

S O H O T

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AMALA GROOM

Every step taken across these many First Nations now known as 'Australia' is and always will be on Aboriginal land.

Instead of shying away from this or being in fear or denial of it, the gift for all Australian's is to embrace what is the oldest practicing cultures on earth.

The word 'embrace' quite literally means cherish, hug, love, welcome, and acceptance.

As sovereign peoples, as is the practice of our cultures, we ritualistically acknowledge our Ancestors, our Elders, our Country, and our Kin who hold our Lore, our Language, our Land, and our Custom.

When we travel away from our homelands, we do this also. In this, we are actively demonstrating our respect for those that are living, those that have passed and those that will come in the days after tomorrow.

On behalf of all of the artists, curators, producers, partners and supporters that are a part of *so hot right now now now* we pay our respects and give our humble gratitude and eternal thanks that we were able to share this time together, grow as individuals and as a collective, tell our stories through our arts practice, that when we travelled we were kept safe and throughout the entire two years of us working together we stayed together as a group.

We are all in this together.

# DEDICATION

AMALA GROOM

When I was a child, I wanted to be a teacher.

I always thought that this was the most romantic of vocations. That to know something and share that something with others emitted a certain aura that if you experienced synesthesia I imagine would be comparable to the feeling of love.

As an adult I try not to use the words 'teach' and 'learn', they both reflect paternalism and a hierarchy of knowledge as if one is always superior to the other and that one holds all of the power.

Across these two years, I have worked intensely with each of the program artists to find their authentic selves, who they are, what motivates them, what their circumstances are, their history, their beliefs. In understanding this we worked together to refine their expression across their artwork to reveal their most authentic selves. As an artist, I did with them what I do with myself.

Admittedly I gave so much to this program and to this exhibition, and at one stage I asked if I had given too much? I was told that I had it to give. And I did and I do.

Because I believe in these artists and in this program and in this exhibition but at the ripe old age of 43 the only way I could have arrived at this point is because people believed in me. And they continue to do so. I have had countless mentors and at times this generosity has been overwhelming, only because I had my own issues to work through and like many people, suffered from chronic imposter syndrome. They could see something in me that I could not see in myself.

And that's what this exhibition is dedicated to; people believing in people, the ongoing cycles of knowledge and the never-ending circles of sharing.

# ABOUT

ALEX WISSER

Co-curated by Amala Groom, Kris Townsend, and Alex Wisser, *so hot right now now now* is the culmination of the Cementa Incorporated/Arts OutWest Regional Artist Mentoring Program (RAMP), a two-year creative and professional development program designed and delivered by Amala Groom to eight selected regional artists from across regional NSW: Aleshia Lonsdale; Asma D Mather; David Doyle; Freyja Moon; Gus Armstrong; Kate McKay; Lily Cummins; and Ronnie Grammatica.

RAMP mentorship was provided by industry curatorial peers including Jeff Khan (Performance Space); Michelle Newtown (Artspace); Adam Porter (Campbelltown Art Centre); and Tian Zhang (PARI); and creative mentorship provided by artists Liam Benson, Deborah Kelly, and Claudia Nicholson. Extensive administrative support was provided by June Gollard in establishing the program framework.

The project itself was created as a means of addressing the challenges that regional artists face in connecting into and

negotiating the arts industry, concentrated as it is in the urban centers. Based on systems of care, radical transparency, and collective decision making, the program focused on the need for an integrated approach to creative and professional development that initiated the artists in different facets of building and maintaining an arts career, highlighting the gaps on long term investment in individual artists practice and the development, presentation and tourability of regionally generated exhibitions that can compete on par with urban programming.

The success of the program was in part due to Amala's refusal to treat the professional and practical aspect of building a career in the arts as something detached from the artistic practice itself. Each artist's work, their reasons for making, the passion and interest that drove their practice was first established and clarified as a foundation upon which the more conventional career building skills of writing an artist statement or working with a gallerist were then developed. This methodology

came out of Amala's own extensive experience with mentors and in participating in professional development opportunities.

Her background in advocating for First Peoples rights and freedoms at the *United Nations Permanent Forum on the Rights of Indigenous Issues* in New York (2010-2016); as the youngest Director on the *National Congress of Australia's First Peoples* (2015); and the first inaugural identified Director on the *National Association of Visual Arts* (2017-19) laid the infrastructure as a way to integrate her extensive advocacy work into a tangible outcome for NSW regional artists.

The ethos of the program was based on First Peoples methodology and open to artists of all cultural backgrounds as a sustainable 'future' model on best practice, applicable across all industry.

One of the early shortcomings of the more conventional programs that she sought to avoid was the 'fiffo', ad hoc nature of their delivery. For this reason, Amala insisted on

the sustained, long-term structure of RAMP, which would allow her to establish trust and close relationship with each artist and to foster a co-supportive community between them as a group. Across this extended period, Amala was able to address each area of need in turn and to affect a whole of career impact with each of the artists. While the purpose of the program was to deliver practical skills, the process employed was essentially social, with substantial time given to consideration and discussion of the personal challenges faced by each artist in the pursuit of their artistic vision. Likewise, the meetings with industry leaders were not exclusively confined to discussion of the pragmatics of negotiating artworld structures, but time was given to allow presenters to tell the story of how they built their own career, the challenges, and opportunities they faced as either unique to their own journey or general to anyone trying to make their way in the arts. This rendered the prospect of navigating the structures of the art world in a relatable form, making its prospect less onerous and intimidating.

