

Lincoln Austin

Lincoln Austin won the *Art for Life* award in the 2023 Queensland Regional Art Awards for a shaped painting that is at once inclusive and deeply personal. Samantha Littley discusses how the artwork relates to the award's theme of "Perspective," and how it connects with the artist's broader concerns.

ESSAY SAMANTHA LITLLEY

Lincoln Austin's recent success in winning the *Art for Life* category in the Queensland Regional Art Awards (QRAA) seems apt. The award's focus on supporting "emerging and established artists outside the Brisbane City Council area," and its aim to foster links between artists and their communities, dovetail with the Ipswich-based sculptor's desire to connect with their audiences and create uplifting visual experiences.

As their 2021 survey *Lincoln Austin: The Space Between Us* confirmed, their impulse is to activate space and to bring their artworks and their audiences into proximity. While their practice is largely three-dimensional, they adopt, as I proposed in the catalogue essay for the exhibition, "a fluid approach to medium," making "sculptures that function as 'paintings' and 'pictures' that expand in space."

This methodology plays out in their award-winning entry, *I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here*, 2023, which takes the form of a minimalist painting given depth and rhythm through the corrugations that Austin has introduced into what would otherwise be a flat surface. Award judge and Badtjala artist Dr. Fiona Foley delighted in this sleight of hand, remarking in her comments that "One

of the marvels of life is the art of artist Lincoln Austin. Enthralling us with movement in colour and form, this work is no exception—but pure wonder – how did he do it?"

The question begs asking, though it is by no means the most important aspect of the work whose rainbow-roll of colours bewitches and beguiles. To explain the dynamics is almost a sin, except that even after they are grasped, the work continues to weave its magic. Ever the maker, Austin eschewed corrugated iron in favour of aluminium composite, a pliable material they had experimented with to create the sculpture *Causal Loop #5*, 2016, for their 2016 solo exhibition at Caloundra Regional Gallery, *After Reflecting on the Matter*. For Austin's QRAA entry, they devised a method of bending the metal over a pipe, a painstaking process

that necessarily dictated the scale of the artwork and others from the series, which comprised three finished pieces after four others flopped. While the masking-tape technique the artist employed to create the modulated striations is self-evident, the effect Austin has achieved with it is nothing short of miraculous—an effervescent palette you can virtually taste that conjures memories of fruit-tingles and pine-lime splice.

The invitation Austin's artwork extends through this visually seductive, rippled



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01 Lincoln Austin, 2022, photographed by Louis Lim

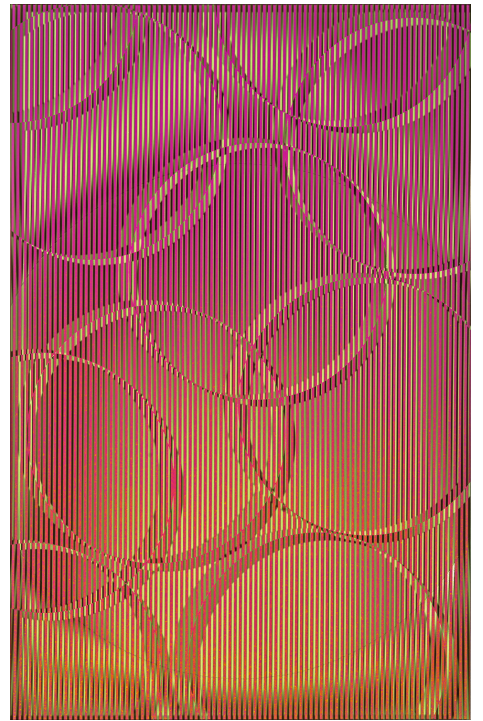
02 *Are You Experienced*, 2013, acrylic sheet, acrylic paint, aluminium, LEDs, 101 x 121 x 13 cm, photography by Mick Richards

03 *Shadow Boxing #5*, 2013, 41 x 61 x 5 cm, acrylic Sheet, polymer paint, aluminium, photographed by Mick Richards

