

# firstdraft

Melbourne Art Fair

22-25 February 2024

## Soft Cell

Shannon Toth, Amy Prcevich, Easton Dunne,  
Danica I. J. Knežević, Dustin Voggenreiter

Within the shared realms that we move through lies a concealed network of invisible architecture that charts separate paths and boundaries. These paths, defined by vague conventions, act as both guide and limit, directing the transit of bodies as they traverse a landscape fraught with uncertainty, systemic barriers and structural inequalities. Soft Cell brings together work by five artists from the 2023 Firstdraft program to navigate these nebulous and unclear borders and ambiguous social constructs.

At the edge of maps in open-world video games players encounter a virtual boundary, imperceptible yet impenetrable. A collision occurs, progress is abruptly halted. When meeting these invisible walls the character model stutters and jives against them as the player attempts to push beyond the horizon. Occasionally game designers will create a canonical explanation for this interruption; you're marooned, isolated in a locked room, or not permitted to pass the city limits. Rarely, the explanations for the barriers in our own lives are so simple. Built on histories of exclusion, the walls of soft cells pitch and yaw in line with shifting values and changing hierarchies.

In line with this, the veil of "tradition" is thin and malleable and is often co-opted and weaponised to maintain systems of privilege and altered to suit the purposes of exclusion. Is it cultural preservation or stagnation to maintain these unspoken rules, once built on precedent and now held together unconvincingly by a fetishisation of tradition? "We have always done it this way" seems a hollow mantra clinging desperately to the past. This feeble war cry declares disdain, a fear of the other, the new, and the different from myself, in rigid assuredness.

The safeguarding of traditions becomes a discernible marker of privilege while occupying soft cells reminds us that barriers to access extend beyond the physical. Some of us have no gatekeeper to challenge our passage through these concealed walls. Pathways of opportunity stretch out before them, unobstructed and unimpeded, while others navigate a maze of restrictions and obstacles. Spectral, unseen sentries maintain our so-called, social order - comfortable, institutional, ignorant.

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Whether identifying the bounds of our social and economic circumstances or steeped in the knowledge of our personal limitations the works in Soft Cell intersect at these perimeters. Tradition is recognised and questioned, systems are noted but challenged. These works undo the passive acceptance of institutional structures and invite reflection on the frameworks embedded within our realities.

**Artworks** (clockwise from left and top to bottom)

Shannon Toth,  
*Compression Repression*, 2024  
60 cm x 180 cm x 60 cm  
marshmallow, icing sugar, pine

Amy Prcevich,  
*Workaround*, 2023  
10 minutes 49 seconds  
videographer, editor: Jade Muratore, colourist:  
Julien Chichignoud, Cast: Fahmida Haque, Meri  
Olic, Victoria Williams

Easton Dunne,  
*Hell Bent*, 2023  
70 cm x 55 cm x 30 cm  
synthetic polymer paint on mdf and timber with  
screws and adhesive, synthetic fringing

Danica I. J. Knežević  
*Being Home, Xray Edition*, 2023  
107 cm x 48 cm x 12 cm  
xray box, duratan lightjet digital photography

Danica I. J. Knežević  
*Couch, Walker, Chair, Electric Chair and the  
Bed*, 2023  
dimensions variable  
basa wood, reclaimed fabrics, metal twine,  
foam, stainless steel key rings, wire, rubber  
washes, wheels

Dustin Voggenreiter,  
*Homo "Bozo Part" VII*, 2024  
79.5cm x 133cm x 10cm  
steel, LED screen, looping animated GIF

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## Compression Repression

Shannon Toth

Compression Repression fleshes out the dynamics between food and embodied experience by employing the confectionary treat, marshmallow. Marshmallow is made up of sugar and gelatine. Once ingested these materials become useful carbohydrates and proteins for the body. The same materials exist in human mucus, which is produced by the body at times of infection or arousal. Mucus creates a layer of protection, like a blanket over vulnerable parts of the body.

