



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

BIRDS AND LANGUAGE

Conference

Thursday 19 and Friday 20 August 2021

9:00am – 5:00 pm

**Room 203 RD Watt Building Room,
and Zoom
The University of Sydney**

Pop-up event:

**Sydney College of the Arts,
Building A22, Old Teacher's College**

Birds and Language is supported by the Sydney College of the Arts, School of Literature, Art and Media, The University of Sydney



Image: Eugene Carchesio The Ventriloquist Series 1 (detail) 2017 Watercolour on paper © the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photography by Madeleine Kelly.

BIRDS AND LANGUAGE

The sounds birds make form structured series, comprised of complex syntaxes, nuanced in tone, precise, sometimes excessive, often regarded as being of compelling aesthetic value. We do not hesitate to refer to many of these sounds as *songs*, or, more prosaically, *calls*. We move, easily, too, towards thinking about these sounds as a species of *language*.

More, we readily speak of the visual rhetorics of birds: ideas of performativity, display, mimesis and deception. We sometimes dare to think of birds as artists—not only singers, but bricoleurs, assembling extravagant, colour-coded nests, as in the case of the bowerbird. More, recently, we have become more comfortable with thinking of some birds as capable of higher-order reason, as experiments with crows demonstrate capacities to think through and to solve complex physical problems.

This conference poses a simple question:

What is it to talk of birds and language?

How might such a question provide the impetus and grounds for an interdisciplinary encounter between the natural sciences, the humanities, and the creative arts?

PROGRAMME

Thursday 19 August

9:00 – 9:30 Madeleine Kelly **Welcome and context**

Papers on birds, sky and materiality

9:30 – 10:00 David Brooks ***Bird Song (extracts)***

Birdsong. Where do I begin? Maybe the word song is part of it. That shutting out.

That keeping at bay. What we are shutting out. I prefer call. The call of the whip bird, the call of the magpie lark (which is so different to the magpie's). But even that's a problem. If song shuts out call, for example, call shuts out song, though it's hardly a binary matter. They – call, song – shut out other things, like talking to oneself, or the herding or hunting sounds whip birds use to stir up insects from the leaf-litter. Or the conversation, the exchanges of opinions and information of swallows, memories of vast landscapes, epic journeys, poisoned oases, the joy of distant arrivals.

10:00 – 10:30 Elizabeth Presa **Of gods and birds**

This paper examines ancient Roman augury practices where the movement of birds was interpreted as auspices of the gods. It considers how a poetics of augury can translate into a contemporary sculpture practice to reveal the patterns and marks of birds as a primordial writing. In so doing it proposes an ethics of 'contemplation', as a form of paying attention to the land and the skies and the birds that dwell there. In 2018, I bought 22 acres of land adjacent to a state forest on the traditional land of the Dja Dja Wurrung people in central Victoria. Given that sovereignty of the land has never been ceded raises the question of what exactly has been bought - the wild life which seemingly moves about at will, the trees and plants whose seeds scatter in the wind, a drought, a flood, an atmosphere - and what is my place here? Thus, I turn to art and ask, "how can an art practice facilitate solicitude for the life that inhabits and relies on this piece of land and sky?" An initial response calls for a 'contemplative' art practice. The etymology of this term - with its invocation of birds, prophecy and the divinities - suggests a way of proceeding as 'contemplation' has its roots in the Latin word 'templum', a word used to denote the defined area of sky or land in which an augur received auspices, the divine messages from the gods. In ancient Rome auguries were performed within the templum by priests from the College of Augurs who practiced five types

of auspices, two of which came from birds- *ex avibus* (from birds) and *ex tripudiis* (from the dance of birds feeding.) By appropriating a poetics of augury this paper asks, how can a sculpture practice reveal what might be easily overlooked in bird behaviour? How might a section of ground or 'templum' bearing the marks, scratches, footprints, of birds be mapped as notations or symbols of a primordial writing? And following ancient augury practices, how might these notations and symbol be interpreted as portentous signs, or must they remain forever a mysterious and unfathomable language?

MORNING TEA

11.00 – 11:30 Jessica Laraine Williams, Dr. Roger Alsop, Alex Last, Dr. Mathew Berg **Unseeing elegy of the tetrachromats**

Unseeing elegy of the tetrachromats (2021) is an artwork featuring recorded performance, sound and visuals composed for an endemic Australian bird: the crimson rosella (*Platycercus elegans*). Whilst the crimson rosella attracts much popular adulation for its vibrant plumage of primarily red and blue, the complexity of its auditory and visual lexicon is still emerging in the empirical record. We recognise and speculate on curious facets within these ecological patterns: these include the rosella's higher temporal acuity of vision (also known as flicker fusion frequency, or how quickly birds can see and navigate their world) and their ability to see into the ultraviolet wave band of light (tetrachromacy, being the condition of colour vision in four dimensions). Temporal acuity rates are known to vary between bird species themselves, eliciting the notion that such variances might be analogous to a 'secret code' of signaling intra-species; invisible to predatory birds, for example, but perceptible between birds of the same species. Whilst UV- reflective markings on bird plumage are typically narrated through their mechanism in courtship and fitness signalling, we also contemplate a visual encounter with a colour that remains absent in our human sensorium. This has implications for radical care and empathy with our cohabiting animal aesthetes, an elegy for the unseeing narrowness of human-centric visions. This project is supported by The Faculty Graduate Research Fund (FGRF), The Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, The University of Melbourne.

