



MICHELLE MOLINARI

Correlations: From the Past to the Present

Michelle Molinari

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Correlations: From the Past to the Present

1 - 26 April, 2025

Opening event: Saturday 5 April, 1 - 3 pm

Michelle Molinari presents a body of new work that responds to the representation and depiction of animals in both Eastern and Western art histories. Reflecting on her recent travels throughout Japan, Molinari's work seeks to juxtapose and explore the influence of Japanese art within the still-life genre.



Please feel free to contact Claire Harris, Director with any enquiries or to make a time to view artworks once they arrive in the gallery. info@flg.com.au

*An exquisite corpse:
On Michelle Molinari's Correlations: From the past to the present.*

Catalogue Essay by Sarah Jones, 2025

"...It seems the universe has contracted to be this but only for today."

Carolyn Leach-Paholskii

In Hokusai in the Antipodes – Thirty-six- Love Letters to a Mountain, poet Caroline Leach-Paholski invokes Katsushika Hokusai's study of Mt Fuji to describe her own beloved Wurdi Youang. Her poem is a love letter both to the granite monadnock that she paints anew each day, as well as to Hokusai's fervent study. Michelle Molinari's Correlations: From the past to the present returned me to Leach-Paholski's Hokusai-framed view. The central work for the exhibition at Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, features a reimagining of Hokusai's Block of Chickens. It is immediately recognisable, and yet it is fundamentally altered. The seven fowl in Hokusai's unique oval design, originally shaped for a paper fan, are joined by 3 additional hens, Molinari's own, that fill the picture plane to square. The lustrous gold of Hokusai's bird's feathers are expertly captured in Molinari's small flock, but the sharp lines and the inquisitive eyes of those live birds remain in Hokusai's past. In the new foreground, the present lays limp. Molinari's addition of a dark horizon to the brilliant blue of the original drags the eye downwards to the soft new death. Seven old chickens mourn three freshly deceased birds upon a new ground. While in previous works, exquisitely rendered creatures retreat in their eternal rest, in Ascending to Hokusai's Flock of Chickens (2025), three sets of closed eyes loll towards us with such fragility that you could almost miss time falling from under your feet. This is Molinari's inimitable skill, the illusion of time arrested, a contraction of the universe...but only for today.

Correlations: From the past to the present, approaches works by Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige and Imao Keinen, works Molinari encountered on a recent research trip to Japan. In her dedicated studies, she alternates between reproducing the spacious compositional elements, the inked line work and the expert colour rendering of Ukiyo-e and Kachō-e, in and among her own painterly techniques. She deconstructs and painstakingly reassembles, testing and extending her own technical proficiency. The resultant body of work, richly coloured and finely detailed, is chimeric. Vibrant gradients, intersecting planes, caricatured figures and deep cut calligraphic line work meet hyper-realist, still-life oil rendering. Somewhat uncannily, Hokusai's chickens lie among van Aelst's; and the floating world, rich with stories and symbolism, permeates the depths of the Vanitas. Molinari's paintings fold art histories, geographies and eras into truly exquisite corpses.

And each fold is an instructive pause, an invitation to step outside of time's perpetual pull. The illusionary stilling of time by death remains Molinari's fascination, and though Correlations: From the past to the present might initially seem a departure from the artist's usual velvety depths; the message remains: memento mori. Hokusai certainly could not forget. His notoriety is exaggerated by the fact that he died before he thought he should have, still obsessively painting Mt Fuji as his enduring 'peer'; as Molinari paints death as hers. The tactility of those still warm chest feathers pull the hand forward, the eye catches in the gold beneath, as if the spark could re-ignite. The softness of three small deaths is illuminated.



Quail and poppies after Hiroshige 2025,
oil on aluminium, 40cm x 30cm
\$2,500 AUD



'Quail and Poppies (after Hiroshige)' distills Michelle Molinari's practice of delicate reconstruction and reassembly. Drawing from Utagawa Hiroshige's *Kachō-e* (bird-and-flower prints), she meticulously recreates the compositional grace of Edo-period print-making while introducing her own symbolic interventions. A lone quail balances on a vibrant stem, its alert posture juxtaposed against the limp body of another below. The rich crimson of the poppies intensifies the sense of fleeting beauty, evoking a dreamlike stillness that speaks to Molinari's enduring fascination with time and transience.



