

Angelica Vesiti

In the Round



Tessa Giblin
Director of Talbot Rice Gallery

Curator's Intro

In the Round builds upon the practice of Australian contemporary artist Angelica Mesiti, to take us on a dynamic journey that extends through historical painting, ancient musical notation, geological specimens and musical instruments. Mesiti consistently returns to communication and translation in her sound, performance and video installations, reflecting the struggle of communities to co-exist. Through her selection from the University's collections, she has delved into nature and deep time, as well as ideas of cycles, resonances and rotation. Taking this unique opportunity to combine present concerns with historical research, Mesiti allows her artworks to echo through ancient objects and to materialise in new works made for this expansive exhibition.

Anchoring this first major exhibition of her work in the UK are the installations *Over the Air and Underground* (commissioned by the Busan Biennial in 2020), *ASSEMBLY* (commissioned by the Australian Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2019), and *Citizens Band* (commissioned by ACCA in 2012). These three substantial works offer windows onto different elements of Mesiti's practice: from the communication of trees and the vision of bees; to the occupation and performance of resistance in the halls of democracy; to the migration of people, customs and music. Her artworks mine histories and perform messages, with sound, vocalisation and percussion running throughout the exhibition.

Alongside almost 50 items selected for display, she has also produced three

new works in response to these collections: a choral recording of a seventeenth-century score, *Melissomelos, or, Bee's madrigal*; a photographic work bringing together a sixteenth-century sea atlas and a marble landscape, and a sculptural work of etched granite.

Unlocking the potential of the University of Edinburgh Collections to catalyse creative practice, *In the Round* is an evocative exhibition, where buildings, instruments, plants and collectives of people communicate in ingenious ways, and collections are explored through the lens of an exceptional contemporary artist.



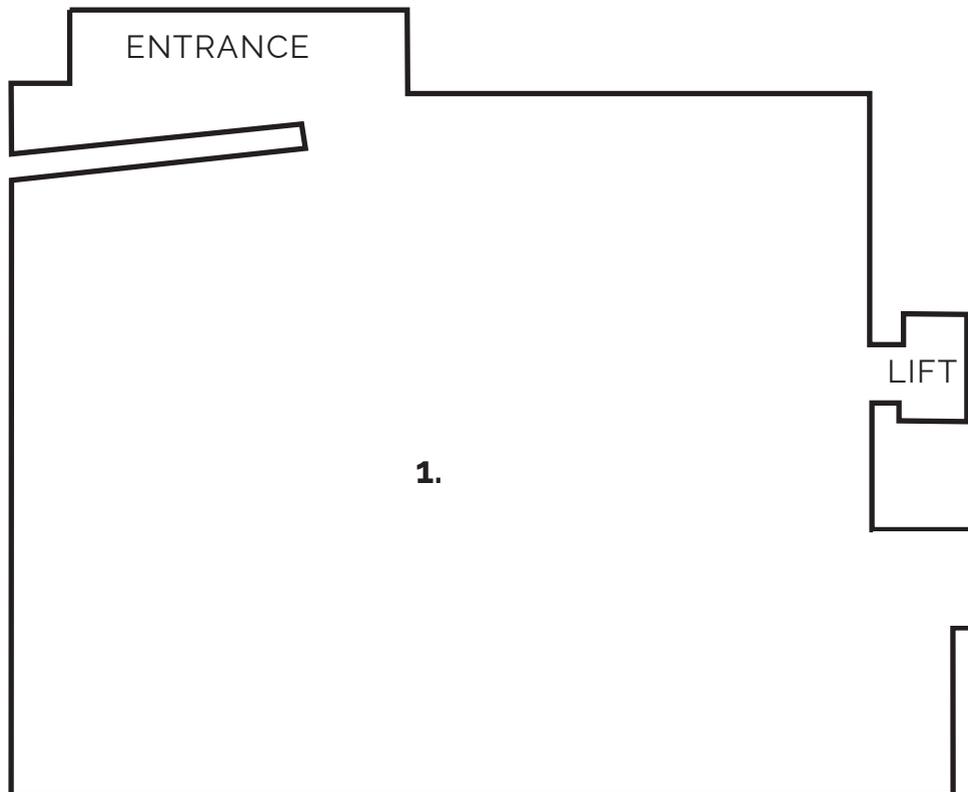
Image: Angelica Mesiti, *Over the Air and Underground*, 2020, 5-channel video installation with 10 channels of sound. Commissioned by Busan Biennale 2020. Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Anna Schwartz, Australia



WHITE GALLERY

Angelica Mesiti**1. *Over the Air and Underground*, 2020**

Five-channel video, 10 channels of mono audio, 9 mins



SIDE GALLERY

Angelica Mesiti**2. *Hum (black galaxy)*, 2021**

Granite, enamel, 1 m diameter

Commissioned by Talbot Rice Gallery

Collections**3. *Serpent*, c. 1815**

Joseph Taylor, Glasgow, Scotland

Copper with brass stays, mounts, keys and crook

MIMEd 0191

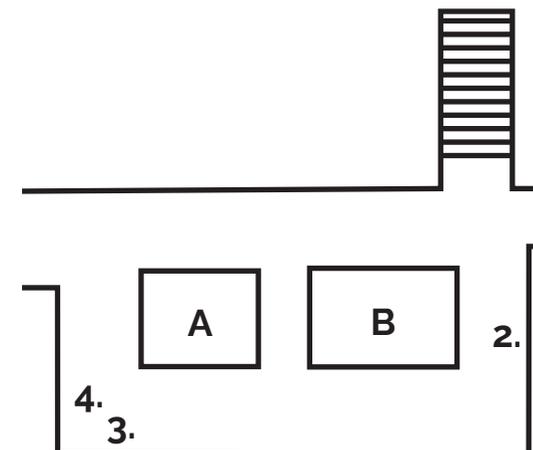
4. *Constellation: Serpens, the Serpent, Uranometria*, 1655

Johann Bayer (1572-1625)

Published by Johann Gorlin, Ulm

Matte archival photographic paper on Dibond

Vitrines A and B. All items are labelled within the vitrine, with a summary of the Side Gallery on page 8 and a full list of collection items on pages 9-13.



1. *Over the Air and Underground*, 2020

Five-channel video, 10 channels of mono audio, 9 mins

Angelica Mesiti turns her exploration of communication and translation to forest communication, carried through the living systems beneath our feet and through the air around us. In the root structures and growth networks beneath forests, as well as through airborne processes, plant life is known to communicate – to share information about threats and pests, and to even distribute sugar to enable the survival of 'the community', which forester and author Peter Wohlleben calls 'social security'. Researchers suggest that trees are communicating through electrical signals and sounds that they've measured at a frequency of 220 hertz – their roots are crackling. This is the sound filling Mesiti's purple-hued room – 10 human voices, each humming an 'A' note (or 220 Hz) to mimic this process. But this is only one way that trees talk to each other – they also communicate over the air. They release scented buds and blooms, produce riots of colour, and drop seeds and nuts in order to attract the pollinators they need to diversify the next generation's genetic makeup. All of this communication – appealing to the senses of birds and insects is part of the trees' 'language', all of it designed to give a tiny proportion of their fledglings the chance to mature and take over the genetic responsibility.

