

HERE&NOW20: PERFECTLY QUEER



THE LAWRENCE WILSON ART
GALLERY, CURATOR AND ARTISTS
ACKNOWLEDGE THE WHADJUK PEOPLE
OF THE NOONGAR NATION, THE
GADIGAL AND DARUG PEOPLE OF THE
EORA NATION AND THE WURUNDJERI
AND BUNURONG PEOPLE OF THE
KULIN NATION, THE TRADITIONAL
OWNERS OF THE LANDS ON WHICH
WE LIVE AND WORK.

WE RECOGNISE THEIR STRENGTH
AND RESILIENCE AND PAY
RESPECT TO THEIR ELDERS PAST,
PRESENT AND EMERGING.
SOVEREIGNTY WAS NEVER CEDED.

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The University of Western Australia has been a vibrant centre of creative endeavour from the moment the first students arrived on the Irwin Street campus in 1913. The University was then, and remains, a singular hub of creative experimentation where ideas can be expressed openly, where conventions are challenged, and new work is presented and performed.

Since 1973, when the Undercroft Gallery was officially opened in what was previously a breezeway under Winthrop Hall, the University has presented exhibitions of work by local artists working at the cutting edge of practice. When the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery opened in 1990, it carried on that tradition. With the facilities of a purpose-built contemporary gallery, it was able to increase both the number and quality of exhibitions. Through this exhibition history, the University has documented a unique, localised critique of imported modes of cultural practice, one that has developed from the conditions of living and working in this specific place at a particular moment in time.

The *HERE&NOW* exhibition series was established in 2012 to capture that vibrancy and provide a snapshot of activity across current practice within an area of focus within the visual arts. Each year the exhibition highlights the creative enterprise of Western Australian artists working at the cutting edge of contemporary visual arts. Curated by an emerging curator with links to a community of artists, the exhibition showcases their achievements and provides a local context for their practice.

For the inaugural *HERE&NOW* exhibition in 2012, Katie Lenanton curated an exhibition that explored the interface between craft and fine art and the liminal space of Artist-Run-Initiatives (ARIs). *HERE&NOW13* focused on artists with a disability, curated by Katherine Wilkinson, and *HERE&NOW14* showcased artists working in ceramics, curated by Emma Bitmead. In 2015 *HERE&NOW* explored sculpture in an ever-expanding field through the insights of curator Andrew Purvis and in *HERE&NOW16: GenYM*, curator Hamida Novakovich examined the practice of four young Muslim artists. In 2017 Chelsea Hopper chose a group of contemporary

artists responding to the impact of photography as a tool that shapes our vision of the world. Two years ago, on the 50th anniversary of Marcel Duchamp's death, Anna Louise Richardson investigated Duchamp's continuing impact on the practice of a select group of Western Australian artists. Then last year, Joanna Sulkowski focused on five artists exploring textiles in her exhibition *HERE&NOW19: Material Culture*.

The current generation of Western Australian artists has an open and critical approach to the ideas circling around them. They are actively engaging with peers around the world while keeping themselves deeply embedded here. This sense of connectivity is evident in their practice and in the ways in which they are constructing their careers.

This year Brent Harrison has worked with eight artists who draw on histories and their own lived experience to create artworks that reflect on what it means to be queer in Perth in 2020. As he notes, the exhibition is an excellent opportunity to contribute to the professional practice of local queer artists: 'In addition to supporting local queer artists, the exhibition will also open a dialogue with Perth communities about the experiences of queer people and the issues we face.'

I would like to thank all the artists for their contribution to this project and, in particular, Brent Harrison for his thoughtful and sympathetic curatorial direction. Working in tandem with the staff at the Cultural Precinct, he and the artists he has selected have created an exhibition that encapsulates the energy, dynamism, and informed connectivity that typifies art made here and now.

Professor Ted Snell AM CitWA
Director, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery



HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer

HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer first developed in the archives of the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), a room packed with dusty cardboard boxes that house decades of all but forgotten information on artists, exhibitions and Western Australian art history. As I dug through this archival graveyard, I stumbled across the catalogue for *Queer in the West* (1996), an exhibition curated by Ricardo Peach. Featuring gay and lesbian artists from Western Australia, the exhibition critiqued the draconian *Law Reform (Decriminalization of Sodomy) Act 1989*, a piece of legislation that prohibited the “encouragement or promotion of homosexual behaviour” in public spaces, which included the display of queer artworks.¹ Prior to this, it was illegal for sexual acts to take place privately between two people of the same sex, and despite this small win, it remained one of the strictest gay law reform acts in Australia until it was finally overturned in 2002.

Queer in the West occurred during the global AIDS crisis, a time that saw queer visibility peak in cultural institutions despite the increased public scrutiny of queer communities who were widely perceived as the source of HIV/AIDS.² Although it was illegal to exhibit queer artwork during this period, *Queer in the West* was not the only queer exhibition to take place during the Act; additional exhibitions included *Skin: An Exhibition of Contemporary Western Australian Gay and Lesbian Art*, PICA (1993), a controversial Robert Mapplethorpe retrospective, *Mapplethorpe*, Art Gallery of Western Australia (1995), and *Queer'dom*, PICA (1999). Since the law was overturned almost 20 years ago in the *Acts Amendment (Lesbian and Gay Law Reform) Act 2002*, and the exhibition of queer artworks made legal, there have been only a handful of exhibitions at major institutions in Western Australia that explicitly feature the work of queer artists.³

The term queer is used as a means to resist the oppression and erasure of sexual and gendered minorities while also celebrating difference. Queerness can also be characterised by its rejection of the institution and the mainstream but without the level of public support that cultural institutions attract, the work of queer artists still remains marginalised. This marginalisation remains a risk even when queer

artists are represented by such institutions. In a recent review of the blockbuster exhibition *Keith Haring | Jean-Michel Basquiat: Crossing Lines* at the National Gallery of Victoria, Marcus O'Donnell notes that there was barely any mention of Haring's homosexuality, which the artist himself acknowledged as a major influence. As O'Donnell points out, “... if this exhibition had failed to recognise the importance to Basquiat's work of his experience of being a young, black man, in the same way it has ignored Haring's gayness, it would have been condemned”.⁴

The artists in this exhibition are part of a shared lineage that traces acts of queer resistance in the community. Through this historical legacy, these artists draw on the past and present as well as their own lived experiences of queerness to navigate through the world. The intergenerational dialogues that traverse the artists' works offer insights that not only span time and memory but also extend beyond age, gender and sexuality. These artists have created artworks that reflect on what it means to be queer, and utilised the works to dismantle dominant heteronormative and genderist narratives, to explore the significance of kinship and desire and to offer a version of history that positions themselves at its centre.

Very much aware of this legacy, Jo Darbyshire has consistently advocated for stronger representation throughout her decades-long practice. Darbyshire, whose work was featured in *Queer in the West*, is also known for her 2003 curated project, *The Gay Museum*. Held at the Western Australian Museum, *The Gay Museum* sought to rectify the absence of any visible queerness within the State's Collection. Through artistic intervention, Darbyshire reinterpreted materials from various departments such as anthropology, history and biology to emphasise the rich history of queer culture in Western Australia.⁵

In *HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer*, Darbyshire has selected 13 artworks created by canonical 20th century Australian artists, including William Dobell, Sidney Nolan and Janet Cumbræ-Stewart, in the University of Western Australia Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art. In her installation, Darbyshire illuminates conservative attitudes held by cultural institutions (especially during a time

when being queer was illegal in Australia, notably most of these works were acquired prior to 2002), which led to the erasure and separation of the artists' sexuality from their history. Quotes from articles by historians and art critics that allude to an artists' queerness accompany each work. Through her intervention into these collections, Darbyshire provides us with a more holistic understanding of these artists and their work, along with highlighting the assumptions of heteronormativity.

In the 1990s Darbyshire lectured at Curtin University and among her students was Andrew Nicholls. Influenced by Darbyshire, Nicholls began to explore queer subjectivity, eventually leading to *Queer'dom*, an exhibition he co-curated at PICA in 1999. In *Queer'dom*, Nicholls sought to expose the contradictory definitions of the word "queer", and to describe a term that by its nature is beyond definition.⁶

For *HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer*, Nicholls has created four large-scale drawings in his signature camp aesthetic that depict the changing of the seasons. Based on 18th century Meissen porcelain figurines, each drawing depicts a group of nude male models made up of Nicholls' friends from different generations (predominantly – though not all – queer-identifying, and predominantly from the local arts community). Each model is immersed in flamboyant opulence and surrounded by a rich utopian garden of delicate flowers, exotic birds and buzzing insects. In employing a cornucopia of tropes and clichés associated with the European decorative arts, along with his own personal references, Nicholls has crafted a world that embraces homoerotic desire and queer intimacy while exposing the constructed nature of sexuality and gender. In his essay for Nicholls' 2019 solo exhibition *Hyperkulturemia* at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, curator Dr Robert Cook describes Nicholls' investigation into queer representation as a "foundation" to younger artists; queer artists from previous generations remain still relatively unknown, a history waiting to be brought to light through projects like Darbyshire's.⁷

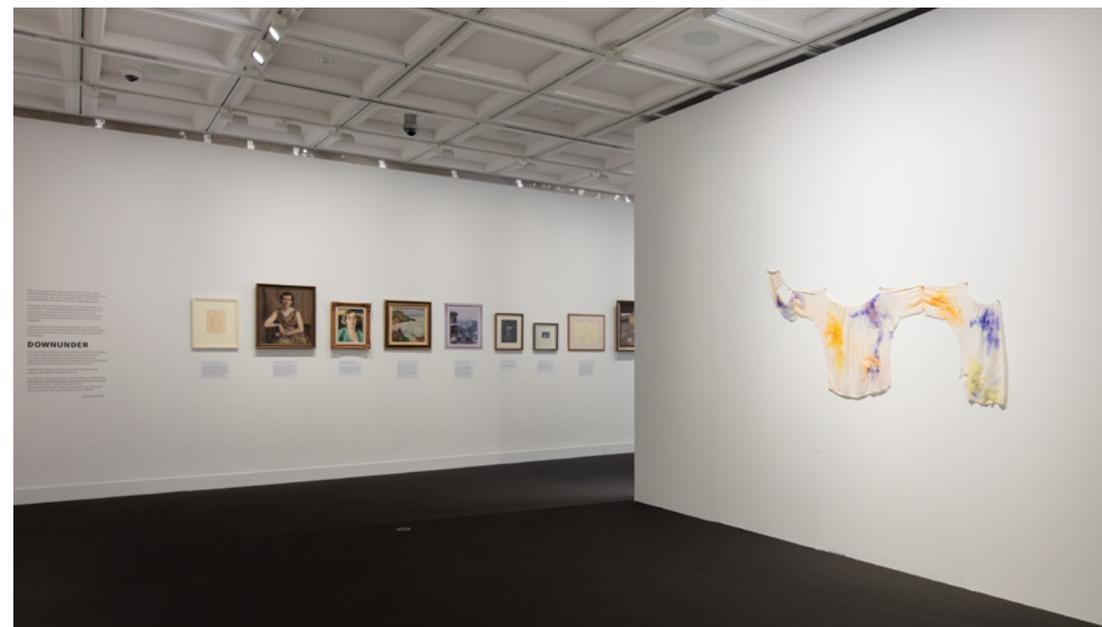
Benjamin Bannan, an artist who belongs to this younger generation, draws on shared queer histories in his towering artwork *Salvation Rainbow*. The work stands as a testament to the legacy of Perth's Order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group that belongs to a

worldwide collective of queer nuns who employ serious parody to satirise the Roman Catholic Church, while offering outreach, support and protest on behalf of their communities.⁸ The Sisters were prominent in Western Australia during the AIDS epidemic and were pivotal in bringing the AIDS memorial quilt west in 1993 and 2005, and campaigning for the repair of the Western Australian AIDS Memorial.

As part of his process, Bannan undertook research into the Sisters' informal archive, establishing intergenerational relationships that ensure the passing down of local queer histories. In *Salvation Rainbow*, Bannan has retraced the Sisters' *Rainbow Habit* into a series of simplified 1:1 scale garment patterns that have been etched into aluminium, creating a plaque to the scale of an early-Renaissance altarpiece.⁹ In doing so, Bannan memorialises the physicality of the Perth Sisters and their contributions to serious political and social engagement that may have otherwise been forgotten.

Religious iconography also extends into Colin Smith's installation *Bloodletting*, which merges the Catholic Church's confessional booth with a quasi-doctor's waiting room. In the work, Smith references the historical practice of bloodletting, a procedure whereby a physician would use leeches to draw blood from a patient in order to cure an illness, as an analogy for the progression of his transition. Throughout the process of his transition, Smith has come to equate the relationship he has with his endocrinologist with that of a worshipper and a God. Inside Smith's confessional lies a medical green hip chair surrounded by a suite of red monochromatic paintings laden with black clay leeches. The visceral paintings document aspects of the surrounding installation, combining the religious with the medical and seeking to defy feelings of shame and guilt. Accompanying the installation is a prayer Smith wrote that illustrates the relationship between the flesh and spirit that was in response to Galatians 5:16-26. Using the prayer as a trope to comment on the narrative of the alignment of the trans body and soul, Smith presents a secular insight into a holistic way of being.

