



Persistence of Vision;

The Sleep of Reason
Produces Monsters

Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro

9 August – 3 September 2023

ART SPACE ON THE CONCOURSE



THE CONCOURSE

Persistence of Vision;

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters

Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro.

A Willoughby City Council curated exhibition exploring the realm of the phantastic.

Belief in the phantasms of the past such as The Loch Ness Monster, ghostly spectres, Little Green Men and Bigfoot have mostly been put to bed through modern scientific analysis. But what has replaced these bug-a-boos?

COVER IMAGE: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Stepping on Lego* (detail), 2023, repurposed Lego

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Humans have always grappled with the tension between truth and their belief structures. Throw in unorthodox opinion, maverick convictions and globalisation that present us with multitudinous conflicting ideals, and you can understand how we sometimes do not know what to believe. ***Persistence of Vision; The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*** takes us back to a time when mistruths and fakery were harmless. The invention of photography presented us with the idea that the photograph was the convincing go-to in the representation of reality, freeing up the need for painting to play this role. However, trickery that could be produced in the camera lens and the darkroom to create supposed paranormal photographs exposed that truth in photography could no longer be guaranteed. Outrage and dissent between believers and non-believers of the paranormal could create headlines, but it never threatened the political status quo. One may or may not truly believe in the possibilities of ghosts, UFOs or rare creatures that did not fit into known zoological taxonomy, but they did evoke a sense of curiosity; a delicious compulsion to be scared; a fascination with otherworldliness.

We live in a time where misbeliefs feel more dangerous. Fake news, conspiracy theories and public truth claims are easily disseminated through the internet and social media channels. Artificial Intelligence potentially further complicates the situation as AI researchers threaten a possibility of reality collapse.

Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro's exhibition symbolically present these two worlds; the nostalgia of questionable yet beguiling paranormal beings created by analogue technology and the divisive disinformation of Post Truth in our current political climate.

The phantasms of the past dominate the exhibition walls; Collin Evans levitates above his audience; Freddy Jackson's ghost is presented as an isolated portrait and supernatural forces propel Janet Hodgson from her bed. Nessie creates ripples emerging from the waters of Loch Ness. They are familiar images from our past, but Healy and Cordeiro's interpretations rendered painstakingly in repurposed Lego evoke an impression of digital pixels, suggesting the truth of the photograph is only an illusion.

The sculptures in the exhibition are representations of the items rioters used as weapons during the January 6 insurrection in Washington DC. Composed without the same detail as the phantasms, they present these weapons as comical and pathetic.

Persistence of Vision; The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters takes us on a wondrous journey to remember the fantastical illusions of the past—those that delighted us within books and magazines—but alert us to the delusions of the present.

Cassandra Hard Lawrie, Curator and Visual Arts Coordinator,
Willoughby City Council



ABOVE: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Fire Extinguisher*, 2023, repurposed Lego. Photograph: silversalt

LIST OF WORKS

Patty 352, 2023, repurposed Lego, 130.4 x 174.6 x 3.2 cm (three panels)

The Surgeon's Photo, 2023, repurposed Lego, 194 x 336 x 3.2 cm (four panels)

Medium Levitation, 2023, repurposed Lego, 274 x 200 x 3.2 cm (four panels)

Stepping on Lego, 2023, repurposed Lego 223 x 266 x 3.2 cm (three panels)

Made in Turin, 2023, repurposed Lego, 59.5 x 50.3 x 3.2 cm

Goddard's Delayed Departure, 2023, repurposed Lego, 100 x 100 x 3.2 cm

I Want to Believe, 2023, repurposed Lego, 153 x 103 x 3.2 cm

Witches Hat, 2023, repurposed Lego, 34 x 22 x 22 cm

Desk Drawer, 2023, repurposed Lego, 11 x 24 x 16.5 cm

Helmet, 2023, repurposed Lego, 13.5 x 26 x 20 cm

Bear Spray, 2023, repurposed Lego, 14.5 x 4.7 x 9 cm

Skateboard, 2023, repurposed Lego, 11.2 x 86 x 55.5 cm

Fire Extinguisher, 2023, repurposed Lego, 47.4 x 25 x 40 cm

Knife, 2023, repurposed Lego, 4 x 30.2 x 20 cm

Handgun, 2023, repurposed Lego, 3.6 x 20.5 x 10.2 cm

Tomahawk Axe, 2023, repurposed Lego, 3 x 33.2 x 17.5 cm

Crutch, 2023, repurposed Lego, 111 x 20 x 4 cm

Baseball Bat, 2023, repurposed Lego, 117 x 10 x 10 cm



RIGHT: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Patty 352*, 2023, repurposed Lego. Photograph: Andrea Christie-David

ARTIST STATEMENT

Persistence of Vision; The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters explores the realm of the phantastic. Do humans innately possess a surplus of mental energy that leads them to seek out occluded knowledge? Belief in the phantasms of the past such as The Loch Ness Monster, ghostly spectres, Little Green Men and Bigfoot have mostly been put to bed through modern scientific analysis. But what has replaced these bug-a-boos?

This series of artworks combines the diaphanous spectres of the past with the delusions of the near-present. Utilising Lego as its primary medium, **Persistence of Vision; The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters** offers Lego mosaic renderings of endearing paranormal entities of the past combined with small Lego sculptures of improvised weapons collected in the aftermath of the January 6 insurrection in DC. Both subjects are manifestations of a desire to transpose the make-believe into the real.

One of the Lego mosaics is a rendering of frame 352 of the Patterson-Gimlin film; taken on October 20, 1967, claiming to document a Bigfoot aka The Sasquatch walking through a dry creek bed. The film was a staple of TV series and books such as *Great Mysteries of the World* and Usborne's *The World of the Unknown*. We have fond memories of perusing

these kinds of creepy yet fascinating tales while playing with Lego in the lounge rooms of our youth.

We feel that rendering this famous and well known scene in pre-loved Lego—faded and discoloured, utilitarian and loved by young and old—references the nostalgic period in which the Golden Age of Cryptozoology occurred. Just as Lego is well known by all, so too are the phantastic creatures that inhabited TV and pulp books. The pixilated nature of Lego lends itself well to describe the photographic, televisual or digital nature of our consumption of neo-folklore.

These days, classic cryptids like Big Foot and the Loch Ness Monster are filed pretty close to the space on the shelf that Santa Claus or the tooth fairy reside. But it seems there was a gentler time when people could research these fantastic creatures within the Academy without being entirely jeered at. Our technological age has killed off these monsters but in doing so, have we given birth to newer, more virulent ones?

The internet seems to be the natural habitat where the new phantasms are born and thrive. Science's victory of the paranormal of old seems to have given birth to a whole new array of questionable chimeras: the Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters. As people find comfort in ideas such

as Flat Earth Theory or Pizzagate theories; we may be pardoned for looking back to an age when Bigfoot's existence was still a possibility, with wistful fondness.

These mythic legends of yore became part of our collective psyche, they were born during the age of oral folklore and thrived under the glow of the cathode ray tube. The steely gaze of the Scientific Method has all but banished these creatures from the realm of rational possibility. But in return we have been forced to live with the entirely irrational: freedumb fighters cooking up theories that make the Satanic Panic of the eighties look moribund.

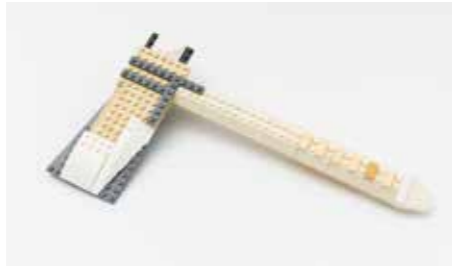
The January 6 riots are a macro effect of these flights of fancy. Unable to come to grips with the chasm between their imagined world and the harsh reality of public opinion, present day tin foil hat wearers endeavour to violently transpose the spectres in their minds into our reality. As a sauced up Rudolph said "We've got lots of theories, we just can't find the evidence."

Bigfoot, Nessie, Mani-pogo, Bukit Timah Monkey Man, come back, we need you. If humans must believe in the phantastic, can we at least keep our monsters endearing?

**Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro
2023**

RIGHT: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro,
I Want to Believe, 2023, repurposed Lego





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro,
Bear Spray, 2023, repurposed Lego
Tomahawk Axe, 2023, repurposed Lego
Helmet, 2023, repurposed Lego

Knife, 2023, repurposed Lego
Skateboard, 2023, repurposed Lego
Baseball Bat, 2023, repurposed Lego
Desk Drawer, 2023, repurposed Lego

CENTRE:
Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro,
Handgun, 2023, repurposed Lego

RIGHT: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro,
The Surgeon's Photo (detail), 2023,
repurposed Lego. Photograph: silversalt

BELOW: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro,
Goddard's Delayed Departure, 2023,
repurposed Lego. Photograph: silversalt



WORDS BY BARRY KELDOULIS

When I started on this essay I had in mind a title—“Imagination Made Solid”—but now I think it might be “Would Claire & Sean Lie To You?”.

I found Claire & Sean’s first foray into using Lego blocks as a medium for artistic expression surprising, confronting, and beautiful. (They have a knack for arranging mundane materials in an aesthetically pleasing way).

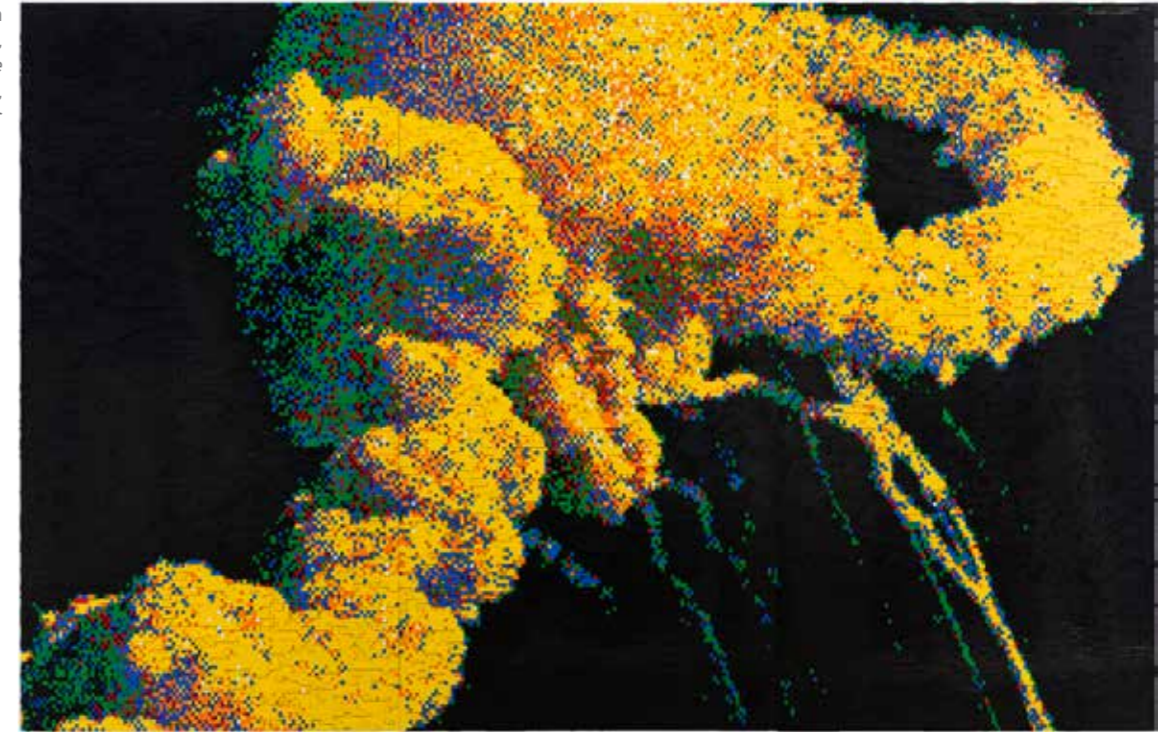
Surprising, for here was an artistic duo well known for their sculptures and assemblages making wall works for the first time. But, of course, as artists renowned for an unusual take on things, they were not using paint, or watercolour, or charcoal, but a medium profoundly associated with three-dimensional forms: Lego. And to my mind and most others, Lego was used to make structures, not create images. Also, the childhood building blocks were usually used to create replica objects or things from a child’s imagination—houses, vehicles, spaceships—that may not have lasted till the end of that day’s playtime, and destruction was part of the creative process. But because of this destructive element in the nature of childish play, these hard plastic bricks are virtually indestructible (if you trod on one, your foot came off painfully second best). As artworks they are likely to outlast any painting!

