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**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**

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# CONTENTS

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<b>THE CURIOUS ART OF FALLING DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Beata Batorowicz &amp; Sebastian Di Mauro</i>	
<hr/>	
<b>RESEARCH AS FAIRY TALE</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Ross Woodrow</i>	
<hr/>	
<b>WONDERING IN WONDERLAND</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>Chris Lee</i>	
<hr/>	
<b>CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER: STUDIO RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>David Akenson</i>	
<hr/>	
<b>BETWEEN EARTH AND THE UNDERWORLD</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>David Broker</i>	
<hr/>	
<b>ARTISTS</b>	<b>18</b>
<hr/>	
<b>DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE AND INTO WONDERLAND</b>	<b>64</b>
<i>Louise Martin-Chew</i>	
<hr/>	
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>68</b>
<hr/>	
<b>PHOTO CREDITS</b>	<b>70</b>
<hr/>	

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

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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.

4

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".<sup>1</sup>



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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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).