



The Good

ANNA LOUISE RICHARDSON

Mediation Handbook



Cover: Anna Louise Richardson, studio documentation for *The Good*. Photo by Bo Wong.
Above: Anna Louise Richardson in her studio. Photo by Bo Wong.

About this Mediation Handbook

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 **Anna Louise Richardson | *The Good***.

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/cultural-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 *The Good* 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 starting points for conversation and engagement.

This handbook was developed by M&G NSW with contributions from Anna Louise Richardson, Julia Roche, and Bren Donnellan, in partnership with The Condensery, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery and UQ Art Museum.

About the Artist

Anna Louise Richardson is an artist and freelance curator investigating rural Australian identity and associated mythologies. Richardson works primarily in charcoal and graphite on cement fibreboard, creating realistic drawings which are often rescaled, flattened, and/or cut-out to amplify the subject itself. Her artistic practice reveals ideas of intergenerational exchange, parenthood and signifiers of identity based on her experiences of life in rural Australia living and working on a multi-generation beef cattle farm. The complexities of human relationships with the natural world and the intergenerational qualities of these relationships are driving themes throughout her practice. Richardson's work is also concerned with the social narratives that shape and determine how we value animals - whether that be through culture, commerce, ecology, or beyond.

Richardson shares a studio on the farm with her husband Abdul-Rahman Abdullah - a Malay/Australian Muslim artist whose sculptural practice draws on the narrative capacity of animals to explore the intersection of politics, cultural identity and the natural world. Their three children are the seventh generation to grow up on the property. Richardson's work is often autobiographical, revealing intergenerational connections with the land. Her father and sister manage the farm business, and her late mother was a veterinarian, artist and furniture designer/maker who ran Megan Christie Designs from a converted shearing shed studio.

Richardson holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Curtin University of Technology, Perth and has been a practicing artist since 2014. Primarily a visual artist she also contracts as an independent curator working with Australian art institutions, festivals and organisations. Richardson's curatorial practice focuses on issues of regional and marginal identity as well as intergenerational communication. She is particularly interested in art practices concerned with place making, the archive and identity politics and is committed to working with different communities within the Australian social landscape to provide platforms and acknowledgment of diverse voices and experiences.

Bio from Artist's website: <https://www.annalouiserichardson.com/biography.html>

Right: Anna Louise Richardson on her family farm 'Kalga', in Whadjuk Nyoongar Boodja, Peel Region, WA. Photo by Bo Wong.



About the Exhibition

The Good is a major new solo exhibition by artist Anna Louise Richardson whose practice is centred around rural life, embedded in the experience and drama of everyday reality. Working primarily in charcoal and graphite, Richardson's work explores ideas of intergenerational exchange, parenthood and identity based on her experiences of living and working on a multi-generation beef cattle farm in rural Australia.

The Good was originally conceived for The Condensery in QLD (July – October 2023) and Wagga Wagga Art Gallery in NSW (March – June 2024). In developing *The Good* for The Condensery, the impetus was to further the agricultural story without shying away from the underbelly of rural life. This included Richardson's fear of the dark, as well as the complex relationships between humans and the natural world, tinged by grief, death, and the competing demands of nurturing new life. However, it quickly evolved to a positive force – years of hardship across the country really demanded it. In a world increasingly defined by division and hardship, Richardson's work points to the necessary act of radical optimism needed to seek goodness in all things.

The national tour, developed with M&G NSW, will bring this exhibition and its associated public programming and professional development to regional and public galleries across QLD, NSW, VIC, and WA from 2023 to 2027.

Curated by Rachel Arndt & Dr Lee-Anne Hall. A Wagga Wagga Art Gallery and The Condensery exhibition touring with ART ON THE MOVE and Museums & Galleries of NSW. This project was made possible by the Australian Government's Regional Arts Fund, which supports the arts in regional and remote Australia and the Regional Exhibition Touring Boost supported by the WA Government. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal art investment and advisory body.



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 2020–2022 M&G NSW reached audiences of 363,000 through 12 exhibitions showcasing 108 Australian artists at 43 unique venues nationally. 1,920 public programs were delivered and over 5,900 students were engaged through educational programs.

ART ON THE MOVE

ART ON THE MOVE is Western Australia's only organisation dedicated to touring contemporary visual art exhibitions throughout the regions, interstate and beyond. Our work explores the connections between art and place, bringing together and inspiring diverse communities. artonthemove.art

About the Curators

Rachel Arndt:

Rachel Arndt is the Director of Wangaratta Art Gallery. Rachel has over two decades of experience in the visual arts in Australia and internationally. Her commitment to regional gallery practice was cemented through a decade with Museums & Galleries of NSW in multiple roles leading a comprehensive range of programs, strategic initiatives, funding opportunities and professional development events for the gallery sector, including the largest regional touring exhibition program of contemporary art in Australia. In early 2021, she moved to Queensland to lead The Condensery in Toogoolawah, where she has implemented the gallery's inaugural strategic vision and artistic program, including the first professionally curated suite of exhibitions. With a deep commitment to connecting artists and art with audiences, she has established a learning and engagement program focusing on children and young people, implemented a comprehensive rebrand, and embarked on a marketing strategy to build the gallery's profile and reach. Rachel spent four years in the UK working across exhibitions, loans, acquisitions and collection management for the Arts Council Collection, London and Christ Church Picture Gallery, Oxford. She holds a Master of Arts Administration from UNSW and a Bachelor in Visual Arts (Honours) from the University of Sydney.

