

Remedy for the Doldrums

Foreword

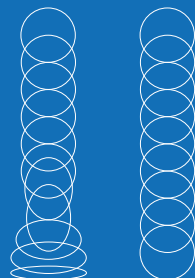
Gertrude has demonstrated its commitment to supporting early practice curators for more than two decades through its Emerging Curator Program. This initiative provides curators with the opportunity to research and develop new projects and ways of working with artists with the professional support and financial resources of the organisation. In 2020, Gertrude has been delighted to work with Siobhan Sloper toward the development and presentation of *Remedy for the Doldrums*.

Devised and instigated in advance of the COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown, the project has assumed greater potency in its reflections on the remedial affects of play on boredom. Assembling recent works and newly commissioned projects from a range of Australian and international artists, *Remedy for the Doldrums* takes focus on how artists reflect on play as a pursuit, upon the aspects of chance, on the idea of the ruse, modes of competition, and in recasting our experience of the everyday. In a year that has seemed endless, at times monotonous, and deprived of most possibilities, we have become highly attuned to the idea of remedies and cures. We have become used to the limited surroundings in which we spend all of our time, as it passes alternately mind-numbingly slow or at great haste. If there is a need for a remedy to the doldrums, then that moment is surely now.

I would like to sincerely thank and commend Siobhan on such a thoughtful and timely exhibition, and her determination and commitment to its evolution in the face of a year of relentless obstacles. These sentiments also extend to the participating artists, Ciaran Begley & James Nguyen, Francis Carmody, Simon Denny, Sophie Hyde, Elizabeth McInnes, and Erwin Wurm. Gertrude is extremely grateful for the generous ongoing support of Michael Schwarz and David Clouston, patrons of Gertrude Glasshouse, as well as the City of Yarra for their support of the 2020 exhibition program.

In a year marked by extraordinary turmoil, frustration, anxiety and estrangement, *Remedy for the Doldrums* reminds us of how vital art is in providing reflections of and relief from a world in considerable turmoil. As Melbourne trepidatiously awakens from substantial hibernation, and while the world still reels from and reacts to an ongoing crisis, through once again having the opportunity to visit galleries and experience artists' works in real life, *Remedy for the Doldrums* may not be a cure-all, but it is certainly a tonic.

Mark Feary
Artistic Director,
Gertrude Contemporary



Remedy for the Doldrums

Visitors to the opening of *First Papers of Surrealism*, an exhibition staged in New York in 1942, were confronted by children who, at Marcel Duchamp's instruction, bounced balls and played hopscotch around them. This seemingly minor intervention was a significant comment on prevailing avant-garde attitudes to work and play. In bringing this playfulness into the gallery space, Duchamp did not merely nod to his own childhood, but to the playfulness now regarded as inherent within the surrealist movement, through the purposeful disruption of the formality of the vernissage.

To promote *Remedy for the Doldrums*, the image of two bouncing balls has been adopted in homage to Duchamp, to adolescent behaviours of play, and to the erosion of the formalism of the gallery space. In the bouncing ball graphic, one squishes upon landing and the other doesn't, a subtle difference that distorts our capacities of perception. Desperate to break the cycle of repetition the viewer waits for an apex, but none ever comes.

Remedy for the Doldrums assembles an international and intergenerational group of artists who explore characteristics and systems of play within their work. From structured gaming to the ludicrous and absurd, the artists use the languages of play to explore global, social and political concerns and the role of play within the everyday.

The importance of play for development and as a vital enabler of social cohesion was theorised by Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga in his 1938 text *Homo Ludens* (The Playing Man). Huizinga explained that play turns the working man, *homo faber*, into a more creative and more intelligent being. Huizinga's theory continues to inform our understanding of psychology, sociology and pedagogy.

Despite this, play is often perceived as unproductive. Through a capitalist lens, play is frequently understood as the opposite of work. Through an understanding of art-as-work, or art-as-commodity, art-for-play and play-for-art could therefore be suggested as being of diminished value.¹

Today, play exerts a great influence on work. In the working environments of the current economy, play has become a motor for creativity, and thus productivity; and its role in the future seems ever more crucial. Play techniques like gamification exercise a degree of influence on the philosophies of global corporations like Apple, Google, Amazon, and Facebook.

