

PRESENT
COMPANY

17 OCTOBER – 6 DECEMBER 2020

MΔC
Museum of Art and Culture
Lake Macquarie ▲ yapang

PRESENT
COMPANY

Damian Smith

Luke Sales / Romance Was Born

Trent Parke

Jamie North

Nell

Sara Morawetz

Karin Catt

Ian Burns

Helen Britton

curated by Meryl Ryan

MAC has always been committed to supporting and promoting artists who hail from or are based in our region through exhibitions, artist and community projects and art workshops. Emerging or well established - these artists are at our centre.

Present Company is an outstanding example. The artists, whose work is featured in the exhibition, all come from this region and made their way to national and international recognition. In presenting this project, MAC celebrates their collective creative success, encourages aspiring artists and provides an uplifting and engaging experience for our audiences.

Congratulations and many thanks to all involved: to MAC Senior Curator Meryl Ryan for her expansive curatorial vision and the amazing artists who have either agreed to lend or make these works for the exhibition; to Scott Bevan for his fresh and engaging essay; and Raelene Narraway for her catalogue design.

We also acknowledge Create NSW for ongoing program support. Without the support of all of these individuals and organisations, the exhibition would not have been possible.

We look forward to your response to this exhibition and enjoyment of the many to come.

Debbie Abraham

Director, Museum of Art and Culture, Lake Macquarie



PRESENT COMPANY



If you were hosting a dream dinner party, you could not ask for better guests than this group.

Photographers Trent Parke and Karin Catt. Multi-disciplinary artists Helen Britton, Sara Morawetz and Nell. Sculptors and installation artists Jamie North and Ian Burns. Ballet dancer Damian Smith. Fashion designer Luke Sales, co-founder of the Romance Was Born label.

Each of these nine artists has turned talent and tenacity into careers that have transported them around the world and into extraordinary experiences. What each has created is not just compelling and provocative art but amazing lives for themselves.

Through what they have created, the artists in this company have taken us with them, transporting us into their lives and deeper into our own lives.

Collectively, the art of this company opens doors, opens eyes and opens minds.

If creativity takes courage, as Henri Matisse argued, then each of these artists is courageous and fearless. Which makes each of them all the more enticing as dinner party guests.

However, in this strange time of COVID-19, that dinner party has to remain a dream for the moment. While their creations are in the same room for this exhibition, it is near-on impossible for the artists to be.

But, in many respects, they are all together.

The artists are made present by their past. For each of these people are from the Hunter. And where they are from has also shaped who they are and what they do.

And while they may be far from the lake, their art has found a place at MAC with this exhibition. In fact, we all can find a place in the gallery, sharing time and space. Never mind social distancing; here we are, connected by creativity. So make yourself at home, and revel in what you see, with *Present Company*.

Helen Britton has been based in Munich for about 20 years, but this internationally renowned jewellery maker has never lost sight of 'home'.

To her, home is Australia 'because of my connections to people and land' – and water.

Helen was born in Lithgow, but when she was a baby, her family moved to Newcastle, living on the fringe of the wetlands at Shortland. When Helen was about seven, the family headed to Warners Bay.

Lake Macquarie flowed into her life.

'The lake was very, very important for me,' Helen says, as we chat via the form of communication that will be synonymous with COVID-19: Zoom. 'It was a place of mystery and excitement.'

She would swim in the lake, peer into its depths and explore the banks of the creeks feeding it, even though back then those waterways were treated as little more than drains. To Helen, it was all a portal to adventure. She vividly recalls seeing an octopus at Warners Bay.

'Those kinds of experiences as a child, the images, they never leave you,' she says. 'It's a momentary image of maybe a second or two seconds, but they're in your mind permanently. They're such an exciting moment.'

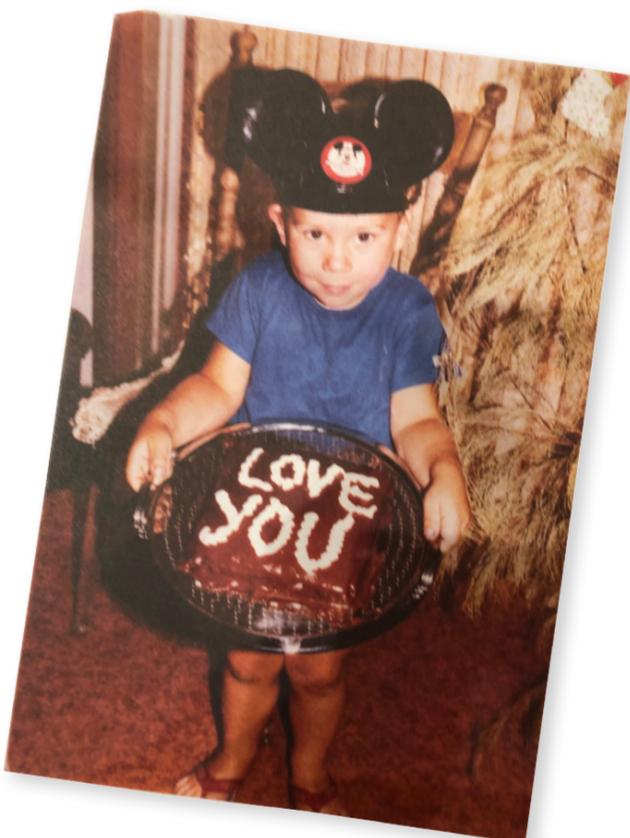
Helen also became fascinated with how materials could be shaped and transformed. That fascination was fed by her home region. The future artist-jeweller recalled visiting the BHP steelworks on a school excursion, watching molten metal being poured.

'So it was a parallel moment to seeing the giant octopus in the lake,' she says.

Around the same time as Helen was finding her way in Warners Bay, across the lake at Blackalls Park, Ian Burns was making his way on the water, canoeing and sailing, fishing and dreaming.

'We'd scavenge. You'd leave home with a couple of slices of bread and a fishing line, and you'd try to catch some bait, then you'd move up to trying to catch something bigger,' Ian says via Zoom from his New York City home.

'I spent a lot of time thinking, a lot of time napping on the jetty. It was a very visual experience, I guess, just enjoying what's around you.'



As a student, Ian wanted to pursue art, but he 'drifted' into engineering, working in that field until he was about 30. He quit his job, practised ceramics, studied fine arts at the University of Newcastle then, in the late 1990s, left for the United States.

Like his life and career, Ian has been making installations that are assembled from fascinating bits and pieces, creating works that are eclectic and kinetic.

Ian says whenever he is asked how long it has taken him to make a particular work, he often replies by quoting Mark Rothko's response to that kind of question: 'All my life'. 'Obviously, you're the sum of your experiences,' Ian says.

'I think a lot of good artists just conflate their experiences, lots of experiences in life, and make something.'

Some years after Ian was exploring and scavenging around the lake, and just a few kilometres away in Toronto, Damian Smith dreamed of pursuing his passion for dancing. He would literally leap onto the world's stage for ballet companies in Europe and the United States, including as a principal dancer with the San Francisco Ballet for more than a decade. But the Wonnarua man felt that his feet and soul remained connected to the Hunter, which he considers 'my home, my country'.

By boat, the journey across the lake from Toronto to the shores of Swansea takes only about 20 or minutes or so. And it was around there that a young Jamie North would venture onto the water with his father, fishing and observing, scooping up the foundations of his future career as an artist.

