

# The National 4 Australian Art Now

## Media Release

***The National 4* opens across four leading Sydney cultural institutions**



Left to right: Susan Balbunga *Bamugora* 2023. Naminapu Maymuru-White *Milngiyawuy–Celestial River* 2023. Katie West *The women plucked the star pickets from the ground and turned them into wana (digging sticks)* 2023. Installation view, *The National 4: Australian Art Now*, Carriageworks. Photo: Zan Wimberley

Artists from across Australia and beyond converge on Sydney to present new and ambitious works for [The National 4: Australian Art Now](#), the fourth iteration of the free biennial survey of Australian contemporary art, opening tomorrow at four leading cultural institutions across Greater Sydney.

A partnership between the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Art Gallery of NSW), Campbelltown Arts Centre (C-A-C), Carriageworks and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA Australia), *The National 4* brings together 48 new artist projects involving more than 80 artists from across Country, generations and communities.

*The National 4* features bold, distinctive and experimental works that reflect the diversity and vitality of the art being made in Australia today. For many artists this is their first presentation at a major cultural institution in New South Wales.

The exhibition is curated by **Beatrice Gralton** at the Art Gallery of NSW; **Emily Rolfe** at C-A-C; **Freja Carmichael** (Quandamooka) and **Aarna Fitzgerald Hanley** at Carriageworks; and **Jane Devery** at the MCA Australia. This year marks the first presentation of *The National* at Campbelltown Arts Centre, extending the footprint of the exhibition across Greater Sydney.

In a joint statement, Beatrice Gralton, Emily Rolfe, Freja Carmichael, Aarna Fitzgerald Hanley and Jane Devery, said: '*The National 4* is a dynamic collaboration resulting in four distinct exhibitions that unfold

across our respective organisations. It brings together diverse works by more than 80 artists reflecting the multiplicity of perspectives informing the art being made in Australia today.

‘Collectively the artists in *The National 4* contribute to broader conversations across a range of critical ideas, including intergenerational learning, community and social interconnectedness, the role of language, and personal narratives that acknowledge broader social and political issues.’

The opening program runs across three days from Friday 31 March to Sunday 2 April and includes more than [20 free events](#) including performance, film, talks and workshops, to extend on key ideas in the exhibition. The opening program invites audiences to connect with artists and hear their stories.

*The National 4: Australian Art Now* is proudly supported by the NSW Government through its tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW.

## ***The National 4* highlights**

14 artists are presented at the Art Gallery of NSW, as well as an artist project at the Brett Whiteley Studio in Surry Hills for the first time in the history of *The National*, highlights include:

- **Robert Fielding’s** immersive video installation *Milpatjunanyi* honours the practice of drawing in the earth with a wire or stick – a vital and enduring form of women’s storytelling from Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY Lands).
- **Nabilah Nordin’s** intensely colourful and richly textured installation *Corinthian Clump* is a raucous confrontation between the classical architecture of the Art Gallery’s historic vestibule and the artist’s free-form sculptural language.
- **Gerry Wedd’s** 600-plus hand-formed tiles and vessels in *Where Are We Now? (Where are we now?)* champions the role of ceramics as a tool for mass communication. His tiled hearth decorated with text and imagery is like a conversation between diverse threads of history, and chronicles his interest in nature, contemporary music, politics and social justice issues.
- **Natasha Walsh’s** intervention at the Brett Whiteley Studio gives an insight into the artistic process. Walsh is making a new body of work at the Studio titled *Hysteria*, where she revisits famous paintings of women by men, creating new interpretations of these images that reveal the complexities of representation.



Installation view of Nabilah Nordin’s *Corinthian Clump* 2023 presented as part of *The National 4: Australian Art Now* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, photo © Art Gallery of New South Wales, Mim Stirling

11 artists are presented at Campbelltown Arts Centre, including:

- **Shivanjani Lal's** *Aise Aise Hai (how we remember)* is a field of 87 plaster cast sugarcane stalks, referencing the number of boats that transported over 60,000 people from India to Fiji between 1879 and 1916 to work as indentured labourers; among them were Lal's ancestors.
- **Christopher Bassi's** installation *Island Revelation* embodies a series of paintings that draw from a group of iconographic motifs of the Torres Strait. The artist is interested in how these motifs function as symbols of his personal relationship to the Torres Strait landscape, in reading Country and considering it sacred, and the motifs' connections to the Catholic art of Velázquez and Goya.
- **Brook Andrew's** video *GABAN* summons a number of interlinked stories concerning the mess of the colonial fall-out, performed by characters who personify cultural objects held in colonial collections and elements of the institutional power of the museum. *GABAN* eventually reveals new pathways of intersecting histories to challenge prevailing narratives and bring about repatriation, healing and revenge.
- **Lynda Draper's** *Talismans for Unsettled Times* comprises a sea of ethereal ceramic sculptures created over the period of a decade. Draper likens this body of work to a votive offering – a voluntary offering of an object to the gods in a period of anxiety or change. Creating work is a meditative and deeply personal undertaking for Draper. It is a way for her to process the instability of recent years and to work through questions surrounding personal, long-held beliefs.



Installation view of Christopher Bassi's *Island Revelation* 2023 presented as part of *The National 4: Australian Art Now* at Campbelltown Arts Centre, photo: Mim Stirling



11 artists are presented at Carriageworks, including:

- Senior Warrawarra artist, **Susan Balbunga's** art practice is informed by her lived experiences growing up in the bush and the knowledge she acquired from her family. Balbunga weaves gunga (*Pandanus spiralis*) into bamugora, a traditional conical form that has metaphoric, cultural and functional significance.
- *FM Air* is a new dance by **Jo Lloyd**, performed three times during *The National 4*. Presented in Carriageworks' Public Space, the three performers move in a continuous bind, oscillating in a transparent fabric bag.
- In *Wintinganhu (sister-in-law)*, **Teho Ropeyarn** tells his mother's story through printmaking and sound. Family, Country and culture are carved into each line of his prints, embodying his connection to the Injinoo community, Cape York.
- **Erika Scott's** *The Circadian Cul-de-sac* is an otherworldly scene assembled from discarded fish tanks, tyres, Tampax instructions, empty photo frames, knick-knacks and other stuff, rearranged and reconfigured to test how personal understandings relate to broader systems and currencies.



Erika Scott *The Circadian Cul-de-sac* 2023. Installation view *The National 4: Australian Art Now* Carriageworks. Photo: Zan Wimberley

The work of 13 artists and 2 collectives are presented at MCA Australia, including:

- **Allison Chhorn's** immersive video installation meditates on the daily routines of her Cambodian–Australian family and addresses histories of migration and the ongoing effects of colonisation.
- **Simryn Gill** has created a poetic evocation of her elderly Italian neighbour's garden, which connects local and personal experiences to broader questions of place and belonging.
- Collaborative and community-based practices have a strong presence in the exhibition at MCA Australia, including a powerful video installation produced by artists from **Jilamara Arts Centre** filmed on Country in the remote Milikapiti community in the Tiwi Islands, and a project by the collective **Ivi** based between Queensland, Aotearoa New Zealand and Tonga which emphasises knowledge-sharing and social harmony through the production of ngatu (barkcloth).



Simryn Gill *Maria's Garden* (detail) 2021, installation view *The National 4: Australian Art Now* Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023, ink on paper, image courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Anna Kučera

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication featuring full-colour reproductions, essays by the exhibition curators, profiles on each of the exhibiting artists and texts by **Jennifer Higgie** and **Ellen van Neerven** (Mununjali Yugambah). The publication is available to purchase from the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Carriageworks and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

*The National 4: Australian Art Now* is a free exhibition and opens tomorrow across four Sydney cultural institutions:

- Art Gallery of New South Wales: Friday 24 March – Sunday 23 July 2023
- Campbelltown Arts Centre: Thursday 30 March – Sunday 25 June 2023
- Carriageworks: Thursday 30 March – Sunday 25 June 2023
- Museum of Contemporary Art Australia: Friday 31 March – 9 July 2023

For more information: [the-national.com.au](https://the-national.com.au).

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