

# **GARETH SANSOM**

## **TRANSFORMER**

### **ARTWORK LABELS**

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## ***Gareth Sansom: Transformer***

*Gareth Sansom: Transformer* traces the sixty-year career of one of Australia's most provocative artists. Gareth Sansom came to prominence in the 1960s as a radical convention-breaking painter, with influences ranging from Pablo Picasso and Jean Dubuffet to Francis Bacon and British Pop Art.

Born in Melbourne in 1939, Sansom studied art at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology between 1959 and 1964. He held positions as Head of Painting and Dean of the School of Art at the Victorian College of the Arts between 1977 and 1991 before retiring to concentrate solely on art-making.

This is the largest and most extensive survey of the artist's work to date, and follows Sansom's entire career through more than 130 works, many never exhibited publicly before. Suites of works on paper and photography complement more than fifty paintings, including many vital works from the past fifteen years. Together these works describe the evolution of a pioneering figure of the Australian avant-garde.

# One of us must know

1966

oil and enamel paint and collage of gelatin silver  
photograph, offset-photo lithograph and printed paper  
on composition board

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane  
Purchased 1990

1990.039

# The great democracy

1968

acrylic, oil, enamel paint and collage of offset-photo  
lithographs and pencil on composition board

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Gift of Emmanuel Hirsh in memory of Etta Hirsh, 2007

NGA 2007.375

# Self-portrait

1979

oil and enamel paint, polyvinyl acetate, pencil, and collage of gelatin silver and type C photographs and offset-photo lithograph on paper

Collection of the artist

# The most Catholic clairvoyant

1964

acrylic, oil, enamel paint and collage of photo transfer and pencil on paper and offset-photo lithographs on composition board

Collection of The Hirsh Family, Melbourne

# Tree of my life

1976–77

oil and enamel paint and collage of gelatin silver photographs, cardboard, polyvinyl acetate, fibre-tipped pen, charcoal and staples on cardboard

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane  
Purchased 2007

2007.118

# Country cricketers

1966

acrylic, oil, enamel paint, crayon and collage of offset-photo lithographs and pencil on paper on composition board

Collection of Paul Guest, Melbourne



# He sees himself

1964

oil, enamel paint, pencil, crayon, polyvinyl acetate,  
chalk and gelatin silver photograph on composition board

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented by the National Gallery Society of Victoria, 1965

1507-5

# All roads lead to the Red Pavilion especially after dark

1966–67

oil, enamel paint and collage of offset-photo lithographs  
on composition board

Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne  
Donated by Dr. David Rosenthal, 1992

1992.2

# The recollections of a Canberra Jet pilot

1965

acrylic, oil, enamel paint, crayon and collage of  
offset-photo lithographs on composition board

Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne  
Purchased 1988

1988.5

# Rosebud

1965

oil, enamel paint and collage of offset-photo lithographs  
on composition board

Private collection, courtesy of Sotheby's Australia

# He Once was a Flyer

1965

oil, enamel, collage and pencil on composition board

Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

Gift of Craig and Connie Kimberley 2002

2002.11

# Dogfight

1966

oil and enamel paint, pencil, crayon and collage of offset-  
photo lithographs on cardboard on composition board

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by  
Mrs Elizabeth Summons MBE, Fellow, 1984

AC14-1984

# The green pavilion

1966

oil and enamel paint, pencil, pastel, oil crayon and collage  
of offset-photo lithographs on composition board

Geelong Art Gallery, Geelong  
Gift of Alan Mitelman, 1991

1991.6

# Banbury Cross

1969

oil, enamel paint, polyvinyl acetate and collage of  
offset-photo lithographs on composition board

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
A.M. Ragless Bequest Fund 1982

8211P27



# Study for a portrait II

1980

acrylic, oil and enamel paint, fibre-tipped pen and collage of pencil, ink and charcoal on paper, gelatin silver photographs and 35mm transparencies on composition board

Geelong Art Gallery, Geelong  
Gift of Alan Mitelman, 1991

1991.7

# Evening rendezvous

1977

oil and enamel paint and collage of cut printed paper, etchings, gelatin silver photographs and masking tape on composition board

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of an anonymous donor through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2010

2010.545

# Conversation piece

1977

oil and enamel paint, fabric, wood and collage of gelatin  
silver and polaroid photographs and electrical tape on  
composition board

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of an anonymous donor through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2010

2010.546

# Wee Ian

1967–68

enamel paint and collage of offset-photo lithographs  
on composition board

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Gift of an anonymous donor through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2010

2010.544

# Standing figure

1966

oil and enamel paint on composition board

Collection of Paul Guest, Melbourne

## ***Mortality and symbolism***

The personal iconography that Sansom deploys in his works features many references to faith and mortality, as well as symbols of religion and belief. The artist is drawn to depictions of mortality and a search for meaning in popular culture, particularly in cinema.

