



BOUNDARY

STRIDER

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LUKIFER AURELIUS AU
OLIVER BENSON US
MARTINA HOFFMANN FR/US
BRUCE RIMELL UK
LIBA WARING STAMBOLLION FR/US
IAIN WHITTAKER AU

CARRIE ANN BAADE US
KIM M EVANS AU
CAMERON POTTS AU
ROKU SASAKI JP
MADELINE VON FOERSTER DE/US

Above:
Roku Sasaki, *Lucifer's Love*, 2021, watercolour and tempera on paper, 56 x 75cm.

Overpage:
Cameron Potts, *Caterpillar Supernova*, 2016, acrylic, pen, pencil and glitter on hard board, 200 x 160cm.

Frontcover - Figure 1:
Madeline Von Foerster, *Die Botschaft (The Message)*, 2022, oil and egg tempera on panel, 101.5 x 76cm.

FOREWORD

Art has always been an abstract construct. Associating symbolic meaning to images has existed from our very beginnings when our earliest ancestors first scratched and painted marks on rock walls. Since those earliest times, artists have always strived to express and capture something of the sublime in their creative renderings; much of art, writing and other creative pursuits would often delve into the religious, spiritual, and philosophical questions of life and reality.

Despite many antecedents, in contemporary times there has been a perceptible movement away from many of these fundamental enquiries leaving only a relatively small cadre of artists in literature, cinema and visual arts who continue to explore these primary and elemental questions.

The exhibition *Boundary Strider* being presented at Wollongong Art Gallery brings together eleven Australian and international artists whose paintings expand our understanding of the interplay between mythopoetic consciousness and rational reality. In the context of this exhibition, the term boundary strider refers to those who exist on the outskirts of a community - the outliers who not constrained by convention continue to transcend the physical world and portray a wider vision of awareness including spiritual, mythical, or mystical themes.

The artworks in *Boundary Strider* break through the everyday and mundane views of life and reality, providing visual conduits for alternate fantastical and visionary artistic experience. Embedded with non-linear elements of time, improbable creatures, and spiritual, mythical, and mystical symbolism, the artworks in this exhibition collide in unique often astonishing ways.

Wollongong Art Gallery is pleased to present *Boundary Strider* and would like to thank curator and artist Iain Whittaker for bringing this exhibition together and to Wollongong. This has been a mammoth undertaking impacted at various times by the COVID pandemic and the vagaries of working with international artists and complexities in uncertain times. Iain has been resolute in his commitment to bringing this exhibition together throughout protracted and often challenging circumstances and has done so with good humour and grace.

We would also like to thank the exhibiting artists Lukifer Aurelius, Carrie Ann Baade, Oliver Benson, Kim Evans, Cameron Potts, Martina Hoffman, Bruce Rimell, Roku Sasaki, Madeline Von Foerster and Liba Waring Stambollion for their commitment to this project over this often changing landscape.

Boundary Strider is an exhilarating exhibition presenting unique and enticingly symbolic worlds. We hope you enjoy the journey.

John Montealeone
Gallery Program Director



THE MEARCSTAPA BRUSH

Western philosophical tradition from its beginnings in the Presocratics and the Old Testament has been prejudiced against images (phantasia) in favour of thought-abstractions. In the period since Descartes and the Enlightenment conceptualisation has held preëminence; the psyche's tendency to personify has been disdainfully put down as anthropomorphism. One of the main arguments against the mythical mode of thinking has been that it works in images, which are subjective, personal, sensuous. This above all must be avoided in Western epistemology, and so in depictions of the forces of nature. To personify has meant to think animistically, primitively, pre-logically. The senses deceive; images that would relay truth about the world must be purified of their anthropomorphic elements. The only persons in the universe are human persons.

James Hillman *Pan and the Nightmare, 1972*

Celebrating a provocative fusion of metaphysical transformation and ecological interconnectivity, merging mythic universes with the natural world, *Boundary Strider* showcases a dynamic group of International and Australian artists converging in a way never possible before the advent of social media. Existing largely outside mainstream international art networks, the artists participating in this exhibition have been required to navigate and shape-shift through a complex set of structures, relationships, digital interfaces, and most recently Covid travel bans, in order to collectively manifest a real world presence.

