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. Courtesy: Utopia Art Sydney.

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15 May 2015

Utopia Art Sydney's ceramics exhibition *Clay 2* included two names likely to be not necessarily as artists: curator Glenn Barkley and Olsen Irwin

work was good. Barkley's work was a playful take on traditional silhouettes but rewarding decision to exhibit a number of small vessels as a highlight on artists who have other lives in the art world – and there are the competing demands on their time.

sources of income to support themselves. And it's no surprise that they put their arts knowledge and expertise into a formal, salaried position in the gallery, as writers or gallery staff, for example. But because they're also artists, they can face different challenges and arguably aren't as visible as they

For Wright, the choice to downplay their art practice in the public realm. The late Wilton was a successful and wide-ranging career as a writer, curator and educator, later opening his own exhibition space in Sydney. Yet as his partner, the artist Hilarie Mais, explains, he was "a private painter by choice, and only in the last decade started exhibiting again after a 40-year break. This, he felt, allowed a purity of independence for his continuing enquiry... keeping close to his truest intentions."

"Wright's work has been described as 'uncompromising, abstract, characteristically monochrome and moody,'" she adds. "He was fascinated by the theories of light and colour, used as a way to explore the phenomena of visual perception. His later works grew from an accumulated understanding drawn from an academic life that provided a rich perception of the poetry, politics and history of modernity that shape contemporary life."

Other artists, however, have long exhibition histories on their CVs, like Christopher Hodges. He runs Utopia Art Sydney but says being a gallery director happened more by chance than by plan. He started selling artworks by his friends as a favour (John R Walker was the first – they still work together) and when the opportunity came up to sell works by women from Utopia he took that on too. Gradually he realised he had a talent for it. But the decision to open his own gallery was largely motivated by the difficulty he faced finding a likeminded dealer to represent him as an artist.

Hodges is a painter and sculptor who held his first exhibition in 1978 and more recently has begun to concentrate increasingly on sculpture. He says he relies heavily on his team at the gallery, who can talk objectively about his work with clients so that he doesn't have to. Beyond the gallery walls, managing his profile as an artist can be more difficult.

"The relationship that you have with curators is an interesting one," he says. "My job [as Utopia's director] is basically to get those curators to pay attention to the artists of the gallery. Some people I have a very friendly relationship with. Other people, it's professional, so sometimes I have to push a little to make them think about the artists I represent. So they see me as that guy... I don't think I've been terribly disadvantaged but I definitely have been categorised as the gallery person."

Perth-based artist Douglas Sheerer took a similar route, opening Galerie Düsseldorf with his wife Magda in 1976. He has been exhibiting his artwork for more than 30 years and was also a lecturer

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at Curtin University School of Art for over a decade. He says Magda's involvement in Galerie Düsseldorf has been invaluable, allowing him to spend time on research and studio practice when he's needed to. There have still been challenges, though.

"Being a professional within the arts sector and trying to stay intensely focused as an artist is not easy," Sheerer says. "It requires great tenacity and most importantly a positive belief in oneself and one's ongoing research."

For the past two years he has been working on a series based on close, first-hand observations of the sun. "As an object in space, its form, its light projection and its visual effects are there to be studied on a constantly changing basis. I find this intriguing and challenging," he says. The results are minimal and beautifully coloured images of the sun's corona.

But commercial gallery shows aren't necessarily for everyone. Curator and writer Daniel Mudie Cunningham says he exhibits his art in non-commercial spaces to avoid any perception of conflict with his role as Artbank assistant director and head curator. It's a respectful choice that still gives him room to show and maintain a profile as an artist.

In one of his best known video works, *Dog eat dog*, 2013, he wears a dog costume and chews his way through a pile of hot dogs. Whether you call it a take on the circle of life or a dog-eat-dog art world, it is darkly funny. His video work *Oh Industry*, 2009, is in the dLux MediaArts exhibition *Scanlines*, which tours the country until 2017, and he is preparing for a show at the Australian Centre for Photography about the 10th anniversary of the Cronulla riots.

Others are finding exhibition opportunities through university. Regular *Art Guide Australia* contributor Tracey Clement has had her art writing published in *Art & Australia*, *Australian Art Collector* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, among others, but her first passion is sculpture and she is currently working on a new installation as part of her PhD studies at the Sydney College of the Arts. She is interested in the end of the world, particularly the idea that climate change might be the new Cold War. The installation, featuring towers of salt capped with fragile steel forms rusting away to nothingness, will be part of a group exhibition titled *Mapping the Drowned World* at the art school from 8 to 31 October.

