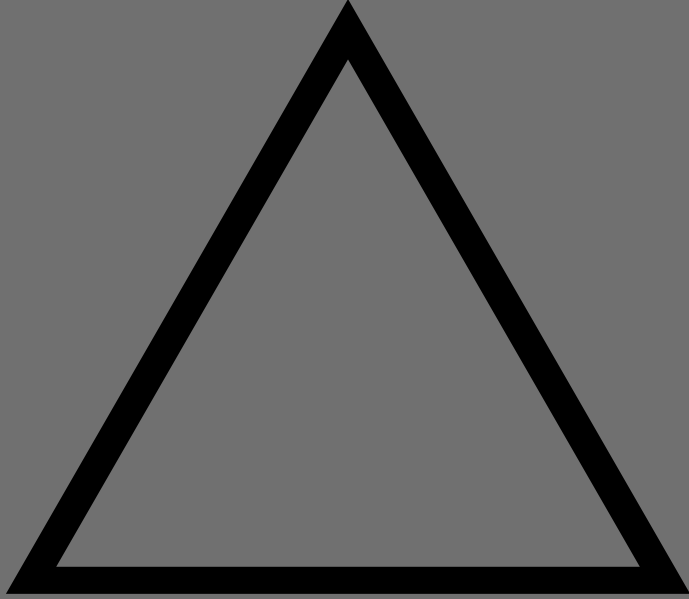


us

be

we



us.

universal stories

welcome.

We are proud to be launching Lake Macquarie City Council's redeveloped and rebranded art gallery as MAC: Museum of Art and Culture yapang, Lake Macquarie. The project has been in development since 2015 and made possible through the generous support of the NSW State Government's Regional Cultural Fund.

The three exhibitions on display show the direction MAC yapang will take to support Council's Arts Heritage and Cultural Plan by presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programming, curating contemporary art exhibitions, supporting the creation of new artwork and making the collection accessible to our community.

The last three years have been exceptional in Lake Macquarie for the development of arts and culture. Alongside MAC yapang – the first of the major infrastructure projects – we can look forward to more urban and public art, our new Multi-Arts Place opening in Speers Point, Rathmines Theatre, Windale Library and Community Centre, and Cameron Park Library Museum that will be delivered over the next five years.

I hope you enjoy the new space and I look forward to seeing the community make the most of our beautiful art museum by participating in its programs and joining in its many events for years to come.

Clr Kay Fraser

Mayor, Lake Macquarie City

foreword.

us. universal stories is one of three exhibitions marking the reopening of Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery as MAC: Museum of Art and Culture ▲ yapang, Lake Macquarie. Its place in this trio firmly reinforces our commitment to contemporary curatorial and arts practice over the past two decades and into the future.

Through art we can discover so much about the culture, ideas, people, lives, places and issues of the time. Contemporary artists will also leave their mark on history by producing material culture that interprets and critiques what is happening now, to us. This is at the heart of *us. universal stories* – a sensitive account of what is happening to the planet and how we, as humans, can come together to share concerns, feelings and a firm determination to secure the future of humanity.

Congratulations and many thanks to all involved: to Meryl Ryan for her curatorial vision; the artists who have either agreed to lend or make these moving and profound works for the exhibition; to Robert Cook, Curator of 20th Century Art, Art Gallery of Western Australia for his thought-provoking essay; and Stephen Goddard for his elegant catalogue design. Also sincere thanks to the staff and management of Art Gallery of Western Australia and Artbank, to the gallerists and their teams, and to the generous private lenders who have shared their treasures with us.

Council also acknowledges the grant from the Gordon Darling Foundation for this suite of catalogues, as well as 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 many to come. ▲

Debbie Abraham

Director

MAC: Museum of Art and Culture ▲ yapang, Lake Macquarie

introducing us.

meryl ryan

The 21st century is already marked by resolute movements for change (in economic segregation, sexual exploitation, gender identification and more); by outbreaks of dire violence (in the name of faith or ideologies); and by an increasingly informed youth voice about the health (particularly environmental, but also political) of the planet. With the hardships and unrest comes a mounting and more universal demand that the divides of old be overcome and replaced with a unity in tolerance and action. Let's hope it's finally dawning on us that we are all in this together.

For the launch of the newly extended, reconfigured and renamed art museum at Lake Macquarie, this imperative took shape to determine the rationale of this opening exhibition. With an international interest and reach, the exhibition moves across painting, photography, installation, sculpture, video and performance by significant contemporary artists, who draw on aspects of the human condition in their art practice. Transcending specific politics, culture, sexuality, religion or place, these artworks look to the big picture and suggest narratives that reflect on our nature, our primary values and our diversity to help us understand the world and make sense of each other.

As human beings we acknowledge – beyond the griefs and guilt of history – enduring shared truths: the beauty of difference, the desire for love and a sense of belonging (so rich in the works by Sam Jinks, Angelica Mesiti and Michal Rovner); the influence of fear and challenge of courage (in three haunting pieces by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah); the power of familial bonds (movingly evoked by Abdul Abdullah, Richard Lewer and Christian Thompson); the levelling and common language of music, movement and emotions (harnessed by Mesiti, Thompson, Lottie Consalvo, Chiharu Shiota and Nell); and concern for the natural world we depend on (poetically referenced by Consalvo and Alex Seton).

The largest installations in the exhibition, both in scale and breadth of thematic relevance, are by two of Australia's finest artist-storytellers: Richard Lewer and Angelica Mesiti. Commissioned for *us.*, Lewer's two new major works are conceived as meaningful partners in the installation. The multi-panelled painting *Burial in Hamilton* backgrounds a *resting place*, a procession of individualised urns produced in collaboration with ceramicist Felicity Law. Like the painting, the urns celebrate life, in death, each one memorialising the story of a lost loved one as collected, through invitation, from the broader community.

In contrast to the materiality of these works, Mesiti's immersive *Citizens Band* comprises four discrete films, played individually in sequence then simultaneously, their screens facing inwards to form a room. We eavesdrop on four people of diverse backgrounds each absorbed in recreating sounds distinctive to their cultural origins. Their music acts as an intimate form of staking belonging, of finding home away from home.

Compelling and heartfelt, the artworks in *us.* are both complex and direct. The ideas cross over, collide and resonate throughout the space to suggest meaning and unexpected connections, like life. They address what has always mattered – love/loss, vulnerability/compassion, home/belonging, survival/sustenance/preservation – and implicate urgent present-day concerns such as waste (the environment), flight (migration, refugees) and post-truth (technology, fake news, politics).

Today they talk to everyone. ▲

Meryl Ryan

Senior Curator

MAC: Museum of Art and Culture ▲ yapang,
Lake Macquarie

Alex Seton

born 1977 Sydney, NSW
based in Sydney, NSW

► *Tributes to a Past* [detail] 2019
Statuario, Bianca Carrara,
Bardiglio marbles
and stainless steel
180 x 30 x 24cm
Courtesy of the artist
and Sullivan + Strumpf
© Alex Seton



communal polyperimeters.

robert cook

Y

ou'll see this. I'm running too fast.

Maybe to catch up. With the mixed metaphors, the alsos after alsos. With the so many versions of Us. Each macro or micro alien to the other. Each

morphing into new structures, internal cohesion giving way, folding, spiralling, centres not holding (Yeats and all that). Each strange and stranger to itself (Walt Whitman's 'I contain multitudes'). Yet magnetic at times long enough for tactical solidarity, for purposeful platforms of freedom and oppression both...there being historically no clear ground, and certainly none structurally; your take on the Us as leather-gang or linen-hegemony dependent on the Us you're in, entering or leaving. The stakes at hand in that.

So we (Us) have good reason to be wary of group formations, and good reason to consider the perimeters they perform as dams and borders both. Used in the wrong way our voices are electric fences and at this point in time (as at all points in time), therefore, Us can and should be a question lest it be territory and not ground...but tipping the capital U forward, even if just a little, we release it as rhizomatic multiple, the sex which is not one (Irigaray) and the other ways this is queered (Munoz), as polyvalency and polyamoury, as adventure and relief from the mono-this, the mono-

that, the 'I' as phallic maypole, the mythologies of singularity (Lacan). And indeed, art practice right now makes itself known as such by its various ethical-reflexive interrogations of categories of the perimeter but cognisant of the ongoing ethical pleasures and necessities of the welcoming. It's a very delicate matter.

