

## ELISE RASMUSSEN

Born in Edmonton, Canada, 1977. Lives and works in Los Angeles, USA. Pronouns: she/her

### *The Year Without a Summer* 2020

16mm film transferred to 4K/HD, 4 channels of sound  
20:05 minutes

Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles, USA, with assistance from Canada Council for the Arts.

Elise Rasmussen's *A Year Without a Summer* is a siren's call to the eerily relatable current climate reality. The title of the work refers to a season in 1816, when the world experienced extreme weather events, blanketing the northern hemisphere's summer sky with smog. A century and half later, it was discovered that the eruption of Mount Tambora on the volcanic island of Sumbawa in Indonesia was the cause of this catastrophic shift in the world's weather patterns. It set off a chain of wild occurrences, such as violent storms, floods, and dramatic skies that inspired artists from the Romantic period. One was Caspar David Friedrich's (1774–1840) iconic painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818), known for its representation of the human looking out to the vastness of the landscape and pondering on the sublime.

These natural disasters resulted globally in a low-yield harvest, economic downturn and mass civil unrest, which influenced the writings of seminal science-fiction writer Mary Shelley (1797–1851). In the summer that was not, Shelley and other significant writers of her time such as Lord Byron (1788–1824) and Percy Shelley (1792–1822) took a trip to Switzerland's Lake Geneva, where the holiday was derailed due to constant rain and storms, causing her to stay inside and write the Gothic tale of *Frankenstein* (1818).

Rasmussen inserts herself into the continuum of this historical framework by travelling to Sumbawa during the hottest summer on record, and later to La Becque for an artist residency on the shorelines of Lake Geneva. Through a watery lens, the artist unsettles the existing narratives of art and literature by centring them in a larger lineage of ecocide. By connecting other seemingly disparate geographic zones—the Rocky Mountains in Northern Canada, São Paulo, the ice sheets melting off Greenland, and plastic clogged oceans off the coast of Bali—Rasmussen's visual atlas becomes mounting evidence of the ongoing impact of Eurocentric actions on the Earth and its waters.

# SUPERFLEX

Expanded artistic collective founded in 1993, based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

## *Dive-In* 2019

HD video installation  
19:55 minutes

*Dive-In* was originally commissioned by Desert X in collaboration with TBA21-Academy with music composed by Dark Morph (Jónsi and Carl Michael von Hausswolff). Courtesy of SUPERFLEX, Denmark.

A quintessential vestige of modernism and Hollywood screen culture, the first 'drive-in' cinema in New Jersey (1933) signalled the advent of accessible film culture in the inter-war period. These drive-ins followed the advent of the 'parking lot', a suburban space made necessary due to the mass production of affordable automobiles in the 1950s and '60s as a middle-class suburban commodity and leisure. With flexible transport readily available, the drive-in cinema quickly became a popular pastime.

Copenhagen-based collective SUPERFLEX's *Dive-In* sits atop a former carpark, on the front lawn of the art museum. In the daytime, the monumental structure of stacked pink aluminium blocks contrasts with the brutalist museum façade and the sandstone of the Great Court Building. Developed in collaboration with former UNSW scientist Dr. Alex Jordan, an expert in the collective behaviour of fish, the material and pink hue of the porous surface has been identified as preferential for marine creatures, specifically coral polyps.

At twilight, *Dive-In* seems to fill with water. Footage of fish engaging with its submerged structure is projected onto the pink surface, transforming it into a cinema screen. The work anticipates a future altered by climate and sea-level rise, where environments and architectural structures will be eventually surrendered to the sea. *Dive-In* becomes a portal between the present and a subaquatic future, a latent site for marine biodiversity, and a submerged ruin of the present. *Dive-In* welcomes viewers to submerge themselves in time and materiality at this interspecies meeting place for humans and marine animals alike.

*Dive-In* is activated at night, with the screening hours beginning at twilight. It runs from approximately 5:30pm–9:00pm nightly. Please check UQ Art Museum's website for the interactive program surrounding the artwork and more about the exhibition Oceanic Thinking, running until 25 June 2022.

