

Culture Art &amp; design City life

# 11 artists you must see in the 11th Asia Pacific Triennial

Nick Dent

December 6, 2024 – 8.50pm

The Asia Pacific Triennial is Brisbane's – some would say Australia's – biggest contribution to contemporary world art. Now in its fourth decade, there is nothing else quite like it.

As some indication as to how big a deal it is, the show will be travelling to London's Victoria and Albert Museum in 2026, a somewhat ironic achievement given how loudly colonialism is decried in many of the artworks.

This year's APT explores themes of history, crisis, war, empathy, social action and Indigenous peoples, as well as the healing of culture and of the environment. Works range from hand-woven traditional textiles to high-tech video installations.

More than 500 pieces by more than 200 artists are on display at the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art. Nations across Asia and the Pacific are represented, including, for the first time, Saudi Arabia, Timor-Leste and Uzbekistan.

The family-friendly exhibition is entirely free, but potentially daunting. With that in mind, this masthead went along to pick out 11 artists whose work is the most evocative, eye-catching, impactful, and, to our eyes at least, fun.

These artists are in no way the only ones worth checking out, but they offer a window into what is a large and imposing show.



New Zealand artist Brett Graham's *Cease Tide of Wrong-Doing, 2020*. c  
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Kawita Vatanajyankur and Pat Pataranutaporn. *The Machine Ghost in the Human Shell* (from the 'Cyber Labour' series), 2024. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND NOVA CONTEMPORARY / © KAWITA VATANJYANKUR

## 1. Kawita Vatanajyankur, Thailand

Vatanajyankur's video works are hilarious and chilling. They are filmed performance pieces in which her body becomes a tool, or part of a machine: rubbing her face on a plate like a dish brush, rotating like a loom, or measuring

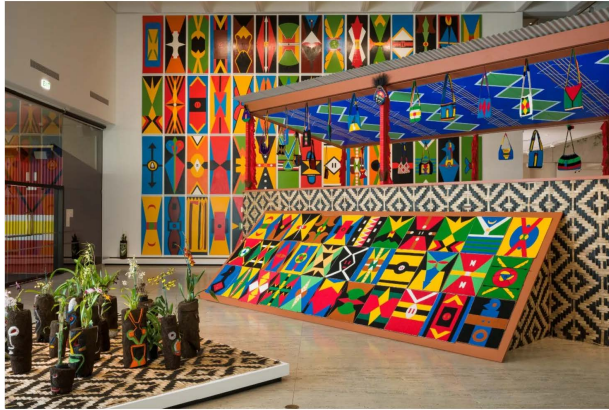
rice as a set of scales. The metaphor of the exploitation of workers in the consumer economy could not be plainer.

Her 2024 work *The Machine Ghost in the Human Shell*, made in collaboration with MIT scientist Pat Pataranutaporn, pairs her body with an AI 'ghost' figure to explore the endgame of AI in turning people into mere automatons.

## 2. Brett Graham, Aotearoa (New Zealand)

Graham's nine-metre black tower *Cease Tide of Wrong-Doing* looms in the entranceway to the APT inside the GOMA. It's based on the sacred *niu* poles that existed during the New Zealand wars over sovereignty (1845-1872). His work looks back at colonisation using monumental sculptural forms.

*O'Pioneer* is a three-metre high white turret decorated like a wedding cake. It's in reference to the wedding of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1840 – the same year as the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi – implying the colonial violence upholding traditions of Empire.



Installation of Haus Yuriyal's artwork including (front to back) *Bopa*, 2024, *Kalabus*, 2024, *Kamkau Ike* (Haus Toktok) 2024, with Yuriyal Bridgeman's *Yuri Alai Eagles* (ceiling shield paintings) 2024 and *Kuman* (shield) paintings, 2024.  
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## 3. Haus Yuriyal, Papua New Guinea

Greeting you at the back entrance of the QAG is a vibrant pavilion decorated with shield (*kuman*) designs and 27 dangling string bags (including one in tribute to the Brisbane Broncos). Haus Yuriyal is a large collective of artists in the Jiwaka and Simbu provinces of Papua New Guinea, and this 'haus' represents their meeting place.

## 4. Zac Langdon-Pole, Aotearoa (New Zealand)


Our modern life is a confluence of historical accidents, a confusing puzzle, and so are the large-scale works of Langdon-Pole. They combine different jigsaw puzzles into massive and disorienting wholes. Using more than 64,000 pieces in total, the works mash up different 19-century paintings and space images from the Hubble telescope.

The Kiwi artist is also exhibiting a sculpture titled *Another World Inside This One*. It's an axe with the wooden handle carved into the shape of a small tree. Inspired by the notion of 'Captain Cook's axe', it's a surreal object that evokes ideas of conquest – both of the natural world and of Indigenous peoples.



Zac Langdon-Pole's *Another World Inside This One*, 2024 – an axe with a sapling carved from the handle.

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We can't wait to unveil 🇲🇴 Mongolian artists Nomin Bold and Ochirbold Ayurzana's striking 'The Cup of Life' 2023 – an imposing curtain of grinning skulls – at the Asia Pacific Triennial opening this weekend!

This epic installation combines painter Nomin Bold's use of Buddhist symbolism with sculptor Ochirbold Ayurzana's practice as a metalworker and features nearly 2,000 cast-metal skulls suspended floor-to-ceiling, embodying the artists' vision of skulls as 'life cups' – vessels of human consciousness and symbols of mortality.

