

Image List

1	Aidan Gageler, <i>Memory Loss</i> , 2022, dye sublimation on aluminium, 60 x 45 cm	3+2AP	750
2	Aidan Gageler, <i>Zero</i> , 2022, dye sublimation on aluminium, 60 x 45 cm	3+2AP	750
3	Aidan Gageler, <i>Shrike</i> , 2022, dye sublimation on aluminium, 60 x 45 cm	3+2AP	750
4	Aidan Gageler, <i>Spring</i> , 2022, dye sublimation on aluminium, 60 x 48 cm	3+2AP	750
5	Aidan Gageler, <i>Little Joys</i> , 2022, dye sublimation on aluminium, 60 x 48 cm	3+2AP	750
6	Aidan Gageler, <i>Old Skin</i> , 2022, dye sublimation on Aluminium, 60 x 43 cm	3+2AP	750
7	Harry Merriman, <i>Landscape of Light</i> , 2018, single-channel video, dimensions variable	NFS	
8	Gabriela Renee, <i>Gedara Yanavā, Going Home...</i> , 2022, installation, family archive of objects, photographs and moving image, dimensions variable	NFS	
9	Chenfei Xio, <i>Guan Yin Help You I</i> , 2022, augmented reality headset/rendered images printed on gator boards, 59.4 x 84.1 x 0.5 cm	NFS	
10	Chenfei Xio, <i>Guan Yin Help You II</i> , 2022, augmented reality headset/rendered images printed on gator boards, 59.4 x 84.1 x 0.5 cm	NFS	
11	Chenfei Xio, <i>Guan Yin Help You III</i> , 2022, augmented reality headset/rendered images printed on gator boards, 59.4 x 84.1 x 0.5 cm	NFS	
12	Aaron Sun, <i>White Australia</i> , 2022, single-channel video, dimensions variable	NFS	
13	April Widdup, <i>You lived, and I will remember that (I)</i> , 2022, [In memory of Queer lives lost to hate-crimes and suicide], recycled wood, mirror, LED lights, mdf, vinyl, 156.7 x 66.8 x 125.8 cm	NFS	
14	April Widdup, <i>You lived, and I will remember that (II)</i> , 2022, [In memory of Queer lives lost to hate-crimes and suicide], recycled wood, hot sculpted glass, monitor, mdf, laminated sheet glass, 94 x 141.5 x 163 cm	NFS	
15	Emily April O'Neill, <i>Between Bodies and Screens</i> , 2022, interactive installation; projection, custom JavaScript program, newsprint, sensor mat, audio, screen-printed fabric	NFS	

Huw Davies Gallery
2nd March - 15th April 2023

photo
access

VIEW2023

Emily April O'Neill, Aidan Gageler, Harry Merriman, Gabriela Renee, Aaron Sun, April Widdup, Chenfei Xio

I arrived in Canberra during the summer at the end of 2020. My car, packed full of kitchen items, bedding, a short life's worth of trinkets, has no air conditioning. It was very hot.

I remember looking at my phone and seeing that I was 22 minutes away from my destination: a flat in Campbell I had rented sight unseen, straight off the internet. I remember being overtaken by a truck with red neon lights along its chassis and a profane bumper sticker displaying a hula-hooping lady in the style of a Sailor Jerry tattoo. Sailor Jerry is my favourite tattoo artist. As I approached my new home I was struck by the vast space surrounding me, a novel kind of excess in comparison to where I'd come from, where footy fields seemingly outnumbered houses and the verges stretched further than my childhood backyard. Canberra is sparse.

At university I wrote a master's thesis on art in public places and became heavily interested in how environment might impact not only one's sense of belonging, but also one's artistic output. Canberra is a city full of space, used and unused. It is a place where long aspects remain visible in inner-suburbs, unlike the big cities of Melbourne or Sydney. It is a young city, requiring residents to create afresh rather than respond to existing heritage and culture. And although it is considered a 'garden city' with fewer suburban hedges than any other municipality in Australia, the divide between public and private is strong, where significant portions of life and social events take place in the domestic sphere.

As a student, I remember reading Jurgen Habermas' 1961 book *The Public Sphere*. In it, Habermas describes 'public space' as an intermediary point between private life and the state – in essence where the people, the rule makers and the trendsetters meet. He discusses the importance of our public spaces, positing the need for these meeting points to allow for citizens to engage in discourse, to share ideas, and to contribute democratically to the formation of their environment.¹ In Canberra, I often think of Habermas' ideas and wonder how the vastness of Canberra influences its artmaking inhabitants; sometimes wondering whether the oversaturation of potential meeting places coupled with the sometimes-privatisation of social events might support highly stylised and individualistic artistic practices.

