

A Metro Arts  
Creative Initiative



# the Critical Writing Project

**Featuring**

**Sam Harrison  
Carol Schwarzman  
Georgia Hayward  
Kathleen O'Hagan  
Christian Rizzalli**

**20  
23**

# INTRODUCTION

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**E**ach year Metro Arts presents numerous exhibitions, currently centred around three galleries in Factory Lane, West Village. Rapidly coming and going, these create brief and unique contexts for experience. While exhibitions will take on new lives in both memory and in professional contexts - as documentation on a website, work accessioned to a collection, or lines on a CV - it is their capacity to create dialogue, between artists and artworkers, between visitors and friends, between writers and readers, that is central to their effect on the world.

The critical writing group from which this publication emerged aimed to extend this dialogue. Five local writers were invited to reflect on exhibitions at Metro Arts during 2023. If writing can act as contextual nest for the artworks, the program aimed to create a further supportive nest for the participating writers: a space for the development of each writer's unique voice. This was encouraged by regular group meetings throughout the year that were often attended by a guest interlocuter. If writing is a solitary activity, this project aimed to place the development of the writing within a social context, to carve out time for consideration and debate around writing as professional, conceptual and social practice.

Exemplifying the precarity, and fluidity, of the contemporary art landscape, each participant (and each interlocuter) is much more than a writer, often also working as an artist, arts worker, research student or educator, or a variegated mix of these. In an essay that analyses the erosion of funding for art schools and the re-organisation of these under neoliberalism, David Cross argues that this context and its concomitant processes of competition, debt and the instrumentalisation of knowledge and social life has drastically increased inequality.<sup>1</sup> For Gary Hall, analysing the same situation, or what he calls the 'Uberfication' of universities, this has resulted in artists and writers further exacerbating neoliberalism, as their precarity leads to the cultivation of themselves as microentrepreneurs, or 'artpreneurs'.<sup>2</sup> Cross also suggests the (inadvertent) complicity of artists and educators in the processes of neoliberalism, but his argument uses an unexpected rhetorical manoeuvre to present an alternative perspective and additional insight.

Cross interweaves his analysis of the structures and policy of the 'creative industries' with quotations taken from *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel that imagines a world in which clones exist in order to provide organ transplants for non-clones. The specific clones



that the novel follows are raised in an institution that encourages their creativity and the production of artworks, and they find empathy, compassion and peace despite the inequality that determines their lives. Though it isn't explicit, Cross seems to be suggesting that the situation of the clones in *Never Let Me Go* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the neoliberal precariat and, in particular, the state of the humanities and of artistic labour. The novel asserts the potential for care and connection amidst a context of exploitation and instrumentalization but, as Cross notes, this focus on 'resilience' depletes structural analysis and the ability for the clones to fully understand their situation and the social forces that have created this. They seem to avoid the complicity that Hall identifies, via a focus on relationships of care rather than entrepreneurialism, though ultimately, for Cross, their limited knowledge and inability to change their situation is inadequate.

Drawing a parallel between the clones of *Never Let Me Go* and contemporary artists and indebted humanities students is a rather dramatic gesture, and possibly quite tasteless, but it is also evocative. Indeed, the beauty of Ishiguro's sparse prose and the empathy and admiration we have for the clones introduces a seed that complicates Cross's conclusions. This glimpse of alternative ways of being embodied by the clones resuscitates the importance of localised contexts of care and dialogue against the idea of a totalised understanding of our situation.<sup>3</sup> Bruno Latour, also referring to this context of diminishing investment in the humanities and declining public support, proposes that this is possibly because the role of the critic so often becomes one of assumed superiority: always right, seeing what the masses miss and overturning the assumptions of the naive believers.<sup>4</sup> Against such alienating retreats into mastery, Latour argues for criticism that creates space for dialogue: "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the

participants arenas in which to gather."<sup>5</sup> It is in this spirit that this 'critical' writing initiative was founded. The writing and its processes, embedded in discussion, opens the work, reader and author to more: multiplying contexts and perspectives rather than reducing this to the finality of the critic's chosen framework. As Patricia Reed writes:

*"The challenge of creating a better account of our complex, interdependent reality today supersedes the capacities of any single heroic human actor. Knowing our world – a knowing that can admittedly never be total or complete – can only be the result of bit-part intelligences, requiring massive collaborative efforts at an unprecedented scale; the crises of our times are too acute for us to shy away from this challenge. As such, humility and the capacity for conceptual revision are key ingredients"*<sup>6</sup>.

These goals of collaboration, humility and revision are woven into the artworks and writing documented in this publication.

I would like to thank Jo Thomas, former CEO and Artistic Director of Metro Arts, for the support and encouragement in the realisation of this program. Thank you also, of course, to the participating writers - Sam Harrison, Georgia Hayward, Kathleen O'Hagan, Carol Schwarzman and Christian Rizzalli - and the interlocutors - Dominique Chen, Caitlin Franzmann, Tara Heffernan, Jane Howard, Louise Mayhew, Tim Riley-Walsh and Elizabeth Willing - for their generosity in time, spirit and collegiality.

**Kyle Weise**

Coordinator |

Critical Writing Project 2023

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# Main Drag

Written by Kathleen O'Hagan    Exhibition by Easton Dunne

**T**here are numerous ways to gauge the speed of spaces.<sup>1</sup> A long-haul truck races, without a minute to spare, along the Bruce Highway. An Uber inches further, **braking, jolting**, across the William Jolly Bridge. Easton Dunne's solo exhibition measures time in the familiar circuit of Rockhampton's Main Drag, flanked by signs and signifiers of a rural queer idyll. Dunne curbs the temporal narratives which erect the urban as a 'progressive' liberated locale in contrast to the 'regressive' rural closet.<sup>2</sup> Instead, they signpost an alternative queer visibility – grounded in and framed by regional identity. Viewers are greeted immediately by the exhibition title's wordplay, which hints at Dunne's playful recoding of the streets of Australia's 'beef capital.'

Time drags on like rubber against concrete. Expanded across the gallery's centre, a video recounts a twenty-five-minute loop navigating, via car, Rockhampton's broad streets. Dunne reflects on the 'half-life' of their adolescence spent in the rear-view mirror. The video tours landmarks from their youth, herded between their Catholic

boarding school and family's isolated cattle property. The immersive projection is recorded in real-time and from the perspective of a dashboard camera.

There are traffic islands paved with palm trees, Motor Inns painted with hibiscus, and according to the road signage Mackay is only 338 km away. The central city is split by the serpentine current of the A1 motorway, intersected by the Fitzroy River en route to the Great Barrier Reef. Flanked by 'Big Bull' statues, 24 hr truck-stops and 'A Man's Toyshop' hardware store, the viewer is provided key identifiers of 'Rocky' life and industry. As the authors of *Queering the Countryside* argue, 'what it means to be rural is mired in powerladen signs.'<sup>3</sup>

For many queer individuals, their relationship to rural and regional places is integral to their self-identity. Yet these connections are not without discrepancy. As Dunne states, while having an 'acute sense of [their] own queerness and transness on a subjective level,' the billboards and signs meant to instruct gave no 'social or cultural representation' of who

they were. The difficulty of identity-building for queer youth is intensified by the 'politics of LGBTQ visibility', which portrays 'backwards' regional communities 'as the last place [they] should be'.<sup>5</sup>

Queer theorist Judith Halberstam defined 'metronormativity' to describe the binary which informs stories of queer migration.<sup>6</sup> The need to 'escape' the constraint of rural life is imprinted in narratives of coming out and the emancipatory power of the 'big city'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, rural queers challenge dominant conceptions of rurality, not by producing new expressions of queerness, but by harnessing existing social and cultural signs in unique and imaginative ways.

Dunne utilises camp and kitsch aesthetics to remould the hyper-masculine and over-idealised iconography of their home town. Boldly shaped billboards, enveloped in neon pink faux fur, line the walls of the gallery space. Two sit on either side of the projection screen, like sentinels straddling a flamboyant thoroughfare. In Feeling

Backwards, Heather Love argues for camp's 'backwards' pull, a temporality paradoxically ascribed to rural spheres.<sup>8</sup> Camp betrays a 'stretched' adolescence with its yearning for lost pleasures and a dogged attachment to forgotten fashions.<sup>9</sup>

Like camp, drag is a 'backwards' art. Its exaggerated pantomime of bygone celebrities and songsters revels in our 'pop' cultural past. (As do cowboys, in leather boots.)<sup>10</sup> Pointedly, Cameron Crookston contends that drag's 'backward-facing' perspective is an indispensable way for queers to create and connect with their own histories.

Dunne's hyperfeminine aesthetic (think PINK!) and use of 'fly' faux fur addresses their own Y2K upbringing. In conversation, they recount Elton John's crooning voice on the car radio, and the unmatched pageantry of the Friday night rodeo. As such, Dunne's billboards fuse icons of rural brawn and bliss with effeminate fun. Their chosen fabric imitates the vivid tactility of fluffy cowhide, warmed by the morning sun.



Easton Dunne, Main Drag (2023), installation view Metro Arts. Photo courtesy of the artist.





Easton Dunne, *Main Drag* (2023), installation view Metro Arts. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Beach Bliss. Bush Battlers. Boom or Bust.** Dunne's six upright signs recoat images Rocky usually paints for itself. Each maintains its own chosen theme such as fast food, surf, and turf. A focal point of the exhibition, a large sign proclaims, 'Welcome to Paradise!' The irony of this greeting is not lost.

