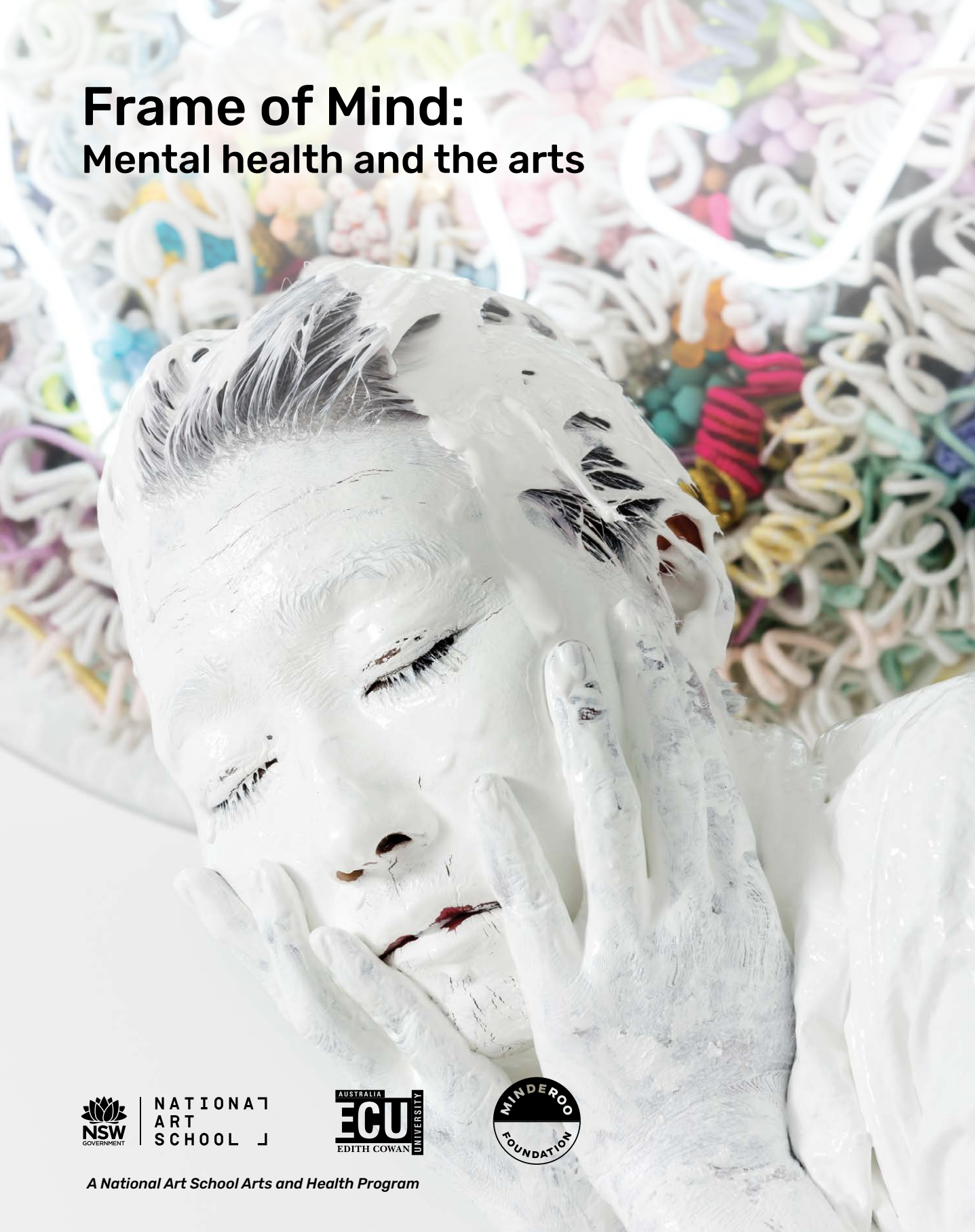
Frame of Mind:
Mental health and the arts



NSW GOVERNMENT | NATIONAL ART SCHOOL

AUSTRALIA ECU EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

MINDEROO FOUNDATION

A National Art School Arts and Health Program

Foreword

Minderoo Foundation is delighted to be supporting this significant collaborative project between the National Art School and Edith Cowan University which furthers the national conversation about arts and mental health.

COVID-19 has been a stark reminder of how critical artists are to our community, and how their work connects us during times of isolation. We must ensure we're listening to our artists, to understand the unique mental health challenges they face.

At Minderoo Foundation, we seek to connect with artists and organisations that share our appreciation for the powerful role arts and culture can play for the broader community.

We are so pleased to be working with the National Art School and Edith Cowan University to present this program.

Nicola Forrest AO
Co-chair and co-founder, Minderoo Foundation

Introduction

The National Art School is proud to be part of this innovative program exploring the mental health issues faced by artists and how art can help improve mental wellbeing.

Frame of Mind is also about fostering artistic connections between the east and west coasts of Australia. It is a pleasure to be collaborating with Edith Cowan University and the Minderoo Foundation on this exciting public program of exhibitions, artist talks, workshops, student projects, publications and more, and welcoming artists from Western Australia to Sydney for some creative cross-pollination.

Frame of Mind delves into the darkness many artists deal with in their practice, exploring the ways making art can help them face their own fears whole offering insight, reassurance and human connection to others through their work.

The Frame of Mind: Mental health and the arts program has been generously supported by the Minderoo Foundation, we are very grateful to them for making this project possible. We hope you enjoy this fantastic program and find your own inspiration here.

Steven Alderton
Director and CEO, National Art School, Sydney

Cover:
Hiromi Tango, *A Bleached Genes,* 2018, performance still. Photo: Greg Piper. Image courtesy artist Hiromi Tango and Sullivan+Strumpf.

Frame of Mind:
Mental health and the arts

The National Art School (NAS) in Sydney and Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Perth have joined forces to create *Frame of Mind: Mental health and the arts*, generously supported by the Minderoo Foundation. Presented over May, June and July in 2021, this public program series draws in artists and experts from Western Australia and New South Wales to explore the mental health challenges faced by artists, and the ways artists engage with themes of mental health within their work.

Delivered across both states and livestreamed to a dedicated microsite, the program features artist talks, panel discussions, an exhibition, a symposium, and a vlogcast series. Through collaborative conversation these diverse outputs prompt crucial reflection and discussion around mental health in the arts sector, and the importance of the arts to the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians.

Presented alongside the events program, this publication features artists from NSW and WA, as well as newly commissioned essays by experts in the field of mental health.

frameofmind.nas.edu.au

Frame of Mind: Mental health and the arts is a part of the National Art School Arts and Health Program.

‘Dangerous emotional terrain’: caring for artists during arts-based health research

The use of the arts to generate and disseminate evidence-based research has become a powerful knowledge translation strategy to influence health care consumers, practitioners, artists, policy makers and the general public[1]. Arts-based research refers to a wide array of artistic forms including music, visual arts, photography, poetry and dance/theatre[2]. The arts have only recently been recognised in the research process; both to produce research and to disseminate research[3]. Arts-based research has become an important strategic tool for knowledge translation, community awareness and public health programs[4,5].

Arts-based health methods are used to enhance awareness and knowledge of the illness experience, and have been shown to engage and empower research participants to enhance confidence, express emotions and acquire insight[4]. Arts-based knowledge translation involves communication of research findings in an emotive and embodied manner; it is this embodiment that renders it a unique and distinct form[6]. For example, visual images often have immediacy and an affective power that elicit bodily and sensory experiences and that can evoke strong emotions from emotionally distressing images[7]. One central challenge associated with arts-based knowledge translation is the notion of ‘dangerous emotional terrain’ coined by Gray and his colleagues[7], and used to refer to the potential of the arts in the research process to have negative effects on the individuals creating or performing and on audience members viewing these artworks or performances[8]. It has been recognised that arts-based research methods have the potential to generate unanticipated types of harm or discomfort, which may lie outside of the harmful experiences normally considered by ethics committees[9].

This topic has been the subject of exploration and has tended to focus on the potential negative implications for research participants using art to depict their difficult experiences or the audience viewing such work[10]. The experience of artists working on these arts-based research projects has been given more limited examination[11]. Slawieniec-Haw’s book based on research with performing actors is among the few studies that address the negative consequences of portraying human suffering, distress and/or violence. [14] She identified the costs and rewards related to artists engaging with narratives and/or images of human suffering, distress and/or violence, as well as forms of attention and care that can support individuals. Rossiter and her colleagues provide a good example of the ways in which they incorporated an ethics of care at the outset of their project, which involved research-based theatre to share study findings on dementia.[12] They ensured that in the very early stages of rehearsal, the actors were informed of the research process, and began to experiment with methods of translating the themes and codes from the research into scenes and narratives. They noted the importance of ensuring a high degree of sensitivity to the experience of the performer in the hopes of better understanding what negative and positive impacts of engagement in this work might ensue.

Our team has also contributed to research on ‘dangerous emotional terrain’ for artists involved in arts-based health research[16]. One example was vis-a-vis the co-creation of a research-based dance performance to disseminate empirical research findings on pathways to care for youth experiencing psychosis[7]. The research team of researchers, dance choreographer, dancers and musician engaged in subsequent reflections on the impact of creating the project, which allowed us to identify a number of strategies to mitigate potential negative consequences that might arise from embodying these experiences of psychosis through movement or music[13].

We demonstrated that, in order to continue working with narratives and/or images on human suffering, distress and/or violence, artists need to take time away from their work. This includes taking physical, mental and emotional break times. Distance can assist professionals in maintaining resilience and joy in their work. In addition, artists should be informed about the potential negative effects of embodying difficult and traumatising experiences, prior to involvement in the research project[7]. Evidence suggests that the risk of emotional fatigue and dissociation are manifest in healthy artists or actors that embody emotionally difficult roles. Performers should be encouraged to embody a character while maintaining their own identity and cognitive thoughts.

During the research process, researchers and artists should consider encouraging mentorship and emotional support for the entire team working with difficult material[8]. It is essential to provide adequate preparatory material for artists on the research team, ensuring an explanation of the nature of the research and the role they are expected to embody and visualise or perform. It is also critical to be explicit regarding ways to access the necessary supports and services to resolve any difficulties that may be encountered in embodying difficult emotions and experiences. The importance of reflexive practice cannot be underestimated and this represents a central feature of ethics in practice[13].

It is important to consider our responsibilities to artists taking on these roles. Just as researchers have responsibility to address risks to our research participants, we also have a responsibility to artists and creatives working on these projects. Hunt et al.’s work on the ethics of an engaged presence offers a model to follow[15]. Although this model acknowledges the limits and risks related to contributions of health professionals, it is equally applicable to artistic performers. It supports the notion of reflexive practice, as well as developing, sustaining and promoting collaborative partnerships. As the field of arts-based health research continues to grow internationally, it behoves us to consider the potential for dangerous emotional terrain and build in processes for addressing negative consequences of embodying difficult experiences.