Derived from a translation of the Old English term "Mearcstapa" from the story of Beowulf, boundary strider refers to those who exist on the outskirts of a community. In folklore, Mearcstapa could move freely in and out of groups, and act as a cultural bridge to neighbouring tribes; intimating a transgressive existence emerging from in-between spaces, speaking from the margins, haunting centres of power and traversing liminal topographies allied to wilderness and the outlaw. Uncanny and disorientating, Mearcstapa are aligned to "natural", or otherworld forces that refuse to remain in their appointed places. Boundary striders evoke the inexhaustible strangeness of the everyday world, where unfathomable depths glimmer under humdrum ordinariness, a blooming, buzzing, wild proliferation of shapes and forms shot through with shadows, predation and risk.

A deep affinity with nature, coupled with the capacity to imagine plural futures, grounds and inspires featured art works. Enfolded in tragedy and triumph, estrangement and union, they speak from the threshold between the worlds, of imaginal realms and contemporary experience, of strange primordial ages and ancestral places, and life riven with divinity and mythopoeic thought. Existence and its interpretation is ever political, but it is also a form of sacred text written in the language of symbols and inspiring a shift in our anthropocentric vantage point. Always a fertile terrain for projecting a culture's desires, fears, whimsy, or will, nature is no longer the soulless, eternally bountiful other; a discreet realm set apart from human activity conveniently reduced by allegory, political commentary, assumed function and hierarchic placement.

In uncertain, hyper-transitional times of tipping points, ecocide, and resource wars, it is easy to believe that art can never change things. Yet, just as creativity is vital

for reinventing the legitimacy of the scientific quest and harnessing avenues of adaptation and co-existence, visual expression is fundamental to any transformation of consciousness. Speaking to essential questions around reciprocity, understanding, and regeneration, *Boundary Strider* offers imagery which can help us think of the natural world in embodied, active, distinctly relational terms whereby production of new knowledge is possible within the transcendent as well as everyday knowing of nature. It has long been clear amongst indigenous peoples, those who are so much better at surviving and thriving in local natural ecologies, that visual expressions of animist consciousness are far from childish and uneducated. As a living conduit for complex interconnected worlds of parallel, natural, and magical existence, animistic thinking reveals many of the subtle and synergistic ecological relations in nature that mechanical or purely scientific approaches miss.

In an age where images are generated and disseminated at unparalleled speed and volume, when prime mythopoeic visual experience is either a distant memory animated by ironic interpretation, or belonging to the non-Western other, *Boundary Strider* arrives with a different vision—one where anthropomorphic and fantastic imagery challenge those perspectives which flatten a diverse, multiplicitous otherness by a wilful blindness and deafness to anything that does not speak in words. Resilient and primed by its cross culture accessibility, painting's diverse image language proves once again that its sidelining in recent decades has been both short sighted and counter-productive.

In quiet contrast to the communications avalanching out of today's social media, where incessant consumption, conformity, and viral status are measures of success, the painted images in *Boundary Strider* unfold as they did in their making, under the slow art of the eye and the hand, resurrecting imagination, reflection, and intellection. Taking time with a painted surface in order to reach out to others, to stretch identity and provoke empathetic events beyond normal boundaries, poses challenging and perhaps surprising immersive possibilities. Through intuition and revelation, deep connections are formed, dissolving the boundary between human existence and the more-than-human world, crisscrossing the globe irrespective of borders, nationhood, and contemporary art hierarchies.

Iain Whittaker
Curator



Left:
Kim Evans,
Nature Imaginarium, 2015,
ink and acrylic on fabiano
cotton paper, 65 x 45cm.

Above:
Bruce Rimell,
*Are We Orbiting Simulated
Lives, Or Memories Of
Everything, Everything All
At Once...?*, Panels 2 & 3 of
a 5 panelled frieze, 2022,
acrylics, inks & markers on
canvas, 30 x 450cm.

