

# Art

JOHN MCDONALD

## Market forces

Singapore v Hong Kong is shaping up to be the great rivalry in international art fairs.

Visitors to the new Singapore Art Fair were greeted by a large Robert Indiana sculpture spelling out the word "LOVE". It was an invitation to share a love of contemporary art that has struggled to take root in this prosperous island state. This time around, there was no room for hesitation.

Ever since Singapore signalled its intentions to become a culture hub with the establishment of a National Arts Council in 1991, it has worked tirelessly to promote an interest in the visual arts. The Singapore Art Museum was opened in 1996, and the National Gallery in 2015. There have been seven Singapore biennales since 2006, the most recent – named *Natasha* – runs until March 19.

This month saw Singapore re-enter the contemporary art fair circuit, big time, with the inaugural edition of Art SG. One of the major motivations for trying again has been the problems that have befallen Singapore's great rival, Hong Kong. During the past decade, as Hong Kong's Art Basel fair has grown in global importance, Singapore has struggled to compete. This is partly because of Hong Kong's liberal approach to taxes and duties, but also because of a fundamental difference in popular support. Despite Singapore's sustained focus on the arts, it has proven difficult to build audiences.

With the disruptions of the pandemic and the new laws imposed by Beijing, there has been a flight of capital from Hong Kong, and questions raised over connections to an international art market that had previously seemed assured. Encouraged by a significant number of businesses that have relocated from Hong Kong, Singapore saw its chance.

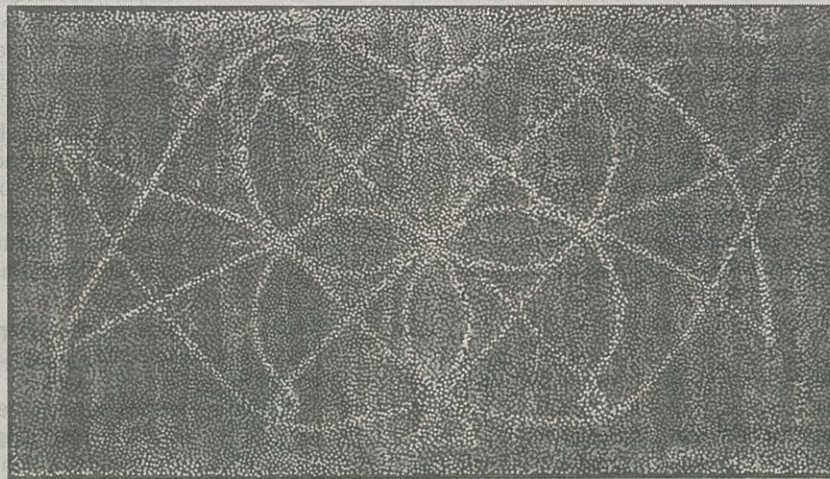
Throughout Art SG 2023, Hong Kong was the elephant in the room. Dealers were divided between those who had switched their allegiance to Singapore and those who believed Hong Kong would bounce back. Even those who were going to show with Art Basel Hong Kong, from March 23, were happy to experiment with the Singapore fair, and hope it succeeds. The reason is simple: Singapore is so wealthy it represents a gigantic potential market if the art bug takes hold.

Art SG was organised by a group called The Art Assembly, fronted by three highly experienced campaigners in Sandy Angus, Tim Etchells and Magnus Renfrew. This is the same group that runs Sydney Contemporary, along with fairs in Taipei, New Delhi and Shanghai. These three men have been closely involved with the rise of the Hong Kong contemporary art market, as was the Art SG director, Shuyin Yang.

Regardless of track records, it was always going to be a risky exercise to launch a new fair in Singapore in January, at a time when the world was still easing out of COVID-19 restrictions and coping with chaotic, expensive air travel.

The first big achievement of Art SG was to secure 164 exhibitors, by far the largest group of galleries to be assembled in Singapore. Final attendance was posted at 42,706. To put that into perspective, last year's Sydney Contemporary featured 95 galleries, with 28,000 visitors. According to a press release, this represented "huge success".

In this game, however, there are many ways of measuring success. For Art SG, one early breakthrough was to sign a sizeable group of uber galleries, including David Zwirner, Gagosian, Lehmann Maupin, Pace, Perrotin, Thaddaeus Ropac, Templon, and White Cube. These are among the world's largest and wealthiest art dealers, with a clientele drawn from the ever-expanding ranks of global



Clockwise from main: Alvin Ong's *Baby*; Grace Wright's *Finding You Here Again (2022)*; Art SG secured 164 exhibitors; Daniel Boyd's *Untitled (TFPisd)*.

billionaires. Some, like Gagosian – which boasts 22 outlets – are virtually multinational corporations, with queues of clients willing to take the dealer's advice on which high-priced artwork they should acquire next.

In today's contemporary art ecology, museums play a role in raising the profile of an artist, the critics a much smaller role. The real power lies with the big commercial galleries that create new stars, consolidate reputations and cultivate influential collectors and curators. For an artist, being taken on by a top gallery is a vital step towards getting one's work into museums and important private collections. So much for fame and money. Can a place in history be far away?

The big galleries act as drawcards for collectors and as status symbols for a fair. Sydney Contemporary 2022 had none of these prestige exhibitors, which confirms Australia's marginal status in world art. Singapore did much better, but it must be admitted few dealers put their best foot forward. Their most desirable art was kept for another day (possibly in Basel or Miami).

Another coup was the sponsorship of UBS, the Swiss bank that has identified itself more comprehensively with the international contemporary art market than any of its competitors. The art fairs have become an integral part of UBS's world marketing strategy, with its logo acting as a badge of quality, like a Michelin star for a restaurant.

The actual organisation of the fair was strictly hierarchical: the major galleries were located downstairs at the Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre, while the top level hosted a mix of special projects, mid-range and emerging galleries. There was a section called Reframe, which featured digital art and NFTs, and the usual lively program of talks and presentations, including a mind-expanding interview with Hiroshi Sugimoto, the Japanese artist known for small, minimalist photos of the sea, who is now designing buildings and landscapes.

From an Australian perspective, Art SG offered an entrance point into the international market for those few dealers willing to venture beyond our shores. There were exactly four: Sullivan + Strumpf, Station, Chalk Horse and Yavuz. By now, Sullivan + Strumpf has established itself as Australia's most internationally ambitious gallery. It has been a consistent attendee at art fairs, while richer, more established galleries have decided to stay home. This consistency is paying off in terms of sales, new collectors and a new stable of Asian contemporary artists. Singaporean artist Dawn Ng, who shows with S+S, was featured in a solo exhibition held in the UBS lounge. Other artists, such as Sam Jinks, Alex Seton and Sam Leach, have proven to be art fair favourites.

Station, with galleries in Sydney and Melbourne, held a solo exhibition of new

paintings by Reko Rennie. Founded in 2011, the gallery has risen through the ranks in stealthy fashion and is now attracting a good deal of attention. It's a risk-taker, willing to get behind some of the more adventurous art being made in Australia today.

Sydney gallery Chalk Horse is not one of the wealthiest galleries but it has contracted a real passion for the fairs. At Art SG, a show of paintings by Clara Adolphs sold out. As for Yavuz, the gallery was established in Singapore long before it opened in Sydney but has rapidly become one of the most talked-about venues in town. At Art SG, Yavuz showed Aussies such as Abdul Abdullah and Guido Maestri alongside Asian artists.

Australian artists also featured with some of the international dealers. A powerful diptych by Aida Tomescu could be found at Flowers (London/Hong Kong), while Daniel Boyd was showing with Kukje Gallery (Seoul/Busan). Auckland gallery Starkwhite held a solo exhibition of amazingly *chic* minimalist works by Sydney artist Jonny Niesche, and sold everything in sight.

The real success of Art SG can't be assessed until Art Basel Hong Kong appears at the end of March, which will allow us to see whether there has been a transfer of power in the Asian contemporary art market. As Art Basel is already boasting 177 exhibitors, thoughts of Hong Kong's demise may be premature. While the response to the first Art SG augurs well for its future, this race has a long way to run before the baton changes hands.

John McDonald was a guest of Art SG 2023.



Bowness, Tate

## Both sides now

The work of esteemed sculptor Barbara Hepworth can be seen to embody both feminine and masculine qualities

**T**hroughout the centuries and around the world, sculpture has taken two main forms: carving and modelling. The first process is subtractive, cutting away material to reveal the figure; the second additive, building it up in a malleable substance such as wax or clay. To these can be added, in the last century, assemblage and welding, in both of which existing materials are altered or brought together into new configurations.

The earliest sculptures were no doubt carved from wood, initially probably as decorations on the handles of tools and then as fetish or magical figures, perhaps beginning with pieces of wood whose natural shape inherently suggested a figure or features. But already by the later Stone Age, neolithic peoples from Stonehenge to Malta began to erect the massive monuments we call megalithic. Those at Filitosa in the south of Corsica may be the earliest to have schematic facial features.

Modelling in clay is no doubt also very old, but unless fired into ceramic form remains ephemeral. Ceramic sculpture itself has an important history, from Tang China to the Della Robbia workshop in renaissance Florence, but the highest vocation of modelling was as a preparation for bronze casting, which was perfected as a medium for full-scale statues in Greece in the fifth century BC. At the height of the classical period, the most important freestanding sculptures were in bronze, while architectural reliefs were carved in marble.

Many great sculptors in modern times have practised both of these processes, like Donatello, the most remarkable bronze sculptor since antiquity, and yet also a masterful carver in both marble and wood. Michelangelo, in contrast, was almost exclusively a carver, and his whole conception of the art of sculpture was based on his experience of carving, which he saw as a process of liberating from the block a form already virtually existing within it.

At the same time, his unparalleled genius for imagining that virtual shape in the block allowed him to work in a way unlike any other carver before or since. The usual process is to draw the intended figure on all four sides of a block and then begin to work your way in carefully, taking care not to take off too much in any one spot. Michelangelo understood or conceived the latent form so clearly that he could simply cut in from the front of the block, which is why his unfinished slaves, unique in the history of sculpture, appear to struggling to break loose from the stone.

