



# A BESTIARY OF REVERIE

by Dr Nicola Hooper



EDUCATION  
RESOURCE







## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Dr Nicola Hooper is a Meanjin/Logan-based artist who lives and works on the lands of the Yuggera people in Logan, Queensland, Australia.

With a background in design and illustration, lithography and drawing became integral to Nicola's studio practice whilst completing a Masters of Visual Arts (MAVA) and MAVA hons (1st class) at Queensland College of Art, Brisbane, Queensland. Nicola was awarded a Griffith University Postgraduate Research Scholarship to undertake a Doctor of Visual Arts which she completed in 2019 particularly focusing human/animal relationships, more specifically the transfer of animal diseases to humans ZOONOSSES (animal diseases that transfer to humans such as mosquito borne viruses and Covid 19).

With *A Bestiary of Reverie* Hooper explores these concepts more deeply, she asks the question...Does our interactions with animals make us more animal? Hooper has created

a curiosity cabinet of sorts... with her created hybrid creatures.

Hooper uses the aesthetics utilised from the era of the Natural History and the circus side show, in her subversive artistic approach, she challenges established perspectives and urges viewers to reevaluate their ecological roles.

*A Bestiary of Reverie* recontextualises hybrid creatures into compelling narratives, drawing from the historical traditions of a 'Bestiary'. She uses these creatures as cautionary symbols and the artworks are informed by anecdotal stories where she makes associations to mythical creatures that have historically represented various human behaviours. In today's context, they emerge as metaphors for issues such as anthropomorphism, zoonotic pathogen transmission, and human-animal interactions.

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# A BESTIARY OF REVERIE

“And what of monsters?  
Can they love too?  
We know quite well they can.  
For we know that they do.”

\*Alice Hoffman, *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*, 2014

In the exhibition “*A Bestiary of Reverie*,” Brisbane (Meanjin) - Logan-based artist Dr. Nicola Hooper has transformed the gallery into a Victorian Gothic-inspired salon of extraordinary creatures. The exhibition acts like a room-sized wunderkammer—a cabinet of curiosities—where human-animal hybrids of dark dreams, myth, and tales adorn the gallery walls.

The atmosphere is set with blood-red walls, intricately designed wallpaper, chandeliers, and gilded frames, creating a dramatic backdrop for the exploration of zoonotic pathogen transmissions through human-animal hybrid forms. Some of these creatures have historical origins in mythology, while others represent potential hybrid beings created from interspecies virus transmission. The gold ornate frames elevate the creatures from mere oddities to celebrations of natural beauty and wonder.

“*A Bestiary of Reverie*” is the second in a series of large-scale exhibition projects that delve into the zoonotic pathogen transmission between humans and animals. This ambitious project aims to raise awareness and provoke thought about the intricate and often perilous relationship between humans and the animal kingdom.

In this exhibition, Hooper employs traditional storytelling methods through lithography,

photography, and painting to create an environment where past, present, and future representations of the ‘bestiary’ are explored. Each piece is meticulously crafted to draw the viewer into a world where the boundaries between human and animal, reality and myth, are blurred.

Throughout the exhibition, Hooper invites the viewer to question their relationship with viruses and animals. By presenting these hybrids in a setting that evokes the grandeur and mystery of a bygone era, she encourages contemplation on how these relationships have evolved and how they continue to impact our world today.

This body of work explores a range of zoonotic viruses that pose significant threats to humanity, including leptospirosis, avian influenza, swine influenza, parasitic worms, and aquatic zoonoses, to name but a few. Through her art, Hooper aims to amplify and balance the perception of animals in the natural world, highlighting both their inherent beauty and the potential dangers they may carry as vectors of disease.

“*A Bestiary of Reverie*” is more than just an art exhibition; it is a profound exploration of the delicate and often fraught relationship between humans and animals. By immersing the viewer in a Victorian gothic-inspired environment, Hooper challenges us to rethink our understanding of zoonotic pathogens and the hybrid creatures they may spawn. Her work serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of respecting and understanding the natural world.

