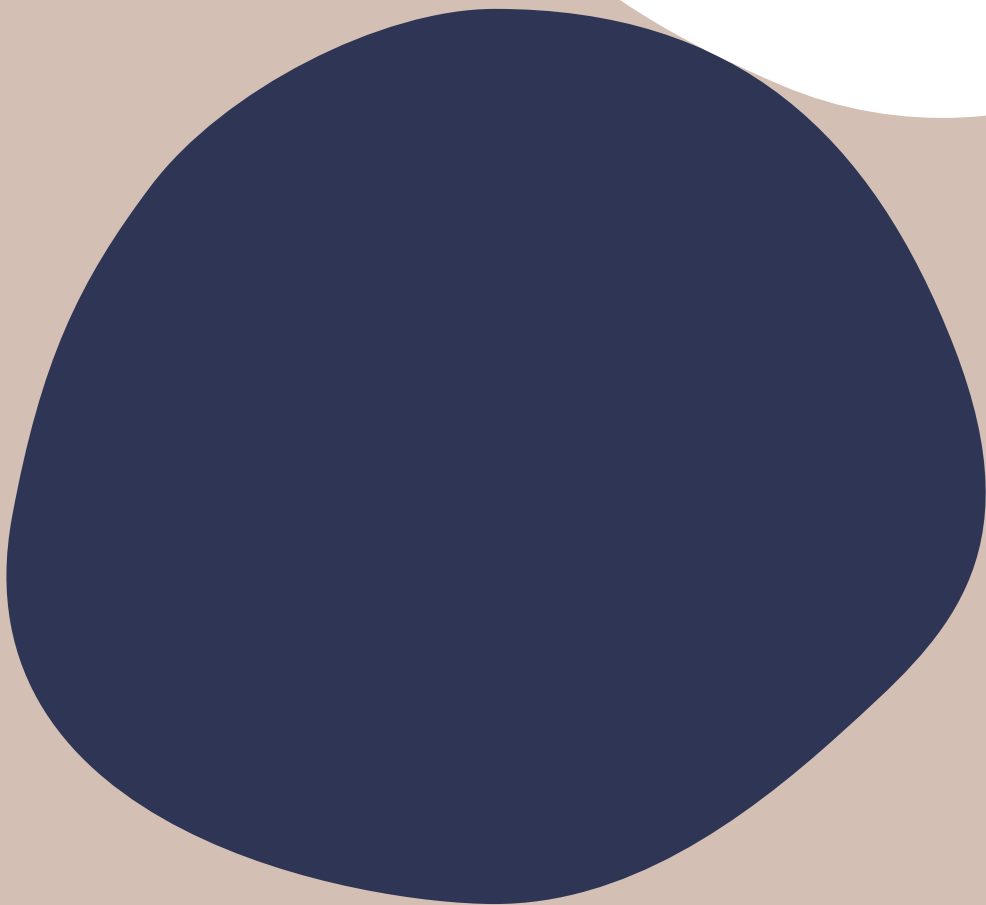
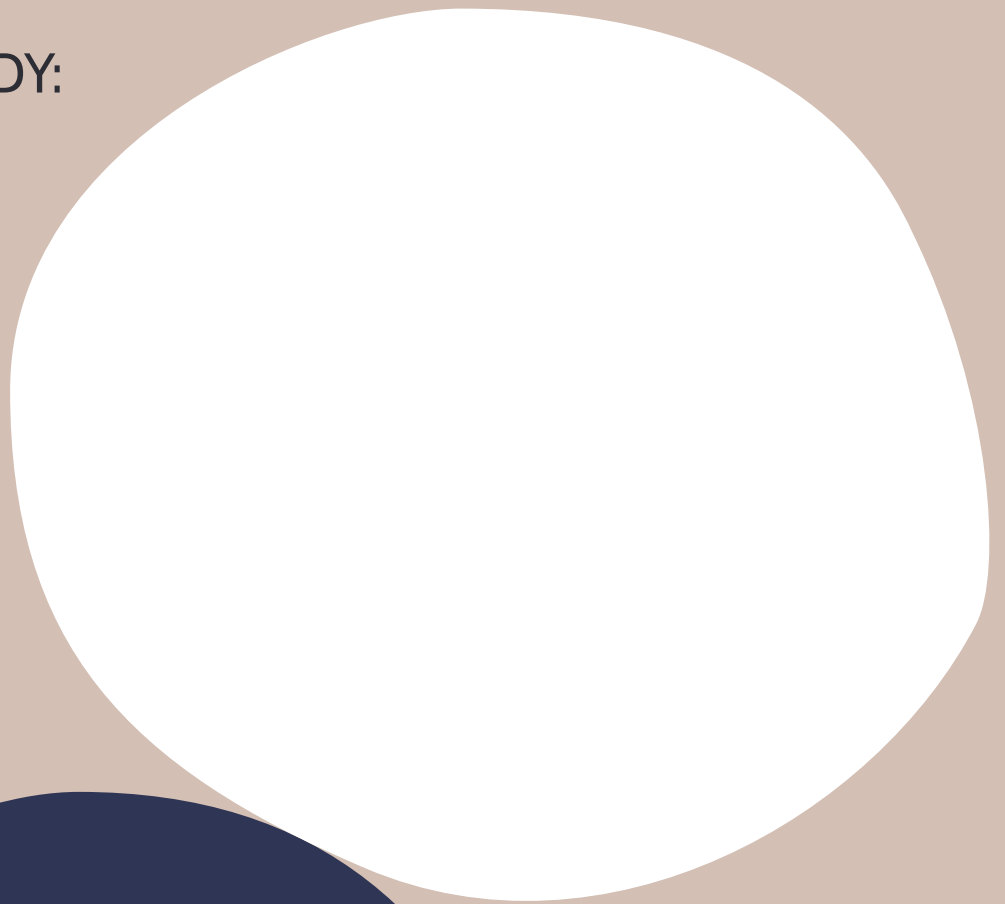


