

2021 Dobell Exhibition Grant

The 2020 round of the Dobell Exhibition Grant was assessed on Thursday, 22 October by a four-member panel consisting of:

- Brett Adlington, Director, Lismore Regional Gallery
- Michelle Belgiorno, Trustee, Sir William Dobell Art Foundation
- Paula Latos-Valier, Art Director, Sir William Dobell Art Foundation
- Rachel Arndt, Gallery Programs & Touring Exhibitions Manager, Museums & Galleries of NSW

The panel assessed six applications from publicly funded and regional galleries across NSW. A very competitive and varied range of proposals were received. After much deliberation and debate, the Panel unanimously decided to award the Dobell Exhibition Grant of \$40,000 to Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) for their proposed exhibition *Shadow Boxer*.

The panel commented that the application was engaging, and the theme of the boxing ring is a compelling one for artists and the community of the Maitland area (as well as further afield regionally). *Shadow Boxer* will explore the way artists respond so vividly to boxing's grit, history and contest. The exhibition will highlight the work of contemporary Australian artists exploring ideas of race, gender, class and physicality of boxing alongside the exploration of Maitland's own boxing legacy. It was noted that the exhibition featured strong work, a great variety of artists and media and linked well with Maitland's collection of both art and boxing memorabilia. The panel also commented that the curatorial theme provides a great opportunity to develop a broader audience with interests in both sport and local history.

Overall the panel was impressed with the ambition and calibre of all six applications which addressed a breadth of curatorial themes and concepts but that were always related strongly to their collections or local communities. The panel wished to remind applicants that it is important to contact M&G NSW staff prior to developing an application to receive advice and guidance on aligning the projects to the criteria of the grant, developing the project, and budget.



Karla Dickens, Ms Ready and Mr Willing, 2019, Inkjet print, Ed 1/3. Courtesy of Andrew Baker Art Dealer and Karla Dickens.

2021 Dobell Exhibition Grant Recipient Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) – *Shadow Boxer*



The boxing ring is a magnetic site for artists. What is it about the fight that speaks to artists through the ages and why do some contemporary artists respond so vividly to its grit, history and contest? *Shadow Boxer* will highlight this cultural fascination and showcase the work of contemporary Australian artists who explore ideas of race, gender and class and the sheer physicality of boxing in their work.

The exhibition will be presented from 5 June – 22 August 2021 and curated by Dr Gerry Bobsien, Cheryl Farrell and Kim Blunt. Artists and contributors include Karla Dickens, Richard Lewer, Michael Willson, Keri Glastonbury, Nigel Milsom, Fiona McMonagle, Bianca ‘Bam Bam’ Elmir and David Matthews.

Shadow Boxer will look at boxing from diverse perspectives including the work of Karla Dickens and her homage to the acclaimed Aboriginal tent boxers of the 1920s - 1950s. The exhibition taps into the deep-rooted connection that the City

of Maitland has with boxing and will feature rare items from the MRAG Collection connected to the story of the ‘Maitland Wonder’, Les Darcy. In 1915, when boxing was a major sport in Australia, Les Darcy captured the hearts of the nation, becoming a boxing world champion and national hero. MRAG is custodian to objects from that era that relate directly to Australian boxing history as well as personal items belonging to the Maitland champion himself.

The exhibition will include a combination of new work, loans, work and artefacts from the collection as well as recent acquisitions, and will include painting, sculpture/installation, poetry, documentary writing, sports photography, historical memorabilia and artefacts.

MRAG will also present diverse public programming to engage a broad audience of sport lovers, art lovers and newcomers to contemporary art. Programs will include drawing workshops with Richard Lewer; a series of talks in the gallery in a boxing ring designed for lively discussion where contestants will spar verbally; a filmed conversation between Gallery Director Gerry Bobsien and UK based writer David Matthews; *Free Art Sunday* events through the exhibition catered to children; adult drawing workshops with a professional boxer as model; an artist talk by AFL head photographer Michael Willson, who drew wide media attention in 2019 with his iconic image of AFLW star Tayla Harris in mid flight; and boxing workshops for women with Australian champion boxer and advocate for women and multiculturalism in sport, Bianca ‘Bam Bam’ Elmir.

For more information about the Dobell Exhibition Grant please contact: **Susan Wachter, Gallery Programs Coordinator**, susanw@mgnsw.org.au

The Dobell Exhibition Grant is supported by the Sir William Dobell Art Foundation and managed by Museums & Galleries of NSW.

Image this page: Fiona McMonagle detail of still from *The ring*, 2014, digital video animation, 16:9 ratio, colour, sound 7:24 minutes
Courtesy of the artist, Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne, Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide, Olsen Gallery, Sydney.

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