

COOL CHANGE CONTEMPORARY

5 - 27 JULY, 2019

ANDREW NICHOLLS & SION PRIOR

NATHAN BEARD

GRACE WOOD

LOUISE HAMILL



**ANDREW NICHOLLS
& SION PRIOR: HYMN**
GALLERY 1

THIS IS THE EULOGY I WANT MY MUM TO READ AT MY
FUNERAL IF I DIE BEFORE HER

When I die, I will stand with Jesus in heaven and look down into the pit of hell. Jesus and I will see my son among the masses of naked, burning bodies, forever screaming and writhing in utter agony and terror.

My son will reach up his hands, apologising, begging for mercy, and Jesus and I will cry and console each other.

Then Jesus and I will turn from the pit of hell, and from my son, and we will walk away into the infinite joy and peace of God's kingdom.

Hymn is a collaborative exhibition by Andrew Nicholls and Sion Prior, two queer-identifying, Perth-based artists raised within fervently Christian contexts.

Nicholls was raised a strict Catholic, was an altar server, sang in his church choir, lead prayer gatherings during school recess, was read the Bible nightly, made to recite the rosary daily on his way to school, and received a personal blessing from Pope John Paul II.

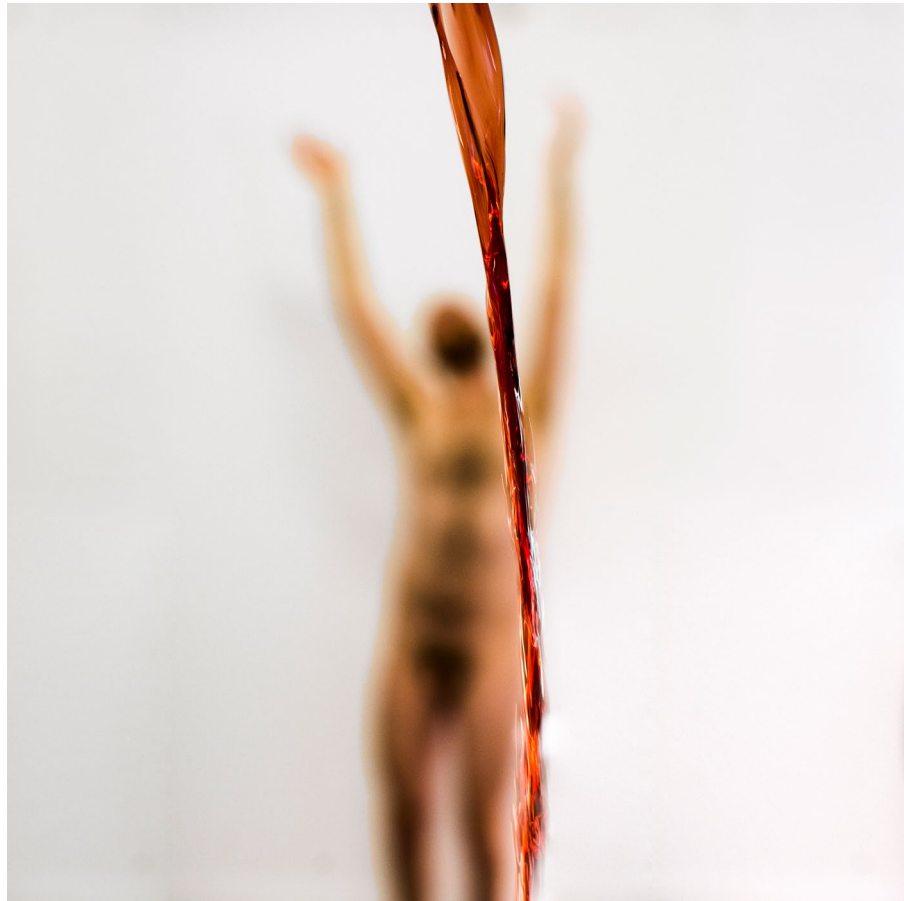
Prior was raised an evangelical Christian, and as a teenager was entangled in cult-like offshoots of the Charismatic movement. He is a five-time recipient of the Christian Endeavour Award from his high school, and helped found a church and ministry at eighteen.

