



Roger Kemp and the Tennant Creek Brio

Melbourne Art Fair 2022
17.02 - 20.2.2022

Tennant Creek Brio

Courtesy of Nyinkka Nyunyu Art
and Culture Centre



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FOREWORD

Desert Waves – Apparr Manu Ngara (Story from the Country)

by Dr Erica Izett

Melbourne Art Fair 2022 and Chapman & Bailey Gallery.

[As a fledgling artist Fabian Brown was first mentored by his brother] I kept growing, growing, sketching. Doing a bit of art, maybe for a hotel - but other times not for selling, for my grandfather...body painting. ... Now I do contemporary paintings. Gotta look forward, look forward to what you're doing, gotta be excited. Contemporary ones, they a bit strange - very different to traditional ones - we are in the middle of it, I'm in the middle, the guys are in the middle - between traditional and contemporary." [Private correspondence

Brown, F, McLean, L. 2021]

Fabian Brown

"This *karti kari* (men's) project that we've got going. That all started maybe two or three years ago. [2016] I was working at the men's centre, Anyingini Health. We were doing this kind of group therapy - social and emotional wellbeing. ... That was how it started, they were doing it for their wellbeing, but it turned out to be a big thing - exhibitions, catalogues, a new art movement and all." [The Brio originated after hours in a backyard studio in 2017 with the main catalysts, Rupert Betheras, Fabian Brown and Joseph Williams]

"One of our motivations for us artists...is to be better represented in galleries and museums, in Captain Cook culture...We collect objects and materials that come from two different worlds, one ...[for example] our spears...hold[ing] traditional histories and values, and the other side of the history is the meat hooks, TVs and pokies. These materials tell stories of two worlds crossing over." [ABC and Art Guide interviews, 2020]

Joseph Williams

The Tennant Creek Brio sprung from the cross-currents of desert culture and tailings dumped by breaching technologies. Paint and artefacts pound on board and tech debris alike. New dreams alchemise. These interference patterns have gifted their practice a signature creole of eclectic motifs and archetypes. Their new poetic sings and exorcises wounds of displacement, casting pulp-fiction and truth-telling out into the world.

Rebel, revel and remedy could be a catch cry of the collective. Art happens in the meeting of these forces like a cross-fire wave. Underbelly friction forces up crests and collaboration builds momentum. The collective is unconstrained by the usual conventions of desert art. Members power their outsider edge with artist-diplomats from both worlds (cultural and digital) propelling the spin of cross-fertilisation. They surf their audience on the high of their brio, and the works both lash and embrace in the backwash.

At the heart of the collective's drive is the synergy of relations that asserts strength and healing. They honour connectivity in a way that resists cultural alienation, western tropes of individualism, and stasis. The studio is a place of empowerment, a space for catharsis, brotherhood, and creating waves and dissemination. There the collective bravely declare their stories of living culture from country. Resonant with past and present histories of recognition and revival - theirs is a contemporary rendition, a performance of fierce engagement, owning the cross currents, the joy and pain of belonging.

by Dr Erica Izett
Independent Curator and Project Manager
of the Tennant Creek Brio



Face the Music:
Roger Kemp,
Fabian Brown,
Rupert Betheras
& the Tennant
Creek Brio.

By Lévi McLean

Melbourne Art Fair
2022 and Chapman
& Bailey Gallery.

You gotta face the rhythms
and the harmonies
and the melodies
of the cosmic ages
can't run
can't hide
space age is here to stay
space age is here to stay gotta face the music
- Sun Ra (1)

The Tennant Creek Brio (TCB) speak to us from past, present, and future possibilities. Each artist, like an instrument in an orchestra, lends his voice to the collective's polyphony of rhythms, basslines, harmonies, and harmonic dissonances.

The collective, a formation of different cultural backgrounds from five northern and central desert regions (Warumungu, Warlmanpa, Warlpiri, Kaytetye and Alyawarr) to the south of the continent in Naarm (Melbourne).

