

Curatorial Proposal

Jenny Hickinbotham

Please see this submission on my website for further images and full discussion of art works selected:
<https://jennyhickinbotham.com/curatorial-proposal>

Introduction

I propose a curatorial project called *Secrets of a Rich Inner Life*. Contemporary life is challenging, requiring technical savvy, resilience and emotional awareness. However, capitalism, democracy and consumerism demand unwavering compliance with school, employment and patriarchal cultural mores. *Secrets of a Rich Inner Life* investigates the effects of systemic and social demands on people's mental health and wellbeing. This contemporary project shows how retaining connection with our bodies, our minds and our souls will develop strengthening self-awareness and self-love. Gaining richness through connection with self and others enriches our inner selves.

Curatorial Theme

The principle proposal of this curatorial project is that humanity's compassion is on the rise in response to the demands of marginalized persons/groups, those living at the intersections, demands for equality and demands for human rights for all. Dalai Lama says that compassion will save the world.

Billionaire Nick Hanauer's TED Talk: *The dirty secret of capitalism – and a new way forward*, argues that basic economic underpinnings of capitalism have been very wrong. He proposes that it isn't capital that promotes economic growth, it's people and it isn't self-interest that creates economic success, it's reciprocity and it isn't competition that produces our prosperity, it's co-operation.¹ The Morrison Government's recent budget is an example of these contemporary economic beliefs.

Morrison recently agreed, after much procrastination, to a Royal Commission into the high suicide rates of soldiers returning from war zones like Afghanistan. Emotional engagement is on the rise. Emotions used to be considered 'feminine', 'weak' and harmful, for instance, people who could not manage emotionally might end up mentally ill and/or incarcerated in an asylum. Professor Antonio Damasio, neuroscientist, has been studying emotions for thirty years, 'he argues that our internal, emotional regulatory processes not only preserve our lives but actually shape our greatest cultural accomplishments'.² We can reflect upon Nick Hanauer and Morrison Government's contemporary take on economics for the people.

My curatorial theme is *Secrets of a Rich Inner Life*, after Robert Dossaix's comments at the launch of his most recent book *The Times of our Lives*. Robert survived AIDS but experienced much trauma as his colleagues and friends didn't survive, his painful experience is detailed in, *A Mother's Disgrace*. My own life is defined by trauma, childhood neglect, exploitation and abuse. Unfortunately, difficult early life experiences impact a person's opportunity. Some lucky people find a mentor or supporter who help them to a place of repair and recovery, some people grow into that place, some people never get there. This project investigates artists engagement with emotional self-knowing and their notions of a Rich Inner Life.

Emotional experience and exploration are contemporary artistic themes. Destiny Deacon's retrospective DESTINY at NGV, the catalogue review reminds us, Deakin is a 'descendant of the Kuku and Erub/Mer people from Far North Queensland and Torres Strait, Deacon is internationally known for a body of work

¹ Hanauer, N., 2019, *The dirty secret of capitalism – and a new way forward*, TED Talk, 19 Oct, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th3KE_H27bs

² Lenzen, M., 2005, *Feeling our Emotions*, Scientific American MIND, 1 April, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/feeling-our-emotions/>

depicting her darkly comic, idiosyncratic worldview'.³ *Postcards from Mummy 1998*, showed a series of postcards detailing the 'place' Deakin's mother calls home, the land, the time, the water, the environment. This work reminded me that my own mother has no 'place' in this country. Brook Andrews also inspires my concept of self in this 'place' and reminds me about colonial atrocities. Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce's exhibition at Tarrawarra *Looking Glass*, 28 Nov 20 – 8 March 21 was one of the most emotive exhibitions I have ever encountered. Emotions inform our inner life experience, I felt cold and warm, rich and poor, sad and happy.

Selection: How you have selected the artists

I follow Liquid Architecture (LA), a contemporary sound art organization, supporting emerging sound artists through events, performances, online promotions and more. I heard Thembi Soddell's sound art piece Commissioned by Liquid Architecture for '*Unheard Relations*' in March, a satellite event for the '*Site and Sound: Sound Art as Ecological Practice*' at McClelland Sculpture park. Thembi did her PhD at RMIT, it was on '*A dense mass of indecipherable fear: the experiential (non)narration of trauma and madness through Acousmatic sound*', her interests align with this curatorial project.

