



Grace Cossington Smith art award 2016

National art award supporting
contemporary Australian artists



Exhibition of finalists 5 November to 10 December 2016

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Selection panel and judges: Rhonda Davis, Dr Andrew Frost and Mary Faith

Nick Collerson

David Collins

Ben Denham

Shoufay Derz

Kate Downhill

John Edwards

Dongwang Fan

Ashleigh Garwood

Eloise Kirk

Owen Leong

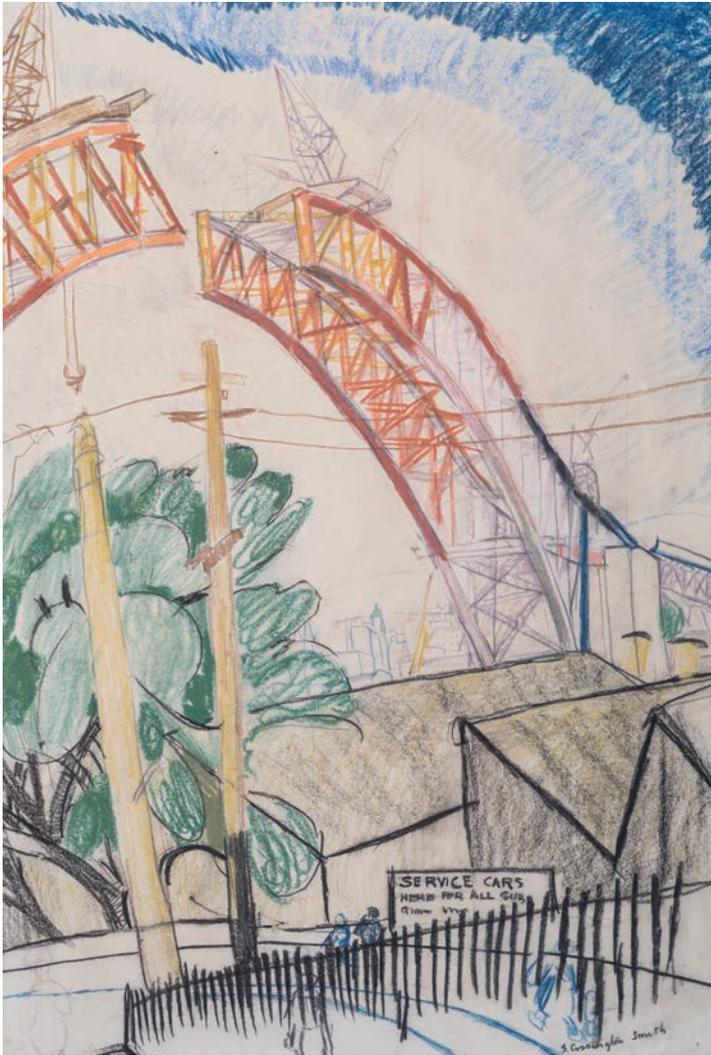
Laura Moore

Deb Mostert

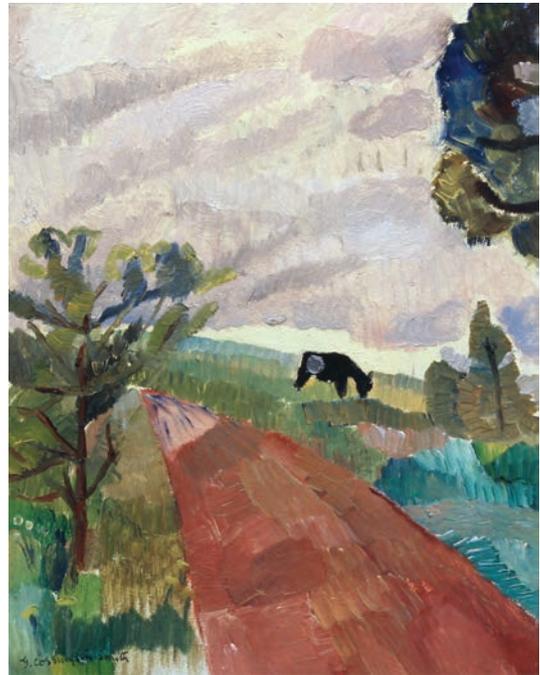
Marisa Purcell

Genevieve Felix Reynolds

Mark Titmarsh



Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984)
The Curve of the Bridge, 1929-30
Pencil and pastel on paper
Collection of Abbotsleigh
Courtesy the estate of Grace Cossington Smith



Grace Cossington Smith
Calf in the Landscape
Oil on paperboard
Collection of Abbotsleigh
Courtesy the estate of Grace Cossington Smith

It is with great pleasure that we celebrate the 2016 Grace Cossington Smith art award. The artists have interpreted the theme of *Making Connections* in different ways, demonstrating a diversity of creative thought. Grace Cossington Smith made connections with her world through artworks, and this vibrant exhibition serves as a joyful celebration and reminder of this famous local artist and Old Girl of Abbotsleigh.

Congratulations to all short-listed artists who were chosen to exhibit in this wonderful space. The variety of media and the different interpretations of the theme provide an interesting and thought provoking exhibition. It will be viewed by many local visitors over the next month and the works will be integrated into the teaching program to inspire our Visual Arts students. Teachers, Old Girls and students will enjoy the works at their leisure along with the local public.

I would like to thank our selectors, Dr Andrew Frost and Rhonda Davis, who carefully chose the 15 artists on display from more than 300 entries. We are fortunate to have such highly respected art professionals involved in our Grace Cossington Smith art award exhibition.

About the selectors

Dr Andrew Frost is a researcher in science fiction, cinema and contemporary art, the art critic for Guardian Australia and a lecturer in the Department of Media, Music, Communications and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney. He is the writer and presenter of more than dozen documentaries on Australian contemporary art for ABC1 and is the director of *My Space Program: The Art of Peter Hennessey* [Arts HD, 2016].

Rhonda Davis is senior curator at the Macquarie University Art Gallery. She has curated numerous exhibitions and was co-curator project manager for the exhibition *Affinities: 7 Museums, 50 Objects*, which won a Museums Australia Award in 2014. She was one of the co-editors for the recently published book *Macquarie University Art Collection: 50 Highlights*. Rhonda has written extensively with a focus on Australian modernism and is currently a PhD candidate researching the social history of Central Street Gallery.

I would also like to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Director of the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery, Mrs Mary Faith and the Gallery Coordinator Ms Lisa Jones. As we celebrate the third anniversary of the GCSG, we rejoice in the success of their work. I invite you to enjoy this exhibition and join our community of learners as we share in the artist's concepts of *Making Connections*.

Judith Poole
Headmistress

From the Director

A cornerstone of the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery is the creation of an environment where visitors can enjoy and appreciate artworks with the freedom to question and interpret. Seeing and looking is not the end of what happens to a gallery visitor, it is an exciting starting point of an experience. The role of the gallery is to spark ideas, and art can do this in many marvellous ways. Museum administrator Stephen Weil acknowledged this when he said that a museum (gallery) has 'the potency to change what people may know or think or feel, to affect what attitudes they may adopt or display, to influence what values they form'.

One of the joys in a competition with an open call for entries is the varied responses from artists who, in the case of the Grace Cossington Smith art award, are making connections with their world. What can be seen is the commitment of artists as they connect with their materials, their techniques, the subject matter and the audience. The artists' evident passion to connect creates the spark that educators can utilise in a variety of learning situations.

The artworks of the 15 finalists represent a wide range of approaches, in concept and media. The works of Kate Downhill, John Edwards, Dongwang Fan, Owen Leong and Genevieve Felix Reynolds reveal connections with culture, the past, the present and memory. **Kate Downhill** mediates imagery connecting her history and memory with inspiring narratives. **John Edwards** pays homage to the resilience and stamina of all bushrangers and settlers. He pictures their pride and grit in keeping up appearances through colluding, conspiring and connecting in order to survive. For **Dongwang Fan**, painting is a connection to his past as an ivory carver, and to his Chinese heritage in which the dragon is a powerful symbol of nationhood. **Owen Leong's** photography makes multiple connections between his Chinese cultural heritage; specifically, the traditions regarding healing the body. **Genevieve Felix Reynolds** explores connections between images of the past and procedures of the present.

Ideas about the world we inhabit are investigated by Nick Collerson, David Collins, Shoufay Derz, Eloise Kirk and Deb Mostert. The connections they make suggest a familiarity with place but also hint at memory and mystery. **Nick Collerson's** work draws on his personal observations about communication and experience, while **David Collins** is connected to his local natural environment, the Hawkesbury River, with a current focus on the mangroves that line the river. He feels his works can connect with the viewer on different levels, both conscious and unconscious. **Shoufay Derz** explores the connections and interconnections between known and unknown worlds, the transience of life, communal and personal stories and a celebration of its mystery. **Eloise Kirk** draws on the subject of landscape, geology and exploration creating unexpected, sometimes surreal, connections. Her images are composed from fragmented

objects in collage, flat masses of colour and textural resin pools, and for **Deb Mostert**, birds and personal objects connect as metaphors for ideas about migration.

