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Brent Harris: *Surrender & Catch*, the first major monograph of the Aotearoa-born, Melbourne-based artist Brent Harris opens at AGSA

*'Creating a narrative out of a life,
a life which is messy, unpredictable contradictory and mostly private'*
Brent Harris

Adelaide Australia: The Art Gallery of South Australia has announced a major survey exhibition exploring the work of senior contemporary Melbourne-based artist **Brent Harris**, presented from **6 July – 20 October 2024**. The exhibition ***Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch***, curated by Maria Zagala and co-presented with TarraWarra Museum of Art, brings together over 150 paintings, drawings, studies and prints, traversing the artist's practice and stylistic shifts over his career.

Surrender & Catch at the Art Gallery of South Australia sees an expanded collection of works from the recently closed TarraWarra Museum of Art exhibition which received rave reviews.

***'This exhibition is an outstanding journey through the work of one of Australia's most prominent surrealist artists.'* Artshub**

Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch maps the ways Harris's art has developed over the past four decades, featuring a broad selection of works from 1987 to 2022. Harris's distinctive style, which moves between

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figuration and abstraction, deploys both humour and the grotesque to examine psychological subject matter as he visualises his complex and contradictory feelings. Indeed, the exhibition title refers to Harris's interest in sociologist **Kurt H. Wolff**'s notion of 'surrender and catch' as a process for self-analysis and as a method of working.

Addressing the experience of the body and desire, faith (and the question of what follows death), and childhood memories of porous familial relationships, **Brent Harris says**, *"To experience 30 years of your past, laid out in images of your own making, is alternately quite emotional, sobering and a bit scary. During the making of these works one doesn't really see how things might add up in the future. Time is that added ingredient. In considering what the result of a life spent making imagery now looks like, an overriding concern has been a return, again and again, to thinking about the human condition - the craziness we all face in our individual and collective struggles, in attempting to hold our lives together in some meaningful way. My work is a continuing search, vainly perhaps at times, to make meaning. I am endlessly searching for revelation, if only expressed in a desire to the next image to be revealed."*

Harris says of his family relationships influencing his work "It never seemed therapeutic but it certainly felt like rich psychological material to mine. They might come from traumatic experiences but its not, I'm not doing it as cathartic, it's simply as a way to generate imagery."

Harris's ambiguous forms in his work derive from his use of the Surrealist technique of automatic drawing to access unconscious imagery. Working concurrently across painting, printmaking and drawing, Harris has developed a generative methodology, where each medium feeds the development of his art in unexpected ways.

AGSA Curator of Prints, Drawings & Photographs Maria Zagala said: *"Developed slowly over the course of many years, this exhibition presents a comprehensive overview of Harris's formidable career. If the making of art can be seen as a process of excavation, then the circumstances of Brent Harris's maturation – from a difficult childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand through to his early twenties as a gay man during the onset of the AIDS pandemic in Melbourne – provide the foundation from which his work has emerged over the past four decades."*

Surrender & Catch showcases works from the significant collections of both TarraWarra Museum of Art and the Art Gallery of South Australia. Augmented by a selection of loans from both public and private collections and institutions, the exhibition charts a journey from *The Stations* (1989), Harris's first major series exploring the death of his friends to AIDS, to his return to the subject in 2021.

The exhibition emphasises the cross-pollination of imagery and the development of forms in his printmaking, drawing and painting practice. Also included are prints by **Louise Bourgeois**, **Kiki Smith** fellow NZ artist **Colin McCahon**, and brand new acquisitions from **Edvard Munch** and **Gordon Walters**, all artists who have had a significant influence on Harris's work.

"Brent is an artist whose work has changed over the years, and he is someone who has always been open to influences from esteemed artists and to have these works hang alongside Brent's will give the audience a unique opportunity to see firsthand how his work has been informed by these artists," says Maria Zagala.

AGSA Director Rhana Devenport ONZM said, *"In partnership with TarraWarra Museum of Art, the Art Gallery of South Australia is proud to present Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch, the first major monograph of the Aotearoa-born, Melbourne-based artist Brent Harris. This monograph is published in tandem with the artist's*

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retrospective at TarraWarra Museum of Art in 2023 and an expanded presentation at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2024. The driving force behind this project is Maria Zagala, AGSA's Associate Curator, Prints, Drawings and Photographs. A significant gift to AGSA of over fifty of the artist's works from the private collection of James Mollison, AO, and Vincent Langford was the impetus for the exhibition. Their gift, in 2017, transformed the Gallery's holdings of Harris's works on paper, with many of these acquisitions on display for the first time in this exhibition."

Zagala's relationship with Brent Harris has been established over almost three decades. The relationship showcases the nuanced and insightful curatorial approach of Zagala that has led to one of the most exciting and thought-provoking survey exhibitions of Harris's work it showcases the rich relationship, understanding and appreciation Zagala has of Harris's work.

"I first met Brent over 25 years ago and it's been a working relationship that has evolved into a really meaningful friendship and it's an honour to curate this retrospective look over Brent's illustrious career and hopefully introduce those unfamiliar with Brent to his fascinating suite of works", says Maria Zagala.

Key works featured in the exhibition have come from the National Gallery of Australia and the late James Mollison who was the inaugural director of the institution. Mollison was a huge advocate and supporter of Brent's work and Mollison's partner Vincent Langford will be in attendance at the opening weekend of the exhibition.

AGSA's flagship public program events, Neo, First Fridays, and Start, will have themes of Hariss's exhibition running throughout.

This exhibition is Co-presented with TarraWarra Museum of Art.

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Image caption: Brent Harris born Palmerston North, New Zealand 4 October 1956 Listener 2018, Melbourne oil on linen 152.0 x 110.0 cm Collection of Patricia Mason and Paul Walker, Melbourne © Brent Harris

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KEY DATES Media Invite: Friday 5 July @ 5.30pm
Exhibition Season | 6 July – 20 October 2024, Art Gallery of South Australia
Admission is free

IMAGES <https://agsa.sa.gov.au/media/brentharrismediaimages>

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ABOUT BRENT HARRIS:

Actively exhibiting since the mid-1980s, Brent Harris (born 1956, Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand) is a painter and printmaker who has lived in Melbourne for over forty years. Harris's works are known for their flat space, clean lines and graphic forms, which belie the underlying themes of his work, such as mortality, trauma, eroticism and childhood.

Harris's imagery often originates from a process of automatic drawing, a technique originally learned in his undergraduate studies at the Victorian College of the Arts and which enables access to the unconscious. Harris uses the imagery in these drawings to create his paintings, often reworking compositions and motifs for a sustained period of time and across mediums. An accomplished printmaker, Harris experiments with a range of techniques, including intaglio, woodblock and monotype.

Harris has exhibited extensively in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and has undertaken residencies in Paris, Japan, Singapore and Rome. Harris's works are held in all major Australian collections and several international collections including the British Museum and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