Papers that explore music, birdsong and the Umwelt

11:30 – 12:00 Mark Pemberton **The Aesthetic Wonder of Birdsong**

There is something extraordinary and yet familiar about Pied Butcherbird song that, without acquiring completely new bird-music references, is readily understood according to human aesthetic criteria. Philosophers already struggle to produce definitions for the terms, 'music' and 'art', so is it worth adding sounds produced by non-humans to such a thankless task? This paper suggests that it is not. However, it proposes that much can be gained by comparing birdsong to the production and reception of human art without declaring the former to be the latter. Thus, this paper avoids the 'is birdsong music' question in favour of exploring how the affordances of such a phenomenon can inform how we produce and receive art. To do this, I take a systemic view informed by Gibsonian ecological psychology; that is, one in which the motion of an object in an environment is also a 'motion of the environment'. From that perspective, I use birdsong as a vehicle to consider topics such as ways of listening and knowing, creativity, and the function of narrative. Notably, this paper does not seek to understand what birdsong is, but rather reflects upon why we find it wonderful. I suggest that part of the answer lies in Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's understanding of aesthetic wonder as 'an intuition of something that is not present'; one that provides, 'an intuitive grasp of the inconceivable that is not present in perception'.

12:00 – 12:30 Hollis Taylor **Birdsong: Language or Music?**

Potentially fruitful cross-species comparisons are often sidelined by overt or veiled claims of human uniqueness. A case in point: although many species possess sophisticated cognitive abilities that predate human language, linguocentrism and the assumption that culture depends upon language may encumber animal research. Nonetheless, the cultural transmission of birdsong offers an outstanding context for addressing both language and music. Darwin noticed the parallels between language acquisition in human infants and song learning in birds. Indeed, humans are the only primate species with the rare and specialized cerebral capacity for vocal learning. In the 1950s, biologists turned to songbirds to unravel the song acquisition process, including analysing songs as social signals and what these communicate. What does birdsong mean? Although they stop short of identifying birdsong as language, researchers now hold that complex birdsong and other animal communication systems may transmit much more information than previously believed and could contain language-like structure. Meanwhile, zoömusicologists set about examining how sound is aesthetically deployed by animals, especially birds. In this paper, I meditate on whether birdsong's most apt and utile metaphor is language or music. Both domains are subject to regular assertions of human exceptionalism. I review how some scholars differentiate human music and language, whilst others would blur the distinction by framing music as the "universal language", offering linguistic-analytical explanations of music, or itemizing other similarities between the two (from neuroscientific studies of brain structure to design features). Drawing on von Uexküll's concept of *Umwelten* to guide us out of this impasse, I argue that his assertion that meaning is made everywhere disconnects meaning from language's tight clutches. I conclude by reviewing the implications this broadened understanding of meaning in birdsong might offer researchers in the natural sciences and humanities.

LUNCH 12:30 – 1:30

1:30 – 2:00 John Tonkin **On the spatialised rendering of Birdcalls**

In this presentation I want to look at some contemporary VR projects that have sought to visually represent the perceptual experience of being blind. These largely focus around the spatialised visual representation of audio. I also want to tease out some theoretical influences on the work. Around 100 years ago, Jakob von Uexküll introduced his notion of the Umwelt; the perceptual world that an animal inhabits and acts within. Critically for von Uexküll, this world was quite distinct from the Umwelt of any particular human observer. In his book “A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans” (1934), von Uexküll speculated about the varied sensory experiences of a range of different animals such as sea urchins, jellyfish, amoebas and, perhaps most famously, the tick. Taking a decidedly non-human-centric approach, he imagined the sensory world that they inhabit. Reading these accounts, one is made aware of the phenomenal specificities of our own human sensory experience. While Von Uexküll has remained relatively unknown, his influence has been significant for a broad range of thinkers. This relates to his quite radical equating of the significance of the sensory experiences of the human and non-human, something that has resonated with many post-structuralist and posthuman scholars. He also proposed that animals do not just sense the worlds that they inhabit, they create these worlds. This idea has parallels in more contemporary research into embodied cognition and perception and relates to an earlier body of my research; “Experiments in Proximity” (2010-2016).

2:00 – 2:30 Mark Byron **Not of One Bird But of Many’: The Long Migration of Clément Janequin’s *Le Chant des Oiseaux***

The fascination of musicians and poets with birdsong has taken many forms over time, embodying attempts to represent birdsong, to understand it in relation to our own aural and semantic codes, and to exploit the symbolic valency of birds in terms of creativity, instinct, and social organisation. The enduring, variegated life of one musical composition provides a window onto some of these themes across the deep time of human history: the folk song adapted and scored in the early sixteenth century by Clément Janequin, titled *Le chant des oiseaux*. Francesco da Milano – the Italian lutenist known as *Il Divino* – arranged the song soon afterwards for lute, retaining the lyrics and its extended mimicry of birdsong. The twentieth-century German composer Gerhard Münch arranged the score’s violin line for Olga Rudge, with whom he collaborated in a series of *Concerti Tigulliani* in Rapallo in the 1930s. The American poet Ezra Pound – a principal organiser of the concerti – was struck by the way Münch’s arrangement preserved the integrity of the birdsong. He saw in this process a kind of philological purity in which ancient poetry was preserved by virtue of its intermeshing with music, both human and natural, casting the song back to the Provençal poetry of the troubadour ‘Arnaut Daniel and god knows what hidden antiquity.’ Such was the effect on his poetics that Pound repurposed Münch’s arrangement in his Canto LXXV, the second of the *Pisan Cantos* composed when Pound was interned in a United States Army Detention Training Center in the final months of the Second World War. This paper will chart the history of this *chanson* from the early modern period to the mid-twentieth century, providing a critical assessment of how its form and presentation intersects with the ostensible subject matter of birdsong captured and reimagined by musicians and poets across time.