Therefore. Let's take these knots and doublings not as precedents but as analogues for what is occurring within (and about) this exhibition...as it tremors different articulations of intersubjectivity in regards to the problems and possibilities of commune-ication itself. Perhaps this flattens the matter, but it was Wittgenstein (wasn't it?) who raised the question of whether your notion of red corresponds with my notion of red (or was it pain he was writing about?). Did he mean that language, as that which joins us, is not only frighteningly indeterminate but equally based on a concept of empathy and goodwill? Something like: 'I accept your generalities as specific', and vice versa, and that: 'I accept your meaning as a kind of intent towards me, and by this I acknowledge the very fact that you are messaging and I see it as purposeful and hopeful and in this somehow feel that "I am I" because you are "I" and have made some motions to the further subdivision and unification of that'. That's the heart of the matter... and so an Us is composed and choreographed in this space of doubtful union, always tentative, needing contexts of reassurance, and replication.

This is how this particular Us, as exhibition, e-c-h-o-e-s, if I am hearing the work correctly firstly through Nell's violins: three-dimensional anthropomorphic exclamations...whose code-shifting and context dependency is integral...as we imagine them from the positions of player, viewer, listener, maker... and soundless until we feel their vibrations as we make their faces, or repurpose, by, say, blowing into them, forcing an invasive intimacy. Clearly both imaginative/interpretative strategies locate communicability as a threshold that holds open and at bay the impossible possibility of a transfer of experience, positing, maybe that an Us must hold unfathomable difference in its being. (But then to push toward overcoming it, no matter how much of a gamble that is! Well!) Oh, is it right, or an overreach, then, to posit that the sealed-up, hyper-networked silence of Chiharu Shiota's *State of Being (Tenor Horn)* proclaims the capacity for (non-literal) ways and webs of 'reaching out' while pitching that we are always already embedded in tendrils of meaning, while implying that these are often, at least partially, tangled against our grain and our intention (language is never 'enough') and thereby a substance to cut or hijack oneself out of?

And Angelica Mesiti's work sits *between* these spaces, embodied language and vocalised gesture being a 'carrying with', a framework to bring together expression and reception as a kind of

'passage', all language being translation and a layering up of pasts over presents to create an experiential field (pool or people) from the world entire, the thing that holds you as you variously speak it into being through the tensions of disjuncture and uprootedness.

This trailing of places and past selves present too in Alex Seton's works as an edifice of skin totems one life to another, these poles the very foundation of a shared language, his sculpture becoming residue and lines of orientation, and like Brancusi, heading to the sky and back to earth. As does Sam Jinks' *The Deposition*, a kind of Passover and cradling, a regression and an enveloping, an intimate collapsing into, a surrender, an abjection (the abject leakage of all intimacy and thereby all togetherness?), as Richard Lewer and Felicity Law remember, too, by way of the grave, the layering down and bedding into the realm of the land the Us over which we live and walk. And traced from realm to realm in Michal Rovner's work, from above, fully global (in the modes this means today, the emphasis on pressure points)... *Blue Land*...lines of bonds and their severance crisis-crossing are an insistence of hope and despair, and abstract because impersonal (though it being simultaneously a question about how space might be made for others in advance of knowing their veering directions, or the specifics of their needs and desires)...a guessing in some fashion, the

silence of which Abdul-Rahman Abdullah and Abdul Abdullah's works operate in through zones of family and tradition to create pathways out of the domestic into a bigger sphere and to make spaces of communion and a solitude that is not that and that we peer at, faithful or otherwise, observing without interrupting, our role as viewers to not get between and to thereby honour betweenness itself this being part of our implicit contract. This functional relationship between 'viewers' and 'makers' is what Lottie Consalvo's paintings perform, making present Abstract Expressionism's core tenet of Faith that someone will read this, will accept that my arms and body roamed and traced and accreted and contained and that the gestural, temporal nature of it all is itself not just subjective but an arena for the frontality of self, painting becoming what it may have always been – a structure to play out the flip between furtive cruising and full-bodied assertion of both parties...a checking out and a sizing up, an assessment of potential...to expand the self, or expend it...

One more way this is faced and voiced.

