

KARLA MARCHESI



DISCO INFERNO

NICHOLAS
THOMPSON
GALLERY

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS IN 2025

10 TO 27 SEPTEMBER 2025

Shimmering Begonia leaves pile high—striated, variegated, polka-dotted, and waxed. Luxurians and Angel Wings stretch heavenward as an offering to the gods. A surreptitious bowerbird tirelessly adds to the Bacchanalian scene with evermore trinkets and fruit.

How much will be enough to appease them?

In an age of sensory overload, our screen-driven culture doles out bitesized treats and sugar-coated indulgences. Short-form videos, optimised for rapid consumption, roll across our retinas and soothe digital anxiety like worry beads. The dopamine rush of online outrage and disposable consumer trends offer the illusion of control in an increasingly untethered world—one where feelings of powerlessness and pessimism, born from politics' failure to meet the crises of our time, often feel too expansive to confront.

When working class poverty deepens, middle-class prosperity wanes and the wealth of the top 1% surpasses that of the Gilded Age, attachments to small things count.

Add a “*Labubu*” to the pile. Too much is never enough.

Combining centuries-old vanitas traditions and the aesthetics of Baroque art with the glitz of 1970s disco, *Disco Inferno* (2025, Nicholas Thompson Gallery) explores fleeting pleasures in a hypermediated, economically anxious age. Borrowing its title from The Trammps' 1976 hit, the exhibition presents botanical arrangements poised in delicate tension, between surface and substance, desire and decay, delight and disillusionment.

In hyperreal, luxuriously maximalist scenes, flora and party paraphernalia are depicted in a neo-Rococo celebration of excess and revelry. Iridescent textures gleam like mirror balls; branches sway like dancers on the floor. But all that glitters is not gold.

The disco era offered joy and escape, particularly for marginalised communities, yet unfolded amid economic decline, political unrest, and social upheaval. The era bore the aftershocks of race riots, the Vietnam War, political assassinations, and the Watergate scandal, leaving many disillusioned and adrift. More than two centuries prior, the ornamental extravagance of the Rococo era masked a society on the brink of violent Revolution.

Against the backdrop of our own historical poly-crisis moment, *Disco Inferno* asks: How does one live meaningfully in the shadow of existential despair? Here, the exhibition title's second meaning comes to the fore: in Latin, *Disco Inferno* translates to "I learn by suffering."

For over a decade, Karla Marchesi's practice has drawn from and reimagined the "Impossible Bouquet" genre of 17th-century Dutch still life painting. At the height of the tulip trade, secular merchants embraced this genre, in which blooms from every season appeared together in impossible abundance: a simulacrum of nature. Initially drawn to its symbolic capacity to represent market capitalism and Western worldviews, Marchesi has since developed the motif into a personal lexicon: One that entwines autobiographical narrative with broader ideological critique, utilising bathos, pathos, and the absence of the human figure to speak to both intimate and universal concerns.

With an air of affirmative nihilism and tragicomic melodrama, Marchesi's paintings depict complex entanglements of multigenus flora in hypernatural, posthumanist scenes. Positioned between seduction and repulsion, her botanical subjects operate as potent allegories—sensuous yet critical, underscoring the duality of human nature. Where vanitas still lifes once used cut flowers, burning candles, and bubbles to symbolise life's fragility (or, here, party balloons), Marchesi's forms pulse with vitality. They grow abundantly, emerging from lush piles and assume the role of anthropomorphic protagonists, brimming with agency and adaptive resilience. Wax candles share space with electric bulbs, signalling a path from transience towards endurance.

All may not be lost.

The party may be over, but traces of humanity's prevailing capacity for hope and rebirth remain in its wake. Behold the begonias boogie as they dance the night away.



KARLA MARCHESI

Disco inferno

2025

oil on linen

166.5 x 166.5 cm

\$8,900

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KARLA MARCHESI

Wasted waiting

2025

oil on linen

166.5 x 166.5 cm

\$8,900

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KARLA MARCHESI

Midnight oil

2025

oil on linen

165 x 152 cm

\$8,800

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KARLA MARCHESI

Like a prayer

2025

oil on linen

165 x 140 cm

\$8,600

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THOMPSON
GALLERY

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KARLA MARCHESI

Playpen

2025

oil on linen

165 x 140 cm

\$8,600



KARLA MARCHESI

The colour out of space

2025

oil on canvas

120 x 105 cm

\$5,500

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KARLA MARCHESI

Electric boogaloo

2025

oil on canvas

120 x 100 cm

\$5,500

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KARLA MARCHESI

Openings

2025

oil on canvas

80 x 70 cm

\$4,400

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KARLA MARCHESI

Lights up

2025

oil on canvas

80 x 55 cm

\$3,900



KARLA MARCHESI

Night stations

2025

oil on acrylic glass panels, triptych

41.3 x 76 cm

\$3,300



KARLA MARCHESI

The longest minute

2025

oil on acrylic glass panels, triptych

43 x 30 cm

\$2,900



Berlin based Karla Marchesi has Bachelor of Fine Art (2004) and Honours in Fine Art (2007) degrees from the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, where she received the University Medal for academic excellence and the Honours Thesis Prize. Karla received the Philip Bacon Galleries Prize for Excellence in Drawing in 2003, enabling her to study for a semester at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, US.