Katherine M. Boydell, BA., MHSc., PhD, FASSA
Professor of Mental Health
Black Dog Institute, Sydney, Australia

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The importance of supporting creative arts in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic

2020 will be remembered as the Year that turned most of our assumptions about our daily lives, and the communities in which we live and thrive, on its head. As the COVID-19 pandemic led to the rapid shutdown of our everyday working and social lives, we faced one of the greatest threats to our collective mental 'wealth' since World War II.

From a mental health perspective, two big things really matter in our lives. One is personal autonomy and the other is social connection. They may sound like opposites but, in truth, they are highly complementary. The first describes our capacity to make key choices, pursue our interests and make our own mistakes. The other describes the extent to which our own individual and collective wellbeing is actually dependent on the welfare of those we really care about.

In a very practical way, personal autonomy also depends on having a productive and engaging job, or at least being in the business of education, training or practical skill acquisition somewhere along the pathway to that goal. Social connection isn't just having family, extended kin or close friends, it's actually participating in those much broader social and cultural exchanges that underpin our shared beliefs, give us great pleasure and add much needed depth to our everyday lives. Humans are very social animals who really only thrive when they act together and derive great pleasure from their shared experiences.

So, what did we learn in the first year of the pandemic? Importantly, while Governments can throw large amounts of cash at direct job and income support, and purchase the necessary health infrastructure to keep us all safe, they can't simply buy what our community really does value. In my view, what 2020 really taught us (quite independently of whether Governments were actually listening) is that the community came to value what they could no longer experience collectively.

One of those most central losses was the community's direct connections and experiences with the creative arts – in their many and varied forms. One of the most important consequences of that was the realisation of the extent to which our individual and collective mental health and wellbeing relied on the social cohesion, and exploration of shared concerns, that is so often promoted by the creative arts. Through the active connections with the arts, many people access not only a whole range of their own emotions, but also those that are shared more widely in their communities.

While some comment endlessly about the importance of maintaining other shared community events, like major sporting contests, I'd contend that many people actually highlighted the extent to which attending major and minor cultural and creative arts events was central to their own wellbeing, and that of their local communities. In recent weeks, I've been struck by people's great enthusiasm for returning together to the theatre, the performing arts, art galleries, museums and those many other shared spaces where we can either value the collective experience or quietly reflect alone on the nature of recent experiences.

Many of us when faced with major challenges in our own lives, including encounters with our own mental distress, have sought expression or comfort or connection through one or another artistic medium. Those who can write often do. Those of us who provide mental health care often encourage that activity. But verbal expression is not for everyone and others turn readily to music, visual or performing arts or other creative outlets.

In doing so, many of us are drawn to the work of those who have genuine skills in these creative fields. The creative arts are filled not only with vivid representations of personal distress and disconnection but, very importantly, also depict personal journeys to recovery and reconnection. Identification with, and appreciation of, those representations provide greater comfort and support to those of us who are not blessed with such talents.

But what of the mental health and wellbeing of the creative artist themselves? There is no doubt that 2020 was particularly hard on those whose incomes, livelihoods, motivation to persist and connection with like-minded people relied on a well-functioning creative industries sector. The importance of that sector not only to the national economy but also to the mental health and wellbeing of those engaged with it was not readily conceded by those with a more narrow view of the critical employment, and education and training roles, played by the sector.

I spend a lot of my own time with young people who are on the journey to developing their own unique identity and place in the world. The creative arts sector, through its provision of casual employment alongside the development of skills, experiences and opportunities for personal expression, often plays a broader critical and supportive role.

For many older artists, I was also struck not only by how hard the various shutdowns, and ongoing restrictions of use of shared public spaces, had been on their livelihoods but also the extent to which their key role in promoting the mental health and wellbeing of our wider society was in danger of not being more clearly recognised. We all require recognition of our social contribution.

For those of us fortunate enough to be classified as 'essential' workers, this type of social recognition is common and ongoing. In my view, we need to be much more strident in our social communications as to the extent to which a vibrant creative arts sector, and its practitioners, are critical to our broader mental health and wellbeing. Hopefully, one unexpected outcome of 2020 will be much greater social recognition of this fact.

An unfortunate stereotype that still surfaces regularly in my world is that creative people need to endure great mental distress, even severe mental ill-health, if they wish to foster their own creative spirit. The long list of creative people who have experienced mental illness, and worse - died prematurely as a result - is often presented as evidence that the two are so intertwined that it is not possible to promote early intervention or active medical or psychological treatments as a better way forward.

This 19th century myth is one we need to dispel in the 21st century. I've spoken to, and admired the work of, many very capable artists. What is striking to me is their accounts of their inability to function creatively or productively when unwell. A visual artist recently described to me the experience of living and working in Tuscany but being completely unable to relate to the light or the landscape. A writer friend, when unwell, sits for hours with disconnected bits of dialogue and personal narratives that lead nowhere.

Another painter described the experience of not being able to think straight, forgetting most of the important details in his life and wondering whether he had developed early dementia. Another visual artist described the way that he had no energy to draw or paint. It wasn't just a lack of inspiration. It was literally the lack of physical capacity to engage with the task.

Clearly many artists, along with many other professionals, struggle with the development of their own particular identity. Having acquired the requisite skill, the challenge is to find that unique way in which

we may be able to express ourselves and have a real impact in our chosen field. Self-doubt is not the sole affliction of creative artists. It is widely shared among many very capable, intelligent and emotionally sensitive people. Some significant anxiety about the quality of the work and the uncertain personal road ahead is inevitable.

What really matters is that when we do find ourselves in a place well beyond normal anxiety or self-doubt, and lost in something much darker – like a major depressive episode, suicidal thinking or a manic period – that we have the personal insight and, hopefully, the support of others to reach out for real care. This is not an easy process for anyone. Nobody does it easily on their own. We all need people to take the journey with us and, often, we need someone close to initiate that process for us.

These days we increasingly recognise that at least 75% of mental health problems start before age 25 years, and probably 50% before age 15. Consequently, there is much emphasis on encouraging young people to get professional help much earlier in life than was the case a generation ago. However, many middle-aged and older people – particularly men – will have never connected before with professional care as a teenager or young adult. Importantly, it's never too late to start!

So when artists connect with professional care, what happens next? Does the treatment (and particularly the medications) rob them of their creative talents or so dampen their normal sensitivity that they can no longer live and work in the creative industries? Again, in my experience, and my wider dialogue with many affected, theses fears about loss of essential talents are unfounded.

In fact, some get those things under control that had previously seriously hampered their progress. Things like alcohol and other drug dependence, chronic insomnia, crippling procrastination, repeatedly broken intimate relationships, endless catastrophising about their professional future and estrangement from close family and friends. When successful, treatment appears to be associated with increased productivity – more completed works, more timely engagement with the external world.

Another common question I'm often asked is whether it's smart to share one's own personal experiences of mental ill-health with professional colleagues. While personal circumstances do vary, a very common experience these days is for those who share common interests (like the creative arts), and have been through very similar challenges, to share their insights. These peer-based networks are often of great comfort and do provide another level of support and genuine empathy that may be missing from other interactions with health professionals or other family and friends.

So, as we move on from the massive disruptions of 2020, and live with the ongoing consequences of the pandemic, in my view it's time that we are actively promoting the true social value of the creative arts sector and, in particular, its unique contribution to our national mental 'wealth'. At the same time we also need to support those in the sector, at all ages and career stages, to attend individually and collectively to their own mental health and wellbeing.

Professor Ian Hickie
Co-Director, Health and Policy
Brain and Mind Centre
University of Sydney

Frame of Mind: Mental health and the arts has drawn together artists from New South Wales and Western Australia who explore themes of mental health within their practices. Encompassing a wide range of materials, themes and approaches, this selection demonstrates the diverse ways that artists make sense of their inner worlds.

Hiromi Tango (NSW)

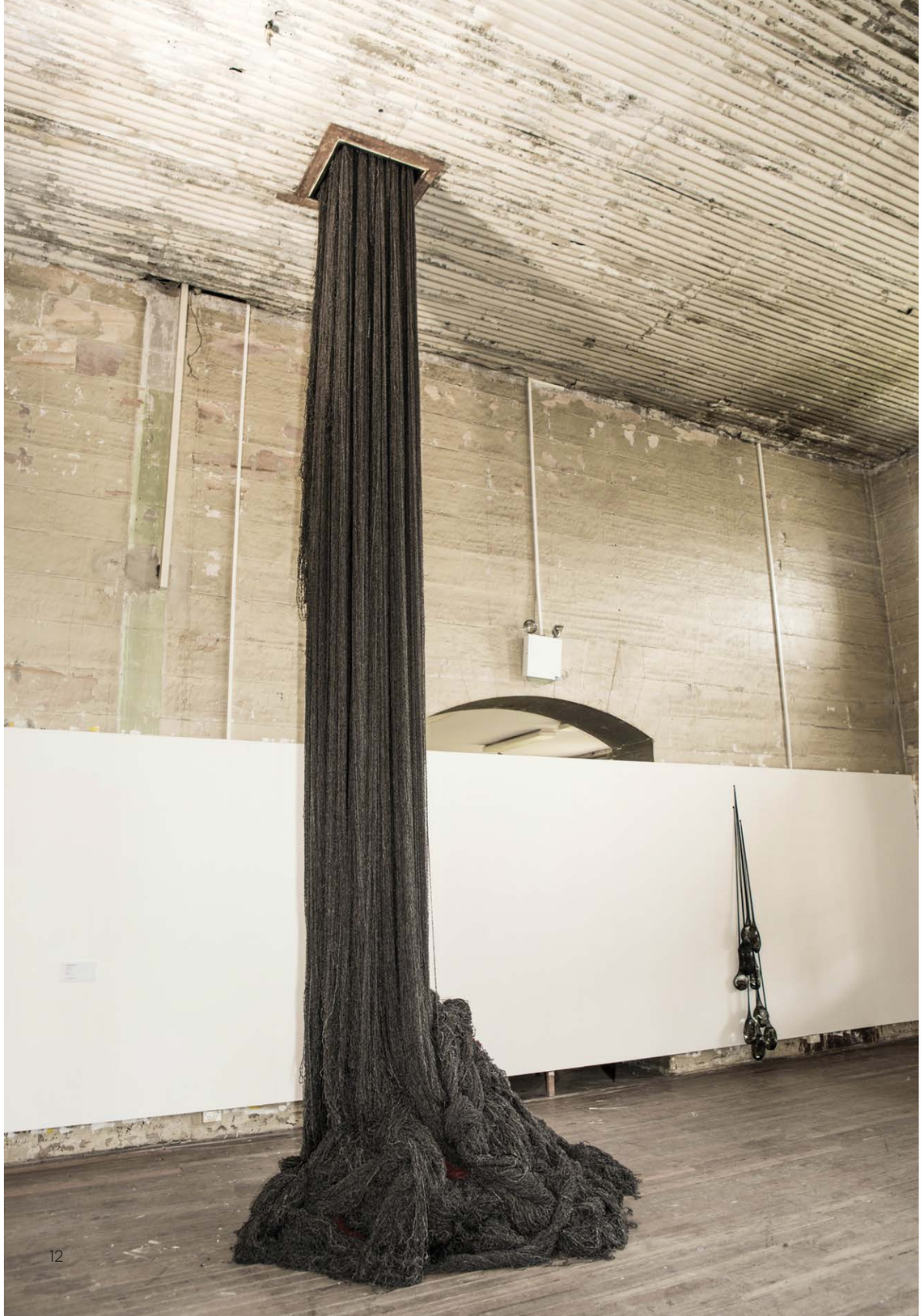
Hiromi Tango has been engaging dynamically at the intersection between art and mental health for over ten years. Drawing on her own experiences of anxiety, the artist's elaborate installations and performances allow audiences to consider the embodied self, the emotional terrain of our relationships with others, and the healing possibilities of art. She has collaborated with numerous scientists, health professionals and research institutions and has exhibited the products of these collaborations locally and internationally. In both her studio practice and her community engagement projects Tango dedicates herself to exploring how various aspects of the art-making process can contribute to positive mental wellbeing.

