

# FOREWORD

Gemma Ben-Ary, artist and co-curator

The pearl has cast a spell upon many throughout history; it is a gem of folklore, it is decadent, sensuous and magical, and yet at the same time, our relationship with it seems problematic. It is this fascination that forms the common thread that connects the artworks in this exhibition. Fascination is a very human trait. Our eye is caught by lustre, and the gleam of a pearl captivates us, it seems to be a magical token connecting us to the depths of the ocean.

During the Renaissance and Baroque period in Europe there was an appetite for imperfect pearls, a symbol of erotic love. In contradiction, it is also a symbol for purity, the Virgin Mary is often depicted adorned with pearls. In *Lust for Lustre*, several artists respond to ideas around female sexuality. Olga Cironis' work is an investigation into the virgin / whore problem, and she is also interested in the power of language and the way that words and labels are applied to women to shame, subjugate, or control. Rizzy's response in a similar way critiques the idea of femininity that is engrained in our collective psyche, examining and deconstructing ideals of domesticity, servitude and sexuality, and Erin Coates brings us the feminine monstrous and the Australian Oceanic Gothic, exploring the dichotomous nature of pearls as objects of beauty that originate from an irritation; a reminder of their abject qualities of infection and abnormal growth. Pearls also provoke thoughts about animal consumption; many vegans do not wear pearls.

The pearl holds a glistening place in the magical realm of many cultures; in Japanese mythology, pearls are described as the tears of fantastic beings such as mermaids and angels. For the Chinese, black pearls symbolise wisdom, formed inside a dragon's head, and carried between its teeth. Tane Andrews references ancient Vedic texts, which claim that the pearl is born of the Earth's waters and the heaven's powers, fertilized by a flash of lightning, and Bethamy Linton has delved into Ancient Greek mythology, creating a piece entitled *Tears of Aphrodite*, the goddess of love.

As gemstones, pearls have been used throughout history as a display of wealth and power. Cleopatra once demonstrated the might of her empire to Mark Anthony by dissolving a pearl earring in vinegar and drinking it, claiming that she could devour the wealth of a nation in a single sip. The Spanish King, Philip IV was blamed for irresponsible spending habits that squandered the Crown's wealth, and eventual decline of Spanish power in the Western world. Eva Fernandez' *'Uneasy Lies the Head That Wears the Crown'*, draws upon the 16-17th century Vanitas genre, preoccupied with the idea of the memento-mori, and the transience of life and earthly pleasures. Katrina Virgona's series, *Casa Savoia: The Last Queens of Italy*, portray aspects of femininity, inheritance and wearable weaponry.

The Yawuru people of Broome have a longstanding history of pearling and shell-trading dating back over 20,000 years, used in ritual and ceremony and connects them to other aboriginal nations through important trading routes, but many Yawuru were later enslaved by European settlers in the late 1800's and forced to dive for pearls. Robert Andrew's work is an investigation into his Yawuru heritage to reveal aspects of his personal history that have been buried.

This exhibition explores the fascination for pearls, with a glimmer of enchantment and a whiff of something a little salty. Each artwork in this exhibition has been considered in line with more universal and historical concepts, looking at the pearl as a material, a symbol, an animal product, and a catalyst for discussing issues. Women's rights, animal rights, colonisation, greed, luxury, magic and folklore are all addressed here, in startlingly contemporary ways.

## Acknowledgements

To all the artists: we have felt so privileged to witness the creation of these works, and have been bowled over by the generosity and creativity you have shared with us. We thank each and every one of you from the depths of our hearts. You are all absolute treasures. Gemma & Rizzy xx

## References

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Direct citations from interviews held with the artists in November, 2019



## ANDREW NICHOLLS

The ceramic 'lusterwares' manufactured en masse for the Western market during the mid-twentieth century reflected the buoyant optimism of the post-war era. Brands such as Western Australian-produced Wembley Ware mimicked the historically-elite luxury of pearlescent materials in a modern and affordable medium that could be enjoyed by the newly-affluent middle classes. This work is a ceramic memento mori for a post-millennial audience, turning the distinctively cheerful mid-century pearlescent sheen to the contemplation of darker matters.

