

Abbotsleigh Grace Cossington Smith art award 2026

National art award supporting
contemporary Australian artists

Selection panel and judges:

Anna Davis and Barry Keldoulis with Mary Faith

52 finalists for the 2026 awards

The Abbotsleigh Grace Cossington Smith art award \$25,000, acquisitive

The Abbotsleigh Grace Cossington Smith early career artist award \$5,000, non acquisitive

The Abbotsleigh Grace Cossington Smith local artist award \$5,000, non acquisitive

3:33 Art Projects collaboration

The Grace Cossington Smith Gallery and Abbotsleigh pay respect to the Darug people who are the traditional custodians of the land and whose deep connection to culture and customs have cared for this country.

We acknowledge elders past and present for their spiritual connection to place.

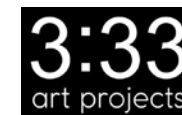
We recognise this land as a meeting place for Darug people and respectfully continue this tradition through the bringing together of our communities through art, culture and learning practices.

Supported by: **FUJIFILM**

All artworks courtesy and copyright the artists

Cover artwork by Lisa Jones

Gallery photograph copyright Richard Glover



Welcome to the 2026 Abbotsleigh Grace Cossington Smith art award, a carefully considered selection of 52 works that invite connection to a breadth of perspectives and artistic approaches.

Established in 2014, this biennial acquisitive award provides vital opportunities for both emerging and established artists, locally and nationally, to present their work within a dynamic and supportive context. Open to artists working in any two-dimensional form – including drawing, painting, watercolour, collage, printmaking, photography and textiles – the award continues to attract a compelling diversity of media and expression.

As John Dewey noted in *Art as Experience* (1938), ‘Every art communicates because it expresses. It enables us to share vividly and deeply in meanings... Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular.’ This insight resonates strongly within this year’s exhibition, where each work offers a point of connection, bridging individual experience with shared understanding.

For Abbotsleigh and the wider community, the Abbotsleigh Grace Cossington Smith art award offers not only an inspiring cultural experience but also meaningful opportunities for student engagement through direct encounters with contemporary practice and artistic communication. Art is a powerful window through which we can reflect upon, question and better understand the complexities of our current world.

The 2026 awards include the \$25,000 major award, the \$5,000 Early Career Artist Award, the \$5,000 Local Artist Award and the opportunity for an artist to work with 3:33 Art Projects. The award is made possible through the ongoing generosity of Abbotsleigh, and we gratefully acknowledge the continued support of Fujifilm.

I extend my sincere thanks to judges Anna Davis and Barry Keldoulis for their expertise and thoughtful consideration in selecting this year’s finalists and award winners. Special thanks are also extended to the many artists from across Australia who submitted work for consideration. Congratulations to the 2026 finalists. This exhibition is a testament to your dedication, care and shared commitment to the enduring value of art and community.

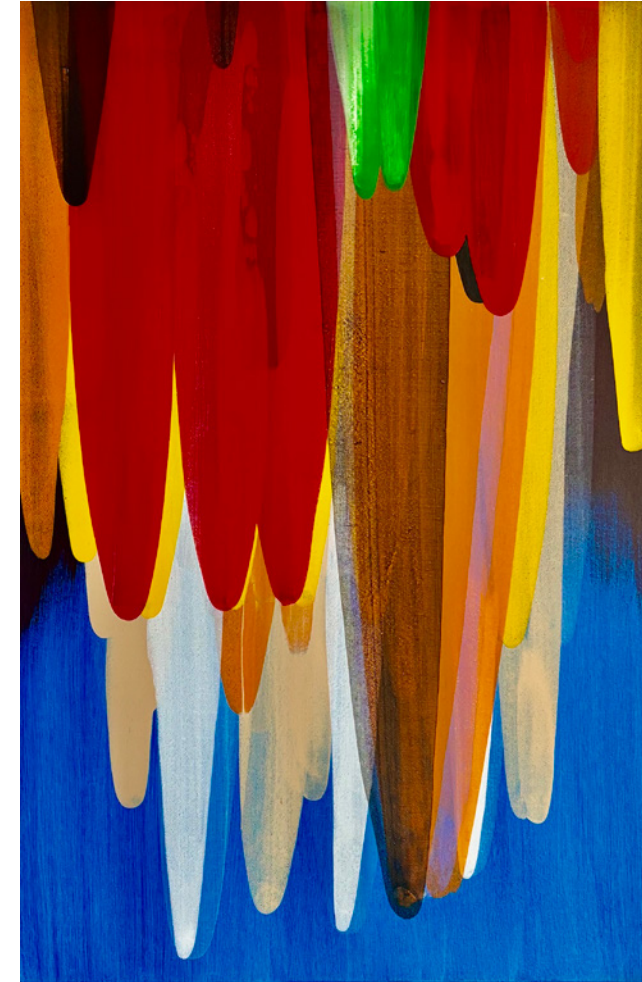
Mary Faith
Director
Grace Cossington Smith Gallery

