



portent





Andrew Nicholls with Chad Peacock, *Portent 1 (Earth)*, 2023

Artist's statement: Andrew Nicholls

Throughout human history solar eclipses have been viewed as omens of pending disaster. The apparent extinguishing of our star is a primally-uncanny phenomenon that seems to signify a disruption of the natural order. The ancient world proliferated with interpretations of such events as the sun, bringer of light and life being abducted or devoured by a foe, and Abrahamic religious scholars have linked them to the expulsion from Paradise, Christ's death on the cross, and the end of days. The word itself derives from *èkleipsi*, a Greek term linked to the concept of abandonment, and multiple cultures have interpreted eclipses as the Solar deity turning its back on humanity in disdain of our actions. In India people would submerge themselves up to the neck in the Ganges during eclipses as a form of spiritual cleansing, while in some South American villages the children of the community would be gathered together to scream at the sky and chase away the evil entity thought to be devouring the sun.

For millennia eclipses have been understood to portend political turmoil and the toppling of empires. In ancient Babylon, a commoner would be crowned

monarch during eclipses to ensure that any bad luck would befall him, rather than the true ruler; following the eclipse he would be sacrificed to ensure that any misfortune would follow him to the grave – a gruesome custom said to have been later adopted by Alexander the Great. The deaths of Charlemagne, King Henry I of England and Louis XIV of France were all preceded by solar eclipses, and followed by periods of dramatic social unrest.

In August 2017 I was on an artist's residency in Brooklyn when a full solar eclipse passed over the United States. Eclipses happen on a fairly frequent basis due to the intersecting orbits of the sun and the moon, however often they occur in remote places or during inclement weather. The 2017 eclipse was notable in that it crossed 14 American states in late summer, allowing millions to witness the 'path of totality'. I foolishly chose to stay in New York, seeing only around a third of the sun obscured, while a close friend flew south to experience totality and returned declaring that it was one of the most profound moments of his life; seeing this for myself went to the top of my bucket list.



Andrew Nicholls with Chad Peacock, *Portent 3 (Air)*, 2023

Three years later at the beginning of the COVID lockdown, with Western Australia's borders slammed shut for the foreseeable future, I convinced myself that it would never happen. Upon googling 'next total solar eclipse' I was astounded when the top result was 'Exmouth, Western Australia, April 2023'. Elated, I realised that even if we would never be able to travel by air again, I would be able to get there, (on foot if necessary). In late 2022 I was invited by Holmes à Court Gallery @ No. 10 to develop a solo exhibition for inclusion in the 2024 Perth Festival. With the Festival's 2024 theme announced as *Ngaangk* ('The Sun') and my Exmouth trip pending, this struck me as an ideal opportunity to develop an exhibition playing upon the common understanding of eclipses as bad omens.

The resulting exhibition explores eclipse lore from multiple world cultures, and reflects my interest in Planetary Magickal tradition (another obsession emerging from the COVID lockdown) in which eclipses signify moments of profound change and evolution. The exhibition's musical score, composed and improvised by the incredible Ad Lib Collective and Wind Up Bird is structured to mimic the action

of the Exmouth eclipse with its slow build up, and the frenetic energy of 'totality' (which in Exmouth was just over a minute in length). It provides the soundtrack to the exhibition, with complementary gallery lighting design by Alex Spartalis (GDP Productions), timed to brighten and dim in tandem with it. The associated performance (which premiered at the Gallery just prior to the exhibition opening) draws upon eclipse lore and traditions of Planetary Magick, and features exquisite custom-designed solar regalia by Boorloo/Perth-based jeweller Sarah Elson, and costuming by Western Australian fashion icon Rebecca Paterson. The other works are intended to expand my solo practice (which to date has largely focused on historical research) to comment upon contemporary humanity's current precarious position in relation to climate change, the global pandemic, war, and the political rise of the new-wave right-wing, speculating about which calamity the Exmouth eclipse may have been foretelling.

Participating Artists

Andrew Nicholls

Andrew Nicholls is an Australian/British artist, writer and curator based in Borloo/Perth whose practice explores power and aesthetics through a camp lens. Particularly known for his highly detailed pen and ink drawings, his work extends into ceramics, video, performance, installation and expansive curatorial projects. He has undertaken residencies and exhibited across Australia, Southeast Asia, Canada, China, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. His work is represented in collections including Artbank, The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Janet Holmes à Court and the Kedumba Collection of Australian Drawings. He is a member of Art Collective WA and shows with .M Contemporary, Sydney.

