The 2025 Gertrude Studios exhibition opens on 31 October and closes on 13 December.

various small fires

With Tarik Ahlip, Moorina Bonini, Gabi Briggs, Renee Cosgrave, Grace Culley, Tara Denny, David Egan, Erin Hallyburton, Jordan Halsall, Nadia Hernández, Rebecca Jensen, Alexandra Peters, Jenna Lee, Georgia Morgan, Chunxiao Qu and Yusi Zang.

Various Small Fires brings together new and recent works by sixteen artists currently participating in the Gertrude Studio Program.(1) Bookending the organisation's fortieth anniversary exhibition series, a structured survey of institutional history, the annual studios exhibition reorients attention towards the present.

Departing from the thematic cohesion associated with group surveys, this iteration embraces difference as its guiding impulse. It attends to the distinct ideas, processes, and sensibilities that animate Gertrude's studio community, foregrounding the generative tensions and affinities that emerge when artistic production occurs in a space that is both private and shared.

The exhibition has been developed by Curator Brigid Moriarty with the Gertrude Studio Artists.
Exhibition graphic design by Alex Torcutti.
Exhibition seating is available at Front of House. Please see a member of the Gertrude team.

JENNA LEE

Jenna Lee's new installation Blackened Tongue (2025) stems from the artist's concentrated engagement with eucalyptus and its ability to ignite, burn, regenerate, and carry memories of land in its scented leaves. Lee thinks of Larrakia language the same way, as an ecosystem that can recover and grow again after devastation.

Each leaf is cut from the pages of Aboriginal Words and Place Names, a book that flattens over 250 unique Aboriginal languages and over 850 regional dialects into one imagined whole. Lee stained the paper black with Japanese sumi ink made from black soot, a material that holds the memory of fire.

The repurposed Bosistos eucalyptus oil bottles reference both the extraction of natural resources and the plucking of Aboriginal languages for words, without connection and context to publish and commodify. They also connect to where Lee has lived in Naarm Melbourne since relocating in 2020, directly across the road from the original Bosistos factory in Richmond.

Lit by the flickering image of a flame, Blackened Tongue manifests as a small act of renewal, with language whispering from the shadows.

REBECCA JENSEN

Dancer and choreographer Rebecca Jensen's work operates across theatres, galleries, films and community-based projects. Jensen's low-fi, process-driven practice focuses on the body and the interdisciplinary potential of choreography. Jensen uses the equally speculative and practical qualities of dance to encourage reflection, connection and transformation.

THE SUN IS NOT FUN (Flesh Mirror reflected) (2025) is a new two-channel video work that blurs speculative fiction with personal narratives, unfolding in a vivid, unstable present where memory bends and parallel realities emerge. The work was created from live-feed footage from multiple performances of Jensen's work Flesh Mirror, which was co-devised with Weave Movement Theatre and collaborators. Flesh Mirror premiered at Artshouse, Naarm Melbourne in 2025, co-presented by Melbourne Fringe as part of Pulse.

NADIA HERNÁNDEZ

Venezuelan-born artist Nadia Hernández's multidisciplinary practice considers loss, memory, and memorialisation in relation to the diasporic experience. The textile banners suspended in Gertrude's foyer form part of a larger project titled En Todo Tiempo (At All Times) (2024–2025), which also includes sound and publishing components.(2) Developed during Hernández's Fountainhead Residency in Miami, the project has been presented in various iterations, including at the 2024 Oslo Freedom Forum (in partnership with the Human Rights Foundation) and the 2025 TarraWarra Biennial: We Are Eagles, curated by Yorta Yorta woman Kimberley Moulton.

