

**TANISHA BURTONYK** is a Perth based artist, with a practice founded on her personal experience of diaspora. She uses drawing to bring questionable and undetermined spaces under examination. Tanisha was born in South Africa (1988), and then lived in Zimbabwe, until her family had to flee in 2001. She finished her A-levels in England, before migrating to Australia in 2007, where she completed her BA Fine Art (Hons). Tanisha currently works as a Sessional Academic, within the School of Design and Art, at Curtin University, Western Australia.

**GINA CINANNI** lives and works in Perth Western Australia. Since 1986, after graduating with a BA (Art) and Postgraduate Diploma in Art and Design at Curtin University, Cinanni has exhibited in numerous exhibitions with a collection of her work at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. In this exhibition, Cinanni has transformed her art practice to a new order while focusing on her role as Chair, OUA (Art and Design) Studies, in the School of Design and Art at Curtin University.

**MOIRA DOROPOULOS** lives in Perth Western Australia, where she has been a staff member of Curtin University since 1992 and is currently the Course Coordinator of the Fine Art Major, OUA Art studies in the School of Design and Art. As an Executive Committee member of the Textile Exchange Project (TEP), she is involved in the international promotion of contemporary Western Australian Textiles. Doropoulos' art practice examines cultural traditions and objects of material culture, through the application of both contemporary and traditional methods.

**ANNA NAZZARI** is a Perth based artist. Her practice focuses on the investigation of mythological tales, superstitions and unusual events that emphasise moral certainty and foster a reading of the absurd. Her work is often painstakingly made and combines old world skills with contemporary art processes to aesthetically convey the contradictory or futile facets of life. In 2011, she completed a Doctorate of Philosophy (Art), which analysed the absurd fate of gender ambiguous narratives. Her art practice primarily accommodates 3-Dimensional form but can also incorporate video, drawing and photography. Nazzari currently works as a Lecturer at Curtin University's School of Design and Art, OUA Art Studies program.

**MARZENA TOPKA** arrived in Australia in 1983 from Poland. She studied art history at University of Western Australia graduating with a BA (Fine Art) (hons) in 1992. Since then she completed Advanced Diploma at Central TAFE (2003), BA (Art) (hons) (2005) and Master of Creative Arts in 2011 at Curtin University. Marzena is a Sessional Academic at Curtin University School of Design and Art, Open Universities Art Studies. Her art practice is concept driven and she works across various media. At the heart of her practice lies the conviction that there are qualities that escape measurement.

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**F L A W L E S S M E A S U R E S**

# FLAWLESS MEASURES

DR ANNA NAZZARI

It is probably a superfluous measure to point out that the somewhat hyperbolic title of this exhibition should not be taken literally. Most humans are programmed to believe that all things can be amended or enhanced so the idea that anything can be rationalised as flawless, as something perfect or unimpaired, instantly raises suspicion. It is not surprising then that the word flawless, when linked with the word measures, heightens an already conflicted status. After all, understood in their own rights, measures are vehicles of disputed reasoning. This occurs because they are human constructs designed to implement order, unity and continuity and so, are subject to unexpected whims or modifications in human thinking. Thus, for the five artists presenting in this exhibition: Gina Cinanni, Tanisha Burtnyk, Marzena Topka, Moira Doropoulos and Anna Nazzari, flawless measures are an amplification of the already dubious rationales derived from contradictory and transient human formed measures.

