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TITLE Down the Rabbit Hole



**A QUEENSLAND COLLEGE OF ART, GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY
AND UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND
VISUAL ART RESEARCH PROJECT**

CO-CURATED BY BEATA BATOROWICZ AND SEBASTIAN DI MAURO

AUGUST 2013

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THE CURIOUS ART OF FALLING **DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE**

BEATA BATOROWICZ
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THE WELL-KNOWN CHILDREN'S NOVEL *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*, BY CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON (PSEUDONYM LEWIS CARROLL), BEGINS WITH A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL, ALICE, AND A WHITE RABBIT.

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Dressed in a handsome waistcoat, the White Rabbit is running out of time, hastily scurrying about and panting to the sound of each tick from his elegant pocket watch. Alice, in her curiosity, eagerly chases after him. Caught in the intrigue of the chase, Alice has no time to hesitate as she falls *down the rabbit hole*...

Yet there is an *art* to falling down the rabbit hole. Somewhere between the relentless chase and the unexpected fall is a potent collision of inner and outer creative worlds. A fantastical chaos between the personal and the social, intuition and logic, sub-consciousness and consciousness, fact and fiction, sense and non-sense. It is at this enchanted moment that a complete immersion in the creative process takes over... and *all* sense of time is lost.

This loss of time carries more meaning than *just* being immersed in creative curiosity. It signifies the disorientation of the protagonist while simultaneously acting as a narration device in disorienting the reader. That is, encountering a surreal world disorients Alice. As she becomes curiously immersed in this world, she loses the ability to decipher reality from fiction. In doing so, Alice transports the reader into the same dilemma, shifting them from familiar to unknown territories of their imagination. In short, this disorientation process suspends the reader's disbelief.

This notion of creative curiosity is the central curatorial premise for the *Down the Rabbit Hole* exhibition. Initiating a unique cross-institutional collaboration between Queensland College of Art (QCA), Griffith University, Brisbane, and the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Toowoomba, *Down the Rabbit Hole* showcases both two- and three-dimensional works by twenty-two emerging artists: Kathy Appleby, Glen Bowman, Olivia Bradley, Jason Castro, Linda Clark, Ellie Coleman, Grace

Dewar, Dan Elborne, Addis (Adis) Fejzić, AJ Gogas, Dale Harding, Amber Kilkenny, Kay Lawrence, Tarn Maclean, Carol McGregor, Julie-Anne Milinski, Chris Kelly, Michelle Roberts, Eric Rossi, Brian Sanstrom, Glen Skien, and Lynden Stone. This cross-institutional collaboration is a two-part exhibition, showcasing firstly at QCA's Webb Centre Gallery, The Project Gallery, and POP Gallery in Brisbane, and then travelling to USQ Gallery and the Red Door Gallery in Toowoomba.

Central to this collaborative project is the way in which these emerging Queensland artists explore visual narratives through both personal and social realms and how they manifest in local, national, and international platforms. In particular, the project investigates the role of the artist as both the protagonist and the narrator. Each contemporary artist tells their own story by visually navigating the viewer through metaphorical, symbolic, or mythical realms. These visual stories blur boundaries between fact and fiction, luring the viewer 'down the rabbit hole'.

In doing so, the artist does not aim to elude or misguide the viewer under false pretenses. On the contrary, these visual narratives make explicit the artist's subjective agency, preempting the viewer to find the 'little truths' among the make-believe. Yet, there is a cunning craft to engaging the viewer in this way, as often the viewer needs to take an active part in choosing the collection of stories she or he will gather. A similar concept is put forward by Susan Chase, who states that "for all narrative researchers, a central question revolves around which voice or voices researchers should use to interpret and represent the voices of those they study".¹



The significance of *Down the Rabbit Hole* lies in its interpretation and application of creative curiosity within a critical studio-research context. Therefore, the role of practice-led research is poignant to this project, as it adheres to the very notion of *experiencing* creative curiosity in order to effectively *fall* into the rabbit hole. It is only through engaging with experience that other worlds can be understood. In this way, creative curiosity becomes an intellectual pursuit; like a riddle that makes sense of what is initially perceived as non-sense. Often, such visual research methods are employed to cautiously interweave intellectual rigour and creative intuition within contemporary art practices. This inquiry forms an ongoing subtext for this project, and is addressed through the critical role of contemporary studio research.

While there are many roles that the artist can take, the artist-as-narrator is particularly relevant for this research project. This role can be likened to the narrative-inquiry research methodology commonly employed in education. Within the education research, narrative inquiry is critical in activating the researcher and simultaneously acknowledging subjectivity in a way that enriches the academic focus of the research. More specifically, narrative inquiry acknowledges the centrality of the research as a form of telling and retelling the experiences of both the studied subject and the researcher.² This premise underpins the importance of *experiencing* Alice's sense of curiosity within creative art practices.

Pioneering researchers in the field of education, Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin discuss narrative inquiry as *active* research because it functions as an engaged agent for transferring knowledge and lived experiences.³ This method embodies analysis of constructed memory and perceived memory significant to the subjectivity involved in recording art history. Eleni Gematou discusses art-historical writings in relation to narrative:

the art historian aims to make a story out of the interpreted works of art by arranging them in certain order, deciding which work to include or to exclude and stressing some works over others.⁴

Similarly, the idea of history as a subjective narration is significant to this project. This form of engagement has been a stimulus used throughout twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, whereby artists have used embodied symbolic and metaphorical strategies to address historical cultural agency.

Therefore, narrative inquiry, as both a method and a phenomenon of study, is a way of thinking about and making sense of cross-disciplinary experience.⁵

Narrative inquiry is both a creative and critically engaged process that interweaves art production and research outcomes through using story-telling as a vehicle to convey cultural and philosophical content within visual art. We could also argue here that the narrative-inquiry methodology itself is an active agent in emphasising the fluid parameters between creativity and critical thinking. Contemporary discourses in visual-art research further view creative curiosity as an important self-reflexive strategy in fostering this relationship.⁶

In this exhibition, it could be interpreted that creativity and criticality are intrinsically linked as it showcases not only professional expertise but also new contributions to the visual-art field. We congratulate all the artists for their creative curiosity, their stories, and, most importantly, for falling down this rabbit hole. ♦

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1 Susan Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), xix.

2 Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 5 (1990): 2.

3 Ibid.

4 Eleni Gematou, "Subjectivity in Art History and Art Criticism," *Rupkatha Journal* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 2009): 5.

5 Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience," 14.

6 Michael Holly and Marquard Smith, eds. *What Is Research in the Visual Arts?* (London: Yale Press, 2009).

RESEARCH AS **FAIRY TALE**

ROSS WOODROW

ALL THE ARTISTS FEATURED IN THIS EXHIBITION ARE PART OF A NEW GENERATION TEACHING AND STUDYING IN AUSTRALIAN ART SCHOOLS WHO DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES WITH PARTICULAR ATTITUDES TOWARDS MAKING, WRITING, AND THINKING ABOUT ART.

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This is the generation educated under the rubric of art as research. While Australian art schools were amalgamated with the university sector over twenty years ago, the real impact on tertiary art education occurred when PhD and other doctoral programs in creative fields were introduced during the mid-to-late 1990s. A number of the artists in *Down the Rabbit Hole* are completing a studio-based PhD; thus, by definition, they are conducting research and are producing research outputs. The debate over the legitimacy of studio practice as research has moderated in recent times, but it remains a contentious point.

But why is there such resistance to accepting art as research from within the academy as well as from within the creative-arts disciplines themselves? It might be tempting to say it is simply a collision of the two competing powerful myths of the artist and the scientist. However, there is no singular answer to this discontent, but rather, a constellation of factors—including history, economics, and politics—all of which have very little to do with logic. A quote from a paper I wrote in 2005, when the debate was more vociferous, easily illustrates the unfathomable logic used in attempts to selectively include creative activity by artists as research:

No reasonable reader in the wider community could accept a definition for research [by the Australian Research Council (ARC)] that states “creative work [referring principally to the sciences] undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge” with an addendum noting—“this definition encompasses creative work and performance”. “Creative work” that includes “creative work”—this is the academic Wonderland speak we have all come to accept. Work in the creative arts is research only

when the ruling disciplines say it is, in other words. Ask our constituency in the wider sociocultural sphere what “creative work” means and they will be unequivocal—creative arts practice.¹

Naturally, I have included this example since it highlights my delight at seeing the rationale for this exhibition of creative-based researchers under the title *Down the Rabbit Hole*, which is as playful as it is profound in encapsulating the nature of creative endeavour in Academe—or rather, Wonderland. If you might imagine that the creative work that artists do is different in spirit to that of science you only need to read the most important and influential twentieth-century book on the nature of scientific research: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas Kuhn (1922–96). Originally published in 1962, a special fiftieth-anniversary edition was published in 2012.² In his treatise, Kuhn demonstrates that scientific revolutions are triggered when individual scientists reject the rules, codes, and premises that have established the existing paradigm. Kuhn is specific in noting that these “creative scientists” must first act “like artists”, and operate in a world without rules;³ in other words, they must jump down the rabbit hole to create a paradigm shift. Occasionally, jumping into this “world out of joint” is necessary to create “the essential tension” that triggers new forms of thinking, although, for Kuhn, the ultimate aim of the scientist is to climb out onto the other side with the shape of a new paradigm and the tools to build it.⁴ It is not only the individual inventive scientist who must behave like an artist to trigger a paradigm shift since the shape of the new paradigm must have sufficient “aesthetic” appeal to a quantum of colleagues to succeed. As Kuhn puts it, “The man who embraces a new paradigm at an early stage must often do so in defiance of the evidence



provided by problem-solving.”⁵ This often means deserting existing theories for one that satisfies aesthetic notions of being “neater” or “simpler”. Because new theories often only attract a few scientists and it is upon these few that the ultimate triumph of the paradigm may depend, “the importance of aesthetic considerations can sometimes be decisive”.⁶ Giving emphasis to the role of aesthetics, Kuhn wrote: “Even today Einstein’s general theory attracts men [and women, I’m sure] principally on aesthetic grounds, an appeal that few people outside of mathematics have been able to feel.”⁷ That was written fifty years ago, while today it is commonplace, even in popular culture, to accept that it is only in the realm of pure mathematics that numbers combine to reveal their true beauty.

I should add that mine is not an eccentric reading of Kuhn. The most recent study on art-as-research in the United States, undertaken by Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner, has this to say:

The results of what Thomas Kuhn (1970 edition) has called *revolutionary science*, projects of science that result in new gestalts or ways of conceiving the physical world, seem especially akin to the kinds of world-making that some works of art provide. We believe that an individual (or a member of a group of people) who works at the peak of their powers in shaping a form that has aesthetic characteristics and generates meanings functions as an artist. But then you could say that the aim of preparation of all kinds of research is to do it in a way that makes its features aesthetic. At its very best, a scientific research study also becomes a work of art and the researcher an artist.⁸

Clearly, the ARC’s definition of research should simply refer to “creative work undertaken to increase our stock of knowledge and understanding”. Perhaps there could be an addendum stating this could include creative work in the sciences and humanities if outside of systematic norms. Yet, things are never that logical in Wonderland, I’m afraid.

Importantly, Kuhn made no distinction between scientist and non-scientist in defining creative success; “No creative school recognizes a category of work that is, on the one hand, a creative success, but is not, on the other, an addition to the collective achievement of the group.”⁹ If we assume that the academic/professional art world is equivalent to the scientific community as keepers of “the rules of the game”, then it is possible to find many parallels in the professional characteristics of these two communities, especially in the way they both eschew any appeal to outside political bodies, heads of state, “or the populace at large” in matters of judgement.¹⁰ I should caution that any argument against my conflating of the academic art sphere and the professional art world is unsustainable today since many senior artists hold PhDs, and almost every Australian representative at the Venice Biennale over the past decade has a postgraduate qualification. It might be assumed that the instant and infinite exposure offered by the Internet would have democratised or de-professionalised the art world, but the millions of hits on YouTube count for nothing until a work is noticed and accredited by one of the keepers of ‘the standards’. The example of the two young Brisbane-based artists, Nicole Beaumont and Sarah Clark, who work as CLARK BEAUMONT, exemplifies this. After viewing their work on the Internet, two of the world’s most influential museum directors and curators, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Klaus

Biesenbach, selected CLARK BEAUMONT to join a pantheon of twelve great international artists to represent Australia in the recent major art project *13 Rooms* in Sydney, sponsored by John Kaldor, one of Australia's most important collectors and public patrons.¹¹ I am not implying that CLARK BEAUMONT's work is not equivalent in quality to the project's established artists, such as Damien Hirst and Marina Abramović, or that the process is unpredictable. On the contrary, I am suggesting the close parallel that exists between the peer-review systems within the scientific and the artistic community.

The scientific equivalent to the CLARK BEAUMONT example would be a young scientist being published in the premier science journal *Nature*, in that Clark's and Beaumont's future careers appear to be secure. To doubt that these significant curators, and others like them, shared some equivalent basis for unequivocal judgements would be to accept caprice and whimsy as drivers of progress in the arts. I will put this in the terms that Kuhn used in relation to expert reviewers in science:

To doubt that they shared some such basis for evaluations would be to admit the existence of incompatible standards of scientific achievement. That admission would inevitably raise the question whether truth in the sciences can be one.¹²

The sardonic flavour in Kuhn's statement becomes clearer with the knowledge that he is referring to what he called "normal science"; that is, the existing paradigm, which, by its nature, resists change. Kuhn was writing when physics dominated the scientific field, whereas "today biotechnology rules".¹³ In the contemporary state of play, "neuroscience is the queen of the natural sciences", and the neural explanation is a paradigm that has begun to gain traction in many non-scientific disciplines, including art and art history, or *neuroarthistory*.¹⁴ The current belief that biological science, in particular neuroscience, can explain most human activities that are sourced in the brain, including criminality, art, music, and literature, is based on a vague acceptance of the prestige and glamour of science as a discipline rather than a hard-headed analysis of the claims being made or an understanding of what is at stake. At least, this is the view of Raymond Tallis, who, in his compelling *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity* (2011), presents the current proliferation of biologism and neuro-evolutionary politics as part of the rise of a biologistic pseudo-science to rival the expansion of phrenology in the early-nineteenth century. His description of many of the totalising aspects of neuroscience as a neo-phrenology is particularly telling in relation to Kuhn's comments on the incompatible standards

of scientific achievement, since Tallis pillories and parodies the content of many peer-reviewed articles that appear in high-ranking science journals. He accuses them of exhibiting bad science, poor logic, and being philosophically bereft of value. At various times in the nineteenth century, many key scientists—Darwin among them—accepted phrenology and its principles. Tallis is (or was) a respected neuroscientist and only time will tell if he has simply become the Mad Hatter whose hysterical ravings will be forgotten when we return to the reality of the current paradigm. I, for one, am willing to join him at Alice's tea party since I like the shape and style of his narrative.

