



VELLA

RYAN VELLA

≡ UNDERGROUND SPANDEX ≡

26 NOVEMBER 2021 » 5 FEBRUARY 2023
ARTSPACE MACKAY ★ MACKAY REGIONAL COUNCIL



FOREWORD»

Local artist Ryan Vella has been creating graphic style illustrations for over two decades. He first exhibited at Artspace Mackay in 2003 as part of a group exhibition entitled 'Headspace', showcasing works by young and emerging Mackay artists. It was at the opening of this exhibition that Ryan first met writer John Birmingham, who had been invited to Mackay to officially open the show. Impressed with what he saw, John approached Ryan to illustrate the 10-year anniversary, graphic novel adaptation of his cult classic 'He died with a felafel in his hand'. The rest, as they say, is history.

Ryan has maintained a fulfilling creative practice in his hometown of Mackay. He is guitarist for local metal band Viper Syndicate and continues to collaborate with writers, artists, and illustrators throughout Australia and overseas. He'll dismiss the accolade, but Vella is our local art anti-hero. And, our Assistant Curator Jamie Wilcox has done a brilliant job drawing out some of what makes him tick.

With a focus on recent work, 'Underground Spandex' showcases Vella's intricate line drawings of comic characters in graphic, narrative scenes. It also explores a more recent compulsion to bring his experimentations with collage and mixed media, usually reserved for canvas paintings, into his illustration practice.

It is with great pleasure that we continue our relationship with Ryan Vella and present his latest exhibition 'Underground Spandex'.

Tracey Heathwood

Director, Artspace Mackay, Mackay Regional Council

Ryan VELLA *Morton Stone: undertaker* 2021, ink, acrylic and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.5cm. Gary CHALONER (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

COVER: **Ryan VELLA** *Killeroo* 2021, ink on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

NEAR DAYBREAK.

THERE SHE GOES.
FINALLY FOUND HER!
I'VE BEEN TRACKING THIS
SUCKER FOR MONTHS.



SHE'S HEADING
TOWARDS THAT
TOMB. IT MUST
BE HER NEST.



PERFECT!
IT'S ALMOST
DAWN.
I'VE GOT HER
TRAPPED.
SHE WON'T
HAVE A
CHANCE!



HEY! IT'S
TIME TO DIE
YA CRUSTY OLD
SLAG!

HISSSS!
WHO DARES
DISTURB
ME??!

Q&A» WITH RYAN VELLA★

Jamie Wilcox, Assistant Curator at Artspace Mackay, in conversation with Ryan Vella, talking about the experiences, influences and techniques that have shaped his current exhibition '*Underground Spandex*'.

JW: Ryan, you are a Mackay local and exhibited at Artspace Mackay for the first time in 2003. Can you shed some light on your experience of living and working regionally and how that has shaped your practice?

RV: I think living in a more isolated place like Mackay makes you develop with less outside influence. It forces you to grow independently a bit more.

JW: As a local artist and guitarist for metal band 'Viper Syndicate', you are well known for your distinct graphic style. Where did your love of drawing begin?

RV: It came from watching cartoons as a kid. I used to copy the characters and spaceships from shows like 'Starblazers' and 'Astro Boy'.

JW: The works in this exhibition highlight your mastery of intricate ink line drawings. Beyond this, you also design and produce signature gig art for Viper Syndicate and other local bands. What is the core connection between your artistic and musical worlds?

RV: I've always loved both. Especially bands with a more visual or performance element. A big attraction is album cover artwork. I love albums with art on the cover. As a kid I first noticed the album covers of Iron Maiden, years before I heard their music. I love both now.

JW: In your recent works, such as *Weapon of choice*, we see the application of collage and a lot more colour. What has prompted this significant shift in technique?

RV: I've always used mixed media in my canvas painting work, so I wanted to start incorporating it into my comics. I enjoy taking chances

with my art, so using colour and collage is a new way to experiment with my comics. I would say that I have gone back to my art school roots, which was all about trying new techniques and experimenting. It keeps things interesting and fresh working that way.

JW: Have there been any other artists who have influenced this experimental journey?

RV: Mainly the American artist Bill Sienkiewicz. He uses mixed media in his work a lot.

