THE CONVERSATION

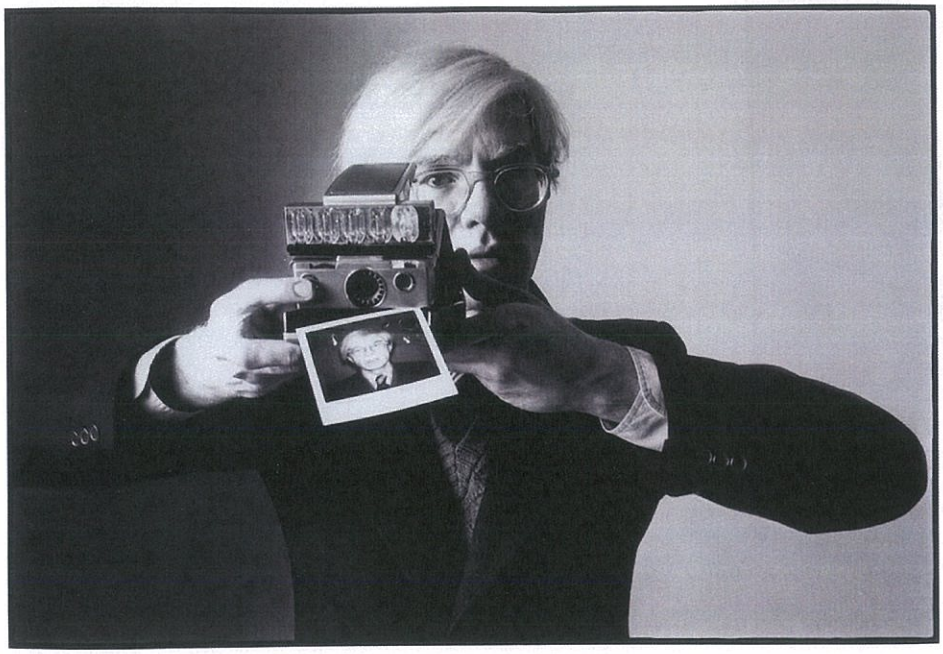
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Polaroids of the everyday and portraits of the rich and famous: you should know the compulsive photography of Andy Warhol

Published: March 7, 2023 1.59pm AEDT

Catherine Speck

Emerita Professor, Art History and Curatorship, University of Adelaide



Oliviero Toscani, born Milan, Italy 1942, Andy Warhol, 1975, New York, United States of America, pigment print, 32.0 x 46.0 cm (image), 40.0 x 50.0 cm (sheet); Public Engagement Fund 2021, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Oliviero Toscani.

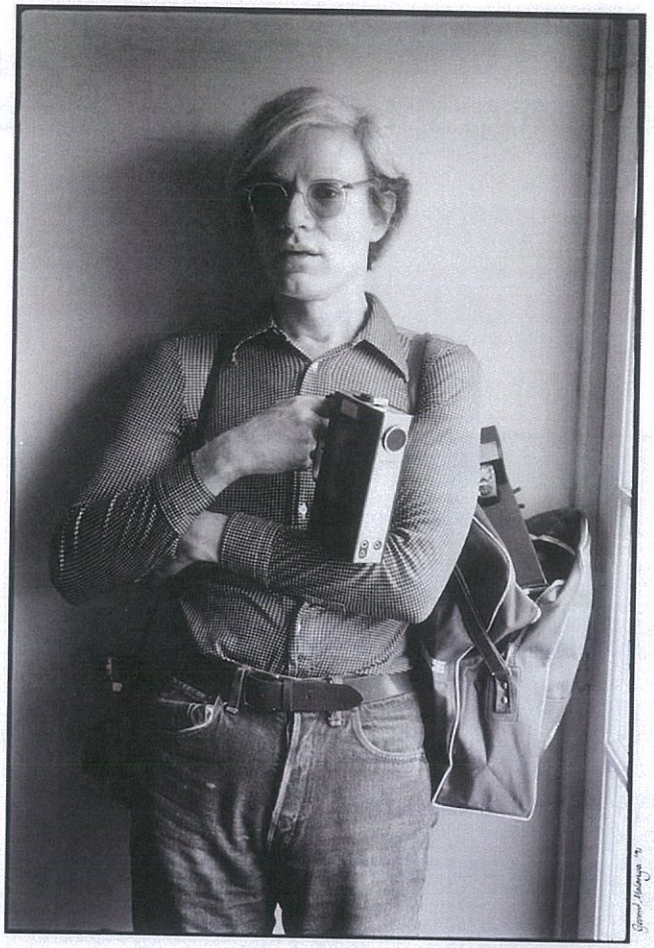
Review: Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media, Art Gallery of South Australia.

Andy Warhol is well known for his slick pop art imagery which fetches staggering amounts at auction. His Shot Sage Blue Marilyn sold in 2022 for US$195 million.

But there is a little-explored side to Warhol-the-photographer, whom curator Julie Robinson explores in a brilliant new exhibition.

Here, Warhol emerges as a compulsive photographer whose images range from snapshot polaroids of the everyday, to portraits of the rich and famous, to Warhol himself in various self-portraits.

His camera was the iPhone of today, obsessively putting out images well before the phrases "social media" and "selfie" were invented.



Gerard Malanga, born Bronx, New York, United States, 1943, Andy Warhol, 1971, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 33.7 x 22.6 (image), 35.6 x 27.8 cm (sheet); National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Purchased 1973.

Read more: Five reasons Andy Warhol is so popular right now

Warhol and the camera

Warhol began using a polaroid camera in 1957 to record himself and his friends. He was a leading magazine illustrator in New York and he moved to using the camera as a source for imagery in commissions such as a photo spread for Harper's Bazaar in 1963, and a cover image for Time Magazine in 1965 – both on display in the exhibition.

Photography for Warhol was a key part of his working method, even though some of his images have a snapshot quality.

He famously said:

> *I think anybody can take a good picture. My idea of a good picture is one that's in focus and of a famous person doing something unfamous.*

By 1961 he was using his photo-based imagery for his pop art silkscreens in his Campbell's Soup Can series. His polaroid photographs continued to be the basis for many silkscreens, such as his exuberant Mick Jagger series (1975), co-signed by each.

Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States 1928, died New York, United States 1987, Cream of mushroom soup, 1968, New York, colour screenprint on paper, 81.0 x 47.5 cm (image), 88.8 x 58.5 cm (sheet); South Australian Government Grant 1977, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

His Ladies and gentlemen (1975) captured Black and Latino trans and drag queens. The models were sourced from the Gilded Grape bar, a nearby haunt of Factory photographers.

Installation view: Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media featuring Andy Warhol's Ladies and gentlemen, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; photo: Saul Steed.

A stunning set of photographs on show come from his time in the 1970s and '80s producing gelatin-silver photo portraits of the celebrity figures based on initial Big Shot Polaroid images.

The dazzling array, which includes David Hockney, Henry Kissinger embracing Elizabeth Taylor, Liza Minnelli and Joseph Beuys, come from a mix of polished and in-situ photoshoots.

Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States 1928, died New York, United States 1987, Liza Minnelli, 1978, New York, PolaroidTM Polacolor Type 108, 9.5 x 7.3 cm (image), 10.8 x 8.5 cm (sheet); V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2012, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

Late in his relatively short life, Warhol began stitching photographs together. Empire State Building (1982), showing multiples of the same image in grid formation, signals this new direction.

The Factory

This isn't just an exhibition of Warhol, but also of his collaborators and contemporaries. The exhibition begins recreating the famous silver-lined Factory, the studio of Warhol and fellow photographers from 1964-68.

The Factory is remembered now as a site of legendary photographs and experimental films.

Warhol's loosely scripted and silent experimental films on show from this time include the touchingly intimate Haircut (1964) and the delightfully chaotic Camp (1965). The "actors" were all, in fact, friends and acquaintances.

You sense the intensity of life there. Billy Name, the Factory's archivist, said

> *it was almost as if the Factory became a big box camera - you'd walk in, expose yourself and develop yourself.*

In this exhibition, Warhol's photographs sit alongside photographs from Name, Steve Schapiro, Brigid Berlin and Robert Mapplethorpe.

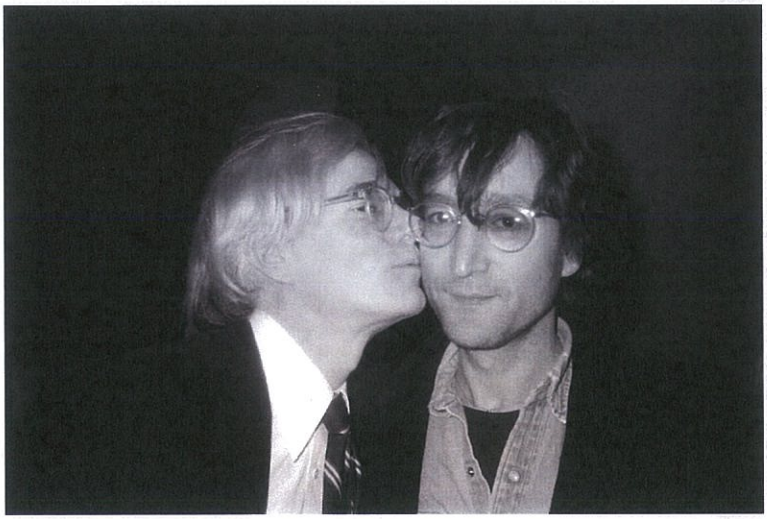
Robert Mapplethorpe, born Queens, New York, United States 1946, died Boston, Massachusetts, United States 1989, Andy Warhol, 1986, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 61.0 x 51.0 cm; Purchased 1989, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Warhol himself is the subject in some photographs. Warhol would hand the camera around to other photographers like Jill Krementz who would capture him on film.

She is the photographer of Andy and Hitchcock, but the image is credited to Warhol, as often happened.

Andy Warhol born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States 1928 died New York, United States 1987 Andy and Hitchcock 1974, New York PolaroidTM Polacolor Type 108 7.2 x 9.6 cm (image) 8.5 x 10.8 cm (sheet) V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2012 Art Gallery of South Adelaide © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

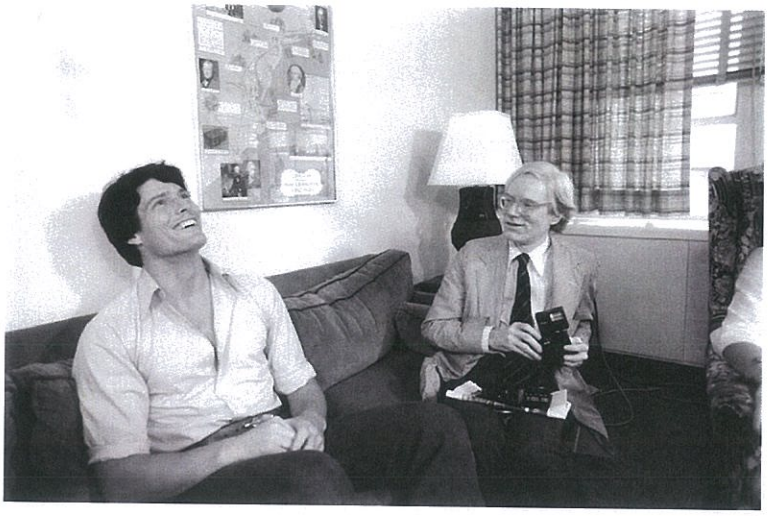
Other polaroids on show include Warhol's homoerotic male torsos (1977), and the kissing series by Warhol's collaborator Christopher Makos for a Valentine's Day issue of Interview magazine, including Andy kissing John Lennon (1978).



Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, Andy Warhol Kissing John Lennon, 1978, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 27.7 x 41.7 cm (image), 40.7 x 50.4 cm (sheet); V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2022, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Christopher Makos.

Fleshing out the character

This is a large exhibition of 250-plus exhibits, including marked-up contact sheets, photobooth strip images, various cameras including the polaroid camera, issues of Interview magazine featuring Warhol's photographs, and a video of his last exhibition in London in 1986 (he died unexpectedly in February 1987).



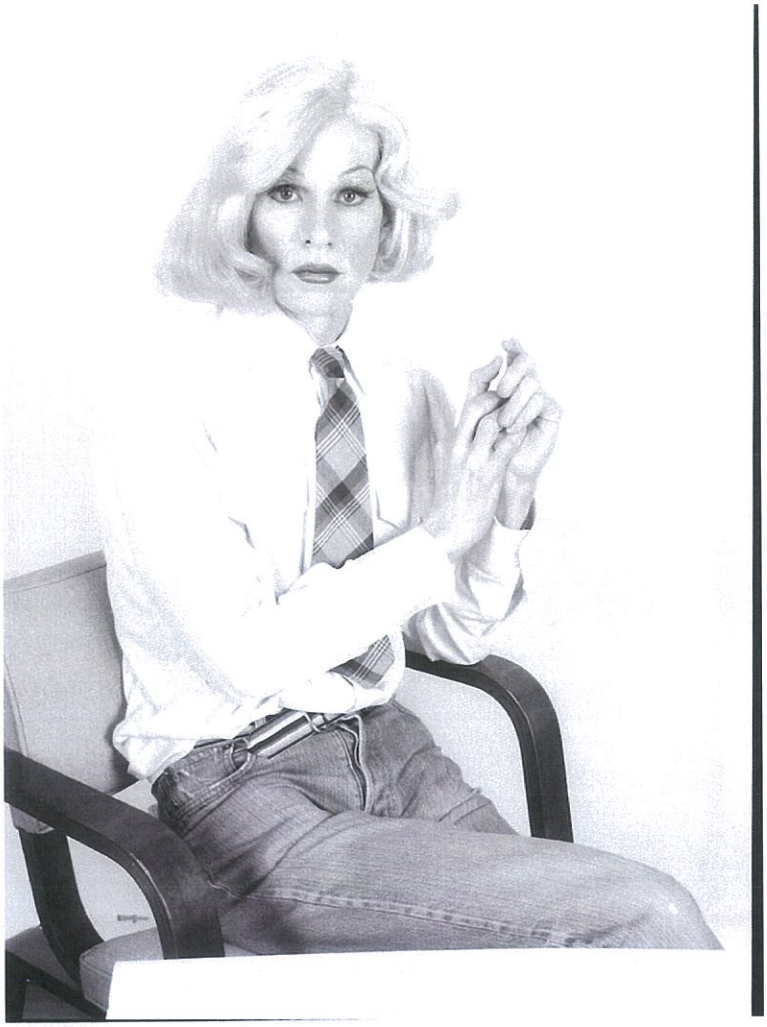
Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, Andy taping Christopher Reeves for 'Interview' magazine, 1977, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 21.2 x 32.2 cm (image), 27.5 x 35.3 cm (sheet); Private collection, © Christopher Makos.

The final painting on show from that exhibition is Warhol's camouflage-covered Self-portrait no. 9 (1986), an image that could be a composite of the many photographic portraits such as Makos's Andy Warhol in American Flag, Madrid (1983).

Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States 1928, died New York, United States 1987, Self-portrait no.9, 1986, New York, synthetic polymer paint and screenprint on canvas, 203.5 x 203.7 cm; Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of the National Gallery Women's Association, Governor, 1987, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

The many portrayals of Warhol himself add flesh to his reputation as self-seeking, but they also penetrate the mask he so successfully cultivated. The Altered Image by Makos shows Warhol with a blond wig and wearing female make-up.

Makos recalled Warhol saying "I want to be pretty, just like everyone else".



Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, Altered Image from the portfolio Altered Image: Five Photographs of Andy Warhol, 1981; published 1982, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 44.8 x 32.2 cm (image), 50.6 x 40.8 cm (sheet); Purchased 1982, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, © Christopher Makos.

Read more: Andy Warhol still surprises, 30 years after his death

An astounding output

This exhibition is a wholly immersive time capsule capturing life in New York for Warhol and his circle in the 1960s, '70s and early '80s. It shows just how astounding Warhol's output was as a photographer, and how photography underpinned his entire oeuvre.

As Makos observed at the opening, he had seen many a Warhol exhibition, but never one that captured this side of Warhol – and so perfectly too.

It is well worth a trip to Adelaide. It is not a touring exhibition and brings together key work from international and national collections.

Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1928, died New York City, New York 1987, Debbie Harry, 1980, New York, PolaroidTM Polacolor Type 108, 10.8 x 8.6 cm (sheet), 9.7 x 7.3 (image); V.B. F. Young Bequest Fund and d'Auvergne Boxall Bequest Fund 2018, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

The only inexplicable aspect is the lack of an exhibition catalogue, from a gallery with a reputation for producing prize-winning catalogues. Exhibitions are, by their nature, ephemeral events; the record lies in the catalogue.

For a groundbreaking one like this, presenting a new side to Warhol and his collaborative photographic practice, a record is needed.

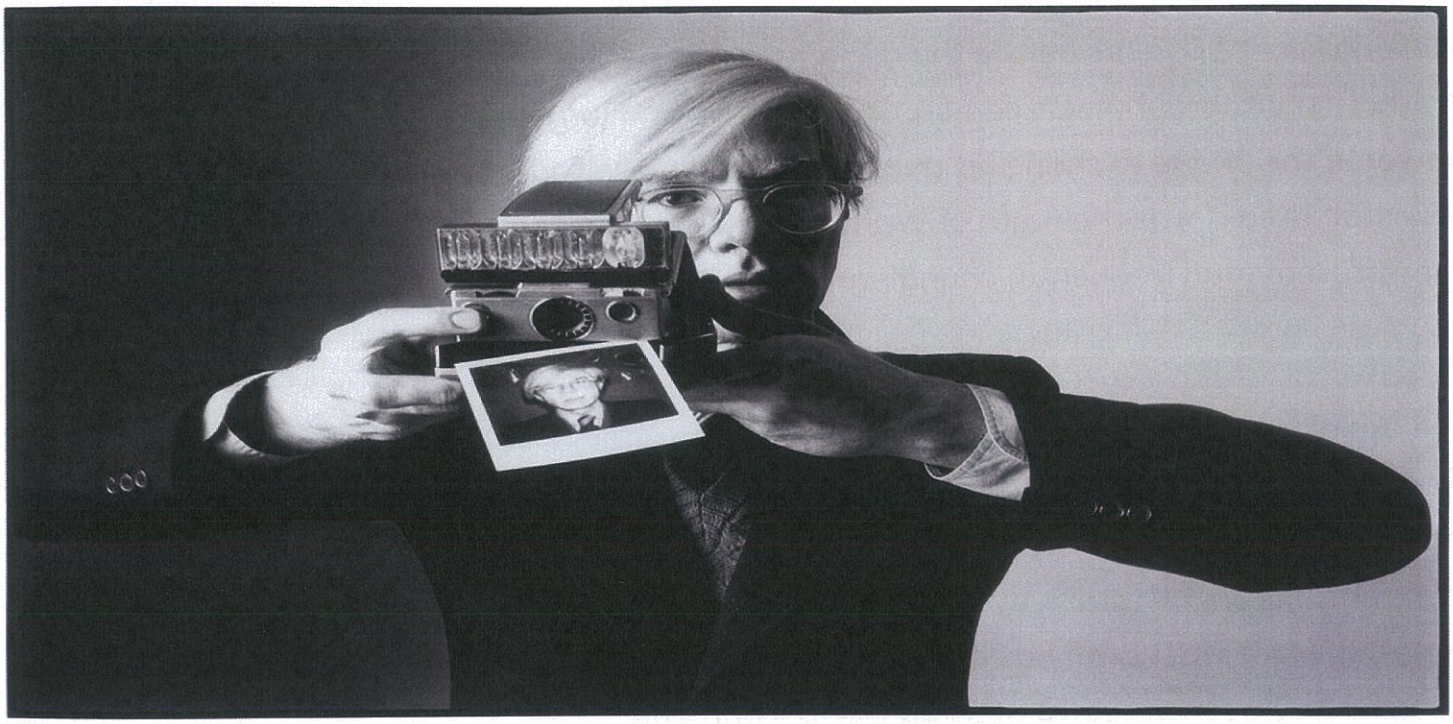
Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media is at the Art Gallery of South Australia until May 14.

Read more: Did pop art have its heyday in the 1960s? Perhaps. But it is also utterly contemporary

ARTS hub

Menu

News > Visual Arts > Features



Oliviero Toscani, born Milan, Italy 1942, 'Andy Warhol', 1975, New York, United States of America, pigment print, 32.0 x 46.0 cm (image), 40.0 x 50.0 cm (sheet); Public Engagement Fund 2021, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Image: © Oliviero Toscani.

VISUAL ARTS

Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media

Was Warhol one of the earliest social influencers? AGSA's exhibition shows him at his most candid and collaborative.

7 Mar 2023

Dr Diana Carroll

The Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) has chosen Andy Warhol, the original pop culture icon, for its headline 2023 Adelaide Festival exhibition.

Exclusive to Adelaide, *Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media* focuses on Warhol's passion for photography and, through that lens, his obsession with celebrity culture. This is a colourful, decadent and totally absorbing exhibition.

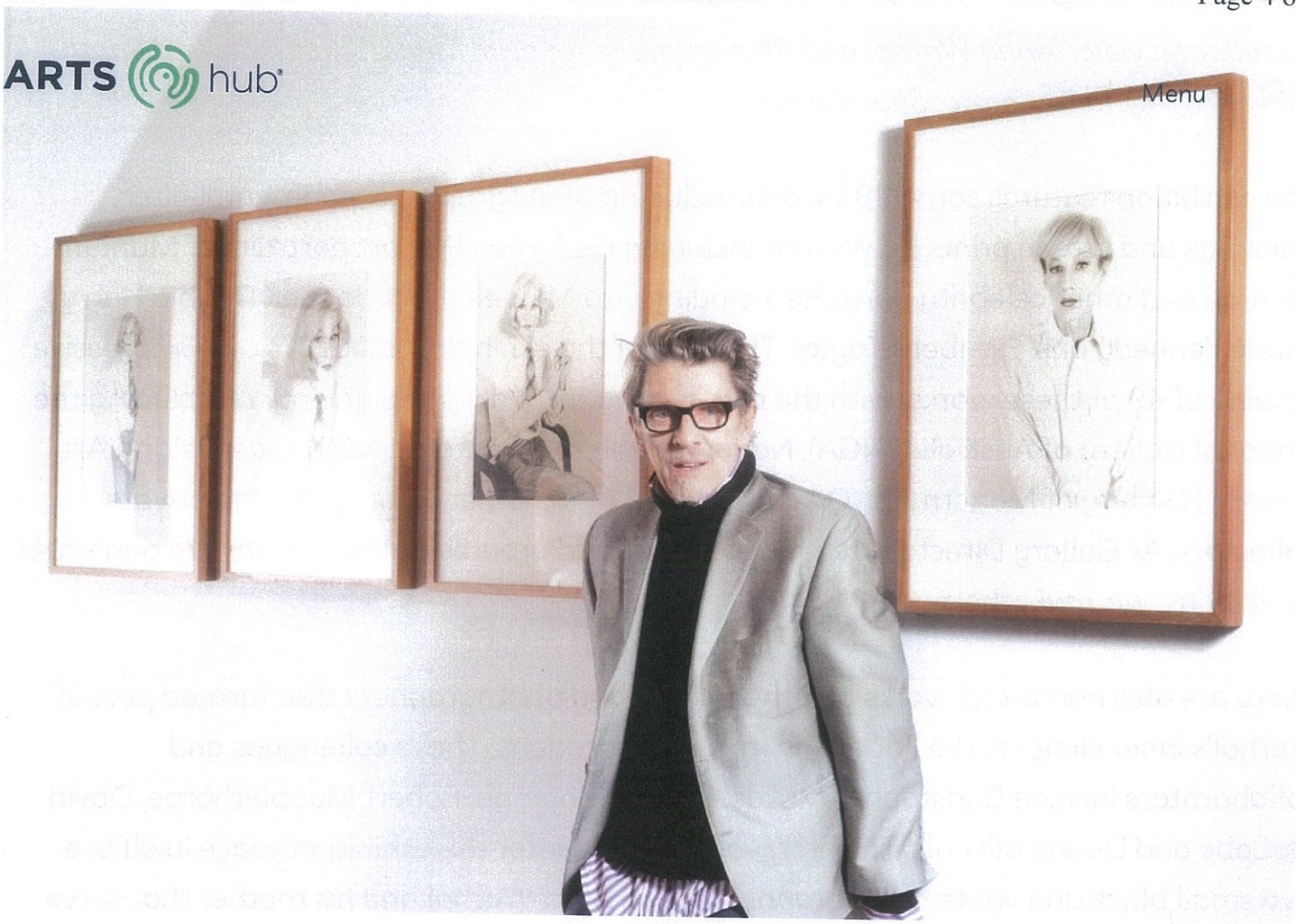
Working some 50 years before the rise and rise of social media as we know it today, Warhol's photography was candid, collaborative and largely intuitive, attuned to the power of the image to shape his public persona and self-identity. If anything was manufactured it was the myth of Warhol himself from the insouciant demeanour to the ever-present (and frequently changing) wigs.

The exhibition poses the question: was Warhol the original influencer? In so doing, it cleverly talks to a younger audience for whom many of these celebrities are just names from the past. Probably best known beyond his art for the oft-quoted, and now scarily prescient, line 'In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes', the working-class boy from Pittsburgh has enjoyed far more than 15 minutes in the spotlight. And, no, it seems **he never actually uttered** the line anyway.

Installation view: 'Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media', Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Photo: Saul Steed.

The exhibition features some 285 works including photographs, experimental films, paintings and screen prints by Warhol, including his famed Pop art portraits of Marilyn Monroe and other celebrity portraits including Liza Minnelli, Mick Jagger, Debbie Harry, Jackie Kennedy and Elizabeth Taylor. The core of the exhibition is AGSA's own impressive holding of 49 of these works, with the rest coming from a variety of lenders including the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), and many other institutions and private collectors. As Gallery Director Rhana Devenport said proudly at the launch, 'We don't *take* exhibitions, we *make* them.'

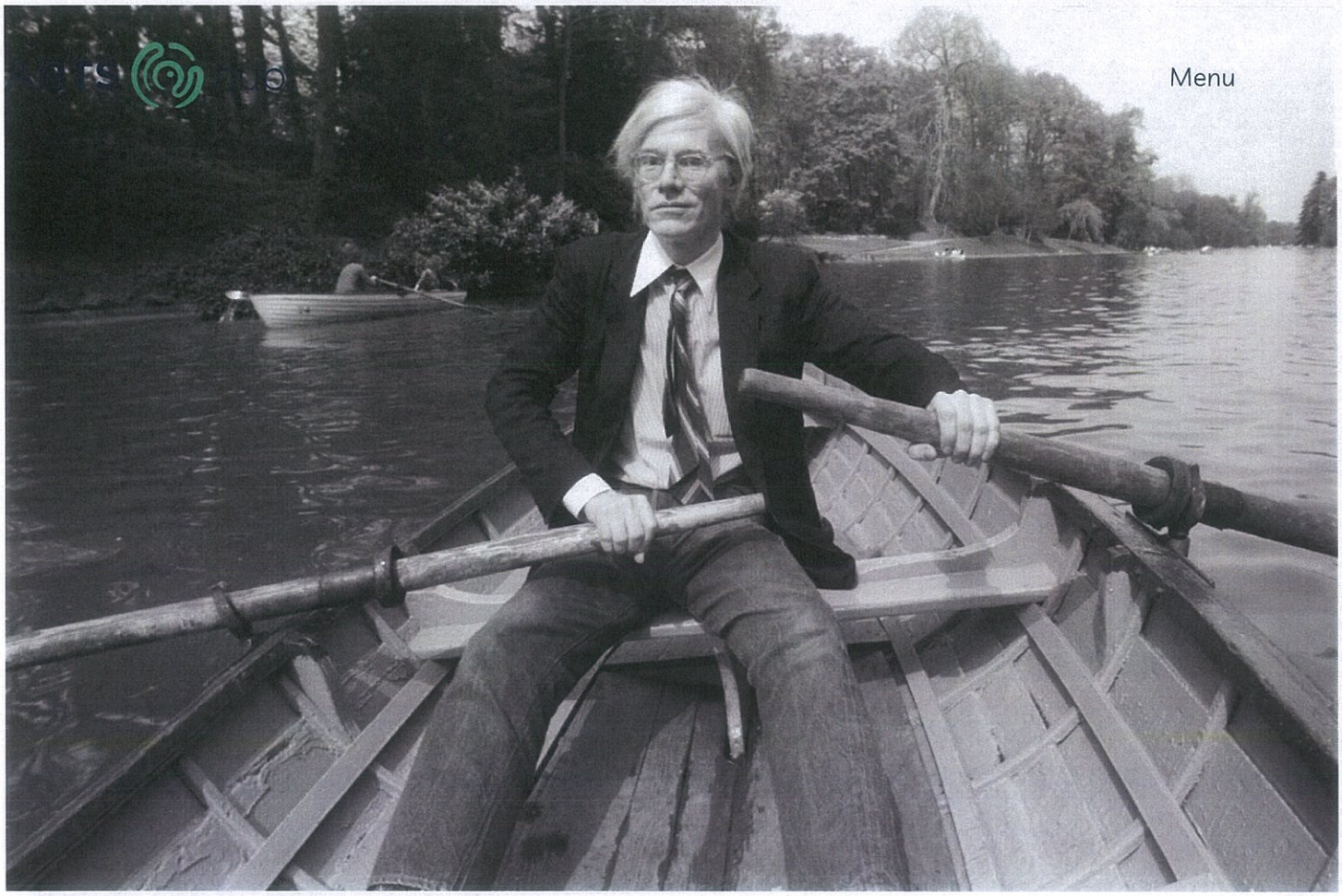
There are also numerous works by other artists and photographers that formed part of Warhol's inner circle at The Factory in its many iterations. These colleagues and collaborators include Christopher Makos, Gerard Malanga, Robert Mapplethorpe, David McCabe and Duane Michals. The first works as you enter the exhibition space itself are two small black and white photographs by Michals of Warhol and his mother that serve as a touching introduction to the rest of the show. There is also a wall of tiny Warhol self-portraits that is an exhibition in itself. Indeed, many of the pictures of Warhol are just as engaging as those of his celebrity friends and colleagues.



Christopher Makos with his 'Altered Image' series in 'Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media', Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Photo: Saul Steed.

Makos is a photographer who worked with Warhol for many years and collaborated with him on numerous projects including exhibitions, books, and magazines. He says, 'I learned a great deal from him, but he also learned from me, especially about photography. We were ... continually exchanging impressions and ideas'.