To create these works, Hernández chose six songs from an evolving archive of protest music spanning from 1940 to 2025 and restructured their lyrics into a new poetic composition:

like a seagull at all times
until life
~~(that)~~ just finishes breaking
shine for their absence
traces of courage (the)
[glorious, immense, sublime and tender]
(love)
has long gone on its journey

During her residency in Miami, Hernández invited fellow Venezuelan artists, musicians and family members to gather and engage with the protest song archive and her newly constructed poem. This resulted in the creation of a 30-minute collaborative sound work honouring the enduring relationship between music and political protest in Venezuela, and the neighbourhood as a site of collective opposition and grassroots action.(3)

1 The title derives from an artist book published by Ed Ruscha in 1964.
2 A copy of the Hernández's limited-edition publication is available to view at Front of House.
3 To listen to the accompanying sound work, visit gertrude.org.au/exhibition/various-small-fires

GERTRUDE

Gertrude acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters on which we operate. We pay our respects to the Wurundjeri people and their ancestors and Elders – past and present.

Gertrude is assisted by the Visual Arts, Craft and Design Framework, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments; and the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria. Past is Prologue: Four Decades of Gertrude is supported by the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund and Proclaim.

The Gertrude team is grateful to Lexi Kerr for installation support, Shane Selleck at Manfax Paints for exhibition signage, and Alex Torcutti for exhibition graphic design.

The banners on display feature fragments from Hernández's text. Translated, they read: like a seagull; at all times. For Hernández, the fragmented nature of the text speaks to the unfinished history of struggle and a disjointed sense of belonging. By weaving together personal narratives, political histories, and cultural movements, the works in En Todo Tiempo highlight the ways in which resistance is encoded in song and memory.

GRACE CULLEY

Grace Culley's Checky Dog in the Family Room (2025) is a new installation in two parts. Checky Dog is a Great Dane-scaled sculpture affectionately named after the artist's childhood teddy – a small blue and white gingham dog. The visually permeable state of Checky Dog reveals its structure, highlighting Culley's hands-on approach to problem solving and the detailed construction techniques usually hidden in her sculptural works.

Checky Dog stands on a floor-based piece titled Family Room, comprising 5 steel frames carefully arranged on a hand-painted sheet of MDF. The frames and painted surface feature botanical motifs selectively drawn from the nineteenth century wallpaper designs of William Morris, a key figure of the Arts and Crafts movement who famously rejected industrialisation in favour of handmade production methods.

The respective material processes in Checky Dog in the Family Room reflect on both personal and historical dimensions of handicraft and DIY culture, and what the artist describes as 'the precarious threshold that separates nostalgia from wilful ignorance.'

RENEE COSGRAVE

Renee Cosgrave invited members of Te Reo Maioha, a Māori language class she attends in Naarm Melbourne, to create a collaborative window painting using rākau (cuisenaire rods) that celebrates culture, connection to place, and language reclamation.(4)

The painting depicts rivers and waters that members of Te Reo Maioha have a connection to. When Māori introduce themselves with a pepeha, Māori usually start by talking about their maunga (mountain), then the awa (river), the iwi (tribe), and lastly, introduce themselves. A pepeha is a way of acknowledging and honouring one's connection to the whenua (land) and tīpuna (ancestors). The group has depicted the shapes and wairua (spirit) of their awa by using the rākau, to show and connect how they whakapapa to whenua (country/land) and tīpuna in Aotearoa New Zealand and other nations, lands and cultures.

The work uses colours: kahurangi – the cloak of Ranginui (the sky father) in the evening (a dark blue), and some say kahurangi is for the sky; kikorangi – the colour of the skin of Ranginui in the morning (a light blue), and some say kikorangi is for the sea; pounamu – a deep green; wherō – red; mā- white; pango – black ; parauri – brown, which has been used to represent our marae (tribal/meeting house).

The artists would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong people as the Traditional Owners of the sacred lands and waterways where we live and learn language; and acknowledge awa and our tīpuna as living beings and co-creators of this artwork.

GEORGIA MORGAN

Existing somewhere between film footage of a conservation treatment and documentation of an urban plein air painting, Here to Clean Up (High Street) (2025) is a meditation on preservation and giving thanks. On her daily journey to her studio, Georgia Morgan frequently noted the hand painted sign of a local laundromat, spruiking across two lines, 'Laundrette $4 wash'.

