

a velvet
ant, a
flower
and
a bird

Artwork Labels

a velvet
ant, a
flower
and
a bird

Guest curated by Professor Dr Chus Martínez,
Head of the Institute of Art Gender Nature at
the FHNW Academy of Arts and Design, Basel,
Switzerland.

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Lighting Design: MEGS Lighting

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Potter is situated on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples. We recognise and respect the role that art, image-making, storytelling and oral traditions have held in maintaining a continuous culture that goes back over 65,000 years.

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A velvet ant, a flower and a bird

If we were to describe in a few words what the exhibition you are about to see is about, we could say it is an exercise of the senses and the mind, exploring how cognition extends beyond humans – and how media, art, technology and biology participate in cognition.

Millions of networks of cognisers – human, non-human and technological – continuously share information and even unconsciously cooperate in producing the intelligence of the world. We live inside a web of processes that perceive, decide and act without awareness.

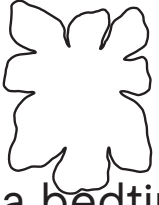
The human brain has become the new model for technological identity. Artificial intelligence is said to mimic its architecture and learning mechanisms. But perhaps we need another definition of this organ – a brain capable of receiving like a flower; a brain that remains social and dynamic; one that can transform through creation and rupture, and fly free from all determinisms and essentialisms oriented toward the ownership of intelligence.

To survive, we need a life that has no fixed form. Art is that life.

a flower

Odo of Meung—under the pseudonym Macer Floridus—wrote *De viribus herbarum* around the mid eleventh century. It is a scientific book about plants written in verse. Because of this, one might imagine the book to have been an oddity – but far from it: the text was copied, glossed and printed continuously from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. The main concern of the book was to explain how nature’s creations, including flowers, could serve human health and reveal divine order. Imagine now that the flowers in this exhibition are verses that tell the reverse story: how humans could finally serve nature. Like flowers, we need to learn how to evolve through the loss of petals instead of accumulation. Like flowers, we should learn to repeat the energy of the sun. Like flowers, we could become devices of pure sensation – colour, scent, texture and fragility, arranged for the regeneration of the social.

Friend flower, computer flower, flower law.



Have you ever read *Telephone tales*? The book is about a salesman Signor Bianchi, who every night at 9 o'clock calls his beloved daughter to tell her a bedtime story. One of those nights, he tells the story of Martino, a boy living in a very small village who cannot get his head around the fact that there are three roads leading out – two go to nearby towns, but the third seems to go nowhere. Everyone in the village calls it 'the road to nowhere', and nobody ever takes it. One day, Martino gets the courage to take that road and, to his surprise, he discovers a new world! It leads to a place full of towers and full of flowers! Of course no one believes him. They all *know* that it leads nowhere. But Martino returns to nowhere often, and brings those wonderful flowers to each and every one of his friends.

– Gianni Rodari, *Favole al telefono* (Telephone tales), 1962

In *Merlo*, Joan Jonas transforms into a bird. She appears in the video wearing a dark, hooded robe as she moves through a series of outdoor settings – rocky cliffs, a rushing river, an exposed balcony overlooking a valley. At each site she raises a long paper cone to her mouth, producing haunting, bird-like calls that reverberate through the landscape.

The paper cone becomes both an instrument and an extension of the body. Its amplified cries evoke the merging of human presence with the natural world. The title, meaning ‘blackbird’ in Italian, refers to the ways humans project feelings onto the blackness of the bird. According to an Italian legend, long ago blackbirds had white plumage. During a particularly cold winter, a mother-blackbird (or *merla*) sheltered in a chimney with her chicks to escape a brutal freeze. When she emerged, her feathers were stained black by soot. From that moment on, descendants of the bird were born black.

Created in Florence, *Merlo* addresses Jonas’s exploration of gesture, species interaction, folklore and video performance.

Joan Jonas

born New York,
USA 1936, lives in
New York

Merlo 1974

single channel video, black and white, sound,
16 minutes 13 seconds

produced by Art/Tapes/22

recording engineers: Raffaele Corazziari
and Alberto Pirelli

courtesy of The Kitchen Archives

Julia Mensch, a visual artist and researcher based in Berlin and Buenos Aires, explores the intersections of plant intelligence, colonial histories and ecological resistance through her long-term research project titled *Amaranth as political agent*, 2023–25. In *Song of amaranth*, Mensch follows the life of a plant that is indigenous to the Americas – rooted in the ceremonial and agricultural traditions of Mesoamerica and the Andean highlands, where it has been cultivated for thousands of years. Once revered by Indigenous communities, later suppressed under colonial rule, and now re-emerging as a resilient ‘super-weed’ within industrial monocultures, amaranth carries a layered history of endurance and resistance. By collaborating with singer Sofía Viola, Mensch translates this history into song, allowing the plant’s ancestral rhythms and contemporary struggles to shape the narrative. The work invites us to hear the amaranth’s story as well as the Indigenous knowledge attached to it – a narrative disrupted by the colonial times.

This work was made in cooperation with Sofia Viola, part of *Amaranth as Political Agent*, realised in the framework of *Plants_Intelligence. Learning Like a Plant*, a research project funded by SNSF and hosted by IAGN HGK Basel FHNW.

Julia Mensch

born Buenos Aires,
Argentina 1980, lives
in Berlin, Germany

Song of amaranth 2023-25

single channel video and sound, 5 minutes

2 seconds

music and lyrics by Sofía Viola

sound recorded at Estudio Belcebú, Buenos
Aires, Argentina

sound engineer and mixing: Juan Belvis

Mastering: Moreu

Tessa Laird's ceramic books – specifically made for the exhibition – take the form of both closed and open volumes, each one referring directly to a book she is reading or has a personal connection to. In a world where texts are increasingly fragmented, excerpted and dispersed across digital platforms, Laird's books preserve content by giving them physical presence and weight. They are anchoring objects that hold the integrity of a book in its entirety, resisting the idea that reading from beginning to end is in inevitable decline.

Some pieces open outward like unfolding narratives, while others sit closed, suggesting the potential of unread or partially held knowledge. Glazes pool, colours deepen and surfaces shift between matte and glossy, giving each book its own personality and aura. The conversion of paper into fired clay becomes a gesture of care: a way of keeping the ideas, stories and philosophies that matter to her materially intact.

Laird's ceramic books invite viewers to consider reading as a sensory, embodied experience.

Tessa Laird

born Titirangi,
Aotearoa New Zealand
1971, lives in Naarm,
Melbourne

a thousand shimmering ecologies or one
2012-2026

earthenware, underglaze paints
courtesy the artist and Melanie Roger
Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland

Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran's practice revolves around paper as a resilient, sustainable and political material. Paper is an ancient technology and a keeper of memory and imagination – born in China more than two thousand years ago and carried across cultures as a medium for writing, ritual, clothing and exchange. This new piece – a second skin over an existing architectural feature – is a layered, plant-like construction echoing paper's role as an intermediary between the natural and human worlds. Each colour-saturated piece recalls petals, leaves, and the internal architectures of flowers. As the shapes are superposed, they form a vertical organism that seems to grow upward – part dress, part spine, part devotional object.

The interplay of overlapping forms produces a sense of movement, as though the piece were continually reorganising itself. It recalls the intuitive processes of folding, unfolding and hybridising that shape both paper usage and natural growth, while also invoking the logic of totems or talismanic structures.

Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran

born Ottawa, Canada 1984,
lives in Naarm, Melbourne

Solar rope 2026

handmade washi paper, dye, calico,
pins
courtesy the artist

In these two canvases Mia Boe reflects on the long-standing exclusion of Aboriginal and Indigenous intelligences from the technological and digital development and the systems that shape a great part of today's contemporary life. With sharp wit and a satirical edge, Boe stages a conversation between ancestral knowledge and the so-called 'advances' of the modern world, exposing how Western frameworks often overlook the depth, sophistication and futurity embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing.

The paintings originate in Boe's characteristic blend of humour and critique: familiar symbols of data, machinery or bureaucratic logic collide with figures, spirits and stories tied to Country. Through this juxtaposition, the work challenges viewers to recognise Aboriginal intelligence not as a relic of the past or a metaphor, but as a vital form of knowledge capable of informing – and redirecting – the futures we build.

Mia Boe

Butchulla and
Burmese ancestry,
born 1997, lives in
Naarm, Melbourne

The Aboriginal robot 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Art Gallery of Western Australia

purchased through The Art Gallery of Western
Australia Foundation: TomorrowFund, 2025

The story 2025

oil on linen

Art Gallery of Western Australia

purchased through The Art Gallery of Western
Australia Foundation: TomorrowFund, 2025

Noriko Nakamura presents a new large-scale mural inspired by the ancient magnolia tree – one of the world’s oldest flowering genera. Magnolias first appeared during the Cretaceous period, between 142 and 65 million years ago, long before bees existed. Their thick, resilient petals evolved to withstand pollination by beetles, a relationship that has continued across millennia. Magnolias have witnessed extraordinary spans of geological time, surviving dramatic shifts in climate and landscape. In Japan, the magnolia is associated with perseverance, dignity and a deep love of nature.

Nakamura’s mural takes this lineage as both subject and metaphor. A magnolia tree stands in her front yard, blooming each spring. This cycle has become intertwined with her child’s growth and her own experience of aging – an annual reminder of continuity, renewal and quiet resilience.

Alongside the mural are a series of hand-carved stone sculptures, a longstanding focus within her practice. Working with materials such as sandstone, marble and limestone, Nakamura shapes forms that feel simultaneously ancient and tender. The slow, physical process of carving allows her to respond to the natural qualities of each stone – its grain, density and irregularities. These sculptures often echo botanical or bodily forms.

Noriko Nakamura

born Kofu Yamanashi, Japan
1986, lives Castlemaine,
Dja Dja Wurrung, Victoria

Magnolia lover 2026

acrylic paint
courtesy the artist

Moon totem 2015

limestone
The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by
Michael Caswell and Olivia Poloni, 2019

Womb II 2024

limestone
courtesy the artist

Noriko Nakamura

born Kofu Yamanashi, Japan
1986, lives Castlemaine,
Dja Dja Wurrung, Victoria

Bruised buttocks 2021
limestone

courtesy the artist

Pregnant womb 2021

limestone

courtesy the artist

Anouk Tschanz's work centres on portraits of plant leaves, guided by her sustained investigation into how light interacts with photosensitive materials. By attending closely to the photochemical responsiveness of film and paper, she brings the relationship between material, surface and illumination to the foreground – allowing light to shape not only what is seen, but how it is seen. She has long employed analogue black-and-white photography as her primary artistic language, valuing the darkroom as a site of intervention, intuition and material discovery. The ability to shape an image during film development and enlargement is central to her process: each hand-printed photograph emerges through meticulous steps of filtering, masking and exposure, often generating parallel series as by-products of these investigations. Her new work presented here is called *Ragwurz* a name referring to a group of orchids in the genus *Ophrys*, a Mediterranean orchid genus. Tschanz took the images on a series of trips to Puglia, Mallorca and in Switzerland, where the artist lives. These flowers – unlike other orchids – are terrestrial, with their roots on earth, and they possess a very distinct trait: they imitate the shape, colour, hair, and even the pheromones of female insects so that their patterns often resemble the abdomen or wings of insects and some species have metallic blues, deep violets, or complex markings. The work provides us with a group portrait of a species that appears to us humans as especially tricky and smart – if you will – since they deceive insects with their appearance, defying the traditional idea of plants being passive. Male insects attempt to mate with the flower, making the plant one of the best examples of evolutionary cheating in the plant world.

The artist has been supported by Pro Helvetia: Swiss Arts Council to show these works in Australia.

