

**Education Resource Kit**  
**Year Levels 7–12**

**Exhibition: *Hair Pieces***  
**Dates: 4 May – 6 October 2024**

**Heide venue: Main Galleries**  
**Exhibition Curator: Melissa Keys**



Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

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## **Hair Pieces: Introduction**

**By Melissa Keys, Exhibition Curator**

*Hair Pieces* explores the significance of hair and its complex connotations in contemporary culture through a selection of recent Australian and international works of art.

For millennia hair has been a resonant and compelling subject, transmitting ideas about gender, mythology, status and power, the body, psychology, feminism and notions of beauty. Occupying a prominent place in the world of appearances, it has always assumed a particular importance in relation to the self and society. At once radiant and repellent, hair often induces powerfully visceral, unconscious and involuntary responses in those who encounter it.

Featuring works spanning five decades, this exhibition examines the myriad ways in which artists utilise hair to investigate and conjure generative and even magical possibilities encompassing growth, empowerment and transformation. From expressions of resistance and self-determination to associations with unbound freedom, fairy tales and the fantastical imagination, hair embodies a multitude of meanings and, in a sense, refuses to be tamed.

### **Artists**

Marina Abramović (SRB/USA) and Ulay (GER/USA), Francis Alÿs (MX), Janine Antoni (US), Georgia Banks (AUS), Polly Borland (US), Sonia Boyce (UK), Christina May Carey (AUS), Sadie Chandler (AUS), Edith Dekyndt (BXL/BE), Karla Dickens (AUS), Jim Dine (US), Peter Ellis (AUS), Tarryn Gill (AUS), Mona Hatoum (US), Zhang Chun Hong (US), Lou Hubbard (AUS), Jiang Jian (CN), Nusra Latif Qureshi (AUS), John Meade (AUS), Ana Mendieta (US), Hayley Millar Baker (AUS), S.J Norman (US), J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere (NRA), Patricia Piccinini (AUS), Wes Placek (AUS), C. J. Pyle (US), Chuxiao Qu (AUS), Julie Rrap (AUS), Charlie Sofo and Debris Facility (AUS), Christian Thompson (AUS), Kemang Wa Lehulere (SA), Helen Wright (AUS), Ai Yamaguchi (JPN), Shih Yung-Chun (TW), Louise Weaver (AUS).

## Resource for Educators

*Hair Pieces* delves into the multifaceted significance of hair in contemporary culture, showcasing a collection of recent artworks created by both Australian and international artists. The exhibition considers how artists utilise hair to probe diverse themes such as growth, empowerment, and transformation. Across various artworks and performance pieces spanning five decades the complex connotations associated with hair are unravelled and investigated.

In this education resource, we will examine three themes of the exhibition:

1. **Identity and Society:** Hair serves as a potent symbol for expressing self-identity and societal norms. It embodies ideas surrounding gender, mythology, status, power, and beauty. Through artistic interpretations, the exhibition delves into how hair can shape and reflects individual and collective identities.
2. **Uncanny Possibilities:** Hair captivates the human imagination, evoking themes of fantasy and mythology, and the suggestion that hair holds mysterious and unexpected powers, possibly even supernatural ones. From fairy tales to ancient myths, strange and eerie potential outcomes or occurrences are associated with hair. The exhibition explores the fantastical elements of hair, inviting viewers into a realm of imagination and wonder.
3. **Power Dynamics:** Hair has long been associated with power dynamics, as a symbol of both strength and vulnerability. For centuries hair has been used a weapon of conquest, violence, and control, while also signifying resistance and self-determination. The exhibition examines the complex interplay of power within the context of hair, highlighting its role in asserting authority or challenging societal norms

For educators it is important to note that the exhibition is not strictly speaking a thematic project, but rather it is grounded in the artists' shared interest in the symbolic, metaphoric and material possibilities of hair, as well as its suggestiveness. While there are affinities and threads that connect different works, the curator was more interested in creating an exhibition that explored the complex significance of hair in a way that is compelling and open-ended.

Teachers are encouraged to utilise the suggested questions and approaches provided in this resource as they see fit, tailoring their approach to best suit the needs and interests of their students. By embracing the diverse perspectives and interpretations embedded within the exhibition, educators can foster rich discussions and encourage critical thinking among students, allowing them to engage deeply with the subject.

## VCE Art Creative Practice: Unit 2

Reflection and evaluation is an important part of the creative practice. The questions relating to each of the works referenced in the *Hair Pieces* education resource investigates ideas, meanings and messages in the works through applying the three Interpretive Lenses: Structural, Personal and Cultural to the analysis and interpretation of the ideas, meanings and messages of artworks from different times and cultures.

- Teachers are encouraged to use the questions to prompt students to consider the ways artists use visual language to communicate ideas and meanings in their artwork.
- Students can substantiate their interpretations of artworks with evidence they find from the artworks themselves, along with the curator's summary and wall text as provided in this resource, together with the prompt questions.

### Exploring the theme of Identity and Society in the works in the exhibition

- **Identity and Society:** Hair serves as a potent symbol for expressing self-identity and societal norms. It embodies ideas surrounding gender, mythology, status, power, and beauty. Through artistic interpretations, the exhibition delves into how hair shapes and reflects individual and collective identities.

### Ana Mendieta

Born 1948 Havana, Cuba. Lived and worked New York, United States of America. Died 1985



Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)* 1972

colour photographs

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

© the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC, and Galerie Lelong, New York

### Exhibition label:

One of the earliest works in the exhibition is a sequence of photographs documenting Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta's performance *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplant)*, 1972, which emerged from a boundary-breaking period of culture, politics and social change in New York city during the 1960s and 1970s. Mendieta created the work in collaboration with her friend, the writer and poet Morty Sklar, and it involved the artist methodically transferring individual strands of Sklar's beard to her body and fastening them with glue to the skin on her upper lip.

One of two interrelated bodies of work, the suite of photographs forms part of Mendieta's important 1970s experimentations in which she altered her physical appearance through a range of cosmetic interventions. Mostly intimate private actions, but in this instance a live performance, the experiments often incorporated hair and wigs as a way of questioning and rupturing gender constructions and stereotypes. They have in part been attributed to Mendieta's fascination with Marcel Duchamp's elusive and subversive personas, such as his female alter ego Mademoiselle Rose Sélavy.

### Questions exploring the theme of Identity and Society

1. How does Ana Mendieta's performance, *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplant)*, challenge traditional notions of gender and identity?

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2. In what ways does Mendieta's use of facial hair in her performance serve as a commentary on societal expectations and norms regarding physical appearance?

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3. What might Mendieta be suggesting about the fluidity and malleability of identity through her collaboration with Morty Sklar and the act of transferring his beard to her own body?

