

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

A black and white photograph of a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a large rock. The texture is grainy and uneven. In the lower right corner, there is a lighter, rectangular area that appears to be a different material or a shadow. The overall tone is dark and moody.

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, Billy Bain, Daniel Boyd, Shannon Boyd, Blak Douglas, Troy Emery, Lyndal Irons , Claudia Nicholson, Jason Phu & Maja Baska, Anna Louise Richardson, Kate Rohde, Osselan Tupai Scanlan, Regina Walter, Christopher Whiticker & Linda Brescia

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

PENRITH REGIONAL GALLERY

09 Nov 2024–16 Feb 2025



Jason Phu & Maja Baska, *MAKE THE PANTHER YOU WANT TO SEE*, 2024

When does a story become a myth? Is it the importance of the message, or the way in which it is told and retold, remembered and repeated over generations? What then, do we make of the myth of the elusive Penrith panther, a mythology that is protean in nature, shifting shape and meaning as the communities of Penrith and our environment change too. And why, in an age of pervasive photography, fact-finding and debunking does this mythology prevail - in fact thrive?

Spot the Difference brings together sixteen artists from Penrith and across Australia to give credence to this local lore and explore the possibility it holds for communities old and new. Like many myths, the panther seems to evade simple interpretation, but rather exists as a vehicle to relay and reflect the values and beliefs imbued upon it – values of resilience, survival, visibility and representation. The exhibition establishes the polar opinions of ‘fact’ or ‘fiction’ to then suggest a third alternative, that the panther and the mythology surrounding it do exist, if only in our collective imagination.

Dhungatti artist Blak Douglas presents *The original Blak Panther* (2024), the title referencing the historic Black Panther political organisations of both the United States and Australia. The Black Panthers adopted the icon as a symbol of strength and determination, which became synonymous with civil rights movements across the globe from the 1960s. In this work, the (original) panther is allied with Pemulwuy, a Bidjigal warrior known for his resistance warfare and guerilla tactics implemented to repel British forces during First Contact. Douglas frames both the panther and Pemulwuy as fierce and feared figures, contrasting the two to ask audiences to consider who we revere in our society and why.

But what does it mean to be from an area, or more specifically from *this* area? Billy Bain’s *From the Area* (2024) marks a new development in the artist’s practice as an exploration of his Indigeneity in the context of his ancestral Dharug Land, in contrast to his adopted home of Gayamay/Manly. Bain’s familial connection to Dharug Country was unbroken until the 1920s when the native Indigenous protection act stripped his forebears of their land. This dispossession, or unsettling, forced Bain’s family to Gayamay Country in Manly, leaving the artist to find himself as an outsider in his own land, needing to adapt – here as a masked figure, who both does and does not belong. *From the Area* invokes the panther as a metaphor for the artist as a Dharug man difficult to spot in plain sight, camouflaging in the shadows but remaining resolute, strong and ever-present.

For other artists, the panther symbolises the ongoing impacts of colonisation through a reading of the panther as an introduced species in unfamiliar land. Anna Louise Richardson’s *On The Hunt* (2017) originated from the artist’s experiences as a sixth generation European to live and work on a 3000-acre farm in Western Australia, and

her research into the existence of ‘phantom cats’ in the region. These sightings, documented or anecdotal, are captured with the same technique of charcoal on cement fibreboard, and with each different image the artist seems to reinscribe the lore of the cat within our national psyche. Richardson reveals how our relationship to place is filtered through layers of history, storytelling and imagination.

But surely not all of these sightings are mythical creatures. Abdul-Rahman Abdullah reminds us that all mythology has its origins in the real world. Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Abdullah is interested in the individual and collective memory that is embedded in familiar and familial experiences. *Big Cat* presents to us a domesticated black cat in a moment of rest, perhaps even dreaming. Using a reductive sculptural technique, *Big Cat* seems to emerge from within its own material, reminding us of the innate capacity of art to transform utilitarian materials into objects of majesty.

The slippage between the fantastical and the real, I would argue, is one of the tenets that art shares closely with sport. Sport – like art – occupies a space of spectacle, wonder and collective experience. Regina Walter has long been interested in the spectacle we associate with



Billy Bain, *From the Area*, 2024

sport. Her collection of works for *Spot the Difference* flourish in the realm of speculation, asking us to imagine an alternative reality where the on-field theatrics of the Penrith Panthers are transposed directly into the real world. Her work amplifies the spectacle of the game, making it larger than life, and in doing so has the effect of shifting our perception of the world around us.

