

There-Is Alchemy



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Continuing her long association with Western Australia over decades, Melbourne-based artist Sonia Payes exhibits at There-Is in Northbridge as part of the 2022 Fringe Festival.

Driving along North Lake Road in Winthrop, Sonia Payes' work *Re-Generation*, a white four faced goddess symbolically leading humanity to regenerate the environment, is placed appropriately against the backdrop of Robert St Park. The City of Melville purchased the work of the Melbourne-based artist in 2016 when it was exhibited at Sculpture by the Sea in Cottesloe, and it has become an unusual and popular place making marker in the landscape ever since. Payes says people in WA recognise her work because of it. "That actually always leaves me feeling really fulfilled."

Her upcoming exhibition at There-Is in Northbridge, *Sonia Payes: Alchemy* as part of the Fringe Festival, continues a long connection with WA, and is a celebration of her ever evolving practice. "I stayed in Perth in the late 1970s after I finished Year 12, and fell in love with it," she says. Initially capturing her world solely through a camera lens, Macmillan published her massive undertaking *Untitled. Sonia Payes Portraits of Australian Artists* in 2007. Three years in the making, and requiring travel across Australia and overseas, the book includes 700 images of 60 significant artists and their studios including Brook Andrew, Shaun Gladwell, John Olsen, Jeffrey Smart and Imants Tillers. Ted Snell in his Introduction to the book described her images as "empathetic portraits" indicating "an artist in command of her medium."

Since then, Payes has explored digital imagery, 3D technologies, animated film and sculpture, and exhibited across Australia, as well as internationally in New Zealand, China, the USA and the UK. In Perth she has exhibited at John Curtin Gallery, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, and, on numerous occasions, at Sculpture by

◆ Sonia Payes, *Self Portrait with Re-Generation*, purchased by the City of Melville in 2016. Photo courtesy the artist.



◆ *Alchemy 2*, 2021, Type C print on metallic paper, 51 x 43, by Sonia Payes.

the Sea in Cottesloe and the Mandorla Art Award, with her work currently on show in Spain at Barcelona's 6th Photo Biennial.

In *Alchemy* at There-Is, Payes transforms her daughter's facial likeness into a hybrid documentation of human intervention on earth, depicting a constant interaction with the environment. These deeply personal images involving family interrogate key questions confronting the human species.

She says her ongoing love of Western Australia has never diminished. "I love exhibiting in WA and being in WA. People in WA are great, calmer - maybe because your weather is mostly fabulous and people spend more time outdoors!"

Though border restrictions will mean Payes will miss the opening night of her exhibition, she has booked a flight and accommodation for the last four days of the show after WA opens its borders. "Fingers crossed the government doesn't change the dates!" she says.

Sonia Payes: Alchemy is on show at There-Is from 28 January until 12 February.