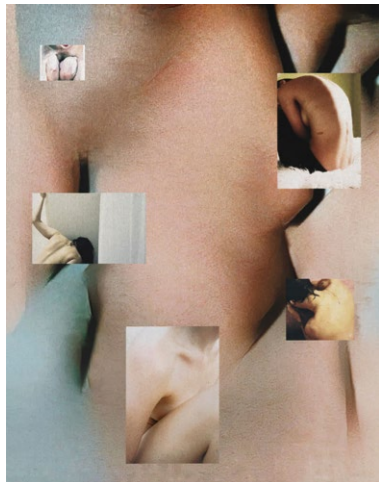


Graduate profile

Annabelle McEwen

Annabelle graduated from NAS in 2022 with a Master of Fine Art majoring in Printmaking, after beginning her Bachelor of Fine Art in 2018. Her multidisciplinary practice considers “how users of digital landscapes achieve agency in an algorithmically curated space”. As a visual metaphor for the effect of cyber navigation on the individual, Annabelle uses mainstream algorithms and artificial intelligence as tools to create corrupted images of the body and the self. She then transfers these virtual images onto real world objects to give the digital experience material form and speculate on existential futures.

Looking back now at her first days at NAS, Annabelle remembers she was excited and nervous to start the new degree. It was her second go at tertiary study, after starting an arts degree at the University of Sydney when she left school. “I quickly realised I didn’t thrive in the large, impersonal environment of an undergrad Arts degree,” she says.



Annabelle McEwen, *Reversed Hotlink Composition* 2022

She was also burnt out after finishing high school in 2015, so she took some time off, worked, travelled and moved out of home before starting at NAS. Following her interest in artmaking, art history and philosophy, she decided to apply for art school after meeting NAS students and attending exhibitions on campus. “I remember hearing such positive feedback about the institution and the resulting communities and discourse,” she says.

As with many other students, Annabelle arrived at NAS intending to major in painting, but took a different turn after her introduction to printmaking in first year. She found herself engaging with the fundamental physical labour and machinery of print, in both its traditional and expanded forms.

“It made me realise that art is not simply about symbolising, metaphors or visual languages within a painted or drawn ‘picture’, but that it extends to actual physicality and materiality of process and medium. These factors are what makes visual art different from other forms of creative expression, using physical labour and diverse materials as a form of research in a way no other investigation can achieve.”

In her second year, Annabelle won the Ellen Lee O’Shaughnessy Printmaking Award, an unexpected and encouraging surprise. “It truly granted me a great deal of confidence and validation that all the hard work I was putting in was being recognised.”

During her BFA studies, she discovered the biggest challenge was the unavoidable competition with her peers. “Because it is a visual medium which is an extension of the self, it is hard to avoid comparing yourself to those around you,” Annabelle says. “The feeling of not being good enough, current enough, trendy enough, skilful enough or insightful enough was really difficult.”

Yet this also taught her an invaluable lesson: how to push through those unhelpful comparisons to focus on what makes your own practice meaningful and important.

When she graduated with her BFA in 2020 however, she felt something was missing. “The experience of the degree is different for everyone but for me, I had only just begun to scratch the surface of what interested me and how I could use my practice to investigate these interests.”

So she decided to continue with the two-year MFA course, to keep up the creative momentum. “I was also still very unsure of where I wanted my life to go after the BFA. I didn’t know if I wanted to be a full-time artist, or what kind of job I wanted.”

Applying for Masters opened up new opportunities. As well as continuing to explore her own practice, Annabelle had the opportunity to teach and run workshops. She also took on the position of studio assistant to second-year printmaking student Shelley Baxter, who has autism and some physical challenges, and needed help with practical and theoretical work.

“The most important thing was to assist Shelley but give her complete agency, so it’s her work,” says Annabelle. “A big part of my role was ensuring she was making her own decisions, like we all do, trying to help her understand why she likes making what she does.”



Shelley Baxter, BFA Printmaking student

In her role with Shelley, Annabelle found she was learning just as much: patience, adapting to different types of communication, and working with different materials from her own practice such as etching and fabric work. She was also struck by how supportive Shelley’s cohort were, and how Shelley’s happy personality helped them in turn. “Seeing her everyone gets the feeling everything is going to be alright.”

In 2022 Annabelle participated in more than 10 exhibitions and graduated with her MFA. It was a completely different feeling to her BFA graduation. “I felt proud and accomplished. I also felt that I had direction of where I wanted to be in the art world.”

The future looks “fluid and diverse” to her now.

“I don’t want to box myself into traditional notions of what an artist is. I am excited to contribute to artist-run initiatives, enriching discourse within art communities and interrogating rapidly developing technology and the way it impacts us as users.”

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