

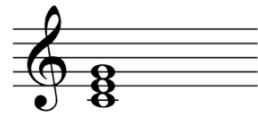
I. Baroque as framework

The present exhibition takes its name from the musical explorations of varying textures and sensations in the Baroque period. This ushered in a rich, emotive palette to work with. In contrast to the fairly constant emotional tone of the Renaissance repertoire, Baroque composers sought to differentiate each work from the next.

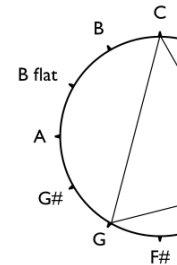
Each piece explores a single contrasting sensation or texture, making it homogenous and self-contained, while also imbuing it with a unique identity within a set of works. The contrast comes from the relationship between different movements and not from internal tensions, which in the Western canon would only come later in the Classical period.

The Baroque paradigm provides a useful working method with which visual artist Brett McMahon and composer David Banney are able to find common ground between two highly differentiated practices, allowing them to graft together disparate elements under an overarching narrative without assimilating their differences or contriving false parallels.

The paradox of symmetry and stability in harmonic structures



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II. Six-part structure

Far from limiting the artists, this structural starting point allows divergent practices to coexist in space and time while remaining faithful to their own methods and motifs. By agreeing to a sparse set of rules – create six pieces each, texturally homogenous within themselves, but texturally differentiated from one another – Banney and McMahon are able to incorporate this collaboration within the natural evolution of their individual oeuvres.

An exhibition is inevitably an arbitrary start and finish in an ongoing process; both artists' practices reach back into the past and forward into the future. With the addition of each new piece, a body of work expands, but is ultimately never finished.

On this occasion their timelines converge, giving rise to work made contemporaneously, but it is easy to imagine tracking forward in time and encountering entirely different results and mixing together samples from radically different periods in anachronic abandon.

III. Convergence of two

The exhibition space – or perhaps more fittingly, the 'performative' space – becomes host to a cross-disciplinary jam session: the meeting point of two artists who are free to roam within the minimal strictures of key and time signature. Aficionados of McMahon and Banney will recognise trademark riffs even as they improvise to a new tune.

Banney's composition is built of highly contrasting movements each: *Prelude* (static), *Tocata* (spikey), *Arioso* (lyrical), *Recitative* (mellow), *Dance* (rhythmic) and *Chorale* (spacious). Contrary to the sequential logic of musical interpretation, all six movements are reproduced simultaneously in the exhibition. Their arrangement throughout the gallery space further disrupts their linearity.

Co-habiting the gallery are McMahon's sculptures, as if expressions of the same spectral phenomena but on radically different wavelengths. Also numbering six, these assemblages of ravaged forms combine to create a tactile counterpoint to Banney's aural textures. Together they set up unresolved cadences and dissonant intervals.



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IV. Accidentals and assymetrics

Having worked separately from one another, it is only within the exhibition space that the 12-piece ensemble comes together. There is clearly an intention not to lock pieces together: loudspeakers are unhidden; here there are no theatrics, no illusions or tricks.

Art critic Sebastian Smee finds that McMahon favours work that forms itself and is not overly contrived or composed.¹

Just as McMahon provokes a sculpture to unfold before him in a series of interventions – some controlled, others accidental – so too does the interaction of aural and material elements take on a life of its own.

Banney observes these interactions as minute fluctuating asymmetries, which for him is the source of creation. No sooner than perfect stasis is achieved, it is up-ended and un-balanced in a never-ending and infinitely fecund cycle of growth and decay.