Kuhn's insight into characterising this netherworld of invention and creative enlightenment that artists work within as the domain that scientists must inhabit in order to discover new theories and triggers for paradigm shifts highlights the identity problem that artists have in Academe. While it would seem obvious that no meaningful messages can be conveyed in a land without codes, and it might also seem logical that ideas conceived in such a place or state could not offer any definitive or repeatable explanation, this does not mean that art and science created outside the existing boundaries, belief systems, and scientific principles does not add to the stock of human knowledge and understanding. Often, works of art progress our understanding by highlighting the problem/s in our world view. As Irving Massey recently noted, "Works of art create meanings that are simply not contained in their elements but emerge for the first time in the collision of those elements."¹⁵ In art and the art of the fairy tale, it is "what does not make sense that makes sense, what escapes plausibility that creates plausibility—i.e., new 'meanings'".¹⁶ Fifty years ago, Thomas Kuhn told us something similar about scientific revolutions.

I extend my congratulations to Dr Beata Batorowicz from USQ and Sebastian Di Mauro from QCA, Griffith, for co-curating such a stimulating research project across their respective institutions. Special acknowledgement also goes to all the artists involved, as the quality of their work here is exceptional. ♦

PROFESSOR ROSS WOODROW

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1 Ross Woodrow, "The Irrelevant Consumers of Culture," *Artists, Designers and Creative Communities: 2005 ACUADS Conference Proceedings* (Perth: Edith Cowan University, 2005), <http://acuads.com.au/static/files/assets/2cf02958/woodrow.pdf>.

2 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*, with an Introductory Essay by Ian Hacking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

3 Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 97.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 156, 157.

6 Ibid., 155.

7 Ibid.

8 Tom Barone and Elliot W. Eisner, *Arts Based Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 62, 63.

9 Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 162.

10 Ibid., 167, 168.

11 *13 Rooms*, 11–21 April 2013, Pier 2/3, Walsh Bay, Sydney.

12 Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 167.

13 Ian Hacking, Introduction to *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ix.

14 Raymond Tallis, *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), 15.

15 Irving Massey, *The Neural Imagination: Aesthetic and Neuroscientific Approaches to the Arts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 181.

16 Ibid.



WONDERING IN WONDERLAND

CHRIS LEE

WHEN ALICE FOLLOWS THE WHITE RABBIT DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE, SHE ENTERS AN IMAGINATIVE PLACE IN WHICH THE LOGICS AND IMAGES OF HER VICTORIAN WORLD ARE SYMPTOMATICALLY REFIGURED. A 'WONDERLAND' IS QUITE LITERALLY A PLACE OF AWE, PUZZLEMENT, AND SURPRISE.

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While a place of confusion and uncertainty can be a place of fear, it can also offer opportunities. By definition, the sublime instils fear without immediate danger, and Wonderland is sublime in the sense that it offers us a spectacle that suggests that our own place in the world is small and more of a mystery than originally thought. Wonderland is a place of grotesque vision, strange events, and errant affects. But what possible harm can come to a fictitious little girl called Alice in a wondrous world that makes a point of making very little sense at all?

Alice in Wonderland is considered a children's story, and children's stories are really only allowed to scare children if they promise to return them to their parents safe and sound and ready for bed. Lewis Carroll's story makes a transition from an idle moment on a riverbank to an underworld of the imagination by suspending fear and disbelief so that we might have a moment to reconsider our differences. The threats and dangers of Wonderland are conventions in an accepted ritual that removes us from the modern world of fear and trembling. They are part and parcel of a game; a fictionalised form of imaginative play that relaxes the rules of behaviour so as to allow for daring—even a little ritualised transgression.

Lewis Carroll's story is often described as a nonsense fiction, which means that it invests in forms of incoherence. In narrative, this can mean a chain of events that seem to defy the accepted laws of time and place, cause and effect, motivation and character. The sight of a white rabbit with pink eyes drawing a pocket watch from his coat pocket is what first attracts Alice's attention. "Oh dear! Oh dear!", he says, "I shall be late!" He is a rabbit running after the

linear time of productive capitalism. Surely not, when all of nature spends itself generously according to the (re) generative processes of season and cycle? Time is out of joint; the rabbit with the pocket watch is out of place. Alice cannot help but follow it all the way to Wonderland. Carroll has already told us that she is looking for "pictures or conversations", for "what is the use of a book" without them?

The images, colours, textures, forms, and/or objects that prompt conversations about the nature of time and the place of different peoples within it is what coheres the disparate aesthetic forms in this joint exhibition. Reading the artists' statements gives the visitor a sense of the eclectic character of inspiration, the range of conception, and the diversity of practice encompassed in this showing of works. The artists take us 'down the rabbit hole' by reconfiguring images, objects, and forms and bringing them into new, often wondrous, relations. In this way, they help us to reconsider a world of routine and familiarity as newly available for interpretation. This is an exhibition designed to cause wonder.

In some ways, this reveals one of the challenges that practice-based research work in the creative arts presents to professional, disciplined, formalised codes of knowledge and understanding. And, of course, one of the most exciting things about the way that *Down the Rabbit Hole* does this is its engagement with the public. Inspired by biography, autobiography, history, philosophy, politics, and literature, these artists seek to reconfigure the markers of our world in ways that inspire us to remake it.

Narrative plays a significant role here, for refiguring a story or remembering a forgotten story can challenge established myths and patterns that are so well worn we have almost lost our power to think beyond them. Metonym is a key trope for it allows an object or an image to be a part of all that it has met. I am also struck by the ways in which these artists use symbol, quotation, (re)inscription, and association to rewire the past, present, and future. This exhibition asks you to reimagine the legacy of the colonial enterprise, the embodied nature of subjectivity and experience, and the stimulating connections between the imagination and reason, the individual and society, private life and the public sphere.

Universities offer aspiring artists a number of advantages, among them, the opportunity to understand artistic practice in the context of established and developing skills and technologies. Universities also offer them the ability to situate their own practice through exposing them to art theory and art history. They further offer stimulating exposure to knowledges in the wider disciplines of the humanities and sciences. But, universities should be cautious not to tame and conventionalise their students; rather, they need to aggressively aid and abet them in their journey down the rabbit hole of practice-based research. They need to facilitate their engagement with a wider public.

This is why the Faculty of Arts at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is excited about supporting this exhibition of work by aspiring artists. *Down the Rabbit Hole* places the art of our students alongside those from the Queensland College of Art (QCA), Griffith University, in front of a wider public. From conception to production to

exhibition, it is a process that offers a wonderful learning opportunity. A commitment to life-long learning is core business for our artists and it is core business for USQ and QCA. We hope this exhibition takes us somewhere new and we hope it takes you there as well. ♦

PROFESSOR CHRIS LEE

Associate Dean of Research, Faculty of Arts,
University of Southern Queensland



CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER: STUDIO RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

DAVID AKENSON

IN 1971, FRENCH CONCEPTUAL ARTIST DANIEL BUREN PROPOSED THE 'EXTINCTION' OF THE STUDIO.

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The death of the studio was meant to reflect a change from the idea of it as a masculine site—in which the solitary genius creates masterpieces for the modern museum—to one understood as a frame or ideological context for the creation, and also the reception, of works of art. When one thinks of the romantic or artist-genius model, names such as Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, and Francis Bacon usually come to mind. In Australia, Brett Whitely embodies this form of tortured genius par excellence. In fact, his studio is preserved in Surry Hills, Sydney, as a symbol of his singular gifts. In reaction to this stereotype—and, associated with it, the broader ideological context of modernism—artists began to pursue projects beyond the white cube and the sanctified space of the artist's studio.

As poststructuralist theory replaced romantic ideas of human agency associated with the genius model, the word 'research' began to replace older models of creative work. Discipline-specific models of studio practice in the tertiary-education setting underwent a parallel critical review of the ideological and practical functions associated with the specific focus on discipline expertise. Out of this critique emerged an interest in cross-disciplinary experimentation and socially directed collaborations. But, while it is true the modern understanding of studio practice and associated models of subjectivity has been subject to intense criticism in both theory and practice, arguably, the understanding of what constitutes studio practice has been expanded rather than rejected tout court.

The actual death of the studio will have to await the auditing zeal of the modern university's finance departments. In the meantime, it is worth considering the kinds of research typically undertaken in these studio spaces in the so-called 'post-studio' milieu. At the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), we have very catholic tastes when it comes to both studio and traditional academic research; a kind of aesthetic lingua franca underpins our approach to research, whereby the traditional meets the contemporary, the high meets the low, the inside meets the outside, and the singular meets the collective. The contemporary studio is a space where individual studio research projects associated with a specific medium, as much as collaborations and intra-specific or cross-disciplinary projects, are supported. The student is only asked to contextualise their practice in relation to the broader aesthetic field—to position their research and develop both the material language for making and the conceptual language to articulate that position.

One of the potential consequences of understanding practice as research is a loss of idleness—the requirement to be accountable to research metrics, such as Field of Research (FoR) codes, focussed assessment criteria, or some industry expectation. There is no hiding behind aesthetic disinterest and judgments based on formal qualities. However, unlike science, art does not always submit to such metrics. Having intention meet execution often leads to a tyranny of the concept, a situation where imaginative and creative enquiry are denied or at least stultified. An important consideration in this context is curiosity-driven research, or the idea of following a hunch that captures the student's attention and



leads them down unfamiliar roads of discovery. This form of research entails a certain degree of risk, which might not 'pay off' at assessment time, nor produce an accountable research outcome. Nevertheless, research risks are worth taking, not as a replacement for research accountability but as a complement to it—an excess yet to be accounted for or measured as a research outcome. A kind of traumatic moment in the making that will have been the cause of new research.

While we might want to question some of the assumptions that emerged out of romanticism—in particular, the studio model it engendered—we might not need to expunge all notions of creativity. Studio research today might pursue some kind of 'madness' in the method, to the point where curiosity gets the better of us and we follow a barely contoured hunch with one eye on accountability and the other open to discovery; some new idea within the old or familiar. Curiosity-driven studio research can embrace this madness or moment of uncertainty within the given research context—the art within the science.

At USQ, studio research provides a space for the employment of established methods of research and accountability, but equally, experimentation, reflection, and curiosity-driven enquiry. The student can follow the latest trend, producing a variant of the current formula for institutional success, or work against the grain and risk a qualified reception. This kind of studio research is made with a conscious intention developed from within a given researched context, but equally from a liminal space; a space at the threshold of conscious understanding. Liminal spaces open up possibilities for novel contributions to the known or otherwise mapped, ordered, and reified social and cultural spaces we inhabit.

Down the Rabbit Hole encapsulates something of this way of understanding the studio; an understanding that embraces the liminal space where the known and the unknown, the tried and the untested, collide. This open, littoral space of the 'in between', evocative of the philosophy behind by the present collaboration between the two institutions, is found in much of the work for this exhibition.

For example, **Dan Elborne** brings together the beautiful and the sublime in slip-cast 'bullets' that commemorate his grandfather's service in the Indonesian War of Independence. The beautiful, hand-painted patterning on the surface of the bullets produces a positive pleasure in response to a formal display, while the sublime feeling associated with the all-too-ordinary function of the real bullet adds a feeling of unease associated with the formlessness of war. **AJ Gogas's** French-knitted anthropomorphic objects stand vertically, suggesting the humanist subject, and yet the material is soft, requiring armature to give it form and prevent its horizontal collapse. **Tarn McLean** works at the intersection of art and design, the real and the virtual. Her 'paintings' owe as much to her mobile electronic studio as they do to a physical space. Through a blend of old and new media, McLean breaks free from both ideological positions. **Grace Dewar** produces 'natural' objects through industrial and chemical materials; beautiful form mixes with a toxic, formless extrusion of industrial material, while **Chris Kelly's** elegiac works negotiates the political exchange between colonial history, contemporary Western aesthetics, and craft techniques. Her meticulously carved works restage a division of labour marginal to orthodox Marxist accounts as much as they redress alienation. In a project not unrelated to that of Kelly, **Jason Castro's** sand paintings explore a kind of 'third space' where indigenous identity and Western values and structures of power clash. The face, for Castro, is the meeting of ethics and politics, a post-Levinasian humanism that transcends binary positions of 'I' and 'other', 'us' and 'them'. **Linda Clark's** meticulously crafted surreal objects resemble Rorschach tests, hovering between the familiar and the not-so-familiar, the conscious and the unconscious, the material body and immaterial thought, while **Glen Bowman's** formal works bridge the divide between modernist formal experiments and isolationist claims, and engagements with phenomenological space, light, and kinetics.

