On Vulnerability and Doubt
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Andrea Büttner
Cherine Fahd
Brent Harris
Tala Madani
Linda Marrinon
Archie Moore
Charlie Sofo
Ambera Wellmann

Curator: Max Delany
The thinking around *On Vulnerability and Doubt* was initially inspired by the work of a number of artists – working independently, without reference to one another, across geographic and generational divides – whose practices somehow share things in common: a sensibility perhaps, steeped in a sense of minority and deviation from the norm; prone to humour and critique in relation to patriarchy and power; with a tendency towards the deflating of pomp and ceremony, and against grandiosity. Each has developed compelling, highly formal albeit idiosyncratic languages, whilst also attuned to ethical and existential questions, and an affective dimension related to feeling and subjectivity. The works in question included Tala Madani’s luminous, scatological paintings of (mostly) middle-aged men going about absurdist social rituals, shining a spotlight on conventions of masculinity and authority, and on our collective failures and shortcomings more generally; Linda Marrinon’s paintings and modestly-scaled sculptural observations on behaviour and manners, fashion and costume, rendered with sentiment and humour, and dry, art-historical wit; and Andrea Büttner’s art and research into the politics of poverty, and discourses related to shame, desire and what it is to be human.

Related questions of vulnerability and doubt – aligned with a sceptical attitude to patriarchy, state power and institutions – have enjoyed widespread expression and affect recently in wider public and academic contexts. Movements such as #metoo and #BlackLivesMatter have ‘mobilised enormous and powerful waves of feeling, from compassion to guilt, from shame to rage’.1 As vulnerability scholars Anu Koivunen, Katarina Kyrölä and Ingrid Ryberg have noted: ‘Vulnerability is no longer (if it ever was) only about weakness or immobilisation, but very concretely about agency’.2 In rethinking vulnerability as a productive, critical term, away from ideas of victimhood and a lack of agency, diverse artists, scholars and activists have identified vulnerability as a concept helpful in destabilising categories of normality, and countering hegemony, underscoring the value of difference, queerness and otherness, engendering empathy and understanding, and valuable in expressing ‘the complexities, tensions, and ambiguities of experiences of gender, sexuality and power in contemporary life’.3

Archie Moore’s photographic work, *Under my skin* 2019, for example, engages with bodily flesh and *trompe l’oeil* in presenting
the bare-chested artist in the company of others wearing T-shirts adorned with the image of Moore’s torso. The image initially presents a charming awkwardness related to intimacy and modesty – of one’s body on display, and wearing on the outside what is usually covered and hidden from view. The idea of getting under someone’s skin is both a provocation, and a call for empathy; as the artist notes: ‘I enjoy the process of putting the viewer in my shoes’.4 But Under my skin also has a more sinister undertone connected to expressions of doubt and distrust concerning cultural identity, Aboriginality and legitimacy, in relation to skin colour and blood fraction, something that Moore has experienced and understands only too well.5

Moore’s work also taps into mainstream contemporary public discourse, whereby – in politics, journalism, education, and cultural communication generally – we seem to have less and less patience for expressions of vulnerability, doubt and complexity, and instead seek reassurance in authoritative expressions of certainty and faith. On social media, for example, we increasingly orient ourselves around hard-held, algorithmically-aligned absolutist positions devoid of nuance, ambiguity and complexity. Whilst in conventional politics and journalism, we are increasingly presented with self-assured, hard and fast, left and right, black and white positions, but ultimately, shallow-rooted and short-sighted, which side-step critique and elide complexity.

As art historian and academic Robert Nelson outlines, doubt is not only intrinsic to critical thinking and scientific method, but has made a long, rich and imaginative contribution to the history of art, ideas and political philosophy. In classical times, for example, ‘to entertain doubts is to confront doubts, which is brave in the same way that confronting death is brave; hence the value of the concept in dialectic. To evade doubts is to prevaricate or to fail to grasp what lies in contention’. In the Renaissance, Nelson continues: ‘Doubt is not a weakness but indicates something legitimately unresolved, possibly tragic, as when love and honour are in contention’.6 In a breath-taking sweep through the history of doubt in philosophy, literature, art and ideas, Nelson demonstrates how doubt has been ‘richly inflected with poetic meaning, understood as essential to feeling, to the terms of existence, to philosophy and ontology’.7

The question of doubt is addressed centrally in Brent Harris’ series of Borrowed plumage paintings from 2007, a number of which present the probing fingers of Saint Thomas the Apostle – Doubting Thomas – plunging his fingers into the body of Christ, suggestively penetrating Christ’s wounds. In these and other invocations to doubt, touch and touch-me-not, Harris sets up philosophical and erotically charged compositional conundrums – targets and orifices which are at once gaping holes projecting deep into the recessive space of the painting, or modernist black circles which sit flat and matter-of-factly on the surface of the picture plane – which, in the face of doubt, seek to test the very ability of painting, and by extension art itself, to compel conviction.

Love fills us with doubt and doubt questions our faith. And yet, doubt also requires special powers of attention and reflection, ‘to turn things around in your mind, to gain a [new or] better perspective’.8 The story of the Doubting Thomas also underscores the importance of physical experience, and of engaging feelings and sensations other than the purely visual. On Vulnerability and Doubt inevitably engages with what might be understood as the realm of feelings, emotions and an affective dimension in the production and appreciation of contemporary art practice. These subjective terms not only relate to the position of the artist, but equally transfer to the spectator, to the reception of the work, to the capacity that art has to touch, move, motivate and mobilise us as viewers.9

Recent interest in theories of Affect are very much at the heart of Charlie Sofo’s practice, which shows us – articulately and poetically, in strange and unexpected ways – how abstract feelings such as intensities, sensations, vitalities and resonances pass from body to body – human and non-human, just as they do from the work of art to the viewer. Thinking about art, life and politics through feeling is central to Sofo’s work, and how such affective dimensions, and qualities such as mood and atmosphere, are critical to our psychic and bodily relations. Striving to create a social, emotional and affective space for artistic encounter, Sofo’s sculpture, videos, collections and writing are interested in how desire might be made visible, and in exploring – in the words of Harald Szeemann – how ‘attitudes become form’. Szeemann’s formulation might also serve as an apt description for Cherine Fahd’s Fear of project of 2011/2019; a suite of photographs documenting a series of written text posters, pasted up by the artist in urban contexts, which projected private
fears into public space. Articulating the generalised anxieties that we carry as individuals, and the relations of the individual to the body politic, Fahd’s project also reflects on the cultivation of fear and shame in social space and public discourse. Whilst her posters were only temporary and ephemeral interventions into the public sphere, her project makes clear the ways in which attitudes such as fear and shame, for better and worse, can so easily become socially entrenched as forms in the world to which we are part.

Arguing that an affective dimension is as important to progressive art practice as material or formal invention, art historian Sue Best has contended that ‘new beginnings can involve feeling as well as form’, a position reiterated by Elizabeth Grosz when she states that ‘art works affect before they inform, perform or communicate’.10 Tala Madani’s animated film Overhead projection (crowd) 2018 shows the way in which projected cinematic images literally imprint themselves upon our subconscious, embedding themselves in our subjectivity, which in turn stimulate and motivate new forms of behaviour and action, finding release in new energies and vitality. The paintings of Ambera Wellmann are another case in point, insofar as the substance of paint gives a corporeal dimension to intimacies and intensities. Attuned to experience as much as description, her paintings are as much about relationships and sensations which exist between the painting and the viewer as they are about the self-sufficient relations of form and subject contained within the frame of the work.

On Vulnerability and Doubt seeks to address these affective contours and dimensions, bringing together a group of artists whose works variously engage with questions of vulnerability and doubt, intimacy and desire, shame, love and awkwardness. In exploring the role of doubt, and the story of the Doubting Thomas, the exhibition also considers the significance and primacy of feeling over or alongside the visual, and the critical role of humour, ‘the minor’ and ‘otherwise’ in relation to figures of authority. On Vulnerability and Doubt also embraces the complexities that artists have about putting themselves and their work on display, and the bringing down of one’s guard in the face of vulnerability and humour. In celebrating these layered and complex artistic practices and ideas, we are mindful of the diverse and unanticipated ways in which our subjectivities and identities, our bodies and our politics, are shaped by, and precariously subject to, affective engagements with art, media, culture and power relations in the world around us.

1 Anu Koivunen, Katriina Kyrölä And Ingrid Ryberg, ‘Vulnerability as a Political Language’, in Anu Koivunen, Katriina Kyrölä And Ingrid Ryberg (eds.), The Power of Vulnerability: Mobilising affect in feminist, queer and anti-racist media cultures, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 3.
2 ibid., p. 3.
4 Archie Moore, email to the author, 18 March 2019.
5 Blood fraction refers to a work by the artist from 2015, in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, which also explores the politics of skin and language to classify, quantify and assign meaning based on race. Moore has noted in response how, ‘Non-Indigenous people will identify Aboriginal people by skin colour, but Aboriginal people do so by relationships’. Cited in Steve Dow, ‘Archie Moore Interview’, in Archie Moore 1970–2018, Griffith University Art Museum, Brisbane, 2018, p. 33.
10 Susan Best, Visualizing feeling:..., p. 3. Elizabeth Grosz’s formulation is drawn from liner notes to Best’s book.
Andrea Büttner, Untitled 2017
woodcut on paper, 200.0 x 140.0 cm (left), 200.0 x 130.0 cm (right)
Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; and Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz. © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photograph: Andy Keate
In the early 2000s, I would regularly visit my grandmother on Friday nights for an early dinner. She was in her mid-nineties, and still living independently. We would meet in a restaurant up the road from her house, and afterwards I would walk her home. She was slow but determined. It would take about half-an-hour to make it the three hundred metres or so down the hill.