As Dunne states, 'Who's paradise? Is it paradise for the First Nations people whose land has been stolen? Paradise for queer or trans people like me who sometimes struggle to access adequate physical and mental health care?'<sup>11</sup> Thus, their aesthetics of gaiety are equally serious in their confrontation of regional Queensland's continuing colonial legacy. As the visitor guide attests, 'you simply can't experience the Rockhampton of today, without an appreciation of days' past.'<sup>12</sup>

By peering backwards, Easton Dunne reimagines a queer past, present and future for their regional community. *Main Drag* provides an alternative pathway to rural belonging, paved by distinct markers of queer visibility. Indeed, as this exhibition travels from Rockhampton to Brisbane to Sydney, and back again. Influence runs both ways, as does our National Highway.

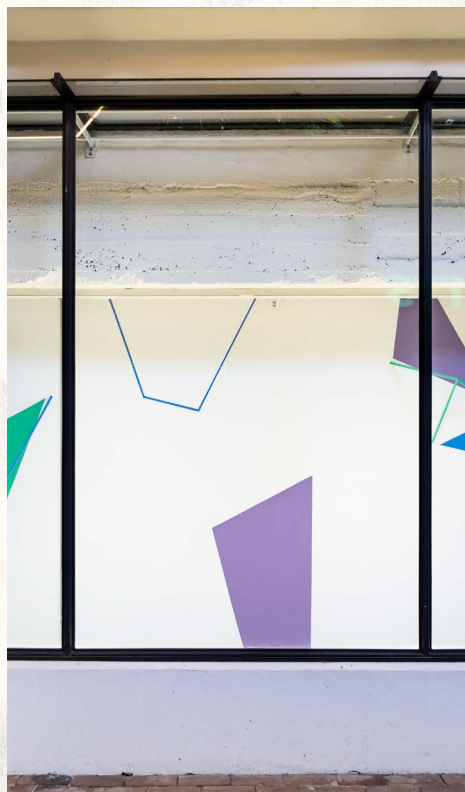
*See page 45 for endnotes*

# Be There Or Be Square?

Written by  
Christian Rizzalli

Exhibition by  
Renee Kire

Renee Kire, *Be There or Be Square* (2023), installation view Metro Arts Window Gallery. Photo by Louis Lim.



One of the fundamental goals of any art object is to provide an aesthetic solution to a conceptual or ideological problem. The means by which an artist provides this solution have varied throughout art's history. When we consider the art of today, it can hardly be denied that this is a time of striking polyphony, in which artistic practice is decidedly varied and open-ended.

In such a broad and open field, however, the artist faces new challenges. How might one offer something new in an art world that seems at times to be completely oversaturated? Faced with this challenge, some artists and their works merely continue to exist, circulating around the contours of the so-called "art market," whether in a major or minor capacity. And do make note, that success in this art market is by no means a measure of success in the search for compelling aesthetic solutions to ideological conundrums.



One recent work that breaks convincingly from this stalemate is Renee Kire's *Be There or Be Square*, displayed in the Window Gallery at Brisbane's Metro Arts from the 18th of March to the 15th of April, 2023. The simple rectangular space of the Window Gallery is neither inside nor outside; it is set back into the wall of the building, while its glass casing protrudes into the public space. Under Kire's hand, this compact gallery is brought to life, occupied by a dynamic arrangement of geometric shapes. Coloured in pastel green, blue and purple, her polygons dance around the wall.

Perhaps most notable are the skeletal extensions that draw these shapes into threedimensional space, forcing themselves off the wall and towards the viewer. The polygons and their spatial extensions are imbued with a certain vivaciousness; they appear lively rather than static, active rather than passive. Most notably, from the very moment of encounter, the work strikes its viewer with an emphatic insistence upon a renewed aesthetic of geometric shapes and spatial constructions, located here at the very interface between the gallery and the public sphere. This, quite simply, is a work that demands attention.

As an historian of art, one feeling I cannot shake is that Kire's *Be There or Be Square* would not have looked out of place in the streets of Moscow, in those heady and radical years that followed the Soviet Revolution. It would stand proud beside the works of Soviet masters such as Liubov Popova, Varvara Stepanova, or El Lissitzky. And yet, Kire's work is not an act of derivation. In fact, as the artist explains, she came to this aesthetic organically, on her own terms, as an extension of her investigations into the Minimalist art of the 1960s.

So, the question becomes: how might we understand Kire's work, and its evident — even if accidental — entanglement with the aesthetics of Soviet Constructivism? To answer this question, I propose approaching Kire's

work via the aesthetic principles of the Constructivists themselves. Those which offer the greatest utility for this analysis, which bear the most notable relevance to *Be There or Be Square*, are *Faktura*, *Tektonika*, and *Operativity*. These key tenets of Constructivism were some of the primary qualifiers against which the Soviets measured their own work.

By approaching Kire's work on Constructivist terms, the analysis that follows will seek to offer some reciprocal enlightenment: the Constructivist lexicon may guide us to better understand the aesthetics of Kire's *Be There or Be Square*, while at the same time her work may provide some new insight into the practical function of the Constructivists' deeply theoretical principles (and their continued relevance for artists of today). In other words, this is an exploration that goes two ways, both forwards and backwards in time...

## 01. ФАКТУРА / FAKTURA

ФАКТУРА / FAKTURA. *Faktura*, roughly the Russian equivalent for the French *facture*, refers to the assemblage of textures, the choice of materials and their interplay in the overall construction of the work.<sup>1</sup> It received an earlier articulation in the work of the Cubists (particularly in the context of their synthetic experiments), but became a central guiding principle for the Soviet avant-garde in the early post-Revolutionary years.

In Kire's *Be There or Be Square*, an analysis of *Faktura* necessitates close viewing of the work. Such a viewing reveals three key textures at play: the white walls of the gallery, the painted polygons, and the spatial constructions that push the work into three-dimensional space. What is shared by these textures is an utmost attention to detail. Kire has been meticulous in the construction of this work, rendering its textures with absolute clarity, purity and precision. There is no trace of painterly surface on the polygons or the spatial constructions. They appear almost machine-made — a skilful



Renee Kire, *Be There or Be Square* (2023), installation view Metro Arts Window Gallery. Photo by Louis Lim.

concealment of the artist's hand (which is especially remarkable when one learns that the spatial constructions are made of plywood, rather than the smooth steel or plastic materials that they emulate).

What is the function of this peculiar Faktura in *Be There or Be Square*? How does this assemblage of textures impact or shape the function of the work? From the very outset, upon approaching the work, Kire's viewer is met with a sense of almost scientific or industrial coolness (perhaps reflective of the artist's interest in 1960s Minimalism). Accustomed to entering a work via the hand of the artist, via some sense of subjectivity, the contemporary viewer is here confounded. Searching for imperfections will yield little success. No — denied this kind of engagement, the kind in which close viewing reveals clues as to the artist's presence, the viewer is forced instead to step back, and to contend with the work in its entirety.

## 02. ТЕКТОНИКА / TEKTONIKA

ТЕКТОНИКА / TEKTONIKA. The closest English equivalent for this word is architectonics, which has had a long and lively history of use in the field of modernist architecture and design. What it refers to, in simple terms, is the quality of harmony and balance in construction.<sup>2</sup> A particularly compelling example of Soviet architectonics can be seen in the works of Liubov Popova; consider, for instance, her *Painterly Architectonic* of 1917 — with its elegant yet dynamic layering of geometric forms, the work seems to almost pre-empt Kire's installation.

Kire's *Be There or Be Square* exhibits a masterful grasp of architectonics. Upon stepping back, and taking the work in its entirety, the viewer is faced with a scene of excellent balance, even within the somewhat irregular bounds of the Window Gallery space. Despite the work's commitment to abstraction, the various shapes and constructions have not been



arranged by chance: green, blue, and purple are here presented in harmony, with no one colour or form seeming to dominate the others. The result is that the work maintains a strong sense of unity — it functions as a unified whole, and holds the viewer's attention as such.

The extrapolation of the flat surface into three-dimensional space takes the work one step further. To this end, *Be There or Be Square* is at once neither painting nor sculpture, but sits somewhere in between. By achieving such a fine architectonic balance between two- and three dimensions, Kire produces a delicate tension between flatness and volume. Pulling the viewer into this tension, *Be There or Be Square* invokes a desire to engage — to walk around in front of the work, and to view it from different angles.

### 03. ОПЕРАТИВНОСТЬ / OPERATIVITY

ОПЕРАТИВНОСТЬ / OPERATIVITY. This term was particularly dear to the artist and writer, Sergei Tretyakov, for whom operativity referred to the functional aspect of the work, the very mechanism by which it worked upon its viewer. For Tretyakov, operativity (and the related paradigm of factography) concerned art that did not seek to simply represent life, but rather to intervene in it, and make it anew.<sup>3</sup> While the above analysis has offered some initial interpretation of Kire's work, it is in the realm of operativity that *Be There or Be Square* offers its most compelling aesthetic solution to an ideological problem.

In *Be There or Be Square*, the notion of intervention is central — active intervention in the experience of the viewer. This is not an aspect of the work that can be divined through inspection of photographs, but rather must be experienced (a premise that is embedded in the work's title: "be there or be square," which is to say, be there in person, or miss out on a true experience of the work). What one notices when interacting with the work, is that the

skeletal extensions of Kire's polygons are far from arbitrary. They are, in fact, perfectly placed, so that when viewed at precisely the correct angle, the thin, coloured beams align with the polygons to produce illusionistic webs of three-dimensional polyhedrons. The work thus acquires a gamelike character, provoking the viewer to move around and search for just the right positions from which the various polyhedrons materialise.

