There is
22 February – 16 March 2019
RITUAL:
A sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence.

The making of art is itself ritualistic, the sequestered place is often the studio, the sequence of activities always highly individualised and motivated by a compelling rationale. All the artists invited to participate in this exhibition have explored this idea of ritual process to examine key ideas in human experience that seek knowledge, comfort or pose questions about our identity and how we engage as social beings. In the works they have created, the 12 artists consider how rituals impact our culture, our communities, our lives, and how we identify ourselves as individuals and as members of larger groups within those communities.

The quotidian rituals of practice are evident in all these works, though for Teelah George and Rebecca Bauman that absorbing, repetitive process of making opens up a unique space of contemplation and reverie. Through their slowly accumulating yellow stitches and red dashes, they build an arena of traces documenting process and quantifying time. George's glistening embroideries capture light and pulsate with each minor change of our orientation to present a shifting field of extraordinary beauty. Similarly, Baumann's methodical record-keeping literally marks out time, each mark a companion of its predecessor and a prelude of more to come. Together these marks combine to create a shimmering fugue, a dazzling chronicle.

The rituals of art are embedded in the everyday lives of these artists in their studios and also as family members and participants in their communities. For Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, the works he creates embody that sense of belonging. Embedded in family life and memories and intertwined with narratives from the Qur'an, his works induce a dreamlike musing on the power of objects and animals to evoke meaning. His image of a lamb trussed for ritual slaughter is given the reassuring title I've Been Assured That You're Going To Heaven My Friend, his execution undertaken with an air of sanctity that is seamlessly blended with blood, shit and meat. Ritual and religion are here entwined, the sacrificial lamb standing for all those innocents who make the ultimate sacrifice for others, willingly or not.

In Tarryn Gill's work the quasi-religious ambiance she creates in her installation hints at a similar orthodoxy, but the meaning remains tantalisingly out of reach. The mythical golden cat-beast occupies centre stage with the artist in an exotic temple overseen by the duality of sun and moon and flanked by phallic pillars. These elements are suggestive of the transience of life, or possibly they hint at re-birth and the rituals of regeneration. Whatever the interpretation, the charged space Gill creates in this assemblage of objects induces a sense of mystery and of the inexplicability of faith.

For Tom Müller, the essence of ritual is encapsulated in the nature of the venue in which these activities occur, this sequestered place where we are separated from the cares and concerns of the everyday world. Once we have entered the ritual space, objects and activities are transformed, they assume special meaning, they become magical once that threshold is breached and we move beyond time and space into the realm of rites and ceremony. For that reason, his work Spectres evokes that place of transformation in a space constructed through the use of light, haze and sound, which energies the space we participants now inhabit.
Olga Cironis similarly evokes a mysterious arena of engagement in her meditation on the rituals of play. By carefully stitching a blanket around a rocking horse, the object itself is disguised, but only just; the shroud conceals, but not completely, leaving us with an uncanny sense of unease, of not knowing all that lies beneath. The joyous childhood toy and the comforting blanket are combined into a haunting echo of what has been lost, which induces a sense of disquiet. This intimate uncertainty is amplified, quite literally, through the sensors on the animal’s back that echo through a speaker on the wall the moment when it is touched.

Although many of the works in Ritual hint at the darker, unknowable, disturbing aspect of ritual it is also true they can be celebratory. Rituals give us a framework to commemorate the extraordinary and the noteworthy and formats that embody respectful contemplation. Anna Louise Richardson’s fascination with the heroic Phar Lap, the Wonder Horse of her title, has been memorialised on an altar to the now iconic animal whose bodily remains are fetishised like some medieval saint. She places his massive heart, cast in bronze, on a plinth that replicates the plinth on which Peter Corlett’s bronze sculpture of Phar Lap sits at Flemington, and documents it in a print on the wall. They are presented as reliquaries to worship and, just possibly, to act as aide-memoires of the animal’s treatment in life as in death.

Iconic images are also sites for ritualising our beliefs. Tom Roberts’ 1895 painting Boiled Up encapsulates our sense of Australia as a larrikin entity, lawless and dangerous. For Jarrad Martyn that mythologising is a platform to explore how those attitudes remain manifest in humanity’s disastrous impact on the natural environment, both its topography and ecosystems.

Plan depicts the hold-up recorded by Roberts in 1860s Victoria but with the bushrangers replaced by characters from history, all of whom bear witness to the disastrous impact of our ongoing ecological abuse.

As defined, ritual is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects and its performative aspect is an integral part of our conception of such activities. In Andrew Nicholls’ series of photographs, the performance is played out in a gay beat called the Rambling in Central Park in New York. In a secluded area of woodland, Nicholls mimics the gestures of Brooklyn-based model George Dellinger, who lived opposite the Ramble during the early 1980s when the area was at its height of infamy as a cruising ground. Late in 2017, Andrew dressed similarly to George and together they returned to the site in a performance that celebrates the historical significance of tacit knowledge and covert gesture to gay men and alludes to nomenclature and secret ritual between men in plain sight.

