

# ARA DOLATIAN

*IN BETWEEN FORMS*



THIS IS NO FANTASY  
dianne tanzer & nicola stein

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## IN BETWEEN FORMS

29 MAY - 20 JUNE 2026

THIS IS NO FANTASY is pleased to present *In Between Forms*, a new exhibition by interdisciplinary artist Ara Dolatian, marking his first solo exhibition with the gallery.

This body of work draws on Mesopotamian female deities, queens, and poetic traditions to explore unstable states between human, animal, and the monstrous. Influenced by the voice of Enheduanna and The Exaltation of Inanna, the sculptures reimagine ancient modes of invocation as contemporary acts of transformation. Figures shift across genders, species, and temporalities, resisting fixed categorisation and challenging patriarchal structures that seek to stabilise identity and power.

Informed by feminist and queer readings of Mesopotamian history, the work understands the body as constructed, relational and in flux. Hybridity operates as rupture, while the monstrous emerges as a generative site of resistance. Horns, drawn from ancient symbols of divinity, mark the figures as both sacred and otherworldly.

Presented in white and gold, the sculptures oscillate between archaeological relic and living body, holding tension between absence and presence, ruin and elevation, where transformation becomes a continual and embodied process.

EXHIBITION OPENING:  
Saturday 30 May | 2 - 4 pm  
THIS IS NO FANTASY  
108-110 Gertrude Street  
Fitzroy VIC

### BIOGRAPHY

Ara Dolatian is an interdisciplinary artist with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Sculpture) from RMIT University (2012) and a Master's in Social Science (Environment and Planning).

Dolatian's practice explores the intersection of cultural landscapes and natural ecosystems, with a particular focus on Mesopotamian artefacts and literature. Through his sculptural and ceramic work, Dolatian creates hybrid and reimagined forms that evoke both the ancient and the contemporary, exploring the evolution of deities and mythical beings within these historical landscapes. His pieces, characterised by distinctive shapes, captivating colour palettes, and delicate contours, bring to life the essence of archaeological figures and decayed architectural sites.

Dolatian's work has been exhibited widely in Australia and internationally, garnering support from prestigious organisations such as Creative Australia, Creative Victoria, and the City of Melbourne.

Dolatian has exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria, Scott Lawrie Gallery, Auckland New Zealand, Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney, Contemporary Art Space, Montevideo, and Liverpool Powerhouse in Sydney. His work is held in a number of private and public collections.

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The world's first known author was a princess, priestess, and poetess, who lived in what is modern-day Iraq, over 4,000 years ago. Her name was Enheduanna, and she wrote passionate hymns of praise to numerous deities, including Ishtar - the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war. In her composition known as *The Temple Hymns*, Enheduanna gives a powerful statement of originality:

*The compiler of the tablets was Enheduanna. My king, something has been created that no one has created before.*  
(The temple hymns, ETCSL 4.80.1).

In this exhibition, *In Between Forms*, artist Ara Dolatian carries forward this ancient legacy of celebrating powerful Mesopotamian goddesses by experimenting with hybridity, animality, and monstrosity.

Inanna is the Sumerian name for Ishtar, and she is the oldest known deity in the world for which we have written evidence. The use of hybrid and animal imagery to give form to this ancient and complex deity, seen in this exhibition, is also a feature of Enheduanna's poems of praise.

The artwork "*Feathered Guardian*" reflects the connection between birds, the heavens, and gods in ancient myth. Ishtar's presence on the battlefield is described using the analogy of a predatory bird - she is described preying even on other deities. This avian imagery, found in the exhibition, is also seen in the Queen of Night relief (sometimes known as the Burney Relief), dating to around the 19th century BCE. This beautiful relief shows a nude deity (most likely Inanna/Ishtar), with giant wings that extend from her torso, and raptor-like feet. The goddess is shown wearing the "horned cap" of divinity - much like Dolatian's horned creations.

The context of the Queen of Night image is likely Ishtar's visit to the Underworld to visit her sister, Ereshkigal. This visit results in conflict between the pair, and then in the transformation of Ishtar's body. Through divine intervention, she is revived and returned to her original bodily form. Transformation and the incorporation of animal imagery, then is a shared feature of the ancient divine imagery, and their new incarnations in this exhibition.

The further focus on monstrosity in the exhibition is also seen in the ancient myths from Mesopotamia. Ishtar herself teams up with the monstrously large Bull of Heaven to seek revenge for a romantic snub in the famous Epic of Gilgamesh. In another myth, she and her faithful servant, Ninshubur, must fight off a pack of monsters while Inanna escapes with the cosmic *Me* - a complex constellation of powers necessary for the functioning of the universe. Several deities, such as the solar deity Shamash, and the storm deity, Enlil, have protective relationships with monsters such as a fearsome forest guardian named Humbaba, and the scorpion/human hybrid creatures who guard the edges of the world. The at-times antagonistic, at-times collaborative relationship between gods and monsters in myth shows the dynamic nature of this connection - a flexibility reflected in the diverse forms of this exhibition.

