

PRIMAVERA
Young Australian Artists



Tiyan Baker
Christopher Bassi
Moorina Bonini
Nikki Lam
Sarah Poulgrain
Truc Truong

Mediation Handbook



COVER: Nikki Lam, *the unshakable destiny_* (still, detail), 2021, 16mm film transferred to digital 2k, colour, sound, image courtesy and © the artist

ABOVE: Tiyan Baker, *Personal computer: ramin ntaangan* (detail), 2022–23, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, computer parts, computer monitors, screensaver video, bamboo, wood, palm and coconut leaf, plastic twine, heirloom machete, sunflower seeds, LED lighting, foam, spray paint, lucky bamboo, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

About this Resource

This handbook is designed to assist tour venues, front-of-house staff, educators and volunteers to navigate the themes, ideas and issues in the exhibition *Primavera: Young Australian Artists*, curated by Talia Smith.

Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&G NSW) has been researching and providing training on the practices of Mediation (sometimes referred to as Cultural Mediation) with the aim to equip gallery and museum staff with the tools to implement this engagement strategy across the sector.

Mediation is about deepening the engagement of audiences at a peer-to-peer level through personal opinions being shared, knowledge being discussed, and visitors being given the freedom to arrive at their own interpretations. You can read more about Mediation practice here: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/programs/%20cultural-mediation/cultural-mediation/>

Volunteer and front-of-house staff are often the first people confronted with a wide range of questions from audiences. Outreach staff and educators engage their communities through public programming, enabling safe spaces for discussion, creativity and enquiry for all visitors. Through this handbook, M&G NSW aims to help gallery staff and volunteers develop an inclusive and culturally sensitive vocabulary to talk about the themes and ideas in *Primavera: Young Australian Artists* with the local community. This handbook is designed to be used as a reference point throughout the exhibition presentation at your venue as well as provide some deeper background and reflections for conversation and engagement.

This handbook was developed by M&G NSW with glossary contributions by Merindah Funnell, Emma Hicks and Nicole Barakat for FLENK Collective and Dr Megan R. Fizell.

About the Exhibition

Primavera: Young Australian Artists is an annual exhibition for Australian artists aged 35 years and under. It was initiated in 1992 by the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in dialogue with Dr Edward Jackson AM and Mrs. Cynthia Jackson AM in memory of their daughter Belinda, a talented jeweller who died at the age of 29. The exhibition commemorates Belinda Jackson by celebrating the creative achievements of young artists who are in the early stages of their careers.

Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists is guest curated by Talia Smith, who considers what artists are creating to challenge society's prescribed structures. Through works of various media, including installation, video, painting, sculpture, mark-making and text, the six artists – Tiyan Baker (b. 1989, Garramilla/Darwin), Christopher Bassi (b. 1990, Meanjin/Brisbane), Moorina Bonini (b. 1996, Naarm/Melbourne), Nikki Lam (b. 1988, Hong Kong), Sarah Poulgrain (b. 1992, Thul Garrie Waja/Townsville) and Truc Truong (b. 1987, Tarndanya/Adelaide) – draw on their lived experience to disrupt the dynamics of power and deliver compelling alternatives to the status quo.

Protest. Reimagining. Perseverance. These are the lenses through which curator Talia Smith has considered the work of the six young Australian artists she has chosen for inclusion in *Primavera 2023*. What unites them, Smith writes, is how the artists 'reckon with the perils of history, education, culture and language to question authoritative structures and systems'. They assert that there is more than one way of living and offer impressions of how it might look.

Talia Smith, 'Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time' in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

RIGHT: Truc Truong, *I Pray You Eat Cake* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, toys, found objects, packaged food, synthetic polymer paint, fabric, wood, aluminium, stainless steel, electromechanical components, dried pig intestines and trotters, dried chicken feet, tassels, rope, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley



Key Exhibition Themes

IDENTITY

Individual, collective and cultural identity are strong themes in the exhibition with the artists exploring these in different ways - through collections, place, cultural representation and iconography.

CONNECTION TO PLACE

The exhibition explores connection to place and lived experiences, place-based histories and memories, and symbols of home referencing the natural environment such as bamboo, shells or palm trees.

LEARNING NEW SKILLS

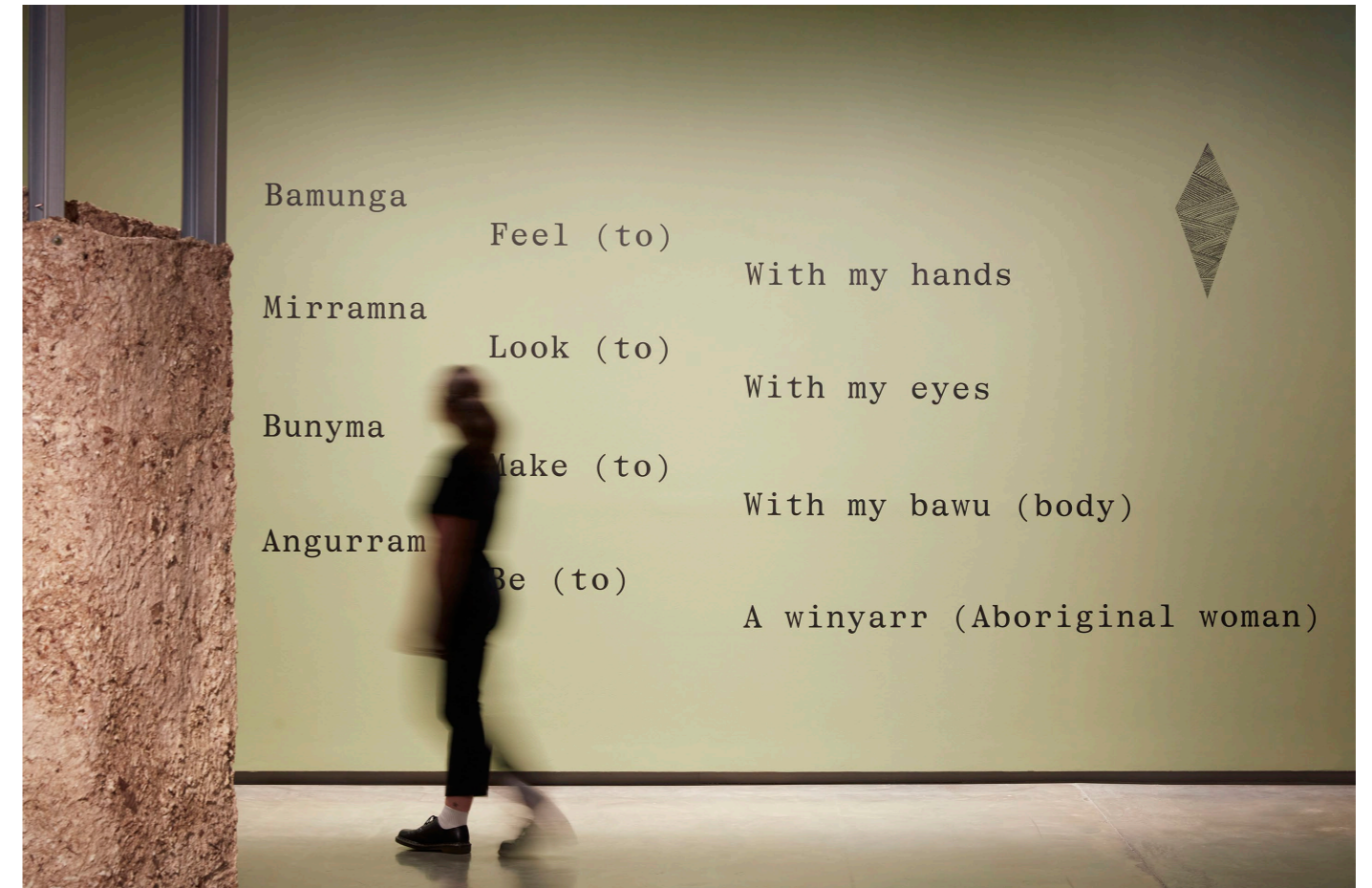
Artists explore ways of passing on knowledge, learning new skills and knowledge sharing. Making is a way of connecting with culture and keeping knowledge alive across generations.

ART AS ACTIVISM

Artists explore themes of activism, resistance and disruption to power structures.

‘The artists in *Primavera 2023* are creating works that face our complex histories head-on and challenge the futures that we are writing and living right now. Every day there is a new call to action among my peers. We are collectivising, we are growing, but also I think that action is already happening.’

Talia Smith, ‘Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.



