

'One grand symphony' at relaunched Adelaide gallery

The latest development in Adelaide's ever-evolving gallery landscape sees GAGPROJECTS director Paul Greenaway relaunching his Kent Town exhibition space with a standout solo show of new work by Chinese-Australian artist Guan Wei.

Written by [John Neylon](#)



Paul Greenaway alongside works in GAGPROJECTS 'entrée' exhibition *Soft Landing*. Photo: Jack Fenby / InReview

One day, someone with a deep desire to tell the story of Adelaide's art galleries and spaces will take up the challenge and embark on that long, lonesome journey.

Maybe it will be a team of writers, tasked to cover the scene from Adelaide's first one-person exhibition (George French Angas, Legislative Council Chamber, 1845) to Samstag Museum's [Night for Day](#) (2023 Adelaide Festival) in the Adelaide Railway Station concourse, a stone's throw from the old Council Chamber building. In between may be found hundreds of art spaces ranging from enshrined venues, including the Art Gallery of SA and Royal South Australian Society of Arts, and encompassing a wide spectrum from commercial galleries to artist cooperatives and "gallery without walls" pop-ups.

The roll call of the lost and disappeared is long. They served their purpose, ran out of steam, were struck down by COVID or interest rates and so on. But, as GAGPROJECTS (previously Greenaway Art Gallery) demonstrates, nimbleness in a context of shifting cultural tastes, economic realities and beckoning opportunities can pay dividends and bolster longevity.

When the gallery was established by director Paul Greenaway in 1991, Adelaide's contemporary art-space landscape was enhanced by GAG's program that mixed the best of local established and emerging talents with national and international artists. Significantly, and parallel to a diverse exhibition program, it created opportunities for local artists to present their first one-person shows and to participate in art fairs both within Australia and elsewhere.

A key strategy in this proactive program was a decision to establish a bridgehead in Berlin, which Greenaway recognised as an emerging hot zone for contemporary art and artists. He opened a small exhibiting space in the Mitte district of Berlin in 2008 and upgraded in 2015 to Phasmid Studios, a

complex offering three to six-month residencies for artists and lecturers. With the Phasmid package came opportunities for artists to build networks to resource individual studio trajectories.

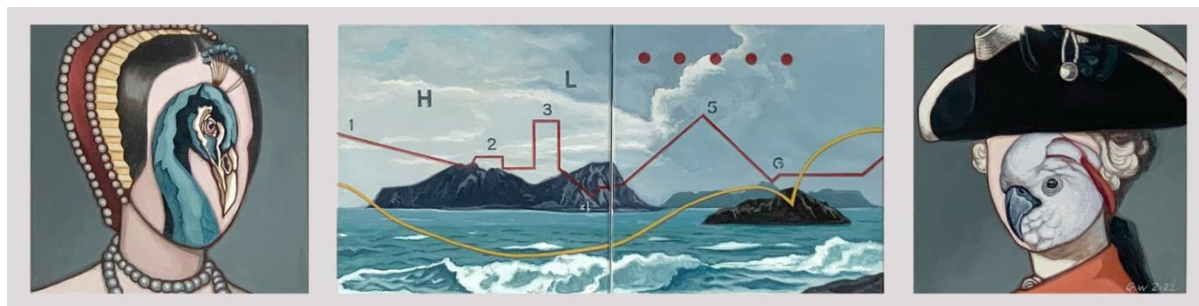
Back in Adelaide, GAGPROJECTS continued to conduct exhibitions at the Kent Town gallery, as well as exhibiting local and interstate artists at art fairs, but by 2018 it had relocated to a former Flak hanger site in Berlin. Most recently, faced with significant disruption associated with the pandemic, economic uncertainties and the war in Ukraine, Paul Greenaway has decided to relocate back to Adelaide and in effect relaunch Kent Town as an exhibition space.

This month it presented an entrée exhibition called *Soft Landing*, a line-up of works by local and interstate artists including Hossein Valamanesh, Ariel Hassan, Jenny Watson, Pierre Mukeba and Patricia Piccinini.

Brushing aside predictable “You’re back – I thought you’d gone!” local responses, Greenaway sees opportunities to build new audiences among contemporary art enthusiasts and collectors. So expect more information and keys for looking/thinking prompts both in the gallery via wall texts and through social media, artist interviews and the like.