The five videos that make up *Over the Air and Underground* are all filmed under ultraviolet light, thus, we see what a bee might see, hovering around its target. These wondrous pollinating insects, who by most accounts seem to hold our fragile ecosystem together, can see in the ultraviolet spectrum, but can't, for example, see the colour red. Perched like buds on trunk-like poles dissecting the voluminous space of Talbot Rice Gallery, the video screens show plants, flowers and glistening threads slowly rotating. These threads of mycelium – fungal roots, and the star actors in the web of communication that knits plant life together over sometimes vast expanses – were grown by Mesiti in the studio. Able to carry messages and relay information in a complex system, mycelium have even been suggested as models on which to base computing technology. This beauty and amazing complexity is eventually, like all living things, reduced to the humus of the forest floor, decomposed and fed back into the ecosystem.

Ending with a rotating image of rot and mould, referring to the final processes that break down living matter, a vision that resembles a swirling galaxy fills the

room. This last image, recalling something like an imagined primordial soup or even a black hole encircled by swirling matter, transports Mesiti's artwork from the short life cycle of a budding plant or foraging insect, to the origins of life itself, all underscored by the fragility and fallibility of the human voice. Like Dutch vanitas paintings of old – still life paintings reminding viewers of mortality – *Over the Air and Underground* is a meditative encounter that reminds us we are not separate from the world around us.

Credits:

Vocalists:
Clara Eon
Christine Gautier
Valentin Ranger
Felipe Vasquez
Lily Ehrlich
Anne Becker
François Guerce
Mathew McWilliams
Angelica Mesiti
Marc Parazon

Producer: Anne Becker, PLATÔ

Botanical creative direction:
Simon de Dreuille & Elena Seegers

Cinematographer: Pierre Jouvion

Camera Assistant: Martin Grillet

Gaffer: Brice Tupin

Sound Recordist/Mix:
François Gueurce, Marc Parazon

Picture and Sound Editor:
Angelica Mesiti

Colourist: Muriel Archambaud

Commissioned by the Busan
Biennale 2020

SIDE GALLERY

'As *In the Round* came together, I began to recognise circular shapes, conceptually and aesthetically in the show – in terms of choreographic movement, an arrangement of objects within a space or ideas of revolution, evolution, repetition and resonance. These circular forms and their recurrence across different fields of knowledge became a basis for selection across the collections. I found myself drawn to these circular shapes that occur in naturally formed specimens as well as in religious imagery and astronomical research.' Angelica Mesiti

Mesiti delved into collections, unearthing a vast selection of objects that expand into deep-time, from a meteorite embedded with the first solid matter to form in the solar system; fossilised rain drops and remarkable spherical geological specimens that occur in the natural world; to ring and cup marks that re-occur in Neolithic stone carvings across Europe. Rooted within the natural world around us, the soundscape of a community and a dialogue on a democratic stage, this selection of objects expands Mesiti's ideas to include observations and cosmologies that seek to understand our place in the universe.

2. *Hum (black galaxy), 2021*

Granite, enamel, 80 cm diameter

This granite work is etched with circular forms that intersect and cross one another – a kind of discord within the harmony of concentric rings – suggestive of sound waves, planetary orbits or ripples in water, occurrences that are ephemeral by nature but here are carved into stone. The drawing stems from a sketch Mesiti produced for *ASSEMBLY*, reflecting the shape of an amphitheatre. It is within this architecture that people come together to create an audience, limiting any sense of hierarchy, to provide an equal viewing and speaking platform.

'I wanted to make a drawing related to one of the central ideas in *ASSEMBLY*; the relationship between harmony and discord. This concept is realised in the musical score but also has political implications. As I was creating this work, I was also thinking about *Over the Air and Underground* where the flowers are constantly rotating and in the final sequence, we see a Petri dish of mould shot under UV light – a play of micro macro as though we're looking at the night sky.' Angelica Mesiti

Collections

3. *Serpent, c. 1815*

Joseph Taylor, Glasgow, Scotland
Copper with brass stays, mounts, keys and crook
MIMEd 0191

This snake-shaped, bass instrument is a member of the brass family of instruments, meaning the sound is produced by the player 'buzzing' their lips into a mouthpiece. Serpents date back to the late sixteenth century, where they were originally used to accompany plainchant in churches. In the eighteenth century they were adopted into military bands and occasionally used in the orchestra.

4. *Constellation: Serpens, the Serpent, in Uranometria, 1655*

Johann Bayer (1572-1625)
Published by Johann Gorlin, Ulm
Matte archival photographic paper on Dibond

Uranometria is one of the most important star atlases ever produced. It was the first to identify the stars within each constellation with a Greek letter. Known as the Bayer designation, the system is still in use today. The constellations are highly accurate and the locations of the stars reflect the best observations of the time.

Vitrine A

Ichthyosaurus vertebra

Jurassic
EUCM.0003.2017

Ichthyosaurs are extinct marine reptiles, the name derived from the Greek words for 'fish' and 'lizard'. They first appear in the fossil record around 250 million years ago and survived until about 90 million years ago. In the UK many Ichthyosaur fossils were found on the Jurassic Coast of Devon. Lyme Regis specifically is closely associated with the early female palaeontologist Mary Anning and her brother Joseph who in 1811 found the first complete Ichthyosaur skull

Calcified bird's nest

Locality unknown
EUCM.0040.2017

The nest of a small bird containing six eggs that have been calcified. Locality unknown – possibly from the petrifying wells of Matlock Bath, England.

Septarian concretion

EUCM.0347.2013

'Septaria' comes from the Latin word septum meaning 'partition' and refers to the variety of angular cracking found in these rocks. Historically these

specimens have been variously identified as dinosaur eggs, other types of fossils, extra-terrestrial debris or even human artifacts.

Calcite concretion

Dolomite, locality unknown
EUCM.110.4812.C

Concretions are hard bodies that form in sediments before they become fully consolidated into rocks. They can form any shape, but occasionally form almost perfect spheres. Slow chemical changes, perhaps related to microbial activity, cause minerals to come out of the groundwater and seal the sediment together.

Charles Lyell bead rain drops

Bay of Fundy, Kentville, Nova Scotia, Canada

Rain prints in sun hardened mud sent to Lyell by Dr Webster in 1849. EUCM.0107.2013

The tidal range in the Bay of Fundy is the largest in the world, at 16 metres. This occasionally allows heavy rain showers to be captured in time, with rain drops making impressions in the soft red mud as the tide goes out then the mud baking hard before the tide comes back in. Charles Lyell witnessed this phenomenon while on his travels in America. In one of Lyell's articles, similar specimens appear with the caption: 'Examples of

rain-prints made by a heavy shower, which fell on the 21 July 1849.'

Algal deposit

Locality unknown
EUCM.0064.2017

Evidence of early life on Earth is often preserved in the geological record as layered or concentric banding in limestone. These are formed when layers of algae grow in mats, which then become coated or bound in lime-rich sediment, producing fine, mm-scale layers. These ecosystems may then become preserved in rock, developing patterns reminiscent of landscapes.