LUSTREWARE VANITAS, 2019  
PVD on glazed superwhite porcelain



## ROBERT ANDREW

Robert Andrew's work is an investigation into his own repudiated histories and the complexity of belonging to mixed ancestry, through the use of natural materials combined with robotic technologies. The work focuses on his Yawuru (Broome) heritage to reveal aspects of Australian Indigenous history that have been hidden, and informed by unravelling the effects of colonialism on his own family history.

DATA STRATIFICATION 2017 2019  
Burnt branches, rocks, pearl shell, string, aluminium, electromechanical components



## TANE ANDREWS

*"When the ocean roared against Parjanya with lightning, there from was born the golden drop"*  
(Sadvimsa Brahmana 5-6)

In ancient Vedic texts, the pearl is born of the Earth's waters and the heaven's powers, fertilized by a flash of lightning.

Here the mythology is reinterpreted by intermittent digital flashes of lighting. Climatic forces in nature are rendered and contained within the confines of a mirror.

SILVER SCREEN, 2019  
Looped footage, projection, mirror



## ERIN COATES

There is a dichotomous nature to pearls; they are at once objects of beauty and value, yet originating from an internal irritation in the pearl shell, and thus relating to abject qualities of abnormal growth. My wallpaper and sculptures show entwined and hybrid lifeforms; ascidians, human teeth, cephalopods, fleshy folds, hair, orifices and tendrils of seagrass. Referencing our evolutionary origins in the ocean, this work also speculates on a possible future – one in which humans have depleted oysters from the sea and grow pearls from our own bodies.

MARINE BIOMASS LATERAL EVOLUTION, 2020  
Limited Edition printed textured wallpaper



*Lustre*

17 January - 28 February 2020

Cover: *Lustreware Vanitas*, Andrew Nicholls, PVD on glazed superwhite porcelain, dimensions variable, 2019. Image c/o the artist.





### RIZZY

The association of pearls with particular ideas of femininity is ingrained in our cultural psyche. As the daughter of the moon, the pearl represents purity, generosity, integrity and loyalty. Prized throughout history, in this work I use pearls to reference where historically the value of a woman has been placed. Exploring themes of domesticity, fertility and the body, this piece illuminates ideas of feminism and equality.

### DOMESTIC VALUE, 2019

Sugar, pearls, found objects, photographs on pearl paper



### ANGELA STEWART

'The luminescence sought in a surface can speak of many things ; love, loss and desire. A constant in our lives.'

### PRUDENZA #4, 2019

Oil on canvas



### BETHAMY LINTON

In developing this work I looked to Ancient Greek jewellery forms and mythology. I borrowed from both the legend that pearls are the tears of Aphrodite, goddess of love and 'Mati' the Greek evil eye emblem to talk about ideas around the lust for beauty (and wealth) and their treachery. Repetition as a device in the titanium elements (both the chain links and the tear drops) is a nod to ancient Greek artefacts, as is the use of very high carat gold which speaks also to the goddess. The three tear drops suspended from the golden eye represent The Graces, and also The Furies, their counterpart.

### TEARS OF APHRODITE, 2019

Titanium, gold, pearl, silver



### GEMMA BEN-ARY

The animals are slipping into oblivion, only the delicious and the beautiful will survive, farmed and subjugated by human appetites. Where we once gazed in awe at the wonders of the earth and her secrets, we are now consuming and harvesting destructively, creating middens of an unimaginable scale. Will we learn to lend an ear, to listen to the ocean? Can we learn to hold hands with the abyss? In this work, the abyss gazes mournfully back.

### THE ABYSS, 2019

Oyster shells, glass eyes and polymer clay



### JODY QUACKENBUSH

This artwork is a sculptural costume headpiece, informed by the ocean and its creatures, and particularly inspired by pearls, oysters, and by the floating and undulating quality of underwater plants and animals. Like much of my work, this piece has been constructed in an intuitive and somewhat spontaneous fashion, using found, collected, repurposed and second-hand materials. My sculptural costumes are often the beginning of a creative journey for me, as they are the impetus for further exploration with photography, using models in interesting urban and rural settings around Perth.

### PEARL MASK, 2019

Fabric, plastic and faux pearls



### KATRINA VIRGONA

This series is collectively titled Casa Savoia: The Last Queens of Italy. It reflects and extends an interest in aspects of femininity, inheritance and wearable weaponry. My mission has been to bestow a sense of royalty upon abandoned bric-a-brac. The overall forms are inspired by spear-like hatpins used for personal defence in the Belle Époque while the crest designs reflect elements of crowns and tiaras worn by Queen Margherita, Queen Elena, the May Queen (Marie-José) and other members of the House of Savoy. This headpiece may inspire new artworks for me in the future and be used to create photographic prints, hand-coloured photographs, or paintings.

### CASA SAVOIA: THE LAST QUEENS OF ITALY SERIES, 2018

Knitting needle, blanket, found objects, glass



### OLGA CIRONIS

Olga Cironis works with text and mixed materials to reclaim and investigate labels that are used to dehumanise women. Her work responds to society's apparent desire to constrict, conceal or devalue women. Words, like materials and textures, can be hard and brutal, or soft and seductive. Olga's work is a reminder of the power of materials and words.

### SWING, 1995

Steel, freshwater pearl, lace and satin



### PAM JONES

My work is a contemplation of the ocean and all its beauty and bounty and pays respect to these natural gifts from the sea. The pearl: "ocean's rainbow", is a prize to cherish.

### GIFT FROM THE SEA, 2019

Sterling silver and freshwater pearl



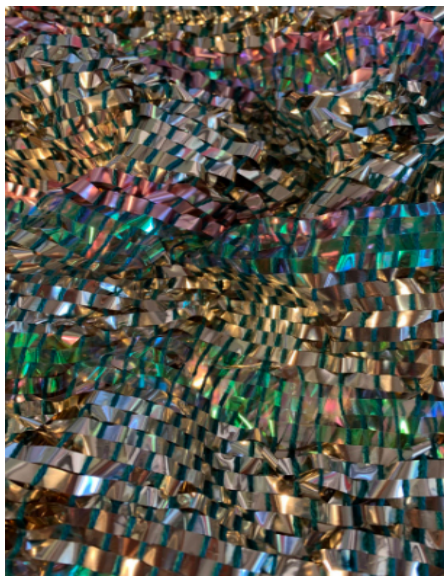
### PAULA CRISTOFFANINI

**Pearl** – weight, burden, load, yoke, saddle, shackle, fetter, cuff, encumbrance, hindrance...

I am interested in looking at what we women are and what we become by our choices and circumstance and the role and dangers of everyday objects as markers of identity. I am exploring the allure of ornaments and accessories and their capacity to burden and circumscribe.

### WOULD NOT BE SEEN DEAD WITHOUT HER (PEARL) EARRINGS, 2010

Lightjet prints mounted on Aluminium



### CARLA ADAMS

In this work Adams recreates flesh, skin and body using woven plastic materials. Extending on previous projects that consider how low quality phone cameras and the screen distort the human face, this work is an abstracted form of her own body. Using the glossy, pearlescent materials often associated with craft and kitsch, her broader practice is aligned with feminist sculptural and textile practices and investigates how women navigate digital dating platforms.

### BODY (BIG, BEAUTIFUL, BROKEN, BETTER), 2020

Woven mylar, cotton, dowel and plastic



### TANIA VILOSEVIC

HOLE LOTTA PEARLY peeps at pearl necklaces, exploring the act as the margins of conventions and sexual/gender structures

*She was really bombed, And I was really blown away, Until I asked her what she wanted, And this is what she had to say: A pearl necklace. She wanna pearl necklace. She wanna pearl necklace. She gets a charge out of bein' so weird, Digs gettin' downright strange. But I can keep a handle on anything, Just this side of deranged.* (Lyrics from Pearl Necklace by ZZ Top)

### HOLE LOTTA PEARLY, 2019

Digital video / performance

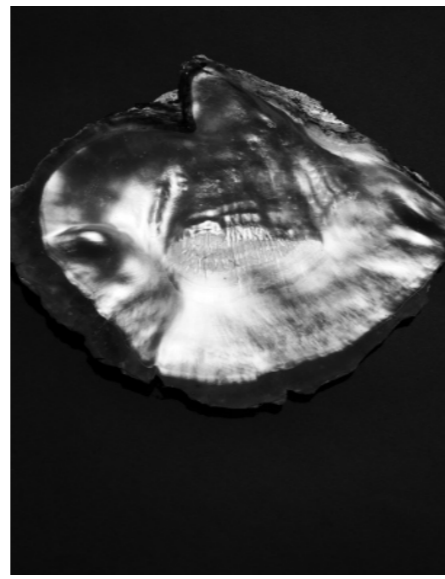


### EVA FERNANDEZ

This work draws the symbolic category of still life paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries. Vanitas, referring to the Christian view of the transience of earthly life and the worthless nature of wealth and power. From the book of Ecclesiastes the verse is 'Vanita vanitutum omnia vanitas' translated in the King James bible to 'vanity of all vanities'. With all our rich objects depicting plenitude and luxury we are reminded of the bleakness of our impending mortality.

### UNEASY LIES HE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN 2019

Giclée Inkjet print on Hahnemühle fine art paper



### LEE HARROP

The images in *PS, I love you just the way you are*, depict Pinctada maxima oyster pearl shells sourced from Paspaley Pearling Company, Darwin, Northern Territory. The process of grading the pearls harvested from these shells is explained on their website titled, 'The Five Virtues'. What happens when we consider the scrutinising of the pearl with respect to the five virtues: Lustre, complexion, shape, colour and size alongside the relentless scrutiny of a woman.

### THE FIVE VIRTUES, 2019

Digital photograph



### MANDY HARWOOD

Pregnant, Indigenous women were stolen from their families and forced to dive for pearls. WTF?!

### ABSENT TRUTHS, 2019

Mixed Media on Paper



### MELANIE DARE

Melanie Dare is a process-based visual artist working in Perth, WA. During the 20 years of her art practice she has investigated how meaning is created within individual subjectivity through various perspectives and mediums. While researching this project she has become fascinated with the mythological, metaphorical, and physiological aspects of pearls. This body of work is the product of investigating the exhibition subject within the larger framework of her conceptual practise.

### CULTIVATION OF THE PEARL: AN INVESTIGATION 1, 2019

Acrylic paint, calcium carbonate and graphite on wooden panel



### SUSAN FLAVELL

This is an object made from despair.

### RINGIN' (DETAIL), 2020

Found and recycled objects, glue and paper Photograph:



### NATALIE WILLIAMSON

I heard a story about oyster mushrooms being able to clean up oil spills left by mining. A small story, a hope, it reminded me that among the boundless unknowns this planet is full of wonderful things I never imagined.

### Growth 1,2 and 4, 2019

Cold Porcelain (glue, cornflower, baby oil and vinegar), Bitumen, coal, marine varnish



### RYCK RUDD

The industrial pearling process for clams begins by prying them open for insemination. The milking process for cattle begins by trapping cows in rape racks for insemination, typically with bull semen collected by means of electrocution-induced ejaculation. In taking the glamour from pearls I remark upon our species' penchant for twisting natural phenomena towards something disturbingly unnatural.

### THE FARMING, 2019

Oil on canvas