Moorina Bonini, *dapalama (between)* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, vinyl text, charcoal, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley



Learn more

MCA Primavera Pathways – Learning Resource - Hear from the Artists of *Primavera 2023*, https://www.mca.com.au/learn/learning-resources/primavera-pathways-2023/?mc_cid=fdebb97e27&mc_eid=a974b6b66a

Susan Acret (2023) ‘For Primavera, Emerging Australian Artists Propose New Paths’, in *Ocula*, <https://ocula.com/magazine/insights/mca-primavera-emerging-australian-artists/>

Primavera 2023, Museum of Contemporary Art website, <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

Jo Higgins (2023) ‘The talented and the restless: Six young artists to watch at Primavera’, in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/the-talented-and-the-restless-six-young-artists-to-watch-at-primavera-20230918-p5e5h4.html>

Emma Kate Wilson (2023), ‘Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists’, in *Art Almanac*, https://www.art-almanac.com.au/primavera-2023-young-australian-artists/?utm_source=maturalart&utm_medium=referral

LEFT: Installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, image courtesy and © the artists, photograph: Zan Wimberley



Installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, image courtesy and © the artists, photograph: Zan Wimberley

About the Tour

The national tour, developed in collaboration with Museums & Galleries of NSW, will bring *Primavera: Young Australian Artists* and its associated public programming and professional development opportunities to 9 regional and public galleries across QLD, NSW, VIC and SA from 2024 to 2026.

Venues and dates are as follows:

The Condensery Somerset Regional Art Gallery	QLD	13 Jul - 1 Sep 2024
Noosa Regional Gallery	QLD	14 Sep - 3 Nov 2024
Cowra Regional Art Gallery	NSW	15 Dec 2024 - 2 Feb 2025
Goulburn Regional Art Gallery	NSW	14 Feb - 22 Mar
Bank Art Museum Moree	NSW	4 Apr - 31 May 2025
Blue Mountains Cultural Centre	NSW	21 Jun - 10 Aug 2025
Wangaratta Art Gallery	VIC	23 Aug - 19 Oct 2025
Latrobe Regional Gallery	VIC	31 Oct 2025 - 15 Feb 2026
Murray Bridge Regional Gallery	SA	16 May - 19 Jul 2026

Learn more

Celina Lei (2024), 'Primavera: Young Australian Artists receives three-year regional tour', in *Artshub Australia*, 2024, <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/news/primavera-young-australian-artists-receives-three-year-regional-tour-2701410/>

'Visions of Australia to showcase Australian art across the country', in *Australian Arts Review*, 2024, <https://artsreview.com.au/visions-of-australia-to-showcase-australian-art-across-the-country/>



Nikki Lam, *the unshakable destiny_2101*, 2021, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, 16mm film transferred to digital video, 2K, colour, sound, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley



Sarah Poulgrain, *Learning how to build a houseboat: walls, fixings and rope* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, steel, aluminium, handmade paper pulp, handmade rope, ceramic, glass, digital HD video, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

About Museums & Galleries of NSW

M&G NSW runs the largest regional touring program in NSW and is committed to touring exhibitions of contemporary visual art to communities throughout Australia. Throughout 2021–2023 M&G NSW reached audiences of 386,842 with 15 exhibitions showcasing 114 artists at 80 unique venues nationally. 1,205 programs were delivered and over 9,200 students were engaged.

Find out more about M&G NSW's touring program:
<https://mgsw.org.au/sector/exhibitions/>

Touring Partner, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia

The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) presents, collects and engages with the art of now. Guided by the principles of belonging, connection and influence, they aim to be the defining platform for contemporary art and ideas in Australia and beyond. Located on Sydney Harbour at Tallawoladah, a home to stories, art and culture for over 65,000 years, the MCA contributes to the continuity of culture on our site. They connect the widest possible public to contemporary art through their collection, exhibitions, events, creative learning and access programs.

Exhibition Glossary

ACTIVISM The use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result. The process of campaigning in public to bring about political, social, economic or environmental reform. Activism refers to action taken that challenges the status quo and those in power to change society and benefit the greater good. There are many types of activism such as: protests and demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, online campaigns, civil disobedience, and protest art.

ARTIVISM Art Activism, or Artivism is the use of creative expression to cultivate awareness and social change, spanning various disciplines including visual art, poetry, music, film, and theatre. Artivism harnesses the power of art to influence social transformation. Given the emotional impact of art, artivism can highlight contradictions, appeal to the imagination and stimulate important dialogue. Artivism can challenge harmful norms, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY Collective memory is a mental representation of past events that are common to members of a social group. It is expressed in numerous forms including oral and written narratives, monuments and other memorials, commemorative rituals, and symbols. It serves a range of functions, such as establishing and maintaining relationships, teaching others, and supporting group identity. Collective memory is common to a group, but it is remembered by individuals.

COLONISATION Colonisation is an exploitive practice driven by the prospect of increased power and wealth whereby an invading foreign state controls a people or territory through often violent political subjugation. Colonisation involves occupying the land with settlers, imposing cultural practices on First Nations populations like language or religion, and commandeering the region's resources to benefit the colonising settler-nation.

COUNTRY As defined on the AIATSIS website, "Country is the term often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity." Look at the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia for a visual representation of many of the distinct language groups that make up this country. While this map is a wonderful resource and guide, the best way to know whose Country you are on/from and who the Traditional Owners are is to respectfully ask. Speaking with local councils or land councils are a good place to start. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/>

COLONIAL NARRATIVE Australian's historical narrative is based on the story of European settlers, told from a Colonial viewpoint, with little acknowledgement of the truths and experiences of First Nations people. This narrative has resulted in legacies and contexts that continue to shape who we are and how we identify to the world around us.

CONTINUING CULTURAL CONNECTION Closely linked to the concept of cultural identity, continuing cultural connection is the ability to maintain the historical traditions of a culture and carry them forward into the future. Colonisation and assimilation policies in Australia have resulted in the separation of First Nations communities from their traditional cultural values, practices, beliefs, and knowledge transmission, contributing to a loss of identity.

CULTURAL IDENTITY Cultural identity is belonging to, or feeling that you belong to, a particular culture. It develops as individuals take on the beliefs, ideals, behaviours, and customs of the communities in their lives. Cultural identity has a major influence on confidence and self-esteem.

DECOLONISATION Decolonisation is the process of reversing colonisation whereby the invading settler-nation withdraws, leaving the formerly colonised region independent to determine the form and structure of its statehood and government. In Australia, where First Nations peoples still do not have self-determination and the Eurocentric coloniser's sociocultural systems remain, decolonisation is still underway.

EUROCENTRISM Eurocentrism is a tendency to focus on Europe, placing European history, culture, and economics at the centre of the world, whilst excluding a wider world view. It is an inclination to interpret the world in terms of European and Western values and experiences.

ICONOGRAPHY Iconography is the traditional imagery or visual symbols associated with a subject, often religious, political or cultural. It can be used to represent complex ideas and themes or as a means of identification, storytelling or interpretation. Artists use iconography to convey specific meanings in their work. First Nations artists are renowned for their use of symbolism and iconography.

INDIGENOUS-CENTRED APPROACHES Re-centring First Nations voices within colonial structures and histories. Recognition of the importance of self-determination, cultural authority and leadership to First Nations people. Empowering Indigenous people in decision-making processes.

LIVED EXPERIENCE Lived Experience is the personal wisdom and experience that someone has gained from direct, first-hand involvement, as opposed to knowledge that someone may obtain from a second-hand source, which may be based on hearsay, assumptions, research or the media. Lived experience provides a higher level of understanding of everyday events, situations or issues. Lived experience includes the cultural, spiritual, physical and emotional experiences of an individual, family or community.

POWER STRUCTURES The ways in which power is organised or shared in society or in an organisation. The structures and systems that regulate and influence how decisions are made. In Australia, power structures have been put in place through the processes and legacy of colonialism. Artists in this exhibition are questioning existing authoritative structures and systems, particularly regarding the position of public galleries and museums as institutions within the structural framework of power.

RACISM The Australian Human Rights Commission defines racism as 'the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others.'

See more detailed information on racism from the Australian Human Rights Commission here: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/what-racism>

RESISTANCE Resistance is the act of fighting against something or refusing to accept something. It can include a broad range of behaviours and actions and can occur on different scales, from the individual or micro level to the macro level.

'I view all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic and cultural practice as sites of resistance. Every story that is told, whatever the artform, can be viewed as political... it asserts Indigeneity, what it means to be Black, and in doing so resists the hostile dominant culture, that which seeks to silence and undermine.'

Eugenia Flynn, 'In the face of a hostile dominant culture we will continue to share our art and be deadly,' *The Guardian*, 29 November 2016, quoted in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue 'Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time', Talia Smith, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

SKILLS-BASED LEARNING

Skills-based learning is a holistic approach to education that emphasises the development of practical skills and knowledge through hands-on practice and application. This type of learning ensures competency and relevance to real-world challenges and demands. This learning approach allows the ongoing sharing of knowledge and skills with others.

SOVEREIGNTY

Broadly, sovereignty refers to a state or a governing body that has the supreme right and power to govern itself without any interference from outside forces. For First Nations people in Australia, it can refer to the acknowledgment of Indigenous laws and customs, as well as recognising their unbroken historical and present connection to land and waterways. Indigenous sovereignty is not currently recognised in the Australian constitution, which is derived from British law enforced through colonisation. It is worth noting that many different people define Indigenous sovereignty or 'Blak sovereignty' in different ways.

