

# ROBERTSON PARK ARTISTS STUDIOS

## *Decompression*

### *A Studio Exhibition*



22 November - 1 December 2019

Holmes à Court Gallery @ No 10, Douglas St. West Perth

Exhibition Opened by City of Vincent Mayor, Emma Cole  
Keynote Speaker, Lee Kinsella, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, UWA

Opening Night Music by



The Robertson Park Artists Studio operates from Halvorsen Hall, a small building located in an idyllic, inner-city park in West Perth. Within these walls there is a spark of something that is very hard to describe, but it may well be this intangible element that is the reason that this artist run initiative (ARI) is now celebrating 20 years. In a collaborative, energised environment, each artist acts as a charged agent engaged in creative processes that they know to be both vital for themselves as individuals and for the sustenance of multiple creative communities. Central to the success of this group is a respectful collegial relationship between creative individuals: Christopher McClelland, Frances Dennis, Graham Hay, Bethamy Linton, Sarah Jane Marchant and Carol Rowling. This group has demonstrated that “the key determinant of community identity is grounded in self-belief and shared aspirations rather than in an externally imposed definition or in any economic imperatives.”<sup>1</sup> Their success is founded upon the ability to sustain themselves differently and independently. Hay explains the unique relationship between the ARI and the City of Vincent:

*Because we do not receive any grants or subsidies from the City, or any level of government for that matter, we handle all administrative tasks ourselves and have a commercial lease and pay city rates, we have an enviable artistic and policy autonomy than most government supported artist studios or local government arts centres do not have.*<sup>2</sup>

Robertson Park/Boojoormelup is located on a network of fresh water wetlands and continues to be an important Noongar meeting place.<sup>3</sup> Where once it was a reliable source of fresh water and food, it continues as an important site for meeting, culture and exchange for a diverse range of groups. The 6 artists who operate from Halvorsen Hall forge beneficial and reciprocal relationships with various communities – those local to West Perth and those that have no geographical relationship to Robertson Park. They participate in community and City events while maintaining their own art workshops and industry events, exhibiting nationally and internationally – communicating by word of mouth and via social media.

This exhibition is a major event for the group as it is an opportunity for new work to be presented to the public in a dedicated exhibition space, and for the artists to consolidate relationships with audiences new and old. The title, Decompression, refers to the act of freeing works from the cramped conditions of the studio and recontextualising them within the vast space at Holmes à Court Gallery@No 10. Decompression may also refer to the liberation that comes from stepping away from everyday obligations and responsibilities, walking through the grounds of Robertson Park, and into the supportive studio environment.

The interwoven relationships that have been forged between the artists are reflected within the studios by the tangle of extension cords that power the venue. Reflecting spontaneous and innovative adaptation that is a feature of any successful ARI, power plugs fill every available outlet and snake their way up and over doorways and beneath desks to terminate in a variety of appliances. **Graham Hay's** paper clay sculptures are maps that record the social interactions of individuals who are bound to a larger group by collegial affiliations, family and/or creative exchanges. His practice is a form of social analysis and he has considered the sophisticated and often overlapping network of associations that spill out from one, small Halvorsen Hall. Hay has long been engaged in social network analysis with a focus upon cultural communities. In an interventionist performance piece, Critical Mass, 2017, he created 6000 fragile porcelain champagne flutes that bore the contact details of practicing Australian artists. He transported them to Venice where he encouraged people to use and keep the flutes at two exhibition previews in the lead-up to the 2017 Venice Biennale. As a result, the flutes have found their way to over 80 countries and into the personal collections of 100s of arts advocates. The movement of such objects, and indeed Hay's latest sculptural constructions, reveal social relations in unexpected and challenging forms.

An extension cord trails out through the east doors of Halvorsen Hall to charge **Carol Rowling's** power grinder. An impatient maker, Rowling primes five to six sheets of canvas with acrylic paint, assembling them together, before using her power tool to gouge through the layers. In works such as Fragmented Earth, 2019, her cuts reveal layers that represent compressed history in textural rifts that exploit the burns inflicted by her tool. Rowling's practice has been developed over 19 years, and perhaps her current recourse to industrial tools is a nod to her builder father. However, she also notes that her subtractive technique was influenced by a work that Hay completed using old government reports and glossy magazines. To create Lot's Wife, 2002-03, Hay drilled a hole and used a metal rod to compress and secure the papers, before sculpting the form. Rowling has chosen to concentrate her technique on the production of evocative views of vast tracts of the Australian landscape. Both Rowling and **Frances Dennis** collect material to include in their art during travels across the continent, returning to Perth recharged and impatient to develop new ideas in their work. For Dennis, the studio exists as a sanctuary:

*The beautiful park lifts my spirits even before I enter the building. When I get inside, I feel like I'm home. Coffee, clay, and art people! I'm generally a loner and no other art people exist for me outside. No expectations or pressure from anybody except myself and deeply appreciated encouragement from them to simply keep on making. The fact that we have an open plan studio makes it possible to communicate even without knowing, by osmosis.*<sup>4</sup>

In *Dress Rehearsal – The Old Crock’s Choir*, 2019, Dennis applies her close observation of gestures and stance to the production of ceramic figures that results in a playful jumble of unique characters. Her humorous depictions warmly portray all-too-human follies and quirks. In an easy movement from sculpting in clay, Dennis switches genres to mix the coloured pigments collected during her travels into oil paints to complete landscape paintings. Dennis’ evocations of places, such as Docker River

*/Kaltukatjara in the Northern Territory*, utilise imagery from drone photography. A downward perspective allows her to deny a traditional horizon line and instead run the landscape to all edges of her canvas. This vision is consistent with her experience of riding across the seemingly infinite landscape and her enduring appreciation of it.

