

HAYLEY ARJONA



THE FOOL

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY

20 MARCH TO 13 APRIL 2024

HAYLEY ARJONA: THE F⊙⊙L

Hayley Arjona presents a series of paintings and small sculptures that relate with one another within a looping narrative. The sculptures appear as characters that have stepped out of the paintings into a performative drama where fantasy, neurosis and horror reign. The paintings are mostly life-size and like the sculptures they demand intense scrutiny. Look closely and find teeth, skeletal bones, claws, animalisms inside architectural spaces, crevices, tunnels, orifices, dismembered body parts. Inside the body. Inside the mind. Imploding and exploring a psycho-dynamic narrative.

Art historically the artist nods towards surrealism and the dreamwork undertaken in psychoanalysis but she envelops this in a sense of fun. There is certainly depth psychology here but it's not taking itself too seriously. The artist presents this for our contemplation. But what astonishes me in this work is the way in which the artist lays bare a self-psychoanalysis. What are we to make of *Cosmic Betrachten* where the artist thrusts her multiple selves and her exploding bellies into a thunderous apocalyptic sky. The body is obviously wounded but the look on her face is triumphant. Is she thrusting molten lava into the universe or waiting eagerly for it to pour into her? And what is the slim green hand threatening to do?

Hayley Arjona's art practice is clearly influenced by her studies of the unconscious mind.¹

Hidden and unknown desires and fantasies which are given voice through our dreams recur in her work. These are often violent, unexplainable but containable in art. Artists explain the working of mind, soul and psyche more accurately than those committed to science alone.

Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung and Melanie Klein each used paintings, literature and poetry to explain their theories of the mind. Wilfred Bion who studied under Melanie Klein came up with an interesting theory about wild thoughts – those peripheral, silly, violent, erotic glimpses that we have – and the ways in which artists nurture these and are able to contain them within art works. The best works, according to Bion, are those that represent the truth of these wild thoughts and make them available for future generations. They do this by containing an emotional experience – literally drawing a line around it – that can be shared by others.²

Hayley Arjona's paintings and sculptures depict minor and major eruptions of the mind. Here we see a battle in progress as the ego comes to understand its other. The work is tough and whimsical and at times heartbreaking. She does not shield us from much when she presents herself sitting in her own wishing well in the painting *Wishing Hell* but the ceramic version, like all the sculptures, celebrates this in a fairy-tale characterisation.

In my mind, these paintings and their 3-D characters in ceramics are like performance art, a wild avant-garde, operatic cacophony. I think of performance artists like Katya Grokhovsky whose painting, installation and performance practice approaches the feminine/feminism in a similar way. Paul McCarthy does the same for the masculine and, of course, is much better known because of this.

Wild female work is alive and well, warped and deformed, violent and brave in Arjona's visual art practice. A critique of patriarchy and its Oedipal mythologies and ideologies is at the heart of these works which are made more intense because of the extreme personalisation.

In *The Crumbs of Love*, a sentimental rendition of an infant, stands within or outside another's imaginary body – an anaconda snake's aqualung-like physicality provides a soft threat. The child is pissing herself whilst feeding treats to a tribe of skeletal figures led away by a naked man. *Happy Birthday Baby* is more sinister with the phallic candle melting over the severed claw of an animalist being who turns away from us as small rodents sniff the air.

The exhibition has an uncanny aspect as we watch the artist's dreamscape unfold. Babies and crocodiles take on equal importance. The *Claybies* are cute lumpen figures, with Arjona reflected in their eyes. *Crocodile Cradle* plays on a more violent edge, sometimes the child has the eyes of the artist, at other times not. The gaze is literally sliced out of the face and separate to the object, prone, blinded. But the little girl looks fairly contented in the jaws of the beast. *Palace of Answers* on close inspection doesn't offer much respite from the psycho-babble of the unconscious but it's a fabulous ceramic interpretation of a horrible dream. Arjona's take on feminism is very contemporary and empathetic, every wound resonates, all beasts are welcome.

Anne Marsh, 2024

¹ Hayley Arjona is a registered art therapist who has received research funding from La Trobe University, School of Psychology and Public Health. She has designed and continues to develop 'Expressive Post', an art therapy program for people in the women's prison system.

² See Naomi Wynter-Vincent, 'In C: Towards a 'Bionian' Theory of Creativity', *British Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 38:4, 2022, pp. 655-665

Hayley Arjona 'The Fool' opening speech by Prue Allan

Saturday 23 March 2024

Hello, everyone. It's my privilege to be present here at the opening Hayley's exhibition. I'm also fortunate enough to call her my friend. I'll hopefully move my mouth and some words will fall out that make sense and are relevant. I'll hopefully do you and your work some justice too. Hayley did ask me to give a brief talk. So, yeah, 11 pages later (laughs). I then realised, well, it's not her eulogy. And you can read about her in her bio. And we know it's not her first rodeo.

So, speaking to Hayley about my love affair with her work, we talked about potentially having a more conversational approach and making it more casual, which really speaks, I think, to Hayley's ethos in both her art and her work, because it's about connection, that's my interpretation. And relationships. Relationships to others, but also relationships with ourselves, which we know is where the magic happens. That's where the magic is. In light of this, I hope Hayley will clarify and add as we go. Because when Hayley asked me to do this, I felt very underqualified.

However, learning the title of the exhibition, **The Fool**, it was something that I thought perhaps I had some experience in, with a combination of social anxiety and neurodiversity and deficits in executive functioning, I guess. Impulsivity and sensation seeking has led to a bit of a string of bad judgement and poor choices in my life, So I think I've had nearly half a century of playing the fool, so I thought, perhaps I was qualified. You know the inner critic, the voice that says, you're going to be ridiculous. You couldn't possibly. You're not the right person for this. You sound stupid, or you're going to make a fool of yourself. Pardon the pun. So, in the tradition of the great fool archetype from the end of the 20th century, a certain George Costanza, I adapted his behavioural experiment, saying the opposite to one's instinct. It worked out well for him, for a little while anyway. Rebelling against my inner critic, I said yes instead of no. In doing this, Hayley has given me the opportunity to do some research on the fool, and she guided me to consider the fool in a different light.



We try to suppress the fool part of ourselves. We play it safe. We strive for other people's acceptance, to the detriment of our true nature. But the fool is the part of us that also holds spontaneity. It's playfulness and authenticity. The fool, as Hayley brought to my attention, in their naivety, steps without fear into the unknown. The fool embraces imperfection and follows instinct rather than what others tell them to do, risking ridicule and scorn or rejection to follow their true path. When I was worrying 'what am I going to say about you to all these art people', Hayley said, 'well, I'm just compelled to do this. This is what I'm driven to do', which I think is amazing.

The fool is that integrity and the courage to be ourselves. It's letting go of the need to be defined by or find our value in the responses of others or performing this out of fear. It's about being fully present to another human being. The fool's able to have a sense of humour, even in difficult situations, which can create a sense of hope. The fool is us laughing at ourselves. I think the fool is underestimated, which is a nice place to be in, too, sometimes. So, yeah, it's not hiding behind a persona in order to impress others. I think from your work, and what speaks to me about the aspect of the fool that I read was that it speaks of that resistance to convention and societal norms. Fools represent values which are rejected by the group because they oppose social norms and rules. They're social misfits, they're the rebellious ones. They are called fools by conventionalists. Is that a word? Fools are agents of change whose function is to uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are built on. And that's what Hayley's work represents to me.

I met Hayley through music, going gigs, and her and her partner, Link, seem to be our kind of a people. However, due to my ignorance of contemporary art, and because Hayley is quite achiever, as probably most of you know, she's very humble and a private person, I had no idea of the extent of her talents. And getting to know Hayley, I learned that we share a passion of understanding brain and behaviour, and learning about the complex, fragile, multi-dimensions of the human condition. And a deep commitment to learn how to support others in the process of healing and change. So, when I discovered her work, it was like the scene in the movie, where the protagonist opens an ancient old dusty box, and their facial expression is joy and wonder, aglow with the treasures inside. Except it wasn't Indiana Jones in the Temple of Doom. It was me in a domestic setting in the dark, with a glow of a phone screen staring at Instagram, but the treasures of Hayley's work were illuminating me. I was mesmerised by the candy colour, array of glorious neon super-scapes, and I let the colour wash over me. Feasting in the explicit detail, drinking it all in. This brilliant merging of reality and imagination. Enjoying the fruits of this person's pursuit of documenting an inner world, which with realism, consciousness, trust, and with

illusion (now I'm getting a dry mouth. That's a sign of anxiety, isn't it? Any thoughts yet, Hayley?) The amplification of obscure, dreams, vision, and fantasy, blurring reality, mythology, religion, alchemy, and fairy tales. The mythical creatures, the physical, mental, and spiritual entities, and Hayley, all encapsulating themes of death and rebirth. But for all the dark parts, the things that maybe I interpret, like yearnings or forebodings, or rage, or shame, the equal light parts are there also, body to body, a sense of self-realization, and creativity, and courage, and curiosity, and connection, and compassion, and even calm. These images that are integrally connected to us, the living, to those ethereal planes and dream states by those bridges of the emotions that you draw on. I went a bit metaphysical here.

