

STATION

What does a shadow feel like?

– Ellinor Pelz

A shadow follows you; it is you and it is not. A shadow coerces light to the periphery as it consumes the volume of darkness cast by your physical presence. It hovers insistently to veil meandering thoughts, memories, secrets, and histories – elusive, but willing. The exhibition *what a shadow feels like* negotiates the awareness and loss of being. It dismantles the experience of space to create one made by resemblance – a shadow.

what a shadow feels like brings into dialogue works by five contemporary artists – Daniel Boyd, Heather B. Swann, Dean Cross, Nell and Brent Harris – that explore the poetic and the political. The included works intervene with the body's path to shift perceptions, test psychological states and explore phenomenological observations. In this exhibition, a shadow is used as a metaphor for destabilisation and awareness; clarity and ambiguity; that which is lost and found.

More volts, more volts!

Only light can efface the fears of evening. Like a confused moth flurrying to a light source, sometimes we find ourselves stumbling through the night, longing to arrive at the flicker of illumination we see at the end of a windy road. Akin to a warm lamp reflecting prolonged waiting, Nell's staggering *Made in the light – drip, 0* 2011 & 2022, neon raindrops are installed on the façade of the Gallery to lead us to shelter with a gentle hello. Making permanent what is a fleeting existence, Nell's raindrops highlight the minuscule occurrence of a single drop journeying through the sky that later collides into a puddle. In an acknowledgment of mortality and impermanence, Nell's practice investigates the complex relationships of duality and opposition.

In mind of beginning and endings, Nell's paintings read and are titled: *I KNOW why i STAYED 2020* and *I KNOW why i LEFT 2020*. Radiating with determination, the artist's use of affirmative language and energetic bursts of gold reflect the 'lightning bolt' moment of realisation that encourages growth and change. Floating above the pair like a guiding halo is *Little Ghost 2020*, a gentle blue ghost making an empathetic 'ooh' expression as it watches the duality of emotions play out beneath. Here the artist reflects upon the roles and interconnection of relationships to places, spaces, people and the self. Through light and dark, together and alone, fire and water, joy and sadness, Nell's works remind us of what it means to be human in a fleeting, beautiful and complicated world.

truth is built every day from this melancholy

When true darkness arrives, shadows fold together and details are lost. Suggestion endures and memories are negotiated until histories become reconfigured moments. With a mind approaching doubt, the likeness of what is remembered in the daylight drifts further into a sequence of assemblage and collapse. This denial of completeness is explored by Daniel Boyd, a Kudjla/Gangaluman from North Queensland, and North Pentecost Island in Vanuatu. Interrogating legacies of colonisation and the repatriation of displaced histories, Boyd's practice mediates the indication and presentation of the lost.

Untitled (S -37.844071, E 144.995611) 2022, transforms the gallery's glass entrance door into a moveable threshold of interference. Scaled with a myriad of circular lenses cut from black vinyl, Boyd's two-way installation fractures one's line of sight to the 'other side', creating moments of focus and distortion that reflect upon the erosion and erasure of memory.

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In accompaniment, Boyd's silent composite video *Quiver*, 2020, projects a flickering cosmos across a wall in a gestural dance of light, colour and movement, shifting between revealing and concealing. With shimmering resonance, Boyd's immersive video cycles a momentum of trembling breaths, like shutters of the earth and the blades of an aperture opening and closing.

*you are remembering too much
forget as much as you are able*
– Heather B. Swann

Your nervous system works in overdrive to guide every thought, memory, feeling, heartbeat, blink and breath. If physicalised, it may take the form of a fertile, heavy and shadowy cloak that is worn on one's back – a silhouette only the wearer can see, hear or feel. Leaning into these uncanny, dream-like notions is Heather B. Swann, whose practice explores intense and extreme emotional states of being.

The artist describes a lullaby as the state between sleeping and waking, where boundaries dissolve. In *How the mind works* 2021, Swann depicts the makings of a nervous system with a grouping of ink-stained thought-like-bubbles, nearly bursting at the seams. With sensuous elegance, each shadowy form seems to acknowledge one another's presence as the ink outlining them overlaps or nearly touches, like magnets that either connect or repel.

