

Merri-bek Summer Show: Love in Crisis

Front Gallery

1.

Lily Santamaria

Love Bomb Art Swap, 2025

Mixed media on paper and canvas

Dimensions variable

NFS

Love Bomb Art Swap is the documentation of community members' participation in a recently installed Community Gallery and Artswap Box in Dunstan Reserve Food Forest. The community has been invited to take or leave an artwork, or create something with the materials provided.

This project is designed to recreate — on a community scale — the way I express love to, and have felt loved by, other people. From the naive 'feel better soon' pictures drawn for my mum, to the rush of warmth I feel on seeing my work displayed on friends' walls, creating has always been my way to give and receive love.

The impulse to create is a spark all humans share. In a world where our differences are often twisted and used as weapons in another's quest for power, celebrating what we do share — in our many different ways — is an act of defiance, vulnerability and love.

2.

Deepika Rao

Together Under the Amber Canopy, 2025

Acrylic on canvas

60 x 50 cm

\$800

Together Under the Amber Canopy reflects love as the quiet force that steadies us through life's inevitable change. Autumn teaches us that letting go is part of life's rhythm; yet in this season of falling leaves, the presence of another becomes an act of grace.

Two figures walk in step, sheltered beneath one umbrella. Around them, muted tones evoke grief and uncertainty, while above, amber trees blaze with warmth. This duality holds a question: in times of crisis, will we move through change with fear, or with love?

At its heart, the work is a reminder that even amidst endings, love can transform loss into renewal. When we choose compassion over resistance, colour and connection return. Togetherness becomes our strength, the light that carries us through storms and into brighter horizons.

3.

Ruth Groves

All Eyes on You, 2025

Archival print on rag paper

60 x 60 cm

POA

Who knows where love goes in a crisis? Some things cannot be loved, like war and violence but whatever happens all eyes are on you.

4.

Richard McCoy

Heart Emoji, 2025

Digital print on metal

59 x 42 cm

\$1,000

Heart Emoji is a new metamodern, digital work utilising glitched 3D rendering, suggesting the digital nature of love, connection and community in the 21st century. Sitting between sincerity and irony, the work printed on metal challenges the nature of portraiture and romantic couples' photographs.

5.

Batoul Ahmad

The day I thought of death, I saw a dead bird, and my friend wrote her will, 2025

Mixed media

42 x 30 cm

\$125

After the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, I went back for the first time in 10 years to visit my city, Damascus. I left with the prominent urge to shave my head because of the amount of grief that had to be experienced. A lot of atrocities and massacres happened in Syria, and are still happening since my visit, including the kidnapping and assault of women. Love and empathy remain a question, not concepts, in the Syrian context. I have been looking for answers since my return, but I end up with heavy feelings of despair, horror, and madness. The aftermath of following the news becomes an invitation to go mad. So, I imagine hosting a party for grief, where we all cut our hair and every single strand of hair turns into a woman.

6.

Emilion Clark

Madonna Gotica, 2025

Oil on board

40 x 30 cm

\$170

In this painting I reimagine the Madonna as a gothic figure — myself; a deliberate clash between sacred iconography and subcultural aesthetics. The Madonna has long been a symbol of pure, eternal love, yet by giving her a gothic visage — pale, shadowed, and melancholic — I place that ideal under strain. This challenges viewers to see love not only as luminous and holy but also as fragile, haunted, complex, and marked by human imperfection. Through this tension, I aim to invite reflection on how sacred ideals of care and compassion can coexist with feelings of alienation and despair, showing love as something both enduring and vulnerable.

7.

Duncan Young and Alex Hirst

The Excalibrush, 2025

Timber (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and glass

Dimensions variable

\$3,900

The Excalibrush are an elevation of an otherwise forsaken household object. Love can be expressed in many ways; the ways in which we love each other, the ways which we love and care for the world around us, and the way in which we care for and cherish objects. The tools which we use in repetitive daily tasks which, over time and through their usefulness, we can develop loving relationships with.

