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Hazelhurst

SUTHERLANDSHIRE
ARTS
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Deborah Kelly, *Venus Envy redux* 2019

RocoColonial

**An artist initiated project by Gary Carsley
presented by Hazelhurst Arts Centre in partnership with Bathurst
Regional Art Gallery**

RocoColonial, a new exhibition at Hazelhurst Arts Centre, brings together 15 contemporary Australian artists working across painting, sculpture, design and fashion who explore themes at the intersection of the terms Rococo and Colonial.

The exhibition will include many new works from artists Deborah Kelly, Jenny Watson, Louise Zhang, Jennifer Leahy, Belem Lett and Techa Noble.



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Paradigms such as Rococo or Colonial are often considered to be disparate, immutable categories that are neatly cleaved periods of time. This hard-edged separation offers little opportunities to consider parallel histories - how things may be happening elsewhere or at the same time.

This exhibition materialises imagined overlap between the terms Rococo and the Colonial, inferring the connectedness of things and linking Australia to a wider, speculative world of multiple, concurrent histories. As such, *RocoColonial* allows formal associations and historical coincidences to pass backwards and forwards between the slippery stylistic classification Rococo and the vexatious period term Colonial. There are three key coincidental dates from this period – 1770, 1793 and 1815 – in which important historical events occurred in both France and Australia.

In 1770 while Lieutenant Cook was charting the east coast of Australia on the other side of the world Marie Antoinette was marrying the future Louis XVI of France, this moment coincidentally marking the end of the rococo and the beginning of the colonial.

The Rococo, a fluid and ambiguous artistic movement was among the first to articulate a comprehensive approach to the unity of art and design. Among its many modes of creative expression, was the incorporation of sculpture and painting and it introduced entirely new categories of furniture such as the chaise longue. Additionally, carpets, ceramics and wallpaper contributed to the articulation of the sumptuous interior spaces with which this style is popularly associated. Derived from the French term *rocaille*, Rococo was initially applied to a form of shell and rock garden ornamentation but later came to be closely associated with *Chinoiserie*, reflecting the expanding trade with East Asia and the onset of world-wide production and supply chains.

Cartographically, Cook's map of Australia with the asymmetry of its Eastern and Western halves, the sweeping curves and counter curves of the Great Australian Bight and the elongated flourishes of its large and small peninsulas resembles an elaborate and decorative rococo cartouche.

The close proximity of Hazelhurst to the site of Cook's landing and the first meeting of Aboriginal and European people on the east coast of Australia is the reason why it was chosen for the first iteration of the exhibition.

The elaborate, playfulness and excesses of the Rococo that were epitomised by the royal couple came to end with the French Revolution of 1789 which overthrew the



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monarchy. In early 1793, almost exactly to the day, while the first free settlers were setting foot on land at Port Botany, King Louis XVI was being executed by guillotine at the height of the French revolution.

Lastly, in 1815, when in the Northern Spring Louis's conservative brothers were being restored to power in France and seeking to reverse the reforms made by the French revolution and Napoleon, concurrently in the Southern Autumn Macquarie was proclaiming and naming on unceded Wiradjuri land the future town of Bathurst.

Contemporary scholarly responses to the Rococo have begun to acknowledge that behind the facade of affected elegance lurked both an anxiety and a deeply troubled expectation of impending cataclysm. Then as now, issues of globalisation, accelerating inequality and the systematic abuse of power by a ruling elite were threatening the established order of things. In the art of the Rococo, play and life are indistinguishable and it introduced a radically new concept of reality; in which dreams, fantasy and foreboding are constantly present elements. Coincidentally, today many contemporary Australian artists are using similar approaches to question the political, cultural and economic realities of our time.

Esme Timbery's work, *Shellworked Slippers*, is one of the two critical reference points for Rococolonial. Derived from the French term *rocaille*, Rococo was initially applied to a form of shell and rock garden ornamentation. Additionally, Esme's works exemplify the Indigenous craft practices of La Perouse, close to Botany Bay, the site of the first meeting place for Aboriginal and European people on the east coast of Australia. As a memorial to the stolen generation the work draws attention to the devastating impact of British colonisation on Aboriginal people.

Belem Lett's playful work, *Paradise Lost* draws on decoration and pattern from baroque and rococo Europe art and design. This work along with the part science fiction, part fantasy work *Pineapples* (created for the exhibition) sees the rococo shift into modernism with highly decorative areas juxtaposed with flat colour.

Deborah Kelly explores ideas of gender and power. In her new work *Venus Envy (redux)*, she reuses and reinterprets the image of Marie-Louise O'Murphy, the 14 year old model for Francois Boucher's 1752 work *Jeune Fille allongée (Reclining Girl)*. Hand cut from discarded art history books, the multiples images undo the authority of the original and suggests another life for the model, one in which she has more agency over their bodies, desires and representation.

Descended from the Mamu, Ngagen and Ngajan peoples of northern Queensland, **Danie Mellor** explores the interaction between people and their relationships with Country, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, telling stories of the challenge of European settlement in this country and of the passage of history. *Fragments of Anthology* combines the artist's contemporary photos with a small selection of historical images to suggest a shared authorship of history and events.

Joan Ross's work deal with the historical narratives of settlement and questions assumptions of our cultural identity as well as notions of being 'civilised' – particularly during the height of European imperial expansion. In the video work *BBQ this Sunday BYO* the process of colonisation is re-enacted through the Australian ritual of a summer picnic.



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After completing research at the Sutherland Shire Historical Society, as well as Abercrombie House and the Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum, both situated in Bathurst, **Jennifer Leahy** has created a new photographic series *The Deep Surface* which brings together a fictional gathering of women captivated by crystals and geological specimens. As the Rococo affirms in its dramatic styling that art is construction and inhabitation, these images blend the luscious notion of earthly treasures, decorative interiors and obsessive possession.

ARTISTS: Brook Andrew | Tony Clark | Peter Cooley | Deborah Kelly | Belem Lett | Jennifer Leahy | Danie Mellor | Marc Newson | Técha Noble & Romance Was Born | Joan Ross | Justin Shoulder | Esme Timbery | Jenny Watson | Louise Zhang
CARTOUCHES: Renjie Teoh

Exhibition details

RocoColonial

Hazelhurst Arts Centre: 4 May – 30 June 2019

782 Kingsway, Gymea.

Open daily 10am – 5pm

Bathurst Regional Art Gallery: 2 August – 22 September 2019

Gary Carsley is an Artist & Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Art & Design UNSW.

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