

Yvonne East, *Stratum* Figures 1-8, 2012, Charcoal on Paper, 3000 x 1500 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.

[strey-tuhm, strat-uhm] *noun*, plural -ta or -tums. 1. a layer of material, naturally or artificially formed, often one of a number of parallel layers one upon another: a stratum of ancient foundations. 2. one of a number of portions or divisions likened to layers or levels: an allegory with many strata of meaning. 3. *Geology*. a single bed of sedimentary rock, generally consisting of one kind of matter representing continuous deposition. 4. *Biology*. a layer of tissue; lamella. 5. *Ecology*. (in a plant community) a layer of vegetation, usually of the same or similar height. 6. a layer of the ocean or the atmosphere distinguished by natural or arbitrary limits. 7. *Sociology*. a level or grade of a people or population with reference to social position, education, etc. the lowest stratum of society. 8. *Linguistics*. (in stratificational grammar) a major subdivision of linguistic structure.

## FOREWORD

STEVE SAFFELL  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
COUNTRY ARTS SA

At Country Arts SA we have a proud tradition of supporting the creative aspirations of South Australian artists.

In 2011, we launched the inaugural Breaking Ground award in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival Centre's Artspace Gallery.

The award gives a practicing contemporary artist from regional South Australia the opportunity to develop a body of work for exhibition at the Artspace Gallery along with funds for an exclusive mentorship opportunity.

The award was embraced by the arts community, generating in excess of 30 applications from across the state. Each entry was judged by our esteemed panel of visual arts professionals including the Chair of the Regional Galleries Association of South Australia Melinda Rankin, Charissa Davies, Robert Zunic, Annalise Reese and Mercedes Mangnall.

It was with great pleasure in July of 2011 that we announced Victor Harbor based visual artist Yvonne East the inaugural recipient of this award. She boasts a stellar resume, producing six solo exhibitions and taking part in numerous group exhibitions.

Her unique style combines two dimensional works with multimedia performance techniques, showcasing her talent to combine traditional art forms with the new digital media technologies of today.

Stratum is the result of Yvonne's Breaking Ground journey and exemplifies her unique artistic style. As Chief Executive Officer of Country Arts SA it is my pleasure to welcome you to our first Breaking Ground exhibition. Enjoy.



Yvonne East, *Stratum*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 1120 x 920 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.

# Y V O N N E E A S T : T R A N S C E N D E N C E

JANE HYLTON

CURATOR AND COLLECTIONS CONSULTANT

The figures in Yvonne East's work are protagonists in a universal story. Her giant, superbly-executed naked figures ascending into nothingness, her gently curled nudes and upright, naked figures struggling under the weight of seen and unseen burdens, are all journeymen in search of fundamental truth. As we, the audience, witness their travels we understand that these grand-scaled, overlaid works are about pain and revelation, about knowledge and power, strength and weakness and about the existential nature of being. These are the persistent challenges faced by all of us no matter what our circumstances.

The title for this exhibition is encapsulated in a single word – Stratum. It is an ideally appropriate word for the layered nature of what Yvonne East is exploring. For all of us our first layer – or stratum – is our superficial appearance such as our choice of clothing, the colour of our hair, our skin, and our eyes. While there is a lot of information that is conveyed to others by our appearance, like our age, gender and even cultural origins, there is so much more that remains hidden beneath that initial layer. For this reason East strips her figures bare, both figuratively and metaphorically, and in her works on paper, even removes all grounding influences. Without any means

of support these figures become buoyant, liberated and elevated as if weightless. They are then overlaid by the artist with visual strata that provide keys to understanding origins, country, passions, creativity, imaginations and language.

In 2011 Yvonne East took part in a spoken and visual performance piece developed by South coast writer Michelle Murray. Titled *The Black Wedding Dress*, the exhibition also included work by other South Australian artists Nyorie Bungey, Michael Bryant, Barbary O'Brien and Annabelle Collett. For her part East drew, in charcoal, a larger-than-life naked figure lightly suspended from bound wrists. Over the surface of this drawing, itself suspended at the end of the room in which the performance took place, images were projected that seemed to relate to the figure but paradoxically also apparently came from a different time and place. Some, like tribal symbols or bolts of lightning, appeared threatening, while others were more soothing and comforting. The whole effect however, was deeply unsettling and evoked disquiet in the viewer.

It is from this first foray into the projected, overlaid image that many of the works from this exhibition come. East selected friends and acquaintances as models (both male and female) for her huge charcoal drawings. Stripped of the layers of clothing behind which we all hide, these individuals had to come to

terms with how vulnerable they felt under the gaze of an artist who has not cosseted them in anonymity and who is bent on understanding the very nature of being. East has drawn every lump and bump without enhancement, and at the same time has cleverly distorted the figures. The slightly arched backs, the hands spread in an expression of unbalanced surprise, and the subtle twists of these models' bodies, convey lightness and ascendancy. They have been lifted out of their daily lives to something higher and infinitely mysterious.

Similarly, in her paintings Yvonne East presents her figures (this time all female) naked and vulnerable, but in some takes this conveyed sense of susceptibility a step further and confronts her audience with the primeval. While a couple of figures float dreamily, uncurling from a foetus-like position, others are grounded and challenging. These people dwell in a world of dark cave-like recesses, filmy, nebulous beginnings and hot, lifeless deserts. They are also real and un-idealised, existing in a strange, half-way world between consciousness and sleep, conflicted by the contrasting nature of freedom and obligation, as if at the portal of profound knowledge.

One of the paradoxes embedded within East's work (and there are many) is the unsettling relationship between her craftsmanship and her deliberate attempts to deflect her audience's attention away from it.

