



Light Sensitive

TOWN HALL GALLERY

WED 26 APR – SAT 15 JUL 2023

Featuring: Leslie Eastman, Kinly Grey, Taree Mackenzie,
Jazz Money, Sanja Pahoki and Meagan Streader



ESSAY BY

Rachel Keir-Smith
Town Hall Gallery Curator

Light is an intangible yet ever-present force, radiating energy and heat as the source of all life on earth. Natural and built environments are navigated by the ways they are illuminated, and our daily conversations are replete with references to it: “a light bulb moment”, being in “a dark place”, or “glowing with pride”. Some of us are more sensitive to it than others, as illustrated through the personal stories and site-specific responses in ‘Light Sensitive’, an immersive and contemplative exhibition.

From natural to neon, the six exhibiting artists harness light as a subject for creative exploration and a material to stage multi-sensory encounters. Principles of science and observable phenomena are examined alongside evocative spiritual, poetic, and metaphorical interpretations. In the mediums of photography, installation, poetry and sculpture, each artwork offers a beacon to navigate the liminal space between our inner and exterior worlds.

Encountering Meagan Streader’s intimate glass sculptures is a charged emotional and physical experience. Overlapping coloured glass textures are carefully arranged and backlit, referencing the infinity of patterns within kaleidoscopic imagery and the spiritualism often associated with stained-glass windows. Ethereal and atmospheric, each glowing work gives the sensation of experiencing light simultaneously from both inside and outside of the object, resulting in subtle shifts in the viewer’s perception of colour, texture, and form.¹

Activated by external light sources and the movement of the viewer, ‘dissolve your edges’,

2022, by Jazz Money (Wiradjuri), holds the fragmented text of a poem within the pressed surfaces of white paper. Phrases relating to light, shadow, movement, and form have been debossed within seven pristine parchments, each piece with softly torn edges.² The poem is only revealed to the eye when a shadow is cast from the light of the room or nearby artworks. Inkless and refusing capitalisation, this work evokes First Nations memory and oral traditions, and the ways knowledge can be hidden or shared through the structures, rules, and conventions of language.

Sanja Pahoki, who studied and now teaches photography, has developed a keen sensitivity to subtle shifts in light. She speaks of an embodied photographic experience where her eyes are like the aperture and shutter of a camera, letting in light to create images in her mind, both latent and fixed.³ In her work, Pahoki uses humour and ambivalence to explore the nature of self and the role of anxiety, while examining the double meaning of perception as both seeing optically and understanding. In ‘Being Kazimir Malevich,’ 2018, the videos, neon, and 2D objects come together to create a larger self-portrait, reflecting her profound contemplation of life, illness, and death through her relationship with art and her family, including a video of her parents as time-traveling aliens delivering a message from the future to look after the health of our eyes.⁴

Both intimately personal and cosmically reflective, Kinly Grey’s ‘death’, 2021, is a poetic exploration of feeling and experience. In the centre of the room, a burnt-orange neon circle glows; it measures 52cm in diameter, the length of the artist’s body

when they were born. Below the circle, a round satellite disk filled with shallow water appears both reflective and translucent, it distorts the reflection of the orange circle and the audience looking in, as if it's a window to the "other side".⁵ A self-portrait and reconciliation of Grey's fraught relationship with their body and their past, this work creates a space for deep contemplation and existential inquiry.⁶

Taree Mackenzie's installations create a sense of wonder and surprise by directing viewers away from their habitual ways of looking. Using constructed sets and basic visual devices, the artist creates optical illusions and different effects by colour mixing with light.⁷ 'Pepper's Ghost effect, three diamonds, blue and green', 2023, draws on an early theatre technique where ghosts were projected onto the stage through light and reflection.⁸ Suspended shapes block out the colours from two light boxes, urging the viewer to seek multiple positions to experience the different outcomes from mixed colours. By revealing how the effect works, the audience have the pleasure of both experiencing the result and understanding how it has been made.

Also fascinated by the enigma of seeing, Leslie Eastman's installation practice stems from an approach to painting as an expanded practice that extends beyond the frame into real space.⁹ Often foregrounding light and its connection to how we see and how we experience and understand space, Eastman has created a new site-specific installation for this exhibition. A moving light travels across installed coloured surfaces, producing

a range of unfolding and at times unexpected colour readings. These result from the principle of additive colour combinations, producing moments of perceptual ambiguity as the projected light generates unexpected intensities and colour relationships in the eye of the beholder.¹⁰

In a remarkable fusion of creativity and science, 'Light Sensitive' showcases the narrative potential of light and its innovative application in art. With an acute sensitivity to the symbolic, conceptual, and functional aspects of the medium, the artists in this exhibition celebrate light in its many incarnations, evoking a sense of wonder and appreciation for this seemingly magical phenomenon.

1 Myf Doughty, "This space of vibration", exhibition catalogue, Meagan Streader: THIS SPACE OF VIBRATION at MARS Gallery, 3 August – 28 August 2022

2 Jazz Money, "dissolve-your-edges", accessed 10 March 2023, <https://www.jazz.money/dissolve-your-edges>

3 Sanja Pahoki, in conversation, 16 February 2023

4 "Sanja Pahoki", Sarah Scout Presents, accessed 10 March 2023, <https://www.sarahscoutpresents.com/artists/42-sanja-pahoki/overview/>

5 "Kinly Grey: death dreams desire", CARPARK, accessed 10 March 2023, <https://www.carparkgallery.com.au/kinly-grey-death-dreams-desire>

6 Kinly Grey, email correspondence, 22 December 2022

7 Taree Mackenzie, email correspondence, 22 December 2022

8 "Taree Mackenzie on 'Pepper's ghost effect, triangles, cyan and red'", ACMI, published 25 February 2021, <https://www.acmi.net.au/stories-and-ideas/taree-mackenzie-on-peppers-ghost-effect-triangles-cyan-and-red/>

9 Leslie Eastman, email correspondence, 21 March 2023

10 Ibid.



WORKSHOPS & PROGRAMS

EXHIBITION OPENING

SAT 29 APRIL, 2–4PM

Join us for the official opening of 'Light Sensitive'.

Free, bookings essential.

EXHIBITION TOURS

SAT 29 APRIL, 1–2PM

WED 21 JUNE, 12–1PM

Join this curator-led tour of 'Light Sensitive'. Hear directly from the artists and gain a deeper understanding of the artworks on display.

Free, bookings essential.

CINEMA SESSION

WED 17 MAY, 6–8.30PM

Join us for a screening of 'Gregory Crewdson: Brief Encounters', introduced by a guest speaker.

All tickets \$10, bookings essential.

LIGHT ENCOUNTER

SAT 20 MAY, 2–3PM

Join artists Phoebe Whitman and Leslie Eastman for collaborative performance and presentation exploring historical and contemporary ideas concerned with light.

Free, bookings essential.

WORKSHOP AND ARTIST TALK

SAT 8 JULY, 2–4PM

Explore the magic of the camera obscura with artist Leslie Eastman. In this hands-on workshop, participants will build their own simple pinhole cameras to understand the foundations of photography and the innovative ways light can be used to create art.

Tickets \$60 / Concession \$48.

All materials provided. Bookings essential.

For more information and to make a booking visit: www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/arts



IMAGES

FRONT COVER

Taree Mackenzie, 'Pepper's ghost, triangles, cyan and red', 2018, installation view, Neon Parc, 2018, image courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Christo Crocker.

BACK COVER

Sanja Pahoki, still from 'A message from the future', 2016, single channel HD video, 5:00 mins, image courtesy of the artist.

OUTSIDE FOLD

Meagan Streader, 'Mediating between two desires (green)', 2022, acrylic, textured glass, COB LEDs, transformer, 78cm x 38cm, private collection, image courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery.

INSIDE FOLD

Kinly Grey, 'death', 2021, neon, parabolic dish, water, dimensions variable, image courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Charlie Hillhouse.

OPENING HOURS

Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm

Sat, 12–4pm

Closed public holidays

HAWTHORN ARTS CENTRE

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