

# Visual arts

Andrew Harper



## Making the invisible, visible



Untitled (IC1 male), left, and Untitled (filing cabinet) detail, above, both by Ashe.

*THIS TOO SHALL PASS, by Ashe, Contemporary Art Tasmania, Tasma St, Hobart, Performances each Saturday at 1pm, Until May 27*

**T**he residue of life is inevitable: we will hold the effects of time on our bodies. We're like ships, gathering barnacles and cargo that we are, apparently, required to carry because that's what we need to be humans that exist in the world: we have documents, proofs and evidence of a life lived.

We all carry these things: we have memories and significant photographs and stuff we need to carry.

And we carry ourselves, and we have real weight and other weight too.

This Too Shall Pass, seems to be about the very weight of ageing and mortality. The entrance to the gallery draws us past a series of photographs of documents and folders, that share no clues as to what they might actually be, beyond being important in some way, as documents are very important in our culture.

The centre of the work is something far more important: an actual human. The

exhibition at times features a performer lying partially suspended in an industrial sling, but when I saw this a photograph was holding the place of the real flesh and blood version. The whole thing looks uncomfortable, unnatural and somehow medical: the body we see is being lifted as we might elevate an injured limb. The photograph is of an older man, who looks at the very least confused or upset, naked and very vulnerable. It's a deeply arresting image.

There is much that can be gleaned from it: it suggests illness, loss of strength, loss of autonomy. The industrial sling leans into a notion of a culture that treats people as objects, as burdens.

Across from this is a selection of more files and papers and folders that have been set into concrete blocks – set in an actual filing cabinet. Elsewhere, a bell pings repetitively, relentlessly, marking the passage of time.

This Too Shall Pass is not a particularly subtle show, although it has excellent nuance and shading. It's better off without subtlety though – the idea that ageing is confronting and that we carry heavy baggage, that we are heavy baggage. That we are composed of flesh that sags and may well need support. That we accumulate and that somehow, somewhere, everything we have gathered up will have to be dealt with in some way, either by us, or by whoever it might be we leave in our wake.

This Too Shall Pass feels like a very frank discussion around the reality of mortality, and the weight that society places on us as we age and engage, inevitably, with bureaucratic institutions and systems.

This is a perspective not seen all that much in our deeply youth focused culture, but it's at the core of many issues we all face – what will become of the vulnerable people who live at the edges of our society as we age?

*DON'T LET LEAVES INTO YOUR HOUSE*

By Joan Ross

Bett Gallery, Until June 3

Price range: \$3300-\$7700

Joan Ross has an established approach to making art that uses elements of satire and cultural criticism of Australia and its colonial history. She's long used that very recognisable vibrant fluorescent yellow that we associate with bureaucracy and government regulation – and by implication, fascism – to comment on problematic aspects of the country of Australia as it is now, and as it was historically.

This new show is within the broad parameters she's laid out, but leans as well into an idea of decadent consumption, using ideas we might associate with advertising; in particular she creates a perfume, Possession, that's the very scent of colonialism itself, and a slogan: Just Take It. This is pretty much what the British Colonists of Australia did; and Ross is not telling us anything new; it's more like a link is being made to contemporary destructive and extractive consumption that is taking place at a terrifying rate now – Ross suggests a direct link. Aesthetically, Ross is really leaning in to bright and lush for this show with some of the most glowing images I've seen featured here including one rather different work, The Flower Game, that suggests Ross is spreading out and finding new elements of her practice to explore.



*Always the last one at the party.*