

Liminal Encounters

Exhibition Essays

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Hard Liquid: Transparency, visibility, and the mesmerising obscured

Hard Liquid: Transparency, visibility, and the mesmerising obscured, approaches glass not as a neutral state but as a material full of contradictions. On the surface, glass appears simplistic, transparent, and stable. Yet at a molecular level, glass resists a clear categorisation. Scientifically, glass is an amorphous solid: its atoms are arranged chaotically, more like a liquid frozen mid-flow. This strange composition is at the heart of *Hard Liquid*, an exhibition that explores these intriguing contradictions and how they shape our urban landscapes.

This exhibition presents the material of glass as a physical contradiction. It reveals and conceals, invites, and distances. The environment around the material is revealed, reflected, and distorted to create environments that feel like liminal spaces. This exhibition offers up glass in the hands of the featured artists as a metaphor for the unstable balance between what is seen but remains obscured.

Hard Liquid places the paradoxical nature of glass at the heart of the visitor's experience, highlighting the works of Laresa Kosloff and David Jolly. Kosloff's work *Stock Exchange* 1998 was shot on Super 8 film, displaying a voyeuristic view into the Stock Exchange offices in Melbourne. The video is exhibited alongside Jolly's urban-scape paintings and watercolours. For both artists, glass operates not as a simple material of

aesthetic fascination but as a metaphor guiding the viewer through a layered exploration of visibility and all its contradictions.

Kosloff's work draws in viewers' attention with its smooth movements and striking black and white colour palette. The video effortlessly glides up and down on a vertical axis in mesmerising slow movements across seductive, glossy interiors. This speaks to Kosloff's artistic exploration into links between the body and its connection to the spaces they move through every day. As Kosloff's unsolicited recording charts, the internal goings-on of the stock exchange, workers mill around the office as they shuffle paper and converse, but like a silent movie with no subtitles, the viewer is left to fill in the blanks. Kosloff's interest in this balance between individual agency and free will questions our autonomy in such seemingly transparent landscapes. We see without hearing; we watch without entering. The glass walls of the building mislead us into a false sense of intimacy, and yet there is no certainty as to the true context of what we are seeing. Kosloff's work captures something essential about how glass structures modern life: it invites the gaze but can refuse genuine access.

Together in this exhibition hang Jolly's *Open* and *Hotel*, both part of the series *Liquid Nature 2006*. These watercolours and painting echo Kosloff's narrative to present the impenetrable glassy exteriors of corporate infrastructure. With more than two decades of painting experience, Jolly imbues his photorealistic works with an uneasiness at their monolithic uniformity, drawing on

Kosloff's sentiment of an outsider looking in. His work *Refinery* part of *Liquid Nature* 2006 draws on his interest in quiet and reflective works. The oil on glass painting creates the illusion of solidity yet opens its transparency to viewers as they step closer. The personal experiences that Jolly has with his surroundings and his incisive observation allows him to capture dream-like urban landscapes that stand in between familiarity and the unknown. Jolly's opaque renderings of transparent environments work as a static counterpart to the momentum of *Stock Exchange*, fostering dialogue across mediums.

Hard Liquid's layout resists a single path. Visitors may first be drawn to the projection of the Stock Exchange, then expand outward toward quieter surfaces, moving between stillness and motion in their own rhythm. There is no fixed route. The show resists linearity, allowing visitors to find their own rhythm between stillness and motion, between film, paint, watercolour and between openness and refusal. Sightlines can overlap, reflections shift, and meanings surface only gradually. Transparency here is not a state but a process too, unfolding through movement and delay.

The works also connect to broader critical conversations about visibility and architecture. Professor Andrea Mubi Brighenti's research into space and sociology reminds us that visibility is never neutral; it is always the outcome of mechanisms and systems that regulate perception and power. Similarly, architectural historian Beatriz Colomina examines how glass in modern

architecture gives the illusion of accessibility through visibility while simultaneously enforcing surveillance and control. In this light, Kosloff's silent gaze and Jolly's impenetrable facades become more than aesthetic gestures and instead become mediations on glass's structure, the conditions of looking and being looked at in contemporary life.

As glass artist Wayne Pearson has observed, glass is itself a paradox. In daily life, we rarely notice it as it holds such an omnipresent place in contemporary life yet when artists draw attention to it, its contradictions come into sharp focus. It is fragile yet enduring, protective yet vulnerable, intimate yet distancing.

Hard Liquid explores transparency as an unstable negotiation —between light and surface, observer and observed, clarity and shadow. It reminds us that every act of looking is also an act of framing, and every surface of clarity conceals its own depths. This exploration of glass reveals the fascinating material as a mirror of contemporary life and all its contradictions.