OLSEN ORMANDY:  
a creative force



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17 November 2018  
– 17 February 2019

Newcastle Art Gallery

## Foreword

Newcastle Art Gallery is proud to present *OLSEN ORMANDY: a creative force*; an exhibition celebrating the artistic practice of Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy. For over thirty years Olsen and Ormandy have built a reputation as designers for one of Australia's most iconic brands - Dinosaur Designs. What is not so well known is that underpinning their award-winning success is a strong and enduring individual creative practice informed by art, design and fashion. Their work has been exhibited, collected and commissioned by galleries and museums nationally and internationally.

Having previously exhibited as Dinosaur Designs, this exhibition project provides a new opportunity for Olsen and Ormandy to develop their own personal works of art that celebrate their practice as singular artists. Both artists' work is marked by a strong relationship between colour and form through a shared language evident when they collaborate while variations and distinctions come to the fore in their individual pieces inspired by the natural world.

Olsen's acute understanding and mastery of materiality is evident in her seamless 'inky' blending of colour and organic forms throughout her resin-based works of art and expressive paintings. As a counterpoint, Ormandy's balanced and defined colours border on 'hard edge' abstraction and reflect an acute sense of detail and precision in the handling of large-scale painting and sculpture.

*OLSEN ORMANDY: a creative force* includes newly created paintings, sculptures, textiles and site-specific installations augmented with personally selected works of art drawn from the artists' substantial archive.

It has been an absolute pleasure to curate this exhibition with the artists and I extend my sincerest gratitude to Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy for their enthusiasm, generosity and passion. Sincere thanks also to Richard Brooks, Heleena Trahanas, Grant Hoffman and the highly professional Dinosaur Designs team for their fundamental commitment to the success of this major summer exhibition project.

Lauretta Morton  
Director  
Newcastle Art Gallery

The logic of beauty  
The art of Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy  
Andrew Frost

‘No flag planting, it’s the journey’  
Louise Olsen

Our paths first crossed at art school in the early 1980s. As I was beginning my final undergraduate year at what was then City Art Institute [now UNSW Art & Design] Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy arrived in first year and seemed to be, even then, fully formed identities. Louise was of course a part of the Olsen family, well known bunyip art royalty, and Stephen, perhaps not so well known, but with the look and apparent confidence of a mid-80s rock star.

Their talent matched their aura, and within a few years Olsen and Ormandy – and Liane Rossler – established what would become Dinosaur Designs, first as a stall at Sydney’s Paddington Markets, then quickly expanding into an international presence. Their company is one of the success stories of Australian design, and now, some three decades and change later, Olsen and Ormandy’s artistic identity has been primarily linked to their brand.