Right:
Martina Hoffman,
Creatrix, 2019, oil on canvas,
60 x 40cm.



ENVISIONING HOPE: NOTES ON *BOUNDARY STRIDER*

Shivaun Weybury

It might well seem as though our post-Trump, post(?) pandemic, crisis-riven world needs more evidence, more proof and certainty, and far less fantasy and charlatanism, less masquerade and concealment, less ambiguity. But if we think about it, the perfidious, cynical, cruel discourse that has come to pervade our media-spaces and has now tunnelled its way into the consciousness of so many previously (or relatively) reasonable people is the hollow opposite of anything like the rich, connective expression of imagination or magic, myth or vision. Instead, it feeds on an empty, disconnected kind of 'fact' that is simply repeated, again and again, until it gains a lifeless traction. If, like me, you've tried battling it with logic or incredulity in heated, pointless exchanges over social media, you will know that it is fundamentally immune to evidence, and unperturbed by 'the truth'. This heartless noise is only quieted in the face of something Real¹— something awe-inspiring, creative, and based in a radical kind of acceptance or trust. This is a Real not able to be proven, not factual. It is an ethic of hope and belonging that, as humans, we can only achieve in love, or in art.

Both love and art require a suspension of certainties, and a willingness to embark on something unforeseeable and potentially transformative—perhaps even ruinous. 'I', the controller-ego, am undone and rearranged in love and in art, and this undoing is the hopeful thing we can trust in. It is the thing that connects us to one another, to the natural world, and to the universe itself. Love and art and trust are fundamentally related to boundaries—those between self and other or human and non-human most specifically. 'Other' is not just some additional bounded self that I have to deal with; it is the unknown, the accident, the in-between, the hybrid, the mess, the not-yet or not-quite or not-even. Otherness is what we encounter in/at the boundary, and we are particularly good at trying to banish or police it. To love, to create, to trust is to allow the other a place; to approach the boundary and open oneself to—or commune with—a kind of disintegration.

Artists, healers, sorcerers, visionaries and witches from nearly all of the cultures on Earth have been walking this line—striding it—for thousands of years, knowing that another of its portals or access points is the thing we call 'nature'. Being in or connecting with the natural world—with plants, animals, soil, weather cycles, minerals and other natural materials, but also with natural-human processes such as birth, breathing, growth, sex, dreaming, menstruation and yes, death—brings us closer, or back, to the boundary at which we are able to become open and hopeful once more. This is why human destruction of the 'natural' environment and our continual abuse of the other lifeforms with which we share the planet is so devastating: we are destroying our avenues for hope.

So, in my humble opinion, the artists in this exhibition are mounting a defence; *Boundary Strider* is a collective refusal to give up hope, and the works within it are asking us to come back to the edge, come again to the potential opening and trust that makes us vital, meaningful beings. All of the works are paintings, and all are monumentally elaborate and painstaking in their execution—a true labour of love that speaks to us of slow, patient commitment and care-taking. They are meditations, dreamings and devotions: visual incantations that use matter, light, pattern and colour to conjure strength of purpose and the will to reverse the damage we are doing to ourselves, to the planet, and to future generations. This collective labour is crucially important right now, as Putin bombs Ukraine², as Australians look to a new government for direction and vision, as floods and heatwaves cripple communities across the globe, as animal and insect populations dwindle, and people blame, troll, or shoot one another.

