



# *DIRT*

Group exhibition

**Stala Contemporary**

14 October - 4 November 2023

A group exhibition featuring artists:

Barbara Bolt (WA)

Patrizia Biondi (NSW)

Stephen Brameld & Jay Staples (WA)

Jenny Gilbertson (WA)

Kathryn Haug (WA)

Lindsay Harris (WA)

Eric Hynynen (WA)

Nicholas Imms (DNK)

Johnny K (NSW)

Lauren Kennedy (WA)

James Lai (NSW)

Jarrad Martyn (VIC)

David Usher (QLD)

This exhibition *DIRT* serves as a metaphorical canvas for land/terrain/place/ground which aims to delve into the profound connection between artists and the earth; the surface that inspires and unites them.

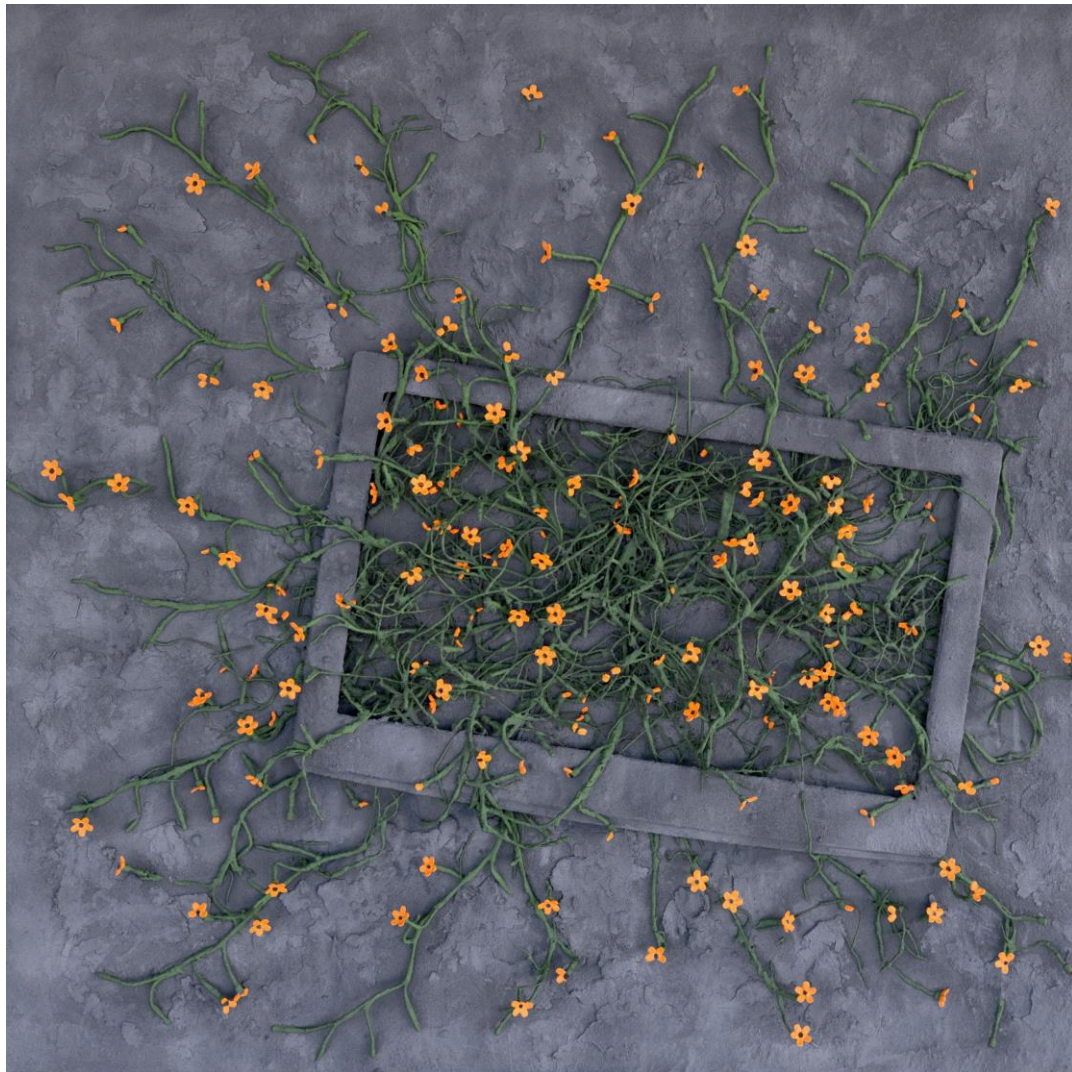
Whether the invited artists draw inspiration from the raw wonder of the natural world, the rich cultural heritage bound within the soil, the ecological complexities of a changing world or the human condition as a response, their contribution to *DIRT* will be an integral part of a collective conversation about the landscapes we inhabit and the stories they tell.