I will not remember your name 2018, is a collection of eleven sculptural performance tools, reminiscent of walking sticks, that lean against a wall waiting to be caressed by a gentle hand and taken on a journey. Each sculpture is unique and laden with rounded bumps made up of small faces that form handles to hold or hooks to hang from. In one swift movement of initiation, a series of ethereal performers take a sculpture into their stride and tap it insistently against the floor whilst they walk. Closely following one another around the gallery in a herd-like formation, a harmony of dialogue emerges:

*"... Be more intimate,
You will feel better."
"I am trying to remember."
"Some fleeting glances and nothing else."
"The letter that never came reads
Dear, dear, oh dearest dear..."*

In a sequence of understanding, remembering and forgetting, narratives appear in a haze of clarity and confusion to evoke ideas of memory, longing, grief and lust.

In a multiplicity of gathering and unravelling, Worimi man from Ngunnawal/Ngambri Country Dean Cross negotiates the politics of representation to rebalance dominant cultural and social histories.

Through collage, Cross entwines Country, place, personal and collective memories to create a nuanced choreography of ideas. Made by the collection and combining of materials from various contexts, collage collides, constructs and manipulates our understanding of what is seen to be 'true' and 'real'.

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Une Tempête 2022 captures a turbulent and disorienting atmosphere. With dual meaning, the phrase translates to 'a storm' and 'A Tempest', a 1969 play by poet, author and politician Aimé Césaire. Set in a contemporary Caribbean society, the play is a retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from a post-colonial perspective in the throes of unrest, colonialism and power.

Applied with pressure, the charcoal pigment bleeds and smudges across the paper to form a dark void with splinters of piercing light. Next to it lies sprays of black aerosol paint and a small photographic portrait of a person wearing a paper bag mask, cut with holes for eyes and a nose. Staring directly into the camera lens (or at you) the subject's expression shifts between melancholy and silent strength as we question their agency to be a willing participant, or not, in this *mise-en-scène*. Harnessing an ambiguity that permits re-creation, the artist practices with a sense of opacity that speaks to entwined shadows of the past, present, myths, memories and the untold. Assembled within the framework of modern and contemporary art and life, *Cross* highlights the complications that emerge from the misinterpreted or misremembered.

It's best left obscure, shrouded in a dusky haze

Brent Harris's *Garden #1* 2005 has a weightlessness to it that is only felt whilst free falling through the air or gliding effortlessly beneath the ocean's surface. Forming, unforming; rising, sinking; Harris's dripping pink and black forms brood, drift and melt between abstraction and figuration. A power dynamic appears between the two painted forms, as a shadowy mass and spiralling vine encroach closer towards an uncanny human/animal silhouette. It is uneasy and disturbing as much as it is intimate and sensual. Embracing life's enduring pain and suffering equal to its beauty and joy, Harris's bodily and familial visual language is born of a desire to test psychological states and make sense of the human condition.

Ready or not, here I come!

Is a shadow true reality, merely a reflection of it, or purely the absence of light? As Plato conjured in his *Allegory of the Cave*, imagine being trapped in a cave staring at a wall where your reality is based upon the shadows cast by the manipulation of fire and light behind you. It is only once you escape and witness the 'true' (or perhaps 'other') world that you realise your 'reality' has been based upon the influence or limitation of perceived knowledge and beliefs.

The works in *what a shadow feels like* are akin to playing a game of hide and seek, where the 'hider' conceals themselves in an environment to be found by the 'seeker'. Capturing the ominous gap between the joy and anxiety of searching and being found lies the shadow, and its persistent ability to exist between one another. In this exhibition, the shadow is confronted, measured, dismantled and rebuilt in a solidarity of imagination and reality. With fertile ambiguity, the included artists explore psychological states, the complications of memory and history, and our ability to negotiate them.

Though shadows do not live in the light, they are servants of it. A shadow never truly disappears. Even in the depth of the night, your shadow is carried like a weight upon your back. Filled with thoughts and memories of love, triumphs and failings, your shadow serves as a gentle mediator between the internal and external world.