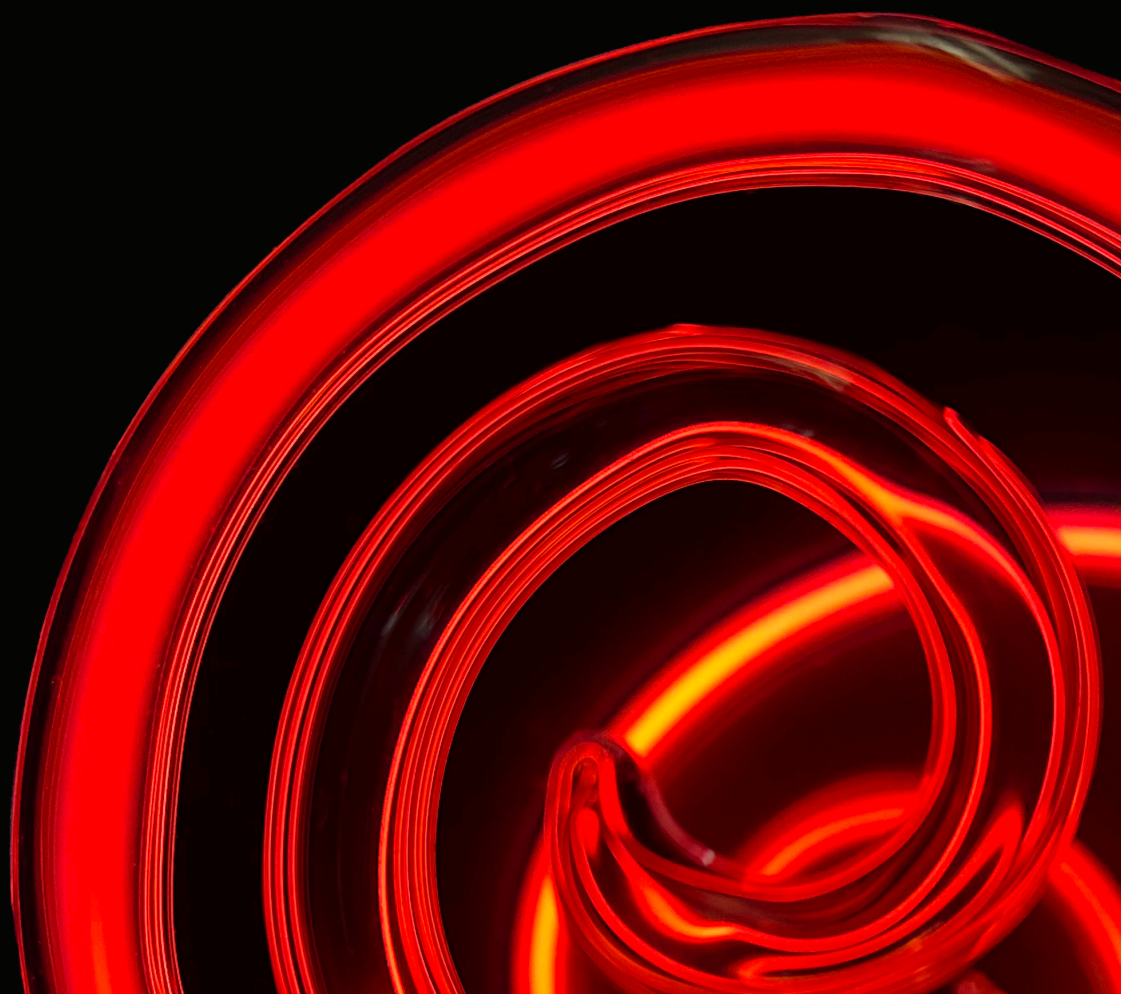




ARTefacts

October 2024 - March 2025

THE ANU
CLASSICS
MUSEUM



The ARTefacts Project

Co-Curators Georgia Pike-Rowney and Julian Laffan

The ARTefacts Project engages contemporary artists and scholars completing higher degree research in the creation of new works that respond to the collection of the ANU Classics Museum. Co-curated by artist, educator and PhD candidate Julian Laffan, and Friends' Lecturer in Classics and Classics Museum Curator Dr Georgia Pike-Rowney, the project enables participating artists to animate, activate and interrogate the collection through the lens of contemporary art practice and scholarship.

The exhibition displays the contemporary works throughout, and amongst, the ancient collection of artefacts in the museum, with the aim of creating a direct dialogue between ancient and modern works. The creative responses spark new questions and debates concerning material, meaning, value, and narrative. The aim of the ARTefacts project is to intentionally recontextualise artefacts in order to investigate the politics of identity and materiality from the perspective of makers. Within the museum context, creative practice as a research methodology connects contemporary artists, scholars and audiences with new dialogues, and thus, new futures, for ancient artefacts and collections.

Participating artists have been supported by the Friends of the Classics Museum Creative Bursary towards the new creative and written works. The exhibition launch event is supported by the Research School of Humanities and the Arts (RSHA).

