

BlakLight

Rooftop Rewritten

Artwork Labels

BlakLight: Australia's First Nations Art Takes Over

In an Australian State Gallery first, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is not only centre stage but the entire stage, during *BlakLight*, a month-long program celebrating the diversity of First Nations art and culture.

AGWA is proud to present *BlakLight*, which sees every gallery space dedicated to Australia's most significant contemporary art form – offering a different lens on viewing the world, providing an invitation to every Australian community member to come together, acknowledge our shared histories, and engage in truth-telling around national and cultural identity.

Accompanying this gallery-wide focus is an event program sparking conversation about historical and cultural identities and exploring the notion of community through visual art, talks and more.

Be challenged, be surprised, be moved and be delighted.

Rooftop Rewritten

For *BlakLight*, seven Aboriginal writers and curators respond to the sculptural works that sit atop the Gallery building, all of which are by non-Indigenous artists. This project not only invites a different way to think about these sculptures but also demonstrates the importance of culturally diverse speakers and narratives in the western art domain.

Writers were given freedom to respond in any way they chose, and the end result is a thoughtful, provocative and fascinating meditation on the way in which cultural material is offered and perceived.

Émile Antoine Bourdelle

born 1861 Montauban, France

died 1929 Paris, France

worked in France

Grande torse du fruit (étude sans tête no.1)

[Large torso with fruit
(headless study no.1)]

1911

bronze

Purchased 1979

1979/00S3

A body without a kaat or koort.

A headless form floating in an empty scene. I imagine this is how Emile-Antoine Bourdelle visualised this 'large fruit torso' sitting in the neutral white box of the gallery space. A non-thinking sexualised being with the bare minimum of female form. Nameless and devoid of identity, as a foreign figure caught in a Deleuzian and Guattarian world. Is this figure, a body-without-organs, desiring more for its skimpy existence?

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The figure now floats above Boorloo, facelessly peering onto Country. Faced with its own reflection, which is no longer neutral. Look out over Boorloo and see it as it always was and always will be. Before the white man came this place was neither neutral nor empty. Like this figure we were once faceless bodies. Not anymore. Welcome to the new world moin ya modern terra nullius (no more modern no man's land).

*kaat=head, koort=heart in the Nyungar language

**TUI RAVEN - INDEPENDENT WRITER AND CURATOR
YAMAJI/NYUNGAR**

Oliffe Richmond

born 1919 Old Beach, Tasmania

died 1977 London, England

worked in England

Figure

1964

bronze

Purchased with funds presented by the
Friends of the Art Gallery, 1981

1981/OS12

Bronzes are a curious thing, imbued with grandiosity, resilience and their overt, self-proclaimed importance. Bronzes of all kinds have me thinking of monuments, and monuments conjure images of recent news media. Symbols of the colony, of patriarchy, of the *European centre*, tumbling to the ground – encased in thick red paint, the colour of anger, of blood, of life and of death. The very same images where police are stood, armed and ready to defend these strange symbols of power, symbols of atrocity.

These are images of now, and this is Australia.

Figure (1964) is not like those monuments of men, ghosts of our painful past. It holds within it an enduring sadness, a darkness and a weight beyond its physicality. A headless figure, bound? A body bag? Or something else?

This feels like a bronze for now-time – a memorial, of and from the past, made for the future.

GLENN ISEGER - PILKINGTON
NHANDA AND NYOONGAR PEOPLES

Henri Laurens

born 1885 Paris, France

died 1954 Paris, France

worked in France

Baigneuse (Fragment)

[Bather (Fragment)]

1931

bronze

Purchased 1980

1980/00S6

At least this figure is active, moving through imagined water as the artist wished her to. A dynamic female figure, the artist fought to master the Cubist technique of depicting simultaneous viewpoints in sculptural form. This is the manic pixie girl muse; the girl that slips through your fingers like quicksilver. Fleeting gestures, darting eyes and a coquetteish tilt to the head of the figure all speak to the ubiquitous male gaze. Little does she know that so many men's fantasies have been placed upon her, but I wonder how she would feel about her agency – her right to herself - being cast in eternal bronze by the artist as admirer/as captor.