Christian Thompson singing in Bidjari, straight to camera, but to me personally, my age reading/ rendering him as neo-romantic, traces of the Blue Nile, The Human League, by which I mean a melancholic vulnerability and expressive sensitivity that in some ways translates by giving form, and so

not by emoting in a codified way...this complexity deepened, and also its reach...when he closes his mouth, looks slightly awkward or at least self-conscious...this amplifying further, extending its generational and community-joining-and-conjuring resonance, the gentleness of singing that exists as a controlled sculptural 'handling' of an ebullient affect in the space of linguistic slippage... implying we are joined by punctum not studium... Can there be anything more woundingly beautiful? In a work called *Refuge?* I'm in a kind love, without a border here...

...such that the Us is a rescuing and a caregiving, a waiting and a wanting, a ritual and an iterative, elemental echoing, an entity always...live and propositional. But how to hold it or be with it?

The challenge (it has always been so): to articulate an Us inclusively while negotiating the problematics of a concomitant concept of a Them (the perils and warnings of Structuralism). As it is embedded in our awareness that we all have secret codes we think are evident and evident codes we think are secret... that the resonant concepts of guests, and friends and strangers and open doors and invitations (Derrida) circulate by way of opening a new art museum space that maps out the challenge and calls its promise into being, softly, carefully. ▲

Robert Cook, 2019

Curator of 20th Century Art
Art Gallery of Western Australia

us.

the artists

Abdul Abdullah
Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Lottie Consalvo
Sam Jinks
Richard Lewer with Felicity Law
Angelica Mesiti
Nell
Michal Rovner
Alex Seton
Chiharu Shiota
Christian Thompson

Abdul Abdullah

born 1986 Perth, WA
based in Sydney, NSW

- ▶ *Abdul-Hamid Ibrahim
Perceval Charles Charles
Charles Charles Charles 2012*
C-type print
150 x 110cm
Courtesy of the artist
and Yavuz Gallery
© Abdul Abdullah /
Copyright Agency 2019



Abdul-Rahman Abdullah

born 1977 Port Kembla, NSW
based in Mundijong, WA

Little Ghost 2019
stained wood
125 x 78 x 52cm
Collection of MARS, Melbourne

► *The Visit* 2017
painted wood, glass light fitting
200 x 90 x 22cm
Collection of MARS, Melbourne
© Abdul-Rahman Abdullah /
Copyright Agency 2019

Wednesday's Child 2013
tinted resin,
paper carpet, chandelier
installation dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and
Moore Contemporary, Perth



Lottie Consalvo

born 1985 Melbourne, VIC
based in Newcastle, NSW

- ▶ *The Deepest Sea, Black* 2019
acrylic on canvas
198 x 137cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Dominik Mersch Gallery
© Lottie Consalvo

- ▶ *The Deepest Sea, White* 2019
acrylic on canvas
198 x 137cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Dominik Mersch Gallery
studio installation view
Photographer Dean Beletich
© Lottie Consalvo

*The exact moment that
I tried to live forever* 2017
acrylic on board
160 x 122cm
Gifted by the artist through
the Australian Government's
Cultural Gift program, 2019
Cultural Collections,
Lake Macquarie



Sam Jinks

born 1973 Bendigo, VIC
based in Melbourne, VIC

- *The Deposition* 2017
mixed media, including
silicone, pigment, resin,
fabric, human hair
Edition of 3 plus
2 artist's proofs (#2/3)
94 x 100 x 68cm
Kate Smith collection
Image courtesy of the artist
and Sullivan + Strumpf
© Sam Jinks



Richard Lewer

born 1970 Hamilton, NZ
based in Melbourne, VIC

- ▶ *Burial in Hamilton*
[details] 2019
oil on epoxy-coated copper
122 x 353cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan + Strumpf and
Hugo Michell Gallery
Photographer Andrew Curtis
© Richard Lewer

Overleaf:

- Burial in Hamilton* 2019
oil on epoxy-coated copper
122 x 353cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan + Strumpf and
Hugo Michell Gallery
Photographer Andrew Curtis
© Richard Lewer

**Richard Lewer
with Felicity Law**

Richard born 1970 Hamilton, NZ;
Felicity born 1974 Melbourne, VIC
both based in Melbourne, VIC

- ▶ *a resting place*
[details] 2019
13 ceramic urns
installation dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artists,
Sullivan + Strumpf and
Hugo Michell Gallery
Photographer Andrew Curtis
© Richard Lewer and Felicity Law