It was always slightly difficult finding things to talk about. The world or worlds into which she had been born, had grown up with and lived in were unutterably different from my own. I did not know very much about her life, except for a few scattered externalities, a heap of dissimulating and inconsistent familial representations. For the most part, she did not have much enthusiasm for telling her own story. Why would anybody be interested? I think, for her, words were predominantly superfluous reportage of indifferent events. Her utterances were typically laconic and impersonal. She had loved fishing; when she got too old to go alone, she took up the pokies. ‘It’s as good as thinking nothing’, she would say. She liked it when she won too, though it was not entirely the point. ‘We were so poor when I was growing up’, she once said. ‘Lucky you’re not now’, I clumsily replied after some time. ‘Yes’, she said, ‘better than the other way around’, and that was it for the conversation. For my grandmother, the present was best if it was empty; the past was mainly a dead letter.

Then she started having recurrent nightmares. The scene concerned what she assured me had been a real incident. It must have taken place sometime in the early 1910s in the family home on Brunswick Street, in the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy, when my grandmother was perhaps four or five years of age. My great-grandparents were Polish Jews who had ended up in Melbourne after fleeing pogroms at home. Fitzroy was an industrial working-class suburb in those days with a strong Irish Catholic streak. My grandmother recalled being a little girl peeking out of the terrace window on Friday nights to see drunks beating each other senseless. ‘Justin’, she once remarked, ‘the gutters of Brunswick Street would run every Sabbath with blood’. (Well, they still do today, if probably not for the same reasons).

That was not the scene tormenting my grandmother. All she would say was that it concerned a situation in the garden where her father had punished her unjustly in front of a group of his friends. She would not give any further details; I know neither the alleged
crime nor the punishment. What she did say was that the overwhelming sense of rage, shame and injustice was waking her again and again in the middle of the night, and she would be forced to get up, sweating, exhausted, and unable to go back to sleep. The feelings seemed to her as intense as they were on the day on which the event had occurred. Her frail and aging body would shake with the humiliated passions of childhood. ‘But Gran’, I would say, ‘everybody in the dream has been dead for at least fifty years. No-one else knows or remembers; you don’t have to worry’. ‘Oh, but I do’, she said, ‘I do’.

What a phrase: do because she had to, or do because she had decided she had to? An infinitesimal rift opens between the do of absolute necessity, the destiny of historical nightmare, and the do of the obligations of passion, the choice to affirm what befalls you. The re-emergence of shame in unprovoked and unexpected dreaming – inexplicable, involuntary, anachronistic, repetitive representations – seemed to provoke a question of paradoxical freedom. Under such conditions, to tell someone that they do not need to feel shame seems pointless at best. The scene of shame is too overdetermined.

When people start thinking about the question of shame, appearing before others – being seen – almost immediately and invariably arises as an essential element of the phenomenon. In a very famous analysis, Jean-Paul Sartre emphasises precisely this aspect. Sartre describes a man peeping through a keyhole, whereupon a sudden noise behind him apprises him that he is being watched by an unknown other. At once he feels ashamed. A subject has become nothing but an object before the gaze of another. It is this recognition by the subject that it is just another object-in-the-world for others that constitutes its shame. While it always seems keyed to a highly situated event, shame has a universal destiny.

Knowing the shame of becoming an object, the subject disappears. For Sartre, ‘the Other is the immense, invisible presence which supports this shame and embraces it on every side; he is the supporting environment of my being-unrevealed.’ The ‘Other’ is a guarantor of one’s own apparition in the world through the experience of shame. Yet, as Bernard Williams has underlined, in shame ‘the viewer’s gaze draws the subject’s attention not to the viewer, but to the subject himself’.

As such, shame is constitutive and primal; so fundamental, in fact, that one cannot be a subject without it. By the same token, one cannot fully be a subject with it. This is presumably why the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan would later coin the neologism hontologie, a composite of honte, shame, and ontology, the study of being. For Lacan – unlike the French philosopher René Descartes, for whom radical doubt was finally and definitively banished by the formula ‘I think therefore I am’ – shame banishes doubt by placing the subject at the irreducibly equivocal intersection of being and appearing: I am there only where I appear to the other, yet where this appearance is tantamount to my eclipse. Yet I am not there where I appear – although I am only there. I am a subject only insofar as I have become an object, and therefore not fully a subject at all.

The word ‘shame’ itself derives from an Indo-European root meaning ‘to cover’. To appear at all is vital to being a subject, but the very fact of appearing threatens to turn the subject into an object. Knowing this, the subject knows shame (of de-subjectivation) as essential to itself. In such knowing, the subject seeks to cover its shame – although this very covering then becomes the emblem of the shame it would deny. What am I? The shameful concealment of a vanishing. The Biblical book of Genesis is indecently explicit in this regard: shame is at the origin of humanity as the indelible marker of the Fall. Adam and Eve, having eaten the forbidden fruit, attempt to hide themselves away from God’s sight. It is also precisely because of its irreducible address to the gaze of another – God himself in the Biblical story – that makes shame such an opportune resource for those who seek to establish and expand their control over other humans. As Jacqueline Rose writes in an incomparable essay:

Shame may require an audience, but at the same time it is secret and hidden, not something which as a rule people are in a hurry to share... And yet shame is also an action, a transitive verb – to shame – with a very public face. Shaming someone can be a political project.

Shame, accordingly, is regularly targeted by those who police our community to enforce the boundaries between inside and outside,
inclusion and exclusion, the appropriate and inappropriate, good and evil. At the limit, these inherent links between visibility and shame can become fodder for revenge killings and state torture. Discussing the revelations of the paramilitary operations of the United States of America during the second Gulf War, Ruth Leys underlines how technologies of visual representation come to be implicated in the worst kind of practices of shaming: ‘As a ‘shame multiplier’, the camera epitomizes [sic] the logic of torture at Abu Ghraib, which can be defined as a spectatorial logic of shame’. In such circumstances, the sorts of shame that typically forge and bind community are violently turned against it, becoming a force of destruction both of individuals and societies by means of the dissemination of shaming images. Yet a further paradox also threatens to emerge, whereby the very efforts to multiply shame as a tool of domination can lead to the dissolution of its coercive force and the inversion of its intent. There is always something shameless about the shaming of others – a shamelessness that can in turn sometimes threaten the powers that would deploy it.

This potential of shame to re-coil upon attempts to instrumentalise it in the service of power is implicated with the relationship between humans and animals, precisely because the affect of shame is usually forbidden to all non-humans. At the end of Franz Kafka’s novel The Trial (1925), the protagonist Josef K. receives a visit from his two executioners: ‘the hands of one man were right at K.’s throat, while the other thrust the knife into his heart and turned it there twice. With failing sight K. saw how the men drew near his face, leaning cheek-to-cheek to observe the verdict. ‘Like a dog!’ he said; it seemed as though the shame was to outlive him’. To die, as Kafka has it, ‘like a dog’, is precisely to be separated from your own shame at the point of death. Your animal body dies; your shame survives; what were you when human but a volatile mix of the two?

In a brief essay titled ‘The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights,’ the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas proffers a commentary on the passage in Exodus: ‘You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs’. The image of the dog has often meant: servile, subhuman, thoughtless, unclean, lowlife, just as often as it has signified fidelity. Levinas recalls that, as a Jewish prisoner of war in Nazi Germany, he and the other prisoners were treated as precisely sub- or nonhumans by their guards. The only creature that continued to treat the Jews as if they were human was not itself human; it was an itinerant mutt that the inmates named, improbably, Bobby. The dog ‘would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men’. The dog for whom it is legitimate to eat any meat – that is, because it a creature beneath the law, unconsecrated to the sacred – is also the only creature remaining in the situation who will continue to greet other creatures beyond exterminatory fantasies of species-difference. The slander of race is meaningless to dogs like Bobby.

Notoriously, K. dies without really knowing the particularities of the judgement, the reasons for his bizarre trial that seems to have no clear boundaries or procedures, the obscurity of the persons and places and functionaries with which he comes into contact. All he really has to go on is his own hunch that, as the very first line of the novel asserts: ‘Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested’. Kafka thereby links slander, the false accusation or false witness – pure symbolic injustice as such – to the problematic of sin and shame. Such slander finally turns into a death-sentence, which leaves behind it the residue of an indestructible shame.

By making shame the final and purified product of a legal process, Kafka emphasises how the origins of shame are integrally bound up with procedures of justice and injustice. In Genesis, it is humanity’s injustice against God Himself – the disobedience of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil – that leads directly to the shame of Adam and Eve needing to be covered by a fig-leaf. The etymological links of ‘shame’ to ‘cover’ have been evoked above, and it is further suggestive that the word ‘hell’ also has an Indo-European relative, derived from Germanic languages, meaning ‘to cover’ (and the equivalents in many other languages also return to a word for what is underneath, for example, covered by the earth). The whole confection seems to be a cover-up whose un-covering leads only to further cover-ups.

So who was it then who ‘slandered’ – verleumdet haben, defamed, libelled – K. in the first place? (It certainly was not a real dog.)
Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has offered an ingenious suggestion: the person who slandered K. must have been none other than K. himself. Noting that in Roman law a person found guilty of promulgating false accusations would be branded on the forehead with a ‘K’ for kalumniator, Agamben proposes that kalumniator must be Josef K.’s true surname. This seems preposterous. After all, who would slander themselves? Even for our own time – which banalises heteronyms through the magic of online avatars and is fanatical about shaming and trolling and cancelling all sorts of persons on social media – self-slander may be beyond the pale.

