

figuring
figuring

ground
ground

1st july–3rd september 2023
curated by abbra kotlarczyk

grifton
regional
gallery

f i g u r i n g
figuring

g r o u n d
ground

On behalf of Grafton Regional Gallery, the curator and the artists, we would like to acknowledge the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this exhibition is held. We honour First Nations' cultures and their enduring connections to land, sea and community, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Always was, always will be Aboriginal Land.

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ABBRA KOTLARCZYK

ABBRA KOTLARCZYK

a body in the form of—
a world

form of—

a world

*I wanna think about desire.
Ground knows I've lamented it;
wax lyricised, wane hypothesised it.*

—Alison Whittaker¹

In the opening stanza of Gomeroi writer Alison Whittaker's poem *The History of Sexuality Volume III*, the ground is invoked as an expansive, all-knowing witness to the speaker's grapplings with desire. From a position of lamentation, inside the waning belief in the existence of a sovereign, queer, blak desire, the speaker of this poem asks: how might this kind of love exist; how might it be *figured*?

When Caity Reynolds, then Exhibitions Officer at Grafton Regional Gallery, approached me in 2021 to curate an exhibition that centred the experiences of LGBTQIA+[*] people in dialogue with the rural setting of the Clarence Valley, I returned to my own experience growing up in the Northern Rivers. I was a teenager in the 90s, and at that time the move towards reclaiming the term 'queer' in an altogether new way was still relatively emergent. While I would not know to use the word queer at this time, a process of coming to identify as such was concurrent with a broader cultural and societal reckoning with what it meant to call yourself queer—not merely as a stand-in for 'gay' (as it was in earlier decades), but as a "critical and political identity that challenged normative ideas about sexuality and gender."²

Regardless of the language that accompanied my questions of desire—my unfurling *into* as a means *beyond* myself—this was a process of being witnessed by my own rural context. Before I put words to my desires and uttered them to another living person, there were the trees, those huge volcanic boulders and the earth that was my patch of solace in the rainforest property of hinterland Mullumbimby on Bundjalung Country. In 2021, on being asked to curate this show, I took myself back there; I imagined what an encounter with a project such as this might have meant for a kid like me, struggling to figure out her place. *Figuring Ground* is the result of such revisitation.

It is important to acknowledge that for many of us, the words 'queer' and 'rural' when placed together evoke a complicated terrain of emotions, from feelings of joy and nostalgia to ambivalence, pain and trauma. While not all artists included in this exhibition share the experience of growing up

rurally, their varying lived experiences and sensibilities foreground a wide range of expressions charted in these works. As a launching-off point towards a much larger set of questions around what might constitute a queer figure/ground relationship—itself a process of reimagining what are in many respects outdated western tropes used to separate and delineate ‘self’ from ‘world’—these works give shape to some of the dimensions of LGBTQIA+ desire and belonging across the continent we now call Australia.

If we apply visual artist Amy Sillman’s thinking about the artist as ‘holding’ and the art historian as ‘beholding’ colour³—that is, the artist grappling materially with the properties of individually-coloured pigments in a tube; how their varying weights give clues to their sources of origin and extraction—we could similarly think of LGBTQIA+ people as ‘holding’ ground. In thinking through what a collective wayfinding might look like for LGBTQIA+ artists in 2023, in navigating a world affected by numerous and compounding crises, works in *Figuring Ground* communicate a rich process of *tuning into* ground in the pursuit of *holding* and *beholding* place—place as the queer body in deep relation with the world that sustains, nourishes, oppresses, and delimits it.

In the same way that we might think of holding one’s breath—a reflex that queer people will know and have to rehearse all too often—we can be said to attune to ground in ways that other people may never have to consider. LGBTQIA+ people, along with many others, including migrants, refugees, Indigenous and differently abled folk, intuitively ‘read’ ground whenever they are required to assess a place for reasons of safety or social cohesion. For this and many other reasons, we may find that being in the world is a process of *unsettling*—of occupying and paying attention to various forms of *suspension*. In this way, LGBTQIA+ artists can be said to be the perfect agitators, putting into practice various forms of interrogation born out of a particular (and particulate) mode of existence that in many cases—spiritually, philosophically, materially and otherwise—collapses the neat categorisations of figure and ground, self and world.

Insofar as an exhibition can be thought of as a body of work, *Figuring Ground* is the culmination of many bodies brought together, temporally, as one: a body in the form of a world⁴ made *for* and *by* us, with many others in our minds and hearts. This is our offering.

Figuring, where ground becomes:

atom, chroma, void;
earth system;
weft + warp;
line, as body, inscribed.

* The acronym 'LGBTQIA+' (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer, intersex, asexual and others) is used throughout this text in fluid combination with the more contemporary umbrella term 'queer'. It is important to note, however, that many people who identify as LGBTQIA+ do not identify as queer. Other interchangeable terminology, namely Indigenous and First Nations, is also used throughout this text.

JAZZ MONEY

JAZZ MONEY

it's always been always

always

and when they question whether
your twisting queer bodies
have lay here since always
probing for 'proof' for 'evidence'
in their written records of dispossession
beat your chest sib
and say 'here'

ELIJAH MONEY

ELIJAH MONEY

figuring ground—
a queer rural revival

a queer rural revival

I am a Wiradjuri guest on the unceded sovereign lands of the Wurundjeri peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nations. This is where I live, work, and am writing from today. I am paying my respects to Elders both past and present. As there are multiple borders in close proximity to one another in Grafton, I additionally want to extend this respect to Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl peoples as well as Wurundjeri mob. Their forebears have been custodians of this land for millennia. I stand on the land where Aboriginal peoples have performed age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation, and renewal. I acknowledge the living culture and the unique roles in the life of the region. I recognise and respect this cultural heritage, the beliefs and relationship with the land; these continue to be central to the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, Yaegl and Kulin peoples of both past and today.

We are all unwilling participants in the colony's hardwiring of what are often colloquial and stereotypical perceptions of rural upbringings and their placements. Breaking this mould, the exhibition *Figuring Ground* at Grafton Regional Gallery presents us with artworks from across the continent, gathered to rejoice in what more nuanced framings of queer expression can look and *feel* like.

Growing up in a heteronormative lens in a small-town setting on Boon Wurrung country of the Eastern Kulin Nations—*away from the big smoke*—was done so treading lightly, pensively. So much so, that for many rural queers, coming into our own only felt like a reality once adult autonomy was more readily available and commonly done so amongst other like-minded queers—classically, in cityscapes. This isn't to brush over the phenomenal history that has and will continue to take place in less urbanised spaces. I have never-ending adoration for older queer folk who have returned to a rural life, or maybe they never felt the inclination to leave.

Look closer, go deeper than the colonial (heteronormative, heteropatriarchal and supremacist) regime and timeline that we're *all* currently forced to navigate: darlin', don't you know these very grounds we're existing on have always seen queer bodies, across this continent we commonly know as 'Australia'? Rural since when? Regional where? The very concept of gender and its binaries are an imported construct; Blakfellas have been queer, trans, 'pre-rainbow' people before any could say otherwise.

Pervasive heteronormativity has been used as a poison, sending strong toxic shockwaves across borders and chicken wire fences as a form of battle. Our bodies have been sensationalised as a political threat to the settler nuclear family. Our existence is not another toy for the gubbament to parade and play with—but if you want Dolls, Kens and Thems,* then we can provide.

Instead, we hold queer joy; something so unique and intrinsic to our existence and experience. Shifting the perspective, we are beyond exclusively sharing the effects of queer silence and its traumas, which is what makes reclaiming our individual queer experiences in a collective way so deeply exhilarating.

While it feels remiss of me not to mention an assortment of additional rural queer artists and peoples who have done admirable things, I would like to highlight one particular group of queens. My mind immediately turns to the lengthy trip that the Tiwi Island Sistergirls** made when they managed to finesse and organise a crowd-funded trip of a lifetime, making their way down to Mardi Gras together to celebrate in 2016. The dedication that went into arranging this journey was so spectacular and has become such widespread news, since sharing their story with the masses. For some this may not appear impressive, but on the contrary, their success is to be celebrated and upheld. Reading about these Sistergirls was one of the first recollections I had of seeing visible transgender mob.

Recurring themes of queerness weighed heavy on my dreams of a peaceful youth throughout primary and secondary school. The ‘accusations’ made by peers about my sexuality were often met with repetitive, defensive and dismissive responses on my part. I had to think quick on my feet as to what the desired outcome would be, given the few choices at hand: to be other’ed, maybe targeted, made invisible; or minimise oneself in order to coast. Having chosen the latter, I was able to break free of these social restraints I initially chose to strap on, once moving away—carefully, with precision, undoing all of the DIY internalised queerphobia that had smothered me for so many years. This is a lifelong journey, however, that expands with our knowledge and adaptability. I wonder if city kids could ever fathom the process of moving away from where they grew up with a cherished promise of a ‘new’ life. A ‘new’ start. My perception of moving to Naarm (Melbourne) was that I could be anyone and anything—a prospect that I took very seriously and personally. I’m incredibly grateful to have been raised just a moment away from glittering oceans, surrounded by silvered greenery, and held by sleepy seconds slowly reaching for minutes then hours. In more recent years, I find myself softly trying to edit and re-work some of my experiences from childhood through adolescence, in the optimistic attempt of having each and every one of them shine brightly, when that simply wasn’t the case. This, too, is an important thing to have to admit

and know how to navigate: how to grieve a childhood that *could*, and *should* have been, instead of wading amongst a romanticised fabrication.