The collaborative process is not incidental. One artist sharpened his painting practice for decades unauthorized across public spaces. That is is another form of collaboration in which street artists share in the commons of the public wall: capping, elaborating, and continuously updating what came before. In Tennant Creek, prior to the rise of the collective, a dialogue on masonite boards began taking shape between Fabian Brown and Rupert Betheras. On one end of the country, decades prior in '80s Melbourne, Rupert was painting trains with his elder brothers; towards the other end, on Warlmanpa country in a place called Kantiji, Fabian etched pictures of movie stars, break dancers and other hip-hop icons into the walls of his childhood homes. Fabian was also taught by his older brother, who he watched paint at the single men's quarters in Ali Curung when he was young; while others—Joseph Williams, Jimmy Frank jnr, Marcus Camphoo, Clifford Thompson, Lindsay Nelson, and Simon Wilson—would become like their forebears; artists, song-men, and artefact makers. Like a musical composition evolving over years, their collaborations communicate between the various histories that they pattern and layer.

In a multitude of voices, the TCB relay stories in mythical terms about invasion, industrialisation, alienation, adaptation, and ancestral and cultural power: aspects of modernity captured in a contemporary epic of subversion, war, trauma, class tension, brotherhood, kinship, beauty, and healing.

A system of rites is observed before the TCB's mythical creations are called forth. An outburst of colours, rhythm, abstraction, and fledgling figurations draws from various traditions that echo in the members' everyday lives: the Central Desert, Melbourne's



Face the Music: Roger Kemp, Fabian Brown, Rupert Betheras & the Tennant Creek Brio.

By Lévi McLean

Melbourne Art Fair 2022 and Chapman & Bailey Gallery.

underground, global popular culture, the bush, the boondocks, the theatres, and the streets. Through Rupert, the TCB have claimed aesthetic kinships with a Melbourne cultural scene 2700 kms south of their homelands in the heart of the Barkly region. There is serendipity in being exhibited alongside another mythmaker, Roger Kemp. From a very different background, he was once an outsider of the cultural establishment but is now considered one of Australia's great artistic innovators. It is another chance encounter the TCB will make the most of.

While the TCB draw from a broad church of iconographies, Kemp's mythical lexicon is strictly monotheistic. For him, Christian symbols feature prominently: crucifixion, sacred geometries, and saintly allegories of the natural world. Kemp's abstract symbology is, like that of the TCB, located where the spirit realm manifests in the everyday. "I go out," says Kemp, "the feedback I mean comes from reality, you know, moving about, meeting people. So it's coming in en masse, you know, and it's being computerised."⁽²⁾ Kemp and the TCB share a belief that the relational experience of the everyday is a mystical playground of spiritual forces. Kemp draws from the parables of European liturgy. The TCB draw their tributes from a pantheon of global mythologies. Fabian and Rupert nod as much to Lichtenstein as to comic book subculture in Bigger off! (The Protector...), and the conglomeration of cultural genealogies seeded in the mass-collaborative work, *The One Eyed Man*,—on display at Chapman and Bailey Gallery in Abbotsford.

The One Eyed Man was first displayed in the TCB's breakout exhibition, staged at the 2020 Sydney Biennale, NIRIN. We are the Living History, We are Really Re-enactments of Before the Christ Ancestral Beings. The One Eyed Man reveals the creative process that in large part defines the TCB: hybridised cultural references; collaborative process; and myth making on full display. The One Eyed Man speaks to us from its multiple genealogies and timelines—readymade, conceptual, sculpture, painting, performance, video, traditional, Western, Indigenous. It appears in-between the peripheral regional place of making, and the Australian artworld and traditional Warumungu culture. In effect, The One Eyed Man is a keystone for new paradigms of creative practice: an apparatus for understanding, whereby viewers, artists, curators and cultural institutions emerge as a contingent collective, co-complicit in the act of our becomings.

