

The background is a textured, mottled pink and purple. Two hands are raised, with fingers pointing upwards. The hands are painted with a gradient from light green at the base to yellow and then red at the tips. In the center, between the hands, is a dark purple crescent moon. At the top, there are two small white flowers with black centers and thin black stems. The title 'Ariel's Song' is written in a white, cursive font across the middle of the hands.

Ariel's Song

LUISA HANSAL
JESS TAN
WADE TAYLOR

With works from the University of
Western Australia Art Collection

12 February - 23 April 2022
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.*



ARIEL'S SONG

I find it difficult to fix on something that this exhibition is about, but I can at least tell you about how it came together.

For the years of 2020 to 2024 each Perth Festival program has as its thematic centre a Noongar word, moving skywards from *kaarla* (both 'fire' and 'home') to *ngaangk* (sun). In 2022 we are at the shore, eyes to the horizon, thinking on *wardan*: the ocean. I have been holding this word inside me and letting the sensations of my body guide me towards meaning, something it has been tough, these last few years, to fix on. I am tired, and I want to be weightless. When I feel like this I go to the sea.

It feels ridiculous to admit to, but this exhibition started as a vision, perhaps as a kind of wish. I imagined a dark, cool room, deep blue and quiet, generous with negative space to fill with thinking or with calm and studded with small bright jewels of colour like coral, or seaweed, or darting fish. I wanted lie on the floor of this room and sleep like I was under a spell.

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery holds, in the UWA Art Collection, a significant group of works by Western Australian painter Audrey Greenhalgh (1903 - 1991), who often returned to the

coastline as a subject. I had the notion that the esoteric idea of an exhibition that was *trying to feel like being underwater* might be usefully anchored by images of the actual ocean, a way of introducing it as a real place as well as a metaphor. At the gallery Dr Sally Quin and Kate Hamersley introduced me to several other beautifully oceanic works in the collection that became part of the narrative - a wobbly port at night by John Perceval, a moment fixed in time; a William Dobell gouache of inky depth and mystery; a shield shape holding a rolling sea that curls into snailshell spirals, a crest for some elemental entity by Stephen Holland, created in the year of Greenhalgh's death.

This is, initially, all I had to offer artists Lusia Hansal, Jess Tan and Wade Taylor: a mood board of oceanic imagery, the promise of a conversation with an art collection and the vision of this deep blue room. And the sense that thinking through this exhibition as a curator might echo their own processes of thinking through an artwork, feeling the way through uncertainty towards something that holds together.

What holds Luisa, Jess and Wade's work together in conversation, for me, is their use of a heightened, psychological colour, a high



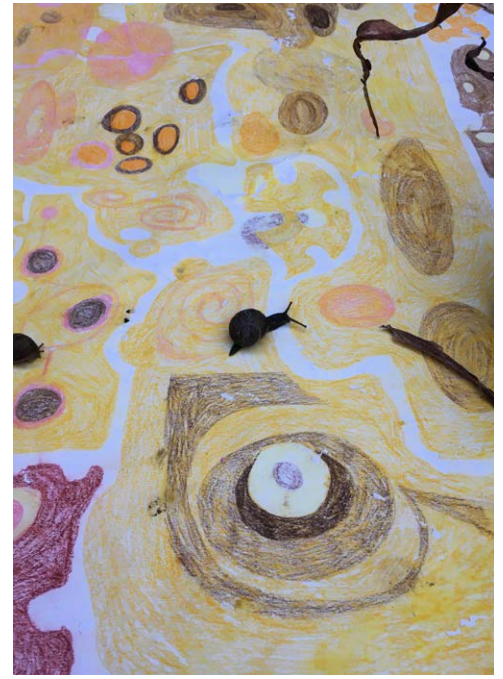
key brightness that produces an emotional resonance or an other-worldly presence – the colors of fishing lures, deep-sea bioluminescence, vivid sunsets, oil slicks and ectoplasm. And, brought together, they create a kind of gradient or ouroboros of representation and abstraction, the suggestion of forms in transition between states.

At one end of this spectrum is Wade. His paintings create the illusion of real space, but they vibrate with the sense of something about to happen. Scenes of profound quiet are contrasted with scenes of violent forces – fires and willy-willies – stilled into image. Wade's paintings are identifiably Perth, otherwise ordinary, recognizable in their palette of sky and sea and limestone and sand, and in the suggestion of great drama lurking beneath flatness. But, they also hold something transcendental. I look at Wade's paintings and think of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* – of a banal place built into an epic landscape and over a foundational violence that seeps into the daily minutiae of life to make everything weird, everything a portal through time. Wade does this, perhaps, by the simple trickery of painting landscapes as though they are still life – focus is pulled in each painting towards a towards a

central subject, a memento mori of place rather than object. Everything must pass.

