

# The Western Sydney Cosmopolitan: Everything but the Kitchen Sink

## An exhibition essay by Jordan Valageorgiou, Chairperson at We Are Studios

John Cena meets Jesus in this proudly anti-Epicurean show where we practice moderation only in moderation.

*Acts of Inheritance* interrogates identity as something lived, layered and continually remade.

We come to know ourselves through small, everyday acts and performances—our own and those of others, families, cultures and communities as they leave their mark upon us.

Individualism is rejected in favour of a philosophy that posits connections between people as approaching the sacred in their significance—consider particularly Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” relationalism and the value he places on relationships between people. Even the smallest gesture, viewed through this lens, is elevated into something weightier and more revelatory about human nature and experiences on the macrocosmic scale.

*Acts of Inheritance* features 17 Disabled artists presenting works that position identity as something performed in ongoing dialogue between who we have been, who we are becoming and the worlds that shape us.

From intimate disclosures to thundering proclamations, artists in *Acts of Inheritance* play with scale, materials and emotion to present a raw and rich hyperreality as dense and diverse as Western Sydney. As Disabled artists living and working in Western Sydney, we experience life with a broader range of emotional responses and the metaphorical speakers turned up to 11. Our highs are richer, our lows are deeper and humour is ever-present in our lives.

Tom Stoppard’s quip that actors are the “the opposite of people” invites us to explore its antithesis—are we not all actors in one really long play? There is a theatricality to the ways we move as individuals through the world. “All the world’s a stage” said old man Shakespeare. Life is a tragicomedy and it is definitely bigger than Ben Hur.

Some artists revisit family stories or inherited acts; others reflect on Disability, mental health, and shifting perceptions of self and how we perform it. This show is a raw, gutsy and honest exposé by the artists that reveals deep truths in unexpected ways.

Inheritance is not just receiving money in a will (for the lucky few) or the values, rules and personality traits we learn from the family, friends and trends that raised us. Here, inheritance is not fixed or predetermined, but enacted through the choices we make, the stories we tell and the ways we show up for one another.

**Leanne Larwood** delivers a sarcastic F-U to the impact that ‘well-intentioned’ comments from other people can have on us. **Taylah Devlin** boldly reframes her life’s journey with a pop-culture twist.

**Virginia Bucknell** challenges her upbringing to disinherit attitudes and behaviours that hold her back. **Jordan Valageorgiou’s** Lego on steroids turned oversized banners use intergenerational storytelling between Greek men to explore the complex family legacy passed from men to boys.

**Grazia Napoletano’s** Southern Italian meets Western Sydney Catholic iconography is a passionate and singular cultural expression of her lifelong faith and an act of folk evangelism. **Timothy W. Martin’s** maximalist installation draws on wrestling culture and masking to give himself permission to reveal more of his authentic self, hyperstylised for public consumption.

**Rebecca Sciroli’s** gentle but brutal work highlights the absence of women murdered by men and draws on her lived experience as a survivor of violence against women.

**Jane Thatcher’s** music video makes the case for joyful self-expression in a world full of bad news and difficult circumstances.

**Ria Cirera-Cruz’s** banners offer a dream-like, spiritual blend of beauty, colour and happiness to evoke a moment of joy for the audience. **Georgina Evans** explores the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature and reminds us of the roles we play as people interacting with, and living within the environment

**Adrienne Proud's** soft sculptural charm bracelet is a gentle kind of spiritual memento, a tactile reminder to self to recall good memories and motherly love in tough times. **Kiri Smith's** works embody the sacred relation between mother and child and her lived experience as a Disabled mother and deep connections with her two daughters with Disability.

**Miah Tito-Barratt** offers a contemplative, dreamy cloudscape that challenges the audience to form their own interpretations and meanings—a commentary on the impact lived experience has on our perception.

Wiradjuri artist **Holly-lee Dickson** recreates a small but life-defining ritual on Wiradjuri Country—throwing a ball for her dog, Rumbo, by the Turon River near a rockface where her ancestors once moved, lived, and left their presence in stone and story. The intimate hologram and digital animation flickers, glitches, and imperfect edges are intentionally preserved; they echo the way reconnection with Country and culture often arrives—unstable, half-formed, flickering back into place before clarity settles.

As a final *Act of Inheritance*, We Are Studios worked on a community project with local Central West artists to create animations presented in Bathurst. Highlights from **Aili Brenton**, **Nina Frankie** and **Eden Young's** process work are presented in the exhibition to introduce a new generation of Disabled artists as professional practitioners.