As plastics fill our landfills and our oceans, there has never been a more important time to love and cherish the tools of our daily life. All objects, no matter how sterile or refined, have been born from our Earth and should be valued equally, rather than assigned within a hierarchy as we so love to do in this Western culture of ours. *The Excalibrush* lifts the humble toilet brush from its lowly position as our shit-stain cleaner and asks for thanks in its otherwise thankless existence. Down with hierarchies, love of all things will bring us through this crisis.

8.

Joy Barrett and Jennifer Williams Barrett

Till death do us part, 2025

Textile

Dimensions variable

POA

Till death do us part is a visceral response to the theme *Love in Crisis*. This wedding dress, embroidered with the names of 78 women who died from intimate partner violence in 2024, confronts the romantic ideal of love with its darkest reality. The bodice, corseted and bound, evokes control and entrapment, while the heart-shaped tags pleading 'LOVE ME' echo the desperation and vulnerability often masked by ceremony. Scattered rose petals — symbols of both celebration and mourning — will fade over the course of the exhibition, mirroring the fragility of hope. The fullness of the skirt also holds the artists' stories, stitched with their memories of coercive control, gaslighting, and stalking. Viewers are invited to place a paper rose in tribute, transforming passive observation into active remembrance. This work asks: when love becomes crisis, how do we resist, remember, and rebuild? And what future do we dare to imagine?

9.

Jess Hall

Material Body 01, 2025

Ink, cotton and wool on linen

98 x 98 cm

\$2,800

Material Body 01 alludes to human relationships with nature and how the relationship, whilst often fraught, can also be transformative, leading to a deeper understanding of how a love of nature can increase a sense of connectedness and care in a time of climate crisis.

This work engages with craftivism, making use of traditional craft practices in a contemporary context. Traditional embroidery samplers are reimagined as upscaled specimens and abstracted patterns, embracing the meditative quality of embroidery.

Material Body 01 utilises embroidery as a drawing technique, featuring backstitch, French knots, chain stitch and brick stitch. Flower anatomy and diagrams are depicted, with botanical imagery referenced at a cellular level, reflecting microscopic views of plant life, reminding us of our connectedness to nature.

10.

Flora Georgiou

Red Riding Hood, 2025

Paper collage

37 x 40 cm

POA

Love in Crisis is a fairytale, fractured as it may be — a re-interpretation of *Red Riding Hood*, confronting her wolf predators; the subconscious stores conflict, distrust and trauma. Over time an empowering experience that replenishes the soul and the heart.

11.

Elain Della Rocca

You can't take it, 2025

Digital print_

60 x 49 cm

\$250

This piece explores my personal struggle with love, not just the giving of it, but the way it's often demanded of me, as if it's something I owe to others. People around me seem to assume that because I have love within me, they are automatically entitled to it. They treat it like a resource they can claim, rather than a gift I choose to offer.

12.

Nazanin Moghadam

I fell in Love with your eyes, 2025

Mixed media

30 x 40 cm

In the afternoon on a cold day, I saw you in the crowd.

You stood there, silent and strong.

Eyes fixed ahead, facing the tide.

I saw your hand raised, holding the light.

I heard your voice break the fog.

That day, I fell.

I fell in love with your eyes.

You grabbed my hand and took me through the dark.

The blood dripped from your eyes, covered the ground.

Flowers grew from your hands, red like a beating heart.

That day, I fell.

I fell in love with your eyes.

13.

Amelia Dowling

loving you is clarifying, 2025

Cotton thread on vintage postcard

9 x 14 cm

\$180

This hand-embroidered artwork on a vintage postcard relates to the theme of *Love in Crisis* in a number of ways. Firstly, it is a statement of gratitude — for the clarity, safety and joy I feel in my personal relationships. And secondly, in a world increasingly filled with intolerance, fear, AI sludge and misinformation, it is a hand-made love letter to care, attention, patience and kindness as clarifying acts of resistance.

