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Feathering the Nest: Richard Nylon



Holly Barbaro

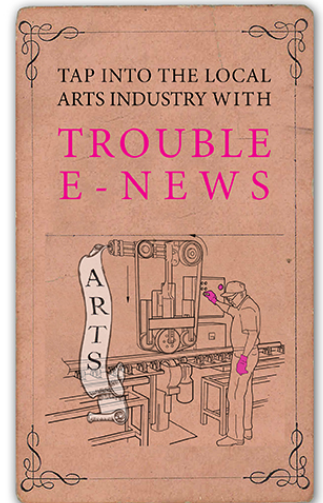
With the artist intervention moving into the mainstream of exhibition programming, and the rise and thrive of fashion exhibitions in the museum sector, it seems a natural evolution for the two to collide in Richard Nylon's guest curation titled *Feathering the Nest* at The Johnston Collection.

Artist interventions, involving an artist from outside an institution critically and creatively engaging with a museum and its collection, was arguably (and controversially) first practiced in Australia by contemporary artist Domenico de Clario at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1975. In the last summer of 2014/15, three of Australia's state galleries, being the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Queensland Art Gallery, ran fashion exhibitions as their major 'blockbuster' shows. The collaboration between milliner Richard Nylon and house-museum The Johnston Collection therefore seems an ambitious venture, shrewdly balancing the risk of the intervention with the mass appeal of fashion.

Richard Nylon has been creating millinery pieces for over twenty years. His work has been collected by the National Gallery of Victoria, commissioned by The Australian Ballet, and he teaches millinery at RMIT University. Nylon is recognised for his audacious personal style often captured in the social pages. He has collaborated with bridal couturier Gwendolynne Burkin for almost his entire career, both operating from their adjoining studios in Kerr Street, Fitzroy. As for Nylon's personal interests and story, *Feathering the Nest* discloses this in remarkable detail and intensity.

The Johnston Collection is a house museum in leafy East Melbourne Victoria. Its founder William Johnston traded in antiques and left his collection and home in trust to be administered as a museum. Although Johnston is recorded to have rearranged his antiques to form a series of vignettes in his store, it has been in more recent times that a program of inviting external creatives to rearrange the collection has been officially implemented. The program evolved from inviting identities such as philanthropist Lady Potter (2004) and Lynne Landy (2002), magazine editor and wife of the former Victorian Governor John Landy, AC, OBE, who inserted domestic and personal touches to the arrangement such as flowers, framed photographs and even a cat basket. This has been followed by celebrated and gifted fashion designers of Akira Isogawa (2010) and Romance Was Born (2012). Other notable creatives have included architect and designer Pascale Gomes-McNabb (2012), contemporary artist Rosslynd Piggott (2013), Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet David McAllister (2014) and former curator of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW (now known as Sydney Living Museums) Dr James Broadbent (2014). In a competitive climate of attracting visitation, the programming allows the museum to refresh its offerings, encourage repeat visitation, and provide the public with a three dimensional experience of the guest curator's creative output and imagination.

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The Fashion Force

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by Inga Walton

Krystyna Campbell-Pretty's passion for fashion has endowed the National Gallery of Victoria with a substantial number of exceptional couture and *prêt-à-porter* ensembles, accessories, sketches and studio drawings, photography, fashion journals and supporting textual material over the last ...

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Nylon explained that he chose the exhibition title *Feathering the Nest* as feathers reference his millinery practice, and the expression arouses the idea of intimate domestic environments. Nylon advised that he had no all-encompassing theme for his guest curation. Several themes do, however, cross-pollinate throughout the house, such as time, and the interests and inner life of Nylon fused with that of the museum founder William Johnston and his collection. The exhibition also shows the strength of fashion designers in the area of exhibition design, a preoccupation with materials and surfaces, and an accentuated use of intuition in executing an artist intervention.



The blue room, conveniently described for its deep indigo blue wall treatment, focuses on time and scientific-related objects. The room can be heard before it is entered, having several metronomes clicking unnervingly in the room. The noise replicates the ticking of the clock, a number of which are also found in the blue room. Several of the collection's barometers are also placed in the room. Veering to an autobiographical narrative, Nylon explains that he vividly remembers his grandfathers, both farmers, regularly inspecting their barometers given the importance of weather to farming the land.

Beyond the personal associations, Nylon advised that his use of the metronomes are part of his wider use of triangular and pyramid shapes in his arrangement as they act to draw the eye up, making full use of the high ceilings of the museum. The ticking not only adds the element of sound to the exhibition, but engages a primal startle response, creating a sophisticated and experiential exhibition design.

The green-drawing room is given over to the grandeur of Louis XIV, particularly through the invocation of the ceremony lever, the king's elaborate arising and dressing ceremony. The museum's four-poster bed, despite its Indian origin and being made circa 1800, has been re-imagined as the site of the ceremony. The Baroque music of Louis XIV's court composer Lully plays in the room, integrating music into the exhibition. If this sounds questionably grandiose, Nylon has offset the grandeur with humour with a cluster of Staffordshire greyhound figurines (circa 1870) across the surface of the bed providing a wink to royalty's love of dogs, and a dog's love of their master's beds.



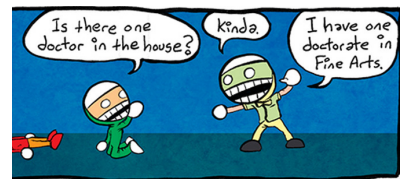
In this **SPECIAL EPISODE** of **Deep Trouble** we interview **Charles Firth of the Chaser**. He offers an analysis of the state of play for the major parties in 2019, why the Labour Party lost the 'unlosable' election, as well as ...

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Ive Sorocuk – Comics Face Supreme

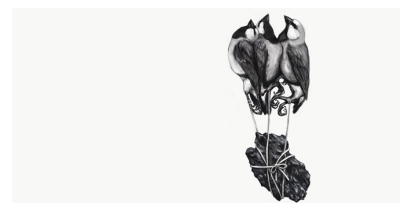
Trouble met **Ive Sorocuk** at the same comic con called Supanova in 2008 where they met Mandy Ord. We were immediately attracted to his weird sense of humour, his superheroes, *The Diggables*, and ...

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Bob's Convoy

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by Ben Laycock

PART ONE : The Long Road to the Far North

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SALON April-May 2019

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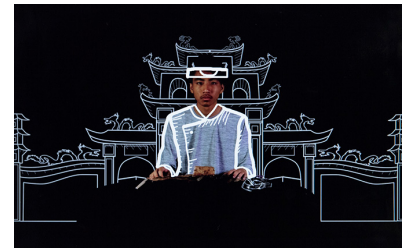


Nylon has arranged the upstairs bedroom as a tribute to his long-time collaborator Gwendolynne Burkin. The room features several gowns selected by Burkin herself from the Gwendolynne archives. They can be seen laid out on the chaise lounge, intriguingly reminiscent of Sophie Calle's intervention at the Freud Museum, London, where she lay her wedding gown over Freud's patient examination lounge. Although academic commentators note the artist intervention genre owes much to avant-garde practice, Nylon puts the similarity down to coincidence and intuition. In particular, he cites that his display owed much to the lounge's yellow upholstery and the gold dress melding together well.

Revealing Nylon's and Burkin's shared memories of collaboration, a group of miniature portraits are mounted on the wall, half concealed by an open wardrobe door, and another group of miniatures are displayed prominently in a central display case. Nylon explained that the two groups represent the many brides that he and Burkin have seen over the years, some confident knowing exactly what they want, and others who are more shy and unsure. Other objects in the room include ceramics with *Chinoiserie* motifs, crystal lamps and Persian rugs selected by Nylon on the criteria that they are 'objects Gwendolynne would like' as a tribute to his collaborator, muse and friend.



Specially made hairpieces and accessories for the exhibition are displayed in the dressing room, playfully sitting on various marble sculptures from the Collection. Nylon stated that the pieces relate specifically to each sculpture. For example the sculpture of Mercury (circa 1840) wears a small helmet with feathers. The bust of Seneca, who Nylon thought looked miserable, was given 'a very sparkly headpiece to cheer him up'. The creation of works in



APRIL/MAY 2019 COVER: Richard NGUYEN, *All mixed up* (detail)
2018, digital video, duration 1:57 min. Canning Vale College. *Pulse Perspectives*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth Cultural Centre, Perth (WA), 6 April – 22 July 2019 – artgallery.wa.gov.au

Yvette COPPERSMITH, ...

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Getting Personal with Vince Jones

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interview by Steve Proposch

Vince Jones remembers playing in the Wollongong under 10s soccer team. "I was born in Paisley, just outside of Glasgow. My dad ran out of steam for Scotland at the time. He wanted to go somewhere ...

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Happy Birthday Comics

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Trouble turned 15 in April 2019, and for our birthday issue we wanted to thank by way of featuring some of our past comic contributors, who have been a highlight for us throughout the years. Many of these beautiful and ...

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response to an intervention commission is a clearly positive outcome and legacy of this genre of exhibition. A fashion designer's greater proximity to the commercial world is also perceptible in the gift shop, where visitors can purchase small items made by Nylon, providing a tactile experience and a souvenir of the exhibition.

The remaining upstairs rooms feature various materials, giving an insight into the fashion designer's tools of trade. The yellow room highlights feathers and glass. Nylon stated that feathers are his favourite millinery material and 'see through' is his favourite colour. The southern alcove of this room displays bird-related objects ranging from ceramic figurines to a Victorian glass bird dome. Nylon framed the display with a curtain of peacock feathers that ripple with movement, seemingly activated by the arrival of visitors into the room. The display is further enlivened with a recording of Australian and English birds overlaid with excerpts from Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue des Oiseaux*. Messiaen's music featured in the Balletlab production *Aviary*, of which Nylon designed the dancer's headpieces in a collaboration with designer Toni Matcewski. These layers of meaning and materials, communicated in a visually arresting display, are a highlight of Nylon's exhibition design.

The study is filled with silver objects installed in a pyramid structure, drawing the viewer's eye upward as desired by Nylon. The silver items are bound in black stocking which adds a gothic, theatrical feel to the arrangement. Apart from acting as a counter-point to the white cloud room downstairs, the ever-resourceful Nylon explains that black stocking is proficient in cleaning silver.



The most personal and evocative of the rooms is the white room. Themed as the 'cloud room', Nylon has used several of his veils to cover objects in the room. Glass tears are thread from the chandelier to rain down below it. Nylon has placed his sister Deirdre's bride doll, which can be wound to play Beethoven's *Für Elise*, at the centre of the room amidst the glass tears. Deirdre passed away at age four before Nylon was born. This private sadness, told in the softness and delicacy of the bride's veil, caused the room to linger in my mind long after seeing the exhibition.

Feathering the Nest is saturated with ideas from the mind of one of Melbourne's most admired creatives in the field of fashion. Each room has a different focus yet stories and themes reappear throughout the house providing a dream-like experience, peppered with humour. Revealing the inner life and interests of Nylon, the exhibition's major achievement is its execution of exhibition design. Visitors to the exhibition will be granted an insight into Nylon's creativity and exposure to the evolving exhibition offerings at The Johnston Collection.

The Prophet from Lebanon

March 13, 2019 | troublemag



Kahlil Gibran: The Garden of the Prophet, until 17 March, 2019

Immigration Museum, Melbourne

by Inga Walton

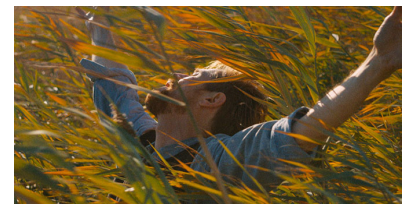
One of my dearest dreams is this – somewhere, a body of work, say fifty or seventy-five pictures will be hung together in ...

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Julian Schnabel: At Eternity's Gate

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A DEEP TROUBLE INTERVIEW

with Dr Mark Halloran

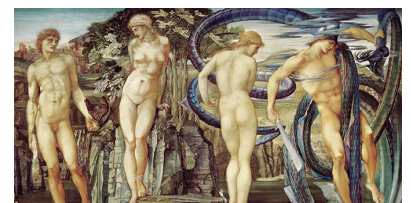
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Richard Nylon

Fairhall House-Museum Tour *Feathering the Nest*, The Johnston Collection, East Melbourne (VIC), until 20 October 2015 – johnstoncollection.org

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