Thembi led me to Archie Barry who's work with the body, with connection and audience interaction encouraged me to see their work as investigative of the richness of one's inner life. Barry creates performative works as well as video. Lisa Hilli was also referred by Thembi, she uses photography to query feminism and intersectional issues, her work focusses on hair and connection. Networking is a significant element of my artist search and engagement.

Destiny Deacon has a successful public profile, her NGV Artist Profile says she is, 'an artist, broadcaster and political activist, her performative photographs, videos and installations feature members of her family and friends as well as items from her collection of 'Aboriginalia' – assorted black dolls and kitsch'.⁴ Deacon's work relates to my curatorial theme, as does the works of most indigenous artist because they live with epigenetic and contemporary trauma every day while seeking resolution and affirmation of their cultural beliefs and practices which lead to richness of inner life experience. Very few curators engage with the trauma narrative.

These connections have led me to other emerging and contemporary artists whose interest is trauma and recovery. Sam Stanley-Jones is currently sanctioned inside a mental health ward. Sam voluntarily leads and inspires others to join her to make art with Elwood and St Kilda Art Nerds every Saturday at Luna Café in St Kilda. I have included Sam's self-portraits created with pastel on paper over the past months of difficult mental health challenge.

I am on the Board of Schizy Inc, an incredibly innovative and long-striving, not for profit community group. Sandy Jeffs is a board member and advocate for mental health awareness, including stigma annihilation. Schizy initiates artist events such as Mojo Film Night held 23rd May at ACMI and Animo held 6 May at City Library Gallery. Anyone with lived experience of mental health is encouraged to engage and include works, there is no selection process. Anyone interested to make short films for Mojo is encouraged to join supportive informative workshops leading up to the event.

There are many wonderful contemporary artists in Melbourne, I choose to draw from this pool of seemingly invisible professional and emerging creative people.

³ Deacon, D., 2020/21, *Postcards from Mummy*, DESTINY, 23 Nov 20 – 12 Feb 21, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/destiny/>

⁴ Deacon, D., 2021, *Artist Profile*, Museum of Contemporary Art, <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/destiny-deacon/>.

Artists

Thembi's *Love Songs* is a sound work made up of five movements and I have requested she provide this work for my curatorial project. In her audio paper commissioned and published on the Liquid Architecture site, Thembi, a strongly emerging contemporary artist, explains her approach to *Love Songs*:

My approach to creating my own first-person madness narrative through abstract sound, then, had the aim of expanding my thinking beyond these frameworks through a language outside of words or visual forms. While composing, I used sounds and compositional gestures as tools to reflect upon and understand my experiences, building a fluid, abstract language of ambiguity and metaphor, a language that could connect with those intangible aspects of my experience that could not be seen or translated into words, and were therefore misunderstood by a medical system that relies on observable, so-called objective data to research and understand what it treats'.⁵

Thembi's sound creation engages with my curatorial themes of trauma, emotion and bodily experience. Her work is contemporary and challenges psychiatry's heavy unnecessary use of labelling, medications and verbal illusion/false promises. Dr Lucy Johnson, a UK Clinical Psychologist, and many other prominent medical professionals currently argues that nothing about psychiatry is based in science, rather suppositions of the patriarchal culture.

'Lisa Hilli is a Gunantuna artist prioritising indigenous knowledges and matrilineal systems to subvert colonial Western histories contained within ethnographic and archival material and documentation. Hilli's work often represents the black female body and the politics of hair as ongoing themes that enable her to explore, combine and disrupt the confines of photographic and textile practices. Through gender discourses she often depicts in/visibility and agency using landscape and portrait environments'.⁶

Paul Carter in his lecture to RMIT Honours students in 2020 argued that people may thrive at the intersections, this can be a place of re-generation and renewal, which seems to be the case for Lisa Hilli. Her profile shows an international reputation as a professional artist with numerous group and solo exhibitions completed. I would include Lisa's work *Sisterhood Lifeline 2018*, because, they consider the importance of connection to our life, both outward and inward facing.