Through slow and repetitive action such as wrapping and weaving Tango's works encourage participants to slow down, and experience enhanced mindfulness through sensory engagement with colour, movement, sound and aroma. By hosting open workshops and community engagement projects she ignites the protective and healing aspects of social connectivity. At times the works employ natural metaphors for physical and mental processes of transformation. For example, *Lizard Tail* explores the concept of a lizard dropping its tail as a means of separating ourselves from difficult emotions and memories, while *Healing Garden* projects draw on the healing properties of nature, and the many ways that engagement with flora can contribute to wellbeing.

Tango's works have been exhibited at major national institutions, including Art Gallery of South Australia as part of the Adelaide Biennale, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery Of Modern Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, and the Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne, as well as regional projects in Hobart, Cairns, Lismore and Western Australia. International projects include a solo exhibition with Sullivan+Strumpf in Singapore and Art Basel in Hong Kong, and a residency and installation with artist partner Craig Walsh for the Gwanju Biennale in Korea. Ongoing projects exploring mental health include collaborations with Dr Emma Burrows, Florey Institute in Melbourne and neuropsychiatrist Dr Patricia Jungfer in Sydney, and the *Healing Garden* series, a site responsive project that has been exhibited across Australia and internationally in diverse locations including Indonesia, Dubai, Singapore and the United States.

Hiromi Tango is represented by Sullivan+Strumpf.

Hiromi Tango, *Amygdala,* 2016, performance installation, Art Basel Hong Kong 2016. Photo: Jason Findley. Image courtesy Hiromi Tango and Sullivan + Strumpf.



Stevie Fieldsend (NSW)

Stevie Fieldsend creates work that details an emotional state – a feeling or bodily sensation of a past event. With materials as diverse as glass, charred wood, steel and textiles the works explore the way in which emotions and past traumas can be processed and integrated through the making of art. Drawing upon potent personal experiences of trauma and complex PTSD these deeply felt works give powerful material expressions of the way seemingly fixed states of being can, given the right circumstances, be transformed.

The artist says "Central to my work is the female body, trauma (or how trauma resides in my body and mind) and a sense of movement, of oozing, falling, coming to, going somewhere, a maturation in flux – perhaps too soon, the fissures between internal and external, a gravitational plummet, transference, the sensation of being pulled out of myself, of exceeding boundaries – a transgression." In works such as *Descent* (pictured) the artist explores transgenerational trauma, painstakingly untangling a torrent of fibres over 165 hours. Repeating these gestural patterns over and over, the artist engages with the alchemical potential of making as a way of processing and healing: "Something inside unravels a little, becomes looser, becomes tangible and externalised which opens up space for new possibilities, for both myself and my children and so on…"

Fieldsend studied glass at Sydney College of the Arts and The Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre in Adelaide, and completed both a Master of Fine Art and a Master of Studio Arts at Sydney College of the Arts. She has participated in solo and group exhibitions both nationally and internationally and has been the recipient of numerous art prizes including: the Scenic World Staff Choice Award for Sculpture at Scenic World (2015), the Rookwood Necropolis Sculpture Award (2013) and Sculpture in the Vineyards (2012). She has been a finalist in the 2015 NSW Visual Arts Fellowship (Emerging), the Redlands Konika Minolta Art Prize (2015), the Fisher's Ghost Art Award (2014), the Blake Prize (2013), and the Willoughby Sculpture Prize (2013). Fieldsend's work has been presented at Hong Kong Art Central, Sydney Contemporary Art Fair, Melbourne Art Fair and in curated group exhibitions at Moreton Bay Regional Gallery, Caboolture Regional Art Gallery, Cessnock Regional Art Gallery, Campbelltown Regional Art Gallery and Blacktown Arts Centre. She is represented by Artereal Gallery.

Stevie Fieldsend, *Descent*, 2014, polyester carpet fibre, 700 x 200 x 200 cm. New Contemporaries, Sydney College of the Arts.
Photo: Jacquie Manning

Giselle Stanborough (NSW)

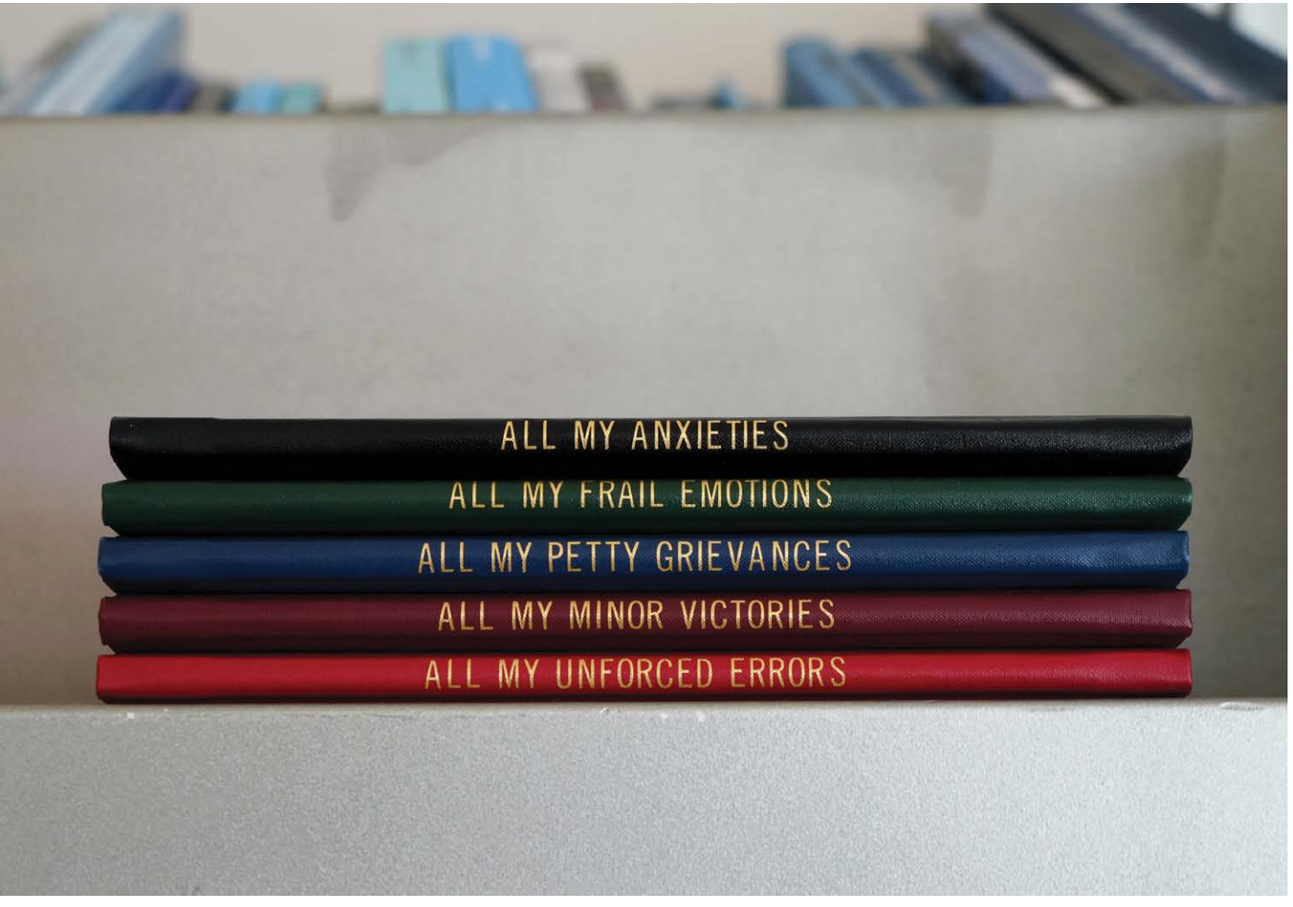
Giselle Stanborough is an intermedia artist whose works examine the interpolation of the self, and the relationship between connectivity and isolation. Drawing upon psychoanalytic perspectives and motivated by a curiosity in the increasing indeterminacy between the private and public spheres, Stanborough's work addresses contemporary interpersonal experiences in relation to technology, feminism and consumer capitalism.

The artist says: "The need to distinguish that which is existential from that which is political remains urgent today. Psychopathologies are the stuff of everyday life. The distinction between good and ill mental health is not one of type, but of degrees of intensity. This diagnostic continuum is readily exploitable, such that the onus is on the precarious worker to build 'psychological resilience' in the face of their diminishing wages and the corrosion of their rights. There is no better Pharmakon (as a medicine-poison-scapegoat) to explain (away) the declining mental health of my generation than 'the internet', which mental health experts often address in such vague and generic terms it seems they may as well be blaming the humours.

It is tempting to fall back on the tropes of the Romantic tradition when considering artists and their mental health, but this would be to willingly ignore the changing nature of art as industry in the age we call 'contemporary'. Today, artists find themselves in the paradoxical position of being hyper-professionalised and yet unable to make a living from their profession."

Stanborough's work has been shown at major venues such as Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne, (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney, (2017); Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, (2015) and Next Wave Festival 2014, Melbourne, (2014). In 2018 she was the recipient of the The Katthy Cavaliere Fellowship, a prestigious $100,000 award given to three female artists. This led to the newly commissioned work *Cinopticon*, presented at Carriageworks, Sydney in 2020.

Giselle Stanborough, *Cinopticon (Wall)* 2020. Photo: Zan Wimberley.
Cinopticon was commissioned by Carriageworks, as part of "Suspended Moment: The Katthy Cavaliere Fellowship", made possible with funds from the Estate of Katthy Cavaliere in partnership with the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) and Museum of Old and New Art (Mona).



Sara Morawetz (NSW)

Sara Morawetz is a conceptual artist from Newcastle, NSW, now based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, whose interdisciplinary practice engages a range of mediums including performance, installation, photography and video. Her work is an examination of the systems and structures that measure experience, investigating concepts such as time and distance to explore their physical, emotional and exhaustive potential.

Her work *All My Anxieties* is an ongoing personal periodical – a continuing performative action and emotional archive designed to catalogue the artist's flaws, failings and insecurities one month at a time. Conceived prior to the COVID pandemic (yet produced in its wake), *All My Anxieties* presents a methodical analysis of Morawetz's internal monologue at a unique moment of isolation and uncertainty. With titles including *All My Failures, All My Petty Grievances, All My Unforced Errors* and *All My Minor Victories, All My Anxieties* is an unfiltered exposition of the artist's raw, neurotic, and routinely conflicted sense of self and the internal metrics by which she measures the world around her.

Sara is a PhD candidate at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney and an Australian Postgraduate Award recipient. Her work has been exhibited throughout Australia and internationally, including exhibitions at the Museé des Arts et Métiers (France), the Australian Consulate-General New York (USA), the Queens Museum (USA), RAPID PULSE International Performing Arts Festival (USA), Open Source Gallery (USA), Dominik Mersch Gallery (NSW), Wollongong Art Gallery (NSW), Firstdraft (NSW), West Space (VIC), FELTSpace (SA) and Verge Gallery (NSW). She was 2016 winner of 'the Churchie' National Emerging Art Prize, a recipient of the Moya Dyring Studio Scholarship (AGNSW), the 2017 Vida Lahey Memorial Travelling Scholarship (QAGOMA Foundation) and funding from the Australia Council for the Arts.

The titles currently completed in this ongoing series can be viewed at: saramorawetz.com/all-my-anxieties

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Sara Morawetz, *All My Anxieties* 2017–ongoing, performative action, artist books and digital work. Dimensions variable. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

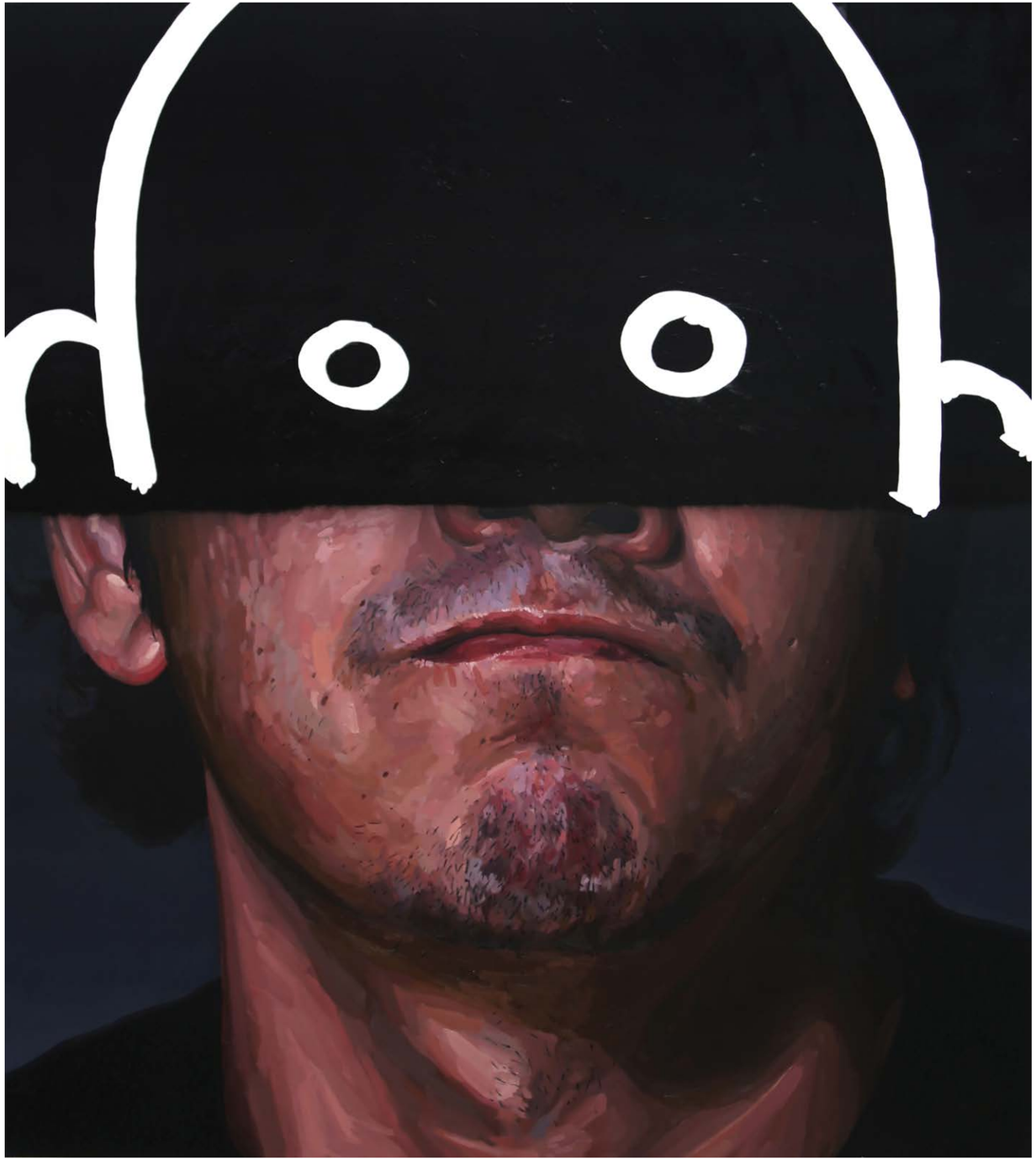
Abdul Abdullah (NSW)

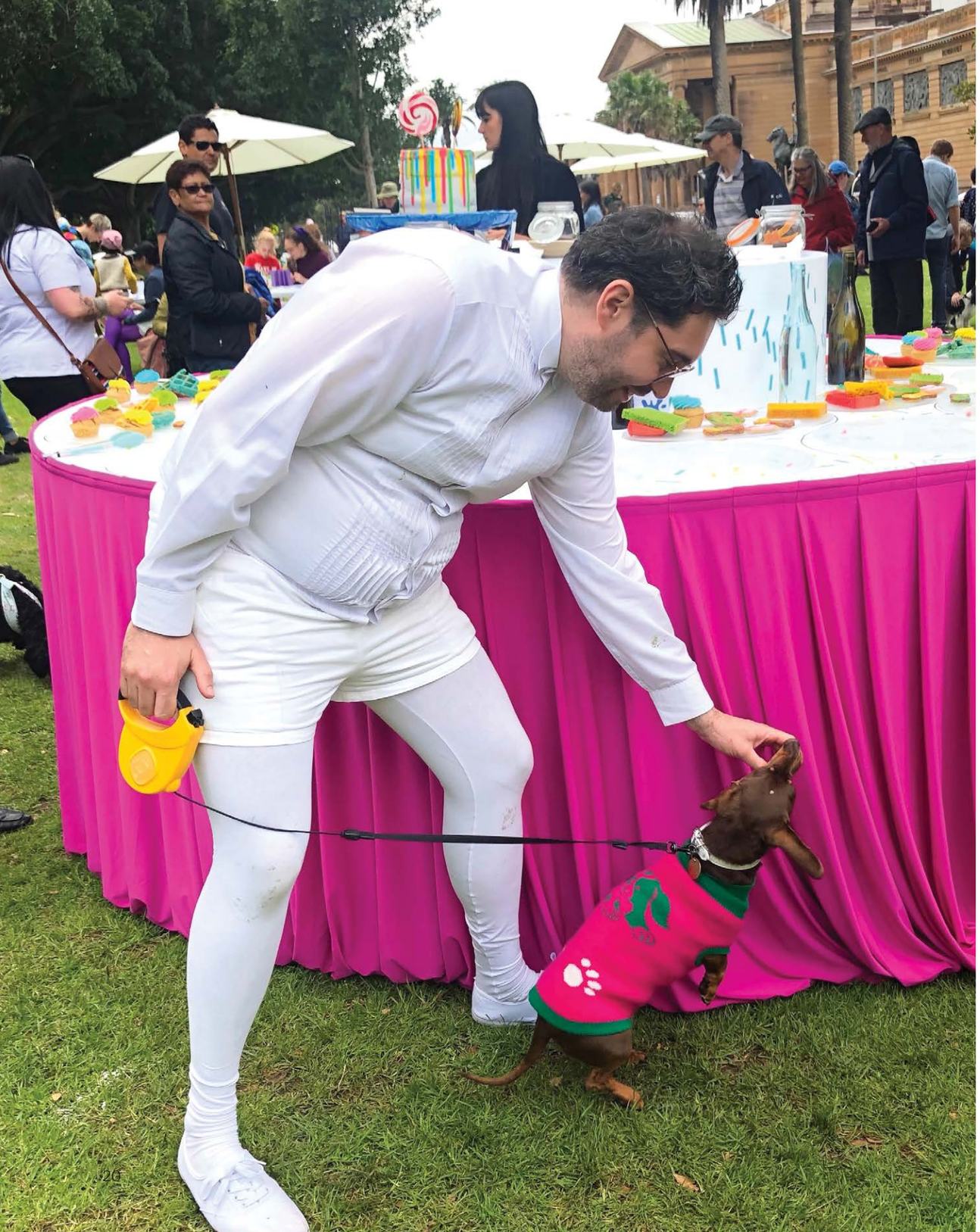
As a seventh-generation Muslim Australian of mixed ethnicity who grew up in suburban Perth (an 'outsider amongst outsiders'), Abdul Abdullah's multi-disciplinary practice is motivated by a longstanding concern with the complex feelings of displacement and alienation associated with histories of diaspora and migration. Providing a voice to these rarely told topics, he creates carefully crafted political commentaries that speak of the 'Other' and the experiences of marginalised communities. Intersecting between popular culture, contemporary conflicts and personal experience, his recent works renegotiate histories and create space for alternative possibilities and new conversations.

In *Untitled self-portrait* (2020) from the Discombobulation series the artist creates a self-portrait characterised by a personal, chronic sense of societal discomfort, before using a $16 can of spray paint to cover it up. This act of defacing was integral to the work's purpose. As the artist says: "The only thing I am certain of is my uncertainty, and in times of uncertainty there is something cathartic and self-affirming about constructing something only to destroy it… few things are too precious that there is no value in their interrogation, everything that is built can be rebuilt, and no tradition inherently oppressive is worth maintaining." The portrait was finished with two cartoonish ears and eyes, looking out uncertainly towards something else.

Abdullah's works are included in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, The Museum of Contemporary Art, The Art Gallery of Western Australia, The Gallery of Modern Art, Artbank, the University of Western Australia, Murdoch University, The Islamic Museum of Australia and The Bendigo Art Gallery. He has presented work extensively throughout Australia and internationally, with recent exhibitions including Art Basel Hong Kong (2018), *Stories we tell to scare ourselves with* at MOCA Taipei (2019), the Adelaide Biennale at the Art Gallery of South Australia (2020), and The Armory Show in New York (2020). He is a five-time Archibald Prize finalist and five-time Sulman Prize finalist and is represented by Yavuz Gallery.

Abdul Abdullah, *Untitled self-portrait* 2020, oil and aerosol on linen, 72 inches x 64 inches. Photo: Courtesy the artist.





David Capra (NSW)

Performance artist David Capra is best known for his collaborations with dachshund Teena. With works incorporating sculpture, installation and video the pair create engaging multi-sensory experiences, inviting audiences to participate and contribute meaning to the work. Dressed in trademark white the artist is like a 'walking paper towel', absorbing everything around him. Capra describes himself as an 'intercessory artist', whose work takes the form of interventions into physical and social space designed to initiate healing.

In 2015 Teena and David worked together to create *Teena's Bathtime* for the Museum of Contemporary Art's Bella Room Commission. Audiences were invited to assist in giving the artist's sausage dog a bath, encouraging multi-sensory participation and exploration and allowing them to relate to Teena's experiences around anxiety - Teena doesn't quite enjoy bath time. In 2018 they performed *The long and short of it: Life lessons from art-dog Teena* to an audience of 5000 at TEDx Sydney and answered the question "What makes a dachshund the perfect muse?" in an article for the Guardian newspaper. In 2019 David and Teena collaborated with Kaldor Public Art Projects, producing a series of "Teena Takes on..." educational videos and Kaldor Studio project at the Art Gallery of NSW. They also featured in Genevieve Bailey's documentary *Happy Sad Man* (Melbourne Film Festival) following the lives of 5 men managing their internal worlds. Capra is currently coordinator of Little Orange Studio at Campbelltown Arts Centre, a working studio for artists who identify as a person with disability, d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing and/or Disabled Creatives.

Reflecting upon the experience of artists, Capra says: "The art world can be tricky to traverse, relationships can feel somewhat transactional at times. Teena and I have sustained ourselves by keeping one paw outside of it. Over the years we have made our own micro artworld, filled with supportive people that fuel our work. When Teena and I work with others, we feel it's important to identify people's agendas early on to ensure we contribute to things that matter at the end of the day and cater less to the 'dog eat dog' world."

David Capra, *David Capra and Teena, Doggy Picnic,* 2019. Kaldor Public Art Projects, Art Gallery of NSW.

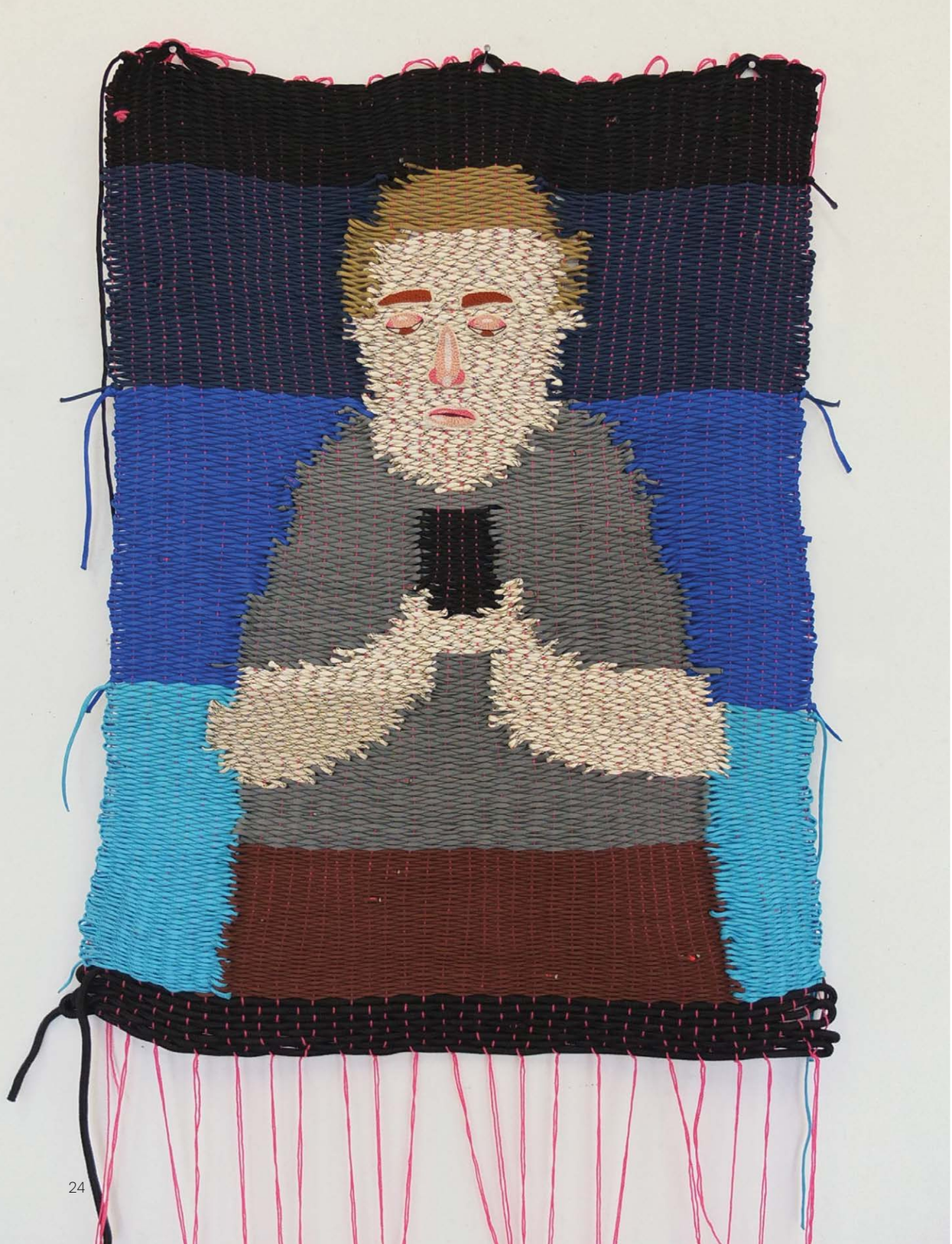
Anna Nazzari (WA)

Anna Nazzari is a Perth-based visual artist and creative producer working across film, sculptural installation and drawing. Her practice focuses on the investigation of mythological tales, superstitions and unusual events that emphasise moral certainty and foster a reading of the absurd. Her work is often painstakingly made and combines old-world skills with contemporary art processes to aesthetically convey the contradictory or futile facets of life. She often collaborates with fellow Perth artist Erin Coates, creating films and sculptural installations that highlight human fragility.

In recent works Nazzari has examined the Oceanic Gothic through a reimagining of Western Australia's coastal waters and the marine flora and fauna which inhabit them. *Immersion* brings the dark side of human existence to the fore through a future grappling with the legacy of climate change. The work depicts a male figure emerging out of the sea, but one who is being devoured, from the inside out, by a sea anemone. With allusions to the genres of body horror and science fiction this oceanic reclamation signposts a transmigration, a shift from a human existence and location to an otherworldly one.

Nazzari has exhibited throughout Australia, at venues such as Fremantle Arts Centre (WA), Linden St Kilda Centre for Contemporary Arts (Vic) and Firstdraft Gallery (NSW). In 2020 she was included in the Adelaide Biennale at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Her collaborative and non-collaborative screen-based works have been shown at numerous international film festivals. In 2011, she completed a Doctorate of Philosophy (Art), which analysed the absurd fate of gender ambiguous narratives. She currently works as a Lecturer at Curtin University's School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry, via the OUA Art Studies program.

Anna Nazzari, *Immersive* 2020, watercolour on Arches, 81.5 x 69 cm. Photo: Michelle Becker.



Carla Adams (WA)

Carla Adams work includes sculpture, textiles, craft practices, painting, drawing, research and book-making, navigating the complexities of relationships from an embodied, female perspective. Recent projects include the documentation of her encounters with over 1000 men on Tinder, blending deft humour with wry observation to reframe their digital self-presentations and reflect on the psycho-social environment of online dating. By documenting her own experiences Adams reflects on the unsettling power structures and perplexing attractions that can ensnare us in these networks.

Of '*Harrison (You are what's wrong with today's society)*', the artist says: "The slow process of weaving these portraits allows plenty of time for the crafting of a narrative for the subject outside of the fleeting online encounter. Perhaps he plays tennis, maybe he has a collection of cactuses. I think he might be allergic to peanuts. By doing this, the works become a kind of 'dear John' letter. I know we never really knew each other but I want you to know that I'm over you. I forgive you."

Adams was born in Perth and graduated with first class honours from Curtin University in 2014. Her work has been exhibited at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Turner Galleries, Bus Projects (Melbourne), FELTSpace (Adelaide), ARTBAR at The Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney), Verge Gallery (Sydney) and Blindside (Melbourne). In 2013 her work was selected for the Hatched National Graduate Exhibition at PICA. In 2017 and 2020 she was a finalist in the Joondalup Invitation Art Awards. She is represented by Aster + Asha Gallery.

Carla Adams, *Harrison (You are what's wrong with today's society)* 2017, paracord, polyester rope, acrylic yarn, cotton and pendant, 66 x 104 cm. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

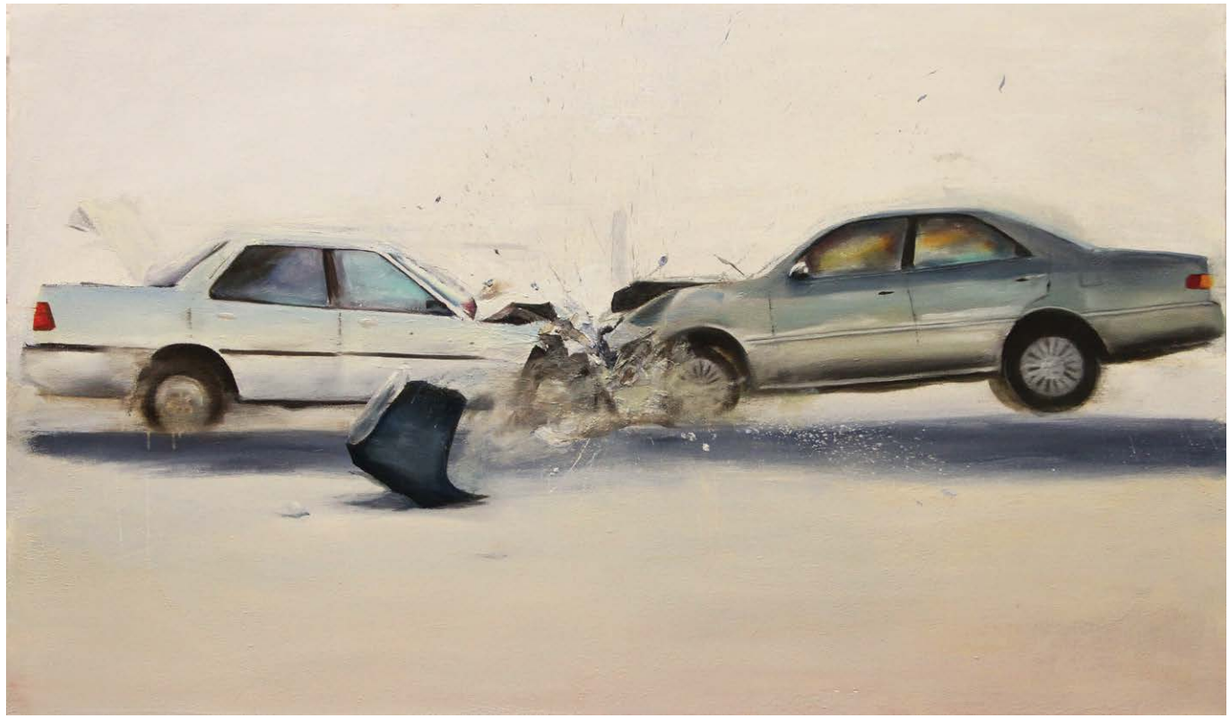
D’Arcy Coad (WA)

D’Arcy Coad is an emerging artist from Western Australia with a practice that bridges contemporary art, fashion and textiles. His contextual and creative influences stem from his upbringing in rural Western Australia. Growing up mostly in the Southern Wheatbelt he experienced slaughters, hunting, mulesing and docking, as well as being accustomed to the sight of roadkill viscera. Death and desire have emerged as two colliding themes that guide his construction of image, fashion and garment.

In *Morbid Curiosities* Coad uses hand-cut photomontage collages to pair the sensuous images of German-American fashion photographer Horst P. Horst with visceral subject matter drawn from crime scenes, anatomical lithographs, post-mortem documentation and Medieval bestial concoctions. Through these juxtapositions Coad transmutes sedate deathliness into something obscurely glamorous that teases the senses. In these works he confronts mortality as something comical, cathartic and seductive.

Coad studied at Edith Cowan University, completing a Bachelor of Arts (Majoring in Contemporary Fashion and Textiles) in 2018 and Honours in 2020. He has exhibited at the Spectrum Project Space in ‘Tussle, the Graduate Fashion Showcase’, in ‘Looking Back’ and in the 2017 ‘Meniscus – Graduate Fashion Showcase’. He was included in Urban Couture, in Joondalup, Western Australia in 2019 and was a participant in Eco Fashion Week Australia, Fremantle, Western Australia in 2017 and 2018.

D’Arcy Coad, *Morbid Curiosities* 2020-2021, hand cut photomontage collages, dimensions variable. Photo: Courtesy the artist.



Roderick Sprigg (WA)

Born in Merredin in 1979 and raised in Leonora and Mukinbudin, Roderick Sprigg is a multi-disciplinary artist whose art practice centres on the politics of masculinity in regional communities. His work explores complex internal dialogues, experiences of mortality and the sanctity of human life. In projects such as *Occasional Tables* Sprigg facilitates inter-generational dialogues by drawing family members together to collaboratively craft coffee tables. In *GOLD* he embodies the mythic male figure of the prospector to explore personal family narratives and discourses of heroism and failure.

The artist says: "There are moments I can remember where fear, exhilaration, success and failure all met. Moments in time that are etched into my psyche. I recall the burst of adrenaline and utter disappointment in my stupidity, playing out in an explosion of blurs and technicolour hyper focus. I still recite some of these memories with old mates when we catch up and wonder how we're still alive. There are other memories that remain mute."

Roderick Sprigg gained his Bachelor of Arts (Visual Art) from Curtin University in 2006, which incorporated an exchange at the Ecole Nationale Superior d'Art in Dijon, France. Sprigg has held solo exhibitions at Ceci N'est Pas Une Usine (France), Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Fremantle Arts Centre, Craft Victoria and PS Art Space. In 2009 he was featured in Primavera at the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney. His recent solo exhibition *Dancing to the Sound of my Grandfather's Bones* was held in March 2021 at PS Art Space in Fremantle. Sprigg has participated in group exhibitions throughout Australia at venues such as Lake Macquarie Art Gallery, Moore's Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Kalgoorlie Arts Centre, and Latrobe Regional Art Gallery.

Roderick Sprigg, *Chicken,* 2019, oil on canvas, 107 x 178 cm. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

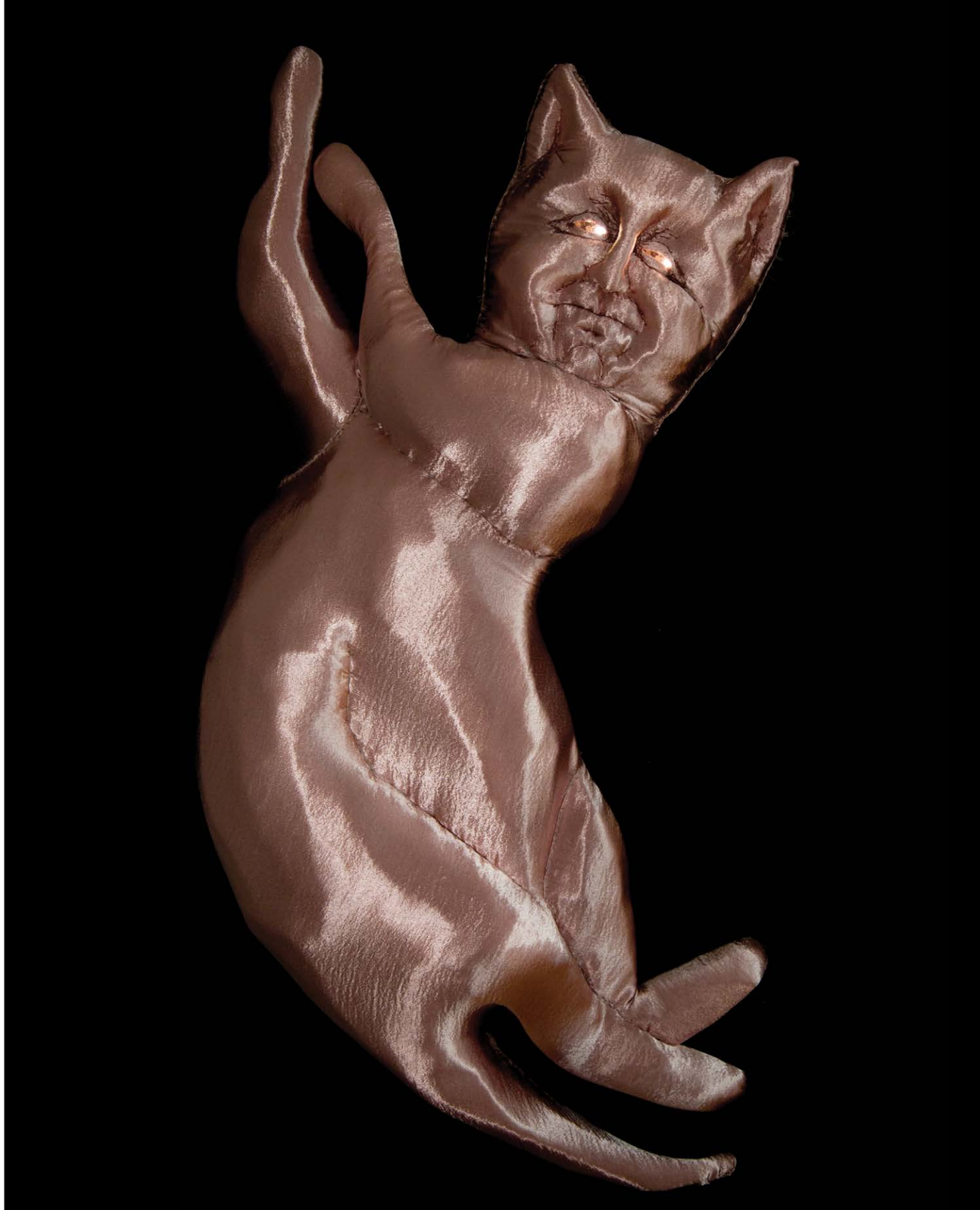
Tarryn Gill (WA)

