

Breakdown

Alexandra Bircken

Talia Chetrit

Martine Syms

Kaari Upson



PALAS[®]

Breakdown 13 July–24 August 2024

Through the works of four artists, Breakdown considers the vulnerabilities, transformations, and complexities that emerge from moments of disintegration and reconstruction.

Talia Chetrit interrogates photography and its construction and function within society, extending the complicated mechanics of the medium on subject and frame. Most recently her subjects have included pregnancy, childhood, and parenting – represented as humorous and absurd provocations to conventional preconceptions.

Kaari Upson, employs a wide array of material approaches to conflate and confuse fiction with fact, breaking down performed life to examine trauma, fear, fantasy, and other manifestations of the human psyche in both private and collective conditions.

Alexandra Bircken's work deconstructs everyday functional objects (clothing, motorcycles, rocking horses and packaging), reconfiguring them as sculptures. Her works maintain anthropomorphic forms but have a sense of inversion – Bircken exposes their external and internal makeup. Her sculptures are often deflated, amputated, and rendered dysfunctional.

Martine Syms highlights the disintegration of traditional narratives and the construction of new ones through digital media. These narrative structures suggest both an autobiographical and collective index of wants and fears in front of a backdrop of cultural, racial, sexual, and economic injustices.



ALEXANDRA BIRCKEN

Alexandra Bircken (b. 1967, Cologne, Germany) is a sculptor best known for her objects and installations that incorporate an unusual range of materials: from everyday objects such as hairdye packaging, rocking horses and sawn-up motorcycles, through textiles in handmade and machine-processed form to organic matter such as wood, leather, bones, or even a placenta. Anything that surrounds us can become a sculptural medium. Her approach is characterized by an examination of the human body, its needs, desires, and relationship to its environment.

Bircken trained as a fashion designer at Central St Martins College of Art and Design in London, which is apparent in her appreciation of the tactile qualities of materials. This experience underpins not only her interest in the use of textile materials, discarded items of clothing and techniques of weaving, knitting and crochet, but also her interest in the human form and her preoccupation with dressing the space.

In *2 Circles* (2020) Bircken dislocated the frame of a pushbike from its wheels, handlebars and machinery. Distended and abstracted, it becomes a sort of hieroglyphic wall drawing. Unhinged, it begins to look almost skeletal, brachial, spatchcocked. Bircken interrupts movement, turning function to dysfunction.

In *Mindmap* (2020) Bircken plays with the material of our protective forms, either exaggerating our desire for solidity and stability to the point where an object becomes unusable – like a pair of hockey gloves cast in bronze – or betraying its fundamental fragility, like a helmet stitched loosely of thread. With fibrous veins and arteries, it becomes almost unrecognisable as a helmet, revealing the cranial form it is supposed to protect.