RIGHT: Truc Truong, *I Pray You Eat Cake* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, toys, found objects, packaged food, synthetic polymer paint, fabric, wood, aluminium, stainless steel, electromechanical components, dried pig intestines and trotters, dried chicken feet, tassels, rope, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley





Installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, image courtesy and © the artists, photograph: Zan Wimberley

About the Curator



Talia Smith is an artist and curator from Aotearoa who is now based in Sydney, Australia. She has curated exhibitions for organisations such as the Singapore International Photography Festival, Intitute of Modern Art, UTS Gallery, Ballarat Foto Biennale and Cement Fondu among others. Her writing has appeared in various publications such as Memo Review, Art New Zealand and artist catalogue essays and books. She has completed research residencies in Singapore and Germany and currently works as the Coordinator of Programming at Blacktown Arts.

ABOVE: Talia Smith, 2022, photograph: Anna Kučera

Learn more

Talia Smith website, <https://talia-smith-c8f1.squarespace.com/contact>

Te Tairāwhiti Arts Festival (2024), ‘Talia Smith – Te Ara i Whiti Artist 2024’, <https://tetairawhitiartsfestival.nz/talia-smith-te-ara-i-whiti-artist-2024/>

Murray Art Museum Albury (2022), ‘Talia Smith: Don’t be bashful, wear the flower behind your ear’, <https://www.mamalbury.com.au/exhibitions/talia-smith-dont-be-bashful-wear-the-flower-behind-your-ear>

Talia Smith (2022), ‘Loose Canons – Talia Smith’ in *The Pantograph Punch*, <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/talia-smith-loose-canons>

basis (2020), ‘FEATURE #17: Interview: AIR_Frankfurt - Talia Smith’, <https://basis-frankfurt.de/en/interview-talia-smith>

Verge Gallery, University of Sydney (2010), Talia Smith, *Monuments to Moments*, <https://www.verge-gallery.net/exhibitions-new/talia-smith-monuments-to-moments>

Watch and Listen

Kaldor Public Arts Projects (2021), ‘Future Curators: Talia Smith’, <https://www.facebook.com/KaldorPublicArtProjects/videos/future-curators-talia-smith/2875764586075460/>

Pro Prac Podcast, ‘Talia Smith’, Season 3, Episode 7 (including transcript), <https://propracpodcast.com/pro-prac/seasons/season-three/season-three-talia-smith/>

About the Artists

The practices of *Primavera* artists are explored here, through the lenses of ‘Protest, Reimagining and Perseverance’ as adopted by curator Talia Smith in her consideration of the work of the six young Australian artists she chose for inclusion in *Primavera 2023*. This section includes a short bio for each artist, a reflection on the artworks in the artists’ own words, Talia Smith’s interpretation of the works, quotes from catalogue essays and links to learn more. Together with relevant images, this section aims to provide deeper understanding of artists’ work, thought processes, influences and motivations.



Installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, image courtesy and © the artists, photograph: Zan Wimberley

Protest | Moorina Bonini



Moorina Bonini is a descendant of the Yorta Yorta Dhulunyagen family clan of Ulupna and the Yorta Yorta, Wurundjeri and Wiradjuri Briggs/McCrae family. An artist whose works are informed by her experiences as an Aboriginal and Italian woman, her practice attempts to disrupt and critique Eurocentric ideas of the Indigenous, especially within western institutions. Grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems, Bonini's practice also seeks to unsettle the narratives placed on Aboriginal people as a result of colonisation.

‘There are many, many people, you know, that have taught me so much about culture and about how to be a strong winyarr – an Aboriginal woman. And I do walk in the footsteps of giant yenbena – ancestors. I really do feel them with me every time I make work and everything I do is for them because it’s for my community. This idea of celebrating my family, my Aboriginal family because I want to see them in these spaces. I want to see us in these spaces. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we’re all working towards this future where we can speak, and be comfortable, and be recognised, and be self-defining for ourselves.

I’m very interested in looking at the spaces that I move and work within, which are predominantly western institutions. So, this work presented within Primavera speaks to this relationship between myself, my bawu, which is the Yorta Yorta word for body, and this institution being the MCA, a space that does have a history of being exclusive or tied deeply to western contexts and discourse. From an Aboriginal perspective, it’s important to be critical of these spaces because they actually exist in opposition of my own. It speaks to this really interesting space that I exist in - the between, the dapalama.

For some people, they will be quite difficult statements to sit with, but I really do encourage everybody to consider these statements because they might shift away from their preconceived notions around Aboriginal culture and practice and, instead, see something different presented through an Indigenous lens. These statements talk to this need for transformation. To think of a future, we have to reckon with the past. And to reckon with the past, we have to talk about it now. And to talk about a future, we have to all be part of that conversation.’

Moorina Bonini, (2023) *Video Transcript*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.
Host Site: <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

LEFT: Moorina Bonini, 2023, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Moorina Bonini



Moorina Bonini, *dapalama (between)* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, vinyl text, charcoal, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

From the Curator

‘What is key to Bonini’s work is the way she decentres the ‘white eye’ and re-centres an Indigenous voice, making space for histories, traditions, and ancestors to be acknowledged inside the museum. For this iteration of *Primavera*, Bonini has created a text-based work that interrupts the museum walls and ceilings, making her voice physical and leaving traces of it throughout.

Writing about Bonini’s work in 2020, Timmah Ball (Ballardong Noongar) asserted that, ‘Blak culture is celebrated, but only when it fits the framing of whiteness, when its beauty is grand and spiritual, when it contributes to capitalism or tourism. The white eye that holds the key casually erases the culture.’

Talia Smith, ‘Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

From the Catalogue

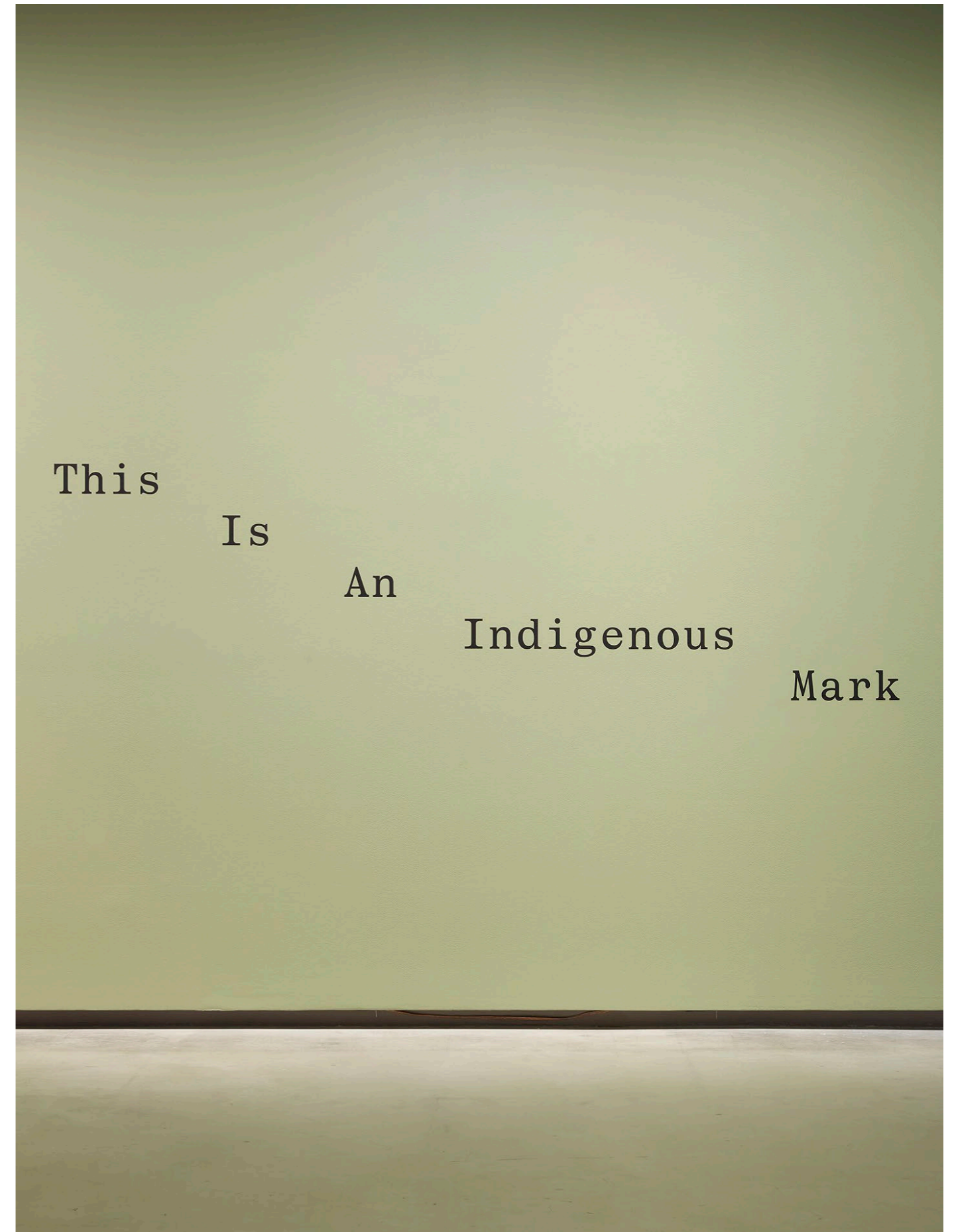
‘Moorina’s desk, in our shared this mob studio [a Melbourne based First Nations collective], is covered with gum leaves, emu feathers and barbed wire. There’s a handmade digging stick, archive boxes, a camera and a chainsaw. When she strips stringybark she covers the room in a thin layer of dust from Country. Aboriginal flags cover the windows so that strangers can’t peer in as we make. A possum tail hangs on the wall as a warning (or celebration, or both?) – you’ve entered a Blak space.