Artists: David Jolly, Laresa Kosloff

Curated by Bing Han, Evie Haultain, Enya Hu, Mia Kalis, Jinghan Li, Ying Liang.

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The Fleeting Dream

The Fleeting Dream subtly manipulates our sense of reality. Paintings, video and photographic works probe our memories, facilitating an experiential moment in the 'real' and the illusory. Within them the exhibition explores different layers of personal emotions and the possible connotations behind daily settings. These works by artists Pat Brassington, Helen Johnson, James Lynch and David Noonan—held in the Buxton Collection—reconstruct familiar scenes into something dreamlike, fleeting and fragile.

The photo-collage works by Brassington and Noonan—grouped together—exemplify the artists' explorations of the unfamiliar in the familiar. The pair distort elements of the everyday, defamiliarising the ordinary to convey a dreamlike atmosphere. Presenting scenes charged with tension, memory, and the slippery space between waking life and imagination, the artists invite viewers to question the boundaries between the ordinary and the uncanny. Brassington's *Woo/1999* distorts the familiar innocence of the boy into something serene and unsettling. The hazy, dreamlike glow was disrupted by the mysterious textured foreign tongue. This twists reality into an enchanting and disembodied space. While Noonan's *Untitled #6* 2005 and *Visitors* 2005 both transform the ordinary living space into a dreamlike and ritualistic stage and evoke nostalgic emotions. These works provoke an atmosphere that blurs reality and illusion, setting an essential tone for the exhibition.

Further disrupting the familiar, Johnson's *History Problem* 2013 displaces itself from the closeness of Brassington, Lynch and Noonan; its depth counter to the stillness of the figures frozen in acrylic. The painting probes the tension between reality and memory. Australia's colonial and national histories are layered, and contested, lived in one way but remembered in another. A collective memory endures fragmentation, resembling a fleeting dream that is open to distortion. Johnson reveals this problem colonial history is subjected to, and disrupts the authority of colonial imagery in *History Problem* by highlighting the transient nature of the stories societies tell themselves in an attempt for solace. Lynch, beside Johnson, finds movement in the colours, the familiar motion of life brimming with the surreal as elephants occupy family rooms and metaphorical texts push women into water. Lynch's *The Party's Over* 2006 is firmly rooted in the familiar (albeit surreal), as it evokes fleeting memories and the spirit of human emotion. The form of this work—a jumpy, constantly shifting and frame-skipping video style—reflects the complex and unsettled nature of emotions, multiplying dreams from reality. The movements of the video loops contrast with the static tension of the painting, while personal emotions and collective memories echo each other, creating an intertextual relationship. This dual narrative reveals the multifaceted nature behind personal emotions and memories, expressed in these works through exaggerated artistic techniques. It also echoes our theme: the inherent instability and vast interpretive space of dreams as elusive entities. The pair of works

invite the viewer to find familiarity within the unfamiliar; to comfortably (or uncomfortably) reside within the boundaries put forth by Brassington and Noonan.

The ordinary is a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life.

(Kathleen Stewart, 2007, *Ordinary Affects*)

Collected, *The Fleeting Dream* posits an unusual within the usual; an exploration of the facilitatory surreal in investigation of a reflexive moment. Our shifting assemblages of the ordinary define how we perceive ourselves and our experiences. In investigating this relationship, the works of *The Fleeting Dream* facilitate a reflexive, affectual experience in the 'real' and the illusory. In this, we find ourselves 'connected' to the works, or more accurately: to the assemblages within them.

Artists: Pat Brassington, Helen Johnson, James Lynch and David Noonan.

Curated by Wei Ren, Seven Shen, Betty Yao, Jasmin Wu, Hugo Webster, Charlotte Wik, Xuan Zhang, Zoey Zhou, and Dawn Zhu.

Luminance

Luminance is the intrinsic lightness of an object; how light and brightness is perceived by the human eye. The interplay of surfaces with light, and the emission of light via colour and ‘non-colour’, becomes a way to think about perception and materiality. This exhibition explores light, luminosity, and reflection as both physical phenomena and conceptual triggers. *the veil*, currently exhibiting at Buxton Contemporary, explores transition, memory and the ‘liminal spaces’ of the in-between.¹ These conceptual threads are respected, as our exhibition, amidst other groups, reference perceptions, binaries and the “unseen”.

The Buxton collection itself is marked by Michael and Janet Buxton’s personal tastes, particularly their love of “colour, passion, [and] vibrancy.”² This exhibition aims to take these concepts in a literal sense, with light serving as a physical element activated by reflective surfaces, bright colours and glowing objects. Taking John Nixon and Mikala Dwyer’s respective practices into consideration, light as a metaphor conceptualises the possibilities of art making past skill, into the process of intellectual thinking.