In fact, all artists represented in this exchange exhibition embrace both the risks and rewards that attend the exploration of this liminal space between two otherwise fixed points of reference. To inhabit this space challenges artist and audience alike to consider an experience at once familiar and distant, a curious space where nothing is quite what it seems. ♦

DAVID AKENSON

Lecturer in Art Theory, Visual Art
University of Southern Queensland

BETWEEN EARTH AND THE UNDERWORLD

DAVID BROKER

"... AND WHAT IS THE USE OF A BOOK", THOUGHT ALICE, "WITHOUT PICTURES OR CONVERSATIONS?"

—LEWIS CARROLL, *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*

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If Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is not the perfect metaphor, it is eminently appropriate for an exhibition of work by artists setting out on a challenging journey of self-discovery, where the familiar is never quite as it seems. Alice's inordinately lengthy fall from Earth to Wonderland gave her time to consider how she might respond upon landing, only to discover that everything was ultimately confusing and surprising. What she found was a curious world that reflected her own experience in an entirely different form. In a land where nothing and everything was new, Alice experienced the paradox of art, and her encounter with the familiar in an unfamiliar package was the material of transformation.

Down the Rabbit Hole (after Alice) might appear to be an obvious route for the artist and yet, it is not necessarily so. With an exhibition brief to explore "the use of visual narratives" and focus on the "metaphorical, symbolic, and mythical facets within visual stories and the way artists use storytelling to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction", many emerging practitioners may be entering uncharted territory. In theory, every work of art should tell something of the artist's story, since each new work reflects something of a unique experience that is communicated through diverse, disparate forms. In a world where contemporary art has become highly institutionalised and is in danger of serving little more than the academic practices of studio research, methodologies, and 'creative industries', it is important that artists are also afforded the opportunity to simply tell their stories.

Among the most courageous works being produced today are those by the descendants of First Peoples. Their stories are personally difficult, and frequently challenge audiences with issues they may not wish to confront. **Jason Castro** speaks of a dual heritage filtered through contemporary Western art and traditional Native American practices. He has found novel ways of retelling the stories of Native Americans via a complex critique of ethnographic photographer Edward S. Curtis who documented 'dying' North American tribes through a lens of contrived uniformity. Using sand painting, the traditional medium of his people, the Diné (Navajo), Castro undoes Curtis's stereotypical images, which have become a definitive record of Native America in all but the eyes of Native Americans themselves. Castro's work has significant relevance in Australia where Aboriginal people from groups of rich cultural diversity have been perceived and recorded by Europeans as a homogenous entity. **Dale Harding**, whose people are of Bidjara and Ghungalu country in central Queensland, addresses cultural genocide with work that complicates the matter by introducing issues of sexuality. Harding's research into the untold stories of his communities leads him into unavoidably painful territory. Identifying with his matrilineal ancestors and accessing a Country Women's Association aesthetic, Harding's oversized needles and embroidered/cross-stitched slogans in pieces such as *Blakboy, Blakboy, The Colour of Your Skin Is Your Pride and Joy* (2012), reveal uncomfortable truths in relation to the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women who were, at the same time, denied the comforts of home and family on their own lands.

For audiences willing to consider the oppressive histories of their colonial ancestors, the work of artists such as Castro and Harding bear significant rewards. Shameful though their stories may be, they are critical to the understanding of our own Australian history, and the forging of a brighter future. **Chris Kelly** draws upon an indigenous heritage (Bungalung people of northern New South Wales) to make objects that reflect the ongoing problems of assimilation. Carving clothes in camphor laurel wood, an introduced species, her children's shoes, Sunday dresses, and bonnets address the discomfort felt by children forced into foreign colonial garb completely inappropriate for the Australian environment. Kelly invokes the 'well meant' travesty of the Stolen Generation as these rigid clothes attest to the unethical and inhumane lengths European settlers went to in order to recreate Aboriginal people in their own image. Survival against the odds and the dynamism of ancient cultures is also a feature of **Carol McGregor's** *Journey Cloak* (2012), in which the artist employs the 'symbolic re-emergence' of the possum-skin cloak as a compelling signifier of Aboriginal identity. Of Wathaurong (in southern Victoria) and Scottish descent, McGregor recalls a past in which the cloak provided practical warmth, courtesy of fur pelts, while the inside contained vernacular insignia and accounts of the people's connection to their lands.

The idea that non-indigenous Australians continue to be strangers in a strange land provides important source material for many artists who employ notions of heritage to position themselves in new territories. With postmodernism, the visual arts became an effective way for artists to connect with the past and engage with the present. The art of *stećak*, medieval tombstones that lie scattered across the blood-stained terrain of Bosnia and Herzegovina have proved to be the spectral inspiration for **Addis (Adis) Fejzić's** work, *The Bosnian Triumphal Gate* (2012). Drawing on an atavistic past that belongs as much to him as to the land from which the stones have emerged, Fejzić's cultural heritage steers his artistic practice, which revives and revitalises sculptural forms of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Conversely, **Eric Rossi** sees artists as tourists. His *Pikkochinno* and *The Cheerleaders* (both of 2011) are paintings that respond to his recent visit to Jogjakarta, and focus on the changes experienced in local Indonesian culture due to globalisation and tourism. Rossi's work considers the cultural slippages created by global tourism and constant exposure to the ways in which individuals and groups are perceived by visiting others. Citing the personal experience of understanding his Australian-Finnish background in the context of the Pacific, Rossi uses his work to explore the ambiguities felt by so many people today in relation to their legacy and dynamic, new cultural situations.



Close to the surface of cultural heritage lies the more immediate and overlapping layer of family, wherein a wealth of material exists for the inquiring artist. **Julie-Anne Milinski's** engaging "autobiographical recollections" blend stories of her green-thumbed grandmother—"the unconscious recycler" who crafts objects from plastic bags—and her mother-in-law who is gifted in the arts of crochet.

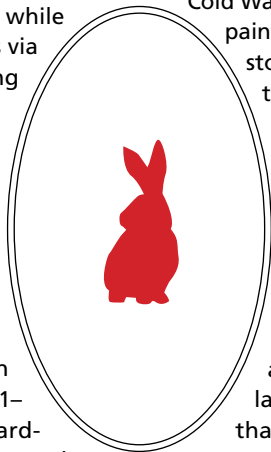
Taking the *Sansevieria trifasciata* (commonly known as mother-in-law's tongue), a plant with social (kinship) and ambiguous environmental connotations, Milinski pays playful homage to her idiosyncratic relatives while introducing her own environmental concerns via a weed with possibly miraculous air-purifying qualities.

Milinski literally weaves her story around the plants, creating crocheted 'cozies' in toxic colours and non-biodegradable materials that ironically restrain and manipulate nature while providing a bizarre form of décor for the plant itself. **Dan Elborne** explores his family history through the story of his Dutch grandfather who fought in the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–49). His *500* (2011–12) ceramic bullets are modelled on standard-issue ammunition given to Dutch soldiers, and cast in earthenware that was used in the Netherlands for traditional delftware plates that imitated porcelain. It faithfully references Elborne's ancestry while also generating tensions between the creative nature of refined artisan crafts and the degrading brutality and destruction of war.

Collective and personal memories emanate from the stories passed from generation to generation. Unstable and unreliable memories transformed by the passage of time are a problematic area for many artists and yet they are a source of endless fascination. On memory, **Michelle Roberts** notes in this catalogue that it

is not a static record of history, but rather an oculus through which we revise our past, a mesh through which we filter and shape our present and an oracle we consult to create our future by remembering it into being.

Her collaged installations bring together found objects, photographs, drawings, paintings, and prints that represent real and imagined memories in a way that demonstrates the volatility of memory. The past often appears as a construct of the present, whether it is the broad sweep of history or private recollections that fade and find new, variously altered, form in current thought. This phenomenon, found in the production of personal histories, permeates **Glen Skien's** fusion of print, assemblage, and collage in which the material of found objects and their surfaces receive in-depth attention. Working with the view that the familiar, everyday objects that surround an individual play a significant role in constructing a sense of self, he generates fresh ideas from old objects while never completely erasing original resonances of structure and function.



Memory might scarcely be any more than convenient fiction. The fictions that artists generate reveal something of themselves through stories that are not specifically their own but rather of which they eventually claim ownership. Thus, narrative becomes the material through which a concept is expressed. **Lynden Stone** gives visual form to a seductive tale that is ridiculous enough to be truth. Recounting the well-documented story of the meeting between former US Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, her work is a comical account of Cold War international relations. Through paintings and painted objects for the museum, Stone recounts the story of the infamous 'Kitchen Debate' in which these two historical figures publicly argued over the authenticity of a modern American kitchen displayed at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. Stone creates a fascinating "parallel alternative" that imagines the world leaders in a flatulent exchange, 'dumping' on each other's technological advancements in a conversation with global implications. **Katherine Appleby's** paintings, drawings, and prints envision *Firdarrig*, an imaginary land of her own invention. The flora and fauna that inhabit this place might be figments of her imagination; however, they are almost believable and reminiscent of the highly detailed natural-history drawings so popular during the nineteenth century. I am reminded of the William Farquhar Collection of watercolours by unknown artists in which the creatures of Malacca and Singapore appear to be objects of fantasy in their exotic natural environments. Appleby modernises the genre, raising contemporary questions in respect of the overload of interactive media with the intention of fracturing comfortable illusions of fantasy and reality.

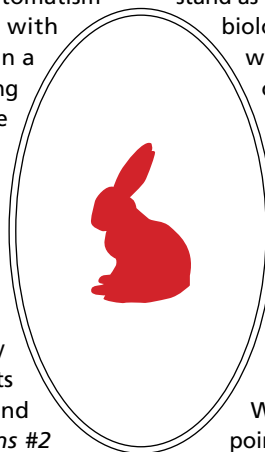
Just slightly outside the zone of memory lie profoundly personal explorations of states of mind. These are stories that attempt to reveal something of the human condition while setting up an exchange that involves a range of emotive actions between artist and audience. **Brian Sanstrom** makes work that address issues of loss and grief on both an individual and collective level. His sculptures employ the concept of 'the void' to ask his audience to consider the personal experience of loss and the ways it has affected links between past, present, and future relationships. **AJ Gogas's** story is essentially untold, demanding the viewer's participation in reaching conclusion. French-knitted forms represent common experiences, thoughts, or emotions that bear witness to physiological states of mind. Each strange and quirky textural construction is alive with colour, on the one hand proudly hand-made, and, on the other, technically sophisticated and imaginative.

Although **Tarn McLean's** two- and three-dimensional paintings overwhelm the audience with vibrant colour and the illusion of movement, they also reflect, in the tradition of colour-field painting, what the artist is thinking. This

is not a passive revelation as she challenges the critics of painting and the idea that it is a medium past its expiry date. McLean's 'canvases' defiantly dominate the viewer's field of vision, rudely awakening them with the exhilaration of an intense encounter, filled with raging currents of vivid pigment. Similarly, **Linda Clark** attempts to open up a space in which artist, work of art, and audience are arrested in the act of engagement. Drawing upon her own experiences, her layered wooden and metal installations make reference to the Rorschach test, the surrealist notion of automatism and chance. Clark presents her audiences with interactive kinetic work that might function in a similar way to the Rorschach inkblots, stimulating the imagination in ways that are specific to the viewer and entirely unpredictable.

For another group of artists, stories exist within the works themselves, where the material, its engagement with light, and the complex experience of perception produce distinctive 'narratives' in their own right. **Glen Bowman's** sculptural practice is defined by light, in the way painters used *chiaroscuro* or strong contrasts between light and dark to deceive the eye and give a sense of volume. *Fragmented Illusions #2* (2012) blurs the boundaries between what is perceived and what is actually there. Skeletal forms in light and dark are the dramatic tools that enable viewers to deconstruct illusion and reconstruct the work. **Grace Dewar's** interest in the physical properties of ordinary materials, such as expanding Polyfilla, is the key to discovering different ways of seeing the same object or material. Elements such as illumination from within bring about changes in the way that a material is viewed, and thus Dewar leaves space for an open-ended interpretation that is informed by the environment in which the work is exhibited. **Olivia Bradley** complicates encounters with light by suggesting that visual perception is generated not from what we see before us but rather from our previous experiences. Her work attempts to confuse the visible with the invisible, the silent with the audible. *Light Study #1* (2012), like Darth Vader light sabres, reach for the ceiling, dimming and brightening, and are accompanied by the sound of breathing. The audience is captured by the sound of life and trapped in an environment of light and dark, thus implicated in the trance-like rhythms of existence. At this point, the work of art attempts a form of hypnosis, trying to lull the audience into a meditative state.