Nathan Beard's work also deals with feelings of shame and guilt, especially those associated with performing acts of "authentic" cultural expression. For Beard the anxiety surrounding these acts is fuelled by the Western perspective



that deems flourishes of the hand and limp wrists as effeminate or queer. The gestures are also linked to certain Asian stereotypes that persist within parts of the queer community, which view the behaviour as undesirable and coded with inferiority. Modelling his sculptures on hand signals from Lakhon nai performances, Buddhist statues and the traditional Thai greeting, the wai, Beard has problematised this notion by casting his own hands and imitating these gestures.¹⁰ Each sculpture is limply resting and has been manicured with a set of acrylic fake nails adorned with camp embellishments such as miniature Thai fish sauce bottles and Swarovski crystals. Beard's playful and uncanny sculptures relish in their excessive use of kitsch as a means for combating racial stereotypes that often border on either fetish or repulsion. Alongside his use of artificial materials, Beard also proudly expresses his Thai cultural heritage through casts of the Buddha's hand, fruit and camp garlands made from monks' robes, creating sincere monuments to these gestures.

Connections to family are a consistent theme throughout Janet Carter's body of work, but while Nicholls' meticulous drawings realistically depict his broader community, Carter's quick and gestural drawings offer a personal insight into her relationship with her chosen family. Carter's work is driven by the need to find comfort in a growing health crisis. For Carter, the impact of the social distancing restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic recall the precautionary advice during the AIDS crisis. The limitations suddenly being placed on the physical intimacy between people reminds her of the messaging that demonised queer sex in the '80s and '90s. With government health advice requiring everyone to stay home, Carter found herself isolated from her chosen family, suddenly forcing her to connect with them through readily accessible digital technologies. Organising weekly 'catch ups' with five family members both online and in person (although 1.5 metres apart), Carter proceeded to draw each of these sessions using iPhone footage, Zoom meetings and screenshots she recorded to document the experiences and to reveal the domesticity of her relationships during this period. Carter's work demonstrates the importance of intergenerational relationships in queer culture and how kinship is formed as a way for queer people to construct their own lineages.

Like Carter, Brontë Jones' idiosyncratic video work *Wet Ride Scrub Daddy* also employs the lo fi qualities of the iPhone camera to create a sense of intimacy. Resembling a love letter, the work explores desire between two "bike-loving-dyke-daddies" and is visualised through footage from cycling trips and sudsy, oily close-ups of a bike being washed.¹¹ Through recordings of her experiences and material possessions, Jones creates a network of images that, for her, resonates with the word "daddy," a term that she uses while rejecting binary gender constructs, highlighting the fluidity of queerness. Employing the optimistic looking Scrub Daddy sponge as a point of departure for this, Jones opens up a space to play with the word affectionately and affirmingly. Alongside these material representations, Jones narrates personal anecdotes of public interactions that affirmed and disrupted this nuanced expression of gender. In one, she tells the story of her partner who was violently attacked for being mistaken for a gay man; a "faggot". The attackers later realised their error, labelling her a "dyke". This story punctuates Jones' work creating a sense of discomfort and unease. While the protagonists identify within a fluid space in between, we are confronted with this outside need to classify bodies. It is here that the word "daddy" takes on its new meaning; it is more than an affectionate term to describe someone lovingly, it is affirming and understanding.

Lill Colgan's work examines how gender impacts their lived experiences. The work is informed by Colgan's time working in retail, an environment where the idea of gender is rigid and unforgiving. Made from a blouse that was gifted to them by a close friend, the work was then dyed by Colgan with ink from retail fashion security tags. Used as a means to prevent theft, these ink-filled tags are intended to rupture and stain a garment when someone attempts to steal it. Colgan's work compares this system of theft prevention to the experience of being a trans person in public space, often feeling like a deviant stained spectacle.

At the same time, the work also explores Colgan's experiences of femininity through the relationships they have with a close group of friends who are cis-women. These women have often gifted them clothing, an act of generosity that Colgan sees as opening up space for them in an imperfect world. Through the process of dyeing a blouse that has been



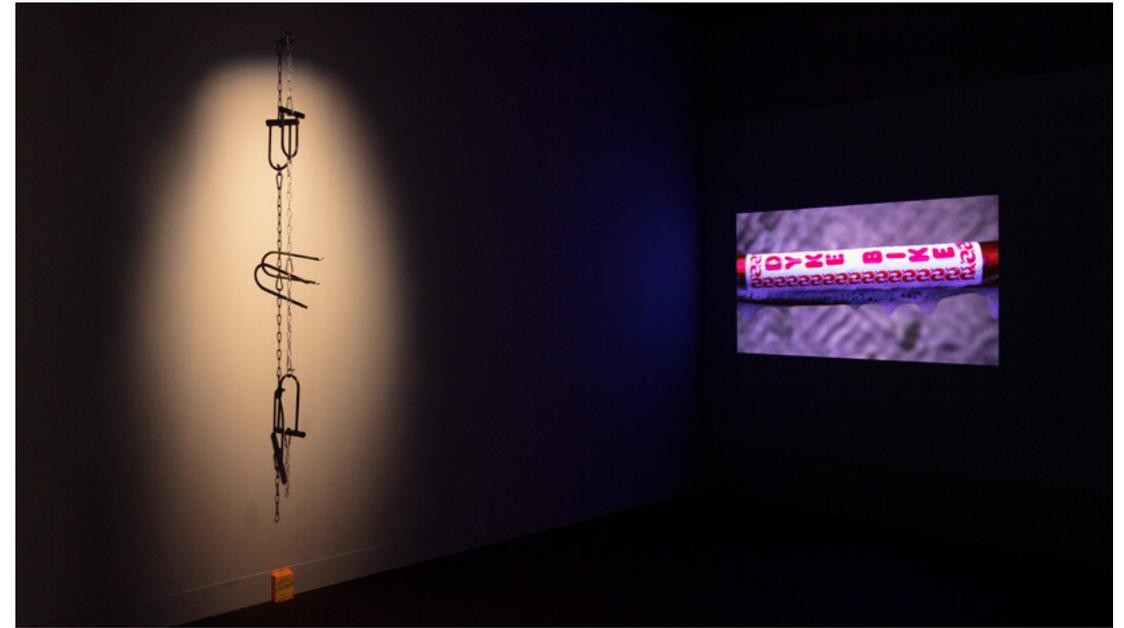


lovingly passed on to them, Colgan presents a new way of thinking about experiences of transphobia. Colgan reconsiders these “stains”, or experiences, as a bittersweet accumulation of memories that result from the patriarchal, Western capitalist world. Dyed onto the garment is a secret acronym that only Colgan knows the meaning to, a message of survival and a reminder not to reveal everything in a work that is so personal.

Together, these eight artists create a dialogue that reinforces the fact that queerness is fluid; it is unique to everyone. Through their work, they connect past histories as well as reframe their own lived experiences. While some artworks celebrate homoerotic desire and queer intimacy, others explore chosen families and ways of forming accepting communities. The public and private narratives of transitioning are also explored, in addition to ways of transgressing the binary model of gender and creating a space for the artists to exist without being categorised. Several works disrupt abhorrent racist stereotypes and errors of historical representations, while others seek to remember the political actions of those who came before us. It is with this in mind that I reflect on *Queer in the West* and the other illegal exhibitions that took place during the 1990s. I think of how these artists risked everything by publicly displaying their artworks and because of them, we are able to have this exhibition today. Now it is no longer illegal and there is no excuse. I hope we don't have to wait another 20 years for an exhibition like this.

Brent Harrison

Curator, HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer



- 1 'Outlaw Art' Review, ABC TV Perth, 4 November 1996, accessed 16 April 2020.
- 2 T. Nguyen, *Queering Australian Museums: Management, Collections, Exhibitions, and Connections*, PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2018. Sydney Digital Thesis Open Access, p.134, accessed 11 July 2020.
- 3 Despite the seeming reluctance by institutions to engage with the practice of queer artists, a plethora of exhibitions have taken place at local Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs). These spaces have allowed artists to create a platform for themselves and their community while providing an opportunity to show risky and experimental works.
- 4 M. O'Donnell, 'Why did the NGV put Keith Haring back in the closet?', *The Conversation*, 13 January 2020.
- 5 J. Darbyshire (ed.), *The Gay Museum: An exhibition exploring the history of lesbian and gay presence in Western Australia*, exhibition catalogue, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 2003, accessed 11 July 2020, <http://www.jodarbyshire.com/uploads/text-files/gay_museum_catalogue.pdf>.
- 6 A. Nicholls, 'Queer'dom', *The Westside Observer*, Sept 17, 1999.
- 7 *Hyperkulturemia*, edited by Dr. Robert Cook, Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2019. Exhibition catalogue, accessed July 11, 2020, <<https://artgallery.wa.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/wa-now-andrew-nicholls-hyperkulturemia>>.
- 8 M. M. Wilcox, *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody*, New York University Press, New York, 2018.
- 9 Rainbow Habit describes a set of six satin habits, each with a six-meter train in a singular colour of the original rainbow flag. It requires 12 Sisters to manifest in its entirety; collectively embodying a literal and symbolic rainbow flag.
- 10 Lakhon nai is a Thai performing art that originates from the royal court in Thailand.
- 11 Quote from a conversation with the artist, July 11 2020.

Images:

Pages 3, 6 (bottom), 8-9: Installation view of *HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer*.

Page 6 (top): Andrew Nicholls, *The Four Seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter)*, 2019-2020, archival ink pen on watercolour paper, 114 x 140 cm each.

Page 10: Janet Carter, *Drawn From Life* (detail), 2020, visual diaries, pen, pencil and charcoal on paper, single channel video, dimensions variable.

Page 12: Brontë Jones, *Wet Ride Scrub Daddy* (installation view), 2020, D-locks, Wet Ride bike lubricant, carabiners, Scrub Daddy sponge and two-channel video, dimensions variable.

QUEER&NOW

HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer brings together the works of WA artists to question the meaning of queerness, reflect on and interrogate history from a queer perspective, and to create embodied, inquisitive and complex works that take the slippery nature of the word itself and find the spaces where desire seeps through. This essay does not seek to define, explain or provide legibility to an understanding of queerness to the reader. At its heart queerness is a refusal to be bounded by definitions, the term existing as a stand-in for when we might find a better way, sometime in the future, to describe this deliberate lack. It's a verb as well as an adjective, a way to navigate the world, and to lock this into a set of definitions and concrete actions will ultimately take away its power, its 'undetonated energy'.¹

This essay arose from a set of questions without answers. What does a queer exhibition look like, both here and now as well as into the future? What does it mean to curate a queer exhibition? How does queerness exist within an arts institution, a location with its own structures of categorisation, representation, and historic narratives? How can we encounter queerly informed objects, feelings and desires within this context?

I ask these questions mindful of historical precedence and aware of the dangers of institutional representation. Any exhibition that takes queerness as a starting point can easily collapse into a circular and endless attempt to define the term.² A basic understanding of queer can become all too easily analogous with gay and lesbian, meaning that the focus of a queer exhibition falls solely on the artists' sexual identity rather than how these artists might challenge the structures of power that lead society to define sexuality as normative, binary and reproductively focused. Curator Brent Harrison's task to put together an exhibition that takes as its starting point a word which by its very nature seeks to evade definition means that the premise upon which he began his work was already unstable.

Harrison's first instinct – an urge to delve into the archive – was a queer act, steeped in a desire to question accepted histories, discover the lost or hidden aspects of the

past, and reconsider how these lost stories might provide unexpected paths by which to navigate our cultural and political present. His research into the exhibitions history of Western Australian arts institutions revealed that there was a (relative) plethora of exhibitions in the 1990s that focused on the works of queer artists. These exhibitions occurred at a time that continues to be a historical flashpoint for an understanding of queer history and politics. The most visible of these moments are the Stonewall Rebellion in New York City, and the actions of activist group ACT UP. ACT UP's work to hold governments accountable for their fatal and deliberate lack of action in the face of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 90s remains influential today because of its grassroots support and use of community-focused activism in order to communicate its message. In Western Australia, this was also a time when queer activism and politics sharpened as a response to the same inaction. This was also the time at which the homophobic laws around public depictions of homosexuality were challenged, undermined and resisted.³

This period of trauma and its resulting escalation of resistance is regularly used as a historical marker from where we can start to track the now of queerness and reflect on the struggles that we continue to fight. Since the 1990s, queer activists and artists have been asking how queerness can maintain its radical political potential against a backdrop of continuing conservatism, nationalism and capitalism. These questions resonate all the more powerfully in the present moment, reminding us that this work is not, and will never be, finished. Reference points such as these exist not only to remind us of the battles that have been won, but as markers of a circuitous journey within the work of resistance.

Queerness has a complicated relationship with the past. At once a source of trauma and loss, it is also a source of deep comfort, a connection with others that can provide a vital avenue to validate feelings and locate desires. Delving into an archive to find veiled histories of queers who came before, detecting presences through coded language, hints and suggestions is the favourite pastime of many a queer who is searching for a telling of history where they might be able to recognise themselves. These relations across time have a powerfully affective

character, as it is through an examination of the continuing emotional attachment to these historical moments that transformations of thought, feeling and political action can take flight.

We look to these moments of the past as ways to reimagine and hope for queer futures. It is for this reason that the linearity of history, the long slow march from one place to another, doesn't always feel so direct when considering the unexpected ways history can arise and remind us that our work is not yet done; the path ahead may want to double back on itself, what seemed lost or erased can still be found. Queerness is recursive, evasive, and resists any attempt to historicise and move on without reflection.

The recent history of queer activism in some ways mirrors the challenges faced by the curation and presentation of exhibitions that focus on the artists' queer identity. As Harrison notes in his curatorial essay, platforms and spaces for queer WA artists to exhibit their work did not disappear after 1999. The grassroots, community-led spaces of artist-run initiatives and collectives continue to provide a vital experimental platform for the presentation of artists whose practices go unnoticed by institutions – or for those who may deliberately reject them.

