

The years between 1964 and 1966, when the figurative studies and drawings in ink, gouache and pen in this room were made, were formative for the recent National Art School graduate Binns. After completing her studies in 1962, spending a year as a telephonist then several months in Melbourne, Binns returned to Sydney and began a period of serious artistic exploration and development characterised by figurative and geometric abstraction.

At art school, Binns had drawn and painted from live models in a context relatively indifferent to modernist experimentation. Binns's mid-1960s explorations of figurative abstraction reveal the artist's interest in Dada and Surrealism—exciting, early twentieth-century art movements discovered during her studies, whose proponents sought alternatives to the 'rational' worldviews they held responsible for the horrors of war. Like the Surrealists, Binns became interested in 'automatic drawing'—a technique of allowing the unconscious mind to work. Evident in the biomorphic shapes and riotous bodies that appear in her gouache paintings and biro drawings, Binns began to invite more spontaneous approaches into her art-making. These modestly scaled works were made in the lead-up to the artist's first solo exhibition at Watters Gallery, Sydney, in 1967, in which Binns followed her experimental impulses in larger, radical ways.

**No title (figure) 1964**

ink on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1993

**No title (seated figure) 1964**

ink on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1993

**No title (abstract motif) 1966**

gouache and felt-tip pen on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1993

**No title (abstract motif) 1966**

gouache and felt-tip pen on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1993

In February 1967, Binns's first solo exhibition opened at Watters Gallery, a newly opened commercial space located at 397 Liverpool Street in East Sydney. Consisting of paintings, constructions and drawings, it was the culmination of a period of intense work and searching, during which Binns attempted to 'unlearn' her art school education and discover what it meant to be an artist.

Of the exhibition's numerous works (several were destroyed after it closed), the paired paintings *Phallic monument* and *Vag dens* have become emblematic of the exhibition, arising from Binns's intuitive 'desire to represent male and female sexuality through images'. With their biomorphic and psychedelic forms, shiny enamel paint and bright 'fairground colour' (in the words of one disgruntled critic), these companion works reveal the influence of Dada and Surrealism on Binns's early practice, as well as that of close friend, artist and anti-authoritarian figure, Mike Brown.

Binns's 1967 exhibition produced lines of enquiry and motifs that the artist has continued to explore throughout her practice: from the use of patterning to the subconsciously derived figure of the vagina dentata—an archetypal image of a vagina with teeth, only discovered by Binns after completing *Vag dens*. The form appears across multiple subsequent works. With their sexual nature, *Phallic monument* and *Vag dens* also secured the artist's reputation as an icon of Australian feminist art.

### ***Phallic monument* 1966**

synthetic polymer paint on composition board  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 1993

### ***Vag dens* 1967**

synthetic polymer paint and vitreous enamel on composition board  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 1978

Installed across the walls, floors and ceilings of the two-level terrace, Binns's first solo exhibition at Watters Gallery featured vibrant abstract paintings alongside playful, dangling, mobile constructions; sculptural toys with moving parts; freestanding assemblages; and junk-like, satirical statements. While Binns's psychedelic renditions of male and female genitalia are remembered as the exhibition's boldest provocations, the rough, makeshift character of many works also caused great consternation for reviewers of the day, who responded in shocked tones to their perceived 'unprofessionalism'.

With the motor-driven pulsing of its plastic mesh component, *Suggon* was among the exhibition's strongest vexations, disturbing critics with its intense colour and bodily symbolism. Its hard-edged abstraction contrasts here with the unruly organic patterning of *Orange Flam*, which Binns painted, cut up and re-combined to achieve its final form. Achieving resolution through re-working and patterning is an enduring feature of Binns's practice.

***Suggon* 1966**

vitreous enamel on composition board, electric motor, synthetic polymer mesh, electrical component, steel

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1977

***Orange flam* 1967**

oil on composition board

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

Purchased 2007 with funds from the Bequest of Grace Davies and Nell Davies through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

The two-part series *The scenario of children and castration*, 1984, was created as Binns was returning to studio practice following her years immersed in community projects. Revealing an interest in psychoanalytic thought that dates to Binns's first exhibition at Watters Gallery, the seventeen drawings that comprise the series were first exhibited alongside other works in Binns's second solo exhibition of paintings at Watters (1985). The two narrative sequences explore psychosexual development and centre on stages of adolescent becoming, metamorphosis, gender identity and the relationship between mother and child.

