

## *Habitat* ShrewD Collective

Chris Fontana, Tracey Lamb, Amanda Laming,  
Nina Sanadze and Mimmalisa Trifilò

Gertrude Glasshouse  
Friday 8 September – Saturday 7 October 2023

*Habitat* began with an exploration of the storied 'Tower of Babel' concept, in which language is attributed symbolically as the source of division among the world's people. ShrewD Collective has decided to build something positive together, engaging with a process that embodies the universal challenges of communication and mutual understanding.

Bringing together five diverse visual languages, the artists collaborate to construct new architectural elements using words and conversations, clay, steel, paper, wood, stone, string, fabric, and plants. *Habitat* stands as an alternative to the Babel Tower; a porous and visually rich space that immerses viewers who can spend time exploring, reading, thinking, sitting, or gathering within.

*Habitat* serves a dual purpose—it reflects and critiques the current state of the world, while offering hope and ideas for a better society.

In this envisioned world, dialogue, communication, and understanding are assumed, challenging the obstacles presented within the Tower of Babel narrative.

The project comes about as Gertrude Studio Artist Nina Sanadze opens her Gertrude Glasshouse exhibition opportunity to the collective, shedding light on their artistic practice and methodologies of fostering mutual support, community cohesion, and collaboration. Staying true to Sanadze's large-scale, peace-building social practice projects, the artist has further expanded this concept into the Collective Polyphony Festival.

### Acknowledgements

Collective Polyphony Festival is a multi-space event that fosters and nurtures emerging and established artist collectives, founded upon the central idea of artists supporting artists.

The festival runs from 2 September – 28 October 2023 across participating venues BLINDSIDE, Daine Singer, Gertrude Glasshouse, Mary Cherry, SEVENTH Gallery, Stockroom and Testing Grounds.

Nina Sanadze is represented by Daine Singer, Naarm Melbourne.

Gertrude Glasshouse is generously supported by Michael Schwarz and David Clouston.

Gertrude Glasshouse is generously supported by the City of Yarra, through the 2023 Annual Grants Program.

Collective  
Polyphony  
Festival

Gertrude acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners and custodians of this land and waters and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.



Media Partner

The Monthly The Saturday Paper 7am

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1. ShrewD Collective  
*Welcome Mat*, 2023  
695mm x 400mm  
Coco husk  
Courtesy of the artists
2. Mimmalisa Trifilò  
*Outside In*, 2023  
Dimensions variable  
Broadbean varieties: Aquadulce, Coles Dwarf, Aprovecho, Long Pod, Crimson Flowered, potting mix, compost, coco husk  
Courtesy of the artist
3. Amanda Laming  
*Clearing the House*, 2023  
2500mm x 2500mm  
Mixed media including plastic, nylon, polyester, sisal, elastic, linen thread, porcelain, cardboard  
Courtesy of the artist
4. Nina Sanadze  
*Unus Mundus*, 8500+ languages, 2023  
50mm (w), 50mm (d), 8500mm (h)  
Matchsticks, ink, glue, steel cable  
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer Gallery
5. Mimmalisa Trifilò  
*Inside Out*, 2023  
Dimensions variable  
Charcoal, paint pens, chalk markers, chalk  
Courtesy of the artist
6. Tracey Lamb  
*Conversation Pit*, 2023  
440mm (h) x 4000mm diameter  
circular seating  
Steel, powder coating, adjustable feet, rubber end caps  
Courtesy of the artist
7. Tracey Lamb  
*Raise the Roof*, 2023  
760mm (h) x 2200mm (w) x 2700mm (l)  
Timber, acrylic paint, copper brackets, bolts, screws, glue  
Courtesy of the artist
8. Nina Sanadze  
*Unus Mundus*, 2023  
4000+ book of religions  
300mm (w) x 330mm (d) x 370mm (h)  
Paper, thread, granite, gold imitation  
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer Gallery
9. Chris Fontana  
*Polis*, 2023  
2500mm (h) x 3600mm (w)  
Mixed media on rice paper on hessian  
Courtesy of the artist

### ShrewD Collective

ShrewD Collective is a group of five ShrewD female artists. We assemble, weave, weld, paint, sculpt, draw, and write, maintaining our autonomous artistic styles, and then bring these together to form something entirely unique.