A troubled relationship with institutional recognition is central to any identity which locates itself on the margins, and we can ask how an exhibition of queer artists might navigate this. What does it mean to exhibit this work in an institution, a place that can be considered to be a normalising location that provides credibility and legibility to the arts practices platformed within? What is the price of legibility to the public for an identity that is fundamentally formed through a critical disruption of widely accepted social values? At their worst the work of arts institutions, both historically and in the present, is ultimately an act of violence – one which, whether deliberately or not, participates in and reproduces heteronormative structures, erasing difficult narratives and pre-emptively censoring elements of queerness when it might damage them, or promoting them when it suits their agenda. On the other hand, an institution that challenges structures of power by actively embracing the practices of artists including queer, trans, Indigenous, people of colour,

migrant, and working-class voices, is one that can undermine dominant discourses that seek to silence, and instead create new possibilities for cultural and political futures.

These questions, suggestions and provocations do not necessarily have answers. The work of *HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer* contains within itself messy questions, embodied histories, slippery desire, and challenges to respectability, normalising tendencies and political inefficacy. It creates uncomfortable feelings, causes confusion and disrupts complacency. This is the work of a queer exhibition – to defy expectations and foreclose definitions before they can land.

Miranda Johnson is a writer and curator from Boorloo (Perth). She is currently Hatched Curatorial Fellow at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts and a founding board member of Cool Change Contemporary ARI. Miranda graduated with a Masters (Distinction) in Contemporary Art Theory from Goldsmiths, University of London in 2015.

- 1 E. Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010, p. xvi.
- 2 I. Hufschmidt, 'The Queer Institutional, Or How to Inspire Queer Curating', *On Curating* 37, 2018 [online].
- 3 See Brent Harrison's essay *HERE&NOW20: Perfectly Queer* in this publication.

Salvation Rainbow

Some Notes on Benjamin Bannan's Work

*As an activist strategy, what I call 'serious parody' simultaneously critiques and reclaims cultural traditions in the interest of supporting the lives and political objectives of marginalized groups.*¹
Melissa M. Wilcox

The young and promising Benjamin Bannan (Perth, 1997) belongs to a generation of artists emerging in a post-pandemic scenario, where globalised attitudes towards queer topics are being investigated to confront broader struggles against the superstructures of race, gender, and sexuality.² A preoccupation with the past is an integral part of Bannan's practice. The *translation* of which, raises the system of classification of information from taxonomy of knowledge to an aesthetic principle aimed at addressing cultural, social, or political criticism related to the present. It is what Hal Foster poignantly defined as *an archival impulse*, an attitude to 'share a notion of artistic practice as an idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects, and events in modern art, philosophy, and history'.³

Emblematic of Bannan's *modus operandi* is *Salvation Rainbow* (2020), a monumental etching in aluminium and enamel that recalls an altar triptych, intertwining a complex and nuanced web of references. Somewhat sacrilegiously, Bannan borrows simultaneously from European art history and queer subculture while revealing his audacious methodology, which is based in archival research. *Salvation Rainbow* was inspired by the transnational phenomenon of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an unlikely order of 'twenty-first century queer nuns'.⁴ More specifically, the work is informed by the vernacular of Perth's Order and their affiliations with the Australian Sisters in Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney.

Bannan focuses on a case of microhistory, investigating the significant contributions of this small activist group over their 33 years in the capital of Western Australia.⁵ These actions include bringing the AIDS Memorial Quilt to the city; supporting the fundraising of the WA AIDS Memorial (2001); and the more joyful homage to the Sydney Order, the *Rainbow Habit*, a set of six satin habits, each in one colour of the traditional rainbow flag, worn by the Sisters on momentous occasions like Pride.⁶

In *Salvation Rainbow*, Bannan reframes the *Rainbow Habit* in the context of the Sisters' unrivaled political activism and camp occupation of public space, isolating a series of patterns for each of the garments that make up one habit (like gown, scapular, veil, and train). The artist has retraced the garment patterns to their most basic form and layered them to become a drawing that is suggestive of holy Catholic iconography, such as an angel or a crucifix. The gold enamel treatment of the work is evocative of luminously adorned altarpieces from the Western tradition, for example Giotto di Bondone's *Ognissanti Madonna* (c. 1310, Uffizi Museum, Florence), or the enigmatic *Deposition* by Masaccio (c. 1426, National Museum of Capodimonte, Naples), masterpieces reliant on symmetry and gleaming with gold leaf, which encourage a transcendental experience.

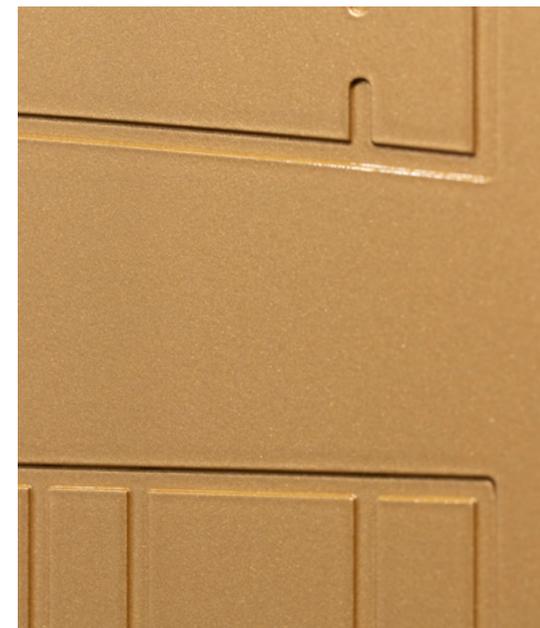
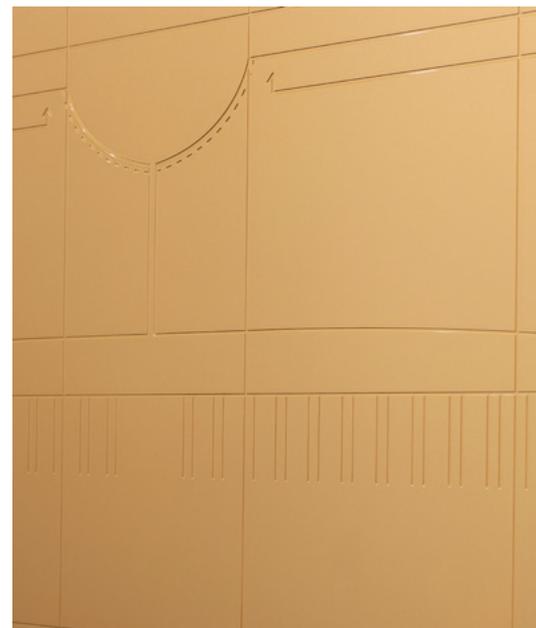
The glossy surface quality of *Salvation Rainbow* nods to the satin of the habits, but also the water of the WA AIDS Memorial, and reflects the viewer within the work in a similar way that the Sisters act as a reflection of their community. The gaze has been a central concern in much of Bannan's recent work and several of Lacan's key concepts come to mind. Thinking about his seminal articulation of the Mirror Stage in relation to the formal qualities of *Salvation Rainbow* could provide a useful framework for the viewer to contemplate their own shifting misrecognitions, obfuscations, deflections, projections, and self-reflections. Conceptually, we see these notions mirrored in the Sisters' use of *serious parody* in their own constructions of identity, gender, and religion.⁷

Salvation Rainbow, with its multiple points of access both formally and conceptually, holds

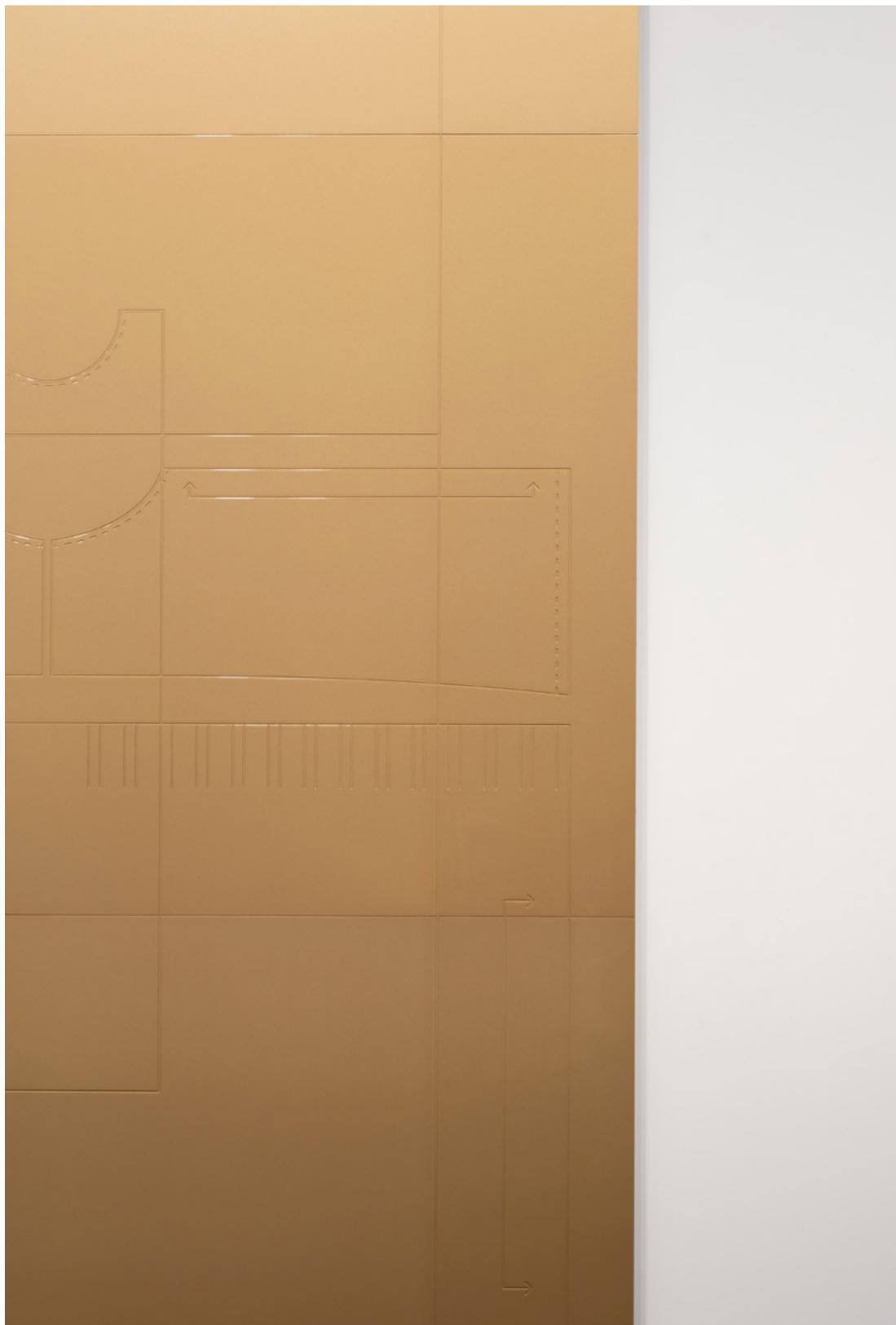


space for different reflections or readings depending on the viewer's perspective, and the questions asked. If an artwork offers different answers to different questions, are perhaps all equally valid? If we ask ourselves as W.J.T. Mitchell provocatively did: *What do pictures want?*, then in return, could we ask a work not only to be queer but also religious, social, ethical, or even political?⁸ *Salvation Rainbow*, like all interesting artworks, raises more questions than answers.

Eugenio Viola (Naples 1975) is the Chief Curator of Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (MAMBO), having previously held curatorial positions at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (2017-2019) and MADRE Museum of Contemporary Art, Naples (2009-2016).



- 1 M. M. Wilcox, *Queer Nuns. Religion, Activism and Serious Parody*, New York University Press, New York, 2018, p. 2.
- 2 The description of the historical present as the 'post-pandemic' scenario must be defined explicitly as the next phase of development of discourse: within and not outside the historical development of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 H. Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, in 'October', no. 110, Fall 2004, pp. 3
- 4 M. M. Wilcox, *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody*.
- 5 Microhistory places emphasis on small units of observation such as individuals or communities. By reducing the scale of observation, it aims to reveal larger, complicated functions within individual relationships and specific social settings. See Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg's contributions in journals such as *Quaderni Storici*, *Historische Anthropologie* and *Critical Inquiry*.
- 6 The AIDS Memorial Quilt is composed of fabric panels, each in memory of an individual who has died of AIDS, designed and completed by their loved ones. The quilt gradually grew as it travelled around Australia and has been displayed alongside visiting panels from the American Names Project. The Perth Sisters are responsible for bringing the AIDS Memorial Quilt to Western Australia on two separate occasions. Firstly, in 1993 when the quilt was displayed at the Fremantle Passenger Terminal, and again in 2005 at the Perth Concert Hall. The Sisters became the custodians of Western Australia's portion of the quilt when it was divided between the States and have recently donated it to the Western Australian Museum.
- 7 M. M. Wilcox, *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody*.
- 8 W. J. T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, October, Vol. 77 (Summer, 1996), pp. 71-82.



Images:
Pages 18, 20-21: Benjamin Bannan, *Salvation Rainbow*, 2020,
etched aluminium and two-pack enamel, 320 x 180 x 5 cm.

