



Mythopoetic

Women Artists from Australia and India

COVER IMAGE

Pushpamala N. *Indrajaala/Seduction*
2012 (detail of video still), from the series
Avega—The Passion: The Drama of Three
Women, single-channel digital video (black-
and-white, silent) 4:27 min (looped). Image
courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte,
New Delhi.

MYTHOPOETIC: WOMEN ARTISTS FROM AUSTRALIA AND INDIA

10 APRIL—18 MAY 2013

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ART GALLERY
PROJECT GALLERY
WEBB GALLERY

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FOREWORD

Griffith University Art Gallery (GUAG) and Queensland College of Art (QCA) Galleries are proudly united for the first time to present the exhibition *Mythopoetic: Women Artists from Australia and India* across three venues located within the South Bank campus of QCA. *Mythopoetic* has come together to coincide with the *Encounters: India* festival, organised by Queensland Conservatorium of Music. GUAG and QCA Galleries are delighted to be satellite venues for this major event, which takes place across the South Bank cultural precinct and Brisbane city, charting connections between the philosophies and cultures of Australia and India.

The exhibition is a culmination of many interwoven collaborative efforts spanning cultures and localities from India to South Bank. Emerging curator Marnie Dean has brought together the works of fifteen artists who are connected through their individual explorations of mythology. In each case, the works reflect an engagement with mythologies, their legacies, and how these impact on their subjectivity as females and as artists. The varied and diverse works span a range of mediums, reflecting the rich and broad topic.

This exhibition continues Dean's curatorial efforts in uniting and giving agency to the voices of women, with particular reference to her passion for, and personal connection to, the Indian sub-

continent. Her previous exhibition, *Re-Picturing the Feminine: New and Hybrid Realities in the Artworld—A Survey of Indian and Australian Contemporary Female Artists*, staged in December 2012, at Gallery OED, Cochin, was a satellite event of the inaugural Kochi-Muzuris Biennale. This exhibition presented a feminist case to an Indian audience. Many of the artists from this earlier exhibition are again represented in *Mythopoetic* in a continuation of the dialogue begun in the Cochin exhibition. Here the artists elaborate further, reclaiming and creating new mythologies while firmly situated as both female and empowered.

Dean's work as an artist is also featured in this exhibition. In the work titled *Morrigan-Kali the "SHE-WOLF": Wave of the Future*, Dean recontextualises feminine myths pertinent to her own identity, leading the call to women to write their own mythologies. *Mythopoetic* brings to light new possibilities by exclaiming, in a female chorus, the ancient and contemporary mythologies of existence, travel, discovery, creation, destruction, and rebirth.

GUAG is a free public gallery located at the QCA's South Bank campus. A diverse and rigorous range of exhibitions are generated and displayed in-house and/or toured throughout regional, state or national galleries in a bid to focus attention on contemporary practices and their historical contexts.

QCA Galleries present exhibitions of, by, and for students, staff, alumni, and relevant artists in a range of galleries located on the QCA campus and elsewhere. The QCA Galleries provide vital support and opportunity for practitioners to present and engage with art. These galleries are often the first place in which student artists hold exhibitions, and through this exposure, gain a further audience beyond the institution. QCA Galleries nurture fledgling artists in a tiered experience offered in a safe space, to experiment and begin their practice while moving through increasingly professional activities that ground them for a longer career in the wider arts world. Exhibitions such as *Mythopoetic* situate these fledgling artists in a context of excellence alongside professional artists, many of whom are foremost in their field.

Mythopoetic represents a fruitful opportunity for our two multifaceted organisations to work together, eloquently demonstrating a shared goal of fostering understanding and excellence in art.

Naomi Evans
Director, GUAG

Cassandra Lehman-Schultz
QCA Galleries Coordinator

MARNIE DEAN

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MYTHOPOETIC: WOMEN ARTISTS FROM AUSTRALIA AND INDIA

As the term in the title suggests, *mythopoetic* is a play on the Latin-derived word *mythopoeic*—of or pertaining to the making of myths.¹ The significance of myth and mythology is often assigned empirical value, art historically, in semiotics. From this currency of signs, myth is seen as an order of signification connoting meaning to a wider society. It contains visual language that is relevant to the society and culture in which it belongs. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest that “Like metaphors, myths help us to make sense of our experiences within a culture.”²

Invested with this knowledge, artists aligned with the second wave of feminism attempted to re-introduce symbols and visual iconography that belonged to old mythology and matriarchal societies of ancient history. Symbols like goddesses, Sheela Na Gig, the spiral and yoni/vulvic or vaginal forms that Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro identified as “central-core imagery”,³ were used as rhetorical devices representing united female sexuality and power. As the feminist art movement progressed to include anti-essentialism, along with postmodern interpretation, the context for a unifying symbology no longer existed. Old symbols, archetypes, and goddesses were no longer adequate in gendered representations of women.

Defining her own anti-essentialist stand-point, author Donna Haraway concludes her famous “Cyborg Manifesto” with the words, “Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.”⁴

This statement summarises Haraway’s findings. She wanted women to create new mythology; new representations of women were needed. Haraway’s idea was that these new mythologies could adequately characterise women in modern times and move beyond the binary oppositions that had generated the prevailing gendered perceptions. In particular, she scrutinised the common identification between women and nature; she believed identification with both nature and technology was more accurate and that the character of modern women was derived from hybridity and multiplicity.

In the twenty-two years since Haraway made this statement, contemporary artists have participated in developing new knowledge within diverse and often overlapping cultural realms. Women artists involved in such practices have developed sophisticated and creative methodologies to engage with society in a variety of ways, and through their artistic endeavours have introduced new knowledge to popular culture. Following this example and bringing together two cultures in multifarious disciplines, the exhibition

Mythopoetic: Women Artists from Australia and India, provides a context for Haraway’s notion of new mythologies in new directions and is, in accordance with her ideology, a “self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship”.⁵

The exhibition looks at the strong contemporary art emerging from India and the intersections this provides artists locally and nationally within Australia. By choosing India and Australia as key regions for this dialogue, the exhibition holds an open space to demonstrate cultural difference and a cross-cultural array in which women artists are both directly (as part of the intent of their work) and indirectly (as a by-product of their work and practice) creating myth-making gestures, new myths, and mythologies through their artistic processes. These are evidenced in the visual languages generated by the embodiment and themes of the stories, histories, and images in the work of each artist. Within Haraway’s framework, collectively, these diverse visual languages may be viewed as contributing to a developing visual culture in contemporary art practice within the wider South Asian and Asia Pacific regions. This wider culture is important to begin to document because, as Charles Green suggests,

When we think about art in this region, the most crucial, but also the most blurred, questions focus on how artists define themselves in relation to their own cultures—and how, at the same time, they come to terms with the particularly diasporic nature of contemporary global art.⁶

It is significant that women artists from different cultures, with diverse backgrounds, are engaged in self-determining contemporary practice that is re-writing and creating mythologies (directly and indirectly) as a mode of expression to navigate their individual and global culture. The occurrence of this method in India and Australia may be attributed to the activism and interventions of feminisms globally; as Judith Brodsky and Ferris Olin suggest, “feminist innovations have become so thoroughly embedded in contemporary perspectives”,⁷ and both countries have well-documented feminist practices. The emerging visual culture highlighted by this exhibition provides grounds for new knowledge to emerge and, while requiring further research to examine the causes and effects, it evidences the impact of global culture on women artists with shared colonial and postcolonial histories across the common divide of east and west. Within this sphere, *Mythopoetic* is a visual documentation of women in the Asia Pacific and South Asian region (and, as such, has

wider implications) and their critical visual expressions. It is also a visual culture that is representative of a current episteme—its impact can be multi-directional and is aesthetically assembled by the interaction of networks of signification.

The word *mythopoetic* represents the context for survey in this exhibition. The context for survey is the way each artist is creating gestures towards mythologising from their place in the world (in relation to India and Australia), and how they make sense of that place (globally). Within the parameters of Australia and India, Haraway’s concept and the exhibition’s wider inclusion in Griffith University’s Encounters: India festival, Australian works included in *Mythopoetic* have a dialogue to, and with, an Indian milieu—either through content or through physical relationship (with the artist or their work linked to the Indian contemporary art scene, with a history of mythologising in their contemporary practice). Artists in this exhibition are re-picturing, re-contextualising and re-imagining the feminine in myriad ways and addressing subjects such as the body, identity, history, gendered roles, subjectivity, sexuality, hybridity, and globalisation. The exhibition is situated in three separate spaces, which provides a wider context in which discontinuous and analogous elements in individual works

converge, revealing the affinities inherent in this emerging visual culture. These relationships are important because they operate cross-culturally in a wider context, and demonstrate the shared codes, concerns, dynamics, and lexicon (in accordance with Haraway’s anti-essentialist slant) contributing to the visual languages converging to form visual culture in *Mythopoetic*.

In observing all the works in the three exhibition spaces, some factors are instantly recognisable. These are the affinities or the “causal relations” (as Michel Foucault suggests, causal relations are the places of intersection between knowledge systems and networks of signification⁸) shaping the formation of visual culture created by women artists. The places of intersection shared by the artists in *Mythopoetic* are shared approaches in artistic process, theme, and practice that may be viewed as gestures (whether indirect or direct) toward mythologising, and do not make claims for any imposed natural identification or *a priori* between the works, they are instances of connection only. Within a broader structure that encompasses individual creative practice, and allows cross-cultural difference, a formal analysis of causal relations can be made to assist to define knowledge systems associated with the visual culture *Mythopoetic* defines. The definition of these indices will be

made and evidenced through an exploration of each artist's work, with a brief history contextualising this aspect of their practice. Thus the curatorial framework for *Mythopoetic* maintains the anti-essentialist boundaries of Haraway's argument, encompassing space to include the cultural differences, individual artistic integrities, ideologies and intentions of each participating artist, while evidencing the emerging visual culture and documenting the space from which its contributions to knowledge systems can be made.

MYTHOPOETIC— POPULAR CULTURE

An immediate observation that can be made of *Mythopoetic* is the confluence of popular culture in many of the works in. Artists employ different methodologies to mimic, appropriate, repeat, manipulate, and employ aesthetics from popular culture. Further, they are engaged in practices that borrow from a wide variety of popular-culture forms, including cinema, animation, fashion, advertising, anime, reality television, digital aesthetics, cartoons, comics etc., and they are expert in manipulating the genre codes inherent to those forms. The manipulation of these aesthetic traditions allows artists to construct unique visual languages that both reflect and penetrate the wider cultures they are immersed in. Traditionally in contemporary art,

popular culture presents itself as its own "medium"—one that on the surface seems familiar and reassuring but baits and switches audiences into an awareness of the feminist potential, an oppositional re-reading of the original, and sometimes both at the same time.⁹

While not all of the artists participating in *Mythopoetic* have a distinctly feminist agenda, many make use of the rhetorical power of popular cultures as a medium, manipulating them for

their own purposes. In varying degrees, artists in *Mythopoetic* use popular culture to offer alternative representations to the dominant depictions of the gendered feminine (art historically, culturally, and corporeally) and, in particular, employ it to make gestures towards creating new mythologies. The artists in this exhibition use popular culture to create a new visual culture, employing populist lexicon to define their own unique networks of signification.

