

LEGACY



LEGACY

10 SEP - 11 OCT 2020

Featuring artwork by Pat Brassington, Liam Benson, Cigdem Aydemir, Nina Sanadze, Michelle Ripari, and Emmet Davies.

What will we leave behind?

In a time of generational change, we ask what is a 'legacy'?

Artists are at the forefront of inciting change, but they're equally connected to the past through their practices. In this exhibition their work opens a dialogue to consider what do we keep, what do we share, and what do we leave behind.

Presented in pairs, the works of six artists respond to the legacies that inform their lives as creatives: the visual and social languages used in their work, the shared narratives of history – many of which are being questioned by younger generations; and the legacy of the creative self.

Wyndham City acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Wyndham Art Gallery stands and we pay our respects to their elders, past and emerging.

Wyndham Art Gallery
Great Art. Deep West.

Image (Cover) : Cigdem Aydemir - *Plastic Histories: Busts* - 2014 (video still)

Image (Right) : Cigdem Aydemir - *Plastic Histories (AG Ogilvie) I* - 2016





Curator's Note

A dialogue between co-curators Caroline Esbenshade & Dr. Megan Evans

Being from different generations, our co-curators discuss LEGACY in this transcribed conversation. Reflecting on experiences of the generational divide, the premise of the exhibition and the changes in the art world from then to now the conversation reflects the process of curation and the reflection on the themes which unite the show.

Image: Pat Brassington - *The Wedding Guest* - 2005

Caroline Esbenshade: Let's start with the premise for LEGACY, how did it come about?

Megan Evans: LEGACY came from conversations over recent years with Millennials and Generation Z who, at the moment are really impacted and aware of what they see as a bad legacy being handed down from the baby boomer generation and their lack of care for what was to come. On the other hand, in conversations with previous generations; they often feel that young people don't understand or credit the work done that laid that foundation for them to even be conscious of those concerns. The idea was to link those two generations and create a conversation between them - to impact that generational divide.

CE: I feel like in the end a few ideas of 'legacy' came together and intertwined, it's really opened a dialogue between past, present and future. Let's get into what some of those shifts have been like: What was the art world like before computers? Because, of course I've never experienced the artworld without computers.

ME: It was very different. In fact, I remember when I did my PhD the internet was so slow and took up to an hour to upload one image. My whole PhD was done, pretty much, without using the internet. Instead a lot of time was spent physically in libraries and visiting exhibitions. And how we experienced art was delayed. It took time for what was happening across the rest of the world to get to our shores, it was much less global.

CE: I think it boils down to how computers have changed our experience - that temporal shift, shortening distances and time with how information is shared. My current experience is the total opposite to your PhD. The only way I've been able to continue my master's during this pandemic is that it's entirely online. My lectures are on Zoom and I can't get into the library or even on campus. Instead I'm relying on what the library has digitised and online sources I can find. I'm at the point of even giving myself a little kudos if I go find one of my own books to use, even debating how related the reference is. I just really want at least one physical book listed in my bibliography, whereas you would have been chuffed to say you had a digital article to reference!

ME: It also meant we collected a lot of books. I have a huge library of artbooks and reference books because it seemed important to have them in your own home because you couldn't always access the library. Now it seems a little ridiculous. You can look at everything online. And it looks much better because it has a light behind it. I still love artbooks though.

CE: Oh, I've purchased a few during this pandemic, yes. But the ease of the internet to just quickly look up anything...

ME: Yes, all that knowledge being out there - it's changed education. When I went to art school it was very much medium based education. People studied either painting, print making, ceramics, or sculpture – people were trained in a particular area. The computer has opened new ways to access knowledge and as such different art forms. Digital photography and video have opened opportunities enormously to individual artists. Prior to the computer, making a film was a huge affair that cost a lot of money and took a lot of people. Now artists can make a film on their phone and even edit it on that device. There's a lot more access.

CE: Agreed. Now there is an expectation to NOT be honed-in on one medium because those resources are available. You should be doing painting, video, trying all the things! Then on top of that, the expectation that you also build your own website.

ME: It's not the best thing for you. For me it was a freedom. I was trained as a painter and then realised I could do all these other things. For you there's a pressure to do utilise these other mediums when, what you want to do is paint. It's that classic 'grass is greener on the other side'.

CE: So, do you think the digital domain is a burden or an opportunity?



Image: Nina Sanadze - *Embedded* - 2020 (video still)



ME: I think sometimes it feels like a burden. Very often as artists we suffer from comparing ourselves to others. Before the internet and computers there were only a handful of art magazines and you'd be bummed to not be in there, but it was a limited opportunity. Now you have so many ways to self-promote and get yourself out there but there's also this overwhelming knowledge of how many artists are out there. Before you didn't have a sense of the breadth of people who were making art. You could focus on what you were doing rather than feeling overwhelmed by the mass of people you were competing with for exposure.