While operating primarily as an arts peer support group, this nurturing intent extends through our work into the wider community. Our collective objective comprises inhabiting various sites and spaces through which we can design and deliver projects that encourage social engagement. Our experience as arts practitioners is enriched through meaningful interactions with the public, encouraging us to consider audience participation as integral to the making of art and community building.

We believe that during times described as ‘challenging’ at best, we each have the power to undertake small but significant positive actions.

As one collective of many, we aspire to contribute to a grassroots movement towards building and reinforcing a sense of social cohesion and belonging.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Country in which we live and work, the Wurundjeri, Bunurong, and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation and the Brataualung people of Gunaikurnai Country. We admire their resilience and determination as the first artists, changemakers, and caretakers of the land, sea, and waters. As artists who have an intimate relationship with concepts, materials, and culture, we are committed to celebrating the First Peoples’ inextricable spiritual and cultural connection to this sacred place.

**Chris Fontana** is an artist and writer based on Bunurong, Boon Wurrung, and Wurundjeri Country. She presents a contemporary worldview through an anthropological lens, fracturing our perception of the present by situating current human experience within the ongoing human story. This often involves a process of mapping across time, exploring the politics of place, and the relationship between geography and shifting ideologies. Monumental yet fragile and tactile, her works consist of archaeologically layered assemblages of archival newspapers and documentation, cartography, thoughts, and drawings.

Chris Fontana’s monumental but intricate installation encloses the back of the *Habitat* space. A richly textured, narrative map reflects upon the contrived and rapid construction of historical Melbourne as an urban habitat. The work critiques the concept of the ‘new’ city, and the universal[ised] language of capitalism as both a unifying and destructive force.

**Tracey Lamb** is based on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung lands. She is an abstract sculptor who predominantly works with welded steel. Her practice embodies feminist principles through her chosen medium and artistic concepts. Modern architecture and design are adopted as reference points within her work. Additionally, she explores the histories of marginalized 20th-century female designers to suggest alternative narratives and to challenge patriarchal power structures. Tracey has recently completed a permanent public artwork for Maribyrnong City Council.

Moving from this emotional space, visitors approach the cradle of the installation—a large welded piece by Tracey Lamb shaped as a welcoming and functional conversation pit and shelter. It reimagines the foundation of a successful Tower of Babel, providing an idealised gathering place for conversations, contemplation, and storytelling.

**Amanda Laming** is based on Gunaikurnai Country. Her large textile installations and ongoing drawing practice reflect on life’s experiences as a subject matter, evoking pathos in the viewer. The immediacy and tactility of her creative processes are meditative. Her work is held in major public and private collections, and she has exhibited widely including the National Gallery of Victoria, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and Tolarno Galleries.

Amanda Laming’s enormous sphere-shaped sculpture greets visitors at the entrance, overwhelming and confronting them with its size, texture, and smell. It externalizes anxieties, enveloping tension and deep psychological concerns within its ball of nerves and bundled domestic memories.

**Nina Sanadze** is a Soviet-born (Georgia) artist based on Bunurong land. Her practice is dedicated to peace-building and often takes the form of large installations and social practice. Sanadze presents narratives built upon personal stories from within the experience of conflict. She believes that peace-building is achieved through proactive work. Sanadze is represented by Daine Singer Gallery and is a resident of the Gertrude Studio Program. She has received multiple awards and recently held a solo show at Kunsthall 3.14 in Norway.

Nina Sanadze attempts to comprehend, order, and conceptualise the inconceivable vastness, complexity, and diversity of humankind through visual enumeration. Her creation is a book showcasing 4000+ world religions and towers of 8500+ world languages, where endless multiplicity democratically adds up to a common denominator of our similarity.

**Mimmalisa Trifilò** is an artist educator living and working on Bunurong, Boon Wurrung, and Wurundjeri Country. Trifilò is passionate about visual arts, collaborative modes, and the power of social art practice to engage publics in diverse settings. Her artwork encompasses the central themes of identity with an emphasis on alternate histories, intercultural dialogue/pedagogy, ethnobotany, and ecology.

Within this space, Mimmalisa Trifilò uses language to transform the abstract into tangible reference points, signs, and symbols. Writing becomes a vehicle for communication with our selves and with others. She also nurtures plants, rapidly growing and transforming within the gallery space, serving as a metaphor for tamed nature, grief, hope, and regeneration.

