

TENDER EXOTICS

BOBBY BEAUSOLEIL
NIK KAMVISSIS
MARGARET STONES
ALAN TOWNSEND

CURATED BY LISA CAMPBELL-SMITH
UNDER THE CURATORIAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM,
CONTEMPORARY ART TASMANIA

EXHIBITION: 2 – 31 MAY 2015

TENDER EXOTICS

A recent exhibition titled *Open Field* held at Hauser and Wirth Somerset in the UK, celebrated the founder of the New Perennial movement, Piet Oudolf. The works on display were Oudolf's sketches and designs for a series of public gardens. The drawings were layered with symbols, codes, and colour; steeped in the knowledge of plant life. What is fascinating about their presence in a 'high art' context, removed as they are from the finished gardens, is that they become loaded with possible narratives; instantly imbued with meaning beyond their schematic and instructional purpose. *Tender Exotics*, has at its centre a similar set of intentions, that is, to place works into a context in which they have not been previously considered.

Tender Exotics brings together a collection of works from Bobby Beausoleil, Nik Kamvissis, Margaret Stones and Alan Townsend. From the margins of contemporary art practice to the pedagogical rigours of scientific illustration, *Tender Exotics* considers the criteria by which artists and objects are assigned to correspond with contemporary themes and curatorial agendas. The assemblage of this trans-historical grouping is presented here, not to seek order through it, but rather to explore a juxtaposition of descriptive elements and latent possibilities.

Borrowing its title from the 18th Century publication, *A collection of various forms of stoves, used for forcing pine plants, fruit*

*trees, and preserving tender exotics...*¹ the exhibition also incorporates visual material from these architectural drafts. The design principles of hot houses in this book, as well as other historical sources, such as Loudon's *Hortus Britannicas*, are used as templates to create wallpaper which features in the exhibition. The diagrams within this traditionally crafted wallpaper tie together various elements of the exhibition – offering reflection on historic models of propagation of plants, and insight into the botanic gardens of the 1700s that ventured into the collection and conservation of rare and introduced species.

These established institutional practises may be compared to cultural institutions such as museums and art galleries where, amongst other things, they categorise and translate visual characteristics of objects. As Art historian, Svetlana Alpers states in her essay 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing,' ... what the museum registers is visual distinction rather than cultural significance.² Alpers essay formulates the phenomenon 'The museum effect,' which examines the dogmatic nature of the museum to translate objects by isolating them from the context they came from, placing them in a position for attentive looking, and thus transforming their meaning.³ This is especially given weight with the display of ethnographic objects, objects often not originally intended for attentive viewing. Recent critical evaluation of this practice has made the museum something of a contested site.

How is this then echoed in a contemporary art space? Freeing objects from the museum and displaying them in contemporary

art galleries in juxtaposition with contemporary art, may not necessarily apply a sense of cultural significance. On the contrary is the process only extending the misunderstanding of cultural material by further re-contextualisation, robbing the object of its historical possession? Or, are new interpretations, audiences and appreciation found?

It is not historic diagrams or the hierarchy of encyclopaedic collections that drives this exhibition, but recognition of the possibilities of meaning in opening up the seam between these artists' work, practising in the various fields of history, botanical drawing and contemporary practice. Rather than patching the works together, the exhibition finds new relationships in these spaces.

The hand-drawn images of contemporary artist, Nik Kamvissis are inhabited by botanic and natural phenomena. Kamivissis's anthropomorphic figures, present a cosmos of convoluted internal dialogue in the pictorial animation of the natural world.

1. William Robertson, *A collection of various forms of stoves, used for forcing pine plants, fruit trees, and preserving tender exotics: intended as well for the use of amateurs, as that of students in the art of gardening*, London: published as the Act directs, Jan. 1, 1798, at R. Ackermann's, 1798.

2. Svetlana Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing,' in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Ivan Karp and Steven Levine, eds. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press), 1991, p. 30

3. *ibid.*, p. 27

Frequently evocative of a half plant, half human, typically in vivid colours, and invariably related to an appearance of a sort of false mythology, these aggregations raise questions of intention and process. Readily showing themselves as hand made, works such as *Pop-up puppets* and *Come to me*, in this context reveal influences that may extend to botanical sketches.

In the case of Bobby Beausoleil, his works are made from pencil on bristol board, the only materials available to him in prison. Viewing his prolific body of work, Beausoleil constantly returns to similar themes - the animal kingdom, mythology, archetypes - often depicted in allegorical forms. Isolated from art world practises, and moreover the natural world, Beausoleil presents intimate idealisations of nature. Despite attempts to label him, 'outsider or insider artist,' Beausoleil's sole occupation is making art. However, unlike artists from the academy, where biography can be seen as taboo, here it dominates. The exhibition does however present Beausoleil's sound practice in the piece he composed for the soundtrack of the 1972 Keneth Anger film, *Lucifer Rising*, an artistic output he has become known for.