2:30 – 3:00 Genevieve Campbell **Wayai, how the Bush Stone Curlew tells a Tiwi Ancestral story**

Wayai is the Tiwi Ancestral woman who, at the death of her infant son, became the Bush Stone Curlew, to cry in grief every evening. Wayai’s cries of pain and regret are heard through the birds’ call at night and through the ‘crying words’ in widow mourning songs. More than being mimetic of birdsong, these are the cries of grieving women’s predecessors and connecting them, through their own songs and through the Curlew’s calls all the way back to Wayai. The sounds of the country are the sounds of the Ancestors, and the songs tell their stories. Elder songwoman Calista Kantilla says “When they call out, we worry that someone is grieving. When we hear her crying, we share her sadness.” Audio-visual piece, a spoken statement and question/discussion time

AFTERNOON TEA 3:00 – 3:30

3:30 – 4:00 Julia Miller **y Linguistics and Ethno-ornithology: Bird songs and bird stories from the Western Province of Papua New Guinea**

In 2012 and 2013 I travelled to Papua New Guinea as a part of a linguistic and ethno-ornithological documentation team. During these trips we conducted many early morning bird walks. These walks were an engaging, natural elicitation environment for collecting fluent, unscripted language as well as carefully pronounced target words. Armed with a head-mounted microphone attached to our main language consultant, a shot-gun microphone to capture birdsong from a distance and a pack of eager local bird spotters, our team collected hours of birdsong. Submerge yourself in a soundscape of these early morning bird walks across the savannah lands and around the swamps of remote Papua New Guinea. Hear the calls and learn the Nén names for birds such as the Greater Black Coucal, the Black-billed Brush Turkey, the Rufous Fantail, Zoe Imperial Pigeon, the Magnificent Riflebird, King Bird of Paradise the Little Shrike-thrush, Helmeted Friarbird, and others. Photos, audio commentary and birdsong, extracts from short stories in the Nén language, and examples of phonetic transcriptions of a selection of Nén bird names.

4: 00 – 4:30 Jen Valender **Silenced strings 2021, single channel, colour video, 3:28min**

Silenced strings is a short film that explores a history of relationships embedded in shared habitats. The work observes the silenced song of the huia, an extinct avian species, highly revered in Aotearoa. The silencing of the huia was slippery and slow. In 1901 a high-ranking Māori woman took an elegant black and white huia feather from her hair and placed it in the Duke of York's hatband during his visit to New Zealand. The gesture catalysed a fashion trend, and the tapu plumage became a lucrative commodity. This work was filmed at an abandoned granite quarry; a site that speaks to the sounds and scars of coexistence and troubled ecological histories. Screening and talk.

5 - 7 **POP-UP EXHIBITION AND DRINKS, Sydney College of the Arts Courtyard**

Tully Arnot, Robyn Backen, Stuart Bailey, Felix Cehak, Catherine Clover, Ashleigh Eriksmoen, Alex Gawronski, Helen Hardess, Tiana Jefferies, Madeleine Kelly, Blake Lawrence, Leo Lazarus, Melody Owen, Raquel Ormella, Pamela See, Shonah Trescott, Jessica Laraine Williams, Roger Aslop and Mathew Berg,, [and more](#).

Friday 20 August

9 – 9:30 Ian Maxwell **Introduction to Day 2**

Papers that explore mimesis, mimicry and sight

9:30 – 10 Jay Johnston and Ruth Barcan **Looking Askance: Human–Bird Sensory Ecologies**

Avian species are distinguished by their capacity to see in the ultraviolet (UV) colour range invisible to humans. A plumage that looks drab grey or monochrome brown to the human eye may appear to birds as a feast of iridescent pinks, blues and greens. Some species of Australian parrots, for example King Parrots (*Alisterus scapularis*), have even been found to have feathers that glow. As behavioural ecologist Esteban Fernández–Juric exclaims “birds can perceive colours that humans cannot even imagine” (2016: 155). As explored in the eccentric adventures of Charles Foster (*Being A Beast* 2016), animals perceive the world very differently to humans. Using his knowledge of the particular animal sensory system, Foster's preparation involved training his own senses to be more like those of the species he wanted to emulate. This included ‘being’ a swift. This paper aims to explore a ‘double-vision’ of human bird–watcher and bird. Acknowledging that avian perception will forever slip beyond our ken we nonetheless seek to explore the practices of bird-watching from an expanded multi-sensory perspective, that requires the active cultivation of perceptive literacy, whilst simultaneously envisioning the return gaze. Sensory ecology both enables significant contribution to conservation practice and challenges preconceptions about the role of individual senses. The need to look askance to see clearly.

10 – 10:30 Tessa Laird **Pretty polyglot: parrotization as the difference in repetition.**

In the hall of mirrors that is mimesis, Paul Carter suggests that parrots reflect our human propensity for mimicry. In *Mimesis and Alterity*, Michael Taussig writes of the colourful bodies of dead parrots being used in rituals where the mastery of a foreign language is desired. Mimesis longs to become other, and Carter notes that in the foundation stories of many cultures, parrots introduce and protect those key markers of difference: language and colour. While Jack Halberstam invokes Monty Python's dead parrot as emblematic of our zombie relations with animals, artist Sergio Vega proposes “Parrot Theory” which sees “the rise of a global, postcolonial avant-garde forever changing the world into words, mirrors, and colours, as we speak...” For Vega, the days of the hierarchical and lonely eagle are over, and the era of the parrot has begun. He compares parrots to “flocks of immigrants from the warm regions of the world” who bring with them spices and colours, and are communal and communicative. Information technology has created a “parrotization of culture”: not banal chatter but a cultural commons. This paper proposes to investigate the parrot as emblem for preserving difference within relationality in a changing world.

10:30 - 10:45 – Ashley Eriksmoen **Linear Semiosis**

PechaKucha (a quick, image-heavy slide talk, 15-20 slides in 6-8 minutes)

In this slide talk, I will address the mimetic visual relationships existing between linear fragments that imply semiotic qualities including wooden sticks and twigs, chromosomal karyotypes, hieroglyphics, ancient and modern alphabet characters, and iconic symbols referencing human material culture. The talk and images will draw connections between the ways birds and humans collect, gather, order and join fragments into visual and physical phrases and objects. Through choices each builder makes in the course of assemblage, these fragment accretions create communicable meaning and functionality. I will propose that the outputs and detritus of our own industrial manufacturing of domestic objects has created another system of icons and fragments of meaning, which I bricolage into new visual statements. An indicative selection of images includes Fiona Hall's Manuhiri (Travellers) (2014-2015); chromosomal karyotypes of birds and humans; alphabetic characters reminiscent of or evolved from tree and stick forms i.e. Ogham; divination through sticks; avian nest-

builders using the timber shed from their wooded habitats; vernacular architecture, and my own art practice using the wood detritus of our material culture—broken wood furniture—in assembled works addressing habitat concerns.

