

CONNECTING THE WORLD THROUGH SCULPTURE

In the Air
30 October – 13 November 2021

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This exhibition traces one journey among many possible routes through the Monash University Collection and is presented in three separate iterations—*From the Ground Up*, *The Sculptural Body* and *In the Air*—as part of a suite of exhibitions and programs celebrating 60 years of the Collection throughout 2021.

Connecting the World through Sculpture has been conceived as an ‘archaeological dig’ through the Collection that imagines the gallery space as housing memories of different spatial strata or layers of artworks that are uncovered across the course of the exhibition period. In this final iteration, *In the Air*, all the artworks are suspended from the ceiling or the walls and appear to be levitating in the galleries. We are prompted by the spaces above and below, between and surrounding the sculptures to extend our view beyond form to include ‘negative’ space and other invisible forces at play including gravity.

All of the works in *In the Air* have been produced within the last three decades and represent a wider turn in contemporary art to installation-type practices since the 1990s. The selection also reveals a growing confidence within the University to acquire works of various dimensions and compositional complexity. Callum Morton’s *24 Hrs*, 1995, came into the collection via an important, although short-lived, art prize run by the University. It marks one of the earliest acquisitions into a public collection for this now established artist (and previous head of Fine Art at Monash), illustrating the important role the University has, and continues to play, in supporting emerging artists and practices.

Quoting the ubiquitous shopfront awning and its ‘24 Hrs’ signage, Morton’s work encourages us to think about the burdens of the late

capitalist, twenty-four-hour economy and cycles of boom and bust, as well as ‘high street’ vernacular architecture itself. While life-like, this artwork is not life-size, and its change of scale partially removes *24 Hrs* from its everyday referent and reconstitutes it in the realm of sculptural objects with associated art historical movements—for example, the readymade and minimalism.

John Meade also plays with scale in *Set of Holds*, 1999. The title references indoor rock climbing holds, but Meade’s versions are scaled much larger than any human hand could grip. Like Morton, Meade allows us to view an everyday form in a new way through this strategy, in this case revealing its more sensuous sculptural potential. Joshua Petherick also utilises scale in *Condolence iii*, 2017, a sculptural rendering of a massively oversized rusted metal screw that appears to have penetrated the gallery wall (from inside to out). Making for an unexpected and somewhat menacing encounter, it suggests an alternate and differently-scaled dimension of time and space.

Susan Hawkins’s work *Hung Together 2*, 2018, has a similarly visceral impact. Composed of a series of found furniture legs, it gives the impression of having walked halfway up the wall, as a multi-legged creature like a centipede might. Here Hawkins conveys how ordinary objects can be transformed into sculptural works that tap into our psyches in ways that are difficult to explain. Likewise, Lauren Berkowitz’s *Dystrophy*, 1997, appears to be growing out from the corner of the gallery. Berkowitz manipulates perforated, crimson leather offcuts into a shape and form that presents as being of the body and imbued with human vulnerability.

Where the gallery walls are necessary armatures of a kind for Hawkins and



Berkowitz, arguably for Petherick too, for Kate Beynon they are equivalent to a giant sheet of paper upon which she ‘writes’ in images and characters crafted from chenille sticks, recounting the larger-than-life story of the ancient Chinese heroine Li Ji.

James Lynch’s *Umbrellascope*, 2007, is the only kinetic artwork in *In the Air*. It is made from two multi-coloured umbrellas, one facing down and the other upturned, which together slowly rotate. Around the time Lynch made this artwork, he also created a series of hand-drawn animations of dreams. The two can be related; the spinning colours of the *Umbrellascope* are reminiscent of hypnosis spirals and its dysfunctional arrangement recalls the nonsense of dreams.

