

# THE 68TH BLAKE PRIZE

11 May – 7 July 2024

CASULA  
POWERHOUSE  
ARTS CENTRE

LIVERPOOL  
CITY  
COUNCIL

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*Sharing the wealth of words*

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# THE 68TH BLAKE PRIZE

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**11 May – 7 July 2024**

## INTRODUCTION

The Blake Prize is one of Australia's most iconic art prizes. The exhibition takes place every two years and highlights local and international artists who explore spirituality and religion through their creative works.

The Prize has been challenging artists to explore these themes since 1951, with Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre becoming home to the prize from 2016. The Blake Prize is a much-loved exhibition for the local community because the artworks inspire awe while also asking big questions about what it means to have faith in this moment of history.

Liverpool is the most appropriate home for this nationally significant prize. We have a community of people from over 150 different birthplaces speaking over 140 languages, with an equally diverse range of faith

backgrounds. The presence of the Blake Prize in our community helps to confirm Liverpool as an international city celebrated for our rich cultural diversity.

The 57 finalists for the 68th edition of the Art Prize have been selected by a panel of judges renowned for their contribution to contemporary art and spirituality in Australia. Casula Powerhouse is grateful to Dean Cross, José Da Silva and Professor Jay Johnston FAHA for undertaking the challenging task of selecting both the finalists and the winners of the Art Prize from a pool of over 600 entries. We all look forward to seeing how their decisions will impact the careers of these finalists.

Congratulations to all the finalists for using art to inspire and provoke contemplation in our community.

We would like to acknowledge the Cabrogal Clan of the Darug Nation who are the traditional custodians of the land that now resides within Liverpool City Council's boundaries. We acknowledge that this land was also accessed by peoples of the Dhurawal and Darug Nations.

# PRIZES

## **The Blake Prize \$35,000 Non-Acquisitive**

Established in 1951, The Blake Prize is an open art prize that challenges artists to engage in conversations relating to religion and spirituality. It is open to all faiths, artistic styles, and media.

## **The Blake Emerging Artist Prize \$6,000 Acquisitive**

The Blake Emerging Artist Prize is an acquisitive art prize of \$6,000 with the winning artist's entry becoming part of the CPAC's Collection. This prize is open to artists who are within the first 5 years of their practice.

## **The Blake Established Artist Residency and Exhibition**

The Blake Established Artist Residency is open to artists who have been practicing for more than 5 years. The prize includes a one-week studio residency followed by a solo exhibition in the 2025/26 exhibition program.

The recipient will receive a fee of \$1,500 to complete the residency and an artist fee of \$5,000 for the solo exhibition. The recipient will receive curatorial guidance through the research and development and delivery of the solo exhibition.

# THE 68TH BLAKE PRIZE

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# FINALISTS

## Ripples in Saif-ul-Maluk lake, Kaghan Valley, Naran, Pakistan (Soft Target -Pakistan Chapter)

2023

UV inkjet print on matt archival paper + DIASEC

Acknowledgements: This work is edition of 7 + 2AP

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Shot at the edge of Saif-ul-Maluk Lake shore in Pakistan and taken just before dawn with an iPhone and without any digital augmentation, *Ripples in Saif-ul-Maluk* photograph captures the artist's standing silhouette, a perspective beyond the pictorial and seeping into the physical gallery space. Abdullah M.I. Syed's performative gesture of standing as a solitary figure among the glorious natural casting ripples in water, suggests how our thoughts, voices, and actions reverberate throughout the universe, transferring knowledge and creating zones of infinite contemplation.

The artwork is part of *Syed's Soft Target: Nature* photograph series, in which the artist visited many scenic landmarks around the globe that are also endangered cultural and natural world heritage sites. In the Ripples photograph, Syed remembers and enacts his childhood activity of throwing stones to make them run on the water—a performative action reverberating in mystical knowledge of divine connection and enlightenment and creates ripples tied directly to the Islamic arts and its commitment and affirmation of unity as expressed in diversity. The project also explores Syed's migrant identity as a diasporic Pakistani Muslim man residing in Australia and how his anxieties relate to social ecology, cultural economization, urban sprawl, and the issues of belonging.





## Asa

2023

Hand detailed low relief from resin and bioplastic with mounted archival pigment printing on art canvas

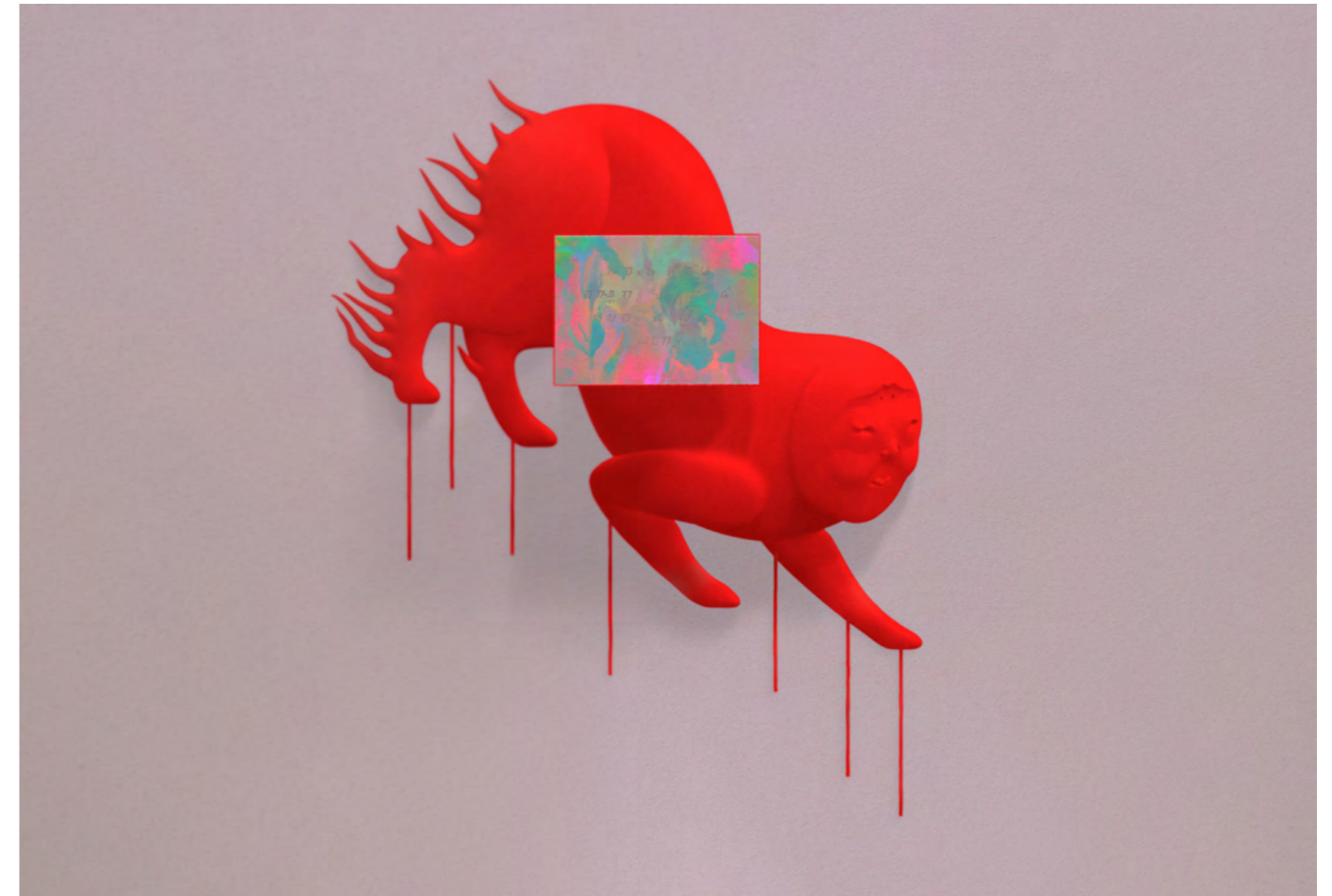
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In the face of perpetual upheaval and ongoing chaos, I contemplate identity-based solidarity and careful performativity. How we often overlook something due to its foreignness or fall prey to divisive narratives.

Growing up amid biases against Chinese Indonesians in Indonesia, existing from the Dutch colonisation's 'divide et impera,' the West-backed 1965 massacre, and the 1998 riot that happened when I was 12 years old, I find solace and understanding through making. It serves as my safe space, allowing me to let go and heal from intergenerational trauma while making peace with the past.

Now raising a young family in Australia, I seek to reconnect with my cultural heritage and beliefs, to reclaim aspects of my identity and pass on some values to my children. Among them are animism, belief in beings, and a simple spiritual chant my mum taught me.

It's as a prayer to transcend boundaries for shared happiness – beyond identity, nationality and borders. Despite realising the limitations of individual agency, I try to defy crisis-induced inaction by cultivating hope, symbolized by the iris, and reciting this chant for all beings.



# Alyssa Aleksanian

## Sacred Botanical

2023

Oil on linen canvas

.....

One's spiritual / religious lineage is a fundamental link to our past. The vast devotional body of work, ephemeral and extant, that our ancestors investigated, explored and gifted us, exists in the hope that we would, in times of conflict be held secure in belonging & community.

This work, *Sacred Botanical*, is an exploration of my spiritual lineage. Depicted throughout this work are the sacred plants of the Bible, along with plants sacred to the Druids and early Celtic Christians. The botanical plants, in their lacing and intertwining on the canvas, are designed to form the ghosted image of the Chi-Rho (☩)- one of the oldest known Christograms.

The botanical plants depicted, sacred to the Druids and early Celtic Christians, are the Yew, Ivy, Oak & Mistletoe. The sacred plants depicted from the Bible are the Anemone, Rose, Madonna lily, Grape & Iris. Each plant had its own sacred meaning and use to the ancestors.