MORNING TEA 10:45 – 11:00

11 – 11:30 Johanna Bell **How do we represent extinction on the page? Poetic experiments for a verse novel**

What would it be like to live in a world without birdsong? In a parallel now, birds are vanishing and the few remaining species have lost their songs. Vera spends her days in the archive at the Department of the Vanishing, rebuilding lost species from the stories, art and scientific data left behind. It's thankless, invisible work and in the silence, Vera starts to lose her way. Then, at the back of a rusty compactus, Vera makes a discovery that could reverse the epoch of silence. If only she can muster the courage to leave the world she knows and venture back to her childhood. How else can vanishing birdsong be represented on the page?

11:30 – 12 Jessica C Masters **Henry Green's pigeons and the death of symbol**

Birds feature centrally in Henry Green's interwar British fiction. Blackbirds' songs background John Hayes's injuries in *Blindness* (1926); pigeons appear regularly in *Living* (1929); and more notably, a single dead pigeon opens his pre-WWII novel *Party Going* (1939), where a group of young London socialites wait in a station while their train is delayed. Critical responses to Green have tended to explain the dead pigeon's significance in terms of Europe's impending war, with Beryl Pong arguing the "insistent illegibility" of Green's pigeons forecasts how even war becomes mundane in a rapidly-changing socio-and geo-political landscape. However, critics have also noted *Party Going's* dead pigeon is carried over from those featured in *Living* (1929), which queries how looking back, not only into Green's oeuvre, but into the social and political history of birds can further attempts to destabilise narrative certainty through open-ended symbols. Green pushes the allusive density of birds almost to breaking point, giving them a symbolic language of their own that communicates across texts and historical epochs. This paper connects the historical significance of *Party Going's* 'Bright Young People' with the European history of the pigeon, and asks what kind of meaning remains when a symbol dies.

Communicating with birds and speculative fiction

12 – 12:30 Stuart Cooke **Ethological Poetics: reflections, refractions, and concerns**

This presentation – somewhere between a scholarly paper and a creative essay – will be both retrospective and speculative in nature. Firstly, I will summarise my recent attempts to theorise an 'ethological poetics' across bird, insect and plant species, and the ways in which I have tried to articulate such poetics, both as a scholar and as a poet. Thinking more specifically about the Albert's lyrebird, I want to use this paper to tease out some of the [necessary?] contradictions in my theorisation up to this point, and leave room for responses from my colleagues. After all, the Albert's poetics are necessarily collaborative; his composition is "a voice picture of the local scene", to quote Sid Curtis. So, how does the lyrebird interrogate voice, authenticity, otherness? What is the lyrebird's poem if not collage, assemblage, slippage? How can I begin to say anything about this when the I belies the syrinx? What can we say? How can we be created?

LUNCH 12:30 – 1:30

Thinking and Storytelling with trees and birds - lunch workshop

12:40 – 1:20 Brigitta Summers **Understandings of systems that stress interdependence, and which model processes of interspecies sympoiesis**

This workshop will bring together between 5 and 10 people to think with trees through a series of story-telling prompts. While these prompts will be focused on thinking with trees, there will be opportunities to bring birds into the picture through thinking about how birds relate to trees. The workshop will bring us into dialogue with trees as an important part of the network in which birds, trees and humans are all entwined. Trees and birds are commonly associated together for obvious reasons – trees provide habitat for birds and offer a wide variety of food sources. In Australia (and elsewhere), it is also widely known that birds play an equally important role for the trees, as pollinators. In this context, it makes sense to think of birds and trees together, as forming interspecies webs of life-making.

1:30 – 2 Oliver Hamalainen **Corella Flashmobs: Psittacine avant-garde happenings as sites of cultural production**

This summer Naarm (Melbourne) was the site of extensive, impromptu flashmobs staged by clamorous groups of Psittacine performance artists, attracted by the abundant seeds of the introduced plane tree. This species shaded Aristotle's lectures at the academy as he conceived the anthropocentric rational human, and now it sustains the Little Corellas in the Arts

Precinct as they stage their flashmobs and go viral. Corella flashmobs are important because they are a sufficient aesthetic spectacle to wrest human attention from an increasingly anthropocentric imaginary. This creative essay proposes to respond to the gifts of their work by treating them as sites of cultural production. I will use my concentrated scholarly attention as an offering. This attention is given as a form of what biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer terms "reciprocity" with the Corellas. To open dialogues that encourage rethinking the anthropocentric nature of art criticism. Unpicking, then rebraiding together the threads of distinction between human and more-than-human ways of art-making and sensing. Exploring what the Corellas give, how we receive and what we can give back to our more-than-human art colleagues in the process.

2 - 2:30 Dr Zoë Sadokierski and Dr Timo Rissanen Conversations with Regent Honeyeaters PART TWO

This paper responds to the provocation 'how do birds and humans communicate with each other, and what might we learn from such exchange' by describing a series of monthly encounters with the captive Regent Honeyeaters at Taronga Zoo, intended to inform the authors' creative practice. The Regent Honeyeater is a critically endangered Australian bird, and Taronga Zoo leads a breeding program to mitigate against the species' imminent extinction. We outline our approaches to 'communicating' with these birds. First, an evolving series of questions we pose to help us foster empathy with the birds. For example, what is a home to a nomadic bird and what might 'future' mean to a captive bird? Second, dedicating time to regularly visit the birds, documenting our encounters with field notes and audio-visual recording. Finally, producing visual and material artefacts in response to our observations and research about the birds. Through this process of attempting to communicate with and about the birds, we learn to value slow processes, plurality and other-than-human perspectives. This process is part of a larger, ongoing creative collaboration titled 'Precarious Birds' in which we explore ways we, as designers, can give form to the complexities of human/avian entanglement in the extinction crisis, through material and visual creative practice.