Margaret Stones plant portraits were originally created for the six volumes of *The Endemic Flora of Tasmania*,⁴ drawn with the purpose to facilitate taxonomical classification. Of more than 200 drawings included in the volumes, almost all were done in her home in Melbourne where she received the living specimens brought in from Tasmania.⁵ They are taxonomic investigations which, in a museum context, have also been admired for their dynamic aesthetic beauty. The aesthetic aspect of the scientific representations of plants in her work within the frame of *Tender Exotics*, offers viewers new ways of regarding those representations today.

The seeds of *Tender Exotics* originated in contemplating images that serve as an interstice - sketches for the construction of 18th century hot houses, drawings by unknown artists tucked in with the liner notes on the inside sleeve, or the untidy designs for Piet Ouldolf's remarkable and carefully assembled gardens. Hindsight brings to the fore aspects of this selection of artists and works that were originally understood and sought more intuitively. This exhibition does not seek a centre, nor understand one through its absence, but instead urges new and uncommon ideas in the correspondence and contradictions these artists bring to a precarious whole.

LISA CAMPBELL-SMITH

4. *The Endemic Flora of Tasmania* is a six-volume botanical book, commissioned and sponsored by Lord Talbot de Malahide, London: Ariel Press, 1967 - 1978.

5. Irena Zdanowicz, 'Endemic Flora of Tasmania,' in *Beauty in Truth: The Botanical Art of Margaret Stones*, National Gallery of Victoria, 1996, pp. 14-15

THE NON-SENSE OF SENSIBILITY

What is Art? What is its function, and how does it produce affect? Setting aside essentialist and ontological conceptions for the moment (where, respectively, Art is a latent potential of the natural universe as conceived in Platonic thought or a perpetual state of becoming in and of itself as described in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari), Art is a human construct mediated by discourse. It is a mode of sensory-aesthetic perception whose function is to prompt critical reflection upon our environment. In *Tender Exotics*, Lisa Campbell-Smith emphasises Art as discursive critique, whilst, with disjunctive vigour and disruptive glee, problematises our reliance on Classical and Poststructuralist positions in art criticism, which remain the dominant opposing pillars for apprehending aesthetic perception and placing value on the art-object in our contemporaneity.

With this collection of disparate pieces, seemingly antithetical visual, aural and spatial disturbances, traversing historical, formal, disciplinary and cultural bounds, *Tender Exotics* interrogates the discursive practice of structured presentation itself. Campbell-Smith's subversive intent? Curation as a practice of containment aiming for release (what Deleuze calls deterritorialisation)—the imposition of structure as a disruptive act, intent on exposing the very conceit and the anthropomorphic violence that is the basis of imposing meaning on the "real". This is "Curation of the Absurd",

an absurdist framing device as metanarrative where, unlike Beckett or Ionesco, Hermann Nitsch or Abruption, it is not the content that forces us to question, but the very container itself: the exhibition as confoundment rather than explication; reducing art to pure, abstracted form, and at the same time, exposing art and its bonds and bounds of perception as a construct, a prison house of signification.

So, what connects these seemingly disparate aesthetic objects, these unique authorial obsessions, these "unlikely but undeniable kindred spirits?" What connects the post *art brut* abstractions of Nik Kamvissis' drawings? The mythic-occult psychedelia circumscribed by Bobby Beausoleil's notorious incarceration? The child-like fascination and Enlightenment discipline informing the hyper-realist representation of illustrative botany? And the panoptic structural designs of 19th Century horticultural imperialism as postmodern pastiche?

Individually, we can apprehend them to varying degrees through the lenses of aesthetic essentialism and aesthetic materialism: Beausoleil's scorpio as a satanic "music of the spheres," a cosmic rendition of the cult of the occult, evoking his involvement in the contra-hippie affectations of *Lucifer Rising*—the obverse of an essential beauty in the universe; or, with Townsend, architectural design for practical containment as foregrounding the constructivist contingency of human knowledge as the panopticon for aesthetic containment and its resultative representation. We could compare their formal qualities: the resonant visual semblance of "Come to Me" with Stone's detailed

fronds, where one is a hyper impressionist homage to the other, depending on the ocular convention you want to apply to each.