Anouk Tschanz

left to right:

born Bern, Switzerland
1994, lives in Zurich

Ragwurz 2023

Ragwurz 2024

Ragwurz 2024

Ragwurz 2025

Ragwurz 2024

Ragwurz 2024

Ragwurz 2025

Ragwurz 2024

Ragwurz 2025

Ragwurz 2025

Ragwurz 2025

Ragwurz 2025

Ragwurz 2025

all works silver gelatin photographs
courtesy the artist

In the same way as the authors of early medieval illuminated manuscripts turned to the garden as a source of symbolism and imaginative invention to create their botanical manuscripts, Agnieszka Polska collaborates with generative AI to cultivate a contemporary, speculative garden in *The book of flowers*. Time-lapse footage of blooming plants merges with digitally generated imagery to form an uncanny landscape where organic forms, mythic narratives and technological processes intertwine. Through this synthesis, Polska traces a fantastical history of human-flower relations, revealing cycles of intimacy, exploitation and transformation. By treating AI as a modern-day scribe – one shaped by hidden biases and labour – she reimagines the illuminated page as a moving, hybrid surface where stories are continuously rewritten.

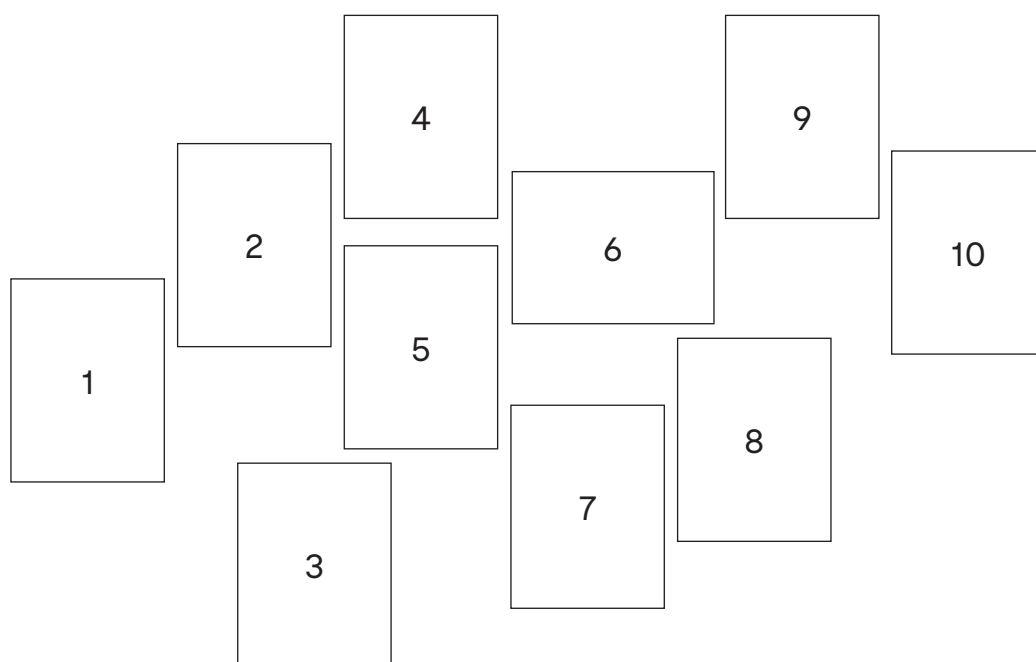
Agnieszka Polska

born Lublin, Poland, 1985,
lives in Berlin, Germany

The book of flowers 2023

HD video, 9 minutes 38 seconds,
sound
courtesy the artist

Anthony Romagnano's new series of flowers has been produced specifically in response to the exhibition. Working primarily with Prismacolor pencil, he builds dense, mosaic-like surfaces in which familiar subjects – here flowers, though he also depicts portraits and fragments of the everyday – are reimagined through saturated colour and intricate patterning. A defining characteristic of his work is the vibrancy and dynamic energy that emerges from a method grounded in close observation, repetition and a strong sense of structure, combined with a deep interest in expression. The result is a highly personal exploration of how images can shift between representation and abstraction. Through patient mark-making and a distinctive rhythmic approach, he transforms ordinary scenes into vivid, layered compositions that invite viewers into a richly constructed visual world.



Continued overleaf

Anthony Romagnano

born Naarm,
Melbourne 1985, lives
in Naarm, Melbourne

1. *Orange flower 2025*

2. *Blue Rose, White Rose, Light Green Rose,
Purple Flowers and Red Rose 2025*

3. *Red rose 2025*

4. *3 white flowers 2025*

5. *Light pink rose 2025*

6. *4 red and white roses 2025*

7. *Catapillar, 10 Crabs and 8 Yellow
Spots of Flowers 2025*

8. *Beetle 2025*

9. *2 pink flowers 2025*

10. *Red, Orange, Yellow flowers 2025*
all works greylead and coloured pencil
courtesy the artist and Arts Project
Australia

John Pule's painting practice originates in the traditions of Niuean hiapo, a decorated cloth made of bark known generically as tapa across Polynesia. His compositions weave together memory, mythology, and lived experience, layering figures, vegetation, water currents, language, and abstract marks into densely patterned fields that pulse with movement. His distinctive palette – oceanic blues, volcanic reds, deep greens, earthy ochres, and resonant blacks – evokes both the physical landscapes of Niue, a self-governing island nation in the South Pacific, and the emotional terrain of migration and belonging.

This very exuberant work created during the artist's time on O'ahu in Hawai'i, brings together painting and poetry to reflect on the layered histories, spiritual geographies and lived experiences of the Pacific. Pule's artistic practices brings together Niuean visual languages with contemporary symbolism, connecting land, ancestry, migration and the shifting forces that shape today's Pacific identity.

John Pule

born Liku, Niue 1962,
lives in Niue and Tamaki
Makaurau Auckland,
Aotearoa New Zealand

Hao 2024

oil on canvas

courtesy the artist and Gow Langsford
Gallery, Auckland

Across art history, flowers have been a charged subject for women artists – a site where personal expression, an interest in research and science and gendered expectations intersect. For centuries, women were excluded from academic training, barred from life-drawing classes, and denied access to the grand genres of painting such as history, mythology and large-scale narrative scenes. Flowers, along with still life and domestic subjects, became one of the few ‘acceptable’ themes they were permitted to study and exhibit.

Kate Daw’s flower paintings belong to this historical tradition in Western Art . She adds text and memory to reflect on how the everyday holds both meaning but also a deep challenge. Her floral motifs appear as carriers of personal history, of personal narratives and traumas, as well as being sounding boards that echo other voices – writers, friends, collaborators – that she weaves into the painted field. For contemporary women artists the flower remains a fertile site for art precisely because of its layered and complex history. To paint a flower is to enter a long lineage but also to question it: to expose how the smallest, most overlooked subject can carry the weight of narrative, labour, memory and intellectual reflection.

Kate Daw

born Esperance,
Western Australia,
lived 1965-2020

1. *Acapulco I* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
purchased by the Ian Potter Museum of Art,
2014

2. *Acapulco II* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
purchased by the Ian Potter Museum of Art,
2014

3. *W. Morris briar rose II* from the series
In between days 2010-11
gouache on found blackboard
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
purchased by the Ian Potter Museum of Art,
2014.

4. *W. Morris sweet briar I* from the series
In between days 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family

5. *Blue flower double blue* from the series
In between days 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family

Continued overleaf

Kate Daw

born Esperance,
Western Australia,
lived 1965-2020

6. *W. Morris, daisy I* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family
7. *Summer, Perth* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family
8. *Blue flower pink tulip* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family
9. *F. Broadhurst fingers* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family
10. *Orange flowers* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family
11. *F. Broadhurst fingers* from the series *In between days* 2010-11
oil paint on found blackboard
collection of the Hassan family

Helen Maudsley

born Naarm,
Melbourne 1927, lives
in Naarm, Melbourne

The listening man 1956

gouache over pencil

National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne. Gift of the artist, 2013

© H. Maudsley

The lady in the belt 1956

gouache over pencil.

National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne. Gift of the artist, 2013

© H. Maudsley

Tamara Henderson's flower-like vessels that glow and delicate spider-web structures are drawn from her most recent body of work. Formed through processes of blowing and assembling glass, the pieces appear simultaneously botanical and science fictional. The lamp-flowers open like translucent blooms, their curved petals catching and bending light, while the net-forms trace the geometries of spider silk, frozen in luminous tension.

Henderson's work often conveys dream, ritual and intuitive atmospheres and mental states. Her sculptures behave like mediums between familiar objects, imagined worlds and environmental fantastic landscapes. Here, energy, or the possibility of generating and radiating energy, does not only refer to the spiritual flow of life, but also to the possibility of becoming independent, autonomous and, ultimately, free.

Tamara Henderson

born New Brunswick,
Canada 1986, lives in
Sydney

Floral Lamp 2025

blown glass, light, electrical cabling
MECCA Collection
© Tamara Henderson

Floral Lamp 2025

blown glass, light, electrical cabling
courtesy the artist & PALAS, Sydney

Floral Lamp 2025

blown glass, light, electrical cabling
courtesy the artist & PALAS, Sydney

Web wall light black 2025

fused bullseye glass, light, electrical cabling
courtesy the artist & PALAS, Sydney

Web wall light green 2025

fused bullseye glass, light, electrical cabling
courtesy the artist & PALAS, Sydney

Derek Tumala's *Kayamanan ng Pilipinas (Treasures of the Philippines)* is a digital movie that unfolds as a new version of an earlier piece with the same title. Drawing from the Philippine archipelago's vast flora, Tumala constructs a moving landscape in which endemic plants are modelled, animated and choreographed within a generative system. The work is driven by real-time weather information – temperature, humidity, wind patterns and shifting atmospheric pressure – which modulates colour, luminosity, and the speed of transformation and density of visual layers.

As the climate in Manila fluctuates, the digital plants respond, expanding, contracting, pulsing or dimming in subtle shifts that link code, ecology and time. This interplay between plant imagery and atmospheric data echoes Tumala's broader practice, in which technology becomes a tool to sense, record and reimagine ecological conditions. By allowing weather to literally shape the artwork, Tumala positions nature not simply as subject but as co-author, reminding us how deeply our environments – physical and digital – are interwoven with the forces that sustain or endanger them.

Derek Tumala
born Manila,
Philippines 1968,
lives in Manila

Kayamanan ng Pilipinas (treasures of the Philippines) 2025-26
single-channel video 4K, CPU component,
coding, weather API
courtesy the artist

Ingela Ihrman's flower works transform familiar botanical forms into large, embodied presences. Made from textiles, papier-mâché and handcrafted skins, her flowers are not costumes but alternate bodies or forms she steps into, to inhabit the life of a plant from within. By becoming a bud, a bloom, or a species with unusual reproductive behaviour, Ihrman explores how the agency, desire and complexity of plants often goes unnoticed.

Her choice of species is deliberate. She gravitates toward flowers whose biology unsettles human expectations: self-fertile passionflowers, giant waterlilies that trap their pollinators, plants whose dramatic cycles of opening and closing hinge on scent, timing and vulnerability. These botanical 'exceptions' expose the limitations of viewing nature as passive, decorative or powerless.

Through slow, meticulous making and embodied performance, Ihrman invites viewers to imagine what it might mean to feel, move and respond as a plant. The flowers become soft architectures of thought – structures through which to consider humility, interdependence and the possibility of becoming other. They suggest that agency can take many forms, and that life perceived as still or delicate may in fact be dynamic, strategic and full of force.

The artist has been supported by the Swedish Arts Council to show these works in Australia.

Ingela Ihrman

born Kalmar, Sweden
1985, lives in Stockholm

*Giant Waterlily Victoria
Amazonica*, 2012

paper, textile, scent, glue
courtesy the artist

Amorphophallus titanum, 2013

textile, paper, scent, glue
courtesy the artist

These three paintings from Rosslynd Piggott appear at first as expanses of pale, mist-like colour – an atmosphere rather than images. Soft fields of cameo rose, celeste, lavender and Tiffany blue drift across a luminous white ground, producing a sensation of something glimpsed at the edge of perception. The work carries the quiet authority of a widescreen landscape seen through haze: a scene not fully formed, but felt.

Piggott draws on the refined traditions of decorative art, particularly the elegant spatial poetics of the Japanese Rimpa school, with its cloud motifs, botanical fragments and sliding-screen panoramas. Yet she works with an almost minimalist restraint, dissolving form until only tonal shifts and the faintest traces of movement remain. What seems minimal is in fact finely calibrated – each band of colour behaves like a prism, hinting at light bending or dispersing from unseen sources. Rather than presenting narrative or spectacle, Piggott creates a space for slow looking.

Rosslynd Piggot

born Naarm,
Melbourne 1958, lives
in Naarm, Melbourne

Extending cloud-ness, 2012

oil on canvas

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Anthony Scott, 2018

Unfolding flower-cloud space no. 4 2011-12

oil on linen

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Anthony Scott, 2018

Two versions of eyes closed 1999

oil on linen

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
purchased by the Ian Potter Museum of Art,
2018

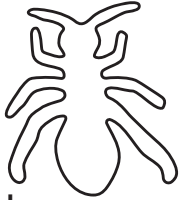
Level 1

A velvet ant,

The velvet ant is not a true ant but a wingless wasp. Researchers have studied the microstructure of its exoskeleton, discovering that its exceptional blackness – absorbing more than 99% of visible light – results from a delicate hierarchy of microscopic ridges that trap and diffuse light with remarkable efficiency. This natural design now inspires science to develop ultra-black materials for solar energy harvesting, stealth technology and optical instruments, echoing the velvet ant's ability to control light through structure rather than pigment.

Humans are inclined to seek solutions and outcomes. Yet it is impossible to separate the animal from its skin – the solution its body has evolved for survival on Earth from its particular form of intelligence. Materials themselves possess a kind of intelligence – one that does not emerge from computation, but from the constant interaction between matter and environment. The velvet ant, in this sense, should be regarded as both researcher and philosopher, presenting a theory of a body that thinks through its surface, revealing how perception can be inscribed in matter itself.

However, as an ironic twist, this section of the exhibition is devoted to ants and not wasps. Why? Because, sadly enough, the wasp has not yet found its place in literature or the arts ...



It was during the Middle Ages that a genre called *bestiary* emerged: a collection of descriptions of animals, both real and imaginary, each accompanied by a moral, religious or allegorical interpretation. Certain languages were especially quick to adapt allegorical and didactic prose and that was probably the reason why the philosopher Ramon Llull wrote *Llibre de les bèsties* (*The book of beasts*) as early as 1289 in the Catalan language. The book became a hit of the time because he gave the genre a radically new political purpose: the animals are no longer just symbols of virtue or vice, they are the actors in a narrative that explores power, justice and moral reasoning.

The genre, centuries later, was embraced in children's books and television series such as *The adventures of Maya the bee*, a children's book by the German writer Waldemar Bonsels, published in 1912 later adapted as a TV series that aired in 1976. The series follows Maya, a curious young honeybee who leaves the hive to explore the world on her own terms. Along with her best friends Willy and Flip, she discovers the meadow's many creatures – friendly, dangerous, funny, and sometimes troublesome. The ants – as happens throughout the whole history of bestiaries and literature – play a side role. However, they embody a sort of incredible Army of Love-style behaviour, parodying the existing armies and showing that their collective behaviour has a clear goal: to help any other being in the prairie. The series presented them as crucial characters embodying an innovative, distributed cognitive system, one without a leader – showing children how intelligence can emerge without central control.

– Ramon Llull, *Llibre de les bèsties* (Book of beasts), 1288–89

Ian W Abdulla's landscapes refer to his life growing up along the River Murray on Ngarrindjeri Country in South Australia. His paintings present everyday scenes – fishing, swimming, gathering, travelling the riverbank – as living, shared histories. Bold colours, flattened perspective and strongly outlined forms give each scene a clarity that mirrors the directness of his storytelling. A defining trait of Abdulla's work is the handwritten text that often stretches across the upper part of the image. These brief sentences are fragments of memory, connecting each landscape to the personal experiences and the rhythms of his community life. The words and image merge together: the text tells you what happened, and the painting shows how it felt.

Ian W Abdulla

Ngarrindjeri, 1947-2011

Finding frogs in the night to put on the cross line to catch a Ponde or Pilarkie over night

1990

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

from the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia

purchased with the Mayne Contemporary Art Fund 2002

Heather B Swann moves between sculpture, drawing and painting as methods to grasp the fine line that divides the real from the fantastic, the oneiric, and the uncanny dimensions of the world. Across these mediums, Swann builds a world populated by figures that possess a mythical sense of presence and the tension of the magical. Her works are at once tender and unsettling, inviting viewers to reflect on the myths and narratives that nourish our understanding of gender, the social, and our broader understanding of life.

In *Leda and the Swan*, which is installed on the level above, the artist reimagines the ancient Greek myth in which Zeus, disguised as a swan, approaches and overpowers the mortal Leda. Traditionally rendered as a scene of seduction, the story carries an undercurrent of coercion and imbalance that Swann brings to the surface.

In the adjacent paintings, scale embodies a psychological dimension. Large animals and staged figures coexist in ambiguous environments, making it clear that living together demands effort – the continuous exercise of acknowledging the tension between human and non-human beings. The monumentality of Swann's paintings creates an immersive visual field, giving the scenes a theatricality that they share with her three-dimensional works.

Heather B Swann

born in Hobart 1961,
lives in Hobart

Oh lover, hold me close – green slippers 2021
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
courtesy the artist and STATION Gallery,
Melbourne

Heather B Swann

born in Hobart 1961,
lives in Hobart

The staggering girl 2021

acrylic on wood panel

Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
purchased through the Ann Bennett
Acquisition Fund, 2023

Heather B Swann

born in Hobart 1961,
lives in Hobart

Oh lover, hold me close – the pool 2021
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
courtesy the artist and STATION Gallery,
Melbourne

Heather B Swann

born in Hobart 1961,
lives in Hobart

Leda and the swan 2021

bronze stained old wood, wax, buttons
Buxton International Collection, Melbourne
©Heather B Swann

This experimental music machine by Percy Grainger, together with a selection of his drawings, illuminates the composer's vision of what he called 'Free Music.' Seeking to liberate sound from the constraints of traditional notation and fixed pitch, Grainger designed hand-built devices that could translate drawn lines, curves and cut patterns into continuously shifting tones. His use of paper, wood and simple mechanical components reflects both his resourcefulness and his belief that music could move with the natural fluidity of waves, wind and human breath.

The drawings reveal the conceptual foundations behind the machine. Some function as working diagrams, mapping how movement might generate pitch; others record Grainger's attempts to visualise sound as undulating contours. The pairing highlights Grainger's position as an inventor as much as a composer, and his lifelong pursuit of new forms of musical expression.

Rosalind Hall and
Michael Candy

lives in Naarm,
Melbourne

lives in New York, USA

Kangaroo pouch tone-tool 2016 [replica
of machine by Percy Grainger originally
fabricated by Burnett Cross in 1952]
steel, brass, paper roll, sewing machine belt,
electronics
Grainger Museum Collection

Percy Grainger

born Naarm,
Melbourne, lived
1882-1961

*"Kangaroo Pouch" method of synchronising
and playing*
8 oscillators 1952
watercolour, ink and typescript on paper
Grainger Museum Collection

*"Kangaroo Pouch" method of synchronising
and playing*
8 oscillators 1952
watercolour and ink on paper
Grainger Museum Collection

Untitled (Codemaster) 1951
watercolour, ink and graphite on paper
Grainger Museum Collection

Oscillator-playing tone tool, 1st experiment
1951
watercolour, ink and graphite on paper
Grainger Museum Collection

This video by Rivane Neuenschwander and Cao Guimarães follows a group of ants carrying brightly coloured confetti across the ground. Filmed with close attention and patience, the work transforms an ordinary scene into a slow, hypnotic choreography. The ants move in shifting lines, disperse, reorganise, and set out again, creating patterns that appear both deliberate and unpredictable. As the confetti fragments catch the light, the image oscillates between documentary observation and a kind of moving abstraction.

The title *Ash Wednesday* refers in this instance to the day after Carnival in Brazil, when celebration gives way to everyday rhythms. Neuenschwander and Guimarães use this moment not to depict human festivity directly, but to observe its traces as they enter another ecosystem. The confetti – symbols of excess, colour and fleeting joy – are repurposed by the ants as material for labour and survival. The work reveals how small, almost invisible actions carry their own form of collective intelligence, and how the remnants of human ritual become woven into the natural world.

Rivane Neuenschwander
and Cao Guimarães

born Belo Horizonte,
Brazil 1967, lives in São
Paulo, Brazil

born Belo Horizonte,
Brazil 1965, lives in Belo
Horizonte

Quarta-feira de cinzas/Epilogue 2006
HD video, colour, soundtrack by O Grivo
5 minutes 48 seconds

courtesy the artists and Galeria Fortes
Vilaça, São Paulo, Tanya Bonakdar
Gallery, New York and Stephen Friedman
Gallery, London

Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison's work, newly commissioned for this exhibition, is dedicated to the velvet ants of Australia. A series of suspended folding screens compose a digital collage rooted in the artists' long-standing practice with natural-history research, paper, print and collage. The format allows them to conceive a pedagogical, narrative work that integrates rare book natural history illustrations and science, while also reflecting on their ongoing engagement with nature and biodiversity.

The format has a function: it becomes a handmade transmission machine. Fold by fold, panel by panel, Haby and Jennison tell and show moments in the history and behaviour of a given species – the velvet ant. Engagement, commitment, and the desire that all of us might participate more actively in the lives of animals and plants, animate a practice that insists on better, more attentive forms of coexistence.

Image of Female Mutillidae (velvet ant) by Dr Ken Walker, Senior Curator of Entomology, Museums Victoria Research Institute.

Gracia Haby and Louise
Jennison

born Naarm, Melbourne
1975, lives in Naarm,
Melbourne

born Naarm, Melbourne
1976, lives in Naarm,
Melbourne

Specimen 1963

2026

paper, wood

courtesy the artists



Malcolm Howie was an Australian botanical illustrator whose short but prolific career produced some of the most accurate and sensitive renderings of Victorian fungi. Largely self-taught and living with significant physical disability, Howie became highly respected by botanists and mycologists for his ability to capture the precise colour, texture and form of species that are often visible for only a brief moment in the landscape. Commissioned in the 1930s by botanist Dr Ethel McLennan for the School of Botany at The University of Melbourne, these works reflect a unique collaboration between scientific research and artistic skill. In contrast to dried herbarium specimens – which lose their vivid hues – Howie’s paintings preserve the fleeting beauty of mushrooms, coral fungi, jelly fungi and other groups as they emerge during the fruiting season. Today, the illustrations remain an important part of The University of Melbourne Herbarium, a testament to Howie’s contribution to both botanical art and the study of Australian fungi.