But of course, that is not the whole story. Both Olsen and Ormandy have continued to work as artists, their complementary practices in painting and sculpture connecting to their design work. Reading their press, it is often noted that they are ‘also artists’ as though this is a surprise. The reality of a creative career is that limits or borders between disciplines are largely illusory, and meaningful connections can be drawn between their individual practices, their shared interests and enthusiasms, and the exacting and rigorous standards they apply to all their work.

For every artist there is a will to perfection. Even when their creative processes allow for all sorts of happy accidents, playful collisions or unexpected outcomes, there is also always a need for control, or to at least to set the parameters for the final work. Olsen and Ormandy’s art is inextricably bound to their shared aspiration for what they call ‘an effortless sense of completion’. One does not look at their art and imagine that it all just happened by chance.

Olsen’s initial inspiration for her art is often literally drawn from nature. Working with sketchbooks to record impressions of the structure

and flow of natural shapes and forms, she then finds materials that are analogous to her starting points. Olsen's use of resin, for example, is sensitive to its potentials as its own stuff, as well as its ability to suggest something else, something natural. The ovaloid medallions of resin in her mobile sculptures are first cast into moulds and, while in a porous state, Olsen adds inks to produce hanging pieces that are, in their patterns, lines and shapes, reminiscent of microscopic sea creatures or, at a much grander scale, the sublime scatter of stars of galaxies and nebulae. In a similar process, the table-form sculptures, with their pours of pigment, shell-like surfaces and stalactite legs, recall the jellyfish form that initially inspired the artist. In a duo of sculptural pieces produced for the exhibition, Olsen experimented with the force of gravity and the plastic flow of resin. Placing two sculpted cores on a stand and then pouring viscous, coloured resins over the top, the plastic slowly flowed over the core and off the stand, creating in turn long tendrils. By repeating this process, Olsen has produced works that are akin to the formation of stalactites, but they also suggest ferns or hanging succulents. Although entirely artificial, the results have the appearance of something organic, and alive.

Many of Olsen's wall sculptures, with their undulating spines and protrusions reminiscent of sea caterpillars or spiders, have in fact formed as accretions of wearable pieces amassed together from single smaller scale objects. Inspired by seeing multiples of her jewellery designs laid out on a table, Olsen composed the individual elements into a single work using colour and tonal relationships as her guide, the final form seemingly continuous, but the individual parts of the sculpture all individually hand-made elements.

In her paintings, Olsen will often work with small-scale studies, experimenting with inks, soaking paper, starting with a simple structure and then seeing where the process leads. Olsen's painting is based in a sense of order, but one fascinated with how play can produce unexpected results, albeit within understood limits. Of course, knowing where the limit is – that crucial decision of knowing when to *stop* – has evolved alongside Olsen's process of working.

There is a core idea for Olsen, a structure to work with, but the journey is all. For an experienced eye – one that has been in training since her childhood among the artistic milieu of Australia's leading modernist artists – a picture can almost 'speak', telling the artist when to step back, to leave the work in an exquisitely balanced state of completion.

If Olsen's process could be said to be about the moment of completion, then Ormandy's work is as much about where a work

starts. Ormandy begins his work in both sculpture and painting at the same point – with a general interest in colour, or specifically, such as a work he shows me when I visit his studio, a sculpture made of individually cast plastic pieces that are arranged on a table and looks like a reversed, three dimensional heat map, beginning with lighter shades of his palette of colours at the edges and then growing darker at the centre. It's a piece that began its life as Ormandy contemplated why purple was his least favourite colour. Why was that so? And what could he do with it?

The result is what Ormandy refers to as 'a banquet for the eye' an array of contrasting and complimentary colours, anchored by a fascination with tonal relationships, an accretion of shape and form into a final object that has its own subtle logic. Ormandy tells me that, over a long period of time, he came to realise that beyond colour relationships, were tonal relationships, which he says are just as important, if not more important, than choosing the colours for his work. The viewer picks up on these tonal relationships subconsciously. This is, in essence, the key to the artist's entire practice.

Ormandy's sculptural works have two major threads of production. One is what he refers to as his 'totems', colourful smaller scale works that sit on the floor, a table top, or plinth. The other sculptural works run in a variety of sizes, and like the totem sculptures they can be domestically scaled, but they are also often major pieces destined for the atria of office buildings, parks or city plazas. Both threads of sculptural works have shared roots in what the artist terms 'three-dimensional collage' and his interest in polychromatic colour.