Weltchronik (The Nuremberg Chronicle), 1493

Hartmann Schedel (1440-1514)
Originally published in Nuremberg, 1493
Courtesy the artist

This image represents the seventh day of creation as described in Genesis, when the Cosmos is complete. By the hand of God, the concentric circles encapsulate the medieval understanding of the Universe. Following the Ptolemaic system, the Earth is at the centre. It was extremely difficult for people to reject this model when Nicolaus Copernicus proposed a Sun-centred universe in 1543.

Whale vertebra

Courtesy Dr. Gillian McCay

A vertebra plate, possibly from a minke whale, found on Raffin beach at Stoer Head in the north-west Highlands of Scotland.

Agate

EUCM.0348.2013

Agates are primarily formed within cavities within volcanic and metamorphic rocks. These cavities are filled in with silica-rich fluids from which concentric solid layers are deposited on the walls of the cavity, slowly working their way inwards.

Vitrine B

The Boundary of Balance, 2019

Dong Ding
Gold and silver-plated brass, crystal, cubic zirconia, pearl, agate, 15 x 10 cm
EU5694

The Art Collection acquired one piece from Dong Ding's sculptural jewellery collection *Boundary of Balance*; a series of works which explores the relationship and tension between balance and imbalance. This exquisite sculptural work is also a carefully engineered kinetic jewellery piece which can be disassembled and re-

assembled by the wearer, with interchangeable and detachable details such as rings, tie pins and earrings integrated into the overall composition.

Nickel iron meteorite: Gibeon

EUCM.110.0759.C

Gibeon is a meteorite that fell in Namibia approximately 30,000 years ago. Its surface glitters with the beautiful Widmanstätten pattern – a texture that only forms in metal objects that have cooled in the gravity-less vacuum of space. Radiometric dating, a method used to date rocks based on the known rate of radioactive decay, places the iron-nickel crystallisation in Gibeon at 4.5 billion years old.

Stony meteorite

Pueblito de Allende, Chihuahua, Mexico
47541

The Allende meteorite, which fell at Chihuahua, Mexico in 1969. Containing some of the oldest matter known in our planetary system, studying it has led to new understandings of the early solar system. The small white areas known as calcium-aluminium inclusions represent some of the first solid matter to form in the solar system, the swirling dust around the young Sun.

Achnabreck Cup and Ring Markings, 1953

Collection Historic Scotland
Photographic Library
SC 2013720

Achnabreck is the most important site in Argyll by virtue of its size and complexity. Cup and ring marks or cup marks are found in several areas of Europe, while similar forms can be found throughout the world. The wide geographic spread of similar motifs has been noted by many researchers as extraordinary and an indication of wide-ranging connections, and the possibility of long-distance travel. Cup-and-ring marks are in dialogue both with the natural cracks and fissures of the bedrock, as well as with the meteorological environment, playing with the obliqueness of light at certain times of day and the textures of rain water sitting in their indentations.

Stony iron meteorite: Imilac

EUCM.0647.2008

The Imilac meteorite dates back to the beginning of our solar system. This specimen was part of a much larger meteorite which disintegrated over the Atacama Desert in northern Chile, possibly in the 1300s. Pallasite meteorites like Imilac formed in the asteroid

belt between Mars and Jupiter 4.5 billion years ago. This cross-section reveals how the heavier metals and minerals sunk to the middle of the meteorite, whilst the lighter minerals rose to the upper layers, called the mantle. Rocky planets including our Earth formed in the same way.

Haematite

Locality unknown
EUCM.110.4834.C

Haematite is a type of iron ore and may form a variety of crystal shapes. The name haematite is derived from the Greek word for blood, *αἷμα* (haima), due to the red colouration found in some varieties of haematite. These colours have historically been used as a pigment.

De revolutionibus orbium coelestium (On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres), 1566

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543)
Second edition, published in Basel. Courtesy The Crawford Collection, Royal Observatory, Edinburgh

This is the most important scientific book of the 1500s. In this ground-breaking text, Copernicus states that the Earth rotates daily on its axis, and along with all other planets in the Universe, revolves yearly around the Sun. This challenged the

long-accepted Ptolemaic system, in which the Earth was stationary at the centre of the Universe, with all the planets and the Sun rotating around it. When published, the powerful Christian Church, university scholarship, and even common sense, all endorsed Ptolemy. Copernicus' theory had great theological implications, only becoming widely accepted a century later.

Antediluvian Landscape, 1967

Max Ernst (1891-1976)
Oil paint and paper on wood board, 15 x 20.5 cm
EU0103

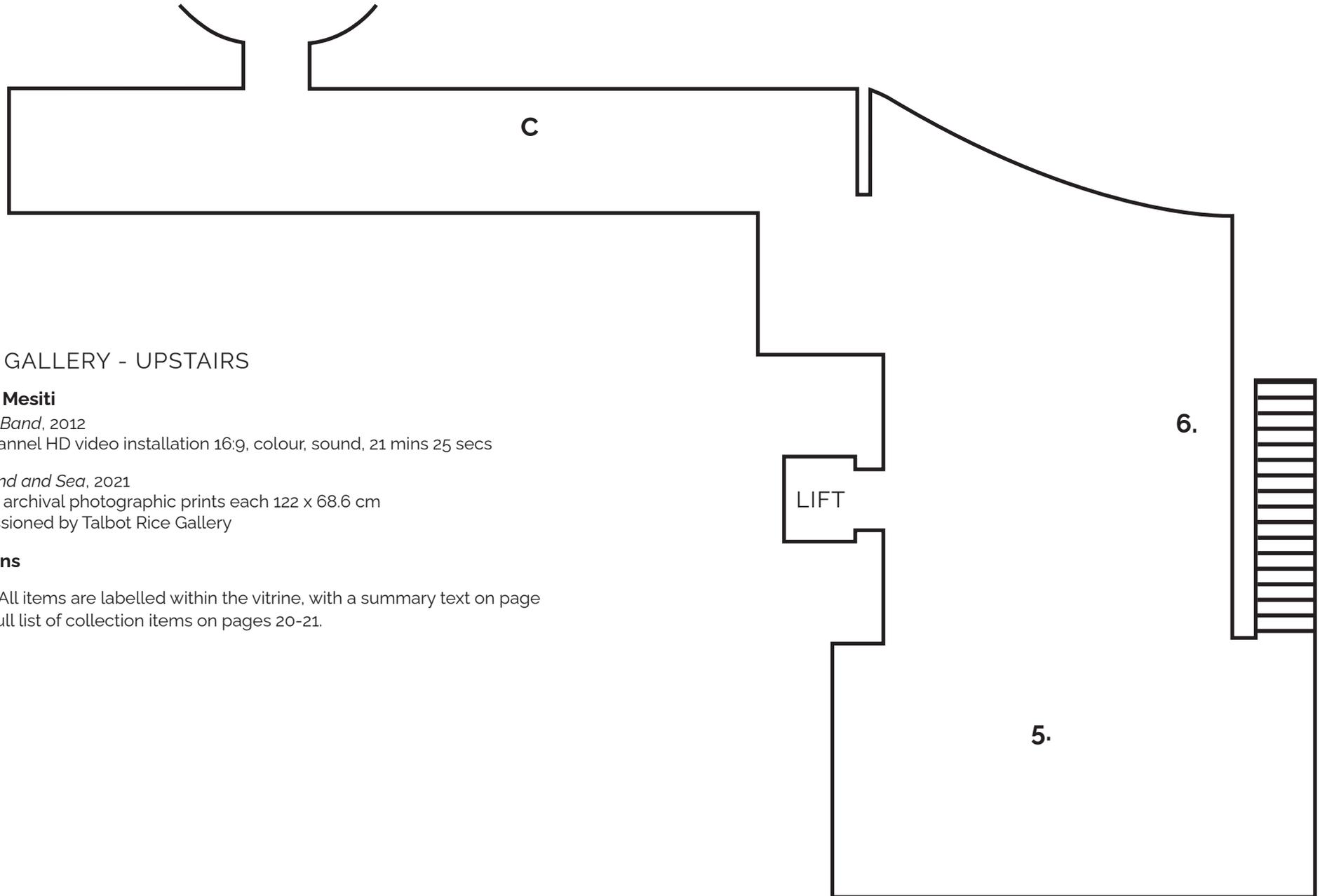
The title *Antediluvian Landscape* directs our imagination to biblical cosmology – to a time between the fall of man and the Genesis flood and to a landscape now lost. Ernst's painting has been produced by 'decalcomania', a technique prominent among Surrealists for its automatism. Decalcomania is a blotting process whereby paint is squeezed between two surfaces to reveal the randomly created image.