There is, most importantly, a political end to this operative game. To find the right positions, the viewer must see the work from Kire's perspective, locating her natural eye-height and the point of view from which the work was constructed. This reveals a key ideological concern for Kire, in the ongoing challenges faced by female artists in contemporary art spaces, especially where the typically masculinist genre of abstraction is concerned. By placing the viewer in her position, *Be There or Be Square* forces one to consider Kire's experience, to occupy her reality. Certainly, this is a relatively abstract idea, but it exhibits an interest in a kind of subconscious cognitive transformation that would have been at home amongst the most radical experiments of the interwar avant-garde.

The findings of this analysis are twofold. Firstly, analysing Kire's *Be There or Be Square* through the Constructivist lenses of Faktura, Tektonika, and Operativity has revealed the various formal and aesthetic strategies by which the work functions, from its surface textures, through its architectonic construction and into its operative intervention in the viewer's experience. These aesthetic principles have encouraged a close consideration of the work's formal features, with a kind of scientific clarity that would perhaps be missing from a more conventional approach.

Secondly, in uncovering moments of resonance between this work and the theories of the Soviet avant-garde, some light has been shed on the Soviets' dense

and sometimes impenetrable theories. Faktura, Tektonika, and Operativity are demystified through their application to Kire's work, with each key principle playing a demonstrable, functional role in the work and the viewer's experience thereof.

This aspect of the artist's practice, this exploration of a spatialised geometric abstraction, is certainly exciting. In developing this new (or renewed) aesthetic paradigm of abstraction, Kire has stumbled upon fertile ground for future experimentation.

When the Constructivists produced comparable works, particularly during their so-called "laboratory" period, they engaged in a deliberately scientific process of experimentation, producing and reproducing, and refining their models with each iteration. Eventually, their deeply abstract constructions came to provide the foundation for far more utilitarian projects, such as Vladimir Tatlin's Model for the Monument to the Third International, or Gustav Klutskis's designs for street kiosks. Perhaps, for Kire, a similar approach of laboratory-style experimentation and refinement may allow her to expand upon this aesthetic model, and to break new ground with its operative potency.

*See page 46 for endnotes*







Jody Rallah, *Guldes* (2021–23), Installation view of *Under currents*. Photo by Joe Ruckl

# Under – currents 1

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Written by  
Sam Harrison

Exhibition by  
Jody Rallah

To find a current one must first identify the movement of ripples on the surface, ripples that draw attention through light reflecting back to the observer. To capture this moment in time, to preserve the ripple, would render it meaningless as the presence of change is what gives it meaning and gives us the ability to see the current. Undercurrents talks to deep cultural, spiritual, and metaphysical connections that are only identifiable through the reflections that they leave upon our lived experience; by pinning them down in specific definition we seem to lose our chance for a fleeting understanding.

Jody Rallah presents us with an immersive installation of artworks blending contemporary art with cultural practice. Instead of telling us what it means to have a **connection to country**, we are invited into a space comprised of a balance between certainty and vulnerability, where Rallah feels through her cultural and spiritual relationships.

Explaining this exhibition feels similar to explaining the punchline to a joke: the meaning is in the nuance that is captured in a moment of silence just before an 'ah ha!' exclamation of understanding. The central challenge of the exhibition is the reframing of a Western understanding of macro and micro perceptions. For the sake of translating this challenge into the linearity of text it feels necessary to start with what I read as the the biggest ideas and work down and around from there.

The 'biggest' reflection underpinning the exhibition is an understanding of time and space as a medium in which cultural and spiritual meaning is embedded, rather than as a conceptual means of measurement. In the work Guides, a constellation of stars is shrunk down into a room of woven stars that come together to form an ancestor spirit, depicting the embedded knowledges held within these celestial bodies. Rallah's own personal reflection talks to the relationship between the elders that guide us and the functionality of the stars that guide our movement across country.

To an individual, the physical bodies of the stars in the sky and mountains may seem inevitably large and unchanging. However, these bodies become everchanging and fluid when we identify as a continuous community that has born witness to the flow of the mountains. For we are the bodies that have flowed atop them as the wind and water has shaped them. In Movement Map, Rallah paints the mountains as a flowing river on which clay coolamons float. She uses these coolamons as a depiction of the human body throughout her practice due to their use as a tool of nurture: used to carry young children and also for collecting food.

It makes sense then, that the lived experience of an individual is one of exploring the embedded knowledges that flow around us. Weaving is a motif throughout the exhibition. Rallah reflects on this as an act repeated throughout time, connecting her to her ancestors. Weaving is a process that we learn to remember as



our elders teach us each different patterns and knots. Star Etchings capture this moment in time. In an acknowledgement of both recent historical disruptions to the living practice of these weaves, and the importance of maintaining these, the fibres are depicted as etchings into the copper paint beneath the hands.

The 'smallest' reflection is upon the very mediums she holds in her hands when making these works. A medium that exists within our bodies to carry out important functions for creating energy, connective tissue and blood vessels. It helps maintain our nervous and immune systems and plays a part in activating genes. This medium is copper, a metal formed in stars a long, long time ago.

Rallah talks to the use of copper not only in relation to the body and the stars but also directly to its use as telecommunication wiring that connects the globe, a literal current that runs underneath the ground and oceans to connect the continents. The combination of these copper wires with weaving practices depicts the metaphysical interconnected and inter-communicating undercurrents that form a picture of what it might mean to be **connected to country**.



Artist Jody Rallah (2023). Photo by Joe Ruckli.



Jody Rallah, *Undercurrents* (2023), Installation view Metro Arts Gallery One.  
Photo by Annelze Mulder.

# Under - currents 2

Written by Carol  
Schwarzman

Exhibition by  
Jody Rallah

**U**ndercurrents is a gentle exhibition, one that delivers a compelling meditation on materiality, bodies, and community. In order to take in Jody Rallah's flowing, rambling installation of objects and paintings, it helps to keep the mind quiet, and discern slowly. Her low-key, intuitive approach and straightforward economy of means invite us to consider fresh possibilities for becoming-with nonhumans, through synergies networking from one softly lit room to another. The artist capitalises on

the multi-room exhibition space to create a journey in which disparate visual methods can be felt as connected. This work is not about confrontation, or spectacle. It is about being-in-relation-to what is present, right before our senses, to imagine new relational possibilities.

Rallah, a yuggera/yuggerabul and biri/bindal artist from Brisbane, has installed her work in what at first appears to be a speculative, experimental manner, but there is a thoughtful method here. She asks 'what will happen when these



particular materials, objects, images, and artworks are invited to act together? As I walked the length of the flowing, earth-toned wall landscape, Movement Map – Painted clay river made of mountains (2023), I thought about the title's linking of deep time, matter and play. Movement Map is, indeed, painted using clay pigments, but how can a river be made of mountains? We know that rivers slowly erode the land, causing rock and soil to slip downward into the water. But from a contemporary Western worldview, blurring states of matter is problematic: solid mountains cannot flow like water and liquids, solids and gasses are generally conceived as separate and bounded. Perhaps Rallah is reminding us that, viewed in deep geological time, earth formations and even continents move, whether or not humans can perceive such slowly shifting, lithic relationships or vast temporalities.

In Undercurrents, we enter into Indigenous relationality's temporally unbounded entanglement with nonhumans both living and nonliving. As scholar Shawn Wilson has written in Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods, Indigenous worldviews make "no distinction between relationships that are made with other people and those that are made with our environment".<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson has stated:

*"In Indigenous cultural domains relationality means that one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory".<sup>2</sup>*

Therefore, for viewers, Rallah frees us up. Now, we begin to think of water and rock as relatives with each other, and as relatives to humans. As our relatives.

Throughout the exhibition, the presence of the human hand figures prominently, whether in painterly marks and gestures,

or in the materiality of hand-formed copper wire or clay, or as rendered in pictorial imagery. In Movement Map – Painted clay river made of mountains, small hand-made ceramic coolamons are attached to the wall by splashes of mud, intermittently marking a human presence along the river/ mountains. In the next room, two acrylic and gold leaf paintings, Ingredients to Wealth (2019), employ naturalistic realism, rendering pairs of hands holding either a dilly bag or a coolamon, gathering various flowers, fruit and seeds, in a manner invoking a traditional cycle of harvesting native food sources. In the exhibition's third, intimate black-walled room, the hands' presence in Guides (2021-2023) is inbuilt. The artist's fingers' traces are felt by the shaping of many twisting, spiraling, and interwoven meters of repurposed copper wire.

This sparkling, free-form sculpture, suspended from the ceiling, calls to mind towering nebulae birthing stars (as in photos taken by space telescopes), partially formed baskets, maps of the Dreamtime, or nodes and synapses of our nervous system. As such, Guides functions as a body comprised of locations of intention that coalesce, interrupt, and move on to other locations. Structured similarly, a mythic soundscape of nature sounds, didgeridoo and human voice, composed by Rallah, works to immerse the viewer, to imagine vast shifts of scale and time in contrast with human-scaled details of the artist's handiwork.

As a whole, Undercurrents visualises an inter-subjective landscape, blending worldviews, cultures and standpoints. Through this affirmative mix the artist builds a unique cross-cultural aesthetic.

See page 46 for endnotes

# MAVA PATHFINDERS

Ensuring a strong local independent sector of artists, MAVA Pathfinders supported three Queensland, mid-career artists James Barth, Caitlin Franzmann and Elizabeth Willing to explore entrepreneurial opportunities and harness their potential to build sustainable careers. Based at the MAVA Substation, the program focused on exploring new opportunities and ways of working that better ensure immediate and long-term financial sustainability, and exploration of artistic practice in the creation of new work. In June of 2023, at the conclusion of the 12 month residency, the artists presented a showcase of their practice and their experiments at the MAVA Substation with the exhibition: Artefacts of the Working Process.