Her subjects could easily be cloyingly pretty and viewers instantly gratified by admiration of technical skill. Instead the artist asks us to immerse ourselves in the multiplicity of layers she offers, and through them guides us to understand what it is that she wishes to convey. As a consequence Yvonne East does not deliberately seek beauty in her work (which is, nevertheless, beautiful) but instead hides these starkly exposed figures beneath snaking lines that have their origins in the constantly repetitive patterns of life: the contours of a landscape, the microscopic DNA of a blowfly, the beautiful circles of a fingerprint or the circular nature of a piece of weaving.

Yvonne East's figures are ordinary individuals with ordinary lives, unique just like all of us. They are joined, like all of us, to the quirks and glitches that make us the centre of our universe and at the same time infinitesimally small and unimportant in the great scheme of things. At the entrance to this exhibition appropriate warnings concerning full frontal nudity have been provided for the public. Another warning could also be suitable: be prepared to confront a fundamental truth – we are all vulnerable, we are all so much more than we superficially appear to be, we are all capable of transcendence.



Yvonne East, *Lamar* (detail), 2012, Oil on Canvas, 920 x 820 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

YVONNE EAST

This exhibition is an exploration of the relationship between the mind, body and our environment.

There is an intentional ambiguity in the images projected on to the figurative charcoal drawings. They are created by filming, in real-time, brush and ink paintings I have created on large screens. The images reference topographic maps of Adelaide and Fleurieu regions, electron microscope images of human skin and bone tissue, light micrographs of lily flower embryo sacs and giant blowfly chromosomes, and satellite images of South Australia. There is a visual relationship not only between the micro and macroscopic of the natural environment, but also the replication of these patterns in social structure, architecture, science and art.

The painted works in this exhibition are a depiction of the protagonist's epic journey. The works refer to myths and storytelling using metaphor to illustrate the psychological struggle of the human condition.

I present this work as part of a discussion, and encourage interpretation. The work no longer belongs only to me. Its meaning is now determined by each individual and their own history of faith and storytelling, social appropriateness, prejudice, scientific observation, and environmental connection.

broken  
I carry it  
the beasts burden is my own  
in slumber  
it nuzzles  
warm and comforting.  
When I travel  
the burden is heavy.  
What I carry  
defines my strength.  
One day I will bury it in the ground  
unneeded  
But I postpone the moment  
I walk away  
unheeded  
unbound.



Yvonne East, *The Horse*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 1370 x 870 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.

From the sacrum to my throat  
Crows pull thin strands,  
to surrender the fetid.  
The song call is clear.  
Released from my old skin  
suffocating,  
I had stayed too long.  
I missed the ceremony.  
What was meant to happen  
and had been known  
was lost.  
Yet it found me  
in the darkest of places.  
The embers of ceremonial fire  
breathed life.  
I passed through  
And it began



Yvonne East, *Ceremony*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 1370 x 870 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.




Be *humble* for you are made of *earth*.  
Be *noble* for you are made of *stars*.

SERBIAN PROVERB







Some part of *our being* knows this is where we came from. We long to return. And we can. Because the cosmos is also within us. We're made of star-stuff. We are a way for the cosmos to *know itself*.

CARL SAGAN

My cave is underground  
You can't see it.  
I hold a stone in my hand  
For ballast  
or perhaps for defence.  
I watch from the entrance  
one way in, one way out.  
Inside I am transformed  
from flesh  
to unknown.



Yvonne East, *Cave*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 920 x 820 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.

black

white

grey

earth

sky

tree

body

mind

spirit



Yvonne East, *Desert*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 870 x 970 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.



Yvonne East, *Surrender*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 1070 x 710 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.



Yvonne East, *Lunar*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 920 x 820 mm. Photo: Richard Hodges.





When we try to pick out anything by itself we find that it is *bound* fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be broken, to *everything* in the universe.

JOHN MUIR

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### MAJOR PRESENTING PARTNERS THANK YOU



### PRESENTATION SUPPORT



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*Chief Executive Officer* Steve Saffell  
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The Country Arts SA Visual Artist Professional Development Award provides a practicing contemporary visual artist from country South Australia the opportunity to develop a body of work for exhibition in a major gallery space in metropolitan Adelaide and receive a mentorship opportunity to further their career.

### THE ARTIST WOULD LIKE TO THANK

Jane Hylton for her beautiful writing, inspiring support, and passion for creativity.

Craig Williams from Mosaic Audio Visual for aiding and abetting my insane visions.

Richard Hodges for hours of photography work and problem solving, and for not having a nervous breakdown handling large unruly pieces of fragile paper.

Thank you to Katinka, Craig, Beth, Kyra, Anthony, Rob and Steve from Country Arts SA for this opportunity and your incredible support. A big thank you to Charissa from Artspace Gallery for creating a wonderfully supportive environment and space to exhibit.

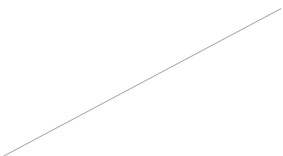
A heartfelt thank you to all of the models involved in this project. I thank you for your trust and faith, and for being a the embodiment of transcendence; to conquer insecurities and be comfortable with feelings of vulnerability. Without you I could not make works of art that comment so directly on the human condition. I am in awe and gratitude.

### REFERENCES

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**John Cage** (1912 – 1992)  
An American composer, music theorist, writer, philosopher and artist.  
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**Carl Sagan** (1934 – 1996)  
An American astronomer, astrophysicist, cosmologist, author, science populariser, and science communicator in astronomy and natural sciences.  
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