The olive branch has come to be understood as a universal symbol of peace (ancient Greek), and was added, as the painting evolved, as a fervent wish for peace in this time of current conflict.





## The Psalm Card

2023

Watercolour on paper

.....

I entered this world abruptly. The doctor who delivered me had torn my brachial plexus nerve paralysing my right arm and told my mother that he'd met his "Waterloo".

This painting depicts me with my disability visible, an image I'd often lament on. When I first went to Sunday school I came back with a psalm card I'd randomly picked out of a basket. On the card was written, "Strong is thy hand" Psalm 89:13. The verse reads "Your arm is endowed with power, your hand is strong, your right hand is exalted". Those words spoke deeply to my mother which later spoke to me. As my faith strengthened so did my arm, not in a physical sense but a strength of spirit that's washed away the pain and shame my disability had brought me.

*The Psalm Card* is a watercolour that displays flaws which is crucial for this piece. I wanted to convey rawness and emotion which the medium has captured with the watery layers adding depth and meaning. The stops and starts of the brush strokes are a lot like how my life has played out. There is sadness and longing there but also a sense of hope.



# Anna Tregloan & Adriano Cortese

## BELIEF SYSTEM

2023

Multichannel control system, 3D printed housings, copper wire

Acknowledgements: Creators: Adriano Cortese and Anna Tregloan.

Composition/Programming: Bob Jarvis. Production Manager/Lighting: Govin Ruben. Control System: designed and developed by the UNSW Interactive Media Lab and UTS Creativity and Cognition Studios. Team: Oliver Bown, Sam Ferguson, Kurt Mikolajczyk, Ella Mannor. Producer: Nic Clark. Trumpet: Elliott Hughes. This work was created on the lands of the Gadigal, Yalukit-willam, Boon Wurrung and Bunurong people

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In their separate practices Anna Tregloan and Adriano Cortese share an interest in reframing the everyday experience through a philosophical excavation of belief and imagination. In BELIEF SYSTEM they have created an evolving archive of documented beliefs drawn from a cross section of society.

Comprising over 5000 recordings each beginning with the words "I believe", when presented at full scale, this immersive installation utilises specifically developed software to sweep the individual recordings through an environment comprising of 120 speakers. Suspended on shimmering tangles of copper wire, each speaker is housed in a casing that hangs like an inverted ear-trumpet inviting visitors to eaves drop.

The beliefs are arranged into thematic groupings (flocks) and programmed to move through the space; sometimes swarming en masse and sometimes as if trickling on a breeze. This movement is controlled by weather data drawn from a mini weather station fixed to the exterior of the venue.

The experience encourages spectators to introspect on what it is we think is true, what we value in life, how we relate to others and who we want to be. The work conveys a sense of the unity of humanity, connected, paradoxically, by our diverse and contradictory beliefs.



*Audio in the installation includes intermittent and infrequent references to domestic violence, sex, drug use, suicide, and some course language.*



## I Am Holding Many Contaminated Flowers

2024

Roses, Swarovski crystals

.....

*I am Holding Many Contaminated Flowers* is an extension of my explorations in playing with the ephemerality of flowers. In these works, I slow down the cycle of the flowers natural deaths by starving them of water and encasing them in epoxy resin shell.

*I am Holding Many Contaminated Flowers* looks at the symbolism of a romantic 12 stemmed bouquet and subverts their already loaded romance-enforced presence into the realm of kitsch/craft discomfort. The roses are laced with garish Swarovski crystals in formations inspired by mould/fungus growths to push back against the simplified romantic narrative of the rose. The crystal growths on the slowly dying flowers creates a tension to question what are considered beautiful materialities.

Due to the transitory nature of these works, I make them a week out before installation dates. This is to capture the changing colour of the roses. The photo's I have provided are of previous examples of these pieces. If required, I will be able to provide updated shots closer to the installation.



## Numen

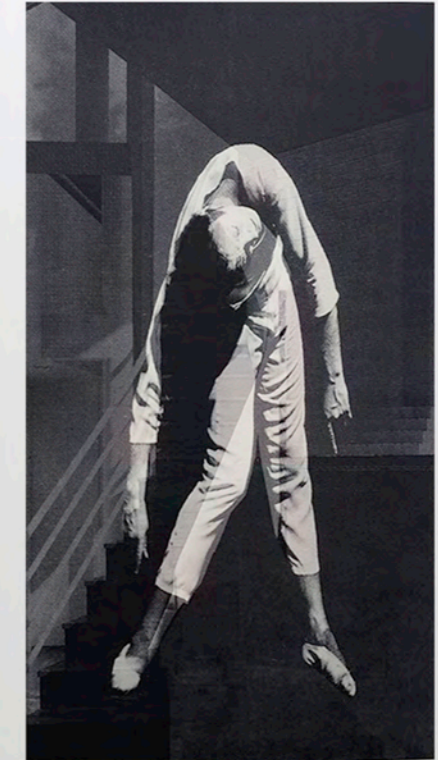
2023

Digital print on aluminium

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*Numen* is the result of my research and interest in representing the ineffable phenomenon of the numinous experience. Numinous, a concept coined by the German theologian Rudolf Otto, describes 'persons, things or situations having a deep emotional resonance, psychologically associated with experiences of the self - referring to a dynamic agency or effect independent of the conscious will.'

According to Otto, it possesses a specific yet inexpressible quality. Usually, this feeling or the source of it, is interpreted as God, but for some it might be the Absolute, the Ancestors, the uncanny, or the supernatural. This 'particular' state can take many forms - it can cause one to feel small and insignificant, or the self can cease to identify with the individual body and expands to become one with Everything. I am interested in the universal truths of these transient feelings and experiences.





## Lighten the Darkness

2022

Linocut

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The first recorded voyage through the Torres Strait by a European was made by the Spaniard Luis Vaes de Torres in August 1606 during the age of Great Navigations. It was, the discovery of pearl-shell that lured so many to the area.

At about the same time as the pearling industry was beginning to develop, another venture was underway in the Loyalty Islands. The missionaries at Lifu had decided to use Torres Strait as stepping-stones for the spreading of Christianity throughout Papua New Guinea. On Saturday, 1 July 1871, the LMS ship, Surprise, carrying the Reverend McFarlane and Reverend Murray together with South Sea Islander evangelists anchored at Kemus on Erub, a day that has gone down in Torres Strait history as Keriba Lagaw Buiya or Coming of the Light.

A warrior named Dabad and his men, ready to defend his land and people, encountered McFarlane who dropped to his knees on the beach before them and presented The Bible. Dabad accepted the book he couldn't read, and its promise of lightening the darkness with the introduction of Christianity and, though he wouldn't have known it at the time, a new era for the islands of Torres Strait.



## 忘川 River of Oblivion

2022

Organza chiffon, EVA glue and embroidery thread

Acknowledgements: Artwork concept developed during Parramatta Artists' Studios Open Residency 2022 at Wentworth Point Community Centre and Library

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In Chinese numerology, 99 signifies eternity. When my grandfather became terminally ill, my family sought solace in studying Buddhist beliefs. This installation features 99 intricate sigils floating along white mesh, imitating souls passing through to the afterlife in an underworld river. The fluid symbols are distorted renditions of the 8 auspicious signs in Buddhism morphed with other symbols in my personal lexicon. This work chronicles learning and reconnecting with spirituality, as death can both divide and bring people together. This work was created collaboratively with my father, Ngan Kwan Cheung.





# Christine Dean

## Voyage into Solitude (Log Cabin)

2023

Oil on canvas

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This painting was created while living in a small cottage during a freezing winter in rural Wisconsin USA. Its title 'Voyage into Solitude (Log Cabin)' refers to Henry David Thoreau's 'Walden - Life in the Woods' and the design of the work makes reference to a traditional quilt block pattern known as 'Log Cabin'. The use of floating text on the surface of the image provides a screen resembling the busy urban world of signs, social connections and communities frequently involving jostling sub-cultures and identity politics. In contrast the mandala-like form of the interlocking geometric motifs takes the viewer to a red square in the centre of the painting which symbolises the hearth of a chimney in the language of quilting.

The experience of solitude, inner reflection and contemplation are difficult to find in an increasingly fast-paced city such as Sydney. Thoreau's two years, two months and two days in the woods represents a search for inner wisdom through the practice of aestheticism. The life of the hermit plays an important role in religious traditions, this painting expresses a desire for hermitude, acknowledging that solitude is important for spiritual development and the journey to being an artist.



## Paska

2023

Acrylic on carved woodblock

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As a child my Father would observe the orthodox holidays. In the lead up to Easter he would dye eggs vibrant colours, a personal quest to perfect each colour and its intensity. Since having my daughter, this is has become a tradition for the two of them to spend together over the stove, sharing and imparting the process. As I've reflected on this past year and my Father's cancer diagnosis I have often thought of the interactions and rituals between he and my daughter, the significance of the eggs and their symbolism for resurrection and new life.





