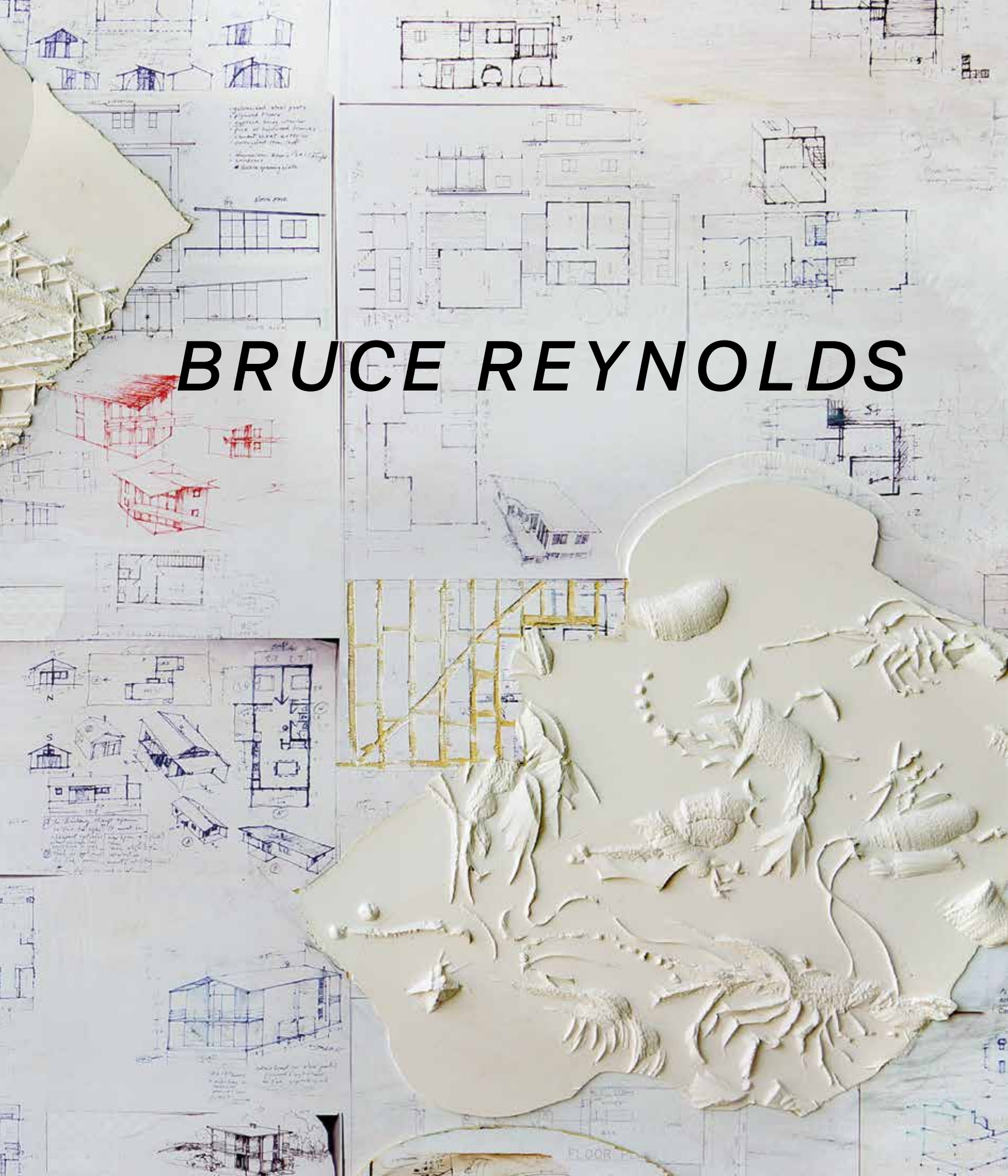
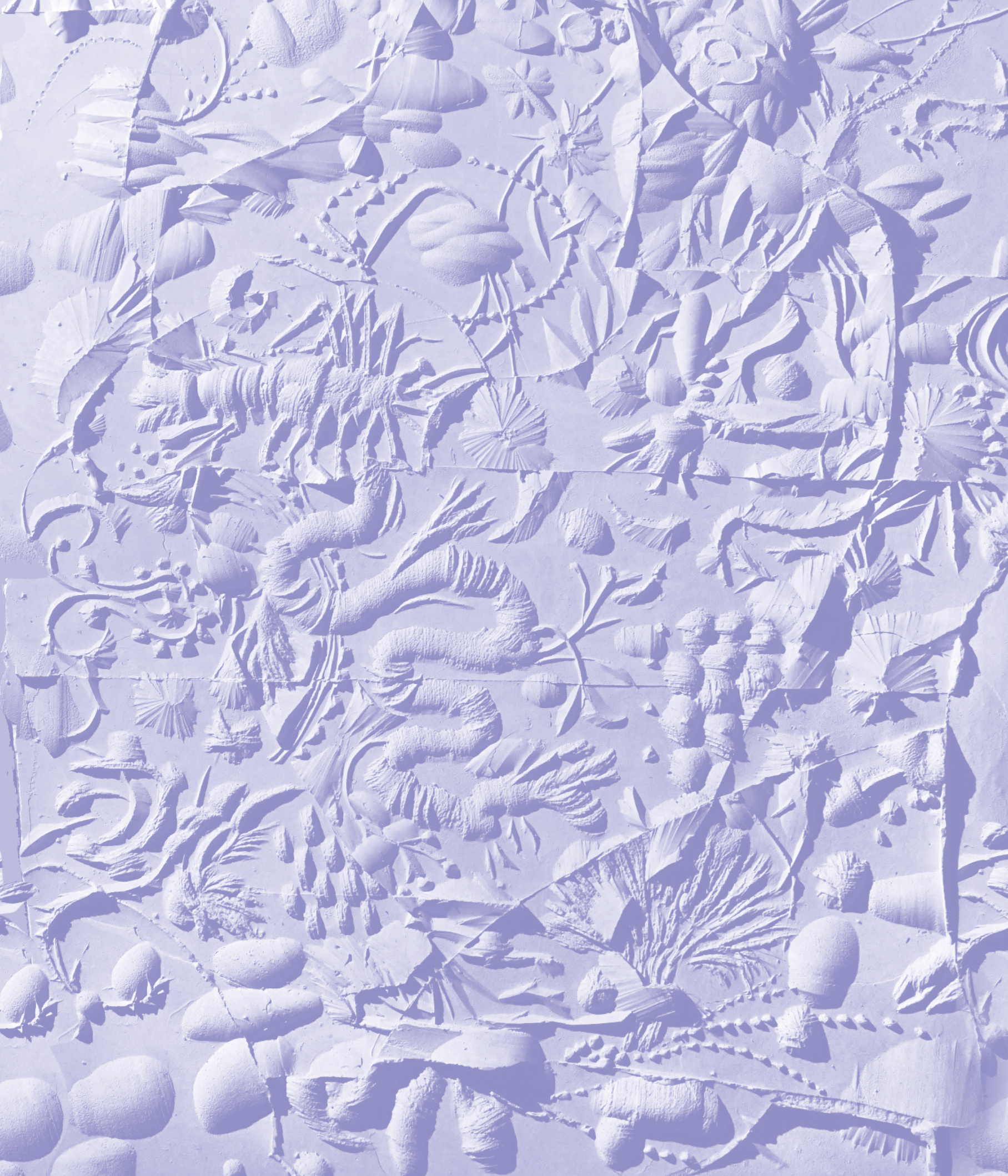


