

OUT OF THE PARK

ROBERTSON PARK ARTISTS STUDIO



STALA CONTEMPORARY, 12 CLEAVER ST, WEST PERTH

11-21 NOV 2020, WED-SAT 10am-4pm

Exhibition opened by City of Vincent Mayor, Emma Cole

 STALA
CONTEMPORARY
ART GALLERY & PROJECTS

www.robparkart.info

www.stalacontemporary.com.au

The aim of the Art Academies of the 17th and 18th centuries was to impose rules, ideas and practices which were basically conservative, and realistic. History, Mythology and Religion were the only acceptable subject genres, and only formal composition with three-dimensional perspective was allowed. Artists then, as now, however, liked to challenge rules and traditions, believing that these did not necessarily represent contemporary ideas and concerns. When, in 1863, the Salon jury in Paris refused two thirds of the paintings presented, Emperor Napoleon – responding to public demand - ordered that they should be exhibited anyway. By 1884 the *Société des Artistes Indépendants* accepted the work of any artist who wished to participate. So began the tradition of artists exhibiting together, sharing ideas and supporting each other. Robertson Park artists follow these precedents. They are more than capable of mounting their own exhibitions. They believe that traditional genres and conventions can be valued, and learnt from, but that they can also be challenged, changed and adapted to address current issues. As Picasso once said, 'If you wish to break the rules, you must first know what they are!'

Frances Dennis sees change as one of these ideas. She explains that after travelling on the back of a BMW GS1200 for hours all that remains are colours, shapes, the thrill of the ride and a feeling of constant change. Dennis understands, as did Turner and then the Impressionists, that neither the landscape nor the observer stands still. Landscape exists essentially in flux, movement and transition, as the light, weather conditions, time of day and the seasons constantly change. The moving elements of water, wind and light are not just 'extras'; they are as much a part of the environment as solid earth and rocks. Even when the ride is not so joyful Dennis takes heart from the American novelist E.L. Doctorow, who wrote that life can be like travelling at night; sometimes 'you can see only as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way'. The human imagination is capable of capturing different types of movement, fast and slow, joyous and despairing, and together mind and landscape can be brought together to create a reality that transcends them all - a reality that emerges from within the imagination, and which includes close-up images of the ground beneath as well as the sky above. Captured by the artist, they converse with the viewers, inviting them to extend their experiences inwards to their own imaginations and outwards into the cosmos. There is definitely a sense of joy and fun in Dennis's small, sculptural figures. These are idiosyncratic, but they are in the tradition of the 'grotesque', a word which refers to a grotto or a cave, and which goes back to medieval times. These are strange, mysterious and charming images which originate from the darker depths of the human imagination.

Sarah Jane Marchant is also inspired by the Australian landscape, particularly the Kimberley region of WA with its vast, flat, open spaces, richly coloured red earth and never-ending, clear skies. She has captured these colours and the way that they constantly change with the weather conditions and time of day. Marchant is fascinated by the distinctive boab tree, which stands strong and often solitary in the Kimberly landscape; sometimes squat, round and pock-marked like a small, mud hut, sometimes tall and elegant, like a woman raising her arms to the sun. Birds and their nests are also featured, and their shapes and textures are repeated in the leaves of the trees, as well as in each other, so that although they appear as separate elements, they form a unified whole. Varying with the time of day different shadows come out to play. There is a saying that 'you cannot outrun your shadow, but you can invite it to dance.' These boab shadows remain attached to their trees, but they dance and celebrate with them at the same time. Arms and branches wave in harmony with each other, raised to the sky in ecstasy like clapping hands or candelabra. The dance is traditionally a repetition of the rhythms of creation and a process of transforming space into time. In Marchant's paintings this tradition is continued, but within the striking colours and desert environment of northern Western Australia. There is an element of *fantasy*, but then fantasy does not refer to unreality. It is just a different type of reality, and one which is just as relevant to the human condition as everyday experience.

