



Almost Here, Almost Now

21 June – 24 August 2025

The Riddoch Arts & Cultural Centre

Almost Here, Almost Now is a far-reaching exhibition that draws from the collections of The Riddoch Arts and Cultural Centre and the National Gallery of Australia, bringing together a wide range of significant works from both Australian and international artists. Working with themes of mapping, living on the land and adaptation, the exhibition asks us to consider the relationship between land and sky, what it means to us and how we situate ourselves in the world.

While cartography and topographical mapmaking is thought to have its precedents in the Egyptian Turin Papyrus Map dated 1150 BCE, forms of mapping that carried both spiritual and practical application predate the written language. From cave wall markings that charted the stars to the evolution of navigational maps that would rapidly accelerate the exploration of the globe, the drive to locate ourselves in space and time continues at pace - even at a time when we carry a personalised GPS navigation system in our pocket.

While the land and the sky have been mapped as a means of direction and navigation, we can however expand our view to look at a definition of mapping that includes notions of identity, belonging, the passage of time and ways of living.

In *Almost Here, Almost Now* the traditional and broader definitions of mapping emerge as the unifying theme, dealing with both the marking out of physical space and measuring of time. Surveying works that contemplate the grandeur of astral bodies and geological time through to the humble scale of tiny and endangered insects, the exhibition casts a wide net to ultimately ask where our own 'here' and 'now' might be.

A photograph is a faithful mapping of light onto the surface of paper. In his work *The Artist's Hand*¹ Axel Poignant depicts his friend's rugged hand in black and white, the deep lines a testament to his labour. These furrows indicate how the world has left its mark on him while simultaneously symbolising human agency – the ability to shape the world in our image. The photograph serves as reminder that when we seek to map the world we also reveal a story about ourselves, or as Werner Heisenberg put it:

"What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning."²



Angelina Pwerle's *Bush plum*³ painting charts an expansive story on country. With great precision Pwerle paints each tiny white dot in the dreaming of Ankwarreye (bush plum), building a detailed terrestrial map of how the seeds fall and flower on her ancestral land. Similarly, works by Emily Kam Kngwarray⁴ use brilliant blues, dusty reds and yellow ochres to tell the multiple dreamings of her Alhalkere (Utopia, NT) homeland,

in her words: "the whole lot." Kngwarray worked quickly, mostly outdoors and flat on the ground, making paintings that speak to our meaningful place in the world rather than solely our spatial location upon it.



Zooming in on a section near Berrin/Mount Gambier, Margaret Worth's *So Many Raindrops*⁵ takes a bird's eye view of pine plantations, the divisions of land fractured like broken glass into a complicated patchwork of greens, purples and browns inside a geographical area known as 'The Green Triangle'. Painting with determined accuracy, Worth notes the sections of property and marked changes in growth between them. In mapping the landscape with the painted text 'H2O' floating over the

ground like a watermark, Worth is speaking directly to issues around land use and management in this region, raising questions about the distribution of natural resources and the sustainability of forestry practices.

Following European contact in Australia in 1770, a transformation of the land and waterways was undertaken. To replicate a European lens, arable land was adapted, manipulated and reshaped for high yield agriculture. The evolving nature of this landscape has long been a touchstone for artists concerned about the widespread ravages of lands for strip mining, cattle grazing and urban development.

William Delafield Cook's *A haystack*⁶ turns traditional landscape painting on its head, emphasising the highly managed systems in an agricultural environment. Meticulously painting every straw, the artist contrasts the vision of an unspoiled wilderness so treasured by the European colonial



painter, with a prosaic utilitarian landscape, moulded exclusively in service of human consumption. Like Worth's *So Many Raindrops* the work prompts the viewer to reflect on how the land is used, opening up the space to both marvel and critique how we model the land to our end.

In Raymond Arnold's eight-panel *Imaginary landscape - eighteen months in Tasmania*⁷ the printmaker builds a picture of the Queenstown Mountain range of Frenchman's Cap, viewed from the base. Steep, harsh and degraded from copper mining in the region - sulphurous waste stripped the trees and eroded the soil - this altering of the land is represented by the artist with ink smudges on the paper darkening the sky. While pointing to the damage wrought on this cherished place, Arnold's practice also marvels at the phenomenal restoration of bushland that has taken hold of defunct mines in the region.