Simple, classic and timeless, the sign served as a marker of her approaching destination. For much of her time in the studios, the sign remained a constant, until it began being tagged, animating further layers of graffiti. Morgan then embarked on the transgressive act of repainting the sign as it had been, a restorative gesture unlikely to be noticed. This static shot video captures the devotional nature of Morgan's practice – a quiet thank you note to her neighbourhood written in paint and goodwill.

DAVID EGAN

In recent years, small circular forms – the artist calls them 'cells' – have begun to populate David Egan's paintings. Like real cells, which belong to a larger network and can take on a multiplicity of roles in the body, these ambiguous motifs have performed a range of representational functions in Egan's works: rosary beads, food crumbs, or the corollas of flowers. In earlier works, the cells appeared flat and discrete – maintaining a sense of autonomy. In Meaning gathers up (2025), however, the cells have become spherical, taking on solidity as they huddle together in formation. Grouped together on a dinner plate encircling a cosmic landscape, the work seems to frame viewing as both a metabolic and visual act.

Within his painting practice, Egan resists the impulse to predetermine outcomes, instead embracing uncertainty and the slow unfolding of possibilities. With I don't want to look it up anymore (2025) and Chopping wood for practise (2025), perceptible shapes, images, and systems surfaced gradually as he 'coaxed little blobs of colour into collision with each other.' This deliberate, methodical process reflects his desire to inhabit and sustain a state of attentiveness and uncertainty.

JORDAN HALSALL

Jordan Halsall's practice centres on disruptive practices and technological change, critically examining ideas of progress and growth. Bookends (Green Hell) (2025) forms part of a new series of modular sculptures inspired by video game health bars – visual indicators of a player's lifeforce that suggest decline, continuance or exit, and evoke the containment of real and virtual bodies.

The central components of these sculptures are lined with hand-dyed gingham and tartan fabrics sourced by the artist. The textiles are encased within horizontal wall-mounted forms made from fibreglass, 3D-printed plastic and resin. To produce these works, Halsall collaborated with a network of fabricators operating through DIY setups – disruptive modes of production made possible by the increasing accessibility of new technologies.

Extending Halsall's exploration of technological innovation and its disruptive impact on health and wellness, this series also links back to the notion of the contemporary artist as a 'prosumer', a hybrid of producer and consumer.

ALEXANDRA PETERS

Alexandra Peters' Midnight Hammer (2025) is a large-scale diptych of glowing orange and deep midnight blue. While Peters summarises the work as a painting, it is equally concerned with processes of drawing and expanded printmaking. Gestural black forms partially obscure the work's charged fields, seeming both to erupt from within and to sit upon the layered surface. Peters' characteristic use of vinyl – a material associated with industrial and bureaucratic settings designed to hold and move bodies – operates in tension, simultaneously repelling and containing the paint, pigment, and ink. The abutting panels heighten this sense of confrontation, while the frame-within-a-frame composition imposes a manufactured order over the turbulent middle, like containment under strain.

The title is perhaps a reference to Operation Midnight Hammer, the code name given to a series of U.S. military strikes on Iranian uranium facilities on 22 June 2025. While not a depiction of those events (systems of opacity run through all of Peters' work), Midnight Hammer channels an atmosphere of tension, aftermath, and geopolitical volatility. The Trump administration hailed the attacks as a 'spectacular military success' though satellite imagery that followed failed to verify the extent of their damage assessment. It would seem that Peters

4 Te Reo Maioha is a Te Ataarangi Māori language school teaching the Māori language to adults in the Eora Nation Sydney and Naarm Melbourne. Thousands of adults have passed through the doors of Te Reo Maioha throughout this period. Classes are total immersion using only Māori language. The main emphasis is on listening and speaking rather than written learning. The program includes other forms of communication without the need to speak English, including singing (waiata), sign language (tohu a ringa), and the use of coloured cuisenaire rods (rākau). This method enables students to quickly memorise and retain what is being taught. More information: learnreomaori.com

is out to question the role of the image itself, and its ability to convey a felt sense of rupture, control, and collapse.

