our lives. In *Kink*, a work from 2015, two photographs are halved and joined, showing the depersonalised body wrestling with an abstract, architectural form; imitating, enabling and disabling the body.

The tendency of collage is often to corrode the individuality of each component. Previously disassociated materials verge in on each other in an act of both elimination and invention, a metamorphosis that occurs at the boundary of another image.

In Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels*, the character of Lila suffers from a strange malaise which she refers to as

'the dissolving of margins,' where the boundaries of bodies, objects and buildings burst and collapse in a deluge of mass. In Ferrante's essays she refers to this condition as *frantumaglia*: 'my mother left me a word in her dialect that she used to describe how she felt when she was being racked by contradictory sensations that were tearing her apart. She said that inside her she had a *frantumaglia*, a jumble of fragments' (*Frantumaglia*, 2016).

In the chaos of the *frantumaglia*, the conflicted dualism of Mishima encounters the inherent pluralism of the mind, amid the turbulence of resolving internal contradictions and dichotomies. It is a rupturing of the whole, a collapse of the framework, a splintering migraine. Ferrante also notes that 'a writer seeks above all a form for his world.' There is

catharsis in the quiet arrangement of fragments, and finding the symmetries and harmonies between them. Maybe within the *frantumaglia* there is an offering, a way to see destruction as a prelude to construction, as a possibility for the emergence of a new form. ■

@zoecroggon
zoecroggon.com

01 Zoë Croggon, 2019, photograph Martin King

02 *Kink*, 2015, C-type Print, 80 x 80 cm

03 *Lucia*, 2018, archival inkjet print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 65 x 79 cm

Courtesy the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne

ROBERT KLIPPEL **SCULPTURE-IN- THE-LANDSCAPE**

Tribute
GEOFFREY LEGGE

ROBERT KLIPPEL'S OUTPUT WAS A PHENOMENON OF INVENTION AND INGENUITY. IN OCTOBER 1944, AT TWENTY-FOUR YEARS OLD AND WITH NO KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ANY ART FORM, KLIPPEL BEGAN CARVING HIS FIRST ORIGINAL SCULPTURE. A DECADE LATER HE BECAME COMMITTED TO WELDED SCULPTURE. KLIPPEL EXPRESSED HIS VISION IN ONE BODY OF WORK AFTER ANOTHER. HIS WORK FLOWED ON AND ON, A RIVER OF INEXHAUSTIBLE IDEAS.





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Not long ago I encountered the sculpture *No. 247 Metal construction* (1965–68) in the exhibition ‘Assembled: The Art of Robert Klippel’ at TarraWarra Museum of Art, Victoria. It was set centrally in the space, backlit by a large window on the far wall. By some magic optical illusion, I saw *No. 247* not as 2.7 metres high in the gallery but outside, as a towering work dominating the TarraWarra landscape. A fleeting and enthralling glimpse which rekindled in my mind Klippel’s preoccupation over fifty years with the notion of ‘sculpture-in-the-landscape.’ This preoccupation unfurled in a fascinating way. Up to the time of what I term his ‘Great Wood Sculptures’ of 1987, Klippel had only completed two sculptures directly derived from his ‘sculpture-in-the-landscape’ obsession. Only two, over fifty years!

The first of those two sculptures, *No. 330 ‘Locus Solus’* (1972–78) – a joint work with James Gleeson – is a diorama. Dioramas are the subject of numerous of Klippel’s paintings, drawings and collages and, as we shall see, a diorama was to introduce the most extreme developments in his welded steel sculptures. The other sculpture, *No. 329* (1977), was a realisation in three dimensions of a body of collages composed from images of machinery, including the magnificent photomontage *Philadelphia* (1978–79) – Klippel’s largest work on paper.

Now it is necessary to return to Klippel’s river of inexhaustible ideas which has come up to the Great Wood Sculptures of 1987, 1988 and 1989. No one was prepared for them. Certainly, they are not immediately recognisable as Klippel’s work. They are coloured and often earth-hugging, like Buddha or the Sphinx, possessing in Klippel’s words, ‘a quiet, serene limitless quality’ (James Gleeson, *Robert Klippel*, 1983). His metal sculptures rarely resort to colour (though in his drawings and paintings coloured sculptures abound). The large size of the wood sculptures also comes as a surprise; they dwarf the metal sculptures. And there is also the seemingly random scattering of small parts in the Great Wood Sculptures that isn’t to be found in his metal works. These unexplained differences, as well as the uncanny ease with which the Great Wood Sculptures came together, convinces me that during 1986 Klippel made a breakthrough into a richer level of sculptural inspiration.

After the wood sculptures Klippel returned to work with metal, thirty sculptures of which he exhibited in 2001. It behoves us now to see if that richer inspiration that birthed the Great Wood Sculptures also influenced the metal works. It is apparent that far-reaching changes did occur.

Let’s consider *No. 979* (c.1968–2001), a small work (only twenty-two centimetres

high) dominated by a column rising from a substantial base. At the top are strong flange shapes that could be petals. Klippel’s final move was to place fragile elements of stiff wire in casual-seeming arrangement across the top. Look where we like, we will be hard put to find anything similar to *No. 979* in the artist’s thousand or so other sculptures. The expression on Klippel’s face – that happy wonderment – as he placed those fragile elements on that bold upright, showed me that he knew what he was doing was unique within his work.

Now we can move to the major work in the 2001 exhibition, and the most wonderful development within Klippel’s preoccupation with ‘sculpture-in-the-landscape.’ Up to this point the main metal sculpture embodying his obsession was *Sculpture No. 329* (1977). But *Sculpture No. 981 Diorama* (c.1968–2001) occupies another world altogether. It has none of the assured abstract elegance of *No. 329*. Its form is that of a rugged, uninviting desert island. Unsightly structures situated on barren terrain are foreign; an introduced species. Everywhere are vestiges of an obsolete industrial activity. There is no knowing their origin or purpose. Everything has fallen, and is falling

01 *No. 712 The train*, 1987, wood assemblage, 226 x 415 x 152 cm
02 *Philadelphia*, 1978–79, photomontage on paper on canvas, 151.5 x 242.5 cm, AGNSW, Sydney, purchased 1980



03

further, into disrepair suggesting time past and time passing. It is a deserted island haunted by the ghosts of past inhabitants. This work asserts that a mindset different from that which nurtured the 'sculpture-in-the-landscape' idea for fifty years is now at the helm.

Klippel's great friend, James Gleeson, despite ill health made his way to the exhibition just to see *No. 981 Diorama*. When he saw the work he glowed with congratulatory delight for his friend. There was no doubt that he was overwhelmed by the sculpture. I strongly feel that this work, the most remarkable realisation of Klippel's 'sculpture-in-the-landscape' obsession, does, at a crucial and fundamental level, trace its genesis from Gleeson's late great paintings.

It is an extraordinary coincidence that in 1982, when he was sixty-six years old, Gleeson experienced a breakthrough in his work. Then, four years later in 1986 as we have seen, Klippel also aged sixty-six had a breakthrough which was to result in the Great Wood Sculptures and *No. 981 Diorama*. In the case of both artists the resulting work baffled us; all of it was uncharacteristic of anything that preceded it. Gleeson's paintings reveal, with perfect verisimilitude, the unceasing turmoil

in the cosmos where metamorphosis rules unopposed. Apparent to us, but unperceived by Klippel or Gleeson, Klippel seems to have discovered *No. 981 Diorama* somewhere in Gleeson's late paintings – that is to say, somewhere in the far reaches of Gleeson's mind. Here, cosmic chaos is abated and humans and their endeavours are brought to centre stage. Our attention becomes drawn to the island; its vulnerability in a tempestuous world is borne witness to by fragmenting, storm-eroded cliffs. The rigours of survival on that treeless atoll excites our sympathy for the people who spent their lives there.

During the making of this work, Klippel would have recalled traveling by train in America. Factories and other edifices from the booming railroad era were abandoned and disintegrating. The artist found them very interesting. Like *No. 981 Diorama*, these factories had become memorials to the Industrial Revolution. A nineteenth century priest who worked in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow, and who witnessed the hardship and misery in the factories at that time, wrote these words: 'and all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil / And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell' (Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*, 1877).

When we read the words we visualise and experience more than is written about this desperate situation. Every element in *No. 981 Diorama*, even the tiniest or untidiest, is like a word, impeccably chosen so that when we look at the sculpture we visualise and experience beyond what we see. Its significance lies in the fact that what we see is beyond what can be put into words.

It is a conundrum. We don't know what steered Klippel into a work of such visual eloquence, of such emotional richness. Without doubt, *No. 981 Diorama* is an amazing achievement that demanded all his inexhaustible invention and unfailing ingenuity. Where was he heading at the time of his death? Who can guess what direction such a fertile mind would take. I think we must be very grateful that he lived long enough to give us *No. 981 Diorama*. I believe it will find a place in many hearts, and in the history of Australian art. ■

03 *No. 981 Diorama*, circa 1968-2001, steel and bronze construction, incorporating part of *No. 119*, 32 x 114 x 52 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 2001, photograph Jenni Carter

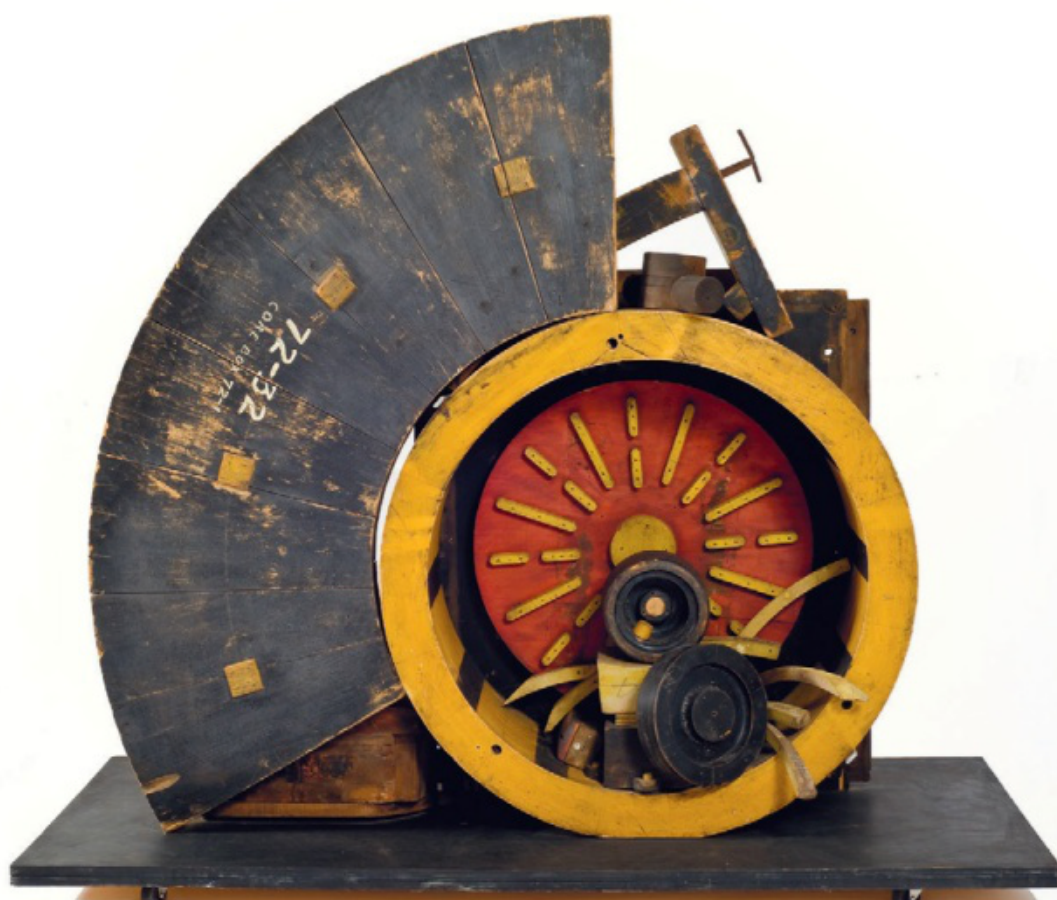
04 *No. 789*, 1989, wood assemblage, 147 x 179 x 85 cm, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, Gift of Robert Klippel 1999

05 *No. 979*, 1968-2001, steel, 29.9 cm (height), collection Roslyn and Tony Oxley, photograph Stephen Oxenbury

06 *No. 247 Metal construction*, 1965-68, welded and brazed steel, found objects and wood, 269 x 145 x 126 cm, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, purchased 1983, Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

Courtesy the artist's estate, Annette Larkin Fine Art, Sydney, Galerie Gmurzynska, Zurich, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne, Roslyn and Tony Oxley, Sydney and Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

"Klippel's 'sculpture-in-the-landscape' obsession traces its genesis from Gleeson's late great paintings"



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Drew Pettifer *A Sorrowful Act: The Wreck of the Zeewijk*

Essay
TED SNELL

IN HIS NEW BODY OF WORKS, DREW PETTIFER INTERROGATES THE BEGINNING OF AUSTRALIA'S QUEER HISTORY. ON AN ISLAND IN THE HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ARCHIPELAGO OFF THE COAST OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, IN DECEMBER 1727, TWO YOUNG MEN WERE FOUND GUILTY OF SODOMY AND CONDEMNED TO AN AGONISING DEATH, MAROONED ON SEPARATE ISLANDS. WITH DEFT SKILL, PETTIFER RECONNECTS US WITH THESE TWO BOYS THROUGH HIS PHOTOGRAPHS, INSTALLATIONS AND VIDEOS.

Drew Pettifer is the quintessential artist/academic who weaves together his knowledge and insight as an historian with a rigorous practice of image-making to explore gender, sexuality and the politics of desire.

His first encounter with the story of two boys from the Dutch VOC Ship Zeewijk, left to die on separate islands in the Houtman Abrolhos Archipelago, was a



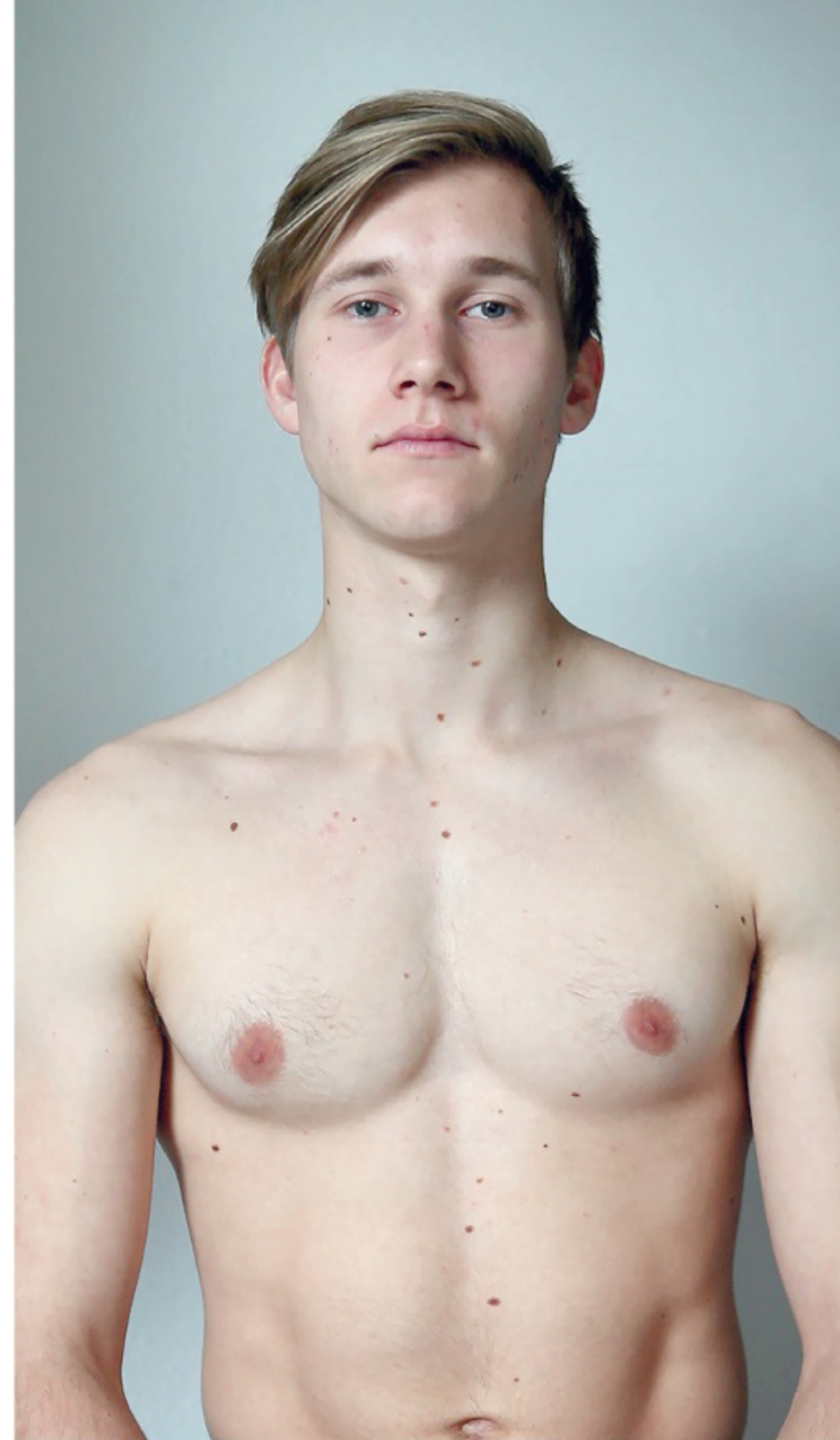
03

moment of realisation of the importance of this event in recontextualising our history. It was the beginning of Australia's European queer history, a brutal and cruel one that is still little known. It began on an island off the coast of Western Australia, in December 1727, sixty years before Captain Philip imposed the punishment of death for sodomy in the newly founded colony of New South Wales.

Engaging the multiple strands of his creative and professional practice, Pettifer began his archival research and documented his engagement with these ideas in photographs and videos made at sites related to the event, including Gun Island. He also visited museum collections in Australia and the Netherlands with the support of an Australia Council grant,

where he encountered the ship's log, amongst other documents.

Adriaan van der Graaf's journal from the Zeewijk reports that after colliding with Half-moon Reef on 21 May 1727, the ship's company abandoned the wreck and established a base on Gun Island. When the rescue party they sent out failed to return with help, they set about building a new boat (the Sloepie – Little Sloop) from the remains of the wrecked vessel. During this fraught period, two young men (aged eighteen and twenty-two) were discovered, 'committing with each other the abominable sins of Sodom and Gomorra.' In one of the first recorded European trials on this continent, they were found guilty and condemned to death. Each was marooned without food or water on a



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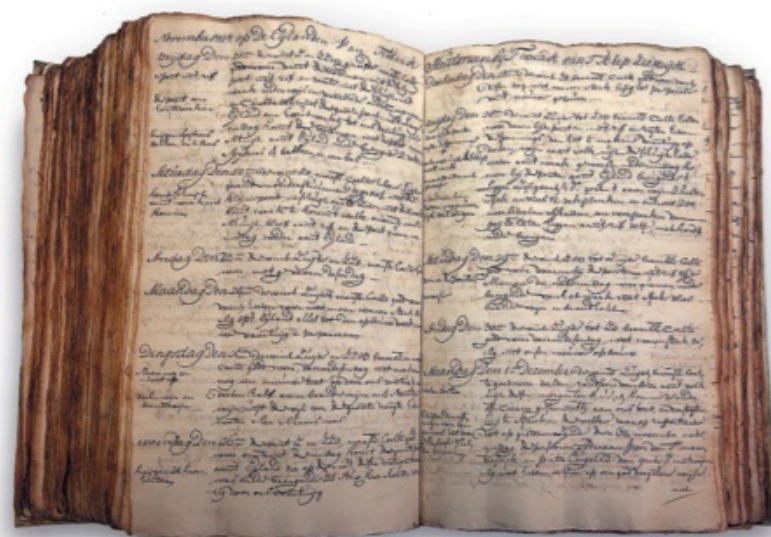
separate island north-east of Gun Island, where they perished. Their agonising deaths mark the recorded beginning of a homophobic history of Australia, a history that needs to be reclaimed.

As Pettifer explains, 'like many artists working in an archival mode, this process could be said to be recuperatory, as it attempts to reclaim this obscure queer history, (re)inserting the past into the present. The combination of built archives found archives and, at times, quasi-fictional archives in this project articulates a historical 'truth' that challenges dominant narratives through a profound act of historical revisionism.'

For Pettifer, this truth is made accessible through art, which makes that encounter



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“The homophobic history of Australia needs to be reclaimed”

with history a visceral experience. In outlining the major theme of his novel *Atonement*, Ian McEwan suggests that human beings can only inflict suffering if they are without empathy for others because ‘cruelty is a failure of the human imagination’ (interview with Kate Kellaway, ‘At Home with his Worries,’ *Observer*, 16 September 2001). Pettifer orchestrates this empathetic connection with deft and economic skill in his photographs and videos. Once we are hooked by this narrative about these two young men, and we connect with them over time, he guides us through a timeline of queer oppression in Australia to a point of contemporary awareness. History is continuously remade in the present, and in that reframing, we are reconnected with those two young men and simultaneously alerted to current experience.

This is not a museum exhibition, though the show includes historical items such as maps and items from the wreck. Their presence enhances the veracity of the narrative; they speak from that time. Yet, there is also a blurring of these truths, as the objects themselves acquire new meaning through contemporary slippage.

The maps anchor the narrative to a particular site, but even then, the actual islands on which the boys perished are undocumented. In the exhibition, they

are represented by a small pile of sand and a small pile of shale referencing their composition. As an audience, we are left to reshape this narrative, make it our own, and re-articulate its significance through the act of remembrance.

Identification with these two boys took Pettifer to the Netherlands, to walk in their footsteps through the streets of Sint-Maartensdijk and Gent where they wandered and to connect with their relatives, two of whom are documented in Warhol-style ‘screen-tests.’ These are the only human presence in the exhibition, conjured up on a screen, overseeing the event with a calm detachment. They provide a sense of continuity and hope. Just as van der Graaf made entries in his log, so these are entries in Pettifer’s artist’s journal. Together with his large-scale video work documenting the journey from Gun Island to one of the possible islands where the boys were left, they are a central component of his navigation of the Zeewijk saga. Featuring a voiceover from the Hon Michael Kirby, interspersed with traditional Dutch sea shanties, the video documents Pettifer’s odyssey across the ocean and across time, as he reconnects with the boys and in the process links us into their narrative.

The elements of this extraordinary story are encapsulated in the installation of

forty-five small-scale framed photographs, hung in a grid, though with some grid places left blank to reflect the broken historical record. Nothing is complete, and no history is immutable. The gaps are eloquent reminders of slippage and omission. This body of work, and the major publication that will accompany it, will contribute to that expanded history. The essays, photographs of sites, the rescued objects, captain’s log, maps, and documents provide the evidence on which we will all build our personalised chronicle.

