



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Institute for
Australian and Chinese
Arts and Culture

澳英艺术文化研究院

Individual and Universal: The World We Share

28 February - 16 May 2024



Nelson Nghe



Pamela See



Ning Chen

Gallery opening hours: Monday – Friday (9:30 am – 5:00 pm)

Address: Building EA.G03, Parramatta South Campus

Western Sydney University



Introduction

Australia is home to more than one million people of Chinese descent with a wide range of identities, life histories, views and places of origin. The Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture (IAC) at Western Sydney University is very excited to present its first art exhibition of 2024 entitled *Individual and Universal: The World We Share* featuring Ning Chen, Pamela See and Nelson Nghe, three distinctive Asian Australian artists of different styles, working in different mediums. What connects them is that they all draw on their cultural history and heritage in pursuit of their social, cultural and artistic identities as a migrant Australian and first-generation Australians of migrant parents. Their lived experiences have enabled them to develop their individual voices and styles, whilst exploring the interconnected aspects of the world we live in.

In this exhibition you will see Ning Chen, a Shanghai-born artist who moved to Australia in 1989, reinventing traditional Chinese ink on paper painting in a bold and subtle way by incorporating Western contemporary elements in his visual presentation of the complexities of human nature. For example, in his painting *Distance*, created during the Covid lockdowns, he paints two horses, one inside a transparent box, the other outside, desperately trying to reach each other but separated by a thin layer of glass. The work has been created in clear colours in a transparent light, both of which give a sense of serenity. At the same time, the mix of feelings exuding from the painting is so intense and palpable that viewers are led to experience an inevitable juxtaposition of hope and despair, attachment and distance. Pamela See, a Brisbane-born Australian of Malaysian Chinese parents, practises a contemporary form of papercutting based on a tradition originating in the Song Dynasty in China to investigate the impact of migration on the Australian cultural landscape. Her copper works, like her paper cut-outs, are also highly symbolic, suggesting the change migrants catalyse in the environments they enter. Her new work, the *Prohibition* series, are copper cut-outs representing alcoholic drink carriers with an array of invasive flora depicted on the carriers including jasmine, lilies, morning glory and dandelion which have medical uses but are also deemed weeds in Australia. The works question the role of context in determining the positive or negative nature of any entity. Nelson Nghe, a

Western Sydney-born child of refugees and migrants of Vietnamese and Cambodian Chinese heritage, with his vibrant paintings, unique mixed media assemblages and text-based works, challenges hard-to-face issues such as stigma and shame attached to gambling, a pursuit particularly designed to attract newly arrived migrants of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. His installation *I Bet You*, created specifically for this exhibition, provides viewers with an intimate and immersive experience.

For this exhibition, we are delighted to have awarded the Chey Fellowship to Pamela See and Nelson Nghe for the creation of their new works, *The Prohibition* series by Pamela, and the installation *I Bet You* by Nelson. The Insitute is delighted to have established The Chey Fellowship, created in honour of the founding director of IAC, Professor Jocelyn Chey AM, and her late husband, Moon Lin Chey. The aim of the Chey Fellowship is to foster collaborations between exhibiting artists and IAC through encouraging and supporting their artistic exploration. Ning Chen had prior commitments and was not able to create new works for this exhibition.

Together, these three artists present a brilliant insight into the individual and universal elements at play in the world we share.



Professor Jing Han
Director, Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture
Western Sydney University



Pamela See
Drawing Water
60 x 110cm
Cotton rag
2024



Dr Pamela See (Xue Mei-Ling) is an Australian visual artist who practices a contemporary form of papercutting. Her paternal grandfather left China in the early 1930s, and her father, in turn, emigrated from Malaysia in the early 1960s. Born in Brisbane in 1979, Pamela grew up in South East Queensland during the 1980s.

Pamela has been exhibiting since the late 1990s in museums and galleries, including the National Gallery of Australia, Arteriet in Norway, the Museo Gustavo de Maeztu in Spain, the Qing Tong Museum in China and the International Studio and Curatorial Program in the US.

Her artworks are included in collections housed in The Australian War Memorial in Canberra, The National Gallery of Australia, The National Portrait Gallery of Australia, The Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide, the Hua Xia Papercutting Museum in Changsha, Swire Properties in Beijing and Chinachem in Hong Kong.