# BRUCE REYNOLDS







# HOW SOON IS NOW?

**BRUCE REYNOLDS**

Museums & Galleries Queensland





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## **FOREWORD**

**REBEKAH BUTLER**

*Executive Director  
Museums & Galleries Queensland*

Museums & Galleries Queensland is delighted to present *How Soon is Now?* a new exhibition by contemporary artist Bruce Reynolds showcasing the evolution of his practice from collage to relief and sculpture over a number of decades, as well as his ongoing interest in the relationships between pattern, history and the built environment.

This touring exhibition was conceived when Bruce approached Museums & Galleries Queensland with the idea of sharing his works and unique practice with audiences nationally.

In that initial proposal, Bruce framed his ideas: "Voltaire said '*The ancient Romans built their greatest masterpieces of architecture for wild beasts to fight in*'. He also added, as James Cook embarked on his voyage to Australia, that '*History is nothing more than a tableau of crimes and misfortunes*'.

Both men were simultaneously describing space – social space and geographic space – Voltaire with words, Cook with charts and elevations."

In this exhibition, Bruce explores his own philosophical notions of history, and social and geographic space. His subdued relief sculptures contrast with his colourful two-dimensional works fashioned from repurposed, inlaid linoleum, to create a visual language of pattern and colour that is simultaneously playful, nostalgic and contemplative. Whether viewed individually, or collectively as a whole, Bruce's works have a physicality that is frequently overlooked in today's growing digital environment.

*How Soon is Now?* shares its name with a song by influential English rock band, The Smiths. There is a lyricism and other-worldliness found in Bruce's exquisite cast relief sculptures and two-dimensional collaged linoleum works. They invite a deeper reflection of the 'ancient' and the 'now' and ponder how we arrived at this point.

Touring *How Soon is Now?* would not be possible without the generous support of the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program. In thanking them, we also acknowledge the support of Arts Queensland, the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and the Australian Cultural Fund. I also acknowledge Museums & Galleries Queensland's wonderful Staff, Debra Beattie, Andrea Higgins and Rachael De Groot, for their work and role in bringing this touring project to fruition.

Museums & Galleries Queensland is committed to supporting Queensland contemporary artists and creating opportunities to engage new audiences with their practice. It has been a pleasure to work with Bruce and we congratulate him on this stunning exhibition. I have no doubt that visitors to *How Soon is Now?* will be drawn in by the surface qualities, motifs and symbolism of his beautifully crafted sculptural and assemblage works and find connections with his thought-provoking ideas of history, culture, architecture and philosophy.





Man of Letters 2, 2014

**THE SUBSTANCE OF PICTURES**  
**BRUCE REYNOLDS**

Well before Photoshop, I dreamt of applying pattern with the wipe of a hand; the patterns of Rajasthan's miniatures and Duccio's surfaces.

