

IN MEMORY OF STARS

This exhibition expands on Gebhardt's recent large-scale lightboxes from the same series installed along the Birrarung (Yarra River) for PHOTO 24. Notably, the work 'Wallaby', presented in this exhibition, also won the prestigious William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize in 2022.

"Western cosmologists say bones are made from material traces of incredibly rare, calcium-rich supernovas, which are the explosive death and afterlife of unique stars," says Gebhardt.

"In memory of stars contemplates lost futures created by ongoing colonial impacts in the form of native animal bones sourced from veterinary and scientific archives."

Gebhardt's glowing images delineate the exquisite skeletons of seven native animals killed on Wadawurrung country and oceans off the coast of Australia.

They are arrayed as seven lightboxes on one wall of Gallery 1 in a spiralling sequence of ghost-like hauntings: wallaby, speckled maskray, possum, flounder, cockatoo, moray and dragonfish.

"These works interweave X-ray technology with elements including satellite and long exposure photography of the night sky on Wadawurrung country, where the land animals were found," says Gebhardt.

"This involved the layering of light frequencies so small they pass through skin, and others so vast they began millions of light years away."

Gebhardt's detail-rich lightboxes invite close inspection, revealing information not visible to the naked eye as a way to speak to colonial violences that may be deliberately hidden or erased.

"The architecture of these skeletons are visually complex and wondrous," says Gebhardt. "While some remain intact for the purposes of scientific exploration, others reveal injuries from technologies such as lawnmowers, fish-hooks, vehicles and firearms."

"I'm interested in the way dominant societies are haunted by that which they attempt to erase. By enhancing the luminosity of these once animated bones with elements such as fire, smoke, stars and cloud, the work suggests the entangled lines of connection between cosmology, trauma and sentience," says Gebhardt.

Amos Gebhardt would like to thank the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Dr Paola Balla for their generous time, knowledge sharing and consultation.

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