Originally shown in Peters' first institutional solo exhibition The Graven Image at Warrnambool Art Gallery earlier this year, the work is presented here in a new configuration. A cluster of gas canisters and shisha pipes – part of Peters' accumulative network of objects that suggest the containment and movement of bodies and commodities – appears to map the gestures of the painting onto the gallery floor, transposing the latent violence of the image in real time.

YUSI ZANG

Yusi Zang's paintings and sculptures reflect on conditions of banality, transforming everyday scenes and objects through gestures that are at once absurd and quietly unsettling. Zang'spractice pursues a form of realism that both mimics and extracts from the objects she observes, reflecting the artist's desire to 'make the eyes discover the intensity and subtlety of things in the tedious life.'

In Godzilla (2024), bodily or plant-like tendrils emerge from a diagonally perforated surface. The uncomfortable presence of these appendages hints at some kind of corporeal 'other' lurking beneath the flattened, steely calm of a domestic exterior. Informed by the experience of adapting to Australian life while remaining detached from her hometown, Zang's works navigate the hidden tensions of displacement and assimilation. Godzilla embodies this state of quiet unease, pointing to the gradual unravelling of an apparently stable existence.

ERIN HALLYBURTON

Erin Hallyburton's sculptural practice engages with fat studies and intersectional theory to examine the conceptual and material limits of the body, and how these limits are produced and negotiated in specific sites. Working with edible and transforming substances, Hallyburton stages processes of decay and seepage within the gallery space, unsettling assumptions that objects and bodies are coherent, discrete, and autonomous.

In Gut Twist (2025) Hallyburton turns to energy-dense and processed foodstuffs to explore how fatness and class are co-constituted in dominant cultural narratives. Affordable, accessible, and long-lasting foods often carry negative connotations as they are assumed to lead to the accumulation of fat on the body. In this way, harmful perceptions of fatness and class have become closely entangled.

A long chain of linked hotdogs spills from a glass funnel and unfurls across the gallery floor. Each sausage is filled with rendered animal fat, emitting a faint savoury scent that invites both attraction and repulsion. Through the interplay of desire, disgust, and pleasure, Gut Twist questions how such sensations frame our understanding of bodies and consumption.

TARA DENNY

With her most recent sculptural work, Ravishing Rose (2025), Tara Denny takes cue from adornment, diverting from her practice's proclivity towards obscurement and reductionism. This new work, cast in bronze from the amalgamation of various hand-moulded wax forms, shaped into a necklace-like armature, alchemises transitional and discarded studio experiments into a more permanent and precious state. While newly cast, the patina evokes a history of skin contact, like bejewelled gold handled frequently and with deep fondness. As an object, it seems to trap stories of such love, suspending them, holding them tight and immortalising them. Protruding with solidity from the wall, the work also evokes the form of a brace, yet not one of restraint, but rather, of support and protection.

GABI BRIGGS

Gabi Briggs' GEDYURA (2024) – the Anaiwan word for woman – bears witness to Aboriginal women's frontier resistance and confronts its erasure from colonial narratives. Briggs describes the work as unfolding through deep time, a temporal field in which story, memory and relation are continuous rather than fixed. The point of departure for this work is a historical newspaper clipping recounting the story of an unnamed, armed Aboriginal gedyura who was among a group of men accused of raiding stations in New England.

A rifle woven from lomandra is poised alongside a video in which Briggs faces away from the camera, emulating the movements of the unnamed gedyura as described in the article. Rather than a re-enactment, Briggs engages in an ongoing re-writing of the story, one where the colonial record is brought into relation with living memory, allowing tenderness and truth to re-emerge over time

Briggs is shown gathering the lomandra used to make the rifle with her irbelas (mother, mother's sisters) and bawas (sisters). The artist describes the deep kinship and shared knowledge embedded in this work as 'a powerful weapon passed down by my matriarchs.' For Briggs, the act of weaving is both process and meaning, embodying resurgence through relation.