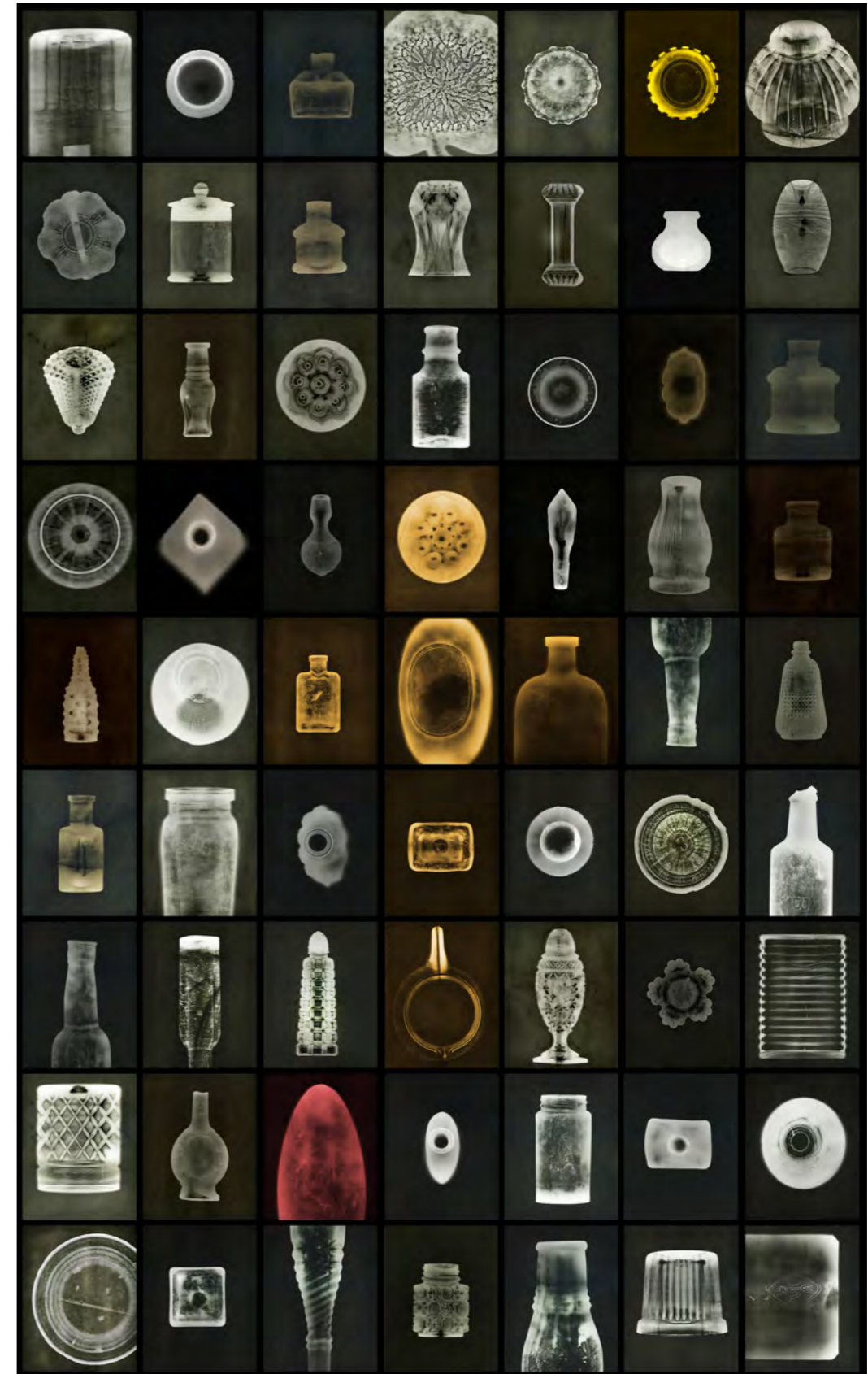
## The Spirit Bottles of Giovanni Baptista

2023

Framed photograph

It is 1630s Florence and Giovanni Baptista is in lockdown in Florence, surrounded by plague. In a dream he is told that a chest of bottles lies in his basement. Upon finding these bottles he is mystified by their strangeness and believes that he can see into the future: bright suns, buildings, etc. He believes that these images hold strange codes. They are speaking of the present and the future.

A magical realist theme underpins this collection of scans of 63 photograms. I placed each bottle onto 13x10cm pieces of thirty year old photographic paper. The paper was flashed with light. During development images were revealed in negative form. I loved how these old bottles started to look like ancient relics or icons. The ephemeral was becoming the sublime. This quiet process took me back to the very birth of photography, where shapes were captured on silver salted paper. It helped rebuild my faith in photography, particularly after the interruptions of Covid. It has been a magical experience, returning to a very pure practice. The surrounding project explores our human connections to the plague in 17th century Florence: doubt, fear, anxiety, faith and hope.





## The Birth of Birds

2023

Charcoal from my mum's fire, white ceremonial ochre, genuine silver leaf, acrylic on canvas

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In the beginning of time, the birds were created first. A medicine man flew down from the sky and turned himself into a humble man, we call Karringalabil. Before he created the land, mountains, sky, under Country, waterways, forests, plants, animals and people, he created the birds to assist him with the Creation of Wadawurrung Country.

He cut the bark from the manna gum tree and gathered clay from the river to form the bird shapes. He carved the crow, called Waa, who breathed life into all the birds.

When he formed djirndap, the cocky, his crest caught a light. Dropping fire everywhere.

Karringalabil created the magpies, Parrwang. They didn't like the darkness and decided to lift the sky, when doing so the first sunrise arose. Followed by the first rainbow, we call Binbeal. Karringalabil was so pleased to see all the colours of the rainbow, he went onto creating the remaining birds in all the colours of the rainbow.

He then decided to create himself a partner. Creating the most beautiful bird of all the black swan, Kunuwarra. He then turned himself into a wedge-tailed eagle, called Bunjil and flew into the night sky turning himself into a star.





## Angels Keep Empty Spaces Where Something Can Be Left

2023

Synthetic polymer, marble dust, damar, watercolour, ink on birch panel, bespoke frame

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When I was asked to describe this work I saw it as a Reformation of heartbreak - a symbol of an alchemic spiritual repentance eroded with the passage of time. The Lutheran sensibility reframes things. How might one heartbreak look after a thousand years of merciful transformation? How would an archaeologist understand the notes app? How would my search history make someone feel in the deep future?

I consider this work to be, in a manner of speaking, a forgery; an archive of me or you once we turn to dust. As a faux relic it conjures some ontological response, a desire to ascertain what place it had within a lineage of time, as if part of a speculative history.

This forgery of a Medieval devotional artwork was generated with confessional AI prompts to make an image of scorned lovers or lonely angels and transferred to a birch panel with office supplies. It is one of a series of artworks. Forgery here has a double meaning. On one hand it has the implication of hollowness - a facsimile with value incomparable to the original thing. On the other they are forgeries of prescient objects from an indiscernible time. Forged like ore to a sword.



## Aurora:Dawn

2023

Flexi-Neon

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There are many legends of the Aurora, in my Danish heritage she was a Goddess who threw the lights across the sky to guide the people to Valhalla. In Roman and Greek Mythologies Aurora sleeps in saffron robes between her siblings, Luna (the moon) and Sol (the Sun). All life comes with dawn and as such Aurora also known as Hausos, Auseklis, and Eos is always even in Indo and Northern European tales female and divine. My sculptural neon interpretation is the simple equation of that which gives birth to the divine and life. Aurora is depicted as a very sexual divinity and as Ushus she took many lovers .

Aurora's task is to disperse the darkness and give us knowledge of ourselves in the light in many different cultures, legends and religions. This work is to help us contemplate that sexual divinity of light.





## Cheshme-e Jaan **چشمه جاں / / The Spirit Spring**

2023

Neon, red gum rehal (book holders)

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*Cheshme-e Jaan* explores the forgotten history of Cameleers and their long relationship with the First Nations people. In this work, Alavi reimagines the first meeting between First Peoples and the early Cameleers near a natural spring, honouring the knowledge that was shared when the Cameleers were shown regular water sources, rock holes, creek beds and springs. Inspired by rahel (Islamic book rest) at the Broken Hill Mosque established in 1887 by Cameleers, this work consists of a series of collages and rahels made from the discarded railway sleepers of the Old Ghan Railway, a railway line that was birthed from the cheap labour of the Cameleers.

On top of the rahels, there are two verses of the Sufi poet Mowlana of Balkh (known as Rumi)'s poem in neon:

*My soul heard something from yours  
Since my heart drank from your spring*

Considered cheap labour, Cameleers from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Kashmir are not adequately known in Australian society. At the time, they were vilified by media and government, despite performing a key function in their colonial endeavours. A century later, thousands of people from the same region as Cameleers, facing similar discrimination.



## Lantana II

2023

Human hair (artist's own), Graphite, Yupo paper (Wooden Frame)

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We as Australians often document ourselves within the wildernesses of our landscape, becoming emblematic as a representation of an area that has been tamed, controlled and conquered. What makes this complex is when it is done by those of Western descent and the Colonialist lens it brings. How does Country retain its spiritual essence and relevance when it is constantly being controlled and diminished through the environmental impacts of colonialism and urbanism?

*Lantana II*, highlights the lost of spiritual connection to land through the introduction and impact of lantana, a popular garden flower adornment in Europe, that has become an invasive weed destroying native habitats. Drawing comparisons between this weed and humanity, *Lantana II*, uncovers the similarities and problematic structures between the two organisms.





## Death of the Settler

2023

Type C Photograph

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Death of the Settler references Holbein's Body of the Dead Christ. It was taken in a butcher's shop in the Goldfields town of Clunes, Victoria that has never been renovated. Clunes is on DjaDja Wurrung country near where my own ancestors settled in the 1800s. It is part of my ongoing scrutiny of my Catholic and Settler history through the metaphor of the male nude. This image combines the contrary forces of desire and death. The model is a local mechanic whose body reflects a physically active life now posed at rest, the setting of a butcher's shop referencing Settler dominion over the land and its inherent violence. My art is inspired by the work of my late friend and mentor Rev Michael Bernard Kelly and his seminal work "Seduced by Grace" that seeks to reconcile queer desire with Catholic belief.



## The Creation of Adam 2023

2023

Digital capture still photograph, pigment print on archival paper, taxidermy butterfly.

Acknowledgements: I acknowledge the Indigenous "PAIWAN" Tribe of Taiwan who collaborated with me on this reinterpretation of one the great 'Origin' stories and tribal art forms as acts of 'divinity' passed down from our gods and ancestors.

.....

Made in Taiwan, whilst 'Artist in Residence' 2023. A community engagement collaboration with Indigenous Taiwanese tribe "PAIWAN". An opportunity to engage a dialogue with one of the greatest rendition of the 'creation myth' and 'origin' story Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam". Paying homage to the visionary grand master, this legacy piece transcends borders, cultures, languages, generations.