By choosing white and gold for his artworks, Dolatian wordlessly expresses the purity and hierarchy of the divine world in ancient thought. Gold is referenced repeatedly in myths about Ishtar, signalling her connection to abundance, which is a key part of her imagery. The purity of the goddess is reflected in hymns, and is connected to her identification with the morning and evening star, Venus:

*Your divinity shines in the pure heavens like Nanna or Utu. Your torch lights up the heavens, turning darkness into light.*  
(Inana C, 4.07.3)

In this exhibition, Dolatian himself shines light on these ancient figures and concepts. Like Enheduanna, he has created something entirely new in doing so.

- Words by Louise M. Pryke

Dr Louise M. Pryke is an Assyriologist, author, and researcher specialising in the ancient Near East, with a focus on Mesopotamian mythology, religion, literature, ecology, and animality. She holds a PhD in Ancient Near Eastern History from the University of Sydney and has taught and researched at both the University of Sydney and Macquarie University. Her work explores themes of divinity, kingship, gender, mortality, and the relationship between humans, animals, and the natural world in ancient Mesopotamian texts and traditions. Pryke is the author of several books, including *Ishtar* (2017), *Gilgamesh* (2019), *Scorpion* (2016), and *Wind* (2023).

Bibliography:

Black, J.A., G. Cunningham, J. Ebeling, E. Flückeriger-Hawker, E. Robson, J. Taylor, and G. Zólyomi. 1998–2006. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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6. Throne, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
48 x 26 x 26 cm  
\$3,500

7. To Arrive, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
40 x 18 x 16 cm  
\$3,000

8. To Raise, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
36 x 19 x 19 cm  
\$3,000

9. Wind, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
46 x 19 x 19 cm  
\$3,500

10. Light, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
36 x 14 x 14 cm  
\$2,500

11. Darling Lover, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
40 x 16 x 16 cm  
\$3,000

12. To Stride, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
44 x 18 x 16 cm  
\$3,000



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12. To Stride, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
44 x 18 x 16 cm  
\$3,000

13. To Step, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
36 x 11 x 11 cm  
\$2,500

14. Queen of All Lands, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
39 x 19 x 19 cm  
\$3,000

15. Lion, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
37 x 16 x 17 cm  
\$3,000

16. Feathered Guardian, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
38 x 18 x 16 cm  
\$3,000

17. My Queen, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
50 x 25 x 25 cm  
\$3,500





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My Queen, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
50 x 25 25 cm  
\$3,500



QUEEN

TO DESTROY AND TO CREATE

TO STEP, TO STRIVE

TO STRIVE, TO ARRIVE

QUEEN

QUEENS

ANNA

ARE YOURS,

THE QUEEN

OUR QUEEN

QUEEN

بغداد



She Who Walks Between Forms, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
52 x 22 x 22 cm  
\$3,500



Holy Woman, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
35 x 13 x 14 cm  
\$2,500



Sing, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
33 x 11 x 11 cm  
\$2,500



To Assign, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
37 x 13 x 13 cm  
\$2,500



Seven Powers, 2026  
earthenware, glaze, lustre  
38 x 20 x 20 cm  
\$3,000

# ARA DOLATIAN CV

## QUALIFICATIONS

- 2014 Master of Social Science, Environment & Planning, RMIT University, Melbourne
- 2012 Bachelor of Fine Arts – Sculpture, RMIT University, Melbourne

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 In Between Forms, THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne VIC
- 2025 Whispers from the Floodplain, James Makin Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2024 At The First Flood of Daylight, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne VIC
- 2023 Heavenly Bodies, James Makin Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2022 Entities, Scott Lawrie Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
- 2022 Mythos of the Island, James Makin Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2022 The Land Between Two Rivers, NGV Design Week, Factory X, Melbourne VIC
- 2021 Artefacts, Blindside ARI, Melbourne VIC
- 2020 Site With No Real Place, C3 Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne VIC
- 2019 Heterotopia, Stockroom Gallery, Kyneton VIC
- 2018 Narratives – Realities, fictionalising the present and contaminating the fantastical wilderness, Jonathan Crowther ARI, Melbourne VIC
- 2017 Controlled Instabilities, Contemporary Art Space, Montevideo, Uruguay
- 2017 Progress and Passivity, Five Walls, Melbourne VIC
- 2016 Hybrid Terrains, Black Centre AADK, Spain
- 2016 Reflection as Ideological Hallucination, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2015 Navigating With Uncertainty, C3 Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne VIC
- 2012 Frame of Reference, RMIT University, Melbourne VIC

