



ANNA LOUISE RICHARDSON  
CURATED BY

HODA AFSHAR (VIC)  
BRUNO BOOTH (WA)  
HELEN BRITTON (GER/WA)  
MAX PAM (WA)  
KARRABING FILM  
COLLECTIVE (NT)  
BRUCE SLATTER AND  
NICOLE SLATTER (WA)  
VALERIE SPARKS (VIC)  
ANGELA TIATIA (NZ/NSW)  
JAMES WALKER (WA)  
IAN WILLIAMS (WA)

**PICA**  
PERTH INSTITUTE OF  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS

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**REFRACTED  
REALITY  
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PICA  
03.11.2020  
10.01.2021**

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Inside Image: Helen Britton, Australian Welcome, 2020. Image courtesy the artist.

Ground Floor Gallery

When electromagnetic light waves cross the boundary from one transparent medium to another they become refracted, and depending on their combination appear as different colours to the human eye.<sup>1</sup> Refraction is also responsible for the magnifying properties of glasses, cameras and microscopes and the natural optical phenomena of rainbows and mirages.

Our view is often altered by atmospheric forces; moisture, the mixing of cold and hot air, or the glass through which we are looking. Taking the window as a motif and metaphor, *Refracted Reality* presents the work of ten artists and collectives whose practices explore mediated truth, personal sovereignty, and the environmental upheavals that frame the Australian psyche. The works selected for this exhibition become the medium through which ideas pass and bend, echoing questions of privacy, representational fictions in a post-truth era, and a renewed interest in both the intimacy and constrictions of interior space.

At its simplest, a window is an opening that admits light or air and affords a view to both exterior and interior space. It is thought that many aspects of human health and wellbeing can be significantly improved by viewing nature through a window. Interestingly, a window tax was enforced in England until 1851 when it was repealed due to rapid urbanisation and overcrowding in cities that raised the spectre of epidemics.<sup>2</sup> Valerie Sparks' photographic wallpapers feature exquisite examples of introduced and native Australian flora that press larger than life against the images' window-like frames beyond which looms a background of stormy skies. Questioning the comfortable demarcation of inside and outside, the hyperreal and slightly threatening quality of the *Sanctuary* series presents the window as a weak point that makes us vulnerable by what it lets in.

For Bruce and Nicole Slatter the window is a peephole into seemingly mundane scenarios of suburban life. Rendered with disarming realism, their collaborative paintings set scenes that appear recently vacated. Here, there is a sense of deracination and uncertainty, of the familiar transposed into the unfamiliar, characteristic of Australian Gothic.<sup>3</sup> This discomfort in the view is carried over from European colonial history, where colonisers sought to shelter from a seemingly harsh and alien landscape.

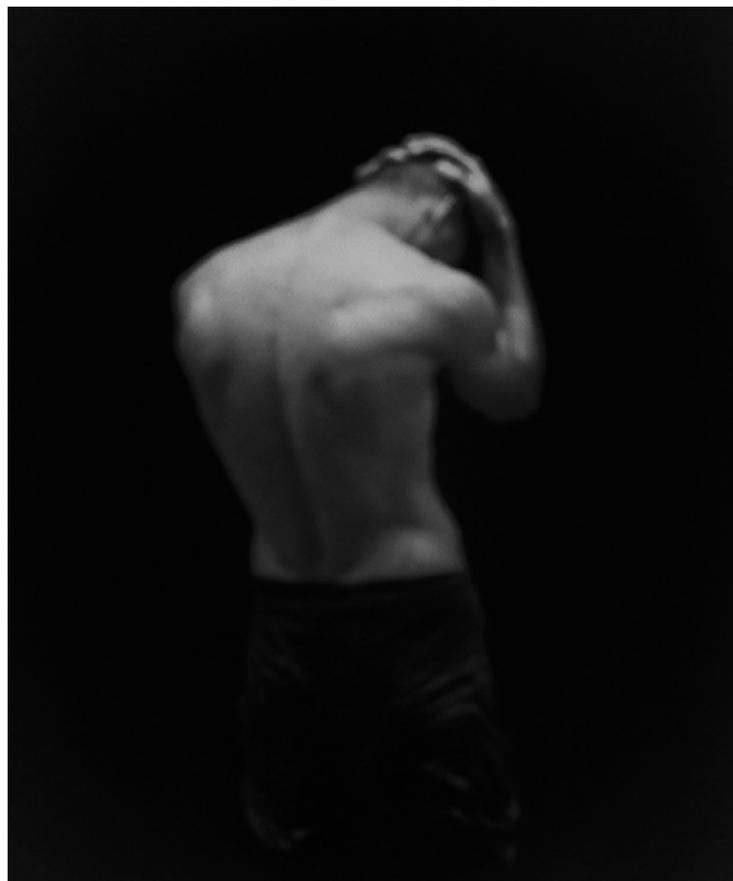
The ubiquitous digital screen is the modern window on the world – a mechanism through which a seeming totality can be accessed in a rapid and vivid spectacle of truths. As a means of observation, it appears to represent *the* truth, though more often it is a deceit. Ian Williams' still life compositions of washed out moulded forms are painted not from reality, but through the filter of video games. Sourced via a scouting exercise through digital landscapes, everyday items are selected and exported to create a vaguely familiar yet physically impossible choreography of objects. Glossy and reflective, the scenes present a reality that can never be experienced in real life.