The works of that series *Where we are going, Where we have been, Why?* (2010 – ongoing), were confronting because of their subject matter, the title referring to a pre-prepared lesson created by Christa McAuliffe to be delivered from the space station to millions of children. The images of the works were those same images that were seared into the minds of the millions and millions of children and adults that watched, horrified, as the space shuttle *Challenger* disintegrated on the edge of space; the Lego brick structure of the works mimicking the pixilation of the screen as the cameras zoomed in to confirm the annihilation.

There are many aspects of that original series that continue through to this new body of work.

The works illustrate the power of humans wanting to believe in something greater—and acknowledge the importance of photography and the power of mass-media imagery—certainly in the sense of the propagation of these phenomena from local lore into international sensation. It is often said ‘seeing is believing’, and though never really true, the adage that ‘the camera never lies’ held sway until very recently (probably until Photoshop came along). The Loch Ness Monster was a local legend until the 1934 photograph ‘proved’ her existence to a world-wide audience, so too

RIGHT: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *85+ Black & Yellow*, 2021. From the series *Where we are going, Where we have been, Why*. Photograph: Luis Power



Bigfoot. The ghostly mystery of Goddard's Squadron exists only through a single photograph. Although numerous, UFO sightings are only given veracity with photographic evidence. Though not a photographic phenomenon, the *Shroud of Turin* could only gain widespread notoriety through photographic reproduction.

Interestingly, the pixilation inherent in building an image with Lego blocks not only mimics the basic construction of a digital image, but also metaphorically parallels the debunking of many of these phenomena—the further away from these works you are the clearer the image, the closer you get the more abstract and less convincing they appear. The 'Nessie' pic has been proven a hoax, so too the Bigfoot image, and Freddie in Goddard's Squadron could be a trick of double or time exposure.

However, some mystery does remain. For me, perhaps the centrepiece of this exhibition is the *Stepping on Lego* work, as its story relies less on photographic evidence and more on the account of many witnesses over a period of time. Indeed, there is a police report of a young Constable being hit by (nothing less than) a Lego brick that flew unaided by human interference across the room, and was warm to the touch!

But possibly more interesting than the litany of weird phenomena during the period of haunting (levitation, gravelly voice, furniture moving...) is the ongoing interest in the case. Sure, there was lots of media coverage at the time (in the 1970s), but the artists led me to a 2022 podcast devoting over an hour to dissecting the event. I was also sent a link to an online amateur investigation into Goddard's Squadron...

Could this lead us to the kernel of the artists' fascination; there's something else going on here.

It occurred to me recently as I was drawn into the spectacle watching *Lego Masters* on TV in the hugely popular Sunday evening time slot: Lego is no longer just child's play and the domain of children. My mother used to quote Corinthians to the teenage me "to set aside childish ways" and there is a general sense that one turns from a child into an adult chrysalis like, a metamorphosis into another more sophisticated being, resistant to superstition and with reduced curiosity, resigned to life in a less wonderous world.

But Claire & Sean seem to be saying something different...

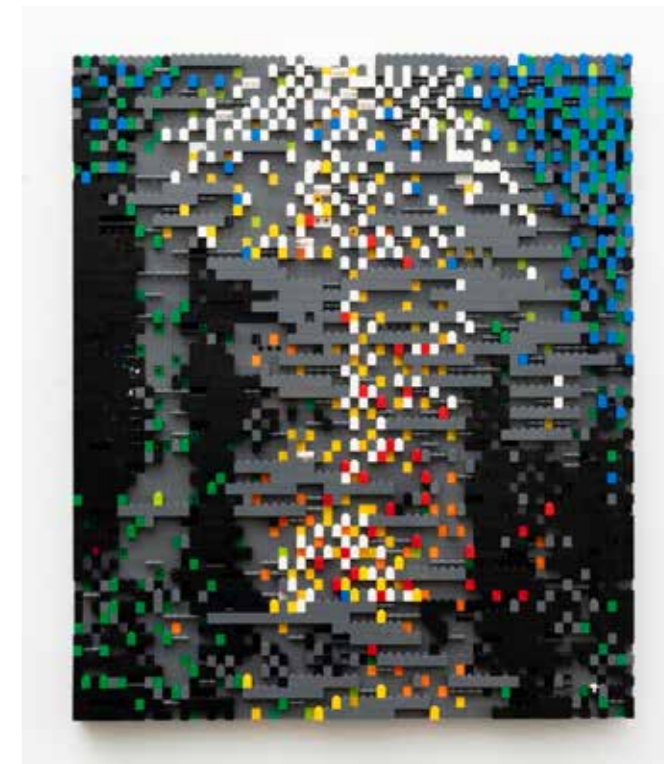
The fascination of these phenomena does not disappear as we grow older. In some cases, it does not diminish but grows stronger, blurring the line between childhood imaginings and adult longing for childish innocence. The wonder lingers.