To be hung high above the show, the artist has created a flag – his standard – based on the stacking pattern of the onion-shaped bottles found on the Zeewijk, that are both phallic and yonic. It boldly shows his colours by celebrating sexual ambiguity, the need for recognition, and for tolerance. ■

@drewpettifer

EXHIBITIONS

‘Drew Pettifer: A Sorrowful Act: The Wreck of the Zeewijk’

23 May to 15 August 2020

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth

21 August to 26 September 2020

Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, Geraldton

01 *Untitled (Bram)* (still), 2019-20, video

02 *Untitled (Gun Island)*, 2019, chromogenic print, 30 x 45 cm

03 *Untitled (The birds)*, 2019, chromogenic print, 30 x 45 cm

04 *Untitled (Bram)* (still), 2019-20, video

05 *Untitled (Half-Moon Reef #2)*, 2019, chromogenic print, 30 x 45 cm

06 *Untitled (Journal #1)*, 2019, chromogenic print, 30 x 45 cm

Courtesy the artist



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Wedding Rat II draws on the Đông Hồ printmaking genre, which Mai Nguyen-Long first encountered in Hanoi in the early 1990s. One of Nguyen-Long's favourite Đông Hồ images is 'The Rat Wedding', depicting rats making offerings to a cat for a peaceful wedding. For the artist, this is a coded critique of power structures, and the act of referencing it through *Wedding Rat II* is about overcoming fear and reviving heritage. This work was created for an exclusive Artist Profile edition of 100, printed on dó paper made from Rhamnoneuron balansae sourced through Vietnam University of Fine Arts where the artist studied in 1994.

Mai Nguyen-Long, *Wedding Rat II*, 2020, relief print on dó (dzo) paper, 22 x 14.5 cm (image); 28.5 x 20 cm (paper), ed. 100, commissioned by Artist Profile, photograph William Yang. Offer valid from 27 Feb to 27 May 2020. Mai Nguyen-Long is represented by Art Atrium

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01



Between Paradise and Apocalypse

Adam Geczy

Having visited Iceland on an art residency in 2011, the impressions of rapture and bewilderment were hard to shake off. The nagging feeling led to an application to Hafnarborg, the contemporary art centre in the former fishing town of Hafnarfjörður. On the top floor of a spacious apartment is the artist's residence, available to artists for a calendar month. September seemed the right time, lodged between the two seasonal extremes, and is also sympathetic to views of the Northern Lights – although in the end I only once saw them from behind a skein of cloud. No matter, there were plenty of consolations.

Then and now, countless people are drawn to Iceland because of the mystique of its remoteness. Many refer, with appreciative squinted eyes, to the 'lunar landscape' generated from the relatively recent (geologically speaking) volcanic activity that is still active below the land's crust. I had been to the northern region years before in the height of summer, but was compelled to see more because the otherworldly atmosphere seemed to have a renewed resonance at a time of overpopulation and environmental disaster. With this intent at the back of my mind, the artworks that eventuated almost made themselves.

Iceland is not only a landmass of volcanic activity – steam can regularly be seen issuing from the ground, and the hot pools that you bask in are geothermal – but situated amidst several water currents, generating variable climactic conditions. Instead of enjoying a sunny day, Icelanders are more likely to enjoy a sunny few hours; or a sunny glimpse.

The weather is as fickle as a moody child, with as many changes in a day that for some climates is enough for a week. I would go for long walks beyond the town's outskirts, attentive to the air, sky, wind and light. Even in the space of an hour there were changes that made for dramatic visual contrasts, including some of the most spectacular cloud formations to be seen anywhere in the world. At the end of the walks, returning to my lodgings, the difference between inside and outside space left one with a small sense that, when you went indoors, you had left something behind.

Clouds, landscape, weather – as an artist you know that you are already in the midst of some pretty dense cliché, but as an artist you must also have the gumption to leave aside inhibition and to immerse yourself in the proverbial here and now. As an artist you have the right – if not the *duty* – to bask occasionally in childish wonder. Iceland beguiles as a place where paradise

and apocalypse are present in equal measure, both physical and imaginary.

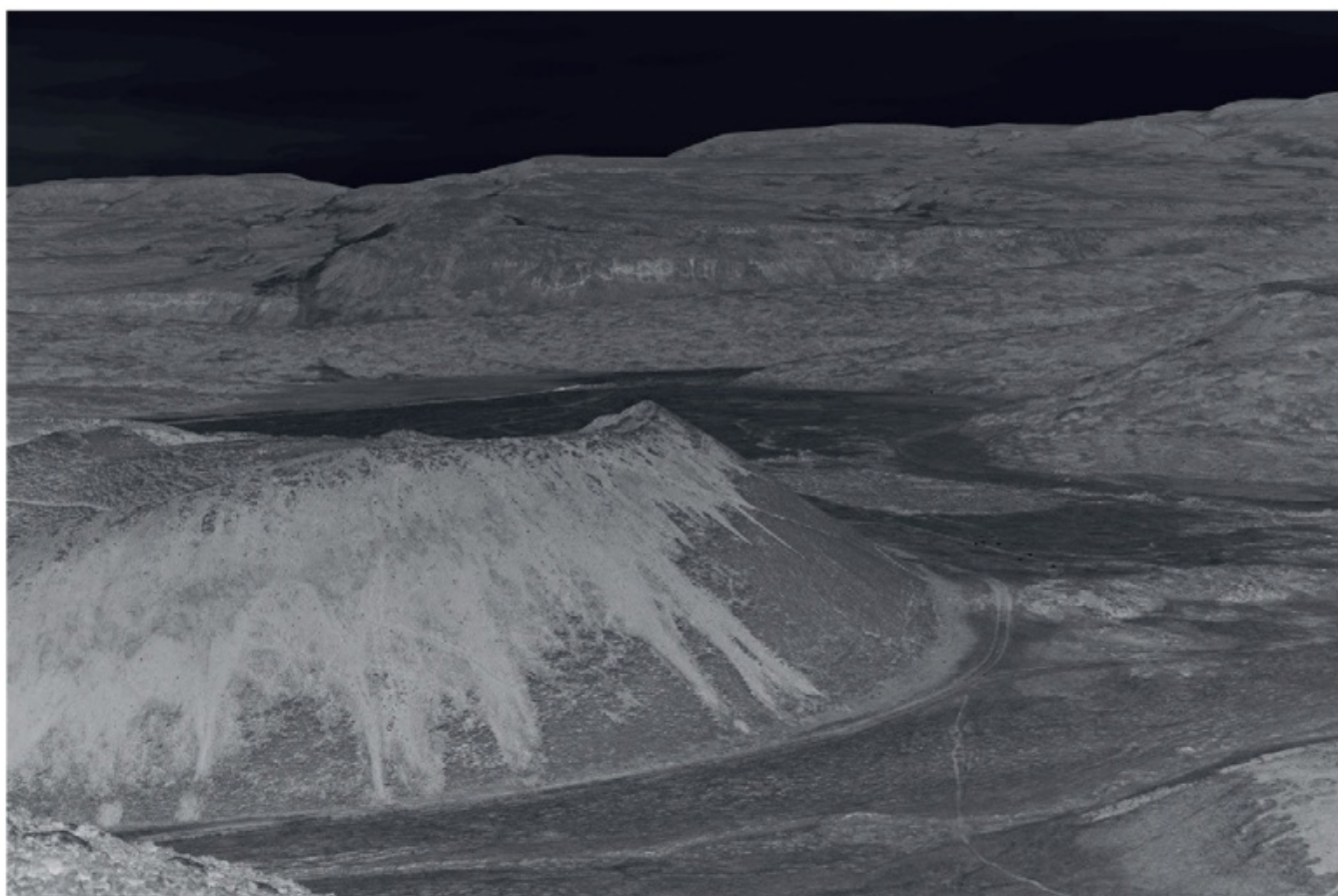
The air was pristine, the water purer than from a bottle. There was something unreal about it all, prompting nostalgia – which is so rife today – for an unblemished past.

In the tour to north fjords, I would regularly upset my partner for abruptly careening the car to the side of the road, leaping out to take a series of shots. Against the high hills and the craggy plains of loam and stone, the clouds seemed to have their own life, their own language. Seldom were they not a counterpoint of formations: cirrus and cumulonimbus, stratocumulus and cirrostratus, in spellbinding combinations.

01 *After the Apocalypse No 14*, 2019, digital photograph, dimensions variable

02 *After the Apocalypse No 11*, 2019, digital photograph, dimensions variable

03 *After the Apocalypse No 6*, 2019, digital photograph, dimensions variable





04



*“ We are the ones
who see beauty,
and it is we who
see danger ”*

05



06

Most days there was some kind of storm, then calm and the reprieve. The transitional state and the coming-to-rest. This was the first series, *After the Rain*, mainly depicting clouds and landscapes that appear lifted out of a storm. There is a pleasing relief to these works.

In travelling to the south, I visited the black beaches, where the sand grains are a jet black, the residue of hundreds of thousands of years of volcanic activity. The day was overcast, which gave everything a greyish tinge. The photographs were taken in colour, evident in some tell-tale details, but for the most part they comprise soft monochromes. I framed the series of images as abstract paintings, made of three bands. This series is entitled *After Sugimoto*, paying homage to the seascapes made from 1980 onward by the Japanese photographer, Hiroshi Sugimoto. Sugimoto made these works all around the world for over a decade. He composed them rigorously the same, so that the horizon-line is precisely in the middle, a homogenising strategy that nonetheless highlighted the subtlest details of atmosphere. Referencing Sugimoto was also in the vein of the artist himself who, in his works, referenced Sol LeWitt and Brice Marden. Sugimoto also did a series after the paintings of candles by Gerhard

Richter. All cases, the world of the elements enters the world of abstractions.

My intent was to do something similar, in this case to oscillate between black-and-white and colour, between abstraction and figuration. The only manipulation was to play with the alignment of the three strips. At times the water comes in at a diagonal, in a very painterly way, like a spontaneous lick of paint. I am unsure as yet whether these works will form part of a decade-long project as it had done with Sugimoto, but the fires in California and now in Australia have given me plenty to think about.

The third in the trilogy was *After the Apocalypse*, which is where my experience of being in Iceland comes full circle, as they meld a real landscape with a hypothetical one. It is the only series that has digital intervention. Just before I left for Iceland, I was told that locals had said goodbye to a glacier that had been there for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. When I later spoke to the gallery's director, she told me that she had grown up in a village where the glacier could be seen from her bedroom window. Now it was irrevocably gone. Such news makes intruders of us all.

Some landscapes are littered with sulphurous rocks, another has a purple sky

as if from some nuclear fall-out. But if the title elicits foreboding, the images have the dispassionate air of places that have existed long before us, and will exist long after. We are the ones who see beauty, and it is we who see danger.

As a result, none of the works have a human presence. It was pointed out to me that there are traces – in houses and or road features – but it would be wrong to edit these out, as these remnants only highlight the absence of humanity. This adds to the silence of the work and allows the viewer, I think, an easier point of entry. You are free to choose from melancholy and serenity, loneliness and solitude, or – as is the case with human affect – an unaccountable combination of them all.

The photographs were all produced on a Nikon Z7, a mirrorless digital camera of extreme precision and versatility, which included the easy ability to vary the focal point and to calibrate focal length. The trilogy comprises each fifteen works, ultimately to be installed in grids of three by five, counterpoised by three large prints on separate walls, one from each series.

If the work generates foreboding, that foreboding, I hope, is mitigated by the calm that comes from things being beyond our control, from the need to surrender.