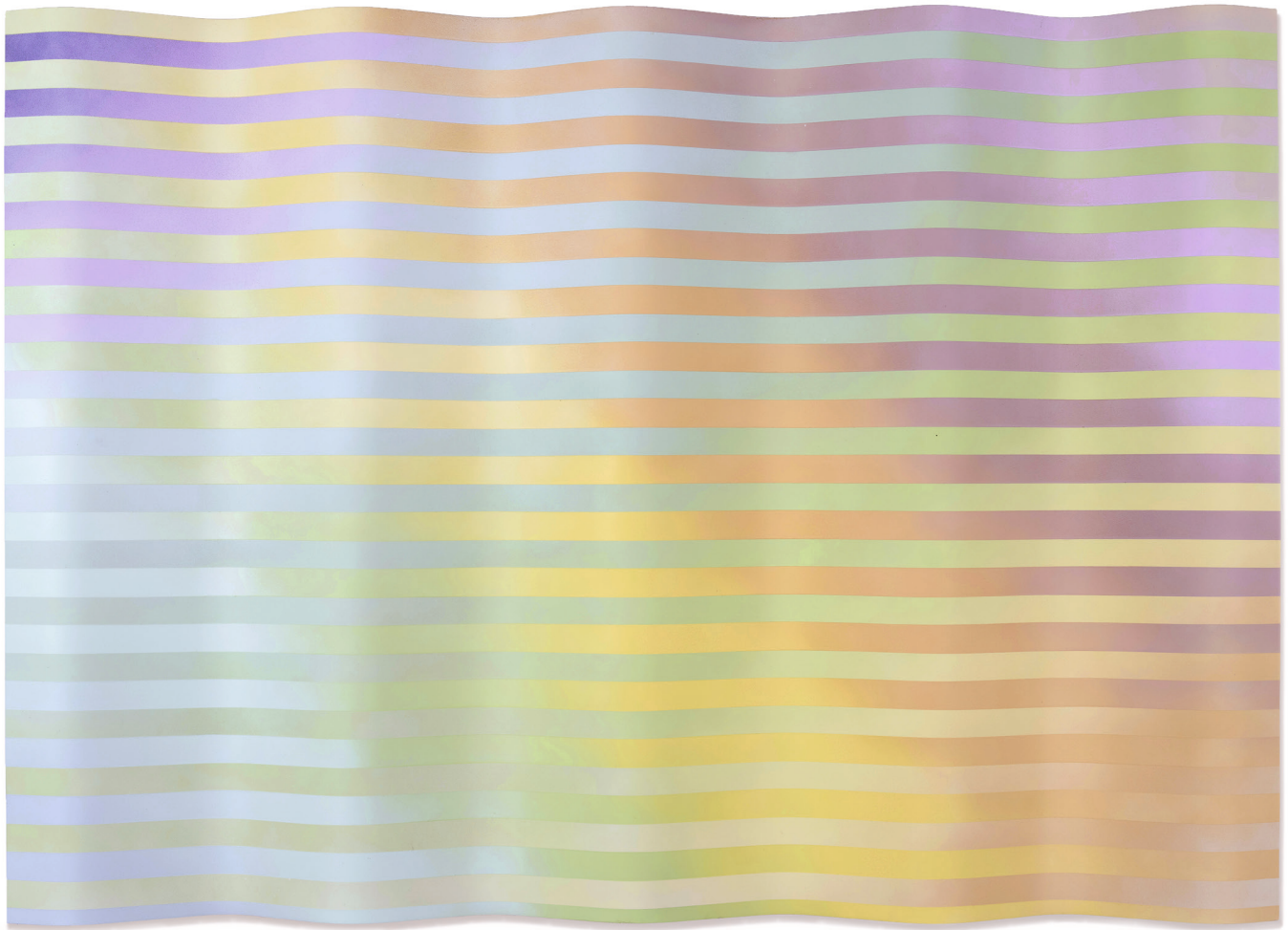
04 *I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here*, 2023, synthetic polymer paint on aluminium composite board, 80 x 9 x 113 cm, photographed by Carl Warner



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This artwork rewards the viewer optically if they adjust their point of view

surface is characteristic of the generosity and curiosity with which they approach their practice. The pleasure they find in conceptualising and realising works that create visual, perceptual, and physical experiences is palpable. Though the shaped painting relates to Austin's lenticular artworks that play with perception, such as the *Shadow Boxing* series and the lightbox *Are You Experienced*, all 2013, it has more in common with works that have emerged in recent years, including *Touched Lightly* and *Don't Get Carried Away with Yourself, Lincoln*, both 2020. While disparate in medium, these examples all carry biographical undertones and speak of the artist's yearning to express more of themselves through their work. This is revealed through the poetic and metaphorical titles, and the unashamedly effusive forms that the artworks take. In each case, the rainbow hues are, as Austin expressed in their artist statement for the latter work, "a platform for [LGBTQIA+] voices," and "informed by my personal journey of letting go of the anxiety of expressing joy in public."

In the postscript I wrote for *The Space Between Us*, I observed that "the directions that [the new works] suggest are full of potential and are imbued with hope for a more connected future." And so it is with *I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here*, which has both personal resonance and a relational element that establishes a dialogue between the artist, the work, and the viewer. They are invited to join Austin in considering the narrative embodied in the undulating, redolent curves of the "image / object," which they have described as "a love lament, made in memoria of desperately seeking to understand the unique view of another, to the extent that I almost lost sight of myself." In this sense, the artwork responds to the award's theme of "Perspective," and its brief to "share storytelling that extends notions of individual and collective perspectives."

Describing the inclusive intent of the work in their artist statement, Austin wrote that "The surface topography [allows] two (or more) people to look at the same thing, at



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the same time, yet see something quite different. This artwork rewards the viewer optically if they adjust their point of view, encouraging interaction and movement."

The remark recalls a concept that Austin expressed to me in 2019 when we were conceiving their survey, that "if the audience can stand and look at the work in a passive way, then, in my mind, I have failed." With its gentle, poignant irony and its invitation to play, *I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here* meets this self-imposed test. ■

05 *Causal Loop #5*, 2016, 172 x 172 x 172 cm, aluminium composite, brass, steel, photographed by Lincoln Austin

06 *Don't Get Carried Away With Yourself, Lincoln*, 2020 and ongoing, 300 x 300 x 300 cm, polyester fabric, carbon fibre, brass, photographed by Louis Lim

Images courtesy of the artist, Flying Arts Alliance, Queensland