

## Exciting Australian art to buy for your home

By Amy Campbell, *The Australian*, 13 January, 2021.

*50 works by 50 artists — all for sale. Presenting The Australian's inaugural summer exhibition, a showcase of the most exciting young Australian artists working today.*

Life has changed. But the desire to surround ourselves with beauty and creativity endures, and has arguably deepened. And while accessing fine art in traditional ways – chiefly, visiting galleries here and abroad – has been disrupted, for many involved in this industry it has been a period of innovation that has spurred new and inclusive ways of viewing, understanding and buying art.

It's this moment of evolution that has inspired The Australian's Summer Exhibition — a showcase of sculptures, paintings, photographs and works on paper. Beautiful to look at, it's a celebration of some of the best and brightest artists working today. Every work included is also for sale.

All 50 pieces have been selected because they signify what's happening in Australian art and culture right now.

So, what is happening right now? The primary art market in Australia is experiencing a small boom. For obvious reasons, flying to international art fairs is off the cards, and this has led Australian collectors to rediscover a local market packed full of prodigious works by tomorrow's household names.

It means there's a renewed focus on Australian stories and more opportunities for emerging artists to have their work seen, as gallerists and buyers look toward home. It's this time of risk-taking and yes, even optimism that our summer exhibition represents.

Searching for artworks by 50 of the most promising names in Australian art right now was a straightforward enough task. But in addition to introducing you to these artists, we wanted to display artworks you can actually buy. So we added the 'on sale' factor to our curatorial criteria and threw ourselves into the search. Two weeks later, we had a long list of about 100 artworks. All of them were by exemplary artists, the difficulty of whittling them down became increasingly clear.

Ceramics was one area we were particularly excited to highlight. In recent years, the medium has dropped its craft-like associations to emerge as a collector's darling. This is thanks in no small part to the boundary-pushing works of ceramicists like Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran, Lynda Draper and Aaron C. Carter — to name just a few.

Ebony Russell is another talented ceramicist gaining recognition for her otherworldly sculptures. Made from porcelain, her vessels could pass as wedding cakes. But while they appear delicate on the outside — each piping of porcelain is applied with such precision — Russell's pieces are also represent a sense of divine feminine strength.

From ReadingRoom, a young Naarm/Melbourne-based gallery with a very hip roster of artists, we selected a work by Aaron C. Carter. A multidisciplinary creative whose practise explores the gulf between painting and sculpture, we chose to feature his wonderfully organic clay work called, 'Clops'.

"A feature of Carter's creative process is an ongoing exploration of the space between objects: using fixing points and weaving materials with excess and lightness, to emphasis the slippage of connecting forms, play with pictorial space and layer his image making." writes Olivia Radonich, the founder and director of ReadingRoom.

When it came to painting, our intention was to highlight a wide spectrum of mediums and styles.

This led us to Tom Polo's expressive canvasses, Lucy O'Doherty's rose-tinted realism and the powerful storytelling of Mia Boe, Badtjala/Burmese artist from Brisbane who records and rewrites Indigenous histories with her paintings.

Otis Hope Carey was another obvious choice. A proud Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung man, he spent years competing on the professional surfing circuit before picking up a paintbrush professionally. His work is distinctly contemporary in style, yet it's grounded in ancient Indigenous symbolism. "I try and keep it as simple as possible, but keep the stories really connected to spirituality," Carey recently told *The Australian*.

"When I see my art I see my family and songs, dancing... it's hard to explain because there's just so much to it for me."

Elsewhere, you'll see an evocative portrait by Sudanese-born, Melbourne/Naarm-based photographer Atong Atem, who was recently invited to exhibit as part of the National Gallery of Victoria's Triennial — and she's only 29.

If your taste tends more towards the monochromatic, you might like 'Burnt Banksia #2' by Laura Jones, a Sydney-based artist and Archibald Prize finalist, or 'epigraph' by Kirtika Kain, whose practise seeks to re-contextualise ordinary, everyday materials like bitumen and wax.

"I enjoy creating a unique Dalit expression, imagining what our ancient material culture would look like if it had survived, if it were valued and displayed," says the artist, who was born in Delhi before moving to Sydney as a child.