Malcolm Howie

born Melbourne, lived
1900–1936

*Watercolour paintings of Victorian fungi from
the 1930s, 1931–35*

watercolours on paper
from The University of Melbourne Herbarium,
School of BioSciences, Naarm



Scan the QR code to explore The University of Melbourne
Herbarium Collection Online

Filmed near Orrtipa Thurra, also known as Bonya, on Eastern Arrernte Country, in Australia, this film focuses on towering cathedral termite mounds that rise from the desert as living architectures of time, climate and collective labour. O’Callaghan’s video composition and precise, rhythmic editing highlight the structures’ sculptural presence and the ecological animal intelligence that shapes them.

The work continues the artist’s exploration of endurance, environment and the deep interdependence between human and non-human systems. *The Source* evokes the question of perspective – one in which scale, agency and survival are reconsidered through the patient, communal forces of a tiny and essential agent in the natural world; the ant.

Mel O’Callaghan

born Sydney 1975, lives in
Paris, France and Sydney

The Source 2023

single-channel HD colour video,
9 minutes 16 seconds, stereo sound
courtesy the artist and Cassandra Bird
Gallery, Sydney and Gallerie Allen, Paris

In these mol djinbakara (black baskets), Helen Ganalmirriwuy Garrawurra and Margaret Rarru Garrawurra bring together generations of Yolŋu weaving knowledge with their own refined sense of form and colour. Harvesting pandanus from Country and preparing natural dyes by hand, they transform familiar materials into sculptural objects. These baskets are distinguished by clean contours, weaving and a powerful palette of blacks and (at times) other earthy tones. These colours are not decorative alone: they carry the meanings of land, lore and ancestral identity specific to the Liyagawumirr Garrawurra clan. While rooted in the practical traditions of fibre-craft, these djinbakara possess a sculptural character in the natural and mental spaces that speak about continuity, memory and the strength of Yolŋu women's cultural practice.

Margaret Rarru
Garrawurra

born Galiwin'ku (Elcho
Island) 1940 lives Milingimbi,
Northern Territory

Mol Djinbakara 2024

Gunga (Pandanus Spiralis) and Balgurr
(Kurrajong – Brachychiton Populneus)
and natural dyes

The University of Melbourne Indigenous
Art and Culture Collection
purchased, 2024

Helen Ganalmirriwuy
Garrawurra

born Galiwin'ku (Elcho
Island) 1955 lives Milingimbi,
Northern Territory

Mol Djinbakara 2024

Gunga (Pandanus Spiralis) and Balgurr
(Kurrajong – Brachychiton Populneus)
and natural dyes

The University of Melbourne Indigenous
Art and Culture Collection
purchased, 2024

Helen Ganalmirriwuy
Garrawurra

Mol Djinbakara 2024

Gunga (Pandanus Spiralis) and Balgurr
(Kurrajong – Brachychiton Populneus)
and natural dyes

The University of Melbourne Indigenous
Art and Culture Collection
purchased, 2024

It is striking how, in his series of prints entitled *Swamps*, the natural swamp converges with Brent Harris's handling of ink. The pigment moves and blurs in ways that echo the instability of wetlands, creating spaces where forms emerge and dissolve as unpredictably as in the landscapes that inspire them. Harris's print operates as both image and process: the screen-printed layers arise from forms he first traced in drawing, then filtered through other media. The result is a surface that seems calm and graphic at one glance, but at another reveals slippages of figuration, psyche and terrain. The print is not merely a reproduction of an idea, but a re-animation of it – a personal study of how internal mental processes and material ones intersect and manifest.

Brent Harris

born Palmerston
North, Aotearoa
New Zealand
1956, lives Naarm,
Melbourne

Swamp no. 8 2001

colour screenprint

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Mark Grant, 2018

Swamp no. 6 (lavender) 2001

colour screenprint

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Mark Grant, 2018

In 2016, writer Ingo Niermann coined the name ‘Army of Love’ to describe a speculative community devoted to distributing love, touch and attention more equitably – a concept that anchors much of his and filmmaker Alexa Karolinski’s shared practice. Since its founding, the Army of Love has recruited and trained people of diverse ages, genders, ethnicities and appearances across Europe, completing the struggle for a prosperous and just society by offering sensual care to all who need it. In 2018, the Army entered the ocean – the elemental origin of love and life – and continued its trajectory to Cuba, where *Oceano de amor* was made, and where volunteers articulated a speculative future marked by automation and the reconceptualisation of love as a form of labour. The film extends this vision, using the sensuality of water, gesture and choreographed encounters to explore new forms of emotional solidarity. The film invites viewers into a space where love – personal, social and utopian – becomes an act of collective practice and possibility.

Alexa Karolinski and
Ingo Niermann

born West Berlin, Germany
1984, lives Berlin and
Los Angeles, USA

born Bielefeld, Germany
1969, lives Basel, Switzerland

Oceano de amor, 2019

HD single channel video, colour with
sound, 93 minutes

courtesy the artists

Supported by Fachausschuss Film
und Medienkunst Basel-Stadt / Basel-
Landschaft, Castello di Rivoli and Robot
Love, a project of the Niet Normaal
Foundation

This Benjamin Armstrong sculpture looks almost like a living form. It emerges from the artist's sustained fascination with the ways psychological and bodily forms are connected to one another. Here, he uses blown glass as a translucent core, a kind of inner anatomy around which layers of wax accumulate like skin or organic residue. The hybrid materiality creates a sense of something alive yet ungraspable – a presence that seems to breathe, secrete or grow.

Armstrong worked with blown glass in the mid- 2000s, but it is not his primary or most persistent medium; it appears more as a distinct phase in his practice in works exploring translucency, interiority and bodily fragility. Armstrong situates viewers in a state of heightened attention, where emotion, memory and physical sensation intertwine.

Benjamin Armstrong

born Naarm, Melbourne
1968, lives in Naarm,
Melbourne

Into the underworld 2007

blown glass, wax

Michael Buxton Collection, The University
of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by
Michael and Janet Buxton, 2018

Humpty Doom is a body of work made around Liss Fenwick's hometown of Humpty Doo on Larrikia Country in the Northern Territory. In the image *Nuptial flight*, Fenwick focuses on a special moment in the natural world. The work's title refers to the mass airborne emergence of insects on Larrakia Country, an event that signals reproduction, renewal and the cyclical forces of life. In all three of these photographs, the artist appears to capture an ecological moment as a celebration and an expression of the land's own temporalities that unfold independently of human presence or control. The photographs present the unease of vitality and tension caught up the surrounding landscape – a place shaped by colonisation, resource extraction and environmental stress. The saturation of the image and Fenwick's use of flash draws viewers in, as an invitation to overcome the tense coexistence of non-human life and settler-imposed systems.

The works ask us to reconsider how we read the land, to understand it not as a backdrop to human narratives but as an active, generative natural force. The series attentively looks at a world in which natural cycles persist even within disrupted environments, where the movement of insects becomes a reminder of the complexity and resilience of more-than-human life.

Liss Fenwick

born Larrakia Country, Northern Territory 1989, lives in Larrakia Country and Naarm, Melbourne

Termitaria

Zöe frestick, Gunn Point

Nuptial Flight

all works from the series

Humpty Doom 2023

inkjet prints on cotton rag

courtesy the artist

Miles Howard-Wilks joined Arts Project Australia in the early 2000s, developing a distinctive visual language across drawing, painting and, more recently, ceramics. This new commission for the exhibition, expands his exploration of three-dimensional form in clay and his long-standing fascination with animals and the natural world.

In this piece, Howard-Wilks turns to ants – creatures known for their collective intelligence, adaptability and intricate social structures. Formed in ceramic, their scale and repetition lend the work an animated, almost comic presence. Throughout his practice, Howard-Wilks draws attention to the extraordinary within the everyday, revealing how nature and the animals that inhabit our planet possess an incredible sense of expression and eloquence.

Miles Howard-Wilks

Storm ant 2025

born Naarm,
Melbourne 1979, lives
in Naarm, Melbourne

Red ant number 1 2025

Magpie ant number 1 2025

Red ant number 2 2025

Magpie ant number 2 2025

Red ant number 3 2025

Magpie ant number 3 2025

Red ant number 4 2025

Magpie ant number 4 2025

Red ant number 5 2025

Red ant number 6 2025

Magpie ant number 5 2025

Magpie ant number 6 2025

Red ant number 7 2025

Magpie ant number 8 2025

Magpie ant number 9 2025

Magpie ant number 10 2025

Continued overleaf

Miles Howard-Wilks

Magpie ant number 11 2025

born Naarm,
Melbourne 1979, lives
in Naarm, Melbourne

Magpie ant number 12 2025

Magpie ant number 13 2025

Baby ants 2025

Untitled, 2022

Untitled, 2023

Untitled, 2020

Untitled, 2025

Untitled, 2023

Untitled, 2022

all works glaze, earthenware
courtesy the artist and Arts Project
Australia

In *Sugar Train Ride for the Ants*, Choksi imagines an unlikely scenario of leisure for worker ants. Conceived as a performance, the work involved sugar-laden transport vehicles that attracted ants and temporarily diverted them from their habitual tasks of scouting and gathering food. Framed as a playful 'tour package,' the project speculated on rest, reward, and so-called irresponsibility within systems defined by labour and efficiency.

As the sugared train was carried through public space in Los Angeles, it drew both ants and curious passersby, collapsing distinctions between performance, urban environment, and nonhuman participants. The work gently questions assumptions about productivity, care, and the possibility of rest across species.

Neha Choksi

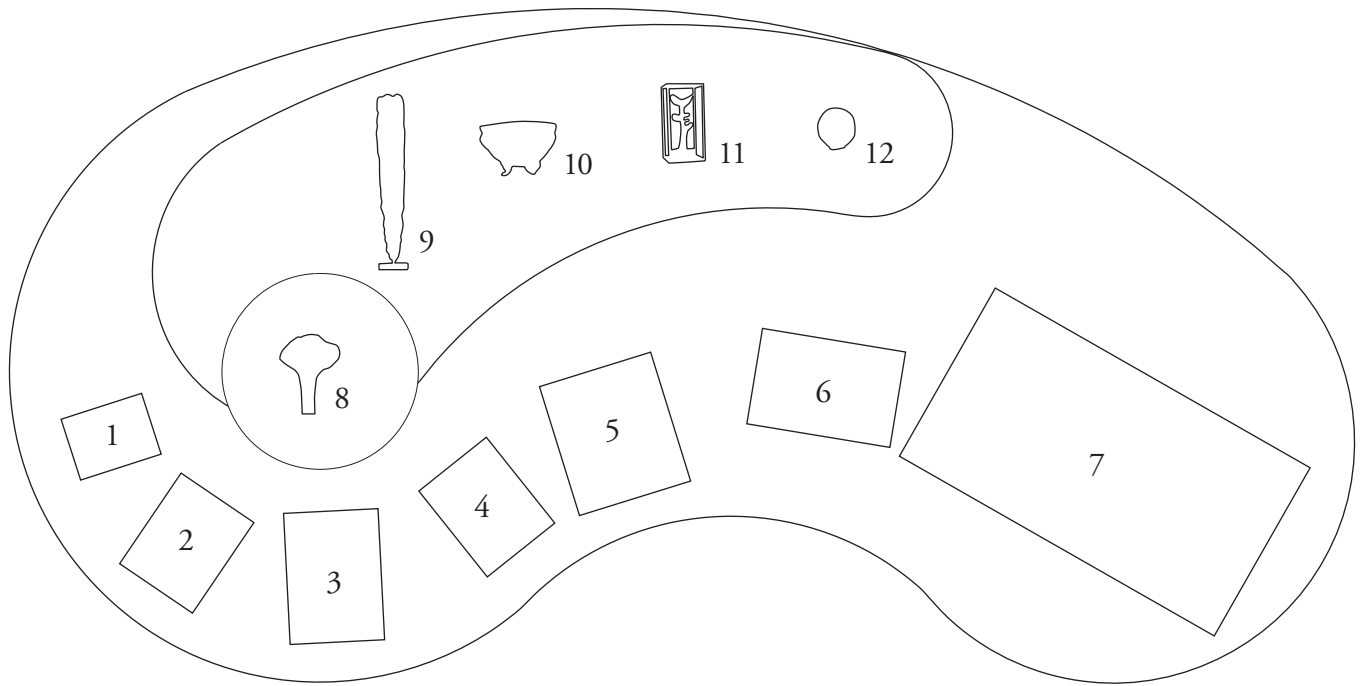
born Belleville, New Jersey,
USA 1973, lives in Los
Angeles, USA and Mumbai,
India

sketches for the performance *Sugar
train ride for the ants* 1997

inkjet prints (originally ink on
watercolour paper, 20 x 50 cm)
courtesy the artist and Project 88,
Mumbai