👁️🧠👁️ : Nathan Beard's *Limp-wristed Gestures*

Nathan Beard's *Limp-wristed Gestures* are a pair of gestural silicon casts of the artist's hands, based on Thai dance movements and Buddhist statues. The first inspiration for these works is the disembodied, rubber limbs found in nail salons—the plastic hands that showcase nails with glamorous surrealism. For Beard, this prosthetic sight ricocheted into a complex association of cultural signifiers referencing his Thai-Australian cultural background, by drawing from the hand gestures of traditional Thai dance, Lakhon Nai, and the fingernails of Buddha.

The gaze of self and others certainly modulates this connotative play, and *Limp-wristed Gestures* inhabit this chaotic stage with a kitsch uncanniness. The stunning hand objects—held on colourful stands of coated steel—assemble a myriad of found materials to reconfigure the drama of looking. These referents range from fish sauce to rare cosmetics, and fake orchids to pieces of monk robes' fabric. Some of them are in the fantastic hand stitched, fabric garland that hangs where the sculptural wrist meets their base, while others rest in their palms. These familiar objects become unfamiliar, inducing the mysterious sense of eeriness caused by doubles, such as dolls. Indeed, the doubles in *Limp-wristed Gestures* are glamorous shadows of the artist, for they cast his body to produce an intensely alluring sight.

Beard's hand objects stand morbidly limp yet beautified with cosmetics to remind us of morticians, who apply make-up on vacant bodies in the morgue. Art historian Hans Belting sees the corpse as an image of life, for the cadaver is indexical of an absent presence—an imprint of dissipated consciousness. *Limp-wristed Gestures* are a disembodied picture, an inanimate trace of evaporated presence, because they hold evidence of cultural life. This 'cultural life' is the perceptual flow of culture as met by the artist, within a sequential narrative of identity making. Same as life resembles an episodic encounter with a protagonist (ourselves), cultural formation is a serial and filmic experience of insights, progressions, and digressions. *Limp-wristed Gestures* are not the carcass of any one culture, they are the image of significant thought-moments: fleeting instances, remembered and performed within the theatre of identity. It is the mummification of

triviality—the small things we grasp and recall when constructing ourselves—now immortal. These are the shadows of the artist as he negotiates the connotative endlessness of his Thai-Australian heritage. They are cultural flashes, like snapshots in a memory reel.

These impressions resurface as extremities from the deep abyss of time passed, now detached from a body or whole, to float unboundedly over a haunting garden of signifiers. Like a miraculous return to Paradise Lost, where Adam and Eve renounced eternity by biting the apple of knowledge, a myriad of fleeting thought moments reincarnate in *Limp-wristed Gestures*, to claim immortality. The orchid, held by one of the disincarnated hands, is a memory object that enjoys resuscitation. For Beard recalls how this evocative flower proliferates in endless representations of Thailand (even used to create an exotic ambience on Thai Airways' first class), creating a stereotyped icon of Thai-ness. Following this recall, he incorporates fake orchids sourced from markets in Bangkok by placing them in his dismembered hands, creating the illusion that the sculptures are holding a flower.

This makes them look like they are hovering in a vast garden of meaning, where they pick up spirits from the underworld of remembrance, and renounce their body in favour of new significations. The orchid is a revived image that emerges from the recesses of the artist's recollection, once immaterial in the imagination, it finds a new vessel in this visceral assemblage.

This is a process of divine raiding, stealing souls from Hades by pulling and re-embodying phantoms of intercultural memory. Other images rescued by Beard include Tiparos and Squid fish sauce, which make an appearance as (admittedly cute) miniature bottles, referencing the culinary vistas of the artist's childhood. The work expands on this diasporic referent with copper Swarovski Elements that, in the words of Beard, 'look like crystalline fish sauce'.

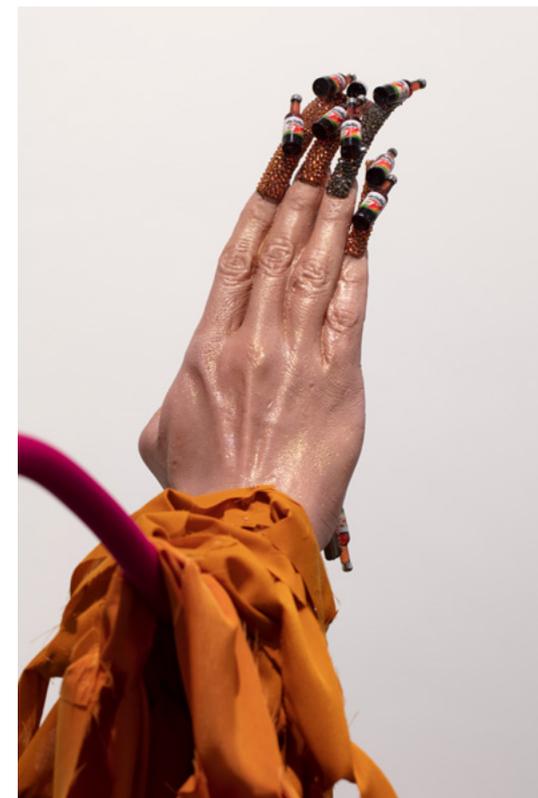


Following this trail, he also ordered a discontinued Tom Ford nail polish called Burnt Topaz to use as a base for the Swarovski Elements. The base colours are in fact an abstraction of the Thai Airways logo, which invokes a Deep Violet purple and a pinkish Flirt, as found in the airline's palette.

Thus, coining this associative method of remembrance as a divine raiding conveys a supernaturalised interpretation but also a fabulous heist, for the connotative echoes of divinity inevitably resonate with John Water's *Divine*—who approaches drag with a glittery, abject sensibility. Nathan Beard shares this perverse stance, as his works show a latent sense of undecipherable strangeness, shrouded in glamour. Beard is also a divine mirror that reflects the Western gaze back on itself, creating a magical rupture in racial relations, same as how Perseus defeats Medusa by reflecting her mythological stare. For the content of his work is made of materials that are gazed and signified to create a coherent notion of Thai-ness. He conjures and reconstitutes this Thai-ness with aberrant glitz in *Limp-wristed Gestures*, where its embodied semiology stays still, becoming the beautified corpse (or image) of cultural impressions.

Diego Ramirez is an artist, writer and arts worker interested in the gaze, stereotypes and monsters within a racialised discourse.





Images:
 Pages 24, 26: Nathan Beard, *Limp-wristed Gesture (i)*, 2020, silicone, found objects, acrylic nails, Swarovski Elements, cotton, wax, Fenty Beauty, Tom Ford Beauty, nail polish, painted steel, dimensions variable.

Pages 27-28: Nathan Beard, *Limp-wristed Gesture (ii)*, 2020, silicone, found objects, acrylic nails, Swarovski Elements, cotton, wax, Fenty Beauty, Tom Ford Beauty, nail polish, painted steel, dimensions variable.

Undressed Porcelain: Nicholls' Stylised Nudes

Andrew Nicholls' drawings reinterpret the aesthetics of 18th and 19th century visual culture through a queer lens. The use of homoeroticism to queer imagery appropriated from Western mythology and art history is the conceptual backbone of his artistic practice. Nicholls' *The Four Seasons* series queers the classical elements of *The Four Seasons* ornamental figures created by the Meissen Porcelain Factory, resulting in an opulent and erotic splendour of male nudity. The factory was established in the Saxon village of Meissen in 1709. *The Four Seasons* ornamental figures were crafted by the factory between 1715 and 1720.¹ The subtle nod to Rococo aesthetics evident in the figures cemented them as fashionable decorations atop mantlepieces and in the cabinets of aristocratic European residences.²

In *The Four Seasons*, Nicholls translates seasonal motifs into a camp chronological timeline. Portraits of men from Nicholls' personal and professional networks feature in four dazzling scenes, ranging in age from their mid-twenties to late fifties. In *Spring*, five young men frolic amongst flowers, resembling of rebirth and rejuvenation. The continuation of nature's lifecycle is represented by the inclusion of pollinating hummingbirds, butterflies and bees. The harvest scene of *Summer* delivers prosperity and sustenance. Summer's harvest is alluded to by the wielding of a sickle, whilst the man to the right coquettishly cradles a sheaf of wheat. The wheat crown symbolises the fruits of one's labour.

Autumn pictures a Bacchanalian atmosphere of drunken models, resplendently posing amid sunflowers, kangaroo paws, and proteas. An impish-looking centaur poses atop a wine barrel. The taller figure cradling a wineglass is crowned with vine leaves. In *Winter*, a stark display depicts older men grouped amongst the wintertime blooms of hollies and magnolias. The inclusion of owls and ravens harks death's impending arrival. Nicholls' choice to draw bearded, older men replaces the use of drapery as a motif in the original Meissen figures to shield oneself from winter's frosty temperatures.³ The *Winter* scene then joins up with the *Spring* scene. In doing this, the series is cyclical, rather than a linear trajectory. Nicholls carefully inserts elements of Rococo design

throughout the series, referring to aesthetic trends of the mid-17th century when the sumptuousness of Meissen porcelain was fashionable.⁴

As an artist from a working-class Catholic background, Nicholls' exploration of luxury aesthetics is a method of reclamation, subverting visual codes of affluence within Western art history to claim as his own. Nicholls sexualises the sculpted forms of the Grecian male athlete associated with hegemonic standards of classical beauty, representative of what Johann J. Winckelmann writes as symbolic of "physical and moral achievement".⁵ He inserts the nude male body in a homosocial setting within exuberant and hallucinatory environments.⁶ The body is thus transformed into a template of desire in a way that is exclusive to Nicholls, his hyperdetailed drawings flaunting the male body as an object of lust. The drawings repossess images of nature from traditional paradigms of hegemonic femininity into a shameless display of a gentler, romanticised manhood, resisting the exaggerated machismo of heteronormative masculinity.

Matt Siddall is an emerging curator, writer and arts worker based in Naarm (Melbourne), originally from Boorloo (Perth).



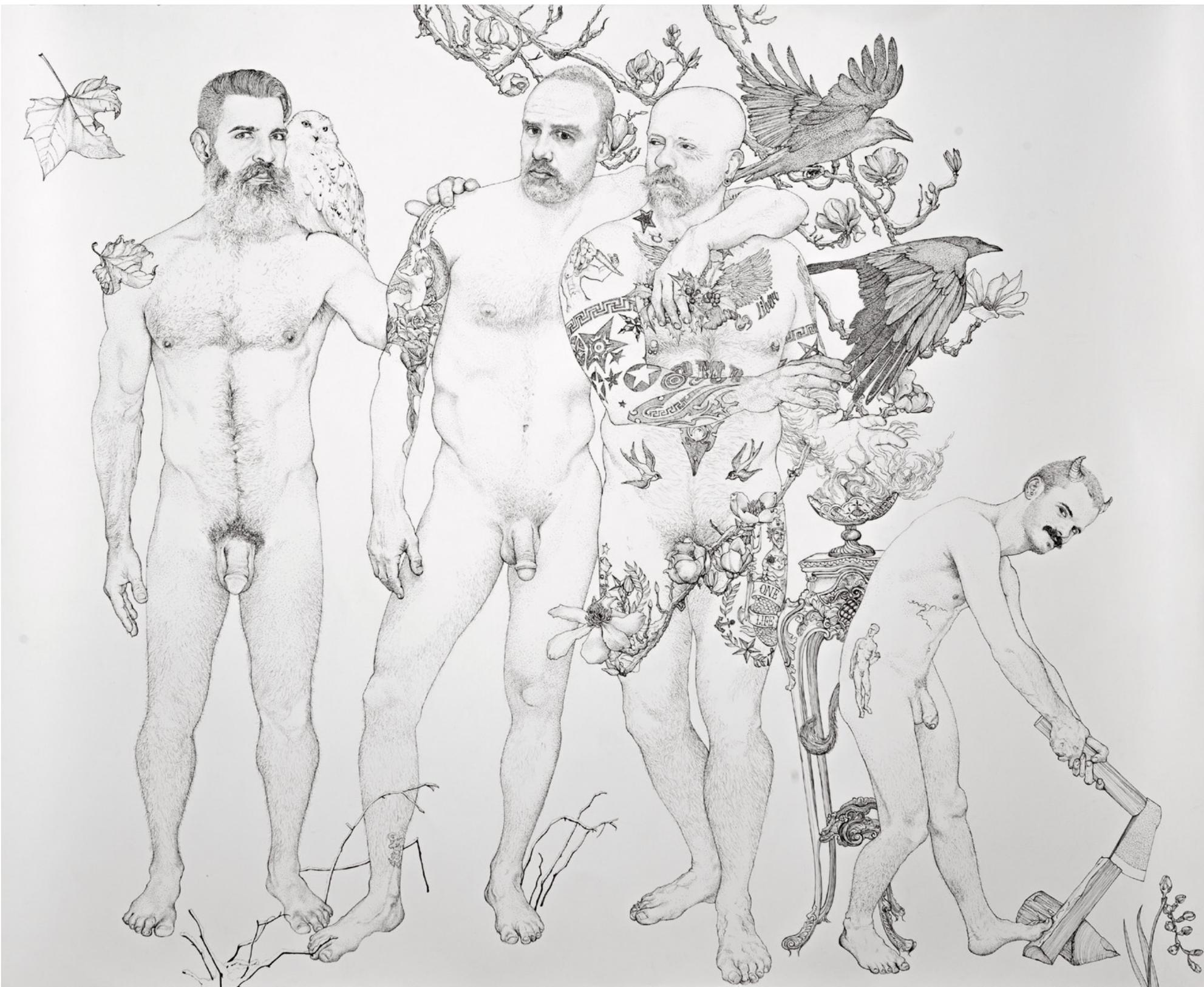
- 1 M. Martin, 'Meissen Porcelain Factory', *The World of Antiques & Art*, no. 74 (August 2008), pp. 158-159.
- 2 E. Mew, 'The American Collector and Connoisseur: OLD DRESDEN MEISSEN PORCELAIN – PART II', *Arts & Decoration (1910-1918)* 3, no. 12 (1913): 415.
- 3 J. Rosenberg, 'The Four Seasons', *Bulletin of the Fogg Art Museum* 10, no. 4 (1945): 129.
- 4 H. Huth, 'A Meissen Centerpiece', *The Art Institute of Chicago Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1959): 40.
- 5 W. Davis, 'Queer Beauty', in *Queer Beauty, Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 31, accessed 01 July 2020, <<https://doi.org/10.7312/davi14690.5>>.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 30.