Karla has held solo exhibitions in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. In 2012 she undertook a studio residency at Atelierhaus Mengerzeile, Berlin that preceded her first international solo exhibition at Kunsthalle M3, Berlin. She has subsequently participated in a number of international group exhibitions in Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg and the USA and held solo exhibitions in Berlin, Luxembourg and Singapore.

Karla is a recipient of the 1st Prize and 3rd Prize in the Redland Art Awards (2010 and 2022), the Wilson Visual Arts Award (2012) and an Australia Council for the Arts Early Career New Work Grant (2013). Her work is included in a number of public collections including The University of Queensland Art Museum, the Museum of Brisbane, the Australian Catholic University and several regional galleries.

Disco Inferno is Karla Marchesi's fifth exhibition with Nicholas Thompson Gallery.

Photograph Dale Grant

KARLA MARCHESI

Born Brisbane, Australia. Lives Berlin, Germany.

EDUCATION

- 2007 Bachelor of Fine Art, First Class Honours, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University
- 2004 Bachelor of Fine Art Queensland College of Art, Griffith University
- 2003 Semester study at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, United States of America

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 *Disco Inferno*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne Australia
- 2024 *Slow Growth*, Jan Manton Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
Weathervane, Galerie Cyprian Brenner, Hüttlingen, Germany
- 2023 *Slow is Smooth, Smooth is Fast*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
Cruise Control Death Drive, Bark Gallery Berlin at Potsdamer Platz 8, Berlin, Germany
- 2022 *Slow Burn*, Jumbo Receiver, Berlin, Germany
Desire Path, Jan Manton Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2021 *Vanity Fair: Select Works*, Jan Manton Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
Sugar Fever Dream, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2019 *To proceed within a trap*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2018 *Floral Atlas*, Artscape Contemporary, Luxembourg
Gold Standard, Helmut, Leipzig, Germany
- 2017 *After Nature*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2015 *Vivarium*, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2014 *Here nor there*, Australian High Commission, Singapore and Chan Hampe Galleries,
Raffles Hotel Arcade, Singapore
- 2013 *Hang-Ups*, Beam Contemporary, Melbourne, Australia
Every moment lives together, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
- 2012 *To have and to hold*, Beam Contemporary, Melbourne, Australia
Finders Keepers, Firstdraft, Sydney, Australia

- Recent Paintings*, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2011 *Deterior*, Blindside Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2010 *Left Behind*, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2008 *Interiors*, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- Dwelling*, Metro Arts, Brisbane, Australia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 *Collecting the Future: 50 years of the Griffith University Art Collection*, GUAM, Brisbane
- 2024 *Rocks & Tethers*, Bark Berlin Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- FoYou*, Voluntary Art Liaison Group exhibition, Berlin, Germany
- Liquidation Totale: Tout va disparaître*, Oblivion Collective, Pal Projects, Paris, France
- According to Her*, Bark Berlin Gallery & Kultur am See e.V Bad Saarow, Bad Saarow, Germany
- Le nouveau Biedermeier*, Tick Tack, Antwerp, Belgium
- Art Karlsruhe* (Art Fair booth) Bark Berlin Gallery, Karlsruhe Germany
- A Summer Selection*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2023 *200 under 2000 CSR*. Berlin, Germany
- Bark Berlin Gallery*, Booth B1, Kunst Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland
- Miniutra*, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
- AmtSalon 5th edition*, Bark Berlin Gallery booth, Berlin, Germany
- 2022 *FEEL FREE*, Scotty, Berlin, Germany
- Sneak Peak*, Mirus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
- Trash to Impress*, Polarraum, Hamburg, Germany
- 2021 *Vitality*, Mirus Gallery, Denver, Colorado USA
- 2020 *Floral Obsession*, Artscape Contemporary, Luxembourg Art Week, Luxembourg
- Tondo*, InFormat, Projektraum, Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin
- An Australian Spring*, Michael Reid, Berlin
- Five Years*, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
- Built Forms*, Redcliffe Regional Gallery, Queensland, Australia
- The Family Home*, Redland Art Gallery, Queensland

