

An abstract painting with a textured, impasto style. The upper portion is dominated by a large, irregular shape filled with various shades of blue and teal, suggesting a sky or a body of water. Below this, there are horizontal bands of dark brown and deep red, interspersed with patches of olive green and yellow. The bottom edge is jagged and uneven, with more blue and brown tones. The overall effect is one of layered, organic forms.

art  
et  
al.

**Australian Memoir**

art  
et  
al.

**Curating Collections / 02**

An Art et al. publication

Curated by Billy Mann

in collaboration with Monash University

Museum of Art | MUMA

Cover: Teelah George, *A Clearing, a Periphery*  
2019 (detail). Monash University Collection,  
Melbourne. Purchased by the Monash Business  
School 2019. © Teelah George

**Australian Memoir**



While numerous public and private collections of contemporary art exist across the world, university art museum collections are interestingly not so widespread; most are located in the United Kingdom, the United States or here in Australia. Monash University's own collection is relatively young, as is the University itself. In 2021, we celebrated sixty years of the first intake of students to Monash, as well as the establishment of the Monash University Collection.

What sets Monash's collection apart, is its focus on post-1960s contemporary Australian art. From its inception, the Collection was shaped contemporaneously, acknowledging developments in art as they occurred, rather than in retrospect. To collect in such a way is thrilling, but not necessarily suited to the risk-adverse! We continue in the spirit of the Collection's early years, supporting living artists and their practices as they evolve, and reflecting on the key debates and concerns for artists of our times.

Since the beginning, the Monash University Collection was 'put to work' through its display in buildings across the University's campuses, with the intention not only to engage students, academics and the greater community with art, but also to create a cultural context for teaching and learning at the University. We are always looking for new ways to share the Collection, bring fresh eyes into it and invite new voices to enter it. Hence, we jumped on the invitation — through our colleagues at Arts

Project Australia and with Art et al. — to be involved in the wonderful Curating Collections initiative.

It has been a real privilege to meet and work with Billy Mann, who generously shared his own story and developed a nuanced response to the Collection that connected with his personal history and a memorable trip made to Australia in the 1990s. It was a great opportunity for us to respond to Billy's interests, reflections and further inquiries. I can best describe this process as a lively 'call and response'. Billy's selection of works is idiosyncratic, moving across genre, media and time. It connects beautifully to his written piece that reflects on the act of travelling itself, as well as the Australian landscape and life in our cities — from the perspectives of both Indigenous and settler artists. Creating new narrative links between works, we hope his thoughtful selection will inspire more journeys through our Collection. I would like to thank Billy first and foremost for his great enthusiasm and engagement with us. Thanks also to Sim Luttin and Jennifer Gilbert for bringing us all together and keeping a close eye on the project. Thank you to MUMA's Education Officer Melissa Bedford, Collection Manager Emma Neale and especially Museum Officer David Thomas for their participation in this project.

During a time when it has often felt more difficult to reach out and connect, this project shows that there is always a way and so much to gain from doing so.

## Introduction

CHARLOTTE DAY / DIRECTOR  
Monash University Museum of Art | MUMA

Monash University Museum of Art. Photo by Trevor Mein







Following on from our first Curating Collections titled *Antidote*, between Arts Project Australia artist Michael Camakaris, and the Cranford Collection in London; we bring you a new collaboration between London-based, Submit to Love Studios artist Billy Mann, and the Monash University Collection in Australia – a university art museum collection which is actually quite rare these days. With virtual working now often the norm, as the world shifts in and out of Covid-19 restrictions, these sorts of collaborations seem less overwhelming, and open a world of opportunities never thought possible before.

With collaboration at the core of Art et al., we are constantly thinking about the act of exchanging ideas and how significant this can be for all involved. Across several weeks, Billy chatted with staff members working with the University Collection, learning and sharing stories of his travels across Australia in 1997. These stories triggered ideas and were a source of inspiration for staff when thinking of artworks to share with Billy. After a period of reflection and writing his story down, Billy chose 24 artworks that reminded him of memories and scenes from his three-week Australian camping trip. This includes a thread, linen and bronze work by Teelah George that Billy chose for its lush, sprawling expression of colour and spirit, as well as a highly patterned painting on canvas by Yikartu Bumba (left) that Billy chose because ‘it pulled me into a vast exploration of concepts about mapping and pathfinding’.

*Australian Memoir* is the title that Billy chose, and it is just that, but Billy takes us on his journey in a very animated way. We hope you enjoy reading Billy’s story alongside exploring his chosen collection of artworks.

LEFT Yikartu Bumba, *Country North of Wirnpa* 2007 (detail). Monash University Collection, Melbourne. Purchased in 2007. © Yikartu Bumba, Courtesy of Martumili Artists, Western Australia

## Foreword

JENNIFER GILBERT  
Art et al. co-founder



# Australian Memoir

BILLY MANN

Billy at Kata Tjuta



Billy presses his ear to the highway

When my friend Spud told me to lie down and press my ear to the blacktop, I wondered whether the packet of bush biscuits we'd just finished had a special ingredient. This was my introduction to Australia, on the first night of a three-week camping trip. We were halfway to Uluru from Alice Springs, at a roadhouse on the Lasseter Highway. With my ear hard against the ground, I heard the rumble of a road train five miles away. How could something so far seem so close? Five minutes later the triple-trailer ripped past us with a mighty roar, sending up a cloud of red dust. We walked away rubbing our eyes.

So far and yet so near... I wondered that again as I opened my eyes on the vast diversity of the Monash University Collection. It was like bumping into an old friend after more than twenty years. And all my first impressions as I set foot in 'the land down under' came teeming back. All the memories of an eye-opening journey into the unknown put me back in a place that was both familiar and strange at the same time. The reminiscence was so vivid that the 15,000 kilometres that now sat between us felt like no distance at all. In that moment, it struck me that those three weeks in 1997 had left an indelible mark on my soul. The experience had become part of my identity, a part I had neglected for nearly a quarter of a century. Australia was in me and there was something about the Monash University Collection that told me it was a good fit. It fed a yearning for discovery, pulling in multiple impressions and notions about place and people.





Grampian Mountains, New South Wales



Rail track and salt lake, South Australia

The trip actually began two weeks before I arrived. An advance party of fellow campers had already started in Darwin and explored the northernmost parts of the Northern Territory. I hooked up with them in Alice Springs and was briefed on the next stages of our journey... first west to Uluru and Kata Tjuta, then south down the Stuart Highway to Adelaide, where we'd meet Australian friends and journey up the Murray River aboard a houseboat called Freedom. From there we'd drive to Melbourne, then to Sydney, and then fly back to Britain.

If there is a narrative arc in this travelogue, it is in the land and the environment. From the hard, red, remoteness of Australia's scorched centre, to the rolling green fertility of the southern wine regions, and then into the hard-faced congestion of the big cities. It was a slow-build from emptiness to full-on – from being all alone out in the wilds of Central Australia with nothing more than a toilet roll and a spade, to being four deep at the bar of a Sydney pub. In the early stages of our journey the land, to my innocent eye, seemed to be full of defiance. Later, in towns such as Coober Pedy (function: opal mining), Woomera (function: aerospace) and in the cities, it was wilfully compliant.

Right from the start, the sensual and the logical came flying out of their traps... or so it seemed. I already knew that Australia is around thirty-two times the size of the UK, but equations ( $AUS = UK \times 32$ ) count for little as your Honda campervan eats up mile after mile of burnt

orange earth. It was appropriate as we headed west towards Uluru, that our soundtrack was an album called Diesel & Dust by Midnight Oil.

