# Dionisia Salas
## a fistful of light



**Wagga Wagga Art Gallery**
**October 2026 – February 2027**

CIVIC ART BUREAU
Director Adam Bell
Melbourne Building upstairs Smiths Alternative
76 Alinga St / GPO Box 2299 Canberra ACT 2601 Australia
info@civicartbureau.com / civicartbureau.com

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# Dionisia Salas: A Fistful of light

In *A Fistful of Light*, painting becomes a language of instinct, imagination and dream. Developed through years of working with abstraction, the artist approaches painting as a fluid and intuitive form of communication, where gesture carries lived significance and shape can hold meaning and reference.

This new body of work explores the space between the material world and the subconscious, bridging everyday experience with imagination and dream states. Working through a slow, analogue process of searching and unearthing, the artist allows images to emerge through the act of painting itself, as painterly knowledge slides humorously and sometimes surprising into subconscious forms. Drawing plays an important role in this process, offering a direct, bodily language that feeds into the energy of the paintings.

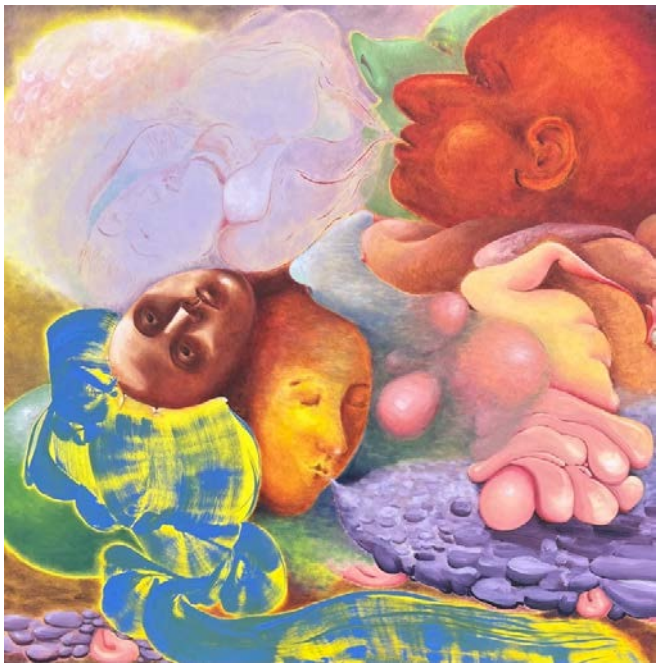
Moving fluidly between abstraction and figuration, biomorphic forms drift through weightless, shape-shifting spaces. Membranous, fleshy and cosmic forms emerge from the painted surface, while heads and cartoon-like figures gradually appear, as if dreamed, breathed or pulled into being. Humour and flamboyance sit alongside more abject and subconscious forms, creating a world that is playful, strange and tumultuous.

The works inhabit a state of questioning, doubt and becoming, where recognition continually slips back in abstraction. Through the fluid nature of paint, *A Fistful of Light* embraces the tension between control and chaos, allowing unexpected forms to emerge through instinct, gesture and the material possibilities of the painted surface.

# Catalogue of works



*Cloud shadow unknown*, 2026
Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm
$4200



*Sandsight*, 2026
Oil on canvas
101.5 x 101.5 cm
$4200



*Singing ash and grit*, 2026
Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm
$4200