Ron Adams	NSW	Louise Gresswell	VIC
Kim Anderson	VIC	Craig Handley	NSW
Sally Anderson	NSW	Tina Havelock Stevens	NSW
Susan Andrews	NSW	Petrina Hicks	NSW
arHITects	NSW	David King	NSW
Susan Baird	NSW	Frankie L Abroon	NSW
Richard Bardsley-Smith	NSW	Nerissa Lea	TAS
Emma Beer	ACT	Michael Lindeman	NSW
Lee Bethel	NSW	Tom Loveday	NSW
Ynja Bjornsson	NSW	David Newson-Tran	NSW
Yvonne Boag	NSW	Anh Nguyen	NSW
Clare Brodie	NSW	Adam Norton	NSW
Lucia Canuto	NSW	NOT	NSW
Tam Cao	NSW	Lori Pensini	WA
Tsz Chan	NSW	Tim Price	NSW
Tristan Chant	NSW	Debbie Pryor	SA
Donovan Christie	SA	Marisa Purcell	NSW
Xanga Connelley	NSW	Lucy Roleff	VIC
Inga Dalrymple	NSW	Jennifer Rosnell	NSW
Julia Davis	NSW	Peter Sharp	NSW
Tamara Dean	NSW	Chantelle Stewart	NSW
Amy Dynan	NSW	Kate Tucker	VIC
Edward Essing	NSW	Kate Vassallo	ACT
Shannon Field	VIC	David Wells	QLD
Cutler Footway	QLD	Anna Weston	QLD
Dianne Gall	SA	Cynthia White	NSW

For Ron Adams, form arises through the careful interplay of colour and geometry. His paintings explore these elemental forces, whose convergence shapes a distinctive visual language developed over many years. In conversation, it is clear that Adams selects his colours, shapes and words with deliberate, subjective intent. Like many artists, he uses painting as a way of processing and making sense of the world around him. Acting as a kind of filter, Adams distils the clutter and noise of contemporary life through a process of reduction. He breaks down familiar forms and reconstructs them, imbuing universal symbols with a heightened chromatic intensity. In doing so, he draws on images embedded within our collective cultural memory, revealing their quiet symmetry and enduring simplicity. This canvas, in particular, reads as a playful echo of Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família, reimagined through pure colour. Vertical drips and tapered spires in vivid reds, yellows, greens and blues evoke the basilica's soaring towers, abstracted into rhythmic, painterly forms. Where Gaudí drew inspiration from nature and light, these ideas reappear here as layered bands that overlap and press together, like stained glass translated into acrylic. The palette is brighter and more reductive than the church itself – stripped of stone and mosaic – yet the composition retains the clustered rhythm of the Sagrada Família's silhouette. Some drips resolve in soft, teardrop caps, subtly recalling Gaudí's organic finials. The white ground acts as a field of light, allowing each 'tower' to stand independently while contributing to a cohesive, skyline-like whole. Rather than an illustration, the work operates as a visual riff: the exuberance of Gaudí's architecture distilled into syncopated colour. It carries the same sense of upward movement and celebratory density that defines Barcelona's most iconic basilica.