14.

Rita Sciacca

At the Heart of Connection, 2025

Graphite pencil, watercolour and cotton thread on cotton paper, Perspex box

30 x 30 x 7.5 cm

\$200

My work uses the motif of mother and child to symbolise the relationship between love, kindness, empathy, compassion, guidance and its interconnectedness to community. The mother-child relationship symbolises a guiding force, wisdom, nurture, care to the child and by extension to the community and others in need. Many communities share these meanings as the interconnectedness in life. The symbolism of the heart as love and unity extends to the collective, to community, transcending boundaries. The heart is a universal spiritual force. It can be seen as the force strengthening community bonds, kindness and connection. I like the idea that the heart has the physical function of circulation and repair to bridge the many crises taking place in the world, the division creating suffering and isolation experienced in community, as a bridge to bonding and healing. In the decorative red floral background, I have handwritten the verses on love by the poet Rumi to invite the viewer to contemplate the themes of universal kindness. The thread represents interconnectedness and different states.

15.

Claire Sadler Jones

Resilience, 2025

Acrylic on canvas

25 x 25 cm

\$150

The painting depicts an image of plants emerging from a hardened rocky soil. The earth has been ravaged by fire, yet from this crisis of destruction, vegetation pushes its way through; surviving the destruction. Hope is being restored and with that a form of love from nature.

16.

Nicola Vance

Flowers of Romance (not), 2025

Digital print

30 x 42 cm

NFS

My artwork is in response to reading Viv Albertine's memoir *Clothes, Clothes Clothes; Music, Music, Music; Boys, Boys, Boys* (Faber & Faber, 2014).

Part confessional, explicit and defiant, it follows Albertine's journey from childhood into the liberating, cultural upheaval of the punk movement. Briefly rehearsing with Sid Vicious' band, The Flowers of Romance (never performing), then finding her zenith as guitarist with feminist band, The Slits (1978–1982) who challenged the 1970s male-centric music scene.

Her trajectory from punk's iconoclasm to the crashing silence of domesticity compounded by illness, claustrophobic marriage and divorce, sent Albertine into prolonged depression. Music, filmmaking and family support provided the key to her recovery. Albertine sees life as a circular journey — as if travelling around an orange. Occasionally, in tough times, hanging upside down; when confident, climbing up the sides, but overall determined not to fall off.

'I still believe in love'

- Viv Albertine

17.

Matthew Carey

Marking more, 2025

Digital collage

42 x 30 cm

NFS

This work showcases the measures we may take in the endeavour of self-love. A permanent mark on the skin can carry an abundance of depth, or exist only as an ornamental charm. This display documents marks that have collectively become a catalyst for realising self-love; enhancing and modifying oneself as a way to love what might have never been accepted.

18.

Angela Dionysopoulos

Golden Thread, 2025

Mixed media

66 x 50 cm

\$400

An invisible golden thread weaves us to togetherness, with self with others and on a cosmic level. Love sits between this connection, a feeling of finding home. This home can be within oneself, a beloved, a community. When the golden thread spins its magic, it guides with love, whether to a physical home or a sense of belonging.

19.

Christine Tammer

Lola Lolls, 2025

Linen and thread

24 x 27 cm

\$470

Lola Lolls, is about walking around Coburg Lake with my dog, looking at families and catching up with other dog walkers.

It is a hand-stitched meditation on fragility and resilience. Made with linen, thread, and both hand and machine sewing, the work balances softness with structure. Its frayed edges, stitched grasses, and open spaces evoke both vulnerability and persistence — a quiet expression of love that endures even in times of crisis.

20.

Lewis Spiteri

Painful Shoes, 2025

Acrylic on paper

45 x 32 cm

POA

A novel way to illustrate love in crisis, is to show an example of love not in crisis.

