

# STILL

NATIONAL STILL LIFE AWARD  
2017

CH  
COFFS HARBOUR  
REGIONAL GALLERY  
RG

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## 2017 JUDGE LISA SLADE

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ARTISTIC PROGRAMS, ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Lisa Slade** oversees curatorial, education and public programs at the Art Gallery of South Australia. She joined the gallery as Project Curator in 2011 and has brought a strong curatorial signature – one that brings the past into dialogue with the present. She has extensive experience in education and learning initiatives, as well as a comprehensive background in curating and public programs. She managed the 2012 and 2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art and curated the 2016 Adelaide Biennial. Lisa has also taught in secondary and tertiary contexts for over two decades. She currently lectures in several postgraduate courses delivered by Adelaide University in collaboration with the Art Gallery of South Australia.



### STILL: NATIONAL STILL LIFE AWARD

Building on the ten year foundation of Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery's still life painting award, **Still** is a biennial, acquisitive award for works in the genre of still life, in all media, open to Australian artists at all stages of their careers. **Still** seeks to highlight the diversity and vitality of still life in contemporary art practice, broadening the interpretation of this enduring genre.

Still: National Still Life Award offers \$20,000 for the major award and \$5,000 for the People's Choice Award.

All works in the exhibition are for sale.

Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery is sited on the lands of the Gumbaynggirr people. We acknowledge the richness of their continuing culture, the wisdom of Aboriginal Elders both past and present and pay respect to Aboriginal communities of today.

## MAJOR SPONSOR

### MERCEDES-BENZ COFFS COAST

Mercedes-Benz Coffs Coast and I are proud to be the major sponsor of Still: National Still Life Award, which not only reaches out to all Australian artists, but encourages creativity and innovation in arts practice.

I'm proud to have a strong and ongoing association with Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery because supporting arts and cultural endeavour is essential to creating a vibrant and interesting community; and one that has an important place in the national cultural landscape.

**TODD BLEWITT AND COFFS COAST MERCEDES BENZ**

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**MOVING ART**  
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## SUPPORTING SPONSORS

### SLATER + GORDON LAWYERS

Slater and Gordon are thrilled to support Still: National Still Life Award through the development of an education kit to accompany the exhibition. The creative arts have a valuable role to play in strengthening Australian communities and Still is emerging as one of the most exciting arts initiatives in Australia. Educational institutions from around the country will be able to access the Still resources online. By learning about the history and importance of the still life genre, our future visual artists will be inspired to create the next generation of world class art.

Slater and Gordon are committed to building strong relationships through our sponsorship of community initiatives that educate and inspire.

**HEATHER MCKINNON**

### SASO.CREATIVE

As an ongoing supporter of the arts in Coffs Harbour, saso.creative is delighted to be a supporting sponsor of the 2017 Still: National Still Life Award. We believe in the importance of the arts to the wider community, as both an entertainment and as a mirror to and critic of prevailing cultural norms. It's how society progresses. We are honoured to be part of the staging of this exhibition, and look forward to supporting the arts and art initiatives in Coffs Harbour and surrounds into the future.

**SAM CHAPMAN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR**

### MOVING ART

Regional exhibitions are important and inspiring. They provide an opportunity to see fantastic work from many talented and diverse artists, enabling us to truly appreciate the creative process. It's lovely to be able to sponsor Still: National Still Life Award and to give back a little to the local area, which provides so much to my business and to me as a person.

**AIDAN HILL**

# FOREWORD

CATH FOGARTY, CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, GALLERY AND HISTORY SERVICES COORDINATOR

On behalf of the team at Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery I'm proud to present **Still: National Still Life Award** 2017 and I congratulate all the selected artists whose wonderful works make this exhibition.

This inaugural biennial art award builds on the gallery's longstanding association with the still life genre which until now, has focussed on painting. Opening the award to all Australian artists working in any medium has brought a fresh and contemporary exploration of still life's enduring themes; life and death, reverence for familiar objects and the meaning and memory they carry.