The codes and signifiers carried by certain objects form the foundations of many a practice, as artists ask what stories are intrinsic to certain objects or materials and how these might be employed, changed, or subverted. Lace, for example, is the perennial enhancer of feminine beauty; matrimonial white lace has connotations of purity, while black lace, used in the fascinator, is a potent symbol of sensual awareness. **Ellie Coleman's** *Black Lace* (2013) considers issues of feminine identity and the objectification

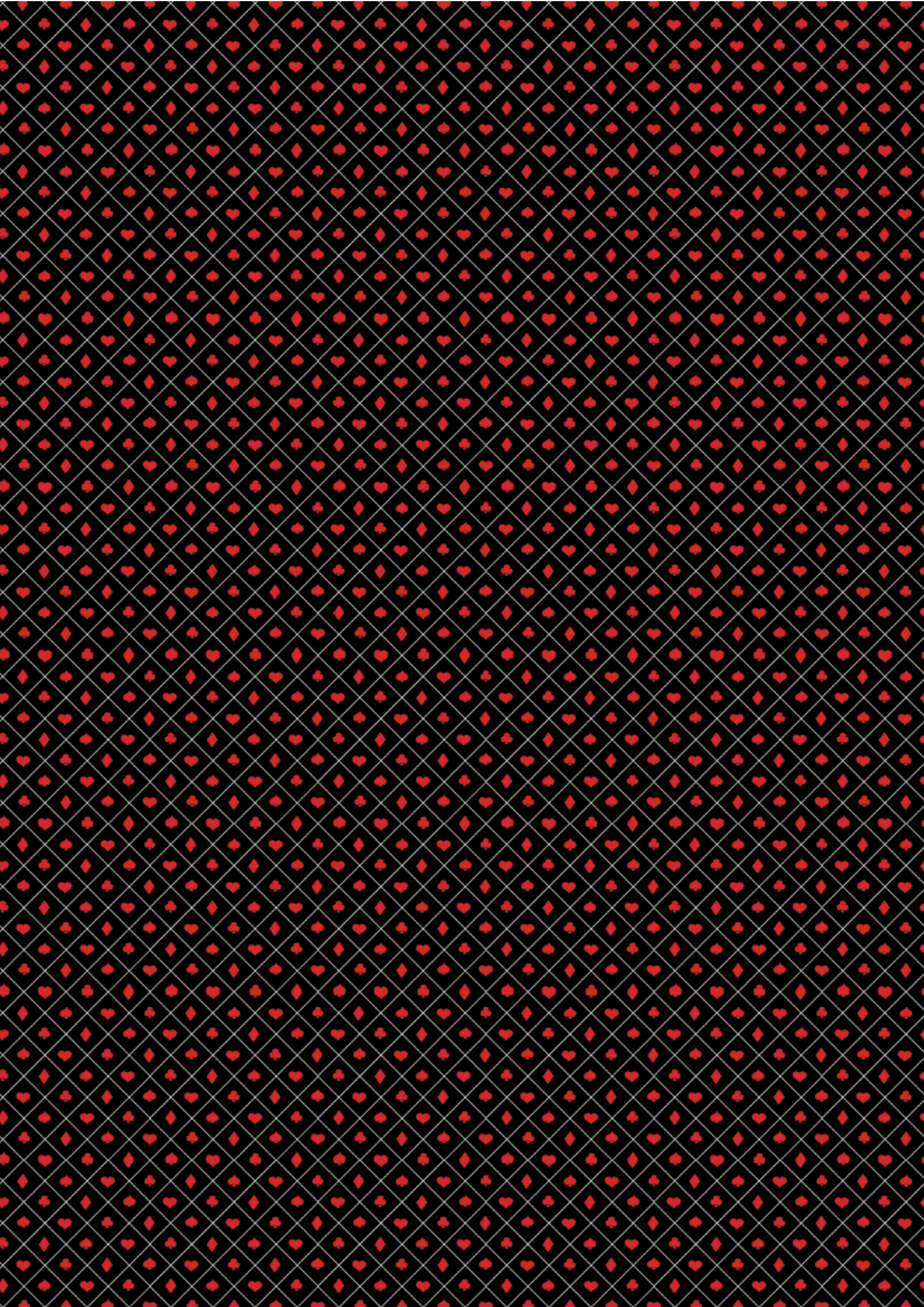


of women. Her autobiographical photographic installations dramatise representations of women, and use the veil to reveal shades of grey within the construction of simplistic 'black-and-white' stereotypes. **Amber Kilkenny** introduces tating, a particularly durable lace, constructed with a series of knots and loops, to explore stories of the heart that reach beyond anatomy, and focus on its symbolic and metaphorical significances. This process makes an important association with her family members who made lace and stand as intricate 'capillaries' connecting with anatomical, biological, and human technologies. Intricate textile work, such as lace and tating, bears the illusion of fragility, and this aspect of textiles interests **Kay Lawrence**. Envisioning a world where everything hangs in the balance, her work is a visual description of fragility—a language of delicacy—that frames a kind of beauty existing on the edge of disaster. Bringing together fabrics, frames, branches, and fibre in installation, Lawrence's materials mirror the fragility of the natural environment and speak of the current state of the planet.

While the rabbit-hole metaphor is an interesting point of departure, the artist's story does not need a plot, a beginning, or an end. To a greater degree than literature and film, art shares stories that artists make in open collusion with their audience, and, together, both parties generate and drive the 'narrative'. With every engagement, a myriad of reverberating cultural experiences are reflected. Using diverse mediums, materials, objects, and ideas to tell their stories, artists may not be the masters of their own communications, and yet, with every new work there exists a strong desire to be heard, to tell one's story in a unique way, not only in its self reflection but also in the way that it is told. The infinitives that have, to some extent, become the clichés of art theory and interpretation—to explore, to interrogate, to research, and to reflect—exist as the conceptual tools that drive artists' decisions on their use of materials and the ways that stories can be told. The works included in *Down the Rabbit Hole* often exhibit a sense of struggle as each artist grapples with ideas that are often profoundly personal, complex, and revealing. Drawing upon cultural narratives, myths, symbols, and interchangeable facts and fictions can be precarious psychological territory and yet, crossing the Styx—the mythological boundary between Earth and the underworld—is an irresistible journey for adventurous artists. And art provides no shelter for the timid. ♦

DAVID BROKER

Director, Canberra Contemporary Art Space





ARTISTS

Katherine Appleby

Glen Bowman

Olivia Bradley

Jason Castro

Linda Clark

Ellie Coleman

Grace Dewar

Dan Elborne

Addis (Adis) Fejzić

AJ Gogas

Dale Harding

Chris Kelly

Amber Kilkenny

Kay Lawrence

Carol McGregor

Tarn McLean

Julie-Anne Milinski

Michelle Roberts

Eric Rossi

Brian Sanstrom

Glen Skien

Lynden Stone

KATHERINE APPLEBY

I AM INTERESTED IN THE HYPER-REALITY THAT RESULTS from contemporary skepticism in metanarratives, which once acted as external referents for differentiating reality. My artistic practice addresses this concept through depicting nature interpreted by the imagination.

In particular, the body of work here is an investigation of a fictitious place, *Firdarrig*. This place is documented and described with detailed paintings, drawings, and prints of its flora and fauna in a method that resembles early natural-history painting. However, these works are presented in a manner that mimics the information overload we witness in modern interactive media. This is apparent by pushing

the individual pieces close together, coupled with text, so that they become one large, and somewhat overwhelming, work of art. The aim is to disorient the viewer and suspend disbelief. This process is particularly important as it difficult for the viewer to differentiate between reality and fantasy.

Additionally, fantasy becomes a tool with which we can explore, understand, and critique reality. By fabricating a place such as *Firdarrig*, I am able to create a frame through which I can examine and comprehend my own reality. Each viewer has the opportunity to do likewise and the view through the frame is unique to each observer. *Firdarrig* is a place to which I can return to and explore as I wish.

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ABOVE *Kragateiur and Kraketur* (detail) (from the *Encountering Firdarrig* series) 2012, acrylic on board, 42 x 29.9cm



ABOVE *Braktouya* (detail) 2012, acrylic on board, 42 x 29.9cm



GLEN BOWMAN

MY ART PRACTICE INVESTIGATES THE ROLE OF perception and the ability to create visual illusion within site-specific sculptural installations. In particular, I explore the visual tension between positive and negative space in order to create perceptual illusion. Through this approach, my work is concerned with the interplay of light, scale, and the physical fragmentation of large three-dimensional forms. These facets are further contextualised through the integral engagement between the sculptural forms, the viewer, and site. Central to my studio focus is the interaction between binary oppositions, such as light and shadow, so as to engage the viewer.

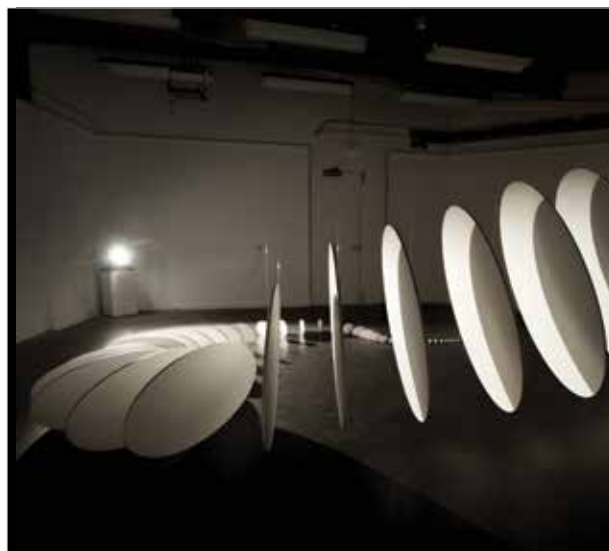
In *Fragmented Illusions #2*, the role of visual illusion is examined through the use of light, and the way it is cast onto the fragmented forms—bringing it to the foreground or rendering it into the background. The work places emphasis on enabling the viewer to ‘see’ the missing pieces, which, when combined with what is physically seen,

allows them to fill in the blanks, and provides an illusion of a whole. In doing so, the work blurs the boundaries between what is *perceived* and what is *actually* there. The viewer’s awareness of their positioning in relation to the work and how they physically navigate the gallery space is also heightened. Through these processes, the role of the viewer is *activated*; they become critically engaged with the work rather than being a passive observer.

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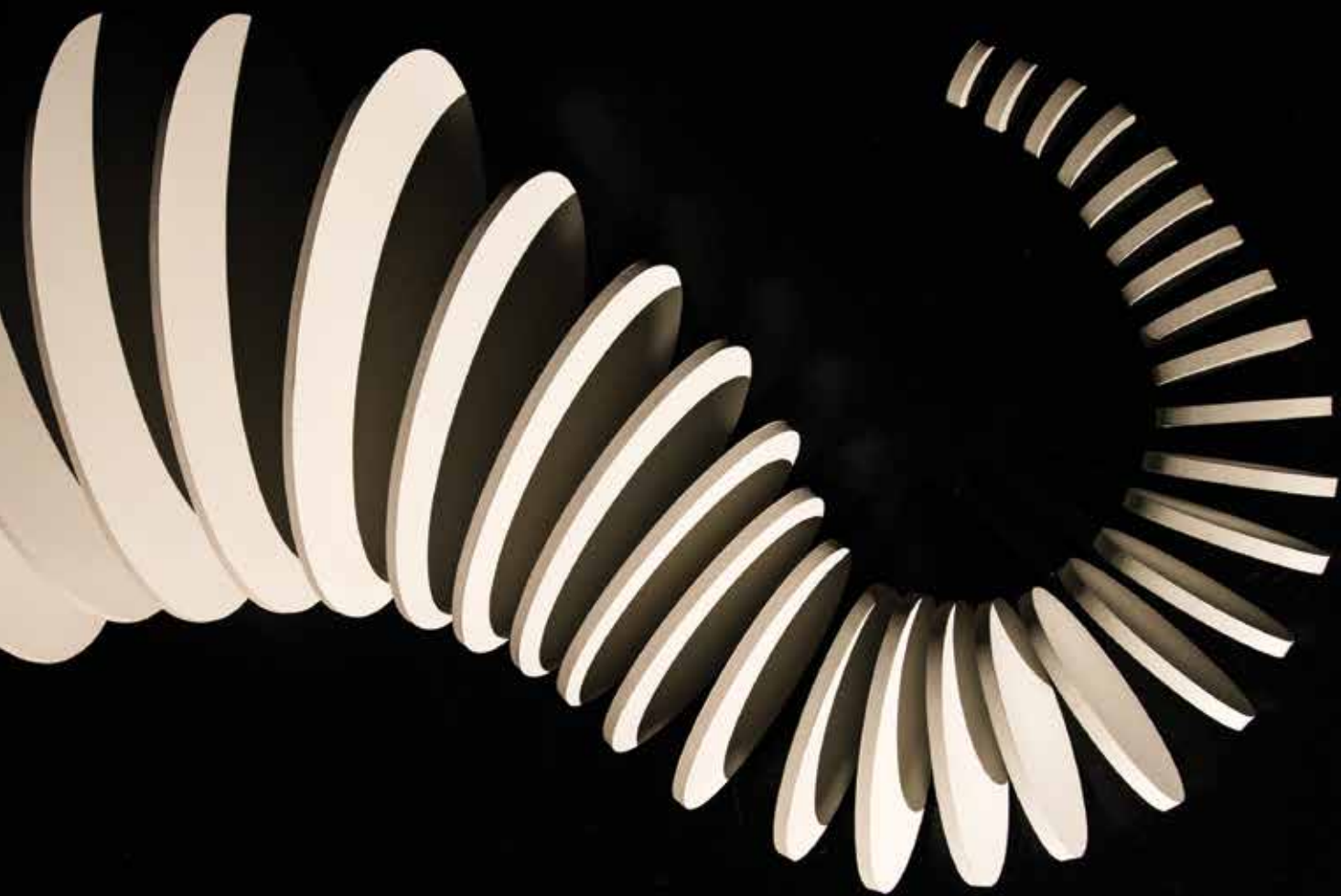


ABOVE *Fragmented Illusions #3* (detail) 2013, acrylic on MDF, dimensions variable



ABOVE *Fragmented Illusions #3* (detail) 2013, acrylic on MDF, dimensions variable

RIGHT *Fragmented Illusions #2* (detail) 2013, acrylic on MDF, dimensions variable

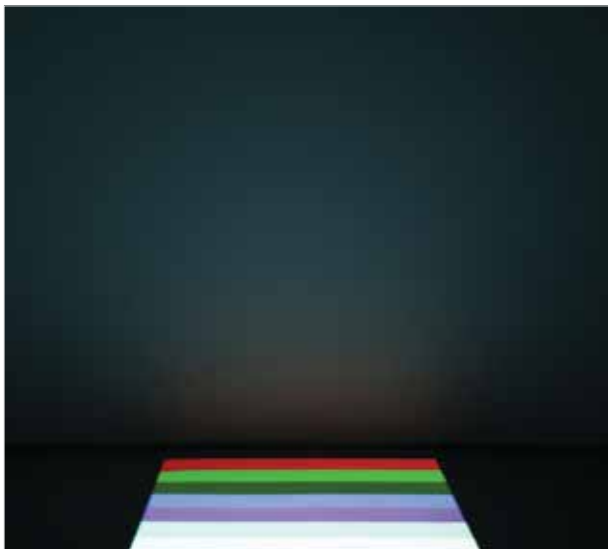


OLIVIA BRADLEY

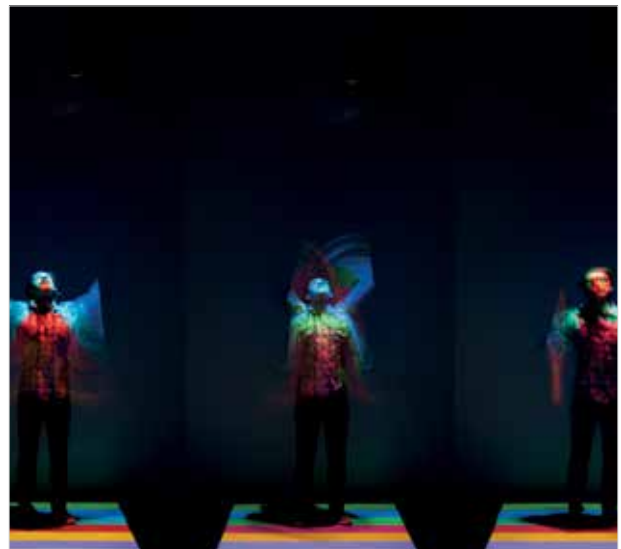
Visual perception theory asserts that what we see is largely made up of what we have previously experienced, rather than what appears before our eyes. For *Light Study #1*, Olivia Bradley stretches and probes the bounds of perception, confusing the visible with the invisible, the audible with the silent. Concerned with engaging the viewer's experience of a work of art, Bradley investigates how perceptions may be altered and impacted by variables such as light, colour, and sound.

