

Parallel Universe
2019 - Curator – Dr Felicity Spear
Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne, April 2019

Artists Comments

Magda Cebokli
Sensorium 2019, Acrylic on linen
Lumen #1 2011, Acrylic on linen
Lumen # 2 2011, Acrylic on linen

Our eye only sees what our neurology enables. We may have expanded our various senses with technology but even here the same caveat applies. The Hubble telescope enables us to see further, infra-red cameras and radio telescopes expand our spectrum, x-rays, CAT scans, DNA analysis are just examples of how we open up parallel worlds of understanding. However, what we 'know' is still biased by the structure of the tools we use to gain information and by how we interpret that information.

Lesley Duxbury
Closing the Distance 2019 inkjet print
(Acknowledging the support of The Fremantle Arts Centre and The City of Fremantle).

I am interested in the ways that the extraordinary world of 'nature' can enter into the unremarkable urban world and that nature may be revealed in local, direct experiences even though we have become far-removed from the natural world. Through close observation of the local environment and imaginative constructions the mundane world of the everyday may be regarded with wonder.

Vicki Hallett
Beyond out Hertz 2019 sound installation acrylic, wood, sounds, speaker

I am a graduate from the Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne and a musician, composer, sound artist and committed interdisciplinary researcher. My compositional process is closely linked to field recordings through scientific analysis and ecological patterns and I am constantly looking for ways to extend my practice with more theoretical analysis and understanding, bringing together and creating a stronger relationship between the scientific analysis, expertise and artistic ingenuity. With a strong interest in bioacoustics research and acoustic ecology, my interest lies in creating conversation and gaining greater understanding of environmental sounds. My approach to research and creative practice extends and expands acoustic ecology as an immersive, socially engaged, accessible and interdisciplinary field that can inspire the community to listen to the environment and sonically explore the cultural and biological diversity of ecosystems.

Sound source locations and thanks: Great Artesian Basin, South Australia, Limpopo Province, South Africa, Dr Ros Bandt's Acoustic Sanctuary, Fryerstown, Victoria, Australia, African forest elephant - courtesy the Elephant Listening Project at Cornell University, USA, Blue whale and ice crashing- courtesy Dr Brian Miller and the Australian Antarctic Division.

Sam Leach

Proposal for Owl Lunar Extravehicular Helmet 2019, oil and resin on wood
(Courtesy Sullivan and Strumpf Gallery, Sydney. NSW).

This work is based on considerations of the relationship between humans and non-humans in an environment off the surface of the earth. The understanding of human perception is continually refined through biological research on non-human animals and the ability of non-humans to perceive aspects of the world humans are not biologically capable of sensing expands our knowledge of the world. This expanded field will be crucial in future explorations.

Harry Nankin

The Age of Loneliness 3 (Damselfly nebula), 2018 Pigment ink jet print on archival rag paper.

This inkjet print on rag paper reiterates a camera-less *plein air* silver gelatin film photogram. It records the shadows of winged invertebrates attracted to the light of an ultraviolet lamp installed on the dry salt-bed of Lake Tyrrell in the Victorian Mallee. Like a starry nebula, the swarm of insects orbits the light. This playful analogy between tiny lives and the heavens attends to the importance of *scale* in everything we perceive. Like the size of a damselfly relative to a nebula. Or, like the simple external appearance of an insect compared to the intricacies of its biochemistry, evolutionary history or ecological role. Perspective conferred by a sense of scale also brings into focus our failure to accept the nature and constraints of the global biosphere. Stranded in the falsely-scaled hubris of anthropic domination, our collective trajectory appears to be towards an ever-deepening ecological crisis.

Felicity Spear - Curator

Many Worlds 2016-18, oil wash, pastel pencil, ink on paper

Other world umwelt # 1 2013 oil on linen

Other World - #2 2013 oil on linen

What was the 'WOW' signal? Was it a cryptic message from an 'other' universe? If we define the 'universe' as 'all there is' or 'all that exists', then it would seem that there can be only one universe. But if we define 'universe' as 'all we can ever see' then many universes may indeed exist as parallel, other or alternative universes. The brain is a complex organ where the interplay between the world of our senses and their effects comes into play. In 1909, the German biologist Jakob von Uexküll made the observation, which escapes most of us, that different animals in the same ecosystem tune in to different environmental signals. These are fundamental to their communication and signification. The small subset of the world which an animal is able to detect he described as its *umwelt*. A parallel universe perhaps?

Debbie Symons

Sing, 2019. Hand blown glass installation

Symons' techno-romantic works explore the concept of a parallel universe through the metaphor and fragility of the nest. Recently returning from a residency in the Amazon rainforest, Symons' was intrigued and fascinated by the precarious suspension of the yellow-rumped cacique nests, hanging above the surface of the flooded forest. The reflection of the birds' nests against the night sky in the waters below added to the otherworldliness of this vulnerable and conflicted place. Her nests hang from the gallery ceiling. Embedded within the fragility of their materiality and superimposing reflections of the night sky, they elude to undiscovered multiverses while also reflecting our own.

Tarja Trygg

Is anybody there? Solargraph, pin-hole image – pigment digital print
(Courtesy Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland).

‘Is anybody there?’ This is a question that humankind has been pondering over millennia as we gaze into the night sky with the knowledge that Earth is only one of a number of planets circling the Sun, a speck of dust in what we understand of the known universe. Finding a new habitable planet, or another universe beyond our own which might provide company, or a threat or an escape route from our own is still pure speculation. If humanity is set on a path of destruction is there another option? Trygg’s image suggests a place where no human traces are seen. Looking at the horizon takes thoughts somewhere far away, into a deep dream-like space about which, as yet, we have not enough information. (This image is a pin-hole photograph with an unbroken extended exposure captured over many months in a region of the northernmost municipality in Finland where seasons change rapidly during the year).

Michael Vale

The Red Triangle 2018, oil on linen.

Somewhere I heard and liked the term ‘avant-gothic’ which, for me, suggests a satiric pathway into the dark mysteries of life and death, where the separation between the ludicrous and the sinister is almost non-existent. I am interested in themes of the irrational, the impossible, and the indefinable narrative - the world that exists between our inner and outer experiences. This usually takes the form of volatile scenes inhabited by absurd and clown-like figures enacting mercurial moments of possibility in human affairs, a kind of sunset of the conscious mind. *The Red Triangle* is derived from an improvised composition that draws inspiration from James Ensors oft-used subject, a skeleton wearing a busby. Here this character smokes while discussing formalist painting or, perhaps, an ambiguous logo. Either way, there is no intended meaning other than a satiric rejection of the rational world.

(Michael Vale acknowledges Monash University Art, Design and Architecture)

Anne Wilson

Ghost in the Machine 2019 video

(Dancer: Charles Ball and thanks to Jaymis Loveday, ARS Electronica Australia & Australia Council for the Arts)

Where is cyberspace, the birthplace of the automated drone camera? A dancer measures time through movement while the drone eye, moving in real space measures time through algorithms. Binary codes. I became enamoured with the drone, affectionate towards its cute insect like form. Like some prosthetic device trying to find a home in flesh, the drone camera is an attention seeking device, ominously evoking emotions from us humans. We dance with it, at times like a sensual partner and at times as if a threat. In making ‘ghost in the machine’ I searched for its birth place, a parallel universe.

*In a way, technologies have negated the transcendental God in order to invent the machine-God. However, these two gods raise similar questions.*¹

¹ Cyberwar, God And Television: Interview with Paul Virilio; for c-theory

<https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14355/5131> accessed 16/3/19)

Parallel Universe

Imagining a parallel universe suggests that we look to the complex workings of the human brain, much of which still remain a mystery, in order to propose a parallel or different universe. The idea or experience of an imagined *other* is the subject of the artists in this exhibition. They create works which speak of an unfamiliar environment where a different way of thinking or seeing, a scientific hypothesis or a psychological state, could be extended beyond our sense of an immediate reality. We can and do experience what could be thought of as parallel universes in our mind, our dreams and imaginings. But what if beyond our dislocated dreams we could *sense* a parallel universe made possible because we could see more of the information which we cannot now see? A universe which another being might perceive but humans might not.

Few of us understand that the part of the electromagnetic spectrum which is available to us is a minute fraction of it. Our brains are tuned to detect an extremely small fraction of the surrounding reality. Different animals in the same ecosystem tune in to different environmental signals. These are fundamental to their communication and signification. The human sensorium is enough for us to get by in our own ecosystem, but it does not approximate the larger picture. So, the idea of a parallel universe also captures the idea of limited knowledge, of unobtainable information, and of unimagined possibilities which if experienced could be unsettling, mysterious, stimulating or enlightening in some way. We accept the reality of the world with which we're presented. But so much goes undetected in our lives. What would happen if we could go beyond the limits of our senses or our current imaginative possibilities? And what would this mean for planet Earth, a speck of dust floating in a vast and as yet unfathomable universe of possibilities? Would this endow us with the intellectual humility required to ensure the survival of life on our planet?

Fifty years ago on July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the Moon, breaking away from planet Earth to explore our only natural satellite. Since that time some of the mystery of the moon has been demystified. The feat of actual travel to the moon has become the new 'hero' story and has stimulated a fresh generation of science fiction addicts. All Earth-based study of the Moon has been limited by the fact that only one side of the Moon ever faces Earth. This has caused much speculation about what might be on the other side. Recently however space exploration has beamed back photos from the Moon's other side as human generated technologies penetrate further into space. There 'be no dragons there', and plenty of material for scientific research. However, the Moon is the largest and brightest object in our night sky and it continues to radiate an air of mystery, and to stimulate our curiosity, suggesting many associations and imagined experiences in the universe of our minds.

Dr Felicity Spear March 2019.

