

Crosslight



HIGHWAY TO NELL

REVIEW BY GARTH JONES

EXHIBITION | NE⁴LL | SHEPPARTON ART MUSEUM

The Maitland raised, Sydney-based Nell opened her eponymous show at Shepparton Art Museum (SAM) last month.

Situated about two hours north-east of Melbourne, Shepparton is another regional town, like Maitland, best known for industry. Shepparton, however, has the distinction of hosting an early tour by the Australian rock band AC⁴DC in 1976.

On the 40th anniversary of that gig, Nell's debut survey show (an exposition on a specific theme) draws heavily upon the artist's teenage worship of the iconic band.

Investigating the symbolism of spirituality, sexuality and rock-and-roll, NE⁴LL – the show – is a startling, visceral journey utilising media including video, installation,



Nell, Let There Be Robe, 2012

painting and ceramics.

Nell explores universal themes and rituals familiar to the human experience – life, faith, grief, creation – through primitive, egg-like forms, ominous cenotaphs (inscribed with Biblical verse and song titles) and the tools of music making (drum sticks, guitar picks).

This powerful iconography evokes the cycle of life with a playful melancholy. Indeed, the gallery space encourages reverent contemplation, its starkly lit, interconnecting rooms suggestive of spaces for worship.

Nell's installation *The Wake*, in particular, is a moving meditation on death and creation, utilising a collection of unique, egg shaped ceramic vessels known as Haniwa, or Japanese funerary objects. These memento mori – reminders of death – unsettle the viewer and encourage quiet reflection.

Elsewhere, Nell's video work is more exuberant. In one piece, *Fly as high as me*, the artist assaults a giant fly with a cricket bat to the point of exhaustion. In another, *Quiet/ Loud*, she meditates on an amplifier while a female guitarist shreds noisily. In perhaps the most ambitious, Nell recreates and gender flips AC/DC's historic 1975 film clip *It's a Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock And Roll)*.

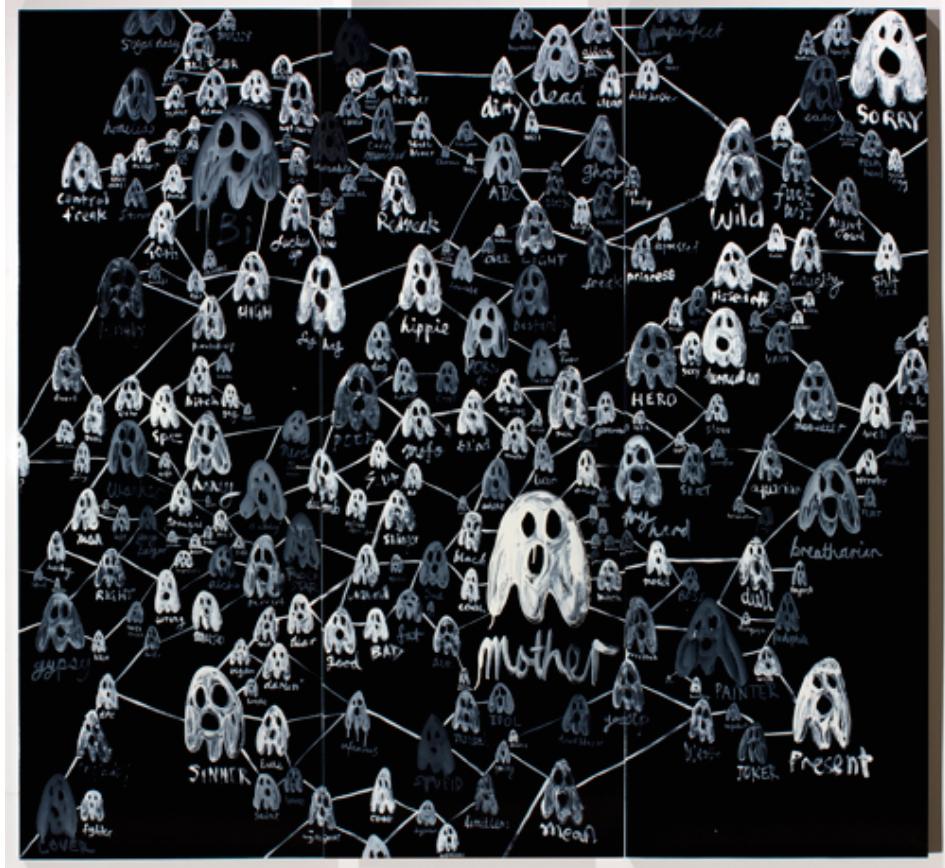


Nell, *Quiet/Loud*, 2016

Further exploring life's binaries, installations of The Beatles' *White Album* and AC/DC's *Black Album* are juxtaposed on opposing walls. Even the artist's blackletter logo itself, split in two by a divine lightning bolt, suggests the duality of the human condition.

A neon-lit terrarium, Nell's 'Cabinet of Curiosities' – or Wunderkammer – entitled *Some of the Things I Like*, features works from SAM's varied collection curated by the artist, including Canberra artist Heather B. Swann and emerging rock star sculptor Ramesh Nithiyendran.

Curated by SAM's Rebecca Coates and Anna Briers, *NE 4LL* is laid out cyclically, transporting the viewer from space-to-space, each investigating an aspect of the



Nell, Some of the things I am, 2011

artist's eclectic practice.

The gallery's high-ceilings evince sacred places. The work *Let There Be Robe* features a pile of plectrums/ communion wafers at its base and stands, arms outstretched, in a room decorated with crucifixes fashioned from drum sticks and paint brushes.

Exploring various forms of worship, belief and shared human experiences through an exciting range of media, NE *SHLL* is a powerful experience, at once raw, cathartic, warm and playful.

The exhibition itself and the museum's diverse collection in general should be sufficient motivation for the art lover to make the sojourn north.
Highly recommended.

NE~~LL~~LL is showing until 27 November.

NE 5LL
Shepparton Art Museum
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www.sheppartonartmuseum.com.au

Instagram and Twitter @sam_shepparton
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