Melbourne artist Steve Bush’s surreal sensibility will be on display at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, in an exhibition of new and old work spanning the past 30 years.

The exhibition, titled *Stephen Bush: Steenhuffel*, follows Bush’s award as the fourth recipient of the $30,000 Vizard Foundation Contemporary Artist Project grant, which enables the selected mid-career artist to pursue new directions in their practice and make new work.

Bush can be described as a figurative painter who borrows from historical landscape painting conventions and 19th century photography and then dismantles those traditions by juxtaposing kitsch and folksy elements with accidental effects such as swirling pools of acidic coloured paint.

His works are often populated with beekeepers, farm equipment, rubbish bins, alpine scenes, men on horseback, and portrayals of Babar the elephant.

Bush is also known for repeatedly using self-imposed parameters in his painting practice, such as limitations on his colour palette to just red or green and, as revealed in one gallery space in this exhibition, purple.
Exhibition Curator and Director of the Potter, Kelly Gellatly, says, “I liken Bush’s painting practice to that of a contemporary musician – remixing and reusing the motifs and subject matter that have reverberated across his work for several decades, pushing and re-invigorating both the practice and art of painting itself.

“Bush’s oeuvre is tantalisingly playful and confounding in its embrace of circularity and repetition, and never ceases to surprise in its creative re-use of an expansive back catalogue of subject matter and motifs.

“At the heart of Stephen Bush’s practice is the constant, almost nagging question of what it means to be an artist and particularly, what it means to work in the most anachronistic of mediums – paint,” said Gellatly.

Liza Statton, author of the catalogue essay titled, Stephen Bush: Unconditional reinvention, summarises by saying, “Though seemingly curious and incongruous, such an assortment of interests reveals a fascination with the ordinary, contempt for the notion of progress, and a view that paintings are constructed things that question both the subjectivity of the artist and the viewer.”

The exhibition will include a large suite of new works on paper featuring a new theme, ‘chicken coops’, several new paintings, and selected earlier works from the past three decades, alongside an idiosyncratic grouping of works chosen by Bush from the University of Melbourne Art Collection, including a 19th century lithograph by S T Gill, a gouache of a snow hut by Melbourne-based architect Lloyd Orton, a Gould print and an eccentric collection of ink on wood paintings – revealing Bush’s whimsical and irreverent sensibilities.

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Images, and interview with the curator, Ms Kelly Gellatly, are available upon request.
For listings please refer to exhibition as: Stephen Bush: Steenhuffel. A Vizard Foundation Contemporary Artist Project

Backgrounder: Stephen Bush


Stephen Bush has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria, 2007. In 2012 he was the recipient of the Australia Council’s New York Green Street Residency and in 1993 undertook a studio residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris. His work is represented in many significant public collections including Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; as well as numerous private collections throughout Australia, Europe and USA.