Luisa Hansal's paintings open into an interior world, still representational, but on its edges. They are a search, through painting, to capture something beyond what can be articulated in speech. They appear as though created in a mediative state and in evoking this, they produce one – something like the sensation of being awake inside a dream or feeling that dream disappear upon waking, of a world that appeared concrete dissolving into the smoke and mirror of symbol. Their internal logic is fluid, wet, watery; shapes bloat at the edges or flow into other forms. Recently, these paintings have moved further away from the solid edges of shape, object or figure – from hands, feet, moths, dresses, curtains, flowers – and into an almost entirely abstract space of either cosmic or atomic scale that recalls the mystical surrealism of mid-century American painters Agnes Pelton or Gertrude Abercrombie, or the spiritualist abstraction of Swedish pioneer Hilma af Klint.

Jess Tan's practice loops back through the psychological wormhole and into the 'real' space of physical, sculptural,



objects. Her process is digestive, both actually and metaphorically. Seeds and pips and shells are preserved from food to become material; a degree of agency is passed over to non-human processes of creation, destruction, composting, decay. Jess makes *with* the world. A suite of drawings create an associative stream of shape and symbol and are then left outside to be finished – eaten – by snails. A trail of beautiful debris suggests tidelines of seaweed and shell. The title of a body of drawings and objects configured specifically for the architecture of Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery and extending past the windows and into the world beyond it, borrows from the logic of the moon snail, referring to ‘sand collars’ – curled masses of sea snail eggs and sand grains held together by a gelatinous secretion – that wash up on the shore. Sculpture is not an exclusively human activity.

The title of the exhibition came later in the process, after the lineup was assembled. *Ariel's Song* was the title of a survey of Audrey Greenhalgh's works curated by Melissa Harpley for Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery in 1994, several years after the artist's death. It refers to a passage in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a visceral description, sung by a wind-spirit in the

control of an exiled Duke with magical powers, of a King lost in a shipwreck, his body transformed by the ocean into coral and pearl. Powerful forces beyond human control are at work.

Greenhalgh had used lines from the oft-quoted passage – which is the origin of the term ‘sea-change’ – as titles for several paintings of the wreck of the SS Kwinana, but Harpley identified in it something of the artist's ethos in general. She quotes from the artist in the exhibition catalogue: *“For me, painting is an act of worship...I do not try to paint a representational image but rather convey, to the best of my ability, the intense vitality, energy and movement below the surface... To me, a painting must always have a life movement within itself... so when I paint, the demands of the painting take over, dictates what must be done.”*

I had also, I realised, used the passage in an essay written several years earlier about Jess's work, which at the time featured gels, liquid soaps and other goo and more explicitly anomie and coral-like shapes. I had encountered it not in its original context but in Joan Didion's (1934–2021) book about grief published in 2005: *A Year of Magical Thinking*.



As a title it closed the loop of references, and more accurately captured the feeling evoked for me by the original vision – not so literally the feeling of being underwater, but of *surrender*, a state in which it was possible to be at peace with forces beyond our control and feelings difficult to name. A sense of how the human body and imagination, made so separate from the world in Western thought, might start to lose its edges and be reabsorbed into the world.

Of transformations, rich and strange.

Gemma Weston
Curator

Images l-r:

Audrey Greenhalgh, *Jade in the window*, 1956, oil on composition board, 55 x 66.4cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, McGillivray Bequest Fund, 1984

Wade Taylor, *Marlee*, oil on wood, 42 x 32cm, courtesy the artist

Wade Taylor, *Port*, oil on wood, 32 x 42cm, courtesy the artist

Jess Tan, *untitled*, 2021, egg shells collected from 2020-2021, texta, pillow feathers, wire, paper mache, 2020, courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth

Jess Tan, *essence of sand collar drawing*, 2021, mark making from snails and watercolour pencil on paper, courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth

Luisa Hansal, *rocks in the river*, 2021, oil on canvas board, 30.5 x 25.4cm, courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth

Luisa Hansal, *leafworm*, 2021, oil on canvas board, 25.4 x 30.5cm, courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth



Jess Tan, *essence of sand collar*, 2021, drawings and installation, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth

LIST OF WORKS

William Dobell

Fisherman, n.d gouache, 8 x 11.7cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1974

Audrey Greenhalgh

Untitled (sea), nd, gouache, pen on paper, 21.6 x 30.6cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the artist, 1991

Untitled (sea scene), nd, watercolour and black pen on paper, 15.6 x 10.3cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the artist, 1991

Gale warning, 1970, oil on composition board 58.1 x 79.6cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, The Ruby Rose Maller Fine Arts Acquisition Fund, 1991

In the studio, nd, oil on paper, 56.3 x 38.1cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the artist, 1991

Untitled (abstract), watercolour on paper, 28.8 x 38.8cm (two sided), The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the artist, 1991

Untitled (sea, clouds), nd, watercolour on paper, 36.5 x 26.8cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the artist, 1991