Jamie grew up in Caves Beach, when it was a 'new suburb that was carved out of the coastal scrub'.

As a sculptor, Sydney-based Jamie often makes something out of nothing, turning the ugly into something beautiful, constructing and creating works from what most of us destroy and discard. It was a practice Jamie developed as a boy. Being the son of a bricklayer, Jamie fossicked around building sites and the bush to see what he could find, working out what could be reused.

What's more, feeling as though he wasn't connected to 'that raw edge of suburbia' where he lived, Jamie literally put down roots. It is something he still does, as plant life sprouts from the rubble, recycled and reimagined, in many of his sculptures.

'I was always doing plant experiments, repurposing things, forming attachments to rocks and sticks, bringing them home and binding them with twine and melting wax over them,' he explains of his childhood. 'There was always something going on.'

For Trent Parke, the backyard of his family's home in another relatively new suburb, Rankin Park, was filled with trees and wonder. He considered it part of his 'amazing childhood' in Newcastle, with four touchstones: the bush, the beach, the lake and the suburbs.

'Those parts of Australian life have stayed with me and my work, and what I've focused on,' says Trent, whose photos show how he composes snippets of life in his viewfinder and then performs visual alchemy by turning what he sees into poetry.

Yet home also holds painful memories for Trent Parke. When he was 13, his mother, Dianne, died suddenly of an asthma attack in their house. Dianne was a photographer, and she had a darkroom in the laundry. After losing his mother, Trent picked up her camera. The teenager felt impelled to try and catch light and time – and emotion.

'The first pictures I remember taking were of my footsteps walking out of the laundry,' he says. 'And they were wet. Seeing my footsteps on the cement, quickly turning around, and taking that picture of my footprints, and then watching those footprints evaporate in a few seconds...

'So I guess the camera has then, as a result, for me, been my way of holding onto time, and not letting things slip away.'

From seizing the ephemeral to shooting stars. One night in the early 1980s, 12-year-old Lambton girl Karin Catt headed into town with her camera to photograph INXS lead singer Michael Hutchence at Newcastle Workers Club. Both INXS and Karin Catt would grow into giants in their respective fields. As a photographer of cultural and political leaders, Karin has trained her eye on some of the most famous faces of our times, from Nelson Mandela and Jack Nicholson to Bill Clinton and Elton John, peeling off their mask in portraits that look simple but say so much.

A little further west of Lambton and Rankin Park, young Sara Morawetz was more than likely in her room in the family home at Edgeworth, reading a book.

'I was probably in the library more often than not,' Sara says of her early years.

As a teenager, Sara attended Newcastle Grammar School, where she had a view to the future.

'I had a favourite window overlooking the sea, so I spent a lot of time in there, reading from various different sources, piecing them together. I was always fascinated about how things intersect,' Sara says, explaining how her interests journeyed across disciplines, from history and philosophy to sociology and anthropology. 'You can't just look at the small picture.'

Like some explorer during the age of the Enlightenment, Sara has headed out into the world, pursuing her interests in both art and science. She is particularly interested in 20th-century science and conceptual art. One of her recent projects was *étalon*, which involved Sara walking across France to rediscover the metre. More than exploring that unit of length, the artist was also seeing how she measured up, testing and challenging herself, and pushing the limits of her knowledge.

'I'd never call myself a scientist as such,' says Sara, who studied visual arts and is married to mathematics researcher Darren Engwirda. 'But I like to think about how scientists work and spend a lot of time observing them, particularly at home!'

Sara sees science 'as a tool to test ideas, and I think art has that same capacity'.

'It's what I try to do with my work. I see them as running in parallel. We're testing different outcomes, and we're hoping for different outcomes in what we test, but the ultimate thing is discovery.'

About 40 minutes' drive up the valley from Newcastle, in Maitland, a teenager named Nell was learning how to be a 'Renaissance woman' in the 1980s and early 1990s.

To her, cultural life was a feast, and she wanted to devour it all. But she had to go looking for it – and to create it herself.

'I would jump out my window at night, go around the back to the garden shed, turn the light on and make little watercolours,' she recalls.

'Without any particular role model, I just painted and drew and made children's books and tie-dyed clothes and wrote bad poetry and played bad guitar.'

Living in Maitland, Nell noted, the absence of ready access to the cultural life she craved 'fostered a rich internal life, an imaginative life and a resourcefulness to make things that you had at hand, and that certainly stayed with me.'

'Maybe if I'd grown up in a cosmopolitan and stimulating environment, I wouldn't be the person I am.'

A few kilometres away, at East Maitland, the career of a celebrated fashion designer was taking shape. A teenage Luke Sales was turning cast-offs found in op shops (quite a few of this company spent their childhood years in second-hand stores, exploring and discovering) into striking wearable statements, using sewing skills his mother had taught him.

They didn't know each other then, but Luke and Nell shared a craving to create and a desire to find the culture they couldn't unearth even in the local op shops.

'I used to sit in my bedroom window and I could hear the courthouse bells chime, and the town hall bell chime on the hour,' recalls Nell. 'And I used to think, "This must be what it was like to grow up in Europe", and then I used to think, "It's an hour closer to when I can leave".'

Nell did leave Maitland, as soon as she finished high school. She headed to Sydney. So did Luke Sales.

While studying in Sydney, he met Anna Plunkett, another aspiring designer from a regional centre, Albury, and they founded their label, Romance Was Born.

Nell has studied, exhibited and performed around the globe, crossing borders, just as she has done with her art, embracing drawing and sculpture, painting and music. The sum of those experiences has not only broadened her world view, it has sharpened her focus on where she has come from.

'I think part of being a young person is rejecting where you came from and using it as an energetic springboard to propel you into other parts of the world, which I did,' Nell says. 'And you think it has no bearing, but it is a massive part of who I am.'

As COVID-19 took hold of the world early in 2020, the scent of home literally helped Sara Morawetz breathe easier.

She and her husband had been living in New York City for more than six years. When the pandemic led to a lockdown, Sara figured she could cope. After all, for one of her performance pieces, *How the stars stand*, she lived in a gallery for more than a month, her days and nights regulated by Mars time.

But then, both Sara and Darren Engwirda became infected with COVID-19.

'I was sick for three weeks with high fevers, body aches, lack of smell, lack of taste,' she explains. 'It was quite full-on. That was happening during the massive wave that went through New York City.'

'If we were in Australia, I think we absolutely would have gone to a hospital, but the system in New York was so overrun.'

In the search for some relief, the couple reached back to their Australian childhood by putting eucalyptus oil drops in boiling water and inhaling the steam.

'We knew that we were struggling, and we knew this [technique] works from when we were children, and doing it when you had a cold, so "Let's try it out",' she says. 'And it really did help.'

For an artist who had explored the meaning of measuring length with the metre, Sara Morawetz gained a new insight into distance, as she inhaled eucalyptus vapours in order to breathe.

'You definitely got a sense of how far away you were from home.'

To the east of Sara's apartment in Brooklyn, Ian Burns was in his home at Queens, watching the pandemic tear through the city he had lived in for more than 20 years. His life, and his pursuit of art, suddenly became more contained.

'We're not far from Jamaica Hospital here,' Ian recalls. 'So when it started, all we were hearing were ambulances. We had neighbours who got it [COVID-19].'

'You just had to be careful. Very careful.'