The first sequence, *The scenario of children*, introduces 'inner world' characters reminiscent of Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung's archetypes—symbolic images that he theorised were drawn from the collective unconscious. The second, *Castration*, similarly dramatises adolescent identity formation through a transforming central figure whose features are obscured by a chrysalis-like 'pod', and Binns's recurrent 'vag dens' motif (first seen in the major painting of that name from 1967 and reproduced as the vitreous enamel on steel *Repro vag dens* 3, 1976).

Reflecting on *Vag dens* and its teeth, Binns has said 'It's never simply been an image of castration to me', but a symbol of 'legitimate power'—just as a 'tigress has teeth which can both rip animals apart and gently carry her cubs'. Binns's continuing fascination with intuitive insights and unconscious knowledge has guided her practice, as has her belief in art as a means for learning about and processing human experience.

### ***The scenario of children***

from the series ***The scenario of children and castration 1984***

*The Scenario*

*Looking for 'Doleful' I*

*Looking for 'Doleful' II*

*Finding Doleful—about to be born into the realm of law*

*Doleful child*

*Angry child*

*Goodie goodie girl*

*Foetus*

*Held gently by vag dens*

pen and ink on paper

Courtesy of the artist, Milani Gallery, Brisbane, and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

## ***Castration***

from the series ***The scenario of children and castration 1984***

*The pod*

*The adolescent is a boy*

*Adolescent vag dens and the demanding child*

*Erection*

*Lying across vag dens*

*Standing up with vag dens*

*The blood*

*The transition*

pen and ink on paper

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

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***Repro vag dens 3 1976***

vitreous enamel on steel

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

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Collaboration has been a defining aspect of Binns's career, most strikingly in the experimental and participatory projects she realised in the 1970s and 1980s. These projects, such as *Artsmobile*, 1972–73, one of Australia's earliest community projects, are detailed in the accompanying artist monograph. In Binns's later painting practice, her continuing interest in collaboration is evidenced in paintings made with artists Geoff Newton, Derek O'Connor and Merryn Gates, in which one artist responds to a canvas begun by the other.

The now legendary community project, *Mothers' memories others' memories (MMOM)*, 1979–81, followed the collaborative *Scenes from the highway of life*, 1977—a postcard rack comprising contributions from both trained artists and non-artists (now lost). With a similar attitude of inclusion, *MMOM* set out to investigate—with others—the creative expressions of women in the domestic sphere. Its aim was to collect 'memories, anecdotes, family albums, letters, diaries, memorabilia, handcraft and other examples of creative expression for presentation, or for future safekeeping'.

The project's first phase was at the University of New South Wales, Sydney (where Binns was in-residence) in 1979 and resulted in an exhibition of participants' work at the University ranging from needlework to photo-collage. The project's second phase continued through 1981 in the Western Sydney suburb of Blacktown, where Binns was working with Community Arts Officer Pat Parker as an artist-in-community. Participants' projects were seen in 'halfway' exhibitions at Watters Gallery and George Paton Gallery, at a final exhibition at Westpoint shopping centre in Blacktown, and later in the form of documentation and postcards at the 1982 Biennale of Sydney. Two postcard racks were produced, one purchased by the National Gallery of Australia on exhibition here, and one gifted to Blacktown. During the project, Binns created the two-channel slide work and audio interview *Self-portrait self-image*, 1980, which features images of Vivienne's mother Joyce Binns alongside corresponding years in Vivienne's life.

## **VIVIENNE BINNS AND PARTICIPANTS**

### ***Mothers' memories others' memories 1979–81***

artist-in-community project, including workshops, exhibitions, slide–audio tape works, posters, film

Held at various locations including University of New South Wales and Blacktown, Sydney

Supported by the General Studies Department, University of New South Wales; Craft Board and Community Arts Board of the Australia Council; Blacktown Community Council for the Arts; Blacktown Arts and Crafts Group; and Blacktown Municipal Council

### ***Mothers' memories others' memories: postcard rack 1980***

screenprints on vitreous enamel on steel; prints attached by nylon line to anodised steel postcard rack

