

# THE OH NO SUN HOLLY ANDERSON

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As I write this next to the heater in the middle of a cold grey, wintery Melbourne day, summer, and sunny Brisbane, feels like a world away. Climate change has caused our winters to get colder, and our summers to get hotter. The heatwave that hit Queensland this past summer inspired Holly Anderson's exhibition *The Oh No Sun*, exploring her fears about the looming threat of a human-made ecological apocalypse.

We've all heard the quintessentially Australian lines from the poem *My Country*, by Dorothea Mackellar:

*I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains  
Of ragged mountain ranges  
Of droughts and flooding rains.  
I love her far horizons  
I love her jewel-sea,  
Her beauty and her terror –  
The wide brown land for me!*<sup>1</sup>

The poem is a nostalgic ode to Australia, which Mackellar wrote while in England and yearning for her Aussie homeland. Despite being written over one hundred years ago, before the affects of global warming and sunburn were discovered, the idea of Australia as a 'sunburnt country' rings true today. In *The Oh No Sun*, everyday scenes of a sunny, carefree summer are undercut by a current of anxiety, which threatens to break through the surface – evoking the tension between beauty and terror. The sun shines while our planet burns.

*Lying on my stomach, a thin, damp towel underneath me, my body creates indents in the sand. The mid-afternoon sun beats down on me. I feel my skin absorbing and radiating the heat, sweat drips from my bathers to pool next to me on the towel. I imagine my skin sizzling like bacon on the stove. The heat suffocates, weighing me down and making me groggy. I know that I need to roll over, like a rotisserie chicken.*

In Anderson's paintings, there is a sense of the fragility of the human body against the forces of nature. Overpowered by light and sun, the body is passive to the elements. In *Sunbathing*, Anderson presents an imagined cross section of her sunbaking body, heat radiating from her core, her organs angry red and baking. The grossly abject body is removed from its context, resembling a pepperoni pizza. In *Bad Burn*, her badly sunburned body provides a background for a floating smiley face, the eyes made up of two moles on her back.

*I have an appointment to get my moles checked. I should have done it sooner, but I say that after every summer and never do it. Last year my dad and two friends had malignant moles removed. I know the dangers of skin cancer – we all do. Slip Slop Slap. My moles are stars making up the constellations in the freckled galaxy that is my skin. If I drew lines between them what shapes or images would appear?*

Bright, warm yellow appears in Anderson's paintings as the colour of sun, sunflowers and the disc of a daisy. For me, yellow signals the arrival of summer, conjuring memories of lazy days and hot, sleepless nights; mango juice that drips down faces and hands; buttercups that make chins glow when held up to the face – nostalgic memories of childhood and happiness. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe described the psychological effects of the colour yellow in his influential philosophical text *Theory of Colours*:

*We find from experience, again, that yellow excites a warm and agreeable impression... The impression of warmth may be experienced in a lively manner if we look at a landscape through a yellow glass... The eye is gladdened, the heart expanded and cheered, a glow seems at once to breath towards us.*<sup>2</sup>

Anderson's lens has less of a golden glow and more of a burning heat. She uses washed-out, white space to represent heat and light as an anxious abundance of sun. Her images appear overexposed, like photographs taken from a camera pointed directly into the light. So, in this sense, the absence of the warm yellow sun suggests a subversion of the fuzzy romanticism that Goethe describes.

*The sun's glare blinds me temporarily. It takes a few moments for my eyes to adjust, my pupils slowly narrowing. Fuzzy, floating worms dance through my field of vision as I squint into the light.*

Eye floaters are floating spots or shapes in the field of vision caused by clumps of protein fibres in the eye, which form and cast shadows on the retina. These floaters may be especially visible when looking into bright light, such as on a sunny day. Anderson inserts black and white wiggly lines and dots into her paintings as signifiers of floaters. They contaminate the romantic subject of the paintings by floating around in ambiguous and foreboding forms.

*The Oh No Sun* conveys Anderson's unease about the future of our planet, through a tension between the romantic and the anxious. But the picture is not totally bleak. Anderson sprinkles a strange sense of humour throughout the work. Some of the paintings seek a hopeless laugh through the surreal and silly subject matter or the insertion of floating smiley faces. Rather than preaching environmentalism (although we could probably all do with a reminder), Anderson's paintings are personal, internal reflections that examine and untangle her own relationship to the sun.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Dorothea Mackellar, *My Country*, 1908

<sup>2</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, 1810, p. 307



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