



Ted Snell is the director of the University of Western Australia's Cultural Precinct, and currently the WA art reviewer for *The Australian*.

# World of art

WORDS Ted Snell

*I Don't Want Anybody Else* (2013). Acrylic, clear coat, nail polish and mixed media on canvas. Installation view, Moana Gallery.



## CASEY AYRES

What does it mean to be a man in the twenty-first century, when so many changing definitions of masculinity are in collision? How do boys navigate this increasingly complicated gendered terrain on the path to maturity? Casey Ayres has explored his own journey, and that of his generation, in a series of exhibitions at the OK Gallery in Perth, and the young Western Australian artist is about to embark on a major new project that will undoubtedly sharpen his focus.

In his previous exhibitions – *Picnic at Fangning Rock*, *Tunc* and *Interregna* – Ayres has recast his own life through a series of filmic tableaux, or stills from a film-noir retelling of a childhood suffused with the tropes of gender construction and peppered with a large serving of anxiety. From a brightly coloured kindergarten painting to a cabinet of sporting trophies, to the dark and sinister baseball bats he presented in *Tunc*, Ayres traces his pathway through innocence to manhood with confronting candour.

Against a backdrop of cars and bikes, tools and grease, basic mechanics and hard labour, he retells the familiar narrative of a suburban adolescence, but with underlying menace, teetering on the edge of violence. In *Picnic at Fangning Rock*, he focuses on the cult of the car and its identification with virility, with speed and power and a sexualised adrenaline rush. His photographs elaborate the existential dilemma of contemporary masculine identity: drag races shrouded in the haze of burning rubber and high-octane emissions, interspersed with photographs of his grease-stained hero lamenting his lost love while carrying, *Pieta*-like, the car's remains to a last resting place.

In tandem, Ayres has also explored his dual heritage as an Asian Australian through his collaboration with Abdul Abdullah and Nathan Beard in *The Greater Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere*. Their project of exhibitions, events and video examines multiculturalism in the context of globalisation, where reconciling cultural sensitivity with social alienation becomes increasingly perplexing.

Along with Abdul Abdullah, Ayres is about to embark on a residency at the University of Western Australia, where he will have the opportunity to bring the two concurrent strands of his practice into sync through an intensive period of creative activity. It will be interesting to see what eventuates in July, when the residency culminates in the presentation of the video work he creates in the PRO/JECT space at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.

Ayres has his finger on the briskly beating pulse of important issues that are shaping contemporary experience, which makes him an artist to watch as we move headlong into the second decade of the twenty-first century.



Above:  
Bugai Whyoulter, 152 x 106cm



Left:  
Janine McAullay Bott  
Car 52 x 34 x 32cm  
Palm fronds and curtain rod rings

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Representing award winning Nyoongah Bush Sculptor Janine McAullay Bott.

South Fremantle  
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exhibition dates  
Enquiries to Anna Kanaris  
ph: +61 8 9336 7787  
m: 0418 900 954  
e: info@artitja.com.au  
w: www.artitja.com.au