Space travel was considered the last frontier. But as scientists smash atoms into ever smaller bits, and we read in magazines of 'The Evolutionary Argument Against Reality', as we generally accept it—and physicists suggest and Hollywood seems to confirm the existence of parallel universes—humans now turn to solving the riddle of the metaphysical and paranormal not only as one of the frontiers of science, but almost as an everyday hobby.

In making these stories, myths and legends of scary ghosts and mythological creatures solid, Claire & Sean acknowledge that yes, you grow bigger, but the childhood fears and fascinations, the gullibility and truth seeking never leave us.

The adult is an extension of the child within. Would Claire and Sean lie to us?

Barry Keldoulis
2023



ABOVE: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro,
Made in Turin, 2023, repurposed Lego.
Photograph: silversalt

BIOGRAPHY OF ARTISTS

Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro use their artistic practice as a tool to help locate themselves within the systems employed by our contemporary society. The pair believe that the central motif of our age is the tension created between the Primacy of the Individual and the Social Contract that is subscribed to through our complex, global inter-dependency with our fellow human beings. The formal and informal systems that our collective society utilises both supports and constricts the individuals that comprise the organisation.

The artistic collaboration reconfigures and juxtaposes elements of the biological, the historic, the cultural and the astronomical to create artworks that help decipher who we are and what we have gained and forfeited in order to realise our present existence.

Their work has been included in numerous exhibitions in Australia, Belgium, China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Switzerland, Turkey, Taiwan, the UK and the USA.

In 2005 Healy and Cordeiro were awarded Australia Council residencies at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, and Tokyo, Japan. In 2006—2007 they were Guest Artists at the Universität der Künste, Berlin, having been both awarded

Samstag Scholarships. In 2010 they took part in the inaugural Art Setouchi Triennale, Japan.

The duo have held solo exhibitions at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin 2006, The Art Gallery of New South Wales 2007, La bf15, Lyon 2009, The Corcoran Gallery, Washington DC 2011, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney 2012 and the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre in 2021.

Their installation *Life Span* was part of the Australian representation at the 53rd Venice Biennale. They also took part in the 5th Auckland Triennale, curated by Hou Hanru. Their work *Mondo Futuro* was included in the 2018 Australian Biennale. They have also participated in the Oku-Noto 2020+ Triennale, Japan.

The City of Sydney commissioned their public work *Cloud Nation* which is located in the Green Square Library Tower. Their latest public artwork was commissioned by the City of Parramatta, *Place of the Eels*, located in Parramatta Square. Most recently, in 2022, they won the Sulman Prize at the Art Gallery of NSW.

Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro are represented by N.Smith Gallery, Sydney



ABOVE: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro.
Photograph: Osamu Nakamura

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Artist Talk 11am – 12.30pm **SATURDAY 19 AUGUST**

CHATSWOOD LIBRARY MEETING ROOM

A conversation with artists Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro.

Join the artists for a discussion on their work, artistic processes and creative influences, in conversation with Council's Curator Cassandra Hard Lawrie.

Workshop 2pm – 4.30pm **SUNDAY 27 AUGUST**

CHATSWOOD LIBRARY CREATOR SPACE

Lego Printmaking Workshop with Gallery Lane Cove.

Combining the fun of Lego and our love of printing, this workshop teaches you how to create fun designs.

Bookings essential.

Register: Scan QR code or visit

<https://legoprintmakingworkshop.eventbrite.com.au>



RIGHT: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro,
Witches Hat, 2023, repurposed Lego
Photograph: silversalt.





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The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters

is a Willoughby City Council curated exhibition,
presented in partnership with Chatswood Culture Bites.

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N.Smith Gallery, Sydney.


FREE


www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au/arts

ART SPACE ON THE CONCOURSE (next to Box Office)
409 Victoria Avenue, Chatswood

Opening Hours:

Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday: 11am-5pm
Friday and Saturday: 11am-8pm

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#Chatswood #Artspace

LEFT: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *The Surgeon's Photo* (detail),
2023, repurposed Lego. Photograph: silversalt



WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

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We appreciate your feedback. THANK YOU!