An apt example of the appropriation and integration of popular culture is evidenced in the visual lexicon of artist Kate Beynon. Beynon has a well-documented visual language that appropriates from popular culture's aesthetic forms. Her visual lexicon is vast, with symbols, talismans, motifs, and imagery belonging to her diverse heritage and her use of popular culture is essential to her practice. Indian artist Pushpamala N. is renowned for her sophisticated and accomplished emulations of various visual languages from the history of Indian popular culture; she creates series of photographic/performative tableaux, and videos/films in which the artist, a chameleon, assumes the roles of various characters.

MYTHOPOETIC— RE-MYTHOLOGISING

Symbolic transactions towards new mythologies can be achieved through the use of existing archetypes or stereotypes from traditional mythology. In the process of creating the new, many of the artists in *Mythopoetic* use various existing archetypes, stories and symbols and re-contextualise their symbolic meanings, ascribing existent signs with new implications that are relevant to the cultures artists are engaged with today. To this effect, these artists bring old mythologies, stories, and archetypes to the present moment and global

culture. This is different from the second-wave feminists who attempted to use similar symbols and myths to engender signs with unified symbolic meaning. Seeing the mythical figure as a powerful precursor of the abject stereotype, many of the artists in *Mythopoetic* use existing mythology to represent the complexities of current society, which cannot be represented by any unifying forms; instead, individual artists prescribe image codes that are relevant to their own location, experiences, and lives as women.¹⁰ Indeed, in this exhibition, there are overlapping uses of the same mythological figures with different and equally challenging and thought-provoking representations. Three different artists portray the Greco-Roman figure of the Gorgon-Medusa differently. Sangeeta Sandrasegar reclaims Medusa's creative powers from the realms of shadow as a hybrid symbol of women today; Kate Beynon cleverly transmutes the original into her *Transfigured Gorgon* (2012) as an empowering anti-racist figure; and I, Marnie Dean, borrow Sylvia Plath's account of Medusa as a Jellyfish, depicting transforming attitudes about women's sexuality.

Other artists in *Mythopoetic* also undertake re-interpretations of historical and mythical figures. Indian artist Sonia Khurana reworks the tropes of the tramp and the modernist man-about-town, the *flâneur*, into new archetypal/stereotypical forms, encoded with subjective inference. With her own name referring to the Goddess Durga, a figure with a close association to the Hindu Goddess Kali, artist Shambhavi re-assigns meaning to the classical sign of the Goddess's tongue (traditionally portrayed in Hindu Art) to represent the potential for violence in modern India as an experience of a universal human condition. Pushpamala N. employs mimesis to re-define the famous villain from the Ramayana, 'surpanakha', into a new form and semblance, amalgamating

existing stereotypes such as the “Native South Indian Woman”, the “Femme Fatale”, the “Witch Doctor”, the “shaman” and the “Noble Savage”. Australian artist Laini Burton adopts the masculine Atlas figure from Greco-Roman form to represent the contemporary condition of women “wanting to have it all”, transforming the body of Atlas into metamorphic female form. The simultaneity of these pre-figured critiques reinforce Haraway’s position and offer the viewer familiarity with alternatives and new insight.

MYTHOPOETIC— NEW ARCHETYPES

In working to offer alternatives to the universality of the prevailing masculinised representations of gendered female forms, many women artists (as exemplified in *Mythopoetic*, in accordance with Haraway) create new stereotypes and archetypal signs. Often women artists create the “new” through the hybridisation of existing forms; sometimes they depict the experience of the evolution of cultural and political space in the sociological landscape, such as through migration or globalisation; and sometimes new signs and symbols are developed with the intervention of new knowledge systems, such as the rapidly changing fields of science, medicine and even by digital means. New mythologies are created through combining the personal with the universal, the corporeal with the incorporeal, the objective with the subjective, and through other dynamic juxtapositions that integrate seemingly polarised positions, offering a range of multiplicity to the viewer. In the symbolic order of such new mythologies as those presented in *Mythopoetic*, the denotation of the signified cannot be presumed; “woman” as a sign does not automatically equate an image crux—the semiotics are far more pluralistic than that. Indirect networks of signification that operate via interconnection

are more prominent than direct or linear sign systems. If direct symbolic order exists, it will, concurrently, find relationship with discursive signification elsewhere in the work. In portraying a mythology that might begin to illustrate women today, the examples offered in *Mythopoetic* embrace difference, simulacra, and polyvalent agencies to define visual culture.¹¹

In *Mythopoetic*, numerous artists represent new mythologies and new symbolic orders in distinctive ways. For example, Sonia Khurana creates a new symbolic order by subsuming the male gaze through the re-positioning of her body in space in her work. The artist embodies spaces in different ways, privileging the everyday and the horizontal over the vertical axis. Khurana reconfigures symbolic order and creates new subjective archetypes such as the “artist-as-landscape” (in *Logic of Birds* 2006) and a nomadic global figure that conversely makes performative gestures “lying down” as an empowered act of sovereignty. Australian artist Simone Eisler creates new chimeric sculptural forms in installational suites by hybridising the landscapes from her heritage with the Australian terrain, crafting an “animalia” that reflects twenty-first-century technologies literally, and the transformative powers of humanity, metaphorically. Inspired by the comic books of her childhood, Dhruvi Acharya creates an unusual pantheon of female protagonists that she has endowed with special powers. Her women have the ability to communicate via processes that replicate cellular biology and comic books; her women are hybrid botanic forms. Acharya has created her women to symbolise the changing social-structures in middle-class India. It is a unique and personal mythos. Kate Beynon has a long history of mythologising in her practice in myriad ways. For *Mythopoetic*, Beynon has

merged aspects of traditional archetypes to create a pantheon of new hybrid goddesses and mythic figures, reflecting the diversity of multicultural Australia, offering commentary about racism and bigotry.

MYTHOPOETIC— RE-ORDERING TAXONOMIES/ EPISTEMOLOGIES

Another method evident in *Mythopoetic* is the incidence of artists re-ordering taxonomic and epistemic relationships, to create new context, consequence and meaning. By manipulating nomenclature and the structures surrounding systems of knowledge, these artists disrupt traditional relationships between space and symbolic classification, with consequences that can affect “order” beyond visual realms. By re-ordering the relationships between structures inherent in society, culture and politics, these artists bring awareness to the temporal connections in empirical organisation. They question the ascriptions given to representation and the fundamental order of cultures, examining art historical canons and historicity, bringing awareness to alterity and marginal positions. By re-establishing the relationships between epistemic indices, new networks of economies, knowledge, and symbolic meaning (visual culture) can emerge. This type of investigation can be entered into in a variety of ways, to formulate new visual culture. The obvious example is a conceptual re-ordering, where symbolism is altered, with immediate semiotic consequences. The way a work of art is named and the value attributed to it are other obvious examples of taxonomic reconfiguration. However, these reconfigurations can have more subtle visual consequences through a multitude of different approaches.

A good example of this methodology exists in the work of Australian artist Pat Hoffie, who reconfigures taxonomic and epistemic mores in her practice through her production methods. Hoffie draws the viewer's attention to the existence of poverty in the developing world, with a particular focus on the ascriptions of value given within the global art market. By employing artisans in developing countries to make her work, Hoffie has been able to expand the networks available to those artisans and assign new symbolic meaning to society. This changes symbolic order and creates new archetypes with new visual culture. Another excellent example of the use of this methodology to devise new myths is seen in the work of Australian artist Fiona Hall, who has a long history of creating work with epistemic and taxonomic reconfigurations. She employs different methods to undertake her interventions. In *Mythopoetic*, it is the materiality of the artist's work that reconfigures the normal associations between symbolic meaning, taxonomy, and epistemology. The material she uses to make her work disrupts the viewer's normal associations between the "visual, cultural and symbolic orders"; in the process Hall depicts a new archetypal and stereotypical 21st Century Man (2011).

MYTHOPOETIC—HYBRID AND PLURAL VISUALITY

In defining the primary "causal relations" in the visual culture in *Mythopoetic*, the existence of hybridity and plurality is also apparent. Visually, this occurs at many levels in the work: symbolically, literally, perceptively, and aesthetically. A hybrid and plural position is privileged in the visual culture of *Mythopoetic*. It is often represented as subjective, offering a different stance to the prevailing uni-central and phallogocentric position in art-historical canons. What replaces the primarily, objective and singular gaze of masculinised visual culture in *Mythopoetic* is an approach which is multifarious at every level of representation. Within the boundaries of hybridity and plurality, cultural difference is easily integrated, as is individual artistic practice. Through hybridity and plurality, disparity, dissonance, and difference can co-exist in a broader visual culture that also makes reference to affinity and mutuality in the process of realising new mythologies related to the diverse experiences of women from different cultures in today's global world.

In the following explorations of each artist's work in *Mythopoetic*, particular reference is made to the categories defined as the causal relations belonging

to the visual culture of this exhibition. The work of each artist is explored within the context of a new mythology and through their alignment with the aforementioned categories, with reference to each artist's wider oeuvre and practice, giving a brief account of creative careers. Specifically, the cross-cultural dialogue existing between Indian and Australian women artists and their work has generated the existence of specific zones of connection, which are defined as the causal relations that foreground the visual culture represented by this exhibition *Mythopoetic: Women Artists from Australia and India*.

NOTES

1. "Mythopoetic," *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Macquarie Library, Macquarie University, 1987), 1133.
2. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
3. Please see Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's article that defines "central core imagery", "Female Imagery," *Womanspace Journal* 1, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 11–14.
4. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 181. Full article available online through Stanford University, <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Haraway/CyborgManifesto.html>.
5. *Ibid.*, 155. To begin to locate the position and parameters of the curatorial framework and context for survey in *Mythopoetic: Women Artists from Australia and India*, I borrow the statement in which Donna Haraway defines her anti-essentialist feminist space.
6. Charles Green, "Beyond the Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial," *Art Journal* 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 81. In this article, Green discusses the position of contemporary artists from the Asia Pacific (specifically India and Australia).
7. Judith Brodsky and Ferris Olin explore the impact of feminisms in society generally and contemporary art specifically in the article "Stepping Out of the Beaten Path: Reassessing the Feminist Art Movement," *Signs* 33, no. 2 (2008).
8. Michel Foucault's concept of "causal relations" are the places in which disparate knowledge systems overlap, in shared zones of connection and commonality. Foucault addresses this subject broadly through his definition of a modern episteme in the chapter titled "The Human Sciences", in his book *The Order of Things* (London and New York: Routledge, 1966). A particular passage describing the structure of the modern episteme and causal relations may be found on page 378.
9. See Maria Elena Buszek's article that explores the use of popular culture in women artists' practice, titled "Once More, with Feeling: Feminist Art and Pop Culture Now," *Art Pulse Magazine* 3, no. 4 (Summer 2012).
10. Geeta Kapur explores the impact of global feminisms on contemporary art through the practice of five women artists from India. In the beginning of the essay she explores the semiotics of "women as image" through an account given by Rosalind Krauss, in feminist practice and I borrow her idea (about the deconstruction of the masculinised gazes [via global feminisms] privileged in art historical canons) to provide an example of the aesthetics in *Mythopoetic* in the first paragraph under the sub-title "Mythopoetic—New Archetypes"; two of the artists the author investigates in this essay are also in this exhibition. Kapur, "Gender Mobility: Through the Lens of Five Women Artists in India," in *Global Feminisms*, ex. cat., ed. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (New York: Brooklyn Museum and Merrell, 2007), 79.
11. Geeta Kapur introduces the concept of re-mythologising in feminist art practice through a discussion of the work and practice of artist Nalini Malani in her essay "Gender Mobility", 83.



