

ART THAT CELLS

From cells to bio-matter and our day-to-day imprints, these Adelaide artists create partnerships in unexpected places

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JOY LEVINS, GLASS ARTIST SALA ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT SAHMRI

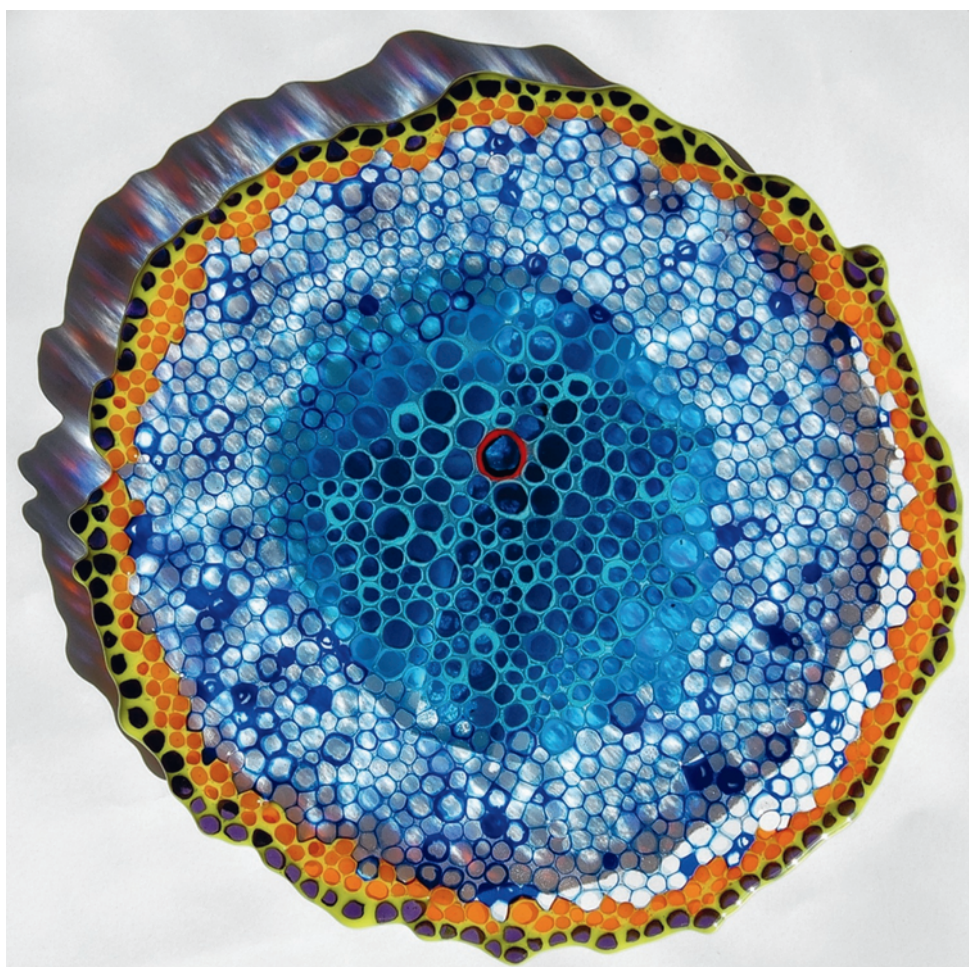
Glass artist Joy Levins knew a move to Australia from her hometown of Dublin in 2012 would be a dramatic bend in the road for her but she wasn't prepared for the discoveries she was about to make with her art.

It was in Adelaide Irish-born Levins first discovered the art of creating murrine, the small pieces of glass with three-dimensional coloured patterns made famous by the town of Murano, Venice. This led her to create glass work that closely represented all the features of a cell, the smallest unit of life that can independently replicate itself. These pieces comprise circles of blocks of colour made of murrine. Encapsulating them in clear glass, they appear as free-floating cells.

The wide variety of cell formations would provide Levins with endless possibilities to produce new and interesting work. She began researching cells to replicate their delicate patterns, all different from the next. When scientists began buying her work, Levins realised she was creating more than just an aesthetic piece, she was also replicating something close to the real thing. She wanted to get closer.

"I applied for SAHMRI to challenge myself. I thought I would either sink or swim," she says. Levins had been accepted for the SAHMRI residency when she decided to enter the The Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize Competition. Her entry, a replication of a stem cell, was accepted as one of the finalists, clear confirmation that her work had scientific merit along with its obvious aesthetic qualities.

If she needed a confidence boost for her upcoming SAHMRI residency, this was it. An immersion in the science of what she was representing was the perfect next step for her. Together with bioartist Niki Sperou, fellow SALA artist-in-residence for SAHMRI this year, Levins is creating works for their exhibition *The Colonised Body*. The theme of Nutrition and Metabolism at SAHMRI is Levin's chosen focus. It was a natural progression from looking at plant cells to the food we eat. In fact, it has been a total surprise for her. SAHMRI's research is less about food and more about disease and its connection with diet.