*Paperbark* Kathryn Haug (WA) 2023 oil on board 60 x 91cm \$2950



*Uncanny Valley* Barbara Bolt (WA) 2023 watercolour and digital print on archival paper (left panel: digital print on Canson Infinity 300gsm -  
right panel: watercolour on Saunders Waterford 300gsm) diptych (framed) 43.5 x 87.5cm \$1850



*Bloom Again* Eric Hynynen (WA) 2023 earth, cement, found objects, acrylic and enamel on canvas 130 x 130cm \$5000



*Desert Poem* Eric Hynynen (WA) 2023 Kalgoorlie sand and polyurethane on canvas 110 x 110 x 14cm \$5000



*Dirtscape* Lindsay Harris (WA) 2023 pigment and resin on hemp (framed under clarity glass) 81.5 x 105cm \$3300



*Stacked Form Standing*

Nicholas Imms (DNK)

2023

smoked oakwood on plywood base

37 x 19 x 6.5cm

\$2300





*Adobe (window with chilli ristras, agave & cross)* Jenny Gilbertson (WA) 2023 porcelain slip over BRT 21 x 17.5 x 8cm diam. \$795



*Tsankawi*

Jenny Gilbertson (WA)

2023

porcelain slip over BRT

16.5 x 9.5cm diam.

\$650



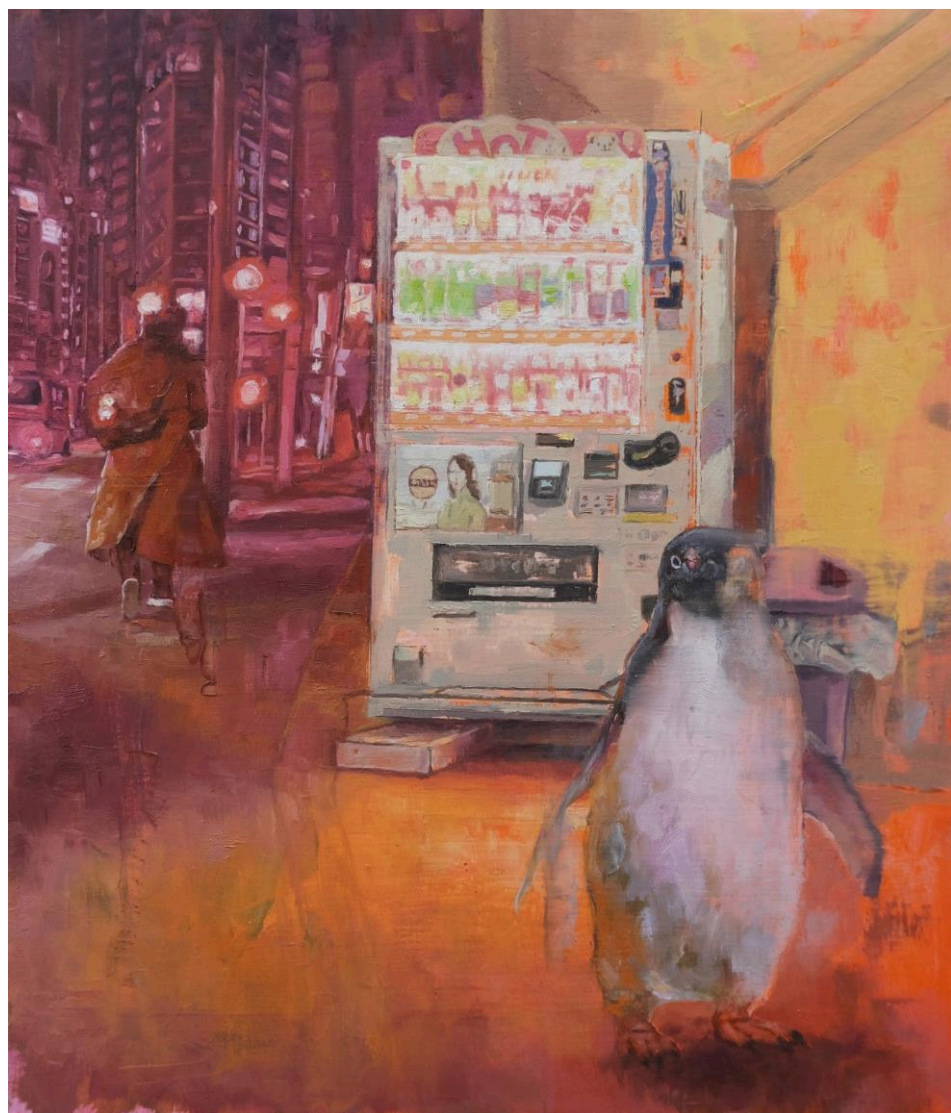
*Arizona dreaming* Jenny Gilbertson (WA) 2023 porcelain slip over BRT, 16.5 x 12.5cm diam. \$650



*Homage to Georgia O'Keefe – Black Cross with Stars and Blue* Jenny Gilbertson (WA) 2023 porcelain slip over BRT + copper 17.5 x 9.5cm diam. \$650



*My Last Breath 1* Patrizia Biondi (NSW) 2023 recovered glass objects, recovered crystal chandelier parts, recovered plastic plumbing, recovered removalist trolley tyre, glass frit, recovered banksia pods burnt in the 2019/2020 bushfires on Mount Banks NSW 80 x 50 x 27cm \$2200