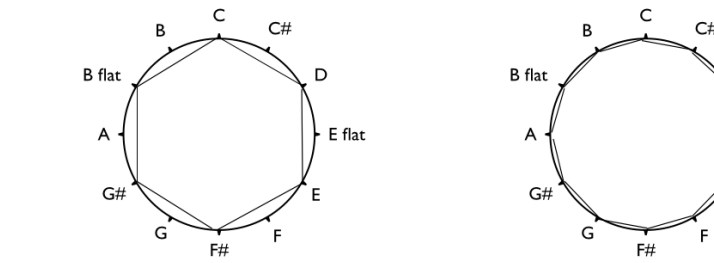
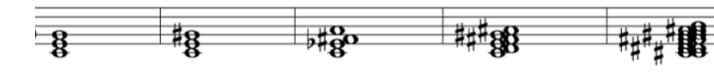
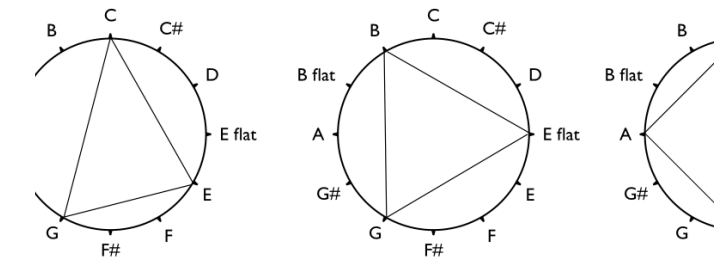
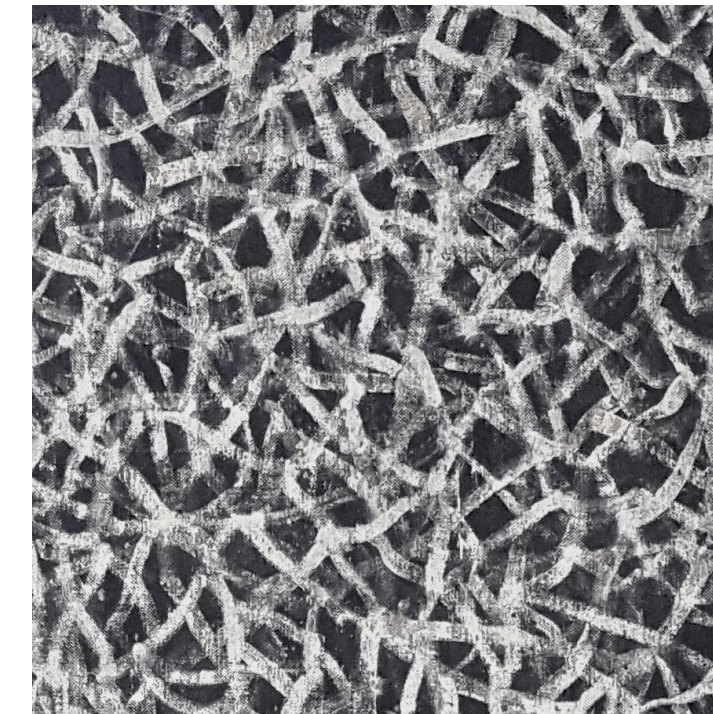
¹ Sebastian Smee, "The Afterlife of Things" in *Distillation: The Art of Brett McMahon*, Newcastle Art Gallery, 2015.

V. Endless permutations

The spatial and temporal nature of the exhibition means that no two visitors will address quite the same phenomena. As you move through different zones in the exhibition space, the punctuated *Tocata* fades out while the mellow *Recitative* fades in. Or, at a midpoint between two sculptures – where your field of vision encompasses several – the textural distinctions bleed and ontological borders blur. The matt gloss of charred remains reveals the crosshatching of woven canvas behind.

There is space to think your own thoughts, to imbue the work with your own interpretation. What is essentially a multi-channel cycle of 12 pieces and its reception by an impossibly diverse audience, provides for endless experiential permutations.

Your emotional landscape as viewer-listener might well traverse states of refreshment, ecstasy, excitement, frustration. Your experience is spontaneous, live; it occurs in the moment as the improvisation of McMahon and Banney plays out.