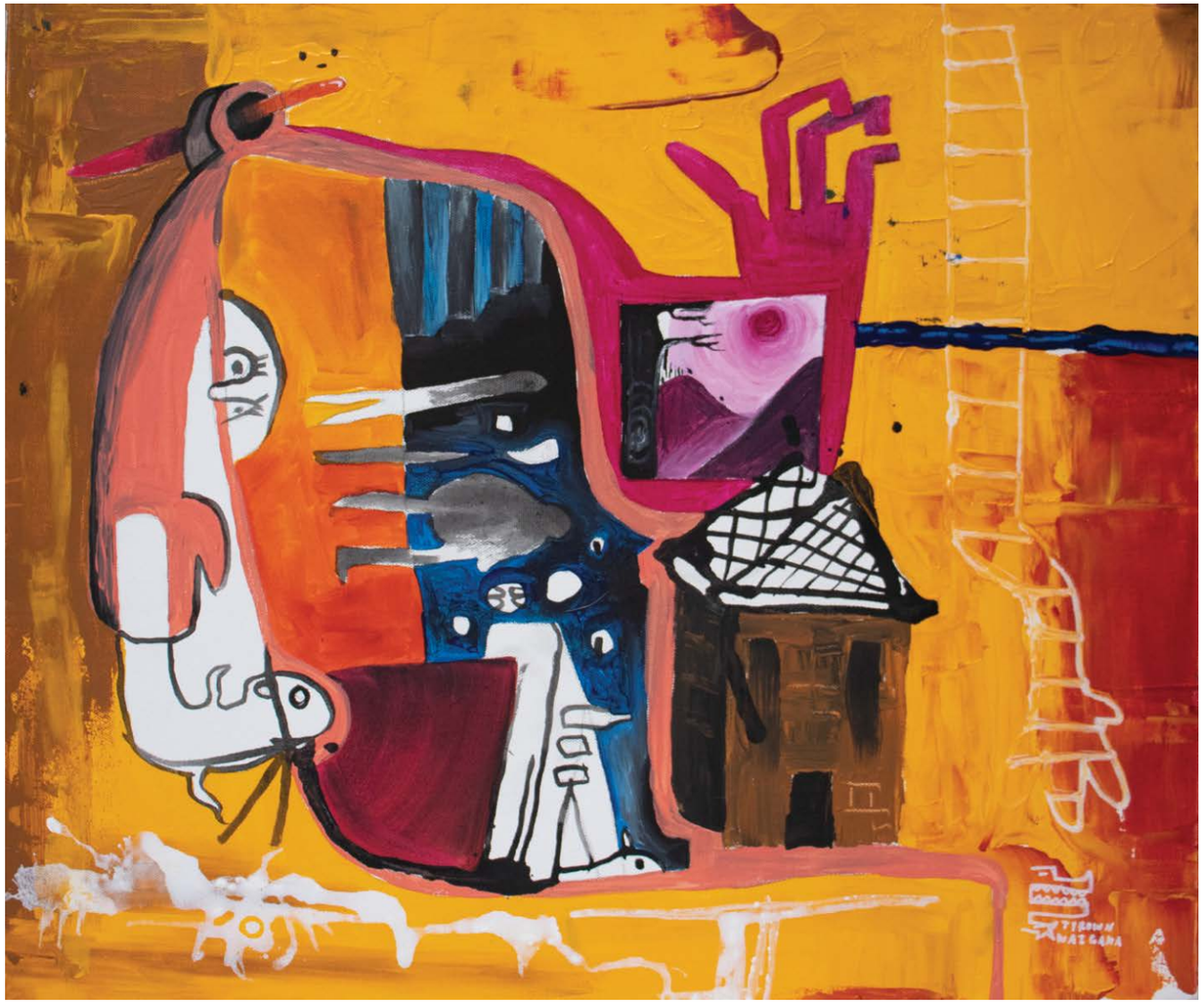
Psychoanalytic ideas have long played a role in the work of Tarryn Gill. With a practice encompassing sculpture, photography, video, theatre set/costume design and performance she is interested in exploring the liminal space between the personal and the collective, the contemporary and the ancient. Her aesthetics and materials are heavily informed by her background in competitive calisthenics and dance from the age of 5 to 25. Her art making processes now mine this source material to assert the value of the feminine and personal against the masculine model of genius that has defined much of art history.

In recent years Gill's work has become increasingly concerned with her reflections on self-understanding and growth. Inspired by Carl Jung's Active Imagination process she has leant into a more intuitive approach that delves into the psychological, using making as a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious. Of her series The Tricksters, she says that they are "are a swarm of shape-shifting figures made during a phase of uncertainty and change. They are hand-stitched animal familiars merging into self-portraits –attempts to give shape to the terrifying figures that would appear in my recurring dreams at the time. I identified them as Jung's archetype of the Trickster – a character fond of malicious pranks who can also appear as a saviour. The process was an attempt to confront my fear, making the figures visible and defined in a way I could further understand them and their message." She describes the creation of these works as a process of "meeting myself through art making".

Through solo and collaborative practices and her partnership with Pilar Mata Dupont, Gill has exhibited and undertaken residencies across Australia, Argentina, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, UK and US. She has held solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of South Australia, at Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney and has exhibited works in the 2016 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, in the 17th Biennial of Sydney, at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin. She is represented by Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert.

Tarryn Gill, *Trickster (Pink Feline)* 2018, EPE foam, LED lights with microcontroller, hand-sewn synthetic fabric, threads. 90 x 50 x 15 cm.
Photo: Courtesy the artist and Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert.





Tyrown Waigana (WA)

Tyrown Waigana is a Wandandi Noongar (Aboriginal) and Ait Koedhal (Torres Strait Islander) multidisciplinary artist living in Perth. Using surreal humour and wry observations he creates works that explore the intersection between myths, legends and everyday life. His diverse output spans painting, sculpture, animation and graphic design, which combines colourful abstraction with pop culture and Indigenous art references.

He began making art as a child at his Nan's home where his 'family members designed, carved and burnt etchings into digeridoos for decoration. They also did drawings and paintings and there was always something creative happening,' he explains. This creative responsiveness to the world around him is evident in his paintings, sculptural works and animations. His job as an installer of exhibitions at the Fremantle Arts Centre was the catalyst to create a delightful digital animation that documents the unpacking of each new artwork on arrival in the gallery. In combination with his sculptural portrayal of wall preparation, it provides an insight into the attraction of install as a form of professional engagement for an artist.

His recent body of work examines the duality of human experience. "Many people have a depraved side of themselves", he explains "the question is would you be able to handle yourself knowing you've done these dreadful things?" Through making art he has found a way to confront these questions and simultaneously find "...a place, you can forget about yourself and all your problems".

His exhibition credits include *A Forest of Hooks and Nails* (2021) and *Revealed* (2019 and 2020) at the Fremantle Arts Centre, and *Dark Side* (upcoming, 2021) at There Is Gallery. He has created designs for the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, Australian National University, First Nations Justice Campaign and in 2020 he was the winner of the prestigious NAIDOC poster competition with his work *Shape of land*. In the same year he published his first comic book *The Rest Of Your Life's Gonna Be Shit*, and was presented with the 2020 NAIDOC award for Perth Artist of the year.

Tyrown Waigana, *A Nice Place to Hate Yourself*. 2021, acrylic on canvas 51 x 61 x 4 cm. *Photo: Courtesy the artist.*

DARK SIDE

27 May–17 June 2021:
Gallery25 and THERE IS gallery, Perth WA

Tarryn Gill, Carla Adams, Nicola Kaye & Stephen Terry + Lyndall Adams + Marcella Polain, Paul Uhlmann, Roderick Sprigg, Mary Moore, Sharyn Egan, Anna Nazarri, Stormie Mills, D'Arcy Coad, Tyrown Waigana

Curated by Ted Snell

Artists make sense of their world through their work. This can be through an examination of the external world or an interrogation of their internal world and it is most often in an attempt to find balance. Everybody has a dark side, a place of fear and dread they go to voluntarily or not. Managing that part of our lives is crucial to health and wellbeing, as COVID-19 has highlighted. However, it requires self-awareness, courage, and resilience to confront that aspect of your psyche. Artists have always worked in that penumbral space, on the cusp between dark and light.

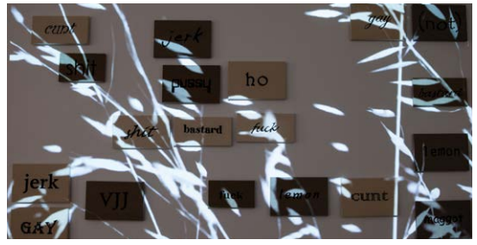
Unfortunately, the image of the tormented artist exploding their anxiety and frustrations onto a canvas has become the default image of creative genius. As depicted by Julian Schnabel in *At Eternity's Gate*, Vincent Van Gogh, cutting off his ear in a frenzy and painting olive trees in a fit of dervish hallucination, has come to signify authentic, meaningful expression. Yet, while the process of confronting the dark side is admittedly both painful and productive, the romantic myth of ordained seers living outside the constraints of human society is misleading. For most visual artists, their studio is a safe place when external pressures have the potential to overwhelm and where the dark side can be harnessed.

The World Health Organisation has reported, "… that depression is expected to become the world's second most burdensome disease by 2020"[1]. One in five Australians aged between 16-85 has also experienced some form of mental illness exacerbated by the isolation and dislocation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

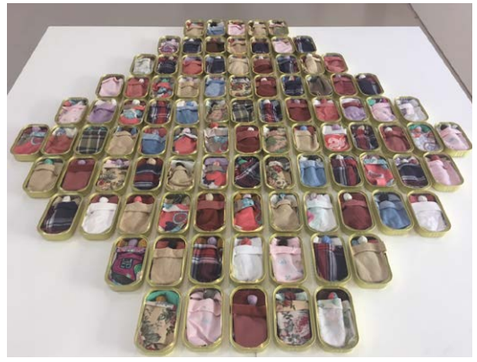
Significantly, anxiety and depression have impacted Aboriginal communities, with suicide the leading cause of death for Indigenous children aged between five and seventeen[2]. However, while therapeutic and medical treatments are widely employed (sometimes with dangerous side effects) global research increasingly documents the beneficial impact of the arts in promoting mental health and wellbeing at an individual and societal level. An opportunity exists to radically impact on this spreading nightmare and artists provide an exemplary model of practical, structured engagement with their dark side.

When offered the opportunity to undertake psychiatric counselling, the German poet Rainer Marie Rilke reputedly protested, saying, "Don't take my devils away because my angels might flee too." In a similar response, the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch confessed in his diary that "My fear of life is necessary to me, as is my illness. They are indistinguishable from me, and their destruction would destroy my art". Both artists understand that the dark side is a counterbalance in life and provides the richness and complexity that defines us as individual human beings. This is not to underestimate the impact of severe mental illness or to suggest that the arts are a panacea, merely to stress the therapeutic benefit of engagement with the arts as a tool to nurture wellbeing.