My painting *Painful Shoes*, is a humorous portrayal of a man carrying a woman due to her painful shoes, simple steps of kindness.

Love in crisis at all levels, one could say, is systemic of the 'me generation'. The reduction of loving steps towards one another.

The *Painful Shoes* painting displays an analogy of how simple steps of kindness towards one another can go a long way towards reversing any love crisis in the community.

21.

Frank Servello

Holding On In The Storm, 2025

Photograph

30 x 42 cm

POA

The unfocused and blurred figures suggest uncertainty, instability, and disconnection. It mirrors how love in crisis can feel unclear, with emotions and intentions hard to read. The rain symbolises sadness, struggle, or difficult times, with the wet street reflecting the heaviness and emotional weight of crisis in a relationship.

Despite the storm, the couple share an umbrella. This represents an effort to stay connected and protect each other, even when surrounded by chaos.

The traffic, lights, and urban blur emphasise external pressures and distractions. Just like in relationships, outside forces can create strain and contribute to crisis. The two figures walk side by side, but their blurred forms suggest fragility — love that exists but feels at risk of slipping away.

22.

Jane Farnan

Hold Fast, 2025

Charcoal and pastel on paper

42 x 30 cm

POA

Hold Fast reflects our deep need for connection through physical touch; in this image it is expressed as a steadying and supportive embrace.

Whether to console or protect in a crisis, or celebrate as a gesture of love and solidarity, the need to hold or to be held is a universal human experience.

23.

Hana Othen

lost, 2025

Acrylic paint on canvas

30 x 43 cm

NFS

My work explores love as a form of resilience and activism in the aftermath of disaster. Rooted in personal memories of my auntie's house in rural Miyagi — where the 2011 tsunami left deep scars on my family and community — I consider how objects, places, and shared histories carry both grief and hope. More than a decade later, the damage lingers, but so too does the strength that emerges through acts of care, generosity, and solidarity. Healing is not sudden; it unfolds slowly through the everyday: listening, remembering, raising the next generation with tenderness, and holding space for one another. In honouring these gestures, I ask what it means to give and receive love in troubled times.

24.

Nicole Irwood

love remains, 2025

Watercolour and ink on paper

49 x 41 cm

\$600

This work stages an encounter with Death, not only as mortality but as a stand-in for anxiety and the unseen pressures that shadow intimacy. The skeletal figure is present but not dominant, a companion at the table rather than an adversary. In this framing, love is not the erasure of crisis but the willingness to remain alongside it.

The clipped topiary introduces a second tension. Nature is ordered into submission, and beauty is maintained through control. This setting echoes the broader fragility of human attempts to manage both ecological and emotional uncertainty.

Drawing on the tradition of the Memento Mori, the scene entwines dread with tenderness. Love here is not sentimental escape but the resilience to share space with what unsettles us, a quiet insistence that intimacy can endure even when crisis sits beside us.

25.

David McCall

Leaders Dancefest, 2025

Acrylic on paper

31 x 56 cm

\$80

Instead of conflict and division this painting shows some leaders (Putin, Zelensky, Trump, Netanyahu) having a 'Peace Love In – Dancefest.' They are holding hands, standing together and displaying to the world that love, friendship and mutual respect can overcome wars, human misery and lead to ongoing peace and harmony between nations.

26.

Michael Crowhurst

Un/resolved, 2025

Photographic collage

21 x 29 cm

\$150

The exhibition asked art practitioners to respond to 'love'. The written text responds to a difficult situation. The words sit over a Bon Soy container — bright red but difficult to read. We're taught to aim to resolve tricky situations. Complex spaces sometimes remain un/resolved. I love complex spaces.

27.

Sandra Tobias

Push and Pull – Love in Crisis, 2025

Hand-cut gouache and watercolour on paper

64 x 78 cm

\$4,000

Our world walks on eggshells, pitched against each other for space, land, water — for a safe place to sleep, to dream, and to love.