We never imagined that **Still: National Still Life Award** would attract such strong interest in its first year. Many thanks go to all 605 artists who submitted an entry. It was a very strong field of diverse and impressive works that made the selection process challenging given our limited exhibition space. Artist finalists represent all states and the ACT and traverse all art forms.

Special thanks go to Lisa Paulsen, art collector and former Museum of Contemporary Art board member and Brett Adlington, Director of Lismore Regional Gallery who, along with Jo Besley and I, selected the award finalists. Thanks also to our inaugural judge Lisa Slade, Assistant Director, Artistic Programmes, Art Gallery of South Australia – it's an honour to have her involved.

With sponsorship support from leading local businesses and professional services including Major Sponsor, Mercedes-Benz Coffs Coast and Supporting Sponsors; Slater and Gordon, saso, creative and Moving Art; **Still: National Still Life Award** has come into being. I would like to extend a personal thank you to Todd Blewitt, Heather McKinnon, Nanette Backhouse, Sam Chapman and Aidan Hill. Their support is greatly valued and sends a clear message that arts and culture matter and are essential threads in the social fabric of our vibrant and creative community.

A big thank you goes to the Friends of the Gallery who are an incredible support team. The work of the executive over the past 12 months has been extraordinary and the *Art Goes to Court* event has been a truly innovative way to raise the profile of **Still: National Still Life Award** and the arts in Coffs Harbour generally. Their fundraising efforts go to purchasing new works for the gallery's collection as well as providing a raft of events throughout the year.

Heartfelt gratitude goes to our volunteers; where would we be without them? They are an essential part of everything we do including front of house and sometime back of house. They're our install team, our catering support team and at times our moral support team. Thank you.

The Regional Gallery is a cultural service provided by Coffs Harbour City Council and I extend a special thanks to the Mayor, Denise Knight and all the Councillors who continue to support arts and culture.

# ESSAY

JOANNA BESLEY, GALLERY AND MUSEUM CURATOR

Illusion, mystery, the loss and persistence of memory, how we look and what we see, resilience and survival—these are just some of the ideas explored by artists in the inaugural **Still: National Still Life Award 2017**. With the seemingly simple premise of representing objects, the still life genre in fact presents artists with a surprisingly rich array of themes, concepts and aesthetic strategies. As poet Mark Doty argues in his extended essay on still life:

IT IS AN ART THAT POINTS TO THE  
HUMAN BY LEAVING THE HUMAN OUT;  
NOWHERE VISIBLE, WE'RE EVERYWHERE.  
IT IS AN ART THAT POINTS TO MEANING  
THROUGH WORDLESSNESS, THAT  
POINTS TO TIMELESSNESS THROUGH  
THINGS PERMANENTLY CAUGHT IN TIME.  
THAT POINTS TO IMMENSITY THROUGH  
INTIMACY. AN ART OF MODEST CLAIMS  
THAT SEEMS PERENNIAL, INEXHAUSTIBLE.

Of the perennial still life themes, mortality is perhaps the most important, powerfully articulated in the French name for the genre, *nature morte*, literally “dead nature”. When we contemplate the material world, we inevitably begin to question whether we too are simply matter. From its origins in depictions of natural bounty and material riches in Classical frescoes and Egyptian tombs, still life has always sought to remind viewers of the transience of life, that *omnia mors aequat*: death makes us all equal. The depiction of objects is coded with symbolism and allegory. Skulls, candles, smoke, fruit and flowers just moments from decay are constant reminders of the inevitability of death.

In the hands of contemporary artists, reminders of mortality are channelled into social and political commentary. Whose lives matter is the question posed by Julian Meagher’s rendering of a space blanket, pervasive in media footage and imagery of the global refugee crisis. The shadow of violence in the home, supposedly our safest space, disturbs the scene of Susan O’Doherty’s kitchen. Ronnie Grammatica’s *Roadside Memorial* reminds us of the prevalence of death in other taken-for-granted zones, the car, the bike and the road. In delving into the derivation of the word mortgage as a “death pledge”, Kellie Lecczinska positions the current difficulties in achieving home ownership in Australia as alternately a form of imprisonment, denial or slow death, paradoxically conveyed by her sumptuous *vanitas* imagery.

