**Beyond the Horizon**
**Beyond the Sea**

**19 November 2026 to 21 February 2027**
**La Trobe Art Institute**

**Amanda-Lea Bell, Mel Deerson, Aidan Hartshorn, Leonard French, Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello OAM, Michael Riley and Shireen Taweel**

**Curated by**
**Karen Annett and Jacqui Shelton**

## Beyond the Horizon
## Beyond the Sea

by Karen Annett and Jacqui Shelton

**On a sunny January day in 1967, Leonard French stood in the garden of his Heathcote home in Central Victoria and demonstrated the effect of sunlight filtering through a geometric template. In the photograph that documents the moment, the artist's face is patterned with light and shadow.[1] The demonstration anticipates the effect of his iconic glass ceiling in the Great Hall of the National Gallery of Victoria (1968). Even without the kaleidoscopic colour of the glass panels, this simple action gets to the heart of French's glass works – light can radically alter bodies, architectures and spaces, when filtered, reflected or refracted through transformative planes.**

**The exhibition *Beyond the Horizon Beyond the Sea* finds its starting point in the transformative potential of light, taking as a point of departure another of French's glass works. *Four Seasons* was originally commissioned for the La Trobe University campus in Bundoora in 1978, where it was installed under the main administration building for several decades. It is currently deinstalled, awaiting conservation. Constructed from coloured French and Belgian hammer-shaped glass, *Four Seasons* utilises a brutal manipulation of traditionally fragile materials to invoke the four European seasons while referencing Christian stained-glass windows, Celtic iconography and nature worship.**

**Reflecting on Leonard French's assertion that "all art is religious" this exhibition explores First Nations Australian, queered, diasporic, regional and marginalised approaches to spirituality and cultural**



1 Missingham, Hal (1967) *Len French showing the effects of sunlight filtering through a geometric patterned template held aloft, Heathcote, Victoria*, 14 January 1967 [photograph]. Accessed 28 October 2026 [National Library of Australia digitised item. PIC/14456/35 LOC Album 1165/2 copy]

**practice. The artists transform received narratives of spirituality, filtering meaning through alternative lenses to disrupt perception and open space for alternative ways of seeing.**

**For Mel Deerson the ability of stained glass to transform bodies in space and time is erotic in the sense that bodies are changed by the light cast on them through windows – much as French's face was transformed by the template held aloft. Working in the medium of film Deerson considers stained-glass windows, and the colours they cast, to be the earliest and perhaps slowest form of filmmaking.[2] Their immersive two-channel film, *Dream of the Open Window* is a meandering exploration of the erotics of colour and light through zoomed-in footage of windows, giant books being read underwater and erotically charged crystal glasses played by a disembodied hand. An improvised soundtrack is structured around a series of simple chords and vocalisations: of pianos, voice, the drone-note of a finger tracing the edge of a glass. Images of bodies and orifices (mouths, cups, empty books, windows into buildings) are penetrated by a transformative light. Here, coloured glass is treated as permeable while bodies, space and time are unfixed and tangled, or open. Like the amorphous solid of glass, Deerson maintains that histories carry distortions, pressures and traces of the forces that form them.**

**In the risograph-printed publication accompanying their newly commissioned work, Deerson considers how a prism and stained-glass hold and release colour: "The prism takes something seemingly clear and tosses a rainbow from it. But the stained-glass window retains the colour in its body. The prism throws the colour free, while stained glass holds it like a loosely held fist, letting it dribble out. Both leak and spray onto the floor and walls, a ghostly shadow lying colourfully supine."**



2 Deerson, Mel (2026) *Stained Glass.* Published by Mel Deerson with the support of La Trobe Art Institute and UNSW, printed by Stray Pages

This image of colour spilling across walls finds an echo in Amanda-Lea Bell's work, which channels sunlight through a Perspex panel, casting subtle, momentary rainbows into the gallery architecture.

Originally commissioned by Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Bell's *F = m•a (five ways to make a rainbow)* addressed the specific histories of the colonial building it was first exhibited within. The artwork references the violence of imposing colonial infrastructures on unceded land through its implication of built structures in its resolution. However, Bell was determined for "... everything to rest lightly on the building because I wanted it to be the antithesis of force."[3] The lightness (literally) of this gesture is echoed by the inscription of lyrics from Rage Against the Machine's song *Testify.* With lines translated by Noongar language specialist Charmaine Councillor and inscribed on the gallery's walls by Noongar man Dan Mitchell, the phrasing retains its power, but becomes gentler and more generous. The rage remains, but the message is less concerned with 'control' and instead on what it means to 'hold'.

In Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello's work, glass becomes a means of holding multiple stories, perspectives and knowledge systems together. During her May 2026 residency at La Trobe Art Institute, Martiniello spent time on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, meeting people, going out on Country with local artist and cultural leader Janet Bromley, and visiting La Trobe University's collection. Seeing French's glass works up close, she was struck by the density and weight of the hammered glass. The tension between glass's transparency and mass has long informed her practice: in earlier works, Martiniello drew on its apparent lightness to evoke woven eel traps, fish traps and baskets; in her Rainbow Serpent eggs, *Painted Desert Continuous Creation Story* (2024), she explores its opacity and weight.



3 Coleman, Glaire G (2025) 'Amanda Bell makes light work' *Art Guide*, 27 March 2025. Accessed on 28 October 2026 [https://artguide.com.au/amanda-bell-makes-light-work/]

Martiniello also viewed two photographs from Michael Riley's 1998 series *Fly Blown*, held in La Trobe's collection. These works hold ground and sky in close relation: a dead galah lies on cracked earth, while clouds are reflected in the shiny surface of a crimson-red cross. Thinking with Martiniello about the weight of French's glass and the fleeting effects of light led us to Riley's broader body of work, where sky, clouds and reflection recur. In *Spirit clouds* (1997), three clouds drift through a violet and orange sky, appearing as fleeting witnesses to change. While the format of the vertical triptych carries biblical overtones (suggestive of the Trinity and the heavens), the work refuses to be fixed to a single reading.

Across Riley and Martiniello's work, images of land, water (or reflection) and sky offer a way to consider how natural forms can carry spiritual meaning. Writing about another of Leonard French's coloured glass windows, his daughter Lisa French describes a progression "from turtles (land), through the fish (water), to birds (sky)," giving the work "a powerful sense of regeneration and ascent, a spiritual and natural completeness."[4] This sequence offers a point of resonance for Martiniello's *Between the Light* (2026), where glass forms evoke clouds, feathers and sky, within floating, mirrored, internally lit wooden boxes displayed in groups of four 'seasons'. The second new work by Martiniello *Prayers to Light* (2026) use hammered glass, referring directly to her encounter with French's *Four Seasons* and bringing its material weight into the gallery through glass and poetry.

Martiniello's observation of French's hammered glass also opened a conversation with the work of fellow Canberra Glassworks artist Aidan Hartshorn. In his 2025 exhibition *Fulcrum*, Hartshorn used glass, light, water and concrete to explore the ongoing colonial processes that disrupt Walgalu connections to Country, materially engaging with what was



4 French, Lisa (2026) '"Decorating the heavens": a new Leonard French window sheds light on his masterpiece' *The Conversation* 10 September 2026. Accessed 28 October 2026 [https://theconversation.com/decorating-the-heavens-a-new-leonard-french-window-sheds-light-on-his-masterpiece-290855]

used to build the Snowy Hydro Electric scheme on his family's Country in highland southeast of New South Wales in the 1960s. His knapped glass works have been built under mentorship that allowed him to produce cultural objects, symbolically piercing the works to explore themes of disconnection and destruction of cultural practice.

The glass is both fragile and sharp, and its form calls to mind the cultural materials stolen from communities and held by museums around the world. Through this cultural practice revisited in glass and its title, *Accession 2025.03.001-008* (2025) references both the extractive collection practices of institutions – including La Trobe University – and the material processes witnessed in French's hammered glass. Hartshorn is clear that he does not think there is a direct correlation between his own processes and that of French's. Yet, bringing the material and technical similarities of these two artists' practices together (across timescales, across cultures, across Country) brings into sharp focus the subconscious modes of meaning-making that glass and light unlock in different cultural or spiritual contexts.

While Hartshorn's work is grounded in his deep and specific connection to Country, Shireen Taweel speculates about places unknown. Like the title of this exhibition – *Beyond the Horizon Beyond the Sea* – her work gestures towards a space beyond fixed coordinates. It evokes the horizon as a limit that is always moving: a line that appears to separate land from sky, or sky from water, but which can never actually be reached.

The carefully pierced copper surfaces of Taweel's sculptures are reminiscent of the geometric template held aloft by French in the photograph by Missingham in 1967. While French's finished glass works – his celebrated ceiling and windows – are intended to be fixed in their



architectures, the portable template he was photographed holding is more akin to Taweel's instruments. These delicate copper sculptures, from the series *unknown arcs of a sphere* (2025) take inspiration from historic astronomical tools, scaled to directly correspond to how use these celestial navigational devices to traverse land and sea. Light pierces the geometries of these handmade way-finders to envision migration beyond earth, speaking to the celestial networks of stars that chart paths between the earthly and cosmic, scientific and spiritual. Nearby, two aquatint prints from *the suns down* series (2025) display soft, dream-like mountain ranges beneath celestial spheres. In Taweel's works, light passing through pierced copper turns shadow into form and pattern into a means of orientation. Her sculptures and aquatints imagine routes through unfamiliar geographies, extending wayfinding towards futures beyond Earth.