The iconic scenes in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) of a knight playing chess with Death, in the guise of the Grim Reaper, is one such example among many that can be found in these works. The knight's suspicion about God's existence, in the wake of the Black Death that has gripped the country, could be related somewhat to the struggle to maintain an absolute belief in art and art-making through the cathartic process of studio practice.

# Alchemy

2009

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Miss Piggy's brush with mortality

2014

oil and enamel paint, pencil, ink and latex on canvas

Private collection



# Religiosity á la Mode

2000

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne  
Gift of Lion Capital 2010

2010.35

# Looking for God in abstract art 2

2010

oil and enamel paint and collage of inkjet print  
and polaroid photograph on canvas

Federation University Australia Art Collection, Victoria  
Purchased, 2010

Cat. No. 952

# Mr Art meets Mr God

2011

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Collection of the artist

# Teahouse of the August Goon

2011

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Looking for God in abstract art

1985

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Gift of Loti Smorgon AO and Victor Smorgon AC, 1995

1995.238A-C

## **Cathartic successes**

Sansom's early adoption of collage in his career, both as a material process and method of juxtaposing imagery, led him to be closely associated with it as a medium. In 1985 he was awarded a fellowship through the University of Melbourne and was artist-in-residence at Macgeorge House in Ivanhoe for the duration of the year. Believing that he was being pigeonholed as a collage artist, Sansom used the residency as an opportunity to challenge his practice by producing a suite of large paintings, while avoiding collage. Two of these works are on display in this room, and are emblematic of Sansom's use of a larger than bodily scale which would continue through his paintings to the present day.

# Glory hole road – voodoo

1985

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Collection of Paul Guest, Melbourne

# **My sin for Norman**

1985

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Gift of John Firth-Smith, 1990

1990.48



# **A forensic possibility**

2011–12

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Collection of Christian Nicks, Sydney

# Fantasy Island

2008

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Queen size bitch

1979

oil, collage of cut and torn paper and offset-photo  
lithographs on cardboard

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria  
Gift of Nora Sansom 1979

1979.135

# Welcome to my mind suite

**Family valium**

**Mind disguise**

**Famous kitchens**

**Mind slide**

1979–80

enamel paint and oil, fibre-tipped pen and gouache on collage of gelatin silver, type C and polaroid photographs, printed paper and masking tape on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1980

AC69.a-d-1980

# Castro

1976–77

oil and enamel paint and collage of offset lithographs  
on cardboard

Private collection

## Sacrificial altars

These often dense, ambitious works are among the largest paintings produced by Sansom. Together they articulate a progressively changing relationship to colour palette and pictorial density, and span a period of twenty-five years. The works from the 1980s display chaotic worlds that figures emerge from or roam within, standing in contrast to the bolder but comparatively restricted palette of the more recent work.

One of the earliest works in this room, the impressive triptych *Du hast keine chance, nutze sie*, 1981, owes its title and a number of pictorial elements to a visit to Berlin Sansom made undertook around that time. The phrase was painted on the Berlin Wall and translates to 'You have no chance, make use of it', a sentiment that the artist adopted as an equivalence to the act of art-making, much like his use of the narrative of *The Seventh Seal*.

# **Gareth Sansom**

born Australia 1939

## **Australian Tapestry Workshop, Melbourne (workshop)**

est. 1976

### **Family trust**

1990

wool, cotton

woven by Andrea May, Hannah Rother and Jennifer Sharpe  
Collection of the Australian Tapestry Workshop, Melbourne

# Sweeney Agonistes

2005

oil and enamel paint and collage of type C photograph on canvas

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

The James C Sourris, AM, Collection. Gift of James C Sourris, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2012. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

2012.472a-c



# Gotterdamerungerdungerdumbergungerdung!

1981–82

oil and enamel paint, charcoal, pencil, polyvinyl acetate  
and collage of gelatin silver photographs, offset-photo  
lithographs and paper on composition board

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by an anonymous donor, 1983 AC12.1-7-1983

# Du hast keine chance, nutze sie

1981

acrylic, oil and enamel paint, collage of photographs  
and cut paper, ink, pencil on composition board

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
Henry Salkauskas Art (Purchase) Award 1986