Beyond interpretations of play being understood as a tool towards increasing productivity, play can be political. As artist and game designer Mary Flanagan suggests in her text *Critical Play*, history is full of artists deploying various modes of critical play to undermine political, social and institutional conventions.² One need just think of the colonialist rhetoric insinuated in games like *Squatters* or *Catan*, as examples. Players express political bias by choosing what games to play, by the same token, game makers have the power to challenge the norm and influence social change.

Siobhan Sloper
Curator

1. David Hopkins. *Duchamp, Childhood, Work and Play: The Vernissage For First Papers Of Surrealism*, New York, 1942 – Tate Papers | Tate. [online] Available at: [tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/duchamp-childhood-work-and-play-the-vernissage-for-first-papers-of-surrealism-new-york-1942](https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/duchamp-childhood-work-and-play-the-vernissage-for-first-papers-of-surrealism-new-york-1942)

2. Flanagan, M. (2009) *Critical Play*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press

Artworks

(Left to right, front to back)

Ciaran Begley & James Nguyen

Begley Nguyen Art Prize Lottery, 2020
Artworks provided by online entrants, iPad, book (printed after the draw)
The Art Prize Lottery will be drawn on Friday 4 December, with special guest Georgia Banks as Spinner

Elizabeth McInnes

The Children’s Library, 2017
Wall paint, perspex, Tasmanian oak, Indian ink, hand ground flour, salt, egg
46 x 38 x 8cm

Simon Denny

Centralized vs Decentralized Conway’s Game of Life Box Lid Overprint: Inspired by TripAdvisor (Facebook Big Basin v2 AI/ML Hardware vs DIY GPU Bitcoin PoW Miner), 2019
UV print on ‘Game of Life: Trip Advisor’ box lid
35 x 48cm
Courtesy of the artist and Fine Arts, Sydney

Simon Denny

Centralized vs Decentralized Conway’s Game of Life Box Lid Overprint: Skill and Chance (Amazon AWS Custom Storage Server vs DIY 12 GPU Windows 10 Bitcoin PoW Miner), 2019
UV print on ‘Game of Life: Skill and Chance’ box lid
42 x 60.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Fine Arts, Sydney

Simon Denny

Centralized vs Decentralized Conway’s Game of Life Box Lid Overprint: Adventures Edition (Facebook Big Basin AI/ML Hardware vs DIY GPU Bitcoin PoW Miner), 2019
UV print on ‘Game of Life: Adventures’ box lid
39 x 52.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Fine Arts, Sydney

Sophie Hyde

To Look Away – Tilda, 2015
Single-channel HD Digital video, dual stereo sound, 18 minutes
Created as part of the 5-channel work To Look Away, 2015 with the Restless Dance Theatre, Adelaide
Performer/Co-Creator: Tilda Cobham-Hervey
Cinematographer/editor/producer: Bryan Mason
Composer: Jason Sweeney
Art Department: Lucas Croall, Gaelle Mellis, Nick Phillips
Movement Co-ordinater: Michelle Ryan
With thanks to Arts SA, Closer Productions and Restless Dance Theatre

Erwin Wurm

Astronomical Purpose, 2014
From One Minute Sculptures series
Pedestal, 2 tennis balls, instruction drawing
75 x 45 x 45cm

Erwin Wurm

The Speculative Realist, 2015
From One Minute Sculptures series
Pedestal, pen, instruction drawing
30 x 150 x 150cm

Francis Carmody

Companionships not for a herd, 2019
Laminated newspaper clipping, ink jet print, cartoon
55 x 75cm

Francis Carmody

Melbourne’s Most Loyal, 2019
Laminated newspaper clipping, 11 collected coffee cards
55 x 75cm

About the Works

Ciaran Begley & James Nguyen’s Art Prize Lottery is as it sounds, a kind of pseudo art prize with the winner drawn through a lottery system. The Art Prize Lottery is predicated on luck and holds a lens up to the art world, to the so-called experts or taste makers. The system that the artists utilise here, a game of Two-Up, speaks to Australia’s convict past and how modes of colonialism continue to resonate in contemporary culture. It almost goes without saying that gambling is inherently flawed; geared toward failure for the player and success for the house; and riddled with personal suffering through addiction. Yet by no means do the artists wish to equate the grief encountered by losing an art prize and the great losses encountered by individuals in the gambling arena. Rather, by placing an ‘ArtBet’ Ciaran and James remind us that the odds are rarely in our favour.

Francis Carmody’s Companionships not for a herd (2019) playfully collages archival elements that speak to discrete infiltrations of social and economic structures. The first includes a newspaper clipping detailing the theft of a family’s dead dog in a suitcase mistaken for DJ equipment, from Flinders Street Station, alongside a photo taken by the artist documenting a Chisenhale Gallery attendant removing a donor’s name from the vinyl ‘friends list’, indicating the withdrawal of funding and the end of the relationship. Melbourne’s Most Loyal, (2019) consists of two archived elements which speak to customer loyalty. The first a newspaper clipping detailing how the City of Melbourne doesn’t host the yearly Formula 1 race in Albert Park to make money off the race weekend itself, but in order to cash in on the speeding fines the race inspires in the area throughout the rest of the year, no doubt by some repeat offenders. Eleven coffee

loyalty cards accompany the article, suggesting a relationship between caffeine, speeding and customer loyalty. Through the construction of these narratives the artist perpetuates story telling traditions, cautionary tales and folklore in contemporary society.

While the figure of the child is not depicted in Remedy for the Doldrums, Elizabeth McInnes’ The Children’s Library (2017) explores the intersection of language, development, education and play. The Children’s Library was first conceived during a residency in the village of Gois, Coimbra, Portugal. In Gois there is a large paper factory Fabrica De Papel em Serplinz, a mill that produced the bulk of newspapers for the Portuguese public during the 1980s, later abandoned by the workers in protest against political corruption and the economic mismanagement of Portugals economy. The work is about language, and lineages of histories marked by words. The Children’s Library forms as refabricated detritus of a found object from the Fabrica De Papel em Serplins as a tool for teaching children how to read and spell.

Sophie Hyde’s To look away – Tilda (2015) depicts a lone female figure, Tilda, finding relief from her apparent boredom – a remedy for her doldrums. The film starts with Tilda sitting upon a windowsill, she swings her legs back and forth as if to amuse herself. These actions are followed by her running her fingers up the wall, and then, larger more gestural movements - sitting with her legs in the air; balancing herself between two walls; until these actions evolve into the full bodily movement of dance. Inherently playful, seemingly unchoreographed, the work speaks to the innate playfulness we all have within ourselves.

Simon Denny co-opts the well-known board game Milton Bradley’s Game of Life overprinted with images of Amazon and Facebook servers, Bitcoin miners, and cells from Conway’s Game of Life. Using the terminology of centralised and decentralised as metaphor to describe the different architectural models of governance and technology Denny comments on the increasing role technology plays in our everyday life to our social behaviours and attitudes.

In 2003, Erwin Wurm exhibited One Minute Sculptures in the front and main galleries at Gertrude Contemporary as part of Melbourne International Arts Festival – introducing audiences to the ability of the body to play with our notion of what sculpture might be. Remaining as relevant as it was when first exhibited, the One Minute Sculpture series of participatory works challenge both the physical relationship between human and object with unconventional pairings; and preconceived notions of visitor behaviour within a social gallery context.

The length of time attributed to these work – one minute – is nominal, the artist himself admits it is “not as a literal thing”³ –perhaps just enough time for a selfie? By entering into an unwritten contract with the artist to realise the work, a paradox is created, through activating the work, which will inevitability come to an end, you are accepting your own failure, and the destruction of the work which you have created.

Wurm invites you to collaborate. Follow the instructions and realise the work. Go ahead. Play. Fail.

3. Marianna Cerini, C., 2020. Three Oranges Give A Glimpse Inside Erwin Wurm’s ‘Absurd’ Visions. [online] CNN. Available at: edition.cnn.com/style/article/erwin-wurm-one-minute-sculptures-art/index.html

Artist Biographies

Ciaran Begley & James Nguyen

Ciaran Begley and James Nguyen have separate creative practices, but through their on-going friendship and conversations continue to produce projects where their concerns overlap and sit in disagreement.

Meeting at Sydney College of Arts, they collaborated with Consuelo Cavaniglia to run A Curator Visits opening up networks and curatorial relationships. In Melbourne, Begley and Nguyen have presented work at Gertrude Glasshouse Hell is Other People and at Kings ARI they presented We Are here Because We Are Here with the help of Georgia Banks, Simon Booth, and Cyrus Tang.