DHRUVI ACHARYA METAMORPHOSIS—WOMEN IN THE METROPOLIS

Dhruvi Archarya spent her early life in India. She committed to her painting practice when she moved to the United States and, homesick, began to depict an imagined world in works inspired by her longing for her motherland. This imagined world has evolved into a sophisticated and unique visual language that aesthetically finds roots in the popular culture of Amar Chitra Katha comics (which Acharya read as a child), American graffiti culture, miniature painting, and colour-field theory as prescribed by the abstract expressionist Grace Hartigan (whom Acharya studied with). Acharya's works explore the banalities of metropolitan life and are intermeshed with more serious imagery, depicting pollution and the negative effects of urbanisation in India. The female figures in her work negotiate these mixed and polarising terrains with humour

and a nonchalant, almost self-obsessed preoccupation; their attitude represents a visual account of the psychological impact of city life. What emerges collectively in her paintings are new archetypal depictions of women in India. Acharya's India has a rising middle-class, changing social structures, and is represented in a gendered space with women protagonists whose civic liberties are fundamentally affected by globalisation. While her women are "housewives" and often connected to the home, Dhruvi endows her figures with extra powers that assist them to negate boredom and isolation, and navigate a complex world. Her figures have amoeba-like abilities to transfer information, thoughts, and feelings in ways that replicate processes in cellular biology and comics. Her women are hybridised with botanic life, unusual chimeras

who, according to the artist, inhabit "a world where thoughts are as visible as 'reality', and where the protagonists live and metamorphose by the logic of that world."¹

In her work titled *Mumbai City* (2009), Dhruvi continues this exercise, in a figurative allegory of domestic-dwelling female protagonists inhabiting an imagined city. Acharya endows her protagonists with guru-like qualities that give them authority; they are no ordinary housewives—they have evolved into hybrid forms. Their hybridity portrays the resolve necessary to adapt to the infringing plurality of modern India. In Acharya's mythology, women mimic nature, providing the fertile substance that supports the city. She represents the inter-generational relationships between women as a social structure that transforms



Dhruvi Acharya *Mumbai City* 2008, diptych: digital print on canvas.
Image courtesy of the artist and Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai.

into the landscape of this city. Mumbai, which is one of the most populated and polluted centres in the world, is characterised in a manifestly feminine framework, with a structure that is organic and permeable.

After spending ten years in the United States, Dhruvi now works in Mumbai. Her paintings have been shown in museums, galleries, and art fairs around the world, including the San Jose Museum of Art, USA, in 2011, and the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, in 2004. A large-scale digital mural was commissioned by Mumbai International Airport in 2009.

1. Dhruvi Acharya, correspondence with the author, 27 August 2012.

DI BALL MULTIPLE SELVES—MYTHOLOGISING PERSONAE

Di Ball is a new media artist with a long history of “performing selves”. Ball had an early creative life working as an architect, where a flair for performance found an outlet designing theme parks. Her creative practice progressed into the visual arts, where she first emerged playing the role of the Hindu Goddess Kali, in performances for Luke Robert’s Pope Alice. Ball continued to hone her practice and was an early pioneer of digital art in Queensland, with artwork constructed around her “performing selves”, in which she assumes various characters including “Fleur Ball”, “iBall”, “Glo Ball” and “Beach Ball”. Linda Carroli explains Ball’s modus operandi, suggesting that,

By evoking these myriad avatars, Di is asking whether it is possible for anyone to really “know thyself”, despite the Apollonaire doctrine which commands it, because the multiplied self is constantly in flux. Subsequently, in the presentation of this cacophony of personae, Di deploys technologies of self, gender and subjectivity.¹

Ball’s multiple selves are performance personae and digital avatars, each with their own distinct narrative, each an aspect of the artist that is integrated as a larger mythology, a very personal mythology and a logo called the BallPark, accompanied with the axiom *my life is/as a theme park*

(a reference to her earlier career). Di Ball is the “architect” of a growing mythology, which has an interface at www.theballpark.com.au. The “BallPark” is a creative practice founded in digital and feminist theories, which encompasses digital imaging, web-art, blogging, installation and video. In the video work featured in *Mythopoetic*, Di Ball explores a relatively new persona called “binDi Ball”. It is a play on the word bindi, which she says is the

HOT SPOT: The area between the eyebrows, known as “Ajna” meaning “command”, the seat of concealed wisdom. It is the centre point wherein all experience is gathered in total concentration.²

For Ball, her character “binDi Ball” encompasses both her name and the word bindi phonetically and symbolically. The work begins with the artist applying the blue paint of her former self and the Kali persona. The paint disappears and re-appears, as layers of truth are revealed; Ball relates the journey,

So binDi set off to India and attempted to peel back the veils. But India was not always kind to her, the photo shoot beauty a mere layer. She was older now, a young mind trapped in the body of a 60 year old. It was difficult. She visited forts and palaces, and wished they were not all built on the top of hills. She experienced the stillness

of a lake at sunset, quickly marred by the din of traffic. She wasn’t looking for God, and never found her... But she found her voice again in Kerala where her heart sang. Her smile returned. Her laughter was heard.³

The video was originally commissioned for inclusion in a collateral exhibition to the Kochi Muziris Biennale in 2012, and so Ball set forth on a journey all over India in the months preceding the Biennale to find the self that would emerge in India. The video reflects the gaze of Ball’s Indian persona “binDi”, as she meanders through the landscape of Varanasi and other parts of India. The video is presented in circular format, another reference to “BinDi”. What emerges through this video is Ball’s subjective experience; it is a reclamation of the value of womanhood, removing the veils of ideology prescribed by populist notions regarding femininity and age. As Ball’s journey progresses beauty is revealed, an un-superficial reality, in contrast with the title of the work.

Di Ball has exhibited her work nationally and internationally, participating at ISEA Singapore (2008), *Re-Picturing the Feminine*, Gallery OED, a collateral exhibition of the Kochi Muziris Biennale Open (2012) and has participated in the Nes Arts Residency in Iceland (2009) and ISEA Istanbul (2010). Di Ball lives and works in Brisbane.



Di Ball *BinDi Ball Is Deeply Superficial* 2012 (video still), single-channel digital video, 15 min, (looped). Image courtesy of the artist.

1. See Linda Carroli, "The Ball Park," 2000, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://www.theballpark.com.au/aboutkrystal.htm>.
2. Di Ball, artist statement from "Re-Picturing the Feminine", Gallery OED Cochin, collateral venue to the Kochi Muziris Biennale Open, 12 December 2012–28 February 2013.
3. Ball, *ibid.*

KATE BEYNON

HYBRIDITY—TRANS-CULTURE & NEW MYTHOLOGIES

Kate Beynon is a prominent artist in the Asian and Pacific regions, whose practice has morphed over time. From early interventions with language to the “grrrl-power” exploits and digital interventions of her avatar “Li Ji: Warrior Girl” (2000), she has explored issues related to identity and the politics of race and globalisation in iconic imagery that attempts to depict her “complex hybrid self”. Beynon has a distinctive and instantly recognisable visual language with well-documented symbology that has been appropriated from her diverse heritage, which includes Chinese, Malay, Welsh, and Norwegian ancestry. Anna Edmundson explains that “Beynon’s work has evolved its own distinct lexicon, which draws on the visual genres of Eastern and Western comic book graphics, Chinese calligraphy and late-twentieth-century graffiti art.”¹ The diverse influences in her visual language also include anime, fashion, and the artist’s family life.

Beynon creates her own mythology via a pantheon of archetypal forms. The works in the *Trans-Mythic Woman Warrior* series (2012) are new works by the artist, commissioned for a collateral exhibition to the Kochi Muziris Biennale. The five circular paintings introduce the concept of Australian hybridity and multiculturalism to the Australian-Indian cross-cultural dialogue. The series re-pictures feminine gendered imagery to include portrayals of new archetypes

that do not privilege any singular ethnicity, but, in the artist’s own words, represent “hybrid cultural identity, through imagining transcultural reinterpretations of female mythic figures”.² The titles of the works in the *Trans-Mythic Woman Warrior Series* allude to their hybrid nature: *Transfigured Gorgon*, *Nine-Tailed Fox Spirit*, *Warrior Mer-Woman*, *Transcultural Spider Goddess*, and *Guardian Ranger with Lion Dogs*. Beynon describes them, explaining

Centrally featured, the green-eyed dragon-haired *Transfigured Gorgon*, who specifically turns bigots to stone, is surrounded by four other figures: the *Nine Tailed Fox Spirit*—a shape-shifter—inspired by Chinese and Japanese folk stories, a *Warrior Mer-woman* with Tai Chi blade and robe adorned with deep sea creatures, a *Transcultural Spider Goddess* with 8 eyes and limbs, and a cloaked *Guardian Ranger* with bow and arrows, accompanied by lion dog protectors.³

Beynon’s growing pantheon shrewdly reconfigures female bodies to place them into the context of a contemporary Australian and an, ever growing, globalised world. Her trans-mythic figures are new archetypes that she has created, combining beneficial attributes from previous myths. In particular, the painting *Guardian Ranger with Lion Dogs* plays on a visual familiarity with

“little red-riding-hood”, however Beynon’s version has come prepared to ward off any wolf, represented as a formidable opponent to predators, with a protective breast-plate, and accompanied by her three courageous lion dogs, a familiar motif in Beynon’s work. Beynon’s *Nine-Tailed Fox Spirit* is a roving environmentalist, capable of shape-shifting and merging into the physical landscape with camouflage, preparing her to cope in any circumstance, while keeping her “foxy” wits about her. The camouflage she is wearing in this guise features a print based on ginko (or “gingko biloba”) leaves, the unique species of ancient Chinese tree thought to have nutritional and medicinal properties. Beynon’s *Transcultural Spider Goddess* is a networker with an impressive ability to weave webs of communication and understanding between cultures. Presented in the pose of a yoga *asana*, the figure is also capable of dealing with the stresses of modern life (a link to Beynon’s use of talismans and symbols in earlier series). Her *Warrior Mer-Woman* is an expert martial-artist and no longer a passive mermaid without legs, Beynon’s mer-woman has agency.

Transfigured Gorgon, an appropriation of the Greco-Roman Medusa, is translated into a figure with a firm female gaze, possessing an anti-racist agenda. The hybrid figure of the Medusa, half-woman, half-monster, has been perceived as an outsider



Kate Beynon *Transfigured Gorgon* (from the *Trans-Mythic Woman Warrior* series) 2012, acrylic paint and Swarovski crystals on canvas. Images courtesy of the artist, Milani Gallery, Brisbane, and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

historically in history, myth and poetry. "Medusa became the only mortal among three Gorgon sisters. The adjective gorgos (gorg'i) means 'terrible', 'fierce', and 'frightful'."⁴ For Beynon, the *Gorgon Medusa* is cast into the gaze of multicultural Australia and the world. She is a hybrid figure capable of seeing and perceiving; she has the power to meet that gaze, to deconstruct, to subsume and to overthrow objectification, misogyny, and all forms of prejudice/discrimination/hatred with anti-bigotry powers that "turn only bigots to stone". In this phrase and gesture, the artist reveals the racist potential in contemporary life. *Transfigured Gorgon* may symbolically represent the migrant or the sub-altern, or any marginalised hybrid being, whose very existence is as threatening, "terrible, fierce or frightful" as the mythical Medusa, to those in society frightened by the experience of "other",

whatever that may mean to them. However, for Beynon, society has the ability to transform, just like her Gorgon; in a final gesture, Beynon has imbued the figure with redemptive powers: "the *Transfigured Gorgon* has the power to release those (from their stony form) who reflect enough to seek knowledge and understanding to transform their negative and previously ill-informed mindset to a genuinely non-bigoted, new way of thinking".⁵

Beynon has exhibited her work internationally. She participated in the groundbreaking *Global Feminisms* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007, curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin. She has mounted many solo exhibitions and has been a finalist in the Archibald Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, in 2006, 2010, 2011 and 2012. Her work is held in

numerous collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and the Museum of Modern Art (MMK), Frankfurt, Germany. Beynon participated in *Re-Picturing the Feminine*, Gallery OED, a collateral exhibition to the 2012 Kochi Muziris Biennale Open in India, and was a judge the 2013 Sir John Sulman Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales.