Mikala Dwyer’s practice is also concerned with creating psychologically-charged objects and environments. The large-scale, suspended *Diviner*, 2012, holds in equilibrium a number of elements; these include a Perspex cube, diamond shapes, ceramic weights and a vessel filled with soil. Mostly devoid of colour, the highly reflective surfaces add to *Diviner*’s illusive quality and suggest its role as a giant dream catcher or portal to other possible realms. Robert Owen, likewise, explores multiple dimensions in his series of painted steel objects titled *Vessel—Memory and Logic Units*, 1997. While he created these outlines of impossible

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All works Monash University Collection,
Melbourne

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solid forms using computer programming, the description of them as units of 'memory and logic' suggests they manifest a confluence of sources.

Drawing comes to mind when looking at Owen's vessels, as it does with Mira Gojak's *From the Outside to the Outside*, 2009: one of Gojak's suspended wire sculptures that she describes as 'drawings in space'. In this artwork, she takes a line for a very long walk that involves many entanglements and evokes mapping and visualisations across disciplines including physics and biology. Like Gojak's sculpture, Megan Cope's *Currents III (Freshwater Studies)*, 2021, also refers to mappings—in this case, settler maps and knowledge of Country, as well as scientific research into the effects of climate change on water. Drawings of a very different kind are produced by Cope's suspended ice sculptures. As they melt, they bring organic materials into contact with alkaline and acid-infused papers, revealing qualities of water not evident to the eye alone.

Like Dwyer, who has long been fascinated with the geometry of crystals and their potential conducting and healing powers, Koji Ryui is interested in their ability to endlessly replicate. Constructed from single-use plastic straws, *Extended Network Towards the Happy End of the Universe*, 2007–11, utilises the fluorescent colours and bends in the straws to create a delicately poised yet complex, interlocking system of cellular-like units that is designed to be made and remade site-responsively. Anne-Marie May's *Untitled (Hemaspectrum)*, 2015, is also context-responsive. Commissioned by the Faculty of Science, May used the opportunity to further her interest in light and look at the biological process of light bonding molecular chain structures of proteins. This research inspired

the work's composition of moulded, coloured Perspex and plywood forms that are linked together without fastenings to become a mesmerising play of form, colour and light.

The idea behind *Connecting the World through Sculpture* was to celebrate the breadth of sculptural practice represented in the Monash University Collection. What we didn't anticipate was how thrilling it would be to engage with these wonderful groupings of works, most of which would not usually find occasion to sit side by side in the galleries. We have learnt a lot about the artworks themselves, and the themes, threads and processes that connect them to each other and to our university context. There has been a lot of behind-the-scenes work undertaken to bring these three iterations together, which wouldn't have been achievable without the input of all MUMA staff and especially the Collection and Curatorial teams, as well as our amazing installers. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the artists who engaged with us throughout this process and acknowledge previous MUMA staff and University management, as well as donors, who made key decisions at key times to build the Collection that we are proudly custodians of today.

Charlotte Day, Director, MUMA

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Room sheet design: Warisa Somsuphangsri
Graphics: Rachel Schenberg
Text preparation: Francis E. Parker and Melissa Ratliff

MAKING SPACE coordination:
Melissa Bedford and Brendan McCleary

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LIGHTWELL GALLERY

Joshua Petherick

Born 1979, Adelaide; lives and works in Melbourne.

***Condolence (iii)* 2017**

patinated, urethane hard-coated foam, paint, pigment and metal hardware

Purchased 2018

In his investigations into mimesis or re-presentation, Joshua Petherick is concerned with a critical abstraction that arises through systems of production and translation from one material or context into another. He is particularly concerned with processes of degradation, both in a digital context, in which his source material becomes progressively abstracted, and in objects such as *Condolence (iii)*, in which he meticulously recreates degraded surfaces.

Using methods that can be likened to special-effects makeup in cinema, his sculptures take on the appearance of future relics that turn the mind towards the life of materials beyond human timescales. The abrupt emergence of *Condolence (iii)* through the pristine wall of the Museum, seemingly at odds with the sentiment of its title, speaks not of a haunting from the past but of a future obsolescence breaking upon the present.

Susan Hawkins

Born 1934, Gunnedah, NSW; lives and works in Brisbane and Melbourne.