Helen Britton is used to travelling for work, attending exhibitions of her jewellery, drawings, and installations around the world. But with the pandemic, she has been confined to her German base, unable to get 'home'.

'I have to try not to cry,' she says.

What's more, the COVID-related restrictions and lockdown have impacted on her work, which she finds frustrating.

As Helen says, 'I am my work, Scott.'

Yet what brings Helen some comfort is that at least a part of her will be keeping company with other Hunter-raised artists during this time of isolation.

'To be able to show my practice, who I am and what I make, as somebody who still identifies very strongly with Newcastle, is really – also emotionally – very, very important.'

For Trent Parke, who lives in Adelaide, this exhibition represents a homecoming, all the way back to his boyhood backyard. And by virtue of what he is exhibiting, he is inviting all of us into the space behind his family home at Rankin Park.

The ethereal images of cockatoos are just 18 pieces from a very large visual 'jigsaw' titled *The Black Rose*, the culmination of a seven-year project in which Trent explored the concept of home. And that project, along with a vivid dream he had, brought him home.

He set out to capture with his camera what he had seen in his dream. He spent weeks in his father's backyard, taking thousands of photographs, including many images of the visiting birdlife. He even built himself a bird hide of out an old cubby house.

'Each morning and night, I sat there for hours on end, waiting for the cockatoos to come in and land on Dad's bird-feeding post,' he says. 'It was quite therapeutic. And, visually, there are these incredible big white birds.'

What's more, as he discovered while being back home, the memory of his mum was towering over him. Trent learnt from the neighbours that a big old gum in their yard was known as the Dianne Tree, because she had once fought to save it from being bulldozed.

'Sure enough, in a literal way, after seven years of diving into different aspects of home,' Trent says, 'that's how it all ended up. Mum really was standing there, looking over us, in the form of this amazing tree.'

So for Trent, to be part of *Present Company* is also about embracing the past. It also allows him to acknowledge and celebrate where a journey through a dream/life began.

'If you can't shoot in your own backyard, you can't shoot anywhere,' Trent says of his work.

'It's imagination. Imagination is the key to it all. You have to be able to sit there and imagine something, and then turn something from nothing into something amazing.'

Sara Morawetz and Darren Engwirda have recently moved to Santa Fe, in New Mexico, where she is relishing the space and the light. Those two elements remind her of Australia.

The move also reconnects her with an ongoing project called *Letters Home*. Whenever Sara changes address, she writes a letter and sends one to every place she has ever lived.

'A lot of letters go to these random addresses all through Newcastle that I lived in, in varying points in my life,' she says. 'Sometimes people get back in touch with me. They find me. "I got this letter from you!"'

Right now, the project assists her to measure more than the distance from here to there, from now to then; it helps Sara work out where home is.

'You think 2020 and the year that has been, the distance from home, and being far from home, has probably never felt stronger in that sense,' she says. 'It's a strange thing. It ebbs and flows.'

The Hunter is renowned for what it exports. We even export the very ground we stand on.

But whatever we send out comes back.

In the case of coal, it is often returned as cheap consumable goods, ideal for cluttering our lives.

But when we send brilliant minds and creative souls out into the world, what they give back is invaluable. They send back a part of themselves. They send back a part of us.

In their own way, each of the artists in *Present Company* is doing what Sara Morawetz does, composing letters home.

And, as this exhibition demonstrates, we are the fortunate recipients. As a result, it is not just the artists whose lives are enriched and enlarged by what they create.

And what they create keeps them close.

No matter what distance these artists cover, no matter how much time passes, no matter even the effects of a pandemic, through what they create, and why, home is with them.

As Nell tells me, 'Home is always part of you.'

Which means we are always with them.

And they're with us. We are together.

We are past, future, present company.

Scott Bevan

Hunter-based writer and broadcaster Scott Bevan is a Lake Macquarie-based writer and broadcaster. His latest book is *The Lake: Exploring A Splendid Sheet of Water*.

Pictured previous spread, L-R: Nell, Luke Sales, Trent Parke, Ian Burns. Images courtesy of the artists.

DAMIAN SMITH



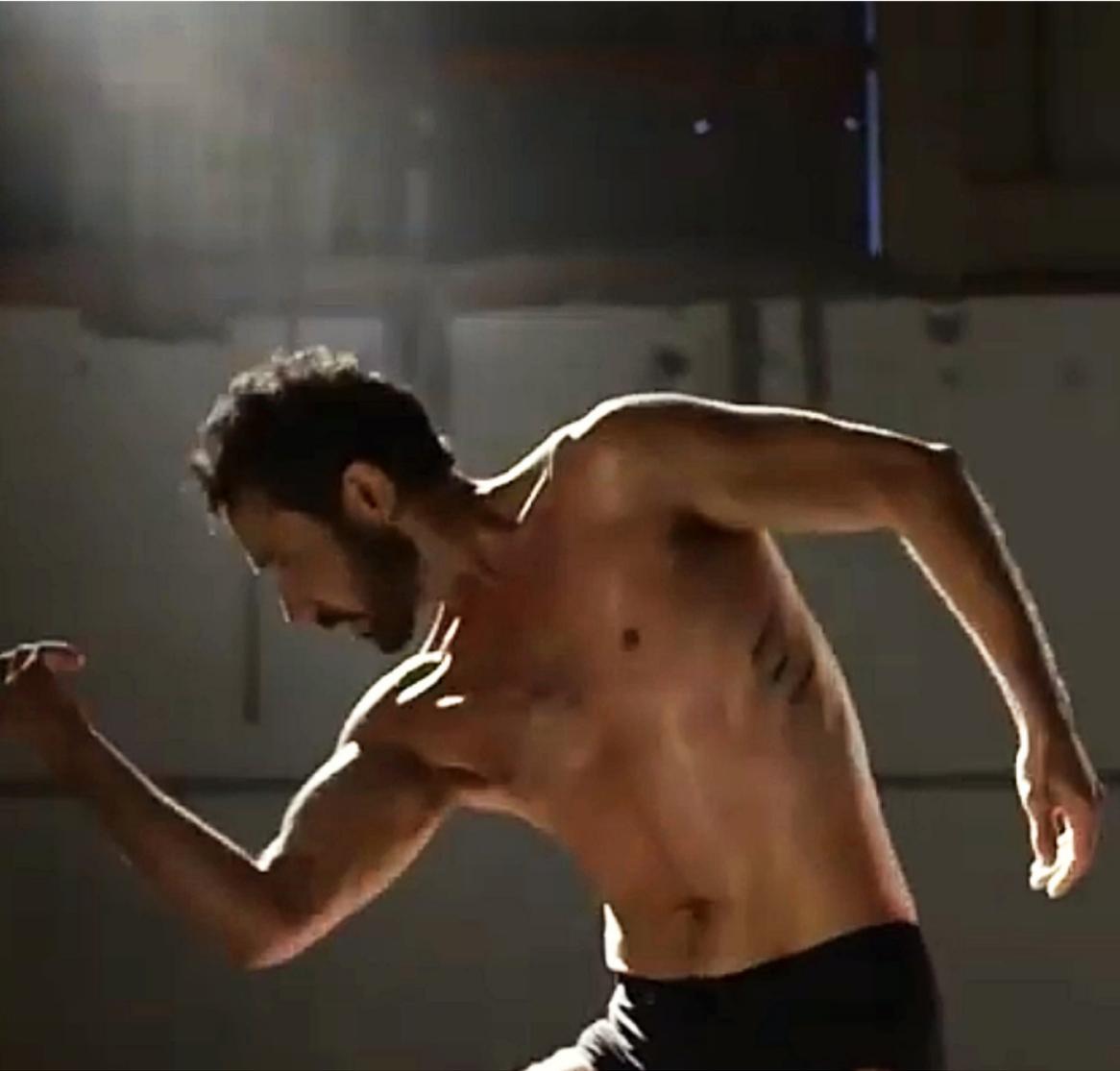
Born in 1973 and growing up in public housing in the coastal town of Toronto, Damian Smith went on to become one of Australia's most internationally acclaimed male ballet dancers. At age 16, after finishing studies at The McDonald College in Sydney, he was offered a full scholarship to continue his training at the School of American Ballet in New York City, USA. His professional career began in France, and he toured Europe with Ballet Du Nord before becoming a Principal Dancer with the San Francisco Ballet (from 2001). Throughout his 25-year career, Smith has performed across continents in over 200 ballets, with over 25 having been created for him. He retired from the San Francisco Ballet in 2014 and returned to Australia in 2018 to become the Artistic Director of the National Theatre Ballet School in Melbourne. Since his impressive international stage career, he has undertaken new projects exploring the influence of dance on his life, and his Wonnarua identity. His short film *Arrellah* (2014) was created for the 45th anniversary of the San Jose Museum of Art and *As Is*, for the Mostly British Film Festival (2015).

The Hunter Valley is my home, my Country, and has been for my ancestors of thousands of years. Even though I have spent most of my professional career in the United States and Europe, there is no denying the connection and sense of belonging I have with the Hunter region. As a Wonnarua man, it's my birthplace and the closest to my heart. It's where I am most connected to the earth, my family and my true self. This is the purpose of my film; to strip away the elements of production and reveal the raw artistry and artist and perform within my chosen genre of artistic expression simply as it is.

All images are stills from *As is*.
Damian Smith in performance.

As is 2015
video performance
duration 3:52mins

Courtesy of the artist



LUKE SALES / ROMANCE WAS BORN



Luke Sales remembers making regular visits to the local op shops while growing up in Maitland in the 1990s. His passion for clothes took him to East Sydney TAFE's Fashion Design Studio where he first met Anna Plunkett (born 1982 in Albury, NSW). In 2005, they were both selected for a prestigious competition in Italy that led to the offer of internships with Galliano at Dior in Paris, which they were not prepared for. They turned down the offer, recognised a shared vision and created their own distinctive fashion label, Romance Was Born. Alongside Plunkett, Sales has welcomed collaboration with celebrated artists including Del Kathryn Barton, Nell, and Jenny Kee, and iconic international brands such as Lego, Marvel and Disney. Romance Was Born foregrounds the relationship between fashion and art and the evocation of emotion. Each garment is an immersive cultural experience rich in characterful fabrics, embroidery, detailed appliqué, vintage elements, and other fascinating details. The duo's dedication and wild imaginations have seen their garments attract exhibitions at major museums and red-carpet showcase by celebrities like Cate Blanchett, Miley Cyrus, Nicki Minaj, Cyndi Lauper

and many more. Pieces by Romance Was Born are held in major collections including Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, and the National Gallery of Victoria. In 2018 Thames & Hudson published the monograph *Romance Was Born: A Love Story with Fashion*, detailing the team's rise to prominence.

Romance was Born (Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales).
Photo Daniel Boud (above)

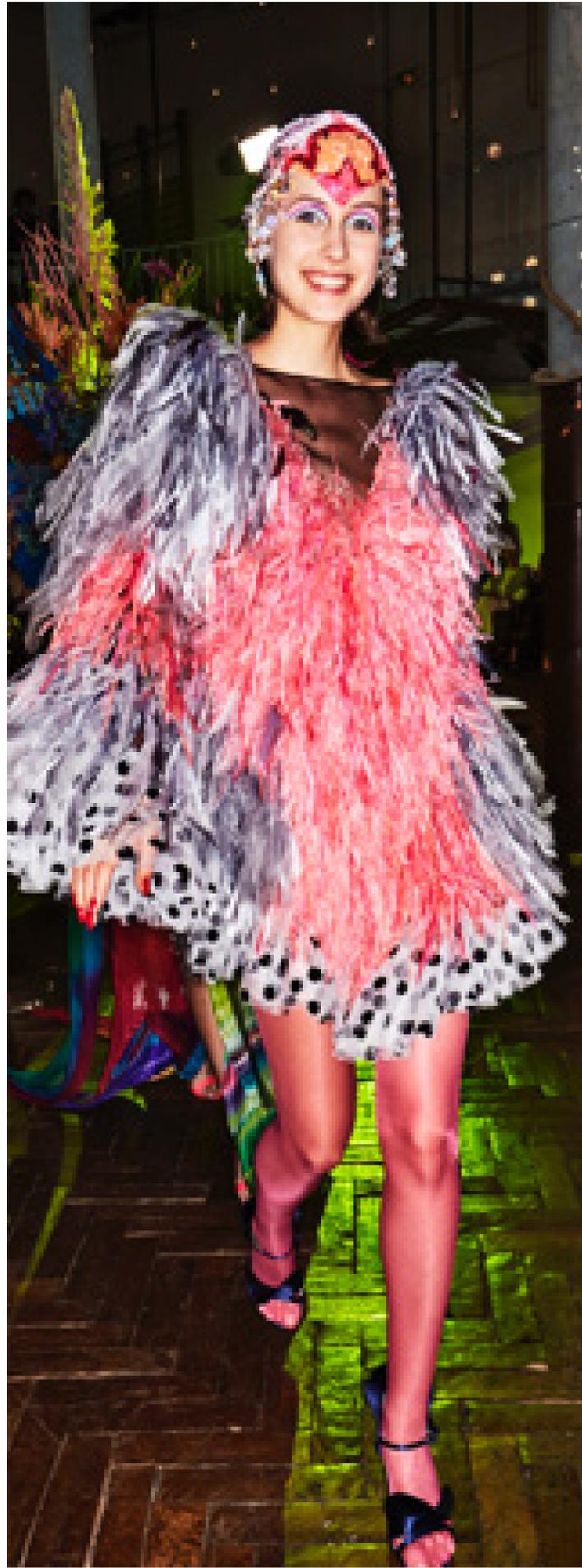
Rainbow Lorikeet Gown from 'step into paradise
'kinda couture' collection' 2018 (right)

Uni Oz Patchwork Jacket Dress from 'step into paradise
'kinda couture' collection' 2018 (centre)

Galah Showgirl Dress from 'step into paradise
'kinda couture' collection' 2018 (far right)

Courtesy of Romance Was Born





TRENT PARKE



Award-winning photographer Trent Parke is distinguished among artists for his evocative and darkly poetic imagery exploring psychological states and ideas of home and family. Born in Newcastle in 1971, and comfortable with a camera from a very early age, Parke set up a laundry-based darkroom as a teenager to develop and control his own images. A career in photojournalism took him from a cadetship with the *Newcastle Herald* and work with *The Australian* newspaper to eventual selection in 2007 as the first Australian member of the prestigious Magnum Photo Agency. Currently based in Adelaide, South Australia, he has recently published his seventh book, *Crimson Line* (the first, *Dream/Life*, in 1999). Parke strives for images that capture the meaning and experience of the moment, with many of those moments being in some way autobiographical. His work has been widely exhibited and is held in significant collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney as well as Artbank, The Sir Elton John Collection and many other private collections.

*Thursday 4th of July
4.30am.*

I am standing still in the backyard of my Newcastle home.

Down the very back where the tin pool used to be.

Its late .

The sun has slipped from the horizon and the once blue sky is now white. The colour DE saturated from the dark surrounding landscape.

I am looking back at our white weatherboard house.

Behind it, a dense hill of black silhouetted gum trees. (What's left of the bush after the sprawl of the 70's took place.)

From the left of the house, one of the many towering trees in our yard that once jointed the gully beneath the hill, suddenly starts falling directly towards me.

Birds , cicadas, flying insects, shaken from their perches evacuate.

Fleeing into the evening sky as the gum tree comes crashing down.

I do not move. The massive tree lands at my feet and the earth shakes.

Then another starts to fall, and another.

Possums jump from branch to branch.

They continue to crash at the base of my feet. All missing me by centimetres.

Every time a tree misses me I think 'boy, that was lucky'. (Something my dad would always say.)

In the end I am completely surrounded.

Boy, was I lucky.

I am lucky.

I look to the tree-less sky.

Silent.

It is completely filled with the birds, cicadas and insects, all hovering mid flight, like remote controlled toys.

I marvel at this and then climb up onto the fallen trunk and look back to the house. It is untouched.

There is one tree left in the yard.

At that moment dad walks out through the back screen door.

He walks up to the last giant tree and with a puzzling expression gives it a small shove.

The tree comes toppling my way.

Again it misses me.

I climb up onto it and look inside.

The entire trunk is damp, black, rotted.

It crumbles under my touch

I have the uncontrollable feeling it's somehow been eating itself alive.

Trent Parke's recounting of the dream which was the catalyst for making the body of work featured in this exhibition.



Trent Parke. Photo: Narelle Autio (left)
Trent Parke's bird hide in Newcastle (above)
Courtesy of the artist



Backyard dream 2011 from 'The Black Rose' (overleaf)
installation of 18 inkjet prints on cotton photo rag
each 84 x 70cm. Courtesy of the artist and
Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide, and Michael Reid, Sydney





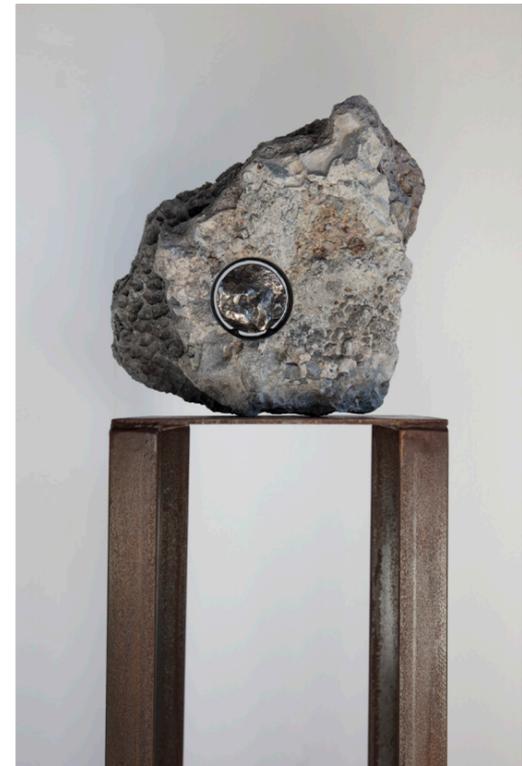


JAMIE NORTH



In view of his background, it's not difficult to understand where much of the inspiration for Jamie North's conceptually rich and uniquely beautiful sculptural forms derives. Born in Belmont, he grew up by Lake Macquarie surrounded by bushland with Newcastle's industrial area not far away. He forged an art practice at the intersection of the man-made and the natural with many of his signature concrete sculptures conceived to be inhabited by Australian native plants. North has earned prestigious residencies in the USA, Turkey and Singapore and is much in demand for public art commissions throughout this country. His works have been widely exhibited and are held in institutional collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart. In 2016, his monumental work *Succession* – now a much-loved part of the collection and a feature of MAC's sculpture park – was selected for the 20th Biennale of Sydney.

It has taken time and distance to appreciate the value of growing up in my part of the Hunter. In some ways it was relatively isolated from the cultural and social things that are readily accessible to those who grew up in big city environments. However, I credit that distance with helping me to evolve my conceptual ideas which are greatly influenced by the Hunter's attributes, those of remnant bushland, beach, suburbia and industry. Interesting things can happen on the fringes, distinct from the centre where ideas can have a certain sameness.



Moving Mountains (Dearborn no.1) 2016
silver gelatin print on Ilford cotton rag
112.5 x 142cm (framed), edition of 3 + 2AP

Moving Mountains (Dearborn no.2) 2016
silver gelatin print on Ilford cotton rag
112.5 x 142cm (framed), edition of 3 + 2AP

Moving Mountains (Dearborn no.4) 2016 (right)
silver gelatin print on Ilford cotton rag
112.5 x 142cm (framed), edition of 3 + 2AP

Slag Study no 6 2019 (above)
blast furnace slag, stainless steel, epoxy

Courtesy of the artist

Succession 2016
cement, steel, steel slag, coal ash, oyster shell,
organic matter
2 pieces: 450 x 90cm, 420 x 90cm
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift
Program in memory of Kerry North, 2017
Cultural Collections, Lake Macquarie



NELL



Nell's practice crosses over conceptual and performance art, painting, sculpture, music and immersive installation. Her work deals with big issues such as life and death, through a distinctive aesthetic and iconography featuring references to religion mixed with her first passion, rock 'n' roll. Born in 1975 in Maitland, Nell moved to Sydney in her late teens to attend art school. Her studies took her from Sydney College of the Arts to the University of California, USA, and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France, with influential mentors that included Lindy Lee, Joan Jonas, John Baldessari and Annette Messenger. Before the age of 30, she had exhibited in USA, the Netherlands and India. Nell is the recipient of several internationally recognised grants and awards, her work has been exhibited widely, including selection for the 2016 Adelaide Biennial, and is held by significant collections including Art Gallery of South Australia; Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; and the University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane. In 2011, she collaborated with the iconic fashion label Romance Was Born in a large-scale exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria and has completed a number of public art installations including the most recent *Eveleigh Treehouse* with its much-admired public engagement component.

I grew up in Maitland, in the same house from when I was born until when I left for Sydney to go to art school. It's challenging to say what growing up in Maitland was like, because I don't have anything to compare it to. I remember playing a lot of sport – hockey, athletics, cricket, judo and tennis. And I remember watching a LOT of sport on TV – mostly cricket and rugby. I craved cultural stimulation and there wasn't much to be found. My saviour was the radio. In chronological order it was 2KO Saturday Night Jukebox, 2NX, NEW FM and then when I was 16 years old Triple J. My dad's record collection helped too. Without any encouragement or role model, I drew and painted, made children's books, tie-died clothes, wrote (bad) poetry and played (bad) guitar. But I couldn't wait to leave as I knew the whole world was waiting for me! In retrospect, there is no doubt that the absence of the cultural life I wished for fostered a rich imaginative life and a deep resourcefulness within me to make things regardless of the circumstances. And yet, growing up in Maitland seeped into my practice – the music from the radio, blow-flies, the aesthetics of Sunday School and yes, even cricket. Maitland will always be a big part of who I am.

