

# INTRODUCTION

To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.

– Samuel Beckett

This retrospective exhibition explores the work of contemporary artist Brent Harris. Born in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1956 and based in Melbourne since the early 1980s, Harris has developed a distinctive approach to his art, deploying both humour and the grotesque to explore complex psychological subject matter. Over the past four decades his work has addressed the experience of the body and desire, faith (and the question of what follows death), and childhood memories of porous familial relationships.

Since the early 1990s, as a means of accessing unconscious imagery, Harris has employed the surrealist technique of automatic drawing. This process has allowed him to 'surrender and catch' forms. It is a paradox that Harris's highly personal excavations are often expressed through a formal vocabulary that quotes other artists. Harris's dramatic shifts in style have been shaped by these artistic engagements, yet his work has consistently returned to the themes that have preoccupied him from his beginnings as an artist. This exhibition explores the continuity of these concerns and maps the cross-pollination of his imagery across his printmaking, drawing and painting practice.

*Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch* is co-presented by the Art Gallery of South Australia and TarraWarra Museum of Art and showcases the collections of both institutions, augmented with loans from public and private collections.

# EARLY YEARS

Harris was born in Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand, in 1956. As a young man he was expected to work as a carpenter in his father's building business which he did for several years. He was introduced to art through regular visits to regional galleries during childhood road trips and by studying art books at his local public library. Unsupported by his parents in his decision to study art, Harris migrated to Australia in 1981 and studied at the Victorian College for the Arts between 1982 and 1984. As Harris acknowledges, his first solo exhibition grappled with the influence of New Zealand painter Colin McCahon:

Out of art school in 1985, and in search of myself as an artist, Colin McCahon loomed large. There seemed no way for me to avoid him, he was still alive. I had read somewhere that McCahon was somewhat reluctant to declare his influences, and I focused on his painting acknowledging Mondrian. In 1988 I had a large exhibition of paintings with nearly all the canvases containing the written word, my homage to McCahon.

Harris experienced early success, with the National Gallery of Australia acquiring paintings from his first solo exhibition, including *Weeping woman*, 1987. The works on display here are stylistically eclectic and demonstrate the significant impact of Harris's teacher Peter Booth, as well as the influence of the wide range of artistic sources being consulted by Harris at the time, including Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Jasper Johns.

# **Weeping woman 1987**

oil on linen

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1988

# **Untitled 1987**

# **Untitled 1987**

coloured pastel on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gift of James Mollison AO and Vincent Langford  
through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation  
2017. Donated through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program

# House 1987

oil and charcoal on linen

The State Art Collection, The Art Gallery of Western Australia  
Gift of John McBride, 2009

# **Sound Curtain 1988**

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

# **Whites hinged on black 1988**

oil on linen

The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts  
Program by Rodney and Barbara Davis, 2017

# Apron of abuse 2022

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

Harris first painted a small version of this work in 1992 in response to being verbally abused on a street in Melbourne for being gay. As a retort to being called a 'pansy', he decided to create a painting that incorporated the motif of the pansy flower, one which he had first seen in the work *Slip Covered Armchair*, 1986, by the American artist Robert Gober, whose work he admired.

Harris's painting was also inspired by the post Second World War German artist Sigmar Polke's *Large cloth of abuse*, 1968, which comprises an oversized piece of fabric inscribed with derogatory words in the German language. Harris had seen a photograph of Polke wearing the artwork as a large cape, in a gesture that Harris interpreted as a form of processing verbal abuse, and by calling it out, diminishing its trauma. In this painting, Harris decided to transform the idea of a cloth into the more domesticated form of an apron—suggesting that this garment can also be seen as a kind of protective clothing. As such, the apron is a kind of shield.

TarraWarra Museum of Art acknowledges the complexity of these issues and respects that viewers may have diverse views on the subject. The Museum respects the diversity and cultural safety of all visitors to the Museum. If you have any concerns, please speak to a staff member.

# THE STATIONS

In 1989, Harris created a series of fourteen large canvases called *The Stations*, which reference the Biblical story of Christ's Crucifixion. He selected this particular narrative as a way of processing the reality of those close to him—and the wider gay community—who were dying as a result of the AIDS pandemic.

Harris's paintings were inspired by Colin McCahon's *The Fourteen Stations of the Cross*, 1966 (Auckland Art Gallery), and the American painter Barnett Newman's series of the same title, completed between 1958 and 1966 (National Gallery of Art, Washington). Harris later observed:

Both Newman's and McCahon's *Station* series were my inspiration here. I continued with the reduced palette of my 1988 works, but [was] now becoming more geometric. My engagement with the series has never really been religious. In 1989 I saw the Stations story as a ready-made narrative for the AIDS pandemic, running rampant through the gay population since the early 80s. My engagement was more psychological and philosophical, the rapid journey from life to death of a young person.

Although not religious, Harris has consistently turned to Christian iconography to tell his story.

# The Stations 1989

printed by John Loane, at Viridian Press, Olinda  
etching, aquatint, colour aquatint, roulette,  
soft ground, burnished aquatint, plate tone  
printed á la poupée

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gift of Philip Williams through the Art Gallery of South Australia  
Contemporary Collectors 2020. Donated through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program

While working on *The Stations* paintings, Harris decided to make an accompanying series of prints, translating the compositions of the paintings onto copper plates. Working in reverse and on the smaller scale helped him to resolve the composition of some of the works. Engaging the printer John Loane at Viridian Press, Melbourne, Harris realised the compositions in densely inked passages of aquatint.

The success of working back and forward between printmaking and painting during the making of *The Stations* became a model for the artist in the coming years, with Harris and Loane collaborating on works over the following four decades.



# **The Stations 1989**

Top row, left to right:

- I Christ before Pilate**
- II He takes the Cross**
- III The First Fall**
- IV Christ meets Mary**
- V Simon helps carry the Cross**
- VI Veronica wipes the face of Christ**
- VII The Second Fall**

Bottom row, left to right:

- VIII Christ comforts the women of Jerusalem**
- IX The Third Fall**
- X The Disrobing**
- XI The Crucifixion**
- XII The Death**
- XIII The Deposition**
- XIV The Entombment**

## **Station XII (The Death) 1989**

oil on linen

TarraWarra Museum of Art collection

Gift of Eva Besen AO and Marc Besen AO. Donated through  
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2011

## **Station XIII (The Deposition) 1989**

oil on linen

Collection of Mark Grant and Stephen Nagle, Victoria

# **Station XIV (The Entombment) 1989**

oil on linen

Collection of Peter Lovell and Michael Jan, Melbourne

# APPALLING MOMENT

The absurd gets me closer to an intensity of sensation ... The sensation of being in the body ... The sensation is only ever forming/transforming, never whole. This is why my images are nearly always cropped part-objects. They can never fully declare a meaning. Just like life itself ...

(Brent Harris)

During a six-month residency in Paris (1993–94), Harris began to question the purpose of his art. Rebellious against the formal elegance of the city and his own abstract canvases, he gave himself permission to transform the dots that were appearing in his loose drawings into works suggestive of a face. Harris found that he could rely on his doodles and drawings—‘dumb marks’—to bring forth imagery with latent meaning. He decided he would allow the strange, suggestive forms—such as an elephant’s head—to remain in his compositions and described this shift to absurd figuration as his ‘appalling moment’. The new bodily forms were concerned with tapping into memories stored in the body.

# **Appalling Moment 1996**

oil on linen

Collection of the artist

# **Appalling Moment E 1994**

oil on linen

Private Collection, Melbourne

# **Appalling Moment (wig) 1995**

oil on linen

# **Appalling Moment (with mou[stache]) 1998**

charcoal on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gift of Michael Galimany through the Art Gallery of South Australia  
Contemporary Collectors 2018. Donated through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gift Program

# Study for **Territory** 1993

oil on linen

Collection of Vince Langford, Melbourne

# **Bloom** 2000

oil on linen

Collection of Vince Langford, Melbourne

# **Bloom (The Deep) 2000**

oil on linen

Collection of Glenn and Sonja Hawkins, Auckland

# **Bloom (Hiding) 2004**

oil on linen

TarraWarra Museum of Art collection  
Purchased 2005



**Nagasawa bloom**

**Lugubrious lands**

**Untitled**

**Curtain**

**Weeping**

from the series **The Nagasawa suite 1999**

woodcut, printed in black, grey inks on Japanese paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gift of James Mollison AO and Vincent Langford through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2017. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

In 1999 Harris undertook a three-month residency at Nagasawa Art Park, near Kobe, Japan, to learn the traditional *ukiyo-e* woodblock-printing technique. This stay resulted in a suite of prints which he printed himself. Some of the imagery was generated by his immediate environment, while other forms had appeared in Harris's notebooks before his travel to Japan. Harris worked these up into more resolved compositions in the Nagasawa woodcuts and this imagery formed the basis of the paintings in the series *Bloom* and *Swamp*, which Harris made on his return to Melbourne.

# Just a Feeling #1 1996

oil on linen

Monash University Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts  
Program by David Slack 2018

Courtesy of Monash University Museum of Art

# Just a Feeling #4 1996

oil on linen

Monash University Collection

Purchased 1998

Courtesy of Monash University Museum of Art

Like the earlier elephants in *Appalling Moment*, the tone of these works is comical, the obsessive-compulsive gaze returning to describe sexual pleasure and discovery.

## **Just a Feeling #2 1996**

oil on linen

Monash University Collection

Purchased 2002

Courtesy of Monash University Museum of Art

## **Just a Feeling #6 1996**

oil on linen

Monash University Collection

Purchased 1998

Courtesy of Monash University Museum of Art

'These four paintings form a series of six attempts to express a bodily feeling on a flat surface. Part object, part facial, part bird box, scrotum, breast, once described as libidinally driven.'

- Brent Harris

# THE DELUGE/SLEEP/THE UNTIMELY

Harris returned to regular life-drawing sessions in the early 2000s, finding the process of working from a naked life model invigorating. He found pleasure in the distinctive qualities of charcoal—its softness, range and tactility—which encouraged him to continue excavating the imagery as it evolved on the paper. Some of the drawings recall the entwined bodies depicted in the ‘deluge’ drawings of the Italian Mannerist artist Jacopo Pontormo. Harris noted at the time that the drawings evoked ‘the idea of a deluge, a cleansing, a flooding, a catastrophe’.

In 2003, as a respite from the difficult imagery and slow progress of working on the large *Grotesquerie* paintings, Harris created a series of small works titled *Sleep*, which reference a recurring dream from his childhood. They were also inspired by Henri Matisse’s paintings of sleeping figures and Odilon Redon’s images of closed eyes, works that he had seen on his recent travels. Unlike his slow preparatory process of the previous decade, he now experimented with painting directly onto the canvas as he worked, using charcoal before applying oil paint.

# The Untimely (No. 3) 1998

# The Untimely (No. 7) 1998

woodcuts, printed in red, cream, black, purple inks  
on Japanese paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gift of James Mollison AO and Vincent Langford through the Art  
Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2017. Donated through the  
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

These two large-scale woodcut prints emphasise the menacing ocular motif of the *Untimely* series. Harris created the works using the 'jigsaw' technique favoured by Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1865– 1944), to whose work he was introduced to through his frequent visits to the National Gallery of Victoria print study room when he was a student at the Victorian College of the Arts.

# **The Untimely (No. 9) 1997–98**

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

# SWAMP

Over the period of working on *Swamp* 1999–2001, Harris painted seventeen canvases and created a series of prints, maintaining his approach of working back and forth between mediums. The imagery in *Swamp* suggests the body, but one that is open and porous, the drooping shapes evocative of flaccid membranes of flayed skin. Harris later described the series as being concerned with memories from his teenage years of yearning, loneliness and isolation. As the curator Lara Strongman has observed in relation to this series:

Swamps are darkly fertile places where death and life co-exist, and where new life emerges from the traces of the old. Neither quite land nor quite water, but existing somewhere between them, the swamp is a place of constant becoming.

Harris's approach to pictorial space in *Swamp* was carefully developed through extensive preparatory drawings. The final result provokes the viewer into an active process of reading the composition. The two interlocking zones create a tension between figure and ground, the viewer's eye attached to one reading before slipping into another, depending on which colour dominates. This formal ambiguity is matched by the uncertain emotional register of the not-quite-figurative, not-quite-abstract paintings.

## Swamp 2000

seven aquatints printed in black and brown inks  
on paper

TarraWarra Museum of Art collection

Gift of the artist. Donated through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program 2009

# **Swamp (no. 1) 1999**

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

# **Swamp (no. 2) 1999**

oil on linen

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Allan R. Henderson Bequest 1999



# **Swamp (no. 6) 2000**

oil on linen

TarraWarra Museum of Art collection

Gift of Eva Besen and Marc Besen AO 2001

# **Swamp grey 1999**

oil on linen

Collection of John McBride, AM, Sydney

# **Drawing no. 6 (Deluge) 2007**

charcoal on paper

Collection of Athol Hawke and Eric Harding, Melbourne

# **Drawing no. 14 (Deluge) 2007**

charcoal on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
South Australian Government Grant 2008

# **Drawing no. 25 (Deluge) 2007**

charcoal on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gift of the artist 2009

# **Drawing no. 5 (Deluge) 2007**

charcoal on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
South Australian Government Grant 2008

# **Sleep no. 6 2003**

oil on linen

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gift of James Mollison AO and Vincent Langford through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2017. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

# **Sleep no. 17 (closed eyes) 2003**

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

Bottom row, left to right:

## **Sleep no. 18 (eyes closed) 2003**

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

## **Sleep no. 16 2003**

oil on linen

Collection of Peter Andersen, Melbourne

Top row, left to right:

## **Sleep no. 7 (silence) 2003**

oil on linen

Collection of Peter Andersen, Melbourne

## **Sleep no. 20 2003**

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

# GROTESQUERIE

In 2000, Harris made a number of small, loose sketches depicting three figures: a bare breasted female, a horned creature, and another emerging, but unformed, presence. Harris identified these as the Mother, the Father and the children of their union. The iconography laid bare the dysfunctional dynamic of a family unit, with the Father represented as domineering and the Mother as unseeing. Working on the imagery for the best part of the next decade, Harris completed twenty-six paintings on this theme of troubled family dynamics, as well as a suite of woodblocks and lithographs. The suite of seven small woodblocks exhibited here encompasses the key elements of the iconography across the *Grotesquerie* series.

## Heritage I 2004

## Heritage II 2004

printed by Martin King at the Australian  
Print Workshop, Melbourne  
lithograph printed in grey & black inks on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gifts of John McBride through the Art Gallery of South  
Australia Contemporary Collectors 2008

# **Grotesquerie (no. 20) 2009**

oil on linen

Collection of the artist



# **Grotesquerie (no. 1), (no. 2), (no. 3), (no. 7), (no. 10), (no. 9), (no. 14) 2002**

colour woodblocks on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gifts of John McBride through the Art Gallery of South Australia

Contemporary Collectors 2008

## **Abraham 2007**

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

# THE ECSTATIC MOMENT

In 2009, during a three-month residency in Rome, Harris began to paint directly onto small boards in response to the Renaissance frescoes he encountered there. He found Raphael's altarpiece *The Transfiguration*, c. 1516–20, particularly compelling, seeing in its complex, multi-figure composition a dramatisation of the belief and doubt that had beset him from his earliest days as a painter.

Painted in gouache, *The ecstatic moment* series expresses a feverish energy. Working swiftly, Harris drew on each board with charcoal before adding vibrant layers of colour, using the rich palette of Raphael and his Renaissance contemporaries. On his return to Melbourne Harris continued to paint on the same small scale, developing each composition directly on the board as he worked.

## **Rome #3 (The ecstatic moment) 2009**

charcoal and gouache on board,

Collection of Athol Hawke and Eric Harding, Melbourne

## **Rome #4 (The ecstatic moment) 2010**

charcoal and gouache on board,

Collection of Peter Lovell and Michael Jan, Melbourne

# **Rome #6 (The devil loves you) 2009**

charcoal and gouache on board

Private collection, Adelaide

Left to right:

## **Surrender and catch #4 2010**

Monash University Collection

Purchased 2010

Courtesy of Monash University Museum of Art

## **Surrender and catch #5 2010**

Private collection, Melbourne

## **Surrender and catch #6 (The devil loves you 2010**

Private collection, Melbourne

## **Surrender and catch #11 2010**

Collection of Susan Oliver AM, Melbourne

## **Surrender and catch #22 2010**

Private collection, Melbourne

# **Surrender and catch #26 2010**

Private collection, Melbourne

# **Surrender and catch #27 2010**

Private collection, Melbourne

charcoal and gouache on board

# SURRENDER AND CATCH/ THE REASSEMBLED SELF

Around the same time of his 2009 Rome residency, Harris's psychologist recommended the works of two German-American writers that would become influential on his painting. In the psychologist Kurt H. Wolff's notion of 'surrender and catch' as a theory of knowledge and self-discovery, he found reflected the intuitive process he had continued to explore following his residency in Paris in the early 1990s, while the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut's *The restoration of the self* suggested a way to approach both his conception of himself and that of the work of art.

Harris wrote at the time:

Its basic concept is that we are continually putting ourselves together. It is an act of endless reassembling, not only of one's most private self but of the many selves that we present to the world. In our attempts to put ourselves together we are prone to failure—we may never quite arrive, but the attempt must be made. This group of small paintings presents themselves as a gathering of possibilities on a pictorial level each makes an attempt at wholeness.