Acknowledgments

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Participating artists Harriet Schwarzrock, Aidan Hartshorn, Susie Russell and Robert Nugent
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Friends of the ANU Classics Museum
Research School of Humanities and the Arts
CASS Building Operations
HAL Admin Team
Benedict Laffan
Martin Rowney
Drill Hall Gallery
National Museum of Australia





Image: Maggie Otto

Treasures of the Wolgal Tribe

Aidan Hartshorn, 236 PI (Post Invasion)

Lapides Aurata of Hartshorn: Two variations of gilded and knapped stone from Red Hill station made in Wolgalu (Walgalu, Wolgal) Country, South-Eastern NSW.

Gilded Belongings of the Wolgal Tribe: Eucalyptus bark, Eucalyptus wood, gold leaf – Wereboldera, Dumuth (Tumut)

The Diamond Shard of Wolgal: slumped and plaster-etched glass with stringy bark relief – Wereboldera, Dumuth (Tumut)

Artist Statement: *Treasures of the Wolgal Tribe* is an extension of a body of work undertaken in 2018. Exploring the aesthetics of archaeological practices and modes of public display, this collection of cultural Wolgalu objects utilises the parameters of archaeology to form a spatial disruption of the histories that it has perpetuated to be the canon. The gilded Wolgalu objects have infiltrated and invaded the museum space, placed in situ amongst 'classical' objects from other cultures, places, people and time.

The pseudo-archaeology of the Wolgalu items implies the questioning of the authority that archaeology holds over the historical canon, and the value traditionally placed upon objects in museums. I'm always brought back to question 'If First Nations People of Australia utilised gold and other "precious" materials, would we have been seen differently?'



Artist Biography: Aidan is a Walgalu (Wolgal, Wolgalu)/ Wiradjuri man whose Ancestral land resides in the High Country of Australia, parts of the Snowy Mountains in the Kosciuszko National Park, and Riverina region of NSW. His cross-disciplinary practice challenges settler-colonial histories tied to his Aboriginal and European ancestry and identity. Using both natural and industrial materials, his practice addresses the impacts of colonial settlement and industrialisation effecting Walgalu and Wiradjuri Country and culture. Aidan's career has seen him work between both museum and gallery collections and contexts as the Wesfarmers Assistant Curator at the National Gallery of Australia. He is currently a Lecturer of Contemporary Art in the ANU School of Art and Design and undertaking his Master's degree.



Image: Robert Nugent

If only you could see what I have seen with your eyes.

Robert Nugent, 2024 CE

Video loop 16'; stolen 1st century bronze portrait head, possibly of the empress Livia; excerpts from Dziga Vertov's Man With A Movie Camera (1929); eye acting: Georgia Pike-Rowney.



Artist Statement: This short film responds to, and features, a bronze portrait head of a woman dating from the early 1st century CE, possibly depicting the Empress Livia. It was stolen from the ANU Classics Museum in 2004. In her darkest moments I imagine she still holds tightly to her memories of growing up in 1st century BCE Rome. With all Livia must have seen since then, I can't imagine being stolen from a cabinet in the ANU Classics Museum would have phased her. It would be nice to know what happened to her after that.

Bronze portrait head of a woman

1970.04 (Stolen)

Rome, early 1st century CE

This fine bronze was the most important piece in the ANU Classics Museum collection until it was stolen in 2004. Given its quality, it may depict the Empress Livia, wife of Augustus (57 BCE – 29 CE) or the Emperor's sister Octavia (born c. 36 BCE). Purchased by ANU at the exhibition 'Three thousand years of classical art' in the David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney, 1970, Catalogue no. 136. Stolen December 2004, insurance claim settled. Listed on the global database of stolen art, the Art Loss Register. This object has never surfaced since the theft.



Artist Biography: Rob is a Canberra-based director, writer and cinematographer whose enquiries often document situations where humans bump into the non-human world. His films employ and critique various documentary forms. His last three films came out of expeditions to remote locations in Indonesia, Guinea, Iraq, Ethiopia, Egypt, Tanzania and Australia. His 2007 film, 'End of the Rainbow', won international film awards and screened in Europe and the US.



Image: Harriet Schwarzrock

Spiralling

Harriet Schwarzrock, 2024 CE

Laboratory glass tubing, ionised neon gas, electrical potential from high-voltage transformer. Responding to 8th century bronze spiral brooch.

Artist Statement: I have always been drawn to the simultaneous sense of expansion and contraction that a spiral represents, with its twisting and unravelling actions. These spiralling vials were formed in response to an exquisite 8th century BCE bronze brooch (pictured below, ANU Classics Museum 1980.12). The regularly twisting metal reveals the skill of the maker. Rather than solid bronze, these transparent tubular glass forms are hollow, encasing inert neon gas at a low pressure. Under certain conditions, these specially prepared contents have the potential to flicker and pulse, revealing a reddish neon glow.