*Niomi Sands*

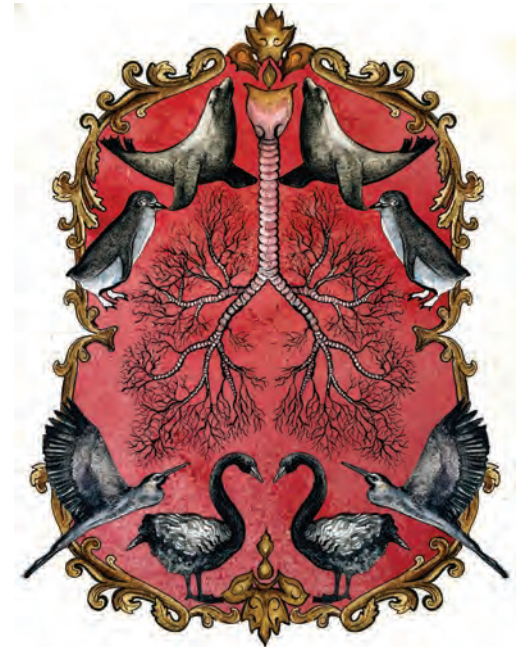
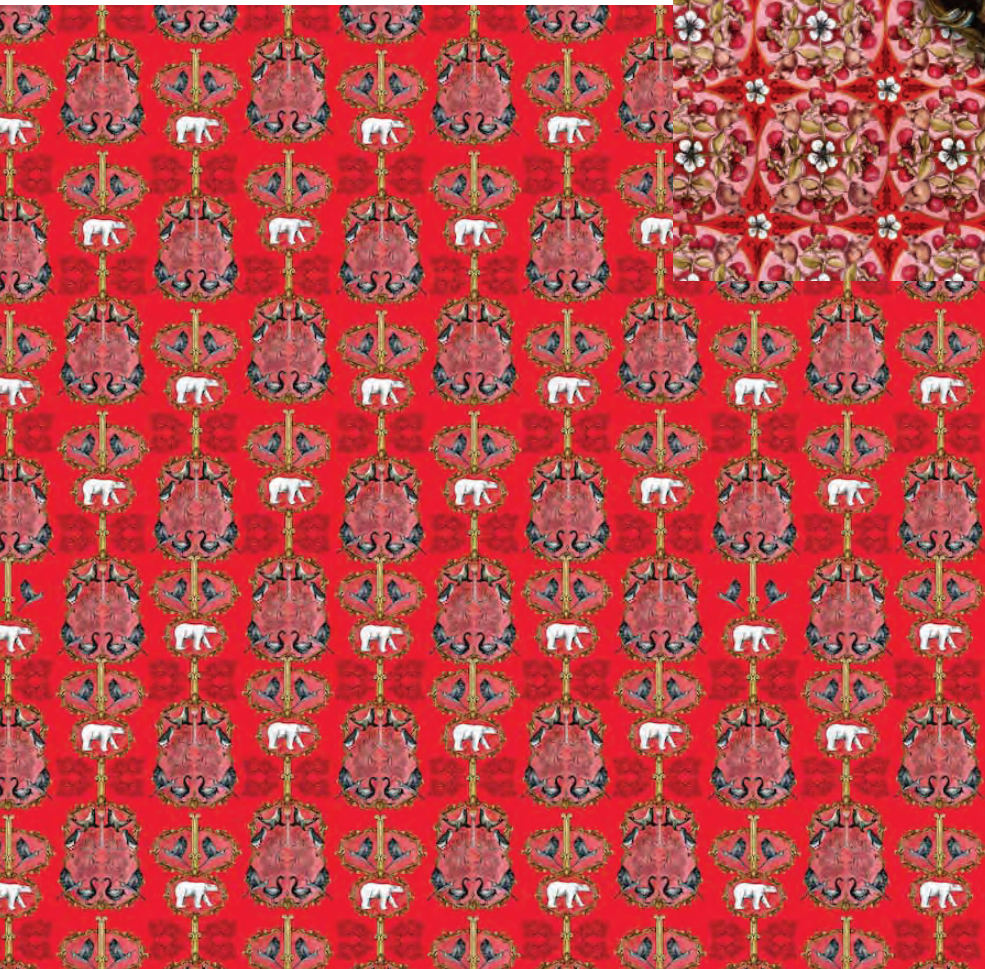
Creative Industries Program Leader  
Logan City Council



# WALLPAPERS

## RODENTS AND RASPBERRIES

This artwork created using hand coloured lithographs and matching wallpaper tells the story of an outbreak of leptospirosis in NSW in 2018. It was diagnosed in 84 fruit pickers working at the raspberry farm. This is the largest known outbreak of leptospirosis in Australia. Workers were exposed through scratches inflicted during harvesting, which became contaminated with leptospirosis from mice. Rodents love raspberries.



## AVIAN INFLUENZA WALLPAPER

Created using hand coloured lithography, and printed digitally. A polar bear in Alaska succumbed to the H5N1 avian flu virus in 2023. The virus is believed to spread through contaminated bodily fluids, and the polar bear

is suspected of having contracted the disease after feeding on the carcass of an infected bird. The current outbreak which has had global impact is a significant threat to sea mammals and other wildlife, and the Australian government is investing heavily in preparedness and response measures.



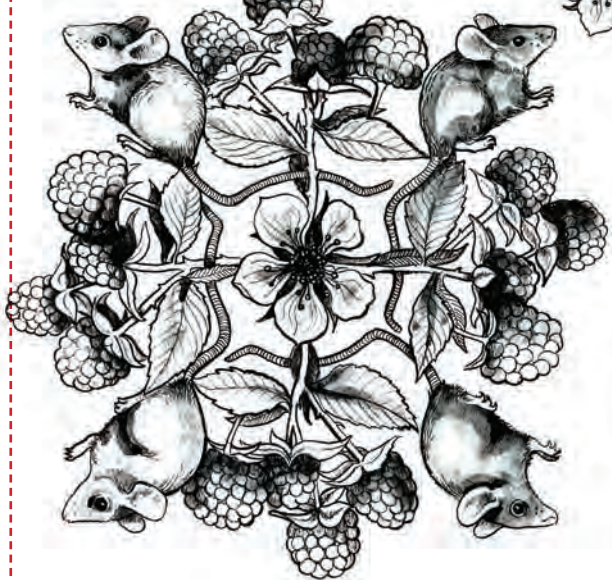
# PROJECT 1

## USING OBJECTS FROM THE NATURAL WORLD CREATE A PATTERN THAT COULD BE STEP AND REPEATED INTO A WALLPAPER



Wallpapers are an important element in Dr Hooper's exhibitions, helping to transform gallery spaces and create an emmersive environment. She uses them to help tell her stories.

1. Consider what story you would like to tell
2. Divide paper into quarters.
3. Draw design for 1 tile in 1 quarter.
3. Photocopy tile and rotate 90 degrees & trace using a window or lightbox
4. Once all 4 quarters are drawn, fill in the gaps.
5. Colour design
6. Scan
7. Join design digitally, scale down and print.





## KYRA

This hand-coloured lithograph printed over photo image. Created after the bizarre, world-first case, of doctors in Australia discovering and removing a live, 8cm parasitic roundworm, *Ophidascaris robertsi*, from the brain of a NSW woman. Discovered after the woman's strange symptoms started in her stomach, moved to her lungs, and then a fever, cough and night sweats. She eventually complained of symptoms including forgetfulness and depression. Experts believe the parasite came from Warrigal greens in the area contaminated with python poo. Logan First Nations artist Kyra Mancktelow is a Quandamooka artist with links to the Mardigan people of Cunnamulla. Kyra's totem is the python.<sup>1</sup>



## PIG MAN

This artwork created using hand-coloured lithograph printed over photograph tells the story of Nicola's son and the subject of 'Pig Man.' The work combines hand-coloured lithography and photography. Hooper draws on references to the now-extinct tusked 'Grice Pig'<sup>2</sup> to draw attention to the complex relationships between humans, animals and disease. Her broader practice involves consideration of zoonotic diseases, the fragility of human life, and the intersection of art, science and disease. As a young girl diagnosed with type one diabetes and prescribed injections she felt a close association with animals, including domestic pets, and also pigs, after benefitting from injections of porcine insulin.<sup>3</sup> 'The feisty 'Grice' 'Pig Man'