Bio from Public Galleries Association Victoria: <https://pgav.org.au/Wangaratta-Art-Gallery-appoints-new-Gallery-Director-10338>

Dr. Lee-Anne Hall:

Since 2020, Lee-Anne Hall (Dip T, Grad Dip, MA, PhD) has been the Director of Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. In her role she actively curates and leads a team in exhibition development, education and public programs. Lee-Anne was formerly the Director of Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest (2012 – 2018). Lee-Anne has also had a career in the tertiary education sector, arts management and curatorial practice. She has taught and coordinated post-graduate programs in Museum Studies at the University of Sydney (2012–2018; 2010), Arts Management at UTS (2011–2012), and Leisure Studies and Arts Management at UTS (1991 – 2002). Her research interests and involvements include Indigenous art and culture, reconciliation, museums and Indigenous representation and cross-cultural history.



Above: Anna Louise Richardson in her studio. Photo by Bo Wong.



Above: Anna Louise Richardson and family on her family farm 'Kalga', in Whadjuk Nyoongar Boodja, Peel Region, WA. Photo by Bo Wong.

Glossary

The Big Ideas	
Rural Life	<p>The experience of living outside large towns or cities, often referred to as 'living in the country.'</p> <p>Contextual differences between a rural and urban life are worth considering, including (but not limited to): smaller communities, physical distance/isolation, limited access to services, proximity to wildlife/nature, and a strong economic association with agriculture and industry.</p>
Generational Knowledge	<p>Theoretical or practical understanding shared between generations of people, oftentimes developed through experience or broader cultural identity.</p> <p>While it is often acquired through modelling the behaviour of family members and/or direct teaching, Anna Louise Richardson suggests it may emerge from objects themselves – especially those which are rooted to a particular place.</p>
Radical Optimism	<p>Using a positive or hopeful worldview to generate personal or social change. Prioritising positive assumptions about the future to motivate change in the present.</p>
Animal Ethics	<p>A branch of philosophy which questions the moral responsibility that humans have toward animals, including the quality and quantity of care that should be extended. This is particularly complex when it comes to considering the different ways humans interact with animals depending on their perception as wild creatures, companions, or a food source/product.</p>
Farming Fundamentals	
Pasture	<p>Land covered with grass and other low plants suitable for grazing animals, especially cattle or sheep, to feed on.</p>

Grazing Management	<p>The process of organising grazing animals to make the best use of pastures, while maintaining the pastures themselves. It is intended to make a farm more sustainable, balancing the feed requirements of animals with the vegetation available.</p> <p>For example, rotational grazing is a process where animals are allocated new grazing areas in a sequence, allowing for previously grazed pastures the time to recover and regrow.</p>
Rapid Fire Definitions	
Chook	A chicken.
Gumboots	Long rubber boots used to keep feet dry through rain or mud, also known as wellingtons.
Horse tack	Equipment that is used to ride, handle, and care for a domesticated horse (e.g. saddle, stirrups, and reins).
Mozzie	A mosquito.
Poddy calf	A newborn or unweaned calf, especially one that is orphaned or taken away from its mother and hand-fed
Runabout	Utility vehicle used as transportation on a farm.
Seed potato	A potato tuber that has been grown so it can be replanted and produce a potato crop.
Stock feed	Feed for livestock, known as fodder rather than foraged food, often in the form of chopped hay or straw, grain, lupins and pelleted feed.
Windfall	A fruit blown down from a tree or bush by the wind, also used to describe unexpectedly receiving a large amount of money.

Intergenerational succession	<p>The process of transferring control of a family farm – including the specific skills, practical knowledge, and wisdom needed to maintain the well-being of the farm – to a younger generation.</p> <p>With the average age of Australian farmers being 58, this process is essential for securing the long-term viability of a family farm.</p>
Working Family Farm	A farm which is currently owned and operated by a family, often for generations. Despite growing concern about the growth of corporate farming, family farms continue to be the most common form of farm ownership in Australia.
Healthy pasture ecosystem	<p>There is contention over what it means for a pasture ecosystem to be healthy in Australia.</p> <p>Pasture management has often privileged productivity and profitability – attempting to ensure feed is available for livestock year-round – rather than considering landscape health more broadly (i.e. soil quality, water quality, contributions to climate change, and levels of native biodiversity).</p> <p>Prior to the arrival of Europeans and introduced agricultural methods, Indigenous peoples of Australia had well-established cultural practices when it came to agriculture, cultivation, land/animal management, aquaculture, and harvesting which minimised harm to the environment itself. While Australia does have native pastures, many have been cleared in the course of colonisation.</p> <p>For an introductory resource on native pastures from a farming perspective, read Biodiversity in the Paddock by Josh Dorrrough, Jacqui Stol, and Sue McIntyre: https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=procite:dc9b10fe-5405-4ab5-8c5f-ca49c4c5ad87&dsid=DS1</p>

Further Information

About contemporary rural life: Try watching *Landline* on ABC iView or ABC TV, Australia's only national agricultural television program covering stories from Australia's rural and regional heartland. <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/landline>

About the history of agriculture in Australia: Try reading *First Knowledges Country: Future Fire, Future Farming* by Bill Gammage and Bruce Pascoe.