*Boca profunda*, 2025-26
Oil on canvas
102 x 102 cm
$4200



*Hole pooled*, 202
Oil on canvas
106 x 106 cm
$4500



*Sandtime*, 2026
Oil on canvas
122 x 122cm
$5000



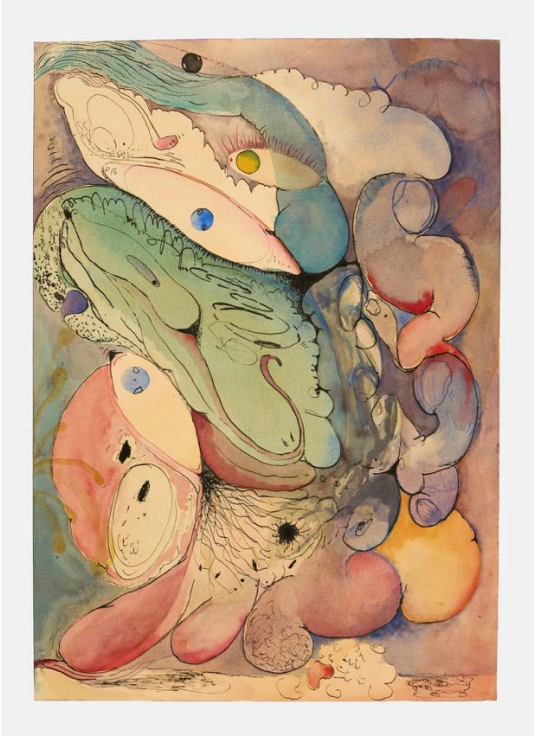
*Air swallowed*, 2026
Oil on canvas
165 x 130 cm
$6000



*Flung far*, 2026
Oil on canvas
122 x 122 cm
$5000



Air will float, 2026
Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm
$4200



*Untitled 4*, 2026
Gouache and ink on paper
51 x 36 cm
$800



*Untitled 3,* 2026
Gouache and ink on paper
51 x 36 cm
$800



*Untitled 5*, 2026
Gouache and ink on paper
51 x 36 cm
~~$800~~ SOLD



*Untitled 2*, 2026
Gouache and ink on paper
41 x 31 cm
$700

# Translating dreams – essay by Yvette Dal Pozzo

Language is central to understanding the work of Dionisia Salas. Though her works are emboldened with feeling, language gives a framework to unpack the dichotomies jostling within them. The exhibition title, *A fistful of light*, demonstrates this tension perfectly. In this, the artist presents an impossibility: a bold, physical gesture trying to grasp an uncontainable force.

Salas has spent much of her life considering communication and meaning. She has had direct exposure to different languages in her life, with her family background from Spain and having lived in Berlin for several years. Familiar with the act of translating and mis-translating, she is also intrigued by local particularities in turns of phrase, aphorisms and slang that can at times be jarring or humorous. Like moving between languages, Salas' work is an act of translation itself, carrying the logic of dreams across into colour and form.

In her multi-faceted life as an artist, teacher and mother, vocabulary, phrases and understanding are a part of the everyday. These roles bring a consciousness of language to the fore, grappling with reason and meaning, and analysing sense and non-sense. Language provides an entry point to begin to understand Salas' work which is full of intriguing contradictions and questions. Beauty, dreams and spirituality sit side by side with the abject, visceral, painful parts of life.

Salas' work resists neat categorisation, oscillating between abstraction and representation, with both as important as the other. Throughout her practice, colour and form have been key to reading the work. What is exciting about this new body of work is that representation of the face and figure is taking a more central role. While still used with restraint, sometimes sporadically and other times obscured, these recognisable moments sit amongst the artist's rich dreamworlds. The act of creating is intuitive and sometimes surprising. There is a sense of discovery within the making and viewing of the works, following impulses and "a sense of knowing but not necessarily understanding straight away".[1] This is how language is first learnt, and it is how these works ask to be read.

The details found here are part of an ever-expanding visual language of form and line built throughout her oeuvre. Recurring phrases and punctuations of dream-like billowing breath, spheres, ears, lips and eyes form an alphabet by which to begin to understand connections and meaning. Less concerned with fixed meaning than with conveying feeling and evoking memories, the works invite viewers, like learning a language, to absorb and infer, experiencing an overall sense before honing in on specific phrases.