Nell, from *Cherine Fahd x Carriageworks // Eyes Open Eyes Closed and Something In-Between* (left), a series of portraits of the extended Carriageworks artistic community (above).
Nell. Photo Penny Lane

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, nell 2010 (right)
enamel on New Zealand kiln-dried pine
213 x 76cm

from mother to daughter - all relationships are endless 2010
(centre)
enamel on New Zealand kiln-dried pine
215 x 76cm

A year on earth 2011 (far right)
enamel on New Zealand kiln-dried pine
203 x 76cm

Some of the things that I AM 2011
enamel on New Zealand kiln-dried pine
213 x 228cm

TODAY - A baby is born 2011
enamel on New Zealand kiln-dried pine
203 x 76cm

Eucalyptus Ghost Song 2020
hand blown glass, eucalyptus leaves from South Eveleigh
110 x 90 cm (ghost 57 x 40 x 38cm)

Courtesy of the artist and STATION,
Sydney and Melbourne

SARA MORAWETZ



Sara Morawetz is an interdisciplinary artist fascinated with the 'Scientific Method' and the implications this has philosophically. Born in 1982 and raised in Lake Macquarie, she lived in New York City for six years before very recently moving to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her practice explores the systems of standardisation we have employed to manage a chaotic world and how these constructs can be interrogated through artistic inquiry. Morawetz's recent work has engaged a number of collaborations between the arts and sciences, including partnerships with scientists from NASA, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, National Institute of Standard and Technology (USA). She was winner of 'the churchie' National Emerging Art Prize in 2016, the Vida Lahey Memorial Travelling Scholarship (QAGOMA Foundation) in 2017, and a recipient of Australia Council for the Arts funding in 2018. In 2019, she delivered a TEDx talk, presenting the project *étalon*, where she walked across France in pursuit of rediscovering the metre. Her work has been exhibited throughout Australia and internationally including at the Musée des Arts et Métiers (Paris), the Australian Consulate-General New York (New York) and RAPID PULSE International Performing Arts Festival (Chicago).

Lake Macquarie's was the first gallery I was ever involved with – I was a volunteer when it was launched in 2001 (I also attended photography workshops with Izabela Pluta in Awaba House around the same time) – so in many respects, this show feels like coming full circle/homecoming. I still remember Peter Atkins' Journal work displayed in that first exhibition – it was an archive of artefacts from everyday life (I distinctly remember a collection of bread clips!). I can see aspects of that work in my own practice: the nature of collecting, temporal investigation, embedding the personal within the everyday... and I believe that the opportunity to think through such work with visitors in the gallery space was very impactful in my life at that juncture.

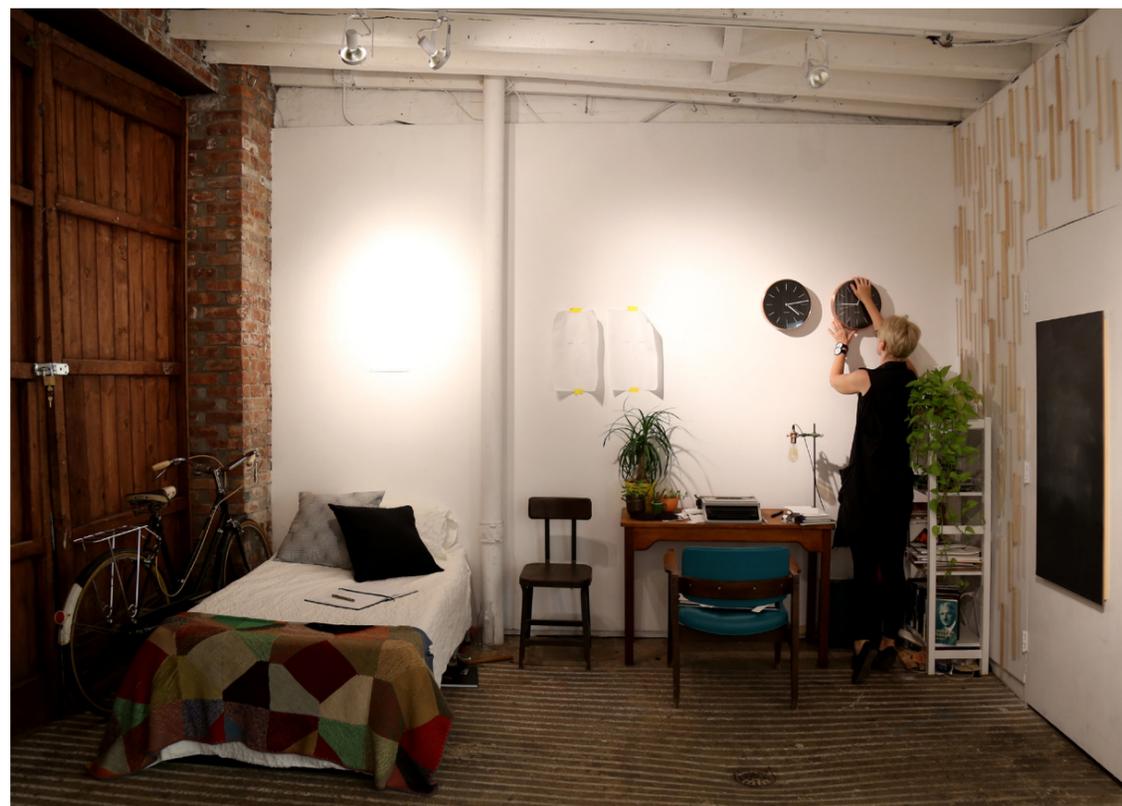
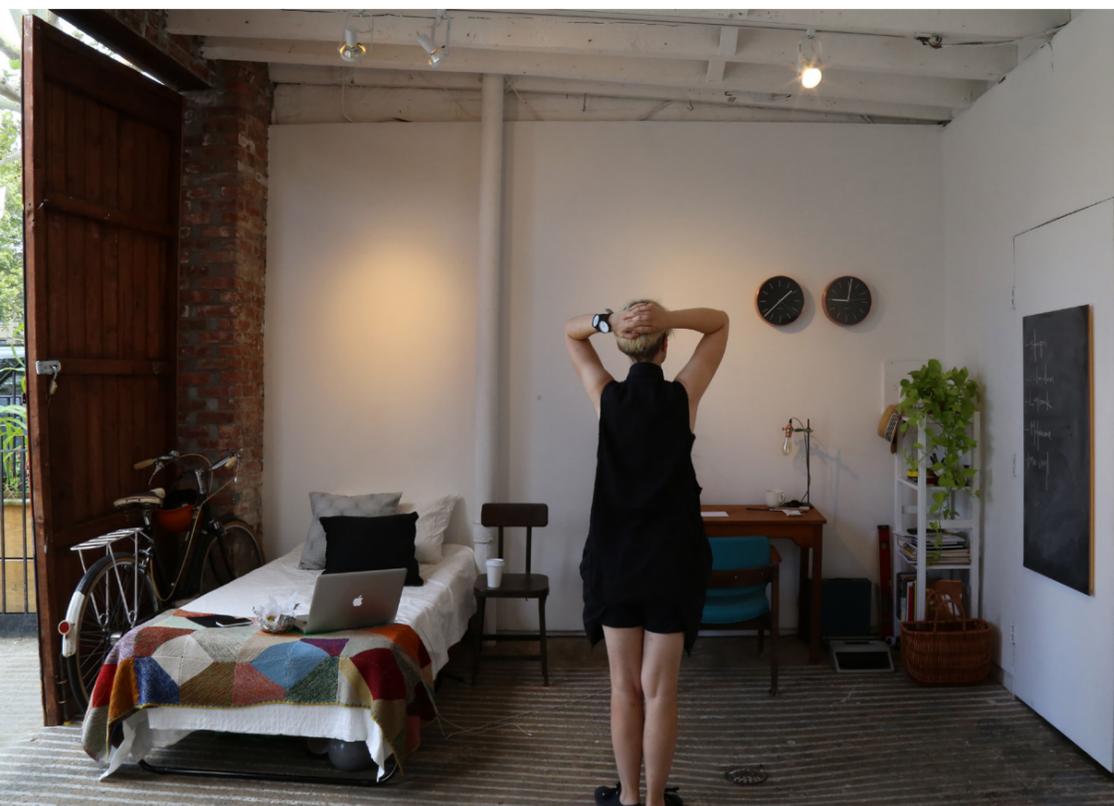
Sara Morawetz (above). Photo Lea Girardin.