Represented by GALLERY 144

Sagrada Família, 2025,
acrylic on canvas,
90 x 60 cm





My work explores our complex and often unsettling connection with the natural world. Inspired in part by the 'strange, winged creatures' of Mary Oliver's poem about loss, *About Angels and About Trees*, this drawing overlaps my experiences of human bereavement with a wider sense of grief and anxiety associated with climate change and the loss of fragile ecosystems. Traversing an uneasy space between seeking solace in nature, while also confronting the horrifying reality of a natural world in crisis, the landscape reflects my own grief back at me as it undergoes its own multitude of losses. An acute awareness of the peril we face only heightens my sense of wonder as the sunlight pierces through the trees, transforming them, creating the illusion of a void – or an angel. Everything is in flux, our final destination is unknown, and our existence on this planet is both sublimely beautiful and fleetingly tragic.

Represented by Flinders Lane Gallery

<https://kim-anderson.com.au>

Into Thin Air #2, 2026,
ink, graphite, charcoal and cold wax on paper, mounted on board,
100 x 60 cm

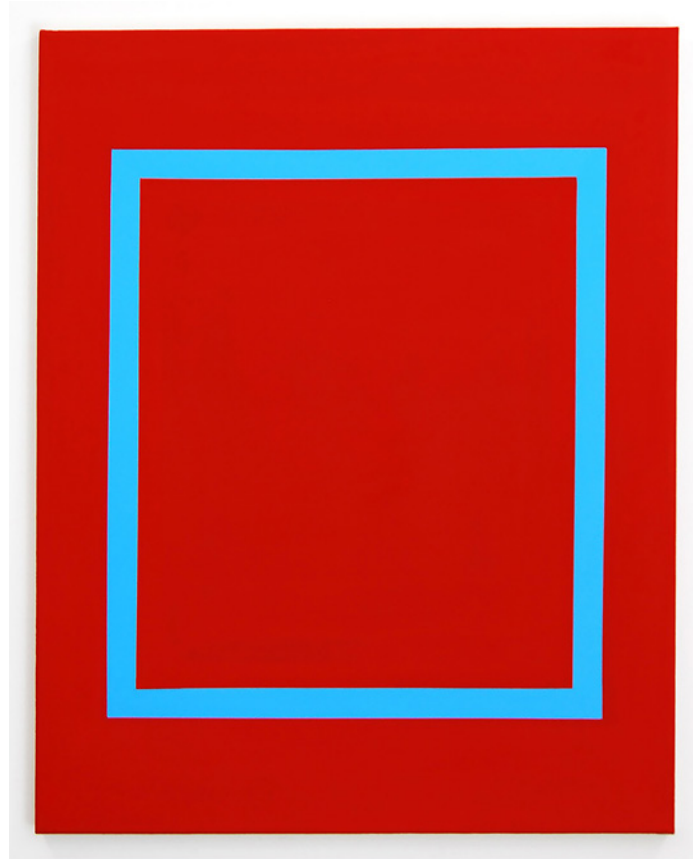
Balancing Jug, Augie's 1S Underwater Painting, Haberfield Window, Horse for Dad draws on still life and landscape motifs as symbols of containment, care and memory, bringing together personal and art-historical references to explore the entanglement of motherhood, domestic experience and creative practice. During a recent period between homes, my son and I rented a place in Haberfield and the window in this work, based on the kitchen window there, marks this transitional time between our past family home and life and future. The landscape references Bob Thompson's *Echo and Narcissus* (1965), particularly its depiction of a mother, child and male figure. In my work, the male figure has been painted out and replaced with an alternate figure and horse, representing my late father. The painting also incorporates an appropriation of my son's underwater-themed painting alongside kangaroo paw and a floating orange jug. This jug is a recurring motif within my work. As both vessel and symbol, the jug suggests holding, carrying and pouring; gestures closely tied to motherhood and broader collective female experience.