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1982

### ***Mothers' memories others' memories, UNSW 1979***

screenprint

Collection of the artist

Alongside the collaborative environments and happenings of the early 1970s, Binns was establishing a professional enamelling practice—a self-learnt craft that she progressed as a source of income and taught at schools and in community settings. Part of a life-long reckoning with the artist's role in society, Binns's commercial pursuits led not only to her 'funky ashtrays', architectural commissions and photo-silkscreened enamel prints, but also to a sustained questioning of the separation between fine art and craft or industry-based artforms. The artist's experiences in this period working at a small enamelling factory in Geelong and participating in the Sydney Women's Art Movement led to her first 'consciously feminist' works, exhibited in the 1976 collaborative exhibition *Experiments in Vitreous Enamel, Silkscreened Portraits of Women* (with Marie McMahon, Toni Robertson and Frances Budden), first at Watters Gallery then at George Paton Gallery, Melbourne. The majority of the show's exhibits were based on images from family albums, such as the works dedicated to Binns's grandmother Laura Wilkinson (nee Lowe) at different ages on exhibition here. Delving into personal recollections via the family album became a guiding methodology for the subsequent community project *Mothers' memories others' memories*.

Binns considers process and relationships, more than medium-specific concerns, to be the animating force behind her practice. The slide kits (often accompanied by audio) that she developed alongside works like *Mothers' memories others' memories* represent one of the artist's methods of documenting and archiving more complex, ephemeral, relational and time- and site-based projects.

***Mothers' memories others' memories* c.1984, digitised 2019**

slide show with audio tape transferred to single-channel digital video, colour, sound

duration: 30 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

***Self-portrait self-image* 1980**

slide show with audio tape transferred to digital video, colour, sound

duration: 45 minutes

Collection of the artist

***Laura (Lowe) Wilkinson c.1885, and rainbow* 1975**

screenprint on vitreous enamel on steel

Collection of the artist

***Laura (Lowe) Wilkinson with Joyce (Wilkinson) Binns (aged 5, 16, 47 & 74 years)* 1976**

screenprint on vitreous enamel on steel

Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia

After *Mothers' memories others' memories*, Binns went on to realise further, significant community projects, each extending over several years. *Full flight*, 1981–83, positioned Binns as an artist-in-community across the Central West of New South Wales on the invitation of Margaret Smith, Community Arts Officer for the region. Travelling in a caravan equipped with a studio, Binns conducted workshops and created murals, posters, bulletins and newsletters in numerous towns ranging from Lithgow to Lake Cargelligo. *Country-city connections*, 1986–88, a project run by North Sydney Municipal Council with Community Arts Officer Jan Grieve, involved artist-led workshops and walking tours along the Lachlan River in Central Western New South Wales as well as at points on Sydney Harbour and in North Sydney. These too are detailed in the accompanying exhibition publication.

As the decade closed, Binns initiated her ongoing work *Tower of Babel*, 1989–, a project that embedded many of the processes, relationships and questions of the preceding ten years. Today, the collaborative, mixed-media installation with soundtrack (the audio accompaniment *Babble of Voices*, played at an intentionally low volume), comprises diverse individual works on ninety wooden boxes contributed by sixty artists from Binns's 'personal community of influence, respect and caring' alongside works of her own making. Among this community are friends, colleagues, family members, students and participants from *Mothers' memories others' memories* and *Full flight*. Representing a range of perspectives and backgrounds, *Tower of Babel* reflects upon connection, and on how we make, think about and value art.

## VIVIENNE BINNS AND COLLABORATORS\*

### ***Tower of Babel* c.1989, remade 2021**

slide kit with audio tape transferred to single-channel digital video, colour, sound  
duration: 16 minutes 11 seconds

Remade with permission and recent documentation from the National Gallery of Australia

Courtesy of the artist

### **Companion to the work *Tower of Babel* 1989–**

mixed media installation with sound; art works by numerous artists in wooden boxes supplied by Binns, installed on low floor plinth

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Gift of the artist 2020

\* ***Tower of Babel* collaborators to date:** John Abery, Daphne Anderson, Genara Banzon, Lionel Bawden, Ray Beckett, Peter Binns, Beverley Bisset, Irene Broadhurst, Elsie Brown, Mike Brown, Erica Burgess, Norma Cairns, Eugene Carchesio, Cheo Chai-Hiang, Virginia Coventry, Rebecca Cummins, Mandhira de Saram, Brian Doherty, Kate Dugdale, Helen Eager, Lois Eastwood, Bonita Ely, Nola Farman, Ruth Frost, Akira Fujishita, Kunio Fukushima, Tamio Fukushima, Merryn Gates, Laurel Gray, Christopher Hodges, Pat Hoffie, Steven Holland, Tess Horwitz, Marie Howard, Wayne Hutchins, Kyomi Itani, Hiroo Itoh, Narelle Jubelin, Therese Kenyon, Josephine Knight, Shoichi Kogure, Leonie Lane, Seiko Machida, Maria-Luisa Marino, David Martin, Eichi Matsuda, Lila McLain, Marie McMahan, Jean Nixon, Rod O'Brien, Valerie Odewahn, Pat Parker, Elwyn Perkins, Gregory Pryor, Emily Purser, Neil Roberts, Catherine Rogers, Shigeyoshi Satoh, Dalia Shelef, Muriel Smith, Jane Stewart, Osami Tominaga, Peter Tully, Ruth Waller, Meg Walsh, Paul Westbury, Alice Whish and Anthea Williams