Agamben’s point is that self-slander is a comic (and paradoxical) formation: to truly slander oneself (as opposed to confessing), you have to believe yourself innocent. Yet, in levelling such an accusation, you are guilty of slander and, in being-so, you can no longer believe yourself innocent. Therefore, you haven’t slandered yourself because you are indeed guilty (of the crime for which you have illegitimately accused yourself). However, if you know yourself guilty, you must be innocent of such slander. Agamben comments:

One understands, then, the subtlety of self-slander as a strategy that aims to deactivate and render inoperative the accusation, the implication that the law addresses to being. For if the accusation is false and if, on the other hand, accuser and accused coincide, then it is the fundamental implication of man in the law itself that is called into question. The only way to affirm one’s innocence before the law (and the powers that represent it: the father, marriage) is, in this sense, to falsely accuse oneself.10

My grandmother had wanted to tell me about her dream of shame. There was something in it, or about it, that she wanted to transmit, however enigmatically. She had clearly wanted to protest the injustice of the occasion that had given rise to it and, according to her testimony, she had been falsely accused. Shame at the accusation; shame at the punishment; shame at the injustice. Yet the dream itself was repeating the experience, in a kind of self-accusation; if you are indeed innocent, why do you still feel shame? Was it the irremediable situation of the situation that was retriggering the shame? Was it that she felt the need to bear witness against the false witness? Was it to testify that time cannot heal shame? Was it to attest to a gap between herself and herself? Was it to affirm an intensity of life that would otherwise find no expression? Is shame the indelible trace of the passing of others in the becoming of oneself?

Shame is so complex, fundamental and sticky an affect that there is no easy way to circumvent its claims. Perhaps that also means that shame is not only a paradoxical sign of existence, complicity and subordination, but provides the means to – beyond any analysis of such shame and the supposed reasons for it – express one’s innocence in an address to justice. Perhaps the trick is to live not by denying shame, but by affirming its testimony; not as a reapportioning of blame, but as an indication of the impossibility of living without a relation to others.

5 Ruth Leys, From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007, p.3. Leys notes that, over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, there was a broad shift in theoretical emphasis from guilt to shame, from what Leys calls ‘mimetic theories’ (i.e. the self as constituted by trauma) to ‘anti-mimetic theories’ (i.e. the trauma as external to the self that it affects) – and therefore participates in the fundamental shift from a primacy of intentions and actions to that of materials and experience. Such a shift is, for Leys, characteristic of what is now often called ‘identity politics’.
9 Franz Kafka, The Trial, p.3.
Andrea Büttner

Andrea Büttner, Beggar 2016
woodcut on paper, 126.5 x 90.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; and Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz. © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photograph: Andy Keate
Our phones are anonymous, intuitive gestures, smooth and spontaneous, and made without thinking. The Phone etchings enlarge and transfer these basic, quotidian gestures onto the flatbed of the etching plate, elevating them to the heroic scale and symbolic status of abstract expressionist painting, albeit with a sense of abjection and otherness that traces of bodily fluids and materiality provoke.

Whilst Büttner’s practice is characterised by a complex heterogeneity, embracing research and publishing, sculpture and installation, video and performance, she maintains a dedication to printmaking and its traditions, which have historically ranked lowly on the hierarchy of art-historical significance and value. Büttner’s deployment of printmaking has a conceptual resonance, and a critical register in the minor key. She has spoken of her interest in Franciscan vows of poverty, and her woodcuts display a commitment to a povera aesthetic, both figuratively, in their iconography and an almost monastic restraint – the work Corner 2011–12 or Potatoes 2017 might be exemplary in this regard – and materially, in the ways in which her woodcuts are carved, or ground out, from large sheets of plywood, itself a mundane, prosaic material.

Büttner has referred to a sense of ‘pathetic visuality’ inherent in her practice; an ethical position aligned with certain branches of conceptual art. In the place of authority, uniqueness, individualism or grandiosity, Büttner retains a preference for more collective and democratic processes. At the same time, as the artist has noted, the woodcut is also aligned with ideas of authenticity and humanism, and diverse, wide-ranging contexts from folk art to metaphysics. The evidence of the artist’s hand and the elevation of collective, artisanal values is inevitably present, aligned with the mobilisation of subjectivity and the very idea of being human. Büttner’s works are, indeed, all too human in their disclosure of vulnerability, their search for beauty and embrace of failure, and their understanding that: ‘When, as an artist, you exhibit your work, offering it up for public judgement, shame is invariably one of the emotions at stake.’

Büttner’s Phone etchings of 2015 continue this sensibility; in apparently abstract compositions that bear the anonymous traces, marks and smudges that we habitually leave on the flat-screen surfaces of our smart phones. If the cut of the Beggars woodblocks is purposeful and deliberate – notwithstanding the resistance of the woodgrain to the artist’s gesture – the traces that we leave on our phones are anonymous, intuitive gestures, smooth and spont-

Andrea Büttner’s series Beggars, 2016, presents a line-up of prone, cloaked figures, with expressive hands and outstretched arms, appealing to the viewer. Each of the veiled, pleading figures is shrouded, as if to hide their shame. The nine insistent figures are articulated in the simple, rudimentary yet determined lines of the relief printing process. In a colour edition of the series each of the images is printed in monochrome variations, resulting in fields of exuberant colour reminiscent of medieval stained glass or expressionist graphics, but also of modernist instructional books and pedagogical children’s illustrations.

The outstretched hand of the beggar in art history is a subject the artist has explored in depth, including a subsequent book published in 2018, also titled Beggars, ‘about art and poverty, art history and beggars, shepherds and kings’. Exploring discourses of poverty and shame, which recur throughout the artist’s practice, Büttner’s Beggars exemplify the ways in which the artist seeks to privilege that which might otherwise remain undervalued or neglected – endowing the figure of the beggar with dignity, and humble gestures with gravitas. The series inevitably points to questions of social, economic and art-historical value. Mindful of the contradiction that ‘art collectors would likely never give a beggar the amount they might spend on the depiction of a beggar’, Büttner’s project is equally focussed on contradictions which appear in Christian theology and philosophy, and which return, again and again, in contemporary politics and morality, in the increasingly divisive positioning of us and them, and in the denigration of the vulnerable, the outsider and the poor. As a reflection on the relationship between art and economics, poverty and patronage, Büttner also sees the beggar figures ‘as images of artists before their viewers’. Like their subjects, the prints themselves are related to the body, and the reach of the artist.

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woodcut on paper, 136.0 x 99.0 cm. Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; and Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz. © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photograph: Andy Keate

Andrea Büttner, *Beggar* 2016
woodcut on paper, 155.5 x 125.0 cm. Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; and Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz. © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photograph: Andy Keate
Cherine Fahd

Cherine Fahd, *failing* from the series *Fear of 2011/2019* archival pigment print, 58.0 x 87.0 cm. Courtesy the artist
ONE IS AFRAID OF TIME (AMONG OTHER THINGS)
MIRIAM KELLY

‘Can the human mind be completely free of fear?’ asks the late philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. In this 1970 recording, of what must have been thousands of lectures on this topic, he is spot-lit against a gold curtain in a dark Californian theatrette as though performing stand-up comedy.1 There are no cheap gags and no laughter, here, in fact no sound from his live audience as he continues to unpack just how it is that we have accepted the physiological and psychological experience of fear – along with its escalation and counterpart in violence toward one another – when the human mind has the capacity to be free from fear as a driving force. Pausing between each word, he muses, ‘most of us are apparently neurotically afraid of the past, of today and of tomorrow’.

I have come to this particular video following a digital deep-dive under the auspice of ‘research’, as Cherine Fahd had mentioned that she recalls reading On Fear by Krishnamurti in 2011, around the time when her Fear of series first began. Ten minutes in, however, I hover over the time bar: forty-five minutes to go. As Krishnamurti begins, ‘one is afraid of time…’, I find myself agreeing out loud; I am on a deadline and I can feel the uncomfortably sweaty onset of a bout of fraud-complex. I pause the thinker, who is now mid-way through an explanation of comparison being the breeding ground of fear.

I have positioned two of the small-scale test prints of Fahd’s Fear of photographic series beside my desk for contemplation and motivation. One shows Fahd in Darlinghurst’s Foley Lane, finishing the pasting up of a large white poster on a solid burgundy wall, framed on the right-hand side by the grill of an air vent. It is a beautifully crafted image. The poster reads ‘fear of wasting my time’. Notwithstanding the lower-case letters, this is a statement that feels declarative in a way that is underpinned by ambition and earnestness, certainly more than the sense of anxiety that I am currently harbouring about wasting valuable writing time. Below it, however, is a statement far closer to home. This second test print shows a much smaller poster, which appears as though it is hiding in the brick crevice in which it is installed, taking on the very texture of the wall behind, wishing to disappear altogether. Across the top left corner of this page, all-in-one-line, are the words ‘fear of failing’.

The pit of my stomach and palms of my hands signal to me that these words are a pretty accurate description of my own current predicament. I resume with Krishnamurti for a few more minutes of ‘research’ distraction.