Images:
Pages 30-38: Andrew Nicholls, *The Four Seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter)*, 2019-2020, archival ink pen on watercolour paper, 114 x 140cm each.











LILL COLGAN / STAS JULIEN-MARTIAL



Images:
Pages 40-43: Lill Colgan, *Soothing Systems*, 2020, Morrison silk-crepe blouse, retail security tag ink, copper wire, pins, dimensions variable.

Downunder

In this time when queer identity is becoming mainstream and there is no longer, in Western art galleries at least, the need to conceal what was once 'unspeakable', what do we gain from questioning past collection strategies?

It is courageous of museums to welcome what is by necessity a critical exercise but it also opens up curatorial practice to create exhibitions in museums that reflect social paradigm shifts.

My aim for this exhibition was to explore the University of Western Australia Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, to try to identify queer (LGBTQ) artists and work about queer issues, and to make a work about what I found.

Research was difficult. It quickly became apparent that information was scarce, artists were presumed heterosexual until proven otherwise, and public silence about queer sexuality prevailed. Despite some very famous names included in the collections, only a few works talk openly about queer issues or identity.

It is understandable that such a university collection was careful not to collect anything connected to an activity that was illegal in Western Australia until 2002.

Public silence about queer sexuality was also understandable; it aimed to protect the reputations of both artists and institutions and to avoid controversy. These collection practices reflected nationwide, conservative attitudes in general, and of course, these had consequences.

It wasn't that there were no gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or queer artists – it just meant that they took every opportunity offered to them, to escape from conservative Australia. The politics of sexuality have always been linked with political freedoms and it has been argued that 'expatriatism' was a feminine response to nationalism back in Australia, and that it was not only women, but also homosexual men, who felt the constraints of this patriarchal and masculinist order.¹

Many artists travelled to Europe and Asia, where they took the opportunity to enjoy

freedoms around sexual relationships that were unavailable to them in Australia. While some artists who returned to Australia were able to sublimate their homosexuality (like William Dobell, at great cost) others simply could not, and returned to live in Europe – Australia's loss.

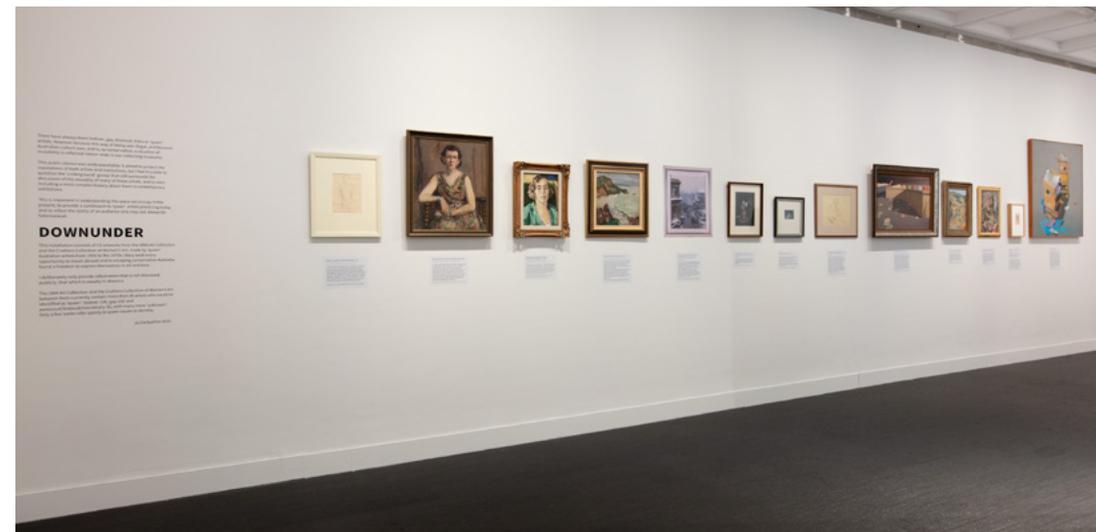
I carefully sieved through references in biographies or student theses to gather quotes that discussed personal relationships. I rang eminent and trusted art historians, all of whom gave me snippets of valuable information and often I followed up on suggestions that came through 'underground' gossip.

I found the collections between them contain more than 39 artists who one could identify, or who identify, as 'queer': lesbian (14), gay (16) and pansexual/bisexual/non-binary (9), with many more unknown.

My initial proposal for an installation aimed to 'turn the past collecting attitude upside down'. I wanted to display 13 artworks, made by the more established queer artists (from 1900 to the 1970s) in the collection, upside down, as a group, along a line.

Under this line I would juxtapose texts in which I deliberately only talk about what is never usually discussed publicly – the sexuality of the artists. It is not a curatorial policy I would usually adopt, but was done to highlight what is usually absent.

Unfortunately, this proposal could not be realised. Arts Law advised that the assumed moral rights of the artists should be protected and that it might be perceived as 'derogatory' to install the artworks upside down. I like to think the artists, all now dead, would have quite liked to join me in making my statement, but it was not to be.



I thought of calling the work 'No dead artists have been offended in the making of this work', but more seriously, I feel it is time to question the 'underground' gossip that still surrounds the discussion of the sexuality of many of these artists, and to start including a more complex history about them in contemporary exhibitions.

This is important in understanding the space we occupy in the present, to provide a continuum to 'queer' artists practicing today and to reflect the reality of an audience who may not always be heterosexual.

I believe visibility and diversity is key to a richer cultural life for everyone. Jeffrey Smart admitted he had been consumed with a loneliness that made him feel like he was the only homosexual in Australia. It was only when he found a book by a psychiatrist that named famous composers, writers and artists that were homosexual, that a process of acceptance allowed Smart to fully realise his artistic potential.²

History is fascinating; it can always reflect a different story depending on who is doing the interpreting. Let's stop being so conservative.

Jo Darbyshire is a West Australian artist and social history curator that exhibits regularly in solo and group exhibitions and has an established public art profile. She completed a Master of Creative Arts in Cultural Heritage at Curtin University of Technology, Perth, WA in 2004. Her artwork is held in all major public institutions in WA and private collections nationally and internationally. She is represented by Art Collective WA.

Images:
Page 46, 48-56: Jo Darbyshire, *Downunder*, 2020, 13 artworks and vinyl, dimensions variable.

Pages 49-50 (L-R): Grace Crowley, *Standing nude*, n.d., pencil, 34.4 x 27 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1982. © Grace Crowley Estate.
Bessie Gibson, *Portrait Of Mme May*, 1938, Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 53 cm, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, CCWA 189. © Elizabeth Dickson Gibson/Copyright Agency, 2020.
Attributed to Margaret Preston, (exhibited as *Self Portrait*), 1940, oil on cardboard, 40.4 x 29.8 cm, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, CCWA 167, © Margaret Preston/Copyright Agency, 2020.
Bessie Davidson, *Guethary II*, c. 1940, oil on plywood, 47.7 x 48 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1982. © Art Gallery of South Australia.

Pages 51-52 (L-R): Bessie Davidson, *Guethary II*, c. 1940, oil on plywood, 47.7 x 48 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1982. © Art Gallery of South Australia.
Reproduction of Janet Cumberae-Stewart, *View from a window, London*, 1926, pastel, 46 x 38 cm, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, CCWA 914. © Estate of Janet Cumberae Stewart.
Roy de Maistre, *Studio still-life*, c. 1968, coloured chalks and oil on black paper, 31 x 23 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1981. © Roy de Maistre Estate.
William Dobell, *Fisherman*, n.d., gouache, 8 x 11.7 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1974. © Courtesy Sir William Dobell Art Foundation.

Pages 53-54 (L-R): Jeffrey Smart, *Ponte Testaccio*, 1970, oil on linen, 58.3 x 90.3 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1977. © The University of Western Australia.
Justin O'Brien, *Figures in a landscape*, 1976, oil on linen canvas, 45.8 x 33.5 cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Dr Albert Gild Fund, 1977. © The Estate of Justin O'Brien.
James Gleeson, *Madonna and child*, 1939, oil on canvas on composition board, 50.5 x 36.5 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Sir James and Lady Cruthers, 2004. © Gleeson/O'Keefe Foundation.

Pages 55-56 (L-R): Justin O'Brien, *Figures in a landscape*, 1976, oil on linen canvas, 45.8 x 33.5 cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Dr Albert Gild Fund, 1977. © The Estate of Justin O'Brien.
James Gleeson, *Madonna and child*, 1939, oil on canvas on composition board, 50.5 x 36.5 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Sir James and Lady Cruthers, 2004. © Gleeson/O'Keefe Foundation.
Sidney Nolan, [*Portrait of Randolph Stow*], c. 1962-63, watercolour, 14.0 x 9.0 cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Mrs Helen McArthur, 2011. © The Sidney Nolan Trust.
Alan Oldfield, *Boxes*, 1976, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 121.8 x 122 cm, The University of Western Australia, Dr Albert Gild Fund, 1977. © The University of Western Australia.

There have always been lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or 'queer' artists. However because this way of being was illegal, and because Australian culture was, and is, so conservative, a situation of invisibility is reflected nation-wide in our collecting museums.

This public silence was understandable; it aimed to protect the reputations of both artists and institutions, but I feel it is time to question the 'underground' gossip that still surrounds the discussion of the sexuality of many of these artists, and to start including a more complex history about them in contemporary exhibitions.

This is important in understanding the space we occupy in the present, to provide a continuum to 'queer' artists practicing today and to reflect the reality of an audience who may not always be heterosexual.

DOWNUNDER

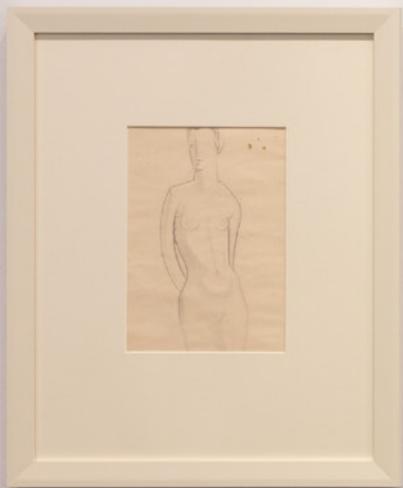
This installation consists of 13 artworks from the UWA Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, made by 'queer' Australian artists from 1900 to the 1970s. Many took every opportunity to travel abroad and in escaping conservative Australia, found a freedom to express themselves in art and love.

I deliberately only provide information that is not discussed publicly: that which is usually in absence.

The UWA Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art between them currently contain more than 39 artists who could be identified as 'queer': lesbian (14), gay (16) and pansexual/bisexual/non-binary (9), with many more 'unknown'. Only a few works refer openly to queer issues or identity.

Jo Darbyshire 2020

1 R. Butler and A.D.S. Donaldson, 'French, Floral and Female: A History of UnAustralian Art 1900-1930', part 1, issue 5, *Melbourne Art Journal*, University of Melbourne, 2010.
2 *Talking Heads*: 'From loneliness to iconic status: Jeffrey Smart reflects on his formative years', ABC1, 3 July, 2008.



Grace Crowley, *Standing nude*, n.d.
 From the University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"Grace Crowley, also known as 'Smudge', is believed to have been in a relationship with Anne Dangar between about 1915 and 1929. They both studied and taught at Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School and went to France together in 1926, where they studied painting... Dangar's niece, Norah Singleton, recalled their pandering of conventional gender roles both in private conversation and public appearances."

From B. Schultz, *Paris 1911: Rembrandt's Golden Age of the Arts*, Taschen/Artforum, c. 2010. See also [www.artforum.com](#) or [www.taschen.com](#).



Bessie Gibson, *Portrait of Mme Moy*, 1938
 From the University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"In 1905, aged thirty-two, Bessie Gibson left Australia to further her artistic studies in Paris. Her family favoured her painting career and promised to support her for three years. Bessie settled in Paris, found herself a flat in Montparnasse, and did not return to Australia until 1947... She had an intimate relationship with another Brisbane painter in Paris, Anne Alison Greene (1878-1954) who returned to Brisbane in 1946 because of illness."

From Bessie Gibson, *Portrait of Mme Moy*, 1938, University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002.



Attributed to Margaret Preston, (exhibited as Self Portrait), 1940
 From the University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"Expatriation, we argue, was a feminine response to nationalism back in Australia... Unwilling to submit their work to any wider nationalist agenda, these women and men were free to explore the world they knew, a world known perhaps only to themselves and to those who truly knew them."

From B. Schultz, *Paris 1911: Rembrandt's Golden Age of the Arts*, Taschen/Artforum, c. 2010. See also [www.artforum.com](#) or [www.taschen.com](#).