*The aftermath and the ikon of fear* is one of a number of significant works made by Binns on her return to painting after a hiatus of nearly two decades. For Binns, the studio became a place to process the learning and encounters of the preceding years, and where different conceptual interests could be explored.

In this painting, interior and external worlds meet in one picture plane, where expressive mark-making, concrete experience and emotional reflection combine. Annotated with place names that map the regional New South Wales locations visited by Binns during her three-year community project *Full Flight*, 1981–83 (along with a miniature rendition of the project's banner and bird motif), the canvas's two horizon lines suggest a turbulent 'shadow' landscape of the mind. The painting's central emotive figure also echoes the intuitively derived, developmental drama of the drawing series *The scenario of children and castration*, created in the same time period.

***The aftermath and the ikon of fear* 1984–85**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Tate, with support from the Qantas Foundation in 2015, purchased 2020

In the late 1980s, Binns initiated a new direction in her practice. After years spent working in the country's rural interior she turned her focus outwards, motivated by a desire to situate herself as an Australian artist of European descent practicing on colonised Aboriginal land within the broader Asia-Pacific region.

Binns framed her works engaged with the Pacific through the lens of 'learning': learning about the geopolitics of the region, its interwoven cultural lineages, and her own identity. She began citing and integrating many different source materials—from contemporary media imagery to historical objects held in public collections and photographs from her family archive.

While many of Binns's earlier projects had been oriented towards maternal genealogies, this body of work considers her relationship with her father. *Pacific strands and 7 Mile* and *Pacific strands and result of raid on 7 Mile* are based on photographs he took during his service in New Guinea during the Second World War, and include his regiment number 'NX19888' as a kind of signature. These paintings reproduce the hazy resolution of the tiny black-and-white originals combined with tapa patterning and abstract line work.

***Pacific strands and 7 Mile* 1995**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
Collection of Jenny Bisset, Sydney

***Pacific strands and result of raid on 7 Mile* 1995**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
Private collection, Sydney

Binns's meditations on a regional identity were catalysed by time spent living on the central coast of New South Wales in the early 1990s, on the Pacific rim. She became fascinated by the shoreline and, more specifically, how the play of light would animate the surface of the water in relation to the ground beneath, which she explored in several bodies of photographic work.

At this time, layering emerged as a key method and conceptual tenet in her practice. Numerous works of this period stage a dialogue between the hand-painted and the mechanically reproduced, bringing notions of repetition, mediation and circulation to the fore.

***Over neg 20 10 1994***

synthetic polymer paint on chromogenic print

Collection of the artist

***Over print four 1994***

synthetic polymer paint on chromogenic print

Collection of the artist

***Centring the Pacific 1994***

synthetic polymer paint and photocopies on handmade Japanese paper  
Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***Gracing the Pacific 1994***

synthetic polymer paint and photocopies on handmade Japanese paper  
Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

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***Inter culture 1992***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

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Cognisant of her own situatedness as an artist in the Asia-Pacific region, Binns's works of this period express her interest in the steady 'seepage' of cultural information between cultures, and consider Pacific as well as British-colonial influences. Synthesising different traditions and histories, they also treat the painted surface—like the Pacific Ocean—as a connective membrane and a conduit for exchange.

*Surfacing in the Pacific*, for example, is an assemblage of art historical references. The mountainous vista echoes a painting by the English colonial artist William Hodges, who accompanied Captain Cook on his second Pacific voyage. Onto this ground, Binns has layered references to Australian modernists Grace Crowley and Frank Hinder, her contemporary Mike Brown, and the patterning that adorns Tongan ngatu or tapa cloths—all of which are cited at the bottom of the canvas. Counter to Hodges's Western fantasy of an exotic paradise, Binns's composition suggests the complex simultaneity of differing cultural perspectives, an idea also summoned by the phrase that runs across the top edge.