As a food, the marshmallow situates its purpose within the body, however, it also appears to be a pillowy and soft textile. Draped over the pine spine, the weight of the marshmallow compresses the elasticity of the timber. The form of the marshmallow suggests comfort however the mechanics of the structure indicate the corporeal structure is under duress. Excess lengths of marshmallows accumulate in folds around the base of the structure. The security blanket is slipping—it is no longer required.

**Shannon Toth** (b. 1992) is an artist based in Naarm, Melbourne, VIC. Drawing upon embodied experience they heat, bend and wear down materials to uncover their pliability. Through a discourse from engineering and cooking, they reconfigure the familiar to explore the tension between minimalism and abundance.

In 2016 they completed a Bachelor of Architecture from Queensland University of Technology. Recently they graduated with a bachelor of Fine Art from the University of Melbourne.

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## Workaround

Amy Prcevich

To ensure the financial sustainability of art making, most artists engage in paid labour outside of time they commit to their art practice. This often positions paid employment in competition with a commitment to art practice. With wry humour *Workaround* draws on office tropes and the conventions of the instructional video to present a series of strategies used to claim time and space for art making in the context of the office. Informed by her embodied experience as an artist-arts worker, the work celebrates the artistic impulse to agitate, rebel, resist and destabilise. The stakes of the workaround, both for individual artists and the arts sector, is high. Its ultimate aim is to safeguard art making from diminishing under time constraints imposed by paid labour by offering an alternative possibility of how an art practice can be maintained and supported.

**Amy Prcevich** interrogates narratives of social and public space, time, the office, language and labour – specifically the nature and value of artists' labour. Her paid employment across the arts sector has often informed her conceptual, spatial and text-based practice.

Amy has been the recipient of several grants and residencies including Test Sites, Public Art Project Development Grant from the City of Melbourne and Parramatta Artist Studios and has exhibited at The Substation, Arts House, Bus Projects (VIC) and PARI, Campbelltown Arts Centre and Firstdraft (NSW). Amy recently completed a Master of Fine Arts at University of New South Wales and is curator of Language Exchange at Fairfield City Museum and Gallery (NSW) (February-June 2024).

Alongside Elvis Richardson, Miranda Samuels and Shevaun Wright, Amy is part of the art-activist collective Countess Report, the go-to resource for artwork and analysis on gender representation in the Australian visual arts sector.

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## Hell Bent

Easton Dunne

Hellbent is a series of sculptures created for Easton Dunne's 2023 solo exhibition, "Welcome to Paradise", at Rockhampton Museum of Art. This body of work expresses the unique experiences, frustrations and joys of being queer in regional Australia. With a focus on materiality, symbolism and playful camp aesthetics, Dunne mines the matter of everyday regional life for glimmers of queerness, seeking to reveal, recontextualise, and recode the familiar as queer.

Hellbent consists of three wall sculptures combining silhouetted figures of cowboys and cowgirls flanked by palm trees and other symbols of 'paradise,' set against outlines of Catholic churches that the artist attended as a young person with their family. Constructed like small stages, the works resemble miniature monuments to the camp performativity that Dunne perceives in both the elaborate rituals of Catholic mass and in typically rural forms of sport and entertainment including bull and bronco riding, which were part of the artist's childhood.

The scale, form and display of these sculptures echoes that of important symbols from Catholic churches and masses such as the Stations of the Cross or a tabernacle. The pink fringing skirting each work could be equally at home as an embellishment on a drag queen's dress or a professional bull rider's chaps. Inspired by advertising for Western-genre films, whose narratives carry the potential for homo-romantic undertones in the trope of the isolated cowboy/cowgirl, these queer cowboys and cowgirls cut defiant figures as they line

**Easton Dunne** is an artist, artworker and arts educator based in Central Queensland on Darumbal Country. Their work explores connections between identity and place through an autobiographical lens with a particular focus on LGBTQIAP+ narratives in rural and regional contexts.

They utilise drawing, sculpture, installation and time-based media to create autobiographical narratives offering their perspective on life as a queer, transgender and non-binary person who grew up in rural and regional Central Queensland and returned there to live as an adult after studying and working in South-East Queensland.

Informed by Rural Queer Studies, Dunne's work aims to facilitate dialogue and exchange between regional and metropolitan communities around how socio-cultural and geographical factors influence diversity in queer identity work and practices.

Dunne completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at Queensland College of Art in 2012 and a Postgraduate Diploma of Education at Queensland University of Technology in 2014.

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## Body Says, No Danica I. J. Knežević

*Body says, No*, by Danica I. J. Knežević, examines the complex association and dislocation of the medicalised body and the invisibility of care. The exhibition merges videos and images with mobility aids to draw attention to the medicalisation of the body.

Knežević's works include: *Enacting Dreams/Always Knitting*, a video embedded into a walker; *Two Way Street*, where the artist and her mother display mutual acts of care as a silent comedy movie; *Being Home*, a photographic series of the artist's home modifications; and *Body Says, No*, a video projection portraying miniature medical furniture that mimics the way structures demand the body to say, no.

These works aim to disassociate mind from body, spirit from body and emotions from the body by drawing attention to assistive devices, medical support aids and body equipment. How do machines stand in for the body and support it? Uncomfortable and far from individualised, they hold, imprint and hurt the body. When the body says no, it is either for it to hold its ground, to protect itself or because the structure and support aids do not give access to the body. Mobility aids and the body work together to ensure survival. While the aids become a portrait of the body.

**Dr Danica I. J. Knežević** is an early-career artist, researcher, sessional lecturer, and carer who creates Performance Art, Video, Photography and Installation. Her work explores interpersonal encounters, queerness and the exchange of care. Implicit in her work is Knežević's use of her body and the transference of communication that often comes into play between audience and performer, which mimics the interchangeability of caregiver and receiver. Through her performances, she uses her body as a form of communication to interact and care for others. These performances are actions that examine the interchangeability of caregiving and receiving. She was born in Australia and is from the Slovenian-Croatian diaspora. This cultural context has taught her the meaning of body, performance, physical labour, grief, and mortality. She catalyses this cultural knowledge through performing and visualising care as reciprocal actions, finding a balance between failure, necessity, and aesthetics of interdependence.

Knežević holds a PhD from The University of Sydney, Sydney College of the Arts. She resides and works on Dharug and Gadigal lands in Sydney, Australia, as a practising artist and sessional lecturer at The University of Technology Sydney and Australian Catholic University. She has exhibited in many exhibitions, awards and prizes

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## Homo “Bozo” Part VII Dustin Voggenreiter

Homo “Bozo” Part VII is a digitally animated GIF, displayed on a large LCD screen, partially concealed by prison-cell window frames. The work explores the idea of our limited capacity to understand the world around us - As creatures born with sense organs geared towards survival, we grasp at making sense of the complex, chaotic reality we inhabit.

The piece is purposefully gritty, grainy, absorbed by darkness and concealed by metal bars – poetically eluding to the gaps in our species ability to understand reality. This is an idea which extends from Plato’s famous cave shadow allegory (500+ BCE) to avant-garde theories proposed by Cognitive Psychologist Dr Donald Hoffman, all of which highlight the inadequacy of human perception.

Homo “Bozo” utilises the monotony inherent in the GIF format as a means of channelling the looping, unresolved nature of these ideas. We are trapped within our species specific perceptual interface, peering through a narrow window to a reality we may never truly access.

**Dustin Voggenreiter** is an artist who grapples with big ideas, reaching back towards the dawn of time to explore the evolution of human perception. His work addresses the limited window of human perceptual experience, through a practice spanning animation, sculpture and monochromatic post-painting abstraction.

Working with this eclectic material pallet, the artist translates Darwinian accounts of our uniquely human visual perceptions into objects which allude to a tenuous grasp of reality. As a species, our perceptual experience appears intuitive and veridical; however, evolution science explains a reality that appears alarmingly opposed to those experiences.

Dustin’s works are at once pleasurable explorations of texture and colour, as well as being a meditation on the invisible forces underlying the contemporary human experience. He has recently graduated from the MFA program at RMIT, has begun exhibiting at galleries throughout Australia, and has completed the Situate Residency during the first half of 2022

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