With *Light Study #1*, Bradley utilises the potential of light as a medium for illustrating perception, as it may be modelled to create space and form. In this work, several poles of light reach toward the ceiling, dimming and brightening to the sound of breathing. The viewer becomes unavoidably implicated, not just as their visual perception is skewed as the room lights and dims, but as their breath might become measured to align with the rhythm of the work. Effecting a subtle trance-like state, *Light Study #1* envelops the viewer in a meditative, contemplative space.

— Laura Brown



ABOVE *Light Study #2* (detail) 2012, video projector, DVD player, dimensions variable



ABOVE *Light Study #2* (detail) 2012, video projector, DVD player, dimensions variable

RIGHT *Light Study #1* (detail) 2012, video projectors, DVD players, speakers, plastic tubes, dimensions variable. Installation shot from GAS Award 2012, Griffith University Art Gallery, November 2012



JASON CASTRO

I INVESTIGATE MY DUAL HERITAGE THROUGH THE combination of contemporary Western art and traditional Native American and Mexican art forms. The work examines the role of anthropology in defining indigenous peoples as static relics of the past, and challenges these notions through challenging the Eurocentric frameworks of these assumptions.

The series *Little White Lies* are sand paintings of Native Americans, appropriated from the photographic work of European-American ethnographic photographer Edward S. Curtis. Between 1907 and 1930, Curtis conducted an extensive project of photographing the North American tribes, resulting in twenty volumes and over 1500 photographs. Curtis was heavily influenced by 'dying-race' theories of the time and set about recording what he perceived as being a 'vanishing race'. However, Curtis did not create an accurate record of Native American

people. Indeed, he would remove any sign of the twentieth century and carried with him wigs, beads, and costumes to transform anyone who did not look 'Native American enough'. Often, the same set of beads and ceremonial dress would reappear in photographs of different tribes.

As a means of confronting these myths, I recreate these images in the traditional medium of my people, the Dine, which is sand painting. The images are severely cropped from the originals, focusing on the face, and eliminating the stereotypical signifiers of Native America, such as feathers and beads. They are hybridised images, hovering between photograph and sand painting. Being a Native American is represented as being engaged in the contemporary world, surviving colonialism, while at the same time being mindful of history and politics. This series rewrites Eurocentric grand narratives and repositions Native American experience as something alive, vital, and embedded in hybridity.

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ABOVE *Little White Lies* #1 (detail) 2012, sand painting on wood, 120 x 80cm



ABOVE 1 *Little 2 Little 3* 2013, platinum/palladium print, 43 x 28cm



LINDA CLARK

MY INSTALLATIONS INVESTIGATE PSYCHOLOGICAL models and creative processes within a contemporary art context. That is, I draw upon a combination of personal, historical, and psychological approaches in stimulating creativity or analysing visual thought processes through the subconscious. These approaches include the surrealist notion of automatism and chance-driven forms of art-making, as well as research on the Rorschach (inkblot) test for psychological diagnosis. With this grounding, my studio practice explores creativity through intuitively driven processes.

Central to this studio research is the role of creative logic undertaken by both the artist and viewer. More specifically, my focus on creative logic involves the process of exchange

between the artist's conceptual intent and the audience's response triggered by the experience of the work. In this way, my sculptural forms become devices and mechanisms that facilitate this exchange process within a constructed and prescribed installation environment.

Within my installations, layered wooden or metal forms act as open-ended devices allowing the viewer to experience multiple readings through the interplay of forms and shadows. To facilitate the viewer's subjective response, the work is designed or installed with the capacity to be manipulated by the viewer. In this way, my art practice is concerned with the creative engagement between the artist, work of art, and participant.

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ABOVE *Everything You Ever Thought About Yourself* 2011, plywood, 25 x 35 x 25cm



ABOVE *Before Ours* (detail) 2011, plywood, steel rod, wooden handles, dimensions variable

RIGHT *Ours* (detail) 2011, plywood, tiger wire, leather handles, dimensions variable



ELLIE COLEMAN

MY WORK FOCUSES ON THE MULTIFACETED NOTION OF feminine identity, particularly the complexities involved in representing the female body within contemporary society. In this light, I also interweave personal and social realms, often exploring issues of self-identity. For example, in my photographic work, I construct a series of self-portraits that employ multilayered imagery that symbolically reference stereotypical representations of femininity. Simultaneously, I override these stereotypes through ambiguous undertones within the work, navigating the viewer between positive and negative spaces.

In the photographic series *Black Lace*, I explore Western representations of women through the idea of lace. That is, white lace being the signifier for Western stereotypes of the 'good' woman, and black lace representing the 'bad' woman. Inherent in these stereotypes are cultural, historical, and social conditionings that are also addressed within my work. For example, white lace carries positive

attributes regarding Western rituals, such as weddings, and black lace as negative attributes particularly pertaining to the objectification of female sexuality. By exploring the use of black lace within these portraits, I examine visually their shades of grey as a way of subverting Western female visual representations and stereotypes.

My photographic installations also conceptually review the relationship between the subject, the work, and the viewer and how the notion of seeing plays a role within one's perception. That is, the role of the viewer looking at the work could be one of an objectification in itself. Therefore, my photographic series often play with subverting the notion of gaze within socio-historical and gendered contexts.



ABOVE AND RIGHT *Black Lace* series (detail) 2013, platinum/palladium print, 28 x 43cm



GRACE DEWAR

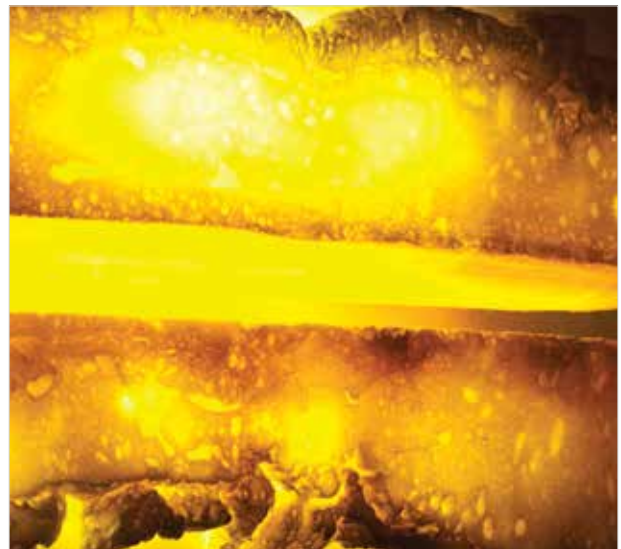
MY SCULPTURAL INSTALLATIONS EXPLORE THE physicality of everyday materials, such as expanding Polyfilla, and how it visually transforms itself to occupy the gallery space. In this way, I investigate the relationship between materiality, light, and the placement of forms in order to visually shift the everyday object into an illuminated work of art. Through this approach to materiality, my sculptural forms convey a self-referential sense of vulnerability and fragility.

My art practice is process driven, and intuitive experimentation is integral to creating ambiguous forms. I value ambiguity because it allows my installations to be visually transient, blurring the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar. In creating this environment, I highlight a subjective and open-ended dialogue that allows the viewer to form their own interpretation. Through this approach, my work engages the viewer as an active participant in the construction of the work's meaning.

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ABOVE *Mind's Eye* (detail) 2011, Polyfilla expanding foam, 110 x 65 x 30cm



ABOVE *Abyss* (detail) 2011, Polyfilla expanding foam, 65 x 55 x 27cm

RIGHT *Mind's Eye* 2011, Polyfilla expanding foam, 110 x 65 x 30cm



DAN ELBORNE

MY CERAMIC INSTALLATIONS ARE A SYMBOLIC representation of historic events often relating to war, particularly the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–49). My Dutch grandfather was one of five hundred men who were drafted from Holland to fight in this conflict. In this work, each of the five hundred bullets is individually hand-decorated, using traditional delftware colours and designs. The bullets themselves are cast from .303 bullets, which were the standard-issue ammunition given to the Dutch soldiers of this time. The models are cast using earthenware, which was used by the Dutch as an imitation for porcelain to create traditional delftware plate sets. An integral part of this work is to emphasise the relationship between contemporary practice with traditional methods of art-making and materials relating to the historical event. This creates tension between ideas such as mass-manufactured objects against handmade objects, and the brutality of military forms against the sensitive nature of the topic itself.

I am interested in exploring ways to create objects that reflect the horrors of war, and the impact it has on the viewer. Along with this, I conceptually approach this subject matter with a symbolic caution, with the work itself employing aesthetically refined qualities of porcelain, signifying fragility and preciousness. I am interested in this contradiction between the concepts behind my work, against the visual appearance of object itself. Expressing these contradictions through the work and its installation allows me to communicate both the harsh realities of war itself as well as the sensitive notion of memories relating to war.

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ABOVE AND RIGHT 500 (detail) 2011–12, glazed earthenware with manipulated decal and 500 x .303 bullets



ADDIS (ADIS) FEJZIĆ

IN MY ARTISTIC PRACTICE, I AM GENERALLY CONCERNED with stone, and its sculptural history and aesthetics. The focus of my current research is the art of *stećak*, a unique Bosnian sculptural phenomenon. I am interested in enlivening *stećak* in my own work, ultimately focusing on contemporary sculpture and its aesthetics. In a way, I return to the past and reconnect with my cultural heritage in order to act in the present and move forward.

The long-term aim of my research is to contribute to the understanding of the art of *stećak* as a timeless stone sculpture form as well as a contemporary form, one that also encapsulates my personal experience.

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This Bosnian art form belongs to the wider European mediaeval timeframe. However, it also parallels other sculptural traditions from prehistory to, paradoxically, the twentieth- and twenty-first-century stone sculpture forms. I see this old Bosnian sculptural practice as a knot, or fusion, of different stone sculptural expressions and traditions, with its multileveled content.



ABOVE *Flyssil*: Bozzetto 2012, terracotta, 17 x 13 x 6cm



ABOVE *Sentinels*: Bozzetto 2012, terracotta, overall size 14 x 18 x 18cm (polyptych consisting of six pieces; single piece approx. 14 x 8 x 3cm)

RIGHT *Bosnian Triumphal Gate* 2013, polystyrene, adhesives, sand, plaster, 250 x 240 x 60cm



AJ GOGAS

CONCEPTUALLY, MY WORK IS DRIVEN BY EVERYDAY experiences—the apprehension of personal stories by an object, thought, or emotion. These experiences interwoven through works of art allow for an expression of self. I draw on the physiological state of mind and physical elements behind memory, composing my sculptural pieces as a perpetual witness towards these phenomena.

While I use a variety of materials and processes, the reoccurring venture of experience is established through the use of mundane objects, vibrant and engaging colours, and a continuous raw, hand-made quality. The subject matter can determine the materials and forms of the work but it is this raw quality that links them. Throughout my body of work, I experiment with textile processes and textural elements that are traditionally associated with 'craft'. I toy with these techniques, emphasising their irreverence to high art.

The child-like sense of play and eye-catching repetitive colours I use are contrasted by the fragmented personal stories that are encoded within the work. Often playful and exuberant on the surface, there is always a sense of something darker beneath the surface. The unique combination of raw and formal elements allows the work to resonate as something not merely viewed but experienced.



ABOVE AND RIGHT *In All Your Glory* (detail) 2012, French-knitted forms and wooden stands, dimensions variable



DALE HARDING

POPULAR VERSIONS OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORIES ARE supported by convenience. The burden of the truth is shouldered by those who are silenced. I am particularly influenced by the untold histories of my communities.

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ABOVE *Of One's Own Country* (detail) 2011, timber, steel wool, needle, thread, 300 x 180 x 5cm



ABOVE *No Blame Rests with Them* (detail) 2012, timber, string, zinc-rich paint, 240 x 170 x 15cm

RIGHT *No Blame Rests with Them* 2012, timber, string, zinc-rich paint, 240 x 170 x 15cm



CHRIS KELLY

MY INSTALLATIONS ARE INSPIRED BY MY ABORIGINAL heritage, and depict the social issues brought on by assimilation during the early European settlement of Australia and its continuing repercussions among Aboriginal Peoples. This is exemplified through my work that addresses the subject matter of the Stolen Generation in both historical and contemporary contexts. In doing so, I explore a range of mediums in order to present a critical voice on personal and social levels.