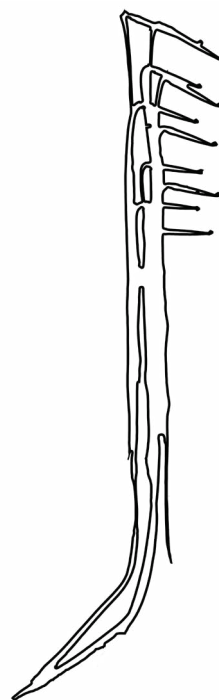
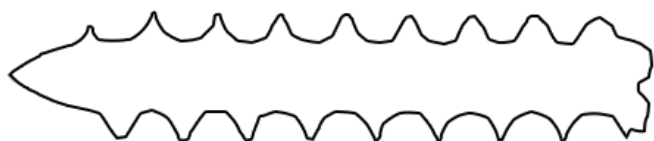
***Hung Together 2* 2018**

timber, cable sleeve and heat shrink tubing

Purchased 2018

Susan Hawkins uses reclaimed industrial and domestic objects to construct sculptures and installations that often involve motorised or sonic elements. This sculptural wall installation comes from a body of work that Hawkins made for a collaborative exhibition with photographer Clare Rae, *Irrational Behaviour*, at Sutton Projects in Melbourne.

With both artists having a strong absurdist vein running through their individual practices, their works were created in a call-and-response manner to allow parallels and the potential for conceptual crossover to be found. For *Hung Together 2*, Hawkins walked a cluster of furniture legs up the wall and added heat-shrunk cable sleeves as long, languorous tails. In the best Dada tradition, Hawkins isolates and adapts fragments of found objects to make new, curious and highly suggestive entities.



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NORTH GALLERIES

Kate Beynon

Born 1970, Hong Kong; lives and works in Melbourne.

Li Ji (Mountain) 1996

chenille sticks and cotton

Purchased 1996

In around 350 CE, Gan Bao, a historian at the court of Emperor Yuan of Jin, published a compilation of Chinese legends called *Soushen Ji*. One of these tells of Li Ji, a girl from a village in the Eastern Yue (northern Fujian) who was menaced by a giant python that lived in a cave on Mount Yong. On the first day of the eighth month of every year, the python demanded a girl from the village to eat. Pretending to offer herself as the next victim, Li Ji took a sword and a snake-hunting dog and slayed the monster. Kate Beynon came across the legend in a textbook while she was learning Mandarin as a young adult in Australia and has deployed this female warrior figure in several works from the end of the 1990s.

Mount Yong is the second in a sequence of six elements depicted by Beynon from the Li Ji narrative. She has used black chenille sticks—or pipe cleaners—to form the image of the mountain, which is reminiscent of Chinese prints; ‘bumpy’ red ones are used for the letters to imitate the varying thickness of calligraphic brushstrokes. In Beynon’s depiction, the illustrations appear to have ‘jumped off the page’, presented as large-scale wall-based works which immerse the viewer/reader in the heroic narrative of Li Ji.

Robert Owen

Born 1937, Sydney; lives and works in Melbourne.

Vessel—Memory and Logic Unit #1 1997

Vessel—Memory and Logic Unit #2 1997

painted steel

Purchased 1998

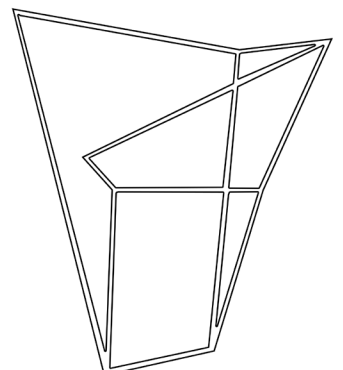
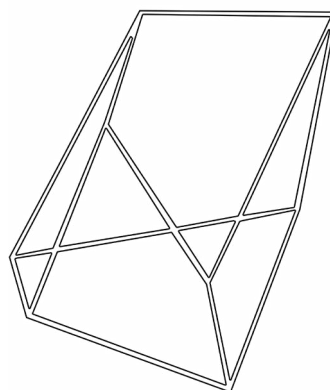
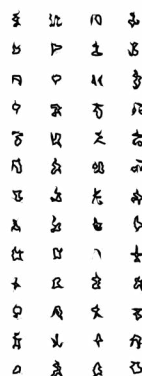
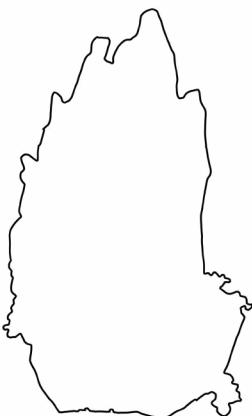
Vessel—Memory and Logic Unit #10 1997