CE: I'm a junky for Instagram. Checking out other artists, seeing what they're doing... but it is a burden because now your creative practice needs PR to go with it. And I find the whole digital footprint so frightening. With my generation we had Myspace, and then Facebook – I find myself looking back and thinking if I had my time again, I wouldn't have posted something. Gen Z on the other hand, well I feel like they're just... everything is out there!

ME: [laughing]

Image: Liam Benson - *Mrs Boss slays the Malevolent Scoundrel* - 2011

CE: No really – you can find all this stuff! I googled myself and what I found... my old portfolio website from uni – all that old work. And my Myspace with some picture when I was 14. That whole idea of 'that'll be on your permanent record!' – but now it's also public!

ME: That's funny because for me, thankfully, my older work isn't online to be found. It's on slides. I don't even have a slide projector to look at them anymore. For me what I love about Instagram and those platforms is that, really - you make work to be seen. Before those platforms you'd do all this work and eventually have an exhibition. It was a long gap between when you made the work and it had an audience. Whereas with Instagram, you can get immediate response. Of course, what I'm doing now is what I feel like I should be doing, even my mistakes. If you are in your early stages as an artist and are developing your work especially if you aren't as technically as proficient - that's really tough. You want to show your work but... it's like my murals. Looking at them I say "oh god I'm so embarrassed" because I did them in my 20s - I can see how different generations deal with that exposure.

CE: Well yeah - you're like a full baked person! Some of us are out there all half-baked, like a squishy cookie. You feel like you gotta do brand management. All up though – does it provide more opportunities?

ME: I think so, definitely. At the end of the day the struggle is to get the attention of curators. As a curator - there is no shortage of work to look at, it's really hard to get our attention. The great thing now is you don't have to physically go to see an exhibition. It used to be hit or miss if an artist was showing their work when a curator happened upon it

CE: And it's easier to 'passively' look into an artist and their practice without getting their hopes up.

ME: That's true too, you don't have to hurt artists feelings as much as you did before. Now you can check it out before.

CE: And there are more avenues now. So many publications have an all-digital branch or blog to publish emerging work or additional stuff that might not have gelled with the print release. What are some other barriers that have been pulled down by older generations?

ME: Access is the key thing. I was involved in the women's gallery, one of the first exhibitions they had. That gallery was set up because there was no opportunity for women artists to show their work and when you did you were a 'woman artist', not just an artist. We still haven't achieved equity as far as women's exposure in the arts – or artists of colour, or artists who are outside the heteronormative box. But it's that activist work that has been done - artists and curators have raised these issues in society. And academics, thinkers, writers – all of them opening the artworld with artists making the work that has commented on those issues. Way bigger than the impact of the computer is the legacy of the struggle people have undergone to overturn the patriarchy in the art world.

CE: And now we have art that touches on social and cultural issues where 20 years ago the work would have been about aesthetics and practice.

ME: Absolutely. Post-modernism was the conversation at the end of the 80s, breaking down the artist as hero and the domination of white male artists. Women began entering the debate, Indigenous and other non-white people too. That gave some space for those voices and they spoke to those issues. You're right, before it was about art for art's sake. It was about abstraction, colour, shape form – art was about art and the process of making art. Now it's about the voices of people who had been silenced and the slow education of us all in relation to our impact on those voices that were oppressed Previously European art spoke to other artists, whereas now its speaking much more broadly.

CE: 'Who' the artist is, no longer the straight white male – brings those different narratives and stories into the forum and now it's not just generations reflecting but tiers of artists within each generation. The shift in dialogue isn't just the voices speaking but also the time the response is taking because of technology.

ME: And the world's become more global. People recognise themselves in people on the other side of the world – which validates those social concerns rather than being parochial and focused on where you are.

CE: So, with all these shifts and changes – what's the same, what hasn't changed?

ME: Ultimately, I think it's the struggle to be authentic. No matter access or opportunities the ability of each artist to be authentic to themselves. Ultimately, how to make good art, art that's real and connected to who you are - not replicating something that's in fashion in the art world debates. That's a hard journey. The toughest struggle is how to be authentic in what you do, in what you make, and how you talk about it.





That's the thing that's consistent across generations.

CE: It brings it full circle really, that authenticity. Retaining that, when so much of the digital world feels so contrived and manufactured. To be a good artist you must be authentic, but to be successful you have to put you and your work out there in preconceived, artificial way.