John Nixon is perhaps best known for his commitment to colour. The Experimental Painting Workshop (EPW), a project defined by Nixon as an “intellectual proposition”—a non-physical site permitted Nixon to rupture conventional artistic practise, as he employed principles of monochrome, non-objectivity and

constructivism.³ He championed the colour's ability to possess energy, projecting its own light. *Colour – Rhythm, Film Composition 5* 2006 emits its own luminosity, through its visual brightness, but in the work's restrained monochromatic concept, projects an intellectual enlightenment, a championing of art practice. Light conceptualises the possibilities of art making past skill, into a process of intellectual thinking.

Nixon's works have been criticised for being “severely reductive” and “visually austere.”⁴ His works are pared back, with entire series (such as *EPW: Orange*) being devoted to polychromatic or monochromatic palettes.⁵ This criticism is to reduce the relationship between his monochromatic works and his readymade practice. Nixon notes the “intellectual terrain” that is unlocked by utilising the device of nomination; the “choice” of what becomes “art” rather than reliance on conventional artistic skill.⁶ Here, this is understood as the metaphorical illumination of artistic practice—the luminosity which grows from the freedom of choice. In the context of *Luminance*, this terrain is unlocked through mental, or cognitive illumination. Both the monochrome, the polychrome and the readymade mark the transition of artist intention from “practice as skill” to “practice as choice.”⁷ Both Dwyer and Nixon choose decidedly minimalist, restrained or simplistic compositions. The art is the practice.

Dwyer's *Untitled* 2012 engages in luminant dialogue with Nixon's works, as the lamp casts a literal light over

Nixon's works. As the most familiar source of light (being an electric lamp), *Untitled* becomes a vessel for light, not just in its bulb, but the ability to promote dialogue in illuminating its surrounding environment. *Untitled's* glow activates the silver surface of *Silver Monochrome 2008*, bridging a quiet, radiant exchange of energy. Light here is not just the transmission of physical light, but the sharing of space; a dialogue between works.

Untitled references Dwyer's wider practice of exploring spatial relationships—it works as an architectural intervention in the white gallery space. Standing at over two metres tall, it commands vertical observation, and an alteration in visitor contemplation, from Nixon's repetitive practice. Readymade metallic objects invite the viewer to look closer, to consider the relationship of these objects to the industrial frame and surrounding works, reflected on the beads.

Silver Monochrome, displayed to the left of *Untitled*, marks a change in Nixon's practice. Nixon began painting with silver in 1995, as an alternative to his signature orange works. Though Nixon understands silver as a “non-colour”, he finds synergies in how silver and orange conduct light.⁸ In comparison to *Colour 5*, the silver works are extremely opaque, but Nixon connects the two hues through their ability to conduct a sense of energy. Silver exists between materiality and light, utilising its reflective and textural qualities to create rich visual layers and a strong sense of structure.

Silver Monochrome and *Untitled* are in dialogue, forming a physical connection between Nixon and Dwyer. *Untitled*'s physical light source enhances the reflectivity of *Silver Monochrome*, injecting a sense of shadow across its textured surface.

Artists: Mikala Dwyer, John Nixon

Curated by Jessica Alderton, Yile Bao, Juliet Day, Yiting Fang, Suri Feng, Jo Fewster, Yuting He, Shujing Ji, Zhiyu Ma.

Endnotes

1. "the veil," Buxton Contemporary, accessed August 18, 2025, <https://buxtoncontemporary.com/exhibitions/the-veil/>.
2. Luisa Bosci et al., *Buxton Contemporary* (The University of Melbourne, 2018), 12.
3. Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), "John Nixon - EPW," 2004, 8, https://content.acca.melbourne/legacy/files/2004_EPW_John%20Nixon_Catalogue_1.pdf#:~:text=John%20Nixon's%20paintings%20are%20concerned%20with%20the,objects%20that%20are%20incorporated%20into%20the%20work.
4. Andrew McNamara, "Readymade Abstraction: The Case of John Nixon," *Eyeline*, ahead of print, 1998, <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.778683259421237>.
5. Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), "John Nixon - EPW," 9.
6. Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), *John Nixon - Thesis - Selected Works from 1968-1993* (1994), <https://content.acca.melbourne/legacy/files/John%20Nixon%20Thesis%20screen.pdf>.
7. McNamara, "Readymade Abstraction."
8. "John Nixon - EPW: Silver," Anna Schwartz Gallery, 2006, <https://annaschwartzgallery.com/exhibition/epw-silver-2>.

All the Clocks Have Stopped

All the Clocks Have Stopped captures the restless melancholia of the Australian Neo-Gothic, an artistic sub-genre of the late 20th and early 21st centuries bound to histories of dispossession, violence, and erasure. Influenced by global traditions of Gothic literature, horror cinema, and the gritty subcultures of punk, the Australian Neo-Gothic dwells in the liminal spaces between dreams and reality. Presence is constantly haunted by absence—that which remains is defined (and Othered) by what no longer is. Practitioners within this movement blend folklore, theatre, memory, and nightmares, resisting the confines of normalcy in favour of what lies in the peripheral. Encapsulating this, *All the Clocks Have Stopped* brings together the works of six contemporary Australian artists from the Michael Buxton Collection: Peter Booth, Tony Clark, Tracey Moffatt, Mike Parr, Ricky Swallow, and Louise Weaver.

The exhibition's title draws a line from Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' existentialist ballad *Higgs Boson Blues* 2013. Inspired by the all-consuming grief of British-American poet W. H. Auden's *Funeral Blues* 1936, Cave's song is littered with imagery that swims between England, the Americas, and the singer's influential upbringing in rural Victoria. The song's hypnotic rhythm and surreal lyrics leave listeners unable to situate themselves, evoking the disorienting, languid heat of Australian summers and their ability to transform our encounters with place. Mirrored in the haunting landscapes of Booth's imagination, Moffatt's strange

fervent dreamscape, and Swallow's silent scream engulfed in darkness, this persistent sense of displacement is symptomatic of the Australian Neo-Gothic being innately without place, floating somewhere in between. The origins of the Gothic genre are rooted in medieval Anglo-European soil, oceans away from colonised Australia, and are therefore both aesthetically and narratively at odds with the landscapes here. The Australian Neo-Gothic becomes a ghostly hybrid, desperately attempting to find footing within the liminal space it occupies. The genre is weird and eerie, two words that have been defined in the context of art, writing, and music by critic Mark Fisher.

In his book *The Weird and the Eerie* 2016, Fisher defines the eerie as a failure of absence and/or a failure of presence, and the weird as the presence of something in a context which it does not belong in. The Australian Neo-Gothic encapsulates both of these terms, addressing the discomfiting presence of the colonial Other in stolen landscapes—landscapes haunted by the dislocating horrors of an all-too-recent history. *All the Clocks Have Stopped* invites viewers to sit uncomfortably in this nightmarish space, providing only clipped vignettes of half-told, half-concealed stories. This unpolished narrative jigsaw mimics the experience of living under colonial capitalist establishments such as so-called Australia. Collectivity and community are traded for para-social hyper-individualism, isolating everything into separate corners, disillusioned and lonely. To emphasise this, each work here is displayed in a disjointed salon-style hang, occupying isolated pockets of space in orbit around one another. Rather

than being engaged in seamless, easy dialogue, the artworks in *All the Clocks Have Stopped* are self-conscious in each other's company. The wild convulsions of Clark's small, greyed landscape links tensely across the white gallery wall to Weaver's ominous, hanging black and white spider, two images of nature frozen in movement. This is juxtaposed with Parr's slowly flashing video works, sterile and measured in comparison. The emptiness that surrounds each artwork becomes a framing device rather than a vacuum, electric with meaning.

These artworks relate implicitly to one another not just thematically and aesthetically, but through their contextual proximities, all sharing space within the historical and contemporary artistic landscapes of colonial Victoria. In this location, the Australian Neo-Gothic adopts a distinct flavour – darker, moodier, colder—which is apparent in *All the Clocks Have Stopped*. The lands here are overrun by introduced (and invasive) flora and fauna, the bluestone streets of Naarm/Melbourne city are shadowed by towering Gothic Revival buildings, and regional bushscapes are still haunted by colonial fears and mythologies. In a country still named and governed by colonial powers, all that surrounds remains splintered and strange, slipping in and out of liminality. The artists represented here ponder this in-between-ness with a sombre yet theatrical flair. As was the original intention of patrons Michael and Janet Buxton, the works included in *All the Clocks Have Stopped* (and the collection they come from) showcase the unique, disquieting tone of Australia's contemporary arts industry, as artists

grapple with the eldritch realities and unrealities that exist here.

Artists: Peter Booth, Tony Clark, Tracey Moffatt AO, Mike Parr, Ricky Swallow, Louise Weaver

Curated by Raisa Mclean, Olivia McRae, Caitlin Mullaly, Sachi Orrock, Camilla Peffer and Gina Ramsay