# JAMES BARTH

Silk Screens for Paintings. (2023). James Barth. MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process, Gallery One, Metro Arts, Photo by: Masimba Sasa.

Written by  
Kathleen O'Hagan

In its opening seconds, James Barth's video work *Earthbound* (2023) crepitates with an airy buzz as black flies swarm against a diffused grey slate. Produced during her residency at the MAVA Substation, this short film is indicative of her interdisciplinary process and keen canonical lens. The film's production, rather than the completed digital commission, is traced as a series of studio artefacts in the exhibition *MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of Working Process*.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's dancing flies betray their long-held significance as harbingers for the impermanence of life and the humility of death.<sup>2</sup> Renaissance thought fused Medieval fable with religious fervour to endow flies with otherworldly power, due to their inexplicable birth from decaying fruit and decomposing matter. Similarly, both *Earthbound* and the remnants of its creation exhibited here —storyboards, digital models, and exposed silkscreens

—are littered with ashen renderings of rotting citrus, scattered scrapheaps and overturned feasts.

As if strangely spawned by an invisible hand, sixteenth-century artists painted flies (known as *Musca depicta*) into their portraits to confront their artwork's "materiality", diminishing the space between the "virtuality of the painting and the actuality of the real world."<sup>3</sup> Notoriously, the fantastical artist biographer of the Renaissance, Giorgio Vasari, recounts the tale of a young Giotto aiming to impress his master, Cimabue, by discreetly rendering a fly over his painting. Vasari declares that the fly "looked so natural that when his master returned to continue his work, he tried more than once to drive the fly away, convinced that it was real."<sup>4</sup> By deceiving the eye, the fly reflects that all is not what it appears. As such, theorist Steven Connor argues that "no other creature seem[s] so fit for the purpose of communicating between ideas of form, decomposition and recomposition as the fly."<sup>5</sup>

Skilled originally as an oil painter, James Barth's practice has shown the slow introduction of digital and "immaterial" applications. As such, Barth's flies usher the veiled illusionism of her composed and recomposed creations. Her artistic development is repeated as a series of rectangular "screens" or "frames", displayed on a thin, grey shelf. Bulldog clipped to plywood boards, 3D modelled thumbnails are printed and sequenced in narrative, iterative pen drawings are confined to the borders of a sketchbook and images of her avatar's armature and body mesh are layered together on translucent paper. Her work showcases a cyclic production where use of both painted and digital mediums converge and evolve together over time. For instance, Barth's gestural ink-sketches of peeled mandarins and a decomposing still-life resemble the flat grey tones of Blender's three-dimensional models.

Barth's "compost" painting *Heap (2022)* provides a surface-level interface with traditional mark-making, Her brushstrokes blurring the still-wet paint of this hyper-

detailed vanitas composition. However, this painting is not physically present in the exhibition. Instead, two large silkscreens act as indexes of its creation. Her expansive tableau was meticulously sculptured as a digital image before being exposed and screen-printed with oil paint onto a dibond substrate.<sup>6</sup> The painter's lingering touch is expunged further in Barth's keyframe animations. Screened in Gallery Two, *Skydancers: Study (2023)* manipulates a distinct set of assets, props and models animated via open-source software. As such, the artist's movement is substituted for a physics simulation, eliminating the indexical mark altogether.

As a preliminary study for *Earthbound*, *Skydancers: Study* displays two conjoined air dancers languidly entangling towards the sky before falling back to earth. The sub-tropic world they inhabit is both dreary and capricious, the murmuring foliage and flickering pixelation providing vitality to an otherwise fatigued landscape. The sky dancers act as phantom proxies for the artist's own figuration. Comparably, preliminary modelled "drafts" for Barth's paintings and full renders of her animated



James Barth, *Compost (2023)*, installation view of *Artefacts of the Working Process*, Metro Arts Gallery One. Photo courtesy of the artist.





James Barth, designing and rendering for paintings and video, Performance Capture, exhibited in MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process, 2023. Installation View, Metro Arts. Image courtesy of the artist.

armature display a piercing gaze and her familiar slick long hair. These digital likenesses are frozen in place and purposefully positioned as sculptural assets in her composed still- "life."

Pointedly, the artist's digital phantoms infer both self-projection and self-protection. As Jacques Lacan argues, the phantasm, or fantasy, is determined by the fact that it "pushes its way in front of the real, protects it, and thus makes it harder to access."<sup>7</sup> Barth's digital avatars, and the stifling, immaterial world they inhabit, are at once linked to the "real" and nonetheless veil it. For Barth, this distance appears intentional, evoking greater control to explore her transgendered identity and image, and insulating against painted self-portraiture's implicit exposure.

Similarly, the slight grain of digital decay permeates Barth's grisaille renders, shrouded against the audience's uneasy voyeurism. This visual distortion infers a "psychological defence," a form of ambivalence that states "you can't get to me."<sup>8</sup> Her doppelgängers do not come into full focus and their features are cast in grey like a death mask. As such, Barth envisages deterioration and erasure as conjugate to transformation, where illusion and representation festers, idles, and is coated in residual pigment.<sup>9</sup>

Barth metamorphoses the rich iconography of painting (such as self-portraiture and still life) and its semantics (to render and compose) into the digital realm. Her work fuses artistic mythmaking with a painter's pursuit, carefully constructing illusive worlds and mirrored apparitions that defy traditional representation. In this way, both the exhibition's pointed focus on preliminary work, and the artist's tight control over her image, enables a new mode of artist mythology. Unlike Vasari and Giotto, Barth's practice extends to both "rendering flies" and concocting the fables that surround them.

*See page 46 for endnotes*

# CAITLIN FRANZMANN

Written by  
Carol Schwarzman

*Artefacts are made,  
organisms grow: at first glance  
the distinction seems obvious  
enough... [but] artefacts and  
living things as it turns out, are  
not so very different after all.*<sup>1</sup>

– Tim Ingold

Caitlin Franzmann’s recent sculptures don’t simply question the difference between an artefact and a natural object. On the contrary, her constructed assemblages exist simultaneously as neither – or both. When taken as a whole, each sculpture blurs the boundaries between what is human- or nonhuman-made, or what is “natural” and what is “ideal”. Her works, which combine widely diverse components, can be taken as discrete, relational coalitions of things mixing intuition, concept and affect. Bricks, plants, water, fungi, glass or charcoal: every element is placed by Franzmann in a meaningful relationship to the other as well as to the assemblage.

The works are made to change over time: a mushroom grows within a purpose-built glass vessel, taking on the vessel’s

slumping shape (back into, 2022); a rusted clump of an old tin can oxidises, breaking down into flaking bits, and is mixed by with vinegar to stain stripped-back lantana roots (song fountains, 2022). For the artist, the importance of the rust (iron oxide) lies not only in how the wood it stains will transform over time, but also in the fact that iron is the life-supporting, oxygen-carrying constituent of our blood.

In this way, works such as back into and song fountains embody Franzmann’s poetic study of interwoven systems of being amongst animals, vegetables and minerals. She does not make distinctions between life and non-life, and instead always keeps in view the agential capacity of all kinds of matter to build and affect the world.

The Metro Arts Visual Arts (MAVA) Pathfinders exhibition, *Artefacts of the Working Process*, was my first encounter with Franzmann’s use of rusty metal for making art. During an interview with her, I learned she’d found the corroded metal in the roots of a tree beside Cressbrook Creek, while exploring the site of her 2022 exhibition, *Natural State*, at The Condensery.<sup>2</sup> The metal is probably the remains of condensed milk cans thrown into the creek (that is, decayed artefacts from this defunct industrial site). The rusted clump is a component of rust (away) (2022), a work which included an



elegant rust-stained blackwood timber arc weighted at one end by a hunk of petrified wood, and a stained timber circle standing upright on its side, balanced by the rusted metal hunk, assembled and presented on a mirrored plinth. When a viewer passes by rust (away) they see their reflection in the mirror, and are factored into the assembled equation of intra-acting matter and things.<sup>3</sup> Franzmann had found the petrified wood in a Condensary cabinet, and had it analysed by an expert. They identified it as an ancient relative of the *Araucaria* species from the local region, most probably millions of years old.

At Metro Arts, in keeping with the exhibition's title of *Artefacts of the Working Process*, the rust was presented on a table simply as a blob of corroded metal placed next to the glass jar of vinegar varnish made and used by the artist. Also on the table, the petrified wood reappears as the support for the blackwood timber arc. These partial artefacts are material details and data chosen by the

artist from the works back into and rust (away) (as exhibited in *Natural State*). They can be said to shift visually and discursively in function and context as they are rearranged and re-exhibited from one venue and curatorial construct to another. This repositioning foregrounds the way that Franzmann's practice proposes an interchangeable, nonlinear language comprised of networks of things and their stories: if the assembled sculptures shown in *Natural State* are seen to be complex, relational narratives grounded in the places from which they've emerged, then their individual components laid out on the table in *Artefacts of the Working Process* could be said to be 'chapters', 'sentences', or 'words'.

My speculation here is not to indulge an analogy between literature and assemblage, but rather to suggest that the artist is building a method of aesthetic and affective perception that does not value precious materials or mimicry of nature. For Franzmann, webs of material, narrative



Caitlin Franzmann, *Rust* (2023), studio remnants exhibited in *Artefacts of the Working Process*, installation view Metro Arts Gallery One. Photo by Kyle Weise.

relationships, always shifting and ultimately ephemeral, recall our bodily presence within and throughout environments. Hence, her inclusion together of the rusted metal and the petrified wood, both of which have evolved over vastly different timescales into hunks of iron oxide – the same chemical compound that supports our absorption of oxygen from the air we breathe.