### CHRISTOPHER ALLEN

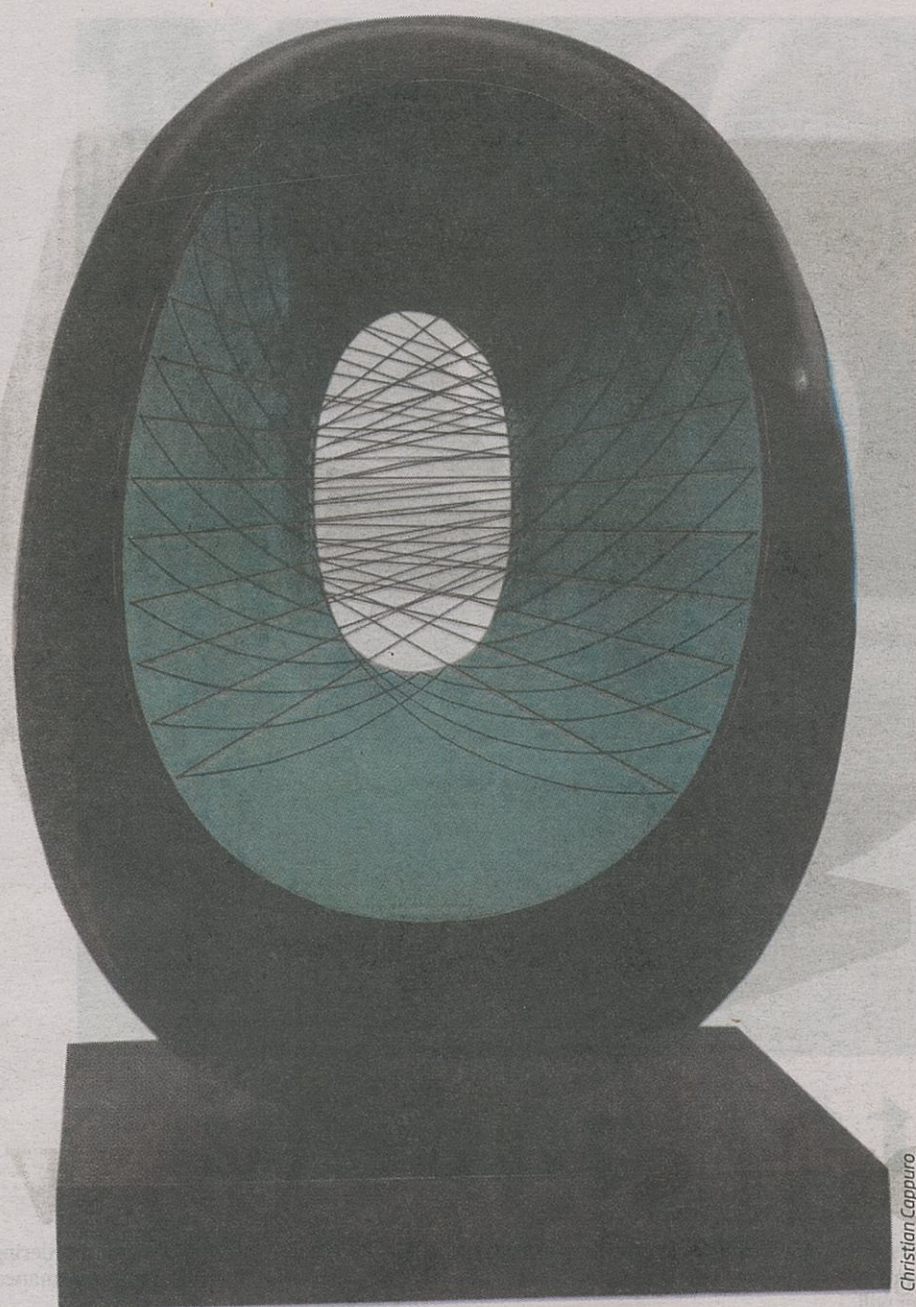


**Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium**  
Heide Museum and Art Gallery, until March 23

Bernini too was a natural carver of prodigious ability, although his style was radically different from that of Michelangelo. Rodin on the other hand was a modeller, whose greatest works are all in bronze, and hardly ever touched a chisel. Even *The Kiss*, though executed in marble, was copied by an assistant from a model first formed in clay and then cast in plaster. Such reproduction was made considerably easier by the use of a so-called pointing machine, which contributed to the rapid manufacture of sometimes lifeless copies by artists of average skill – although admittedly still surpassing the ability of most sculptors today.

By the end of the 19th century, several currents converged to set the scene for modernist sculpture. For one thing there was a renewed interest in carving, and particularly direct carving, rather than copying from a model, especially with the aid of the pointing machine. This went hand-in-hand with a concern for the integrity of materials, promoted by Ruskin in his criticism of the illusionism of late Gothic tracery and of Baroque sculpture; marble can represent flesh or fabric, but should never lose the sense of being stone.

The concern for authenticity in process and in materials led to a revaluation of archaic Greek sculpture around the turn of the 20th century. Previously, these stone carvings of youths from the seventh and sixth centuries BC had been regarded as a primitive stage of Greek sculpture; they were not even given the generic name "kouros" until the beginning of the 20th century. But now they became archetypal expressions of the art of sculpture; in 1908 Rainer Maria Rilke published his famous poem "Archaic torso of Apollo", and there is a photograph of Matisse, undoubtedly influenced by his friendship with Rilke, sketching another one in the Louvre in 1932.



Christian Coppuro



Christian Coppuro

Primitivism as a new interest in earlier and simpler forms of art, and as a source of renewal for artists who had grown up in the culturally stale world of modern mass society, led to the rediscovery or new appreciation of many forms of earlier artistic expression, from the Spanish Romanesque sculpture and painting that fascinated Picasso, as we saw in the recent Melbourne exhibition, to the masks and fetishes of the tribal peoples of the Pacific and Africa and even, in Barbara Hepworth's oeuvre, of the colossal standing stones of the megalithic period.

Hepworth (1903-75) was heir to all of these developments, a contemporary of Henry Moore (1898-1986) and almost a generation younger than Jacob Epstein (1880-1959). Born in Yorkshire, she studied at the Leeds School of Art (1920-21), where she met Moore, who remained a lifelong friend, and then at the Royal College of Art (1921-24); there she met a fellow student, John Skeaping, whom she married in Florence in 1925, while they were both studying in Italy. They had one son together before separating in 1931, when she fell in love with Ben Nicholson, an abstract painter.

Her earliest work in this exhibition is from just after this period. *Kneeling Figure* (1932) is a fine example of the modernist ethos of truth to materials and direct carving, even preserving the lower part of the original rosewood block as a base, so that we are reminded of the initial mass from which the figure has been cut; the kneeling posture allows the figure to be more compact and thus make more economical use of the block and many parts of it, like the back, elbows or lower knee are only just inside the virtual frame of which the base reminds us.

Hepworth had triplets with Nicholson in 1934, and at the outbreak of war in 1939 they moved to St Ives in Cornwall, where she would live for the rest of her life. This idyllic seaside environment, far more peaceful and more spacious than London, is evoked in the exhibition in a short documentary film written by Cecil Day-Lewis, *Figures in a landscape* (1953) which also includes fascinating footage of the artist at work.

Cornwall is an ancient Celtic land, dotted with megalithic standing stones which later directly inspired Hepworth's quasi-figural vertical pieces. But it is also, as Day-Lewis reminds us, a geologically ancient land formed of granite but subject to the endless erosion of wind and water. Corsica too is a granite island – the title indeed of Dorothy Carrington's famous book, subtitled *A Portrait of Corsica* (1971) – but also subject to the wind and wave erosion that produces the extraordinary hol-

low forms called "tafoni". Sydney sandstone displays similar forms but is of course a much softer material, so that the extent of erosion is less surprising.

Having just been in Corsica a couple of months ago, I was reminded of these natural shapes by the hollow forms characteristic of Hepworth's mature sculptures. At the same time, they and her equally original pierced sculptures are inherently feminine and evocative of the womb. As Day-Lewis suggests, some of these naturally hollow forms appear to have been associated both with birth and death – an inevitable and cyclical link – by the early inhabitants of this country.

Hepworth's sculptures play on the tension between convex exteriors and concave interiors, as though between complementary male and female energies. The inside spaces are often complex, none more so than the largest example in the exhibition, *Corinthos* (1954-55), made after the loss of her son by her first marriage in a flying accident, and a subsequent trip to Greece.

On her return to St Ives she found that her travelling companion had sent her a shipment of a hardwood from Nigeria that was apparently several centuries old. One

segment of this remarkable timber was carved into this work with a title inspired by her recent travels. Although the outside of the wood is varnished and the interior painted white, Hepworth does not let us forget the original form of the timber as a segment of tree trunk.

The inside is particularly intriguing, carved into a series of curved planes that intersect and suggest a kind of inwardly-spiralling vortex. Thus the interior space is in no sense amorphous, but rather shaped by energy and movement, here articulated as sculptural form. In other cases this otherwise invisible energy may be represented by her distinctive use of strings or thread.

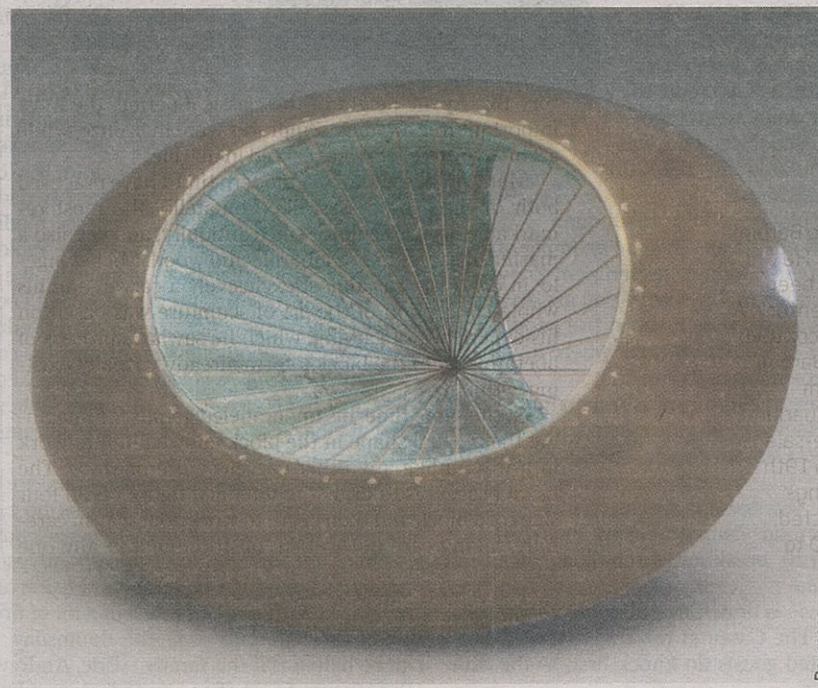
But Hepworth's threads have other associations too. They recall the rigging of the boats she watched sailing out to the sea every day; or the strings of a musical instrument; or even the lacing of clothes, boots or a sack. In one of the most perfect of her hollow and pierced forms, *Spring* (1966), by now translated into bronze but painted green inside, the string is attached in a way that deliberately alludes to lacing.

All of the associations I have suggested – rigging, musical strings, lacing – entail tension, whether because they are holding a mast erect, producing a particular musical note or fastening clothes or shoes. And of all of these, it is perhaps the fastening that is most directly relevant to Hepworth's sculpture, for one can interpret the tautly-drawn strings as holding together the quintessentially different worlds of the inside and outside, the masculine and the feminine dimensions of her sculpture.

This is one of the ways we can think about the "equilibrium" of the exhibition's title. Sculpture requires this quality in so many ways: in the first place, a sculpture has to be able to stand on its own feet, unless it is conceived as a mural. Hepworth herself said, in a passage quoted on one of the wall panels, "In sculpture there must be a complete realisation of the structure and quality of the stone or wood which is being carved. But I do not think that this alone supplies the life and vitality of the sculpture. I believe that the understanding of the material and the meaning of the form being carved must be in perfect equilibrium."

Here she begins by acknowledging the fundamental modernist demand for truth and integrity in the handling of materials, but goes on to assert the further principle that form and content, or material and idea, must also be in harmony. The strings that lace up the inside and the outside of her sculptures, in their taut stillness, invite us to contemplate the artist's reconciliation, or at least her momentary resolution, of fathomless opposites.

**Clockwise from facing page, Barbara Hepworth's: *Corinthos* 1954-1955; *Spring* (1966); *Kneeling Figure* (1932); and *Sculpture with Colour and Strings* 1939**



Bowness

## 12 Visual arts

### PUBLIC WORKS

Joan Grounds, Ceramic Parcel, 1972. Powerhouse Collection. On display in exhibition Clay Dynasty, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, until March 5.