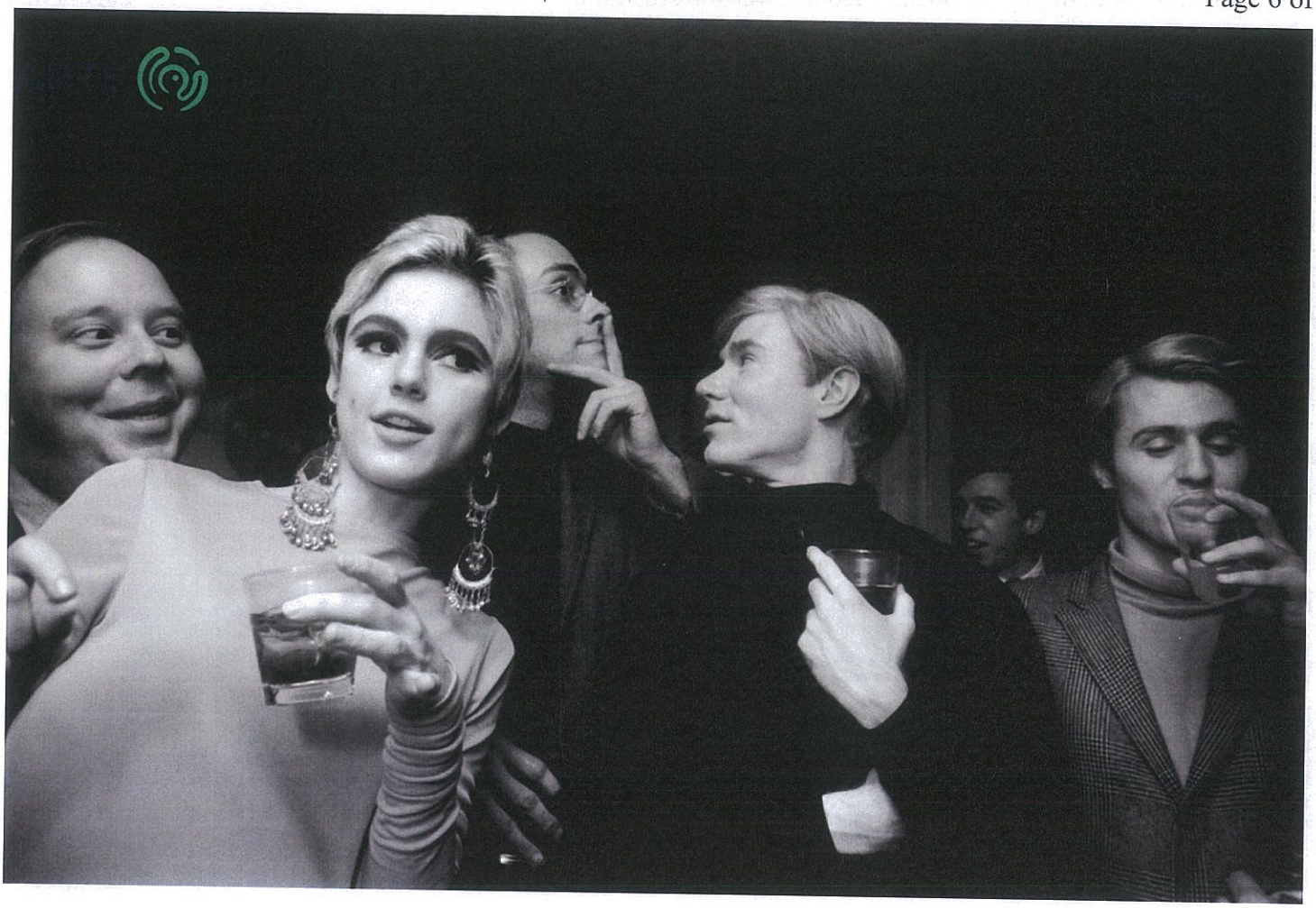
Makos took countless pictures of Warhol doing everyday or 'unfamous things', including rowing a boat on a lake in Paris, having a massage or wearing a clown nose. But even those that appear spontaneous were usually carefully choreographed to display just the right amount of insouciant disregard for the camera.



Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, 'Andy Warhol in a row boat in Paris's Bois de Boulogne', 1981, Paris, gelatin-silver photograph, 27.7 x 35.6 cm (sheet), 18.3 x 27.9 cm (image); Private collection. Image: © Christopher Makos

Makos was in Adelaide for the launch of the exhibition and spoke about the Warhol years at an *In Conversation* event with AGSA's Senior Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photograph, Julie Robinson.

'Andy met me and was, of course, smitten with me right away,' he told the full house in the Radford Auditorium.



Steve Schapiro, born Brooklyn, New York, United States 1934, died Chicago, Illinois, United States 2022, 'Edie Sedgwick, Andy Warhol and others at a party', 1965, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 31.5 x 47.1 cm (image), 40.0 x 49.9 cm (sheet). Image: Courtesy of Fahey/Klein Gallery, © estate of Steve Schapiro.

The Factory years were clearly a period of intensive chaotic creativity. Warhol was entranced by the instantaneous quality of the Polaroid camera and took thousands of images. But even so, many pictures attributed to Warhol do not actually have the hand and eye of the artist. The Polaroid cameras were passed around and we can never know who actually took those individual pictures.

As Makos says, 'It's his camera and his film, so it's his picture. Whoever is paying the bills owns the picture.' And while plenty of the pictures were taken informally, at social events at the Factory, Makos says many of the celebrity pictures that look candid were fully set-up and posed, so maybe nothing is really as it seems.

Robinson has been working on this project for 10 years or more. AGSA bought three Warhol Polaroid photos back in 2012 and from there the collection has grown to the significant holding it has today.

The exhibition explores the social aspects of Warhol's photography, including the collaborative nature of his photographic practice, the role photography had in his social interactions with others and the candid social media 'look' of his images.

These concepts apply to the two strands of Warhol's photographic practice that are brought together here: photography as an essential part of his working method, as source material and inspiration for screen prints and paintings; and photography as an art form in its own right. When Warhol died in 1987 there were more than 60,000 photographs in his estate.

Warhol's work was unashamedly commercial as well as creative and he always had an eye for the dollar. During the 1970s and 1980s he made countless commissioned portraits, available to anyone who could afford the US$25,000 studio fee. These portraits were based on Polaroid photos he took in his studio. This allowed Warhol and the sitter to choose the one that would be made into the portrait.

His studio photo shoots were often of a social and collaborative nature, with studio assistants and others photographing alongside Warhol, while studio guests watched on.

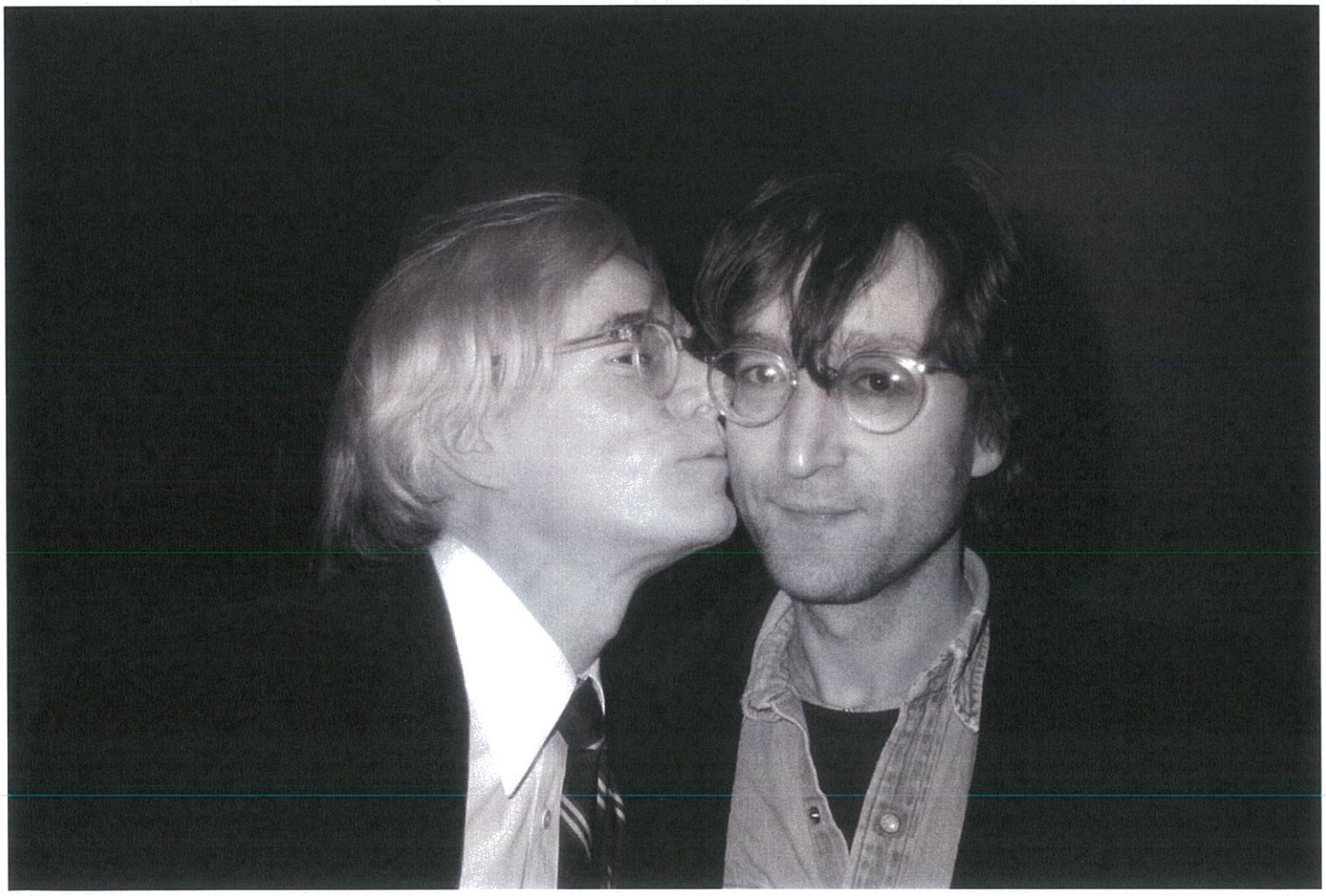
Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1928, died New York City, New York 1987, 'Henry Gillespie', 1985, New York, synthetic polymer paint and screenprint on canvas, 101.6 x 101.6 cm; South Australian Government Grant 1996, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Image: © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc ARS/Copyright Agency.

Warhol is only known to have made portraits of two Australians, Henry Gillespie and the late Loti Smorgon. Gillespie was in Adelaide for the launch of the exhibition and posed with his colourful portraits, the four works reunited here to be hung together. One is usually in AGSA's permanent collection of, the other three at the NGA.

Art critic Robert Hughes famously described Warhol as the 'voyeur in chief to the marginal and then the rich'. This is starkly apparent in this exhibition of celebrity and decadence. We can only imagine Warhol's response had he known that his *Shot Sage Blue Marilyn* was sold at Christie's in New York last year for US$195 million. This is the highest price ever achieved for a work by an American artist.

The 1964 silkscreen image shows Marilyn Monroe in vibrant close-up with bright yellow hair, striking blue eyeshadow, and deep red lips against a rich blue background. Interestingly, those bright red lips that feature in so many of his iconic portraits do not always belong to the person in the image – Warhol would add them in to enhance the image in a forerunner of today's Photoshop.

'During the 1960s, in addition to creating his Pop art paintings, Warhol was a leading underground filmmaker, making hundreds of experimental films. Some were silent, some were loosely scripted and others were largely improvised; most invariably relied upon friends and acquaintances as "actors", such as in his 1965 film *Camp*,' says Robinson in the notes to the exhibition. There are also examples of screen tests or 'stillies' – three-minute silent portraits of sitters who were instructed to sit motionless and gaze directly at the camera.



Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, 'Andy Warhol kissing John Lennon', 1978, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 27.7 x 41.7 cm (image), 40.7 x 50.4 cm (sheet); V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2022, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Image: © Christopher Makos.

Warhol exhibited very few of his photographs during his lifetime although, in January 1987, just weeks before he died, he revealed a new approach to his photography in an exhibition of 'stitched photographs' at the Robert Miller Gallery in New York.

In an essay about Warhol portraits, Tony Shafrazi said, 'I see Warhol as a gentle magician who stole the hypnotic eye of the photograph and gave it to us as a gift so we could use it to look at ourselves.' This seems so true when you are immersed in this wonderful exhibition.

Read: Don't underestimate the cold call: behind HOTA's Pop exhibition

Interestingly, one of the major pieces is an 'unauthorised edition' from Sunday B Morning of the famous (and ubiquitous) Marilyn portrait. These editions were initially rejected by Warhol who refused to endorse them as genuine editions and even wrote 'not by me' on each one. Times change, however, and they are now endorsed in the official *catalogue raisonné* of Warhol prints. And, yes, the iconic Campbell soup cans are featured larger-than-life on the facing wall.

Installation view: 'Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media' featuring 'Andy Warhol's Self-portraits', Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Photo: Saul Steed.

Andy Warhol and Photography: A social media is set out across four gallery spaces representing the four stages of the Factory, Warhol's famed studio on East 47th Street in Manhattan. Some of the walls are covered in silver, although it's not the same silver foil as was used originally to cover the walls of the studio from floor to ceiling. There is a Silver Cloud Studio in the Foyer of the Art Gallery where you can create your own silver print portrait; this is a free activity suitable for all ages.

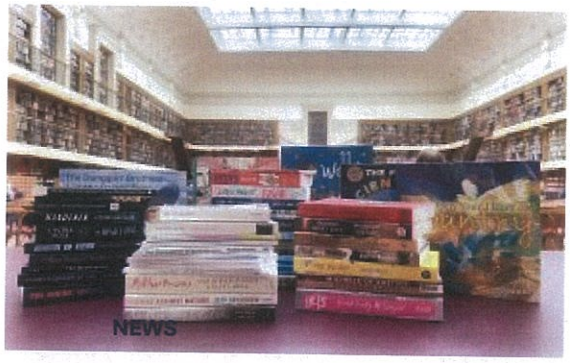
Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media ***is a ticketed exhibition at AGSA to May 14 2023.***

Dr Diana Carroll

Dr Diana Carroll is a writer, speaker, and reviewer based in Adelaide. Her work has been published in newspapers and magazines including the Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, Woman's Day, and B&T. Writing about the arts is one of her great passions.

Related News

All Arts Design Education & Student News Glass News Opinions & Analysis Performing Arts Reviews Visual Arts Writing and Publishing



Opportunities and awards

Art prizes open for entries, plus First Nations Creative Fellowship recipient and book awards announcements, and more!

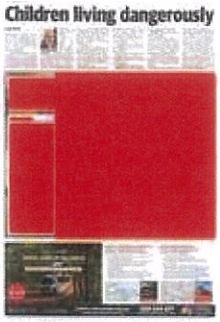
CELINA LEI

Remote Indigenous artists zooming in on photography

New work in photographic mediums is shining light on First Nations stories we don't often get to see.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, WARHOL: ICON'S POP ART...
By PATRICK MCDONALD

The Advertiser
Friday 3rd March 2023
246 words
Page 22 | Section: NEWS
494cm on the page



LIGHTS, CAMERA, WARHOL: ICON'S POP ART SNAPS

PATRICK MCDONALD

TWO former associates of Andy Warhol have met for the first time at the Art Gallery of SA's major exhibition of the late US pop art icon's photographs.

Penny Arcade, who first performed at the Adelaide Festival in 1994 and this year returned at the Pyramid in Victoria Square, was introduced to Christopher Makos, who also collaborated with Warhol in New York and took 25 of the photos in the show.

"Andy loved photography," said Arcade, 72, who was born Susana Ventura and met Warhol in the 1960s.

"This is the great synchronicity of events – apparently the curator had been trying to get in touch with me for six months," Arcade said.

"So it was a complete shock to me that this show was happening."

Despite their shared history with Warhol, Arcade and Makos had never crossed paths before.

Makos's photographs include one of Warhol in a woman's wig and makeup, and others of him kissing celebrities John Lennon and Liza Minnelli.

"I used to have a two-page column in Interview magazine ... when Valentine's Day was coming about, I said to Andy, 'Let's get you kissing people'," he said.

"Everybody is very lucky in Adelaide to have some of these moments of New York history."

Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media runs until May 14.

Friends of Andy Warhol, Penny Arcade and Christopher Makos at the Art Gallery of SA. Picture: Matt Loxton

brisbane times

Culture Art & design Photography

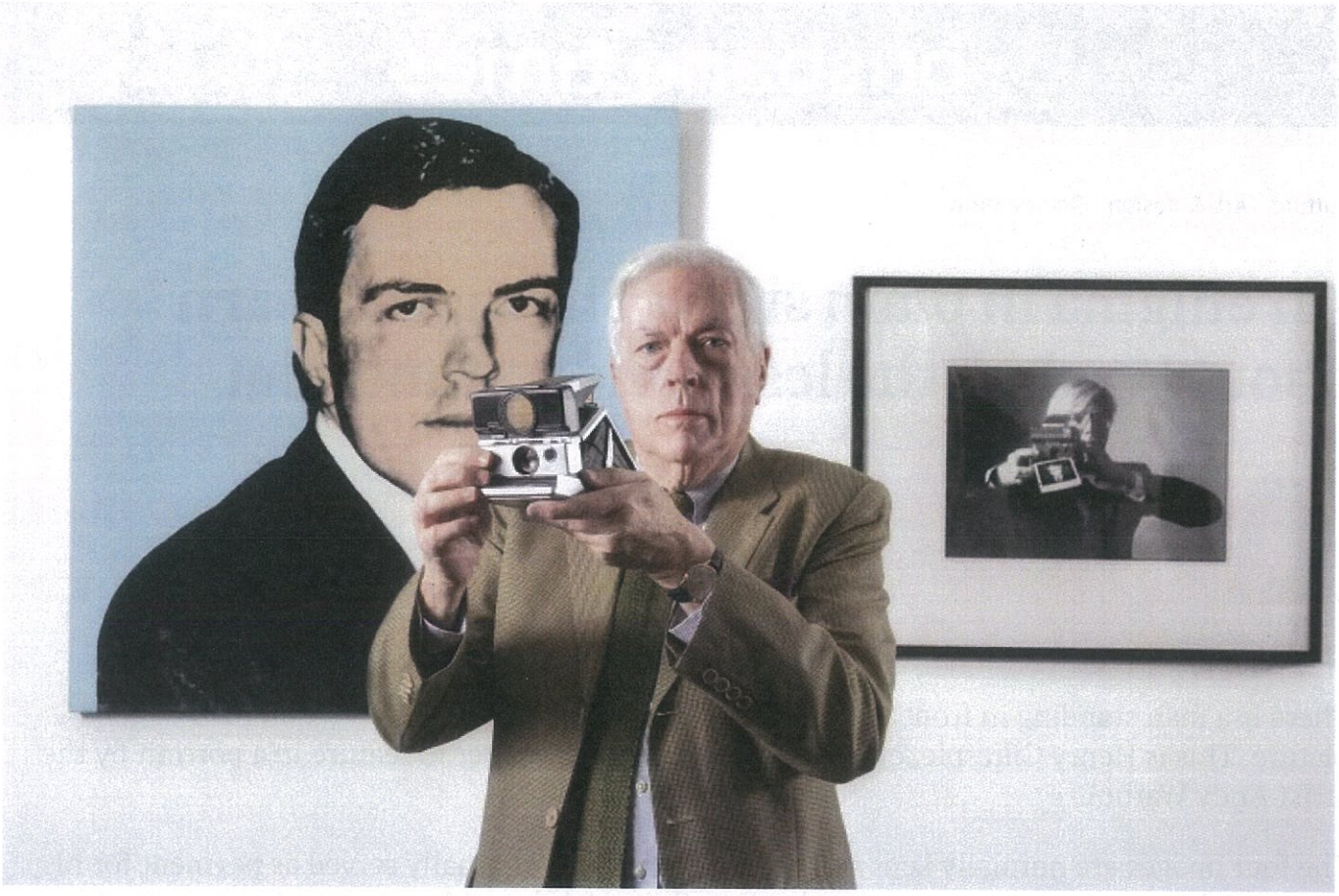
An enigma in plain sight: The more I learn about Warhol, the less I understand him

Elizabeth Flux

March 3, 2023 — 4.30am

There is a man standing in front of four colourful portraits of himself as we all rush to get a picture. This is Henry Gillespie, one of only two Australians ever to feature in a portrait by the artist Andy Warhol.

The four images are normally kept separately. One, which originally served as payment for his work on Warhol's *Interview* magazine, hung in Gillespie's home for years and is now owned by the Art Gallery of South Australia. The other three are part of the National Gallery of Australia collection. "They don't come out very often," he tells me. "It's lovely to see them because they belong together – and they've been hung correctly," he adds with a small smile.



Henry Gillespie with Andy Warhol's Henry Gillespie and Oliviero Toscani's Andy Warhol, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. SAUL STEED

Gillespie's portraits form part of the premiere exhibition *Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, which takes the unusual approach of focusing on Warhol – better known for his paintings and films – via his still photography.

The gallery has built the exhibition from the ground up, starting with its own core collection of 45 photographs and expanding from there. Julie Robinson, senior curator of prints, drawings and photographs, has spent 10 years carefully researching and gathering the pieces to tell this story, both of how Warhol saw and was perceived in the world.

Andy Warhol and Henry Gillespie. COURTESY OF HENRY GILLESPIE

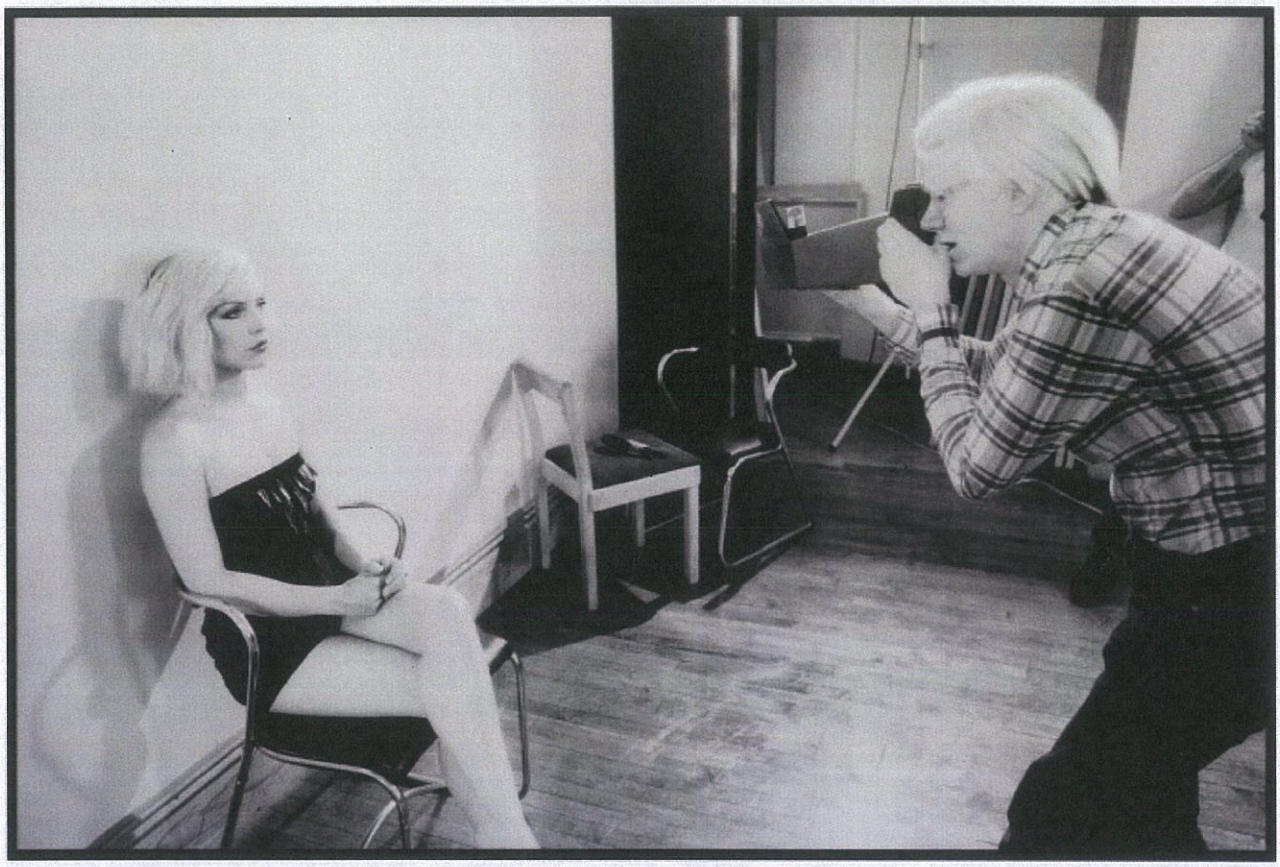
"Everybody knew that he carried a camera in his social circle, but not many people had seen his photographs," says Robinson. "He was taking a couple of rolls of film a day." From there, he would work with photographer, friend and collaborator Christopher Makos to decide which ones to print.

When Makos walks me through the exhibition, he highlights the *Altered Image* series he helped steer which feature photos of Warhol made up and wearing different wigs. "Andy said 'I just want to be pretty.' And don't we all want to be pretty?"

Christopher Makos with his Altered Image series in Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media, AGSA.
SAUL STEED

Directly opposite is a wall filled with Makos' own photographs of Warhol: Warhol rowing a boat; Warhol painting the American flag; Warhol having an elaborate crown placed on his head. "Because Andy loved posing and being in front of the camera, it always ended up being a portrait," Makos says. "He was very self-aware in a way that all of these Instagrammers are self-aware."

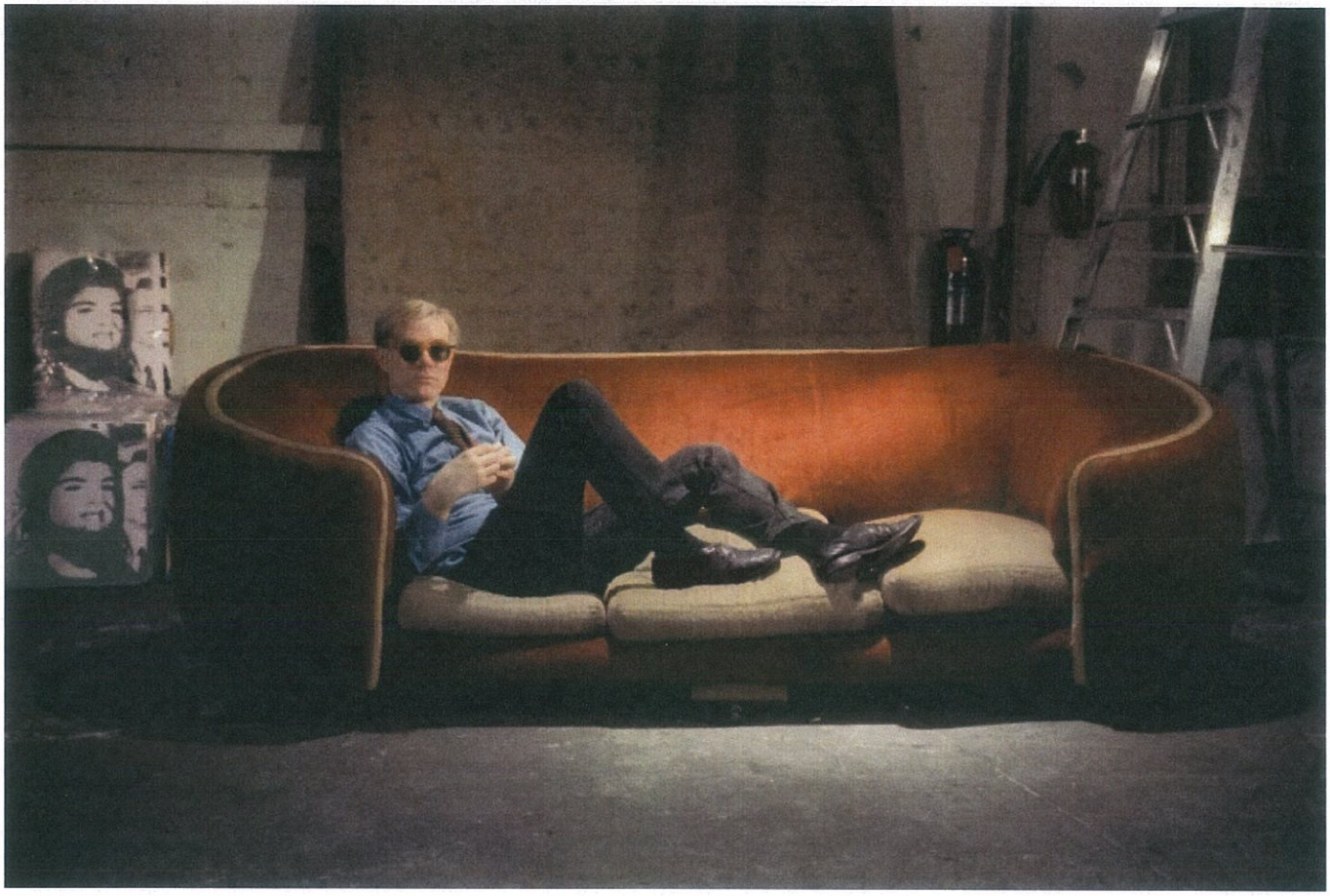
At multiple points on our walk through, Makos stops to take photos on his phone. He captures people looking at the photographs or walking into other rooms. Earlier, when guiding a bigger group with Robinson, he would raise his phone to take pictures of us while we were taking pictures of him.



Andy Warhol photographs Debbie Harry. CHRIS STEIN

There are meta moments like these built into the exhibition itself. There are photographs of photographs being taken. Warhol's famous Marilyn Monroe series takes pride of place on one wall. Directly in front is a horizontal glass cabinet featuring the original image that inspired it, with rough lines drawn to indicate where the picture should be cropped.

In almost every room, your eye will be drawn to a final image, then just to one side you'll see the smaller photograph that it's built from. Pictures feature within pictures. A signed photograph of Shirley Temple takes pride of place next to a portrait of Warhol where the same image can be seen just over his left shoulder. When you leave, you're encouraged to pose on a red couch beneath a picture of Warhol doing the same.



Andy Warhol on the red couch at the Factory, 1964, New York. BOB ADELMAN,

There are over 250 objects on display, including books, photographs, cover sheets and cameras. In between Warhol's own photos, there are images of him taken by his friends and contemporaries, including Robert Mapplethorpe.

Credit for photographs is also sometimes a blurry issue, Makos points out. Warhol made a habit of passing around his camera, so some of the images credited to Warhol are ones taken by his friends – including Makos. He doesn't seem to mind, though according to the exhibition notes, some others were less relaxed about it.

The story of relationships, of social circles, of who held fascination for Warhol plays out across the walls in every room.

"He made people look glamorous," says Gillespie. It's true, though one of the most fascinating aspects of the exhibition is how he made glamorous people – the myriad celebrities in his orbit – look candid while still maintaining a degree of mystique. In between the portraits are moments of life simply being lived. He seems both paparazzo and trusted friend, catching those around him off guard.

There's a wall of Mick Jagger. Debbie Harry appears time and time again. Liza Minnelli is another favourite subject, with Makos adding that sometimes if Warhol was dissatisfied with the lips in a picture he was working on, he would regularly print an image of Minnelli's on top instead.

It's strange though, after walking through room after room of pictures of and by Warhol, the man himself seems more mysterious than ever. Sometimes he looks relaxed, others he looks strained. He poses, and it's hard to know what the truth is underneath the facade.

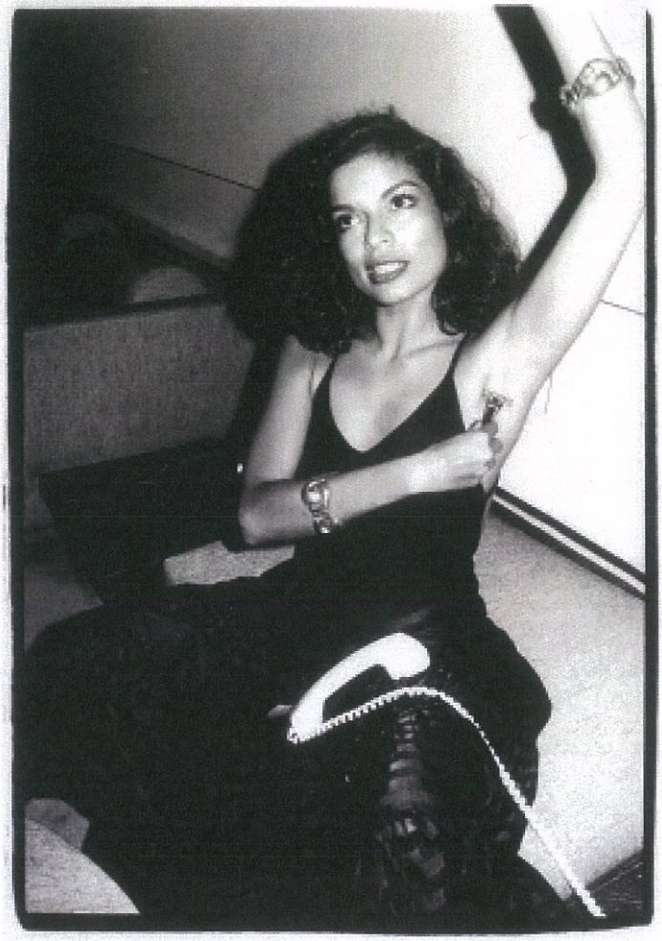
Beneath the costumes, the staged images, and in between his celebrity friends, there is perhaps one hint, one constant.

"I often point out to people, look at Warhol's hands," says Makos. "He was very awkward – he didn't know what to do with his hands." After hearing this I see it everywhere. Hands clenched together, hands resting on props, hands held at uncomfortable angles. There are only a few moments where his hands look completely at ease: when he's holding a camera.

Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media is on at Art Gallery of South Australia until May 14.

A cultural guide to going out and loving your city. Sign up to our Culture Fix newsletter here.

Elizabeth Flux is Arts Editor at The Age. Connect via Twitter or email.