Franzmann's poiesis of inter-being extends as well into human discourse and communities: she conceives her creative practice as an experiment toward expanding new forms of collective artmaking and social life. Therefore, with every project, she collaborates with other artists, historians, scientists, growers, community environmental groups, or Indigenous elders, among others. This transdisciplinary approach introduces new ways of thinking, experiencing, feeling and being. For example, since 2017, she has worked with artist/naturopath Dhana Merritt, who creates interactive performative artworks centred around the act of drinking medicinal herbal beverages.

Recently, during a workshop titled, drawing stories from old stones (in connection with Natural States), Franzmann served a refreshing drink of green algae powder, pineapple juice, and soda water, formulated to prompt consideration of the co-evolution of plants and microbes.<sup>4</sup> Then, a guest speaker, the landscape architect Christoph Pester spoke about the fine points of his petrified wood collection.<sup>5</sup> Taken as a whole, drawing stories from old stones was designed to act as a provocation for participants to work collaboratively on a drawing inspired by the fascinating patterns of preserved details of the bark, wood, and cellular structures of one of the petrified wood samples.

Franzmann prompted the group to collaborate in pairs, and to draw on one piece of paper. The two people had to work out between themselves how to make the edges of their drawings meet, further complicating the process of working in partnership. She included a facsimile of

one of these drawings in Artefacts of the Working Process, placing it on the table beside the piece of petrified wood. Perhaps Franzmann is proposing that this artefact, drawn cooperatively by two human collaborators, and based upon millions of years of natural processes, could be considered a natural object – as 'natural' as the making of a beehive by worker bees – if we consider humans to be a part of, and not separate from, their environment.


*See page 47 for endnotes*



# ELIZABETH WILLING

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Written by  
Georgia Hayward

A photograph of artist Elizabeth Willing standing in front of her artwork. She is wearing a green and white vertically striped, long-sleeved button-down shirt with a matching tie belt. Her hands are clasped in front of her. The artwork behind her is a dark, circular composition filled with numerous small, colorful, abstract shapes and patterns, resembling microscopic organisms or celestial bodies. The background of the entire page is a light, textured, off-white color.

Artist Elizabeth Willing in front of her work at the exhibition opening of MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process (2023), Metro Arts Gallery Two. Photo by Masimba Sasa.

# Have you ever seen an ugly carrot?

It seems like a silly question, but somehow I know you can visualise it. A slightly misshapen, stumpy or non-linear shaft with dull green

fronds. Although we know this is an organic form, this type of produce has been prescribed as undesirable or inadequate. Somewhere between our fanatical obsession with food porn and growing need to connect excess and glamour to our culinary experience, we began to adhere to a foodie beauty standard. So much so, that capitalist 'genius' has commodified this food discrimination, establishing a commodity sub-genre for 'ugly' produce.

In this capitalist pursuit for ideal food, the substances we ingest are becoming more and more unrecognisable. Control has become a guiding principle of food production, changing our language of agriculture from 'growing' to 'manufacturing', causing cosmetic perfection to become a metric for navigating food safety. The introduction of food technology has seen the machine become our trusted farmer, chef, and server.

Elizabeth Willing's practice considers the complexities of our interactions with food - how we make, consume, and digest it. Utilising food as both a material and conceptual focus, Willing interrogates the synthetic qualities of our industrialised food. From highly-processed cheese singles to extruded corn puff forms, she considers both the scientific and psychological implications of these constructions of 'nutrition'. The hyper-application of these food technologies has generated a slippage in our understanding of what we consider food, and what is ingestible innovation.

Willing's wallpaper print *Diffuse*, exhibited at Metro Arts as a part of *MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process*, continues this complex line of inquiry to question the saturated consumption of pills in our diet. Set against a vast black background, at first it appears that Willing has captured a collection of telescopic imagery of diverse galaxies. Yet upon closer inspection, what appear to be expanding nebulae, reveal themselves to be microscopic powder pigments exploding from the centre of dissolving pills.

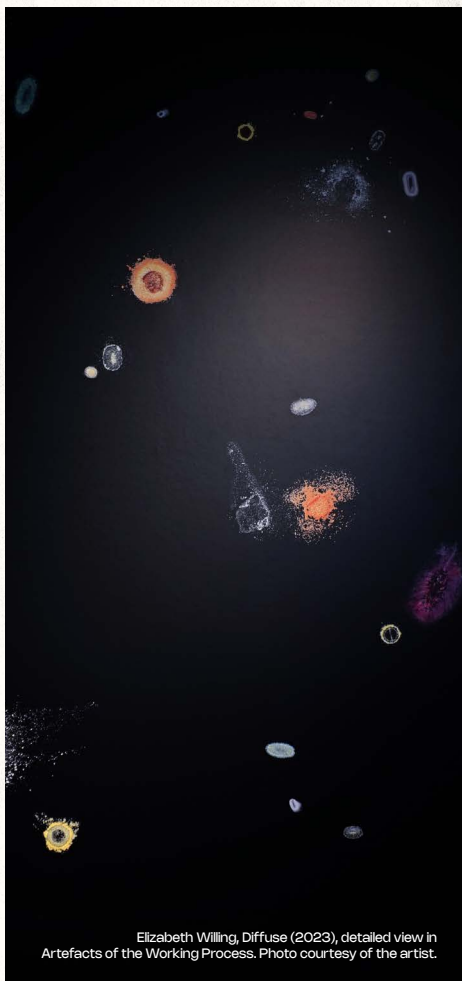
Through this interplay of the macro and micro, the composition of these medicinal capsules are brought into contemplation, urging a considered reflection of our consumption of these synthetic substances. The visual diffusion of these typically uniform tablets induces a palpable



memory of my childhood attempts to ingest tablets. Capsules would get caught between the bridge of my tongue and the top of my throat, and I remember the thin membrane coating would start to dissolve and disperse on my tongue - catching a taste of these nondescript powders. Through destruction of these taste-less and texture-less tablets, the usually unseen substances within are brought into view, and we are challenged to consider the effect of these food technologies, as pollution in our bodies.

The process of medicinal capsule diffusion is typically designed to be absorbed through the membrane of our intestines, it was never quite intended to be a speculative experience. The intestine is vital to holistic bodily health, connecting the systematic absorption and redirection of food matter, with effects on the regulation of transient modes of wellbeing, including stress and sleep management. Yet our long-understood association of innate intuition grounded in our gut becomes compromised with the introduction of artifice into this microbiome. How can our bodies operate instinctively when the foundations of its system become altered by introduced food technologies?

By drawing an awareness to our active consumption of these machine-crafted substances, Willing prompts us to recognise the growing influence and interference of food technology on our wellbeing and urges us to consider what lies ahead.



Elizabeth Willing, *Diffuse* (2023), detailed view in *Artefacts of the Working Process*. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Tiana Jefferies, *teetering, tittering, tits up* (2023), installation view Metro Arts Gallery One. Photo by Louis Lim.

# teetering, tittering, tits up

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Written by  
Georgia Hayward

Exhibition by  
Tiana Jefferies



# Camp-ing is a *tender feeling*

**T**eetering, tittering, tits up by Tiana Jefferies reveals (and revels in) slippages between camping as recreational activity and camp as queer aesthetic sensibility, using the cross-fertilisation of these associations to develop a critique of colonial space.

My first experience of camping, like many, was on Year 8 school camp: a structured, yet open encounter with familiar bodies in a place that was not-school and not-home. Camping is an in-between space that opens possibilities and imaginations and draws attention to the enclosures and rules that structure 'non-camp' life. Similarly, camp as queer aesthetic is a kind of playmaking that repetitiously constructs

and deconstructs identities and encounters as a means to navigate or position oneself within a place. Both camp and camping are deliberate and theatrical departures from our fixed and familiar infrastructure, allowing new unarticulated worlds to unfold. Camp/ing is defined by paradox and flux, shifting between movement/stasis, familiar/unfamiliar and freedom/control.

Via sculptural assemblage, Jefferies plays with these intersections between camp and camping to materialise and celebrate a non-normative space. Exploring the material threshold between people and nature, Jefferies warps and reconstructs camping tarps, springs and metal frames into ambiguous sculptural bodies that savor the tension between function and form. *cool-de-sac*, a sculpture poised at the rear of the gallery, reinvigorates a used fabric tent to effortlessly costume a derelict pool-side umbrella. Flirting with a hyper-masculine sensibility for the utilitarian, these assemblages subvert the practical

Tiana Jefferies, *teetering, tittering, tits up* (2023), installation view Metro Arts Gallery One. Photo by Louis Lim.



applications of these materials and transform nylon and polyethylene into sensuous surfaces. Stakeless and untethered, these tent bodies appear to collide in motion, quivering, arched and bent. These obscurely postured sculptures embrace a sense of awkwardness, not as a transitory means but as mode of being. Here, camping paraphernalia becomes the performing subject.

Presented at Metro Arts in the heart of West End's West Village commercial precinct, these fluid works sit in stark contrast to the traditional, fixed gallery space. Through this emplacement the playful possibilities of the sculptures develop political reverberations. On the precipice of second-wave gentrification driven by developers and government policies, West End is expected to see its population quadruple over the next twenty years. The West Village precinct has contributed to this process of rapid urban development. Gentrification is a powerful means of colonial control in cities, it is a method of establishing and progressing the dominant Western cultural narrative of metropolitan individualism. Yet, within the walls of the Metro Arts gallery these queer objects covertly disrupt this normative discourse.

