

# Circleworks

## ESSAY

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Curated by Trent Walter  
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*Circleworks* uses the formal aesthetics of the hand-drawn or handmade circle as a departure point to explore artistic processes, perspectives, experiences and stories. The exhibition features artworks by Arts Project Australia artists **Fulli Andrinopoulos** and **Julian Martin**, alongside works by Mimili-based artist **Linda Puna** and **Louise Bourgeois**. Each artist has produced their artworks within specific contexts—culturally, geographically and materially—yet they connect through the formal repetition of their circle-like motifs. This visual connection allows for the chance to closely consider the particularity of each artist’s visual sensibility. *Circleworks* aims to celebrate these relations while acknowledging cultural differences.

[>> View catalogue here.](#)

*Arts Project Australia respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, exhibit and create art.*

## An active openness, moving outwards

The first thing to say about the artworks in Circleworks is that they aren't really circles. You could describe them as circle-like and that would be a more accurate description, but it only tells part of the story. While the connections between the works are predominantly formal, what you see in this exhibition are constellations of meaning derived from each artists' lived experiences, manifested through their chosen materials and combined with what we—the audience—ascibe to them. This is true of all artworks and their reception, but it comes to the fore in Circleworks because of the formal repetition of this circle-like motif. It invites us to consider the material and conceptual elements of each work individually, as well as the connective tissue that forms between and among these works by Fulli Andrinopoulos, Louise Bourgeois, Julian Martin and Linda Puna.

The second thing to say is that the decision of what has been included—and by implication what has been excluded—in this exhibition reflects my personal subjectives, practices and processes. This seems like an obvious statement about curation, but in making an exhibition with a seemingly wide-open categorisation for inclusion, why draw the line at these four artists' works? For me, curation—and all forms of artmaking—is a process that involves collaboration, discussion, research, doubt, continuous reassessment, instinct and material feeling. These last two processes, instinct and material feeling, are closely connected and are of great significance to my world view. My experience in art is mostly through materials, and predominantly through the materiality of printmaking: paper, ground, ink, copper, etc.

There are so many instances in the studio, as an artist, curator or collaborative printer, where I act on instinct. Sometimes it is to provoke a response when the momentum of a work or project has becoming inert; other times it is in response to being in the moment, which requires spontaneity. In both instances, material takes over and conventional thinking about the implications of actions is deferred. Sometimes an understanding of what took place only manifests hours, days, or months afterwards. Other times it is instantaneous. This type of instinct cannot be underestimated in art. It is not a lazy, inactive kind of process. Instead, I would describe it as an active openness: a willingness to allow a collision of concepts and elements, and to reflect on their significance to the work at hand. Later, these elements may be recombined until another arrangement is made. This process is

repeated, sometimes towards success and sometimes towards perceived failure, but always moving on. In this sense, an active openness is a continuous movement outwards. For me, it is informed by my own lived experience of working with visual material over the past two decades. In adopting this approach, I'm interested in making the art work.

So, it is clear from the outset that I have some biases: I'm drawn to works on paper, mostly printmaking, and to an artistic and curatorial method that privileges a form of instinct. So why include Julian Martin's ceramic works *Untitled* (2018) and *Untitled* (2019)? For me, they engage with two key texts that expand an understanding of printmaking. José Roca's notions of the graphic unconscious expands the language of printmaking beyond medium specificity, while Georges Didi-Huberman's writings on the *empreinte*, literally translated as imprint, considers the neglected history of art as it relates to imitation or mechanical processes seen to be outside of artistic knowledge.

Martin began making art at Arts Projects Australia at age twenty in 1988 and is renowned for his pastel drawings, bold and graphic in their abstraction. His glazed earthenware works share some of these forms, yet where recent drawings focus on a restrained series of motifs the ceramics are multifarious. They are like pebbles that have been collected from a shoreline and arranged into careful compositions of colour and form. The tension between the matte surface of Martin's pastel drawings and the reflective, textured surfaces of the glazed earthenware is compelling. José Roca writes: "When print processes are mobilized, even if inadvertently or unconsciously, by artists working in various media, the term print can be reclaimed, referring once again to a series of actions rather than to a stable substantive, to a process instead of a product." Reflecting on the production process of these works, I picture Martin forming the clay in his hands, a type of mould from which each form is cast.

This relationship between printmaking and sculpture can be evoked through the relationship of the sculptural mould to the print matrix: it is the mould or matrix from which sculpture, ceramics or prints are cast. Sculptors have made great printmakers and vice versa. Louise Bourgeois made her first prints in the late 1930s as greeting cards for family and friends and went on to study lithography and painting at the Art Students League after moving to New York in late 1930s. Though she would take large breaks from printmaking, it was a medium she returned to throughout her career. Across her lifetime Bourgeois made 1,575 compositions in print. Among these are

many state proofs, where Bourgeois reworked a plate to change its composition and from which another variation of her motifs would emerge: an active openness. In 1990, she gifted her complete printed oeuvre to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which keeps an archive of this printed material online. In this archive, you can see the progression of Reply to Stanley Hayter (1996) from a pair of ink, pencil and watercolour drawings made in 1970 to the impression on display as part of Circleworks. Stanley Hayter ran a renowned print workshop in New York, Atelier 17. Bourgeois worked there in the 1940s (among many other émigré artists) on engravings, but found the process of making long curved lines difficult. Reply to Stanley Hayter seems to signify an achievement, a 'see what I can do' moment long after she'd left Hayter's workshop. It is a technically dazzling work and the iconography fits into a categorisation of abstraction within Bourgeois' practice. There also remains a biomorphism: the circle-like form being equally an eye, a cocoon, a bodily vessel.

Linda Puna's series Ngayuku Ngura (My Home) (2021), was made in the community of Mimili. More specifically, the works were made at Mimili Maku Arts, an Aboriginal owned art centre in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, or APY, Lands. Geographically, the community is located 477 kilometres south-west of Mparntwe (Alice Springs), a roughly six-hour drive mostly on bitumen with the final stretch on dirt. Puna is clear about her iconography:

It's kapiku Tjukurpa (water story), a water tank. Today we mainly use water tanks for our water. The other artists often paint rockholes from out bush, but I spend most my time in community, so I paint the water tanks. I love their shapes and patterns. Every house has one, and the kids like to swim in them!

I feel privileged to have watched Linda paint. With a board resting in her lap, she moves the acrylic onto the paper or canvas in broad, gestural strokes. What makes Linda's approach unique is that she doesn't use a palette; instead, she mixes all the paint together directly on her substrate. The results are varied and lively surfaces, a palimpsest of the colours Linda sees around her. She painted the water tank motif that features in her works in Circleworks directly onto a screen that was flooded with a screen filler and then washed out. Linda, perched up high in her mechanical wheelchair, whooped with excitement as she gave directions as to the orientation of her painted backgrounds and as each print was pulled.

There is a similar repetition in the works of Fulli Andrinopoulos. My first encounter with Fulli's works was in the stockroom at Arts Projects Australia. They were a revelation. Intimate in scale yet containing multitudes, Andrinopoulos' drawings in pastel and ink are devotional in their exploration of her repeated subject matter. We may never know what the iconography means to Andrinopoulos, yet its significance compels her to return to it over and over. The edges of her forms are porous, supporting a transformative view of the circle-like forms that inhabit these works. The repetition in form also draws the viewer's attention to the material qualities of the work: from the translucent nature of ink to the impenetrable scumble of layered pastel. Each impression is an imprint of Andrinopoulos' hand, a record of processes outside of artistic knowledge.

Roca's explanation of the graphic unconscious—wherein print can refer to 'a series of actions' and to 'a process instead of a product'—offers a way to draw together the disparate material, conceptual and contextual elements of the artworks in *Circleworks*: from the shifting grounds of Linda Puna's works on paper to the evolved state proofs of Louise Bourgeois' *Reply to Stanley Hayter*, the reconfigurations of Julian Martin's ceramics to Fulli Andrinopoulos' variations of circle-like forms. It can also be extrapolated out to the iterations of *Circleworks* itself: the exhibition, the publication, and its presence on social media and in each viewer's memory. Each artwork and each version of *Circleworks* is a continuous act of openness, moving around and outwards like ripples in circle-like formations.

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Trent Walter, 2022