



**Sincerely Yours**

# Sincerely Yours

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Curated by Sophia Cai

This publication has been designed and printed on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. Indigenous sovereignty has never been ceded.







**Daniel Pace**

*Untitled, 2019*

acrylic, felt tip pen on paper

50 x 70 cm

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Represented by Arts Project

Australia, Melbourne

# #CASUALFAN

## by Sophia Cai



Dear Min Yoongi,

How are you? Have you eaten? Are you well rested and recovered? I was so worried when you returned from America last month and tested positive, but I'm glad to hear you are now out of isolation. I hope you get to spend the new year with your family and closest friends, please give Min Holly a hug from me.

Do you remember 2020? More specifically, do you remember 28 May 2020? That was the night you livestreamed to talk to your fans about your latest mixtape D-2. You also said during your live that you used to make up stories about a male singer and male athlete that you liked. Yoongi, did you just admit to writing slash fanfiction?<sup>1</sup> I didn't know it was possible to like you more. My first 'published' writing was Harry Potter fan fiction at the age of 11. Nothing exciting, just the usual Ron/Hermione vanilla narrative, but written before I knew the pairing was canonical (and before we all knew Rowling's anti-trans bigotry). Is this letter to you my attempt again at fanfiction, albeit in the context of an epistolary curatorial essay?

*Sincerely Yours* is a group exhibition that was borne from devotion and love, to examine the intersections between fandom and artistic practice. The exhibition came to fruition because, when I was aching to breathe and survive, you were there to pull me from the dark. When you told me that "it's okay not to have a dream" and that "just being happy is fine," you told me I was enough. You helped shift the goalposts of what I wanted from this fickle life.

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<sup>1</sup> The term slash fanfiction was believed to have originated in the Star Trek fandom in the 1970s to refer to the romantic pairing of 'Kirk/Spock' fanfiction. Today the term is used more generally to refer to romantic or sexual pairings of same sex characters.

I know you understand the power of fandom. Fandoms and hobbies can offer us a salve or a momentary distraction from the harsh realities of daily existence. There is a reason why Pokémon cards have skyrocketed in price during the last two years, and why so many of us are finding nostalgic comfort in childhood icons. Encountering the works of artists **Carly Snoswell**, **Daniel Pace** and **Jenny Ngo**, I relish in their expressions of role models from my 1990s childhood. From Disney princesses, Nintendo heroes, to the first feminist I saw on the screen (Lisa Simpson), these works remind us of the long-enduring impact of characters from popular culture in our everyday lives. By the way, did you know that Mario is more recognised than most political leaders of our time? (Sadly, Trump still trumps Mario).

Fandoms can be sacred spaces, because they are built in imagination. They can provide a means of escapism, offering alternative realities that don't yet exist. In this way, they share a commonality with artistic expression as a form of world-building. Don't you think that the BTS universe enchants fans precisely because the worlds you and your bandmates have built through songs, lyrics, and music videos continue to inspire theories? World-building is at the centre of **Nick Capaldo's** intricate works on paper, drawn from Star Wars films, which demonstrate the artist's ongoing interest in imagining these intergalactic encounters. Fantasy is also present in **Danny Lyons'** music video, which introduces us to the artist as singer/performer, taking cues from popular music production. There is something joyous about belting your heart out to your favourite song for all to see.



You might also recognise the main subject of **Dylan Goh's** video installation as one of your bandmates – Kim Taehyung. Goh's pastel dreamscape is an expression of queer fantasy: imagining a world where the artist and the idol are companions, travelling the world together. Speaking of idols, **Ari Tampubolon** uses the dance choreography of TWICE<sup>2</sup> to express fannish devotion, while simultaneously challenging the white cube of the gallery space. Because of course, the cultural context of our fandoms are not neutral spaces – far from it. You would know this first-hand, having experienced racism and xenophobia because your band doesn't fit into the dominant Western music industry's shallow understanding of white excellence. Existing as a person of colour in these modes of cultural production, do we have to be 10 times more exceptional, to be the exception?

While fandoms can be built on fantasy, they can also act as a means to form real, lasting connection and community with others. The works of **Alanna Dodd** and **Miles Howard-Wilks** express this through their connection to one of the largest communal fandoms in contemporary life – football teams. When I first moved to Melbourne, this was one of the biggest cultural adjustments I had to make. I don't understand the phenomenon entirely, but I do understand the devotion to shared successes – is this not why when you win music awards, you say that the award is because of us, your ARMY?<sup>3</sup> There is a vulnerability and tenderness that comes from giving form to our

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<sup>2</sup> TWICE is a popular K-pop girl group active since 2015

<sup>3</sup> ARMY, which stands for 'Adorable Representative MC for Youth', is the name given to the fanbase of BTS.

everyday desires, particularly when these expressions are shared with a larger community. This is the power of fandom, right? Not in the singular, but in the global. Fandoms have the potential to challenge existing hierarchies and power structures by banding people together under shared goals. And that is what makes them revolutionary too. Revolutionary in the sense that love is revolutionary, world-building, and powerful. You should know, you've written countless love songs.

I might be biased, but I think it takes courage and commitment to devote yourself to any fandom, to tell the world *"this is what I care about and why."* I love people that love things deeply – is this why I love you? Maybe I'm a romantic idealist, but what is the point of existing in this world if not for these small moments, when you can excitedly recognise something that makes your heart full? When **Mel Dixon** tattooed the works of her favourite artist and writer on her chest, she literally inscribed them close to her heart for all eternity. This reminds me of the line in your 2015 song 'Intro: Never Mind' where you rap: "It's not easy but engrave it onto your chest." It's a bold display of sincere intimacy, which is perhaps the reason why your bandmate Park Jimin did later get these words tattooed on his chest. And when **Raquel Caballero** meticulously hand-quilted a death portrait of Frank Sinatra, she is similarly inscribing her own devotion and sincerity to the subject of her work.



Is it love... or is it the murky contradictions of contemporary neoliberal society?



But it would be remiss to talk about fandom, without also acknowledging that like other expressions of love, it can be mutable, cause heartbreak, and change. Fandoms can be sources of immense joy but also incredible pain. While this exhibition does celebrate the motivational power of fandom, I am all too aware of how the lines between love and commodity culture under capitalism can produce ethically ambiguous zones. You aren't a stranger to this, Yoongi, your company releases new merchandise featuring your face every other week – my home is filled with so many photos of you to the point where visitors ask if you are my relative. In **Amy Meng's** soft sculpture, the cartoon-like figure at the centre acts as a stand-in figure, representing at once the simultaneous infantilising and sexualisation of Asian women in popular media. This is the danger of these one-sided expressions of love, particularly ones that position youth as something to be consumed. Being a feminist and a #casualfan of idol culture is the contradiction that keeps me up at night. It's not your fault, but it is the flip side to this life I've chosen with you.

Despite this, or because of this, why do I still write to you? Why do I still try to reach out through the void between idol and fan? Perhaps it is in these flaws and moral ambiguities, that fandoms can teach us valuable lessons about what it means to live and love. That feelings don't have to last forever to be meaningful, and that sincerity, nay, *being a fan about something*, is actually a pretty incredible expression of optimism in these trying times. This exhibition would not exist, if it was not for this. And in this way, this exhibition would not exist, if it was not for you.

Mostly, what I love about loving you, is that it does motivate me to be a better version of myself. I don't need you to know me, to know that this made an indelible impact on my life. Being a fan, opening myself to the joy and pain that this has brought me, makes me a better person and curator. By bringing these feelings into this exhibition, I hope I can be a part of a show that is guided by vulnerability, care, and radical joy, to challenge the elitism and snobbery of the so called 'art world' where having big feelings is often trivialised or dismissed.

Thank you for making me proud to call myself your fan.

Borahae,<sup>4</sup>

💜 Sophia

Do you feel like yoongi / jimin / BTS is a daily help, in your thoughts and emotions



Genuine question

Hm, depends. They do make me happy. But Hybe capitalism beast makes me sad

God it's hard right now cause I'm literally curating a project about fandom and I am struggling with my fandom

My next project should be about breaking up with your 7 boyfriends lol

## Sophia Cai

Sophia Cai is an curator, arts writer, part-time academic, and full-time ARMY based in Narrm/Melbourne, Australia. She currently teaches as a sessional lecturer in Critical and Theoretical Studies, Victorian College of Arts at the University of Melbourne, while also maintaining an independent curating and writing practice. Sophia is particularly interested in Asian art histories, the intersections between contemporary art and craft, and feminist curatorial methodologies and community-building as forms of political resistance.

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<sup>4</sup> Borahae, which literally translates to "1 purple you" is a Korean portmanteau - of the words for 'purple' (borasaek) and '1 love you' (saranghae). It was first spoken by BTS member Kim Taehyung during a fan meeting to declare love between BTS and ARMY.



# Honolulu, 2002

## by Sunanda Sachatrakul



It's a balmy rainbow ómbre dusky sky in late summer. The crowd roars in applause. We hoot and holler for Britney, who's illuminated by the meticulously arranged lights hanging above every corner of the 40 by 20 metre stage. She's a spectacle. The expansive blushing sky sparsely dotted with glimmering far away suns serves merely as a backdrop for her magnificence. In her singularity, in her one-ness, in the individuality of her being THE BRITNEY SPEARS, she's a spectacle to behold.

She announces in her signature laid-back Louisiana drawl, "now, I need someone to help me sing this next song." She searches the crowd. She looks to the right of me, to the left of me, behind me and in front of me. Every cell of my body is squeezing out the one wish that she'll look at me.

"You! In the Britney T-shirt!" She pauses and flashes a goofy face, "Now I know that's a WHOLE lotta y'all." She laughs her Britney laugh, so genuine, so endearing, so in recognition that she's made a silly fool of herself in front of 80,000 people but it's not the least bit embarrassing.

I must be burning up in this crowd of bodies, stuck together like melted, decade-old gummy candies. From the rippled, congealed lump, a white hot light seems to emanate from my face. The intensity of the light bores through my skin and I can't be sure if it's from the inside out or the outside in. Maybe I'm losing consciousness, maybe I'm dying...

what a perfect place for it to happen to 19 year old me, dedicated to Britney ever since I first heard those signature chords on Bangkok's poppiest English radio station. Hit me, baby one more time, and again, and again, and a million times over.

"I want you to sing with me," Britney insists again. I watch myself be lifted by the crowd, carried by the wave of deliquesced gummies, towards the stage. I watch myself somehow gracefully step onto the stage, instead of the clumsy roll I'd usually expect from my round body.

"What's your name?"

"Su...nanda." I hear myself and watch myself answer.

"That's a beautiful name!" Britney sincerely responds. Must not be many Sunandas in her world. "I've never met anyone with that name before. I really like it."

"Thanks, I'll let my mom know." I feel like I'm re-entering my body. I'm just talking to an old friend. On stage. In front of 80,000 people. And live TV around the world. DON'T THINK ABOUT IT!

"And you're funny!? Talk about the full package!"

Is Britney Spears flirting with me?

"So, Sunanda, I need you to sing a song with me.

You may have heard it in my new movie--"

"I loved Crossroads, Lucy!" I'm feeling a rush of confidence.

Hell yes, I'm flirting with Britney Jean Spears. She giggles.

"Well, let's keep the song a surprise for them," she gestures out to the 80,000 disfigured, conjoined gummies before us, "but here are some adapted lyrics I think you might like to sing."

She hands me a piece of lined paper with her handwriting on it, and a sparkly purple glitter pen and whispers, "change what you'd like to."

I scrawl on the page, look up and nod at her, she turns to the band, and they begin to play the music.

*I used to think  
Dad had the answers to everything  
But now I know  
That life doesn't always  
Go that way, yeah  
Feels like I'm caught in the middle  
That's when I realise  
I'm not a boy  
I'm not a woman  
I just need to be me  
Genderqueer identity  
Cuz I'm in between  
I'm not a girl  
There is no need to protect me  
I'm not a boy  
So don't show me all the nudes you've got  
I'm so beyond this bullshit  
So don't tell me to shut my eyes*

*I'm not a boy  
I'm not a woman  
I just need to be me  
Genderqueer identity  
Cuz I'm in between  
I'm not a girl  
And if you look at me closely  
You will see I'm gender-bi  
This queer will always find  
Their way  
I'm not a girl don't tell me what to believe  
(I'm not a boy)  
I'm just tryin' to find the word that's me, yeah  
(All I need is time) oh, all I need is time  
(A moment that is mine) that's mine  
Cuz I'm in between  
I'm not a boy  
I'm not a woman  
All I need is time (is all I need)  
A moment that is mine  
Cuz I'm in between  
I'm not a boy  
Oh  
I'm not a woman*

At the end of the song, Britney turns to me, gives me a tight hug and takes back the microphone.

"You're very brave. Let's hear it for Sunanda, the brave!"

Now the crowd is roaring in applause for me. They are hooting and hollering for me. Finally, Britney kisses me on the cheek and this time, it's not a spotlight. The hot white light is really radiating from my face.

## **Sunanda Sachatrakul**

Sunanda is a clown, comedian, writer, producer, radio host, and well, that's a good place to leave it. They were born in New Delhi, raised in Bangkok and 'never adulted' in New York and Los Angeles, so it's pretty fair to say they're a global citizen, wanky as it may sound. Since moving to Melbourne in 2019, Sunanda has created and performed their solo multimedia debut show, "How Gay am I?" to sold out audiences at Fringe 2019 and Midsumma 2020. Their stand up show, "Yes, We Tan!" was Broadsheet's Top Comedy Pick of Fringe 2021. They are also a core member of the Melbourne birthed queer clown collective, Po Po Mo Co. Before Sunanda performed, they produced everything from an indie feature film to comedic web shorts such as Broad City's finale webisode, "I Heart NY". They've also worked with Emmy-winning talent from Hacks, Saturday Night Live, The Daily Show, and more shows and comedians that you may or may not be a fan of.



**Alanna Dodd**

*James Hird against*

*Collingwood, 2008*

gouache, graphite and

watercolour on paper

38.3 x 28.7 cm

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Represented by Arts Project

Australia, Melbourne

# One Night Snatch, or Brother Wang's guide to eating out in Tashkent by Jinghua Qian



Obviously, I knew Wang was a bit of a fuckboi. I'd heard all the stories from the Tokyo Olympic village. But despite her dubious reputation, I couldn't deny that she was also (a) pretty cute, (b) an excellent dining companion, and thus — unfortunately — (c) 100% my type. Though her type seemed to be young, provincial girls in the lower weight classes who were easily impressed by that Brother Wang swagger.

In any case, this wasn't a date: this was work. I'd filed all my stories from the championships, fought the copyeditor who wanted the headline "Win-Win-Win for Li Wenwen", and even managed to submit a listicle of "Top 10 lifting faces" to the GenZennial content mill I begrudgingly wrote for sometimes. Now the comp was over, and I figured I could whip up a tourism story to make some extra cash before I left. Who better to show me the tastiest sights of Uzbekistan's capital than the butch snack of Team China?

Last time she was in Tashkent, at the 2020 Asian Championships, Wang had taken home three golds and made a competition PB, so you best believe she celebrated lavishly. She



even got Little Monkey drunk on cognac, doing handstands on the edge of the fountain outside the Alisher Nava'i Theater. I'd seen the photographic evidence. And besides, Wang was never shy of an opinion, especially about food. She'd struggled to make weight when she first moved up to the -87kg class, but now she'd taken eating to a fine art. I knew she'd relish the opportunity to put things in my mouth.

It was a cloudy winter's day with an icy wind that made me regret getting a fresh fade before the trip. The boys had gone off to karaoke with their coterie of groupies, and most of the remaining team had gone to see a play at the Ilkhom. Wang and I started off in the late afternoon at a restaurant that specialised in barbecued fish. It was the first meal I'd had in Uzbekistan without bread, mammal or bird, and I was delighted at how the sweet, delicate flesh separated into fine flakes. The restaurant was swanky in a garish, dated way — it felt like we were the only people there who weren't celebrating an engagement. I ordered us each a glass of sparkling, and Wang grinned as I toasted to bachelorhood.

Our second stop was an Uzbek restaurant. Wang shepherded me through to a vine-covered patio filled with tapestries and coloured lamps. The sky had started to darken but she kept her Ray-bans on. I expected no less — I'd seen the photos of her wearing shorts and sunnies to a wedding while women in full-length gowns fussed over her. I tried not to stare at her thighs in her trademark trackies, or imagine them squeezing my face, instead stuffing myself with more manti than was wise.

Next was a chic Georgian wine bar with copper lights and exposed brick. Every pour paired nicely with the spread on offer — lamb meatballs in a pomegranate sauce, spicy ajapsandali, eggplant rolls stuffed with walnut puree. I vowed to return with an empty stomach so I could sample all the khachapuri on the menu. We split just one, topped with egg. The soft yolk spilled onto Wang's chin. I wiped it off with my thumb.

I was properly tipsy now, but the crisp night air slapped some sense into me as we sauntered towards our next destination, an upscale sashimi joint that transformed into a bar each evening. We nestled into our velvety booth and ordered a flight of Japanese whiskies and a platter of sweets. The conversation slowed and turned, as it inevitably does, to our exes and overlaps. Everywhere in the world, queers and aunties seem to have a sixth sense for this intimate geometry, and after a decade covering the strength sports beat, I knew my own numbers were creeping up too. Sure enough, it didn't take long to find our four degrees of separation via a pair of Ecuadorian lifters who were known to share more than chalk and hair wraps. Wang smirked and rested her arm on my shoulder — a classic bro move.

I couldn't tell if we were vibing or colluding. It was well after midnight, but there was still time to wingman each other through the press contingent afterparty back at the hotel if need be. There was a lavender-haired video editor from Barbend who I knew was keen on either — or preferably both — me and Wang. Instead, we kept drinking, chatting and sidling closer, with no mention of joining anyone else.

The whisky and wine made my pulse heavy, but there was still the possibility of making good choices. Wang was turning pink, too, and I noticed how she lined up the plates perpendicular to the table's edge. I joked about her being a neat freak; she laughed and said I should see her locker. I said I'd love to, which is how we ended up sneaking into the training hall at 3am.

The cleaners must have been scheduled for the morning, because the hall was a mess. We added our coats and scarves to the chaos. Wang showed me her locker, which was just as meticulously organised as expected. I felt like a teenager in an American high school movie: me, the nerdy protagonist, buzzing with nerves as the hot, arrogant jock cornered me against the cool metal locker.

Wang clasped my skinny shoulders and asked if I'd ever actually tried weightlifting. *Not really*, I admitted. I lifted weights at the gym but I'd only attempted the Olympic lifts once or twice, giving up quickly because I knew enough about the sport to recognise that my technique was terrible. She ran her hands down my arms and commented that I'd be well-suited to it, with my short limbs, as long as I could pick up the moves.

I let her cajole me into a few warm-up sets of front squats. I'd never used a women's bar before, and it took me a moment to get the hang of it. Wang corrected my stance, the placement of my hands, the curve of my spine. It felt good to be guided like this, like an artist's poseable figurine or so much clay. We moved onto overhead squats. *You need explosive strength, but also finesse*, she said. *Power and control*.

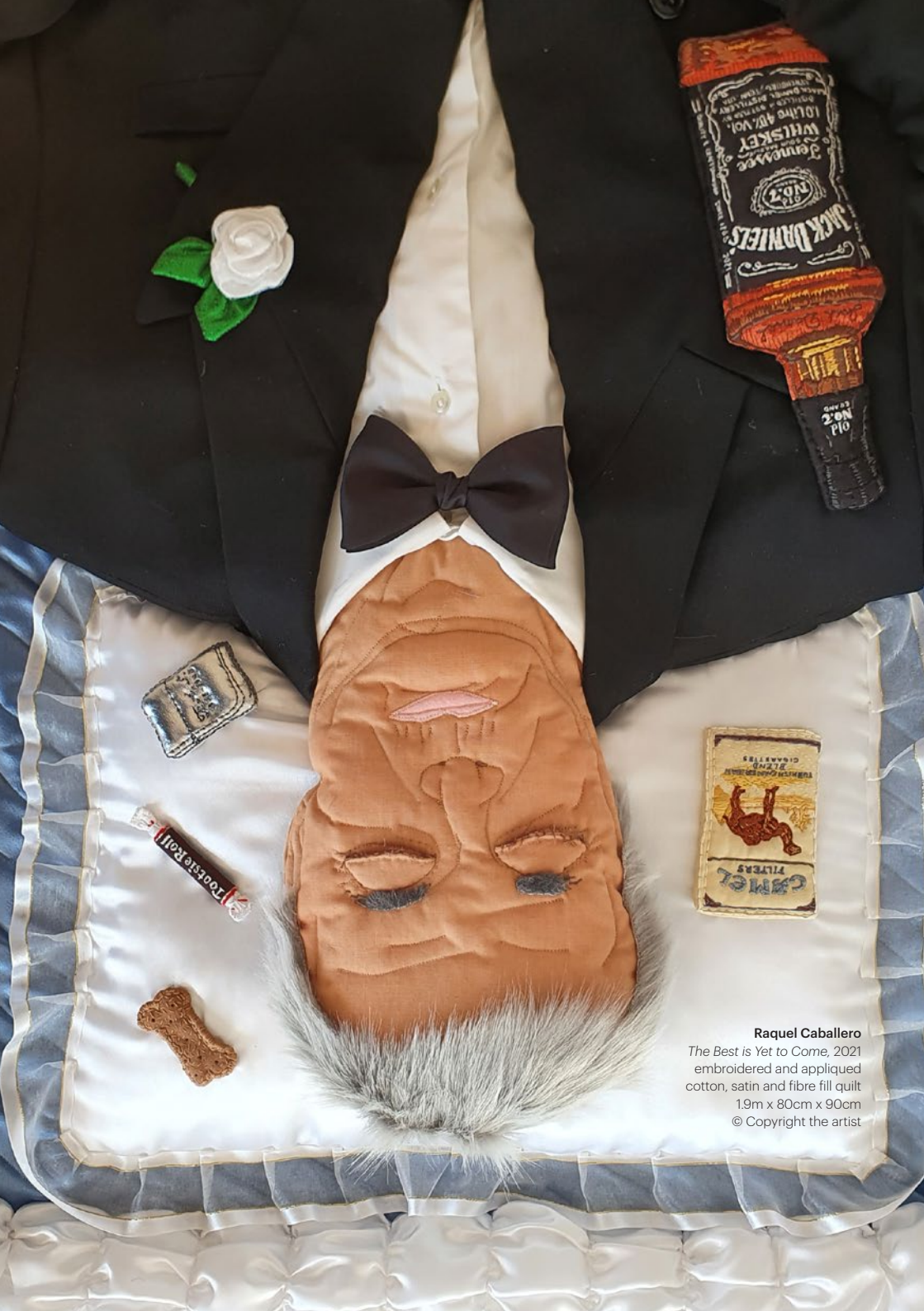
Wang handed me a wooden pole to practise the snatch movement. She circled, watching from all sides. *Freeze*, she instructed as I sunk into the receiving position. Her hands gripped my hips from behind, pushing me into a workman's squat, my butt nearly touching the floor. *Great. Now stand*. Her breath was hot on my nape. She made me repeat the motions until she decided I'd earned some weight.

I sipped from her water bottle as she loaded the bar, admiring her thick legs, the crease in her neck. Stepping onto the platform, I told myself, *Drive up, dive under*. Wang held my gaze and repeated, *Power and control*. I took a deep breath, and started the pull. The bar went up more easily than I expected. I ducked under, catching it low. The movement felt novel, yet natural — I trusted myself with the weight. Power and control. The hardest part was done, the heaviest was to come. I drove my legs into the platform, imagining the earth rippling underfoot. Miraculously, I stood. I felt the air snap.

*Lovely*, Wang breathed.

## Jinghua Qian

Jinghua Qian is a Shanghaiese-Melburnian writer often found worrying about race, resistance, art, desire, queerness and the Chinese diaspora. Ey has been a performance poet, a radio broadcaster, a television journalist, and an arts critic. Eir work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Saturday Paper*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Overland*, *Meanjin*, and *Peril*, on ABC TV's *China Tonight*, and once on a brick wall. Jinghua lives in Melbourne's west on the land of the Kulin Nations.



**Raquel Caballero**  
*The Best is Yet to Come*, 2021  
embroidered and appliqued  
cotton, satin and fibre fill quilt  
1.9m x 80cm x 90cm  
© Copyright the artist

# What do you like about vampires?

by Diego Ramirez



*Two thousand and eighteen*, what a weird year for me. I remember waking up at 5am one morning in February to weigh beetroot leaves—not the vegetable, just the stems—while I steamed the taproot. The context is a bit of an eating disorder that I picked up when I was six, and this moment was one of my most eccentric flare ups. Oops!, what an elegant overshare. My issue is more to do with discipline in inverted commas rather than appearance, so please spare me the *E!* *Entertainment* babble. And I always know who feels deeply uncomfortable with themselves, because they get pathetically gossipy about this stuff (get help and a hobby, people). It only happens sometimes, but when it does, it is like my brain scolds me for lacking a lifetime of character. Next thing you know I am micromanaging zucchinis at early hours of the morning to rush into becoming a disciplined person. I also start reading the tarot to find magical paths towards fortitude, and get very excited when I get strict cards. Anyway, I went to therapy and learned to shrug it off by developing a more flexible mindset. Lots of laughter.

Oh yeah, I was also into vampires. Like, *really* into vampires. They epitomise cravings and obsessions with their blood addiction and in the words of an artist statement, this aspect of their practice “resonates” with my sensibilities. One legend recommends throwing chickpeas on the ground when a vampire is around, since they have the compulsion to count: *been there, done that*. I also respect that they keep on (un)living while mak-

ing their suffering a kind of poetry. They are invariably calm and stylish too, which is a good reminder to look good, even when on the brink of oblivion. Sure, they kill a bunch of thousands of humans on the way but who am I to judge. Well, I guess if you put the corpses in a pile that would be a lot of people. But I am still willing to look past their character flaws at this point.

Either way, they are quite resilient figures. I can only recall one vampire movie featuring a suicide, and that is Spike Lee's *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* (2014), which is a remake of *Ganja & Hess* (1973). The protagonist waits for the sunrise and the light kills him, which makes one realise how easy it is for them to call it quits. Yet, it is atypical for them to do it. They keep moving forward with just the right amount of tragedy, calling their condition a 'dark gift' with a sexy vocal fry, and so on.

This excitement for things that refuse to die led me to answer a Gumtree ad in 2018 looking for members to join a vampires study group. "Are you available during the day or night?" they asked. "Night," I replied. Unfortunately, we met in the afternoon, which rapidly undermined my enthusiasm. I knew I was heading into a nest of connoisseurs, but nothing prepared me for this level of fanaticism. I am not exaggerating, I have a graphic tattoo on my arm that reads *El Vampiro*, that comes from a b-grade poster that no one cares about. No one. But check this out, the minutes from the meeting that day say, "\*\*\*\* openly noted Ramirez's arm tattoo of German Robles as Count Karol de Lavud in *El Vampiro*." Yep, this person took one glance at my tattoo and went reverse image search all over it.

At some point during the meeting, they asked us to share with everyone what we like about vampires. This was my favourite part, because one person said they were a real-life vampire and looked at me to sustain eye contact, for a mysteriously prolonged length of time. I am not saying they were flirting with me. But I think they were hitting on me. Like, at least a little bit. Not going to lie either, it really crossed my mind. In fact, it has been crossing my mind for the past few years: *what did that stare mean?* I like to think we could have had a bloody good night, sponsored by Medicare, but at the time I was too debilitatingly sad to pursue a racy lead. As for myself in that instance, I did not share everything that I like about vampires, choosing to focus on conceptual ideas. In retrospect, I wish I had unravelled about my toxic relationship with vegetables for the awkward thrill of it. Today, I am righting my wrongs.

## Diego Ramirez

Diego Ramirez makes art, writes about culture, and labours in the arts. In 2018, he showed his video work in a solo screening by ACCA x ACMI and he performed in *Lifenessless* at West Space x Gertrude Contemporary in 2019. He has shown locally and internationally at MARS Gallery, ACMI, West Space, Torrance Art Museum, Hong-Gah Museum, Careof Milan, Buxton Contemporary, WRO Media Art Biennale, Human Resources LA, Art Central HK, Sydney Contemporary, and Deslave. His words feature in *Art and Australia*, *MeMO*, *Blue Journal*, *Disclaimer*, *NECSUS*, *Meanjin*, *un Projects*, *Runway Journal*, *Art Collector*, and *Australian Book Review*. He is represented by MARS Gallery, Editor-at-large at *Running Dog* and Director at *SEVENTH*.



# Best of Me by Natasha Hertanto



“Why does it matter whether or not they’re together in real life?”

“Because... because...”

My partner was seated next to me, our legs folded atop a long bench, knees bumping. He scooped a mouthful of what we both agreed was a horribly executed mango on shaved ice. I chomped it in frustration. He held back his laughter.

He’s compared my love for Korean pop group BTS to his love for Star Wars, but he couldn’t grasp my obsession with two members: Park Jimin (26) and Jeon Jungkook (24), and the... unspecified bond they have. Scratch that. My sister and I, along with a sizable portion of the fandom are deep-in-our-marrows convinced they’re secretly dating.

The duo’s dynamic is best encapsulated by the trope: ‘he’s large (JK) but I’m in charge (Jimin).’

For Jungkook, the youngest in the group, losing just isn’t part of his vocabulary. His unrivalled athleticism is softened by a variety of artistic pursuits including drawing,

painting, photo and videography. Despite rocking a tattoo sleeve and multiple piercings, he exudes ‘baby brother’ energy—helpful, sweet, introverted.

Jimin, on the other hand, has a contemporary dance degree under his belt that makes him a versatile and emotive performer. He describes himself as ‘cutie, sexy, lovely, sweet guy’ but is really a Slytherin Head Boy with a Hufflepuff heart. On their trip to Malta as part of the travel series *Bon Voyage*, each member was given pocket money to buy souvenirs. Jimin spent his on snow globes to gift to everyone else in the group. He’s the person you want to wrap you in a blanket burrito when you get your heart broken because he makes the worst feel bearable.

Together, they exude a magnetic charm that makes you want to scream into your fist.

\*

On Jimin’s birthday in 2017, the two went on vacation to Japan—the only known pairing to have travelled outside of BTS’ schedule. Jungkook released a vlog which he shot, directed, and edited titled ‘Golden Film Closet (G.F.C) in Tokyo’, documenting their adventure.

Beyond archiving the special day, it immortalised every sensory experience: the weather, food, items chosen and bought. Instead of a PSA announcing “look at my person!!!”, I understood couple vlogs as a gift to say, “this is how I see you, this is how you make me feel, this is what I think about when we’re together.”

The song choice, therefore, is paramount as the lyrics and melody serve as the vlog’s backbone. Jungkook chose the track, ‘There for You’, a collaboration between Troye Sivan and Martin Garrix, which explored resiliency in a relationship during difficult times. Troye, who is openly queer, is an artist Jungkook often refers to as one of his favourites.

The vlog moved me, perhaps more than others, because I used to make them when I dated someone I really, really liked.

*“Around the world and back again,  
I hope you’re waiting at the end.”*

Rather than a haphazard montage, every shot is cut, timed, and styled to each lyric. The camera follows Jimin’s back as he navigates Tokyo’s lively streets and alleyways for the first line. For the second, we view him front on and slowed. The words feel apt as they were scheduled for a world tour that would end up lasting a year, months after the vlog was released.

*“When you’re screaming out, and they only hear you whisper,  
I’ll be loud for you.  
I’ll be loud for you.”*

This chorus is set in a small restaurant after the two ordered beef rice bowls. It involves cuts of food slowly disappearing from Jungkook’s bowl, interspersed with Jimin eating and chewing happily, ending with him rubbing his belly. The last shot lingers on Jimin’s empty bowl—long enough for the audience, or at least me, to pick up on its significance.

Long-time fans would remember that during their training and debut days, BTS followed an almost oppressive diet and exercise regimen. Albeit a ‘normal’ part of the K-Pop industry, Jimin experienced the worst effects including fainting during concerts. It’s not the most ‘romantic’ shot, but this scene feels as if Jungkook’s assuring us: “Don’t worry, Jimin-ssi eats well nowadays!”

The video ends with the lyrics  
*“I’m running, running just to keep my hands on you...”*  
on repeat.

Shots of Jimin walking out of Disneyland in a Mickey Mouse hat are sliced and styled to match the song’s rhythm. Fans noticed on multiple livestreams that year that the two’s lock screens were pictures of Mickey.

★

This isn’t the first time I’ve obsessed over an ‘on-screen’ couple who seem suspiciously chummy. Damon (played by Ian Somerhalder) and Elena (Nina Dobrev) from *The Vampire Diaries* came out as an ‘off-screen’ couple in 2012 after two years of discreet romance. Snow White (Ginnifer Goodwin) and Prince Charming (Josh Dallas) from *Once Upon a Time*, also announced their relationship that year, and are now parents to two sons.

At 16, I was hunched over my school’s library computer watching the pairs’ flirty banter, innocuous touches during interviews, and fan-made kiss scene compilations in 24Op. Deep in sleuth mode, I gathered evidence of what real love looked like and the ways it resisted hiding.

★

Rather than more ‘loud’ moments like G.C.F, the ones that live in my head rent free are the mundane ones.

One is of Jungkook forming a heart with his fringe while brushing his teeth. As Jimin passes, he mumbles (because of the foam in his mouth) “heart-u.” Jimin shoots a small smile and continues past him. Jungkook says louder, “heart-ul!” in an indignant tone.

It reminds me of when my partner’s busily cooking a Michelin-star-worthy dinner for us and I’m shoving my Animal Crossing avatar dressed as a maid at his face. It’s the same indulgent, soft smile. A patient, “not now, my love.”

As other members answer questions on press tours, Jimin would occasionally crack his neck, and like clockwork Jungkook would sweep in to massage it.

During long drives, I often find my hand absent-mindedly drifting to the nape of my partner's neck. Whether it's to release the tension on his shoulders or just to play with his hair.

And last, a fan-shot clip of Jimin hugging Jungkook's back just as the stage lights go off. A split second captured between public and private.

When my partner and I travel, we hold hands on the first night to fall asleep like otters. There's no performativity or even practicality. Only intimacy.

\*

"Why does it matter whether or not they're together in real life?"

Fifty minutes of frantic over-explaining later, our mango on shaved ice has turned into a bowl of yellow goop.

"They remind me of us," is what I should've said. "It matters because I made a vlog for the first time in 6 years and it's of you and Sydney and I was so happy when you said: 'I want this projected on my tombstone when I die.'"

Feeling deflated, all I could say was "I don't know."

## Natasha Hertanto

Natasha Hertanto is a Chinese-Indonesian storyteller and dog-mom based in Naarm. Her work can be found in Kill Your Darlings, Voiceworks, Australian Multilingual Writing Project, Archer, & more. In 2021, she completed The Wheeler Center's Hot Desk fellowship and won the Ultimo Fiction Prize. She studies International Development at RMIT.



## Amy Meng

Amy Meng is a fiber-based interdisciplinary artist currently based in Sydney, Australia. She holds a Bachelor in Architectural Studies from the University of New South Wales, and an MFA from the Fiber department at the Cranbrook Academy of Art. Amy's practice stems from a fascination with kawaii culture and psychoanalysis. Drawing influences from manga and anime, she employs textile techniques to investigate the ambivalent nature of issues concerning infantilisation, fetish, domesticity and more. Fabricated personas act as surrogates in her narratives, embodying the emotions and psyche of those living on the periphery of a phallogentric social fabric. They oscillate between the sweet and the perverse, the infantile and the adult, in a world where reality and fantasy are intertwined.

Through craft Amy disrupts notions of the "safe haven", and re-examines domestic stereotypes, namely the house wife and the otaku.

*Yours Truly*, 2020  
fabric, thread, yarn and fiber fill  
42cm x 87cm x 18cm  
© Copyright the artist



## Alanna Dodd

Alanna Dodd is an artist working in Naarm. Working in a range of mediums, her early work focused thematically on depicting football heroes, and recently her practice has shifted to semi-abstract imagery reflecting personal interests and passions. These involve layers of colour and brush marks, constantly reworked and developed until fully resolved, which give the works an accomplished depth and complexity. Alanna's works possess an endearing simplicity in form and a joyful, vibrant colour palette. Alanna works in Naarm, Melbourne and has been an artist at Arts Project Australia since 2005.

*Untitled (James Hird and family)*, 2008  
ink and gouache on paper, 56.7 x 38.2 cm  
© Copyright the artist  
Represented by Arts Project Australia, Melbourne



# Carly Snoswell

Carly Snoswell is an artist working and living on Kurna Land. Her work has recently examined fandom and the creation of craft objects as an ode to particular pop-cultural phenomenon through gendered and labourious forms of craft-making. Through this she attempts to validate these repetitive and obsessive tendencies that develop through involvement in fandom and hobby crafts, working to challenge notions of superficiality and inferiority to present the deep emotional connection that is felt through this engagement. She recently completed a Masters by Research at the South Australian School of Art with her thesis "Beyoncé is a Port Supporter".



# Ari Tampubolon

Ari Tampubolon is an emerging K-pop enthusiast based in Naarm. Through the use of film, installation, and expanded writing, Ari engages with the legacy of Institutional Critique methodologies, reconfigured from the position of queer diaspora. Ari has shown recent works at Seventh Gallery, BLINDSIDE, Gertrude Glasshouse, and is one of the recipients of the 2021 Multicultural Arts Victoria Diasporas Commissions.

*Symposia: This is dedicated to K-pop girl group, TWICE. We love you. 2019-2021.*

LED lights attached to perforated steel fittings and steel wire, 3M hooks, plywood, and single-channel video (3:15min).

Dimensions variable

Photography credit: Aaron CV Rees

© Copyright the artist

*I always wanted to be just like Lisa Simpson, 2018-19*

wool, sequins, curtain rings, Dimensions variable

Photo by Jenna Pippett

© Copyright the artist





## Danny Lyons

Danny Lyons is an artist working in photography, video, and drawing. Often incorporating personal experiences in his work, self-portraiture and a re-imagining of himself as his favourite pop icons/film icons is a feature of his practice, resulting in humorous fan art collections. Danny often incorporates his favourite movies, music, and bands, including Silverchair, KISS, Rambo, Joan Jett, E.T., Essendon Bombers, ACDC and more. Danny works in Naarm, Melbourne and has been an artist at Arts Project Australia since 2017.

*Kiss*, 2019  
marker, paint pen on paper, 35 x 50 cm  
© Copyright the artist  
Represented by Arts Project Australia, Melbourne

## Daniel Pace

Daniel Pace's small works on paper are executed in pencil with blocks of solid colour and strong outlines, often on coloured surfaces. He is also a skilled ceramicist and digital artist. Regardless of the medium he is working in, he is an ardent fan of Disney and the films of Tim Burton, both of which inspire and inform his practice. To view his work is to connect with a range of fantastical characters portrayed in much the same style as they were originally created, yet lovingly re-interpreted to reflect Daniel's unique perspective. Daniel works in Naarm, Melbourne and has been an artist at Arts Project Australia since 2010.

*Untitled*, 2019  
acrylic, felt tip pen on paper, 56 x 38 cm  
© Copyright the artist  
Represented by Arts Project Australia, Melbourne



# Jenny Ngo

Jenny Ngo is a painter, digital artist, animator and gamer. Working from reference images that she researches and sources, her work shifts between skillfully illustrated paintings in gouache and acrylic, to slick yet 'cute' digital renderings. Inspired by Japanese anime, she is known for her psychedelic renderings of animals created with exaggerated features in lurid, fluoro colour palettes. Her artworks are as unsettling as they are appealing—some elements are true to life, all the while bright colours are applied elsewhere, adding a surreal, unnerving twist. She is currently exploring software that can turn her animations into a narrative-based playable game. Jenny works in Naarm, Melbourne and has been an artist at Arts Project Australia since 2010.

*Untitled*, 2012  
ink on paper, 39 x 28.5 cm  
© Copyright the artist  
Represented by Arts Project Australia, Melbourne



# Dylan Goh

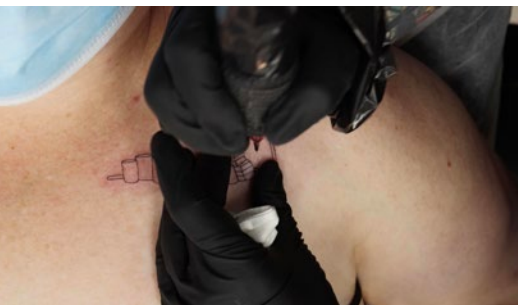
Dylan Goh is an artist-curator on unceded Bidjigal and Gadigal lands. His practice (encompassing socially engaged initiatives, ceramics and installation) is grounded in holding agency over how cultural narratives are represented. Speaking to experiences as a 2nd generation Asian Australian caught between two worlds, Dylan leverages storytelling and participation to disarm audiences, engender empathy and transfer knowledge.

*줄러*, 2021  
video installation, single-channel video,  
pillows, music box, journal, calendar, perfume,  
white shirt, handwritten notes, photographs  
dimensions variable  
© Copyright the artist

# Mel Dixon

Mel Dixon is an artist living and working in Naarm. In 2018 she graduated with First Class Honours in Fine Art from the Victorian College of Arts, The University of Melbourne, having previously completed a Bachelor of Health Science of Naturopathy at the Australian College of Natural Medicine and Endeavour College. Her work navigates and examines the relationship between the unconscious self, autobiographical memory, and the tactility of experience. She examines the role of psychosocial emotive culture and the self through photographic and sculptural installations, to challenge materiality and experience within feminist constructs. She embraces the written word in her work as an influence, and mode of research and making, creating texts that engage with literary traditions and the autotheoretical turn.

*citation 1*, 2021  
single channel video, 12:08"  
© Copyright the artist



# Miles Howard-Wilks

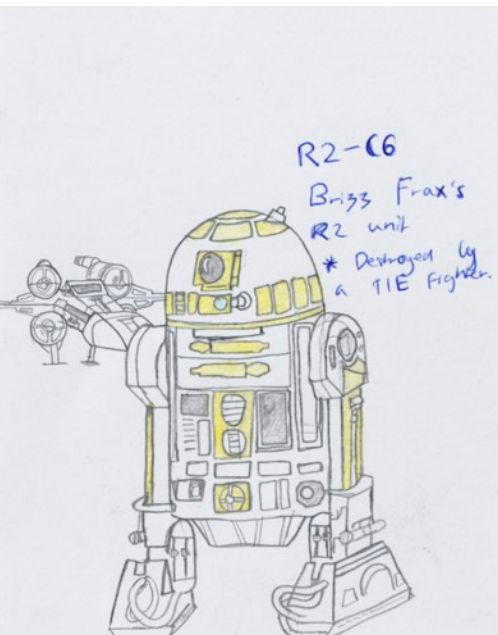
Miles Howard-Wilks is a multi-disciplinary artist, specialising in painting, ceramics, photography and digital art. Thematically his practice is distinctly Australian, featuring landscapes and seascapes with recurring motifs of iconic animals, landmarks and transport. While the imagery in 2D work often combines several themes in one complex vision, Miles is singular in his focus, creating detailed compositions featuring trams, magpies and reptiles and their eggs and bones with character and elegance. Miles works in Naarm, Melbourne and has been an artist at Arts Project Australia since 2000.

*Untitled*, 2020  
earthenware, glaze, 13 x 15 x 8 cm  
© Copyright the artist  
Represented by Arts Project Australia, Melbourne

# Nick Capaldo

Nick Capaldo is an artist whose work shifts between illustrative drawings and loose, painterly skiescapes. His illustrations often feature the character Sonic the Hedgehog, which he draws repeatedly in homage to the digital icon. In contrast, his paintings explore space travel, as well as planets and the limitless, expanding universe. Nick works in Naarm, Melbourne and has been an artist at Arts Project Australia since 2004.

*Untitled (R2D2), 2012*  
pencil on paper, 18 x 10 cm  
© Copyright the artist  
Represented by Arts Project Australia, Melbourne



# Raquel Caballero

Raquel Caballero is an art school dropout, reformed librarian, and literary obsessive, based in Sydney, Australia. Her work occupies a peculiar space between homespun craft and pop culture, merging outsider influences with celebrity fascination in unpredictable, engaging ways.

*The Best is Yet to Come, 2021*  
embroidered and appliqued cotton, satin and fibre fill quilt  
1.9m x 80cm x 90cm  
© Copyright the artist



# Thank you

This project has been a collaboration between West Space and Arts Project Australia. The curator Sophia Cai would like to thank the team at both organisations for their tireless work, support, and flexibility over the last two years: Sim Luttin, Thea Jones, Andy Butler, Seb Henry-Jones, Shell Odgers and Jack Cannon. Special thank you to Shell, who designed the zine, and Ashley Ronning at Helio Press, for providing the riso covers for the publication. Thank you to all the contributing artists and writers for sharing your work with us, this exhibition would not be possible without you.

Sophia would also like to thank her family and friends, particularly her fellow ARMY who were the first readers for texts published here. Special thanks to Kim Namjoon, Kim Seokjin, Min Yoongi, Jung Hoseok, Park Jimin, Kim Taehyung and Jeon Jungkook for being the inspiration for the project. You never walk alone, and this project is a testament to that.

This project is dedicated to all the casual fans out there.  
Stay nerdy, stay devoted, and don't be afraid to let your fan flag fly.

Cover Image:

**Jenny Ngo**

*Untitled, 2015*

acrylic, greylead pencil on paper

70 x 50 cm

© Copyright the artist

Represented by Arts Project Australia, Melbourne

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**COLLINGWOOD  
YARDS**





# Sincerely Yours

Arts Project Australia and West Space

22 January - 6 March 2022

Curated by Sophia Cai

## Featuring

Alanna Dodd

Amy Meng

Ari Tampubolon

Carly Snowswell

Daniel Pace

Danny Lyons

Diego Ramirez

Dylan Goh

Jenny Ngo

Jinghua Qian

Mel Dixon

Miles Howard-Wilks

Natasha Hertanto

Nick Capaldo

Raquel Caballero

Sunanda Sachatrakul

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