



Lisa Reihana, *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2015–17. Details, single-channel ultra HD video, 64' (looped) 7:1 sound, colour, ed. 2/5. Purchased 2015 with funds from the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation Appeal and Paul and Susan Taylor. Collection Queensland Art Gallery. Photograph Norman Heke. Courtesy the artist.

# APT9: WORLD HISTORY

ALISON CARROLL

**T**he Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) is its own world and it is a world I want to live in.

On the most literal level it can provide proof of terrible events, often chastening in their rawness and the knowledge that these realities continue. However, though many artworks in APT9 (The 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art<sup>1</sup>) focus on such injustices, alerting us to social issues and politics past and present, there is the lingering sense that ultimately humanity can rise above such things. That humanity can acknowledge and address its ills, with artists and their capacity to encapsulate and illuminate these realities a central part of this process. APT shows us demons and monsters. It also shows us redemption. And often just joy

Many works in APT9 focus on injustice either implicitly or explicitly Lisa Reihana's wonderful creation of the interaction of Europeans and people of

the Pacific has captivated audiences in Brisbane and internationally (I just saw it in London, watched with delighted concentration by the mostly British visitors), with its celebration of both Oceanic culture and the seeming equality of the engagement with the visiting English, but the sting is in the title: *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (2015-17). Captain Cook and his men's mission to watch the transit of the planet Venus in the Southern Ocean also brought new and lethal germs and cultural hegemony Yes, infected, but the final impact on the viewers of this piece is admiration for the artist and the scope of her creation, and admiration for the cultures so clearly and marvellously on display

Vincent Namatjira arranges a row of Indigenous elder painted portraits equivalent to a row of (all-white) Prime Ministers and another of the country's Rich List. Who would think such a formal device could be so



committing to them (often through commissions, always a risk), and then giving them such suitable and respectful sites.

These are all reasons I want to live in APT world.

But there is more. Beyond, or beside perhaps, these individual artists' contributions to this exhibition is the exhibition itself. This is the ninth iteration of an idea about investigating and celebrating what artists from this part of the globe are doing, and deciding if it is special; asking if it offers something beyond the individuals included. What formed it in the early 1990s sustains it still, but it was an infant then, just born, with all the hope and anxiety of that event. How has it developed now to adulthood? I see the same DNA, but that DNA has been shaped by the events of the last twenty-five years both around the globe, in the region and within Australia.

It started with such energy and verve. Chris Saines, Simon Elliott and Judy Gunning, now all senior in QAGOMA (Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art), were there at the start and know this history. They know of the support from visionary Federal and Queensland politicians, before the struggle sometimes since (as I see it as an outsider) to keep that energy up in the face of the conservative Howard years and subsequent economic tightening. They know about increasingly similar big events in Asia and around Australia—the Singaporeans getting into step,

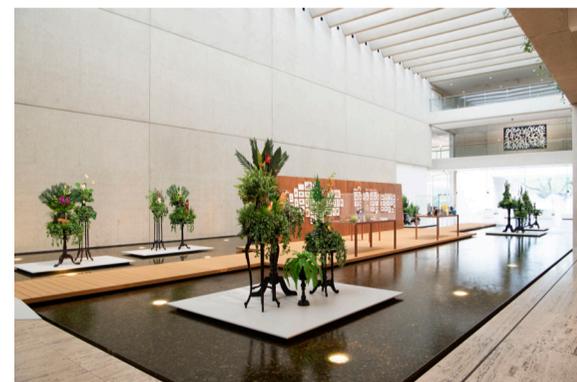
and Adelaide and now Melbourne State galleries starting big contemporary shows. It is worth stressing that these two southern galleries could do this because they had both seen the success of early APTs, and learnt from them—the spectacle and the colour and the idea that people would come, despite early fears that no-one was interested in contemporary art, or, God forbid, Asian art.

