

# Telling

This exhibition brings together work by women artists who use narrative to explore some of their ideas, experiences and 'psychological landscapes'. These narratives are of both personal and broader significance and employ materials and figuration as a means to engage the viewer in the specific context of story.

Stories mirror who, what and how we are in the present and provide settings, ideas and structures for the future. Fictive or factual, stories often employ allegory or symbolism to 'say something but mean something else'. In the context of this exhibition, constructed narratives begin with the experience and perception of the artist and as such provide a unique insight into the life of the mind.

Barry Schwabsky has stated, "Before there was Art, there was painting" (2011, 10)... a sweeping statement but true, nonetheless. Some of the earliest evidence of human civilisation indicates that people told stories through pictures. Before 'Art' was named, this activity existed as a fundamentally practical expression of daily life, a recounting or imagining of the ways and means of existence.

A common cultural belief is that we need narrative - a diachronic view of life in order to establish things like moral values. However, in neuroscience, current understandings of the empathic and social nature of the brain suggest a more external, 'objective' point of view with little attachment to our personal story may produce a more accurate, meaningful and ethical paradigm for contextualising experience. Perhaps the natural distancing produced by artistic process and presentation could encompass this idea; narrative pictures can transcend the anecdotal through artistic means, producing a democratising effect somewhere between the diachronic immersion we seem to need and the continual negotiation of what is external to us.

Narrative pictures may be a 'frame' of a larger, ongoing story or be compressed into a single image. They may imply something is about to happen or has already taken place. The often ambiguous or incomplete nature of narrative promotes an engagement with images that requires a level of understanding unique to the viewer, belying the artist as sole author and transferring agency to the beholder.

It could be argued that the place of pictorial narrative has been challenged or appropriated by film, and perhaps to an extent this is true, considering the comprehensiveness of moving images with sound. However, given one of our earliest exposures to learning systems - children's storybooks - picture-narratives remain relevant through their ability to convey meanings which explore ethics, empathy and imagination without directly locating in the highly orchestrated, polysensory world of the moving image.

The human impulse to decode, find meaning or simply relate to things ensures that story telling remains relevant through imaging ideas that reflect aspects of existence such as identity, culture and human relationships. Paintings and drawings are generally static, but they move about in our consciousness as we identify our own stories in them. Moreover, art history and its attendant material traditions provide further meaning and context in these narratives.

Narrative art, from Greek mythology to history painting, to the personal and sociological narratives of the present, renews itself collectively from the outside in (culture) and individually from the inside out (us). Narratives speak to us of their time but endure through the necessity to re-analyse and communicate universal human truths.

The two-dimensional plane as a 'window into a world' and therefore a stage for human narratives may be considered passé, however, this basic illusion is perhaps less circumscribed than what we think, since what is presented evolves just as the world we live in does - even if it is only one 'view'. Narrative worlds continue to invite our curiosity by providing a pictorial experience in which we recognise our own potential and frailties through the stories of others.

Chelsea Lehmann

## Adelaide Central Gallery



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### Artists

Nerissa Lea, Chelsea Lehmann, VR Morrison, Marie Peter-Toltz and Anna Platten

Nerissa Lea is represented by Australian Galleries, Melbourne  
Anna Platten is represented by Hill Smith Galleries, Adelaide

**Curator** Chelsea Lehmann

**Exhibition Manager** Gloria Strzelecki

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### Exhibition Open

Tue & Wed 9am - 7pm  
Mon, Thur & Fri 9am - 5pm  
Sat 26 July & 2 August 1 - 4pm

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### cover image

Chelsea Lehmann, *History* (detail), 2014, oil on board, 50 x 45cm



# Telling

Adelaide Central  
Gallery





### Nerissa Lea

Nerissa holds a degree in printmaking and cinematography (South Australian School of Art, UniSA) and currently lives and works in Tasmania. Her work employs narrative realism to express pictorially the incommunicability of life experience through the mediums of painting and drawing. Lea has undertaken residencies at Griffith University and the Cité Internationale des Arts and her work is held in public collections including Albury Regional Gallery (NSW) and Queensland Art Gallery. She has been highly commended in several art prizes including the Willoughby Art Prize and Portia Geach Memorial Award, which she was awarded in 2004. Nerissa Lea is represented by Australian Galleries.

**Nerissa Lea** *Swansong* (detail), 2012, pastel on paper, 57.5 x 76.5cm  
**Nerissa Lea** *A story without a title (or how I sailed the seas in a box)* (detail), 2012, pastel on paper, 76.5 x 57.5cm

### Chelsea Lehmann

Chelsea is an artist working primarily in painting and drawing using sources such as art historical painting and contemporary images of the figure combined in non-illusionistic pictorial spaces. Her current work explores the aesthetic potential of scientific imaging techniques such as X-ray and Infrared photography. Lehmann was listed as one of Australia's 50 most collectable artists (*Australian Art Collector*, 2008) and has been awarded several grants, residencies and awards including the Ruth Tuck Scholarship (SA), project grants from Arts SA and the Helpmann Academy and recently the Australian Post Graduate Award. Chelsea Lehmann is currently a PhD candidate at UNSW Australia | Art & Design.

**Chelsea Lehmann** *Providence* (detail), 2006 - 2013, oil on linen, 196 x 146cm

### VR Morrison

VR is a painter living and working in Sydney. Her paintings use traditional techniques to reference larger frameworks of art history, mortality and commodification, bringing both the past and present to light simultaneously. Morrison has exhibited widely in regional and university galleries across Australia including Gippsland Art Gallery (Vic.), Macquarie University Art Gallery (NSW) and University of Queensland Art Museum and commercially with Sullivan and Strumpf gallery in Sydney. She has been a finalist in many prestigious prizes including the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize, Sir John Sulman Art Prize (AGNSW) and the Metro Art Award (Vic.) in which she won the People's Choice Award in 2005.

**VR Morrison** *Little Beast* (detail), 2013, oil on mahogany, 50 x 50cm

### Marie Peter-Toltz

Marie was born in France and has studied painting at the New York Studio School, The Artist Student League of New York, College of Fine Arts (UNSW) and the National Art School in Sydney, as well as art history in Madrid, Vienna and Paris. Her painting practice is concerned with portraying the female form in composite pictorial spaces exploring intimate and allegorical scenes of her past in contemporary settings. Peter-Toltz has been a finalist in several prizes and awards, including the Waverly Art Prize (NSW) and the Portia Geach Memorial Award (2008). She was recently the recipient of an artist grant and residency through the Vermont Studio Center, US.

**Marie Peter-Toltz** *Big Marlowe* (detail), 2013 - 2014, oil on linen, 130 x 97cm

### Anna Platten

Anna is a painter living and working in Adelaide. She uses a realist approach to depict imaginary worlds originating from perceptions of the everyday, often constructing her own props and costumes to create a convincing illusion of envisioned realities. Platten's work has been included in exhibitions at Queensland Art Gallery (GOMA, 2008), Samstag Museum of Art (2009) and recently a major retrospective *The Devil is in the Detail* at the Art Gallery of South Australia (2012). Her work is held in many important private and public collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia and the National Gallery of Victoria. Anna Platten is represented by Hill Smith Gallery, Adelaide.

**Anna Platten** *Family Portrait* (detail), 2013 - 2014, oil on linen, 172 x 196cm

**Nerissa Lea** *Swansong* (detail), 2012, pastel on paper, 57.5 x 76.5cm