2:30 – 3 Toyah Webb Avian 'Making Kin' in Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach Trilogy

The first novel in Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach Trilogy* follows an unnamed biologist as she searches for traces of her dead husband. While navigating the mysterious coastal landscape known only as Area X, she discovers things *changing*. Did her husband die, or simply become something else? Presented as the contents of her diary, the novel ends when the biologist stops writing. However, in the trilogy's final installment, the narrative returns to her diary, where she describes her encounter with an owl. For the biologist, this bird represents the possibility of her husband's transfiguration. In the absence of shared language, a reciprocal poetics of gesture emerges: bird and human become kin. Drawing on the work of Donna Haraway, this paper will explore the human-avian 'making kin' presented in VanderMeer's trilogy. I will argue that this performance of interspecies-sympoiesis proposes new ways of species-becoming in the 'Chthulucene'. A substitute for the human-centred 'Anthropocene', Haraway's term indexes both the tangled, twiggy and fibrous body of the nest, as well as the tentacular imagery of speculative Weird fiction. What stories does this nest weave? How does Weird fiction reimagine relationships with our nonhuman kin?

3:00 – 4:00 Artists in conversation

A roundtable of artists in conversation about the bird work in the pop-up event, Sydney College of the Arts

AFTERNOON TEA 3:30 – 4:00

4:00 Chau Chak Wing Museum, Natural selections, Bird specimens

Natural Selections showcases some of the most intriguing bird, mammal, fish, insect and invertebrate specimens from the Macleay Collections of natural history, largely collected by members of the Scottish Macleay family who emigrated to Australia from 1826. Featured specimens include a cattle egret acquired from Madagascar well before the species was first seen in Australia, and a magnificent display of Australian cockatoos, illustrating the classificatory systems created by scientists to give order to the enormous number and variety of specimens.

END OF CONFERENCE

SPEAKER AND ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Tully Arnot Working across kinetic sculpture, installation, video, photography, virtual reality and performance, Tully Arnot's practice explores the effect that contemporary technology has on human relationships, looking at the isolating nature of our increasingly

connected, but ultimately disconnected world. Themes of automation and simulation feature strongly in Arnot's work, often looking at robotic and non-sentient substitutes for humans and human interactions. The surface of the human body, and notions of touch are analysed through the mediating effects of social media, HD digital information and haptic technologies – often exploring this through consumer level devices. Arnot has also focussed on the emergent field of plant robotics and cognition, and how technology mediates our relationship with the natural world. Arnot's work investigates the tensions between the organic and digital spheres, and the blurring boundaries as symbiotic relationships develop between these worlds. Tully Arnot completed a BDesHons (2009), and MFA (Research) (2014) at UNSWA+D, both awarded first class. Recently Arnot was awarded the 2019 ACMI Mordant Family VR Commission. Arnot won the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship (2015), NAB Emerging Artist Award (2014), and SOYA365 (2012). Arnot recently exhibited at the 2019 Coventry Biennale, and has exhibited internationally.

Roger Alsop's practice includes sound art, composition, interactive art & video art. He works in all forms of performance, recorded, sound, web, and video arts. He teaches undergraduate, postgraduate and research students at Melbourne University and Box Hill Institute, and has mentored performance students at Victoria University, and through the Spark program. He is an active researcher in the areas of performance and performing arts, interactive art, sound art, and composition, and has supervised and supervises research students in these areas. He has written on topics including sound and interactive arts; artistic approaches to environmental sustainability; art and bio-imaging, cross media art, and gesture interactions.

Robyn Backen is a contemporary artist whose work makes connections between art, science and philosophy. Her sound, light works, constructions, and computer-generated systems often examine the cultural context of the spaces they inhabit. Drawing upon more than 20 years of research into technology, materials, and communication, Backen has completed many large public commissions, international shows, and residencies, including most recently in China and Sweden. She is also a recipient of the Australia Council Fellowship. Backen has shown in many national and international exhibitions. She is a lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney.

Stuart Bailey is a lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney. His studio practice tackles the disconnection between political awareness and action, often through the lens of the political poster. Bailey explores these ideas through contemporary print processes, sculpture and installation. In 2018, with Wendy Murray, Bailey he co-curated 'Fresh blood: Redback Graphix and its Aftermath' at Casula Powerhouse that examined the legacy of Australian political poster collective Redback Graphix. He has worked nationally and internationally and in 2005 held the Australia Council Studio Residency in Los Angeles.

Ruth Barcan is an Honorary Associate Professor in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies and an affiliate of the Sydney Environment Institute. Her research centres on embodiment, the senses and everyday life, with a particular interest in everyday practices of sustainability. In recent years she has studied the environmental dimensions of the revival of domestic chicken-keeping in Sydney and the campaign for legal personhood for the Great Barrier Reef. Her current research centres on everyday life as a space of informal environmental education. Ruth is the author of *Academic Life and Labour in the New University: Hope and Other Choices* (2013); *Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Bodies, Therapies, Senses* (2011), *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy* (2004), and the co-editor of *The Temporalities of Waste: Out of Sight, Out of Time* (Routledge 2021), *Imagining Australian Space: Cultural Studies and Spatial Inquiry* (1999) and *Planet Diana: Cultural Studies and Global Mourning* (1997).

Johanna Bell is a writer, independent producer and Churchill Fellow who works across audio, poetry and fiction. Based in Darwin, she is the founder of StoryProjects, an award-winning production house that elevates new voices and strengthens communities through storytelling. Her latest community arts project, the BIRDS EYE VIEW podcast, created with women in the Darwin Correctional Centre, was awarded 2020 Australian Podcast of the Year, an NT Human Rights Award and a nomination for a Walkley Award in Journalism. Johanna's poetry and children's fiction are widely published and in 2020, she and her long-term collaborator, Dion Beasley, were nominated for a Prime Minister's Literary Award.