¹ Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Mit Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1962. P14

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VIEW is an annual photo media-focused award exhibition hosted in PhotoAccess' Huw Davies Gallery. It provides a survey of emerging artists in the ACT and surrounds and helps in our understanding of how local creative practices engage with contemporary issues. *VIEW2023* brings together the works of seven artists: Harry Merriman, April Widdup, Gabriela Renee, Emily April O'Neill, Chenfei Xiao, Aaron Sun, and Aidan Gageler. It hosts multimedia installations, traditional and non-traditional photo media and animation. Its themes explore process, marginalisation of people of colour, the queer body, and the environment. Each artist explores a sense of self and responds to shared place, whether environmental, social or digital. Together, *VIEW2023* provides an intra-related perspective created by Canberra artists, which enables discourse between independent makers in the city.

Physical space, in particular natural landscapes and environments, are explored by Harry Merriman, an artist who works within an extended photographic practice. His works investigate the natural environment surrounding the ACT and offers respite from places that are stereotypically public and come under social scrutiny. A current MFA student at UNSW, Merriman's practice investigates the impact humans have had in the shaping of our physical and natural landscapes, and in turn how our created or altered environments affect our sense of self.

Merriman's interest is trained on the Australian landscape. His three-channel work in *VIEW2023* titled *Landscape of Light* is set in rural Australia and trails a rural property throughout the day. It offers shots of first light atop boulders, fields and trees, cascading light trickling in through cracks and gaping holes in eerie barns, shots of skies and fields, and finally, a sunset over a rustic house. *Landscape of Light* is used by the artist as a catalyst to focus on environmental change. It asks audiences to pause and observe how something might look at a particular moment and how extraneous influences beyond light, such as the roar of cars, radios blaring and chirping birds might attach or affix new meaning to the world we're experiencing.

Artists April Widdup and Gabriela Renee evoke the public space and its limitations through sharing personal stories and asking how their identities might contribute to a new public space, or how existing public norms force them to navigate their environments differently. April Widdup is a sculptor whose works explore place and isolation from a queer perspective. Widdup's practice navigates spatial coding, a means of operating and directing bodies within places that often cause people who fall outside bodily norms to experience unease and vulnerability. Widdup's works are heavily Kantian in philosophy, drawing on the idea that place is linked to the body.² Their works seek to bring attention to spatial coding and offer a revision as a means of challenging and reforming social issues experienced by queer people navigating public space.

Widdup's contribution to *VIEW2023* is a sculptural work titled "*You lived, and I will remember that*" which acknowledges the dangers faced by queer people in public places.

Renee also questions the cultural significance of the document, family objects, and archival images – and their power to reconnect and restore fragmented identity and belonging for people of a diaspora.

Aaron Sun

Aaron Sun born in China is an emerging multidisciplinary artist based on Ngannawal and Ngambri country, Canberra. In his practice, he explores different media materials and tells unique visual stories in the context of his own cultural background. He sees new media and technology as a bridge between cultures, allowing complex social issues and cultural barriers to be broken down through mixed media. His works include 3D modelling, virtual reality, short film, photography, photogrammetry, and installation.

April Widdup

Having graduated from the School of Art and Design at The Australian National University in 2022, April Widdup considers themselves a multidisciplinary artist focused on creating immersive installation pieces. Widdup's practice focuses on the political potential of art and its ability to challenge and encourage critical thinking. They merge their passion for social justice and sustainability, utilising waste products and transforming them into works that engage controversial and political themes of identity, mobility, and place.

Chenfei Xiao

Chenfei Xiao is a queer multimedia artist specialising in immersive installation and performance. His practice addresses social, cultural, and political matters, including race, sexuality, and digital culture, from a post-digital perspective.

Xiao holds a Masters in Contemporary Practices in Art and Design from the Australian National University and a First Class Honours degree in Creative Arts (Drama) (Honours) from Deakin University.

² Casey, Edward S. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1998.

Artist Bios

Emily April O'Neill

Emily April O'Neill is a contemporary artist practicing on Ngunnawal and Ngambri country. Emily is interested in interdisciplinary practice, and her work is concerned with how emerging technology alters our rituals, intimate spaces, and identity. This work takes form in interactive installation, projection work, and screen prints. She completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours), majoring in Printmedia and Drawing in 2022 from The Australian National University. Her research took form in how we are intertwined in physical and virtual spaces and the politics of privacy and data distribution in these spaces.

Aidan Gageler

Australian artist Aidan Gageler lives and works between Awabakal and Yuin Land (Lake Macquarie/South Coast, NSW). He graduated from Camberwell College of the Arts, UAL with first class honours. Gageler's practice thinks through photography's receptibility, both to light and to sentiment. Curiously its materials bruise with exposure to time, attesting to a kind of fleshy experience akin to our own. The artist employs traditional media to produce his abstract works, allowing antique substrates and exhausted chemistry to lend their quirks and failures to each image. Made without a camera, these works are ungoverned by intelligible markers, pictorial and otherwise.

Harry Merriman

Harry Merriman is an emerging artist from Boorowa, NSW (Wiradjuri and Gandangara Country), who uses an extended photographic practice to create artwork in response to the natural landscape.

Merriman's work focuses on how humanity has shaped the physical world around us and how the environment we have created for ourselves shapes us. Merriman holds a Bachelor's in Media Arts & Communication from UTS (2018), a Diploma in Photo imagery from Billy Blue (2019) and an Honours in Fine Arts from UNSW (2020). Merriman is currently undertaking a Master of Fine Arts at UNSW.

Gabriela Renee

Gabriela Renee is an emerging artist based in Canberra (Ngunnawal and Nambri Country) whose practice concerns complex cultural and personal narratives. Renee is of Sinhalese, Malayali, English, Shetlander, German and Irish descent and is culturally Australian and Malaysian. Her works are multidisciplinary, immersive installations that reimagine and recontextualise imagery and objects from her family archive to explore her personal disconnect from a hybrid cultural identity.

Comprised of recycled wood, hot sculpted glass, mirrors, LED lights, MDF, vinyl and sheet glass, their mixed media piece fractures observers' views of a video through several glass balls. Through form and display, "*You lived, and I will remember that*" utilises the symbol of refraction to scrutinise the process of observing queer bodies in public spaces, representative of societal norms which marginalise or misrepresent queer people. Further, it questions how queer people might typically be grieved, remembered as victims or placed into a historical narrative. "*You lived, and I will remember that*" seeks to spark new traditions for remembering, mourning and most importantly healing" says Widdup.

Gabriela Renee is a Canberra-based artist of Sinhalese, Malay, English, Shetlander, German and Irish descent. Her practice, which is governed by complex cultural and personal narratives, seeks to posit art as a tool for reconnecting and restoring people with fragmented family histories and for the artist herself to gain agency throughout the process of exploring her diasporic identity. Renee's practice is multidisciplinary, often combining found materials and objects from her family archives with made objects to create immersive installations that reimagine and recontextualise her hybrid cultural identity.

Renee expands on her multidisciplinary investigation of personality in *VIEW2023* by presenting a mixed media installation titled *Gedara Yanavā, Going Home*. *Gedara Yanavā* is a kaleidoscopic artwork consisting of photographs, a home-burnt CD in fluorescent casing and a sari. It is linked to a childhood memory of dancing at home to a Bollywood song which she called 'the mermaid song' for her family at age four. Playfully evoking the divide between public and private, the work humorously indicates to the viewer a level of intimacy through the display of family photographs while engaging with wider cultural influences and norms which are evoked through traditional clothing and a mass-produced CD. Renee's work explores her mixed cultural and ethnic identity and is focused on her heritage. *Gedara Yanavā* revisits an innocent and intuitive connection to herself at a juvenile period where cultural norms and identities are yet to be formed. From a mature lens, however, it allows Renee a line of reconnection to a cultural memory formed at a time prior to an understanding of societal norms or expectations.

Emily April O'Neill is an interdisciplinary artist who incorporates technology and biology into her practice. She looks at the overlapping of life and technology in the modern age, questioning how the line of public and private is being redrawn and how that redrawing might affect us. In particular, O'Neill is concerned with the ability of emerging technology to alter personal rituals, intimate spaces and identities.

For *VIEW 2023*, O'Neill considers the intertwining of physical and virtual ecologies through an interactive algorithmic installation titled *Between Bodies and Screens*. Formed of projection, newsprint and printed fabric the work, which is managed by a customised JavaScript program, evokes the spiritualism of the desk and desktop: a considered place for ritual work, virtual intimacy and online identity.

Through combining digital ephemera, an audio installation and a physical space, *Between Bodies and Screens* forces its viewers to consider how the boundaries of the physical and the digital might be dissolving, and how customs revolving the use of new technologies, which once seemed fringe, are now inescapable. Each experience with *Between Bodies and Screens* is unique, with newsprint being projected across the space, generated in time while the viewer moves through the work.