Hayley Arjona: Well, I like that you brought up bridges. I think something that's different from Prue's practice to my practise is that mine is very solitary and isolated in a studio, and Prue's performing on stage, and for her that connection, those bridges between people happen immediately or with immediacy. And I think that's why I asked you to talk today, because I connect with you on that level. I can't do what you do. But when I listen to your music and *Affordable Repayments* as a group, it brings up these images for me that I cannot recreate. And my work is probably some attempt of recreating all these scenes, and everything that happens with my dreams or in reality, or witnessing your band, and hearing, experiencing that sound, your screams, things like that, that are so raw that maybe defies a representation. Somehow, the filters of me and cartoons and whatever else is in there forever is the only way I can spit this stuff out. But the way you do it is completely your own and I can connect with that. If I maybe could tell you some of those things, maybe you'd see them in your mind's eye, too.

Maybe I wonder if they're similar to what you see when you sing. But anyway, that's the part of the way we connect, the two of us. There's something about the idea of the humour and celebrating something that might be uncomfortable, that I think Prue really encapsulates, too. And it's really difficult for somebody with a persecution complex not be scared that it might come across as arrogant or vain and to actually just say this stuff needs to be celebrated. And the idea of vulnerable is a weird word. I like that we came up with the word raw, and I think raw speaks to some truth that we're trying to portray.

Yeah, I love that one. I wanted to bring up my delight in when you enthusiastically consented to doing our album cover. I gave Hayley an unmastered version, and she just took to it with gusto, and it was played it over and over and over and over. She's done this absolutely brilliant piece of work in a very short amount of time. And she's ringing me excitedly, telling me about the music invokes

these archetypes of Egyptian goddesses of death, and the hippopotamus, the ferry man, and we were like, 'whoa!' Delighted, especially when she described my partner and I, as seeing our heads mesh together. Like melting together. This psychedelic merging of our minds in this psychedelic mess, and it was just like, 'Oh, that sums us up!'

Hayley, the artist, the therapist, the academic, the farmer, the feminist, the nonconformist, the metaphysical explorer. Through her work, she opens a doorway to explore different realms and planes of existence. She beautifully captures habit and harmony within our physical, causal, emotional, and relational lives. In her work purgatory in paradise, a state of unconscious nature, where every night we get to be this little yogi. We go to sleep, and get to move into that world for a moment, and just before we fall back into the reality of consciousness. And Hayley has that gift of being able to document that. She not only walks between those two worlds, but she grabs it and captures it, and is able to bring back and share with us. It's beautiful.

Once I asked Hayley to describe, I wanted her to describe our band. She said, It's beautiful, nostalgic, deep, and absurd. I thought, yes, that sums up how I feel about your work as well. It's indifferent and earnest. It's nonsensical and raw. It's meaningful and meaningless. Akin to the full concept, Hayley's work encourages the practise of removing one's own persona, the social mask and giving us permission to realise the more genuine part of ourselves. And as Hayley said before, her work invites you to lean into the uncomfortable. It's like being able to lean in and tolerate all the facets of this the human experience, all emotions, not just good or bad. And if you're brave enough to do so, that raw state allows for transformation and has that ripple effect on others, which is what you do in your work, help people move through their stuff and be more receptive and be able to develop deeper connections.

Hayley Arjona: The idea of transformation is quite important in all aspects of my life. And I did in this work here, so thanks for bringing that up for me. The idea of amplifying certain parts of the painting and putting them into clay and vice versa is part of that, and it's trying to chart that in a way. I think I'm on the road. I could be absolutely going mad doing it. But this idea of once something is realised and known, then what do you do with it? Does it just continue, or do you make something else out of it? I'm just really interested in interrogating that and scratching away at the surface, like I scratch away at the clay. But thanks for your words, Prue. I really appreciate it. I feel even more connected with you now than before, which is what I was hoping to do.

NICHOLAS
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HAYLEY ARJONA

Cliffhanger

2024

oil on board

160 x 122 cm

\$5,500

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HAYLEY ARJONA

The big shhh

2024

oil on board

160 x 122 cm

\$5,500

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Wishing hell

2024

oil on board

160 x 122 cm

\$5,500

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Ego Island

2024

oil on board

120 x 120 cm

\$5,000

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Number one fool

2023

oil on board

120 x 120 cm

\$5,000



HAYLEY ARJONA

In ermine eyes (blue)

2024

oil on board

120 x 120 cm

\$4,000

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

in ermine eyes (brown)

2024

oil on board

120 x 120 cm

\$4,000

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Cosmic betrachten

2024

oil on board

100 x 100 cm

\$4,000

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Happy birthday baby

2024

oil on board

100 x 100 cm

\$4,000

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Info graphic how to - shut the fuck up

2024

oil on board

100 x 100 cm

\$4,000



HAYLEY ARJONA

The crumbs of love

2024

oil on board

100 x 100 cm

\$4,000

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HAYLEY ARJONA

The jury

2024

oil on board

80 x 80 cm

\$3,000

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

No void incoming

2024

oil on board

70 x 65 cm

\$1,200

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

The ungrateful creation

2024

oil on board

70 x 60 cm

\$1,200

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Moon unit (green)