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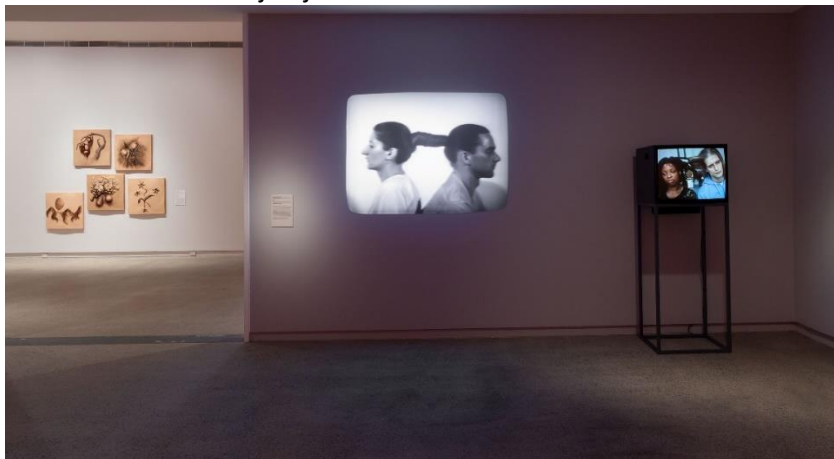
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**Marina Abramović,**

Born 1946, Belgrade, Serbia. Lives and works New York, United States of America

**Ulay**

Born 1943, Solingen, Germany. Lived and worked Amsterdam, the Netherlands and Ljubljana, Slovenia. Died 2020 Ljubljana



(Centre) Marina Abramović and Ulay

***Relation in Time* 1977**

Video

duration 2:27 min

Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives and LIMA Amsterdam

*Installation view, Hair Pieces, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.*

© the artists

**Exhibition label:**

Another performance piece in the exhibition, by celebrated collaborators Marina Abramović and Ulay, emerged from a radical European creative milieu in the 1970s. Titled *Relation in Time*, the performance (documented on video) took place in Bologna, Italy, in 1977 and saw the two artists seated back-to-back, with their hair bound together in a tightly formed coil, for 17 hours.

Every hour, three minutes of the physically demanding endurance work was recorded, quite literally charting the artists' growing discomfort and the unravelling of the physical attachment between them.

One of many iconic works that the duo performed together throughout their 12 years of collaborative practice, *Relation in Time* suggests interdependence and its slow undoing, made palpable through the vehicle of hair as an intimate extension of the self, an indicator of the passage of time, and an embodiment of the dynamic impermanence of life.

**Questions exploring the theme of Identity and Society**

1. How does the binding and physical connection of Marina Abramović and Ulay's hair in *Relation in Time* symbolise themes of interdependence and connection within society?

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2. In what ways does the unravelling of the physical attachment between Abramović and Ulay throughout the performance reflect broader societal concepts of relationships and their evolution over time?

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3. How does the 17-hour endurance performance of Marina Abramović and Ulay in *Relation in Time* shed light on the challenges and transformations that relationships, both personal and societal, undergo over time?

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## Sonia Boyce

Born 1962 London, England. Lives and works London



(Right) Sonia Boyce, *Exquisite Tension*, 2005,  
1 cube monitor video, HD in colour (shown without photographic print)  
Edition of 5 + 1 AP

Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, London

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

© the artists

### Exhibition label:

Similarly exploring the complexities of human relations through the metaphor of entangled hair, British artist Sonia Boyce's work *Exquisite Tension* comprises a video of a two-person, day-long performance in which the participants, artist Richard Hancock and curator Adelaide Bannerman—who had never previously met—were seated side by side, facing the audience. Their hair was woven together by a series of interconnecting braids.

When viewing the recording it is evident that a series of binaries play out as open-ended provocations, such as black/white, male/female, theatre/life. The hair of each performer is of a comparable length with a centre parting, yet is distinctly different in texture, colour and cultural signification. The intertwining of their hair thus suggests physical, cultural and social tensions and alludes to the constructed nature of power relationships operating on both an intimate micro and structural macro level.

Made in 2005, *Exquisite Tension* relates back to an earlier live work when Boyce braided her own hair with Hancock. It also directly references *Rope Piece*, 1983–84, by Taiwanese-born performance artist Tehching Hsieh and his American collaborator Linda Montano. This influential project saw the two artists tethered together by a long cord in an epic, year-long performance that resonates with Boyce's own focus on the conditions and dynamics of individual and societal relationships.

### Questions exploring the theme of Identity and Society

1. How does the artwork *Exquisite Tension* by Sonia Boyce use the visual symbol of intertwined hair to express ideas about diversity, identity, and social tensions? Can you relate this to your own experiences or observations in society?





'Natural Black Loving Care' hair dye, used by her mother to cover her greys, then dragged her sodden tresses across the gallery floor like a brush. In applying broad strokes of slippery black pigment back-and-forth across the space in rhythmic gestures, Antoni conflated the high-minded philosophical and psychoanalytical aesthetic concerns of action painting with the more quotidian motion of mopping.

Audience members viewing the performance were gradually pushed outside the gallery walls as the artist progressively snaked her way towards them, drawing the entire floor surface into the frame of the performance. Critic Catherine de Zegher has pointed out that Antoni's performance ironises the male-dominated history of abstract expressionism through the often-gendered menial work of cleaning and the sexualised position of the worker on all-fours.

The artist herself remarked that being on her hands and knees was 'very vulnerable', but that 'claiming the space was empowering'. Throughout the performance the free, unfettered potential of art was held in tension with the shackles of labour and the economics of daily life.

### Questions exploring the theme of Identity and Society

1. How does Janine Antoni's performance in *Loving Care* challenge traditional notions of art-making, particularly in its use of unconventional materials and actions? How does this challenge your understanding of what art can be?

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2. In what ways does Antoni's use of her mother's hair dye and the act of dragging her hair across the gallery floor convey themes of personal identity and familial relationships? How does this relate to your own experiences or perceptions of family and identity?

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3. How does Antoni's performance in *Loving Care* address gender dynamics and power structures within the art world and society at large? How might her actions subvert traditional gender roles and comment on issues of labour, vulnerability, and empowerment?

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### Wes Placek

Born 1947, Salzgitter, Germany. Arrived 1950, Australia. Lives and works Melbourne, Victoria



Wes Placek, *Hair of murdered women from the Auschwitz, Poland series* 1975

gelatin silver photograph

32.8 x 48.9 cm

© the artist

Courtesy the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased through the KODAK (Australasia)

Pty Ltd Fund, 1976

**Exhibition label:**

Australian artist Wes Placek's work *Hair of Murdered Women* is one of a series of photographs taken by the artist in the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland in 1975.

The images document aspects of the camp infrastructure and the categorised piles of hair, crutches, artificial limbs and spectacles stolen from the bodies of the more than one million people murdered in the camp.

Shot in black and white, the dense composition captures a small yet telling remnant detail. More than two tonnes of plaits and braids, curls and tresses of every colour were found when Auschwitz was liberated in 1945, poignantly highlighting how hair is a powerful signifier of human identity and individuality, and a representation of life itself.

**Questions exploring the theme of Identity and Society**

1. What does Wes Placek's photograph *Hair of Murdered Women* from Auschwitz concentration camp reveal about the profound impact of hair as a symbol of human identity and individuality?

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2. What does the presence of categorised piles of hair, crutches, and other personal belongings in Placek's photographs tell us about the systematic dehumanisation and persecution of individuals in Auschwitz?

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3. How does the black and white composition of Placek's photograph contribute to the emotional resonance of the image?

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**Nusra Latif Qureshi**

Born 1973 Pakistan. Arrived Australia 2001. Lives and works Melbourne, Victoria



Nusra Latif Qureshi  
*Medusa's Respite Room* 2017  
synthetic polymer paint and gouache on  
illustration board  
33 x 25.5 cm  
© the artist  
Courtesy of The State Art Collection, The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth Purchased 2018

**Exhibition label:**

Layered and open-ended, Nusra Latif Qureshi's work intricately combines the theatrical tropes and perspectives of Indo-Persian miniature painting with European aesthetics to create searching images that often appear visually paired back while being subtly multi-referential.

In *Medusa's Respite Room*, Qureshi depicts the famous gorgon in a state of repose. The redoubtable mythological figure is portrayed in a pensive state opposed to her customary 'female rage' and as a fierce threat to forces of male conquest and control.

While the figure of Medusa has been subject to divergent interpretations throughout history, Qureshi presents her here as a supernatural being in a gently assertive celebration of the dynamics of feminine power, with the gorgon's hair registering as sensory antenna rather than a wrathful nest of striking snakes.