Liesegang rings

EUCM.0004.2021

Liesegang rings are coloured bands, distinguishable from other structures by their concentric or ring-like appearance of cement

observed in sedimentary rocks. The precise mechanism from which they form is not entirely known and is still an area under research.



WHITE GALLERY - UPSTAIRS

Angelica Mesiti

5. *Citizens Band*, 2012

Four-channel HD video installation 16:9, colour, sound, 21 mins 25 secs

6. *Over Land and Sea*, 2021

Diptych: archival photographic prints each 122 x 68.6 cm

Commissioned by Talbot Rice Gallery

Collections

Vitrine C. All items are labelled within the vitrine, with a summary text on page 19 and a full list of collection items on pages 20-21.

WHITE GALLERY - UPSTAIRS

5. *Citizens Band*, 2012

Four-channel HD video installation 16:9, colour, sound, 21 mins 25 secs

From the Paris Métro to a Sydney street, Angelica Mesiti explores global migration through the remarkable performances of four musicians, each one an immigrant with a unique musical heritage.

Loïs Géraldine Zongo was taught water drumming by her aunties in Cameroon. Traditionally performed in rivers in central Africa, 'Liquindi' (or 'playing the water') could be used to signal across long distances. In a Parisian swimming pool, Zongo articulates her rhythms using only her hands and the water around her, ending with a look of quiet wonder and triumph.

Mohammed Lamourie is originally from Algeria and performs its traditional Rai music. Partially blind, he knows his Casio keyboard by touch. He performs songs written by Cheb Hasni – an Algerian singer whose picture is taped to the keyboard, who was assassinated in 1994 at the age of 26. Hasni's songs were celebrated for pushing back against fundamentalism, and were at times banned in Algeria because they included forbidden subjects such as open expressions of love. Mohammed, now living in France (where Hasni's wife and child also fled), performs these songs as symbols of liberty and resistance to a largely disengaged audience on the Paris Métro.

Bukhchuluun (Bukhu) Ganburged was a concert performer in Mongolia before emigrating to Australia. Filmed on the streets of Sydney, Bukhu performs Mongolian throat singing and plays a morin khuur (a horsehead fiddle – so esteemed as to be considered a symbol of the nation of Mongolia). Against a background of racing traffic and seated on a pop-up stool, the morin khuur – which UNESCO deemed a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity', transmits cultural heritage across vast expanses of sea and experience.

The final performer is Sudanese immigrant Asim Gorashi, who performs a song through whistling. Developed during the Sudanese harvest, when music and revelry were forbidden to ensure a long and productive working day, workers would whistle as an alternative. Asim Gorashi is an expert, claiming first place at the 36th International Whistlers Convention in 2009 and filmed by Mesiti in his taxi cab in Brisbane.

One by one we watch these intimate portrayals of the musicians performing their cultural heritage in very different, very public, and sometimes precarious contexts, with little more than their instrument, their body and a world of expression in their faces to tell their stories. The artwork culminates in the initially distanced performances being brought together into one cacophonous finale, flooding all of the screens with images and sound and suggesting that for a moment at least, these musicians from Sudan, Algeria, Mongolia and Cameroon are harmonising into one, complex citizens band.

Credits:

Performers:

Loïs Géraldine Zongo
Mohammed Lamourie
Bukhchuluun (Bukhu) Ganburged
Asim Gorashi

Paris Crew

Cinematographer: Bonnie Elliott

Sound Recordists:

Alessandro Angius, Gerald Ladoul,
Maciek Hamela

Production Manager: Martine Caron

Sydney Crew

Cinematographer: Bonnie Elliott

Camera Assistant: Elena Sarno

Sound Recordist: Richard Boxhall

Executive Producer: Bridget Ikin,
Felix Media

Producer: Jodie Passmore

Editor: Angelica Mesiti

Composer for 'Cacophony':
Stefan Gregory

Sound Mix : Liam Egan

Colourist: Trish Cahill

Acknowledgements:

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. Angelica Mesiti was awarded a Creative Fellowship from the Australian Film Television and Radio School to support this project. Commissioned for NEW12; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. Produced by Felix Media.

6. *Over Land and Sea, 2021*

Diptych: archival photographic prints each 122 x 68.6 cm

In this new commission, two items from collections are bought together in photographic diptych.

The Cotham Marble (commonly known as 'landscape marble') is typical of that once quarried near Bristol, a site now covered with blocks of flats. It is significant because its geological makeup naturally resembles a landscape scene, which prompted the sociologist Roger Caillois to suggest it, 'proved that nature, which through mere creative fantasy, could depict ruined cities or pleasant valleys dotted with smiling groves.' These marbles were also referred to as *lusus naturae*, or 'freaks of nature.'

Next to this is the *Atlas maritimus* or *sea-atlas* from 1675, which depicts the human construct of borders – carving territories and designating the places that we call home. Held within the atlas are the scientific perspectives of the seventeenth century, revealing how borders and territories were then understood.

Both objects reflect distant places construed through human imagination: one the chance image created in geological strata and recognised by the human mind; the other, the pieces of understanding being assembled during the problematic era sometimes referred to as the 'Age of Discovery'.

Angelica Mesiti has staged this diptych against the backdrop of *Citizens Band*, drawing a direct connection between these historic objects and this contemporary artwork. Seemingly photographed in situ with the sea-like blue background of this room, and reminiscent of museological object portraits, the atlas and the marble float on a blue bed, forever entwined with this space and the stories of migration and cultural heritage at the heart of *Citizens Band*.

Collections

Vitrine C

'I was looking at the collection for musical instruments from different origins that could speak to ideas in the works *ASSEMBLY* or *Citizens Band*.