GEDYURA was originally presented as part of These Arms Hold, an exhibition organised by Lardil curator and writer Maya Hodge at Incinerator Gallery in 2024, which centred on the legacies of Aboriginal women resistance fighters. Here, the work is presented in two distinct phases, beginning with its full presence. During the exhibition, Briggs will remove the rifle and return it to Anaiwan Country and Community. This act of withdrawal and repatriation honours Indigenous survivance – a concept at the heart of GEDYURA that merges survival with resistance – and resituates the work in deep time.(5)

TARIK AHLIP

Tarik Ahlip has a background in architecture and works across sculpture, film and verse. The artist has requested that no contextualising notes accompany his work.

CHUNXIAO QU

Chunxiao Qu's neon work NO, BECAUSE I AM (2025) forms part of a larger narrative project of the same name. At its centre is an autobiographical trilogy of novels that recount the artists recent experiences in Finland.(6) The trilogy draws on the traditions of phantasmagoria – an early form of horror theatre – and xianxia, a Chinese fantasy genre in which protagonists undergo spiritual cultivation in pursuit of immortality.

For Qu, writing has become a core strategy for navigating adversity in a foreign context and, as the work's title suggests, a means of cultivating transformation. While the trilogy unfolds in long-form prose, the neon work here distils its essence, illuminating the elastic power of language in all its forms and configurations. In just four words, Qu evokes a potent act of defiance and liberation.

MOORINA BONINI

Dungula is central to this Bonini's new moving image work, reflecting both light and knowledge across interconnected layers of woka (Country). na-nanyak (to dream) (2025) speaks to Aboriginal understandings of time as circular and continuous, without beginning or end, and acknowledges moments where Ancestral knowledge resides.

Just as our Ancestors' knowledge is embedded within woka and Dutala Woka (Sky Country), the Dungula acts as a mirror, reflecting the stars, songlines, and the presence of Yenbena. The light glimmering on the river's surface evokes the movement of stars, an interplay between water and sky that reveals the layered connections of knowledge and culture.

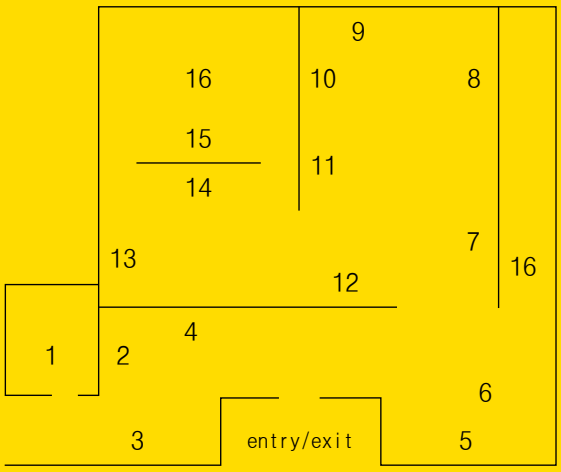
The sound piece accompanying na-nanyak (to dream) deepens this exploration, tracing the rhythmic pulse of woka. It evokes how woka holds, encodes, and transmits knowledge through a living system of relationships – a matrix of continual exchange.

yenmatj (to burn) (2024-ongoing) is a long-term intervention at Gertrude Contemporary, initiated by Bonini during Gertrude Studios 2024. Continued here, selected areas of the exposed wooden beams outside the galleries bear burn marks drawn from South-Eastern Indigenous mark-making practices. The act of burning and the marks themselves are emblematic of Indigenous knowledge. yenmatj (to burn) operates as both a critique of the white cube and an attempt to reconfigure it, while also acknowledging the woka upon which Gertrude exists.