*God's beard in flames over Pacific patterns* draws on various print reproductions of paintings representing god in the Christian tradition, juxtaposed with the tapa patterning that Binns has used to consider Australia's relationships within the region. The beard motif has been separately explored by Binns in numerous drawings reflecting on 'gender and other conventions'.

***God's beard in flames over Pacific patterns 1993***

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***Surfacing in the Pacific 1993***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Parliament House Art Collection, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra

Purchased 1997

Binns's meditations on the region were deeply influenced by travel. In 1992, she visited Rarotonga in the Cook Islands for the Sixth Festival of Pacific Arts. There she attended a workshop in which Tongan women shared their practice of decorating tapa cloth, demonstrating the techniques and inviting participants to try it themselves. The experience was particularly formative for Binns, who noted a visual dialogue between the gridded surfaces of modernist abstraction and the grid formation of the tapa designs, which she emphasised 'have different purposes and are differently concerned with meaning'.

Binns subsequently experimented with abbreviated tapa designs as a device through which to explore notions of intercultural exchange, placing it over found imagery or in conjunction with woven fabric patterns such as gingham, tartan or Argyle diamonds. In *Tapa over a republican governor-general* and *Tapa over Japan one*, she layered these patterns over pages from the airmail *Guardian Weekly* to suggest a process of 'reverse colonisation'.

***Blobs over Japan pattern 1993***

synthetic polymer paint on paper  
Griffith University Art Collection, Brisbane  
Purchased 1993

***Blue and gold tapa over Japan pattern 1993***

synthetic polymer paint on paper  
Griffith University Art Collection, Brisbane  
Purchased 1994

***Tapa over a republican governor-general 1993***

synthetic polymer paint on newspaper mounted on paper  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 1995

***Tapa over Japan one 1993***

synthetic polymer paint on Japanese rice paper  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 1995

Binns's painting *Mrs Cook's waistcoat* depicts a relic she encountered in the collection of Sydney's Mitchell Library: a piece of Tahitian tapa cloth partially embroidered for Captain Cook by his wife, before (presumably) abandoning the project when Cook died on his third Pacific voyage. An object freighted with signification, Binns has observed: 'Mrs Cook was doing to the surface of tapa cloth something similar to what her husband was doing to the surface of the world'.

Binns returned to the theme of Cook's voyages after travelling through the Kimberley in Western Australia in 2002. She produced numerous canvases evoking the vast expanses of spinifex grass and distinctive termite mounds that dot the inland desert landscape, their painted surfaces often haunted by the spectral presence of the HMS *Endeavour* (the ship Cook used to sail to what is now Australia).

These works feature Binns's experimentation with combed surfaces, a technique she developed during her Australia Council residency in London in 2000. Partly inspired by her close scrutiny of the dense, undulating lines in colonial engravings, here the combed grounds suggest an ambiguous conflation of spinifex plains and sea, with the 'termounds' — as Binns refers to them — invoking both tombstones and islands.

***Mrs Cook's waistcoat* 1997**

synthetic polymer paint and tapa cloth on canvas

The State Art Collection, The Art Gallery of Western Australia

Purchased 1997

***In aura, Captain Cook and termite mound 2003***

synthetic polymer paint and natural earth pigments on canvas

Artbank Collection

Purchased 2005

***Termound 2002***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

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***Termounds and Captain Cook 2003***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Irene Sutton, Melbourne

***Captain Cook in spinifex green 2002***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Canberra

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One of Binns's most extensive bodies of work memorialises the 'unknown artist': the maker or designer of fabrics, floor coverings and other objects and surfaces found in the home, whose identity—like that of the officially commemorated unknown soldier—is lost. This series has its origins in Binns's community art projects—particularly working with women to explore their histories and heritage in *Mothers' memories others' memories*, 1979–81—and her interest in art as a collective, human pursuit rather than a product of heroic isolation.

The earliest acknowledged work in this vein is *In memory of the unknown artist: woven plastic cloth, gift from Ruth Waller*, 1996. This work recreates the texture and colours of a tablecloth that Waller, a longtime acquaintance, artist and colleague at the ANU School of Art, had found at a market in Sydney. The cloth reminded Binns of matting she had seen in the Cook Islands and Samoa that combined traditional materials with brightly coloured wools and plastics. Binns recounts that she 'gazed at it over time, in the way one does with household items, sometimes aware and other times in less conscious states, noticing the changes it underwent in different lights and from different angles'. In repainting the cloth, Binns was able to follow its maker through their process of creative decision-making and to come to know them in some way. In this close looking, she says: 'I meet the mind, the body, the cultural circumstances, the mechanical processes and material factors which produced the object. I became aware of aspects I cannot enter or fully understand because I am not equipped. At times it is knowledge unavailable to my cultural experience and realities.'

