



# THE 69TH BLAKE PRIZE

SATURDAY 2 MAY – SUNDAY 14 JUNE 2026



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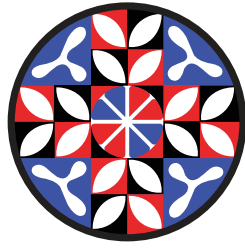
Published by Liverpool Powerhouse,  
April 2026

Cover image credit: Shireen Taweel,  
'Shoe Bathers', 2022. Installation shot  
at Liverpool Powerhouse, winner 68th  
Blake Prize. Photography: silversalt  
photography.

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



# THE 69TH BLAKE PRIZE

## INTRODUCTION

For 75 years, the Blake Prize has been a vital force in the Australian arts landscape. Established in 1951, the Blake Prize is a biennial prize exhibiting the works of artists and poets who explore religion and spirituality in contemporary life. The 69th Blake Prize features 33 artist and artist collectives, and 8 poets from across Australia.

Liverpool is proud to host this storied prize, especially within a community as spiritually diverse as ours. The Blake Prize offers an important platform for artists and poets to grapple with contemporary experiences of spirituality and religion through their chosen mediums.

For audiences, this provides a rare opportunity to step back, slow down, think deeply, and, through the work of artists and poets, complicate ideas that can otherwise feel like truisms around belief and spirituality. And because these kinds of conversations still remain taboo, what the Blake Prize offers is a space to encounter a range of perspectives and consider how these ideas are reflected across our communities.

The intention of the Blake Prize isn't to shock but to start conversations. While some works have historically provoked strong reactions, they remind us that discussing belief still matters, and that art can open those conversations in ways other spaces cannot.

Often, the strength of a work in this prize lies in its ability to prompt deeper reflection, to ask you to see from a perspective you may never have been positioned from before.

The 69th Blake Art Prize has been judged by an expert judging panel comprising visual artist Claudia Nicholson, writer and academic Associate Professor Chris Fleming, and First Nations curator Tess Allas. The 69th Blake will award the following prizes: the Blake Art Prize, the Blake Acquisitive Art Prize and the newly launched Blake Next Generation Scholarship. This scholarship provides a new opportunity for mentorship, curatorial support and financial assistance to an emerging artist to present their first institutional solo exhibition at Liverpool Powerhouse.

Once again Liverpool Powerhouse has partnered with WestWords, the Western Sydney Centre for Writing, to present the Blake Poetry Prize. The 2026 Poetry Prize has been judged by poet, essayist and novelist Kevin Brophy AM, poet and songwriter Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon and writer, musician and scientist and Coco X. Huang, winner of the 2024 Blake Poetry Prize.

The 69th Blake Prize also marks the return of the Blake People's Choice Art Prize, giving you, the audiences, the opportunity to have your say.

# ABOUT THE JUDGES

## 69TH BLAKE ART PRIZE JUDGES



**Claudia Nicholson**  
**Visual Artist**

Over the past decade, Nicholson's practice has examined her relationship to Colombia and, more broadly, the Latin American region, in an ongoing negotiation of geographic, cultural, and temporal distance. These interests constitute a material exploration of kinship, memory and the struggle against forgetting – in both conscious and unconscious terms. In 2023-2024, Nicholson was the artist in residence at the University of Technology, Sydney and undertook a research and development program culminating in a solo exhibition, 'If The Mountain Is Burning, Let It Burn' (2024). In 2022, she was commissioned by the Sydney Opera House to develop a new video work, 'The Deep Rivers Say It Slowly' for Shortwave Festival which was screened at AGNSW as part of Projections #16: Blood, fire, feathers: The films of Ana Mendieta, 2024. In 2020, she was commissioned by the NGA to develop Art Trail, an art interpretation resource for children. In 2019, she was commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art to light up the facade of the MCA for Vivid Sydney. Nicholson is a recipient of the NSW Emerging Visual Arts Fellowship (2017).



**Chris Fleming**  
**Associate Professor in Humanities at Western Sydney University**

Chris Fleming is an award-winning Australian writer, translator, and academic. He is the author or editor of ten books, including René Girard: Violence and Mimesis, Modern Conspiracy: The Importance of Being Paranoid, and the acclaimed memoir On Drugs (Giramondo). His essays, fiction, graphic work, and translations have appeared in publications such as HEAT, The Guardian, Overland, Artlink, Island, and The Los Angeles Review of Books. He is Associate Professor in Humanities and a member of the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University.



**Tess Allas**  
**Independent Curator**

Tess Allas is a visual arts curator, researcher, writer and artist specialising in contemporary Indigenous art. She has been engaged as a curator for the AGNSW, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, the Kluge Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection (USA), the Art Gallery of South Australia, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Wollongong Art Gallery, Murray Art Museum Albury, Carriageworks, the Museum of Sydney and currently at the Australian Museum. Her independently curated exhibitions as well as her own works as an artist have been shown in the Australia, Finland, France, Canada and the United States. Her visual art practice has included printmaking, ceramics and film.

# ABOUT THE JUDGES

## 2026 BLAKE POETRY PRIZE JUDGES



### **Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon**

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon is from Walyalup/Fremantle and spent over a decade living and working in the US, inspiring her recent collection on motherhood in the wake of the first Trump presidency, *If There Is a Butterfly That Drinks Tears* (Life Before Man/Gazebo Books). Her writing has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Australian Book Review* and alongside the US poet laureate Ada Limon in the anthology, *Dear Human*. She has won the Bruce Dawe and KSP Poetry Prizes; and has been shortlisted for the Peter Porter Poetry Prize. In 2024 she completed a PhD in Creative Writing on erasure poetry and forgotten histories. Currently, she teaches creative writing and ESL in university, college and private settings.



### **Kevin Brophy**

Kevin Brophy AM is a poet, essayist, and fiction writer. He is a past winner of the Calibre Prize for an outstanding essay, and the Michel Wright Prize for poetry. His fiction has been shortlisted for the Vogel Prize and the FAW Christina Stead award. He has been patron of the Melbourne Poets Union since 2004, managing publisher for Five Islands Press (2008-2020), and Director of the Five Islands Prize for a first book of poetry (2022-ongoing). He is an Emeritus Professor in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne. In 2021 he was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for services to creative writing and education. His latest book is the poetry collection, *An Inventory of Longing* (Whitmore Press, 2025). Martin Duwell, in *Australian Poetry Review*, has written of this book that, 'There is a good case for seeing Kevin Brophy as one of Australia's most humane poets.'



### **Coco X. Huang**

Coco X. Huang is a Chinese-Australian writer, musician and scientist. She primarily writes fiction and poetry and enjoys creating intermedia: interdisciplinary hybrid works that challenge and extend conventional forms. Her cross-disciplinary works recently won the 68th Blake Poetry Prize and the Youth Award of the Remagine Art Prize. She has also received a Faber Writing Academy Scholarship and Caruso Writing Residency at the KSP Writers' Centre and was shortlisted for the Booranga Prize for Prose and the Woollahra Digital Literary Prize for Poetry. She is a Toolkits: Digital Storytelling and Citizen Writes alumna and has performed at the National Young Writers' Festival, Boundless Festival, Sydney Festival and QPoetry! 2024. Her works have appeared in *Meanjin*, *Voiceworks*, *the Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cordite*, *Going Down Swinging*, *Meniscus*, *fourW* and elsewhere.

# LIST OF FINALISTS

## 69<sup>th</sup> Blake Art Prize

Akil Ahamat

Tarik Ahlip

Giles Alexander

Jiva Parthipan and Zanny Begg

Dagmar Cyrulla

Christine Dean

Tamara Dean

Paula do Prado

Emma Fielden

Todd Fuller

Phillip George

Croydon Wharéc

Morgan Hogg

Drew Connor Holland

Emily Hunt

Delia Juburri

Cameron Kawurlkku

Pā'utu-'O-Vava'u-Lahi, Adriana Māhanga Lear

Dr Kirsten Garner Lyttle

Enoch Mailangi

Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello OAM

Vedika Rampal

Caroline Rothwell

Lauri Smith

Nicola Smith

EJ Son

Ali Tahayori

Tony Tran

Murat Urlali

Bugai Whyoulter

Prita Tina Yeganeh

Sary Zananiri

Collective including: Gaius Wapi, Pius Wasi, Joachim Mamambi, and David Bridie, with video artist K. Deverell and the many cultural artists from Changriman Village, Chambri Lakes.

# LIST OF FINALISTS

## 2026 Blake Poetry Prize

Allison Browning

Vuong Pham

Adrienne Eberhard

Freshta Nawabi

Kathryn Reese

Omar Sakr

Terri Slanovits

Chen Wang

# PRIZES

## **The Blake Prize**

**\$35,000 • Non-Acquisitive**

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

## **The Blake Poetry Prize**

**\$5,000 • Non-Acquisitive**

The Blake Poetry Prize challenges contemporary poets of disparate styles to explore the spiritual and religious in a new work of 100 lines or less. The Blake Poetry Prize is strictly non-sectarian. The entries are not restricted to works related to any faith or any artistic style, but all poems entered must have a recognisable religious or spiritual integrity and demonstrate high degrees of artistic and conceptual proficiency.

## **The Blake Acquisitive Art Prize**

**\$10,000 • Acquisitive**

The Blake Acquisitive Art Prize is an acquisitive art prize of \$10,000 with the winning artist's entry becoming part of the Liverpool City Council Art Collection. This prize is an open prize which is open to all entrants of the Blake Prize. Acquisitive means that the artwork automatically enters into the Liverpool City Council Art Collection.

## **The Blake Next Generation Scholarship**

**\$5,000 • Non-Acquisitive**

The Blake Next Generation Scholarship is awarded to an artist in the early stages of their professional practice who has not yet had a solo exhibition in an institutional setting. This prize supports the development of an artist's practice and the presentation of a debut solo exhibition during the December 2027 – March 2028 exhibition block.

## **The Blake People's Choice Art Prize**

**\$2,000 • Non-Acquisitive**

The Blake People's Choice Art Prize will be awarded to the artwork with the highest votes by visitors to the exhibition. The winning artist will receive \$2000. The winning voter will receive a voucher for Bellbird Restaurant at Liverpool Powerhouse.