David Brooks, a poet, short fiction writer, novelist and essayist, is an Honorary Associate Professor at the University of Sydney where he taught Australian Literature from 1991 to 2013, researching in poetry and poetics and co-editing the journal *Southerly*. In the years since, he has become increasingly involved in animal advocacy. He lives in the Blue Mountains with rescued sheep. His latest works are *The Grass Library* (2019), a memoir-cum-meditation on animal rights, and *Animal Dreams* (Sydney University Press, 2021), seventeen essays on the animal in contemporary literature, philosophy and public policy.

Mark Byron is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Sydney. He teaches and publishes across the genres and practices of Modernism: prose, poetry, drama, and film, as well as textual and editorial theory. He is author of the monographs *Ezra Pound's Eriugena* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) and *Samuel Beckett's Geological Imagination* (Cambridge UP, 2020), and with Sophia Barnes produced the critical manuscript edition *Ezra Pound's and Olga Rudge's The Blue Spill* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019). Mark co-edited a dossier with Stefano Rosignoli on Samuel Beckett and the Middle Ages in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* 25.1 (2016), and is editor of the essay collection *The New Ezra Pound Studies* (Cambridge UP, 2019). He is President of the Ezra Pound Society.

Genevieve Campbell is a 2019 University Fellow at the Sydney Environment Institute and Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Across 30 years as an orchestral horn player, she has played in opera, symphony, chamber, music theatre, marching bands, soundtracks, stage shows and television. In 2007 she met the Tiwi Strong Women's group and with them co-founded Ngarukuruwala (We Sing), bringing Tiwi and non-Tiwi musicians together in collaborative composition, performance and recording. Her Doctoral research centred on the repatriation to the Tiwi community of ethnographic field recordings of Tiwi ceremony and song archived at AIATSIS, and, with senior singers, creating the first musicological analysis and notated transcription of classical Tiwi melodies. She is currently a Sydney University Fellow, working with the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the Sydney Environment Institute and Tiwi song custodians with focus on the role of Tiwi song and oral, embodied and performative knowledge systems in cultural maintenance, artistic creativity and social health and spiritual wellbeing.

Felix Cehak is a Queensland based filmmaker, and recent graduate of Griffith University Film School and UNSW Art & Design. Recent works explore vernacular or local imagery, often of the natural history of Queensland's border country, as a metaphor for the broader human ecology.

Catherine Clover's multidisciplinary practice addresses communication through voice, language and the interplay between hearing/listening, seeing/reading. Using field recording, digital imaging and the spoken/written word she explores an expanded approach to language within and across species through a framework of everyday experience. Brought up in London UK she arrived in Melbourne Australia as visiting artist through Gertrude Contemporary in the 1990s. Her work has been exhibited and performed internationally since the 90s. She teaches in Melbourne at Swinburne University (MA Writing), RMIT University (MA Public Art) and holds a practice led PhD (Fine Art) through RMIT University.

Stuart Cooke is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and Literary Studies at Griffith University. His latest books are the poetry collection *Lyre* (UWAP, 2019) and a translation of Gianni Siccardi's *The Blackbird* (Vagabond, 2018), and his recent articles have appeared in *Auto/Biography Studies*, *Environmental Humanities*, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* and *Swampen*.

Ashley Eriksmoen Over the past decade, Ashley has been salvaging timber and appropriating discarded wood furniture to construct her works. Her practice, which spans sculpture, contemporary craft and critical design, addresses pressing environmental issues including natural resource use, consumer waste, deforestation and wildlife habitat reductions. Ashley holds a Bachelor of Science in Geological Sciences, studied Fine Woodworking at College of the Redwoods, and earned a Master of Fine Arts at Rhode Island School of Design (2000). Ashley exhibits nationally and internationally. She is currently based in Canberra, Australia, where she lectures at the Australian National University School of Art & Design.

Alex Gawronski is an artist, writer, independent gallerist and lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts, USyd. His interests focus on the intersection and tension between art's institutional framing and alternatives for autonomous intervention. He is further interested in the political economy of contemporary art; how, where and by whom, value is ascribed within its networks. Gawronski participated in the inaugural presentation of *The National: New Australian Art* for which he was commissioned to create three large scale architectural interventions at the AGNSW, MCA and Carriage Works (2017). Other exhibitions include; *Circling the Sun*, First Draft, Sydney (2021); *Extinction*, Taita Studios, Málaga, Spain (2020); *Axes*, Goya Curtain, Tokyo (2019); *Contour 556*, Canberra, ACT (2018), *The Watched*, Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA), Albury, NSW (2108); *Call of the Avant-Garde: Constructivism and Australian Art*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, (2017). Gawronski is co-founding director of KNULP, Sydney (2015 -). He is a lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts (SCA), the University of Sydney.

Helen Hardess lives and works in Brisbane on the land of the Yugarabul, Yuggera, Jagera and Turrbal peoples. Her experimental art practice engages with materiality, expanded drawing, and audio visual to push against art history's hierarchies, our contested foundational narratives, and precarious global futures. She has shown work in Redland Art Gallery (Brisbane 2021), Vacant Assembly (Brisbane 2020), BLINDSIDE (Melbourne 2018), STABLE (Brisbane 2018), Spring Hill Reservoirs (Brisbane 2018), and POP, White Box, and Webb Galleries Griffith University (2017). She completed a residency at House Conspiracy, (Brisbane 2018). She has a Bachelor of Fine Art from Griffith University (2020).

Oliver Hämäläinen is a Melbourne born and based artist who works across video, performance and sculpture. His practice uses the body as the site of investigation and collaboration to activate cultural solidarity with the more-than-human world. He is currently completing a Masters in Contemporary Art at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Tiana Jefferies is an emerging artist based in Meanjin who uses casting, digital modelling, projection, and installation processes to develop a posthuman mapping of materiality and relationality. Jefferies is currently under examination for a Master of Philosophy in Experimental Creative Practice at the Queensland University of Technology. She has exhibited at Outer Space, MetroArts, The Walls Artspace, and various group exhibitions throughout South East Queensland.