painted steel

Donated through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

Working in both two and three dimensions—but also considering the fourth dimension—Robert Owen’s practice is unified by his interest in light, colour and geometry. This group of sculptures from 1997 has its origin in two earlier bodies of work: the *Memory and Logic Unit* series from the late 1970s, which Owen made immediately after returning to Australia after twelve years living and learning in first Greece and then London; and *Vessel*, a group of large-scale sculptures, the first of which from 1989 is based on the truncated cube visible in Renaissance artist Albrecht Durer’s etching *Melancholia*, 1514.

In the 1990s, Owen developed his own computer program to take his drawings of points arbitrarily plotted on a grid and establish how they would connect following the physical characteristics of cubes, dodecahedrons and four-dimensional hypercubes. The resulting ‘impossible’ objects cannot be represented as solid forms in three-dimensional space but only as linear networks, such as in his *Vessel—Memory and Logic Unit* series.



Mira Gojak

Born 1963, Adelaide; lives and works in Melbourne.

From the Outside to the Outside 2009

epoxy paint on wire, steel and copper

Purchased 2009

Mira Gojak has made a number of very large, suspended sculptures that are closely related to her drawing practice. Indeed, she regards these works as drawings in space and the varying gauges of wire in the sculptures have their equivalents in the density of her mark-making on paper. Whether in two or three dimensions, her gestures express the tension between two actions: to expand and extend out into the world, and to contract and retreat; hence this work's title, *From the Outside to the Outside*.

Gojak listens to music in the studio, translating the pure sensation of sound into visual form. The dense areas of the work are like intensely rhythmic passages, which she describes as voids from which she is trying to escape, following the irreversible line to find a way through.



Callum Morton

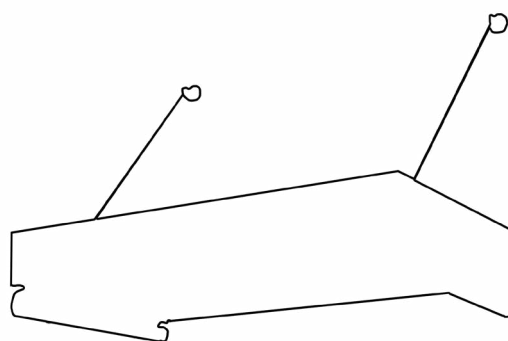
Born 1965, Montreal, Canada; lives and works in Melbourne.

24 Hrs 1995

wood, canvas, steel, synthetic polymer paint and enamel
Monash University Acquisition Art Prize 1995

Much of Callum Morton's work is concerned with architecture and, like an architect producing models, he regularly shifts the scale of the forms that his sculptures replicate. He became known in the 1990s for his rebadging of icons of modernist sculpture and architecture as future relics of late capitalism. *24 Hrs* is reminiscent of certain works by the American minimalist sculptor Donald Judd, with its rectangular, wall-mounted form that in this case Morton has disguised as an awning from the kind of convenience store that can be found in cities the world over. With its signage in the middle of being painted out, *24 Hrs* presents a failed promise of modernist perfection and perpetuity, as well as questioning the 24/7 nature of late capitalism at the very time it was building in momentum.

In 1995, Morton received the Monash Acquisitive Art Prize for this work, an award supported by former Vice-Chancellor Professor Mal Logan for emerging artists. Morton is also responsible for *Silverscreen*, 2010, which supports MUMA's signage on Dandenong Road and quotes the structure of drive-in movie screens that proliferated in the post-war years but have since been left behind by newer entertainment technologies.



