

# Art Almanac

The editorial team invites you to submit images and details of your exhibition for consideration for the Exhibition Brief and Feature pages.

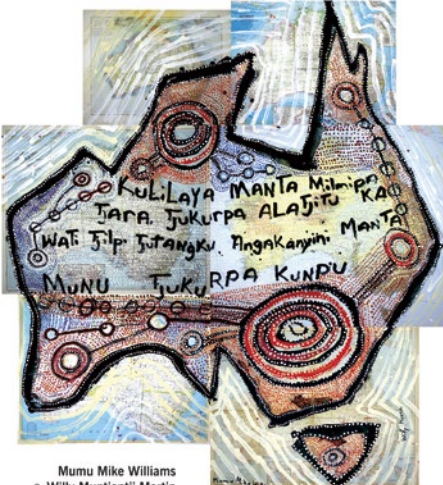
Simply email press-ready images of artworks at 300dpi (with a physical size of approximately 10 x 10cm) along with full details and a statement about the exhibition to [info@art-almanac.com.au](mailto:info@art-almanac.com.au)

Please include all image caption details: artist, title, date, materials, dimensions, copyright, courtesy and photography acknowledgements.

Exhibition Briefs and Features are published at the discretion of the editorial team.

## Art Almanac


December 2017 - January 2018 \$6



Mumu Mike Williams  
& Willy Muntjantji Martin  
Fiona Foley  
Unfinished Business

## Art Almanac

June 2018 \$6



Glenn Barkley  
Raquel Ormella  
David Ralph

### David Ralph

Elli Walsh

Based between Melbourne and Leipzig, Germany, David Ralph creates quiet, uncanny scenes that conflate a host of dichotomies: nature and culture; exterior and interior; physical and psychological.

*Your paintings capture a connectivity between architectural spaces and the human experience. How does your latest series build on this?*

I realised early on that the built environment is very important to me; it's a metaphor for who we are or might aspire to be. Winston Churchill once said "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." I've always been attracted to this idea. In my work I make portraits of people as their environments; it's a sort of collective portrait. I like the residual spirit of abandoned buildings as a kind of theatre of life, full of history, mystery and psychology.

My latest series is about stimulating curiosity and looking for clues in interiors. To some extent, like a detective, I want to elicit a portrait of a person from their background, their things, in their absence.

*Many of your spaces seem silent and empty, evoking the loneliness endemic to contemporary urban life. What are you trying to convey here?*

Silence at times is great; it's a counterpoint to the noise of the city. I see emptiness as space to think and loneliness as a challenge to be curious; to contemplate and observe the things around us that we would otherwise miss in our busy lives. Being a painter is a very solitary business, so the work really echoes this.

These kinds of spaces can also be intriguing in and of themselves, like a cave you've discovered you don't want figures competing with the space for your attention; you want to study the cave. For a long time in the Academies of Europe, interiors without people or a grand narrative were frowned upon. The rise of the painted interior in the mid 19th century coincided with crime fiction and the psychoanalysis of Freud and Jung, so this subject is very much about personality, 'interiority' and psychology. My scenes signify a variety of people and states of mind. Where I have incorporated figures, they are melding with the interior as if one and the same, belonging. I like to think of figures as part of the woodwork ingrained or camouflaged like an animal in a rainforest.

*What informs your luminous, jewel-like palette?*

I use colours that suggest a place somewhere between fantasy and reality, colours from the past that feel a little old, like aged colour photos or, in the case of my club interiors, like the residue from cigarette tar has stained the painting. The surreal look of the colour is reinforcing that painting is fiction, but I'm not a fan of flat out surrealism or straight realism. I prefer to consider my scenarios as reality being stranger than fiction – which isn't too hard to find these days.

*In your new work Jungle Room (2018), foliage sprouts from the ambiguous walls of a lounge room. What are you exploring here?*

Interiority or inner subjectivity. *Jungle Room* is based on an existing interior designed by an artist who made a film in Hawaii. Encountering the Hawaiian jungle had a profound and lasting effect on him. When he arrived home he knew he wouldn't fly again due to his fear of flying, so to get that feeling back he converted a space in his house into a jungle room. In the latter days of his life he spent most of his days there, singing and playing guitar. It was his favourite room because of an encounter with Hawaii and its jungle.

30



When I learned this about the 'Jungle Room' I had to paint it because it exemplifies what I like about interiors – that they display the lengths people will go to make their interior into a portrait of their psychological needs and interests. Often what people yearn for but can't have, they create as a virtual reality.