"Catalogue introductions," said Robert Hughes, "are the No Man's Land of criticism. There should be no need to explain the paintings: they can be left to talk for themselves, more subtly than with words."⁽³⁾ The TCB are not afraid of letters and words nor of the No Man's Land between cultural traditions and life forms. This is where they find the thematic and visual motifs they deploy, speaking in unequivocal terms to a sense of shared humanity and oneness. In Fabian and Rupert's vision of *The Elephant and His Punk Friends From Different Countries*, the title and the imagery give the painting a clear message: as a species, we are accountable not only to one another but also to a vast constellation of terrestrial animals and terra. In a recent conversation with Fabian, he spoke about *The Elephant and His Punk Friends From Different Countries*, stating:



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By Lévi McLean

Melbourne Art Fair 2022 and Chapman & Bailey Gallery.

“[the work is about] the relationship between different kinds of animals, where they’re from, what background. Zebra and horses look the same... like people they are the same.

A family of animals gathering, animals coming together. The ivory and the rhino horns –they are being hunted to extinction but we can look after them. Keep away from them when they’re wild, they might give us a ride when we’re tired. Equal opportunities. Untamed animals are put in a zoo, sometimes for protection; but also, when the wild animals roamed the country, poachers saw big money, big bucks, billions of dollars. I was recycling cans to make money in Tennant Creek between 2008 and 2014. Collecting cans, collecting animals...(4)”

For Kemp too the non-human ranks equally to the human. This is seen in Kemp’s continual return to the bird, a symbol of musicality and the emblem of St Francis, patron saint of animals and the environment. In an interview with James Gleeson, Kemp said: Because my thinking had gotten away so much that it had taken the earth, the aeroplane and metaphysics all into one, you know. I’d used the human form like I do, or rather the birds, the human form, the aeroplane which was another science sort of idea, and try to wrap all those up into one symbol. There is precedent for such chance associations. Sidney Nolan’s acclaimed 1962 opera set for Igor

Stravinsky’s *The Rites of Spring* is remembered for the Arnhem land costume designs that were inspired by Nolan’s time in the Northern Territory⁶. The ballet drew on Russian folk traditions to celebrate the universal idea of rebirth. For Kemp who once trained as an opera singer, opera was the artform that performatively embodied humanity’s aesthetic potential⁷. For the TCB, the allegorical powers of folk mythologies are likewise put to work through abstraction and reconfiguration. The works on display in this show, in which all these memories reverberate, forge new myths from the fragments of the past and press us to reckon with the future, whatever that may be.

Notes

1. Arkestra, S., 1989. *Sun Ra & the Arkestra - Retrospect + Face the Music* [Sunday Night Live]. [Tape] New York City: Broad Way Video

2. Kemp, R., 1978. Roger Kemp interviewed by James Gleeson in National Gallery of Australia collection

3. Hughes, R., 1961. *Recent Australian painting 1961*. London: Whitechapel Gallery, p13

4. Brown, F, McLean, L. Private correspondence, 26 Jan 2021

5. Kemp, R., 1978. Roger Kemp interviewed by James Gleeson in National Gallery of Australia collection

6. Poignant, A., Nolan, S., Wilson, N. and Stravinsky, I., 2007. *Indigenous connections: Sydney Nolan's Rite of Spring*. Sydney, N.S.W.: Art Gallery of New South Wales, p2

7. Marshall, J., 2007. *Embodied Modernism: Visual arts and the aesthetics of Roger Kemp and Rudolf Steiner*. *NGV Art Journal*, 47, pp25-35



Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

*The Elephant and His Punk Friends
From Different Countries, 2021*
Enamel paint and mixed media
on canvas, 181 x 320 cm.
\$20,000



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

Contagious, 2020
Enamel paint and mixed
media on canvas, 136 x 255 cm
\$13,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

Old Man and his Campdog,
Enamel paint and mixed
media on canvas, 136 x 254 cm.
\$13,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras
(with Ce)

