



## MEDIA RELEASE

TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2022

### TULLY ARNOT EXPLORES HOW PLANTS FEEL IN NEW VIRTUAL REALITY COMMISSION AT ACMI

ACMI proudly presents the premiere of **Tully Arnot's** latest work *Epiphytes*, a multi-sensory virtual reality (VR) project exploring the sentience of plants, in the final instalment of the \$80,000 Mordant Family VR Commission series.

Set within an abstract representation of Tully's childhood backyard, *Epiphytes* consists of an environment featuring a diffuse, shifting, magenta palette. Reliance on sight is de-escalated in favour of sound and scent to influence the user's bodily responses within the virtual space. The work honours alternative forms of plant communication and consciousness, inviting the user to question their own perception.

Developed during the Australian bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the ongoing climate crisis, *Epiphytes* uses implied forms of nature such as shadows from an unseen canopy and mobile, amorphous shapes to elicit feelings of solastalgia – emotional distress over a loss of natural environments. Simultaneously the work encourages a more symbiotic and interconnected way of being in the world, drawing on the premise of the artwork's botanical namesake: the epiphyte - an organism that feeds on the air, water and natural refuse of its environment to give back to its ecosystem.

*Epiphytes* features interviews with evolutionary ecologist Monica Gagliano, acoustic archaeologist Umashankar Manthravadi and echolocation teacher/blind researcher and activist Thomas Tajo. Arranging these sonic elements within the VR environment, Tully invokes curiosity and exploration by the user, while generating a conversational dialogue between these three diverse theorists.

Field recordings of local birds and other ecological sounds complement the recorded conversations of the theorists, along with sounds representing water and nutrients flowing through trees, suggesting a natural environment that is either fabricated or fading. The audio is spatially controlled, using virtual reality as a powerful acoustic tool to represent sounds that cannot be created in reality.

**Artist Tully Arnot said:** "With the support of ACMI and the Mordant Family VR Commission, I've had the opportunity to use VR to imagine the perception of plants and explore multi-sensory ways of being in the world. Through de-centring the human experience, I hope the project encourages audiences to reflect on more caring and interconnected relationships that we can have with each other and our ecosystems."



**ACMI Director and CEO Seb Chan said:** “Since 2017, ACMI and the Mordant Family VR Commission have been collaborating to support artists working at the forefront of media technologies. This has cemented Australia’s national museum of screen culture as a leader in this space. Across 12 meditative minutes, Tully Arnot’s *Epiphytes* uses VR in a new way – downplaying the visual in favour of audio immersion – and invites us to think differently about nature and how we perceive the plant life around us.”

**Professor Cav. Simon Mordant AO said:** “*Tully Arnot: Epiphytes* marks the final instalment in the Mordant Family VR Commission – a program that our family has proudly delivered alongside ACMI. This work is an example of an artist expanding his creative practice and delivering on his promise to use VR in new and exciting ways.”

This the third and final instalment of the Mordant Family VR Commission, which supports Australian visual artists with an established gallery-based practice to experiment with and extend their craft using VR. The commission was created in partnership with Professor Cav. Simon Mordant AO and Catriona Mordant AM, the City of Melbourne and ACMI.

Visitors to ACMI can experience *Epiphytes* using the cordless Oculus Quest 2 virtual reality headset, allowing them to freely explore the virtual environment. This headset is recommended for users over 12 years of age, but the content is approachable by all ages with parental supervision.

***Tully Arnot: Epiphytes runs 4-27 November 2022 in Gallery 3 at ACMI, Fed Square, Melbourne. Entry is free and bookings are recommended. Visit the [ACMI website](#) for more info.***

**NOTES TO EDITORS:** Download a full list of exhibition artworks, captions and images [here](#).

#### **ABOUT TULLY ARNOT**

Tully Arnot is one of Australia’s leading visual artists. His work uses found objects, tech and the manufactured items of modern life to create absurdist sculptures and installations, and is designed to challenge the way we interact with ourselves and technology.

Arnot has exhibited across Australia, UK, Germany, Belgium, Italy, China, Russia, and New Zealand. His work has increasingly incorporated video, documentary, performance and experimental media as a means for understanding how technology mediates our relationship with the natural world.

Arnot's work addresses the role of automation and simulation, often looking at robotic and less-sentient substitutes for humans and human interactions. Many of



his projects investigate innovations in plant robotics, as well as emergent research into plant communication and consciousness.

### **ABOUT ACMI**

ACMI is Australia's national museum of screen culture. The museum reopened in February 2021 after a two-year, \$40 million redevelopment – an architectural, programmatic and technological transformation. Navigate the universe of film, TV, videogames and art with us. ACMI celebrates the wonder and power of the world's most democratic artform – fostering the next generation of makers, players and watchers. ACMI's vibrant calendar of exhibitions, screenings, commissions, festivals, and industry and education programs explore the stories, technologies and artists that create our shared screen culture. More at [acmi.net.au](http://acmi.net.au)