

Fantastic Worlds



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Counihan Gallery In Brunswick

7 June – 7 July 2019

Artists

Graeme Base Lance Balchin Leigh Hobbs

Elise Hurst Alison Lester Marc Martin

Cat Rabbit and Isobel Knowles (Soft Stories)

Tai Snaith Shaun Tan Anna Walker

Exhibition Curator

Edwina Bartlem



Shaun Tan, *Never drop your jar*, 2012, oil on canvas, 762 (h) x 864 mm.

Photographer: Matthew Stanton. From *Rules of Summer* published by Lothian Children's Books in 2013

FANTASTIC WORLDS:

*Exploring the imaginary characters
and worlds of picture book art*



Anna Walker, *Apartment*, 2016, digital collage from watercolour and pencil on paper, approx 400 mm (h) x 560 mm. From *Florette* published by Viking, Penguin Random House Australia in 2017.

Fantastic Worlds is an exhibition and public program that celebrates and explores the fantastic and imaginary characters and worlds of selected Australian picture books through original artworks, animations and associated media. Curated for families and children (aged 2 to 10 years old), this exhibition invites visitors to get up close to experience these imaginative worlds and the curious, mysterious and whimsical characters that occupy these realms.

Artists featured in the exhibition include Graeme Base, Lance Balchin, Leigh Hobbs, Elise Hurst, Alison Lester, Marc Martin, Cat Rabbit and Isobel Knowles (Soft Stories), Tai Snaith, Shaun Tan and Anna Walker.

Fantastic Worlds revolves around representations of fantastic and imaginary characters and worlds within selected picture books, and there is a strong narrative quality to many of these works. A number of sub-themes also thread through this exhibition, symbolically weaving together different artworks. In some cases, artworks overlap with a number of these secondary themes. Sub-themes include: Imaginary Worlds; Anthropomorphic Animals; Journeys of Discovery; Inner-Worlds (including emotional and psychological states); Cautionary Tales and Fairy Tales; Climate Change and Environmental Destruction, and possible Future Worlds. There may well be other sub-themes that you can identify as you explore the exhibition.

Comprised of original artworks, developmental media and newly designed installations, this exhibition celebrates both finished artworks and the creative processes involved in making art for picture books. The original artworks in this exhibition all engage with the principal theme and utilise a range of creative techniques including oil painting, watercolour, illustration, collage, sculpture, digital collage, animation and installation. Complimenting these artworks are selected associated media — sketchbooks, working drawings, soft sculptures, collage elements and sets that were used to create the published artworks. Presenting finished works with developmental media allows viewers to consider the creative process undertaken by artists to create new artworks for picture books.

Why picture book art?

Picture books are one of the first places that young children engage with the world of visual culture and representation. They are sites of wonder, curiosity and learning, often facilitating early creativity, literacy and understandings of the world and other people. Arguably, the artworks in these publications are the primary reason that children, especially young children find them engaging.

Yet this creative field is sometimes undervalued by the 'fine art' world because it is seen as more of a commercial artform. While picture books are part of commodity culture and intersect with other creative disciplines such as writing, book design, graphic design, photography and publishing, picture book art is an important and innovative creative discipline. It is also a growing field that has become more aesthetically diverse and competitive over the past few decades.



Leigh Hobbs, *As the clouds parted, Mr Chicken was thrilled to see Paris*, 2009, pen, ink, gouache and acrylic on paper, 305 (h) x 430 mm. From *Mr Chicken goes to Paris* published by Allen & Unwin in 2009. Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria. Accession no: H2017.234/2. Acquired through the Cultural Gifts Program in 2016.

Significantly, the artworks in picture books draw young readers into narratives and present them with visual representations of characters, environments, social situations, problems and ideas. A dynamic relationship is generated between images and words, requiring people to read across and between these elements to make their own associations and interpretations. While some



Tai Snaith, *New Friend's Garden*, 2019, paper, stoneware clay, watercolour, gouache and ink, approx 576 (h) x 856 mm. From *You Might Find Yourself* published by Thames & Hudson in 2019.

artists in *Fantastic Worlds* adopt a literal approach to representing the characters and narrative action, not all artists work in this way. In fact, many of the artists embrace a more lateral approach to developing artworks for picture books, creating surreal, obscure or psychological interpretations of the text, thereby leaving them open to multiple readings.

Participation

Audience participation is a central curatorial strategy for *Fantastic Worlds*. As already noted, the exhibition and public program have been designed with families and children in mind and this project

is grounded in research into the needs and interests of this specific audience. Young children learn best in art museums and galleries when their curiosity is sparked and they have opportunities to participate through first-hand, creative activity and play.¹ It is for this reason that audience participation is such an important aspect of this exhibition.

A number of museum researchers and educators including Barbara Piscitelli (2011); Piscitelli and Louisa Penfold (2015); Deborah L Perry (2012) and Donna McColm (2018) have argued that creative participation and hands-on interaction and play are important for encouraging a sense of belonging and opportunities for children to learn in art museums. Participatory installations and hands-on creative activities essentially transform art museums and galleries into more inviting environments for children to learn about art and to grow creatively, emotionally, intellectually and socially.

Fantastic Worlds includes multiple opportunities for visitors to experience creative interaction through the exhibition and associated activities or public programs. There are several installations in the exhibition that evolve and change over the duration of the display as a direct result of audience participation.

Cat Rabbit and Isobel Knowles have created a new installation titled, *Story-go-round* (2019) that encourages young visitors to create a character or set piece that can be added to a spinning, interactive fictional world. The artists describe this artwork as a 'collaborative storytelling installation' because audience members add to the visual narrative by creating and contributing an element. Audience members can watch as their story grows over time and as different elements overlap and interact with each other to

¹ Piscitelli, 2011: [12 May 2019], https://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/BPiscitelli_2011.html

generate multiple narrative possibilities. Forget linear narrative! *Story-go-round* offers a topsy-turvy, open-ended narrative that is constantly changing during the exhibition.

Anna Walker has created a new *Florette*-inspired garden installation in the Gallery's vitrine space, while also providing the catalyst for the *Grow a box garden* participatory installation in the Brunswick Town Hall's atrium. Visitors are invited to help cultivate the garden by decorating boxes with flowers, plants, insects and birds, then adding them to the installation during set time-frames. Over time, the garden can be seen flourishing and growing through the community's creative contribution.

In addition to participatory installations, creative activities such as make-your-own picture books, drawing and reading offer young visitors fun and layered experiences. These activities allow children and adults to get creative and to make their own art and stories in the gallery. Creative workshops, story-time and family day activities also provide artist-led and social opportunities to become actively involved in art-making and reading in the gallery.

Fantastic Worlds offers visitors diverse imaginary characters and realms to explore. It is hoped that you discover something that intrigues and inspires you to keep imagining and creating your own fantastic worlds.

Edwina Bartlem

Exhibition Curator



Cat Rabbit and Isobel Knowles (Soft Stories), *Turtle is happy with her new friends*, 2015, plywood, felt, polystyrene, armature wire, polyfill and cardboard, 1200 (h) x 1200 x 600 mm. From *Too Much for Turtle*, published by Thames & Hudson in 2015.

References

McColm, 2018: Donna McColm, 'Making Our Mark: A Short Guide to Participation in Contemporary Art', in *NGV Magazine*, NGV Triennial: Special Issue, vol 2, Mar/April 2018, pp. 26-29.

Perry 2012: Deborah L. Perry, *What Makes Learning Fun? Principles for the Design of Intrinsically Motivating Museum Exhibits*, Lanham, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK, AltaMira Press, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

Piscitelli, 2011: Barbara Piscitelli, 'What's driving children's cultural participation?', in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, ed. Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2011, [12 May 2019], https://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/BPiscitelli_2011.html

Piscitelli and Penfold, 2015: Barbara Piscitelli and Louisa Penfold, 'Child-centred Practice in Museums: Experiential Learning through Creative Play at Ipswich Art Gallery', in *Curator: The Museum Journal*, vol 58, no 3, July 2015, pp.263-280.



Anna Walker, *Florette shop window (detail)*, 2016, digital collage from watercolour, pencil and collage on paper. From *Florette* published by Viking, Penguin Random House Australia in 2017.



Lance Balchin, *Mechanica Papilo (Mechanical Butterfly)*, 2016, digital collage print, approx 590 (h) x 840 mm. From *Mechanica: a beginner's field guide* published by Little Hare Books in 2016.



Shaun Tan, *All Fur*, 2014, paper, wire, air-drying clay (DAS), acrylic paint, wax, 180 (h) x 180 x 70 mm. From *The Singing Bones* published by Allen & Unwin in 2015.



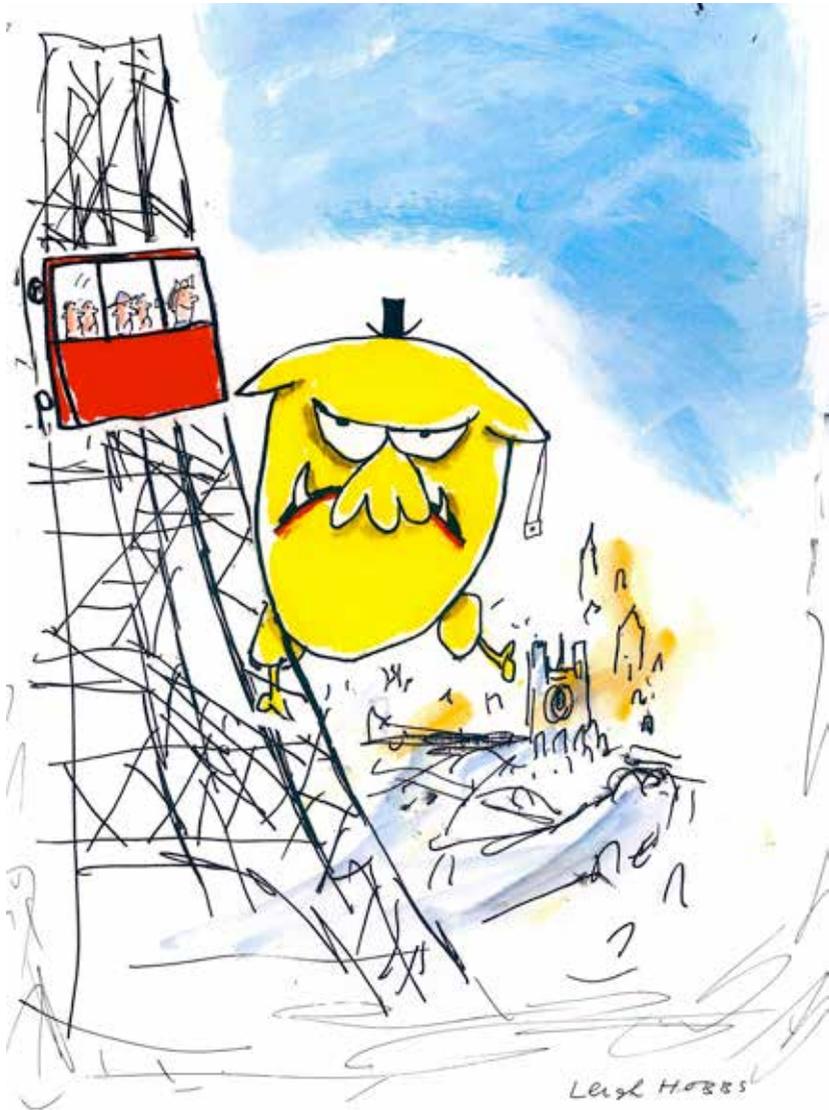
Tai Snaith, *Try New Things*, 2017, paper, stoneware clay, watercolour, gouache and ink, approx 576 (h) x 856 mm. From *Slow Down, World* published by Thames & Hudson in 2017.



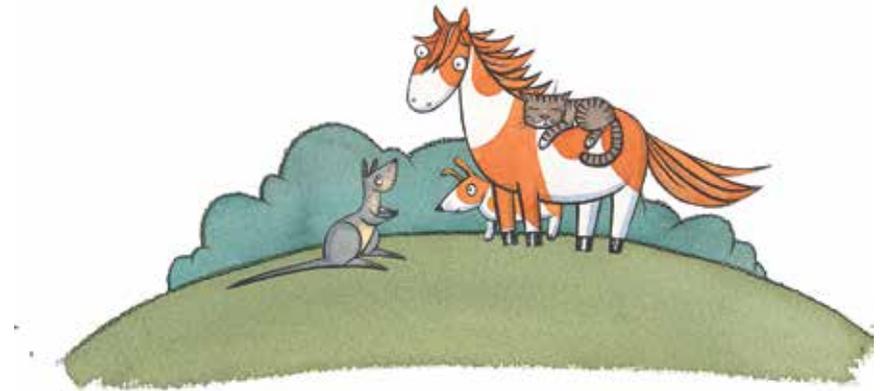
Graeme Base, *The Soldiercrabs*, 1991, watercolour and ink on hot press illustration board, 710 (h) x 830 mm. From *The Sign of the Seahorse* first published in 1992. Published by Puffin Books, Penguin Australia in 1996.



Elise Hurst, *Imagine a city and drops of rain*, 2014, pen and ink on paper, 320 (h) x 450 mm. From *Imagine a City* published by Scholastic Australia in 2014.



Leigh Hobbs, *Mr Chicken goes to Paris* (cover image), 2009, pen, ink, gouache and acrylic on paper, approx 430 (h) x 305 mm. From *Mr Chicken goes to Paris* published by Allen & Unwin in 2009.



Alison Lester, *Noni the pony rescues a joey* (inside title page), 2018, watercolour and collage on paper, 220 (h) x 280 mm. From *Noni the pony rescues a joey* published by Allen & Unwin in 2018.



Alison Lester, *Noni the pony lives near the sea*, 2018, watercolour and collage on paper, 220 (h) x 280 mm. From *Noni the pony rescues a joey* published by Allen & Unwin in 2018.

BOOK LIST

The artworks featured in the exhibition were published in the following picture books.

Graeme Base

Animalia

First published by Penguin Australia in 1986.

Graeme Base

The Sign of the Seahorse

First published in 1992. Published by Puffin Books, Penguin Australia in 1996.

Graeme Base

Uno's Garden

First published by Puffin Books, Penguin Australia in 2006.

Lance Balchin

Mechanica: a beginner's field guide

Published by Little Hare Books, Hardie Grant Egmont in 2016.

Leigh Hobbs

Mr Chicken Goes to Paris

Published by Allen & Unwin in 2009.

Elise Hurst

Imagine a City

Published by Scholastic Australia in 2014.

Lucy Estela and Elise Hurst

Girl on Wire

(words by Lucy Estela and images by Elise Hurst). Published by Puffin Books, Penguin Random House Australia in 2018.

Alison Lester

Imagine

First published by Allen & Unwin in 1989.

Alison Lester

Noni the pony rescues a joey

Published by Allen & Unwin in 2018.

Marc Martin

A River

Published by Viking Books, Penguin Random House Australia in 2015.

Cat Rabbit and Isobel Knowles (Soft Stories)

Too Much for Turtle

Published by Thames & Hudson in 2015.

Tai Snaith

Slow Down, World

Published by Thames & Hudson in 2017.

Shaun Tan

Rules of Summer

Published by Lothian Children's Books in 2013.

Shaun Tan

The Singing Bones

Published by Allen & Unwin in 2015.

Anna Walker

Florette

Published by Viking, Penguin Random House Australia in 2017.

Anna Walker

Mr Huff

Published by Viking, Penguin Random House Australia in 2015.



Lance Balchin, *Mechanica* (endpapers), 2016, digital collage print.

From *Mechanica: a beginner's field guide* published by Little Hare Books in 2016.

To Tristan and Bróna. You are the centre of my world and I can't wait to experience many more fantastic adventures together. E.B.

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All images courtesy of the artists.

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Fantastic Worlds is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Thanks to State Library Victoria for lending a selection of Leigh Hobb's artworks and associated media from the Pictures Collection. In particular, thanks to Gerard Hayes, Fiona Wilson and Sarah Haselton for coordinating this loan.

Thank you also to project partner, Brunswick Bound for their generous contribution to public programs.



Cat Rabbit and Isobel Knowles, *Turtle*, 2015, felt, plastic eyes, cotton, polyester stuffing and armature wire, approx 170 (h) x 90 mm. From *Too Much for Turtle*, published by Thames & Hudson in 2015.

Marc Martin, *Deepest Jungle* (detail), 2015, digital collage from watercolour, pencil and gouache on paper, 225 (h) x 560 mm. From *A River* published by Viking Books, Penguin Random House Australia in 2015.