Across the exhibition, artists draw on inherited forms and iconographies, carrying them into new contexts and opening received narratives to other ways of knowing. Using the work of Leonard French as a point of departure, *Beyond the Horizon Beyond the Sea* invites us to look beyond geographic, cultural and conceptual centres, towards spaces where fixed boundaries and linear time become less certain. Across these distinct practices, spirituality emerges as a way of sensing relations between material and immaterial worlds: through cultural practice and surviving stories, the movement of water and arrangement of stars, the body and language, and the charged space between what can be seen and what cannot. The exhibition holds us at the horizon's shifting threshold, where the known and unknown, the visible and unseen, remain in relation.

## List of Works

**Amanda-Lea Bell**
Badimia (Yamatji) and Yued (Noongar), born Whadjuk Country 1965, lives Wardandi Country / Goomburrup

***F = m•a (five ways to make a rainbow)* 2025–26**
**acrylic, graphite, sunlight**
**dimensions variable**
Courtesy of the artist. Translation by Noongar language specialist Charmaine Councillor and writing by Noongar man Dan Mitchell.

**Mel Deerson**
born Naarm/Melbourne 1983, lives Naarm / Melbourne

***The Dream of the Open Window* 2026**
**two channel video with digital video, 16mm and Super 8 direct animation, 12:46 minutes.**

***The Dream of the Open Window* 2026**
**riso-printed publication 20 pages, Edition of 75**
**Printed by Stray Pages**

***Floating window* 2026**
**coloured pencil on paper**
**21 × 14.8 cm**

***Floating window and its shadow* 2026**
**coloured pencil on paper**
**21 × 14.8 cm**

Courtesy of the artist



**Leonard French**
born Naarm / Melbourne 1928, died Taungurung Country / Heathcote 2017

***Four Seasons (Summer)* 1975**
**glass**
**180 × 180 cm**
La Trobe University Art Collection, purchased 1978

***Untitled study for glass mandala* 1979**
**glass**
**39.5 × 37 cm**
La Trobe University Art Collection, donated through the Cultural Gifts Program by Lisl Singer

**Aidan Hartshorn**
Walgalu & Wiradjuri, born Wiradjuri/Wiradyuri Country / Wagga Wagga 1995, lives Kamberri/Canberra

***Accession 2025.03.01–08* 2025**
**knapped glass, LED lights**
**8 pieces, dimensions variable**
Courtesy of the artist and N Smith Gallery

**Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello OAM**
Arrente, Chinese, Anglo-Celtic, born Kaurna Country / Adelaide 1949, lives Kamberri / Canberra

***Between the Light* 2026**
**hot blown and kiln formed glass with hand-crafted murrine, wood, paint, LED strip lighting, 2-way mirror acrylic**

**10 pieces in 4 seasons:**
**A1 – Cloud #1, 49.6 × 12.6 × 9 cm**
**A2 – Storm Sky, 49.6 × 22.6 × 9 cm**
**B1 – Cloud Feather Sky #1, 55.6 × 23.6 × 9 cm**
**B2 – Djaara, 55.6 × 25.6 × 9 cm**
**B3 – Feathered Horizon, 55.6 × 8.6 × 9 cm**
**C1 – Cloud Feather Sky #2, 53.6 × 26.1 × 9 cm**
**C2 – Feather Cloud Sky #1, 53.6 × 18.6 × 9 cm**
**C3 – Fractured Sky, 53.6 × 18.6 × 9 cm**
**D1 – Cloud Dreaming, 58.6 × 15.6 × 9 cm**
**D2 – Cloud #2, 58.6 × 28.6 × 9 cm**

*Between the Light* was supported by the ACT Government through its Arts Activities Funding 2026.

***Prayers to Light* 2026**
**engraved and enamelled reclaimed float glass, hammered kiln fused recycled hot blown glass shards**
Courtesy of the artist

***67 pieces grouped in 12 poems***
Courtesy of the artist



**Michael Riley**
Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi, born Wiradjuri Country / Dubbo 1960, died 2004

***Spirit Clouds* 1997**
**silver dye bleach prints**
**28 × 56 cm (each)**
Museum of Australian Photography, City of Monash Collection, acquired 2001. Courtesy of the Michael Riley Foundation and The Commercial

**Shireen Taweel**
born Gadigal Country / Sydney 1990, lives Gadigal Country / Sydney

***the sun's down IV* 2025**
**engraved copper plate, aquatint print, 300 gsm hanhemuhle etching paper**
**53 × 78 cm**

***the sun's down VI* 2025**
**engraved copper plate, aquatint print, 300 gsm hanhemuhle etching paper**
**53 × 78 cm**

***unknown arcs of a sphere IV* 2025**
**engraved and pierced copper, silver solder**
**20 × 34 × 20 cm**

Courtesy of the artist and STATION Gallery

***unknown arcs of a sphere VI* 2025**
**engraved and pierced copper, silver solder**
**20 × 34 × 22 cm**
Private collection

Published by La Trobe Art Institute on the occasion of the exhibition *Beyond the Horizon Beyond the Sea*, 19 November 2026 to 21 February 2027.