Christopher McClelland practises traditional oil painting. It is not certain when or where this originated. It is often attributed to Jan van Eyck at the beginning of the 15th century, but possibly goes back to the early Middle Ages. Over time many different techniques and usages evolved. Deeper, richer colours developed as artists learned to take advantage of the large amount of pigment that could be contained within an oil base. Traditional genres such as landscape, seascape, figure studies and portraiture emerged, and became favourites of oil painters. In this tradition McClelland captures the overwhelming power of the sea and the ceaseless movement of the surging waves. It is also a tradition which brings with it the ideas of the ocean as symbolising the unfathomable depths of the waters themselves and of the human unconscious, which is also unfathomable.

Like many contemporary artists McClelland takes advantage of the rich colours and lustrous textures of oil, but also finds ways to experiment with both technique and subject matter. He includes magical and whimsical images such as leaves falling or floating over the ocean, flying horses or a fish attached to a hot-air balloon. In one of his Indian Ocean paintings the power of the sea and of a looming storm are brilliantly captured by traditional means, but the paint is allowed to dribble from the crest of a wave right in the foreground, reminding the viewer that this is a painting not a physical reality. In his figure studies he captures the human skin tones and the delicacy of human hair in ways that are reminiscent of the great Renaissance artists like Titian, Raphael and Correggio.

Also employing traditional subjects and techniques but with modern applications are McClelland's compositions using gold leaf. These present as collage or even proto-Cubist works, but as he himself explains: 'They are really a 21st century tribute to those wonderful, late medieval and early Renaissance artists like Cimabue, Giotto and later, Fra Angelico.' He greatly admires their ability to merge the spirituality of Medieval Art with the new humanism and realism at the early Renaissance.

Carol Rowling takes landscape and natural elements, including plant forms, as her inspiration. She represents the landscape in all its manifestations including a small work showing the devastation of fire. The colours here are as intense as the fire itself, but also slightly blurred, as if the smoke from the fire is still in the air.

Mostly, Rowling reworks and reimagines these natural elements into abstract shapes, which she calls contours. These shapes, and the images they contain, use references which are far removed from more 'realistic' perspectives or traditional compositional devices. They are organic rather than geometric, somewhat eccentric, but with their elegantly curved, smooth edges they suggest relationships with and within the circle. The circle is a symbol of completeness, and in their own way each of these works suggests a wholeness and a completeness.

The elements themselves, and the rich red and brown earth colours, become the subject matter, as Rowling digs down into the earth and her canvasses with an angle grinder. Then she flies above it in a way that makes flight itself the subject of the work. The medium becomes the message. The energy generated by her images of flight and their dynamism of movement seems to bring together the sense of flying in the air with the earth beneath, so that there is a sense of poetry, and a suggestion of transcendence. Her *Earth Songs* illustrates this as the viewer could be flying over sand dunes or wind-born leaves. The vertical orientation invites the viewer to experience not so much a view of land or leaves but the notion of flight itself - a notion which cannot be conveyed or supported by traditional forms of perspective.

Kimberly Coast presents an aerial view of clouds, rocks and ocean. The solidity of the rocks becomes an equal counterpart to the restless surging of the ocean. There is unceasing movement, but also a sense of timelessness, and unfathomable depth. This evocation of time and space is quite a challenge for both the artist and the viewer.

Graham Hay believes that art and artists build complex networks, connections, friendships and communities. His paper-clay constructions represent these networks. The making of Art is an activity that is constantly evolving, growing expanding and developing like an ongoing human conversation.

His structures are geometric, but also abstract and somehow organic. Hay takes a small shape, often a cylinder, and gradually extends and adds to it so that it becomes a concrete form of an abstract idea. Each piece is another step further along the continuum of exploration, and onwards and outwards into the dialogue. Is there an end? Should there be one? Art is more about asking questions than answering them. Worm-like tubular shapes coil around in layers as if there is no way out of the circle. Sometimes slender cylindrical shapes swirl out from a central point, and sometimes 'tentacles' emerge from a central point to 'wave around' in search of a connection.