The fate of the environment preoccupied many Still entrants. In drawing our attention to the vibrancy of coral, Laura Jones suggests its demise through bleaching and climate change. Similarly, Angela Casey's deflated globe, hazard tape and the ambiguous noosing of a bird conjure a dystopian future of our own making. Exploring the same vein, other artists instead emphasise resilience. Through the delicacy of bush botany, Sarah O'Sullivan and Paul Kalembe accentuate the toughness and regenerative powers of the Australian ecosystem. Colleen Greig-Canty's moving rendition of a dead Tasmanian Silveryeye underscores this tiny creature's tenacity. In the work of Tony Albert and Robert Moore, resilience is perceived through a cultural frame. How does the modest identity of small coastal towns, represented here by a handmade sign, survive in the face of our obsession with real estate and lifestyle? The commodification and consumption of Aboriginal people and culture is re-cast as survival by Albert in his strident imagery of the kitsch ashtray. This object is far from mute: "you tried to erase us, poison us, objectify us" it asserts, "but our culture endures".

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Merran Esson and Samantha Thompson also consider the agency of objects, a neglected collection of Clarice Cliff or the funnels and bottles found in rural sheds and the back of kitchen cupboards. How do these endure and remain useful? Redundancy is the subject of Victoria Reichelt's work too. How much longer will we use wooden pencils, or will they soon be found only in museums, collected for their curiosity value? Here, the still life becomes a measure of wonder, interrogating the impulse to collect and display. For Tiffany Cole, collecting is an attempt to master time and harness desire. In articulating longing and nostalgia, her stepfather Mike's collection simultaneously solidifies his identity in the here and now. Similarly, Vipoo Srivilasa's *Household Shrine* exalts the huge emotional investment fans make in the objects of their adoration, be they footy players or artists. In a more sombre register, Damien Shen reminds us that museum collecting can be

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akin to theft as Western museums amassed and displayed human remains for so-called scientific purposes. For his people, the Ngarrindjeri, and many other Indigenous people across the world, museums collections are not inanimate objects, but living culture. The spirits of people stolen from their communities over hundreds of years must be returned home to restore equilibrium and heal historical wounds.

Sarah Goffman brings a different angle again to a collection. Making plastic reproductions of a selection of Asian ceramic works in the Wollongong Art Gallery collection and then intricately decorating them with permanent marker and enamel paint, Goffman questions what we take to be valuable and conversely, what we consider rubbish. Given that disposable and throwaway plastic objects last as long, if not longer, than almost any other material, her work

leads us to question our reliance on this ubiquitous substance. Laura E Kennedy, Vanessa Holle and Karl de Waal also probe how we allocate value, playing with our perceptions of materials and upsetting our expectations of what certain materials should look like or be used for. In her delightful "typology of useless objects", Helle Jorgensen is fully inventive, creating enigmatic objects that conjure unknown stories. Mystery imbues other works too—just what is that helmet so meticulously painted by Sam Leach? What is it used for and why does it have purple feathers? What's going on through Michael Langley's rainy night window and what darker truths are hidden in Lilli Waters' luminous world of unlikely fruit, crustacea and vegetables? Like the other photographs in the exhibition, this work shows how the medium of photography, so inextricably linked with light and darkness, is particularly productive for still life. Like their Old Master forerunners, the ways that contemporary photographers choose to highlight or obscure particular objects reveals their deeper meaning and symbolic significance.

INDEED, THIS FORCE  
PULSATES THROUGH ALL  
THE ARTWORKS IN THIS  
EXHIBITION, ATTESTING TO  
THE EXCEPTIONAL BREADTH  
OF ARTISTIC RESPONSE THAT  
STILL LIFE ENABLES.