When thinking about land use, it is easy to jump to agriculture, forestry and cattle farming, but what about the city? Urban development and infrastructure is so embedded in how we live, it takes some imagining to see what lies beneath it.

Much of Shaun Gladwell's practice interacts with urban architecture. Investigating ways to repurpose the function of the city's public space, Gladwell's performance pieces will have the artist in situ, in real time, employing modes of expression like skateboarding, BMX and surfing to repurpose the built environment. In *QUAY MDCCCXVIII-MCMLXXXVIII SEQUENCE*⁸, we watch from above as the artist dances atop a compass-shaped public seating block. The video work locates him in Sydney's Circular Quay, bringing to our attention how his movement interacts with the local seagulls, but also his exact location in space.

We know that change to the natural environment has enormous impact on the way we live and who we become. As technologies morph and grow to occupy new spaces, so too do their footprints on our physical

and spiritual realms, forcing an ongoing adaptation and renegotiation of worldly rites and rituals. While natural selection might explain the adjustment of organisms to their environment in order to improve their chances of survival, how we change our behaviour, psychology and values to adapt at speed is less clear. What do we change to belong — and what must we hold onto?

The works of Fiona Hall and eX de Medici speak to the effects colonisation and technology have on the natural world, flagging cautionary tales and exploring the weird, and sometimes wonderful hybridisations of lifeforms.

Fiona Hall's *Macromia splendens / splendid cruiser*⁹ speaks up for the kingdom of the animals, clad in khaki army fatigues and emblazoned with the French revolutionary slogan - 'liberte, egalite, fraternite' - the dragonfly appears as an involuntary victim of war, fighting for its survival in a world reshaped by human intervention.

eX de Medici similarly points to the fragility of our natural world bringing the existence of microlepidoptera (tiny moths) to our attention in the watercolour work *Species #37*¹⁰. In a series of works de Medici pays homage to the smallest and most ancient of animals but also speaks to the immense hybridity and adaptivity of living things. Like Hall, de Medici's work offers a cautionary tale for this age and an unflinching proposition of what is at stake.



Like maps, artworks are often made where words won't suffice. Using colour, scale and movement, the pieces in ***Almost Here, Almost Now*** seek to transmit a visceral feeling or elicit a surprising connection in the viewer to ground or reframe our perception, if just for a moment.

¹ Axel Poignant, *Artist's hand*, 1941, gelatin silver photograph.
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. Purchased 1984.

² Heisenberg, Werner. *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*. New York: Harper, 1958

³ Angelina Pwerle, *Bush Plum*, 2005, synthetic polymer paint on canvas.
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. Purchased 2008.

⁴ Emily Kam Kngwarray, *Untitled*, 1993, synthetic polymer paint on watering can.
Gift of Rodney Gooch 1998. Collection of the Riddoch Arts & Cultural Centre.

⁵ Margaret Worth, *So Many Raindrops*, 2007, synthetic polymer on marine grade plywood.
Gift of the artist 2023. Collection of The Riddoch Arts & Cultural Centre.

⁶ William Delafield Cook, *A haystack*, 1976, synthetic polymer paint on canvas.
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. Purchased 1977. © William Delafield Cook

⁷ Raymond Arnold, *Imaginary landscape - eighteen months in Tasmania*, 1984, etching.
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. Purchased 1986.

⁸ Shaun Gladwell, *QUAY MDCCCVIII-MCMLXXXVIII SEQUENCE*, 2005, moving image.
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. Gift of the artist 2005.

⁹ Fiona Hall, *Macromia splendens / splendid cruiser*, 2009-2011, military camouflage material, paint, mixed media. National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. Purchased 2016. © Fiona Hall/Copyright Agency, 2025.

¹⁰ eX de Medici, *Species #37*, 2001, watercolour with white gouache.
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. Purchased 2002. © eX de Medici.

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