These works all play with the powers and mysteries of impossibilities. Could they be real? Well, yes, they are real because they exist; they are not just imitations. They occupy real space. There are repetitions of shapes and spaces; there is tension; there is attraction through each one's aesthetics. In *Abispa meadewaldoensis*; a construction of cylinders of various sizes are clustered and 'clumped' tightly together in a roughly circular formation. This is supported by vertical cylinders. The balance is maintained but at the same time eccentric, even precarious. There seems to be no 'centre of gravity.' The vertical cylinders are like pillars which struggle to keep their upright positions. There is communication but it seems to be in danger of toppling from its support base. Building social, emotional and artistic networks, with all their human desires, failures and inconsistencies, is difficult, but worthwhile. They are what make us human.

Jan Altmann (lecturer and writer): BA (hons), MA, Dip Ed, Ph.D. (Murdoch)



*"Kimberley Coast", mixed media 110 x 110cm
Photograph by Victor France*

CAROL ROWLING

Carol Rowling studied Art and Design at TAFE and the Claremont School of Art. She has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally at private galleries and art fairs including Sydney, London, Madrid, Bologna and Galway, and has held solo exhibitions at Turner galleries Perth and Collie Art gallery W.A.

Carol's abstract and textural approach to the landscape is mostly from an aerial perspective. Carol uses ochre's collected from the Kimberly and Pilbara regions.

The richness of colour and texture that the ochre's provide not only lends to the layers of paint and tone but of the layering of time in which these granules have been formed over the centuries.

Carol also uses a sculptural form of painting which she calls "breaking colour" by carving into layers of coloured canvas with an angle grinder once again echoing the layers of time.

www.carolrowling.com.au

CHRISTOPHER MCCLELLAND

Christopher McClelland is a multi-award winning artist who has held over 20 solo exhibitions, both in Australia and overseas. He has exhibited in hundreds of group exhibitions and is represented in public and private collections in Australia and overseas.

Light, colour and atmosphere are important aspects of his work, as well as explorations of identity and culture. Recently he has been exploring and adapting traditional academic techniques of painting and drawing, developed through post-graduate studies he completed in Florence and Paris. Many of the techniques are inspired by the artists of the Renaissance, Baroque and even 19th century European narrative paintings. However, Christopher is fascinated by the crossover between the rigour of academic techniques and lusciousness of paint being allowed its own freedom of expression. In this way, many of the works are contemporary explorations of the act of painting itself.

www.christophermcclelland.com

*"Drawing from live model #2" 2020
Nitram Charcoal and white chalk on tinted paper*





"Full head" 2020
Ceramic porcelain paper clay, 22 x 19 x 24 cm
Photo credit: Victor France

GRAHAM HAY

Flow Channels

"My immediate art connections come from teaching recreational classes, mentoring emerging artists within this group and within three undergraduate mentoring programs. A recurring theme is the importance of personal connection and professional art groups. My own achievements have always come from key information or support from my peers. These include the Thermal Shock and Robertson Park Artists groups, as well as local, national and international artists, art educators and their professional associations. These works are my attempt to articulate what it feels like to actively socially construct, as well as be constructed by a community. To make space for oneself, to make space for family, to make space for peers, to make space for all others."

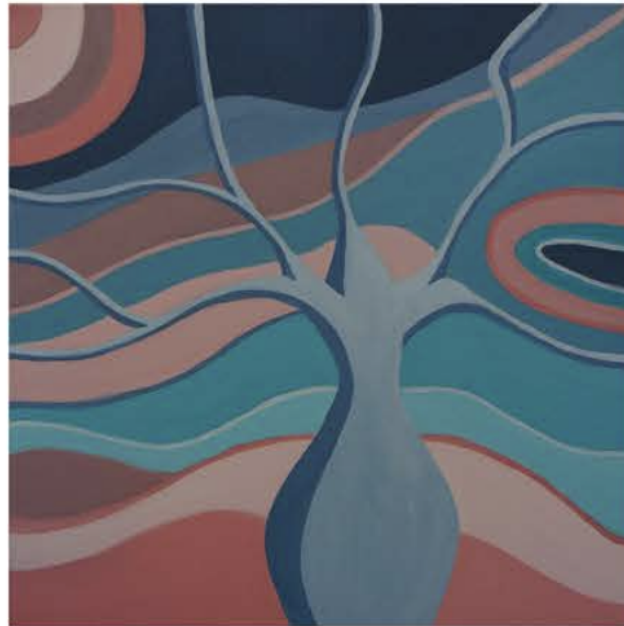
Graham Hay is an artist, paper clay expert, participant in seven overseas biennale and elected member of the Académie Internationale de la Céramique. He is undertaking postgrad studies at Curtin University