[Ascending to Hokusai Flock of Chickens](#) 2025,
oil on aluminium, 60cm x 80cm
\$5,000 AUD



In 'Ascending to Hokusai's Flock of Chickens', Michelle Molinari reimagines Hokusai's Block of Chickens, expanding his famed oval composition into a striking, contemporary tableau. While Hokusai's birds peer inquisitively outward, Molinari's additions turn the scene into an elegy. Seven birds remain upright, their golden plumage gleaming with the artist's meticulous rendering, while three lie motionless in the foreground. It's a delicate shift—one that transforms a traditional Japanese print into a poignant memento mori. Time stands still, yet loss is deeply felt.



[Java sparrow with magnolias after Hokusai 2025.](#)

oil on aluminium , 40cm x 30cm

\$2,500 AUD



'Java Sparrow with Magnolias (after Hokusai)' is a striking meditation on life, death, and artistic lineage. Inspired by Hokusai's *kachō-e* (bird-and-flower paintings), Michelle Molinari layers her own painterly realism over the delicate stylization of Japanese woodblock prints. The composition is beautifully balanced—the lively bird clings to a twisting branch above, while below, its counterpart lies motionless, nestled among fallen magnolia petals. This interplay between movement and stillness, past and present, mirrors the broader themes of *Correlations*. In *uki-yo-e*, birds often symbolize vitality and seasonal transitions, while in European still life, fallen creatures evoke *vanitas*—reminders of mortality. Molinari's ability to bridge these visual languages creates a poignant reflection on impermanence and our complex relationship with nature.



[Kacho study after Keinen](#) 2024,
oil on aluminium, 30cm x 40cm
\$2,500 AUD



In 'Kachō Study (after Keinen)', Michelle Molinari enters into a visual conversation with 19th-century Japanese artist Imao Keinen, known for his intricate bird-and-flower compositions. Here, a cluster of sparrows flutters across the canvas, their lively gestures animated by delicate ink-like linework. Yet, in the foreground, three small forms rest in stark contrast—feathers still, eyes closed. The push and pull between life and death, movement and stillness, is at the heart of Molinari's *Correlations*. Each brushstroke bridges the past with the present, reconfiguring art historical traditions through her uniquely poetic lens.



[The sparrows performance](#) 2025,
oil on aluminium, 30cm x 40cm
\$2,500 AUD



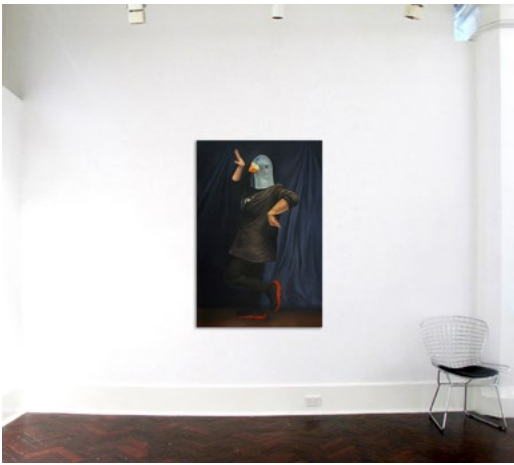
Playful yet unsettling, 'The Sparrows' Performance' merges Japanese ukiyo-e aesthetics with Michelle Molinari's signature approach to stillness and theatricality. Dressed in vibrant kabuki-style costumes, anthropomorphic sparrows take the stage against a luminous yellow backdrop. The dramatic movement of their performance contrasts with the quiet blue expanse below, evoking the traditional layering of time, theatre, and allegory found in Edo-period art. A poignant tension lingers: is this a celebration or a farewell?



In *Correlations: Past and Present*, I explore the intriguing and complex ways in which animals have been depicted in both Eastern and Western art traditions, with a focus on the contrasting visual language of Japanese ukiyo-e and European painting. These two art forms, though separated by geography and culture, often present animals as symbols, creatures of beauty, or subjects that communicate deeper themes about humanity and nature. Through this body of work, I seek to highlight the nuanced differences and similarities in how these two worlds perceive and represent the animal kingdom, by forming a dialogue between the past and present; the dead and the living; and our relationship with the natural world.

In European painting, animals are often presented within a context of realism or allegory, frequently linked to ideas of the sublime or the pastoral. In contrast, ukiyo-e, frequently imbues animals with elements of anthropomorphism. This representation reflects a distinct cultural attitude where animals are not merely subjects of nature but part of an interconnected world with humans.

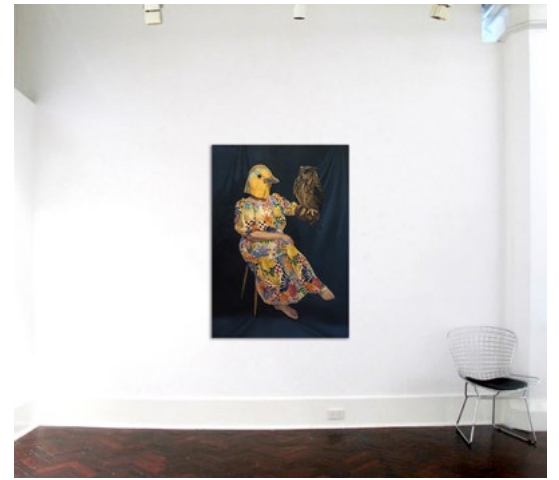
The influence of anthropomorphism in ukiyo-e is deeply tied to the spiritual and philosophical beliefs of Japan, where animals are often seen as symbolic of larger metaphysical concepts such as transformation, fate, and the cyclical nature of life. In works like those by Katsushika Hokusai or Utagawa Kuniyoshi, animals such as cats, birds, and foxes are depicted with human-like features or emotions, inviting viewers to reflect on the relationship between humans and the natural world. These anthropomorphized creatures act as mediators between the human and the divine, the earthly and the spiritual, embodying the delicate balance of nature and the human experience.



Anthropomorph I, 2025
oil on canvas, 102cm x 152cm
\$9,500 AUD



In 'Anthropomorph I', Michelle Molinari continues her exploration of identity, theatre, and the intersection of human and animal. A figure dressed in sleek contemporary attire strikes a flamboyant pose, but their head is obscured by a surreal, oversized pigeon mask. The contradiction is both humorous and unsettling—are they performing for us, or are we the ones being observed? The dark, draped backdrop recalls the grandeur of classical portraiture, yet the avian mask and bright red soles pull us into the uncanny. As with much of Molinari's work, the piece challenges time, tradition, and our understanding of self.



[Anthropomorph II](#), 2025
oil on canvas, 102cm x 152cm
\$9,500 AUD



Draped in an ornate, floral-patterned dress, the central figure in 'Anthropomorph II' exudes an ethereal calm. Their delicate, barefoot pose suggests serenity, yet their bird mask—a soft golden hue, almost glowing—introduces an element of strangeness. Perched on their gloved hand, a real owl meets the viewer's gaze, unblinking and wise. The interplay between reality and illusion is at the heart of Molinari's *Correlations*, where identity is fluid, historical influences fold into the present, and the act of seeing is itself a performance.



Owl after Hiroshige 2025
oil on canvas
61cm x 45cm
\$3,600 AUD



'Owl (after Hiroshige)' is a striking conversation between Japanese ukiyo-e and European realism. Michelle Molinari recreates Hiroshige's delicate composition of a sleeping owl perched on a moonlit branch, juxtaposing it with a meticulously rendered, hyper-realistic owl in the foreground. This juxtaposition highlights two distinct approaches to animal representation—where the ukiyo-e owl exists as an elegant, almost spiritual form, Molinari's contemporary owl, with its piercing gaze and tethered foot, is bound to reality.



Study of a rabbit 2025
oil on canvas
30cm x 40cm
\$2,500 AUD



'Study of a Rabbit' seamlessly blends two artistic traditions, bringing a contemporary perspective to historical imagery. In the foreground, a lifelike rabbit dozes in quiet repose, while behind it, a delicate ink drawing of a leaping hare—reminiscent of the famous Chōjū-giga scrolls—animates the background.

Molinari's *Correlations* series explores how animals have been depicted across Eastern and Western art. In Japanese ukiyo-e, anthropomorphized animals frequently serve as allegories for human nature, as seen in the Chōjū-giga scrolls, where rabbits and frogs engage in human-like play. Meanwhile, European traditions often depict rabbits with pastoral realism, symbolizing innocence or the passage of time. By merging these elements, Molinari creates a dialogue between movement and stillness, mythology and reality, past and present.

MICHELLE MOLINARI

Michelle Molinari is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts (BFA Hons.) and recently completed a Masters of Cultural Materials Conservation at the Grimwade Center for Conservation (The University of Melbourne). She works as a professional artist across the disciplines of painting, drawing, and sculpture and is represented by Flinders Lane Gallery Melbourne. Her work is held in public and private collections throughout Australia and overseas. Molinari was awarded the Majalis award (2012); the Stirling Collective Award (2013) and the Graham Hildebrand Travel grant (2014) for the study and development of contemporary art practice.

She has been a finalist in the Dobell Drawing Prize (2024), the Eutick Memorial Still Life Award (2019, 2018, 2016), the Fisher's Ghost Art Award (2018) and the AME Bale Travelling Scholarship (2016). In 2017 her work was curated into the Art Gallery of Ballarat group exhibition Romancing the Skull which explored themes of mortality, politics and rebellion. In the same year her work was included in Close Encounters a group exhibition at Gippsland Art Gallery. Molinari has been the recipient of the Graeme Hildebrand Foundation Travel Grant (2014) which allowed her to undertake residencies in both New York (USA) and in Florence (Italy), the Fiona Myer Award (2012) and the Majlis Encouragement Award (2012). Her work is held in the Gippsland Art Gallery Collection, The Stirling Collective and The Art Students League of New York, USA.

EDUCATION

2023 Masters of Cultural Materials Conservation, Melbourne University
2017 Program coordinator / tutor, Art Encounters, Melbourne Studio of Art
2013 Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours), VCA , University of Melbourne
2012 Bachelor Fine Arts, Printmaking, VCA , University of Melbourne

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2025 Correlations: From the Past to the Present, Flinders Lane Gallery, VIC
2023 Anthropocene, Flinders Lane Gallery, VIC
2021 Reflect, Flinders Lane Gallery, VIC
2019 Mimesis, Flinders Lane Gallery, VIC
2018 Posthumous Tableaux, Gippsland Art Gallery, VIC
2016 Here & After, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne VIC
2014 Nature Mort, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2013 Mortality Observed, LWOO, Port Jackson Press, Fitzroy, VIC
2011 On the Wall, Brunswick Street Gallery, Fitzroy, VIC

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 Fragile Earth: Extinction, Gippsland Art Gallery
2020 STILL, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne
2019 30 x 30, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne
2017 Romancing the Skull, Art Gallery of Ballarat
2017 Close Encounters, Gippsland Art Gallery
2015 The Vyt Residents Exhibition and Open Studio,
Elizabeth V. Sullivan Gallery, Orangeburg, New York
2014 Melbourne Art Fair, Royal Exhibition Building, Carlton, VIC
2014 Portrait Show, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, VIC

2013 Graduate Exhibition 2013, VCA, Margaret Lawrence Gallery
2013 Exploration 13, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2012 Graduate Exhibition 2012, Victorian College of the Arts, VIC
2010 VCA: Round 1, New North Gallery, Fairfield, VIC
2010 Top Arts 2009 Season of Excellence, Ian Potter Centre NGV
2009 Top Arts 2008 Season of Excellence, Ian Potter Centre NGV

RESIDENCIES

2015 La Macina di San Cresci, International Artist Residency, Tuscany Italy
2015 The League Residency at Vyt, New York
2014 The Graeme Hildebrand Foundation Travel Grant

PRIZES, AWARDS AND GRANTS

2024 Finalist, Dobell Drawing Prize
2022 The Fisher's Ghost Art Award, Campbelltown Arts Centre, NSW
2019 Finalist, Eutick Memorial Still Life Award
2018 Finalist, Eutick Memorial Still Life Award
2018 Finalist, Fisher's Ghost Art Award
2017 Finalist, Lethbridge 10000 Small Scale Art Award
2016 Finalist, A.M.E Bale Travelling Scholarship, Glen Eira Council Gallery
2016 Finalist, Eutick Memorial Still Life Award
2015 Finalist, Shirl National Youth Portrait Award, Bega Valley Regional Gallery
2015 Finalist, The Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, VCA
2014 Finalist, Eutick Memorial Still Life Award, Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery
2014 Winner, A.M.E Bale Travelling Scholarship, Glen Eira City Council Gallery
2014 Winner, The Graeme Hildebrand Foundation \$10,000 Travel Grant
2014 Finalist, Eutick Still Life Award, Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery
2013 The Stirling Collective Award
2013 Flinders Lane Gallery Encouragement Award, Exploration 13
2013 Shortlisted, Hatched National Graduate Exhibition, PICA, Perth WA
2012 Fiona Myer Award
2012 Majlis Encouragement Award
2012 Wallara Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery
2012 Finalist, A.M.E Bale Travelling Scholarship, Glen Eira Council Gallery
2011 Finalist, A.M.E Bale Travelling Scholarship, Glen Eira Council Gallery
2010 BSG Small Works Art Prize
2009 Greg Dickson Scholarship

PUBLICATIONS

2023 'The Big Book of Little Art Essays', Flinders Lane Gallery

COLLECTIONS

Gippsland Art Gallery Collection, The Stirling Collective
The Art Students League of New York, USA



FLINDERSLANEGALLERY

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