Prior to modernism, linoleum imitated carpets. I once found a piece like a Persian rug in Soho, New York. When I returned to Brisbane, QLD, and explored a half demolished house in Canberra Street, Hemmant, I came across a lino floor that looked like a painting I had made in Canberra, ACT, where I grew up. This house was built from flattened tins, tea chests and wallpaper. Its nailed and pasted surfaces spilled over each other; some structural, some decorative. I took the lino home where it became apparent that, as patterned surfaces over a wooden box, they needed little or no paint to represent my intentions.

My lino works reposition little histories in the present.

Like collage, relief continues to combine image and object; since Lascaux in France and the scarring of trees here in this country. Both relief and collage are born from the exchange between positive and negative, whether ripped, carved or cast.

My cast architectural scale reliefs at the Ipswich Justice Precinct and in Ann Street, Brisbane, QLD, both grew from collages and were informed by the lino works. Subsequently, many cast works in *How Soon is Now?* were conceived as fragments of an imaginary larger whole.

My shift away from found materials was accompanied by a rush to colonise the blankness of white plaster with motifs and gestures from everywhere and anytime, informed by the geographical and historical breadth of my interests. Representation emerged in the relief works with the exploitation of the material. *Man of Letters* was the first work to directly reference figuration contemplating the satirical work of Voltaire and the simultaneous work of Cook.

My family is a global diaspora. Each generation grows up away from the previous one. I settled near Moreton Bay, QLD, a rich marine resource that for me implicates the Mediterranean, western migration, brutality and displacement. In this light, the works in *How Soon is Now?* reference struggle, migration, suburban settlement and the ambiguously temporal.





Large Hydra. 2014

## HOW SOON IS NOW? GENEVIEVE FELIX REYNOLDS

"I am the son and heir of nothing in particular": words of doubt and protest from 1984, during a time of thrusting western economic growth and disruption, aimed backwards at the oscillations of conservatism and cultural quickening of prior decades. Today, this sentence still feels poignant, resonating with accusations aimed at globally felt failures: political, environmental and cultural. It links the past to the present, acknowledging this inheritance with a floating ambivalence and implies a movement towards exploration and invention. To be the heir of nothing *in particular* is freeing; one is untethered. This can be a new ground zero.

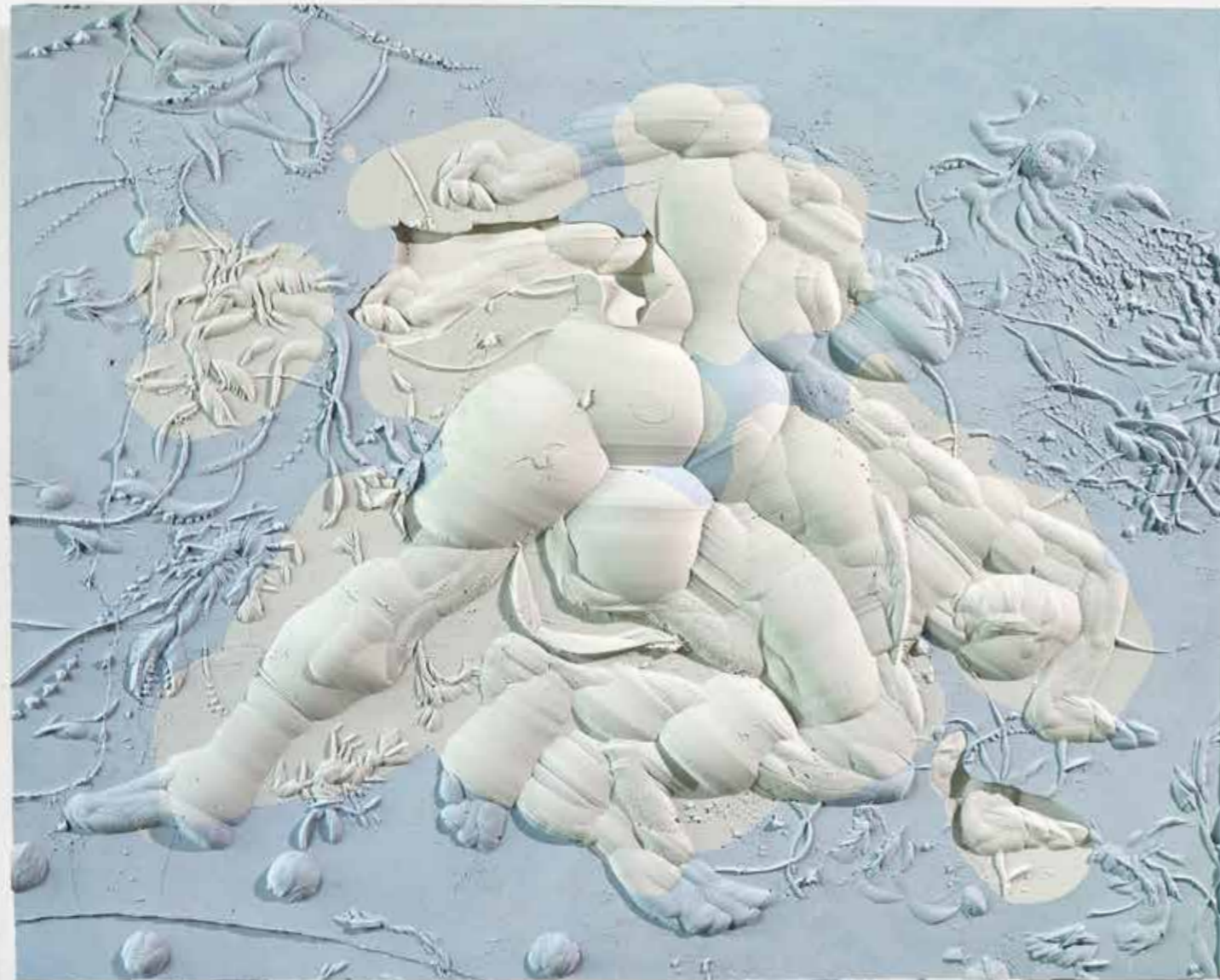
Culturally speaking, Bruce Reynolds has not inherited anything *in particular*. Like many Australians, migration and colonisation have genetically and socially shaped him into a person without clean ties to a single cultural history. His familial story is one of Nigerian and English migration, of colonised and coloniser, into a country where neither has claim. Without ancestry or cultural allegiance, 'belonging' to a place in any concrete sense must be limited in scope, to personal involvement, familiarity and care.

