

Creative Sanctuary

8 November 2023

In a world that can feel overwhelming at times there is a place that exists within us all that can offer respite, renewal, and hope. Creativity is a portal to the realm of the imagination, through it we can find solace, inspiration or be transported to faraway places.

By engaging in a creative act, in whatever form that may take, we can access an inner world which allows us to connect with ourselves deeply and honestly, explore our potential, discover new and different ways to express ourselves and bring our dreams and ideas to life.

Through creativity, as a viewer or maker, we can be transported to incredible places - places we have been, places we would like to go or places we can only imagine.

Creativity can be a sanctuary, every brushstroke, note, word or movement can be a meditation and a celebration of our own creative potential.

Featuring paintings, drawings and sculptures, *Creative Sanctuary* showcases eight artists from the Cunningham Dax Collection who have found solace and inspiration in their own creative sanctuaries. Their works invites us to step into their world and experience the power of creativity to transform, transport and heal.

Exhibiting Artists: Isabella Duncan, Jacqueline King, Carla Krijt, Emma McEvoy, Rosa Niran, NEG, Renee Sutton and Elizabeth Turnbull



Artist statements

Content warning: Please note that some of the artist statements mentions mental health experiences including topics relating to post traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, sexual & psychological abuse, childhood sexual abuse, depression, mania, schizophrenia, cancer, anxiety, suicide, Holocaust, fear, death and trauma.

Isabella Duncan

I want to tell you that I am ok, that I am living a decent life, that I am a Wife, a Mother of two, an Artist, and a successful Professional, that I have been married for over twenty years, and that I have a degree and two Master's degrees.

I want to tell you that I am not at all suicidal. I want to tell you that miracles happen every day, and they have nothing to do with God, and a little to do with luck. I want to tell you that there is no fate and there is no destiny.

I want to tell you that some things are random, and sometimes there is no reason for them happening. I want to tell you that I am justifying myself, I want to tell you that once you have been mad, it is hard to ever be really sure again: I want to believe that this isn't true and that I am sure, but not too sure. I want to tell you that not know is much harder, but closer to the truth.

I want to tell you that. "The point between two worlds is the hallmark of great art, as it is the hallmark of a life truly being lived" (Woodman, 1993). I want to tell you that no matter what you see in an art object, it is all about you. I want to tell you that if you feel revolted, saddened or scared of an art object, they are your feelings, you created them.

I want to tell you that we are all creative. "Everything we know and feel and every statement we make are all fantasy based, that is, they derive from psychic images" (Hillman, 1990).

I want to tell you that I am as amazed as you are about the quantity and depth of my artwork. I want to tell you that. "No matter how alienated the artist is from society, that person's expression continues as effort to engage life (McNiff, 1989). I want to tell you so much....

P.S. I want to tell you there is hope.



Isabella Duncan
Ophelia, 1998
Acrylic on canvas
175 x 144 cm
2011.0079

Jacqueline King

My art practice utilises an ages old method of copperfoil (tiffany) glasswork in revelational ways. As an untrained artist I don't know what I shouldn't be doing so an idea comes to mind and I try to make it real which seems to work more often than not. Given that my glass work is my salvation, a meditative state which enables me to feel the only real peace in any day it is something of an obsession for me and so I am often concerned that I am building myself a tower of glass as so many pieces surround me. Slowly I do sell work though and even that process ovides healing as it forces me to engage with the world more which slowly over time is becoming less anxiety filled.

Making art to me is truly what made life worth living. It became my only voice when I was completely disabled to speak my truth. I suffer complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder resulting from sexual & psychological abuse in the work place over an extended period at the hand of an employer (despite me being a senior executive) plus an earlier experience of childhood sexual abuse that was never dealt with. This condition rendered me house bound, suffering severe depression and unable to construct understandable communication channels to those I loved around me. I was very close to death when I began making glass works at the gentle prompting of someone who cared.

I can look back now and see that it all is a kind of metaphor of my own life. I am making things of great beauty out of shattered parts, very slowly and with great patience and love, much like I am trying to rebuild my own life and have it reveal itself as worthy and beautiful! I simply would not be here today if not for my artwork.



