

MISFIT

COLLAGE AND QUEER PRACTICE



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The National Art School is delighted to present Queer Contemporary 2020 – a vibrant program of exhibitions, salon events, talks and workshops. Presented in partnership with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, Queer Contemporary transforms the National Art School into the Mardi Gras hub for queer art and visual culture.

The centrepiece of this year's program is the original exhibition Misfit: Collage and queer practice. Bringing together eleven Australian and international artists working in diverse media, Misfit looks at how queer artists use the creative power of collage to deconstruct social and political narratives.

I would like to thank all the artists for their enthusiasm and commitment to Misfit, with special thanks to Tony Albert, Brian Fuata, Del Lumanta and Sarah Rodigari who developed new works for the exhibition. I also extend deep appreciation to artist Gary Carsley for his ambitious and innovative new work made in collaboration with four NAS students.

In addition to this exhibition guide, I encourage you to take a Queer Contemporary brochure to discover our wider offering of critical and stimulating events as part of Mardi Gras 2020. Happy Mardi Gras!

Steven Alderton
Director and CEO, National Art School

MISFIT: COLLAGE AND QUEER PRACTICE

The theme of this exhibition emerged from simple questions: Is there such a thing as queer art, and what does it look like? Do queer artists have a distinct approach, a way of working, an angle of attack? Misfit proposes the sometimes explosive, sometimes gentle but often world-changing impulse towards rearrangement as a common element of queer art practice.

What is exceptional about the queer experience of not fitting is its pervasive character: from an early age, queers can present an unwelcome rearrangement to the structural order of school, community and family. In adolescence, they tend to be scrutinised: Will they properly straighten, or will they fall sideways? This encourages acts of masking and passing; queers learn to unbend the contours of their selves for their own social and sometimes physical survival. In this relentless effort at adaptation, identity becomes an unstable concept.

Queer people can experience identity as montage, bricolage, assemblage and collage. In a state of misfitting, identity is inclined to shift and be prone to reinvention. The queer art of drag is pure collage. It is one body layered atop another. Drag mocks our expectations for alignment – for one body to seamlessly and permanently occupy one gender. It proudly exaggerates the points of misalignment and the performative nature of the gender construct. In drag, two never quite become one, and this is the point.

Collage challenges the unit, that violent tool of empirical measurement framing all of our cultural and economic systems. It unsettles boundaries and confuses distinctions. It subverts the traditional unitary ambitions of the artwork by cutting up the picture plane and juxtaposing competing perspectives. Collage repulses the recessive gaze that tries to single out, isolate and corner. Its effect tends to be all over and all at once – meaning is scattered, and value is redistributed.

In Queer Phenomenology (2006), Sara Ahmed suggests that being channelled into a specific kind of life 'presses' on the body: 'We are pressed into lines, just as lines are the accumulation of such moments of pressure.' These invisible guides keep us on a certain track; they are also directly embodied – to hold oneself straight is to be in line with gender and sexual norms. The eleven artists in Misfit deviate from these lines. They cut into and across them, diffusing their directional pull. As Paul Yore's tapestry announces – a comic play on boy band One Direction – there is 'NO DIRECTION'.

The works in Misfit show the many forms through which Ahmed's lines press on us. In the practices of Brian Fuata and Sarah Rodigari, for instance, it is often the press of language; for Del Lumanta, the press of sound; and in the work of Guanyu Xu, it is the press of the family line. Each artist in the exhibition uses collage to divert these disciplining structures. In doing so, they create ambivalent spaces of madness and magic, where misfit is the only possible designation.

Scott Elliot
Curator



Tejal Shah, Lucid Dreaming IV, 2013, collage, digital print on archival rag paper, 21 x 33 cm. Courtesy and © the artist and Project 88, Mumbai

NATIONAL ART SCHOOL

14 February – 14 March 2020

Misfit: Collage and queer practice
Curated by Scott Elliot
Rayner Hoff Project Space

Part of Queer Contemporary
14 February – 14 March 2020
Gallery open Mon–Sat, 11am–5pm
Fridays in February until 10pm



Cover: Guanyu Xu, Windows of the Worlds (detail), 2019, archival pigment print, 100 × 125 cm. Courtesy and © the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York

Three-part performance by Brian Fuata Rayner Hoff Project Space	Apparitional charlatan \ minor appearances along the wall, 2020	Part 1: Fri 14 Feb, 7pm Part 2: Fri 21 Feb, 6pm Part 3: Sat 22 Feb, 2pm
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Misfit is dedicated to all our queer siblings who bring humour, compassion and sparkle to the world in the face of grave oppression. We acknowledge the struggles of queer forbears who fought for equality in Australia. Most important, we pay our respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation on whose sacred land this exhibition takes place.

