

National Works on Paper 2022 Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery

Since the 2020 National Works on Paper (NWOP) exhibition, we have witnessed a time of great political, humanitarian, economic and ecological upheaval. The 2022 exhibition sees the work of seventy-eight finalists coalesce in an incisive expression of this moment from the quotidian to the universal. Reaching and roving across far-ranging histories, cultures, conceptual ideas, materiality and geographies, this selection of works shares not only distinction in the paper medium, but collective resonant themes of transformation and relationality.



Left: Lucienne Rickard, *Fold* 2021, graphite on paper, 150 x 150 cm Right: Emma Fielden, *Confluence* 2020, ink on paper, 28 x 60 cm

Paper has memory. Traces of its history live within its fibres and form part of its narrative. Impressions are revealed in visible, tactile, aural and olfactory ways, engaging our senses as it imparts the stories written in its skin. Lucienne Rickard and Emma Fielden use processes of change to elucidate their ideas. In *Fold*, Rickard crouched on the floor of her studio, labouring with a large-scale sheet of paper for an eight-hour duration. Rickard felt the experience in her body for days afterwards, with an aching back, sore thumbs, dry skin, and a bruised heel-of-palm[1]. *Fold* is a record of experience – the paper has transcended its smooth, pristine beginnings to capture an expression of endurance in a beautiful humming architecture, where networks of linear geometrics undulate, shadows shift, and edges are softly worn. In her work *Confluence*, Fielden captures the after-effects of mutually transforming materials by placing two blank sheets of paper side by side and pouring ink onto them. As the ink dries, the materials interact, shifting and shaping as they alter each other irrevocably.

Several artists in this year's exhibition investigate the inherent nature of paper as they purpose it in three-dimensional forms, including Sherna Teperson in a paper construction and Ngilan Margaret Dodd in a woven work. Teperson's piece *Air* (breathing spell) focuses quiet attention on slowing down. A network of diminished octahedrons cluster like molecules, the building blocks of material phenomena – a cloud, interior spaces of the body, frog spawn. The palette and repetition of pattern slow the eye and invite contemplation. Ngilan Margaret Dodd is a Tjanpi Desert Weaver living in the Mimili Community on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY Lands). In her work *ngayuku walka* (my mark) Dodd preserves *milpatjunanyi*[2], the making of marks in the sand to tell stories. With the wire she used as a girl to draw, Dodd has shaped the marks of story, around which she has woven paper to create a series of textural gestures. The artist states: 'I've come around full circle, using paper and wire to hold my stories for the grandchildren, for everyone to see my drawings and song.'[3]



Left: Sherna Teperson, *Air (breathing spell)* 2021, 300gsm watercolour paper, PVA, air, pine, screen-board, varnish, 162 x 63 cm.
 Right: Kent Morris, *Barkindji Blue Sky - Ancestral Connections #9* 2020, giclée print on paper, 160 x 110 cm

Paper is synonymous with record keeping and documentation. In their respective practices Robert Fielding and Glennys Briggs source material from institutional archives to examine memories and histories of colonisation. In AIM, Robert Fielding, of Western Arrernte and Yankunytjatjara descent, appropriates the format of Australian Inland Mission (AIM) posters that were published by the Christian Church in the mid-1900s. By referencing these posters, Fielding investigates the role of paper in the state and institutional deracination of Aboriginal people. Fielding's father was taken from his family on the APY Lands in the mid-1900s. The artist says: 'This work is a process of unlocking his story, of restoring traumas and truths of the past and repairing the present.'^[4] Glennys Briggs is a Taungwurrung-Yorta Yorta woman and multi-disciplinary artist. In her collagraph titled *WHY* an historic photograph is reproduced, depicting a group of Aboriginal men shackled at the neck. This brutal practice was sanctioned by the state and continued in some areas into the 1960s. The image is dominated by the artist's central proposition: *WHY*. The question hangs unanswered, implicating the historical and ongoing violence and racial injustices of the colonial project.