As a first-generation Australian, Reynolds' experience has been characterised by a working-class migrant philosophy – pull your socks up, get on with it, keep busy, ensure you don't fall through the cracks. Born out of necessity and a couple of world wars, this conception of a life well-lived does not leave much room for experimentation or enquiry. It tends to discourage introspection and instead praise physical labour, honesty, and generosity within one's community: values manifest in his mother's specific brand of energetic altruism within their multicultural suburban community. Newly-arrived Maltese, Italian, Baltic and British migrants were welcomed with gifts of food, neighbourhood introductions and briskly networked employment opportunities with pragmatic efficiency. Stoicism and labour are keys to success when you start from ground zero.

Art practice, however, is a form of experimental enquiry, and it is here that Reynolds departs from this system of value. His work is characterised by manual labour, long hours in the studio, and a deep interest in the honesty of materiality. A brusque, almost brutish approach to carpentry and production is refined by expert material manipulation and a vastly informed and intuitive visual language.

Being untethered has its perks. Without a strong sense of cultural belonging, one is freed to roam; across continents, between historical narratives, dipping in and out of concepts, forms and aesthetics. The breadth of this exploration is evident in Reynolds' practice, which is the culmination of research into the interwoven art histories of some of the largest and oldest civilisations.





Sea Fight, 2022

Despite this scope, Reynolds prefers perception over statistical and historical generalisation. His attention is engaged by the specific. In art, this leads to an interest in materiality and processes over ideological agenda. The fallibility of the narratives of art history are to be found in artists and objects that can't easily be categorised – and of these, there are thousands, especially in the spaces between cultural traditions. Objects are wordless, and explanation and categorisation approximate but often fail to represent their deep-layered complexities.

A generalised narrative is a simplification of reality, Reynolds would argue, which prioritises trend-finding and minimises that which does not fit. In his words, “the advantage of art [as a reference] is its wordlessness, its authenticity”. Art does not equal art history, and artefacts are not dead. Historical objects continue to exist, today, in both physical and pictorial spaces: simultaneously, they belong to the past and present. Scrutinising these artefacts is very different to reading about them, and often a dazzlingly more detailed experience.

Reynolds' neurodivergence may play a part in this approach. Looking to the specific holds his attention, but not for long – his gaze must keep wandering, from object to object – history is the only place one can find enough quantity, quality and variety to satiate. As an ever-hungry disciple of the visual, sources of inspiration are chosen through a lens searching for 'in-betweenness'. Validating his aversion to art history narratives, artworks that play at the edges of traditional categorisation are favoured.

Growing up, there was a favourite game in our household. What's halfway between a rhinoceros and an oyster? What's halfway between a cardboard box and a fountain? There are no wrong answers, but some are better than others. As a medium, sculptural relief is an 'in-between' category. Not quite three-dimensional, not quite two-dimensional, it hovers between the two and utilises characteristics from both. As such, it has mostly been left out of the history of art, becoming unfashionable by the turn of the 19th century and downgraded to classification as decoration – not quite architecture, not quite art and, as a result, to be swept under the rug, along with the physical and intellectual craft of similarly 'in-between' makers; of mosaics, tapestries, domes, vessels, arches, painted friezes, woven carpets and more.

In-betweenness is having a comeback, however. Motivated by a desire to review and challenge the dogmatic, binary ideologies of the recent past, the 21st century has embraced the dissolution of traditional categories throughout social, political and cultural spheres. As a result, new and complex approaches to binary concepts are flourishing. Physical and pictorial space are being renegotiated, too; in part nourished by a cultural

interest in entanglement and idiosyncrasy, in part by feminist-led reappraisals of craft, and in part by the weirdness of new technologies in art. Thus far, binaries retain their importance in our conception of ideas, but they are there to be negotiated as far sides of a spectrum.

As an artist, Reynolds is part of this movement. His works play between painting and sculpture, chance and precision, decoration and concept, representational and abstract, new and archaic. Borrowing forms recognisable from a swathe of places and times in Australia, Asia and Europe, he manipulates plaster, paper and linoleum into objects that silently and statically explore the dimensions of physical space.

Favouring a chainsaw as his current drawing tool, semi-abstract forms are carved into existence. Moulds are carefully collaged together in order to transmute negative imagery into positive protrusions via poured plaster. These forms are not flat, and not sculptural: relief exists in 2.5 dimensions. It reaches out towards the viewer, but stops; it departs, but does not arrive. Perpetually in transit, its 'reaching' demands reciprocal acknowledgement of our own bodies. A silent, 'slo-mo' intimation: “remember where you are.”

“Where” demands a “when”, too, especially in the face of an archaic medium-like relief. Its historical mode is most familiar adorning buildings whose gravitas is owed to stretching out the moment from the present back beyond the outmoded. The past is linked to one's present physicality.

In *Sea Fight*, 2022, molluscan abstractions swim around muscular lumps. They are one and the same poured surface, colour bleeding across delimited forms. Its construction, like all Reynolds' works, is a careful dance between chance and intention. “Preparation is 80% of the task”, he admits. As long as this is thorough, the “unintentional” can be “more articulate than the intended”. Reynolds may be depicting natural forms, but his interest is cemented in the overlapping and abstract – colour, material and depicted poses increase visual ambiguity, which allows the eye to enjoy texture and gesture over any contained narrative.

Shellfish are repeated motifs throughout the exhibition, jutting against architectural design, industrial pattern and taut masculine flesh. Lifted from the reefs of South East Queensland, this imagery also explicitly references the origins of the material from which it is formed – deposits of limestone – billions of compressed ancient shells. This is a nod to the warm, shallow, embryonic seas from which all life emerged – saltwater is our shared origin story and sustenance.

Overlaps, categorical limits and combinations shimmer together across every individual artwork. This interest in the shared and ambiguous is owed to Reynolds' life-long love





Coronas, 2015

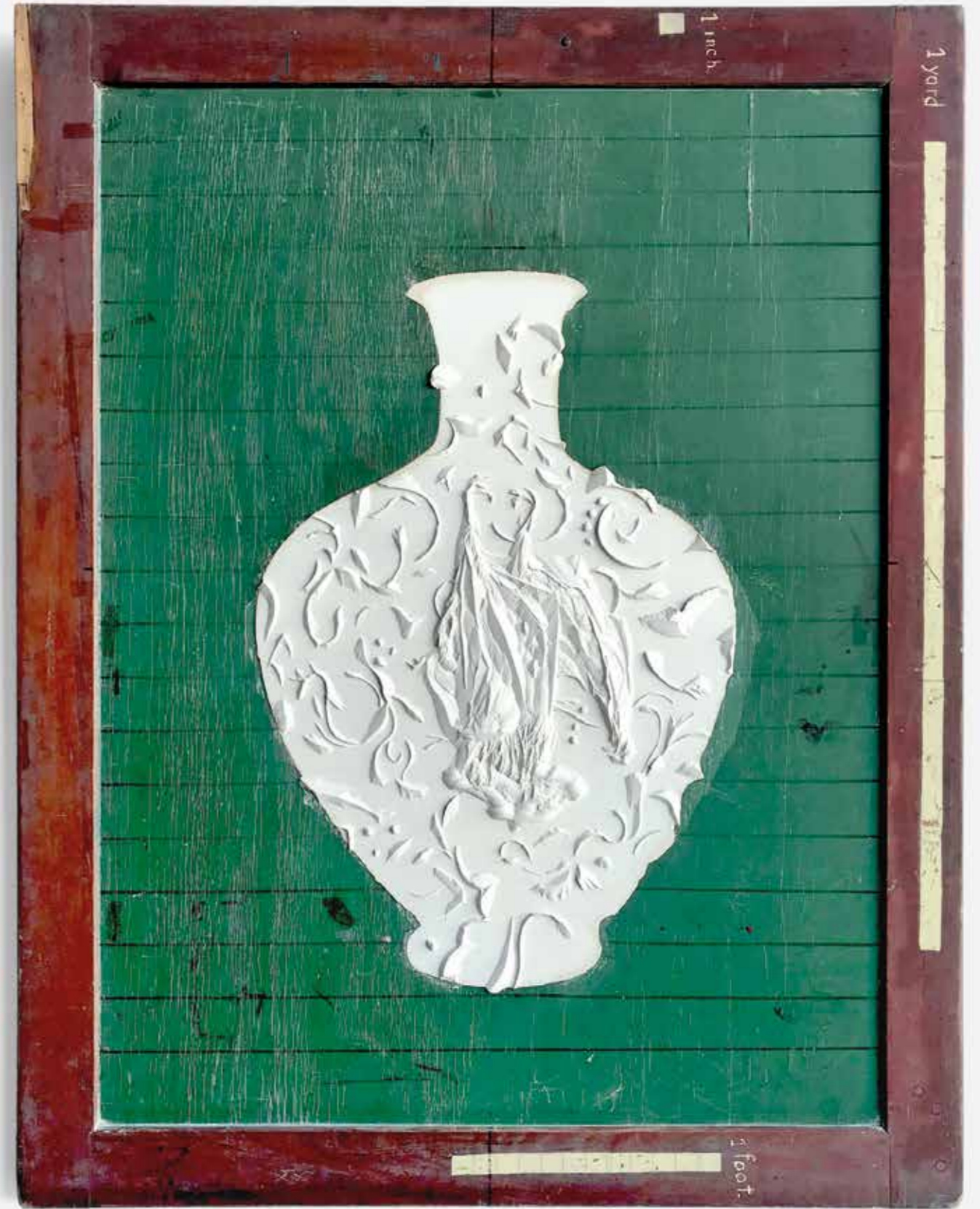
of collage, which for many years was explored through floor linoleum, ripped from half-demolished mid-century kitchens across Queensland. Originally fabricated in the 19th century to imitate the details of carpets and tiles, linoleum is an amalgamation of cultural references itself, a link back to the industrial revolution and earlier interwoven histories of craft.