Level 1

Works on plinth



Continued overleaf

1. Helen Maudsley
born Naarm,
Melbourne 1927,
lives in Naarm,
Melbourne

Roses 1955
pencil, paper
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Helen Brack, 2014
2. Helen Maudsley

Untitled [hand] not dated
pencil, paper
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Helen Brack, 2014
3. Helen Maudsley

The skeletal lady 1956.
ink, pencil, paper
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Helen Brack, 2014
4. Helen Maudsley

Untitled [abstract cones and curls] not dated
pencil, paper
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Helen Brack, 2014
5. Helen Maudsley

Zebra lady 1956
ink on paper
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Helen Brack, 2014

Continued overleaf

This group of early drawings marks a formative period in Helen Maudsley's practice. Working in gouache and pencil, Maudsley reduced the human form to essential lines, curves and compositional axes. Figures appear poised, upright and lightly structured, their bodies merging with architectural elements that hint at an inner geometry. They also evoke a psychological condition: the wish to stand and hold as a woman, as a mother, and as an artist. To reduce the figure to the spine is to address the desire to be perceived for one's abilities – such as the simple yet profound ability to stand upright.

Across these drawings, Maudsley treats the figure less as a subject and more as a vehicle through which to explore artistic thinking. Vertical alignments, fine linear scaffolds and carefully measured intervals suggest the beginnings of structural concerns that would later define her abstract 'spinal' and diagrammatic works.

6. Salvador Dalí *Fifty magical secrets of magic craftsmanship* 1947
born Figueres, Spain,
lived 1904-1989
inkjet print, reproduction
© Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí. VEGAP/
Copyright
Agency, 2025
7. Salvador Dalí and Walt Disney *Destino* 1947 (released 2003)
born Figueres, Spain,
lived 1904-1989
born Chicago, USA,
lived 1901-1966
animated film, 6 minutes 43 seconds,
sound
courtesy the artists and the Walt Disney
Corporation, licensed by Roadshow Films
Pty Ltd

Destino is a short, animated film conceived by Salvador Dalí in collaboration with Walt Disney Studios in 1945-46 and completed decades later in 2003. The work brings Dalí's surrealist imagery into motion: shifting landscapes, dissolving forms and symbolic figures unfold with the fluid logic of a dream, a logic that inspires this whole exhibition. Time melts, bodies morph and desert vistas open and collapse, all in keeping with Dalí's conviction that the subconscious is a primary terrain for artistic exploration.

Accompanying the film is a drawing that highlights Dalí's long-standing fascination with ants. For Dalí, ants were not incidental creatures but potent symbols that appeared throughout his work from the 1920s onward. They often represented decay, anxiety and the instability of the material world, qualities he connected to early childhood memories from Catalonia and to the darker impulses of the psyche. In his drawings, ants swarm, fragment or accumulate with unsettling precision, functioning both as literal insects and as psychological signs.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>8. Barbara Swarbrick</p> <p>born Manchester,
United Kingdom 1945
(arrived in Australia
1975), lives in Victoria</p> | <p><i>Untitled</i> [vase] c. 1989
earthenware
Victorian College of the Arts Collection
(VCA) – Margaret Lawrence Bequest</p> |
| <p>9. Carol Murphy</p> <p>born Donald, Victoria
1957, lives in Victoria</p> | <p><i>Sea cone</i> '98 c.1998
ceramic
Victorian College of the Arts Collection
(VCA) – Margaret Lawrence Bequest</p> |

Carol Murphy's *Sea cone* evokes the possibility of erasing, in many ways, the boundary between land and sea. As if every time we hold water or drink, we invoke the rivers and seas that converge and contain the invisible – to the human eye – universes of the ocean. The sculptural form appears as if shaped by tides and winds, its materials recalling the shells and conches lying at the water's edge. The piece resonates with a long lineage of shell-inspired vessels – from ancient Mediterranean conch-shaped libation cups to the Rococo fascination with marine ornament. Murphy's object channels the ocean's slow, generative forces: it seems simultaneously constructed and eroded, holding the suggestion of geological time made tactile. Her way of making honours nature, as if reminding us that materials – like wood in the form of trees and forests – carry the memory of what we take from the natural world each time we create.

10. Toni Warburton *Tripod Bowl with Mollusc and Hormosira Banksii, Neptunes necklace motifs* c.1998
born Sydney 1951, lives in Sydney and the South Coast, New South Wales
terracotta
Victorian College of the Arts Collection (VCA) – Margaret Lawrence Bequest

Toni Warburton – active since the 1970s – belongs to a generation of Australian artists who expanded ceramics beyond studio craft traditions, opening the medium to conceptual, environmental and site-responsive approaches. Her practice spans vessels, drawing, installation and writing, yet clay remains a central way of thinking through place, history and material experience. Warburton’s ceramics balance clarity of form with surfaces that register the movement of heat, pigment and process. Imprinted with the forms of shells and seaweed from Victoria’s coastline, this terracotta vessel appears to cradle salty memories of tidal movements, crawling with life and cycling through decay and regeneration.

11. Adrian Mauriks *The blue tree* 1998
steel and wood
born Hertogenbosch,
The Netherlands (arrived
in Australia 1957), lived
1942-2020
Victorian College of the Arts Collection
(VCA) – Margaret Lawrence Bequest

Adrian Mauriks is known for his reinterpretation of hard industrial materials into soft, organic forms that suggest growth, drift and dynamic motion. His sculptures feel animated due to the use of curves and rhythms that echo natural forces such as wind, water and unfolding plant life. By drawing movement out of mass, he shifts abstraction toward a language grounded in the behaviours of nature rather than its representation. His biomorphic shapes bridge the artificial and the organic, inviting viewers to sense the vitality held within solid matter and expanding sculptural expression toward a closer, more intuitive dialogue with the natural world.

12. Pippin Louise Drysdale
born Victoria, Australia
1943, lives in Naarm,
Melbourne
- Untitled* c. 1985
porcelain
Victorian College of the Arts Collection
(VCA) – Margaret Lawrence Bequest

This ceramic piece by Australian artist Pippin Louise Drysdale presents a small, window-like scene set within a rounded sculptural form. At its centre, a dark winged silhouette moves across a deep blue sky, framed by softly modelled clouds in pale cream and rose tones. A second, smaller silhouette in the lower left echoes the first figure, giving the sense of an unfolding narrative. Drysdale's careful composition creates the feeling of looking through to a suspended moment in the sky. The form has historical precedents. Rounded vessels bearing framed pictorial scenes appear in Japanese ceramics of the Edo and Meiji periods, in the front-facing imagery of Chinese moon flasks, as well as in the stylised animal motifs of Art Deco pottery.

Pippin Louise Drysdale is known for a ceramic practice that combines sculptural form with a deep interest in storytelling.

and a bird

The conference of the birds is a book written by the Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar in the twelfth century. In it, all the birds of the world gather and are led by the hoopoe bird, who invites them on a perilous journey to find the legendary bird-king: Simorgh. The birds question the entire pursuit and start making excuses for not going, with the result that only thirty of them complete the journey. 'Si-morgh' literally means 'thirty birds' in Persian, so the remaining thirty birds discover that the Simorgh they were looking for was actually just themselves, together.

We are living in times of escapism. Denial and self-deception are ways of coping with the difficulties of dealing with structural social changes that increasingly endanger personal and collective freedom. 'Freedom' is also a complex notion that deserves as much – if not more – attention than 'intelligence' or 'nature'. Liberal freedom assumes that we are individuals who 'lack' something (rights, goods, satisfaction) and who act to get it. It is a reactive model. Imagine freedom otherwise – like a bird flock, a collective movement defined not by choosing between possibilities but inventing new ones. A swarm intelligence that emanates a feeling of freedom emerging from relation, rhythm, and a collective sensitivity to the world.



There was once a man who was also a bird: Papageno. He loved birds so much that he had become a bit like one himself. He went about covered in feathers and carrying a birdcage, catching birds for the Queen of the Night. Half man and half bird, he often felt lonely and longed for a partner.

One day, some mysterious messengers told him that there was a perfect match for him – a woman named Papagena, who was just like him. But first, Papageno had to prove himself brave and honest.

He tried, but he failed all the tests of wisdom and silence. In the end, he could only be true to himself – speaking in the joyful, wordless language of birds. Then the sound of a magic flute opened up the world, and Papagena, drawn by its beauty, could not resist joining him in their childlike ‘Pa-pa-pa’ duet.

– Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *The magic flute* (German: *Die Zauberflöte*)
Libretto: Emanuel Schikaneder. First performance: 30 September 1791,
Vienna, Austria

Lauren Burrow often starts her working process with a story, memory or fragment from lived experience, allowing it to guide her engagement with research and the form a work takes.

Her new work, produced for this exhibition, is inspired by philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood and her account of surviving a crocodile attack. The installation responds to Plumwood's famous encounter with a crocodile in Kakadu National Park – an experience that profoundly reshaped her thinking about human exceptionalism and the relationship between people and the more-than-human world. Plumwood described the moment as being held in the steady gaze of an animal capable of taking her life. That moment of mutual visibility – fearful, humbling and transformative – becomes the conceptual anchor for Burrow's work.

Supported by The City of Melbourne Arts Grants.

Lauren Burrow

born Garramilla, Darwin 1992,
lives in Naarm, Melbourne

Minimum exposure 2026

smashed car windows (Holden Torana
and ambulance), glitter nail polish,
brass; suport: sub-water native timber,
beeswax
courtesy the artist

In this rare self-portrait, artist Naomi Hobson appears holding a Barking Owl or Ngurku – an animal embedded in the stories and ecosystems of Coen, her homeland in Far North Queensland. Hobson’s practice often interweaves a study of the landscape with the stories and kinship systems that have shaped her as a Kaantju and Umpila woman and her community. The owl is here both a companion and an image of natural guidance and impressive intuition.

The genuine calm that the owl and artist appear to share enhances their bond – with the owl’s alert gaze and the artist’s quiet confidence inviting viewers to participate in this special and living relationship. The work reflects Hobson’s ongoing commitment to expressing Indigenous identity in a contemporary visual language that is unapologetically personal. Through this self-portrait, Hobson reaffirms her connection to the natural world and asserts the importance of stories carried not only by people, but by the animals and environments that sustain them.

Naomi Hobson

Southern Kwangju / Umpila, born
1979, lives in Coen, Queensland

Rare 2025

inkjet print on cotton rag
MECCA Collection
© Naomi Hobson

Produced especially for this exhibition, *Ecography (egg) temple for all cosmic arrivals* unfolds as a vast, oval field of concentric blue rings, drawn directly onto canvas. The work reads like a cartography of energy or a sonic ripple, expanding outward from a dense, luminous centre. At the heart of the drawing, an egg contains a bird – an image of incubation, potential and imminent emergence.

