

# In Homebound, seven local artists assess their practice in light of COVID-19

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Peter Haynes

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📷 Joel Arthur, Golden Fleecing, 2021. Picture: Supplied

**Various Artists. "Homebound". Canberra Contemporary Art Space, 44 Queen Elizabeth Terrace, Parkes. Tuesday - Sunday 11am to 5pm. Until May 2.**

*Homebound's* intriguing premise "takes a group of artists and asks what actually happened during this bizarre period (COVID-19) in which many artists could do nothing except make art by whatever means available", and "where, by necessity the focus moves to the local area".

Canberra Contemporary Art Space director David Broker has garnered a heterogeneous selection of local, or locally connected artists whose work in combination presents an exhilarating intellectual and visual display, and individually provocative and seductive objects.

Rosalind Lemoh's installation consists of five works in which cast concrete bicycle helmets are variously inserted with coloured perspex sheets. These are inscribed with titular texts that allude to an elision of the personal with the general, but with an overlapping which points to issues that affect us all. Lemoh's adherence to the use of industrial materials allows her, paradoxically, to produce softly insinuating pieces.

Robbie Karmel's four sets of works constitute an intensely private, introspective visual diary. There is a surrealistic quality to the piles of seemingly random graphic "representations" of his daily inner and deeply personal confrontations and struggles with his attempts to comprehend the futility of an arts practice in a period of pandemic overlay. The results insistently question the purpose of our own and art and the artist's existence.

Rory Gillen's *Transcription* and *Transduction* series are concerned with the translation/transposition of a physical object to a photographic (in its broadest sense) re-presentation of that object. The results are visually attractive abstracted patterns that celebrate their source as circulation boards.

Aidan Hartshorn's *Growth* is an incisive and aesthetically, conceptually and thematically absorbing work. It consists of a rug and a chair, the latter a very English chair (probably late 19th-Century Jacobethan revival or copy thereof (European culture), stuffed with kangaroo fur (Indigenous culture). The leather cover of the chair is split. The kangaroo fur stuffing surges out with a defiant determination that subverts the physical integrity of the leather seat cover. The deliberate paradox of overt subtlety that characterises this work is arguably the best example of this I have seen. The metaphor is powerful, intelligent and aesthetically and intellectually cutting.

Joel Arthur's three works interrogate his understanding of the history of art, and in particular Australian art and its influential European antecedents. *Golden Fleecing* sees Hans Heysen meeting Classical Greece, meeting 17th-Century vanitas still life, and a touch of 1970s Op Art, in a stunning visual exegesis of the thesis referred to above. Beautifully painted and carefully delineated, the contrived incongruities in this work coalesce to form a clever self-interrogation of the artist and his practice.

Natalie Mather's *cardiopharmacy* also speaks to art history. Hers is an allusive and encompassing image in which the heterotopic ("place within place") proffers visions of constructed and sometimes clashing (artistic) worlds while concurrently questioning

the origins and continuing existence of these. Her exquisitely grand visual concatenation may not provide answers but certainly forces interrogation.

Robbie Karmel's visual diary is given nuanced pictorial delineation in Emma Beer's two works - *everlasting* and *...getting to know thyself from the kitchen table, or not*. A wry sense of humour aligned with an incisive understanding of where she is coming from artistically, has characterised Beer's art for some time. The play with transparency and opacity in layered patterns is both intellectually clever and visually captivating.

*Homebound* is a strong exhibition with thematic solidity and individual works that give it expressive punch.

Congratulations to the artists and Canberra Contemporary Art Space.