The basis of her work will be infrared colour images of cells that SAHMRI's scientists can see under the microscope.

She is looking at images of nerve cells but is also interested in the dietary aspect of the research and is hoping to soon have some images from that area to work with. Her desire is to produce a permanent piece for SAHMRI that will reflect the work of the theme group of Nutrition and Metabolism.

Levins is working on a large wall piece which will be made of at least five separate pieces. She hopes to create pieces that will not sit flat against the wall, but will appear fluid and organic just like the cells she will represent. Being able to mount a collection on a wall, and a curved wall at that, is a thrill.

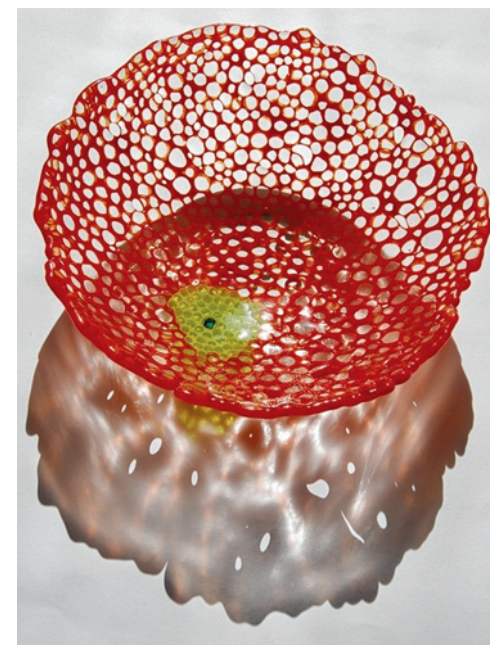
"I just love the idea of transparency on the wall and that reflection of everything. My plan to have pieces on the wall of different

depth will be another challenge," she says. The fact that this is a large-scale piece is a turning point for Levins. "It is rare for me to be able to do that, normally I will only be able to do one or two smaller pieces," she says. "It is not frightening for me to undertake large-scale now."

The residency is giving her time to experiment with different techniques, such as sandblasting or mixing glass powders with wallpaper paste and splashing them onto glass and firing them in ways that will provide more texture and make the glass appear more organic.

Looking ahead, she is unlikely to deviate from her work on the cell but with her new knowledge, she will add different techniques and hopes to have a long-term alliance with SAHMRI's researchers. "I was googling to get a greater understanding of what I was doing

Left and below, Joy Levins' cellular artworks have been embraced by scientists and researchers; main picture, Niki Sperou; right, her textile showing gut-microbiota-brain interactions; bottom, Sperou's drawing of a gut on white paper perforated with holes showing a pink layer underneath - a disruption to the form and a metaphor for disease that can occur from lack of balance in our microbiota



but then to meet the people that are looking at this stuff, well that's been amazing."

See Joy Levins' work in a joint exhibition *The Colonised Body* with fellow SALA artist-in-residence Niki Sperou, August 12-September 9, SAHMRI foyer, North Tce, city
Levins is also involved in two group exhibitions for SALA: *The Kensington Collection*, The Kensington Hotel August 1-31 - opening night Thursday August 4; and *Diversified*, Arkaba Hotel July 28-August 31 - opening night Thursday July 28

NIKI SPEROU SALA ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT SAHMRI

All her life Niki Sperou has had an innate curiosity in the notion of the human hybrid, a prominent creature in Greek mythology having the body parts of a human and those of other species. Sperou is something of a hybrid herself. Talking to her, you are not entirely sure whether you are in the presence of a scientist or artist. The art she creates, known as bioart, has something of both. For the uninitiated, bioart involves the use of living organisms or their parts to create art works. As living organisms are subject to change, transformations are the dominating feature of Sperou's art.

Along with Joy Levins, Sperou is creating art works for their joint exhibition, *The Colonised Body*. In her quest to find out more about what makes us human, Sperou has





been working with researchers in the Infection and Immunity theme group of SAHMRI to research the human microbiome, the sum of the microbes that live inside our bodies. These microbes are colonisers of our bodies making us human and “other” all of the time. Traditionally, a coloniser was feared but scientists have discovered that microbes are beneficial to our health and should be encouraged. Sperou sees gut microbiota as a bodily garden that needs to be nurtured rather than attacked by antibiotics and preservatives in food.

Sperou’s residency will produce an outcome of a series of what she calls “gut works”. Her mixed media works are visual metaphors for the information she has learnt. One of the works will be a hanging textile form of the human body made of transparent skin-like fabric which she proposes to impregnate with seeds that will sprout and grow. In other words, a living exhibit.

Sperou likes the idea of rewilding the body in the same way scientists support biodiversity of flora in our natural world. The strong and unique visuals of her art ensure that the viewer can gain an instant understanding of the science. In this way, the average person can be part of a conversation from which they might ordinarily be excluded. “I like the idea of exposing the hidden. I suppose that’s what scientists do all the time, they are delving into what is hidden and making it visible.