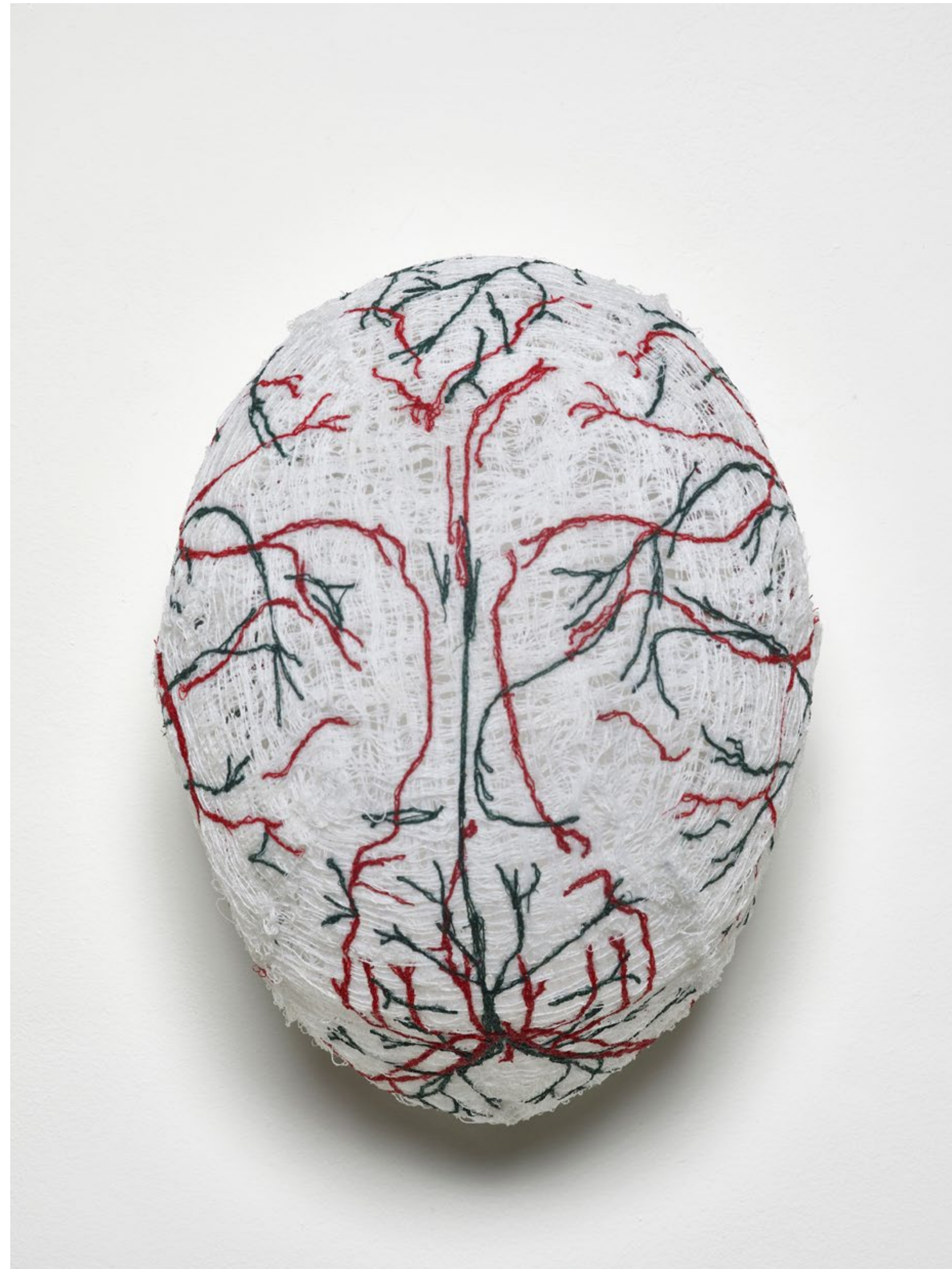




Alexandra Bircken
2 Circles, 2020
Aluminium and varnish
67 x 113 x 4.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Herald St, London



Alexandra Bircken
Mindmap, 2020
Polyester thread and epoxy
35 x 23 x 26 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Herald St, London



TALIA CHETRIT

Talia Chetrit (b. Washington, DC, 1982) focuses on the human body—often her own—as a starting point to examine how images are constructed to support different agendas and interpretations of reality. After beginning her practice with an exploration of the manipulative nature of photography, Chetrit is increasingly interested in the relationship the camera has with the subject matter it documents. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, at institutions such as The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Sculpture Center, New York; LACMA, Los Angeles; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami. Chetrit's most recent solo museum exhibitions include *Amateur*, MAXXI BVLGARI PRIZE, MAXXI, Rome (2018); and *Showcaller*, Kolnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2018).