There is also *The Dark Emu Story*, a documentary that charts the impact of this book by Bruce Pascoe, available to watch on ABC iView and ABC TV. <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/dark-emu-story>

About sustainable farming: For information on holistic planned grazing, try watching *What is Holistic Management?* by Savory Institute. <https://vimeo.com/797386601>

For an understanding of the role of livestock in reversing desertification, watch the TED Talk *How to green the world's deserts and reverse climate change* by Allan Savory. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpTHi7O66pl>

Watch organic farmer Joel Salatin speaking about the role of grass in sustainable farming in his TEDx Talk *Cows, Carbon and Climate*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Z75A_JMBx4

Watch John Wick's video on how compost can assist with the carbon footprint of agriculture. *Carbon Farming: Harnessing The Power of The Soil*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z91QsZAI_w

Regenerative Agriculture: To learn more about regenerative agriculture, look at the RCS Australia website. <https://www.rcsaustralia.com.au/what-is-regenerative-agriculture/>

Watch the series of videos on regenerative agriculture by The Western Port Catchment Landcare Network (WPCLN). https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjE8GJied2s8X_MUTwZxyRDmTxuVY5G-v

Watch Australian sheep and cattle property manager and researcher Dr. Charles Massy OA speak on regenerative agriculture. TEDx Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et8YKBivhaE> and Perth NRM Keynote Address https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rllu7II-__YE. You can also read Dr. Massy's book *Call of the Reed Warbler*.



Glossary and Further Information prepared by Bren Donnellan with Anna Louise Richardson.

Bren Donnellan

As a writer and multi-disciplinary artist living on Gadigal land, Bren Donnellan (she/they) has prioritised creating work which connects and empowers queer people. Since graduating from UNSW in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Creative Writing and a Bachelor of Fine Arts, they have worked with Museums & Galleries of NSW in a number of roles, including telling stories about the history and culture of NSW on the Storyplace website.

Above left: Anna Louise Richardson, *Right gumboot*, 2023, charcoal on cement fibreboard. Courtesy of the artist. Above right: Anna Louise Richardson, *Windfall*, 2023, charcoal on cement fibreboard. Courtesy of the artist. Photos by Bo Wong.

In-Conversation: Anna Louise Richardson & Julia Roche

Wagga Wagga Art Gallery has been facilitating a co-mentorship between local artist Julia Roche and Anna Louise Richardson. This initiative is part of Wagga Wagga Art Gallery's commitment to developing local artists, under its RAD (Regional Artist Development) program. When *The Good* is on view at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery in 2024, Julia will have an exhibition on view concurrently, curated by Hayley Megan French. Anna has had the opportunity to visit Julia's property and see her studio in the lead up to this simultaneous presentation of their practices. On 7 September 2023, Anna and Julia met up again in-person at the art fair Sydney Contemporary and recorded their conversation, which has been converted into an edited transcript below. This conversation reveals interesting similarities and differences between the artists' practices, families, and ways of life.

JR: Hi, Anna.

ALR: Hi Julia. I find it so funny saying that because my sister's name is Julia.

JR: It's a beautiful name, so my Mum tells me.

ALR: I very much approve, it's a favourite name of mine.

JR: There we go. So, my first question: is the environment in which you create important to the consistency and evolution of your work? Or does the intricacy and focus required for your work mean it's produced separately or without influence of environmental factors?

ALR: Definitely. I create my work using a screen for my reference material. I always work from a photographic reference, but I don't often print them out, it's always blown up on a screen. I work in the studio which is a big shed in our backyard. I work mostly in the daytime or at night if my husband Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, who's also an artist, is working, because I don't like going outside at nighttime on my own, so I will go outside if he's out there too. And sometimes...

JR: That's so funny.

ALR: ... he laughs at me, but he says, "Do you want me to walk you inside?" And I always say, "Yes, please."

JR: How far is your studio?

ALR: Oh, only 50 meters. I'm capable of going outside at night if I have to but if I have a choice, I won't. And in terms of the environment around us, we live on a beef cattle farm, and I tell people that my work is autobiographical even though it's not portraiture,



Above: Anna Louise Richardson and son Aqeel visiting Julia Roche's studio in Wagga Wagga, NSW. Photo by Dr. Lee-Anne Hall.

as I am represented through the animals and objects that I draw and my references always come from my life. Even if I don't consciously realise it at the time, the works that I make are a deep reflection of what's going on in my life. In the past I've made some works which in hindsight I realised were about the fracturing of our family and the future of the farm when Mum got sick, and I hadn't quite connected that until looking back on them. The works for *The Good* are all about the things that were directly in front of me that I really loved and found joy in.

Often when I'm making work I'll have an affirmation or a question and I'll kind of ask the universe to show me what I'm going to make next. I started working like that when I had my first child, Aziza – which is such a mind and body altering experience – and I wasn't sure what I would do as my art practice. I started responding to what was happening to us, to Aziza and me, looking at the interactions we had with animals, and I started making work about that. So, it's letting my life show me the things within it that are interesting to make work about. Now when stuff happens, I think, "ooh, there's an artwork here".