When asked what frameworks will guide selection of artists for the forthcoming calendar of exhibitions and beyond, Greenway says that he “likes artists who think” – and, one supposes, an audience that is predisposed to think in the presence of works.

GAG’s relaunch project, *Assumed Reality*, an exhibition of new work by [Guan Wei](#), is well equipped to take its audiences on such a journey. The Beijing and Sydney-based artist is a prominent figure within the east coast scene and beyond. but until now, has rarely shown Adelaide. He was one of the generation of artists that left China following the Tiananmen Square events of 1989, and immigrated to Australia in 1990.



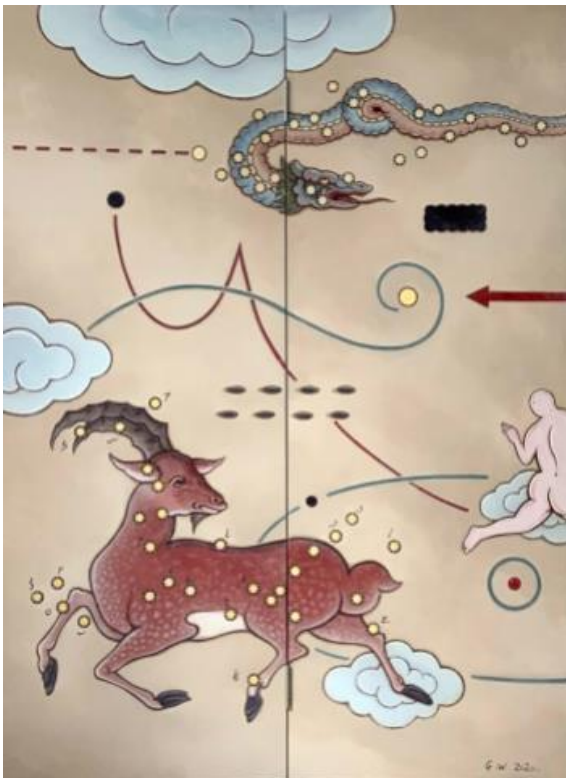
Guan Wei, *As Myth has it No. 8*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 130cm (4 panels), courtesy of GAGPROJECTS, Adelaide.

His iconography has been described as light in tone and profound in message. Themes of migration, personal and cultural identity are explored through a seductive blend of humour, irony and mordant social commentary. His best-known imagery – which evokes maps and templates of imaginary worlds, composed within the format of a traditional landscape screen – incorporates symbols, cyphers, fabulous creatures and cartoon-like figures to suggest the cross currents and dark secrets of historical narratives.

Guan Wei is open and forthcoming about his symbolic language. *As Myth has it*, for example, features a landscape rendered in the style of an early colonial, topographical painting, flanked by portraits of a woman in period costume and a military officer. The woman’s face is superimposed

with a conch shell or seed pod, and the man's the head of an owl. The artist comments that these visual devices “manifest the surprise and joy of great geographical discoveries, as well as the destruction of the ecosystem”.

This work acts as a window through which to view Guan Wei's juxtaposition of symbols, also to be found in other works in this exhibition. An example is *Star Map No. 1* which incorporates an assemblage of various constellations from ancient mythology alongside interstellar trajectories of geometric symbols alluding to subjects as diverse as space exploration interwoven with cosmological creatures. The artist refers to this calibrated mashup as acting “like one grand symphony”.



Guan Wei, *Star Map No.1*, 2020, acrylic on board, 174 x 124 x 3.5cm, courtesy of GAGPROJECTS.



Guan Wei, *Plastic Surgery*, 2015, acrylic on linen, 180 x 110cm each (4 panels), courtesy of GAGPROJECTS, Adelaide.

This exhibition swings like an errant comet, from the outer reaches of speculation about a post-human future for a tremulous humanity, to the bitter harvest of slice and dice of AI surveillance and profiling. *Plastic Surgery* tracks this territory, harnessing the bland reassurances of screen-driven imagery to confirm – and at the same time subvert – systems that lay claim to our individual identities. Makes you think.

Assumed Reality, by Guan Wei, is showing at GAGPROJECTS (39 Rundle Street, Kent Town) from May 3 until June 4. Other artists who will present exhibitions at the gallery in 2023 include Angela Valamanesh, Sundari Carmody and David Griggs.