

***HOMEGROWN; A Critical Past* exhibition**
Exploring how artists respond to the past to inform the future.
Opening Night speech by Kathie Najar
Wednesday 03 April 2023

Thank you Hugh, for the introduction and welcome everyone.

“Exploring how artists respond to the past to inform the future” is indeed an interesting subject to explore within the visual arts.

Thank you Cassandra, and to all the exhibiting artists for your insights, from the urgency of maintaining our old-growth natural world, the importance of continuing the tradition of oral story-telling, the layers of multi-cultural histories that then propagate new cultures, and the unreliability of AI’s prediction of our super charged futures.

I honour the Cammeraygal people, the traditional custodians and caretakers whose unseeded land many of us live, work and play on, as our natural environment is referenced by most of the exhibiting artists. Our natural world shows us how-to-live in balance/equitably, how to remain resilient through desolation, offers supportive structures and harmony, out of what appears to be chaos... and then there is the consumption and waste that also devastates our environment.

All these nouns I have just quoted I extracted from the artists statements – and so, the cry for the survival of our natural resources are undeniably louder every day.

Leaning on and learning from the past is also demonstrated in these artworks though the representation of traditional cultures in telling a contemporary tale. Every culture has its folklore, encompassing myths, legends, fables, religion, prayers, proverbs, and instructions. Here, truth is less important than providing social cohesion. I see story telling as transmitting knowledge, preserving cultural heritage, and shaping individual and collective identities. As we all know too well, our digital world can let us down, therefore I see these intergenerational narratives as our most sustainable knowledge-storage-systems.

With mass global migration (persecution, war, famine, rising sea level etc) the being, becoming and belonging is key to a successful, inclusive, multi-cultural society. A more plateable representation of this integration is considered through the traditional European style still life mingling with the local flora, and the multi-faith symbolism co-habituating harmoniously.

To quote my old mate google...

“By studying the past, we can learn from our mistakes and avoid repeating them. We can also identify the forces that drive change and use this knowledge to shape a better future.”

I have long held the belief that contemporary art is a great indicator of the current social condition, and with that, the health and needs of its people. The artworks represented here offer insights into our local social condition, and they have the power to drive change, as all of these artworks rest and build on the past in the quest for that unpredictable yet sustainable future.