*Displaced Glow* Jarrad Martyn (VIC) 2023 oil on board 27 x 23cm \$1200



*Mirounga 2* Jarrad Martyn (VIC) 2023 oil on board 28 x 23cm \$1200



*I Love a Sunburnt Country* Jarrad Martyn (VIC) 2022 oil on board 28 x 24cm \$990





*Rolling in the Mud* Stephen Brameld & Jay Staples (WA) 2023 acrylic on board (framed) 122 x 123cm \$3000



*I love the smell of fresh air* Johnny K (NSW) 2023 oil, house paint & aerosol on board (framed) 90 x 90cm \$3400



*Bury me Deep (in the dreams of dirt)*

David Usher (QLD)

2023

oil on canvas

60.5 x 76cm

\$1600



*Paddocks trees and vines*

James Lai (NSW)

2023

acrylic on canvas, Tasmanian oak floating frame

60 x 80cm

\$1850



*Recording Time*

Lauren Kennedy (WA)

2023

ochre, ink, acrylic and water-soluble wax crayon on linen

150 x 207cm

\$4400

What is our relationship to dirt? *Dirt* is a shape shifter. It is strife. It has a way of insinuating itself into every nook and cranny making and leaving its mark. It gets between our toes and under our fingernails, dirties our faces and sullies our clothes. It is the grit on the floor that drives us mad. Dirt is, it seems, something that needs to be “controlled” and yet dirt makes our world. Dirt is both earth and world – the raw material of our world and the formed matter that is our world.

In our everyday understanding, earth or dirt is seen as that amorphous mass upon which, and out of which humans create their world. This is particularly true in a “natural resource” rich country such as Australia. In this instrumentalist understanding of the world, where everything (including humans) is considered as a resource to be used as a means-to-an-end; earth is considered as brute mute matter available to be extracted and moulded by humans into “useful” things for human beings. What then can art do where *everything* has become a resource?

I want to put it another way. Earth is the potential and possibility that enables different worlds to emerge. It is the dynamic and creative force of possibility. This is the dirt of art. The role of the artist is to work dirty to create strife. Here strife is not figured as a destructive force as commonly understood. In art to create strife, is to produce ambiguity and polyvalence to enable us to go beyond ourselves. Strife is to set in motion so that it can remain strife ... and there is strife aplenty in this exhibition<sup>1</sup>.

We encounter strife in the painting of Johnny K. Here a landscape painting made with oil, house paint and aerosol is titled, *I love the smell of fresh air*. Meanwhile Eric Hynynen has repurposed fairy lights to become blooming flowers in *Bloom Again* while Stephen Bramfeld and Jay Staples are rolling in mud with acrylic on board. In contrast, Lindsay Harris' *Dirtscape* and Lauren Kennedy's *Dirt* just give us dirt in a its grounded and resonating form, as if to say: Is it happening?

And here we behold Patrizia Biondi taking one last breath with her extraordinarily fragile assemblage of recovered objects bearing witness to the cataclysmic bushfires of 2019/2020. The fragility of this work talks to Jarrad Martyn's cry *I love a sunburnt country*. Here the conversation between artworks offers us a stark reminder of what is at stake for the earth and the world.

There is a critical dialogue too between the virtual and the real playing across this exhibition. James Lai's *Paddock, Trees and Vines* takes on the quality of textiles while Kathryn Haug's *Paperbark* becomes paperbark. Here a painting is not just a painting; it becomes the thing-in-itself as does David Usher's *Bury Me Deep (in the dreams of dirt)*. The haunting of the virtual emerges when elements in juxtaposition don't quite stack up, as in Barbara Bolt's *Uncanny Valley*. On the other hand, however, Nicholas Imms' *Stacked Form Standing* does stack up, but instead plays with our affections and our perceptions – what is figure – what is ground?

And so we return to the ground, the earth and to dirt in its more literal sense. In her ceramic works, Jenny Gilbertson shows us that dirt is never mute nor is it merely the substrate for human actions. The pots that we see before us are not merely the work of the artist but have emerged from a complex collaboration with the earth—earth, water, air and fire. She notes that, ‘working with clay is a great leveller. It is never finished until it has passed through its final ordeal by fire.’ This is what art *is*. An ordeal by fire. It is strife-making.

**Dr Barbara Bolt**

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<sup>1</sup> I draw on Martin Heidegger's discussion of “strife” as the dynamic that is created between world and earth in the creation of the work of art in the essay, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’. See Heidegger, M. *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, pp. 139-212.

*STALA Contemporary would like to acknowledge the continuing strength and culture of the Nyoongar Whadjuk people, traditional custodians of the land we stand on and offer our respects to Elders past, present and future.*



## **An independent commercial gallery space dedicated to contemporary art**

Stala Contemporary has exhibited and advocated for contemporary artists since 2006 across five gallery locations in Perth, WA.

Director Sherri Staltari is passionately committed to presenting a dynamic and diverse range of Australian and international artists' work through a monthly program of exhibitions and projects. Stala Contemporary is now open in its newly renovated gallery premises at 11 Southport St, West Leederville.



**Stala Contemporary**  
**ART GALLERY + PROJECTS**

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