In Eduardo Navarro's drawing practice, metamorphic energies and beings in continuous transformation are recurring themes and working methods. Drawing becomes a way for him to affirm that there is no such thing as closure or a definitive end, but rather an eternal flow – one that connects, reconnects, and gives meaning to every stage of life and afterlife. Lines do not conclude; they circulate, echo, and return, sustaining a sense of ongoing becoming.

This work is also deeply mythological – unapologetically so. It resonates with thousands of poems, stories, and images across cultures that understand birth as an origin to be protected, cared for and revered, rather than something to be exploited or destroyed. The egg at the work's centre stands as a primordial symbol of fragility and power. It holds within it the promise of life and transformation, and situates the drawing within a timeless narrative of care, continuity, and cosmic responsibility.



Eduardo Navarro

born Buenos Aires,
Argentina 1979, lives
in Valparaiso, Chile

*Ecography (egg) temple for all cosmic
arrivals 2025-26*

ink on cotton
courtesy the artist

Jane Jin Kaisen's video centres on the figure of a swan, a mythological figure that so often also embodies the marvellous and the impossible. The scene happens in a northern autumn, enhancing a sense of darkness and symbolism as a way to speak about the shadows of our present times – the crimes, ruptures and losses that remain difficult to articulate in daylight. Taking the form of a visual and poetic response to a text by Swedish poet Mara Lee, the work becomes both a meditation on our current global condition and an exercise in learning to see differently.

For Kaisen, the night is not merely an absence of light but a transformed field of perception. After years of crises – wars, economic instability, rising nationalism, the failures of progress narratives, ecological disruption, and the psychic residue of a global pandemic – she asks how vision might adapt to darkness. *November* is at once a gothic turning of the world's shadows and a paideia: a practice of moral and intellectual formation through art. The work invites viewers into a slower, more attentive mode of looking, suggesting that in order to understand our present, we must learn to navigate obscurity, uncertainty and the unspoken.

The artist has been supported by the Danish Art Foundation to show this work in Australia.

Jane Jin Kaisen

born Jeju Island, South
Korea 1980, lives in
Copenhagen, Denmark

November 2025.

single channel digital video, 4K stereo
sound, 12 minutes
courtesy the artist

In the carving traditions of the Tiwi Islands, birds are powerful carriers of story, movement and connection between land, sea and spirit worlds. Harold Munkara's hand-carved bird sculptures continue this lineage: each form reflects the artist's deep knowledge of Country and the role birds play as guides, messengers and markers of seasonal change. Made from locally sourced ironwood, Munkara's works honour the rhythm of Tiwi life, translating ancestral narratives into graceful, contemporary carvings.

Harold Munkara

Arlikampwarni (Pelican) 2025

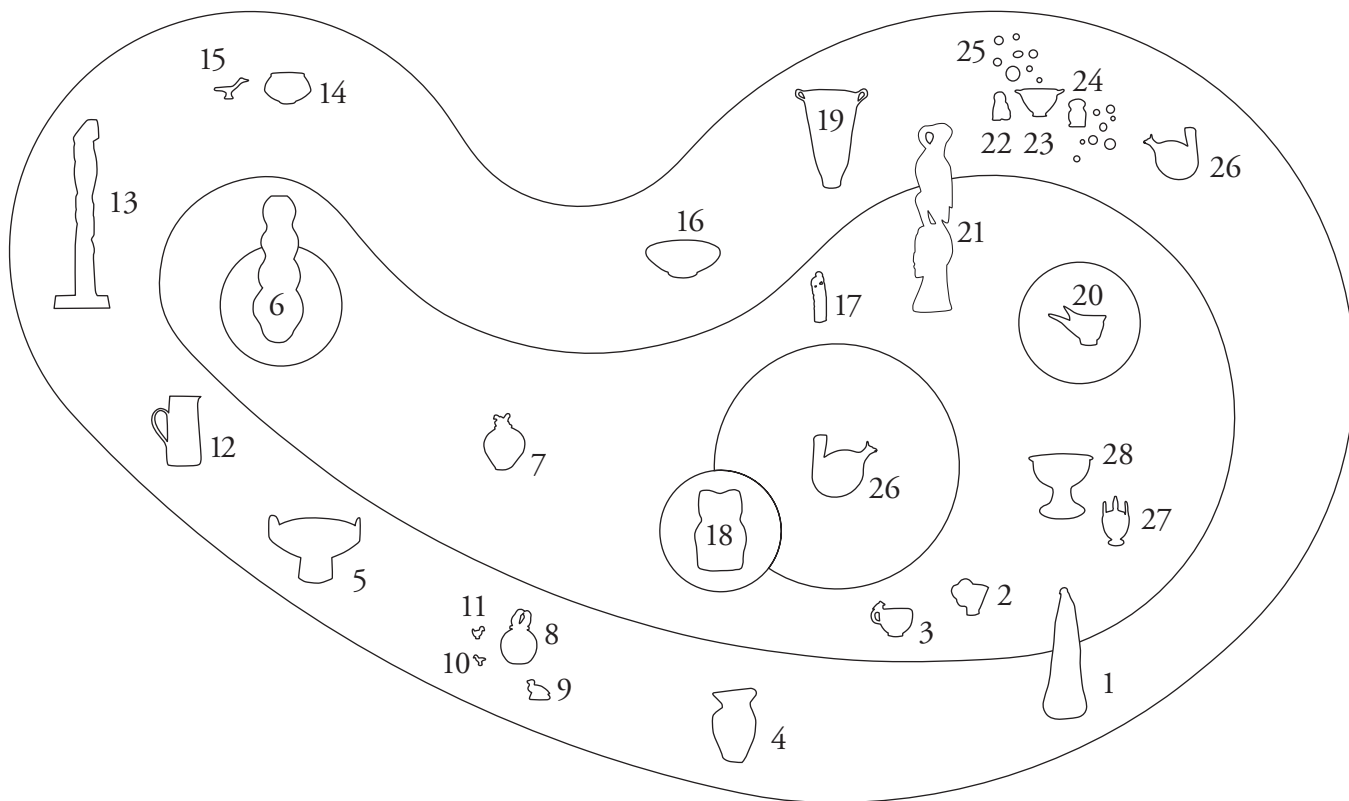
Warnarringa/Kapala, born
Tiwi 1967, lives in Tiwi

Jilarti (Brolga) 2025

Arlikampwarni (Pelican) 2025
all works Kartukini / Ironwood
(*Erythrophleum chlorostachys*),
steel stand
courtesy the artist and Ngarrawanajirri

Level 2

Works on plinth



Continued overleaf

1. Lorraine Jenyns *The birth of Horus* 1973
earthenware with enamels
Born Melbourne
1945, lives in Lutruita,
Tasmania
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection
Purchased 1973.

In this ceramic sculpture, Lorraine Jenyns turns to Egyptian mythology as a means to explore transformation and the symbolic power of animals. It depicts a stylised bird – evoking Horus, the falcon-headed god associated with protection, renewal and the rising sun. Rather than illustrating the myth, Jenyns interprets it through the language of studio ceramics: simplified form, tactile surfaces, and a quiet, totemic presence. The bird appears both fragile and resolute, emerging from the vessel-like body of the sculpture as if caught in the moment of becoming. Jenyns’s interest in myth, humour and anthropomorphic form is evident here, and marks her shift in the early 1970s from functional pottery to ceramics embodying sculptural characters. Through this work, she suggests that even the most familiar forms can hold the weight of ancient stories and the cycles of birth, spirit and renewal.

2. Barbara A Swarbrick

born Manchester,
United Kingdom 1945
(arrived in Australia
1975), lives in Victoria

Pink Cockatoo cup 2003
glazed ceramic
Victorian College of the Arts Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection

3. Barbara A Swarbrick

Kookaburra cup 2002
glazed ceramic
Victorian College of the Arts Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection

4. Barbara A Swarbrick

Crimson Rosellas and Golden Delicious
1990
glazed ceramic
Victorian College of the Arts Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection

5. Barbara A Swarbrick *Birdbath* 1997
glazed ceramic
Victorian College of the Arts Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection

6. Barbara Swarbrick *Flying through the forest* 1998
glazed ceramic
Victorian College of the Arts Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection

Barbara Swarbrick's ceramic vessels engage with both craft and a surprising sense of narrative and storytelling, transforming functional forms into sites of symbolic presence and personal expression. Rooted in earthenware and underglaze decoration, her works blend traditional pottery techniques with bold graphic imagery – birds, flora and gestural line – that evokes memory, place and identity. Swarbrick's extravagant way of dealing with everyday forms such as cups, teapots and vases surpasses traditional ideas of function and transforms them into more than just containers. They reflect the stories and gestures of human life, shaped through tactile surfaces and intimate scale. With each piece, she invites viewers to consider how the empty, filled or imagined vessel holds not only substance, but meaning.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 7. Judith Pungkarta Inkamala | <i>Wrens</i> 1998 |
| Western Aranda, born 1948,
lives Ntaria, Hermannsburg,
Northern Territory | terracotta
Victorian College of the Arts
Collection, The University of
Melbourne Art Collection |
| 8. Judith Pungkarta Inkamala | <i>Budgerigars</i> 2000 |
| | terracotta
Victorian College of the Arts
Collection, The University of
Melbourne Art Collection |

Judith Pungarta Inkamala's hand-built terracotta vessels often feature animals sculpted on their lids or painted across the curved surface of the pot. These figures – birds, horses, dingoes, kangaroos and other native creatures – are not decorative additions but carriers of story. They anchor each vessel to Country, recalling the artist's memories of growing up in Ntaria (Hermannsburg) and the close relationships between community, animals and landscape.

Inkamala's detailed underglaze painting often wraps her vessels in scenes of everyday life: bush tracks, homesteads, gatherings and encounters with wildlife. In these works the birds themselves are the focus. The small animal sculptures perched atop the lids extend the narrative into three dimensions, transforming each pot into a story-vessel, where land, memory and living beings coexist. Through these works, Inkamala affirms the importance of animals in Western Arrernte culture and offers a vivid, intimate portrait of life on Country rendered in clay, colour and form.

Continued overleaf

9. Josie Papialuk *Untitled [swimming waterbird]* 1950s.
soapstone.
Born Puvirnituk,
Canada, lived 1918-1996
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection. Gift of David and Marion
Adames, donated in memory of Robert
Murray Heatley, 2018.

Josie Pamiutu Papialuk was an Inuit artist from Puvirnituk (also spelled Povungnituk), Quebec. He worked with sculpture (especially soapstone), printmaking and drawing, often depicting birds, marine animals and scenes of the Arctic environment. *Swimming water bird* is a small stone figure portraying a waterbird gliding across the surface of a northern lake. Carved in smooth, rounded soapstone, the bird's form is reduced to its most expressive features: the curve of the body, the suggestion of wings, the forward thrust of motion. Papialuk's sculpture is rooted in Inuit carving traditions, and tells of the close relationship between people, animals and landscape. It captures an important part of the bird's Arctic life with beautiful clarity – even a modest gesture in stone carries a sense of presence, vitality and lived experience.

10. Artist unknown *Bronze bird fitting* c. 1st millennium BCE
bronze
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Harold and
Barbara Sacks, 2011.
11. Artist unknown *Bird figurine* not dated
stone
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Neil Taylor Collection.