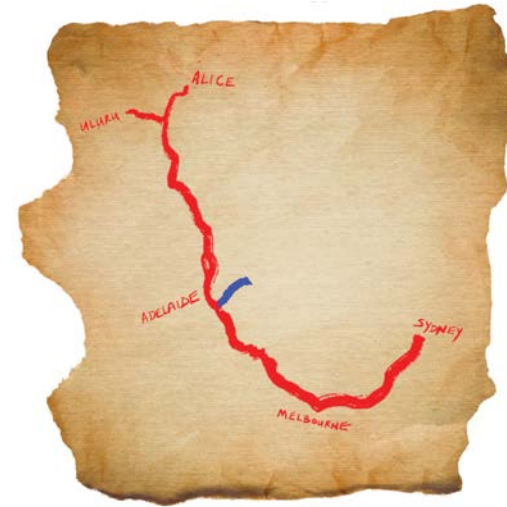
Other sensations arrived head-on. The rare appearance of an oncoming vehicle on the highway locks your eyes in a test of scale. That bird you just saw hovering in the distance turns out to be a dead fly on the windscreen. Then there's Australia's clumsy courtship of line and pattern. On a map it resembles a misshapen pie, but onto this eccentric plan has been drawn a grid of pathologically straight lines dividing all of Australia's 7.7m square kilometres into six territories. Inside this rigid frame are mountains, rivers and lakes in mesmerising non-conformist shapes. Rocky outcrops bubble up from barren flatness and stand massively, all stumpy and proud.

Our passage across the border from the Northern Territory to South Australia, signalled a transition from red to green, then from green to blue as we entered New South Wales. Metaphor lingers in colour so, with no irony intended, our lodgings in Sydney were in Kings Cross, an area known for its 'red-light' attractions and 'blue-movie' parlours. Our days out of town were on trips to the Blue Mountains or to the seaside at Manly and Freshwater Bay.

The artworks I've put together here is an eclectic, but hopefully evocative short memoir. It has been chosen by naked instinct rather than cool reason. Some of the thinking is tenuous. The Anne Ferran black-and-white print from her *Carnal Knowledge* series, for example, is favoured



Spud in tent, South Australia



Road trip route map by Billy

because it is reminiscent of both the surface texture of Uluru and the intimate huddle of Kata Tjuta. The collages and composites of John Nixon, Kushana Bush and Richard Larter spoke of the cities. Teelah George's luxuriant colour-wheel stitchwork landscapes are simply irresistible.

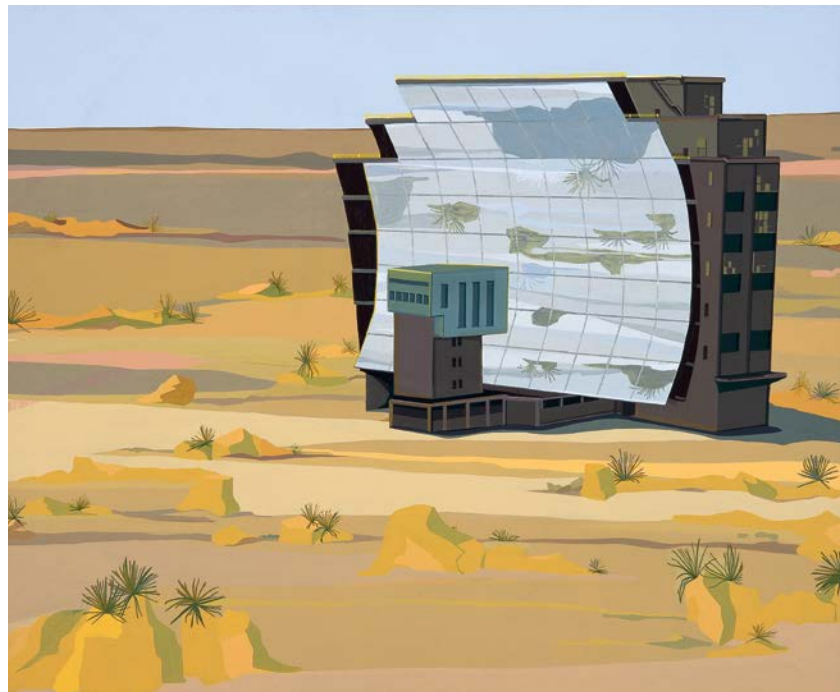
When Spud next told me to press my ear to something it was to a tree on the banks of the Murray River. 'What can you hear?' he asked. I heard what sounded like a storm drain in action. 'Thirsty things, trees', he said with a wink. In the end, with such flimsy impressions and distant memories as my guide, this selection risks adding up to little more than reheated fantasy in a three-way with nostalgia and false memory. Yes, we caressed the scaly skin of Uluru, something which I understand is now prohibited as it is recognised as a sacred site. Yes, we gazed at the moons of Jupiter up in the clear black night sky. But most of the time we just revelled in domestic ordinariness. We sat still, our 'thongs' on our feet, our 'stubby holders' at our side, sucking up this new world of wonder. The Aboriginal folk music of Baku was our serenade. We mastered one-pot campfire cooking. We played 'pokies' in small-town bars. We conned a few Australians into believing we personally knew Princess Diana, whose tragic death was non-stop news during our visit. We were woken up in the middle of the night by the shriek of rutting koalas. In this sense, Australian Memoir is more of a reckoning than a comment or an explanation. It is the rough statement of a relationship. It is Australia and Me.