The title can read both ways, bringing into question who is the 'Creator' and the 'Created' in this narrative?

Our narrative, suggests 'Adam' is the 'Creator' and is gifting the Tattoo Art of Samoa to the Rebirth of Traditional Art of Tattoo / Tatau to the indigenous 'Paiwan' Tribe of Taiwan. Cudjoy who plays 'God' is the First Taiwanese Traditional Tattooist spearheading the revival of the lost Art form of our generation. The 'origin' of contemporary art has it's roots in 'primitive' practices of story telling capture and encryption via song, dance, food, art, tattooing. The 'body' is a unique, multidimensional living archive of previous 'eternities'.

The creation of art and life are acts of 'Divinity' and the 'Devine'.





## The Veil is Thin

2022

Acrylic, agate, bronze, calendular, flowers, clay, copper, dried, flowers, fabric, fire blackened cedar, foam, French glass, gem, stones, kahu feathers, lava rock, obsidian, paint, paper, pearls, plaster, plastic, pins, resin, ribbon, rope, rosehips, rye grass, sand, scotch thistle, silk, silver, silver rowan berries, smoke, Tasmanian peppercorns, Tī Kōuka fibres, velvet, wood, wool

.....

Aotearoa New Zealand artist Jen Alexandra engages with traditions of spirituality and seasonal lore. The title for these works, *The Veil is Thin*, describes a time or place when it is easier to connect with the spiritual realm. The sculptures offered here are variations on symbols and ideas common to the Samhain festivals in the pagan Wheel of the Year. Part of a European heritage, this nature-based belief system has often been relegated to the feminine and denigrated as myth, despite many aspects being absorbed into more familiar Christian and secular festivities. Many other cultures and communities have spiritual practices that are grounded in nature, including te ao Māori. Connecting with an ecofeminist form of worship that harks back to ancient European practices, Alexandra challenges the patriarchal, postcolonial structures that continue to dominate our understanding of the world today and suggests there are other ways of seeing and knowing—if we are prepared to look.



## article-particle (Guyu-Gwa)

2022

Pigment jars, burnt pages of Aboriginal Words and Place names, acrylic stand, punch label

.....  
*article-particle (Guyu-Gwa)* explores the transformation and reclamation of language and the power of fire as a ceremonial healing practice for the Gulumerridjin (Larrakia) people. This installation features pigment jars of different sizes each containing the burnt remnants of multiple editions of 'Aboriginal Words and Place Names,' a widely published book that presents First Nations words without any connection to people or place.

In this context, fire becomes a tool of rejuvenation and rebirth, breathing new life into the previously dislocated words embedded on the page. The burnt remnants, are presented as transmuted pigment, offering a new means of writing language, encapsulating the resilience of a people determined to preserve our rich linguistic heritage.

The jars are labelled with the Gulumerridjin word for fire, 'Guyu-Gwa', this repetitive gesture not only this word within its cultural context but also serves as a ritual for the relearning language by the artist. Each letter punched onto a label further embeds the word within memory in an ongoing process of relearning language.





## Seven Sisters Story

2023

Acrylic on Linen

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This is a Tjukurpa (Creation Story) about the constellations of Pleiades and Orion. The sisters are the constellation of Pleiades and the other star Orion is said to be the man Nyiru or Nyirunya. Nyiru is forever chasing the sisters known as the Kunkarunkara women as it is said he wants to marry the eldest sister. The seven sisters travel again and again from the sky to the earth to escape Nyiru's unwanted attention. They turn into their human form to escape Nyiru, but he always finds them and they flee back to the sky. As Nyiru is chasing the sisters he tries to catch them by using magic to turn into the most tempting kampurarpra (bush tomatoes) for the sisters to eat and the most beautiful ili (fig) tree for them to camp under. Every now and again one of the women fall victim to his ways. It is said that he eventually captures the youngest sister, but with the help of the oldest sister, she escapes back to her sisters who are waiting for her. Eventually the sisters fly back into the sky, reforming the constellation.





# Johanna van der Linden

## you can touch me

2023

Etching on paper, thread, steel

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Thomas inserting his fingers into Jesus' side after the resurrection, a moment of penetration and embodied intimacy. "you can touch me" considers the implication of materiality with the body, and the slippages and tensions between sacrality and violence. "you can touch me" is part of a larger body of research exploring the new materialism, and the relationships between Catholicism, shame and the female and othered body.





## Untitled (light)

2023

HD video

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Here is the reproduction of natural phenomenon as directly as possible, with no digital manipulation, together with the imperfections of both the location and the means of recording. Light travels to your eyes, its photons delayed, spitting into colours seen and unseen. Its rays have signified the presence of the divine, suggested a moral dimension, said to give form to word. But it is light itself, here in this purest form that is divine.





# Johnathon World Peace Bush

## Saint Matthew

2023

Locally sourced earth pigments/ochres on linen, framed

Acknowledgements: Courtesy the Artist, Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, and THIS IS NO FANTASY

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Since a mission was established on Bathurst Island in 1911, Catholicism remains embedded in the colonial experience of the Tiwi people. In this work Bush recreates the iconic Catholic narrative of Saint Matthew the Apostle reading from his gospel, combining it with Tiwi cultural designs drawn from jilamara (ceremonial body painting) using local earth pigments collected from Country around Milikapiti. The power of Bush's work as a contemporary artist is that he frames these narratives from a Tiwi perspective, celebrating the resilient and ancient living culture to which he belongs.

"Saint Matthew, the great mind of plenty, bringing sharing and caring to the world. His words revolved around the world with love, for love. Loyal to the people, loyalty for the people. It's the Aboriginal laws and the Western laws, two histories one history, you know... Two stories tell one story. My story. From the past towards today, from today towards the future I see the smiles of happy faces everywhere I may roam. Come with me to a happy place, back to our roots, back to culture where we all belong. One people different colour, one people, nice people." – Johnathon World Peace Bush





## Coming in the Clouds

2023

Beeswax, pigment, brass, aluminium

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Coming in the Clouds (2023) is supported by handmade frames that act as a vessel or pool, as Molten beeswax is drowned in water leaving a flowing and textured surface that creates an instant solid topography. The work is wet with heat, evaporated, fired, cooled, warmed, and then set. My water cast works are forged in a way based on the divination practices of carromancy. Installed in a motif resembling a petal, or infinity symbol, the work is both in stasis and flow. I'm interested in the organic alchemy of this process connecting it to cosmology, baptismal practices and systems of flooding.

I work with wax as the primary material in my practice for its practical possibilities while gesturing towards the spiritual cult I was raised in. The most common question I get asked about my work is the one that scares me most, "Will it melt?" Beeswax melts at 62 degrees celsius and if the wax turns to liquid in our ambient environment, we will have already arrived at judgment day. I feel that it's much more obvious and palatable to see the vulnerability that art presents than reality at times.



## The Reckoning

2021

Photographic print - Performance documentation

Acknowledgements: Image Credits: Emma Fishwick

Performers: Helah Milroy, Janine Oxenham and Joshua Pether

The Reckoning is commissioned by BlakDance through BlakForm, with funding from Restart investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund- An Australian Government Initiative, supported through the Australia Government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program and is also supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. Additional support from Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA).

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*The Reckoning* is a work that addresses the intergenerational trauma of both the body and site through acknowledgement of Australia's colonial history and its violence imprinted on the bodies and spirits of First Nations people. It is a progressive and meditative ritual expressed through listening, contemplation, connecting to Country and engaging with cultural knowledge. It also becomes an act of decolonisation, wherein performers go beyond the bounds of performance and its artefacts to produce an authenticity that acts as a spiritual quest for truth and knowledge.

In 2021 the first performance outcome of *The Reckoning* was a 7 hour durational performance at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA). Entirely improvised, the artists explored through the performance three key questions: What is trauma? How do we access the trauma? and How do we move through and past the trauma?

The two photos are of the beginning and end of the work respectively. The first, a durational stillness over a period of an hour. The second, the evolution of ceremony crafted by spiritual/shamanic forces (an ancient birthing from within). The simplicity of each holds much weight. *The Reckoning* is both an example of contemporary First Nations performance and modern day ceremony.





# Katie Stackhouse

## Song Vessel

2021

Single-channel video with sound

Acknowledgements: Writer/director and co-editor: Katie Stackhouse

Performed by Sunny Kim

Videographer, sound recordist and co-editor: Mitch Nivalis

Sound mixer: Patrick Telfer

Field support: Emma Byrnes

Sculpture: Katie Stackhouse, Song Vessel, 2021, Bronze, 300 x 133 x 120cm

Bird calls in order of sound appearance: Welcome Swallow, Brown Thornbill, Australian Raven, Blue Wren, Spotted Pardalote, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Yellow Wattlebird, Sulfur-Crested Cockatoo, Grey Fantail, Eastern Rosella, Eurasian Coot, Yellow Rumped Thornbill.

This performance and video was made on the land and by the waters of the Kulin nation and we pay our respects to Elders, Past, present and future of all people of the Kulin Nation. We respect the enduring strength of all First Nations People and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

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The video Song Vessel serves as a primal summoning, urging the restoration of space, land and enduring interconnections. By seamlessly integrating video, sculpture, sound and performance, the revitalising potency of ancestral melodies becomes a resounding avenue for change, nurturing the land and every entity within it. Crafted on ancestral territories of the Kulin Nation, the sculpture's conception, and the accompanying performance stand as a tribute to the profound significance of place. This synergy underscores the resonance of shared history and the imperative of cherishing and healing our environment, The video captures a poignant clarion call to action, fostering a profound metamorphosis; one that embraces the nurturing of the land, honouring its heritage, and safeguarding the myriad lives it cradles.





## Black Hole: Ruthless Preceptor of Space and Time

2023

Acrylic on carved woodblock

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This carved woodblock was inspired by the bizarre and unlikely intersection between black holes and the wrathful nature of the Buddhist and Hindu deity Mahākāla, known as the Great Black One and God of Time.