**Questions exploring the theme of Identity and Society**

1. How does Nusra Latif Qureshi's depiction of Medusa challenge traditional representations of femininity and power in art and mythology?

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2. In what ways does Qureshi's fusion of Indo-Persian miniature painting and European aesthetics contribute to the layered complexity of *Medusa's Respite Room*?

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3. Discuss the significance of portraying Medusa in a state of repose and contemplation, and how it reimagines her character within the context of feminine agency and autonomy.

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**Roslynd Piggott**

Born 1958, Melbourne, Victoria. Lives and works Melbourne



Rosslynd Piggott, *Unknown Woman—From China to Brixton and Elsewhere*, 2001, human hair, woven fabric tag, safety pin, printed tracing paper, envelope edition 24/25, Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Heide Learning © the artist  
Courtesy of Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

**Exhibition label:**

A long trail of hair characterises Rosslynd Piggott’s *Unknown Woman—From China to Brixton and Elsewhere 2001*, and concerns a life story in micro form.

The limited-edition piece is intended to be worn on the body and pairs a length of human hair that the artist purchased at the Brixton Market in London with a ribbon into which the title of the work is woven.

The purchase of the hair made Piggott deeply curious about the person in distant China who had cut and sold it, and their life circumstances and personal narrative. Through the work’s modest gesture Piggott sought to draw a conceptual thread between herself, the anonymous woman who parted with her hair, and the unknown wearer of the artwork, each possibly living in vastly different contexts and locations across the globe.

**Questions about the theme of Identity and Society in the artwork**

1. How does Rosslynd Piggott use the symbolism of human hair in *Unknown Woman—From China to Brixton and Elsewhere* to explore the theme of identity?

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2. Discuss the significance of the artist's choice to weave the title of the artwork into a ribbon paired with the purchased human hair. How does this choice contribute to the narrative of the piece?

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3. In what ways does *Unknown Woman—From China to Brixton and Elsewhere* prompt viewers to reflect on the interconnectedness of individuals across different cultural and geographical contexts?

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**Zhang Hong Chun**

Born 1971 Shenyang, China. Lives and works Lawrence, Kansas, United States of America



Zhang Hong Chun, *Life Strands*, 2004, charcoal and graphite on paper, White Rabbit Collection, Sydney, donated through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program by Judith Neilson  
Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro, © the artist

**Exhibition label:**

Long black locks have been a defining feature of artist Zhang Chun Hong’s art and life. She shares this luxuriant physical attribute with her twin sister and has often explored their sibling relationship through her work in illustrations of black plaits and tresses that merge and conjoin.

Her monumental yet intricate charcoal drawing, *Life Strands*, pictures a single braid that runs to almost nine metres in length and mimics the impeccably refined gestural aesthetics of a traditional Chinese ink painting.

Taking the classical format of a vertical hanging scroll, the sweeping expanse of the installation is episodic in nature, poetically evoking the passage of time and the interweaving of the many threads, tensions and turns that shape human existence.

The abundance of the plait incrementally thins out and eventually comes undone as it nears its end. In the artist’s words, the long braid ‘represents a woman’s life cycle from the untangled radiance of youth, through ... to the frail grey hair coming with age’.

**Questions about the theme of Identity and Society in the artwork**

1. How does Zhang Chun Hong's use of long black locks in her artwork reflect her personal identity and relationship with her twin sister?

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2. What do you think the unravelling of the braid towards the end of *Life Strands* symbolises about the human experience and the passage of time?

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3. How does the traditional Chinese ink painting style contribute to the overall meaning and emotional impact of the artwork?

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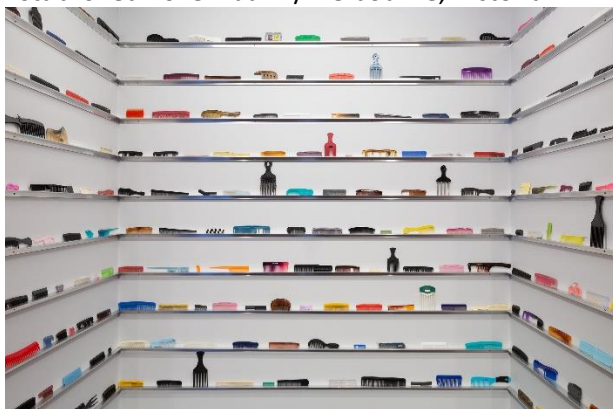
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**Charlie Sofo**

Born 1983 Melbourne, Victoria. Lives and works Melbourne

**Debris Facility Pty Ltd**

Established 2015 Naarm/Melbourne, Victoria



Charlie Sofo, Debris Facility Pty Ltd, *Found Combs*, 2007–23, courtesy of the artists. Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro, © the artists'

**Exhibition label:**

Focused on ideas around personal property, longing and loss, artists Charlie Sofo and Debris Facility have been collaboratively building an archive of found, discarded and lost hair combs since 2008.

The pair literally 'comb the streets' looking for these misplaced objects, many of which are worse for wear with broken teeth and residual bits of hair and dirt, while others are intact and appear unused, their purpose never fully realised.

Sofa and Facility's project is strangely touching, their amassed assortment of miscellaneous sticky and broken specimens laced with the DNA of their absent owners, with whom they were once in intimate relation. The combs are presented in rows inside a purpose-built cabinet, an arrangement regarded by the artists as a musical score, an ode to loss, distant forms of connection and perhaps to their own collecting 'drives and desires', which exceed the bounds of the ordinary.

**Questions about the theme of Identity and Society in the artwork**

1. How does this collection highlight the interconnectedness of individuals within society?

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2. What do you think the broken and discarded nature of some of the hair combs says about the transient nature of human relationships and the passage of time?

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3. In what ways does the arrangement of the hair combs inside the purpose-built cabinet contribute to the overall meaning of the artwork, particularly in relation to the artists' interpretation of it as a musical score?

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**Georgia Banks**

Born 1988, London, England. Lives and works Melbourne, Victoria





Georgia Banks, *Girl Arranging Her Hair* 2012–24, human hair, courtesy of the artist, installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Heide Learning © the artist

**Exhibition label:**

Driven by an impulse to register and hold close that which is usually discarded, Georgia Banks has for the last ten years been meticulously collecting the hair that she sheds each day. During this time she has progressively layered, shaped and rolled the hair into an ever-growing mass that she considers to be a process-based lifelong project.

*Girl Arranging Her Hair* is thus a living archive of the dynamic bodily and material aspects of the self. Periodically throughout the duration of the exhibition, Banks will add newly lost hair to her evolving project, incrementally accumulating and residually tracing her own physical presence.

**Questions about the theme of Identity and Society in the artwork**

1. How does Georgia Banks' artwork challenge traditional notions of identity by using discarded hair to create a 'living archive' of her own bodily experiences?

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2. In what ways does *Girl Arranging Her Hair* reflect the artist's relationship with her own body and the passing of time, considering the continuous addition of new hair to the evolving project?

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3. Reflecting on the title of the artwork, how does the act of arranging one's own hair become a metaphor for self-expression and the construction of identity within society?