Represented by N Smith Gallery

www.sallyleeanderson.net

Balancing jug, Augie's 1S underwater painting, Haberfield window, horse for dad, 2026,
acrylic on polyester,
153 x 137 cm





The 2026 Abbotsleigh GCS art prize theme 'making connections' has proven valuable for me when reflecting on Grace Cossington Smith's painting *The Window*, 1956. The domestic environment reveals saturated hues and luminous light in a crowded interior. Cossington Smith used the window as a compositional device, bringing the outside in and inside out: the window reveals a world full of imagined possibilities.

The subject of the window in painting goes back centuries. Under the influence of post-minimalist painting, I have been exploring the potential of architectural elements that suggest entrances/exits, borders, gaps and structures on both a conventional canvas stretcher and on the painted object. *Blue rectangle* invokes a transitional space, between one space and another, from the blue rectangle to the red surface, from the real to the imagined.

<https://susanandrews.com.au>

Blue rectangle, 2026,
acrylic and marble dust on canvas,
86 x 66 cm

Toponymy is the discipline of giving names to places. Our work's title, *Kamay/Botany Bay National Park*, makes legible a connection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous toponymies and, by extension, their respective knowledge systems. The image's two distinct but entangled layers make this correlation tangible and propose a respectful congruence between them. Confabulated from 70 xerographic prints applied to 9mm thick marine ply, *Kamay/Botany Bay National Park* is an arboreal scene overlaid with a section of breezeblock wall. Formally and conceptually, this acknowledges a concurrent rupture and continuity in the subject.

Breezeblock is a form of openwork, like lace or other ornamental patterns made up of repeating voids and solid shapes. This work purposefully crafts connections and equivalences between historically separate gendered modes of practice – building and lacemaking. Crucially, the work's different yet related strata visualise the deep connectivity and interdependence between the natural and built environments.

www.thearthitects.org

Kamay/Botany Bay National Park, 2026,
70 hand cut Xerographic prints on 120 gsm paper
applied to 9 mm Marine Ply,
122 x 122 cm



My view as I wait for the light rail at Chalmers Street, central railway. Directly across from me is the dental hospital building. A multi-storey building constructed in 1940 in the 'streamline modern style' – modern for its time, with its repetitious soaring façade. Yet it seems the current tenants want me to know the world is a colourful place. They present me with a 'Smartie façade' at street level, set against the wider monotoned 'canvas' that is the building. But there's more. I'm physically connected to this structure from the past by the attributes of modern life. The yellow line I must stand behind; the dedicated bikeway/shareway transit system with its own colours and markings; not to mention the grey pavers, which have replaced the mundane concrete, and which display survey marks – the indicators of change.

rbswatercolour.com

Smartie Façade, 2025,
watercolour,
53 x 72 cm





When making these paintings, or more specifically, when I think about making these paintings. I think about two things: raw material and pure sensibility. The most conspicuous thing about my painting is the assertive tension between surface and space, the energised and ethereal colour relations and the engaging duality and inversion of both substance and method. I work relentlessly in opposition to activate sensations (physical, mental and emotional) that explore every infinite possibility and reflect on the human condition. From happiness, sheer joy and excitement, to pain, sorrow and despair. My most recent paintings riff off the experience of walking amongst the light at sunrise or sunset when every colour of the rainbow is seen in the sky, shifting fast and slow, all at the same time. I attempt to capture this light through a single gesture applied at speed, emulating the swiftness of time and experience similar to watching the light of the sky softly dance.

Represented by Nanda/Hobbs

www.emmabeer.com.au

Lady Drag, 2025,
acrylic on cotton canvas,
140 x 110 cm

The gridded composition in *My Father's Handkerchief* is an act of memorium, linking the gridded handkerchiefs my mother would fold and prepare for my father, a connection of object, place and memory. Paper is experienced as a material that is fragile and light; the act of ripping and manipulating a material that is usually a support gives the paper a strong sculptural presence. The work challenges traditional notions of paper's softness, imbuing it with changes in light and shadow, a sense of growth, layering, strata, rhythm and movement, undulations... and all of these are petrified or coagulated by the wax encaustic layered over the paper. Part painting, part sculpture, evasive, it is not quite possible to pin down the subject matter, the product of multiple acts of scoring and hand-ripping strips of paper, connecting the material through cutting, folding and re-ripping.