In this hand-cut gouache, I explore the push and pull of life and love: its fragility, its ruptures, and its capacity to endure. The act of cutting becomes both wound and opening, suggesting the fractures that crisis reveals, but also the possibility of connection through vulnerability.

Together we share one planet, one earth. Without love — as kindness, care, and compassion — we cannot exist. This work asks us to recognise love in crisis, not as an ending, but as a call to reimagine how we live with one another, the need for collective effort in times of turmoil.

Through delicate cut layers, I aim to draw the viewer into this ritualised dance — one that asks not just for hope, but for conscious, compassionate action, For Peace.

28.

Alister Karl and Patrick Tonks

Beautiful / Hand Forest (Goodbye to reality), 2025

Single channel video

Duration: 6:50 mins

NFS

Patrick was wrongly diagnosed with schizophrenia for nine years, an experience explored through this new work. It is a homage to three friends — unknown to one another — who each shared similar stories of their experiences of psychosis. The work also reflects Alister's experience of growing up with, and caring for, his mother during her regular episodes of psychosis.

The second part of the work responds to the theme of stormy weather, speaking both to the escalating climate crisis and to internal struggles: weathering mental health challenges and finding a way through to the other side.

Together, these works consider *Love in Crisis* — whether through the love of a mother, a friend, or for the wider world, which so often feels caught in crisis.

Both pieces are collaborative, Patrick providing the still images and Alister creating the animation. Both artists developing the theme and direction of the work.

29.

Mwaffaq Al Hajjar

If only my fingers, 2025

Mixed media

60 x 42 cm

\$100

The work is an attempt to imagine the final gesture of a victim in a massacre — a hand raised, fingers extended like a fragile weapon. It is a moment where love persists even in the face of certain loss: the desperate attempt to shield the house, the loved ones, the fragile walls of carton. Here, love becomes both a resistance and a vulnerability, a force that endures even as violence tears through it. It is an exploration of love's manifestation during the last moments.

30.

Alessia Catalano

Into the multi-verse, 2025

Acrylic and Posca pen on canvas

64 x 46 cm

\$150

My artwork explores how love exists in crisis within our hyper-digital age. The figures, dressed in retro business attire, wear VR headsets while walking together, referencing both intimacy and disconnection. Though side-by-side, they are immersed in separate realities, suggesting how technology can fragment relationships and distance us from authentic connection. The repeated phrase 'into the multiverse' highlights this tension between shared presence and individual escape, reflecting the broader crisis of love in a world where digital spaces often replace physical closeness. Yet, their parallel stride also suggests resilience, a reminder that love endures despite distraction, distance, and division. Through the bright, pop-art style and ironic imagery, the work critiques contemporary relationships while imagining how compassion and companionship might survive and adapt within fractured realities.

31.

Joeli Eastell

Growing in the Cracks, 2025

Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas

81 x 101 cm

\$1,248

In times of collective uncertainty, deepening our connection with our communities and the urban environments we inhabit can open us to a shared consciousness of care and peace. My work reimagines a familiar city street as a space for reflection and the renewal of our collective spirit, inviting viewers to consider how moments of attention, compassion, and connection can sustain us even in times of crisis.

32.

Josh Wilson

Over the hill, through the park and across the way, my love's garden, where the land meets the sky on the stolen land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People of the Kulin Nations in the crisis of modernity, 2025

Watercolour on paper

60 x 50 cm

\$15,000

A portrait of a place where I loved, was loved and that I love. My girlfriend's garden (at the back of a rented share house in terrible repair, the one before last). Filled with objects we found on the street, repurposed and remade. On the stolen land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People of the Kulin Nations, in the crisis of modernity. Where we spent the years of lockdown and were very happy. Until it sold and we were evicted so the new owners could move in.

33.

Robert Waghorn

abstraction imitating nature, 2025

Oil on board

115 x 90 cm

\$3,000

Love is a delicate dance at the best of times. Given and received any way that we can. Leaving signs wherever possible. A carving in a tree.