Almost always depicted in black and with the embodiment of inexorable power, both black holes and Mahākāla are terrifying oddities, presenting profound intellectual challenges to scholars of their time.

Guided by astrophysics, and leaning on the visual language of Tibetan thangka, I composed the artwork using the structure of a black hole and placed a mystic figure guarding the mysterious center of a black hole, "singularity" while wielding the tools we deploy to explore the universe.

The painting's outer rim depicts the distortion of spacetime of an accretion disc, followed by the boundary of the event horizon with a singularity at its center.

The wielder is holding an antenna-like sceptre, symbolising communication. A brush symbolises literacy. An abacus symbolises numeracy and computing. A mirror enables us to observe space and time, revealing the structure of our reality.

By embracing both science and religion, this painting illustrates a serendipitous intersection and explores the story of humanity's insatiable desire to understand the world around us.





## Buraq

2023

Single channel video with audio installation, found domestic rug and traditional Oud Arabic perfume

Acknowledgements: This work was filmed in consent and permission with Agung Gunawan, his family and community in regional Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2014 and was finalised in 2023. Agung is a Javanese dancer and choreographer trained in several Indonesian classical dance forms.

Courtesy of the Khaled Sabsabi and Milani gallery Brisbane, Australia.

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*Buraq* is inspired by the multiplicity of spiritual and artistic references of interest that are consistent with my philosophies and practices as a Muslim artist.

According to Islamic faith, Buraq (Arabic "lightning") is the mount that served prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during his Isra and Mi'raj journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and up through the heavens and back within the one night.

At the forefront of the video a group of Sufis practicing a Ziker, a devotional chanting that is common in many of our spiritual traditions. In Tasawwuf (Sufism) we refer to these devotional ceremonies as remembrance of the Divine. In the video's background in colour and in silence, are dancers performing a traditional Javanese dance. The bringing together of these two elements for me personally opens conversations and possibilities while affirming the importance of a considered balance for holding, sharing spiritual and traditional stories / spaces.

Muslim Sufis often speak about the innermost part of the heart in which divine revelation is experienced and learned. My intention for this work is to invite audiences to witness a world that eloquently explores visual manifestations of subtle social realities and the strength of shared spirituality and territories.



# Khashayar Salmanzadeh

## 10 flowers of Shiraz

2023

Oil, PVA and charcoal on canvas

Utilising traditional and experimental painting techniques, this work investigates the historical and contemporary experience of Bahá'í women. As members of a world faith and religious minority originating in 19th century Iran, Bahá'ís seek to promote the oneness of mankind and the equality of men and women. June 2023 marked the 40th year anniversary of the execution of 10 Bahá'í women in my hometown of Shiraz. Most being in their 20s, their deaths are an example of the intense religious persecution that Bahá'ís suffer in Iran.

This portrait is of a young Bahá'í woman and creative practitioner living in Melbourne. Faced with overwhelming global narratives of diaspora and oppression, the youth of today inherit the tragedies of the past whilst working towards a brighter future. Drawing on the symbolism of saffron flowers I thus connect the story of the 10 women of Shiraz with the women of today, who are now engaged in the same spiritual and societal struggle of freedom, equality and justice.





## 9 Enso Signs painted in Grave soil

2023

Soil and acrylic medium on canvas

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The 9 Enso signs are made with clay soil from both Trangie and Rookwood cemetery graves, with permissions. The colours come from particular spots, sorted, and retain different shades and textures. The reds are mostly from Trangie. The greys and yellows from Rookwood. The clay soil has been washed down to a slurry, sieved, settled to remove the rough 'grog', dried, pulverised and sifted to a light powder. The clay soil is then mixed with acrylic medium and a little water to make a paint-like emulsion.

The Enso sign is a calligraphic practice in the Zen/Chan tradition and used in related cultures. It is painted repeatedly as one lets go, with a clearer mind, spontaneously, with grace and simplicity. The closed circle suggests completeness and even the enlightened state of mind. The incomplete is open, about emptiness, death, the void, the unknown and the state of the unenlightened mind seeking in the void. It is also a symbol of possibility.

The Enso is married with mortality in these works, from ashes to ashes and dust to dust, clay to clay, crazing as it dries. A mortality that is marked by a coloniser's practice of burying the dead in sacred grounds.



## Gloria's Nightly Dance

2022

Sculpture - Silicone, foam, metal, mohair, pressed flowers, resin

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'Gloria's Nightly Dance' is a larger than life-size silicon sculpture that depicts an elderly women in her nightie on a pillow kneeling forward in a prayer like stance. She notices her hands and feet are transforming back into nature. They feature clear resin with pressed flowers to depict this transformation.

By blending surrealism with hyperrealism, I intended to craft a piece that not only captivates the eye but also provokes thought. This work is a bridge between the tangible and the ethereal, making visible the invisible threads that connect our dreams and reality.

This surreal sculpture comments on this spiritual connection between waking life and dream life as well as the circular nature of life, connected and made up of the same elements as earth. The extraordinary in the ordinary.





## What Was Done in the Dark Has Been Brought to the Light

2022

Hand engraved and polished geological core sample from the Yilgarn Craton  
Western Australia

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This artwork resituates one of many similarly worded bible phrases such as 'For there is nothing covered, that shall not be known' Luke 12:2 (KJV). Engraved in stone on a totem of deep time the words resonate with a deeper history of creation beyond our imaginings and pre-dating our existence. The artwork is created in the material that forms the structure that gave rise to and supports life on this planet – intrinsic to life.

The material has been extracted from hundreds of meters below the ground through the process of diamond core drilling in mining exploration that creates these cylindrical pieces of rock known as geological core samples. The core is brought to light through the extractive process of mining that happens out of public view and continues mostly unnoticed. Countless meters of core, like this piece, are mostly discarded as a mining by-product. As we mine our planet using earth altering extractive practices in search of potential mineral resources, we undermine our planet and existence.

This artwork is intended to expose viewers to the extractive mining practices while challenging our belief in not only the origin of life but to our existence if we lack responsibility for it.



## Deities in Temples III

2023

Screen Print on silk threads, then woven

Credit: Produced at the Lower East Side Printshop, New York

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*"Deities in Temples III"* examines recently recovered and translated (from French to English) museum registration cards that verify the existence of lost Pidán weavings. The work endeavors to decolonialize their legacy through their interpretation by Sok's family members. Through drawing, painting, writing, or oral exchanges, Sok has invited members of her family to guide the construction of a new Pidán weaving to stand in the place of the missing textile. This piece stands to decolonize the act of the Pidán's destruction and institutionalization through their re-imagination as contemporary weavings.





## You Gotta Have Faith

2023

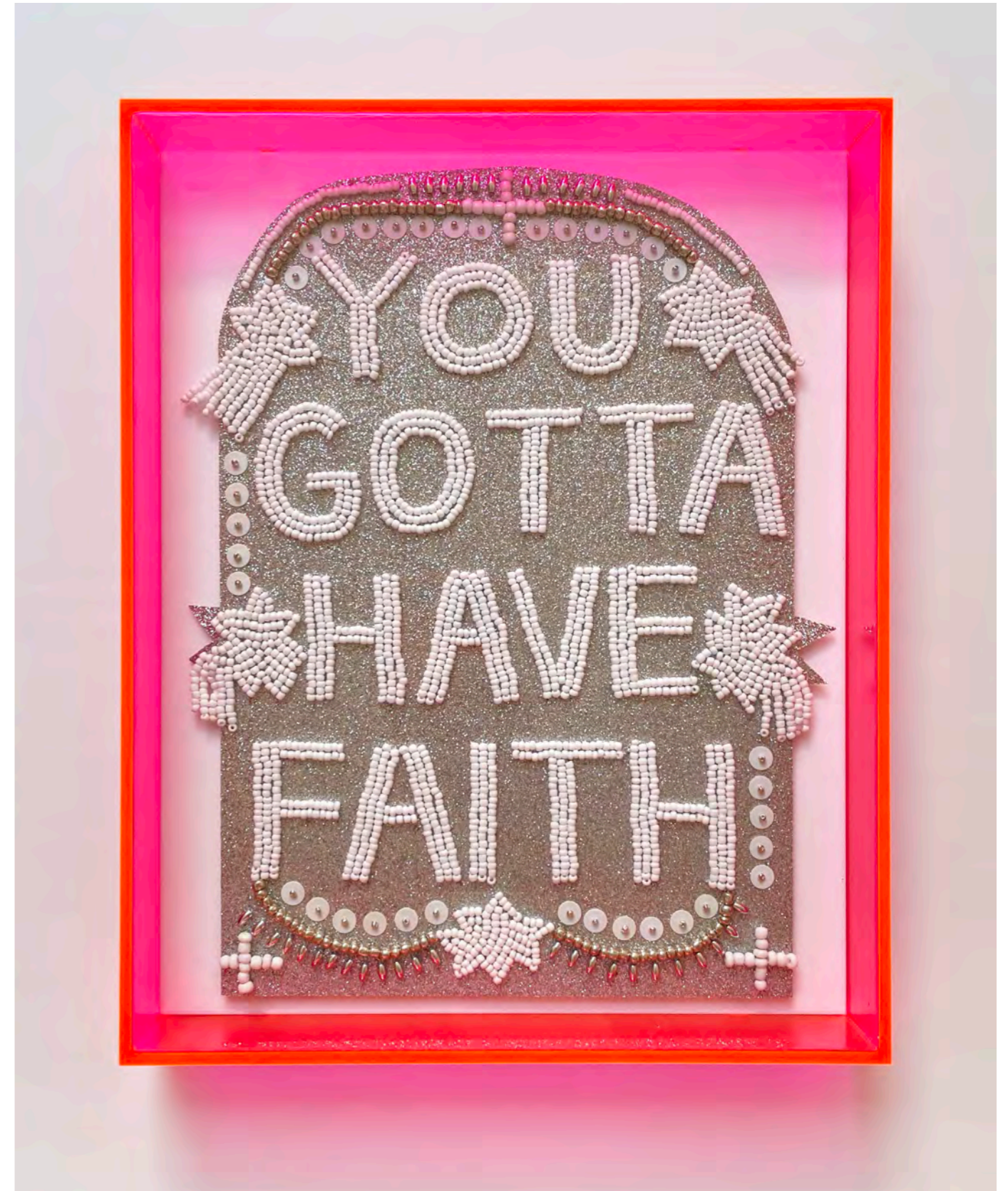
Beads, sequins, thread, glitter paper, perspex frame

.....

