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**Stream E:** Cultural Change and Creativity in Science and the Arts

(This talk will relate the group exhibition entitled Spectacular Failures, held in the CDU Nan Giese Gallery between 14<sup>th</sup> August and 19<sup>th</sup> September.)

**Title:** The power of words in modernist and contemporary visual arts

**Abstract:** In contrast to narrative and literary genres, the visual arts traditionally produce wordless artworks (e.g., painted or sculpted depictions that do not include words) and works in which words are included without being a primary focus. However, a number of significant modernist and contemporary visual works focus on highlighting isolated words (see, e.g., word-focused works by Duchamp, Kosuth, Nauman, and numerous conceptual and propaganda artists). In word-focused artworks, words are highly salient aspects of the work content or are provided by an essential title that is an inseparable part of the work. Typically, such words fall short of establishing complete narratives or theories. What are the functions of words in word-focused visual arts? Do artists use non-narrative word-focused art as a means to prompt action? Using a psychohistorical approach that integrates philosophy with history and empirical aesthetics, we hypothesise that the impact of word-focused visual arts depends on 'prime-and-prompt' processes involving semantic priming and multisensory triggers for creative imaginings. 'Priming' is an experimental technique whereby exposure to one stimulus influences a response to a subsequent stimulus, sometimes influencing action without cooccurring awareness of that influence. We review evidence on the various ways in which 'prime-and-prompt' processes elicited by word-focused visual artworks could influence feelings and behavioural propensities. The analyse of these 'prime-and-prompt' processes can be placed onto a spectrum ranging from deceptive manipulations (as in political propaganda by means of art) to truth-tracking artistic interventions (as in some socially engaged and environmental art).

**Bio**<sup>1</sup>: Nicolas Bulot is a Lecturer in Philosophy and Co-Chair of the Artlab at the College of Indigenous Futures, Arts and Society, CDU. His academic work engages with philosophy of science, aesthetics, and social philosophy. He has edited three volumes and published more than 30 peer-reviewed publications on the science of art, person identification, and social cognition.

**Bio**<sup>2</sup>: Lee Harrop is a practicing visual artist and PhD Candidate in Visual Arts at CDU.