From the shimmering past, he slowly and purposefully explains that the recipe for individual and collective harmony requires us to ‘observe the quality of fear, the general structure of fear, the nature of fear, but not get lost in a detail or particular form of one’s own fear’. It occurs to me that this is a key principle in the format, anonymity and physical realisation of Fahd’s series. While the scale of the text and paper, and their subsequent positioning in the lane, reflect ‘how loud or how quiet’ these fears were in Fahd’s mind, she also notes that the words are typed rather than handwritten so as not to appear diaristic, and thus tap into both the personal and universal.2 I had always imagined the great sense of catharsis Fahd must have experienced in the sloshing of home-made wallpaper glue over this naming of both rational and irrational fears, before publicly sharing and then psychologically, and physiologically, leaving them behind.

‘It wasn’t cathartic’, Fahd replies by email, dashing my romanticised notions, ‘it was frightening! … The action of making the fears public was embodied in the very action of pasting the poster to the wall. The pasting process was as much the revelation as the content of the text was a disclosure’.3 A self-portrait by way of this revelation, in equal measure terrifying and courageous, Fear of manifests the deeply personal as a carefully crafted provocation of empathy. With this work, we are offered the opportunity to both reflect on and have reflected back at us ideas of universality and the human condition. It was indeed both the content of the texts and the public nature of their disclosure that first drew me to the Fear of series, and it is their capacity to act as a mirror that continues to be needed, perhaps now more than ever in a time characterised by an increasingly frenzied ‘culture of fear’; a movement in entirely the opposite direction to that proposed by Krishnamurti’s discourse.

1 Accessed at https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/can-human-mind-be-completely-free-fear-0.
2 Cherine Fahd, email to the author, 15 May 2019.
3 Ibid.
Cherine Fahd, *meeting new people* from the series *Fear of 2011/2019* archival pigment print, 58.0 x 87.0 cm. Courtesy the artist

Cherine Fahd, *bad mother* from the series *Fear of 2011/2019* archival pigment print, 58.0 x 87.0 cm. Courtesy the artist

Cherine Fahd, *never happy* from the series *Fear of 2011/2019* archival pigment print, 58.0 x 87.0 cm. Courtesy the artist

Cherine Fahd, *getting old* from the series *Fear of 2011/2019* archival pigment print, 58.0 x 87.0 cm. Courtesy the artist
Cherine Fahd, *wasting time from the series Fear of 2011/2019* archival pigment print, 58.0 x 87.0cm. Courtesy the artist.
Brent Harris

Brent Harris, *Listener* 2018
oil on linen, 152.0 x 110.0 cm
Collection of Paul Walker and Patricia Mason, Melbourne
At the entrance to his studio, Brent and I greet one another without the customary shaking of hands. I register this fleetingly, without judgment, just a passing mental note in social etiquette: a formality done away with, unnecessary today.

Upstairs above the street, where Brent has spent the Easter holidays working furiously on a new body of work soon to be shown in his Wellington gallery, my thoughts of hands – of touch – continue. In the foreground of a large painting, appearing before an atmospheric sky and snow-capped mountain peak (a recurring motif in recent work), a pair of blood red hands reach searchingly towards the centre of the canvas. Brent points across the studio to a charcoal sketch of hands in the same formation, completed twelve years earlier, and explains how they appeared to him for re-use as a subject in this recent work as if a revelation; as though the new painting and the old drawing had conspired with one another, guiding the hand of the artist.

‘When I start to write’, begins Henri Focillon in his 1948 essay *In Praise of Hands*, ‘I see my own hands soliciting my mind, leading it’.1 I have long held a similar sentiment – *I think through my fingers* – trusting that, when faced with the daunting glare of a blank Word document, my fingers will find the keys to craft the words that may otherwise elude me. I imagine, I say to Brent, that it is the same for a painter standing before a primed canvas. Some alchemy, some magnetism, flows between the hand and the mind. ‘Art is made with the hands’, continues Focillon, ‘...they are the instrument of creation, but before that, the organ of knowledge’.2

I recognise this quest for knowledge in the behaviour of my eight-month old son, who processes the world around him not only through sight, but through touch. It is through touch that he comprehends distance and difference, learns to distinguish reality from image, and to understand the world on his own terms. Everything is scrutinised in this way: his ears, my cheeks, our long-suffering cat, the soft fur of a favoured toy rabbit, grass, sand, the rough surface of a wooden table, the mesh lining of his cot. The one thing he cannot reach to touch is his own hand. Instead he holds it out before him, choreographing a slow dance of five fingers: a performance that both delights and perplexes him.

Touch, as a form of comprehension, forms the subject of much of Brent’s work for *On Vulnerability and Doubt*, in a number of paintings drawn from his 2007 series *Borrowed plumage*. Two companion pieces, *Borrowed plumage #7 (touch)* and *Borrowed plumage #3 (noli me tangere)*, depict Mary Magdalene reaching towards the newly risen Christ – here represented as a corporeal absence, an abstracted circular form or ‘soft target’ as Justin Clemens has described elsewhere.3 In the first painting, *touch*, Magdalene’s hand appears outstretched, her fingers alert in anticipation. In the second, *noli me tangere* (‘touch me not’), a stump takes the place of her hand, preventing the disciple from the satisfaction of reassuring physical contact. Magdalene’s faith is thus put to the test. She must trust in her belief, trust in her ears and eyes, that the man she loved and knows to have died is hereby resurrected.

The Apostle Thomas was more skeptical (or sensible, depending on how you look at it). He knew, from his own infanthood perhaps, that looks can be deceiving. Faith alone was not enough for him to believe the news of Jesus’ rising. He needed to touch his wounds, place his finger where the nails had pinned Christ’s hands to the cross, trace the incision in his side. *Borrowed plumage #6 (doubt)* and *Borrowed plumage #4 (doubt)* portray the moment of Christ relenting to Thomas’ probing desires. In both paintings a wavering, if amorphous, digit penetrates the central orifice of the ‘target’. This meeting is at once sensual and unsettling, yet also deeply satisfying. Thomas is no longer doubting.

Religion has often found its way into Brent’s work, although he himself is not a believer. He says there was a time when he might have been, if faith had found him at a younger, more vulnerable, age; offering salvation from a difficult family, the hope of something else, something more. Instead, he found art – itself a form of belief system. Now, the bible serves as almost a set of instructions: allegories for making sense of the inherent mess of life. In Brent’s hands, these parables become abstracted, rendered graphic. His works may be read literally, but also universally. The human hand itself – a recognisable palm, five fingers – is largely absent from these paintings. But the efforts of a hand’s searching, both
with restrained trust and questioning doubt, are palpable and profound.

In the journey from studio to gallery, painting’s relationship to the tool of its creation becomes distant. Heavily invigilated and displayed under controlled conditions, painting commands us, as viewers, to have faith. You can look, but don’t touch. Here in Brent’s studio, with walls, floors and surfaces playing casual host to work in varying states of completion, the evidence of his touch is everywhere. Yet he, above all, must trust in the language of sight. On my way out, Brent picks up a well-thumbed postcard: a reproduction of a section of Piero della Francesca’s fresco *The History of the True Cross*, c.1452–66. Reduced to A6 printed form, the influence of the painting is none-the-less apparent. Here are the Renaissance pinks and blues that appear in Brent’s own palette; the foregrounded figures, distant peaks, a celestial form and Christian cross. Two sentries wield weapons, a servant rests his head against his palm. In the background, in his slumber, a Roman Emperor dreams a divine apparition. ‘In hoc signo vinces’ the angel whispers – *by this sign shalt thou conquer*. The reward, perhaps, for overcoming doubt.

2 ibid.
Brent Harris, *Borrowed plumage #3 (noli me tangere)* 2007
oil on linen, 244.0 x 136.0 cm. Private collection, Melbourne

Brent Harris, *Borrowed plumage #7 (touch)* 2007
oil on linen, 244.0 x 136.0 cm. Private collection, Melbourne

Brent Harris, *Borrowed plumage #4 (doubt)* 2007
oil on linen, 120.0 x 89.0 cm. Private collection, Melbourne
Tala Madani, *Overhead projection (crowd) 2018 (stills)*
single channel animation, 1:08 mins. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London
TALA MADANI’S COMIC CUTS
JULIE EWINGTON

Tala Madani draws small people who inhabit a large, uncertain, even threatening universe. The edges of this world are unseen, never detailed; all the action is staged front and centre, scrutinised under a spotlight. Often hilarious, always cutting, Madani’s scenarios are crafted from the simplest means: a few summary lines, backgrounded in the paintings by washes of lurid colour.

Drawing is foundational, however, even when the works are expansive paintings, and certainly when they transmogrify into animations. This is drawing with bite: a rich history of satirical comics and cartoons lies behind Madani’s scathing mini-scenarios, from Honoré Daumier to American newspaper cartoons, and, importantly, the lively comic histories of her native Iran. ¹ There is the existential irreverence of American artists Philip Guston and Paul McCarthy, and like her antecedents, Madani’s purpose is subversive: she homes in on complacency, cruelty, even the blithe self-interest of those dear little babies. And she is unsparing.

All Madani’s active ur-protagonists appear to be men, whether the busy little babies in the paintings, or the anonymous slope-shouldered fellows in her animations.² The unflappable affability of these folk is counterpoised by their grim missions – in the recent large paintings, the children single-mindedly mine their ‘Shit Mother’ for building material for their own purposes. Here Madani’s drawing finds its mark in her examination of the individual psyche in its social relations and contexts. Her soft-bodied folk are always in transition between one state and another, if not actually, then potentially. We see that the outlines of the protagonists are crisp enough, but are barely able to contain the un govern ed libidos they circumscribe: these bodies are squishy and amorphous, a sign of the ungovernable drives and desires propelling humans to act, and a warning of the dangers only barely held together by social customs and mores. With graphic economy, Madani is asking us to look at the mundane, ostensibly solid but always potentially fragile character of social life.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the summary farce of Crowd 2017, perhaps the most surprising fate befalling Madani’s men. As a group of anxious chaps watches from below, a giant penis inflates, deflates, and finally smashes them to smithereens, wantonly destructive even when flaccid. Worse, the absurd conflict of this scenario is internalised by the solo fellow in Overhead projection (crowd) 2018, who watches the scene play out, then ruefully compares his own improbably long member with what he has seen. This sly slippage shows the poignant critique at the heart of Madani’s work; it links what looks like systematic phallocratic privilege with the downright puzzlement of discrepant individual experience.