Jacobus Capone also foregrounds the performative and then represents his ritualistic encounters with various environments as videos or photographs. Forewarning (Act 1), documents a specific performance undertaken at the Larsbreen glacier at 78 degrees North. While kneeling, Capone placed the tip of a hunting knife pressed against a pocket of the exposed glacial ice and drew a single line: “hopelessness and hope functioning as the works warp and weft”.

Often physically demanding, through his durational performances Capone positions himself as “… a warning and act of reconciliation between humanity and landscape”. The poetry of this action in Forewarning (Act 1) lies not only in its beauty and...
simplicity but because it polarises humankind's environmental impact while delicately exploring notions of ecological grief.

The ritual practice of art-making can reconcile and connect in intriguing ways. Pilar Mata Dupont’s photographic series The Madman is a Dreamer Awake alludes to Immanuel Kant’s conception of the madman as a waking dreamer who has to reconcile his dream with the world he inhabits. Photographed in Schönau am Königssee, the images re-interpret a dream Sigmund Freud had while on holiday in Schönau in 1898, of ancient Roman ruins placed into alpine settings. For Mata Dupont, his dream suggests a ‘neurotic’ longing for Rome, for stability, order, and tradition, which Freud hoped might be relocated to his spiritual home of alpine wonder. Nearby, in the neighbouring village of Berchtesgaden, another dreamer resided, Adolf Hitler.

David Collins’ large-scale photographic tableaus are meticulously constructed with a cinematic aspiration that draws us into the realm of secretive ritual. Exotic and magical, he creates a world of occult hedonism, a contemporary variant of neo-pagan rituals and popular culture as painted by Thomas Couture or directed by Baz Luhrmann. These beautiful people halt their ceremony for a few seconds to be recorded in their sumptuous costumes, brazenly look us in the eye, and then return to their engrossing rites. Collins’ seductive vision weaves a compelling contemporary narrative through their extraordinary world of beauty and excess. “My generation surrounds itself with as many resources as possible in an attempt to feel affluent, and revels in the beauty of one another’s youthful bodies”, he explains.

This exhibition presents a diverse group of works by 12 artists, each of whom is exploring the act of ritual as a process in constructing their art practice while concurrently interrogating how ritual acts as a vital component in transforming, informing and critiquing contemporary experience. For each, their experiences are different, as are their practices and methodologies, yet each adds to our understanding of how ritual both informs and shapes our lives. In the works they have created we have insights into the ways in which rituals impact upon our attitudes, our beliefs, our experience, and into the ways in which we identify as individuals and also as members of larger groups within our community.

Professor Ted Snell AM CitWA
Curator
Chief Cultural Officer, University of Western Australia
LIST OF WORKS

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah  
*I've Been Assured That You're Going To Heaven My Friend*, 2013, resin and satin, 75 x 38 x 180 cm

Rebecca Baumann  
*Untitled (any moment now)*, 2018, ink on paper, 71 x 84 cm, (21 x 14.7 cm each)

Jacobs Capone  
*Forewarning (Act 1)*, 2018, site-specific performance/photograph, 100 x 150 cm, edition 1/5

Olga Cironis  
*Wild (in my mind)*, 2008, rocking horse covered and stitched with grey blanket and embedded sensors, size variable

David Collins  
*Eclipse*, 2018, giclee print, 71 x 55 cm  
*The First Night*, 2018, giclee print, 52 x 65 cm  
*Daughters of the Dawn (Rite of Ostara)*, 2017, giclee print, 77 x 65 cm

Pilar Mata Dupont  
*The Madman is a Dreamer Awake* series 1-4, (2013-15), glicée prints, each 89 x 120 cm, edition 1/5

Teelah George  
*Saffron*, 2019, thread on cloth, 170 x 120 cm

Tarryn Gill  
*Belly of the Beast (Figure 1)*, 2018, mixed media, 65 x 203 x 16 cm  
*Belly of the Beast (Figure 2)*, 2018, mixed media, 65 x 203 x 16 cm  
*Belly of the Beast (Gold Feline)*, 2018, mixed media, 136 x 107 x 12 cm  
*Belly of the Beast (Self)*, 2018, mixed media, 81 x 78 x 7 cm  
*Belly of the Beast (Moon)*, 2017, mixed media, 54 x 54 x 6.5 cm  
*Belly of the Beast (Sun)*, 2017, mixed media, 54 x 54 x 6.5 cm  
Approx 2.5 x 6 m

Jarrad Martyn  
*Plan*, 2019, painting, oil and acrylic on canvas

Tom Müller  
*Spectres*, 2019, LED, hazer, sound monitors, dimensions variable

Andrew Nicholls  
*Rambling 1-5*, 2017, photographic print, each 100 x 66.6 cm

Anna Louise Richardson  
*Wonder Horse*, 2017, bronze, laminate, vinyl, 140 x 100 x 45 cm, edition 1/3  
*Gift Horse*, 2016, lithograph on cotton rag paper, 70 x 50 cm, edition 6/10

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All rights reserved. ISBN 978-1-925793-12-3  
Cover image: Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *I've Been Assured That You're Going To Heaven My Friend*, 2013, resin and satin, 75 x 38 x 180 cm  
Inside cover: David Collins, *The First Night*, 2018, giclee print, 52 x 65 cm

A UWA Away Project - an initiative that presents the University of Western Australia’s arts and cultural programs at venues off-campus.