**THE 69TH  
BLAKE PRIZE**



**FINALISTS**

## Extinguishing Hope

2025

Asynchronous Multichannel AV Installation (2 Channel Video, 2 Channel Stereo Parabolic Sound, 4 Channel Mono Sound).

Courtesy the artist.

.....  
*Extinguishing Hope* is an AV installation centred on a snail and I in conversation.

The installation comprises two video channels featuring the same scene in multiple variations, two parabolic speakers that reproduce the intimate dialogue and a soundscape that evokes the party scene that lies outside of the frame.

The work uses the motif of darkness to represent our age that is producing an excess of information, both data and emotional, that is increasingly impossible to make sense of. The conversation revolves around us trying to make sense of our setting at the edge of a party. In the ensuing exchanges and misunderstandings about the night, the fire, celebrations and screaming, we arrive at fundamental "fictions" that can carry us through uncertainty: promises, miracles, visions and hope.

The work was driven by research focussed on Islamic literature and philosophy, particularly a manuscript of Kidung Rumeksa Ing Wengi (Song guarding in the night), scribed by a Javanese exile in Sri Lanka - the same exile that my ancestors experienced. This talismanic text calls for protection from that which might harm us in the dark and takes on greater poignancy in the exilic darkness of its scribe's context.



## **On Her Return (Facial Burns and a Garland of Flowers)**

2024-5

Plaster, pigment and sand.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

This work centres the questions of how to make work while collectively witnessing an ever unfolding, annihilating violence, and indeed, how to even address this violence. These questions remained unresolved both within the work and in the process of its making.

This work was made on my return to Australia from a period living in Turkey and Lebanon during the later half of 2024. This piece is part of a body of work made during this period that uses historical reproductions as a means of addressing the very real possibilities of cultural and physical loss.

This work is derived from reproductions drawn from historical and archival sources, and composed according to a perennial theme of religious art: persecution. While this theme in religious art is traditionally attended by the promise of beatification, this work locates religious aesthetics within a profane politic and seeks to locate its potency in addressing real questions of justice.



## Nothing Compares to Thee

2025

Handmade rabbit skin glue, gesso, bole, water gilded 24 karat gold leaf and oil paint on birch panel in the trecento Sieneese manner + handmade water gilded 24 karat gold leaf frame.

Courtesy the artist and MARS Gallery.

.....

My practice investigates how the devotional aesthetics of 14th-century Sieneese painting can illuminate forms of spiritual communion within music culture. My PhD research proposes that for many in a secular age, music occupies the space once held by organised religion: a site of ritual, transcendence and collective meaning-making. The public grieving that follows the death of a musical icon operates as a modern eulogy, while the light, sound and spectacle of stadium concerts echo the sensorial choreography of medieval mass — each designed to induce awe and bind communities together.

Drawing on Dr Graeme Lawson's *Sound Tracks* and its archaeology of music as ritual, my work explores how shared and personal musical memories shape contemporary forms of spirituality. This artwork traces the public spiritual evolution of Sinéad O'Connor and intertwines it with a personal family memory to consider how music moves us across time, culture and experience, becoming a source of solace and connection.

The reverse panels reference the grisaille outer doors of medieval altarpieces, offering an abstract cosmology grounded in *Musica Universalis*, the ancient concept of planetary harmony. Concentric monochrome forms evoking vinyl grooves, musical notation and orbital paths, proposing a contemporary devotional object where sound, memory and the sacred converge.



# Jiva Parthipan and Zanny Begg

## **Pakiboy<sup>2</sup>**

2025

Two-channel video work with sound.

Courtesy the artists.

.....

Pakiboy<sup>2</sup> is a two-channel film installation comprising documentation of an original dance work created by Jiva Parthipan, London 2000, alongside a re-staging, in which the artist dances with his younger self, Sydney 2025.

The original 'Pakiboy' performance explored themes such as coming out to family, Jiva's Hindu identity, desire and being comfortable in one's own skin. Pakiboy<sup>2</sup>, conceived in collaboration with Zanny Begg returns to this original performance over twenty years later to re-explore these themes while also addressing Jiva's degenerative neurological condition, Parkinson's Disease, and the aging body.

Pakiboy<sup>2</sup> explores what it means to be human and how we can find strength and joy in our bodies as they age, transform, degenerate and transcend. As Jiva dances with his younger self, re-performing everyday rituals, such as having a cup of tea, and inventing new movements and dances, his body shakes with disease but also commands with presence, revealing what is lost as we age - but also what is gained.

Jiva died shortly after making this work, it is presented by Zanny in his memory.



# Dagmar Cyrulla

## Prayer

2025

Oil on board, plastic and goldleaf.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

When my father passed away a few years ago, I gravitated back to prayer. The comfort of knowing there is something greater than me, it allowed me to believe that maybe my dad was in heaven having a beer. This painting addresses my journey back to prayer. I have placed the young girl signifying innocence in the centre of a collage of toy soldiers.

The soldiers represent the worst in us, they are covered up in gold leaf like so much of the bad things in the world are hidden. Perhaps if we pray and improve ourselves, we will become more tolerant, and the senseless wars will end throughout the world. The act of praying is not just about asking for things from a higher being, but a reflection on our own actions and a hope for the future.



# Christine Dean

## Reincarnation

2025

Oil on canvas.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

What is the relationship between art history, appropriation and reincarnation? This painting represents the work of four artists who have passed away, all of whom I knew personally and whose work I admire. The artists are Vernon Treweweke, John White, Sidney Ball and Wendy Paramor. All four artists exhibited in The Field exhibition in 1968, and fragments of their work have been combined in this composite painting. The appropriated works are Treweweke's 'Ultrascope', White's 'Broken Marriage', Balls' 'Transoxiana' and Paramor's 'Luke'. The design of the work depicts the cycles of birth, life, creativity and death.



## Metamorphosis #1

2025

Archival inkjet photographic print on cotton rag paper.

Courtesy the artist and Michael Reid - Sydney + Berlin.

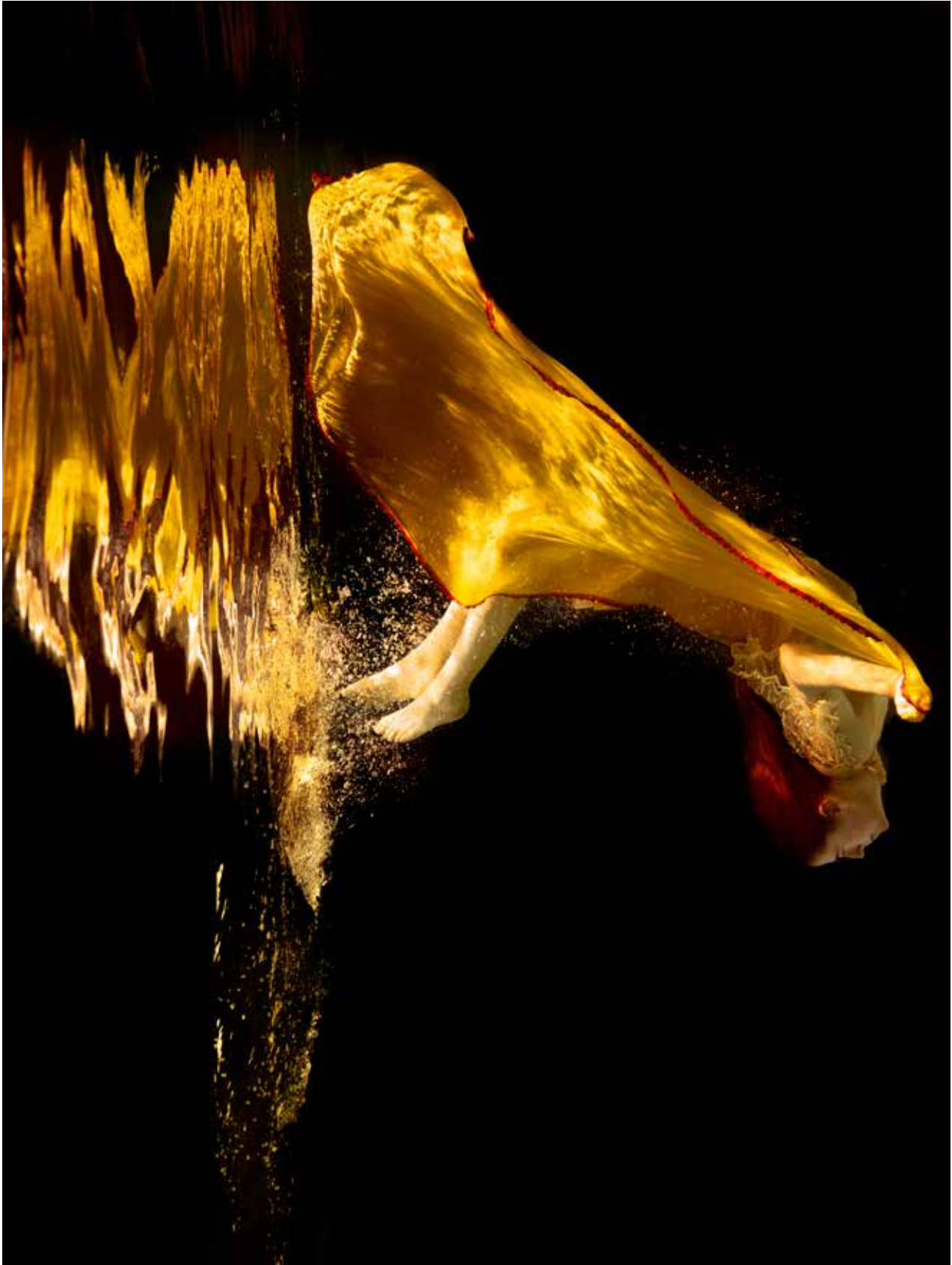
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Descending from a Jewish mother and born in Australia in the 1970s, I was raised within a mix of Jewish and Christian traditions. Yet as I came of age, my spirituality shifted away from doctrines of an omnipresent God toward a reverence for the natural world. It is within nature in its cycles of growth and decay, in the universal seeking of light and warmth of the sun that I find divinity and purpose.

The miraculous reality of existing as a sentient being remains a source of awe. My spiritual inquiry lies at the edges of consciousness: Where do we come from? Where do we go? What exists beyond the limits of human perception?