These materials are integral to Moorina’s practice, which emerges from her love of Country and family, and a thirst to know more. She moves through the world with fierce pride and a profound sense of who she is. Strong Blak women guide her.

Within this mob, we have long conversations about institutions and the ways we resist them as Indigenous women. We flip between wanting to burn them down and focus on our own, to accepting to sit within these fraught systems, attempting to shift them, and supporting one another while we try. Through her creative practice and PhD research, Moorina interrogates how these systems operate and their potential for change through Indigenous-centred approaches.’

Kate ten Buuren, ‘Sovereignty in action’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023

RIGHT: Moorina Bonini, *dapalama (between)* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, vinyl text, charcoal, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley



Learn more

Moorina Bonini website, <https://www.moorinabonini.com/>

Moorina Bonini (2024), *Wayirra in These Arms Hold*, curated by Maya Hodge at Incinerator Gallery 6 July - 8 September 2024, <https://www.moorinabonini.com/exhibitions/wayirra>

MADA Gallery Monash University Caulfield (2023), *Code-Switching: Creating Space to Align Structural Values*, Solo Exhibition by Moorina Bonini, <https://www.moorinabonini.com/exhibitions/wanyarra-active-codeswitching-2023>

Monash University, Art Design & Architecture (2024) 'Moorina Bonini selected to join Creative Australia's (re)situate Biennale Delegates program', <https://www.monash.edu/mada/news/2024/moorina-bonini-selected-to-join-creative-australias-resituate-biennale-delegates-program>

Moorina Bonini (2020), 'A Tribute to the Concrete Box (For Aunty Hyllus)', Catalogue Essay, Bus Projects Exhibition, <https://busprojects.org.au/library/a-tribute-to-the-concrete-box-for-aunty-hyllus>

Moorina Bonini (2016), 'Reflecting, re-examining and relocating', *Farrago*, <https://farragomagazine.com/article/farrago/2018-12-13-reflecting-re-examining-and-relocating/>

Timmah Ball (2020), 'We move in with caution', exhibition review of *A Tribute to the Concrete Box (For Aunty Hyllus)* at Bus Projects, https://busprojects.org.au/media/pages/library/we-move-in-with-caution/8226c272bc-1586332309/catalogue_moorina-2.pdf

Moorina Bonini: Melbourne now NGV, *In Gowidja (After)* (2021), <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/melbourne-now/artists/moorina-bonini/>

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, *Artist statement: This mob*, <https://acca.melbourne/text/artist-statement-this-mob/>

Gertrude Contemporary (2024), 'Announcing Artists Joining the Gertrude Studio Program in 2024', <https://gertrude.org.au/news/announcing-artists-joining-the-gertrude-studio-program-in-2024>

Watch

Moorina Bonini, (2023), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

MADA Gallery, 'Code-Switching: Creating Space to Align Structural Values', Moorina Bonini, solo exhibition, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djVCnewVsxE>

Bayside City Council (2022), 'Artist Profile: Moorina Bonini - Ellen José Art Award for Young Women Winner', <https://youtu.be/G4V aQfrxBY?si=o9 tqSk w9XU iX>

Bayside City Council (2022) 'NAIDOC Week 2022: In conversation with artist Moorina Bonini - event recording', interview by Joanna Bosse, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jVhao7LRrE>

'Moorina's artworks are sites of resistance. This mob's studio is a site of resistance. The individual Indigenous body working within an institution is a site of resistance. A possum tail on a wall is a site of resistance. Her interventions of mark making throughout [the exhibition catalogue] are sites of resistance.'

Kate ten Buuren, 'Sovereignty in action' in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

Protest | Nikki Lam



Nikki Lam is a Hong Kong-born artist, curator and producer based in Naarm/Melbourne. Working primarily with moving images, her work explores hybridity and memory through the contemplation of time, space and impermanence. Often dealing with the complexity of migratory expressions, Lam's current research focuses on the concept of artistic agency during cultural, social and political transitions, particularly within the context of screen cultures.

'The Unshakable Destiny trilogy has been a series of works that allowed me to record my grief for Hong Kong, a city that has gone through unimaginable change since 2019. While I negotiate my relationship to my home, there's something very difficult to articulate when it comes to my own sense of belonging being a migrant in the diaspora during these significant political and cultural transitions.

This project documented my enquiry around subjects of memory, cinema and protest over the four-year period between 2020–2024. In this iteration of the project, we have the first chapter, *the unshakable destiny_2101* (2021) and part of second chapter, *Release* (2023) presented in a constructed set that functions as an expanded space of the films.

The set represents a time-space that was forever contained, much like my experience with the 2019 protests in Hong Kong and from afar. The image of it comes back over and over again in the later films in the trilogy, forever haunting me and other Hong Kongers. The set has been designed to reflect cinematic nostalgia for a Hong Kong that was no longer, with references to Wong Kar Wai's cinema of Hong Kong in the 1960s, as well as Hollywood's cyberpunk/cyber-orientalist imagination of the city in the future.

I tried to toggle the tension between (international) cinematic representations of the city with my own, very specific experience of Hong Kong cinema in the first film. For example, while the character wears a cyberpunk cheongsam, she is pondering her next move on an ubiquitous foldable stool that is often used as a weapon in Cantonese gang movies in the 1990s and 2000s. I am particularly interested in how the diaspora often connects via cinema, and how these nostalgic references hold very different meaning to them. In recognising these references we share a bond across the world, and often, across generations and communities. I love playing with the aesthetics and language between art and popular culture.

Unlike other art forms, moving image (and lens-based art) sits in a unique cultural spot where most audiences understand the language of narrative cinema. Working with this preposition has allowed me to remix narrative expectations and shift their understanding of a subject using a language that they are already familiar with.

There is something fascinating and terrifying, about trying to communicate with an audience that has already made up their minds about the form you are working in. But in most part, I fully lean into the vulnerable position of this tension as it also gives me great joy when a work resonates with its audience.

If the first film was a memory of protests, or the cyclical feeling of entrapment in a political situation, *Release* (2023) would be the ‘letting go’ of it. In its animated sequences, walls are slowly burning, and bauhinia flowers are growing up into the void. I should also mention that there are protest-coded symbols in the films that I don’t usually explain explicitly. While the set dissolves into the abyss we see a circular traveller that turns infinitely. Here I am trying to metaphorically let go of that space I had created for myself. The set, alongside its symbols of protest, confusion, disillusion, and their representations released into the void, or a different realm.

This series of works have shifted a lot since its first film in 2021. Even though it has reached a wide audience here and overseas, at its core, this is a work for Hong Kongers everywhere.’

Nikki Lam, (2024)



PREVIOUS: Nikki Lam, 2023, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Leah Jing

ABOVE: Nikki Lam, *the unshakable destiny_2101*, 2021, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, 16mm film transferred to digital video, 2K, colour, sound, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

From the Curator

‘Nikki Lam uses the language of cinema – in particular Wong Kar Wai and Asian Futurism – in her film *the unshakable destiny_2101* (2021), to explore the political unrest in her home country and the distance one feels as part of the diaspora. Lam’s films cleverly walk the line between the history of cinema and the history of political activism, weaving together memories and experiences to create a speculative space for reflections of body, image, history and protest.’

Talia Smith, ‘Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.



From the Catalogue

‘*the unshakable destiny_2101* by Nikki Lam is an expansive and haunting video trilogy that builds upon the artist’s long-abiding contemplation of time, protest, and cinema. In the first two films – showing in part for *Primavera 2023* – Lam invites us to linger in the speculative realms of personal and collective memories where truth comes in fragments and the wheel of cyclical histories, turns. Echoes from the past (or the future) resound as the character stands in as a witness of history to explore the fullness of nostalgia and grief.’

June Miskell, ‘The speculative realm of collective memory’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

‘For Lam, this is as much a speculation of truths as it is an attempt to imagine what is still to come.’

June Miskell, ‘The speculative realm of collective memory’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

Nikki Lam, *the unshakable destiny_2101*, 2021, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, 16mm film transferred to digital video, 2K, colour, sound, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

Learn more

Nikki Lam website, <https://nikkilam.info/>

Nikki Lam: Melbourne now NGV, *the unshakable destiny_2101*, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/melbourne-now/artists/nikki-lam/>

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Nikki Lam, *the unshakable destiny_2101*, 2021, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, 16mm film transferred to digital video, 2K, colour, sound, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

Perseverance | Christopher Bassi



Christopher Bassi is an artist of Meriam, Yupungathi and British descent. Working with archetypal models of representational painting, his work engages with the medium as sociological and historical text and as a means of addressing issues surrounding cultural identity, alternative genealogies, and colonial legacies in Australia and the South Pacific. Through critical re-imagining, Bassi's paintings become a space for a type of speculative storytelling that considers questions of history and place and the entangling of personal and collective identities.