APT has continued the spectacle and the colour. Some of that is described above. But they have kept one thing distinct: an allegiance to this region,

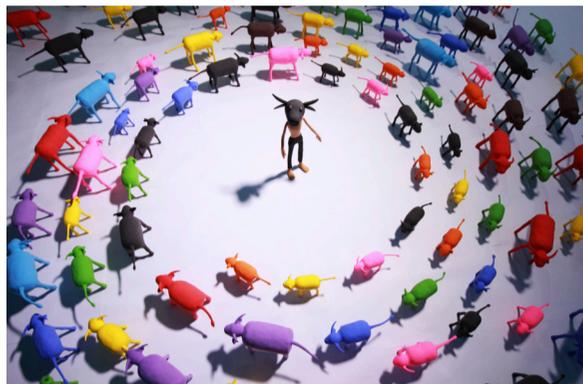
and to the people of this region; to the idea that there is, within the bounds of often arbitrary borders, a sense of coherence, of self-identity of inclusion that maintains the idea that we are friends and friends of long-standing—the best sort of friends. They have kept that dear. Are there other visual art endeavours that do

this? Perhaps if one was a European the European centrality of *documenta* would give this response; perhaps *Manifesta* for the less well-endowed Europeans, perhaps the Havana Biennale in the old days with its Third World focus. But not much else. These all have their character and if you are within the fold of that character, understanding that character and identifying with it, then these events give a special sense of 'belonging'. APT does that for this region. I met curator friends at APT9, whom I had first met at APTs twenty

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clockwise from top left: **Aisha Khalid, *Water has never feared the fire*, 2018.** Installation view. Fabric, gold plated and steel pins. Triptych 492.75x167.65cm; 492.75x83.8cm; 492.75x83.8cm. Commissioned for APT9. The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art. Purchased 2018 with funds from The Myer Foundation through the QAGOMA Foundation to commemorate the 25th anniversary of The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art. Courtesy the artist and QAGOMA; **Women's Wealth Project**, detail, est. 2017. Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre, Chabai, Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Courtesy the artist and QAGOMA; **Munem Wasif, *Kheyal*, 2015–18.** Still, single-channel video, 23'34", black and white, sound, 16'9". Courtesy the artist and QAGOMA; **Donna Ong and Robert Zhao Renhui, *My forest is not your garden*, 2015–18.** Mixed media installation. Courtesy the artists, FOST Gallery and ShanghART Gallery; **Iman Raad, *Days of bliss and woe*, 2018.** Detail. Acrylic on plywood and wood. Commissioned for APT9. Purchased with funds from Tim Fairfax AC through the QAGOMA Foundation. Collection QAGOMA. Courtesy the artist; **Simon Gende, *Kavage spearing the Australian first plane to PNG*, 2018.** Detail. Acrylic on canvas, 77x118cm. Collection the artist. Courtesy the artist and the QAGOMA. Photographs Natasha Harth.



clockwise from left: **Pangrok Sulap, *Sabah tanah air-ku*, 2017.** Woodcut, offset ink on block-out blind, ed.5/10, detail diptych: 414.5x300cm; 411x298.3cm. Purchased 2017 with funds from Ashby Utting through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation. Collection Queensland Art Gallery. Image courtesy the artists; **Bounpaul Phothyzan, *Lie of the Land*, 2017.** Aluminium, wood, soil, seeds, 2 parts: 80x400x80cm (each). First commissioned for *Imaginarium: To the Ends of the Earth* at the Singapore Art Museum. Collection of the artist. Photograph Natasha Harth; **Zico Albaiquni, *The Imbroglia Tropical Paradise*, 2018.** Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 120x80cm. Courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery, Singapore; **Souliya Phoumivong, *Flow*, 2018.** Production image. Stop motion animation, colour, sound. Courtesy the artist.

years ago, including one from Taiwan. We remembered how she was (verbally) attacked in public by a very confident mainland Chinese curator, trying to intimidate her (a bit of *real politik*), and how she stood up to him. We smiled at the memory

I have not said the other important thing about APT's inclusivity here: how it brings in the unlikely and the usually dismissed or unloved and gives them centre stage. It envelops them in love. I am thinking of North Korea here (though I am not sure about the love in this case), but certainly PNG, and now the (to me) totally unknown nooks of creation in the Pacific.

The Women's Wealth project undertaken over the last eighteen months by some thirty women from Bougainville, the Solomon Islands and Australia (the fewest in number) is just heart-warming. In a way the results do not matter—they are not spectacular like some previous Pacific offerings—but the goodwill of the venture just oozes out. The women weave with local materials, grasses, straws, whatever, and make work that is celebrated in this show. They are included within the embrace of the institution and, by extension, the community watching it all happen. This is what is unique here. Is there a museum or art gallery elsewhere that would put on a big 'contemporary' exhibition that would so seamlessly include what to others would be 'traditional craft'? APT bends that rule and not with academic heft, nor with apologies or guilty back-room dealing, but just by doing it.