By design, camp aesthetics are antithetical to the dominant culture. By focusing on plurality of expression and relationally-responsive theories, camp undermines established institutional systems and resists a narrative of individualism. The exaggerated gestural and material qualities of these camping remnants, as fashioned by Jefferies, confront colonial manifestations of permanence and possessive value, testing power relations that pervade these contested spaces. This playful subversion is further demonstrated by the remodeling of found building materials, such as the polycarbonate sheeting and bolts which form *deux me*,

into physically 'teetering' forms. Oscillating tensions between fluid and fixed, precarious and stable, the use of camping equipment in these works echoes the continued displacement of people within this urban frame that parallels the histories of colonisation in Kurilpa (West End).

Jefferies shares with us an image of an otherwise. By disturbing the ideals of urban permanency through a Camp framework, Jefferies reconnects us with an awareness of place relative to each other and our ecological environment. In a similar vein to Michael Foucault's theories of place, Jefferies constructs a heterotopia that is at once both disruptive and stimulating.

Through the use of creative subversion and juxtaposition, Jefferies deconstructs our implicit understandings of place to pose a radical transgression of the established socio-political structures. This act of imaginative resistance from within these institutions, embraces unpredictability and discomfort. By opening a world behind the surface of our present state, Jefferies' profound work urges a reimagined worldview that holds space for queer and ecological intimacies.



Brian Robinson. *Al Baud Tonar – Harvest Season Time*. Paiglit plastics, feathers, shells, wood, raffia 180 x 270cm Commissioned for Precision (2023). Installation View, Metro Arts. Courtesy of the Artist, Mossenson Galleries, Perth and Onespace Gallery, Brisbane. Photo by Louis Lim.



# Precision

Written by  
Christian Rizzalli

Various Artists: Curated by  
Stephanie Lindquist, with Minqi Gu.

# Cut, Slice, Sever, Lacerate, Fracture, Dissect, Dissemble.

**W**hat, precisely, is the artist doing, when they begin the process of creation by destroying something that already is? What does it mean to begin creation with an act of destruction?

In *Precision* (held at Metro Arts from the 6th of May to the 10th of June, 2023), the violence of cutting is camouflaged under a vision of tranquility and calm. A sparse, clear and unobstructed arrangement of works offers instead an atmosphere of contemplation. The immense level of detail in the exhibition redirects the viewer's attention: away from the violence of cutting, and towards the repetitive and meditative labour by which the works were produced.

Nevertheless, the *raison d'être* of the exhibition lies in the very act it obscures, in the art of cutting. The following analysis seeks to look beyond the outward appearance of calmness, to recover the dual act of destruction/construction from which these works were made. How might this offer a deeper understanding of the works featured in *Precision*?

## 1. Cut with the Kitchen Knife

The Dadaists taught us, long ago, that an act of aesthetic rupture may be matched with an ideological one. In cutting the popular imagery of their day — press photographs and news articles in particular — the Dadaists intervened in the very fabric of modern life, and tore it apart. Their act of incision was just as political as it was visual. So what kind of ruptures are provoked by the artists of *Precision*?

Elysha Rei's *Rabbit (proof) fence* (2023) offers a fine case study. Here, the artist has made a paper fence of the most extraordinary exactitude. Everything is perfect: perfectly measured, perfectly cut, so fine and delicate. This fragile paper monument hangs from the ceiling, casting a mesmerising shadow against the gallery wall behind. The real point of interest, however, is located in the bottom-left corner of the work, where a hole has been cut in the paper fence (the remains sitting in a pile on the gallery floor), and a rabbit appears poised to jump through.

The form of the rabbit has been cut from the immigration papers of Rei's own grandmother, and so here is the rupture. To cut these papers is to lacerate and attack the very social and political structures they represent — namely, the reprehensible White Australia Policy that was in effect from 1901-66. The cutting of the rabbit's outline has rendered the papers entirely useless and unreadable; no passages or lines are left intact. And so, just as Hannah Höch famously *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the Beer Belly of the Weimar Republic* (1919), so here does Rei cut with the artist's scissors through the racist institutions of 20th century Australia. The violence of cutting, which is effectively masked by the detail and perfection of the paper fence, is central to the political messaging of *Rabbit (proof) fence*.



## 2. Death to language and all it stands for

For another example, we might look to the work of Martin Smith. His work, *Charlie* (2022), deploys a strange mixture of cyanotype and collage to produce what the artist describes as an “unidentifiable portrait” — a vague outline or silhouette of a nondescript figure, depicted from the shoulders up. For the collage element, Smith has used letters that have been individually cut out, offering the exhibition’s audience yet another show of remarkably precise and repetitive labour.

But again, we would do well to focus on the violence of cutting that gave rise to this work. It is by cutting these letters out, by dissembling the words from which they came, that Smith forces his audience to view the letters as individualised entities, entirely abstracted from their original context and use value as the fundamental building blocks of written language. This is a savage attack on the structures of language, the very mode by which humans make meaning and communicate.

To this end, Smith’s work calls to mind the optophonetic performances of Raoul Hausmann, in which the artist “[broke] down the material of spoken and written language into their smallest components” in an attempt to “inspire his audiences to examine their own psychic construction through linguistic and social forces.”<sup>1</sup> Hausmann’s performances, just like the Dada montage of Höch, foregrounded disjunction and deconstruction as a method of radical critique. Most interestingly, both the means and the end of Hausmann’s experiments bear similarity to Smith’s work, which — by using the dissembled fragments of language to produce an “unidentifiable portrait” — criticises the role of language in the formation of identity.

## 3. After destruction: (re)construction.

And yet, the artist who begins their task with cutting and tearing does not stop there. From the fragmentary fruits of their destructive labour, the artists in *Precision* have finished the job in precisely the opposite manner: by constructing something new from the ruins of the old, reordering and reimagining the visual world.

For an interesting precedent, we may look to the work of the Dada propagandist, John Heartfield, for whom the act of suture — of stitching the pieces back together to produce new visual forms — was just as important as the inceptive act of cutting. The potency of his propaganda lay in his ability to create new and fantastical imagery, a new reality, out of fragments and scraps.



Martin Smith, *Charlie*, 2022. Cyanotype with cut out letters made from photographs. (Detail). Photo by Louis Lim.



Anna Carey, *Everything you imagine is real* (2022), Precision exhibition (2023), giclee print 100x 88cm, edition of 6 (detail). Photo courtesy of the artist.

In Precision, such a process is exemplified by the work of Anna Carey. Her dreamy architectural constructions of imaginary “psychic shop fronts” show the audience an alternative reality, in which connection is foregrounded. This appears firstly in a formal sense, in the wholeness of the depicted scenes, where the disjuncture of their creation is disguised by the careful fabrication of a believable illusionistic space. But the centrality of connection (ie. the ‘stitching together’) extends even beyond the works themselves, as the audience is invited to call the phone number featured on the shop fronts and thus connect, in reality, with the artist herself.

#### 4. Cut carefully — with precision

Precision raises many interesting questions for the makers and viewers of contemporary art. The artists included in the show share something essential in their various approaches to art making, which resonate remarkably with the work of the Berlin Dada. The reemergence of an “art of cutting,” as signalled by Precision, is far from insignificant.

In a world marked increasingly by crisis and revolt — as those who dare to struggle make very real and material efforts to lacerate, fracture and dissemble the structures of society — Precision calls us to remember the power of cutting: to remember that paper is not the only thing under the knife.

*See page 47 for endnotes*



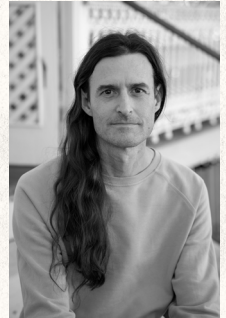
# MEET THE WRITERS

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## KYLE WEISE

COORDINATOR | CRITICAL WRITING PROJECT 2023

Kyle Weise is a writer and curator. He has a long involvement with artist-run and not-for profit spaces, including co-founding and co-directing Screen Space (2010-2016) and Kuiper Projects (2017-). He was the Curator (Exhibition Program) at Metro Arts from 2018-2023.



## SAM HARRISON

WRITER

Sam Harrison is a Brisbane based artist and curator with cultural connections to Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri people of Central NSW. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) in 2018 from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne.

Sam has worked in a number of creative capacities, as an exhibiting artist, curator, artist assistant and arts teacher for young adults with autism. He has a keen interest in exploring how art functions in urban settings to create healthy, inclusive and enjoyable environments.



His practice revolves around discussion and analysis of the Australian Identity. His practice can be narrowed down into three general focuses. Firstly, utilizing historical and contemporary learning resources to re-conceptualize how we interpret the national story. Secondly, to create conversation in the present, about the present, to identify where and what we are as a collective, yet diverse cultural entity. Lastly, to think and envision what an increasingly connected, mobile and global future has in store for us.



## KATHLEEN O'HAGAN

WRITER

Kathleen O'Hagan (she/her) is an emerging arts writer, artist and educator based in Meanjin (Brisbane). She graduated from a Bachelor of Visual Art with First Class Honours and a University Medal in 2021. She currently works as a Sessional Art Theory Tutor at the QCA, and as a Venue Support Officer for Caboolture Regional Art Gallery. Her work has been published in NiTRO Edition 41 and Lemonade: Letters to Art, alongside multiple essays for local artists and exhibitions.

## CAROL SCHWARZMAN

WRITER

Carol Schwarzman is a visual artist and independent arts writer based in Meanjin/Brisbane. Her writing focuses on contemporary visual arts, culture and nature. She contributes to publications in Australia and internationally such as Artlink, Art Monthly Australia, Art & Australia, Sculpture, The Brooklyn Rail and Contemporary Ceramics. She is currently a PhD candidate in art theory at University of Queensland.