'My work's engaged and indebted to a European model of oil painting. I'm interested in the history and its imaginative potential to offer a space for me as a Meriam and Yupungathi man to tell my own stories and talk about my own history. The, sort of, catalyst for the work was really a type of imagining. I was starting to think about the way that the ocean was this kind of connecting body. During Covid, the Torres Strait was pretty much cut off from access. And so, when I think about myself in Jagera and Turrbal Country in South East Queensland, walking out and putting my feet in the ocean, and feeling the water. And that water being the same water that connects up to the Torres Strait, it became a way to connect and a way to be somewhere whilst I was somewhere else.

I have a collection of shells that are from North Queensland and Cairns and Thursday Island. And I began to create these small little effigies or monuments to the south west waters of a great ocean. In reality, they're quite tiny. They existed about 15cm tall. They're enlarged to give them a little bit more presence. Then they, sort of, take on a bodily presence. Some of them look like figures. Some of them look like religious iconographies, like a cross. Some of them are like vessels and chalices. They're staged in a way that captures a kind of heat and a kind of light that is reminiscent of North Queensland.

It's really important to have space for imagination, for thinking through new ways of being in the world. Thinking back to old ways and bringing them forward. It's a proposition that I, sort of, set myself with what painting can actually do as a world making exercise, you know, of a dreaming exercise. A work particularly like this is about imagining new futures, you know, what happens if we were to give the same care and thoughtfulness that we do to historical icons in a European sense. Why shouldn't we have a monument to a nation? The idea that non-humans have rights as well.'

Christopher Bassi, (2023) *Video Transcript*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.
Host Site: <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

LEFT: Christopher Bassi, 2021, image courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery © the artist, photograph: Rhett Hammerton



Christopher Bassi, *Monuments to the South/West Waters of a Great Ocean*, 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, oil on board, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

From the Curator

‘The paintings of Christopher Bassi are luscious in colour and have the rich tones reminiscent of Baroque or neoclassical paintings, but their subjects are palm fronds, pearl shells or the artist himself, an Indigenous man.

With his work, Bassi preserves his culture by taking the knowledge he has learned from traditional painters (who are often referred to as the ‘masters’) and weaving himself and his experience of culture into the ‘canon’. Each painting then raises the question of what art history’s ‘masters’ would look like had the past been more equitable, and if galleries and museums had been more inclusive.

There are many stories within Bassi’s paintings. They reflect his own journey thinking about his cultural identity and history, and what is meaningful and important to him. They also question the traditions of European painting by placing these objects, or himself, as the subject.’

Talia Smith, ‘Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

From the Catalogue

‘Throughout Bassi’s practice, the iridescent pearl shell, the flesh of a ripe mango and the lusciousness of palm fronds evoke a tropical narrative. It’s a narrative that celebrates natural objects that inspire a life and memory beyond their inanimate qualities.’

Rebecca Ray, ‘Nuances of identity and history’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

Learn more

Ames Yavuz (2024), 'Artist spotlight: Christopher Bassi', <https://mailchi.mp/amesyavuz/christopherbassi-artistspolight?e=d4a8b83b20>

Louise Martin-Chew (2024), 'Inside Christopher Bassi's beautiful Brisbane Studio', in *Art Guide*, <https://artguide.com.au/inside-christopher-bassis-beautiful-brisbane-studio/>

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Watch

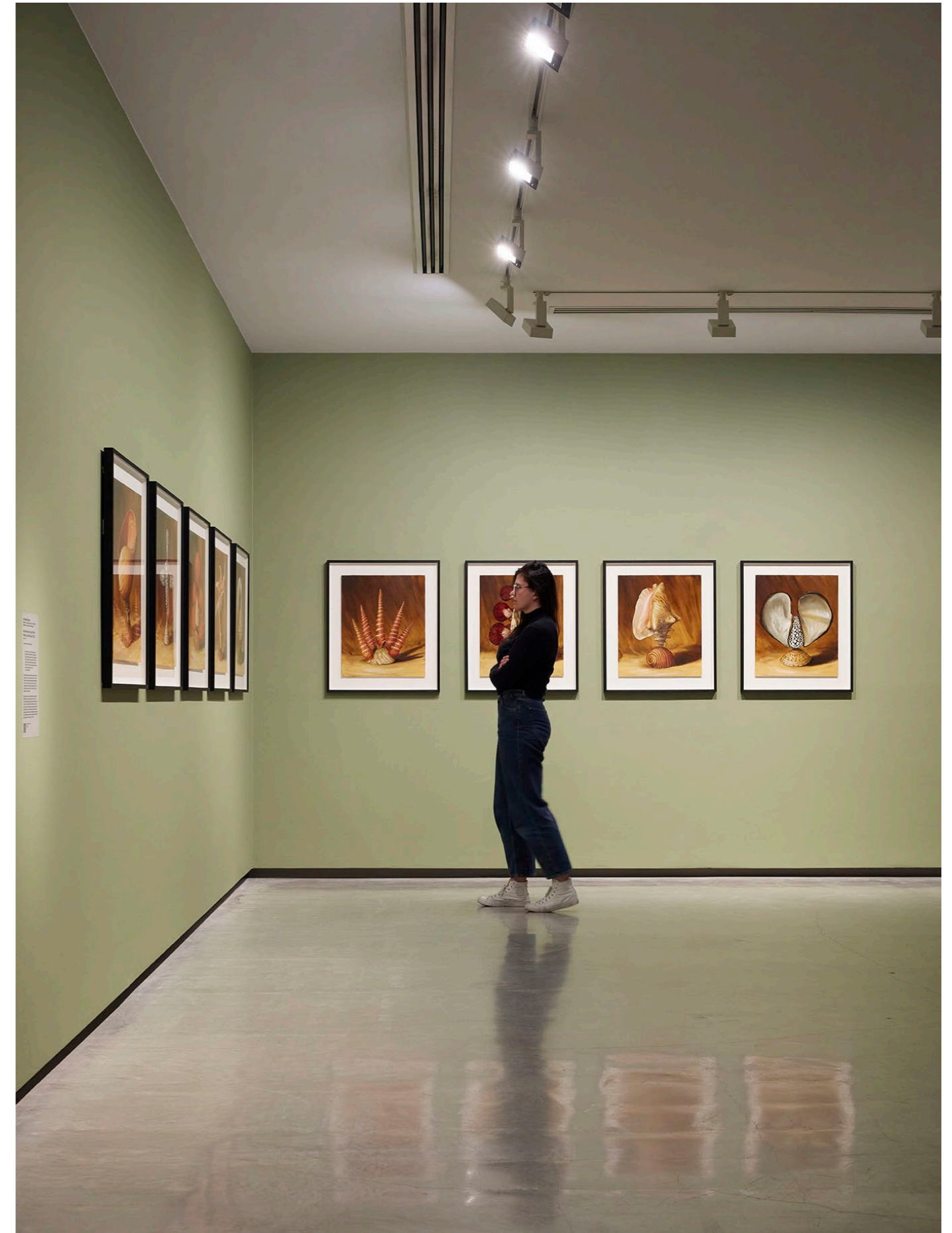
Christopher Bassi, (2023), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

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National Association for the Visual Arts, 'NAVA Artist File: Christopher Bassi', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWJhWHKnwrU>

RIGHT: Christopher Bassi, *Monuments to the South/West Waters of a Great Ocean*, 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, oil on board, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley





Christopher Bassi, *Monuments to the South/West Waters of a Great Ocean* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, oil on board, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

‘For Bassi, painting represents a multitude of meanings – from the process and pure delight of creating to the history of painting within the western art canon, its relationship with colonialism and the subsequent attitudes that followed.’

Rebecca Ray, ‘Nuances of identity and history’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

Perseverance | Truc Truong



Truc Truong is a visual artist based on Peramangk and Kaurna Country, Adelaide. Her art practice is primarily focused on assemblage and installation. She explores the interplay between deliberate and accidental encounters during the creative process, allowing works to be open-ended and constantly evolving. Truong draws influence from postcolonial theory, exploring the interconnected power structures between Vietnam, France, Christianity, and Buddhism. Treading a fine line between rage and humour, she creates convoluted spaces and memories that critique the power structures she attempts to evade.

‘My work is from personal experience, but it is for those who, like me, who had parents come from war-torn countries. And had to find a way to be themselves, and survive or challenge or understand who they even were. From a very young age, there was this tension in my family with who we were, what country we were on, what culture we would maintain and hold, and what we believed in. So yeah, there’s a lot of assemblages and a lot of things going on in the work.

For example, the tablecloths, so I call them altar cloths. I see them as spiritual elements in my work. They’re from clothing that I haven’t thrown away. Some are as old as 25 years old. And I think the clothing talks to my exploration into the importance of subcultures that occur because people are looking for acceptance in a different area of their life. Growing up, I was looking for someone who looked like me, but also had a similar experience to me and that model minority of playing the violin and doing really well at school wasn’t me. And so, the altar cloths is essentially me not fitting in with the status quo. Me feeling totally rejected from society.

