I WAS HERE



Inside cover: Tom Buckland, *Constellation* (detail), 2016 - 2017, mixed media, dimensions varied. Image courtesy of the artist.

Outside covers: Alex Seton, *I was here*, 2017, spirit ink, Bianca Carrara marble, 152x52x2cm. Images courtesy of the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

I WAS HERE

Tom Buckland (ACT) | Wanda Gillespie (NZ) | Kate McMillan (UK) Yhonnie Scarce (VIC) | Alex Seton (NSW) | Amy Spiers (VIC) Robyn Stacey (NSW)

Curated by Anna Louise Richardson (WA)

I WAS HERE considers instances of denial, removal, absence and invisibility in Australia and New Zealand's current and historical political landscape.

The photographic and sculptural work of artists Tom Buckland, Wanda Gillespie, Kate McMillan, Yhonnie Scarce, Alex Seton, Amy Spiers and Robyn Stacey revisit landscapes, technologies, events and people to reflect the continual remaking of history.

Sifting through the detritus of old futures, *I WAS HERE* recycles wanted and unwanted stories of a contested past. The works act as containers of memory that slip between the real, the imagined and the forgotten. Scarce's handblown glass yams reference the ongoing trauma of colonisation on Aboriginal people and pay homage to matriarchal histories. Examining stories of vanishing, Spiers presents a campaign against whitewashing over histories of removal and displacement with convenient mythic fictions. Landmarks and permanent monuments are undermined, washed out and unmapped in Seton's marble sculptures.

Highlighting the all-permeating nature of history and illuminating the otherworldliness of the recent past McMillan's narratives of forgetting and place reveal and conceal an intriguing history bubbling beneath the earth. Constellations of mini-worlds in Buckland's work present a myriad of futures in a dystopic choose your own adventure. Gillespie's imagined societies present the possibilities of an ancient future, while historic icons are distorted into Stacey's shadowy upside down lands where fleeting moments of the present pass into history.

Exploiting the immersive scale of installation, cinematic imagery and the mark of human intervention, each artist has created a point through which history can be accessed. Building on tales of abandonment, degradation and the repurposing of historical narratives, *I WAS HERE* lays out the endless remnants of a future in motion.

22 July to 16 September 2017 Fremantle Arts Centre



TOM BUCKLAND

Tom Buckland (b.1988) is an emerging artist best known for a practice informed by a strong ethic of making and materiality. Cardboard, hot-glue, timber and found objects are his weapons of choice. Buckland uses installation and sculpture to transport the audience into other worlds that darkly mirror our own reality, questioning contemporary human relationships with technology, animals and the environment.

In 2015 Buckland graduated from the Australian National University School of Art with honours and was the 2016 recipient of a Russell Kennedy Lawvers Studio Residency courtesy of Canberra Contemporary Art Space. In 2016 he was awarded the CAPO Macquarie Telecom grant for emerging artists. Buckland started 2017 with his solo show Contact Light at Canberra Contemporary Art Space and then organised and facilitated the Home For Unloved Animals project which was a community art workshop and exhibition run in conjunction with Tuggeranong Arts Centre and regular artistic collaborator Rebecca Selleck. Buckland is exhibiting work in Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart later this year.

Top left: Tom Buckland, Post-Human (detail), 2017, cardboard, found objects, peephole viewer, mirrors, foam, miniature people, skeleton, dimensions varied.

Top right: Tom Buckland, Suburban Fantasy #2 (detail), 2017, cardboard, found objects, peephole viewer, mirrors, miniature people, cotton, foam, dimensions varied.

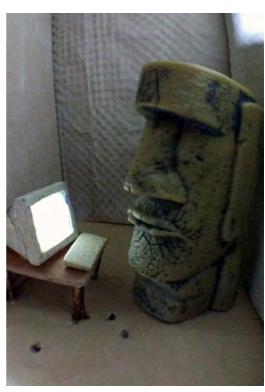
Bottom left: Tom Buckland, Seven and a Half Million Years (detail), 2016, cardboard, electronics, LEDs, found objects, peephole viewer, mirror, miniature scientist, dimensions varied.

Bottom right: Tom Buckland, Ancient Meet Obsolete (detail), 2016, cardboard, electronics, LEDs, found objects, peephole viewer, miniature Moai, dimensions varied. Images courtesy of the artist.









