

MATTER

WORKS FROM THE
CRUTHERS
COLLECTION OF
WOMEN'S ART

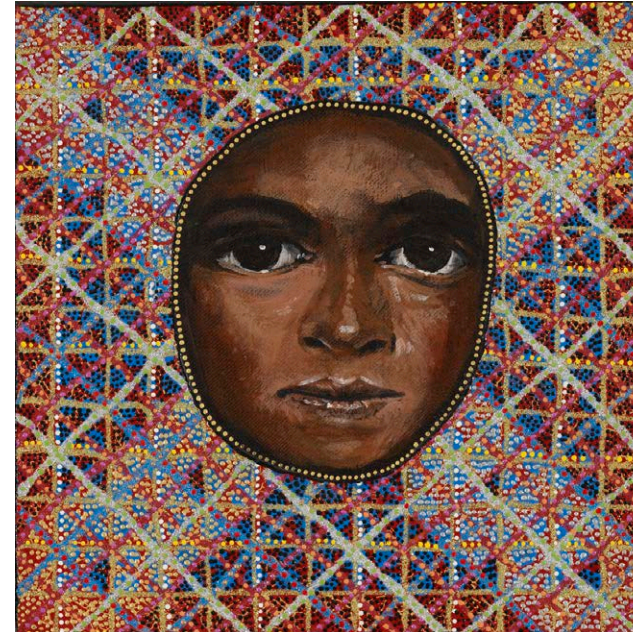
17 JULY — 27 NOVEMBER 2021
LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY



Toni Warburton, *Self portrait in a Fair Isle pullover*, 1983-85, terracotta and tin-glazed majolica, 15 x 5 x 8cm, © courtesy the artist



Eveline Kotai, *Bremer Bay to Pemberton*, 2002-2004, wool tapestry and canvas 31 x 32cm, © courtesy the artist



Julie Dowling, *Icon to a stolen child* (detail), 1998, acrylic, red ochre and plastic on canvas, 24 x 25cm each (4 parts) © courtesy the artist and the Copyright Agency 2021



Vivienne Binns, *Laura Lowe-Wilkinson (with Joyce Wilkinson-Binns aged 5,16, 47, & 74 years)*, 1976, vitreous enamel on steel, 41 x 31cm. © the artist, image courtesy the artist, Milani Gallery, Brisbane, and the Copyright Agency 2021

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Changing states of matter is an apt metaphor for transformations that occur as an artist's concept is realised. Transitions and transformations – whether of light, of colour in the landscape, of personal stories of change or of love and loss – can all be found in this exhibition. While showing work that is wildly varied in material expression and scale, this survey focuses on the processes by which artists resolve their work. Many of these works have emerged from creative networks and communities, or as part of a collaboration, and defy easy classification as ‘high art’, ‘craft’ or ‘community art’. In the artists' hands, the process of changing material states is the way in which unseen or internal changes and relationships can be so eloquently communicated.

Pink galahs in flight around Ntaria, 1995, is a large collaborative terracotta mosaic produced by the internationally recognised Hermannsburg Potters (Maggie Watson, Carol Rontji, Elaine Namatjira, Dulcie Enalanga, Beryl Entata, Irene Entata, Noreen Hudson, Elizabeth Mocketarinja, Virginia Rontji). Together, the artists have worked terracotta clay to create tiles, painting the base-relief surfaces with underglazes to create a vibrant rendering of life in the Ntaria landscape.¹ Western Arrarnta artists continue to use clay forms to illuminate their connection to the artistic legacy of Albert Namatjira, to Country and to their culture and heritage.

Susan Norrie's powerful, large-scale painting, *Fete III*, 1987, is anchored by the recognisable Disney character, Donald Duck, amongst an accretion of confusing and fragmented images. The disturbing landscape is a skin built of visual distractions

which can only temporarily mask the seismic shifts of life – cycles of love, loss, exuberance and decay. Michelle Nikou casts the innocuous tissue box in bronze in recognition of weighty and significant moments that punctuate our everyday. Nikou's wonky boxes stand on stilted legs, appearing to be almost animate, open forms. They are no longer able to hold tissues – as was their original function – but now allude to both a physical and psychic absence. Here, the physical tissue, those cells and DNA that reflect our life experiences, are no longer visible having morphed into a different state of energy or matter.