JW: Your graphic narratives often involve apocalyptic/dystopian/horror scenes underpinned by humour. How important is the element of humour in your work?

RV: I've always liked sci-fi and horror. You can do anything you want. I like the freedom. I also love humour in comics. Most of my work has a large mix of dark comedy and satire. It's a great way to fit social commentary into my stories.

JW: In this exhibition we are introduced to some of your own characters including *Battery Hen*. Does the process of inking your own characters vary from that of inking for other artists?

RV: Not really. I do the same for both, but I probably spend more time and make more effort with other people's characters, out of respect.

JW: What is the source of inspiration for your characters?

RV: Anything and everything. I usually start with the character's name and then do visuals and personality.

JW: Over the years, you have collaborated with over twenty artists here and internationally, on various projects including your first self-publication 'Underground Spandex'. Has evolving technology and connectedness helped or hindered the collaboration process?

RV: Emailing art has been a huge benefit for me. It saves time and money. The same with social media. I now get heaps of work offered to me online. It's been great.





V=1A

JW: In 1999, your comic artwork featured in the '14th International Exhibition of Drawings' at Croatia's Museum of Modern Art alongside other artists as part of a celebration of the underground comic art movement.

In the catalogue essay, Dr Michael Hill wrote: *'In its own small way, the underground comics community not only contributes to the visual cultural life of Australia but also to an understanding of it. It adds to the ongoing critique of Australian culture and provides a healthy and relatively unregulated creative outlet. From its position on the margins its critical viewpoint is expressed with great humour. 'Taking the piss out of things' would seem an appropriate and very Australian way of describing it.'* Would you say that this is still relevant?

RV: I think so. Especially now in this increasingly PC world.

JW: How was the experience of exhibiting internationally?

RV: It was fun. I felt honoured to be included. Apparently, there was a snowstorm on the exhibition opening night in Croatia.

JW: Like many comic artists, you have self-published work to counter mainstream censorship – what for you is important about the freedom to publish content about themes, ideas and causes that you are passionate about?

RV: It's just the freedom that I enjoy. I don't want to change my art for anyone. The main reason I do art is for myself and my own enjoyment. Otherwise, it becomes 'work'.

JW: In 2003, you met John Birmingham at Artspace Mackay who commissioned you on the spot for the graphic novel adaptation of 'He died with a felafel in his hand'. How does it feel to be exhibiting back in the same space all these years later?

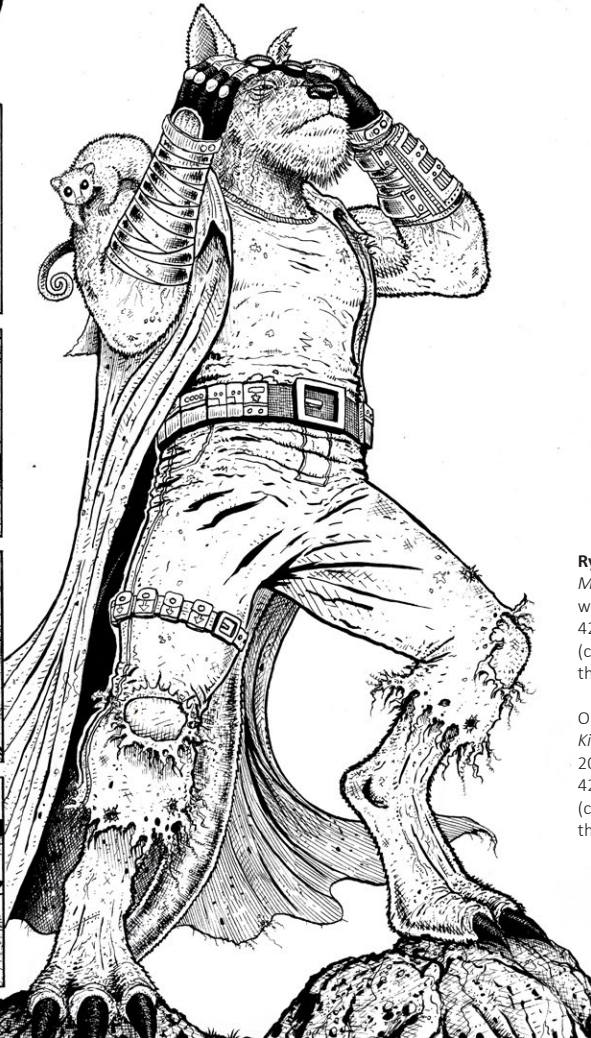
RV: It feels great! I've got so many good memories of Artspace Mackay, it will always have a special place in my heart.

JW: On this same point, did this major project have any lasting impacts on your career or practice?

RV: It has, even now. Some of the art in this exhibition is directly because of 'He died with a felafel in his hand'. I asked Gary Chaloner, the creator of Morton Stone, what work he had seen of mine. He said 'felafel'.

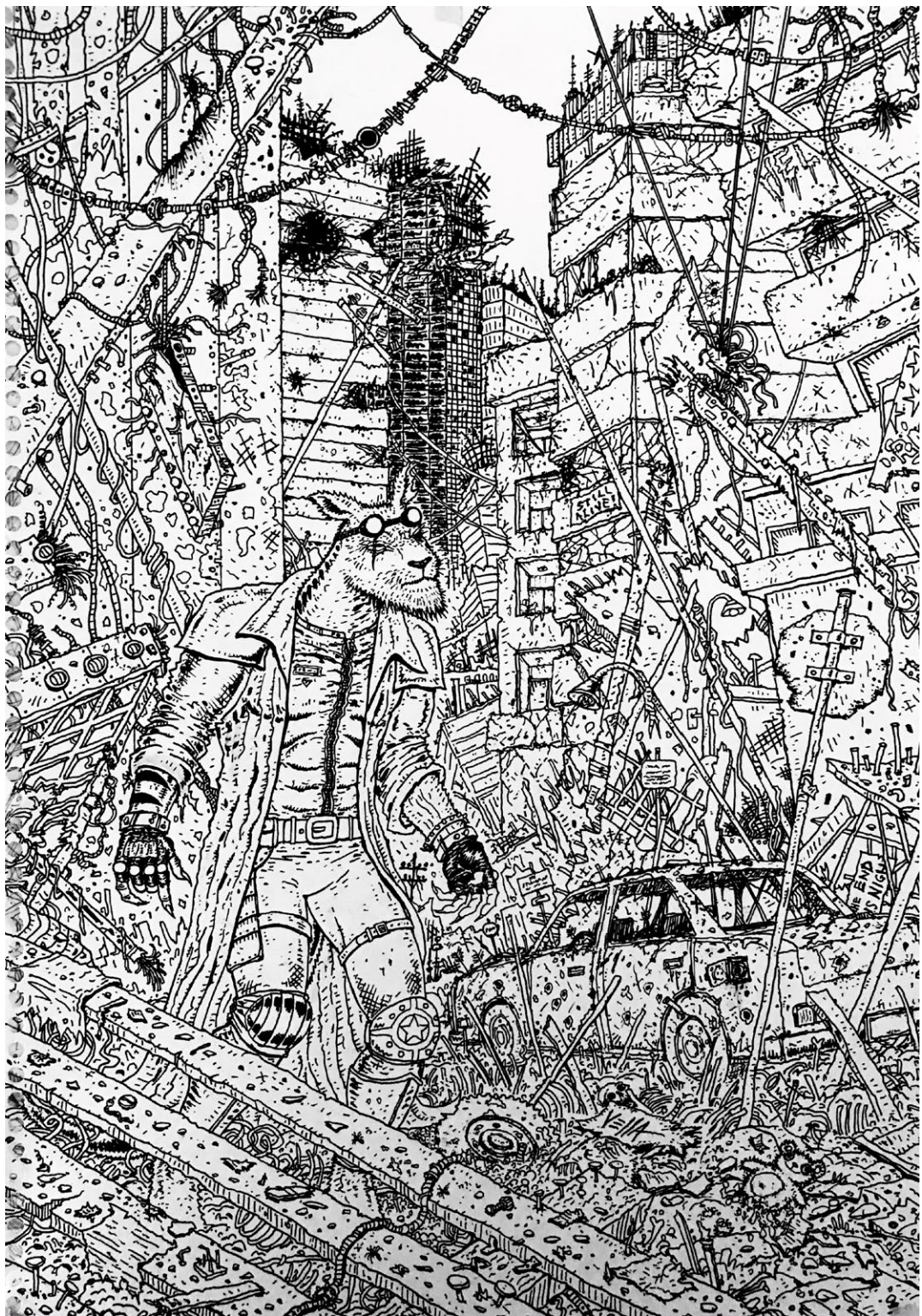
JW: Could you tell us what is next on the horizon for you, Ryan?

