

Media Release
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'One foot on the ground, one foot in the water' opening soon at Museum of Art and Culture Lake Macquarie, *yapang*

EXHIBITION DATES: 14 May – 10 July 2022



Image: Timothy Cook, 'Kulama' 2013, natural earth pigments on linen, 200 × 220 cm, Courtesy of the artist, Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti, and Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, Photographer: Ian Hill

Artists featured in the exhibition: Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer, Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, Nawurapu Wununmurra.

Curator: Travis Curtin

Introduction

At a time when many are experiencing complex feelings about the frailty of life and future uncertainty, the exhibition 'One foot on the ground, one foot in the water' turns to the subject of our own mortality.

Eleven contemporary artists present paintings, sculptures, installations and sound works that invoke experiences of loss, impermanence, transience, remembrance, memorialisation and their own expressions of grief.

Each artist offers insight into the ways we let go of death, or hold it close, as a continuing living presence in the world. Artworks and other objects can reflect these kinds of present-absences, allowing the departed to continue to resonate in our memory, and in objects that outlive them.

Exhibition

The exhibition offers an environment of gentle calm that encourages quiet contemplation, with space for both individual reflection and social discussion. 'One foot on the ground, one foot in the water' presents over 20 works of art ranging in scale from a massive 3.3 metre cast iron and steel monument by Kyneton-based artist Michael Needham to intricate handmade vessels crafted out of biodegradable florist oasis foam by participants in Catherine Bell's 'Facing Death Creatively' workshops. The contrast between vast and minute scales is echoed in the contrast between singular and repeated forms, and ephemeral and permanent materials, referencing the relationship between the universal and the individual, the eternal and the finite. These dualities reverberate throughout the exhibition.

The curator Travis Curtin says "The immediacy of loss is one of the most difficult experiences to articulate in words. 'One foot on the ground, one foot in the water' tests what an art exhibition can do to express the complexities and mysteries of the emotional experiences surrounding death and loss that reverberate through time."

Timothy Cook is one of the most well-known artists practising in the Tiwi Islands. Cook presents three new works, 'Tutini' (Pukumani Poles), along with two large 'Kulama' paintings. In 2012 he was awarded the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) for a painting depicting the same subject matter.

Internationally renowned Gija artist Mabel Juli, from Warmun, presents a new large 'Garnkiny Ngarranggarni' painting. Juli has painted 'Garnkiny doo Wardel' (Moon and Star), an important Ngarranggarni (Dreaming) story, prolifically since the 1980s when

she began painting under the instruction of celebrated Warmun artists Queenie McKenzie, Madigan Thomas and Rover Thomas. The 'Garnkiny Ngarranggarni' explores forbidden love, kinship and the origins of mortality from a Gija perspective.

The exhibition presents paintings in charcoal and earth pigments, ceramic, glass, tatami mats made of 'igusa' (woven soft rush straw grown in marsh areas) and sculptural works made from wood, plaster, oxidised steel and cast iron. There is an interplay between organic, fragile, more ephemeral materials and the weighty, enduring sense of permanence inherent in others.

While 'one foot on the ground' is very much present, 'one foot in the water' is suggested only in Nawurapu Wunurṁmurra's cluster of 'larrakitj' (memorial poles) titled 'Garrapara'. They evoke in their mystery the incomprehensibility of the transition from life to death.

A similar evocation of the ephemeral, of transformation and the life cycle is captured in the work of UK artist duo French & Mottershead, who present an experiential sound work titled 'Grey granular fist' (2017) from the series 'Afterlife'. The sound work requires the participant to sit in a chair in the gallery and listen to a 20-minute sound recording that describes what would happen to their body if they were to die right there, in the gallery. The work is described by French & Mottershead as an opportunity 'to experience the afterlife of your body.'

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring six newly commissioned texts by First Nations authors. The essays and 'in conversations' offer new insights into the subject of our mortality, situating Australian First Nations knowledge and perspectives at the centre of discussion and commentary.

Authors include Yinimala Gumana, a Yolngu artist educated in Yolngu law and ceremony and anointed as a future Dalkarra/Djirrikay (leader of Dhuwa and Yirritja ceremonies); Mabel Juli, Gija Elder and senior artist; Wukun Wanambi, senior Yolngu artist, a leader of the Marrakulu clan and director of The Mulka Project; and Pedro Wonaeamirri, senior Tiwi Culture man and artist.

Curator Travis Curtin's text introduces his curatorial framework for the exhibition, discusses the artists' concepts and explores relationships between the artworks.

-ENDS-

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Available to interview:

- Travis Curtin, Curator
- Artists upon request

***One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* is a La Trobe Art Institute exhibition toured by NETS Victoria**

La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) is La Trobe University's centre for contemporary art, curatorial practice and cultural collections. With art and artists at the centre of everything we do, we give expression to links between research, student experience, industry, community and geography. As both physical site and growing network, partnerships with creative, academic and local communities are key to our work.

NETS Victoria delivers extraordinary contemporary art, craft and design to regional Victoria and beyond. The organisation works closely with curators and galleries to develop ambitious and stimulating exhibitions that foster the exchange of ideas and promote new works by a diverse range of leading and emerging Australian artists.

Travis Curtin is the curator of 'One foot on the ground, one foot in the water', developed while he was curator at La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) from 2017 to 2021. Travis is currently Exhibitions and Collections Curator at Koorie Heritage Trust, Naarm/Melbourne. Recent exhibitions Travis has curated include: Autoluminescent (2019); unbranded (2019); Castlemaine State Festival, Visual Arts Program (2019); Miwatj (2018). "

The exhibition has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body, as well as receiving development assistance from NETS Victoria's Exhibition Development Fund, supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.



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