Our years in youth are not able to be rewritten, yet so many of us queers are able to recreate moments of firsts: our first queer kiss, first queer party, first queer lover, our own gender reveal, first queer chosen family, the list goes on.

In highlighting collective rurality and queerness, *Figuring Ground* includes a broad range of artists with differing practices, experiences and understandings of how these terms relate personally, intersecting through their abilities as visual storytellers. Multifaceted, we hold a wide selection of our memories both beaming with queer joyous acts and moments, and of harrowing hurt and heartbreak. The artworks that are on show here hold intricate and delicate folds of narrative that have been carefully considered and created with the intention of sharing. Queer expression is an essential part of our being, making this exhibition, that is exclusively highlighting us, so deeply special.

*Dolls, Kens and Thems: terms of reclamation of trans identity and self. 'Doll' refers to someone who is trans feminine; 'Ken' refers to someone who is trans masculine; and 'Them' refers to those whose pronouns are they/them and are transgender beyond the binary. These terms are used in a tongue-in-cheek manner.

**Sistergirl: refers to a trans woman or trans feminine person who is First Nations. The masculine counterpart term is Brotherboy.

elijah money (he/him) is a queer Wiradjuri brotherboy who was raised on Kulin Nations where he continues to reside. His practice includes visual art, writing, MC, workshop facilitator, drag performance and more. These are all ingrained with strong recurring themes of colonialism, assimilation, skin colour, gender, mental illness, sexuality, climate change, stolen generations, identity as well as critiquing the Eurocentric western idealised structure that each person in so called "Australia" is forced to maintain.

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ground as—
atom,
ground as—
atom, chroma, void

void.

*Clouds of dust are filling the sky...
they remind us of atoms as they fuse
their parts to create continuity.*

—Etel Adnan⁵

There are many ways we could think about the given slipperiness of queer expression—how it works, often gently, to rupture and upend normative, disciplining forces as a force of its own. One is in how Jim Ellis hands it to us in his biography of the British artist, iconoclast and gay rights activist Derek Jarman: “Queerness, like colour, is a matter of definition and usage; queer doesn’t designate a stable thing or identity but rather a way of being in the world, an ethics of existence.”⁶ In this way, queer, like colour, is *wholly* contextual.

As elusive as the reading of a colour itself is—the light and dark of which is determined by what encircles it—the colour blue is one lens through which we can enter *Figuring Ground*. Through observation of a given colour—in this case travelling through the architecturally renovated void at Grafton Regional Gallery as an appropriated site of monochromatic focus—we can begin to appreciate how hue and saturation, historic use and application reveal a microclimate for diverse expressions of queer lived experience.

Blue is a colour that shares a dynamic range with the historic and emotional terrain of queerness: from appropriations of Thomas Gainsborough’s *The Blue Boy* (1770) to Yves Klein’s International Klein Blue (and the adjacent monochromatic intensity of his 1958 exhibition *The Void*); from Felix Gonzalez Torres’ “Untitled” (*Loverboy*) series (c. 1990s) to Derek Jarman’s eponymous film painting *Blue* (1993)—an image-less portrait of the queer body under duress of HIV/AIDS, and what David Egan describes as “a single flat plane [of colour] that is neither wholly figure nor ground.”⁷

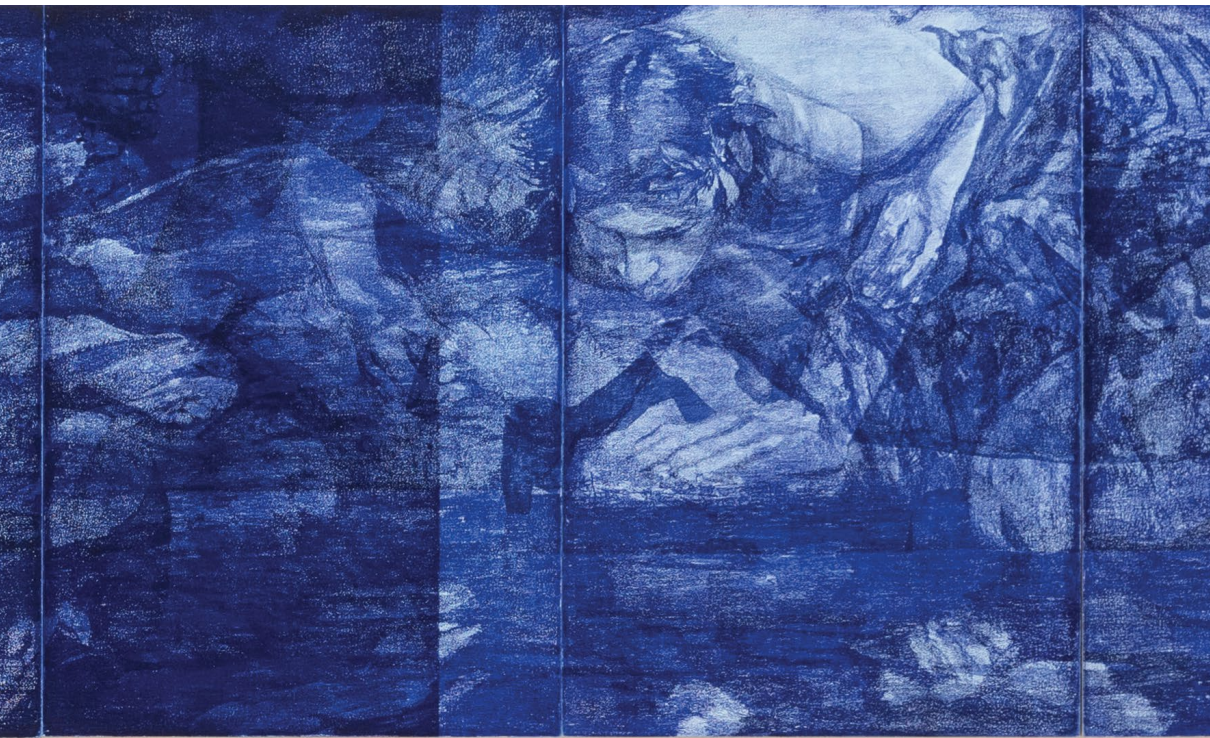
The respective treatments of blue in *benjamin bannan*’s works (pages 27, 28) showcase the dynamic range of this spectrum: in one we encounter a minimal soft blue charting absence and containment in the body, while in the other we find a cacophony of layers and historic referents threatening to become an overburden of ground itself. *archie barry* (page 30) and *briony galligan* (page 32) animate blues to reach into the breaks of life, death, sexuality and the afterlife, where colour

foregrounds a supernatural and emotive charge that barks and shimmers through modes of rest and response, grief and resistance. Thai Sapphire—a deep, almost purple hue—is a specific blue produced by the British paint company Little Greene in partnership with the National Trust as part of their Colours of England line that *nathan* beard's work (page 34) incorporates, in an attempt to free colour from its colonised clutch. At an even deeper tonal level, *spencer* lai (page 36) uses a single source of synthetic blue felt, rendering an almost indecipherable spatial field of figure and ground, lifted from an erotic scene in the work of Pierre Klossowski.

As a microcosm intent on penetrating the historically charged ground of the white cube and its attendant power relations, these works offer us something of a primer for the possible ways we might approach ground: as a constellation of atomising forces to be experienced and, in many cases, resisted.

Benjamin Bannan, *Whither Narcissus* (AES+F, Cavé, Dalí, Lépicicé, Poussin, Waterhouse), detail, 2023, carbon paper transfer on primed birch-ply, 29.7 x 252cm (3 panels), made with the assistance of Beth Maslen, photography by Andrew Curtis, courtesy of the artist.





benjamin bannan (he/him)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Concerned with converging notions of shame and anonymity, surveillance and the monument, the artistic practice of Benjamin Bannan (b. 1997, Boorloo/Perth, WA) spans video, installation and printmaking.

'Untitled (Shroud) considers bodies in various states of decay, transformation, and pleasure, and refuses immediate comprehension to challenge impulses of access and disclosure by drawing on Minimalist aesthetics. The work is made to the dimensions of The Shroud of Turin and the seams create a grid that mimics the relic's pattern of creases from centuries of being folded. The linen has been coloured to its blue hue with a dye made from Truvada (PrEP), a drug used to treat and prevent HIV/AIDS. The weave of the fabric metabolises the medicine in a way that a human body can't, as pure colour. *Whither Narcissus* (AES+F, Cavé, Dalí, Lépicie, Poussin, Waterhouse) reimagines the aesthetic possibilities for the pathologised Narcissus—a figure who, in Western modernity, was transformed from an aesthetic to a psychological subject. As a psychological diagnosis, narcissism emerged alongside the progression of sexology, with increasing affiliations to inversion and homosexuality, becoming a surrogate for the artist and a vehicle for coded declarations of same-sex desire. Transformed from antiquated administrative use into a pictorial material, carbon paper is used to render key art historical references to the mythical figure of Narcissus, the densities of which shifts from a series of portraits set in a landscape to a series of portraits that threaten to *become* a landscape.'

Benjamin Bannan, *Untitled*
(*Shroud*), 2022, linen
dyed with Truvada (PrEP),
polyester thread, 430 x 110cm,
photography by Andrew Curtis,
courtesy of the artist.



archie barry (they/them)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Archie Barry (b. 1990, Eora Nation/Sydney, NSW) is an artist whose practice spans performance, video, music production and writing. Working at the intersection of self-portraiture and iconoclasm, their work is autobiographical, somatic and process-led, speaking to ideas of personhood and embodiment.

'*Blue Dog* is a performance artwork in which I ventriloquise a miniature pale blue sculpture of my head, made of silicone and human hair. Without words, this sculpture and I sing, growl and bark to other artworks and people in the gallery space. At the edge of making vocal sense, the performance is an invitation to wake up sensations and give attention to otherwise silent spatial relationships between artworks, architecture and human visitors. Jordy Rosenberg's 2018 novel *Confessions of the Fox* reimagines 18th century London thief and jailbreaker Jack Sheppard as a trans rogue with the supernatural power to hear the voices and demands of the commodities that he frees. In a parallel manner, making *Blue Dog* drew me to listen and wonder about cultural objects that are owned and enclosed by the stilling practices of gallery and museum buildings. Initially devised in the National Gallery of Victoria, for the 2021 NGV Triennial, in a room of 19th Century European decorative art objects—a potent space for learning about collective stories of power, mortality and ownership—the performance is attuned to histories of extraction and possession in the physical matter of culture. Moving along the floor by sliding on my back, with the head of Blue Dog raised on one arm, classical relationships of figure and ground become horizontal and inseparable.'

Archie Barry, *Blue Dog*,
2021, documentation
of sculpture used
in performance for
NGV Triennial 2021,
photography by Charlie
Sofo, courtesy of the artist.



briony galligan (she/her)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Briony Galligan (b. 1983, Lutruwita, TAS) makes environments through drawing, installation, sculpture and performance that are vaporous—more atmosphere than coherent logic. Galligan positions sculptural objects as conduits, imagining them as artworks that double as tools and appendages to move through disequilibrium. Her works for *Figuring Ground* were produced as part of the Maumaus Independent Study Program in Lisbon, Portugal supported by the Ian Potter Cultural Trust.

‘In *Becoming vapour* the sleeves of three shirts are replaced with loosened limbs, long enough to hang from my balcony and stroke the faces of passersby on the street below. Incorporated into this work are sequins made from Baci chocolate wrapper cutouts—a repeated material motif that references the artist Félix González-Torres’ use of Baci (Italian for ‘kisses’) and piles of candies often corresponding to the bodyweight of friends and lovers dying of HIV/AIDS. These wrappers are my way of connecting to González-Torres’ work: material leftovers of a genealogy of practice. Accompanying the shirts are a series of drawings, rubbings of stone walkways in Lisboa, Portugal. A stone could be described as sexual if it exceeds itself. Similar to González-Torres’ ‘melting’ as being about the dissolution of one figure into another, ‘becoming vapour’ implies a breaking down of the figure—an oozing into the atmosphere. I want to ask: is there a way to melt and be vaporous without disappearing? Is *becoming vapour* also becoming visible?’

Briony Galligan, *Becoming vapour*, 2023, blueberry, soy milk, bleach and dye on cotton shirts, polyester, linen thread, cotton, sequins, Baci wrappers, easter egg wrappers, New Year's Eve decorations, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist.



nathan beard (he/him)

Lives and works between Boorloo/Perth and Naarm/Melbourne.

Nathan Beard (b. 1987, Boorloo/Perth, WA) is a multidisciplinary artist who draws on his Australian-Thai heritage to deconstruct understandings and characterisations of ‘Thainess’, authenticity, and the complex influences that structure diasporic identity.

‘*Bloom* draws on a catalogue of photogravure plates published in *Sculpture in Siam*: a 1925 catalogue by Alfred Salmony, Assistant Director at the Museum of Far Eastern Art in Cologne, which I encountered in the British Museum Library. At the time of its initial publication, this was considered an important study of the sculpture in Thailand, and several of the artefacts documented in this volume are now housed within the British Museum’s collection of Thai objects. In reimagining these objects free from the confines of this ethnographic context, I’ve incorporated a range of visual cues from my mother’s domestic Buddhist shrines: the Bhumisparsa Mudra—a hand reaching downwards towards the earth, typically symbolising the moment of Buddha’s enlightenment; and flowers typical of offerings. Rather than being observed as a static artefact, the image of the disembodied mudra is recast as an effete hand limply floating above a bloom of plastic orchids decorated with Swarovski crystals. Springing forth from a matte blue field of Thai Sapphire paint, this work positions the otherwise everyday visual language of my mother’s shrines as a form of veneration and subversion.’



Nathan Beard, *Bloom*, 2023, digital print on Ilford Galerie Pearl, plastic orchids, Light Siam Shimmer and Light Siam Aurora Boreal (AB) Swarovski Elements, Little Greene Thai Sapphire paint produced in partnership with the National Trust for their Colours of England campaign, 40 x 60cm, courtesy of the artist, sweet pea and Aster + Asha Gallery.

spencer lai (they/them)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Spencer Lai (b. 1991, Malaysia) is a multi-disciplinary artist working across multiple forms and formats including sculpture, installation, curation, writing and drawing, with materials often including text, found objects, design elements or images from pop culture—lifted from thrift stores, online or by chance encounters. Their work produces associative meaning from a range of accumulated materials that are worked into assemblages, installations, exhibitions and often curatorial group 'environments'.

'The oscillation between Ornamentation and pure form is present in most of my work. It could be said that Ornamentation is a coercive tool to elevate the objects and environments of everyday life, as if to distract oneself from the misery of this existence. The tone and register of the works (maybe their attitude?) oscillates: some works are passive or open, contemplative, divine, direct and minimal, flowery, austere, banal, beautiful, abject. Our desire to be loved, to provide love, to care for one another. To have people remember our birthdays, to be provided guidance, to guide others. How is one formed? We can better ourselves through education (skill, labour), achieving virtuosity through our appearances (material language accessories, fashion, codes of presentation), demeanour (gesture, poses). To do what is expected of us. It is likely that we are formed through instruction, as we are shaped by the hands of many.'

Spencer Lai, *Navy (parallel bars)*, 2017, synthetic felt, adhesive, 94 x 71.5cm, photography by Claire Rae, private collection, courtesy of the artist.



Spencer Lai, *pink (flowers in vase) (after Vignes)*, 2018/1972, synthetic felt, adhesive,
50 x 60cm, photography by Neon Parc, private collection, courtesy of the artist.



While we must be mindful not to conflate the struggles for climate, LGBTQIA+ and Indigenous justice, there are many points where these tenets of political and cultural resistance have met, and increasingly, continue to overlap. A large majority of contemporary artists engaged in queer politics also attune to land and Indigenous struggles, attending to the unsettling of lived experiences in occupying a marginalised position on ‘settled’, stolen land. As the poet and artist Jazz Money9 notes of this intersection, First Nations and LGBTQIA+ people are perfectly placed as generous and generative visionaries equipped to follow cultural protocols that can lead us towards new imaginaries for better earthly relations.

The inherent complexities of living on privatised, stolen land means that ground becomes one of a range of problems to be figured out. Nowhere is this more pressing than from an ecological perspective, with our human relations and responsibilities to earthly systems in urgent need of reappraisal, if we are to survive here. While one dramatic solution to climate change may be to make kin not population—that is, prioritise better relations with earthly systems over human procreation; an idea that proposes what for many LGBTQIA+ people and others is a reality born of desire, or necessity, or both—another is to pay more attention to the textures and qualities of how we are figuring our relationships to ground, in an effort to foster more healthy and harmonious interactions.

Staged beneath a bright and open blue sky, the work of *jazz money* (page 46) poetically envisions a state of play in which frozen water holding the bodies of Indigenous flora melts its grip, with the residue of this liberation from colonising force becoming a desirous substance to be immersed in. Immersion is an artistic methodology and mode of co-creation across species and biota in the work of *rafaella mcdonald* (page 48) whose rich material practice exposes treated canvases to microbial, vegetal and mineralogical activation through processes of burial and submersion within ecological—and often toxic, urban—sites. *benjamin woods* (page 50) composes a moving, breathing collage—what he calls video “sketches”—for engaging with the physical and aural habitats of sandy ghost shrimp within urban and

coastal waterways. *mira oosterweghel* (page 45, 52) contributes video and site-intervention works that queer dominant colonial narratives of masculine labour, using humorous, painterly and performative gestures to interrogate power dynamics between humans and other, namely pastoral, kin. The large scale photographic diptych of *jesse boyd-reid* (page 54) gives form to inter-species, gender and familial relations, along with notions of cyclical renewal. Here, the common carpet python becomes a local adaptation of the ancient symbology of the circular Ouroboros: a snake emblem shown swallowing its own tail, denoting continuity, wholeness and infinity.

Where modern science has helped us to understand that 99% of the unique genes in our bodies are bacterial, with thousands of discrete other species existing in and on us,¹⁰ the notion of human beings as single, discrete entities is increasingly eroding. For people struggling to appreciate how a person can conceive of their gender identity as plural—that is, more than (or both) female or male—I encourage thought for the thousands of expressions that are already contained in our bodies, and for the given fact of us all being, already, plural. Many of the works here come out of such adjacent thinking, where Cartesian notions of mind and body, as to self and world, are opened up and played with to delightful and often urgent effect.



Mira Oosterweghel, *Soiled feet rammed dirt*, detail, 2022, sheep poo on glass window, dimensions variable, site specific installation at Incinerator Gallery, photography by Lucy Foster, courtesy of the artist.

jazz money (she/her, they/them)

Lives and works on Gadigal Country, Sydney.

Jazz Money (b. 1992, Cammeraygal Country, Sydney, NSW) is a poet and artist of Wiradjuri and Irish heritage producing works that encompass installation, digital, performance, film and print. Working across mediums, Money's practice is centred around questions of narrative and legacy: place memory, First Nations memory, colonial memory and the stories that we tell to construct national and personal identity. Their first poetry collection, the best-selling *how to make a basket* (UQP, 2021) was the 2020 winner of the David Unaipon Award. Money describes *Crush* as “a poem in the form of a film / a film in the form of a poem”. The work moves between the personal and the political as the artist considers the sticky intersection of colonialism and desire. Large blocks of ice holding indigenous flora in suspension recall both the anticipation of desire and the fossilisation and objectification of First Nations people and culture by colonisers. As the ice drips and melts onto the artist's body her words in Wiradjuri and English are revealed slowly and powerfully—her agency is skilfully reclaimed and asserted.’



Jazz Money, *Crush*, 2021, single channel 4k, 3min 49sec, videography and editing by Jazz Money, audio by Gabriel Santos, commissioned for *Textbook For Desire*, 2021, Cement Fondu, collection of Artbank Australia, photography by Four Minutes to Midnight, courtesy of the artist and Artbank Australia.

rafaella mcdonald (they/them)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Rafaella McDonald (b. 1987, Awabakal and Worimi Country, Newcastle, NSW) has a playful and gestural painting and sculptural practice that explores notions of the handmade within broader material tangents, such as chemical interactions, form and decay. To this end, McDonald registers material intersections of the political, economic, social and environmental with the body and self.

“ground obsessed and eternally falling” takes up the connection between desire and identity as to how this shapes our relationships to each other and our environments. The canvases take on the staining and mutating influences of the non-human, through processes of contact and co-constitution with Clarence River waters and biotic matter on Bundjalung Country in Grafton. Following the tangents of these various natural bodies, gestural mark-making and shapes open themselves up to something unstable, through the microbiome and pH balance of the water and humus. This work becomes a collaboration between the human and non-human; a meditation on the joint futures we share with others and otherness. The title of this work takes inspiration from the title of the 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, quoted in the diaries of Lou Sullivan: a trans writer and activist living in San Francisco (1975–1991). Writing in his diary “I’m no scientist, but I know things begin and end in eternity”, there is no doubt the fluid gender presentation of David Bowie in the lead was of interest to Sullivan. More than this, perhaps Sullivan saw queer identity akin to a process of falling—one that is in perpetual motion.’



Rafaella McDonald, documentation of work in progress for *I am passing through*, 2021, site specific installation at Footscray Community Arts Centre, curated by Tamsen Hopkinson for *Connect: Parts 1 and 2*, photography by Emma Lipschitz, courtesy of the artist.

benjamin woods (he/him, they/them)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Benjamin Woods (b. 1988, Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung Country, Naarm/Melbourne) is an artist working in sculpture and sound. He explores how embodied relationships with sonic objects can generate attention to relational and ecological connection.

'Benthic Community Flutes Sketch 2 (Snapping and Sandy-ghost Shrimp, Swamp Scrub, Mussel) has been made alongside the inter-tidal flows of Moonee Ponds Creek and its conjunction with the great Birrarung/Yarra River, Wurundjeri Country. This sketch includes blown glass flutes inspired by the burrows of the sandy ghost shrimp, field recordings of snapping shrimp and mussels at the meeting area of Moonee and Birrarung, beeswax flute recordings, and sand structures. Benthic communities are complex inter-tidal ecosystems of flora and fauna that live in waterways and coastal areas. The glass flutes are an expression of subterranean organisms that produce porous thresholds of ground, water, and organic matter, with the work being formed in the movement between the flutes, their sounding in different places and the forces of the creek itself. These structures are brought into proximity with sites of concreted drains which impose limits on the diverse lives of animals and microorganisms that might otherwise thrive within the site of the creek. The gravity of benthic ground is thick with forces, and the breath of these forces reverberate in figuring them.'



Benjamin Woods, *Benthic Community Flutes Sketch 2 (Snapping and Sandy-ghost Shrimp, Swamp Scrub, Mussel)*, video still, 2023, field recording, performance documentation, digital video and stereo audio, 14min 57sec, videography by Elena Betros-Lopez, courtesy of the artist.

mira oosterweghel (she/her, they/them)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Mira Oosterweghel (b. 1987, Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne, VIC) is an interdisciplinary artist working through performance, video, collage, text, sound and sculpture as methodologies of research to explore embodiments of systems of power, queer affect, and corporeality.

'Like a torrent spills the bed is a video and performance work that explores relationships between agriculture and Australian nation building narratives. This work is informed by my own experiences of queerness and my childhood spending time on my grandparents' farm on Gunditjmara land in southwestern Victoria. Through the work, performers Megan Payne and Lydia Connolly-Hiatt act out the gestures and forms of imagined protagonists in stories of animal husbandry. Drawing on the dancers' training and their casual intimacy in friendship, the work uses humour and a queer gaze as a way of thinking through colonial stories of masculine labour. For *Figuring Ground* I will also create a version of an earlier work, *Soiled feet rammed dirt* (2022): a work that responded to Walter Burley Griffin's architecture at the Incinerator Gallery in Aberfeldie, Victoria, by creating 'shit' stained glass windows, smeared and pigmented with sheep poo. This work echoed the church-like design of the building to consider the Essendon Incinerator as a monument built to conceal the ugliness of industry and the complexity of Australian working-class pastoral narratives. A new iteration of the work will consider these ideas within the particular context of Grafton Regional Gallery.'



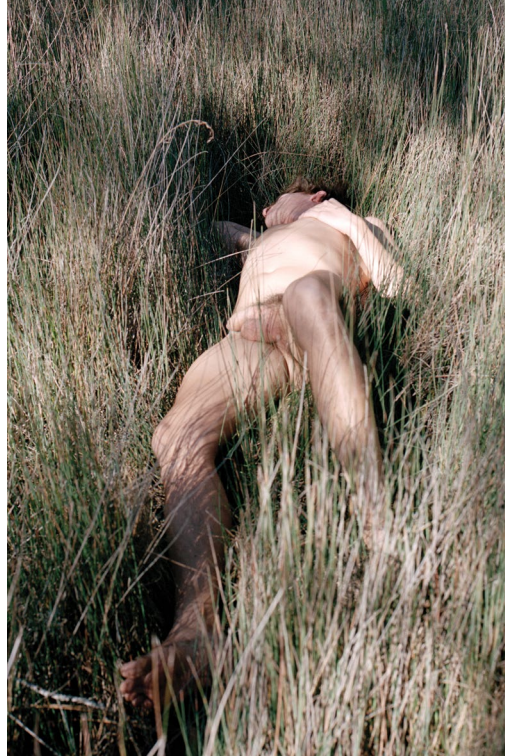
Mira Oosterweghel, *Like a torrent spills the bed*, video still, 2020, HD video, 7min 26sec, videography by Ella Sowinska, performers Megan Payne & LG Connolly-Hiatt, courtesy of the artist.

jesse boyd-reid (he/him)

Lives and works on Bundjalung Country, Mullumbimby.

Jesse Boyd-Reid (b. 1991, Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne, VIC) is a visual artist and arts worker whose practice is primarily concerned with photographic representations of family, queerness and collective connection.

His work uses a formal and often allegorical visual language to consider the inherent nature of queerness as a means for individual and collective connection. Working with chosen kin in the artist's hometown, Boyd-Reid documents the lives of those closest to him as part of an ongoing long-form photographic project that spans over a decade and charts the highs and lows of a family as they navigate a path through loss, belief and contemplation. In this process the artist becomes both a participant and an observer, experiencing and reflecting simultaneously. *Sister, Brother* alludes to the Ouroboros, the symbol of cyclical renewal which recurs as a key motif in Boyd-Reid's work; reflecting the space/place where endings and beginnings are not separate but are seen to be part of a flowing continuum. This work employs form to consider the poetics of the everyday and the place beauty has in life. The mirroring of the formal elements within the diptych echo connections between our sense of the internal world and our perceptions of the external: between self and non-self, between the individual and the collective.



Jesse Boyd-Reid, *Sister, Brother*, 2023, C-type photographic prints, 254 x 180cm each, courtesy of the artist.

ground as—

ground as—

weft + warp

we ft + wa r p

*Both the ornamental and the quotidian
can contain a map of the utopia that is
queerness.*

—José Esteban Muñoz¹¹

As *elijah* money writes in his beautiful and staunch introductory essay (page 15), ‘rainbow’ identities (not requiring such terminologies of distinction pre-colonisation) have co-existed on this continent for tens of thousands of years. Bound up in the continuity of these gender expressions are vast cultural practices and knowledges that have enduring relationships to the hand-made by way of clothing, textiles, fibre arts and expanded notions and applications of fashion. While many of these practices, including the Sāmoan *siapo*—a fine cloth made of the bark of the paper mulberry tree—have been under threat during the colonial period, we are currently experiencing what artist and curator Léuli Eshrāghi describes as the “cultural renaissance of the Majority World.”¹²

In modern times, the function of clothing and textiles as a site of queer cultural construction can be traced back roughly 300 years to the existence of male fraternities, including Molly’s: a group of elaborately dressed men who would gather and perform both formal and mock weddings. Notable 20th century periods such as the lavender scare (1950s), post-Stonewall riots (1970s) and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (1980s) produced varying effects in queer fashion: from careful sartorial codifications to the high excess of experimentation in disco, punk and gay/club subcultures.¹³ In light of such symptomatic regimes, clothing and textiles exist as a primary mode for queer and gendered expression. Fibres hold and are themselves made of the ground; they are kept strong in the vertical and horizontal, ornamental and quotidian enmeshment of warp and weft to produce new sites for inhabiting and extending bodies into space.¹⁴ Where Sara Ahmed says that “bodies become straight by tending towards straight objects”,¹⁵ one site of liberation for the queer body is in its tending toward objects that are soft, pliable, undulating and open.

In the work of *léuli* eshrāghi (page 62) the looping video becomes a “futurist loom” weaving cultural continuity through depictions of the artist’s body held inside a soft, billowing wrap around the waist, which acts as a *siapo* being tussled by the desert winds of Arrernte Country near Mparntwe/Alice

Springs. Resonant in its echoes with the nuptial practices of the Molly's, along with the ceremonial function of the siapo used for weddings and funerals, the silk drapery of *d harding* (page 64) responds to Chanel's Look 62, the wedding dress, from its Haute Couture Spring-Summer season, 2020. The silk, which has been stained with hematite—a crystalline mineral itself structured of lattice formations—prompts consideration for First Nations fashion and clothing against oppressive and stereotypical formulations. Queer methodologies of excess and camp are woven into the hard and soft, faux and manufactured, rigid and malleable materials of *kate bohunnis*, (page 66) prompting consideration for what are often extreme, absurd and essentialising renditions of gendered and biological assumptions.

Where these works, along with bannan's *Untitled (Shroud)* (page 28) and others are queer objects that remain open and vast in how they might be read—how they *fall differently* each time they are configured—I read a material methodology resonant with José Esteban Muñoz's idea of queer futurity, where they signal “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.”¹⁶

Kate Bohunnis, *too soft,
too opulent*, detail, 2021,
stainless steel, faux fur,
faux pearls, rope, plastic
beads, 385 x 130 x 93cm,
photography by James
Whiting, courtesy of the
artist and STATION Gallery.



léuli eshrāghi (they/them)

Lives and works in Kanien'kehá:ka, part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and Anishinaabe territories, Montreal, Canada.

Léuli Eshrāghi (b. 1986, Yuwi Country, QLD) is a Seumanutafa and Tautua Sāmoan/Persian/Cantonese artist and curator who intervenes in display territories to prioritise global Indigenous and Asian diasporic visibility, sensual and spoken languages, and ceremonial-political practices.

‘Conceiving the screen as a futurist loom, *AOAULI (VILIATA)* is a work of visual literature which comes from the ‘recent future’ to explore circular time, relational space, and embodied knowledge. Sensual and tender movements of the body and the land align with linework tracing animal and bird deities known to us for thousands of years before plantations, commerce, chastity and shame arrived in the Sāmoan archipelago. My body shimmers in the thermal waves of heat, and glistens in the sun, marked with motifs carried always on our bodies in tatau form, and wrapped around our bodies in siapo form. *AOAULI (VILIATA)* is part of a practice of drawing on futures where political borders, religious control, economic domination and cultural erasure have weakened, where we return to who we are and can be, understanding how to continue to innovate all our cultures in pluralist societies.’



Léuli Eshrāghi, *AOAULI (VILIATA)*, video still, 2020-22, HD video, sound, 4min 41sec, filmed south of Mparntwe on Arrernte Country, commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and generously assisted by Stuart Miller, Alexandra Grisedale and Dane Brookes, courtesy of the artist.

d harding (they/them)

Lives and works on Turrbal and Jagera Country, Meanjin/Brisbane.

D Harding (b. 1982, Barada Barna Country, Moranbah, QLD) works in a wide variety of media to explore the visual and social languages of their communities as a cultural continuum. A descendant of the Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal peoples, they draw upon and maintain the spiritual and philosophical sensibilities of their cultural inheritance within the framework of contemporary art internationally.

'In late 2020 on Turrbal and Jagera Country in Brisbane, I came across the Chanel Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2020 video online; look 62, the wedding dress, changed the way that my lifelong interest in textiles would be experienced. There are long canons and histories in Brisbane of textiles, bush dyes, Indigenous knowledges of plants and fibre, and Indigenous fashion. Around considerations of access, resources, fashion and beauty, I had been asking questions about quality, excellence and skill when synthesising my interest in making artworks, and my interest in cultural forms, including fashion and clothing. Fake, Indigenous 'inspired', toxically produced, and incongruent textiles and designs have been used in our families to make the kinds of Murri clothes that we want for ourselves. On sight of the wedding dress, I was moved to seek answers to my questions, including: 'why can't we want high quality materials and outcomes?'; 'what does Central Queensland Couture textile and clothing look like?'; 'do we actually want things like luxury and couture?'. This is ten metres of courtier silk that I have special-ordered and stained with hematite, and it remains available as material in potential for being used to make something further at a future moment.'

Harding is represented by Milani Gallery.

D Harding, *Ten metres of
couture silk stained with
hematite*, 2021-2023, satin
silk, hematite, beefwood
tannins, 1000 x 140cm,
photography by Carl
Warner, courtesy of the
artist and Milani Gallery.



kate bohunnis (she/her)

Lives and works on Kurna Country, Tarntanya/Adelaide.

Kate Bohunnis (b. 1990, Kurna Country, Tarntanya/Adelaide, SA) works in metal, mould-making, textiles and print. As a queer woman working in male dominated industries of metal fabrication and sculpture, her works are highly charged with allusions to power, dominance, subjugation and containment, often demonstrating the restrictive and sometimes punitive nature of patriarchal ideals and fetishisation of genders norms.

'too soft, too opulent is part of a larger body of work titled *fill me up and make me useful*, which was first presented at STATION Gallery in Melbourne in 2021. *fill me up and make me useful* expresses the absurdity of the patriarchal perception of a woman's body as possessing both inherent physical and cognitive failings. Reducing a body's value solely to its (assumed) biological potential creates a monolithic body—one that is rendered too biological and therefore too vulnerable for impactful use outside of a reproductive realm and, simultaneously, strips it of cognitive capability. The sculptural forms are made from the contrasting mediums of hard, sharp steel and soft, fluffy fabrics, and foreground handstitched embroidery that recalls reproductive systems in the abstract and malformed. They inhabit a space between violence and uselessness. Lacking in structural integrity, these forms have lost control and will soon encounter complete dysfunction.'

Bohunnis is represented by STATION Gallery.

Kate Bohunnis, *too soft, too opulent*, 2021, stainless steel, faux fur, faux pearls, rope, plastic beads, 385 x 130 x 93cm, photography by James Whiting, courtesy of the artist and STATION Gallery.



Poets, like artists, are drawn to consider the line: *how* and *why* and *where* does it break. The line can be thought of as both a horizontal formulation (however fragmented) on a page, or as the work—its force, its *point*—more broadly. It was Walter Benjamin who described imagination as “the deformation of what has been formed.”¹⁹ For Ahmed’s theorising,²⁰ it is the heterosexual ‘background’ as default condition that is always already behind us, synonymous and given hardly any thought as to its function in disciplining bodies and their desires. In a world that is set before us in a straight line—from the heterosexual couple seen as a point along a line passed to the child as their inheritance and thus background, to the vertical and horizontal lines used to plot the family tree—many queer artists use formal strategies of deforming, twisting, rubbing, dissolving and mark-making to destabilise lines, and in so doing, vitrify new, oblique ones. Here, bodies are envisioned as soft repositories for inherited and desired lineages; palimpsests that hold and thereby also obscure the residue of worldly impressions; ground that is imagined as a fleshy and socially inscribed space that can carry the trace of both fleeting and enduring encounters.

The video works of *charlie sofo* (page 74) frame the playful interactions of everyday objects and bodies as they rub against each other, creating a symphony of wobbles, wriggles and shuffles out of the daily handling and holding of unstable ground. For *william yang*, (page 76) a technique of handwriting directly onto the print object is telling of the inseparability of stories inside images. In his work *Joe* (page 77) writing becomes an immediate mode of communication in the telling of an intimate, sexual encounter with a deaf man, whose body becomes both figure and ground in the transmitting of a fleeting, cherished moment. *sj norman* (page 78) uses contemporary performance to situate long lines of ceremonial ritual in the form of cicatrices: a word meaning both the scar of a healed wound and a scar on the bark of a tree. Aboriginal scarification—now practised almost entirely in Arnhem Land—is a language of lines marking flesh that can communicate a broad array of stories about the bodies that carry them. The lead light sculpture of *amy jane parker* (page 80) uses techniques of contortion to subvert

straight Christian imaginaries, with the artist positioning a queer reading of the Virgin Mary's womb as an artificial, crystalline and cyborgian 'first place' comprised of the ground in extracted lead, glass and manufactured pearls.