Be among the first in Brisbane to see it at the Triennial this weekend. Free entry.

#TriennialQAGOMA #QAGOMA @bold.nomin @ochirbold.ayurzana

👤 Lorena Natale Agudelo, Installation Officer, QAGOMA, finalising the installation of 'The Cup of Life' 2023 behind the scenes at GOMA.

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## 5. Nomin Bold and Ochirbold Ayurzana, Mongolia

More than 1500 cast-metal skulls form a startling 'curtain' at GOMA. Some of the skulls have two eye sockets, some have three, and some have just one. The work is both a reminder of mortality (or memento mori) and a gesture towards Buddhist ideas of the human, the godly (with three eyes) and the monstrous (with one).

The artists are from Mongolia, and their work, titled *Life Cup*, represents "the loss of unity with nature in the process of the country's urbanisation", according to co-curator Reuben Keenan.



Dawn Ng, Waterfall VIII (still), 2023. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND SULLIVAN+STRUMPF / © DAWN NG

## 6. Dawn Ng, Singapore

This video piece in a darkened room shows time-lapse footage of a 60-kilogram block of ice melting. The artist, Dawn Ng, has infused the ice with pigments, making the melting process very beautiful to watch.

Ng took inspiration from images of the earth from space. You can read a warning about climate change into it if you like (the title, *The Earth Is an Hourglass*, would suggest that), but the overwhelming effect is otherworldly and sublime.



Piguras Davao, *The Silent Witness* (detail), 2019. NICK DENT

## 7. Piguras Davao, Philippines

Ten artists worked on a monumental oil on canvas, 12 metres long, that combines creation myths, history, references to western art, and the *Star Wars* saga. *The Silent Witness* has WWII fighter planes turning into flying fish, the god Manama creating the world, the underworld goddess Mebuyan suckling demonic babies, as well as samurai, conquistadors, and an eye blinking from the bottom of a toilet bowl.

The painting is intended as a tribute to Davao, the largest city by area in the Philippines. It helps to know that Davao's history encompasses a sultanate, Spanish rule, American administration, Japanese occupation, the Marcos regime and the People Power revolution.

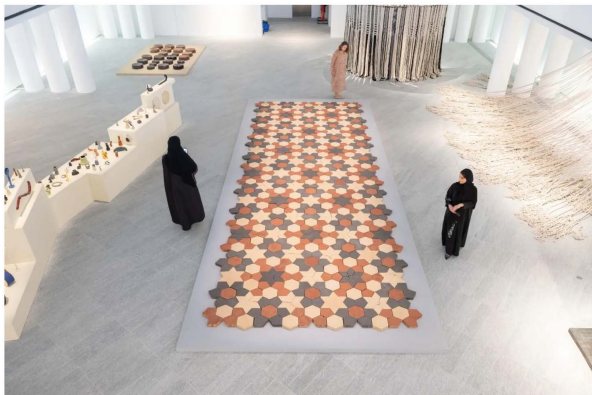


Rithika Merchant, *Temporal Structures*, 2023. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND TARQ, MUMBAI / © RITHIKA MERCHANT

## 8. Rithika Merchant, India

Merchant's beguiling gouache and watercolours on paper feature curious bird people that the artist says are "proxies of us, coming to terms with what we have done to our planet and looking for answers in the sky, the water and land".

Both futuristic and mythological, the series *Terraformation* features plants, ants, whales and the Hindu eye, with its connotation of the power of knowledge.



Dana Awartani, *Standing by the Ruins* (installation view), 2022. COURTESY: THE ARTIST / © DANA AWARTANI



## 9. Dana Awartani, Saudi Arabia

New York-based Awartani's work *Standing by the Ruins* consists of 439 handmade adobe bricks shaped as pentagons, hexagons and stars. In making them she deliberately left out the ingredient of hay, which means the bricks are cracking.

Awartani's parents are Palestinian, and her intention is to make us think of war and violence in the Middle East, while also reflecting on the region's architectural traditions.



Kim Ah Sam, *Where Our Journey Takes Us* (installation view), 2022.

## 10. Kim Ah Sam, Australia

Ah Sam's woven conical structures spring largely from her own imagination, albeit with a number of important influences. Termite mounds found in Kalkadoon country (Mount Isa) inform the overall shape, as does the region's general topography.

Ah Sam was born in Meanjin/Brisbane and lives and works in Tulumur/Ipswich, but feels a paternal connection to the Kalkadoon area. The fringing of emu feathers is a reference to the massacre site of Battle Mountain. These works hang in space at the QAG, gently rotating and rewarding close examination.

## 11. Mai Nguyen-Long, Australia

The comical array of clay figures that make up the *Vomit Girl Project* have a dark origin for the Hobart-born artist. An exhibition of her work in Sydney was protested by the local Vietnamese community because her accent was perceived to be from the formerly communist north. The central figure in her clay and earthenware sculptures expresses the shame and trauma of the diaspora.

Each object carries its own symbolism, including the bombshell shapes and the colour orange, a reference to the toxic herbicide Agent Orange. The legacy of the war looms large in them.



Mai Nguyen-Long, *The Vomit Girl Project* (detail), 2024. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND MICHEL REID SYDNEY + BERLIN / © MAI NGUYỄN-LONG

**11th Asia Pacific Triennial is at the Gallery of Modern Art and Queensland Art Gallery until April 27, 2025. Admission is free.**

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