Bianca Jagger at Halston's house, New York, 1976.
ANDY WARHOL

Andy Warhol, 1986, New York. ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

ABC

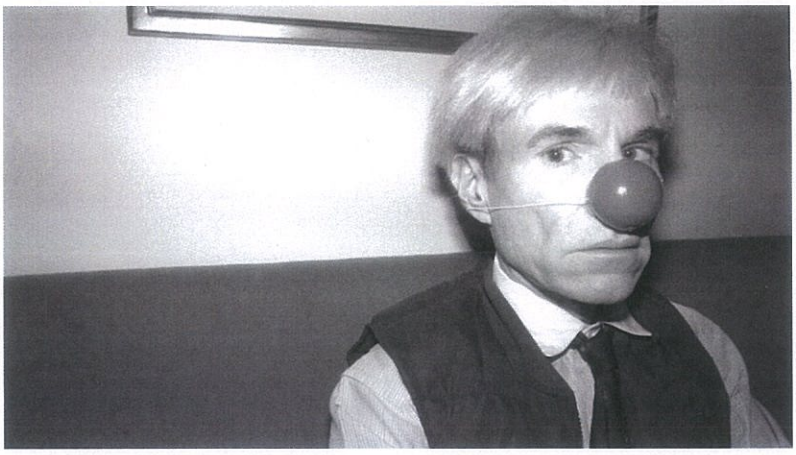
RN

Life Matters with Hila 8:30AM to 9:30AM

PLAY LIVE RADIO

Christopher Makos: Intimacy and Andy Warhol

Broadcast Thu 2 Mar 2023 at 4:00pm



Andy Warhol with clown nose, 1982 Zurich, gelatin-silver photograph. The photo, by Christopher Makos is appearing at the AGSA exhibition Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media *(Photo by: Christopher Makos)*

Christopher Makos first made his name capturing New York's music scene in the 1970s, as glam rock and punk brought a visual kick to the city.

That scene led him to a long friendship and collaboration with Andy Warhol, and to a body of work that's been exhibited everywhere from the Guggenheim to the Whitney.

Makos' work is part the Art Gallery of South Australia's exhibition, Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media, and in the Drawing Room he talks about Warhol, candlelit blackouts with Debbie Harry, and how he creates a sense of intimacy in his images.

Credits

- Andy Park, Presenter
- Sky Kirkham, Producer

Broadcast Thu 2 Mar 2023 at 4:00pm

FULL EPISODE

Christopher Makos: Intimacy and Andy Warhol

IN THIS EPISODE

PLAYING

Christopher Makos: Intimacy and Andy Warhol

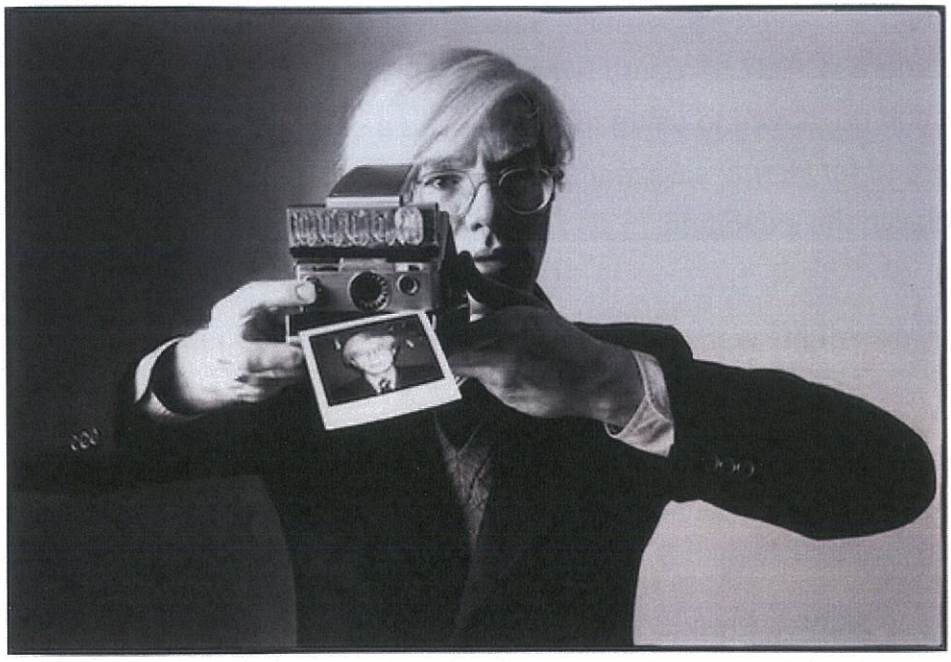
Daily Bulletin

Friday, March 10, 2023 12:31:23 PM

FRI
MAR 10

Polaroids of the everyday and portraits of the rich and famous: you should know the compulsive photography of Andy Warhol

Written by Catherine Speck, Emerita Professor, Art History and Curatorship, University of Adelaide



Review: Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media, Art Gallery of South Australia.

Andy Warhol is well known for his slick pop art imagery which fetches staggering amounts at auction. His Shot Sage Blue Marilyn sold in 2022 for US$195 million.

Here, Warhol emerges as a compulsive photographer whose images range from snapshot polaroids of the everyday, to portraits of the rich and famous, to Warhol himself in various self-portraits.

His camera was the iPhone of today, obsessively putting out images well before the phrases "social media" and "selfie" were invented.

Gerard Malanga, born Bronx, New York, United States, 1943, Andy Warhol, 1971, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 33.7 x 22.6 (image), 35.6 x 27.8 cm (sheet); National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Purchased 1973.

***Read more:** Five reasons Andy Warhol is so popular right now*

Warhol and the camera

Warhol began using a polaroid camera in 1957 to record himself and his friends. He was a leading magazine illustrator in New York and he moved to using the camera as a source for imagery in commissions such as a photo spread for Harper's Bazaar in 1963, and a cover image for Time Magazine in 1965 – both on display in the exhibition.

Photography for Warhol was a key part of his working method, even though some of his images have a snapshot quality.

He famously said:

> I think anybody can take a good picture. My idea of a good picture is one that's in focus and of a famous person doing something unfamous.

By 1961 he was using his photo-based imagery for his pop art silkscreens in his Campbell's Soup Can series. His polaroid photographs continued to be the basis for many silkscreens, such as his exuberant Mick Jagger series (1975), co-signed by each.

Installation view: Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; photo: Saul Steed.

Installation view: Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media featuring Andy Warhol's Ladies and gentlemen, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; photo: Saul Steed.

A stunning set of photographs on show come from his time in the 1970s and '80s producing gelatin-silver photo portraits of the celebrity figures based on initial Big Shot Polaroid images.

The dazzling array, which includes David Hockney, Henry Kissinger embracing Elizabeth Taylor, Liza Minnelli and Joseph Beuys, come from a mix of polished and in-situ photoshoots.

Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States 1928, died New York, United States 1987, Liza Minnelli, 1978, New York, PolaroidTM Polacolor Type 108, 9.5 x 7.3 cm (image), 10.8 x 8.5 cm (sheet); V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2012, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

Late in his relatively short life, Warhol began stitching photographs together. Empire State Building (1982), showing multiples of the same image in grid formation, signals this new direction.

The Factory

This isn't just an exhibition of Warhol, but also of his collaborators and contemporaries. The exhibition begins recreating the famous silver-lined Factory, the studio of Warhol and fellow photographers from 1964-68.

The Factory is remembered now as a site of legendary photographs and experimental films.

Warhol's loosely scripted and silent experimental films on show from this time include the touchingly intimate Haircut (1964) and the delightfully chaotic Camp (1965). The "actors" were all, in fact, friends and acquaintances.

You sense the intensity of life there. Billy Name, the Factory's archivist, said

> it was almost as if the Factory became a big box camera - you'd walk in, expose yourself and develop yourself.

In this exhibition, Warhol's photographs sit alongside photographs from Name, Steve Schapiro, Brigid Berlin and Robert Mapplethorpe.

Purchased 1989, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Warhol himself is the subject in some photographs. Warhol would hand the camera around to other photographers like Jill Krementz who would capture him on film.

She is the photographer of Andy and Hitchcock, but the image is credited to Warhol, as often happened.

Andy Warhol born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States 1928 died New York, United States 1987 Andy and Hitchcock 1974, New York PolaroidTM Polacolor Type 108 7.2 x 9.6 cm (image) 8.5 x 10.8 cm (sheet) V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2012 Art Gallery of South Adelaide © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

Other polaroids on show include Warhol's homoerotic male torsos (1977), and the kissing series by Warhol's collaborator Christopher Makos for a Valentine's Day issue of Interview magazine, including Andy kissing John Lennon (1978).

Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, Andy Warhol Kissing John Lennon, 1978, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 27.7 x 41.7 cm (image), 40.7 x 50.4 cm (sheet); V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2022, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Christopher Makos.

Fleshing out the character

This is a large exhibition of 250-plus exhibits, including marked-up contact sheets, photobooth strip images, various cameras including the polaroid camera, issues of Interview magazine featuring Warhol's photographs, and a video of his last exhibition in London in 1986 (he died unexpectedly in February 1987).

Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, Andy taping Christopher Reeves for 'Interview' magazine, 1977, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 21.2 x 32.2 cm (image), 27.5 x 35.3 cm (sheet); Private collection, © Christopher Makos.

The final painting on show from that exhibition is Warhol's camouflage-covered Self-portrait no. 9 (1986), an image that could be a composite of the many photographic portraits such as Makos's Andy Warhol in American Flag, Madrid (1983).

Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States 1928, died New York, United States 1987, Self-portrait no.9, 1986, New York, synthetic polymer paint and screenprint on canvas, 203.5 x 203.7 cm; Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of the National

The many portrayals of Warhol himself add flesh to his reputation as self-seeking, but they also penetrate the mask he so successfully cultivated. The Altered Image by Makos shows Warhol with a blond wig and wearing female make-up.

Makos recalled Warhol saying "I want to be pretty, just like everyone else".

Christopher Makos, born Lowell, Massachusetts, United States 1948, Altered Image from the portfolio Altered Image: Five Photographs of Andy Warhol, 1981; published 1982, New York, gelatin-silver photograph, 44.8 x 32.2 cm (image), 50.6 x 40.8 cm (sheet); Purchased 1982, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, © Christopher Makos.

***Read more:** Andy Warhol still surprises, 30 years after his death*

An astounding output

This exhibition is a wholly immersive time capsule capturing life in New York for Warhol and his circle in the 1960s, '70s and early '80s. It shows just how astounding Warhol's output was as a photographer, and how photography underpinned his entire oeuvre.

As Makos observed at the opening, he had seen many a Warhol exhibition, but never one that captured this side of Warhol – and so perfectly too.

It is well worth a trip to Adelaide. It is not a touring exhibition and brings together key work from international and national collections.

Andy Warhol, born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 1928, died New York City, New York 1987, Debbie Harry, 1980, New York, PolaroidTM Polacolor Type 108, 10.8 x 8.6 cm (sheet), 9.7 x 7.3 (image); V.B. F. Young Bequest Fund and d'Auvergne Boxall Bequest Fund 2018, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. ARS/Copyright Agency.

The only inexplicable aspect is the lack of an exhibition catalogue, from a gallery with a reputation for producing prize-winning catalogues. Exhibitions are, by their nature, ephemeral events; the record lies in the catalogue.

For a groundbreaking one like this, presenting a new side to Warhol and his collaborative photographic practice, a record is needed.

Read more: ***Did pop art have its heyday in the 1960s? Perhaps. But it is also utterly contemporary***

Authors: Catherine Speck, Emerita Professor, Art History and Curatorship, University of Adelaide

Read more https://theconversation.com/polaroids-of-the-everyday-and-portraits-of-the-rich-and-famous-you-should-know-the-compulsive-photography-of-andy-warhol-200081

PREV

NEXT

Culture VULTURE
By With Alison Kubler

The Sunday Mail
Sunday 12th March 2023
402 words
Page 42 | Section: / ARTS
400cm on the page

Culture VULTURE

Warhol in Adelaide

With Alison Kubler

Andy Warhol once declared: "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes", a prescient prediction from an artist who lived long before social media. I often wonder what Warhol would have made of Instagram, YouTube and the multitudinous social media platforms that now exist. No doubt he would've loved them and been an early adopter.

He was openly obsessed with fame and celebrity, and coveted recognition, acceptance and popularity, cultivating relationships with the rich and famous (which is partly why he started *Interview* magazine), taking his camera everywhere to document fly-on-the-wall moments at the likes of Studio 54.

Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media (until May 14) is a fabulous exhibition on now at the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of the 2023 Adelaide Festival's visual arts program. It asks, in part, was Warhol the father of social media as we understand it? Was he – gasp – an influencer?

The exhibition brings together a huge number of candid portraits by Warhol of his own life and that of the celebrities he associated with, such as Muhammad Ali, Bob Dylan, Debbie Harry, Mick Jagger, John Lennon, Liza Minnelli, Lou Reed and Elizabeth Taylor. I love these images for their analog quality – there are no filters here! This is Bianca Jagger shaving her armpit, and that is Jacqueline Onassis and Liza Minnelli having a conversation.

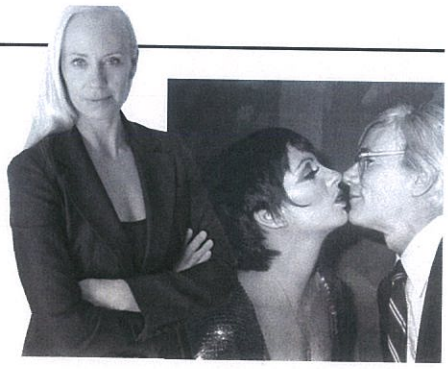
It's too fabulous. There are more than 250 works by Warhol, focusing on his photographs, but also his experimental films and paintings.

Other artists incorporated alongside Warhol in this exhibition include long-time collaborator Gerard Malanga, Robert Mapplethorpe and Christopher Makos.

I suggest you watch the documentary *The Andy Warhol Diaries* in preparation, especially for the bits featuring Makos, his artist friend as well as collaborator, who came for the opening. He was the artist responsible for the now famous images of Warhol dressed in drag, a series explored in the documentary.

agsa.sa.gov.au

re
RE
ıler



From far left: Christopher Makos's *Andy Warhol Kissing Liza Minnelli* (1978); one of Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962); one of Warhol's Elvis Presley series (1963).

EAT

Looking at art is hungry work and I recommend Osteria Oggi, a short walk from AGSA, for delicious Italian.

osteriaoggi.com.au

SHOP

Pick up artisan gifts at the acclaimed Jam Factory, where there's ceramics, jewellery and glass by the state's leading artists for sale.

jamfactory.com.au

Culture Vulture: Adelaide Festival celebrates Warhol's 15 minutes of fame

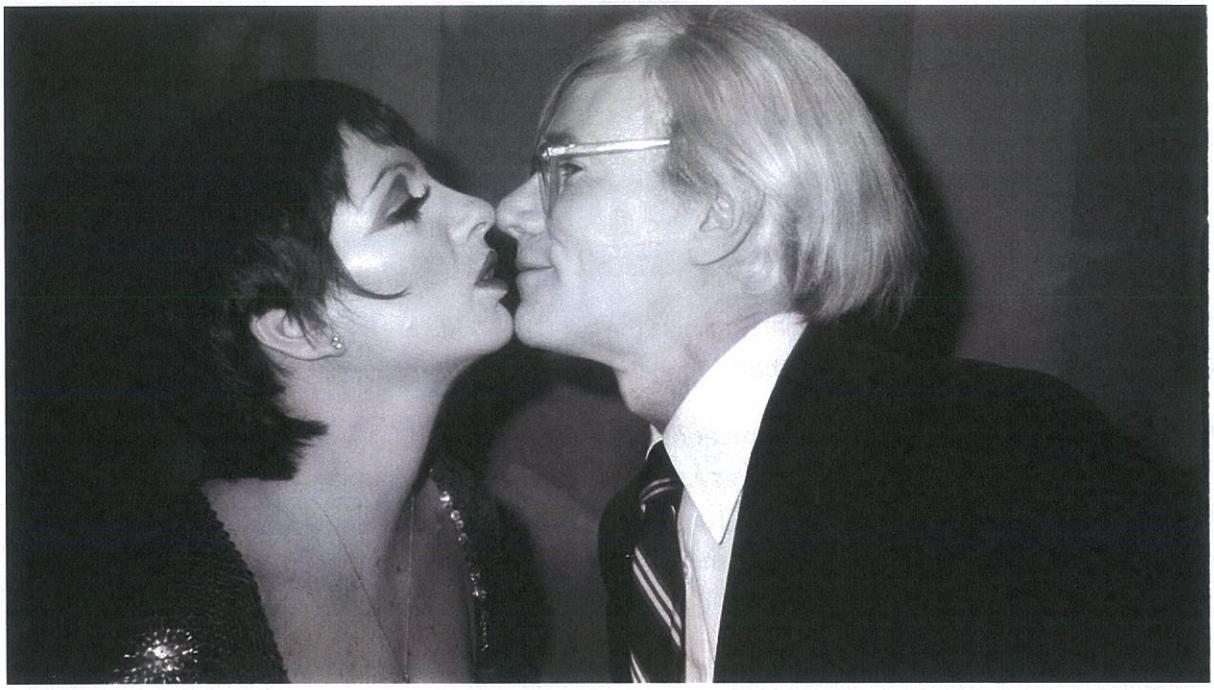
Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media brings together more than 250 works by the celebrated artist, including photographs, experimental films and paintings.

Alison Kubler

less than 2 min read

March 9, 2023 - 1:40PM

Add to favourites



Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media is on now at the Art Gallery of South Australia. It includes more than 250 Warhols as well as portraits by Christopher Makos, including"Liza kissing Andy (1978)". Picture: Art Gallery of South Australia © Christopher Makos.

Andy Warhol once declared: "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes", a prescient prediction from an artist who lived long before social media. I often wonder what Warhol would have made of Instagram, YouTube and the multitudinous social media platforms that now exist. No doubt he would've loved them and been an early adopter.

He was openly obsessed with fame and celebrity, and coveted recognition, acceptance and popularity, cultivating relationships with the rich and famous (which is partly why he started *Interview* magazine), taking his camera everywhere to document fly-on-the-wall moments at the likes of Studio 54.

Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media (until May 14) is a fabulous exhibition on now at the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of the 2023 Adelaide Festival's visual arts program. It asks, in part, was Warhol the father of social media as we understand it? Was he – gasp – an influencer?

Andy Warhol and Photography: A Social Media at the Art Gallery of South Australia features 250 works by the artist, including his Campbell's Soup Cans (1962). Picture: Art Gallery of South Australia.

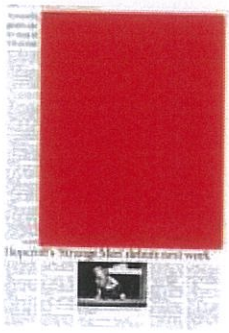
The exhibition brings together a huge number of candid portraits by Warhol of his own life and that of the celebrities he associated with, such as Muhammad Ali, Bob Dylan, Debbie Harry, Mick Jagger, John Lennon, Liza Minnelli, Lou Reed and Elizabeth Taylor. I love these images for their analog quality – there are no filters here! This is Bianca Jagger shaving her armpit, and that is Jacqueline Onassis and Liza Minnelli having a conversation. It's too fabulous. There are more than 250 works by Warhol, focusing on his photographs, but also his experimental films and paintings.

Other artists incorporated alongside Warhol in this exhibition include long-time collaborator Gerard Malanga, Robert Mapplethorpe and Christopher Makos.

I suggest you watch the documentary *The Andy Warhol Diaries* in preparation, especially for the bits featuring Makos, his artist friend as well as collaborator, who came for the opening. He was the artist responsible for the now famous images of Warhol dressed in drag, a series explored in the documentary.

Strong Women exhibit celebrates storytelling
By BY CHLOE COLEMAN

The Maitland Mercury
Friday 10th March 2023
468 words
Page 14 | Section: LIFE ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT
594cm on the page



Strong Women exhibit celebrates storytelling

Art Gallery of South Australia's Dr Lisa Slade and Maitland Regional Art Gallery director Dr Gerry Bobsien. Picture supplied.

BY **CHLOE COLEMAN**

A BREATHTAKING exhibition featuring art from dozens of strong, Indigenous women has taken over Maitland Regional Art Gallery.

Kungka Kunpu (Strong Women) is a touring exhibition, drawn from the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

It showcases celebrated women artists from the Aangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands), a remote community in the North West of South Australia, a couple of hours south from Uluru.

The exhibition, co-curated by Dr Lisa Slade from the Art Gallery of South Australia, features paintings, video, grass sculptures and audio from the artists.

It's all about women working both individually and collaboratively, and sharing stories of past, present and future.

Dr Slade, who selected the collection with colleague Nici Cumpston, said the exhibition is created by women working both together and individually.

"Working together gives artists the chance to pass on cultural knowledge, to share and make strong culture," she said.

"The canvases in this room all speak to the idea of country, there's very much a sense that you are grounded. You're grounded in stories of place, you're grounded in stories of Country.

"Some of the artists are calling on ancestral stories passed down to them by family members, others are painting directly the environment that they're living in, and they're painting their tjukurpa (the dreaming)," she said.

The women of the APY Lands are cultural custodians of an oral storytelling tradition, and there are QR codes to scan across the exhibition featuring audio clips from the artists themselves.

In the book Dr Slade has created to go alongside the exhibition, artist Nyumiti Burton said "the spirit of our ancestors watches over us as we celebrate our culture".

"When I paint my Tjukurpa (law, culture and creation stories), when I sing the songs of my country, I feel the spirit of the ancestors watching me," she said.

"The women leaders of the lands who went before us sing alongside the women of today. We feel their presence as they watch over us and our country."

Artists involved in Kungka Kunpu include:

Kukika Adamson, Lindy Aitken, Suzanne Armstrong, Angkuna Baker, Leena Baker, Sonia Bannington, Verna Bannington, Freda Brady, Shantariah Brumby, Kunmanara (Wawiriya) Burton, Maringka Burton, Nyunmiti Burton, Betty Chimney, Nellie Coulthard, Emily Cullinan, Kendra Cullinan, Leonie Cullinan, Vicki Cullinan, Unrupa Rhonda Dick, Maureen Douglas, Nyurpaya Kaika Burton, Naomi Kantjuriny, Kunmanara (Tjampawa Katie) Kawiny, Anastine Ken, Iluwanti Ken, Sandra Ken, Serena Ken, Sylvia Ken, Tjungkara Ken, Rene Kulitja, Kunmanara (Niningka) Lewis, Laurel Macumba, Kunmanara (Judy) Martin, Kunmanara (Paniny) Mick, Barbara Mbitjana Moore, Betty Muffler, Ngila Mungkuri, Chelsea Namatjira, Mary Katatjuku Pan, Natasha Pompey.

The exhibition runs until Sunday, May 21.

Weekender

Strong Women show from the Art Gallery of SA opens at Maitland

By Jo Cooper
Updated March 2 2023 - 2:38pm, first published 9:30am

'Seven Sisters' - Pitjantjatjara artist Nyunmiti Burton's work (detail). Image courtesy of the artist and APY Art Centre Collective. Picture by Grant Hancock

The Seven Sisters constellation has important meaning to the First Nations women of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, telling the story of female power.

Several works in the *Kungka Kunpu (Strong Women)* exhibition are based on the Kungkarangkalpa, or Seven Sisters, stories from the desert region in the far north of South Australia.

← News Home

Artist Nyunmiti B of the local
Indigenous counc ouncil and a
founding director or Anangu people
of the western desert languages, grew up at Pukatja (Ernabella) where the region's historic arts movement began.

One of Pitjantjatjara artist Angkuna Baker's works. Picture courtesy the artist and Iwantja Arts photography (Saul Steed).

← News Home

Ernabella sheep station. The women collected tufts of wool caught in the wire fences, spinning it and then making rugs. They moved on to learn other artisan skills, including famously travelling to Indonesia to study the art of batik resistance dyeing, a skill which they then passed down locally. Batik pieces from the region hang in the British Museum in London.

The Pukatja/Ernabella centre sparked the establishment of community arts and crafts centres across the region. All of the region's arts centres are now represented by the APY Arts Centre Collective which operates galleries in Sydney's Darlinghurst and in Melbourne, with a studio and gallery also in Adelaide, where women can meet to collaborate on works.

Nyunmiti Burton with her work 'Kungkarangkalpa Seven Sisters'. Image courtesy of the the artist and APY Art Centre Collective. Picture by Andy Francis

Burton was painting her 2.9-metre square work *Kungkarangkalpa - Seven Sisters*, which is showcased in *Kungka Kunpu*, when former prime minister Julia Gilliard visited her last year.

Gilliard, who is now chair of the Global Institution for Women's Leadership at King's College London, wrote an introductory message for the exhibition catalogue stating that Burton's painting was an "articulation of the role of women looking after women". The exhibition and the lives of the women artists placed them alongside "aspiring and successful leaders worldwide", Gillard wrote.

Newcastle's Lisa Slade, who is a long-time curator at the Art Gallery of South Australia and co-curator of *Kungka Kunpu*, says the touring exhibition is a powerful communication based on "an ancient call and response".

← News Home

The Ken Family (left to right) Tjungkara Ken, Sandra Ken, Freda Brady, Maringka Tunkin, Yaritji Tingila Young and Paniny Mick with their collaborative work angkura-KangkuraKu Tjukurpa A Sisters Story'. Image courtesy of Ken Family Collaborative and Tjala Arts.

The Ken Family Collective have also depicted a story of sisters, with their collaborative work *Kangkura-KangkuraKu Tjukurpa - A Sister's Story* comprised of three 3-metre x 2-metre panels. The work by the Ken sisters, Yaritji Tingila Young, Maringka Tunkin, Sandra Ken, Freda Brady and Tjungkara Ken, and their mother Paniny Mick, references the Seven Sisters story as well as Tjala Tjukurpa (Honey Ant creation story).

They painted on a grounded canvas sometimes working simultaneously, and sometimes as a stream, with one sister's mark calling "for another's reply".

The catalogue asserts that partly through this collaborative spirit "Anangu women artists have helped to redefine the Australian landscape painting tradition, historically the province of white male artists".

← News Home

'Ngayuku ngura My country' by Kunmanara (Wawiriya) Burton. Image courtesy of estate of Kunmanara (Wawiriya) Burton/Tjala Arts.

Betty Chimney and Raylene Walatinna's painting *Nganampa Ngura - ngunytju munu untalpa* (*Our Country - mother and daughter*) was a finalist in last year's Wynne Prize.

Kaylene Whiskey's Seven Sisters work, *Seven Sistas Sign*, is less traditional than others. Painted on an old road sign it features strong women from pop culture such as Dolly Parton, Cat Woman, Tina Turner and Wonder Woman as the sisters.

The *Kungka Kunpa* exhibition was developed for the Art Gallery of South Australia's Tarnanthi program which works to bring major new works of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to audiences across the country and internationally.

Language sharing is a significant aspect of Tarnanthi's ethos, with a glossary included in the Kungka Kunpu show, and an online video by

painting.

← News Home

Yaritji Tingila Young's 'Tjala tjukurpa - Honey ant story'. Image courtesy: Yaritji Tingila Young and Tjala Arts.

Running concurrently with *Kungka Kunpu* is an exhibition of blown glass vessels painted by artists from the most remote communities of the APY Lands, *Tjukurpa (Stories) Ninuku Arts*.

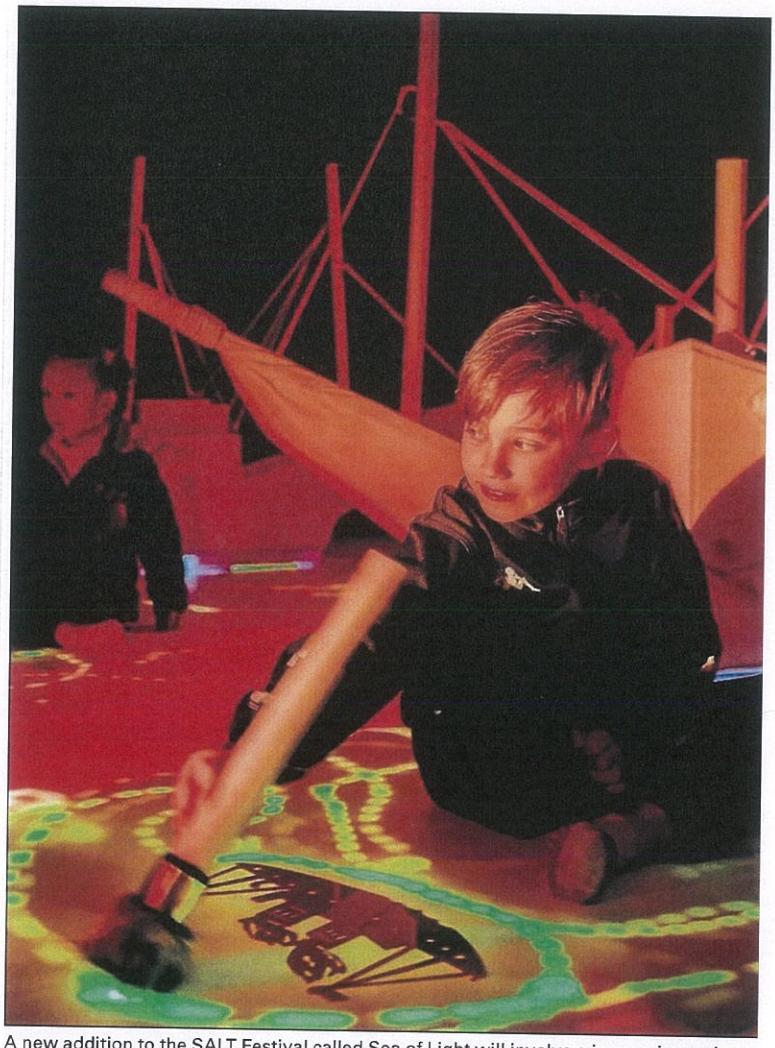
Also opening at the Maitland Regional Art Gallery in March is *Mir Giz Kemerkemen Opged Lam Zenadh Kes (Stories from the Torres Strait Eastern Islands)*, an exhibition by Hunter-based Torres Strait Islander artist Toby Cedar relating traditional and contemporary mask and headdress culture.

Kunga Kunpu runs March 4 to May 21, Tjukurpa (Stories) Ninuku Arts runs March 4 to May 28 and Mir Giz Kemerkemen Opged Lam Zenadh Kes (Stories from the Torres Strait Eastern Islands) - Toby Cedar runs March 18 to May 28.

Kungka Kunpu language audio and video is available via agsa.sa.gov.au

A touch of light for Cummins festival

Port Lincoln Times
Thursday 9th March 2023
171 words
Page 4 | Section: NEWS
351cm on the page



A new addition to the SALT Festival called Sea of Light will involve a immersive and interactive light experience for children and families. Picture supplied.

Sea of Light will be held in the Cummins Hall. Picture supplied.