RV: Just more comics, and more music.



Ryan VELLA *Killeroo: Old Man Rufus* 2021, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

OPPOSITE: **Ryan VELLA** *Killeroo in City (inked)* 2021, ink on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.



BATTERY HEN

RYAN VELLA ©2022

HI, I'M BATTERY HEN.
I'M A BOUNTY HUNTER.

I'M HERE TODAY LOOKING
FOR A SPOILT RICH KID WHO
STOLE A HIGHLY UNSTABLE
EXPERIMENTAL ENERGY
GUN FROM THE ARMY.



I'VE TRACKED HIM TO THIS AREA. HMMM... HE'S GOTTA BE AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.



YIKES!

LEAVE ME ALONE!

ZZZRT!



WHOA!
HEY, THAT GUN IS REALLY DANGEROUS. IT MIGHT OVERHEAT AND EXPLODE. YOU GOTTA STOP USING IT!

GET LOST!
YOU'RE LYING!
YOU JUST WANT IT FOR YOURSELF!



THAT WAS CLOSE.

YOU CAN'T STOP ME!
I'M THE HOTSHOT KID!

ZZZRT!



THE END



RYAN VELLA: UNDERGROUND SPANDEX

LIST OF WORKS

Ryan VELLA *Morton Stone: undertaker* 2021, ink, acrylic and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.5cm. Gary CHALONER (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *G'nort* 2022, ink, acrylic and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. J.M. DEMATTEIS and Keith GIFFEN (creators). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Ghost Rider* 2022, ink, acrylic, whiteout and colour marker on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Roy THOMAS, Mike PLOOG and Gary FRIEDRICH (creators). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Reverend Frank* 2021, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Leigh CHALKER (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Skye* 2022, ink, acrylic and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Peter LANE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *The Phantom* 2021, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Lee FALK (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Killeroo* 2021, ink on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Killeroo: Old Man Rufus* 2021, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *The Creeper* 2022, ink, watercolour, acrylic, colour marker and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Steve DITKO (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Guy Gardner* 2022, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Gil KANE and John BROOME (creators). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Spacecreeps* 2021, ink and acrylic and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Ryan VELLA and Leigh CHALKER (creators). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *The Jackaroo and Flash* 2021, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Gary CHALONER (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *The Southern Squadron* 2022, ink, acrylic, collage and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. David DE VRIES (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Sydris (two pages)* 2021, ink, acrylic, whiteout and photocopy print on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Shane SYDDALL (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Sydris title page* 2021, ink on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Shane SYDDALL (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Battery Hen* 2021, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Ryan VELLA (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Battery Hen Page 1* 2021, ink and whiteout on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Ryan VELLA (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Battery Hen: Hotshot Kid (two pages)* 2022, ink, pencil, colour markers, acrylic and white out on paper, 42 x 29.7cm each. Ryan VELLA (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Weapon of Choice (two pages)* 2022, ink, pencil, acrylic, watercolour, colour markers, white out, string and feathers on paper, 42 x 29.7cm each. Ryan VELLA (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Killeroo and Pets* 2021, ink on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Killeroo in City* 2021, pencil on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Killeroo in City* 2021, ink on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Darren CLOSE (creator). Image courtesy the artist.

Ryan VELLA *Ghost Rider* 2022, ink, acrylic, whiteout and colour marker on paper, 42 x 29.7cm. Roy THOMAS, Mike PLOOG and Gary FRIEDRICH (creators). Image courtesy the artist.

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ARTSPACE MACKAY, Civic Precinct, Gordon Street
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www.artspacemackay.com.au

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