I was able to spend three weeks in Iceland, which has allowed me to admire it with some depth and calm. It had also provided me with a stage to capture some works dealing with some big themes that, until then, I felt poorly equipped to confront. ■

@adam_geczy

EXHIBITION

The Pingyao Festival of Photography

18 to 24 September 2020

Pingyao, China

04 *After the rain No 5*, 2019, digital photograph, dimensions variable

05 *After the rain No 2*, 2019, digital photograph, dimensions variable

06 *After Sugimoto No 6*, 2019, digital photograph, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Monster Theatres

2020 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art

Preview

FULVIA MANTELLI

The 2020 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art celebrates a thirty-year milestone with ‘Monster Theatres’, curated by Leigh Robb, who is also Art Gallery of South Australia’s (AGSA) first Curator of Contemporary Art. The title draws from the Latin *monere* (a warning), and *monstrare* (to make visible), gesturing toward the multiple meanings of ‘theatre.’ Featuring multicultural artists across all artforms, the exhibition spans AGSA and Adelaide Botanic Gardens, transposing inside-outside narratives.

Looking to artists as a starting point, Robb began by speaking with previous exhibitors about their perspectives, including Fiona Hall – whose 1990 Biennial experience was a pivotal moment. It allowed Hall to completely change artforms and mediums, with her first iconic ‘Paradisus Terrestris’ sardine tins series. ‘I asked for her (Fiona’s) advice about what’s important and what’s at stake’ says Robb, ‘she said that aside from being a huge profile builder, there needs to be space for experimentation, to shapeshift your practice and have the curator’s support and confidence to be able to take those risks.’

This sort of artist-curator relationship – underpinned by trust and creative curiosity – is what makes Robb tick. In over fifteen years of exhibition-making across the globe, she has collaborated with notable practitioners on many bold, experimental and elaborate projects.



01 Julia Robinson, *Beatrice*, 2019–20, silk, thread, felt, steel, brass, gold-plated copper, foam, cardboard, pins, fixings, 300 x 380 x 270 cm, © Julia Robinson/Hugo Michell Gallery



02

As curators, we're always thinking about finding the conditions that allow for works to evolve and be nurtured. 'Monster Theatres' is a provocation: in thinking about things on a monstrous scale, they tend to take up a lot of space, conceptually or physically. Nearly all the works in the Biennial are hermetic, each requiring their own environment, architecture, stage. It's like curating twenty-three solo shows.

Robb's selection of Biennial artists reflects how contemporary artists are ramping-up their reactions to our turbulent times. She explains, 'I was led by their work, the responses I keep seeing: gender in the twenty-first century, patriarchy, climate change, technology, spirituality, subjectivity.

Without a doubt we live in monstrous times of increasing polarity and vulnerability. I've seen shifts toward harnessing action and more politically overt works, coming from real fears. Some of these artists have shaped Australian art history and transformed international contemporary art discourse – pioneers who are still at the top of their game and indefatigable.'

Robb previously worked with Stelarc on an ambitious project in Western Australia: a performance with live optical and audio inputs from London and New York, and an exoskeleton arm manipulated by gallery audiences and online internationally. Stelarc's Biennial work extends that project to new heights (see page 88).



03

The artist still wants to deal with ideas of control, power, outsourcing the senses and the body as obsolete, but with a more physical interface: a voodoo element where the public choreographs a small robot, both in-situ and online, to animate its nine-meter counterpart. It's been a collaborative process across robotics and technology, with engineers, programmers, automation companies, working with elements that haven't even been used in industry on this

02 Megan Cope, *Study for Untitled*, 2020, rock, violin strings, dimensions variable, © Megan Cope/This Is No Fantasy, Melbourne

03 Pierre Mukeba, *Kitenge* (detail), 2019–20, fibre-tipped pen, synthetic polymer paint and applique on canvas, 240 x 600 cm, © Pierre Mukeba/GAGPROJECTS, Adelaide



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scale – and it's all being supplied, designed and built in Adelaide. This work explores a more complex system of interaction between human and machine.

Robb refers to our time as being 'in the grip of the age of the Anthropocene.' The devastating impact of humans on the earth's ecosystems and the resulting climate crisis is something many of the Biennial artists are responding to, such as Mike Bianco, an apiarist, ceramicist, performance artist and activist.

At a time where human lifestyle threatens to render the honey bee extinct, Bianco's 'Anthrocomb' project highlights our interdependence with these remarkable insects. His recent project at the Science Gallery London harnessed the heat generated by a colony of urban bees to power an incubator to grow and sustain human skin cells. His participatory work at Adelaide's Botanic Gardens invites you to rest with 50,000 bees moving beneath you. The scent of the propolis and the hive's sound are all-consuming.

Like Bianco, Yhonnie Scarce investigates ways of negotiating monsters of fear and anxiety. Also at the Botanic Gardens, her new site-specific work occupies the Dead House, which was once a morgue for the Lunatic Asylum. Robb sees this work as 'closest to the Frankensteinian story.' Large blown-glass bush bananas,

peeled back like a body undergoing autopsy, resemble apparitions with their beautiful milky alabaster colour. Scarce looks at the treatment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal patients, how human remains were sent overseas, and the key protagonists of these dark histories of trauma and dismemberment.

Interested in how monsters are manifested, in particular that a warning is 'both a sound and a presence,' Robb cites the works of Megan Cope and Julia Robinson which play on the double-meaning of 'siren.'

Cope is an influential voice regarding the impact of colonisation. Using rocks extracted through mining, her new work is a lamentation for an exploded country. A beautiful instrument that, when played, echoes the sound of the threatened curlew bird, known as a harbinger of death or a warning. It's about radical empathy.

Robinson touches on that too. Her haunting work brings together Scylla, a multi-limbed goddess with an insatiable appetite, and Beatrice, a protagonist from Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1844 gothic novel *Rappaccini's Daughter*, in which a scientist grows a poisonous garden that only his daughter can tend. Based on a lethal flower, Robinson's tentacular, tendril-like work talks about new hybrid forms for 'disobedient' or 'toxic' women.

All of the artists in 'Monster Theatres' have put their ideas and practices on the line to make ambitious works that are inspiring, moving, profound and transformative. Although some are daunting, there are very sensitive works with alternative speculations about inter-species intimacy, or collaborating and listening. A lot of empathy, tenderness and poetry.

In the wake of the landmark survey 'Australian Perspecta' (NSW 1981–2000) and the short-lived Melbourne International Biennial (1999), and in the context of Sydney's 'The National' (since 2017) and the Melbourne Triennial (since 2018), Robb comments on the successes and challenges of Adelaide Festival's visual arts flagship: 'Enduring platforms for contemporary and experimental practice are driven by relevance, urgency and necessity. Some have prevailed different directors, economies and formats. Similarly, Adelaide Biennial's remit, venues and curatorial agendas have changed over time. It expands with each iteration and right now it's about 'a slow looking'; intimate, deep-time encounters with artists' work.'

The Adelaide Biennial is the nation's longest enduring curated platform for contemporary Australian practice. The city is a nexus, where its particular history and geography – between the country's north, south, east and west – make it a poignant place to be able to explore dangerous ideas. ■

EXHIBITION

Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Monster Theatres
29 February to 8 June 2020
Art Gallery of South Australia and Adelaide Botanic Garden

- 04** Garry Stewart and Australian Dance Theatre, *Supernature*, first development, performance still, dancer Christopher Mills, © Garry Stewart/Australian Dance Theatre, Adelaide, photograph Sam Roberts
- 05** Karla Dickens, *Clown Nation*, 2019, mixed media, 120 x 120 xm, © Karla Dickens/Andrew Baker Art Dealer
- 06** Mikala Dwyer: a shape of thought, installation view, featuring *The Angel; Possession; Sigil for Heaven and Earth*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2017
- 07** Mike Bianco, *Study for Anthrocomb*, 2019, performance still, photograph Saul Steed, © Mike Bianco

Courtesy the artists and Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

We should be more afraid of the sun than the moon

Anna Louise Richardson

Preview
LOUELLA HAYES

EVERYDAY DANGERS ARE LARGER-THAN-LIFE IN ANNA LOUISE RICHARDSON'S NEW EXHIBITION AT GALERIE POMPOM THIS MARCH. INCARNATIONS OF FEAR ENCOUNTERED WHILE RAISING SMALL CHILDREN ON A CATTLE FARM, THE OBJECTS TELL A STORY OF THE ARTIST'S LIFE IN A RURAL SETTING. A KNIFE, POWER CORDS, POISON; THE OBJECTS ALSO TAP INTO A SHARED SENSE FEAR IN THE FACE OF OUR OWN MORTALITY.

Anna Louise Richardson's charcoal and graphite drawings are luscious and dramatic. Her subject matter can be confronting: a hanging carcass, an oversized fly, amplified by the depth and tone of her drawings. Muscle is glossy; hairs are defined. Ideas of our human relationship with the natural world are pushed into the spectators' sphere, with a flattened perspective that homes in on intricate details and emphatically lays out the frankness of an existence shared with other species, everyday dangers, and the inevitability of death. Derived from Richardson's own experiences of life on a cattle farm in south-west Western Australia, the artist's latest works share new revelations of rural life: raising children on a farm.

Familiar and domestic objects feature in Richardson's exhibition 'We should be more afraid of the sun than the moon,' showing at Sydney's Galerie pompom as part of Art Month this March. The

exhibition presents a series of oversized cut-out drawings of everyday objects, ranging from power cords to poison. They are objects of danger, incarnations of parental worry. *Knife* (2019) depicts a giant kitchen knife, as tall as a person, hanging point-to-floor, while *Crash* (2019) represents the dismembered door of a wrecked car. Embodying everyday disquiet, the works provoke imaginings of calamities on a domestic scale.

These depicted objects are salient to Richardson's life as a mother of young children on a cattle farm. Her daughters, two-year-old Aziza and infant Althea, who she raises with husband and fellow artist Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, are the seventh generation of her family on the farm. Touching on the complex emotions and responsibilities of multigenerational farming, Richardson's work emphasises how relationships to place and nature can be shaped through different histories, storytelling and imagination.

The complexities of our human relationships with the natural world and the intergenerational qualities of these relationships are driving themes throughout Richardson's practice. Last year the artist completed *Aziza's Zodiac* (2018-19), a 12-panel artwork featuring one animal for every month of a year after the birth of her daughter, Aziza. The work, a year-long project created for an exhibition at Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth, reflected her daughter's life, told through the animals around her. It serves as a record of her daughter's personal history

on the farm, and responds to Richardson's own evolving narrative of motherhood.

Working in charcoal and graphite on cement fibreboard, Richardson's drawings are both gritty and realistic. 'I love the depth, softness, tone and grubbiness of charcoal,' says the artist. The monochromatic consistency of this material lends an overarching moodiness to her works, which can be as edgy in aesthetic as they are in the rawness of their content. In cohesion with a sense of rural pragmatism, Richardson's choice of materials is also practical: 'In art school I started drawing on cement fibreboard, because it was cheap and easily available. It's a fabulous material; fibre based, so essentially like paper but pre-toned, hardy and utilitarian.'

Scale is a considered feature of Richardson's works. The artist often works to real scale in her drawings, even those featuring large subjects such as bulls and horses, as seen in *Phar Lap – Bone* and *Phar Lap – Skin* (2017), a life size depiction of a horse skeleton alongside a living horse. 'I love the physical and logistical challenge of working big,' says Richardson, 'and the immediacy of understanding something in a familiar scale is important to help viewers relate to my work.' Sometimes works are scaled up, as with the unnervingly large *Knife*, emphasising the artist's perspective of the subject, or its prominence in her mind. 'I have been experimenting with cut-outs, to situate the object in any environment, and scaling up objects, in proportion to their presence in my life, or how much I worry about them,' Richardson explains.



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For Richardson, her work is successful when it connects with the viewer through shared experience. Her latest series of drawings examines what domestic and familiar objects may tell us about our own stories of pasts, presents and futures. The works are tonally dramatic and pictorially realistic, rich with light, shade and detail. The inflated presence of dangerous objects through enlargement and flattened perspective is gritty, and unnerving.

Revealing ideas of intergenerational inheritance, parenthood and identity based on her experiences of life in rural Australia, these works speak directly to our common sense of anxiety about danger, our collective fear of death, and our innate need to protect the ones we love. ■

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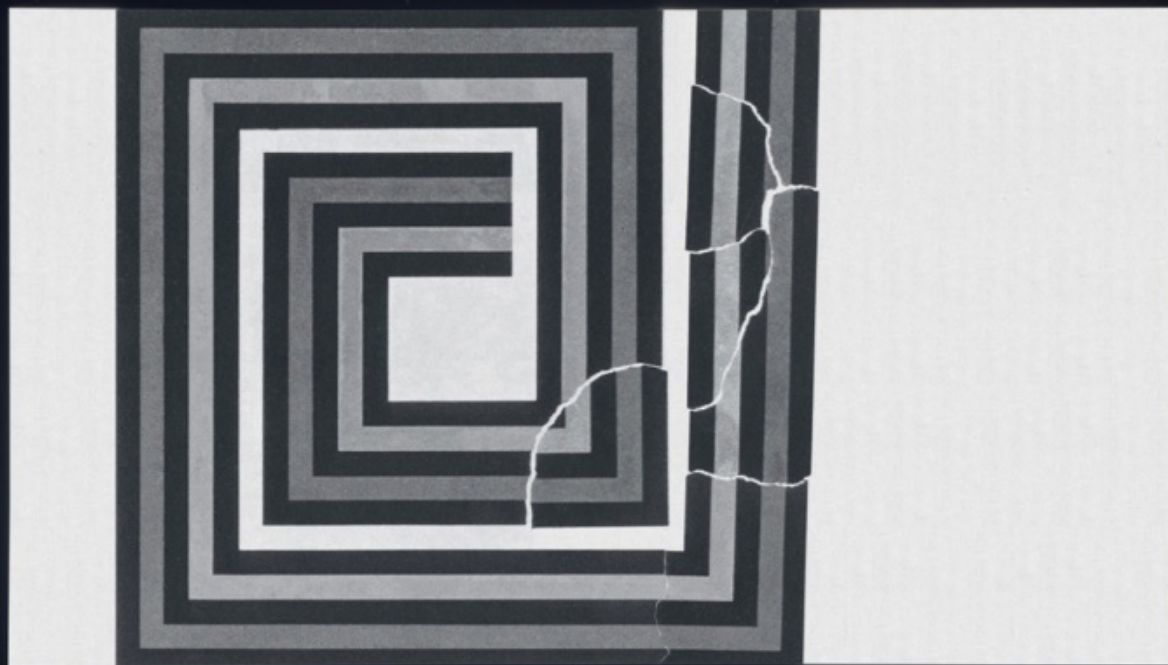
EXHIBITION

'We should be more afraid of the sun than the moon'
4 to 29 March 2020
Galerie pompom, Sydney

01 *Phar Lap - Bone*, 2017, charcoal and ink on cement fibreboard, 300 x 322 cm
02 *Phar Lap - Skin*, 2017, charcoal on cement fibreboard, 300 x 322 cm

03 *Knife*, 2019, charcoal on cement, fibreboard, 167 x 20 cm
Courtesy the artist and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Around the Grounds



14 March to 28 June 2020
Art Gallery of Ballarat, Vic

 @davidnoonan

A Dark & Quiet Place (film still),
2017, sound, 28:00, Edition of
5 + 2AP
Courtesy the artist, Modern Art,
London, Art Gallery of Ballarat and
Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

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STAGECRAFT

DAVID NOONAN

VIEWING THE NOTION OF NOSTALGIA AS AN 'AESTHETIC' RATHER THAN SENTIMENTAL LONGING, DAVID NOONAN'S FORTHCOMING EXHIBITION 'STAGECRAFT' AT ART GALLERY OF BALLARAT IS EVOCATIVE OF PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORIES.

Preview

ELLINOR PELZ

David Noonan is on an endless quest to source, construct and amalgamate a range of inexplicable and beguiling images. His processes are reliant upon the synchronicity of accidents, as the artist comments, 'one image activates a dormant one and something quite special happens.'

Like the role of a puppeteer who imbues their objects with the perception of life, Noonan poetically superimposes abstract and representational imagery through a tactile process of re-vitalisation.

With a curatorial idea adhering to Noonan's heightened sensitivity to the construction and experience of space, 'Stagecraft' will present an intimate and melancholic suite of silkscreen collages, tapestries and a film across three adjoining spaces, surveying the Ballarat-born artist's practice over the last five years.

Acting as a gestalt, grey-scale silkscreen collages on dyed linen will evoke a haunting residue that references narratives only partially accessible though sourced imagery, including folk textile quilts and theatrical imagery from many different contexts and time periods. The somewhat context-less identity in *Untitled* (2015) is at once isolated and intermediate as washes of tonal gradation and textile collages simultaneously separate and adjoin limbs in a complex layering of imagery.

'Stagecraft' will also exhibit Noonan's most recent process translating flat paper compositions into hard key black and white jacquard tapestries created by Belgian weavers. In *Untitled* (2019), organic lines dribble around the circumference of lone figures, foregrounds and backgrounds merging Noonan's

punky aesthetic of underground press with a sophisticated and seamless layering of imagery.

Acting as an architectural object floating in space, Noonan's immersive film *A Dark and Quiet Place* (2017–18) collates an archive of material collected and sifted over a decade. Appearing life sized to invoke a bodily relationship to the moving imagery, the work features large, stripped back sets staging patterns of abstraction and figuration to reflect on the world of the theatre and performance. The accompaniment of an electronic soundtrack, composed by the artist and his assistant Matthew Berka, triggers an eerie, mesmeric atmosphere.

Ahead of his exhibition, Noonan expresses his deep connection with the regional city that stages 'Stagecraft' along with many of his early memories: 'Like any crucial stage in life; growing up in Ballarat, especially in my teenage years, was an immensely formative and influential time for me. I have always had a very strong aesthetic and emotional attachment to the place.'

RIVER LANGUAGE

KATE DORROUGH

In her new series of large-scale paintings and hand-built ceramic forms, Kate Dorrough continues her ongoing focus on the river as a fundamental source of fertility within the Australian landscape. The Sydney artist posits the river as a vital life force, with its cyclical nature of renewal and destruction, while also considering its importance as a potent historical and cultural emblem embedded in our literature and inherited visual language.

Drawing from memory and previous art residencies, Dorrough reduces the river to an abstracted essence. Her stoneware ceramic forms evolve over time with numerous firings, where iron oxide bleeds through layers of glaze, slips and stains, creating alchemic gestures. Calligraphic marks float above stained linen canvases and fields of painterly marks, distilling recollections of swimming in warm, shallow, Gum leaf-stained river edges and cool mysterious umber depths. This process of layering paint and clay echoes a layering of told and untold stories and collected memories of the river.

'The river is political, and a place of remembering. Broad and strong, the river is a unifying symbol,' reflects the artist. Her works acknowledge our need to understand the river in order to protect and preserve its fragile ecosystems.



1 to 16 May 2020
Arthouse Gallery, Sydney

@katedorrough

katedorrough.com

Language 2, 2019, acrylic on linen, 137 x 153 cm

Courtesy the artist and Arthouse Gallery, Sydney



01

BESSIE DAVIDSON & SALLY SMART
TWO ARTISTS AND THE PARISIAN AVANT-GARDE

Bessie Davidson was one of a cohort of female Australian artists who, at the turn of the nineteenth century, sought to expand their lives and artistic careers by travelling to the cultural centres of Europe. Davidson was one of the few who remained in Europe, establishing herself within the vibrant artistic milieu of Paris' Montparnasse. Throughout her career, she received many accolades and awards including being made a chevalier of the Legion of Honour – the highest award conferred by the French Government.

Whilst Davidson's work has been largely overlooked in Australia, stories of her life as an artist living in Paris were frequently told in Sally Smart's childhood home in rural South Australia. Davidson was Smart's great aunt, and her legacy empowered Smart to follow her own artistic ambitions.

This exhibition brings together more than fifty works spotlighting Davidson's modern French impressionist painting style. Bendigo Art Gallery has invited Smart to create new work responding to Davidson's legacy – lodging her work back into the story of Australian art history.

Smart, who recently retraced Davidson's life in Paris, has worked with leading dancers Deanne Butterworth and Jo



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Lloyd to create a cross-disciplinary video installation representing Davidson's relationship with lifelong friend – and rumoured lover – Margaret Preston. This work 'embodies the timeless psychological tensions for these women, grappling with the avant-garde in art and life, at a traumatic period in human history – with war, isolation, gender, and modernity.'

28 March to 21 June 2020
Bendigo Art Gallery, Vic

@sally.smart
sallysmart.com

01 Sally Smart, *Twilight*, 2019, performance still, dancers: Deanne Butterworth and Jo Lloyd, photograph Jeff Busby

02 Bessie Davidson, *An interior*, c. 1920, oil on composition board, 73.1 x 59.7 cm, Gift of Mrs C Glanville 1968, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Courtesy the artists and Bendigo Art Gallery, Vic



“ Being an
artist is a
solitary life.
It's wonderful
to have
someone to
exchange
ideas with ”

26 February to
22 March 2020
GAG Projects, Adelaide

01 Angela Valamanesh, *Dark
life 5*, 2018, 63 x 18 x 10
cm; *Dark Life 1*, 2018, 58.5
x 14 x 8.5 cm, ceramic on
plywood backing

ANGELA AND HOSSEIN VALAMANESH

ARTISTIC COLLABORATIONS ARE INTRIGUING – THE ACT OF CREATIVITY COUPLED WITH INTIMATE PARTNERSHIP CAN BE HEADY. IT IS ONE THAT ADELAIDE-BASED ARTISTS ANGELA AND HOSSEIN VALAMANESH HAVE MASTERED FOR DECADES.

Preview

COURTNEY KIDD

Angela and Hossein met in the mid 1970s at the South Australian School of Art and have been living together since, sharing ideas and supporting each other in their endeavours to make art. Their creativity and work together has resulted in important commissions such as the *Irish Famine Memorial* (1999) a bronze sculpture at the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney, *14 Pieces* (2005) outside the South Australian Museum, and the *Ginkgo Gate* (2011) at the western entrance of Adelaide's Botanic Gardens. While the artists share a studio, each has independently maintained

a consistency of purpose and enduring confidence in their individual practice.

The show at Greenaway Art Gallery (GAG Projects), held in conjunction with the sixtieth anniversary of the Adelaide Festival, showcases each artist's individual works. While Angela's microscopically examine the connections within the natural world, Hossein's works offer a restrained beauty, a minimal intervention of nature.

‘Our work is compatible,’ comments Angela. ‘It is fairly quiet in terms of



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colours and textures. Hossain's mediums are sculpture, painting. I tend to work with ceramics, but we're both intensely interested in the natural environment, its vulnerability, its fragility and how this manifests in the making of art.'

Angela began as a studio potter before her work evolved to become more sculptural. Her current touring exhibition with Jam Factory, 'About being here,' surveys her utilitarian ceramic objects and elegant clay forms that pay homage to the stellar work of Australian ceramicists Gladys Reynell and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott.