Ad Lib Collective

Genre bending Ad Lib Collective is a group of performers and composers who create unique and transformative musical and inter-disciplinary performances. Based between Boorloo/Perth and Naarm/Melbourne, Ad Lib is directed by percussionist and composer Thea Rossen. The Collective's projects are rooted in sound and regularly feature improvisation and cross genre collaboration. Ad Lib collaborators include electronic music artists Sleep D, media artist Sohan Ariel Hayes and Boston Based MASARY Studios and their works have been presented by Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Recital Centre, Four Winds Festival and more.

Sarah Elson

Sarah Elson has pursued an interest in traditional metalsmithing and its use in contemporary visual arts practice for over 30 years. Her work examines the nature of preciousness and the preciousness of nature. She graduated from Curtin University's former Jewellery and 3D Design course in 1991 where she went on to teach as a casual tutor for 24 years. In 2001 she was the recipient of a Samstag Scholarship and holds an MFA from the Chelsea School of Art and Design, London. Her work is held in numerous collections including the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Janet Holmes à Court Collection. She is a member of Art Collective WA.



Andrew Nicholls, *Lunar Deity*, 2023

Chad Peacock

Chad Peacock is a Western Australian visual artist born and raised in the Perth Hills, working with the mediums of digital video, audio and photography. An infatuation with the balance of nature, and desire to highlight the beauty in the everyday drives his ongoing exploration of his home state. Picking up a camera at an early age, his passion turned into a full-time career documenting the work of renowned artists from around the globe. As a result, several organic collaborations began, resulting in his work being exhibited in galleries across Australia including The Art Gallery of Western Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney.

Wind Up Bird

Wind Up Bird is a new collaboration between composers/synth-artists Josiah Padmanabham from Grievous Bodily Calm and Gazey, and award-winning Australian composer, James Ledger. Their music is a melting pot of influences all blended into psychedelic electronic textures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AD LIB COLLECTIVE FEATURING WIND UP BIRD

Percussion: Thea Rossen
Clarinets: Ashley Smith
Synthesizers: James Ledger (Wind Up Bird)
Josiah Padmanabham (Wind Up Bird)

CREATIVE TEAM

Lighting design: Alex Spartalis (GSD Productions)
Filmmaker: Chad Peacock (Peacock Visuals)

Additional
Cinematography: Jennifer Chiasson, Winston
Cromwell, Parker Evans-Davies,
Sohan Ariel Hayes

Performance
Director (*Fire*): Mitchell Whelan

Jewellery
and Regalia: Sarah Elson

Costumes (*Fire*): Rebecca Paterson

Makeup (*Fire*): Manuao Makeup

Sound recording: Azariah Felton

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Portent

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CAST

FIRE

Sol
Luna
Mars
Mercury
Jupiter
Venus
Saturn
Sacrificial Victim

Sam Madame
David Charles Collins
Timo Kroker
Nicholas Harle
Manuao TeAotonga
Thomas Fitzgerald Bloomer
Jeffrey Jay Fowler
Tim David Green

EARTH

Sol
Luna

Sam Madame
David Charles Collins

WATER

Laurissa Brooke, Rachel Bull, Alessandro Cellerini, Emily Clements, Theo Costantino, Marco D'Orsogna, Susan Flavell, Lauren Formentin, Brent Harrison, Sohan Ariel Hayes, Tayah Lee Traub, Katrina Longo, Will Nichols, Amy Plant, Sion Prior, Pearl Rasmussen, Manuao TeAotonga, Zulpa Rivai, Ashley Smith, Jack Wansbrough, Mags Webster, Laetitia Wilson

AIR

Jámila Leonne Ferreira Santana Bispo, Ziya Wolf Ferreira Santana Bispo, Dahlia Guest, Hiba Hattat Ryan Robin, Emily Walker

Cover image: Andrew Nicholls with Chad Peacock, *Portent 2 (Water)*, 2023

Inside cover image: Sam Madame as Sol with *Anigozanthos Manglesi Crown with Stapelia, Stapelia Sceptre and Stapelia Orb* by Sarah Elson, 2024.

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**Ngala kaaditj Noongar moort keyen kaadak
nidja boodja.**

*We acknowledge the Noongar people as the
original custodians of this land.*



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Department of
**Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries**

**AD LIB
COLLECTIVE**
PERFORMANCE CREATION