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## Lou Hubbard

Born 1957, Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland. Lives and works Naarm/Melbourne, Victoria



Lou Hubbard, (vitrine) Photographs of the artist and her hair at various stages of her life; Assorted Artist Books 1998, installation view of Lou Hubbard *BALD* exhibition, Site 02, Melbourne 2000; 'Hair netted as police act on a snip-off', newspaper clipping published in *The Age*, 1 April 1998, *Coiffed and corrupt: Prime Minister Hashimoto's apology, and the hair patterns of some ministers forced to resign over various scandals* 1983–1997, oil on wooden wardrobe panel, polyethylene chain, white screws; *Bed Hair* 1999, bubble wrap, human hair, polyimide tape and metal bed frame, *Hair Stock* 1999, human hair, rubber bands and plastic shopping bags, *Die Cuts* 1999, synthetic polymer paint and gaffer tape on polyester, *Bald* 2007, single channel video, all works courtesy of the artist and Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro © the artist

### Exhibition label:

An assortment of curious hair imaginings unfold within Lou Hubbard's absurdist artist books, video work, sculptural forms and assemblages. The works are witty and incisive investigations that tease out the very nature of hair, its multiple presentations, behaviours, dysfunctions and psychological primacy.

Through a farcical lens Hubbard's broad-ranging project surveys bad hair, missing hair, bouffant and cut hair, seductive ponytails and brill-creamed coifs. A number of the works are based on the artist's perverse observations of the hairdos of disgraced global figures, such as the slicked-back pompadour of the scandalised Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto—seen as a 'slightly oily politician' whose corrupt dealings forced him out of office in the late 1990s—or the big hair of White House intern Monica Lewinsky, whose notorious sexual encounters with President Bill Clinton led to his political and personal censure.

Other works in the series are inspired by ordinary people with extraordinary hair that the artist has encountered in the public domain, their locks, manes, ringlets and receding hairlines sparking her slapstick powers of invention, wry humour and sense of celebration.

Hubbard's fixation with tresses commenced in 1992 when embarking on a ferry to Tasmania. She boarded behind a man whose head was shaped 'like a high-top loaf of bread with a hair-cut and a comb-over that really accentuated his skull's unusual formation'. Following him onto the ship Hubbard felt compelled to draw his visage, and from that moment onwards her variously poignant, ridiculous and sad 'strange theatre of hair' came into being.

In an artist statement that accompanied a large presentation of her hair-based works in an old clothing factory in 2000 (a number of which are included in *Hair Pieces*), Hubbard declared that she aimed to make objects that are 'rude, degenerate, basic, bizarre, disturbing, raw, anthropomorphic, used, rejected, retrieved and transformed'. 'In my world', she observes, 'human hair is detachable, reversible and in constant modification'.

**Questions about the theme of Identity and Society in the artwork**

1. How does Lou Hubbard use hair as a medium to explore the identities and societal roles of both public figures and ordinary individuals in her artworks?

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2. In what ways do Hubbard's absurdist investigations into hair challenge conventional notions of beauty, power, and authority within society?

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3. Reflecting on Hubbard's statement about human hair being 'detachable, reversible and in constant modification,' how does her artwork provoke viewers to reconsider the fluidity and complexity of identity within the context of ever-changing societal norms?

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**Jiang Jian**

Born 1968 Chengdu, Sichuan, China. Lives and works Zhengzhou, Henan Province, China.



Jiang Jian, *Newborn*, 2013, oil on canvas; *Occur* 2012, oil on canvas, Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Clytie Meredith, © the artist  
Courtesy of White Rabbit Collection, Sydney, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Judith Neilson

**Exhibition label:**

Artist Jiang Jian creates highly detailed paintings of the distinctive patterns and distribution of hair across the scalp that are unique to each individual, such as crowns and swirls that move in clockwise and anti-clockwise directions.

The artist has referred to the top of the head as the 'other face'; a dynamically expressive part of the body that is overlooked and largely ignored. Precise and poetic, Jiang Jian's works are made through an extraction process, each strand of hair created by cutting with a razor into a dark monochromatic pigment ground and removing a sliver of paint from the surface.

While in a sense the images can be seen as portraits that capture a person's distinctive physical traits akin to fingerprints, the lines and energy radiating out from the circular whorls also suggest the infinite variety of the cosmos, and its spiral galaxies, with the body and universe inextricably intertwined.

**Questions about the theme of Identity and Society in the artwork**

1. How does Jiang Jian's unique approach to depicting hair patterns challenge traditional ideas about portraiture and individual identity within society?

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2. Considering Jiang Jian's description of the top of the head as the 'other face,' how does this perspective invite viewers to reconsider the significance of seemingly overlooked parts of the body in shaping personal identity?

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3. Reflecting on the artist's use of hair patterns to evoke the cosmos and spiral galaxies, how does this symbolism contribute to broader discussions about the interconnectedness of human beings with the universe and society?
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**Exploring the theme 'Uncanny Possibilities' in the works in the exhibition**

- **Uncanny Possibilities:** Hair captivates the human imagination, evoking themes of fantasy and mythology, and the suggestion that hair holds mysterious and unexpected powers, possibly even supernatural ones. From fairy tales to ancient myths, strange and eerie potential outcomes or occurrences are associated with hair. The exhibition explores the fantastical elements of hair, inviting viewers into a realm of imagination and wonder.

**Louise Weaver**

Born 1966 Mansfield, Victoria. Lives and works Melbourne, Victoria

**Peter Ellis**

Born 1956, Sydney, New South Wales. Lives and works Melbourne, Victoria



Louise Weaver and Peter Ellis, *Leonardo's Wish*, 1992, pasta-making machine and silk hair, collection of the artists.

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

© the artist

Courtesy Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

**Exhibition label:**

This sculptural installation is one of several in the exhibition that utilise hair to creatively explore processes of metamorphosis, gender mutability and the fluidity of desire.

In this instance long cascading straight synthetic locks have been fed through the teeth of a pasta maker and elaborately twisted into braids and spiral buns that echo the ornate studies made by the Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci in 1504 in preparation for his painting *Leda and the Swan*. Now lost, the painting has acquired a mystical status and is known only through copies made by Leonardo's followers, and has thus itself become a fable and allegory of transformation, deception, power and illusion.

The sculpture also relates to a cautionary tale told by Weaver's mother, who, as a child decided to 'straighten' her curly auburn locks by threading them through the cylinder of a mangle, a mechanism used to wring water from laundered clothes. Unfortunately, she quickly learned that the handle on the apparatus turned in only one direction and her hair needed to be cut short to free her from the machine.

A further reference point can be found in the spiralling bun hairstyle of Madeleine Elster, played by Kim Novak in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 film *Vertigo*. Elster's hair is a key visual device and symbolic element within the film, which dealt with themes of obsession and transformation, mirror imaging, past life experiences, vortices, dreams, vertigo and falling.

### Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities

1. How does the sculpture *Leonardo's Wish* by Louise Weaver and Peter Ellis merge historical references with personal narratives to create a sense of mystery and enchantment?

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2. Can you identify any specific elements in the artwork that evoke a feeling of uncanny possibilities associated with hair and transformation?

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3. Reflecting on the cautionary tale from Weaver's mother about threading her hair through a mangle, how does this anecdote contribute to the uncanny possibilities explored in *Leonardo's Wish*? What does it suggest about the unforeseen consequences of attempting to alter one's appearance, and how might this relate to broader themes of transformation and illusion in the artwork?

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**Christina May Carey**

Lives and works Naarm/Melbourne 1985



Christina May Carey, *Hypnagogia*, 2021–2024, HD video, desktop monitor, laptop, custom steel structure, carpet, extension leads, stereo sound and speakers; *Rattails!*, 2024, HD video, ipad and iphones; *Red-Eye*, 2022, C-type print on Fuji Lustre, oak frame, all courtesy of the artist  
Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro  
© the artist

**Exhibition label:**

An unsteadiness and disequilibrium pervades Christina May Carey’s interior environment of flickering sensations, which resembles a chaotic home office setup. Precariously balanced on a small table resembling a spindly insect, two laptop screens and mobile telephones asynchronously show a video of hair being braided and a lively swarming mischief of rats.