"In many ways, being a freelance writer is the perfect part-time job for an artist going to art school," she says. "I'm spending more time on my art practice than I have been able to in years... It was a different story when I had to work a day job in addition to my freelance writing; then the art always seemed to be the thing that had to give when time was tight."

Yet Clement, like Hodges, finds her reputation in the art world can be mixed. "Frankly, if I'm known at all it's more likely to be for my writing than for my art practice. This means that... gallerists, curators and magazine editors don't tend to think of me as an artist," she says. "But the upside is I can get them to at least take my calls!"



Glenn Barkley, *An experimental bed in the puddle of creativity*, 2014–15. Courtesy: Utopia Art Sydney.



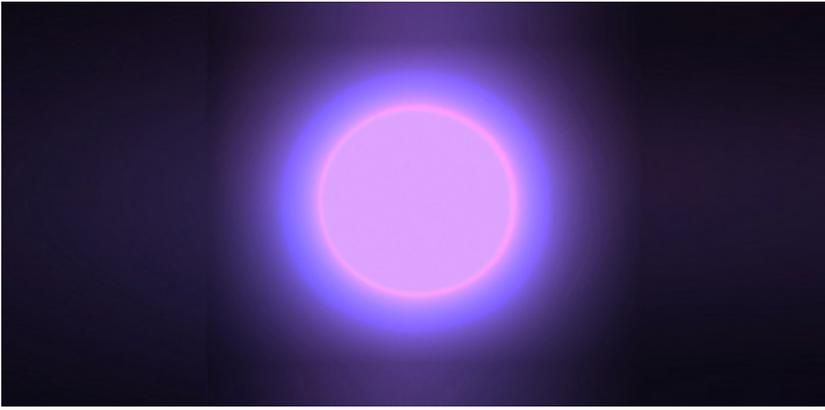
Daniel Mudie Cunningham, *Dog Eat Dog*, 2013, HD single channel video, 2:59 min. Production still: Catherine White. Courtesy of the artist.



Daniel Mudie Cunningham, *Oh Industry*, 2009, HD single channel video, 4:11 min. Courtesy of the artist.



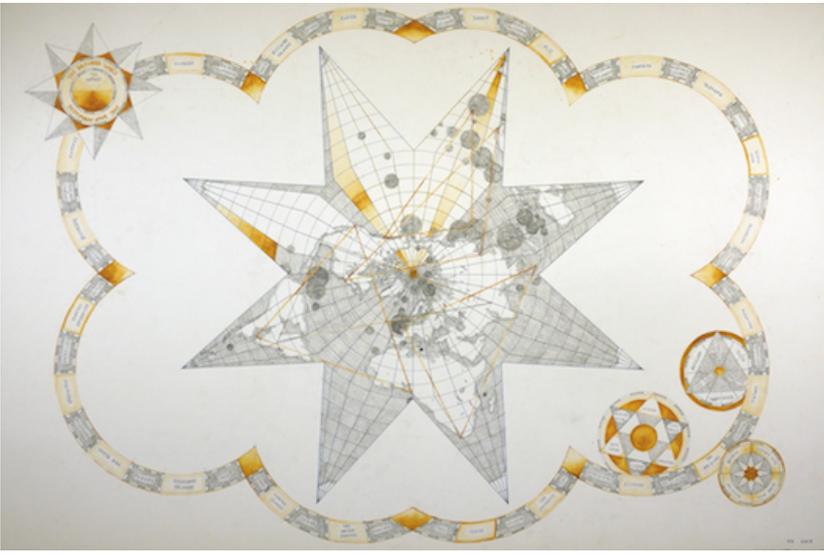
William Wright, *Earth*, 1966, oil on canvas. Photo by John Bloomfield.



Douglas Sheerer, *Pink Corona into Blues*, 2014, electrostatic transfer on acid free white coated polyester film, acid free adherence onto galvabond steel sheet, 330 x 162.5 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth.



Tracey Clement, *The Drowned World* (work in progress), 2015, salt, rusty steel, cotton, dimensions variable, maximum height 190 cm. Photo: Isobel Markus Dunworth.



Tracey Clement, *Critical Cartography: Peterrmann Star*, 2014, pencil and rust on paper, 80 x 121 cm.



Glenn Barkley, *Golden Pilgrin Flask with small Plateau*, 2015.



Brett Stone, *untitled 5 piece stack*, 2014, clay.



Christopher Hodges, installation view from his exhibition *Balance* at Utopia Art Sydney in 2014. Courtesy: Utopia Art Sydney.



Christopher Hodges, *the white flower*, 2009, painted steel, 250 x 250 x 125 cm.

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