



Nocturne

Curated by Kirrily Hammond

Fuli Andrinopoulos ■ Dionne Canzano ■ Alan Constable ■ Leo Cussen ■ Emily Ferrell ■ Peter Graham ■ Brent Harris ■ Kelvin Helferman ■ Jess Johnson ■ Nuan Nguyen ■ Cameton Noble ■ Warren O'Brien ■ Galah Sheehan ■ Jelena Telecki ■ Terry Williams



ARTS PROJECT AUSTRALIA

Nocturne

In the 1890s French symbolist painter Odilon Redon created several images titled 'Closed eyes', which depicted the head and shoulders of a woman asleep. Her calm, relaxed features suggest she had escaped from the grim reality of France at that time, to an inner world of the imagination.¹ More than a century later, the painting by Jelena Telecki titled 'Nurse smoking' 2012 bears a striking resemblance, albeit transformed to a more contemporary context by the presence of a nurse's uniform and a cigarette. Telecki's lone figure also has her eyes closed and it is unclear if this is a fleeting reverie or a moment of private introspection; a respite from the exhaustion of night shift. In the work of both Redon and Telecki there appears to be a disconnect between reality and the artists' dreamlike, enigmatic imagery. Their characters and creatures emerge from the night – when the world has dissolved into darkness, and the mind begins to wander.

Peter Graham's strange otherworldly paintings and sculptures follow a similar trajectory, allowing the imagination free reign. He describes the painted organic forms that emerge from his open topped skulls as 'night time growths'² and has dedicated an entire series of works to portraying the growth of the senses stimulated by darkness. Fungal blooms are literally sprouting from his delicate figurative sculptures –

the eye sockets of 'believer' 2010 are replaced with protruding flowering forms, while a veritable forest emerges from the skull of 'man with mushrooms' 2010. These are nocturnal growths, plucked from the subconscious. They emerge from corpses, suggesting a darkly optimistic fascination with death and the afterlife, fecundity and renewal.

There is a quiet intensity in the singular, circular form that is repeated in each of Fulli Andrinopoulos' small pastel drawings. Without unique titles to differentiate between them, her works are defined by their distinct colour palette. From combinations of pale grey and pink to vibrant orange, yellow and red; in each drawing layers of saturated colour are glimpsed through the densely applied pastel. The works have a meditative quality, and sustained looking provides insight into the practice of an artist with an innate sense of colour and an ability to bring a composition to life through her sensitive rendering. While a single work could be a celestial object, viewed on mass, the drawings could also be a constellation of stars, orbiting in the night sky.

Images of the night recur throughout Alan Constable's practice and include drawings of observatories capturing the light pathways of stars and a lunar landscape titled 'The dark side of the moon' 1993. Constable also depicts the gentle evening light in his evocative pastel drawings 'Not titled' 1998 and 'Not titled' 2004. Figures are indeterminate and industrial building sites are romanticised in a golden twilight.

There is an element of mystery to the night that is a common source of artistic inspiration. Our limited night vision invites us to imagine what might be there in the dark; the unknown leaves a space for creativity. Long lost memories resurface in our dreams and nightmares, transformed by our aspirations and fears, taking shape in the gloom. An emotive drawing by Leo Cussen, 'Not titled' 2002, features a ghostly apparition with



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arms and legs outstretched and truncated. Strong, repetitive strokes of pastel in grey and black surround the figure and convey a sense of menacing urgency. Equally ominous are two cloaked characters in another of Cussen's drawings. While the artist has left their features undefined and their forms indistinct, there is a sense of foreboding communicated through the mark-making and murky tones.

The spirits are summoned in Brent Harris' monotype 'The fall #56' 2012. A group of figures appear to be enacting a religious ceremony as they huddle together in shallow water, watching a display of luminous beings dance across the night sky. This is one reading of Harris' image – yet his extended series of prints invites multiple narrations. His protagonists cluster in the landscape, their demonic features emerge from the dark, or in another image the strangely gentle eyes of a bearded man arrest the viewer, yet his decapitated head floats above the sea. Is this purgatory? It is definitely otherworldly. While the series title 'The fall' refers to Christ's journey towards death in 'The Stations of the Cross',³ these monotypes speak to a larger narrative of our own life cycle that includes moments of whimsy and periods of dark contemplation.

The gentle floating eyes of the bearded man are reminiscent of 'Eye Balloon' 1898 by Redon, who once said 'My drawings suggest and cannot be defined. They determine nothing. Like music, they spirit us into the equivocal world of the indeterminate'.⁴ The works in *Nocturne* share an ambiguity of form and meaning that relies on the viewer's intuition to decipher and interpret. Images of nature, figures and urban landscapes all become vehicles to express the artists' inner worlds: if we close our eyes under the cover of darkness we can allow ourselves to dream.

Kirrily Hammond
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¹ The difficult social and political environment from which Redon and the Symbolist movement emerged is outlined by Jodi Hauptman in *Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2005.

² Conversation with the artist, 13.2.2013.

³ Harris completed a series of prints entitled 'The Stations of the Cross' in 1989. This connection is explained by Jane Devery in her article *Brent Harris's the fall*, 'Imprint', Vol. 47, No.2, Winter 2012.

⁴ Odilon Redon, as quoted in Ingrid Ehrhardt & Simon Reynolds (eds.), *Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870 - 1920*, Prestel, Munich, 2000, p.17.



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Jelena Telecki *Nurse smoking* 2012 oil on canvas 51 x 41cm
Image courtesy the artist and Gallery 9, Sydney



Peter Graham *it is seeded in futility, it is imbedded in dry loam* 2003
oil on linen 80 x 60cm Private collection, Melbourne

1. Brent Harris *The Fall #57* 2012 monoprint 31 x 23.5cm Private collection, Melbourne
Image courtesy the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
2. Alan Constable *Not titled* 1998 pastel on paper 66 x 50cm
Image courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia, Melbourne
3. Fulli Andrinopoulos *Not titled* 2011 pastel on paper 16 x 23cm
Image courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia, Melbourne
4. Emily Ferretti *Lamp* 2012 oil on linen 53 x 42cm Private collection, Melbourne
Image courtesy the artist and Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne
5. Leo Cussen *Not titled* 2002 pastel on paper 27.5 x 37cm
Image courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia, Melbourne

Front cover: Dionne Canzano *Not titled* 2007 pastel 56 x 43.5cm
Private collection Image courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia, Melbourne

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