Untitled (the sea), nd, watercolour on paper, 10.5 x 13.6cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Miss Joan Greenhalgh, 1992

Jade in the window, 1956, oil on composition board, 55 x 66.4cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, McGillivray Bequest Fund, 1984

Old Kwinana wreck, nd, watercolour on paper, 39 x 57cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the artist, 1991

Luisa Hansal

stars that kept me afloat, 2021, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4cm

moon that kept me afloat, 2021, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4cm

little mermaid, 2021, oil on canvas board, 30.5 x 25.4cm

softly remember, 2021, oil on canvas board, 30.5 x 25.4cm

rocks in the river, 2021, oil on canvas board, 30.5 x 25.4cm

leafworm, 2021, oil on canvas board, 25.4 x 30.5cm

friendship bracelet (for Audrey), 2022, beads, armature wire & oil painted brass hands, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth

Steven Holland

Seascape, 1990-91, gouache on cardboard, 21.2cm x 30.2cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the artist, 1991

John Perceval

Night gull, 1957, enamel on composition board, 91.8 x 122cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Tom Collins Bequest Fund, 1957

Jess Tan

essence of sand collar, 2021, drawings and installation, dimensions variable.

Courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth

Wade Taylor

Marlee, oil on wood, 42 x 32cm

Deepdale, oil on wood, 42 x 45 cm

Port, oil on wood, 32 x 42cm

Beach Road, oil on wood, 63 x 63cm

White Hills, oil on wood, 83 x 63cm

Blue Crescent, oil on wood, 43 x 43cm

All works courtesy the artist

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Luisa Hansal and Jess Tan are represented by sweet pea, Perth

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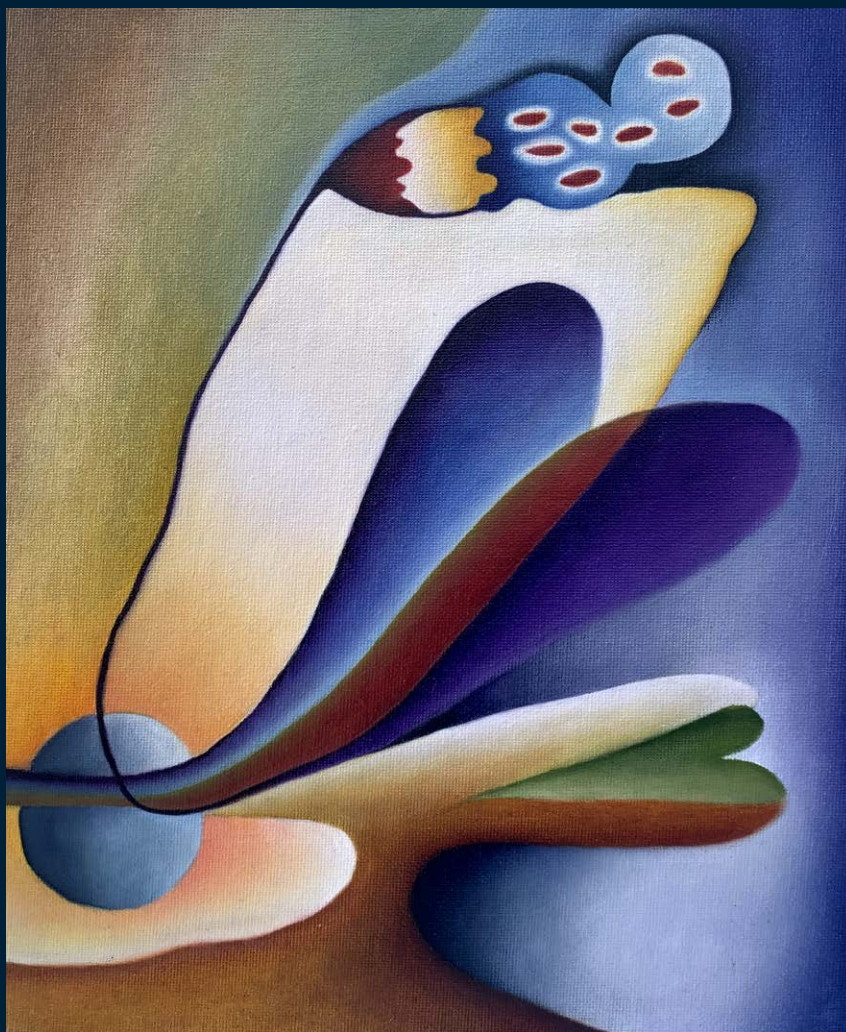
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Cover image:

Luisa Hansal, *moon that kept me afloat* (detail), 2021, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4cm, courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth

Image:

Luisa Hansal, *little mermaid*, 2021, oil on canvas board, 30.5 x 25.4cm, courtesy the artist and sweet pea, Perth



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