Kata Tjuta, central Australia





# First Impressions



Nadine Christensen  
*Glass Minnow* 2001  
 Synthetic polymer paint on board  
 50.5 x 61cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 2002  
 © Nadine Christensen



Clifton Pugh  
*Dingo and Drought* 1961  
 Oil on composition board  
 68.3 x 91.1cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased c.1961  
 © Estate of Clifton Pugh



Teelah George  
*A Clearing, a Periphery* 2019  
 Thread, linen and bronze  
 105 x 100cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased by the Monash Business  
 School 2019  
 © Teelah George





## On the road



Terry Matassoni  
*Taking the Slow Road Home* 1990  
 Gouache on paper  
 54.5 x 74cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1990  
 © Terry Matassoni

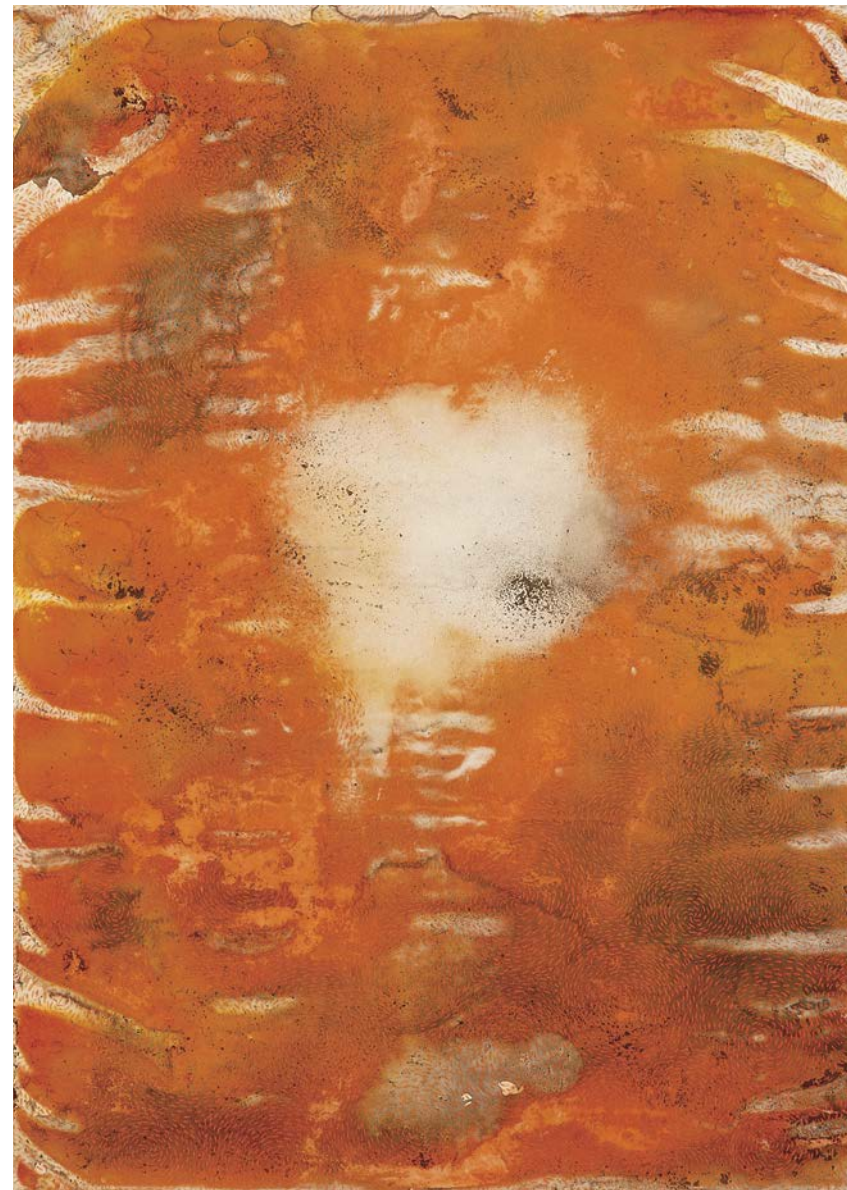


Anne Ferran  
*Untitled*  
 from the series *Carnal Knowledge* 1984  
 Gelatin silver print  
 47 x 54cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1988  
 © Anne Ferran, Courtesy of Sutton Gallery,  
 Melbourne





Yikartu Bumba  
Manyjilyjarra people  
*Country North of Wirmpa* 2007  
Acrylic on canvas  
73 × 121.5cm  
Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
Purchased 2007  
© Yikartu Bumba, Courtesy of Martumili  
Artists, Western Australia



Judy Watson  
Waanyi people  
*claypan* 1990  
Pigment and pastel on canvas  
182 × 131cm  
Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
Purchased 1993  
