

## *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy*

Curated by Joel Stern

31 May - 20 July 2019



Image credit: Installation view of *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy*, featuring works by Makiko Yamamoto, Eric Demetriou and Ceri Hann. Photo: Christo Crocker

Exhibiting Artists: Ceri Hann, Danielle Freakley, Eric Demetriou; Gabriella D'Costa, Jacqui Shelton (with Alice Heyward and Megan Payne, Jake Moore, Makiko Yamamoto, Mel Deerson and Briony Galligan, MP Hopkins, Simon Zoric and Steven Rhall

Performances by: Ash Kilmartin, James Rushford and Rachel Yezbick, Jacqui Shelton, Alice Heyward and Megan Payne, Jake Moore, Kate Brown, Mel Deerson with Briony Galligan, Melody Paloma, MP Hopkins, Sonia Leber and David Chesworth, Diago Ramirez, Tim Dwyer, James Rushford and Rachel Yezbick, Kate Brown, Jake Moore, Carolyn Connors, Sage Pbbbt, Jenny Barnes.

Initiated in 2001, the *Octopus* series of exhibitions supports ambitious curatorial practice, through engaging an invited curator annually to develop a project that draws upon their research interests and provides a platform for new forms of exhibition making. In 2019 Gertrude is delighted to be working with Joel Stern, Co-Artistic Director, Liquid Architecture.

The exhibition is called *Ventriloquy* and explores things, bodies and voices held in-and-out of sync, in the wrong time or place - through new works and performances by Australian and international artists.

‘What we call ventriloquism is an effect, created in the mind of the spectator. (As Steven Connor says, “The art of ventriloquism consists very largely in persuading the audience to do much of the ventriloquist’s work [...] in enfleshing the voice from the skeletal approximations that the ventriloquist supplies”.) Ventriloquy is as much a trick of the mind as it is a trick of the mouth. The sound is issuing from either the wrong time and place, or the wrong voice and body. Or from no body at all. The voice and its shadow, time out of place, a wrong time-place: ventriloquism is about being in-and-out of sync.’

- excerpt from *Narcissism and its Echoes: Notes from Steven Connor’s Knee*, essay written by Joel Stern and Danni Zuvela, May 2019.

Joel Stern is a curator, researcher and artist concerned with theories and practices of sound and listening. With Danni Zuvela, he is Artistic Director of Liquid Architecture, an Australian organisation for artists working with sound. Other initiatives include the artist collective OtherFilm. and Instrument Builders Project, instigated with Kristi Monfries in 2013. In 2018, with James Parker, Stern curated *Eavesdropping*, an exhibition and research project exploring the politics and ethics of listening. Stern has been curated festivals, events, exhibitions, screenings and concerts in Australia and internationally since the early 2000s. He is a PhD candidate in Curatorial Practice at Monash Art, Design and Architecture, where he teaches Sound (in the Space of Art).



Image credit: Installation view of *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy*, featuring works by Simon Zoric, Danielle Freakley, Gabrielle D'Costa and Jacqui Shelton and Ceri Hann. Photo: Christo Crocker

# VISUAL ARTS 7 - 10

## **Explore and Express**

Levels 7 - 8 (VCAVAE033)

Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to explore and develop themes, concepts or ideas in artworks

Levels 9 - 10 (VCAVAE040)

Explore the visual arts practices and styles as inspiration to develop a personal style, explore, express ideas, concepts, and themes in artworks

## **Respond and Interpret**

Levels 7 - 8 (VCAVAR038)

Analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed in artworks and how they are viewed by audiences.

Levels 9-10 (VCAVAR045)

Analyse and interpret artworks to explore the different forms of expression, intentions and viewpoints of artists and how they are viewed by audiences.

# VISUAL ARTS 7 - 10

## Questions

How many artists and artworks are in this exhibition?

What medium and materials can you observe?

Choose one artwork and describe what it looks like.

What unusual adjectives or verbs can you use to describe what is directly in front of you – scary, rough, pulsating, comedic, etc.

## Suggestion

The Octopus series of exhibitions support ambitious curatorial practice, through engaging an invited curator annually to develop a project that draws upon their research interests and provides a platform for new forms of exhibition making.

