

#BUSHFIRE BRANDALISM

THIS RESOURCE was developed for school students when viewing #BUSHFIRE BRANDALISM and UNPREPARABLE at the Gallery or online. It provides context and questions when looking at these artworks, explores the intentions of the artists and how these artworks may be positioned within the continuum of artmaking.



SAVE AN AUSSIE ICON
#BUSHFIREBRANDALISM



Image: *Caramello Dodo*,
Kirsten Browning 2019
poster



Image: *Abandoned* Fiona Lee (detail) 2021
dimensions variable, epoxy resin, house ash,
remnants of clothing, pegs, washing line, wood

UNPREPARABLE

FIONA LEE

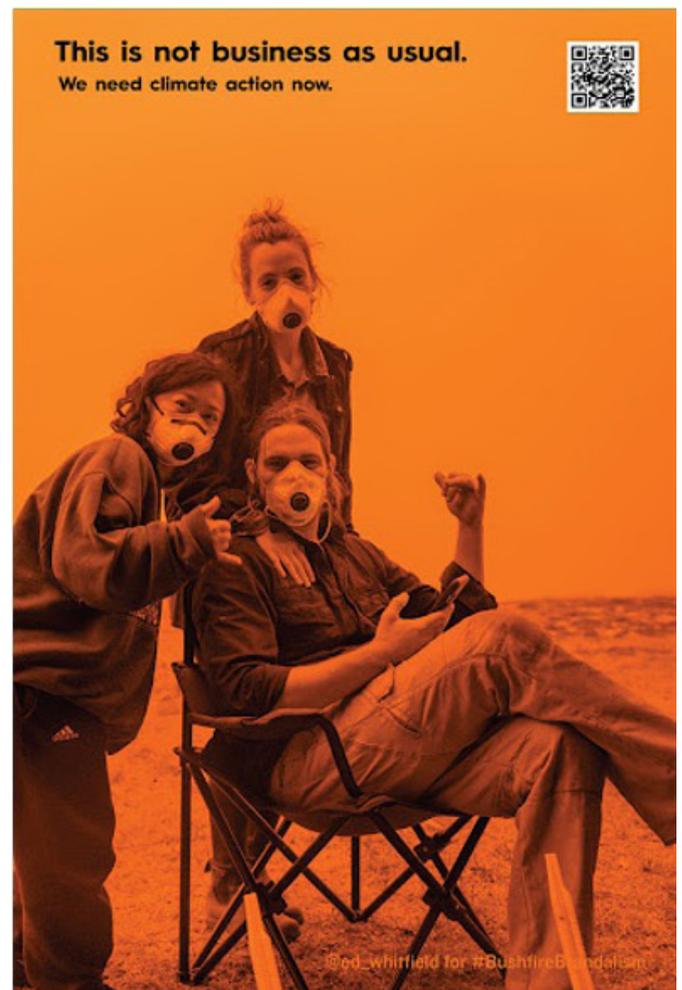
ABOUT THE EXHIBITIONS

#BUSHFIRE BRANDALISM

14 of the 41 artworks exhibited at Maitland Regional Art Gallery.

Artists: Amok Island, David Booth (Ghostpatrol), Thomas Bell, Kirsten Browning, Tom Civil, DVATE, The Lazy Edwin, Tom Gerrard (AEON), Dani Hair, HEESCO, Sarah McCloskey, Fintan Magee, Cel Out, Ed Whitfield

On a weekend in February 2020, 41 artists took to the streets across three Australian cities for the nation's largest unsanctioned art campaign *#BushfireBrandalism*. Speaking to the climate crisis, drought and bushfires, this undertaking was a direct reaction to the feelings of powerlessness experienced by the artists during the catastrophic bushfires of 2019/2020. This exhibition presents a number of these works and highlights the longstanding interest of artists as champions of the environment using their creative energy to affect change, raise awareness and disrupt the methods of traditional media. 14 of the 41 posters created for *#Bushfire Brandalism* were exhibited at the Gallery.



Some People Spent New Year's Eve Like This Ed Whitfield 2019 poster

UNPREPARABLE

Fiona Lee

This exhibition is a very direct personal response to environmental emergency. In the catastrophic bushfires of 2019, artist Fiona Lee lost her home and studio on Biripi Country outside Taree. This loss now drives her, like many artists to contribute to debate, affect change and give voice to environmental issues. While dealing with the immediate impact of losing her home, political and public commentary emerged that this was not the time to talk of climate change. The response from artists was swift.

I felt silenced by politicians. I had to call out these comments. There is a clear link between the bushfires and a heating planet and I've used the evidence of the climate crisis, the scorched remnants of my home, to communicate this.

Fiona Lee



*Now is not the time to talk about climate change (detail) Fiona Lee 2021
recovered chain saw blade, acrylic paint, recovered objects*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

#BUSHFIRE BRANDALISM

Georgia Hill

Originally my concern for the environment was more of a personal viewpoint, not something I anticipated bringing into my body of work. However, as I often work in the public domain painting murals and connecting with different communities, it is almost impossible to ignore the changing context that exists around all of us as we live day by day. I have always cared deeply for the environment and our climate and feel very lucky that my work can communicate the positive action that needs to take place.