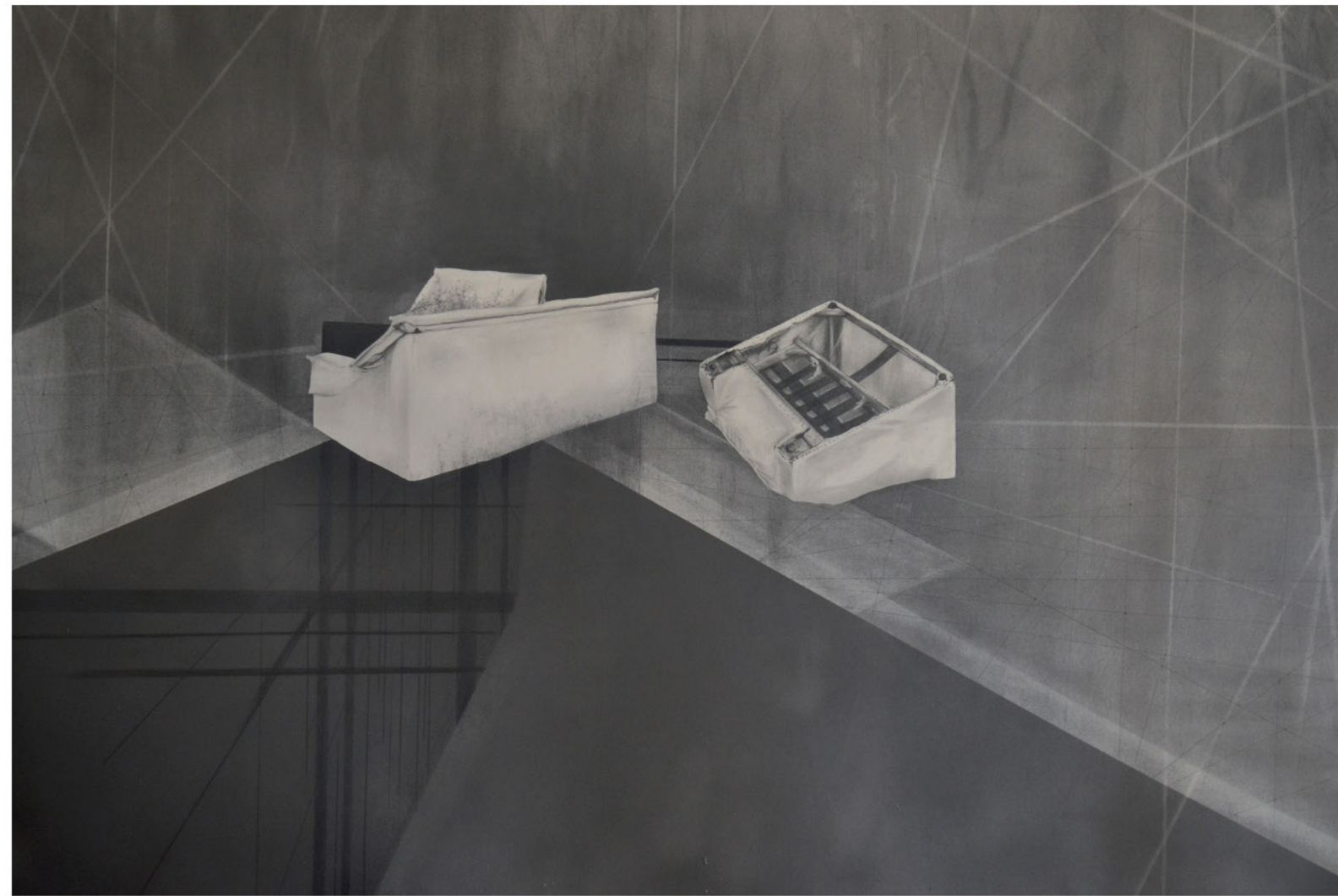
It would be wonderful to disassociate from a human centred mode of thinking and see the world from the perspective of something completely non-human. If we contemplate Greek philosopher Protagoras' view that, "Man [sic] is the measure of all things: of those that are, that they are; and of those that are not, that they are not" (Reuben 1976, 1), then the very idea of disassociation seems impossible. Abel Reuben reiterates this idea in *Man is the Measure* to suggest that the only way to make sense of the human enterprise is to acknowledge that it is strangely and inescapably human and that all of our attempts to apprehend the world, in their entirety, stem from our understanding of homo sapiens.

It is fair to say that this understanding is driven by a quest to appease an insatiable metaphysical questioning of "what is really there?" and "what is it like?". For humans, this need alleviates the anxiety of who we are and where we belong in the world. An idea ingeniously expressed by Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* when the sperm whale, the ultimate example of anthropomorphism, attempts to understand its world and itself before death:

Whale: Ah...! What's happening? It thought. Er, excuse me, who am I? Hello? Why am I here? What's my purpose in life? What do I mean by who am I? Calm down, get a grip now... Oh! This is an interesting sensation, what is it? It's a sort of... yawning, tingling sensation in my... my... well I suppose I'd better start finding names for things if I want to make any headway in what for the sake of what I should call and argument I shall call the world, so lets call it my stomach. Good. Ooooh, it's getting quite strong. And hey, what about this whistling roaring sound going past what I'm suddenly going to call my head? Perhaps I can call that... wind! Is that a good name?... Hey! What's this thing? This... lets call it a... tail - yeah, tail! Hey I can really thrash it about pretty good, can't I?... Now - have I built up any coherent pictures of things yet?... Hey! What's this thing suddenly coming towards me very fast? Very very fast. So big and flat and round, it needs a big wide sounding name like... ow... ound... round... ground! That's it! That's a good name - ground! I wonder if it'll be friends with me?