## GEORGIA HAYWARD

WRITER

Georgia Hayward (she/her) is an emerging artist and artworker of Maranganji and Anglo-Celtic descent. Her practice explores the influence of public space on contemporary social dynamics and community development. Based in Meanjin, Georgia works as the General Manager at Outer Space, a non-for-profit contemporary arts organisation focused on supporting the artistic practices of emerging, early and mid-career artists. Outside of her role with Outer Space, Georgia is an Editor and Board Member for Runway Journal, an experimental digital art platform that commissions and publishes critical and artistic works that respond to thematic callouts and engage with current threads of Australian and international contemporary art.

## CHRISTIAN RIZZALLI

WRITER

Christian Rizzalli is an art historian based at the University of Queensland, where he works as a sessional lecturer and tutor. His research is primarily focused on the history of the Italian avant-garde, and the way in which modernist aesthetics were deployed by communist and Fascist artists and architects in between the two world wars. With this topic as a springboard, Christian is also interested in the broader (global) relationship between avant-garde art and radical politics, particularly at the intersection of art and architecture. Having recently completed his PhD, he is now working towards publication of his research in peer-reviewed journals.







# ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES & EXHIBITIONS

# MAIN DRAG

Presented in partnership  
with Firstdraft.

Gallery Two

18 Mar – 15  
Apr 2023



Easton Dunne, Main Drag (2023), installation view Metro Arts. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Main Drag applies aesthetics of kitsch and camp queer visual culture to the stereotypical signs and signifiers of local and communal identity that can be seen along the national highway running through Rockhampton, the town where Dunne resides in Central Queensland.

Resurfacing images that the area uses to market itself to visitors and frame its own identity for locals with hot pink, fluffy faux fur that resembles cowhide, Dunne attempts to resist and reframe the hyper-masculine narrative of being the “beef capital of Australia” as offering the potential for an alternate queer utopia in this regional location.

## EASTON DUNNE

Easton Dunne is an artist, artswoker and arts educator based in Central Queensland on Darumbal Country. Their work explores connections between identity and place through an autobiographical lens.

They utilise drawing, sculpture, installation and time-based media to create autobiographical narratives offering their perspective on life as a queer, transgender and non-binary person who grew up in regional and rural Central Queensland and returned there to live as an adult after studying and working in South-East Queensland.



Informed by Rural Queer Studies, Dunne’s work aims to facilitate dialogue and exchange between regional and metropolitan communities around how socio-cultural and geographical factors influence diversity in queer identity work and practices. Dunne completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at Queensland College of Art in 2012 and a Postgraduate Diploma of Education at Queensland University of Technology in 2014.

[@easton\\_artist](https://www.instagram.com/easton_artist)

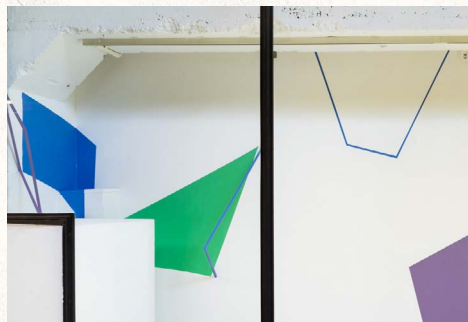
[www.eastondunne.com](http://www.eastondunne.com)



# BE THERE OR BE SQUARE?

Window Gallery

18 Mar – 15 Apr 2023



Renee Kire, *Be There or Be Square* (2023), installation view Metro Arts Window Gallery. Photo by Louis Lim.

Through the merging of sculpture and painting, this site-specific installation is an exploration of three-dimensional forms and their relationship to space. With the use of perspective and viewer interaction, this installation introduces a new way of observing and understanding – promoting new ways of inquiry through fragmentation of knowledge. The work slowly reveals itself through the responsiveness of the participant, making them think about their surroundings and their ability to adapt to new situations. The viewer is a vital part of the work, as they are required to adapt to their surroundings to complete the work.

## RENEE KIRE



Renee Kire is a Meanjin/Brisbane based artist and a graduate from the Queensland College of Arts, where she recently completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours). Working across both sculpture and installation, Kire's practice responds to the historical feminine and masculine dichotomy within visual arts by occupying space in untraditional ways.

Often feminizing harsh geometric forms through patternation, adaptability, and evidence of the handmade; Kire uses material investigation to reject the static qualities of conventional sculpture, resulting in the creation of unstable configurations with a touch of femininity.

By referencing overlooked figures from art history, particularly women from the Minimalist movement, she aims to emphasize the historical gender gap in the art world. This context is important in her work, reflecting an interest in modern composition, architecture, and minimalism in a way that embraces flexibility and responsiveness to one's surroundings.

[www.reneekire.com](http://www.reneekire.com)

[@reneekire](https://www.instagram.com/reneekire)

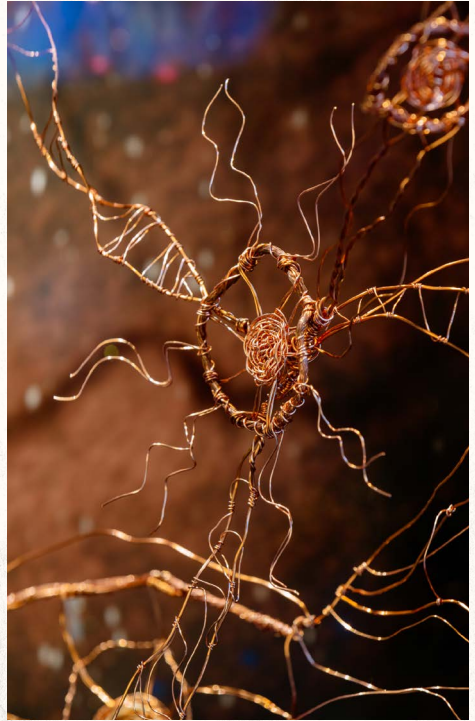
# UNDERCURRENTS

Gallery One, Two, and  
Window Gallery

30 Sep – 28 Oct 2023

Exchange is a living process of transformation, like conversations that span across generations. To share and ignite the spirit kept alive between ancient and living relations. Our hearts beat the songs of thousand plus generations, guided in haptic practice, and embedded and encoded in our exchanges.

Jody Rallah explores the Undercurrents of life on Yuggera Djara, the experience of Country and reflective narratives between sky, land and our role as custodians on Country. Immersive and intimate forms, including a woven constellation installation, soundscape and ceramic vessels, provide a sense of connectivity to Country and reflections of place and identity.



Jody Rallah, *Currents* (2021-23), installation view of Undercurrents. Photo by Joe Ruckl.

## JODY RALLAH



Artist Jody Rallah (2023). Photo by Joe Ruckl.

Jody Rallah's work engages with concepts relating to how materials and place are alive, carrying knowledge, narratives, and teachings through generations to evoke experiences of connection and inclusivity.

Rallah is a yuggera/yuggerabul – biri/bindal artist from Brisbane and a graduate of the Queensland College of Art.

Rallah works across a variety of creative methodologies including object making, sculptural installation, painting, soundscape and collaborative practices to investigate how the experience of community connection, haptic education and contemporary conditions can influence our relationship with Country and each other. She is conscious of how making with transformative mediums impacts our relationship to the past, present, and future.

[www.jodyrallah.com](http://www.jodyrallah.com)

[@jodyrallah](https://www.instagram.com/jodyrallah)





## MAVA PATHFINDERS: ARTEFACTS OF THE WORKING PROCESS

Gallery One, Two and Window Gallery 24 June – 15 July 2023

At the close of their residency, MAVA Pathfinder Artists, Caitlin Franzmann, Elizabeth Willing and James Barth shared developments and learnings from their time in the MAVA studio. Upskilling and resourcing mid-career artists to thrive, the MAVA Pathfinder Program supports artists to explore new opportunities to build a sustainable creative practice.

## JAMES BARTH

James Barth is Meanjin/Brisbane-based artist whose work reflects her intersecting interests in painting, 3D computer graphics, self-portraiture, and cinematic languages. Barth's work manipulates processes of painting and 3D animation to interrogate how digital spaces can simultaneously hold productive and critical mediations for her transgender identity and representation more broadly. In her paintings and videos, avatars that recall the artist's own image fluctuate between the tangible and ambiguous.

[milanigallery.com.au/artists/  
james-barth/](https://milanigallery.com.au/artists/james-barth/)

Artist Caitlin Franzmann in front of her work at the exhibition opening of MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process (2023), Metro Arts Gallery Two. Photo by Masimba Sasa.



# CAITLIN FRANZMANN

Caitlin Franzmann is a Brisbane-based artist who creates installations, sonic experiences, performances, and social practice works that focus on place-based knowledge and embodied practices. She creates intimate situations within galleries and public spaces that allow for gathering, conversation and storytelling as a way to encourage reflection on histories, complex ecosystems and environmental concerns specific to a place.

[www.caitlinfranzmann.com](http://www.caitlinfranzmann.com)

# ELIZABETH WILLING

Elizabeth Willing creates performance, sculptural, and installation works using food and food culture as inspiration and material. For her, food is the catalyst she uses to translate the ineffable body, to reflect on the performance of eating, and to facilitate multisensory experiences in an otherwise ocularcentric context.

Willing uses hospitality as a framework for understanding the relationships that develop in her artworks between the audience, artist and artwork, with her objects being the mediator and outcome of performing hospitality.