She was invited to contribute to a young and emerging artist program, Starter Space, at the Queensland Art Gallery in the early 2000s. This was proceeded by inclusion in the national touring exhibition *Echoes of Home*, instigated by the Museum of Brisbane. During this decade, she also developed her skills through residencies in China and the US, funded by the Australia China Council, Australia Council for the Arts and the Brisbane City Council. During the late 2000s her work featured in solo exhibitions in many regional galleries across Australia, including Noosa, Goulburn and Gympie. Her work was also featured in a solo exhibition at the Museum of Chinese and Australian History in Melbourne in 2019 and in a group show *So Fine* at the National Portrait Gallery and Sydney Lunar Festival in 2018. Her most recent solo exhibition, *...By Celestials*, was shown at the SOL Gallery in Melbourne in January 2024. Pamela has also created various site-specific installations both across Australia and in New York and Beijing. Her most recent installation, *Hopping Under the Same Moon*, was created for the CWS Moon Festival at the Chung Wah Temple in Darwin in 2023.

Dr Pamela See holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Arts from Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, and a Master of Business and a Master of Education from Queensland University of Technology.

Investigating the impact of migration on the Australian cultural landscape has been a primary focus of her work.



Fat Choy or Fa Cai
15 x 50 x 100cm
Cotton rag
and acid free glue
2024

Artist Statement

I was born in Australia, but my maternal grandparents are from Guangdong Province in China where Foshan papercutting is the endemic style. Although it dates back to the Song Dynasty (960-1279), during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) papercutting artisans in this region began applying their techniques to thin foils of copper. In this exhibition I will be showing works in both mediums.

Most of my works investigate issues associated with migrant settlement in Australia. In keeping with Chinese papercutting rhetoric, my compositions are filled with depictions of flora and fauna. The allegories often feature an interplay between species that are endemic, migratory and introduced. Since the late 2010s, I have been profiling Chinese Australians who have contributed towards the cultural landscape from the 19th century to the present. As well as cutting their portraits, I have been making paper effigies of crops they cultivated.

As far as my copper works are concerned, this is a medium in which I have been recently experimenting. In addition to paying homage to this ancient art form, the materiality of copper helps convey two different sentiments in the works. In *Sandpiper Curlew Dispersing Water Pepper*, the property of copper as a conduit is exploited. This is a work depicting an avian species dispersing a floral one. It symbolises the change migrants can catalyse in the environments they enter. In the *Prohibition series*, the material of copper harkens back to Mesopotamia when it was used to make vessels for drinking. During this time beer was also brewed and consumed. The medicinal use of alcohol and its contrasting abuse in social contexts can be reflected upon through these depictions of flora which have medical uses but are deemed weeds in Australia. These works question the role of context in determining the positive or negative nature of any entity.



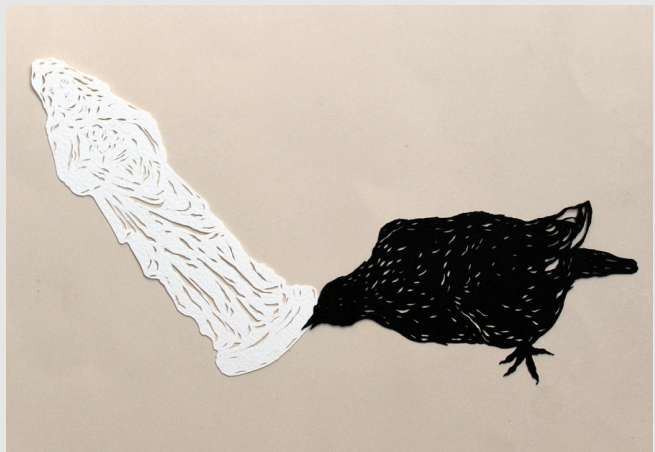
Sandpiper Curlew Dispersing Water Pepper,
Copper, 2024



Long, Cansons Mi-Teintes and cotton rag, 2024



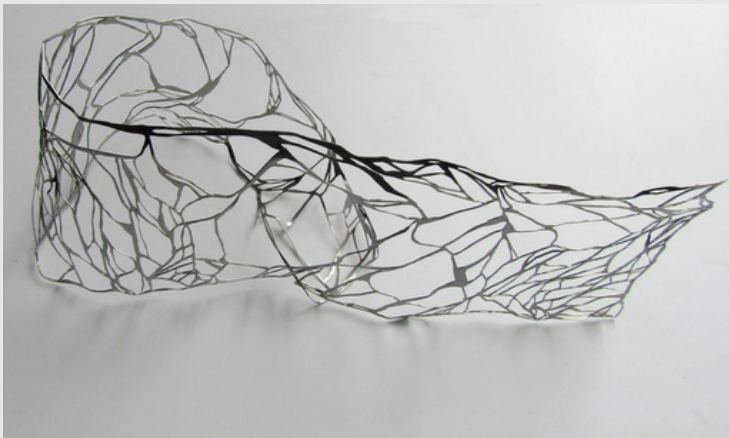
Perched...Buddha, 25 x 19cm, Cansons Mi-Teintes and Arches watercolour paper, 2019



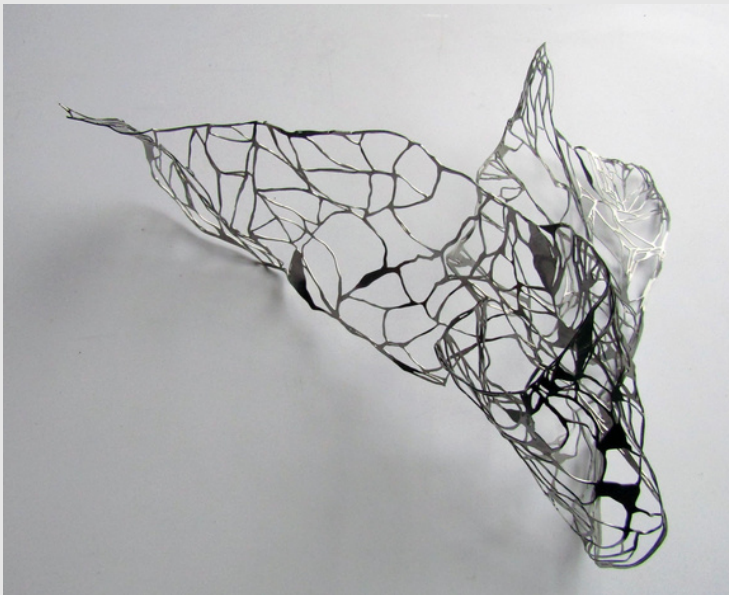
Perched...Mary, 18 x 15cm, Cansons Mi-Teintes and Arches watercolour paper, 2018



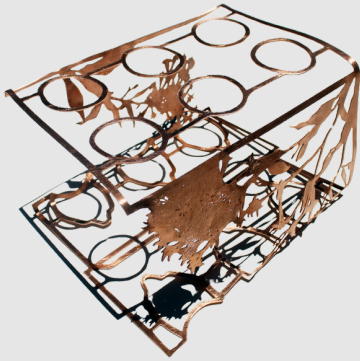
Perched...Ganesha, 46 x 26cm,
Cansons Mi-Teintes and Arches watercolour paper, 2020



Before and After, 14 x 47 x 28cm, Stainless steel, 2022



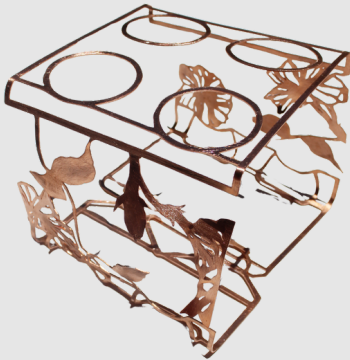
Before and Again, 43 x 55 x 25cm, Stainless steel, 2022



Prohibition of Jasmine
19 x 30 x 21cm, Copper, 2024



Prohibition of Pea
21 x 22 x 27cm, Copper, 2024



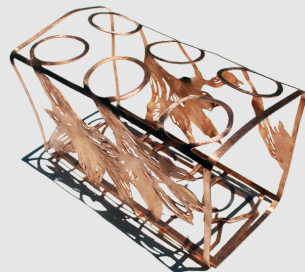
Prohibition of Morning Glory
19 x 22 x 27cm, Copper, 2024



Prohibition of Periwinkle
17 x 19 x 31cm, Copper, 2023



Prohibition of Dandelion
17 x 32 x 22cm, Copper, 2024



Prohibition of Lily
17 x 19 x 31cm, Copper, 2024



Ning Chen, born in Shanghai in 1957, is a renowned contemporary Chinese artist based in Melbourne. Chen graduated from the Shanghai School of Arts and Crafts, one of the few art schools in Shanghai at the time, and was a member of the Shanghai Artists Association. In 1989 Chen moved to Australia where he began his cross-cultural journey of artistic

exploration. Chen's artistic career has spanned both China and Australia and his works are deeply influenced by both cultures, integrating the essence of traditional Chinese art with innovative elements of modern Western art.

Chen specialises in using traditional Chinese brush and ink on paper in his creation. He is well known for his unique creation of anthropomorphic animals, especially horses. His art explores his understanding and thoughts about life, nature and culture through innovative techniques.

Chen has had many solo and group exhibitions in Sydney, Melbourne and Shanghai. His latest solo exhibition entitled *Riding on Dreams* was held in Live in Art in Sydney in 2023. He was the finalist in the 2023 Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award. His ink painting *Wang* won the Melbourne Ross Art Prize in 1993.

Over the years Chen has continued to create a balance between tradition and modernity, exploring the relationship between man and nature, East and West through his artworks. He is committed to building a bridge of cultural exchange through his artistic creations, and his artistic career is a testimony to the fusion and innovation of Chinese and Western art traditions.

Artist Statement

I was born and grew up in Shanghai and so had my artistic roots deeply embedded in the rich history and culture of China. After moving to Australia in 1989, I began my new journey of artistic exploration in a very different cultural environment that has since injected new vitality and perspectives into my artistic creations.

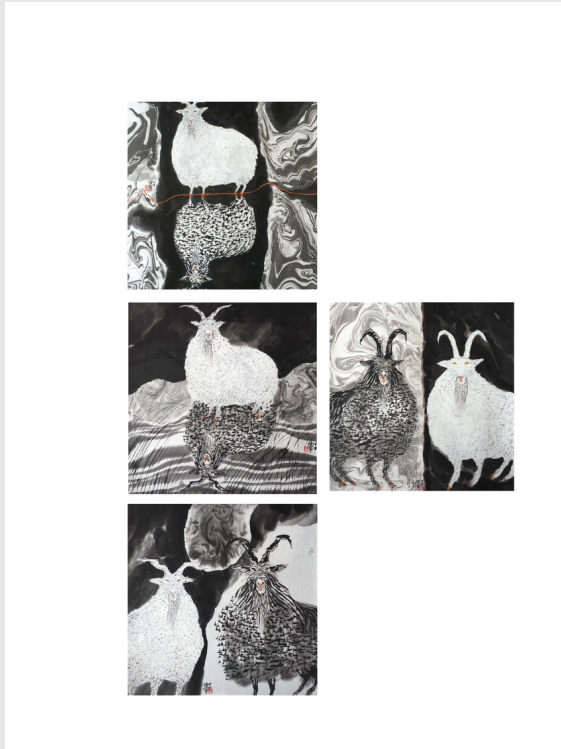
I love and have consistently used traditional Chinese brush, ink and paper to paint and experiment with incorporating Western contemporary elements in my perception of the world and our relationship with nature. My paintings prominently feature anthropomorphic animals, horses in particular. The horse is not only a vivid image, but also a symbol of my pursuit of freedom, strength and beauty. The horse, a recurrent theme in my practice, has been both a source of inspiration and a bridge of emotional resonance between me and viewers. Through the image of the horse, I explore the complexity and innocence of human nature, as well as the position of the individual in society and nature.

In my art practice, I always adhere to the principle of inheritance of traditions as the foundation and incessant creativity as the soul of art. I respect and love the depth of traditional Chinese ink and brushwork, and at the same time I continue to seek innovation and breakthroughs based on this tradition. I try to break cultural boundaries and integrate the artistic elements and ideas of the East and the West to create a unique visual language.

My paintings, while seemingly and deceptively simple, are imbued with my personal reflections on the world we live in and invoke unlimiting aspirations towards the future. Through careful handling of colours, lines and space, I try to build an art world in my paintings that has both traditional Chinese aesthetics and a sense of contemporary art. This art world is both real and a fantasy, concrete and abstract, and it invites the viewer into a unique exchange of emotions and thoughts.



