



VISUAL ARTS

Lincoln Austin's 'Don't Get Carried Away With Yourself, Lincoln', part of their latest exhibition. Source: Flying Arts Alliance.

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Lincoln Austin new exhibition centres joy and perspective

Winner of the 2023 Queensland Regional Art Awards in the major 'Art for Life' category, Lincoln Austin's solo exhibition provides a vibrant retrospective.

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David Burton

Anyone who titles their exhibition after a Pet Shop Boys song is clearly onto something. Lincoln Austin's *Wouldn't Normally Do This Kind of Thing* is the artist's solo exhibition supported by **Flying Arts Alliance** (FAA) as the 2023 Queensland Regional Art Awards (QRAA) 'Art For Life' winner. The exhibition, which is currently being shown at Brisbane's Judith Wright Centre, emphasises joy and communion between the artist and the audience.

'I decided to use the 1993 favourite Pet Shop Boys dance floor hit of the same name as the impetus for this

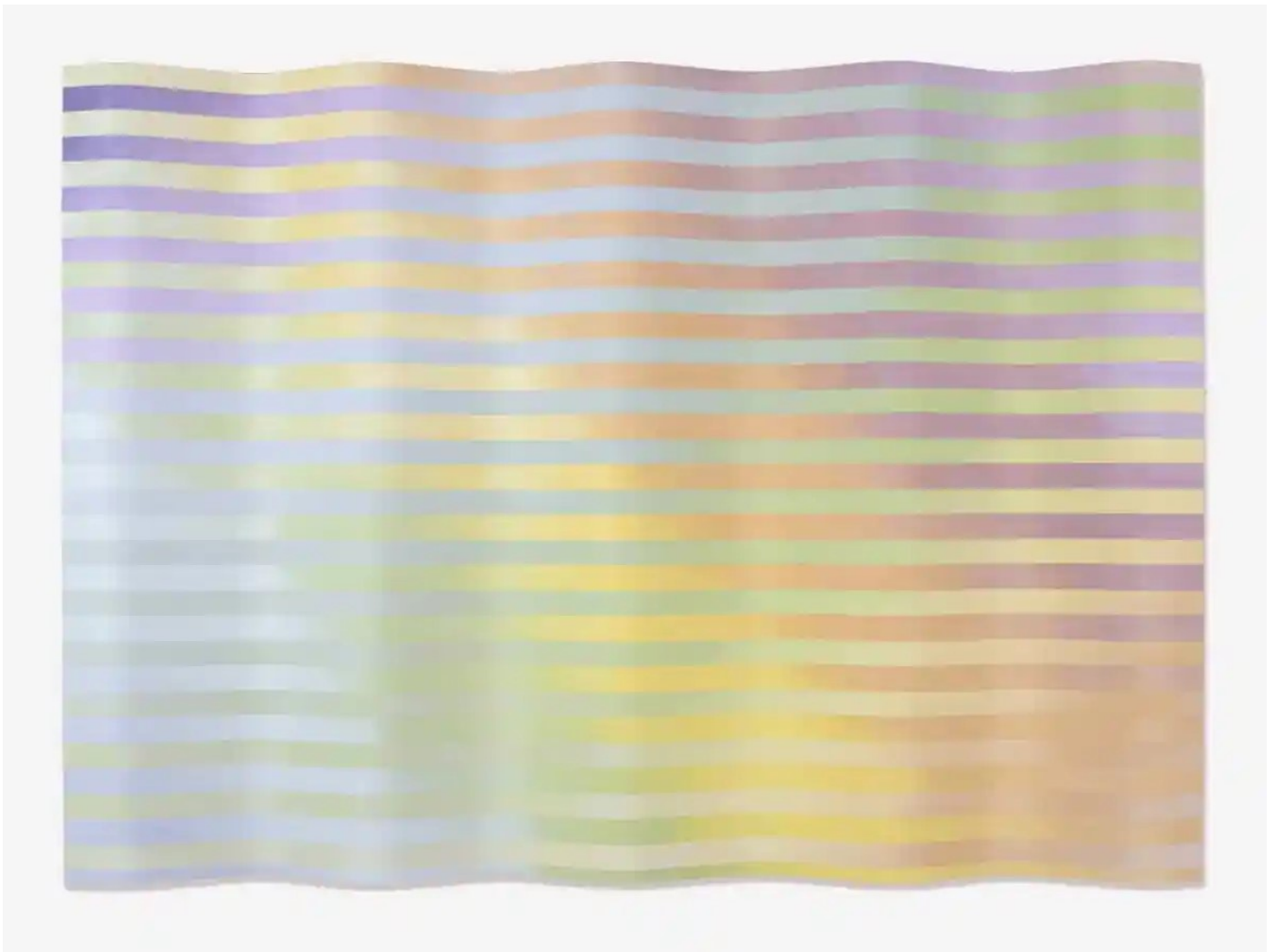
exhibition,' says Austin. 'I was 19 when this gem was released and, yes, as the lyrics suggest, "if people say I'm crazy, I tell 'em that it's true". The words point to a deeper meaning for Austin and the exhibition. The song challenges the idea of a perceived "normal", just as Austin's work constantly plays with perception.

The most significant piece of the exhibition, *Don't Get Carried Away With Yourself, Lincoln*, is a multicoloured geometrical sculpture made from polyester fabric, carbon fibre and brass. The rainbow colours are a deliberate biographical inclusion for Austin, who reflects on the importance of providing platforms for queer voices in their artist statement for the work. The work was also 'informed by my journey of letting go of the anxiety of expressing joy in public,' says Austin.



Joy and wonder are at the centre of the artist's work. The piece that won them the QRAA is titled *I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here*. It appears as a minimalist painting, but is presented on corrugated aluminium. It gives the piece depth, but also radically changes itself depending on the angle from which the viewer examines it.

Such trickery sparks wonder for the viewer, and similar optical playfulness has been the focus of Austin's career. The award represents a moment of retrospection for Austin and a robust recognition of their work. The QRAA 'Art for Life' award is one of the most valuable prize pools for **regional artists nationally**.

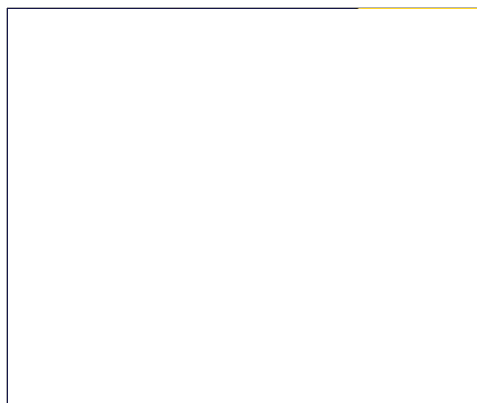


Lincoln Austin's 'I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here'. Photo: Carl Warner.

Lincoln Austin's work marries joy with finesse

Judge for the QRAA and Badtjala artist Dr Fiona Foley said of the award-winning work, '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 [they] do it?'

Certainly when encountering *I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here*, the question is inevitable.



But the answer, as writer and curator Samantha Littley has noted, only dilutes the wonder that Austin rigorously sought. Regardless, the process demonstrates the determination at work in Austin's methodology.

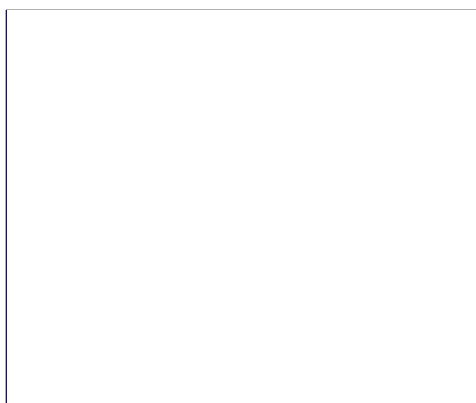
'They devised a method of bending metal over a pipe,' wrote Littlely in **an essay on the artist**, 'a painstaking process that dictated the scale of the artwork and others from the series, which comprised three finished pieces after four others flopped.'

'I take pleasure in the process being quite draining,' Austin told **Artist Profile**. 'You know at the end of the process, there'll be something you can enjoy. There has to be love. If there's no love in the process, you're wasting your time. I also think there needs to be humour.'

Austin's unifying, colourful work is finely crafted, relying on mathematics and patterns, which they view as a singular, human language. Their view on optics harmonises with the themes present in their favourite Pet Shop Boys' song and with queerness more broadly. 'There's something really beautiful about an optical phenomenon, that it's not really illusory, it's a real thing that happens, a problem with the communication between the eye and the brain. It's a lovely thing that you can confuse them... Looking is not absolute.'

Lincoln Austin on the value of art in regional Queensland

FAA is unique in Australia for its longevity (founded in 1971) and its diversity of work. The QRAs represent one aspect of the organisation's work, with a prize pool of \$140,000 in 2023, an increase of \$100,000 from the previous year. This rise in sponsorship funds goes directly to artists.



FAA's chair, retired Queensland Court of Appeal judge, Anthe Philippides, **previously told ArtsHub**: 'We really just went out and told the story of Flying Arts and why it is unique. And when people hear that story, they can sense something quite authentic at the heart of what Flying Arts is. And I think that authenticity has remained through the 50 years of stewardship by many dedicated people.'

The theme for the QRAs in 2023 was 'Perspective'. 'My practice is all about perception and perspective and playing around with optics,' says Austin. 'It perfectly fitted ... my philosophy and practice.' Austin's work and the legacy of FAA point to a vibrant network of artists in regional Queensland and beyond.

Austin became a regional artist in 2007, moving to Ipswich mainly because they could not expand their practice and remain financially viable. 'It's done exactly what I hoped it would do,' **Austin says**. 'It's given me space to work. There's a beautiful, creative community there. The gallery's been supportive from the moment I arrived.' Austin's work has toured across regional Queensland, and they've found meaningful connections and community in regional spaces.

Austin's current Brisbane exhibition is at the Judith Wright Centre until 27 May.



David Burton

David Burton is a writer from Meanjin, Brisbane. David also works as a playwright, director and author. He is the playwright of over 30 professionally produced plays. He holds a Doctorate in the Creative Industries.

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