

NO ONE PERSON CAN OWN THE LANDSCAPE: REBIRTH AT BUNDANON

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On a bend along the Shoalhaven River songline, an art museum sits imbedded in the hill. The new gallery sits on the 1000-hectare site gifted to the Australian public by artist Arthur Boyd in 1993, alongside the original 1866 homestead, the late artist's studio and collection. Most revered for his landscape painting, it is unsurprising that Boyd was himself a passionate environmentalist. Aside from housing his collection, the newly launched art museum perpetuates this legacy of landcare in its very fabric.

Kerstin Thompson's architecture has embraced the hill, with only the front facade exposed. This, alongside geothermal climate control, reduces the exorbitant environmental impact of stabilising conditions that such a museum requires. The buildings on the site are responsive to their environment: defensive against bushfires, which came within just one kilometre of the collection in the summer of 2019–20, and flood. The neighbouring accommodation and creative learning centre, the Bridge, is modelled on trestle flood bridges. It straddles the gully to allow the swelling Shoalhaven to flow beneath.

This is the creative landscape which so influenced Boyd, and it is his drawing practice which provides the starting point for the museum's first show, 'From impulse to action'. All but two of the 14 artists conceived their works in residence, inspired by the very landscape which Boyd loved, and forming a celebration of Bundanon as an important site of cultural production that has existed for millennia.

It is perhaps outside the box for an inaugural display at a place so closely associated, and indeed borne of, Boyd's legacy. Prior to my visit, I did won-

der at how Chief Executive Officer Rachel Kent, with decades of experience as a contemporary curator, would approach Boyd's influence, which I associate more closely with modernism than contemporary art. 'Boyd was a contemporary artist in his day,' says Kent.¹

What some may not realise is that, while Boyd's artistic bequest is front and centre, Bundanon is in fact a national cultural institution under the auspices of the Australian Government, the first to be situated in the regions. The museum's opening show, rather than a predictable collation of Boyd landscapes, bridges the gap from one artist's enduring impact to contemporary cultural establishment.

Interspersed between Boyd's works on paper are a series of commissions which speak to the generations of artmaking which have taken place on the Bundanon site. The first work is Boyd's *Figure, baby and ram* (1965–70), immediately setting a precedent for themes of birth, knowledge transfer and renewal. Uncle Steve Russell (Bidjigal) and Auntie Phyllis Stewart (Yuin/Dharawal) have contributed to two works in the exhibition which foreground traditional making techniques and look to share this knowledge with future generations. Russell worked with the young men of the local Gadhungal Murring saltwater people to produce fish traps and nawi (canoes).

In a collaboration with Russell and Stewart titled *700 bowls* (2021), Dean Cross (Worimi) 'rematerialises' an entry from the list of provisions on the First Fleet in a participatory project. That list included precisely the number of items in the artwork's title, but the colonisers need not have bothered – First Nations technologies made objects such as these readily available. As



Top:
From impulse to action, exhibition installation view, with the work of Dean Cross and Arthur Boyd, Art Museum, Bundanon, 2022; photo: Zan Wimberley

Bottom:
Dean Cross with Uncle Steve Russell and Aunty Phyllis Stewart, *700 bowls*, 2021, detail; natural fibres and shelving; courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery, Sydney and Singapore; photo: Zan Wimberley



part of the exhibition, visitors are invited to join weaving workshops and contribute their first bowl to the installation. At the opening, the space was a void, empty of knowledge, but slowly has filled as these skills have passed on.

Kaitlen Wellington's large-scale text works contemplate the intergenerational legacy of the trauma of colonisation. A young Yuin woman, Wellington couples powerful prose with sound components – clapsticks, vocals, nowra (black cockatoo) and gadu (the ocean) – conveying the artist's confusion, denial and the recovery of historical wounds.

Emily Parsons-Lord captures another experience of grief through transforming materials. As a child, the artist visited Bundanon regularly with her mother, who recently passed away. Parsons-Lord

revisits her memory of the site and her mother in *Every essence of your beloved one is captured forever* (2021) by taking charcoal from the bushfire-affected trees and her mother's ashes, subjecting them to a process that accelerates more than one billion years of geological force and heat to produce two diamonds. With such compelling conceptual work and intent, 'From impulse to action' forges a connection between artists past, present and future.

1. In conversation with the author on a visit to Bundanon, 14 February 2022.

Curated by Sophie O'Brien, 'From impulse to action' is on display at Bundanon's Art Museum, Illaroo, until 12 June 2022.

Top:

Emily Parsons-Lord, *Every essence of your beloved one is captured forever*, 2021, installation view, 'From impulse to action', Art Museum, Bundanon, 2022; single-channel video with stereo sound, steel, charcoal sourced from Bundanon, manufactured diamonds; photo: Zan Wimberley

Bottom:

Kaitlen Wellington, *True reflections*, 2021, detail; paint, acrylic, stereo sound; photo: Zan Wimberley