EXHIBITION NOTES

TONY ALBERT ^{NSW}

Tony Albert enacts the violence of the colonial gaze by cutting into postcards and illustrations depicting Aboriginal people. In the Atypical collages, Albert slices up imagery of generalised Aboriginal lifestyles found in vintage schoolbooks. He recomposes the fragments into geometric patterns that reference the clan designs of his Girramay and Kuku Yalanji people of Far North Queensland. In the OUTlandish series, these designs are cut into paper postcards to leave gaping holes. On some postcards, he carefully excises faces and bodies. Albert’s gestures of incision have many meanings: they can refer to acts of wounding and erasure, and to a selective vision that registers monocultural stereotypes instead of complex – and potentially queer – human subjects. By deleting or fragmenting the iconic ‘black’ focus of his material, Albert undoes reductive representations of Aboriginal people and takes control of the narrative of ‘othering’.

OUTlandish (1–9) 2020
Atypical (1–28) 2020
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SULLIVAN AND STRUMPF, SYDNEY
Gay Your Life Must Be 2008
PRIVATE COLLECTION

ARCHIE BARRY ^{VIC}

Bum TV is an early explorative work in the practice of Archie Barry. Fragments of footage are collaged onto the artist’s body in a deliberately home-spun spanking video. Pulling from material freely available on the internet, Barry explores ‘how gender and sexually diverse lives are celebrated, questioned and oppressed in accessible public archives’. Footage of

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See the NAS Queer Contemporary program of exhibitions, events, talks and workshops: nas.edu.au/queer-contemporary-2020

ambiguity of a queer position. Embedded in this multivalent work is the narrative of the cruising ground, a space of queer gathering that is audaciously outside, but (usually) dependent on camouflage – the cover of night and impenetrable undergrowth.

Outside 2020 – GARY CARSLY WITH FERGUS BERNEY-GIBSON, BEA BUCKLAND-WILLIS, ELIZA GWYNNE, ISAAC SPIGELMAN
YOWL (For All Our Queer Ancestors) 2017

BRIAN FUATA ^{NSW}

In a three-part performance, Brian Fuata channels the ‘apparitional charlatan’, a spirit figure that imbibes fragments from its environment. Fuata’s structured improvisations are spontaneously executed but deeply researched. For Misfit, he looks into the history of the Wall, a once-notorious site of gay prostitution that stretched along the external Darlinghurst Road side of the Rayner Hoff Project Space. Assuming the amorphous shape of the ghost, Fuata draws on eight windows embedded high within the Wall. For Fuata, the ghost-act is a means of neutralising the body, turning it into an absorbent surface for the accumulation of language, histories and textual matter. Freely collaging this material, Apparitional charlatan excretes disorienting new narratives where meaning is endlessly reformed.

Apparitional charlatan \ minor appearances along the wall 2020

DEBORAH KELLY ^{NSW}

Venus, Roman goddess of love and classical icon of sexual desire, is a recurring motif in recent works of Deborah Kelly. In her collages, the goddess is invoked in countless guises: insect–plant–human–animal–sculpture–mongrel–bastard. Unlike traditional portrayals of Venus, Kelly’s goddess is rarely still and never recumbent; she is always poised to fight, take flight or metamorphose. Kelly reclaims a subject that has for millennia been framed by the hands, eyes and appetites of heteropatriarchy. This teasingly mercurial Venus does not offer herself up to the gazes of men. If she is to be grasped by anyone, as in Armed Venus, it’s by a woman (with luscious red nails).

Kelly’s impossibly hybrid forms torment idealised versions of the female body and upend any understanding of queerness as a perversion of the natural order. For Kelly, monstrousness is something to revel in. Her bestial figures emanate magisterial splendour – rather than expunged from nature, they are its magical embodiment.

FROM THE ONGOING SERIES
Greater Venus Variations – The Sower 2017
Venus of Beeness 2017
Venus as a Boy 2017
Die of Love (1) 2017
Armed Venus 2017

DEL LUMANTA ^{NSW}

In Parade Fatigue, Del Lumanta positions the listener between two speakers and two aural worlds – one drawn from alternative queer club culture, the other from popular gay anthems and Mardi Gras parade broadcasts. Experiencing a collage of warped and original sound bites in real-time, the listener is made to grapple for orientation. Lumanta creates an uneasy scenario of in-betweenness, prompting us to consider how we associate with queer culture in its less and more recognisable forms. Floor markers direct the movement of the audience in a loop between the speakers, sending them on a march and at the same time demarcating the space of a dancefloor. Parade Fatigue draws our attention to spaces of queer gathering and the ever-growing site of ‘the party’, asking how they can remain radically inclusive when co-opted as tools for capital.

Parade Fatigue 2020

SARAH RODIGARI ^{NSW}

Collaging words and phrases from found texts and conversations, Sarah Rodigari plays with and undermines the controls of language. The words engraved in Heavy Lifting represent a collage that teases out the paradox of the queer institution. With this site-specific sculpture, Rodigari directs our attention to the traces of institutional history at the National Art School. Positioned before the original stone walls of Darlinghurst Gaol (c. 1841), the sculpture sits within a larger collage of textual engravings: blocks of sandstone set in the walls carry inscriptions by the prisoners who cut them. This was a system of keeping count – once a quota was reached, the prisoner would be pardoned. Each block effectively paved one person’s path to freedom while imprisoning another. Rodigari highlights here the circular operation of institutional power, which relies on the binary forces of detainment and release, exclusion and inclusion. She also reminds us that homosexuality was a criminal offence in New South Wales until 1984: the title Heavy Lifting can allude not only to the queer incarcerated, but to the multigenerational burden of marginalisation.