1. Anna Edmundson, "The 'Crisis' of Multiculturalism Examined through the Work of Four Asian-Australian Artists," *Humanities Research* 15, no. 2 (2009): 106.
2. Kate Beynon, correspondence with the author, 7 December 2012.
3. Ibid.
4. Miriam Robbins Dexter, "The Ferocious and the Erotic: 'Beautiful' Medusa and the Neolithic Bird and Snake," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 1 (2010): 25.
5. Beynon, correspondence with the author, 7 December 2012.

LAINI BURTON

THE BODY—WOMEN IN VISUAL CULTURE

Laini Burton is a visual artist, critical theorist, and academic with a creative practice that includes sculpture, painting, drawing, installation, and writing. Her early work revealed the prejudices placed on women in visual culture and the history that prefaced this through identifying the roles of power and agency in feminine masquerade and carnival. Burton's creative practice explores the politics of the body in space and visual culture, emphasising the role of gender politics and gendered space in popular visual culture, in contemporary Australian art practice, and in the formation of identity. Burton's artistic practice has a strong research base, from which the subjective and objective gazes inherent in the (same) popular cultures, are manoeuvred in work that deconstructs, parodies, and reclaims. Through this theoretical base, Burton manages a subjective representation of the female body in her artwork, which defies genre codes and instead reflects the complex and hybrid reality of twenty-first-century women and the changing social structures of family and domestic life in Australian and global culture. This is exemplified in the work titled *Taking Atlas (Stealth)* (2013); Laini Burton explains her concept in the following statement,

Mythological Atlas had the arduous task of holding up the celestial spheres

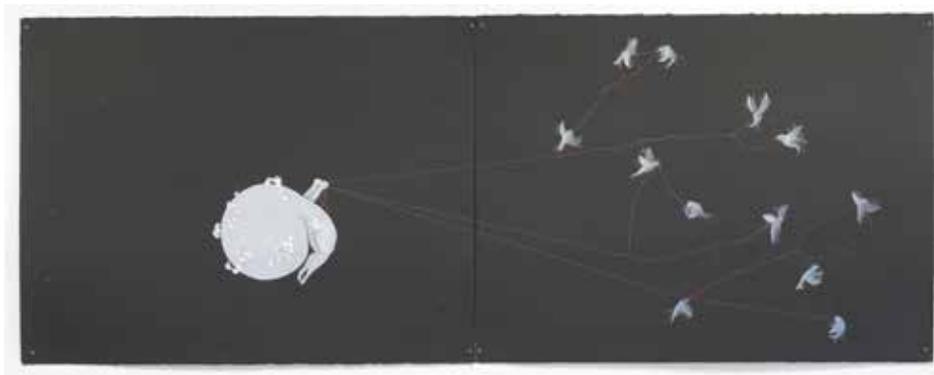
around which the heavens revolve. I identify with and embody Atlas, carrying the weight of the world while being directed by the things that matter most. This work honours all those able women who, like me, demand the right to a professional, creative identity while still attending to the necessary and complex yet wondrous role of being a 21st century woman.¹

Burton transfigures the classical male icon from Greco-Roman mythology called Atlas. Atlas was a Titan that made the mistake of siding with his brother Cronus in a war against Zeus. In punishment, he was compelled to support the weight of the heavens by means of a pillar on his shoulders. Atlas is classically depicted throughout art history holding the world on his shoulders in *Taking Atlas (Stealth)* Burton transforms the Atlas metaphor to represent modern women, who carry the weight and responsibility of their worlds. Burton has depicted this concept through a body in metamorphosis. The swelling body, perhaps pregnant, isolates a characteristic of a changing twenty-first-century culture, in which being a woman specifically means being responsible, that the condition of female-hood is identified with a weight of responsibility and the pressure to "have it all"; bearing financial obligations, the desires for a rewarding career and family life

and for Burton a fulfilling creative life. The figure in the work is holding cords bound to bird-like figures who fly effortlessly away, suggesting that there is a freedom that privileges twenty-first-century women, who can have it all in a balanced life. The challenge is in the balance that for Burton's figure holds the process of creation in the womb, a reference to the gendered space in the work.

Dr. Laini Burton has completed a major publication with Intellect Journals, UK, in collaboration with Professor Efrat Tseelon from Leeds University; she publishes regularly in academic journals, exhibiting throughout Australia and internationally. Dr. Burton showed her work titled *Taking Atlas* (2012), in *Re-Picturing the Feminine*, Gallery OED, a collateral exhibition to the inaugural Indian Biennale of Contemporary art, Kochi Muziris Biennale Open (2012). Dr. Laini Burton is a lecturer in Fine Art & Art Theory at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

1. Laini Burton, correspondence with the author, 29 March 2013.



Laini Burton *Taking Atlas (Stealth)* 2013, diptych: pencil, ink and gouache on paper.
Image courtesy of the artist. Photographer: Carl Warner.

MARNIE DEAN

SACRED FEMININE—“GRRRL” MYTHOLOGIES

Marnie Dean is an Australian new media artist with a practice that combines drawing, digital imaging, painting, sculpture, animation and installation. Dean has lived in India and the United States. Her practice reflects her trans-cultural life, interests in feminism and early participation in the counter-movement known as “Riot Grrrl”. The Riot Grrrl movement embraced feminist theories regarding digital aesthetics and cyborgs, with many female hackers, bloggers, animators and digital artists engaging with its “grrrl” rhetoric. Evolving from this earlier position, Dean’s work appropriates aesthetically from popular culture forms such as anime, advertising, music and fashion, with a developing visual language that is distinctly digital and highly saturated. Her early work explored feminine representation and identity in digital ontologies via her avatar, a character called “Dollygrrrrl”. Her current practice continues to explore female imagery recontextualising feminine figures from her own Druid/Pagan British and Irish heritage, with qualities appropriated through her study of Tantra (Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu), creating work that reconciles the polarities in the prevailing stereotypes regarding Western women: such as the sacred and profane, the virgin and the whore, attempting to imbue female sexuality with spirituality.

The work titled *Morrigan-Kali: the ‘SHE-WOLF’: Wave of the Future*, was inspired by an exhibition that Dean frequented when she was living in Los Angeles, mounted at the Getty Center titled *In the Beginning Was the Word: Medieval Gospel Illuminations* (2010–11). At the time, Dean was also re-reading Hélène Cixous’s “The Laughter of the Medusa” in which the author proclaims the virtues of women writing for women:

I shall speak about women’s writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.¹

Dean combines the aesthetics in the exhibition with Cixous’s imploration and instead of the Christian bible, she imagines a fantastical gospel, with a feminine voice and lore that combines the knowledge of the ancient Celtic Goddess the Morrigan (a Goddess of destruction that, through the ideas of art historian Thomas McEvilley and author Joseph Campbell, can be traced via Greco-Roman mythology to Hindu Kali²) with that of the Hindu Goddess Kali. Dean envisioned

a revelatory text that foretells a bright future where a coming matriarch/heroine called the ‘she-Wolf’ would redeem women collectively and raise their status all over the world. Dean began to illustrate this imagined text in a work that replicates stained glass and appropriates the genre codes of medieval illuminated manuscripts, renaissance painting and popular cultures with symbology, borrowed by the literary voice of Sylvia Plath. Plath’s is a distinctive and poetic female voice that is as impassioned as any gospel, loaded with intense imagery, the kind of voice Dean imagined in response to Cixous. In particular, Dean depicts Plath’s image of the Medusa as a Jellyfish, as a protagonist in her illustrated women’s volume, Sibylle Baumbach explains, “Plath not only points to the transition of this figure from the verbal and visual into the aural sphere, but conceives the encounter with the Gorgon as both a traumatic encounter and the overcoming thereof”.³ In Dean’s work, Medusa is taken from the oral sphere into the written and translated into a visual image with a new context, she represents the ability of women to transfigure and transform their own images collectively, writing their bodies and the sacredness of their sexuality back into history and into a contemporary episteme. Dean uses the figure of the She-Wolf, and connects her to



Marnie Dean *Morrigan-Kali the 'SHE-WOLF': Wave of the Future 2012*, lightbox illumination, digital print on transparency, customised display. Collection: Mr Binoj Cheruvathur Kochurri, India. Image courtesy of the artist.

Medusa in the work, as Kelly Oliver explains “the she-wolf is neither the real wolf nor its mask, but rather the she-wolf is a figure for dangerous female sexuality and fecundity”. Creating this new relationship, Dean reconfigures both archetypal forms to represent the sacredness of women’s sexuality and creativity. The artist presents a subjective and empowered rendition of women’s sexuality in her imagined illuminated feminine volume.

Marnie Dean has explored her emerging curatorial practice in an exhibition titled *Re-Picturing the Feminine: New and Hybrid Realities in the Artworld—A Survey of Indian and Australian Contemporary Female Artists*, commissioned by Gallery OED,

Cochin, a collateral venue of the Kochi Muziris Biennale (as part of the Australian Consulate of India’s OZFEST initiative), with twenty-one of the world’s emerging and leading contemporary artists. Dean is the curator of *Mythopoetic: Women Artists from Australia and India*.

1. Hélène Cixous, “The Laughter of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen and Paul Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875.
2. Art historian Thomas McEvilley, in his book *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, explores the foundations of Western civilisation and argues that today’s Western mainstream must be considered the product of both Greek and Indian thought. He shows how trade, mythology, imperialism and migration allowed cultural philosophies to intermingle freely throughout India, Egypt, Greece, and the ancient Near East. This book spans thirty years of

McEvilley’s research. See McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Ancient Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002). Author Joseph Campbell explores the common meanings in myth and mythic figures in separate cultures, and their relevance today; he believed the religions of the world to be the various, culturally influenced “masks” of the same transcendent truths. See Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Smith (New York: Anchor Books, 1988).

3. Sibylle Baumbach, “Medusa’s Gaze and the Aesthetics of Fascination,” *Anglistische Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 128, no. 2 (2010): 238.

SIMONE EISLER

ANIMALIA—CHIMERIC MYTHOLOGIES

Simone Eisler is a Brisbane based artist who works internationally and nationally. Her creative practice has emerged from an early focus on sculpture to include installation, photography, performance, drawing and painting in work that is meticulously and skillfully developed to combine elements from the natural world with technology. Eisler carefully fashions her imaginal worlds that may be constructed with sculptural objects and multimedia installation, through which, the artist engages in performative gestures that she documents, producing rich and atmospheric photographic series. Eisler's practice is fluid and inclusive and founded on her expertise as a sculptress, her work resonates with liminality, inhabiting strange yet familiar spaces "in-between", that portray physical transformation, evolution and biodiversity.