- 2019 *Female Gaze*, Artscape Contemporary Art Luxembourg at the Foundry
Luxembourg
Re_wild, Artscape Contemporary Art Luxembourg at CMS Luxembourg
Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia
VIS-IBILITY, QUT Art Museum, Brisbane
Outmoded, Nachtspeicher23 Hamburg, Germany
- 2018 *Almost Nature*, Caves Bernard Massard, Luxembourg. *Neue Echtheit, 48 Stunden*
Neukolln, Berlin, Preview, Nachtspeicher23, Hamburg, Germany
- 2017 *Artscape Contemporary*, Luxembourg Art week, Luxembourg
Raze Raise, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia
Scenes of our city, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane, Australia
- 2016 *100% Brisbane*, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane, Australia
Frieze, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
Bayside Acquisitive Art Award, Brighton, Victoria, Australia
Summer Show, Michael Reid Berlin, Berlin, Germany
A Conversation about Portraiture, Pine Rivers Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2015 *Panorama*, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
Wandering Archive, Blindside Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award finalist exhibition, touring Regional Australia
- 2014 *David Malouf & Friends*, Museum of Brisbane, Australia
Triptych, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award, Grafton, New South Wales, Australia and
touring
Double Trouble, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
- 2013 *Archival Wandering: Karla Marchesi, Clare Rae, Melanie Jayne Taylor*, Scope Miami,
Miami, Florida, USA
Heuriges 013, Ausstellungsraum.at, Vienna, Austria
Triptychon (phase 2), Pavillon am Milchhof, Mitte, Berlin, Germany
Triptychon (phase 1), Atelierhof Kreuzberg, Berlin, Germany
20 Jahre Ateilerhaus Mengerzeile Housesalon, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, Germany
Sunshine Coast Art Prize, Caloundra Regional Art Gallery, Sunshine Coast, Australia

- 2012 *Orientation*, Beam Contemporary, Melbourne, Australia
- 2011 *Together in Harmony*, The Korea Foundation Cultural Centre, Seoul, Korea
Our Place, touring regional Queensland
Winning Works, Pine Rivers Art Gallery
People and Places, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2010 *Gaze: people, relationships and place*, Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland
Weapons of Mass Consumption, Town Hall Gallery, Hawthorn, Melbourne
Something or other, Old Space ARI, Brisbane, Australia
The Stanthorpe Art Festival, Stanthorpe, Australia
The Churchie Emerging Art Prize, QCA Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
Redland Art Awards, Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland, Australia
- 2009 *World's Best Practice*, Old Space ARI, Brisbane
12+ Queensland Artists, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2008 *15 Artists*, Redcliffe Regional Art Gallery
Clayton Utz Travelling Scholarship, Metro Arts, Brisbane, Australia
16th Annual Pine Rivers Art Awards
- 2007 *15th Annual Pine Rivers Art Awards*

GRANTS & AWARDS

- 2025 Finalist - Lethbridge Landscape Prize, Lethbridge Gallery Brisbane
- 2023 Finalist - Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia
- 2022 Third Prize- Redland Art Awards
- 2019 Finalist - Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia
- 2017 Finalist - Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia
- 2016 Finalist - Bayside Acquisitive Art Award, Brighton, Victoria, Australia
- 2014 Finalist - Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award, Grafton, New South Wales, Australia
- 2013 Recipient - Australia Council for the Arts New Work Grant – Early Career
Finalist - Sunshine Coast Art Prize, Caloundra Regional Art Gallery, Sunshine Coast, Australia
- 2012 Winner - Wilson Visual Arts Award
Highly Commended - Spirit of Youth Awards
Recipient - Career Development Grant, Arts Queensland

- 2011 Shortlisted finalist - Australia Council for the Arts, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien Residency
- 2010 1st Prize - *Redland Art Awards*, Queensland Regional Art Awards Young Artist Prize
Recipient - *Career Development Grant*, Arts Queensland
Finalist – *The Churchie Emerging Art Prize*, QCA Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2009 Recipient - *Young Artist Mentoring Program*, Youth Arts Queensland - mentor Anne Wallace
- 2008 Runner-up 2D Category, *16th Annual Pine Rivers Art Awards*
- 2007 Recipient - *University Medal for Academic Excellence* over 4 years of study
Recipient - *Honours Thesis Prize*, Art Theory, Queensland College of Art
Recipient - First Prize 2D Category, *15th Annual Pine Rivers Art Awards*
Recipient - *Griffith Award for Academic Excellence*
- 2004 Recipient - Highly Commended Prize, *The Thiess Art Prize*, Griffith Award for Academic Excellence
- 2003 Recipient - *Philip Bacon Galleries Prize for Excellence in Drawing*, A scholarship sponsored by Philip Bacon Galleries, valued at \$5000, to study at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, USA

RESIDENCIES

2012-13 6-month studio residency at Atelierhaus Mengerzeile, Berlin, Germany

COMMISSIONS

- 2023 Book cover: Morgan Bach *Middle Youth*
- 2020 Album cover: Grief Scene *Bad Times*
- 2019 Single cover: Dead for ages *In defence of an ordinary life*
- 2014 *David Malouf & Friends*, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane, Australia