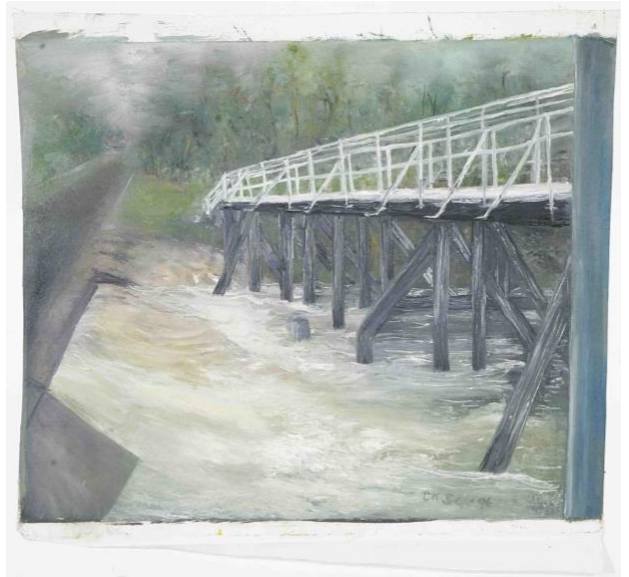
Jacqueline King
Black Heart, 2008
Glass, steel, copper foil
35cm (diameter)
2012.0302

Carla Krijt

Carla was born in Holland 1945 and came to Australia as an 11 year old. In the context of what she described as a “nervous breakdown”, Carla was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1980. A diagnosis of mania followed.

Carla explained that she had been doing her art since 1980, since her “breakdown”, as therapy and described art as “having helped her at worst times of mental illness.” Carla always liked painting and drawing, but was not a trained artist. She created many of her paintings and drawings as recollections of dreams she was experiencing. She described these dreams as often “being taken over by grandiose images, ideas and voices.” These works were then a focus for her in trying to understand the meaning of the various symbols she identified in the images. Carla often referred to these as “ingredients” and stated the importance to her of “trying to understand the ingredients and their meaning to understand the story/dreams of her congested mind.”

Art helped Carla “to find structure through the chaos by turning to art when she feels lost to mediate, relax and get clarity.”



Carla Krijt
Untitled, 1996
Oil paint on canvas
46 x 48cm
2003.3838

Emma McEvoy

They say the art we create is an extension of ourselves; of our past, our hopes, our struggles, our dreams, and very often our pain. Art is and has been an expression of the journey I have found myself on and the many roads it has led me to.

My attraction to art began at a very young age, having suffered from what I was sure was an eating disorder for many years, I found comfort in making art. It was not until I was nineteen and finally sought help that I was diagnosed with Bulimia Nervosa and entered recovery. In the six long, intense, at times extremely difficult and at times extremely rewarding years since, art has become something so much more than 'making pretty things.'



Emma McEvoy
The Paper Crane, 2012
Digital print on rag
24.5 x 24.5cm
2013.0049

Photography, being my medium of choice has become my truest love, and even more so the voice I could not find when I was struggling. *I photograph from the inside out.* It is my way of expressing the inexpressible; it has become the golden key that unlocks some of the secret doors inside of me. Photography gives me a way to make my innermost thoughts, feelings, beliefs, fears and dreams visible, it has been a pathway to healing the wounds I had been carrying around for so long and has provided me with a way to reconnect with myself on a deeper level. Struggling to articulate myself in therapy, I found solace in creating images that would act as bridges between my world and this world. It was a way between my inability to speak and my longing to be understood. Through this creative process another piece of my burden was shed. My pain lessened and I felt a little less heavy.

These images are a part of an ongoing series that I started developing during the early stages of my recovery when I was still very much engaged in my eating disorder and have continued on to some years later when I started to actually embrace recovery and seek freedom outside of this illness. This series is an intimate journey that takes you on a not so linear path. Just like life, recovery isn't always smooth sailing. While I consider myself to be doing really well in recovery and am headed in the right direction, recovery is something that I work on daily

and will need to be conscious of for some time. The images I create today reflect this contrast in experiences, some are dark and some are light to mirror the road recovery takes you on. The biggest difference between then and now is that no matter what curve ball recovery or life throws at me, at the end of the day I will always believe that 100% recovery is possible and that is what I will continue to strive for. And I hope others who are on the same road will strive for that too. Not wanting to go down the shock factor path and add to all the misconceptions or encourage judgement, I have looked past the symptoms and behaviours and focused on the thoughts and feelings. My images are symbolic and have an aspect of surrealism to emphasise the way the eating disordered mind can often convince us to think, feel, and see things about ourselves that are often completely inaccurate. A lot of people think eating disorders are all about food, weight, and unusual behaviours but not many people understand that this is actually the eating disorder's way of distracting everyone from what is really going on deep inside.

I want to show you that, I want to take you inside.

My art has a voice, if you listen quietly, you will hear them speak.”

Rosa Niran

Born to Holocaust survivors in a displaced person's camp in Italy, Rosa migrated to Australia in 1951 at five years of age. Throughout her life she has been an accomplished architect, landscape designer and business professional, as well as a published botanical illustrator and author.

Rosa was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 2000 and began to reassess her life. She underwent surgery and shifted her energy wholly to the things that mattered to her: her partner, family, friends and herself. In 2007 Rosa's cancer returned and with the more serious diagnosis of secondary breast cancer with bone metastases she developed new feelings of fear, dread and eventually death anxiety.

Rosa drew on her creativeness and inventiveness to help her understand these new feelings. Although she had never used art to directly express herself before, with the anxiety and life-threatening diagnoses, she experienced a creative outpouring, making hundreds of paintings, drawings and sculptures over the following years as a means to examine and know herself. Rosa described finding meaning only through the physical act of painting. She has stated that her paintings reveal something to her, an awakening.

"Describing feelings that I have no words for. When they appear before me, I can see them and conquer them. The thing I have learnt, that once it is out in a drawing, on the canvas, it is outside my mind and I can have temporary peace."



Rosa Niran
Chuck No.3, 2007
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 40cm
2012.0353

Renee Sutton

The Cunningham Dax Collection holds over 200 of Renee's artworks, which have been made over six decades and in many different contexts. Her artworks have been made in psychiatric hospitals, in community art groups and also privately at the artist's home. Renee is one of the few artists represented by the Dax Centre, who has such a comprehensive body of art that documents the artist's life experiences and circumstances over such a long period, from her very earliest works through to the present.



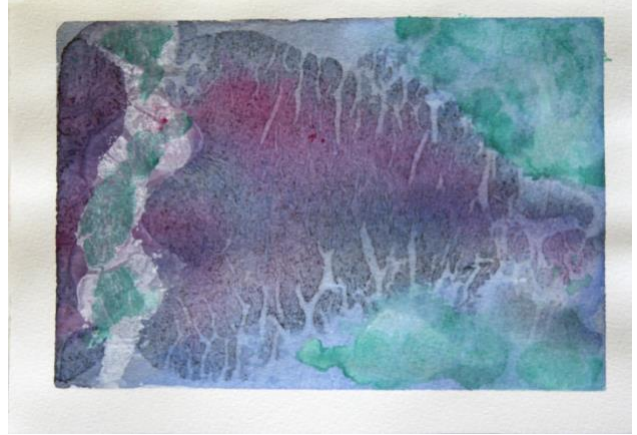
Renee Sutton
Untitled, 1958
Acrylic on canvas
42 x 33.5
2003.2853

Renee's art practice is intuitive and she works very independently, having stated that she is not influenced by other artists or artistic styles. Rather, she paints what she feels at any given time and this goes some way to explain the stylistic diversity in her work. Renee is enigmatic about her art practice, explaining that, "I don't think of it as being me, I just do it and hope for the best."

Renee has tracked her feelings, the events of her life and her private thoughts through a continuous production of subtle and delicate vignettes, allowing the viewer to catch glimpses of her memories and states of mind.

NEG

Since the age of nine, NEG has had an experience of mental health issues. NEG took part in Prahran Mission's Second Story program, as well as taking a place as an artist in Stables Studio. She has undertaken a Writing and Editing course at RMIT, as well as various art therapy sessions. NEG has also undertaken classes in Oriental Ink Brush, "Which I love because I can paint tranquillity and in the doing feel some tranquillity myself". She says that "[I feel] that people don't know what it's like to live with BPD and I think my work/writing shows something of that. I hope that people can learn from it.



NEG
Untitled, undated
Watercolour on paper
15 x 21cm
2009.0216

Some of the topics covered in this exhibition may cause distress. Please connect with one of the following services if support is needed.

Lifeline: 13 11 14

SANE Supportline: 1800 187 263

SANE Forums : www.saneforums.org