

THE WALLS ART SPACE

SALLY WRIGHT AND RAE SAHELI

THE BOLD MARK

13 - 29 AUGUST, 2021

THE BOLD MARK brings together a duet of new works by Gold Coast artists RAE SAHELI and SALLY WRIGHT. Their works cross-over in a shared focus on surface tensions and processes driven by the physical, and sometimes forceful, act of mark making. Collectively THE BOLD MARK hones in on the two dimensional surface as a target for graceful and explosive gestures.

[Clockwise from entrance]

SALLY WRIGHT

INKING IN WITH TWO PINKS [2020]

Collage
25 x 18 cm
\$ 120

PAINT DABS WITH MUSTARD (LOOKS LIKE WAVES BREAKING) [2020]

Collage
37 x 22 cm
\$ 150

INKING IN WITH ROYAL BLUE [2020]

Collage
25 x 25 cm
\$ 150

SPLASH OF PINK LANDSCAPE [2020]

Collage
25 x 25 cm
\$ 150

INK RESIST WITH ORANGE, (LOOKS LIKE MARSH) [2020]

Collage
30 x 31 cm
\$ 170

SATURATED LAYERS, TORN KNOT WITH SOFT BLUE RESIST [2020]

Collage
25 x 25 cm
\$ 150.

STRATA, ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION, IN COLOUR [2020]

Collage
30 x 30 cm
\$ 170

FLOODED WITH FIELD OF PINK AND POOLS OF BLUE [2020]

Collage
25 x 25 cm
\$ 150

INKED IN WITH DAUB OF YELLOW [2020]

Collage
25 x 16 cm
\$ 120

RAE SAHELI

LINE OF FIRE [2021]

12 Gauge Shots Fired at Aluminium
113 x 113 cm
\$ 600

VELOCITY [2021]

12 Gauge Shots Fired at Aluminium
120 x 20 cm
\$ 400

PERFORATION [2021]

12 Gauge Shots Fired at Aluminium
120 x 40 cm
\$ 500

SHOT AT [2021]

12 Gauge Shots Fired at Aluminium
120 x 86 cm
\$ 550

PULLED THE TRIGGER [2021]

12 Gauge Shots Fired at Aluminium
120 x 80 cm
\$ 550

AIM, SHOOT [2021]

12 Gauge Shots Fired at Aluminium
120 x 60 cm
\$ 550

SALLY WRIGHT AND RAE SAHELI IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS BENNIE

CB: *Hi Rae and Sally. Thanks for taking the time to do an interview with me about your upcoming exhibition at The Walls Art Space titled The Bold Mark. Let's kick things off with your individual interpretations of what this, rather bold, title means to you.*

SW: When we had the residency at The Walls last year, I remember having my work climbing up the wall, both recklessly and unashamedly. There was a sense of vulnerability in that for me - I scrutinised each piece within the installation to ensure it had a rightful place. There was one work that I was very unsure of - it had a very thick black branch stretching across the page - filling more than a third of it. I shared my uncertainty with a friend, who was surprised, they in turn loved it - said they loved the confidence of that, how they enjoyed considering how an artist chooses to make these marks. It stayed with me - making bold marks. There's a commonality between Rae's and my work, which is about surface exploration, but using different mediums. And yet I think this title sums up how we both approach artmaking. I've never been able to settle on a description for myself that better encapsulates the different mediums I use than dubbing myself a mark-maker. Of course 'mark' has an additional meaning for Rae - she finds and takes mark.

RS: I agree with Sally about surface exploration, making bold statements with experimentation and exploration as mark makers. Making a 'bold' statement with different materials and surfaces sums up both of our work as being spontaneous, alternative methods of art making. Doesn't get any more bold than making art with a 12 gauge shotgun.

CB: *Sally, you raise an interesting conundrum, that I think is particular to artists, and that is - uncertainty. It's a curious paradox that often, when we seem uncertain about something in our work (a line, mark, brush stroke, shape, form), our peers respond enthusiastically. For me, uncertainty seems like an important state to foster while making work, and it belies a tension that seems imperative for a work to operate successfully. Both of you make work that teeters on the edge of elegance and chaos, and I imagine uncertainty occurs regularly both in the work's creation and then deciding what is to be presented. Can you tell me a bit more about your process and medium interests?*

RS: My work is defined by a process that favours chance, chaos and randomness. Using a 12-gauge shotgun aimed at panels, canvases, and other various supports to create explosive and gestural 2-dimensional artworks. I have been using this technique since 2019 and it represents a synthesis between my passion for the sport of shooting and creating art.