Chenfei Xiao is a contemporary multimedia artist who uses digital and augmented reality technologies to make sense of the modern world. Their artworks share similar tropes and ideas with April O'Neill's, but focus on the plethora of influences and manifestations in digitised public spaces, including hyper-participation, neo-animism and increased interactivity. Xiao's contribution to *VIEW2023* is a headset-based augmented reality experience that explores topics of queerness and religion. Titled *Guan Yin Help You*, Xiao's 2022 work is a result of personal and lived experience as a queer Chinese Buddhist. It is derived through mixed scenography across three rendered portraits of a figure: one shrouded in mist, another portrayed in a deity like fashion atop a dreamlike dining-room setting, and a third clear closeup holding an array of objects including sex toys, tissues, condoms and socks with their many arms.

In its forms and environments, the figure represents Xiao's several identities, from a conforming and normative Buddhist person, to a queer person navigating a historical belief system. Xiao evokes the iconography of the Thousand Hand Guan Yin, a Buddhist goddess who is worshiped for her virtues of altruism and her ability to help people resolve problems in their daily life. In her first rendering, Guan Yin presents a stereotypical Buddhist iconography in an augmented framework. However, recontextualised within a dreamlike rainbow environment and surrounded by objects of sexual desire, she represents a mortal problem with the human condition, and the challenge within stereotypical religious discourse that excludes or avoids queerness.

Aaron Sun is a new media and technology artist of Chinese descent, currently based in the ACT. His works, which are often narrative-focused, explore various media materials through stories of his cultural background. By doing so, his artworks utilise technology to examine complex social issues and frame cultural barriers in a new lens. His works include 3D modelling, virtual reality, photography, photogrammetry and installation.

Sun's contribution to *VIEW2023*, *White Australia*, presents a thought-provoking and multi-faceted investigation into the history of racism in Australia and its persisting existence within today's society. This immersive multimedia installation utilises various historical and contemporary archival materials to explore the complex and evolving nature of racial prejudice. Through powerful visual and auditory effects, *White Australia* challenges viewers to confront their own biases and consider the role they can play in creating a more just and equitable society.

Aidan Gageler is an abstract artist based between Awabakal and Yuin Land (Lake Macquarie and South Coast NSW) whose practice combines traditional photo-production techniques with arcane scientific materials that utilise antique substrates and exhausted chemistry. Gageler works on film but never uses a camera, rethinking photography and photographic mediums, and showcasing an alternative methodology towards the production and development of film. Through removing the camera from the production process and applying chemicals and substrates directly to film, chance controls the development of Gageler's artworks and sustains focus on intelligible markers and the randomness of chemical materiality.

As a collection, Gageler's works in *VIEW2023* are eponymously titled *The Giver*, taking inspiration from the 1993 novel by American author Louis Lowry. In her novel, Lowry conjures a utopian society which is revealed to be dystopian as the story progresses. Colour in *The Giver* is significant, where the society is initially described as black and white, symbolic of a devoid and emotionless place, however as the novel progresses, colour is reintroduced and the protagonist of the story, a 12-year old boy named Jonas, is enlightened and begins to experience a more fulfilling range of emotions.

Gageler's works in *VIEW2023*, parallel the range of colour and emotion in Lowry's novel. *Memory Loss* is void-like and consists of primarily grey and black colours that form cloud-like patterns around an overexposed white rectangle in its centre. It is a stoic feeling artwork that evokes a sense of wishfulness through its light centre. In contrast, works such as *Little Joys*, which has a predominantly a pink and light-purple hue, feels to me like an expression of serenity and enlightenment. Together, Gageler's *The Giver* series provides an immediate encounter with photography, and a demonstration of the capabilities of photo-development through varied approaches of light, time and chemistry. They construct a resonance and provide, through themselves as object, hopefulness.

Place means many different things to many different people, even with shared common localities, experience and knowledge. When artists present works, although their surroundings influence them, artistic displays are intrinsically individual.³ *VIEW2023* is a highly stylised exhibition, showcasing a rendition of Canberra and beyond which is non-homogenous. The artists involved push the boundaries of photo media within contemporary arts practices, and allow their viewers to understand afresh how a local creative practice engages us with local and global contemporary issues.

With multilayered and multifaceted approaches to presenting works within a photo media context, and in the cultural and geographical context of Canberra and the surrounds, *VIEW2023* and its artists showcase the range of potentials for a local arts practice, looking both inward and outward.

- Emerson Radisich

Emerson Radisich is an art curator and researcher based in Canberra.

³ Michael, de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1988. P117