While the fate of these chaps is administered without compunction, it is not nearly as cruel as the relentless pursuit in Mr. Time 2018 of a hapless victim up and down an escalator by a group of vicious thugs. The pathos of his single-minded adherence to daily routine is matched in its robotic determination by the implacable cruelty of his pursuers.

Tala Madani’s quasi-feminist comedy cuts both ways. (She is what cartoonist and writer James Thurber always feared: an intelligent woman with a pen). Provoking equally laughter and apprehension, Madani’s work speaks to the precariousness of the grip we all hold on civility, and, coupled with that, to our hopes for the possibility of life lived with dignity. It is a theme satirists have explored since antiquity; it is a timely alert for these dark times.

The title Comic Cuts is a tribute to a British publication dating from 1890-1953, a much-imitated pioneer in the field.

¹ While Madani resists the reduction of her satire to her Iranian roots, she has said ‘I probably wouldn’t have become a painter if I hadn’t been the product of emigration’. See Negar Azmi, ‘The Charming, Disgusting Paintings of Tala Madani’, New Yorker, 28 April 2017; accessed at https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-charming-disgusting-paintings-of-tala-madani.

Tala Madani, *Mr. Time* 2018 (stills)
single channel animation, 7:04 mins. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

Tala Madani, *The crowd* 2017 (stills)
single channel animation, 0:47 mins. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London
Linda Marrinon

Linda Marrinon, *Rock with underpants* 1992
bluestone and cotton, 31.5 x 22.5 x 13.0 cm. Private collection, Melbourne
Photograph: Andrew Curtis
Underpinned by ideas of fragility and humour, Linda Marrinon’s practice is an exploration of social manners and fallibility. Considerate of those who bear the consequences of this failure, Marrinon directs her attention toward the downtrodden, eliciting empathy from her viewers while calling attention to human inadequacies. Marrinon mostly chooses to work with reference to historical styles and yet her art characterises a uniquely modern-day unease. Marrinon’s appropriation of elements from art history are also imbued with a particular fragility that allows her works to speak about an increasingly anxious, awkward and vulnerable society, albeit often with a tongue planted firmly in cheek.

In recent years, Marrinon has produced a collection of mostly small, delicate plaster sculptures in a neoclassical idiom. Whereas plaster traditionally acted as a throwaway mould for neoclassical sculpture, Marrinon consciously chooses this as her final medium so that the works embody a sense of their own temporariness and instability. Intrinsically to Marrinon’s capacity to elicit a tender response with these works is her deliberate use of an apparently nonchalant material aesthetic. Marrinon’s sculptural technique – informed by her formal training – is in fact extremely proficient and technically demanding, yet, she consciously chooses to finish them with a casual air and apparent off-handedness. Complete with gnarled surfaces and slap-dash paint jobs, Marrinon’s sculptures imbue their subjects with a benevolence that shows the human side of society’s shortcomings.

Many of Marrinon’s sculptures represent historical figures abstractly. Some stories suggest narratives of individuals worn down by society, at times by unjust treatment, but the artist redeems them as worthy of note. Gainsborough’s daughters 2017 is a clear reference to the eighteenth-century painter Thomas Gainsborough who, over the years, repeatedly painted his two daughters, Mary and Margaret. Commentators have noted that the sense of optimism seen in earlier portraits escapes the women’s faces in later paintings, so much so that by the time they reach adulthood the sisters appear somewhat jaded. Marrinon’s representation of the women shows them as mute, with only the most essential of indentations to suggest a face, rendering them speechless. Despite this, it is impossible not to feel a tenderness towards them, and their diminutive scale, while the crude, knobbly finish of the plaster is tinted with pastels, suggesting a warmth and vulnerability. Let’s also not forget the fate of the Rhesus monkey – that Marrinon paid homage to in 2016. A species repeatedly used by humans for scientific testing due to their close genetic makeup, Marrinon’s monkey is depicted here with a pleading, human-like expression, green eyes staring out sadly, and torso gnarled, with the base of oxidised copper-green suggesting it has been left to rust.

Marrinon’s earlier works, made in the 1980s and early 1990s, are cooler, and exhibit a detached restraint. Deliberately adopting a second-degree aesthetic, Marrinon was able to successfully undermine the absurd seriousness with which morality has been socially inculcated for centuries on end. Nowhere is this more apparent than in The four cruelties 1982, an early series of poster-sized panels that depict modern-day interpretations of historical moral codes. Executed in an instructive manner, with text and a small central cartoon, the series is a clear nod to William Hogarth’s 1751 engravings, The four stages of cruelty, produced as a tool to educate lower class citizens in proper conduct. Like Hogarth’s cruelties, Marrinon makes reference to the torture of animals and the beating of women, but also seems to humorously trivialise questions of morality itself – not speying your cat and embodying the ‘ignorant’ yobo – undoubtedly a critique on the notion of educating people upon hierarchies of class.

Consideration of Marrinon’s historical references inevitably lead to her dialogue with the history of gender in art. Her earlier work, in particular, comments upon dominant narratives of historical avant-gardes and modernisms attributed largely to white men. Like many women contemporaries working in the 1980s and 1990s, Marrinon chose appropriation as a mode of satire and critique. Hey waitress 1986 adopts a pop art sensibility, with eye-catching text and a bold, simple graphic. Despite the familiarity of the cartoon-like aesthetic, it is difficult not feel extremely uncomfortable observing the headless female ‘behind’ the decidedly patriarchal demand: ‘hey waitress’. The precise juxtaposition between the impersonal aesthetic of the work and its content makes it all the more jarring. The same might be said of Sheet 1993, a large canvas diptych that
might loosely resemble a Cy Twombly abstraction, but the nature of its title and palette alludes to the intimate space of the bedroom, with the painterly markings evocative of sweat smears, grime, semen and menstrual blood that might accumulate on one’s bedsheets. This work feels embarrassing yet relatable, reminding us that so much of what we (particularly women) are ashamed of is simply the stuff of human function; yet we spend much of our lives pretending it does not happen, and cleaning up the aftermath.

Finally, *Rock with underpants* 1992, a bluestone rock ‘dressed’ in men’s underwear, is entertainingly absurd. Implicit to a reading of Marrinon’s *Rock* is art history’s representation of the human body and, specifically, the nude form so often idealised by male artists. Of course, the notion of a rock wearing underwear is entertaining – ha, it’s not human! – but Marrinon has clearly selected a rock that references a human torso and the underwear acts as a referent to the human form and the genitalia that it suggestively conceals. The humility of one's body is offset with a good old laugh. The classic saying, ‘at the end of the day, what else can you do but laugh?’ plays over in my head. The truth of this phrase is that it is habitually used to deflect from awkward or unbearable situations.

For Marrinon, patriarchally-enforced, outdated laws of morality are precisely what leads to the fragility and anxiety that have become our quotidian norms. But Marrinon’s figures somehow face their adversity with nonchalance as though laughing off the morality that they too are subject to. Unkempt but not shying away from the public eye, they present themselves with a sense of gay abandon. Even if the Gainsborough sisters lived centuries before us, Marrinon establishes a sense of continuity between them and us. Then and now, humiliation, anxiety and exhaustion continue to play a central role in our lives; a fact we regularly laugh off as a means of simply getting by.
Linda Marron, *The four cruelties* 1982
synthetic polymer paint on cardboard, 101.8 x 75.8 cm (each, four panels). Collection of the artist
Linda Marrinon, *Figure with tumbleweed* 2019
silver leaf and synthetic polymer paint on plaster, 60.0 x 20.0 x 15.0 cm. Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Linda Marrinon, *Gainsborough’s daughters* 2016
tinted plaster, 71.0 x 28.0 x 11.0 cm. Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Archie Moore

Archie Moore, Under my skin 2019
photograph, 180.0 x 150.0 cm. Courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney
UNDER MY SKIN
MAX DELANY AND MIRIAM KELLY

In bell hook’s *Writing Beyond Race*, the author concludes with a call to arms, addressing the urgency for practical actions that foster empathy and love. hooks introduced this rallying cry with an analysis of the failure in the twentieth century, notwithstanding feminist theory and cultural criticism, to deliver an end to ‘dominator culture’:

[C]hallenging all of us to move beyond the barriers created by race, gender, class, and/or religious difference, for a time at least, it appeared that we would be entering a brave new world where differences could be understood and embraced, where we would all seek to learn from the ‘other’, whomever that other might be. All the theories of border crossing, of finding a way to ‘get a bit of the other’, did not fundamentally change... In our everyday lives all of us confront barriers to communication – divisive hierarchies that make joining together difficult, if not impossible.¹

These reflections key into the conundrum at the root of Archie Moore’s ongoing consideration of empathy and its possibilities and limitations in Aboriginal affairs and Australia’s relationship with First Nations people. ‘Without empathy’, reflects Moore, who has always sought out ways to put the viewer into his position – through installation, narrative or sensorial affect – ‘we live and work side-by-side with other people, and remain unaware of others’ inner selves and feelings’.²

