



MEANWHILE

18 NOVEMBER — 28 JANUARY 2023



- 1 Julie Poulsen
- 2 Rose Rigley
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- 6 Barbara Dover

Image credit: Rose Rigley, Telling Tales, detail, 2022, enamel-coated copper wire. Photo: Michael Marzik.

“Celebrating the power of the collective creative experience, while bringing their own philosophical and personal frameworks to the themes of time and place.”

Andrea Huelin

JULIE POULSEN

Poulsen was born and educated in Brisbane, and grew up travelling formative localities including Papua New Guinea and the Gold Coast. She spent a year in Cooktown in 1977 prior to enrolling in a Diploma of Creative Arts in Toowoomba.

JENNIFER VALMADRE

Valmadre works primarily across mixed media encaustic painting, sculpture and ceramics. She holds post-graduate tertiary qualifications in art and has also lectured and mentored other artists extensively.

LOUISA ENNIS-THOMAS

Ennis-Thomas lives and works between Melbourne and Cairns in Far North Queensland. Her multi-disciplinary approach embraces the creative possibilities of painting, drawing and sculpture, blurring the boundaries in between.

ROSE RIGLEY

Rigley is based in Cairns and values the connection and collaboration that lecturing visual arts at TAFE Queensland (Cairns) provides, returning in recent years as part of the teaching team to the same campus where her own creative meanderings first started in 2011. She also now holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Curtin University and is undertaking a Bachelor of Education with the University of Tasmania.

RAEWYN BIGGS

Biggs is of Polynesian ancestry and this cultural heritage is a strong underlying thread throughout most of her work. She completed her Diploma of Visual Art in 2011 at Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE.

BARBARA DOVER

Dover is a Cairns-based contemporary artist whose multidisciplinary art practice primarily deliberates on the relationship between humans and animals, with the understanding of animals as sentient beings.



Image credits: *Meanwhile*,
installation view, NorthSite
Contemporary Arts, 2022.
Photo: Michael Marzik.

- 1 Barbara Dover and Jennifer Valmadre's (right wall) artworks
- 2 Julie Poulsen, installation view
- 3 Rose Ringley, *Telling Tales*
- 4 Raewyn Biggs, *Stranger in a Strange Land*
- 5 Jennifer Valmadre, *Bowls of Colour*
- 6 Louisa Ennis-Thomas, *Parasite (Clinging to the belly of the world)*

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Ask an artist why they choose to work alongside others – even if they don't really see them much, collaborate or socialise with them – and they may talk about a number of practical benefits. Important factors for many artists are the sense of shared endeavour, of community, of invisible moral support in what can be an emotionally fraught, physically challenging business involving sustained effort and will, often with unpredictable outcomes. The artists of *Sixfold Project* have devised a shared creative space like this, but it is not under the one roof. Indeed, it is not even in the same Australian state.

The six women met and began exhibiting together in Cairns, far north Queensland, but they are now working in their own studios, from various locations around Australia and New Zealand. Still, they benefit from this sense of working communally. Highly self-motivated, and prolific in their own careers, these mid-career artists don't seek coaching, banter, or comparing notes as they negotiate their place in the art world – they already have the runs on the board. They are professionals who have seen the benefit in connecting with each other and sharing their journeys towards their collaboratively determined goal, purely because of the energy and reinforcement of purpose that is created by their common, simultaneous striving. As they have shown in the past, the power of their collective artistic sensibilities is powerful indeed.

The latest exhibition by the artists of *Sixfold Project* – Barbara Dover, Louisa Ennis-Thomas, Rose Ringley,

Raewyn Biggs, Julie Poulsen and Jennifer Valmadre – is called *Meanwhile*, celebrating the power of the collective creative experience, while bringing their own philosophical and personal frameworks to the themes of time and place. New work for the exhibition has been created simultaneously by these artist colleagues, across disparate geographic locations.

The artists work in isolation but meet regularly via video connection to exchange thoughts and processes, and to seek candid responses; gradually refining and clarifying their intentions and experiments. The artists describe this process as an 'energising' opportunity to 'reject, reshape, reaffirm and renavigate their works through a shared creative process'. Their work includes painting, sculpture, photography and installation, with a variety of experimental mixed media, as is the group's usual multi-disciplinary approach. In each other, these individuals have recognised a similar work ethic, and a willingness to be fearless with their art making. Supported by each artist's simultaneous efforts, they contemplate their experiences and preoccupations, and seek to express their evolution.

For some of the *Sixfold Project* artists, these contemplations are biographical. As she often does in her work, Julie Poulsen began with an idea expressed in words, in this case a poem reflecting on her experience of time. The resulting paintings and assemblage fragments are joyful jumbles of beaches and bodies, pets and play – perhaps a

realisation that the act of collecting experiences through photographs, sketches and memories, and then giving them new life in her skilfully haphazard paintings is a beautiful way of experiencing life. Like so many memories or thoughts leading from one to another, her semi-abstract images seem to continue from panel to panel within the large diptych 'Meanwhile the beach is warm', with lines of stitching providing a visible manifestation of the intuitive process of resolving an artwork. Padded panels give a sensory dimension to the artworks, accentuating the assembled nature of the pieces.