Many of the three dimensional works in the exhibition demonstrate how effectively still life enables artists to explore form and composition. Placement, space, colour, line and the quality of surfaces are all exquisitely considered. Pioneer visionaries Gwyn Hanssen Pigott and Georgio Morandi are never far away as artists such as Kelly Austin, Richard Spoehr and Kati Watson invite us to consider the resonance of vessels and how our understanding of an object is influenced by its relationship to others. Artists working in other mediums do this too, from the utter simplicity of Cleo Wilkinson's mezzotint and the lucidity of Susan Jacobsen's collage to Anselm van Rood's vibrant vessels, Mary Donnelly's tabletop and Alana Hunt's intriguing small trees captured on video. On face value, the use of moving imagery seems to be the antithesis of still life. Yet, each of the video works, Hunt's as well as those by Elvis Richardson and Nathan Taylor, deploy time and space in ways recognisable from traditional still life painting. These works capture scenes and moments, but extend them, using video's ability to play with time; postpone, prolong or quicken it. Richardson's rhythmic succession of found images generate intriguing vignettes of the intimate lives of

others, while Nathan Taylor's perpetual loop speaks of our insatiable appetites—for experience, pleasure and the unattainable. Time then, is another persistent still life theme taken up by artists in this exhibition. For Tanya Baily, it is the capturing of a passing moment in the morning light, Trisha Dean, the transformation of clay into ceramic, while Fran Callan's kitchen table literally layers time with everyday materials blending together with paint and pencil. Josh Mackenzie uses enamel and aerosol to recall psychedelic album art and saturated technicolor cinema. In transforming an ephemeral, handmade, paper label into tapestry, Sarah Edmondson halts time, and gives this disregarded object longevity and newfound status.

To "look at the overlooked" (to borrow from Norman Bryson) is another fundamental still life strategy that a significant number of the Still finalists engage. Guy Gilmour elevates a humble vegetable peeler with a mastery of restraint, Linda Greedy finds order among decals and Zai Kuang's generic bag of flour is as finely executed as classical drapery. Painters Rene Bolton, Ben Fayle, Myriam Kin-Yee, Kiata Mason, Alison McKay, Tim Snowdon and Mirra Whale approach enduring subjects such as fish, meat, glass, flowers and fabric with feeling and virtuosity, reminding us that still life is as much about the skill of observation as the mastery of technique. The exuberance of several ceramic works depicting the everyday—Mechelle Bounpraseuth's maligned birds amid cigarette butts and fries, Scott Duncan's fairy bread and lamingtons and Sassy Park's homeopathic drops—highlights the current vitality of this medium and how, by broadening the award beyond painting, the Still exhibition exemplifies contemporary art-making.

Far from being "simply" things, objects in a still life artwork are carriers of meaning. More than symbols, these representations embody memory, identity and emotion. The handles and subtle dents on Annette Blair's extraordinary glass workshop arrangement, Tom Carment's typewriter and Elie Begg's toys manifest the hands, minds, even spirits, of the people that used them. Similarly the rooms depicted by Nicolette Eisdell and Greg Weight personify their inhabitants. In Prue Venables' and Stephen Nothling's works, the objects are literal memorials; more than *memento mori* these are vehicles for grieving and remembering. For Brendan Smith, assembling objects sparks a stream of memory; associations that bring past, present and future together, while Louise Allerton and Terri Butterworth trace the enduring force of objects either when they disappear or as memory itself recedes. Indeed, this force pulsates through all the artworks in this exhibition, attesting to the exceptional breadth of artistic response that still life enables.

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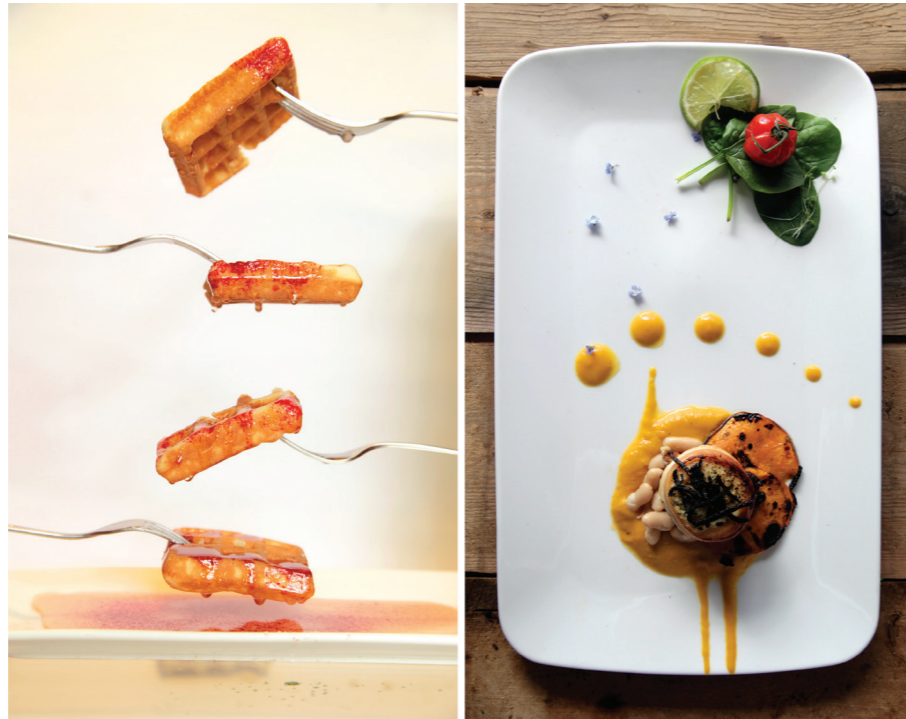
FINALISTS  
STILL 2017

# NATHAN TAYLOR

UNTITLED 1 & 2 (SCREEN TIME) 2016

Dual channel HD Video, 16:9, infinite loop, edition 1 of 5 | Dimensions variable | Courtesy of Bett Gallery

Social media platforms have become pervasive vehicles for contemporary food imaging. Experience is increasingly mediated through digital images, now a habitual part of online interactions. The influence of food's historical depiction is significant, yet current trends suggests an evolution of this visual relationship into something that is unashamedly sybaritic. This diptych of augmented photographs explores a craving for new vicarious experiences. The perpetual loop is symbolic of our appetite for the unobtainable ideal driving popular media.