Faith is a multifaceted and universal experience that transcends individual differences, encouraging a collective sense of hope and interconnectedness. Despite societal differences in race, gender, and class, a universal thread of faith ties us together, representing hope and serving as a poignant reminder of our shared humanity.

To have faith is to believe and can be sourced from religious, spiritual, cultural or ethical beliefs, or as a profound trust in one's intuition, a conviction that things will work out guided by an inner knowing, often without tangible evidence or proof.

The commonality of faith, belief and ritual are explored through the meticulously handcrafted process of hand stitching through the surface of paper repeatedly, the artwork glitters in optimism through the ritualistic adornment of the hand stitched beads, thread, and sequins. The act of sewing and adornment itself being ritualistic in its nature of the repetitive motion denotes a meditative state much like the rituals and experiences found in spiritual practices.





## The Flower it Gleams (after Jim Hodges & Hildegard Von Bingen)

2023

Found artificial flowers c. 1930-present (polyester, acetate, silk), polyester thread, viscose thread, c.1950s rayon fabric formerly from Job Warehouse, gifted by Matthew Crossley of OHM Architecture

Acknowledgements: This work was supported through Creative Victoria's Creative Projects Fund

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*The Flower it Gleams*, is a cascading lacelike veil constructed from gathered second-hand artificial flowers. Their petals kiss, meditatively hand-stitched together to form an expansive threshold, pierced with a central archway – a shimmering portal which one can pass through if they so choose.

The work borrows its title from an antiphon – a sung psalm – by 11th-century abbess and composer Hildegard Von Bingen, weaving images of a gate, flower and dawn light into a meditation on the religious mystery of the Virgin birth.

The truth of a flower is bound up in its inevitable decay, as is the truth of all of us. With devotion, joy and solemnity, *The Flower it Gleams* considers mortality and the eternal – an exploration of our simultaneous knowledge and denial of the inevitability of death. A celebration of the unknown, of eternal mystery, of the ever-present rhythms of natural cycles and threshold points of our human lives.

Exploring transience and permanence, ideas of keepsake and arresting time, this work draws upon our eon-old desire to create simulacra of nature, and the subtext inherent to this pursuit; to tap into the creative and destructive powers of the universe – to play God, to defy death.





# Maissa Alameddine

## Songs For Sitti: Prayers for my Grandmother

2022

Textiles: Family prayer rugs, chiffon scarfs,

Objects: camping stools

Projection: Digital Photo Projection of Tree

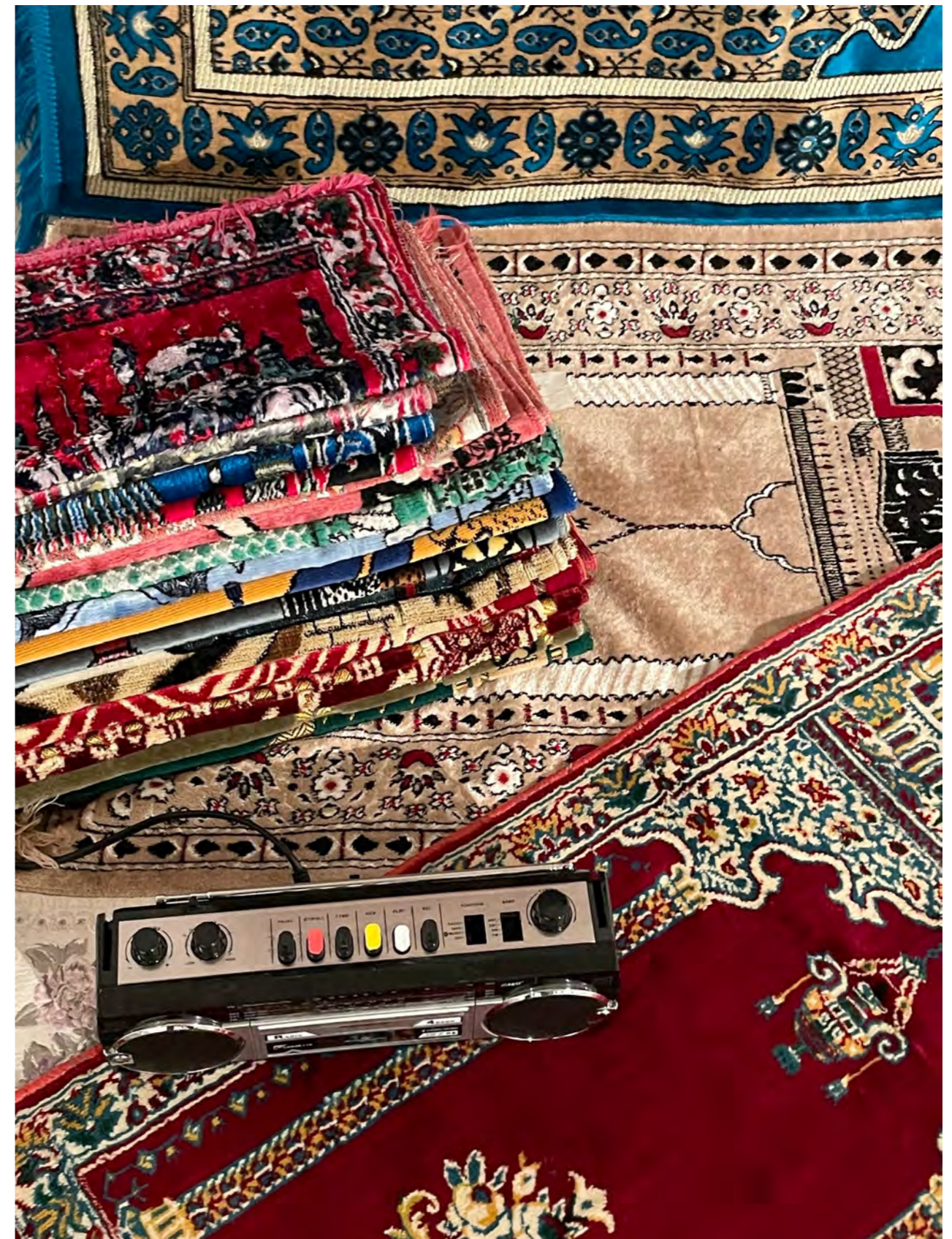
Soundscape: Cassette tape Audio loop 4'30" soundscape

Acknowledgements: To Sitti

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I never had to bury anyone in the soil or the seas of this land. I come from a small migrant family. I never said goodbye to Sitti, my grandmother, and her passing always seems like a dream. This work honours her voice and the legacy she left me. I carry with me her red prayer rug and her voice. I use prayer rugs given to me with prayers and blessings from community, family and friends. The soundscape is layered with my voice singing from Sitti's repertoire, old tape recordings of her voice with family. I invite visitors to sit, listen, meditate, and remember those who we have lost in our far away ancestral lands, those we never said goodbye to.

*\*I had the opportunity to perform live a prayer and song at the opening of Rookwood's Hidden 2022 which brought together family and friends who contributed to the work.*





# Maria Pia Mosquera

## Cephalophore

2022

Oil on board

Rooted in the aesthetics of Latin-American colonial art, *Cephalophore* (head-carrier) reimagines the traditions of religious iconography by imbuing it with the folkloric and the supernatural — all of which are pervasive elements of quotidian Colombian culture. This religious syncretism, in which the supernatural elements of Catholic religion melded with local folklore, reflects the violent history of conquest and the consequent mixing of blood of the Spanish and Indigenous peoples, a history which is thus always present in Latin-American culture, exerting a tyranny of temporal distance. It is a colonial experience that is both different from that familiar to Australians, yet very much the same. *Cephalophore* references paintings of saintly martyrs and religious penitents (the white hood or capirote), but by whimsically intertwining elements of the folkloric and the supernatural, simultaneously tells a story of temptation, sin and guilt, the figure tormented by his demons, real or imagined, until he loses his head.





## Mary In The Field

2023

Oil on linen

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Set in an unknown field, on a glorious day, this painting cross-fertilises spirituality, femininity and maternalism. It is happy chaos and lovingly profane. In contrast to the classical tradition of featuring religious icons holding children in poses of ancient Archaic frontality, my Mary looks away and down. She is focused on herself, her body and her own time, instead of outwards at the viewer. There is no universality here, no religion, no big over-arching spirituality inferred. This painting is meant instead as deeply personal and private moment writ large, and made significant in its oil paint medium, on its traditional cradle of canvas and wood. I enjoy painting moments of transcendence and freedom in the most ordinary times. Like now, pissing in a field.



## Celestial Bodies (Eclipse)

2022

Nine channel video

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Taoran Li and Ariff Fakir for portraying Luna and Sol. Also to Laura Peters and James Clarke for the crystal bowl audio

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A celestial body is a naturally occurring physical entity, such as a sun, planet, moon, or asteroid that abides in the observable universe. Over the course of human history, there has existed an evolving relationship between us and our most influential celestial bodies; the sun and the moon. They inspire humanity, they impact us by their very existence. Historically, in myth and story, we have given them extra power by imbuing them with personality, motive and even deification.