Represented by Egg & Dart Gallery

<http://leebethel.com/>

My Father's Handkerchief, 2025,
wax encaustic on ripped paper board,
132 x 112 cm



When I am in Seoul, I often take an afternoon walk in Namsan Mountain Park, which is close to my studio in Yongsan-gu. Namsan Park is a great place to experience the different seasons of the Northern Hemisphere, which are more distinct than the seasonal changes in Sydney. At the top of the mountain, the view of Seoul is amazing and always changing. I can see across the vast sea of apartments and office buildings to the other mountains that surround the city of Seoul. The painting, *A Day Meander*, was made after I walked in Namsan Park at the end of winter when the spring light was beginning, and colour was returning to the flower beds. The trees are stark just before the blossoms begin. It is all very bright and sharp after the grey of winter, and I was struck by the light and warmth of new beginnings.

Represented by Art Atrium

<http://yvonneboag.com.au>

A Day Meander, 2025,
acrylic on canvas,
183 x 152.5 cm





I make paintings that map unseen connections through form, placement and time. My practice approaches landscape as a field of relationships rather than a site for depiction. Working through reductive compositions, flat matte colour and a subtle underlying grid, I explore how architectural and topographic forms align, separate and coexist. Opaque and transparent shapes negotiate proximity without collapse, suggesting intimacy, belonging and the tensions within community. Spatial order becomes a language of connection, where distance, repetition and alignment carry emotional weight. Painting is a place of listening – an attentive process shaped by restraint. In this work, connection is held through spatial relationship rather than narrative. It exists in the intervals between forms, in disciplined omission and in the balance between stillness and quiet movement – a field where relationships are continuously negotiated.

Represented by Gallerysmith Vic

<https://clarebrodie.com>

form . placement . time 9, 2025,
matt vinyl paint on cotton canvas,
76 x 71 cm

Lucia Canuto works across disciplines, experimenting with print media to include them in contemporary discourse. Her work as an educator is also part of her expanded practice as a printmaker in her rural community. In *Embrace*, Canuto considers the sacred green square of the sports field, within whose boundaries team players embark on a passionate experience of commitment to one another. This work considers the sports field as a liberatory site for connection. Masculinity is expressed without scrutiny. Affection, touch, closeness and aggression coexist. The agony and the ecstasy are shared with spectators in an atmosphere of devotion. Gasps of surprise or yelps of joy echo like powerful waves, in unification and polarisation.

luciacanuto.com

Embrace, 2024,
cyanotype and natural dye on crepe de chine silk,
148 x 105 cm





When reading about Grace Cossington Smith, I was surprised to find that we were born on the same date, 20 April. Another connection that binds us as artists is that we both paint from life the urban and natural environment, albeit with a different palette and manner. Here is a painting I did en plein-air on my travels to Florence in 2024. I enjoyed the rows of ochre to mustard-coloured family dwellings with terracotta roofs that just shone in the light.

Australian-born Vietnamese artist Tam Cao trained at the Julian Ashton Art School and Florence Academy of Art, excelling in various media, particularly pencil, charcoal and oils, with a focus on drawing from life. His artwork aims to explore the dynamic between the subject and the artist's vision, drawing inspiration from figurative realism while contextualising it within modern culture.

www.tamcao.com.au

The Balcony, 2024,
oil on canvas,
35.5 x 30 cm

Tsz Chan (Evelyn) explores connection through the structure and symbolism of the Chinese character 星 (star) in *Constellation*. Incorporating elements of semi-cursive script from Chinese calligraphy, strokes flow into one another, forming an unbroken rhythm that reflects continuity and interdependence. Circular forms extend from the composition, each linking an end to a beginning, suggesting stars as points of light that gain meaning through relation rather than isolation. Connecting these circles is the lower component of 星, 生 (life), rendered as a continuous line that evolves into minimalistic human forms with the last bottom stroke grounded. This gesture expresses interaction, coexistence and shared experience. Through the integration of script, symbol and form, the work reflects on how connections are formed across cultures, between individuals and the collective, and through moments in time, revealing life as a constellation of relationships.

