

OPEN HOUSE

10 DEC - 17 JAN 2021

Co-curated by Ayesha Dharmabandu and Paul Zahra

Featuring work by artists Angela Hickey, Duain Kelaart, Stephanie Lenehan, Catherine Mackay, Dean Patchett (aka Tilter), Crystal Peterlin, Stephanie Prole, Michelle Ripari, Jeff San Agustin (aka Vigilante Creative), and Moreen Wellington Lyons

Art makes a house a home...

And you're invited over to ours, virtually; to discover the artists and creatives in our community.

This digital exhibition is a celebration of how much the arts community in Wyndham has grown while creating a space to talk about art, creativity and community.

Co-Curated by emerging curators and community members Ayesha Dharmabandu and Paul Zahra, OPEN HOUSE celebrates what makes Wyndham great and invites our artists and emerging curators in the community to create a home inside the virtual gallery walls.

Wyndham City acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Wyndham Art Gallery stands and we pay our respects to their elders, past and emerging.

Wyndham Art Gallery
Great Art. Deep West.

Front cover images (clockwise from top left) : Moreen Wellington Lyons - *On Land is Home* - 2019, Angela Hickey - *Commuter - Destination Unknown* - 2019, Stephanie Prole - *Small Window* - 2019, Michelle Ripari - *Dad's Beast* - 2015, Catherine MacKay - *Family Isolation* - 2020, Duain Kelaart - *Al Drago* - 2019
Image (Left) : Crystal Peterlin - *In Dreams unfold the Universe* - 2016 & *Graphics throughout by Dr. Megan Evans*



OPEN HOUSE

Curator's Note by
Dr. Megan Evans

Open House is a bit of an anomaly at present. We can't really open our houses at the moment. The gallery has had its doors closed since March due to COVID restrictions and this exhibition, as with many others we have had this year, has had to transform into something else. We had planned for comfy couches and conversations about art, situated amongst the work of our wonderful local artists, however this digital form allows viewers to find their own comfy couch to traverse the world of our artists.

We hope it inspires conversations in the households of Wyndham.



The ten artists who have been selected by our guest curators, hand in hand with our in-house curators, are Jeff San Agustin, Angela Hickey, Duain Kelaart, Stephanie Lenehan, Moreen Wellington Lyons, Catherine MacKay, Dean Patchett, Crystal Peterlin, Stephanie Prole, and Michelle Ripari.

The artistic life of Wyndham is growing, and OPEN HOUSE is an exhibition that celebrates this. Ayesha Dharmabandu and Paul Zahra are two community members and artists themselves, who have been active in developing the local arts mob through the artists co-operative RedWest. They have been mentored by myself and co-curator Caroline Esbenshade, who was one of the originators of RedWest, to discover and select the work on show. It is great to see members of our local community step up and be involved. Living and working in a locality is a great opportunity to help create your community allowing you agency in the places and spaces where you reside.

Ayesha and Paul have worked together to experience the difficulty and also the joy of curating. There are always many ways an exhibition can go. It is like building a house, you have to have the framework first and then there are so many choices to make, should you do a slick modern house or a 70's revival style. Once those decisions are made that determines the wall colours and the fittings. It is the same with selecting works for

Image (Left) : Jeff San Agustin (aka Vigilante) - *Alice in Wonderland* - 2020

Image (Right): Duain Kelaart - *Chupacabra – Gargoyle Hybrid* - 2020





FORD falcon

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Ripari

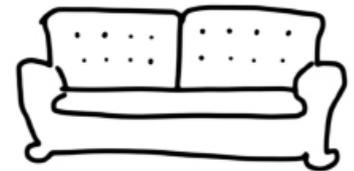
an exhibition. Choices are made by what goes with what and how the overall exhibition fits together. It is sometimes said that curating an exhibition is like making a work of art using other people's work. It all has to hang together.

This exhibition includes a wide variety of mediums, from video to papier-mâché to fine pencil drawing. Jeff San Agustin's works are heroic in nature. *Chadwick Forever* is no doubt a note to Chadwick Boseman who tragically passed away recently, being the much-loved star of Black Panther. In Jeff's image the character from the fictional film stands atop what could be a memorial stone carved of the man himself. He also reworks the fairy tale of Alice in Wonderland into a powerful modern-day woman. Catherine MacKay deals with the feelings of social isolation that we are all too familiar with at the moment in her work by that name. We see the crush of faces and pets all distorted somehow by the attempt to fit into the frame. Alternatively, her work *Sienna* shows a woman alone contemplating a plant, possibly the other equally difficult but different experience of being alone through isolation.

Moreen Wellington Lyons work speaks about connection to country. As a Jaadwa woman from Western Victoria living in Wyndham her connection to her land and community is evident in her beautiful painting, *Our Country is Home*.

Image (Left) : Michelle Ripari - *Dad's Beast* - 2015

Image (Right): Stephanie Prole - *Hotel Soap* - 2019





'Gariwerd' is the traditional name for the Grampians and her painting *Gariwerd Rainbow Serpent* seems to be a tribute to that country and sacred place.

A different sense of place is evoked in Stephanie Lenehan's photographs. *Inquietude 1* and *Inquietude at Grand Central Station*. Both include portraits of a young girl standing with an orange slash across her eyes. She stands alone in both photographs and the orange intervention in the black and white photograph seems almost violent, a paradox against her title. Perhaps it is a comment on the silence of personal reflection.

Both Michelle Ripari's pencil work and Duain Kelaart's papier-mâché sculptures hint at long hours lovingly toiled over their art practice. Michelle takes seemingly random slices of life and literally draws attention to them. *Dad's Beast* is a corner of what is presumably her father's car, a Ford Falcon. Both the image and the title bring up associations with loved old cars that hang around long after their due by date and their roadworthiness. *Discarded* is a close up of rubbish and Michelle's attention to detail takes something insignificant and gives meaning to it.

Duain has spent thousands of hours constructing *Al Drago* and *Chupacabra - Gargoyle Hybrid*. They are wonderfully wrought, and fabulous examples of the imagination bought to

Image (Left) : Catherine MacKay- *Sienna* - 2020

Image (Right): Jeff San Agustin (aka Vigilante Creative) - *Chadwick Forever* - 2020





life in 3D. It is always a pleasure for me to see such things that have the mark of the hand in them, not computer generated or 3D printed. Stephanie Prole's paintings, *Small Window* and *Hotel Soap* are as delicate as Duain's dragons are robust. Her deft use of acrylic to give us a glimpse of a dwelling including the damaged roof and cracked wall are masterful, as is the simple *Hotel Soap* image.

Crystal Peterlin has similarly mastered the digital world with her new age creations. There is a uniformity in her artwork that works well as a suite. She creates an otherworld that we can dream into with the replication of the image.

Dean Patchett (aka Tilter) is a graffiti artist with a difference. He takes photographs of trains and then does his graffiti on the photographs. I guess we could call him a virtual graffer. His work is a fine example of that genre. His designs are dynamic and he provides another way to practice his art without getting arrested.

It's a pleasure to see these artists bloom in our virtual OPEN HOUSE exhibition. We look forward to the day when we can actually open our doors and have them all visit the gallery to make themselves known and celebrate our local creativity in what has been a challenging time.



Image(Left) : Michelle Ripari - *Discarded* - 2016

Image (Right): Catherine MacKay - *Family Isolation* - 2020

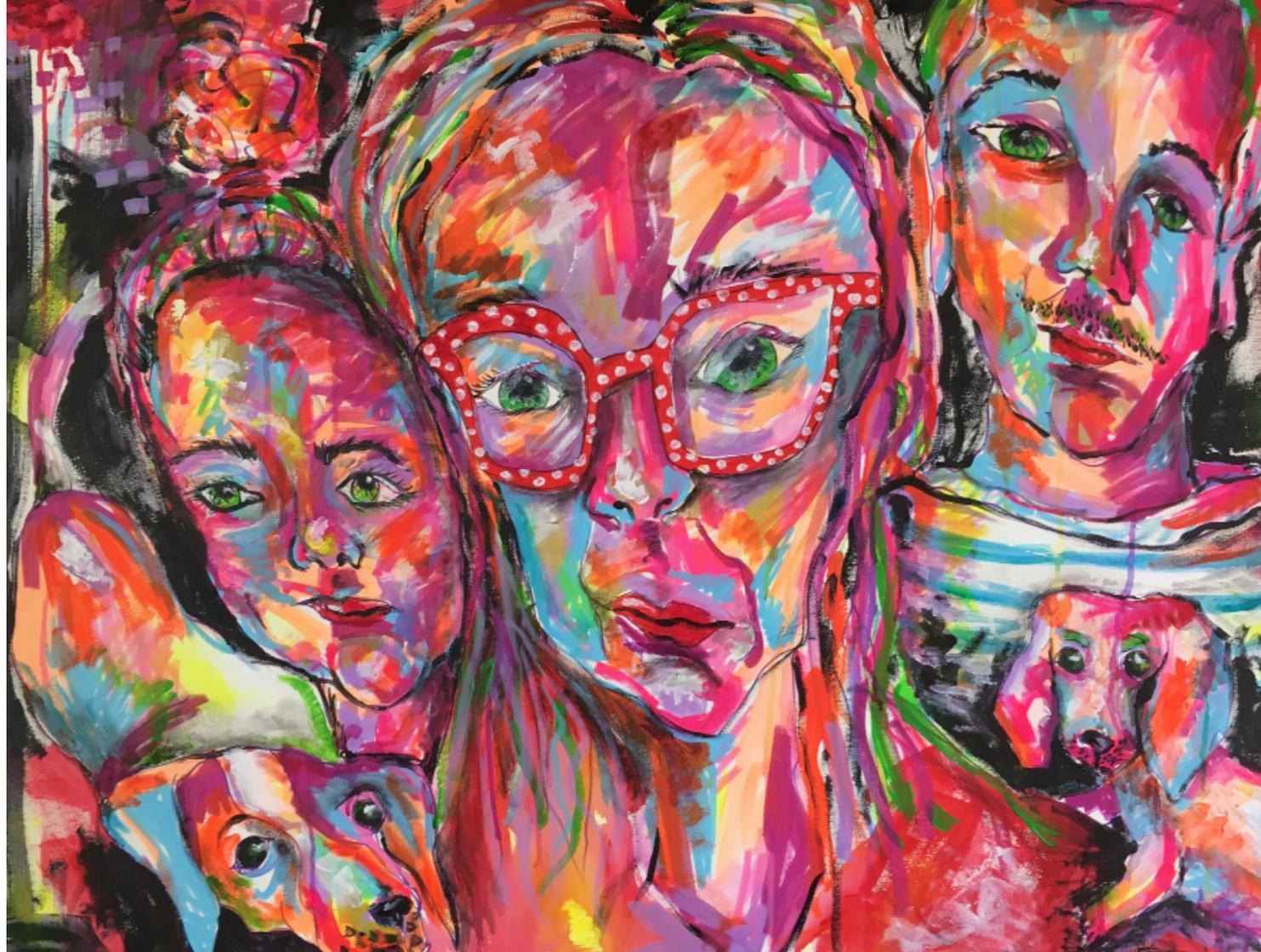




Image: Dean Patchette (aka Tilter) - *Brush 2 Melbourne* - 2020







Open House

Catalogue Essay by Fatima Measham

Fatima Measham is a writer and speaker based in Wadawurrung country. She was formerly a consulting editor, columnist and podcast producer for Eureka Street, where she focused on issues of social justice, identity and politics. Her work has appeared in Meanjin, the Guardian, America magazine and other publications.

In real estate terms an open house refers to a property that has been put on the market, and the times in which it may be examined. The permission rests on a potential transaction. Space, time and means. These are dimensions of privilege in a political economy that has always favoured homeowners and landlords.

An 'open' house can thus be a contradiction, pointing instead to selective access. It is pitched at those in a position to buy and have time and mobility to consider their choices. It is worth reflection in municipalities such as Wyndham, which has seen housing developments spread as far as the fringe.

It goes without saying that it is not necessarily 'open house' if you are poor, Indigenous, immigrant, or young and queer. This makes us stop short. But it

Image: Moreen Wellington Lyons - Gariwerd Rainbow Serpent - 2019



also compels us to push past. What if we re-examined points of access? What happens when we unlock doors? Is there another open-house model that aligns more closely with the nature of our relationships and context as human beings?

Some of the answers can be found in how the term is used in settings like art, education, community, and even our home. A public exhibition, a school fête, an invitation to iftar at the local mosque, a housewarming for a young couple: these come closer to a truly open house because they are not conditional. Permission to enter does not rest on a transaction, but on the possibility of encounter, a shared experience. It is enough to come as you are.

This is revealed on a few levels in OPEN HOUSE. It is an eclectic collection put together by emerging curators Ayesha Dharmabandu and Paul Zahra. From restrained works by Stephanie Lenehan, Michelle Ripari and Jeff San Agustin, to the exuberant visions of Crystal Peterlin, Catherine Mackay, and Dean Patchett, the pieces in the virtual exhibition are personal – snapshots of internal moments during a period of acutely shared experience.

Image(Left) : Stephanie Lenehan - *Inequitude at Grand Central Station* - 2020

Image (Rlght): Saphanie Prole - *Small Window* - 2019

Each piece is a room in itself: distinctive, detailed and full of story, such as the works from Moreen Wellington Lyons, Duain Kelaart and Stephanie Prole. All together the collection makes for a provocative mix, where mundane and profound elements together create something different.

The curation, in other words, has simulated a house – eliciting in us the sense of humility, curiosity and thrill that we feel when someone opens the door to somewhere new. It is a terrific opportunity to get to know the growing community of local artists in Wyndham. They will be instrumental to the post-pandemic vibrance of the city.

Open House invites us to consider deeper concepts of home, the way it is analogous to art and how both offer a radical model for society.





Whatever we think of a house – the nostalgia, familiarity, and drama – it is first a physical space bound by walls, a roof, and floor. It exists on the material plane. When we hold this idea in the context of material needs, we start realising how such spaces relate to justice.

Having a house, for instance, means having privacy. Having privacy, in turn, means having opportunity to act without interference: to eat, sleep, relieve ourselves. It lets us pray and create. Our relationships, by and large, are nurtured in private.

That is what a door does. It marks space behind which we can be safely vulnerable. Since vulnerability is our default state as human beings, home becomes as fundamental as breathing. These dynamics are reflected in art – the making of it requires conditions that resemble home. It is where we feel most able to be ourselves. It is the site of our longing and struggle.

Both art and home also carry an invitation. The door becomes a gateway rather than a barrier, framing a potentially transformative encounter. We understand this every time we are moved by a piece of art, music, literature, film and dance. It is the sensation of being let in, or of recognising something familiar in the way something has been arranged. Sometimes we just happen to have the same ‘furniture’ as someone else.

In a society where there are fewer and fewer places left where we are let in without some sort of credential – a paid ticket, a credit card, some form of identification, or a pre-booked appointment – it is important to hold on to the idea that our humanity requires no validation. That not all our encounters have to be transactional.

The open house is in fact one of the oldest models of human value, carried from ancient civilisations into the medieval age. Hospitality was both the norm and a sacred duty,



breaches of which were divinely punished. In Greek mythology, gods would disguise themselves as ordinary travelers to test humans.

It is a value borne out of recognising interdependence: an obligation to extend hospitality to others, as we may ourselves be in such need another day. But it also points to our fundamental human frailty. We are all travelers, who sometimes look to an open door as night falls.

Past that door, both the host and the guest become vulnerable, as proximity holds potential for harm as well as good. Hospitality – like art – thus offers a radically more hopeful narrative about ourselves. It rests on mutual honesty and tenderness.

Victoria is emerging carefully from months of a tough lockdown. It is a good time to reconsider the ways we think about home, and the values that can be drawn from the 'open house' as practice.

Who are we not seeing in our own spaces? Where have we kept doors closed, or installed unreasonable hurdles? How do we treat people after we let them in? Or, to bring it back to art, how much longer will we keep ourselves from seeing other strokes, palettes, and dimensions?

These are important questions to ask in a country that continues to lock out First Nations and seaborne refugees, and fails to address the barriers of racism, poverty, and inequality. Open house? Whose house?





Go Deeper:

A series of experiences
that offer further insight
into the exhibition