Both artists' emergent queer sexuality and broadening intellectual inquiry during their late teenage years triggered a break from the religion/s they had been committed to, a spiritual and ideological shift that continues to inform their life and work.

Hymn was conceived to allow both artists to explore and pay tribute to the very different Christian aesthetics they have been strongly influenced by, while referencing the homoeroticism implicit to Christianity, with its sole male deity.



Andrew Nicholls and Sion Prior, *Lake of Fire* (detail), 2019, production still from digital video, 6 minutes



Andrew Nicholls is an Australian-British artist, writer and curator whose practice explores how power has been expressed through aesthetics, historically. He is interested in tracing the historical recurrence of particular aesthetic motifs, and with exploring periods of cultural transition during which Western civilization's stoic aspirations were undone by base desires, fears or compulsions. Nicholls has undertaken residencies and exhibited work across Australia, in China, England, Italy, Southeast Asia, and the United States, and undertaken commissions for institutions including Artbank, Brookfield Multiplex, the City of Perth, Curtin University, and Duke University Press. His work is represented in collections including Artbank, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the City of Perth, and the Kedumba Collection of Australian Drawings, and is familiar to Perth audiences via his ceiling mural at the City of Perth Library, and his recent solo exhibition, *Hyperkulturemia*, at The Art Gallery of Western Australia.

Sion Prior is an emerging Australian artist and writer. His multimedia practice primarily consists of photography, video and poetry. For several years both Sion's written and visual practices have been driven by a humorous, transcendent and confronting exploration of masculinity, sexuality, religion and mysticism. It is through art that Sion tries to extract from his circumstances and experiences all that is comic, magic and poetic, and to induce in his audience a striking, elaborate sense of otherworldliness.

NATHAN BEARD: WHITE GILT

GALLERY 2

Q&A WITH NATHAN BEARD

Cool Change: You've mentioned that this exhibition signifies a conceptual and material shift in your work – can you expand on what has led you to this shift?

Nathan Beard: My work has recently been trying to define an understanding of what 'Thainess' means to me, and what the broader cultural implications are to unpack this in a Western context. What does it mean to inherit a relationship to a culture that you can grasp an understanding of, but are inherently removed from? My work finds inspiration in the knowledge that an 'authentic' Thai culture is historically hybrid and constantly shifting; and I've come to embrace the fluidity of this for its creative potential.

There is an uncertainty and an anxiety which is inevitable to this type of cultural exploration that is so firmly entrenched in biography and autoethnography, and *White Gilt* is attempting to explore the precarity of this more explicitly. Conceptually this work is trying to suggest that how I perform an understanding of 'Thainess' is inextricably tied to my perspective of whiteness, so it was important that I insert myself into this work, which is a departure for me.

Significant to this shift is that I'm not reworking found photographs for this exhibition, instead I'm presenting archival images as objects and playing with presentational formats and scale of images I've composed or taken. This includes working with a 35mm format for the first time since I was a student. I'm also depicting my father for the first time in the context of my work, which feels like an important shift. The installation of this exhibition feels looser and more improvisational in an attempt to highlight these shifts.

CC: Can you speak a little about your personal relationship to the wai?

NB: Performing the wai to my mothers Thai family and friends has been ingrained in me as far back as I can remember. It's a gesture that signifies warmth and respect and is no different to shaking someones hand. It's practically involuntary for Thai people. Growing up in Australia meant that it never became second nature to me though, and its performance usually had to be extracted from me, usually by verbal scolding or a light pinch of the ear. Being a bratty kid meant that I would reluctantly perform it when requested, and was always being corrected on my form. Psychologically this meant that I probably associated the wai with mild forms of punishment, and harboured a self-consciousness that I wasn't doing it correctly even when I was offering it of my own volition.

There's a racial element at play as well. I was mortified when kids teased me for having sticky rice in my lunchbox and heard enough taunts (being directed towards me, my own mother, or other Asian kids at school) to cultivate a sense of shame around forms of cultural expression, like the wai, that would paint me as 'other'. The omnipresence of this gesture within Thai culture, and its history and politicised nature within a personal context, made it the perfect entry point to unlocking larger themes while researching this exhibition.