The work in the exhibition *Mythopoetic: Women artists from Australia and India*, is titled *Field* (2007) and is from a larger installational suite titled *Anima Requiem* (2007). *Field* is an example of Eisler's poetic imagination, representing a "physical" collective of chimeras, that accentuate the instinctual character and libidinal drives of human nature. Eisler describes the work stating,

The installation *Field* from the larger *Anima Requiem* is a rebirth/funerary garden,

which celebrates death as a new beginning and as a transformative process. Only natural materials are used to create the installation, some materials once belonged to living organisms that have died, and these have been hybridised to create new entities, symbolic of new life and metamorphosis.

The horned entities in *Field* are enlivened through movement and the artist's command of her natural mediums. *Art Monthly Australia* editor Maurice O'Riordan says that, for Eisler, the "elongated arc of the animal horn is like a phallus", which in *Field* accentuates and extends the possibilities of both the human and the animal, by mixing their qualities, both physical and instinctual.¹ The work uses the ancient mythological figure of the chimera, as a metaphor for the development of modern biotechnologies; ancient vision in the twenty-first century has become a modern reality. Eisler brings this reality into a marvelous focus, literally and symbolically. The term "anima", references both animals and the Jungian notion of anima/animus, wherein the anima is the female within the male psyche, sometimes shown as a woman in a man's dream, a signifier of the unmistakable sexual aspect of the work. Eisler's pseudo-sexual mythology is,

Childlike, ritualesque, equally conversant with what's frightening, endearing

and cute—simultaneously pantheistic and post-apocalyptic.²

Simone Eisler's *Field* evokes imagery of what might have been a "remote colonialist perception" of "Terra Australis," but is grounded in the complexity of multi-cultural Australia. Her *Field* re-creates a fantastical landscape imbued with the atmosphere and dark otherworldliness of her ancestral Transylvania (in Romania) and the Black Forest (Germany), with materials belonging to the eco-culture and landscape of Australia. Upon entering the space, the viewer is presented with a beach-like scene, with a natural palette that appears to transcend into the gallery walls. The foreground of the installation is inhabited by a series of gleaming horned creatures, beautifully worked objects that are mysteriously submerged in mineral ilmenite sand. The creatures are both ancient and futuristic, ostensibly in possession of another knowledge or wisdom, so fundamentally different from humankind, yet driven by the same instincts and desires; they might, imaginatively, thrive in any Grimm's Brother's tale. Eisler creates a world with an "irrevocation of an ever-evolving humanity," in her own unique mythology with surrealistic juxtapositions that combine binary elements such as male and female, nature with technology and involuntary with voluntary drives.³ *Field* is an enigmatic



Simone Eisler *Field* 2007, ilmenite and cow horn. Image courtesy, Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane, and Gallerysmith, Melbourne. Photographer: Mick Richards.

hybridisation of symbolic forms, with a surreal visual language, that manipulates the familial associations with certain objects and recontextualises these, allowing the viewer access into another world.

Simone Eisler participated in *Re-Picturing the Feminine*, Gallery OED, a collateral exhibition for the Kochi Muziris Biennale Open (2012) and *Arc Biennial of Art*, Brisbane (2009). Her international residencies include the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris, Artist-in-residence (2008), PAF Artist-in-residence, St Erme, France (2007). Eisler has mounted many solo exhibitions and public art works, completing commissions all over the world.

1. See Maurice O'Riordan's article on Simone Eisler, "Garden of Earthly Shadows," *Photofile* issue 90 (2011): 8–10.
2. Carol Schwarzman, "Dealing With the Past," *Artlink* 30, no. 3 (2010): 44–47.
3. O'Riordan, "Garden of Earthly Shadows".

FIONA HALL MATERIALITY—RE-ORDERING TAXONOMIES

Fiona Hall is one of Australia's most renowned contemporary artists. Her early practice was photographically based and has evolved to include installation, painting, sculpture, public gardens and video. The materiality of Hall's work is an essential aspect of her practice, that mimics, exposes and reinforces the rhetoric and ideas she engages with. As Kate Davidson writes:

Hall sets up antitheses and combines incongruous elements: traditional and topical, literary and popular culture, conventional craft practices and mass-produced objects.¹

Hall develops unique methodologies to interlock with unfamiliar mediums that reveal her immeasurable skill and patience in processes that are often labor intensive, producing intricate detail.

Hall's mythologising occurs through her visual re-ordering of taxonomies that reconfigure traditional archetypes to include cultural anomalies and some of the harsh realities of contemporary life. Describing Hall's use of sardine cans in her work of the early 1990s, Sasha Grishin provides a good example of Hall's taxonomic restructuring:

The ubiquitous erotic sardine cans, through which the artist gained a popular notoriety in the early 1990s, present

open cans with sprouting botanically precise sculptural plants with high relief tableaux of erotic vignettes. Below is written the botanical classification in the best tradition of Carl Linnaeus. It is this incongruous juxtaposition of the different systems of classification and visualisation that gives these objects their particular and potent impact. Meaning resides not in any one particular system, but in the seams created through the clash of systems.²

Hall makes use of taxonomic re-structuring in diverse ways in a practice that explores consumerism, globalisation, and colonialism in large bodies of work that visualise the impact of such phenomena on the planet. In the work titled *21st Century Man* (2011), Hall combines the iconic symbols of American currency with the image of the skull, in a menacing rendition of a current humanity and its economies' negative impact. The skull motif is loaded with symbolic association in many cultures that may be interpreted in the work, however, universally the skull signifies death. An encroaching danger is hinted at, portending the inevitable and imminent destruction of humankind. Hall creates a direct relationship between money, man and death, which we may interpret as "greed that kills" or "destruction from capitalism". Hall meticulously

constructs the skull motifs from dollar bills in a process that exposes the dominant economic culture—American consumerist capitalism—and re-orders the epistemic connection between that economy, historical and cultural associations, popular culture and the environment (as the twenty-first-century man's impact on the planet). The work is a hybrid metaphor formulating new symbolic language.

Fiona Hall lives and works in Adelaide, South Australia. She has had an extensive connection to contemporary practice in India, having previously collaborated with renowned Indian artist Nalini Malani in an artist book titled *Global Liquidity & 23 images of the Avon Lady* (1998), which was featured in the exhibition *Global Liquidity* in 1998 at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney, Australia. Hall has participated in many international Biennales, including *Documenta 13* (2012) and the *17th Biennale of Sydney* (2010). Major retrospectives of Hall's work *Big Game Hunting*, have been mounted by Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.

1. Kate Davidson, "The Art of Fiona Hall," *Art and Australia* 43, no.1 (2005): 14–15.
2. Sasha Grishin, "Fiona Hall," *Australian Art Review*, 9 July 2005, accessed 3 March 2013, <http://artreview.com.au/contents/873050955-fiona-hall>.



Fiona Hall *21st Century Man* 2011, US dollars, unique work from a series of 25.
Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

PAT HOFFIE

HUMAN RIGHTS—ECONOMIC VISUAL CULTURE

Pat Hoffie was born in Scotland and arrived in Australia at the age of four. Her creative practice has evolved from a foundation in painting to include sculpture, installation, performance and video. Hoffie spent extended periods of time travelling in Afghanistan and through Central and South Asia, an early influence on what became an international career with multiple links to and within the Asia Pacific region. Hoffie is a pioneer of feminist art in Australia and an advocate promoting human rights through visual culture internationally. Her practice engages with mythological and cultural content via the methods of production employed to create her work. Specifically, Hoffie has developed creative strategies that expose the economic structures that support the exploitative nature of poverty in a globalised economy; in the process establishing new networks of signification that deconstruct cultural stereotypes with new visual outcomes, creating new visual culture. She has employed artisans in the Philippines and other areas of the Asia Pacific to work on projects—often with a human rights agenda—that render the inequities of the global economic systems transparent, and that also highlight the inequities of the ascription of value given to various forms of cultural production, mandated by a globalised art market. In her art the inevitability of cultural servitude to capital flowers into

something more complex and generative, and demonstrates how the local can make its mark on global frameworks.¹ This particular aspect of her career culminated in 2006 in an exhibition and book titled *Fully Exploited Labour*, produced in collaboration with the University of Queensland's Art Museum.

Hoffie's work titled *Ideology and Artefact #2* (2012) is the product of a collaboration with fellow artist Veronica Sepulveda, who assisted Hoffie in physically making the work; both artists were set up in Hoffie's studio, stitching, cutting, and constructing in an atmosphere convivial for "women's craft". Craft remains an aesthetic reference in the installation, a vernacular recognisable in Hoffie's wider oeuvre. The work reflects the current status of women in Kerala in India, where Hoffie participated in a collateral exhibition to the inaugural Kochi Muziris Biennale in 2012. Hoffie plays with visual metaphors and symbols that borrow from Kerala's communist history, referencing the aesthetic influence on communist visualities derived from Russian Constructivism together with visual syntax from the local language of Kerala called Malayalam, in bold red embroidered script and toys used in the marketing of McDonald's. The work heavily appropriates the visual appearance of the pop-culture landscape of local villages in Kerala, where advertising for capitalist ventures are interlaced

with images that emphasise local economic revenue streams, surrounded by communist symbols and paraphernalia from political campaigning. Through the hybridisation of aesthetic references, Hoffie develops a new visual language. The visual language expresses the impact of globalisation on economies of women artisans in India. The symbolism and syntax is multi-layered, tracing economic systems and the network of economic infrastructure that influences the lives of women artisans practicing various traditional craft forms.

Dr. Pat Hoffie regularly contributes to critical theory and visual arts debates within Australia in platforms that have included the *Biennale of Sydney*, *Perspecta* and the *Asia-Pacific Triennial*, for which she has participated as a curator. She is a Professor of Art, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, heads the research focus group SECAP (Sustainable Environment through Culture, Asia Pacific), and was appointed UNESCO Orbicom Chair in Communications by Griffith University.

1. See Sally Butler, "Pat Hoffie: Cultural Servitude," *Artlink* 27, no. 2 (2007).



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Pat Hoffie (in collaboration with Veronica Sepulveda) *Ideology and Artefact #2* 2012, silk, plastic, cardboard, Fimo. Image courtesy of the artist. Photographer: Carl Warner.

SONIA KHURANA

THE BODY IN SPACE—NEW SYMBOLIC ORDER

Sonia Khurana explores the politics of selfhood and space through the medium of her body, in a practice that has (according to feminist readings of her work) redefined gendered representations of the feminine in India. After early forays in painting, she extended her practice into other mediums. Her video performance titled *Bird* (1999) established Khurana internationally as an important emerging contemporary Indian artist. In the years that have followed, Khurana has continued to develop an interdisciplinary practice that incorporates mediums including performance, video, photography, text, drawing, and installation.