More recently Angela's practice has been influenced by her doctorate *Under the Microscope: Making art from science*, which investigates images made using the earliest microscopes from the 1600s. Her work at GAG reflects this research, 'I'm motivated by a continued fascination with the diversity of life forms, their similarities and differences, combined with the intuitive knowledge that as human

beings we are all connected.' *Shades of Pollen: yellow to red* (2019) and *Once I was a teardrop* (2018) are fine examples of her luminous microscopic forms, which breathe from the work's surface and recall the beautiful drawings of pollen grains by botanical illustrator Ferdinand Bauer.

Intrigue with how science might influence art is also evident in her experimental three dimensional forms *Dark Life 1* (2018) and *Dark Life 5* (2018). These tapered ceramic objects are propelled by a radiant metallic sheen resembling that of car Duco, but in this context the shiny black glaze 'recalls the qualities of insects that pollinate flowers, in particular orchids, and reveals how the plant and insect share certain characteristics,' reflects the artist. It is an ambiguity further realised in the experimental visual interplay between figuration and abstraction.

Hossein's work also reveals a playfulness in the ways he transposes a human element to his sculptural forms, such

as in the larger elegant sculpture *Takes Two* (2017). The cool majesty of intricate twigs and branches in bronze is offset by the copper oil burners projecting light into the ether, an interplay of heaven and earth. It is this connecting and fusing of the physical and the metaphysical, the human and the universal, that underpins Hossein's practice – influenced by the writings of Sufist mystic Rumi, along with features of Middle Eastern culture such as architecture and geometry. Hossein's is an elegant art where aesthetics, form and meaning are one. The artist explains, 'I attempt to create a feeling of equilibrium, an image of balance and tranquillity, a place for contemplation and dreams.'

Sense of place is a recurring exploration in the work of this Iranian-born artist, who trained at the School of Fine Art in Tehran before moving to Australia in 1973. His use of text in English and Farsi (Persian) attests to this. Charting connections and journeys, *Tokamachi Samue* (2019) is made from a map of the region in Tokyo, fixed to cloth and sewn to shape the samue, the traditional worker's jacket. It was created on the occasion of both artists being commissioned to install their work *Guardian* (2018) at Australia House in conjunction with Japan's Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale. 'Angela was involved with the reading and research and I investigated the spatial qualities of the site,' says Hossein, 'Being an artist is a rather solitary life and it is wonderful to have someone to exchange ideas with before making them public.'

That both artists have evolved practices spanning more than forty years, and that they can work individually and together, attests to passionate dedication, discipline and consummate skill. Persistence in a volatile economic climate has been fundamental for the artists, as Angela reflects, 'getting and maintaining viable commercial gallery representation is challenging because galleries keep closing, but we keep making new art!' Angela and Hossein constantly look at the world and find something new to say – something that can only be said through the creation of art.

02 Hossein Valamanesh, *Tokamachi Samue*, 2019, maps on cotton backing, 125 x 95 cm (framed), photograph M. KLuvaneck
Courtesy the artists and GAG Projects, Adelaide

Joseph Beuys Cafe

Essay

AMELIA WINATA

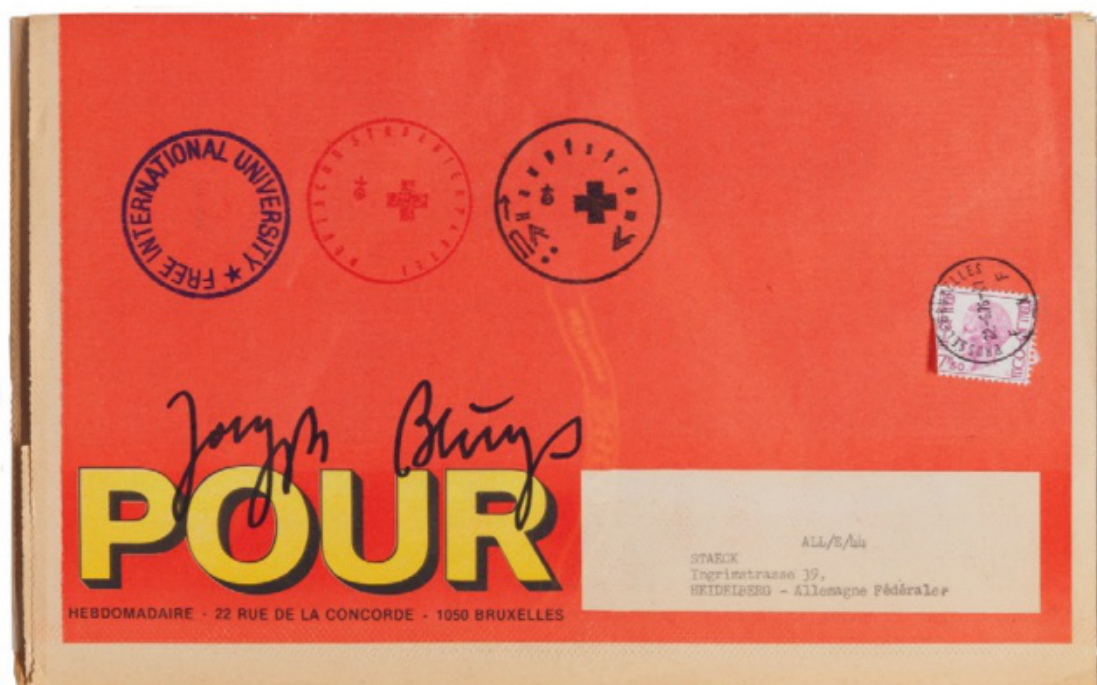


JOSEPH BEUYS CAFE IS A SMALL MELBOURNE GALLERY ESTABLISHED BY COLLECTOR IAN GEORGE, SHOWCASING HIS EXTENSIVE COLLECTION OF WORKS BY THE GERMAN ARTIST JOSEPH BEUYS (1921-1986).. AMELIA WINATA SPOKE TO GEORGE ABOUT HIS DECISION TO OPEN THE SPACE AFTER SEVERAL IMPERMANENT ITERATIONS, AND WHY BEUYS HAS HAD SUCH A LASTING EFFECT ON HIM.

Is it too early to call Joseph Beuys Cafe the sleeper success of the 2020 Melbourne arts calendar? An appointment-only gallery established by collector Ian George, this is the only space in Australia dedicated to the seminal figure of late-modern Conceptualism. Name a post-war German artist and they will likely have some sort of connection to Beuys. His influence was so widely spread partly because he taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1961 to 1972, where his students included some of Germany's most important late-modern and contemporary artists such as Blinky Palermo and Sigmar Polke. Yet, in Australia, the artist is somewhat missing from the lexicon, despite the absolute impact that he had on subsequent generations – a fact George puts down to the 'tyranny of distance.' Beuys' conceptualisation of 'social sculpture' – that civilisation was itself a total work of art – summed up his belief in art's potential for transforming society and politics. George is interested in practical approaches to Beuys' Social Sculpture and Permanent Conference and how these can create impulses in society to transform it in open, humane ways in freedom.

Joseph Beuys Cafe is located in a former cleaner's room that has remained relatively untouched since 1937. It is somewhat ironic that art goers have the chance to view presentations dedicated solely to Beuys not at a major institution but in this modestly renovated gallery in Melbourne's historic Nicholas Building. George chose to selectively renovate the site to reflect Beuys' enthusiasm for decay and the process of time. Eschewing the white cube aesthetic, he has allowed various strata of paint to remain visible, showing the history of human activity that the site has been witness to over the decades.

George is an engineer by profession, a founding director of Melbourne integrated property company CGA Bryson. He has collected extensively over the decades, firstly privately then for his office but eventually as a passion project. His interest in collecting was catalysed by the modernist architect Harry Seidler – an avid art collector of modernist art – with whom George worked in the 1980s. George



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recalls meeting Helen Frankenthaler at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, 'a trace of the influence of Harry Seidler', who was an enthusiast of Abstract Expressionism. Over the years he has amassed an impressive inventory that arguably warrants display in the increasingly fashionable 'house museum.' His collection includes pieces from the likes of William Kentridge, Tony Bevan, John Beard, Clinton Nain, Bruce Armstrong, Giuseppe Romeo and Callum Innes. But it was Beuys who held George's interest the most. He sees the artist's work as a true synthesis of action and thinking and believes that his practice represents 'the image of humanity.'

His other great interest is Rudolf Steiner, George states that 'through Beuys I found a grounded approach to Steiner's epistemology.' Beuys was profoundly influenced by Steiner and held approximately 100 of Steiner's books in his library. In his construction business, George forged a new collaborative approach to working with staff, contractors and consultants which resulted in publication of a book *From Me to We; design and build collaborative workplaces*. Many, if not all, of the principals used in this project arose from his interest in Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner and the content of their work.

Without knowing it, many Australians have encountered Beuys through artists who have extended on or borrowed from

his practice. This is an important aspect of George's decision to dedicate a space to the artist. 'A lot of artists have been inspired by Beuys – or at least, his impulse – and some may not realise that their art is based on Beuys' revolutionary approach,' states George. Indeed, I recall my first encounter with Beuys through Marina Abramović's 2005 reperformance of Beuys' 1965 piece *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* at the Guggenheim in New York. Documentation of the reperformance showed Abramović clad in a khaki trouser/ vest combo and white shirt, her face covered in honey and gold leaf, arms raised in the air. Clutched between her teeth were the ears of a dead hare, its body hangs loosely in front of her body. This being one of my first encounters with Beuys, via Abramović, my immediate response was equal parts intrigue and confusion.

I admit to George that Beuys has consistently remained somewhat of an enigma for me. He agrees that Beuys' practice is challenging, but that the visceral response is, in fact, a very valid reaction to the works; the visceral being, of course, something common to all humans. George insists it is not so much about 'understanding' the works so much as feeling them. Beuys said that 'there is nothing to do with art except look.' Over the decades, George has been in contact with countless Beuys works – some easier to sit with than other – and he acknowledges that he has also developed

his understanding of the artist's practice slowly. In many ways, George's slow and organic approach to Beuys is encapsulated by his choice of a quiet, non-traditional exhibition space. Exhibitions might run for a month or a year, they might include works from other artists or may even tour to regional areas. Indeed, previous to making the Nicholas Building its home, the Joseph Beuys Cafe had existed temporarily in various locations around Victoria, including at RMIT University and Federation University in Ballarat. Talks and conversation will be common in the space. But nothing is set in stone and George is contented to see the space develop organically. He reiterates that this is the crux of Beuys' practice: 'everything changes, everything is in movement.' And so, the addition of Joseph Beuys Cafe shifts the Australian arts landscape into new and unknown territory. ■

Joseph Beuys Cafe is co-directed by Dr Wolfgang Zumdick, Düsseldorf, Emeritus Professor David Thomas and Ian George.

Joseph Beuys Cafe
Room 313, Nicholas Building, 37 Swanston
Street, Melbourne
Open by appointment

02 *POUR*, Posted Magazine in original package, addressed to Staack, 1976, signed in black, 18 x 29 cm, stamped 'FIU Free International University, Deutsche Studentenpartei' (German students party) and 'Hauptstrum'

03 *3 Ton Edition* (detail), 1973-85, 6 vinyl sheets silkscreened on both sides, 46 x 45.5 cm

Courtesy Ian George



Japan **Supernatural**

Review
SOO-MIN SHIM

THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES' (AGNSW) NEW SYDNEY INTERNATIONAL ART SERIES 'JAPAN SUPERNATURAL' IS THE FIRST EXHIBITION OF ITS KIND IN AUSTRALIA, SHOWCASING MORE THAN 180 WORKS FROM OVER THREE CENTURIES OF JAPANESE ART. IT'S A CAPTIVATING EXHIBITION BASED AROUND THE 'SPIRITUAL,' MATERIALISING THE PARANORMAL AND THE MYSTICAL. YET THE EXHIBITION'S RELIANCE ON SUPERSTAR NAMES LIKE TAKASHI MURAKAMI TO PULL CROWDS SUGGESTS A NEED TO ENGAGE WITH JAPAN IN LESS SUPERFICIAL WAYS.