Bessie Davidson, *Guethary II*, c. 1940
 From the University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"Margaret Preston's first relationship was with Bessie Davidson, another painter, and a pupil four years her junior. They travelled and studied extensively together in Europe, largely on Davidson's allowance, between 1904 and 1910... After her relationship with Margaret Preston broke up around 1911, Bessie Davidson returned to France and lived the rest of her life as an artist with her 'patron' and 'beloved companion' Marguerite Le Roy, also known as Dauphine. They were buried in the same grave."

From B. Schultz, *Paris 1911: Rembrandt's Golden Age of the Arts*, Taschen/Artforum, c. 2010. See also [www.artforum.com](#) or [www.taschen.com](#).



Bessie Davidson, *Guethary II*, c. 1940

Oil on canvas, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"Margaret Preston's first relationship was with Bessie Davidson, another painter, and a pupil four years her junior. They travelled and studied extensively together in Europe, largely on Davidson's allowance, between 1904 and 1916. ... After her relationship with Margaret Preston broke up around 1911, Bessie Davidson returned to France and lived the rest of her life as an artist with her 'patron' and 'beloved companion' Marguerite Le Roy, also known as Dauphine. They were buried in the same grave."

From *Wendell Steyerl*, 2002, *Wendell Steyerl: A Life in Art*, University of Western Australia, 2002. www.wendellsteyerl.com



Janet Cumbræ-Stewart, *View from a window, London, 1926* (reproduction)

Reproduction of oil on canvas, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"In 1922 Janet Cumbræ Stewart left Melbourne for London and spent the next seventeen years painting and exhibiting in Europe. She had successful exhibitions in London and Paris and sent works to commercial galleries in Australia. ... In 1931 she settled in Allassio, Italy with her 'companion', publicist and business manager Miss Argemore Farrington 'Billy' Bellairs. Billy was a distinctive and enterprising woman of independent means who dressed in masculine attire."

From *Wendell Steyerl*, 2002, *Wendell Steyerl: A Life in Art*, University of Western Australia, 2002. www.wendellsteyerl.com



Roy de Maistre, *Studio still-life*, c. 1968

Oil on canvas, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"The Australian modernist painter Roy de Maistre, who briefly became White's lover, but more importantly was his 'intellectual and aesthetic mentor.'"

Quoted in *Wendell Steyerl*, 2002, *Wendell Steyerl: A Life in Art*, University of Western Australia, 2002



William Dobell, *Fisherman*, n.d.

Oil on canvas, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2002

"What it does not say is that his guarantee of iconic status demanded the suppression of his homosexuality. His gayness had not been an issue in the anonymous seclusion of London or the protective, developing bohemia of Kings Cross but after 1944 Dobell kept the bargain for acceptability in Australian society."

From *Wendell Steyerl*, 2002, *Wendell Steyerl: A Life in Art*, University of Western Australia, 2002



Jeffrey Smart, *Ponte Testaccio*, 1970

Oil on canvas. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2017

"Being an artist and being queer was a very lonely situation," he said. "It was a chance literary encounter that started the process of acceptance that allowed Smart to more fully realise his artistic potential. Until that point, he says, he was consumed with a loneliness that made him feel like he was the only homosexual in Australia. "There was a wonderful book put out by Kenneth Walker, who was an English psychiatrist," he said, "I found out that so many of the famous composers were puffers. And I found out how many of the artists were puffs. And writers. I thought 'This is amazing!'"

©2017 Jeffrey Smart. From *Jeffrey Smart: The Art of the 1970s*, edited by Jeffrey Smart and others, published by the University of Western Australia, 2017.



Justin O'Brien, *Figures in a landscape*, 1976

Oil on canvas. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2017

"He painted sweet confections of the human condition but I think he painted them as a balm for something inside himself... He held himself back sexually for a reason - partly because it was forbidden by the Catholic Church and partly because it was illegal. Jeffrey said Justin was an alcoholic for a reason."

See *Jeffrey Smart: The Art of the 1970s*, edited by Jeffrey Smart and others, published by the University of Western Australia, 2017.



James Gleeson, *Madonna and child*, 1939

Oil on canvas. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University of Western Australia, 2017

"In the 1960s, he took to working with a magnifying glass, placing miniature male nudes, painstakingly copied from muscle-men magazines, against landscapes dreamt up from his subconscious. Gleeson agrees his homosexuality was reflected in his work, which was influenced by Michelangelo 'using the male form as an embodiment of the concept of beauty.'"

Interviewed by Jeffrey Smart, *Jeffrey Smart: The Art of the 1970s*, edited by Jeffrey Smart and others, published by the University of Western Australia, 2017.

Yeah okay look, it's 2020 and everyone's spent the last decade ceaselessly talking about gender. Online, and in meatspace, endless discussions, discourse, and diatribes diligently endeavouring to decode, detangle, and demystify the gender delirium. What is gender? How are we expressing it? What are we doing with our own genders, with other peoples' gender? Gender as performance, gender as a feeling, gender as a series of roles to be embraced, subverted, rejected, policed, or ignored entirely. Gender gender gender! Fresh gender served piping hot!

We all have our own relationships with our own gender - loving it, hating it, pointedly refusing to acknowledge it, like a silent fart at a dinner party. The fact remains we (and particularly we as queer people) are keenly aware of our gender as we navigate the world. We are all performing our own little rituals of gender.

Colin's art carries within it his relationship to his own gender, and the rituals therein. The work depicts the coalescing of two spaces that have historically been hostile towards trans people: the medical, and the confessional.

There is something inherently voyeuristic about the confessional space. About being observed by a priest, laying yourself bare, confessing all your secret, hidden parts to a wilful recipient. It's sexy. It's like exhibitionism for your soul.

The medical space is voyeuristic too, but it is not sexy at all. It's too clinical, too burdened with the weight of illness and malady. The medical professional watches, yes, but their gaze is on the troubles of the body, not those of the soul. The experience of divulging your woes to a doctor is not cathartic. Often it feels invasive. For queer and gender non-conforming people, it frequently feels judgemental and hostile.

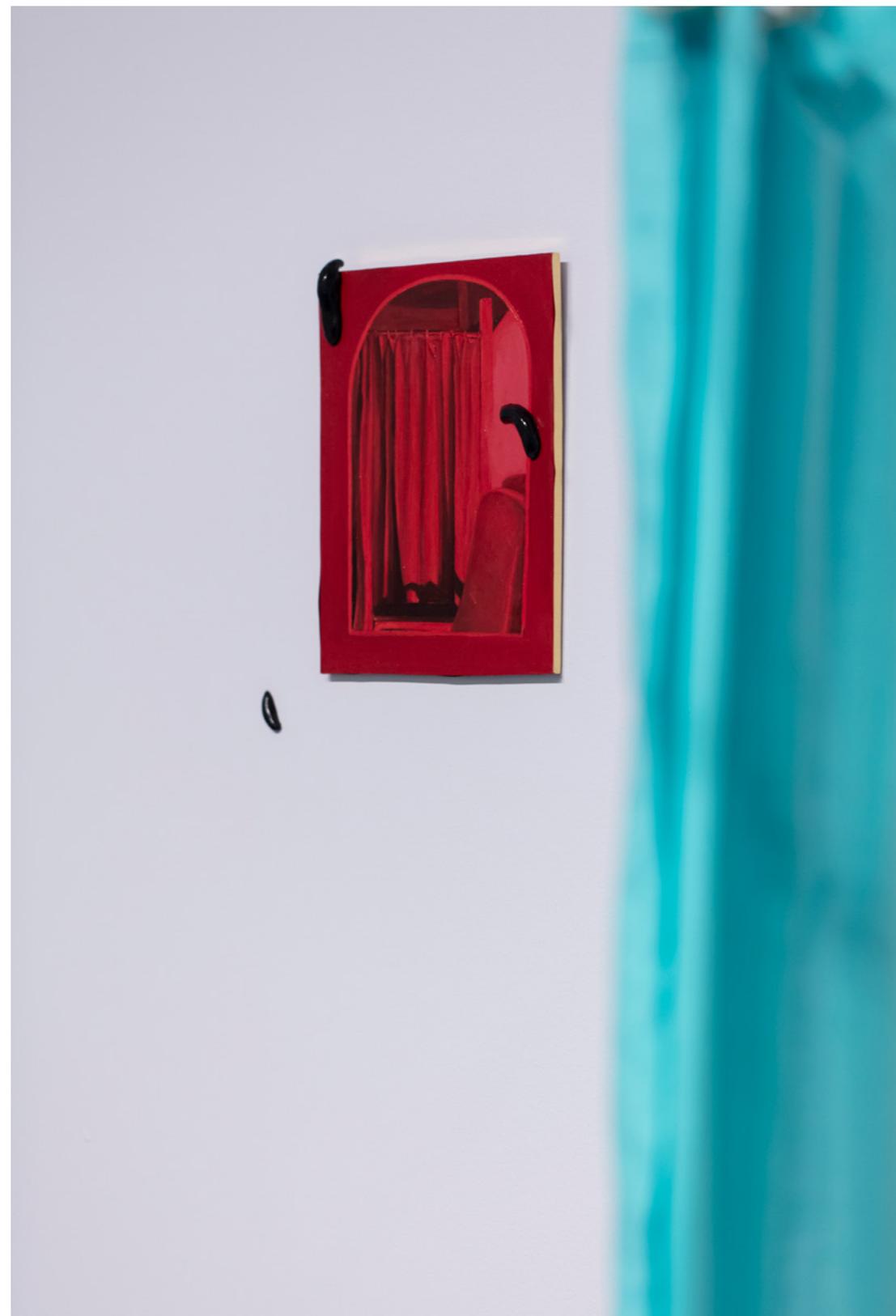
By merging these two spaces, the work bridges the divide between body and soul. We are invited to imagine a space wherein the body and the soul are treated as one entity, inextricably linked, and united by blood. Here we see gender not only as a purely physical and emotional experience, relating to the body and mind, but also a spiritual one. What is the gender of the soul? How do our spirits transcend, transform, and transfigure the limitations of our gender?

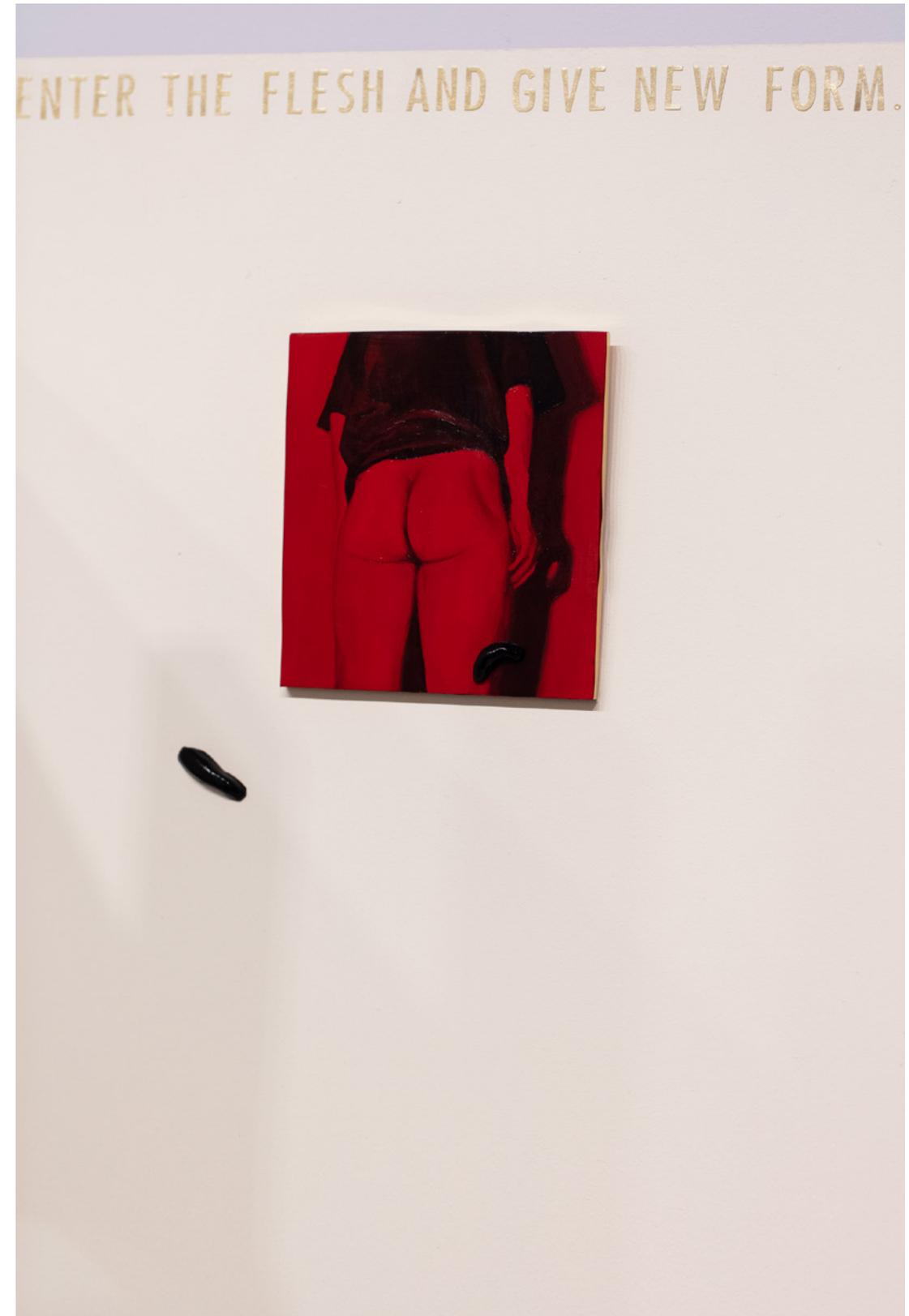
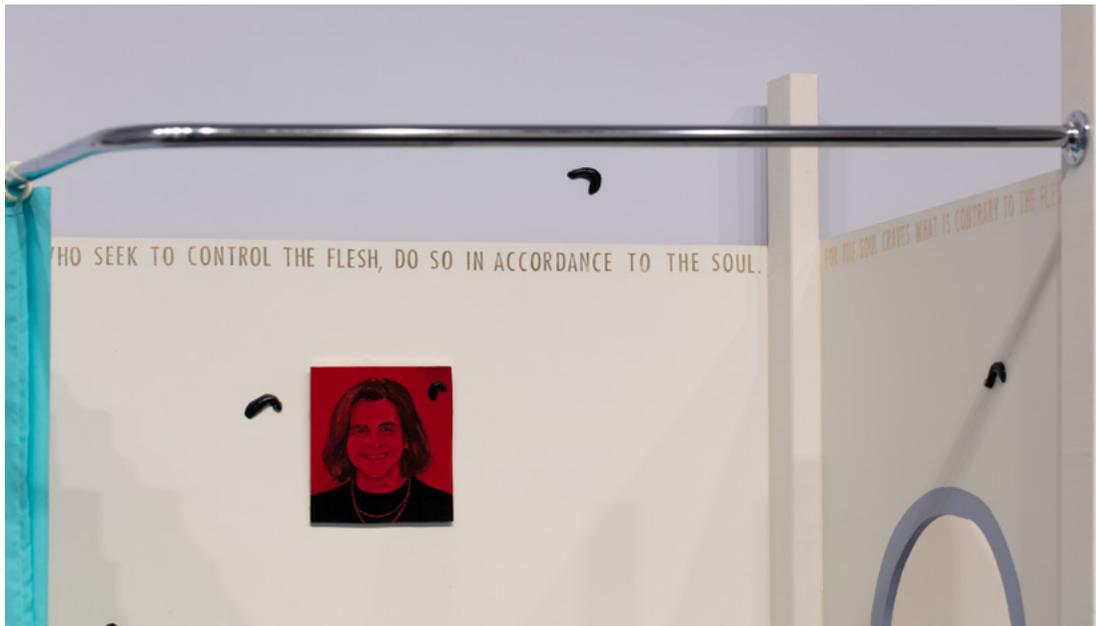
There is deftness and panache to Colin's work. But underpinning that is a deep sense of playful, joyous irreverence. The space appropriates the aesthetics of nightmares. With its slick, shiny, viscerally organic leeches and hellish red paintings. But it is playful too. For every ominous sense of palpable dread there is a wink and a nudge, as if to say: "Sure, gender can be scary, but wouldn't you agree it can be silly too?"