VI. Beyond Baroque

Although useful in understanding the structure of the exhibition and relationship between works, McMahon and Banney's practices move far beyond the strictures of Baroque forms. The model of textural differentiation provides a social contract of sorts, through which two divergent practices can engage. The 12 works presented were produced independently before arriving to the gallery, where they are recontextualised and form vastly new meanings in relation to each other.

As a working methodology for the coexistence of disparate elements, the Baroque model can be extrapolated to our political reality. It is a framework that proposes meeting points between diverse agents without assimilating their individual identities into a homogenous whole – a worthy proposition for today's society. Beyond Baroque we might find even more appropriate models for social heterogeneity in later musical periods, however, as with any metaphorical abstraction, reality is far more complex.

DAVID BANNEY | COMPOSER

Through meeting with Brett McMahon and the Gallery's director, Gilleen Shaw, we formed a wonderful creative triangle. It was during one of our many conversations that the term 'Baroque' took root. Paying homage to Baroque concepts is not new in itself – a century ago composers such as Stravinsky, Ravel, Prokofiev and many others found in Baroque forms a directness and simplicity that allowed them to shed the heavy, emotionally-intense language of the late Romantics, and create new and unique sound worlds.

The string quartet was an unknown entity to Bach and Handel, emerging as an important force in the middle and late 18th century. Thus, the chance to compose a 'Sonata for String Quartet' presents exciting challenges and opportunities. A symmetrical set of four notes – D, E, F, G – lays the foundations of the work, with subtle variations breaking the symmetry.



In 2015, composer David Banney encountered Brett McMahon's installation work for the first time and saw in it the tension between symmetry and symmetry-breaking he had been seeking in his own music. It was then that these two artists discovered the formal and conceptual affinities between their practices and that the present exhibition came to life.

Sonata for String Quartet 2017

I. Prelude

II. Toccata

III. Arioso

IV. Recitative

V. Dance

VI. Chorale



The Christ Church Camerata String Quartet

James Ferguson and Sandra Fitzgerald, violins

David Banney, viola

Gavin Clark, cello

Images

front cover. Brett McMahon *Remnants* (detail) 2017 paper, acrylic, enamel and shellac