JR: Yeah, getting more conscious.

ALR: It's totally a consciousness about what to do. That's also how I name my work. I'll say to myself, "okay, I want a title to come to me", and then I go for a walk or whatever, and it just comes rather than trying to force it. I think if we weren't living the life we do on the farm, my work would be completely different.

JR: Yes, of course. It's all interconnected, isn't it?

ALR: All right, I have a question for you. Energetically, you have many colours woven into your life, you're managing your creative business, you're working on the family farm, you're nurturing a big family and a loving partnership, where does your work draw inspiration from these threads and where does it provide inspiration? And what is your family's relationship to your work? I'm always interested in that. I know with my family, I'm getting better at telling them about my work, but I find it easier to tell the public about my work than my family.

JR: Because you feel... Because why?

ALR: It's so close to home, right?

JR: It's real. Because they know you so well.

ALR: Yeah.

JR: I consciously haven't identified my family, as such, as an inspiration to my work, I think because in my art practice I directly refer to the landscape and the environment and how I sit within it. That being said, it's all very intertwined and the energy from my

family definitely affects the way I create. Creating also allows me to be a much more vibrant and engaged family member. I can't imagine being a mum and not being an artist, and I can't imagine being an artist and not being a mum.

ALR: Yeah! I say to myself I am an artist and a mum, not a mum who is an artist.

JR: We moved back to the family farm near Wagga from Sydney 5 years ago. I think I'm still learning about the energy that being a mum and living on the land creates, and then how that energy is felt or seen in my art. I think I'm still trying to work out my place in this environment. That idea of allowing time and space for the environment to recognise me as much as me recognise it.

ALR: That's beautiful.

JR: So my husband is not in the arts, he works in agriculture, but he's a huge supporter and gives me a lot of time and space to work. He's amazing and he understands when I need a break or I need more concentrated time in the studio – particularly in the lead up to an exhibition. My kids are very good critiques from an aesthetic point of view, actually. As is my Mum. I engage her a lot just from a compositional point of view. I often want people's advice, but then on the other hand, when I bring a work in from outside, a lot of the time I don't want to change it, even if it is a bit awkward or it doesn't quite work aesthetically. I feel that because of the context it was created in, it should be left as is. I find this process really exciting because it takes away all of those constraints I've created in my head, or learnt at art school about how painting should look, and focuses on the journey and the collaboration with the environment. The story is in the awkwardness, the accidents. And yeah, the kids, I think just that naive, untrained eye, it's actually quite powerful to have their feedback.

ALR: Do they have suggestions for you of what you should paint?

JR: Yeah, definitely, the palette, the symbols, etc. They paint themselves and they're quite articulate and forthcoming with their opinions of different works, as is my dad!

ALR: Do you have any artists in your family?

JR: My sister Jacqui Meyers is a master of many creative trades. She primarily paints and works with clay in a supported studio group in Wagga called The Art Factory. Jacqui has Down syndrome and is one of the kindest, most intriguing person I know. We are hoping to collaborate on a project and hopefully exhibit together in the coming year. Mum and Dad both are creative in their own rights – both can draw beautifully but don't practice regularly. Do you?

ALR: My Mum, Megan Christie, was an artist. She was my go-to critic before my husband Abdul-Rahman. And because she was also a vet, she used to help a lot. I'd say, "Mum, come and help me with the anatomy. The leg is backwards; it looks weird".



Above: Anna Louise Richardson, *Pillows*, 2023, graphite on paper, framed. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Bo Wong.

Or when using a photo reference, a lot of the time the animals are standing in grass and I would say, "I can't see the feet" and so she would help me get it right. She was an amazing drawer and her anatomical knowledge was on point.

JR: She knew it, ingrained in her.

ALR: Yeah. She used to draw without a reference, so she was a much better artist than me in many ways. I miss her, I really love that feedback, it was a great way to work.

JR: My next question is, and I guess with particular reference to *The Good*, did the COVID lockdown period alter your practice? This is with reference to technique, subject matter, scale and just the general energy of your work.

ALR: I mean, not COVID per se. Because it was a different experience in WA, it's hard to say what was or wasn't an effect of COVID, right? I don't know what I've missed out on professionally from COVID, because who knows? We were very shut off in Western Australia for quite a long time, but that also didn't actually impact me too much, other than a career defining solo show at Maitland Regional Art Gallery that I couldn't attend. I was really sad about that. But because we have little kids, it was also quite nice to just have an external reason to not be as active and travelling. Mum passed away at the beginning of COVID, and although she didn't die of COVID, there was a sort of global recognition that everybody's having quite a shit time for those few years and a lots of empathetic connection. A lot of people lost people who were very dear to them and there was that total recalibration of what is important in your life and focus on people in the home and the family, and those things became really important. Mental health and looking after people, I think, probably had a much bigger impact than COVID restrictions. It was a positive flow-on as a culture and I don't know whether or not we've managed to keep some of those things but I hope so. It connected people in a different way and I think that possibly would've been the biggest effect on my practice.