(Adams 1984)

Measures are a means of creating order and control through knowledge. The more humans know, the more it is possible to regulate their lives. This idea is implicit in how humans have used their body parts: the length of a foot, the width of finger, the span of a hand or the stride of a step to measure their surroundings and standardise their world. Bodily measures, such as these, not



only serve as indicators of a size or an amount but they also provide data relative to our bodies. Falling down a hundred foot hole, for example, would more than likely mean certain death for a five-foot something adult human, so measures are employed to help us safely navigate and manage our world.

Our mode of classification also hinges on the particular idiosyncratic ordering of homo sapiens. Reuben notes, for example, in the nineteenth century biologists superseded the class of "quadrupeds" by the class of "mammals" to abandon the class of "raptors" and to re-categorise sponges as animals instead of plants, and whales as mammals instead of fish (Reuben 1976, 16). This occurred, he suggests, not because the individual creatures gave a crap about what they were classified as, but because humanity needed to impose and clarify their own knowledge and order of intelligence. Of course it stands to reason, if we were to lose our status as the most dominant species then our world would not be ordered and classified in relation to the human mind and body.

Consequently, for the artists exhibiting in *Flawless Measures*, nothing is immune from the classifications of measure. All objects and subjects are located or locate themselves within preconceived systems of measurement that break down life, bodies and time into manageable parts. Although, this may sound scarily obsessive, this does not necessarily mean that all human measures are inappropriate. Such a belief would imply that an intrinsically chaotic world is more desirable. Instead, the artists are of the view that there is no inimitable preexisting structure that humans suddenly stumble upon. All measures are always dependent on how humanity came to be, what it is now and what it will be in the future. As humans are the impetus for all modes of measure it is therefore lunacy to suggest that the data governing measures is fixed; it is

always subject to inconsistencies and reinvention. And it is these paradoxes or leakages in the system that the exhibition seeks to unravel.

To contemplate flawless measures, Gina Cinanni's artwork *Corruption: File System Error I* explores the role information storage systems play in the management and operations of corporate organisations. In these environments, data can be created and recorded via digital or hard copy technologies. The perceived efficiency of complex digital systems often ensures that these are the preferred modes of amassing data. The retrieval of digital data though, can be restricted by the capabilities and failings of initial programming. A factor, which means digital systems frequently rely on other data storage systems to distribute dependable information for forensic investigation and classification.

While Cinanni's repetitively torn, compressed, and colour-categorised manilla folders appear to illustrate the declining status of hardcopy data, they are, in actuality, the manifestation of digital data extracted from operational excel spread-sheets. As a divergent system of human measure, her inaccessible folders evoke nostalgia for simple and stable storage systems while simultaneously alluding to the one dimensionality of digital data systems.

Tanisha Burtnyk expresses the notion of defective human order via her series of "poly-scenic" drawings. In these images, traces of human existence are evidenced by an array of discarded household items hovering in dissected and vortex-like spaces. The drawings are evocative of maps, but maps that elicit a sort of innate wrongness. In this context, it is as if the secure order of mapping has been inverted for other world applications. For most people, maps operate as a system of measure that enable us to bring order

to chaos, to represent or impose boundaries, explore ratios of scale and chart new terrains. The depiction of geographical locations on maps also allows us to rationalise the idea that spaces and places are real and not mere constructions of our imagination. While Burtnyk's drawings harness some cartographical devices such as imposed boundaries, differences in scale and the representation of new territories, they inflict a sort of melancholic geographical zone-less-ness in which domestic place and space are immeasurable and far from inhabitable.

The grid is another signifier of how humans order and regulate people, places and things. For Marzena Topka, the calendar, which is little more than a glorified grid, is a testimonial of such policing measures. As a means of keeping chronological time, the calendar appears to harmlessly inhabit human living and working environments under the pretext that it will help plan routines, celebrations and rituals in the years, months, weeks and days to come. Yet, the calendar has a sinister side; it invades the psyche of its disciples by dictating their routines and legislating their habits. Its manageable grid like structure reinforces habitual ways of being, both in the activities one undertakes and in how they react to life and its responsibilities. For Topka, the calendar homogenises experience, making everything appear mundane, repetitive and predictable.

