

Global Gambits and Playful Revisions

9 May - 9 June 2024

ART SPACE ON THE CONCOURSE



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Exploring how artists use play and satire to highlight global issues such as climate change, colonisation, and political injustices.

ARTISTS

Giles Alexander

Zachariah Fenn

Josh Harle

Professor Ian Howard

Freya Jobbins

Dapeng Liu

Amanda Marburg

Joan Ross

Ariel Ruby

Toydeath

A Willoughby City Council curated exhibition presented in partnership with the Sydney Comedy Festival and Checkmate Chatswood.

Co-curated by Cassandra Hard Lawrie and Miguel Olmo.

COVER IMAGE: Josh Harle, *The Accident* (detail), 2024, still from interactive work. Courtesy of the Artist

OPPOSITE: Toydeath, *Barbie Army* (detail), 2009, single-channel video with sound. Courtesy of the Artist

Global Gambits and Playful Revisions

Exploring how artists use play and satire to highlight global issues such as climate change, colonisation, and political injustices.

Global Gambits and Playful Revisions delves into the role of play and games in navigating life's challenges. Artists creatively use play, satire, and repurposed children's toys to shed light on issues such as climate change, colonisation, and political injustices. Experience racing cars, toy soldiers and circuit-bended electronic toys through the lens of an artist's playful yet serious call to awareness.

The exhibition explores how we use play and games in our lives to deal with, practice for and talk about difficult situations, and the way that through play, satire and repurposing of material like children's toys and infantile attributes, artists raise awareness of and make us confront subjects like climate change, colonisation and political injustices.

The exhibition frames the discourse on how playful engagement and critical thought can coalesce to challenge

and redefine perceptions of global and social issues. It emphasises the dynamic interplay between visual satire and the serious undertones of the themes it addresses, creating a space where art and activism intersect with the transformative power of humour. This exhibition posits that through the strategic use of contrast—between the light-hearted and the grave, the simple and the complex—artists can provoke a deeper contemplation on the revisions needed in our societal visions.

Each artwork acts as a portal, offering viewers an opportunity to engage with alternative narratives that challenge the status quo, encouraging a re-evaluation of preconceived notions and the possibility of envisioning a different future. Through 'playful revisions', the exhibition explores the idea that art can serve as a catalyst for change, employing the juxtaposition of humour and gravity to illuminate the path towards societal transformation.

By inviting the audience to reflect on the 'global gambits' presented by artworks, the exhibition fosters a dialogue that transcends the boundaries of traditional art viewing. It is a call to action, a plea for viewers to not only engage with the art on display but to carry forward its message of critical engagement and hopeful re-visioning into their everyday lives, empowering them to be agents of change in a world that desperately needs it.

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Playful dissonance; engagement through irony and satire

*"Almost all creativity involves purposeful play,"
- Abraham Maslow.*

In the countless conversations I have had with fellow artists and creatives over the years, a common statement is often used to describe their creative process; "I play with..." I also find that when asked about my creative process I too refer to the start and middle sections of my process as playing with something, playing with the material, playing with the idea, playing with the processes, toying with conflicting ideas. More than merely a figure of speech, play is the portal through which we move from the blank page or canvas into something resembling that which we want to manifest. Through play we move from the state of fear that can inhibit progress to a state of flow. Play in most instances, is the first step in the thousand-mile journey that is the process of creating and of being creative.

As Albert Einstein so eloquently put it, "play is the highest form of research"^[1]. Einstein's statement encapsulates the idea that through play, individuals engage in a process of exploration, experimentation, and discovery. Much like rehearsals and dress rehearsal prepare performers for a final production, allowing them to refine their skills and uncover potential improvements before the actual performance, play serves as a valuable tool for learning and development in various aspects of life.

There are numerous studies that suggest that play is not only enjoyable for children but also serves as a crucial tool for learning and development (Elkind D. 2007)^[2]. Play allows children to experiment, take risks, and navigate social dynamics, mirroring the challenges they will face in adulthood. Furthermore, a recent study from Stanford University on the psychology of fostering empathy reaffirms long-held beliefs. It emphasises that opinions aren't swayed by mere facts but by experiences that evoke empathy. In other words, "when we play we learn"^[3].

Global Gambits and Playful Revisions engages with the work of 10 artists that in some way or another connect their presentations to an aspect of play or playful dissonance. Be it the repurposing of children's toys such as toy soldiers, plasticine or doll houses, gamification and gaming engines, or the games that adults play such as poker machines, or 'big boys toys', or the use of irony and satire in playful visual puns, or those works that approach the subject matter from what could be considered infantile or childish aesthetics. The works in the exhibition may at first glance present a superficiality and shallowness about them, however, the artists' intention to explore the intersection of playfulness and profound reflection is soon manifested upon a second, third or fourth glance.

In her work *Crystal Castles*, Ariel Ruby navigates the delicate balance between whimsy and introspection, through a group of sculptures made with sections of cutesy, innocent, and colourful toys, designed for make-belief play, inviting viewers to explore the complexities of the human experience. Asking audiences to look beyond the “veneer of sweetness”, to reveal narratives that unlike the fairytales it depicts speak to the complexity and at times darker aspects of human relationships.

In contrast, Freya Jobbins and Prof. Ian Howard’s sculptures provide a counterpoint, most notably through the absence of colour, but also in the nature of the toys that give form to the work. Both artists have worked with plastic toy soldiers, a toy popular in the past, reflecting the cultural glorification of military heroism and patriotism during wartime periods such as World War II. However, as societal attitudes towards violence, gender roles, and child development have evolved, so too has the perception of toy soldiers. Not to say that violence and aggression have been removed from children’s playtime routines, as these have moved from the physical into the digital. Although more research is needed to fully understand the impact of violent video games on children and adolescents^[4]. The jury is still out whether children and adolescents today are more likely to engage in violent actions as a result of playing aggressive video games than their grandparents were who played with toy soldiers.

Josh Harle’s *The Accident* presents a performance lecture woven into an interactive simulation of the Mars Perseverance

Rover and a Fukushima reactor cleanup robot. The work examines the contrasting events of the Fukushima disaster and the Mars Rover’s successful launch. Both events, representing the highs and lows of scientific endeavours, are linked by their shared use of radioisotope power systems and their embodiment of remote scientific observation. Positioned through the lens of Paul Virilio’s theory of the ‘integral accident’^[5], that posits that the instant a technology is created, its adverse impacts also come into existence. Although not implied by the work, following Virilio’s line of thought it is conceivable that catastrophic events and acts of terror similar to the Columbine High School shootings are linked to the development of the technology. Whether the manufacture of high-powered guns or first player shooter games.^[6]

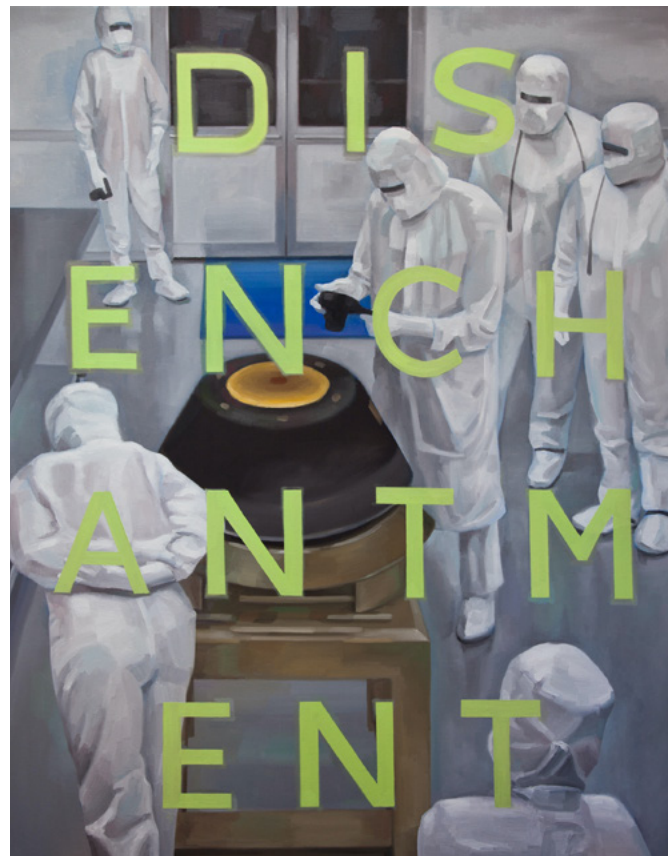
As well as play (irony and satire, frequently the domain of comedians and storytellers) function as a form of social commentary or critique, allowing individuals to express dissent or challenge prevailing norms and beliefs in a playful manner (Gibbs, 2000)^[7]. Giles Alexander’s *Allegory for a Sentinel Species* ironically highlights the disconnect between human indulgence and the ecological impact of such extravagance, suggesting a critique of consumerism and the prioritisation of material wealth over environmental stewardship. Like Alexander, Zachariah Fenn’s *In Due Time* delivers a powerful message about the fragility of our existence and the imperative to confront the ecological challenges of our time. In Fenn’s work two menacing figures play a game of pass the ball with planet Earth, oblivious to the doom that their actions bring upon the inhabitants.

This exhibition underscores the profound role of play, irony, and satire in the creative process and their power to engage audiences in dialogue about complex issues. The featured artists demonstrate the diverse ways these elements can be harnessed to create thought-provoking works, inviting us to look beyond the surface and engage with the deeper narratives. As we navigate an ever-changing world, these elements remain relevant, reminding us of the transformative power of creativity and the importance of a playful spirit. The act of 'play' remains a fundamental part of our human experience, fostering a culture of innovation, empathy, and critical reflection. As we move forward, let's continue to embrace these elements through our creative and communal endeavours devising solutions to the many issues affecting us as a species, and how we in turn may affect our planet.

