



ALTERED STATES

Stuart Elliott

Shire of Mundaring Acquisition Exhibition

11 March - 7 May 2023

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

Established in 1985, the Shire of Mundaring Art Collection is a unique and richly varied body of artworks that focuses on the eastern region. The collection has paintings, prints, drawings, ceramics and sculpture, which showcase the development of local artists and visual arts practice. The collection features artworks of historical and contemporary significance that document the changing social and historical landscape over a period of almost 40 years. The continued acquisition of artwork representing the depth and diversity of local artistic talent maintains a strong link to the local community and cultural heritage.

FOREWORD

Altered States celebrates the work of seminal artist Stuart Elliott, and his career spanning almost half a century. Elliott's works delve into our relationships with the environment, technology and other humans through his fundamental fascination with 'fakeological' readings of symbols, altars, archaeological artefacts and rituals. The exhibition frames a legacy of influences on Elliott's work and represents the chronological extremes - from its edgy beginning through the decades of inspired and inspiring creation told through four distinct parts.

ABOUT STUART ELLIOTT

Stuart Elliott spent the formative periods of his career in the Perth Hills and still fosters a strong following of supporters within that community. Gaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Sculpture) in 1980, Elliott went on to experience the transformative artistic and socio-political potential of puppet theatre through Spare Parts Puppet Theatre. In the mid-1980's he travelled to the USA and Europe, gaining significant influences through ethnographic, military and toy museums. Elliott continues to exhibit and educate locally and internationally, working on a range of public, private and corporate commissions. In 2010 he was honoured with an Artsource Lifetime Achievement Award and continues to make a significant contribution to WA's visual arts sector. His sculptures and paintings are held in Collections around the world.



Culture is embedded within poetic narratives that help to shape our lives and the world we are in. It is neither voraciously dynamic nor unequivocally passive.

It has an elusive sense of materiality with a vibrant scattering of drama through which artists hone their sweeping artistic vision. An innate spirit of creativity resonates with unfettered dynamism in *Altered States*, a long-awaited survey exhibition of the work of esteemed artist Stuart Elliott. A comprehensive sweep of artworks represents a laudable career spanning many decades. Both installations and wall-works capture a rumbling sense of imposing materiality via the largesse of remarkable stage and museum craft wherein consequential art affixes itself to the very skin of extant consciousness. The venerable historic and contemporary relevance, and critical significance of Elliott's work is irrefutable.

Elliott's multi-faceted and enduring arts practice has long been informed by immersive studies – both formal and self-driven in archaeology, anthropology, philosophy, and theories of art and iconography – amongst other arcane genres. His creative space is akin to a 'museum' or powerhouse of largely idiosyncratic things. Clustered objects and ephemera await a magical transformation through which lumbering jetsam burgeons into profoundly prepossessing artworks. Elliott's endlessly complex two and three-dimensional works articulate immersive and spatial narratives that are sufficiently convincing for us to suspend disbelief and rouse the latent life of inanimate

objects. They serve as keenly wrought repositories for encoded histories, where folklore and legend ultimately supersede reason. Encompassing Elliott's fascination for the ersatz and the fake, his artistic ilk largely subsumes the invented realm of Fakeology. It is through this context that the artist communicates the ethos and concerns of our age, holding a corrosive mirror aloft to the metaphoric decline of the future world.

Altered States is a broad, descriptive title that subsumes and defines processes of incremental change. Comprehensive in its scope, this exhibition comprises four distinct, but still compellingly connected parts. Their connection is tacit rather than overt, and they evoke a fundamental fascination with 'fakeological' readings of symbols and the genesis of a blurred signification wherein objects mediate their relative autonomy. The distribution of gallery space for this show follows an intuitive utterance of narrative, where installation decisions were based on the curatorial premise of rendering lucid allegory and socio-political critique.

Male Power Fetish, an enshrined figure, marks a beginning of sorts as a pivotal artwork, its starting point initiating a successive manifestation of unexpected, progressive shifts. An artwork of monumental importance to Elliott's long and distinguished career, the provenance

of this piece resonates with the genealogical origins of profound works for which he is renowned. With a nod toward the equivocal chain of history, *Male Power Fetish* is juxtaposed with *Fabricator II*, the two poignant works framing a legacy of influences. Each represents the extremes of a chronological divide – *Male Power Fetish* at the edgy beginning and *Fabricator II* after decades of inspired and inspiring creation. These important works form a mainstay of signification informing the utterance of the artist, his work and this exhibition. The provenance of a group of arcane altar pieces spans the entirety of Elliott's arts practice, made manifest in the earliest work, *Male Power Fetish* (1980), and the most recent, the iconic *Fabricator II* (2022). Whilst these are fictional altars, their impulse is firmly situated in the current cultural era. Most of these altars assume the appearance of conventional shrines and icons.

Aspects of the exhibition siphon the epithet 'alter' as a cogent inference of change. A blazing comet or hurtling meteor metaphorically connotes that looming 'alterations' are immanent, and they will be definitively consequential.

Many of these comet paintings portray a rushing celestial mass, whilst other works suggest random hypothetical consequences of collision. The comet is proffered as an allegorical operative of impending change.

Labyrinthine installations, impenetrably knotty and vast, frame something of a cornerstone to Elliott's enduring practice. Whether as formal, impractically commodious board games, fraught cityscapes or vacillating columns of vehicles, all have provided rich potential to push the juncture of the whole and the sum of its parts to where space itself becomes a major discursive component. These installations, like any urban environment, comprise the active, dormant and derelict. Each is a component of the mis-en-scene, part of a greater sum portraying a place teetering on the brink of decay or gentrification. This prodigious body of work attests to Elliott's boundless intellect and creative capacity as a truly consequential and enduring artist.

Sue Starcken
Artist, Writer, Curator, 2023



I have recently embarked upon a journey to learn more about the history of Western Australian visual art. It is a field that is still ripe for exploration, with many lacunae and a hesitantly sketched and incomplete topography on the charts.

Dragons and inland seas may yet populate the places that are poorly documented in this history. But equally the absence and the silence may in fact reflect a kind of cultural desert.

It is, of course, a matter of perspective. Tom Gibbons once described the Perth into which he arrived in the 1950s as existing on a starvation diet of culture – in comparison to the cultural experiences he left behind in Salford, UK. I also think of Durer's rhinoceros¹ and Stubbs' kangaroo², fantastic beasts imagined from a described reality, or De Vlamingh's "rats" on Rottnest³, all efforts to depict and describe things for which the language of the foreign observer was ill-equipped. The challenge of local art history is about

many degrees of separation from the established canon of an international art history, and the difficulty of documenting a local history in a language that does not betray itself as a pidgin dialect.

The iconographic elements of Stuart Elliott's work are applied across much of his oeuvre, particularly in the format of works and custom-built frames and special tables for the display of his work, as can be seen in this exhibition. But I have long been interested in Elliott's treatment of the figure in his work, which I think deserves special mention in terms of their iconography. One of the stand-out features of Elliott's figures is that they are almost exclusively clad from head to toe in some form of PPE (personal protective

equipment). These figures are icons for a place where humanity is constantly at risk from its own endeavours, and beg the question about just what kind of humanity occupies these outfits or even what vestiges of humanity remain under the masks.

I think that Elliott's practice is a fascinating counterpoint to the Australian landscape tradition and has its roots firmly here in Western Australia. The natural landscape is in fact a conspicuous absence in the work of Elliott. But in our Western Australian context the natural landscape is, to a large degree, a resource to be consumed, and a setting for industry and endeavour in support of that consumption. These industrious and itinerant tradies are

the people that populate Elliott's artworks, and the desolate landscapes in his works anticipate the impending industrial wasteland that much better represent our Western Australian civilisation than the romantic remains of rural Australia celebrated in the mythology underpinning much Australian art.

Dr Duncan McKay
Arts Writer, 2022

1 Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), *The Rhinoceros*, woodcut, 1515
2 George Stubbs (1724-1806), *The Kongouro from New Holland*, oil painting, 1772
3 Willem de Vlamingh (1640-1698), Captains log from 1696



6

IMAGES

Cover: Stuart Elliott, *Sentinel*, 2022, wood, paint, 50 x 30 x 20 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

1. Stuart Elliott, *Male Power Fetish*, 1980, wood, mixed media, 103 x 46 x 48 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.
2. Stuart Elliott, *Fabricator II*, 2022, oil on board, wood, 57.5 x 31 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.
3. Stuart Elliott, *Pan I: Canarium*, 2022, oil on canvas, 31 x 61 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.
4. Stuart Elliott, *Pan II: Concierge*, 2022, oil on canvas, 31 x 25 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.
5. Stuart Elliott, *Pan III: Repository*, 2022, oil on canvas, 31 x 61 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.
6. Stuart Elliott, *ATRA II*, 2022, oil on canvas, 31 x 61 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



7190 Great Eastern Highway Mundaring WA 6073

T: 08 9295 3991 | info@mundaringartscentre.com.au

Open Wed - Fri 10am - 5pm, Sat - Sun 11am - 3pm | Closed Mon, Tue & Public Holidays

MUNDARINGARTSCENTRE.COM.AU



Mundaring Arts Centre respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we operate, the Whadjuk people, as well as other First Australians connected with this land. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present.