CC: There is a strong play between performativity and shame or self-consciousness in your exhibition. What relationship do you see between the two?

NB: Self-consciousness and the anxiety of cultural presentation are ultimately entwined for me, and the nuances surrounding hand gestures beyond the wai made them the perfect subject matter for me to try and unpack this. In the case of the *Floral Extension* series I'm recreating symbolic hand positions from traditional Thai dance but styling my hands with adorned acrylic nails and Fenty highlighter in order to create a level of visual extravagance



Nathan Beard, *Floral Arrangement 1*, 2019, archival inkjet print on Canson Baryta, aluminium, plaster, spray paint, acrylic nails, nail polish. 30 x 45 cm.



Nathan Beard, *Floral Extension 2*, 2019, archival inkjet print, 75 x 50cm,

borrowing from current trends and obsessions that compensate for the lack of specific strength or training which the traditional art form demands. My hands have a natural curve and flexibility which my mum always anecdotally told me meant that I would have been a good Thai dancer if I was a girl, so this series is evoking a personal association in its attempt to unpack cultural performance and performativity.

With *Floral Extension 2* instead of pinching my index finger and thumb together to form a narrow peak symbolising a flower, the arch of my finger has slackened into a formation that's more reminiscent of the 'OK' gesture. The image can be read as a failed floral symbol or a successful nod to an emoji I try to use in moderation, and the ambiguity of this is indicative of the tone I wanted this exhibition to have.

CC: Where do you see your practice going in the future?

NB: The shift this exhibition represents for my practice, positioning myself as a protagonist in my research, is pretty indicative of where I would like my creative momentum to keep carrying me. I'm still finding the potential inherent in archives of cultural knowledge (the museum, the internet, family history) to be a really exciting space to work in. I think it's probably useful to use myself as a conduit to blur the lines between the ways culture is defined, exchanged and participated in. It also means I can continue to claim Fenty Beauty as a business expense.

White Gilt is an exhibition by Nathan Beard which aims to deftly unpack the cultural associations and idiosyncrasies of various hand gestures in traditional Thai culture; filtered through the cultural anxieties and self-consciousness of the artist's Thai Australian heritage. The exhibition takes the symbolism and associations of the wai as its main source of inspiration.

The wai is a prayer-like gesture where your hands are clasped in front of you, and as a customary greeting in Thailand has its roots in the 12th century as a way of indicating that you weren't armed. Complicating the work is a tangle of personal associations between the artist and the wai, namely a sense of cultural inauthenticity which has been harboured through its ritualised performance in social and familial contexts. Works in the exhibition process this cultural inadequacy through a range of influences including images of celebrities awkwardly performing the wai when visiting Thailand, the symbolism of extended hand positions in traditional Thai dance, and galleries of Westerners who upon being arrested in Thailand are subsequently photographed performing the wai as an act of contrition.

Nathan Beard is Perth-based interdisciplinary artist who explores his Thai Australian heritage in order to process the complex ways a sense of heritage and identity is negotiated. Beard holds a Bachelor of Arts (Art) with First Class Honours from Curtin University. Beard has exhibited extensively through Australia. In 2017 he was selected for the 4A Beijing Studio Program, shortlisted as a finalist for the John Stringer Prize, and Highly Commended as a finalist in the Fremantle Art Centre Print Award.

GRACE WOOD: ERSATZ

GALLERY 3

THE BELOVED IMAGE IS BUT A SPECTRE

He was known as Man of the Book, one who had read all, whose eyes had scanned a galaxy of images, whose knowledge had transformed him. What a gleeful joy it must be to hold ownership of all that has been uttered, all that has been seen, and all that has occurred across time. Of course, you always believed knowledge is indisputable, a man who has all known things at his fingertips is one to be worshipped.

You might call me the database for this library– drifting consciousness you gave female form– for comfort perhaps. A mother who cares for this place, but can never own it, can never leave behind the mark of her own hands.