Planning for an exhibition at Firstdraft was included in the strategy from its inception with the understanding that a course of professional development activities with no concrete outcome would potentially strand much of the value we have been able to deliver. *so hot right now now now* will tour across regional NSW throughout 2023-2025 with galleries and dates forthcoming. The second cohort of RAMP artists is scheduled to commence in mid 2023.

RAMP and *so hot right now now now* were supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW and the Regional Arts Fund provided by Regional Arts Australia and administered by Regional Arts NSW. Program partners include West Darling Arts, Southern Tablelands Arts, Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, and Glasshouse Regional Gallery.

# THE BIG FISH

AMALA GROOM

In my role as an artist, I was recently asked on a professional development program application what was I influenced by - I thought this to be quite curious and so this is how I answered:

*"I think it's naive to say that everything that you are exposed to doesn't influence you in some capacity given that everything shapes the lens of your own experience, which in turn is unique to you as an individual but is also reflective of the family and epoch that you are born into".*

When we look at family, we consider of course our genealogy or in my father's native tongue our whakapapa but to extend this out further to reach the family in which we choose, includes our partners and our loved ones who we share our lives with. The former is presented as a non-choice 'you cannot choose your family' and the latter is the family that we choose. This of course is dependent on your belief system.

In my belief system I believe that we are miwi (spiritual beings) on earth

having a physical experience and that we are all droplets of Bayaami, the Wiradyuri creator spirit known as many other names across many other religions, philosophies, and histories. And that the same way that a droplet of rain when connected with another droplet of rain eventually forms a river or a lake or a stream or indeed an ocean, that we as human beings on earth are all connected through this spiritual realm. And further, that our bodies are finely tuned instruments of Bayaami and when we remember how to play our instrument of mind/body/soul that we are in kanyini, in unconditional love and harmony with everyone and everything, quite literally living on the wave of life.

So, in this regard and employing my belief system, I believe that as miwi before we incarnate that we choose our parents and that we contract with our higher selves and the angelic realm on the things that we will plan to do with our journey on earth. This is known as many things including destiny or fulfilling one's life path.

So, if we are born into a family that was born in the bush then this is where we begin our life journey - we may have energetically chosen this as a spirit before we incarnated on to earth but as a baby this is not what some may render as a 'lifestyle choice'.

Same goes for time. If you believe in reincarnation, here we go again, but it's this cycle that has brought you back at this time.

I always found the term 'contemporary' to be baffling because of my read on time as a machination of control that is forcibly imposed upon our miwi - it centres the left brain and the intellect over the emotion thus separating us from ourselves in our connection to Bayaami and to the universe. To follow one's feelings over one's intellect I have come to realise is a radical act of consciousness but requires the drowning out of the western world to retain the silence within.

Many religions do this and indeed this is the premise of transcendental meditation. My most very favourite





of artists, David Lynch says of his inspiration that *"Ideas are like fish. If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you've got to go deeper"*.

And then he just catches them. Just like that. He meditates and the ideas swim around and he just catches them. And to me that is what makes great art. Lynch connects to his Bayaami, his ancestors, his angelic structure, his higher power - his most authentic self. He meditates to remember who he is as a miwi on earth, what his soul purpose is and how he can manage to exist in the madness that we find ourselves in.

And mad it is. I haven't seen as many street evangelists preaching the wrath of God and the impending judgement day as much as I had anticipated given our current state. And in many ways, you kind of can't argue with them - fires, flood, plague and pestilence - we have copped it all which makes our epoch pretty bloody tragic.

When the world has gone mad, and all our environments are reflective of this - what are we to do? This is what capitalism looks like. This is what colonialism looks like. We all suffer. Some more than others but as a collective when the water runs out, we all die.

In observing those of us that are glued to our devices performing wokeness in the hope that TikTok culture as an advertisement of own good personhood, carrying that keep cup that reads VIRTUE in bold serif and letting everyone know that we are 'doing better' is to me the most extreme form of capitalism - if no one liked your post would you still virtue signal? This is external - it doesn't really matter - we think it does but in the big scheme of things it really doesn't. What matters is the internal and at the end of the day the only thing that we can have any sense of control over is ourselves. We are responsible for ourselves; we are all self-sovereign.

The four artists that feature in this essay are all at an existential crossroads and their artwork in

this exhibition marks that very spot - like the atomic clock their work captures the moments in between problem and solution which in this case is tension.

The tension for Asma D Mather is one of transition, of being in between two worlds. She is a cartographer who makes maps that chart this world and the other world. Mather flies in between both worlds as a constant which is apparent in both her work and herself. Her etchings in *unSEEN: the world of dust - annotations for the isthmus* (2022) are reminiscent of an ancient epistemology that she has tapped into. The challenge here is the balance between the two - her three etchings sit together on a seesaw that is always in motion and constantly in flux. That she can capture this intangibility bewilders me - how any artist can contain the knowledge of man on paper is mind boggling. I remain in awe.

Freyja Moon's installation *Patient* (2022) is a double entendre as she is both in this case the patient (receiver of medical attention) and must exercise patience to receive



said medical attention. This artwork itself is tense and is this way by design. Moon wants the audience to experience a glimmer of her reality through the makeshift waiting room in which she has occupied her idle hands with constant embroidery - the repetition of the words 'a stitch in time saves nine' is the thread that connects her.

For Gus Armstrong the tension in *Dubitatur Tensio* (2022) presents itself across the three characters in his compelling drama all receiving equal billing. The land, the cows, and the artist. Armstrong's struggle is ethical, financial, moral, and deeply personal and is a real point of conflict. He is a landowner who is hyper conscious of the impact of capitalism on the bush who believes in regenerative farming practice but runs cattle on his farm to survive in this fiat world. His moving image work cuts between these characters to reach a crescendo then reverses itself all the way back to the beginning. The end is the start. We have not made any progress, but we understand a bit more about his dilemma.

