

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

AN ANTHOLOGY OF STRANGE CREATURES

ARTWORK LABELS

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Bruce Armstrong: An Anthology of Strange Creatures

Melbourne artist Bruce Armstrong is best known for his monumental totemic sculptural figures installed in public spaces around Australia. Often hewn from massive pieces of red gum or cypress, his birds, beasts and mythical beings have a raw energy that assert a commanding presence and engage with the viewer directly. Armstrong has worked as an artist since graduating from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1981.

Bruce Armstrong: An Anthology of Strange Creatures surveys the artist's practice from the late 1970s to the present, and highlights his interest in mythological and imaginary figures and enduring preoccupation with the relationship between sculpture and the environment it is located in. Installed throughout the three foyer spaces of this building, the exhibition includes more than thirty of Armstrong's carved sculptures, a selection of cast bronze works and some of his animal portraits on wooden panels.

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Guardians

1987

Red Gum

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented by the Bardas Family as the winner of
the Bardas Family Sculpture Commission, 1987

S11.a-j-1987

'I was offered the chance as a young artist, at around thirty years of age, to create a work for the forecourt of the NGV on St Kilda Road. After a number of attempts to create a solitary work, one hot Saturday afternoon I thought to continue my interest in Egyptian mythology and make a pair of "guardian animals". These types of paired animals were intended in ancient times to ward off evil spirits. I hope that their presence in this exhibition brings a similarly good energy, and positive thoughts, to Federation Square.'

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Eagle, maquette

2002

painted Cypress

Private collection

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Rest

2002–03

painted Cypress, pigment, synthetic polymer paint

Collection of Loreto and Martin Hosking, Melbourne

‘This work was prompted by a love of the ancient Egyptian portrayal of the relationship between life and death. I not only wanted to try and say something about the heavy finality that awaits us, but also to suggest that death may be a worthy thing to think of during life: the idea is that thinking about death might make us better at living.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Sarcophagus

2003–04

Painted Cypress

Private collection

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Horus

1978

plaster

Private collection

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Guardians, maquettes

1986

Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

That's what you think (Knuckles)

1991

Red Gum

Private collection

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Black dog

2016

Painted Cypress

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Bast

c. 1990

painted Cypress, synthetic polymer paint on
plywood

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Still life (Mirror)

1994

painted Cypress, synthetic polymer paint on plywood

Collection of Dr Christine Healy OAM

‘One day in the studio I was sitting looking at a sculpture of a cat which I had just finished, and it occurred to me that I’d like to do a portrait of it. Once I had made the painting I turned my subject, an inanimate object, in the direction of the portrait and it felt right. It was something of a Eureka moment for me. I then made a number of works that pursued this theme.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Speculum (or Bear)

2012

painted Cypress, gold leaf

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

A building

1985

Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

‘I have always had an interest in architecture, and for many years I yearned to see the old cities of Europe. I imagined them as a wonderful, perfect world – the kind you might see in a book. These works served as a kind of homage to that imagined world. When I did finally get to travel to Europe I felt a strange mix of disappointment and enchantment. I think it’s fair to say that many imagined things seem more perfect than reality.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Gotham City

1985

Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Horse

c. 2007

painted Cypress, bronze

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Prowl

2003

Painted Cypress

Collection of Loreto and Martin Hosking, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Fish

1979–80

Elm

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

‘I made this work as a second-year student at RMIT in 1979. I borrowed a U-shaped chisel to indicate the scales – much later I realised that I had faced them the wrong way. That poor fish is destined to swim in circles for eternity!’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Bear

2006–07

bronze, edition of 7

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Bull

2006–07

bronze, edition of 7

Private collection, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Gryphon

1983

Cypress and rosewood

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Snake

2012

Painted Cypress

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Nap

1986

Red Gum

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Michell Endowment, 1986

DC8-1986

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Tyger

1984

Red Gum

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria

Hugh Williamson Emerging Artist Prize, July 1984

1984.56 a-c

'I received the Hugh Williamson Emerging Artist Award at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in 1984 with this work. At that time it had a light coating of shellac and it was meant to remain indoors. During the thirty years since, during which it's been displayed outdoors at Ballarat, *Tyger* has developed a wonderful patina resulting from human contact, which I have come to regard as an important part of my work.'

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Bunjil, maquette

c. 1996

painted Cypress

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

‘I made this sculpture as a studio work and first exhibited it at the Melbourne Art Fair. I was working on a submission for a public sculpture in Docklands when I found out that the creator spirit of the Kulin nations is a wedge-tailed eagle. My eagle then became the maquette for *Bunjil* in Wurundjeri Way.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Bête Noire

2012

bronze

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

‘This piece is a casting in bronze from the original wood sculpture. I cast it because the work was very meaningful to me but had been sold. I felt that I needed the image to stay close to me. It is intended as a kind of yin–yang, black–white reconciliation of opposites in the human spirit.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Noir Bird Man 2

2007

painted Cypress

Private collection

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Impasse

2003–04

painted Cypress

Bearbrass Collection, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Self portrait

2005

oil on composition board

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

‘Once, on a trip to Spain, I met the proprietor of a hotel I was staying in who bore an uncanny resemblance to me. As it turned out, one of his hobbies was falconry and I thought, “Gee, I wish I was you”. Much later when I felt like doing a self-portrait it occurred to me that I could be that person in an imagined way.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Stretch

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Mam

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Choice

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Acrobat

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Dancer

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Skater

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Shaman

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

The orator

1988

bronze, Red Gum

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Mimesis

2001

Painted Cypress

Collection of Andrea Ziegler, Sydney

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Obelisk

2008

painted Cypress

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Worlds and worlds

1984

Red Gum

Private collection, Ballarat

‘This work was my first commission. The owner and I became friends during a job and worked out that we had many shared interests. At first he asked me to make a mythological creature, which was essentially a naked pregnant woman on a ten-headed horse. My response was, “How would you feel about a turtle with a building on its back?” The result came down in my favour, which was great as it was a theme I was interested in at the time.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Crocodile

2000

painted Cypress

Private collection

‘The strange thing about this work is that I had no idea I was about to make a crocodile when I started. I found a large log which had some rot in it and simply set about cutting all the bad bits out. Then, after a day or two, I looked at it and thought it looked like a crocodile, and I just ran with it.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Herald

2009

pastel on Cypress panel

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Ari

2015

oil on Cypress panel

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Black bird

2001–02

oil on Cypress panel

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

‘I started my life in art as a painter and have maintained an interest in two-dimensional work. This has always run as a parallel to my sculpture practice. I generate a lot of offcuts when making my sculptures, and I use them as surfaces to draw and paint on. I really enjoy the fact that they have a life in them that is different to paper or canvas. For me, the imagery is provoked by the raw material of the wood.’

BRUCE ARMSTRONG

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Snakes and ladders

2014

shellac and pigment on Cypress panel

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Hooded and jessed

2014

pastel on Cypress panel

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Welcome home

2001–02

oil on plywood

Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Bruce Armstrong

Australia born 1957

Falcon

2001–02

oil on stained Cypress panel

Collection of the artist, Melbourne