The work I made for *The Good* was about looking for the good things in life after this period, including Mum dying, which is the worst thing to ever happen to me. I wanted to focus on the positive things in my life and look at the good stuff and make work about things that I loved. They could be really tiny things, like a stack of pillows, or they could be something quite meaningful and big. To make a body of work that was celebratory, we don't often see a lot of artwork about joy, and we don't even talk about joy that much, we don't talk about how much we love our family and our partner and our kids and how proud we are of things we love. Social discussions seem to always be about woes or wishes or things that aren't great, not about celebrating, and I think I wanted to counter that a bit. It's been really nice to have feedback from the show that people recognise that too, which is really nice because it feels like such a daggy thing to make art about.

JR: And probably one of those things people don't realise they've missed until they

read about it and see it and then they're like, "oh, refreshing."

ALR: I mean, it's cheesy, but everything does have a silver lining, and I do kind of believe that. So, I think you can always find good stuff.

JR: Sorry about your Mum.

ALR: Thank you.

JR: Yeah, it's been such a confusing time in our lives, that whole period of time with COVID lockdowns.

ALR: Yeah, and having tiny children without a mother is quite hard. It's such a moment when you have kids to connect to your parents and then to miss out on that opportunity, that sucks. It's another one of those experiences where you realise that everybody alive will lose a parent. When you have kids, those doors of relatable experiences and empathy open - you enter this whole other world, and losing a parent is the same. So it's been really nice to have that connection with other people too.

JR: That's quite special feedback because it's such a personal sentiment to the show.

ALR: I didn't want the show to be about losing a parent, but it's come from that. I made a whole body of work about Mum after she died and experiencing her presence through the presence of birds. Then I wanted to go, "what's next? Where am I moving through that?". I'll probably look back on *The Good* and think, "oh yeah, I was obviously making work about grief and the stages of grief as I went through it".

JR: I quite like the idea you touched on earlier, to work and then let associated meanings evolve. I get a bit stuck thinking, "what are the meanings and how am I going to make art around it", rather than make art and let it speak to me, or to whoever is engaging with it. It's interesting to see what surfaces, because obviously a lot of things are subconscious, or you haven't even identified or articulated what it is, but it immerses aesthetically. It's such an authentic way of creating art and of making meaning.

ALR: It's nice to work with a curator or someone else in that way, someone writing or responding to the work, because if they can see that, I think, "yes, that's what I meant. You nailed it. Whatever you said was exactly what I was trying to articulate, it must be working!".

JR: A hundred percent. It's phenomenal, that's why it's so interesting. That's why collaborating is so good, isn't it? Because then you start hearing what other people say and you're like, "oh, I hadn't actually... yeah, that's exactly..."

ALR: Yes! So, you respond directly to the landscape in your work. You often paint outside at night for long stretches, which I think is just a really fascinating mode of

making work. I am very curious because I'm really terrified of the dark and I want to hear how you feel in the landscape at night and what your inner dialogue is? Your work reflects calm, how do you find that with your work?

JR: I go into autopilot when I'm heading out. It's a very disarming experience. Even if I'm not actually in the bush at night, I'm in my studio, which is a 1900's repurposed wool shed- it's pretty much like being in the elements. It's probably a hundred meters from the house and other than the moonlight, it's pitch black around that area. I quite enjoy walking home in the still of the night. But I will admit I usually have my loyal Labrador Poppy by my side.

For a show I had at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery years ago, I created a series of large scale landscapes where I layered and layered with washes of diluted oil paints. During the drying process (but while the paintings were very much still wet) I would leave them in the elements on an elevated part of our farm as a way of collaborating with nature. I'd let whatever the environment was showcasing play its part on the work. If it rained, the artwork would take it, or if leaves fell on it the subtle motifs would mark. Probably the biggest reaction I noticed was in the winter, as dew would rest on the wet oil paint it would resist and create this really beautiful distressed lightening-like pattern. My aim was to relinquish control, and let the environment play a part in the evolution of the work. In reflection, I wasn't exactly sure of what I was doing or why. I was working in the wool shed, there was a mouse plague, we were in a drought, and the summer had been really dusty. I'd have to dust all my canvases every morning before I could get to work... everything was just a bit stinky and gritty. I was starting to feel really anxious in the lead up to the show. It got to a point where I had to totally embrace it, or have a melt-down. So I decided to incorporate the environmental elements into the evolution of my paintings. If dust settled on my work, I would accept it, use it as texture. This process allowed me to let go.

Working in the nighttime is quite freeing. I appreciate your fear of the dark, but I think because my environment is so familiar- it's where I grew up- I have a very different relationship to the darkness. Weirdly, I think if I was in the city at night, I would be freaked out walking around on my own. I'm probably more conscious or aware of people, whereas I think because I know I'm alone I don't get anxious or scared. My senses are heightened because I can't see much. I enjoy painting in silence, or just with the natural sounds of the animals. I usually work barefoot so I feel my feet on the ground.

ALR: Even at nighttime?

JR: Even at nighttime. In winter, less so because it's bloody freezing! They're quick short painting sessions outside because I don't handle the cold well. But I do get lost in the moment and usually can see more than one would think. If there's not a lot of



Above: Julia Roche painting plein air on her family farm. Photo by Jack of Hearts.

moonlight, I'll use a flame of candle or if I have driven the car up I might leave the car facing the other way with the headlights on, so I'm never sitting in total pitch black.

