

## **Review: Arcadia, Glen Eira City Council Gallery**

**By Dan Rule**

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The outwardly utopian worlds that grace the sculptures and photo-based works in Arcadia – including a striking new series by Poxini Papapetrou and a suite of sculptures by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah – are not quite as they seem. This group exhibition frames the notion of Arcadia via the prisms of migration, history, mythology and the natural world.

Indeed, darkness lurks in the bright plumes and lush vistas. The vast scale and muted palettes of Valerie Sparks' photomedia works, which bind together exotic birdlife in hyper-natural settings, belies their troubling history. The winged creatures that perch amid her rambling menagerie – or that she captures in a form approaching portraiture – are specimens gathered by colonialist explorers, only to be displayed (and displaced) in European museums.

In a similarly subdued palette, Michael Cook recasts moments of early colonial contact, only with Indigenous protagonists taking the place of their Dutch, French, Spanish and English counterparts.

Sonia Payes' recent series of photographs, *Mia*, is the exhibition's most elusive, but also most powerful. The soft, atmospheric, multiple-exposure images picture the spectre of two female figures, their paths and visages crossing and merging in the pall of a ghostly light. That the protagonists are in fact Payes' grandmother and niece adds another layer. Here, we witness the throes of family history and generational legacy.