Tyson Yunkaporta writes in his book *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Will Save the World*, First Peoples' Law says that nothing is created or destroyed because of the infinite and regenerative connections between systems [and people]. Therefore, time is non-linear and regenerates creation in endless cycles.⁷

⁵ Soddell, T., 2020, *Love songs*, Disclaimer, <https://disclaimer.org.au/contents/love-songs>

⁶ Connor, E., & McAneeley, M., 2019, *transits and returns*, Institute of Modern Art & Vancouver Art Gallery, Hemlock Printers Canada. P91

⁷ Yunkaporta, T., 2019, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking will Save the World*, Text Publishing, Australia. P51.



Figure 1 Lisa Hilli, *Sisterhood Lifeline*, 2018.

Archie Barry
e human

body, suburban streets and domestic interiors with an inverted colour palette. These sites are transformed with a new agency, textures become almost palpable and the surface of the image blushes'.⁸

Barry's work subverts and aligns with this curatorial project, the body's interior is inverted, the *Secrets of a Rich Inner Self* are exposed through Barry's work as he explores his inverted self through his work.

Sam Stanley-Jones has spent the majority of 2021 in and out of mental health hospital wards. Sam voluntarily started Elwood and St Kilda Art Nerds, which meets at Luna Café in St Kilda every Saturday. Sam inspires creativity with her leadership, support and open banter about finding yourself, knowing yourself and connecting with others. Included in *Secrets of a Rich Inner Life* at four of Sam's recent self-portraits, the series is titled *Troubled*.

Sandy Jeffs is a mad-poet, she was incarcerated in Larundle mental asylum in the 1970s and only released when community pressure closed those institutions for ever. Sandy found her voice through her poetry and has honed her skill to ice-pick clarity. She's political, personal, knowing, caring and sassy.

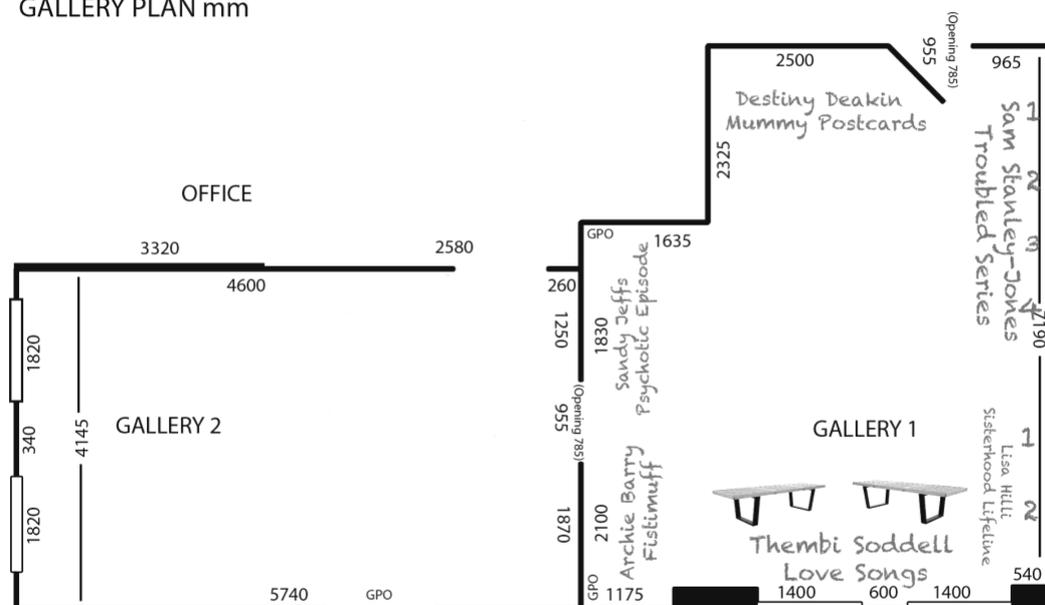
Destiny Deacon has a successful public profile, her NGV Artist Profile says she is, 'an artist, broadcaster and political activist, her performative photographs, videos and installations feature members of her family and friends as well as items from her collection of 'Aboriginalia' – assorted black dolls and kitsch'.⁹ Deacon's work relates to my curatorial theme, as does the works of most indigenous artist because they live with epigenetic and contemporary trauma every day while seeking resolution and affirmation of their cultural beliefs and practices which lead to richness of inner life experience. Very few curators engage with the trauma narrative.