# MONIRA AL QADIRI

Kuwaiti, born in Dakar, Senegal, 1983. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Pronouns: she/her

## *Divine Memory* 2019

Single-channel film on HD  
4:20 minutes

Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by Kunstverein Gottingen, 2019

In this single-channel video work, Monira Al Qadiri invokes the aesthetics of animal documentaries by presenting an artificially distorted underworld of octopuses in hot pinks and electric cyans. Set against a soundscape of religious poetry recitations from 1990s Islamic television programming, the octopuses swim in enchanting sequences that echo a music video.

With the use of archival religious recitals, Al Qadiri recalls her childhood in Kuwait amid targeted broadcasting propaganda that embedded prayer and teachings from the Koran in the everyday. *Divine Memory* complicates the idea of human dominion over the natural world upheld by monotheistic religions. The octopus, as a pre-human ancestor, connects to God by way of nature, a memory that is pre-human, genetic and innate. Here, Al Qadiri sustains a sensorial and affective link between prayer and power, poetics and memory, God and nature, human and octopus.

By rendering the octopus as a symbol of nature's pre-monotheistic and pre-human memory, Al Qadiri's work arrests the Anthropocene—the current epoch, in which human activity has had a totalising impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems, and where scant regard is given for pre- and non-human life forms. Instead, Al Qadiri emphasises the diversity and complexity of multispecies life, where co-evolution and interconnectedness underpin a radically shared, and perhaps even divine, existence.

## IZABELA PLUTA

Born in Warsaw, Poland, 1979. Lives and works in Newcastle and Sydney, Australia.  
Pronouns: she/her

*Counterspace (The Pacific: visualisation of bottom of the pacific / relief of bottom south parts) 2021*

*Counterspace (The Pacific: twilight schedule / sunset schedule) 2021*

Silver gelatin photographs (contact negatives); unique

Courtesy the artist and Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney

At the height of the Cold War, the Arctic Ocean was a frontline due to its strategic location between the USA and the USSR. Dozens of ‘drifting stations’ were established by the USSR on pack ice floes as research facilities and nuclear refueling and refuse stations. While the initial intent was for espionage activity, these research stations tracked and collected critical data that have furthered our understanding of fundamental processes in the ocean, leading to critical knowledge about climate change in the Arctic—the frontline of our warming planet.

Artist Izabela Pluta sourced the rare 1974 *Atlas Okeanov (Atlas of the Oceans)* a book of maps from the Soviet War Department, which is host to the data from the Cold War drifting stations. Pluta physically unhinged the spreads of the Atlas, reorienting specific pages to deliberately question and complicate its record. What ensued is Pluta’s ‘Counterspace’ series, where she uses the original atlas pages in the darkroom. As the enlarger light passes through the paper’s surface, it fuses together both sides of the map, presenting them as new images, with areas that lack focus or visually redact information and clarity. The source imagery chosen here forms a set of diptychs; one visualises the depths of the so-called Pacific, and the other charts its twilight and sunset schedules.

A ‘counter space’ can be understood as a set of military assets or capabilities. In Pluta’s expanded photographic gesture—both an act of assemblage and darkroom practice—she offers the image plane up as a counter space or a set of assets. She deliberately distorts the accuracy and infallibility of what we have come to expect from mapping as a tool of surveillance, especially through settler-colonial expansion.

## IZABELA PLUTA

Born in Warsaw, Poland, 1979. Lives and works in Newcastle and Sydney, Australia.  
Pronouns: she/her

### *Oceanic Atlas (vanishing)* 2020

Pigment print on eco-solvent cotton rag paper

Courtesy the artist and Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney

*Oceanic Atlas (vanishing)* further complicates the maps of the *Atlas Okeanov* with coastlines slipping in and out of one another, in some parts utterly erased, or invented—a premonition perhaps of our submerged future. What Pluta draws into sharp relief in these works is the subjectivity of mapping—what is emphasised or omitted—and how this practice forms and alters our thinking about nationhood, and the way power structures transverse invisible borders. It further emphasises the militarisation and industrialisation of our ocean spaces. Research initiatives, such as Seabed 2030—which in 2021 was one-fifth of its way into its lofty goal of mapping the world’s seafloor by 2030—leave unanswered questions about how, and by whom, this data might be harnessed, or extracted, and to what end.

## TABITA REZAIRE

Born in Paris, France, 1989. Lives and works in Cayenne, French Guyana. Pronouns: she/her

### *DEEP DOWN TIDAL* 2017

Single-channel HD film  
19:15 minutes

Courtesy of the artist, and Goodman Gallery, South Africa. Commissioned for Citizen X - Human, Nature and Robots Rights by Oregaard Museum, Denmark.

*DEEP DOWN TIDAL* explores the transoceanic system of Western communication technologies that are installed on the world's seabeds, such as submarine fiber optic cabling and internet wiring. By locating these technologies deep within the ocean, Rezaire examines the colonial systems of power that encode their infrastructure, relocating the domain of control from the land to under the sea. The ocean constitutes the new forefront of colonialism in an era defined by rapid technological advances that underpin access and control of information.

Rezaire visually maps the cables along former transatlantic slave-trading routes that mirror the Middle Passage—the route of the former slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. These routes chart an entangled and complex narrative of Black bodies, histories, memories, technologies, and knowledges, that have been subsumed by the violent extraction of the Western colonial project. Through this mapping, Rezaire brings these two seemingly divergent histories into sharp focus, exposing the ocean as both graveyard and abyss. However, she simultaneously highlights the ocean waters' capacity for regeneration and healing, an element accorded a cleansing power, associated with purification, change and rebirth. Short circuiting the West's technological expansion through acts of dancing, singing, and praying—on, to, and for the ocean—*DEEP DOWN TIDAL* channels an ancestral gesture of refusal.

# IZABELA PLUTA

Born in Warsaw, Poland, 1979. Lives and works in Newcastle and Sydney, Australia.  
Pronouns: she/her

## *Variable depth, shallow water* 2020

Silver gelatin photographs mounted on acrylic, chromogenic print on metallic paper mounted on acrylic, pigment prints on aluminium, dye-sublimation prints on polycotton, polyester wadding straps, archival inkjet prints mounted on di-bond, aluminium, polyester resin, sandbags.

Courtesy of the artist, Newcastle and Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney.  
*Variable depth, shallow water* is also being presented in the artists solo exhibition *Nihilartikel*, at UNSW Galleries in 2022.

To dive is to embrace groundlessness, immediately shifting our perspective away from the landlocked, inhibiting our language, and augmenting our breath. Diving is an innately mediated experience; wetsuits, tanks, goggles, inflatable vests, cages, flippers, and weighted belts are all apparatus that assist bodies to descend or surface. Technology has given way to increasingly crisp and lifelike underwater imagery; however, at times it is impossible to capture the depth of colour and the density of the water.

Pluta's *Variable depth, shallow water* is a tangible attempt at addressing the fragmentation of vision under the surface. Capturing the innately disorienting rehabilitation that takes place underwater, picture planes descend, hang and jut up from the cage-like structure. The primary images are of the Azure Window, in Gozo, a small island off Malta. Rising 28 metres out of the sea, the famous arch developed from wave erosion on the rocky cliff face. Known in Maltese as Tieqa-Tad Dwejra, the sea stack was a popular tourist destination until its collapse after intense storms in 2017. Pluta heard about the collapse in 2018, and being a diver, she made her way to film the submerged natural ruin, now roughly 12 metres below the surface of the ocean. She filmed both above with a drone and below with a camera, charting the depths of both her descent and of the fragmented Dwerja.

It is not known exactly when the arch came into being, but the entire process of erosion is believed to have taken around 500 years. Relatively short in geologic time, witnessing the final collapse of the arch in our lifetime has become a metaphor for ecosystem collapse and the rapid acceleration of climate change in our epoch. Dwejra's collapse represents planetary scale reduced to an instant; a realtime before and after. In this way, *Variable depth, shallow water* is a ruin, the disassembled and mutable space of memory informed by deep time, loss of site: a monument submerged.

## CHARLES CALLINS

Born in Hughenden, Queensland, 1887. Died 1976, Brisbane, Queensland.

### *Moreton Bay* 1976

oil and enamel on composition board

Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 1977.

Charles Callins came to painting local seascapes late in life. As a self-taught artist, Callins' practice rested heavily on years of accumulated stories, vivid memories, and knowledge of coastal Queensland. Most of his professional life was spent in maritime journalism, often writing under the pseudonym "Prudence". After a brush with death in 1951, when he rescued a teacher from drowning, Callins began to document seascapes and their adjacent industrialisation in order to evidence habitat loss.

*Moreton Bay* transports us to the 1970s, where lush islands punctuate a colourfield sky and water splashed in tonal blues to indicate depth levels around sandbanks. The multiperspectival view warps the horizon line to squeeze in Bangamba (Mud Island), Noogoon (St Helena Island), Danggar (Green Island), Jercuruba (Peel Island), Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), and Mulgumpin (Moreton Island). Significantly, *Moreton Bay* articulates Callins' activism against the Fisherman Islands development in 1976, which was lobbying to form one large artificial island, which is now the site of Brisbane Airport and Australia's third largest port.

Conservation deeply informed Callins' painting technique, which prioritised the narrative and sought to physically endure the harshness of depicted marine environments. Weatherproof materials—oil paint and enamel on masonite—were applied in hope of withstanding flash floods, rain, and salty ocean spray. Almost an extension of his journalistic practice, the canvas space is maximised for storytelling—the distorted and strange horizontal space, capturing the vastness of the ocean, its radiance, and the ebbing sensation of being aboard a vessel.



## ALICIA MERSY

Born in Montreal, Canada, 1988. Lives and works in New York, USA. Pronouns: she/her

### *Nobody owns the sea* 2020

Single-channel video  
12:51 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

*Nobody owns the sea* is a free-flowing record of conversations with Athar and Hakeem Barghouti, two teenage boys from the West Bank, in occupied Palestine. Athar and Hakeem allow the artist Alicia Mersy access to a rooftop over Al-Manara Square in Ramallah to get a better photograph of a street poster of their uncle, the jailed political leader Marwan Barghouti, a seminal figure in the Palestinian Intifadas, uprisings that took place in 1987 and 2000.

After this chance meeting, Athar and Hakeem are frank with Mersy about the occupation and surveillance that shape their daily life, describing their experience as they come of age in apartheid. The film documents the teens lament over the politicisation of their natural landscape, navigating viewers through the maze of settlements and encroaching boundary lines that are at the forefront of their daily existence and activities. This is exemplified by the beach that lies just 25 kilometres from their village that they cannot visit, and can only see when the horizon is clear. One of the young men recounts a story that transgresses his annexed reality, where he received a permit to visit the sea for the first time near Haifa (north of Tel Aviv); his story is immediate and drenched with longing for this pure memory.

Both 'seas' on the boundaries of Palestinian territories—the Dead Sea on the Eastern boundary of the West Bank and the Mediterranean at the Gaza Strip—are largely off-limits to Palestinian use, hampered by blockade, water pollution, or threat of death. While for many Palestinians the sea is 'occupied', Athar and Hakeem assert their individual sovereignty through storytelling, revealing a little-heard perspective on the history of Palestinian dispossession, grounded in access to nature.

## ELISE RASMUSSEN

Born 1977 Edmonton, Canada. Lives and works in Los Angeles, USA.  
Pronouns: she/her

### *Did you know Blue had no name?* 2018

16mm film transferred to HD Video  
6:38 minutes

Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles, USA, with assistance from Canada Council for the Arts.

### *Cyanometers* 2018

Six C-Prints

Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles, USA, with assistance from Canada Council for the Arts.

In ancient texts and across global languages, there is often no word for blue, the colour that appears on the visible spectrum between green and indigo. *Blue* is a relatively new word in the English lexicon, which emerged through the colonial impulse to extract resources such as lapis lazuli or turquoise. Consequently, it has been known by many names: ultramarine, indigo, sapphire, heliotrope, azure, turquoise, cobalt, faience, cerulean, cyan, cuprorivaite/Egyptian blue.

In *Did you know Blue had no name?*, artist Elise Rasmussen exposes the history of contest and conquest that pervades the colour blue. She investigates the story of eighteenth-century Swiss scientist and alpine enthusiast Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740–1799), who invented a cyanometer to measure the blueness of the sky. Despite him being credited as the first to climb Mont Blanc, it was in fact the lesser-known Dr Michel-Gabriel Paccard (1757–1827) and Jacques Balmat (1762–1834) who, following a race set by Saussure, reached the summit in 1786.

Centuries later, French artist Yves Klein (1928–1962) developed the patented 'International Klein Blue' through a process of objectification and extraction of female labour, using their bodies as a tool for him to employ the patented colour of pure ultramarine. The colour blue evaded photographic technology, with there being no capability to capture blue. This led to innovations such as split printing as an optical illusion, where photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) tricked the viewer into seeing water as a representation of sky. By addressing these stories of power, subjugation and trickery, Rasmussen uncovers the histories that dwell beneath the shadows, seeking what is missing from archives when it comes to scientific technologies for measuring, capturing, and naming the colour blue.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations visitors are advised that the exhibition may contain images, names, and voices of people who are deceased. Permission has been granted from the family for all images and artwork to be shown here and in the exhibition.*

*The family of Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul has advised that her name and artwork be used in accordance with her wishes.*

*The Bentinck Island Artists included in this exhibition are Birrmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha and the late Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul. The larger group of artists include their family members Thunuyingathi Bijarrb May Moodoonuthi, Wirrngajingathi Bijarrb Kurdalalngk Dawn Naranatjil, Amy Loogatha Rayarriwarrtharrbayingat, Warthardangathi Bijarrba Ethel Thomas, as well as their aunt and mentor Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori among others.*

## BENTINCK ISLAND ARTISTS

Bentinck Island is located in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Queensland. The story of the Bentinck Island Artists is illustrative of how colonisation shapes climate, and, in turn, the lives of island Indigenous communities, who are among the first populations to feel the impacts of climate change. Bentinck's story is echoed by other coastal or geographically low-lying populations globally, where hundreds of thousands of people are routinely uprooted annually by coastal flooding.

Dulka Warngiid is the Kayardild language group name for Bentinck Island, which translates as the 'land of all', 'whole world', or 'the one place'. In 1948, after severe drought affected the communities in the Gulf area, violent storms and tidal waves engulfed their freshwater supply and submerged most of Bentinck Island. After these events, missionaries coercively relocated the entire population, causing lasting displacement and impact on continuing Kaiadilt language and culture.

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Database, intensifying weather-related events have annually displaced more than 24 million people globally. The World Bank estimates that another 143 million people will be displaced by 2050, largely isolated to only three regions: sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. The Kaiadilt peoples' displacement is a premonition of the frightening reality of climate futures. In these works, Birrmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha and Kuruwarriyingathi Bijarrb Paula Paul, visually express memories of life on the island and in the reef. They also express their longing for Kaiadilt to return home and to remain there so that future generations are on Country.

# BIRRMUYINGATHI MAALI NETTA LOOGATHA

Born 1942 Bentinck Island, Queensland. Kaiadilt peoples. Kayardild language group. Lives and works on Mornington Island, Queensland.

## *Makarrki* 2013

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2013.

Birrmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha paints significant sites from her home on Bentinck Island, such as *Makarrki*, the place where her father King Alfred was born. Loogatha's bright, colourful expression of significant sites on the island evokes the joy, and rich storytelling that the Island brought to the people who inhabit it. However, the work also refers to the traumatic experiences that she and her sisters had of being forced off Country by missionaries. *Makarrki* is both a work of love and longing to return to her land, one shadowed by the impact of forced relocation of island populations, such as the Kaiadilt peoples.

Loogatha tells the story of King Alfred, his passing, and her experience trying to return to her homeland:

*My father was King Alfred and he had six wives. When he died, his brother Percy took over the family and took care of us. When I grew up, I went to the mainland and worked as a housemaid like a lot of the young girls from the Island. I enjoyed this time being young and having fun... I returned to Mornington and became strongly involved in land rights and my people's wish to return to our homeland. I was a grandmother by the time we returned to our homeland..*

# KURUWARRIYINGATHI BIJARRB PAULA PAUL

1937–2021. Born in Bentinck Island, Queensland. Kaiadilt peoples. Kayardild language group. Lived and worked in Mornington Island, Queensland.