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Dimmed lights and a sky of paper lanterns at the entrance 'Japan Supernatural' demarcates the crossing of thresholds. While these immersive elements transport visitors into the metaphysical realms of Japanese folklore, they are also part of an anthropological curatorial approach, clearly evoking notions of the 'traditional' – a loaded concept ineluctably tied to the equally slippery idea of 'authenticity.' Such

theatrical features invite skepticism around the sensationalisation of Asian Art in Australia and was a concern unfortunately confirmed with the inclusion of art superstar Takashi Murakami, whose works have dominated the marketing of the exhibition.

Murakami's theory of 'super-flat' was first coined in 2001, writing that Japanese 'society, customs, art, culture: all are extremely two dimensional,' reflected in the

pictorial surface and in contemporary Japanese culture that, to Murakami, was preoccupied with empty consumerism.

However, nearly twenty years on, how significant is 'super-flat' to an Australian audience? Specifically, how is it relevant under the framework of this particular exhibition? Is it a commentary on the loss of spirituality and tradition amongst Japanese capitalism?





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Over the decades, as Murakami has developed a cohesive, marketable brand and aesthetic, his work has become largely homogeneous. When he had first emerged in the 1990s, his work was a biting post-modern critique and subversion of tradition, a solid rhetorical analysis of Japan's self-image. Today, his visually-satiating mega-murals read merely as affirmative pop art. In an exhibition entirely based around Japanese culture, his work is subsumed by the very essentialisation and homogeneity he had initially challenged twenty years ago, exemplifying how difference can be easily transformed into cultural commodity.

The mural that cost AGNSW a mysterious 'seven-figure sum' is *Japan Supernatural: Vertiginous After Staring at the Empty World Too Intensely, I Found Myself Trapped in the Realm of Lurking Ghosts and Monsters* (2019), which is ten metres long and three metres tall. Based on Utagawa Kuniyoshi's 1847 *nippondaemon*, a central feline spirit is surrounded by *nekomata* (dancing cats) and samurai soldiers. These symbols are based off Edo period (1603–1868) folklore. According to historians Carol Gluck and Marc Steinberg, the Japanese Edo booms of the 1980s and 1990s in art identified the Edo period as 'the site of the lost-but-not-forgotten authentic Japan ... the regeneration of Japanese tradition.' By using Edo period imagery it may be argued that Murakami contributes to what sociologist Yoshino Kosaku identified as *nihonjinron-ism* in 1992, a fixation on the essentialist notions

01 Takashi Murakami, *Japan Supernatural: Vertiginous After Staring at the Empty World Too Intensely, I Found Myself Trapped in the Realm of Lurking Ghosts and Monsters*, 2019, acrylic resin paint, gold leaf, glitter, 300 x 1000 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Foundation Purchase 2019, © 2019 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd., photo courtesy Kaikai Kiki

02 Takashi Murakami, *In the Land of the Dead, Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow* (detail), 2014, acrylic on canvas mounted on wood panel, 300 x 2500 cm, The Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles, © 2014 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co, Ltd, photo courtesy Kaikai Kiki

03 Miwa Yanagi, *Rapunzel*, 2004, gelatin silver print, 100 x 100 cm (image); 138.1 x 138.1 x 7 cm (overall), private collection, courtesy Look Gallery, Berlin

04 Miwa Yanagi, *Gretel*, 2004, gelatin silver print, 100 x 100 cm (image); 138.1 x 138.1 x 7 cm (overall), private collection, courtesy Look Gallery, Berlin



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of national culture in Japan, or as Kosaku writes, ‘an excessive emphasis on Japanese peculiarities, can ironically have the unintended consequences of strengthening cultural nationalism.’

A number of Japanese cultural critics such as Yoshiko Shimada, Azuma Hiroki and Yoshitaka Mori have raised concern with Murakami’s turn to *nihonjinron-ism*, as early as 2001, asserting that Murakami’s works may exacerbate the simplification of Japanese culture to satiate a Westerner’s fascination with ‘exotic’ Japanese subculture. In Mori’s words, ‘the concept of ‘superflat,’ ‘Japan,’ ‘Japanese,’ ‘Japanese culture’ and ‘Japaneseness’ are all absolutely essentialised as a homogenous set of values and art simultaneously set up as an international commodity to be consumed by overseas consumers.’ Considering these caveats, the AGNSW’s decision to include not just one large Murakami, but two, must be interrogated. Murakami’s bombastic works, dominating such enormity of space, threatens to flatten the entire exhibition.

Indeed, his other mural, *In the Land of the Dead, Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow* (2014) which is twenty-five metres long, shares a room with a number of 1700s *ukiyo-e* prints. On one side of the room, these prints are all densely packed, presented in a maze-like construction,

“ Today, his visually-satiating mega-murals read merely as affirmative pop art ”

whilst Murakami’s mural is brightly lit and occupies an entire wall, to the disappointing effect of completely dwarfing the detailed, intricate prints. Some prints were presented four to one wall, making it difficult to move amongst crowds, so that it was more likely for visitors to give one desultory glance or dismiss them entirely.

Meanwhile, Murakami’s enormous room was placed adjacent to works by newer artists like Miwa Yanagi and Fuyuko Matsui whose quieter, sensitive photographic and video works created poetic counterpoints. Matsui’s series of paintings, including *Joining the conversion* (2011), takes on a political inflection, as the wall texts states, ‘although her exacting paintings reference Japanese traditions, her images present the cumulative weight of life’s small pains, particularly in the contemporary lives of women in Japan.’ Matsui began this series in 2004 reconsidering Buddhist paintings of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), which were designed to eliminate carnal

lust from monks by presenting decaying female bodies, ‘a representation of women’s bodies that Matsui finds abhorrent.’ Matsui’s works did not merely replicate tradition for the sake of aesthetic, but rather seemed to be actively developing upon ‘tradition’ by commenting on it in a clearer way than Murakami. ■

EXHIBITION

‘Japan Supernatural’

Until 8 March 2020

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

05 Fuyuko Matsui, *The parasite will not abandon the body (Ōsei wa karada o saranai)*, 2011, hanging scroll; colour on silk, 30 x 80 cm (image); 125 x 102.7 cm (overall), collection of the artist, © Fuyuko Matsui

Courtesy the artists and Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

Jon Molvig

Maverick

Review
BRUCE HEISER



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IT'S REMARKABLE TO CONSIDER JON MOLVIG'S SOLO EXHIBITING CAREER SPANNED JUST THIRTEEN YEARS FROM 1955 TO 1968, BEFORE HIS PREMATURE DEATH OF ADVANCED KIDNEY DISEASE IN MAY 1970. THE RETROSPECTIVE 'JON MOLVIG: MAVERICK' AT THE QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY (14 SEPTEMBER 2019 TO 2 FEBRUARY 2020) ALLOWED AUDIENCES TO RECONNECT WITH THE ARTIST'S OEUVRE THROUGH A THOUGHTFUL AND ENGAGING PRESENTATION, WHICH WAS BOTH OVERDUE AND VERY REWARDING.

One hundred and twenty-two works displayed chronologically in purpose designed spaces make up the retrospective, assembled by Michael Hawker, curator Australian Art at Queensland Art Gallery. Molvig's practice is introduced through a number of smaller oils dating from 1948, produced while the artist attended the Strathfield annex of the East Sydney Tech College after the Second World War. Presented after these Sydney pictures are works executed in the early 1950s, when Molvig travelled abroad with fellow Strathfield alumni to the UK and Europe (1949–1952).

The oils from this time are unsurprisingly uneven, but the following sequence of paintings reveal Molvig developing, among

which is his 1954 Blake Prize entry *Crucifixion* (1953). In this painting, the Cross – from which the forlorn figure of Christ hangs – appears to be made of sugarcane, alluding to Molvig's flirtation at the time of moving from New South Wales to Queensland.

The next bracket of paintings includes some of Molvig's most iconic pictures and those that set him apart from his peers: *The lovers* (1955), *Bride and Groom* (1956), *Self portrait* (1956) and *A twilight of women* (1957). The maturity and ambition of these works is impressive, particularly when considering the artist's debut solo exhibition was in early 1955, when he showed ten works concurrently with Ian Fairweather at Sydney's Macquarie Galleries.

Hawker has placed particular emphasis on the artist's 'Centralian' series, displaying over twenty works. In 1958, Molvig travelled to Alice Springs and central Australia to paint the interior landscape with his then partner Marijke Degeus. The resulting body of pictures contributed (along with the work of Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd) to the development of a contemporary approach to the Australian landscape, dominated at the time by artists like Hans Heysen and Robert Johnson.

The next generation of Australian painters viewed and experienced the landscape in an altogether different manner, mindful of the Indigenous population's relationship to country and sensitive to the history that had played out. Molvig's ambition to treat



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the landscape in a new way is identified by two precursors to the 'Centralian' works: *Burnt landscape no. 1 (After the fire)* (1953) and *Spirit of a dead land* (1956).

In the last decade of his life, Molvig's practice shifted from high figurative expressionism towards a sparser sensibility, leading in turn to a sense of detachment, of being removed from his subjects. That's not to say the artist cared less or was in any way less engaged. Although not academically minded *per se*, Molvig remained a deeply critical observer of the world and was unwavering (and unapologetic) in his responses, believing each series required an approach unique to itself. His outlook in this regard left him open to the charge that his practice was uneven – appearing to skip from style to style. Hawker acknowledges this criticism, remarking, 'ultimately he was prepared to take risks with his art and not stick to a formula which sold well.' Molvig remained steadfast in retaining this approach to image making. The common thread underpinning his practice was his facility as a draughtsman.

Molvig's more minimal approach is evident in the *Eden Industrial* works (1961–62), particularly the ink and wax resist works executed on paper. Two further series were to follow, the *Pale Nudes* produced in 1964 and the *Tree of Man* suite from 1967–68. Both series were identified by Molvig's biographer Betty Churcher as having compositional elements informed by Indigenous imagery, admired by the artist in the form of rock art and bark paintings during his travels to central Australia in 1958 and again later in the 1960s.

The exhibition concludes with five paintings and two small oil studies from Molvig's final series, *The Tree of Man* (1968). Although the artist initially prepared two figurative oil studies for the series, the ten paintings that make up the completed suite depended entirely on the use of symbols, with two recurring motifs: the stylised form of a backbone and rib cage and a roundel or target. These symbols – made from templates applied to the board and then painted in – were placed against grounds occasionally split by a horizon line, suggesting the landscape.



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In truth, these paintings remain as elusive as the day they were first viewed. When shown with Rudy Komon in April/May 1968, they made up Molvig's last solo exhibition held in his lifetime.

In 'Maverick,' viewers find themselves in the rewarding position of having to ask questions of the artist while simultaneously having things revealed by him. The retrospective uncovers Molvig as innovator, provocateur and observer. ■

01 *A twilight of women*, 1957, oil on hardboard, 137.2 x 148.6 cm, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art collection

02 *Tree of man VII*, 1968, oil and enamel on hardboard, 121 x 121 cm, private collection

03 *Crucifixion*, 1953, oil on hardboard, 136 x 60.8 cm, Ipswich Art Gallery collection

Courtesy Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Shirin Neshat

Dreamers

THERE IS A LOT TO FIND INTERESTING ABOUT SHIRIN NESHAT'S *DREAMERS* VIDEO INSTALLATION AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA, AND YET THERE IS MUCH TO BE DISAPPOINTED BY.

