

THE SUN AT MIDNIGHT

30 September —
11 December 2022

***The Sun at Midnight* invites you to explore the presence of Hellenic references through distinct contemporary art practices and the contemplation of diasporic motifs. The exhibition's title speaks to the phenomenological capacity for art to function as a conduit between time, place and culture.**

This exhibition has been curated by artist and gallerist Adam Stone, and includes pieces from five Australian contemporary artists whose works are informed by classical Hellenic motifs and principles.

The Hellenic Museum is excited to launch *The Sun at Midnight* as the first installment of a suite of exhibitions in its newly opened, dedicated contemporary gallery. This space will host a changing roster of contemporary projects that engage with the themes explored in the Hellenic Museum's broader collection and programs.

From curator Adam Stone:

The Sun at Midnight explores the presence of Hellenic references through distinct contemporary art practices and the contemplation of diasporic motifs.

Belonging to the Pitjantjatjara cultural group and living and working in the remote community of Mimili, South Australia, **Ngilan Margaret Dodd's** included works are characterised by the fusion of ancient Greek and Indigenous Australian cultures. Encountering the Greek hydria on television, Dodd adapted this iconic form to her traditional weaving techniques, creating a conceptually rich and resolutely contemporary body of work.

The influence of Greco-Roman culture is of profound significance to **Stephen Benwell**, who is known for his idiosyncratic and iconic interpretation of the male figure. Initially inspired by 18th century glazed ceramic figurines, Benwell's point of reference soon developed to incorporate the poise and grandeur of Greco-Roman statuary, albeit at a miniature scale. His soft palette and evocative handling of clay offers a decisively human and thoughtfully contemporary investigation into representations of classical masculinity and beauty. Benwell's nude male statues are anchored in classical Hellenic principles, bolstered by two significant research trips to Greece in 1997 and 2008.

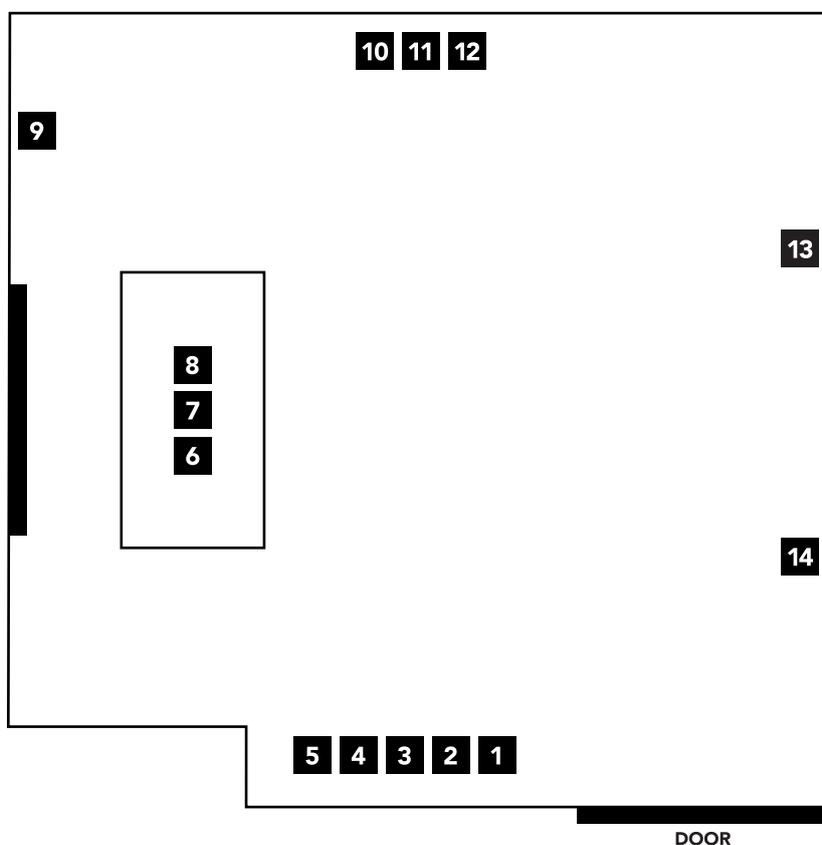
Grace Wood's contribution to the exhibition comprises two photographic collages printed on fabric which include imagery from the artist's trip to Greece in 2017, which she undertook whilst living in the UK. Her work is concerned with ideas prevalent in contemporary photographic discourse on the archive and digital technology's capacity to generate, alter and namelessly disperse images. Classical statuary is a recurring motif in the artist's practice and is used as a device to challenge elitist male-centric art history; the gaze and representations of the idealised female form. For *The Sun at Midnight*, she has created two new artworks embellished with faux pearls that extend the photographic plane into the third dimension.

Ann Debono's practice shares a fascination with image discourse, considering and challenging where representational painting situates itself within its slippery logic. Her work in *The Sun at Midnight* is titled *Antiphon*, which is a choral musical device of call and response. Dynamically split by a tilted axis, the painting is divided in two sections, the upper depicting a Hellenic archaeological dig site and the lower, an image taken by the artist at Palazzo Colonna during her 2018 residency at the British School in Rome. This work challenges the objectivity of seeing, where the processes of archaeology – retrieving and distinguishing artefacts concealed in the earth – shares a logic with image theory; where process and signifiers allude to complex, transient territories.

Rob McLeish's practice spans drawing, collage and sculpture and is known for its astute material understanding and experimentation. Influenced by sporting culture and motifs, his works are bound by strong ties to Hellenic principles, where athleticism and beauty ideals were explicitly intertwined. These recent works are from the artist's ambitious *Distortions* project consisting of 60 monochromatic pencil drawings. The works' distinct aqua hue alludes to the modern swimming pool, a recurring motif which draws its origins in early Hellenic culture. The works depict classical statuary which appear to distort and melt away under the transformative surface of the picture plane, echoing the rippling surface of a pool.

A cornerstone of Western culture and art history, Hellenic classicism and its cultural principles still readily pervade and provide a baseline for contemporary artists to adopt or challenge. *The Sun at Midnight* provides a platform for discourse and an opportunity to connect seemingly disparate artistic practices and threads which encompasses a multi-generational group of artists at varied points in their careers.

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STEPHEN BENWELL

Appears courtesy of
Niagara Galleries

- 1 **Figure, standing on one leg** 2016
Bronze, AP, edition of 4
- 2 **Statue – blue, red** 2016
Earthenware
- 3 **Coupe and base, Canister and base, Bust and column, Bust and column** 2010
Earthenware
- 4 **Caledon** 2022
Ceramic
- 5 **Small head with blue eyes** 2018
Earthenware

NGILAN MARGARET DODD

Appears courtesy of the artist
and Tjanpi Desert Weavers

- 6 **Red fibre vessel** 2021
Minarri grass and raffia
- 7 **Natural with orange rim fibre vessel/Blue** 2021
Minarri grass and raffia
- 8 **Green, orange and pink fibre vessel/ Natural purple** 2021
Minarri grass and raffia

GRACE WOOD

Appears courtesy
of LON Gallery

- 9 **Gulf of Thessaloniki and the Vardar River mouth, pearls** 2022
Photographic print on canvas, acrylic paint, pearls, Victorian ash frame
- 14 **A relic, a grid** 2022
Photographic print on canvas, acrylic paint, pearls, Victorian ash frame

ROB MCLEISH

Appears courtesy
of Neon Parc

- 10 **Distortion 12** 2021
Pencil on paper
Courtesy of the Alex Cleary private collection
- 11 **Distortion 17** 2021
Pencil on paper
- 12 **Distortion 10** 2021
Pencil on paper
Courtesy of the Jan van Schaik private collection

ANN DEBONO

Appears courtesy
of Sutton Gallery

- 13 **Antiphon** 2021
Acrylic and oil on linen