BUXTON CONTEMPORARY

30 OCT 2026
– 24 APR 2027

a / part

HODA AFSHAR

TUESDAY TO SATURDAY
ALWAYS FREE

Buxton Contemporary
The University of Melbourne
Cnr Southbank Bvd & Dodds St
Southbank Victoria

University of Melbourne Museums and Collections

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

a/part brings together photographic and video projects by acclaimed artist Hoda Afshar. Its grouping of works, made across an eight-year period and alongside collaborations with Vernon Ah Kee and Behrouz Boochani, explore the experiences of individuals and communities whose lives have been affected by policies of exclusion. This includes Indigenous children who have been incarcerated across the country, men who have been detained by the Australian government at Manus Island's Regional Processing Centre, and individuals who have called out alleged institutional wrongdoing across government departments and agencies.

Centring on their stories, the works and their subjects confront us with the forces that determine who is permitted to speak, to be seen and be heard, and who is excluded from the political order. They ask what leads us to see and accept some form of violence as normal. By foregrounding resistance and struggle against these systems, the works invite us to see through these ways of seeing – to see things differently.

Code Black / Riot (2025), *Agonistes* (2020) and *Remain* (2018) ask us to look beyond the language of policy and bureaucracy. In doing so, these works reveal the tension between making

experiences visible and protecting those who have the courage to tell these stories. Collectively, they trace aspects of the contemporary history of Australia's carceral system, and critique the ways systems of power and control target, criminalise and punish certain people and communities. Afshar's new video *Shafaq* شفق premiered here, shifts the focus closer to home, reflecting on her experience of watching war unfold from afar, and away from her family in Iran.

a/part is an invitation to attend to the question of what holds us together, and what keeps us apart.

Content warning:

Please be advised that this exhibition contains images of people who have passed away. There are references to the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia, and to Australia's off-shore detention, particularly the experiences of those seeking asylum who have been detained on Manus Island. There are first-hand accounts of racism, and physical and institutional violence in these places, alongside discussions of suicide and self-harm. This content may be distressing for some audiences, and may not be suitable for children.

HERITAGE GALLERY

Hoda Afshar

Portrait #01 – #16
from *Code Black / Riot (Portraits)* series 2025
inkjet prints

Courtesy of Hoda Afshar and Milani Gallery

Behrouz Boochani

The Horizon is the Host of Colours 2025
text

Courtesy of Behrouz Boochani

Co-commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney and the University of Melbourne. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body. It was also supported by Buxton Contemporary Circle, with assistance from the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

This project was developed through a series of community visits, relational dialogue and time on Country, facilitated and supported by First Nations-led advocacy organisation Change the Record with additional support from YETI (Youth Empowered Towards Independence).

GALLERY ONE

Hoda Afshar
Vernon Ah Kee
Behrouz Boochani

Code Black / Riot 2025
multi-channel digital video, colour, sound
looped 33 mins

Director: Hoda Afshar
Producers: Vernon Ah Kee, Hoda Afshar

Cinematography: James Wright
Editors: Hoda Afshar, James Wright
Sound design: Byron Dean, Timothy Johannessen
Colourist: Peter Hatzipavlis
Research: Vernon Ah Kee, Hoda Afshar, Behrouz Boochani
Cultural advisors: Change the Record, YETI, Vernon Ah Kee
Music by: Timothy Johannessen

Courtesy of Hoda Afshar and Milani Gallery

Vernon Ah Kee

Code Black 2025
acrylic on canvas (nine panels)

Courtesy of Vernon Ah Kee and Milani Gallery

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Code Black / Riot

Code Black / Riot is a series by Hoda Afshar, artist Vernon Ah Kee and writer and human rights defender Behrouz Boochani that responds to the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia. Their collaboration reflects a shared belief that this mass incarceration is a crisis that demands not only national attention, but collective action. Indigenous children between 10–17 years of age make up only six per cent of their age group, yet are twenty times more likely to be imprisoned in Australia.

Created with the support of Change the Record and Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI), Hoda Afshar's photographic portraits are of children with lived experience of incarceration. The participants were invited to conceal their identities in the making of each portrait, while making a personal statement. These self-anonymised images are a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of Indigenous young people, whose very presence stands against a long history of attempted erasure under settler-colonial rule.

Code Black / Riot

Taking its name from codes used within youth detention, *Code Black / Riot* considers the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Filmed on Vernon Ah Kee's Country in North Queensland, the project was developed through a series of community visits and discussions on Country. This multi-channel video work presents interviews with children and detention centre staff, reflecting on their experiences of living and working within the youth detention system. *Code Black / Riot* draws attention to the violence inherent in structures of incarceration that deprive these children of a future.