Miguel Olmo

Co-curator

1. "The Ultimate Quotable Einstein" edited by Alice Calaprice, Princeton University Press, 2010.
2. The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier, Healthier Children, David Elkind, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, V 47, No. 9 September 2008
3. Yana Buhner Tavanier: Can social activism be playful?, *Ted Radio Hour*, 11 Feb 2022
4. Greg Toppo, Do Video Games Inspire Violent Behavior?, *Scientific American*, 1 July 2015
5. Paul Crosthwaite, Accident, in John Armitage (Ed.), *The Virilio Dictionary*, 2013 Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
6. Mike Nizza, Tying Columbine to Video Games, *New York Times*, 5 July 2007.
7. Gibbs, R. W. (2000). Irony in Talk Among Friends. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 15(1-2), 5-27



LEFT: Dapeng Liu, *Disenchantment*, 2023, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Artist

Giles Alexander

Allegory for a Sentinel Species, 2017, oil on raw linen with tape

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Created at the height of Australia's 'climate wars' when "global warming" and "big new taxes" were being used as political hot-potatoes that burned numerous leaders on both sides of politics. ***Allegory for A Sentinel Species*** pictures the car; in one sense as the loyal steed analogous to George Stubbs' horse, status paintings, a functional mode of transport that doubles as a rich man's folly, yet in another sense akin to Morandi's porcelain still lifes; their combustible vigour drained, only incapacitated fragile fossils of a bygone golden-age remain. Canaries were once used by miners as an early-warning-system down a gas-filled mine. The sentinel species in this case is humankind, as we're driving blissfully, blindly toward our own oblivion.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

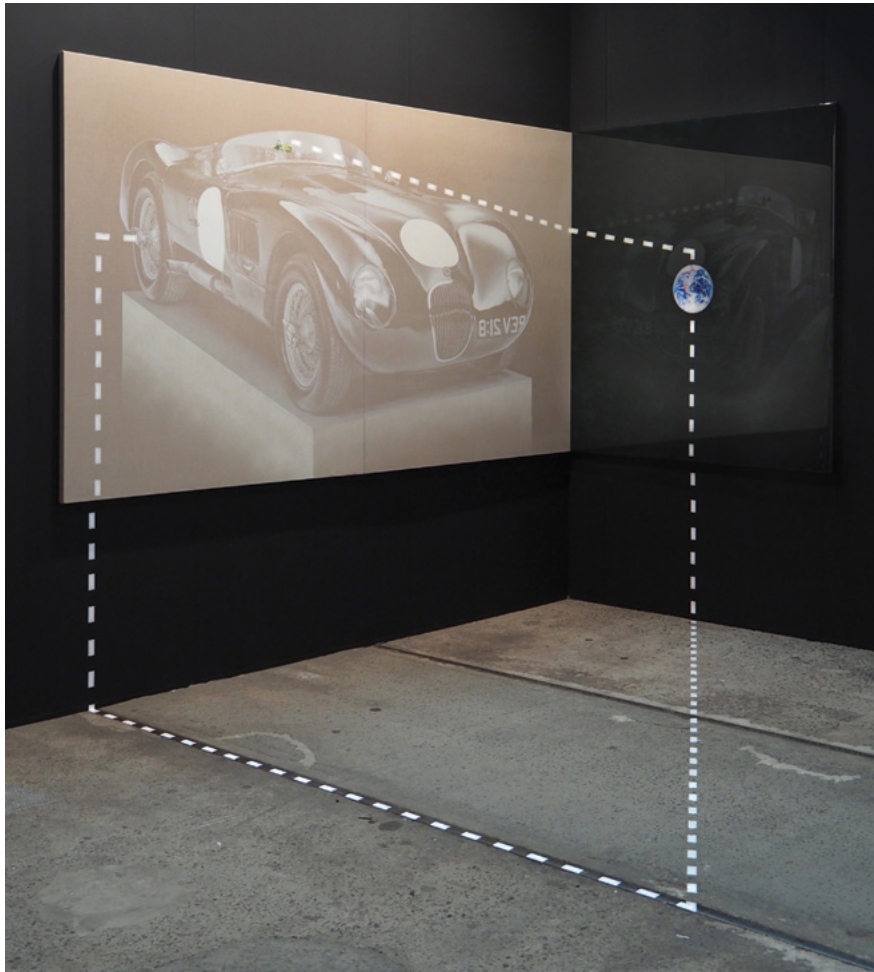
Born in the UK, Giles Alexander has completed a BFA with Honours and an MFA from the National Art School.