When something is taken away from you, the feeling that is left is a void that is most horrible and most ghastly. My heart breaks and continues to break when I admire *The keeper of memories* (2022), the work of Lily Cummins. The tension for Cummins is in its exposure - to tell the story of her memories being stripped away from years of electric shock therapy is the most private and intimate of experiences and to make this public can only be described as an act of bravery. The magic here exists in her ability to transcend tragedy, to create something so beautiful, so angelic. This is the work of alchemy.

The repetition of the now calls attention into what is contemporary; what is of this moment, the relationship between the macro and the micro and the spaces in between, where we as humanity find ourselves today.

And it is today that we hear that the 'sovereign' of these many lands now known as Australia, Queen Elizabeth II has passed from this world into the other world. May she rest in peace and may we all find peace in our own self sovereignty.





# SO. WHAT. NOWNOWNOW

ALEX WISSER

The title of this exhibition takes its delicious irony from the conflation of the realities of climate change with the delusions of art world pretension to manifest the conflicted nature of social and political comment made through contemporary art. The title is a slick gesture of brazen self-promotion, worthy of the most sophisticated, cynical art world climber, but when placed on the work of these eight artists 'from the country', its pretence slips like a mask. Its braggadocio is deflated by the clear contradiction that the work makes to the title. Clearly, these artists are talking about another kind of 'hot', and the 'now now now' takes on another tenor: sounding like a manic refrain, an endless series of ephemeral moments we are condemned to in our Sisyphean pursuit of the contemporary.

The exhibition makes this statement only to present such social and political realities in the gap that its provocation opens. Beneath this statement, the artists present a series of works that address the heat that rises from the bitumen of the highway, from the drought-stricken country, from the bushfires and from the history and ongoing

impacts of colonial dispossession. While heat is the metaphor that unifies the work, its unity goes deeper than the mere moment of climate change to recognise the more fundamental temperature of the society that has brought us to this moment.

Ronnie Grammatica's 'portraits' in *Roadside Memorials* (2017-2022) document the practice of marking the site of fatal road accidents with arrangements of white crosses, plastic flowers, stuffed toys, photos, and paraphernalia associated with the passions, interests and character of the person memorialised. We all know these 'sites', at once the punctuation of bright colour and confusion of form that flash from the side of the road as we speed past, evoking the passing of a stranger we did not know expressed in the devotion of the family and loved ones that created this pilgrim point.

The photographs are taken from a documentary middle distance, without particular framing convention to tighten the drama or consolidate affect. At times the roadside barrier intervenes

in the foreground to create an awkward, unavoidable imbalance in composition. The artist has slipped a black cloth behind the tribute to isolate it from the rest of the world, elevating its statement of veneration toward the realm of the medieval altarpiece and the later tradition of the vanitas. And yet, the artist has studiously left the transformation incomplete.

The documentary style of the photograph has left the tarnished, tired, dust-laden, rain-sodden, and sun-bleached abjection of the plastic and polyester tribute in place, creating a tension between the ardent sincerity of its devotional content and the base materiality of its form. The roadside shrine is a centuries old folk tradition that finds itself transformed through its adaptation to the modern road and highway. As Grammatica remarks, "the side of the road is a kind of no-place, it is the margin of the corridor of our transit between two actual places". He is fascinated by these sites of human mortality that literally rise out of nowhere as a place marked and thus constituted by loss.





This ancient impulse to locate memory in a place, to plant it in the land as the stable persistence of the meaning of human life, is reborn through its adaptation to the roadside, the very symbol of the hyper transience of contemporary life. Like flowers in the cracks of concrete, it is startling to perceive the defiant life of this simple human instinct to remember blooming in the one environment that is most hostile to it.

The tradition goes much further back than the folk traditions of medieval Europe. The Aboriginal cultures of this continent have preserved sixty thousand plus years of memory in the land, the country, through the song lines and the stories all connected to place. It is thus not surprising that Wiradjuri artist Aleshia Lonsdale would choose another image of transience to evoke the flight from memory that constitutes the last 252 years of our history.

In her work *Domestic Baggage* (2022) the humble suitcase evokes both memory and transience. Baggage is a universal trope signifying the past we drag along

with us, even as we flee from it. Lonsdale draws on this established understanding to evoke the gravity, the sheer weight of the burden we refuse to face or come to grips with. The sorrow of these objects, from the leathery remains of the older luggage to the reinforced cardboard and the textured vinyl of mid-century travel to the shapeless, sad sack cheap synthetics of contemporary bags, they all carry the scars and take the shapes of objects beaten, kicked, and dragged through time.

This pile of lost memories is restored to dignity by the artist through the application of luggage tags, each neatly printed as a conscientious attachment to its owner, giving it a home address and the name to which it belongs. On each of these tags is the date and description of an act or practice of colonial dispossession. Like the styles of the suitcases, the formal qualities of the atrocity changes, from the blunt trauma of the massacre to the insidious practices of child removal and disproportionate incarceration rates leading to deaths in custody. The generic continuity of the 'suitcase' persists across all the changes to its cultural logic:

material, formal, stylistic. This continuity echoes that expressed by the tags, evoking the living history in which we participate. The artist invites the audience to consider carrying this baggage on a daily basis, as she does.

