

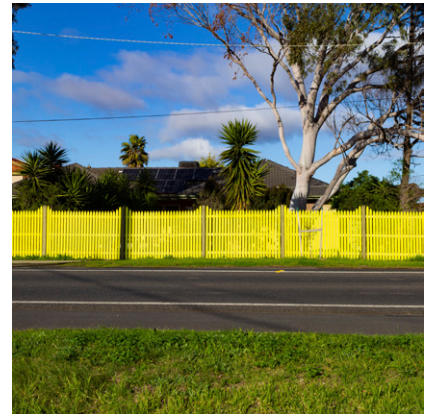
de-centre
re-centre



LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY
15 FEBRUARY - 3 MAY 2025



Naomi Hobson, *Fragility*, 2024, pigment print on archival cotton rag paper, 174 x 116.5cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Leah Jane Cohen Art Bequest, 2024



Kyle Archie Knight, *Coca Cola #2*, 2022, inkjet print on Canson Platine Fibre Rag, 50 x 50cm, courtesy of the artist
Kyle Archie Knight, *Untitled (VB)*, 2022, inkjet print on Canson Platine Fibre Rag, 50 x 50cm, courtesy of the artist
Kyle Archie Knight, *Yellow Fence*, 2022, inkjet print on Canson Platine Fibre Rag, 42 x 42cm, courtesy of the artist



reframing representation

de-centre re-centre explores the survival and connectedness of communities despite the marginalising forces that seek to erase or diminish them. The artists in the exhibition employ photographic media in a variety of ways, but they share common threads: a deep engagement with place, identity and belonging, and the use of photography to challenge dynamics of visibility and power.

The title of the exhibition alludes to the 'centre' and 'peripheries' of culture, where so-called 'middle Australia' is parsed in political discourse to denote a middle-class, white, heterosexual and metropolitan majority. This is the default audience/consumer addressed in popular media and shown on screens, despite efforts to diversify representation to better reflect the lived realities of the population. This exhibition decentres this default viewpoint to highlight some perspectives that are minimised within mainstream culture, although it does not presume to speak for all. Crucially, *de-centre re-centre* examines photography as a medium with complex legacies which can be used as a powerful tool for self-representation and advocacy. In this exhibition, artists deploy and disrupt photographic conventions

such as genre, composition, surface, and series to affirm the presence and agency of the subject. Here, the camera is used in First Nations, diasporic and queer communities to reflect on strategies for survival, bearing witness, care and resistance.

Artists in *de-centre re-centre* engage with photography's inherent complexities across a range of techniques. Some artworks operate in a photodocumentary mode while others demonstrate a more staged approach, however, the production of the image complicates this distinction, as artists mediate between digital and analogue technologies, play with scale, and weave narratives. There are a broad range of approaches to portraiture and how it can encompass collective belonging. Such artworks reveal powerful connections between subject and place; some works are deeply rooted in specific locations, whilst others speak of cultural ties that cross geographies, or reclaim spaces that have historically excluded specific communities. The relationship between photographer and subject is at the core of *de-centre re-centre*, with artists working within their own communities, through shared connections, or by turning the lens back on the self.

Landscape, traditionally a genre that defines the Australian artistic canon, is here reimagined as an agent within a network of temporal, cultural and personal relationships, underpinned by an ethics of care. Mary-Lou Orliyarli Divilli (Nyikina/Ngarinyin/Yawuru), Tace Stevens (Noongar/Spinifex) and Miriam Charlie (Garrwa/Yanyuwa) explore the intertwining of Country with deep familial connections as well as fleeting moments of everyday life. Divilli describes Country and art practice as sources of healing; her carefully staged images show her children illuminated by pools of light in dramatic outdoor scenes, and their presence is suggested in articles of clothing—possibly outgrown, or freshly laid out to be worn. Stevens' ongoing project *Tjilpi* (Anangu word for 'old man') focuses on her father Lydon Stevens as he travels for work and cultural obligations, carves cultural artefacts, tells stories and shares knowledge. In *de-centre re-centre*, the viewer is introduced to Lydon through a series of overlapping images that simultaneously soar over desert country and attend to close detail, capturing brief, busy moments as well as time spent in quiet contemplation. The process of journeying to Country and reconnecting with loved ones following COVID-19 isolation is documented in Charlie's polaroid series *Getting to Borroloola*, where the immediacy of the photographs and handwritten notes facilitate an intimate portrait of community. As well as documenting the emotional experience of Charlie's return, the series reframes life in a remote community through a lens of compassion, dignity and respect.

Naomi Hobson's (Kaantju/Umpila) 2024 photographic series *Life of the River* shows members of the artist's community in relationship to the Wukaanta (Coen River) during monsoon season on the Cape York Peninsula. Hobson's depiction of the interconnectedness of the Coen community with the river celebrates the abundance of life and colour during the wet season as well as the ancestral history that the place holds. *Fragility* and *Enlightened* portray intimate interrelationships within the river's embrace, honouring the enduring belonging of the community to this place and countering colonialist depictions of young First Nations men as threatening outsiders.

Kyle Archie Knight's (Wiradjuri) mapping of queer suburbia in Naarm/Melbourne is a love letter to the campness of the everyday, surfacing within domestic and built environments both as a trace of queer lives and through the playful recoding of (hetero)normative signifiers. The artist's affectionate depiction of the 'burbs recalls Mark Booth's description of camp as a wilfully perverse marriage of marginality and ubiquity (Booth, 1999). As Ray Cook (2023) notes, Knight's attraction to the silly,

tacky and dilapidated markers of his neighbourhood comes from a place of empathy; his inclusion of childhood photographs as well as tokens of his present life point to an enduring connection to such places and their idiosyncratic aesthetics. Camp is also core to the work of Gerwyn Davies, Scotty So, and Amos Gebhardt, who play on visual tropes of the American Wild West, the Chinese historical epic, and European religious art. To excavate queer resonances across such diverse contexts is to acknowledge that while social norms vary across geography and time, same-sex desire and diverse gender expression occur in all human civilisations; the creative reimagining of queer histories can be a strategy for resisting erasure and connecting to far-flung cultural ancestors.

Davies' costumed self-portraits in the Arizonan desert are akin to mirages: dazzling visions that appeal to the fantasies of the thirsty traveller within a hostile environment. The artist's glittering figure is comically incongruous in the landscape and yet remains unknowable and unreachable. Also incorporating self-portraiture, So's *Shungay* series draws from Asian erotic paintings, European Chinoiserie, cinema and contemporary culture, treading the fine line between humour and sincerity that characterises camp. In citing the aesthetics of Christian altar pieces, Amos Gebhardt's *Family Portrait* centres on two fathers tenderly cradling their child, surrounded by chosen family, talismans and sacred texts, with as much reverence as Hubert and Jan van Eyck's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (c. 1432). The triptych envisions the radical care of queer community by evoking the holy family within an Edenic paradise, portraying the parent-child triad and their support network as a manifestation of divine love.

Enactment is a powerful strategy across the exhibition, where performative actions recorded by the camera make dynamics of power and subversion visible. For example, Fijian-Australian artist Torika Bolatagici shows her daughters dancing attack and defence on the basketball court, or performing a *détournement* of Bruno Munari's attempt to find comfort in an uncomfortable chair, to challenge the systemic exclusion of people of colour, particularly women, from institutions of knowledge. By inviting the participation of First Nations, Black, and global Indigenous people of colour in projects such as *The Community Reading Room*, Bolatagici makes space for critical reflection, self-determination and healing.

The Bougainville-born artist Taloi Havini and Australian photographer Stuart Miller's 2009 *Blood Generation* series bears witness to Bougainville's generation born into the war with

Papua New Guinea from 1988-1998, the trauma embedded in its contested territories, and the continuing political struggle for sovereignty and justice. *Russel and the Panguna mine* visits the abandoned Panguna copper mine established in 1972 by Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) and Cozinc Rio Tinto of Australia Limited (CRA), which disregarded the local clan-based matrilineal land ownership system in seizing the site. The community's resistance to the mine led to its closure in 1989, but following this event, tensions in Bougainville and with Papua New Guinea escalated, leading to ten years of war which killed approximately 10 percent of the island's population. Havini notes:

Perched on the fringes of stolen wealth, Bougainville man Russel had no choice but to live a life of guerrilla warfare for the first ten years of his life. Completely isolated from any humanitarian or medical aid, he recalled on many occasions being caught in the crossfire but was agile enough to escape into the thick jungle. He lived in constant fear of being shot or captured. Men like Russel were once boys who began their childhood as young recruits defending their land in jungle warfare (Havini, 2013).

The *Blood Generation* series records the subjects' continuing emplacement in Bougainville, despite the dispossession and trauma wrought by recent history.

Brenda L Croft's (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudburra) *Naabámi (thou shall/will see): Barangaroo (army of me)* is a large series of portraits of First Nations women and girls with cultural affiliations across the continent. Named for the Cammeraygal woman Barangaroo (1750-1791), the portraits emerged from sessions in which the sitters reflected on Barangaroo's experience during the early years of the colonial invasion, and important First Nations women in their own lives. The series of more than 70 portraits enacts a collective show of strength and endurance; in Croft's words:

The ancestral warrior woman spirit of Barangaroo is embodied in all of us as contemporary Australian First Nations women and girls, in our endurance of the continuing settler-colonial project - fighting for acknowledgment of our existence, for our communities and homelands, and for our ancestral futures (Croft, 2023).

Croft's reclaiming of the 19th century photographic technique of wet plate photography involves the digital reproduction of the intimate and one-of-a-kind plates at large scale; the portraits

Naabámi (thou shall/will see): Barangaroo (army of me): Tristan (Dharawal/Yuin) and Naabámi (thou shall/will see): Barangaroo (army of me): Ali I (Biripi) venerate their subjects through the fine detail and sumptuous tones of the monochrome image. The ambitious scale of the project and the digital reproducibility of the image gestures towards a vast force of resistance to colonisation.

Nuriah Jadaí's (Martu/Mangala) layering of portraits of women and girls with copper and gold leaf imbues them with an aura of preciousness whilst referencing the damaging impact of the mining industry on Country. Like Croft's portraits, Jadaí's works *I See You, I Am Tired, Don't Mess With Me* and *I Am Defiant* express the strength of First Nations women's resistance to the colonial project, and align with the artist's advocacy for the protection of Country as an anti-fracking activist. Her metallic surfaces are echoed by Sherry Quiambaó's *Gold Mountain*, where the protective function of the foil blanket is complicated by its shimmering allure, reflecting tensions between safety and affluence in consumerist society. The glittering wounds of Ramak Bazmar's heroic women possess a similarly dualistic quality; the artificiality and studied formality of the portraits distances the viewer from the harrowing violence they allude to. Meanwhile, Maria Maraltadj's (Kwini) mirrored surfaces and disrupted landscapes suggest experiences of vulnerability and self-discovery, deflecting the viewer's gaze in some instances and reflecting it back in others, alluding to a collapse of distinction between place, self and other.

In a related approach, Simryn Gill visualises complex layerings of place, culture and lived experience. Her immersive and detailed series of silver gelatin prints *Forest* evokes a timeless jungle, but the stillness of the images bely the transitory moment of the photograph; fragile scraps of printed text torn from books are attached to plants, soon to decay or blow away. These interventions take place in ruined buildings and neglected gardens in Singapore and Malaysia being slowly reclaimed by nature. The scale of reproduction allows close reading of Gill's highly specific source material, such as a Chinese cookbook, the *Ramayana*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Origin of the Species*, and *Frankenstein*. Operating like a visual poem, the artist's textual collages foreground the post-colonial hybridity of these sites but resist straightforward interpretation.

Gill's portrait *A small town at the turn of the century #5*, was captured as the 21st century dawned in Port Dickson, Malaysia, where the artist grew up. While the photograph is brimming with visual information about the sitter and their environment, by



covering their head with tropical fruit and only referring to the site as 'a small town', the portrait is rather comically anonymised and reduced to tropes of the 'exotic'. This leads to the politics of visibility as a core theme throughout the exhibition, with each artist choreographing the viewer's engagement with their subject in different ways. Some sitters avert their eyes, obscure their faces, confront the lens with an unflinching gaze, or may be physically absent from the image, compelling us to reflect on the dynamics of looking and being looked at, and forcing us to reckon with the subject's agency as well as our own voyeurism. This raises the issue of how being visible in particular contexts can impact personal safety, and how marginalised communities navigate this risk in daily life. The artists exercise care in exposing their subjects to the gaze of a viewer who could be either a member of their own community or an unknown outsider.

In *de-centre re-centre*, photography serves as a powerful tool to address themes of survival, identity, and belonging while navigating complex relationships between culture, place, and power. Across the emerging, mid-career and senior



practitioners in the exhibition, strategies for reimagining landscape, queering history, visualising relationships and subverting colonial representation are explored. Artworks invite viewers to reconsider not only the subjects within the frame but also their own position within the act of looking. This exhibition offers a reflective space for exploring visibility, agency, and resistance, while honouring communities that continue to navigate the impact of marginalisation in daily life.

Theo Costantino
Director, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

images left - right:

Taloi Havini and Stuart Miller, *Gori standing in the Buka passage*, 2009, inkjet print, 80 x 120cm, copyright Taloi Havini and Stuart Miller

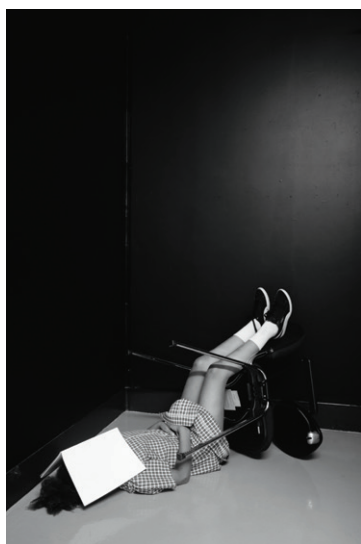
Brenda L Croft, *Naabāmi (thou shall/will see): Barangaroo (army of me), Tristan (Dharawal/ Yuin)*, 2019-21, inkjet print (from original tintype, wet plate collodion process) on archival paper, 143 x 112cm, courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

Scotty So, *Reflection, 01*, 2022, digital photograph, 150 x 100cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Leah Jane Cohen Art Bequest, 2024

Sherry Quiambao, *Veiled, gold mountain hides the heart*, 2024, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Hemp, 120 x 80cm, courtesy of the artist



Ramak Bazmar, *Scene 3, The Hero's Gaze*, 2023, pigment inkjet print, 100.5 x 149.5cm, courtesy of the artist, Ramak Bazmar



Torika Bolatagici, *First in Family (after Munari)* (detail), 2019, 14 pigment ink prints on Hahnemühle Hemp paper, various sizes, © 2019-2025 Torika Bolatagici

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Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery and Perth Centre for Photography acknowledge the traditional owners of the different parts of Country in this exhibition and pay our respects to the people of these nations.

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Cover image:

Gerwyn Davies, *Bandit* (detail), 2023, archival pigment print, 85 x 150cm, courtesy of the artist, Jan Murphy Gallery and Michael Reid Gallery

The University of Western Australia would like to acknowledge that this exhibition takes place on Whadjuk Noongar boodjar, and that Whadjuk Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land, and continue to practice their values, languages, beliefs and knowledge.

LWAG with Perth Centre for Photography and Perth Festival.



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