Similarly, Rose Ringley began with a poem, written in the style of a fable, reflecting upon her family of origin. In her moving story about being a witness to the experience of victims of the Stolen Generation, Ringley contemplates ideas of connection, belonging, cruelty, kindness, strength and healing. The resulting sculptural pieces are organically shaped, tubular and transparent, crocheted from salvaged copper wire with what must have been no small degree of sustained physical exertion, determination and patience. As the artist says, 'These disembodied tongues... (are) an ongoing mantra to hope and a helpless penance to the challenge of an unchangeable past.' *Telling Tales* has a gentle poignancy that characterises Ringley's work.

For Raewyn Biggs, time and place were distorted by sudden illness in her family and international lockdowns, as she found herself

a stranger in an unfamiliar expat community within a foreign city – Auckland, New Zealand. For *Meanwhile*, Biggs presents large-scale photographic projections that place her within, but clearly outside her new environment with its seemingly welcoming, colourful shopfronts. In *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the artist portrays herself as a masked superhero figure, bravely landing in this new place that needs her, but she is unable to reveal her true identity.

Jennifer Valmadre's mastery of her mediums is such that she can break the rules and let her ideas be guided and influenced by the materials themselves as she pushes them to uncharted places. Her trust in her process and her resulting track record of extraordinarily original work has led to this new series, *Bowls of colour*, multiples of wall-mounted, semi-spherical forms made from casting plaster with nylon and fibreglass. The gelato-coloured concave surfaces have the inlaid techniques of encaustic painting, which contrast with the dark, nut-like shell on the convex side. The product of a long process of experimentation in colour theory and aesthetic conventions, this installation is highly original and intriguing.

Louisa Ennis-Thomas continues to experiment with form, texture and challenging materials in *Parasite (Clinging to the belly of the world)*: her speculative investigation of themes of exploitation and adaption. The textile installation is made up of more than 50 human-sized forms, cut and sewn from discarded agricultural sacks and suspended from the ceiling in an upside-down 'forest'. The open weave of the hessian brings to mind skin as well as bark, creating an unsettling sense that the forest might be natural, but it is clearly a human-made plantation of sorts, with the limp forms clinging to the ceiling in rows. The installation, which Ennis-Thomas describes as an exploration of 'our human desire to control, cultivate and harvest resources...and the global impacts this relentless preoccupation sets in motion', shows the curiosity and intellect that characterises her oeuvre.

In a magnificent synergy of ideas, Barbara Dover's new work *Reckoning* continues her career-long focus on the perils facing our environment, particularly animals who are caught up in the effects of a warming planet. The sculptural installation is foreboding exemplified: it takes the form of traffic safety cones formed from concrete, with found animal hair encased within, and protruding in places as if the animal was trapped in the form.

The contrast between the organic animal-derived materials and the brutal concrete delivers that sucker punch of heartfelt recognition that Dover does so well. Dark, pockmarked forms of bollards in the installation, *Sentinel*, bring to mind charred ruins, while porcelain safety lights in *Detour* suggest warning and threat.

Accompanying their individual bodies of work are two installations made in collaboration by all six artists. *Meanwhile* is a playful video showing footage from each of the artist's lives and working processes, giving environmental context to the artworks on show, and illustrating that the artists are simultaneously living different lives in different regions, with the connecting thread of creative progress towards the exhibition.

The installation in the Void space at the NorthSite Gallery is a collection of multiple artworks and objects that represent the creative development processes in each artist's studio. The installation is like stolen peeks through windows or curtain partitions into the artists' private studio workplaces, where there is evidence of the artists' trials and errors pinned to walls, laid out on the floor, or waiting for attention on easels. This is the scene of the artists' battle with their materials, processes and their own ambitions (and shortcomings) for the body of work they are focused on.

The Sixfold Project artists have circumvented the challenges of many mid-career artists, as well as those of artists living in isolated regional areas, by creating their virtual co-working space. Within this space, the artists have permission – indeed, more like an imperative – to be ambitious and to aim for excellence within their own practices. Working together, they have the confidence to go down the dark and sometimes scary path of the unknown, and to wrestle with materials and processes that might bring their ideas to light. In doing so, they are lifting the standard of contemporary art in their own regions by modelling determination and hard work, quality and professionalism to their fellow artists, their art students and mentees, their collectors and their gallery networks. Most importantly, their highly resolved and thoughtful artwork is adding to the visual language archive of human (and animal) experience; bringing us new ways to understand our world and ourselves.

Words by Andrea Huelin
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