Water Song, 60 x 45cm x 3, Ink on rice paper, 2019



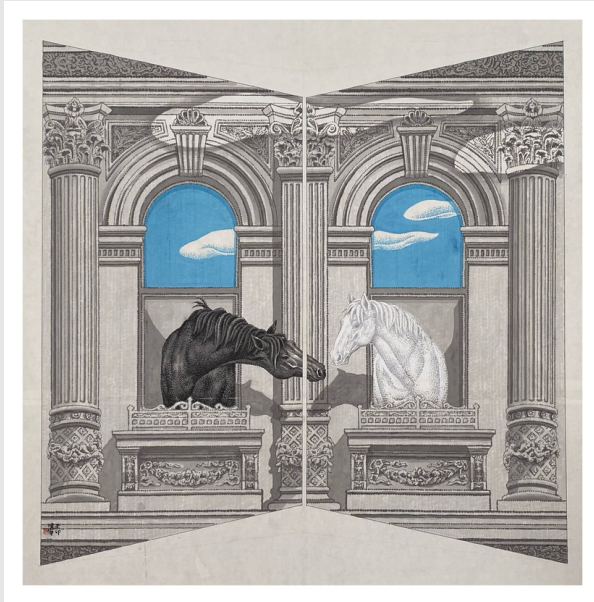
Sheep · Four Seasons, 33 x 33cm, Ink on rice paper, 2018



Distance, 66 x 95cm, Ink on rice paper, 2020



Dance with the Wind, 67 x 93cm, Ink on rice paper, 2022



Next Door, 90 x 90cm, Ink on rice paper, 2023



Open the Window of the Soul - Reading Huang Gongwang's Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains
65 x 95cm
Ink on rice paper
2023



Nelson Nghe is a Western Sydney-based artist engaging with a diverse range of mediums including painting, photo media and assemblage. Nelson's practice is characterised by the passionate use of mixed media and playful abstractions to push boundaries and highlight intersectional narratives as a first-generation Australian Chinese growing up queer within a culturally and linguistically diverse background in Western Sydney.

Nelson graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce and Diploma of Fashion Design and interweaves these backgrounds onto his current art practice to understand the intergenerational impacts of his Chinese diaspora. In 2013, as a freshly graduated designer, he was announced Peroni & Harpers Bazaar Young Designer of the Year. In February 2023 he had his debut solo exhibition *Playtime* which was presented as part of Sydney World Pride that year. Nelson has been a finalist in several major art awards, including the Fisher's Ghost Art Award, Hornsby Art Prize and Blacktown City Art Prize. In 2023, Nelson won the Blacktown City Art Prize People's Choice Award.



Bug
55 x 88cm
Mixed media on canvas
2023

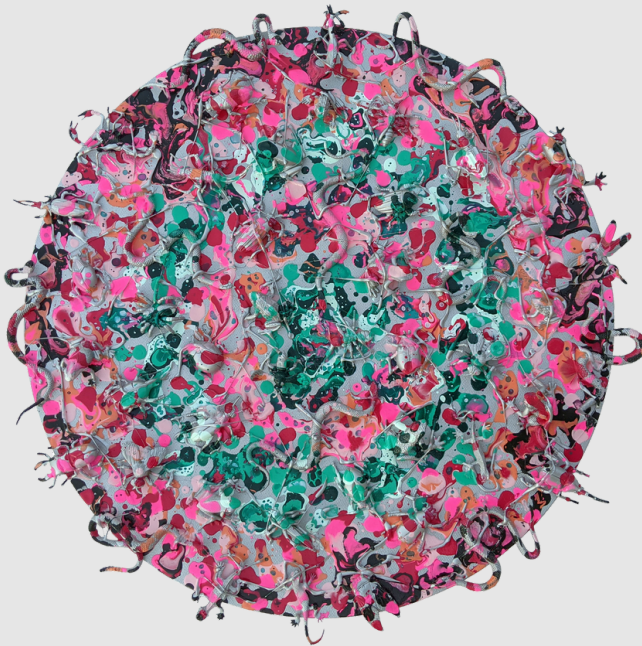
Artist Statement

This body of work shines a light on Australia's gambling problem. Growing up within a culturally and linguistically diverse background in Western Sydney, I draw upon my lived experience of gambling harm as a family member to mediate conversations around trauma, gambling harm, and the Chinese diaspora. Research has shown that members from culturally and linguistically diverse communities who gamble are up to seven times more likely to develop severe problems associated with gambling. It has also been estimated that in the Australian Chinese community, problem gambling rates are between two and eight times higher than the general population.

I sublimate my lived experiences onto paintings, mixed media assemblages, and text-based works in order to engage with the unseen traumas in modern Australian society as a by-product of the migrant and refugee re-settlements. Being the child of refugees and migrants who experienced the Khmer Rouge regime and the Vietnam War, I aim to build cross-cultural and intergenerational dialogue about the complexities of diaspora and my first-generation Australian-Chinese identity. To new arrivals in a Western country, casinos and clubs present as venues that are perceived as safe, attractive and culturally sensitive to CaLD members as they offer culturally specific food, drink and entertainment (including gambling games), all mimicking the busy nightlife.

Each piece aims to break down the stigmas and shame attached to gambling, which has long been associated with Asian culture. The mixed media assembling process of these pieces echoes the fact that poker machines are highly complex devices that have been designed by experts. They are also considered the most harmful form of gambling, and the cause of the majority of gambling addictions. The use of vibrant paints on objects and canvases parallels that of sensory cues, such as flashing lights which, when paired with a reward, lead to "riskier" decision making. At the same time, the physical process of layering found objects and materials reveals the hidden levels of shame and stigma around the topic of gambling. This creates barriers for refugees and newly arrived migrants to seek help around this area.

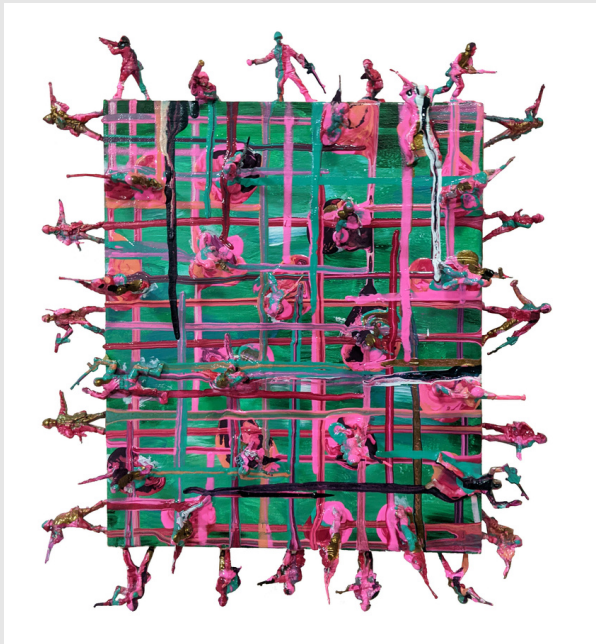
Ultimately, by recognising the interconnectedness of individuals and the world we share, we can work towards creating a world where much-needed gambling reforms are implemented. There is compelling evidence that a mandatory cashless gambling card will help minimise the harm caused by gambling, and gambling reform has never been needed more when considering that Australians spend more on gambling per capita each year than any other country. By sharing the lived experience of gambling harm as a family member, I hope to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage change in our world.



One Last Spin
40.6cm
Mixed media on canvas
2023



Intersectionality, 31 x 31cm, Mixed media on canvas, 2023



Intersectional, 25.5 x 30.5cm, Mixed media on canvas, 2023



Third Culture Kid, 51 x 51cm, Mixed media on canvas, 2023



In Case of Emergency, Break, 51 x 51cm, Mixed media on canvas, 2023



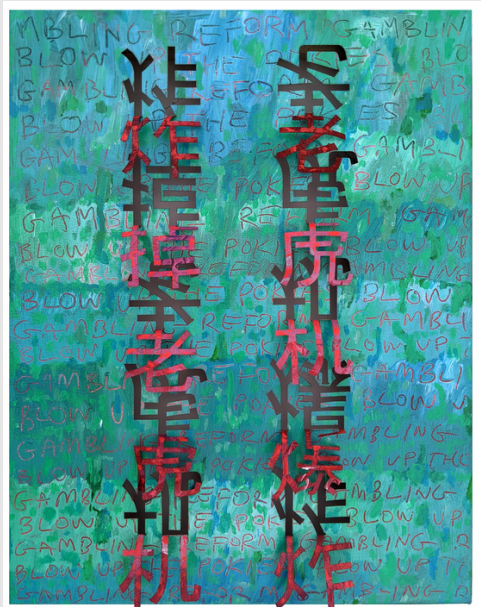
Bug a Boo, 50 x 60cm, Mixed media on canvas, 2023



Bug Me, 51 x 51cm, Mixed media on canvas, 2023



Blow Up The Pokies - Gambling Reform
 50.8 x 101.4cm
 Mixed media on canvas
 2023



Double Happiness
 40 x 30cm
 Acrylic on canvas
 2024

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