However, this affords us only a taxonomical coincidence. It is in their forced juxtaposition where concord resides. Collected as a whole, bound by the frame of the exhibition, they reveal the constraints of the prison itself. At a formal level from this perspective, we could say they share a fealty to the unfinished project of Modernist abstraction; amplifying lines of intensity, spectra of physical waveforms as nodes of density in a rhizomatic network of limitless potential and unidirectional flight, where line and hue, visual rhythm and pointalistic conglomeration serve to expose form and structure, along with the discursive relations of power underwriting their very intelligibility, whilst ostensibly aiming for representation. But this is representation as its analogue: anti-representation as fidelity to the truth of the event.

Or, to get to the point of framing, we can look at this collection in terms of their cohabitation in space. Specifically, in the space of the exhibition. All these works have a common anti-art heritage, they are created and practiced outside the approved institutional frameworks of the academy, the gallery and the critic. They represent the art of transgression, *art brut*, naïve art, outsider art, functional art, anti-art, non-art...Whatever. And here they are, forced into the very institutional framework that denies their validity as Art in conventional terms. This brings us to the core of the arbitrary nature of tracing equivalence, and the potential role of the curator as Bakhtinian trickster.

At the core of Campbell-Smith's curatorial sensibility is the absurdity—the impossibility of curation itself. The conceit of the gallery, the violence of the exhibition, the despotic regime of signs and the coercive duplicity of signification. If the ultimate meaning is that there is no meaning, no univocal structure, no transcendental truth, that doesn't matter; Art has done its job: it made you think. The non-sense of sensibility. This is not nihilism, but liberation, ontic freedom of a materialist composure, the positivity of constructive potential, Francois Laruelle's "non-philosophy" as a scientifically brutal, affirmative aesthetic release. To paraphrase Nietzsche, Nature doesn't give a fuck about you, get on with the joyful science of making life a more interesting force in time through critical vision.

SEAN BAXTER

BOBBY BEAUSOLEIL

Cupid and Venus: Love Chastised (series of 2) 2007

Pencil on paper, 27.9 x 35.5cm



Bobby Beausoleil, *Astarte: Mother of Mothers* (series of 2) 2007
Pencil on paper, 33 x 45cm



NIK KAMVISSIS

Sucking on Nothing (series of 4) 2011
Pencil on Paper, 42 x 59.4 cm

Sucking on Nothing (series of 4) 2011
Pencil on Paper, 42 x 59.4cm



MARGARET STONES

Pratia irrigua, 1971

watercolour and pencil on paper, 91.1x 28.0cm

Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston



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Fern unpubl. drawing

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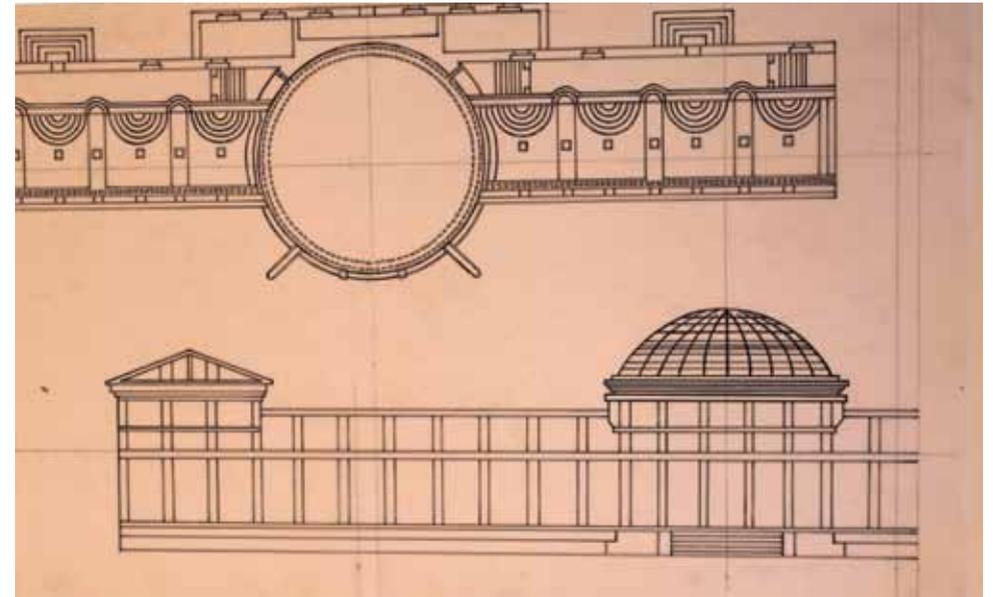
Gleichenia absida

- 1 Habit x1
- 2 Part of rachis, front & back x2
- 3 Young frond, with scales x4
- 4 Scales from young frond x8
- 5 Pinnae from above & below x4
- 6 Enlargement of pinnae x16
- 7 Scale from pinnae x48
- 8 Spore case (12 to each pinna) x20

Coll. Travelling Tea Tree Society,
Mr. Phyllis Bink, 12/73,
AW B. Robinson.