“Screen time” has become the major pastime of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, offering anonymity and the capacity to magnify, switch off or simply stare at our own reflections. In Angela Tiatia's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (2019) a cast of 40 self-worshipping figures embroiled in individual acts of love and ritual coalesce into a shared human interest in survival of the self. Similarly mapping emotion as a photographic process, Max Pam's *The Sea of Love* (2020) is a semi biographical sampling of the zeitgeist of his lifetime between 1949 and now. As an expanded presentation of Pam's latest book, this work explores love and obsession in all its forms from the caprices of the popular despot to Pam's own deeply personal response to desire, family, connection and otherness.

Windows can also be internal portals, ones which can open our hearts through images that trigger memory. Bruno Booth's and James Walker's works offer an introspective visit to past times, often with family members who we can't be with or can only visit through the picture frame, camera lens or screen. Booth's reimagined ex-ambulance camper van in *New fossil, same molecules* (2020) offers a glimpse into childhood memory. A life-sized vehicle drawn on sheer fabric hovers precariously within arms-reach as if inviting audiences to open the back doors and jump into the ghost of a memory. Similarly evoking a timeless and sensorial journey, Walker's practice is deeply rooted in aviation, an occupation he shared with his father. The pair have a love of radio-controlled aircraft, having worked together as baggage handlers for Qantas and now separated by the ocean, connected only by the possibility of travel, a luxury once taken for granted. Australia's geographical existence as



# REFRACTED REALITY PICA 03.11.2020 10.01.2021



an island with eighty percent of the population living circled around the shore in an economic, historic, and environmental entrapment leaves us all vulnerable in times of turbulence or change.

A window is also an opportunity for action, especially within Australia, for the exclusion, dehumanisation, and death of vulnerable bodies out of view. Hoda Afshar's *Remain* (2018) is a collaborative photographic series, made with and documenting refugees Behrouz Boochani, Aref Heidari, Nemat Heydari, Emad Moradi, Shamindan Kanapadhi, Edris Nikghadam, Ramsiyar Sabanayagam, and Abdulmajid Tiben, who were unjustly detained on Manus Island, an island in Papua New Guinea that is used by the Australian Government as a de facto prison for asylum-seekers heading to Australia. Mandatory detention policies in Australia are amongst the harshest in the world, indefinitely punishing those without a visa in offshore facilities that are hidden from the media, unsustainable, inhumane and contrary to human rights. After the facility was forced to close in 2017 and following seven years of imprisonment, these men were left stateless, exiled in paradise yet continually tortured by the disturbing politics of Australia.

A different nightmare is reflected in Karrabing Film Collective's dystopian two channel video *Mermaids/Mirror World* (2018) which charts Western industrial toxicity and the lived experience of Indigenous people in Belyuen, a community on the Cox Peninsula in the Northern Territory of Australia. Mermaids, mud, the nightmare of colonialism, and environmental destruction are mixed together in this Aboriginal-futurist work. Karrabing Film Collective's work not only offers a window into the contemporary life and history of Indigenous peoples in Northern Australia it also mirrors the precarious state of our species and the planet.

Windows are metaphors for seeing, existing in the liminal plane between hiding within a sanctuary and confronting the world outside. Helen Britton's drawing, jewellery and sculptural series highlights ecological collapse as it examines the effects of Australia's worsening natural disasters. As an Australian citizen living and working in Germany, Britton channels deep sadness and anger at the siege laid on Australia's wildlife and the charred remains of a landscape that is globally seen as a biological sanctuary. A safety net for global ecological health, Australia's biodiversity is at

great risk. The reality of climate change and industrial growth coupled with policies such as Environmental Offset policies reduce what is left of the natural ecosystem to a market solution, whereby biodiversity destroyed by development and industry can be compensated for through ecologically equivalent gains elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> At some point very soon, there will be no more elsewhere. There is no insurance policy for the planet, making the role of the artist in making visible the chaos of the world, and asking who or what is made vulnerable in closing the window and pulling the blinds, more important than ever.

Anna Louise Richardson,  
Curator

<sup>1</sup> 'Refraction,' *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/science/refraction>.

<sup>2</sup> 'Window Tax,' UK Parliament, 2020, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/towns/tyne-and-wear-case-study/about-the-group/housing/window-tax>.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Tondorf, 'Lure and Does the coast have a place in the Australian gothic landscape?', Master's thesis, Southern Cross University, 2016, <https://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1563&context=theses>.

<sup>4</sup> 'EPBC Act environmental offsets policy,' Australian Government, Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2012, <https://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/epbc-act-environmental-offsets-policy>.

Images top to bottom:  
Bruce and Nicole Slatter, *Mujarr (Australian Christmas Tree)*, 2020. Image courtesy the artists. James Walker, *Precipice*, 2013. Image courtesy the artist. Hoda Afshar, *Portrait of Aref*, from the series *Remain*, 2018. Image courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.