The artists in the *Dark Side* exhibition have all found ways of making sense of their world and marking out a space for themselves by confronting their fears and then externalising them in artworks. Their creative

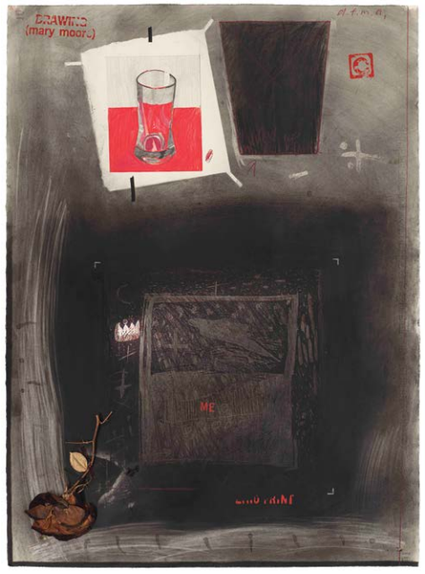


Lyndall Adams, Nicola Kaye & Stephen Terry and Marcella Polain *Contested Spaces,* 2020, multimedia and black embroidery cotton on cotton duck and Belgian Linen

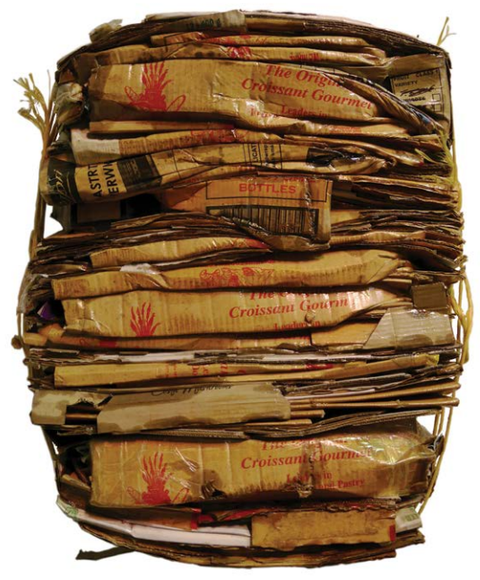


Sharyn Egan, *Our Babies 1,* 2019, sardine cans, gravel, fabric and mixed media.

Paul Uhlmann, *Air (VII).* 2020, oil on linen, 41 x 36 cm.



Mary Moore *Drawing 1 (Mary Moore)*, 56.5 x 76.5cm, Etching and mixed media on Arches, 1976



Stormie Mills, *Modern life.* 2016, compacted cardboard, paper, twine and glue. 860 x 180 cm.

practice is a mechanism that allows internal narratives to unfold in the controlled environment of the studio. While so much else is under sway by external forces, the practice of artmaking remains singularly the practitioner's domain. The artist has ultimate and sole control over the outcome. This security and groundedness enables artists to share their insights, provide reassurance, and offer a safe space for their audience to confront the collective concerns of their communities.

For Nyoongar woman Sharyn Egan, the memory of being taken from her family "... and treated like dogs"[3] was a catalyst for re-creating the small babies she and her friends make from sardine cans, scraps of fabric, gravel, and whatever else was on hand. Her creativity was both a way of making sense of the nightmare she was experiencing while simultaneously moving beyond and taking control. The safe space that art-making provides is also solace and a coping mechanism for Tarryn Gill. In the studio, "I meet myself through artmaking," she explains. Similarly, Tyrown Waigana describes his work, *A nice place to hate yourself* as about "...finding a place you can forget about yourself and all your problems". These artists believe that by making art, it is possible to engage their internal and external worlds. "Music enables me to live my life,[4]" says composer Max Richter.

Facing a distressing situation can be both illuminating and traumatic. Anna Nazarri embraces the dark side as a "... world of otherworldly escape that provides a world of unimaginable exploration". Confronting the "vicious, scarring effects" of her Tinder experiences enabled Carla Adams to weave portraits of her dates that announced, "... I want you to know that I'm over you. I forgive you". This form of healing is also at the core of Lyndall Adams, Nicola Kaye, Stephen Terry, and Marcella Polain's project to 'concretise memory' by confronting the traumas exacerbated by COVID-19.

Death and desire remain a constant in our lives. The 21st century has magnified many of our responses, exposing our frailty in ways we could not have imagined. D'Arcy Coad's approaches "... death as something comical, cathartic and seductive" in his complex collages, while Mary Moore contemplates the tragic death of her beloved sister "... using drawing as a way of linking my external world with my interior life". In his paintings of car crashes Roderick Sprigg recounts moments in time when "... fear, exhilaration, success, and failure all met; though he confesses "... there are other memories that remain mute". While never in total control, having the ability to juxtapose this catalogue of fears into articulate narratives provides these artists with both solace and insight.

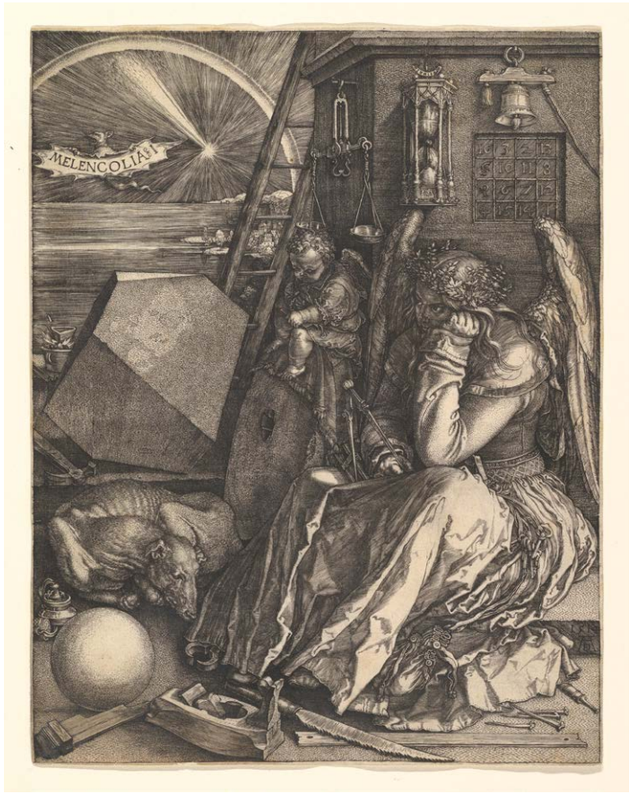
The Dark Side explores how these artists use their creative practice as a mechanism to comprehend their world. Through the experience of making art, they confront their fears and give external visual form to their existential musings. The process of delving deep, of spending time in the safe space of their studios, provides solace and insight that offers hope and fulfillment. It is not a place of retreat but of acknowledgment and acceptance that gives direction and focus. In an increasingly stressful world, it also showcases our humanity and, most importantly, our resilience.

Ted Snell

Professor Ted Snell, AM CitWA, is Honorary Professor, School of Arts & Humanities, Edith Cowan University. Over the past four decades he has contributed to the national arts agenda as Chair of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Artbank, the Asialink Visual Arts Advisory Committee and University Art Museums Australia. He is currently Chair of Regional Arts WA and on the board of ANAT and the Fremantle Biennale. He is a commentator on the arts and is a regular contributor to local and national journals.

1 What is depression - TERRAM PACIS. https://www.terrampacis.org/media/videos/what-is-depression-238.html
2 Suicide rate for Indigenous Australians remains ... https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2019/09/26/suicide-rate-indigenous-australians-remains-distressingly-high
3 All artist's quotes provided to the author March 2021
4 *Max Richter's Sleep*, Directed by Natalie Johns, 99 minutes, 2020, Madman Entertainmen

Contemplating Darkness within Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514)



The following is a brief meditation on the engraving *Melencolia* (1514) by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). This is a work for these COVID-19 times reflecting the general malaise of our global community and the plight of the individual; where nothing goes as planned and when one's drive and spirit is held back by seemingly invisible forces. In contemplating this enigmatic print, I draw on my own experience as a practicing artist to consider potential meanings of darkness, stasis and the creative process.

The engraving itself is quite small at 23.9 x 18.9 cm (The Art Gallery of NSW) and could be folded neatly into an A5 notebook, however despite its small size it looms large within the imagination. The image depicts a point of stasis. Everything is motionless. I recognise this antechamber within my experience, when one's creative verve is becalmed; the room where one must wait, when a creative block has set in, as a result of attempting to go beyond the limits of one's immediate understanding.

A ladder appears to ascend. Solid objects are littered about in the open-air studio as apparent representations of Plato's ideal forms which through striving, work and contemplation, may potentially open doors to new worlds. The androgenous angel is heavy. Earthbound. For the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) "all angels are terrible" (German Literature. (n.d.)), for they carry a double purpose to potentially inspire the artist with luminous ideas within the everyday mundane world, or, alternatively to destroy and isolate the subject. Durer's angel is unable to soar and is moored within sickening solitude and inertia. This point of paralysis is somehow a psychic wall which must be transcended. In Aldous Huxley's (1894-1963) *Doors of Perception* there is a moment when, experiencing reality through an altered state, the writer pauses to wonder at the beauty of the folds of his trousers and is in total absorption as he contemplates the weave of the fabric cloth; it was a miraculous moment without the self-conscious burden of ego, where all was stripped away to reveal "naked existence" (Huxley, 1994). This state of total absorption appears within the print itself, in the way the artist has engraved the lines within the folds of the dress of the angel with absolute clarity. It is engraved with a numberless configuration of dots, lines, dashes and swirls with an almost hallucinogenic crispness which at times threatens to overwhelm the image with a material darkness. This darkness is also a psychic state which can incapacitate, if not devastate the subject.

At the top left-hand corner, a bat shrieks through nature, holding aloft a sign 'Melencolia I'. During Dürer's time, each individual was thought to be dominated by one of the four humors, with melancholy associated with bile being the least desirable of the four (The Met Museum. (n.d.)). From a humanist perspective this excess of black bile was a kind of gift, for it bestowed a quality of attention which enabled the highest degree of creativity, which however came with attendant costs.

In summary, it is true that depression can destroy a person, however within Dürer's print is an invitation to look at depression in another way. If today we can see this state of melancholia as holding potential for new insights, then the pain of going through such terrible moments in our lives may be seen to hold some benefit both for the individual and society.

Paul Uhlmann

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Resources

If you, or someone you know, would like to talk further about mental health, we recommend the following resources.

Black Dog Institute
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
Mental health resources and support tools.

Lifeline
13 11 14
lifeline.org.au
Provides all Australians access to crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Mensline Australia
1300 789 978
mensline.org.au
A telephone and online counselling service offering support for Australian men.

Kids help line
1800 55 1800
kidshelpline.com.au
Free phone and online counselling service for young people. Available 24/7.

Suicide Call Back Service
1300 659 467
Provides immediate telephone counselling and support in a crisis. Available 24/7.

1800 RESPECT
1800 737 732
Support if you, or someone you know, is experiencing sexual assault or domestic and family violence.

Beyond Blue
1300 224 636
www.beyondblue.org.au
Provides support programs to address issues related to depression, suicide, anxiety disorders and other related mental illnesses.

Reach Out
www.reachout.com.au
Online youth mental health service.

ACON
www.acon.org.au
A counselling and support service for LGBTQI+ people and people with HIV.

NACCHO
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
www.naccho.org.au
02 6246 9300
Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and Aboriginal Medical Services in each state and territory.

National Art School

156 Forbes Street
Darlinghurst, Sydney
NSW 2010
+61 2 9339 8744
nas.edu.au
CRICOS 03197B

Edith Cowan University

270 Joondalup Dr
Joondalup
WA 6027
134 328
ecu.edu.au

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PROGRAM PARTNERS

MAJOR SUPPORTER

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