34.

Roshan Dhillon

The Fruit Box, 2025

Oil on canvas

91 x 76 cm

\$3,000

Typically, in times of crisis, small acts of love are overlooked in favour of eye-catching performances.

My perspective changed when I stumbled across an empty box on a patch of grass. Occasionally, this box is filled with fruit by people in the Merri-bek community for people in the community.

It is this silent, unprejudiced love for those who need it most that inspired this piece.

The Fruit Box serves as a reminder of the love that is ever-present in our communities. It prompts the audience to focus on the little bits of love that are all around us during even the worst of times.

35.

Ismihan Sen

Love Left in the Corner, 2025

Acrylic and mixed media on canvas

70 x 100 cm

\$110

This work reflects the presence of love even in the shadow of crises and difficult times. The cornered interior space represents a sense of confinement, helplessness, and loneliness. The mask/death image emerging at the lower left reminds us of the fragility of life, while the warm tones and the opening light symbolise hope and love. Love creates a path even in the darkest corners.

In connection with the theme *Love in Crises, Crisis*, this piece emphasises that love remains a source of resilience and hope under the harshest conditions.

36.

Ashton Wastney

Fig. 88, 2025

Oil on linen

81 x 66 cm

\$2,200

This painting asks how love endures when connection feels fragile. The fractured brushwork reflects the divisions of our time, yet within the broken surface lies a persistence of care. The figure, both vulnerable and resilient, becomes a metaphor for community: fragile but unyielding in its search for unity. The work suggests that even the smallest gestures of tenderness can resist division and bring people back together.

37.

Aalayah

My crisis became my love, 2025

Acrylic on canvas

70 x 80 cm

\$750

This artwork was created while I was in prison and learning this art form has saved my life. The love I had for myself had completely faded until the brush put the love back inside of me.

38.

Lis de Vries

Honouring the leatherworkers, 2025

Woven textiles, metal wire and leather

100 x 45 x 30 cm

\$400

Honouring the leatherworkers is a homage to Australia's leathercraft industry. It is an expression of love for a tradition in crisis. The work is created from leather offcuts sourced from a leathergoods manufacturer still operating on the outskirts of Melbourne. This family-owned business, rooted in the Italian community, has a long and proud history, sustained by the skill of its leathercraft artisans. Yet it is facing a crisis as production shifts offshore and the number of locally trained workers declines.

The offcuts used in this work are remnants of cutouts used for leather tool belts, they have been reimagined and given a new life. The piece has been constructed with mini-weaves woven in the negative space, which have been tied together to create a garment. The garment is finished with straps woven by the artist. The piece expresses love for cultural heritage and the skills of the leather artisan.

39.

Stephanie Karavasilis

Larger than the Universe, 2025

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

\$575

This work is a memorial to mothers in war zones, exploring what we lose when we dare to love. As one mother in Gaza declared to Amnesty International: 'To be a mother during genocide is to fight every minute, every second.' Through symbolic objects and testimonies from the suffering mothers of Palestine, I hold space for the displaced and the forgotten, centring love as an act of hope, resistance, and survival.

40.

Jean Taylor

Four Pairs of Woollen Socks on a Woolie Rug, 2025

Wool and plastic covered paper clips

100 (diam.) cm

NFS

Love means warm socks in winter hand knitted in a variety of colours and with wool off the sheep's back mixed with a bit of long-lasting synthetic.

This means these socks, made with love, will last for a very long time.

I've knitted socks on four needles for myself, for friends, for my lesbian lovers as well as for raffles, at lesbian feminist meetings and gatherings, and more recently in front of the TV, since the 1970s.

It is still pleasing to be able and willing to do this important and enjoyable work to ward off chilblains and keep mine and other's feet snug and warm during the cold winters in Naarm.

And with the woollen rug for cold knees thrown in for good measure.