*Large Hydria*, 2014, is a painting of this sort. A silhouette of an archetypal vessel is built out of 1950s abstraction, florals and faux terrazzo. This “palette of patterns provided by Queensland” is wrapped, frame-like, in a shape pulled from the Italian Baroque. Geometry, nature, culture; ancient, mid-century, now; thematic implications are embedded within a fractured composition. *Reconstructivist*, 2018, plays a similar game, but limits itself more strictly to references to 20th century abstraction, Malevich-like. Here, the ancient is only implied, by the patinas of past materialities. In Reynolds’ words, “when lino is ripped from a floor in a final historic gesture, it embodies pathos and defiance. It signposts an end of sorts. It becomes...decoration without form, ambassador for a life lived, the material version of a photograph”. Linoleum, like the medium of relief, is a material gripped by architecture – without this solidifying structural context, it reads as incomplete and allusive. Decontextualised from the sites in which we expect to find them, plaster and lino act as reliquaries for remembered cultural objects, once whole and new.

When asked about his experience of viewing art, Reynolds muses, “we often walk away [from a work] with a heightened sense of our own other reality, as one does after a holiday or a movie”. *How Soon is Now?* activates this awareness. Form fuses with ornament, pattern with patina, and abstraction with illustration, in a celebration of visual and contextual complexity. Conspicuously, some material and thematic aspects of the 21st century are neglected. References to the flat perfection of screens and manicured industrial technologies, in particular, are glaringly absent. This omission is purposeful – a bold rejection of flatness, smoothness, and the simplification of space and concept. Here, material substance demands more. Energetic and textural, these objects refuse clean definitions of category, both conceptual and material, demanding first-hand observation and acknowledgment of corporeal space. We are, in time, here.

1. *How Soon is Now?* by The Smiths. Songwriters: Johnny Marr / Steven Patrick Morrissey. *How Soon Is Now?* lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group, Warner Chappell Music, Inc.