Barkindji/Malyangapa artist David Doyle picks up on this thread of memory and pulls it taut over the forty-five thousand documented years that his peoples have lived continuously on country in his work *Wontenella - Menindee lakes* (2021). The fact that across this vast history, there was never any interruption to the capacity of these lakes to support human life was brought home to the artist when in 2019, a mass fish kill event due to unprecedented drought, saw the waters rendered undrinkable for the first time in living memory. The artist's response was to cut the form of a discarded refrigerator door, salvaged from the country it would represent. These negative forms reveal another layer beneath. The artist had covered the underside in packing tape with the simple warning 'fragile' repeated in all the urgency of a police crime scene.



This tape was designed as a caution to treat with gentle respect the objects we produce and transport across all the distances of space. Its application to the very land that is eclipsed, ignored, dissolved in our rush to an elsewhere that is perpetually deferred, would be ironic if the tragedy of it didn't get there first. The manic pursuit of elsewhere is quietly folded into the here and the now of the land it is destroying. Even the fridge door makes this remark: of all the objects that we make, the sturdy, enduring body of its steel form would be the last of which we might call fragile. And yet, there it is, in all its mortality: a corpse, its iron form oxidising as it is slowly recalled into the country from which it was extracted. The parallel is exact. Into the rugged, hardened, and harsh surface of the door, the fragility of the land is both carved and manifested.

This land is taken up as the medium through which Kate McKay contemplates our current condition, in the clay that informs her ceramic tableware in *no body leaves* (2022). The long table is set, the beautifully crafted plates are placed within their dinner sets, awaiting food,

the glasses wait for wine. But no one sits at this table and instead of a feast, the table is littered by the blackened form of leaves that litter its white surface like flecks of ash off of the bushfire. The white of the tablecloth and the black of the leaves combine to produce an ashen quality, the frozen silence of it produces a sense that this table exists in a dimension outside of that which life and its feast inhabits.

McKay speaks of the quiet everyday significance of the vessel, its mundane ceremonial role in the nourishment of the body as a spiritual function. To see these objects trapped in their frozen, lifeless aspect, perhaps to see them as art objects even, is to look into the reflection of our current lives. It reflects the exhibition itself, around which we gather, we eat food, and we drink wine. We will celebrate life and the creation of the world that the artist achieves, we will go through all the motions, perform all the rituals that constituted such a celebration, and yet we will do so in the silent, ashen, and frozen memory of the fires, the pandemic, and the floods that we have all endured. I recognise myself in this

reflection, drinking wine I can no longer taste, taking pleasure that no longer has the carelessness of joy, detached now from the life of which it is a celebration.

If this seems a dire conclusion, what other conclusion can we come to? That is the serious question asked by this exhibition. It is not an accident that it is asked by regional artists. After all, the heat we all feel is experienced by people living in the regions in a way that is more immediate, coherent, and consistent than is often possible in the cities. It is a physical phenomenon, in that the effects of climate are experienced first in the regions where life is often more vulnerable to climatic variables than those living in the cities. It is also because society in the country retains the form of older ways of life: its history and community are located in place and so its relationship to its history, our history, exists now in the present and cannot be consigned to the past.





## RECOGNISING REGIONAL CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

TRACEY CALLINAN

At the forefront of the exhibition *so hot right now now now* is the need to share and showcase the work of artists located in regional NSW. The exhibition demonstrates contemporary storytelling through visual arts, influenced by place. It breaks down the preconceptions of what regional arts practice is too often perceived to be, through eight distinct artistic responses to a world struggling with the impacts of its wasteful culture.

The fact that these contemporary artists are all located in regional NSW is not incidental or irrelevant. As participants in the Regional Artist Mentoring Program (RAMP), an 18 month initiative led by Amala Groom, they have been given access to creative and professional development that supports their practice and its connection to an art world often out of reach to regional practitioners. It is also clear that these artists all have something to say in their work that reflects their experience of living in non-metropolitan places. Many of the stories that emerge in *so hot right now now now* are raw and difficult. They challenge any lingering

interpretation of regional NSW as a rural idyll and exposes a different, harder but more nuanced version of regional life.

The making of art can happen anywhere but, in this exhibition, there is a strong sense – despite the vastly different backgrounds of the artists – of being embedded in place, of working on country. Across regional arts practice many artists would argue that their work is not meant as a response to place. Despite this there are experiences and stories that come from these places. Artists need to explore their stories or experiences – either because of these places or despite them. Development programs like RAMP ensure that regionally located artists have opportunity to hone their skills, and are challenged to extend their practice, so that they are not marginalised by their geographical location. Giving artists the platform of a Sydney exhibition is also highly valuable so that their stories can be shared, and their work recognised to a broader audience.

Living regionally can offer many positives; artists claim a large range of motivations for wanting to be based where they are, but it remains the fact that many regional artists also experience disadvantage. There is a spatial polarisation that can occur if regional areas are not provided with services and opportunity (Gibson 2010). Issues of urban bias in the arts are not specific to Australia and are experienced in other parts of the world (Bell, 2015; Harvey, Hawkins & Thomas, 2012), but in Australia this is exacerbated by large distances, small regional populations, minimal service delivery, less access to markets and audiences, and challenges in finding a creative milieu to participate in, giving rise to the reality of isolation. The solitary nature of much visual arts practice needs to be balanced with support and access through programs such as RAMP, produced by Amala Groom and Kris Townsend in collaboration with Cementa Incorporated and Arts OutWest and major organisational partners and industry and artistic leaders as mentors.

Regional NSW benefits from the input of its cultural organisations and from the Regional Arts Development Organisations (RADOs) that support creative practice to bring the goal posts within reach. The profile of regional artists is different to that of metropolitan artists; on average our artists are older, we have more women, more disability, more First Nations representation and less cultural diversity than our city-based equivalents (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017). These factors are part of the reason that regional artists need to have issues of access and equity addressed in the opportunities provided. The artists featured in *so hot right now now now* come from different parts of NSW, they represent a diversity of backgrounds and of practice. Together their stories represent a range of social, cultural, and environmental expressions both personal and public, contemporary interpretations on contemporary experience.