While deeply impactful on a personal level, Moore’s concern is also for ‘the perceived impossibility of knowing and understanding another’s experience’, a metaphor for the failure of reconciliation in Australia: ‘How can someone who hasn’t grown up ‘Aboriginal’ with the feelings of ‘difference’ ever truly, fully understand?’³ Moore’s practice possesses this underlying sense of the impossible – not just in feeling as another might have, or putting ourselves in their ‘skin’, but actually understanding their mind⁴ – a sentiment that seems tempered with the artist’s unshakable attempts to test hooks’ ‘border crossings’, with the knowledge of what she describes as ‘the intention of truly remaining connected in a space long enough to be transformed’.⁵

In *Under my skin* 2019, Moore identifies this border-crossing space as both possible and at the same time acknowledging it as a farce. Conceptually, the work builds on the consideration of skin colour as a problematic identifier, most clearly articulated in *Blood fraction* 2015. In this earlier photographic self-portrait, Moore sought to address the ‘absurdity of quantifying race in a fractional way’, with reference to Moore’s own experiences of embodied and projected racism: ‘I’m too pale to be Aboriginal for some non-indigenous people and also not black enough for some Aboriginal people. I don’t know where I sit, and does it matter anyway?’⁶

Moore’s strong knowledge of the social-historical power of image-making saw *Blood fraction* adopt an anthropological aesthetic of classification, while *Under my skin* 2019 takes its cue from the highly constructed relations imaged in political protest or even ethical fashion campaigns. In this recent work, Moore employs his limited edition, artist’s-body t-shirts, inspired by Atticus Finch’s statement in *To Kill A Mocking Bird* that: you can never fully understand a person ‘until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.’⁷ Originally exhibited in a pop-up garment store manner at The Commercial gallery in Sydney gallery under the title *Shirtfronting* – a term related to aggressive confrontation in sport or politics – *Under my skin* continues Moore’s deft probing of signifiers of identity, whilst also underscoring concerns about the direction of contemporary political discourse and the increasing and devastating improbability of empathy in our body politic.

2 Archie Moore, email to the authors, 20 May 2019.
3 Archie Moore, email to the authors, 20 May 2019.
7 Archie Moore, email to the authors, 20 May 2019.
EVERYTIME I GET AN EMAIL FROM YOU
MIRIAM KELLY

Charlie Sofo’s *Low notes* 2019 is a stripped-back, text-based video which brings together two-years’ worth of written reflections and observations, each with a small affective twist. Sofo has, for example, noticed the dust on top of his bedroom cupboards, and has taken comfort in the realisation that he may never clean it off. As soon as he articulates this, however, a doubt is seeded, that one day it might be cleaned, now that it has been noticed. Such observations and anxieties related to the quotidian have formed the crux of Charlie Sofo’s practice, and, whilst it is rare for Sofo to exhibit them as such, his written reflections serve as the beginning of each new work, whether video-based, photographic or found object. In this sense, *Low notes* might serve as an index or coda to Sofo’s methodology and motivations more broadly. With a characteristically subtle self-effacing humour, his *Low notes* are weighted towards considerations of emotion, with sensitivity to the nuances of language and the layering of meaning.

Sofo has always made his titles work hard, homing in on a phrase or combination of terms that effortlessly hint at the logic underpinning a material choice, or the reasoning behind a particular inventory. The choice of *Low notes*, Sofo explains, conceptually underpinned by his interests in thinking around ‘low theory’, but also acts as a connective thread between the nine companion works on exhibition, with ‘low’ as a term making literal reference to environmental terrain from which many of the materials are drawn – from the street, under car wheels, or parkland bushes – and to the beliefs attributed to such ‘things that are dirty, or abject, or not worthy in some sort of way’.

Sofo has never been particularly concerned with the Duchampian politics of ‘elevating’ ‘low’ materials by way of bringing them into a gallery context. Rather, his interest in engaging with institutional modes of presentation and viewing the ready-made lie in what theorists of affect have described as the ‘stickiness’ in the relations between the human and object worlds – that is, the ‘intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between intensities and resonances themselves’.

In the nine works here, Sofo has sought to crystallise the ‘intensities and resonances’ apparent in *Low notes* – that is, a simplification or restraint, in that each individual work has been limited to just one action and one material, with the ‘twist’ then left up to the viewer’s associations. *Library* 2019 registers the impact of removing a book from a library shelf; *Reference points* (16 photographs of a nipple) 2019 is an inventory of the ‘only real dot on the body’, sometimes visible under clothing. Sofo describes his approach as engaging with ‘systems there to erase doubt on one hand – to take account for something, with everything contained and highly ordered’. However, while there is ‘a sort of sense of keeping chaos at the door’, at the same time the artist opens a veritable Pandora’s box of associative meanings, as he notes: ‘there is also always something feeble or futile’. Sofo invariably laughs as he articulates the parameters of a work, oscillating between the logic of its manifestation, or serious considerations of its display, and what he finds farcical about attributing this tone to the discussion of dirty lost socks.

‘[T]erms like serious or rigorous tend to be code words in academia, as well as other contexts, for disciplinary correctness’, Jack Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure*; ‘they signal a form of training or learning that confirm to what is already known according to approved methods of knowing, but they do not allow for visionary insights or flights of fancy’, or failure. Many of Sofo’s recent works engage this sense of absurdity or ‘futility’ through an intentional tentativeness, or the stipulation of impermanence, both rooted in Sofo’s mindfulness about his source material and the impact of ‘taking something away’, ‘destabilising the whole system’, as much as his awareness that it is that this instability that is the essence of the work itself. The self-explanatory title of *Lost soccer balls* (removed from circulation for the duration of the exhibition) 2019 is, for example, is complemented by the precarity of their display, simply resting on their shelf. This work, like the earlier *Chocks* 2013–15 – a collection of indicative material types or typology of car wheel supports – is noticeable for the lack of interference with its ‘real-world’ form, that also indicates its readiness for the reversal of its extraction – be it from the Atherton Gardens’ bushes or under the wheels of Northcote trailers – to take place at any time.
The ‘old’ internet refrain of ‘what is seen cannot be unseen’ is not without relevance in thinking about Sofo’s practice, not only as an articulation of his carefully crafted observations, but also in the heightened sensibility to the quotidian that his work can produce in us as viewers – even if only for a moment. Sofo’s adoption of the vulnerability, doubt and the potential for failure, that comes with the honesty of these reflections – the dust on his bedroom cupboard – are what can make these works both so tough or uncomfortable and at the same time so intimate and compelling. ‘Every time I got an email from you’, Sofo laughs as he delivers his work, ‘Vulnerability and Doubt’ are in the subject line, and with language being a kind of spell that makes things happen I’m like, ‘oh god’ and my heart starts pounding. It’s like being in shows about failure ... is this going to produce something that no one actually wants to happen?’

Sofo’s works operate in this visible-invisible terrain of affect and the quotidian with a whole-hearted embrace that it could go either way.

1 Both in reference to the phrase’s coining by Stuart Hall as the theorisation of popular or low culture, as well as Jack Halberstam’s adoption of ‘low theory’ to counter heteronormative thinking, particularly around ideas of success, creativity, doubt and failure.


4 Conversation with the artist, 31 May 2019.

5 ibid.


7 ibid.

8 ibid.
Charlie Sofo, *Undone* 2019 (still)
digital video, 1:09 mins. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Charlie Sofo, *Low notes* 2019 (stills)
digital video, 3:00 mins. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney
Charlie Sofo, Chocks 2013–15
wood, concrete, metal stone, dimensions variable. Collection of Clinton Bradley, Sydney
Ambera Wellmann

Ambera Wellman, *Pastoral* 2018
oil on linen, 56.0 x 51.0 cm. Private collection, Belgium. Photograph: Ramiro Chavez
It's difficult to tell where one body ends, and another begins, in the polymorphous, painterly confusion of copulating figures that populate Ambera Wellmann's recent paintings. A productive sense of ambiguity abounds, as entangled body parts and flesh tones fluidly blend, rush and merge into one another, giving themselves over to one another, and their surrounds.

Wellmann's impasto mark-making attests to the corporeality of painting, as much as it does to fervent, impassioned bodily experience. At times we experience a rush or swoosh of painterly gesture, which accelerates and redirects our gaze, in the same way that a limb might reach across a body, to redirect our attention with a focussed caress. We get the sense of the painter somehow reaching to activate libidinal zones within the painterly field, to produce a phenomenological equivalent to the carnality on display. This is the drama at play as Wellmann's paintings move back and forth from interior to exterior, detail to scene, in a visual blur attuned to sensation rather than description – or, as the artist would have it, ‘blurry moments of clarity’.

Wellmann sets her figures within an ambiguous proscenium space – aligned, more often than not, to the psychological space and scale of the domestic – so that there is a sense of the figures performing for the viewer. Wellman's protagonists are indeed subject to the scrutiny of the spectator, and yet, as Meeka Walsh has observed, 'we see the solipsistic self-sufficiency of lovers, unmindful of any scopophilic gaze'.

This dynamic and morphology is promoted by the artist as a driver of intimacy, not only between the painting's subjects, but more importantly between the painting and the viewer. As Wellmann suggests: 'The explicit exterior of the painting betrays a private, subjective interiority, and their ambiguity – confusion, violence, or abstraction – is the moment in which a subjective kind of intimacy may occur for an observer'.

