

# **POLLY BORLAND**

## **POLYVERSE**

### **ARTWORK LABELS**

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# Untitled XXXII

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5

2004

cibachrome photograph

Private Collection, Melbourne

Borland developed her *Bunny* series after meeting English actress Gwendoline Christie in Bristol, where they both lived at the time. The images play on the seedy glamour of the Playboy Bunny centrefold and bring an unhinged, dark and absurd quality to the conventions of sexualised images of women. Borland works intuitively with the model and costume, investing the images with a playfulness that intersects sassily with the erotic. Christie, who is particularly tall, is captured in physically vulnerable or awkward moments. There is a clear sense of her performing the seductress, but at the same time she is irreverent, seemingly mocking that stereotype.

## ***Polly Borland: Polyverse***

*Polly Borland: Polyverse* presents the work of Melbourne-born, Los Angeles-based artist Polly Borland. Key works from the artist's career are shown, including photographs and tapestries from five major series: *Bunny*, 2004–5, *Smudge*, 2010, *Pupa*, 2012, *Not Good at Human*, 2016, and *Monster*, 2017. These works set the scene for *MORPH*, a new body of work completed this year.

Polly Borland was born in 1959 and began her career as a photographer for Australian and international magazines. In 1989 she left Melbourne for the United Kingdom, where she immersed herself in the vibrant, creative community of England in the 1990s. In the 2000s she moved away from editorial photography and towards more creative, often studio-based work. Since moving to Los Angeles in 2011 she has further explored the body, unconscious associations and the psychological.

The works in *Polly Borland: Polyverse* are a melange of beauty, ugliness and the complexity of life, inviting us on a subliminal visual excursion.

Polly Borland dedicates this exhibition to Louie, Earl and Arthur.

### **Polly Borland**

Australia born 1959

# Untitled XI

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5

2004

cibachrome photograph

Private Collection, Melbourne

# Untitled XVI

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5

2004

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XXVII

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5

2004

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled III

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5

2005

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled VIII

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5  
2005

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XIII

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5  
2005

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XVII

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5  
2005

cibachrome photograph

Collection of Tracey Lester, Melbourne

# Untitled II

from the *Bunny* series 2004–5

2005

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled (Nick Cave in a blue wig)

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased NGV Foundation, 2012

2012.333

The subject of this portrait is Australian musician, writer and filmmaker Nick Cave. Borland and Cave first met in Melbourne in 1978, beginning a long friendship and creative association. Borland has often photographed Cave, and in turn he has contributed short stories and poems to her catalogues. Cave wrote in 2010, 'I am struck by Polly's deep love for her subjects and the dignity that exists in their dysmorphia'. This work is part of Borland's *Smudge* series, in which Cave and other models are photographed wearing body stockings, theatrical costumes, heavy make-up and wigs so their identity is all but obscured, and gender becomes irrelevant.

# Untitled I

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled IV

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled IX

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XIII

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XVI

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XXI

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XXVI

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XXX

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XXXII

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled XXXIV

from the *Smudge* series 2010

2010

cibachrome photograph

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

## Tapestries

In 2010 Borland began working with Fine Cell Work, a British arts-advocacy organisation that trains prison inmates to create needlework as a means of promoting creativity and self-esteem, and generating income.

Borland sends her photographic works to Fine Cell Work, and the inmates make them into tapestries. The front of the tapestries follow a pattern and reproduce the photograph faithfully, but the backs are chaotic and show the hand of the needle worker, reminding us of the personal involvement of that individual.

The repetitive pattern of the stitches recalls the pixelation of low-resolution digital photography, but Borland's photographs are made with analogue film, and therefore could not be pixelated. The works are a material exploration of the relationship between handmade, analogue and digital techniques. They evoke the question of time and labour that exists in those techniques and in the lives of individuals who are incarcerated.

# Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

2018

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

In 2001 Borland was one of six artists commissioned to photograph Queen Elizabeth II to celebrate her golden jubilee, marking fifty years as British monarch. Borland only had a five-minute window to create the portrait, which is a unique representation of the Queen for its close-up and brightly lit quality. The gold background, though symbolically in keeping with the golden jubilee, also brings associations antithetical to the subject: circus, cabaret and Hollywood glitz. Borland later sent the image to Fine Cell Work to be turned into needlework by prisoners living in British jails managed by Her Majesty's Prison Service. This work was stitched by 'Mr Mulligan' (full names of those working with Fine Cell Work are withheld).

# Tits

2017

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Mother

2017

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of Michael Schwarz and David Clouston,  
Melbourne

# Scream

2018

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Stack Head

from the *Not Good at Human* series 2016

2016

inkjet print

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney

# Mouth

2017

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Private Collection

# Sack

2017

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Brute

2018

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Not Good at Human

2016

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney

# Freak

2016

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney

# Love Dolls

2016

reversible hand-stitched wool tapestry

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney

## Monster

*Monster* is a series of works Borland made in 2017 that extend her use of costuming from the representational to the abstract. In this sense, the series sets the scene for her new series *MORPH*, 2018, which can be seen in the second gallery.