The installation’s title, *Hypnagogia*, refers to the sensation of slipping in and out of control of the body when in a state suspended between wakefulness and sleep. It relates to a series of vivid hallucinations experienced by the artist during episodes of sleep paralysis. The episodes took place while Carey was temporarily sleeping in a small home study where light penetrated through window blinds, causing intense disorienting physical, visual and auditory sensations.

In her videos the rhythmic braiding of the hair paired with the moving images of swirling, intertwining rat’s tails provokes a compulsive visceral response, uniting tactile bodily sensations with disrupted internal states.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. What sensations or emotions does Christina May Carey's use of the combination of mundane office elements with surreal imagery, such as braiding hair and swarming rats, evoke for you as a viewer?

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2. How does Carey's use of video elements depicting hair braiding and rat swarms contribute to the portrayal of the state between wakefulness and sleep?

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3. How does the installation blur the lines between the physical and the imagined?

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**Christian Thompson**

Bidjara man of the Kunja Nation

Born 1978 Gawler, South Australia. Lives and works Naarm/Melbourne, Victoria



Christian Thompson, *Heat*, 2010, three channel HD video installation, courtesy of the artist and Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne.

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

© the artist

Courtesy Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne

**Exhibition label:**

Christian Thompson’s sensual three-channel video *Heat* taps into the way that women’s locks have carried many symbolic and spiritual significances throughout history and across diverse cultures. The unbinding of women’s hair for example, has often been associated with the unleashing of cosmic powers and it was believed during the Spanish Inquisition that witches had the capacity to raise storms simply by loosening their hair.

In Thompson’s installation *Heat* the unbound tresses of three female protagonists appear to float hypnotically, free of gravity, as if reaching and extending outwards beyond the boundaries and constraints of the body.

The artist has said in relation to this work that his grandmother used to send him on walks into the bush to see desert flowers in bloom, and gusts of desert wind would catch his hair and lift it off his head: ‘I always thought about that kind of synergy that exists between the physical DNA of my body, and the natural world, and how they are designed to be connected to each other’.

With a siren-like quality, Thompson’s supernatural entities beckon viewers into an interconnected world, and evoke the seductive beauty of the desert. Yet the desert, as the artist has ominously remarked, can also give one a ‘false sense of sanctuary’, and for those who are unfamiliar with this environment it is a ‘perilous and potentially fatal terrain’.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. What does the portrayal of unbound tresses in Christian Thompson's video installation *Heat* suggest about the unleashing of cosmic powers and the interconnectedness between the physical body and the natural world?

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2. Thompson's description of his personal experiences with desert winds and his grandmother's influence provides insight into the inspiration behind *Heat*. How does knowing this background information deepen your understanding of the artwork's exploration of the relationship between human DNA and the natural environment?

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3. How does Thompson's portrayal of floating, unbound hair evoke a sense of enchantment and danger simultaneously? What do you think the artist is trying to convey about the allure and peril inherent in the natural world, particularly the desert landscape?

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**Ai Yamaguchi**

Born 1977 Tokyo, Japan. Lives and works Tokyo



Ai Yamaguchi, *hanahiru (sneeze)*, 2012, acrylic paint and gold paint on wild cherrywood  
© the artist

Courtesy the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 2012

**Exhibition label:**

Japanese artist Ai Yamaguchi's exquisite mural-sized, multi-part painting *hanahiru (sneeze)*, 2012, unfolds episodically as a series of fragments and is suggestive of a larger calligraphic scroll, unseen in its entirety.

The installation articulates the lustrous, fluid visual appearance and sensation of a stream of unfurling jet-black hair, laid over a delicate, kimono-patterned, floral ground. Comprising an interchangeable arrangement of overlapping wooden panels, it captures the sweeping almost cinematic experience of viewing a scroll as each new section is revealed. The panels, however, can be presented in any order, breaking with the sequential linear approach of traditional narrative image making and introducing a sense of playfulness and freedom into the work.

Yamaguchi's flowing tresses capture the transitional moment when a woman's hair is released from a top-knot, and is rendered free and unruly, celebrating a moment of unbound possibility. The artist observes that hair is a part of ourselves as well as something that seems to have a separate existence, joining the inside with the outside, giving the impression of linking the body with its surroundings.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. How does Ai Yamaguchi's artwork *hanahiru (sneeze)* use the imagery of flowing jet-black hair over a kimono-patterned background to create a sense of mysterious possibilities?

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2. How does the fluidity of the hair and the unconventional arrangement of wooden panels contribute to the artwork's intriguing and playful nature?

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3. Yamaguchi breaks from traditional storytelling methods by allowing the panels of *hanahiru (sneeze)* to be presented in any order. How does this unconventional approach make you feel as a viewer? How do you think it impacts the way you experience and interpret the artwork's narrative and themes of transition and freedom?

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**Polly Borland**

Born 1959, Melbourne, Australia. Lives and works Los Angeles, USA



Polly Borland, *Untitled XXIII* and *Untitled IX*, from the series *Smudge*, 2010, chromogenic prints, © the artist  
Courtesy, Monash University Collection, purchased by the Faculty of Science 2013.

**Exhibition label:**

Australian artist Polly Borland uses artificial hair to absurd effect in her alluring series *Smudge* that disguises, morphs and transforms the human body through bulbous shapes, additional faces, growths and manes of hair that bring to mind the hairy beasts of folklore.

At once unfamiliar, comical, mysterious and poignant, Borland’s mute dysmorphic figures have blank faces with rudimentary features and prompt us to search for a connection and to find an affinity or a shared humanity in her unsettling, seemingly grotesque abstracted physical forms.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. What feelings or reactions do you experience when observing the bulbous shapes, additional faces, and growths in Borland’s work *Smudge* that evoke hairy beasts of folklore?

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2. How does the artist's use of absurdity and ambiguity challenge traditional notions of beauty and identity?

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3. How might the uncanny nature of these figures in Borland's work encourage us to reconsider our perceptions of normalcy and difference?

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**Tarryn Gill**

Born 1981 Western Australia. Lives and works in Perth, Western Australia



Tarryn Gill, *Guardian*, 2014, foam, hair extensions, gemstones, thread, glow in-the-dark fimo and sub speaker, State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, purchased through the Sir Claude Hotchin Art Foundation, Art Gallery of Western Australia Foundation 2015

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro  
© the artist

**Exhibition label:**

Tarryn Gill's soft sculpture *Guardian* is at once humorous and strangely menacing. The figure is shrouded in thick layers of blonde hair through which a wide-open mouth of uncertain expression and pristine white teeth erratically emits the sounds of laboured breath and an eerie breeze. Jewel-like eyes offer no insight into the state of the entity.

The enigmatic creature belongs to a body of work made by the artist following a residency at the Freud Museum in London, where she had access to Sigmund Freud’s personal collection of Asian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities and figurines—many of which are funerary and tomb relics excavated from burial mounds, pyramids and graves.

Lingering in the gallery with its suggestive title and resemblances to characters from pop culture, folklore and mythology, this hairy totem of the unconscious invites speculation as to where it sprang from and what it might do next.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. How does Tarryn Gill's sculpture *Guardian* blend elements of humour and menace to create the sense of uncanny possibilities?

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2. What emotions or thoughts does the figure's appearance evoke for you as a viewer, considering its shrouded layers of hair, ambiguous facial expression, and eerie sounds emitted from its mouth?

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3. How does the artwork's resemblance to characters from pop culture, folklore, and mythology, contribute to its intrigue and allure? What uncanny possibilities might arise from imagining the figure's role in different narratives or scenarios?