Recent years have changed the regional and rural landscape. The natural disasters, the

pandemic, the move by many from the cities into the regions and the new and different ways of working have all created a new set of circumstances. Although challenging, there has been a shift in attitude to the regions, in the sense that they offer an alternative lifestyle, community and value. Even as we remove the rose-tinted glasses, the sense that regional places are sites of their own unique cultural expression is one that has gained momentum. This momentum needs to be realised through increased and wider high-level opportunities for those that live away from our main cities.

The social and cultural dynamics of regional communities are themselves unique. These dynamics shape and influence the artists who live and work in the regions. In turn these artists may reflect aspects of this place, often at the frontline of the impacts of climate change. *so hot right now now now* is a timely demonstration of regional artists exploring these global themes, while the recent increase in interest in regional areas provides some irony about the exhibition title.

There is no question that the practice of regionally based artists make a significant contribution to the identity, culture, vibrancy and quality of life of their communities. What the RAMP does is provide pathways for these artists to have an impact beyond the local. Some of the themes explored in this exhibition resonate beyond the immediate and all are either recognisable or in some cases experienced more broadly. We need more programs that support regional artists to generate culture specific to their location and to connect this culture into the wider arts world. We need to know that artists are able to be supported to make art wherever they happen to reside and for these artists in this exhibition it is in the regions.



# NEW DAY GOING

GINA MOBAYED

In *so hot right now now now* the works of eight artists are finally together in one room. Thanks to the commitment of producers and curators, Amala Groom, Kris Townsend and Alex Wisser and a host of mentors we get to experience the result of their time together and the relationships now woven through their work. The artists have been encouraged and challenged through an ambitious 18 month mentoring program facilitated mostly online. These practitioners are working from distant places across regional New South Wales where you can see the breadth of the sky uninterrupted by the urban. Far from ideal though, these are also places where the land has been ravaged by a violent and colonising human intervention for over two hundred and fifty years. For the last two years we have seen the weather become a terrifying spectre of that intervention as it has turned on us in horrifying new ways.

In Gus Armstrong's video landscape, *Dubitatur Tensio* (2022) we see this intervention finely traced through a series of repeated images powerfully soundtracked with a

dread inducing score. He traverses the country on foot showing us a scar upon the land only made possible by human intervention. The film cuts between wide drone shots of Armstrong and close ups of cattle face to camera. At one point they shuffle backwards and away from our gaze. Their instinctual movements position the audience as something to recoil from.

In *Wontenella - Menindee lakes* (2021) David Doyle, a Barkindji/Malyangapa artist, reveals the impact of time and weather upon a discarded refrigerator door, abstracting the object far and away from its origin. The presence of the found object is strong in this exhibition. As a device it orients us towards the work as we acknowledge its familiarity only to be struck by the artist's confronting message. What keeps striking home in *so hot right now now now* is that the works, and the artists are calling for a sense of humanity to shift towards a more sustainable way to live in and on the land, and how we live amongst each other.

This call motivates me to step closer to the work and its conceptual realm, especially with *unSEEN: the world of dust - annotations for the isthmus* (2022) Asma D Mather's etchings. I want to see every detail so finely traced into these complex compositions. My eye travels over them like a map, searching for the key in the details of text, line, and image. Her work prioritises the heart over the brain as the more vital organ. I pause in this contemplation of her work because for me only an artist could perceive an idea so gentle yet so urgent.

Through assemblage Ronnie Grammatica and Lily Cummins explore seeing and memory respectively through their workings of memorials. This prompts us to remember or as Cummins puts it, not to forget. In *The keeper of memories* (2022), a Wunderkammer presents the collection of the artist's personal past experiences. It could be considered macabre but there is a light touch in Cummins hand. The empty pill packets signal the possibility that relief has not yet been found. They