Jay Johnston, is Associate Professor in the Department of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney. She is a bad birdwatcher and platypus lover. An interdisciplinary scholar her academic work is at the interface of philosophy, arts and religion and is centrally concerned with subtle bodies, the cultivation of perception and multi-species ethic-aesthetic relations. Her most recent monograph: *Stag and Stone: Religion, Archaeology and Esoteric Aesthetics* (2021).

Madeleine Kelly is an artist and senior lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts, USyd. Her practice-led research is based on the broad interdisciplinary field of painting, with a focus on human entanglements with animals/plants/energy. She is deeply interested in iconography, figuration, the pictorial and painting both as an object and philosophical visual language, with this interest extending to the institutions that circulate it, such as aesthetics and art history. Her research and writing focus on metaphor and inter-iconic visual 'languages' that suggest the contingency of knowledge. She views the field of painting as composed of networks of aesthetic, topographic and historical positions. She has shown nationally and internationally. Her works have entered many public collections in Australia, including QAGOMA and several permanent university collections.

Alex Last is an interdisciplinary artist living and working on Muwinina land in nipaluna, lutruwita (colonial name; Hobart, Tasmania). Alex works in a range of mediums across various disciplines, exploring the entangled, dissonant, cryptic and transformative relationships between living organisms and their human relatives. In a minor effort to dampen global anthropocentrism, Alex labours to uncover those narratives which illuminate the ornate subjectivities of earth's scorned and unseen creatures. In recent years, various projects have involved an exploration of the material and energetic dependencies which trap human beings into extractive modes of existence.

Tessa Laird

Tessa Laird is an artist, writer and Lecturer in Critical and Theoretical Studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne. Tessa's writing and pedagogy explores intersections between art and animal studies, aesthetics and ecology. Her books include a speculative approach to colour theory: *A Rainbow Reader* (2013), and *Bat*, a cultural history of bats, as part of Reaktion's

celebrated Animal series (2018). Tessa recently edited a special issue of Art + Australia with the theme Multinaturalism. She is currently researching a book on her concept of Cinemal, the becoming-animal of experimental film.

Jessica Laraine Williams

Jessica Laraine Williams is a transdisciplinary researcher, visual artist, writer and part time PhD candidate at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, The University of Melbourne. Her creative work relates to interests in performative identity, relational cartography (systems) and institutional critique. Jess has been working for over a decade as a clinical physiotherapist, and now specialises in aged care physiotherapy. Jess' PhD research situates the concept of the posthuman through transdisciplinary work with art, oriented through the perspective of an embedded practitioner in the field.

Blake Lawrence is an interdisciplinary artist working across photography, drag, video, performance and ceremony. Drawing on the performative potential of materials, Lawrence works in entanglement with crude and camera-less photographic processes. They are devoted to relationship and responsibility beyond genealogy, absence and residue, drag, care, love, sex and pleasure in a practice-based research. Borne from Yaegl land and waters in Northern NSW, Lawrence lives and works on Gadigal land. They completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at the Sydney College of The Arts, and subsequently Honours In Design (Photography) at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Leo Lazarus is a writer, poet and traveller from Melbourne, Australia. A passionate explorer of the wonders of life on Earth, he uses writing as a way to discover, share and enjoy the beauty around us. From tranquil glades and riversides to bustling markets and streets, the pen, and the page are his anchors in attempts to capture the essence of a place. Through sharing his work and running writing workshops he encourages others to delve into the world of words. His first book, *Myanmar in Moments*, is out now through Ginninderra Press.

Jessica Masters is a research officer at Australian National University and a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Sydney. She studies relationships between decadence and modernism, women and cosmopolitanism, and aesthetics of decay.

Ian Maxwell is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts School of Drama, where he majored in Directing. Subsequent to that training, he embarked upon academic work at the University of Sydney, where he completed his PhD - an ethnography of Hip Hop culture in the suburbs of Sydney in the 1990s - in 1997. Ian is Chair of The University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee and Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. He is also President of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies and a Vice-President of Performance Studies international and a Sydney Environment Institute researcher.

Sanne Mestrom is an artist and senior lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts, USyd. Her practice-led research seeks to incorporate "play" into a socially engaged practice as a means to question the social consequences of urban design. Her current research investigates ways that art in public places – and urban design more broadly - can become critically integrated, inclusive and interactive spaces. To do so, her projects bring together sculpture and the body to examine the role of art in rewriting current definitions of 'play' as relating to the physical, experiential and ideological conditions of 'place'. She has exhibited nationally and internationally. Her works have entered many public collections in Australia, including The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, the National Gallery of Australia and several permanent university collections.

Julia Colleen Miller is the Senior Data Manager for the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language and a digital archivist for the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures. Julia has a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Washington (2013). Topics of her thesis include acoustic phonetics, endangered language documentation, and language variation. In her research, she has had the opportunity to travel to Papua New Guinea as a member of a collaborative language and ethno-ornithological documentation team. She is a keen bird enthusiast.

Raquel Ormella's practice encompasses various media and can be divided into two broad thematic streams: political language and its effects on national identity, and the complex relationship between humans and the natural environment. In 2020 her work was included in the first iteration of the landmark exhibition *Australian Woman Artists 1901 to Now*, as part of the National Gallery of Australia's *Know My Name* program. Raquel's work has been included in the TarraWarra Biennial, *Slow Moving Waters*, (2021), Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (2015); the 2013 California-Pacific Triennial (2015), 2010 Aichi Triennial (Japan), 2008 Sydney Biennale, the 2003 Biennale of Istanbul and the 2002 Sao Paulo Biennale (Brazil), as well as many group exhibitions in Australia including *Material Politics*, Institute of Modern Art Brisbane (2017) and *The National*, New Australian Art, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney (2017). In 2018 Shepparton Art Museum curated a solo survey show, *I hope you get this*, that toured to 5 galleries and museums in the eastern States with NETS Victoria. She is a Lecturer at the School of Art & Design, Australian National University, Canberra. She is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Melody Owen is represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland. She has an MFA in Electronic Integrated Arts and a MA in Environmental Arts and Humanities and is currently doing an art practice PhD in VR and zoosemiotics at UNSW in Sydney Australia. She is an interdisciplinary conceptual artist and works across many mediums, both digital and analog. Owen has shown at the Portland Art Museum, Nine Gallery, PDX Gallery, the Art Gym, and many other venues and festivals around Portland, the United States, and the world. She has been awarded several high-profile grants and artist residencies in Paris, Quebec, Iceland, Switzerland, Austria, California, and Oregon and was an Artforum Critic's Pick in 2015.