WANDA GILLESPIE

Wanda Gillespie (b.1980) is an Australian/New Zealand artist working in sculpture and photography to explore fictions and ideas around history, culture, ritual and ceremony. Gillespie's work questions the nature of reality through narrative, often presenting her sculptures as historical artefacts. An interest in the mystical, paranormal spirit world is central to her work. Gillespie creates sculptures primarily in wood and ceramic. Photography is often used to create staged performative pieces involving costume making and sculptural props.

Since graduating in 2009 from the Victorian College of the Arts with a Masters of Fine Arts, Gillespie has exhibited regularly with recent solo exhibitions including *Levitation Practice* at MARS Gallery, Melbourne 2016; *The Ceremonial Processions of Dreamers* at Lindberg Galleries, Melbourne in 2015; *The Antarctic Kingdom of Gondwanaland* at Craft Victoria and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne in 2011 - 2012; *Into the Void* at Linden Contemporary Centre for the Arts, Melbourne in 2010; and *Tana Swiwi* at Westpace, Melbourne in 2010.

Gillespie has been funded through the Australia Council, Arts Victoria, and the City of Melbourne for her solo projects and was artist in residence at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, through the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In 2007, Gillespie was awarded an Asialink residency to Bandung. The experience had a significant influence on the direction of her work. Here she created her first wood carved sculptures. After her residency she returned several times to Bali and around Java to create new work. As her passion for woodcarving grew, she trained in traditional woodcarving at the Melbourne Guild for Fine Woodworking. By using traditional techniques in contemporary ways, she seeks to disrupt notions of linear time and history as truth.









Top left: Wanda Gillespie, *Spirit 3 (Pritika)*, 2016, woodcarving (Totara), 24x13x10cm. Top right: Wanda Gillespie, *Spirit 2 (Greg)*, 2016, woodcarving (Matai), 15x15x11cm. Bottom: Wanda Gillespie, *Seeker 2 (Kai)*, 2016, woodcarving (Ash), fur, fabric, logs, 160x70x50cm. Previous page: Wanda Gillespie, *Seeker 1 (Fuyuko)*, 2016, woodcarving (Ash), paint, fur, fabric, leather, string, 140x40x40cm. Images courtesy of the artist.

WE WERE THERE, or Art at One Remove

"I was here." Those words in Carrara marble are one half of a work by Alex Seton. Like the statement of someone who has just inscribed a wall with graffiti, his sculpture, the work which gives this exhibition its title, evokes the act of art-making and the double paradox of art's being of place, territorial, and yet atemporal. Like all art, Seton's work was made in a present different from the perpetual present, or perpetuity, in which objects exist; as soon as a work is made its original circumstance falls away. In our heedlessly digitising culture in which everything appears to be both present and in the present-tense, the art-object, as a site of contemplation, is as likely to appear lost or anachronistic, as real and live.

Other works, notably Kate McMillan's *Lost* (2008), a photographic series which documents a scenic New Zealand landscape beneath which a village lies buried by a long-past volcanic eruption, indicate that the condition apparent in much contemporary art today, its atemporal contextlessness, might also be what we think of the world at-large – that existence itself is best apprehended at one remove, as something from the past.

The notion that art-objects today are not produced for contemplation but rather in and for expectation, the expectation, on the part of the audience and their institutions, that the artist is still sufficiently well empowered to create the context of social meaning for the artwork, can allow us to make a different kind of sense of what might otherwise appear to be melancholy in McMillan's work. *Lost*, with its human-scaled absence and its clear relation to the vast, indifferent processes of Nature, is also, unavoidably, an intimation of impending catastrophe.

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Perhaps the Analogue is best thought of, not as adjective, but as noun. In contrast to the digital which transforms inputs into code, the Analogue is thingness. It is when one object acts as an equivalent for another: one object can be an analogue, a replacement, a metaphor, for another thing. In a certain sense a sculpture is always an analogue for something else, even if the artwork itself is a found-object.

Both Wanda Gillespie and Yhonnie Scarce present us with analogous realities. For Gillespie, whose smaller than life-size figures seem to reference the art of pre-modern and Indigenous cultures, art is a theatre of interiority in which ambiguous, imaginary or sacred worlds are made real. Scarce, in contrast, uses her art denotatively, retroactively, referring back to presences and events obscured by settler history.

One intriguing aspect of digital culture is the nostalgia for analogue technologies – the record, super-8 film and drawing. Among artists this extends to the current enthusiasm for wooden sculpture; carving figures being a primal artistic impulse alongside drawing and song. Scarce's use of glass for her sculpture, a material in many ways akin to lava, gives her analogues for bushfood a disturbingly brittle, implicitly volatile, presence.