2024

oil on board

60 x 50 cm

\$1,200

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Moon unit (orange)

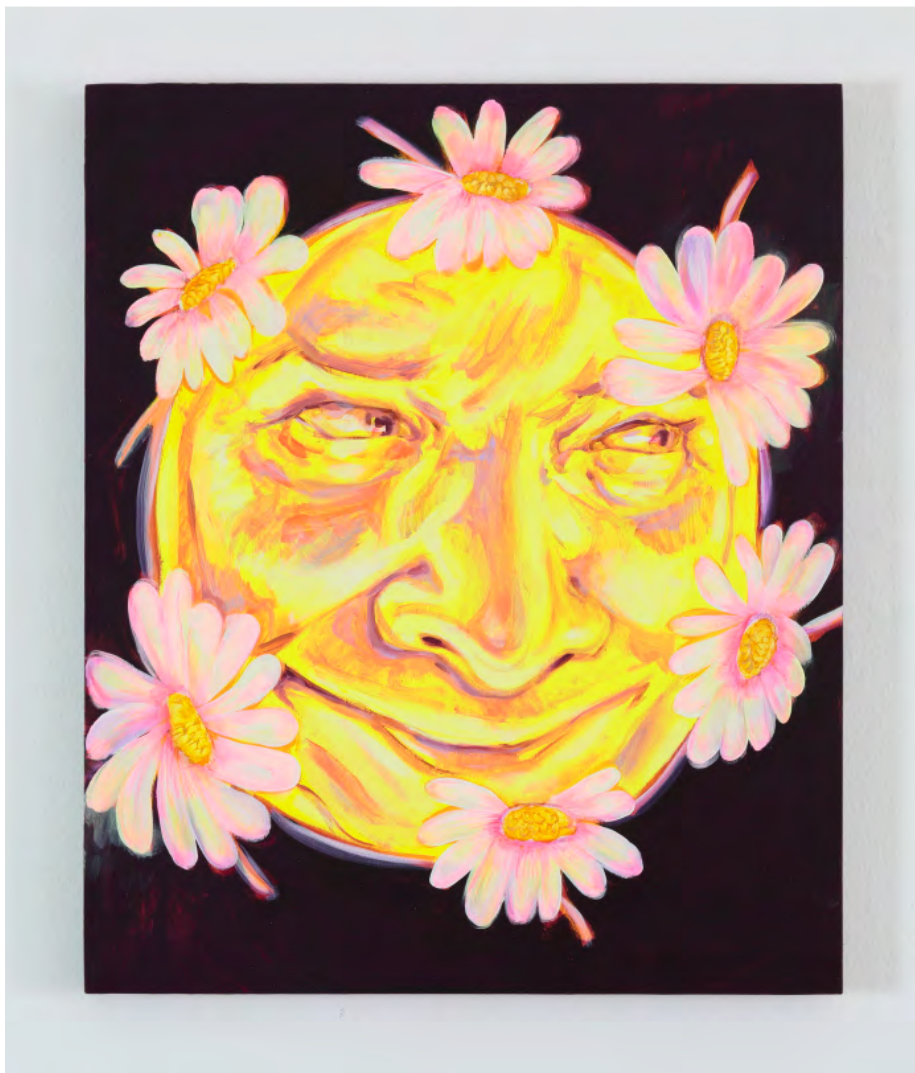
2024

oil on board

60 x 50 cm

\$1,200

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Moon unit (pink)