Travel is also a key stimulus to **Sarah Jane Marchant’s** practice. UK born, Marchant found her place in the colour and life of the Kimberley region. Her training as an illustrator has honed her ability to distill scenes to essential elements. Marchant’s paintings of landscapes from the far north of the state are characterised by the distinct quality of saturated light, starkly contrasting colours of blues, reds and oranges and scenery punctuated by the swollen forms of boab trees. The truth of the depth of her engagement with this place is offered in the shadow cast by the trees themselves - at the base of these solid and grounded forms is the dancing silhouette of **the artist herself**. A recent development of her practice is the result of a gift of small round boards given to her by Dennis. The boab form anchors these paintings and the trees expand to reach towards the curved edges. The works in this series seem to take the form of amulets or heraldic symbols as they attest to her membership of a creative community and personal affiliation with unique qualities of her adopted country.

**Christopher McClelland** provides a very different vision of the Australian landscape. His oil paintings shimmer and glow but, rather than each work being a comfortable evocation of place, McClelland disrupts his scenes with surreal or discordant inclusions. In *Lute on the Southwestern Highway*, 2019, our eye is challenged to not pursue the bitumen road that runs deep into the picture plane but to grapple with the hovering appearance of a mandolin in the foreground. Similarly, in his recent seascape paintings, *Indian Ocean Painting series*, leaves from deciduous European trees drift above the turbulent, glassy waves. Autumnal colours contrast with deep, ocean greens to emphasise that the leaves exist as markers of things out of place. This is McClelland’s acknowledgement that the recent arrival of European/coloniser cultures only touch lightly upon the history of this continent in comparison to Indigenous Australians’ ongoing occupation that reaches back deep in time.

As a 4th generation silversmith, engagement with metal working traditions and the crafting of jewellery is also intrinsic to the practice of **Bethamy Linton**. Halvorsen Hall provides Linton with a studio separate from the family workshop where she can pursue more personal artistic concerns. Her *Icon series*, 2018, is a result of inspiration found in a 1978 publication, *Rare and Vanishing Australian Birds*. Linton was delighted by the detailed, coloured illustrations and sought permission from author Peter Slater to reproduce the images. Using the same tools as those used in ancient times, Linton hammered, carved and shaped the metal. In each work she inserted rare and precious gemstones to enhance the intrinsic and symbolic value of the venerated bird. Sculpted silver and gold flow around the bird illustrations, contrasting the luminosity and warmth of the illustrations against the sheen of the metal surrounds. Every piece from the *Icon series* is completed with a modern inflection in the form of a titanium frame that has been lace cut by hand. This series speaks of the fragility and beauty of threatened birds and the need for each miraculous species to be acknowledged and treasured.

*King Brown casket*, 2014 is another lace cut titanium form, this time fashioned into an extraordinary box. The coiling scales course over many sides of the piece and testify to the strange charge that comes from recognising both the beauty and danger of this reptile. The King Brown is a robust, venomous snake able to live in multiple habitats, but it too is having to adapt to survive in the face of extensive and rapid degradation of the natural environment.

The **Robertson Park Artists Studio** is a resilient ARI. It has survived the global financial crisis, the resulting contraction of the commercial gallery sector and buying public, and cuts to Australia’s arts funding agencies. It operates within its own, constructed network of support systems which allows member artists to pursue experimental practices that may not align with mainstream institutions or industries. They share an imperative to make art.<sup>5</sup> The network of supporters that are connected to Robertson Park Artists Studio is the mechanism by which that art can happen. The artists are to be congratulated for their remarkable output and for forging **profound connections between one another and the community through their art and actions**.

Lee Kinsella 2019. Special Projects Curator at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia.

1) Crowther, David and Cooper, Stuart "Rekindling community spirit and identity: The role of ecoprotectors", *Management Decision*; 2002; 40, 4; ProQuest Central, page 351, 2) Email from Graham Hay, 18 October 2019

3) Noongar place name, [http://www.cbcg.org.au/projects\\_robertson.html](http://www.cbcg.org.au/projects_robertson.html), accessed 1 November 2019

4) Email correspondence with Fran Dennis, 24 September 2019

5) David Bromfield, catalogue essay, <https://www.robparkart.info/bromfield20001.html>, accessed 5 October 2019.