Each of the works in *Boundary Strider* reminds us that we can respond to this calamity with something other than withdrawal, despair, consumption, addiction or violence: we can attend to our capacity for connection; we can carefully cultivate the beauty and joy that communing—with each other and with other beings, or ways of being—affords. Bruce Rimell's vivid panorama renders shimmering sensations that function like queer hieroglyphs, focusing our attention on what he calls "Beyond-The-Self Exploration". Lukifer Aurelius refers to his work as a *mise-en-scene* of dream-like agencies that facilitate a "movement beyond our ordinary sense of volitional self". Martina Hoffmann, Liba Waring Stambolion and Kim Evans also draw from meditative and/or dream states in their representations of hybrid, "otherworldly" creatures that allude to the interdependency and interconnectedness of all life on our planet. Hoffmann refers to her paintings as vibrational "portals" that lead to space-times and interactions that heal broken connections; both Waring Stambolion's "living paintings" and Evans' sentient composites address us in "an intuitive symbolic language" that weaves together the fate of human, animal/insect and plant life. Similarly, Roku Sasaki conceives of his work in terms of a growing thing—the product of a kind of natural dream—that consists in an abundance of energy and breaks down categorical barriers between life forms. Cameron Potts' astonishing *Caterpillar Supernova* affords us a kind of vision that is usually only possible through technological augmentation, and the vision is a hybrid one: it encompasses the micro and the macro to demonstrate their fundamental continuity.³ Every one of these works deserves its own essay; for the sake of brevity, however, I have chosen several others to serve as 'focal points' in the hope that they will help us tease out the central concerns and approaches tying the artists and works of *Boundary Strider* together.



Lukifer Aurelius, *Untitled*, 2014, oil on aluminium panel, 100 x 97cm.

¹ My understanding of the concept of the 'Real' has its roots in a Freudian & Lacanian tradition that conceives of a register beyond small 'r' reality that cannot be rationalized and is a kind of ethical drive. See J. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book VII, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Porter, Routledge: New York and London, 1992. For an accessible explanation of the Lacanian Real, see PlasticPill's "Lacan on the Real", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UPhrQjHi_s accessed 18/5/2022.

² Fittingly, the word Ukraine—in Eastern Slavic languages—literally refers to a boundary or frontier: u ("at") + krai ("edge").

³ All quotes from the artists are taken from statements provided by them to the author.

Featured on the front cover of the exhibition's catalogue is Madeline von Foerster's exquisitely rendered *Die Botschaft (The Message)* [fig. 1], depicting a moment in which an 'embassy' of non-human lifeforms literally attempts to communicate, and commune, with us. This strange ambassador hails from the Cloud Forests of Costa Rica and comprises more than 50 individual species of flora and fauna—many of which are, or were, endangered due to loss of habitat. The message brought before us is sealed, for our eyes only, and is delivered by this human-shaped menagerie with what might be trepidation. The effort these creatures have gone to in order to address us is extraordinary: they are literally attempting to enfold or enmesh themselves in another way of being. Indeed, they appeal to us by way of a gestalt, mimicking the imaginary integration that allows human beings to conceive of themselves as discrete, bounded entities, separate from nature. There is something a little clumsy, perhaps even comical about this chimera—I can't help but think of Frank asking Donnie Darko why he is "wearing that stupid man suit",⁴ or cartoons in which a bunch of animals disguise themselves as human by balancing one atop the other beneath a huge overcoat. Bordering on caricature, the assemblage-creature mocks us earnestly, like a jester might—knowing that all the life on Earth depends on its careful balancing act.⁵

An omnidirectional threat pervades this meticulous, beautiful painting. But environmentally speaking, there really is something hopeful in the message, if only we will take it seriously: the geographical location from which it was sent is one in which deforestation has been successfully reversed, and biodiversity restored. Since the mid-1990s, Costa Rica has utterly transformed itself by implementing a government scheme—funded by a tax on fossil fuels—that pays landowners to protect, conserve and restore the country's ecosystems. This forward-thinking approach has led to the regeneration of many thousands of previously decimated hectares of land, which are now teeming again with wildlife, providing people with income, attracting tourists, generating educational and business opportunities, improving health outcomes and strengthening social bonds.