Works of art produced during the Second World War reflect the experience of wartime when so many loved ones were absent and dedicated to the war effort elsewhere, and anxiety regarding their safety was constant. There is an austerity evident in the selection of materials and subject matter that is pared back and descriptive. Self portraits by Nora Heysen (the first Australian woman to be appointed as an Official War Artist, 1943-1946), and Sheila Hawkins, alongside Grace Cossington Smith's *Dawn landing*, 1944, are realised using a subdued palette. Aadge Bruce was born in 1934 and her childhood experience of scarce food and resources in war-torn Holland influenced how she collected and reused materials in her work, as demonstrated in her careful construction of the cushions, *Generosity*, *Greed*, and *Courage*, 1996.²

“Stitch ’n’ Bitch” is a phrase that had been used to refer to social knitting and crafting groups prior to World War II. On the home front, many hands were busy working and being in company was an important means of providing an

empathetic ear and supportive community based on shared experience. Contemporary realisations of community-driven and communal creative production take the form of Rhonda and Susannah Hamlyn's *Chit Chat*, 1996, and Vivienne Binn's *Laura Lowe-Wilkinson (with Joyce Wilkinson-Binns aged 5,16, 47, & 74 years)*, 1976, from her *Portraits of Women* series. This work was part of the genesis of Binn's artist-in-community project *Mothers' Memories*, *Others' Memories* that foregrounded the history of women as aligned with industry and craft.³

The richness and density of experience embedded within the surface of works is evident in Julie Dowling's powerful portraits of Aboriginal people. Dowling has used DNA in her work as a material, listing blood and ochre from the traditional lands of the Badimaya people, in the realisation of stark and beautiful paintings. These portraits reference the Western tradition of icon painting which depicts hallowed, often religious, figures whose value is intrinsically linked to the use of gold and precious stones. In Dowling's *Icon to a stolen child*, 1998, her use of glitter and plastic gemstones built into a rich tapestry of marks and surface provides insights into the life story as each face looks out to meet our gaze.⁴ The physicality of the work, combined with Dowling's remarkable rendering of these individuals, squarely locates them and their histories in the public realm to shimmer in the light today.

From Lisa Wolfram's dried drips of paint at the base of her *Painting #271*, 2009, to Lilla Lowe's sumptuous renderings of apples and blossoms in oil on cedar board and Sarah Goffman's 2014 installation of transparent and

opaque forms made from plastic, velvet and bone, there is a richness of materials and subjects in *Matter*. And just as the experience of making is embedded within each of the works, it is in the gaps – the open weave or the fragmented forms – that so much can be expressed. The gathering of tangible matter exists in the knowledge of all that is invisible – those aspects of life that cannot be seen but are felt and essential to life. Time spent together and time spent apart; pivotal moments from our daily rituals that are marked, acknowledged and savoured.

Lee Kinsella
Curator

1. The watercolour paintings of Albert Namatjira may be the most recognised depictions of the Ntaria (Hermannsburg) landscape.
2. Margaret Way, “Memories - Macabre and Magic: exhibition review Aadge Bruce: Domestic Bliss Artplace Claremont Western Australia 9 May -1 June 1996”, *Artlink*, Vol 16 no 4, December 1996, p 78 – 79.
3. Note in artist file – communications between Vivienne Binns and Gemma Weston, August 2014.
4. Inscription on the reverse of the illustrated work : “Icon to a Stolen Child: City Girl... For those who live in Concrete + Steel.”