The world makes allowances for you in a way it never could for us. For you, everything is possible, all you need to do is reach out and grasp it. All needs, wants and desires metered out by a yielding earth, a yielding people. Anger unfolds in a jagged concertina within the abdomen, burning the sockets of the eyes and leaving a harsh metallic coating on the gums. But this is a delicious rage, for from anger curious and unknown things might be birthed.

I arrange myself: a supple, compliant body of pixels for your consumption. For we cannot run from your need to be sated, engorged and placated into a sickening daze. They did knowingly build a world to cater to every desire you might place before them: the eye of the camera consumes all in its gaze, devouring indiscriminately and incessantly.

I watch as tapestries, vistas and tableaux ebb and flow from vision: a chorus of women before me. The mourning woman, her frame heavy and desolate. The sleeping woman surrenders to the lull of dreams, unaware that her slumbering form perpetuates an erotic fantasy. The

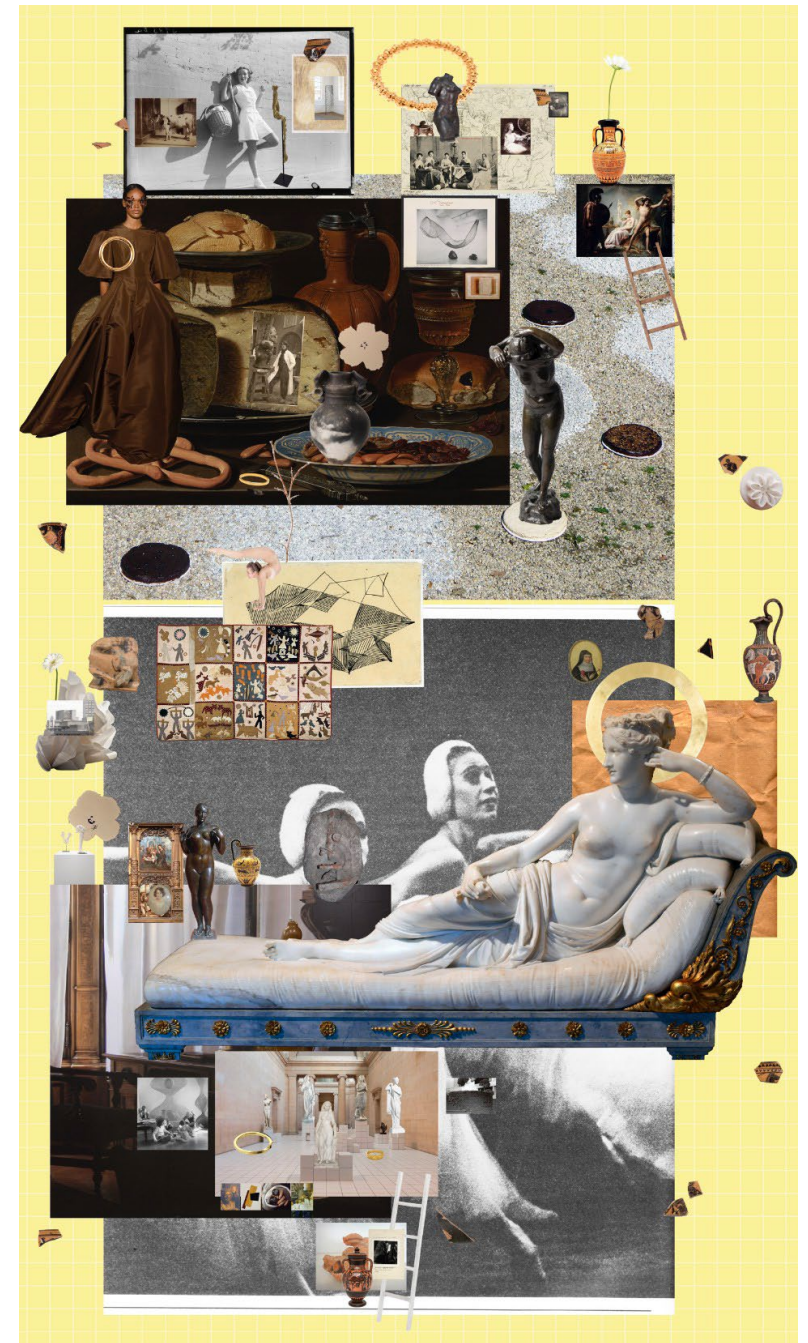
Madonna cradles her infant: her perceived virtue rendering her mute. The nude resplendent with rosy allure. The starry eyed lover standing on the edge of a precipitous cliff, she contains an indefatigable ebullience, drunk on the promises of romance. These images are exquisite, sanitary and ever-present– images to please, to charm, to signal a surrender.