Review

NICHOLAS NEDELKOPOULOS

As it is typically the case for projected digital video installations, viewers find they have walked into an already progressed work. If there is the intent by the maker to tell a story – even with a non-linear narrative structure like that of *Dreamers* – one would need to sit through a second screening. With *Dreamers* being a trilogy projected in three spaces, the viewing process is a somewhat disjointed experience amplified by the viewers' brief comings and goings.

Sarah (2016) is the first room of the trilogy. It opens with a female face looking up from a water-submerged body. The same woman is then seen roaming around a smoke-filled forest, passing a smoldering fireplace (the only remains of a house) and nearby, scattered on the grass, are locks of hair. Standing still, the back of a woman disappears in the thickening smoke.

There are two scenes in this film that made it worth persisting through its almost thirteen-minute duration. One is a distant long shot of visually distorted soldiers marching towards the camera. The second is a group of women fully covered in black cloth walking towards the camera in what looks like a grieving procedure of faith. Both these scenes remind me of the empathetic directorial style in movies by Japanese directors Kenji Mizoguchi – particularly *Street of Shame* (1956) – and Akira Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985).

The second room screens *Illusions and Mirrors* (2013). In the opening sequence we see the ocean's crashing waves, like fingers, trying to allure a woman (actor Natalie Portman) into its depths. In the distant sand dunes is a figure, which – because of its distortion and movement – looks like a smudged animated pencil drawing. I enjoyed this for its sheer ambiguity.

After a number of scenes of *Illusions and Mirrors*, we find the woman standing in the room of a stately home in ruins where a seated woman, herself, confronts her. The camera pans around the room. Seated on benches next to Portman is a small group of people staring at her; a bigger confrontation is now in play.





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There's a chilling strangeness in the air like the type that has been splendidly created by David Lynch in his film *Blue Velvet* (1986). Neshat's cinematic treatment, the simple fuzziness of the shot, is what creates the right oddness here – until it is interrupted and spoilt by the camera sharpening its focus to reveal a rather bland and inappropriate group of faces.

The standing woman (Portman) now walks up a stairway in a shot that is blurred and this, refreshingly, brings back its oddness. She follows a man until she comes across two distorted figures slouched on a couch, one mothering and stroking the other (Madonna and Child). The child snarls nastily at the woman standing, yet when the child is in focus she is, once again, the woman herself. We are taken back to the ocean and its crashing waves to end this thirteen-minute film.

Dreamers concludes with *Roja* (2016), the third room of the trilogy. A shirtless man sings The Seekers' hit *The Carnival Is Over* before falling into a rant at an Iranian-American woman in the audience: 'I think you should come onto the stage, you're going to be exposed for the cunning deceiver you are.' His body language like a carny is over the top, but because of its intense confrontational nature, it turns out to be the strongest performance in the trilogy. The woman runs out to escape the shaming, we then see her standing in front of the marvelous The Egg theatre in New York before running towards a lake where an older woman is waiting. The older woman moves back only to move forward to push the younger woman away and

"Neshat works best when engaging with the narrative form"



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after a few more scenes this fifteen-minute video fades to black.

Neshat's blatant homage to Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's experimental short film *Meshes of the afternoon* (1943) to realise her trilogy is, for me, the failing. Her interweaving of dream and reality, search and observation, is tedious. It is a pity that the artist didn't take the opportunity with *Dreamers* to explore the medium further and give us a visual experience that wasn't restrained and overridden by concept. Neshat's direction only acts to sabotage her work's aesthetic strengths. The distorted images show us what was possible, but her use of theatre and dance was ultimately a clumsy

distraction. Contrastingly, her feature films *Women Without Men* (2009) and *Looking For Oum Kulthum* (2018) are to be applauded for their clarity, suggesting that Neshat works best when engaging with the narrative form. ▣

EXHIBITION

'Shirin Neshat: Dreamers'
Until 19 April 2020
NGV International, Melbourne

- 01 Shirin Neshat, photograph Rodolfo Martinez
- 02 *Illusions & Mirrors*, (still), 2013, black-and-white digital video sound, 13 min 22 sec
- 03 *Roja* (still), 2016, single-channel video installation, 17 min 15 sec
- 04 *Sarah* (still), 2016, single-channel video installation, 12 min 55 sec

Courtesy the artist, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels; © Shirin Neshat



High Wire

Lloyd Jones & Euan Macleod

Review
JOE FROST

What kind of book might an artist and a writer create together, given free reign?

This is the question proposed by the *kōrero* series, a venture by Massey University Press enabling the artists and writers of New Zealand to explore the weaving together of words and pictures in published form.

While there is nothing new in publishers engaging artists to illustrate writers' works, either across generations (Matisse's *Poesies de Stéphane Mallarmé*) or between contemporaries (Louise Bourgeois and Arthur Miller's *Homely Girl*), the *kōrero* series aims to achieve something else. By inviting participants to collaborate

from scratch on a theme that is open to evolution, novelist and series editor Lloyd Jones has created the tantalising possibility of artist and writer starting at the beginning; not with a finished story to be illustrated. Jones describes it as 'a conversation across craft and discipline between artists in their approach to a shared topic,' with the hint of a softening of the familiar hierarchy that places word before image.

With *High Wire*, the first of the *kōrero* publications, Jones has set the ball rolling by pairing himself with painter Euan Macleod to produce a striking hardback book, almost entirely black and white, slightly smaller than A4 format. Reading

like a story but with leanings towards essay form, it is a highly personal rumination on art and memory through which both authors' preoccupations with their homeland is a defining theme.

Jones and Macleod have a history of working together and it is clear from the rawness of *High Wire's* content that their friendship has given them both the freedom to work unguardedly. The writer has not felt the need to clear the bodily fluids from his sentences, although mercifully it is spit and not shit (Jones's chosen issue in the novel *The Cage*) that is doused about, only sparingly, here. The painter has drawn prolifically and heedlessly, applying himself to figural

subjects that lie squarely within the range of his usual imagery, although the motif of the walking man has not taken to a tightrope before.

While on first viewing it is Macleod's pictures that establish the atmosphere of *High Wire*, it does after all seem to be Jones' text that is the skeleton of the work, setting specific points of reference that establish the scope of the narrative. From the opening page he addresses the painter and reader together, telling us how he invited Macleod to send drawings of bridges, then reminding him of the tightrope artistry of Philippe Petit, the young Frenchman who walked the line from one World Trade Center tower to the other in 1974. Broaching the grand, fantastical image of an emigrant's bridge spanning the Tasman Sea, Jones writes to Macleod as one of the multitude of Kiwis who, during the 1980s, made the crossing to reach Australia, and there is an implicit veneration of his friend as an artist playing for the large prize; seeking truth and staring down the freefall of failure.

For each passage of text, a full-page or double-page picture is offered in accompaniment. Many of them show a man just managing to stay on a tightrope, or in the moment of toppling off. Rapid pen sketches are interspersed with richly tonal etchings. There are also dark paintings: of the moon aloft and crowds watching eagerly for the tightrope artist to fall. (These darkest pictures appear to have been executed in ink or gouache, although unfortunately, no details of the medium, date of execution, or size of any of the reproduced works are given.) As Jones's story reaches one of its micro-climaxes, Macleod abandons artfulness of composition altogether, his tightrope walker commanding himself, manically: DO NOT FALL. DO NOT FALL. DO NOT FALL.

For all of *High Wire*'s emphasis on the risks inherent in pursuing art, its making does not appear to have induced any anxiety in the authors over the form the work would take. The writer and the artist have produced a book that accords closely with

what could reasonably have been expected from them working together but ultimately apart; for this feels like a collaboration in which each has experienced the labour of creation alone. Those familiar with Macleod's pictorial world may find its location made pleasingly ambiguous by the references and reflections that Jones places beside it, while fans of Jones the novelist should enjoy the burst of visual imagery that Macleod provides. It is a book that their audiences will love.

By publishing it commercially for broad distribution, Massey University Press has taken the kind of project that might usually be found within the wonderful but enclosed world of limited edition books, and made it available to a much larger public. This may be the enduring achievement of the *kōrero* series, which will hopefully bring many more successful collaborations to light. ■



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High Wire
Lloyd Jones and Euan Macleod
Massey University Press, 2020
\$45 (NZD)

01 Euan Macleod, 2019, photograph Andrew Merry

02 Euan Macleod, *Highwire Study*, 2019, hand coloured aquatint, 32.5 x 25 cm

Courtesy the artist, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne, and King Street Gallery, Sydney



01

PICTURING OURSELVES GABRIELLA LO PRESTI

Story **EMMA FINNERAN**

There in the depths of Australian suburbia, walking for hours at a time into the fading light of the afternoon, the wander-smitten Gabriella Lo Presti is performing a kind of 'waking up' of abandoned spaces found at the edge of the sublime and the mundane. Capturing places often dismissed, Lo Presti's photographs meditatively guide us to the metaphor of aliveness. This place, plus me, are alive in something that allows me to bare witness to the very nature of all and myself; a journey within that pushes you out.

In photography the instant is its own question and at the same time, its own answer; a discipline of mind at the service of sensitivity, a harnessing and balancing of thoughtful awareness of the weight, the centre, the surface and the nature of the everyday. Lo Presti's photographs do more than redefine the stuff of ordinary experience; people, things, events. Instead, her photographs – as if spiritualised by sleep – translate the subtleties of magic, wonder, nostalgia and mystery to the individual as both a present and absent object.

Unlike ordinary cultural spaces, the motel is a place that accommodates breaks from traditional time: honeymoons, travel, moments of crisis – heterotopias stuck in a quasi-eternity without geographical markers. In *Motel Wall* (2019), Lo Presti provides a strangely familiar composition of interior and exterior space – a motel window, partitioning human life, eclipses a plastic waste bin that almost looks like it isn't there. The viewer becomes a sentimental partner – the guest in transit, not really invited – and is granted clear yet threatened access to the alienation in our own lives, and those of others.

Printed on acrylic and fabric, or wrapped in plastic, Lo Presti's photographs play with the ambiguities of mind and place, suburbia and nostalgia, the mundane and the sublime; into fantastically intimate compositions of interior and exterior space. *Untitled Still iii* (2019) reminds us that reality is not given; rather it is constructed – of experiences and perspectives that are individual as well as collective. That the sense of home is a religious sanctuary like no other – it's the place in which we live, where our time and our history occur.

The photographic nature of Gabriella Lo Presti's practice is ephemeral, being event-based and time-limited. The artist transcends her transient wanderlust by erecting tactile assemblages and installations nostalgic of the places represented, utilising materials often dismissed and discarded. It feels so simple, so elegant and powerful, that these places and non-spaces she captures are temporal – much like life. And that nostalgia, shown in both the sublime and the mundane, is the assorted and tenuous stuff of illusion. ■

@moltebene__

gabriellalopresti.com

EXHIBITION

Gabriella Lo Presti
27 March to 14 April 2020
China Heights Gallery, Sydney

01 *Untitled Still iii*, 2019, digital print, 282 x 146 x 45 cm

Courtesy the artist and China Heights, Sydney

melbourneartfair.com.au

Melbourne Art Fair 18–21 June 20

Melbourne Convention
and Exhibition Centre

ART

Dr Christian Thompson AO
Primeval Sea 2018
C-type print
Courtesy of the artist
and Michael Reid Sydney + Berlin


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