My premise is further heightened through the craftsmanship I use for my wood carvings. That is, I laboriously carve pairs of children's shoes as well as different hats in order to imitate the discomfort and difficulties faced by the children in servitude, homes, and institutions brought on by assimilation. Using camphor laurel wood, these carvings symbolically emphasise how European methods and ways of life were foreign and forced upon Australia's indigenous people.

The young girl's bonnet and shoes in the work *Neither Seen Nor Heard* symbolise the early European ideal of making 'useful', 'decent' human beings of 'half-castes'. Many of these children were taken 'for their own good' and placed in institutions and work-houses to be trained in a respectable manner so as to become useful members of society. The bonnet and shoes are part of the types of attire that was often worn by young servant girls in rich European homes.

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ABOVE *Walk a Mile in My Shoes* (detail) 2009, camphor laurel wood and other mediums, dimensions variable



ABOVE *Walk a Mile in My Shoes* (detail) 2009, camphor laurel wood and other mediums, dimensions variable

RIGHT *Dress to Impress* 2012, camphor laurel wood and other mediums, dimensions variable



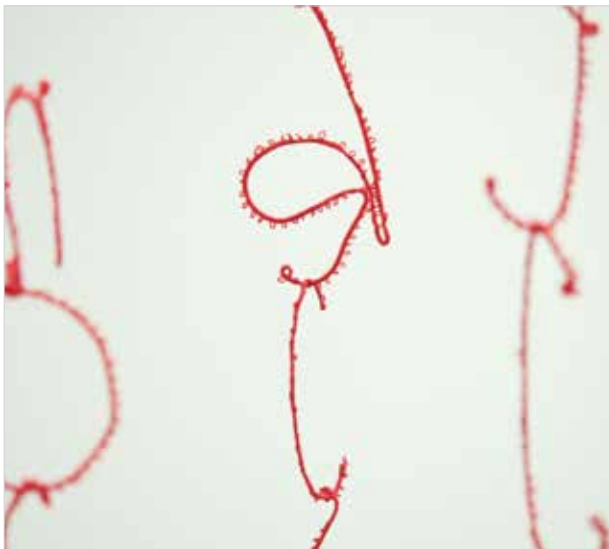
AMBER KILKENNY

MY ART PRACTICE IS CONCERNED WITH THE NOTION OF the body and its anatomical forms. Specifically, the work addresses the heart muscle and its interpretations beyond the body—metaphorically, physically, and symbolically. I play with imagery to suggest the visual associations between anatomical, biological, and man-made systems. My work addresses how we interact and connect to this world through these systems, which are explored through a series of installations that interweave sculptural forms and textile-based processes.

My delicately knotted, vein-like forms employ the self-interpreted lace-making technique of tatting. This textile process bears an important connection to my family's heritage, and has led me to create forms that emphasise repetition and intricacy. The detailed component of my work is contrasted by the loose threads that fall from my sculptures.

Emphasising the tactility of my work heightens the bodily associations in terms of both its vulnerability and its strength. My installations engage the viewer by employing red and blue, the colours of the cardiovascular system, within the forms and site. As forms protrude from the walls, the viewer is made conscious of their own body's relationship with the work. The viewer's response and interaction with the work allows the relationship between the systems and the body to be experienced.

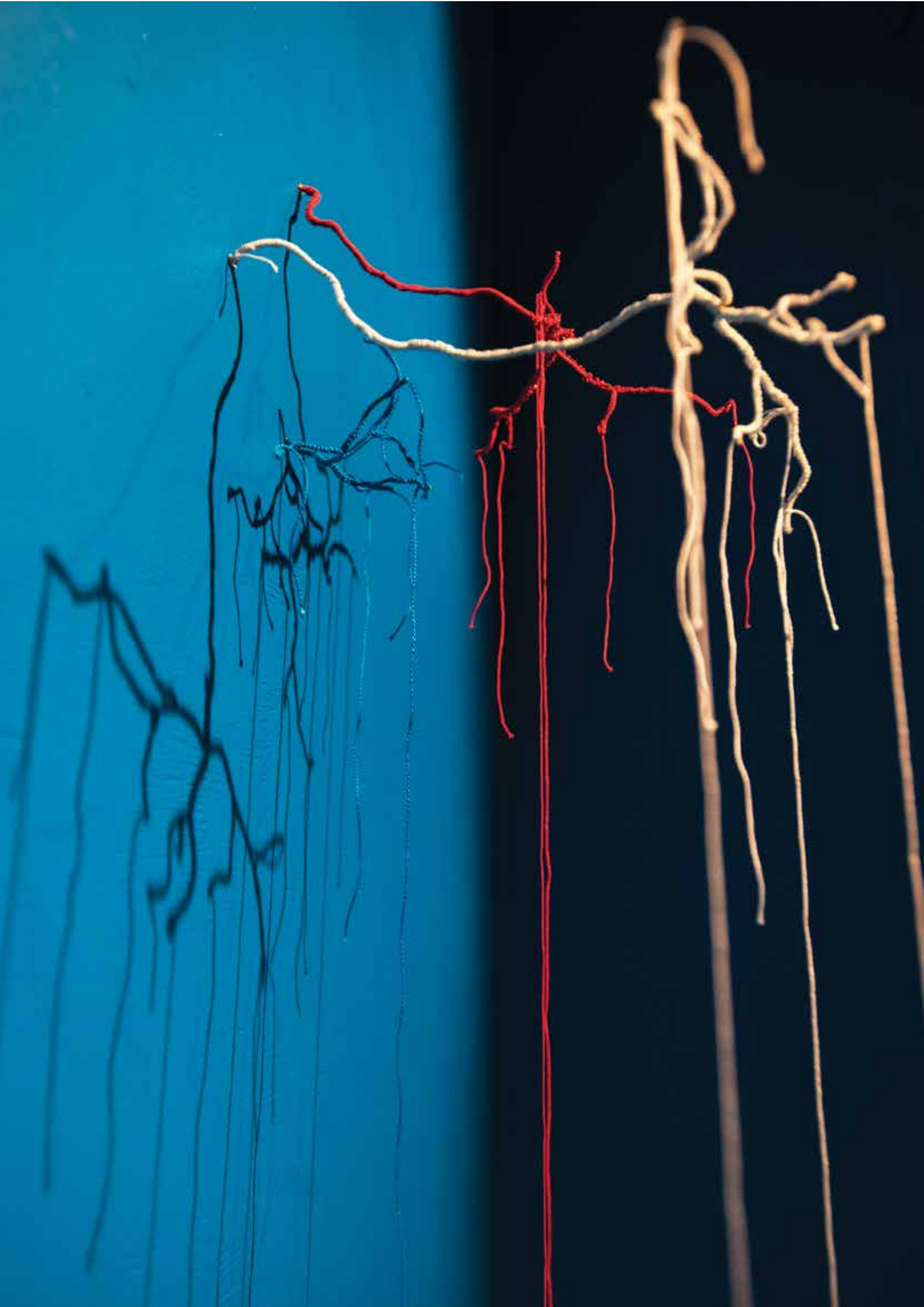
44



ABOVE *Inkling* (detail) 2011, wire and cotton thread, dimensions variable



ABOVE *Untitled* (detail) 2001, ceramic, glass beads, wire, dimensions variable



KAY LAWRENCE

MY CURRENT RESEARCH EXPLORES HOW THE VISUAL and other sensual qualities of fibre and digital imagery can be used to address social, ecological, and cultural issues of the twenty-first century. Working from an ecofeminist perspective, my work addresses the boundaries of nature and culture, developing parameters and perspectives that embrace the fragile and ephemeral nature of both life and time (through fibre), and the fractures and dislocations of the time/space continuum (through digital imagery).

Our natural environment hangs in precarious balance. Humanity is an active ecological agent that impacts on this volatile situation with its overwhelming anthropomorphic-centric behaviours. In the twenty-first century, it is imperative

that we critically evaluate the ways in which we interact with our planet and that we renegotiate the relationships between nature and culture.

Textiles provide a critical connection with the body and also function as cultural signs in a language removed from the body because of their omnipresence from birth. Textile objects readily evoke memories, past experiences, physical, and cultural associations. Consequently, they play a particularly powerful role in helping to contextualise objects and encourage viewer responses.

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ABOVE *Relcology #1* 2012, digital image on cotton, cotton support, cotton and silk threads, 120 x 150cm



ABOVE *It's a Matter of Time* 2012, archival digital image on photo rag, 112 x 84cm, knitted acrylic 35 x 12cm



CAROL McGREGOR

MY PRACTICE ERODES THE BELIEF THAT CULTURE IS static and homogenous by exploring diversity with symbolic installations that challenge artistic cultural stereotypes.

Just as embracing new technology during colonisation enabled Aboriginal people to survive and continue their cultural expression, I reclaim and connect to culture by employing contemporary methods to reignite traditional practices.

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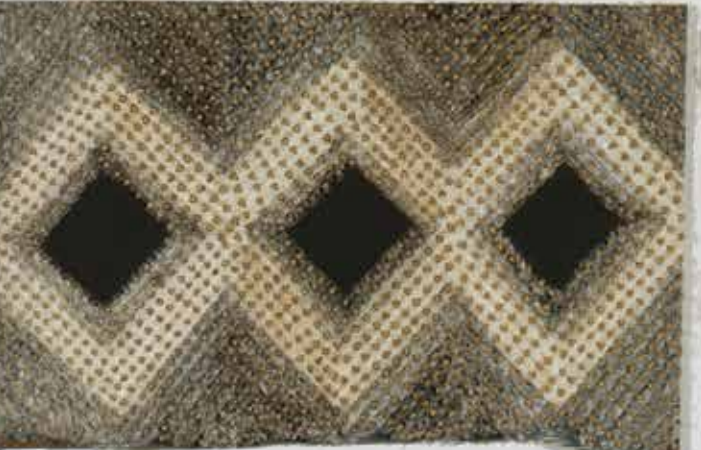
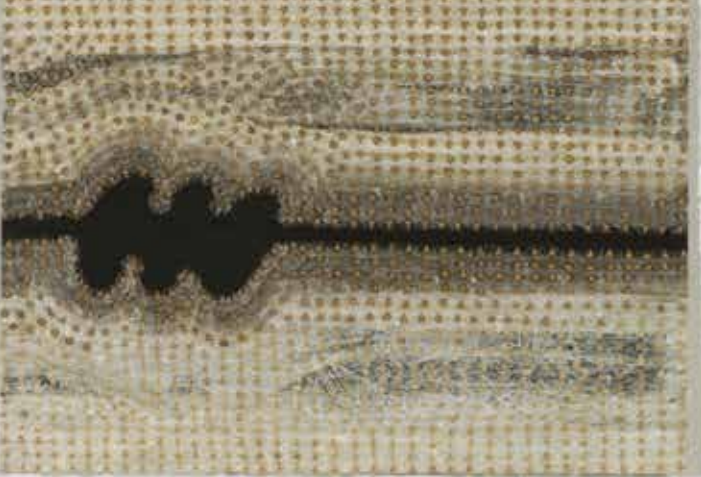
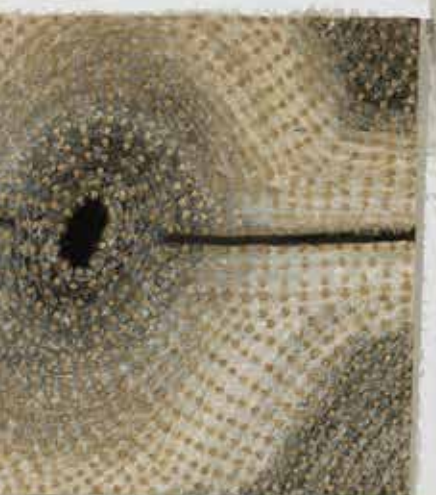
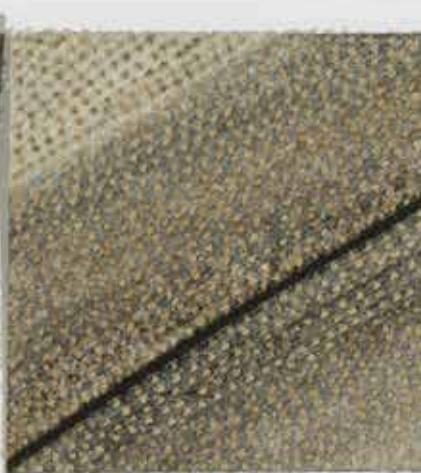


ABOVE *Exposed, Shield, Inner Turmoil* 2012, latex, steel pins, rope, 250 x 30cm



ABOVE *Tides of History* 2010, lambskin, shells, pigment, synthetic thread, 60 x 40cm

RIGHT *Journey Cloak (detail)* 2012, recycled boards, acrylics, seeds, 250 x 450cm

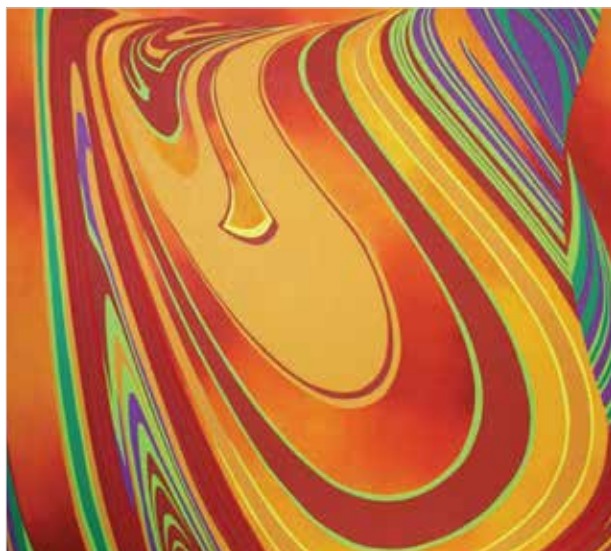


TARN McLEAN

MY WORK CONSISTS OF BOTH TWO- AND THREE-dimensional paintings that investigate the medium's conceptual underpinnings from the mid-twentieth century to its current position. The contemporary focus is particularly important in identifying the relevance of painting within a milieu of new and digital media. Since the 1960s, critical debates on painting have been concerned with painting's autonomy and the different spaces painting has occupied, particularly in modern-art movements from the 1950s to the 1970s. One of the most cited texts on the subject is Michael Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood" from 1967. My works aim to identify how a painting's materiality enables it to transcend its physicality and to be engaged in an ongoing evolution of painting, as opposed to Fried's idea that painting is an art form on the verge of exhaustion. I have also researched more recent inquiries into the debates of contemporary painting, such as Hal Foster's *The Art-Architecture Complex* (2011), which is

important in exploring why many contemporary artists constantly shift between alternating disciplines, such as design and architecture, and yet retain their conceptual intentions associated with painting.