2024

oil on board

60 x 50 cm

\$1,200

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Black sun king no. 2

2023

oil on board

61 x 46 cm

\$1,200

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Black sun king no. 3

2023

oil on board

61 x 46 cm

\$1,200

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY



HAYLEY ARJONA

Rubedo

2024

oil on board

61 x 46 cm

\$1,200



HAYLEY ARJONA

Palace of answers

2023

glaze fired earthenware

40.5 x 33 x 26 cm

\$2,000



HAYLEY ARJONA

Wishing hell

2024

glaze fired earthenware

35 x 30 x 28 cm

\$2,000



HAYLEY ARJONA

Crocodile cradle

2024

glaze fired earthenware

34 x 22 x 18 cm

\$2,000



HAYLEY ARJONA

First born claybie

2024

glazed fired earthenware

17 x 26 x 20 cm

\$2,000



HAYLEY ARJONA

Claybie no. 2, three snakes

2024

glaze fired earthenware

12 x 35 x 13 cm cm

\$2,000



HAYLEY ARJONA

Cosmic betrachten

2024

glaze fired earthenware

20 x 30 x 16 cm

\$1,500



HAYLEY ARJONA

Hand of PAIN T

2024

glaze fired earthenware

25 x 23 x 8 cm

\$1,500



HAYLEY ARJONA

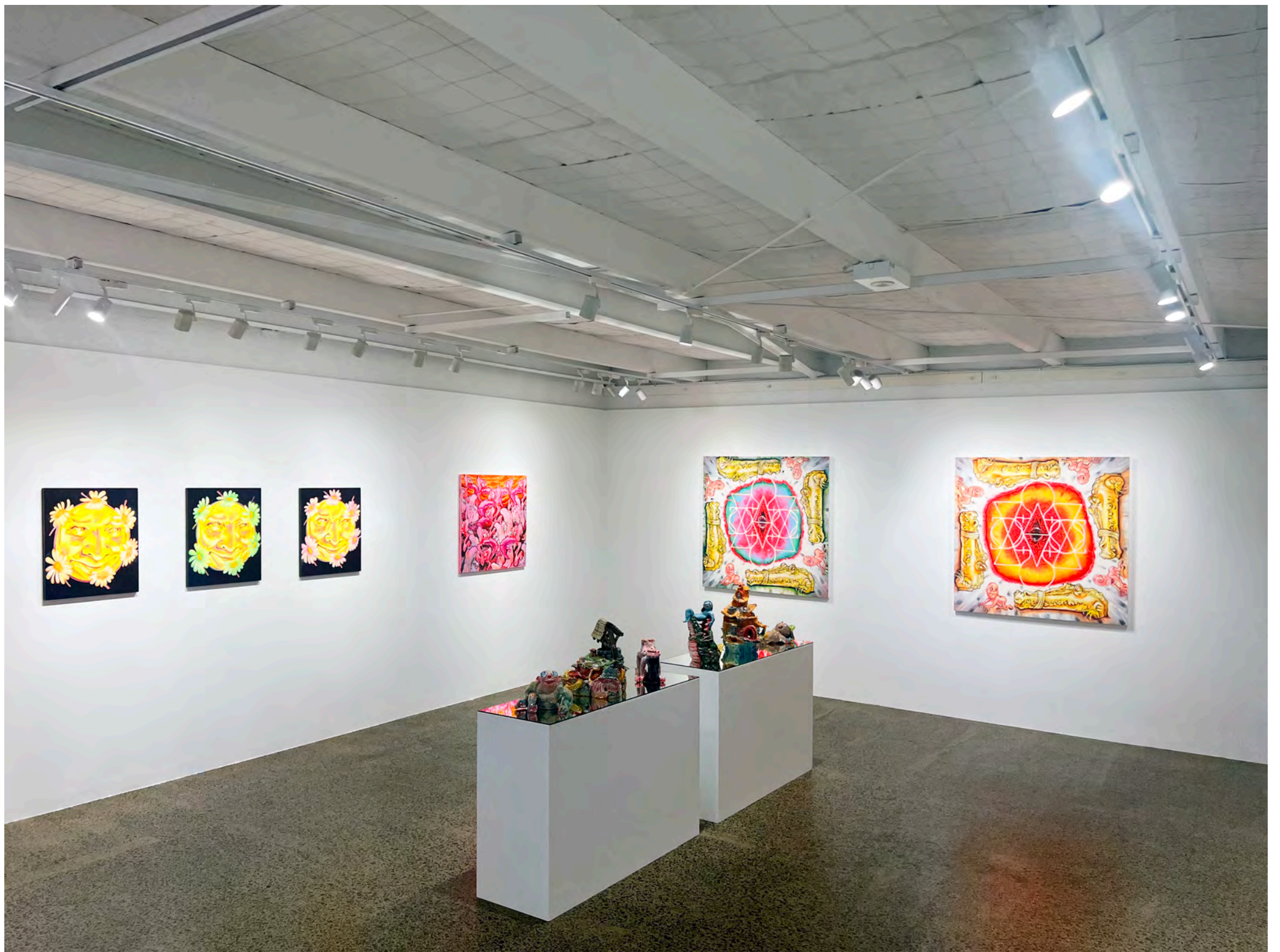
Janus jug

2024

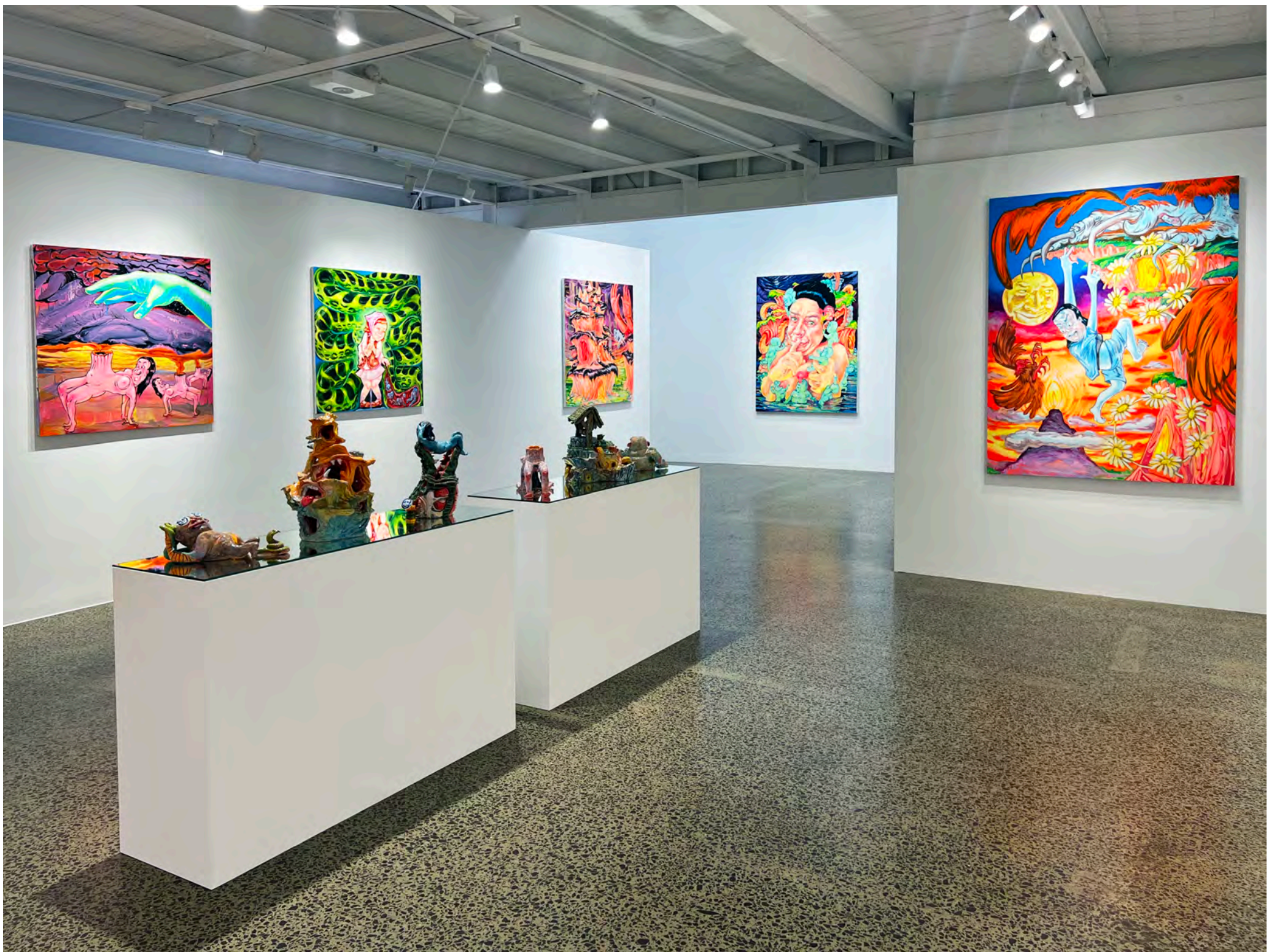
glaze fired earthenware

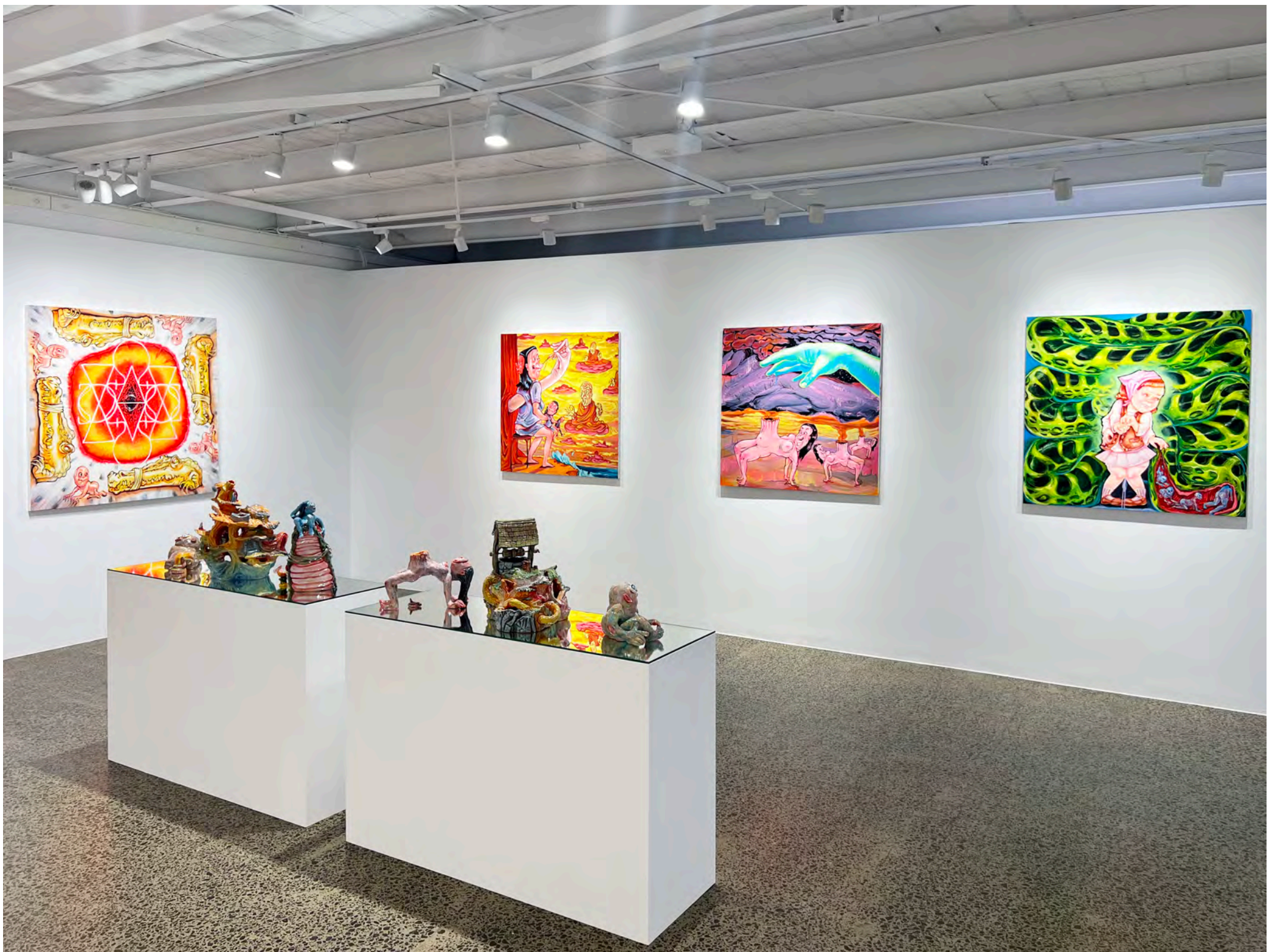
8 x 12 x 11 cm

\$500

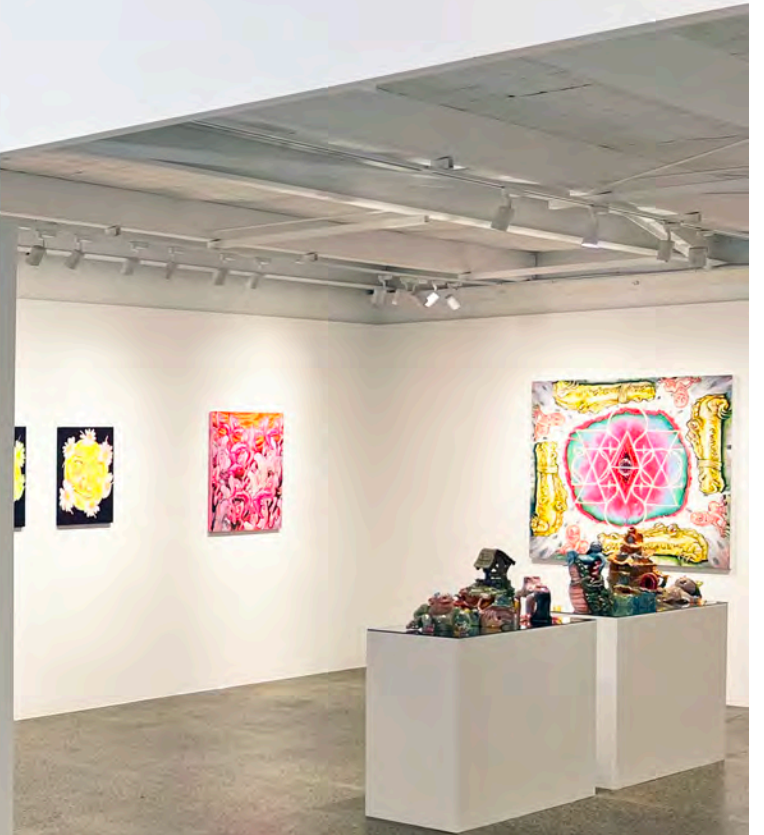












Hayley Arjona has a Masters of Art Therapy from La Trobe University (2020), a Masters in Fine Art from the Victorian College of the Arts (2000) and a Bachelor of Visual Arts with first class honours from the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia (1998). She has held solo exhibitions since 2000 in Melbourne and Sydney.

Hayley Arjona has been included in group exhibitions including NotFair, Melbourne (2021), Unfinished Business – on Art and Feminism at ACCA, Melbourne (2018), Identity and Desire at the Art Gallery of South Australia (2005), None more blacker touring to Geelong Gallery, Shepparton Art Gallery, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Global Arts Link, Latrobe Regional Gallery and Mildura Arts Centre; and Gold Card 1 and Cleanskin at the Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide South Australia (1999 and 1998). Her work has been exhibited internationally in Portugal.

Hayley Arjona is the recipient of Pilot Research Funding, School of Psychology and Public Health, Internal Grant Scheme, La Trobe University (2023), Australian Postgraduate Awards (1999, 2000), a South Australian Youth Arts Board artists in Studio Grant from the Experimental Art Foundation, South Australia (1999), the Corporation of the City of Adelaide Award, Helpmann Academy, South Australia (1999) and the John Christie Wright Memorial Prize for Painting, University of South Australia (1997). She has been a finalist in the Mosman Art Prize (2023), Alice Prize (2018), the Incinerator Art Prize (2018) and the Bruny Island Art Prize (2016). Arjona's work is held in the collections of the Art Gallery of South Australia and Artbank.

HAYLEY ARJONA

EDUCATION

- 2020 Masters of Art Therapy, La Trobe University, Bundoora Victoria.
- 2000 Masters of Fine Art, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne Victoria.
- 1998 Bachelor of Visual Arts - Honours 1st class. South Australian School of Art. University of South Australia Adelaide.
- 1996 Advanced Diploma of Applied and Visual Art, North Adelaide School of Art. North Adelaide. South Australia

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *The Fool*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Collingwood, Victoria.
- 2023 *QMNI*, Kyneton Stockroom, Kyneton, Victoria.
- 2022 *Soul Safari*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Collingwood, Victoria.
- 2019 *Caged in Flesh*, C3 Gallery, Abbotsford Victoria.
- 2017 *Overripe*, Trocadero Art Space, Footscray Victoria.
- 2016 *Sick-O-Delic*, CASPA, Castlemaine, Victoria.
- 2015 *A-holeistic Approach*, blank_space Gallery, Surry Hills, New South Wales.
Already Dead, C3 Gallery, Abbotsford Victoria.
- 2014 *Rock 'N' Roff Redneck*, CASPA, Castlemaine, Victoria.
- 2011 *The Ride*, Mad Gallery, Lancefield, Victoria.
- 2008 *Teatroom*, Boom Festival, Idanha a Nova, Portugal.
- 2002 *Harmoniums*, six24seven, Melbourne, Victoria.
- 2000 *Love Me*, PB Art Gallery, Swinburne University, Prahran Victoria.
Hayley Arjona, Penthouse and Pavement, Carlton, Victoria.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *Mosman Art Prize*, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, New South Wales.
- 2021 *NotFair Art Fair*, Windsor, Victoria.
It's Raining In Sunshine, Lon Gallery, Richmond Victoria.
- 2019 *Carny*, Neon Parc, Melbourne, Victoria.
Shit that I like, Nicholas Projects, Richmond, Victoria.
- 2017/18 *Unfinished Business - on art and feminism*, ACCA, Melbourne, Victoria.
- 2015 *Rave Diggers*, The Bearded Tit, Redfern NSW.
- 2005 *Identity and Desire*, Art Gallery of South Australia.
- 2002 *Painting Now II*, Kaliman Gallery, Paddington NSW.
None More Blacker, touring regional galleries Victoria.

Some Devil Between Us, Bus Gallery, Melbourne.

2001 *None More Blacker*, 200 Gertrude Street Gallery, Fitzroy Victoria.

2000 *She Looks Like She Don't Know Better*, La La Hi Prism videolabel, Stylee Collection, winter.

Trade, touring exhibition, regional galleries South Australia.

1999 *Gold Card 7*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide South Australia.

1998 *Cleanskin*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide South Australia

AWARDS PRIZES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

2023 Pilot Research Funding, School of Psychology and Public Health, Internal Grant Scheme, La Trobe University.

Finalist in Mosman Art Prize, Mosman Art Gallery, New South Wales, Australia.

2018 Finalist in the Alice Prize, Alice Springs Australia.

Finalist in the Incinerator Art Prize, Moonee Ponds, Victoria Australia.

2016 Finalist in the Bruny Island Art Prize, Tasmania Australia

1999/00 Australian Postgraduate Award. for Masters of Fine Art. Victorian College of the Arts.

administered by The University of Melbourne Scholarships Office.

1999 South Australian Youth Arts board Artists in Studios Grant, Experimental Art Foundation South Australia.

The Corporation of the City of Adelaide Award, Helpmann Academy, South Australia

1997 The John Christie Wright Memorial Prize for Painting, University of South Australia.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Artbank, Rosebery NSW.