In the case of this work, Sol and Luna allow us to see them in their humanised forms as they travel their intersecting paths across an idyllically scenic yet brooding realm. Sun and moon, gold and silver, pass across the sky meeting once to 'touch' in an eclipse redolent of 'conjunctio', the alchemical marriage. While we are watching them, only once do they turn to face us and acknowledge our gaze, but even then they look through and beyond us, as if our fragile existence doesn't touch them at all.





# Monica Rani Rudhar

## We Were Connected In A More Complicated Way Than Either of Us Could Even Begin To Understand

2023

Single Channel Video

Acknowledgements: Director of photography and co-editor: Harleigh English

Sound design: Kuba Dorabialski

Cast: Shivanjani Lal

Technical assistance/photography: Szymon Dorabialski

Set Assistant: Nina Dorabialski

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This work merges various personal stories that stem from my Romanian and Indian family to construct a speculative narrative that imagines my past life as my mother's pet cow. I use imagery to depict my mother's mango cravings during her pregnancy whilst I was in the womb and reference her bond with her childhood pet cow named Monica. I draw on the ancient practice of extracting yellow pigment, derived from cow urine after they have been fed mango leaves to intertwine the sacredness of beings with the concept of rebirth. By narrating as both the figure of a cow and daughter, I collapse time to reimagine the ephemeral nature of my psychical existence.

Through a mythological dreamscape, I explore how constructs such as re-incarnation, familial legends and myths give strength, healing and understanding especially as we reflect on our past. This work emphasises the importance of preserving aural histories, especially as they serve to bring ancestral guidance and resilience to future generations.



## Don't Cry My Moko

2023

Embroidery on quilt fabric, tivaevae, woven mat, Pupu shell necklaces, crochet doily, pearl shells, pearl shell necklace, tivaevae pillows and gardenia oil, Single screen video, 04:13 mins

Acknowledgements: Archives New Zealand Te Run Mahara o te Kāwanatanga

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*Don't Cry My Moko* acts as a healing space for us to piece ourselves together. An unfinished Tivaevae and a pearl trapped in its shell, an act of infinitely navigating ourselves and our ancestral lineage.

The Tivaevae is a laborious practice, a physical display of Cook Island values, womanliness, mothering and the pursuit of mana. We look at the Tivaevae as a mode of storytelling in materialising the values of kinship and aro'a (love) within the intergenerational Pacific pedagogy. Making space for Indigenous concepts such as tapu (the sacred) and vaerua ora (the spiritually uplifting) to emerge within these patterned stories. In the various stages of Tivaevae making, this 'cut and tack' technique sits right in the middle, before the women come together to embroider, holding together by one continuous thread.

Recognising the 'enua we stand on and the place we originate from, this work investigates the familial diasporic materiality that is interwoven throughout our histories. Making us question and doubt our level of pasifikaness that we hold, a breaking point of feeling Plastik.





## The Feeding

2023

Acrylic on Canvas

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How do the duties and practices of everyday life, of faith, art, and work meld, collide and frustrate each other, as we navigate the tension of joy and obligation, duty and desire? How and when does the sacred encounter our humdrum, ordinary and quotidian existence? The Feeding seeks to document the relationship between the sacred and the mundane within everyday life. The work observes the ways in which the sacred is experienced, acknowledging the duality of the quotidian task of being physically fed as at once prosaic and allegory for spiritual and mental nourishment.





## UNUS MUNDUS, 4000+ World Religions

2023

Paper, cotton thread, gold leaf, granite

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Nina Sanadze takes on the ambitious challenge of grasping, organizing, and conceptualizing the immense vastness, complexity, and diversity of humankind through visually enumerating belief systems. Her creation, presented in the form of a book, showcases the staggering estimated number of over 4000 religions worldwide, with each one highlighted on a separate page. This visual exploration underscores how endless diversity converges to a shared denominator, emphasizing our inherent similarities.

By acknowledging the sheer number and diversity of belief systems globally, the project aims to reveal a certain insight and is committed to fostering peace through its egalitarian, inclusive, thought-provoking, and playful approach, encouraging reflection and inquiry.

The term "UNUS MUNDUS," derived from Latin and translating to "One World," encapsulates a foundational concept in Western philosophy, theology, and alchemy — a primordial unified reality from which everything originates.





# Peter Maloney

## PLUMBUM ANGEL

2023

Acrylic and gesso on canvas

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As a student in Melbourne, Peter Maloney was strongly influenced by the abstract imagery of Georgiana Houghton, the 19th century artist, whose work was influenced by the Spiritualist movement of the era – informed by the practice of seances in communication with the deceased. Maloney maintained this influence throughout his career prior to dying in September 2023.

Having been prescribed as terminally ill for over a decade, Maloney's health concerns didn't prevent him from continuing to make highly creative progress in the studio, during which time he arguably produced some of this finest work.

*PLUMBUM ANGEL*, one of the final paintings he completed, can be understood as a reflection of his unique character – if not as a depiction of him in the manner of a portrait. Reflecting this ambiguous dichotomy, the work's title refers both to the Latin term for lead – from which the term, 'plumber' stems, and to gay male slang terminology.

Towards the end of his life, Maloney experienced the return of childhood trauma, manifested in recurring nightmares, during which he felt physically assaulted. The imagery of *PLUMBUM ANGEL* suggests the artist's lifeforce being threatened by the unknown, hiding in the tangled maw of mortality.





## Jesus Speaks to the Daughters of Jerusalem

2022

Oil on Vintage Offset Lithograph





## Pieta (The Votive Crown)

2023

Oil on panel with ceramic crown

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*The Votive Crown* calls upon the traditional Pieta, which depicts the moments after Christ's body was taken down from the cross. He is cradled by the Virgin Mary as she mourns, alone. In *The Votive Crown*, the act of mourning is twisted. This is an act of self mourning, as an old self is taken down and laid to rest, and the new self cradles them. The mourning is healthy, as the death of one gives way to the other. A votive offering is a material dedication made to the gods, or other powers, deposited without the intention of recovery or further use. A votive crown is designed not to be worn, but to hang in empty space, or sit on a statue. The acknowledgement of a ghostly form by crowning it feels mournful, but deeply loving. On the other side of the work, the figure embraces the limp form, in an absorptive act, at once bound and separate from their companion.





## Shoe Bathers

2022

Installation, engraved and pierced copper, olive oil soap, timber, and sound  
(25 minutes)

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Initiating sensations of transition and transformation which often take place during the sensory act of a bathing ritual, the fragrant ambience of *Shoe Bathers*, conjures a ritualised phenomenon of spirit, community and family communion. A plurality of bodies, minds and religions, creating intimate histories of unity within the walls of a hammam.

An archive of profound experiences is imprinted in assemblages of handmade olive oil soap, the clusters of intersecting sensations speak to the softened marble walls of the hammam, the memory of the stone shaped by centuries of water passing across contours of the human body.

Resting upon the scented soap, two pairs of embellished bathing shoes, pierced and engraved with heritage motifs and illustrations of the bathing practice, draw attention to a powerful arousing of the senses in an ethereal record of the living and non-living object; stone, metal, water and flesh manifesting virtue.

The ceremonial objects are arranged on packing crates in preparation for a migration of cultural and ritual practices, a continuum of the creation of unities.





## Grandma's Secret Golden Flower

2023

Hand cut mulberry paper, watercolour, light projection

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*Grandma's Secret Golden Flower* touches upon beliefs, transcendence, and the afterlife. I received religion and spiritual education from childhood because they were imbued in Chinese myth and folklore. The golden flower represents light. Light symbolises spirituality.

When my great-grandmother died, Grandma told me that she vanished from our sight to become immortal. She lives on air and water. She has no troubled mind. She can fly and is untouchable. I was fascinated by the immortals' abilities.

When my grandma died, I prayed for her to become immortal. I sought to learn from where the primal spirit transcends. Death is merely a natural part of the end and flow of transformation.

In this work, I created a ritual ceremony for Grandma's spirit to live. Lines from all directions are radiant from the centre. On one side, Grandmother lies peacefully in a vast rice field. Her heart departs from the body to become spiritual. The waterwheel flows backward to nourish. On the reverse, enlightenment eyes look inwards and outwards. Light of body-opening lit up the deep valley through Eucalyptus trees. A newborn baby arrives.

Darkness binds in-between. Every cut sheds light.





## Back-Breeding

2023

Single-channel video, with sound, 11:01 mins

Concept/Director/Choreography/Composition: Tina Stefanou Cinematography/

Edit: Wil Normyle

Production Assistance: Donna Franklin

Sound design: Joseph Franklin

Colour grade: Tim Wreyford

Co-producers: The North Midlands Project, Andrew Bowman and Louisa Cole

Featured performers: Marcell Billinghamurst, Jessica Parker, Cassie Ulijn, Cody Parker, Kane Parker, Jaydee Wilmot, Jazmyne Wilmot, Tina Stefanou, Jackson the Horse, Mikey Turner, Scott and Frankie Bowman, and Angela Dring

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Intertwining vocal workshops, community rituals, and farm practices, Tina Stefanou’s work delves into the significance of grain and wool within a Wheatbelt community in rural Western Australia. Stefanou reimagines activities rooted in a romanticised and Judeo-Christian religious perception of regional life. This exploration taps into the nostalgic force commonly found in rural communities, emphasising the religious undertones associated with depictions of grain, wool, rural farm land, and the nurturing of children as sacred practices.

Stefanou works with these agrarian materials to voice an alter-ritual that celebrates the strange without relying on a religious center. This exploration focuses on labour across species as a sacred union, transcending traditional Abrahamic mythologies and their connections to the nation-state.

The term “back-breeding” refers to the practice of breeding livestock to revive disappearing traits, even those of extinct species. This attempt to resurrect the past contrasts with current realities shaped by climate crises, neoliberal techno-feudalism, and socio-economic circumstances. Stefanou’s conceptualisation views these scientific and agribusiness processes as a form of faith, attempts to re-animate bodies, akin to spiritual or ritualistic practices.