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James Lynch

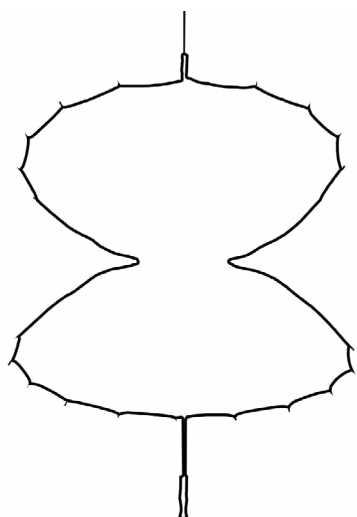
Born 1974, Melbourne, where he lives and works.

Umbrellascope 2007

kinetic rotating suspended sculpture; 2 umbrellas and electric motor

Gift of the artist 2007

At the time when James Lynch made this kinetic sculpture, he was working on a series of hand-drawn animations of dreams narrated to him by his close friends. He had also recently seen the exhibition *Eyes, Lies and Illusions: Drawn from the Werner Nekes Collection* at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne, which included optical devices that created animated illusions prior to the advent of cinema, many of which involved rotating components and names that end with 'scope'. Thinking about these kinds of pre-digital techniques for producing movement and representation, not to mention the odd occurrences of dreams, led to Lynch's whimsical combination of two rotating umbrellas into his *Umbrellascope*.



Mikala Dwyer

Born 1959, Sydney; lives and works in Melbourne.

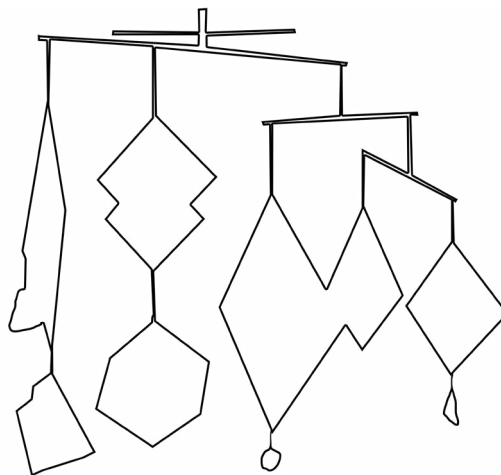
Diviner 2012

Perspex, acrylic, steel, rope, bronze, glazed ceramic, dirt, PETG and mandarin seeds

Purchased by the Faculty of Science 2013

While she works across a range of media, sculpture is central to Mikala Dwyer's practice and for a number of years she has been making giant sculptural necklaces to suspend on the wall—a form of architectural jewellery. *Diviner* goes one step further as a mobile that fills the space between the floor and ceiling. Dwyer's practice has also long engaged with histories of spiritualism and the occult. The 'diviner' of the title may just as likely connect to the verb 'to divine' as to a figure with supernatural or magical insight. The suspended, reflective and translucent planes of *Diviner* suggest scrying mirrors, through which vision and focus might be relaxed and thoughts mesmerised and unstructured to promote receptivity to the spiritual realm.

Among the three-dimensional forms that weigh the work down are a black cube and a transparent vessel. The former recalls the flight recorder of commercial aircraft, the Kaaba in Mecca and the black square paintings of Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich—all containers of possibility, hidden knowledge and the sacred. The latter, made from Dwyer's signature pliable clear plastic, is filled with soil and planted with mandarin seeds that allude to another form of growth or flourishing.



Koji Ryui

Born 1976, Kyoto, Japan; lives and works in Sydney.