I have long wrestled with the terror of non-existence, a dread that has led me to explore metaphysics and philosophy as pathways toward acceptance. The teachings of Tibetan Buddhist master Tulku Lobsang offer solace: "Life is just one day. Yesterday is already dead, tomorrow is not yet born. What you have is today."

This work arises from that meditation on impermanence, likening our brief encounter with awareness to a flower: luminous, transient, and eventually cast to the wind. Here, I have used myself as the model.



# Paula do Prado

## Betum

2025

Crocheted acrylic, wool and cotton yarn, wire, fabric, glass beads.

Courtesy the artist.

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Betum is a Charrúa word representing the number four, a symbolic number within Charrúa spiritual cosmology. Made with my ancestral guides and the spirits of the lands, Betum is a love dedication to the elements and the four directions. Located at the crossroads, Betum represents multiple intersecting narratives connected to my West African, Charrúa and Iberian ancestral lineages. Stylized frogs and a chameleon reference both asterisms and personal themes of adaptability, transformation and the gift of shapeshifting. Unflinchingly feminine, sensual textures hint at reproductive organs and cellular process that also double as natural structures reminiscent of fungi and aquatic snails. Contrasting with these organic forms, geometric outlines brown/red wool echo petroglyphs and rock art from Chamangá, in the northern part of Uruguay. Betum is born of a creative outburst of frogspawn and mycelial blooms sprouting umbilical connections. The work is handmade using both readily accessible and fine art and craft materials. Multiple techniques are layered within the work: crocheted and coiled paper covered wire, tapestry, knotting, wrapping, cobbling and beadwork. The laborious process of weaving together various visual references, materials and beadwork are an act of venerating the spirits and ancestors.



# Emma Fielden

## From Breath

2024

Silverpoint on canvas, sound, video (performance documentation).

Courtesy the artist.

.....

*From Breath* is a performative silverpoint drawing that centres breath as a shared, life-giving force. The work is enacted with a giant handmade silver flute. The flute is a stylus: as I play it, the silver at its tip wears down against a square field of black canvas laid on the floor, leaving shimmering silverpoint lines and resonant sound. Each line is the trace of a breath exhaled through the flute, accumulating as I circle the canvas in an act of ritual repetition and durational presence. Breath, sound, movement and material gradually become inseparable — a gentle, devotional act of being, listening and voice.

The work draws on a lineage of breath passed to me through my mother, a classically trained singer, who taught me how the voice begins deep in the body. This inheritance is not doctrinal but embodied — a form of belief held in muscle memory, diaphragm and pulse. Breath becomes invocation: an ongoing, durational act calling the self into being.

*From Breath* reflects how spirituality may reside in the intimate and everyday act of sustaining life and the voice — each breath, both wholly my own and part of something larger, ancient and communal.



# Todd Fuller

## Dear Christians

2025

Digital video, chalk, charcoal, ink and acrylic animation on paper.

Courtesy the artist and .M Contemporary. Commissioned by Gosford Regional Art Gallery. With thanks to Rod Bower Composition: Ryley Gillen.

.....

This panoramic video was commissioned by Gosford Regional Gallery, who invited me to tell the story of a local Gosford identity. The work explores the radical power of allyship, language, and public witness. It centres on the experiences of The Venerable Canon Rod Bower of Gosford Anglican Church, a figure known for his bold use of a street sign and social media as tools for radical social change. Drawing from an oral history interview I conducted with Father Bower, the animation reflects on how his outspoken advocacy for LGBTIQ rights has resonated far beyond the church pews of Gosford.



## Swimming to Hades

Video.

Courtesy the artist and Gallery Australia.



Country as religion: sunken ancient cities, discernable debris of past lives, past societies, past cultures, past civilisations, past histories, past religions. It is a moirologi, an emotionally charged vocal corpus of mournful lament for the dead. Performed by Greek professional mourners or wailers, overwhelmingly women, the origins of the intangible cultural tradition of moiologia can be traced back to the pre-classical Greek-speaking world of Homeric poetry and Greek tragedy choruses. Stories are caressingly interweaved within passionate, harmonious wailing, a vocalised vehicle ferrying the deceased's spirit to their fate beyond those still living. A ritualised dirge, a performance, a narration of emotional loss and pain through separation linking the living and the dead, past and present, personal and collective faith, to the eternity of the observably unknown and the unknowable. Engaging with the artist's aesthetic vision is not simply a process by looking from without, but also from within. The cyclical ebb and flow of civilisations, as a manifest of humankind's lived experiences and mortality, is being referenced – their observable physical residue limited essentially to architectural meanderings entombed within a vast gravesite of coastal water as memento mori for the present.



## Crucifixion Days; VIII, II, V

2025

Found objects, crucifixes, lace, television, recorded audio.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

*Crucifixion Days* explores the complex and layered nature of personal religious experience, intertwining themes of mortality, intimacy, and spiritual reflection. The central piece (VIII), a flayed, cross-like carcass of a chair draped with a lace curtain partially revealing the figure of Christ, embodies the quiet vulnerability and private devotion that characterise individual encounters with faith. The gleaming image of Christ is superimposed over panning footage of whale bones on a black and white screen (II), as an evocative soundscape compiled of a religious sermon recorded on the streets of Sydney hints at the omnipresence of faith and the diverse ways it manifests in everyday life. The third piece (V), a chrome and gold crucifix sheltered within a metal ribcage, serves as a fragile shrine as commemoration to the primal and ancient skeletal makeup that connects human and animal mortality.



# Morgan Hogg

## Silver Tongues

2025

Courtesy the artist. Commissioned by Sydney Opera House for the Shortwave Program, enabled by The Skrzyński Foundation and Sydney Opera House New Work Now donors and produced by Blacktown Arts with support from Create NSW.

.....

*Silver Tongues* delves into the Avaiki (the underworld) of the Momokē. The Momokē are water people, innocent at heart but follow the instruction of Miru (the Goddess of the underworld). Momokē lures the souls of those who are almost ready to leave the 'enua (the land) and enter into the next life.

This work weaves together Cook Island Ura and spiritual storytelling to tell the darker mythology of the Pacific, seeing the lines between the afterlife and our living.

\*This is one story of the Momokē, there are a variety, with Ati and the Momokē being the most common.



# Drew Connor Holland

## excerpts (hand)

2025

Synthetic polymer, toner, watercolour, graphite, oil, archival varnish on used bedsheets.

Courtesy the artist and Nasha Gallery.

.....

Truthfully this work is a forgery: modern detritus (in this case, stained sheets, scrap stationery, leftover craft materials) are forged into something antique, appearing cut from a canvas. The surface is labored and distressed; faux-dirtied and cracked to create the illusion of age and generational care. Much like most forged relics (the Veil of Veronica comes to mind) it asks where value resides: in the object itself, or in the sense of time and tenderness we project onto things that appear old, worn, and cherished.

This image is drawn from a tight crop of Titian's 'Penitent Magdalene,' removing the surrounding Memento Mori, her crying eyes darting to God, and her solitary mise-en-scene. I printed, transferred, and eroded the image into layers of my grandmother's old bedsheets while caring for her in Forster. I have found myself anxious that, in her state of neurological decline, I won't remember a sense of her younger liveliness after the oncoming dirge. I have tried to make recollections simpler: holding her hand, for example. Here, all that remains here is the universal tenderness of the comforting anxiousness of wrapping your arms around your chest as you brace for the world to change.



## Homunculus trance Nevill Drury (1947–2013)

2025

Calico, glazed ceramic, gold lustre, wood, nylon string, synthetic wig, found textiles, glasses and bronze.

Courtesy the artist and Sim Smith London.

.....

Nevill Drury (1947–2013) was a significant Australian writer, academic, and teacher of esoteric knowledge. In *Homunculus Trance*, I tease out the uncanny qualities of marionettes—their eerie, human-like appearance and movements that have the power to unsettle us. My marionettes are principally influenced by the homunculus found in medieval alchemical literature, a miniature figure brought to life by magic. The puppet act as liminal medium, bridging the worlds of the living and the dead, allowing me to conduct conversations about their lives, magical practices, and visionary experiences.

Nevill Drury wrote over 60 books on esotericism, spirituality, visionary experience, myth, and symbolism. His biography of the artist Rosaleen Norton, titled 'Pan's Daughter,' was instrumental in keeping her legacy alive as both an artist and a practitioner of magic. The marionette of Nevill I created was made as a devotional object, to honour a life dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and to remember his work as a school teacher and bookseller, both very worthy pursuits in life.



## Mimih Spirit

2025

Cottonwood (Bombas Ceiba) with Ochre Pigment and PVA Fixative.

Courtesy the artist and Maningrida Arts & Culture.

.....

The Mimih spirit sits within a complex pedagogical and religious body of knowledge which links Kuninjku people to their distinctive escarpment homelands. Mimih are tall and slender beings, believed to be so thin that they can leave their spirit realm and enter the world of humans by slipping through the cracks in the rocks found in the Arnhem escarpment. They can be incredibly fragile and timid, so much so that even a slight breeze can break their necks, and only emerge at night or on windless days to hunt. As Mimih are said to hold similar kinship systems, languages, and social structures as Aboriginal people, they are believed to have taught the first people everything about survival in Stone Country. They are said to have taught Kuninjku people many of their characteristic ways of cooking, dividing game, hunting, dancing and ceremony. They also created much of the region's early rock art.



# Cameron Kawurlkku

## Djomi

2025

Stringybark (Eucalyptus Tetradonta) with Ochre Pigment and PVA Fixative.

Courtesy the artist and Maningrida Arts & Culture.

.....

Djomi is a freshwater spring surrounded by jungle at the mouth of the Liverpool River in West Arnhem Land. It is a major sacred site with extensive mythological significance for the Kunibidji people. Small streams from the Djomi site carry fresh water into the mouth of the Liverpool River. In many paintings of Djomi these streams are shown and it is believed that all watercourses in the Maningrida district are controlled by the power of the Djomi sacred site.

Djomi is also the mermaid-like water spirit that live in the freshwater spring. They are associated with djabayena, the sawfish, and sometimes are depicted as the sawfish itself or as a woman with the sawfish's tail. Djomi is a powerful fertility symbol, known for their ability to give others babies. The Djomi's influence is so strong that women believe they can easily conceive after visiting the Djomi's stream. The design of the Djomi story also reflects its connection to the natural world, depicting freshwater lily leaves and seaweed from the base of the sea floor, symbolising the interconnectedness between land, water, and the Djomi spirit.



