
PAISOTING

AMOSGST

OTHER

THINGS

PAINTING AMONGST OTHER THINGS

DRILL HALL GALLERY ANU
CURATED BY TONY OATES
9 AUGUST – 7 OCTOBER 2018

ANU SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN GALLERY
CURATED BY PETER ALWAST,
RAQUELL ORMELLA & SU YILMAZ
10 AUGUST – 1 SEPTEMBER 2018

ANCA GALLERY
CURATED BY OSCAR CAPEZIO
10 – 26 AUGUST 2018

ANU

SCHOOL

OF ART &

DESIGN

GALL-

ERY

ANU SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN GALLERY

VANESSA BARBAY / LIONEL BAWDEN /
RILEY BEAUMONT / EMMA BEER /
VIVIENNE BINNS / JULIE BROOKE /
LEAH BULLEN / SUSAN BURET / TONY
CURRAN / TIFFANY COLE / FERNANDO
DO CAMPO / ROMANY FAIRALL /
KIRSTEN FARRELL / ROWAN KANE /
KARENA KEYS / SANNE KOELEMIJ /
WARATAH LAHY / HAYLEY LANDER /
PETER MALONEY / CAT MUELLER /
SALLY O'CALLAGHAN / ELENA
PAPANIKOLAKIS / JACOB POTTER /
RACHEL SIOBHAN POWELL / DIONISIA
SALAS / HELEN SHELLEY / BRYAN
SPIER / KAEL STASCE / CHRIS TWINEY /
RUTH WALLER / JONATHAN WEBSTER /
MEI WILKINSON / ANDRZEJ ZIELINSKI

CURATED BY PETER ALWAST,
RAQUEL ORMELLA AND SU YILMAZ

What is the relationship between truth, reality and art? According to Plato, a good society is founded on wisdom derived from truth and reality.¹ Yet for Plato, truth and reality are not necessarily one and the same thing, particularly when it comes to art. In his opinion truth is determined by how it relates to objects, and in art whether it accurately describes them. Plato states that an artwork is far removed from the true form, as he views representation as 'an imitation' with the ultimate goal of telling a story. Plato's theory of forms can therefore be understood as a type of abstraction because it locates truth outside or beyond material reality. As such it could be a grounding for abstract art, or any art for that matter, where forms and colours are substitutes for the representational, as truth can never be accessed but only inferred through the perception and imagination of the viewer. Renée Descartes presents such an idea by stating that clear perception is the hallmark of truth. His theory is that if the artist has a clear and distinct perception drawn from belief, that is truth.²

¹
Plato, *The Republic*, trans.
Desmond Lee (Penguin
Classics, 2007)

²
Renée Descartes, *Meditations
on first philosophy*
(Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.
Co, 1993).

Abstract art cannot be completely removed from what is commonly believed to be the objective world, because the artwork has been mediated through the artist, who is inherently a product of their individual experiences. Even representational art undergoes a process of abstraction, given that what it re-presents is merely a visible impression rather than the actual object itself. Reality, as embodied in the representational, cannot be accessed without accepting the specific lenses of the medium through which one is observing. This perspective completely eliminates the concept of representational art as anything more than an imitation of 'real' elements in nature. The works of Hayley Lander and Vanessa Barbay play on the blurred line between abstraction and representation by incorporating and transforming elements and processes from nature into recognisable forms.

One way to address the convolution between the real, the perceived and the fabricated is through the use of language. Language consists of a system of signs, signifying meanings that may, or may not, be true. In his essay *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, Friedrich Nietzsche argues

3
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (Createspace Independent Pub, 2012).

that the tool by which we depict reality – language – and reality as we understand it, are both falsehoods: language, because it is an arbitrary system, and reality, due to the limitations of our perception which debilitates us from accessing its totality.³ Yet questioning reality is a process best enabled through the use of language. In this way, text may play a pivotal role in understanding both the individual and their relation to others.

These approaches of language and abstract matter are explored by many of the artists in *Painting amongst other things*. In his *Finlandia* (2016) series Chris Twiney reveals how language can both convey and manipulate truths and reality. Language is incorporated in Lionel Bawden's exploration of the relationships between others and within the self.

Vanessa Barbay takes on the question of how to represent what is in the world by fixing matter as it transforms and coalesces into the abstract. *Autumn Mullet* (2016) and *Feeding on Death* (2013), reflect a process of mimetic naturalism by bringing 'recently deceased animal bodies into contact with canvas [to] harness the transformative nature of the dead animal subject, in order to undermine the authority signified by a representation within a traditional painting format.'⁴ The subject – reality – and its abstraction are intertwined and subverted through her methodology. Barbay takes her subject and reflects its lifelessness into an objectified image, capturing death as a momentary experience – yet in doing so nature reveals life in the lifelessness of her subject matter. Existence and death are perhaps the most abstract concepts, yet they are inescapable for every living body and as such are most 'real' and tangible.

4
Vanessa Barbay, "Becoming animal: exploring iconic and indexical representation" (PhD Exegesis, Australian National University, 2013).

Hayley Lander's work questions the coexistence of humanity with nature. In *We Are Sustained* (2015), Lander intertwines moments of illusion with material incident to show the temporary nature of matter. Lander uses construction waste materials to lend texture and meaning to her artwork. Influenced by her research on ecology and sustainability, her art is a form of environmental activism. The painting juxtaposes the material haziness of the ground, a construction plyboard sheet shaped like a tree, against a realistic depiction of ferns. Reaching out to the edges of the board, a ladder leads the viewer into the green. Indeed, Lander comments on how her viewers often feel the urge to reach out and touch her painting, to feel its inviting texture,

and perhaps to breathe in what lies at the heart of the plant. Gestural brushwork draws attention to areas of exposed board which counterpoint Lander's naturalistic depiction of plants to reveal a correlation between the manufactured natural resource and its origins.⁵

Chris Twiney's work is centred on the question of truth as described and investigated through language and relayed through the newsmedia. *Finlandia*, a series of hand-painted signs that are released from his studio and then photographed against the landscape of Finland, confront the viewer with different presentations and interpretations of truth. In the series *Newsstand*, a photograph, or a double-sided painting mimicking a newspaper banner page, shows headlines and statistics about that country that can be read as 'positive' or 'negative.' Both facts are 'truths' yet they contradict each other. Complicating this further is the photograph from the series *The Halves Divided* that shows both sides of *Newsstand* set up on two sides of a path leading into a Finnish forest. That there is only one path can either confirm or contradict the interpretation that there is one absolute truth. The viewer can choose either side of the board, so that either factual statement can be taken to form a positive or negative opinion of the country and this might be influenced by the reader's pre-existing view or expectations. Twiney's work prompts the audience to question which 'truth' is true, and more importantly, whether it is their true value that is represented. He encourages his audience to interrogate media and advertising that heavily relies on language to convey their messages. The appropriated texts draw attention to the ambiguity and subversion of reality via different mediums.

Twiney further addresses the subversion of reality in the series *MH* (2018). Using acrylic paint he reworks the covers of *Men's Health* magazines, investigating the normative vision of the ideal man as proposed by media. In *APRIL* he reconstructs the image, moving it beyond the recognisable, prompting the viewer to question if the representation of men as depicted in the magazine is not an idealisation but rather a neo-classical abstraction. In *MARCH 2018* and *JAN/FEB 2018*, where the original magazine recommends its readers to 'Build a brand new body in time for spring!' and to 'Get back in shape!', Twiney bleeds the man's eyes – his 'gaze' – into a barcode. Twiney's commentary on the commodification of the human

body tells of how the image supersedes what is within as understood by both the self and the other.

Lionel Bawden describes his use of text as a medium to arouse the emotions of viewers. *These Consuming Emotions* (2018) are paintings on cereal boxes where Bawden pairs phrases with colour to show how text – structural and relatively predetermined – and colour – impulsive and expressive in his use of it – transmit and evoke emotions. *These Consuming Emotions* meditates on the meeting point between language and instinct. By incorporating separate and seemingly unrelated modalities of expression, Bawden comments on the relationship between disparate aspects of the human condition. Bawden's work draws upon the poetic nature of everyday verbs and nouns that have a bearing on day-to-day interactions between people. It draws power from the human tendency to place meaning on the mundane, and brings attention to the fundamentality of the relationships that are built on and revolve around the exchange of words. Bawden's investigations into the potential of language for the construction and transmission of an image extends to himself. He aims to create a self-portrait that is composed entirely of words. His works embody the idea that definition and description of the most relevant entity, the self – without which no description would be possible – is only achievable through a most arbitrary system: language.

The practices of these four artists reveal an interplay between representation and abstraction and in doing so, explore the relation between the noumenal and phenomenal world and point to our potential for accessing truth through feeling, thought and perception. Their works critique the established conventions in art, consumerism, media, and the so-called mundane, challenging the audience to puzzle over novel ways to express existence.