The totems, with their serial composition of repeating modular shapes, echo the early 20th century modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi's iconic construction *Endless Column, Vers. 1* [1918]. Like that venerated masterwork, Ormandy's totems are produced using repeating forms, a technique he first discovered when he was making vases. By adapting the vase form, and finding they worked as minimalist sculptural pieces that could be joined, inverted, and then repeated, the artist had the ideal base unit for a potentially endless series of variations. By adding new units to the process – pieces specifically designed to be used in the sculptures – Ormandy has even more potential variation, a way to produce, 'as many different rhythms that can be built out a limited set of variables'. The next stage in the process is to add colour to the faceted surfaces of the individual units – a collage of colours that create a kind of spectral logic in the work, what the artist refers to as

the 'pop and resonance' of the composition. The pieces are freestanding and seem reminiscent of traditional 'tribal' art, but because of their construction in resin, they're intimately connected to an industrial mode of production, albeit one that's largely hand produced.

The second thread of works is bound up in the essential geometry of classical minimalism. It's no surprise to discover that, along with the work of artists Pablo Picasso and Robert Klippel, Ormandy also acknowledges the influence of sculptors Clement Meadmore, Eduardo Chillida and Tony Smith, artists whose work explored the potential of a singular sculptural language that, while self contained, also suggested a flow in their use of curves, turns, and loops.

There is a certain orthodoxy to the geometric shapes that Ormandy favours that connect him to his influences, but Ormandy's works also continue from the totems what might be termed the sculptural 'logic of shapes', again a series of individual units that lock and join into further iterations and variations. Ormandy brings colour to these works too, something that his cited influences rarely, if ever, did. The artist's addition of carefully chosen colours to facets and planes of the sculptures adds an extra layer to their dimensionality, a kind of puzzle for the eye as one tries to resolve how they fit together - and why.

The notion of interlocking shapes and colours is a connection to Ormandy's paintings. The same sort of visual logic seems to underpin their creation, but where the sculptures have an industrial look to them, the paintings are another proposition. The shock is to discover that Ormandy doesn't paint in acrylics and he doesn't use any kind of masking tape to create the edges. Instead he paints in oils, favouring the paints' luminosity and malleability, and he'll often draw free hand on to the canvas with chalk, experimenting with the relationships between composition and scale. Other times Ormandy works from small-scale collages created from commercial colour swatches, cutting the sharp edges of the samples into softer lozenges of tertiary colours that can then be worked together. Or Ormandy might just as well experiment with photographing older paintings and isolating an interesting intersection of the composition, or he might even experiment with Photoshop to build a palette.

However he might work, the resulting paintings have a similar sense of classical modernism as his sculptures, but with the same ineffable sense of the present too. His hand-painted works have a suppleness that would be missing if they were produced en masse, using hard edge techniques. Ormandy tells me that our eyes are always

seeking out perfection, searching out the flawless edge and simple contrast of colours of manufactured objects. But in nature the eye rarely sees those kinds of combinations, instead sensing the soft edge, the imperfect line, the blend of colour and shade. When we have the same kind of sensation in art – the kind of impression we have in Ormandy's paintings – they too feel 'natural', and perhaps more importantly, achieve the 'effortless sense of completion' that both Ormandy and Olsen strive for.

There is an obvious and continuous aesthetic at play, linking the work of these artists; a deliberate engagement with beauty in surface, form and colour. Their sculptural pieces have an almost irresistible sense of tactility to them, an attraction that compels the viewer to want to trace a finger along an edge or surface. The notion of the 'natural' is another strong connective link in their work, a drive for a convincing simplicity, one that arises from a shared vision of the creative process as something innate, but also exercised, expanded and strengthened over a long period of time. The key to building a visual language, Ormandy tells me, is to make the grammar of creativity as versatile as possible. One senses that versatility, but also a creative strength. Where does it come from? Talking over coffees in her office, Olsen reflects on the shared disciplines of being artists and designers. 'You have to switch your brain around a little bit,' she says. 'But there are the same kind of rigours, in critically analysing your thinking and making.' Looking at the duo's work over the decades there is an irrefutable logic at work, one that is as seductive as it is beautiful.

**Dr. Andrew Frost** is an art critic, writer and documentary maker. He is the art critic for Guardian Australia and a regular columnist for Art Guide Australia. He is also the writer and presenter of more than a dozen documentaries on Australian contemporary art screened on the ABC; and recently co-produced and directed the 'My Space Program: The Art of Peter Hennessey' [2016] and 'The Grand Mistake: A Portrait of McLean Edwards' [2017] documentaries.





**Louise Olsen**  
*Passage* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 153.0 × 153.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Stephen Ormandy**  
*Finger on the trigger* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 198.0 × 153.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Louise Olsen**  
*Floating* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 51.0 × 41.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Stephen Ormandy**  
*3am* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 153.0 × 122.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist





**Stephen Ormandy**  
*Offering* 2018  
oil on linen  
200.0 × 300.0cm  
Courtesy the artist



**Louise Olsen and  
Stephen Ormandy**  
*Collarbones 2* 2014  
resin  
250.0 x 80.0cm  
Courtesy the artist





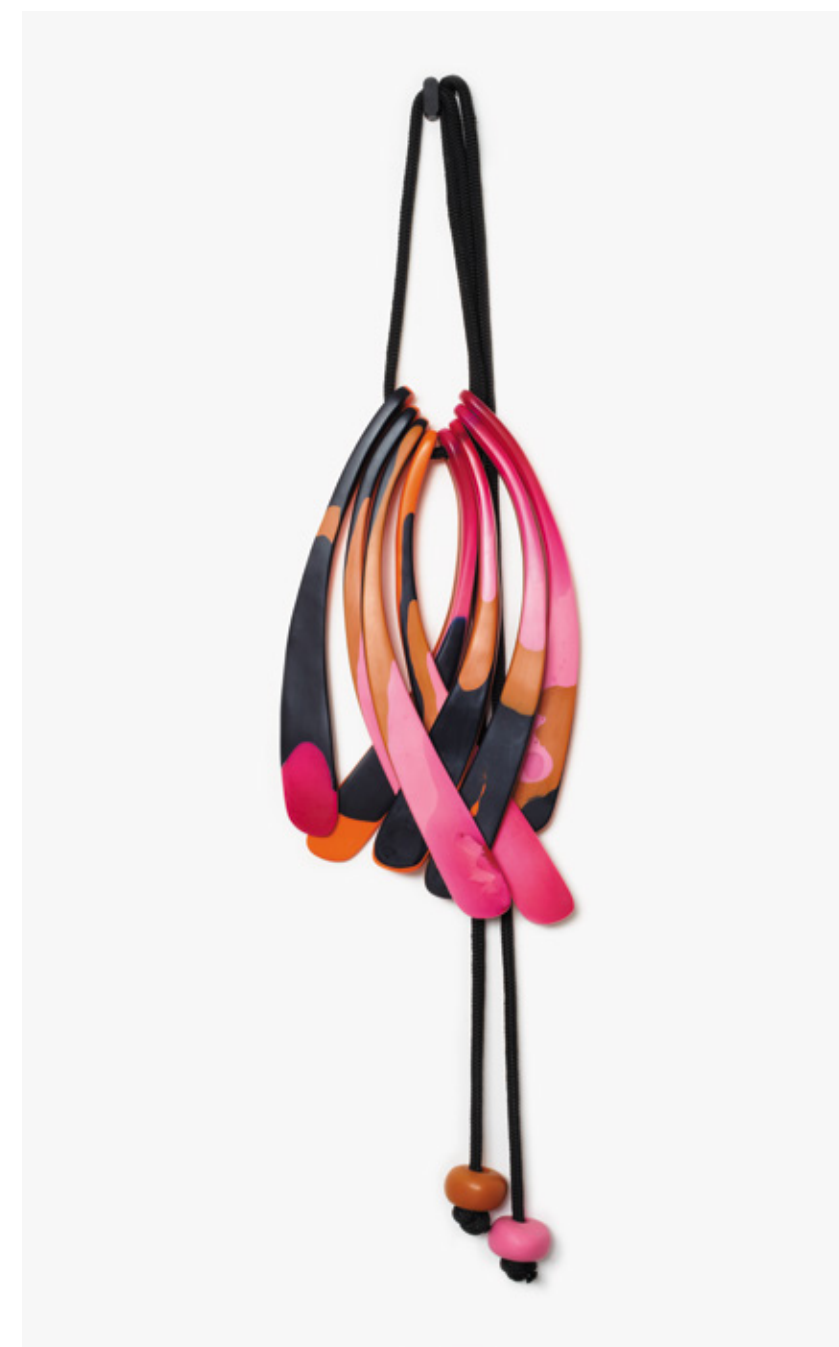
**Louise Olsen**  
*Spring 2018*  
 oil on linen  
 36.0 × 36.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Stephen Ormandy**  
*Low Profile 2018*  
 oil on linen  
 153.0 × 122.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Louise Olsen**  
*Seedling Landscape* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 25.0 × 25.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Louise Olsen and  
 Stephen Ormandy**  
*Collarbones 3* 2014  
 resin  
 120.0 × 90.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist





**Louise Olsen**  
*Dream Garden 1* 2018  
oil on linen  
180.0 × 200.0cm  
Courtesy the artist





**Louise Olsen**  
*Seed Pod* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 38.0 × 31.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Stephen Ormandy**  
*The Factory* 2018  
 resin  
 102.0 × 35.0 × 22.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Louise Olsen**  
*Dream Garden 2* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 152.0 × 182.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Stephen Ormandy**  
*Budgies* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 153.0 × 122.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist





**Louise Olsen**  
*Hidden Lake* 2018  
 oil on linen  
 198.0 × 153.0cm  
 Courtesy the artist



**Stephen Ormandy**  
*Totems* 2016–2018  
 resin  
 dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist

<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Banksia</i> 2018 oil on linen 25.0 × 25.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Seed Pod</i> 2018 oil on linen 38.0 × 31.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Low Profile</i> 2018 oil on linen 153.0 × 122.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Liquid Landscape</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>composition</i> 2018 woven rug 300.0 × 240.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Seed Wind</i> 2018 oil on linen 38.5 × 38.5cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Offering</i> 2018 oil on linen 200.0 × 300.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Liquid Sky</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Dragonflys nest</i> 2016 resin 140.0 × 250.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Spring</i> 2018 oil on linen 36.0 × 36.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>spirit tree</i> 2018 woven rug 300.0 × 240.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>maggie</i> 2018 resin 300.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Dream Garden 1</i> 2018 oil on linen 180.0 × 200.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Waterfall</i> 2015 resin 220.0 × 40.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Sumo</i> 2018 oil on linen 198.0 × 168.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Sea Garden</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Dream Garden 2</i> 2018 oil on linen 152.0 × 182.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>alphabet 3</i> 2018 Wood 120.0 × 120.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>the Alphabet</i> 2018 marble, black stone 100.0 × 100.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Solar Flare</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Floating</i> 2018 oil on linen 51.0 × 41.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>alphabet 4</i> 2018 Wood 120.0 × 120.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>The Factory</i> 2018 resin 102.0 × 35.0 × 22.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Soul Flower</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Hidden Lake</i> 2018 oil on linen 198.0 × 153.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>alphabet 10</i> 2018 Wood 120.0 × 120.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>the stick up</i> 2016 resin 100.0 × 100.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Soul Flower</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Inky</i> 2017 resin dimensions variable	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>alphabet 12</i> 2018 Wood 120.0 × 120.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Totems</i> 2016–2018 resin dimensions variable	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Sun</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>large moon table</i> 2014 resin 115.0 × 115.0cm Private collection	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Blue</i> 2016 acrylic on wood 128.0 × 129.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>two reds one blue</i> 2018 oil on linen 200.0 × 250.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Walking On The Moon</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Moon</i> 2017 resin 400.0 × 300.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Budgies</i> 2018 oil on linen 153.0 × 122.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>3am</i> 2018 oil on linen 153.0 × 122.0cm	
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Moon Tables</i> 2015 resin dimensions variable	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Dark Art</i> 2018 resin 100.0 × 100.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>About Time</i> 2012 resin 110.0 × 110.0cm	
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Orchid bangle</i> 2018 bronze 100.0 × 100.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Finger on the trigger</i> 2018 oil on linen 198.0 × 153.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Collarbones 1</i> 2014 resin 120.0 × 130.0cm	
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Passage</i> 2018 oil on linen 153.0 × 153.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Geisha</i> 2018 oil on linen 198.0 × 168.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Collarbones 2</i> 2014 resin 250.0 × 80.0cm	
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Rhythm Lines</i> 2018 resin 220.0 × 250.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>infinity</i> 2018 painted aluminium 44.0 × 22.0 × 22.0cm	<b>Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Collarbones 3</i> 2014 resin 120.0 × 90.0cm	
<b>Louise Olsen</b> <i>Seedling landscape</i> 2018 oil on linen 25.0 × 25.0cm	<b>Stephen Ormandy</b> <i>Lily pad</i> 2017 resin 180.0 x 100.0cm		

All works courtesy the artist

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