[www.elizabethwilling.com](http://www.elizabethwilling.com)



Artist Elizabeth Willing in front of her work at the exhibition opening of MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process (2023), Metro Arts Gallery Two, Photo by Masimba Sasa.



# TEETERING, TITTERING, TITS UP

6 May – 10 June

Gallery One

teetering, tittering, tits up is an exhibition of sculptural works that imagine structures for queer and multispecies intimacies. Playful reconfigurations of outdoor equipment such as tarpaulin, tentpoles, and trampolines offer refuge in their corrugations and curvatures.

Developed in response to wetland bird hides and other cruising sites, the exhibition takes an irreverent, ironic, and absurd approach to ecological relationships.

Bird hides, banksia trees, playgrounds, and underbellies of bridges facilitate encounters between a range of ecological beings from migratory birds to lovers (human and non-human).



Tiana Jefferies, teetering, tittering, tits up (2023), installation view Metro Arts Gallery One. Photo by Louis Lim.



## TIANA JEFFERIES

[www.tianajefferies.com](http://www.tianajefferies.com)

@tianajefferies

Tiana Jefferies is a Meanjin-based artist working predominantly in sculpture. Her interdisciplinary practice explores materials and structures that mediate human and non-human intimacies. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Art from the Queensland College of Art and a Master of Philosophy from the Queensland University of Technology.

Jefferies has exhibited in group and solo shows at Wreckers Artspace, The Walls, The Old Lock Up, Metro Arts and Outer Space. Residencies include those at Sculptors Queensland and most recently, Hope Street Studio facilitated by Griffith University Art Museum.

# PRECISION

Gallery One, Two, and  
Window Gallery

6 May – 10 June

Curated by Stephanie  
Lindquist, with Minqi Gu.

From paper to photographs, installations and wall sculpture, these Queensland contemporary artists push the boundaries of paper cutting. At a time when the environment and climate change is at the forefront of the media, this approach to a traditional, recyclable and renewable art medium is in itself a political statement. For some of the artists, ecology and sustainability inform the subject matter for their work, for others it is a secondary to an often cutting, critical engagement with the medium or other socio-political issues.



*Elysha Rei, Rabbit (Proof) Fence, installation view Precision exhibition (2023), Metro Arts. Photo by Louis Lim.*

## THE ARTISTS

**ANNA CAREY**

**BRIAN  
ROBINSON**

**ELYSHA REI**

**HENRI VAN  
NOORDENBURG**

**MARTIN SMITH**

**NICOLA MOSS**

**PAMELA SEE  
(XUE MEI-LING)**



# Endnotes

## INTRODUCTION – Kyle Weise

1. David Cross, "Never Let Me Go" in *Distributed*, Edited by David Blamey and Brad Haylock. Occasional Table. London: Open Editions, 2018. 29-51.
2. Gary Hall, *The Uberfication of the University*. Frontrunners: Ideas First. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
3. Similarly, the narrator of Ishiguro's recent novel, *Klara and the Sun* (London: Faber, 2021), has a 'limited' perspective. Klara is an artificial intelligence (or 'AF'), a companion robot, whose lack of understanding of the broader social context of her existence and, for most of the novel, of the purpose for which she has been purchased, does not diminish the beauty of her insights and interpretation. Nor does her ultimate acceptance of her fate and continued dedication to her god (the Sun) diminish her effect on the world and those around her.
4. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern" *Critical Inquiry* 30, 2004. 225-48. "The only loser is the naive believer, the great unwashed, always caught off balance [...]. Is it so surprising, after all, that with such positions [...], the humanities have lost the hearts of their fellow citizens, that they had to retreat year after year, entrenching themselves always further in the narrow barracks left to them by more and more stingy deans? [...]. We [critics] explain the objects we don't approve of by treating them as fetishes [...]. To accuse something of being a fetish is the ultimate gratuitous, disrespectful, insane and barbarous gesture." (239-43)
5. *Ibid*, p.246.
6. Patricia Reed, "Distributed Situatedness" in *Distributed*. 214-25. p.222.

## MAIN DRAG – Kathleen O'Hagan

1. Lucas Crawford, "A good ol' country time: Does queer rural temporality exist?," *Sexualities* 20, no. 8 (Dec 2017): 881.
2. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 9–11.
3. Colin Johnson, Brian Gilley, and Mary Gray, "Introduction," in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, ed. Colin Johnson, Brian Gilley, and Mary Gray (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 12.
4. Johnson, Gilley, and Gray, "Introduction," 14.
5. Mary Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 168.
6. Andrew Gorman-Murray, Gordon Waitt, Chris Gibson, "Chilling out in 'cosmopolitan country': Urban/rural hybridity and the construction of Daylesford as a 'lesbian and gay rural idyll'," *Journal of Rural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2012): 77.
7. Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 36–37; Gorman-Murray, Waitt, Gibson, "Chilling out in 'cosmopolitan country'," 71.
8. Johnson, Gilley, and Gray, "Introduction," 14.
9. Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.
10. Halberstam, *Queer Time*, 135; Nishant Shahani, "'Between Light and Nowhere': The Queer Politics of Nostalgia," *Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 4 (2013): 1220.
11. Cameron Crookston, "It Feels Like Yesterday: Drag, Nostalgia, and Queer Affective History in The Vaudevillians," *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 5 (2022): 877.
12. "Meet the Rockhampton Artist Queering the Beef Capital," interview by Nate Woodall, *Q News*, April 6, 2023, <https://qnews.com.au/meet-the-rockhampton-artist-queering-the-beef-capital/>.
13. "Rockhampton," *Tourism and Events Queensland*, Accessed 15 May, 2022, <https://www.queensland.com/au/en/places-to-see/destination-information/p-56b25da32880253d74c450f4-rockhampton>.

# BE THERE OR BE SQUARE ?

– Christian Rizzalli

1. For more on faktura and debates surrounding this term, see Benjamin H. D Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” October 30 (Autumn 1984): 86-95.
2. Christina Lodder, “Soviet Constructivism,” in *Art of the Avant-Gardes*, eds. Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 364-65.
3. Devin Fore, “The Operative Word in Soviet Factography,” October 118 (Fall 2006): 101, 105.

## UNDERCURRENTS – 2

– Carol Schwarzman

1. Steven Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 87.
2. Qtd. in Melanie K. Yazzi and Cutcha Risling Baldy, “Introduction: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Water”, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol 7., No 1, 2018,
2. Melanie K. Yazzi is bilagaana born for Ma’iideeshgiizhini (Coyote Pass Clan) and Cutcha Risling Baldy is Hupa, Yurok and Karuk and an enrolled member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe in Northern California.

## JAMES BARTH – MAVA

## PATHFINDERS – Kathleen O’Hagan

1. *Earthbound* (2022) was commissioned and exhibited by Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne.
2. Sally Hickson, “Mike Pence’s fly: From Renaissance portraits to Salvador Dalí, artists used flies to make a point about appearances,” *The Conversation*, October 10, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/mike-pences-fly-from-renaissance-portraits-to-salvador-dali-artists-used-flies-to-make-a-point-about-appearances-147815>.
3. Rodrigo Guzman-Serrano, “Where There Are Flies, Media Art You’ll Find: Digital (Im)materiality, Artistic Medium, and Media Art Decay” (Paper presented at the 9th International Conference on Digital and Interactive Arts, Braga, Portugal, October 23 - 25, 2019), <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3359852.3359903>.
4. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists* (London: Penguin Classics, 1987), 35.
5. Steven Connor, *Fly* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 162.
6. “James Barth,” *Milani Gallery*, accessed November 16, 2023, <https://milanigallery.com.au/artists/james-barth/>.
7. Isabelle Graw, “OPENINGS: AVERY SINGER,” *Artforum*, November, 2014, <https://www.artforum.com/features/openings-avery-singer-221829/>.
8. Herman Rapaport, “Gerhard Richter and the Death of Poignancy,” *Parallax* 10, no. 3 (June 2010): 109.
9. “James Barth *Earthbound*,” *Gertrude Contemporary*, accessed November 16, 2023, <https://gertrude.org.au/digital-projects/james-barth-earthbound>.



# CAITLIN FRANZMANN – MAVA PATHFINDERS – Carol Schwarzman

1. Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 339.
2. A regional gallery in Toogoolawah, Queensland, the Condensary once housed a condensed milk factory and packing facility that stopped production in 1938.
3. I broadly refer here to Karen Barad's theory of agential realism in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
4. Algae are an ancient species of nutritional, photosynthesising plant whose origin on Earth has been proven to be one billion years ago. Michelle Starr, "Look at these Mind-Blowing Fossils of 1 Billion-Year-Old Seaweed", *Science Alert*, 25 February 2020, <https://www.sciencealert.com/these-fossils-are-seaweed-that-lived-a-billion-years-ago>. The pineapple fruit, first domesticated by the Tupa-Guarani people of South America over 2000 years ago, was brought to the Old World by Christopher Columbus in 1493, and has beneficial anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties. Marian Butu and Steliana Rodino, "Fruit and Vegetable-Based Beverages - Nutritional Properties and Health Benefits", in Alexandru Mihai Grumezescu and Alina Maria Holban, eds., *Natural Beverages, Volume 13 - The Science of Beverages*, (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 2019), 303-338, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/ananas-comosus>.
5. Petrified wood dates back to the Jurassic Age when dinosaurs populated the Earth, 140-180 million years ago, <https://chinchillamuseum.com.au/articles/chinchilla-petrified-wood/>

## PRECISION – Christian Rizzalli



1. Matthew Biro, "Raoul Hausmann's Revolutionary Media: Dada Performance, Photomontage and the Cyborg," *Art History* 30, no. 1 (February 2007), 38.

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