5 Smith, G. ed., Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2008

6 To read the first eight chapters of Qu's manuscript, visit gertrude.org.au/exhibition/various-small-fires

List of works



1. Jenna Lee
Blackened Tongue 2025
pages of Aboriginal Words and Place Names, sumi ink, repurposed Bosistos eucalyptus oil bottles, wire, glue
dimensions variable
single-channel video, colour, silent
1:08 minutes, looped

Courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery, Naarm Melbourne

2. Rebecca Jensen
THE SUN IS NOT FUN (Flesh Mirror reflected) 2025
two-channel video, colour, sound
23:00 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

Choreographer/Lead Artist/Editor: Rebecca Jensen
Collaborating Performers: Janice Florence, Trevor Dunn, Anthony Riddel, Sonia Marcon, Emma Norton, David Baker
Composer/Sound Designer: Marco Cher
Costume Designer: Geoffrey Watson
Lighting Designer: Harrie Hogan
Creative Producer: Anna Nalpantidis
Videography: Rebecca Jensen, Marco Cher and Emma Norton
Video Consultant/Co-Editor for pre-records in live show: Zoe Scoglio
Production/Technical Manager: Shiv Geaney
Stage Manager: Sylva Storm

Across 2022-2023, Flesh Mirror was developed with the late Uncle Greg whose ideas and contributions have influenced the work.

3. Nadia Hernández
from the series En Todo Tiempo (At All Times) 2024–2025
textiles
2 panels, 297 × 180 cm and 360 × 183 cm

Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Naarm Melbourne and Sydney

4. Grace Culley
Checky Dog in the Family Room 2025
recycled timber, screws, steel wire, steel fixing band, steel flat brackets, twine, recycled MDF, house paint, shellac ink, biro, grey lead
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

5. Renee Cosgrave in collaboration with Akuira, Amorangi, Jasmine Morrish, Rachel Boyd, Angela Cooper-Naresh, Anahera Neho-Cooper, Waru Cooper, Christo Crocker, Lisa Manawa Grocott, Helena Hapeta, Bronwyn Kara, Julien Te Purei Comer-Kleine, Errol MacKinven Hunt, Heneriata Paringatai, Watere Tahi, Irihipeti Waretini and our Kirrip (Bun Wurrung Balug)
Ngā awa whina o te whakapapa (The braided rivers of whakapapa) 2025
acrylic and chalk on window
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artists

6. Georgia Morgan
Here to Clean Up (High Street) 2024
single-channel video, colour, sound
35:16 minutes, looped

Courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Naarm Melbourne
Special thanks to Kit Murphie for help with filming

7. David Egan
Meaning gathers up 2025
oil on canvas
51 × 66 cm

I don’t want to look it up anymore 2025
oil on canvas
107 × 122 cm

Chopping wood for practise 2025
oil on canvas
81.5 × 111.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist

8. Jordan Halsall
Bookends (Green Hell) 2025
fibreglass, polycarbonate, epoxy, gingham, enamel
190 × 350 × 120 cm

Courtesy of the artist

9. Alexandra Peters
Midnight Hammer 2025
acrylic, pigment and water-based ink with screen-print medium and paste on vinyl, enamel, canister, arguileh hose
2 panels, 180 × 260 cm overall

Courtesy of the artist and PALAS, Sydney

10. Yusi Zang
Godzilla 2024
oil on canvas
168 × 112 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Animal House Fine Arts, Naarm Melbourne

11. Erin Hallyburton
Gut Twist 2025
collagen hotdog casings, animal shortening, glass funnel, powder-coated aluminium
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

12. Tara Denny
Ravishing Rose 2025
bronze, patina
15 × 23 × 45 cm

Courtesy of the artist
With thanks to Mal Wood Foundry, Naarm Melbourne

13. Tarik Ahlip
On Her Return (facial burns and a garland of flowers) 2025
plaster, pigment and sand
120 × 240 cm

Courtesy of the artist

14. Gabi Briggs
GEDYURA 2024
lomandra, wood, wire
80 × 15 cm
single-channel video, colour, silent
04:27 minutes, looped

Courtesy of the artist

15. Chunxiao Qu
NO, BECAUSE I AM 2025
LED neon, transparent acrylic
79 × 97 × 1.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and FUTURES, Naarm Melbourne

16. Moorina Bonini
na-nanyak (to dream) 2025
single-channel video, black and white, sound, charcoal
8:04 minutes, looped
dimensions variable

yenmatj (to burn) 2024–ongoing
pyrography
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist