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# BACCHUS

Fiona Blandford, Jan Learmonth, Sarah Parkes and Ellen Taylor  
Curated by Jasmin McNeill

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.





Painted around 1598, Caravaggio's *Bacchus* captures the Roman god of wine, festivity, plant life and fertility. In it, the artist lifts the veil of the divine ideal instead depicting a figure marked by time. A well-used pillow. Aging fruit. Rouged cheeks. Dirty fingernails. And ripples in the wine. Initially seducing us with the romanticism of wine, the subtle reveal of Bacchus's humanity gives this exhibition its name.

This image of wine – epitomising physicality, earth and decay – is a fitting symbol for what the four artists, Fiona Blandford, Jan Learmonth, Sarah Parkes and Ellen Taylor, bring to the Fleet Wines cellar door. In all instances, Bacchus asks the same of us: to look attentively. Where wine is often cast as a signifier of the divine and wealthy, this exhibition insists on its origins in labour, process and impermanence, giving new meaning to Fleet's preoccupation with "capturing those fleeting moments".

Images: Lisa Jenkins during the ArtCube residency at Fleet, 2026. (Next page): Fiona Blandford installation views, *Bacchus*, Fleet, 2026. Photographs by Karli Michelle Photography.

In this exhibition, our four artists respond to Fleet in a distinct way, from the red earth where the grapes are grown, through fermentation, to ritual celebration, the human condition and our relationship to cultivation. Their works stem from time spent at Fleet as part of the ArtCube residency program. Within the landscape of Leongatha, Fleet's vineyard and winemaking process, the artists observed, collected, tasted and dug into the dirt.

The success of each artist in celebrating winemaking lies in their ability to raise value in what we may overlook when stepping into Fleet. The artists guide us to perceive the winery through their own acts of making: collecting the lees pouring down the drain, discarded grape stems from harvests past, plastic left over from the necessities of agriculture and snapshots of daily operations. By paying closer attention to the materials and moments that pass unremarked, *Bacchus* reframes worth through acts of profound care and transformation.

### Climate

Fiona Blandford's photographs emerge from her study of Fleet's environment. By documenting the harvest and the landscape, Blandford situates her works within broader political, historical and ecological contexts. Her photographs capture the vineyard through its terroir, specifically the three climate types: the microclimate around the vine, the mesoclimate of the vineyard, and the macroclimate of the region. To document the microclimate, Blandford dug down to where it all begins, at the vine's root system. The mesoclimate is captured in the landscape of the squashed grapes. And the macroclimate is portrayed by the starry chardonnay sky. While Rosie the dog – hostess, grape taster and protector – stands proud as essential to the winery's ecology.

Wrapped in jewels, *Precious - Vintage 2026* makes visible what is vulnerable, finite and precious. Blandford collected and hung the grapes in early harvest at the beginning of her residency and left them to decompose week by week in the ArtCube. Slowly shrivelling, the grapes became a symbol for





the fragility of this environment. The work draws connections between Southern Victoria's recent 50% vineyard crop loss during unseasonal October rainfall and broader global instability surrounding the demand of finite resources.

Blandford has presented the photographs in ornate gold and wood frames, traditionally used to frame high art paintings. It's reminiscent of the 18th century salon style of exhibition that concerned itself with the hierarchy of subject matter. Her use of the frames around contemporary photography depicting landscapes, animals and still life, unsettle these traditional hierarchies. Elevating these subjects asks us to reconsider what shapes our perception of value.

### Fermentation

Jan Learmonth's artworks are largely influenced by her relationship with water, steered by the boat as a catalyst for how she interprets the world. She describes the experience of being in a boat compelling her to look at everything a little differently. She speaks of the movement of the water, the quietness, and the fauna that observes her as much as she observes them. In the same way she once looked over the lakes of East Gippsland, she now looks over Fleet.

Learmonth began building sculptures that echo the cycles of winemaking, informed by her practice of collecting materials such as branches, bones and dirt. Her affinity for making three-dimensional works shares something with her love of sitting out on the lake's water: both demand presence. Her sculptures are impossible to walk past, occupying space and making us stop, whether we look at them, look through them or look with them.

Then she found her water. Learmonth observed winemaker Justin Jenkins emptying barrels ahead of the new vintage, and was drawn to the colour of the lees flowing into the drain. Collecting the leftover sediment, she experimented with it as



Images: Jan Learmonth installation views. (Previous page): Fiona Blandford (top) & Jan Learmonth (bottom) installation views, *Bacchus, Fleet*, 2026. Photographs by Karli Michelle Photography.



painting material, brushing and pouring it across different papers and surfaces, sometimes standing on them, as if to conjure the same contemplative experience of being on a boat. Watching the lees oxidise and change colour over time, the material became a literal demonstration of the winery subject to time and change.

### Materiality

Sarah Parkes' textile sculptures are driven by materiality first and form second. Her diptych is woven to fill the expansive space of Fleet's cellar door. The tablecloth forms signify hospitality, shared experiences over food and wine, wealth and embellishment. However, the work is unravelling and imperfect, revealing the human labour of its creation and mirroring the labour of the winery.

Searching Fleet, Parkes found discarded hay bale netting and pallet wrap that complemented her silage wrap practice. Parkes was drawn to the tactility of the materials, requiring care when handled and big physical gestures to manipulate their form. Her process is a continual discovery, testing possibilities of material limitations. While the pallet wrap proved unworkable and too rigid, the hay bale netting paired seamlessly with the silage wrap, allowing her to weave the more intricate details of the tablecloth forms.

Her works hold several contradictions at once: luxury and waste, soft and rigid, permanence and disposability. Constructed from single-use plastic – unforgiving and non-biodegradable – the works engage with materials that resist decay yet are essential to cultivation. They stand in contrast to the organic processes of winemaking, taking centre stage as evidence of the unseen legacies of agricultural production.

### Earth

Ellen Taylor's ephemeral and site-specific installation is made in direct response to the

Images: Sarah Parkes installation views. (Next page): Sarah Parkes & Ellen Taylor installation view, *Bacchus*, Fleet, 2026. Photographs by Karli Michelle Photography.





themes that began to emerge for the artists alike at Fleet. In this way, the final outcome of her artwork, *Aurelia*, is collaborative. Yet, there is an intentional aspect in the process of creating the work that remains deeply personal to Taylor. Through the act of foraging in the soil, collecting and sculpting the plant material, she creates intimate and devotional spaces that are at the core of her sculptural practice.

At Fleet, Taylor gathered grape stems from harvests past, first spotted as a dark and decaying pile. Drawn to the black stalks contrasting against the landscape, Taylor was attracted to the aesthetic of this material already entering the final stages of its lifecycle and returning to the earth. Once painstakingly cultivated as they grew in the vineyard, now discarded and their purpose served, the stems are given a second life that honours what they were and what they will become.

The title of the work *Aurelia*, a feminine name that contrasts the blackened and decaying sculpture, refers to the historical word for a chrysalis. A form that emerges incidentally as Taylor works with the hardened stems, reminiscent of a grape cluster, paying homage to their transformation into wine.

### **Bacchus**

Through their study of climate, fermentation, materiality and earth, the artists answer Caravaggio's invitation. When we look closely, our relationship to the labour, process and impermanence with both the work and the wine deepens. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. The divine becomes human. The wine becomes real.

Written by Jasmin McNeill, Curator

Images: Ellen Taylor, *Aurelia* (details), installation views. (Next page): Ellen Taylor, *Aurelia*, installation view, *Bacchus*, Fleet, 2026. Photographs by Karli Michelle Photography.





Images: Jan Learmonth sculpture and wine painting installation views. (Next page): Installation view, *Bacchus. Fleet*, 2026. Photographs by Karli Michelle Photography.





## FIONA BLANDFORD

Fiona Blandford is a photographer with a Bachelor of Fine Art from RMIT living on Bunurong Country. Her practice engages cultural research, politics, landscape, portraiture and still life, influenced by fifteen years as a chef and twelve years as a Community Organiser and Campaigner with BirdLife Australia.

Her photographic work is driven by a strong conceptual and historical consciousness, interrogating the human condition and land cultivation in the name of progress. Her photographic projects include *We are our landscape* (2016), made with the permission of Gunaikurnai Elders, in which she photographs sites of colonial massacre in East Gippsland from the 1830s to 1850s. In *1983 from the freezer* (2016–present), she works with decades-old film stock, embracing unpredictability and impermanence as part of the photographic process. And, *Still life 2010* examines the politics of food through the aesthetic language of classical painting, placing the visual conventions of abundance against the realities of industrialised food production.

Beyond her fine art practice, Blandford is co-founder of Everything is Fine. Nothing is Fine., a sustainable t-shirt label celebrating local beaches and wildlife on Phillip Island, with proceeds supporting koala forest planting through the Koala Clancy Foundation.

Image: Fiona Blandford photographing grape vines at night during her ArtCube residency at Fleet, 2026. Photograph by Karli Michelle Photography.



## JAN LEARMONTH

Jan Learmonth is a sculptural and environmental artist, whose practice investigates land, water and the natural environment through the patient, material process of making. Based in Inverloch in Bunurong Country, she creates mixed media sculptural works lashed, knotted, woven, and welded into being with natural and found materials gathered on her travels through Gippsland and beyond.

Learmonth studied at the Gallery School in Melbourne from 1966, and has since built her practice through decades of making and exhibiting. In 2024, she presented *Passage*, a major solo exhibition at Gippsland Art Gallery.

Water is a prominent subject in Learmonth's sculptures, which function as symbolic and literal maps of her journeys, tracing what it means to move through time and landscape as a momentary visitor. Her works can be surreal or mythical as they take form in her fascination with water culture. Among her extensive body of work, Learmonth is best known for her series of boats. The boat represents a material exploration of the controversial history and culture of land and water in Australia, the movement of people across sea and soil to occupy and exploit the land, and the precarious state of river systems and natural environment. Her work questions attitudes towards the country, interrogating tensions between land use and land care.

Image: Jan Learmonth painting with lees during her ArtCube residency at Fleet, 2026. Photograph by Karli Michelle Photography.



## SARAH PARKES

Sarah Parkes is an artist and designer who knots and weaves narratives of place and home into her sculptural rope works, creating a personal topography of her life and surroundings. Dialogues of care, comfort and the domestic are interwoven with explorations of place and the natural world. Her endless curiosity informs her drive to explore, experiment and push the boundaries of knotting in both her artworks, commercial interior installations and commercial products.

Parkes is well known for her commercial work under Smalltown with a focus on timeless and unique designs made with integrity and craftsmanship. Smalltown has operated for over 18 years, delivering a diverse array of large-scale, site-specific commissioned projects. Recent commissions include Mecca, APT River Cruise Ships, StandardX Hotel, Charter House, Hilton Hotel Melbourne, Hyatt Regency Sydney, and many other bars, restaurants, office spaces and private clients internationally and Australia wide.

Living on Gunaikurnai Country in South Gippsland has had a deep impact on her work, with a renewed focus on technique and materials. From creating rope with a DIY machine to incorporating salvaged and waste materials, Sarah continues her explorative approach to making.

Parkes is also a member of art collective the Hotham Street Ladies, whose immersive and experiential work addresses themes of female biology, feminism, food, dinner parties, gender politics and the contemporary domestic landscape with parody, humour and wicked delight. As well as their books, sculpture and work in other media, the Hotham Street Ladies create installations made from edible materials including icing and fondant.

Image: Sarah Parkes during her ArtCube residency in Fish Creek, 2023. Photograph by Karli Michelle Photography.



## ELLEN TAYLOR

Ellen Taylor grew up making and creating on Bunurong Country in the coastal town of Inverloch, her practice now encompasses large-scale drawings and plant-based installations. Her works are imbued with the obsessiveness and compulsivity of an artist who loves to make with her hands, whether this be hours of layered black crosshatching or the gathering and arrangement of thousands of grasses, leaves and flowers – the work is part of the work.

Taylor uses locally sourced, semi-dried flowers, grasses and plant materials to create foliage installations that act as a serene devotional space. Her work can be seen as drawing in space, grown out of the rich role that flowers play in ritual and symbolism. Taylor first began making large floral displays in her artwork after her mother passed away. The harvesting and collection of the plants is a labour of love and act of dedication woven into her foliage works as an everlasting thread and memorial to her mother.

Taylor completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Sculpture and Spatial Practice, at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2008. In the years following, she has exhibited in various group and solo exhibitions throughout Melbourne and South Gippsland, where she currently works and lives.

Image: Ellen Taylor during her ArtCube residency in Toora, 2024. Photograph by Karli Michelle Photography.



## JASMIN MCNEILL

Jasmin McNeill is a curator based on Gunaikurnai Country whose practice centres of developing contemporary art in regional Victoria. She is particularly interested in environmental and socially engaged practices, often exploring themes of sustainability, place and women's perspective in the context of regional life.

She is an independent curator and is currently the Visual Arts and Cultural Development Officer at Bass Coast Shire Council where she curates Berninnet Art Gallery and the public art program. She is also the co-founder of Toora Arts Network, an artist collective driving art making and exhibition opportunities for South Gippsland artists.

Her recent curatorial projects include *Yawa (Long Journey)* by Maree Clarke permanently on display at Berninnet (2025), *Hidden Ecology* by Toora Arts Network at Coal Creek (2025), *Of the Earth* at Berninnet Art Gallery (2025) and managing two iterations of the ArtCube program in Toora (2024 and 2026).

McNeill lives on and co-owns a 100-acre organic farm. In 2018, Greening Australia revegetated 70,000 native trees on sixty acres, contributing to the water health of Franklin River and creating a significant wildlife corridor. This experience grounds her curatorial thinking in the lived realities of agricultural land, labour and sustainability.

Image: Jasmin McNeill in *Bacchus*, Fleet Wines, 2026. Photograph by Karli Michelle Photography.



## FLEET

Lisa and Justin Jenkins bring a clear and dynamic vision to their winemaking, with refined palates shaped by over 30 years of combined experience at some of Melbourne's most iconic wine bars and restaurants. With extensive experience tasting the world's best wines, the couple have channeled that expertise into crafting wines that are charismatic and full of personality.

In 2016, the couple returned to South Gippsland, Justin's childhood home, to pursue the winemaking dream and produce small, limited-release wines that capture a moment in time.

Each Fleet wine is a reflection of its origin and varietal, offering a snapshot of a fleeting moment, lovingly crafted by two seasoned professionals who are driven by flavour and vibrancy.

Shrugging convention, Fleet's approach to wine is refreshingly open. Nothing is formulaic, each vintage and plot of fruit is cajoled into being the best it can be. This means each release is incredibly exciting and a true reflection of the vintage. What is always guaranteed is that it will be deliciously pure and fun.

Justin's affinity with South Gippsland shines through in these soulful wines. Lisa's extensive hospitality background - she's both a qualified chef and sommelier - has led her to wine show judging and completed the very demanding WSET Diploma in Wines. Her ability to inject her technical background into making delicious and evocative wines runs through all Fleet wines.

Beyond raising their young family with an idyllic life on the farm, the couple are committed to always care for, restore and rejuvenate country for future generations—using a portion of profits to restore farmland to native vegetation.

Image: Justin Jenkins, Rosie and Lisa Jenkins at the Fleet cellar door. Photograph by Cam Suttie.

# ARTWORK LIST

## Jan Learmonth

1. *Lees Forest*, 2026, wood, cotton, 32 x 22 x 7 cm.
2. Wine painting diptych, 2026, lees on paper, variable dimensions.
3. *The Mob*, 2026, cork, metal, variable dimensions.
4. *Unwrapped*, 2026, wood, plastic, metal, 29 x 46 x 43 cm.
5. *Buried*, 2026, bone, paper, wood, ochre, 32 x 45 x 44 cm.
6. Wine painting series, 2026, lees on paper, variable dimensions.
7. *Fragment II*, 2025, wood, metal, twine, 41 x 36 x 31 cm.
8. *Fragment IV*, 2025, cotton, metal, wood, 32 x 25 x 18 cm.
9. *Fragment V*, 2026, wood, cork, paper, metal, 48 x 38 x 34 cm.
10. *Fragment III*, 2026, grass, bone, wood, 39 x 33 x 23 cm.
11. *Fragment I*, 2026, wood, metal, 43 x 50 x 25 cm.
12. *Boat with bird*, 2015, wood, metal, 45 x 225 x 56 cm.

## Fiona Blandford

13. *Grüner Veltliner*, 2026, photograph, 42 x 54 cm (framed), ed. 1/10.
14. *Chardonnay*, 2026, photograph, 58 x 89 cm (framed), ed. 1/10.
15. *Rosie*, 2026, photograph, 45 x 65 cm (framed), ed. 1/10.
16. *Precious - Vintage 2026*, 2026, photograph, 64 x 48 cm (framed), ed. 1/10.
17. *The Source*, 2026, photograph, 42 x 52 cm (framed), ed. 1/10.

## Ellen Taylor

18. *Aurelia*, 2026, plant material, red fruit saw sedge, grape stalks, plastic netting, variable dimensions.

## Sarah Parkes

19. *Tablecloth (check detail)*, 2026, silage wrap, hay bale netting, 320 x 190 cm.
20. *Tablecloth (embroidery detail)*, 2026, silage wrap, hay bale netting, 320 x 135 cm.



Caravaggio (1571 - 1610), *Bacchus*, c. 1598, oil on canvas, 95 x 85 cm, The Uffizi, Florence.



**FLEET WINES**

Leongatha

June 6 - 8 2026,

11am - 5pm daily

Opening Event: June 6, 2pm

**COAL CREEK**

Korumburra

June 18 - August 24 2026,

Thurs - Mon, 10am - 4pm

Opening Event: June 19, 5pm

Panel Discussion: August 8, 2pm - 4pm

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**Fleet**



South Gippsland  
Shire Council