Angelica Mesiti

born 1976 Sydney, NSW
based in Paris, France

- ▶ *Citizens Band* 2012
4-channel HD video installation,
16:9, colour, sound
duration 21mins 25secs
State Art Collection,
Art Gallery of Western Australia
Purchased through the
Art Gallery of Western
Australia Foundation:
TomorrowFund, 2012
Still images courtesy of
Anna Schwartz Gallery
© Angelica Mesiti

Rapture [silent anthem] 2009
single channel HD video
16:9, colour, silent
duration 10mins 10secs
Artbank Collection



Nell

born 1975 Maitland, NSW
based in Sydney, NSW

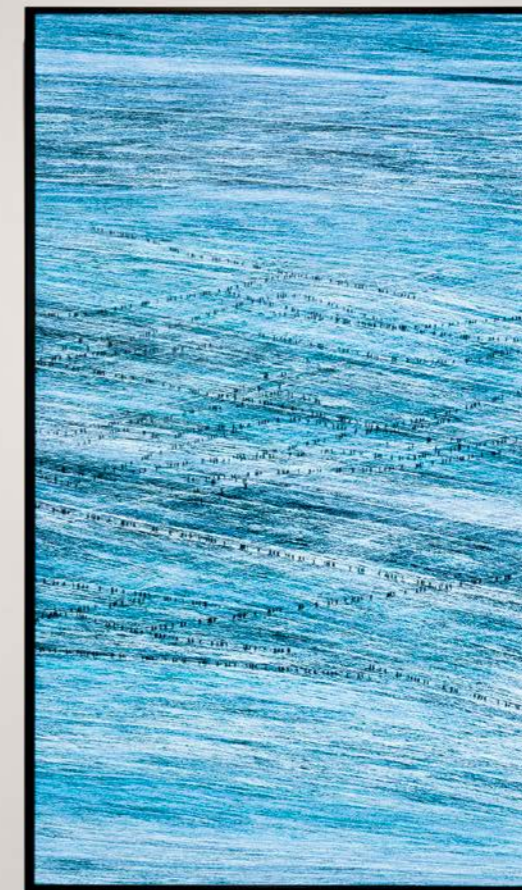
- *if you could hear the sound
of my violin you would know
how I feel* 2015
wood
2 parts.
Object 1: 60.4 x 20.6 x 7.5 cm
Object 2: 60.5 x 20.7 x 8.3 cm
Courtesy of the artist
and STATION, Melbourne
© Nell



Michal Rovner

born 1957 Tel Aviv, Israel
based in New York, USA

- ▶ *Blue Land* 2018
single-channel video
and LCD screen
145.1 x 82.9 x 8.6cm
The Gene & Brian Sherman
Collection, Sydney
Image courtesy of Pace Gallery
Photographer Tom Barrett
© Michal Rovner /
Copyright Agency 2019



Alex Seton

born 1977 Sydney, NSW
based in Sydney, NSW

- ▶ *Tributes to a Past* 2019
Statuario, Bianca Carrara,
Bardiglio marbles and
stainless steel
180 x 30 x 24cm
Courtesy of the artist
and Sullivan + Strumpf
© Alex Seton

- ▶ *Slow the Past* 2019
bronze, silver nitrate
and stainless steel
120 x 30 x 24cm
edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proof
Courtesy of the artist
and Sullivan + Strumpf
© Alex Seton



Chiharu Shiota

born 1972 Osaka, Japan
based in Berlin, Germany

- ▶ *State of Being (Tenor Horn)* 2011,
Berlin
metal frame, thread, tenor horn
70 x 45 x 45cm
Collection of Julian
and Stephanie Grose
Image courtesy of the artist
© Chiharu Shiota



Christian Thompson

born 1978 Gawler, SA
Bidjara people
based in Sydney, NSW

- ▶ *Refuge* 2014
single-channel HD video
with sound
duration 4mins 19secs
Courtesy of the artist
and Michael Reid Gallery
Still image courtesy of the artist
© Christian Thompson





us. universal stories
 curated by Meryl Ryan
 Museum of Art and Culture ▲ yapang, Lake Macquarie
 23 November 2019 – 9 February 2020

This exhibition is one of the three projects:

us. universal stories

we. wiyelliko

be. (your collection) be remembered

curated to launch

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MΔC

Museum of Art and Culture
Lake Macquarie ▲ yapang