

Crossroads | 2022

Elise **BLUMANN** | Brian **BLANCHFLOWER** | Susanna **CASTLEDEN** |
Jo **DARBYSHIRE** | Julie **DOWLING** | Eva **FERNANDEZ** | Thomas **HOAREAU** |
Dianne **JONES** | Connie **PETRILLO** | Gregory **PRYOR** | Joanna **LAMB** |
Brian **MCKAY** | Bryant **MCDIVEN** | Howard **TAYLOR** | Rover **THOMAS**

Crossroads curated by Professor **Ted SNELL** and **Danielle FUSCO** features 17 works from 3500 in the ECU Art Collection, presented as a point of discussion, a prompt for further exploration, a moment of reflection, and a catalyst for further creative practice.

Gallery25

Opening Event: 13 April 2022 5pm - 7pm
To be officially opened by Professor **Panizza ALLMARK**, Associate Dean, Arts
School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University
Exhibition dates: 14 April - 12 May 2022
ACDC Floor Talk: 11 May 2022 12.30 - 1.30pm
Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am - 4pm
Building 10, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

ECU Galleries acknowledges the traditional custodians, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and elders past, present and emerging. We pay our respects for the great privilege of living, making and researching on these unceded lands.

ECU Galleries



Curatorial Essay

Professor **Ted SNELL** AM CitWA and **Danielle FUSCO**

The beginning of each new work is a form of Faustian bargain for every artist. It is a point of departure. Every project is full of potential, ripe with possibility, and always shrouded by the fear of impending failure. It is a leap into the void, a crossroads where ideas are put on the line, challenges are identified, and the resulting fission of risk instantly becomes the engine for creative engagement. Like the famous American Blues singer Robert Johnson falling down on his knees in his song *CrossRoad*, it is an energised moment of decision.

When Rover Thomas rolled out a canvas on the parched red Kimberley earth in 1994 and began to stain it with resin, the image that emerged with the addition of white ochre dots was revolutionary. Suffused with his life experience as a stockman and informed by his cultural knowledge and spiritual connection to Country, he constructed a new conceptual framework for depicting the land. *Crossroads*, an etching made from that original painting, depicts two intersecting tracks, drawn with a reductive simplicity that fuses instantly into memory. Images of the unique Western Australian landscape frequently recur in the selection of works acquired for the ECU art collection.

Elise Blumann first encountered the tortured forms of the Melaleucas along the foreshore of the Swan River when she and her husband Atrnold arrived in Western Australia in the 1930s after fleeing Hitler's Germany. The trees registered their battle with the strong southerly winds in every twist and iteration of their trunks and branches. Set in the glistening white sand and low scrub, they were the perfect metaphor for her life and the state of the world when she was at a crossroads in her own life. Painting on card, initially in situ, she responded to their rhythmic choreography. In the soft pinks, ochres, chromatic greys, and Prussian blue accents she inherited from her Modernist training in Europe, she found a succinct equivalent for the rich subtleties of the local vegetation.

For Howard Taylor, each encounter with the bush was a transcendent experience that presented an opportunity to rethink his approach to documenting the landscape. *Tree and Sky* is a wing-like monolith painted in a modulated tonal flow from dark to light using a variety of different hues of blue. It is the equivalence for looking up to the sky through and around the form of a tree. As Taylor explains. "the physical business of seeing and the more subjective one of feeling" are combined, each viewer "...improves (their) perception by cultivating the looking thing".

Artist's record what they see and the City of Perth as it developed was another recurring theme in the ECU Collection. During the 1990s, Thomas Hoareau documented the changes to the City of Perth. Based at Gotham Studios on the corner of James and William Streets. He watched the destruction of significant buildings and the ebb and flow of people that changed the character of the inner-city environment. Horeau painted what he saw around him, offering a recognisable point of reference for his audience. Perth was at a crossroads, and Hoareau depicted it with incisive clarity to encourage them to register what was happening to their environment.

Every city arrives at various crossroads in its history. In 1962 Perth earned its international epithet, 'The City of Lights', when its citizens agreed to leave their

houselights burning to welcome astronaut John Glenn, orbiting the earth two hundred kilometers above. Since the gold rush of the 1890s Western Australians had waited for the moment when world attention would once again focus on their State and capital city. Then, in 1962 Glenn's flight coincided with the opening a few months later of the Seventh British Commonwealth and Empire games. The iconic Narrows Bridge welcomed the first cars to cross over the Swan in 1957 in preparation for the Games. This structure and the modernist architecture of the Games Village and various sporting arenas gave the City a new identity. When Bryant McDiven, (then a lecturer at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, before it morphed into Edith Cowan University) painted its elegant form, he was documenting that junction when the City embraced the future and internationalism, rather than holding on to its parochial past. Perth host to the Commonwealth Games was not only in touch with international events, but through the arrival of television in 1959, it could now see itself at the centre of world events.

As well as technical and theoretical crossroads, artworks also document an artist's personal response to their world. Julie Dowling has painted her family and the relationship between Australia's black and white history for the past four decades. In this work, she challenges audiences to see her as a mixed-race person, both Yamatji and Wudjula (of white heritage). Her family called her Yellow Fella because she wasn't black but not white either. At a crossroads in her life, she tackled this insinuation that because she was pale-skinned, she had no culture. "I wanted to honour myself despite this derogatory name," she explains.

Jo Darbyshire paints herself on the beach at sunset. Looking west, and hence away from the land. It is both a pleasurable experience that we share with the swimmers on the beach and also a threatening and mysterious encounter with the unknown. This is given visual form by the three menacing Port Jackson shark eggs along the top of the painting. The end of day is a time for reflection, the transition between day and night, a time for decisions. It is also, for Western Australians, a reminder that we most often look outward rather than internally, another crossroad where decisions are made.

In a period of disruption and dislocation, we all search for a sense of belonging. Diasporic cultures finding landfall in distant locations establish connections in whatever ways they can to reconnect with their cultural heritage, to their roots. This is an extremely powerful and necessary process of reflection and interrogation for an artist. Eva Fernandez's body of works *Heresy to Heredity* chronicles her 'delving into the disremembered spaces' of her family's departure from Spain after the Civil War and their subsequent travels to Canada and Australia. In her series of photographs she embraces the vast panoply of Spanish history to construct a dense and intricate record of their journey that speaks eloquently of what has been lost, of what persists, and how it morphs and changes to reassure and assuage. Suffused in melancholy, the images nevertheless generate a sense of hope and possibility. For Fernandez, the poetics of representation is a tool to establish a sense of who we are and how and where we belong.

At the crossroads of representation and reality, Dianne Jones creates a new, more accurate history of Australia that is inclusive rather than exclusive by placing Aboriginal people into historical artworks where previously there were none. *Great Hall of Men* references the 'Grand Tour,' an educational rite of passage for young men of British nobility during the 16th - 18th centuries, to learn the cultural legacy of the Renaissance. As a Noongar artist invited to spend time in Parliament House, Jones noted the tours

that took place there, and the grandeur surrounding “the historical ties with Britain, the solemn rituals required for power to make laws impacting us, every day. The height, the arches, the statues, and the leather-bound books are crafted to induce awe, to speak of some divine right to possess and govern.” Physically asserting herself in this scene, Jones challenges public perception of Aboriginality and the limitations these ideals have imposed in Australian history and culture. She says, “I am not a tourist here on Noongar land.”

Reflecting on Country and identity at a crossroads, Gregory Pryor's *Seagull – de Sainson* references Louis Auguste Sainson's (1800 – 1887) *Vue D'Un Etang Pres La Baie Du Roi Georges (N'elle Hollande)*. The original landscape from Australia's colonial era depicts a European landscape aesthetic. Pryor deliberately disrupts this in his painting, removing the clouds, the plants, and the human figures from the original, paring back the landscape and instead focusing on colour, form, and texture. Pryor's painting is an exploration of the role that environmental and cultural loss continues to play in shaping this place we call Australia.

Susanna Castleden explores themes of mapping, mobility and what it means to be part of a world that, until 2020, was increasingly on the move. The layers of soft grey leaves float behind a map of Australia, indicated in shape rather than line, by the aluminium tags. The tags bear the names of dams, bores and wells, creeks, bays, springs, and hills. The names given to these mapped places, whether natural or manmade, are all cottage garden plants, not native to Australia but transplanted, made to fit the mould. This work questions the impact of humans harnessing the land and is so poignant at a crossroads in humanity where we are starting to see and feel the effects of the impact humans have had on the country and indeed, the planet. We must ask ourselves what, if any, legacy are we leaving for future generations.

The disturbance of the surface of Brian McKay's landscape is much the same as a farmer working the land and leaving their deep impression on pasture, scrub, and forest. McKay's early days were spent working as a graphic artist in Perth, WA in the 1940's and 50s. In 1964, he moved to Greece for a year and was greatly inspired by the worn-down surfaces of marble, whitewashed walls, and ancient copper doors he encountered. It was the marks of time that were left on these materials that greatly inspired him and that led him to create Greek Farm. His deep appreciation of the making process is evident in this abstract, textural work. Allowing the materials and the process to reveal the outcome is McKay's crossroads. The deliberate gestures of the hand indicate time and endurance, both control and a lack thereof.

A scene both familiar and unfamiliar to a Perth city dweller, disconcerting and uncomfortable with only a limited view of what is going on, *Framed View II* is a perfect metaphor in 2022. The perspective of the viewer is squeezed into a long, disconnected hubbub of traffic, the crossroads of metropolitan life and its increasing pressure to do more, be more, have more. This social pressure is often incongruent with the work/life balance many strive for. This has become particularly apparent throughout the last two years with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing us all to slow down, stay at home, focus inward. Whether the forced change of pace was relished or loathed, it has reframed our perception of contemporary life.

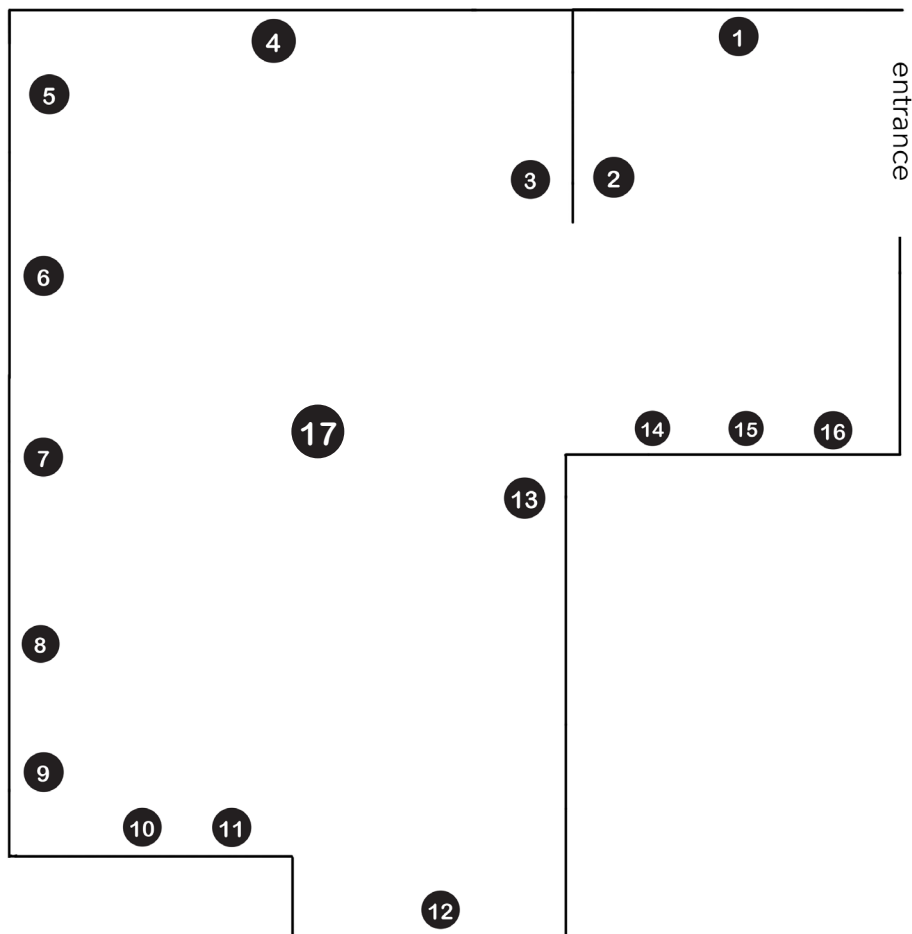
On the Cusp of Change is a challenging work by Connie Petrillo that responds to the ethically and legally fraught topic of how we should represent childhood and adolescence in contemporary visual art. The central image of this triptych is an unusual

scene that blends painting with photography. The two boys are arranged amidst the chaos in a way that references a Christian annunciation scene. The youngest boy announces the advent of adulthood to the teenager on the bed who is reaching out towards him. This reference is reaffirmed with the cherub-like pose in the portrait of the child, in contrast to the teenager peering out of the darkness, the crucifix around his neck catching the light. The emphasis on physical strength, aggression, and sexuality as the cultural definition of masculinity has never been so complex. The male paradox at a crossroads always.

Brian Blanchflower's *Sound Sources - Lux Aeterna* is a mesmerizing, personal encounter with colour, light, and joyous energy. Blanchflower explains, "Painting is a quest of discovery. That's why I work, really, to discover something. When I discover it, it's still a mystery to me, but it's another step along the infinite road." This work is a journey through the artist's energised moments of decision, with his materials and mark making. The longer you gaze at this work, the more you see, creating an understanding that nothing is ever destroyed completely, but rather simply changes into something else over time.

Each of the works in this exhibition marks a similar point of creative decision-making. Each, because of the skill, insight, and creative intent the artists bring to their task, is a fusion of ideas, influences, and intuitive response. Although not easily articulated, it is that dynamic that magnetises our attention and explains why the University has built a collection of artworks over its long history. The Edith Cowan University Art Collection was established at Claremont Teacher's College in 1947 for the enrichment of teaching and the enjoyment of students and staff. Built on a commitment to integrate art into the everyday experience of students, staff, and the wider community, the collection is a point of intersection. At these crossroads, ideas coalesce, and new directions are established. It is dynamic and empowering. This exhibition asserts the rationale for having an art collection because it encapsulates the values of ECU (Integrity, Respect, Rational Inquiry, and Personal Excellence) advocates for its diffusion into all aspects of campus life. In preparation for the new City Campus, it also showcases the cultural treasures held by the University that will have an important part to play in the City's Cultural Precinct.

Illustrated by 17 works drawn from over 3500 in the Edith Cowan University Art Collection, of paintings, photographs, and prints by Western Australian artists, focuses on our City and State. They document how it became what we know and give some hints of what it might soon become. These works are presented as a point of discussion, a prompt for further exploration, as a moment of reflection and, importantly, as a catalyst for further creative practice.



- 1 Joanna Lamb, **Framed View II**, 1998, Oil on board 29.5 x 240cm
- 2 Rover Thomas, **Crossroads**, 1990, Etching, 76 x 56 cm
- 3 Dianne Jones, **The Great Hall of Men**, 2017, Inkjet print on paper, 53 x 80cm
- 4 Connie Petrillo, **On the Cusp of Change**, 1997, Digitised print on canvas, 86cm x 137.5cm
- 5 Elise Blumann, **Riverside Melaleuca**, 1949, Oil on paper on board, 58 x 67cm
- 6 Brian Blanchflower, **Sound Sources – Lux Aeterna**, 1985, Oil on acrylic ground, 180 x 242cm
- 7 Gregory Pryor, **Seagull – de Sainson**, 2007, Oil on linen, 120 x 183cm
- 8 Thomas Hoareau, **The Chrysalid**, 1990, Pastel on paper, 150 x 103.5 cm

- 9 Bryant McDiven, **Narrows Bridge**, 1959, Oil, 49 x 67cm
- 10 Jo Darbyshire, **Looking West**, 1999, Oil on canvas, 50 x 50cm
- 11 Julie Dowling, **Insider: Yellow Fella**, 1996, Acrylic, red ochre, blood, 91.5 x 61cm
- 12 Susanna Castleden, **Trans-plant**, 2022, Aluminium, screen-print, BFK paper, 151x 212 cm
- 13 Brian McKay, **Greek Farm**, 1965, Oil painting, 73 x 80cm
- 14 Eva Fernandez, **Still Life with Pomegranates**, 2016, Archival digital print, 150 x 100cm
- 15 Eva Fernandez, **Still Life with Lentils**, 2016, Archival digital print, 150 x 100cm
- 16 Eva Fernandez, **Still Life with Potatoes**, 2016, Archival digital print, 150 x 100cm
- 17 Howard Taylor, **Tree and Sky**, 1994, Oil on Wood, 279 x 51cm