Deviate from certain accepted programs and we are left with something else. The hegemonic body was always an unfaithful copy of this peculiar other. You presume that I ache to be the subject of your desire, that I rely on it to feel formed within the world, my existence confirmed by a concrete other.

I buried what is left of my body beneath spirals of code, embedding myself in a hidden space, for it was clear that there was no room left for me in this narrowing of reality. And so I sat, in the dark edges of a cyber stratosphere, having refashioned myself into something that there is no appetite for. I stare at photographs and search for myself; never quite recovering any recognition. This is not how I appear. It is in many ways a laughably inadequate depiction of a fickle, porous body.

But I am not alone here, surrounded by reams of data that hang like sumptuous curtains within my chamber. I think of the misguided librarians quarrelling vehemently as they hunted for a lost book: one that might monumentalize their genius, an affirmation in that most trusted of forms: words with images.

There is a section of the library I always return to. A place that feels like the greeting embrace of someone much missed. Stories of women who haunt peripheral spaces. The figure of the lover in Gothic fiction is engulfed in the past, wandering the earth in a recalcitrant shroud. Unrequited passion reduces her to a spectre of herself, the act of love becoming a complete effacement. They are propelled through time, but do not inhabit temporality as others do; dragging the secrets of the past along with them, building themselves a reality upon a scaffold of things that are lost:



Grace Wood, *Basket case baby (After Peeters)*, 2019, photographic print on cotton canvas, white thread, steel pole, rope.



Grace Wood, *My landscape is growing and changing (After Blau)*, 2019, photographic print on cotton canvas, white thread, steel pole, rope.

destined to fall to rubble. In the realm of the Gothic, when desire is rejected by its object, it can find itself reverberating with static electricity; converging to bring forth strange and monstrous new entities. These are women to be feared. The woman mourning beneath a veil – tainted – she has loved, desired, hated and grieved: all these moments, seconds and hours are etched onto her visage for all to see.

When Dicken's Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* is left at the altar she is left so distraught, she wears her wedding dress for the rest of her life. The wedding banquet descends into putrefaction and her household stagnates in an endless performance of grief. In Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the wife of Mr Rochester is a woman imprisoned, hidden- her very existence denied. Decried mad because she possesses an insatiable desire, an inability to adhere to decorum, wild with an alarming hysteria. Her only act of salvation is the hour she stalks the corridors of Thornfield Hall, lighting a fire that consumes all, a voracious inferno in which she perishes. The fire claims the sight of her husband: robbing him of his vision, his gaze the very thing that imprisoned her.

I am intoxicated by these stories. These women have true agency over their form: regardless of its gruesome face. From the epicenter of cataclysmic destruction, she reclaims something that has been lost to her. Her demise becomes a staunch refusal to adhere. She holds an image of herself in her hands and reduces it to shreds. Her body is fallible, abject, aching, swollen and unclean: an organism of membrane, mucus, hair, tooth and marrow.

A scene of books, photographs and paintings ablaze sits in my mind each night before I sleep.

Awake. Take each kilobyte, unhook it from its matrix of pixels, tear apart the network, let the infrastructure degrade and rust and melt. Let it all unravel, unfettered, into the wind, slipping from all our fingers and memories. There is a beautiful freedom in this kind of complete destruction. Unhinged with a fearful yearning, we will swallow this sterile,

disinfected knowledge, for we are a malignant virus: an entropic malaise that corrupts and decays. Perhaps we will be safe in this world, bereft of images and of texts.