I combine multiple methods of digital distortion, fragmentation, and layering with traditional applications of colour field, oil painting, and geometric abstraction onto various surfaces, such as two-dimensional picture frames, contemporary furniture, and exterior walls of public buildings. Through these varying applications of digital mediation and distortion as well as the cross-over into design, I navigate the viewer through an historical journey to symbolic and metaphorical realms, blurring the boundaries between past and present via the use of traditional and digital applications. The works aim to contribute to the broader field of creative research in the area of contemporary painting while taking the viewer on a journey to a new destination.



ABOVE *Topography #12* (detail) 2012, oil and acrylic on linen, 120 x 120cm



ABOVE *Topography #9—Globe* 2012, acrylic and mixed media, dimensions variable



JULIE-ANNE MILINSKI

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IN AN AGE OF SOPHISTICATED HYBRIDISATION AND genetic modification, the concept of nature in relation to botany is increasingly fluid. These works combine the idea of flora and the human hand, where the human role in the construction of the botanical simulation is blatant and raises multiple dichotomies: culture/nature, masculine/feminine, mass-produced/hand-made, art/craft, synthetic/organic. Reflecting on a series of autobiographical recollections—a grandmother with a green thumb, a mother-in-law with a gift for crocheting, and my own fascination with houseplants—the works revisit childhood play in a garden where natural and artificial landscapes meld into one hybrid space.

Evergreen (Post-Plant Wall and Floor Work) is crocheted from plastic flagging tape, a material used in botanical environments to signal potential hazards and delineate areas undergoing human intervention. The forms reference specimens in the Brisbane Botanical Gardens with multiple species collapsed into single hybrid forms. These strange mutations' lack of structure echoes their flaccid attempts at botanical imitation. Small wooden nodules protrude from the wall, their ends painted in high-visibility colours

to alert their presence. Unlike mass-produced, artificial plants, these works are overtly hand-made.

Sansevieria trifasciata is a 'Class R' environmental weed in the Brisbane City Council region. However, in New Delhi, Kamal Meattle, an environmental activist, grows the same plants in large quantities in office buildings for their miraculous air-purifying properties. *Wilhelmina Szeretlek!* represents this environmental dilemma. Simultaneously quarantining and caring for the plants, these crocheted 'cozies' are a form of soft bonsai. Provided with water and prosthetic leaves, the plants thrive in their compromised containers. 'Mother-in-law's tongue', the plant's common name, compares its stiff, lance-shaped leaves to the sharp words that may be delivered by one's mother-in-law. English is my mother-in-law Wilhelmina's second language, and proverbs translated from Hungarian become ambiguous and often amusing. 'Szeretlek' means 'I love you' in Hungarian.



ABOVE *Evergreen (Post-Plant Wall and Floor Work)* 2012–13, acrylic paint, nylon builder's line, pins, plastic flagging tape, poplar dowel, radiata pine dowel, dimensions variable



ABOVE *Wilhelmina, Szeretlek! (detail)* 2012–13, acrylic paint, hessian, marine ply, nails, nylon builder's line, potting mix, radiata pine, *Sansevieria trifasciata* (mother-in-law's tongue), dimensions variable

RIGHT *Wilhelmina, Szeretlek!* 2012–13, acrylic paint, hessian, marine ply, nails, nylon builder's line, potting mix, radiata pine, *Sansevieria trifasciata* (mother-in-law's tongue), dimensions variable



MICHELLE ROBERTS

"IT'S A POOR SORT OF MEMORY THAT ONLY WORKS backwards", the Queen remarked.

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

Memory is not a static record of history, but rather an oculus through which we revisit and revise our past, a mesh through which we filter and shape our present, and an oracle we consult to create our future by remembering it into being. The shifting relationship between reality and imagination in memory serves as the catalyst for my work. I am particularly drawn to the tenebrous spaces between memories: the void in which new things come into being. In my studio practice, I investigate the complex relationship between memory and reality and endeavour to explore the equal validity of lived experience and imaginal experience in autobiographical memory.

In my installations, fragments of memories, both real and imagined, abut in a panoply of found objects, photographs, drawings, paintings, prints, and other inventions. Like a snatch of music, or a line from a story, poem, or myth, a smell, touch, or taste, these fragments trigger a state of reverie and the mind follows them like the White Rabbit into the underworld of memory where anything is possible and everything is real. The installations can never be completed, only reconfigured. Like memory itself, they are in constant flux. Their visual narratives aim to seduce the viewer into re-experiencing and questioning their own reality through the kaleidoscope of their own memory.

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ABOVE *Memoryscape #4* (detail) 2012–13, mixed media on masonite, each panel 91 x 60.5cm, overall dimensions variable



ABOVE *Memoryscape #2* (detail) 2012, mixed media on paper, 240 x 150cm

RIGHT *Memoryscape #1* (detail) 2012, mixed media on paper, 240 x 150cm



ERIC ROSSI

MY WORK INVESTIGATES THE CULTURAL CHANGES experienced within the contemporary globalised world, exploring issues of cultural hybridity and identity. This is a very timely and relevant area of critical debate given the current conditions of globalised change. The work also draws upon the discourse of tourism and critiques the role of the tourist. My visual arts practice is made in the mode of the artist-as-tourist, referencing a tradition of artists who were effectively tourists—among them, Paul Gauguin, Donald Friend, Walter Spies, and Ian Fairweather.

My Dad's Aunt Olga 1 and *My Dad's Aunt Olga 2* are both photographs taken during a performance of mine that incorporated two helicopters. The performance was quite experimental in nature and featured a projection onto the side of the helicopter while it hovered beside me.

In addition to exploring issues of cultural change, such as identity, the performance served as a laboratory to explore my Australian-Finnish background and to examine my cultural position within the Asia-Pacific. I have also written a story, part-fact and part-fiction, which serves as a supplement to the work and forms a part of my personal mythology. Importantly, the works blur the boundary between fact and fiction.

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ABOVE *My Dad's Aunt Olga 1* (detail) 2010, digital photographic print, 76 x 112cm



ABOVE *My Dad's Aunt Olga 4* (detail) 2010, digital photographic print, 76 x 112cm

RIGHT *My Dad's Aunt Olga 7* (detail) 2010, digital photographic print, 76 x 112cm



BRIAN SANSTROM

MY WORK CONTINUALLY EXPLORES NOTIONS OF LOSS experienced by either an individual or a collective. It investigates the processes and responses associated with grief, the emotional suffering that one feels when someone, or something, you have an attachment with, is taken away.

My sculptures invoke and awaken the consciousness of the viewer to question their own self-awareness, and to penetrate into their own personal connection and experience with loss. These works consider the 'void' and its ability to both define and permeate the form. They create a sense of emptiness within the structure, which will enable viewers to reflect on themselves.

Throughout my research, I have discovered that loss triggers emotions that dismantle the way in which one perceives the link between past, present, and future relationships. In other words, loss has the ability to destroy a sense of order, logic, and continuity in one's life and to deconstruct existing belief structures. It is this ability of loss that contributes to ongoing research in my studio practice, and challenges the notions of one's own identity.

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ABOVE *Incision* (detail) 2013, steel, timber, plaster, paint 270 x 210 x 130cm



ABOVE *Incision* (detail) 2013, steel, timber, plaster, paint 270 x 210 x 130cm

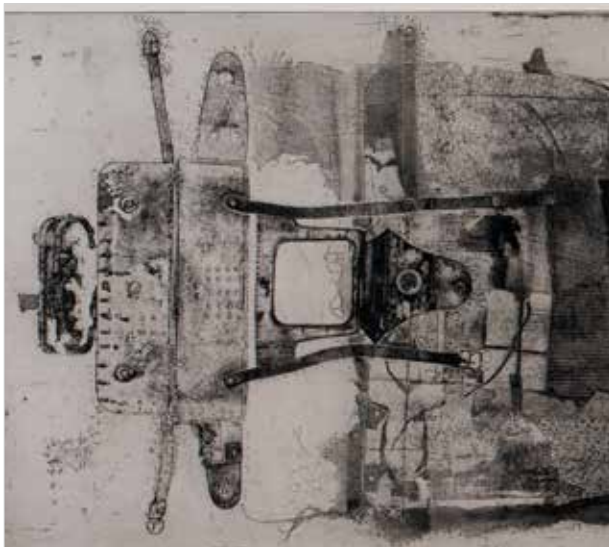
RIGHT *Endoscopy* 2013, timber, porcelain, paint, 175 x 60 x 70cm



GLEN SKIEN

MYTHO-POETIC DESCRIPTIONS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO reaffirm a deeper reflective quality within our personal narratives. In so doing, they have the potential to blur the divisions between fiction and non-fiction, the individual and the collective, the poetic and the rational. These works form part of a current mytho-poetic project that is part of my doctoral studio practice.

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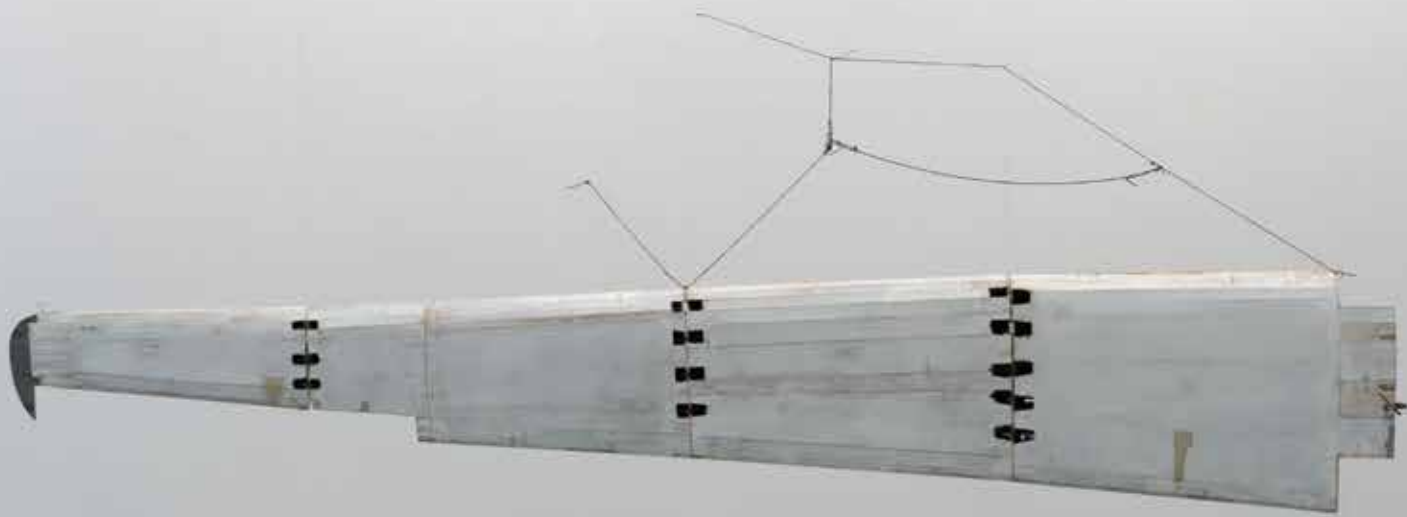


ABOVE *Resemblance 2* (detail) 2012, etching on paper, 200 x 50cm



ABOVE *Archive of the Unfamiliar* (detail) 2013, etching on found postcards, bees wax, dimensions variable

RIGHT *Object Poem—Trace 2* 2013, strawboard, bitumen, and aluminium plates, 375 x 90 x 120cm



LYNDEN STONE

THE 'MANY WORLDS' THEORY OF QUANTUM PHYSICS proposes that quantum superposition never collapses into a single state of material reality; rather, the material reality we perceive is merely one part of an interconnected *wavefunction* of all possibilities that continue to exist, possibly in many interconnected parallel universes. Our reality is merely relative to our observation.

In 1959, Richard Nixon, then US Vice President, attended the American National Exhibition in Moscow. The Exhibition, sponsored by the US government, was a cultural exchange showcasing American technology and the material benefits of capitalism. A replica American house, built on the site, was filled with the latest in American white goods and gadgets that would "make life easier"—as Nixon said—for the "American housewife". Nixon and the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev toured the exhibit together, sampling Pepsi-Cola and looking at artefacts of American life. The pair was filmed using the latest Ampex colour-television technology. During the course of their tour, they effectively 'dumped' on each other's country's technological

advancements. Khrushchev was particularly critical of the model house. He thought the Americans were lying when they said it was a 'typical home' within reach of the average American. Nixon conceded that the Soviets might be ahead in rocket technology, but the Americans, he said, were ahead in other things, such as colour TV. The lively and spontaneous debates between these two leaders as they toured the exhibit became known as 'The Kitchen Debate'.

Alternatively, 'The Kitchen Exchange' is remembered as the first (and possibly only) time that a cultural, molecular exchange was made on a state level. As an historically celebrated act of diplomacy, Nixon and Khrushchev cordially and respectfully exchanged containers of their own flatus while in the kitchen of the model house built for the American Exposition in Moscow in 1959. In this parallel alternative, the barrel containing Nikita Khrushchev's flatus, given to the American people, is held in the Smithsonian Institute. And a Soviet poster celebrating the exchange is held in the Moscow Museum. These items appear courtesy of these institutions.