© Judy Watson/Copyright Agency, 2021



## In the towns



Rosemary Laing  
*welcome to Australia*  
from the series *to walk on a sea of salt* 2004  
Type C photograph  
60 × 122.2cm  
Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
Purchased 2005  
© Rosemary Laing, Courtesy of Tolarno  
Galleries, Melbourne





Jane Burton  
*I Did It for You #2* 2005  
 Type C photograph  
 114 x 114cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 2007  
 © Jane Burton



Lyndal Walker  
*All New Personal Style, Holly-Anne* 2000  
 Type C photograph on aluminium  
 75.5 x 49.5cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Donated through the Australian  
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program  
 by Pat Corrigan AM, 2013  
 © Lyndal Walker





Frank Hinder  
*Nepean, Emu Plains* 1944  
 Watercolour and pencil on paper  
 25.2 x 33.8cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1974  
 © Estate of Frank Hinder

## At the river



Bonita Ely  
*Murray River* 1979  
 Etching, sand on handmade paper  
 75 x 56cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1992  
 © Bonita Ely





Maree Clarke  
 Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Mutti Mutti,  
 Boonwurrung peoples  
*On the Banks of the Murrumbidgee River* 2017  
 Lenticular photographic print, LED lightbox  
 116.8 × 116.8cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Monash University Public Art Commission 2017  
 © Maree Clarke, Courtesy of Vivien Anderson  
 Gallery, Melbourne

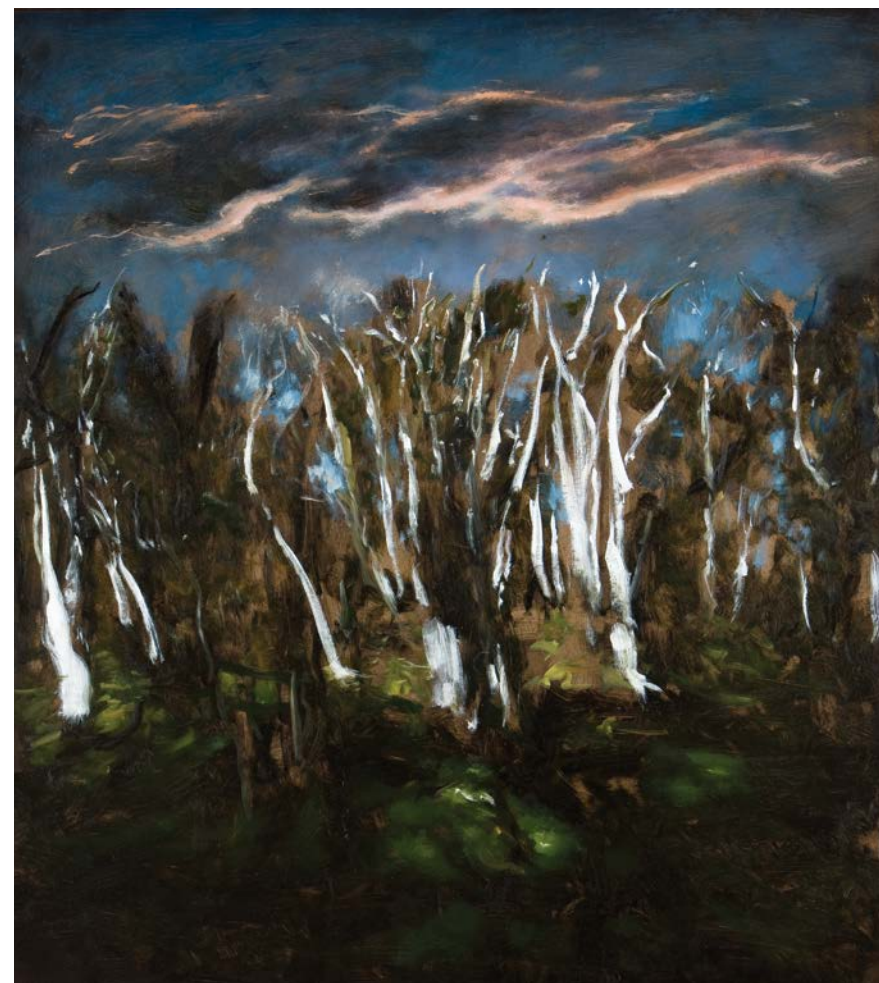


Michelle Ussher  
*Thongs, Autumn* 2005  
 Watercolour on paper  
 10 × 14.7cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 2005  
 © Michelle Ussher





Fred Williams  
*Landscape with Birds* c.1957  
 Gouache on paper  
 40.6 x 59.1cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1966  
 © Estate of Fred Williams



Louise Hearman  
*Untitled #561* 1997  
 Oil on composition board  
 100 x 91.4cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1997  
 © Louise Hearman and Tolarno Galleries,  
 Melbourne



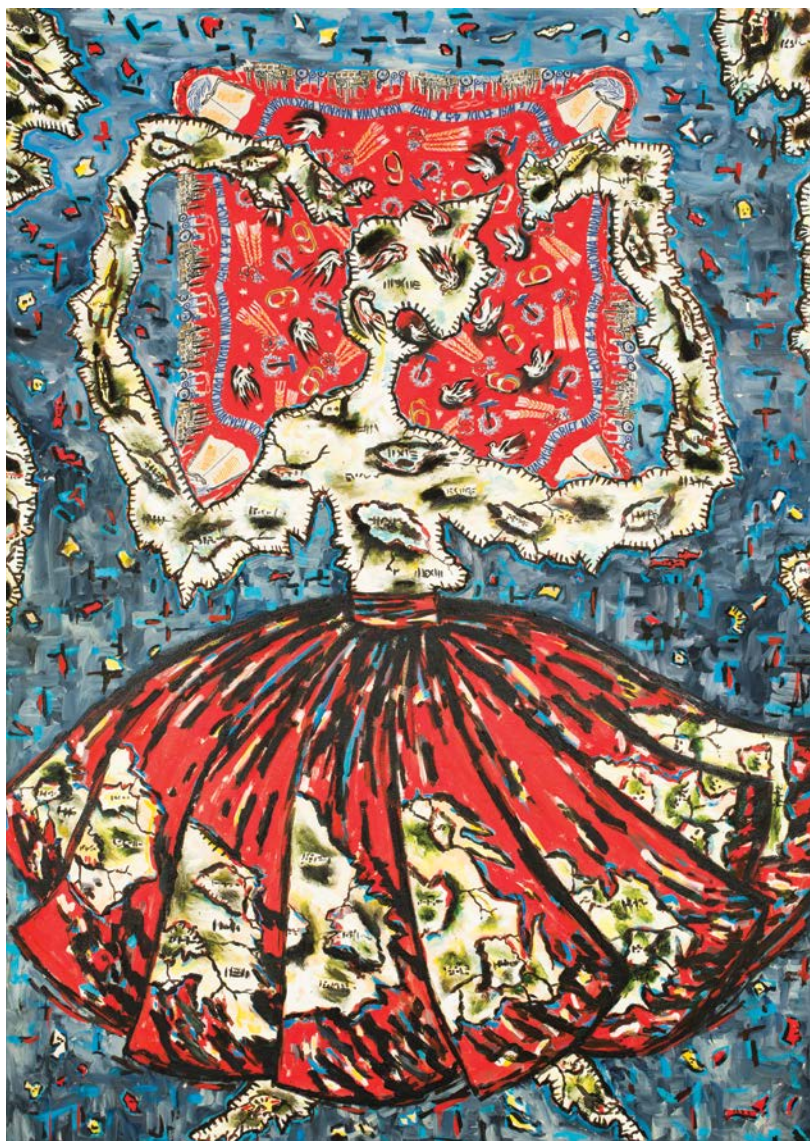


Kushana Bush  
*Actors Unmoored by Wind* 2017  
Gouache, gold leaf and pencil on paper  
51 × 66.4cm  
Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
Purchased 2018  
© Kushana Bush, Courtesy of Darren  
Knight Gallery, Sydney



Destiny Deacon  
Kuku and Erub/Mer peoples  
*Melancholy* 2000  
Lamda digital print from Polaroid original  
135.5 × 159cm  
Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
Purchased 2002  
© Destiny Deacon



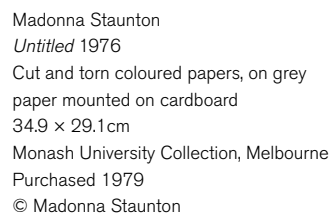


Susan Rankine  
*Oh! Motherland* 1985  
 Oil and fabric on canvas  
 213 x 152.5cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1986  
 © Susan Rankine



Eric Thake  
*Watching the Brolgas, Western Queensland* 1974  
 Linocut on oriental paper  
 41.5 x 34.7cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1977  
 © Estate of Eric Thake







# Departure



Charles Blackman  
*Drifting* 1966–67  
 Lithograph on paper  
 54.7 × 78.6cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1968  
 © Estate of Charles Blackman



Peter Graham  
*Now My Song is Sung* 1994  
 Graphite and gouache on paper  
 151 × 115cm  
 Monash University Collection, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1994  
 © Peter Graham



## Acknowledgements

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**Curating Collections.**

**Produced by the Art et al. founding partners.**

### MONASH UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART | MUMA

Managed by Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), the Monash University Collection includes a diverse range of media from painting, sculpture and photography to video, installation and new media. Known for its adventurousness and commitment to contemporary art as it develops, the Collection is recognised nationally for its currency, depth and diversity. Through a commitment to ambitious public art commissions, an active artwork loan program and the display of art in prominent public spaces, the Collection provides focal points of interest, provocation and reflection.

### BILLY MANN

Billy Mann has been at Submit to Love Studios, London for nine years, following a brain injury that cut short his career as a magazine journalist.

### ART ET AL.

Art et al. is an inclusive, curated international art platform that commissions and presents collaborations between artists from supported studios, artist peers and arts professionals. We elevate diverse voices and creative practices.

Art et al. was conceived and developed by Sim Luttin and Arts Project Australia, Slominski Projects and Jennifer Lauren Gallery in partnership with the Australia Council for the Arts. The project and platform are funded through arts funding from the Australia Council, DFAT through their Australian Cultural Diplomacy Grants Program (ACDGP) and the Aesop Foundation.

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**artetal.org**



Australian Memoir Curator, Billy Mann. Photo courtesy Headway East London.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the First Peoples of Australia on whose lands this exhibition and publication have been made and pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

### CURATING COLLECTIONS / 02

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