



# De-Extincting the Utopian

Troy Emery has become the master artist of the pom-pom animal.

That may sound glorifyingly niche, but it is the outcome of over a decade's worth of constant output, exhibitions at commercial galleries, artist-run initiatives and major institutions, acquisitive prizes and residencies, and the enviable enjoyment of being on the waiting lists of collectors.

Of course, 'pom-pom' is merely convenient shorthand. Emery works with tassels and fabrics of all kinds to create a taxidermy Animalia with imaginary pelts: a recolonisation of the gaze of the colonial museum, via the aesthetic of the acid trip or a Kandinsky, even, an untrapping of the animal (and the eye) from routine seeing.

A graduate of the Sydney College of the Arts in 2009, he has laboured consistently ever since, developing a distinctive worldview into a veritable one-artist cottage industry. Every pom-pom is glued on by hand; an essential and happily impractical task that draws parallels to felting and knitting and has found him an audience and camaraderie in the world of craft. Biographically speaking, though, it was art that offered Troy a utopian exit; as with many people who grow up in a small town, he found he could use his talents to forge a path in the wide, urban world.

Yet there is a still further, broader, question of utopianism, waiting for us in the wings of his work.

A decade since he made his first coincidence of pom-poms and a high-density taxidermist mould ('Wild Thing', 2008), he has released hundreds into the world, of every size and colour. If we look beyond his seemingly endless proliferation of animals as something more than the simple fulfilment of an elite collectors' market (a too-easy dismissal of art under the current system of alienated commodity fetishism that derogates the distance between, say, an Hermès handbag or luxury sofa and our encounter with the incalculable), we can apprehend Emery's extraordinary body of work as a total project, not just as so many repetitions of the same material thing but a set of demands or affordances that challenge the ceaseless and mechanised craft-labour of pseudo-differentiation, and the direction of (the system of) history itself.

Signalled by titles that reveal the artist's interchangeability of the messianic and the science-fictional, this unfinished oeuvre is not only a model of disalienation but also, to borrow from Fredric Jameson, 'a visionary act which allows the Utopian imagination

# TROY EMERY Y WILD LIFE



front cover - birthday cake 50 x 45 x 33 cm, clockwise from top left - big rainbow cat 88 x 101 x 48 cm, the golden fleece 41 x 48 x 21 cm, lilac layabout 26 x 68 x 43 cm, second lump 52 x 66 x 37 cm, late night binge 57 x 90 x 40 cm, polyester, polyurethane, staples, pins, adhesive, 2018.



to break through' (2009, p.49)... for to somehow reverse the world we have ruined, to attempt to undo the mass extinction of animals and their habitats destroyed by modernity, industrialism and neoliberal ideology, would this not be a project worth participating in today: one geared towards a future better than the present, a future that we might actually, collectively wish to live to see?

Emery's improvisatory, freeing, rampantly-psychedelic works offer no total blueprint for a better society, a world at peace with nature, but in the tradition of the enlightenment and the avant-garde they demand that we first think ourselves into - and then invent ways out of - our present catastrophes, where complacency and passivity are mere identifications with the status quo, and where we must now 'make it new', following Ezra Pound, after the wars against nature that curtail our contexts. Here we can transform in relation to the conditions we ourselves brought about; not to suggest that we can ever go back but that we might mutate and find a way forward: that we might not look the same - in the future, in the mirror of the non-human animal - that we might be unrecognisably different. That a path can be cleared, to draw us away from our future of relentless extinctions.

This is not a form of biological revivalism à la Jurassic Park or Dolly the Sheep but the cultural revision of the industrial form, the dystopian impulse that has - everywhere else - dominated how we fail to imagine the future of life on our planet. Contrary to the ubiquitous and ideological entertainment of contemporary remakes and robotic reboots (and as noted by our era's great narrator of off-world colonies, Kim Stanley Robinson), this is the 'truth that hurts' - we live on a planet without a sequel.

Emery's immense menagerie of imagined animals (only a fraction of which can be seen in this Dark Mofu exhibit) thereby populate a parallel universe offering up critiques of our current order's wilful annihilation of diversity, our bad-faith policy of 'profit now and pay later'. It is like the child who cannot imagine any world in which they do not always live... paradoxically brought into focus by an artist who laughingly refuses to act as anything but a child; who experiments: who plays, falls over, and learns to play better.

The plot of the next decade of Troy Emery's work lies 'in the nexus of uncertainty' (to quote the title of one of his recent pieces) but it seems a fair guess that his imaginary animals will continue to expand in dialectical opposition to the shrinking of actually-existing species and habitats in the Anthropocene. To be sure, art alone never saves the world, but we must cease to bother to imagine the future if we refuse to de-extinct the utopian impulse, to see and think it all differently.