I was invited to submit a poster design through a group conversation about the bushfires, climate inaction, and general frustrations many of us were feeling in late January of 2020. I was due to travel for a short residency, so managed to spare 15 minutes to handpaint an existing street poster that the team had on hand.

This is the first time I've been involved in a Brandalism campaign. I used to be quite cautious about being too 'preachy' with my artwork, but as I have grown up and my works mature, it is hard to ignore these incredible platforms to connect directly to the public - especially when the government thoroughly ignores these issues, and advertising washes many messages for monetary gain rather than real action.

I think artists empower people to connect to issues that may seem too big or too removed from our own circumstances. Ultimately climate change will impact each and every one of us, and we are beginning to see both the small and large scale consequences of inaction. We are being shown by our leaders that policy and change will only happen when we ask for it, and artists are key in uniting varied audiences that can then collectively demand change.

Georgia Hill 2021

Georgia Hill, originally from Maitland, is an Australian artist and muralist, specialising in type based artworks and installations. See more of her work at <http://www.georgiahill.com.au/> which includes *You can come back* currently on the front side entrance wall to Maitland Regional Art Gallery.



Act Now Georgia Hill 2020 acrylic paint, found poster
photography Selina Miles

ABOUT THE ARTIST

UNPREPARABLE

Fiona Lee

My work is a raw and unapologetic response to the tragic event of losing my home to bushfires in 2019. I aim to put people in my shoes so that they can understand what it is like to be impacted by climate change, bushfires and drought whilst also listening to climate scientists. One can only draw the obvious conclusion that climate change was a driver of the fires and we need to reduce CO2 emissions immediately to have any chance of a safe climate future. I want there to be a relatable experience and face to climate change as it is often very abstract and far away but survivors like myself know it's not. I hope viewers are moved and shocked at what they see in my exhibition.

There has been a thematic thread of shelter throughout my practice for a long time. I've explored the notion of place in relation to shelter and my place within the world in many different mediums over these years. Unfortunately it seems a logical and cruel progression that I am now making work out of the remnants of my burned down house. In both activism and art I have looked at basic human needs, shelter being one. When my own shelter was taken away from me so abruptly I found myself re-building it in the studio, a process which was simultaneously both confronting and therapeutic. Ultimately, I hope that my work can help others to grasp the existential threat of a heating world more fully and inspire action – as art can often say what words cannot.

Fiona Lee 2021

Fiona Lee currently lives and works in Muloobinba/ Newcastle. She was awarded the 2021 Bushfire Artist Residency at the Creator Incubator, Newcastle and is a recipient of the 2021 Maitland Regional Art Gallery Members Bursary.



Dystopian Era (detail) Fiona Lee, 2020 posters, wheat paste, burnt and recovered items, repurposed shower caddy and head, house ash, fly ash, charcoal, cement, tiles 241 x 1200 x 150cm

THINK ABOUT:

HOW THESE ARTISTS:

- respond to the world in which they live
- demonstrate their connection to the environment
- record and reflect their own concerns in their artworks
- interrupt, disrupt or challenge media and advertising

NOTICE:

- how their artworks were made
- what the materials were that they used
- the size and scale of their artworks and where they were seen

ARTISTS & THEIR WORLD

Artists make art about their world, their ideas and their feelings.

Artists choose materials and formats that reflect their ideas and beliefs.

Artists often challenge and comment on society, ideas, and values.

Artworks can convey multiple meanings simultaneously.

Artworks can communicate to the viewer about the times in which they were created.



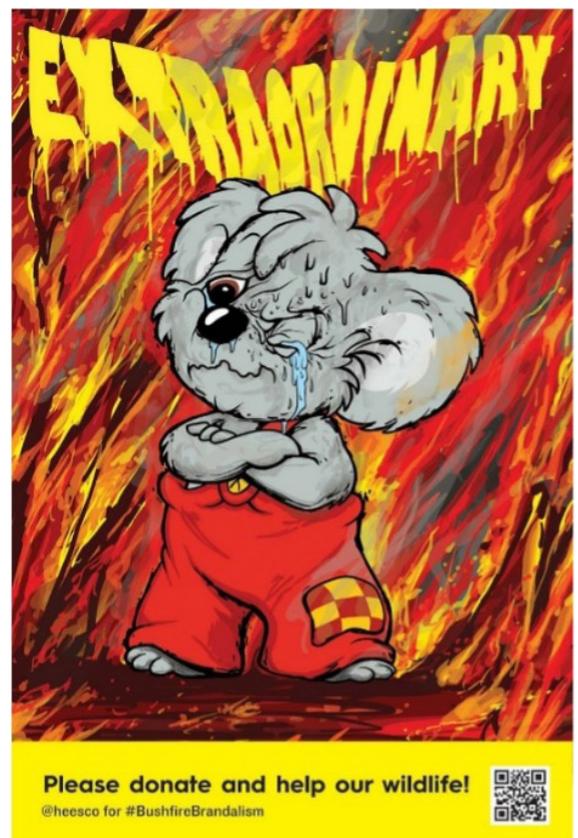
Artists make art about how they respond to their world, whether their world is real, imagined or somewhere in-between.

Artworks – music, writing, dance, drama, sound, performance, visual - reflect the artist's response to their world and how they make sense and meaning of their feelings about it through their own expressive forms.

This means that the content, form and subject of artworks can range from the intensely personal through to public issues of concern - politics, social issues, government policies, chaotic and traumatic events such as wars and sufferings of whole communities - that affect some directly or indirectly.

Today, with world-wide fast forms of communication and connection, contemporary artists and audiences can be in immediate contact with events and phenomena from the local to the global.

Images: top left *Bucket of Ash* Fiona Lee 2019, right *Extraordinary (extinction)* HEESCO poster 2019



CONSIDER THESE ARTISTS AND THEIR ARTWORKS FROM THE PAST:

Guernica 1937 Pablo Picasso
oil on canvas 349.3 cm (h) x 776.6 cm (w)



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted *Guernica* in May 1937 after listening to the radio reports of the Nazi German bombing of the small village of Guernica in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. Picasso, a Spaniard, was living in Paris when he heard that this small village of mainly women, children and old people was bombed relentlessly; the village was of no strategic value in the war and this was one of the first examples of saturation bombing. Picasso immediately stopped his other artwork and started to paint this painting which is considered one of the strongest anti-war statements of all time.

Image source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/spain/articles/guernica-painting-basque-town-defied-its-past/>

LOOK at the size of the work ...
WHY do you think Picasso chose black, white and grey tones only?
CAN you hear anything when you look at this work?



10 Trashy Ideas about the Environment 1994
 Guerilla Girls
 29.21(h) x 22.86(w) cm, printed plastic bag

Guerilla Girls are an anonymous group of female artists formed in New York in 1985 to comment on issues of race and gender through public artworks that include posters, billboards and performances. The artists wear gorilla masks in public and are named after deceased female artists, explaining that it is the issues that they are highlighting that are important, not themselves as individuals.

10 Trashy Ideas on the Environment was printed onto plastic carrier bags combining the notion of artistic expression with the waste produced by consumer culture and all the impacts on the environment; the 'trashy' ideas on the bag at once ironic and humorous. By distributing the artwork on a readily accessible and cheap item the public user is challenged to think on the intrinsic value of the everyday object and how it may convey meaning.

CAN an artwork teach the viewer?
CAN a plastic bag be an artwork?
HOW can you tell if something is an artwork?

Image source:





Wrapped Coast 1969 Christo and Jeanne-Claude
28 October–14 December 1969 installation,
90,000 square metres of erosion control fabric,
56.3 kilometres of rope

Christo and his partner Jeanne-Claude's first public artwork was *Iron Curtain – Wall of Oil Barrels, Rue Visconti, Paris 1961–62* when they filled a Paris lane with wine barrels as their comment on a wall built to separate East and West Berlin in 1962. In 1969 following an invitation from John Kaldor they came to Sydney to create their first land based wrapped work, resulting in 14 km of wrapped coastline at Little Bay, Sydney. This and all subsequent Christo and Jeanne-Claude works have been funded by the artists and sited in freely accessible places. By temporarily transforming the environment of the public site the artwork invites the viewer to freely experience this transformation and think on their individual experience and the ideas it may provoke. Christo and Jeanne-Claude challenge us to reflect on the familiar and the traditional in many ways.

WHAT is an installation artwork?
HOW does Wrapped Coast make you think
about this bit of coastline?
SHOULD artworks be in a gallery?

Image source: www.panthalassa.org/wrapped-coast-by-christo-jeanne-claude/

FURTHER DISCUSSION AND INFORMATION

BUSHFIRE BRANDALISM posters are now on the Gallery walls, but they were designed for and first seen in poster display hoardings across Australian cities in February 2020.

- Why?
- How do you tell the difference between advertising and art?
- What feelings can you see expressed in these posters?

UNPREPARABLE is Fiona Lee's real-life experience that she has turned into artworks.

- What do Fiona's artworks communicate to you?
- Do you think that one of the roles of art is to express ideas that words can't?
- Can you name an artwork that has influenced or affected what you think?

<http://brandalism.ch/>

<https://mrag.org.au/support-us/mragm-magazine/> Meet an Artist, Spring 2021

<https://artguide.com.au/artists-step-forward-to-support-bushfire-relief/>

<https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/7112556/fiona-lees-emotive-works-rise-from-the-ashes/>

<https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guernica>

<https://www.guerrillagirls.com/>

<https://christojeanneclaude.net/>

<https://kaldorartprojects.org.au/projects/project-1-christo-jeanne-claude/>

MAITLAND REGIONAL ART GALLERY

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MRAG is a proud service of Maitland City Council and is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.

Thanks to Georgia Hill and Fiona Lee.