Through her sensitive and inquiring work, Khurana has created myriad representations of women that, indirectly, reference an internal knowledge of self, but privilege universally abject feminine experience. Geeta Kapur describes this dynamic in her early practice, suggesting,

Sonia Khurana is part of the lineage of women working through the body into a space of erotic efflorescence recognised/shown to be (almost definitely) blocked, thwarted, problematised, and therefore won, if ever, by searing forms of self-exposure.¹

From this position, Khurana deconstructs symbolic orders

inherent in popular culture, to provide the viewer with access to a perspective that is peripheral, portraying different instances from contemporary life. Her work re-positions the viewer's gaze, through the association of humour and facile, everyday occurrences, from resistance to empathy. The disruptions she causes deconstruct signs and codes in the visual mainstream, from which new archetypal expressions emerge. Explicitly, in Western theoretical interpretations, Khurana communicates the experience of modern Indian women and with increasing emphasis, an internationalist, even nomadic position, exploring "transcultural transactions within the global".²

Khurana has selected three works to be shown in *Mythopoetic*, which survey the collective impact of her practice, via the individual example of each work. The works belong to a wider period in her oeuvre, which explore the notion of "embodying spaces". In all three works, *Flower Carrier III* (2006), the *Logic of Birds* (2006) and *Lying-down-on-the-ground: Additional Notes* (2009), Khurana's exploration of her body in space is imperative to the re-positioning of feminine representation. The artist chooses characters that have a stereotypically, marginalised relationship with societal space; she explains, "both in *Flower Carrier* and in *Logic of Birds*, I

have pursued the tropes of the *flâneur* and the tramp, I am more attracted towards the abject".³ According to Nancy Adajania, "Khurana performs dispossessed figures who enact their private lives in the glare of public appearance as an attempt to rupture the textures of the everyday."⁴

In *Flower Carrier III* (2006), Khurana wanders the streets of Barcelona, Spain, with her attention focused on a single flower, with the sole purpose of her character's existence attached to the flower. An excerpt from the novel *Immortality* by Milan Kundera inspired the three works in Khurana's *Flower Carrier* series. The text touchingly relates,

She said to herself: when once the onslaught of ugliness became completely unbearable, she would go to a florist and buy a forget-me-not, a single forget-me-not, a slender stalk with miniature blue flowers. She would go out into the streets holding the flower before her eyes, staring at it tenaciously, so as to see only that single beautiful point, to see it as the last thing she wanted to preserve for herself from a world she had ceased to love, she would walk like that through the streets, she would soon become a familiar sight, children would run after her, laugh at her, throw things at her, and all



Sonia Khurana *Flower Carrier III* 2006 (video still), single-channel video, 10 min (looped). Image courtesy of the artist.

would call her: the crazy woman with the forget-me-not.⁵

With a tenderness befitting the text, Khurana assumes a form of the *flâneur* in response to Kundera; she shifts the focus of the *flâneur*'s gaze and gives the figure new symbolic meaning. Traditionally the *flâneur* is interested in the social space of the metropolis. Not only does the *flâneur* gaze starry-eyed at space, but also the 'sensational phenomenon' of space; a fundamental experience of the *flâneur*.⁶ The figure in Khurana's *Flower Carrier III* moves through the streets of the Spanish metropolis, her body participates

in the sociological landscape, but her gaze is focused on a ginger flower, rather than the forget-me-not. The dynamic re-positioning of the body in space forces a denial of the stereotypical associations of the *flâneur* type. Instead of "not belonging," Khurana's flower carrier belongs to her own beautiful existence, that is physically immortalised by the flower in her hand. The work is a hybrid of both video and performance with a visual language that appropriates from the aesthetics of reality television combining with a sense of the everyday. All these aspects in *Flower Carrier III* combine to re-locate the viewer's gaze to be "with" the artist/*flâneur*/flower

carrier, so that the viewer has fundamental access to "their" world.

Logic of Birds and Lying-down-on-the-ground: Additional Notes similarly re-position (literally and textually) the artist's body in space, altering symbolic order in visual culture. The artist commands the right to have space by choosing to lie down, claiming, possessing and inhabiting, etc. Through this action, Khurana offers an alternative to the "verticality of the male totem" and occupies a horizontal paradigm. Her body enmeshes with the space in *Logic of Birds* shifting our perceptions of the vagrant or tramp archetype to an understanding of the "artist



Sonia Khurana *Logic of Birds* 2006 (video still), single-channel video, 2 min (looped). Image courtesy of the artist.

as landscape". We view the figure with the "logic of birds" in a gendered space that is integrative and inclusive. Khurana describes this portrayal of her body explaining,

I strive to do this in an oblique manner; my way of subverting female corporeality would be to show the body as something that is extended in space and persists through time, both phenomenologically and politically.⁷

To lie down is to expose and make vulnerable, however for Khurana this is also an act of sovereignty and so perversely, "lying down" is a powerful, re-

claiming and reparative gesture. The fact that Khurana has "lain down" all over the world, in her performance practice and in video works, provides the viewer with access to a nomadic archetypal figure, with borderless freedom in a globalised world.

The text-based *Lying-Down-on-the-Ground: Additional Notes* is a part of an ongoing project that has a live art component that Khurana has been engaged with for several years, in which public participants enter into shared space to "lie down" with the artist. *Lying Down on the Ground (Version IV)*, the most recent live art performance in Khurana's *Lying Down* series was

staged during the international theatre festival, Bharat Rang Mahotsav in Delhi, 2012. The *Lying Down* series have been performed in cities ranging from Barcelona, Nottingham and Paris to Hyderabad, Delhi, and Aichi, Japan, where Khurana has engaged hundreds of participants in performative ventures.

Khurana was educated in Delhi University's College of Art and in London at the Royal College of Art, and undertook artistic research at the Rijksakademie from 2002 to 2004. Khurana lives and works in Delhi, she has been included in many international exhibitions including *Re-Picturing the Feminine*, Gallery OED, a

collateral exhibition to the Kochi Muziris Biennale Open (2012), *Elles at Pompidou* (2009–11), the Aichi Triennale Japan (2010), West Heavens, Shanghai (2010), *Global Feminisms* curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, Brooklyn Museum (2007–2008), *Horn Please*, Kunstmuseum Berne (2007), *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India*, curated by Chaitanya Sambrani at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (2004–5), the Pusan Biennale (2004). Sonia Khurana's *Bird* video (1999) was previously shown at the IMA in Brisbane, Australia in July 2002, in an exhibition curated by Johan Pijnappel titled *Self: Contemporary Indian Video Art*.

1. Geeta Kapur, "Gender Mobility: Through the Lens of Five Women Artists in India," in *Global Feminisms*, ex. cat., ed. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (New York: Brooklyn Museum and Merrell, 2007), 91.
2. *Ibid.*, 93.
3. Sonia Khurana, correspondence with the author, 6 April 2013.
4. Nancy Adajania, "Q and A with Sonia Khurana," *India Moderna*, ex. cat. (Valencia: IVAM, 2009).
5. Khurana refers to Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Faber and Faber, 2000).
6. See Walter Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, trans. and ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 326.
7. Sonia Khurana, correspondence with the author, 6 April 2013.

PUSHPAMALA N. MIMICRY — RE-TELLING THE TALE

Pushpamala N. is one of India's most prominent artists; she lives and works in Bangalore and Delhi in India. Her practice comprises photography, video, performance, sculpture and installations, exploring issues of representation and identity in visualities that document her own body in an array of roles, personas, characters and avatars in staged and constructed environments. Curator and theorist Geeta Kapur has described her practice as that of a "masquerading artist."¹ Pushpamala N. has a creative practice with an inherent performance base, employing imitation and mimicry in tableaux constructed with sophisticated visual language appropriated from pop-culture traditions. Through her vernacular, Ajay Sinha explains, "the artist conveys a fascination with images and image genres that have a readable presence in the visual culture of modern India."² In particular, Pushpamala N. has used her practice to explore the idea of "the artist as ethnographer," in a process that provides a telling account of the impact of colonialism and nationalism and Pushpamala N.'s own position in postcolonial India or more accurately, what the artist refers to as the "postnational" position. Through her focus on ethnography, Pushpamala N. challenges the authenticity of the photographic image, exposing roles and prejudices in Indian

society and internationally, which through typing and classifying, result in marginalising people.

In the work titled *Indrajaala/ Seduction* from the series *Avega: The Passion* (2012), Pushpamala N. re-contextualises the female villain "Surpanakha" from the Indian epic the *Ramayana*. In the video the demon Surpanakha takes human form and tries to seduce the hero "Lakshmana", who spurns her sexual advances and decides to punish her, disfiguring her by cutting off her nose and ears. The artist as the demon mimics the movements of a shaman from the fragment of an early ethnographic film seen in Melbourne, Australia. This performance provides a historic context for the character, which is presented in guises that simultaneously reflect a colonial and postcolonial gaze through which the demon's identity varies. From this reference point, Pushpamala N. interlaces the black and white aesthetics of early ethnographic film, with cinematic image flows that appropriate from the "trick photography" of early Indian cinema (Dadasaheb Phalke) and even from the aesthetics of video games. There are budget-looking "magical flame effects", used to denote Surpanakha's transition to and from physical form. In the central screen in the video, the character Lakshmana shows off his swordsmanship in an overt display, beheld by the suggested

gaze of an admiring Surpanakha, that later shifts subtly to a violent, staccato spectacle.

The artist inhabits the "physical" form of the Surpanakha trope, with mesmerising gestures she sways in a display that engenders the desires of various masculinised gazes. However, Pushpamala N. does not revisit these positions, she subsumes the masculinised because,

She undermines the sign (the female figure Surpanakha) as linguistically structured within the phallogocentric/identitarian/aggrandised domain of the symbolic; she also therefore, undermines the (perverse) logic of the "feminine as masquerade", based as that is on a fetishistic displacement of the phallus.³

By subsuming the masculinised desire/object dynamic and transitioning the character Surpanakha into a violent atmosphere, juxtaposed with Surpanakha's dreamy surrendering to her fate, Pushpamala N. exposes the character's vulnerability and restores a lost innocence related to her sexuality, prefaced earlier in the work. Through her employment of subtle and multi-layered visual language, Pushpamala N. imbues the character Surpanakha with complexity, reincarnating her into a new life and different mythology. Pushpamala is hybridising and



Pushpamala N. *Indrajaala/Seduction* 2012 (video still), from the series *Avega—The Passion: The Drama of Three Women*, single-channel digital video, 4:27 min (looped). Image courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

transforming archetypes like the “Native South Indian woman”, the “Magician”, the “Warrior”, the “shaman”, the “Femme Fatale”, the “Noble Savage” and the “Whore”, altering the historical and popular symbolism assigned to the infamous villain Surpanakha and accomplishing a re-telling of the Ramayana from a distinctly feminine perspective.

Pushpamala N. studied sculpture at the MS University in Baroda, India. Since the mid 1990s the primary focus of her practice has been photo performance and video. Pushpamala’s work has been shown widely in international exhibitions including *Re-Picturing the Feminine*,

at Gallery OED, a collateral exhibition to the Kochi Muziris Biennale Open (2012), *Photo Espana*, Madrid (2012), *Paris-Delhi-Bombay*, Centre Pompidou (2011), *Beyond the Self*, National Portrait Gallery-Australia (2011), *Chalo India*, Mori Museum (2008), *Century City*, at the Tate Modern (2001) and the Johannesburg Biennale (1995). Her short film *Rashtriy Kheer and Desiy Salad* was showcased in an event titled *Griffith Asia Institute-Perspectives Asia with Pushpamala N.* for Griffith University in 2010.

1. Geeta Kapur, “Dismantling Norms: Apropos an Indian/Asian Avante Garde,” in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 399.
2. Ajay Sinha, “Modernism in India: A Short History of a Blush,” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008), 565.
3. Kapur, “Gender Mobility: Through the Lens of Five Women Artists in India,” in *Global Feminisms*, ex. cat., ed. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (New York: Brooklyn Museum and Merrell, 2007), 86.