I. David Banney from *Crystallising Wagner: Symmetry and Symmetry Breaking in the Tristan Prelude*

II. Brett McMahon *Colony* (detail) 2014–17 acrylic, shellac on hardwood

III. David Banney from *Crystallising Wagner: Symmetry and Symmetry Breaking in the Tristan Prelude*

IV. Brett McMahon *Spill* (detail) 2017 linen, cotton hessian rope wood and chain

V. David Banney from *Crystallising Wagner: Symmetry and Symmetry Breaking in the Tristan Prelude*

VI. Brett McMahon *Traces* (detail) 2017 oil and acrylic on linen

inner cover. David Banney Photo: Dr Howard Gwynne

Brett McMahon Photo: Rowena Foong

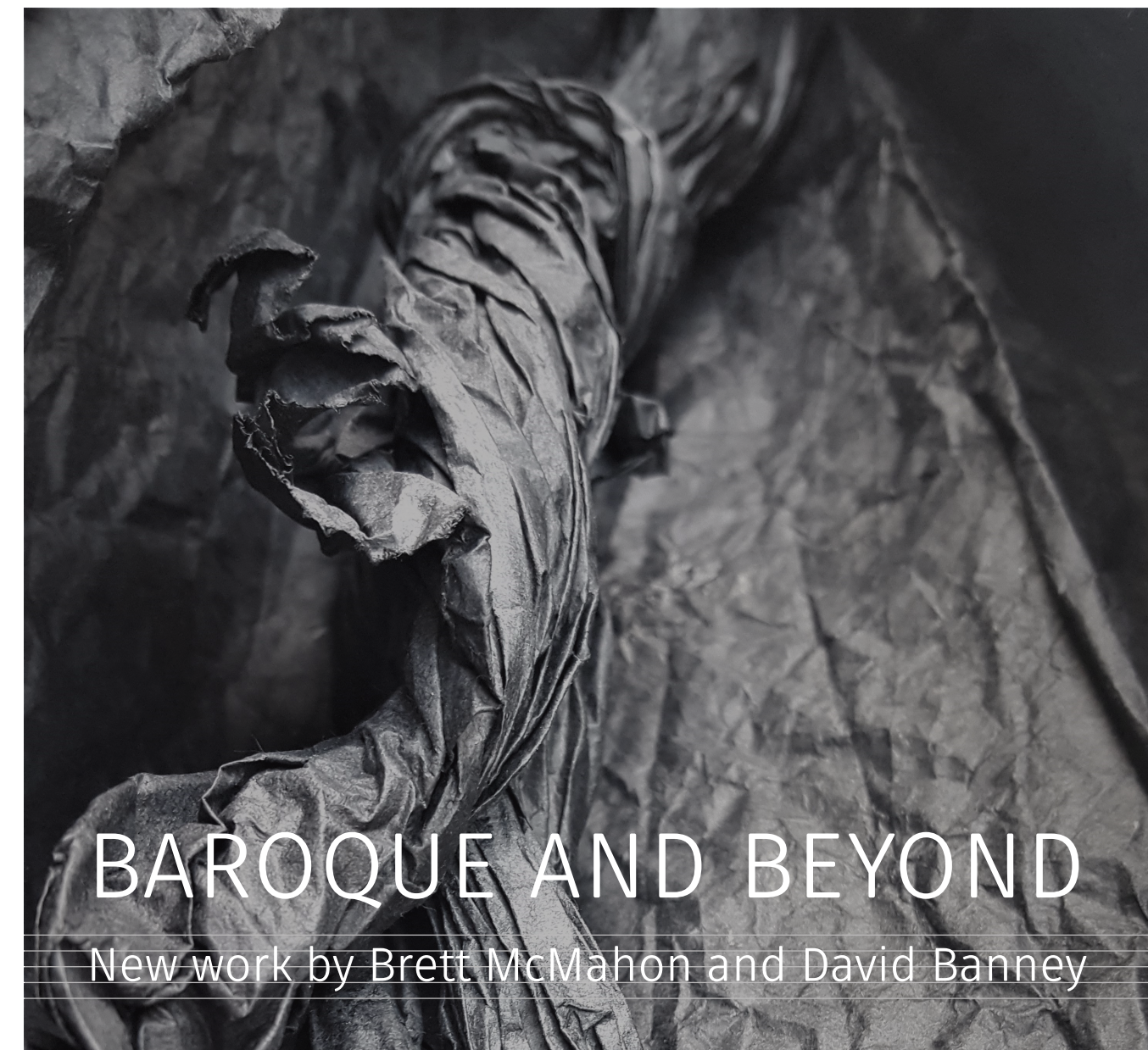
back cover. Brett McMahon *Barks* (detail) 2015–17 acrylic, shellac on linen, cotton wool and hessian

BRETT MCMAHON | ARTIST

The works that comprise the visual aspect of the Baroque and Beyond project are rooted in my ongoing exploration of the coastal bush of the Awabakal Reserve.

The twisted nature and variety of the plants and trees, the interaction between the sea and the land offer an endless variety of subject matter to explore and learn from. Linked by a dark tonal chromatic, the pieces in the exhibition use texture, form and materiality to dialogue with each other and the space they inhabit, very much like movements in a baroque musical structure.

Making the works outdoors, subjecting them to sun, wind and rain imbues them with a sense of self-contained resoluteness; a strength despite their sometimes fragile nature. How these pieces interact and respond to the music composed by David Banney will be exciting and interesting, maybe opening up new creative paths and insights into future making.



BAROQUE AND BEYOND

New work by Brett McMahon and David Banney