# Pā'utu-'O-Vava'u-Lahi, Adriana Māhanga Lear

## Fafangu 'ae fangufangu—Awakening the fangufangu

2024

Two photographic banners (canvas, chiffon, bamboo) with 4-speaker soundscape (fangufangu [Tongan bamboo nose-flute]).

Courtesy the artist.

.....  
*Fafangu 'ae fangufangu 're-awakens' the Tongan fangufangu (nose-flute), a vaka (vehicle/conduit) to Pulotu (ancestral homeland/afterworld), which was banned and re-named ongo tēvolo (sound of the devil) by European Christian missionaries in the 19th century.*

The banners restage 'Double pirogue des Îles des Amis' (1817) — one of only three visual records of early fangufangu playing, all of which feature female performers. The canoe, like the fangufangu, is made from bamboo. Together, these vaka and the artist's body (as a Tongan queer, genderfluid woman) call back to Hikule'o — the originator of the fangufangu and Tonga's highest-ranking, female and genderfluid 'otua (deity) — and her earthly vaka, the sikotā (Pacific Kingfisher).

The soundscape features replicated frequencies of four 1800s fangufangu currently 'sleeping' in museum collections. Each replicated fangufangu is heard through its own speaker. Sounded together, these create 244 four-part combinations, which subverts the four-part harmonic structure of European hymns — a musical form with which the fangufangu, and Indigenous Tongan songs, were forcibly replaced.

At the centre point of the speaker configuration, the listener can hear each fangufangu at equal volume. Together, the speaker configuration and bamboo frames construct a Tongan burial site that is activāted (designative of Tongan relationality) by the audience—as a hearing/feeling body in space.



# Dr Kirsten Garner Lyttle

## Te raranga i te awa (Weaving the River)

2025

Five handwoven photographic Māori kete (baskets), archival inkjet prints (Ilford Galerie Smooth Pearl 310gsm), one phototex printed wallpaper, two wall-mounted acrylic vitrines, three custom black acrylic plinths with opal acrylic tops, three clear acrylic vitrines, internal LED lighting modules, wall hardware, floor hardware.

Courtesy the artist. Te raranga i te awa (Weaving the River) was supported by Creative Australia through the Arts Projects for Individuals and Groups program. Developed and first exhibited in EXCHANGE: ngunggilanha · yunggama · taonga tauhokohoko, curated by Dr Kimba Thompson and Catherine Hunt, Blak Dot Gallery, 2025.

.....

*Te raranga i te awa (Weaving the River)* grows from a question that anchors my practice: How do I use a camera when it has been used as a colonial weapon against my people? Early photographs of waterways in Aotearoa (New Zealand) framed rivers and coastlines as property to be claimed. My work challenges this by returning photography to whakapapa (genealogy) and by recognising images as living participants in the relationships that connect people to Place.

In the Māori world, rivers are tūpuna (Ancestors) who hold memory, history and mauri (life force). Guided by cultural consultation and protocols, I approached these Ancestral waters as relatives and collaborators, recognising their agency and presence. This reflects a belief that care for land and water is inseparable from care for community.

Once printed, I slice and hand-weave the photographs into kete (baskets) using customary Māori techniques. I choose the kete because it is a vessel for carrying food, knowledge and memory. The kete are displayed with a large seascape of Kāwhia; the final landing place of the Tainui waka (canoe). This display echoes museum presentation while critiquing how Indigenous Ancestral Belongings are often isolated behind glass and removed from community touch and presence.



# Enoch Mailangi

## A sudden light from heaven on a road to the Damascus

2025

Two-channel video.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

This performance documentation challenges decolonial assumptions that embracing introduced faith constitutes a betrayal of Indigenous sovereignty, whereby I restory my grief through doctrinal narratology of violence and the media's industrial production of it, performing to Mormon aesthetics and the digital landscape of visualised witnessing.

The site is my childhood church, revisited initially during a funeral after a decade, later documenting to the aftermath of a close family member's publicised death.

Two textual schemas unfold across the sacred sites interior/exterior. Outside, I testimony Paul The Apostle blinding from divine sudden light on the road to Damascus, as I blind my van by removing its headlights and repurpose them inside. Inside, intermittent hazard-like flashes reference teenage Prophet Joseph Smith's first vision by light, deconstructing dramaturgy to materialise the belief systems that give Mormon doctrine its depth, tracking my own embodied memory.

As documented recordings of a hymn from the service play, the lights to each other present the current veil lifted between interior private loss and exterior global suffering.

I performed this during a profound negotiation with the world and faith, whilst the invasive public spectacle of death, a familiar reality to us mob and migrants, is experienced in light and repetition.



# Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello OAM

## Painted Desert Continuous Creation Story

2024

Hot blown glass.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

Sacred songlines extend through the Painted Desert from the traditional lands of the Antakirinja Matuntjara Yankunytjatjara people into my Grandmother's traditional country, Irrwanyere Arrernte Imarnt /Lower Southern Arrernte, in the far north of South Australia. It's vibrantly coloured pop-ups and flat tops are visible from Hookeys Waterhole on the Nappamurra near Oodnadatta where my father was born. These hot blown glass Rainbow Serpent Eggs reference the simultaneous presence of past, present and future which defines the traditional Aboriginal concept of continuous creation, and which mirror the continuously changing landscape of the Painted Desert from an inland sea more than 80 million years ago. This continuum is mirrored in the repeating sequences of melting, layering, marvering and heating in the making process in the hotshop, so multiple overlays of mineral oxides and molten glass replicate the land markings and features of the *Painted Desert*. These places are spirit, sacred life, source, being. They are creation and continuum, they are story without end, the earth their living library. Tjukurrpa.



## inscription against inscription

2025

Digital print hand-transferred onto copper, two-channel video projection, sound.  
Courtesy the artist and Dominik Mersch Gallery.

.....

Vedika Rampal's interdisciplinary practice draws on inherited memories, archival research, and imagined histories to interrogate colonial frameworks and imperial legacies. *inscription against inscription* was developed in response to recurring visits to Hampi in Karnataka, India, an ancient site comprised entirely of temple ruins that have eluded the plunders of colonisation. The installation incorporates two sheets of unfixed copper marked with hand-transferred digital prints, suspended in parallel to form an intimate passageway. On the copper's exterior surfaces, a continuously looped video depicts Nandi, the bull guardian of the Hindu God Shiva, sitting steadfast amid the flowing Tungabhadra River. Unlike artefacts extracted and displaced to Western institutions, the remnants of Hampi remain in situ, weathering over time. Rampal treats copper as a temporal surface that resists preservation, bearing the ghostly traces of previous work. Within this process of circulation, once fragmented imagery of the Ajanta Caves comes to resemble Indic script. Subverting Western museological practices, Rampal proposes a process of re-inscription that unsettles linear time and fixed meaning.



# Caroline Rothwell

## **New Angel (*Caladenia actensis*)**

2025

Polished bronze, paint, lacquer, composite material.

Courtesy the artist and Ames Yavuz.

.....  
*New Angel (Caladenia actensis)* is a sculpture that reflects on a tiny critically endangered spider orchid, *Caladenia actensis*. It is a chimeric sculpture that unites plant, human and circulatory systems, looking to a spirituality and economy based on complex biodiversity.

Stories of medicinal plants and circulatory systems, interspecies connection, care and trickery are present in the work which makes monumental a tiny foundational endangered species from a soft sculptural casting process and recognises that plants and humanity travel side by side.

The spider orchid, *Caladenia actensis* is a unique Australian species whose flower evolved to mimic the look and scent of a female thynnid wasp. This attracts courting males who are tricked into cross-pollinating the next orchid flower they visit.



## **Dawn's Visitors**

2024

Sculpture: silicone, hair, gold, resin, glass.

Courtesy the artist and Traffic Jam Galleries.

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*Dawn's Visitors* delves deeply into the complex relationship between our conscious existence and the realms of dreams and visions. The work serves as a bridge, connecting the tangible, physical world to the ethereal and unseen, highlighting the subtle and often invisible threads that bind these two dimensions together.

This piece is a unique fusion of surrealism and hyperrealism, seamlessly blending elements from both artistic movements. Through this approach, it investigates the profound spiritual ties linking our subconscious mind to the world of dreams, inviting viewers to reflect on the mysteries and connections found within their own inner landscapes.

The creation of *Dawn's Visitors* is entirely handmade, involving a meticulous and multi-step process. It begins with the initial inspiration, which is first captured in pastel sketches. This is followed by sculpting the forms in clay, after which rubber moulds are made to capture every detail. The next stages involve casting the sculptures in silicone and resin, bringing the figures to life with airbrushing, hand painting, and the intricate technique of hair punching. Each piece is finished with careful attention to detail, ensuring that every element contributes to the overall vision and emotional resonance of the work.



## The beginning of spring III

2025

Watercolour on cotton paper, framed.