I have mused on this. I was part of the first APT committee and I argued *against* including the type of work in the Women's Wealth project in that first iteration. Certainly 'contemporary' and in principle appropriate, I argued that this work was expected by the public as the pre-eminent creative expression of our region, and I wanted to challenge the audience with the *unexpected* art of the region. Again, history has intervened. The first APT did challenge, and delight, its new audience, and this has become expected. Now it is time

for this Women's Wealth project to take its indeed rightful place amongst the metaphoric wefts and warps of the other creative work of this region.

Chris Saines has reflected in the catalogue on the importance of history in this APT—that its own history is central to this. In a speech at the accompanying forum he talked of Indonesian artist Dadang Christanto's work being 'unleashed' on an unsuspecting public in APT1, and there is reference to that work in APT9 by countryman Zico Albaiquni. Saines talked of Thai artist Montien Boonma's 1992 Buddhist-centred works, and the reflected issues in Myanmar today. Artists shown in the past, like Anne Noble and Shinro Ohtake, are invited again. And there are pieces from the long past (not really explained for their presence but I am not minding), including works by Mao Ishikawa and Bougainvillians Herman Somuk and Gregory Dausi Moah. There is no conceptual 'theme' as such in this APT, and rarely has there been, unlike Sydney Biennales, for example, but if there was one, it would be this history—of the region through APT. On this, a rare criticism is a reference in the catalogue to the rise of conceptual art in Asia without acknowledgement of the great stand-alone Mono-ha creations of North Asians like Lee Ufan, extensively celebrated in past APTs.

But what of the future? Can this open and generous provision of a platform for the issues of the day continue to be enough? If this remains the preminent curatorial exhibition of our region, can it, and should it, take on a different brief, and perhaps a more curatorially proactive one? Maybe this is the next part of this history

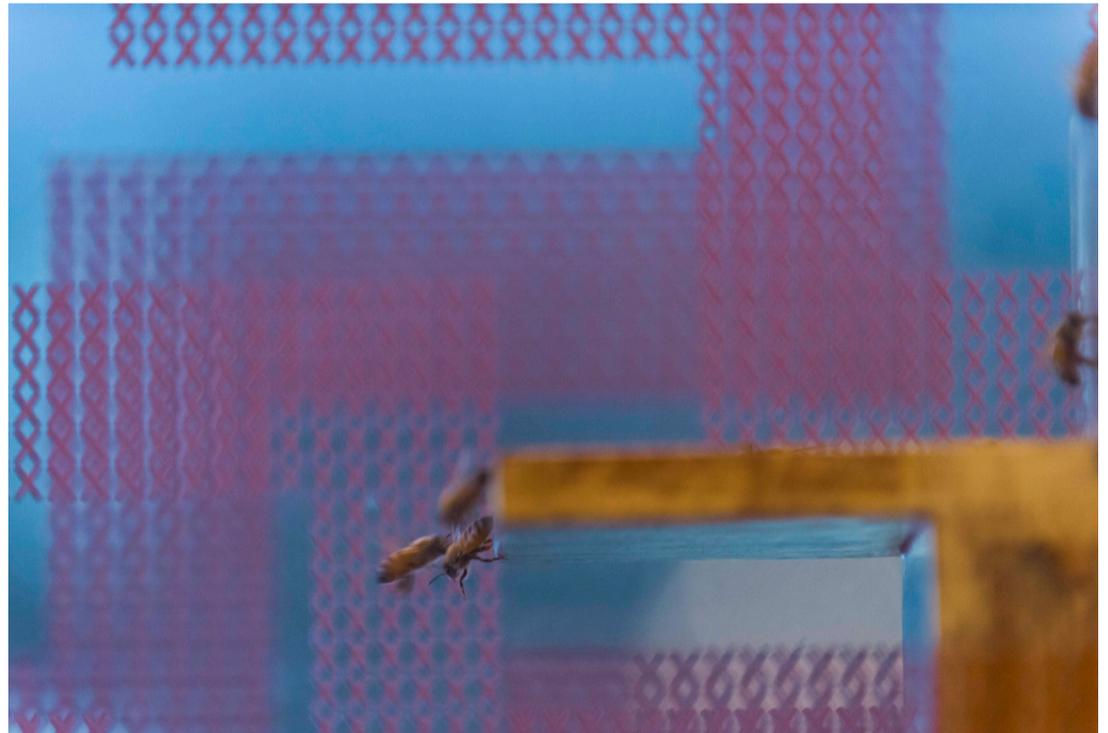
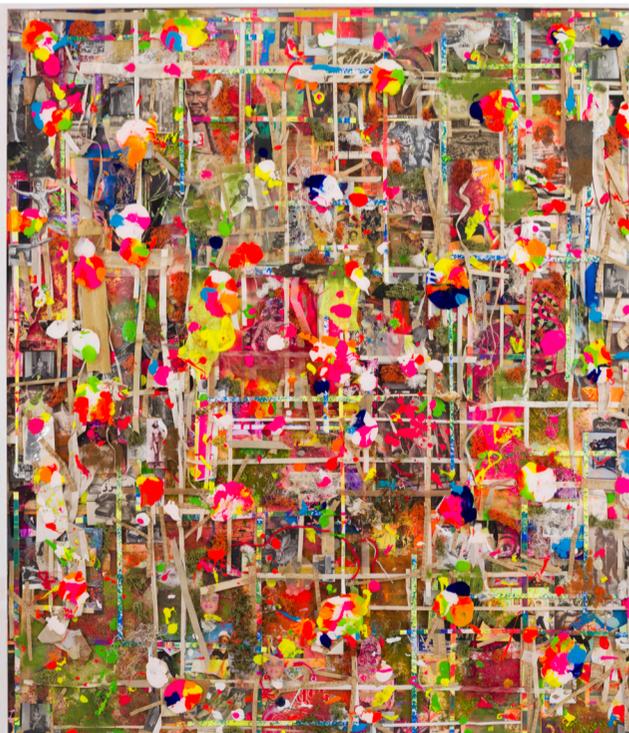
There has never been a major exhibition about contemporary visual art of the First Nations of the Asia-Pacific, anywhere. Can you imagine the challenge and reward of that, for both First Nation artists and their communities, and a wider audience? With a proper conference in association with one of our universities? There has never been a major contemporary art exhibition that