**CLOTHILDE BULLEN - CURATOR | HEAD OF INDIGENOUS
PROGRAMS AGWA**

WARDANDI AND BADIMAYA PEOPLES

Gerhard Marcks

born 1889 Berlin, Germany
died 1981 Burgbrohl, Germany
worked in Germany

Der rufer [The caller]

1967 (cast 1981)

bronze

Purchased with funds presented by CSR Limited, 1982

1980/OS16

The complicated history of this sculptural work made me reflect upon a recent phenomenon in contemporary society; call-out culture. The artist was inspired by the tale of the herald Stentor in The Illiad, whose voice was said to be as powerful as fifty voices together, and in later years came to symbolise humanity's call to peace. Cancel culture, or call-out culture, is the antithesis of the sentiments this work symbolises. It's inclusion in *BlakLight* becomes a way to call-in, to inspire those who seek a change to ideas around nationalism, fundamentalism and structural racism to be immersed in an Indigenous cultural context and to come with us on the next step of this journey, as allies and partners.

**CLOTHILDE BULLEN - CURATOR | HEAD OF INDIGENOUS
PROGRAMS AGWA
WARDANDI AND BADIMAYA PEOPLES**

Jean (Hans) Arp

born 1887 Strasbourg, France

died 1966 Basel, Switzerland

worked in Switzerland and France

Astre en rêve [Dreaming star]

1958

bronze

Purchased 1978

1978/00S1

Curved lines, hard and yet soft, phallic, and yet feminine. Its curves clash with the straight lines of the buildings that surround it, but the softness of this piece speaks to the trees, the clouds, and the rain. Light and shadow create movement. This shape twists and turns, it bends and bows as you walk around it.

What is this? A form made of man, of nature, made of chance? This is Arp's *Dreaming Star*! Look closely and you'll feel. Give away your reasons, your wanting for it to be something, it is form, it is movement and it becomes object but not yet, but will be, maybe.

CHAD CREIGHTON

BARDI AND NYUL NYUL PEOPLES

Henry Moore

born 1898 Yorkshire, England

died 1986 Hertfordshire, England

worked in England

Reclining figure

1956

bronze

Purchased 1963

1963/00S4

She carries a burden few know, her body aches but still her spirit shows. Her children take care of her, tending to her daily, as she did them. She had once nurtured, healed, protected, sheltered, provided sustenance and teachings so that they may thrive and prosper. The curves they once nestled into to seek nourishment and comfort, remain only in memory and in another time. Most are oblivious to the infinite exchange between them, of a mother to her children, the children to their mother. A cosmic woven web that binds them so intimately, connecting them beyond this physical world. Her song still flows and beckons their dance to her ancient rhythm.

They know her as Gooloogoolup.

**BELINDA BRIGGS - CURATOR, INDIGENOUS,
SHEPPARTON ART MUSEUM
YORTA YORTA AND WAMBA WAMBA PEOPLES**

Barbara Hepworth

born 1903 Yorkshire, England

died 1975 St Ives, England

worked in England

Two forms in echelon

1961

bronze

Purchased 1979

1979/00S2

It is not often that an artist so credibly brings together, on a human scale, natural elements, urban topography and the person viewing the form. Coming to AGWA in the 1970's, I remember how much I loved this works dependable solidity, which gave it a sense of completeness. The two apertures in relationship are a key component of the artists desire in making this work, but I have always viewed those apertures as components of a figure, with arms over-reaching, holding something tightly in their grasp. I feel like it's a safe embrace, protective and sure. Some might see the apertures as eyes through which a new view can be seen, but sometimes I prefer looking inwards sheltered by a warm embrace.

**CLOTHILDE BULLEN - CURATOR | HEAD OF INDIGENOUS
PROGRAMS AGWA
WARDANDI AND BADIMAYA PEOPLES**