Over the last two decades at least, Australians and citizens of other Western democracies have scarcely even been able to imagine a government that would look to secure the future of whole ecosystems and work with people rather than against them. But this is exactly what we must begin to do, and exactly why a show like *Boundary Strider* is so necessary: what we imagine, what we envisage and what we en- or dis- courage in or through our representations ends up gaining momentum and driving actual change. Australians have been told ad

nauseum—by oil and mining companies, by conservative governments, right wing media and trolls— that what has already been achieved in places like Costa Rica is crazy, unrealistic, irresponsible, impossible. We have to stop believing these lies, and begin the urgent work of envisaging a polity that takes good government for granted, that insists on life meaning something much more than endless, soulless pursuit of profit.

One attempt to imagine such a thing is Carrie Ann Baade's powerfully optimistic painting *The Allegory of G(o)od Government* [fig. 2]. This visionary manifesto takes its name from one of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's 14th century Siena frescoes, and conceives of government in terms of planetary (r)evolution: a spiritual and ethical process of transfiguration. In Baade's political universe, government is inherently concerned with renewal and rebirth. It is a matter of cosmic guidance (the purview of gods from Egyptian, Christian, Hindu, and Greco-Roman spiritual traditions) and a matter of reflexivity that involves tuning into and trusting something bigger than ourselves. G(o)od Government upholds a cyclical process in which we weigh up our virtues and motivations in order to reset, recalibrate, realign, and choose other courses or pathways. The point here is that we are not required to be perfect or pure in one final moment of judgement; we are instead asked to look again and again at ourselves and our motivations—to 'check in', ethically or morally speaking—to ensure that we learn from our earthly mistakes. Destruction or evil is met with a spirit of perseverance and acceptance of the fact that the universe, the Earth itself, and our own internal worlds are inherently changeable and regenerative. This is an image that refuses to be weighed down by a *fait accompli*, reminding us instead of our capacity to persevere, recover, and make amends.

Practically speaking, transfiguration is a crucial aspect of Baade's creative process as well, which comprises four stages: the artist 'sees' the image in a vision; she makes a preliminary drawing capturing its outlines; she then sources collage material to 'realise' the vision, creating a kind of prototype; finally, she paints the finished collage in a *trompe l'oeil* that faithfully reconstructs the content of—but also the edges and transitions between—the elements in the collaged 'original'. Baade speaks of herself as "someone who is quoting, appropriating, utilising other source material, in order to Frankenstein my own work into existence".⁶ Such an approach resists any attempt to hide or smooth over the tensions that pull at the seams of the work. Boundaries are not seamless, uncontested, smooth sites. They are textured, sometimes sharp and difficult, and often confounding spaces that insist on openness, on the unfinished, on other possibilities.



Figure 2. Carrie Ann Baade, *The Allegory of G(o)od Government*, 2018, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm.

Fidelity to the open nature of the seam connecting different possibilities is also central to the work of Oliver Benson, who, like Baade (and several other artists in this show), creates luminous, visionary paintings that borrow from and pay homage to a range of cultural and spiritual iconography. At first glance, Benson's *Lord of the First Time* [fig. 3] represents a figurative aggregate of different symbols and images, an idol whose bits have been woven together from various cultural and religious traditions. But to reduce it to a neatly-executed pastiche is to miss out on something extraordinary—something that is only experienced when the work is given the time to unravel itself, when its references are taken

seriously as terminals or circuits that allow us to travel, imaginatively, aesthetically, philosophically, through time and space. In fact, this is an incredibly humble and generous image that functions like a mandala: it is a spiritual map that opens pathways to unexpected, interconnected perceptions, questions and knowledges, facilitating focus and understanding. It is, according to the artist, a vision of "the First Teacher"—a Shiva, Sphinx or shaman-like figure that embodies "the Underground Stream": a cultural/spiritual current that flows through the wisdom and iconography of all civilisations and religious traditions.⁷

⁴R Kelly, *Donnie Darko*, Newmarket Films, 2001.

⁵Von Foerster's work recalls the mannerist creations of Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526-1593), in which lavishly painted fruits, plants, animals and other phenomena are pieced together into human-like composite portraits. Like the ambassador in *Die Botschaft*, Arcimboldo's strange beings were arranged to appeal to the self-image of a powerful overseer (they were painted for, and with the patronage of the Holy Roman Emperor and his court) and are full of symbolic flattery. But these are works that play with boundaries too—they are simultaneously portraits, still lifes, and self-portraits; they employ scientific and surrealist processes and languages; they insist on multiple viewpoints that are dependent on distance, proximity or orientation.

⁶Baade, in S Chambers, "Painting with Blasphemy: An Interview with Carrie Ann Baade", *Beautiful Bizarre*, 2018, <https://beautifulbizarre.net/2018/07/24/painting-with-blasphemy-an-interview-with-carrie-ann-baade/> accessed 18/5/2022.

⁷ Author correspondence with the artist, email, 4 June 2022. The notion of "the Underground Stream" can be traced back to 13th century German mystic and theologian Meister Eckhart. See *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. & ed. M O'C Walshe, Crossroad Publishing Co.: New York, 2009.



Figure 3: Oliver Hazard Benson, *Lord of the First Time*, 2020, acrylic on arm panel, 38 x 79cm.

The impressive figure wears the Egyptian false beard and Nemes Crown, both symbols of kingly divinity, and focuses his gaze on some point in the distance beyond us, as if in a trance. Between his ears and his mouth are perched twin ravens, Huginn and Muninn, used by the Norse God Odin to travel outside of his own body and gain divine insight.⁸ At the centre of the figure is a golden sun, flanked by two green lions who seem to be in the process of devouring it. These are rendered in a Persian style, appearing much like the lions found on columns at Persepolis, but their colour and action are undoubtedly related to alchemy. Alchemy has roots in many of the major religious traditions, including Judaism, Islam and Christianity, and its use is documented in Egyptian, Hellenistic, Byzantine, Sanskrit, Taoist, and Medieval European manuscripts.⁹ The Green Lion Eating the Sun is a well-known alchemical symbol, standing for a green liquid sulphate (acid) called “Vitriol of Venus”, which eats through any kind of matter or mineral except gold. It is the eliminator of impurities that leaves behind only that which is truly of value. Alchemists also used the Green Lion to represent the process of photosynthesis, an alchemical process in which plants literally eat the sun’s rays and convert them into food and energy.¹⁰

Researching this singular symbol leads into a labyrinthine network of philosophical traditions spanning a multitude of cultures and historical periods, and there are more: the double-headed eagle associated with the concept of Empire in Greece, Rome, Islamic Spain, Serbia, Albania and Russia; a Japanese demon or *oni*; blue serpents symbolising regeneration and transformation; a ceramic or glass gourd—the first bottle and a sacred vessel used by shamans to carry medicine and elixirs; the firebirds perched atop the figure’s wings, which evoke Native American imagery but are also found in Slavic, Scandinavian, Persian and Chinese mythology; and the myriad of eyes, which refer to deities in Egyptian, Greek, Hindu and Christian traditions, and invoke Ezekiel’s vision of God’s divine chariot, accompanied by cherubim protectors whose wings (and/or wheels) are also emblazoned with eyes.¹¹ Benson’s extraordinary teacher is a two-dimensional portkey—an empathy machine—that engenders a magical form of transportation and gives to us a different kind of time. It opens our eyes to a form of perception that is profoundly incompatible with the impatient, self-obsessed, insecure individualism that has come to define our consumerist way of life.¹²

⁸ According to the medieval Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson, “[t]wo ravens sit on [Odin’s] shoulders and speak into his ear all the news they see or hear. Their names are Hugin and Munin. He sends them out at dawn to fly all over the world and they return at dinner-time. As a result, he gets to find out about many events. From this he gets the name raven-god.” See *Edda*, trans. A Faulkes, Orion: London, 1995, p. 33. Norse sham-ans, like those of other cultures, commonly entered a trance-like state, during which they sent their consciousness on a journey to the spirit world in order to gain perspective and knowledge.

⁹ See P G Maxwell-Stuart, *The Chemical Choir: A History of Alchemy*, Continuum: London and New York, 2012.

