

# firstdraft

Gallery 2

12 Jan – 13 Feb 2022

## Lectus

### Spence Messih

*Lectus* explores ideas of transparency and opacity, fragility and strength, and safety and privacy – not as each other's 'opposites' but rather as inseparable, in non-opposition. The exhibition challenges the notion that representation is synonymous with visibility and that perceiving is synonymous with knowing. Taking its title from the Latin word *lectus*, meaning 'to read', this exhibition aims to think through the ways that we transmit and receive information and the ways it is simultaneously withheld from us.

**Spence Messih** is an artist living and working on Gadigal land (Sydney, Australia). Their practice speaks broadly to sites of pressure, power structures, materiality and language and more specifically about these things in relation to their own experience. Their work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), Sydney; the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA); Auto Italia, London; Artspace, Sydney; and ALASKA Projects, Sydney, among others. They recently completed their PhD at UNSW Arts, Design & Architecture.

#### Artworks (clockwise from left)

For sales enquiries, please

email [spence.messih@gmail.com](mailto:spence.messih@gmail.com)

*Fibre Portraits*, 2021

inkjet paper

text by Vincent Silk

Published on the occasion

of *Lectus*, Spence Messih

[Please take one](#)

*Cinder*, 2021

stained glass

44 × 54 cm

*Idyll I–III*, 2021

stained glass

70 × 50 cm each

*Sinew I–II*, 2021

stained glass

44 × 34 cm

Gallery 1

**Circling the Sun**

Curated by Tim Marvin

Gallery 3

**Lesser palace**

Sofiyah Ruqayah

Gallery 4

**Haunting In Kensington**

Blake Lawrence

**firstdraft**  
**gadigal land**  
**13–17 riley street**  
**woolloomooloo**  
**nsw 2011**  
**+61 2 8970 2999**  
**firstdraft.org.au**

**we acknowledge and pay respect to the gadigal people of the eora nation, the traditional owners of the land on which firstdraft is built and operates.**

**firstdraft is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW; and assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.**



I.

She would have hated motherhood.  
Considered for encasement she proved untenable  
as mothers go, if tenability is to be proven.  
Buried alive instead deep in books  
I call to her in the morning, in the library  
in the ashes, on the drawbridge, above the train station; their feet  
sticking out at odd angles. I waited for her for years, what's a week  
but loan admin. Water spills from the walls and our voices sound  
softer, then again, she wasn't against anyone  
and never stood for that narrative apart from two necessary separations,  
marriage being industrial has its casualties and limits  
as I have mine — I wish I could have been there  
whispering 'Mama' and watching her swing  
a handbag filled with two wine bottles at the nurse's head

II.

Father was snatched from earth by an eagle,  
In the course of slithering on his belly over sun-warmed concrete.  
Should you find him in the grass beneath your feet, or in his skin left behind, a ghostly reminder touching all  
places once  
Should you find his teeth around your ankle and his jaws loosed upon your interrogating perplexion  
Or come upon the trace hairs shed of him, a sizzling skein  
Possibly twist him in your fingers, beads one too and a swinging string bag  
Catch him in leather not quite fitting, shouldering his way through thought and air, long grass  
Would you know his name?  
While Mother, moderately impeded by the deterioration of her earthly form,  
Resists ubiquity but still must touch her limits, and die.  
The two of them stack. Would I know my own name?  
The garlands and gums are enough  
The world was desert, but some of it was swamp

III.

I frequently bemoan their presence  
in my line of sight  
I am conscious of their sinews and my own  
I am conscious of the way we lack  
Compassion for each other  
I slap well wrapt micro fears across their backs  
I look directly into the sun  
I want to experience the side-to-side rocking of them  
Cavorting in my chamber  
They buttress me, wrap my trunk  
Dragooned, I turn upside down and attach as though suckerfish  
Against the cold pale underside and am absorbed  
The seasons of this plant are long  
Goodbye,

IV.

Questioning the legitimacy of both, telling and showing  
As modes of address or intervention, more specifically  
as pursuit of dissemination.  
Should it be found more efficient to pick up a stone and throw it  
Just so, that it could be better, tightly pack a box and drop it,  
parroting river vocals of outskirts, hoist onto your shoulder the stuff  
of legend. We have our limits  
And some of us are enemies now  
My comrade's comrade, my friend  
Humming into my mouth, a quarried maw vibrating with ease of access  
Questioning, if I can't do it nobly  
Then can I do it at all — is there another way  
Seeking the love of a heavenly body, in pursuit of being adored  
Wriggling through the sunshine, between blades of grass and legs

V.

We belong to a people already defeated  
Remaindered but useful  
With weary necks and full bowls of fruit on our heads  
Painted like one of your French girls, bow in our hair  
Orange segment between our teeth.  
Crushed mouse clouds in the sky squint, suspicious  
We rise from the ergonomic chair, hips crack  
Spit our dummy into the top drawer, cave in  
String bags and beads of wood, egg, clay roll between thumb and forefinger.  
Dressed for first impressions, fatigues  
This wretchedness, the dress of terrible strong  
— 'I've made so many mistakes —' Hold our head in our hands.  
This tiny queen in combat slippers and wrist to ankle gown  
This hair shirt.