*The family of Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul has advised that her name and artwork be used in accordance with her wishes.*

## *Flat Reef* 2010

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased with the assistance of Margaret Mittelheuser AM and Cathryn Mittelheuser AM, 2011.

## *Flat Reef* 2010

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Courtesy of Peter and Agness Cooke, Brisbane.

## *Flat Reef* 2010

synthetic polymer paint on linen.

Courtesy of Peter and Agness Cooke, Brisbane.

Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul's paintings map the bright, colourful coral reefs that surround the low-lying Bentinck Island. It is known for its extensive system of reef flats, which at low tide are relatively uncovered. The artist recalled memories of walking out and collecting food, explaining that the work with dominant white gestural marks is a reef covered in oysters: 'Oysters grow on the rocks and from a distance, all you can see is white with all the oyster shells covering the rock.'

Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul's other reef works feature vibrant pink tones that relate to the method the Kaiadilt women use to cook oysters; once collected, the oysters are laid out to cook in rows of hot ash. The dark undertones of her work represent the ash and coals in which they are cooked, which contrast with the bright hues of Bentinck's coral reefs. Through her practice, Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul expressed respect for the life of the reef and the ocean and its capacity for beauty, care and sustenance.

# KURUWARRIYINGATHI BIJARRB PAULA PAUL

1937–2021. Born in Bentinck Island, Queensland. Kaiadilt peoples. Kayardild language group. Lived and worked in Mornington Island, Queensland.

*The family of Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul has advised that her name and artwork be used in accordance with her wishes.*

## *Flat Reef* 2012

synthetic polymer paint on linen  
Collection of the University of Queensland, purchased 2016.

Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul's *Flat Reef* from 2012 exemplifies her individual style and distinguishes her as a member of the Bentinck Island Artists. The artist employed a highly chromatic palette that recalls marine life and its phosphorescence, a phenomenon of algae suspended in water that glows softly in the dark, and is often found in tidal zones. In this work, she has used expressive brushstrokes to suggest the diversity of the reef and the schools of rainbow-hued fish that inhabit it. Her gestural marks provide a sense of movement and create the illusion of rippling water.

This particular work is pared back, with a focus on the dark depths of the ocean, drawing the eye to the multitude of colours and forms in the foreground. Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul presents a watery perspective of flat reefs, providing views that are aerial yet submerged, vast yet specific, with lightness and darkness. She shows us a multi-perspectival view on marine life, complicating depictions of the ocean as one mass that is impossible to perceive.

## SANCINTYA MOHINI SIMPSON

Born 1991, Meanjin (Brisbane). Lives and works in Meanjin (Brisbane).  
Pronouns: she/her

## ISHA RAM DAS

Born 1993, Cessnock, NSW. Lives and works in Meanjin (Brisbane).  
Pronouns: he/him

### *Vessel* 2022

installation, multi-channel sound, corrugated iron, timber, earth, ash, clay lotas.  
Courtesy of the artists and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Sibling artist duo Sancintya Mohini Simpson and Isha Ram Das are descendents of indentured labourers sent from India to work on colonial sugar plantations in the colony of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa). Together their work charts the complexities of migration, matrilineal memory and trauma, addressing silences within the colonial archive.

*Vessel* (2022) is a large-scale sound installation by the artists, which reframes colonial histories and perspectives on Indian indentured labour through experimental sound. Inside a makeshift housing structure, mounds of aromatic earth support clay lota vessels emanating an arresting soundscape. The audio acknowledges the history and lived experiences of those taken from India to South Africa during the late 1800s and the early 1900s. As a form that carries, both literally and metaphorically, the clay lota vessels become ancestral objects that deliver these histories through song and enacted ritual.

Here, the artists' work reorients ownership of this history and pays homage to those forgotten, who were sent out across the 'dark waters' of the Indian Ocean to Natal. While these works refer directly to the South African sugar cane plantations, they are in parallel to the local and often-absent stories of what is known as 'blackbirding' in Australia—the practice of kidnapping South Sea Islander communities and their forced labour on sugar cane farms.



# SANCINTYA MOHINI SIMPSON

Born 1991, Meanjin (Brisbane). Lives and works in Meanjin (Brisbane).  
Pronouns: she/her

## *Tāpū* 2022

watercolour and gouache on handmade wasli paper  
triptych

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.  
The artist would like to thank Isabel Wengert.

Indian miniature painting historically focused on privileging the dominant gender, caste, and class, often omitting the daily lives and experiences of women. In *Tāpū*, Sancintya Mohini Simpson employs miniature technique charting the violence of indenture across the Indian Ocean to Natal, with two protagonists; a casteless woman adrift in an oceanscape, and the vessel of a colonial ship. The woman is submerged under the waves of a tumultuous sea, seemingly cast overboard, and the tall ship continues on out of frame.

*Tāpū* can be understood across many diasporic languages of South Asia—Sanskrit, Marathi, Hindi, among others—as taboo; island; a body surrounded by water on all sides; or the exiling of a person from the mainland. Here in relation to indentured labour, Simpson takes a little known South African Bhojpuri definition of *Tāpū* to mean, “anyone who disappeared from the village (absconded, lost, or murdered) was said to have gone to *Tāpū*, so there was an evil association...” The slippage of language here is important, as *Tāpū* took on new meaning through the forcible displacement of communities, across oceans, to the sugar cane fields of Natal.

(Translation reference: Tinker, Hugh in Rajend Mesthrie (ed), “New Lights from Old Languages: Indian Languages and the Experience of Indentureship in South Africa,” in *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal*, p.198, 1988)

# SANCINTYA MOHINI SIMPSON

Born 1991, Meanjin (Brisbane). Lives and works in Meanjin (Brisbane).  
Pronouns: she/her

## *Vessel / Vessel* 2022

vinyl installation  
UQ Art Museum Window Commission

## *Vessel / Vessel* 2022

poem, ink on wall  
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson is descendent of indentured labourers who were sent from India to work on colonial sugar plantations in the colony of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa). Upon the backdrop of a stormy wavescape, the commission on the front windows of UQ Art Museum pulls a phrase from her adjacent poem 'we carry and hold these vessels.' Here, the word 'vessel' is interchangeable to mean body, water, boat, and by extension, museum, as a site of the ongoing colonial project. Simpson gestures to ancestral 'black waters', both consumed and embodied, but also to submerged futures due to sea-level rise.

# SALOTE TAWALE

Born in Suva, Fiji. Lives and works in Sydney, Australia.

## *I don't see colour*      2021

5:45 minutes

HD video, colour and sound

Courtesy the artist.

In Salote Tawale's *I don't see colour*, the ocean suspends embodied memories, histories and conflicts in a perpetual ebb and flow. The film charts the artists' own body within a milieu of movement that orients the ocean as a site of enduring translocation. Her body in space is captured in the tidal currents she swims against and with, floats upon and is buoyed by.

Within the work, Australia's settler-colonial legacy is submerged within the complexity of Tawale's Fijian-Australian identity. 'To not see colour', as the work's title announces, borrows from the supposedly anti-racist adage that race can be universalised, homogenised, and entirely ignored. The film's narrative subverts this statement by embodying race and racial identity as discernible and evident, seen, albeit roiled and entangled. Australia's colonial waters immerse unsettled legacies of displacement while offering Tawale a restorative link to the Pacific Islands of her heritage.

Here, Tawale draws from the ocean both transformation and healing, where wind and water 'soften the blow' and where 'centuries of hardened power' are washed away.

*The artist would like to thank: Sidney McMahan, Jane Gillespie, Megan Hanson, Consuelo Cavaniglia, Claudia Nicholson, Priya Panchanlingham, EO Gill, and Hayley Forward.*

# STEPHANIE COMILANG

Born in Toronto, Canada, 1980. Lives and works in Berlin and Toronto.

## *Diaspora Ad Astra*      2020

5:25 minutes

HD video, colour and sound

Courtesy of the artist, Berlin. Commissioned by TBA21-Academy with the support of Institut Kunst HGK FHNW in Basel.

Filipina-Canadian artist Stephanie Comilang's *Diaspora Ad Astra* charts a story of a Filipino worker caught offshore on a cargo ship unable to dock. The fictional ship-to-shore transmission recounts his story of his desire to be a TV star, contrasted with the stark reality of offshore labour and the lonely life of a seafarer. As he has no access to the internet, the seafarer reads a tale from the book *Diaspora Ad Astra: An Anthology of Science Fiction from the Philippines* (2013), a collection of stories that charts a multitude of possible futures.