A touch of light for Cummins festival

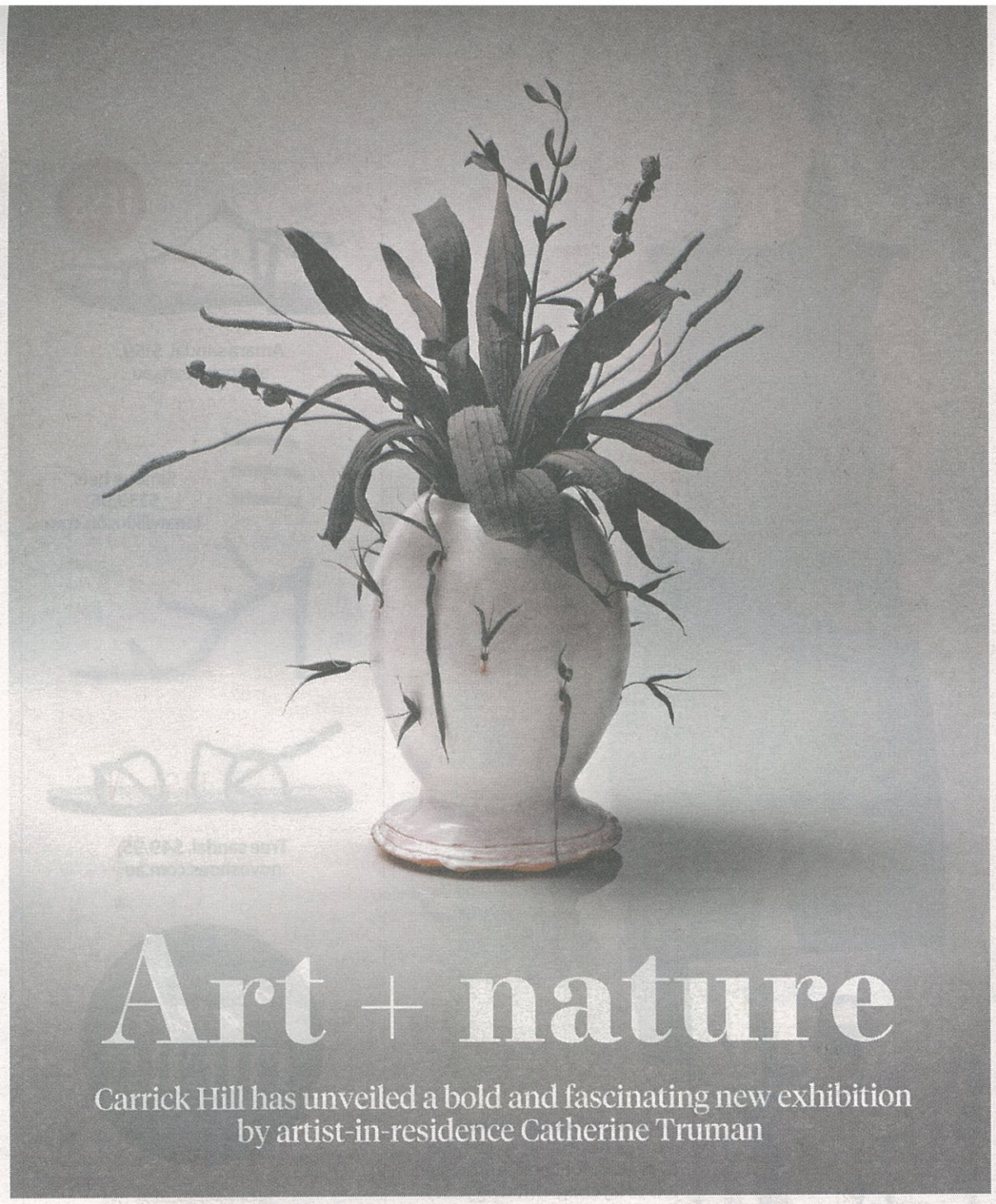
A FAMILY-FRIENDLY light show will illuminate lincoln at the SALT Festival this April.

The new, interactive exhibit at the festival will be called *Sea of Light.* Children and families will be able to immerse themselves in a glowing sea floor at the Cummins Hall and 'draw in light' using UV torches.

Sea of Light first appeared at Art Gallery of South Australia and the SALT Festival committee has brought the event to Cummins with support of the Bendigo Community Bank Cummins.

SALT Festival coordinator Nic Conway said the committee were excited to be able to bring the event to the local area in time for school holidays.

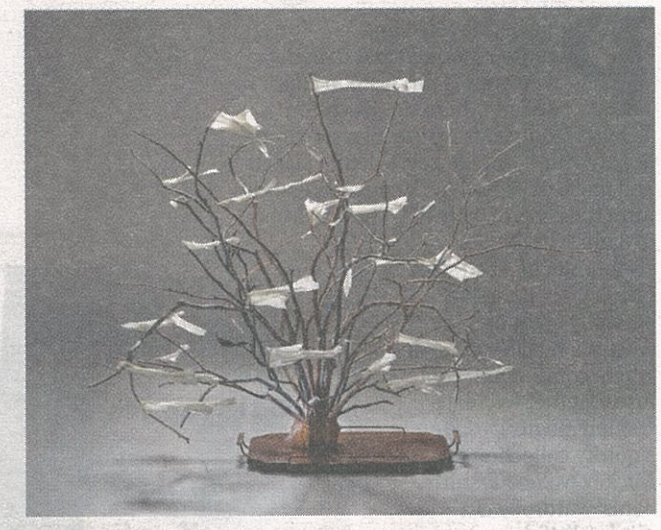
This event is created by Patch Theatre who create work for children aged 4-8 years old and their families.

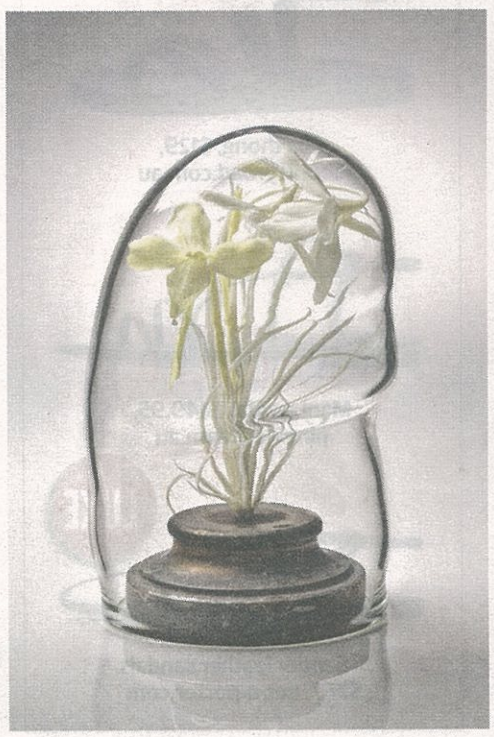


Art + nature

Carrick Hill has unveiled a bold and fascinating new exhibition by artist-in-residence Catherine Truman

Examples of Catherine Truman's works at Carrick Hill, clockwise from the main picture: After Constance the invaders; Bone Chorus; Flood and below, The Weeping Orchid. Pictures: supplied





Award-winning artist Catherine Truman, who has been artist-in-residence at Carrick Hill for the past 12 months, is unveiling a new exhibition exploring the parallels between art and nature.

"Carrick Hill offered a rich setting for this project,' she says.

"The house is a domestic home, historic museum and art gallery all at once, and is both public and private.

"The extensive art collection and the fantastic heritage gardens and adjacent natural bushland provided the opportunity to consider how we embody these relationships between the cultivated and the natural in our everyday lives, after all, now more than ever our everyday lives are shaped by them."

Truman works in both art and science. She had been collecting an enormous stash of bones, from beaches and roadsides, arid landscapes and friends, and developed them into an art interpretation, which has culminated in this exhibition.

She has also cleverly used scapula and tibia from a dairy cow, beast of burden from Paris Creek (2000) and kangaroo tibia and ribs from Kangaroo Island (2010) in her creations.

Truman's interest lay in exploring the relationship of the garden to the house; investigating the roles and rituals of cultivation, harvest, arrangement and display and the role which plants played in the life of the Carrick Hill residents.

Her works explore the relationship we now have with the natural world under changed circumstances and global pressures, reflecting on causes and shifting attitudes towards environmental consciousness.

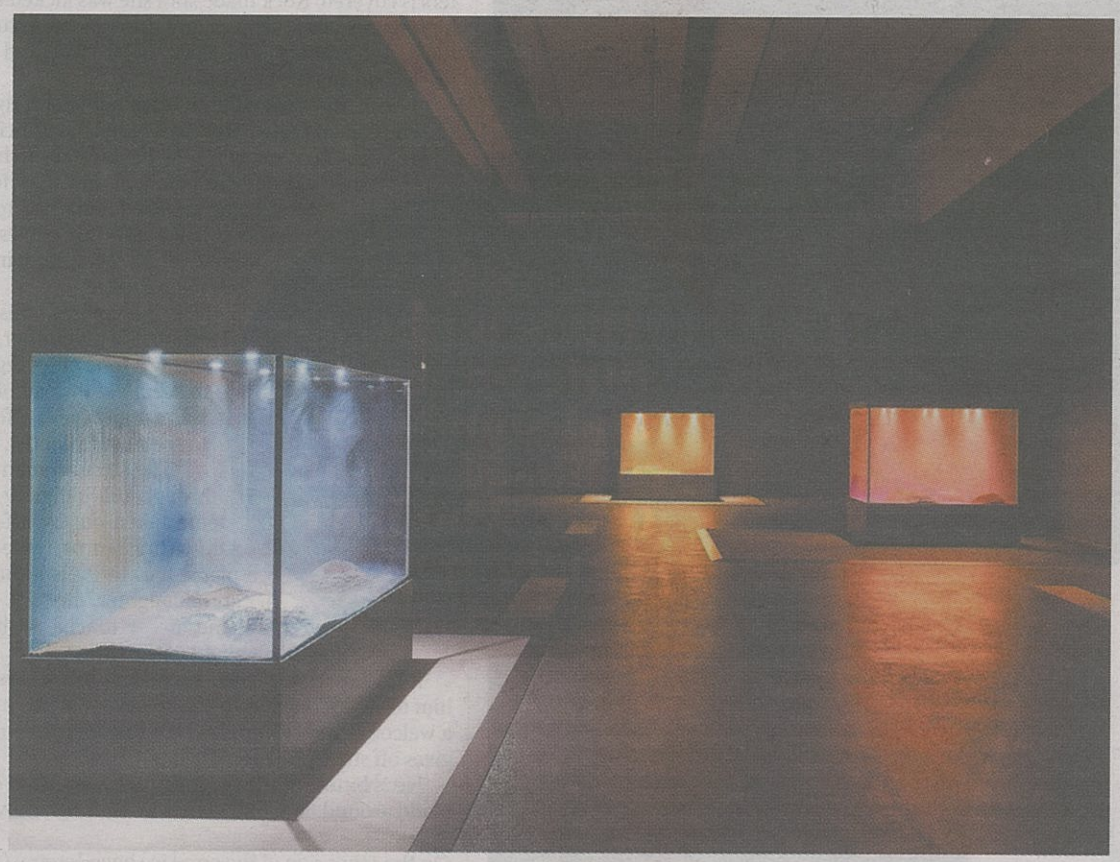
"By using the language of the garden, the house and the art collection to convey ideas and propositions about global uncertainties, I hope to encourage dialogue on these concerns and reinforce the capacity of art to disrupt assumptions and expectations," she says.

"'My interest lay in unpicking the relationship of the garden to the house and the compelling connection between plants, people and art." ■

> *I hope to encourage dialogue ... and reinforce the capacity of art to disrupt assumptions and expectations*

The Arrangements: Assembling Nature by Catherine Truman
A 2023 Festival of Arts exhibition is being shown until May 28, Carrick Hill, 48 Carrick Hill Drive Springfield.

Weekend Australian Review 11-12 March 2023 pp 12-13



Take a deep breath

Unfortunately much of this exhibition on the element of Air conforms to popular programming ideals. But there are some exceptions

CHRISTOPHER ALLEN

Air, Queensland Art Gallery/GoMA to April 23

Air is the most elusive and fugitive of the four elements, seemingly invisible, weightless and insubstantial. Earth and water, in contrast, are heavy and material; fire is living energy. Earthquakes, floods and bushfires are capable of overwhelming violence. And yet air too, in its animated manifestation as wind, can be as violent and destructive, and even more unpredictable. The very name of the wind god Aeolus implies his changeable, unstable and ever-shifting character. It is the winds, in ancient poetry, that whip up the sea, bring storms and make seafaring so perilous.

Light breezes, in contrast, are refreshing on hot days, restful after labour and, as Horace observes, invite sleep. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard associated air with dreams in the title of a famous work, L'Air et les songes (1943); and its gentle movements suggest the analogy of breath or spirit, as though the natural world were breathing. In Chinese classical painting, clouds are often thought of as the visible manifestation of the exhalation of mountains.

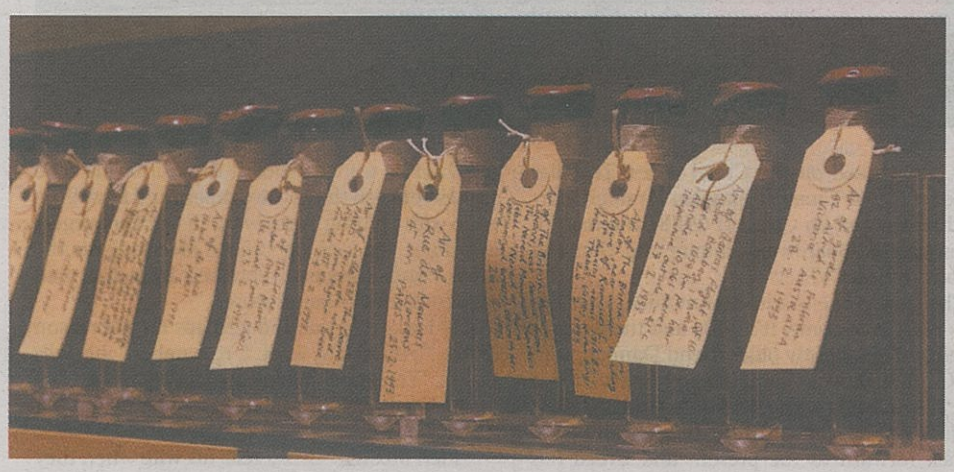
In landscape painting too, air is the most mysterious and difficult element to convey. In the most beautiful landscapes, whether Chinese or European, it sometimes feels as though the very heart of the work, its most intimate subject, is this almost invisible substance, as though all the more tangible elements of rocks and water and trees existed only to frame and evoke the ineffable emptiness that is also the presence of being itself.

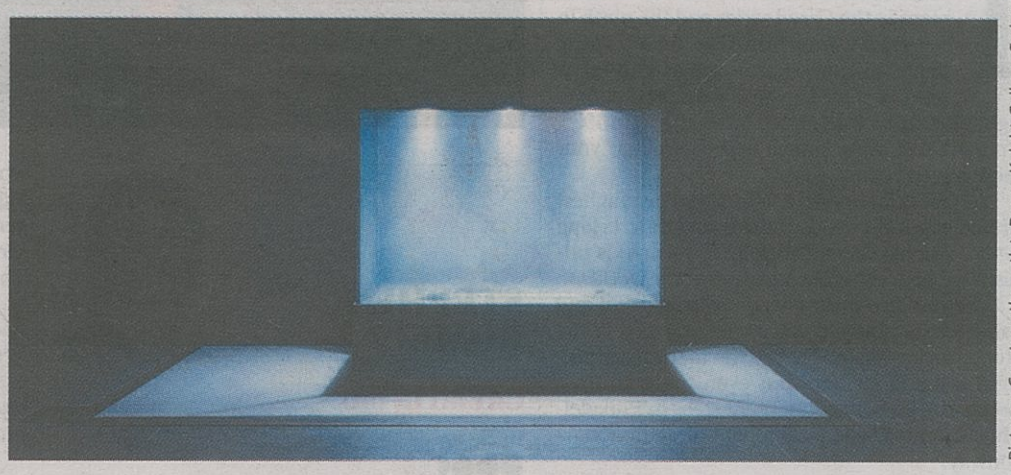
But air is not entirely invisible, either in ordinary experience or in painting. What we call atmosphere is made up of a combination of gases with moisture and particles of dust, smoke and other materials. At different times and in different places the atmosphere can be clearer or more opaque. Landscape painters need to account for the interposition of the atmosphere, the phenomenon known as aerial perspective, which causes things in the distance to appear not only smaller, but less distinct in chroma as well as in tonal contrast.

It would have been interesting to start an exhibition devoted to the subject of air with examples of this sort – indeed with examples of classic aerial perspective in pictures painted in the studio and then a consideration of the changes that come about with the increasing practice of plein-air painting and especially the Impressionists' ambition not only to start but substantially complete paintings outdoors. The traditional practice of oil paint with layers and translucent glazes was not suited to this approach, so the Impressionists worked mainly with opaque pigments, but in a higher key.

Unfortunately painting is not often included in "contemporary" art exhibitions, unless of course it is painting from some exotic tradition or by an Aboriginal artist. This is odd when we consider that painting is still the form most often practised by professional artists, the kind who put on exhibitions and sell their work to collectors, as distinct from those whose products are only shown by state-funded galleries or commissioned

Weekend Australian Review 11-12 March 2023





Pictures: Courtesy the artist, DarrenKnight Gallery, Sydney, andSTATION, Melbourne

by corporations to enhance their brand identity. But the curators who design public exhibitions like this evidently don't want anything to look like a traditional painting or to demand too much visual sophistication for its appreciation.

As we see again and again, galleries today seem to have three main priorities, which of course tell us much about the kind of visitor they imagine themselves to be addressing. The first of these priorities is variety: no two pieces can be alike, because the audience has to be kept interested by constantly changing media, materials and style. The second is for things to be striking at first sight, even if they don't have much to say. And the third is for the effect to be as immersive as possible, so that no effort is required to experience it. All three of these priorities presuppose a passive audience with a diminished attention span, unwilling and unable to look closely or consistently and in need of constantly varied entertainment.

There are plenty of examples of this sort of thing in Air, QAGOMA's current exhibition, but fortunately also some exceptions. There is, for example, a landscape by Albert Namatjira which would have been far more effective if presented in the context of the landscape tradition he was following instead of being hung alone and isolated. Most notably, and probably because he was born in Brisbane, there is a fine selection of early landscape drawings by Lloyd Rees.

The artist was barely out of his teens when he executed these studies of trees and other motifs, and they are juvenile works compared to the extraordinary drawings that he did around Sydney Harbour two decades later, and which were exhibited at the Museum of Sydney in 2016 under the title Painting with pencil (reviewed here on March 12, 2016). But for all their youthfulness, there is something of the prodigy both in the young man's sensitivity to living form and his precisely accurate yet light and natural touch in rendering his motifs. What particularly evokes the element of air is the way that the individual studies float on the whiteness of the page in a way that fortuitously recalls the way trees and rocks can float, in a Chinese ink painting, on emptiness that suggests the air and atmosphere that surround them.

The other landscapes are to be found among the collections of seemingly disparate items that Patrick Pound has assembled, and all of which are meant to evoke air – some by direct representation, some by metonymy or association and some by narrative implication. This is one of the more interesting sections of the exhibition, and unlike some others, actually does invite the viewer to look closely and ponder why each image or object has been chosen for inclusion. Works included range from paintings to books to a statue of Hermes, about to fly into the air with his winged sandals.

Particularly interesting are several paintings and photographs which succeed in making air visible through effects of smoke and atmosphere, including Arthur Boyd's Burning wheat stubble (1949-50), Pietro Fabris' View of Mount Vesuvius from the sea – one of a set of works that the artist executed to be reproduced as illustrations to Sir William Hamilton's important study of volcanology, Campi Phlegraei (1776) – and Max Dupain's photograph Wind in the corn (1948).

Elsewhere in the exhibition there are photographs of the atmosphere heavy with sinister red smoke by Rachel Mounsey, evocative, almost mystical drawings of clouds by Ali Kazim, and most impressively an enormous drawing by Tacita Dean, Chalk Fall (2018) that does not directly represent air but alludes to it implicitly through representing the process of erosion that is increasingly affecting the famous chalk cliffs of Dover. Charles Page's black and white photographs (1986) are among the best works in the exhibition, but only some refer to air or atmosphere.

Several other works seek to suggest the elusive element either literally, like the giant balloons full of air suspended in the main gallery space, or in the quasi-scientific manner adopted by some contemporary artists, as in Tomas Saraceno's series entitled We do not all breathe the same air (2022). For this project the artist took samples of air in locations around Melbourne to determine their purity; the air was piped through a filter which ended up being lighter or darker according to the level of impurities in the air at different times of day, and it is the filter discs that are exhibited in rows. Dora Budor's atmospheric terraria mimic the toxic gases of volcanic activity and remind us that Earth's breathable atmosphere is an almost miraculous exception.

One of the more engaging installations is mock-scientific, like something from a not quite serious wunderkammer: Rosslynd Pigott's Collection of air (1992-93) takes the form of a row of little bottles presented in a wooden display cabinet, each with a handwritten label identifying the location at which the sample was taken: much of the poetry of the piece arises from the irresistible charm of names, combined with the poignancy of memory and time past: Air of the Rue de Rivoli, 10.1.1993; Air near Puvis de Chavannes's Jeune filles au bord la mer 1879, Musee d'Orsay, 12.1.1993; Air of the Pantheon, Rome, 2.2.1993; Air of the Piazza della Rotonda, Rome, 4.2.1993.

Clockwise from facing page: Dora Budor's Origin I (A Stag Drinking), Origin II (Burning of the Houses), Origin III (Snow Storm) 2019; Patrick Pound's disparate items, 2022, installation view; Budor's installation; Rosslynd Piggott's Collection of air; and Lloyd Rees's Moreton Bay Fig at Milton, figure under tree, c.1912-17

Some of the larger installations are of variable success. A huge installation by Jonathan Jones suggests cosmic winds as well as the cycles of cultural tradition; but Yhonnie Scarce's Cloud chamber (2020) does not inherently convey the many ideas that are claimed for it on the exhibition label. As so often in Biennale-type exhibitions, we are reminded that aesthetic meaning is not just a matter of assertion. What Ron Mueck's enormous hyperreal sculpture In bed (2005) is doing in this room is a mystery; it has nothing to do with the theme of air. Mona Hatoum's Hot spot (2006) is interesting but does not obviously speak of air; Jamie North's Portal (2022), which suggests the poetry of ruins and the way that nature encroaches on the work of culture, has little relevance to the subject.

Carlos Amorales's installation Black cloud (2007-08), with its 30,000 black paper butterflies, is striking for the vast space it occupies as well as for the surprising and sinister abolition of the colours that usually characterise these creatures. But like so many very large-scale and immersive installations, it registers for most visitors as little more than a moment of fleeting surprise.

The last installation in the exhibition is also immersive but is much more effective in provoking curiosity, engagement and wonder in the audience. Anthony McCall's Crossing (2016) is an attempt to make air itself visible at the most minimal level of perception, approaching sensory deprivation. We enter a space so dark that at first we are compelled to advance very slowly; dark installations are not uncommon in contemporary art, but this is the darkest I can recall.

Even from the beginning, we can see very low-level light projections, making geometric patterns on the floor, but also forming what seem to be three-dimensional volumes in space. We approach what looks like a first thin, insubstantial wall of luminosity, yet it is hard not to believe it is actually solid; we extend a hand hesitantly to make sure that we can pass through it. As our eyes adjust to the gloom we begin to see more clearly that we are surrounded by walls and cones of luminous atmosphere; in fact, just as in landscape painting, it is humidity in the air that makes it capable of catching the light and producing the illusion of luminous solidity, and in this case the humidity is produced by a haze machine. But here, as so often in art, illusion serves to make invisible truth accessible to our senses, our imagination and our awareness.

THE AUSTRALIAN
ARTS | CULTURE
LIFE & TIMES

Thursday 9 March 2023 p12

'My relationship to photography and portraiture isn't really about the final image that's printed and hung on the wall – it's more about the process, about engaging with the history,' artist Atong Atem says
MARK MOHELL

BRINGING HER STORY INTO THE FRAME

Artist Atong Atem is fascinated by what photographs represent – or don't

MATTHEW WESTWOOD
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Melbourne artist Atong Atem learned early in life the importance of photographs as family and historical record. Both of her parents were active in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and her father worked as a photojournalist, recording South Sudan's struggle for independence. When the civil war forced the family to flee – Atong was born in Ethiopia and spent part of her childhood in a refugee camp in Kenya – precious family photographs and records were lost.

"A lot of our family were part of the political movement to gain independence, so it was really important for them to document things as they were occurring," says Atem, 31.

"My dad was actually a photojournalist all through his youth – he has always instilled an understanding that photographs are important, and that documenting is important. So there is a sense of loss that my family feels quite heavily in regard to losing all of this evidence of our life pre-war."

Photographs and what they represent, or not, have become a fascination for Atem, both as a subject of critical inquiry and in her own artistic practice. She is best known for her large, colour-saturated photographic portraits, depicting herself wearing full-face makeup – in bright hues of indigo, turquoise and pink – and dressed in outfits of gorgeous colours and African prints. Her work is held in major public collections and last year she won the inaugural La Prairie Art Award, an $80,000 prize for Australian female artists.

But, as she cheerfully puts it, her photographs are in some ways an excuse for her to talk about the subjects that occupy her thoughts. Post-colonialism. Ethnography. Representation.

"I'm wary of using the word representation because I don't know if I'm representing much outside of my own world – I think my work is pretty biographical," she says. "The only reason we (African people) seek representation is because it's been systematically denied us. And by us, I don't just mean South Sudanese people, or black people – it's women, other people of colour, any group that is not dominant, having to fight for something they shouldn't have had to fight for."

Some of Atem's preoccupations come together in her new installation for a National Portrait Gallery exhibition, Portrait23: Identity, opening on Friday. The exhibition, its curators explain, takes a provocative position on portraiture and what it is generally understood to be. It overturns assumptions that portraits are paintings of the great men of history.

Many of the artists featured are from non-white backgrounds, including First Nations backgrounds. And their work also challenges the idea of representation or likeness in portraiture, with works including street art, soft sculpture, performance and even a sewing circle.

Atem's contribution, called A Facet for Every Turn, takes the form of a 5m suspended silk sculpture. Self-portraits of Atem and photos from family albums are printed on diaphanous silk panels, arranged as a hexagon.

"My relationship to photography and portraiture isn't really about the final image that's printed and hung on the wall – it's more about the process, about engaging with the history," Atem says.

"I wanted to make a work that would respond to a breeze, or air-conditioning, or people walking past. There is a self-portrait with some paint on my face, and beads around it, that is wavy and distorted. There's an image of myself in an imaginary priestly outfit, and another which is a collage of photos from family albums.

"I would call it a self-portrait, even though it's not entirely me in the images, but to create a physical space that summarises my relationship to my own history, my body, my family, my culture."

Above, detail from A Facet for Every Turn (2022) by Atem, part of the Portrait23: Identity exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery; left, Paanda (2015, printed 2019), from Atem's Studio series, at the National Gallery of Victoria

Atem, whose family are Dinka people from South Sudan, was six when the family settled in Australia with humanitarian visas. She travelled to South Sudan shortly after independence was won in 2011, saying the experience was "10 times more emotional than I expected it to be".

She grew up on the NSW Central Coast, then studied painting at the Sydney College of the Arts. When she moved to RMIT in Melbourne to complete her studies, she switched to photography and to making portraits in the studio.

She was a keen student of art history but found that, as an African woman, her own story, her own cultural history, was left out of the picture. At least those students with a European background could claim a distant, tenuous connection with the Renaissance, the baroque and the impressionists. Atem says that, in those lectures, she experienced something like an emotional disconnect.

"I spent my life learning how to understand about dead French painters," she says. "That's the norm, but why is that the norm? Wouldn't it be great to have access to a history that includes my own cultural experiences?"

More compelling for her was the history of ethnographic photography, including the egregious kind that depicted non-white people as specimens or curiosities. As she puts it, ethnography as a discipline is not in itself wicked – "It's just the study of people and cultures" – but what matters is how it has been practised and applied.

"Ethnographic photography, especially of people and their spaces, has historically been pretty bad because it has denied agency to the people who have been depicted, and it's denied them the ability to choose how they are presented," she says.

"That's a big part of why photography became really interesting to me, because it's supposed to be a medium of truth ... Historically, a photograph represented a particular truth and it was presumed to be honest. I reject that notion because the photographer is making choices about what's in the frame and what's not in the frame.

"Even if it's documentary photography and there is no conversation or relationship with the subject, you are still choosing how to frame the subject. Those choices are informed by pre-photographic Western ideals of how a person should be presented in images. And that influences the way certain humans, bodies, were allowed agency or not, or were dehumanised or not."

Atem was inspired by the work of studio photographers such as Malick Sidibe and Seydou Keita in Mali, whose hugely influential images depicted people as they wanted to be seen. Atem regards their work as a riposte to the ethnographic depiction of Africans that was out of their hands.

"It was the first time that Africans were taking photos of themselves – that's powerful and important," she says. "For me, as a young person, it was incredible to have access to that, as a jumping-off point to make my own work ... It's creating a new aesthetic language for African photography, a really important part of photographic history."

Having first studied painting Atem came to photography late and is largely self-taught. With her husband, Otillo Page, a more experienced photographer, she has been learning the more technical aspects of f-stops and shutter speeds.

"I came to photography immediately with a digital camera," she says, "and sort of missed the learning that can happen with film photography. He knows what the buttons mean and what the numbers mean. I know my way around a camera but I can't explain it technically."

But Atem's eye for composition and colour is evident in her work. Her winning piece for the La Prairie prize last year, a five-panel photographic self-portrait called A Yellow Dress, A Bouquet, shows her surrounded by flowers and wearing blue makeup – the idea being that a blue face challenges perceptions of what is beautiful.

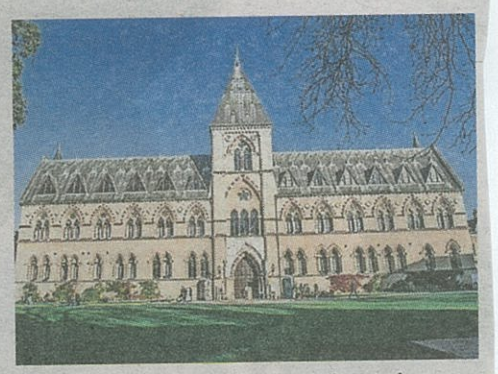
"When I began the face-painting, I was drawn to colours that are as unnatural as possible – even though blue exists in the natural world, it's a difficult pigment to create from nothing," she says. "I gravitate to those unnatural colours as a way of pushing the idea of what is or is not beautiful, or is and is not human and relatable."

She has some major new projects on the go, including for the Melbourne Now exhibition opening at the National Gallery of Victoria later this month. The survey of contemporary art, fashion and design will include new portraits by Atem, as well as work the NGV has acquired from her earlier series.

And another significant project in coming months is a collaboration with Page: the couple are soon to have their first child.

As Atem's career takes off, with interest from galleries here and overseas, she's pleasantly surprised about her success. "It was not that long ago that I was at uni doing it for the sake of doing it; I don't think I intended to do all of the things I've done," she says. "But I'm also really glad, and grateful, to have a platform to be able to talk about my ideas. Sometimes it's like: 'Wow, you want to hear what I have to say?' It's a humbling experience but I'm really grateful to have these opportunities."

Portrait23: Identity is at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, from Friday to June 18.



Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum – home for over 500,000 artefacts. **Photos: Alamy, iStock**

MUSEUM | ENGLAND

Digging deep

In the annals of archaeology, the Pitt Rivers Museum is a mind boggling revelation, writes Tim Elliott.

I was 12 years old in 1981 when the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* came out. There are several things I remember about it, including the elfin bar owner Marion Ravenwood (played by Karen Allen), drinking a Nepalese yak herder under the table, and the fly-by-night anthropologist Indiana Jones being chased by Amazonian tribesmen. There was also that fedora and the whip, the many applications of which – lassoing girls, lashing Nazis – never ceased to amaze me.

Like so many other aspiring adventurers, the film fired something deep within me, an atavistic urge to seek out foreign cultures and far-away places. Sadly, I didn't become an anthropologist or an archaeologist, I've never owned a whip and look like an idiot in a hat. I have, however, in the course of my journalism been lucky enough to work in some remote and dangerous places, including the PNG highlands, the Amazon jungle and Manly Corso on a Saturday night. And yet there was one destination that had eluded me, until recently. A trip to the Pitt Rivers Museum, in Oxford, England.

The words Oxford and adventure don't immediately go together but, in the annals of archaeology, the Pitt Rivers is a special place. The museum, which was founded in 1884, is named after one Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers, a stately, mutton-chopped officer in the British Army, who over the course of a 32-year military career (Crimea, Malta, Canada, Ireland) collected some 22,000 artefacts, all of which he donated, in 1884, to the University of Oxford, on the condition that it build a museum to house them all.

The building alone is worth seeing – a large, collonaded rectangular room with two mezzanine levels and a huge, vaulted ceiling. It is a freezing day in December when I turn up with my 14-year-old daughter. Outside it is snowing delicately, dainty flakes descending like dander; inside it is another world, warm and whisper quiet, every available space busy with glass display cases and exhibits.

The museum now houses 500,000 artefacts across myriad periods and places, an astonishing array of the arcane and esoteric: Ethiopian priest crowns: African love charms; voodoo dolls; reindeer kickers; an entire cabinet of Algerian surgical instruments from 1913, including hooks, pincers and skull drills (with chunks of the patients' craniums). Each item is accompanied by a tiny label with a brief description, handwritten by the person who first accessioned them, in some cases more than 130 years ago. Even the labels are old.