***Cross-stitch cushion cover from Steph (Jones) 2006***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Brisbane

***In memory of the unknown artist: woven plastic cloth, gift from Ruth Waller 1996***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

The State Art Collection, The Art Gallery of Western Australia

Purchased through the Sir Claude Hotchin Art Foundation, Art Gallery of Western Australia Foundation, 1997

***Church hat—Cook Islands 1999***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Canberra

As a material and reference, linoleum or more popularly ‘lino’ —the once-ubiquitous floor covering dating back to the late nineteenth century—features in several of Binns’s works dedicated to the unknown artist. Lino, like carpet and tiles, was of interest to Binns as she contemplated the patterned environments we move through. The presence of this material in her work is largely due to a gift of various pieces collected by Erica Edmundsen and facilitated by Helen Maxwell (whose Canberra gallery Edmundsen frequented).

*A surface of leaves—lino* recreates in paint the patterns of one such sample, produced by Binns using intricate hand-cut paper stencils. In several other works, such as *Floating*, lino itself has been collaged into a painted composition.

***Cambridge carpet 2001***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
Private collection, Brisbane

***Nylon over the Lachlan 2005***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 2008

***A surface of leaves—lino 2001***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
Private collection

***Floating 2000***

linoleum and synthetic polymer paint on plywood

Monash University Collection, Melbourne

Purchased 2018

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Like many of Binns's unknown artist works, *Parkinson and lino* recreates a linoleum pattern from the collection of fragments given to her in Canberra by Erica Edmunsden. This work was conceived following an Australia Council residency in London at the beginning of 2000, during which Binns studied the work of artists who had travelled with Captain Cook on his voyages to the Pacific. Botanist Joseph Banks hired Sydney Parkinson in 1768 as the botanical draughtsman for Cook's first voyage on the HMS Endeavour to South America, Tahiti, New Zealand and Australia.

*Parkinson and lino* also holds other influences in its patterns: the upholstery of London Underground trains, with seating featuring stencil designs by high-profile designers; and the work of Australian modernist Anne Dangar, who had made stencils (*pochoirs*) from designs by cubist Albert Gleizes for her ceramics. Binns made a stencil of one of Parkinson's botanical drawings, which she masked out with tape on the canvas. After painting the lino design on top, the tape was peeled off to reveal the white canvas beneath. Fusing pictorial traditions, these unrelated elements unite different contexts through the principle of patterning.

***Parkinson and lino 2000***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Artbank Collection

Purchased 2001

Binns has been interested in the concept of archetypal imagery since the late 1960s. These are images that reappear across place and time, and are thought to provide evidence of inherited or shared unconscious knowledge between human societies. The recurrence of certain landscapes in art has been a topic of Binns's unknown artist works, in which compositional clichés such as the empty beach, the lone tree or the romantic ruin appear. As Binns says, 'If something has become a cliché, it's a little rabbit hole in the surface of society. If you go down that rabbit hole you're likely to come to the most profound aspects of human experience.'

While *Archetype in Cornwall* is based on Binns's own slide photograph taken when she visited American feminist art scholar Lucy Lippard in 1978, most of her reference images come from paintings found in opportunity shops or printed sources. Two in this category were clipped out of the *Canberra Times* to later become *A symphony of uncertainties: in memory of unknown artists and scenes of popular reverie*: an image of a willow tree in a Western landscape tradition, and another featuring clouds suggestive of Asian influences—both apparently created by amateur artists and reminding Binns of her time spent in Lake Cargelligo in New South Wales as an artist-in-community. Made over a period of almost two years, Binns sees this particular painting as an acceptance of both the force of the archetype and also her own signature marks of 'awkwardness' as an artist. It signals a significant point in Binns's practice where she 'could let things be'.