Reconstructed Vase, 2016



Bulimba Hydria, 2015





Tank Street Hydria, 2016



Timeless Vase, 2017









*Skyphos (Atlantis)*, 2015





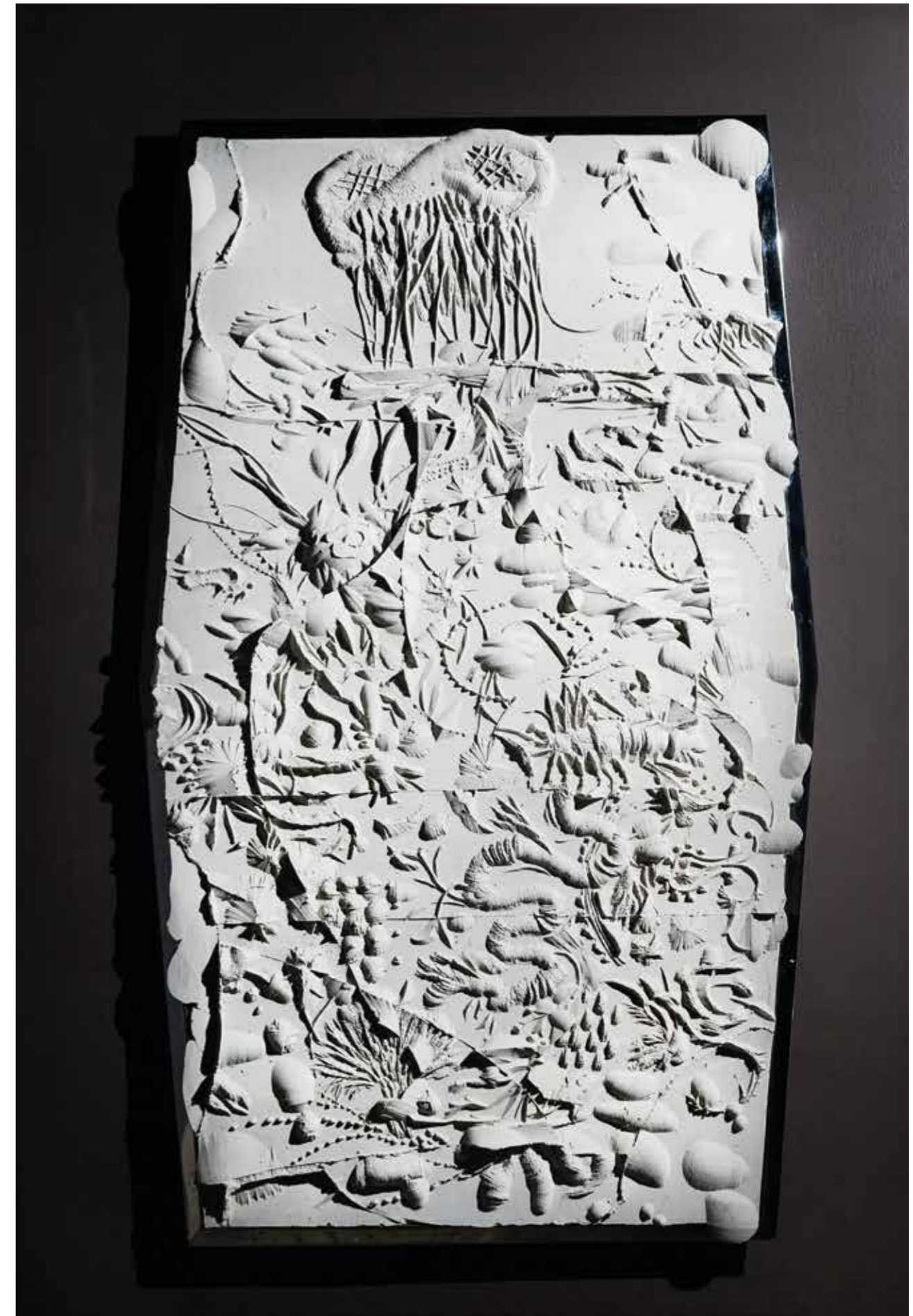








Archaic Vessel #1, 2014



Oceania, 2018





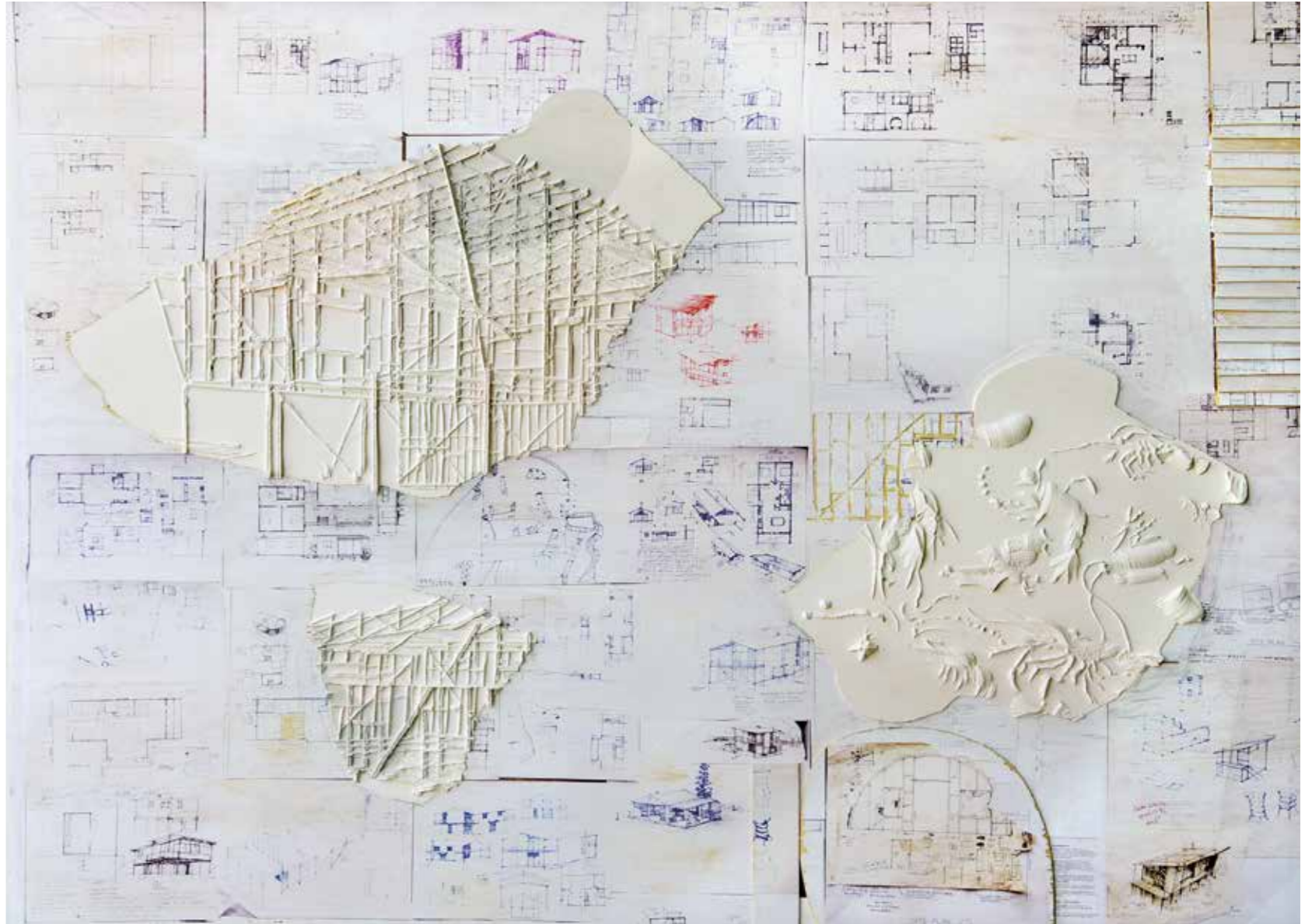
Cornice Frieze, 2015-2016





*Bungalow with Cypress, 2019*





*Weekender, 2014*













*Heraldic, 2015*



*Unification, 2015*





Pastel Cuirass, 2018



Wedgewood Cuirass, 2018





Critical Storm, 2020



Storm at Sea, 2019



## LIST OF WORKS

*Vulcan and The Bull*, 2020,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
550 x 1080 x 60mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Storm at Sea*, 2019,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
400 x 400 x 40mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Critical Storm*, 2020,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
400 x 400 x 20mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Cornice Frieze*, 2015-2016,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
800 x 1120 x 250mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Coronas*, 2015,  
Hydrostone and pigment with  
linoleum and plaster insets,  
920 x 610 x 130mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Heraldic*, 2015,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
1330 x 850 x 110mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Unification*, 2015,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
1310 x 850 x 130mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Pastel Cuirass*, 2018,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
840 x 560 x 80mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Wedgewood Cuirass*, 2018,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
850 x 570 x 80mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Grey Kylix*, 2022,  
Hydrocal and pigment,  
400 x 850 x 80mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Man of Letters 2*, 2014,  
plaster and pigment,  
805 x 585 x 180mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Oceania*, 2018,  
Hydrostone in stainless steel  
frame,  
1420 x 870 x 60mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Large Hydria*, 2014,  
linoleum on plywood panel,  
1750 x 1425 x 95mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*One Yard Amphora*, 2014,  
wooden framed blackboard,  
with plaster inset,  
1370 x 1070 x 60mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Tank Street Hydria*, 2016,  
linoleum, paint and photographic  
print on plywood panel,  
1685 x 1030 x 75mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Weekender*, 2014,  
plaster, pigment, paint, and  
digital print on wood panel,  
1150 x 1530 x 80mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Submerged*, 2022,  