Bronwyn Watson

In 1969 American-born artist Joan Grounds arrived in Sydney after having spent two years travelling in Africa. She was a graduate of the University of California and had trained in sculpture and ceramics in the early 60s under the renowned American abstract expressionist ceramist Peter Voulkos, who was known for his radical dismissal of the borders between craft and art.

Grounds also believed in the need to eliminate these divisions between craft and art, and this is reflected in her practice that includes ceramics, sculpture, video art, film, site installation, and performance art. She also taught ceramics at East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School) in Sydney and was a teacher and the director at the Tin Sheds, the Sydney University art workshop.

In the early 1970s Grounds created 20 hand-built, unglazed stoneware postal packages that authentically mimicked real packages with faux postal marks, addresses, and glazed ceramic panels imitating stamps. Two of the works from Grounds' Ceramic Parcels series are in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney and are currently on display in an exhibition, Clay Dynasty. One of the parcels is labelled "fragile" in bold red letters, contains two functional stoneware cups and a teapot, and is addressed to leading commercial galleries Watters Gallery in Sydney, and Powell Street Gallery in Melbourne.

At the Powerhouse Museum, the curator of decorative arts and design, Eva Czernis-Ryl says that Grounds's influence as an artist and a teacher was considerable and that the Ceramic Parcels are rare survivors from the artist's first ceramics exhibitions, the first held at Watters Gallery in 1972, and the second a year later at Powell Street Gallery. Both galleries were renowned for championing experimental artists. "Her sculptures, particularly her cushion-shaped, hollow ceramic parcels explored the notions of value of art, utility, and fragility and more broadly the current, low art status of ceramics," Czernis-Ryl says. "Grounds also saw her parcels as a vehicle for social comment, screen printing them with self-designed postal stamps referring to contemporary events and issues such as the opening of the Sydney Opera House and the Vietnam War."

Other parcels dealt with sociopolitical issues including censorship, environmentalism, nuclear power, and Australia's purchase of F-111 jet-fighters.

Grounds's ceramic parcels were a high point of the Australian art scene in the early 1970s, Czernis-Ryl says. "Her parcels provide one of the few direct links between early expressionist American ceramics and Australia. A witty statement on freedom of expression, craftsmanship, and the fragility and strength of clay, they still resonate with contemporary audiences as a comment in the infinite art-craft debate. These works document a powerful voice of one of the most original Australian female artists of her generation."

Materials: stoneware

Dimensions: 340 (height) x 360 (width) x 145 (depth) mm

### SALEROOM

One of the leading glass artists of the 20th century was Alfredo Barbini (1912-2007) who was born on the islands of Murano in Venice. He started learning glassmaking at the age of 10 as his family had been prominent glassblowers and beadmakers since the late 16th century. A glass piece by Barbini was one of the top sales at a two-day decorative and collectables auction held by Leski Auctions in Melbourne. Barbini's Cenedese "Aquarium" Murano glass fish block, which dates from around 1960, stands 24cm high and features three fish and aquarium plants. It sold for \$6572 (including buyer's premium) from a pre-sale estimate of \$3000 to \$5000. The top sale of the auction was a 19th century Black Forest "Trumpeter" German table clock with spring-driven movement and an ornately carved case. The clock attracted nine bids and sold for \$8365 from a pre-sale estimate of \$1500 to \$2500. The second top sale was a Blanc de chine Chinese porcelain statue of a Buddha, dating from the 19th to 20th century. It attracted seven bids and sold for \$6572, well above its pre-sale estimate of \$300 to \$500.

Bronwyn Watson

# Shake-up puts arts body back in box seat

MATTHEW WESTWOOD  
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

The Australia Council for the Arts will go through its biggest shake up in nearly 50 years and have its funding levels restored as part of the Albanese government's \$286m national cultural policy to be launched on Monday.

In a major regear for the federal arts agency first established in 1968, the Australia Council will be renamed Creative Australia and expanded to include new bodies to promote contemporary music, writers and illustrators, and Indigenous artists.

It will also link government funding to safe workplaces, following several high-profile MeToo allegations in the arts and entertainment sector.

Workplaces that don't meet minimum standards to protect against harassment and bullying may have funding removed.

The government is also expected to require global streaming giants such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney+ to produce Australian programs, with legislation due later this year after a period of consultation.

Industry body Screen Producers Australia has said 20 per cent of local revenues earned by multinational companies should be reinvested in Australian content.

In a sign Labor is seeking to align cultural policy with popular artforms, federal Arts Minister Tony Burke will on Monday announce the cultural policy, called Revive, at live-music venue the Esplanade Hotel in Melbourne.

The new-look Creative Australia will receive a boost of \$50m a year to about \$269m annually, restoring funding in real terms to the level it was before Coalition cuts in 2014 and 2015.

Anthony Albanese said the cultural policy was a new chapter for the sector following a "decade of neglect and funding cuts" by the former government. "Our new cultural policy Revive will provide the support Australian artists need to thrive and grow," the Prime Minister said. "I am excited by the potential it will unleash, and to see our extraordinary and diverse Australian stories continue to be told with originality, wit, creativity and flair."

"It builds on the proud legacies of earlier Labor governments that recognised the importance of art and culture to our identity, social unity and economic prosperity."

Founded by the Gorton government in 1968, the Australia Council is the main distributor of federal government subsidy for independent artists, small arts companies and major organisations such as Opera Australia and the Australian Ballet.

The rebadging as Creative Australia signals a potential shift to a wider remit to include creative industries and popular art-forms. The establishment of a new body called Music Australia follows a campaign by a coalition of 18 music industry bodies, including rights collection agency APRA AMCOS.

Mr Burke said he would introduce legislation to protect Indigenous cultural knowledge, including measures to reduce the harm caused by fake art.

The government would also provide funding for new Indigenous art galleries planned for Alice Springs and Perth, and \$11m to promote Indigenous languages.

The First Nations-led body within Creative Australia would give First Nations people autonomy over decisions and investments, Mr Burke said.

Monday's policy announcement will not include desperately needed funding increases for Canberra's national collections including the National Gallery of Australia and the National Library of Australia, which say cash shortfalls will soon eat into public access to their facilities. Instead, funding for the collections is expected to be considered as part of the government's budget deliberations. The new Centre for Arts and Entertainment Workplaces, to be part of Creative Australia, is intended to ensure creative workers are fairly paid and not subject to bullying and harassment.

Annabelle Herd, chief executive of music industry bodies ARIA and PPCA, welcomed the government's commitment to address misconduct in the sector.

Mr Burke said the cultural policy would include other initiatives to boost creative industries that generate \$17bn a year and employ an estimated 400,000 people.

MEDIA P19



In her fine-art photographic series *Mountain Ash*, depicting the forests around Marysville in Victoria's High Country, Christine Goerner uses a telephoto lens to select areas of the landscape where the bleached dead trunks of mountain ash trees, killed by the Black Saturday bushfires, are still standing *en masse*. There's a strange, haunting beauty to this image, rendered in a pink colour palette; all those bare trunks are a stark reminder of the death and destruction wreaked in those terrible few weeks in 2009, and yet if you look closely you'll see young regrowth pushing up everywhere among the corpses. Is this an image that shows Mother Nature reasserting herself, then? The answer to that question is rather nuanced, it turns out.

No one knows the forests around Marysville like the ANU's Professor David Lindenmayer, whose ecological studies there go back 40 years. One key thing to know, he says, is that old-growth forest always burns much less severely in a bushfire than young forest. And around Marysville only a tiny proportion of old trees remain, thanks to the commercial logging of old-growth that



ended only in 1991. Those massed bare trunks, which he estimates at 50m tall? They belonged to trees that were only 70 years old – teenagers, in mountain ash terms – when they were killed by the Black Saturday bushfires; that surge of regrowth is only 14 years old. When he looks at this landscape, what Lindenmayer sees is a vulnerable, flammable young forest. “We can only hope it doesn’t burn again in the next few decades,” he says. “If it does, it’s likely to be very severe, and the mountain ash around Marysville will be lost altogether – the system will just collapse into an acacia woodland.”

The mountain ash, *Eucalyptus regnans*, grows phenomenally fast, and in old age can top 100m in ideal conditions. The future of these young Marysville forests may be uncertain, but Goerner, 58, will be along for the ride. She has loved these trees since she played in their shade as a child on family camping trips. This image is from the upcoming second instalment of her acclaimed *Mountain Ash* series. Next, she’s going to photograph the place in winter. “I’m hoping to capture it in snowfall,” she says. “Imagine how beautiful that would look.”

PHOTOGRAPHY CHRISTINE GOERNER BY ROSS BILTON

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE 11



Anthony Albanese with singer Missy Higgins at the policy launch at the Esplanade Hotel in St Kilda. PHOTO: SCOTT McNAUGHTON

## Arts policy rains cash and warm words

Michael Bailey

Arts company chiefs have welcomed the cultural policy unveiled by the Albanese government yesterday, as much for its arts-affirming rhetoric as for the \$286 million in new funding it has promised for the sector.

The centrepiece of the policy is the replacement of the Australia Council with a new grants body, Creative Australia. Full funding details for the body are to be revealed in the May budget.

The body would provide more support for commercial art forms competing for global audiences—art forms that had been marginalised in government funding decisions, said Arts Minister Tony Burke.

The contemporary music industry is to get \$69 million for the creation of Music Australia, which will play the role that Screen Australia plays for the film business, with a remit to invest in the development, production and promotion of Australian music.

Unified Music founder Jaddan Comerford, who is about to embark with management client Vance Joy on a US tour for which 100,000 tickets have been sold, said he was “thrilled” that the “huge export potential” of Australia’s music industry had been acknowledged.

Writers get a \$19.3 million advocacy body and a \$13 million digital lending rights scheme, closing a loophole that left authors unpaid when their e-book was borrowed from a public library.

Among other big spending in the policy, there is \$44 million of new grant money for Creative Australia to bolster youth participation in the arts. Mr Burke said the amount is equal to the amount the old Australia Council cumulatively had lost since its funding was cut by the Coalition government in 2014.

That body will also oversee a new \$19 million “works of scale” fund, which will encourage big collaborative pieces by Australian arts companies.

Another \$11.8 million will go to the National Gallery of Australia to help it tour its collection around the country.

“It’s not right that at any given time, 99 per cent of our national gallery’s collection is stored away in darkness,” Mr Burke said.

As notable as the money was the rhetoric in the launch of the cultural policy at Melbourne’s storied live music venue, the Esplanade Hotel.

“The creative industries are an important part of our economy ... but it’s also important to lift yourself above the usual economic debate,” Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said. “This

is about our soul ... It is literally through the arts that we build our identity as a nation and a people.”

Sydney Dance Company chairman Brett Clegg said such language represented “a very welcome elevation of arts in the national conversation”.

