

# Bad Mannerism

Chris Aerfeldt, Chris Dolman, Lynda Draper, Drew Connor Holland,  
Chelsea Lehmann, Madeleine Preston, Bruce Reynolds.



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Curation, essay, and catalogue entries by Chelsea Lehmann.

Galerie pompom: George and Ron Adams, Samantha Ferris

Installation photography: Docqment



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## Bad Mannerism

*Bad Mannerism* brings together artists of diverse sensibilities, each of whom explores a non-conventional approach to figuration. The theme 'Bad Mannerism' is centred on the potential subversiveness of the Mannerist style, in which artifice and exaggeration are employed as strategies to playfully critique 'virtuosity', especially in relation to idealisations of the body and the objects it encounters. This coalesces with the common understanding of mannerisms as idiosyncratic human gestures or foibles—good, 'bad' or otherwise. A sly pun is also set in motion by the allusion to ill-considered social comportment, or a lack of politesse, suggesting artworks may be unapologetic in what they propose—in their unashamed ambiguity, performativity, or curious materiality. The Mannerist approach reflects a tendency amongst various artistic traditions to eschew naturalism in favour of the affective impact of 'eccentric figuration.'<sup>i</sup>

The exhibition references the art historical context of Mannerism, a 16th Century style that reacted to the aesthetic apotheosis of the High Renaissance by deploying stylistic devices such as collapsed perspective, irrational settings, elongated forms and precariously balanced poses. The freedom of invention and heightened emotional pitch of Mannerist works indicated a reorientation of the role of the artist as a resourceful and independent thinker, unburdened by the cultural supremacy of the High Renaissance and its artistic and social orthodoxies. Other characteristics common to Mannerist works include distortion of the human figure, a flattening of pictorial space, and elaborate decoration. A number of these attributes were maintained in the successive period of Baroque art, which also featured such characteristics as high drama and implied movement — qualities that are present in many of the artworks in *Bad Mannerism*.

The idea of 'bella maniera' (beautiful style), associated with the Mannerists' appropriative strategies and their divestment of naturalism, is central to the aesthetic and conceptual intention of the exhibition. Bella maniera was theorised as an approach that employed the best from a number of sources, synthesizing it into something new. This is a familiar paradigm in the 21st Century where an atemporal or anachronic perspective frames art historical time as a vast 'internet' of artificial designations in which tradition is an un-concluded agenda, rather than a series of ruins, or something that has been stabilised once and for all. Many of the artists in *Bad Mannerism* quote art historical images, objects or techniques and reanimate these sources with concerns from the present.

The Mannerist sensibility resembles Susan Sontag's ideas on camp where the world might be seen 'not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylisation.'<sup>ii</sup> It celebrates the eccentric and the performative by openly exemplifying the constructs and conceits that visual art deploys to bring attention to both itself and the object of artistic application. While Mannerism has also been framed pejoratively—hence the not unwelcome connotation of 'wrongness', pastiche or anti-climax—the artwork in this exhibition shows how the 'mannered' and the authentic are not mutually exclusive. This perspective acknowledges that humour can already reside in the serious, 'reality' in the artificial, and doubt in what might appear outwardly certain.

Chelsea Lehmann, 2018

<sup>i</sup> 'Eccentric figuration' is a term that has gained currency in recent years, and was largely informed by the 1978 exhibition *Bad Painting* at the New Museum, New York. The curator of the exhibition (and the museum's director at the time) Marcia Tucker, said of the exhibition, "'Bad" Painting is an ironic title for 'good' painting, which is characterized by deformation of the figure, a mixture of art-historical and non-art sources, and fantastic and irreverent content.' The term also appears in the catalogue essay for *Eccentric Figuration: The Painting in NY Group* (Jennifer Samet, *Painting in New York*, exh. cat. 2011), and, Eds. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit, *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age: Gesture and Spectacle, Eccentric Figuration, Social Networks*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', *Against Interpretation*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964.

