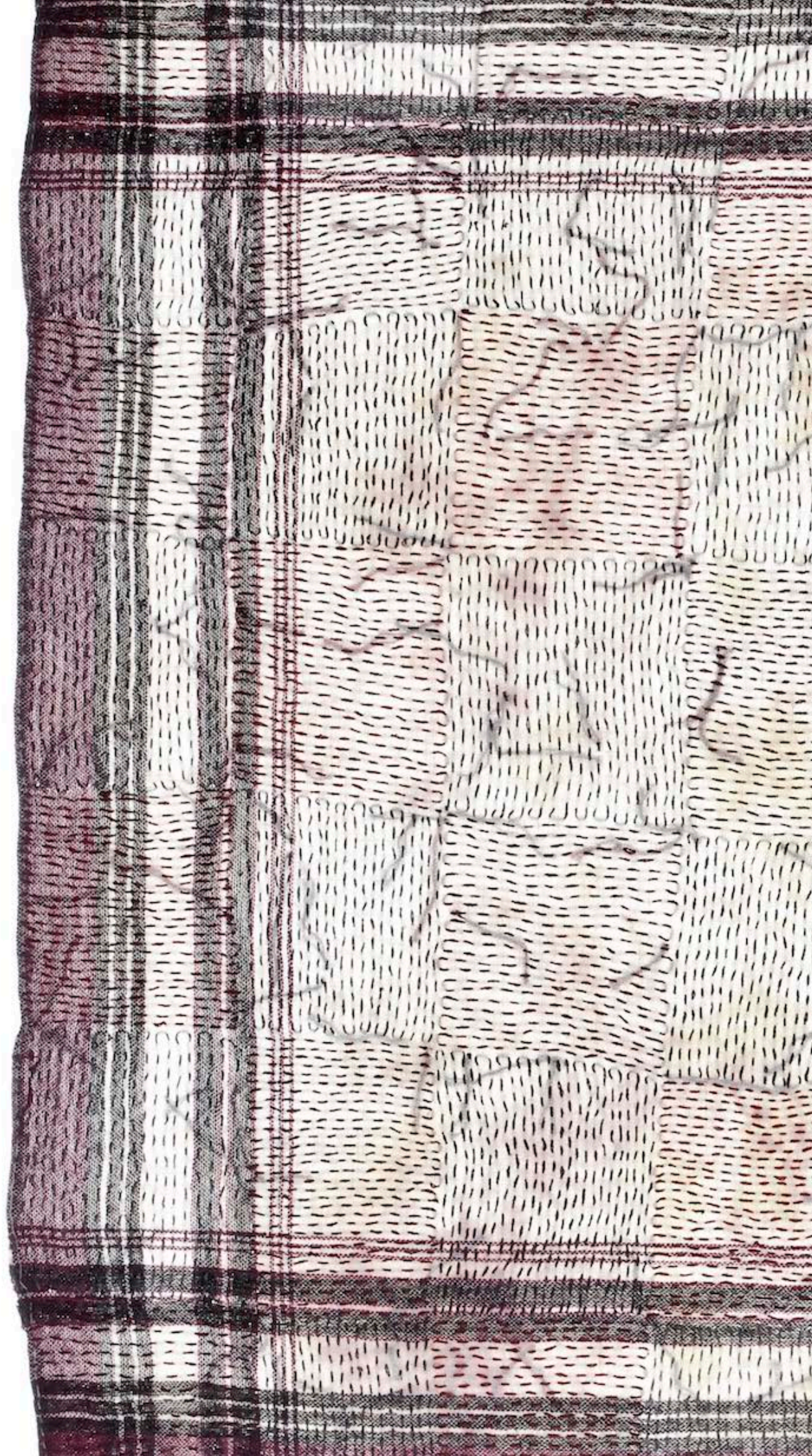




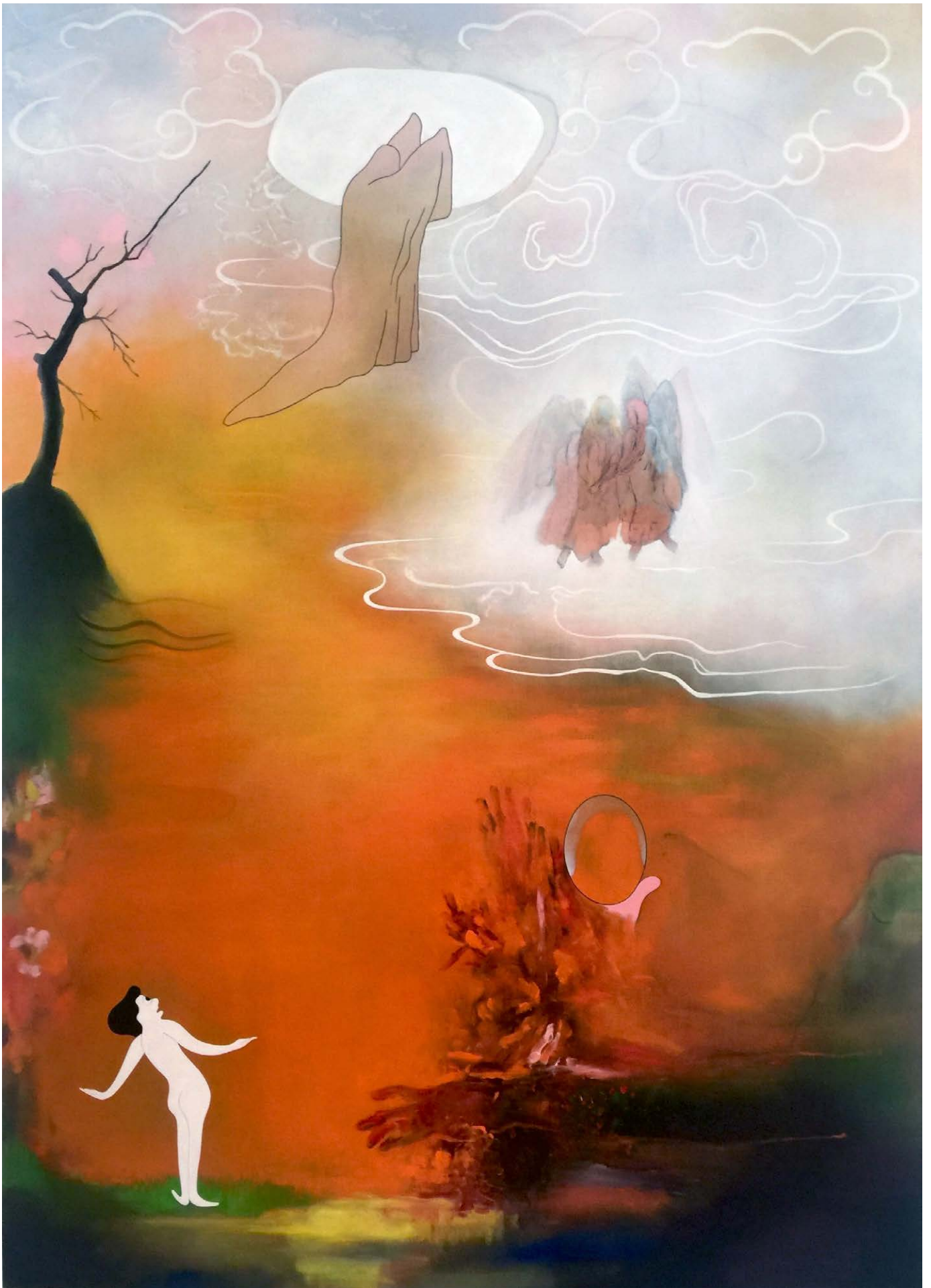
THE LONG KISS GOODBYE

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY

8 February — 9 May 2020







Brent Harris, *The Other Side*, 2016, oil on linen, 244 x 175cm.
Courtesy a Private Collection, © Courtesy the artist.



Iain Dean, *I Am A Joke But At Least I'm Not You*, 2017, oil on canvas, 170 x 120cm, courtesy the artist.

ON HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO.

I began with the idea that this exhibition would cast an analytical gaze on strategies of art making: on mentorship, influence, collaboration and exchange, how an entire practice might be contained in single object, or the fluidity of studio thinking manifested in the gallery.

Its genesis, and the source of its title, is *Sarah Contos presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye*, 2016 – a cinema-screen sized quilt that won Sarah Contos the Art Gallery of South Australia's inaugural Ramsay Prize for Contemporary Artists under 40. Contos made the work specifically for the award. It combines nearly a decade of fragments, artist proofs and studio scraps into an epic composed over a period of three months. Like a cinema screen, it's a portal into both narrative and reverie. Like a movie, it bubbles with sex and drama and comedies and tragedies both real and imagined, each moment in time held together in a whole greater than all combined.

The title of this work describes, to me, something essential of artistic practice: the sense of immersion and obsession that comes from being inside a project, which becomes strangely alien and alive of its own accord once it reaches the gallery, the point of its farewell. It is a cinematic phrase that connects to no film in particular but encapsulates so many fraught and dramatic feelings: the flip of attraction and repulsion, the spectra of longing and proximity, desire and consummation, love and loss.