Borland uses elastic fabric in various colours to constrict and distort the body and to draw out the relationship between the physical and psychological effects of constriction. The psychosexual nature of Borland's work, seen previously in her celebrated 2001 series *The Babies*, which documented the lives of adult men who dress as babies, is presented in a more subliminal way in *Monster*. The title of the series provokes a question about the nature of psychological torment, in that the monster might be within us rather than an outside threat. The series recalls the work of fellow LA artists Paul McCarthy and the late Mike Kelley, who used the abject, the sexual and humour to unsettle viewers and question ideas of taste.

# Monster

from the *Monster* series 2017

2017

inkjet print

Private Collection, Melbourne

# Gag

from the *Monster* series 2017

2017

inkjet print

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Twin

from the *Monster* series 2017

2017

inkjet print

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne.

# Caterpillar

from the *Not Good at Human* series 2016

2016

inkjet print with synthetic polymer paint

Private Collection, Sydney

# Eskimo

from the *Not Good at Human* series 2016

2016

inkjet print

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

Borland's son was her model for the 2016 series *Not Good at Human*. She recalls that this collaboration came at a time when they were both readjusting to their new home of Los Angeles; experiencing culture shock and trying to connect to new people. The model, his youth apparent, is wrapped in a skin of fabric suggesting emergence, as though from a chrysalis. As the title of the series suggests, Borland explores what it means to be human and how our sense of self and relationships to others can present psychological challenges.

# No Future

from the *Not Good at Human* series 2016

2016

inkjet print

Collection of Emily Young, Sydney

# Untitled (pink, orange)

2018

inkjet print on rice paper on lenticular cardboard

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Stack Head

from the *Not Good at Human* series 2016

2016

inkjet print

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney

# Two Heads B

from the *Not Good at Human* series 2016

2016

inkjet print

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney

# Pupa VI

from the *Pupa* series 2012

2012

inkjet print

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

Borland made her *Pupa* series – a reflection on the construction of self-image and narcissism in Hollywood – after relocating to Los Angeles in 2011. Figures and forms are reflected in mirrors or refracted through mottled glass, distorting them into absurd caricatures. Borland shoots on film and prints from scanned negatives. The tactility of this analogue process is an element she also explores through the creation of sculptural forms in the studio, which are in turn photographed in *Pupa* and other series. In constructing these imagined forms, Borland moves beyond documentation and further into fantasies that elicit a range of associations and interpretations from viewers.

# Pupa XIII

from the *Pupa* series 2012

2012

inkjet print

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Pupa XIX

from the *Pupa* series 2012

2012

inkjet print

Private Collection, Melbourne

## ***MORPH***

*MORPH*, 2018, is Borland's most recent body of work and extends the themes that have underpinned her previous series into more abstract visual language. The figure is less identifiable in *MORPH*, evoking the curious images of myth, nightmare and hallucination. Despite the excessive and overabundant forms, the central framing and portrait format of the images are classical in their composition.

The body in these images is on the precipice of dissolving completely into an amorphous state. The forms seem both human and inhuman, inviting existential meditation since – as shown by the Surrealist photographers Dora Maar and Andre Kertesz, who sought to liberate the unconscious – an 'almost human' form invites us to identify with the figure, yet shocks us into a new interpretation.

The nebulous forms in *MORPH* suggest the evocative shapes of a Rorschach test, which psychoanalysts use to create associative images in the minds of their patients. As well as being the site for automatic reactions, thoughts, habits and dreams, the unconscious mind is thought to be the site of complexes, phobias and desires. It generates the parts of our identity that are alien even to ourselves. The forms depicted in *MORPH* invite us to consider subliminal forces that are alive within us by stimulating our subconscious, associative minds.

# MORPH

2018

digital video with sound

20 min loop

Director: Polly Borland and John Hillcoat

Producer: Jonathan Pavesi

Editor: Banner Gwin

Cinematographer: Jordan Levy

Music: Leopold Ross featuring vocals by Ioanna Gika

Colourist: Mark Gethin

VFX: Urs Furrer

Gaffer: Steve Francis

Performers: Sibylla Phipps and Ben Lee Ritchie Handler

Stage: courtesy of Stage This

Special thanks to Rebecca Boorsma, Meghan Lang,  
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Collection of the artist

# MORPH 1–20

2018

inkjet prints

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled

from the *MORPH* series 2018

2018

inkjet print on rice paper on lenticular cardboard

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled

from the *MORPH* series 2018

2018

inkjet print on rice paper on lenticular cardboard

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne

# Untitled

from the *MORPH* series 2018

2018

inkjet print on rice paper on lenticular cardboard

Collection of the artist.

Courtesy of Murray White Room, Melbourne