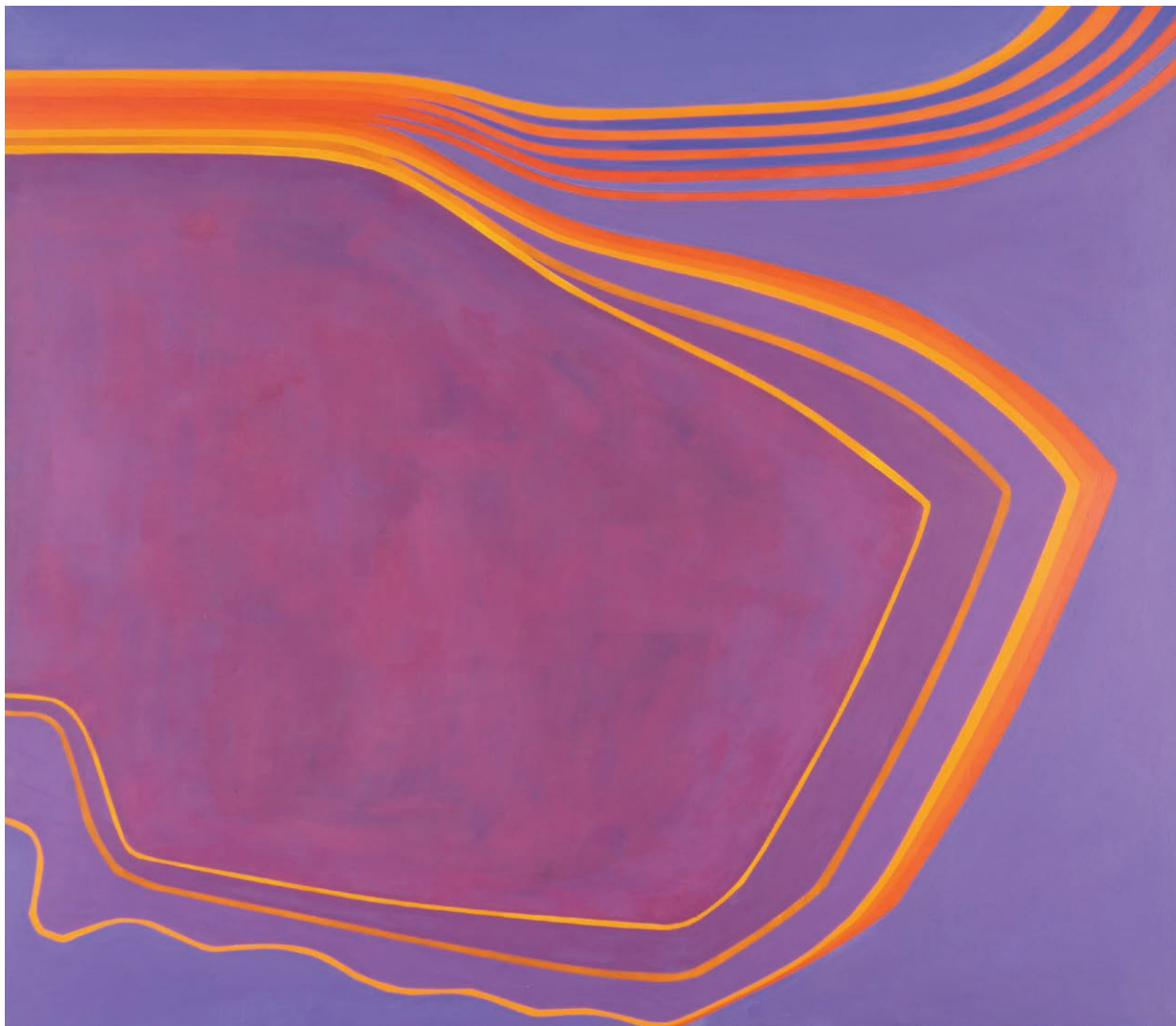


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Hermannsburg Potters - Maggie Watson, Carol Rontji, Elaine Namatjira, Dulcie Enalanga, Beryl Entata, Irene Entata, Noreen Hudson, Elizabeth Moketarinja, Virginia Rontji, Pink Galahs In Flight Around Ntaria, 1995, terracotta clay and underglazes, 95 x 180 x 18cm, © courtesy the Hermannsburg Potters and the Copyright Agency 2021



CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the Noongar people who remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of the land on which UWA stands.

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Thank you to Professor David Sadler, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), Jo Faulkner, Associate Director, (DVCE), and my LWAG colleagues for their part in the realisation of this exhibition and associated programs: Lyle Branson, Mia Davis, Aimee Dodds, Ellie Eshraghian-Haakansson, Gok Lim Finch, Donna Greenwood, Kate Hamersley, Megan Hyde, Anthony Kelly, Janice Lally, Lisa Liebetrau, Clare McFarlane, Sally Quin, Maya Quinn and Liz Smith. Installation staff: Daniel Bourke, Damian Capone, Richard Foulds, Guillermo Kramer.

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IMAGE CREDITS

All images Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia.

cover image:

Lisa Wolfgramm, *Painting #271* (detail), 2009, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 180cm, © courtesy the artist

image above:

Carol Rudyard, *Untitled*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 155.5 x 178cm, © courtesy the artist's estate