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 Molten Tongues, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne VIC  
Punctuate., THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne VIC
- 2025 Spring 1883 Art Fair, THIS IS NO FANTASY, Hotel Windsor, Melbourne VIC  
i cast a larynx, 138 Gallery, Melbourne VIC  
Under the Big Blue Sky, Liverpool Powerhouse Art Centre, Sydney NSW  
Organic Headphones, Velvet Lobster, Sydney NSW  
Group Exhibition, Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane QLD
- 2024 Placed, Manly Art Gallery & Museum, Sydney NSW  
Pride, ANZ Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2023 Melbourne Now, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne VIC  
Jugs, Melbourne Design Week, Craft Victoria & NGV Melbourne, Craft Victoria, Melbourne VIC  
Fred International, NGV Design Week, APT 10, Melbourne VIC  
Pride, ANZ Gallery, Curated by Camille Klose, Melbourne VIC  
Vessels, Craft Victoria, Melbourne VIC  
Summer Show, James Makin Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2022 Amazon / Amazon, Curated by Ashleigh Jones, Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney NSW  
Sensations, Scott Lawrie Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
Aotearoa Art Fair, Scott Lawrie Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
Ceramic pipes, socks & globular, bumpy, suggestive objects, Curated by Vincent Alessi, Conners Conners, Melbourne VIC  
Alter, Curated by Charlotte Watson, Divisions Gallery, Melbourne VIC  
Summer New, James Makin Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2021 Darlings, Curatorial + Co, Sydney NSW  
NotFair Art Fair, Curated by Sam Leach and Tony Albert, Kardinia Church, Melbourne VIC  
Group Exhibition, Stockroom Gallery, Kyneton VIC
- 2020 Fundraiser Auction, Firstdraft, Sydney NSW
- 2019 Tiny World Reunion, Curated by the Wandering Room, Melbourne VIC
- 2018 Utopian Tongues, Curated by Jake Treacy, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne VIC  
In Motion 2018: Rhythm, presented by AIRspace Projects, Sydney NSW  
Biotic & Apparatus, Stanthorpe Regional Gallery, Stanthorpe QLD

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- 2017 Art in Soil, POP Gallery, Brisbane QLD  
Waves, Curated by Charlotte Cornish, The Honeymoon Suite, Melbourne VIC  
NotFair Art Fair, The Shadow Factory, Melbourne VIC  
Anthropoetics of Space, Stockroom Gallery, Kyneton VIC  
Thing in itself // das Ding an sich, Curated by Elyse Goldfinch, Wellington St Project, Sydney NSW  
Stockroom Travels, Cremorne Studios, Melbourne VIC
- 2016 Imagined Worlds, Curated by Kent Wilson, Town Hall Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2015 Moreland Summer Show: Science Friction, Counihan Gallery, Melbourne VIC  
Convergence, Kings Artist-Run, Melbourne VIC  
Group Exhibition, The Lost One's Gallery, Ballarat VIC  
Freak of Nature, Mailbox Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2014 Assemblages, Manningham Art Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2013 Territories, First Site Gallery, Melbourne VIC
- 2012 Crème, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne VIC

## AWARDS | PRIZES

- 2026 Finalist – Darebin Art Prize, Melbourne  
Finalist - Omnia Art Prize, Melbourne
- 2025 Finalist – McClelland: Maquette Sculpture Award, Melbourne  
Finalist – MAC Yapang Art Prize, Lake Macquarie
- 2024 Winner – Bundoora Hostead Prize, Midsumma Australia Post Art Prize, Melbourne
- 2024 Recipient - Creative Australia Arts Projects For Individuals
- 2024 Finalist – Environmental Art & Design Award, Sydney
- 2024 Finalist – Hornsby Art Prize, Sydney
- 2024 Finalist – Omina Art Prize, Melbourne
- 2023 Finalist – Omina Art Prize, Melbourne
- 2022 Finalist – Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize, Sydney
- 2022 Recipient – Arts Projects for Individuals and Groups, Australia Council for the Arts
- 2022 Finalist – Lake Art Prize, NSW
- 2021 Winner – Incinerator Art Award
- 2021 Recipient – Creative Victoria Grant
- 2021 Recipient – Covid-19 Quick Response Arts Grant – City of Melbourne
- 2019 Finalist – Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize
- 2019 Recipient – Career Development Grant, Australia Council for the Arts
- 2019 Finalist – Deakin University Contemporary Small Sculpture Award
- 2017 Exhibition Development Grant, Contemporary Art Space, Montevideo, Uruguay
- 2017 Highly Commended – NotFair Art Fair
- 2016 Commission - Spring Fashion Week, Installation & Commission
- 2015 Finalist –Darebin Art Prize
- 2015 Recipient – ArtStart Career Development Grant, Australia Council for the Arts
- 2015 Commission – Nomad, Beaumaris Library
- 2014 Finalist – Toyota Art Prize
- 2013 Finalist – The Substation Contemporary Art Prize
- 2013 Commission – Midsumma Festival & Moreland City Council

## RESIDENCIES

- 2021 Craft Victoria, Makers in Residence, Melbourne VIC
- 2017 Art in Soil, Queensland Branch of Soil Science Australia, Residency & Commission, Brisbane QLD
- 2016 Centro Negra, AADK, Spain

## COLLECTIONS

RMIT University School of Art  
Bendigo Art Gallery  
Darebin Council  
Private Collections Australia & Overseas

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