For Ben Denham, Ashleigh Garwood, Lauren Moore, Marisa Purcell and Mark Titmarsh, processes and material investigations play a significant role in the articulation of their concepts. **Ben Denham's** work can be read as a diagram tracing the complex and entangled lines that link all organisms through a process of drawing using machines and a custom laser etcher. The works of **Ashleigh Garwood** have gone through many stages of scanning, xeroxing and rephotographing to film and digital to produce a translation of the landscape, not a copy of its physicality. Her works make connections through acknowledging the temporality of that connection, while **Laura Moore** creates photographs that raise questions regarding photography's role in how we communicate and form connections. **Marisa Purcell** considers how the process of painting harnesses her connectedness to the overall union of all things and **Mark Titmarsh** explores the material element of painting. For him, colour is the tension and connection between various modes of light, between the geometric and biomorphic, the painterly and industrial, the flatness of the image and the fatness of an object.

Congratulations to our 15 finalists. Thank you for making the 2016 exhibition so interesting with your different responses to Making Connections.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved in making the art award such a significant program for the creative and cultural sector of our region. The broad knowledge and experience of our judges, Rhonda Davis and Andrew Frost, has been invaluable. We sincerely thank Mrs Shirley Fong for her generous patronage of the winner's prize, and the ongoing support of the Abbotsleigh Old Girls' Union and Fuji Xerox is also very much appreciated.

We look forward to continuing our connection with the wonderful work of Australia's fine artists.

Mary Faith

Director, Grace Cossington Smith Gallery

2014 Grace Cossington Smith art award winner **Margaret Loy Pula**

Margaret Loy Pula belongs to the Anmatyerre people of Utopia in Central Australia. She comes from a distinguished artistic family and she is the daughter of well-known Utopian artist Kathleen Petyarre.

Margaret paints the 'Anatye' or Bush Potato dreaming using a series of fine detailed dots that represent the growth pattern of the plant from an aerial view. The bush potato vine grows after the rains and the vines send out tendrils into the soil and this is where the potato (or bush yam) begins to grow. The women go out to collect the potato and they are cooked in the hot coals of the fire.

She says: *This painting is about my culture, my family. That's my father's dreaming. This is from my father's country, that country is called 'Unjangola'. That is north of Utopia, not too far, but really desert country.*

2014 judge: Rachel Kent, Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

2014 selectors: artist Janet Laurence and curator Nicholas Tsoutas



Anatye Bush Potato
acrylic on linen
150 x 150
Courtesy Muk Muk Fine Art

2015 Grace Cossington Smith art award winner **Jake Blaschka**

Jake Blaschka's work explores connections between art and advertising and questions the pervasive role advertising plays within our contemporary society. *rebajas* is a cropped image of large scale collages placed in a steel frame resembling back-lit bus stop advertisements, while *Obelus 3* is a dense black surface with remnant traces of characters suggesting it could have once supported an advertisement.

His work preserves a link to the original source material; the finished size of the works is that of printed billposters, while the depth and material of the steel frames replicates those of the bus stop ad shells. However, he mediates the images of advertising by presenting only fragmented text or traces of characters on the surface of the aluminium.

Jake says: By emphasizing this dysfunctional character, I intend to intervene with technology used in high-end advertising in the same way I exploit the didactic content within printed advertising imagery.

2015 judges: Geoffrey Legge and Damien Minton from Watters Gallery in Sydney,

2015 selectors: Anneke Jaspers, Assistant Curator Contemporary Art, Art Gallery NSW and Dr Stephen Little, Head of Painting, National Art School.



rebajas من افس. خصم (Drawing as object 3), 2015

Untreated steel, duratrans print, acrylic, fluorescent lights, timber
156 x 104 cm

Obelus 3, 2015

Aluminium composite panel, timber, fluorescent light, acrylic paint, steel angles and paper
150 x 100 cm

2014 Finalists

Susan Andrews
Kevin Chin
Julia Davis
Ella Dreyfus
Jacqueline Drinkall
Cherine Fahd
Sara Freeman
Adrienne Gaha
Sara Goffman
Andre Hemer
Petrina Hicks
Pollyxenia Joannou
Margaret Loy Pula
Wendy Sharpe
Senye Shen

2015 Finalists

Jake Blaschka
Marinka Bozzec
Penelope Cain
Tamara Dean
Chris Dolman
Sara Freeman
Adrienne Gaha
Erika Gofton
Ryan Hoffmann
Pollyxenia Joannou
Tom Loveday
Janet Parker-Smith
Senye Shen
Mark Titmarsh
Sean Wadey

The Finalists

Nick Collerson

Up All Night, 2016

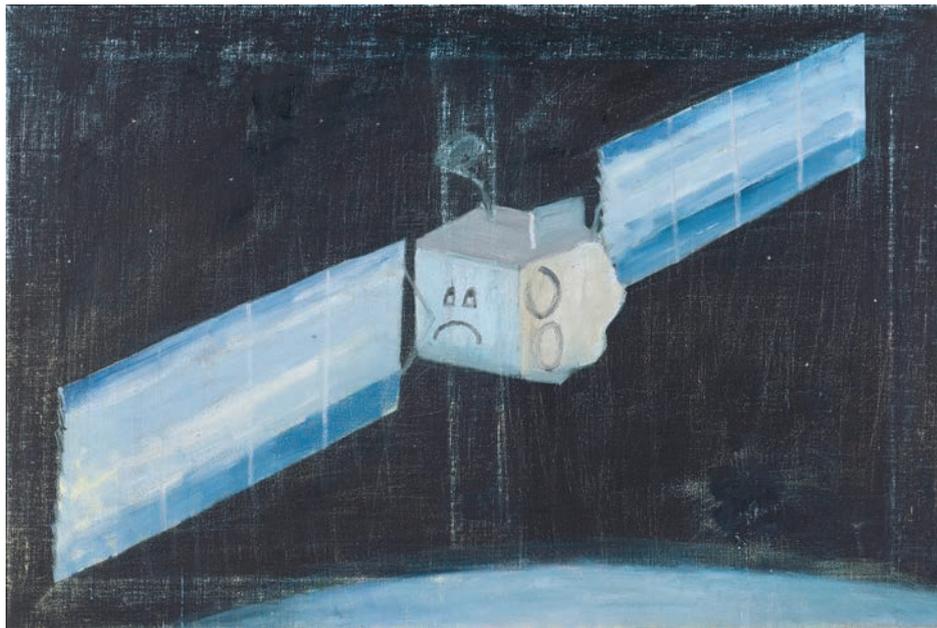
Oil on linen

71.5 x 107 cm

Represented by Liverpool Street Gallery

Though I'm inclined towards the view that an artist explaining their work is unnecessary, I will say the following.

This painting is about communication (connection) between people, both the prosaic and the lofty; from the banal to the quasi religious. For me, when we are rigid with language and meanings, words, symbols and icons get in the way of meaningful communication and connection.



David Collins

Swamp Garden, 2016

Oil on canvas

93 x 115 cm

Represented by Frances Keevil Gallery

Having lived on the Hawkesbury River for the past 30 years, I feel very connected to its natural environment. Recently, the mangroves that line the water course, linking the estuarine and terrestrial environments, have been the focus of my work.

The relationships within each piece are complex and varied. Colours, tones shapes and marks converse with each other and form a structural web. They are tentative connections easily disrupted through minor changes.

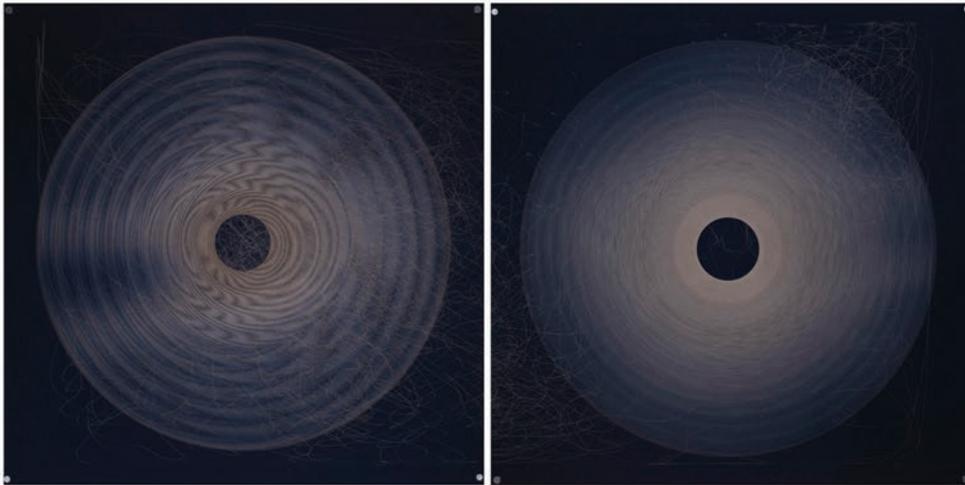
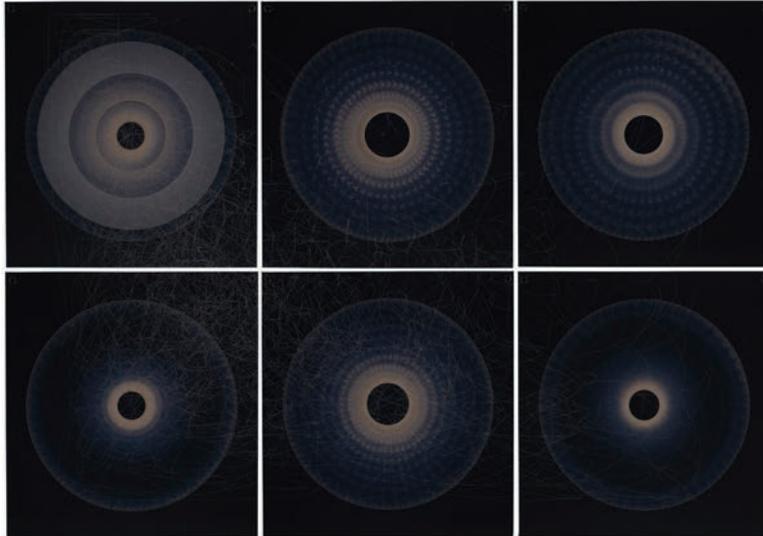
Relating with the viewer is an important though mysterious aspect of what I do; something beyond the concerns of the work. A painting may fail to resonate with viewers or appeal to a range of people and connect with them on different levels, both conscious and unconscious.



Evolution and ecology: spiral set no. 3, 2016
445 nm laser on paper 71.5 x 102 cm

Evolution and ecology: spiral pair no. 1, 2016
445 nm laser on paper 71 x 141.5 cm

The title of this work hints at a biological reading of the emergent spiral forms that have come out of my work with a custom built drawing machine and custom laser etcher. The title comes from a statement by eminent microbiologist Moselio Schaechter, “I would like to add to what Dobzhansky said, ‘nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution’, I would like to add and ecology. Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution and ecology.” By giving this work the title *Evolution and ecology*, I want to point to both the morphology of the cellular forms and the lines that link them. Seeing life from an ecological perspective involves making connections – tracing the complex and entangled lines that link all organisms. This work can be read as a kind of diagram of that process.



Shoufay Derz

Someone digging in the ground (black), 2015

Archival print on archival cotton paper, custom made cedar frame,
stained natural with eucalyptus and rust
104 x 111 cm

Someone digging in the ground (red), 2015

Archival print on archival cotton paper, custom made cedar frame,
stained natural with eucalyptus and rust
104 x 111 cm

*...This talk is like stamping new coins. They pile up,
while the real work is done outside
by someone digging in the ground. – Rumi*

These images were developed from a residency in remote Hill End, the site of an abandoned gold mine. The terrain is punctuated with holes, which I imagine as blank sites of speculation enticing one to peer down into the dark unknown — bottomless wells from which our hopes and anxieties are conjured. The ground is littered with quartz, a sign of possible buried gold.

These voids elicit a shared and familial sense of mystery, of untold or forgotten communal and personal stories, and continue my exploration into material absence. By depicting the women digging a hole in the landscape, I intended to emphasize that even intangible goals have a physical reality. These works are framed with a dark stain made from a brew of rust and eucalyptus leaves collected

Unnamed landscape poems (Diptych), 2016

Pigment print
90 x 99 cm each
Represented by Arterreal Gallery

After almost a year, I returned to find the exact hole depicted in *Someone digging in the ground*, and experimented with laying a pile of 250 blank cartridge papers in the hole. On the paper I poured Chinese ink so that it gathered into a dark abstract pool, and unexpectedly illuminated the landscape directly above. I imagine the wordless blackness of the Chinese ink as being reflecting of a primordial, pre-linguistic void.

Informed by contemporary framings of the sublime, cultural history and memorialisation, my work looks at the creative tension that is created by the dialogue between materiality and absence. Just as the writer uses words to express the ineffable, my practice engages the intersections between known and unknown worlds. The resultant, elegiac artworks are simultaneously a lament on the transience of life, and a celebration of its mystery.



Kate Downhill

Slits, 2016
Oil on canvas
54 x 80 cm

My practice is founded in making connections between past and present through memory. My images are also all connected to the external stimulus; gesture is made in response to a sound or sight. Each painting connects one to the other, stylistically developing, connecting to the last painting, connecting to the next. I am physically connected to the process of the painting; each line connects, joins, becomes drawing, drawn line becomes gesture, becomes paint, becomes the image.



John Edwards

Love is in the Air, 2015

Oil on canvas

170 x 137 cm

Represented by King Street Gallery on William

Captain Thunderbolt and family, 2015

Oil on canvas

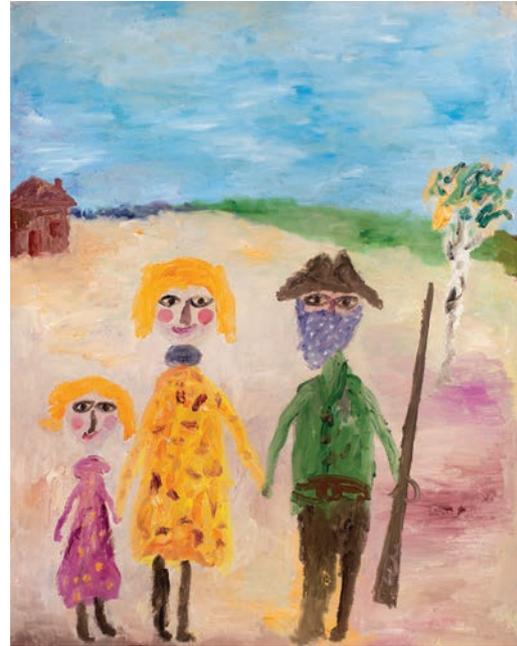
154 x 123 cm

Picnic at Hanging Tree, 2015

Oil on canvas

122 x 122 cm

Narratives evolving from bushranger images are integral to a colonised Australian psyche. Characters were famed for stealing, philandering, mateyness and murder. Captain Thunderbolt was one such legendary figure; the longest roaming bushranger in Australian history. Less is known about the lives of the hardy, gun-toting women who travelled with them. How did they manage family life? In these three paintings I wanted to capture something of their resilience, and his, in the way that the narratives of Colonial paintings captured a spirit of endurance. The day-to-day duties of keeping up appearances in less than salubrious circumstances, suggests something of the grit of an Australian ethos of making do, of being a bricoleur and thriving. As such, my painting hopes to work as homage to all bushrangers and settlers that took pride in colluding, conspiring and connecting in order to survive.



Dragon, 2016
Acrylic on canvas
142 x 140 cm

Dragons have long featured in Chinese folk religious icons such as jade and ivory carvings. Chinese dragons are aquatic creatures that live in water with fluid and hybrid identities. These traditional images are not only beautiful, but a powerful symbol of nationhood connecting people from all walks of life. It is through such symbols that the past connects the present and continues to have a bearing on the future. Dragons use their wisdom to navigate the terrain of ongoing change and transform the traditional Chinese icons into a new kind of postmodern dragon – one that is disintegrated and reintegrated. The background also shows many major world religious symbols. Their interdependence and coexistence symbolises today's China; a mixture of traditional and modern, Eastern and Western cultures and religions. My dragon blends many diverse artistic styles and conventions by combining Chinese art with the principles of contemporary Western art.



Ashleigh Garwood

Under Erasure #3, 2016

Inkjet on Hahnemuhle watercolour paper

101 x 152 cm

Represented by Brenda May Gallery

Under Erasure #8, 2016

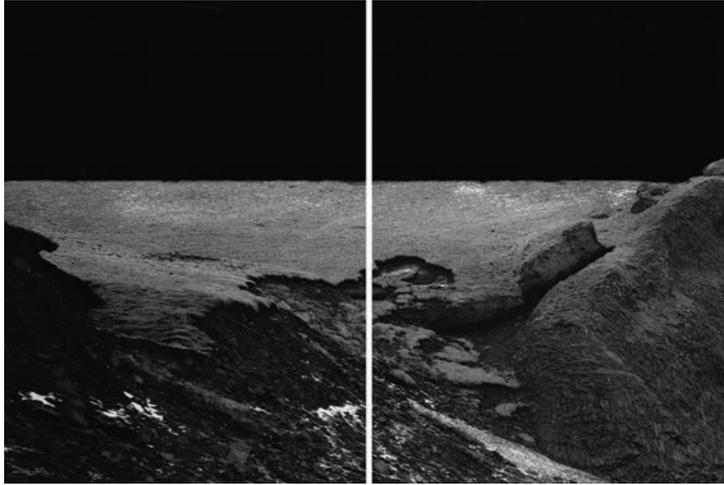
C-type on metallic paper

127 x 152 cm

The images in *Under Erasure* consider our expectations of nature and the landscape and how these have been predetermined through our relationship with images. The works are not the result of an experience recorded with the eye. Instead, they are a mode of translation, a photographic reality that sits in duality and contradiction from the physical reality it stemmed from.

These process driven works have gone through many stages of scanning, xeroxing, rephotographing on film and digital etc. to produce an outcome that aims to be a translation of the landscape, not a copy of its physicality.

The works recognise the theme of *Making Connections* through acknowledging the temporality of that connection. The appearance of erosion through the loss of visual data; the erosion of context as the photograph is taken away from its source; and the physical erosion of place that will continually occur as these sites are visited.



Eloise Kirk

Deep Dark, 2016

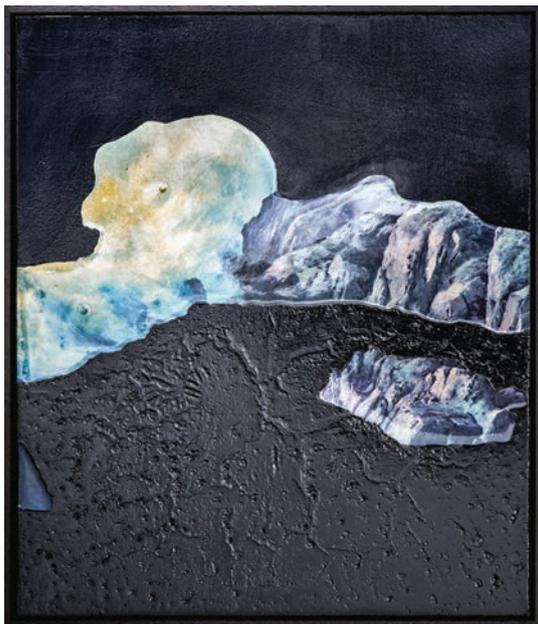
Collage, resin, binder, pigment and acrylic on board
62 x 52 cm

Represented by Colville Gallery, Hobart

Deep Dark 2, 2015

Collage, resin, binder, pigment and acrylic on board
35 x 45 cm

My practice oscillates between methodology and subject, drawing on the surreal nature of assemblage and collage and testing the boundaries between the romantic and the strange. Working within the process of collage, painting and sculpture I draw on the subject of landscape, geology and its links with the surreal, forging connections between discarded images, fetishising and fictionalising landscapes, proliferating a tangled narrative and the colonisation of images and objects.



Sankalpa, 2016
Pigment print on archival cotton paper
120 x 120 cm
Represented by Arterreal Gallery

Emotional Geometry is a new body of work informed by Chinese philosophy, medicine and healing. In this series of photographs and sculptures, I visualise the energy meridians of the body as a form of armour. This new work incorporates crystals and plants for their healing and protective properties, and Buddhist mudras invoking ritual gestures of the body.

This photograph is called *Sankalpa*. A sankalpa is an idea formed in the heart or mind, a private meditation, a deep resolve or intention to bring about positive change in one's life. In this self-portrait, my body is held by a neck brace, which supports the body to heal after an injury. A gold nimbus floats like an armature or exoskeleton around my head, emanating from the mind, anchored in the body. This work makes multiple connections between my Chinese cultural heritage, energy meridians surrounding the body and the poetics of healing.

Mothertongue, 2016
Pigment print on archival cotton paper
120 x 120 cm

In the self-portrait, *Mothertongue*, my body is draped in a veil of protective armour made of interlinked gold chains and medicinal herbs. In traditional Chinese medicine, the woody root of the astragalus plant is used as a tonic to fortify the immune system.

Since I was a child, my mother has used this herb in healing soups she prepares for our family. In thinking of the transmission of culture through her knowledge of medicine and food, I also became interested in the symbol of the 'mother tongue' as a person's first language, or arterial language, which I like to think of as a language of the blood. This work makes multiple connections between my Chinese cultural heritage, family, food and the poetics of healing.



likeness #6, 2015

Gelatin silver print from phone screen

Edition 1 of 1

180 x 130 cm

likeness #12, 2015

Gelatin silver print from phone screen

Edition 1 of 1

180 x 130 cm

likeness #14, 2015

Gelatin silver print from phone screen

Edition 1 of 1

180 x 130 cm

Likeness is a series of portraits that capture both the adolescent subjects and the medium of photography during a shared period of evolution. These teenagers are coming of age at a time when more photographs are taken than ever before and the most common cameras are in our phones. Their identities are mediated through photography and validated by how many 'likes' they can accumulate. Utilising the traditional realms of studio portraiture and wet darkroom printing, I take the photographs on a smartphone take the phone into the darkroom to make a traditional silver gelatin print. This collision of photographic histories and technologies results in portraits that become more unclear and obscure the closer you get to them. From a distance the images look perfect but as you get closer the pixels of the phone screen become visible, raising questions of photography's role in how we communicate and form connections.



Deb Mostert

Sticks and Stones - Migrant Bee Eater, 2015

Watercolour

61 x 46 cm

Represented by Lorraine Pilgrim

In my neighbourhood of Goodna, Ipswich, there are many migrants and refugees living in the community. Some live in limbo on temporary protection visas, trying to make themselves at home in a country which may or may not accept them. Some have already wrested out a reluctant acceptance to stay and are settling in to a new way of life. Some, like my family, have been here a generation and feel more Australian than Dutch. I have some Sri Lankan asylum seekers as friends and they are similar to me, wishing to live in freedom and raise families in peace. The Bee Eater has become a symbol as I think about our changing attitudes to migrants. Australia has one species (*Merops ornatus*) which has a close relative in the Bee Eater (*Merops philippinus*) which migrates through India and Sri Lanka. They look more similar than different.



Marisa Purcell

Connected, 2016

Mixed media on linen

183 x 168 cm

Represented by Olsen Irwin Gallery

Interval, 2016

Mixed media on linen

183 x 153 cm

Skein, 2016

Mixed media on linen

183 x 168 cm

The process of painting harnesses connectedness. All of my work is an attempt to connect to the overall union of all things. By shutting out the superfluous chatter and the mundane, painting is a means to get out of the way of oneself. Tapping into the unfathomable vastness that lies beyond the ordinary conscious brain, there is access to a reality that is beyond language, beyond human experience. My aim is to access this space as a reminder that the reality we experience is just one reality among many. Painting for me guides the connection beyond and playfully invents alternate possibilities.



Genevieve Felix Reynolds

Replaced, 2016

Acrylic on canvas

145 x 108 cm

No price listed (including gallery commission)

Faced with the digital abstraction of contemporary society, I respond with the abstraction of space in an exploration of the impact of contemporary technologies on painting. The mythos of classical art and architecture anchors my image making; contrasting the weight of historic objects against efficient, reproducible digital technologies and the pleasure-seeking immediacy of our post-internet generation. An abstraction of a Greek artefact is framed as an object of new idolisation. Refreshed and disembodied in paint, it simultaneously craves and mocks a slower, simpler platonic era. It laments our loss of physical experience, but there is excitement in the stillness, too – what is next to come?



Light from Light, Part 1-3, 2016

Acrylic and automotive polish on aluminium

110 x 90 cm each

The mystery of light and colour is all around us at all times. It is to be found equally in nature, and in our fluorescent post-industrial environment. Science tries to explain light and creates a muddle of waves and particles. Believers take light to be the essence of the god head, a primordial state of grace that has no forbears, unbegotten, where the only thing that can create a god or light is god as light. For unbelievers, the essence of light is the wonder of the world, the source of all interest in things, the mood of the moment, the play of appearance and depth across an infinity of possibility. In this painting, colour is the tension and connection between various modes of light, between the geometric and biomorphic, the painterly and industrial, the flatness of the image and the fatness of an object, and so on.



Cover artwork by Lisa Jones



art award



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