'I was interested in the traditional use of these instruments and the important place of music making within human culture. Their uses range from entertainment and pleasure to ritual purposes, dance, ceremonies and law making. I was trying to generate a populace of instruments that were representative of many different places, to have a broad view of the way people have used music as a way of connecting, its function as a community binder - a role that music has played for a long time.

'Across the Musical Instrument Collection, I noted the repetition of a circular form. The moon lute was a particularly interesting object for me, for its formal aesthetic qualities – it reminded me of a modernist sculpture or a Cy Twombly assemblage. The installation of the instruments echoes astronomical diagrams of the waxing and waning of the moon.' Angelica Mesiti

Vitrine C

Riq (Arabic: ريق) (also spelled riqq or rik), c. 1970

Egypt
MIMEd 2068

The riq is used as a traditional instrument in Arabic music, both in folk and classical music settings. This example is inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ivory and horn in geometric patterns around the outside and its drum head is made of goat skin. Although in antiquity frame drums similar to the riq are depicted being played by women, today the instrument is predominantly played by men.

18-inch tambourine, c. 1770-1810

England
MIMEd 2768

Tambourines date back to antiquity, with Greek and Roman iconography showing ancient instruments that look very much like today's tambourine. By the Middle Ages, tambourines were commonly played all over Europe. The tambourine was in vogue in the late eighteenth-century – composers such as Haydn and Mozart included what was then considered this 'exotic' percussion instrument in their orchestral compositions in order to imitate Turkish music.

Bien-ta-ku (barrel drum), mid-twentieth century

China
MIMEd 1637

A bien-ta-ku is a barrel drum made of wood, 'built up' in sections like a cask. The heads – usually cowskin or pigskin – are nailed to the shell at both ends with iron nails. The skins are painted, featuring a phoenix embodying 'yin' on one side and a dragon 'yang' surrounded by clouds on the other – complementary principles that only form a whole when brought together in harmony and balance.

Ntongoli or endongo (bowl lyre), before 1968

Uganda
MIMEd 3474

The ntongoli or endongo is a type of lyre that originated with either the Ganda or Soga of Uganda. It belongs to a family of East African bowl lyres located among the Bantu groups that live around Lake Victoria. This instrument is comprised of wooden bowl and yoke with bowl-shaped sound table covered by monitor lizard skin, and with decorative tassels of goat hair affixed to the ends of the yoke.

Banjo, 1891-1911

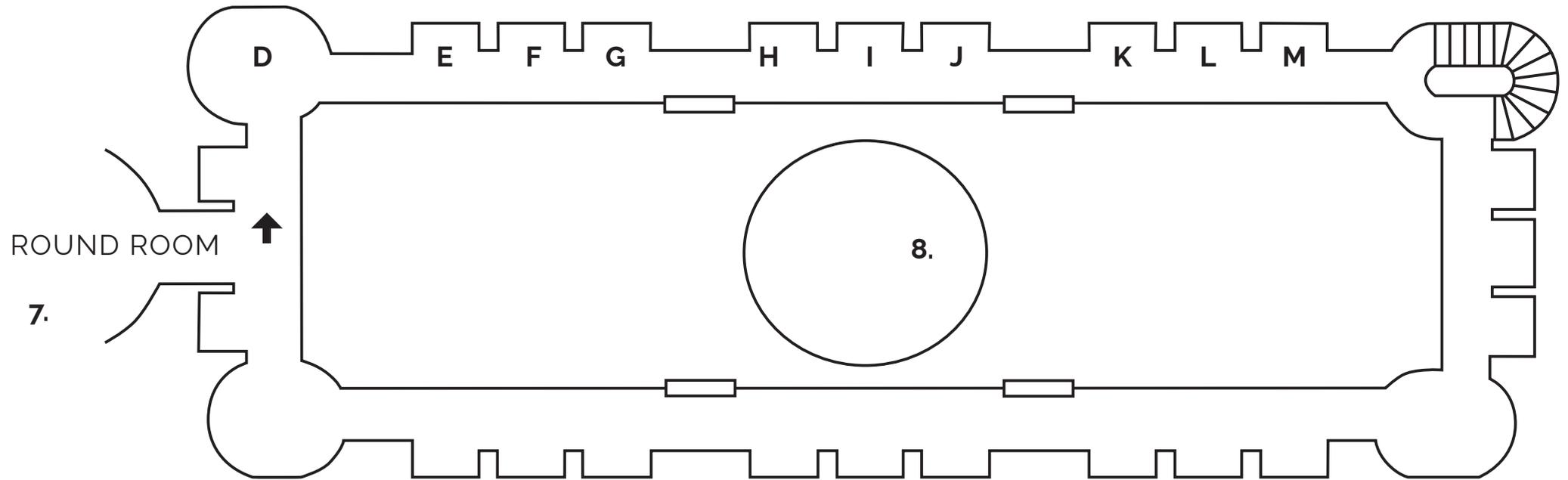
George P. Matthew, Birmingham, England
MIMEd 2164

Early forms of the banjo were created by enslaved Africans, adapted from African instruments of similar design. Banjo-like instruments were developed in the Caribbean, but it is most associated with the United States, particularly the antebellum South. The banjo was introduced to England in the 1840s by early blackface minstrels – white musical entertainers who blacked their faces in crude parody of African Americans.

Yueqin (Chinese: 月琴, pinyin: yuèqín), mid-twentieth century

China
MIMEd 6493

Literally 'moon qin', the name is often translated as 'moon lute'. According to tradition, the instrument was invented in China during the Jin Dynasty (266-420 CE). Today the instrument is frequently played in Beijing opera ensembles, but is also used in accompaniment of dance-songs and other genres of the Yi and other minority peoples of south-west China.



ROUND ROOM

Angelica Mesiti

7. *The Swarming Song*, 2021

Four-channel sound installation, 1 min 20 secs, continuous loop
Commissioned by Talbot Rice Gallery

GEORGIAN GALLERY - UPPER BALCONY

Collections

Bays D-M. All items are labelled within the bays, with a summary text on page 25 and a full list of collection items on pages 26-30.

GEORGIAN GALLERY

Angelica Mesiti

8. *ASSEMBLY*, 2019

Three-channel video installation, high-definition video projections, colour, sound (six-channel mono), 25 mins

ROUND ROOM

7. *The Swarming Song*, 2021

Four-channel sound installation, 1 min 20 secs, continuous loop

Mesiti created *The Swarming Song* in direct response to a seventeenth-century score found in the University's collections. This extraordinary four-part choral score entitled *Melissomelos, or, Bee's madrigal* was composed by English music theorist and bee-keeper Charles Butler (1571-1647) and published in his treatise on beekeeping, *The Feminine Monarchie*, in 1634.

Butler's close observation of bees led him to produce *Melissomelos, or, Bee's madrigal*, a composition that includes a direct translation of the real sound that a queen bee makes. Known as 'piping' the queen calls to the drones – a call and response event that occurs in beehives.

Mesiti has edited Butler's original score to produce *The Swarming Song*, which was recorded in Edinburgh's Reid Concert Hall in July 2021 and comprises a singular female voice 'piping' and a chorus of four voices.

Using the human voice to mimic the 'piping' of bees is closely aligned to Mesiti's *Over the Air and Underground* which explores the communication methods of organic networks – trees that are interconnected via subterranean fungal webs, or the electrically charged exchange that happens between flowers and bees.