ANN-MAREE REANEY AND JILL KINNEAR COLLABORATION—TRAVELLING MYTHOLOGIES

Ann-Maree Reaney and Jill Kinnear have collaborated on a series of works about travelling mythologies inspired by the tradition of the roadtrip as presented in cinema and popular culture. The artwork combines literary and visual references and intersects with the women's own documentation of their travels. The collaboration has produced a unique visual language that appropriates from the locations the artists have travelled to, and finds central focus through the construction of an exquisite garment, which is photographed on a model and placed in virtual environments generated by the artists. The artists have provided this statement explaining the work,

Cinema and the road trip are inextricably bound together by movement, speed and mobility. Both the car and the camera are mobile, can be pointed in almost any direction, operate at speed; video frames one tenth of a second documented our journey. Both cinema and the road trip represent fictional spaces, a space of encapsulated possibility, paradoxically infinite yet compressed and defined by time. Both are frames upon the world, and the video image, taken through the windscreen of a moving car, is twice separated from reality, through the filters of

the lens and the window. The very act of pointing the camera in order to capture “authenticity” is contradictory; the image becomes a fiction, a souvenir, a distortion of memory removed from the reality of the scene.¹

The work in *Mythopoetic* titled *Road Trip India—An Act of Faith* (2013), invites the viewer to an encounter with a visual space created from the experiences and memories of an Indian roadtrip. The central figure in the work, wearing a dress emblazoned with the trucks the artists encountered on their journey, ‘stands before a theatre-like curtain of the same design, presenting the environment—and therefore the notion of the journey—as an imaginative and fictional representation’.² The imagery is constructed from the artists’ travel video and photographs; mediated forms of documentation that focus not only on the decoration of the truck, but also the symbolic disregard for the rules of the road, by those operating the vehicles. The artists continue to describe the trucks explaining, “with cabins adorned as temple shrines with flowers, they are an icon that transgresses all highway lines and rules with—but an act of faith”.³ The work depicts the artists’ fascination with the parallel and cross-cultural references encompassed by “faith” and travelling. *Road Trip India—An Act of Faith* is part

of an ongoing collaboration and series by Reaney and Kinnear, who have both individually had extensive careers.

Jill Kinnear is a prominent textile artist; born in Scotland, she immigrated to Australia. She has completed major commissions and her work is held in several international public collections. Kinnear is a fellow of the Design Institute of Australia; she currently holds the position of Professor of Fibers at Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, USA. Ann-Maree Reaney exhibits her work nationally and internationally, she has been conferred with numerous visual arts awards internationally, nationally and at the state level including the DAAD German government scholarship to undertake research in Berlin and several artist-in-residencies in Paris and China through the Visual Arts Crafts Board of the Australia Council. She was a Senior Lecturer in Sculpture and Head of the Visual Arts Department at the University of Southern Queensland; she currently works as both a visual artist and curator.

1. Ann-Maree Reaney and Jill Kinnear, correspondence with the author, 27 December 2012.
2. Reaney and Kinnear, correspondence with the author, 10 April 2013.
3. Reaney and Kinnear, *ibid*, 3 April 2013.



Ann-Maree Reaney and Jill Kinnear, *Road Trip India—An Act of Faith* 2013, triptych: digital prints on paper. Image courtesy of the artists.

MANDY RIDLEY

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE—PATTERN & CULTURE

Mandy Ridley is an artist with a history of exploring the intersections between cultures, within an Australian milieu. Her practice is process oriented, often beginning with drawing and extending, through her engagement with various material-based methodologies, into installation and public art. Over her long career, Ridley has developed a strong visual language; constructed through her appropriation of patterns, symbols and motifs, in a cultural convergence that represents Ridley's own unique mythology. Ridley's mythology is a conglomeration of visual hybridity, portrayed from a position of personal encounter with the "other," in which pattern becomes the primary visual source to communicate place and identity in symbolic visual language. Ridley explains, "I travel/ travail: incorporating memories, sensations and encounters into my personal archive". Creating a work allows a process of translation to occur, rendering a richly layered record of an idiosyncratic lived experience.¹ Ridley's translations are comprised of symbolisms weaving a visual array, depicting the impact of cultures on her person, and recording the transformations and rich associations that she experiences.

Ridley has undertaken extended residencies in India and Spain. Initial research into Islamic Art in these regions, led to her

being awarded a Fellowship to attend the Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar in 2011. The work in *Mythopoetic*, titled *Sometimes I Feel My Heart Will Burst* (2012), is an example of Ridley's explorations into the impact of culture and place on her corporeal memory. The installation was produced in Australia in 2012 from preliminary work Ridley undertook during her Spanish residency several years earlier. Through the work, Ridley constructs a landscape inspired both by memories of her childhood home, and her experience of travelling along the road to Madinat al-Zahra, the ruined palatine complex, near the city of Córdoba, Spain. Ridley explains,

I travelled 5km out of town on a local bus, alighting with three other travelers who were visiting from Madrid. "Yes, follow us", and we set off in single file along a dusty country road heading towards gently rolling hills. I experienced what I can only call a "body shock" of recognition, at the eerily familiar topography and feel of the landscape, it was just as though I was trudging along the road towards my family farm in Gippsland!²

Ridley's artwork attempts to articulate the strange moment she describes, representing a jolting confluence of memory

and limbic resonance, in an installation constructed with vinyl that has a palette derived from the topography of both the Spanish and Australian terrains, merging botanic and symbolic references in personal motif. This motif is a unique and decorative pattern that takes on its own topography, through repetition and layering, cleverly re-constructing the landscape resonating in her emotional and physical memory.

Mandy Ridley has exhibited her work internationally in the *Kindness/Udarta: Australia-India Cultural Exchange* at the Habitat Centre, Delhi and RMIT Gallery in Melbourne (2012) and in the *Re-picturing the Feminine* exhibition at Gallery OED, a collateral exhibition of the Kochi Muziris Biennale, also in 2012. Her work is held in private and public collections including Artbank, Griffith University Art Collection, the Gold Coast City Art Gallery, and the Museum of Brisbane. Ridley specialises in public art practice, and has successfully completed many commissions nationally.

1. Mandy Ridley, correspondence with the author, 3 April 2013.
2. Mandy Ridley, artist statement, from the exhibition *Cognition* at Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, Victoria, 30 November 2012–27 January 2013.



Mandy Ridley *Sometimes I Feel My Heart Will Burst* 2012, hand-cut digital print, LED lights.
Image courtesy of the artist and Gippsland Art Gallery. Photographer: Lindsay Roberts.

SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR HYBRIDITY—MEDUSA METAPHOR

Sangeeta Sandrasegar is a prominent Australian artist who has exhibited widely nationally and internationally. She has a practice that investigates cross-cultural identity and meaning, through the intersection of literature, myth and visual histories, with a whimsical and sometimes sharp-satire that reflects the strong research base informing her work. Sandrasegar explores issues connected with hybridity, race, immigration, gender, sexuality, postcolonialism and belonging, with visual language that borrows from her own Indian, Malay and Australian heritage. Her depictions of the female figure (sometimes her own) challenge fixed notions about identity and present to the viewer, fluid interpretations, grounded in constant flux and hybrid states, in a personal milieu that plays with objective/subjective interpretation. Within these parameters, Sandrasegar develops her own narrative in separate bodies of work that evolve in response to each other.

Sandrasegar has an extensive oeuvre that is primarily installation based, exploring the two-dimensionality of sculptural media in cut-outs and other forms that, “employ shadow as key formal and conceptual motif,” merging with pattern, mark-making and watercolour investigations, that are often embellished with materials borrowed from popular-culture.¹ Her poetic gestures highlight and juxtapose

areas of cultural difference and convergence, a recent example exploring the shared postcolonial histories shaping the formation of her own and contemporary identity in Australia and India. The work titled *The scaffold called the Motherland spews infinite grace*, was completed in Mysore, India in 2012, using the traditional medium of Indian brass. The scaffolding the title refers to, are actualised as bronze casts of eucalyptus trees used for construction in India. Eucalypt forests were introduced to the Indian landscape through colonial rule, and so the brass “objects embody the processes of transferral and translation that are implicit to globalisation and intercultural exchange”.²

The title of Sandrasegar’s work in *Mythopoetic* is a reverie—taken from a literary source, a line in a poem by Ovid about the mythological “Perseus”. It is called *Take away that monster/ That face that makes men stone, whoever she is* (2009). The work depicts the silhouette of Medusa, beheaded, with an emerging Pegasus, in black felt with embroidered sequins. The work was originally shown in Old Wentworth Gaol in New South Wales as a disturbing, yet poignant metaphor for incarcerated women, however in the context of *Mythopoetic* an extension of the Medusa metaphor is surveyed to include a wider symbolism in alignment with the artist’s broader practice.

Sandrasegar describes her version of the Medusa story, stating,

Medusa is cast outside the legal canon of women by the dominant yet barren warrior figurehead Athena (after being raped by Poseidon in one of Athena’s temples). Sentenced to isolation on a stony island outcrop and with her once lustrous hair turned to snakes, the Gorgon Medusa’s will to beauty and to make life (thus to also take it away) is imbued in her power to turn men to stone. When eventually beheaded by Perseus, even in death Medusa gives life: from her neck springs forth the fully formed giant Chrysaor, and from her blood the winged Pegasus.³

In the artist’s view Medusa is creatrix, and represents the triumph of feminine creativity to cope with marginalisation, a symbol of the parturition of beauty. The work does not cast a shadow; it is a black silhouette, a shadow itself. Sandrasegar has traditionally used the idea of shadow in her work, to bring attention to or re-claim the ‘shadow figure’ from its historic connotations, bringing forward to a position of prominence a new image, as a visual device representing postcolonial and hybrid critical theories. In approaching the Medusa figure, Sandrasegar engages with a



Sangeeta Sandrasegar *Take Away That Monster/That Face That Makes Men Stone, Whoever She Is* 2009, installation with felt, glass beads, sequins, and thread. Image courtesy of the artist and Murray White Room, Melbourne. Photographer: Ari Hatzis.

long history of feminist, semiotic and patriarchal interpretation. Author Hélène Cixous suggests “Medusa has become a central figure for the woman artist to struggle with”, for Sandrasegar it is not so much a struggle, she re-claims the shadow aspect of the Gorgon, instead of the ugly, frightening or grotesque, Sandrasegar offers the viewer an alternative—the beheading of the matriarch is used to represent the power of Medusa’s creativity.⁴ The Medusa is a figure of hybridity herself, traditionally depicted “as monstrous and through the hybrid composite of human and animal parts, Medusa is made into a liminal creature”.⁵ Sandrasegar re-claims the hybrid creature from the liminal space, and uses her to demonstrate the power of feminine creativity, in this guise the Gorgon is thrust into a position in which many women can claim her as symbolic to themselves, she is no longer

dwelling in the fringes, she is a figure of hybridity to be celebrated and admired.

In 2004 Sangeeta Sandrasegar completed a Doctorate of Philosophy across the Victorian College of the Arts and the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne. Sandrasegar’s international exhibitions include, *Re-picturing the Feminine*, Gallery OED, a collateral exhibition of the Kochi Muziris Biennale (2012), the Incheon Women Artists Biennale in Korea (2009), *Slash: Paper Under the Knife*, Museum of Arts and Design New York (2009), *the Fifth Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT 5)* at QAGOMA (2006–7), *Public/Private: Auckland Triennial* (2004). Sandrasegar was awarded the 2012 Rimbun Dahan Arts Residency, Penang, Malaysia, from which she has recently returned to Melbourne, Australia where she lives and works.