Chris Sharp is among a number of commentators to observe the ways in which Wellmann seeks to introduce alternatively gendered perspectives, of psychological and sexual desire, into the painterly canon: 'Aware that this primal human drive – desire – is almost always depicted from the point of view of the male gaze, Wellmann seeks to portray it from [an alternative] perspective in all its complexity, perversity and messiness'. For Wellmann, the question revolves around 'how to streamline eroticism and structure desire,' and, taking sexuality directly as a subject, how to register pleasure in the painterly field. The artist is indeed interested in exploring the potential of, and pleasure in, a female gaze, but also in something more complex, ambiguous and difficult – impossible perhaps – which might be to register and deconstruct bodily experience, desire and sensation itself, whilst resisting the singularity of binary, gendered experience.

These are just some of the knotty contentions embedded in Wellmann's paintings. Also at play is an awkwardness related to painting from memory and personal experience – which also, ideally, functions to awaken individual and collective memory or experience in the viewer, as awkward or liberating as that too might be – along with the idea of presenting intimate experiences to the public gaze. In their unguarded suggestiveness and unsettling ambiguity, we get the sense of an openness to pleasure and vitality, along with an equally uncomfortable (and purposefully inarticulate) sense of abjection, even violence, which is beyond language but somehow related to painterly materiality, corporeality and the ravages of the gaze.

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1 Ambera Wellmann, email to the author, 12 June 2018
3 Ambera Wellmann, email to the author, 11 June 2019.
Ambera Wellman, *Limbal* 2019
oil on linen, 49cm x 52cm. Courtesy the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin

Ambera Wellman, *The subject* 2019
oil on linen, 52.0 x 52.0 cm. Private collection, Hong Kong. Photograph: Ramiro Chavez
Ambera Wellmann, *Mutual provender* 2019
oil on linen, 52.0 x 49.0 cm. The Groeninghe VII Collection, Belgium. Photograph: Ramiro Chavez

Ambera Wellman, *Autoscopy* 2019
oil on linen, 49.0 x 52.0 cm. Courtesy the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin
## List of Works

<table>
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<th>Title</th>
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<th>Size</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Gallery Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ANDREA BÜTTNER</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Corner 2011–12</td>
<td>woodcut on paper</td>
<td>121.0 x 148.0 cm</td>
<td>Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens,</td>
<td>London; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; and Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BRENT HARRIS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Borrowed plumage #6 (touch) 2007</td>
<td>oil on linen</td>
<td>198.0 x 147.5 cm</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Private collection, Melbourne</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CHERINE FAHD</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Borrowed plumage #4 (doubt) 2007</td>
<td>oil on linen</td>
<td>152.0 x 110.0 cm</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Private collection, Melbourne</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TALA MADANI</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The crowd 2017</td>
<td>single channel animation</td>
<td>0:47 mins</td>
<td>Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery,</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PILAR CORRIAS GALLERY, LOS ANGELES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The crowd 2017</td>
<td>single channel animation</td>
<td>0:47 mins</td>
<td>Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery,</td>
<td>London</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>UNIDENTIFIED ARTIST</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Mr. Time 2018
single channel animation
7:04 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

Overhead projection
(crowd) 2018
single channel animation
1:08 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

Shit mother (goalpost) 2019
oil on linen
182.9 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

Overhead projection
2018
single channel animation
7:04 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

Shit mother (leisure) 2019
oil on linen
249.0 x 203.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

LINDA MARRINON
The four cruelties 1982
synthetic polymer paint
on cardboard
101.8 x 75.8 cm (each, four panels)
Collection of the artist

Hey waitress 1986
synthetic polymer paint
on canvas
213.0 x 1672 cm
Private collection, Sydney

Rock with underpants 1992
bluestone and cotton
31.5 x 22.5 x 13.0 cm (irregular)
Private collection, Melbourne

Sheet 1993
synthetic polymer paint
on canvas
165.0 x 244.0 cm (overall, diptych)
Courtesy the artist and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Weeping woman 2015
synthetic polymer paint,
cotton fabric and twine
on plaster
29.9 x 19.5 x 12.0 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

Gainsborough’s daughters 2016
tinted plaster
71.0 x 28.0 x 11.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Rhesus Monkey 2016
synthetic polymer paint
on tinted plaster
25.0 x 15.0 x 11.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Figure with tumbleweed 2019
silver leaf and synthetic
polymer paint on plaster
60 x 20 x 15 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

ARCHIE MOORE
Under my skin 2019
180.0 x 150.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
The Commercial, Sydney

CHARLIE SOFO
Chocks 2013–15
wood, concrete, metal
and stone
dimensions variable
Private collection, Sydney

Bread crusts 2016
gelatin silver prints
65.5cm x 81.0 cm
(overall)
Courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Low notes 2019
digital video
3:00 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Reference points (16 photographs of a
nipple) 2019
inkjet prints
49.6 x 40.7 cm (overall)
Courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Ambera Wellmann
Autoscopy 2019
oil on linen
49.0 x 52.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin

Limbal 2019
oil on linen
49.0 x 52.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin

Found socks 2019
socks, felt, wood
120.0 x 180.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Library 2019
digital video
0:53 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Lost soccer balls
(found for the duration of the
exhibition) 2019
found balls; timber shelf
180.0 x 215.0 x 43.0 cm
(dimensions variable)
Courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Rhesus Monkey 2016
synthetic polymer paint
on tinted plaster
25.0 x 15.0 x 11.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Figure with tumbleweed 2019
silver leaf and synthetic
polymer paint on plaster
60 x 20 x 15 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Undone 2019
digital video
1:09 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Linda Marrinon, Hey waitress 1986
synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 213.0 x 1670 cm. Private collection, Sydney
Biographies

Andrea Büttner

born 1972, Stuttgart, Germany
lives and works in Berlin, Kassel and London

Andrea Büttner was born in Stuttgart in 1972, and now lives and works between London, Berlin and Kassel, where she is the professor of contemporary art at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. In 2000, Büttner received a Master of Fine Art from the Berlin University of the Arts, followed by a Master of Art History and Philosophy at Humboldt University, in 2003, before completing her doctoral studies at the at the Royal College of Art in London in 2009. A nominee for the 2017 Turner Prize, Büttner is the recipient of numerous awards, and other notable individual exhibitions have been held at Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2013; Tate Britain, London, 2014; National Museum, Cardiff, 2014; and the Institute of Modern Art, London, 2008.


Recent group exhibitions include On Vulnerability and Doubt, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2019; TOUCH (AT), nGbK, Berlin, Germany, 2018; New Materialism, Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden, 2018; Cloudbusters: Intensity vs. Intention, 17th Tallinn Print Triennial, EKKM / Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia, Tallinn, Estonia, 2018; 33rd Bienal de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2018; Turner Prize, Hull, United Kingdom, 2017; Kölnskulptur #9, Stiftung Skulpturenpark Köln, Germany, 2017; Please fasten your seat belt as we are experiencing some turbulence, Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai, China, 2017.

Andrea Büttner is represented by Hollybush Gardens, London; David Kordansky Gallery, New York; and Gallery Tschudi, Zuoz, Switzerland.

For further information, see: andreabuettner.com hollybushgardens.co.uk davidkordanskygallery.com galerie-tschudi.ch

Cherine Fahd

born 1974, Sydney
lives and works in Sydney

Cherine Fahd was born in Sydney in 1974, where she continues to live and work. As an academic, artist and writer, Fahd is focused on contemporary photographic practice and currently holds the position of Director of Photography at the University of Technology Sydney.

Fahd has received numerous awards, including the National Photography Prize, Albury City Gallery, 2010, the Josephine Ulrick & Win Schubert Foundation Photography Award, 2004, and was a finalist in the 2017 National Photographic Portrait Prize at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. Fahd has exhibited extensively since 2006 and her work is held in numerous public collections. In 2016, Fahd received a doctorate from Monash University, Melbourne, and is the recipient of a 2019 Carriageworks studio residency at The Clothing Store, Sydney.

Recent individual exhibitions include A Portrait is a Portrait, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney 2018; National Types of Beauty, Arterial Gallery, Sydney, 2017; Homage to a Rectangle, William Wright Artist Projects, Sydney, 2015; Plinth Piece, Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz, Switzerland, 2014; Camouflage, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 2013; Camouflage, Queensland Centre for Photography, Brisbane, 2013; Hiding – Self Portraits 2009-2010, MOP Projects, Sydney, 2010; and Stage Unstage, Hazelmhurst Regional Gallery, Sydney, 2008.


For further information, see: cherinefahd.com

Brent Harris

born 1965, Palmerston North, New Zealand
lives and works in Melbourne

Brent Harris was born in Palmerston North in New Zealand in 1965, and lives and works in Melbourne.

In 1981, Harris received a Diploma of Art and Design at Footscray College of TAFE, followed by a Bachelor of Fine Art at the Victorian College of the Art, University of Melbourne, in 1984, and was an early studio resident at Gertrude Contemporary studios in Melbourne, from 1987 to 1989.

Harris has exhibited widely since 1987 with formative early exhibitions including Perspectives 1989 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, and National Gallery of Victoria’s Moët & Chandon Art Foundation touring exhibition in the same year, propelling his career into the national spotlight. Notable individual and survey exhibitions have been mounted by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2012; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 2006; Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2006; and Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2004.

Recent individual exhibitions include Brent Harris: the small sword, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne, 2017; The Otherside – A Backroom Project by Brent Harris, Tolar- no Galleries, 2016; Dreamer, Tolarno Galleries, 2015; Brent Harris, National Gallery of Victoria, 2012; Just a feeling: Brent Harris, selected works 1987-2005, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2006; Swamp op – Brent Harris, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 2006; and Singapore print and paper pulp works, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, 2005.