He has exhibited extensively in galleries nationally and internationally, including MARS Gallery (Melbourne), Anthony Brunelli Fine Art (New York), Martin Browne Contemporary (Sydney) and with The Fine Art Society in London and Hong Kong. He has been a finalist in numerous art prizes, including the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes, the Mosman Art Prize, the Blake Prize and The Waterhouse Prize.

Giles has held several solo exhibitions at MARS Gallery (Melbourne), Peter Walker Fine Art (Adelaide) Anthony Brunelli Fine Art (New York) and Sydney-based galleries, Nanda Hobbs Contemporary and Olsen Gallery. His work is held in numerous collections, including Art Gallery of Ballarat, Gippsland Art Gallery, Bond University, Macquarie University, Australian National University, Gold Coast Gallery, Tweed River Gallery, Artbank and the London Guildhall Art Gallery.

This artwork is on loan from the Macquarie University Art Collection.

Giles Alexander is represented by MARS Gallery, Windsor, Melbourne.



LEFT: Giles Alexander, *Allegory for a Sentinel Species*, 2017, oil on raw linen with tape.
Courtesy of the Artist and Macquarie University Art Gallery

Zachariah Fenn

In Due Time, 2012-2024, single-channel video with sound

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

This artwork was originally filmed and created by Zachariah Fenn in 2012 as a playful yet sinister depiction of the end of the world. At that time the film was in part a response to the fervour of end-of-the-world predictions that were in full force with the Mayan calendar ending in 2012.

A scene of fun and frolicking in a classic Australian backyard paddling pool has been digitally manipulated and subverted to present a hauntingly apocalyptic landscape. A hand-painted beach ball representing Earth is being possessed and tossed back and forth by devil-like figures in a hellish ring of fire.

The original footage has been revised and enhanced using AI technology, presenting the artwork to a contemporary audience. Twelve years have since passed and while it may have been 'business as usual' since the sensationalised end-of-world predictions, our globe seems to be on a slow but inevitable trajectory towards destruction. ***In Due Time*** is an ever-present reminder, alerting the audience of the fragility of our world and the human condition.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Zachariah Fenn is a multi-disciplinary artist who intuitively responds to the day-to-day stimuli of urban life. With a conceptual approach to his art-making, Zachariah recontextualises urban imagery, materials and everyday objects to address current social and global concerns through his artwork. Zachariah's witty and immediate interventions present his audience with a deeper social commentary on the human condition and the state of our world.

Graduating from UNSW Art & Design with a BFA (Honours) in 2015, he has exhibited regularly for more than a decade in galleries such as Gosford Regional Gallery, Kudos Gallery, Gaffa Gallery and ARO Gallery. Zachariah was a finalist in the 2024 Grace Cossington Smith Art Award and is establishing his art career through private commissions, art installing and facilitating art for Artists living with disability. In 2022, he was part of the *Cities Foretold* exhibition at Art Space on The Concourse.



LEFT: Zachariah Fenn, *In Due Time*, 2012-2024, video still. Courtesy of the Artist

DR. JOSH HARLE

The Accident, 2024, interactive work

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

The Accident is a performance lecture woven into an interactive simulation of the Mars Perseverance Rover and a Fukushima Daiichi reactor cleanup robot; a journey across human endeavours through the lens of the "Integral Accident". The integral accident is a term from technology philosopher Paul Vilio, used to suggest that the negative, "accidental" aspects of a technology are not external or separate - the moment of a technology's invention is also when its negative consequences are brought into reality:

"When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash... Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress."

Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident and Perseverance's successful deployment represent together the apex of human scientific accomplishment and a tragic misfortune; sharing

material realities via Perseverance's radioisotope power system, and embodying the foundational perspective of scientific knowledge achieved through 'isolated observation'.

The work explores our tendency to embrace positives and externalise negatives of technology, the physical offshoring of these externalities to the global south, and connects to the historical context of British nuclear testing at Emu Plains. It is informed by the artist's personal family history, previous research on 'technology as cultural practice', and exploration of First Nations-informed technology governance models, speaking to timely concerns about the rapid adoption of Machine Learning.