ME: it's a paradox

CE: It is! I think for all – whether letting someone into your physical studio 'back in the day' or today doing it remotely through a digital platform – it's that sense of vulnerability that's the same.

ME: Yeh, that's beautifully put. It's the sense of vulnerability as an artist that's the same across generations. Whatever age or career stage it's like ripping open your chest to the world – it's the same vulnerability. It's a nice way to connect intergenerationally, to recognise our

vulnerability. Because that's the heart of what makes good art. To be willing and able to be vulnerable.

CE: I think that's a good way to end!
[laughs]



Images (Left): Emmet Davies - *What I Leave Behind* - 2020
Image (Right) : Michelle Ripari - *Solitary* - 2020



BUSH NOIR TO ART IN THE END TIMES...

By Dr. Ashley Crawford

Dr. Ashley Robert Crawford is a freelance cultural critic, author, essayist, arts journalist and curator based in Melbourne.

Trained as a journalist in the late 1970's, Dr. Crawford holds a Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Melbourne and has authored a number of books on Australian art.

Sir Isaac Newton, in 1675, famously stated that: "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants." It was a concept attributed by many to the 12th-century French Neo-Platonist philosopher, scholar, Bernard of Chartres.

As a metaphor, standing on the shoulders of giants means making diligent use of the understanding gained by major thinkers who have gone before. In other words, consuming their legacy for further understanding and creativity.

Image: Liam Benson - Mrs Boss slays the Malevolent Scoundrel - 2011 (video still)



Pat Brassington, to this writer, is most certainly a giant. Born in 1942, in Hobart, Tasmania, Brassington has never stopped making works that startle and astonish, that create chills and uncanny flushes, night sweats and eerie incantations of strange eroticism. In many ways she forms a bedrock to this exhibition. Brassington has never eschewed crediting other giants in her creative evolution, from the early Surrealists to the bleak majesty of literary giant Cormac McCarthy. And there can be no doubt that her legacy has helped carve new spaces for younger Australian artists (especially, but by no means exclusively, female artists) to traverse.

And that is where the genius of this show's curatorial premise lies. Unlike so many curators who claim utter and remarkable originality, LEGACY acknowledges that while there may be originality aplenty in the selected artists' works, much has been done by their predecessors – the 'giants' referred to above – to break free the chains of expectation to experimentation to roam free.

While Brassington may be the senior figure here, Liam Benson, Cigdem Aydemir, Nina Sanadze, Michelle Ripari and Emmet Davies most certainly hold their own in this eclectic selection.

The curators of this eclecticism, Caroline Esbenshade and Dr Megan Evans, have made clear one of their motives: "Older artists have created platforms for younger artists to experiment, expand and flourish." "They have made space for art, opened up possibilities and left a legacy." And although Brassington may have seniority here, it is more her role of a breaker of rules, a firebrand innovator, that gives her particular import, for Benson, Aydemir, Sanadze, Ripari and Davies all share a similar drive to break the rules.

But the term 'legacy' has a decidedly double-edged meaning here. On the one hand it is decidedly positive – artists who have acted as predecessors and inspirations – indeed, creative maniacs that have opened the cell doors to further creative fecundity. In that regard we return to the notion of 'giants' as inspiration as expressed by Bernard of Chartres and Sir Isaac



Image (Left) : Pat Brassington - *Breath* - 2020 (detail)
Image (Right) : Michelle Ripari - *Solitary* - 2020 (detail)



Newton. Sadly, though, we have also had a succession of other kinds of maniacs, giants of industry and manufacturing, who have led to a proliferation of global waste and pollution. And their legacy is a planet decimated and an atmosphere poisoned.

As Evans notes: “Young people face a future impacted by the legacy left by older generations who have consumed finite resources with little thought for the future. Although older generations have benefited from free access to resources, education and cheap housing, they have also fought for social change enabling the freedoms that young people benefit from now. Artists will respond to these tensions and offer a space for dialogue between the generations. This exhibition will interrogate the question ‘What is a legacy?’; the legacy we leave, and the legacy we share.”

And it is a twisting, byzantine and labyrinthine legacy indeed.

Image (Left) : Nina Sanadze - *Embedded* - 2020 (video still)

Image (Right) : Pat Brassington - *Heart's Blood* - 2017



Liam Benson presents us with the bush-noir adventurism of *Mrs Boss slays the Malevolent Scoundrel*, touching upon environmentalism and sexual identity simultaneously. As a bearded, maniacal figure, replete with rifle and adorned in a colonial-style skirt and mascara, Benson manages to evoke the dread of Wolf Creek or The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith alongside Cormac McCarthy's Child of God while also injecting their video with a strange humour. This is vaudeville bush-noir.