reinforced concrete and pigment,  
950 x 880 x 50mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Sea Fight*, 2022,  
reinforced concrete and pigment,  
975 x 1215 x 50mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Bulimba Hydria*, 2015,  
linoleum and paint on wood panel,  
1655 x 1270 x 80mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Reconstructivist*, 2018,  
linoleum on wood panel,  
400 x 315 x 75mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Reconstructed Vase*, 2016,  
linoleum and paint on wood panel,  
455 x 407 x 70mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Language Vessel #4*, 2022,  
Hydrocal and Hydrostone,  
640 x 345 x 310mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Archaic Vessel #1*, 2014,  
plaster,  
580 x 400 x 240mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Skyphos (Atlantis)*, 2015,  
plaster and pigment,  
570 x 660 x 245mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Bungalow with Cypress*, 2019,  
linoleum, photographic print and  
paint on wood panel,  
450 x 580 x 46mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*Timeless Vase*, 2017,  
linoleum on wood panel,  
590 x 470 x 80mm.  
Courtesy of the artist.



**Project Team:**

Artist, Bruce Reynolds

Rebekah Butler, Executive Director,  
Museums & Galleries Queensland

Debra Beattie, General Manager,  
Museums & Galleries Queensland

Andrea Higgins, Exhibition Program Officer,  
Museums & Galleries Queensland

Rachael De Groot, Exhibition Program Officer,  
Museums & Galleries Queensland

Photography: Bruce Reynolds  
Graphic Design: Michael Phillips  
Colour Balancing: ColourChiefs  
Video: Alex Chomicz  
Education Resource: Elise Black  
Freighting: IAS Fine Art Logistics  
Crating: Michael Littler

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For more information about the exhibition and tour, visit [www.magsq.com.au](http://www.magsq.com.au)

**Tour Venues:**

Ipswich Art Gallery, QLD  
Gympie Regional Gallery, QLD  
Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, QLD  
Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, QLD  
Banana Shire Regional Art Gallery, Biloela, QLD  
Mundubbera Regional Art Gallery, QLD  
Canberra Museum and Gallery, ACT  
Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, NSW  
Devonport Regional Gallery, TAS  
Dogwood Crossing, Miles, QLD  
Redcliffe Art Gallery, QLD

Museums & Galleries Queensland  
122 Gerler Road, Hendra,  
Queensland, Australia, 4011  
+61 7 3059 9740  
[www.magsq.com.au](http://www.magsq.com.au)

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**Images**

Front and back cover: Detail, *Weekender*, 2014

Endpapers: Detail, *Oceania*, 2018 (digitally altered)

p. 2 Detail, *Wedgewood Cuirass*, 2018

p. 4 Detail, *Tank Street Hydria*, 2016

