

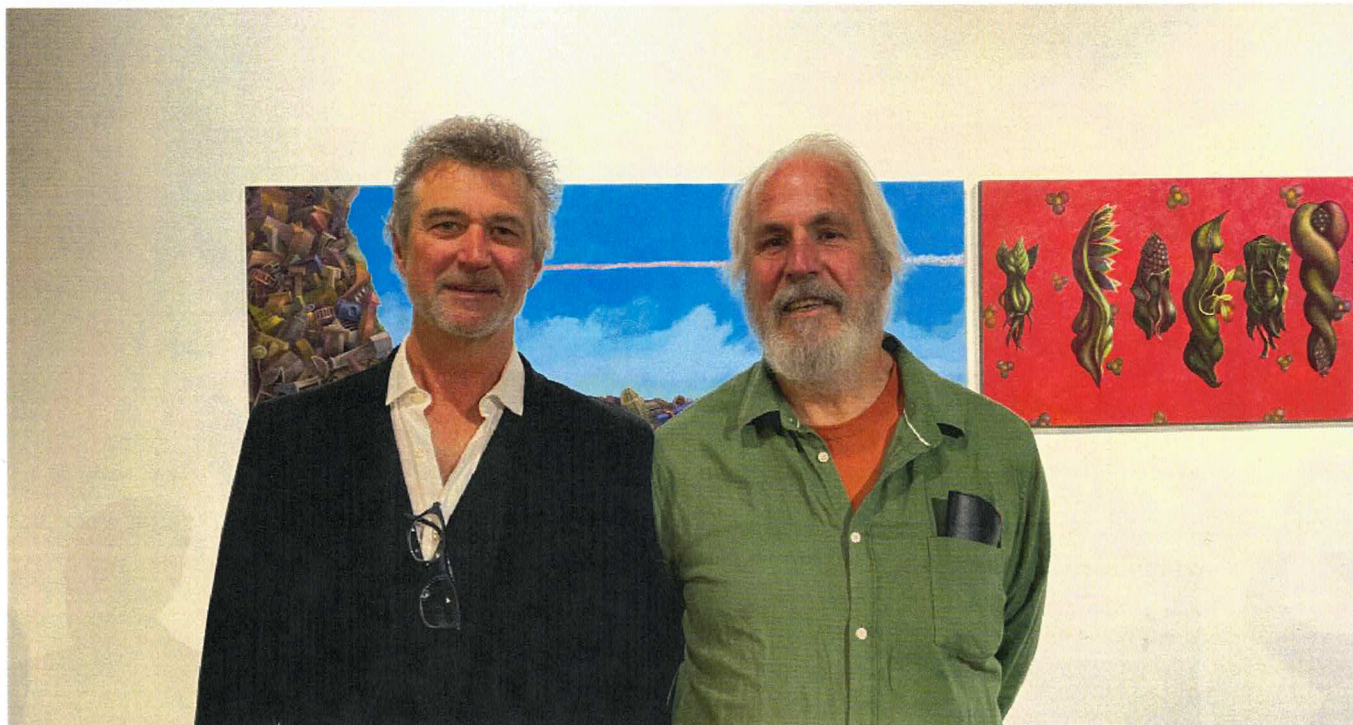
# Diasporae: Stuart Elliott

## The Human Condition: Richard Weller

Holmes à Court Gallery



LAETITIA WILSON



At the end of 2024, as we face ever confronting and unsettling political and environmental realities, it is a privilege to be able to turn to art to find meaning beyond the media barrage. Art can offer an island of respite, as much as insights into the pressing questions of our times. Such an experience is made manifest in the current exhibitions at the Holmes à Court Gallery @ no.10; *Diasporae* by Stuart Elliott and *The Human Condition* by Richard Weller.

Both exhibitions are engaged with the darker aspects of humanity and our past and present treatment of, and actions on, this planet. Elliott, a well-established WA artist, makes sculptural, painting and video works. The artworks are an investigation of the theme of diasporae in its various guises, of both human and non-human. His works resonate with an aesthetic of urban excess, ruin and decay. They are about human displacement and also hint at human hubris – how grand visions of industrialisation and progress are eventually reduced to rubble, or contain the now futile meanings and functions of a past era. These are ideas which have captivated Elliott for a long time, as he writes: “As a kid I built many totally fictional, abandoned or depopulated urban centres. They were built in the walls of redundant clay, gravel and sand pits using just water and a pocketknife. I would myself abandon them returning later to study the ruined ruins. This was long before art school, long before discovering the art of Charles Simonds, James Turrell, Tim Storrier, Ric Amor et al.”<sup>1</sup>

While Elliott's exquisitely crafted, rich in narrative and

◆ Richard Weller and Stuart Elliott at Holmes à Court Gallery in West Perth exhibiting with *The Human Condition* and *Diasporae* respectively. Photo Lyn DiCiero.

layered with meaning installations look to the past, they also fold in present concerns. They blend surreal fiction with known reality and invite non-linear interpretation and speculation. They ask questions of the viewer rather than provide answers.