The gateway into this new series was a small group of watercolour works that the artist used to explore ideas, colours and details before expanding these thoughts into oil paintings. She speaks poetically of this process, of "pulling gestures out of previous works" and following their train of thought into new fields of vision. Recently, Salas has returned to a regular practice of life drawing, capturing the body in real time rather than from memory or references. While the face, limbs and bodily functions have always featured in her works through colour and shape, we now see faces and appendages rendered more fully in *A fistful of light*. The artist wanted to "communicate more overtly, but still with space for interpretation". Something unlocked in these smaller watercolour works, which allowed the figure to confidently grow.

As the figure grew, so too did the dynamic of being watched. The heads that punctuate the new works are both observers and the observed. Watching the viewer, the maker and each other, they appear not in isolation, but in conversation. In *Air will float*, the breath of one figure becomes the

[1] All quotes from conversation with the artist, Walbanga Country/Braidwood, NSW, 15 August 2026.

eye of the next, and in *Sandtime* a cherub is quietly watching another person who appears in profile. *Sandsight* is where this phenomenon occurs most profoundly. In one moment a red-faced god is shadowed by an iridescent green doubled ghost, whose features are becoming distorted; in another section a contemplative Madonna-like face has a counterpart that appears as a loose, wispy, lilac spirit. Many of these occurrences can be read as explorations between ourselves and our inner worlds, or alter egos explored in different facets of life as a creator, teacher, mentor, friend or carer.

Alongside the figures, another punctuation appears in each of the works: the sphere. These can be read and defined in diverse ways, subject to their colour, size, rendering and juxtaposition. The artist is obsessed with circles, holes and spheres as a form that contains the whole meaning of the world in one symbol. It is the universe, an eye, a portal. *Sandtime* in particular depicts circles that are used interchangeably to communicate forms that look like nipples, pupils, thumbs or a cheek. The depiction of holes is used as a way to create dynamism and dimension in the paintings, protruding and receding, an opening to delve into or come out of, and as a way for us to enter or exit a work. This double entendre and ambiguity extends to various unidentifiable forms found throughout the work, which at moments have viewers asking, is it an ear or is it a bulge? Is it a dream or is it a thought? Is it an organ or is it a city?

The slippages between inside and outside, dream and thought, connect to the language of psychoanalysis, a useful reference to understand some of the actions and vignettes at play in the exhibition. We see figures doubled and mirrored, the unconscious and conscious at play, and dream states providing space to explore how we shape and interpret the world. Salas is part of a lineage of artists intrigued with psychoanalytic notions of the unconscious, surrealism and dreams in their work, including Hilma af Klint's *Paintings for the Temple* and Louise Bourgeois' *Spider* series, and Mirka Mora's hand painted dolls, often made from bedsheets and pillowcases which she described as the material of dreams.[2] She shares distinct traits with these artists including embracing colour to convey emotion, the use of recurring symbols and the importance of materials as a foundation to imbue meaning. With an awareness of the weight and tradition of this art history, she develops a style and vernacular that is entirely her own.

Beyond this lineage, Salas is constantly reading about and looking at art. She draws inspiration and visual language from a vast array of sources including Botticelli, Philip Guston, Dana Schutz and cartoons. The artist engages with disparate practices, intrigued by how different artists approach depth, render form and treat the surface. This series gives a clear nod to the Renaissance, with the framing of works at times appearing like frescoes, the figures de-centred, heads peering from all angles and forms creating borders and internal zones for exploration and depth. The artist's curiosity, knowledge and skill is on full display in *A fistful of light*, in wildly unexpected and delightful colour palettes, and in her ability to move easily from expansive abstraction into moments of highly rendered representation.

These recognisable forms and references sit within strong, surreal, pigmented landscapes where forms are sitting, disappearing, shrouded or hidden. Here colour becomes the ultimate language of feeling, going where representation alone cannot, conveying in particular moments joy, intimacy and grief.

Works like *Air will float* contain the artist's distinct fleshy tones of pinks and reds, where we are looking at bodies and forms simultaneously from the outside and inside, seeing organs, toes, hair and breasts morph into clouds and smoke. Among the most adventurous coloured vistas is the work *Sandsight*. A band of glowing light in cobalt blue and neon yellow swirling through frames

[2] Janine Burke and Lynne Cook, 'Mirka Mora', *Farrago*, April 26, 1974, p.11.

the work, with forms of burnt orange, soft lilac, fleshy pink and celadon green appearing throughout. The overall effect can be read as a contrast between the weight and expectation of reality, with the lightness and fluidity experienced in our dream or subconscious selves.