¹⁰ Illustrations of the Green Lion can be seen in alchemical works such as the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (1550). See Joachim Telle, ed. *Rosarium philosophorum: ein alchemistisches Florilegium des Spätmittelalters*, trans. L Claren & J Huber, 2 vols., Wiley VCH: Weinheim, 1992.

Other works in *Boundary Strider* can be said to function similarly, and one of the most resonant of these is Iain Whittaker’s *Parasite* [fig. 4]. This ostensibly apocalyptic scene is a hybrid of two iconic landscapes, at once imagined and real: one is a view across Wollongong to the smokestacks of the Port Kembla steelworks, a ubiquitous sight in/blight on the Illawarra region and part of the symbolic lexicon of every Wollongong local; the other is a dramatic skyscape lifted directly from an early scene in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), when a wistful Dorothy—still at home in Kansas—wonders why she can’t fly ‘Over the Rainbow’, just before a catastrophic storm magically deposits her there. Superimposing these imaginary and actual landscapes creates a decidedly *unheimlich* or uncanny atmosphere, playing havoc with any uncomplicated conception of ‘home’.

But who—or what—constitutes the parasite in this picture? A parasite, from the Greek *parasitos* (meaning “uninvited dining companion”), is one who lives, or feeds, at another’s expense. One possibility is that industrial capitalism (in the form of Wollongong’s ‘Industry World’) is the parasite that feeds on everything: it wreaks destruction upon the natural world, which appears decimated in the foreground, and it blackens the sky with its incessant pollution. Even the human figure—architect of this belching monstrosity—is laid waste in its aftermath: the body appears as a semi-transparent husk, tearing itself apart as it presides over a mountain of slag and dead insects. Insects, of course, provide the basic “ecosystem services” that humans simply cannot do without: pollination; pest and disease control; nutrient cycling, water purification and soil formation.¹³ Losing them means potentially losing everything that sustains us.

And yet, as with so many of the works in the show, this image also represents something more hopeful, despite—or perhaps because of—the obvious destruction it confronts us with. There are clear skies beyond the dark clouds, and it is as if a light is being shone on the way in which we humans have been conducting ourselves. The figure may in fact be emerging from a kind of dream or coma, shedding some part of itself that no longer serves its purpose. If the figure is modelled, as the artist has said, on the “honeyed glow of a cicada shell,”¹⁴ then we might assume that we are witnessing a kind of moulting process, in which the organism sheds an outgrown shell in order to move from one phase of life to the next. A shell is something that protects against vulnerability and suffering, providing a sense of security. But pain is usually a sign that something is wrong, that one needs to move in a different direction or approach things differently.

¹¹ See A Wood, *Of Wing and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, Walter De Gruyter: Berlin, 2008, pp. 2–4.

¹² I am cognizant of the fact that spiritual experiences can also be co-opted into a kind of movement or travel that is entirely compatible with consumerism, but this is an issue that re-quires its own essay and is beyond the scope of the current publication. For more information, see A Norman, *Spiritual Tourism: Travel and Religious Practice in Western Society*, Continuum: London & New York, 2011; T Hyland, “McDonaldizing Spirituality: Mindfulness, Education, and Consumerism,” *Journal of Transformative Education*, vol. 15, no. 4, Oct. 2017, pp. 334–356; and D Maoz & Z Bekerman, “Searching for Jewish Answers in Indian Resorts: The Postmodern Traveler,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 37, no. 2, 2010, pp. 423–39.

¹³ D L Wagner et. al, “Insect Decline in the Anthropocene: Death by a Thousand Cuts”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 118, no. 2, January 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023989118>, accessed 12/6/2022.

¹⁴ Author correspondence with the artist, email, 17 March 2022. Cicadas, like humans, reproduce on a massive scale, but unlike us they manage to live in concert with their environment.

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Right - Figure 4: Iain Whittaker, *Parasite*, 2010-15, oil on canvas panel, 70 x 52.5cm.

Backcover: Liba Waring Stambollion, *The Living Paintings* (central panel), 2016, oil on canvas panel, 98 x 220cm.