In the appreciation of aestheticised, atavistic technologies and their modes of equivalence there is a nostalgia suggestive of the feeling that the world of the past was more reliable, truthful or faithful than much of what is present in the present. Robyn Stacey's photographs of artists' studios and living-spaces that have been transformed into that elemental black-box, the camera obscura, turn the notion of the Analogue into an almost metaphysical proposal: personal space as an archetypal camera, simultaneously an eye and a trope for the artist's mind. Stacey has spoken with surprise of discovering how converting a room in that way reveals that the world outside – gum trees in the case of Hans Heysen's Adelaide studio – is filled with whatever had inspired the thought, work, inner life and the reality of its inhabitant.

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Today's recovery of the Indigenous is part of a broad ethical corrective which is intended to undo the violence of Western colonisation and its modernity. It also performs a function strangely parallel to that of nostalgia, being in a way its alternative in that the idea of the Indigenous allows the evocation of a possible future in which human destructiveness can be minimised, the powerful interiority of Indigenous cultures being maximised. For Scarce, Indigeneity is both identity and being, and so her work necessitates a critique of the modernity that has denied and harmed her people.

Likewise, in Amy Spiers' *Miranda Must Go* (2017), an activist project which aims to draw attention to the effects of the myth of the Australian classic *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the artist is utilising the politics of Indigeneity to expose one of the practices settler culture uses to efface the vestiges of its violence. Spiers' work, in bringing to our attention cultural effacement, emphasises, too, that erasure is a particular kind of psychological repression: the fiction of the girls lost at Hanging Rock was and is an analogue for the absented Indigenous peoples. In Australia Indigenity has been facilitated by the logic of liberal humanism, a tradition which it must always critique, if implicitly. Yet now it may be that this emancipation has accelerated the decline of a hoped for, broadly-shared modern interiority.

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If the Indigenous, like the Environment, can be said to be a reality-principle, a reality-check, a limiting of social and economic excesses, then, in an equally Freudian turn, artists may be nominated as dream-workers, figures performing the hard work of imagining those possibilities which other members of society will initially experience as illusion, then, hopefully, as insight.

Like Gillespie, Tom Buckland's interest is in creating realms that parallel the everyday world. It is as if he wishes us to imagine we can side-step the deep pit of our impending cultural and ecological doom. His *Constellation* (2016 - 2017), analogue and in its own, miniature way cinematic, gives the viewer the privilege of peering through a wall and into other worlds, allowing us to secretly feel omniscient and godly.

Just as in Indigenous cultures, the role of the artist today seems to be becoming that of an intermediary or guide, someone who has retained faith in the viability of the Imaginary, its mnemonic function and comforting social power, someone who can remind us of what too often feels lost. Each of the artists in this exhibition acts as if we need not be trapped in and by our present. Perhaps this sense of being able to escape temporality itself is what Seton is hinting at with his work *Left Turn at Albuquerque* (2017), a video in which he, like Bugs Bunny under a cartoon desert, is shown burrowing through a slab of white limestone, expecting to emerge with the knowledge he – we? – took a wrong turn at that oddly symbolic town.

Instead of artists being critics of their cultures, their worlds, it seems now that they have tasked with the project of dreaming us out of the predicament of our times, our present, by literally having to imagine other ways of being. Yet that may always have been the purpose of art. After all art is, especially in our absence, all and more than is implied by the simple, haunting declaration: "I was here."

JOHN MATEER
Independent writer and curator

KATE MCMILLAN

Kate McMillan's (b.1974) work incorporates a range of media including sculpture, film, sound, installation and photography. McMillan is interested in the linking narratives of forgetting and place, often focusing on the residue of the past. Her artworks thus act as haunting memory-triggers for histories and ideas that are over-looked.

Her most recent solo exhibition, at Castor Projects in London 2016, was titled *Songs for Dancing, Songs for Dying*. McMillan is currently working towards a major project at the Kunsthaus Bethanian in Berlin for late 2017, titled *The Ghosts of Material Things*. In 2016, she was invited to undertake a residency in St Petersburg as part of the National Centre for Contemporary Art, where she developed new film works that were recently shown at the Peter and Paul Underground Fortress of the State Museum.

Recently, McMillan took part in *Acentered: Reterritorised Network of European and Chinese Moving Image* during 2016 Art Basel Hong Kong. Her work has been featured in various museums and biennales, including the 17th Biennale of Sydney in 2010; the Trafo Centre for Contemporary Art, Szczecin; Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne; Perth Institute for Contemporary Art; John Curtin Gallery, Perth; Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth; and the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney. She has been the recipient of residencies in London, Tokyo, Beijing, Basel and Berlin.

McMillan has been the recipient of numerous grants including a 2011 New Work Grant from the Australia Council, which she also received in 2009. In 2013 she was awarded a Fellowship from the Western Australian Department of Culture and the Arts and a Mid-Career Fellowship in 2008. Her PhD, completed at Curtin University in 2014 explored the capacity for contemporary art to unforget history and will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018. She is currently a Teaching Fellow at Kings College, London.



Top left: Kate McMillan, *Forgotten landscapes*, 2008, digital print, 130x160cm.
Top right: Kate McMillan, *Somewhere between loss and losing*, 2008, digital print, 115x130cm.
Bottom left: Kate McMillan, *Lost*, 2008, digital print, 115x130cm.
Bottom right: Kate McMillan, *Trace evidence*, 2008, digital print, 90x110cm.
Generously on loan from The Wesfarmers Collection, Perth.
Images courtesy the artist and The Wesfarmers Collection, Perth.

YHONNIE SCARCE

Yhonnie Scarce was born in Woomera (b.1973), South Australia, and belongs to the Kokatha and Nukunu peoples. Scarce holds a Master of Fine Arts from Monash University, 2010. She is one of the first contemporary Australian artists to explore the political and aesthetic power of glass, describing her work as "politically motivated and emotionally driven". Scarce's work often references the ongoing effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people, In particular her research focus has explored the impact of the removal and relocation of Aboriginal people from their homelands and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

In 2015 Scarce exhibited internationally in Hong Kong, Vancouver and Berlin, and was involved in several major projects around Australia including the Palimpsest Biennale, Mildura and a site specific installation at the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of *Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary and Torres Strait Islander Art*, Adelaide. In 2016 she was curated into *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia* at Harvard Art Museums, Harvard. Scarce's work was curated into the 19th Biennale of Sydney in 2014. In 2013 she exhibited in the 55th Venice Biennale collateral exhibition *Personal Structures; Melbourne Now* at the National Gallery of Victoria; *Heartland* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; the Western Australia Indigenous Art Awards, Perth; and at the Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide. In 2012 Scarce undertook a residency and exhibited at the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Museum, University of Virginia and participated in Aboriginal art symposiums at Seattle Art Museum and the Hood Museum, New Hampshire.

Scarce's work is in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of South Australia, National Gallery Australia, Flinders University Art Museum, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, and University of South Australia.

Scarce is represented by THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery, Melbourne.





Top: Yhonnie Scarce, *Only a Mother Could Love Them*, 2016, blown glass, 16x12cm. Bottom: Yhonnie Scarce, *Florey and Fanny* (detail), 2011, blown glass, cotton aprons, 150x130x30cm.

Generously on loan from the City of Yarra Art and Heritage Collection, Melbourne. Images courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery, Melbourne.

ALEX SETON

Alex Seton (b.1977) is a multidisciplinary artist working across sculpture, photography, video and installation, best known for his use of marble carving. Seton brings this traditional practice to bear on every day objects and contemporary concerns, exploring the technologies, traditions, and modes of production that inform our relationships with the world around us. He also works directly with contemporary political issues, such as Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, and questions of conflict and nationhood.

In 2017, his work *Refuge* was included in the Kochi-Muziris Biennale following his exhibition *The Journey* at Galerie Paris-Beijing in 2016. He has had numerous solo exhibitions, including *The Island*, Newcastle Art Gallery in 2017; *Last Resort*, McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery and Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne in 2014; *As of Today*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra in 2014 - 2015; *Replicator*, Tweed Regional Gallery, Murwillumbah in 2014; and *Roughing Out*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, Gymea in 2013.

In 2015, Seton was awarded a Grand Jury prize at the Fondation François Schneider Contemporary Talents competition, Wattwiller. He was the Inaugural Nancy Fairfax Artist in Residence, Margaret Olley Art Centre, Tweed River Art Gallery, Murwillumbah, in 2014; and in 2012 participated in the prestigious Art OMI residency program in New York.

Recent group shows include *Dark Heart: The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2014; *Sealed Section* at Artbank, Sydney in 2015; *What Marcel Duchamp Taught Me* at The Fine Art Society, London, in 2014; and *Subject to Ruin* at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Sydney in 2014. His work is held in collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Artbank, Art Gallery of South Australia, Australian War Memorial, Newcastle Art Gallery, Bendigo Art Gallery, the Danish Royal Art Collection, Copenhagen, and HBO Collection, New York.

Seton is represented by Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney and Singapore.





Top: Alex Seton, *Proof of Absence*, 2017, limestone samples, dimensions varied. Bottom: Alex Seton, *Left Turn at Albuquerque*, 2017, stop-motion video, 4 minutes. Images courtesy of the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

AMY SPIERS

Amy Spiers (b.1982) is a Melbourne-based artist and writer. Spiers makes art both collaboratively with Catherine Ryan, and as a solo artist. Her socially-engaged, critical art practice focuses on the creation of live performances, participatory situations and multi-artform installations for both site-specific and gallery contexts. Her work aims to prompt questions and debate about the present social order - particularly about the gaps and silences in public discourse where urgent social issues are not confronted.

In January 2017 Spiers initiated a campaign to remove associations to Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* at Hanging Rock. Entitled *Miranda Must Go* the campaign aims to shift attention away from a fiction about disappearing white schoolgirls to the real losses experienced by Aboriginal people in the region as a consequence of white settlement. The project has attracted significant local and national media attention and sparked substantial public debate.

Spiers has presented numerous art projects across Australia and internationally, most recently at Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne in 2016; the Museum für Neue Kunst, Freiburg in 2016; MONA FOMA festival, Hobart in 2016; and the 2015 Vienna Biennale. As an arts writer and researcher, Spiers has published work widely in art journals, books and magazines, including producing texts for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Auckland Art Gallery; Open Engagement; and Das Superpaper. She is currently completing a PhD at the Victorian College of the Arts.



ROBYN STACEY

Robyn Stacey (b.1952) has been creating spectacular and sumptuous images since the mid 1980s. Whether breathing new life into historical collections or bringing our gaze to contemporary society, her work invites us to imaginatively journey into the private worlds of other people. Since 2013, she has been transforming entire rooms into walk-in camera obscuras. Masking windows to leave just a ray of light, as if by magic, the view outside spreads over the room's interiors, but upside down and in reverse. This dream-like moving scene does the opposite of a shadow. It casts trees, drifting clouds, even towering buildings, over the internal architecture and its inhabitant's belongings. "It's like being in your own private movie", says Stacey, who photographs this inside-outside union in the fleeting minutes when light and composition are just right. Notable artist studios and residences provide the sites for this new series, which features Rose Seidler House in Sydney, built by architect Harry Seidler, Hans Heysen's painting studio in Adelaide, Wendy Whiteley's home at Lavender Bay, Sydney and Geoff Kleem's Studio on Parramatta Road, Sydney.

Stacey has presented work in numerous solo and group exhibitions, recently including *Magic Mirror* at Perth International Arts Festival in 2017; *Magic Object: The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2016; and *Robyn Stacey: Cloud Land* at the Museum of Brisbane in 2015. Three substantial publications, *Home* 2011, *Museum* 2007 and *Herbarium* 2004, beautifully capture Stacey's fascination with artifacts and specimens, and offer unique insight into the collections of the Sydney Living Museums, the Macleay Collection of Entomology and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney.

She has been the recipient of major awards, grants and residencies and her work is held in notable public collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of Western Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of South Australia, Queensland Art Gallery, the New South Wales Historic Houses Trust, the City of Sydney, Samstag Museum and Artbank.

Stacey is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney and Jan Manton Gallery, Brisbane.





Top: Robyn Stacey, *Geoff Kleem's Studio, Parramatta Road*, 2016, Type C-Print, 110x156cm. Bottom: Robyn Stacey, *Studio, The Cedars*, 2016, Type C-Print, 110x143.6cm. Images courtesy of the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney.





Top: Robyn Stacey, *Wendy and Brett Whiteley's Library*, 2016, Type C-Print, 110x159cm. Bottom: Robyn Stacey, *Living Room, Rose Seidler House with Exterior Mural*, 2016, Type C-Print, 110x146.7cm.

Images courtesy of the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney.

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I would like to acknowledge the lenders to this exhibition:

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Anna Louise Richardson Curator, I WAS HERE

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