

THE WALLS ART SPACE

RADIUS: NEW ART FROM THE REGION

Azadeh Hamzeii, Dan McDonnell, Michael Philp and Marian Tubbs
Curated by Sarah Thomson

3-18 APRIL, 2021

Radius: New Art from the Region brings together the work of four artists who live and work in South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales. The format of the exhibition, started by The Walls in 2020, seeks to provide a sample of the practices and concerns of artists within the radius of the gallery, stretching from Brisbane down to the Northern Rivers. The exhibiting artists; Michael Philp, Dan McDonnell, Marian Tubbs and Azadeh Hamzeii share geographic proximity to the Gold Coast but take up varying artistic interests spanning the materiality of screens and the internet and the cultivation of the self through culture and memory. Using painting, video, installation and sculpture, these artists' practices offer an indication of the breadth of new art being produced in the region.

The exhibition begins with Michael Philp's paintings, a collection of four works on canvas that draw on the artist's memories of growing up on the beach around Tweed Heads and Kirra, an area where he now lives once again. Michael came to artmaking later in life, embracing painting as a potent tool for revisiting and healing challenging periods in his early years. Born to a white fisherman father and Aboriginal mother—and with many mouths to feed—Michael's family had to abide by the rhythms of nature, maintaining a schedule of river and ocean fishing in rain, hail or shine. These works show Michael along with members of his family standing on the beach, out fishing in the depths during the night, and hauling in fishing nets in the rain.

Tiny figures are depicted in flattened coastal landscapes, stripped of identifying features other than their colour. Rendered in solid blocks of blue or black, the swathes of sea and sky loom large over the figures, feeling at times heavy and at others vast and open. As if through a child's eyes and with the slight fog of memory, the pared back abstract style conceals the details of these stories and instead brings to the fore the sensory experience of these memories. While intensely autobiographical, and imbued with the context of his Aboriginality, Michael seeks to retain an openness and universality in his work, inviting cultural or spiritual interpretations alongside investigations into the materiality of paint and abstract forms. These works recall moments of simultaneous isolation from and connection to family, culture, land and sea.

Through reflecting on these foundational memories, Michael pieces together overlapping identities and reminds us that the process of returning to and strengthening identity can be a grounding, healing force. His openness and acceptance of vulnerability is reflected in the landscapes of these works, offering a sense of solace and acceptance in the vastness of salt water country.

Dan McDonnell is a Southern Cross University PhD student, making art from a 100-year old cottage in a picturesque town in Northern New South Wales called the Channon. In a striking contrast to his agricultural surroundings, Dan's practice centres on the materiality of digital screens and their multi-layered perceptual potential. His practice has developed across multiple disciplines over the years, exploring painting, printmaking and now sculptural installation, bringing to each new medium his previous material understandings.

The installation *Queen of the Nile* encourages viewers to become absorbed and enchanted by a screen that radiates with bright, changing colours, nested within a pattern of green chevron stripes made onto the wall. This design references the moiré pattern—an optical effect in which overlapping geometric lines create the impression of wavering movement—which is created by the physical layers of plastic that make up TV screens. The television screen, modified by Dan, shifts through a colour spectrum, a visual spectacle that draws the viewer closer and directs their attention to the physicality of light.

Once in close proximity, the physical makeup of the screen reveals itself. Warping lines and patterns emerge and an illusory depth becomes visible, tempting the viewer to move around the work to find something that may lie just out of sight. This tension between the materiality of the screen and the images it broadcasts force the viewer to oscillate between focus points as our eyes attempt to view the content and the screen itself at once. The work explores our perceptual relationship with screen-based technologies, playfully highlighting how these devices and applications “control the body by enchanting the eye”.¹ Through a contemporary take on the Op Art sensibility, Dan uses line, colour, form and space to help pull focus from the images that saturate our lives and to become aware of the vessels that carry them—to understand that “the medium is the message”.²

Since moving from Sydney at the beginning of 2020 Marian Tubbs has been living and teaching on Bundjalung and Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi land in Lismore, NSW, making works that explore language, vision technologies and internet materialities.

Splashed across the cover and opening pages of her first monograph, the small sculpture *anagram* is emblematic of her practice: demonstrating Marian's material interests and methodological approach across both digital and physical realms. Found materials are layered and interwoven until they become an inseparable tangle of blue and white wiry fibres, semi-transparent films, and liquid-filled plastic balls, covered in flecks like that of an

octopus' skin. anagram looks as if it could have washed up on the shore after swirling around the great trash heaps of the deep ocean, accumulating discarded materials as it was pushed around by the currents. Hanging on the wall looking still-wet and half-alive, the work appears as if it created itself—an autonomous being that is in fact carefully assembled by the artist.

nervous systems reiterates Marian's material sensibility in video, using imagery, sounds and narratives fished from the internet. The work begins with a story of pre-digital obfuscation; an image mislabeled as being taken at the Great Barrier Reef included in surrealist André Breton's book *L'Amour Fou (Mad Love)* in 1937. Marian suggests the image was willfully mislabelled, an image used to project a fantasy and enforce a mythology. Through a montage of coral spawning, soulful crooning and bouncing squeaking bed noises, Marian weaves together a narrative about networks, hybridity, misunderstanding, and the internet as a space of limitless potential for knowledge and misinformation.

Both *anagram* and coral, the subject of *nervous systems*, seem just beyond the reaches of our understanding, existing as elaborate hybridised plant/animals. While both of Marian's works have an autonomous or algorithmic look, and both draw upon an interest in the relationship between detritus and digital imagery, they also carry a sense of narrative storytelling, an attempt to put the pieces together. Both works have an aquatic sensibility—a squelchiness that links together the primordial soup of the internet and the vast unknowable depths of the ocean.

Upstairs, the exhibition concludes with the video artwork *A Tool is a Tool* by Meanjin (Brisbane)-based Iranian artist Azadeh Hamzeii. Azadeh often draws on objects with cultural or personal significance to draw out dialogues between the individual and universal. In *A Tool is a Tool*, Azadeh sets out on a quest of sorts with the help of her mother to source an antiquated tool—a cotton fluffing bow she saw in a film. Azadeh was fascinated with the way it produced elegant and playful puffs of cotton that appeared to dance, but had not seen it in contemporary use. Connecting with Azadeh across continents via video calls, Azadeh's mother, Shahin Hajbabaei, visits a series of cotton processing factories, speaking to the men who work there in an attempt to source one of these tools. Meanwhile in Brisbane, Azadeh connects with her local Men's Shed to recreate the illusive bow; collaboratively drafting, planning and building the object together.

Azadeh's fascination with this object is a poetic gesture—a reaching out for an object of cultural significance and the building of significance through care and attention. The object becomes a catalyst for an intergenerational shared project with her mother and with the men who tinker away at the Men's Shed in East Brisbane, a place for craftwork and social interaction, often for older men. Azadeh creates her own cotton fluffing bow and retains the ties to her identity in Iran while forging a new identity in Australia with the help of these local men, who take up the challenge with a curiosity driven by Azadeh's passion.

I feel very honoured to have the opportunity to curate this exhibition and am excited by each artist's work. Travelling from Brisbane to the Gold Coast and down to Lismore to meet with the artists I was struck and inspired by the growth of contemporary emerging arts in the region and the artists and artist-run spaces that are making things happen in this part of the world. The format of *Radius* is a welcome opportunity to hone in on and connect artist's practices within our greater geographic proximity at a time when state lines and city boundaries have never felt more obvious. While at different stages of their careers, these artists all show a great strength of practice, collectively demonstrating the broad and diverse concerns of artists of the region.

—SARAH THOMSON, 2021

Endnotes:

¹Dan McDonnell

²Marshall McLuhan (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

MICHAEL PHILP
FAR AWAY (2015)
Acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101cm

MICHAEL PHILP
SUMMER IN THE SURF (2017)
Acrylic on canvas, 102 x 76cm

MICHAEL PHILP
HAULING IN THE NETS (2015)
Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 61cm

MICHAEL PHILP
SUMMER SHOWERS (2017)
Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 61cm

DAN MCDONNELL
QUEEN OF THE NILE (2021)
Modified Sony television, dimensions variable

MARIAN TUBBS
ANAGRAM (2017)
Fiberglass, aqua-resin, orchid moss, ice balls, hair dye, pigment, silicone, 53.5 x 33 x 5.0 cm.
Courtesy of the artist and STATION.

MARIAN TUBBS
NERVOUS SYSTEMS (2019)
Digital video with sound, edition of 3 + 2AP.
Courtesy of the artist and STATION.

AZADEH HAMZEII
A TOOL IS A TOOL (2020)
Video, 00:07:56. Commissioned by 4A Digital.

BIOGRAPHIES

AZADEH HAMZEII
With a focus on the dialogues between the individual and the universal, Azadeh Hamzeii mines her personal history and cultural background as an Iranian based in Meanjin (Brisbane). Drawing from a range of subjects and materials including votive offerings, beeswax, fishing hooks, her father's old film negatives, and Keffiyeh, Hamzeii investigates the localised significance of objects and the potential to elevate their meaning, creating a broader human narrative.

She is an alumni of Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts majoring in Interdisciplinary Sculpture Making and a Diploma of Photography from Tehran University, Fine Arts Department. She has recently exhibited at Outerspace and Wreckers Artspace in Brisbane, the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, and was commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art's 4A digital program.

MICHAEL PHILP
Michael Philp is a contemporary aboriginal artist from the Tweed Caldera whose works explore themes of identity, connection to land, connection to his people, and his own personal memories of his family history within the tweed community. Philp was born to an aboriginal mother and white fisherman father and spent much of his youth at the seaside or on the river. It is these places—where the artist connected with his father, spent time with friends, and reflected in solitude—that feature prominently in recent works. With his signature minimalist style, Michael tells the story of his people from a modern-day perspective.

Philp started painting later in life but was recognised early on in his career with a commendation in the 2009 NSW Parliament Art Prize. His art has been exhibited in solo and group shows across NSW and is now nationally recognised and collected. He is passionate about sharing the healing power of art with others and has facilitated workshops with local schools, aboriginal communities, community

organisations for youth, in conjunction with Lismore Regional Gallery, Northern Rivers Community Gallery, SCU Lismore and Byron School of Art.

MARIAN TUBBS

Marian Tubbs is an artist living and working on Bundjalung and Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi land (Lismore). Her broad research interests include vision technologies, poor materialities and language or text in art. A survey of recent work, *we need guys privacy here too*, was presented at University of Sunshine Coast Gallery 2020-21, accompanied by the first monograph of the artist's work.

Other recent exhibitions include: *Composing Archipelagos*, Contemporary Art Tasmania, 2021; *a complicated good time*, Station, Sydney, 2021; *Looking But Not Seeing*, Benalla Regional Gallery, 2018; *Thank you for coming*, Nice, France, 2018; *Currency*, Lilac City Studio, Sydney, 2018; *Infrastructural Inequalities*, Artspace, Sydney, 2018; *Hypersea*, Monaco, 2018; *Another Dimension*, McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery, Victoria, 2018; among others.

Tubbs' work is held at the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Museum of Contemporary Art and international institutional collections. She holds a PhD from UNSW Art & Design and is course coordinator and senior lecturer in Art and Design at Southern Cross University. She is represented by Station Gallery, Sydney.

DAN MCDONNELL

Dan McDonnell is interested in the material and perceptual make-up of our encounters with screens—what our eyes take for granted when focusing on the content of websites and apps that vie for our attention. McDonnell's work explores the specific colours, forms, and representations of light that make up these sensory experiences. By presenting screens as paintings and paintings as screens, McDonnell deconstructs and blurs the distinctions between the digital and analogue languages and forms.

McDonnell is currently completing a PhD at Southern Cross University, Lismore. His exhibition *Data Streams* was shown at Lismore Regional Gallery in 2019 and his forthcoming PhD exhibition will be on display at Byron School of Art, Mullumbimby.

SARAH THOMSON

Sarah Thomson is an artsworker and emerging curator based in Meanjin Brisbane. She is currently the Marketing and Communications Manager & Curatorial Assistant at the Institute of Modern Art and is the coordinator of the churchie emerging art prize. She has been involved in a number of independent curatorial projects, most recently co-curating Brisbane City Council's Outdoor Gallery exhibition *Sunny Side Up*. Her writing has been published in *un Magazine* and *Art+Australia*.

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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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