Mat. fresh. Kew.

Margaret Stones, *Gleichenia absida*, 1970
watercolour and pencil on paper, 32.6 x 23.5cm
Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston



ALAN TOWNSEND

Strange Fruit (detail), 2015

Pencil and ink on composite film, size variable



Alan Townsend, *Forced Fruit* (detail), 2015
Ink drawing on composite film

BIOGRAPHIES

Bobby Beausoleil

Born in California, USA

Bobby Beausoleil is an artist and composer who has been producing artwork whilst serving a life sentence for murder in the US. Prior to his incarceration Beausoleil was a member of the band The Orkustra, going on to form the group The Magick Powerhouse of Oz. After taking a small role in *Invocation of My Demon Brother* in 1969, Beausoleil was commissioned by director Kenneth Anger to compose the soundtrack for the film *Lucifer Rising*. In 2013, *The Lucifer Rising Suite* was released, as an anthology documenting the entire *Lucifer Rising* soundtrack project from its earliest beginnings in 1967 to its ultimate completion and delivery to the filmmaker in 1979 (included in this exhibition).

<http://www.bobbybeausoleil.com/>

Nik Kamvissis

Born in Sydney, Australia.

Based in Sydney's Western suburbs, Kamvissis has been a practicing visual, sound and vocal artist for over two decades. A recognised force behind the Australian experimental music scene, he has performed and recorded with a diverse range of local and international artists, with improvisation and chance lying at the core of his practice. Recently, Kamvissis was commissioned

to produce artwork for *Geocidal*, an album by Faith No More frontman Mike Patton, and Berlin-based avant garde composer Anthony Pateras.

Margaret Stones

Born in Victoria, Australia

Elsie Margaret Stones is widely considered to be one of the most important botanical illustrators of the 20th Century. Beginning her career as the principal contributing artist to Curtis's *Botanical Magazine*, Stones was commissioned to create images for Australian Postage Stamps in 1957. From 1967 until 1978 she worked on the exhaustive, *The Endemic Flora of Tasmania*, and in 1976 started the first of what would become over 200 works for Louisiana State University, later published as *Flora of Louisiana*. Stones has two genera named after her; *Stonesia* and *Stonesiella*.

Alan Townsend

Born in Tasmania, Australia

Currently studying an Arts Degree at the University of Tasmania, Alan Townsend, local historian and historic handmade wallpaper designer, is the Heritage Officer for the Clarence City Council. One of Townsend's recent projects included reproducing historic wallpaper for the Narryna Heritage Museum located in Battery Point, Hobart. His interest in historic wallpapers stems from the discovery of fragments in his 1820s Kempton home. Townsend has also re-created wallpapers for the Oatlands Gaoler's residence and Dysart House.

LIST OF WORKS

Nik Kamvissis

Sucking on Nothing (series of 4), 2011
Pencil on Paper, 42 x 59.4cm

Sucking on Nothing (series of 4), 2011
Pencil on Paper, 42 x 59.4cm

1 & 2, 2010
Pencil on Paper, 42 x 59.4cm

Bobby Beausoleil

Cupid and Venus: Love Chastised (series of 2), 2007
Pencil on paper, 27.9 x 35.5cm

Astarte: Mother of Mothers (series of 2) 2007
Pencil on paper, 33 x 45cm

Margaret Stones

Leptospermum grandiflorum, 1970
watercolour and pencil on paper, 37 x 26.4cm

Gift of the Fingal Pastoral Company under the Taxation Incentives for the arts Scheme, 1979.
Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston.

Gleichenia abscida, 1970
watercolour and pencil on paper, 32.6 x 23.5cm

Gift of the Fingal Pastoral Company under the Taxation Incentives for the arts Scheme, 1979.
Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston.

Pratia irrigua, 1971
watercolour and pencil on paper, 91.1x 28.0cm

Gift of the Fingal Pastoral Company under the Taxation Incentives for the arts Scheme, 1979.
Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston.

Alan Townsend

Strange Fruit, 2015
Pencil and ink on composite film, size variable

Forced Fruit, 2015
Ink drawing on composite film

TENDER EXOTICS

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CURATOR: Lisa Campbell-Smith, CAT Curatorial Mentorship

DESIGN: Cath Robinson

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Magaret Stones images © the artist and the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery and were taken by John Leeming

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SMITH'S
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