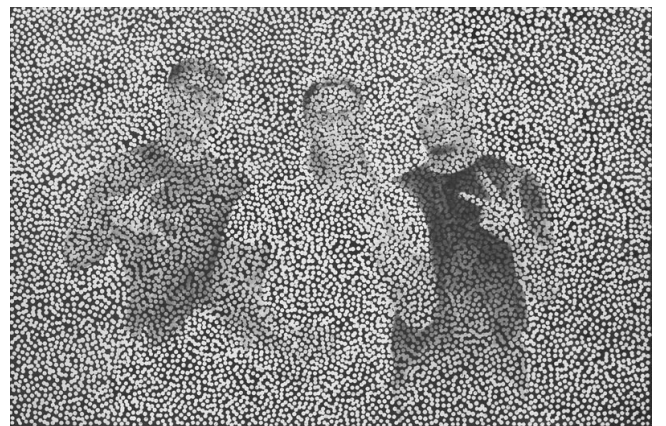
Artists Shannon Boyd and Christopher Whiticker, respectively, glean us an insight into their worlds from the perspective of the local. Boyd is an acclaimed muralist whose subjects include sporting, cultural and civic icons including Jessica Fox, Pat Cummins, Uncle Wes Marn and of course, the Panthers. With this mural, Boyd literally brings the energy and community spirit of Penrith into the gallery space. And this new context provides a platform for us to reflect on the reverberating, powerful impact of the lore for locals. In his work, the panther is a protective figure, for individuals and community alike.

Christopher Whiticker is a member of No Boundaries, an independently run disability art group that has been working out of Penrith Regional Gallery since 2021. Upon arriving at the Gallery, Chris’ artistic talent and love of the Panthers was clear. For *Spot the Difference*, Chris was invited to create an artwork that would make real his larger-than-life passions. *Winner* provides an insight into Chris’ world, where the football field is a symbolic space for his creativity to run wild, and a space that can grow, expand and evolve to reflect our changing community.

Indeed, Penrith is a place that is growing in size and diversity every year. It is home to one of the largest First Nations populations in Australia, as well as one of the most culturally diverse communities. And that diversity is

reflected in the Panthers Football Club, with many players and staff from diverse backgrounds, including from the Pacific community of Western Sydney.

Osselan Tupai Scanlan – otherwise known as Ozzy ‘FTA’ – is a St Marys designer, entrepreneur and community leader. Ozzy’s work spans from graphic designed t-shirts to Oztag uniforms, all of which are underpinned by a commitment to supporting and uplifting Pacific voices. *The Area Picasso* is an archive of Ozzy’s celebratory t-shirt designs from the last five years. Scanning his installation, one can see shirts commemorating milestone games and achievements, but also moments of importance for his community – Last Ride, 3PEAT and of course, *Spot the Difference*. These designs assert the positive impact that the Pacific community of Western Sydney has had not just on the Penrith Panthers, but across the National Rugby League.



Daniel Boyd, *Untitled (AAO)*, 2022

Daniel Boyd continues the conversation of visibility and representation, with his portrait *Untitled (AAO)*. The artist’s subject is OneFour, a Drill rap group lauded for their impact on the cultural landscape of Australia. The artwork was originally submitted to the 2022 Archibald Prize, which many consider to be the most highly regarded art prize in Australia. The criteria for the Archibald is simple; paint a person(s) ‘of note’ from contemporary Australian society. Boyd’s subject choice then, can be read as social and political commentary, to represent members of the Pacific community that are underrepresented in terms of cultural voice, and overrepresented in the criminal justice system. OneFour’s brash and honest lyrics inspired by their lived experience in Western Sydney expose the realities of people who have been economically excluded and socially marginalised, but who nonetheless have claimed a rightful spot within the cultural zeitgeist, against all odds.

So. The Panther. Fact or fiction? Is there a difference? This exhibition can only report on what has been presented for it, a mythology that is both universal and yet deeply entrenched in the local psyche. A mythology that is steadfast in its presence within the community, yet impossible to pin down. One that speaks to ideas of visibility and representation, of hiding in plain sight. And one that continues to live in the people, places and lore of Penrith. Perhaps the only difference is how the panther appears in our minds.

Public Programs

Official Opening Event:
Friday 15 November 2024–6-8pm

Artist Floor Talks:
Saturday 16 November 2024–10am-12pm

Open Days:
Saturday 14 December 2024–10am-2pm
Saturday 18 January 2025–10am-2pm

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