In combining immersion and distance, the work also suggests a relationship between emotion and art making that transcends the

'expressive'. The artists in this exhibition all share this quality: instead of representing the *content* of emotion, it is explored instead as a *process*.

But.

At some point, the analytical distance of my own gaze faltered and the exhibition took on life of its own. This is likely because this approach to emotion requires the kind of magical thinking that finds correlatives for the intangible in the physical world, or because *processes* like this, connected to intense feeling, tend to share something with ritual and ceremony. Penny Coss's 13-metre painting installation, which is altered by the artist twice over the course of the exhibition in a series of choreographed performances, is as much about reflecting an experience of being-in-the-landscape as it is about making peace with the temporary and unresolvable. Both Iain Dean and Brent Harris deal in the abstraction of gods and monsters, with the grandeur and stupidity of human behaviours, like painting. There's a psychological, autobiographical churn beneath surfaces that appear cool, reductive and hyper-referential. Both artists paint as though in code. Clare Peake's seven rings, which contain the ashes of her visual diaries beneath auspicious hessonite garnet, collapse material and immaterial transformations into an object lesson, an ongoing week of talismans against bad faith.

It's also likely because Michele Elliot's work, which draws from her role as artist-in-residence at Tender Funerals in Port Kembla, New South Wales, shifts the 'goodbye' of the exhibition title into an unavoidably



Penny Coss, *Tainted Sky / Falling Horizon* (detail), 2019-20, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 170cm, courtesy the artist

specific realm. Practically, Tender is a community-run funeral home offering affordable alternatives; it's also devoted to changing attitudes and reframing conversations around death. It has become something of a phenomenon – the subject of podcasts and documentaries – due to a generous, sensitive, ethical and distinctively not-for-profit approach to the ceremonies of mourning. As artist in residence, Elliot works with families to devise whatever components of a ceremony might usefully require aspects of 'art making'. This work could potentially be framed as a 'socially engaged project' but it transcends both the academic discourse of that genre of contemporary art and the time-limit suggested by 'project'. In this instance art is an active and functional part of ritual. It provides a service.

(But.

Perhaps it's a thinking error to make the distinction between Elliot's work as participating in a 'real' ceremony and the other artists' works as being *representationally* ceremonial: I believe in the rituals of knowledge-sharing; I believe in the catharsis of burning a diary; every day I wear a specific ring; slow choreography will change a mood.)

Even without the prompt the allusions are everywhere. Digging for context, I remember that the major painting in a series by New Zealand modernist Colin McCahon that both Harris and Dean have referred to in their own work – a connection that prompted first a friendship, now a formal mentorship – is called *Victory Over Death 2*. There are ladders between ground and sky, paintings haunted by history's ghouls, 'other

sides' and men of sorrow and women made into Hollywood phantoms by the camera. There are ashes, and stains, and memorials. But, because we are in the realm of process and because this magic phrase – *the long kiss goodbye* – stills a moment in motion, we are allowed the transcendent realisation that finality is an illusion. Everywhere, regeneration occurs in simultaneity with loss.

I began with the idea that this was an exhibition about artistic practice, which of course it still is.

It turns out it might also be an exhibition about coping.

Gemma Weston
Curator, *The Long Kiss Goodbye*
Visual Arts Program Associate, Perth Festival

Clare Peake, *Things are never ending: 7 rings for 7 days* (detail), 2018, oxidised Sterling silver, past visual diary ashes, hessonite garnet, 7 parts, dimensions variable, (fabrication and design assistance: Max Butcher & Rose Megirian, Many Peaks Assembly). State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Purchased through the Art Gallery of Western Australia Foundation: Tomorrow Fund, 2019.



LIST OF WORKS

Sarah Contos

Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye, 2016, screen-print on linen, canvas and lamé, digital printed fabrics and various found fabrics, PVC, poly-fil, glass, ceramic and plastic beads, thread, artists' gloves, 330 x 610 x 25cm, Gift of the James and Diana Ramsay Foundation for the Ramsay Art Prize 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia.

Sarah Contos is represented by Roslyn Oxley 9, Sydney.

Penny Coss

ANXIOUS SPACES, 2020, multi-media Installation 1300 x 400cm

Pendulum Acts, 2020, performance

Performance times:

Sat 29 February: 2 – 2.30pm

Fri 20 March: 1:30 – 2.15pm

All works courtesy the artist.

Penny Coss is represented by WA Art Collective.

Iain Dean

I Am A Joke But At Least I'm Not You, 2017, oil on canvas, 170 x 120cm

Hellhole, 2017, oil on canvas, 170 x 120cm

Untitled, 2019, monoprint, 32.5 x 24.5cm

Heroic Painting, 2019, woodcut (unique state), 50.5 x 39.5cm

Submissive Permissive, 2019, woodcut (unique state), 50.5 x 39.5cm

Untitled (Umbrella), 2019, woodcut (unique state), 50.5 x 39.5cm

There's no escape, burn it down, 2019-20, timber, oil paint, stoneware, charcoal and spraypaint, 6 parts, dimensions variable

Poor but sexy, 2020, oil on canvas, 172 x 122cm

This is me, this is me giving up, this is me done, 2020, oil on canvas, 172 x 122cm

You are the artist, 2019, oil on canvas, 172 x 122cm

Untitled, 2019, oil on canvas, 172 x 122cm

Depression is boring, 2019, oil on canvas, 172 x 122cm

Down and out in bad ideas, 2020, oil on canvas, 172 x 122cm

Upside down flower?, 2020, oil on canvas, 172 x 122cm

All works courtesy the artist.

Michele Elliot

(Tender cloths), 2019, organic dye from funeral flowers on muslin, open series, dimensions variable

the confidantes (robin), 2018, giclee print on Hahnemuhle rag, 38.5 x 41cm (image size)

the confidantes (the yellowest thumb), 2018, giclée print on Hahnemuhle rag, 39 x 39cm (image size)

the confidantes (inamorata), 2018, giclee print on Hahnemuhle rag, 40 x 43.5cm (image)

the confidantes (relentless work and whiteness), 2018, giclee print on Hahnemuhle rag, 41.5 x 41cm (image size)

All works courtesy the artist.

Brent Harris

The Transference of Colin McCahon, 1988, oil on canvas, 121.6 x 65.2cm, courtesy of Jo Lagerberg and Dr Steven Swift

The Appalling Moment (small study for #3), 1994, oil on linen, 91.5 x 71.5cm (frame size), On Loan from Murdoch University Art Collection

Abraham, 2007, oil on linen, 199 x 127cm, Courtesy of the Edith Cowan University Art Collection

Man of Sorrows, 2007, pencil on paper, 58 x 38.6cm, On Loan from Murdoch University Art Collection

The Other Side, 2016, oil on linen, 244 x 175cm, Courtesy of a private collection

The Other Side, 2016-17, photopolymer gravure with multiple screen printed layers, ed 7/20, 81 x 61.5cm each, Donated by Alan R. Dodge AM & Neil Archibald, 2019, On Loan from Murdoch University Art Collection

Brent Harris is represented by Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne.

Clare Peake (fabrication and design assistance: Max Butcher & Rose Megirian, Many Peaks Assembly)

Things are never ending: 7 rings for 7 days, 2018, oxidised Sterling silver, past visual diary ashes, hessonite garnet, 7 parts, dimensions variable. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Purchased through the Art Gallery of Western Australia Foundation: Tomorrow Fund, 2019.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In my first year as Visual Arts Program Associate at Perth Festival, and as curator of this exhibition, I have a village of people to thank. Thank you to Perth Festival Artistic Director Iain Grandage, for the privilege of this opportunity & thank you to Ted Snell, Chief Cultural Officer of The University of Western Australia, for supporting this idiosyncratic exhibition. Thank you Sarah Contos for trusting me with your work, and allowing me to think & dream under the umbrella of its title, to Brent Harris for the support, advice and location map of your Western Australian works during a very busy year, to Clare Peake, Michele Elliot for trust and loans, to Iain Dean and Penny Coss for leaping into the unknown with entirely new & ambitious bodies of work. To Leigh Robb, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia; Mark Stewart, Curator of the Murdoch University Art Collection; Sue Starken, curator of the Edith Cowan University Art Collection; Colin Walker, Acting CEO, and Dunja Rmandic, Associate Curator of 21st Century Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia; to Jo Largerberg and Steven Swift and two incredibly generous and wonderful anonymous collectors for loans for works. Thank you to all of the staff at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, especially Kate Hamersley, Megan Hyde, Clare McFarlane, Anthony Kelly & Lyle Branson, and to all the staff at Perth Festival, especially Anna Reece, Jessica Darlow and Ciaran McDonald. It's a blessing to work with all you.

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Cover image: Sarah Contos, *Sarah Contos Presents: The Long Kiss Goodbye* (detail), 2016, screen-print on linen, canvas and lamé, digital printed fabrics and various found fabrics, PVC, poly-fil, glass, ceramic and plastic beads, thread, artists' gloves, 330 x 610 x 25cm, Gift of the James & Diana Ramsey Foundation for the Ramsay Art Prize 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia. Photograph courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

Inside Cover image: Michele Elliot, *the confidantes (robin)* (detail), 2018, giclée print on Hahnemuhle rag, 38.5 x 41cm, courtesy the artist

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