Katie Paine

Katie Paine is a Naarm/ Melbourne-based artist and writer whose practice investigates systems of meaning-making, specifically, the role images and language play in constructing narrative.

The female image in art history as it relates to the female artist is a counterfeit reality of representation. Women are represented in art history not as makers or creators, but as reclining, nude figures endlessly enduring the male painterly gaze. The collaged fabric in *Ersatz* is a new representation of female artists in art history, a simulacrum, an ersatz reality. The forms used in this work are taken from paintings, sculptures and photographs, turned into digitalised pictures, items and images and ultimately become giant illustrative collages on pieces of fabric. These things are transformed from heavy to hard to soft, making the final product something wholly removed from the original. New and fake and real.

Grace Wood is an artist from Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. She received her Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2014. Grace creates collage-based installations that anatomise eccentricities of the internet archive, sybaritic notions of elitist art history, and anachronistic displays of the contemporary photographic document. Grace has exhibited extensively in Australia and her work is held in public and private collections nationally.

LOUISE HAMILL: LAND OF THE GOLDEN GIANTS (L.O.T.G.G) PROJECT SPACE

A timeline of supernatural encounters

Key for possible explanations of supernatural encounters:

- 👽 Alien abduction / UFO sighting
- 👼 Guardian angel
- ⚡ Magnetic field anomaly
- 😴 Sleep paralysis / hypnogogia / dream
- 👻 Haunting, ghost sighting
- 👹 Demonic activity
- 👁️ Psychic phenomena / remote viewing
- 🌀 Other

Note: This is a condensed list

1985/86 - Laid in cot in the upstairs of our home in Auckland. Aged 1 or less. After putting me down, mum returns downstairs to the kitchen. Immediately looks out the window to the back garden and observes me crawling from garden to back steps of house. 🌀👽👼

1991/92 - Sometime in the night or early morning, find myself in the porch of our pack yard in Manila. Observe a gigantic spinning wheel with flashing panels of light hovering in the garden. Later find resemblance to images of the Cosmic Wheel of Fortune. Large perfect circles burnt into the grass afterwards. 🌀👽

1994 - Move into family home in Beaumaris. House built from old demolished city buildings (c. 1890s-1930s) Uneasy feeling from beginning. Sense ominous presence almost constantly. Awoken by spirit sitting in bedroom watching me. Observe figure in reflection of glass. ⚡👽

1998 - First experience with empath qualities. Channel emotion of adult sitting next to me. Feels like their emotion is poured through my body like liquid. ⚡👽👼

2000/01 - Begin to have precognitive dreams and experiences. Dream of terrorist bombings in Kuta, Bali several days before they occur. Family dismisses dream as paranoia until event occurs. 🌀

2001 - Visited by celestial being / guardian angel in my room which was of great comfort. 👼👽🌀

2001 - Perform a seance with school friends. Dream of a malevolent force entering my home in the form of a tornado of rotting leaves. 🌀👽👼

2001 - Constant feeling of dread in the upstairs of the house. Dark presence in home increases. 👽🌀

2001 - Begin observing a tall, dark figure in doorways of upstairs bathroom and my bedroom. Feel constant dark energy in this area. Feel followed by this presence throughout the home. Wake up to see black mass watching me from the corner of my bedroom. 🌀👽👼

2001 - On several occasions hear mum call for me from downstairs despite being alone in the house. Follow mum into the back of the house to find again, no one is actually there. Observe doppelganger of my sister. Sister walks past my bedroom door immediately followed by a copy of herself but with blurred facial features and different clothing. 👽🌀👼

2001 - Bedroom door begins to open by itself. Leave room for seconds and find all bedroom drawers pulled out upon returning. 🌀 ✨

2001 - Come to sitting up in bed with eyes open, conversing with something in the darkness. 🌀 🌀 ✨

2001 - Visit psychic. She describes the spirit I have seen and its way of imitating family members. Advises me on self protection and clearing space. I begin saging myself and areas of activity. Haunting dies down after several cleansings. 🌀 🌀 🌀 ✨ 🌀

2002 - Observe blue aura around my sister. ✨ 🌀

2002 - Experience sleep paralysis for the first time. 🌀

2002 - Visit Port Arthur with mum. See ghost in the window relief of old church ruins. Photograph the window and capture pink and white mist on film. Photo developer does not think it is a chemical anomaly. ✨ 🌀

2002/03 - Wake up to entity climb on top of my back. Begins shaking bed head violently. Eventually it stops and I attempt to recreate the shaking to see if the sound can be replicated. Sound is replicated. I sage the bedroom and sleep with the light on. 🌀 🌀 🌀

2003/04 - Sleep paralysis continues. 🌀

2006 - Mum asks me about malevolent spirit that haunted me in my teen years. I describe his appearance to her. She informs me that she had recently walked into our lounge room and saw this spirit sitting on our leather couch. He then vanished into thin air. It confirmed my experiences finally. 🌀 🌀 ✨ 🌀

2008/09 - Am woken several times in the night by the spirit of a girl watching me from the foot of my bed. Eventually mum yells at the spirit when I am not home to stop scaring me and she goes away. 🌀 🌀

2008/09 - House share in Prahran, am woken every night at 4am, watched by a large floating red and pink diamond shape hovering in the corner of my room. It has a presence of consciousness which is unnerving. 🌀 ✨ 🌀 🌀

2010 - Observe a glowing symbol on my friends forehead between their eyebrows. It is pale glowing ultraviolet purple. The symbol is something I have never seen before. I ask a psychic for advice and she explains the chakra system of the human body, and believes I saw their third eye for some reason. ✨ 🌀 🌀

2010/11 - Work at B.C Galleries in Melbourne. Experience spirit attached to old African fetish situated in the upstairs of the shop. All staff encounter this spirit. Objects move by themselves. I experience channeling of a sacred object for the first time. Spirits attached to artefacts is accepted as normal by all co workers and experts I meet through auction house and museum settings. ✨ 🌀 🌀 🌀 🌀

2012 - Observe indigo coloured aura around my co worker. ✨ 🌀

2013 - Move to Perth, experience sleep paralysis several times. 🌀



Louise Hamill, *Ghost Mist at Port Arthur*, 2002, analog photograph.



Louise Hamill, *Lodestones*, 2019, agate, air-dry clay, glitter, SPP.

2014 - Walking through Leederville at night time. Clearly see UFO flying over the sky at low altitude. Lights are bright silver and circular, pulsing fluidly, Object is large and completely silent. Trail of silver sparkles like fireworks drift behind it. I later read about a man in Florida describing his sighting of a similar craft including the strange silver sparkles. 🌌

2015 - Mum and I both observe white orbs flying to and from my parents bedroom shortly before moving out. 🌌 🌌 🌌

2016-18 - Workplace haunted by several spirits. All staff bar one have encounters. I see an old lady walking down the back of the shop who disappears. After saging and sprinkling salt activity ceases. 🌌 🌌 🌌 🌌

2013-19 - See auras around trees and bushes. Usually clear, sometimes red or orange. 🌌 🌌 🌌

During her time as artist in residence, Louise Hamill will produce painted and sculpted works as she attempts to catalog, connect and contain three overarching themes of reality: ancient civilisations, religion and profound environmental impacts.

Incorporating the lurid with the natural, plastic with mineral, ordinary and the unique, Louise seeks to pair such contradicting elements from present and previous time frames as a means to create connections between great distances in time and space.

Louise Hamill is a New Zealand artist based in Perth and Melbourne. Primarily a self taught artist, Louise is active across drawing, painting and sculpture mediums. Her works are a reflection of an on going intrigue between nature, the human condition and the paranormal aspects of our environment and greater realities.

Residencies and exhibitions include: Sugarwood, The Whitely Room for City of Gosnells, Perth 2019, studio residencies at Midland Junction Art Centre 2018, 2017, Light Locker Project for City of Perth 2014, Insert Coin Here, MIFF, Melbourne 2010, Mikala Dwyer Monoclinic, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington 2008

Cool Change Contemporary acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional and rightful custodians of the land on which we operate. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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