ALR: Can you see the colors? Do you know what you're using?

JR: Yeah. Well, it depends on the night. Some nights are super bright, and I work on the elevated part of the farm, so the light from the stars is enough. It just depends on the time of the year. Some nights if the clouds are covering the moon, you can't see much. The main thing I do in the night is mark make. I do apply a lot of paint, it's very messy, but I try and be quite intuitive about what I'm thinking. Obviously you're relying not so much on your sight, but my other senses. I feel like when I'm breathing in the environment at night, it feels different because I let go of all those constraints that I created in my head.

ALR: Do you think you're more part of the environment at nighttime than in the daytime?

JR: Yes, I do. Because you're less stimulated visually and feel more, hear more, smell more. I paint what I feel, along with a bit of collective memory, but mainly what I'm feeling. I love going back into the studio with what I've done and just seeing where my head was, where my hands moved. When I'm looking at my work when I first take it into light, it's still kind of in my heart. It always looks different the next day with fresh eyes. When I work at night I feel very different about my artworks when they're finished, irrespective if they're aesthetically strong, because they are forever connected to that experience. If it was a really powerful painting session, I consequently feel really confident about the painting, which is bizarre and very different to how I respond when working day sessions. I'd be interested for you to look and understand what your thoughts are from an aesthetic point of view – if you can see the strength, irrespective of knowing if I've painted it at night or not. I think because I connect the artwork to such a strong deep feeling of an experience, I'm much less judgmental about those works than if I'm painting them in the daylight. It's hard to get out of your own head when you can see clearly. In the night you can't get in to your head- because you can't control what you're doing – it's all intuitive.

ALR: You've set parameters of control so that you can't control the outcome. I love that, I completely relate to that. I need to be listening to a novel. Not reference book or a podcast, a novel, and be looking at a zoomed in image, so I don't know what I'm drawing and I'm not paying attention. I'm using that "thinky" part of my brain to do something else, and then the other part is making the work.

JR: That's essentially your nighttime experience.

ALR: Yeah, as you're doing, I'm asking "what systems can I set up to take away control?" and just directly connect my hands to what I'm seeing.

JR: Take away what normally controls. And that idea of unlearning all those technical and academic teachings so that you can create simple, raw heartfelt marks. I just can't do that in the studio with lights and stuff. I can't create that same feeling in a painting when I'm aware, when I see too much. The silence just helps me to loosen up.

ALR: This is a good answer.

JR: As a busy mother of three young children and an artist working remotely and often in isolation, I sometimes feel disconnected and at times rather lonely. I'm curious as to the power of having a partner in the arts, do you think that fills that void? I'd just love to hear how it directs your practice, your energy, your outings, and your interests.

ALR: I really love it. At some point before meeting Abdul-Rahman I thought, "I would never want to date an artist", and now I think, "why would you want to be with anyone else?". Aside from loving all that he is, it's so efficient, which I really love. Our social life is our professional life, is our hobby, is our outings and our interests, so it just combines all of those things, which is really, really nice. But on a deeper level, we completely understand what each other does. We understand the conditions for working. We have the same job, which means we're on a fair playing field. It's taken us lots of different trials of how we work, and now we're 50/50, which has been really good. That's a life goal of mine, that we can both have equal time working, equal time with family.

We work as a team in a lot of ways. In a professional environment we can advocate for the other one in a way that you can't really advocate for yourself. We present as a team a lot of the time too, and it's been very beneficial for my career to be able to meet people first as a person and then as an artist as well. And it's fun! Abdul-Rahman has given me a lot of great ideas and I'm able to give him lots of really good feedback. There are parts of work that we've been able to really assist each other with, and I'm always happy to help with fiddly stuff. When I'm drawing we play a game called 'Darker Lighter'. Because my work's all tonal, sometimes the tone doesn't quite match across the drawing, as in the dark tones are not even.

JR: Yeah, because you work in fragments.

ALR: Yes. And because I work with a whole bag of random charcoal pencils that are not all the same blackness, the same hardness, as well as powdered charcoal, there's a lack of control and sometimes the dark tones don't match. I loosely work from left to right, and from top to bottom, because otherwise I smudge it because I'm right handed. When I'm close to finishing I get Abdul-Rahman to look at it and take a photo of the drawing and put it next to the reference photo. It's so helpful. It's easy to see on someone else's work rather than your own. So yeah, we make a great team. The only thing that I think is hard is that we both have the same irregular income, which is really stressful. It would be really nice if someone had a regular paycheck, but I wouldn't



Above: Anna Louise Richardson in her studio packing works for *The Good* with husband Abdul-Rahman Abdullah. Photo by Bo Wong.

trade that for being an artist and the bonus that we work for ourselves and can choose the life that we want within certain limitations.

JR: You said you guys can advocate for each other, where sometimes you can't. How cool is that?

ALR: It's so great.

JR: And it's not even that you can't, but it's just nice that someone else can be there and knows you and can share that, rather than you always having to.

ALR: It's really good. I mean he's getting too famous now, but for a long time I could almost do his talks and knew all of the information about his work. But now I'm like, I can't keep track. But I think it's absolutely a boon to both of us. And we've recently done projects together, which is really nice. We also have this real synergy in what we make. As you know we both make animals, and we often make the same animal, but from completely different lenses and stories. We joke that we have our matching zoos.

JR: Yeah, that synergy of subject. And have they generally come at the same time?

ALR: No. Completely different. What they're about is very different, but visually they're realistic animals, which is quite interesting. Maybe it's like in marriages people tend to become more alike, maybe our visual language merges in some way too.

JR: Isn't that amazing, actually?

ALR: Ok, next question. In regional New South Wales where you live (and Victoria and Queensland for that matter), there are really excellent public galleries with great spaces, staff and programs, far beyond the level of Western Australian regional gallery resourcing. What is your experience working with regional galleries? How have they shaped your relationship to an arts community and the community at large, especially because they play such an important role within the communities where they operate? And where do you see that role?

JR: I've have been lucky enough to have some exhibition opportunities with Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, which is in my hometown. From very early on in my career, just out of art school, they gave me an exhibition space in the emerging area of the gallery, which was awesome. A little foot in the door. In the last few years, their Director Dr. Lee-Anne Hall has done an incredible job bringing together the creative community and creating mentorship opportunities. She's authentically very interested in regional issues, collaborations and engaging the local audience. I'm obviously excited about the opportunity to have a show with them next year, opening alongside your exhibition *The Good*.

The other local regional gallery, which has an incredible reputation and a really good

team is MAMA, Murray Art Museum Albury. They run this annual program where they engage local regional artists to get involved and apply. If successful the mentorship program offers you professional practice experience, mentorship and an exhibition. It's pretty tough industry and I feel like a lot is asked of artists to chip in at every corner of their practice and the exhibition phase, and then often huge commission is taken. It's really hard to balance and often really hard to make anything by the time you've created the work, documented it, framed it, couriered it.

ALR: There's not a lot financially left for an artist.

JR: There's not a lot, yeah. So MAMA do lots of amazing things at lots of different levels, so when they offered me a show I was stoked. It was a really good mentor program and I felt very supported during the creation phase of the exhibition. They assisted with the packaging and courier of the works to and from the gallery, and an artist fee for materials and to support myself while making. I found that a really positive experience and very professional. My feeling is they're quite forward thinking with a really engaged team and an ethos about what a public institution should be doing and how we should be supporting people in the arts.

More broadly, I feel that since the period of time surrounding COVID, a stronger connection between city and country arts/galleries has formed. There seems to be a lot more interest in regional settings. There are lots more collaborations between commercial galleries in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and regional galleries- I think that's really exciting and extremely important. The show next year I'm having alongside *The Good* at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery is going to come up and be hung in Defiance Gallery in Sydney afterwards. From a funding perspective, it's not an area of the arts I've had a whole lot of experience in. I'm quite inspired by you and watching what you've achieved.

ALR: Do you think it's a positive to be an artist from the regions?

JR: I do. I love what it gives my practice; space, environmental inspiration, peace. I do feel like the city galleries are really accessible now, whether or not they're interested in what I've got to say, I'm not sure. What do you think?

ALR: Oh yeah. I mean, we're very lucky because we live a rural regional life right on the edge of the metro area, so it's never felt like I've missed out on anything. It's a massive positive to be able to, on a practical level, receive support as a regional artist, but also cheekily not feel isolated by that. I mean, WA is pretty isolated from the rest of Australia, it's financially isolated to travel and it costs a lot of money to freight, but I think the support that's available is really good. I also love that through *The Good*, my regional experience and outlook means I get to show work to audiences who relate to my work the most.



Above: Julia Roche and family on their family farm. Photo by Tayla Martin.

JR: Yeah, that's good. That's always interesting, the response from people who live in the city. I feel that when I show in Sydney or Melbourne, my work is less understood and more admired. When I show in the country, people get my work a bit more, I guess they possibly relate more.

ALR: It's very peaceful. Whenever we get home, and through the front gate, there's that sense of "ah.." big sigh.

JR: Yeah, deep breath, we're on our own. It's so good.

ALR: We now have the same question for each other for the last one. Do you want to ask it?

JR: Who is the most intriguing Australian contemporary artist to you at the moment, and why?

ALR: It's a great question, but it's a hard question. We're both currently in Sydney on Gadigal land, chatting at Sydney Contemporary and we've seen so much work, but hands down, my favorite thing that I have seen here has been Hoda Afshar's *A Curve* is a Broken Line, which is a major solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It is an incredible body of work, beautifully curated and installed. I think the thing that I

find most inspiring about Hoda is how brave she is. She is Iranian-born and Melbourne-based and uses photographs and moving image to make beautiful work which is very deep, sublime, heartbreaking and politically and socially important. It's all of those things that I think art should be and yeah, just incredible work. But that's cheeky because I saw it today.

JR: That's amazing – sounds like a powerful exhibition. I look forward to visiting.

ALR: I feel like I should add a list of really amazing West Australian female parent artists who I also love like Claire Peake, Olga Cironis, Rebecca Baumann, Pip & Pop. Something Abdul-Rahman and I have both been trying to do is, when we work with other people on projects who are artists, like photographers or writers etc, we try to have a remit to work with artists who are also parents, as a way of giving back to our creative community.

JR: Cool. That's nice. Yeah. That's a nice way of giving back.

ALR: Did you have someone or a few someone's?

JR: Today I went to Defiance Gallery and saw Peter Goodwin's work. The series was gorgeous. It was a relatively intimate interior series. His minimal palette, symbolic language and broad oil painting gestures were quite mesmerizing. Another artist I admire from a painterly perspective, is Laura Jones, who I also saw today at Sydney Contemporary. Her landscapes, interiors and still life oil paintings always make an impression on me. I think I am drawn to her experimental and brave palette. Her quick and fleeting mark-making creates intriguing composition with such depth. And lastly, there's an incredible First Nations artist who's just had a show at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. Did you meet Juanita McLauchlan?

ALR: No, but that show looked so good.

JR: She's someone contemporary and relatively fresh in terms of exhibiting experience, but she's just so clever. Talking with her and listening about her journey has been really interesting. Her textile work is breathtaking and she also draws, print makes and paints. Until that show was hung she hadn't even seen any of the fur textile installations hung, they were all in her studio boxed up. I think she surprised herself with how aesthetically powerful the exhibition was.

ALR: Thank you.

JR: You too.

ALR: It's going to be wonderful to show together in Wagga Wagga. It's going to be a lot of fun.

JR: Yeah, I look forward to it!

About Julia Roche

Julia Roche explores her immediate surroundings situated in the ever-changing landscape, bearing witness to the emotive and sublime qualities of the environment. She grew-up and currently lives on Wiradjuri country at the property 'Wooroola' near Mangoplah in regional New South Wales. As land custodians Roche and her family are learning about, and respect the changing cycles of the ecosystem and the disquieting power of nature.

Her paintings elicit conversations about our relationship with the environment, encouraging a shift away from transient, fleeting associations towards more sustained, symbiotic connections. Working in her studio, a repurposed woolshed, she is immersed in the landscape and exposed to the elements. Her layering processes and intuitive gestural marks are abstract transfigurations of the real and the illusory, evoking the essence of place and marking a moment in time.

Residencies on country such as the regenerative farm 'Bibbaringa' at Bowna have inspired and informed her practice, alongside time spent living in Africa in 2004 and her travels to Asia. Roche gained a Bachelor of Visual Arts from the Sydney College of the Arts in 2008 and a Master of Teaching – Arts from the University of Western Sydney in 2012.

Bio from Artist's website: <https://juliaroche.com.au/bio>

Right: Julia Roche in her studio in Wagga Wagga, NSW. Photo by Jack of Hearts.





Above: Anna Louise Richardson, studio documentation for *The Good*. Photo by Bo Wong.

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.

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

For the national tour of Anna Louise Richardson | *The Good* a suite of resources have been created across professional development, education, engagement and accessibility. Alongside this Mediation Handbook, please also explore:

Publication

A fold-out catalogue to accompany *The Good*, designed by Goldi. The catalogue includes contributions by exhibition co-curators Rachel Arndt and Dr. Lee-Anne Hall, artist Anna Louise Richardson, and Auntie Cheryl Penrith OAM, Wiradjuri Elder.

Signage

Labels produced in the voice of the artist are touring with the exhibition. An introduction panel has also been created with text by the co-curators Dr. Lee-Anne Hall and Rachel Arndt.

In-Situ Video

A video resource filmed at The Condensery in Toogoolawah QLD of *The Good* when installed in this intital presentation. The video was produced by Jim Filmer, Filmertography and is viewable on the M&G NSW website: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/exhibitions/now-showing/anna-louise-richardson-the-good/>.

Audio Description

An audio description developed for *The Good*, read by the artist Anna Louise Richardson. It provides descriptive and creative insight into the themes of the show and the works on display. The recording was produced by Jim Filmer, Filmertography and is able to be listened to on the M&G NSW website: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/exhibitions/now-showing/anna-louise-richardson-the-good/>.



Engagement Activity

Making Fly Swats & Flies: a making activity aimed at early learners created by Anna Louise Richardson to accompany *The Good* as it tours nationally. A video and worksheet have been produced. Closed captions are available for the video and both resources are accessible via the M&G NSW website: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/exhibitions/now-showing/anna-louise-richardson-the-good/>.



Education Resource

An Education Resource written and developed by Tanya Lee, an Artist and Educator working on Yawuru Country, WA. The Education Resource has been created to assist Years 1-12 learning alongside Anna Louise Richardson | *The Good* and focuses on critical and creative thinking to look at, understand and make contemporary art. Links to the National Visual Arts curriculum are noted as easy reference points for teachers. the Education Resource is available from the host galleries, as well as the M&G NSW website: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/exhibitions/now-showing/anna-louise-richardson-the-good/>.

The Good

ANNA LOUISE
RICHARDSON



WAGGA WAGGA
ART GALLERY



City of
Wagga Wagga



ART ON
THE MOVE



lotterywest

REGIONAL
arts
AUSTRALIA



Australian Government
Regional Arts Fund

Museums
& Galleries
of NSW



Australian Government



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