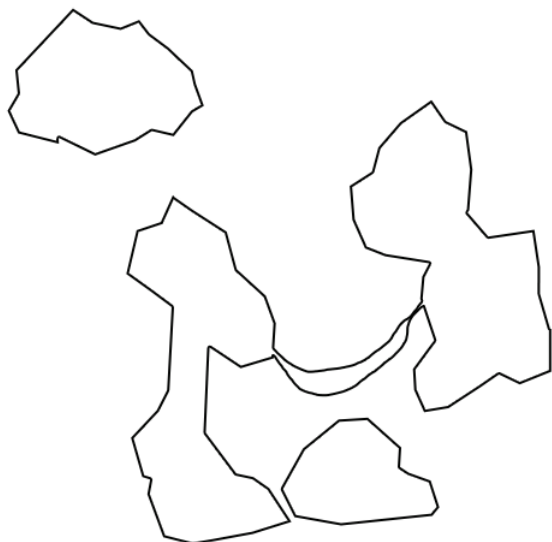
Extended Network towards the Happy End of the Universe 2007–11

plastic, nylon monofilament installation

Purchased 2011

For Koji Ryui, collecting the commonplace objects and materials that become his artworks is analogous to collecting one's thoughts in a notebook. He allows their interesting qualities to suggest how they could be transformed, often through quite minimal gestures, into sculptures. Here, he has used articulated drinking straws as the base unit of cellular structures that, like crystals, have the potential to be endlessly replicated. Straws of one colour take on a particular form and logic, which Ryui sets in dialogue with constructions made from another coloured straw.

MUMA's former senior curator Geraldine Kirrihi Barlow commissioned *Extended Network towards the Happy End of the Universe* for her exhibition *Networks (Cells & Silos)* at the beginning of 2011. Ryui brought some of its components from his studio in Sydney, while others were made over the course of a week-long installation period at MUMA.



John Meade

Born 1956, Ballarat, Vic.; lives and works in Melbourne.

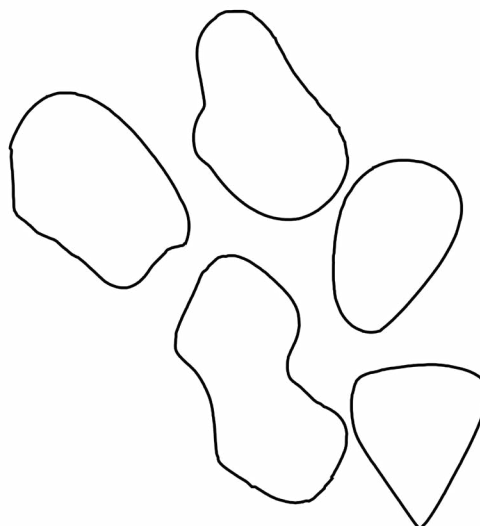
Set of Holds 1999

styrofoam, enamel, polyurethane, sand and lighting

Purchased 2000

John Meade made *Set of Holds* for his exhibition *Hauler Me* at Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, in 1999. Included with this work was a projected photograph of the view from inside a tall office atrium looking upwards, reminiscent of an abstract composition of concentric squares. When exhibited together, the indoor rock climbing-inspired *Set of Holds* and the slide projection emphasised the frequently heroic scale of corporate architecture and implied the desire for moving towards a higher level—perhaps alluding to specific forms of climbing, such as 'up the corporate ladder'. In the scenario Meade presents, climbing is thwarted by the scale of the holds, greater than human hands can grasp. Lit in a way that emphasises the sensual curves of the forms, the *Holds* takes on a more ambiguous relationship to the body.

More recently, Meade was commissioned to design an art column for the new Monash Chancellery on Clayton campus. His pale, monochrome *Asterisk Kolam, 2020*, combines a classical column in the 'Tuscan order' with an oversized, three-dimensional asterisk that references the South Indian *kolam*, an ephemeral pavement drawing made at entrances to bring prosperity into homes.



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Anne-Marie May

Born 1965, Melbourne, where she lives and works.

