

*Established Australian artists are being challenged to produce exciting new work through a project made possible by the generosity of the Vizard Foundation.*

The Vizard Foundation Contemporary Arts Projects offer support to mid-career and senior Australian artists with a simple premise – they have to do something they have never done before or have always dreamed of doing. The new work produced is exhibited at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

Giacomina Pradolini, the Potter's Development Manager, said: *"Multi-decade exhibitions are crucial for artists in terms of profiling their achievement and cementing their reputation. They are also an opportunity for them to reconnect with their own work, and for curators and critics to reassess and rediscover the artists' work. Through these exhibitions young artists are able to better understand professional practice and potential career trajectories.*

*"But we have also learned that these exhibitions risk 'wrapping up' an artist's career. When funds are available to challenge the artist to present something ambitious and new, the exhibition becomes more energised."*

Through the Vizard Foundation's support, artists Jenny Watson and Geoff Lowe have staged successful exhibitions at the Potter. Both have been well-received by visitors and have also proved invaluable for University of Melbourne students, who have had the opportunity to work with the artists.

The third artist to benefit from the gift is Melbourne-based Philip Brophy, who works mainly in film, music and sound. Much of his work is based on the post-war Japanese aesthetic and he admits he has no real interest in the traditional hierarchies of art history.

But it is traditional European painting from the 18th and 19th centuries that has inspired his Vizard Foundation commission presentation – *Colour Me Dead*.

A few years ago, while working in Paris, Philip started to look more closely at the romantic European art from around 1750 to 1950, a period he describes as "probably the dead centre of everything that is utterly conservative and pompous in European culture".

Most people will recognise the kinds of images produced during that period. Naked, buxom women in water, drowned or becoming sirens, or lying on the forest floor were popular themes.

Philip considered what might have been going on in the artists' minds when they were painting – and was disturbed by what he found.

*"I was struck by the intense violence of these images. These figures are under intense pressure. It is like they are about to explode in some way. They have the sense of what is going to happen to them.*

*"There is such incredible implied violence in them, something dark about them, a lot of association between death and sex; the essence of life at the point at which it is about to be destroyed utterly."*

He drew disturbing parallels with images of murder victims. *"If you took a photograph of the nude female body in the state that these paintings were in, you end up with pictures that look like Jack the Ripper's last victim,"* he said.

*"These are the most conservative images from European history and yet today if I took a photograph of any one of these situations with an actual living female body I doubt whether I would be able to exhibit it anywhere."*

*Colour Me Dead* explores Philip's reactions to these paintings. Six works from a collection of 18 will be displayed at the Potter.

Philip said the commission brought with it a sense of freedom. *"Once it was decided that the exhibition would not have to be a retrospective of any kind, and it could be a whole new project, I was relieved because that meant I could focus on something in quite a fulsome, in-depth way and use the opportunity to fit the environment and situation as best as possible,"* he said.

It was a particularly interesting project for him, given he does not consider himself an artist in the traditional sense. He says some of his work ends up in galleries "by fortuitous circumstances", but for this particular project, the Potter was the ideal setting.

*"University museums can allow a merger between the artistic and academic and this project is made for it,"* he said.

He is also looking forward to working with University students during the period of the exhibition, and sharing his new approach to established art.

The Vizard Foundation has been a generous supporter of the University over many years. In addition to significant support for the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the Foundation is currently supporting a wildlife biodiversity conservation project run by the Faculty of Veterinary Science, and the Melbourne Law Review, fostering creativity and engagement among students.



It was great to be given the opportunity to work on something new.