# Bethamy Linton

A 4th generation west Australian silversmith, 5th generation artist in my family, my practice is steeped in a deeply felt sense of history and connection to place.

At the Centre of my art works is the exploration of craft and the act of making both as a tool for expression and separately as an expression of personal agency. Secondly my work focuses on motifs from the West Australian natural environment. These two primary values in my work intersect in the exploration of human action, responsibilities and affect, as viewed relative to place and time. My practice also encompasses silverware and fine jewellery primarily by commission

[www.bethamylinton.com](http://www.bethamylinton.com)

"Western Whip Bird", Silver, Titanium, Giclee Print.  
Cover Image : "Princess Parrot" Silver, Titanium, Giclee Print.  
Photographs by Eva Fernandez

# Sarah Jane Marchant

Sarah Jane Marchant is a contemporary landscape painter originally trained as an Illustrator in the UK. After travelling to the Kimberley region of WA over 17 years ago, she fell in love with the vivid landscape and never left. Sarah exhibits extensively over Western Australia, now her adopted home, and has work in private collections across the globe. In recent years Sarah has also returned to illustrating for local WA authors as well as teaching adults and children.

Sarah has an affinity with the iconic Boab tree of the North West. The characteristic tree of the Kimberley has evolved over the years within her painting and represents the feminine spirit and our forgotten connection to Mother Nature and the Earth with her outstretched arms all encompassing.

[www.sarahjanemarchant.com](http://www.sarahjanemarchant.com)



"Waiting" Acrylic on Canvas 76x76cm

Cover Image:

Detail from "Midnight Watch", Acrylic on Canvas 76x76cm



## Frances Dennis

In addition to her art practice, Frances has undertaken teaching and curatorial work, the most recent of which was the celebration of 100 years of female football in Western Australia, held at the State Library of Western Australia.

In making the paintings and sculptures, Dennis fuses elements of the art making process with remembered experience. In purposefully creating work which is not an exact representation, she is able to work quite freely to personalise a subject, as well as the way in which it is made concrete. As a result of that process, others can be left with enough space to muse, hypothesise and perhaps even recognise.

[www.francesdennis.com](http://www.francesdennis.com)

Detail of "Choristers" Paperclay

Cover Image:

"Evening Ride" Oil & Cold Wax on Panel 34x34cm

## Christopher McClelland

Christopher McClelland is a multi-award winning painter and has exhibited widely within Australia and also in exhibitions of Australian art in London, Paris, Florence and New York. He has held 17 solo exhibitions and participated in over 120 group exhibitions. His artworks are held in a variety of public, corporate and private collections both in Australia and overseas. He studied Art at the National Gallery Art School, Melbourne, the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne University. More recently he completed post-graduate studies at the Paris Academy of Art and the Florence Art Studio. He also teaches Art at Hale School in Perth.

Christopher's most recent works are open ended narratives which explore cultural identity, blending the whimsical with the atmospheric. The paintings are an eclectic mix of the past and present, the wide open spaces of Australia and the traditional images of French and Italian culture



"Rubens Pegasus on a South Western Road",  
Oil on Canvas 92x76cm

Cover Image: Detail "Autumn Leaves Over the  
Indian Ocean #3" Oil on Canvas 152x200cm

[www.christophermcclellandartist.com](http://www.christophermcclellandartist.com)

# Graham Hay

"I am trying to illustrate my social location, but from a new direct."

Hay has exhibited in a dozen countries, including seven biennale; with work in numerous public collections, including AGWA.

He co-led paper clay symposia and conferences in Hungary, Norway, and US, and features in survey exhibitions in the UK (2000) and US (2019-22).

A graduate from UWA, ECU and Curtin, he is currently undertaking postgraduate studies at Curtin. His information packed website compliments teaching across a dozen countries (India in 2019), and in the studio.

[www.grahamhay.com.au](http://www.grahamhay.com.au)



"Thirteen Offspring", Ceramic Porcelain Paper Clay, hi-temp nichrome wire 60x60x60cm.

Cover Image: Detail of "Thirteen Offspring"

Photograph by Victor France

# Carol Rowling

Carol Rowling studied Art and Design at TAFE and the Claremont School of Art. A member of the Robertson Park Studio since 2000, Carol has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally at private galleries and art fairs including Sydney, London, Madrid, Bologna and Galway. She held her first solo at Turner Galleries in 2018, followed by a second at Collie Art Gallery later that year.

Carol's abstract approach has developed into a unique form of painting which she calls "breaking colour", by layering a number of coloured canvases and carving into them with an angle grinder revealing and creating colour and texture. In addition Carol also creates textural painting from an aerial perspective using ochres collected from the Pilbara and Kimberley region. Her work has no narrative and is purely subjective by the viewer.

[www.carolrowling.com.au](http://www.carolrowling.com.au)



Detail from "Pilbara Soil" Mixed Media 150x150cm

Cover image: Detail "Stratum 7" Mixed Media

Triptych 150x150cm, Photograph by Victor France