Credits:

Performers:
Sophie Boyd
Catriona Downie
Hannah Morgan
Esther Norrie

Arranger and Choral Director:
Katy Lavinia Cooper

Sound Recordist: Louis McHugh

Recorded at Reid Concert Hall,
University of Edinburgh

GEORGIAN GALLERY - UPPER BALCONY

Bays D - M

The starting point for this collection of objects was a reflection on ideas pertinent to *ASSEMBLY*.

Mesiti's selection for the upper balcony of the Georgian Gallery has largely been motivated by the research within *ASSEMBLY*, the last major work you will encounter downstairs.

Depictions of ritual can be found throughout these items: dancing figures of Greek antiquity, first-century Gandhāran figures or Hebridean women singing together whilst 'waulking' tweed cloth. Notation and translation, both at the centre of *ASSEMBLY*, are seen here in fifteenth-century Spanish liturgies as well as contemporary abstract graphic scores, while the Ragamala paintings inform the 'modes' used in Indian classical music, known as ragas - by depicting the season and time of day in which a raga was meant to be performed.

Democratic activity and the right to assemble and demonstrate one's political intent is another thread running through these works, be that through protest gestures or clandestine religious meetings for fear of persecution.

Room D

The Feminine Monarchie: Or the Historie of Bees, 1634

Charles Butler (1560-1647)
Printed by William Turner, Oxford
JA2311

Contrary to Aristotle's view, Charles Butler proposed that the beehive was not governed by a male, but 'ruled' by a queen bee. Parallels with the feminine monarchy of the late Queen Elizabeth I are implicit in the title of his book. *Melissomelos, or, Bee's madrigal* contains 4 pages of table-music – with two parts printed up-side-down so four people could sing from the one book.

The Swarming Song

Derived from Charles Butler's *Melissomelos, or, Bee's madrigal*. Ed. Katy Lavinia Cooper
Mesiti has adapted Butler's original score removing the lyrics so that the work uses the human voice to mimic the 'piping' of bees.

Bay E

Liber Processionum Secundum Ordinem Fratrum Predicatorum [Processional for the Order of Preachers, the Dominicans], Seville, 1494

Fifteenth century liturgy for the New World
CRC Inc.S.75

The Order of Preachers established missions in America very soon after the Spanish conquest. It was not long before they were producing liturgical books for the New World. While this copy never travelled west, others from this edition did, and it is this version of the liturgy which was in use in America by the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Russian Old Believers Oktay [Oktōēchos. Chant in Church Slavonic], late-nineteenth century

Guslitsy, Russia
Add.Ms.4

This hand-illustrated chant was created by Russian Old Believers who separated from the Russian Orthodox church in 1666 and continue to practice to this day. Oktōēchos – an eight-mode system of notation has been used for the composition of religious chants in Byzantine, Syriac,

Armenian, Georgian, Latin and Slavic churches since the Middle Ages. Comprised of special signs, the score indicates transitions of the melody rather than notes and it represents how the melody is to be sung (tempo, strength, devotion, meekness).

Bay F

Town & City Halls, 2015

Jo Ganter and
Raymond MacDonald
Print
EU3909

Running Under Bridges is a series of prints resulting from a collaboration between composer, Raymond MacDonald, and artist-printmaker, Jo Ganter. They have created a series of prints and musical compositions that test the possibilities of visual art acting as musical score, and vice versa – exploring the possibilities for creative learning and play outside conventional disciplinary boundaries.

Score 3, 2015

Jo Ganter and
Raymond MacDonald
Print
EU3924

MacDonald and Ganter's process starts with hand drawn 'grids' and photographs that form the basis for the development of more intricate images that become graphic scores for musicians to perform and artworks in their own right. The images are developed in many different ways: by MacDonald and Ganter simultaneously in a studio; sometimes through remote collaboration using scanning and digital editing and sometimes in a live setting during rehearsals with musicians.

Bay G

Asavari ragini of Malkosh, mid-late-eighteenth century

Gouache on paper
Or.Ms 114

A girl sits on a boulder amid a landscape of rolling hills and a lotus lake. She is holding a cobra in her left hand, wielding a stick in her right. It is possible that this musical mode might originate from the Sabara, who traditionally lived with, caught and charmed snakes.

Kanhra ragini of Megha Malar, mid-late-eighteenth century

Artist unknown
Hyderabad, Southern India
Gouache on paper
Or.Ms 114

Krishna rests a long sword on his shoulder while in his hand he holds the blood-stained tusk of an elephant that he has just wounded. In his childhood and youth, Krishna was confronted by a number of demons. One of them appeared as an elephant and was killed by the young god.

Bay H

Apollo and the Muses, date unknown

Robert Sanderson (1848-1908)
Tempera on board, 35 x 79 cm
EU0216

This panel depicts a jovial mythological scene in which Apollo – the classical Greek God of music, poetry, arts and the sun – and the nine Muses (Calliope, Clio, Erato, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Polymnia, Euterpe, Thalia and Ourania) are dancing in a circle on a sandy ground.

Gandhāran sculpture fragments: Female dancers and musicians, first century

Grey schist, 12 x 27 x 6 cm
EU1325

This fragment depicts eight standing figures of female dancers and musicians in relief. The Gandhāran style of Buddhist visual art developed in what is now north-western Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan between the 1st century BCE-7th century CE. The region had long been a crossroads of cultural influences. In its interpretation of Buddhist legends, the Gandhāran school incorporated many motifs and techniques from Classical Roman art.

Sagats (sājāt صاجات in Arabic), Egypt, mid-twentieth century

MIMEd 2065 & 2066

Sagat (Sajat outside Egypt and zills in Turkish) are small finger cymbals worn on the thumb and middle finger of each hand. Although they are often associated with the classical style of Egyptian belly dance, Raqs Sharqi, the instrument is also used in many other genres of Egyptian and Turkish music.

Bay I

Highland Dancing Scene, date unknown

Artist unknown
Oil on canvas, 67 x 82.5 cm
Corson P.378

A large group of people in traditional Scottish peasant dress dancing in front of a steep-roofed, thatched building. The figures are tall and thin and stylised. There are several figures on horseback behind the group and several dogs in front.

Bay J

Waulking Songs (study), 1930

Keith Henderson (1883-1982)
Oil on panel, 17.5 x 25 cm
EU0615

Waulking was the last stage in the production of homespun tweed. During this process, the cloth would be beaten rhythmically by hand, to soften it and make it weatherproof. It would generally be carried out by a group of between eight and twelve women who would sing as they worked.

Bay K

The Arena, 2015

Luc Tuymans
Silkscreen print
EU4282

Partly inspired by eerie groupings of figures as seen in the *Black Paintings* and *Atropos* by Francisco Goya (1746-1828), *The Arena* is one of a series of three prints depicting the shadow of a crowd gathering in an unidentified city square. The crowd's purpose, be it protest, celebration or passive loitering, is undecipherable.

Editions of this print are available at TRG. Please enquire for prices.

Bay L

Covenanters in a Glen, c. 1800

Alexander Carse (c. 1770-1843)
Oil on canvas, 69 x 89.5 cm
EU0608

Covenanters were members of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland who believed that the king could not be the spiritual head of their church. This opinion was deemed treasonous. Ministers with Covenanting sympathies were removed from their churches. Many continued to preach in the open air. This became an offence punishable by death.

Bay M

Les gestes qui sauvent la démocratie!

Poster

Occupy movement sign language, is a set of movements of the arms and hands, used in large gatherings to communicate effectively and democratically. It is mainly used to silently express opinion on the words of a speaker. Some of the actions are directly linked to the management of large-scale meetings (speak louder, technical point, etc). Other gestures are used to facilitate decision-making, in particular by consensus. (I have an objection, I block, I make a proposal).

These gestures are best known for having emerged in popular movements such as the anti-austerity movement in Spain and the international Occupy in 2011, as well as the Standing Night protests in Paris 2016 and the School Strike for Climate in 2019.

To Be Written in Another Tongue [score], 2019

Composition by Max Lyandvert
Mesiti's work *ASSEMBLY* begins with a stenographic machine being used to transpose into shorthand Australian writer David Malouf's 1976 poem *To be written in another tongue*. These notes became the basis of a musical score by Sydney-based composer Max Lyandvert.

David Malouf was born in Queensland, Australia, in 1934 to a Lebanese-Christian father and English-Jewish mother. *To be written in another tongue* reflects on the difficulty of translation and the linguistic disconnection between the speaker in the poem and an ancestor.

GEORGIAN GALLERY

8. *ASSEMBLY*, 2019

Three-channel video installation. High-definition video projections, colour, sound (six-channel mono), 25 mins

Communication and translation are at the heart of Mesiti's *ASSEMBLY*, set within senate buildings in Australia and Italy, and here installed within the neoclassical Georgian Gallery, directly above the University's Law School and former senate room. The body's expression of language and its transmutation of messages is the work's thumping heart, whilst its conceptual motivation is the Michela machine. This nineteenth-century stenographic machine, designed to record parliamentary debate with transparency, captivated Mesiti, who used it to transpose a poem by David Malouf (about language and cultural heritage) into a cascading series of forms: scores, interpretation and performance.

Throughout the work we encounter codes and messages: Australian Aboriginal contemporary dancer Deborah Brown re-enacting protest movements through the universal body language developed for Occupy protests and political happenings; Western classical musicians, dispersed across the empty Old Parliament House in Canberra, collectively performing the now notated poem in isolation (reminiscent of *Citizens Band*); and Lebanese wedding drummers, energetically occupying the empty Senate Halls with riotous, joyful drumming.

The buildings themselves provide the architectural scaffolding for the work. The Roman Senate, in which the Michela machine is still used today, is the modern iteration of the ancient architecture of democracy that litters the Italian capital. And the Old Parliament House in Canberra, Australia's capital, is preserved as a museum and reminder of Australia's complex colonial and democratic history.

As the old colonial halls of power echo with the syncopated rhythm of drums and the free interpretation of the Malouf poem-score on an Eastern musical instrument, young women gather outside in the dark, releasing plastic toys into the night sky. These flying gadgets, lighting up the sky like little sparks

are sold all across Italy by immigrant street vendors, and the young women who have been preparing and launching them, join together as a choir. They are practising a compositional tuning technique inspired by Pauline Oliveros, dominated by the act of listening to find a common tone. Unlike the musicians who have performed their oboe, piano, viola, Persian santūr (hammered dulcimer), or Zulu umtshingo (harmonic flute) in isolation, these young people are enacting a radical form of collective listening. Staring straight toward the camera, the diverse young women embody the idea of a collective in the ancient halls.

Herself born into the Italian immigrant community in Australia and now settled in Paris, Angelica Mesiti knows what it is to be part of a multi-cultural society that struggles with its colonial history. Mesiti's assembled community is overwhelming and uplifting – listening and dancing to the beat of a diverse

Further reading:

An extensive essay about *ASSEMBLY* has generously been made available by the curator and commissioner of the artwork for the Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Juliana Engberg. You can find this essay on our website, at the foot of the Angelica Mesiti page.

Credits:

Producer Bridget Ikin: Felix Media

Cinematographer: Bonnie Elliott,
ACS

Composer: Max Lyandvert

Michela Stenographic Advisor:
Paolo Michela-Zucco

Poet: David Malouf

Canberra Production

Sound Recordist: Kimmo Vennonen

Camera Assistant:
Juntra Santitharangkun

Digital Imaging Technician:
Jamie Gray

Gaffer: Russell Fewtrell

Grip: David Litchfield

Steadicam Operator: Pete Barta

Assistant Sound Recordist:
Aron Dyer

Costumes: Alice Babidge

Rome Production:

Line Producer:
Massimiliano Navarra

Producer's Assistant:
Maichel Marchese

First Camera Assistant:
Stefano Barabino

Second Camera Assistant:
Mattia Gelain

Sound Recordist: Riccardo Gaggioli

Post-Production:

Editor: Angelica Mesiti

Music Mix: Bob Scott

Sound Design / Mix: Liam Egan

Colourist: Billy Wychgel

Post-Production Supervisor:
Peter Lenaerts

Musicians and performers:

Michela Stenographer:
Michele Pigliapoco

Pianist: Sonya Lifschitz

Viola: James Wannan

Clarinet Aviva Endean

Santūr: Jamal Farokhsereshti

Dancer: Deborah Brown

Drummers: *C'DARZ* – John Afram,
Christopher, Dandan, Ricky Hadchiti,
Albert Khouri, Rizik Khouri,
Bakhos Samrani, Nadim Sleiman,
Anthony Younes

Vocalists: *The House that Dan Built*
– Elektra Blinder, Grace Campbell,
Sofia Goulding, Brianna Harris,
Kittu Hoyne, Kiri Jenssen, Emily
Pincock, Harper Pollard, Jayden
Selvakumaraswamy, Iris Simpson,
Thu Tran, Sylvie Woodhouse

Vocalists' Manager: Danielle O'Keefe

Lancia Vendors of Rome

Commissioned by the Australia
Council for the Arts on the occasion
of the 58th International Art
Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia.
Curated for the Australian Pavilion
by Juliana Engberg. Courtesy of the
artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery,
Australia and Galerie Allen, Paris



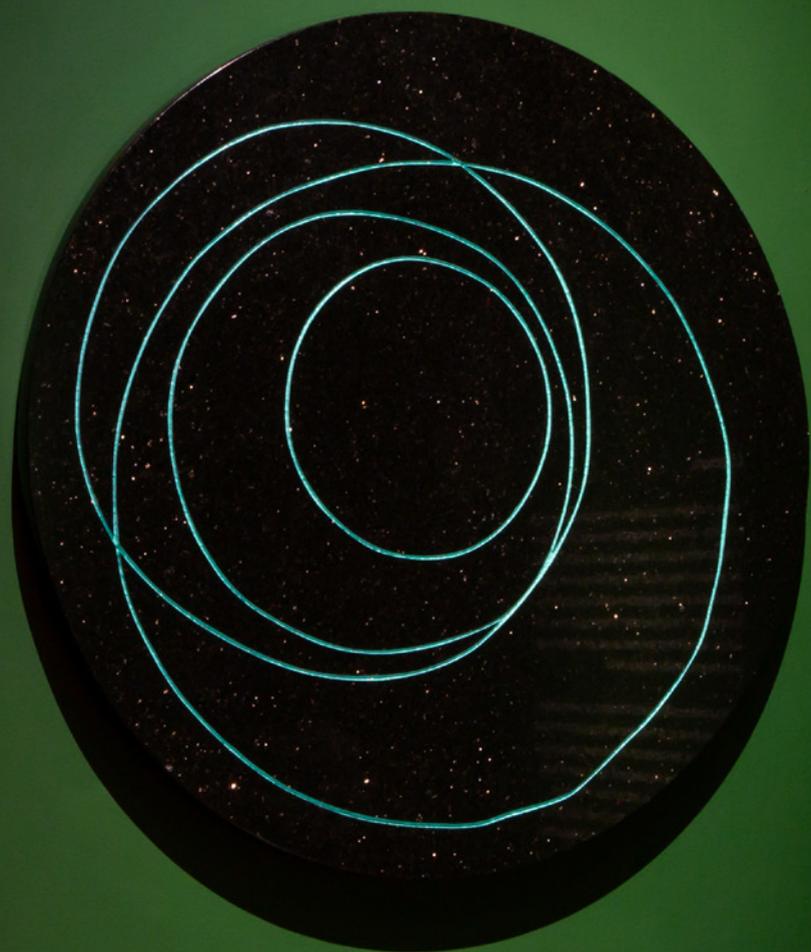
Angelica Mesiti, *Over the Air and Underground*, 2020



Angelica Mesiti, *Over the Air and Underground* [detail], 2020



Collections and Angelica Mesiti, *Hum (black galaxy)* [detail], 2021



Angelica Mesei, *Hum (black galaxy)*, 2021



Collections, featuring *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium (On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres)*, 1566. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543)



Angelica Mesiti, *Citizens Band*, 2012.



Angelica Mesiti, *Citizens Band* [stills], 2012.



Angelica Mesiti, *Over Land and Sea*, 2021



Collections (Vitrine C)



Collections (Vitrine C)



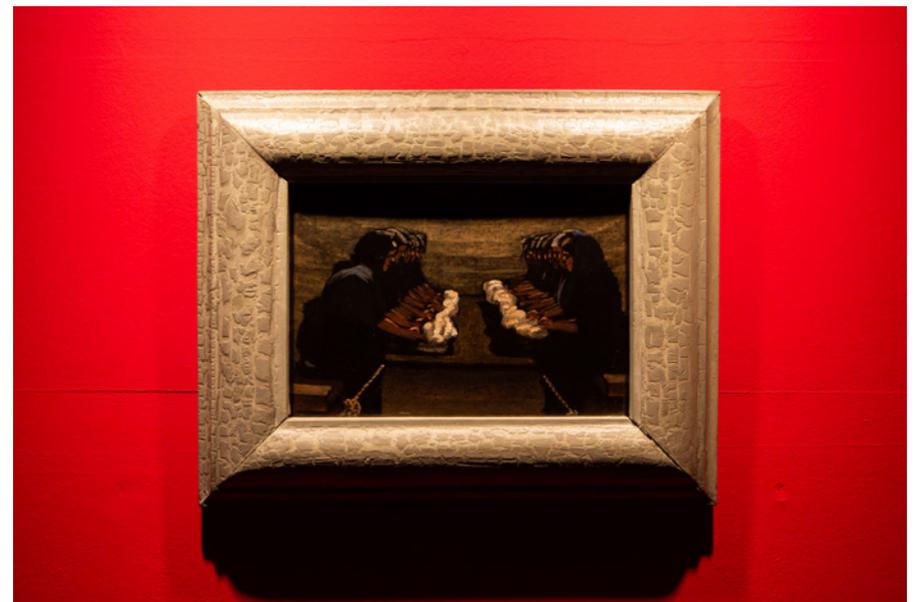
Angelica Mesiti, *The Swarming Song*, 2021



Collections: *The Feminine Monarchie: Or the Historie of Bees*, 1634
Charles Butler (1560-1647)



Collections (Bays E - M)



Collections: Bay H and *Walking Songs (study)*, 1930, Keith Henderson



Angelica Mesiti, *ASSEMBLY*, 2019



Angelica Mesiti, *ASSEMBLY*, 2019



Angelica Mesiti, *ASSEMBLY*, 2019

Biography

Angelica Mesiti

Angelica Mesiti's (b. 1976, Sydney) previous solo exhibitions include National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2020); Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki (2020); Australian Pavilion, 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019); Art Sonje Centre, Seoul (2018); O Space, Aarhus (2017); Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen (2015); Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (2014). Recent group exhibitions include *The Musical Brain*, High Line, New York (2021), *A Story for the future*, Fondazione MAXXI, Rome (2021); Busan Biennale (2020); *Time Cubism*, Gwangju Museum of Art, Korea (2019); Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art (2018). Her major works include *ASSEMBLY* (2019) – commissioned for the 58th Venice Biennale, *Mother Tongue* (2017) – a commission for the European Capital of Culture, Aarhus 2017, *Relay League* (2016) and *The Colour of Saying* (2015). She lives and works in Paris and Sydney.

Further Reading

Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*

Monica Gagliano, *Thus Spoke the Plant*

Angelica Mesiti (ed. Juliana Engberg), *ASSEMBLY*

Kerry O'Brien, *Listening as Activism: The 'Sonic Meditations' of Pauline Oliveros*: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/listening-as-activism-the-sonic-meditations-of-pauline-oliveros>

Michael J. Sandel, 'Justice, Harmony & Community', *Encountering China: Michael Sandel and Chinese Philosophy*

Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*

Marina Warner, *Roger Caillois's imaginary logic*: <https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/29/warner.php>

Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*

Publisher Xml, *Parliament*: <https://parliamentbook.com>

Thanks

Our thanks to Angelica Mesiti who has worked with us to realise an exhibition during a pandemic, adapting existing projects and despite working remotely completely surpassing our expectations for interacting with the University's incredible collections.

A very special thanks to our colleagues across Centre for Research Collections without whom this ambitious presentation would not have been possible: Francesca Baseby, Jonathan Santa Maria Bouquet, Julie-Ann Delaney, Sarah Deters, Daryl Green, Anna Hawkins, Liv Laumenech, Elizabeth Quarmby Lawrence, Gillian McCay, Jenny Nex, Katherine Richardson and Susan Pettigrew.

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Our best wishes to our community partners who have faced such a difficult year. With special thanks to Sally Jaquet, new Music and Arts tutor at Crisis Scotland, for finding a way for us to continue to engage with their members in a creative and safe way.

Many thanks to our new group of Volunteer Exhibition Assistants who bring our exhibitions to life.

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Curated by Angelica Mesiti and Tessa Giblin, Director of Talbot Rice Gallery

Exhibitions Manager: Melissa MacRobert

Gallery Technician: Colm Clarke

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THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

In the Round is an exhibition of Australian artist Angelica Mesiti's immersive video and sound installations that resonate with a selection of objects mined by the artist from the collections of our 16th-century university