In this story, a space traveller roams distant galaxies, searching for resources on other planets. Upon their return home, they are caught in limbo orbiting their home planet, unable to dock. Their colleagues on land are charged with inspecting their ships for illegal aliens or disease. Forbidden to return, they are left orbiting their home planet for eternity. The deep longing to return home is heard in the seafarer's siren song, an eerie parallel to life on board Earth's commercial shipping fleet.

It is estimated that 90,000 commercial ships are afloat on the world's oceans, transporting vital food and medical equipment, energy and raw materials, as well as manufactured goods across the globe. Sea freight makes up 90 percent of global trade and the seafarers fuelling this industry often work 12-hour shifts, seven days a week. The International Maritime Organization outlines that contracts may be no longer than 11 months, but the reality of the COVID-19 lockdown has meant that many workers have been stranded on vessels and are unable to work at sea or have limited or no opportunities ashore, plunging their families into deep financial hardship. As of July 2021, it was estimated that some 250,000 seafarers remain on board commercial vessels, unable to be repatriated to land well beyond the expiry of their contracts.

Through the device of science fiction, Comilang charts the living reality of the men aboard these vessels, who are part of a displaced oceanic diaspora, stateless until they dock on land; her work is an urgent vignette on the flow of global capital and labour.

# BENJAMIN ARMSTRONG

Born 1975 in Melbourne, Victoria. Currently lives and works in Melbourne, Victoria.

## *Edge of a known world* 2009

ink and pigment on paper

Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2010.

In *Edge of a known world*, Benjamin Armstrong steers imagination to all that exceeds the known world—the vastness of the ocean and the inaccessibility of the past, prior to the supercontinents surfacing from the sea. Armstrong's alchemic ink drawings position humans at the edge of understanding, where there are no answers to what lies beyond. The floating transparent orb, with its turbulent ocean and shimmering peaks, draws on the chaotic creation imagery of Hieronymus Bosch (c.1450–1516). As well as Armstrong's field work into the psychogeography of isolated cultures, such as the Rapa Nui on Easter Island, which have existed almost as if within a bubble.

Illuminated pools and seams of white energy interlace elements of Armstrong's ocean world where time collapses in waves. Light bleeds suggest a connection to worlds just outside the frame, where energy is transferred and transformed. The scale suggested in *Edge of a known world* may conjure Astro oceanography—a burgeoning and critical field of ocean science that seeks water sources from other planets. This erudite field of inquiry considering our global climate crisis connects Earth to a larger network of established water worlds within our galaxy—such as Callisto, Enceladus, Europa, Ganymede, and Titan—with the hope that new survival strategies for our planet may be gleaned.

## DEMOS X BLUE ASSEMBLY

The Greek word 'demo' means people, or population. Its plural 'demos' is a group, an assembly, a city, or a chorus of individuals. Artist and architect Andreas Angelidakis's *DEMOS (Sandstone)* approaches architectural and colonial legacies through satire; the physical elements of the work that gesture to antiquity—timeless sandstone and concrete slabs—are in fact a façade. While specific to the foundations of democracy in ancient Greece, *DEMOS* disrupts this legacy. Endlessly reconfigurable and portable, the work is about the spread of failed democracy, the borderless flattening of the internet and the human body, futures in ruin through climate change, the global health crisis, and resource scarcity.

*DEMOS* was first imagined for 74 days of public programming at documenta 14's parliament of bodies at Parko Eleftherias, Athens, as a way to redefine the relation between stage and audience. At UQ Art Museum, the work becomes a learning space and site of dialogue for *Blue Assembly*, the multi-year program exploring our relationship with the ocean by gathering 'blue' approaches to research. By assembling researchers, students and the public alike, the space will be programmed throughout the semester, becoming a dialogic platform to upend our assumptions about the ocean, its vital role in human and non-human life, and our shared futures.

Andreas Angelidakis, *DEMOS (Sandstone)*, 2020. Collection University of Queensland Art Museum.