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2018 -current Artist Assistant for Studio Martin Eder, Berlin
- 2016-2017 Artist Assistant for Studio Anslem Reyle, Berlin, Germany
- 2016 Artist Assistant work for Iris Van Dongen and Alex Tenningkeit

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

2024 Rocks and Tethers, Bark Berlin Gallery, Berlin, Germany

2020 to present: *Proxi Projects*, Berlin - Exhibitions: *There Was a Sense that No One Was Going to Leave the Room, Ever* - Multi-disciplinary Groupshow (2021); *Moon Spill* – Arryn Snowball and collaborators (2020)

COLLECTIVES

InFormat Berlin Painting collective, Berlin, Germany 2014 - 2020

COLLECTIONS

Australian Catholic University Art Collection

Central Queensland University

Gadens Lawyers

Griffith University Art Collection

Lady Cilento Children's Hospital

Museum of Brisbane

Pine Rivers Shire Gallery

Queensland University of Technology Art Museum Collection

Redcliffe City Gallery

Redland Art Gallery

Southern Downs Regional Art Collection, Stanthorpe

St Margaret's Anglican Girls School, Brisbane

Swiss Re

University of Queensland Art Museum

University of the Sunshine Coast

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Elizabeth Fortescue '20 business types + a \$1m super investment = an unusual art collective'
in *Australian Financial Review*, Saleroom, 1 May 2025 p 15

'Redland Art Awards recognise outstanding talent' *Redland Coast Today*, 12 December 2024

Kon Gouritos (ed) Karla Marchesi: *Process in Artist Profile*, issue 64 2023

- Louise Martin-Chew 'Karla Marchesi: Desirous' in *Vault*, issue 40, 2022
- Tiarney Miekus (ed) 'Exhibition previews: Karla Marchesi 'Desire Path' in *Art Guide Australia*, June 2022
- 'Winners announced for Redland Art Awards 2022' Redland Coast Today, 17 October 2022
- Donald Holt 'Genus Hoping Ikebana', *The Review Board*, May, 2021
- Phil Brown 'Brisbane framed: 'Bill Robinson said that if you paint your life you can't go wrong'', *Brisbane News* (online) June 20, 2017:
<https://www.couriermail.com.au/lifestyle/brisbanenews/brisbane-framed-bill-robinson-said-that-if-you-paint-your-life-you-cant-go-wrong/news-story/9a5376a8cf5bf469cd01adeb424f9caf>
- Nicole Ferrie (ed.) 'Art Prize Finalists Announced', *Bendigo Advertiser* (online) May 19 2017:
<https://www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au/story/4674216/art-prize-finalists-announced/>
- Philip A Hartigan 'A view from the easel', *Hyperallergic* (online) Nov 12, 2014:
<https://hyperallergic.com/162078/a-view-from-the-easel-66/>
- Jonathan Tan 'Basic Instinct', *Gallery and Studio*, September 2014, Issue 2, page 20-25
- Dan Pike 2014 'From Brisbane to Berlin and Beyond', *AusInfront*, 11/07/2014
- Sharne Wolff 2014 'David Malouf and Friends – artistic collaboration a Brisbane state of mind', *The Guardian*, Australian Culture Blog, 12/05/2014
- Yvonne Wang 2014 'Artist Karla Marchesi and Her Berlin Wanderings', *The Muse*, 04/07/2014
- Louise Martin-Chew 2014 'David Malouf and Friends', *Art Guide Australia*, 22/05/2014
- Susan Carson 2014 'David Malouf and Friends explores tricks of memory and place', *The Conversation* 21/05/2014
- Review by Dan Rule. *The Age* 18 October, 2013. Life&Style p.5. Online & Print
- 'Artist Nurtures Complexity of Nature' by Dylan Rainforth. *The Age* 2 October, 2013. p.42
- Exhibition preview by Toby Fehily. *Three Thousand* 4 October, 2013
- Every Moment Lives Together, Kunsthalle M3, Berlin, 2013. Exhibition Essay Carmen Ansaldo
- Phil Brown 'Clean Sweep' *Brisbane News* page 33 Issue 886 13-19/06/2012
- Sally Browne 'Peace among chaos' U on Sunday, *Sunday Mail* page 38 10/06/2012
- Hayley Haynes 2012 'Talking Rubbish with Karla Marchesi', *The Flaneur* art blog, 12/06/12
- Penny Webb 'The Ticket - Pick of the month' *The Melbourne Magazine*, *The Age* page 66 30/03/2012

Ronnie Girdham 'Still life rebellion' *Sunday Mail* EVENTS page 16 05/09/2010

Suzanna Clarke 'The stuff of art' *Courier Mail* ETC page 2 04/09/2010

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