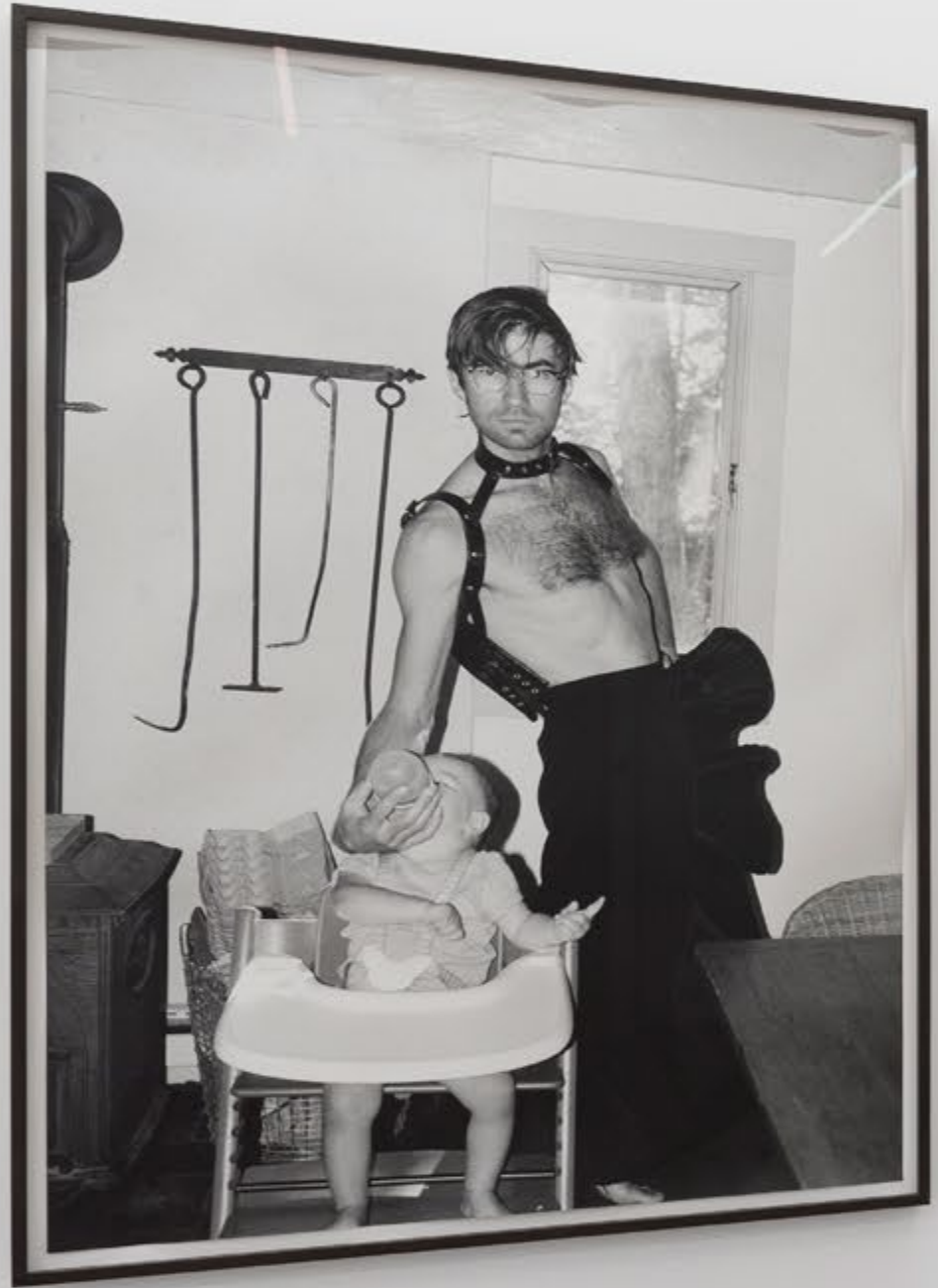
In Chetrit's portraits of domestic life the cast of characters includes herself, her boyfriend, their child, cat, and a selection of props that intermingle with the quotidian routines of child rearing and the home. In *Untitled, (Family #1)*, 2021, her boyfriend,

dressed in women's designer clothes, feeds their child without breaking his piercing gaze. Despite the pretense of self-exposure in these and so many of Chetrit's images, few of her works disclose much about the actual structure of her life, the nature of her habits, or her internal sense of self.

The power of Chetrit's latest images hinges on an odd ambivalence between their banal settings and the presentations adopted by the adults within them. The characters' gender contrivances and charms shift circumstance to circumstance and image to image, adding intrigue to the trappings of a middle-class life that serve as background. The posed postures and direct stares assumed by Chetrit and her boyfriend are less clues to their inner natures and more regular reminders of the camera's presence, as well as the person behind it. These images revel in the fact that they are constructions, and as such they beg the question: who's calling the shots in this drama? We imagine conversations about clothing, props, choreography, lighting, and setting, and the dialogue about what

is presentable when first looking at the film. These works present a new set of negotiations between photographer, camera, and subject.