12. Alexandra Copeland *Winter bird with rosehips* 1999
stoneware
born Naarm,
Melbourne 1947, lives
in Melbourne Victorian College of the Arts Collection
(VCA) – Margaret Lawrence Bequest

Alexandra Copeland's practice emerges like the research of a natural historian, translating the forms of plants, insects, birds and marine life into compositions that hover between observation and abstraction. Working in high-fired ceramics, she applies layers of stoneware glazes that fuse at intense heat, allowing metallic oxides to settle into vibrant, unpredictable surfaces that echo the complexity of natural forms. Her images reveal the strange geometries, vivid colours and quiet rhythms embedded in living things. Copeland approaches each work through close looking, allowing the hand to follow the eye as it traces the curve of a petal or the flicker of a wing. Her pieces invite viewers into this attentive state, where the familiar becomes newly intricate and the everyday natural world feels charged with presence, transformed through earth, glaze and fire into enduring, tactile forms.

13. Inge King

born Berlin, Germany,
arrived in Australia
1950, lived 1915-2016

Untitled [bird form] 1948

partridge wood.

The University of Melbourne Art
Collection

gift of the artist 1983

Carved from partridge wood, *Bird form* shows Inge King's interest in movement, dynamic energy and the expressive potential of natural materials. The sculpture is a bird through refined contours and a poised, upward-leaning silhouette. Rather than presenting a literal figure, King reduces the form to a flowing volume that carries a sense of movement. The natural qualities of partridge wood – its density, fine grain and subtle tonal variation – become integral to the work. In this early piece, King begins to explore ideas that would define her later practice: the tension between form, solid metal and motion, the importance of spatial rhythm, and the tensions created when materials meet the mind, when large-scale sculptures embrace abstraction.

14. Artist unknown *Buffware jar with bird and geometric decoration 3rd century BCE*
terracotta
The University of Melbourne Art Collection.
Gift of David and Marion Adams, 2009
15. Artist unknown *Figurine of bird 450-425 BCE*
terracotta
Classics and Archaeology Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
John Hugh Sutton Memorial Bequest, 1929
16. Artist unknown *Buffware bowl with incised decoration of bird and floral motif c.1200*
Byzantine
ceramic
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
gift of David and Marion Adams, 2009
17. Artist unknown *Okimono of a whole ivory tusk carved in the round of a fiery eyed eagle, feathers downward at a snakeskin and tiger fur nineteenth century*
ivory
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
The Russel and Mab Grimwade Bequests,
1973

18. David Noonan *Owl* 2006
bronze
born Ballarat,
Victoria 1969, lives
in London, UK
Michael Buxton Collection, The University
of Melbourne Art Collection. Donated
through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Michael and
Janet Buxton, 2018

While David Noonan is more widely recognised for his collage-based works that merge archival images with abstract patterning, *Owl* shows a crucial trait of his sculptural thinking: interest in a presence that feels simultaneously familiar and otherworldly. The owl is a recurrent figure in Noonan's work – this variation draws on his ongoing interest in ritual and theatricality, and in the enigmatic presence of the masked or totemic figure. Cast in bronze, the small-scale figurine carries a sense of stillness and watchfulness, its simplified form recalling both ancient votive objects and modernist sculptural language. Noonan's choice of the owl – an animal historically associated with wisdom, nocturnal sight and the occult – amplifies the atmosphere of quiet mystery that permeates his practice.

19. Jan Moran *Untitled* [vase] c.2000
glazed ceramic Victorian College of the Arts
Collection, The University of Melbourne Art
Collection
20. Jan Moran *Bird jug* 2000
glazed ceramic
Victorian College of the Arts Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art Collection

In the hands of Jan Moran, a simple cup becomes a tale. Her approach to function – making a cup – blends with her impulse to transcend it through a fantastical, almost creature-like presence that overtakes the everyday object. The elongated handle, shaped like the head of a green serpent, lizard or bird, transforms the cup into a hybrid being poised between object and animal. Across its surface, Moran layers delicate, gestural imagery – birds in motion, botanical forms and swirling colour – creating a lively narrative that wraps around the vessel's body. The piece plays with metamorphosis and myth, allowing everyday ceramics to slip into dreamlike territory where animals, symbols and utility coexist. Moran transforms a quotidian vessel into a small world of its own: playful, enigmatic and animated by the natural forms that seem to breathe across its glazed surface.

21. Rrikin Burarrwaja *Mokuy* 1950s
wood, natural pigments
Gumatj clan, Yirritja The Leonhard Adam Collection of
moiety, 1932-1980 International Indigenous Culture, part of
the Indigenous Art and Culture Collection,
The University of Melbourne

This carved figure represents a Mokuy, an ancestral spirit-being in Yolŋu culture. Mokuy are often described as mischievous or trickster spirits who may attempt to distract a person's spirit after death, diverting it from returning to its proper Dreaming place and clan estate. Such carvings are used in ceremony and storytelling, transmitting cultural knowledge and lore.

Rrikin Burarrwaja was an important artist from Yirrkala. He worked in North East Arnhem Land, and among other things, contributed to church panels at Yirrkala in the early 1960s, at the time of the historic Yirrkala Bark Petitions.

22. Artist unknown
from the Hellenistic
period
- Untitled* [A Palmyrene marble statuette of a bird] 4th century BCE
marble
University of Melbourne Art Collection.
Gift of David and Marion Adams, donated
in memory of Robert Murray Heatley,
2018
23. Artist unknown
East Greek, Carian
- Untitled* [bird bowl] c. 690-680 BCE
ceramic
Classics and Archaeology Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection
purchased 1976
24. Artist unknown
Inuit, Canada
- Untitled* [owl] 1960s
soapstone
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection
gift of David and Marion Adames,
donated in memory of Robert Murray
Heatley, 2018
25. Coins – see detailed coin label

26. Alan Caiger-Smith

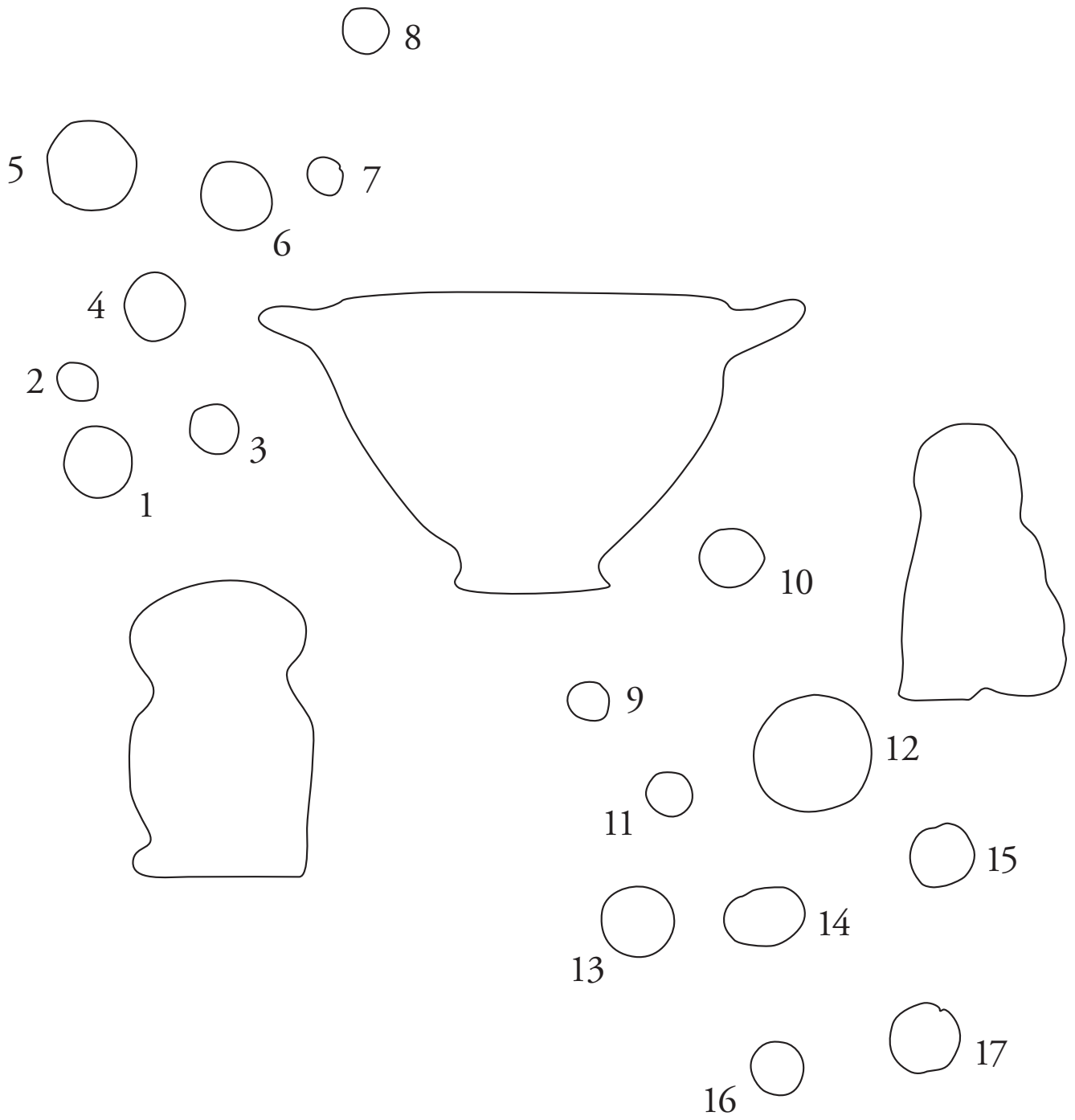
born Buenos Aires, Argentina,
arrived United Kingdom
before 1941 / as a small child,
lived 1930-2020

Untitled [two bird forms] 1972
glazed and decorated stoneware
The University of Melbourne Art
Collection
purchased 1973

Both a master potter and a scholar, Alan Caiger-Smith drew on deep research into Islamic, European and medieval ceramic traditions, approaching pottery as both a craft and a form of knowledge. His calm, balanced forms hold a quiet centre, while their lustrous surfaces – born of wood-fired kilns and complex tin glazes – suggest movement, fire and transformation. Pottery as a lifelong practice and research can be understood as an embodied ecology, an ancient language oriented toward listening to the Earth itself – through clay, soil, minerals and fire. Pottery carries a deep memory of human making and our species' understanding of its crucial dependency on vessels. Working at Aldermaston Pottery in the village of Aldermaston near Reading, UK, Caiger-Smith remained in close contact with the raw materials from which all ceramics begin. He treated the shaping of clay as a way of listening and expressing messages that invite viewers into the charged space between form and flux, where material skill meets centuries of ceramic history.

27. Paestan
Asteas/Python
Workshop
- Lebes gamikos and lid* 350-320 BCE
ceramic
Classics and Archaeology Collection,
The University of Melbourne Art Collection.
Purchased 1978.
28. Artist unknown
- Buffware chalice with red bands and bird
decoration* 8th-7th century BCE
ceramic
The University of Melbourne Art Collection.
Gift of David and Marion Adams

Coins



Continued overleaf

Ancient coins have the capacity to reassure us that the world, though profoundly different in the past, has always maintained a certain coherence through the use of money. All the coins on display here share a common trait: they all feature birds on the reverse, or a Pegasus. In the Greek coinage, birds were extremely common. Birds – an eagle, owl, or dove – instantly signalled divine favour. But birds also acted as logos, cities practically branded themselves with a bird: Athens with the owl; Alexandria with the eagle; Delphi with the raven. Rome also adopted the eagle – aquila – as its emblem. And Pegasus? In truth, a winged horse is still a horse; yet its wings connect the two realms, Earth and the skies, and by extension all the creatures that inhabit them.