This is the beauty of Colin's art. It holds the sacred and the banal in equal esteem. The lines between what is precious, what is holy, what is art, and what is merely an object all blur and run together. In the same way the lines of binary gender blur together. In this act of blurring, the artifice that underpins it all is exposed.

Fred Von Jorgs is a writer, performer, artist, and web developer currently living and practicing on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja. His work frequently involves the integration of writing and visual art with emergent web technologies.









Images:
 Pages 58-63: Colin Smith, *Bloodletting*, 2020, painted false walls (MDF, timber), oil paintings (oil on ply board), air-dry clay, enamel paint, gold foil alphabet stickers, gold foil contact sheeting, hip chair, muslin, metal curtain rods, fake tree, chairs, water cooling dispenser, clock, scrap paper bin, dimensions variable.

A Letter to a Butch Daddy Dyke

28 April 2020

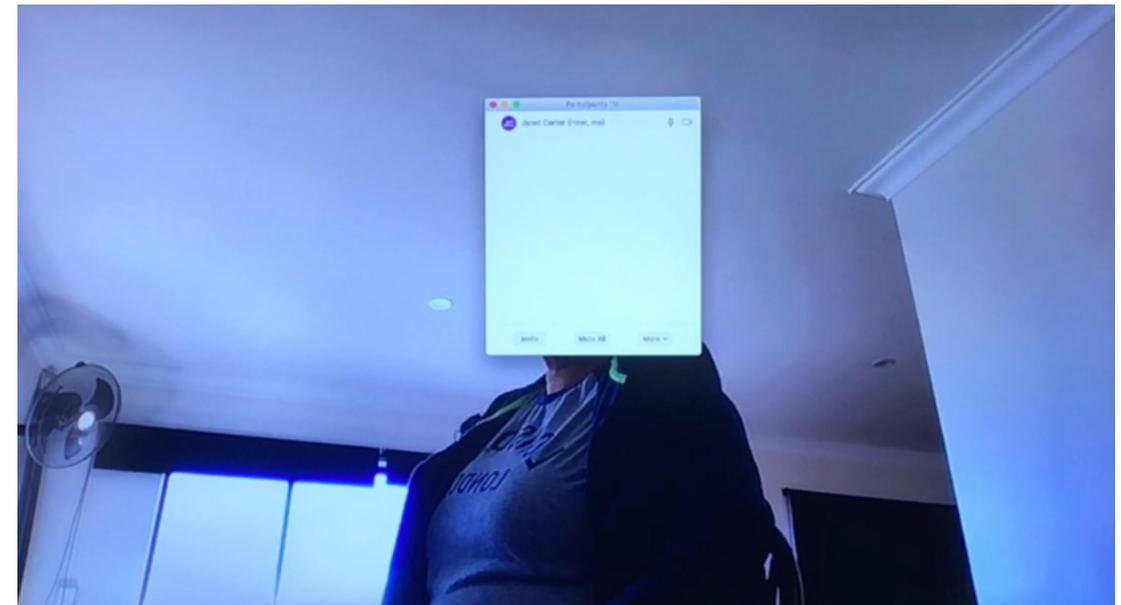
Janet.

Recently I began using 'dyke' to refer to myself. I have never used this identifier before having always preferred the term queer. Perhaps because of the emotional space I find myself in this stage of my life and perhaps because of queers' current ubiquity, I am inclined to turn to dyke as something more incisive, more intimate, more strengthening for me. I look to you and wonder how being a dyke has shaped the course of your life. How being butch, being ex-military, having a history as an IV drug user, being part of the leather community, living on the lands of the Noongar people, has also, equally, shaped you. **It takes a lot of courage still to assert my right to be who I am in the world, and I still come up against that.**¹ When I say the word dyke, I envision the labrys, the double-bitted 'symbol' of lesbianism, with its two sharp edges facing outwards like the two faces of Janus. One blade facing the future and the other facing the past. Janus is the god of thresholds and passages, beginnings and endings, dualities and transitions. An ancient Roman god whose symbolism has a longstanding link to the queer community.² Your work speaks to this bladed-Janus. You're my Knife-Edge Daddy. Your work engages both the older and younger generations of queers. You don't consider one to be the past and the other the future, but you focus on the thick present that is shared between us.³ Your work aims to make a space where these generations can initiate new intimacies, through performative encounters such as kissing and strip poker. You are less interested in the notion of building a community - **communities are transient and ephemeral that come together around particular causes and then they tend to dissolve** - rather, you want to initiate familial bonds - **familial ties are longer and more persistent, they're much more intimate... there's a deeper, longer term, more abiding relationship.** You see these bonds as structures of support and care that can weather time. You are older than I am - not by too much - but there are distinct differences experienced by our generations. The AIDS epidemic being one of them. **Because the reality is, yes, we lost a lot of people and there's still a lot of grief and trauma around that, but there are many of us who are still here and who are still connected to our communities and still active in a whole lot of ways.** You are interested in the transmission of knowledge, recognition and support between these generations. As I am writing we are in a period of self-isolation (The COVID-19 pandemic raises the topic of the AIDS epidemic between us in our conversations, so much so that I again read David Wojnarowicz's *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*). You told me over Skype that you are feeling low and disoriented at this time. So, I want to reach out to you via this writing as a support to you. As a gesture of care. This writing seeks to enact what your work already does - to become a threshold for queer relationalities to emerge. **You say vulnerability and failure... puts us in the hands of others.** But what better place to be? To be held in the arms of another dyke.

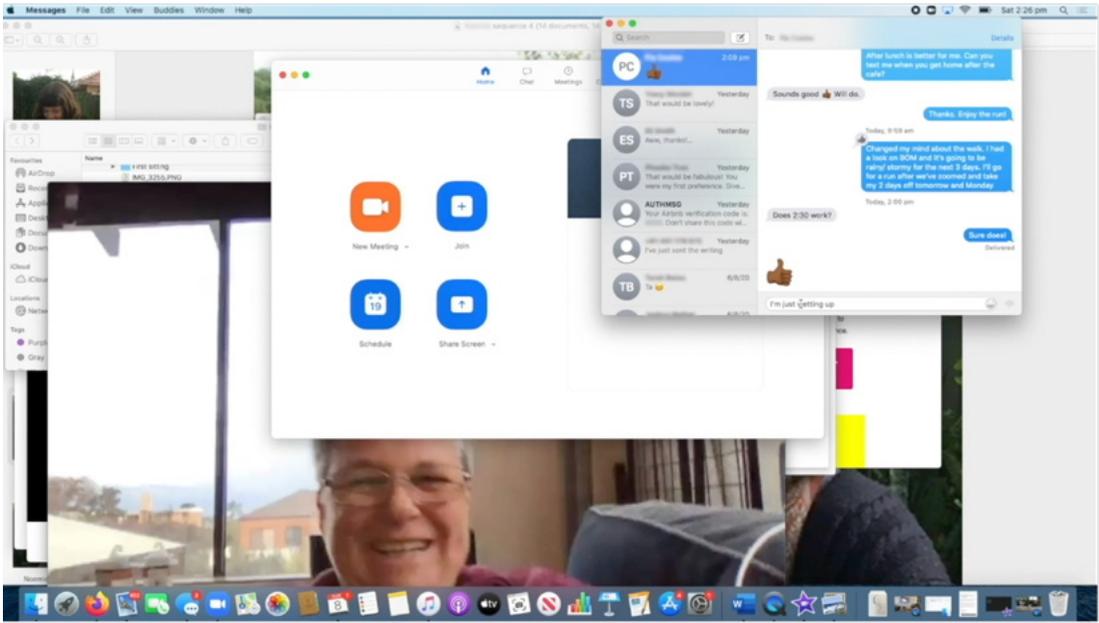
With love.

Frances.

Frances Barrett is an artist based on Gadigal lands, Sydney. She is one member of the art collective, Barbara Cleveland, and in 2019 was a recipient of the Suspended Moment: Kathy Cavaliere Fellowship, a fellowship for women working at the nexus of performance and installation.



- 1 All bolded and italicised text are Janet Carter's quotes extracted from a transcription of an interview taken place on 8 April 2020 with the author.
- 2 Two examples of Janus' connection to the queer community are the Janus Society, an early homophile organisation, and the Society of Janus, a BDSM organisation
- 3 I draw the term 'thick present' from Donna Haraway: 'The present is not a vanishing instant; it is a rich temporality of living and dying, inheriting pasts and enabling futures, but not futurist and not fixated on a vanished past. A thick present, a thick now is the potent time at stake.' H. Peppe, 'Do It Yourself! A New Film on the Life and Work of Donna Haraway', *Frieze* (18 March 2018), accessed 3 August 2020, <https://frieze.com/article/do-it-yourself-new-film-life-and-work-donna-haraway?fbclid=IwAR0NqieGyo6cdfcp9QTFp9Oh4yCITbBV-m8yG_1gmvO2q7STZ7pA14y6KaQ>. 'The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present.' D. J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, *Experimental Futures: Technological Lives*, *Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices*, eds M. M. J. Fischer and J. Dumit, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2016.



JANET CARTER / FRANCES BARRETT



Images:
Pages 66-70: Janet Carter, *Drawn From Life*, 2020, visual diaries,
pen, pencil and charcoal on paper, single channel video, 12 minutes,
dimensions variable.

DBK he-she

I walk you down and along Derbarl Yerrigan from my home in Wurut.^{1,2} we've never touched, until now. [...] two shy boys aching to shift our bodies towards each other, legs dangling over the end of the river jetty. keys tinkle on a pastel pink carabiner with each sway of my hip. I clip my empty mug to my side. The way it clatters nettles at my eardrums and I anxiously remove it.

you say, "I like it. It sounds like a cowbell."

a lover began to hanky flag from a carabiner recently. [...] the sound of the keys rattling against their side made them feel strong. visible in a way they hadn't previously considered. when I am feeling vulnerable, I tuck my keys into my back left pocket, to quieten them.³

From one broken boy to another. I'd gladly smack the arse of any lover with a reversible belt buckle. *switch-y*, you'd probably say. I'd smirk and think, *I will die flagging as a greasy, filthy dyke*.

...

I moved into my first flat, and bought myself trunks and a nice bicycle. [...] The trunks hugged my bum, and the waistband sat low on my hips. u called me daddy, a handful of times. It would take me some time to acknowledge the nuance of this title. young, shy, easily flustered...I wished for you to keep saying it, again and again and again.

...

words like "Daddy" are loaded with associations to kink. [...]

Considering this word – *daddy* – as a signifier of BDSM and other historically culturally divergent ways of thriving. Existing within the fringes of society and the luscious gripes of sexual-romantic liberation, it makes sense that the politics of Kink and Queer liberation are aligned. the nuance of this title (daddy, [...]) is largely misinterpreted on its newly visible homonormative pedestal.⁴ Ditch the notion that to desire *daddy* is to have 'daddy issues'.⁵ I'm not interested in allowing straightness to invade the inherent queerness of intimate play [...]⁶ When we enter a scene we allow space for

evolving parts ourselves to thrive and experiment. What is self-discovery, if not an arduously extended form of asexual foreplay? It can also manifest many other ways, but I digress.⁷

well... it's meant to be subversive using gendered words in the same space because gender isn't binary and language is constructed to enforce binary gender.

[...]

[...] so much of our daily lexicon is arbitrarily gendered. We are taught to perceive common objects + social roles as signifying strength, maleness and masculinity. *Daddy, boy, dominance, fixer, provider; bikes, hardware, carabiners, chain.* it feels empowering to flip the notion of masculinity on its head, to feel boyish *and* soft. To adorn yourself with *hardware*, for the aesthetic pleasure of every dyke that will inevitably clock you in the street. [...] to exchange this nonverbal familial intimacy through this hardware, is to remain seen.⁸ To be seen is to remain malleable and capable of feeling. Lesbian gender nonconformity has never been about being *strong men*. It's about seeing oneself beyond the restrictive parameters of binary gender roles. Seeing this in others. And having this *seen in you*.

...

I love you daddy – I made you a playlist.

~~~> <https://tinyurl.com/TellDaddyYouLoveHer> <~~~

**Aisyah Aaqil Sumito** is a queer and neurodivergent community artist, installer, writer and thinker based on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja.



- 1 Derbarl Yerrigan aka so-called 'Swan River'.
- 2 Wurut aka so-called 'Maylands Peninsula'.
- 3 "Gay men and lesbians can use hanky and key codes as shorthand to communicate their orientations and interests [...]" D. Easton and J.W. Hardy, *The New Book of Topping*, Greenery Press, 2nd Revised ed., so-called San Francisco, California, 2002.
- 4 "Homonormativity is a politic of queer assimilation [...] is antiequeer in the ways that it reifies heteronormativity, and [...] perpetuates gender, sexuality, and racial stereotypes." D. Bolen, 'Homonormativity', in A. Goldberg (ed), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies*, SAGE Publications, so-called Thousand Oaks, United States, 2016.
- 5 Daddy is not a monolith of meaning. Some players *do* want *father*. This is called age-play.
- 6 'Straightness is not an orientation [...] but a system of social relations [...] straightness is very much like capitalism [...] a multifaceted set of social rules that police our bodies, our minds, our desires, and the ways we interact with others.' S. Papantonopoulou, 'We must destroy straightness' in D. Shannon, C.B. Daring and J. Rogue (eds), *Queering Anarchism: Essays on Gender, Power and Desire*, AK Press, Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 2013.
- 7 'BDSM is based on sexual practices but also incorporates our daily interactions and experiences with power.' Hexe, 'Anarchy, BDSM, and Consent-based Culture', in D. Shannon, C.B. Daring and J. Rogue (eds), *Queering Anarchism: Essays on Gender, Power and Desire*, AK Press, Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 2013.
- 8 Familial intimacy: the intimacy shared with family, particularly queer chosen families that don't necessarily occupy normative familial dynamics.

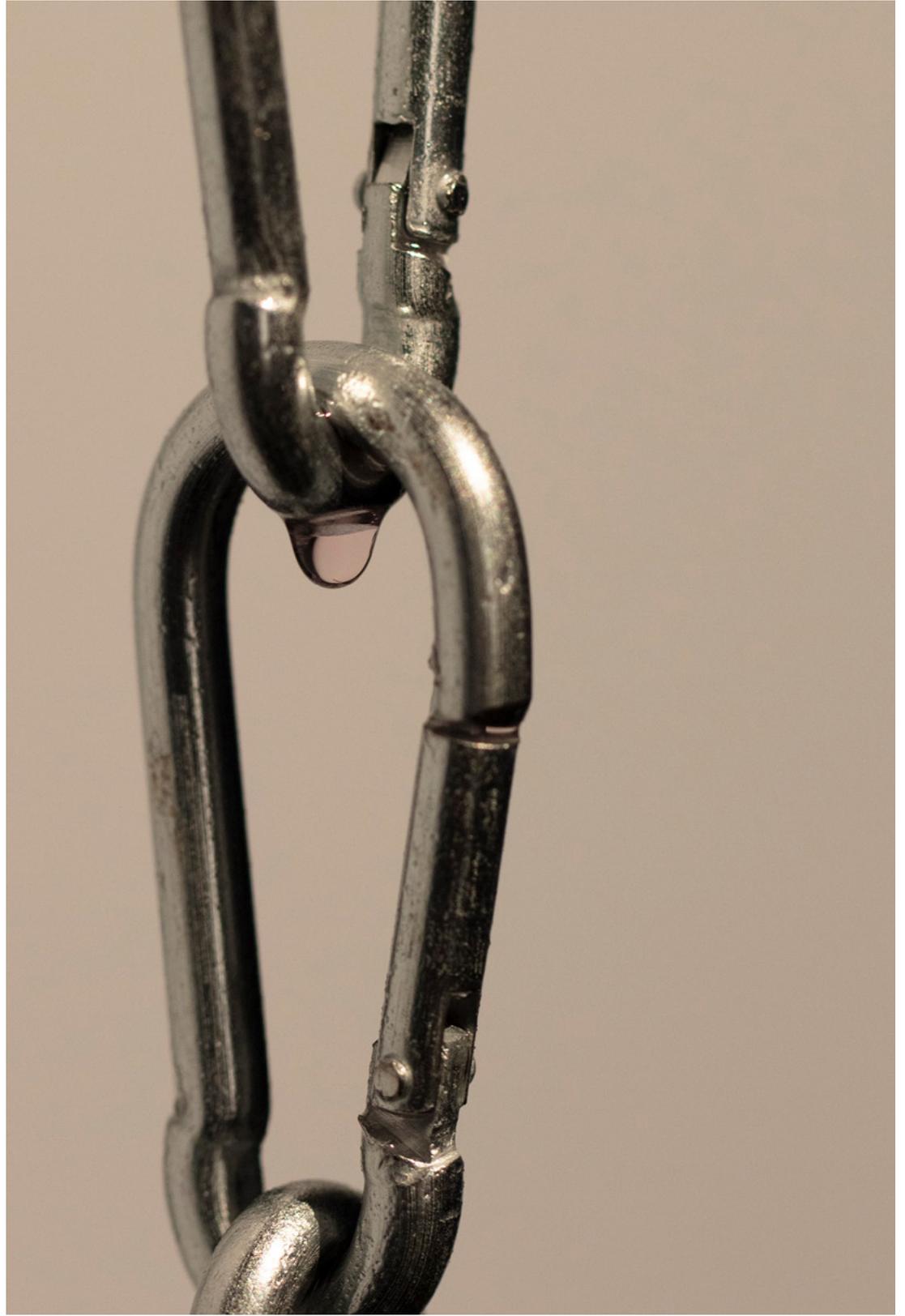
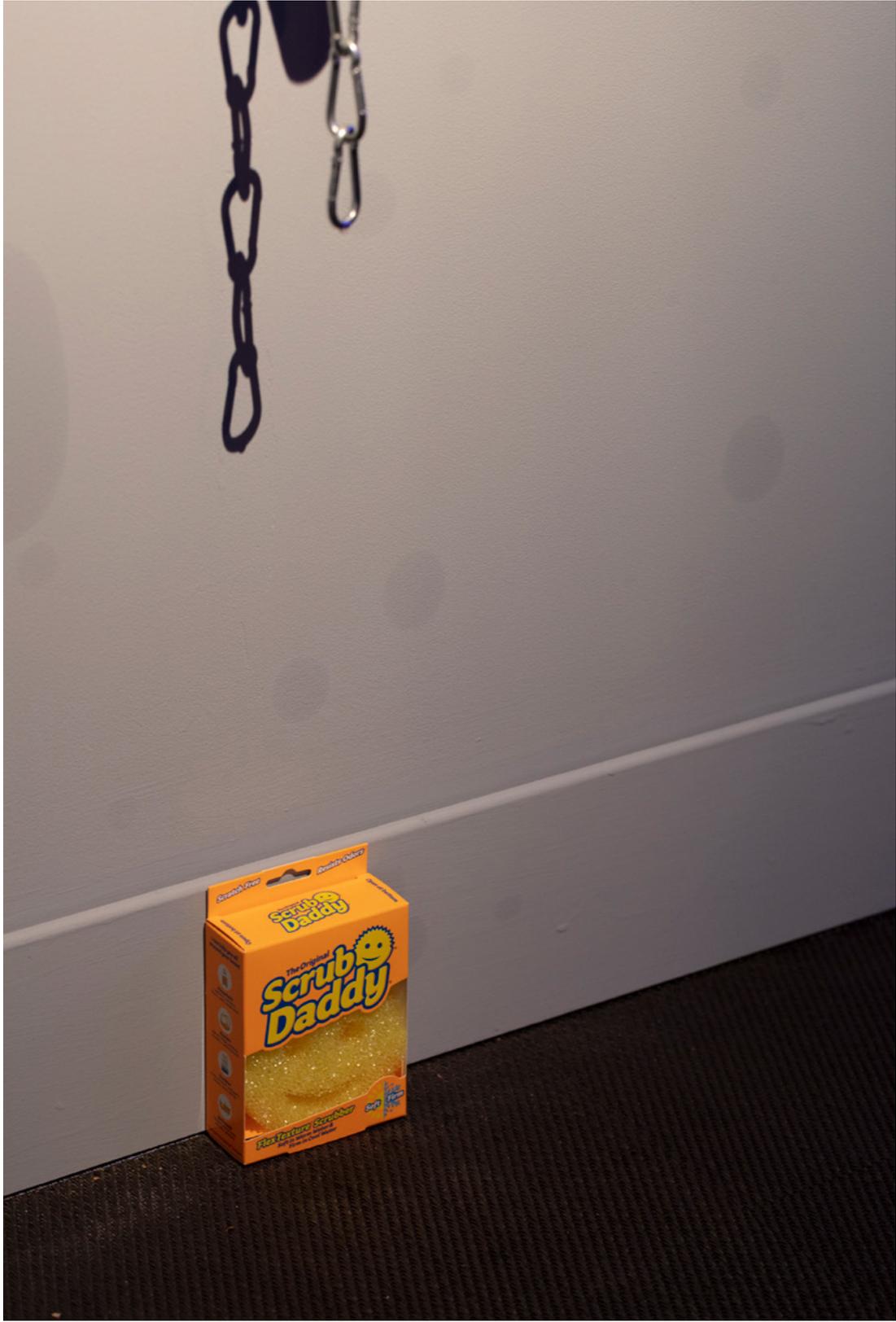
Images:  
Page 72: Brontë Jones, *Wet Ride Scrub Daddy* (installation view), 2020, D-locks, Wet Ride bike lubricant, carabiners, Scrub Daddy sponge and two-channel video, dimensions variable.

Pages 73-76: Brontë Jones, *Wet Ride Scrub Daddy (Part 2)*, 2020, D-locks, Wet Ride bike lubricant, carabiners, Scrub Daddy sponge, dimensions variable.

Pages 77-78: Brontë Jones, *Wet Ride Scrub Daddy (Part 1)*, 2020, two-channel video still, 9 minutes.



BRONTË JONES / AISYAH AAQIL SUMITO





short  
and sexy  
fiction  
about a

en

Scratch Free &  
Resists Odors

New Look!  
New Formula

The Original  
**Scrubby  
Daddy**

**FlexTexture Scrubber**  
Soft in Warm Water &  
Firm in Cool Water

Soft Firm

THRIFTBOOKS

### Curator Acknowledgments

There are so many people I have to thank for making this exhibition possible. Firstly to the artists; Benjamin Bannan, Nathan Beard, Janet Carter, Lill Colgan, Jo Darbyshire, Brontë Jones, Andrew Nicholls and Colin Smith, it has been an absolute privilege to work with each of you, your passion and drive in the face of uncertainty has been unwavering and for that I thank you for joining me on this journey. To the staff at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery; Kate Hamersley, Anthony Kelly, Lyle Branson, Pier Leach, Clare McFarlane, Janice Lally, Donna Greenwood, Connie Sze and the entire install team, it has been such a pleasure to work with you all through this and your professionalism and dedication has been insurmountable. I hope I get the chance again to work with you again in the future. I would also like to give a special mention to Megan Hyde who has been nothing short of exceptional throughout this entire process and to Ted Snell who I cannot thank enough for giving me the opportunity to curate this exhibition. It will not be forgotten. Thank you to Ricardo Peach and Mark Stewart who talked to me about *Queer in the West* and the other exhibitions that took place in Perth in the 1990s. Thank you to Amy Barrett-Lennard, Jeremy Smith, Andrew Varano and Simone Johnson from the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) for loaning material from the PICA archive and to Jo Darbyshire, Andrew Nicholls and the team at the State Library of Western Australia, for lending the exhibition catalogues, your generosity has helped to enrich this exhibition. Thank you so much to Charlotte Hickson, Dunja Rmandić, Miranda Johnson, Hilary Thurlow and Lisa Liebetrau for your support of me and this project and all the help you have provided along the way. I would also like to say thank you to my parents, Bev and Chris for their constant support and to my partner, Ethan Rouse Gerlach, you are perfect to me.

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Pages 31-38: Sundae Studio, 2020.  
Pages 66-67, 77-78: Courtesy the artist.



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