Talia Chetrit
Untitled (Family #1), 2021
Silver gelatin print, framed
152.4 x 101.6 cm
Edition 1 of 4 + 2AP
Courtesy of the artist and Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles





Talia Chetrit
Heel on Legos, 2021
Inkjet print, framed
68.6 x 104.1 cm
Edition 1 of 4 + 2AP
Courtesy of the artist and Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles



MARTINE SYMS

Martine Syms (b. 1988, Los Angeles CA) obtained an MFA from Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson NY (2017) and a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago IL (2007). Syms has earned wide recognition for a practice that combines conceptual grit, humour and social commentary. Using a combination of video, installation and performance, often interwoven with explorations into technique and narrative, Syms examines representations of blackness and its relationship to vernacular, feminist thought, and radical traditions. Syms's research-based practice frequently references and incorporates theoretical models concerning performed or imposed identities, the power of the gesture, and embedded assumptions concerning gender and racial inequalities.

Meditation (2021) is from Martine Syms' Cita's World series. Kita enacts the performances of everyday life in a hyper-digitized world. The character's roles range from meditation guru to cultural commentator, and she speaks directly to questions of consciousness within the systems of labor, race,

technology, and institutional failure. To the cognitive dissonance of Siri mishearing her speech, to the terror of (mis)representation, to the instinct to reconnect with nature. In these video works, Syms creates an environment in which being human is inextricably linked to the impact and interruptions of technological innovation.

"The work-cum-meditation guide features a familiar backdrop of soothing natural vignettes, such as aerial views of mountains. But its ordinariness is offset by the digital character Kita. Based on the figure from the Black Entertainment Television (BET) series Cita's World, Kita asks us to "stay here and just observe." As the work goes on, the digital meditation guide – hackneyed in our overwired and operationalized lives – perverts into a charged question of presence. What could be more jarring than a virtual character demanding that we imagine ourselves as a three-dimensional object? How, indeed, are we present?"

– Adela Kim, "Are We Ded?", Text zer Kunst





Martine Syms
Kita Meditating, 2021
Laser cut cardboard, digital video
88.90 × 152.40 × 17.78 cm
4:19 minutes
Courtesy of the artist, Sadie Coles HQ, London and
Bridget Donahue, New York

[viewing link](#)



KAAARI UPSON

Kaari Upson (b. San Bernadino, 1970; d. New York, 2021). Upson's career was devoted to serial explorations of psychological and capitalist conditions, and physical and relational absences. Weaving reality and fantasy, Upson employs a range of materials including paintings, installations, performances, films, and her celebrated sculptures made of silicone, latex, urethane and fiberglass, casts painted in a range of vivid tones.

Upson's bust sculptures stand as reminders of how slippage and mirroring prevails in the particular brand of patriarchy that defines the artist's world. Upson attempted to sculpt her mother's face from memory, and extended the series through several generations of familial women. Each is cast, enlarged, and thickly painted by Upson to reflect the face of her mother, grandmother, or self, or that of her friend, friend's mother, or grandmother – their faces are then pressed into each other so that the paint smudges and melds, presenting ambiguous, unreliable portraits, each a multiplication of the "her" that weaves through the artist's practice at large.

Upson's work considers the overlaps, fissures and disjunctions between our interior worlds and exterior reality, not just conceptually, but also through her embodied process of casting, "skinning" and inverting objects. Embracing quasi-archaeological, forensic strategies, the artist created uncanny, layered scenarios with the power to surface repressed desires and memories – both personal and collective – with unexpected force. Her work evokes radically destabilized subjects and presents a critical portrait of late-capitalist American culture with its many fetishes, obsessions, neuroses and repressed fantasies.

Upson's work resides in the permanent public collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; among others.





Kaari Upson
Grandma Purple Blue, 2020
Medium-density fibreboard, acrylic and oil paint
52.7 x 36.8 x 37.5 cm



Kaari Upson
Oma (Blind), 2020
Medium-density fibreboard, acrylic and oil paint
53.3 x 30.5 x 38.7 cm





PALAS[®]

© PALAS and the Artist/s. All artwork and content in this document is the sole property and copyright of PALAS and the Artist/s. Under no circumstance may you copy, share, reproduce, modify, publish or distribute elsewhere, in any medium, any of the images or content in this document for any purpose, without proper and prior written permission from PALAS. Unauthorised duplication, distribution or usage is prohibited by the Copyright Law.

PALAS acknowledges that sovereignty has never been ceded by the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, who remain the traditional custodians of the lands, oceans and sky where we live and work. We acknowledge their continuing culture which shapes this region.

Please note all works are subject to taxes and duties where applicable.

palas-inc.com