“That’s what I like to do.”

See Niki Sperou’s work with fellow SALA artist-in-residence, Joy Levins. *The Colonised Body*, SAHMRI foyer August 12-September 9

**JAMES DODD
SALA ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT ADELAIDE
FESTIVAL CENTRE**

Growing up on a farm in the south-east of the state, Adelaide artist James Dodd enjoyed boyhood adventures on his bicycle.

This sense of adventure and immersion in the Australian landscape was what attracted Dodd to the story behind the murals that hang in the foyer of the Adelaide Festival Centre.

The murals were painted by renowned Australian landscape painter Fred Williams commissioned by the AFC at the time of its construction in the 1970s.

Williams took a journey on a houseboat down the River Murray to develop his work. Dodd successfully applied to be this year’s SALA artist-in-residence at the AFC in his



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SALA RESIDENCIES

SAWEEKEND JULY 30-31, 2016



desire to respond to the murals and the journey Williams took to make them. As part of his response, Dodd has taken his own journey down the river, not quite as glamorous but certainly, endearingly Australian, in a tinnie.

He says of the experience: "It was the first time I've spent on the river doing river things. It is a fantastic landscape and it's easy to get excited about the work."

"It did really make it clear to me the scale of the river."

Consistent with his enduring love of bicycles, the idea of a pedal-powered boat that could travel the length of the River Murray appeals to Dodd.

Now fully appreciating the size of the river, turning this fantasy into reality may take longer than he thought. This won't stop Dodd from trying though.

Williams' murals caused controversy in the 70s. They are not realistic renderings but pushed the boundaries of abstract art at the time.

Dodd is creating paintings in response to

this work that plays with some of these more challenging elements, such as elongated landscapes and loose horizon marks. Urban scrawl, a prominent element of Dodd's work, will also feature.

"I like the human mark," he says. "I'm into this idea of psycho-geography which is that a place can contain the spirit of people."

"These marks made in a very immediate fashion are little traces of people that accumulate on objects in our environment."

Dodd also plans to create a mural for an outside wall of the AFC.

Having been involved in facilitating community projects for murals in the past, doing this one alone will be a new and interesting challenge for Dodd.

See the mural at the Festival centre carpark wall during August. Dodd's work will be exhibited from August 19 for the duration of SALA in the Artspace Gallery at the AFC. The outcome for his artist-in-residency for the Adelaide City Library this year will be on display in Francis St Laneway off Rundle Mall



James Dodd's *Mildura Boys*, 2016; and Jessica Lumb's *Spring Came in Autumn This Year*, 2016

adding her personal touches of colour in delightfully surprising places. Golden and rainbow-coloured thread is sewn into bandages. Gauze dressings are made of flowers bought from the gift shop and bandages are made from familiar pieces of clothing such as a favourite T-shirt, which, in a perfect world, would give a patient comfort. An interactive project is planned by Lumb for staff and visitors to join with her in painting the undersides of leaves that fall in the hospital courtyard, providing yet another element of surprise.

During her time at FMC, Lumb has assisted the art therapist on patient visits where she could see first-hand the instant comfort that involvement in artistic activities provides.

"This is a new thing for me" Lumb says. "Normally I put things out there and I have no idea what people's reactions are going to be but with this work you see it instantly."

Happily, Lumb is set to continue to see it having accepted an offer to engage in artistic activities with FMC patients one day a week.

Jessica Lumb's exhibition, from August 2 during SALA, Community Galleries A, B and C of the FMC, levels 2 and 6, and in the glass cabinet outside FMC's Arts in Health office on level 2. Lumb's group SALA exhibitions: *Chroma Coded* at Feltspace, August 3-21 and *Momentary Dwellings*, The Church Studios, Prospect, August 9-21

JESSICA LUMB SALA ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT FLINDERS MEDICAL CENTRE

Random acts of visual joy have been the focus of Jessica Lumb's artistic career since leaving art school in 2008. After all, it was her discovery of the joy she found in art that saved Lumb from buckling under the grief following the death of her father some years ago. Keenly aware of art's power of healing, it was a natural progression for Lumb to become this year's SALA Artist in Residence for the Flinders Medical Centre.

Lumb likes to offer up her art to people as things they may stumble upon unexpectedly. The subtleties of Lumb's approach were likely to be lost in the mayhem of a hospital so this residency presented a challenge. Instead, Lumb is offering her tiny surprises in a different format.

The Japanese art of Kintsugi, is the practice of mending breaks in ceramic objects with gold to highlight the break, in this way embracing the damage as part of their history. Pursuing this theme, Lumb is

Continuing a long held tradition, ACH Group is excited to again be participating in SALA - South Australian Living Artists Festival - promoting and celebrating older people's contribution to the cultural life of our community.

This year's theme is 'LOVE: give, share, celebrate'.



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