<https://www.tcartjournal.com>

Constellation, 2026,
sumi ink on xuan paper,
97 x 68 cm



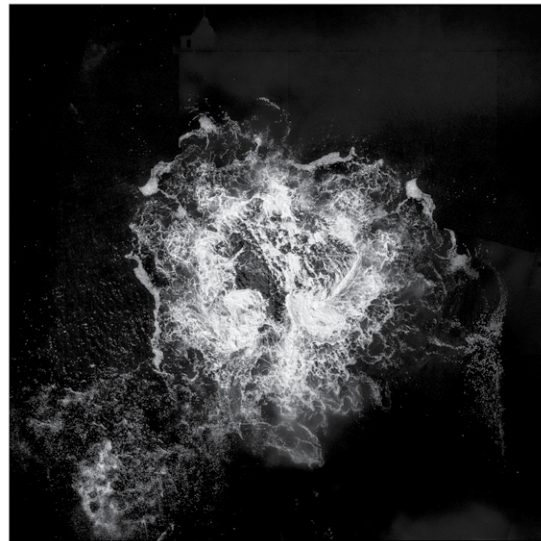
Ever since childhood drives to the Adelaide Hills, I've always looked at the Heysen Tunnels as if it's a portal to the rest of the world (or at least Australia). My painting *Driving Into The Light* is a contemporary response to Hans Heysen's iconic *Droving Into The Light*, which captures the luminous essence of the Australian landscape while recontextualising it within a modern, built environment. The tunnels represent a decisive human intervention, an infrastructure that carves through the land that enables movement, access and connection. Set against Heysen's romantic vision of unspoiled wilderness, there becomes a dialogue between past and present. Through this juxtaposition, I explore how infrastructure reshapes our experience of the landscape, not only altering it physically but redefining how we connect to place, memory and each other.

Represented by Lennox St. Gallery

www.donovanchristie.com

Driving Into The Light, 2025,
oil on canvas,
101 x 76 cm





In Relation: to the heart juxtaposes an electron microscope image of my granddaughter's first tear with a still image from my video *To The Heart: a calling*, filmed from a small boat kilometres from the Australian coast at an altitude of 150 metres. I'm drawn to the awe and power of natural phenomena and the interconnectedness we have with the world and one another. The works reference salt – a material present in both a newborn's tears and the oceans – a substance born in stars yet essential for all living organisms on Earth. Thanks to Dr Karen Privat, Senior Research Associate, Electron Microscope Unit UNSW.

<https://juliadavis.com.au/>

In Relation: to the heart, 2025, diptych, archival inkjet prints on hahnemühle paper, 68 x 68 cm each



I like paintings that are elusive, that deliver a mystery – something to be unravelled with input from the viewer. They leave room for personal history to become a player, to ignite a thread that will take its own turns and outcomes and ultimately deliver an emotion and feeling and connection that will find its own conclusion.

Represented by Piermarq

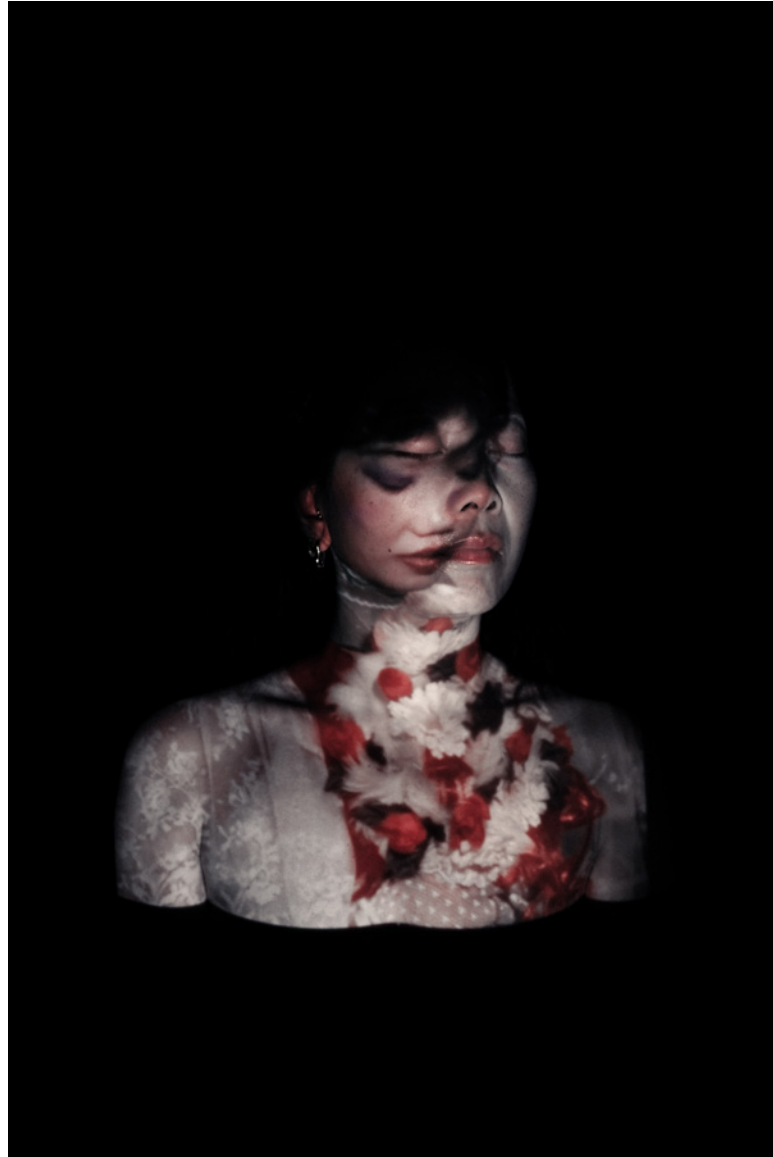
Looking, 2026,
oil on board,
40 x 50 cm

It was meant to be a rest; it was, however, a jungle at night,
full of howls and fear there inside your head, out the window
of the room beyond your head, all was calm, all was bright,
connect to disconnect.

Represented by Australian Galleries

It was supposed to be a holiday, 2024,
oil on board,
28 x 35.5 cm





‘不孝有三，无后为大’ – Of the three unfilial acts, having no descendants is the greatest. Gen's, អង្គរញ្ញាណ, ១៧៩៥ traces the connections we inherit, and what we choose to keep. Inspired by my wife's traditional Chinese Cambodian upbringing and our decision not to have children, this work layers old wedding photographs, digital painting and contemporary photography, generations folded into one another. Cultural symbols persist but hold loosely. This work sits with the connections that hold, even against the weight of an unfulfilled expectation. A bloodline can end with one choice. We live with unfulfilled wishes and the stories we choose to continue or let go.

davidnewsontran.com

Gen's, អង្គរញ្ញាណ, ១៧៩៥, 2025,
 photograph archival pigment print,
 54 x 40 cm

Growing up in Brisbane in the 1980s, I at least had the Queensland Art Gallery; there wasn't much other cultural input. It was there that I connected with the work of Grace Cossington Smith. I returned often to her interiors; they taught me how to paint and how to observe light filtering through my bedroom window, which at the time felt like a kind of cage. The warmth of Cossington Smith's paintings has stayed with me. My work *Afternoon, bedroom* connects with the same impulse she had when light becomes the subject itself. In this painting, the western sun moves across the room, filtering through the windows and casting a soft orange glow over everything.

Represented by Day01. Gallery

www.marisapurcell.com

Afternoon, bedroom, 2025,
acrylic on linen,
140 x 180 cm



As a speech pathologist and artist, I am deeply curious about how we make connections with ourselves and each other. This lifelong interest led me to interview and paint a series of women about the topic. Featured is Ida, a dear friend and psychologist based in Sweden with a strong humanitarian ethos. Ida explained the micro to the macro of making connections – including to her inner self, sense of agency and body, through to how these factors support her connection with others and a sense of something ‘greater’.

www.annaweston.com.au

Ida. Karlstad, Sweden, 2025,
oil on canvas,
132.2 x 101.6 cm