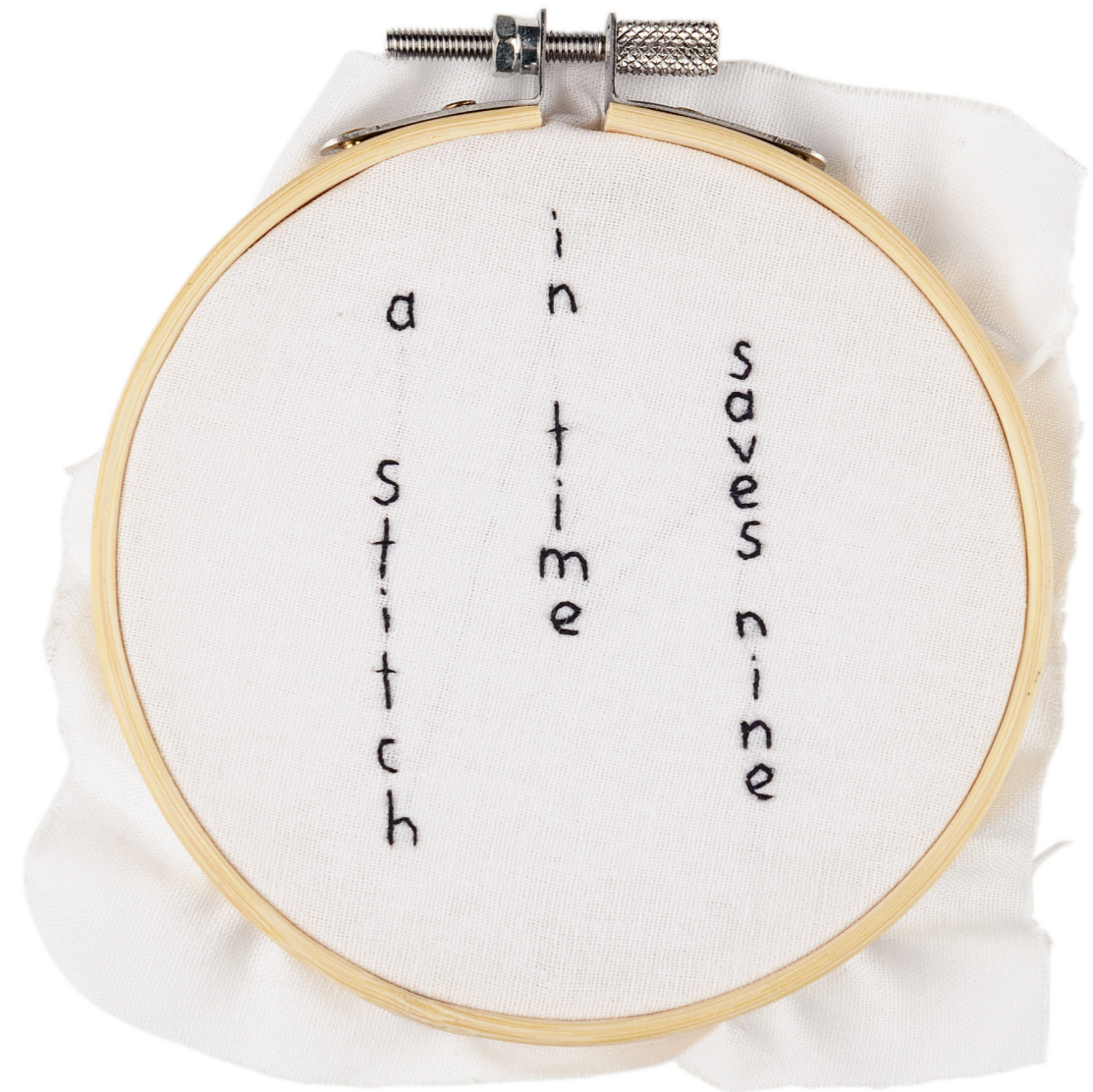
contrast against a small sketch on paper and the smooth contours of vintage glassware placed inside with an obvious heed. In *Roadside Memorials* (2017-2022), Grammatica employs a different kind of drama in his work — that with which we mark people lost, headstones. He composes highly stylised photographs with richly coloured blooms. Other ephemera is worked in amping up a sense of loss and abandonment in each photograph. The cycling of time as relevant to human life is conjured by both artist's work. Freyja Moon, through her textile practice, also works through ideas of time. By trying to connect the past with the present she is literally stitching her way through a journey to clarity. In *Patient* (2022) she offers text as a way to give voice to those who struggle to find it within the volume of today's societal hierarchies.

The artists in *so hot right now now now* are, in varying ways, dealing with some kind of loss too. Aleshia Lonsdale and Kate McKay hammer this home with impactful and sizeable installations. In *Domestic Baggage* (2022), Lonsdale's asks

of her audience to sit with the uncomfortable. Suitcases piled up and arranged on the floor of the gallery are uncomfortable to the eye. Each bears a white luggage tag lolling off the handle like wagging tongues. This installation makes me feel thirsty for water, and it should. Look closer and meet the information that we all must confront, stories of the atrocities of Australia's history and indeed its present. Each tag bears a truth of the violent invasion of land that belongs first and forever to Australia's First Peoples. How restrained of Lonsdale to present just twelve.

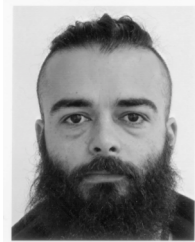
McKay's *no body leaves* (2022) features a dining table adorned with functional ceramics. Scattered, blackened leaves have fluttered down upon the undisturbed dinner setting for eight unsettling the invitation to sit and imbibe, but also holding a place for each artist in this show. Aptly titled this is a powerful maxim nobody gets to leave, nobody gets out alive, everybody has to pay a cost. Still McKay's work holds hope for me, she tells us that whilst it didn't have to be

this way these delicate leaves could be carefully removed, the glasses could still be upturned and the invitation to be at one with those around us could be accepted with a shared new vision of a better way to be.





## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



**Gus Armstrong** is a cross-disciplinary artist who lives and works on Wiradjuri Country in Kandos NSW. His practice comments upon the legacy of western farming practice in the Australian bush as a means of grappling with his own relationship to land. Using his body as a foil, Armstrong employs video, photography and sound to register the conflicting pressures between the vulnerable and dependent human subject and the harsh and fragile landscape, reflecting on the effects of environmental mismanagement and our changing climate in a gesture that suggests the fate of both is radically intertwined.

Positioning himself in the landscape and at the nexus of 'tension', Armstrong works not by posing fact but more by raising questions and instigating dialogue to challenge the cultural practices that regulate human engagement with their landscape.

Armstrong is currently the NSW Artist In Residence w/ Dr. Greg Pritchard (2022); exhibited in Wollongong Yours & Owls Music Festival: Micro Cinema (2022); and exhibited in WAYOUT Vanitas: The Bitter Crust as part of the No Show exhibition, Carriageworks, curated by Aarna Hanley (2021).

**Lily Cummins** is a tactile artist who lives and works on Gundungurra land in Mittagong, NSW. Her practice explores both her self, her memories and the emotive bonds and attachments people develop to place. Her work relies exclusively upon mining her own experience of remembrance, absence and loss.

Working across painting, drawing and installation, Cummins, through investigative mark making and colour theory, seeks to explore an ambiguous narrative, conceived through repeated forms, structures and a physical language that suggests the inevitable passage of time and the decay of memory.

Her practice acts as an auto-historical excavation and as an attempt to recollect the anamnesis that through medical intervention have been forcibly removed from her person. She makes to remember and also so that she will not forget.

Cummins was recently profiled in Critics Choice by Monte, Megan. Art Collector (July-September 2022); received Highly Commended awards in the Waterbrook Drawing Prize (2021); and the Wingecarribee Landscape Prize (2021); and exhibited in The Weirds, curated by Sophie Vander, Curatorial + Co, Redfern, Sydney (2020).



**David Doyle** is a Barkindji/Malyangapa artist, educator, cultural consultant, advocate and purveyor of bush foods and medicines who lives and works on Barkindji lands in Broken Hill, NSW.

His family is from the Menindee region of the Baaka, or Darling River. Following the traditions of his mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, Doyle makes carved emu eggs, mussel shell jewelry, and wooden objects including bowls and sculptures. He mostly uses natural resources or found materials, traditional practice and modern technologies to make sculpture; incorporating stories, both cultural and contemporary to continue Barkindji storytelling traditions and to ensure these stories are passed onto others.

Doyle is currently an Artist in Residence with Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery and West Darling Arts (2022); will be presenting new works in the upcoming arts festival GLAMfest (2022/23); and was a finalist in the Blacktown City Art Prize (2021).



**Ronnie Grammatica** is a photomedia artist who lives and works on Dunghutti land in Crescent Head, NSW. After relocating to Australia from Italy in 2014, Grammatica uses his photographic practice to explore what it means to be Australian as a mechanism to understand both his own culture and the cultures of others.

With a background in graffiti, Grammatica appreciates the beauty found in the fashion magazines but that's not the world he lives in and whilst he admires the natural landscape he remains fascinated by urban human intervention. To him there is a clear distinction between an image that is beautiful and an image that is good. For Grammatica a good image communicates a message.

Grammatica was a recent finalist in the 67th Blake Prize, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre (2022); exhibited in Head On Photo Festival, curated by Moshe Rosenzweig, OAM, (2021); and presented a solo exhibition 200 Years On as a part of the HomeGround Program, curated by Mariam Abboud, Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo (2020).

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



**Aleshia Lonsdale** is a Wiradjuri anti-disciplinary artist, arts worker and independent curator who lives and works on Wiradjuri Country in Mudgee, NSW. Strong matriarchs influence her work as a form of methodical intergenerational cultural transmission which allows the audience to view the world through a First Nations lens.

Working primarily across installation, Lonsdale uses a combination of natural materials and found/discarded objects that address the 'every day' lived experiences and issues which impact her family and community across the past, present and future.

Through astute observation, the distillation of ideas, research, and experimentation, Lonsdale employs art as a way of highlighting issues which the audience might otherwise avoid or turn off from when hit with directly. She asks of her audience to open themselves up to other perspectives and to sit with being uncomfortable.

Lonsdale is an alumnus of the NGA Wesfarmers Indigenous Leadership Program (2021), the Australia Council for the Arts Custodianship Program (2021), and is a current participant in re(situate) - The Australia Council for the Arts Biennale Delegates Program (2022).

**Asma D Mather** is a multimedia artist who works across research contemplation and drawing who lives and works on Wilyakali lands in Broken Hill, NSW. Throughout her practice, Mather engages in invisible research on the unseen where she visualises ethereal systems, mapping constellations of ideas and geography. She is driven by the idea that art can contribute to knowledge in its ability to contemplate and synthesise.

Mather believes that art is a site of concentration; a methodology for knowledge finding and that it has alchemical potential as a meeting point of idea and matter. Her work is constantly seeking to uncover or demystify systems that cause harm to the intelligence of the heart as a real sense that is constantly informing the spirit, however often drowned out by the mind.

Recent achievements include an Honourable Mention in Hadleys Landscape Art Prize (2021); solo exhibition Notes from the Barzakh, curated by Blake Griffiths, Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery (2020); and winning the Create NSW Projects for Individuals (2020 Round 1).



**Kate McKay** is a ceramicist who lives and works on Ngunnawal Country in the village of Collector, NSW. McKay predominantly makes vessels for everyday use with her foundational practice revolving around an intense focus on process. From that, opportunities for exploration beyond the functional realm present themselves.

Through the extended time involved in this formation, she tweaks glaze recipes and tests clay bodies. Through this endless testing, repetition, and experimentation, other sculptural and experiential ideas are also born. Across her practice McKay honours daily rituals through the use of considered, beautiful objects reflecting a deep interest in the ability of hand-made and well-considered plates, bowls and cups to elevate the elemental nature of sharing food and drink to something beyond the merely functional.

McKay was recently awarded the Veolia Mulwaree Trust Creative Arts Scholarship (2022); exhibited in Earthbound, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, curated by Hannah Gee; and was a finalist in the National Emerging Art Prize (2021).



**Freyja Moon** is a textile artist who lives and works on Biripi land in Taree, NSW. Moon's practice is informed by the experience of living with an invisible disability and mental illness. Their work is driven by recurring themes of perspective and clarity in relation to concepts of identity and memory.



With imagery inspired by personal narrative, they comment on the often unspoken or stigmatised aspects of existence with the aim to communicate the significance of recognising and supporting the voices of those who find present structures of society inaccessible. Their artmaking, as a cathartic practice, is integral to their existence. They make art to connect fragments of past and present, and to communicate stories and experiences drawing upon the symbolic capacity of textiles to communicate internal identity.