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**Shih Yung-Chun**

Born 1978 Taipei, Taiwan. Lives and works Taipei



Shih Yung-Chun  
*Braid Cabinet* 2019  
White Rabbit: Contemporary Chinese Art Collection, Sydney  
© Shih Yung-Chun  
Courtesy of Hive Centre for Contemporary Art in Beijing, China

**Exhibition label:**

Taiwanese artist Shih Yung-Chun’s whimsical sculptural work *Braid Cabinet* (2019) is both delightfully odd and macabre. Comprising a vintage dresser that the artist salvaged from an old grocery store then filled with an assortment of shrunken doll-like heads featuring a mix of animal and human faces and adorned with long woollen hair, the work was inspired by a wig shop that Yung-Chun had once passed on a street.

*Braid Cabinet* is both a stand-alone object and part of a larger project in which the artist created and photographed a range of elaborate installations that he meticulously rendered as paintings with a hyperreal appearance. Each aspect of project links back to a fantasy novel titled *Pre-Construction* that Shih wrote during a prolonged period of convalescence. The novel’s entangled dream-like narrative includes a female protagonist with a thick mass of woollen yarn-braided hair, whose presence is echoed in *Braid Cabinet*’s collection of quirky wonky heads. Despite being disembodied the heads stare out of their glass case like creatures from a fairy-tale cruelly frozen by an evil spell, their wig-like woolly hair appearing to continue to mysteriously grow during the stasis.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. What emotions or thoughts arise when observing the peculiar mixture of animal and human features adorning the heads in Shih Yung-Chun's sculpture *Braid Cabinet*?

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2. What do you think the artist is trying to convey about the nature of transformation, through this surreal representation?





The piece is in part a nod to the remarkable wood carving *Penitent Magdalene* of 1440-42 by the celebrated early Italian Renaissance sculptor Donatello, the expressive rawness of which transfixed Meade when he saw it. Donatello's depiction of the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene with a withered, emaciated body cloaked in thick ropy clumps of hair, embodies the suffering that she endured throughout her life, registering her repentance, solitude and the harshness of physical exposure to the elements in the desert.

At the time of making his self-portrait, Meade identified strongly with the pain and sense of reckoning so poignantly expressed by Donatello's carving, choosing to create his own hair cloak as an articulation of his personal life experiences and sense of contrition.

In Meade's enigmatic work 'Siamese' a pair of black wigs seem to hover in space, positioned so closely that the strands merge together as one. In the artist's work hair sometimes appears as an ambiguous presence, challenging our perceptions of the external and the internal and exploring the porous boundaries between inside and out, and between people, ideas and things.

The use of black, he has noted, is 'usually a retreat. Part of me is indulgent and fully engaged in the visual experience of life, but then I withdraw, or retreat to a quieter place—on a tonal level that is what the black represents—it is a departure, or withdrawal from the visceral full-blooded engagement with life, into a more silent mediative space'.

As a young man in the 1970s, Meade worked as a visual merchandiser in a major department store in Melbourne. At the time, he had grown his hair long and was directed by management to cut it in order to conform to the store's strict dress codes and the conservative masculine gender norms of the day.

Such stores often had wig departments and in response to this managerial impost, Meade had a wig made with short back and sides as stipulated in his employer's policy. The artist wore the hair piece during working hours and defiantly tore it off on exiting the store at the end of each working day. The sense of concealing and revealing contained within this anecdote is consistent throughout Meade's practice, where hair corresponds with notions of identity and evokes possibilities for transgression and unconstrained states of being.

### Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities

1. John Meade's sculpture *Self-portrait as Mary Magdalene* invites viewers to contemplate the transformative power of hair, as it veils the artist's own extremities. How does the portrayal of Meade's hands and feet beneath the thick, flowing mass of black hair evoke a sense of uncanny possibilities?

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2. Meade's use of a material called Reducit, which shrinks as it dries, adds an additional layer of complexity to *Self-portrait as Mary Magdalene*. How does the physical transformation of the material reflect the artist's internal exploration of personal identity and vulnerability through the symbolic veil of hair?

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3. What uncanny possibilities arise in John Meade's sculpture *Siamese* from the merging of the two black wigs, and how does this symbolism reflect the artist's exploration of identity and transgression?

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**Julie Rrap**

Born 1950, Lismore, New South Wales. Lives and works Sydney, New South Wales



Julie Rrap, *Horse's Tale*, 1999, from the series *Porous Bodies*,  
ciachrome print  
125.5 x 125 cm  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney Gift of  
Andrew and Cathy Cameron 2008

**Exhibition label:**

Julie Rrap's practice attends to the body as a sensory threshold and cultural repository. *Horse's Tale* consists of a whimsical and uncanny human/animal assemblage—a long hairy equine tail appears to sprout from the artist's behind, triggering a visceral response.

The image is simultaneously titillating, joyous and abject, a witty parody on the objectification of women throughout the history of art and advertising, and the fluctuating social mores around hair; about where hair should be on a woman and in what measure.

An absurdist yet pithy work, *Horse's Tale* reveals the artist seeking through humour to push against patriarchal views of the monstrous feminine and to embrace, rather than recoil from, the female body.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. How does Julie Rrap's artwork *Horse's Tale* challenge traditional views of the female body and its portrayal in art and advertising?

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2. How does the uncanny combination of human and animal elements provoke a visceral response from viewers, inviting them to contemplate the complex relationship between femininity, hair, and societal expectations?

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3. How does Rrap use humour as a tool to push against traditional gender norms and embrace the female body in all its forms? How might the absurdity of the artwork encourage viewers to reconsider their own perceptions of beauty and femininity?

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**Patricia Piccinni** Born 1965, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Arrived 1972, Australia. Lives and works Naarm/Melbourne, Victoria



(left to right, top to bottom)

Patricia Piccinni  
*Orchard* 2013  
Courtesy of the artist, Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery

*Belly* 2011

Collection, Heide Museum of Modern Art  
Purchased with funds from the Truby and Florence Williams Charitable Trust, ANZ Trustees 2013

*Field of View* 2012  
*Vanitas* 2013  
*Sexual Composite* 2012  
Courtesy of the artist, Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery

All from the series *Hair Panels*  
silicone, fibreglass, human hair

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

### Exhibition Label

Patricia Piccinini's series *Hair Panels*, 2012 appear like lab-grown skin canvases from which hirsute specimens grow. In equal parts sensuous, fertile, abject and mysterious, these arresting petri-dish tissue culture experiments catalogue possibilities for the strange hybridity and mutation of crossbred species, and foretell of the comingling of humans, plants and animals.

Influenced by Surrealism's preoccupation with metamorphosis, the fragmented body and the uncanny, Piccinini draws these interests into dialogue with her concern with contemporary biotechnology.

These panels present unsettling plant-animal organisms, clusters of breasts, genitals, hairy crevices and downy growths, interspersed amongst tree limbs and flowers all fashioned from hair. In *Belly* the artist replicates the patterns and texture of wombat fur in a composition that is at once endearing and repugnant, directly confounding contemporary fashion's preference for hairlessness, and breaking down boundaries and hierarchies between all living things.

### Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities

1. How do the unsettling plant-animal hybrids and hairy growths depicted in Patricia Piccinini's series *Hair Panels* evoke a sense of uncanny possibilities, blurring the lines between human, animal, and plant life?

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2. How does the artist's incorporation of contemporary biotechnology into her work add depth to the theme of uncanny possibilities?

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3. How might the use of lab-grown skin canvases and petri-dish tissue culture experiments reflect contemporary anxieties about genetic engineering and the manipulation of life forms?