How the stars stand 2015 (details right)
performance documentation - ephemera: photographs,
type, ink on card, receipts
dimensions variable

All my failures 2017
performative action: artist book, digital images
dimensions variable

Index of arbitrary measures 2019
single-channel video, colour

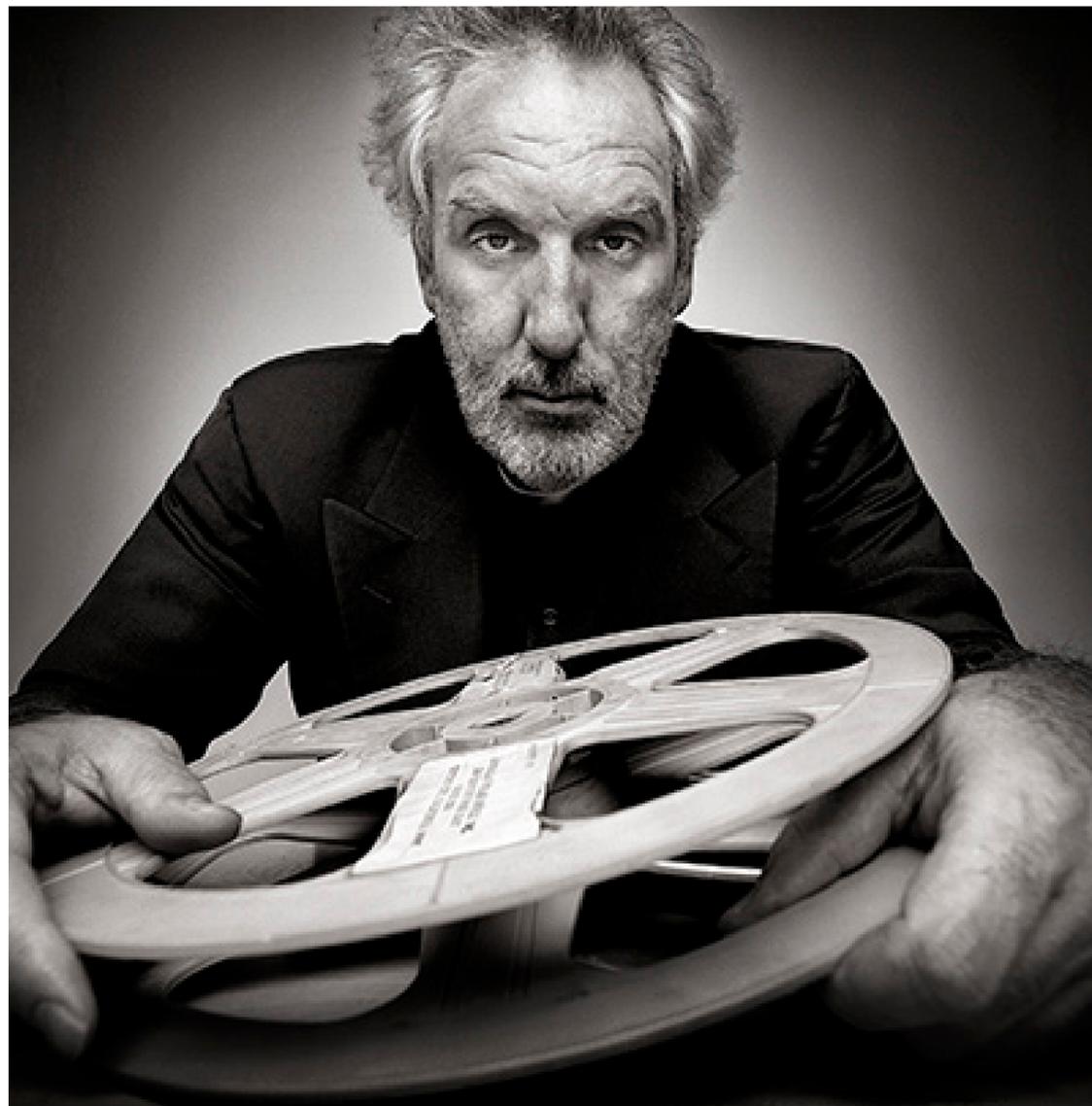
Courtesy of the artist and
Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney



KARIN CATT



As a schoolgirl growing up in Newcastle, Karin Catt began taking photographs of any touring rock bands she got to see. Among the first was INXS, and an early celebrity portrait by the then 12-year-old Catt was of Michael Hutchence. She had lived in London, Paris and New York by 2005, and built up a portfolio of portraits of musicians including Lou Reed, AC/DC, Elton John, Sting, Metallica and REM, and become personal photographer for several high-profile celebrities including Eminem on the road. Now based in Los Angeles, USA, Catt is one of Australia's most accomplished photographers, creating vivid articulate images that capture the personas of her famous subjects. She has worked all over the world for publications the like of *Rolling Stone*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Interview*, *Elle* and *Marie Claire*, and photographed many of the world's most celebrated musicians, actors and politicians, including Dalai Lama, US Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush Snr, Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev, Al Pacino, Robert DeNiro, Jack Nicholson and Cate Blanchett to name a few. In 2006, Catt became the youngest ever photographer, and only the second female artist, to have a solo exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra.