Moon recently exhibited in Northern Exposure 7, Glasshouse Regional Gallery, curated by Bridget Purtil (2022); were a finalist in Whitehall Art Prize: Into the Light (2021); and a finalist in Naked and Nude, Manning Regional Art Gallery (2021).

## CURATOR BIOGRAPHIES



**Amala Groom** is a Wiradyuri conceptual artist who lives and works on Wiradyuri Country in Kelso, NSW. Her practice, as the performance of her cultural sovereignty, is informed and driven by First Nations epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies. Groom proactively seeks to dismantle the Colonial Project by asserting the argument that colonialism is not just disadvantageous for First Peoples but is, in fact, antithetical to the human experience.

Groom remains a staunch advocate for regional arts, artists and audiences and seeks to bridge the gaps between opportunity and access across the arts and cultural sector in regional NSW in her role as Creative Producer for the Cementa Incorporated/Arts Outwest Regional Artist Mentoring Program (2021-22 ongoing).

Supported by Create NSW and Arts OutWest, Groom recently conducted a residency at the British Museum with *The Season*; the cultural exchange between UK/Australia (2022). Recent awards include the Create NSW First Nations Creative Fellowship w/ State Library of NSW (2022) and the Create NSW 21/22 Visual Arts Commissioning Grant for \$100K (2022). Groom is represented by blackartprojects.

**Kris Townsend** is a Wiradyuri creative, administrator and arts worker who lives and works on Wiradyuri Country in Kelso, NSW. Townsend has a 35+ year history of working across fashion and photomedia most notably in establishing Bris Pics; an independent photographic agency which serviced South East QLD and supplied the Fairfax Newspaper Groups and had major clients in the UK, Japan, USA and throughout Europe also working with Public Relations companies.

In the mid 2000's Townsend was diagnosed with a severe, chronic brain condition that affects her cognitive function. After discovering this 'ticking time bomb', and informed by the mindset that every day is a blessing, her energy is now focused on the promotion and development of arts and cultural practice across her extended community.

Townsend is the current Associate Producer on the Cementa Incorporated/Arts Outwest Regional Artist Mentoring Program (2021-22 ongoing). Recent projects include key collaborator on *miyarnu bundara* w/ Nicole Monks, *Sculpture by the Sea, Cottesloe* (2019); and *GAWURA GURUWIN* w/ Nicole Monks, *Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi* (2018).



**Alex Wisser** is a socially engaged artist and creative producer who lives and works on Wiradjuri Country in Kandos, NSW. His practice involves large-scale, long-term projects within a cross-disciplinary, community-engaged practice exploring the potential of art to participate in everyday cultural contexts.

Wisser co-founded Cementa Contemporary Arts Festival and the Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation, both regionally-based, socially-embedded arts initiatives that work to adapt and engage contemporary art culture to real world contexts with social as well as cultural benefits. He has participated in delivering five successful Cementa festivals, giving over 200 artists the opportunity to explore the socially engaged form and works to constantly refine and rethink the capacity of art to function in cultural contexts other than the gallery or artworld.

Wisser recently raised \$180K to purchase the premises of WAYOUT Artspace in Kandos (2022); The Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation (of which he is a founding member) won the Northern Beaches Environmental Art Prize (2021); and he won the Regional Arts Australia Creative and Professional Development Fellowship (2019).

## IMAGE CREDITS

COVER:  
Amala GROOM  
*so hot right now now now*, 2022  
digital montage from hand painted  
text  
dimensions variable  
image courtesy of the artist

PAGE: 9  
Gus ARMSTRONG  
*Dubitatur Tensio*, 2022  
single channel HD video w/ sound  
05:26 mins  
edition of 5 +1 AP  
image courtesy of the artist

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Lily CUMMINS  
*The keeper of memories*, 2022  
paper, bird skull, pill packets,  
glass cloche, photographs, book,  
religious icons (metal), glass bottles,  
nail scissors, tooth, tissue, antique  
medical cabinet  
57 x 36 x 22.5cm  
image credit: Alex Wisser

PAGES: 12,14,15  
Asma D MATHER  
*unSEEN: the world of dust -  
annotations for the isthmus*, 2022  
copper plate etching, hand-  
colouring, dry pigment, charbonnel,  
caligo heidelberg, luma ink on

hahnemuhle 300 GSM  
45 x 45cm x 3  
unique state  
image credit: Alex Wisser

PAGES: 17,18  
Aleshia LONSDALE  
*Domestic Baggage*, 2022  
discarded suitcases, custom  
luggage tags (paper, ink)  
dimensions variable  
image credit: Alex Wisser

PAGES: 20,21  
Kate MCKAY  
*no body leaves*, 2022  
stoneware clay w/ ash glaze (plates)  
and unglazed (leaves), glasseware,  
cutlery, linen tablecloth, wooden  
chairs, wooden table  
dimensions variable  
image credit: Alex Wisser

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David DOYLE  
*Wontenella - Menindee lakes*, 2021  
recycled metal refrigerator door,  
packing tape, clear resin  
60 x 120cm  
image credit: Alex Wisser

PAGES: 24,27  
Ronnie GRAMMATIC  
*Roadside Memorials*, 2017-2022  
canon UV print on PVC  
90 x 60cm x 5  
unique state  
image courtesy of the artist

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Freyja MOON  
*Patient*, 2022  
DMC thread, tea-dyed cotton,  
embroidery hoops, chairs, end  
table, artificial orchid, paper, ink,  
analogue clock  
dimensions variable  
installation view, *so hot right now  
now now*, Firstdraft, Sydney, 2022  
image credit: Jessica Maurer

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ibid  
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