4.1986.a-c

# Friendship's road II

1985–87

oil and enamel paint, collage of gelatin silver photographs, 35mm transparencies, offset-photo lithographs, mousetrap and slingshot on composition board and canvas

State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth  
Purchased 1987

1987/0026.A-F

## Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) tells the story of a man who switches between two different personalities, each with vastly different moral characters. It is a model that underpins the way in which Sansom performs in and through his works, most obviously in artworks in this section of the exhibition where he uses self-portraits and 'disguises' to situate himself as a character, and simultaneously as the artist, within the work. In *Frame me soon*, 1976–77, and *Figure Studies 1*, c. 1976, for example, the artist gazes back at the viewer while dressed in women's clothes, leaving the question of whether Sansom is performing gender as the artist, or performing the role of a woman as a character in a narrative, unclear.

The artist's introduction of prosthetics, latex masks and references to sex in many of these works creates an uncomfortable dialogue with imagery taken from forensic medical books and objects from Sansom's life and childhood. This discomfort combines with a slipperiness of artistic position versus personal stance, and an imprecision of where the character and Sansom differ, in a series of juxtapositions intended to leave questions unanswered.

# Figure studies 1

c. 1976

acrylic and enamel paint on gelatin silver photographs  
and collage of polaroid photographs and offset-photo  
lithographs on cardboard

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria

Purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, 1977

1977.12

# Yes?

1976

collage of gelatin silver photographs and offset-photo lithographs, enamel paint, pencil, fibre-tipped pen, crayon and staples on cardboard

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
South Australian Government Grant, 1984

848P26

# Latex

2015–16

oil, enamel paint and collage of inkjet prints on canvas

Collection of the artist, courtesy of STATION, Melbourne

# Siccolam

1976

collage of offset-photo lithographs, gelatin silver photographs, fibre tipped pen, enamel paint, polyvinyl acetate and charcoal on cardboard

Collection of the artist



# Three figure studies

1990

type C photographs

Collection of the artist

# Electrical Experiments

2003

lightjet print

Collection of the artist

**GOD**

2009

oil, enamel paint and fibre-tipped pen on canvas

Collection of Atticus & Milo, Melbourne

# Sansom cornucopia

1940–2017

found objects

Collection of the artist

# Forensic suite

1979

cibachrome photographs

Collection of the artist

# **A possibility of gender**

2005

oil, enamel paint, inkjet photograph and fibre-tipped pen  
on paper

Collection of Alex & Kitty MacKay, Brisbane

# Forensic suite 4

1990

cibachrome photographs

Collection of the artist

# Forensic suite 2

1990

cibachrome photographs

Collection of the artist



# Forensic suite 3

1990

cibachrome photographs

Collection of the artist

# Beardsley

2014

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

# Frame me soon

1976–77

oil and enamel paint and collage of cut and torn  
offset-photo lithographs and gelatin silver photographs,  
adhesive tape and staples on collaged cardboard

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane  
Purchased 2007

2007.117

# Tongue kissing places

2005–06

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Collection of Alex & Kitty MacKay, Brisbane

# The blue masked transvestite

1964

oil and enamel paint on composition board

State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

Purchased 1989

1989/0171

# Face with Latex Mask

2010

oil, enamel paint and inkjet print on canvas

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

# Daisy-Chain

2009

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Two figures

1978–79

acrylic and enamel paint, charcoal, crayon and pencil  
on paper

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria  
Bequest of Ian Page, 1988

1988.26



# Shoe piece

1978

oil and enamel paint and collage of offset-photo  
lithographs on cardboard

Collection of Nora Sumberg

# Family plot

1978

oil and enamel paint and collage of gelatin silver  
photographs on cardboard

Collection of Nora Sumberg

# Made in Wadeye

2012

pen and ink, pencil, watercolour pencil, fibre-tipped pen, ballpoint pen, tempera, earth and collage of cut colour offset-photo lithographs on paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
Gift of the Sir William Dobell Art Foundation 2012

380.2012

# The Boston Strangler II

1967

collage of cut printed paper, fibre-tipped pen, oil pastel  
and gouache on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria from the  
Bequest of Violet Dulieu, Founder Benefactor, 2003

2003.211

# The star

2013

oil and enamel paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Yvonne Pettengell Bequest, 2014

2014.76

# **The Seventh Seal (i)**

2007

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Jack's back

2008

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2013  
(2013.60)

# Untitled

1989

watercolour, crayon, collage of torn offset-photo  
lithographs on paper

Collection of the artist



# Face on a plate

1991

watercolour, oil and type C photograph

Collection of the artist

# Red cross

1991

watercolour, oil and collage of type C and gelatin silver photographs and offset-photo lithograph

Collection of the artist

# Untitled

1990

watercolour, oil and collage of type C photographs  
and offset-photo lithographs

Collection of the artist

# House

1989

watercolour

Collection of the artist

# Ravana

1989

watercolour

Newcastle Art Gallery, Newcastle

Purchased 1990

1990.042

# Thinking about women while in India

1990

watercolour, oil and collage of type C photograph  
and offset-photo lithographs

Collection of the artist

# Indian love

1989

watercolour and pencil

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008

2008.345

# Frustration

1989

watercolour

Collection of the artist



# Phone me please!

1992

watercolor, oil and collage of type C photographs  
and offset-photo lithographs and typewriting on paper

Collection of the artist

# Oh! India

1989

watercolour and collage of photocopies and  
cut newspaper

Collection of the artist

# Deconstruction au go go

1991

watercolour, oil and collage of offset-photo lithographs

Collection of the artist

# Figures and houses and plants

1989

watercolour

Collection of the artist

# Norman's house

1985

fibre-tipped pen and watercolour

Collection of the artist

# Landscape

1989

watercolour and ink

Collection of the artist

**OK TA TA**

1989

watercolour

Collection of the artist

# **My heart bleeds for India**

1989

watercolour and collage of offset-photo lithographs

Collection of the artist



# Voyage

1989

watercolour

Collection of the artist

# Faces

1989

watercolour

Collection of the artist

# Play

1989

watercolour and pencil

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008

2008.346

# Delicious

1989

watercolour and ink

Collection of the artist

# 45 Oh, boy!

1985

fibre-tipped pen and watercolour

Collection of the artist

# Boroline

1989

watercolour and collage of offset-photo lithographs

Collection of the artist

# East West

1989

watercolour

Collection of the artist

# **A universal timeless allegory**

2014

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection



# Wittgenstein's brush with Vorticism

2016

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Milani Gallery, Brisbane

# **Blast**

2008

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Academic

2014

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

# **I wrote the bits (bitch) you like**

2011

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Thing

2008

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Transformer

2016–17

oil, enamel paint, pencil, plastic and vinyl record  
on canvas

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Milani Gallery, Brisbane

# The keep

2004

oil and enamel paint on canvas

The Michael and Janet Buxton Collection, Melbourne

# Bates Motel

2011

oil and enamel paint and inkjet print on canvas

Private collection



# Bath Dada

2010

oil and enamel paint on canvas

Private collection

# Junior's brush with Vorticism

2007

oil and enamel paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented by NGV Members as the winner of The John McCaughey

Memorial Prize, 2008

2008.260

# An idea of NO

2004

acrylic, gloss medium, fibre-tipped pen, ballpoint pen  
and collage of paper and photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008

2008.344

# Fidelity

2005

collage of torn paper with printed wrapping paper attached to verso, acrylic, enamel paint, cut paper, inkjet print, coloured fibre-tipped pens, ballpoint pen, watercolour, staples and scratching back

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

2013.430

# Performance

2003

synthetic polymer paint, coloured fibre-tipped pens,  
cut paper, pencil, watercolour and polyvinyl acetate

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

2013.427

# Don't look now

2003

collage of inkjet print, cut paper, polaroid photograph,  
synthetic polymer paint, pink and black fibre-tipped pen,  
watercolour and polyvinyl acetate

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

2013.428

# Two figures with gondola

2005

coloured fibre-tipped pen, acrylic, cut paper, pencil,  
watercolour, polyvinyl acetate and scratching back

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

2013.429

# Smart words and dumb words

2004

acrylic, coloured fibre-tipped pens, pencil, collage  
of cut paper, fabric and stickers

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008

2008.343



# Family and cricket stories

1979

enamel paint, oil and collage of gelatin silver and type C  
photographs, ink, adhesive tape, polyvinyl acetate  
on cardboard

Collection of the artist

# Family

1979

enamel paint and collage of gelatin silver and type C photographs, ink, adhesive tape, fibre-tipped pen, charcoal and polyvinyl acetate on cardboard

Collection of the artist

# Floating figure and family

1979

collage of gelatin silver photographs, adhesive tape, coloured chalk, charcoal and polyvinyl acetate on cardboard

Collection of the artist

# Diamond planes construction

1978

fibre-tipped pen, collage of offset-photo lithographs  
gelatin silver photographs, oil and enamel paint, adhesive  
tape, polyvinyl acetate and coloured chalk on cardboard

Collection of the artist

# Self-portrait

2003

type C transparency on transparent synthetic  
polymer resin

Collection of the artist