Looking at these precious ancient items it is easy to think about the many ways – past and present – cultures think about exchange and money. Coins, small as they are, immediately make us think about the scale of the worlds that hold them, about currency debasement, bureaucracy, shrinking workforces that would sustain the system ... and then, of course, humans have invented digital money or money secured not by a central authority by math. But even digital money needs trust. Only belief secures adoption. So, these birds whatever the future bring, still have a future.

1. *Coin – Tetradrachm, Ob: Head of Athena, new style; Rev: Owl r., wings closed, standing on amphora which lies on its side; gorgon-head; ATHE; NIKHTHS 125 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

2. *Coin – Triobol, Ob: Chimaera; l. Sl; Rev: Dove flying left 400-322 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

3. *Coin of Ptolemy X, Ob: Head of Zeus Ammon; Rev: Two eagles l. on thunderbolt; symbol to l., apple branch 117-81 BCE*
bronze
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection

4. *Coin of unknown Ptolemy, Ob: Head of Zeus Ammon r; Rev: Eagle l. on thunderbolt; PTOLEMAIOY BASILEOS 420-390 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
John Hugh Sutton Memorial Bequest, 1929

- 5 *Coin – Tetradrachm, Ob: Head of young Herakles r. in lion skin headdress;
Rev: Zeus seated l. on throne, eagle outstretched r. hand, with l. hand leaning on long sceptre 336-323 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

6. *Coin – Didrachm, Ob: Eagle with closed wings AKRAGANTOS;
Rev: Crab, 450 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

7. *Drachm of the Corinthian Colonies, Ob: Pegasus flying r.; DYR;
Rev: Head of Herakles with lion skin 350-229 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

8. *Coin – Diobol, Ob: Head of a nymph (Olympia?) with hair in sphendone; Rev: Eagle with closed wings r. looking back; in field, ram's head; F A 362-312 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

9. *Drachm, Ob: Head of Athena, of archaic style, wearing round earring and close-fitting crested helmet; Rev: Incuse square, within which owl r., head facing, wings closed; behind, olive spray ATHE 500-400 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

10. *Coin – Tetradrachm, Ob: Head of Athena, of archaic style; Rev: Incuse square, within which owl r., head facing, wings closed; behind, olive spray and small decrescent moon ATHE 449-430 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

11. *Coin- Drachm, Ob: Head of young Herakles in lion skin; Rev: Zeus seated, holding eagle and resting on sceptre not dated*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection

12. *Coin of Ptolemy III, Ob: Head of Zeus Ammon; Rev: Eagle l. on thunderbolt; to l. cornucopiae bound with fillet; between legs, SE (?)*
PTOLEMY BASILEOS 426-221 BCE
bronze
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection

13. *Coin – Tetradrachm, Ob: Head of young Herakles r. in lion skin headdress; Rev: Zeus seated l. on throne, eagle outstretched r. hand, with l. hand leaning on long sceptre* 336-323 BCE
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

14. *Stater of Corinth, Ob: Pegasus with curled wing left; below, Q; Rev: Incuse of swastika pattern* 540-520 BCE
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

15. *Coin of Ptolemy X, Ob: Head of Zeus Ammon; Rev: Two eagles l. on thunderbolt; symbol to l., apple branch* 117-81 BCE
bronze
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection

16. *Coin – Diobol, Ob: Head of Zeus Amarios; Rev: Pegasus flying r.; below, the Achaean monogram, all within laurel wreath 243 BCE*
silver
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection
purchased through the University Apparatus Fund

17. *Coin of Ptolemy VIII, Ob: Head of Cleopatra II or III r., clad in elephant's skin; Rev: Eagle l. on thunderbolt, wings open 170-117 BCE*
bronze
Classics and Archaeology Collection, The University of Melbourne
Art Collection

Marian Tubbs's collage works embody the question: what happens when the virtual becomes the backdrop of everyday reality? When our bodies, spaces and habits are shaped by screens, inputs and algorithmic flows as much as by solid presence? Her collages, full of a life that is sometimes abstract and difficult to describe in simple ways, form new artistic territories – zones where she explores hyper-connectivity and the commodification that emerges from a particular kind of research and labour: hauling, sorting, re-charging, uploading, discarding. These actions define works that might at first glance appear as cheerful assemblages of tropical motifs and streaming video imagery, yet on closer inspection reveal hidden seams of labour, transformation and ecological cost.

Marian Tubbs

born Sydney 1983, lives
Bundjalung, Northern
Rivers and Kabi Kabi,
Sunshine Coast

*the sincerest thing that i could do
was to use words* 2025

lenticular photograph
private collection, Melbourne

shields and the metaverse café 2025

lenticular photograph
private collection, Melbourne

Untitled 2024

lenticular photograph
University of New South Wales Art
Collection purchased 2024

The three works of Teelah George convey her engagement with embroidery as a form of slow observation. Using hand-stitched thread to record subtle shifts in colour, light and atmosphere, George's practice centres on the act of accumulation: stitch by stitch, she builds surfaces that hold time and attention. The labour of making becomes a way of honouring overlooked or passing moments. And in this room, these tapestries morph into maps, offering birds-eye-views of imagined and unwieldy landscapes, held steady in their brass surrounds.

Teelah George

born Boorloo, Perth 1984
lives in Naarm, Melbourne

Theory of a pearl 2025

thread, linen, bronze
collection of Ian Blundell and
Daniela Valmorbidia

Tapestry 2025

thread, linen, bronze
private collection

Descending blushes 2025

thread, linen, bronze
private collection, Melbourne

These sculptures exemplify Nabilah Nordin's distinctive approach to form and material. Built through an improvisational process, the works bring together unlikely combinations of everyday and synthetic materials, shaped and coated into a structure that feels at once playful, raw and deliberately unstable.

Thick textures, vivid colour and hand-formed surfaces give the piece an animated presence, suggesting a form caught mid-transformation. Neither fully abstract nor fully recognisable, they sit between the found and the invented, deliberately unsettling expectations of how sculpture should look or behave. Through this speculative approach to form, the work becomes a method of thinking, where the boundaries between construction and collapse, refinement and roughness, are constantly shifting.

Nabilah Nordin

born Singapore 1991

lives in Los Angeles, USA

Fountain 2023

wood, epoxy modelling compound,

acrylic paint

collection of Lauren and David Seeman

Discipline 2023

wood, epoxy modelling compound,

epoxyglass, balloons

courtesy the artist and Neon Parc,

Melbourne

Silver ray 2023

wood, epoxy modelling compound,

metallic pigments

courtesy the artist and Neon Parc,

Melbourne

Din Matamoro's bird series originated from an unexpected twist between daily life and artistic intuition. Over a long period of time, the artist noticed that while he was cooking, his hands almost unconsciously acted upon configurations of ingredients – bread, spices, skins, fragments of fruit or vegetable – to form silhouettes of birds, which he then documented with nothing more than his mobile phone. From these humble, chance-born moments, hundreds of photographs have accumulated during his daily routines, forming a kind of evolving flock of birds of their own.

Matamoro's work is permanently concerned and shaped by the question of how art can reveal structures that echo natural phenomena, particularly the emergent patterns found in bird flocks and other complex systems. Artistic observation becomes a form of creation; artworks arise not only from deliberate craft but also from responding to the rhythms of life. Meditation and daydreaming are important working methods, since these birds are part apparition, part pattern-recognition, part poetic accident – reminding us that imagination often begins in the smallest, most unassuming moments.

Din Matamoro

born Vigo, Galicia, Spain,
1958 lives in Vigo

Pájaro y otros animales [Birds and
other animals] 2008-20

inkjet prints on cotton rag
courtesy the artist

Ann Lislegaard's work stages an encounter with a digitally animated owl, a creature long associated with prophecy, wisdom, and the thresholds between worlds. Through fragmented speech, looping gestures and an unsettling digital presence, the owl becomes an intermediary that attempts – haltingly – to articulate visions of possible futures. Lislegaard uses animation, sound and repetition to destabilise the authority traditionally granted to the oracle figure, revealing instead a voice shaped by glitches, uncertainty and competing temporalities. The work draws viewers into a speculative space where communication wavers between insight and malfunction, and where meaning is constantly in the process of being formed. In *Oracles*, the owl becomes both messenger and mystery, inviting us to reflect on how knowledge, prediction and technological mediation shape our understanding of what lies ahead.

Ann Lislegaard

born Oslo, Norway 1962
lives in Copenhagen,
Denmark

Oracles, owls... some animals never sleep
2012-18

3D animation with sound
courtesy the artist and palace enterprise,
Copenhagen

Noemi Pfister has created three paintings, for the three floors of the exhibition, each relating to either ants, flowers or birds. In them the main protagonist is Krtek, a little cartoon mole from a Czech cartoon series of the same name. Krtek has an optimism and gentle curiosity that made him an icon of childhood across Eastern and Central Europe in the late 1950s onwards. Created in 1956 by Zdeněk Miler, Krtek portrayed a world that avoided direct propaganda and modelled cooperation, resourcefulness, collective care and a belief in the agency of natural beings – values that in Noemi Pfister’s work continue to embrace.

Pfister is interested in the moral and emotional atmosphere Krtek produced: a politics of kindness, attention, and non-heroic protagonists who navigate their environments with resilience and a deep sense of mutuality and interest in others. The three motifs in these works—an ant, a flower, and a bird—recreate a personal version of a Medieval bestiary referenced throughout the exhibition; a genre that presents animal behaviours as possessing the moral and ethical values that too often humans relativize or dismiss.

Noemi Pfister

born Locarno, Switzerland
1991

lives Basel, Switzerland

(Birds) (Ants) and (Flower) from the
series *Sugar Rush 2026*

all works oil on canvas
courtesy the artist

Onboard the 1766 voyage led by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville there was a woman named Jeanne Barret who disguised herself as a man so that she could be a servant to Expedition Botanist Philibert Commerson, who was also her lover.

Commissioned by the French government, the voyage took naturalists, astronomers and artists to the so-called 'New World' to record and collect natural specimens. After crossing the Atlantic and entering the Strait of the Magellan the ship moored in South America. Bougainville ordered ailing Commerson to stay on board while his servant went ashore to collect samples. It was here that Barret discovered the most famous specimen of the voyage, the sub-tropical flowering vine later named *Bougainvillea*. Do the drawings and pressed specimens in the Paris Museum of Natural History belong to Barret? Only Commerson's name appears in records.

Bougainville 'discovered' (or rather, charted and named) the island of Bougainville in 1768. He sailed through the Solomon Islands, passing along the east coast, naming the island in his own honour.

In the digital drawing titled, *What's in a name?* Taloi Havini is curious about bringing to the surface a pastiche of collaged references that play with the idea of 'discovery'; a concept at the forefront of French and English Empirical consciousness.

By flirting with the readymade digital tools available to her, and through sourcing images from digitised natural historical collections on the internet, she also alludes specifically to her current era of the PowerPoint presentation aesthetic.

Continued overleaf

Havini's own identity contends with the name Bougainville. When asked where she comes from, she naturally says she is a Bougainvillean. Sometimes naming becomes practical. Sometimes it is honouring. Naming is subjective, and it is idealistic and it can be romantic. For her a name is only a name, and as someone who has many of them, she considers names to be like recordings that exist through points of contact.

This work was specially commissioned for the exhibition to reflect on Bougainville, the name of the island from which the artist comes.

Taloi Havini

born Bourgainville, Papua
New Guinea 1981
lives Meanjin, Brisbane

What's in a name? 2023

digital print on paper
courtesy the artist and Milani
Gallery, Meanjin, Brisbane

Eric Thake

born Naarm,
Melbourne
lived 1904-1982

Itchy owl (Christmas card) 1941

Linocut printed in black ink on wove paper
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
acquired by the Department of Fine Arts