***A symphony of uncertainties: in memory of unknown artists and scenes of popular reverie 2005–07***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008

***Archetype in Cornwall 2008***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
KKR Collection, Sydney

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***This moment then 2013***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Christine Gilbertson, Melbourne

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During her Australia Council residency in London and a further research trip to Europe in 2000 and 2001 respectively, Binns studied the drawings and notebooks of Sydney Parkinson and William Hodges, who accompanied Captain Cook on his first and second Pacific voyages. Observing the fine lines produced by tools (called burins) used by engravers to prepare Parkinson's and Hodges's drawings for print publications inspired a new set of painterly concerns and techniques for Binns. She began to make combs by cutting into rubber squeegees that she would then use to draw over her paintings. This created series of parallel ridges similar in appearance to printmaking incisions. By making bigger cuts in the squeegees, she was able to scale up the ridges of paint. The layering of these textures also enabled Binns to simulate the materiality of woven plastic forms and treat the acrylic paint as a plastic medium in its own right, prefiguring the formal mimicry of her unknown artist works.

***Made in London 1 2000***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***Made in London 2 2000***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***Made in London 3 2000***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***Big drawing 2 1997/2011***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

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Since her initial encounter with Tongan bark-cloth patterning at the Sixth Pacific Festival of Arts in the Cook Islands in 1992, the tapa grid has provided for Binns a counterpoint to modernist grids that reiterate the limits of a painting and its separation from the world beyond it. A near constant in Binns's work, the grid spans her biro drawings on graph paper from the mid-1960s—a selection of which are displayed in one of the nearby vitrines—up to paintings such as *Urban graph*, 2017.

In *Big drawing 2*, which was begun in 1997 and completed in 2011, gridded lozenges and dots create an optically charged pictorial space in which forms appear to project or recede. In other works of this period, Binns has used circles and round apertures to similarly trouble the pictorial plane, or feed the composition's energy outward with sculptural inclusions (*Kite-like*, 2011). At a material level, the malleability of acrylic paint provides Binns's with a surface that can be scraped to reveal the layers beneath, hinting at the time it takes for a painting to come to fruition.

Another constant in Binns's practice has been miniature paintings, a means of trying out different styles and types of mark-making in the studio. Finding small-scale works conducive to spontaneity and experimentation, Binns has made several smaller series at different times, some of which are represented in the other vitrine in this gallery. (*Big drawing 2* started as an attempt to work up such spontaneous small drawings into a larger work.) In 2009 Binns's exhibited a major installation of forty-two miniature panels under the title *Particle thought* at the Clemenger Contemporary Art Award in Melbourne.

More recently, Binns has created small 'detritus works', playfully recycling artwork remnants, scraps of dried paint and other collected items that have held her attention into new works. For Binns, these works are a continuing reflection upon the artistic process of resolving tensions between fragmentation, mess, beauty and cohesion, and on judgements of value.

### ***Kite-like* 2011**

synthetic polymer paint and wood on canvas  
La Trobe University Art Collection, Melbourne

Since her initial encounter with Tongan bark-cloth patterning at the Sixth Pacific Festival of Arts in the Cook Islands in 1992, the tapa grid has provided for Binns a counterpoint to modernist grids that reiterate the limits of a painting and its separation from the world beyond it. A near constant in Binns's work, the grid spans her biro drawings on graph paper from the mid-1960s—a selection of which are displayed in one of the nearby vitrines—up to paintings such as *Urban Graph*, 2017, which is currently on display on this campus in the Monash Business School.

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### ***Kite-like* 2011**

synthetic polymer paint and wood on canvas  
La Trobe University Art Collection, Melbourne

***Urban graph 2017***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Monash University Collection, Melbourne

Purchased by the Monash Business School, 2019

MUIMA  
MUMIA

***Empire, spots and fabric 2012***

synthetic polymer paint, metal, cotton and fabric on board  
Collection of the artist

***Figures in scape 2013***

synthetic polymer paint, metal and tape on board  
Collection of Irene Sutton, Melbourne

***Routing tape 2013***

synthetic polymer paint, metal and tape on board  
Collection of Brenton McGeachie, Canberra

***Connections in space 2017***

synthetic polymer paint, crayon and felt-tip pen on paper  
The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
Gift of Vivienne Binns, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

***Connections in autumn with Vivienne 2017***

synthetic polymer paint, crayon and texta on paper  
The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
Gift of Vivienne Binns, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

***Under and over 2015***

synthetic polymer paint, felt-tip pen and crayon on paper with collaged elements  
The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
Gift of Vivienne Binns, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

***Channeled into transparency 2015***

synthetic polymer paint on board  
32.3 x 27 cm  
Collection of the artist

***No title (blue lines, squares and dots on graph) 1965–67***

pen on paper

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***No title (red curving and straight lines on graph) 1965–67***

pen on paper

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***No title (strong horizontal line of red squares just above halfway) 1965–67***

pen and pencil on paper

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***No title (red drawing on graph paper, geometric and organic) 1965–67***

pen on paper

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***No title (graph squares filled with colours) 1965–67***

gouache on paper

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

***No title (blue and red squares and scribbles on graph) 1965–67***

pen on paper

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

*Fig and tiles* is the most recent painting in the exhibition and shows Binns's continued interest in repeating patterns. Binns visited Spain in 2017 to see the Alhambra, the Islamic palace begun in the thirteenth century in Granada that is famed for its geometrical decorations and tile mosaics. *Fig and tiles* grew out of her contemplation of the thinking processes behind the tiles and patterns she had seen there. In Binns's painting, the tiles are old and worn, and the 'arabesques' formed by the shadow of bare branches from the fig tree in her back garden in Canberra. The same technique used in *Parkinson and lino*, 2000, was used here; the branches were first masked out on the white canvas, paint worked over the top, and then the masking tape peeled off to reveal the white canvas.

***Fig and tiles* 2019**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

*Topographica* is the second in a trilogy of large-scale paintings including *Somebody's everyday, somewhere, sometime*, 2009, and *Minding clouds*, 2016, in which Binns disperses numerous photorealistic micro-paintings across the canvas. The viewer must look closely, moving across the artwork rather than taking it all in from a static viewpoint. This fragmented and decentred perspectival technique emphasises that there is no one way to look at the world, consistent with Binns's lifelong commitment to diversity as an aesthetic and political strategy.

*Topographica* is based on a photograph of a dry creek bed that Binns took in Alice Springs in the late 1980s. Into its shadows and indentations, she embedded a series of vignettes. These images variously depict the United Nations Security Council, a Haitian tent city, Egyptian protestors during the Arab Spring, and the battle following the mutiny of the *Batavia* in Western Australia in 1628. Others contain references to contemporary Australian life in the form of beach going, sports activity and office work. Binns has also included an image of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Tower of Babel*, c.1563, a reference to her own community arts project, *Tower of Babel* (ongoing since 1989). As Binns says, the painting is 'a way of reflecting on thinking and the awareness of my mind. I sit in the studio in my backyard in Canberra with thoughts, feelings, ideas and memories. The world otherwise, mostly comes to me through television, newspapers, magazines, books, movies etc.'

### ***Surfacing space* 2001**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

### ***Thinking of Pattie Larter* 2008**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Christine Gilbertson, Melbourne

### ***Topographica* 2014**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Contemporary Collection Benefactors 2014

The multiple small images appearing across *Somebody's everyday, somewhere, sometime*, *Topographica* and *Minding clouds* have been likened by Binns to her prior work *Tower of Babel*. A collaborative installation begun in 1989 involving friends, colleagues, family members and participants from prior community projects, the work's miniature artworks bring together diverse styles, aesthetics and ideas shaped by each individual creator's own context.

In *Minding clouds*, miniature scenes are painted onto pieces of masonite adhered to the surface of the larger painting, based on a photograph Binns took of the Simpson Desert from a passenger aircraft in 1978, since faded to blue. In this work, shorelines dominate the cloud-shaped vignettes, alongside landscapes and scenes of tension: a building in India after a bombing; a protest in Paris after the 2015 attack on the Charlie Hebdo headquarters; Turkish soldiers guarding border fences in Şanlıurfa Province.

***Minding clouds* 2016**

synthetic polymer paint and composition board on canvas  
Private collection, Melbourne

*Somebody's everyday, somewhere, sometime* is Binns's riposte to a curator's description of her as 'a painter of the everyday'. Offering portals to moments of daily life gleaned from newspapers, magazines, television images and her own photographs, Binns makes the point that there is no singular 'everyday'; at any one moment, people across the world are living extremely different lives. These vignettes are embedded in a raked acrylic surface that resembles the kind of lacquered basket that commonly sat on dressing tables in the 1930s or 1940s.

***Somebody's everyday, somewhere, sometime* 2009**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Irene Sutton, Melbourne

MUMA

*Many things together* prefigures Binns's use of vignettes. However, as the title suggests, the painting itself acts as a vessel to hold her diverse concerns. The work synthesises many of the concurrent threads in her practice, such as her use of combed textures, the vintage lino of the unknown artist works and the *Endeavour* motif from the Pacific paintings—a reference to colonialism and its influences.

***Many things together 2005***

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Brisbane

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