My *Primavera* work is heavily influenced by my grandpa, who passed away seven years ago. And before he died, the family were planning a funeral, and they said that he needed to make a choice. Was it going to be a Christian funeral or was it going to be a Buddhist funeral? When all his children kind of left the room, he said to me that, you know, I just want everyone to feel loved and I think that Jesus had good teachings, and I think that Buddha had good teachings. And so, I think I went down this rabbit hole of what faiths do for us and why my family have these different faiths, and what they’re actually centred around. There’s a lot of negativity and there’s a lot of abuse within these faiths but what can you take from it? Love has seemed to be this action throughout history within these religions, and I think at the core of it, my work, it’s questioning what love is.

With me, finding it really hard sometimes to keep going 'cause sometimes life is really difficult. I think... Asking how to keep going and rebuilding with love genuinely centred around, you know, how do we treat others and how do we make new policies or new programs or new buildings that are structured around this idea that's not romantic. It's just an action.

Yeah, I think he's taught me to value love in a different way. But having that tension in my family of are we Vietnamese? Are we Australian? Are we Christian or are we Buddhist? I think those subcultures help me remove myself from such a tense decision that I didn't want to make and just go into something else. Those cloths represent that for me. It's this, again, is a conversation I'm having with my grandpa about the things that I've done in my life. And hoping that, he's having a laugh.'

Truc Truong, (2023) *Video Transcript*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. Host Site: <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>



PREVIOUS: Truc Truong, 2023, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Thomas McCammon

ABOVE: Truc Truong, *I Pray You Eat Cake*, 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, toys, found objects, packaged food, synthetic polymer paint, fabric, wood, aluminium, stainless steel, electromechanical components, dried pig intestines and trotters, dried chicken feet, tassels, rope, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

From the Curator

‘The preservation of culture, no matter how complicated our relationship to it, is also apparent in Truc Truong’s practice. Her Lazy Susans – rotating table-tops – are piled with various objects – toys, furs, food... They are bright and bold and full of nostalgia for childhood, family memories and ancestral shrines. Much like life itself, the joyous moments are also coloured by trauma, in this case by war and racial violence. Rotting or decaying items, decapitated toys and objects on the tables speak to cruel jokes. What is most apparent with Truong’s work is that life is, as Vergès noted, ‘full of contradictions’ and quite often they are sitting side by side.’

Talia Smith, ‘Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

From the Catalogue

‘Truc’s practice is one born out of a conflicting ideological existence, one that pits personal values against lived experience: Christianity against Buddhism, East against West, and healing against trauma. It is human nature to seek patterns to make sense of the world and we see this in the work presented to us by Truc. The patterns that are utilised in her work are racial, cultural, linguistic, philosophical and political. They are the patterns of all that she has experienced and a forecast of the future, one full of both potential and dread.’

For *Primavera 2023*, Truc presents a new iteration of *But it’s funny* (2022), a visual cacophony of toys, shrine objects, fruits, food and domestic products. These are assembled on and around a rotating pedestal draped in fabric, which at one time was drenched in household bleach. Humorous on first inspection, the work draws upon memories of ancestral shrines and childhood, such as Truc’s bà ngoai [grandmother] decorating altars with toys and colourful objects, or a competition to make a last-minute candle for a forgotten birthday.

However, within these joyful moments reverberates the lived trauma of war and racial violence: decapitated toys, naked dolls, rotting fruit, ‘exotic’ foods and decaying flowers. As the pedestal rotates, these disparate objects play against each other, alluding to the multi-layered experience of existing within the Australian context as a second-generation Vietnamese woman.’

Phuong Ngo, ‘Shrines for the living’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.



Truc Truong, *I Pray You Eat Cake* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, toys, found objects, packaged food, synthetic polymer paint, fabric, wood, aluminium, stainless steel, electromechanical components, dried pig intestines and trotters, dried chicken feet, tassels, rope, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley



Truc Truong, *I Pray You Eat Cake* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, toys, found objects, packaged food, synthetic polymer paint, fabric, wood, aluminium, stainless steel, electromechanical components, dried pig intestines and trotters, dried chicken feet, tassels, rope, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

Learn more

Truc Truong website, <https://www.tructruong.com/>

Gertrude Contemporary (2024), 'Octopus 24: Ricochet, Curated by Patrice Sharkey', <https://gertrude.org.au/exhibition/octopus-24-ricochet-curated-by-patrice-sharkey>

ACE Gallery (2023), 'Truc Truong (2023)', <https://www.ace.gallery/education-resources/article/truc-truong-2023>

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Katherine Ruddick (2021), 'Interview with Dr. Tammy Wong Hulbert - Cultural Identity – What does it mean to be an Asian-Australian Artist in 2021?', <https://reshapingworlds.com.au/Cultural-Identity>

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ACE Studio, '2023 ACE Studio Program artist: Truc Truong', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcvtHuE5B_A

Reimagining | Sarah Poulgrain



Sarah Poulgrain's practice draws on self-sustainability and artist-led pedagogy to expand what art institutions can do. Though they produce sculptures, their practice is primarily concerned with building and sustaining respectful and non-hierarchical relationships. Poulgrain's methodology often takes the form of learning a new skill (usually through interest-specific community groups), documenting the process, and re-teaching the skill to others. Their practice aims to facilitate a model of knowledge sharing that disrupts power dynamics and prioritises vulnerability and trust. In their series of works, A set of new skills, Poulgrain taught weaving, welding, chair making, hat making, and aluminium casting, with accompanying exhibition outcomes.

'My house floods probably shin height every year. There have been, like, multiple instances of just, like, shovelling the s**t that has come up out of the toilet. It's awful! It's really bad but, like, from that, I probably got to this point with building the houseboat project. I'm currently in the process of building a houseboat as a response to some immediate threats that have happened at my house, like, very regular flooding. It floods to waist height maybe once every three years in Jagera and Turrbal Lands in Brisbane. It will serve as a place for me to live that's less contingent on real estate and a little bit more resilient to climate crisis. It's not just about having a houseboat at the end but it's having the relationships and that community that can also use the space. A community space that is resilient and that can safeguard that future.

For Primavera, this segment of the boat, I've kind of tried to focus on the bathroom element. I'm collaborating with a lot of different people to do different segments of the boat using this skill-sharing method. I think I've taught maybe, like, 100 people just welding. But it's been quite a nice process of just demystifying something that would otherwise be a little intimidating. It's also kind of satisfying to, like, know the systems of the house and be able to, like, fix them when they go wrong. I feel like the collaborative process is really central to it because the relationships that we form in that process are like a key outcome. I think we need a bit of a collectivist approach to problems like climate crisis and gentrification, and other structures that have failed us. So, when we think about a version of the future, it's one that involves working together with lots of other people.

I think I'd love to live in a house that is filled with objects that I made with my friends. So, I think that's kind of my ideal outcome. The collaboration makes me feel connected to people. My ideal future is one that is collaborative.'

Sarah Poulgrain, (2023) *Video Transcript*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.
Host Site: <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

LEFT: Sarah Poulgrain, 2023, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Llewellyn Millhouse

From the Curator

‘Addressing the persistent inequality of access to the creative sector is key to Meanjin/Brisbane-based artist Sarah Poulgrain’s practice. They engage in DIY or skills-based learning and then facilitate the sharing of those skills with others. Through a reciprocal and collaborative learning process, relationships and community can be respectfully built. With some barriers to access removed, education and the sharing of knowledge become less hierarchical and more about the exchange between people. Poulgrain’s collaborative sculptures in Primavera 2023 act as points of connection throughout the gallery space, interacting in some way with every work.’

Talia Smith, ‘Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.



From the Catalogue

‘As the longest resident and co-founder of Wreckers – an artist-run initiative (ARI) housed in a former bike wreckers’ building – Poulgrain has been a dedicated, yet self-effacing, figure in the city’s ARI community for the past decade. A frequent artistic collaborator and facilitator, their sculptural practice is inseparable from the ethos of reciprocity and community building that underpins their relational practice.’

Over the past four years, under the banner of *A Set of New Skills*, Poulgrain has committed to learning a range of practical proficiencies and sharing this knowledge with the city’s artist community through non-hierarchical workshops and collaborative exhibition outcomes.

Poulgrain’s project draws on the artist’s wide network of collaborators and years of accumulated knowledge to produce their largest and most ambitious work to date – the creation of a fully operational houseboat. The vessel will become a floating artist-run community space and home for Poulgrain, custom built in its entirety as a functional sculpture... The work on display in *Primavera 2023*, documents the various collaborations undertaken for this project: walls produced with Wreckers’ co-founders Hailey Atkins and Anya Swan, fittings and hooks produced with Georgia Morgan, handmade rope made with Leen Rieth, video documentation by Charlie Hillhouse and Madeleine Stack, along with expertise from boat-builders, ecologists and houseboat residents.’