Francis Carmody

Francis Carmody lives and works in Melbourne. Carmody’s work is presented as products of distribution and power structures characterised by a wide range of forms, objects and actions. He explores the structures of the access and narrative through promiscuous research methodologies. Enacted by an initial action from the artist or a constructed model to be carried out by someone else, administrative and hysterical steps are rehearsed to realise projects which in turn are then redistributed as an artifice.

Simon Denny

Simon Denny lives and works in Berlin. He was born in Auckland in 1982. Denny’s work has recently been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including MONA - Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania; MoMA PS1, New York; Serpentine Galleries, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; OCAT, Shenzhen; Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland; WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels; Portikus, Frankfurt; Aspen Art Museum, Aspen; the Museum of New Zealand, Wellington; and Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch. Denny represented New Zealand at the 56th Venice Biennale, and his work has featured in large-scale thematic exhibitions including the 55th Venice Biennale, Manifesta

11, 9th Berlin Biennale, 6th Moscow Biennale, 13th Lyon Biennale, 12th Guangzhou Triennial, 8th Gwangju Biennale, 1st Brussels Biennale, Montreal Biennale, and the 16th Biennale of Sydney. Denny’s work has recently been included in curated exhibitions at institutions including Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Hessel Museum, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; and Institute of Contemporary Art, London. Denny is represented by Fine Arts, Sydney; Michael Lett, Auckland; Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, Berlin, New York; Petzel Gallery, New York; T293 Gallery, Rome; and Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

Sophie Hyde

Sophie Hyde is a founding member of film collective Closer Productions. She lives and works on the lands of the Kurna people in South Australia and makes provocative and intimate films and television.

Her debut feature drama 52 Tuesdays (director/ producer/co-writer) won the directing award at Sundance and the Crystal Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. She directed and produced the Australian/Irish co-production Animals starring Holliday Grainger and Alia Shawkat, which premiered in Sundance 2019 and won a BIFA for Best Debut Screenplay. She created, produced and directed episodic series F*!#ing Adelaide, which premiered in competition at Series Mania and screened on ABC Australia. She created, produced and directed (EP4) the 4x1-hour series The Hunting, which won two Australian Academy Awards for Best Screenplay in Television and Best Supporting Actor for Richard Roxburgh. Commissioned by SBS, it has become their highest rated commissioned program. Sophie is nominated for two Australian Directors Guild awards in 2020 for feature film Animals and TV series The Hunting.

Elizabeth McInnes

Elizabeth McInnes (1991) is an Australian curator, artist and facilitator currently based in Melbourne Australia. Her research centres institutional critique and expanded curatorial praxis. She is the director of Discordia Gallery a Melbourne-based platform for contemporary art and discourse. Founded in 2020, Discordia seeks to establish an experimental venue for the arts; convening, exhibiting, and supporting critical voices of contemporary artists and practitioners within Australia. In 2017 she founded Conch Rotterdam whilst working and residing across Northern Europe, Conch Rotterdam is a nomadic gallery and platform for experimental publishing and curatorial practice. Issues of Exposition #1 Conch Rotterdam’s first iteration of printed exhibitions is currently held in public and private collections of Museen Koeln Kunstund Museumsbibliothek in Cologne Germany. McInnes has exhibited and worked in Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Scandinavia and throughout Europe.

Erwin Wurm

Erwin Wurm (Austrian, b.1954) is an artist best known for his strange depictions of everyday life and his humorous approach to the Formalism style. He was born in Bruck an der Mur and studied at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna and the Academy of Fine Arts in Austria. Wurm takes everyday object such as nails, screws, and almost anything else, and creates breathtaking sculptures that make people question exactly what defines a sculpture. He has been working on One Minute Sculptures since the late 1980s; in these works, a model poses with everyday objects, but in a strange and almost unnatural way. His works have been shown at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and Vienna, the Musee d’Art Contemporain in Lyon, France, and the Centre Pompidou in France. In 2017, Wurm represented Austria at the 57th Venice Biennale.

GERTRUDE CONTEMPORARY

Ciaran Begley & James Nguyen
Francis Carmody
Simon Denny
Sophie Hyde
Elizabeth McInnes
Erwin Wurm

Curator | Siobhan Sloper
Gertrude Glasshouse
Exhibition Dates | 26 November - 19 December 2020

Gertrude Contemporary acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners and custodians of this land and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

Thank You's & Acknowledgements

All the artists
Mark Feary
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Steve Stewart
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Rachel Plank

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