After the Fall

The Guildhouse Collections Project
Flinders University Museum of Art
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While I often use archival materials in my work, this was my first time researching and responding to a particular collection. The works I created for *After the Fall* are my response to the recent tragic events in Afghanistan, and I researched artists who also dealt with themes of war, violence, trauma, chaos and the aftermath. I found many similarities in prints by artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, Jean Duplessis-Bertaux, Jacques Callot and Francisco Goya to past and present events in my home country. In an etching by Callot for his c.1633 series *The miseries and misfortunes of war*, I was amazed, at first glance, at the way Callot appeared to show a group of men playing games on a farm. Look closely, however, and we find that the men are in battle and killing one another. This work is one of 18 sequential prints depicting the horrors of what became known as the Thirty Years’ War. In this series Callot depicts, in graphic scenes, soldiers ransacking farmhouses, raping inhabitants and burning them alive. Corpses hang from trees. I see so many similarities between these works and events in Afghanistan. Until a year ago, it would have been unimaginable the Taliban could take over a country of 40 million people, and overthrow a government backed by the United States and NATO. War is so horrific yet repeats again and again in different places and times.

It’s been a great experience holding Kollwitz’s prints and studying them in detail. Two works I draw on a lot are *Woman with dead child (Frau mit totem Kind)* (1903) and *From many wounds you bleed, O people (Aus vielen Wunden blutest Du, O Volk)* (1896). It’s fascinating to see how Kollwitz magically absorbed what she felt at the time. When I look at these works I feel like I experience a bit of what she felt — a strong, really deep sense of pain and sorrow. She is an artist who lived in a time of war and was deeply affected by it. I have so much respect for her.

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**Elyas Alavi**

**Artist statement**

Elyas Alavi is an interdisciplinary artist and poet who works across painting, sculpture, performance and moving image. An Afghan-born Hazara refugee, Alavi is interested in exploring trauma, memory, gender, sexuality, and social and political crises through his work. Alavi has exhibited nationally and internationally. He has published three poetry books in Afghanistan and Iran, and has received several literature prizes.

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**Biography**

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Alavi’s work featured in a solo exhibition at ACE Open in 2019, the same year he received a prestigious Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship. Most recently Alavi exhibited at The Substation, Melbourne, as part of the Hyphenated Biennial 2021-22. He completed a Master of Visual Arts at the University of South Australia in 2016 and a Master of Fine Arts at Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London, in 2020.
The Guildhouse Collections Project at FUMA gave me the chance to look broadly at a range of European prints dating back to the 1400s. The dark atmosphere in works of human catastrophe and folly by artists such as Sebald Beham, Francisco Goya, Jacques Callot and Georges Rouault made an impression. I was particularly drawn to pages from The Nuremberg Chronicle, printed in 1493, containing more than 1800 woodcut illustrations and text. This ambitious, encyclopedic work is compelling. It was, at the time, the most lavishly illustrated book printed in Europe.

I’m curious about how written and visual information was combined in the Chronicle, and how this work impacted readers at the time. I’m also interested in its content — portraits of royalty, saints, martyrs, ‘human monstrosities’, depictions of biblical events and miracles, and views of cities. I’m drawn to its efficient, elegant typography and layout, and the strong graphic appeal of the woodcut and letterpress printing.

This project was an opportunity to develop skills in working two dimensionally. I trialled several printmaking processes, including etching, drypoint and monotype, and incorporating collage. I also attended an etching workshop at the Australian Print Workshop in Melbourne. I began by responding to an often reproduced series of 21 small images of ‘human oddities’ from the Chronicle. These human figures, reportedly seen in distant lands, include a representation of ‘umbrella foot’, a figure with one foot pictured lying on his back using his oversized foot to shade himself, and a figure whose mouth is so small that he has to eat and drink though a straw, and winks to communicate. Though strangely and, at times, comically distorted, the figures are depicted with compassion and empathy. I’ve re-presented and re-arranged elements of these images to explore different ways of using printmaking in my practice.
Kate O’Boyle

The FUMA European print collection allowed me to extend my PhD research into Christian materiality and consider how performative gestures of worship are represented in the collection. I became particularly interested in *The Virgin protecting two members of a confraternity*, by Agostino Carracci after Veronese (1582). Here, Our Lady of Mercy is giant-like — quite literally larger than life. She holds her large cape open to shelter two men who look up at her in rapture.

Reflecting upon this Mary, and her protection of the confraternity members, I discovered Marian Valley, a Catholic site of pilgrimage near the Gold Coast in Queensland. Marian Valley draws visitors to shrines commissioned by confraternity groups who identify along ethnic lines. The various Marys represented here provide a tangible example of Australia’s diversity, the colonial nature of Catholicism and the continued reiteration of that process in contemporary Australia.

Staying on site at Marian Valley I was invited into the lives of the people who live there or visit. Many stories of hope and triumph were attributed to the Virgin. Many of the Marys find their genesis in times of crisis — war, genocide and tragedy. Trauma is deeply embedded in these shrines, and Mary becomes a figure through which tragedy — personal and collective — can be processed.

Set in rainforest, Marian Valley’s architecture is recognisably Catholic with a Queensland flair. It is unique among Catholic sites. Rather than shutting out the external world, its shrines and chapels engage with the environment. The rainforest is a place of beauty but also ferociousness — the shrines battle moisture, harsh sunlight and large spiders. Maintaining the shrines takes considerable labour which is demonstrated by the ongoing dedication of those assigned to care for each of them.

Kate O’Boyle

*Mother wound* (detail), 2022
PPE COVID gowns, cotton thread
450.0 x 900.0 cm
photo Grant Hancock

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When John Milton embarked on his epic poem *Paradise Lost* he was in mourning for his second wife and in political exile for his part in Oliver Cromwell’s failed republican government. Milton was also blind, dictating his poem to his daughters and trusted aides while in hiding. The narrative follows a war in heaven where the ‘traitor angel’, Satan, and other fallen angels have been cast out by God. Satan seeks revenge on God by tempting his creation — man — and Adam and Eve become corrupted into a mortal life of sin, and expelled from Paradise. Satan eventually uses his knowledge of the fall of Satan, the fall of mankind and, for the poet, the world in an attempt to make evil at the heart of all things.

Milton was one of the leading writers of the English Romantic period, and his work is still widely studied today. His poems are known for their rich language, complex themes, and powerful imagery. *Paradise Lost* is a masterpiece of English literature, and its influence can be seen in the work of many other writers, from William Wordsworth to T.S. Eliot.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton explores the themes of good and evil, faith and reason, and the nature of human nature. The poem is a complex and multi-layered work, and it has been interpreted in many different ways. Some critics see it as a celebration of human creativity and the human capacity for change, while others see it as a warning against the dangers of blind faith and the power of the devil.

Milton’s work is a testament to the power of the human imagination, and it continues to inspire and challenge readers today. Whether seen as a celebration of human creativity or a warning against the dangers of blind faith, *Paradise Lost* remains a timeless masterpiece of English literature.
The Guildhouse Collections Project delivered in partnership with Flinders University Museum of Art provides extraordinary opportunities for artists to delve into one of the largest public collections in South Australia. By inviting artists to research, study and collaborate with the Museum to create new work, the project demonstrates the value of creating new and ambitious environments for artists, collections and audiences to coalesce.

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Guildhouse and Flinders University Museum of Art acknowledge that they operate on the lands of the Kaurna people and recognise the continued relationship to their lands by traditional owners past and present.

Curator and essay: Alice Clanachan
Project Manager: Debbie Pryor
Design: Amy Milhinch and Guildhouse
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