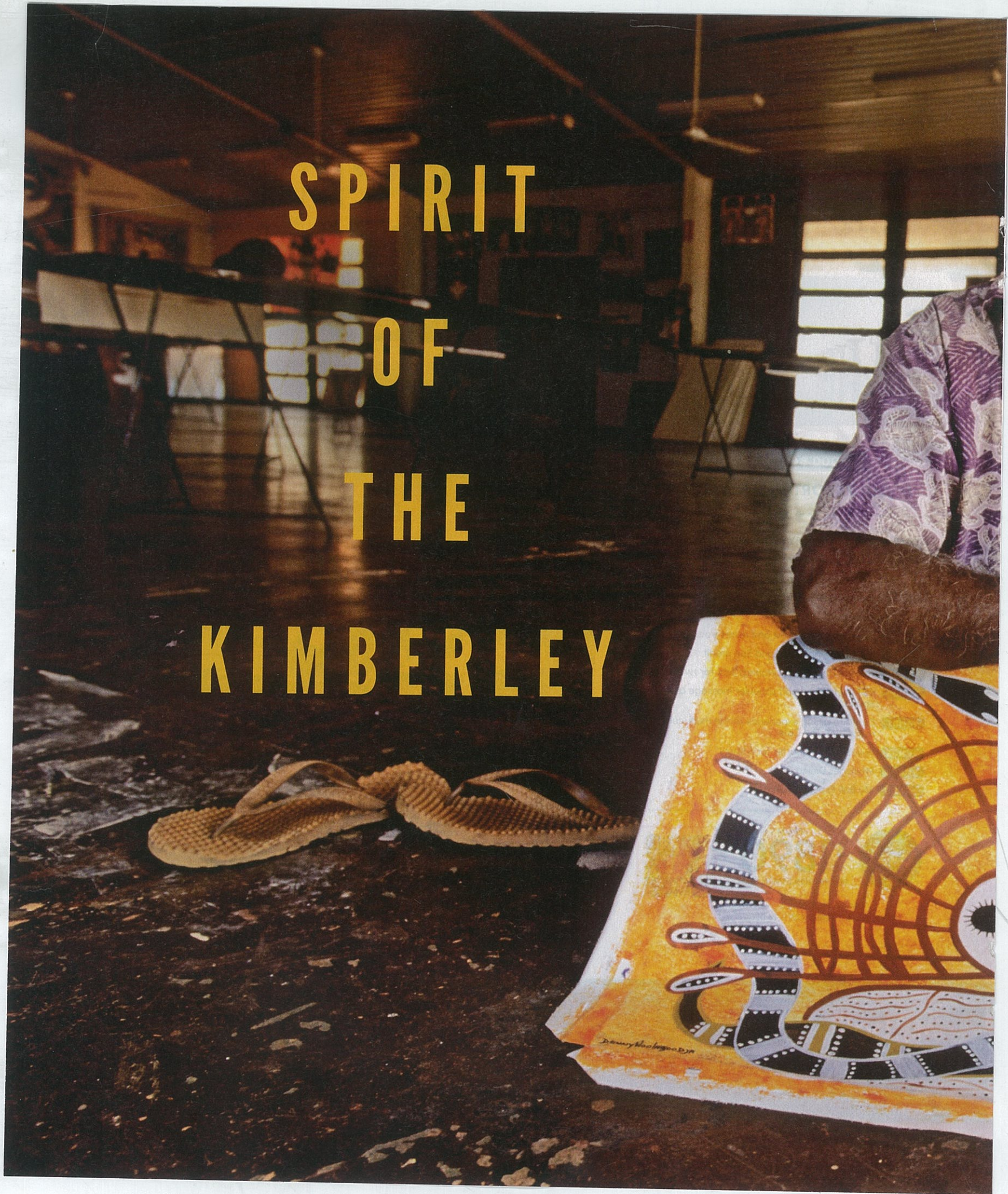
“While the policy is not a magic wand for all participants ... it should be applauded for highlighting the industry’s contribution towards employment and economic activity, as well as the vital role that the arts play in shaping our identity as a nation.”

Opera Australia chairman Rod Sims applauded the principle of inclusion in the policy, not only in the “works of scale” funding, but also in measures such as the new Centre For Arts and Entertainment Workplaces, which will address workplace complaints.

Richard Evans, chairman of Live Performance Australia and managing director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, welcomed a commitment to report on the industry every three years.

However, opposition spokesman on the arts, Paul Fletcher, argued there was actually only about \$240 million of new money, because \$45 million had been raised by the government cancelling the Coalition’s Temporary Interruption Fund for the film industry.

# SPIRIT OF THE KIMBERLEY





*The Weekend Australian,  
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## Two giants of Indigenous culture, and one mission: to shine a light on their world

BY VICTORIA LAURIE

Inside an art gallery on a busy Sydney street, crowds were milling around the paintings of wide-eyed spirit figures from the far northwest of the Kimberley region. It was the final day of the *Power of the Wandjina* exhibition when a group of sports event organisers arrived, not to buy a painting but to look for an elusive image. The 2000 Sydney Olympic committee was on the hunt for a key element in the Awakening section of the opening ceremony that would reflect the living culture of Australia's First Nations people.

And there it was, a floating figure whose staring, mouthless face was framed by a dramatic headdress of cobweb-like complexity. It was Namaralay the creator, a Wandjina spirit that had been painted both on canvas and on rock in a distant cave by artist Donny Woolagoodja. It would become the centrepiece image of the Olympic opening ceremony, an imposing figure that rose up over the main stadium like a benign, all-seeing parent.

"They looked at my painting and they liked it," Woolagoodja recalled later. "I told them that I had to talk to other people before I could say yes. We had a meeting at Mowanjumb when I came back from the exhibition and I got all the permissions from my Worrorra mob, the old people and the artists. They said, 'It is OK to do it'." Woolagoodja described how his art was

linked to Lalai, the Dreaming, and how the Wandjina were visible manifestations of supernatural beings who created the world before transforming themselves into paintings.

Woolagoodja flew to Sydney for the opening of the Olympics. He sat in the stands among Australians who had never heard of his Wanjinna Wunggurr culture from the north-west Kimberley; nor had billions of people around the world who had tuned in to watch.

"When he [Namaralay] came up in the opening ceremony, it made that emotion come out, like when you lose your own relation," Woolagoodja said later. He vowed to make a trip back to the cave rock art site to "refresh" Namaralay, in the place where his great great grandfather Indamoi had painted an earlier image. "When I cried for him I knew he was asking me to go back there and do that for him... because I'd showed him to the world. He drew me back to the cave."

On September 18 last year, Woolagoodja – a quietly authoritative teacher, lawman, artist and author who for decades had been one of the key voices explaining the Wanjinna Wunggurr world to an academic and lay audience – died at the age of 74. In a quirk of fate, only six days earlier another giant of Kimberley art and culture, Janet Oobagooma – with whom Woolagoodja had a deep connection – had died. "We mourn the passing of [these] two most senior Traditional Owners," wrote Dr Martin Porr from the University of Western Australia's Centre for Rock Art Research & Management. "We celebrate their lives and their invaluable contributions to the continuation of their community, as knowledge holders and advocates for their people." He might have added that as a final act the two elders made a gift of knowledge to the world, shedding light on a mysterious German expedition and Kimberley paintings lodged in an institution across the globe.

**Woolagoodja's funeral** in November, two months after his death, was crowded with mourners paying their respects; 14 pallbearers carried his casket.

The funeral was "exhaustingly sad but respectfully completed," says anthropologist Kim Doohan, who had worked closely with her friend of 30 years. In mid-December, Woolagoodja's family took his remains to a remote coastal spot that he had once nominated as the place of his conception, "a whirlpool where two tides meet in the blue sea... I am that whirlpool".

Woolagoodja's nephew, Adrian Lane, says the global spotlight that fell on Kimberley culture in the wake of the Sydney Olympics had been predicted by senior men in the early '90s. "They said, 'One day the world is going to come for us,' and it did," says Lane. "The Olympics showcased all that stuff, our world view, who we are and where this place is."

Yet Woolagoodja had been a champion of his culture long before the Games came along. He made regular visits to significant sites, took part in recording the region's fauna and flora, established tourism ventures, and painted artworks that were sought after by galleries and international collectors. After the Olympics, he designed a building for his community at

## "I think of Donny and Janet as the last of the tribesmen"



Mowanjum, near Derby, as a place to display and sell the community's art. From above, the roof traces the outline of the watchful Wandjina. "We have a very rich culture which is still here today," he wrote in his autobiography *Yornadai-yn Woolagoodja*. "We see it in the drawings on the rocks, the wildlife and the landscape."

"Donny was proud of everything he did for his people and the country," says Lane, a marine park ranger. "He knew all along that things were never going to remain the same. He wanted to grow the Wandjina art, documenting our law and culture and history to the nation."

Woolagoodja always referred to Janet Oobagooma in respectful cultural terms as "Mum", even though she was only five and a half years his senior. Born in Broome on the day in 1942 when Japanese forces bombed the town, she was raised in the remote Presbyterian mission at Kunmunya 350km further north. As a child, she travelled by canoe around parts of the Buccaneer Archipelago, where hundreds of largely untouched islands dot the ocean like tiny green jewels. Periodically, she and her people were moved off their traditional lands and into towns or settlements by missionaries or government. A deeply cultural woman, Oobagooma had learnt from her old people about the complex traditions and languages of three groups – Worrorra, Wunambal and Ngarinyin. Her Indigenous belief system sat comfortably with being a Christian. "God is a Wandjina, all right?" she told the ABC's *Compass* program in 2017, eyeballing the camera in a way that commanded attention. "A life giver, a food giver and a life saver." Her penetrating gaze and frank opinions earned her a reputation as wise counsel on many issues, from native title to youth pastoral care and faith. "But she had a sharp wit – she was good at one-liners," says Francis Woolagoodja, Lane's brother.

Francis invited Oobagooma along whenever they travelled by helicopter into remote country to carry out fire-burning. "After the wet season, you had to clean the leaves out of the caves before burning off so that they didn't cause a fire inside and turn the walls black. I would always take Janet back there so she could



introduce us [to ancestors] and talk in the language of that place. She would always talk first before we went in."

Francis and his brother were raised by both Oobagooma and "uncle" Woolagoodja after their mother died. They often spent weeks on boats travelling with Woolagoodja as they navigated the remotest recesses of the Kimberley coast. "When I was with him, I felt safe," says Francis. "Even when we were in a five-metre dinghy in a storm at night. I never felt I had to worry about anything."

One trip involved revisiting a cave containing a rock art painting, which an archaeologist friend of Woolagoodja was keen to inspect for changes in the pigment's colouring. "I have an image of Donny sitting outside his tent that day, a crocodile laying on the beach about 10m from him," says Lane. "He's like in another world, another aura. He said, 'I don't think we should go now [into the cave], it's not a good time'." But the archaeologist was keen to go ahead, and began walking towards the cave with her five-year-old son. Before long she ran back in a panic – the boy had disappeared. "Just like he was going to the shops or something, Donny gets up and strolls up to the cave," recalls Lane. Within a short time, he had found the little boy sitting under a tree.

"I think of Donny and Janet as the last of the tribesmen, the people who were born in and

walking that country," Lane adds. "There's very few left."

The knowledge of elders such as Woolagoodja and Oobagooma was crucial to gaining native title over their own lands under white law; one determination alone secured their native title rights over 16,000sq km of land and almost 12,000sq km of sea. The pair also contributed to dozens of academic papers, films, videos and several books described as "our modern way to leave our Wanjina Wungurr culture story to our children" – books such as *Keeping the Wandjina Fresh*, *Barddabardda Wodjenangorddee: We're Telling All of You*, and *We Are Coming To See You*.