Bugger Off (The Protector...) 2021,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on canvas, 188 x 193 cm.
\$13,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

Old Man Pelican Master 2020,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on canvas, 203 x 198 cm.
\$13,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras

Outerweb (Old Jack),
Acrylic on canvas,
180 x 150 cm.
\$12,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

Figures and Eagle,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on canvas, 197 x 180 cm.
\$13,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

The Old Struggler,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on canvas, 188 x 183 cm.
\$13,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

*The Quiet Melbourne Demons
Supporter with His Indigenous
Concubine*, enamel paint and mixed
media on canvas, 203 x 217 cm.
\$13,500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

The Angry Wolf Dragon,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

Human Duckman,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras

Remix 2
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

The Vampire,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

Dino Boss,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

Monstrous Whale Shark,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

Inca Priest
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Clifford Thompson

The Blue Men's
Enamel paint and mixed media
on board, 109 x 109 cm
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras

Untitled,
enamel paint and mixed media
on board 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras

Untitled,
Enamel Paint and mixed media
on board 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

*Ufo-Alien, Seal and a Mystical
Monster*, enamel paint and mixed
media on board, 109 x 109 cm.
\$4,200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras / Fabian Brown

Bob Marley's T-Shirt, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 73 x 43 cm.
\$3,300



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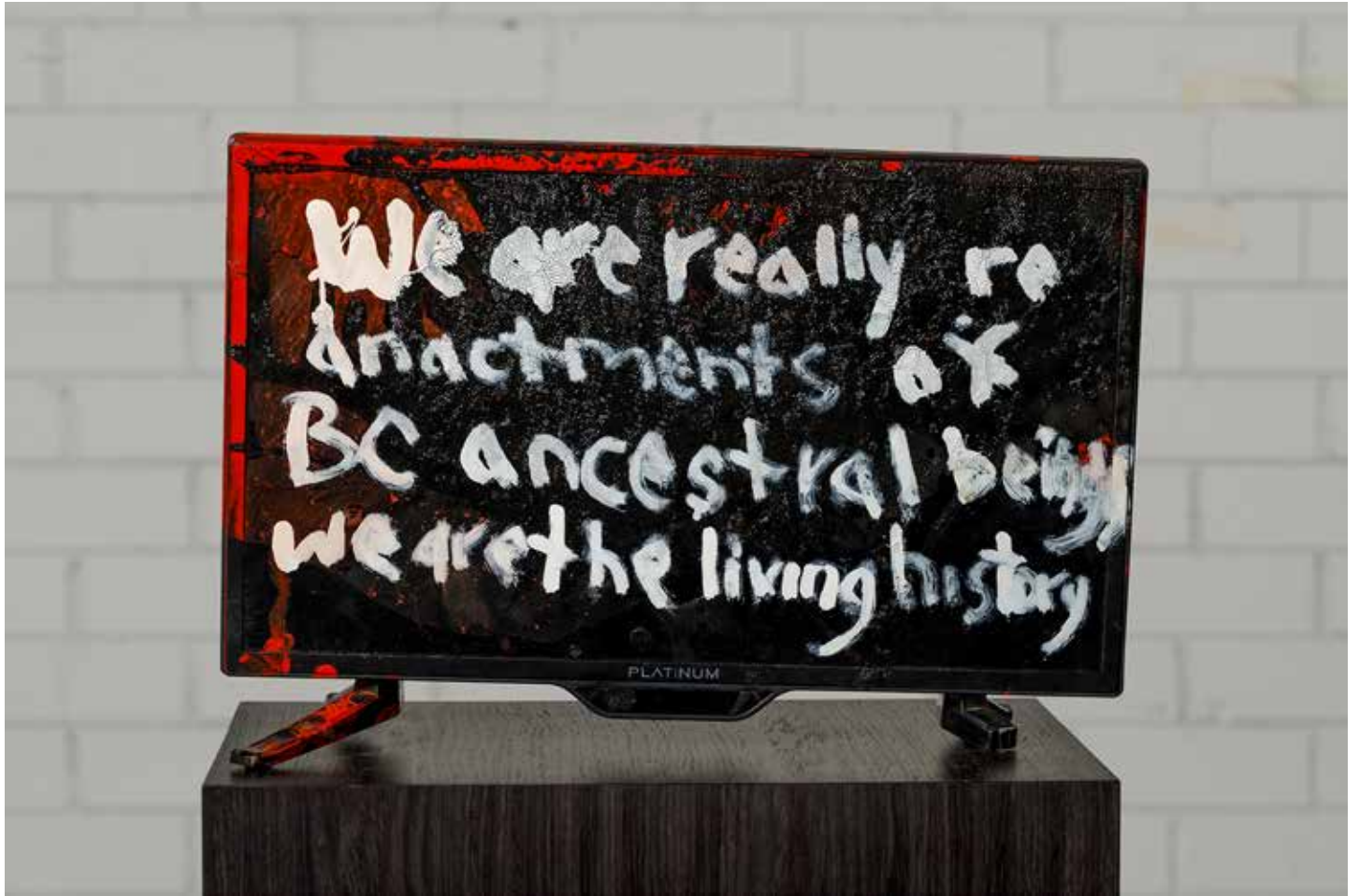


Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

Foreman Wound Series 1 - 14, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 59 x 39 cm.
\$720



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Tennant Creek Brio
Joseph Williams

We Are The Living History, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 29 x 43 cm.
\$1100



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Tennant Creek Brio
Simon Wilson / Rupert Betheras

Wound Series 1 - XXI, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 113 x 67 cm.
\$1080



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras / Simon Wilson

Wound Series 1 - I, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 41 x 45 cm.
\$255



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Tennant Creek Brio
Simon Wilson / Rupert Betheras

Wound Series 1 - XXII, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on canvas, 110 x 63 cm.
\$2200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Simon Wilson

Untitled, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 41 x 56 cm.
\$440



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras

Untitled, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 48 x 74 cm.
\$1080



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras

Wound Series 1 - 6, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 53 x 77 cm.
\$1200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown / Simon Wilson

King of the Roosters, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 112 x 71 cm.
\$3600



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Tennant Creek Brio
Simon Wilson

Cosmos Country Series - III, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 96 x 56 cm
\$1500



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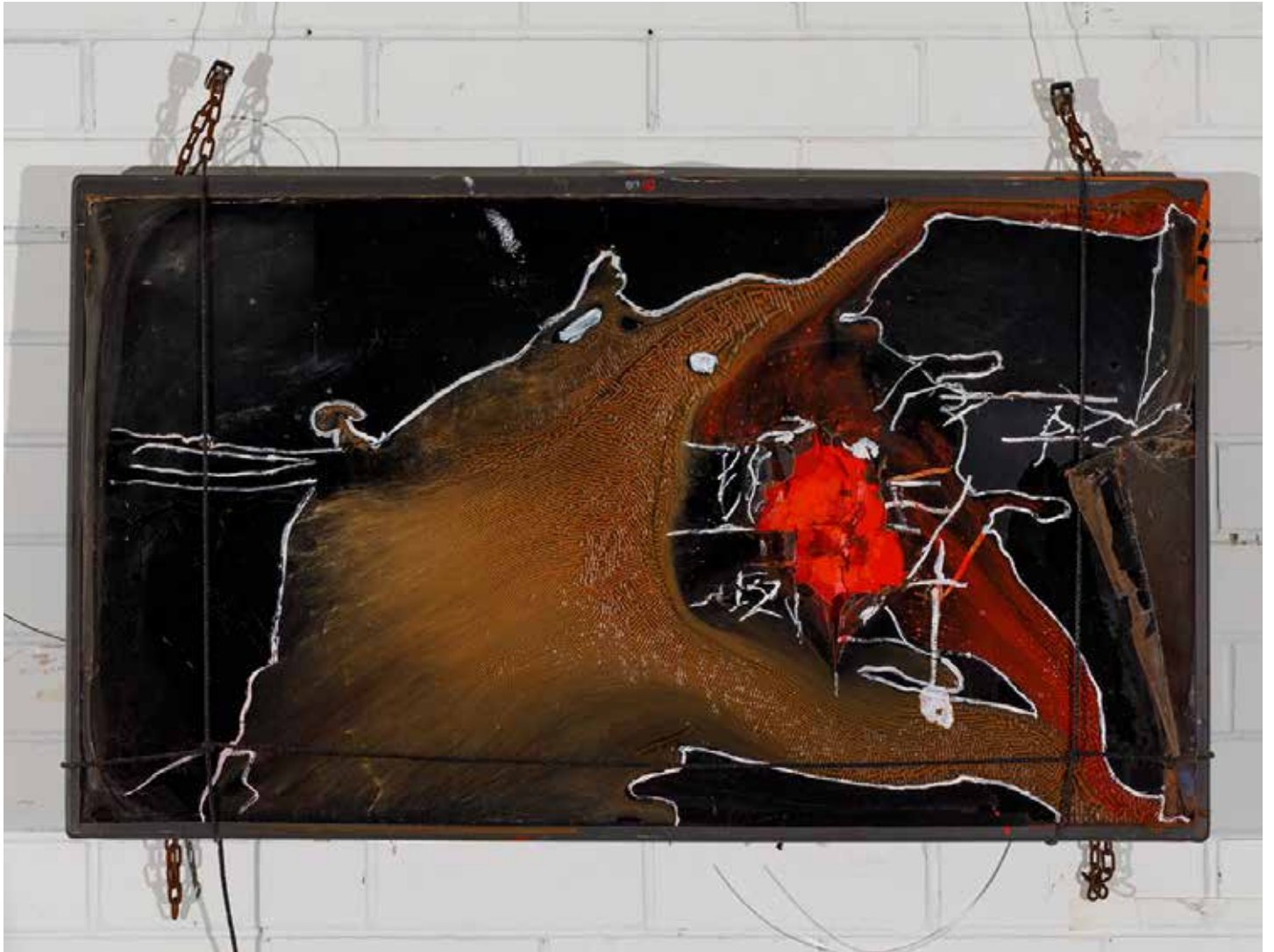


Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

Elder, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 79 x 57 cm
\$1500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Rupert Betheras

Wound Series 1 - 18, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 56 x 97 cm.
\$2200



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Tennant Creek Brio
Simon Wilson

Wound Series 1, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 37 x 53 cm.
\$440



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Tennant Creek Brio
Lindsay Nelson

Wound Series 1 - 10, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 74 x 44 cm.
\$770



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

Wound Series 1 - XV, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 65 x 112 cm.
\$2160



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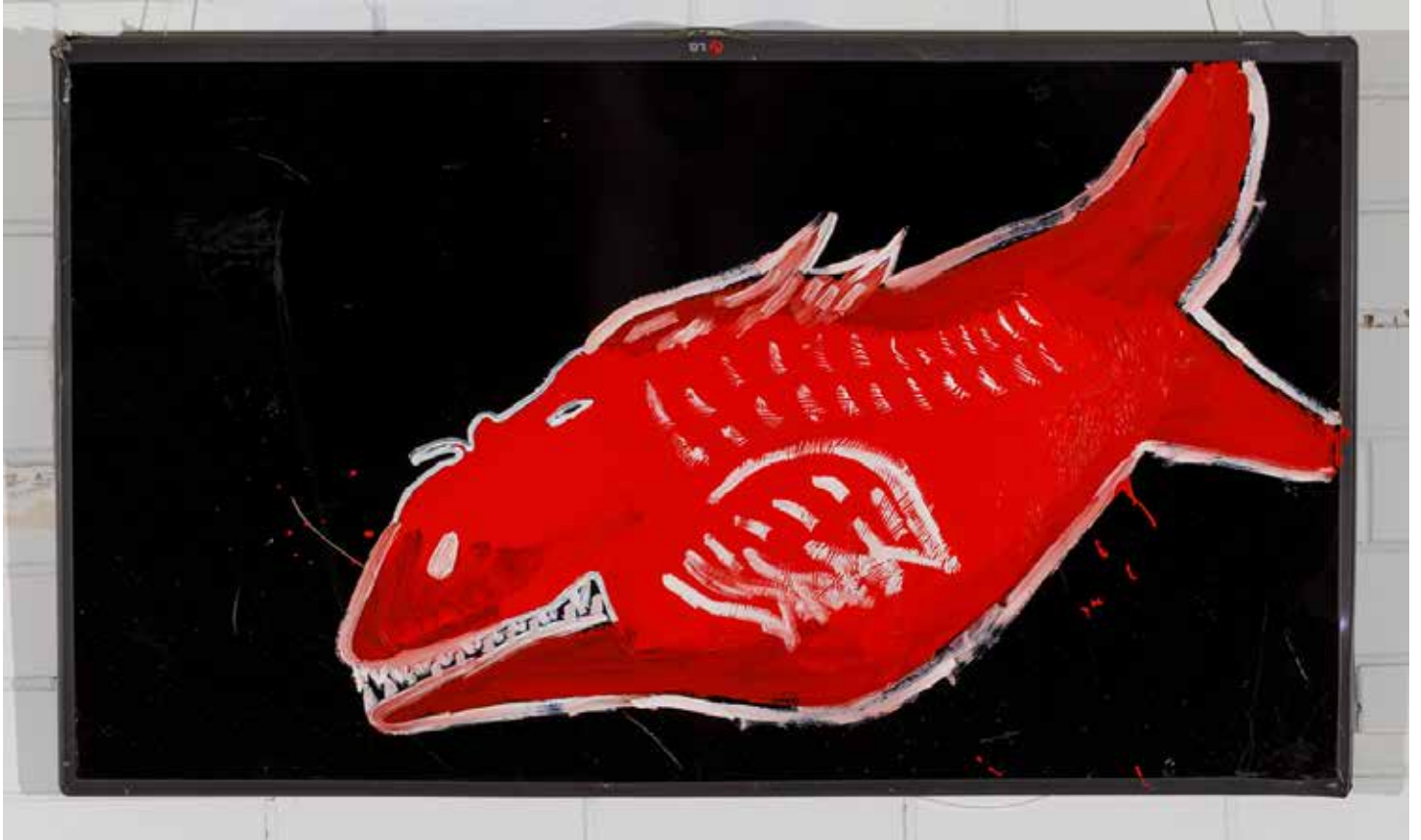


Tennant Creek Brio
Simon Wilson

Cosmos Country Series, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 60 x 99 cm.
\$1500



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Tennant Creek Brio
Fabian Brown

Whale, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 56 x 96 cm.
\$3000



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Tennant Creek Brio
Simon Wilson

Wound Series 1 - 4, 2019,
Enamel paint and mixed media
on tv monitor, 63 x 101 cm.
\$1500



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Tennant Creek Brio

Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras /
Clifford Thompson / Simon Wilson /
Lindsay Nelson.

Pot Of Gold (2019),
Enamel paint and mixed media
on poker machine, 143 x 54 x 57 cm.
\$7,000



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Tennant Creek Brio

Fabian Brown / Rupert Betheras /
Marcus Camphoo

Mixed Tribes (2022),
Enamel paint and mixed media
on poker machin, 129 x 56 x 79 cm.
\$7,000



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Tennant Creek Brio;

Joseph Williams / Fabian Brown /
Jimmy Frank / Marcus Camphoo
/ Rupert Betheras

One Eye'd Man (2019),
Enamel paint and mixed media
on poker machin, 129 x 56 x 79 cm.
\$8,000



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