

ABDUL ABDULLAH
ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH
PERIPHERIES

MOORE CONTEMPORARY

Cathedral Square _ Hay Street Perth



Same time tomorrow, 2020

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Cathedral Square 1/565 Hay Street Perth
info@moorecontemporary.com
moorecontemporary.com
+61 417 737 744

Peripheries and intricate dualities

Somayra Ismailjee

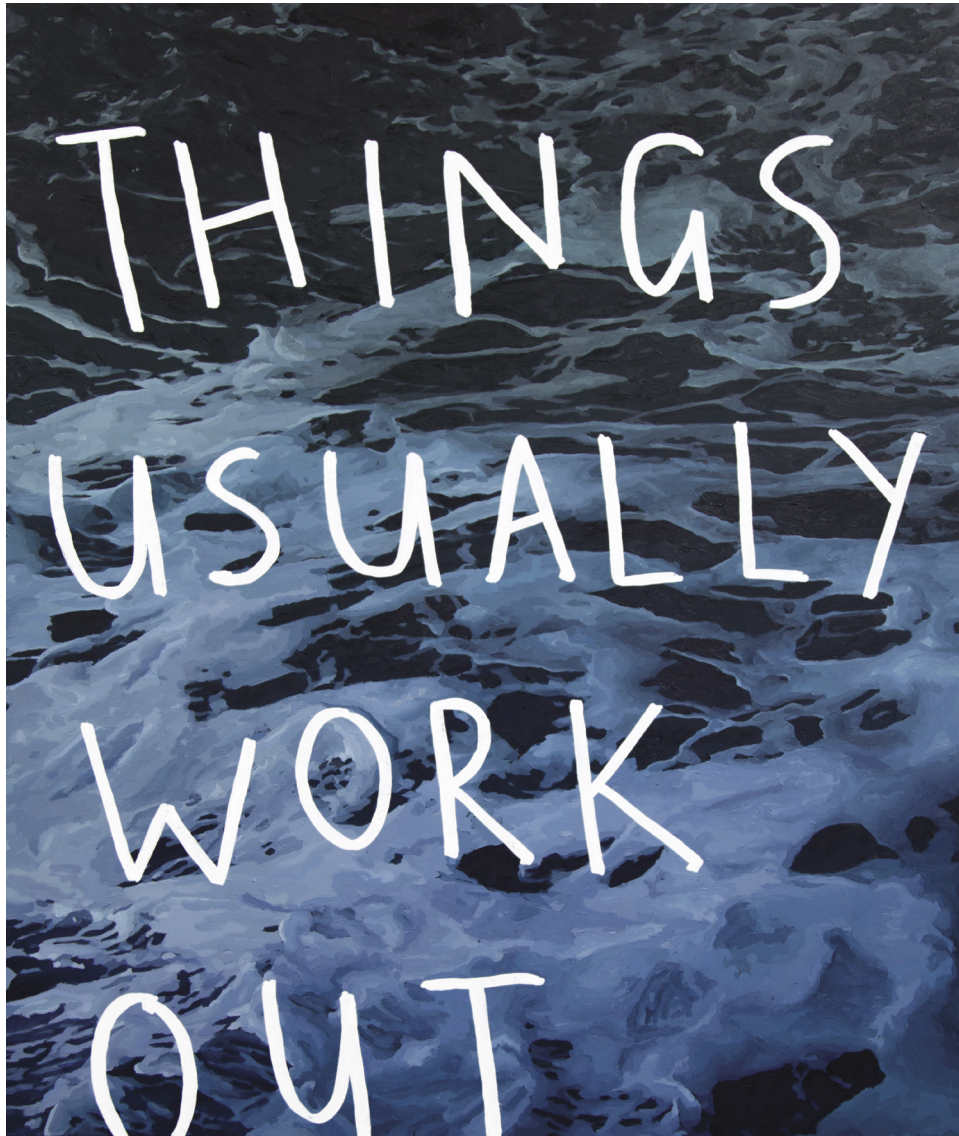
Peripheries, in its second iteration, unites the work of Abdul Abdullah and Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, in the city the brothers grew up in. With nine years between them, the two were born and raised across different generations, different times, reflected throughout much of their work to date. *Peripheries*, however, addresses an experience shared.

The exhibition emerges, mid-pandemic, where borders have been reified, creating tangible correlates for long-existing national and cultural divides; distancing measures and mandatory lockdowns enforcing a sense of isolation not only physical, but psychosocial. *Peripheries* represents a conversation, an insight into the lives of two brothers.

In early 2020, Abdul-Rahman Abdullah gave an interview titled *The Already Isolated*, a feature on the life and work of the artist in practice. The farm Abdul-Rahman lives on with his family is a world of its own, serene and expansive. They live, too, with their many animals, including a pet goat named Trevor, once the subject of a TED Talk given by Abdul-Rahman. He notably discussed Trevor's habit of walking to the end of his chain, planting himself at the furthest point he could reach, as if to explore the limits of his world, to live at the peripheries. Here, Trevor is immortalised in *Same time tomorrow*, a reference to the certainty and routine



Tall Ghost, 2021



Things usually work out, 2021



You're ok, 2021

of his life; Trevor's world is constrained by the boundaries of domestication, but his basic needs are met. The assuredness of his next meal, at the same time tomorrow, is a provision tied to what has been taken away – his freedom. The philosopher John Stuart Mill famously wrote "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied," referring to the capacity and drive of human beings for seeking "higher" ends. In *Peripheries*, we come face-to-face with Abdul-Rahman's incarnation of Trevor, chain leading from his neck, yet his expression perfectly content. *Same time tomorrow*, in the context of our time, seemingly brings us to the duality of what we are willing to give away for what we feel necessary to retain.

Abdul Abdullah and Abdul-Rahman Abdullah translate the concept of the *periphery* from two differing, complementary perspectives; while Abdul-Rahman Abdullah may represent the "already isolated" from a geographical perspective, Abdul Abdullah's conceptualisation of the periphery seems to reflect inwards. His biography states that he "sees himself as an artist working in the peripheries of a peripheral city, in a peripheral country, orbiting a world on the brink." Much of Abdul's work to date has examined identity: how it is defined from the outside in, shaped by dominant modes of racialisation and xenophobia, and how it could be defined from the inside out as a form of resistance.

There are perhaps few contemporary Australian artists whose work has evolved so significantly in style over the past decade; early photographic work, which established Abdul as a mainstay for incisive, sociopolitical artwork bears no aesthetic similarity to the paintings of *Peripheries*, however the core of the subject

matter remains. In *Peripheries*, Abdul carries the thread of peripheral identity more personally than ever before.

From the outset, *I am probably fine* and *Things usually work out* give an insight into the artist's internal monologue. Each painting of *Peripheries* by Abdul is formed by two elements, converging in unexpected harmony; a foundation of seascapes, oil on linen, beautiful and striking, overlaid by thick white lines, from the starkly textual in *I am probably fine* and *Things usually work out* to the cartoonish drawings of *Distant thoughts*, *Thinking about things* and *You're ok*. Here, Abdul uses a seascape the same way a portrait is more than a representation of a subject's appearance alone, rather imbued with personality, emotion and history. In Abdul's work, the movement of the water, the crashing of waves, seems to take the viewer into a state of mind rather than transport us to any physical destination. Rocks are anthropomorphised, *You're ok* pulling elements from the background and the fore together to evoke a face reluctantly smiling, a hand atop its head in forceful reassurance.

Peripheries is an exercise in duality, treading two lines, two conceptions of peripheral identity that run parallel to each other. Each work, too, seems to embody a juxtaposition; contentment and captivity, turbulence and steady reassurance. Perhaps the most fundamental duality here is that of *peripherality* and *centrality* itself. The *centre* seems to be a conception in flux, as normalcy is upended in the world at large. The Abdullah brothers speak, through their work, reflexively of their own peripheral identities – and through the shared humanity we encounter in their work, allow us to reflect upon our own.



Distant thoughts, 2021

Exhibition List

Abdul Abdullah

Distant thoughts, 2021

oil on linen

162.5 x 137 cm

I am probably fine, 2021

oil on linen

162.5 x 137 cm

Things usually work out, 2021

oil on linen

162.5 x 137 cm

Image courtesy of the Artist
and Yavuz Gallery Sydney

Thinking about things, 2021

oil on linen

162.5 x 137 cm

Image courtesy of the Artist
and Yavuz Gallery Sydney

You're ok, 2021

oil on linen

162.5 x 137 cm

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah

Ornament, 2021

hand carved and painted
wood

40 x 48 x 48 cm

Same time tomorrow, 2020

hand carved and painted
wood

60 x 110 x 150 cm

Tall Ghost, 2021

hand carved and painted
wood

197 x 99 x 66 cm

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1/565 Hay Street

Perth WA 6000

+61 (0)417 737744

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