In her series of work, aptly titled *Calendar*, Topka's irregularly scaled, incomplete, sagging, and unevenly coloured crocheted grids function as organic calendars. These collapsible almanacs highlight the ongoing inconsistencies of human regulated measures as well as Topka's optimism for a non-uniform grid through a rejection of linear time, the presence of fugitive boundaries and the loss of definite form.

Not all human measures are automatically ominous. Marriage, for example, can measure the creation of a new singular entity. Traditionally, the rituals and ceremonies of marriage in Western cultures are predominantly linked to ideas surrounding fecundity. For most, marriage was rationalised as means of validating the continuation of a clan, people or society. While marriage in Western cultures today is not necessarily driven by the need to procreate, the unification of two people is still idealised as a way of verifying human love. For Moira Doropoulos, this verification is specifically linked to her own (Greek) cultures' rituals of marriage, in which two individuals in love are symbolically bound together, to become one and emerge as a forever-bonded unit.

The blending of two elements into a solitary form is an unstable process that Doropoulos suggests is swayed by many external factors, internal intricacies and hidden readings. When (or if) a new entity manifests, the unlimited variations, configurations and mutations possible make its status indefinable and unfixed. In her work, *Merge*, she metaphorically represents the contradictions inherent in the fabrication of a single entity via a series of finely stitched shadows on silk organza. The ever-changing cast of shadows stitched onto the organza's surface, are generated from a hand-made object reflecting the ritual bond of marriage. In the work itself, the object is absent and only ever discernible as trace evidence.

For Anna Nazzari, animals are often a measure of our humanity; we employ animals to make sense of our world and gauge ideas about ourselves. Different societies measure an animal's worth in relation to their own human-centred beliefs. Japan's oldest historical book, the *Kojiki* (AD712), for example, warned its society against the consumption of land animals. This caveat ensured that marine based foods became a dominant staple of the Japanese diet and is why the slaughter of whales for research and consumption is not viewed negatively. In Western Australia, the rationale behind the treatment of animals is more ambiguous. The government ceased whaling in Albany in 1978 due to intense public pressure. Paradoxically, although most Western Australians are highly critical of countries that slaughter whales the WA government recently



introduced a catch-and-kill shark policy, which involves setting drum lines off the coast to catch and kill great white sharks.

For Nazzari, the inconsistency in Western Australian policy highlights how humans use animals to create absurd class systems that preference one species over the other. In her series of 3-dimensional photographs, she represents this conflict by placing drawings of animals slaughtered in foreign countries into photographs of locations synonymous with Perth. Her work emphasises the contradictory nature of this Western Australian policy by inferring the cultural realities we oppose are not always as foreign as we imagine.

While we don't always reflect on how the measures controlling our lives are human-centric constructs designed to alleviate metaphysical anxiety, the artists in *Flawless Measures* have taken the time to bring these issues to the fore. They do so knowing that exaggerated and inconsistent measures may have gravitas in this exhibition, however, they are just as likely to be irrelevant tomorrow.

Dr Anna Nazzari is an artist, writer and lecturer at Curtin University's School of Design and Art.

Adams, Douglas. 1984. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: Hitchhiker's Guide 1*. London: Pan Books. Reuben, Abel. 1976. *Man is the Measure*. New York: The Free Press.

**Far left:** MOIRA DOROPOULOS *Merge*, and detail, 2014. Stitch on silk organza, each panel 80 x 50 cm. **Center:** TANISHA BURTNYK. *Neerabup (Swampy Place) I* (detail), 2014. Graphite and pencil on paper; 108 x 108 cm. **Above:** MARZENA TOPKA *Calendar (fragment)*, 2013. Cotton thread, seven works 29.7 x 21 cm each. **Cover:** GINA CINANNI *Corruption: File System Error I* (detail), 2014. Paper; print and shelf, 240 x 12 x 10 cm (approx). **Overleaf:** DR ANNA NAZZARI *On the Road Again*, 2014. Digital print, 29.7 x 42 cm. **Catalogue Design:** Marzena Topka