For further information, see: brentiharris.com.au tolarnogalleries.com
Tala Madani

born 1981, Tehran

arrived United States of America 1994

lives and works in Los Angeles

Born in the Iranian capital of Tehran in 1981, Tala Madani relocated to Oregon in the USA in 1994, and now lives and works in Los Angeles. Madani completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Political Science and Visual Arts at Oregon State University in 2004, and received a Master of Fine Art in Painting at the Yale University School of Art in 2006. Madani has since exhibited widely in the USA, and was the recipient of a major video animation commission for Creative Time, with MoMA PS1 and MTV in 2012.

Recent individual exhibitions include "Open Light, Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2019; Corner Projections, 303 Gallery, New York, 2018; La Panacée, Centre de Culture Contemporaine, Montpellier, France, 2017; Shifty Disco, Pilar Corrias, London, 2016; First Light, Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis, MO, and MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, USA, 2016; Smiley has no nose, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, 2015; Rip Image, Image, Moderna Museet, Malmö, and Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden, 2013; and (X) A, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2017.


For further information, see: talamadani.com

Linda Marrinon

born 1959, Melbourne

lives and works Melbourne

Melbourne-based artist Linda Marrinon completed a Bachelor of Fine Art degree at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1999 and has exhibited widely since graduating in 1982. Marrinon is a recognised figure in Melbourne’s contemporary art scene and has received numerous major awards and commissions. She is represented by Pilar Corrias Gallery, London, and has exhibited internationally including the recent show "An Eagle’s Nest: Contemporary Australian Art" at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane in 2017. Marrinon’s recent solo exhibitions include "The Walls Art Space, Miami, Gold Coast, 2017; Les Eaux d'Amoure, Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, Adelaide, 2017; Smiley has no nose, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, 2016; Selected Works 1982-2000, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2001.

For further information, see: lindamarrinon.com

Archie Moore

Kamilaroi, born 1970, Toowoomba, Queensland

lives and works in Brisbane

Archie Moore was born in Toowoomba and now lives and works in Brisbane. Moore completed his Bachelor of Visual Arts at Queensland University of Technology in 1998 and following recognition in key early career exhibitions, was awarded the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship in 2001, facilitating travel to Prague and further study at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 2010, Moore was awarded the Victoria Small Sculpture Prize and has been shortlisted for the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory five times between 2005 to 2013. In 2018, Moore was recognised with the QUT Creative Industries Faculty Outstanding Alumni Award.

Moore has exhibited widely in Australia since 1998, and his contribution to contemporary practice was recognised with a major survey exhibition held at Griffith University Art Museum, Brisbane, in 2018. In the same year, Moore received a major commission to create a permanent flag-base installation for the International Terminal at Sydney Airport, as part of a partnership between Sydney Airport and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney.

For further information, see: archimoo.reedermoore.com

Charlie Sofo

born 1983, Melbourne

lives and works in Melbourne

Charlie Sofo was born in Melbourne in 1983, where he completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts. Sofo went on to undertake studies in visual arts at the Australian National University School of Art, Canberra, in 2005, followed by a Master of Fine Arts from the Victorian College of Art, Melbourne University in 2012. Sofo is currently a doctoral candidate at Monash Art, Design and Architecture, Monash University, where he also teaches.

Exhibiting since 2005, an individual, early career survey was held at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, in 2007. Since 2014, Sofo was the 2016 Monash University Visual Artist Resident at the Prato Centre in Italy, and undertook a Gertrude Contemporary residency over 2013-14.


For further information, see: charliesofo.blogspot.com

darrenknightgallery.com

For further information, see: archimoo.reedermoore.com

thecommercialgallery.com
Ambera Wellmann

born 1982, Lunenburg, Canada
lives and works in Berlin

Ambera Wellmann was born in Lunenburg, a port town in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia in 1982. In 2011 Wellmann completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at Nova Scotia College of Art & Design University, and in 2016 received a Master of Fine Art and the University of Guelph. Wellman relocated to Berlin, where she now lives and works, after receiving the 2016 Joseph Plaskett Foundation Award; an endowment designed to support early career Canadian artists to work internationally.

Wellman is the recipient of a number of awards, grants and residencies for early career artists, including the regional prize for the BMG 1st Art! at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto in 2011, the 2017 acquisitive National Prize, for the 19th Annual RBC Painting Competition, held at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Recent individual exhibitions include Ambera Wellmann, Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin, 2019; In medias res, Lulu, Mexico City, 2019; Decoy, WAAP, Vancouver, 2018; The Homunculus With a Heart of Gold, Project Pangée, Montreal, 2018; Slipper, Suzanne Biederberg Gallery, Amsterdam, 2017; Clay Pigeon, Dupont Projects, Toronto, 2017; Ambera Wellmann: Recent Works, TrepanierBaer Gallery, Calgary, 2016.

Recent group exhibitions include On Vulnerability and Doubt, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2019; An Assembly of Shapes, Oakville Galleries, Oakville; Thronic Rifh, K-TZ, Berlin, 2018; Chère, Arsenal Contemporary, New York, 2016; Above the Tree Line, Office Baroque, Brussels, 2018; Seed, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, 2018; Mademoiselle, Centre Regional d’Art Contemporain Occitanie, Sète, 2018; I’m Yer Virgil, Super Duchess, New York, 2018; Eye to Eye, Arsenal Contemporary, New York, 2018; Bio-perversity, Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles, 2018; 19th Annual RBC Painting Competition, National Gallery, Ottawa, 2017; Come As You Are, Galerie Antoinette Ertsaskiran, Montreal, 2017; Now Playing, TrepanierBaer Gallery, Calgary, 2017; 18th Annual RBC Painting Competition, Power Plant, Toronto, 2016; The Third Thing, Boarding House Gallery, Guelph, 2016; and A Specific Amaign of Spirit and Dirt, AKA Gallery, Saskatoon, 2016.

For further information, see: amberawellmann.com k-t-z.com

Acknowledgements

It has been a great pleasure to work with each of the participating artists – Andrea Büttner, Cherie Fahy, Brent Harris, Tala Madani, Linda Marrinon, Archie Moore, Charlie Sofo and Ambera Wellmann – to whom we extend our sincere thanks. We are honoured to present extended representations of each artist’s work, including a number of new works developed especially for the exhibition, and we acknowledge with appreciation participating artists’ contributions and commitment to the project.

ACCA also extends its sincere thanks to the numerous lenders to this exhibition, for entrusting us with significant works from their collections, and those who have helped to facilitate these loans: Clinton Bradley; Ingrid Braun; Sue Cato; William and Ann Chanen; Groenighe VII Collection; Chanah Hadad; Patricia Mason and Paul Walker; Modern Times; Andy Song; Kris Spletickenks; Martin Strode; Caroline Williams; Terry Wu; and Kevie Yang.

We would also like to extend our thanks to a number of the representative galleries of the exhibiting artists, whose support and facilitation of loans, transport, images and information is gratefully appreciated: Alexandra Gaty, Jenay Meraz, Whitney Lasker and Jason Marquis at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; Nella Franco at Hollybush Gardens, London; Chris Sharp of Lulu, Mexico; Catherine Wang at Kraupa Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin; Jana Sohn, Laura Lantieri and Steve Fuller at Pilar Corrias Gallery, London; Roslyn and Tony Oxley, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, 2018; Centre Régional d’Art Contemporain Occitanie, Sète; and Doubt, Arsenal Contemporary, Brussels, 2018.

We are delighted to publish new writings on each of the artists, as well as an accompanying essay by Justin Clemens, and we extend our thanks to guest essayists Justin Clemens, Julie Ewington and Amelia Winata, as well ACCA colleagues Miriam Kelly and Annika Kristensen, for their articulate and engaging insights into the artists’ work, and the curatorial premise of the exhibition more generally.

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— MD

Contributors

JUSTIN CLEMENS is a writer, poet and Senior Lecturer in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. His recent books include Lacan Deleuze Badiou, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, with A.J. Bartlett and Jon Roffe; Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy, Edinburgh University Press, 2013; and Minimal Domination, Surplus, Melbourne 2011.

MAX DELANY is Artistic Director and CEO, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; and adjunct Associate Professor at Monash Art, Design and Architecture, Monash University.

JULIE EWINGTON is a writer, curator and broadcaster based in Sydney, and has held a range of academic and curatorial including Head of Australian Art at Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane from 2001–2014. Ewington was curator of The Sculpture of Bronwyn Oliver, TarraWarra Museum of Art, 2016, and a member of the curatorial team for Unfinished Business: Perspectives on art and feminism at ACCA in 2017-18. In 2014, Ewington received the Australia Council’s Visual Arts Award to honour her achievements as a curator, writer, and advocate for the visual arts.

MIRIAM KELLY is Curatorial Manager, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

ANNIKA KRISTENSEN is Senior Curator, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

AMELIA WINATA is a writer and curator and a PhD candidate in Art History at the University of Melbourne. Her research is focused upon the work of German artist Charlotte Posenenske (1930-1985). Winata is a member of the Editorial Advisory Committee at un Magazine, a co-editor of EMAJ, and a founding member of Memo Review. She has written for various publications and galleries including Art Monthly Australasia, Art Guide, Australian Art Collector, un Magazine, as well as CCP, MUMA and Shepparton Art Gallery.

Cassandra Bird, Claire Vistereg and Justin Mowford, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; and Amanda Rowell at The Commercial, Sydney.

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