Untitled (Hemaspectrum) 2015

thermally formed acrylic and birch plywood

Commissioned by the Faculty of Science 2015

Anne-Marie May was commissioned by Monash University's Faculty of Science to make a suspended work for the staircase in the refurbished School of Biological Sciences in 2015. A sculptor with an interest in the light and colour properties of different materials, particularly acrylic, she responded materially to the adjacent glass wall and woodgrain panels of the location with this knotted mobile in transparent and reflective thermally formed acrylic and timber ply. Conceptually, the work considers the term 'Hema spectrum', which in a biological context refers to the process of light bonding the molecular chain structures of proteins. In its original location, *Untitled (Hemaspectrum)* is illuminated by the changing light conditions outside, while its mirrored acrylic refracts coloured light from within the sculpture.



Lauren Berkowitz

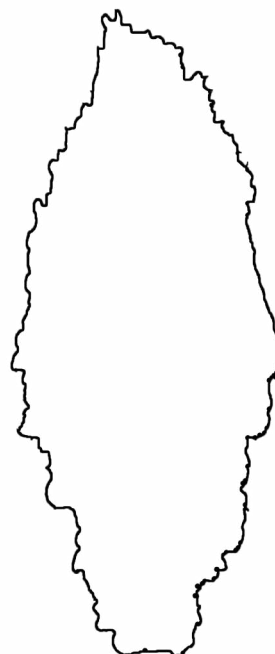
Born 1965, Melbourne, where she lives and works.

Dystrophy 1997

leather cricket ball offcuts and fishing line

Purchased 1998

In her sculptures and site-specific installations, Lauren Berkowitz explores the poetic resonance of natural and manufactured materials through light, volume and space. Reminiscent of the approach of American artist Eva Hesse, Berkowitz eschews the austere formalisms of her post-minimalist sculptural predecessors in favour of a more emotional register and focus on the tactility of disparate, often discarded, materials, whether they be plastic bags, bottles, rubber or sand. *Dystrophy* is made from the leather offcuts produced when cricket balls are stamped, so the work literally comprises punctured skins. Tanned in red, its flesh overtones are reinforced by the title *Dystrophy*, which refers to bodily conditions caused by lack of nutrition. Berkowitz's more recent installation projects have focused on reclaiming plastic waste as an act of regeneration.



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Megan Cope

Quandamooka (Moreton Bay/North Stradbroke Island), south-east Queensland

Born 1982, Brisbane; lives and works between Minjerribah, Qld and Bundjalung Country, NSW.

Currents III (Freshwater Studies) 2021

ice, natural dyes, grapevine, jute, cotton cord and plant fibre

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Purchased 2021

Currents III (Freshwater Studies) was commissioned for the TarraWarra Biennial 2021, *Slow Moving Waters*. Megan Cope responded to exhibition's title, a translation of the local Woiwurrung word 'tarrawarra', after which the Museum and its surrounding area of Wurundjeri Country in Victoria's Yarra Valley are named. The third work in a series that the artist developed in consultation with marine biologist Roberta Johnson, *Currents III (Freshwater Studies)* explores mappings and histories of water from Victoria's mountain regions to the bay, connecting local pre-settlement and colonial social and economic research with more recent records of ocean acidification reporting.

The three ice sculptures, spelling 'I O U', are layered with infusions of red cabbage, butterfly pea flower, rose and turmeric. Presented suspended from the ceiling, the sculptures release these extracts as they melt—natural pH indicators that change colour on contact with the acidic or alkaline household chemicals situated beneath the papers. This results in live and graphic paintings that reveal properties of water not usually evident to the naked eye, but essential to its health and life-giving force.

Cope's Monash Public Art Commission, *Weelam Ngalut (Our Place)*, 2019, welcomes staff, students and visitors onto the Country of the people of the Kulin Nation at the entrance to the University's Clayton Campus.

Monash University Museum of Art

Ground Floor, Building F

Monash University

Caulfield Campus

900 Dandenong Road

Caulfield East VIC 3145

Australia

+61 3 9905 4217

muma@monash.edu

monash.edu/muma

Opening Hours

Tue–Fri: 10am–5pm

Sat: 12–5pm

Closed Sun

Mon by appointment

Entry is always free

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners and Elders—past, present and emerging—of the lands on which Monash University operates. We acknowledge Aboriginal connection to material and creative practice on these lands for more than 60,000 years.