If *Sandsight* explores moments of illumination, a recent work *Singing ash and grit* explores a darker and quieter feeling. An angelic form appears at rest in a sea of purple, propped up by rich grape-like polyps and observed by a sea of small, floating, long-nosed animated spheres that appear like animated suns or a flock of inquisitive birds. It is not made clear if these spirits are a hostile crowd or watchful protectors.

While the exact meaning is obscured and open for interpretation, it is clear that conversation is happening within these works, with unspoken words and gestures conveyed between the depicted human and anthropomorphic forms. There is also a strong but subtle thread of community contained in this new series. *Air swallowed* is painted on a canvas gifted by the late, great artist Vivienne Binns OAM (1940-2026), a close mentor and friend whose advice, humour, and company shaped Salas' life in profound ways. Another friend, painter Joel Arthur, also gifted the artist a 'power colour', a tube of iridescent cobalt blue paint. This tube of paint had previously been gifted to Arthur by another artist, Bryan Foong, with the colour acting as a symbol of generosity and friendship, and a physical point of connection between a network of artists and artworks. Conversation and community have an important impact on Salas, and this is made real in the work itself, and the materials the works are made from which carry importance and meaning.

In *A fistful of light* Salas is asking an impossible question: can we grasp something that cannot be held? The works exist in a dream state and ask us to sense and intuit meaning before we can fully understand. Through a distinct visual dialect combining representation, colour and form, the artist has found a way to speak expansively about the world and how she lives within it, with joy, intimacy, sadness and loss intertwined. The light cannot be held, but it can be shared, connected, passed between figures, between artists and friends, and on to those of us looking.

# Dionisia Salas CV

Dionisia Salas is a contemporary artist living and working on Walbanga Country in the Yuin Nation, Braidwood, Australia.

‘I have been using the canvas as a space for automatic drawing, where physical, spiritual and less structured ideas act as a starting point. The drawings play out, compete, evolve, churn and invade; form bulges out of shape, weaves with line. Moving into paint the colour mashes together to form brown, grey and deep visceral tones that contrast with the pure, tube-squeezed and clean. In paint on canvas, my automatic drawing develops to hold outline and developed, fleshy, scrubbed, built up muscle that alludes to the physical.’

Dionisia explores in-between states of being, using the material tussle of painting to tap into areas of consciousness, subconsciousness and dream states; to play around in what is reality and what is imagined. She has exhibited regularly in solo and group, commercial, curated and artist-initiated exhibitions. In 2024-25, Dionisia held two major solo exhibitions Night Jar at NAP Contemporary, Mildura, VIC and Of mouth and mind Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, Goulburn, NSW.

Dionisia’s work is held in private and public collections nationally and internationally including Art Bank, Canberra Museum and Gallery, Goulburn Regional Gallery Art Collection, and the Australian National University Art Collection. In 2024 she was selected as a finalist in the Sir John Sulman Art Prize, and her work was exhibited at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She has exhibited widely in state, regional and university galleries and commercial galleries including, Sutton Gallery, Narrm/Melbourne, Watters Gallery, Gadigal land/Sydney and Grantpirrie, Gadigal land/Sydney. Dionisia has exhibited consistently in the critical and vibrant artist-run scenes in both Berlin, Germany and throughout Australia including Pavillion am Milchhof, Berlin, TCB and Kings Artist Run, Narrm/Melbourne and Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Kamberri/Canberra. She has been awarded several competitive grants from state and national arts funding bodies and has been awarded funded residencies in Berlin and Australia. Dionisia was awarded a Bachelor of Visual Arts (First Class Honours) from the Australian National University School of Art and Design in Kamberri/Canberra.