The ecological crisis surfaces in many works. Kate Gorringer-Smith's sculptural installation is framed by the rhetorical title: *How do you sleep at night?* A provocation to people in positions of power who have failed to take decisive action against climate change, as well as those who benefit from the spoils of extractive processes in everyday life. Measuring the weeks in a year, fifty-two paper pillows lie in rough rows, each marked variously by fire, water, earth and air. These elemental traces speak of the Earth's growing climate instability that is increasingly expressed through the ecological trauma of bushfire, drought, storm and flood. Meanwhile, Philip Faulks' drawing *Rise and Fall* references a dramatic childhood memory of a jet fighter crashing into a field behind his house in England. A tight formation of fighter planes rush against the dark sky, the aircraft closely infilled with patterns of life: writhing worms, creeping fingers, eyeballs, creatures, trees, built environments, feathers. Some aircraft are on the rise, but most are nose diving, symbolically bearing fragments of the living world to destruction. Faulks suggests that while Western thinking has produced some remarkable achievements, it remains critically, and perhaps fatally, flawed.

Jon Campbell and Anna Hoyle critique late capitalist consumer culture in their text-based works. In a series of vibrant gouache and acrylic paintings, Hoyle pokes fun at the wellness industry, advertising, and green washing as well as the relentless emphasis on labour and productivity. In a zesty mashup of aestheticised contemporary slang and subverted advertising witticisms, a circus of cute, personified protuberances – lips, digestive systems, breasts and phalluses – parade and contort. In *Greedy*, Campbell has painted the title of



Anna Hoyle, 1800BIOSEKURE 2022, gouache and acrylic on paper, 152 x 280 cm

the work over a fluorescent De La Soul poster he collaged in the early 1990s. The text is somewhat distorted, much like the effects of neoliberalism on the global social and economic fabric.

Glen Namundja, from Gunbalanya/Oenpelli, and Gloria Gavenor, from Mornington Island/ Kunhanhaa, create paintings layered with cultural stories. Namundja's *sarrk* (cross hatch) and ochre painting *Yingarna* is a major work in its scale, intensity and artistry, combining several Creation Time stories from western Arnhem Land featuring Yingarna, the creation mother. Namundja is widely recognised for his artistic skill and knowledge of the old stories. In a mode of celebration, Gloria Gavenor's painting *Wallabies' Party* sees a mob of the creatures in silhouette, bounding playfully in a colourful disco. Wallabies of all shapes and sizes dance, arms in motion as they move up and down to the party beat. Gavenor honors the Karnjil (wallaby) who is hunted throughout most of the year and provided sustenance to the old people[5].

In his practice, Barkindji man Kent Morris interweaves elements of the built environment into the continuum of Indigenous culture. In the giclee print *Barkindji Blue Sky – Ancestral Connections #9* a sequence of *kiinki*[6] (corellas) spread their wings, while dissected imagery of telecommunications hardware hovers in perfect symmetry above. The elements of the source image are (re)formed and (re)placed. In Morris's words this provides: 'a fleeting but empowering sovereign moment amongst the day-to-day interventions and absences of truth and equity regarding First Nations histories, knowledges and lived experiences.'[7] The birds and technology synthesise, creating a sense of awe as they soar as one in the brilliant firmament.

The artworks discussed here are a fraction of the seventy-eight in this remarkable exhibition, exemplifying the strength and agility of artists creating work at this time. By offering up stories and pathways, ideas and lifeways, the works reveal unique perspectives of the world and ways of being. Perhaps like the paper we see transformed through diverse and innovative processes, we may be transformed in some large or small way by our encounters with them.

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[1] Email correspondence with Lucienne Rickard, 6 June 2022

[2] Artist statement, Margaret Ngilan Dodd, NWOP 2022

[3] Artist statement, Margaret Ngilan Dodd, NWOP 2022

[4] Artist statement, Robert Fielding, NWOP 2022

[5] Artist statement, Gloria Gavenor, NWOP 2022

[6] Artist statement, Kent Morris, NWOP 2022

[7] Email correspondence with Kent Morris 7 June 2022