⁸ Barry, A., ND, *Fistimufffs*, viewed 28 April 2021, (<https://archiebarry.com/fistimuff/>)

⁹ Deacon, D., 2021, *Artist Profile*, Museum of Contemporary Art, <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/destiny-deacon/>.

BLINDSIDE

GALLERY PLAN mm



Spatial Concerns

Walk through the door and see Sam's Troubled Series, colourful, contemporary, diverse self-portraits. Each suggests 'trouble' experienced in a different, alternate and altering way. Can a 'Troubled' self lead to a rich inner life? Lisa Hilli's work suggests connection, sisterhood is her lifeline, her richness. Thambi's sound art engages on multiple levels, evoking various moods, senses, affects each suggesting an inner emotional exploration/engagement. Archie's video is inverted and out-there, it's bright but it's dull, it's confronting but it's ordinary, it's inner out and outer in. Sandy's poem says it all, the anguish, the confusion, the loss of selfhood, authenticity, where is this inner self, this richness now? Destiny's mother is there, her place, her time, her country.

Audience: Who will attend

- Blindsight's regular participants
- People interested in body and mind, in health and wellbeing,
- People with disabilities, including mental health, as this cohort tend to be interested in complete health
- People attracted by social media posts and arts magazine articles
- People joining the Panel discussion via YouTube, Zoom or Other online means.
- People wandering in.
- People following and interested in these particular artists
- People engaging or inspired to attend through online platforms
- Arts Access press publication

Schedule

Please view my website version of this assignment to see the schedule.

<https://jennyhickinbotham.com/curatorial-proposal>

Please scroll down to the Schedule and note there is a More Events button below the last obvious entry.

Budget

Expenditure	\$	Running Balance	Income	\$	Running Balance
Curators fees @ \$56.07 per hr total 50 hours over 3 weeks	\$2803.50	\$2803.50	Creative Vic Grant	10,000.00	10,000.00
Artists fees, \$2868 divided by five artists = \$573.60 each Lisa Hilli, Thembi Soddell, Archie Barry, Sam Stanley-Jones Destiny Deakin (Indigenous) Poet Sandy Jeffs up to 100 lines \$200	\$3068	\$5871.50			
Panel Discussion of the theme. Panel members will be the six artists @ \$230 each = \$1380 Chairperson Jenny Hickinbotham curator \$260	\$1640	\$7511.50	Attendance online via YouTube, Zoom and Facebook pay as you can. Live in person audience pay \$10 waged or \$5 unwaged. Capacity 50 people	\$500	10,500.00
Promotion, Marketing and Advertising. Social media, newspaper press release and interviews/coffee.	\$600	\$8111.50			
Launch Event Finger food \$500 Drinks \$500 Expect 200 people	\$1000	\$9111.50			
Transport of Sam Stanley-Jones, Destiny Deakin, Lisa Hilli's works to the venue. Thembi's sound file and Archie Barry's video file available over the internet. Sandy Jeff's poem to be typeset and printed for wall display. Sent over the internet.	\$800	\$9911.5			
Administration: phone, printing, petrol, postage, unforeseen items	\$588.50	\$10,500			\$10,500

Conclusion

Curating this exhibition has been a most exhilarating experience for this emerging curator. Preparing and planning the program, meeting and engaging with the artist and gallery manager, hanging the exhibition and hosting the opening night, which included the artist's Panel Discussion of the curatorial theme Secrets of a Rich Inner Life.

One Secrets is that like everything in life, a Rich Inner Life doesn't just happen, we need to seek and secure this experiential treasure. Artists exhibiting and participants to this exhibition will hopefully be thinking and searching further for the delightfully rewarding Richness of Inner Life experience and sharing their Secret with others.

Bibliography

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Lenzen, M., 2005, *Feeling our Emotions*, Scientific American MIND, 1 April, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/feeling-our-emotions/>

Soddell, T., 2020, *Love songs*, Disclaimer, <https://disclaimer.org.au/contents/love-songs>

Yunkaporta, T., 2019, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking will Save the World*, Text Publishing, Australia.

Exhibitions

Deacon, D., 20/21, *DESTINY*, NGV, 23 November 20 – 21 February 21, Melbourne, Australia.

Scarce, Y., & Watson, J., *Looking Glass*, Tarrawarra 28 November 2020 – 8 March 2021. Melbourne, Australia.