This project invited a response to an artefact from the ANU Classics Museum. I wondered about the maker, how they too would have formed their object with fire, and wondered if they too had a special affinity with spirals. I imagined how this brooch may have been worn, clasping a woollen cloak, holding in warmth. I thought about how the action of removing clothing can create friction, enough to make our hair static and even create a small electrical spark. I have experimented with these neon spirals in the dark – surprisingly they do momentarily glow when rubbed across certain clothing.

The spiralling form repeats itself in nature. Perhaps the maker of this brooch referenced a far-off galaxy or observed the geometry of an intricate shell. The spiral is a form that inherently draws far distances closer, as it curls around and onto itself. For me it is a form that collapses boundaries, curls distances and changes directions in response to surrounding forces.



Artist Biography: Harry is a visual artist and glass maker interested in biological systems and connectivity. Drawn to glass' ability to contain and give form to the invisible, her recent works have embraced interactive illumination to describe the subtle electricity within our bodies. Her work is widely collected, and she has won a number of prestigious awards and residencies.



Image: Julian Laffan

The Eye of the Tree: Reading with *Platanus acerifolia*

Julian Laffan, 2024 CE

Inked remnants from a Canberra street tree; London plane woodblock (Platanus acerifolia), printed on tengucho paper, waxed cord, perspex. Responding to 1st- 2nd century CE writing tablet.

Artist Statement: The split across the top panel of the Egyptian writing tablet (pictured below, ANU Classics Museum 1973.01) forms a shape reminiscent of a curved mountain. The line climbs quietly across the surface and this weathered mark, an indication of the long life of a wooden article. This form is visible on both panels, revealing that each belongs to the same tree. The split recalls the tree as a living being, following the contour of a branch reaching outward from the trunk, locating the block within the once living tree.

The ancient tablet is a record of a handheld and portable writing system not unlike the iPad and stylus of today. Inscriptions upon the fragile surface of the wax are the lessons of a student from a distant past, but the marks of the maker are also visible. On the reverse are the incidental scratches and marks made by movement over time. The handwritten replication of Greek text in wax pre-dates the technology of printmaking with a woodblock, which transformed the ways in which information could be shared. The woodblock is a memorial surface of inscription, and, as printed matter, remembers and communicates multiple stories: that of language, of learning and the life of the tree.

In response I explore the traces of the significant, living and animate tree, and trace the fine medullary rays in the grain. The ancient tablet is likely a plane tree (*Platanus orientalis*) and this companion piece is made from a London plane (*Platanus acerifolia*) that was once a Canberra street tree. The marks seen on both iterations are indicative of human and more-than-human inscriptions: a borer-eaten track works its way across, and into, the wood, a remnant knot from a branch can be tracked on the surface, as can the chisel marks of the human hand. The grain of timber is a visual record of time connecting the past and the present as new futures for thinking materially.



Artist Biography: Julian Laffan is an artist, educator and curator based in Braidwood. He specialises in contemporary woodcuts and drawings, using these mediums to create sculptural objects and works on paper that explore themes of history and identity. His works are in the collection of the Australian Print Council, Canberra Museum and Gallery, and significant private collections.

We are suspended in intimate moments,
invited to revalue
the simple and mundane
as disarmingly dramatic.



Of Pots and Prams

Susie Russell, 2024 CE

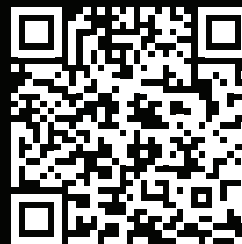
Written response to a ceramic series by Wendy Wood from 1993 CE. Text and silhouette in vinyl.

Artist Statement: In 1993, ceramicist Wendy Wood's modern terracotta vessels went on display in the ANU Classics Museum, joining the ancient ceramics that had inspired their creation. To retell ancient stories and convey their emotional power, Wood photographed friends engaged in domestic life and labour, and strangers moving through public spaces in Canberra. Wood also staged and photographed dramatic scenes, her friends conveying characters with expressive body language.

These figures walk, play, and embrace across blank terracotta backgrounds which variously invoke the office, the park, and home. They stride, smile, and scowl. They lean into and away from one another, hanging or held together as intimate groups: families, lovers, friends, foes. Using silkscreen printing, Wood transferred the images onto carefully replicated ancient Greek forms: the amphora (storage jar), kylix (drinking cup), and lekythos (oil flask). Some vessels are whole, while others are fragments; in each case, the photographic scenes – the stories – are intact. In bearing these stories, the vessels become relics of relation and reproduction.

Since their installation three decades ago, Wood's vessels have invited closer and second looks. Drawing upon work related to visual conventions of kinship, navigating fatherhood, and the stroller as an object lesson, I reflect on how Wood's vessels – in particular the fragmented lekythos depicting 'Mother pushing stroller, and walking child' – inspired my own second look at family, gender, and preciousness.

The full text of Russell's written response is available here:



Artist Biography: Susie is an interdisciplinary researcher and GLAM-sector worker with longstanding interests in embodiment and gender. As a Visual Medical Humanities PhD candidate, Susie is exploring non-gestational experiences of pregnancy and birth, drawing on visual culture, as well as histories of anthropology and medicine.



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