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**Chunxiao Qu**

Born 1993 China. Lives and works Melbourne, Victoria



Chunxiao Qu  
Wig Shoes 2017  
Shoes, synthetic wig  
45 x 15 x 32cm  
© the artist

**Exhibition label:**

Chunxiao Qu’s shaggy *Wig Shoes* are literally made from cut-up hairpieces, moulded over existing lace-up footwear. The work critiques the harvesting and commodification of animal skin and fur within the fashion industries, challenging the viewer to also consider the implications if products were made from human hair and skin.

The fluffy story-book quality of the shoes collides with the artist’s real-world concerns around animal exploitation and harm, seeking to tap into the complex associations of hair with impulses such as abjection, horror and desire.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. How does the juxtaposition of fluffy, story-book aesthetics in Chunxiao Qu's artwork *Wig Shoes* with real-world concerns around animal exploitation provoke viewers to contemplate the ethical implications of fashion choices?

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2. How does the artwork prompt us to confront our own attitudes towards consumption and exploitation, particularly in relation to the use of animal and human body parts in fashion products?

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3. How does the uncanny quality of the shoes challenge our perceptions of beauty and repulsion? How might the artwork encourage viewers to reflect on the ways in which material objects can evoke unsettling emotions and provoke deeper ethical questions?

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**Hayley Millar Baker**

Gunditjmara and Djabwurrung people

Born 1990 Naarm/Melbourne, Victoria. Lives and works Naarm/Melbourne



(Left to right) Hayley Millar Baker, *I Will Survive 5, 4 and 7*, 2020, pigment ink-jet prints, courtesy of the artist, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne and Cassandra Bird, Sydney, © the artist

**Exhibition label:**

First Nations artist Hayley Millar Baker’s body of work titled *I Will Survive* draws upon cautionary tales about survival in the bush that were imparted to her as a young girl. Over time, the narratives have become embellished and entangled, with elements of other stories drawn from miscellaneous sources, including horror movies and books.

Millar Baker’s seductive black and white collages depict haunted landscapes with both colonial and supernatural associations. The protagonist (played by the artist herself) is presented in dark attire concealed under long, silken black hair, a recurring trope of the horror genre and a key motif within this series, marking each character’s transition from Hayley herself to monsters, witches, and more.

There is a sense that things are not right: in one image, the hair parting of the figure, who bends forward over her bloodied hands, extends beyond the parameters of a normal head, and in others, she appears to be hovering unnaturally above the ground. Ambiguous and suggestive, these unsettling images offer open-ended narratives that allude to lingering disturbances and mysterious presences that dwell in the Australian cultural landscape.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. How does Hayley Millar Baker blend elements of cautionary tales with horror movie influences in her artwork *I Will Survive*?

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2. Discuss the significance of the recurring motif of long, silken black hair in Millar Baker's collages, particularly in relation to the horror genre and themes of transformation.

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3. In what ways do the ambiguous and suggestive narratives in Millar Baker's images contribute to the theme of uncanny possibilities, especially regarding the mysterious presences within the Australian cultural landscape?

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**William Wegman**

Born 1943 Holyoke, Massachusetts, United States of America. Lives and works New York and Maine, United States of America



William Wegman, *Grey Hairs*, 1976,  
Single-channel digital video, transferred from  
2-inch video tape, color, sound  
5:04 mins  
Image: (detail) courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix catalogue  
© the artist

**Exhibition label:**

William Wegman’s experimental film *Grey Hairs* pans across the wiry forms and textures of the artist’s aging Weimaraner, a silver-grey dog named Man Ray, who for many years was Wegman’s companion and muse.

Spare in its approach, the drifting aerial view of the dog’s fur-scape ironically holds something of the shadowy mysteries of rayographs, invented by its namesake Man Ray, the surrealist photographer. Both intimate and abstract, moving and strangely absurd, the footage of the Weimaraner’s coat appears in places to be overlaid and superimposed, creating a blurry dreamlike effect and a sense of hovering above an expansive, hairy landscape.

**Questions exploring the theme of Uncanny Possibilities**

1. How does William Wegman's use of experimental film techniques contribute to the uncanny atmosphere of *Grey Hairs*, and how does this enhance the viewer's experience of the artwork?

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2. Considering the connection between the artist's dog Man Ray and the surrealist photographer of the same name, how does *Grey Hairs* blur the boundaries between reality and the surreal, inviting viewers to explore uncanny possibilities within the familiar?

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3. Reflecting on the title *Grey Hairs*, how might the aging process of Wegman's Weimaraner companion serve as a metaphor for broader themes of time, mortality, and the passage of life's phases?
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### Themes exploring Power Dynamics in the artworks in the exhibition

- **Power Dynamics:** Hair has long been associated with power dynamics, as a symbol of both strength and vulnerability. It has been used as a weapon of conquest, violence, and control, while also symbolising resistance and self-determination. The exhibition examines the complex interplay of power within the context of hair, highlighting its role in asserting authority or challenging societal norms.

### Edith Dekyndt

Born 1960 Ypres, Belgium. Lives and works Berlin, Germany and Brussels, Belgium



Edith Dekyndt, *Indigenous Shadow (Part 2, Martinique)*, 2014, *Indigenous Shadow (Part 2, Martinique)* 2014, video, courtesy of the artist and ARGOS Centre for audiovisual arts, Brussels, Belgium  
Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

### Exhibition label:

In this video by Edith Dekyndt what appears to be a shredded and torn flag flies from a makeshift pole. Fashioned from long strands of black human hair, the 'flag' was filmed in Côte du Diamant in Martinique at the location where poet, philosopher and activist Édouard Glissant, widely recognised as one of the most influential and radical figures in Caribbean thought and cultural commentary, was buried in 2011.

Back in 1830, a clandestine merchant ship carrying enslaved people from Africa went aground not far from the site of Glissant's grave. Moving in the same trade winds that carried the ship almost two centuries ago the seemingly shredded flag performs as a silent marker of this brutal and oppressive

historical commerce, and a spectral trace of the millions of individuals whose lives were stolen and remain largely unrecorded.

In 2022 and 2023 Dekyndt's video went viral during a period of social unrest and uprisings across Iran by demonstrators protesting the death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, who died after she was detained and assaulted for allegedly not wearing the hijab in accordance with government standards.

While Dekyndt's work of art was misinterpreted by some to be actual footage of a flag made with hair cut from women protesting suppression under the authoritarian regime, this reading can be viewed as consistent with the artist and Glissant's shared thinking regarding our common humanity, and the need to make all voices heard.

### Questions exploring the theme of Power Dynamics

1. How does the video *Indigenous Shadow (Part 2, Martinique)* by Edith Dekyndt use the symbolism of a shredded flag made from human hair to convey ideas about power dynamics? How does this imagery reflect historical oppression and the struggle for freedom and justice?

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2. How does the use of a flag made from human hair at the location of Édouard Glissant's burial site connect to themes of colonialism, slavery, and resistance, particularly in the context of Martinique's history?

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3. How might the misinterpretation of the artwork reflect broader societal tensions around power, authority, and the fight against oppression?

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### **Mona Hatoum**

Born 1952 Beirut, Lebanon. Lives and works London, England



Mona Hatoum  
*Untitled (Hong Kong cage)* 2019  
Bamboo and hair  
21 x 24 x 18.6 cm  
Private collection, Singapore  
©the artist; Courtesy White Cube, London, England

**Exhibition label:**

Focused on political, feminist and linguistic concerns, Mona Hatoum’s works are often situated within the material body and elicit highly visceral responses. Since the 1970s the artist has utilised the physical materials, traces and spaces of her own body—including her hair, nails, bodily fluids and even footage of her internal organs taken with an endoscopic probe—as stand-ins for the bodies of others and metaphors for human struggle, dislocation and violence.

Hatoum’s work often explores the body as an embattled space, a site of invasion, vulnerability and fragmentation, which is under constant siege as she mines the intersection between the individual and the social body. *Untitled (Hong Kong cage)* is one of many cage-like objects that she has produced over the course of her practice to address both literal and metaphoric notions of control, confinement, imprisonment and institutional violence.

Fragile nest-like forms made from the artist’s collected waste hair are contained within this structure, recalling similar spheres of hair in other related artworks. These balls of hair are equally alluring and repellent, familiar and foreign. Held captive within the cage they allude to the many ways in which individuals and groups are caught within unjust oppressive systems, locked into imposed categorisations and imprisoned within regimes of thought.

**Questions exploring the theme of Power Dynamics**

1. How does Mona Hatoum's artwork *Untitled (Hong Kong cage)* convey themes of power and society? How do the cage-like structure and the use of collected waste hair symbolise concepts such as control, confinement, and institutional violence?

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2. In what ways does Hatoum explore the relationship between the individual and society in her artwork? How do the fragile nest-like forms of hair within the cage represent the vulnerability and struggle faced by individuals within larger social systems?

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3. How does Hatoum challenge viewers to confront uncomfortable realities about power dynamics and oppression through the juxtaposition of familiar and foreign elements within the artwork?

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**Kemang Wa Lehlere**

Born Cape Town, South Africa. Lives and works Johannesburg, South Africa



(Left) Kemang Wa Lehlere, *Pencil Test 2*, 2012, video,

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, 2024, Heide Museum of Modern Art, photograph: Christian Capurro

(Right) Kemang Wa Lehlere, *Pencil Test 2* 2012, video still ©the artist, courtesy of GALERIE TSCHUDI, Switzerland

**Exhibition label:**

Performed in response to the history of apartheid and institutionalised racism in South Africa, *Pencil Test 2*, is a work by Johannesburg-based artist Kemang Wa Lehlere in which he explores the taxonomy and hierarchical classification of hair.

The work refers to the 'pencil test', one of a number of arbitrary systems of assessment deployed by the government authorities in 1950 as part of the Population Registration Act, to divide its citizens into racial groups.

In the test, a pencil was placed into a person's hair and if it fell out easily, they would be classified as 'White', but if it gripped, they would be graded as 'Black', 'Indian' or 'Coloured'. Each of these categories and further subcategories afforded the individual's vastly different rights, living conditions, and forms of social and educational opportunities, allowing the power of the nation's white minority to be maintained through the oppression of the majority.

Here, Wa Lehlere's films himself sliding multiple graphite lead pencils into his hair to form a mass that defiantly stays put, a very deliberate act of reclamation, pride and ancestral connection.

While pencils are a recurring motif throughout his practice and make reference to the over-writing of Eurocentric historiography and the re-inscription of its deleted or omitted scenes, within this work, they paradoxically also suggest the power of a pencil to render you speechless.

Wa Lehlere's *Pencil Test 2* thus deftly speaks volumes to the violent transgressions of the past and to the persistent, complex colonial legacies that continue to be experienced.

**Questions exploring the theme of Power Dynamics**

1. How does the historical context of apartheid in South Africa shape the meaning and significance of Kemang Wa Lehlere's performance in *Pencil Test 2*?

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2. What role does hair play in the power dynamics depicted in the artwork, and how does Wa Lehlere reclaim this symbol through his performance?

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3. How does the act of performing the 'pencil test' on himself challenge the dehumanising and discriminatory practices of apartheid-era racial classification?

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**Karla Dickens**

Born 1967, Djugubuli/Cadi/Sydney, New South Wales. Lives and works Lismore, New South Wales



(left):

(Left to right) Karla Dickens

***Warrior Woman III* 2017**

mixed media, aluminium, feathers  
Private Collection

***Warrior Woman VI* 2017**

mixed media  
Courtesy of the artist and STATION

***Warrior Woman I* 2017**

mixed media  
Collection of Ginger Dickens

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Heide Learning team (left), Christian Capurro (right).

**Exhibition Label:**

The work of Wiradjuri artist Karla Dickens engages with issues of gender, social injustice and racism, especially in terms of First Nations' experience.

Her *Warrior Woman* assemblages comprise aluminium underpants, from which maiden hair, created from a range of materials, suggestively sprouts from the bikini line in a defiant refusal of feminine control. Bringing to mind displayed ethnographic exhibits, Dickens' powerfully transgressive feminist objects, one with a dreaded hair phallus and another with a downy emu feather crotch, are delightfully insubordinate, abundant, carnal and uncontained. They appear profuse, proud, combat-ready and seductively gender fluid.

The artist's use of dreadlocks operates within a complex and nuanced economy of symbolic codes embodied in hair, with writer Kobena Mercer commenting on the historical importance of dreadlocks across cultures as a force 'liberating', rupturing or breaking with the 'dominance of white bias'.

**Questions exploring the theme of Power Dynamics**

1. How does Karla Dickens challenge traditional notions of gender and femininity through her *Warrior Woman* assemblages, particularly in the way she represents hair?

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2. In what ways does the use of materials like aluminium underpants and dreadlocks contribute to the power dynamics explored in Karla Dickens' artwork?

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3. Reflecting on the symbolism of the warrior archetype, how does Dickens' portrayal of *Warrior Woman* confront social injustice and racism, especially concerning First Nations' experiences?

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**J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere**

Born 1930 Ovbiomu-Emai, Edo State, Nigeria. Died 2014 Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria



**Suku Sinero/kiko 1974**  
**Kantanga or Round About 1973**  
**(Untitled) 2000**  
**(Untitled) 2011**

gelatin silver prints

The Hughes Foundation, Sydney

Installation view, *Hair Pieces*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro

### **Exhibition Label**

In a powerful celebration of African culture, J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere's Hairstyles photographic project captures thousands of images of expressive sculptural hairdos worn by Nigerian women between 1968 and 1975.

Developed after the country won independence from the British Empire, Ojeikere's hair archive aligns with a moment of national and individual self-determination and transformation, capturing the skill and endlessly innovative artistry of Indigenous hairstyling.

'Onile-Gogoro', a Yoruba, West African ethnic group expression that means 'to stand tall', is often used to describe the dignity, cultural aspiration and 'quest for self-betterment' that is associated with the types of three-dimensional threaded hairstyles that Ojeikere documented.

### **Questions exploring the theme of Power Dynamics**

1. How does J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere's project celebrate the cultural heritage and identity of Nigerian women through their hairstyles?





themselves having their hair brushed, for 100 strokes each day, over the course of the same moon cycle, with the action to be performed by caregivers, family or community members.

The used brushes, entangled with the accumulated strands of hair, are displayed beneath the corresponding videos of the participants. As objects the brushes are both substitutes for and reflections of the individuals who participated in the process, and exist in contradistinction with hair samples taken during colonial anthropological expeditions, that were collected, classified and held within museums without consent.

Norman's work counters these dehumanising scientific procedures through his affirmative shared ritual where the hair on each brush is a mark of time, community and care, amassed via consensual, loving exchanges. For Norman entrusting 'one's hair to [someone else] is ... an extension of the body towards another, a becoming-multiple, [and] a sharing of ancestral relation'.

**Questions exploring the theme of Power Dynamics**

1. How does S.J Norman's artwork *Magna Mater* challenge historical power dynamics, particularly those related to colonial anthropological practices, through the act of documenting the participants' hair brushing rituals?

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2. Discuss how the process of having one's hair brushed for 100 strokes each day, as depicted in *Magna Mater*, serves as a symbolic gesture of community, care, and shared ancestral relations among the participants.

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3. In what ways does *Magna Mater* reframe the significance of hair as a marker of identity and resistance, especially within Indigenous and transmasculine contexts, and how does this challenge traditional power structures surrounding hair and its representation?

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