

PREVIEW

Portent

Andrew Nicholls with Ad Lib Collective

PERTH FESTIVAL

Holmes à Court Gallery



LAETITIA WILSON



While submerged up to my head in the ocean, I awkwardly squinted towards the bright blue sky as my thoughts travelled towards despair, bad omens and the dire present and future state of humanity on planet Earth. Around me, a group of other people were doing the same thing. Together, as the sun angled down toward the horizon, ending yet another day, we were acting out an Indian solar eclipse ritual directed by local artist Andrew Nicholls for a short film in his upcoming 2024 Perth Festival exhibition, *Portent*.

This curious water ritual and others performed during the celestial event across cultures worldwide, are said to minimise the potential negative effects of solar eclipses. It is one of several others re-enacted and filmed for this exhibition, where mythological, religious and historical cultural responses to eclipses as bad omens are twinned with present day thinking about contemporary issues – including death, violence, war and natural disaster.

Solar eclipses are uncanny phenomena; they confront the natural order of things as the sun, a light and life force, is seemingly devoured. Being immersed in water during a solar eclipse might have some profound culturally specific meaning in India, but it also invites consid-

◆ *Portent 1*, 2023 by Andrew Nicholls. Image copyright the artist.

eration of rising water levels at a time when catastrophic flooding is increasingly common. Within this simple idea, there is greater complexity and layers of meaning spanning different cultures and times.

For all his film works, Nicholls has collaborated with local filmmaker Chad Peacock. This one is based on the element of water and the other elements – fire, air and earth – forming the thematic framework for the other films, all connected to eclipse lore from around the globe. This includes scenes of children screaming at the sun, raging about their compromised planetary futures and scenes of battle playing out the vignette of the sun being abducted by the moon, as well as illustrating the human impulse towards violence and destruction.

This ambitious exhibition was conceived prior to and then kicked off in April 2023, when, alongside thousands of people, Nicholls travelled 1200 kilometres north from Perth to view the solar eclipse. Its arc made Exmouth a key site of the path of totality, drawing people from far and wide for the collective experience of awe in response to a rare celestial event.

This 2023 solar eclipse and the omens it could portend for the future is the driving force of this exhibition. Eclipses are repositories of symbolism and myth. Throughout time, within different cultures and with the help of astrologers and astronomers, they have come to mean a great many things as they have also gradually been more scientifically understood. Symbolically, solar eclipses are associated with the darker spectrum of meaning – mortality, chaos and corruption, overshadowing order, peace and the goodness of light. There are competing forces at play in eclipse lore.

Key to the experience of eclipses and part of the fascination with them, is what happens to light – the gradual dulling of sunlight to become an eerie, unsettling twilight. Light will be carefully controlled in the Holmes à Court Gallery as the space is transformed into an immersive environment capturing the uncanny atmosphere of the Exmouth eclipse and, by association, all solar eclipses.

Another central component in this exhibition is sound. Nicholls has collaborated with Ad Lib Collective and Wind up Bird, who will be creating and performing a dedicated score in response to the theme. This becomes the soundtrack for the exhibition, evoking an appropriately cosmic, psychedelic ambience. It will be played throughout the entire gallery space, complementing the sense of unease in the face of potential pending disaster.

Prior to the exhibition, on Sunday 4 February, the sound work will be performed live alongside another ritual re-enactment involving the lavish scene of a king being dethroned for the duration of the eclipse. This will be filmed to then become a part of the exhibition as one of four large-scale video works.

Nicholls is a prolific maker in other media as well as film and the exhibition is rife with eclipse symbolism, magical thinking and various cultural, cosmological, spiritual and religious references across media. Large scale drawings are drawn directly onto the walls, banners hang from the ceiling and ceramics cluster in a room to the side.

This is a major project by Nicholls, for which he travelled not only to Exmouth but also to Banff to create some of the work. The premise is ambitious and the outcomes promise to be visually striking and experientially engaging. It is a project of global proportions and significance, situating Nicholls as a visionary creative mind at the forefront of considering contemporary times within a broader framework of the weird, dark and at times delightful and mysterious moments and ideas that have come before.

Portent is show at Holmes à Court Gallery from 10 February until 16 March.

Mark, Bowerru and Wunan

Head to Parliament House until August for special art tours to see *Mark, Bowerru, and Wunan* by Aboriginal artist Ngarra, presented by Mossenson Galleries. The unique works highlight the artist's diversity as an accomplished artist together with his unique philosophy on life, as well as commentary about the complexities of traditional Kimberley gather-hunter life.

Mark is the institutional notification summoning clans to a *Wunan* place for the purpose of giving expression to the social, cultural, technological and material exchanges which underpinned Kimberley gatherer-hunter life. *Bowerru* is the institution whereby grievances were settled before clans gathered together at a *Wunan* place. The exhibition provides a small insight into the life of this special lawman of the Kimberley.



◆ *Bowers*, acrylic on paper, 35 x 50 cm by Ngarra.

FLOWERS
Stephen Brameld & Jay Staples
 3 - 24 February 2024

Stala Contemporary
 ART GALLERY + PROJECTS
 11 Southport Street, West Leederville
 Open Wed – Sun, 10am to 4pm
stalacontemporary.com.au
 0417 184 638

Warm Flowers 2023

FLESH
 20 Jan-28 Feb

Hugh Breslin
 Chris de Sira
 Shanti Gelmi
 Robyn Bernadt
 Sophie G Nixon
 Noel Roy Johnson
 Louise Grimshaw
 Rebecca Hepworth
 Charlotte Robinson
 Curated by Robyn Bernadt

AT ELLENBROOK ARTS

FRINGE WORLD FESTIVAL