In finalising the collection we have been guided by Alana Kushnir, independent curator and founder of Guest Work Agency, a pioneering Australian arts law, curatorial and consulting platform.

Kushnir, who is currently heading up the Serpentine Gallery's new R & D Platform Legal Lab, is an experienced collector herself.

"I'm a supporter of having a balanced art collection," she says, nodding to the depth of work featured in our summer exhibition.

Kushnir also has some sensible tips for buyers. For example, if you're interested in purchasing an artwork, it's best not to approach the artist directly.

"If an artist is represented by a gallery, they would expect you to purchase their work through that gallery." Another trap for the uninitiated: freight, packing materials and other extraneous costs tend not to be included in the cost of the artwork, she says. Framing is only included if specified in the work's description. "Before buying, always ask about any additional costs you may need to pay."

"If you have a specific place in mind for the artwork (although you don't necessarily need to!) consider whether the location has any characteristics that might impact on how the artwork can be displayed," adds Kushnir. "For example, you should avoid displaying photographs, works on paper and most paintings where there is direct exposure to sunlight, fluorescent light and heat, as these elements can cause an artwork to fade and discolour." Noted.

The works in *The Australian's* Summer Exhibition range from \$1,000 up to \$23,000 in price. This is indicative of the primary market right now, which, despite the effects of Covid-19, appears to be faring relatively well.

"My feeling is that things are doing pretty well behind the scenes," says Alana Kushnir, the founder and director of Guest Work Agency, a pioneering curatorial and arts law platform based in Melbourne. "There's still a very big demand for good artists. Because instead of spending money on travel or dinners out, we're thinking about buying art."

See something you like? Many of the 24 galleries that represent the artists in our exhibition will happily set up a FaceTime viewing appointment, and send you detailed images of the work. And if you can afford to fork out up front (it's okay, we see you), don't feel like you're priced out of the market. Again, many of the galleries you see here are affiliated with Art Money, an Australian fin-tech company that created a buy-now-pay-later model for the commercial arts world.

When lockdowns forced physical galleries to close, digital platforms like Art Money enabled collectors to continue buying works online. The service allows buyers to pay for artwork in 10 interest-free payments, while it pays the commercial gallery for the art up-front.

According to its CEO Paul Becker, Art Money recorded a notable increase in sales during 2020, even doubling year on year sales in some months.

"Change is hard in any industry, and ironically the art market is one of the most conservative," Becker notes. "Covid-19 has accelerated that change [to online] as the art world belatedly embraces best practice in tech and innovation from other industries." Becker says that since the pandemic began, galleries have been signing up for affiliation with Art Money daily. Today, 1260 galleries are partnered with the service worldwide.

And if you're not in the market — if all you want is to escape, be entertained and maybe gain renewed perspective, we hope you can find that here, too. Because in a time of great uncertainty it's a fact that remains unshakeable: that's what art is for.

A note on the curatorial process...

Our vision for this exhibition was to present a cohesive display of artworks that felt reflective of what's happening in contemporary Australian art today. We wanted to highlight the artists that are shaping the Zeitgeist — the names collectors might have on their radar, if not already hanging on their walls.

Furthermore, we wanted the works included to be on sale, because the best way to support our artists is by buying their work.

Once we had this loose criteria in place, we threw ourselves into the search. We contacted galleries, spoke to collectors and spent many afternoons marvelling at the catalogues of works we received in return.

Eventually we had our long list, but turning it into a shorter one was proving hard. This is when we involved a guest curator, founder and director of Guest Work Agency Alana Kushnir, who knows the intricacies of the art market like the back of her hand.

Kushnir's input helped our final selection take shape, as she encouraged us to get more adventurous and look to artists like Kirtika Kain and Sarah Contos, who are pushing the boundaries of their respective mediums and creating conversations in the process.

The 50 artworks you see here form the culmination of our search. They are by a diverse group of artists from all corners of the country, and they are indicative of the depth of work you might find on the primary art market today.

We hope that you enjoy viewing the works on display as much as we enjoyed choosing them. And please, if you'd like to inquire about any of the works you see here, hit the link in the description at the bottom of the particular work. This will take you to the website of the gallery that represents the artist. From there, the gallery staff will be only too happy to help you out.