Philip Noyce 2002 (printed 2020) (above)
giclee Fine Art print on smooth 100% cotton rag
60 x 60cm

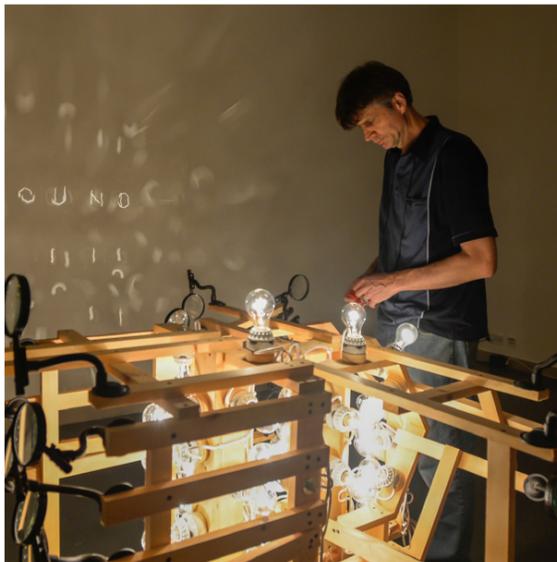
Silverchair 2002 (printed 2020) (centre)
giclee Fine Art print on smooth 100% cotton rag
60 x 60cm

Miranda Otto 2001 (printed 2020) (far right)
giclee Fine Art print on smooth 100% cotton rag

Courtesy of the artist



IAN BURNS



Based in New York City for more than 20 years, Ian Burns is one of his generation's most inventive artists. His fascinating kinetic installations explore the constructs that make up contemporary society. Working inventively with readymade objects, he provokes a critical consideration of consumerist cultures with wit and playfulness. Burns was born in 1964 and grew up in Blackalls Park, Lake Macquarie, originally training in Melbourne as an engineer. More than a decade later he made the shift to visual arts, completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Newcastle (2000); a Master of Fine Arts at Hunter College of CUNY, NY; and eventually a PhD with Griffith University, Brisbane (2008).. Burns has exhibited in many solo and group shows around the world, including in Australia, USA, UK, Germany, Ireland, Austria, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Korea, New Zealand, Norway, United Arab Emirates and Slovenia. His work is currently held in significant institutional collections including Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany; ZIC Museum, Louisville, USA; MAK Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria; Art Gallery of South Australia; Art Gallery of NSW; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria; and Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne.

Growing up on the lake was obviously pretty idyllic as a kid. I just assumed that every kid everywhere had a boat, and access to the very large playground that the lake offered. I went to Booragul High School, right there by MAC, where I got my first real taste of art classes, which I loved.

Art, however, was not considered a career and I was forbidden from pursuing it as an elective in senior school years and directed down the technical/engineering path. Before my work moved me on to Melbourne after high school, I was also a member of the Newcastle Falcons basketball team for 3 years, when they were part of the National Basketball League. As so many well know, the Hunter Valley is a pretty fortunate place, with a fantastic lifestyle and access to so many things. Coming back to the area after years away only brings this into higher relief. There has always been a big creative community and it's so great to see it being better serviced and represented through expansions of regional galleries like MAC.

Step 2014 (detail right)
piano, found objects, electronic and mechanical components,
wood, parquet floor
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts
program by the artist, 2016
Cultural Collections, Lake Macquarie



HELEN BRITTON



Multidisciplinary artist Helen Britton – born in 1966 and raised in Warners Bay – has been based in Germany for over 20 years. Her practice creates jewellery and objects, drawings, stencils and installations, and is informed by popular culture and folk art. She restores disappearing traditions on a backdrop of influences of her native Australian environment. Britton's work has been widely exhibited and is held in significant institutional collections, including the National Gallery of Australia; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Boston Museum of Fine Art, USA; and the Neue Sammlung, Munich, Germany. Britton has been awarded globally recognised awards including the Herbert Hofmann Prize for excellence in contemporary jewellery; and the State Prize of Bavaria for excellence in craft. In 2017, in conjunction with the festival of Perth, the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, presented the exhibition *Interstices*, celebrating 30 years of her practice. In 2017 Britton was also made Adjunct Professor of RMIT, Melbourne.

It is the stillness of a lake that gives a sense of calm that the restless ocean cannot provide. A stillness that can mirror the world. Actually, though, my life began on the edge of a swamp, the now protected Shortland Wetlands, at the time a hindrance of muck for creeping suburbia. Our yard backed directly onto the bulrushes, and at night the animal inhabitants would venture out to startle us kids and send us shrieking back into our brightly lit boxes.

During the day we would brave the walk across the pipeline over the rushes, being careful not to slip, watching for red belly black snakes. The disused sheds on the other side we were certain were haunted and even touching their walls with a stick would lead to death. The thrilling adventure of the swamp fed our imagination, but our home was wrought with terror and fear. One night our courageous mother packed us into the car and we left the swamp for good to arrive on the shores of Lake Macquarie at Warners Bay. The dilapidated house with 58

trees was a hard-found rental sanctuary for a woman alone with two children, at a time when divorce, regardless of the reason, was still scandalous. The lake spread out before our door, separated only by The Esplanade, a fancy name for a busy road. We were safe and I was seven years old.

Warners Bay was then a motley patch of small shops, horse paddocks, remnant bush. A wine bar. A dance hall. Quickly the shores became a space of discovery, a large octopus, purple in my recollection, slipping into the murk. Tales of eels in the creeks large enough to take a Labrador. Fishing and jumping off the jetty where the sand tipped by the council once a year would cover the shards. Bathing the horses at stinky corner and letting them roll on the rough foreshore seaweed. The water was always there before me until I left and continues to this day in my mind's eye.



***It is a stretch of years from then till now,
as I sit here and write this on the jetty of a
pristine lake tucked against the Bavarian
Alps. The pike hunt, we feed the friendly red
tails, holding old bread between our toes
until they rustle up the courage to slurp it
away, and I retain my courage to keep my
foot in the water. The expanse of the water
becomes the space of the imagination as I sit
at its edge and peer into the depths. I learnt
this long ago on that other lake, that other
life, so impressionable, fragile, damaged and
shy. I take strength from the water to this
day, its cold, weighty presence inviting me to
risk its depths, to be courageous, to slip in,
to accept its silence and its calm.***

***September 2020. Ostersee, Iffeldorf,
Germany.***

Unheimlich: The Ghost Train. When I was growing up in Australia there was the yearly Show. In fact, there still is. Everyone comes to town to show their best animal, their best vegetable and the best thing they can bake, pickle or preserve. There are show bags to be had, wonders to be seen; shearing, wood chopping, dogs with wild hairdos. A fabulous spectacle connecting the country to the city.

Then there is sideshow alley. Fun rides, shooting parlours, mangy, bad tempered ponies that children can ride at their own risk. It's a seedy scene, with rumours of sex and violence, of transient livelihoods; jailbirds and petty criminals, the underbelly. Nestled in amongst all this are The Ghost Trains.

As a small child, in a state of fear and excitement, I would avert my eyes when walking past a Ghost Train. A glimpse was enough. I was also of the firm belief that the disused railway sheds on the other side of the swamp where I grew up were haunted and that even touching the walls of these buildings with a piece of wood would lead to certain death. The fear was genuine, but so was the fascination. Carefully kept trinkets from that distant past have become symbols of a primal contradiction. The allure of the unknown and ultimately unknowable.

The rage of decoration 2019
vintage plastic, gold-plated silver
70cm long

Wisdoms Blindness 2019 (above)
silver, paint, diamonds (9.3ct natural browns)
12 x 7 x 1.5cm

Money Pig 2017
gold, paint
7 x 9 x 2cm

Golden Greeting 2017
gold
7 x 4 x 1.5cm

Last Bird 2019 (overleaf, left)
acrylic and gesso on paper
106 x 78cm

Pinocchio's Demise 2019
acrylic and gesso on paper
106c x 78cm

Wisdoms despair 2019 (overleaf, right)
acrylic and gesso on paper
106cm x 78cm

Courtesy of the artist









Museum of Art and Culture

Contact Us

Visitor Services

+61 (02) 4921 0382

mac@lakemac.nsw.gov.au

First Street Booragul, NSW 2284

mac.lakemac.com.au

Box 1906 Hunter Region MC NSW 2310

@themacmuseum

@themacmuseum

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