

ARTIVISMS NOW

LA TROBE
ART
INSTITUTE

Caroline Garcia
Parallel Park
Pierra Van Sparkes
Xanthe Dobbie

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121 VIEW ST BENDIGO 3550

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curated by Brigid Hansen

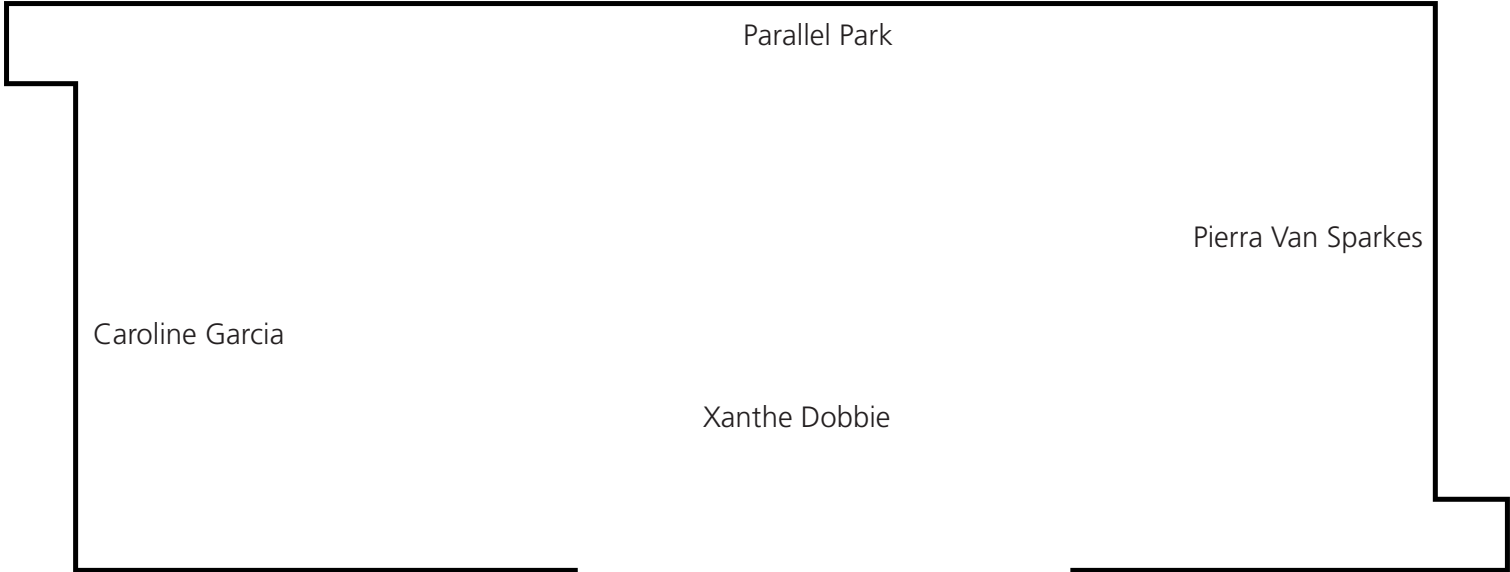
Brigid Hansen is the inaugural recipient of LAl's Emerging Curators Program. Hansen was selected from a competitive process that saw thirty-two applications received from across four states. She was given resources, mentorship support and the freedom to conceive, develop and present an exhibition of her own design.

Artivisms Now is the outcome of her research into marginalised voices, queer issues, and humour in contemporary Australian art. She has drawn widely from the national arts ecology, bringing together four emerging talents who use a variety of media, and presenting their artwork in our largest gallery with careful consideration for exhibition design.

LAl is committed to providing a platform for new voices. The Emerging Curators Program ensures that new approaches are brought into the institute, that new talents are afforded opportunities in an industry with limited platforms; and that curatorial practice is examined and analysed as research material for the Institute.



LA TROBE
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Xanthe Dobbie
Wallpaper Queens
_Elizabeth | Xanadu | Aimee | Kate | Tara | Harriet | Lexie
2018
Digital collage for 16:10 screen ratio printed on silk charmeuse
102 x 64 cm, each

Caroline Garcia
Flygirl
2017
HD video, sound
32 minutes

Parallel Park
Into Another
2018
Single-channel video
9 minutes 15 seconds

Pierra Van Sparkes
Blackfulla Bingo
2017
Ink and print on boards, bingo daubers
Dimensions variable

Look who’s LOLling

There is something funny about humour – especially in contemporary art. The truth is that I don’t like to LOL in a public space. I don’t like that awkward feeling that I get after I’ve LOLled when I wonder if I actually got the joke or if I only got half the joke, or if indeed there was a joke to get. Humour in contemporary art makes me nervous. It’s not that I think that contemporary art should be serious. It’s just that I tend to subscribe to the Kenny Rogers philosophy that ‘*You’ve got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em,*’¹ I don’t like to let my guard down too much. After all, how the hell do I survive in this game if I get it all wrong? I don’t like LOLling because of what it communicates. To some degree, everyone is pretending about something and humour is the release from that pretense. I try not to, but invariably I end up judging LOLlers. Humour has a darkness about it – a subterranean quality of joy generated through someone else coming undone. I feel like I could come undone any second – I am the Johnny come lately to this project – a 52 year old Piscean gay male artist and academic (who is not the curator of this exhibition) who has been invited by a former curatorial student to write an essay about feminist curatorial and studio practices.

The title of this project *Artivisms Now* infers that the works by Pierra Van Sparkes, Xanthe Dobbie, Parallel Park and Caroline Garcia (and the exhibition itself, curated by Brigid Hansen) can be understood as hybrids of art and activism. For me these works are more art than activism. I am clear that the works are grounded in an interest in marginalised points of view but they seem more about articulating anomalies than vigorously campaigning to bring about political or social change.² My assertion is that the ‘activism’ referred to in the exhibition title is closer to a philosophical approach than a course of action. In this sense, adjectives such as provocative, blunt and sarcastic have a place in the reading of the works.

Bingo is a social activity played across Australia and it is likely that the starting point for Pierra Van Sparkes’ ‘*Blackfulla Bingo*’ can be connected with the artist’s grandmother who played avidly. It is a game of chance in which players mark off numbers on a card as they are randomly drawn by a caller. The winner of the game is the first person with a full card. ‘*Blackfulla Bingo*’ is not a game for individuals – the giant wall-based Bingo card can be considered as a communal acknowledgement of phrases and actions that the collective audience may have said or done to an Aboriginal person. Through the display of the work, the gallery operates as a community hall in which the artifice of respectability is interrogated. Triumph (marking all of the boxes) in this game is a bitter sweet mix of the crassness of bragging and the vulnerability of admission. The nasty cringe-infused humour associated with embarrassment in this work can also be understood as an access to empowerment. The first step is acknowledging that you have a problem...

Xanthe Dobbie’s ‘*practice aims to capture the experience of post-internet contemporaneity as reflected through feminism, art history, iconography and queer culture.*’³ Her suite of digital prints *Wallpaper Queens* (2018) was originally developed as computer-based wallpapers designed for significant women in the artist’s life...her wife, friends and polyamorous lovers. Individually each print can be understood as a portrait of sorts whilst collectively the suite reveals facets of Dobbie herself. Perhaps the ‘wallpaper’ format is appealing to Dobbie because there is no single focal point in these works - her dazzling digital collages encourage the eye to scan the entire surface. Fluent in the language of highly sexualised consumerism and deeply idealised beauty, Dobbie’s visual vocabulary is seductive and dangerous. Tacky and beautiful these works seem so wrong yet so right.

The humour associated with melodrama is the rich terrain of collaborative duo Parallel Park. In their video ‘*Into Another*’ they are seen as pall bearers carrying a small coffin through their hometown of Brisbane. The content of the coffin is later revealed to be their dildo that would soon be destroyed in the process of casting 100 concrete versions for a subsequent work of art. Iconography that is often considered taboo is given a leading role – the burial attendees weep as they drip tributes of lube and saliva into the dildo’s freshly dug grave. There is little characterisation in this work – the viewer does not learn much about the couple or even their sentimentality around the dildo. Instead the artists exaggerate, parody and sensationalise experiences of mourning, loss and intimacy (normally reserved for living creatures) via a wobbly pink sex aide.

In the video work *Fly Girl* by Caroline Garcia, the artist has inserted video footage of herself (via green screen) dancing as one of The Fly Girls, the resident dance troupe of *In Living Colour*, an American 90s sketch comedy television series.⁴ The duration of the video correlates to the duration of *In Living Colour*. Garcia is shown exhausting herself through the continuous repetition of dance and rest intervals. In *Living Colour* ‘*was the breeding ground for the comic talents of Jamie Foxx, Jim Carrey, Tommy Davidson, David Alan Grier and the whole Wayans family*’ and the troupe from series 2-4 included Jennifer Lopez.⁵ Through this work Garcia remains firmly locked in the 21st century whilst flirting with popular culture from over two decades earlier. It’s kind of fun to giggle at the fashion and the dance moves but Garcia points to a more serious underlying lineage dedicated to cultural diversity.⁶

In *Artivisms Now*, the artists and curator have engaged in art practices that are not based on subtlety or disguise of process. The works (and the artists) take no prisoners and consciously press buttons in order to challenge and/or interrupt mainstream representations of race, gender and sexuality. Narratives in these works are deeply connected with the artists’ lived experience and whilst all art can be considered autobiographical, this selection has a particularly pungent poignancy. These works (individually and as a group) are not always comfortable - the artists and the curator step over boundaries and social norms to remind the viewer that humour is a relief.

David Sequeira

Dr David Sequeira is an artist, academic and curator based in Melbourne. He is currently Director of the Margaret Lawrence Gallery, VCA, University of Melbourne.

¹Kenny Rogers, *The Gambler*, written and recorded 1979
²<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/activism>
³<https://cargocollective.com/xanthedobbie/About-Xanthe-Dobbie> accessed 1 September 2018
⁴In *Living Colour*, Ivory Way Productions and 20th Century Fox Television, 1990-1994
⁵<https://nypost.com/2018/08/20/remember-when-j-lo-was-a-fly-girl/> accessed 10/09/2018
⁶Whoopi Goldberg “In Living Color brought a new multiculturalism to the primetime variety genre, which basically means there was nothing like it on television anywhere,” <http://marquee.blogs.cnn.com/2012/04/26/the-throwback-in-living-color-honored-as-groundbreaking/> accessed 10/09/2018