Heavy Lifting 2020

TEJAL SHAH ^{INDIA}

Tejal Shah’s Between the Waves series presents an expansive vision of an indefinite queer universe. In Landfill Dance (part two of a five-channel video installation) seven humanoid figures participate in choreographed and vaguely ritualised activities on the crown of a towering rubbish dump. Wearing sci-fi costumes with recycled adornments, they appear to have emerged out of the refuse or resettled there. The edges of the dump are ever-present – we are aware these creatures occupy a marginal space, just outside the bounds of urban society.

Landfill Dance speaks to the possibility of a queer utopia – one that is incompatible with capitalism, but absurdly subsists off and regenerates its dystopic piles of waste. Shah’s multimedia collages also reveal the emergence of life in hostile environments. Outer and Lucid Dreaming IV show a pair of unicorn figures embarking on a visionary journey across saltpans. Richly symbolic, with several esoteric and mythological references, the Between the Waves series imagines a radically reordered, post-apocalyptic world of enigmatic sensuality and fecund potential.

Between the Waves (Channel II, Landfill Dance) 2012
Lucid Dreaming IV 2013
Between the Waves (Outer) 2012
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PROJECT 88, MUMBAI

TYZA STEWART ^{QLD}

Tyza Stewart’s art practice is an evolving self-portraiture project. In 2013, using a Tumblr blog called a photo of me everyday,* the artist shared daily screenshots taken from their laptop. These images typically showed Stewart’s face collaged onto found bodies, often plucked from other Tumblr sites. Sometimes made using Photoshop, or through the arrangement of open files and folders on the desktop, the Screenshot collages explore the artist’s youthful idealisation of masculinity and homosexuality. Dragging files into alignment or letting them fall randomly, the seemingly careless ease with which Stewart constructs new versions of themselves counters the challenging reality of evading gender categorisation. Stewart used the Screenshot collages as studies for the paintings Untitled and Field of Untitle. These works have a different emotional register, with tender inflections of the brush smoothing out disjunctive edges. They are both projections and manifestations of the unbounded self.

* dByza.tumblr.com
Screenshot Collages 2013
Untitled 2014
Field of Untitle 2012

GUANYU XU ^{CHINA/USA}

In Temporarily Censored Home, Guanyu Xu disorders the organised space of his middle-class family home. He documents collage installations made up of his own professional and personal images – portraits of lovers, landscapes, travel snaps – along with family photographs and magazine clippings. Created while his parents were out of their Beijing apartment, each installation is a brazen articulation of his queer self. Images of Xu’s new life in America, where he has lived since 2014, collide with the extracts from Western magazines he privately savoured as an adolescent. This exposes the disjuncture between his early aspirations and lived experience: while the West once promised exciting plurality, in America Xu encountered new forms of cultural,

political and racial hegemony. Inside the apartment, Xu collapses these strands of experience into a non-linear self-portrait. His sprawling collages create a spatial poetry – blocking doorways, partly covering windows and filling unlocked closets. They become metaphors for the ongoing negotiation of living a life in the open. This is reiterated by Xu’s final act – disassembling the installations before his parents came home to find them.

FROM THE SERIES
Temporarily Censored Home – Space of Mutation 2018
Behind My Door 2018
The Dining Room 2018
Windows of the Worlds 2019
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND YANCEY RICHARDSON GALLERY, NEW YORK

PAUL YORE ^{VIC}

The teeming textiles of Paul Yore deploy collage to maximum effect. They are cauldrons of contemporary chatter, refuse, imagery and expletives. Ejaculating penises are as much a reference to the ubiquity of pornography as to the hollow moralising of politicians and the excesses of Australia’s colonial-occupier culture. In his large-scale tapestry Mother Tongue, Yore mockingly alerts us to the language of the modern world, where the words ‘free’, ‘erection’, ‘faggot’ and ‘fuck’ jostle among lurid cartoon characters and teenage pop stars. Mixing laborious traditional needle-work techniques with found scraps and recycled goods, Mother Tongue is at once ravishing and repellent. It is reminiscent of the expulsion paintings of Hieronymus Bosch or Pieter Bruegel’s carousing crowd scenes. Yore’s life-size soft sculptures Backflip and I am Not You set two irredeemable characters on the loose. They force a confrontation with the basest of public acts – skewering the falsehoods of our contemporary society, which accepts certain appalling behaviours while being intolerant of others. Although Yore consistently foregrounds society’s loss of innocence, he defiantly imbues his work with what he calls ‘sequin-clad gay frivolity’, pointing to the generative and healing potential of queer culture.

Mother Tongue 2017
I Am Not You 2018
Backflip 2018

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