

# Today I, Tomorrow You

Curated by Chloe Mandryk

12 March - 4 April 2020

Nishi Gallery

Canberra

**BYRD, MILLIE BLACK, MICHELLE DAY,  
SOPHIE DUMARESQ, RINALDO HARTANTO,  
RACHEL HOWIE, KEVIN ADRIAN MILLER,  
NIKKAYLA AND BERNADETTE SMITH**

**Today I, Tomorrow You** can be interpreted in myriad ways. The idea that change starts with us is a hopeful one but it requires a collective vision. It's not a new dichotomy; we live in the binary of rich and poor, protesters and power mongers, belief in science and fiction and the reality of life and death. Art is a beacon for questions and resoundingly the artists are asking us to pay attention. The significance of art sometimes greets us down the track with a knowing wink, but in these times the reflex is instant - this is about climate change.

## **EARTH**

'Glare' by Kevin Adrian Miller depicts the disappearance of trees in a series of photographs where their lush greenery is obscured by the glaring white hot heat of day. It's not hard to imagine this lens as smoke. The works are shot with reduced colour, and deliberately hung in bright light to make us squint and embody the experience where trees are out of sight.

Sophie Dumaresq asks us to consider the human impact on earth. Her land art installation took shape in the harsh windswept pastoral grasslands used for grazing livestock out by Lake George, New South Wales. Photographs, traces of female hair, and the metal tumbleweeds here in the gallery question how we document and relate to the land as a means of

(re)production. The pink hues are critical of the pesticide Roundup, containing Monsanto Glyphosate. Dumaresq reflects, 'our present day treatment of the land will not only have consequences in the future but are already happening and are here.'

## **WATER**

Bernadette Smith values water, not as a commodity but as a life force. Her work 'Encounter With Self and Other' appears as a protest banner for, and tribute to, water. Smith cites a range of climate issues such as rising sea levels and drought as reasons for creating this installation that implores us to see 'we are not separate from the non human world and our future survival is interlinked with the fate of other species and the biosphere.' Her circular prints try to wed the viewer to water through its aesthetic, an opalescent and sensuous form.

## **FIRE**

Artists, and the rest of us, ruminate on the physical world and our inner landscape. What lies there - anxiety, anger, a sense of being apart? Art can be a salve to this.

Michelle Day presents 'Tread Lightly' a delicate installation emblematic of the frenzied thought she and many feel at the state of the world. As the artist laments, 'everything is in fact moving faster, getting more ludicrous, less genuine, more vacuous and more

narcissistic'. In response to this she has crafted a symbolic cyclone, comprised of threads that carry plastic waste from five Canberra families who consider the weight of their daily impact on the planet. The material has been embalmed in road-marking beads and the ash from recent bushfires. Day explains, 'this installation looks to reflect on the turmoil and disharmony but also the fragility and care needed for our minds and ecosystem.'

On a similar wavelength, Rinaldo Hartanto describes his new body of work *'Archipelago of Fury'* as indicative of 'inherent collective anger in the human psyche' He harnesses the imagery of volcanic bodies, mythical figures and the notion of 'amok' (a word adopted into English after Captain Cook's encounter with angry mobs in the Malay Archipelago). The artist sees it is a metaphor for an 'insular state of mind.' As individuals, we live on our own island that is our headspace, carrying our private fire mountains.' The inclusion of boats and bridges expresses that hope is not lost, as together, humanity can channel the destructive force of amok.

'Hochsitz' by byrd is a towering sentinel made from cardboard with a small room atop that fits one person, though you can't enter. It is built as a hidden, elevated observation point. This comes from a body of works expanding from the contemplation of contemporary German land management practices - framed by the contentious Australian context. The 'ivory tower' reference of this work gestures to the 'wilding' of siloed thinking behaviours from the university sector to the political and public spheres. Following this exhibition the work will be installed in different environments to solicit fresh reaction, introspection and perhaps action from the viewer.

## AIR

Come up for air. It's like a breath of fresh air. Air it out. Some air will do you good. That brings us to the final element to consider, in order to help the planet we must put on our

'oxygen masks' first (I hope this isn't a literal action in the future). Millie Black, Rachel Howie and Nikkayla all prize the beauty of Mother Earth. Yes there is a bit of unease but they lead with hope.

Black celebrates the land in *'This Is Now'*, using its pigment and charcoal enacting a beautiful but haunting experience for the viewer with each painting representing atmospheric changes throughout the day. The blurred forms and limited detail suggest that smoke is encircling. She hopes the works will 'allow the viewer to connect with our surrounding environment and encourage a more harmonious relationship with the land.' Profits from the sale of the works will be donated to Nature Conservancy Australia for their work protecting Australia's land, water and wildlife.

Positively titled *'A Life Worth Living'* Rachel Howie works in a small scale to bring us closer (literally and symbolically) to a future more connected to the earth, where technology works with the earth, not against it. Nikkayla's lovingly rendered portraits of animals are also an act of wishful thinking, mapping the future she'd like to inhabit. The use of black and white paired with richly coloured works communicates her strong intuition about the planet and its creatures. She believes in splendour but also understands the horror animals can face. She says 'there is no grey area - this is happening. Yet I want to have positivity. There is so much negative in this world, I seek to have the positive shown, and I do this by showing in colour what it might be like if attitudes change by putting these few animals into a brighter, secure future. Only by changing ourselves can tomorrow be better for them - all of them, us included!'

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