Cigdem Aydemir, meanwhile, suggests the monumentality of history rendered in plastic. Aydemir works in the mediums of installation, performance and video art with an interest in post-colonial and feminist issues. Through critiquing, decolonizing and queering mechanisms, Cigdem questions established relations of power, while producing work that is driven equally by research, play, criticism and humour.

A moment of pure poetry interrupts the at times abrupt, semi-violent moments of the exhibition. In her work *Embedded*, Nina Sanadze supplies a romantic ode to the Russian sculptor Valentin Topuridze (1907-1980) as her camera gently caresses her personal collection of Topuridze's monumental sculptures. It's a loving embrace, full of nostalgia and questioning and it powerfully reflects the confused times in which we live. The sense of solitary contemplation is intense. It's a gentle cascade of harsh images of stone and sculptural portraiture. It's a reminder that in time of plague we are stranded. But in its contemplation of grandiose depictions of "great male leaders" we are immediately brought back into the daily news in America of what Confederate heroes, or most certainly their metal and stone busts, represent

Image : Cigdem Aydemir - *Plastic Histories: Busts* - 2014 (video still)





in terms of bigotry and racism. Sanadze conjures both poetry and effrontery, the beauty and horror of how history and the present can be read and mis-read simultaneously. As if to emphasise this, her camera segues to a self-portrait of her sitting on an unmade bed in the midst of the rubble, her hair wrapped in a towel, engrossed in a large book – no doubt immersed in the history she has just scanned. As a summation, she scans to another bust, that of Baron Peter Clodt's (1805-1867) bust of the progressive leader Russian Emperor Alexander II who was assassinated on March 13, 1881 – due largely to his decidedly liberal notions of the times.

The Wyndham Art Gallery also aims to include emerging artists in their program. In Legacy they have commissioned two local artists – Michelle Ripari and Emmet Davies – who are essentially at the beginning of their practice, to create self-portraits. (Davies won the 2018 LEAP [Local Emerging Art Prize] that is a part of the

Wyndham Art Prize, for a portrait of his father.) Both are finely-tuned and revealing drawings, but it is Ripari's work with its look of fearful astonishment, and so aptly titled *Solitary*, that seems to capture the feeling of the zeitgeist.

Which leaves us with Ms. Brassington. Works such as *Heart's Blood*, with its sense of a crepuscular epidermis, and the evocative *The Wedding Guest* with its uncanny, Lovecraftian sense of the other-worldly, sum up a sensibility that is Brassington's alone. She is an artist who can somehow inspire shudders of both repulsion and desire in a singular image.

As co-curators Evans and Esbenshade are unafraid to tackle big issues and the artists they have selected are more than willing to walk on a razor's edge. And while these artists have been both rewarded and cursed by the legacies of their forebears, they in turn will leave their legacy to those who follow them.

Image (Left) : Pat Brassington - *Font* - 2007

Image (Right) : Cigdem Aydemir - *Plastic Histories (King Edward) VII* - 2016



Go Deeper:

A series of experiences
that offer further insight into
the exhibition



Sunday Salon

Join Liam Benson to unpack and discuss the theme of historical archetypes by creating narrative folklore based on our personal heroes and villains.

Liam will draw upon their own creative historic archetype, Mrs Boss to facilitate a discussion on history, with the lens on whose voice and presence is missing.

Liam's palpable energy will fuse this discussion with a creative spark, inviting you to respond via sketches, written material, or by sourcing images from online to create a scrap book.

This workshop will fulfil all your escapist dreams!

Open to ages 14 years old+

*Materials required:
Anything you have available at
home to draw, colour in, paint or write with.*

wyndhamarts.eventbrite.com

Image: Cigdem Aydemir - *Plastic Histories (Abel Tasman) II* - 2016

Artist in Conversation

LEGACY

Exhibiting local artists Michelle Ripari and Emmet Davies in conversation with Wyndham Art Gallery co-curator Caroline Esbenshade about taking on the challenge of creating a large format self-portrait for this exhibition.

Given their mediums, graphite and coloured pencil respectively, their creative process is laborious and taking on such a large format was no small feat.

They'll discuss their creative practice, including the experience of shifting the scale of their work, and unpack what 'legacy' means to each of them and how this has informed the self-portraits created for this exhibition.

This recording will be available on Wyndham City's website and YouTube Channel from 6pm on Thursday, 24 October.

Image: Emmet Davies - *What I Leave Behind* - 2020 (in progress detail)





#deepwest
wyndham.vic.gov.au/arts

wyndhamcity