www.grahamhay.com.au

SARAH JANE MARCHANT

In the current climate our connection to nature is now more important than ever before. Ancient civilizations around the world have known this for millennia and now modern man is waking up. We are not separate, but exist only because of our connection to this planet. Sarah felt this connection on her first experience of Australia in the Kimberley region nearly 20 years ago leaving her London life behind. This connection to the Mother Nature has been a part of her work ever since with the majestic Boab tree of the North West and the grounding shadow of feminine spirit a constant theme. The tree has evolved over the years with an increasing surrealist nature and most recently abstracting into pattern formations.

Originally from the U.K. Sarah has a background in Illustration and is currently working on a series of children's books by local Perth Author, Diana Smith. In addition Sarah teaches painting from the Robertson Park Studio where she has been a member for over 10 years.



"Boab Dreaming I" 2020, Acrylic on Canvas, 30 x 30cm

www.sarahjanemarchant.com



"Moon Rising", 2020, mixed media, 80 x 80cm

FRANCES DENNIS

My working process can be succinctly described using a quote from the writer, E.L. Doctorow.

Substituting the first three words "Writing a novel" it then reads as follows:

Making an artwork "is like driving a car at night. You can see only as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way. You don't have to see where you're going, you don't have to see your destination or everything you will pass along the way. You just have to see two or three feet ahead of you".

My inspiration lies essentially in taking the tradition of the Australian Landscape as my enduring subject in the process of art making – my enthusiasm lies in using paint, mixed media and marks to form the visual language of the work. -

While working memories are triggered, grabbed and made concrete. Working this way provides me with enough space to muse and hypothesise, for the viewer to do likewise and perhaps even recognise.

www.francesdennis.com

ROBERTSON PARK ARTISTS STUDIO EST 2000

The light filled studio occupies the whole of Halvorsen Hall (B:1970), which until 1999 housed the Perth City Band. The building itself is located in the middle of the southern (city side) half of Robertson Park.

In 2000, the Hyde Park Precinct Group and the Mayor of Vincent helped five artists find the new studio space, after the Wellman Street Artists Studio closed and Robertson Park Artists Studio was born.

The studio is open plan, with the current five artists sharing the space to suit their individual creative projects, scale and time frames. The space is also shared with approximately 90 recreational and professional art students participating in pottery, sculpture and painting classes. A blended space such as this fosters the creation and sharing of art and art related activities. For further information about the studio please visit our website and social media pages to stay up to date on events or arrange a visit.



176 Fitzgerald St, West Perth 6005

www.robparkart.info

www.instagram.com/robparkarts

www.facebook.com/RobertsonParkArtistsStudio

Cover Image details:

Top Left: Graham Hay, "Normal services will resume shortly" 2020, 25x15x16cm, Ceramic terracotta paper clay. Photo: Victor France

Top Middle: Frances Dennis: "Sky Threat" 2020 44x44cm, Mixed Media on Panel

Top Right: Carol Rowling, "Earth Songs 2", 2019 5x5x120cm Carved Mixed Media

Bottom Left: Sarah Jane Marchant "Inspection" 2019, 61x61cm Acrylic on Canvas

Bottom Right: Christopher McClelland "Indian Ocean Series #2" 2019, 102x153cm Oil on Canvas