I'm excited by the unknown, the uncertainty that's what keeps me creating, pushing the boundaries, exploring and experimenting.

SW: I agree, uncertainty does pop up regularly. It's constant throughout the whole process. I'm also interested in seeing how far I can push a process. I usually start with taking photos of trees - I like the stark contrast of branch lines against a grey sky. The interstices fascinate me. I replicate these in ink drawings, or monoprints, layering the lines over each other in an abstract composition, loosely landscape. In this stage it's as much about enjoying the process and mediums, the splash and deep black of ink contrasting against a blank page, the tease of the ink when you lift the paper after a print, the vigorous rub and varying pressure to follow up with a ghost print. After this I make a decision - does this hold as a work, or do I discard it. From discarded works I create collages, these are really fun, and experimental. And yet there is an element where I am working hard not to overthink them, and instead respond to contrasting drawings and prints, glueing pieces together into a small square composition. Things are a bit grunge-y at this point - tears and pieces. I love the detail here, the marks presented in this format demand that you read them as marks, no longer landscapes, although traces of this are still present. I enjoy trying to find the balance of elegance and chaos (as you put it). This is where I push the process, it's not enough to stop here. Instead I tear back into the collage, and I capture this process in a low-fi stop motion animation, a quick gif which tells the story of how the work evolved.

CB: *Oh wow, that's fascinating. I've always been excited by your use of a shotgun Rae, as a device to create what can be considered beautiful pictures. This is something I would term: process paradox - where an implement that is fraught with tense meaning for many people (while remaining a signifier of freedom and*

recreational pleasure for many others) belies its politics and allows you to author, at your own aim, moments of elegance. And Sally, in your pursuit of a gestural representation of nature that can, and sometimes does, lead toward destruction (the collages) reinforces what I think is the primary similarity between you both and the reason to stage a curated two-person show: and that is the dialectic between what is real and its transformation into art. Rae, by that I mean you stand, poised, aiming a loaded shotgun at metal, wood, glass and a number of other mediums. All that is 'real' and part of the 'representational' qualities of your work. The moment you pull the trigger, that reality is transformed into an artwork littered with shotgun pellet-holes and, as a consequence, is an abstraction of the moment leading up to it. And Sally, your purposeful and slow declination from reality initially via its representation as a photograph, then the representation of motifs within your photographs as lines and shapes, followed by its possible destruction (ripping, tearing) and reformation as collages is, for me, the philosophical crux of the show. To tease out how this dialectic between the real world and its abstracted representation plays out in your work I would like to hear a bit more about your studio experiments, in particular: Rae with sculpture; and Sally with moving image and sound?

RS: My interest in the use of a 12-gauge shotgun to create art has two primary motivations - personal and conceptual. On a personal level my interest in the sport of shooting has been relevant most of my life. I have been shooting casually and at a competitive level for over 20-years and represent a small number of women within a sport that is significantly male dominated. Conceptually however, I am intrigued at the potential for the sport of shooting to create new forms of abstraction, thereby reconciling the predominant patriarchal assumptions of both.

Of particular interest to me is the unique results that occur when I aim my shotgun at different materials and surfaces - wood, canvas, aluminum and glass for example respond in very different and always interesting ways.

Every time I pull the trigger, I cannot predict the outcome. Whether I am aiming at plywood, canvas, aluminum or glass the hundreds of small pellets that constitute a shotgun shell penetrate each surface in dynamic yet unique ways. Aluminum warps to receive each pellet as small protrusions; glass cracks and sometimes shatters; wood splinters and tears; and canvas rips yet receives gun powder as an elegant grey stain.

For me shooting has clear parallels to the creative act. Both require concentration, practice, diligence and clear sighted intention in order to achieve their target. Both require preparation and a good understanding of the tools of their craft. They also share variables that make their outcomes unpredictable - in shooting that can be wind direction, mindset, atmospheric conditions, and the unique characteristics of each gun. These variables can alter the look of the aluminium, making the material buckle, crease and at times tear.

Aluminium is easily pliable, but when shot, it becomes harder to manipulate, as the surface becomes less pliable and much stronger due to the holes created by the shotgun.

In September I will be exhibiting in the Swell Sculpture Festival at Currumbin Beach. I will be showcasing my larger aluminium sculptural works inspiring the viewer to look past the shot holes and see the reflected light and shadows of the sculptured pieces. I hope to inspire the viewer to reflect on the processes involved in making artwork and the impact of that on the finished work.

SW: It's pretty cool to be exhibiting with Rae, and have these similarities of deconstruction highlighted. The shared opportunity of the residency at The Walls introduced me to her and her work. While intuitively you can feel there is a connection, I think you have named the common philosophy succinctly- thank you!

Up until 2019 I hadn't given a lot of time to my arts practice - trying to juggle work and being a mum was a handful. But I finally undertook a small residency at The Field with a focus on just showing up. I had a handful of ideas that I never tried out at art school and was still keen to give those a go. I had an old school projector and some photos made up as transparencies which I threw up onto the walls and traced with ink. I could go on, but the point is that this process of giving space to making has been pivotal in moving forward and resulted in trying really new processes out. I love hands-on materials, getting messy, but it's easy to get stuck in what you know/comfort zones. Turns out I also love low-fi digital mediums. The projector was great. It was also a catalyst.

It was around the same time I stumbled upon making the collages. Inspired by a workshop that I actually was taking my daughter to. I guess it was another opportunity to 'show up' to make art. I made a collage that was meant to be a stop motion animation, probably with a character, but I realised I want to add and subtract the elements of the composition to make a loop. The elements were from surf magazines, lol, but I'd isolated elements that were really just neutral space fillers - contrasting, of course. I got really fascinated with this process.

At the end of this I ended up with a little looped gif. I was really happy with it and surprised that I had made something digital. As a mark-maker I'd never consider this as part of the possible oeuvre. But it actually fits. It's now part of the bigger process, which I've already outlined. There's still a lot to explore and it's a challenge for me to work with something so simple - not to over complicate it. Again, at the time I had been reading about lost places. I'd been challenged to consider what possibly 'lay underneath' where I was currently living, facing up to the displacement of First Nations peoples and the impact of the land after colonisation. I found that the ripping back of the collage had parallels to these learnings/thoughts.

It's evident that my work deals with positive and negative spaces. I pushed this theme for a while, enjoying the parallels between this and mental illness. This has been a theme in my work since my studio-based honours! Oh dear, is that too long? Politics in the world is disheartening, I get caught up in the indifference, the greed, the senselessness of it all. Making art is a sanctuary - not everything I make is packed with meaning anymore, sometimes it's an escape - getting lost in the process, enjoying making. Successfully living with mental illness, for me, requires finding methods of connection, points of healthy escape, and creating artworks does that.

In The Bold Mark I will share select works from a series I made late last year. The works shown are nine collages that were made in conjunction with a series of projections, monoprints and ink drawings over a period of about two months. They are heavily process driven and illustrate a complete destruction from reality. Their titles reference the glimpses of landscape you might get from looking at them, and also the various artworks torn up and techniques that feature there. The works in the show represent a very current point in my practise.

I don't have any sound in the work, but there will be a sound artist responding to our exhibition for the last Sunday. I'm keen to see how that unfolds.

CB: *In 2019/2020 you both were participants in The Walls Art Space inaugural Summer Retreat. A studio residency at The Walls in which selected artists develop work alongside each other with support and mentorship from The Walls staff including myself and our Artistic Director Rebecca Ross. From our perspective Summer Retreat is a rip roaring success. It actively utilises the space during a time when there are no scheduled exhibitions, and it facilitates collegiality and dialogue between local artists. It's where we all got to know each other and has helped provide the context for this exhibition. During that time Summer Retreat gave promise to burgeoning careers and unknown possibilities for your processes and their outcomes. All that seems like a lifetime ago and, perhaps to wrap up, can you tell me what your thoughts are about art and its relevance to life in the age of a pandemic.*

SW: There was a distinct contrast in the promise of the year, starting the Retreat, and opportunities this gave birth too. There was then a sense of shock when we entered the first stages of the pandemic which became a feeling of futility as the art world suddenly came to a halt. I had applied for a grant that I felt confident about, but that whole project was unable to go ahead. Unlike others, I did not find the lockdown productive. I did not want to create, and avoided the studio. I craved the structure that my life was suddenly missing, and found I didn't have the motivation to create a new daily routine that featured my arts studio practise. With a lot of pressure on myself I managed to put together some new artworks and even some successful submissions. And despite the effort this took, I was really happy I had undertaken these projects. Realising that I'm a better artist when I have a separate full time job was helpful, it took some pressure off. As the pandemic continues and we work out a 'new normal', art opportunities are opening up again, I'm grateful. I guess there's a shifted perspective in that art seems particularly vital in the time of a pandemic (art is always vital), and yet it became very hard to access with reduced opportunities. Although I felt at a loss to produce work, I consumed volumes of art online, a

paradox - unable to make my work, which usually keeps me healthy, I found that instead it was the work of others that assisted me.

RS: After participating in RETREAT at THE WALLS last year, I was so inspired and excited for the year ahead. I had a year of exhibitions mapped out. My first exhibition at Ballina was cancelled within the first week and this became an ongoing scene for the rest of the year and even up to now. I had to learn to accept that my exhibitions would be viewed online when exhibiting interstate due to lockdowns. I found it frustrating that I was unable to explain my work in person. I'm more wary of exhibiting interstate and I feel very grateful that I have been able to exhibit locally.

The early stages of the pandemic even though I was unsettled with not being able to exhibit in the traditional way, I found it took me on many new creative paths. On my daily walks I found inspiration for my current work and to explore sculpture as a new form. The pandemic has made me explore and experiment with many new and old skills that I had forgotten.

Even though COVID is still impacting on our lives, being able to exhibit or create helps people feel some normality and at times take our minds off the daily issues of the pandemic.

RAE SAHELI lives and works on Yugambah Country on Queensland's Gold Coast. Rae's formal training belies her current art making process, shifting beyond traditional applications to rendering her compositions through her recreational training as a rifle shooter, and employing a 12-gauge shotgun as her primary tool. Her process favours chance and chaos over any sense of pictorial order and is executed in the safety of a rifle range with special permissions. Her high velocity mark making takes aim at a range of artistic substrates including canvas, plywood and aluminum, to reveal intense physical and emotional gestures.

Rae has recently exhibited at Metro Arts, Tweed Regional Art Gallery, Northern Rivers Community Gallery and Brunswick Street Gallery, as well as with The Walls Art Space where she also undertook self directed residency as part of Summer Retreat in 2019. Rae completed an Advanced Diploma in Visual Arts at TAFE NSW, Murwillumbah, majoring in painting and printmaking in 2020, having previously majored in Painting and Life Drawing at TAFE Central Gippsland and undertaken mentorship in traditional painting techniques with Dick Bishop

SALLY WRIGHT lives and works on Yugambah Country on Queensland's Gold Coast. Predominantly a mark-maker with a painterly abstract style, Sally is interested in exploring surface, contrast, and hidden meanings. Encompassing painting, printmaking, drawing, collage and stop motion animation, her works explore notions of slow technology and the capture of ephemeral traces and actions. Her physical and digital accumulations, layers of paper and images, reveal swathes of broken-down colour and texture, and ghosts (traces left behind after a transfer), these are then transformed into spatial compositions, as installations and projections.

Sally has recently exhibited at Metro Arts, Lorraine Pilgrim Gallery and with Left Bank Art Group, as well as with The Walls Art Space as part of Summer Retreat in 2019 and The Field at M.Arts Precinct where she also undertook self directed residencies. After obtaining her Fine Art Degree from the School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Sally completed her Honours in Contemporary Art at U.T.A.S., Launceston, receiving the Painting Prize. Her works can be found in collections including National Gallery Australia, Bundaberg Regional Art Gallery and Swinburne University.



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THE WALLS is supported by the City of Gold Coast.

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THE WALLS acknowledge the YUGAMBEH people, the traditional owners of the land on which we operate, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the Gold Coast today.

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