The exhibition's title is an open proposition for what it might mean to figure a ground: figure as both a *representation*, as in to form or build something in the mind's eye, and as a process of *working something out*, as in to perceive through the senses. Figuring here becomes a proposition for imagining ground as a site of encounter through forces that are playful, intimate, utopic, subversive and life affirming. Rather than thinking of these art objects as devices that contain or limit interpretation, the proposed thematic frameworks by which we engage with them are just one way of conceiving of this body: a body in the shape of what are endless points of connection along a long line of imagining, that continues to deform and reform as each context and condition requires.

abbra kotlarczyk (she/her) was raised on Bundjalung Country in the subtropical ruins of a decommissioned banana plantation. She makes art, curates, reads, writes, edits, parents and gardens—sometimes all at once—in an attempt to outmanoeuvre the forces that pit us against enmeshment. She is the 2022 winner of the Overland Judith Wright Poetry Prize and currently lives and works on Wurundjeri Country.



Briony Galligan, *gaps, a speaking being*, detail, 2023, pencil, oil pastel and watercolour on paper, Baci wrappers, photocopied text, paper, 64 x 50cm, courtesy of the artist.

charlie sofo (he/him)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

Charlie Sofo (b. 1983, Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne, VIC) has exhibited widely in Australia, engaged in socially driven projects and performances and published creative writing.

‘The two videos included in *Figuring Ground—33 Objects That Can Fit Through the Hole in My Pocket* (2013) and *Cracks, Faults, Fractures* (2012)—contain small gestures: testing the limits of a hole in a pocket and finding faults and cracks in various bits of ground and flooring. Both works have a rhythmic soundtrack, and rely on a process of paying attention or tuning into some unusual frequencies in the world. I hope these frequencies are pleasurable and resonate with the people who encounter them.’



Charlie Sofo, *33 Objects That Can Fit Through the Hole in My Pocket*, 2013, colour digital video, sound, 1min 29sec in *Tutto*, Deakin University Art Gallery, 2022, curated by James Lynch, photography by Jacqui Shelton, collection of Monash University, courtesy of the artist and Monash University.

william yang (he/him)

Lives and works on Gadigal Country, Eora/Sydney.

William Yang (b. 1943, Muluridji Country, Mareeba, QLD) is a photographer who moved to Sydney from Brisbane in 1969. He came out as a gay man and has recorded much of his life in the Sydney gay community since the early 70s.

‘When I came to Sydney to become a playwright with an experimental theatre group in the early 70s, I could not make a living so I turned to photography. I had a camera and was self-taught. I was surrounded by actors who needed headshots so I started off doing actor’s portfolios and then general freelance work. I liked photographing social events and parties and I got jobs doing the social pages for magazines. I was mixing with people from the counterculture, people like Martin Sharp, Richard Neville, Brett Whiteley, Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson. I was part of the emerging gay scene and good friends with artists Peter Tully and David McDiarmid, who were big influences in my practice. In the 80s I began to do performance pieces in the theatre, using slide projection, music and the spoken word. My third piece, *Sadness*, about my Chinese family in North Queensland and people dying of AIDS in Sydney successfully toured Australia and the world. I realised that many of my images had stories. When I first showed these images in a gallery situation I wrote the story directly onto the print—a practice I began in the 90s. The handwritten text became a signature of my work, and people were able to recognise my prints more easily. Currently I do performance pieces which I sometimes bring out as videos; I show my prints in galleries and in book form.’

Yang is represented by Art Atrium.



"Joe." William Yang. 1979. 5

William Yang, *Joe*, 1979, ink on gelatin silver photograph, 27 x 40.3cm, collection of Museum of Contemporary Art, courtesy of the artist, Art Atrium and Museum of Contemporary Art.

sj ^{norman} norman (he/him, they/them)

Lives and works between Gadigal Country (Sydney), Lenapehoking Country (NYC/US) and Berlin (Germany).

SJ Norman (b. 1984, Gadigal Country, Sydney, NSW) is an interdisciplinary artist, writer and cultural worker. He is a trans-masculine Koori with ancestral ties to north-western Wiradjuri and Ngyiampaa-Wailwan Country (Nyngan, NSW) and West Yorkshire, UK.

'I first performed *Cicatrix* (*All that was taken, all that remains*) to mourn the passing of my uncle, Donald Clark—a life-long activist. In one of the last conversations I had with Don, he spoke about a man he knew whose cicatrices on his skin marked him as an initiated man. Don expressed grief around his own disconnection from this practice. This work considers the relationship between the Indigenous body and the carceral state. 147 incisions—the number of Aboriginal people who have lost their lives while in police custody in Australia over the last decade—were made in the skin of my back in a ritual working of 147 minutes duration. Proportionally, Aboriginal Australians are the world's most incarcerated people. Scarification is widely utilised in mourning practices across the Australian continent. Ritual breaching of the skin is performed to honour the dead, or to demarcate a living body in a state of grief, whilst also rendering various things about an individual legible, such as marital and kinship ties or their status as an initiated person. Scarification remains an extant religious practice in remote parts of Australia, however, colonisation and cultural repression has all but eradicated the practice in the South-east. Here I reclaim the ancestral mourning rights I have been divested of as a Wiradjuri person, inviting consideration of the body as a vessel of complex grief and the wound a technology of transmutation.'



SJ Norman, *Cicatrix (All that was taken, all that remains)*, 2019, giclee print, photographic documentation, 59.4 x 84.1cm, photographic documentation of performance commissioned by Performance Space New York, 8 January 2019, photography by Ricardo Martinez Roa, courtesy of the artist.

amy jane parker (she/her)

Lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne.

The sculptural practice of Amy Jane Parker (b. 1990, Wurundjeri Country, Naarm/Melbourne, VIC) is hinged upon material and allegorical qualities, attending to the ways in which affective energies are passed between and indexed within earthly matter.

“immaculate...as transparent as the purest crystal, through which her internal organs, penetrated and filled with divinity, shone brightly” (Gertrude of Helfta, Cevres spirituelles, IV, 50-52).

‘In mediaeval European Christianity, the womb of Mary, Mother of God, was depicted as a crystal window. This transparent, glossy womb was filled with what was thought to be self-medicating materials such as amber and pearls, used to aid labour. These materials held in common their crystalline structure, thought at the time to be a masculine quality, as god-forbid Jesus’s amniotic conditions be that of an earthly woman. Some stained-glass renderings depict this glass, window-like womb as floating outside Mary’s body. Here, Mary’s body is architectural and accessible by all. Dr. Lucy Allen Goss offers a queer re-reading of the womb as a trans proto-cyborg of sorts. More than human, the figure is made up of the ground itself. In work made for *Figuring Ground* I borrow these materials to construct a hanging installation that reflects on how collective perspectives attach to material, and how these considerations change over time.’



Amy Jane Parker, *else loop (wine)*, 2022, glass, dimensions variable, photography by Lucy Foster, courtesy of the artist.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Alison Whittaker, *Blakwork* (Magabala Books, 2018) 63.
- 2 Timothy W. Jones, 'Reviled, reclaimed and respected: the history of the word 'queer'', *The Conversation*, 19 January, 2023, www.theconversation.com/reviled-reclaimed-and-respected-the-history-of-the-word-queer-197533.
- 3 David Egan, *Colour Handling* (Discipline, 2022) 44.
- 4 The title of this essay, 'a body in the form of a world' is adapted from the title of an introductory text, 'A Body in the Form of a Planet: Gaia, Fifty Years Later' by Dorian Sagan in Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, *Gaia and Philosophy* (Ignota Books, 2023) 1.
- 5 Sébastien Delot, Susanne Gaensheimer and Matthias Mühling, eds., *Etel Adnan* (Hirmer Verlag GmbH, 2023) 11.
- 6 Jim Ellis in David Egan, *ibid*, 128.
- 7 *ibid*, 145.
- 8 Diane di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters* (Silver Press, 2021) 22.
- 9 'Episode 10: Jazz Money,' outLOUD (Glebe, BLACKBOOKS, 2022), Podcast, www.blackbooks.online/outloud/.
- 10 Ashton Applewhite, 'Dr Martin Blaser on sacred cows, ear infections and the nature of science,' *American Museum of Natural History*, 2022, www.amnh.org/explore/science-topics/microbiome-health/meet-your-microbiome#:~:text=Seventy%20to%20ninety%20percent%20of,in%20our%20bodies%20are%20bacterial/.
- 11 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009) 1.
- 12 Léuli Eshrāghi, 'TarraWarra Biennial 2023: ua usiisi fa'ava'asavili,' *TarraWarra Museum of Art*, 2022, www.twma.com.au/exhibitions/tarrawarra-biennial-2023-ua-usiisi-faavaasavili/.
- 13 'A Queer History of Fashion | Fashion Culture,' *The Museum at FIT - Fashion Culture Podcast* (New York City, The Museum at FIT, Jun 25, 2019), Podcast, www.museumatfit.podbean.com/e/a-queer-history-of-fashion-fashion-culture/.
- 14 Sara Ahmed, 'Becoming Straight,' in Kris Dittel and Clementine Edwards, eds., *The Material Kinship Reader: Material beyond extraction and kinship beyond the nuclear family* (Onomatopoe 208, 2022) 112.
- 15 *ibid*.
- 16 José Esteban Muñoz, *ibid*.
- 17 Fred Moten, *The Little Edges* (Wesleyan University Press, 2015) 8.
- 18 Sara Ahmed, *ibid*, 120.
- 19 Astrid Lorange and Andrew Brooks, 'Silverfish, Weevil, Ibis - Review: Astrid Lorange and Andrew Brooks on Symrin Gill', *Sydney Review of Books*, 3 March, 2023, www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/silverfish-weevil-ibis/.
- 20 Sara Ahmed, *ibid*.



William Yang, , *The Morning After*, 1976, gelatin silver print, 26.7 x 40.2cm, collection of Museum of Contemporary Art, courtesy of the artist, Art Atrium and Museum of Contemporary Art.

curator's acknowledgement

The guiding premise of *Figuring Ground* is not possible without acknowledging First Nations peoples as the original and enduring custodians of these airways, waterways and lands—ground that carries each of our respective connections to place. I respectfully acknowledge that I am an uninvited guest living on the lands of the Wurundjeri peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nations, having been raised on the uncaded lands of the Arakwal Bumberline people of the Bundjalung Nation in Northern NSW. I extend my respects to Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl peoples on whose country Grafton Regional Gallery sits, to the north of the great Clarence River, adjacent to what is today known as Susan Island. This significant landmark has long been a women's island, believed to have been created by Dirrangun—an old and powerful woman who still exists as part of *wadyarr* (the land) and *aagal* (the sea).¹ Where Grafton Regional Gallery houses many cultural items created by women—including works by my own mother—*Figuring Ground* extends the gallery's commitment to being a site for feminist and matrilineal cultural production in its positioning of LGBTQIA+ artists working in so-called Australia today.

Fundamental to the development of this project was early consultation work with local queer and trans youth groups in Grafton and nearby Coffs Harbour. The overarching message that came out of this process was a need for affirming spaces. My hope is that *Figuring Ground* and its adjacent programming for *Re-Figuring Ground* and *Mixed Signals* can offer nuanced representations of queer expression and self-determination for LGBTQIA+ people today and into the future, especially for those coming into their identities in a rural setting.

I wish to thank the team at Grafton Regional Gallery for their commitment and hard work in

realising this project: to Caity Reynolds for her strong ethic and uncompromising vision in developing this project; to Avron Thompson for her steady presence in turning the organisational cogs; to Cass Samms for her commitment in upholding its ambitious scale; to Maggie McDade for her assistance and attentive editorial eye; to Sarah Nash for her insight, calm leadership and care; and to Angela Lagos-Jay for early programming support. Thank you to Adam Woodleigh of Redalfalfa Graphic Design for his perseverance and collaborative spirit, and to the team at Yoohoo McPhee Print Workshop. Thank you to Clarence Valley Council and Create NSW for their generous financial support in making this project possible.

I wish to thank Elijah Money for his gently staunch take on the personal and political implications of this project, via his beautiful and affecting catalogue essay.

To my support networks—family, friends, colleagues and especially my partner Fleur Gadd and mother Christine Willcocks—thank you for your patience, encouragement and insight. Thank you also to Madé Spencer Castle for his support of this project, and for encouraging me to consider what a queer curatorial methodology can look like.

Thank you to the artists for so sensitively and creatively manifesting what I believe is the important work of queer world making. Your professionalism, honesty and integrity has made creating this body of work itself a site for queer excellence, resilience and connection.

1 Michael Laurie, 'Dirrangun,' *Surfing World Magazine*, 2021, surfingworld.com.au/dirrangan/.

artist—

artist—

biographies

biographies

amy jane parker (b. 1990) is an artist currently living and working on the unceded lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people. The question of how sentiment become sedimentary is one that continues to propel her practice. Recent exhibitions include *'Beneath a Sunkissed Bow'*, Holden Garage, Berlin a duo presentation with Tobi Keck, *'Side by side by side'* with Brighid Fitzgerald, curated by Helen Hughes at Mejia Gallery and *'all planets have seasons because they are tilted'* at Savage Garden. Parker has partaken in residencies at Watch This Space (Mparntwe), Frontyard Projects (Marrickville, Gadigal Country), the University of Tasmania (Nipulina/Hobart) and in the Textilseturs Íslands (Blönduós, Iceland).

archie barry (b. 1990) was born and raised along the ocean harbour and coastal regions of the Eora Nation/Sydney, Australia. Barry is an artist whose practice spans performance, video, music production and writing, presenting solo exhibitions at The Heide Museum of Modern Art (2020-2021) and Blindside Gallery (2019). Barry's work has been presented in a range of group settings including at The Samstag Museum of Art (2022), The Monash University Museum of Art (2021-2022), The National Gallery of Victoria (2021, 2019), The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (2022, 2020, 2018, 2017), The Museum of Contemporary Art (2019), Contemporary Art Tasmania (2019) amongst other spaces.

benjamin bannan (b. 1997) is an artist living and working on unceded Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung/Bunurong lands. Bannan studied at École Nationale Supérieure d'Art, Dijon, and holds a Master of Fine Art (Research) from Monash University. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Wither Narcissus*, SEVENTH Gallery; *Demarcations*, Cool Change Contemporary; *Untitled* (*Saint Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata*), West Space. Group exhibitions include: *Landscape in a*

Convex Mirror as part of the 2021 *Art Encounters Biennial*, ISHO, Timișoara; *Here&Now20: Perfectly Queer*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery; *ARCUS*, Martin Browne Contemporary; *Continuity and Change*, Mundaring Arts Centre; and *HATCHED: National Graduate Exhibition*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts.

benjamin woods (b. 1988) is an artist who practises with training in sculpture and sound. He explores how embodied relationships with sonic objects can generate attention to relational and ecological connection. Woods has been exhibiting and performing for over fifteen years, holds a BFA Hons and MFA from Victorian College of the Arts, and, recently completed a PhD project at Monash University focusing on how habits transform through fragile ecologies of practice (2022). Woods has often worked collaboratively and collectively, such as with *Tributary Project* (with Geoff Robinson, Saskia Schut, Ying-Lan Dann), and as *Lèlè* (Yongping Ren and Ben Woods). He has contributed to group exhibitions and public programs at many institutions including Powerhouse Museum, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, ACCA, Bus Projects, CCP, Blindside, Bundoora Homestead, Melbourne Art Fair, c3 Contemporary, Liquid Architecture, RMIT Design Hub, City of Melbourne Arts Program, Composite, Watch This Space, and more. Recent solo works include: *Little and Many Intensities* for Liquid Architecture; *Leaves (Hope for Resonance)* at Youkobo Art Space; *Forming Resonant Situations* at MADA Gallery; *that which enables and constrains...* at West Space; *widen, subtract, warm, cool...* at Incinerator Art Gallery; *Processual Rhythms* at The Substation; *Enfolding Outward* at Outward Projects; and, *Benthic Community Flutes Sketch 1 (Sandy Ghost Shrimp)* at Study Space.

briony galligan (b. 1983) lives and works on Wurundjeri Country, Naarm, and is currently undertaking the Maumaus Independent Study Program in Lisboa, Portugal supported by Ian Potter

Cultural Trust. Galligan aims to make environments—including through drawing, installation, sculpture and performance—that are vaporous, more atmosphere than coherent logic. She positions sculptural objects as conduits, imagining them as artworks that double as tools and appendages to move through disequilibrium. Recent work addresses histories of childhood and play, the construction of authority and order, speaking, gestating, dying and palliative care. Galligan has also worked responding to various queer representations, archives and scrapbooks and has been curious about the immateriality and invisibility of queer desire, both independently and with artist and writer Mel Deerson. She has shown work at NGV, Heide MOMA, Gertrude, KINGS ARI, Westspace, First Draft, TCB, Cemeti Art House and Sangkring Art Space. Teaching and artist organising is also important to Galligan, working as a sessional academic at Monash and Victorian College of the Arts, running seminars and workshops with Art Programme and Platform Arts Geelong.

charlie sofo (b. 1983) was born in Melbourne (Wurundjeri Land), where he currently lives and makes art. Sofo has been involved in residency programs at Gertrude Contemporary, Monash University Prato Centre, Italy, and Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, supported by the Australia Council for the Arts. Sofo has exhibited nationally and internationally, presented public performances and workshops, and written for various art publications in Australia. He is on the board of Artery studio cooperative and teaches into the Fine Art program at Monash University. Some recent exhibitions include: *On Vulnerability and Doubt*, curated by Max Delany, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2019; *Queer Economies*, curated by Madé Spencer Castle and Abbra Kotlarczyk, Bus Projects, Melbourne, 2019; *Shapeshifters: New Forms of Curatorial Research*, curated by Tara McDowell, MADA Faculty Gallery, Monash University, Caulfield, 2019; *Why listen to plants?*, curated by Liquid Architecture, RMIT Design Hub, Melbourne, Australia, 2018; *The Score*, Curated by Jacqueline Dougherty, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2017.

d harding (b. 1982) works in a wide variety of media to explore the visual and social languages of their communities as a cultural continuum. A descendant of the Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal peoples, they draw upon and maintain the spiritual and philosophical sensibilities of their cultural inheritance within the framework of contemporary art internationally. Harding's work has been exhibited and collected by arts institutions in Australia and overseas. In July 2019 Harding was awarded a Doctorate of Visual Arts from Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. They are currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at QCA.

jazz money (b. 1992) is a poet and artist of Wiradjuri and Irish heritage producing works that encompass installation, digital, performance, film and print. Working across mediums, Money's practice is centred around questions of narrative and legacy: place memory, First Nations memory, colonial memory and the stories that we tell to construct national and personal identity. Their first poetry collection, the best-selling *how to make a basket* (UQP, 2021) was the 2020 winner of the David Unaipon Award. Their writing has been widely published nationally and internationally, and performed on a number of global stages, including: TEDx Sydney, the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Sydney Opera House, Literature Live! Mumbai, Performance Space New York, PEN International, and arts/literary festivals in every Australian state and territory. As a cross-disciplinary artist, Money's work has been presented in public settings and leading institutions around the world.

jesse boyd-reid (b. 1991) is a visual artist and arts worker primarily concerned with photographic representation of family, queerness and collective connection. Boyd-Reid completed his undergraduate and honours degree in Fine Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2019, and was accepted into the Arctic Trust's residency program in Svalbard, Norway. Boyd-Reid was awarded the

Cranbourne Fellowship, the Lionel Gell Foundation Scholarship for Artistic Excellence and the Margaret Lawrence social justice. He has presented work at Blindside Gallery, Lon Gallery, Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery, Museum of Art and Culture, Tweed Regional Art Gallery, AIRspace Projects, Monash Gallery of Art, Perth Centre for Photography and Photo2021.

kate bohunnis (b. 1990) produces pared back, large-scale sculptural installations using metals in contradictory and deliberate dialogue with wax, silicone, latex, leather and textiles. Bohunnis is a graduate from Flinders University, South Australia, with First Class Honours. The winner of the 2021 Ramsay Art Prize and recipient of an Arts SA 2022 Fellowship, Bohunnis has exhibited at ACE Open, Adelaide; Art Gallery of South Australia; BLINDSIDE, Melbourne; COMA, Sydney; FELTspace, Adelaide; Firstdraft, Sydney; Outer Space, Brisbane; Perth Institute of Contemporary Art; and praxis ARTSPACE, Adelaide, as well as in various group exhibitions throughout South Australia. Bohunnis is represented by STATION Gallery, Australia.

léuli eshrāghi (b. 1986) is a Seumanutafa and Tautua Sāmoan/Persian/Cantonese artist and curator. In 2023 they are exhibiting new work commissioned by Aupuni Space (Honolulu), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Tallawoladah), and Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania (nipaluna). In 2022, they presented new work at the Tate Modern, the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, and the Centre d'exposition de l'Université de Montréal. Recent residencies include: TRADES A.i.R./Aupuni Space (Honolulu), Institut français/Cité internationale des arts (Paris), and the University of Tasmania (nipaluna). Their work is held in the Royal Bank of Canada (Warrang/Tsi Tkaró:nto) and Fonds régional d'art contemporain (Carquefou/Nantes) collections, and in private collections in Australia, Canada, and Norfolk Island. They are Curatorial Researcher at Large at the University of Queensland Art Museum,

Curator of the TarraWarra Biennial 2023: ua usiusi fa'ava'asavili at TarraWarra Museum of Art, and Curator of Indigenous Arts at the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. Eshrāghi holds a postdoctoral fellowship from Concordia University, a PhD in Curatorial Practice from Monash University, and a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Arts Management from the University of Melbourne.

mira oosterweghel (b. 1987) is an interdisciplinary artist living and working on unceded Wurundjeri land in Naarm Melbourne. They use performance, video, collage, text, sound and sculpture as methodologies of research to explore embodiments of systems of power, queer affect, and corporeality. Recent exhibitions include: *Unison*, West Space (2023), *Teeth hide*, Kings Artist Run (2023), *Saddle Candy*, Composite (2023), *Soiled feet rammed dirt*, Incinerator Gallery (2022), and *Bone with a hole*, Blindside ARI (2021).

nathan beard (b. 1987) is a multidisciplinary artist with Australian-Thai heritage. Recent exhibitions include: *A Puzzlement*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (2022); *Low Yield Fruit*, sweet pea (2022); *White Gilt 2.0*, Firstdraft (2020); *A dense intimacy*, Bus Projects (2019); and *WA Focus: Nathan Beard*, Art Gallery of Western Australia (2017). In 2017 Beard participated in the 4A Beijing Studio Program and was a recipient of the Australia Council Residency at ACME Studios, London in 2022. He was a finalist in the 2021 Ramsay Art Prize and the 2020 churchie emerging art prize. He is represented by sweet pea and Aster + Asha Gallery.

rafaella mcdonald (b. 1987) has a playful and gestural painting and sculptural practice that explores notions of the handmade within broader material tangents such as chemical interactions, form and decay. Since 2014 McDonald has exhibited in Naarm, through solo and group exhibitions at

NGV Australia, Westspace, TCB Inc, Fort Delta and Daine Singer, as well as producing several large public art work commissions for The Melbourne Metro Authority, Moonee Valley City Council, The Substation, City of Stonnington, Shepparton Art Museum and Next Wave Festival. McDonald completed their Honours at the Victorian College of the Arts (2015) and a Bachelor of Creative Arts from Melbourne University (2009).

sj norman (b. 1984) is an interdisciplinary artist, writer and cultural worker. He is a trans-masculine Koori, born on Gadigal Country. His maternal ties are to north-western Wiradjuri and Ngyiampaa-Wailwan Country (the community of Nyngan, NSW) and his paternal ties are to West Yorkshire, UK. Norman is the recipient of numerous awards for art and literature. He was the recipient of the 67th Blake Prize, a 2018 Sidney Myer Fellowship and a 2019 Australia Council Fellowship. Recent exhibitions include the 22nd Biennale of Sydney and the 4th National Indigenous Art Triennial. His first work of fiction, *Permafrost* (UQP, 2020), won the 2017 Kill Your Darlings Prize for an Unpublished Manuscript. It was listed for 6 major literary awards, including the Australian Society for Literature Gold Medal, the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards in 2 categories, and the Stella Prize. His forthcoming essay collection, *Skin in the Game*, won the 2022 Peter Blazey Prize for Non-Fiction. He works extensively as a freelance performance, music and public programs curator, principally in his role as co-organiser of the Indigenous-led interdisciplinary arts and pedagogy platform Knowledge of Wounds, which he has been running with his collaborator Dr Joseph M. Pierce (Cherokee Nation Citizen) since 2019.

spencer lai (b. 1991) is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Melbourne. They graduated from VCA (BFA with Honours) in 2014. Working across multiple forms and formats, including sculpture, installation, curation, writing and recently, drawing, Spencer's practice produces associative meaning

from a range of accumulated materials that are worked into assemblages, installations and exhibitions. These materials often include text, found objects, design elements or images from pop culture, lifted from thrift stores, online or by chance encounters. The resulting outcomes of their practice are rarely singular or stand-alone objects—rather, their identities are intentionally constructed from multiple references, works, as well as contributions from other artists, resulting in the form of curatorial group exhibitions, or ‘environments’.

william yang (b. 1943) came to Sydney from Brisbane in 1969. He came out as a gay man and has recorded much of his life in the Sydney gay community since the early 1970s. Yang had his first solo exhibition *Sydneyphiles* at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney in 1978. Part of the exhibition showed scenes from gay life at the time: people, parties, shows, events, and nights at the sauna Kens Karate Klub. It was the first time that Australian images of this nature had been shown at a public institution and the exhibition caused a sensation. Since then he has exhibited regularly at Mardi Gras. He is well known for his documentation of the AIDS epidemic in the early nineties. His Performance piece *Sadness* was made into a film by Tony Ayres in 1999. In 1997 he won the Outstanding Visual Arts Event at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras for his exhibition *Friends of Dorothy*. *Friends of Dorothy* is the name he gives to his generic collection of photos of the gay community in Sydney: it has been a book, an exhibition, a performance piece which has toured overseas, and a DVD. In 2021 he had a retrospective exhibition *Seeing and Being Seen* at QAGOMA in Brisbane. Yang is represented by Art Atrium, Sydney.

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ISBN: 978-0-6451014-4-7

Exhibition Curated by: Abbra Kotlarczyk

Art Direction by: Abbra Kotlarczyk

Catalogue Design: Adam Woodleigh (Redalfalfa)

Printed by: YooHoo McPhee Print Workshop

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Grafton Regional Gallery is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.

Gallery Director (Incoming): Sarah Gurich, Administration Officer: Avron Thompson, Acting Exhibition Officer: Cass Samms. Gallery Development Officers: Sarah Nash, Maggie McDade and Jacqui McLeod. Gallery Assistants: Juan Cosgayan, Danny Loyden, Maggie McDade, Cass Samms, Sam Steinhauer. Grafton Regional Gallery would like to thank former staff for their input and support of this project: Gallery Director Niomi Sands, Exhibitions & Collections Officer Caity Reynolds and Development Officer Angela Lagos Jay.



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NSW Government through Create NSW.