Chris Aerfeldt's paintings in *Bad Mannerism* employ the appropriative tactics of the Mannerists and their peculiar stylisation of figures, embodied in the mannequins she has painted into scenes imported from Seurat's famous paintings of the Seine in Paris. Aerfeldt states, 'I was fascinated with *La Grande Jatte* when I discovered it at the age of nine in our family encyclopaedia and dared to cut it out for my scrapbook'. She particularly identified with the idea of social performance and aspirational lifestyle that Seurat so cleverly highlighted by contrasting societal groups on opposite sides of the river – the affluent bourgeoisie of *La Grande Jatte*, and the working class of *Bathers at Asnières*. Aerfeldt points to the artificiality of social pretences and distinctions by dubbing the plastic dummies that inhabit these painted scenes *Siri*, *Alexa*, and *Cortana*, names given to the ubiquitous and disembodied voices we call our 'virtual assistants' today.

Right: Chris Aerfeldt

*Hey Siri, Alexa, Cortana! Let's play Game of Thrones (after Seurat)*

2018

oil on linen

170 x 120 cm

Photo: Docqment



In Chris Dolman's artworks, practically everything and everyone is non-conformist, from the body fashioned from negative space in *Incognito sans pants*, to the 'bad-mannered' characters of *Too Many Chefs* and *After Party*. In the spirit of a Hogarth etching, Dolman's characters jostle each other for room to smoke, drink and eat (and, one assumes, cough, belch and fart) within the confines of pictorial space. Their medieval irreverence and comic extensions (and excretions) push Mannerist exaggeration to new extremes. In Dolman's hands the stylisation of caricature becomes a metaphor for the tragicomic moments of day-to-day life. These scenarios are depicted with the kind of tongue-in-cheek humour that references both the absurd and the emotive registers of human pathos.

Right: Chris Dolman

*After Party*

2018

oil on canvas, acrylic on timber and MDF

100 x 115 cm

Photo: Docqment



Lynda Draper's ceramic works in *Bad Mannerism* combine the monumental with the playful. As objects, they suggest both 'body' and 'world' in their looping skeletons of pinched clay adorned with various protrusions. Draper's artworks have been described as possessing a certain 'economy of touch'\* evident in the sensitive consideration of colour and distribution of shape, yet they are also exuberant manifestations of invention and process. In the work *Spring*, the Janus-like head appears to sprout tentative forms that resemble flora and fungi, while *Black Widow's* improbable anatomy is more imposing, though this is offset by her spidery pink crown and delicately formed embellishments. Draper's objects invite an empathic response from the viewer elicited by their tenderly moulded anthropomorphism and a sense of tactility that indexes both the artist's hand and imagination.

\*Lynda Draper: Why I Create', Phaidon, <http://au.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2018/january/08/lynda-draper-why-i-create/>. Accessed 24/4/2018.

Right: Lynda Draper

*Spring*

2018

hand built ceramic, various glazes

70 x 40 x 40 cm

Photo: Peter Morgan



Drew Connor Holland creates images of the virtual body and embeds them into the fabric of hand-made pulp paper, an unexpected meeting of fluid avatar and the intractably physical detritus of everyday life: penalty notices, wrappers, business cards, dried native flora, schedules, etc. These existential aggregates of what Holland describes as 'junk, street trash, and things I can't throw away' are recycled from his life, referencing the way we consume material culture and use it to furnish an ever-transitioning identity. Holland's prints employ the mannerist tropes of distortion and exaggeration that are familiar features of the virtual body. Through the inherent artifice of these devices, he shows how traditional understandings of bodies and identities can be expanded and traversed in the context of technology, and re-materialised on surfaces amassed from the by-products of existence.

Right: Drew Connor Holland

*Figure (bring me home)*

2018

solvent transfer of screenshot on handmade paper containing pulped notes, warranties, packaging, business cards, Cruiser boxes, dried bouquet of Australian native flora, inkjet prints, wrappers, watercolour paintings, schedules, art ideas, workbooks, sketches, catalogues, Anthony Albanese junk mail, NSW ambulance debt notice, synthetic polymer paint

84 x 58 cm

Photo courtesy the artist



Chelsea Lehmann's paintings are influenced by mannerist affectation and the grandiosity of the baroque figure. In *The Snake (after Cagnacci)*, Cleopatra is unleashed on the future with unbridled, heroic force, playing on the idea of the 'hallucinatory relationship between past and present'\*, considered a key hallmark of the Baroque period. In this painting, based on Guido Cagnacci's *Death of Cleopatra*, the performativity of the Baroque is envisaged through the brushstroke, exemplifying the uncontrolled excesses of form and expression common to both mannerist and baroque sensibilities. Lehmann responds to Cagnacci's painting by deploying Baroque painting's conceits to underscore the very artifice of imagining/imaging the bodies and fates of women through the male gaze, showing how these representations might become less fixed and less stable through 'excessive' gestures.

\*I. Lavin, 'Why Baroque' in *Going for Baroque: Eighteen Contemporary Artists Fascinated with the Baroque and Rococo*, exh. cat., eds. L.G. Corrin & J. Spicer, The Contemporary and The Walters museums, Baltimore, MD, 1995, p. 5.

Right: Chelsea Lehmann

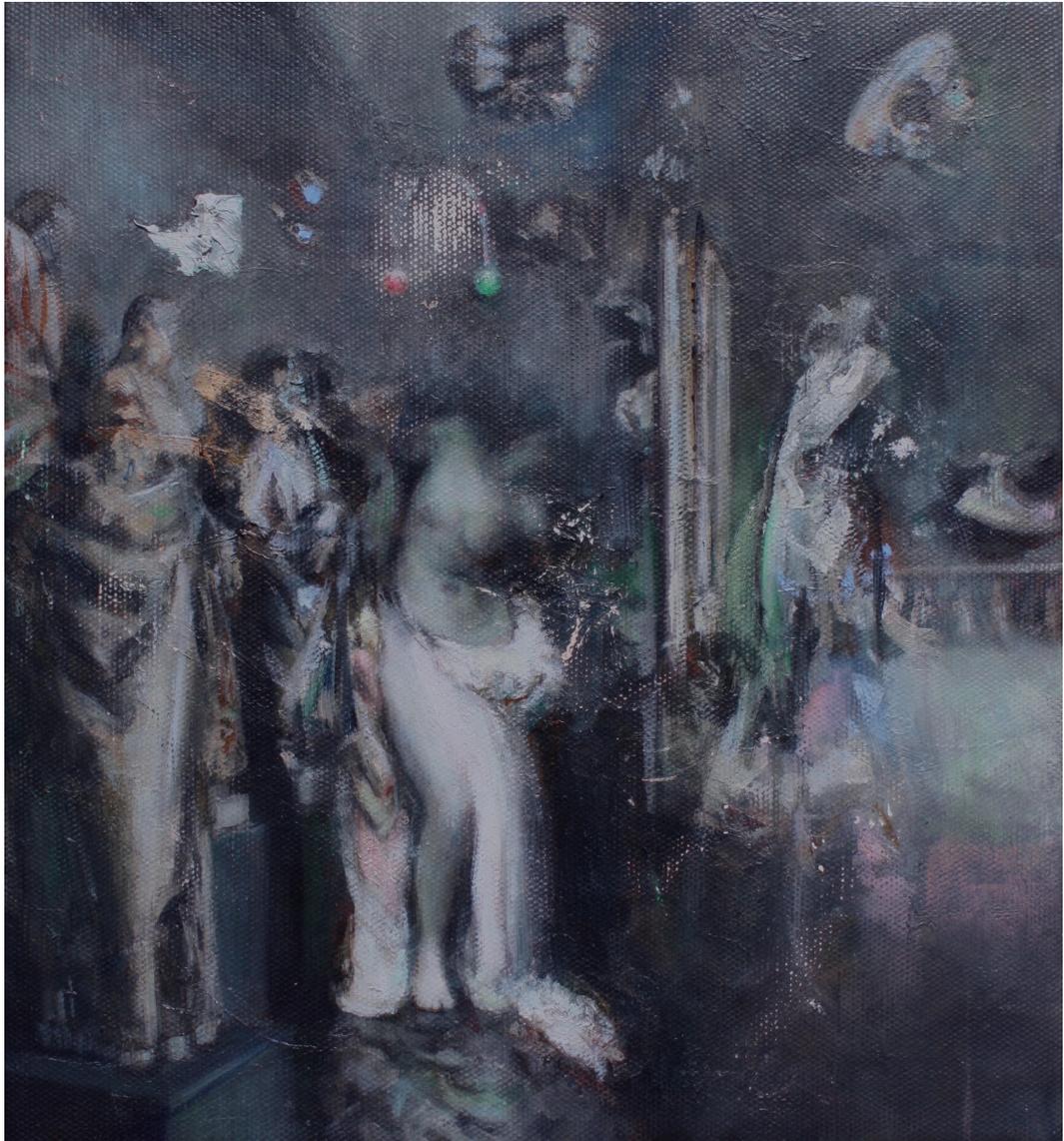
*Magna*

2017

oil on linen

29 x 26.5 cm

Photo courtesy the artist



Madeleine Preston's objects reference the body through the archetype of the 'vessel'. Her work in *Bad Mannerism* is based on the unusual and frequently elongated forms of medieval glassware housed in the Cluny museum in Paris, which holds a remarkable collection of objects from the Middle Ages. Preston explores these delicate and deteriorated receptacles and the curious functionality of glasses with precariously round bases, speculating on their possible role in religious practices, or to impede over-imbibing, (or perhaps the opposite – to encourage drinking). Reaching far back into the archives of human civilisation, Preston responds to these artfully conceived vessels by reimagining their materiality and context, alluding to tensions between necessity and luxury, utility and artifice.

Right: Madeleine Preston

*Intolerable Leisure (Vessel)*

2018

copper, felt, glazed ceramic and wood

dimensions variable

Photo: Docqment



Bruce Reynolds re-envisions the Baroque personage and the decorative tendencies of mannerist architecture through the provisional material of plaster. In these wall-based objects, the ancientness of the casting process and the gravitas of the artefact are re-framed through material improvisation. In *Man of Letters*, chunks of carefully cast and carved plaster are fitted together to construct an intellectual 'type' whose facial features have been replaced with marine motifs rendered in the relief style. These forms resemble aquatic marvels like the Australian yabby, as well as patterns from Chinese ceramics, in an unlikely coupling of East and West. In contrast, *Coronet Sconce* emphasises the tactility and rudimentary qualities of plaster as a counterpoint to the frequently ornate tendencies of these lighting fixtures. Both works point to the potential of cultural, material and geographical combinations and the treasure seeking of the transhistorical gaze.

Right: Bruce Reynolds

*Man of Letters*

2014

Hydrocal, pigment, wood, metal

86 x 60 x 18 cm

Photo: Docqment



## Artist Biographies

Chris Aerfeldt, who currently lives in France and shows primarily in London, is an artist whose large-scale paintings draw on influences as diverse as baroque painting and contemporary fashion images, wryly juxtaposing mythology and modernity, the photo-real and surreal. Aerfeldt's composites present playful alternatives to the current political and economic doom and gloom with resourceful, larger than life women transforming objects into tongue-in-cheek solutions to highlight the futility of more serious strategies being proposed. A past winner of the Anne and Gordon Samstag Visual Arts Scholarship, Aerfeldt's work has attracted the attention of international collectors and curators including Charles Saatchi, David Roberts, and Robert Devereux, and is held in the collections of The University of the Arts, London; Artbank, and The Art Gallery of South Australia. Aerfeldt also represented Australia at the 2010 G20 World Artists Festival. <https://www.chrisaerfeldt.com/>

Chris Dolman's practice uses the formalist tropes of Modernism with incongruent and self-deprecating humour. Moving across painting, printmaking, sculpture, and video, Dolman draws on the histories of Surrealism, and the Comic grotesque, employing non-traditional self-portraiture to explore the fragmented self, engaging themes of doubt and failure, and the ironies implicit in contemporary personal and artistic life. Dolman holds an MFA (research) from Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney University, 2016, and a BFA (first class) from the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, 2010, where he was the recipient of the Wallara Travelling Scholarship (2009). He was awarded the 2017 AGNSW Dyason Bequest, and received New Work (early career) and ArtStart grants from the Australia Council for the Arts, and Artist Support from Arts NSW. Dolman has undertaken international residencies at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, and Frans Masereel Centrum, Belgium. He has exhibited internationally at the Auckland Art Fair 2016, and SPVI Turner Gallery Tokyo, and nationally with solo and group shows at Galerie pompom, Alaska Projects, Firstdraft, West Space, Seventh, FELTspace, Wellington St projects, MOP Projects, Casula Powerhouse, Hazelhurst Regional, Hawkesbury Regional, Fontanelle, Anna Pappas, and MARS Gallery. <http://chrisdolman.com/>

Lynda Draper is a visual artist who lives in the Illawarra region of NSW, Australia, and primarily works in the ceramic medium. Lynda has received numerous national and international awards and grants including a 'Skills and Development' grant and two 'New Work' grants from the Australia Council for the Arts. Awards include: Premier Acquisition Award at the 54th International Competition of Contemporary Ceramic Art, held at the International Museum of Ceramics, Faenza, Italy; 16th International Gold Coast Award, Gold Coast Regional Gallery and the sass & bide COFA Art Award held at COFA UNSW. In 2010 she completed a MFA at COFA UNSW with the assistance of a Planex scholarship. Lynda's works are included in significant national and international collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; International Museum of Ceramics, Faenza, Italy; Renwick Alliance Gallery, Smithsonian Institute, Washington; Artbank, Australia; Shepparton Art Museum (SAM), Victoria; FA Grue collection, Italy; Collection of the Dutch Royal Family; Myer Foundation; Campbelltown City Art Gallery; Gold Coast City Art Gallery, University of Wollongong and the IAC Collection, FLICAM Museum, Fuping, China. <http://www.lyndadraper.com/>

Drew Connor Holland's practice creates a material dialogue between digital and physical archives. Influenced by appropriated cultural nostalgias, his work exists as an ahistoric archaeological representation of shared virtual space. It aims to actualise his feelings of dysphoria towards place, queerness, art and history. Holland's work evokes the current instability in western culture, with recurring motifs of cowboys, unicorns and text, often on backgrounds that are washed-out and barely there. Holland has been exhibiting work regularly since 2013. Since graduating from Sydney's National Art School in 2016 his work has been included in several group graduate surveys, including New Talent at Robin Gibson Gallery and HATCHED: National Graduate Survey at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. Holland's first solo exhibition, *So Far Away From Love* was hosted by Alaska Projects, Sydney, in 2017. <http://www.killdrew.com/>

Chelsea Lehmann holds a Bachelor of Visual Art (Hons) from Adelaide Central School of Art (1998) and was a visiting scholar at Glasgow School of Art, Scotland (1999) courtesy of the Ruth Tuck Scholarship. She has an MFA (Research) from the College of Fine Art, UNSW (2007) and is currently a PhD candidate at UNSW Art & Design, supported by the Australian Postgraduate Award. Lehmann has been the recipient of several awards, grants and local and International residencies and has exhibited widely in Australia and internationally. Her current work focuses on retrieving layers of images within the painted surface through scientific imaging techniques such as x-ray and infrared, and physical erasure. Her aim is to highlight relations between layers of material, between material and image, and between technology and image production. In related research Lehmann explores iconoclasm as a secular, creative act by examining its historical, political, and semiological domains in relation to painting. <https://www.chelseajlehmann.com/>

Madeleine Preston's work includes oil paintings, installation, and three-dimensional pieces. The creation of the work is generally informed by the content. Her recent work has focused on the past and how we choose to remember and how we choose to forget. Recent exhibitions include *Bookmarked* at STILLS Gallery, *Glazed and Confused* at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, Gertrude Contemporary's annual Octopus series *Octopus 13: On this day alone*, and *Over Under Sideways Down* at Manly Gallery curated by Glenn Barkley. In 2016 Madeleine was awarded the Moya Dyring studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, and was a finalist in the Sulman Prize. In 2017 she was awarded the Special Commendation Prize in the Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize and was a recipient of an Australia Council Career Development Grant. <http://www.madeleinepreston.com.au/>

Bruce Reynolds studied at the ANU School of Art and the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne. Following this he taught at the ANU School of Art in the 1980s and at Queensland College of Art from 1986 to 2017. He has had numerous solo exhibitions in Australia and has participated in many group exhibitions around Australia and in Germany. His work is held in public collections including the National Gallery of Australia, the Queensland Art Gallery, the Museum of Brisbane, Artbank, the High Court, Queensland and the Gold Coast City Art Gallery. <http://brucereynolds.net/>