Sarah Thomson, ‘Creating community: a diy guide’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

LEFT: Sarah Poulgrain, *Learning how to build a houseboat: walls, fixings and rope* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, steel, aluminium, handmade paper pulp, handmade rope, ceramic, glass, digital HD video, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

Learn more

Sarah Poulgrain website, <https://www.sarahpoulgrain.com/>

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Watch and Listen

Sarah Poulgrain, (2023), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

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West Space 'Wreckers Walkthrough', <https://westspace.org.au/offsite/work/wreckers-walkthrough>

RIGHT: Sarah Poulgrain, *Learning how to build a houseboat: walls, fixings and rope* (detail), 2023, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, steel, aluminium, handmade paper pulp, handmade rope, ceramic, glass, digital HD video, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley



Reimagining | Tiyan Baker



Tiyan Baker is a Malaysian Bidayuh-Anglo Australian artist who works with installation, photography, video, and sculpture. Her practice draws on historical research, language, digital processes, and material play to trace unseen relationships between words, place, and stories. Centring and celebrating her Indigenous heritage and culture in her works, Baker is also interested in things she has unknowingly inherited. Living far from native lands and amid the (re) colonisation of Borneo, she explores all that can shift, be mistranslated or lost, and what can manifest in its place. Using an artistic logic that is part salvaging and part speculation, Baker's work engages in embodied storytelling and world-building to reclaim her vision of her indigenous heritage in the face of intergenerational shame and disadvantage, systematic destruction of culture, and geographical disconnect from family and kin.

'A lot of my work is about my mother's heritage. She's a Bidayuh woman, which is an Indigenous group from Malaysian Borneo. And a lot of it engages with notions of inheritance. What we inherit without knowing. What we inherit intergenerationally, epochally.

ramin ntaangan is a longhouse. That's our word for it. And a longhouse is a precolonial architectural feature of Indigenous people in Borneo. If you think about an apartment block that has been turned on its side, it's a long house and it has, you know, it literally, you know, can have hundreds and hundreds of people living in them. If you lived in the village, you lived in the house. You didn't live outside of it, you know what I mean? And they really were the heart of our culture, where ceremony was conducted. It was a fortress. It was the heart of all activity. The longhouses that made up our village that I still go to, to visit my family are gone, and they're replaced with western-style housing. I can't live on ancestral land. I'm not considered Indigenous by Malaysian state law because I have a white father. You know, my mother was born in a longhouse. I would like to spend more time there and I would like to build my own house there. And I would like to access my land. But it's not exactly always possible.

I'm very interested in online culture. That's a big part of my work. And I became very interested in custom PC culture. Sort of, like, kicking around, you know. And then I just saw something, and then I was, like, I'm going to make a longhouse PC. It's that easy. And I didn't know how I was going to do it. And I've never built a computer before. And I don't know how to work with bamboo, but I just figured it out. So, there's the computer. You know, it's a beating heart. It's this, like, red centre. This very, like, strong interior space. The door to the longhouse was carved with a crocodile so we have kind of a totemic relationship with crocodiles. And then the other screen, there is some footage that I actually took on ancestral lands. It's very hard to get to. There's a command prompt script that is taken from a book that I found on one of my trips to Sarawak called 'Adat Ngundah Ramin Untangan Bauh', which means 'Rituals to Make a New Longhouse'. And I lifted some ritual chants from that book, and I adapted them and put them as the command prompt. Names like, you know, 'To the God of grandmas, to the God of sharks, to the God of, you know, GPUs'.

Because I'm alone and I'm here, and no one knows or cares about the Bidayuh people, and I don't even have a diaspora to draw on, this is how I have to enact my Bidayuhness rights through, through my artwork. Through my digital life. I pull things together. It's a patchwork methodology. I mean, I spend a lot of time on my computer. You know, I'm just-I'm just freaky. I just Google and I just do all kinds of weird stuff. Nothing suss, I will say, nothing suss. At the end of the day, it's really about me enacting my agency.

We are, like, this manifestation of the past. We have a responsibility to the present and to the future. Indigenous people have always been able to live in the future, in the past, in the present.

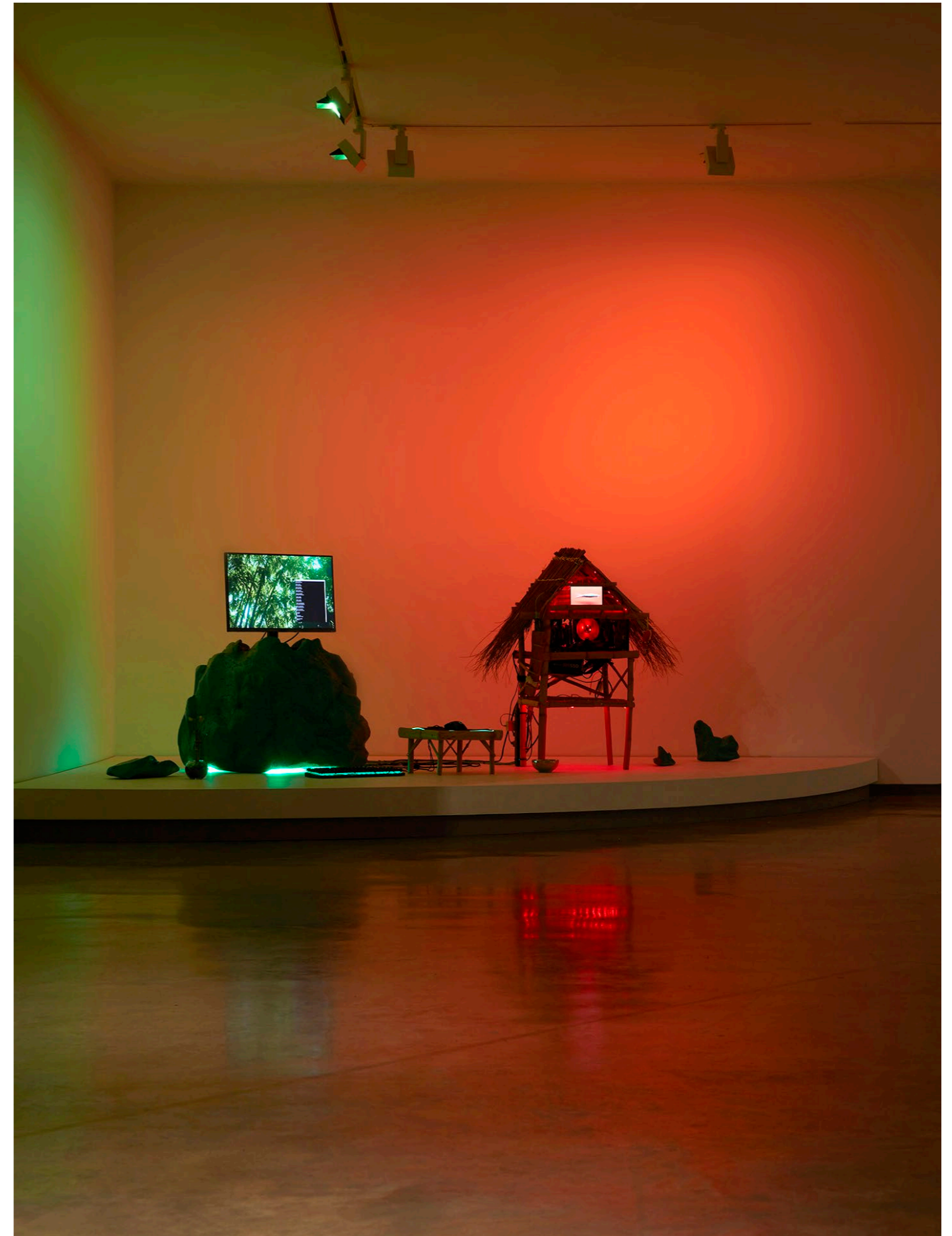
You can't think of time as linear. If you take on this view that we inherit something that we don't know, and we take it with us into the future, it's inherently not linear. So, you know, it's everything everywhere, all at once. That's what it really is.'

Tiyan Baker, (2023) *Video Transcript*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

Host Site: <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

PREVIOUS: Tiyan Baker, 2023, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Alfonse Chiu

RIGHT: Tiyan Baker, *Personal computer: ramin ntaangan*, 2022-23, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, computer parts, computer monitors, screensaver video, bamboo, wood, palm and coconut leaf, plastic twine, heirloom machete, sunflower seeds, LED lighting, foam, spray paint, lucky bamboo, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley



From the Curator

‘Reimagining the future while acknowledging the past is key to Malaysian Bidayuh-Anglo Australian artist Tiyan Baker’s practice. Baker centres her Indigenous heritage and culture within her practice, while also drawing upon historical research and digital processes, to create works that interweave the traditional with the contemporary. Baker’s new iteration of *Personal computer: ramin ntaangan* (2022–23) for *Primavera 2023* represents the ways in which she utilises the digital to maintain cultural and familial connections. Comprising a self-assembled computer system displaying references to her ancestral home, inserted into a bamboo structure modelled on the Bidayuh longhouse – a traditional large, raised communal home built by indigenous communities in Borneo – the work combines the digital and the traditional to consider the countless possibilities of continuing cultural connection into the future, both within the community and across the diaspora.’

Talia Smith, ‘Creating Futures for complex histories, one contradiction at a time’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.

From the Exhibition Catalogue

‘In 2022, Tiyan Baker built a personal computer. Hardware customisation can be a slow process. Parts take months to arrive and then there’s the careful process of assembly. Building your own gear is big in the gaming world – and part of what makes it so appealing, apart from the thrill of assembling a mix of specifications that fit your unique parameters, is that you can pimp its look.’