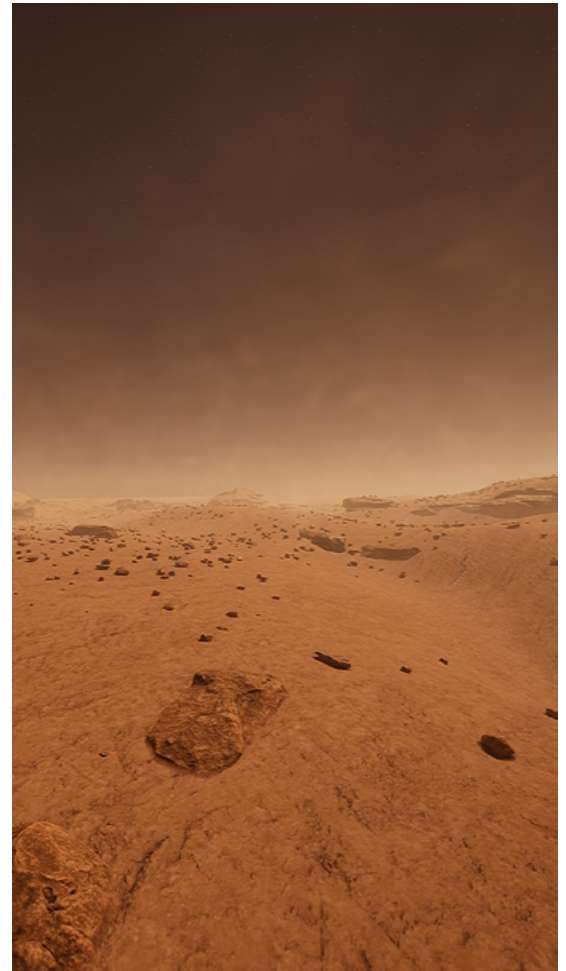
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Dr Josh Harle is a neurodivergent researcher, educator, and media artist, with a background in computer science & cybernetics, philosophy, and fine art, and a doctorate investigating digital virtual space. His practice investigates diverse forms of 'sense-making', technology as cultural practice, and the expressive potential of repurposing digital capture tools through hacking, experimentation, and play.

Harle has exhibited internationally, including at the Vienna Art Week and Today Art Museum, Beijing, and locally for solo and group shows at Firstdraft, the International Symposium on Electronic Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, AGNSW's Contempo program, and Brisbane Powerhouse's 'IRL: Digital Festival'.

Harle is the founding director of Tactical Space Lab, a research space investigating innovative uses of emerging technologies for art-making, through collaborative artist workshops. Since 2017, the lab has hosted 14 artists, with major outcomes including two Mordant/ACMI commissions, inclusion in Ars Electronica and ISEA programs.

RIGHT: Josh Harle,
The Accident, 2024, still
from interactive work.
Courtesy of the Artist



Professor Ian Howard

Triumphalism (detail), 2023, photographic series of installation
(Untitled) (No.41) (detail), 1992, video documentation of original artwork;
plastic models and bitumen-based paint on board

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Toys are by their nature highly expressive objects, designed as they are to attract and stimulate children. This expressiveness is also irresistible to adults, however we normally accept its excess by relegating its meaning and purpose to the supposedly less serious world of the child. That said, toys have always entered adult narratives. For example, the deeply personal Surrealist experience of German artist Hans Bellmer to the global mass audience of Barbie and now Barbie-The-Movie. Toys also occupy adult lives when they grow old. That is, when toys become nostalgic objects, representative of the past—of childhood, family traditions, reflecting “better, happier times back then”. For me and my artworks the excesses of childishness in toys needs to be contained. This is so that some ambiguity, an alternative meaning may enter and emerge from the image. I typically do this by elimination of excess. I strip away all colour by painting the toys uniform black or a deadening grey. And when I use toys in photographs, the optical propensity for extremely short depth of field becomes the perfect device for killing excessive detail and the broader context of the toy-box. The viewer is required to observe very closely and in so doing becomes ensnared within a more uncertain, even threatening world.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ian Howard is an artist and professor emeritus at UNSW Sydney, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, previously the College of Fine Arts (COFA). He was Dean of the College from 1998 till 2013 and prior to that, was Provost and Director of the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

He trained in Sydney (Diploma of Art Education), London (Graduate Diploma of Film and Television) and Montreal (Master of Fine Arts). His artwork progresses a cultural relationship between civilians and military institutions with a concentration on political borders, walls and barriers as well as enforcing vehicles, particularly aircraft, armoured vehicles and ships. He works and exhibits internationally, including in China since the early 1990s where he has exhibited variously with Chinese colleague artist, Xing Junqin.

Video documentation taken by Miguel Olmo of **(Untitled) (No.41)** at Wollongong Art Gallery, where the artwork is part of their collection.



LEFT: Ian Howard,
Triumphalism (detail), 2023,
photograph of installation.
Courtesy of the Artist

Freya Jobbins

Untitled (Nothing has changed Ian Howard), 2019, plastic assemblage on vintage mannequin with water-based bitumen

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

War is a human constant, we are always killing each other somewhere in the world. Toxic war affects not just the individual soldier but his entire family, friends and associates, it creeps into the lives of thousands. War is our history as humans, we gauge time by it, it is such a permanence in today's society worldwide it's become a norm.

This work is Man V Man all over. The conflict continues over land, religion, power, control and egos. Here on this artwork—**Untitled (Nothing has changed Ian Howard)**—the head depicts the fight both seen on the exterior and the interior, the face is a major conflict zone, the brain is the collection area, and this is where the biggest fight occurs. The struggle of morals.