focused on China in all its glory surely a centrepiece of regional and global thinking today 'China' is not just the Communist PRC today but the past and all the tentacles and diasporas of that great cultural, imperial centre, challenging Western thinking face-on. An Australian organization can do this better than anyone: of the region, but not in it; with an understanding of the issues; but with no real, *visceral* skin in the game (indeed putting aside political pressures which just must be faced). Many in the arts in Australia have been rueful at our sector's disappearance from national debate. Geraldine Barlow in her catalogue essay for APT9 describes the importance of questioning authoritative voices. Here is one way to make art and artists central to that, not just for the *real politik* of encouraging the 'arts' to take a central role, but also for the pure importance of the debate and for the challenging, insightful art that surely would emerge. ✨

note

1. The 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art was held at QAGOMA, Brisbane from 24 November 2018 to 28 April 2019.

Alison Carroll is a writer, curator and art historian. She has worked in museums and arts organisations in Australia since 1976, with a focus on 20th century and contemporary art of the Asia Pacific region.



clockwise from top left: **George, *Untitled*, 2012.** From *Images of a Crisis* series. Synthetic polymer paint on mylar, 15x21cm. Collection the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Papua New Guinea and PNG Red Cross Society. Courtesy the artist and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art; **Mao Ishikawa, *Miyuki Higa, born in 1985. Distributor*, 2012.** Inkjet print, 22x31.5cm. Courtesy the artist and Nap Gallery, Tokyo;

**Anne Noble, *Conversatio: A cabinet of wonder*, 2018.** Detail. Courtesy the artist and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art; Photograph Natasha Harth, QAGOMA; **Shinro Ohtake, *Oku-Kei 13*, 2017.** Oil, acrylic, ink, coloured ink, colour powder, printed matter, photograph, ink-jet print, silk screen print, hemp cloth, cotton cloth, synthetic leather, cheesecloth, silk thread, cotton yarn, adhesive cellophane tape, packing tape, metal, lead, sponge, lichen, plastic, plastic sheet, balsa wood, packing paper, thin paper, Japanese paper, newspaper, wall paper, and paper in custom frame, 153x133x9.2cm. Courtesy the artist and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo.