

Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch
2 December 2023 – 11 March 2024
TarraWarra Museum of Art, Wurundjeri Country

Curated by Maria Zagala



TarraWarra Museum of Art today announced a major survey exhibition exploring the work of senior contemporary Melbourne-based artist **Brent Harris**, presented from **2 December 2023 to 11 March 2024**. The exhibition ***Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch***, curated by Maria Zagala and co-presented with the Art Gallery of South Australia, brings together over 100 paintings, drawings, studies and prints, traversing the artist's practice and stylistic shifts over his career.

Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch maps the ways Harris's art has developed over the past four decades, featuring a broad selection of works from 1987 to 2022. Harris's distinctive style, which moves between figuration and abstraction, deploys both humour and the grotesque to examine psychological subject matter as he visualises his complex and contradictory feelings. Indeed, the exhibition title refers to Harris's interest in sociologist **Kurt H. Wolff's** notion of 'surrender and catch' as a process for self-analysis and as a method of working.

Addressing the experience of the body and desire, faith (and the question of what follows death), and childhood memories of porous familial relationships, **Brent Harris says**, *"To experience 30 years of your past, laid out in images of your own making, is alternately quite emotional, sobering and a bit scary. During the making of these works one doesn't really see how things might add up in the future. Time is that added ingredient. In considering what the result of a life spent making*

imagery now looks like, an overriding concern has been a return, again and again, to thinking about the human condition - the craziness we all face in our individual and collective struggles, in attempting to hold our lives together in some meaningful way. My work is a continuing search, vainly perhaps at times, to make meaning. I am endlessly searching for revelation, if only expressed in a desire to the next image to be revealed."

"It is a privilege to be given these opportunities to assess my journey so far, and for any artist to see their work at TarraWarra, one of the most beautiful galleries in the country, is an exceptional opportunity. For the exhibition then to be extended in size to occupy the glorious spaces at AGSA in 2024 will be revelatory, even to the artist alone, I'm sure." Harris said.

Harris's ambiguous forms in his work derive from his use of the Surrealist technique of automatic drawing to access unconscious imagery. Working concurrently across painting, printmaking and drawing, Harris has developed a generative methodology, where each medium feeds the development of his art in unexpected ways.

Exhibition Curator Maria Zagala said: *"Developed slowly over the course of many years, this exhibition presents a comprehensive overview of Harris's formidable career. If the making of art can be seen as a process of excavation, then the circumstances of Brent Harris's maturation – from a difficult childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand through to his early twenties as a gay man during the onset of the AIDS pandemic in Melbourne – provide the foundation from which his work has emerged over the past four decades."*

Surrender & Catch showcases works from the significant collections of both TarraWarra Museum of Art and Art Gallery of South Australia. Augmented by a selection of loans from both public and private collections and institutions, the exhibition charts a journey from *The Stations* (1989), Harris's first major series exploring the death of his friends to AIDS, to his return to the subject in 2021.

The exhibition emphasises the crosspollination of imagery and the development of forms in his printmaking, drawing and painting practice. Also included are prints by **Louise Bourgeois**, **Edvard Munch** and **Kiki Smith**, artists who have had a significant influence on Harris's work.

Director of TarraWarra Museum of Art Dr Victoria Lynn said: *"TarraWarra Museum of Art is immensely proud to partner with the Art Gallery of South Australia on this major survey exhibition of leading contemporary artist Brent Harris, a key artist in our collection. From intimate gestural abstract work to remarkable figurative paintings, we are excited for audiences to experience the artist's oeuvre, characterised by his exploration of the psychologically generative possibilities of the drawn line."*

AGSA Director Rhana Devenport ONZM said: *"In partnership with TarraWarra Museum of Art, the Art Gallery of South Australia is proud to present Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch, the first major monograph of the Aotearoa-born, Melbourne-based artist Brent Harris. This monograph is published in tandem with the artist's retrospective at TarraWarra Museum of Art in 2023 and an expanded presentation at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2024. The driving force behind this project is Maria Zagala, AGSA's Associate Curator, Prints, Drawings and Photographs. A significant gift to AGSA of over fifty of the artist's works from the private collection of James Mollison, AO, and Vincent Langford was the impetus for the exhibition. Their gift, in 2017, transformed the Gallery's holdings of Harris's works on paper, with many of these acquisitions on display for the first time in this exhibition."*

A major highlight of **Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch** is a public forum **Forming/Transforming: The Art of Brent Harris** with the artist Brent Harris and curator Maria Zagala in conversation and presentations by **Associate Professor Justin Clemens** (University of Melbourne) and **Dr Helen Hughes** (Monash University). The panel will come together on **Sunday 11 February 2024** for an informative afternoon to explore Brent's methodology and development as an artist through his dramatic stylistic shifts over his four-decade career.

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KEY DATES ***Brent Harris: Surrender & Catch* is co-presented with the Art Gallery of South Australia**

- **2 December 2023 – 11 March 2024, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Wurundjeri Country**
- **6 July – 20 October 2024, Art Gallery of South Australia**

IMAGES available to download [HERE](#)

IMAGE CAPTIONS (L-R):

Brent Harris, *peaks (vision over Taranaki)* 2019, oil on linen, 220.0 x 160.0 cm. Collection of David Cleary, Sydney © Brent Harris. Photo: Russell Kleyn

Brent Harris, *Appalling Moment (wig)* 1995, oil on linen, 121.6 x 98.6 cm. Gift of Michael Galimany through the Art Gallery of South Australia Contemporary, Collectors 2018. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift Program. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide © Brent Harris

Brent Harris, *Christ meets Mary No. 4* from the series *The Stations of the Cross* 2021, oil and charcoal on linen, 75.0 x 60.0 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington © Brent Harris

ABOUT BRENT HARRIS:

Actively exhibiting since the mid-1980s, Brent Harris (born 1956, Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand) is a painter and printmaker who has lived in Melbourne for over forty years. Harris's works are known for their flat space, clean lines and graphic forms, which belie the underlying themes of his work, such as mortality, trauma, eroticism and childhood.

Harris's imagery often originates from a process of automatic drawing, a technique originally learned in his undergraduate studies at the Victorian College of the Arts and which enables access to the unconscious. Harris uses the imagery in these drawings to create his paintings, often reworking compositions and motifs for a sustained period of time and across mediums. An accomplished printmaker, Harris experiments with a range of techniques, including intaglio, woodblock and monotype.

Harris has exhibited extensively in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and has undertaken residencies in Paris, Japan, Singapore and Rome. Harris's works are held in all major Australian collections and several international collections including the British Museum and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

ABOUT TARRAWARRA MUSEUM OF ART:

TarraWarra Museum of Art actively engages with art, place and ideas within global, national and First Nations contexts. Established in 2003, the Museum presents a changing exhibition program of twentieth and twenty-first century art, creating dynamic and memorable experiences for all audiences encouraging curiosity and creativity within the wider community. The Museum, located in Healesville, has a collection of over 700 works of Australian twenty and twenty-first century art.

TarraWarra Museum of Art, Wurundjeri Country, 313 Healesville-Yarra Glen Road, Healesville VIC 3777

T +61 (0)3 5957 3100 **W** twma.com.au **Opening Hours:** Tuesday–Sunday, 11am to 5pm. Open all public holidays except Christmas Day.

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