Baker’s personal computer is housed inside a small, handmade baruk. The baruk is raised on stilts and the computer glows red inside – a live, beating heart. A couple of red heads hang from the beams and, above the entrance, a crocodile with a parang held between its teeth spins gently. The frame is made of scavenged bamboo, some of it salvaged from other artworks, and the thatched roof repurposed from the brush of a coconut palm hand-broom.

The process of stitching the thatch puts Baker in communion with the work of her ancestors, as they built their baruks with foundations of tahas and roofs of bamboo. The question of what parts of our ancestors are hardwired into us runs through Baker’s body of work.’

Sarinah Masukor, ‘Hard drives and genetic history’ in *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2023.





PREVIOUS: Tiyan Baker, *Personal computer: ramin ntaangan* (detail), 2022–23, installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, computer parts, computer monitors, screensaver video, bamboo, wood, palm and coconut leaf, plastic twine, heirloom machete, sunflower seeds, LED lighting, foam, spray paint, lucky bamboo, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Zan Wimberley

ABOVE (left to right): Moorina Bonini, *dapalama (between)* (detail), 2023, vinyl text, charcoal; Tiyan Baker, *Personal computer: ramin ntaangan*, 2022–23, computer parts, computer monitors, screensaver video, bamboo, wood, palm and coconut leaf, plastic twine, heirloom machete, sunflower seeds, LED lighting, foam, spray paint, lucky bamboo; installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, image courtesy and © the artists, photograph: Zan Wimberley

Learn more

Tiyan Baker website, <https://tiyanbaker.com/>

Sebastian Henry-Jones (2023) ‘Cool Hunter Predictions: Tiyan Baker, We’re keeping an eye on these artists in the year ahead’ in Art Collector, <https://artcollector.net.au/cool-hunter-predictions-tiyan-baker/>

Liminal (2020), ‘5 questions with Tiyan Baker’, <https://www.liminalmag.com/5-questions/tiyan-baker>

Barnaby Smith (2020), ‘Tiyan Baker and Guy Loudon on the cold poetics of the pandemic’ in Art Guide Australia, <https://artguide.com.au/tiyan-baker-and-guy-louden-on-the-cold-poetics-of-the-pandemic/>

Zona Tan-Sheppard (2022), ‘The Durian Head Party’, *The Thorny Fruit*, <https://www.thethornyfruit.com.au/blogs/news/the-durian-head-party?srsId=AfmBOoriXiAsa9ecg-qT7N6Xs7QMBfje0Zsn93YiDQH9bP2VtchlVne>

Common Affairs (2022), ‘Local Social Enterprise Catama Gathers Artist From Across Borneo & South East Asia To Present New Work In Contemporary Exhibition “Dalam”’, <https://www.commonaffairs.co/local-social-enterprise-catama-gathers-artist-from-across-borneo-south-east-asia-to-present-new-work-in-contemporary-exhibition-dalam/>

My Backyard Tour, ‘Bidayuh Traditional Architecture’, <https://mybackyardtour.com/bidayuh-traditional-architecture-%EF%BB%BF/>

Watch and Listen

Tiyan Baker, (2023), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-young-australian-artists/>

Murray Art Museum Albury (2022), ‘National Photography Prize 2022 Interview - Winner Tiyan Baker’, Artist Interview, <https://www.mamalbury.com.au/artist-interview-npp-2022-winner-tiyan-baker>

Prototypes Care Package Series 11, RMIT, ‘Prototype Conversations: Tiyan Baker’, with Lauren Carrol Harris, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObieRQC6T5s>

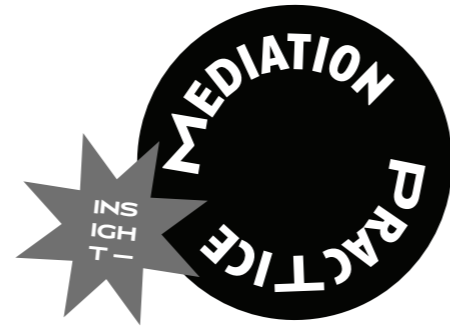
Spotlight (2020), ‘NSW VAEF finalist Tiyan Baker’, <https://vimeo.com/483871546>



Installation view, *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, image courtesy and © the artists, photograph: Zan Wimberley

Prompts for Mediating an Exhibition

This resource helps public-facing teams develop their own understandings of exhibitions and build confidence in talking to visitors about art. Museums & Galleries of NSW and UQ Art Museum have been working closely together to adapt Mediation strategies to the Australian arts and cultural sector.



First time exploring the exhibition:

- What do you see?

- What artworks resonate with you? Why?

- What doesn't resonate with you? Why?

- Write down five words that come to mind when seeing this exhibition.

- Write down five words that come to mind when reading the introduction panel.

Returning to the exhibition:

- What do you see now that you didn't see the first time you explored the exhibition?

- How has this exhibition challenged your thinking or knowledge of a subject?

- What connections can you make between these two sets of words?

- Choose an artwork:

- What questions come to mind when first seeing the artwork?

- Write about something new you've learnt from/or about the key exhibition concepts:

Learning and researching:

- What learning tools do you have available for your exploration of this exhibition?

- Exhibition labels
- Exhibition catalogue
- Artist talks
- Podcasts / videos
- Education Resources
- Other:

- What ideas or works do you want to know more about? Where will you start?

- How has your research changed the way you think about the exhibition?

- What are the key themes that you would like visitors to consider?

- How can you convert your research into a provocation (question) to prompt visitors to consider this aspect of the exhibition?

Knowledge sharing with audiences and other staff (peer-to-peer learning):

- How will you introduce yourself to visitors?

- How will you honour/use/respond to what visitors share with you within a conversation?

- What questions do you plan to ask visitors to prompt conversation?

- What have you learnt from visitors?

- What have you learnt from fellow Mediators?

- How will you share your learnings with the rest of your team?

- What tools will help support your Mediation practice?

- What tools can you develop with your team? Such as:

- Mind maps
- Space to share experiences and ideas (communal diary)
- End of shift discussions
- Other:

Mediation Reflections Worksheet



This Reflection Worksheet is designed to aid the Mediation practice of public-facing teams. It includes prompts for notetaking during exhibition tours or staff/volunteer training sessions to help form a foundation for engagements with visitors about exhibitions, artists, artworks and objects. Museums & Galleries of NSW and UQ Art Museum have been working closely together to adapt Mediation strategies to the Australian arts and cultural sector.

ENCOUNTER

Mediation Questions:

What stories/questions/issues do you feel that the artists are presenting to the visitor?

Note any key terms and concepts that you're personally interested in exploring further.

This question is designed for your personal reflection—you do not need to share your reflection unless you'd like to. Please feel free to make notes, draw, mind-map ideas, or brainstorm questions that might be useful for your practice.

Has anyone else expressed ideas, themes or thoughts that differ from yours? How has this made you viewed something differently?

This question is designed for your personal reflection—you do not need to share your reflection unless you'd like to. Please feel free to make notes, draw, mind-map ideas, or brainstorm questions that might be useful for your practice.

Visitor experience:

How do you feel you can support the visitor's experience of the exhibition? You may like to consider the different perspectives you may encounter, cultural/personal safety, sensory issues, etc.

Other Tour Resources

EDUCATION RESOURCE

The education resource accompanying *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* has been produced by Museums & Galleries of NSW in conjunction with the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, to support the tour.

The resource includes practical and theory-based activities designed for students from Years 1 to 12, however it may be used by audiences of all ages. Some activities can be modified for varying levels of learning and can be undertaken during or after an exhibition visit.

The resource offers:

- Insight into the practice of curator Talia Smith and exhibiting artists Tiyan Baker, Christopher Bassi, Moorina Bonini, Nikki Lam, Sarah Poulgrain and Truc Truong
- Thinking and creative activities for use in the classroom and the gallery
- Links for further reading and exploration

PUBLIC PROGRAM IDEAS

A brief document aiming to stimulate public program development at exhibiting venues. It identifies key themes within the exhibition and highlights potential opportunities for the public to learn about and engage with the exhibition – from independent making activities to gallery led artist talks, workshops, discussions and interactions with local artists and First Nations groups, Primavera artists or the curator.

MCA CURATORIAL AUDIO GUIDE

Curator Talia Smith shares her ideas behind *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* and the connecting threads that brought the six artists together for the exhibition: <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-2023/>

MCA AUSLAN GUIDE

An introduction to *Primavera 2023: Young Australian Artists* in Auslan, <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/primavera-2023/>

PRIMAVERA 2023

Young Australian Artists



Museum of Contemporary Art Australia

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The Exhibition Catalogue was produced to accompany the original exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA). It includes a series of essays that deepen our understanding of the exhibition and the artists. As well as an introductory essay by curator Talia Smith, the catalogue contains texts commissioned by the MCA that address each artist and their artwork individually, including a photographic essay by Primavera artist Moorina Bonini that forms part of her exhibition presentation. Copies of the catalogue are available from the MCA.

A Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Museums & Galleries of NSW touring exhibition curated by Talia Smith. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program.

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