



Deborah Kelly
Venus variations #4 2015

In the *Venus variations* series, Australian artist Deborah Kelly combines celebrated historical depictions of the Roman goddess with contemporary representations of women. Kelly collages iconography from fertility goddesses, art historical Venuses, fashion models and non-human forms like birds and bugs. Often, these hybrid Venuses are transfixed by one-another, other times they stand alone as their own women. Sometimes, elements of nature enter the compositions, such as the fish roe and hair tresses seen here, suggesting Botticelli's *Primavera*. Other times, the central Venus wears a pair of high heels or dons butterfly wings. Importantly, the Venuses that Kelly represents are self-possessing and subvert the Western art-historical narrative of master and muse; subject and object. Instead, they exist in their own space, on their own terms.

Deborah Kelly *Venus variations #4* 2015
from the series *The Venus variations*,
collage of book and magazine cuttings on
paper, 37.5 x 28 cm, Art Gallery of New
South Wales, Contemporary Collection
Benefactors 2016 © Deborah Kelly

Out in sight

In time for this year's Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, artworks by queer artists take centre stage, writes Emma McLean.

In March each year, Sydney explodes with rainbow colours, dance and shared joy. The Art Gallery thrums with activity during Queer Art After Hours, street parties explode in the suburbs and Oxford Street is brightly adorned. But it wasn't always like this. In 1978, a street festival was held in Sydney which was shut down by police through violence and arrests. This event is now recognised as the first Mardi Gras parade and, thanks to the resistance, strength and irrepressible creative energy of the LGBTQIA+ community, the event still thrives today.

In 2022 the Art Gallery began the Queering the collection project, offering queer readings of select collection artworks as part of the Mardi Gras celebrations. The project highlights artworks by contemporary queer artists and draws our attention to historical works, contributing remarkable insights that have often been left out of the mainstream art-historical record. Here, you'll find a selection of queer artists from the Art Gallery's collection whose works span time and place.

Jim Hodges *On we go* 1996, metal chain, pins, 144.78 x 121.92 x 55.88 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Peter Norton 2021 © Jim Hodges

Jim Hodges
On we go 1996

Jim Hodges is an American artist who works with found and industrial materials. *On we go* is a loving homage to friends and community lost during the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 90s. Using thin metal chains, Hodges weaves a sculptural spider's web that evokes a complex tangle of relationships, both tight-knit and far-flung. Despite its ethereal presence spanning the corner of a wall, the artwork is assertive and robust like its real-life counterpart (spider silk is flexible, durable and stronger than steel of the same diameter). In this artwork, Hodges evokes the indiscriminate nature of AIDS and its wide-ranging impacts, while pointing to the queer community's ability to hold strong through adversity.





Francis Bacon *Study for self-portrait*
1976, oil and pastel on canvas, 198 x 147.5
cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales,
purchased 1978 © Estate of Francis
Bacon/DACS, Copyright Agency, 2025

Francis Bacon
Study for self-portrait 1976

One of the 20th century's most celebrated painters, British artist Francis Bacon was out at a time when homosexuality was illegal, contributing to a strained relationship with his family. While Bacon's paintings often portray himself, close friends and lovers, the artist railed against illustration, preferring to capture the essence of another person. He explained, 'A picture should be a re-creation of an event rather than an illustration ... but there is no tension in the picture unless there is a struggle with the object.' This tension often manifested through distortion, warped lines and twisted limbs. While these techniques might be interpreted as a response to inner struggle, they may also be a means of expressing the unique experience of being human.

Harriet Hosmer

Beatrice Cenci 1857

American-born Harriet Hosmer was a significant sculptor who worked in Rome during the mid-19th century, overcoming considerable gender-based obstacles. Her determination and skill led to a placement with sculptor John Gibson, where she drew the attention of wealthy patrons including Lady Louisa Ashburton, with whom she shared a long-term relationship. Her works often depict heroines of Greek mythology, but in *Beatrice Cenci* she renders a then well-known 16th-century noblewoman who murdered her father after years of sexual abuse. Hosmer imagines Cenci as she waits for her execution. She immortalises Cenci's pain sympathetically, preserving her form in marble and, perhaps, showing solidarity.



Harriet Hosmer *Beatrice Cenci* 1857,
marble, 44.1 x 106.3 x 43.8 cm,
Art Gallery of New South Wales,
purchased 1892

Dylan Mooney *Next To You* 2021 (printed in 2023) from the series *Queer, Blak & Here*, digital illustration printed on 320gsm smooth cotton paper, 118.9 x 84.1 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased with funds provided by the Contemporary Collection Benefactors 2023 © Dylan Mooney

Dylan Mooney
Next to you 2021 (printed in 2023)

Dylan Mooney is a proud Biri (Yuwi), Meriam Mir and Australian South Sea Islander man from Yuwibara/Mackay. Mooney’s *Next to you* was among a series of his works titled *Queer, Blak and Here*, acquired in 2023. Mooney blends digital technology and drawing to celebrate First Nations people, culture and resistance against colonisation. His artworks often depict people in his life, from friends to Ancestors. His subjects consistently appear proud, confident, in love and secure in their identities, empowering viewers to feel the same. Among many major commissions, his mural *Still Thriving* 2023 stands tall in Darlinghurst on the side of the Top of the Town building, a reminder to the city of its identity, history and pride.

—
Emma McLean, deputy editor, *Look*



Queer Art After Hours will be held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales on Wednesday 26 February. Entry is free, bookings essential, visit [whats-on/events/queer-aah-2025](#)

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