

TERMINUS: JESS JOHNSON AND SIMON WARD

Heide Museum of Modern Art presents the largest virtual reality collaboration to date by artists Jess Johnson and Simon Ward

2 November 2019 – 1 March 2020

A mysterious universe of alien architecture populated by humanoid clones and cryptic symbols, explored via a network of travellers and gateways.



Melbourne, Australia: Heide Museum of Modern Art will present National Gallery of Australia exhibition *TERMINUS*, a collaboration between New York based visual artist Jess Johnson and Wellington, New Zealand based video maker and animator Simon Ward. Exploring reality as malleable and multiple, the exhibition features five virtual reality artworks situated on a full-scale tessellated floor map and was curated by National Gallery Senior Curator of Contemporary Art Jaklyn Babington. Commissioned by the National Gallery and the Balnaves Foundation, *TERMINUS* will be presented for the first time in Melbourne at Heide Museum of Modern Art from Saturday 2 November 2019 to 1 March 2020. It is the first stop of its national tour by the National Gallery of Australia.

Artistic Director Lesley Harding said: *“This dynamic collaboration translates Jess Johnson’s drawings into animated virtual reality, enabling audiences to have the simulated experience of entering into the hypnotic realms she depicts. Heide is delighted to bring this experience to Melbourne for the first time.”*

With their pioneering use of virtual reality, Johnson and Ward hold a unique position among contemporary art practitioners. Johnson's drawings are transformed from analogue into digital, and from solo practice into cross-disciplinary collaboration. Animated by Ward and enriched with input from developer Kenny Smith and sound composer Andrew Clarke, the result is *TERMINUS*: a mysterious universe of alien architecture populated by humanoid clones and cryptic symbols, explored via a network of travellers and gateways.

NGA's Senior Curator of Contemporary Art Jaklyn Babington said: *"With Terminus, Johnson and Ward have created a virtual reality work of astonishing, pioneering ambition. An experience of Terminus is akin to a cryptic choose-your-own adventure, a physical and mental navigation of a psychedelic aesthetic and philosophical framework. In the commissioning and touring of Terminus, the National Gallery of Australia is dedicated to engaging contemporary artists working at the intersection of art and technology. Terminus is a thrilling extension of the national collection into the 21st century"*

Jess Johnson says: *"My interests lie in world-building and the construction of new realities... The images I create are holographic meshworks of grids, brickwork, architectural monuments, humanoid clones and Messianic figures. My desire to give flesh to this world has driven my more current interests in animation and virtual reality (VR)... I think VR is the most effective conduit from one brain to another that's ever existed. With VR, you can seduce someone into accepting an entirely new reality. VR technology has just started to be adapted by artists and has the potential to explode into new genres and artforms... It will be artists who will harness the technology and use it in ways we can't even imagine yet, opening up new genres in storytelling, communication, expression and exploration."*

TERMINUS presents the viewer with a quest into the technological, and through time and space, as they explore five distinct realms: passing through *Fleshhold Crossing*; taking respite in *Known Unknown*; losing themselves within *Scumm Engine*; bravely facing impending danger in the tower of *Gog & Magog*; and experiencing the brink of sensory overload in the psychedelic scenes of *Tumblewych*. This journey of transformation ultimately reveals an understanding that reality is not fixed but both malleable and multiple.

Describing sources of inspiration Simon Ward comments: *"I had a formative experience with science fiction growing up, particularly in film. With the idea of the Terminus floor-map being an initial building block for the work, Jess and I quickly started talking about the repetitive quests, the archetypes and the monomyth that fill fantasy and sci-fi films."*

As an adjunct to *TERMINUS*, a number of Johnson's drawings and collaborative textile works have been selected for display by Heide Curator Sue Cramer. These include quilts Johnson made with her mother Cynthia Johnson, and garments from Romance Was Born's Summer 2016 collection *Mysteria Wysteria*, a collaboration between the Australian fashion house and Jess Johnson. The functionality of the garments, and handmade qualities of the drawings and quilts, will counterpoint the visitor's encounter with virtual reality, and give a wider sense of Johnson and Ward's collaborative processes, which involve both traditional and new media.

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The exhibition is accompanied by a range of programs including:

Art Talk

Saturday 2 November, 2pm

Join artists Jess Johnson and Simon Ward in conversation with Heide Curator Sue Cramer as they explain the process of transforming Johnson's drawings into a compelling immersive virtual reality installation.

Included in museum admission

-ENDS-

MEDIA CONTACT: For further information or interview requests please contact Claire Martin, claire@articulatepr.com.au, 0414 437 588 or Megan Bentley, megan@articulatepr.com.au, 0452 214 611

IMAGE CAPTION: Jess Johnson and Simon Ward with their Balnaves Contemporary Intervention *Terminus*, image courtesy of National Gallery of Australia.

Exhibition Details:

Terminus: Jess Johnson and Simon Ward

2 November 2019 – 1 March 2020

Heide Museum of Modern Art

7 Templestowe Road, Bulleen, VIC 3105

Museum opening hours

Tuesday–Sunday, 10am–5pm. Closed Mondays

Admission fees apply: Members free | Adult \$20 | Concession \$15 | Children (16 and under) free

heide.com.au

Terminus: Jess Johnson and Simon Ward—A National Gallery of Australia Exhibition.

The National Gallery of Australia acknowledges funding support from Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program aiming to improve access to the National Collection for all Australians. Terminus was commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation.

JESS JOHNSON was born in 1979 in Tauranga, Aotearoa/New Zealand. In 2016, after twelve years of living and working in Melbourne, she relocated permanently to New York. Johnson's drawing and installation practice is influenced by science fiction, language, culture and technology. Her drawings depict complex worlds that combine densely layered patterns, objects and figures set within architectural domains. Such works are often displayed within constructed environments that act as physical portals into her speculative realms. Johnson has held numerous solo exhibitions including at galleries in New York, Hong Kong and Edinburgh; and at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney, Auckland Art Gallery and Christchurch Art Gallery in New Zealand. Jess Johnson is represented by **Jack Hanley Gallery**, New York; **Darren Knight Gallery**, Australia; and **Ivan Anthony Gallery**, New Zealand.

SIMON WARD was born in 1977 in Opunake, Aotearoa/New Zealand. He worked for ten years in feature film costuming, during which time he began to develop his video making practice, which eventually became his major focus. Ward's work is collaborative in nature. He has made over 50 music videos for New Zealand and international artists and co-directs the animated series *Aroha Bridge*, produced by Piki Films. His video and virtual reality collaborations have been shown in New York, Tokyo, Hubei, Edinburgh, San Francisco, Melbourne, Sydney, and Hong Kong. Influenced by the history of cinematographic special effects and animation, his work involves generating visual imagery that mixes reality with the fantastical. New developments in virtual reality technology have allowed him to explore these reality-warping techniques in far more immersive environments.

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ABOUT HEIDE

Set on sixteen acres of parkland with Yarra River frontage, Heide Museum of Modern Art, or Heide as it is affectionately known, is one of Australia's most important cultural institutions. Once a significant Wurundjeri gathering place, the property was later a dairy farm before becoming known as a hub for Australian modernist art and writing after it was purchased by art patrons John and Sunday Reed in 1934.

The Reeds opened their home to the most progressive artists of their era, including Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, John Perceval, Charles Blackman and Danila Vassilieff. Nolan's famous Ned Kelly series (1946–47) was painted in the dining room of the Heide farmhouse.

Continuing this spirited legacy, today Heide works to inspire creative talent, collaborating with emerging and mid-career artists as well as celebrating those who have made major contributions to Australian and international art.

heide.com.au

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