Look and read what you can in the exhibition space, how do you think curator Joel Stern's exhibition, *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy* has pushed the boundaries of conventional exhibition making? What is different, unusual or leaves you feeling curious?

As you complete this activity, think about, the exhibition themes, its design and the curators choice of artists and artworks. Also consider the way the audience interacts with the artworks, are you as viewer expected to play a role?

## Activity

To begin, choose a single artwork in *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy* and spend a few minutes closely observing this work. Next, move your attention to the space around the artwork, are there other artworks in close proximity? Now try to concentrate on the whole exhibition space, think about where artworks have been placed. Can you observe connections between the different artists and their works?

Once you have spent a few minutes looking begin drawing and mapping out what you see without taking your pencil off the page. Try to capture the complete exhibition space rather than specific details. Was this challenging? Did it help you to concentrate and assist you to see and observe more? Why/why not?



Simon Zoric, *Self Portrait / Self Portrait (incognito)*, 2009

Ceri Hann, *Money Talks*, 2019





Image credit:  
Installation view of *Octopus 19:  
Ventriloquy*, featuring works by  
Jake Moore, Danielle Freakley.  
Photo: Christo Crocker

Image credit:  
Detail of Mel Deerson and Briony  
Galligan, *Theatre curtain for  
heaven and hell*, 2018 and *Hell-o  
and Limb-o*, 2019.  
Photo: Christo Crocker



# VCE STUDIO ARTS + ARTS

## **VCE Studio Art**

Unit 4, Area of Study 3: Art Industry Contexts

You will visit a variety of art exhibitions and examine the different methods and roles undertaken in the preparation and presentation of art to the public.

## **VCE Art**

VCE Art, Unit 4: Area of Study 1: Discussing Art

In this area of study, students discuss art ideas and issues and the varying interpretations about the role of art in society. Students select a statement about an art idea and related issues that they research, analyse and interpret.



# UCE STUDIO ARTS + ARTS

## Question

What is the role of curator Joel Stern in *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy*? How and why do curators and artists use concepts and themes in their art and exhibition making? Is there a unifying theme or idea in this exhibition? What does the title, *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy* mean in the context of this exhibition? What evidence can you use to substantiate your opinion? How have the artists in *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy* engaged with this theme?

## Suggestion

With a partner discuss the statement, “Ventriloquism is illusion without deception - a truly deceived audience would undermine the nature of the act.” What is your interpretation of this statement, and how does it relate to what you have seen in *Octopus 19: Ventriloquy*?

(excerpt from *Narcissism and its Echoes: Notes from Steven Connor’s Knee*, essay written by Joel Stern and Danni Zuvela, May 2019.)

As you walk around the exhibition space, look slowly and listen – What role does sound play? What role does the audience play? Do they activate works?

## Activity

Choose a theme (this could be anything) i.e. music, water, sleep, the climate emergency, etc and with a partner or group develop an exhibition proposal. What ideas, topics or concerns emerge from your theme. How can you explore these themes differently? Is it a theme that was previously hidden or only explored from an adults perspective?

As you develop your own exhibition proposal, think back to an exhibition you have recently seen:

- What did you see, hear and feel in the exhibition?
- What was going on and what do you believe unified the artworks and the artists in the show?
- Was the exhibition communicating a particular idea or viewpoint? If so how was this expressed?

Present your exhibition proposal to your class or another group. What new insights or perspectives can they add to your theme and proposal?

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Ventriloquy - the art or practice of making one's voice appear to come from somewhere else, typically a dummy of a person or animal.

Curator - Historically a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection. A content specialist charged with the interpretation of artistic or cultural material.

Audience/s - Individuals or groups of people who experience the arts in a range of settings and contexts (formal, informal, virtual or interactive) through intellectual, emotional and social engagement.

Artists and Artworks - Artist is the term for the creators and makers of an artwork. Artwork is the term for a work or performance.

Illusion - An idea or belief that is not true, or something that is not what it seems to be.

Deception - A statement or action that hides the truth, or the act of hiding the truth from unknowing persons.

## RESOURCES

**Gertrude Contemporary:** <http://www.gertrude.org.au/exhibitions/>

**Liquid Architecture:** <https://liquidarchitecture.org.au/>

**Other Film:** <http://otherfilm.org/joel-stern/>

**Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHrDyKuuImR5KgZ-KCUGXuW>