Wagon or railway carriage like forms referred to as *Tritainors* contain ‘undeclared cargo’ and speak of the diasporae of refugees, looters or migrants. Skip bins full of studio detritus that has passed through the Elliott vision, point to the excess stuff that makes a parallel journey to the diaspora of humans.

There are works that also tackle questions concerning the collusion/collision of church and state and the problems of environmental degradation, waste and political ineptitude. Nature is never far removed from these urban structures, peeking through in selective detail and more boldly through the large surreal curvilinear forms in one of his paintings titled *Involuntary Harvest*.

Richard Weller's artworks, by association, dovetail thematically with the art of Elliott in their concern with the human condition in relation to the non-human. Weller presents a series of 48 small works of ink, acrylic paint and collage. They each take an animal as their subject matter and title. The animals find themselves in various allegorical, symbolic and surreal configurations.





The story begins with the microbe, that tiny entity which has such huge implications for life on Earth. From there, the painting subjects progress through the animal kingdom, selectively, featuring creatures large and small. Each animal is placed within a cultural, symbolic, historical or very present real context. A baby wombat, for example, is curled within a hole underground, taking shelter from a bushfire above. This is a commentary on Australia's 'Black Summer' and the devastating impact on native fauna.

Many of the works engage in environmental statements, where animals are the victims of such impacts. Some of the works direct us to consider the human in place of the animal. The orangutan, for example, uses a cardboard box to shelter from the gaze of onlookers; this recalls people living on the streets with make-shift structures as privacy shelters.

Other works compel us to consider humanity's treatment of animals – such as the pangolin who is gaffer taped ready for illegal trade, or the rat splayed on a board ready for dissection. Weller questions the relationship between human and animal, between culture and nature and in doing so engages in a deliberate anthro-

◆ *Stardust*, 2023, wood, steel and paint, 155 x 80 x 52cm, by Stuart Elliott



◆ A selection from *The Human Condition*, by Richard Weller.

poromorphism, stating: "I decided not to try to transcend anthropomorphism as if it were false consciousness. Instead, I have tried to map its various guises, emphasising how it implicates humans and non-humans in what is now a *denatured* world."<sup>2</sup>

This is the world in which the image of an animal is more commonly the way people experience that animal, removed from the real animal. Existence for humans concentrated in urban centres is largely denatured and it is harder and harder to find areas of nature unspoilt by human activity. Weller's paintings work towards countering this and at the least forging empathy with, if not showing greater care toward, the other lifeforms we share this place with.

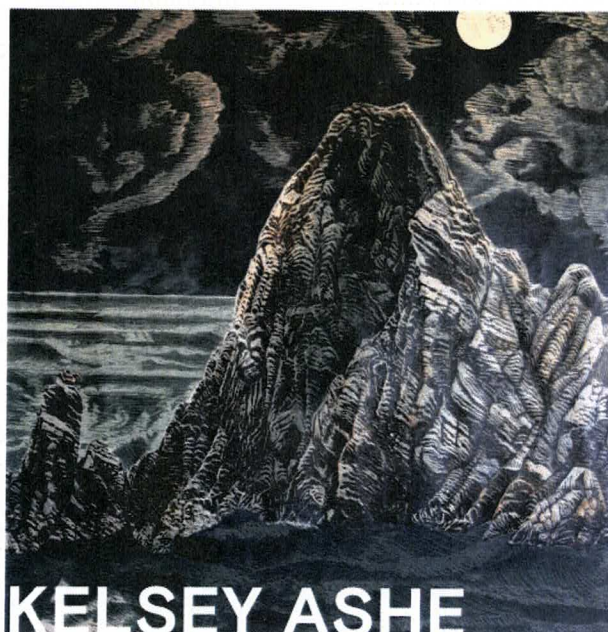
Both Elliott and Weller point to the precariousness of existence on Earth. They do not offer solutions to the myriad challenges, but rather philosophise on the seemingly inevitable trajectory toward extinction. Elliott's works do not omit hope, however, for it peeks through in his representation of nature amidst the detritus and urban structures. Weller's final painting, however, is a black canvas bifurcated by a strip of emergency/hazard tape. It is titled *Extinction*.

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence with Stuart Elliott, 2023.  
<sup>2</sup> Correspondence with Richard Weller, 2024.

*The Human Condition* by Richard Weller and *Diasporae* by Stuart Elliott continue at Holmes à Court Gallery until 14 December.



BUNBURY  
REGIONAL  
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