1 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-66643241>

2 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/scotland/north\\_east/6155172.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/north_east/6155172.stm)

3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/pig-insulin>



# PAPER SCULPTURES

## RED CROWS

Red crows are symbolic in many cultures. Crows are commonly associated with change, transformation, and knowledge or wisdom.<sup>1</sup> Hooper draws on the Chinese folk tale about Red Crows, the story tells of the crows association with fire and heat. Hooper uses these birds as a metaphor in her exhibition for our increasingly warmer world.<sup>2</sup>

The colour red plays an important within the exhibition and research has shown that people tend to associate the colour with negative, danger-bearing emotions, since it is the color of fire, blood, anger, and sometimes of poisonous or dangerous animals.<sup>3</sup>

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1 <https://www.birdfy.com/blogs/blogs/mystical-messengers-unveiling-the-spiriting-of-crows#:~:text=Crows%20are%20commonly%20associated%20strong%20during%20these%20periods,/kucdinteractive.com/mkester/storytelling/pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4413730/#:~:text=emotion%2Delicit%20properties.-,Moller%20et%20al,always%20signal%20hostility%20or%20dan->



Photos: Hooper creating Red Crows in the studio.



## PROJECT 2

# CREATE A PAPER BIRD SCULPTURE USING THE TEMPLATE

This artwork requires A3 paper, PVA glue, scissors and pipe cleaners (to glue on fold for the feet.)

Increase the crow template to A3

HEAD



WINGS



BEAK



TAIL TOP



BODY



FEET



TAIL







## EXQUISITE CORPSE PUPPETS

Hooper has created a series of puppets, using drawings/lithographs/photographs of both humans and animals. She has titled this series of puppets *Exquisite Corpse*.

Also called (Cadavre Exquis) it is a parlour game/collaborative drawing approach first used by surrealist artists to create bizarre and intuitive drawings. It was invented in 1925 in Paris by the surrealists Yves Tanguy, Jacques Prévert, André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. The name 'cadavre exquis' was derived from a phrase that resulted when they first played the game, 'le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau' ('the exquisite corpse will drink the new wine').<sup>1</sup>

Hooper uses these puppets as a method to discuss zoonotic hosts involved in pathogen transmission from animals to humans.

The game is traditionally collaborative, but Hooper creates her creatures solo.

Participants will create their own Exquisite Corpse hybrid paper puppet. Mix and match animals and human parts to create your own character.

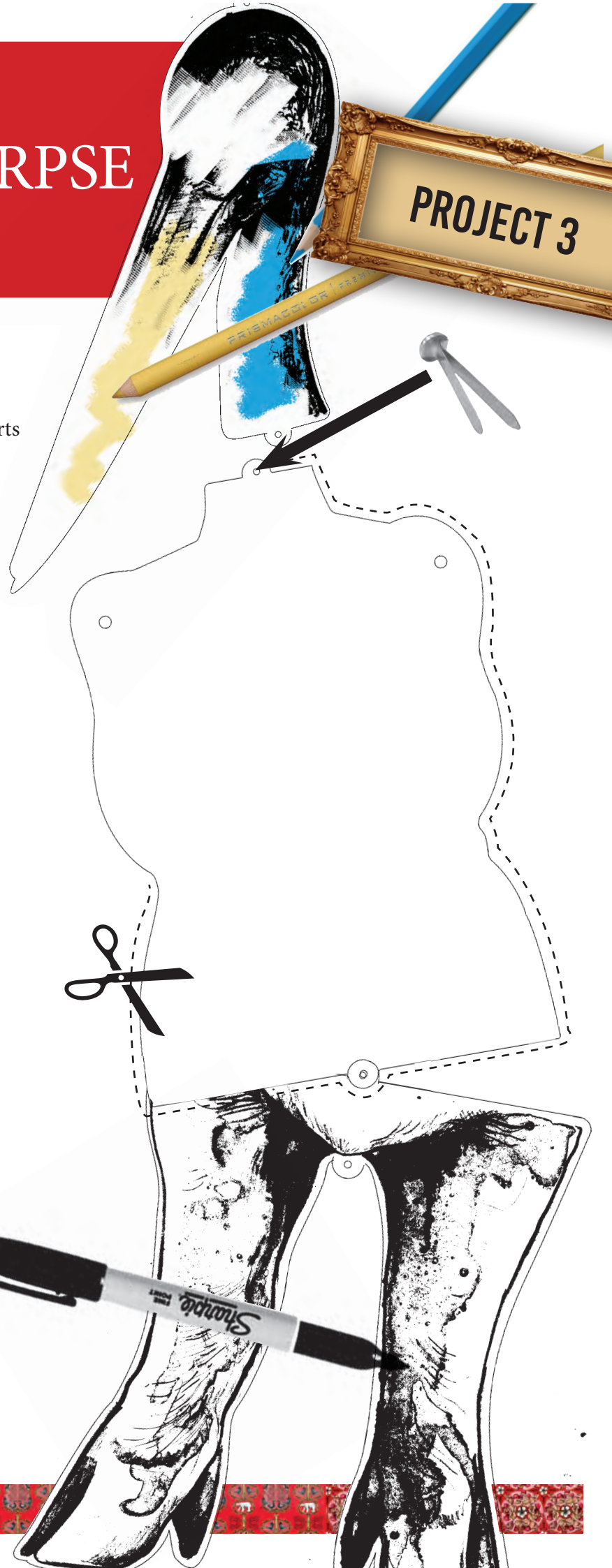
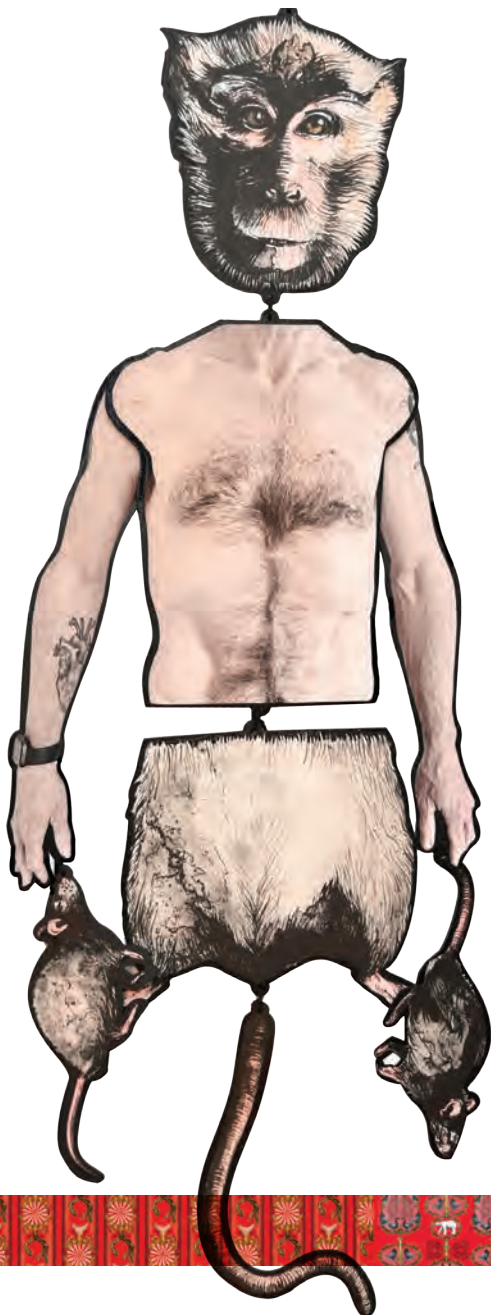


<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cadavre-exquis-exquisite-corpse>



# CREATE AN EXQUISITE CORPSE PAPER PUPPET

1. Cut out a head, body and legs out of paper
2. Consider where the body parts will join
3. Punch holes
4. Draw or photocopy and colour the body parts
5. Connect body parts with split pins
6. Thread string through hole in the head, tie off and use to hang





HUMAN/  
ANIMAL  
BODY PARTS