*Can you walk me through your painting process?*

I'm trying to become less digital and more analogue in my preparation. In the past I would make sketches in Photoshop first, but now I find an interesting environment, photograph it, then paint from the photo – of which I have several exposures so I can see into the shadows and highlights. On the canvas, the photo is heavily filtered through the medium of waxy to textured oil paint. I seek 'painterly' environments that suit this old, if not derelict, medium.

Over the years I've moved away from painting slick contemporary spaces that suit a finer grained realism. I choose environments that kind of look and feel like they might already be an expressive painting – low definition or low tech; emotional. My handling of environments is never literal; I want some things to be lost and new things found in the translation.

**Gallery 9**  
**13 June to 7 July, 2018**  
Sydney

*The Giant Book*, 2017, oil on canvas, 60 x 80cm  
*The Players*, 2017, oil on canvas, 60 x 80cm  
*Jungle Room*, 2017, oil on canvas, 28 x 36cm  
Courtesy the artist and Gallery 9, Sydney

32

### Raquel Ormella

#### I hope you get this


Macushla Robinson

There is a poetic sadness to Raquel Ormella's work that is politically charged, expressing deeply felt approaches to issues of labour, class, migration and nationalism. I spoke with Raquel a week before the opening of her survey show at Shepparton Regional Gallery.


*The relationship between politics and textiles is rich. As Roszika Parker famously wrote, "To know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women." It's also the history of working class protest movements. How did you arrive at textiles?*

I had grown up doing craft. My mother taught me the sewing and needlework, which were also taught to girls at state school. They were essential life skills for a working class person; you needed to know how to repair your clothes. When I went to art school I was influenced by the feminists around me – Jenny Watson, Narelle Jubelin and Vivian Binns, among others. There was this rethinking of modernism through a feminist perspective and that involved re-sensitising textile practices; so class and feminism became intertwined in my work.

A lot of this is about different kinds of labour. Whenever I see something that's embroidered I want to see the back of it because it tells you how it's made, and the time it took. The pieces comprising my new work *All these small intensities* (2018) will be displayed so you can see both sides, keeping that labour on display, presenting them as objects rather than just images.



33



*A self-confessed 'palette hoarder', you've embroidered a series from threads that you've kept since art school. I'm reminded of the work of political theorist Jane Bennett, who reframes the hoarder as someone with a heightened sensitivity to the call of objects in an age of ecological destruction – an 'object-oriented ontology'.*

Hoarding – being messy and not being a domestic goddess – is something you're supposed to be ashamed of. But it's complicated. I was cleaning out my belongings because I was moving studios. I decided I couldn't hold onto things anymore; I had to either use it or get rid of it. This is the thing about being an artist: if you buy something you don't want to throw it out and have to buy it again; you don't have that kind of money. If you come from a migrant family or grow up with material scarcity, there is a displaced emotional relationship to things. On the other hand, if you're renting, you have to cart it all around and that has its own cost, so there's this tension between being frugal and being impractical.

The way Bennett speaks about the 'object-oriented ontology' is quite freeing. The object has its power outside of any theoretical framework or art history, as artists we are sensitive and attracted to the ways that objects resist neat frameworks.

*One of your works is titled My father's work clothes (2018). There's a specific story here – one of migration and labour. Can you elaborate on this?*

The work I was originally making at art school was about my father's migration experience; he left Barcelona to live and work in Germany, which was booming from the steel industry. Then he ended up in South America where my mother had grown up. From Lima, they emigrated to Australia. These multiple migrations are bound to the movement of global capital.

In Australia my father worked in a factory, so he wore grey King Gees. That was a detail I had forgotten until I saw some grey King Gees in an op-shop and I realised that the shades of grey I had bought at art school 20 years ago were the colours of my father's work clothes. Clothing can bring back smells, feelings, memories of your dad coming home and changing out of his work clothes, the rituals of the day. The grey of King Gees is pretty much gone from the spectrum of the city; you don't see people wearing them anymore. It was the colour of people who worked on the railways and in factories.

*There are two banners in this exhibition that read "I'm worried I'm not political enough" and "I'm worried this will become a slogan". Given that activism takes a kind of emotional labour, how do you find a balance between political action and personal care?*

Even though these works come from a particular time and connect to a particular set of relationships, people are still interested in them 20 years later. A lot has changed about activism since then, but the sense of being present and isolated at the same time remains relevant. We feel

34