Woolagoodja and Oobagooma had a hand in virtually every sentence of those written records, says Doohan, who assisted Woolagoodja to write his autobiography. "Both Donny and Janet had a very strong sense that if you don't know who you are and where you come from, you will be lost. And if you're lost, you can't protect your country or yourself."

The pair were also motivated by a sense of disquiet that, for too long, strangers had interpreted their culture and become "authorities" on their rock art. Oobagooma described her vexed feelings about it to an international conference in 2015. "Sometimes we hear about other people talking about our culture and we are worried because they do not know the real

**Centre stage:** Namaralay at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics; opposite, Janet Oobagooma. Opening page: Donny Woolagoodja in 2004

meaning of it," she said. "We are worried because they try to tell our young people and we do not want them to make a mistake."

**Yet late in life, and despite their misgivings** about outsiders, Woolagoodja and Oobagooma chose to be part of an international project spanning two continents and nearly a century. In 1938, a German artist visiting the remote Kimberley region asked an Aboriginal elder if she could sketch his portrait. It was Woolagoodja's great-great-grandfather Indamoi – the man whose rock art inspired his descendant's Olympic creation. The artist was part of a scientific party from the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt, headed by pioneering social anthropologist Leo Frobenius. His teams of anthropologists and illustrators had recorded prehistoric rock art in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, and now it was Australia's turn.

In an era when much of the Kimberley's interior was still unmapped, Frobenius's expeditioners spent several months interviewing Indigenous people and recording their culture. The task of two female artists was to record Kimberley rock art, especially the Wandjinas. "They sat in front of the rock art and reproduced it in a photographic way," explains Porr, from UWA's rock art centre. "They did the first systematic rock art recording in colour in Australia – paintings so accurate they were like photographs." German-born Porr, who migrated to Australia in 2008, had come across German-language references to the Frobenius expedition to Australia – and the archive in Frankfurt. "They were almost forensically looking at what happened back then, and they were quite respectful in a way that some anthropologists of that era were not."

Doohan says she was astonished to learn about the Frobenius archive. "It was absolutely unbelievable. They had been archived but unseen for more than 80 years." The expedition material needed to be translated, digitised and – importantly – repatriated in some form to the

Kimberley. Doohan and Porr began to consult with Indigenous communities and their elders; plans were made to travel to Frankfurt to view the Frobenius material and a later archive from a 1955 expedition, held in Munich.

Both Woolagoodja and Oobagooma were invited, but didn't feel they could make the long journey to Europe. Instead, they chose Leah Umbagai, Donny's granddaughter, to travel with Doohan on their behalf. "We went to Germany about four or five times – Donny and Janet encouraged us to do it," says Umbagai. "The paintings and the pictures of the old people blew me away – they got up close and personal with people I never got a chance to. And they held a lot of information that we don't have. I wanted young people to see it because we have problems with kids not knowing about their culture. We wanted the material to come back to the Kimberley for people to talk about."

The project has turned into a gift of mutual goodwill across time. A digital repatriation project has emerged between the Frobenius Institute, the University of Western Australia and three coordinating partners, the Wilinggin, Wunambal Gaambera and Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporations. An elaborate database, with English translations, is now digitally accessible to the relevant Aboriginal corporations. Groups of elders are able to correct or interpret historical accounts of their own flesh and blood. "They've often said, 'And here's a bit more that you should know'," observes Doohan. "Early on we started to relocate some important sites that we knew the expedition had been to. We went with Donny and Janet to those sites while they were still able, and we cor-



Goodwill: Woolagoodja with Frobenius Institute staff

rected the records. You're standing at the spot and you're saying to them, 'Well, this is what we have from what the Germans observed... what do you reckon?'" Did they object to the Germans' forensic scrutiny? "No, although they did identify when things should be restricted [from viewing]. Janet never liked it but she didn't dismiss everything they did as a result of that. She'd say, 'Well, they only talked to [Aboriginal informants] once', meaning that she strongly believed you couldn't understand the meaning of things on a single investigation."

Recently, the Frobenius Institute printed 150 art reproductions on sturdy material; two Frobenius researchers accompanied them to Australia. "Each copy was to exact scale – if the rock art image was five metres across, the copy is five metres across," says Porr. He hopes the cross-cultural project "can integrate the archive in Germany to the projects the communities have already been working on."

Members of some communities have already got a glimpse of the German collection, and more viewings are scheduled. Lillian Karadada says she enjoyed seeing the portraits of family members. "There was a photo of our grandfather with a young Jack Karadada, our father,

and it is probably the only one which exists. That's very special for us to see."

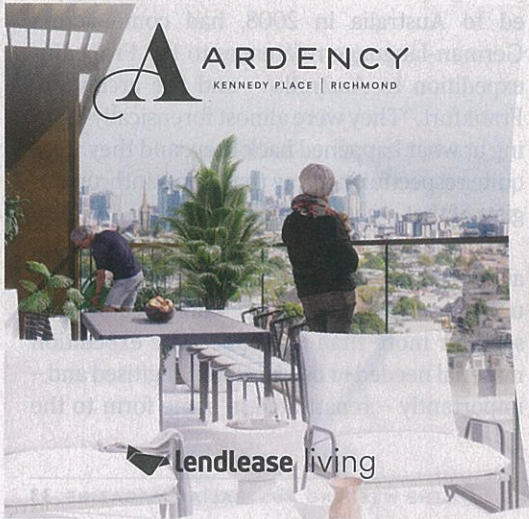
Among the first to view the material was Donny Woolagoodja, as he sat surrounded by hung cloth images in a large shed in Derby. "He was overwhelmed by it, and wanted to take a photo with his phone," recalls Lane. "Then he dropped it and it broke, which he took as a sign. Instead, he did a painting inspired by one of the German paintings. For me, to see the images made me feel like they were famous great people who had their spotlight in that world."

Doohan sensed "a real gratitude" that the portraits had come into existence. "People were so moved, and they said things like, 'I feel like I've got my ancestor here with me.'"

Lane sees it as an opportunity to inspire a new generation. "There's a handful of boys and girls already lined up [as leaders], and Donny and Janet prepared them. We are trying to get kids on country, and this Frobenius stuff is really critical because we're going back in time to instil the values of earlier leaders, linking the country with the people in those portraits."

"It's adding layers of protection, to country that is part of us... it's two-world stuff, like we're part of the puzzle. We're continuing something that goes back to the time of the Creation story. They were powerful people and it's not for us to drop our guard."

Umbagai says the elders' accounts – both historical and those left by Woolagoodja and Oobagooma – make her more resolute, proud to speak out. "We feel like our voices are in the wind, we are whisperers. But they put themselves out there – they said, 'We do exist, listen to what we say.'"



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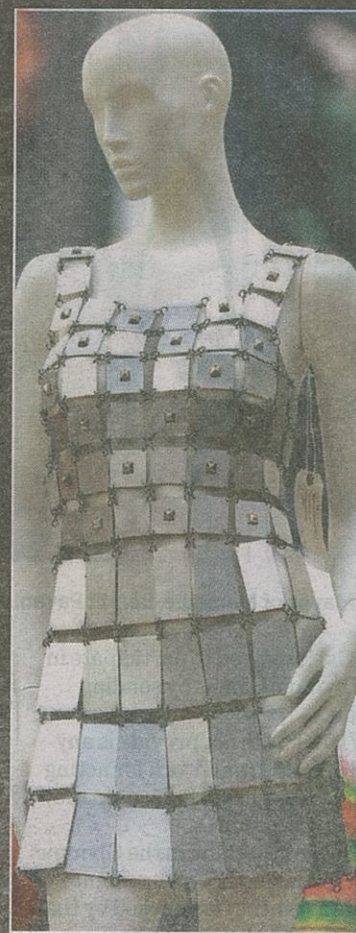


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Clockwise from main:  
Paco Rabanne and  
paper dresses in 1973;  
Jane Fonda wears Paco  
Rabanne in *Barbarella*,  
the designer's  
signature metal tunic.  
Photos: AP



## Vale the designer who showed his mettle

**Mimosa Spencer**

Paris

Paco Rabanne, the Spanish designer best known for his metallic ensembles and space-age designs of the 1960s, has died at the age of 88.

The eponymous label he exited more than two decades ago hailed him as "among the most seminal fashion figures of the 20th century".

Rabanne dressed some of the most prominent stars of the 1960s, including French singer Françoise Hardy, whose outfits from the designer included a minidress made from gold plates and a metal link jumpsuit, as well as Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg, who were pictured in matching silver outfits.

Among his most famous looks were the fitted, skin-baring ensembles worn by Jane Fonda in Roger Vadim's cult science fiction

film *Barbarella*.

The death of Francisco Rabaneda y Cuervo, Paco Rabanne's birth name, was confirmed by a spokesperson for Spanish group Puig, which now controls the fashion house.

"A major personality in fashion, his was a daring, revolutionary and provocative vision, conveyed through a unique aesthetic," said Marc Puig, chief executive of Puig.

Born in a village in the Spanish Basque region in 1934, his mother was a head seamstress at Balenciaga. Rabanne grew up in France, where the family moved after Spanish troops shot dead his father, who had been a Republican commander during the civil war.

He studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He started his career sketching handbags for a supplier to prestigious fashion houses including Givenchy and Chanel, as well as shoes for Charles Jourdan.



**Paco Rabanne: seminal fashion figure of the 20th century.**

He then branched into fashion, designing garments and jewellery with unconventional materials such as metal and plastic.

His first collection, which he described as "unwearable dresses made of contemporary materials" were pieces made of strips of plastic linked with metal rings, worn by barefoot models at a presentation at the upscale Paris hotel George V.

The Paris cabaret Crazy Horse

Saloon was his next venue, where models paraded his skimpy dresses and bathing suits while wearing hardhats.

While his innovation and futuristic designs won plaudits, his fascination with the supernatural prompted public derision at times. He was known for recounting past reincarnations, and in 1999, he predicted the space station Mir would crash into France, coinciding with a solar eclipse.

Surrealist Salvador Dali famously approved of his compatriot, calling him "Spain's second genius".

The designer teamed up with Spain's Puig family in the late 1960s, launching perfumes that served as a springboard for the company's expansion. "We are grateful to Monsieur Rabanne for establishing our avant-garde heritage and defining a future of limitless possibilities," Puig said.