ABOVE *A Parallel Alternative: Nixon and Khrushchev in the Kitchen Exchanging Flatus (Moscow, 1959) (details) 2013*, installation with historical barrel and poster, and DVD projection (details of barrel containing Nikita Khrushchev's flatus, 1959, wood, steel, 24 x 30 x 24cm. Courtesy Smithsonian Institute, American History Museum, Washington.)

RIGHT *A Parallel Alternative: Nixon and Khrushchev in the Kitchen Exchanging Flatus (Moscow, 1959) 2013*, installation with historical barrel and poster, and DVD projection (detail of *Molecules Exchanged!* Soviet government poster, July 1959, screenprint, 94 x 64cm. Courtesy Moscow Museum. Translation of Russian text: "Molecules Exchanged! Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and United States Vice President Richard Nixon engage in a cultural molecular exchange. Moscow, July 1959".)

**МОЛЕКУЛЫ
ОБМЕН!**



Советский премьер Никита

**Хрущев и Соединенных
Штатах вице-президент**

Ричард Никсон

**участвовать в культурной
молекулярного обмена.**

Москва, июль 1959

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE AND INTO WONDERLAND

LOUISE MARTIN-CHEW

TWENTY YEARS AGO, WHILE WORKING AS EDITORIAL MANAGER OF *ART & AUSTRALIA*, I WOULD RECEIVE PHONE CALLS FROM MID-CAREER ARTISTS BEMOANING THE LACK OF COVERAGE OF THEIR WORK (AND THAT OF THEIR PEERS).

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Twenty years earlier, as fashionable youngsters, many of these artists had received fully illustrated, extensive columns exploring their motivations, interests, and aesthetic flashpoints within the same august journal. It was not that these artists had not continued to be interesting, but more that *Art & Australia*, like other media, receives its advertising, circulation, and industry support based on its ability to unearth rising stars—the new and exciting—rather than feature those seen to have already ‘arrived’. *Art & Australia* is itself distinctly middle-aged now, with the May 2013 issue celebrating fifty years of publication. Accordingly, a radical makeover is promised, with freshness an imperative objective, increasing with the frenetic pace of now.

The art world thrives on fresh talent, and young artists continue to emerge from Australian art schools with a steady supply of innovation. Lately, contemporary has reached new heights—not just in the media but in salerooms, institutions, and art galleries. Twenty years ago, auction houses thrived on art from the past. Now, artists aged in their twenties, less than five years out of art school, may command strong prices, win prizes, and be profiled in state and national gallery collections and exhibitions.

The strength of the contemporary is part of what Tony Bennett refers to as “the exhibitionary complex”;¹ and, in his article “Museum Futures”, Terry Smith notes this term with regard to the strong ties between contemporary art and the life of the city, with their associated tourism, and visitation experiences. In Brisbane, the success of the Queensland Art Gallery’s Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) is illustrative of this, with its high visitor numbers tied to

contemporary-art spectacles such as The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (held every three years since 1993), the *Contemporary Australia* series, and other blockbuster exhibitions of the art of today. This is an international trend; Smith writes

Everything about art museums today, no matter where the weight of their collections may lie, seems subject to the demand that they be absolutely contemporary. Many traditional conceptions of the museum are evaporating.²

Donna McColm also acknowledges the successful education programs hosted by QAGOMA as “... enabling direct contact and participation with the artworks [and often the artists]”.³

As a result, the future for the emerging contemporary artists whose work is featured in *Down the Rabbit Hole* is bright, particularly when considered in the light of their historical antecedents. William Robinson (1936–), an Australian artist with the rare distinction of having a public gallery permanently dedicated to exhibiting his work in his lifetime,⁴ exemplifies the changing times for Australian artists. Robinson spent his prime years teaching art, and only began to work full-time as an artist from the age of fifty-three. By contrast, Michael Zavros (1974–) has supported himself with sales of his work, and has enjoyed both critical and marketplace success, since his graduation from the Queensland College of Art (QCA) in 1996. And there are plenty of others who have similarly made a living from their work—through sales, grants, residencies, and commissions—from early on. Victoria Reichelt, Grant Stevens, and Hiromi Tango all illustrate the changing model.

Fresh blood, 'fresh cut' artists, innovative responses, and aesthetic novelty are on the increase as the industry's lifeblood. In turn, an unabated hunger is growing—for new takes on old subjects, which is informed by our contemporary mindset. This is also reflected by new emphases within the Australian national arts funding body, with the current importance of emerging arts and artists signified by the establishment of the Emerging and Experimental Arts section (charged with supporting emerging artists in new and experimental art forms) at the Australia Council in May 2013.

Contemporary art is society's mirror and psyche; it describes the symptoms and causes, and reflects the current zeitgeist and mood. Accordingly, *Down the Rabbit Hole's* artists were selected on the basis of their having developed visual narratives as an inquiry into contemporary local, national, and international debates. Each artist's own memoir is embedded in their work, which navigates viewers between metaphorical, symbolic, and/or mythical realms. The narrative—between fact and fiction—is the lure that invites viewers to escape from reality. For this purpose, contemporary art may claim similar territory to fiction:

We frequently hear fiction reading described by both its readers and detractors as escape.... However, we need to be clear about what readers are escaping from. They are escaping from a narrow, limiting view of the world and journeying to a place where it is possible to experience a deeper connection to our real selves and to live fully in our world.⁵

This two-part collaborative exhibition describes the uncomfortable transition that the Western world is currently experiencing—technologically, socially, and financially—yet ameliorates this transition with individual narrative. The contemporary artistic imagination may be enjoying its current level of popularity due to its ability to recast the difficulty of this journey with humour, folly, and humanity. On a national level, while politically and economically stable, Australia is experiencing political fumbling, continued indigenous inequity, and human-rights abuses (particularly in our treatment of asylum seekers). Our financial prosperity reigns alongside such 'first-world' struggles as depression, obesity, and other societal dysfunction. Yet, as reported in a recent article in *The Australian*, the 2014 Biennale of Sydney will "...remind us that powerful art is not divorced from the cultural conditions, political, social and climatic environments in which it is generated", as put by the appointed artistic director, Juliana Engberg.⁶

Within the works featured in *Down the Rabbit Hole* are themes that relate to many of the transitions being experienced nationally and internationally. Environmental issues and ethics, identity, repatriation and ownership, displacement, globalisation, and fictions and follies drawn from history are juxtaposed with debates and critical narratives from art history, the place-making inherent in public-art initiatives, quantum physics, and the history and philosophies of ideas.

Lynden Stone uses her work to explore the possibilities offered by the "many worlds" theory of quantum physics. Her work draws on, but is not mired in, a theoretical discussion of the possibility of parallel universes. In *A Parallel Alternative: Nixon and Khrushchev in the Kitchen Exchanging Flatus (Moscow, 1959)* (2013), she develops an imaginative scenario from an historical event in such a way as to prove the argument she asserts in her artist's statement, that "Our reality is merely relative to our observation."

In 1959, US Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev met on the occasion of the American National Exhibition in Moscow. Accounts note the rivalry of the two super-powers exemplified through the behaviour, verbal exchange, and body language between the two men. Stone depicts the event in a painted poster that shows Nixon and Khrushchev branded with the name of the US electronics company Ampex. The video record of the exchange (known as 'The Kitchen Debate') was used by Nixon to emphasise American technological advancement. In her statement, Stone adds an irreverent addendum in which their exchange of 'hot air' (flatus) is captured as a relic; "... the first (and possibly only) time a cultural, molecular exchange was made on a state level)". Hand-painted timber barrels are marked with fully detailed museum labels as if held in the repository of the Smithsonian Museum.

While Stone's work adds an alternative reality and a visual dimension to a fictional scenario extended onto an actual event, **Olivia Bradley** provides a physical environment that recasts the observer as performer. While she is interested in how our perception allows embedded knowledge and belief systems to override the evidence before our eyes, her mode of working demonstrates Tess Maunder's recent observation relating to the role of the audience in contemporary art:

Increasingly within contemporary art, the audience has become implicated as a performer ... the spectacle as a conceptual context [that] demonstrates the relationship between spectacle and audience, and consequential exchanges of action and reaction.⁷

In this regard, Bradley's multimedia work, *Light Study #1* (2012) creates an environment in which the viewer is implicated in a claustrophobic embrace. Light in these poles is dimmed and brightened in accord with the viewer's breathing, which is attuned into the rhythm of the work. In her statement on Bradley's work featured in this catalogue, Laura Brown notes that in *Light Study #1* light, colour, and sound recast the boundaries of perception, causing the viewer to "...confus[e] the visible with the invisible, the audible with the silent".

Carol McGregor's works utilise the traditional form of the journey cloak as a vehicle for her highly personal journey into her indigenous heritage. Of Wathaurong and Scottish descent, her sculptural installation titled *Exposed, Shield, Inner Turmoil* (2012) sees a turtle-shell-like shape made from latex suspended from a rope that travels up to the ceiling and down the wall, with the excess coiled menacingly on the floor. Pin heads create a pattern on the exterior 'shell' and crowd the internal space with sharp ends that look like a hairy yet prickly cavity. While she suggests in her artist's statement, "Personal patterning on each panel frames my life journey, connecting reflections to the present", in this work, she allows her individual narrative to personalise the experience of it, rendering an historical journey pertinent and poignant.

Eric Rossi explores his identity as an Australian of Finnish descent in concert with the pressures of globalisation, artistic tourism, and his individual medley of cultural influences. *My Dad's Aunt Olga* (2010) was a performance piece by Rossi that involved helicopters. In the stills presented in this exhibition, the helicopter hovers above him in the darkness of the early evening, referring to the 'in-between space' that non-indigenous Australians occupy. Projections on the side of the helicopters used motifs from popular Hawaiian shirts to represent the exoticism of the 'other' while Rossi danced in character as Captain Eric, his artistic alter-ego. (He wears a 'grass' skirt made from data cables, a Hawaiian shirt, and a black cap.) During the performance, tourist-aimed objects (surf boards, tents, and camping paraphernalia) were destroyed with water dropped by the helicopters, and lie discarded on the tarmac. The stills from the final phase of this performance see Captain Eric's colourful form blurred by movement, the tourist objects as a pile of coloured rubbish, while the strong light of the projection flattens the helicopter to recreate it as a canvas for the simple motifs.

Jason Castro explores his Native American identity to also reposition stereotypes, and to recreate his ancestry as he sees it—alive, vital, and hybridised. He uses the historical images produced by anthropologist Edward S. Curtis, reworked as sand paintings under the title *Little White Lies* (2012), to direct the viewer to approach content with caution and to reveal that history is, by its very nature, compromised.

Tarn McLean's practice is a whole-hearted embrace of the materiality of paint and allows its extension into architectural applications and public spaces. I am reminded of the large scale and action-oriented embrace of space with colour by German artist Katharina Grosse (1961–).

McLean's tight-knit development of ambience is tied to the psychedelia of colour and movement, and notes the digital revolution while also speaking to the history of painting. Her work is at home in the gallery environment but also on the streets.

In contrast, **Glen Skien** weaves personal and nostalgic narrative around household and common objects with their associated memoir and memory. He crafts them into a meaningful dialogue between the aesthetic experience and the viewer's own identification, interacting with meaning, memory, and existential matters that touch on our place in the world.

'Environmental ethics' may be seen as the watchword of the twenty-first century and **Julie-Anne Milinski's** work examines the links that exist, environmentally and ethically, between this generation and that of her grandparents. Frugality may have driven sustainable behaviour in past generations, yet it has a similar impact on the use of resources as current recycling practices. Her sculptural work is created as a hybrid of crochet, plants, and plastic that mutate into colourful folly. It may be seen as a unification of the built and natural environment that deconstructs twenty-first-century human practices.

Australian art that is recognised internationally tends to be work that speaks with a voice that authentically reflects the current realities of Australian life. In this context, it is possible to see the artists featured in *Down the Rabbit Hole* as positioned well within the national psyche, tuning in, extending, and stretching viewers' hearts, minds, and souls. This is artistry without didacticism, and it touches audiences in a meaningful way.

Interestingly, the narratives included in *Down the Rabbit Hole* are fresh, diverse, and relevant without recourse to landscape. (Unlike the exhibition of Australian art, simply titled *Australia*, which will be on show at the Royal Academy, London, from September onwards; once more, a survey of our art to the world is based around the land.) Instead, this exhibition recasts our visual expression into a meaningful exploration of the interests and experiences of the artists, taking the direction of art *Down the Rabbit Hole*—only to emerge in a more personal space with relevance beyond their genesis, rather like the dreams of the imaginative Alice. ♦

LOUISE MARTIN-CHEW

A freelance writer based in Brisbane, Louise has been looking, writing and thinking about art for over twenty years.

1 Tony Bennett cited in Terry Smith, "Museum Futures: Some Speculations," *Art & Australia* 50, no. 4 (2013): 545.

2 Terry Smith, "Museum Futures," 546.

3 Donna McColm, "Contemporary Artworks with Kids: Widening Visitors' Experiences Through Artist-Museum Collaborations," *Art & Australia* 50, no. 4 (2013): 549.

4 The William Robinson Gallery is located in Old Government House at the Queensland University of Technology's Garden's Point (Brisbane) campus. It opened in 2009.

5 Duncan Smith, "Your Brain on Fiction," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 49, iss. 1:38–42.

6 Juliana Engberg cited in Tim Douglas, "Biennale Artists Imagined," *The Australian*, 14 May 2013.

7 Tess Maunder, "Gertrude Contemporary and *Art & Australia* Emerging Writers Program," *Art & Australia* 50, no. 4 (2013): 679.



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