2018  
C.B. Johnson is the author of *Modernity Without a Project: Essay on the Void Called Contemporary* (New York, 2015).  
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- Troy Emery 1981
- 2009 Masters of Visual Art in Sculpture, Performance and Installation, University of Sydney
- 2005 Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) in Sculpture, University of Tasmania.
- Selected Solo Exhibitions**
- 2017 Withdrawn, MARS Gallery, Melbourne.
- 2014 Missions, Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- 2014 Troy Emery: into the wild, Peter Tucker Gallery, Townsville.
- From Far Away, CAPART Victoria gallery, Melbourne.
- Hermes Art Window Project, Hermes Elizabeth at store, Sydney and Hermes Collins at store, Melbourne.
- 2013 Paradise, Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- 2012 Making Friends, Gould Galleries, Melbourne.
- Wild Things, Jewish Regional Art Gallery, Ipswich.
- 2011 Dangerous Company, New Sculpture by Troy Emery, Kings Art, Melbourne.
- Wildthings, Metrion Arts Gallery, Brisbane.
- 2010 Menagerie, Fristradt Gallery, Sydney.
- 2010 Wild Things / New Sculptures, Iain Dawson Gallery, Sydney.
- 2008 The Aesthetics of Nature History, Fristradt Gallery, Sydney.
- Selected Group Exhibitions**
- 2018 The Bayside Acquisitive Art Prize Gallery at Bayside Arts and Cultural Centre, Brighton.
- Autumn Exhibition, Sinter tactile, Penrith Regional Gallery & the Lowers Bequest, Penrith.
- Neon Summer, Glasshouse Regional Gallery, Port Macquarie.
- 2017 Animal Kingdom, The Johnston Collection, Melbourne.
- 2016 TROY EMERY / UP20 SRINIVASA I, RAMESH NITHYENDRAN, Nicolas Projects, Melbourne.
- 2016 OFE 620, Binsidie Gallery, Melbourne.
- MBC at Art Stage Singapore 2016, Marina Bay Sands exhibition centre, Singapore.
- 2015 Fantastic words contemporary Australian Sculpture, Rockhampton Art Gallery, Rockhampton.
- Fertile Ground - Exhibition of 2014 Artists in Residence, The Australian Tapestry Workshop, Melbourne.
- MBC at Art Central Hong Kong art fair 2015, Central Harbourfront, Hong Kong.
- 2014 CURTAIN CALL - THE ROUGH END OF THE PINEAPPLE, Binsidie Gallery, Melbourne.
- Seventh Sun, Hatch Contemporary Arts Space, Melbourne.
- It is what it is: beyond the debate, Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, Windsor.
- 2013 Woolahra Small Sculpture Prize, Woolahra Council Chambers, Sydney.
- It is what it is: beyond the debate, Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, Windsor.
- 2012 McClelland Sculpture Survey and Award, McClelland Gallery and Sculpture park, Langwarrin.
- Public Collections:**
- National Gallery of Victoria.
- City of Townsville Art Collection.
- Deakin University Art Collection.
- Arthunk Australia Collection.
- Goulburn Regional Art Gallery Permanent Collection.
- Awards, Prizes and Residencies:**
- The Bayside Acquisitive Art Prize 2018 - Finalist.
- Gendochi artist in residence prize 2015 - Finalist.
- Fisher's Ghost Art Award 2014 - Finalist.
- Australian Council for the Arts Tokyo residency 2014.
- Australia Council for the Arts, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.
- Hill End artist in residence 2014, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.
- The Woolahra Small Sculpture Prize 2013 - Finalist.
- Linden Postcard Show 2012 - postcard winner, work selected to be produced as promotional postcard.
- McClelland Sculpture Survey and Award 2012 - Finalist.
- Sandra Bardas Studio Grant 2012 - 2013 - Recipient.
- Troy Emery is an artist based in Melbourne and has an art practice encompassing sculpture, painting, drawing and embroidery. Troy spent his youth in the regional city of Devonport in south east Queensland but relocated to Hobart, Tasmania to attend art school. He graduated from a Bachelor of Fine Art (BFA) at the Hobart School of Art, University of Tasmania in 2005. Troy then completed a Masters of Fine Art at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney in 2010.
- Troy's work is held in various private and public collections, including the National Gallery of Victoria Art Bank, Australia Collection, City of Townsville Art Collection, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery Collection, and Deakin University Art Collection. Troy Emery is represented by Martin Browne Contemporary in Sydney, NSW.