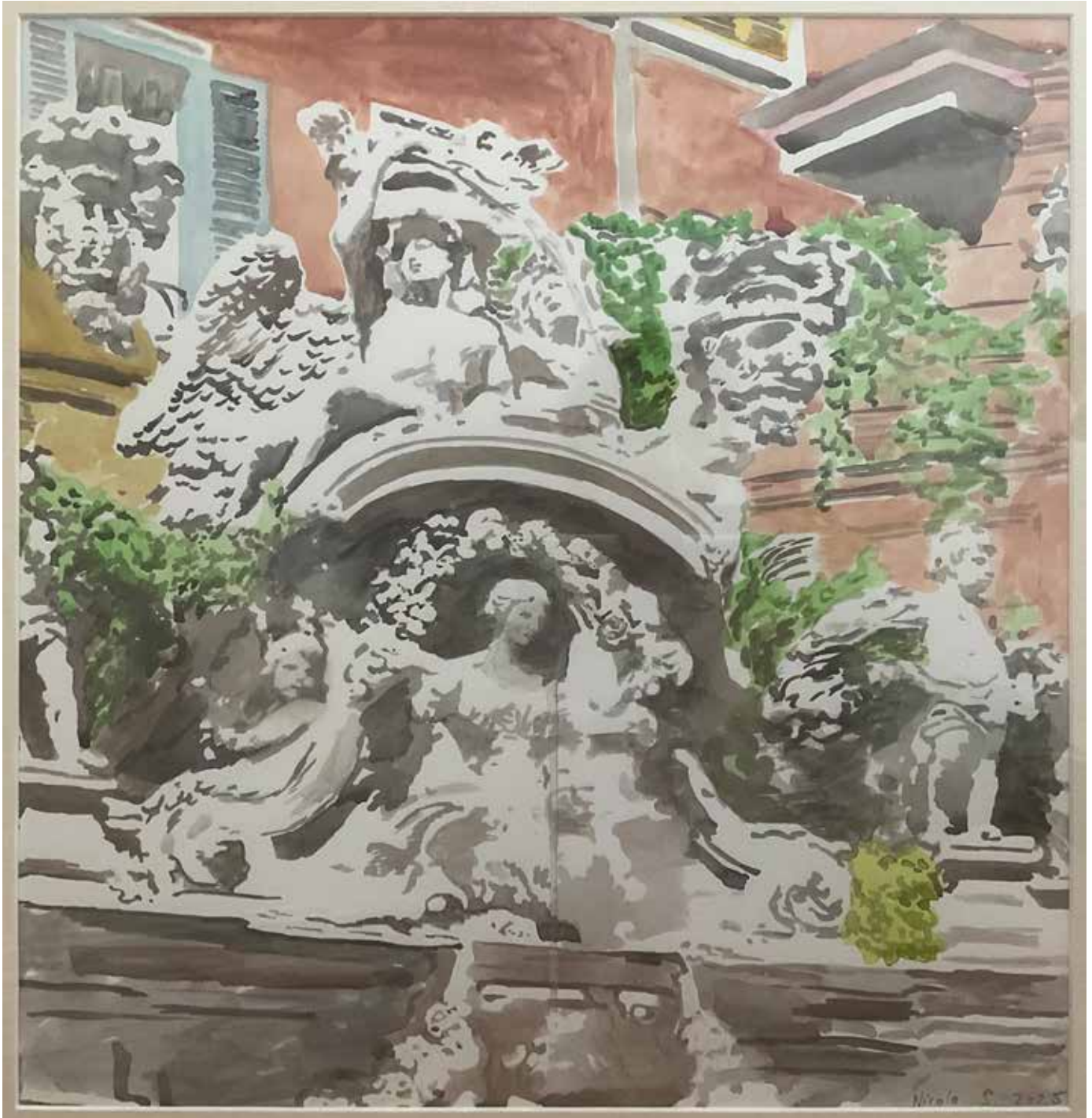
Courtesy the artist.

.....

The cobblestones were wet and it was getting dark. It was the beginning of spring and Antonio was carrying a blue balloon along Corso del Rinascimento in Rome. At Libreria Serendipity I bought a book called 'Roma: Le Fontane,' by Bruno Brizzi, published by Casa Editrice Colombo in 1972. I made this painting looking to a black and white photograph from its pages. The photograph captures a detail of the nymphaeum in the Palazzo Borghese garden — a detail of the pediment of 'Venus at her Bath,' a baroque fountain by Carlo Rainaldi and Giovanni Paolo Schor, with climbing plants.

I made watercolour after watercolour, embracing the medium's famous relationship with chance. I paint and as time stands still it becomes an act of devotion. I think about Rome, her fountains, the Catholic Church, and the depiction of the goddess Venus over the centuries. The art of the seventeenth century saw a high-drama marriage of Classical mythology and Christian imagery.

I put in the climbing plants last. The greenness of life fed them by the sun and the fountain's constant water.



## **Nodding Buddha**

2025

Wood, solar powered buddha.

Courtesy the artist.

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*Nodding Buddha* is a kinetic installation animated by light. When illuminated, the figures begin to nod; in darkness, they remain still. Each motion is slightly out of sync, producing a subtle wave that forms as you watch. The rhythmic ticking of their movement echoes clocks, grounding viewers in the passage of time while also creating a sense of uncanny intimacy.

The Buddhas' gestures feel both tender and absurd, validating whatever thoughts the viewer brings while also unsettling them with sheer repetition and scale. By animating spiritual icons with mechanical precision, the work explores how ritual, belief, and attention intersect in contemporary life. The nods offer comfort, provoke reflection, and invite us to consider the human tendency to seek connection, affirmation, and rhythm, even in automated forms.



## queers were here before they arrived

2025

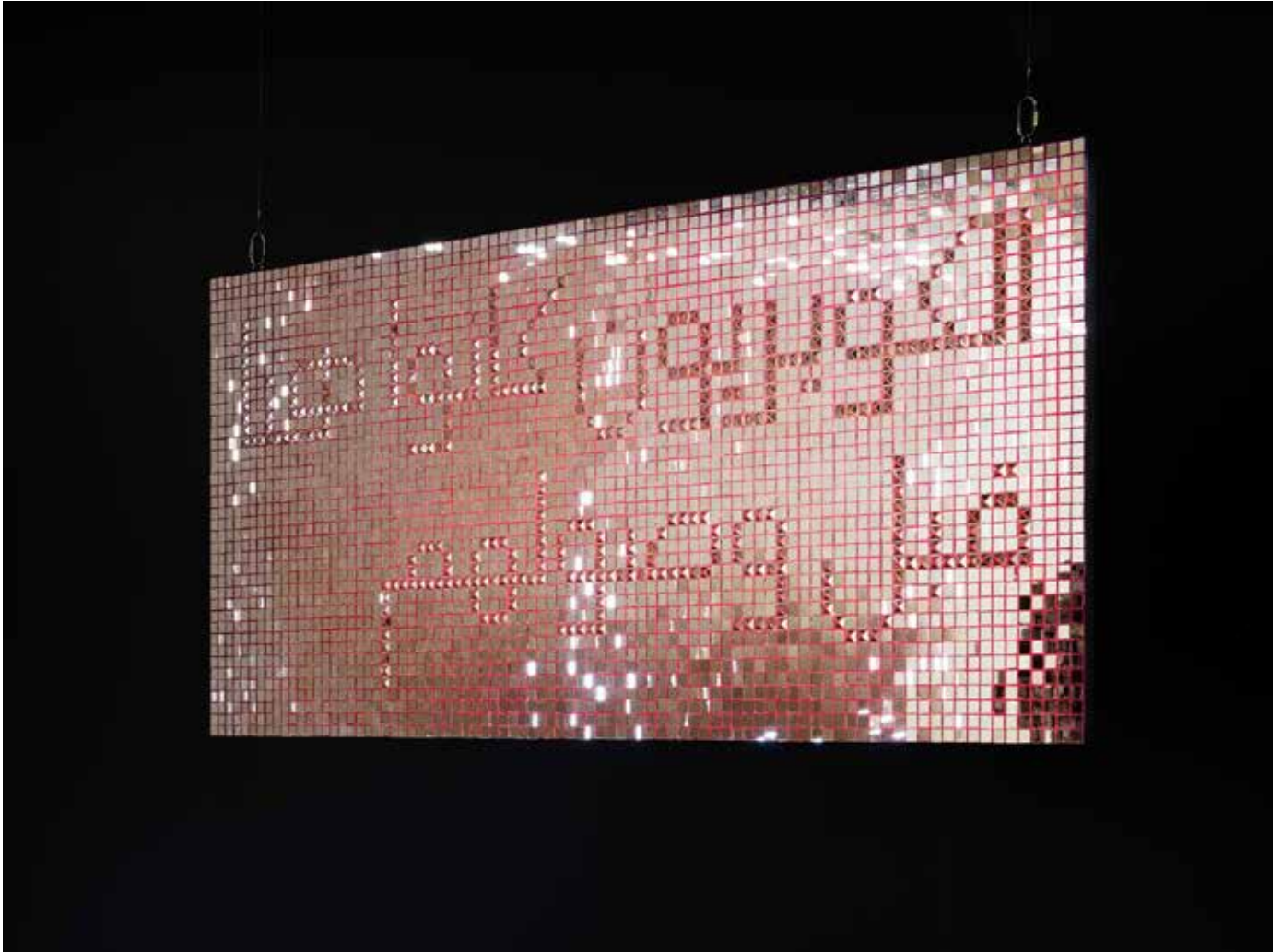
Hand-cut mirrors, pink grout, silicone, aluminium di bond. Courtesy the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY.

.....

A constellation of mirrored fragments forms a phrase in Arabic, the language of the holy Qur'an, that reads, "Queers were here before they arrived." The text shimmers between legibility and abstraction, between what is seen and what is reflected back. The mirror becomes both a surface of encounter and a site of refusal - a place where language, light, and gaze intertwine.

The work gestures toward the persistent denial of queer existence in certain geographies, and the ongoing tendency to frame queerness as a Western construct. Against such narratives, the piece insists that queerness has always existed-rooted in bodies, relationships, and intimacies that transcend borders, religions, and empires.

The work draws on the traditional Iranian craft of Āine-Kāri, historically used to adorn the interiors of sacred spaces such as mosques and mausoleums. In this context, the craft is reimagined through a queer and contemporary lens, allowing its devotional origins to resonate in new and unexpected ways, while also taking on renewed urgency following the 2026 attacks in Iran that have damaged historic Āine-Kāri sites in cities such as Isfahan and Tehran.



## Ornaobscurum-Reficio

2025

UV-cured resin, Stone-cast gypsum, Ceramic, Acrylic and lacquer paints, Metallic finishes.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

*Ornaobscurum-Reficio* is a reimagined altar-like sculpture exploring how spiritual meaning can be assembled when inherited cosmologies feel fragmented. At its centre stands a polycephalic, multi-limbed figure being part-angelic, part-hybrid chimera emerging from intricate architectural ornament. Shell-like, floral, and geometric motifs evoke sacred archetypes across cultural lineages, yet the figure resists belonging to any singular tradition. This ambiguity reflects my diasporic identity, born into an immigrant Vietnamese family within a predominantly Western environment, where belief arrived in dispersed fragments rather than a coherent narrative, requiring assembling meaning across cultures and traditions.

Digitally sculpted from scratch, 3D-printed, segmented, and reassembled by hand in stone-cast gypsum, ceramic, and painted finishes, the work treats digital processes as integral to its meaning. Modelling, dividing, and reconstructing the figure parallels negotiating identity through scattered cultural memories and technologically mediated making. Gold accents and muted greys evoke relics that feel sacred yet untethered from time.

Through its shrine-like presence, *Ornaobscurum-Reficio* reflects on how ritualised objects might hold significance when traditional structures of belief feel uncertain. Rather than asserting a universal claim, it remains a personal relic serving as a self-mythologising artifact forged by longing, hybridity, and the quiet hope that something reverent can emerge through reconstruction.



## Lamentation

2025

Gold acrylic piping paste, gold leaf, shell gold, rhinestones, watercolour on cardboard.

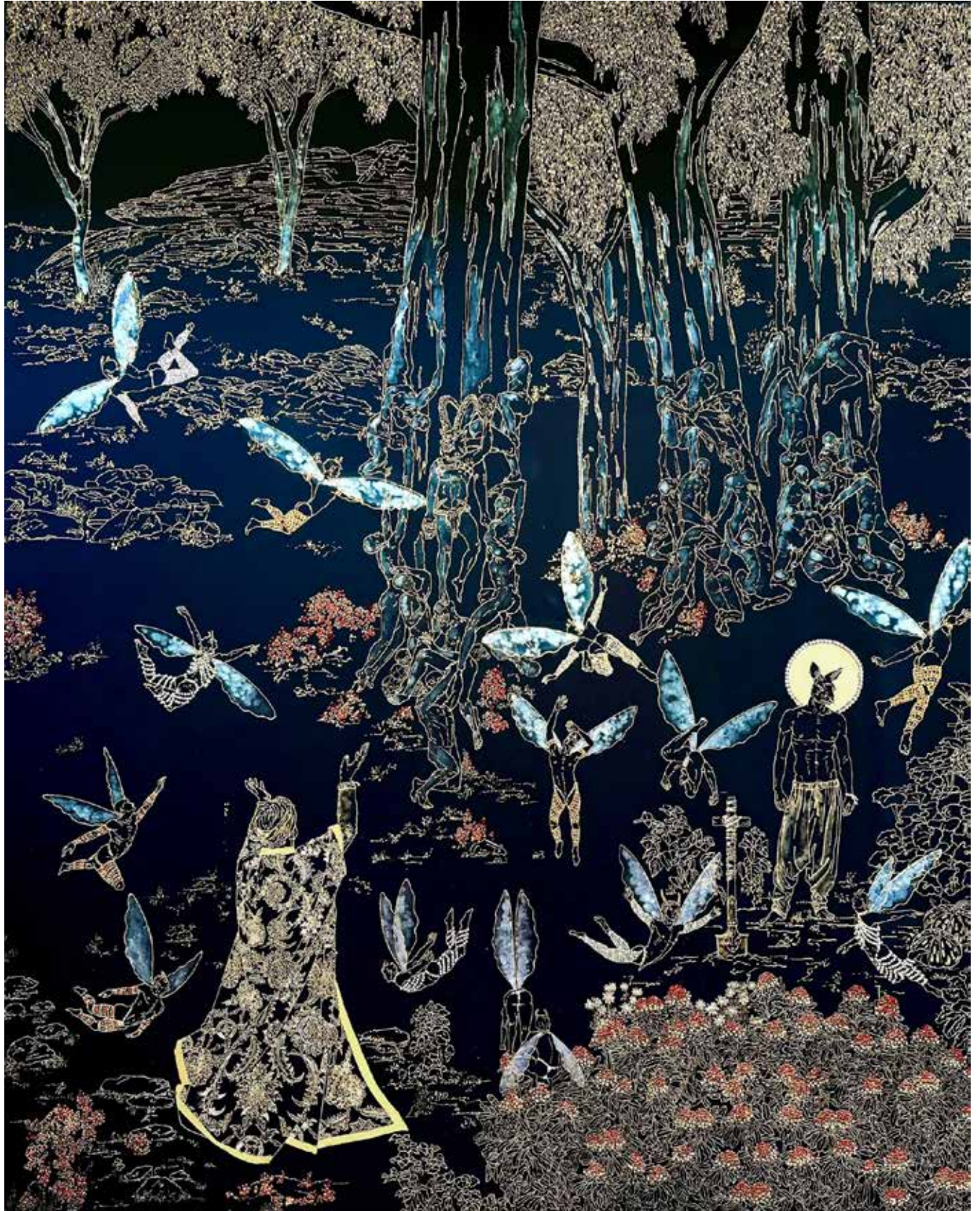
Courtesy the artist.

.....

*Lamentation* invites viewers into a profound journey through the artist's inner world, a rich tapestry woven from diverse spiritual traditions and set against the iconic Australian landscape. This work is a visual dialogue, professionally presented, that explores the convergence of profound personal history and universal spiritual yearning.

Through intricate golden lines against a stark background, the piece orchestrates a compelling collision of Judeo-Christian and Islamic symbols and narratives with the raw, elemental energy of Turkic Shamanism. Figures reminiscent of angels or dervishes, alongside a haloed, messianic individual, seem to dance and ascend amidst a distinctly Australian arboreal setting – the haunting forms of ghost trees, those ethereal, sentinel figures of our environment that stand as silent witnesses. The rich detailing and contrasting tones illustrate how deep cultural heritages seek connection and find new resonance within a contemporary, multicultural environment.

*Lamentation* is a sincere and accessible exploration of shared human experience — a contemplative space where sorrow and spiritual quest intertwine. It beautifully posits the Australian environment as a unique crucible, allowing seemingly disparate faiths to meet, lament, coexist, and discover profound mutual illumination. This piece stands as a testament to the enduring human search for meaning across cultures and landscapes.



# Bugai Whyoulter

## Wantili (Warntili, Canning Stock Route Well 25)

2024

Acrylic on Linen

Courtesy the artist.

.....

Wantili is an incredibly important site, 'where the creation started.' (Cyril Whyoulter). In this creation story, the world was initially dark, and people were like rocks, with no arms or legs. Following the sun's first rising, life-forms become increasingly complex while particular features in the land are created. Beyond these details much of the Jukurrpa narrative relating to Wantili is ngurlu (sacred, taboo), and only for Martu, but the site is open, and anyone can go there.

Wantili lies within Bugai's ngurra (home Country). As described in her account, Wantili was one of the sites she knew intimately and travelled extensively with her family and other family groups during the pujiman period. At this time, Martu would traverse very large distances annually, moving seasonally from water source to water source, and hunting and gathering bush tucker as they went. Knowledge of water sources was critical for survival, and today Martu Country is still defined in terms of the location and type of water. Each of the hundreds of claypans, rockholes, waterholes, soaks and springs found in the Martu desert homelands is known by name, location, quality and seasonal availability through real life experience and the recounting of Jukurrpa (Dreaming) narratives.



# Prita Tina Yeganeh

## My Soil Farsh: Iteration 1 (The Ritual of Gathering)

2024

45kgs of hand-ground red-loamy clay soil, imprinted with 30 3D printed traditional motif-stamps, laid on a plastic mat.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

For artist Prita Tina Yeganeh, belonging is rebuilt through ritualised gathering—an embodied method remembered through *My Soil Farsh (Iteration 1)*, in which the farsh (a Persian carpet and ancient relational ground) is reactivated.

Over nine months, the artist invited strangers to sit together on the farsh. Through repetition, this simple act evolved into ritual. Within its physical borders, a threshold emerged between outer and inner worlds: breathing slowed, attention turned inward, and a sense of rest took hold.

In Persian Sufism, this state is known as Hāl (حال)—a transient condition of heightened presence and intimacy felt in the heart and consciousness. On the farsh, however, ritualised gathering gave rise to a shared Hāl (حال) between strangers, through which belonging was both formed and felt.

This experience is recorded through farsh storytelling—an ancient visual language embedded in Persian carpets—translated into thirty 3D-printed motif stamps, hand-imprinted over 30 hours in symmetrical repeating patterns that trace the gatherings. The red clay soil—hand-ground over 175 hours and sourced from the artist’s home in Queensland—echoes that of her Iranian homeland, forming a material bridge of belonging between landscapes.



## Crossing seas and following stars

2025

Australian green lip abalone inlaid into iridised plexiglass, collected crucifixes made in Palestine (1820s-1980s), collected cushion covers made in Palestine for Australian soldiers (1940s), table with grid lines.

Courtesy the artist.

.....

*Crossing seas and following stars* traces how belief and cultural identity travel across time and geographies. It centres the interpretive labour of Palestinian women who embroidered Australian flags on souvenir cushions addressing Australian soldiers during World War II. Their drifting Southern Cross constellations an act of cultural translation where spiritual belief and political relations negotiate new iconographies.

This logic of reinterpretation expands through new constellations inlaid with Australian abalone on plexiglass and the array of Palestinian-made mother-of-pearl crucifixes, which form the installation's core. For centuries, Bethlehem's mother-of-pearl carvers positioned themselves at the epicentre of a global devotional economy; today, an industry endangered by political restrictions and economic precarity. Gathering crucifixes made between the 1820s and 1980s, the installation charts both distance and proximity.

Conflating the Star of Bethlehem with the Australian Federation Star, the work rekindles historic trades between Palestine and the Asia-Pacific, proposing alternative visions of modernity shaped by Palestinian hands.

Suspended between the earthly and the celestial, it renegotiates cartographies of belief—spiritual, national and cultural. Stars, grids, and travelling objects become points of orientation to illuminate the agency of Palestinian modernity. Belief emerges not as static doctrine, but as a lived experience and circulating practice of cultural resilience.



# Gaius Wapi, Pius Wasi, Joachim Mamambi, and David Bridie, with video artist K. Deverell and the many cultural artists from Changriman Village, Chambri Lakes

## Sayes Arare

2025

Courtesy the artists. Supported by: Creative Australia, Creative Victoria, Arts Tasmania.

.....

My name is Gaius Wapi.

I live in Kirimbit village on the Chambri Lakes in the Middle Sepik region of PNG.

I would like to introduce you to our Art Installation. Sayes Arares is a unique sound and belief, sacred ground music connecting the environment with the spirit world.

It brings reflection on village life and family. These are ancestral songs about day to day living, spirit stories, laws, morality and customs.

Our work has been made by the Sayes Arares musicians and dancers in conjunction with long-time collaborator David Bridie, and a committee of elders including Joachim Mamambi, Michael Suat, Antonia Kowate, Emil Wablasu, Brian Guano, Helen Warambemag. Video artist, K. Verell, filmed the reenactments and other footage.

Sayes Arare connects the everyday and the spirit world. It's a style of bamboo flute playing that originates from the village of Yambe Yambe. It began with a dispute over the killing of the pig, Wa Gwa Sok Os.

This installation preserves our songs, language and dances.

We want to share it with you and the world. We want to preserve this practice for our future generations and for other people learn about and respect our cultural practice.

Wapok Wapok.



# **THE 2026 BLAKE POETRY PRIZE**



## **FINALISTS**

# Allison Browning

## There's No Such Thing as Astrology\* (Or: The last Trump / Odious Joy)

There may have been once. Astrology (if it were to exist) is binary. You are assigned a single sign at birth. Celestial bodies should be assigned. (Other assignments are fake.) Celestial bodies are innate. You must rise, burn, and set in a single sign only. No Leo rising now. Pisces moon later? *Phffff*. Tides are a liberal hoax. Maintain focus on Mars *of which the Moon is part*<sup>1</sup>. Normative science exists. Prescription cures while description makes masses think. Free thought is <redacted>. Streamline (rockets). Reduce bureaucracy<sup>2</sup>. About normative thinking. A story about. A narrative. Once upon a time there ought to be. Long ago, there existed descriptive ethics. In a land far away... Now: Descriptive ethics. *I have the best words*<sup>3</sup>. *I have no—I don't want pronouns*<sup>4</sup>. *Pronouns*. <redacted> are performance art for the easily offended. Sort of like, what am I doing?<sup>5</sup> No multiplicity. Multiplicity. <redacted> challenges the idea of a fixed, singular identity. *No collusion*<sup>6</sup>. *Collusion*. No <redacted>. When a they and them love each other, love does not exist for them. Their existence is endnoted. ✕<sup>7</sup>. <Behind a wall> they're there (but not their). Like Pisces memes, voter fraud. Stargate: pizza in the basement<sup>8</sup>. Tiresias is grooming your children. Bathrooms/Bullets. We worry about bathrooms. Bullets (of no concern/do not concern you). When words are real and someone doesn't like them, they are fake. They themselves are fake news. Every time someone uses 'they' or 'them' or 'their' a bald eagle cries and the Constitution bursts into flames. Planets refuse to orbit, hurtling comets into Congress. Non-binary = <a formatting error>. *When the Regime commanded the unlawful books to be burned*<sup>9</sup>... Inter <redacted> uality. //

//Protein genome. <You are a> non coding region<sup>10</sup>. Deadname Crab Nebula<sup>11</sup>. Ban the zodiac. Clip the wingspan of truth. Curtail (and fail). Affirm what is affirmative. Legislate the stars. Oh, vanguard! Reconfigure language, labels, solar systems. Defund (defend science). Defence! Critical <redacted> theory. We claim<sup>12</sup> fake. Claim celestial. Trans/cendent. Trans/lucent. Trans/Atlantic. Erasure? (Whoda thunk it?) Ascension baby. It's getting hot in here. Oh emperor, where are your golden arches?<sup>13</sup> How smoke curls. How water shapeshifts. How steam ascends.

No cowering animal to your redaction.

Hot. Beautiful. Oh Saturn, how we come around again,

make <redacted> great again, again,

return.

How we rise.

\*Astrology holds a unique place in queer communities for culturally resonant reasons—emotional, social, historical and political. While traditional institutions have often excluded or harmed queer people, astrology has offered fluid archetypes and affirmed multiplicity. Historically, it has offered an alternative spirituality for those rejected by churches or families. During the AIDS crisis many turned to esoteric systems as ways of finding meaning, community and resilience in the face of institutional abandonment.

1 Donald Trump tweet criticising NASA, in which he states the moon is part of Mars. June 8th 2019.

2 During the Trump administration, terms such as 'feminism,' 'intersex,' 'transgender,' and 'descriptive ethics' were removed from federal research funding calls and official documents under the guise of 'reducing bureaucracy' and 'streamlining.' This limited study and discussion of gender diversity, sexuality, and social equity, effectively reshaping what topics were considered legitimate for government-supported research.

3 Donald Trump, Campaign rally. 30 Dec 2015.

4 Donald Trump interviewed by Fox News presenter Laura Ingraham. 30 July 2024.

5 Donald Trump. Campaign rally. 8 December 2015.

6 Donald Trump in conversation with Fox News' correspondent John Roberts in which Trump repeats 'no collusion' seven times in a single answer. 10 January 2018.

7 Under the Trump administration, the X gender marker on U.S. passports was removed, erasing recognition of non-binary identities at the federal level.

8 Alludes to the debunked far-right 'Pizzagate' conspiracy theory, which falsely claimed Hillary Clinton and other Democrats were running a child sex-trafficking ring out of a D.C. pizzeria. Though not directly endorsed by Donald Trump, it was

widely amplified by conspiracy theorists and far-right figures within his political circles.

9 From Bertolt Brecht's poem 'The Burning of the Books'

10 Many non-coding regions of a protein genome have no known function. Non coding regions were historically considered 'junk DNA'.

11 The Crab Nebula is the radiant echo of a supernova first seen in 1054 CE—a luminous tangle of ionised gas and dust still drifting outward from the collapsed heart of a long-dead star. What remains is a striking, expansive form shaped by the force of having become something else entirely.

12 Historically, the queer community has reclaimed slurs (including 'queer', 'dyke' and 'fag') once used to harm, transforming them into symbols of identity, resistance, and empowerment.

13 The 'golden arches' have been used in media as a metaphor for Trump's garish costume of spectacle and self-promotion, evoking superficiality, mass-marketing, and the commodification of politics.

# Vuong Pham

## Father

Through childhood eyes, I watch my father labouring  
in the garage. Shadows grow restless, making out of  
workmanship  
a kingdom. He lifts a welder, and sparks flare onto a car

engine that starts to burr. Flashes form into warm coins  
of light across his eyes. And the engine rumbles like a  
dragon's  
breath. I want to assist, but the younger shadow of myself  
resists,

retreats to a quiet nook where I can watch my father weld  
strength out of fire. I see the shape of dragons across the  
walls.  
Ancient fire, I witness my heritage in it: falling

temples, forgotten tabernacles, candles abandoned at  
the altar,  
left to splutter shadows, villagers fleeing the bombing of  
Đà Lạt,  
one thousand degrees of napalm fire; farther into his  
eyes,

street dogs gnawing charred bones of townsfolk, homes  
alight,  
ossuaries of their own skeletons, Hội An lanterns that  
belonged  
to all and no one, godwits drinking the same blood-

sunset stream, as if heaven was a concept beyond them;  
boat engine ablaze in the exodus, and the ocean turned  
into the glinting eyes of all the drowned, but then the  
dawn

ignited, making a glowing ember of the compass he used  
to lead  
refugees to safety; the shores of another country shining  
like a phoenix at its birth. Ancient fire, as if the garage

was a dragon's den. He welds hour after hour  
in the oppressive heat. Night arrives. He pauses.  
Remembers another time when 're-education' began

with gunfire. Only one shot to the heart, because bullets  
were more  
valuable than people. Here, I fuss about the summer  
weather,  
and watch him from this side of the windowpane,

where I didn't want to turn on the air-con, for the heat  
was making a chalice of his body. I see Nebuchadnezzar's  
fire  
where saints emerge uncharred in the furnace. "Father?"  
I ask.

This is not a question, yet the garage answers in fire and  
iron,  
as if it'd understand the sort of homecoming that  
emerges  
from the rubble. I see how strength is forged in the  
exhaust

of engines, bolts, and welds, of how he works endlessly  
to get the money to send me to an independent school  
so I can learn about a man—a God who sacrificed  
everything

to give me something. Stars flashback thousands of years  
ago.  
And on the ridgeline of his bent back, stoic shadows rise  
with the strength of a dragon if ever I sobbed or reached  
out.

# Adrienne Eberhard

## Ten Blessings of Upper Blessington

*Ben Lomond*

1. Cold hunts in these hills  
with its companion  
the wind singing  
liturgies, swirling  
capes of grey that drape  
low to cast shadows  
trailing wet fingers  
like a hymn
2. Water trails and seeps  
from under scree  
clear, sweet taste an  
annunciation  
a clean pouring  
over edges, spill of  
veils that tinkle in  
confession
3. Scree tinkles and shores  
the mountain's vast flanks  
in piles, mounds, lichen-  
encrusted, black-flecked  
into skink sun-bask  
flattened map for moth  
stone-hearths like pews to  
congregate
4. Grasslands are hearths, cram  
of emeralds in  
bright velvet blankets  
that wrap the earth and  
catch the sun's cloud-dance  
constant hide-and-seek  
rills of water snake  
rosaries
5. Trees snake and snare boulders  
roots the talon-grip  
of eagle, splay-toed  
stance of emu  
so weathered, leathered  
their contours are riven  
deep, etched and flensed, grey-  
guardians
6. Moss flenses and lofts  
bright badge of colour  
forging from dark earth  
to saturated  
veridian spread  
a spongy-sinking  
and glowing hover  
miracle
7. Tadpoles hover-dart  
round, black, lozenges  
silent jet beads on  
a rosary slipping  
and shimmying a  
tail-less future  
freeing feet and legs  
a prayer
8. Woolly tea tree frees  
its soft curls and shakes  
in a green shimmer  
grove of pale light  
trunks leaning like necks  
grazing, a grail  
of blossom under  
immense sky
9. Moth quivers blossom  
spreading wings on rock  
to blend with moss, rust-  
red, mustard-yellow  
black velvet bolster  
embroidered and stained  
like cathedral glass  
soft sung praise
10. Ponds reflect cathedrals  
of sky, limpid eyes  
shallow yet swollen  
with everything  
cloud, stone, root, leaf, fonts  
of holy water  
ready for blessing  
anoint us

# Freshta Nawabi

## Jigar in a Jar

I.

My Baba shared a Tiktok with me the other day  
of some potbellied man with a beard  
deep voice on repeat,  
declaring birthdays are paganistic  
and lit candles hide shaytaan's face.

Eyes bright, I thought of Allah floating up on Al-Kursi,  
a massive air bubble with a mouth  
condemning me to Jahanam amidst a chorus of party horns.  
I swiped off the app and left Baba on read.

II.

What would h(H)e think of you and me?  
The answer thunders across the sky, streams into my mouth.  
I spit it back out and an oak tree emerges from the black soil at my feet,  
brown branches twisting into the silhouettes of my maternal Khalas.  
Eyes bright, the sisters wail and rip out wet chunks of leaves  
from under their windswept hijabs.  
It's me, me, it's all my fault. La'anat ba shaytaan!  
La'anat ba man.

III.

A crinkled receipt hides in the back pocket of my bootcut jeans,  
recording our last trip to Auburn Botanic Gardens.  
We watched a stream of orange and silver Koi carp  
rush by like they had somewhere to be.  
Mouth to mouth, we exchanged breath in the fauna reserve,  
blaze-eyed emus branding the space between my shoulders  
Nonna's silver crucifix trembling at the base of your neck.

Fin.

The last remnants of our *thing* – whatever it was –  
lie curdled over a gutter on Burnett Street.  
Eyes bright, I light a Dusk candle in its memory.  
I burn the year-old receipt over grapefruit-scented flame,  
wax bleeding like my jigar in a jar.

# Kathryn Reese

## Post vespers

*After MG.*

If prayer persists, it's primitive reflex.    Reflux.    A regurgitation.

If prayer persists it's because solutions do sometimes fall from the sky—NaCl, acid rain—  
your breath might still slow their descent.

If prayer persists, it's a rare species of frog burrowed in your throat,  
surviving both drought and saturation.

It's just the tongue's instinct for preservation.    A language  
is lost every fourteen days.    You fast forty days.  
Prayer is counting the words that dry on your desert lips.

If prayer persists—it's a moment of being held, suspended, swung before immersion in the river.  
Your cousin's hand at your wrist. This is not exactly safe.

If prayer persists it's a gasp for air as you swim up from sweat-drenched bedclothes,  
nightmare—or love—stuck in your neck.

If prayer persists it's only echoes of the incantation whispered when your head was  
white with vernix and your legs meconium green.    That magic spell:  
you're beautiful,  
you're mine,  
you're divine.

If your prayer persists it means you aspirated during baptism, and all the red wine spilt on  
your white shirt since cannot wash it down.

If prayer persists it's a snatch of a song. An ear-worm.  
Some parasitic fluke boring holes in your heart.

Or it means you swallowed a watermelon seed and now  
a vine winds itself through your hepatic portal vein.

Or it's just reverberation of fatty acids metabolised by microflora  
blooming along your gut, activating a nervous hyper-sensitivity  
to phytoestrogens. You're not a girl anymore. Take this  
square of dark chocolate and this fist full of earth.  
you're beautiful, you're dirt, you're divine.

## Ode to Prednisone

Before the diagnosis, the slow bleaching of colour, he ate little. It's autism, or the picky eating that runs in the family, or the curse of a body estranged from country, and his diet was as white as his skin, milk and yoghurt mostly, crackers and candy. How we prayed, we bribed, we screamed for him to eat an animal, or vegetable, to stuff him full of all the food we never got in childhood, to finally rid ourselves of this endless hunger. We did not suspect cancer—nobody ever does—invisible killer in his blood, cells in a slow and futile war with each other. Is this the destiny of any settler in bed with a blakfulla? Love is not enough, God, we need poison, we need a treaty, we need land back, we need time travel, we need & need & need—and someone said prayer has to be more than taking, not knowing that I'm prostrate for reversal, I'm rejection personified, I'm saying take it back, back, back—Mum's belt, the raised rent, the crown stamped on coins, the colony festering in our bones, the cure and disease burning my dwindling son. They have him on prednisone now, a steroid, and I watch his flesh roll back on, an extra chin, his face a risen moon as he eats & eats & eats, and I weep. Each day he demands a pizza, butter chicken, zataar, he feasts like a baby on death row, and I cook what I can, then order a fat bankruptcy, and the delivery men grunt and sweat on bikes to and from our house, to and from the hospital, reluctant agents of reprieve, purveyors of cheese. I wonder if they know that they peddle miracles, that the cheap brown bag, the receipt, the grease, the cost, all of it is an answer to a desperate prayer. I should not be glib with grace, I know I should leave a tip, five stars, it's an hour to midnight after all and no one wants to be here; what's left to us in the age of precarity is this currency, the sudden cessation of urgency, the timer reaching the end, the glad note, the exclamation of an early arrival, the barest brush of fingers as we take and take what each of us has to give.

## Aftermath

My skin is dry again this morning. Not from time alone, but from the long winter of chemotherapy— the medicine that scoured me clean, left my palate tasting of salt and metal, left my head bare where long blonde hair once sang in the wind of younger years.

Radiation maps its quiet geometry across my chest now, a new kind of pilgrimage, one I never asked for but walk anyway, one tentative step at a time.

I smooth moisturiser beneath my eyes, as if blessing myself back into a body I am still learning to recognize. Once, I believed myself untouchable— drinking gin with tonic too sweet, driving the Triumph too fast through the National Park, eucalyptus rising like incense around me. Life was a hymn then. The ribbon loose, the light generous.

But the ribbon has tightened. Illness does that— so does grief.

My son and his children have lived with me ten years now, ever since their mother slipped from this world with a sorrow none of us could reach. By luck or by the grace of God, I picked them up that day. I no longer pretend to know why but forever thankful the children were spared.

When police attended, to lift her down, hidden behind cushions on the lounge; two more nooses were found. Child size perfectly formed – ready. My faith trembles when I think of it. But still, it stands.

Now, my grandson is turning sixteen. I love him with the fierce ache of someone who has seen too much darkness and still chooses light. Yet he retreats from the world, folding himself into his room where blue glow replaces sunlight.

He shares that room with a serpent— his silent, nocturnal companion. One creature driven by instinct, the other by wounds he cannot name. Both curling inward, both waiting for a warmth they barely believe in.

I tell him gaming is like life— too much escape and the soul thins. He tells me it is the only place he finds meaning within, where his mind aligns and reality loosens its grip. *“Gaming isn’t a hobby, Nan. It’s my sanctuary. I game, therefore I am.”*

And behind him the serpent lifts its ancient head, as if remembering the old stories— how shedding can mean renewal, how darkness can be a cocoon, how even in the deepest night something sacred waits.

I wonder then if we are all shedding something: my hair, my certainty, his childhood, his fear, our family’s grief— skins we must outgrow to stay alive.

Illness has tested my faith. Loss has questioned it. But love— love keeps mending it one thin thread at a time.

So, I knock softly on his door, holding hope like a candle in a trembling hand. There is light here still— fragile, stubborn, divine. It finds us even when we forget how to look.

And I whisper, *“Come out, my darling. There is a world waiting. We can face it together.”*

## The Woman Who Refused the Kingdom of Forgetting

**I** She folds her prayer scarf as if sealing a doorway.  
A knot.  
A boundary.  
A soft, ancestral command to keep the soul from  
wandering.  
The nurse watches, confused.  
They do not know the scarf is older than the hospital,  
older than the country,  
older than the word patient itself.

**II** The lights hum their sterile psalms.  
False angels.  
Thin and white as lies.  
The doctor asks where it hurts.  
She touches the centre of her chest -  
the cracked temple where her son last placed his breath.  
They mark it as localised pain.  
They do not write:  
Here lives the earthquake. Here lives the prophet.

**III** They hand her pills the colour of distant moons.  
She turns them over like omens.  
She knows medicine can quiet a body  
but it has never learned how to cradle a story.  
Forgiveness, she thinks,  
cannot come in doses.

**IV** The night the men came,  
her tasbih burst like a starfruit splitting.  
Beads scattered toward every direction of the compass.  
She wears the remaining ones on her wrist -  
thirty-one small planets still orbiting her grief.  
The doctor calls them "worry beads."  
She lets the insult fall.  
Even a broken universe is still a universe.

**V** The heart monitor draws green mountains.  
Unclimbable.  
Holy.  
She watches the trembling peaks  
and thinks:  
My faith has this shape.  
A nurse murmurs that her rhythm is irregular.  
She smiles.  
The earth is irregular.  
So is survival.

**VI** At night, her son returns in the rustling sheets.  
A boy made of wind.  
A shadow with warm hands.  
He stands at the border  
where the antiseptic begins.  
He will not cross.  
He has always known  
which spaces refuse the dead.

**VII** When they ask what she believes,  
she answers slowly:  
in light brave enough to find closed eyes,  
in warm tea at the end of long mourning,  
in the stubborn generosity of breath.  
The interpreter shrinks it to:  
She is stable.  
She says nothing.  
Some mistranslations  
are too violent to correct.

**VIII** She swallows the pill.  
Not to forget.  
Not to obey.  
But to bless the body  
that keeps insisting on its own sunrise.  
The pill dissolves like a minor god -  
losing form,  
gaining meaning.  
The doctor thinks she is resting.  
She is praying.

**IX** Morning rises, patient and golden.  
It touches her wrist,  
the place where one bead is missing -  
that bright, perfect absence.  
She lifts her face.  
I will heal, she whispers,  
but not in the language you measure.

**X** The automatic doors sigh open  
as if relieved  
to release her back into the open world.  
She steps through.  
The air greets her without condition.  
Her shadow lengthens behind her -  
half woman,  
half myth,  
wholly witnessed.  
For the first time, she feels the sky lean down  
as if finally understanding  
what the hospital never could.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## **Catalogue originally published for the exhibition:**

69th Blake Prize, 2026

Publisher: Liverpool Powerhouse

Catalogue Design: Liverpool City Council

## **Liverpool Powerhouse Team**

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## **Acknowledgement of Country:**

Liverpool City Council and Liverpool Powerhouse are situated on the land of the Dharug and Dharawal peoples, the traditional custodians of this land.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that this land was also accessed by peoples of the Cabrogal Clan and other clans of the Dharug Nation.

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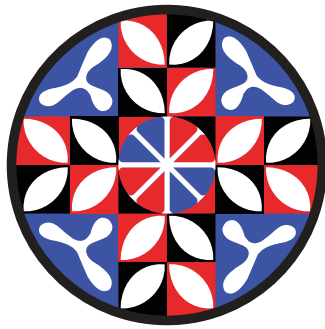
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