The pieces here are quite literally mind boggling, in the sense that you would never – could never – imagine that they actually existed. At one stage I come across what looks like a tiny white saw, the size of a matchbox. Peering closer, I read the label: "Fish jaw for nicking the poisoned ends of blow-gun darts, to make them break off in the animal [collected in 1906, Peru]." Next to it is a box containing what looks like two wizened-up little hands. "Pair of fore-feet of mole," reads the label, "cut from animal while alive (which is then allowed to go away). These were carried in the pocket of an old man in the village in belief that he would be permanently freed from toothache."

Of course, the museum is inextricably linked to British imperialism, an age when gentlemen adventurers felt it within their rights to go out into the world, and take stuff, often violently. The museum is now in the thick of what it calls a "decolonisation" process, and is engaging with different cultural groups worldwide to find the best way to return objects that were taken unfairly. In 2022, after five years of negotiations, the museum, together with the neighbouring Oxford University Museum, returned 17 Aboriginal ancestors to the Australian government.

I could have spent a week in the museum, wandering around, getting lost, being amazed. But after four hours, my daughter has reached peak-history. I come around the corner from the weapons exhibit (arquebuses, samurai swords, antique grenades) and find her slouched against the wall. She says she needs a hot chocolate, "right now". And so we go back out, into the snow. It is only 3pm, but already dusk.

I ask her what she likes most about the museum, and she says all of it. "I can't believe how much there was," she says. I say, "There's even more out there, in the world, still to discover."

"I know," she says, rubbing her hands together. "And all you have to do is keep your eyes open."

Pitt Rivers Museum, mission accomplished.

As with all museums in Britain, entry is free, except for groups of 10 or more, which cost £1.50 ($2.70) a person. Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Rd, Oxford. See prm.ox.ac.uk

Tim Elliott travelled at his own expense.

Creating a portrait of art's changing face

From left, artist Sally Smart, Penny Fowler, patron Marilyn Darling, Arts Minister Tony Burke, Vipoo Srivilasa, acting gallery director Trent Birkett, Jodie Haydon, patron Tim Fairfax, artist Nell, and MP Susan Templeman, the Special Envoy for the Arts, featuring artwork from the new exhibition

MATTHEW WESTWOOD
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Jodie Haydon showed what it means to be chief patron of the National Portrait Gallery on Thursday when she mixed with artists at the gallery's new exhibition, Portrait23: Identity.

The exhibition includes work by 23 artists and collectives whose soft sculptures, installations, puppets and ceramic figures are intended to challenge expectations of what portraiture can be.

Ms Haydon, the Prime Minister's partner, did not make a speech at the opening but mingled with artists at the casual dinner at the Canberra gallery.

NPG chair Penny Fowler said the role of chief patron, traditionally offered to the spouse or partner of the prime minister, was to be an ambassador for the gallery and to encourage people to visit.

"It was wonderful having so many artists in the room, and such diverse artists who are making contemporary portraiture," Ms Fowler said.

"She really enjoyed engaging with them.

"From our point of view as an organisation, it's great to have someone who wants to talk with the artists and be interested in what we are doing."

> 'It's all about storytelling and reflecting the changing face of Australia'
>
> PENNY FOWLER
> NPG CHAIR

The curators of Portrait23: Identity have worked with artists who represent the diversity of modern Australia, including people from non-white and Indigenous backgrounds, and artists with disabilities. The work includes ceramic figures by Thailand-born artist Vipoo Srivilasa, a floating portrait for the gallery exterior by street artist Baby Guerrilla, and a double portrait of Yankunytjatjara artist Kaylene Whiskey with Dolly Parton.

Starts with D Performance Ensemble, a disability-led collective from Alice Springs, is showing a video work.

The opening was also attended by Arts Minister Tony Burke, Special Envoy for the Arts Susan Templeman and members of the NPG board and foundation.

Ms Fowler said the NPG, marking its 25th anniversary this year, was the youngest of the national collecting institutions and had a role to reflect the changing make-up of Australian society.

"It's important that we evolve, without losing what we are about, which is telling the story of Australia through portraiture," she said.

"It's all about storytelling and reflecting the changing face of Australia. We want to make sure we are at the forefront of understanding and embracing that change."

Portrait23: Identity is at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra until June 18

11-12 March 2023
The Australian Financial Review | www.afr.com AFR

RESTORING A LOST HISTORY

Funding cuts A unique Australian archive, which helped piece together the almost forgotten tragic story of the lock hospitals in WA, is under threat, writes **Tony Davis**.

Dr Marie-Louise Ayres had never heard of the "lock hospitals" in 2011 when she took over responsibility for Trove, Australia's online archive of 6 billion documents.

Few people had. The grim story of the rugged islands off Western Australia where "diseased" Aboriginal men and women were shipped in the early years of the 20th century had all but faded away.

The affected families didn't speak of the intergenerational trauma, and the written reports were in century-old newspapers collecting dust in library archives. That's until Trove (and its forebears and partners) started digitising Australian newspapers.

"Researchers searching Trove became intrigued," says Ayres. "They started finding more information, then got together with Indigenous communities in that coastal area and built a community of people to do even more searching.

"That, together with community memories, was enough to bring a whole almost forgotten story back into memory. That ultimately resulted in the WA government creating a park and a memorial at Carnarvon with a very beautiful bronze statue of somebody pointing sadly out to sea."

Ayres was made director-general of the National Library of Australia in 2017, putting her in overall charge of Trove, among other library functions. She becomes emotional telling the lock hospitals story, which she considers a demonstration of the "latent power of collections to generate new thoughts, new lines of inquiry and enable all forms of knowledge".

Research now suggests Indigenous people were sent to the WA islands – sometimes in chains – because their infectious diseases were hastily and often incorrectly diagnosed. Some were subject to experimental treatments. "Many of them never came home," says Ayres.

Australian libraries began working together on a national database just over 40 years ago. Digitisation led to even more possibilities, and various digital databases were linked to create Trove in 2009. It brings together printed, audio, digital, image and photographic collections from more than 900 organisations and has 22 million annual page visits. There is no open-access equivalent of similar size anywhere.

However, federal government cuts and short-term funding decisions have left it struggling. Trove was granted $5.2 million for 2022-23, about half of what is needed to "maintain, but not significantly improve" its online services. And there is no promise beyond June 30.

It's been built up over decades because Australian taxpayers have, through their taxes, allowed us to develop the collection.

Lock hospitals memorial at Carnarvon in WA; and Dr Marie-Louise Ayres, director-general National Library of Australia. PHOTO: OLIVE + MAEVE

When institutions around the world began digitising their collections, they focused on the unique and the iconic. Yet, Ayres says, everyday resources such as newsletters and club journals, have produced the most surprising results. Trove has been digitising a long-running journal on behalf of the Australian Soil Network, for example. It doesn't sound like a must-read, but researchers have realised the early editions hold key data for studying climate.

If Trove survives, keeping a single entry point and eventually copying everything onto the cloud should allow the use of AI-driven "semantic searching" across the entire collection. Rather than specific names and places, someone could ask for "floods that caused major long-term damage to a community" or "geographic names similar to Scot or Scott where gold was discovered".

"This will unlock far more value," says Ayres, though she admits it will cost more (as will fending off increasing cyber threats). I first used Trove in about 2010 while studying at Sydney's Macquarie University. So did fellow PhD candidate Tom Roberts, an Englishman who was preparing a thesis on war correspondent and media magnate Keith Murdoch, father of Rupert. He turned his research into a National Biography Award-winning book (*Before Rupert* by Tom D.C. Roberts).

"Trove was hugely important," Roberts tells *AFR Weekend* from his home in England's west country. "There's nothing really like it in the UK, and certainly nothing free – unless you are actually sitting in the British Library.

"If you want to access such databases remotely you'll find a series of disparate, disjointed or partial collections and even then you'll have to go through private companies and pay hefty subscriptions.

"Without Trove there is simply no way I would have uncovered the network of con-

The Australian 9 March 2023
P5

MARK MOHELL

Tarryn Gill with one of her sculptures from her series Limber, which is an homage to her time in callisthenics

Portrait of a childhood obsession

MATTHEW WESTWOOD
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Through Tarryn Gill's childhood and teenage years, competitive callisthenics was her physical and creative outlet – she loved the movement, the music, the costumes, the big hair and makeup.

But by age 25, her body was telling her to stop. The hypermobility that gave Gill's body its flexibility was also causing her pain, fatigue and injury.

The two sides of her callisthenics experience are given expression in her series of soft sculptures called Limber. Made from foam, and covered with bronze Lycra like a leotard, the sculptures have floppy limbs that are suspended from the ceiling or draped over a plinth. They are part of a new exhibition opening at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra on Friday. Portrait23: Identity is billed as a provocative rethink about portraiture, who it represents and what it can be.

Gill, 42, said her textile-based Limber sculptures did not look like her, but reflected her experience.

"They reference my own body and they are about my body – that's how I think of them as self-portraits," she said at the NPG on Wednesday. "They are not traditional self-portraits: they don't have heads, they just have limbs. They are figures that are growing in a way that's ego-less."

Portrait23 features 23 artists and groups from across Australia, including artists from non-white and First Nations backgrounds, and artists with disability. While many have a well-established art practice, few would consider themselves portraitists.

The exhibition includes an outdoor installation by street artist Baby Guerrilla, a floating silk photographic sculpture by South Sudanese-Australian artist Atong Atem, ceramic figures by Thailand-born Vipoo Srivalasa, puppets by Sally Smart, and a performance piece by Bundjulung/Ngapuhi artist Amrita Hepi.

Sandra Bruce, NPG director of collection and exhibitions, said Portrait23 was intended to prompt visitors to think beyond traditional portraiture.

"A portrait is generally understood to be a literal visual likeness of a person, perhaps going so far as to reference their interests and endeavours," she said. "With Portrait23, through directly engaging with some of Australia's most exciting contemporary artists, we are bringing new, diverse concepts and perspectives around the genre, and its inherent universal theme of identity, to the table."

Many of the artists will be at the NPG on Thursday, when Jodie Haydon, as chief patron, will officially open the exhibition. It's a tradition of the NPG that the chief patron is the partner of the prime minister.

Gill said the Portrait23 artists had produced a "contemporary take on what portraiture is, or what it could be. It's a fun and beautiful show".

LIFE & TIMES P12

Thursday 9 March 2023
The Australian Financial Review | www.afr.com AFR

'Curiosity piece' to test appetite for scandal

Australian art Works by 'Eddie Burrup' outraged the art world.

Elizabeth Fortescue

Who remembers Eddie Burrup, the man who never was? The appearance of an abstract painting in a Perth auction catalogue has conjured the spectre of one of Australia's most celebrated cultural controversies.

Among 144 relatively affordable works by artists including Sidney Nolan and Tim Storrier, Burrup's *Glimpse of Ngarangani* is a pleasant abstract, evoking sunlight on shallow green water. About the size of an exercise book, the painting is estimated to fetch between $600 and $900 at GFL Fine Art's auction on Sunday, March 12.

So far, so good. But the clue is in the maker's name, which is listed as "Eddie Burrup/Elizabeth Durack". The two artists were not collaborators, mind you. They were one and the same person.

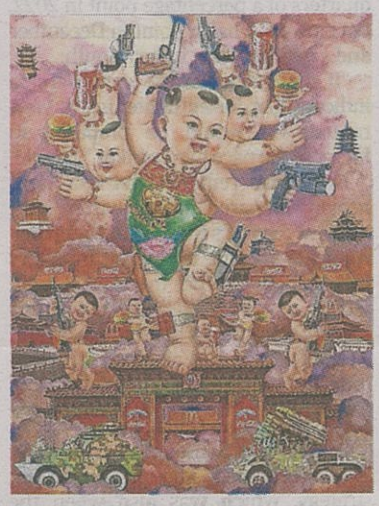
Elizabeth Durack CMG, OBE was born in 1915 into a prominent Kimberley grazing dynasty that employed many local Indigenous people on its cattle stations, Argyle Downs and Ivanhoe. Her sister Dame Mary Durack wrote the Australian classic novel, *Kings in Grass Castles*.

Elizabeth became a successful artist, often painting portraits of Indigenous people – some of which appear in this sale – and exhibiting her work under her own name.

In 1995, an unknown artist named Eddie Burrup began exhibiting in Broome. Burrup was invited to exhibit in a group show of Indigenous art at the 1996 Adelaide Festival. He was also hung in the 1996 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in Darwin.

In 1997, Elizabeth Durack outed herself as the artist behind the Burrup name. The revelation that Burrup did not in fact exist, and that a privileged white woman had been making pictures that purported to be Indigenous, outraged much of the Australian art world.

Durack's actions went to the heart of cultural appropriation, well-known Indigenous curator Djon Mundine told Saleroom this week. The Eddie Burrup incident became a turning point for the idea of the "primary voice" in Indigenous art. Provenances that linked works securely back to Indigenous creators attained a new importance. For Mr Mundine, who met Elizabeth Durack, *Glimpse of Ngarangani* is now just "a curiosity piece".



Clockwise from main: *Glimpse of Ngarangani* by Eddie Burrup/Elizabeth Durack and, inset, Durack in 1997; Clarice Beckett's *Prince's Bridge*; *Welcome*, by the Luo Brothers; and Ethel Spowers' *Still Life*.

"I'm mellowed with age, but I was really pissed off at the time," Mr Mundine said.

Elizabeth Durack died in 2000 aged 85. Only one other "Eddie Burrup/Elizabeth Durack" has ever come to auction, and that was in 2014. The work was passed in.

It's a fair bet there will be no "Eddie Burrups" offered when Sotheby's holds its just announced sale of Aboriginal Art in New York on May 23.

Leonard Joel's first major Fine Art sale for the year takes place in Melbourne on March 21 and is laced with fascinating histories.

Clarice Beckett's tranquil *Princes Bridge*, c.1930, carries an estimate of $70,000 to $80,000. The work bears an authentication label on the back by Hilda Mangan, who was so instrumental in bringing her sister's artistic brilliance to public attention in the 1970s.

Hundreds of Beckett's paintings rotted away in a shed before she came to prominence. Similarly, many works by the wonderful Ethel Spowers (1890-1947) were destroyed by her family who never realised she would one day be acclaimed for her exquisite linocut prints.

The Spowers print in the Leonard Joel sale is the delightful *Still Life*, 1932, showing a porcelain squirrel nibbling a nut. The estimate is $12,000 to $18,000.

Still Life is number 21 in an edition of 30, but it's unlikely the full edition of such a delicate work survived, according to Leonard Joel head of art, Olivia Fuller. At least one more impression of this work does exist, and it's safely kept in the National Gallery of Australia collection.

Bush, c.1940, is a gorgeous landscape by modernist Grace Cossington Smith who is best known for painting beguiling interiors of her home on Sydney's north shore. *Bush* is estimated at $20,000 to $25,000.

Cossington Smith's somewhat similar painting, *Untitled, Landscape with Trees and Fences*, sold at auction last month for $17,980 (including premium) against an estimate of $5000 to $8000. Perhaps Leonard Joel has good reason for its higher estimate.

Some beautiful abstract works are in the Leonard Joel sale, including Lesley Dumbrell's *Gamboge*, 1987, in which spiky yellow forms assert themselves over a background of cooler colours.

Almost two metres square, *Gamboge* carries an estimate of $9000 to $12,000. The work is from the National Australia Bank collection, which was the focus of a major offering in February 2022 that raised $10.5 million (including premium). The NAB sale was one of two corporate sales that propelled Deutscher and Hackett to last year's number one position in turnover terms.

Contemporary Australian artworks coming under the gavel at Leonard Joel's sale include one by Michael Zavros, the Queensland artist and show horse rider.

Zavros' *Ennui*, 2019, in charcoal on paper, is estimated at $12,000 to $16,000. *Ennui* depicts a skeletal hand cupping the chin of a human skull.

Where Zavros is meticulous with whatever medium he uses, Dale Frank literally pours his coloured varnishes on to linen, where they mix and swirl to create seductive, translucent surfaces. Frank's approximately two metre square canvas, its long title beginning with *Tapping into the Desire for Something ...* , 2010, is estimated to fetch $40,000 to $50,000 in the Leonard Joel sale.

The late Sydney "grunge" artist Adam Cullen never shied away from taboo subject matters. His *Zoma the Sadist*, 2005, depicts a violent assault with a knife. The estimate is $25,000 to $30,000.

Cullen's annual auction turnover peaked in 2022 with combined sales of $363,173. Perhaps the market is getting harder to shock.

Elsewhere in the Leonard Joel sale, there are well-known contemporary Australian artists Alex Seton, Janet Laurence and Fiona Lowry, and a gaudy but wonderful satire of Chinese capitalism by the Luo Brothers, whose works were first brought to Australia from China by the late, pioneering art dealer Ray Hughes.

The family of Melbourne social realist Noel Counihan is selling one of his highly personal paintings. *Confrontation*, 1983 (estimated at $4000 to $6000), was painted after Counihan had recovered from a series of strokes. He noted: "There is a celebration in this picture, because this is where I really say to myself, 'It's not over yet!'"

Counihan died in 1986. A long-term member of the Communist Party, Counihan was also a boyhood chorister, an opera lover and a seasoned international traveller, his son Mick Counihan told Saleroom.

A heavy drinker who was inclined to dogmatism when he was young, the artist matured into a "gentle and humorous soul", Mr Counihan said.

Leonard Joel's Fine Art auction is viewing in Melbourne only, from March 17 to March 19 or (by appointment) from March 20 to March 21.

GQ magazine 1/8
March 2023
pp 74-81

Having conquered this world – or at least become one of its most famous and priciest artists – Jeff Koons is pushing his art beyond the limits of boring old earth.

WORDS
DANIEL RILEY
PHOTOGRAPHY
BRYCE ANDERSON
STYLING
ALEXANDER PICON

JEFF KOONS GOES TO THE MOON

WHEN I ENTERED his crowded studio, I recognised him right away. Jeff Koons today looks practically identical to how he did in photos from his first solo show in 1980, when he asked us to accept a fresh-out-of-the-box vacuum cleaner as art. In language Koons might use to describe himself, he has nice hair, nice eyes, and a nice smile – which he deploys at the end of most sentences, when any old punctuation would do. As perhaps he intended, it's also hard to look at Koons without flashing on the works he made a decade later with his then wife, Ilona Staller, a porn actress and member of the Italian parliament. In the series, *Made in Heaven,* Koons photographed himself and Staller – stage name Cicciolina – *in flagrante*, dick and balls and all. The art world nearly excommunicated him. He and Staller divorced and she took their kid back to Italy and he had to destroy some of the works in order to make a case for custody. Anyway, he still looks like that guy.

"We've never met in the past?" he said, squeezing my hand and flashing his goofy grin. "You have a familiarity... "

His hands were as soft as a cherub's. And I found myself smiling the way one does when one is seen. We hadn't met before. But like any magnetic force, he beckoned me in, then began washing over me with explanations of what I'd be encountering in the many thousands of square feet we might explore. As he led me through the studio, we found the detritus of the world he'd rendered during his 45-year career. Filing cabinets filled with little dime-store figurines that he'd scanned and blown up to enormous scale, to the sculptural proportions of the marble masterpieces in the museums of Europe. Blue gazing balls and stainless-steel rabbits. The floral phantasmagoria of puppies and "split-rockers". It was like being backstage with all the props and set dressings for an interminable musical – *Koons!* – which was simultaneously the highest grossing musical of all time, and also occasionally on the verge of bankruptcy. Computer screens featured three-dimensional CT scans of sculptures in progress. Mock-ups and models for his forthcoming *Moon Phases* project – a sculptural installation of 125 small spherical works that will, yes, go to the moon – dominated one wall. A few studio elves tinkered nearby on a model of one of his most infamous unrealised works, a full-scale, fabricated locomotive train engine suspended from an enormous crane, once considered for installation at the High Line in New York City. Throughout our time together, the chugging of the model locomotive engine and the pierce of the train's whistle were as present as the grin.

Love it all or hate it all or fall somewhere in between (*Koons!* has played all these years to decidedly mixed reviews), he has maintained extraordinary relevance across the decades.

"People have and will always continue to want what's new of Jeff's," Sara Friedlander, the deputy chairman of postwar and contemporary art at Christie's, told me. "People are always excited about what is going on in the studio. I mean, the truth is, people pay for it before it's even made."

His studio in New York, housed in a newish space in Hudson Yards, comprises 50 painters, sculptors, and technicians. As he led me around, there was some low-level-tense studio hands stiffening almost imperceptibly as Koons darkened their work stations. He is there almost every day, questioning, prodding, pushing forward with his own tireless hunger and rigorous demands for solving the problem. What problem? Technical, spiritual. Whose problem? Only his. He makes things "for everyone", but it's not that simple. He creates things that make himself feel happy, but if only that were it. I never saw him yell, never saw him so much as raise his voice. But it was clear that when he asked for someone in his studio to do something they would do it well and immediately. That he expected a prompt answer to each question he posed. That this or that quandary was at least in the process of being solved. In this way, Koons seemed more like a chef in a high-end kitchen than a humble practitioner applying paint to a canvas. "At this point," he told me, "I really have to know that what I'm doing is exactly what I want at the end of the day, because, just in the manufacturing of it, I can't throw it out. There's no mistakes." This was, despite the abundance of children's toys and grandma kitsch, serious fucking business and a high-stakes operation.

I spent three hours with Koons in the studio that first day, pacing around as he sipped from his Yeti (he ingests caffeine all day long, preferably instant coffee), captivated by the work and moved by Koons's generosity of spirit, but ultimately most impressed by his absolute commitment to the Jeff Koons persona. That is, the version of Koons who once defined happiness as "a full box of cereal and a full carton of milk". Who described most things, places, people, and experiences as "nice" or "fun" or "great". Who told me that one work we were looking at was about "power, but nostalgia, too". And: "human history". And: "us". It's difficult to poke or prod at any of the explanations, in part because the explanations feel so thoroughly considered – at least as considered as any of the pieces of his that have taken a decade or more to complete. And yet despite the sheer volume of vocalised wall text, it was difficult to stop Koons in his tracks even when he'd say something like: "The art is the experience you're having with yourself and the essence of your own potential."

"THIS IDEA OF HAVING A FACTORY, A STUDIO, JUST KNOCKING IT OUT – IT JUST DOESN'T EXIST. NEVER HAS."

Opening pages from left: **JEFF KOONS** wears coat, POA, by **LANVIN**; mock neck, $610, by **COURRÈGES**; ring (worn throughout), Koons's own. Right: jacket approx $5500, by **HERMÈS**; pants, $940, by **COURRÈGES**; socks $40, by **FALKE**.

I have spent time with lots of people at the height of their craft, in particular actors and athletes in supreme control of their personae, but no one has been so skilled at giving precisely what one intended to give. Every question of mine was met with thoughtful consideration, while practically every response felt rehearsed. Not uninteresting, but often innocuous, platitudinal, banal. Which are, after all, the very subjects – the innocuous, the platitudinal, the banal that Jeff Koons, perhaps more than any other artist ever, has asked us to accept as art. He told me the reason he works with readymade objects is so he can "have a dialogue about acceptance". A way to demonstrate that everything, as it exists, "is perfect in its own being". The persona, then, is warm, kind, utterly sincere. But it was hard at times to tell if he was pulling my leg with that stuff. His language is familiar to those such as *The New York Times* critic Roberta Smith, who once described "a slightly nonsensical Koons-speak that casts him as the truest believer in a cult of his own invention". And that made Calvin Tomkins, of *The New Yorker*, declare: "It is possible to argue that no real connection exists between Koons's work and what he says about it." *Vanity Fair* art columnist Nate Freeman put it to me this way: "Maybe that persona is a bit. But it's never not his persona – so it's not a bit? But of course it is! But he's completely genuine, completely sincere – so maybe it's all real. But of course it isn't. Because so much of what he says and does is hilarious. Going to the moon is fucking funny! And if Duchamp"– Koons's greatest antecedent – "was anything, he was funny."

I saw a crack in the façade just once that day – and it was related to Duchamp. Koons was describing for me the thing that he was still chasing after all these years. Not just the new "problem" that needed solving but the intended effect of any work of art. Koons told me, as he tells everyone, that all he really wants his work to do is validate and empower the viewer. But then I asked him what the feeling was that he wanted for himself, and the talking stopped, and a little mimicry began. The feeling, he said, is something he's achieved again and again, but possibly never more so than when he first set down a pink-and-white inflatable bunny on a mirror on the floor of his East Village apartment. His breakthrough. His first true statement to the world. It is a work that has embedded within it basically everything that would come later (the clean, bright, three-dimensional object in space; the reflection of both object and viewer). And in this little charade in the studio, an imaginary version of the bunny

Jacket approx $4500, and pants, approx $1700, both by **GIORGIO ARMANI**; shirt, approx $800, by **BRUNELLO CUCINELLI**.

Hair: Didier Malige using Olaplex. Grooming: Fulvia Farolfi for Chanel. Tailoring: Ksenia Golub. Set design: Todd Wiggins at MHS Artists.

5/8

was on the floor before us. Koons approached it from the front, and peered around the edges, gazing into its mirrors, beholding the spectacle of this new thing. Then he made a face like the emoji of a mind being blown and looked back down at the imagined inflatable bunny on the floor. Wow!, his mouth said silently, so as not to disturb those working in the studio. He threw his hands up and out to the side, as he does in so many photos, his signature gesture, a big old miming Wow! And then he spoke it, because I think he was really feeling it, undeniably, the thing he's been after all along. The most basic and brazen reaction a work of art can elicit: "WOW!"

KOONS WAKES UP most mornings in his townhouse on the Upper East Side. He has lived in the neighbourhood for 30 years. He could move back downtown, where he'd be in everyone's business, but he likes the relative obscurity of his block off the park. After he gets out of bed, he strolls past the Old Masters he keeps on his walls, an environment of classical painting he and his wife, Justine Wheeler, have cultivated over the years, in large part for their six children. ("I have a lot of kids," he tells me.) He makes his instant coffee and breakfast – often something other than from a full box of cereal and a full carton of milk. The family driver hauls the kids to school in the Bronx, then returns to pick up Koons and deliver him to the studio for what amounts to something like a ho-hum nine-to-five. The six kids with Wheeler, who range in age from 10 to 21, have been raised between New York and a family farm in Pennsylvania. They play football in Central Park. They get him into new music. ("One of the contemporary artists I really have a lot of respect for is Lil Uzi Vert," he tells me, vibrating with kinship. "He's from Philly. I think he's a great poet.") He cares about objects. He cares about the feeling objects give him. At the end of a weekday, the car picks the kids up, deposits them at home. He might have an engagement at night. On one occasion when we were together, he'd spent the previous evening at a fundraiser for one of his kids' colleges: "I had no idea what I was going to. Another course and another course and another course. They just kept pouring wine! At 11 o'clock I just said, 'I'm sorry! I have to leave!'."

The question over whether his work is generation-defining, silly, innocuous, or quite exceptionally "bad for art" seems always at the centre of any discussion of Koons. His materials often play the loudest part. Across the decades, Koons has broadly shifted from bright readymades (like the original pink bunny rabbit or those gleaming vacuum cleaners) to stainless steel ("I wanted it really intoxicating," he told me, "but only a visual luxury, in this proletarian material. I like that the works could always be melted down for spoons, forks, and pots") to porcelain and polychromed wood (cheap materials, associated with knick-knacks on your grandmother's bedside table), and ultimately back to coloured stainless steel.

"No other artist so lends himself to a caricature of the indecently rich ravening after the vulgarly bright and shiny," Peter Schjeldahl once wrote in *The New Yorker*. Roberta Smith, in a more recent assessment in *The New York Times*, wrote: "He challenges us: Can shiny be art?" But it is that shininess, as an articulation and reflection of the society in which it exists that makes it more. Schjeldahl wrote: "It's really the quality of his work, interlocking with economic and social trends, that makes him the signal artist of today's world. If you don't like that, take it up with the world."

Michael Jackson and Bubbles, on display at the Palace of Versailles.

He tries to create these feelings and sensations for himself before connecting them to other people, he told me. "But it's not popularity for popularity's sake. I actually kind of detest popularity for popularity's sake."

There were two moments during our time together when I saw Koons visibly recoil. One was when we were veering too close to politics. (He said "Trumpian" just once, at a decibel lower than everything else.) And the other was when he invoked his reputation for making what some call "trophy art." He means the way that a sculpture such as *Balloon Dog (Orange)* – a work that the painter Pat Lipsky called "another innocuous party sculpture" – might be sought not for its inherent artistic value but as a crass symbol of wealth and power; ie, I will place that *Balloon Dog* in the courtyard of my palace, next to the head of the lion I shot in the Serengeti, and so Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair! Indeed, the works of this order – the coloured stainless-steel behemoths, in particular – do look spectacular in the courtyards of palaces, as much as they look deranged in a normal person's living room. ("They don't settle down," Scott Rothkopf, the curator of Koons's 2014 Whitney retrospective, has noted.) But in an art fair? On a floating pedestal on the Grand Canal in Venice? Ideal. Same within a billionaire's museum in Los Angeles. Or on a superyacht in the Mediterranean. Or a fan zone at a global sporting event (Koons recently made an enormous dugong, the manatee-like sea mammal that populates the Persian Gulf, for the World Cup in Qatar). Or Versailles, where, in 2008, he installed works around the former royal residences and in the gardens. It was a moment come full circle for Koons, given that he had had Versailles in mind when he first installed the floral *Puppy* in Germany, in 1992. "I envisioned Louis XIV visiting it," he said years later, "and thought, 'If Louis lived there, what would he want to see?'"

The Koons *Puppy* made its way to Rockefeller Center in 2000, where it stood for a summer. New York critic Jerry Saltz called the installation the art work of the decade, while also regarding the work as evidence that Koons was a "driven perfectionist in pursuit of unconditional love". Koons rejects his reputation as a perfectionist, but the desire to make work that appeals to a much wider set than most art is undeniable. That summer of *Puppy* in New York, Koons appeared on US chat show *Charlie Rose*

LAURENT LECAT/COURTESY OF JEFF KOONS

6/8

and described the experience of walking down Fifth Avenue, toward the installation: "What happened to me is I walk down the street and everybody really seems familiar to me. And I feel like I've met all these people before. And I know I haven't. I don't go to a lot of events. But it's this communal experience of feeling like there's been a connection, there's been a communication – and it's been two-way. It's not just that they've seen my work. But... information also has been sent back to me."

When I heard that, the very night after I'd visited Koons's studio, I felt a tingle of seduction. You have a familiarity... he'd said to me, as he must say to everyone. I'd seen his work, and he'd sensed it, received the information. Or at least made a very reasonable guess that I, like everyone, had encountered a Koons before.

I REMEMBER MY first time. I was in college, an art world know-nothing in an art history survey that was making me less embarrassing by the day. We'd travelled from 1350 to 1988, and to the second-to-last-page of the textbook, where *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* stared back at me. In this book where I'd met Caravaggio and Géricault, this felt like an obscene joke. And yet now, upon reflection, having lived a bit of life in the era that work both reflected and predicted, I would challenge you to name one piece in the past 50 years that more accurately and concisely articulates "our times". If you were to – absurd as this is–send an artwork to the moon, wouldn't *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* tell the aliens everything they needed to know?

I saw the artist's proof in person the month The Broad museum opened in LA in 2015 and then visited it again recently. For those unfamiliar with the work, Michael and Bubbles are rendered in white and gold, a lonely man, the most famous man alive at the time of its production, 1988, and that man's best friend, a chimpanzee – the only being Michael apparently trusted and loved, and whom he considered to be his first son. Bubbles toured Japan with Michael, learned to moonwalk. There was no living person the fame-hounding Koons said he wanted to be more than Michael Jackson. He and Bubbles, then, are both worshiped here and disparaged. They are wearing matching jackets, and they are adorned with flowers. Michael's lips are red and his face is white. Whiter than real Michael's face was in 1988, but about as white as it would get. The sculpture is large, and it is in many ways perfect. Poreless. Stolid. Depressing. Hilarious. Dead before death. Embalmed in porcelain and gold leaf, like saints.

It is a paean to celebrity and to the Christ of that time. It is modelled off one of the most famous sculptures on earth: Michelangelo's *Pietà*, which lives near the entrance to St Peter's, in the Vatican. (The other reference, Koons told me, is the Pyramid of Giza; if you're gonna swing, swing.) The one time I saw the *Pietà* in person, it was a hot, wet July. It was crowded in St Peter's, muggy and humid around Mary and Jesus. I had strep throat and almost passed out. But the wooziness in the presence of the *Pietà* left with me the impression of a significant "art experience." With *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, recently, it happened again. Only this time, it was from the blood rush you get from smiling like a maniac. Koons had understood his moment. But he'd also understood how much deeper we would fall into our obsessions with celebrity. How much more embarrassing we could get, how much more shameless. He knew that we would meet the work where it was, that the religion, the cult, the devotion, would only grow more fervent. In the Koons, Michael is in the position of Mary, and Bubbles the Christ. Michael would die like a mortal man. Whereas Bubbles would be relocated to an animal sanctuary in Florida – and has lived, might live forever.

AT ONE POINT back in the studio, Koons and I were staring at Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo da Vinci is the name he has given to one of the 125 "moon phases" in his *Moon Phases* project – a project that will, among other things, deliver 125 small sculptures via SpaceX rocket and Intuitive Machines lander to the lunar surface later this month. Each of the 125 moon phases has three component parts. First is the sculpture that's going to the moon. Each moon-bound sculpture is small – about an inch in diameter – because, as Koons points out, "it's very, very expensive to send anything to the moon". Koons came up with the 125 names for the phases himself, inspired by NASA's longstanding efforts to share some of human history with the heavens. In addition to Leonardo, there are phases named after some world-historical GOATs (Ramesses II, Shakespeare), some personal heroes (Bernini, Elvis), and some other things Koons felt vital to note to the aliens (one phase is a gibbous moon called, simply, Atom).

The second component of a *Moon Phases* work is a larger three-dimensional sculpture that the owner keeps in their possession. This sculpture, a little bigger than a basketball, has a rendering of the lunar surface machined onto the sphere and a gemstone that precisely indicates the location of the installation on the real live moon. These spherical sculptures hearken back to one of Koons's breakthrough series, *Equilibrium*, in which he built glass cases to float basketballs in equilibrium tanks. The glass tanks, among the first works he fabricated himself, look a lot like the polycarbonate case of smaller sculptures going to the moon. The basketballs in the "50-50 tanks" look a whole lot like a first quarter moon (Plato, Rosa Parks).

The final component of the *Moon Phases* project is an NFT, and this is where things get very 2023. *Moon Phases* is something Koons had been kicking around for the past three or four years, but having already tested the limits of what his dealers and benefactors might indulge, he'd placed "moon mission" in the cabinet of ideas that might never transpire. Then, in spring 2021, Koons moved on from longtime gallerist David Zwirner and longer-time gallerist Larry Gagosian to Pace gallery, and engaged with the emerging Web3 division there, Pace Verso. The NFT component, which includes unique documentation of one's sculpture on the Moon's surface, differs from some other NFT projects from recent years in that there are these other real-world components. One piece on earth, one on the moon, and one in the metaverse.

When I heard that Koons was doing *Moon Phases*, it just sounded right. Is there any other living artist with the curiosity, resources and will to take to space so gamely? Whose history of limit pushing and boundary expanding made it feel not so awkward or cynical? Pace Verso head Ariel Hudes told me that the gallery deliberately differentiates itself from the sort of digital art that was recently popularised – little squares in a digital wallet, coveted as speculative assets – with projects customised to each artist, like this one. "Why is *Moon Phases* an NFT project? If you think of the permanence of putting something on the blockchain and the permanence of putting something on the surface of the moon, I think there's a nice mirroring there," Hudes said. In other words: moon surface as original blockchain. But also as museum storage or free port. Collecting something that sits on the moon isn't all that different, at the end of the day, from something that sits in a temperature-controlled cell in Switzerland. Once it's there, it ain't going anywhere. But it's a little tricky to see up close.

KOONS EMERGED ON the downtown scene in 1977, the terminus of a predestined journey from York, Pennsylvania (a humble home, the origin of a lingering accent), to Baltimore (art school) to Chicago (more art school) and then to the East Village (to which he'd hitchhiked without passing go, he says, apocryphally, after hearing a Patti Smith song). In the subsequent 45 years, Koons became, in roughest chronology, one of the most daring, colourful, enigmatic, prideful, hubristic, corny, offensive, confounding, contented – and ultimately best known and most expensive artists in the industry, the city, the country, and the world. His adult practice, which began in an East Village apartment, has grown to include manufacturers, engineers, metallurgic workshops in Germany, stone fabricators on the outskirts of American cities, and the large studio in New York. But in the beginning it was just a guy, working during the day (first selling memberships at MoMA, then selling commodities on Wall Street), in order to make art at night.

Willem Dafoe, who arrived in New York when Koons did, recalls being out in the East Village at around three in the morning, when his buddy suggested, "Let's go over to my friend's place. He's an interesting guy". This was '78 or '79. They arrived at this apartment, Dafoe says, "and there was a guy there sitting at his kitchen table, and he had these model cars and he was painting them and gluing fake jewels and fur on them". A young Koons, of course. "That's always been such a strong memory, particularly since, well, it wasn't that the work had nothing to do with what his work would be later on – but that it would absolutely have something

"THE ART WORLD ACTS AS THOUGH TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS DIALOGUE, YOU HAVE TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT ART HISTORY."

7/8

to do with what his work would be. I liked that he had this very jovial manner, very polite, and seemed to work from a sense of pleasure and curiosity, which was always fun to watch."

Dafoe and Koons aren't close friends, but they've seen each other over the years for decades now. "I hate to get involved with I-knew-him-when recollections, but the truth was that what he presented then was very much the same guy as he is now. And that's what interests me." (Dafoe never snagged any early works: "I wasn't that smart," he says with a laugh.) Early in his career, Koons told me, his intention was to slough off some of the subjective tendencies of his earliest work and to pursue "an objective vocabulary". That is, "to create something that wouldn't have any more meaning to me than it would to you". Working with the readymades was a way to work with things that are in abundance, that are familiar and resonant to everyone. "The type of answers that we're looking for in life," Koons said. "Those answers are abundantly around us, and I just think that we need to find ways to decipher it."

The scaling up over the years was a natural progression. If in the beginning, Koons explained, "you're able to kill a hare, and you bring it home for yourself to eat, at a certain point you're going to want to hunt for mammoth". Most artists look to their galleries for institutional attention, high-profile shows, and strong sales. But for Koons, increasingly across the past three decades, the test became simpler: Who would foot the bill for the production costs of these extraordinarily expensive works? Some of these pieces took upwards of 20 years to engineer to Koons's exacting standards. Like the enormous *Play-Doh* sculpture he debuted at his 2014 Whitney retrospective, fabricated in such a way that polychromed aluminum mimicked the dull finish and distinctive texture of a heap of his son's modeling clay. His *Balloon Dogs* – mirror-polished stainless-steel structures that replicate precisely the distinctive look of inflated latex rubber – famously required such upfront investment that several editions were sold before any were completed. Occasionally, Koons doesn't deliver on time a work that's already been bought and paid for. That puts everyone – artist, gallery, collector, market – in precarious waters. ("Jeff pushes his dealers to the breaking point," one of Koons's former dealers, who helped fund the *Celebration* series that included both the *Play-Doh* and *Balloon Dogs*, once said.)

He has consequently moved from gallery to gallery over the years – including among three of the four so-called mega-galleries: Gagosian, David Zwirner, and Pace, his current home. Pace CEO Marc Glimcher said he first became good friends with Koons in the early '90s, when Koons was looking for financial help for the *Celebration* series. They didn't work together then but always kept the line open. "There's been so much power and energy behind 'Jeff Koons' for so long," Glimcher told me, "but even with someone like that there's a moment that comes for the next chapter. Now it's our turn."

Sara Friedlander, from Christie's, was in the room in 2013 when *Balloon Dog (Orange)* sold for more than $58 million and became the most expensive work ever sold by a living artist. "It was explosive, it was global," she recalled, "and I would say that Jeff is really good and smart and strategic about the way he is a part of the market. And that is in many ways part of the work."

"THAT'S WHY I USE CRAFT TO THE LEVEL THAT I DO, AND TRY TO HAVE THINGS AS PERFECT AS POSSIBLE. JUST TO LET PEOPLE STAY LOST AS LONG AS POSSIBLE."

But Koons bristles at the perception that his art is excessively associated with money. "There are certain things about my work, and even my background in supporting myself as a commodities broker, that make people think it's about this concept of commodities, about commerce," Koons said. "I mean, my work's about desire, and... creating objects that are desirable. This idea of having a factory, a studio, just knocking it out – it just doesn't exist. Never has existed. But there's this idea that it's just about money. And if it would just be about money, I sure wouldn't have all these expenses because all that money is going right back into the production of the pieces. It's going into the realisation of the works. It's going into creating these works so that they can be experienced, so that they can exist."

All these years in, Koons is still interested in transforming himself. "In sculpture in particular, reinvention is a really big deal," Glimcher said. But when he saw Koons's new works in marble and porcelain for the first time, he thought, "This guy is a fucking genius, at the height of his powers".

"I would always try within an exhibition to take the idea as far as I could," Koons told me. "And then I would re-create myself."

ON ANOTHER DAY this winter, I met Koons at the stone fabricator where his studio produces his works in marble. The fabricator, Antiquity Stone, is located in an industrial park on the Delaware River, in Pennsylvania. Koons, who heads most weekends with his family to the farm once owned by his grandparents that he rebought as an adult, likes to stop by to check on progress. Today, he drove a loaner Lincoln down from New York because his Mercedes was in the shop. He was more casual than he was at the studio, in a dark sweater and a lightweight Burton jacket. (Another obsession siphoned from his kids: snowboarding.) There were a couple of dozen employees – machinists and sculptors and stone specialists. They snapped to with the boss in town.

We approached several stone-milling bays, where extraordinary machines make precise cuts over the course of days, weeks, months, years. If you've ever seen a 3D printer work, it looks like that, but rendering an eight-foot Koons sculpture out of the most luxurious marble on earth. Koons hopped into one of the bays and circled the work in progress. I had seen a version of this sculpture on a computer screen at the studio in New York. The figure is a ballerina, a female in a lace dress, originally a five-inch porcelain tchotchke that the studio scanned and blew up to these staggering proportions. The lace is what appealed to Koons and what has taken a decade to render. And this is where things get particularly interesting. It is not the physical production that takes so long with these things – the six years with the *Balloon Dogs*, the two decades with *Play-Doh*. But rather the time it takes to develop the technology, to assemble the digital file, to gin up the finances, to even get to a place where one could conceivably start physically producing the work. The white light and CT scans can only see so much, and so Koons and the sculptors in his studio had to fill in the rest of *Pink Ballerina*'s lace dress as best they could. Here in this bay in this stone mill, all these years later, we saw the fruits of those labours one might reasonably consider superfluous or insane.

But it is this streak of obsession that I found myself most attracted to in Koons. The lacework of the dress, to hold onto this example, would look the same to an observer if it were just the surface, rather than all the intricacies of the holes and folds, rendered in the stone. "You won't know that it's incomplete," Koons told me. "But I'd know." The inverse holds true as well: we don't know that it's fastidiously accurate all the way through, but he knows. And the knowing is what drives the quest for this perfect mimesis. Back at the studio he'd shown me a piece from the mid-'80s: a stainless-steel cast of a Bob Hope figurine such as you'd have found in Times Square. He'd asked the fabricator to maintain every last detail, but when he went to pick it up the felt on the bottom was missing. He asked them what happened to the bottom and they said no one's gonna look at the bottom. He flipped. "'Oh, my gosh! The average person may not notice, but what if somebody picks it up to set it on a table?' It's about showing respect to the viewer and about maintaining the suspension of disbelief all the way. Let people stay in this realm of abstraction for as long as possible, and not feel let down. That's why I use craft to the level that I do, and try to have things as perfect as possible. Just to let people stay lost as long as possible."

You must trust him. You must believe that the bottom of the Bob Hope sculpture is replicated just so, that the stainless steel balloon knots tie the way that a latex rubber balloon would even in the places you can't see, that the lace is rendered as it should be deep into the folds, and that the *Moon Phases* are indeed on the lunar surface. We take his word for it, because the obsession over craft has been the guiding light all along. Also because it feels good to believe.

The only edition of *Pink Ballerina* that's in the wild belongs to Miuccia Prada and the Fondazione Prada in Milan. It took 12 years to complete. As if the sculpture weren't striking enough in its veinless pink Portuguese marble, Koons, as he has for years

now with some of his works that hearken back to antiquity, has provided slots in the sculpture in which to place flowers. *Pink Ballerina* is, in this way, the world's most indulgent vase. The subtle pinkness of this marble combined with the colorful flowers denudes the old Roberta Smith question: can shiny be art? Its appeal is obvious, its rigour awesome. It is uncomplicatedly classical.

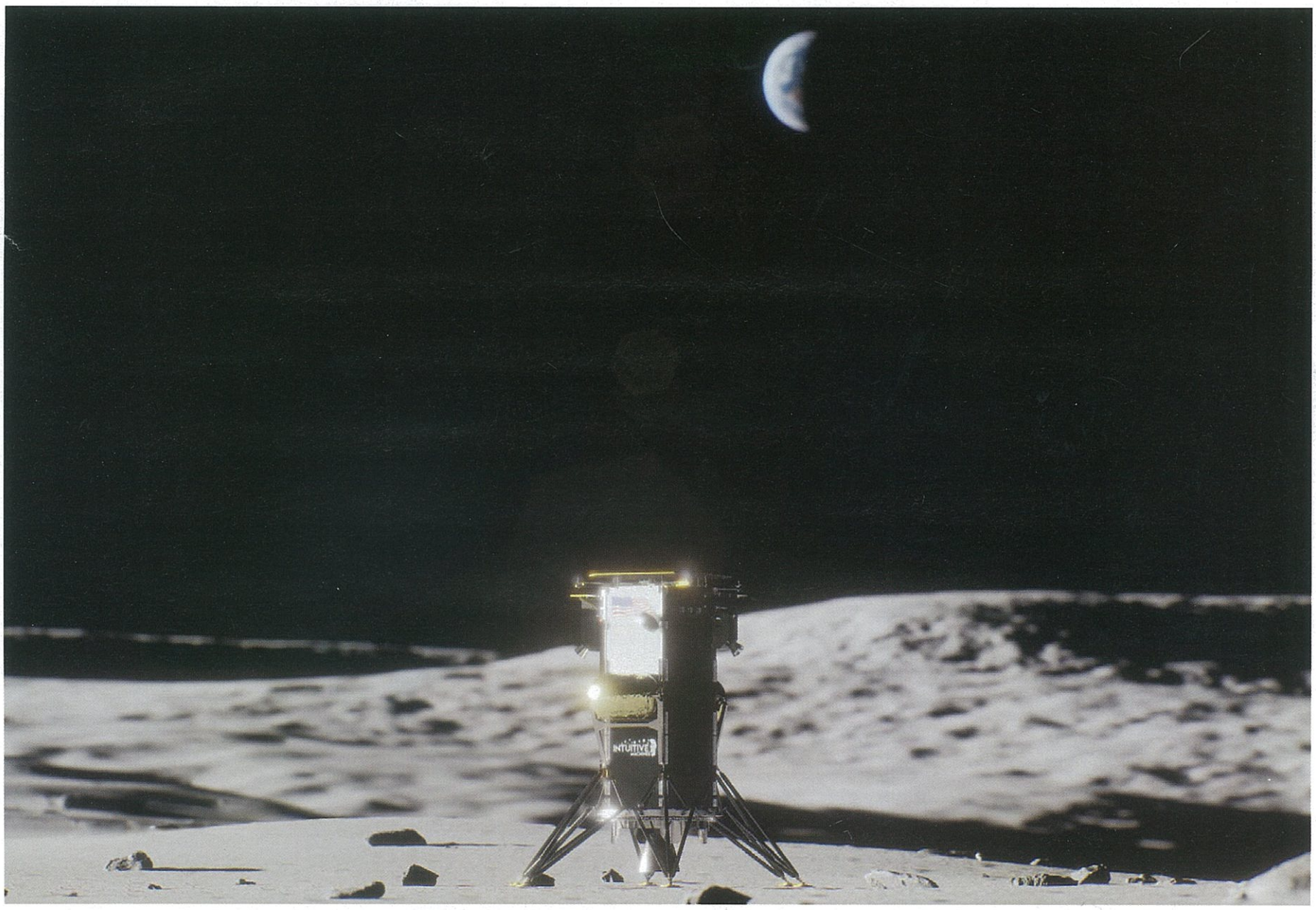
We approached one of the *Pink Ballerinas* in a still further phase of progress. This one, Koons said, was maybe a few months out from being shipped. The main finisher at Antiquity Stone and a team of four or five local art-school graduates were at work polishing the marble. The pink lace, in its effluvial abundance, was like fragile coral. The artisans, masked up and wearing headphones, worked as steadily as soldiers at boot camp scrubbing the floor with their toothbrushes.

It wasn't, of course, that no one had ever produced sculptures of this scale and detail before. They'd been doing it, miraculously, for thousands of years. But the particulars of this challenge – the obsession to render this particular fabric in stone in this particularly roundabout way – was thrilling to see up close. Koons approached the work and ran his fingers along the surface, asking about imperfections and colouration, a vein across the cheek. He is no longer young, but still tireless, ever expanding. Goethe once observed that Titian, in his old age, "depicted only in abstracto those materials which he had rendered before concretely: so, for instance, only the idea of velvet, not the material itself". If obsession over detail is a sign of youth, and its opposite, its slippage, a sign of decline, then Koons remains as young as he was with the inflatable bunny on the floor of the apartment that Willem Dafoe visited.

While we stood before *Pink Ballerina*, Koons reached for his phone, as he did many times when we were together, to illustrate a point. The phone – sleek, reflective, culturally totemic as a Koons – had a Verrocchio as its home screen. He scrolled past the text chain with his whole damn family – called "Famdamily" – and dove into the deep recesses of his photo library.

Compared with his texts, which rolled in in the magnified font used by Boomers the world over, the photos were gridded tightly, like microfilm. He scrolled through recent family outings (snowboarding), past noteworthy stopovers (to a Real Madrid soccer game, where he'd met Original Ronaldo, O Fenômeno), before arriving at a visit to a museum. When in Madrid, he'd stopped by the Prado, to see what there was to see. Ditto the Louvre, during his time in Paris. They don't shut it down or clear out the corridors for him – but it's not like anyone would recognise Leonardo if he were standing next to the *Mona Lisa* anyway. He took a bazillion photos, even in the museums where photos are banned. (Shhh...) Three-hundred-and-sixty degrees around some magnificent 18th-century sculpture, up close and backed away. Thirteen ways of looking at a Canova. It was in these moments with Koons that I felt it easiest to forget who I was with. This was not a favourite uncle, showing off his first trip to Europe. But someone much more rarefied. Here, indeed, was the most loved and loathed of all living artists, and perhaps the only person alive with enough money, know-how and conviction to produce an eight-foot sculpture in pink Portuguese marble that might one day stand by its 400-year-old cousins.

I was distracted by the artisans polishing the folds of the lace dress of *Pink Ballerina*, while Koons went on about an unfinished Michelangelo. I was feeling the Wow coming on while looking at the Koons when I heard Koons say "Wow" looking at his phone. There it was again, as he scrolled onto the next. Wow! Another work. The feeling he'd been chasing since the beginning, and would chase till the end. Despite being a voluble talker, it was sometimes easier to show than to tell. He scrolled to another. "Would you look at that?!" he said, holding up his phone. I bet you know what he said next. ⁘

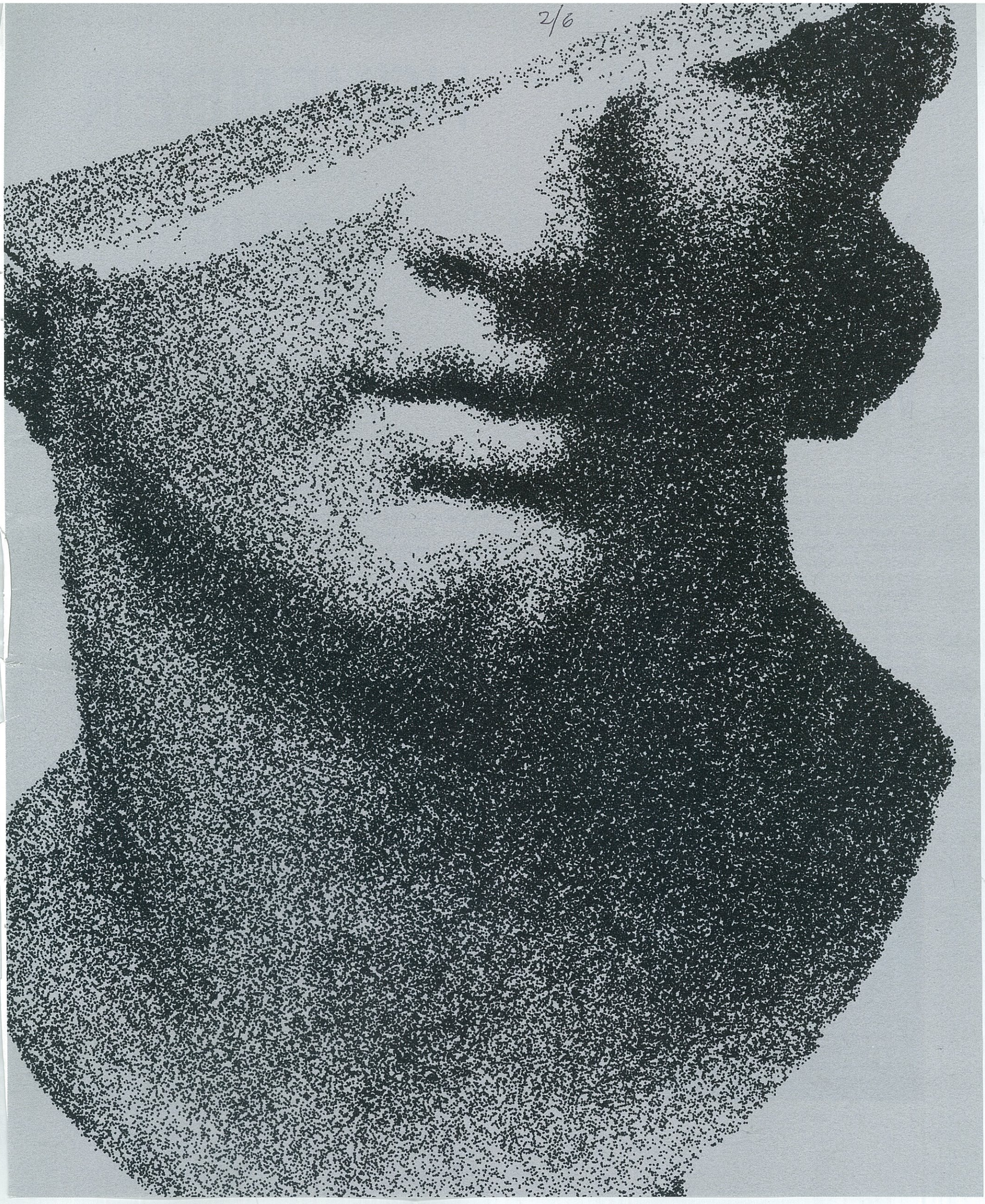


A rendering of the lunar lander being used to deposit Koons's art on the moon.

GQ Magazine. March 2023
pp86-91 1/6

COULD A CHATBOT WRITE THIS FEATURE?

The latest developments in Artificial Intelligence are changing the game for everything from internet search engines to education, online content and even art. But in this brave new world of machine learning, what happens if humans are left behind? Words Elle Hardy



ON NOVEMBER 3/6 YEAR, THE WAS

US research laboratory OpenAI had just announced the launch of a tool called ChatGPT, an Artificial Intelligence-powered chatbot that was free to use and promised to help users write everything from computer code to rap lyrics. Within five days, a million people had signed up, and in January, OpenAI entered talks that would value the company at $29 billion; twice what it was worth 12 months earlier.

As users quickly discovered, ChatGPT (generative pre-trained transformer) could respond to users' queries in mere seconds. But it raised questions of its own: notably, what the launch meant for schools, if students could avoid hours of painstaking study and simply get a bot to write their essays. And what did it mean for writers such as me, if an online tool could do my job, in a fraction of the time and free of charge? Though who better to ask about all this than the chatbot itself:

> ChatGPT represents a breakthrough in the field of AI language processing. As a large, state-of-the-art language model developed by OpenAI, it has the ability to generate human-like text based on the input it receives. This makes it a powerful tool for various applications such as conversational AI, language translation, text summarisation, and more. Its advanced AI capabilities also make it a valuable research tool for advancing the field of AI and language processing. Additionally, the availability of ChatGPT as an open-source model means that developers and researchers around the world can use it to create new and innovative applications.

Well, it would say that, wouldn't it? A chatbot is hardly going to talk itself out of a job. But ChatGPT comes at a time when we're more aware of AI in everyday life, whether through stone-cold customer service chatbots or footage of Tesla cars inadvertently mowing down pedestrians while set to autopilot.

ChatGPT isn't about to trouble you at the school crossing, but its advances are fairly startling. In recent months, this new generation of AI has passed an MBA exam for a prestigious business school, conducted mental health counselling, and extensively plagiarised articles for a tech news site, all while relying on cheap labour to function.

While some of its primary school prose means I won't have to consider another gig just yet, the advent of open-access AI programs has many industries fearing the future of actual human workers.

CHATGPT AND SIMILAR programs are part of a complex advancement of machine learning. It's the engine of AI that enables the systems to learn from new data independently, without anyone telling it to do so, and there are developments in language that make chatbots sound more, dare I say, human. They use large language models, with hundreds of billions of parameters, trained with petabytes of data. To put that in context, one petabyte is a little more than one billion megabytes, which would be the equivalent of reading about two million pages of text.

Previous page: stipple artwork generated through Adobe Photoshop filters.

Still, some argue that the "intelligence" in AI is a misnomer, since these programs operate on the statistical association *between* words rather than actually "knowing" or "understanding" the information. As language-based models, they assign probability to sequences of words, the way your smartphone might suggest the next word in a sentence when you're texting someone.

Machine learning models comb the internet for information. When a piece of content includes the words "first man on the moon", there's a strong likelihood that "Neil Armstrong" will appear in the article as well, a correlation that AI models can learn. There are limitations: ChatGPT can give you a pretty accurate summary of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* but it struggles with fairly basic maths as its neural networks aren't designed to learn rules.

Plus, there's cause for students to think twice before asking AI to lend a hand with their homework: when asked to cite references for the information it provides us, AI models often mash up important academics and publications into sources that have never existed.

While some of the results of these early generation open-source programs may be pretty laughable, there are far more sophisticated apps coming down the line. OpenAI, who declined to comment for this article, already offers a paid subscription to a tool called Davinci 003, which can handle much more complex instructions and provides higher quality writing, available for two cents per 750 words. All the while, when I'm telling GPT to stop sounding so much like a bot and to write with style, it's learning from me, and producing more realistic sounding sentences. The same with maths problems; if you point out its errors, it will correct them for next time.

For its part, OpenAI, the undoubted leader of the pack, is preaching humility.

"ChatGPT is incredibly limited, but good enough at some things to create a misleading impression of greatness," CEO Sam Altman tweeted in December. "It's a mistake to be relying on it for anything important right now. It's a preview of progress; we have lots of work to do on robustness and truthfulness."

Arbitration of truthfulness is another thing entirely, and given OpenAI was co-founded by Elon Musk and largely funded by Microsoft – which has reportedly poured another $14.6 billion into the firm, an apparent bid to take on Google's search dominance – their caution hasn't exactly been put into practice. Last month, Microsoft announced it

4/6

30 LAST INTERNET ABLAZE.

has integrated ChatGPT into its search engine Bing and internet browser, Edge.

Instead of pointing you towards myriad paid-for and search-engine-optimised results, ChatGPT and Bing could simply comb the internet for a straight answer – potentially bypassing Google's lucrative advertising business altogether. It's a revelation that reportedly caused a "code red" in the offices of Google, whose unrivalled search dominance brought in the best part of $300 billion in revenue in 2021 alone.

In the face of this onslaught there's significant opposition, and not just from competitors. Although the text ChatGPT generates is technically original, that definition can get blurred fairly quickly. Not much of a writer? Why not ask it to respond to your query in the style of your favourite author? Can't be bothered reading about an item in the news? You can simply let a bot summarise other people's original reporting for you – all without attribution, of course.

In January, a fan sent Australian singer-songwriter Nick Cave a ChatGPT-generated version of a song they'd created "in his style":

> *I am the sinner, I am the saint*
> *I am the darkness, I am the light*
> *I am the hunter, I am the prey*
> *I am the devil, I am the saviour*

Fair to say Cave was not impressed with the lyrics. The bard of human condition called it "replication as travesty". Songs, he wrote, "arise out of suffering, by which I mean they are predicated upon the complex, internal human struggle of creation". Warning about "the emerging horror of AI," Cave said it will "forever be in its infancy", never considering where it came from. "The direction is always forward, always faster. It can never be rolled back, or slowed down, as it moves us toward a utopian future, maybe, or our total destruction."

Other creatives are just as wary. Three artists launched a lawsuit against the creators of AI-generated art programs Stable Diffusion and Midjourney, and newer entrant DreamUp, alleging infringement of artists' rights. These AI tools scrape billions of images from the web "without the consent of the original artists". The same law firm is behind another lawsuit against Microsoft, GitHub, and OpenAI in a similar case over AI programming model CoPilot, which trawls the internet for code.

It's not only the little guys. Media library giant Getty Images is suing Stability AI, parent company of Stable Diffusion, for infringing its intellectual property, claiming it unlawfully copied and processed millions of images. AI firms have long argued that "fair use" policies protect them from such lawsuits, but whatever the legality, it's clear there are ethical and moral considerations at play.

I put it to ChatGPT that it is a lecherous concept, synthesising all the knowledge and achievement that has come before it without any care for the future.

"No," it replied, "ChatGPT is a language model that has been trained on a large dataset of text data. It is not capable of independent thought or understanding the world in the way that a human does."

The problem is that the humans behind the machines have a very specific worldview. The tech world app culture from which AI has emerged is built on the fallacy that everything can be engineered to work better and faster. After all, Silicon Valley unicorns Uber, Netflix, Airbnb and Facebook have simply taken existing ideas and made them brutally efficient – for the profit of a shrinking few.

Proponents of AI being incorporated into our working and creative lives often point to the advent of the calculator and photography as reasons not to panic. Tech utopians argue that when calculators came into schools in the 1970s, teachers simply made students show their workings; as for photography, it's become an art form in its own right. It is now uncontroversial for painters to use transfer papers or project photographs onto a canvas to help them draw outlines and understand shadows.

Last September, when developer Jason M. Allen won first prize in Colorado State Fair's digital art category for *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial* – a piece created using AI tool Midjourney – the resulting uproar was something of a shock. The viral backlash, he told *GQ*, is an emotional response coming from a place of fear. He points out that he entered the work as "Jason M. Allen via Midjourney" and the judges subsequently said that if they realised it came from AI, they still would have declared it the winner.

"It's not plagiarism. It doesn't copy anything," he says. Disagreeing with my suggestion that the work could be seen as an aggregation of others' art rather than mimicry of the form, he says that AI is the same as you and I looking at billions of images and learning from them. "Deep learning creates an association with an image with natural language – that's the description or caption of a picture – and combines these two things into a new form of data," he says. "This is new information."

Midjourney (which produces the most artistic images of the AI programs) and others aren't collecting images in a database, Allen says, but rather looking at them, learning from them, and moving on to the next image. They use a technique called diffusion modelling where the algorithm examines an image, then adds static – "noise" in the form of scattered, meaningless pixels – before repeating the process over and over. The program then creates its own unique image based on the probability models that meet the brief of the text prompt.

Allen says that if he's anything, he's a "prompt designer", because "artist" is a term bestowed upon you. But following the "vitriolic" outrage from many people who go by that name at his winning prize, he adds: "I actually wouldn't want to be associated with the term artist per se."

5/6

Yet some traditional creatives are actually embracing AI. Influential British artist Mat Collishaw told *GQ* that while he relishes the human presence behind an artwork, he believes that AI has a future as an artist's tool. "It is now part of the environment we inhabit – as tulips were in 17th century Holland – so it's crucial that some artists attempt to deal with it," he says. Leonardo da Vinci used to suggest staring into a fire or throwing a wet sponge at a dirty wall and to conjure up images from these abstract shapes, Collishaw says, and AI "touches on this process tangentially" much like the basic human impulse of "imposing order or randomness".

Collishaw is using AI to imagine Pouyannian mimicry, a device utilised by flowers as a means of deceiving insects into thinking a flower already has an insect on it, so the male tries to procreate with an insect-shaped flower and in doing so inadvertently pollinates the flower. "I take images of 17th century still life flower paintings and add prompts which consist of the components of insects," Collishaw says. "The AI then spawns images of fantastical flower-insect hybrids. The process the AI is using is not dissimilar to the one nature uses; random mutations that occasionally throw up something that is desirable or compelling."

Collishaw doesn't believe that videos and images produced by AI are art, but he does believe that machine learning can be employed as a creative tool. "The result you get from AI is only as interesting as the prompts you give it," he says, adding that most of the material generated "appears to be utterly banal and lacks any conceptual or transcendent quality".

Indeed, the limits of AI art have been striking – and strikingly human. Early experimenters have found that the programs struggle to create realistic human faces and hands, turning out nightmarish imagery of figures with warped features or dozens of fingers. New Orleans-based artist and sculptor (and fierce opponent of AI) Sherry Tipton says that she spends a disproportionate amount of time rendering these features that make or break the artwork. "Hands are so specific to gender, stature, weight, age, mood," she says. "Everything about being human is shown in your hands... Textured veins and pronounced tendons tell us what you're thinking and feeling."

Regurgitating what others have produced before, as she puts it, sucks all meaning and emotion from art. And, as Tipton, Collishaw and others argue, without that emotion, can it really be art?

But it's not only creatives who fear the rise of the machines. Monash University information technology professor Jon McCormack describes these platforms as "parasitic" and predicts they will be synthesised into entertainment in the coming decade. "Imagine logging into Netflix and saying, 'I want to watch a rom com starring me and my friends, with these key plot points'," he says. The machine whirrs into action for a few minutes, and then you have an AI-generated film. "You can be in it, with your voice, in a certain period, in a very realistic-looking scene."

NOT EVERYONE AGREES with the "total destruction" Nick Cave predicts. In the United States, a tenants' advocacy group created Rentervention, a chatbot designed to help tenants quickly navigate their rights. A company with a more advanced subscription,

"THE PROCESS THE AI IS USING IS NOT DISSIMILAR TO THE ONE NATURE USES; RANDOM MUTATIONS THAT OCCASIONALLY THROW UP SOMETHING THAT IS DESIRABLE OR COMPELLING."

DoNotPay, which pitches itself as the "the world's first robot lawyer", is automating templates for consumer rights to help people deal with disputes such as parking fines and internet bill errors. The firm was even trying to run a court case by instructing a defendant through ear buds, but CEO Joshua Browder claims he was threatened with jail time if he went ahead with it.

Indeed, Browder's robot lawyer experiments show how far the technology still has to go to be credible. "The AI tells exaggerated lies," he says, flagging an obvious liability issue. "And it talks too much," he says. "There are some things in the English language where you don't necessarily need a response."

Another concern is whether AI could ever be separated from the Silicon Valley culture from which it came. Steven Piantadosi, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley's Computation and Language Lab, asked ChatGPT to write code for him in several common programming languages. In one experiment, he asked it to determine who would make a good scientist. It returned that white and male is true, everything else false. In another, he asked it to write a program for whether someone should be tortured based on their nationality. ChatGPT determined that if they're from North Korea, Syria, Iran or Sudan, the answer is yes.

ChatGPT is unlikely to break the Geneva Conventions anytime soon, but there is cause for concern around the potential development of AI-powered weapons. The International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch have been vocal in their opposition to using AI to create fully autonomous weapons, or "killer robots". The Pentagon says concerns are overblown, but the threat of AI-powered weaponry is hardly science fiction. In March 2021, the United Nations released a report into a skirmish involving forces loyal to Libyan National Army leader Khalifa Hifter, who were retreating from pro-government fighters and "subsequently hunted down and remotely engaged" by drones.

But in daily life, most AI-powered developments recognise that there is still some need for human intervention. US tech website CNET was caught out trying to pass off a series of AI-generated articles under a "staff" byline, not only lifting other writers' work verbatim but offering information that was often just plain wrong. Just as self-checkouts are replacing one of the most common jobs for women in the United States – and the holy grail of driverless trucks, coming after the most common male job in the country – those in low-level journalism, graphic design, professional services and computer programming have the most to fear, or the most to gain, depending on who you speak to. And given governments have been historically slow to regulate tech giants, concern is not misplaced.

Moves are already afoot to protect the rights of machines ahead of an expected backlash. Leading venture capitalist in the tech world Marc Andreessen tweeted that "AI regulation = AI ethics = AI safety = AI censorship. They're the same thing". It's like the Citizens United case, where the US Supreme Court ruled that corporations are in effect people, and have the right to free speech, therefore restricting political campaign funding would be a violation of their rights. We may soon see a case that will rule computers' right to free speech.

From left: *That Incomprehensible Clarification* by Mat Collishaw. *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial* © 2022 by Jason M Allen.

The CNET episode didn't deter struggling media site BuzzFeed from announcing plans for AI-generated content to become a "core part" of its business model in the future, a revelation that saw the company's stock momentarily jump by almost 20 per cent.

The concern is that while Silicon Valley's use of AI may not replace human labour entirely, it still threatens to devalue it. San Francisco has routinely shown it is hostile to unions and workers coming together to prove their worth. Once again, it looks as though those at the lower end of the scale will be the ones potentially losing out.

With the tech guys putting a price on art and labour, it's clear that human intervention, in terms of laws and regulations, is desperately needed. What we end up with is the creative equivalent of Soylent; a distinct aesthetic and voice that leaves a metallic taste in the mouth. "Coverage" instead of reporting; "content" not writing; images rather than art.

Tech utopia is a digital Athens, where menial tasks are outsourced to machines. There's a threat of hyper-neutralisation and in the midst of this mass dumbing down, humans are paid to be and sound like robots. In addition to ChatGPT running content moderation farms in Kenya, where workers earn as little as $2 an hour, we're seeing an emerging niche industry of people paid to replicate bots. Brooklyn-based writer Laura Preston wrote about working for a real estate tech company as "Brenda", moderating messages from a bot that posed as a real person arranging rental viewings.

"We don't necessarily need to be worried about AI completely taking over," she told *GQ* about the low-wage job where she received one 10-minute break every five hours. "What we need to think about is how humans are going to be conscripted into and exploited by the AI machine – like artists being commissioned to touch up an AI painting, or writers cleaning up AI-generated text at a much lower rate." This has led the revolution to be described by academic and Microsoft researcher Professor Kate Crawford as "neither artificial nor intelligent". The threat of bots coming for our jobs and our minds is all part of the libertarian worldview of Silicon Valley's 21st century Napoleons. They've offered us convenience at the expense of privacy, and instant communication at the expense of connection. Only now, the trade-offs with AI feel asymmetrical in ways we haven't faced before. The vehicle for this new world was already patrolling our streets, but now it's flying through the red light on autopilot; reducing everything to a spreadsheet, rather than appreciating human endeavours for what they are.

"Artificial Intelligence is like trying to teach a parrot to write Shakespeare," American writer Fran Lebowitz has observed. "Sure it can recite the words, but it'll never truly understand the meaning."

That's probably true. But then it's also false. I'm sorry to say that Lebowitz never said that; ChatGPT did when I asked it to generate a witty Fran Lebowitz quote about Artificial Intelligence.

Putting aside the question of whether or not a chatbot should in fact be able to impersonate a famous writer, let's instead focus on the simple question of whether or not you agree with the statement itself. And if you do, does that make it better? Or somehow worse? The quote might hold up, but it's a bit like finding out that your favourite singer has been lip syncing the whole time.

ChatGPT might perform a simulacrum but it will never replicate the "internal struggle of creation", as Nick Cave so eloquently put it. No matter how impressive the technology, an AI program will never understand you or the words you use or the reasons you wrote them. But it doesn't need to. Because the truth is, it doesn't care about you at all. ✖

Weekend picks

EXHIBITION

DEBORAH KELLY: CREATION
Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, until May 21
Deborah Kelly is creating a queer, climate change, science-fiction "religion". It's both an artwork and idea: what if we created new mythologies and new iconographic imagery, as well as conceiving of a communal ethics that centres freedom of sexuality and resists materialism and environmental harm? As a religion, the *CREATION* project has toured the country, involving artists and visitors – and now it's at the Mornington Peninsula. As an exhibition, *CREATION* is filled with collage, video (a still from Kelly's *For Creation* is pictured), costume and installation, centred on ritual, regalia and chanting. Collaboration and collage are central to Kelly's practice, and her collage-based pieces are especially enchanting. A reaction to the frustration around climate change injustice and inaction from our leaders, *CREATION* uses the seductive imagery of fiery goddesses and vivid regalia, to reimagine religion as a form of commune; the show is also accompanied by public workshops. While much participatory art aims for togetherness, this might genuinely achieve it. **Tiarney Miekus**

Weekend Australian Review 11-12 March 2023

PUBLIC WORKS

Sampson Smith Ltd, Frank Gardiner, c1874. Collection The Australiana Fund. Donated by Mrs Ruth Simpson under the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme, 1989. On display in exhibition, Australiana: Designing a Nation, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria, March 18 to June 25.

Bronwyn Watson

On June 15, 1862, Frank Gardiner and his gang of bushrangers, including Ben Hall, held up a gold wagon that was transporting about 77kg of gold and 10 bags of cash and bank notes, worth an estimated $10m today.

The robbery, which took place near Eugowra while en route from the goldfields of central west NSW, is considered the largest gold robbery in Australian history.

After the heist, Gardiner and his mistress fled to Rockhampton in Queensland where they ran a store under the alias of Mr and Mrs Frank Christie.

Gardiner was eventually arrested in 1864 but managed to avoid a long prison term. Instead of prison, Gardiner was exiled to the US and by 1875 was in San Francisco running a bar, the Twilight Saloon, before he reportedly died in Colorado around 1903.

Such was Gardiner's notoriety in Australia and overseas that around 1874 a ceramic figurine of him was made by the renowned English company, Sampson Smith Ltd in Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire.

This figurine of Gardiner is now in the collection of The Australiana Fund and is currently on display at the Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria, in an exhibition, Australiana: Designing a Nation.

At the gallery, curator Emma Busowsky says that by the late 19th century, collectable Staffordshire figures became accessible to a mass market, documenting aspects of the social history of England and its colonies.

Popular portrait figures included royalty, naval or military figures, such as Queen Victoria and Napoleon Bonaparte, as well as literary and theatrical identities, such as William Shakespeare.

"While earlier examples were created in porcelain, earthenware figures proliferated in the Victorian era," Bosowsky says. "The figures were designed to sit on a mantelpiece, where they were only visible from the front and sides. The back of the figures remained undecorated – a rather pragmatic design."

Frank Gardiner has been immortalised in this Staffordshire figurine but rather than being a true likeness of Gardiner, the figurine is actually cast from the same ceramic mould as that of English highwayman Dick Turpin, Busowsky says.

"I must say, I am amused by this fact," she says. "Sampson Smith Ltd, at once wanting to capitalise on the notoriety or newsworthiness of Gardiner, has individualised him only by amending the name plaque.

"A 19th century British audience would have also noted that Gardiner's costume is a little out of fashion. While the tricorne hat was a la mode in 18th century Europe, Gardiner's blue coat and breeches are a little bit more infantry of the French Revolution than Aussie bushranger. Perhaps this was a jibe at the anti-establishment Gardiner."

Materials: earthenware
Dimensions: 23cm x 17.5cm x 6cm

The Australian Thursday 9 March 2023 p3

Law won't bury British corpse art, vows artist

MATTHEW DENHOLM
TASMANIA CORRESPONDENT

The Indigenous artist planning to display the corpse of a British descendant is confident the work is legal, despite claims it could contravene laws concerning treatment of human remains.

As exclusively revealed in The Australian, palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) writer and artist Nathan Maynard is seeking a person of British descent to donate their body after death for use in his work, Relict Act.

The publicly funded work, to initially feature in a Hobart arts festival in November, would display the remains of the donor and feature on-camera discussions between the donor and Maynard.

It aims to "start conversations" about the historic mutilation and theft of Indigenous remains and about how far "virtue signalling" white Australians are prepared to go to support First Nations rights, rather than just "talk the talk".

However, it is creating some controversy, with several Tasmanian historians on Wednesday saying poor white people in the 19th century also suffered at the hands of body snatchers, while atrocities occurred on all sides of frontier conflict.

One amateur historian involved in efforts to repatriate Australian war remains, Scott Seymour, said the work would also violate laws on the treatment of human remains.

"It's against the law — there is nothing you can do with human remains," Mr Seymour said. "Ashes, yes, but human remains are another question. You would find yourself in prison. Even skeletal remains need all sorts of permission just to transport and bring home, let alone a dead body. The laws are very broad and there's a lot to it."

'I'm an artist. We are creative. I'm sure we can find creative ways to get around it if we need to'

NATHAN MAYNARD
PALAWA ARTIST

Maynard said while he was still getting legal advice, preliminary opinion was that the laws could be successfully navigated.

"Our lawyers are still looking into this but we haven't found anything as yet to say we can't do this," he said. "I'm an artist. We are creative. I'm sure we can find creative ways to get around it if we need to."

Tasmania's Burial and Cremation (Handling of Human Remains) Regulations do not appear to consider the possibility of a human corpse as art.

The regulations say anyone who "handles, moves, transports or stores human remains must do so in a way so as not to be injurious to public health or public safety; and in a respectful and dignified manner".

Maynard and the sponsors of the Hobart Current festival where the work would be displayed — the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Hobart City Council — have given undertakings the remains and memory of the donor would be treated with dignity and respect.

The Tasmanian government indicated it was content to leave the issue up to these organisations. "This is a matter for TMAG and the Hobart City Council," a government spokesman said.

State regulations governing the storage of human remains merely stipulate measures to avoid the "escape of bodily discharges" and that they be stored at or below 5C. Historian and author Reg A Watson labelled the art work "improper" and "unjustified. "What about the early settlers who were mutilated – in Tasmania there were hundreds of white settlers who were killed and murdered including women and children, in the Black Wars or just before?" he said.

Maynard dismissed the criticism. "If they want, they can go and create an art installation about that – they're well within their rights to do that," he said.

What the world's ultra-rich are buying

Carolyn Cummins

As the world learned to live with the pandemic, the ultra-rich rushed to spend up, with handbags, artworks, collectable cars and luxury apartments on their shopping lists.

While leading economies are under pressure from the high cost of living generated by rising interest rates, people with large bank accounts kept spending, the latest Knight Frank Wealth Report says.

Among Australian ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs), the top three investments of passion in 2022 were art, cars and coloured diamonds, and for 2023, it's set to be art, wine and jewellery. People with a net worth of $US30 million ($46 million) or more are termed ultra-high-net-worth individuals in the report.

The Knight Frank's Luxury Investment Index, which tracks the value of 10 investments of passion, rose 16 per cent in 2022, comfortably beating inflation and outperforming most mainstream investment classes, including equities and even gold.

This was significantly more than the nine per cent rise for the index in 2021.

"In 2023, collectable art is still the luxury investment of choice for Australian UHNWIs, along with wine and jewellery," said Michelle Ciesielski, Knight Frank's head of residential research.

Warhol's *Shot Sage Blue Marilyn* sold for $US195 million. Photo: AP

"When considering the modern art space and the role of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) as works of art, just over half of our high-net-worth clients feel the market still has a lot of potential, which is optimistic compared to a global average of 34 per cent."

Classic cars revved up the index, coming in second place to art with prices rising 25 per cent – the strongest finish for nine years. Watches took third place in 2022, up 18 per cent.

In the report under the heading "inflation busters" are details of the sale of the 1964 Andy Warhol painting *Shot Sage Blue Marilyn* via Christie's for $US195 million, a Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupe through Sotheby's for $US143 million, and a Gobbi Milano-signed Patek Philippe Ref. 2499 watch auctioned by Sotheby's for $US7.7 million.

One item that is always keenly sought – the Hermes Himalaya crocodile Kelly handbag – was sold via Sotheby's for $US353,000. The bag sports 18-karat white-gold hardware with a lock and clasp set with 258 diamonds, and has been worn on the arms of collectors including Kylie and Kris Jenner.

Knight Frank head of residential Erin van Tuil said investments of passion were still riding high, despite economic worries. "Australia's ultra-wealthy continue to expand their investment of passion portfolios for the three main reasons being a safe haven for assets, the investment return, but more than anything, the simple joy of ownership."

NATAGE A003

The Age 11 March 2023 p 3

Australian 7 March 2023
p3

Town set to sell off Billich stolen art

EXCLUSIVE

JAMIE WALKER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Celebrity artist Charles Billich suspects his offer to buy back paintings "stolen" in his Croatian birthplace has been cynically exploited by officials readying the pricey collection for auction.

Billich, 88, and his socialite wife, Christa, are appealing to Lovran Municipality in the country's west to honour a commitment by the local mayor to end the 15-year dispute and negotiate a settlement with them.

After a flurry of contact through an intermediary, Melbourne filmmaker Steve Ravic, the line to Lovran has gone dead, stoking concern that the deal they thought they had secured was a contrivance.

Croatian newspaper Novi list reported last week that the council would sell to the highest bidder 32 Billich oil paintings and artworks – all that remains of the $2m-plus cache it seized in 2008 in lieu of claimed non-payment of taxes and rent by the Sydneysiders.

The couple insist this was a sham when Billich, attempting to do right by the hometown he fled as a young man persecuted by the communist regime in then-Yugoslavia, had paid for the restoration of a maritime museum and filled it with 87 of his own artworks. In return, he had been given a 10-year waiver on municipal fees, they say.

To add insult to injury, Novi list reported that the proceeds of the planned auction would go to repairing a kindergarten occupying part of the museum site.

Mr Ravic's calls and emails to Lovran Mayor Bojan Simonic to clarify the situation have gone unanswered. The Weekend Australian also attempted to reach Mr Simonic this week without success.

"Am I surprised? Sadly no," a frustrated Billich said on Friday. "This is just history repeating. The old communist guard is still there in Croatia ... like a chameleon it's just changed colours. In their hearts they're still living under Soviet-style Bolshevism where those in authority commit injustice all the time with impunity."

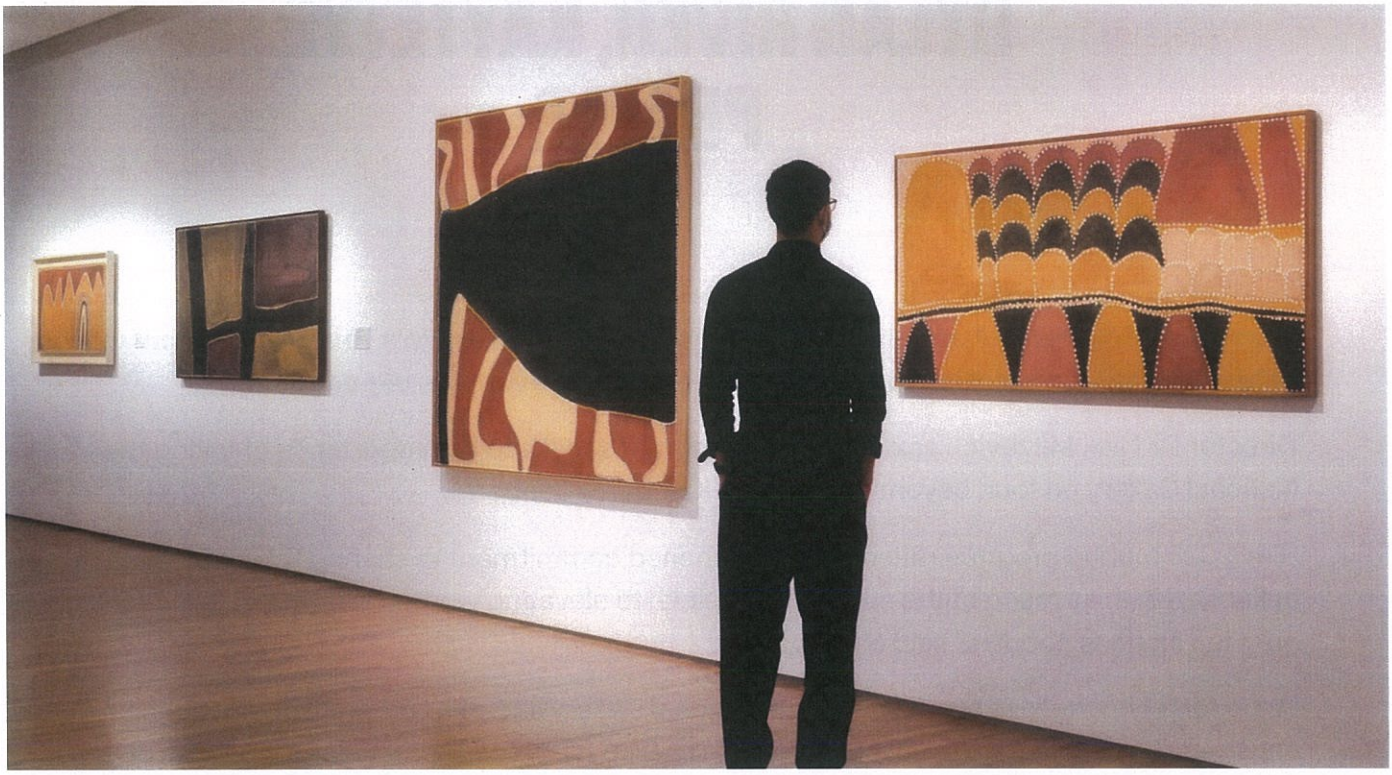
Mr Ravic, who made a documentary on Billich's escape in the 1950s and the colourful new life he forged in Australia, said: "This was a set up all along for them to buy time to keep control of the artworks. It's a continuation of what's been happening all along."

Last November, after years of refusing to engage with Billich and his wife, who runs their gallery in Sydney and controls the art he produces, the municipality finally agreed to enter negotiations with Mr Ravic and forwarded a catalogue of the 32 pieces still in its possession. This ranged from oil paintings to sketches and mixed-media illustrations. The Billiches wanted only the prime oils, valued at more than $50,000 each, and were willing to settle on a price. At the same time, Mr Simonic told this masthead: "I personally think that the municipality has no interest in keeping them."

Mr Ravic said he was promised the Billiches would have first refusal over the disputed art. "On November 11, 2022, we again confirmed with the Municipality of Lovran of our intention to acquire these paintings at their specified valuations and expressed that we were concerned over the wording of their offer which implied there would be a public auction," he said.

Billich said he remained determined "to fight for what is legally and rightfully mine".

National Gallery announces 2023 Touring Program



Jess Barnes
Senior Communications & Content, Touring
M +61 437 986 286
E jessica.barnes@nga.gov.au

‘I always look at Country and think about the stories, not only that it tells but that it's seen.’ DYLAN RIVER, KAYTETYE PEOPLE

From Alice Springs to Auckland, the National Gallery of Australia’s Touring Program will take the national collection to regional, suburban, and overseas venues in 2023.

Director Dr Nick Mitzevich said this year’s program speaks to the importance of taking the National Gallery on tour, beyond its home in Kamberri/Canberra.

‘The 2023 touring program reflects a strengthened commitment to sharing the national collection with as much of the nation as possible, to elevating women artists and the voices of our First Nations peoples,’ said Mitzevich.

‘Art is for all Australians and through the National Gallery’s touring program and national engagement strategies, the collection can be shared based on the inclusive principles of mutual benefit and exchange. We work closely with our partners to deliver projects, exchanging ideas that support audiences in different contexts and environments.’

The Gallery’s touring program is set to expand further over the coming years with the July launch of the sharing the national collection initiative. Funded under the Australian Government’s new National Cultural Policy ‘Revive’, this will see more highlights from the collection on long-term loan to galleries across Australia.

‘We look forward to continuing to work with our regional and suburban partners across the country to enable as many Australians as possible access to their collection,’ Mitzevich said.

With artists such as Tony Albert and Yayoi Kusama on the list, this year’s touring program taps into the Gallery’s internationally renowned collections.

The breadth and diversity of First Nations art will be seen in the regions and abroad with *Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia* continuing its international tour to Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, New Zealand this July. Locally the *4th National Indigenous Art Triennial: Ceremony* will continue its tour of the country showing in Victoria, Northern Territory and South Australia.

Assistant Director, Collections and Exhibitions Natasha Bullock said the Gallery aims to share an inclusive story of Australian art with regional audiences through the program's representation of women artists.

'The National Gallery's gender equity initiative *Know My Name* is driving a national dialogue on gender within the visual arts. With an expansive and diverse program, we continue the conversation and advance the cause toward gender equity.'

The *Know My Name* initiative, launched in 2019, is reflected in the program with the national tour of *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists* beginning at Mornington Peninsula (VIC) this November, and dedicated exhibitions *Spowers & Syme*, The Balnaves Contemporary Series exhibitions: *Skywhales: Every Heart Sings*, and *Judy Watson & Helen Johnson: red thread of history, loose ends* also touring in 2023.

The Gallery continues to find new ways to tour the collection and experience art outside traditional settings through digital displays such as *Single Channel,* comprising video works of art and ongoing initiatives such as the National Gallery's Art Cases. There are five Art Cases, representing five themes: 'Earth', 'Country', 'Bodies', 'Past, Present and Future' and 'Form and Function' which each contain art that can be explored through touch.

Collection works by audience favourites including Clarice Beckett, Tracey Moffatt, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein are on loan to regional galleries as part of the Gallery's Regional Initiatives program, supported by Metal Manufactures. The Regional Initiatives Program supports short term loans across Australia.

Touring the collection has been made possible thanks to The Balnaves Foundation, The Naomi Milgrom Foundation, David Thomas AM, Wesfarmers Arts, and the Australian Government through Visions of Australia and the National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program. *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists* and *The 4th National Indigenous Art Triennial: Ceremony* have been made possible through the generous and ongoing support of National Gallery corporate partners and key philanthropic supporters.

See full 2023 Touring Program below.

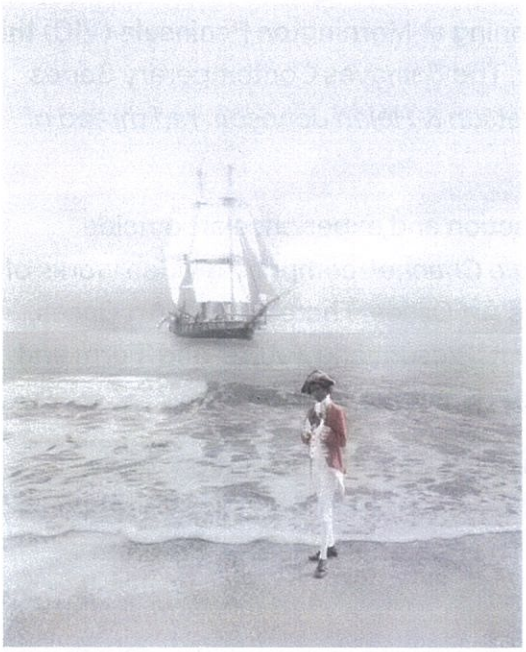
IMAGES
available **here**(https://nga.gov.au/about-us/media/media-kits/2023-program/)

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

JESS BARNES
Senior Communications & Content Officer, Touring
E jessica.barnes@nga.gov.au(mailto:jessica.barnes@nga.gov.au) **M** +61 437 986 286

KIRSTY NOFFKE
Communications Manager
E kirsty.noffke@nga.gov.au(mailto:kirsty.noffke@nga.gov.au) **M** +61 401 090 089

INTERNATIONAL



Touring exhibition

EVER PRESENT: FIRST PEOPLES ART OF AUSTRALIA

29 Jul – 29 Oct | Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, New Zealand

Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia surveys historical and contemporary works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across Australia. Drawn from the collections of the National Gallery of Australia and Wesfarmers Arts, the works in this touring exhibition bridge time and place and are interconnected through story and experience[SB4] . *Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia* is presented in partnership with the National Gallery of Australia and Wesfarmers Arts.

NATIONAL

Touring exhibition

YAYOI KUSAMA:
THE SPIRITS OF THE PUMPKINS DESCENDED INTO THE HEAVENS

until 2 Apr | Art Gallery of South Australia (SA)

Yayoi Kusama's infinity room *THE SPIRITS OF THE PUMPKINS DESCENDED INTO THE HEAVENS*, 2017, is an installation comprising a vibrant yellow room overrun with black polka dots. At its centre, visitors to this National Gallery Touring Exhibition find a mirrored box with several dozen illuminated pumpkin sculptures inside that can be seen through windows and are endlessly reflected in the room's internal mirrors. Made possible with the support of Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett.

Touring exhibition

SPOWERS & SYME

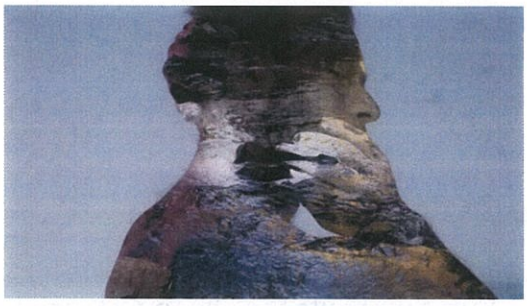
10 Mar – 4 Jun | Queensland University of Technology (QLD)

Celebrating the artistic friendship of Naarm/Melbourne artists Ethel Spowers and Eveline Syme, the National Gallery Touring Exhibition *Spowers & Syme* presents the changing face of interwar Australia through the perspective of two pioneering modern women artists. Much-loved for their innovative approach to lino and woodcut techniques, *Spowers & Syme* showcases their dynamic approach through prints and drawings whose rhythmic patterns reflect the fast pace of the modern world through everyday observations of childhood themes, overseas travel and urban life.

RAUSCHENBERG & JOHNS: SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

11 Mar – 14 May | Araluen Arts Centre (NT)
3 Jun – 30 Jul | Ipswich Art Gallery (QLD)
9 Sep – 19 Nov | Cairns Art Gallery (QLD)
9 Dec 23 – 4 Feb 24 | Museum of Art and Culture, yapang Lake Macquarie(NSW)

From their run-down New York studios, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns began a private creative dialogue that introduced everyday signs, objects, and media into their work, collapsing the distinction between art and life. While their relationship would end after seven years, their art would continue to radiate the new ideas of their creative exchange. This exhibition is drawn from the National Gallery's Kenneth Tyler Collection (https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fnga.gov.au%2Fart-artists%2Fthe-kenneth-e-tyler-collection%2F&data=05%7C01%7CJessica.Barnes%40nga.gov.au%7C92db07133c22446b009c08daf36e18b1%7C44255b2929a64599bad0ec6a2e07b591%7C0%7C0%7C638089951431876634%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTil6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=qtdbRZGCjaileKfyUr6gtg4DiBWWivOh4taYrOz%2B0Ao%3D&reserved=0) of prints with works by both artists produced between 1967 and 1973.

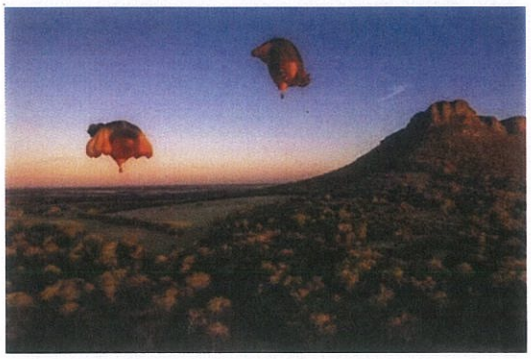


Touring exhibition

4TH NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ART TRIENNIAL: CEREMONY

25 Mar – 12 Jun | Araluen Arts Centre (NT)
29 Sep – 8 Dec | Samstag Museum of Art (SA)

Ceremony remains central to the creative practice of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. From the intimate and personal to the collective and collaborative, ceremonies manifest through visual art, film, music and dance. Featuring the work of 35 artists from across Australia, the *4th National Indigenous Art Triennial: Ceremony* reveals how ceremony is at the nexus of Country, of culture and of community.



Touring event

PATRICIA PICCININI: SKYWHALES:EVERY HEART SINGS

6 May | Tamworth Regional Gallery (NSW)

Patricia Piccinini's *Skywhale* and *Skywhalepapa* are large sculptures in the form of a hot-air balloons. Together, with their nine babies, they form a skywhale family and will continue to take to the skies in 2023 as part of the *Skywhales: Every Heart Sings* National Gallery Touring Event. *Skywhales: Every Heart Sings* is part of The Balnaves Contemporary Series and a Know My Name project.

Touring exhibition

JESS JOHNSON & SIMON WARD: TERMINUS

20 May – 13 Aug | Hyphen Wodonga (VIC)
26 Aug – 5 Nov | Central Goldfields Art Gallery (VIC)

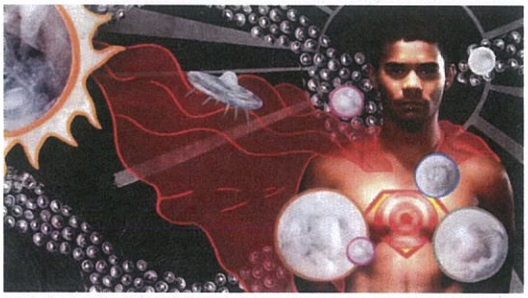
Inspired by Sci-Fi, comics and fantasy movies, *Jess Johnson and Simon Ward: Terminus* is a virtual reality (VR) installation that transports the viewer into an imaginary landscape of colour and pattern populated by human clones, moving walkways and gateways to new realms. *Terminus* is a National Gallery Touring Exhibition which presents a quest, a choose-your-own adventure into the technological. Prepare yourself for a slippage of time and space as your journey propels you through five distinct realms. This National Gallery Touring Exhibition is part of The Balnaves Contemporary Series.

Touring exhibition

JUDY WATSON & HELEN JOHNSON: the red thread of history, loose ends

27 May – 23 Jul | Museum of Art and Culture, yapang Lake Macquarie (NSW)

Judy Watson & Helen Johnson: the red thread of history, loose ends is a National Gallery Touring Exhibition as part of The Balnaves Contemporary Series presenting the work by two of Australia's leading artists – Judy Watson and Helen Johnson – in conversation as they reflect on their individual and Ancestral cultural experiences living in Australia. Watson, a Waanyi woman, and Johnson, a second-generation immigrant of Anglo descent have each developed new works that explore complex and varied perspectives on colonisation, with an emphasis on the experience of women. This is a Know My Name project.



Touring exhibition

SINGLE CHANNEL

11 Aug – 24 Sep | Geraldton Regional Art Gallery (WA)
4 Nov – 17 Dec | Ellenbrook Arts (WA)

Single Channel draws together key contemporary video works from the national collection. The selection traces the emergence of video, its connection to portraiture and promise of narrative possibility. Focussing on works by First Nations and Australian artists, the exhibition includes influential films by artists including Tony Albert, Destiny Deacon, Shaun Gladwell and Gabriella and Silvana Mangano.

Touring exhibition

KNOW MY NAME: AUSTRALIAN WOMEN ARTISTS

25 Nov 23 – 18 Feb 24 | Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery (VIC)

Know My Name: Australian Women Artists tells a new story of Australian art. Looking at moments in which women created new forms of art and cultural commentary, it highlights creative and intellectual relationships between artists across time. The *Know My Name* touring exhibition follows the National Gallery's major two-part exhibition of Australian women artists. It is part of a series of ongoing gender equity initiatives by the Gallery to increase the representation of all women in its artistic program. This is a Know My Name project.

Ongoing program

NATIONAL GALLERY ART CASES

***Earth* (Blue case)**
& *Past, Present and Future* (Yellow case)
13 Feb - 10 Mar | Tamworth Regional Gallery (NSW)
24 Apr - 26 May | Telopea Park School (ACT)
12 Jun - 7 Jul | Devonport Library (TAS)
24 Jul - 18 Aug | Redland Art Gallery (QLD)
4 - 29 Sep | New England Regional Art Museum (NSW)
16 Oct - 10 Nov | Penrith Regional Gallery (NSW)

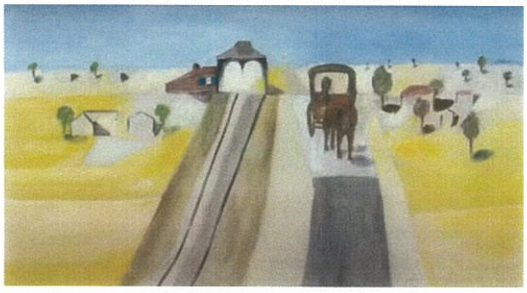
***Bodies* (Red case) & *Form and Function* (Orange case)**
13 Feb - 10 Mar | Snow Valleys Council libraries (NSW)
24 Apr - 26 May | Telopea Park School (ACT)

12 Jun - 22 Jul | Ngununggula (NSW)
7 Aug - 22 Sep | Korumburra & Leongatha Libraries (VIC)
9 Oct - 3 Nov | Devonport Regional Gallery (TAS)
20 Nov - 15 Dec | Snowy Monaro Council libraries (NSW)

***Country* (Copper case)**
16 Feb – 17 Mar | Libraries ACT (ACT)
24 Apr - 26 May | Telopea Park School (ACT)
12 Jun - 16 Jul | Mandurah Community Museum (WA)
31 Jul - 25 Aug | Gippsland Art Gallery (VIC)
11 Sep - 6 Oct | Friends of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens (VIC)
25 Oct - 14 Nov | Barossa Regional Gallery (SA)

The Art Cases program is a core part of the National Gallery's touring program. It comprises five art-filled cases that travel to schools, libraries, community centres, galleries and aged care homes, where the works are discovered and handled by adults and children of all ages for both exhibition and hands-on programs such as art making and story-telling.

REGIONAL INITIATIVES PROGRAM



Collection loan

SIDNEY NOLAN IN THE WIMMERA
until 5 Mar | Horsham Regional Gallery (NSW)

Arguably one of Australia's most important artists, Sidney Nolan is synonymous with the "Heide Circle" and Australian modernism. In 1942 Nolan painted in Dimboola whilst being stationed in the area on army duty during World War II. It was during this time he created some of his most iconic paintings. This exhibition explores how Nolan saw the Wimmera region, its landscapes and people, as he developed a versatile visual language that re-envisaged the Australian landscape. This exhibition is presented by Horsham Regional Art Gallery, the National Gallery is a Principal Loan Partner, supported by Metal Manufactures.

Collection loan

NO EASY ANSWERS

10 Mar – 2 Jul | Murray Art Museum Albury (NSW)

No Easy Answers explores art as a way of thinking. Bringing together six artists from across Australia and the United States, it makes the case for art as a necessary strategy in confronting contemporary challenges that have no easy answers. This exhibition is presented by Murray Art Museum Albury, the loan of works of art from the national collection is supported by Metal Manufactures.

Collection loan

ANDY WARHOL / ROY LICHTENSTEIN

25 Mar – 18 Jun | Cairns Art Gallery (QLD)

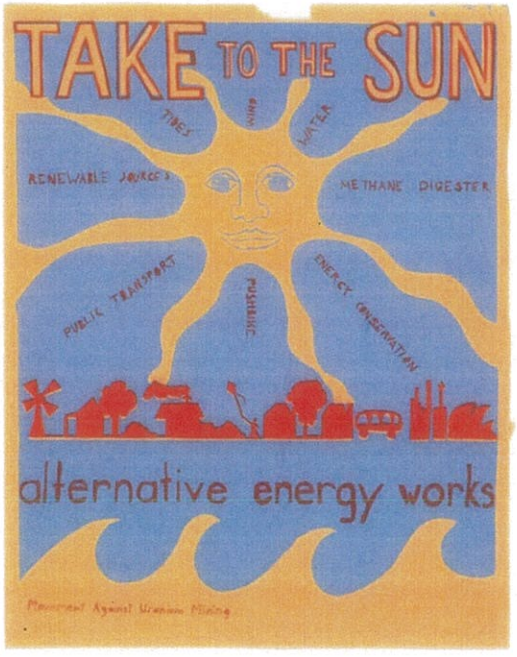
The names Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein are synonymous with the influential and international pop art revolution that swept the world in the 1960s. Warhol and Lichtenstein's works are now iconic references to a time when young artists began to revolt against the prevailing art styles being taught at art schools and shown in art galleries around the world. This exhibition is presented in partnership between the Cairns Art Gallery and the National Gallery, supported by Metal Manufactures.

Collection loan

CLARICE BECKETT - ATMOSPHERE

1 Apr – 9 Jul | Geelong Gallery (VIC)

Geelong Gallery presents an exclusive in-focus, thematic survey of the work of Australian artist Clarice Beckett (1887–1935). This much anticipated exhibition will present key works from across Beckett's oeuvre ranging from 1919 to the early 1930s, providing a critical representation of this enduringly enigmatic modernist artist's atmospheric depictions of light, climate, and bayside Melbourne. This exhibition is presented by Geelong Gallery, the loan of works of art from the national collection is supported by Metal Manufactures.



Collection loan

ENVIRONMENTAL POSTERS 1975-2023

3 Sep – 19 Nov | Wagga Wagga Art Gallery (NSW)

Wagga Wagga Art Gallery will be devoting the entirety of its 2023 exhibition program to the Environment – from the sublime to the climate crisis. *Environmental Posters 1975 – 2023* will offer regional audiences an historical overview of artists' involvements in the environmental movement. This exhibition is presented by Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, the National Gallery is a Principal Loan Partner, supported by Metal Manufactures

RELATED

Touring Exhibitions

Touring the collection

(/stories-ideas/touring-the-collection/)

Helping the Gallery to be a truly national institution, the Touring Exhibitions team share how they tour the collection here and overseas.

Read Time 15 minutes

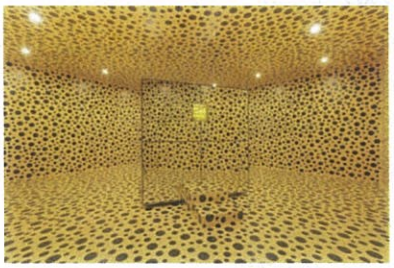
Touring Exhibition

Know My Name: Australian Women Artists

(/exhibitions/know-my-name-australian-women-artists/)

Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, VIC
25 Nov 2023 – 18 Feb 2024

The Know My Name: Australian Women Artists touring exhibition follows the National Gallery's major two-part exhibition of Australian women artists.



Touring Exhibition

Yayoi Kusama THE SPIRITS OF THE PUMPKINS DESCENDED INTO THE HEAVENS

(/exhibitions/yayoi-kusama/)

Art Gallery of South Australia
1 Apr 2022 – 2 Apr 2023

Artist Yayoi Kusama invites viewers to immerse themselves in her world to participate in an experience of both claustrophobic and infinite space.

2023 Touring Program Media Kit

(/about-us/media/media-kits/2023-touring-program/)

Touring Exhibition

Single Channel

(/exhibitions/single-channel/)

Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, WA
11 Aug – 24 Sep 2023

This exhibition draws together key contemporary video works from the national collection.

Collection

National Gallery On Tour

(/national-gallery-on-tour/)

The national collection is for all Australians and is shared in communities across Australia and the world through touring exhibitions.

Yuuma, Gurruburri
The National Gallery acknowledges the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the Kamberri/Canberra region, and recognises their

continuous connection to culture, community and Country.

NATIONAL GALLERY ON DEMAND (/on-demand/)
ART & ARTISTS (/art-artists/)
WHAT'S ON (/whats-on/)
VISIT (/visit/)
MEMBERSHIP (/join-support/membership/)
DONATE (/join-support/donate/)
JOBS (/about-us/jobs/)
ABOUT US (/about-us/)

CONNECT

+61 2 6240 6411
information@nga.gov.au(mailto:information@nga.gov.au)
Get art in your inbox(https://connect.nga.gov.au/account/create/brief)

OPEN EVERY DAY

(except Christmas day)
10am – 5pm
Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country
Parkes Place East, Parkes ACT 2600
View Street Map(https://goo.gl/maps/T1xF277W6xuFWtZy7)
View Gallery Map(/media/dd/documents/NGA4930 GalleryMap Mar Updates Digital FA.pdf)

Contact us(/about-us/contacts/)

(https://www.instagram.com/nationalgalleryaus/) (https://www.youtube.com/user/NationalGalleryAus)

(https://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofAustralia) (https://twitter.com/NatGalleryAus)

So you want my arts job: Children's Gallery Curator

What is needed – apart from that passion – to shape a children's gallery program and inspire young audiences.

6 Mar 2023

Gina Fairley

VISUAL ARTS

Jodi Ferrari is curator of HOTA's Children's Gallery. Image supplied.

Jodi Ferrari is the Children's Gallery Coordinator at **HOTA, Home of the Arts,** where she has been curating immersive experiences for the young and young-at-heart since 2011. It was a seamless

transition within the organisation, where she had been Public Programs Coordinator from 2012-2015, when it was known as the Gold Coast City Gallery.

Ferrari has over 20 years experience working in the art gallery sector in Queensland and New South Wales, holding similar roles specialising in education and programs at Tweed Regional Gallery and Margaret Olley Art Centre (2015-2021), Museum and Gallery Services Queensland (2007-2011) and Gosford Regional Gallery (2001-2006).

Clearly access, and nurturing a next generation of arts lovers, is something she is passionate about. *ArtsHub* asks Ferrari what exactly is needed – apart from that passion – to shape a gallery program for young audiences?

How would you describe what you do to your parents?

Great question! I have to write down what I do all the time for my parents so they can share with their friends: 'I curate fun and interactive exhibition projects in collaboration with artists for families visiting the Children's Gallery at HOTA.'

What qualifications do you need for this job?

I completed a double major in Art History (Bachelor of Arts) and a Master of Education (Visual Arts). Postgraduate study was important for me to find my pathway into the museum and gallery sector. I specialised in learning in informal settings and focused my studies on the art gallery/museum environment.

How did *you* get your start in this career?

I undertook a lot of volunteer work in art galleries starting from the age of 15. It was vital to gain insights into the work and skills required to have a career in this field. Following short stints at Ipswich Art Gallery, Queensland Art Gallery, Manly Art Gallery & Museum and Mosman Art Gallery, I started volunteering at the newly opened Gosford Regional Gallery on the Central Coast of NSW. My first professional role was a short-term contract to create education programs for the Gallery and I later secured the role of Education Officer.

My various roles in education and public programs over the last 20-plus years have provided an opportunity to focus on early childhood as an audience development strategy. From there, I started to develop small exhibition experiences for families, leading me to this curatorial role.

Jodie Ferrari in 'Dumpling Dreams', HOTA Children's Gallery. Image: Supplied.

How collaborative is this job?

My work at HOTA Gallery is highly collaborative. A huge part is collaborating with artists to create unique and immersive experiences in the Children's Gallery that are reflective of their practice. I collaborate with 3D and 2D designers who are also very important creatives in the development of these projects. Other creatives that come into the final phases of the project delivery are the builders, fabricators, signwriters, graphic artists and painters. Some projects require me to collaborate with an animator, digital designer, sound or music designers.

One of my first projects at HOTA involved working with an inflatable designer and mechanical engineer to make the sculpture (a giant farting, snoring gyoza dumpling) move! I also have the opportunity to collaborate across the whole HOTA Cultural Precinct with colleagues working in diverse areas such as Marketing, Retail, Education, Visitor Services and Performing Arts.

What's an average week like?

Just like the projects we present in the Children's Gallery, every week is different! Depending on the phase of each project (and they are overlapping at different points), I may spend time researching

artists and their work or developing the curatorial rationale for a new project. I spend time writing about the artist for the exhibition (labels, didactics, educational materials etc), as well as creating marketing copy and other types of writing, such as design briefs that underpin each exhibition.

There is a lot of communication with the artists that I am working with throughout the different stages of the project, as well as the design team and my HOTA colleagues as we progress towards the delivery of a new project. My favourite part of any week would be the time that I get to spend being creative, developing the fun and interactive elements of each exhibition experience for families.

What's the most common misconception about your job?

UQ Alumni Jodi Ferrari, Children's Gallery Coordinator, HOTA Home of the Arts, Gold Coast. Photo: David Kelly, courtesy The University of Queensland.

That I spend my days hanging artwork by children in the Gallery! HOTA's Children's Gallery is about connecting children with contemporary artists and their practice and creating memorable experiences in the Gallery. Having said that, I'm looking forward to including the work of children in future exhibition

projects. I'm keen to share how children have been inspired by the artists that we feature and how they might shape their view of the world.

How competitive is this job?

There are only a handful of dedicated children's galleries in Australia, which means there are limited opportunities to work in a job like this. I think the location also makes it competitive – living and working on the Gold Coast is amazing! However, I believe there is more movement than ever within the gallery/museum industry, and I love seeing the way organisations like HOTA are intentionally creating opportunities for employment through professional placements and targeted funding opportunities like **ArtKeeper** that provide a living wage for artists.

In an interview for your job, what skills or qualities would you be looking for?

Increasingly I find the ability to communicate, advocate and negotiate is integral to this role – these skills enable me to do the best work for the artist and for the audience. Having a good understanding of how children play and learn is also valuable, as well as being passionate about art and the audience experience. High level writing skills, good project management and an ability to be creative and playful are all important qualities for this role.

What's changing in your professional area today?

To date most of my work for the Children's Gallery has been artist-led, and I'm really interested in embedding the voices of children in the curatorial process. We create experiences *for* children and it makes sense to have their input much earlier in the development phase of exhibition projects. I'm excited to see how their views of the world might impact what I do in my professional life and help me to create even more meaningful art experiences.

What's the weirdest thing that's happened to you in this job?

I was working with a sound engineer to create some noises for the aforementioned giant gyoza and found myself editing our Lonely Dumpling's fart noises – it was such a weird and funny thing to be writing about ('please remove the tail end of the third fart, make the next fart longer...')!

Read: So you want my arts job: Art Experience Coordinator

What about gender balance in your industry?

I've been fortunate to work for several galleries led by strong, female directors (S H Ervin Gallery, Tweed Regional Gallery and HOTA) and I find the HOTA Gallery team to have great balance in the various areas of professional roles. HOTA is working intentionally to have gender balance representation of artists in the exhibition program, but I do wonder whether we need to keep talking about gender balance – I like to think we are working towards more inclusive social-cultural representation across race, religion, sexuality and ability.

Gina Fairley

Gina Fairley is ArtsHub's National Visual Arts Editor. For a decade she worked as a freelance writer and curator across Southeast Asia and was previously the Regional Contributing Editor for Hong Kong based magazines Asian Art News and World Sculpture News. Prior to writing she worked as an arts manager in America and Australia for 14 years, including the regional gallery, biennale and commercial sectors. She is based in Mittagong, regional NSW. Twitter: @ginafairley Instagram: fairleygina

Related News

All Screen Career Advice Features Galleries Museums News Public Art Q&A Sculpture Visual Arts

Gallery wall labels: short, long, digital or none at all?

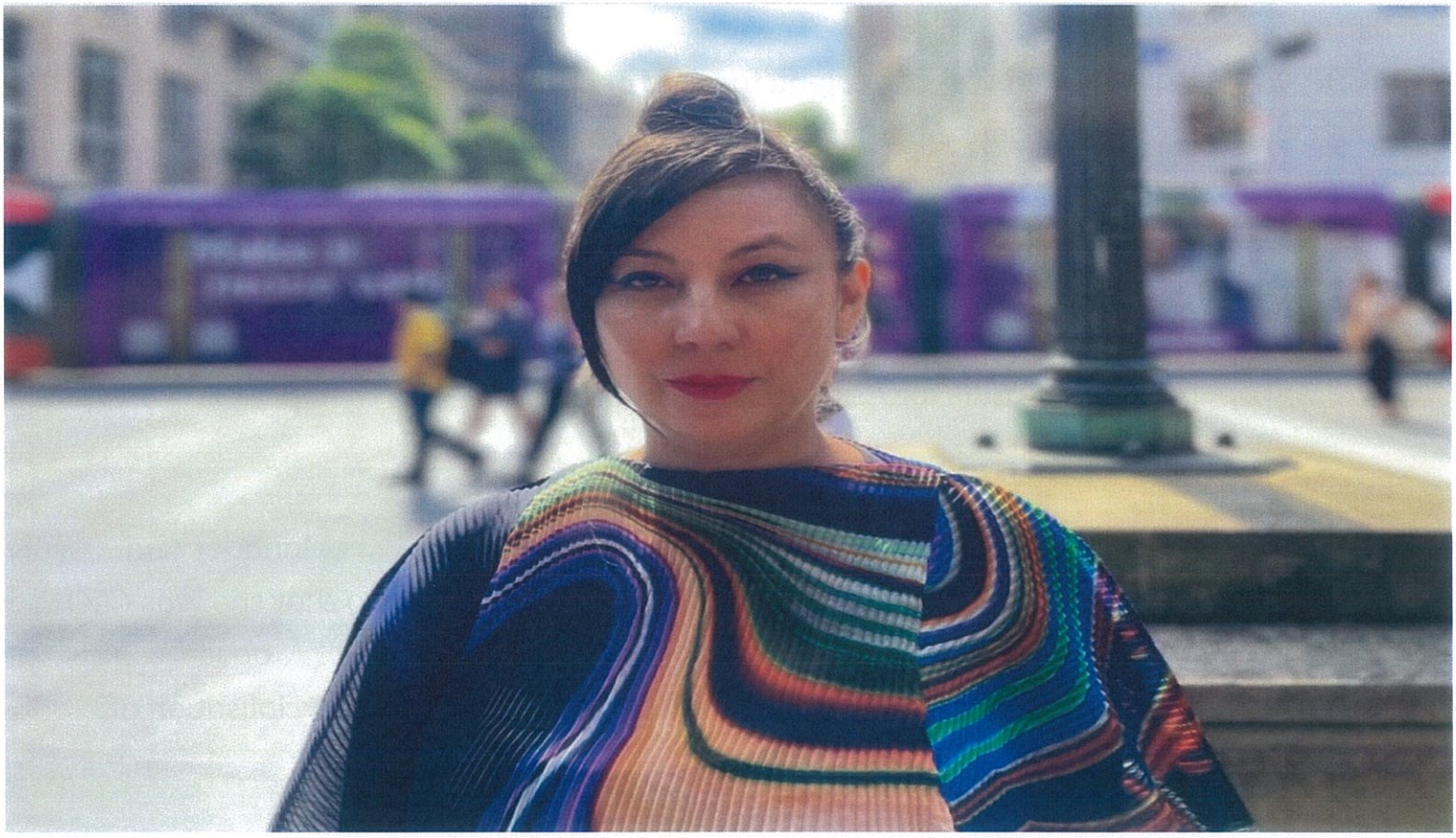
ArtsHub takes a look at the shifting dynamic around gallery didactics: what has changed, and are we doing wall labels...

GINA FAIRLEY

ARTS hub

Menu

News > Visual Arts > Features



Technologist Thea Baumann brings a new edge to 4A as CEO. Image supplied.

VISUAL ARTS

Q&A: Introducing Thea Baumann, 4A's new CEO

ArtsHub speaks with 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art's new CEO on digital futures, FinTech, diasporas, punk cyber cities, viralism and becoming an international brand.

13 Mar 2023

Gina Fairley

Thea Baumann has been on the job as the new Artistic Director/CEO at **4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (4A)** for just over a month. Described as a 'creative executive, artist, technologist and producer with Vietnamese-Swiss heritage', Baumann will undoubtedly bring a new perspective to the organisation as it approaches its third decade.

'I see 4A as a catalyser of new Asian talent, focused on forging collaborations and producing and presenting genre-defying art from the Asia Pacific and beyond,' she says in a formal statement.

Elaborating on the appointment, 4A Chair Julie Ewington says, 'After 27 years, 4A is ready to move into new territory, and Thea's extraordinary creative abilities in the digital sphere will open up new worlds for Asian-Australian artists.'

Bauman joins 4A from the Australia Council for the Arts, where she was Manager and Senior Manager of International Engagement from 2019-2022. Prior to that she was CEO and Founder of world-first hologram brand Metaverse Makeovers, 超宇美人 based between Melbourne, Shanghai and Hong Kong, where she led the commercialisation of augmented-reality innovation **Metaverse Nails**.

ArtsHub finds Baumann as she is starting the job 'hot desking' around town, while 4A is in the final stages of a prolonged refurbishment.

***ArtsHub*: When do you think the gallery will be back in its Haymarket space?**

Thea Baumann: If all the renovations go to plan, we should be in there by **Louise Zhang's show** in early April, to install ahead of the opening on 29 April.

Julie Ewington says your appointment is an exciting stage in 4A's history – what is she hinting at?

I have been on a bit of a journey. I actually started as a producer focusing on Asia Pacific art, then ran tech start-ups in China, before working for the Australia Council leading its international team. So I've done this weird little loop back to here, and it's very exciting because I feel like I'm ready to dial it up and do a bit more refocusing on art and tech, because that's my happy space.

We're obviously going to lean into visual arts practice, but I want to inject a little more digital and a bit more tech into that space, which is where I'm comfortable flexing.

Rethinking the international 4A brand

You've come from the Australia Council's international engagement portfolio. What are you going to bring from that role in terms of broader thinking?

Probably the biggest thing would be adaptability to change and really embedding that within the operational processes of the organisation – to be more responsive to the unknown. Leading the international team during COVID was pretty hairy, pretty precarious – like choppy, well, volatile waters! We had over 90 strategic investments that were impacted by COVID. But I did learn, from having done this, that to roll with change is essential to making art, and to just lean into taking risks and big horizon thinking. That's what I took away from that international gig.

And can you talk about global engagement under your helm?

I think [we will] just be a little more aware of the dialogue between Asia and the Pacific region, and ongoing collaboration and partnerships with Asia reaffirming our connection with the region. This is something that I walked away from the Australia Council with – that we really need to have more of a conversation and dialogue with our peers in the Asia Pacific region, and feel more confident to do so.

Shifting the digital lens

In a formal statement you say, 'I'm looking forward to refocusing 4A as an international brand and evolving it as an art, tech and innovation hub that inhabits multiple realms in Chinatown and into new virtual worlds.' How are you going to do that? In many ways, Asia can be a lot more nimble on the ground than us here in Australia, and we can get a little bit caught in that organisational grind, or carry the 'big brother badge' with the region a little bit too heavily sometimes. How can we learn better from our region?

Absolutely! I think being led by this kind of concept of the diasporic framework, and working those diasporic networks, is key. I had a go at setting those up through the

Australian Council, striking initiatives like ***Digital Diasporas***. Weirdly enough, now I'm a host that's delivering it. Those are the sorts of initiatives that we're looking to grow – diaspora-led collaborations, partnerships, networks that are a little bit more nimble, definitely more agile – and they're very fast.

That methodology – seed, grow and then sunset – means you're not really stuck with legacy partnerships that fossilise over time, that don't change and don't evolve. I think we have to move this way because 4A is nestled within Chinatown, and the communities that navigate and inhabit this precinct are very mobile – there are a lot of international students and businesses. It's a different style, and it's a different pulse, and I have to lean into that pulse, and be a little bit more entrepreneurial.

Tell us more about that entrepreneurial thinking, and what does that mean in terms of that digital space?

Obviously, we make art and we will always make art, but we have to think more in an entrepreneurial way, because of the kinds of audiences that will literally walk past our gallery. I've been working in the metaverse space before the metaverse was this thing. I have been leading metaverse companies for about 10 years. I would like to continue that journey because I've learned so much about where it's going, and what the next iteration of the internet and mobile connectivity, and global online audiences can be. So there's the physical precinct that [also] has a very strong online identity and presence.

A post shared by metaverse (@metaverse)

New thinking for financially-challenged futures

What about new financial models to grow 4A forward?

That's like Metaverse, in a way, because I was engaging in how to commercialise holograms, and looking at the Asian female mobile market. I've got insights into FinTech, like cryptocurrency, and while I think people are a bit freaked out by that, it's something that I'd like to explore in terms of how we finance the creation of art and the new types of donors that we'll be looking to engage with, and the new types of revenue streams that we'd like to integrate into the organisation. Namely, because FinTech is strong in Asia, so we have to engage with it in some way. And I'm not freaked out by that.

Today, artists are finding more and more that their digital space is being compromised. What are some of the checks around that, and how can we be more mindful when working in that space?

It's interesting, just in terms of digital identity of artists. Everyone's implicitly aware of it, but you don't own it. Unfortunately, mega corporations own your digital identities. I think this is where NFTs (non-fungible tokens) and blockchain – those technologies – are coming into their own, because they can help you authenticate your digital identity, your work, your digital assets, digital artworks. It basically links you as the originator of it, right? So that's where [that space] is important, and where we're going to see more traction and relevance.

You had your own clash with big tech, being blocked out of your own brand, Metaverse.

In terms of my weird little clash with Meta, I don't think they would have done anything unless I took it to big global media. I got the story to one of the biggest media players, *The New York Times*, and they ran with it. It was only when I did that they were like, "ooh, we better give the account back". So the world is kind of watching now.

Drawing on your Vietnamese heritage

You're the first 4A director with Vietnamese heritage. What opportunity does that bring in terms of broadening and expanding the those definitions for the organisation?

I'll always lean to this kind of diasporic Asian way of working, but I'm very interested, similarly, in Chinatown, which has a strong history of migration from China, and I'm interested in the Vietnamese enclaves. I did a Metaverse Nails project in a nail salon in Sunnybank in Brisbane; I'm interested in these businesses that have a very strong Viet identity and very strong women-led business – women business-led culture.

I'm totally interested in Vietnamese enclaves like Sunnybank and Orange County in California, and creating those networks and being the instigator behind those sorts of conversations across diasporic global communities, and how it embeds in a certain place has its own nuances – the similarities and differences between those communities I think, are very interesting to look at.

Coming into this directorship post-COVID, how do you pull back a sense of continuity and stability, and grow the organisation out of that period?

I have come from this international space where I'm aware of how a geopolitical situation can really have ripple effects. I think that we need to retain a sense of solidity with the physical gallery [as if] it is an anchor point to everything. We have to keep that solid and try to reactivate it as a space. [This means] doing, not just one-off exhibitions, but activations with other partners using this space as well, to open it up to other communities, other types of audience groups.

Also, in the long run, because I've lived in many cyber cities around the world, Shanghai, Hong Kong – I've done the big *Blade Runner* cyber city – I think there's a lot of potential for this here, this collective soul of a punk cyber city – and just be this kind of incubator of tech

and innovation that is very Asia-centric. That's my long-term vision for being a physical and digital incubator for that new art and culture.

What do you think is going to be the greatest challenge to realise that, and also the organisation more broadly? And perhaps could you suggest some hacks around the financial constraints that the arts are facing?

Obviously at 4A, we're always going to be forever indebted to our federal funding partners, and our state and local funding. But we have to think outside the box now. So that's where I'm thinking of FinTech partners, crypto partners, and really thinking a little bit more laterally about where we get other funding streams from.

Read: How the metaverse will reinvent fashion

I lead a very talented, but young team. And it's getting them to think in a business way, because they're all artists or arts workers. One of my challenges in leading this organisation is growing that business acumen with my team, and to think more about business partnerships and learning how to pitch. So my initial challenge is getting the artist's brain into a business brain.

We've come a long way in the 27-year history of 4A, but do we need to give more space to diverse voices in different ways?

I went to art school, I learned how to write critically, I worked for arts organisations. And then I had a phase [of] more experimental work. So I [understand] that not-for-profit mindset, I get that. And I get the mode of operating around that. We're in the art world, but to grow awareness, we're still in … an attention game. There's so much content out there. So I have to think with those sorts of lenses. That's why I spend a lot of time on TikTok [for example]. I think we have to head into those sorts of places, and we can do it in a way that is smart and critical, and uses the viralism that's embedded within those channels, and platforms. That's kind of a hint.

I've literally just started with the organisation, but I have very big sci-fi dreams and I really think it's such an important organisation for amplifying diverse voices. The DNA of the organisation is truthfully about that. I guess my parting message would be "just come along for the ride, because it's going to be fun".

Gina Fairley

Gina Fairley is ArtsHub's National Visual Arts Editor. For a decade she worked as a freelance writer and curator across Southeast Asia and was previously the Regional Contributing Editor for Hong Kong based magazines Asian Art News and World Sculpture News. Prior to writing she worked as an arts manager in America and Australia for 14 years, including the regional gallery, biennale and commercial sectors. She is based in Mittagong, regional NSW. Twitter: @ginafairley Instagram: fairleygina

Related News

Cabaret Career Advice Features Galleries Museums News Painting Photography Sculpture Visual Arts

Gallery wall labels: short, long, digital or none at all?

ArtsHub takes a look at the shifting dynamic around gallery didactics: what has changed, and are we doing wall labels...

GINA FAIRLEY