

***Shaping Wit* exhibition**
Opening Night speech by Kenny Pittock
Wednesday 21 April 2021

Hi, I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Cammeraygal people, and pay respect to their Elders past and present, who've been creating art here for thousands of years.

My name's Kenny, I'm one of the artists in the show and if you're not familiar with my work, I mostly make sculptures and paintings that often use humour to explore the everyday. I started making work with humour because it was my natural way of coping with life and connecting with people, but I never really thought about it beyond that until the last few years when I've realised that humour can actually be a really powerful way to talk about serious things. My work is mostly about mundane everyday life, although in the last 12 months every day life has been anything but mundane.

I live in Melbourne, so it's just so great to be here in Sydney. This show was actually supposed to open exactly a year ago but obviously needed to be postponed. Last year the world got separated into two categories, essential and non essential, both in society and in our personal lives.

When I'm not working as an artist I also have a casual job as a supermarket cleaner. For most of last year many of my art projects were put on hold. Supermarket cleaning, however, was a different story. It became essential and therefore I was deemed an essential worker. It felt good to be classified essential. Just doctors, nurses, and me mopping up spilled pasta sauce in aisle 9.

It was scary at times, but during moments of intense stress, humour can be so good for us – physically and emotionally – at helping us cope with difficulties and disappointments, and keeping things in perspective.

During lockdown one of the only places we were allowed to go was the supermarket, so suddenly it became one of our only outings and though it was kind of nice to have my mundane cleaning work celebrated in that way, it's also so nice to now be able to return to my real passion and be at galleries again.

It's wonderful to be in an exhibition that celebrates humour. One of my favourite things is hearing people laughing in an art gallery. Making art can be a very solitary pursuit but it's through exhibitions like this we get to gather together.

I'm so excited to be exhibiting here alongside such great artists, including Will Coles, Chris Dolman, Black Douglas, Emily Galicek, Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, Gillian Kayrooz and Tara Maranosky.

And it's a big team effort of course. A big thanks to Miguel and Zac for installing the show, and to Matthew and his team for installing the vinyl signage, a big thanks to Miriam for all the behind the scenes admin, Simone for invigilating, and of course a big thank you to our curator Cassandra.

During lockdown people passed the time by picking up new hobbies, like getting pets, giving themselves haircuts, and giving their new pets haircuts. But also we watched a lot of TV, movies, books and consumed more art than ever before. The arts are often left out of the public discourse

around what is essential, but behind the scenes in all of our homes, they were absolutely essential in getting us through.

Whether it's COVID, bushfires, floods, or any number of other awful things, humour and art can be so powerful and so important in bringing us together and getting us through. After being postponed for a year it's more special than ever that we're all here in this exhibition, and the need for art and finding humour has never been more essential.

If I've learnt one thing from last year it's that humour is essential, and art is essential. Possibly not quite as essential as having a clean supermarket, but essential none the less.

So essentially, what I'm saying is thank you to everyone for coming tonight and continuing to support and celebrate the arts, the fact that we're all here is both wonderful and essential.

Thank you.