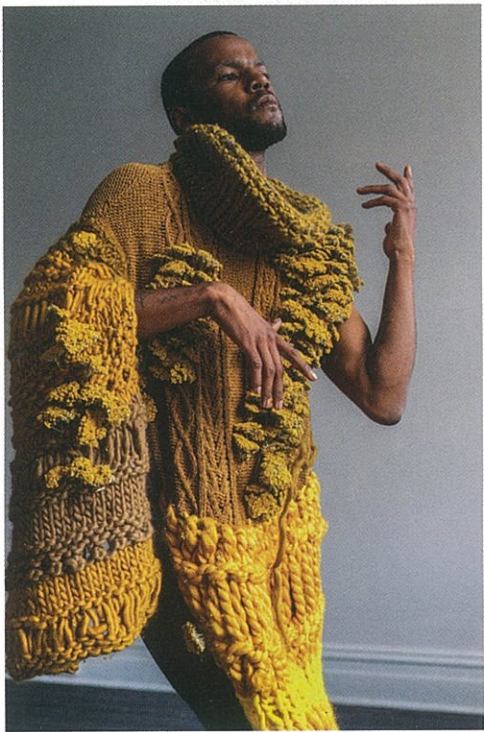
Reuters

*The Sunday Age, February 5, 2023, page 30*

## WHAT

Deirdre Blayney

### Arias in the night, dream weaving and Pop Art



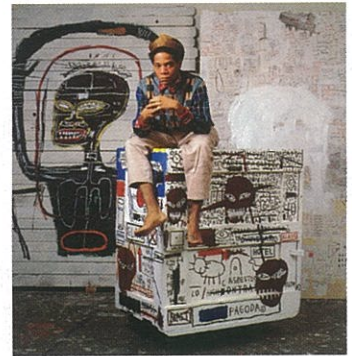
Australian Design Centre is marking Sydney WorldPride with two solo exhibitions by craft and design practitioners. Weaving, crochet, embroidery, quilting, and sewing have a rich history with LGBTQ+ artists, makers and designers. *Unravelling Queerly* and *Chili Philly's Crochet Social 2023* express the role crafting and creative work have played in explorations of identity. The former features work by 10 artists from diverse backgrounds who push the boundaries of textile-based art and craft forms to express their unique voices and unpick complex subject matter. And in their exhibition, Phil Ferguson, aka Chili Philly, uses the framework of a school dance social and transforms everyday objects into elaborate crochet creations. Australian Design Centre, Darlinghurst. Until March 22. [australiandesigncentre.com](http://australiandesigncentre.com)



In the National Portrait Gallery's upcoming exhibition *Portrait23: Identity*, new work from contemporary Australian artists and collectives from every state and territory will be gathered together in a display of portraiture in 21st century Australia. Each artist was invited to realise a new approach to portraiture using the broad concept of identity, across not only painting, drawing and photography, but street art, suspended textiles, performance, ceramics, bronze, and soft sculpture. An accompanying publication will feature nine Australian authors, including Yassmin Abdel Magied, Michelle Law and Hugh Mackay, and events including performances and lectures will amplify the experience. Canberra, from March 10 to June 18.



*The National 4: Australian Art Now* brings together the Art Gallery of NSW, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Carriageworks and the Museum of Contemporary Art in a showcase of works by 53 artists and collectives from across the country. From complex large-scale installations to miniature paintings, shared themes will include intergenerational learning and interconnectedness, personal and national stories, a focus on language and narrative, and explorations of the role of the artist in changing times. March 24 to July. [the-national.com.au](http://the-national.com.au)



*HOTA Gallery* will show works never seen here by Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat in *Pop Masters: Art from the Mugrabi Collection*, New York, alongside artists inspired by their legacy. February 18 to June 4. [hotagallery.com.au](http://hotagallery.com.au)



*Opera Up Late*, hosted by comedian, singer, writer and "compere extraordinaire" Reuben Kaye, is a joint project from Opera Australia and Sydney WorldPride billed as a grand collision of opera and cabaret. It will encompass queer romance, drag and some of the world's most beloved arias. Kaye, who boasts his own respectable vocal range, says a love of opera has inspired him throughout his life. Director Shaun Rennie promises a concert that "celebrates opera and other great musical anthems through a queer lens, as well as celebrating the exceptional queer talent on stage". 11pm, February 18 and 23, Sydney Opera House.

ANDREW CHAN, ACHILLEA, 2021; JO LLOYD, BANG STOP, 2022; RISING, STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA, MELBOURNE; PHOTO PETER ROSEZKY; TARTYN GILL, LIMBER 4, 2021; STEEL ARMATURE BY NEIL ALDU, JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT 1983 © LUZZIE HIMMEL;



**Mind trip |**  
*Lucidity of the  
subliminal  
mind, by*  
Phoebe Gilbert  
of Newtown  
High School of  
the Performing  
Arts, is among  
the works in  
the Artexpress  
exhibition at  
the Art Gallery  
of NSW from  
tomorrow.  
The exhibition  
features  
outstanding  
student works  
produced for  
visual arts in  
the 2022 HSC.  
PHOTO: ROBERT  
EDWARDS

# From stolen generations to world acclaim

By Susan McCulloch

## The Age

Thursday 2nd February 2023

1291 words

Page 37 | Section: OBITUARIES

884cm on the page



# From stolen generations to world acclaim

Susan McCulloch

Anmatyerre artist Barbara Weir achieved international acclaim for her unique paintings of the grasses, lands and dreaming stories of her Central Australian homelands, yet she had been lucky to survive after her birth and later experiences as one of the stolen generations of the 1940s.

Weir, who founded a family dynasty of artists at her Utopia homelands and became a cultural ambassador for her Anmatyerre people, was born Florrie Weir at Derry Downs Station, 230 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs in 1940.

Her mother was 18-year-old Anmatyerre/Alyawarre domestic worker Minnie Pwerle, and her father, Irish-Australian pastoralist Jack Weir, owner of Derry Downs Station, adjacent to the now Aboriginal-owned Utopia region.

At the time black-white relations were illegal. Shortly after Florrie's birth, her mother left her to be cared for by her aunt Molly Pwerle and then by Emily Kame Kngwarreye – who later became one of Australia's most famous artists. Barbara's mother Minnie Pwerle (who herself also became a star artist) married an Aboriginal man – Motorcar Jim – with whom she had six other children.

Kngwarreye would take young Florrie on bush trips – frequently hiding her from welfare patrols on the lookout for mixed-race children. Years later, Barbara described her early life as equally wonderful and fraught. Wonderful as she loved the lands and being looked after by her aunts Molly, Emily, Galya and Lottie Pwerle and Emily Kame Kngwarreye; fraught as she was conscious of her difference to both Anmatyerre people and her white half-siblings. Plus, the ever-present fear of

government authorities. The patrol finally caught up with her at the age of nine when she was seized while fetching water from the station's tank.

First, she was taken to St Mary's Hostel – an Anglican mission hostel on the outskirts of Alice Springs from which she tried to escape on numerous occasions. She was then moved to St John's Baptist Children's Hostel in Alice Springs. Other child inmates of St John's included legendary land rights and cultural leader Charlie Perkins, John Moriarty, soccer player, government adviser and founder of Balarinji Designs and Chicka Dixon, influential unionist, and land rights leader. Her name was changed to Barbara, and she was subsequently sent to hostels in Darwin and Brisbane – from which she also attempted to escape at any given opportunity.

By 18 she was living in Darwin and working as a cleaner. Here, she met and married Mervyn Torres – a Jabba Jabba man from Broome – and had six children. By that time, memories of her birth family were buried in her subconscious; she also had no idea where she was from – remembering only that it was “near Alice Springs” and was called something like “Angudipa”.

Her husband solved the mystery when, on a visit to Alice Springs, he was talking to an elderly Aboriginal man called Tom Williams and casually asked whether he knew of a “Florrie Weir” who had “lived out of Alice Springs somewhere”. Williams told Torres “Florrie Weir; yes, I remember that one, she was taken away from her family out at Utopia (Urupuntja). Her mother Minnie's still alive.”

In 1968, Weir, her husband and her children moved to Papunya where she worked as a fencer, also

witnessing the early years of painting of the founding Papunya school artists. She also became a member of the Papunya council.

Regularly she would drive with her children to the edge of the Utopia lands; just to be there, but not knowing how to enter or to reconnect with her birth family. On one visit Emily Kame Kngwarreye saw her, ran to her, and gave her a huge hug. “Without aunty Emily, I probably wouldn't have gone back (to the community),” said Weir years later.

Unable to speak Anmatyerre, it took her several years to relearn the language and to gradually re-establish a family relationship – first with her sisters who she became very close to, and later with her mother Minnie. By 1974, she had re-learned Anmatyerre and its sister language Alyawarre and she played a pivotal, initiating role in the move to return much of Utopia Station to its traditional owners – one of the earliest successful land rights claims.

In 1985, she became the first woman president of the community's Urupuntja Council and was later the first woman on the Central Land Council. Most recently, in 2020, she was chair of the Urupuntja Aboriginal Health Services Aboriginal Corporation.

Weir's first interest in art was that of the Utopia women's batik making movement in the 1980s. In 1994, she travelled with nine other batik makers to Indonesia to work with traditional Indonesian batik makers.

Simultaneously, she was experimenting with painting on canvas. She started painting professionally in 1990 – exhibiting first at DACOU Gallery, Adelaide, owned by her son Fred Torres (Purla) and shortly after in well-known galleries around Australia

and in Europe, where her work was especially acclaimed.

Weir's paintings became famous for their representations of the once fertile lands of her country at a time when plants, animals, and water were plentiful. Themes include grass seeds, bush berry and wildflowers. In gestural, fine brush strokes and brilliant colouration, she evoked the ripple of the once-lush grasses as animals and winds moved through them, causing the grasses to drop their seeds to be collected and ground for damper.

In a detailed and expansive series called *My Mother's Country* Weir took a different approach – representing her land's sites, travelling tracks and dance lines from an aerial perspective in a myriad of often luminously coloured fine dots. During the 2000s, Weir became an ever more popular and successful artist, travelling frequently to her exhibitions around Australia and internationally – becoming such a seasoned traveller she would give tips to fellow travellers on where to find the best gyoza in the Tokyo

markets and similar culinary specialties in other countries. In 2009, she was named as one of the top 50 most collectable Australian artists.

Weir exhibited jointly with other family members including her mother Minnie Pwerle (who came to painting about 10 years after her daughter); cousin Gloria Petyarre; aunts Galya, Molly and Emily Pwerle; adult children Teresa Purla, Charmaine Pwerle and Fred Purla, grandson Jarrad Kamarre and granddaughter – artist and owner of Pwerle Gallery Jade Akamarre.

She was also an important contributor to talks and symposia accompanying the major retrospectives of Emily Kame Kngwarreye presented by the National Museum of Australia in the 2000s.

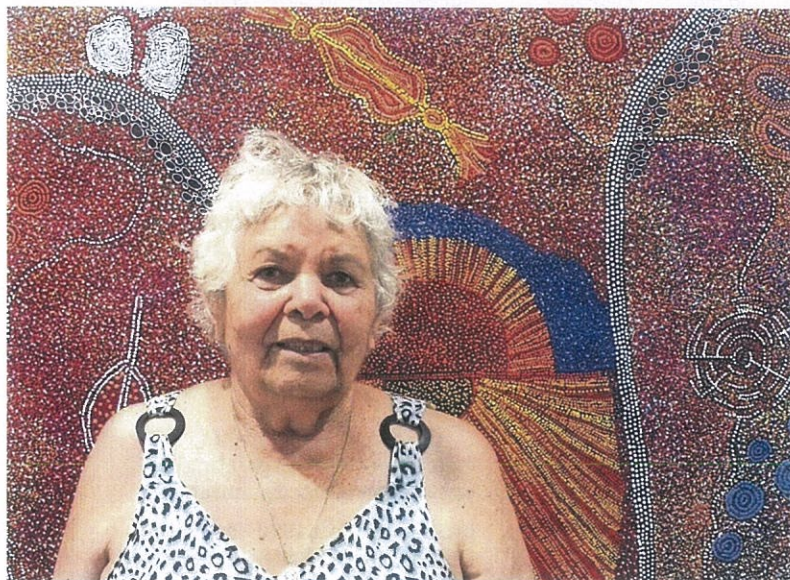
A forthright, strong woman with a great love of painting, the work of other Utopia artists, her culture, country and family, Weir painted continuously until October 2022 when she had a stroke.

She passed away in the Royal Adelaide Hospital in January 2023.

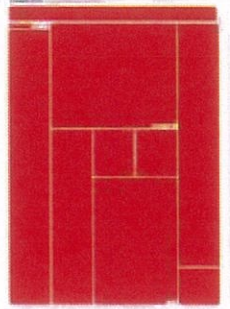
With works in thousands of private collections as well as public collections such as the Art Gallery of South Australia, Queensland Art Gallery, Artbank, Queensland College of Art Griffith University, University of Adelaide, AMP Collection, the Holmes a Court Collection and Macquarie Bank Collection, Barbara Weir leaves a rich and enduring artistic legacy.

She is survived by her children Teresa Purla, Patrick Torres, Fred Purla, James Torres, Mervyn Torres and Charmaine Pwerle, 18 grandchildren six great-grandchildren, sisters Eileen, Betty and Dora Mbitjana and aunts/mothers Molly, Galya and Emily Pwerle.

With thanks to Teresa Purla, Charmaine Pwerle and Patrick Torres for their help with this obituary. Susan McCulloch knew Barbara Weir for 30 years and had interviewed her many times for *The Australian*, *Art Collector* magazine and others. With additional material from the YouTube video *Stories of My People | Country | Barbara Weir | The Stolen Generation*, Red Earth Market, 2021.



Barbara Weir with her painting *My Mothers Country* 2018. Photo: courtesy Alpitje Art Studio



**Grass Seeds 2006** acrylic on linen. Photo: courtesy DACOU Gallery

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© YOSHITOMO NARA, 2016



© YOSHITOMO NARA, 2020



© YOSHITOMO NARA, 2016

L to R: Yoshitomo Nara, 'Mini drawing', 2016. On loan from the artist, courtesy Pace Gallery. © Yoshitomo Nara, 2016. Yoshitomo Nara, 'No war love and peace' 2020. On loan from the artist, courtesy Pace Gallery. © Yoshitomo Nara, 2020. Yoshitomo Nara 'Reach out to the moon, even if we can't' 2016. On loan from the artist, courtesy Pace Gallery. © Yoshitomo Nara, 2016. Images: Supplied.

# AGWA to deliver Yoshitomo Nara’s first Australian solo exhibition

AGWA's exclusive Yoshitomo Nara show is about building on momentum for growth, rather than charging for a ticket, says Director Colin Walker.

1 Feb 2023

Celina Lei



The first Australian solo exhibition of Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara, *Yoshitomo Nara: Reach Out to The Moon, Even If We Can't*, will open at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA) on 26 February. It will be free to gallery visitors.

[Menu](#)

The exhibition is not only an AGWA exclusive, but has been locally curated following close discussions with Nara and Pace Gallery, which has represented the artist in New York since 2011.

A total of 64 paintings, sculptures, ceramics and photographs spanning 2011-2022 will be on view, drawn together to convey the powerful emotional qualities of Nara's 40-year oeuvre and the deeper philosophical undertones of his rebellious cartoon girls.

AGWA Director, **Colin Walker** tells *ArtsHub* that the exhibition will feel unique to AGWA and furthers the gallery's commitment to building a stronger engagement with Asia.

Walker says: 'Since the establishment of the *Gallery Act* in 1959 [that separated the Gallery from the Western Australian Museum], we've only had 12 exhibitions drawn from Asia. Now we've got eight in the next two years.'

The gallery launched the **Simon Lee Foundation Institute of Contemporary Asian Art** in July last year, and has since presented three exhibitions, with Farah Al Qasimi's **Star Machine** opening this week (4 February).

The exhibition will also capture the influx of different cultural experiences at play in the artist's practice – from Nara's memories of growing up in rural northern Japan post WWII to his time in Germany during the late 1980s and 1990s. A body of three-dimensional works trace Nara's experimentation with clay, and a difficult period reflecting on the impacts of the Fukushima nuclear disaster on 11 March 2011.

## AGWA's approach to blockbusters

The exhibition's announcement was made just one month ahead of its opening date – unusual for an international blockbuster of this calibre.

While COVID-19 has knocked exhibition schedules off the rails and required institutions to be nimble on their feet, Walker says it doesn't matter for AGWA whether the exhibition is announced a month or a week in advance.

He tells *ArtsHub*: 'It's really important that AGWA finds ways to be more relevant and see how engagement has changed for galleries. It doesn't really matter when we announce the exhibition, especially if it will be in the gallery for a decent amount of time. People will pick it up and it's about being much more present, much more consistently.'

In addition, *Yoshitomo Nara: Reach Out to The Moon, Even If We Can't* will be on view at AGWA with free entry, in an age when blockbuster exhibitions are almost always about an institution's ability to generate its own income.

This move is a result of how AGWA has changed since reopening in 2021, two years after Walker took the helm.

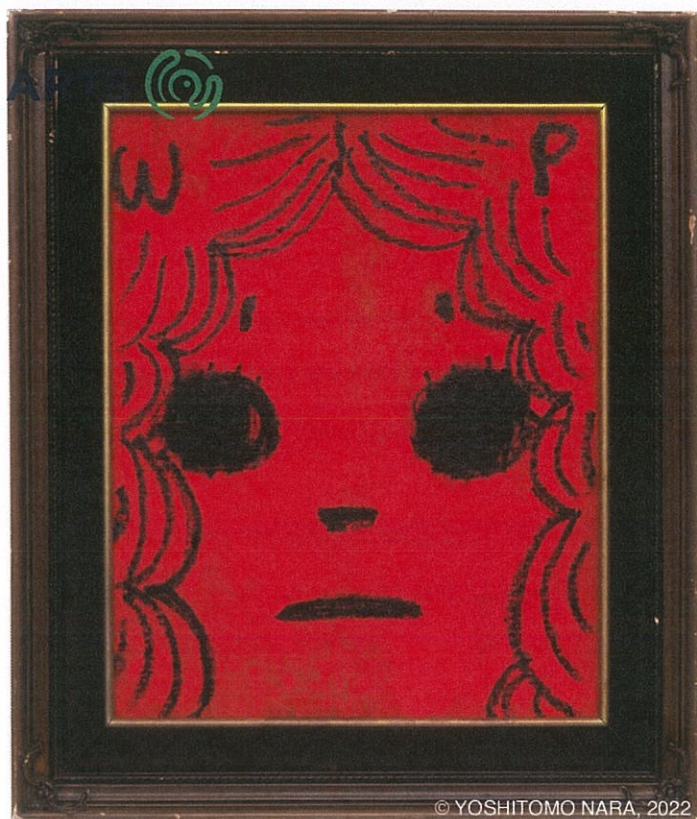
### **Read: [State gallery relaunch to mark new era](#)**

He continues: 'We changed a lot in the gallery over the last couple of years, including a complete rebuild of our commercial offerings. We've taken control of our own investments and been really successful in our new philanthropic programs.'

The exhibition is also supported by the McGowan Government, with partners including Wesfarmers Arts, Simon Lee Foundation and the Australia-Japan Foundation.

Walker adds: 'We are in a period of growth and it's more important for me to keep that momentum by pulling people through the door than charging for a ticket.'

'For the long term, we've managed to broaden the type of things that we present, having more temporary exhibitions and reusing our collection in different ways. It basically means that we've become less



*Yoshitomo Nara, 'WP1', 2022, acrylic and grease pencil on canvas, framed 67.5 x 56.7 cm. On loan from the artist, courtesy Pace Gallery. Image: © Yoshitomo Nara, 2022.*

reliant on the blockbusters to drive either income or visitation.'

Menu

Walker reveals that Nara has been involved in the selection of the works to be displayed, including works from the artist's studio, Pace Gallery, and private and public collections.

The exhibition also follows Yoshitomo Nara's major touring retrospective organised by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) from 2021-2022.

Being a long-time fan of Nara's works, Walker hopes that the free exhibition will encourage visitors to further explore the range of offerings at AGWA, as well as open the doors to the depth of Nara's practice.

'Being able to give people the access to Nara's exhibition and show them everything

else that's in the gallery, that's going to do a lot more towards our development than it is to charge just to see a particular exhibition,' he concludes.

**Yoshitomo Nara: Reach Out to The Moon, Even If We Can't opens from 26 February to 2 June 2023 at AGWA, curated by Robert Cook. Free.**



**Celina Lei**

Celina Lei is an Arts Writer at ArtsHub. She acquired her masters in Art, Law and Business in New York with a B.A. in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Melbourne. She has previously worked across global art hubs in Beijing, Hong Kong and New York in both the commercial art sector and art criticism. Prior to joining ArtsHub, she was an

# VICE REGAL

## The Advertiser

Tuesday 31st January 2023

71 words

Page 17 | Section: LETTERS

40cm on the page



## VICE REGAL

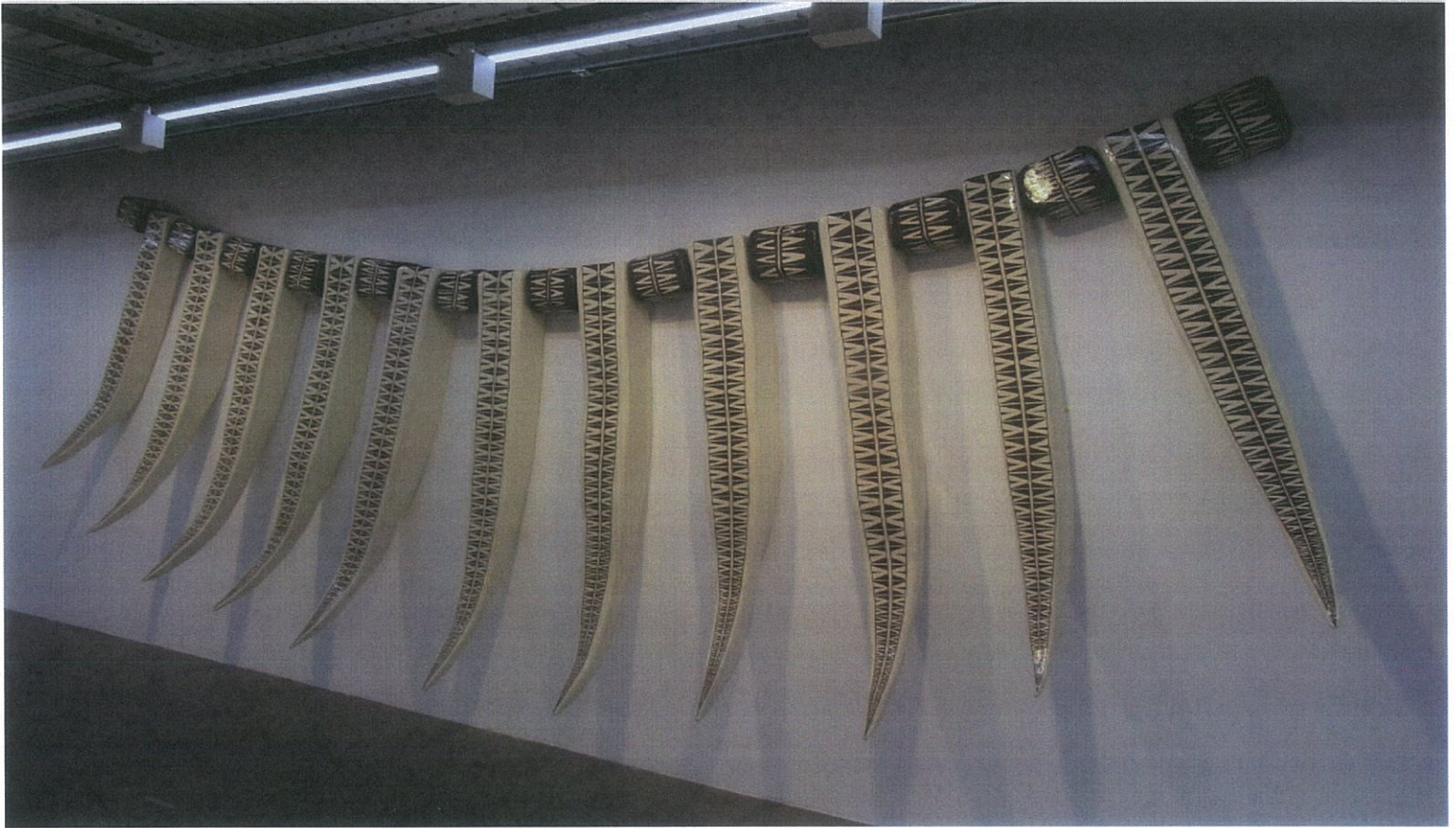
ON Tuesday morning at Government House, Her Excellency the Governor received Returned and Services League of Australia SA/NT Branch president Mrs Cheryl Cates.

Afterwards, at Government House, the Governor and Mr Buntin received the

Art Gallery of South Australia's artistic programs assistant director Dr Lisa Slade, and Mr Rob Blackburn and Ms Yuexiu Shen.

In the afternoon at Government House, the Governor received Spence MP Mr Matt Burnell.

**News** > [Visual Arts](#) > [Reviews](#)



Artist and designer Teleise Lēsa shares the wealth of Samoan heritage through 'Ula Nifo'. Photo: Supplied.

**VISUAL ARTS**

# Exhibition review: Ctrl + Alt + Delete: Reclaim

First Nations and Pasifika artists seek to reset the cultural landscape.

31 Jan 2023

[Pamela See](#)

Among art administrators there is a cardinal rule, often left unspoken, that curators and content providers must remain distinct in their roles for an exhibition to be taken seriously. However, ask any artist who has facilitated a group show, especially from a marginalised community, and the response is fairly consistent. The latest in a series of collaborations between the collective Conscious Mic and Metro Arts, *Ctrl + Alt + Delete: Reclaim*, literally speaks to the desire to stake out some real estate, both with respect to the gallery and in the imaginings of South East Queensland art audiences.

Across the iterations of the annual showcase since Metro Arts made its move to Meanjin/Brisbane's West End in 2021, there appears to be an algorithm that extends beyond the contributions by artist/curators Serge Ah-Wong and Bindimu Currie. The First Nations and Pasifika artists presented paintings and installations in successive years. Teleise Lēsa also returns, having rescaled another necklace to monumental proportions. In addition to 'reclaiming' geographic space, the theme has also been **applied** by some contributors to 'the image of Blak bodies' and narratives 'people have tried to tell about us'.

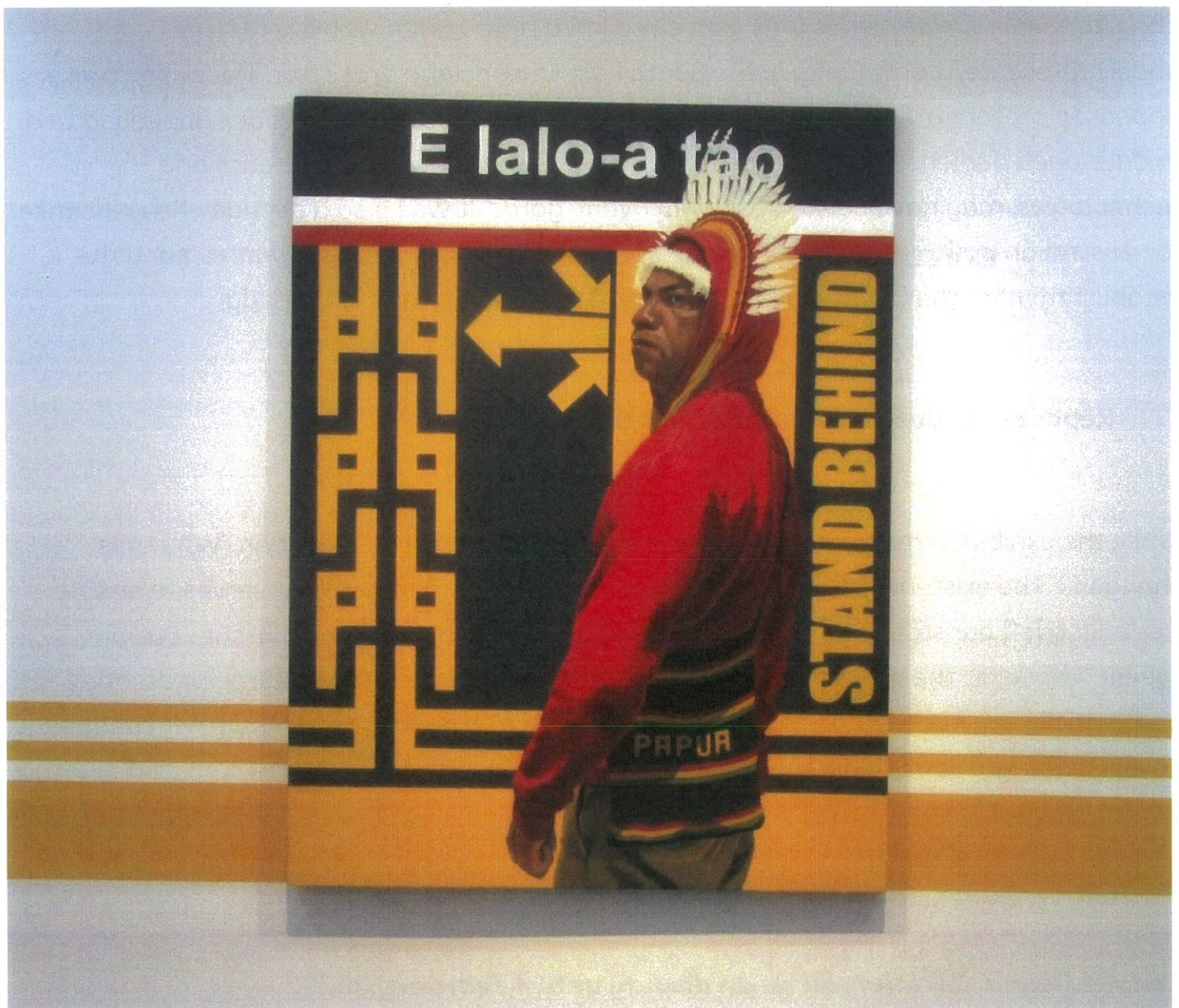
While the names of the artists are far from household, audiences may find many aspects of their artworks familiar. Visitors old enough to remember **IBM**'s release of personal computers in the early 1980s, with the 'hotkey' combination from which *Ctrl + Alt + Delete: Reclaim* takes its title, are given plenty to reminisce. The period also gave rise to anonymous art collectives, a movement driven by the feminist **Guerrilla Girls**, who strove to address institutionalised sexism and racism. The promotional material for this exhibition similarly omits the names of individual contributors.

Subtly seductive, yet soothing as opposed to sinister, Currie's woven *Ngumbu Jarba* (2018) calls for change through depicting a life-sized snake shedding. The multidisciplinary artist is a Gugu-Yalanji, Minyangbal and Gooreng Gooreng, woman with South Sea Islander heritage.

Teleise Lēsa, a New Zealand born artist and designer who identifies as Samoan, was a child when Jeff Koons rose to prominence with his oversized kitsch appropriations of the everyday. To many, *Ula Nifo* (2023) may carry greater cultural significance than the aforementioned commentary on rampant **consumerism**. 'Ula' meaning 'necklace' and 'nifo' meaning 'tooth', she has taken inspiration from this symbol of status. Traditionally worn by high chiefs, these pieces were carved from the teeth of sperm whales. The

relatively recent migrant to Brisbane says she takes great **pride** in fashioning supersized **ARTS** hub homages to her homeland. This sculpture, in turn, imbues the gallery space with an almost hallowed atmosphere.

Similarly symbolic, but domestic in scale, is a playful presentation of resin and 3D printed kava bowls by Abraham Tongia, who undertook his Bachelor of Architecture at Auckland's Unitec. A cluster of his vibrant non-utilitarian representations of the ceremonial vessels colonise a section of the gallery. Some are attached by the legs to the sides of their plinths, as though crawling from one to another. Tongia's considerable skills in 3D modelling may be observed in the surfaces of the more intricate bowls. In others, where the forms are relatively simple, his capacity to cast with translucent, nuanced gradations of colour, is celebrated. Despite the technology attaining ubiquity in Australia over the past decade, 3D printing was patented in 1984. It first appeared in a gallery in the form of resin sculptures by Japanese technologist **Masaki Fujihata** in 1989.



Artist and curator Serge Ah-Wong reflects on the role of migrant/settlers in his painting 'E lalo-a Tao (Remember)'. Image: Supplied.

[Menu](#)

This sanctification of the space is further amplified by the seeming deification of a '**migrant-settler**', in Ah-Wong's *E lalo-a Tao (Remember)* (2023). A graduate of Charles Darwin University, Ah-Wong and his family migrated to South East Queensland from Papua New Guinea. Through a combination of proficiency in figurative painting and integration of pattern, comparisons may be drawn to **Kehinde Wiley**. The, at times, controversial American artist of colour has been associated with the emergence of 'post-racialism'. His being commissioned to paint former President Obama in 2018, by the **National Portrait Gallery**, maybe considered a career apex. However, Ah-Wong favours the abstract motifs of his people as opposed to the imagery of his oppressors. This distinction flavours the compositions with a powerful socialist aesthetic, which some audiences may have previously encountered in Soviet Propaganda **posters**.

The *Ctrl + Alt + Delete* series was conceived in 2018 to create visibility for this underrepresented community in the South East Queensland art sector. The skilled makers appear to present art in forms that are readily recognisable and, arguably, appealing to a middle-aged audience. During the 1980s, many of the concepts, aesthetics and technologies, may have been considered avant-garde. It was also a decade of significance for Australian **politics**, with the introduction of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* and the establishment of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

### **Read: Exhibition review: Data Relations, ACCA**

While the exhibition may not break new ground, it does pose the question, 'What has changed?' The existence of this initiative which, according to Ah-Wong, serves to enable the 'telling [of] our stories on our own terms', would suggest that many issues remain salient. Above all, the project does enable the artists to occupy the cultural landscape, from which they have felt excluded. The other contributors include Jeremiah Nuenedorf, Rovel Hagos and Jori Etuale.

### **Ctrl Alt Delete: Reclaim**

**Metro Arts, Queensland**

***Ctrl Alt Delete: Reclaim will be on display until 4 February 2023.***



Pamela See

Pamela See (Xue Mei-Ling) is a Brisbane-based an artist and writer. During her Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from Griffith University, she researched post-digital applications for traditional Chinese papercutting. Since 1997, she has exhibited across Europe, Asia, North America and Australia. The collections to house examples of her artwork include: the Huaxia Papercutting Museum in Changsha, the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra and the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) in Adelaide. She has also contributed to variety of publications such as: the Information, Medium and Society Journal of Publishing, M/C Journal, Art Education Australia, 716 Craft and Design and Garland Magazine.

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