This openness to failure opened up new possibilities in Harris's work.

# THE FALL

Harris was inspired to experiment with the monotype print technique after seeing an exhibition of the work of Edgar Degas at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 2011. The technique relied on the artist creating an image on the surface of a plate by wiping thick, viscous ink off with a cotton tip or the corner of a rag, before placing a piece of moistened paper on the plate and pulling a single dark impression.

This 'dark field' technique allowed Harris to work quickly and spontaneously, and he found the malleability of the medium was well-suited to the 'surrender and catch' process. In accessing his unconscious via the immediacy of this technique, he discovered that the subject matter evoked a nightmarish underworld, leading him to title the series *The Fall*. In an extended burst of activity, Harris created over one hundred monotypes over a 12-month period.

**Untitled #33, Untitled #37, Untitled #81,  
Untitled #79, Untitled #72, Untitled #91,  
Untitled #1**  
from the series **The Fall 2012**

monotypes on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
d'Auvergne Boxall Bequest Fund 2013



# NORTH GALLERY

My mother denied death, would not talk about it to us. My questions at one time had her in tears. I feel a certain comfort in something unknown. The other side.

(Brent Harris)

The death of Harris's father—from whom he was estranged for many years—

in 2016 precipitated a shift in the artist's subject matter and a return to exhibiting in Aotearoa New Zealand. A number of self-portraits painted in the following years chronicle this change. Harris's re-engagement with the country of his birth is also evident in the appearance of landscapes in his paintings in which he references a lingering memory of the snow-capped mountains of Taranaki Maunga and Ruapehu, which were visible from his childhood home.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Harris returned to The Stations of the Cross subject. In contrast to the pure abstraction of his 1989 series, Harris's 2021 retelling deploys the distinct figurative language of his mature work. This language combines competing pictorial registers including: abstract bands of black and white; scenes painted in a shallow ground, evocative of perspective; objects and figures modelled to convey volume; and a black disc standing in for an eye—or the Divine presence.

Although Harris closely follows the iconography of the Biblical story of Christ's journey to His Crucifixion, the literalness of his retelling seems to suggest a change in the artist's understanding of death, now tethered to the decaying body.

# Embark 2014

oil on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

# Listener 2018

oil on linen

Collection of Patricia Mason and Paul Walker, Melbourne

This self-portrait uses Harris's powerfully compressed symbolic language to depict the artist's new family circumstances following the death of his father. The painting shows a travelling artist, with a canvas stretcher foisted over his shoulder, facing a female figure. The presence of the Mother, as in the *Grotesqueries* series, is signified by the blond-haired female in the foreground, while the Father has now become a large dark mass, hovering over the artist.

The title of the painting and the substitution of ears for the artist's eyes suggest a desire for communication.

# Study for **The lamp** 2019

oil on linen

Collection of Patricia Mason and Paul Walker, Melbourne

# **peaks (the visit)** 2019

oil on linen

Collection of David Cleary, Sydney

# **The lamp 2020**

oil on linen

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gift of Helen Bowden, J. Andrew Cook, Prof. Wendy Brown with support from the Art Gallery of South Australia Contemporary Collectors through the Adelaide Biennial Ambassadors Program 2020

# **peaks (vision over Taranaki) 2019**

oil on linen

Collection of David Cleary, Sydney

# **The Stations of the Cross 2021**

oil and charcoal on linen

Courtesy the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington

# **Grotesquerie 2007**

oil on linen

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia  
Contemporary Collectors 2008

# **The Stations of the Cross 2021**

Top row, left to right:

- I Christ before Pilate**
- II He takes the Cross**
- III The First Fall**
- IV Christ meets Mary**
- V Simon helps carry the Cross**
- VI Veronica wipes the face of Christ**
- VII The Second Fall**

Bottom row, left to right:

- VIII Christ comforts the women of Jerusalem**
- IX The Third Fall**
- X The Disrobing**
- XI The Crucifixion**
- XII The Death**
- XIII The Deposition**
- XIV The Entombment**

# Sad Magdalene 2022

oil on linen

Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

'The imagery for this work was first generated in 2007, after a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art while in New York. A small polychrome sculpture in the medieval section of a Deposition had this weeping figure in the background. I focused on this faceless figure and for some reason decided to make drawings of this on my return to Melbourne. Nothing became of these charcoal drawings at the time. Not until this year, 15 years after first engaging this imagery, I have now painted my *Sad Magdalene*. As it appears now painted, I see also two pink shrouded figures entering a tomb.'

- Brent Harris



**Study for Weeping Magdalene  
no. 1, no. 2, no. 3 2007**

charcoal on paper

Collection of the artist

# **Kiki Smith**

born Nuremberg, Germany 1954

lives in United States of America

## **Virgin with dove** from the series **Blue prints** 1999

etching, aquatint and drypoint, printed in blue inks  
on paper

Collection Brent Harris and Andrew Browne

# Kiki Smith

born Nuremberg, Germany 1954

lives in United States of America

## Virgin Mary

from the series **Blue prints** 1999

etching, aquatint and drypoint, printed in blue inks  
on paper

Collection Brent Harris and Andrew Browne

**Grotesquerie 2002**

**Grotesquerie (no. 11) 2002**

**Grotesquerie (le regarder) 2002**

printed by Kim Westcott, published by Mark Grant,  
Melbourne

colour woodblocks on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gifts of John McBride through the Art Gallery of South Australia

Contemporary Collectors 2008

# **Edvard Munch**

born Norway 1863

died Norway 1944

## **The smell of death 1915**

woodcut on grey paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

V.B.F. Young Bequest Fund 2001

Brent Harris's engagement with the work of historical and contemporary art is complex. It is evident in both his works that directly reference another artist's style or iconography, and as a source of inspiration, as seen in his monotypes which he made after encountering the prints of Edgar Degas. It is also apparent in his collection of the work of other artists, such as Louise Bourgeois and Kiki Smith. The prints by Kiki Smith presented here, belong to her *Blue prints* series which features depictions of the Madonna, a figure Harris has also represented in his work.

Edvard Munch's remarkable ability to communicate emotional states has continued to influence artists and writers, including Harris, who first encountered his work as a student when he regularly visited the National Gallery of Victoria print study room.

A painter-printmaker, Munch worked across both disciplines, achieving expressive works on paper that distilled and magnified his persistent themes. He identified these as love, anxiety, and death. Munch's paintings were informed by his personal experiences, including loss and illness in his childhood (his mother at the age of five; his sister at fifteen), and the intoxicating experience of sexual attraction, love, and the attendant feelings of jealousy and estrangement.

# Louise Bourgeois

born Paris, France 1911

died New York, United States of America 2010

## Bed 1997

drypoint and engraving on paper

Collection Brent Harris and Andrew Browne

'The development of psychological expression in my work is very closely connected to my admiration of Louise Bourgeois. I was taken to her house in New York to meet her at the end of 1989. The main engagement with her work for me is her ability to image her psychological states.'

- Brent Harris

# **Louise Bourgeois**

born Paris, France 1911

died New York, United States of America 2010

## **Fear 2000**

drypoint on paper

Collection Brent Harris and Andrew Browne



# **Louise Bourgeois**

born Paris, France 1911

died New York, United States of America 2010

## **No 2 from the series Anatomy 1990**

drypoint on paper

Collection Brent Harris and Andrew Browne

# I Weep My Mother's Breasts 1996

oil on linen

Courtesy the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington

'This is a very loaded image for me, it relates back to a rather powerful childhood experience.

At about the age of eight, returning home from a wonderful day at Foxton beach, I was sitting on my mother's lap, nestled into her warm and comforting breast.

My father very aggressively dragged me off my mother's lap and bellowed at her: "isn't he too old for that now." From this moment my mother's body became distant, my father was so dominating, my mother seldom showed physical affection toward me after this.

The structure of imagery for this work closely references a work *Jack Frost*, 1990, by the American artist John Wesley (1928–2022).

My painting is an attempted self portrait.'

- Brent Harris

# Drift I–X 1998

printed by John Loane at Viridian Press, Olinda  
spit-bite aquatint, soft-ground etching, etching,  
foul-bite, aquatint and sugar-lift, printed in brown  
ink on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Gift of the artist through the Art Gallery of South Australia

Contemporary Collectors 2014. Donated through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program

This series was inspired by the prints of Louise Bourgeois and an artist book by Marin Kippenberger, seen by Harris during an extended stay in New York in 1997. Harris worked with John Loane at Viridian Press on the intaglio, incorporating etching, aquatint and spit-bite on copper plates and contrasting open areas—on to which acid had been poured directly— with passages of dense mark-making. The call and response of this process, with Harris working in line next to, or over the top of the shape of an acid spill, was highly experimental.