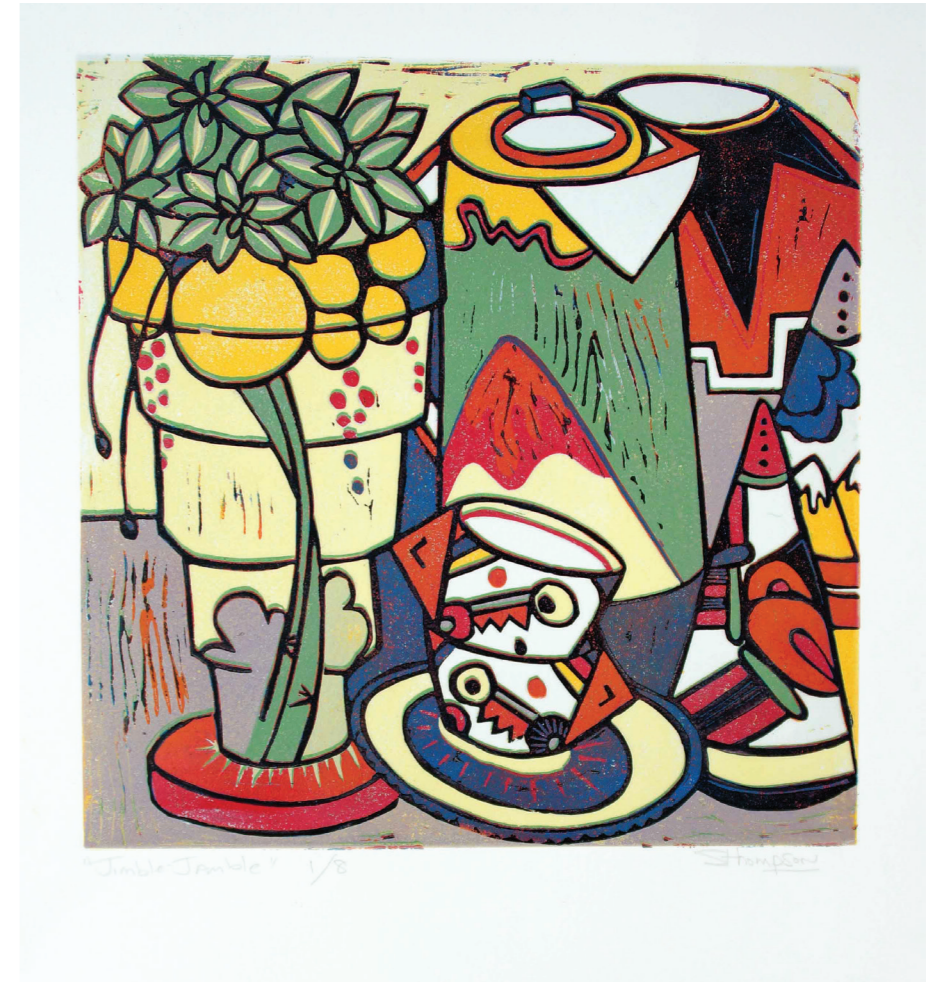


# SAMANTHA THOMPSON

JIMBLE JAMBLE 2017

Reduction linocut on paper, edition 6/8 | 55 x 45 cm

Stuffed into drawers and wonky dressers, peeking out of dusty display cabinets, you will find them. The collection. Amassed over years, given from friends and family as gifts, the collection of Clarice Cliff pieces and others sits and waits. Hand painted as functional objects, they remain useless now, unable to serve their purpose.

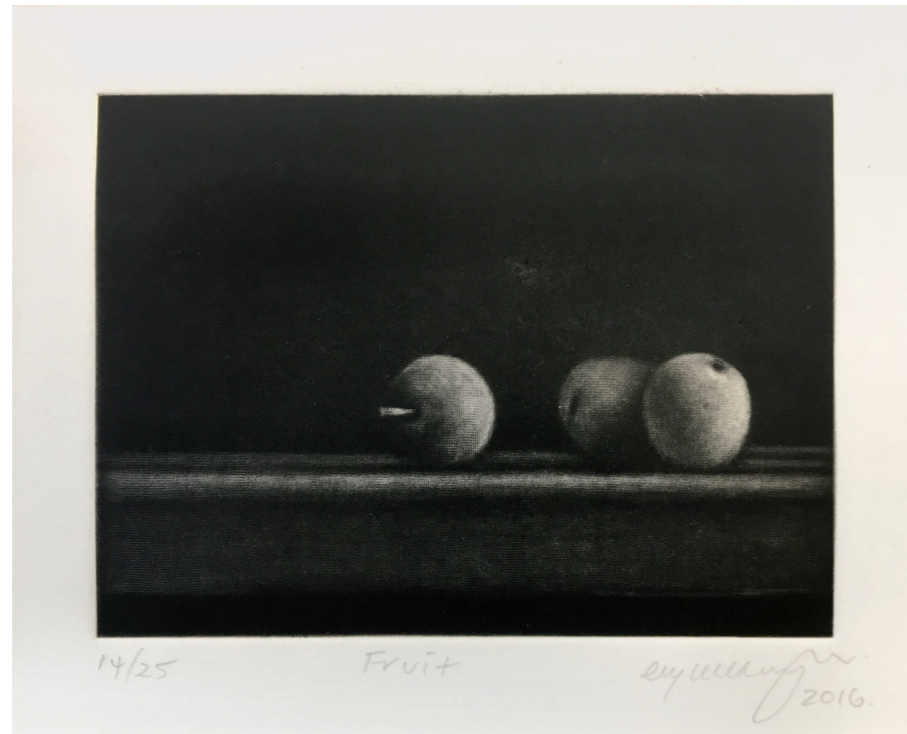


# CLEO WILKINSON

FRUIT 2016

Mezzotint print | 20 x 20 cm

I try to emphasize the singularity and silence of a form. The mezzotint print technique has remained unchanged for the last 300 years. The process achieves tonality by roughening the metal plate with a rocker which creates tiny burrs that hold ink during the printing process. The rocked areas that are left will produce a rich black; areas burnished produce lighter values.





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