Alongside the video work is an original text from Behrouz Boochani, reflecting on his lived experience inside an immigration detention centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, and the parallels he sees with the incarceration of Indigenous people in Australia.

The accompanying nine-panel colour field painting by Vernon Ah Kee appears deceptively simple, yet it draws upon the colours used to code emergencies in detention and related institutions. These include hostage, officer assistance required, self-harm, young people on the roof, external threat, escape attempted, fire, medical emergency, and riot. The vibrancy of these tones stands in stark contrast to the darkness of their associated meaning.

GALLERY TWO

Hoda Afshar

Portrait of Behrouz (#2)
Portrait of Edris
Portrait of Shamindan and Ramsiyar
Portrait of Ari (#1)
Portrait of Thanus
Portrait of Behrouz (#1)
Portrait of Emad
Portrait of Ramsiyar
Portrait of Mohamed
Portrait of Ibrahim
Portrait of Ari (#2)

from *Remain* series 2018
archival inkjet prints

Courtesy of Hoda Afshar and Milani Gallery

Hoda Afshar

Remain 2018
two-channel digital video, colour, sound
24 mins

Courtesy of Hoda Afshar and Milani Gallery

Remain

What was introduced as a temporary measure for those seeking asylum in Australia from 2001 became a prolonged system of detention on Manus Island, northern Papua New Guinea. Although the Regional Processing Centre formally closed in 2017, many former detainees remained on the island in a state of indefinite limbo. Made collaboratively with several of these men, *Remain* brings together photography, moving image, personal testimony and poetry to recount individual and shared experiences of detention.

The works give form to experiences obscured from public view: violence, riots, suicide and the enduring effects of prolonged detention. Yet these confronting accounts unfold against the lush tropical landscape of Manus Island, a place of striking beauty that becomes inseparable from memories of fear and violence. Through this tension, Afshar asks what it means to remain when freedom itself has been indefinitely deferred.

Hoda Afshar

A writer
A disability care worker
An officer and lawyer in the Australian Special Forces
A General Practitioner
A community lawyer
An occupational health and safety manager
A former migration support worker
A disability care worker
A solicitor and barrister

from *Agonistes* series 2020
archival inkjet prints and engraved aluminium panels

Courtesy of Hoda Afshar and Milani Gallery

Hoda Afshar

Agonistes 2020
one-channel digital video, colour, sound
20 mins

Commissioned by PHOTO 2021 International Festival of Photography
Courtesy of Hoda Afshar and Milani Gallery

Agonistes

Agonistes recognises the struggle of a group of individuals—former employees across the military, secret intelligence services, immigration, youth detention, disability care and other agencies—who decided to speak out against alleged wrongdoing or abuse of power, and paid the price for doing so.

Each subject's portrait was created through a detailed photographic recording and 3D rendering that was first printed, resulting in a marble-like bust, and then re-photographed. The portraits thus depict the subjects as heroic or tragic figures in a way that echoes the sculptures of classical antiquity.

Their names withheld, the accompanying text panels recount what each individual witnessed, why they felt compelled to act, and the repercussions that followed their decision to blow the whistle.

The tension between the idealised beauty of the classical forms and the suffering described in the accompanying texts is paramount. The portraits and testimonies ask what it means to act ethically when responsibility collides with law and obligation, and what it means to embody heroism when the consequences of truth-telling can be so devastating.

PROJECT GALLERY

Hoda Afshar
Timothy Johannessen

Shafaq شفق 2026

one-channel digital video, colour, sound
looped 12 mins

Director: Hoda Afshar
Written by: Hoda Afshar, Timothy Johannessen
Photography and montage: Hoda Afshar
Sound design: Timothy Johannessen
Colourist: Peter Hatzipavlis
Special thanks to: Alana Holmberg

Courtesy of Hoda Afshar and Milani Gallery

Shafaq شفق

Shafaq شفق is a poetic visual essay in which Afshar describes, in her mother tongue, the experience of watching war unfold in her homeland, from afar and separated from her family.

The work was made during a brief period when Afshar was travelling and she suddenly felt her two worlds begin to merge, as the earth and the sky were transformed and the distance separating *here* and

there seemed to be eliminated.

The more she looked towards the horizon and travelled inwards, the more the signs and traces of that world and of the war were reflected all around her, as in a mirror. Everything – birds, clouds, planes, circles, sounds – seemed to take on some other meaning. One that only she could see.

What appears as spectacle from one perspective is experienced by others as catastrophe. Virtual war against reality.

The word *Shafaq* describes the reddish glow of the sky after sunset, the evening twilight. It also denotes a threshold, a time of transition or temporariness, as well as the blood of desire and longing.