

**BLOKES**  
**BILLY BAIN**



## BILLY BAIN | ARTIST STATEMENT

The Bloke... The Ocker... The Larrikin... Banjo Patterson... Crocodile Dundee... The man from snowy river... The Digger...

Mythologies of the Australian male have long been engrained in our countries national post-colonial identity. Stoic, white, able-bodied and heteronormative. But what defines the Aussie bloke nowadays? And more importantly, what does it mean to be a bloke that falls outside of the archaic definitions of what being an Australian man entails?

Blokes explores representations of Australian masculinity through taking perceptions of the Australian male and playfully deconstructing them. By interrogating and subverting representations of the Australian male in both popular culture and the everyday suburban life he exists within, Billy Bain seeks to create works that humour our Australian sense of identity. By “taking the piss” out of these perceptions of who he is meant to be, Bain reclaims power and autonomy over his sense of identity as an Indigenous man.

Bain's interpretation of suburban life is subtly autobiographic, with each of his characters embodying a piece of the artists personal experiences. Using his own brand of dry humour, his work transcends between being both celebratory and critical. This is communicative of his inner conflict when dealing with and unpacking the dualities of being a young indigenous man in a community and country where Indigenous identity and representation has been systematically denied.

Billy Bain completed a Bachelor of Fine Art in 2019, graduating with first class honours from the University of New South Wales. He is currently based at Avalon Beach where he creates work from his home studio. 'Blokes' is his first solo exhibition.



*The Artist, 2020*

Earthenware with underglaze, glaze and gold luster

70h x 39w x 36d cm

\$3,300



*Swagman*, 2020  
Earthenware with underglaze and glaze  
65h x 36w x 26d cm  
\$3,300



*Balinese Tourist, 2020*

Earthenware with underglaze, glaze and gold luster

63h x 33w x 27d cm

\$3,300



*Shiner, 2020*

Earthenware with terracotta slip, underglaze and glaze

69h x 44w x 22d cm

\$3,300



*Local*, 2020

Earthenware with underglaze and glaze

68h x 53w x 23d cm

\$3,300



*Bush Ranger*, 2020  
Earthenware with underglaze and glaze  
69h x 38w x 27d cm  
\$3,300



*Clubby, 2020*

Earthenware with underglaze and glaze

70h x 36w x 26d cm

\$3,300



*ANZAC (Leslie John Jack Locke), 2020*

Earthenware with terracotta slip, underglaze and glaze and gold luster

75h x 28w x 25d cm

\$3,300



*Rainbow, 2020, 17h x 11w x 15d cm, \$660*

*Black Cocky, 2020, 23h x 17w x 13d cm, NFS*

*Kookaburra, 2020, 18h x 11w x 16d cm, \$660*

*Cocky, 2020, 24h x 18w x 15d cm, \$880*

*Flamin Galah, 2020, 24h x 13w x 12d cm, \$880*



*Lawn Bowler 1, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

42h x 16w x 12d cm

\$1,200

*Lawn Bowler 2, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

35h x 17w x 17d cm

\$1,200



*Retiree, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

43h x 16w x 15d cm

\$1,200

*Puppy, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze,

glaze and silver luster

14h x 14w x 16d cm

\$880



*The Law, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze  
and silver and gold luster  
43h x 17w x 13d cm  
\$1,200

*Pig Dog, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze  
24h x 13w x 17d cm  
\$880



*Hot Shot, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

40h x 16w x 19d cm

\$1,200



*Six & Out, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

39h x 16w x 14d cm

\$1,200



*Streaker, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

40h x 14w x 11d cm

\$1,200



*Suit, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

42h x 15w x 10d cm

\$1,200



*Hot Tradie, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze and silver luster

43h x 18w x 11d cm

\$1,200



*Lad, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze and silver and gold luster

41h x 19w x 12d cm

\$1,200



*Ice Cream, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

40h x 16w x 13d cm

\$1,200



*Catfish, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze,

31h x 16w x 11d cm

\$1,200



*Drag, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze  
motor of pearl and silver luster  
36h x 17w x 14d cm  
\$1,200



*Croc, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze  
and silver luster  
42h x 18w x 12d cm  
\$1,200



*Big Nipper, 2020*

Earthenware with underglaze and glaze

49h x 20w x 22d cm

\$1,200



*Sea Punk, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze and silver luster

31h x 13w x 11d cm

\$1,200



*Skater, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze and silver  
and gold luster

40h x 15w x 15d cm

\$1,200



*Bikie, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze  
and silver luster

37h x 17w x 13d cm

\$1,200



*Blue Fighter, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

39h x 18w x 13d cm

\$1,200



*Red Fighter, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

38h x 19w x 15d cm

\$1,200



*Rocker, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze and glaze

41h x 18w x 12d cm

\$1,200



*Rodeo, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze

and silver luster

46h x 17w x 12d cm

\$1,200



*Protestor, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze and fabric flag

38h x 15w x 13d cm

\$1,200



*Sidelined, 2020*

Terracotta with underglaze, glaze

and knitted woollen beanie

43h x 15w x 12d cm

\$1,200



*Smokeo, 2020*  
Oil on canvas  
102h x 137w cm  
\$2,500



*The Bowlers, 2020*  
Oil on canvas  
102h x 137w cm  
\$2,500



*My Team, 2019*  
 Oil on canvas  
 91.5h x 101.5w cm  
 \$2,000



*Father and Son, 2020*  
 Oil on canvas  
 152h x 91.5w cm  
 \$2,000



*Sunday Nippers, 2020*

Oil on canvas

91.5h x 101.5w cm

\$1,500



*Welcome, 2019*

Oil on canvas

91h x 122w cm

\$1,500

Billy Bain's examination of the racial relations at play within Australian culture is playful and tenaciously direct. With equal parts humour and disquiet, his ceramic figures call into question our culture's deeply rooted insecurities and falsehoods by interrogating and subverting perceived norms of male identity. *Blokes*, Bains first solo show, presents us with an alchemy – of Whiteness, of masculinity, of autonomy and of identity – within the context of an Australian urban consciousness riddled with subjugation and fear.

Bain presents *Blokes* as a continuation of his critique of toxic behaviours within Australian culture, particularly within beach, pub and sporting contexts. His work asks us: within these sites, how has the Australian male body performed its own identity and claimed authority over the space it occupies? Moreover, how has the body of the non-Indigenous male denied legitimisation of its Indigenous counterpart in that same space?

The beach space in particular is a volatile site of performativity where the heteronormative white male parades his sexuality, wealth, voyeurism and proprietorship<sup>(1)</sup>. For Bain, the beach is a signifier of urbanity and a space his own body has occupied yet never fully gained control of. His works, largely autobiographical, are the beginnings of him reclaiming that control. "I explore the conflicting duality between my Indigenous heritage and that of the Euro-centric culture I was raised within," says Bain. "My own disconnect with my traditional Indigenous culture and Country is a source of motivation for research that informs my work and helps construct my own identity as a suburban Indigenous man."

From material and scale to subject matter, every aspect of Bains work has its purpose and adds specific social and cultural histories to the narrative he seeks to write. The malleability and transformative nature of clay allows him to hypothesise and construct a reality where visual symbols – clothing, skin and eye colour, jewellery – can be reformed to demarcate an alternate social narrative. The stature of his subjects – their small size, angry disposition, unruly bodily hair – does not monumentalise them as if cast in bronze atop a column, rather they are on a human level, approachable and relatable. His paintings and etchings have a similarly conscious complexity. In *Welcome* we are presented with an arrangement reminiscent of the heroism often portrayed in neoclassical compositions, yet as our eye scans the scene we become increasingly attune to its satirical intent.

1 - Moreton-Robinson, A. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015, p37.

Bain's choice to centre his work around the human figure is not an unconscious one. Throughout history, the human body has been a site of conflict. It has been fetishized, defined and constructed through the lens on the non-Indigenous gaze. With raw self-referentiality and humour, Bain inserts a new lens, playfully deconstructing traditional and popular perceptions of the Aussie male as he perceives him. Beachgoers in Welcome celebrate Australia Day by drinking beer bongs and vomiting; dark-skinned Crocodile Dundee, Croc, and Dame Edna Everage, Drag, assume new, seemingly comical, identities while the Balinese Tourist retains his; the non-Indigenous Local seems to be the only character asserting any power amidst the group – arms outstretched, abs tense, face sour.

These bodies, constructed through stereotyped imagery, are the levelling reinterpretations of a young man probing his way through the muddied waters of contemporary Australian culture, ethnicity and gender. Yet the narrative Bain presents us with is not a reflection of his personal judgements, rather it is driven by our own affinity with popular culture. Performances of racial identity in mainstream culture, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have reproduced the idea that these stylistic constructions should be read as an authentic representation of reality(2).

As Robin Boyd sought to highlight the ugliness of Australian architecture, Bain's work is its own condemnation of a social culture laden with racial Featurism (3). The politics of representation which govern Bains work and make it seemingly un-PC, are the same politics which enable its success. Bain gives legitimisation and identity to the urban Indigenous male by deconstructing and mocking the white heteronormative norms which have systematically and repeatedly rejected him. In a time when Whiteness is the default of our culture, Bain seeks to redefine our Australian sense of identity through a unique sculptural language. As a result, the seasoned mateship between blokes begins to unravel. While we may find humour in the blatant mockery of Bain's visual colloquialism, his blokes' disoriented and tokenistic identities are left as a reminder of the disquiet we must bear in the ongoing resolve of racial tension.

Rose of Sharon Leake  
Deputy Editor of Art Collector Magazine  
Editor of Art Edit Magazine / Freelance Writer.

2 - Giardina, Michael D. Stylish Hybridity, Performativity, and the Politics of Representation. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, Vol 27, No. 1, February 2003, pp. 65-82.  
3 - Boyd, R. *The Australian Ugliness*. The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1960.



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