Mark Pemberton is an interdisciplinary scholar with an interest in visual art, improvisation, and the perception and cognition of music and sound. Over recent years, his research uses musical models to address aesthetical issues related to the contemporary production and reception of art. He enjoys listening to natural soundscapes and his research is frequently interrupted by visits from observably intelligent Butcherbirds.

Elizabeth Presa is a visual artist and academic at the Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne. She was Head of the interdisciplinary Centre for Ideas from 2003-2018 and now lectures in Sculpture and Critical Theory. She has an ongoing interest in the interconnections between philosophy and art. International artist-residencies include the Cite International Des Arts, Paris; Nanyang

Academy of Art, Singapore; KNUA Seoul; Five College's Women's Research Centre, Mt Holyoke College, and Amherst College Massachusetts; Youkobo Art Space Tokyo; and Pilchuck glass school in Washington state. In 2018 she led a research project to Tibet with PhD candidates at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

Timo Rissanen is a researcher, educator, artist and designer working across fashion, art and sustainability. His artistic practice focuses on labour, politics and love through installation and cross-stitched poetry. Timo co-curated 'Fashioning Now' 2009 with Alison Gwilt and 'Yield' 2011 with Holly McQuillan and has co-published *Shaping Sustainable Fashion* (2011) with Gwilt, and *Zero Waste Fashion Design* (2016) with McQuillan. He is a founding member of the Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion and is currently Associate Professor and co-director of the Material Ecologies Design Lab at UTS.

Zoë Sadokierski is an award-winning book designer, artist and senior lecturer at the UTS School of Design, where she is a co-founder of Spec Studio, a collective of design researchers exploring narrative approaches to ecological communication. She is former president and a founding member of the Australian Book Designers Association. In 2015 Zoë established Page Screen Books, an independent publisher of artist's books and visual essays.

Pamela See (Xue Mei-Ling) is an Australian artist who uses Chinese papercutting to engage a variety post-digital media, ranging from vector-based animation to 3d printing. Her technique resembles Foshan papercutting, which is endemic to the home province of her maternal grandparents. The implications of human migration is a recurrent theme in her artwork. This includes environmental degradation as being both a catalyst and a consequence. Her artwork features in the collections of the Huaxia Papercutting Museum in China, the National Gallery of Australia and the National Portrait Gallery of Australia. She completed a Doctor of Philosophy at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, in 2020.

Brigitta Summers is an artist living and working on Gadigal and Wangal country. She has a Bachelor of Arts in History and German from Oxford University, UK and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the National Art School. She is currently completing a Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts. Her practice is based primarily in printmaking, but is undergoing a shift towards more collaborative and socially engaged forms of practice.

Hollis Taylor is a Research Fellow at Macquarie University, Sydney in the Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies. Her research focuses on three Australian avian species-pied butcherbirds, lyrebirds, and bowerbirds-as she reflects on animal aesthetics, human exceptionalism in the arts, and the natureculture continuum. She lectures worldwide on *The Music of Nature and the Nature of Music* Her award-winning (re)compositions of pied butcherbird songs are supported by a grant from the Australia Council. Her monograph, *Is Birdsong Music? Outback Encounters with an Australian Songbird*, is forthcoming. Previous posts include as a Research Fellow at the University of Technology, Sydney, the Laboratoire d'Eco-anthropologie & Ethnobiologie in the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, and the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin.

John Tonkin has been a practising new media artist since 1985. In 1999-2000 he received a fellowship from the Australia Council's New Media Arts Board. His broad interests have been around the creative possibilities of computation, particularly focused on interaction as a means of physical and conceptual play. John's recent projects have included several large-scale public art commissions that have expanded his interest in interactivity into the public domain, as well as a series of interactive video works that investigate visual perception as being grounded in a sensorium of bodily sensations and activated through the dynamic movements of the body. He is currently extending this research into virtual reality.

Shonah Trescott is an Australian painter and graduate of the National Art School, 2005. Since 2005 she has been living and working abroad in Germany, Puerto Rico and the USA. She has been the recipient of numerous awards and residencies including fellowships at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg for Advanced Study, Germany, the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris and was the pilot artist for the German Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research Arctic residency. She exhibits with Gallery Eigen+Art, Lab Berlin, Germany, Gallery Ando Tokyo, Japan and Walter Otero Gallery, Puerto Rico. Her work is held in public and private collections such as the Rubell Museum, Miami, USA, Stiftung Olbricht, Berlin, Germany, Umweltbundesamt, Dessau, Germany, Museum of Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico, Dom Museum, Vienna, and the Momentum Worldwide Collection. She has recently moved back to Australia where she is now based.

Jen Valender is an Australasian artist who works primarily with moving image, sculpture, and sound. Her practice and research explore connections between absurdity and dissonance to surface undercurrents of environmental and social problems. Jen was the recipient of Next Wave's New Precinct Award 2019 and the Ian Potter Museum's Miegunyah Research Project Award, for which she presented her paper *Captain Bligh hauled out from under his bed*. In 2020, Jen was an artist in residence at the Centre for Projection Art, exhibiting works for *Light Windows* hosted by the HoloCentre, New York, and the Centre of Visual Art (CoVA). Her projection, *Played as they lay*, recently featured in *Spier Light Art 2021*, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Toyah Webb is a graduate student at the University of Sydney, where she is researching representations of alterity in New Weird fiction. Her latest publications can be found in *Whose Futures?* (Economic and Social Research Aotearoa, 2020) and *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook* (Massey University Press, 2021).