Dionisia Salas is represented by Civic Art Bureau.

## Education

2004- 07 Bachelor of Visual Arts ( First Class Honours), ANU School of Art and Design, ACT

2006 ANU Exchange Program to L'Ecole National Superieur des Beaux Arts, Paris

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

**2026** *A fistful of light*, 31 October - 7 February, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, curated by Andrew Halyday and NSW

**2024-5** *Of mouth and mind,* 22 November 2024 - 1 February 2026, curated by Yvette Dal Pozzo, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, NSW

*Night Jar*, 11 May - 14 June 2024 NAP Contemporary, Mildura VIC

**2019** *Heartbeats*, ANCA art bus, City Walk, ACT

**2017 - 18** *Domino Gold,* 1 December 2017 - 10 February 2018, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, ACT

**2016** *She Walked In and Pulled out a Chair,* 21 September - 25 October Canberra Contemporary Art Space in the City, ACT

**2014** *Every hook, Every loop*, exhibiting 5 new print works from the Glint Residency, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, ACT

*Of feathers and a mouthful of light*, Platform Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne

**2013** *sometimes if you sit in the rain, a rich lady will come by in a limousine and take you home..*, tcb art inc., Melbourne

**2010** *Vu du in light flight,* 23 September – 23 October 2010, Grantpirrie, Redfern, Sydney

**2009** *2009 A*C Odyssey* 27 March – 2 May 2009, Canberra Contemporary, CCAS Gorman, Canberra

## Selected Group Exhibitions

**2026** *Pigment, powder, wax, sand*, 11 April – 13 June 2026, ArtistsJacqueline Bradley, Rosalind Lemoh, Merryn Lloyd, Dionisia Salas, Tuggeranong Arts Centre, ACT

2025 *Tender,* 12 April - 15 June 2025, curated by Megan Monte, Artists: Sally Anderson, Sarah Drinan, Laura Jones, India Mark, Dionisia Salas, Julia Trybala and Amber Wallis, Ngununggula, Bowral NSW

*Hot cold heavy light*, 2 - 31 August, Jacqueline Bradley, Rosland Lemoh, Merryn Lloyd, Dionisia Salas, Civic Art Bureau ACT

*Inner Currents: Abstraction and the Unseen Self* , 28 August - 4 October Richard Blackwell, Tony Curran, Skye Jamieson, Ben Rak, Dionisia Salas, CBD Gallery; 72 Erskine St, Sydney

*Altered Landscapes,* 9 October - 1 November, Gallery Lane Cove; upper level, 164 Longueville Rd, Lane Cove, Sydney

2024 *Exhibition 1*, 5 - 26 October, Emma Beer, Vivienne Binns, Lucy Chetcuti, Liz Coats, Kirsten Farrell, Nicci Haynes, Merryn Lloyd, Raquel Ormella, Dionisia Salas Stefamie Schulte, Ruth Waller, Civic Art Bureau, ACT

2023 *Spring 1883*, 9 - 12 August, with NAP Contemporary at the Hotel Windsor, Spring St Melbourne

*Between Things,* 12 - 21 May, Joel Arthur and Dionisia Salas, Canberra Contemporary Art Space Manuka, ACT

2022 *Grout,* 16 September, Jacqueline Bradley, Karena Keys, Rosalind Lemoh, Merryn Llyod, Dionisia Salas, curated by Owen Lewis, Tiles, Lewisham, NSW

2021 *One or two paintings*, 5 – 23 May, Peter Alwast, Joel Arthur, Riley Beaumont, Rowan Kane, Dionisia Salas, Australian National Capital Artists, ANCA, Canberra

2020 *Highlights from the ANU Art Collection*, 4 – 20 December, Drill Hall Gallery, Acton, ACT

2019 *Druids/Drones Defects*, 7- 11 August, Focus on Abstraction, Pavillion am Milchof, Berlin

2018 *Chris Carmody, Fiona Little and Dionisia Salas*, *Young Friends of the Artist,* 16 March – 14 April, curated by Vivienne Binns, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

*Straight Outta Canberra,* 21 March – 14 May, curated by Alexander Boynes, Artists: Tom Buckland, Sanne Koelemij, Julian Laffan, Cat Mueller, Dionisia Salas, Rebecca Selleck and Rosalind Lemoh, May Space, Waterloo, Sydney,

*Painting Amongst Other Things*, 10 August - 1 September, curated by Ruth Waller, Dr. Raquel Ormella and Dr. Peter Alwast and Su Yilmaz, School of Art and Design Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra

2017 *Emerging from Canberra*, 1 – 18 March, curated by Ruth Waller and Damien Minton, Watters Gallery, Sydney

2014 *A Necessary Evil,* 21 November – 13 December, Renee Cosgrave, Merryn Lloyd, Noriko Nakamura, Dionisia Salas, Bryan Spier Kings Artist Run, Melbourne

2012 Word of Mouth, curated by Mark Bayley, Canberra Museum + Gallery, ACT

*The Presence of the Past in the Future*, 11 August 2012, Artists: Astrid Busch, Dominique Hurth, Dionisia Salas, Regina Weiß, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Friederike Feldmann, Jerome Chazeix, Dephine Chapuis-Schmidt, Stedefreund, Mitte, Berlin

*Cliffhanger*, 12 April 2012, Minken and Palme, Kreuzberg

2011 *The Kids are Alright*, curated by Dr. Fernando do Campo, Artists: Emma Beer, Gregory Hodge, Arryn Snowball, Dionisia Salas, The Paper Mill, Sydney

*Love in the Mourning*, curated by Dr. Helen Johnson, Artists: Teghan Burt, Matt Hinkley, Lewis Fidcok, Joshua Perherick, Dionisia Salas, Death Be Kind, Melbourne

## Grants, Awards, Prizes

2026 artsACT Project Funidng

2023 Finalist: Sir John Sulman Art Prize, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

2022 Finalist: Goulburn Art Award, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery

2020 Homefront Arts ACT Funding

2017 artsACT Project Funding

2010 Australia Council for the Arts Artstart Grant

2009 Finalist: Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship for Young Australian Artists, Art Gallery of New South Wales

2008 Finalist: Fundacion Guasch Coranty International Painting Prize, Barcelona

2008 Torres Spanish Travel Scholarship for Young Australian Artists

2007 Winner: Floriade and King O'Malley's Painting Prize

## Residencies and Projects

2017 The Art Vault, printmaking residency and relief printing mentorship with Antonia Aitken, Mildura, VIC

2014 Glint, Glass and printmaking exchange, Canberra Glassworks and Megalo Print Studio, ACT

2012 Basso Studio, studio residency, Kreuzberg, Berlin, Germany

2011 Megalo Print Studio + Gallery, printmaking residency, ACT

## Collections

Artbank

Australian National University Art Collection, Canberra

Canberra Museum and Gallery

Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, NSW

Megalo Print Studio + Gallery Archive, Canberra

## Articles & Publications

Dionisia Salas, Of Mouth and Mind, catalogue with contributions by Elspeth Pitt, Shaune Lakin and Yvette Dal Pozzo, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, Printer Spitting Image, October 2024

Undiscovered, Elspeth Pitt, Profile for Art Collector, #104 April – June 2023, Produced and published by Art Edited Pty Ltd., p99

Between things, exhibition catalogue written by Emma Beer, May 2023

Everything Matters Emma Beer in Conversation: Zooper Dooper Catalogue, Drill Hall Gallery Publishing, February 2022, pp 57 -68

The Postcard Project, curated by Raquel Ormella, Art Monthly Australasia, Spring Issue 325, 2020, p39

Pattern Play, Yolandi Norris, Artist profile for Printmaking Today, Autumn 2018, Issue 107, Cello Press Ltd. Pp12-13

Index #3, independent publishing project by Justin Andrews, 2012, Melbourne, Australia