Where the rest of the body represents the wars over the centuries, our history of death is the way we study our own history. This work is in response to Ian Howard's work (*untitled*) (*no.41*), dated 1992 and in the collection of Wollongong Art Gallery. I am sorry Ian, nothing has changed since you demonstrated in the era of the Vietnam War.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Freya Jobbins works across assemblage, collage, installation, and printmaking. Her work is based on appropriation, re-contextualisation and the subversion of pre-existent objects, exploring contemporary gynocentric narratives of the human condition, notions of identity, aesthetics, motifs and her own dissimulation. She completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Fine Arts) in 2018.

She has been a finalist in numerous art prizes, including Hazelhurst Art On Paper Award, The McClelland National Small Sculpture Awards, Sculpture at Scenic World, Sunshine Coast Art Prize, Silk Cut, Fisher's Ghost Art Award, Tom Bass Prize for Figurative Sculpture, PARAMOR Art & Innovation Prizes, HIDDEN Rookwood Sculptures and Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize.

Freya has participated in group exhibitions in galleries, including Hazelhurst Arts Centre, Penrith Regional Gallery, Rockhampton Museum of Art and Campbelltown Arts Centre. She held two solo exhibitions in 2020; *Return* at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery and *Firewall* at Goulburn Regional Art Gallery.



LEFT: Freya Jobbins, *Untitled (Nothing has changed Ian Howard)* (detail), 2019, plastic assemblage on vintage mannequin with water-based bitumen. Photo Silversalt. Courtesy of the Artist

Dapeng Liu

The Lightness of Being, 2023, oil on canvas

Disenchantment, 2023, oil on canvas

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Our unsettled world - with cultural conflicts, wars, environmental crisis, serves as a stark reminder of the growing tension between humans and the natural realm.

Such awareness propelled me to embark on a new series of works. This series appropriates a diverse array of real-world imagery that I have purposely sourced from the Internet - news, social media, and films. I also superimposed these images with painted texts and injected personal commentary.

The two paintings in this exhibition provide a glimpse into this oeuvre. One appropriated an image from Instagram showing possibly a performer in a pigeon costume walking in New York. The text has referenced Nietzsche and existentialism. Although life as a whole may be meaningless, according to Nietzsche, art creates meaning and beauty in life. The second painting

relates to the late 2023 news reports that the NASA space capsule Osiris-Rex brought a 4.5 billion year old asteroid sample back to earth for examination.

Disenchantment is a reference to sociologist Max Weber who used it to describe how the development of modernity had taken away the enchantment of the world.

Through these works, I confront living conditions, consumerism, social and environmental issues, exposing the intricacies of our coexistence with nature and the present-day anthropocentric world. They serve as a mirror reflecting the complexities of our modern reality, challenging viewers to contemplate their own roles in shaping the world around them and to confront the disquieting truth of our time.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

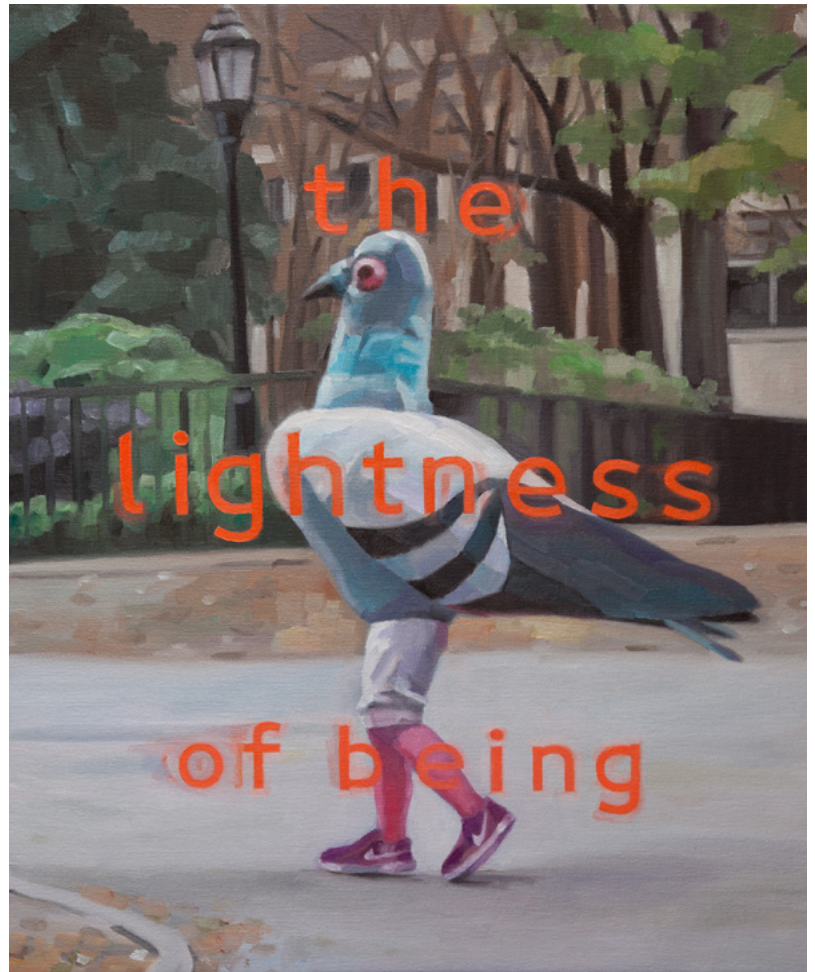
Born in Beijing in 1982, Dapeng moved to Sydney in 2007 and became a full-time artist in 2014. On the path of his artistic exploration, Dapeng interrogates and depicts the tension between old and new, East and West, as well as natural and manmade.

In 2012, Dapeng received his MA by research degree in art history from the University of Sydney. This experience in research has enabled him to critically engage with his main subject of artistic creation-mountainscapes and waterscapes that subsequently led to his larger question—the relationship between nature and humankind.

A three-times Archibald Prize finalist (2022, 2021, 2014), Dapeng's highly commended piece *Portrait of Yin Cao* on blue-and-green landscape was among the top six shortlisted finalists in

the 2014 Archibald Prize. His works are held in private and public collections in Australia and internationally.

Dapeng Liu is represented by Art Atrium, Sydney and Otomys, Melbourne.



RIGHT: Dapeng Liu, *The Lightness of Being*, 2023, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Artist and Art Atrium

Amanda Marburg

Frontier Marshal, 2006, oil on linen

Fame, 2014, oil on linen

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Amanda Marburg's artwork unfolds in a captivating blend of playfulness and satire, where the ordinary intersects with the surreal. In her unique visual language, Marburg transforms everyday scenes into theatrical stages, where the absurd and the familiar coexist and converse. Through a meticulous process of first crafting and then painting from plasticine models, her works attain a distinctive texture and depth, enhancing their dream-like quality.

Marburg's choice of subjects often reflects a whimsical inversion of reality, where the mundane becomes extraordinary and the bizarre becomes endearing. This playful approach is a thoughtful critique of contemporary culture and human behaviors, subtly provoking viewers to question the norms and expectations of society. The exaggerated forms and vibrant colors

in her paintings not only captivate the eye but also serve as a satirical lens through which the world is observed and depicted.

Her recent works delve deeper into themes of contradiction and duality, skillfully using humor as a tool to explore and expose the ironies of life. In doing so, Marburg invites her audience into a shared space of reflection and amusement, where the boundaries between the serious and the humorous blur. The playful nature of her art challenges the rigidity of perception and encourages a more flexible, imaginative interaction with the visual narratives she creates. Through satire, Marburg achieves a powerful commentary on the absurdities of the human condition, making her paintings both intellectually engaging and delightfully intriguing.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Amanda Marburg's distinctive paintings are the end product of an extended process involving photography and model making. Her method is to build plasticine figures and structures before photographing the strange worlds she creates against studio backdrops, which then act as the final basis for her paintings. Characterised by an interchange between two and three-dimensional forms, this laborious process eschews painting things from real life, and instead offers a sustained examination and reworking of ideas and tropes that premise painting as a type of model. Marburg draws from film and art history, as well as cultural artefacts and paraphernalia, to create narratives which are often melancholic yet irreverent.

Amanda Marburg is represented by OLSEN Gallery, Sydney.



LEFT: Amanda Marburg, *Frontier Marshal*, 2006, oil on linen.
Courtesy of the Artist and Olsen Gallery

Joan Ross

Colonial Grab, 2015, single-channel digital video animation with sound

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

In her video work **Colonial Grab**, Ross transports us, via a poker machine game, into the picture space of the colonial painter, English-born John Glover, among others, and out again, creating a world of dissonances—of scale, of aesthetics, of environmental custodianship. In one sequence whole trees are plucked from a Glover painting, along with the Aboriginal people painted in the branches, arranged *Ikebana*-style in a vase by an elaborately-coiffed colonial matron in Ross' signature coloured *hi-vis* dress, who does so with little regard for their lives. Using *Ikebana* to suggest the desire for ultimate control over nature and the land they have taken. The vases are then placed back into the painted landscape. Ross though, subversively makes them curtsy to the land as they do.

In another scene a drone-like craft collects 'data' from a *Kata Tjuta* landscape photographed by Ross, each of these worlds accessed into via the roll of her fictitious poker machine. At one point the drone skywrites the potent words "20-50% off all plants and animals" which touches on a plethora of issues at once, advertising in the sky, one of Ross' pet hates, the surveillance of nature and the selling off of natural resources at a cost. Ross takes the complex power relations between indigenous and colonial Australia to disorienting, yet politically potent heights, connecting the dissonances of art history and contemporary Australian culture, representation, colonisation and control through a personal metaphorical language and the deceptively simple medium of animation.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Since the late 1980s, Joan has exhibited across a range of mediums, from drawing, painting, photography and sculpture to installation, video, and virtual reality. Her experimental works combine colonial iconography and landscape painting with collaged elements of western commodity culture. Her work deals with the connection and disconnection to nature and the ongoing legacy of colonisation in Australia.

Joan's work is held in many national institutional collections, including the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She has held numerous solo exhibitions at galleries such as N.Smith Gallery (Sydney), Bett Gallery (Hobart) and Carriageworks (Sydney).

Her recent projects include designing the hoarding for The Art Gallery of New South Wales' Sydney Modern expansion, and illuminating the façade of The National Gallery of Australia during the 2021 Enlighten Festival. Joan was awarded the National Art School Fellowship in 2023.

Joan Ross is represented by N.Smith Gallery, Sydney.



LEFT: Joan Ross, *The VIP Lounge (Colonial Grab)*, 2015, handpainted digital print. Courtesy of the Artist

Ariel Ruby

Crystal Castles, 2018-23, mixed media installation with found objects, mirror and rotating mechanisms

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Crystal Castles is part of an ongoing project in which the artist collects discarded toys and detritus from the contemporary landscape, grouping these together to construct narratives through sculptural assemblage. These assemblages act as conduits of meaning and memory, taking iconic references to society and culture and remixing them to invite new readings. The installation assumes the role of a sacred repository, housing the treasures of memory and imagination—a limitless expanse teeming with narratives and evoking a deep sense of nostalgia.

This iteration of *Crystal Castles* is a fairy-tale imagining of a typical neighbourhood, where the sweet exterior serves to camouflage the hidden complexities of each character within. The longer you look, the more likely you are to be confronted with cracks in the façade, revealing the messy core of private and public places. The use of found objects, once loved and since discarded, highlights the interplay between human consciousness, consumption, and the creation of value through objects - inviting us to reconsider the value we place on these things - be it more, or less.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ariel Ruby (b.1993 nipaluna/Hobart) is an Australian/Italian artist with deep connections to the places she has called home, and those that she can imagine. She creates lively, moving worlds filled with glittering items and images that explode with narrative and rich emotional memory. Working across a range of mediums spanning analogue and digital, techniques are combined in installation contexts to create immersive experiences for the viewer. With a background in photography and moving image, Ariel has fostered a desire to create multi-disciplinary works that harness a sense of play akin to childhood discovery and imagining.



LEFT: Ariel Ruby, *Crystal Castles*, 2018-23, mixed media installation, found objects, mirror and rotating mechanisms. Courtesy of the Artist

Toydeath

Toydeath Action Figures, 2008, single-channel video with sound

Barbie Army, 2009, single-channel video with sound

Toydeath Live, 2024, single-channel video featuring various live performances from 2001-2012

Locked Grooves, 2001, interactive installation with turntable and 12 inch vinyl (released by Kleptones 2001)

Touch and Tell, 2018, restored and circuit-bent vintage 1981 Texas Instruments

Toydeath Inflatable Backdrop, 1997, inflatable designed by Marty Jay with scenic art by Celia Curtis

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Toydeath adores playing with toys! In the mid-90s, as electronic sounds began to permeate every toy aisle, Toydeath embarked on a mission: to collect and circuit bend these toys, transforming them into musical instruments while donning playful toy-like costumes.

"Picture a hyper band of aliens channelling through a broken AM radio, and someone's playing with the speed control! But the Hendrix-worthy feedback wails are actually the sirens of toy fire engines. The crazy beats courtesy of model helicopters! Re-purposing electronic children's toys to create energetic bursts of rock'n'roll mayhem, this Australian trio knows you don't have to play by the rules to have fun!"

The works on display in this exhibition are a historical look at video clips created and toys used as instruments over the course of Toydeath's career, as well as video documentation of live performances. As Toydeath's practice usually falls within the realm of performance, they have activated some of their musical props with features for audience engagement during the exhibition.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Toydeath started in 1995 with the simple idea of playing heavy metal music on kids' electronic toys and are still going strong today! Based in Sydney's Inner West, Toydeath has played all over the world with tours to Japan, China, South Korea, the USA, and Europe. They have played major music festivals such as the Big Day Out, The Great Escape, and even appeared at the Sydney Biennale. They have released vinyl records and two CD albums, *Pokey as Shake* and *Guns Cars and Guitars*.

BELOW: Toydeath, *Barbie Army*, 2009, video still. Courtesy of the Artist



Global Gambits and Playful Revisions is a Willoughby City Council curated exhibition presented in partnership with the Sydney Comedy Festival and Checkmate Chatswood.

FREE



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