## Impossible Numbers No.1: 3,000,000,000

2023

Embroidered scroll. Cotton thread on linen, perspex

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During the hot and dry summer of 2019-2020 an estimated three billion creatures perished in bushfires that raged unchecked across Australia. There are too many zeroes in 3,000,000,000. This number is impossible to comprehend. Depending on which neuroscientist you ask, we can really only meaningfully engage with quantities of three, or, at a push, five. Anything more than that is just proportionally bigger or smaller than something else. The number of lives lost in these conflagrations is literally incomprehensible.

Since humans became humans we have used religion to try to make sense of the incomprehensible, the ineffable, the seemingly impossible. We use ceremonies shaped by these beliefs to honour the dead. Art has always been an integral part of these processes, as have time and quiet meditation. This embroidered scroll draws on these traditions. I spent approximately 500 hours stitching in excess of 15,000 squares over more than 2500mm of fabric in an attempt to honour some 3,000,000,000 deaths. This work taps into the non-denominational ability of art to say what can only be felt, of repetitive labour to make manifest the incomprehensible, in order to make some kind of sense of impossible numbers; to memorialise incalculable loss.





## Buoyancy

2023

Inflatable vinyl pool, soft toys, inflatable toys, water pumps, PVC pipes, fishing line, ball sinkers, water, enamel paint, and concrete

Acknowledgements: Truc Truong has been assisted by Adelaide Contemporary Experimental Gallery, and the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body

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Truc Truong's "*Buoyancy*" delves into the complex interplay of Christianity, Buddhism, and Vietnamese spirituality, exploring tensions tied to her Vietnamese-Australian experience. At its core, a 4-meter inflatable pool houses a towering crucifix-shaped fountain adorned with dismembered soft toy limbs, challenging conventional notions of love and history. The dismembered limbs, once symbols of innocence, now signify the darker aspects of history, urging viewers to confront the complexities of faith.

Water, universally symbolic in various faiths, plays a pivotal role, mirroring its calming and cleansing significance. Truong's work serves as a conceptual bridge between belief systems, fostering dialogue on the potent role of water as a symbol of renewal and transformation. The inclusion of Koi fish, symbolizing luck and perseverance, adds a personal touch, referencing Truong's familial experiences.

"*Buoyancy*" transcends a mere subversion of Christian iconography, delving into Truong's personal and ancestral practices of grief, love, and faith. The inflatable pond becomes a poignant metaphor for the itinerant materiality of migration, while the crucifix stands as a monument of soft power, questioning enduring religious and philosophical divisions within Truong's family. By challenging the dominance of religion in colonial systems, Truong contemplates the possibility of love under the structural conditions of colonialism.



## Hills of Crosses

2023

Acrylic, handmade cotton appliqués, felt, linen/silk blend, hessian, cotton thread, hand stitching

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The abundance of crosses in Lithuania is a unique phenomenon. Crosses are a synthesis of faith, tradition, artistry, craftsmanship and national identity. In 2001 UNESCO included Lithuanian cross-crafting in the list of masterpieces of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Crosses are signifiers — erected at the entrance to a village, they protected the community. Roadside crosses served as protection for travellers. They also hid misfortunes and mysteries: illegitimate babies, suicides and perished travellers were buried beneath them. An intricate cross reflected social status for a homestead. The majority of village craftsmen were self-taught and adorned crosses with suns, moons, stars, lozenges, squares and circles — ancient Baltic signs that symbolise the universe. Ecclesiastical motifs were gradually included. The Tsarist Russian government banned crosses from being erected or repaired, save for churchyards. The Soviet authorities treated them even more ruthlessly, however the more crosses destroyed by these totalitarian governments, the more abundantly people rebuilt them. Thus many “Hills of Crosses” began to appear in Lithuania. The famous “Hill of Crosses” near Šiauliai has been levelled twice by bulldozers only to be rebuilt. This work celebrates the ways crosses have become a symbol of silent resistance.





## Koonibba, South Australia

2023

Screen-print on calico with iron ore pigment, 40 hand-blown glass bush yams, ammunition boxes

Acknowledgements: Courtesy the Artist, and THIS IS NO FANTASY Melbourne

Printed with iron-oxide pigment, signifying dried blood and the surrounding landscape rich in iron-ore, 'Koonibba, South Australia' (2023) reflects on the introduction of Christian Missions in South Australia. Situated approximately 40km west of Ceduna and 800km northwest of Adelaide, the Koonibba Mission is the birthplace of my Grandfather Barwell Coleman. For many years I have returned to the Koonibba and Point Pearce Mission sites. Through these visits, I have become obsessed with the structures that endure in these communities. I find myself studying the bricks, crucifixes, and bells that sit outside each building. This compulsion stems from the knowledge of the detrimental effect they had on my extended family – enduring loss of language and culture, illness, and slave labour.



## Jesus and Buddha

2023

Mixed media (ceramic, metal, wood)

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'War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength,' from George Orwell's '1984'.

Born from the depths of my emotions, 'Jesus and Buddha' serves as a visceral response to the scenes of profound distraction amid the ongoing war in the Middle East. This sculpture, crafted with an amalgamation of ceramics, metal, and wood, encapsulates a cathartic expression, echoing the tumultuous emotions stirred by the disquieting images and narratives of conflict.

It prompts exploration of the shared contemplative spirit in these revered figures, fostering dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophies. The intentional ambiguity of the sculpture invites personal interpretation, allowing viewers to project their spiritual narratives onto its form. Unfolding new facets from every angle, 'Jesus and Buddha' encourages reflection on interconnected spiritual paths and universal truths.





## Celestial

2022

Inkjet print on cotton baryta paper from unique silver-gelatin photogram.

Ed: 1/2 +1AP

Acknowledgements: Thanks to the trustees of Linden Observatory, NSW

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Astronomical exploration is a way to map our scale, position and place in the universe. Celestial is a cameraless photographic print made by laying a telescopic lens from a decommissioned telescope onto the light-sensitive surface of photographic paper, exposed by the light of the sun. The lens, part of a historical observatory site in NSW, was adapted from remnant glass from WW2 military surplus. This glass was then given a new life in a hand-made telescope to see beyond the threshold of the earth to the planets and stars. Dismantled, the slab of glass has now been used in my work and resembles the celestial bodies that it used to draw focus upon. As if somehow, what this lens has seen, is imprinted within it. A glimpse of the unreachable universe, anchored through light, into an image.



# LIST OF FINALISTS

Abdullah M.I. Syed  
Agus Wijaya  
Alyssa Aleksanian  
Amber Subaki  
Anna Tregloan & Adriano Cortese  
Audrey Newton  
Aylsa McHugh  
Brian Robinson  
Celine Cheung  
Christine Dean  
Christopher Zanko  
Darron Davies  
Deanne Gilson  
Drew Connor Holland  
Dr. Lisa Anderson  
Elyas Alavi  
Emily Portmann  
Greg Semu  
Jen Alexandra  
Jenna Lee  
Jennifer Ingkatji  
Johanna van der Linden  
John Gillies  
Johnathon World Peace Bush  
Jordan Azcune  
Joshua Pether  
Katie Stackhouse  
Kean Onn See

Khaled Sabsabi  
Khashayar Salmanzadeh  
Lachlan Warner Lauri Smith  
Lee Harrop  
Linda Sok  
Liz Payne  
Louise Meuwissen  
Maissa Alameddine  
Maria Pia Mosquera  
Marion Abraham  
Mary MacGregor-Reid  
Eureka O'Hanlon  
Monica Rani Rudhar  
Morgan Hogg  
Nicole Zhang  
Nina Sanadze  
Peter Maloney  
Philjames  
Rat Bedlington  
Shireen Taweel  
Tianli Zu  
Tina Stefanou  
Tracey Clement  
Truc Truong  
Wilma Bader  
Yhonnie Scarce  
Yuhana Nashmi  
Yvette Hamilton

# JUDGES



## Dean Cross

Dean Cross is an artist primarily working across installation, sculpture and painting. Interested in the collisions of materials, ideas and histories, Cross is motivated by an understanding that his practice sits within a continuum of the oldest living culture on Earth – and enacts First Nations sovereignty through expanded contemporary art methodologies. His cross-disciplinary practice often confronts the legacies of modernism, rebalancing dominant cultural and social histories.



## Professor Jay Johnston FAHA

Jay Johnston FAHA is Professor in Religion within the School of Humanities at the University of Sydney. She is a cross-disciplinary specialist who also works in the fields of Heritage, Art History and Practice, Conservation and Environment, and Nordic Studies. Jay is a leader in conceptual and methodological innovation who has been influential in developing new subfields such as aesthetics of religion and subtle body studies. Her research examines visual and material culture with a particular focus on the interrelationship between ethics and aesthetics, concepts of materiality, embodiment and epistemology.



## José Da Silva

José Da Silva is a curator and writer and is currently the Director of UNSW Galleries, where he has developed a dynamic program of contemporary Australian art and design since 2018. He is also the curator of the 2024 Adelaide Biennial of Contemporary Art. Between 2006 and 2018, he contributed to an ambitious program of exhibitions, commissions, acquisitions and projects at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, including a role in the curatoriums for five editions of the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Selected curatorial projects include Gordon Hookey: A MURRIALITY (2022-24, with Liz Nowell and touring nationally); Jacobus Capone: Orisons (2022); Sam Smith: Capture (2021); The Colour Line: W. E. B Du Bois and Archie Moore (2021); Friendship as a Way of Life (2020, with Kelly Doley); Wansolwara: One Salt Water (2020, with Mikala Tai), and Gemma Smith: Rhythm Sequence (2019).

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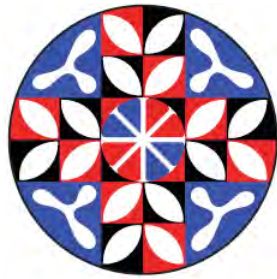
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