1. Dan Rule “A Reflection of Home”, *Broadsheet*, 2 July 2012: <http://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/arts-and-entertainment/article/reflection-home>, accessed 3 March 2013.
2. The work titled *The scaffold called the Motherland spews infinite grace* was recently acquired as part of the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. See Recent Acquisitions, Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection, Viktoria Marinov Bequest Fund 2012: <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/281.2012.a-h/>
3. Sangeeta Sandrasegar’s artist statement: <http://sangeetasandrasegar.blogspot.com.au/2009/06/take-away-that-monster-that-face-that.html>
4. See authors Garber and Vickers discussion of Hélène Cixous article “The Laughter of the Medusa” (1975), in their extensive *The Medusa Reader*, Routledge, 2003, 133.
5. See discussion of the Medusa’s body as a hybrid figure in the article by Melissa Skinner-La Porte “snakes on a Mane: Medusa, the Body and Serpentine Monstrosity”, *inter-disciplinary.net*: <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/mlapottepaper.pdf>, accessed 13 March 2013.

SHAMBHAVI

SYMBOLISM—RE-ASSIGNING “KALI”

Shambhavi's original home is rural Patna, in the northern Indian state of Bihar. Bihar is a land that has ancient roots, connected to the development of Buddhism and sanctified in Hinduism because the River Ganga or “the Ganges” traverses its length. Modern Bihar, in contrast, is one of the poorest Indian states; many of its residents have been forced to re-locate to find work and are subjected to violence in other parts of India. Shambhavi herself now resides in Delhi, a displacement that has been a recurrent theme in her work. Her practice explores many issues regarding domestic displacement in India as a metaphor for larger universal human conditions. Most recently Shambhavi has focused on the sorrowful plight of farmers from Bihar, who, relegated to the periphery of society in a globalised India, have been suiciding in large numbers (a similar predicament to those working the land in Australia). Shambhavi's work is centered around a symbol or object that serves as a visual/conceptual reference-point and metaphor, bringing unanticipated elements into proximity, from a milieu combining the socio-political India, cosmology, mythology and popular culture. Shambhavi attempts to reconcile her feelings and experiences about these issues in works, rich with symbolism, to portray universal human conditions, which are often reflected through the artist's

exploration of cosmology and her visual devices. Her practice includes painting, printmaking, papermaking, sculpture and installation.

Red Kali (1997) is an earlier work from the artist, portraying the steel tongue of the Goddess of Death. There are many stories in Hindu mythology about Kali's tongue, relating how the goddess's rage is motivated into action against malevolent forces, evoking her dance of destruction and thirst for the blood of demons, which could only be dissuaded through the intervention of her husband, the God Shiva, who threw his body beneath her feet. This surprised Kali, who poked out her tongue in shock! In Hindu Art, Kali is traditionally depicted with protruding tongue as reference to her humble position and the many stories in the Hindu pantheon that relate it. *Red Kali* plays on the myriad associations with the goddess's tongue, while cleverly referencing the triangle symbol as the Yantric form of Shakti (divine femininity in Hinduism), and the vaginal/vulvic shape common to Western feminist art, signifying the gendered space in the work. The artist adopts the tongue symbol, portraying a divine feminine power that will vociferously rage, a female figure that will be instinctually impelled to take action, with force, against violence. Sanjog Sharan describes this position stating:

the crimson black, rapier tongued mythical Red Kali is Shambhavi's idea of the Woman, the Goddess whose powers of creation can nurture the need for violence against grave provocation.¹

The tongue/triangle emerges from a red field in the corner of the gallery space, in a gesture that forebodes this violence, depicting the liminal space between malevolence and benevolence, an atmosphere that permeates modern Indian society. The red in the work can represent many things, the rage of the Goddess or the blood spilt through violence. Indian society, like many places in the world, reveres the most benign institutions and, at the same time, is capable of deplorable horrors enacted in the name of those institutions (like the Gujarat riots between Hindu and Muslim extremists in 2002). Shambhavi's *Red Kali* recontextualises the myth by appropriating the symbol of the goddess's tongue, representing contemporary society while reconciling binary oppositions through the idea of a universal, divine, feminine figure with ultimate knowledge. The artist uses a symbol belonging to a classical Hindu figure to epitomise the complexity of modern India, from a universal position that speaks to the wider experiences of violence in global culture. *Red Kali* is given a fundamentally different context



Shambhavi *Red Kali* 1997, watercolour on handmade paper, 12 sheets.
Image courtesy of the artist and Talwar Galleries, New York and New Delhi.
Photographer: Carl Warner.

through the assignment of the foreboding tongue, a tool for peace and a weapon against violence. The Hindu Goddess Maha Kali is visually transfigured in Shambhavi's work, a metaphor for the wider potentials for violence in humanity.

Shambhavi's work has been acquired as part of the permanent collection of MOMA, New York and she has exhibited widely internationally in museums and galleries including the National Gallery of Modern Art

in New Delhi and Bombay, the Association for Visual Arts (AVA) in Cape Town, South Africa and the Tropen Museum, The Netherlands. She participated in the prestigious Khoj International Artist Workshops in 2002 and 2009. In 2011, Shambhavi's participation in a residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute, saw her produce a major body of work that was exhibited in a show and publication titled *Lonely Furrow* (2011).

1. See Sanjog Sharan, "Containing the Cosmos," *Shambhavi: Lonely Furrow*, ex. cat., Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Robertson Quay, Singapore, 2011, 6.

LIST OF WORKS

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY (GUAG)

MARNIE DEAN

(1975–) Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Morrigan-Kali the 'SHE-WOLF': Wave of the Future 2012

lightbox illumination, digital print on transparency, customised display

lightbox: 76 x 160cm; wooden display: 183 x 185 x 22cm

Collection: Mr Binoj Cheruvathur Kochurry, India

FIONA HALL

(1953–) Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

21st Century Man 2011
US Dollars, unique works from a series of 25, #11, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 18
six sheets, each 47 x 34cm

Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

PAT HOFFIE

(1953–) Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

(Collaboration with Veronica Sepulveda, 1980–, Santiago, Chile)

Ideology and Artefact #2 2012

silk, plastic, cardboard, Fimo
installation dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

SONIA KHURANA

(1968–) Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Flower Carrier III 2006

single channel video, 4:3, colour, stereo sound, 10 minutes, looped

Courtesy of the artist

Logic of Birds 2006

single-channel video, 4:3, colour, silent version, looped

Courtesy of the artist

Lying-down-on-the-ground: Additional Notes 2009

single channel video, 4:3, black and white and colour, mono sound, looped

Courtesy of the artist

PUSHPAMALA N.

(1956–) Bangalore, India

Indrajaala/Seduction 2012

from the series *Avega—The Passion: The Drama of Three Women*

single-channel digital video, 4:3, black and white, silent, 4:27 minutes looped

Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi

SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR

(1977–) Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Take Away That Monster/That Face That Makes Men Stone, Whoever She Is 2009

installation: felt, glass beads, sequins, thread

dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Murray White Room, Melbourne

SHAMBHAVI

(1966–) Patna, Bihar, India

Red Kali 1997

watercolour on handmade paper

12 sheets: 366 x 488cm
(12 x 16ft) overall

Courtesy of the artist and Talwar Galleries, New York and New Delhi

LIST OF WORKS

PROJECT GALLERY

DI BALL

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

BinDi Ball Is Deeply Superficial
2012

single-channel digital video, 16:9
colour, sound, 15 minutes looped

The artist would like to thank
Kim Thelander for the Tagore
translation by Shaoni Muckerjee
read by Jose Large to music
composed by Martin Kirkbright.
Thanks also to Mahin who
opened my heart and helped me
to sing again.

Courtesy of the artist

LAINI BURTON

(1974–) Brisbane, Queensland,
Australia

Taking Atlas (Stealth) 2013

diptych: pencil, ink and gouache
on paper

84.1 x 59.4cm each

Courtesy of the artist

SIMONE EISLER

(1975–) Brisbane, Queensland,
Australia

Field 2007

ilmenite and cow horn

dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Spiro
Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane and
Galleriesmith, Melbourne

LIST OF WORKS WEBB GALLERY

MANDY RIDLEY

(1961–) Richmond, Victoria,
Australia

*Sometimes I Feel My Heart Will
Burst* 2012

hand cut digital print, LED lights

230 x 550 x 12cm

Courtesy of the artist

ANN-MAREE REANEY AND JILL KINNEAR

(1959–) Maryborough,
Queensland, Australia

(1953–) Dundee, Scotland

Road Trip India — An Act of Faith
2013

triptych: digital prints on paper

85 x 250cm overall

Courtesy of the artists

DHRUVI ACHARY

(1971–) Mumbai, India

Mumbai City 2008

digital print on canvas

diptych: 121.9 x 487.6cm; 121.9
x 243.8cm each canvas

Courtesy of the artist and
Chemould Prescott Road,
Mumbai

KATE BEYNON

(1970–) Hong Kong

*Trans-Mythic Woman Warrior
Series* 2012

Transfigured Gorgon

Transcultural Spider Goddess

Nine-Tailed Fox Spirit

Warrior Mer-Woman

Guardian Ranger with Lion Dogs

five canvases: acrylic and
Swarovski crystals

each 40.5cm diameter

Courtesy the artist, Milani Gallery,
Brisbane and Sutton Gallery,
Melbourne

CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mythopoetic surveys art and creative practice as an example of a developing visual culture that is re-defining the image of women in the South Asian and Asia Pacific regions. Thanks to the longstanding support of Queensland College of Art (Galleries) and Griffith University Art Gallery, this exhibition provides a platform that showcases the very best intent of Indian and Australian cultural practice. It is with this celebratory accord that *Mythopoetic* shares a wider participation in Griffith University's festival *Encounters: India*.

The exhibition *Mythopoetic: Women Artists from Australia and India* has been made possible due to the initiation of Cassandra Schultz, Professor Pat HOFFIE, Naomi Evans and Simon P. Wright, with the support of Professor Paul Cleveland. In India, I would like to thank the Australian High Commission and the Department of Foreign Affairs who supported the exhibition I curated as part of their Ozfest initiative and the Kochi Muziris Biennale, from which this exhibition *Mythopoetic* has emerged. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the indomitable curator Johan Pijnappel for all his help, together

with the generous and inspiring Nalini Malani for her guidance, continuing encouragement and example of professionalism.

I would like to thank several artists included in this exhibition, who were physically with me in India they are (alphabetically) Di Ball, Kate Beynon, Fiona Hall, Pat HOFFIE. Sonia Khurana, Pushpamala N., Shambhavi and Mandy Ridley, for their commitment to this cross-cultural dialogue and equally I would also like to thank artists Dhruvi Acharya, Laini Burton, Simone Eisler, Sangeeta Sandrasegar (who participated in both exhibitions also) and Ann-Maree Reaney and Jill Kinnear for all their wonderful contributions to *Mythopoetic*. My awesome colleagues in this exhibition, Naomi Evans and Cassandra Schultz, have cleverly devised the first joint exhibition housed across Galleries on Griffith Universities' Southbank campus, in Griffith University Art Gallery (GUAG) and Queensland College of Art Galleries (QCA Galleries) Webb and Project spaces and I thank them for their invaluable contributions that have helped shape this exhibition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY STAFF

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QCA Galleries Coordinator

Emily Gray
Curatorial Intern

Jodie Cunneen
QCA Galleries Intern

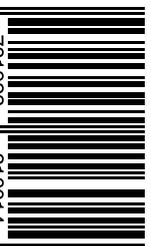
Francesca Vanderwoude
QCA Galleries Volunteer

Brian Sanstrom
Art preparator and Technical
Support

Kieron Wilson
Volunteer Technician, QCA Gallery

and, the wonderful team of
Volunteer Gallery Attendants

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