

# *Five rooms and house rules*



Hilary Jackman, *Link*, 2021. Installation view, Working at Heights.

## **Can we open windows?**

*Our windows are sealed shut due to the climate control system which maintains both temperature and humidity to museum standards.*

## **Can we hang artworks over gallery doors?**

*Internal doors on level two are closed and locked at the end of each day as a security measure.*

## **Can things be placed on the fireplace mantles?**

*The thing to consider is the varnish on the timber, ideally an object won't interfere with that finish.*

## **Are we able to access the verandah?**

*The verandah isn't safe for public access as balustrade heights no longer comply with the state building code.*

**If the keyboard isn't tagged and tested by Saturday the 14th, can it still be turned on for the opening?**

...

Yet in recognising these economies of difference, and through close discussions with each of the artists and the Homestead staff, a set of productive synchronicities and opportunities presented themselves.

As a WAH group exhibition, *Five rooms and house rules* extends on the response required at its original location. By navigating the structural affordances and infrastructure constraints of a late 19th century Homestead, each artist has developed new work that negotiates with the ordinances and laws (written and unwritten) that govern the exhibition spaces and their use of them. This navigation was a slow-moving process that involved exploring balustrade and ceiling heights, balcony access and window fixtures, as well as the precious walls and their picture rail systems. Some of the resulting works are responsive and assimilative, allowing introduced materials and forms to overlap with the decorative detailing of the building. Others exist as calculated interruptions, achieved through extending or exaggerating the rules and protective measures already in place. As a WAH group exhibition, this mix of individual responses, in spite of the rules and regardless of the number of rooms, is consistent with the characteristic spirit of the program as a whole.

- Tim Woodward

*Five rooms and house rules*  
14 September - 23 November 2024  
Bundoorra Homestead Art Centre

Featuring Steven Bellosquardo,  
Jessie Bullivant, Mitchel Cumming,  
Hilary Jackman, Erika Scott, Rachel  
Schenberg, Lily Skipper and Charlie  
Sofa. Curated by Tim Woodward.



**Bundoorra  
Homestead  
Art Centre**

*Five rooms and house rules* is a Working at Heights exhibition. It's an offshoot of a program of one-night exhibitions and events that I began in 2021, hosted by the Northcote-based studio complex Artery Cooperative. At this primary studio location, Working at Heights (WAH) utilises a large three-tiered storage shelf on the ground floor of an industrial warehouse. The physical attributes of this site make it an unlikely gallery, establishing a dynamic of response from invited artists who often navigate the practical challenges of its architectural setting.

When describing the WAH exhibition model to an invited artist, over the course of the conversation I'll find myself saying some variation of the line "and it's possible for all of this to be very easy...", and then afterwards feel an immediate need to clarify. What is easy about WAH? What ease am I passing off as valuable, or as a condition worth protecting? Because as a matter of course, WAH isn't an easy space to work with. There's a giant set of shelves to contend with, the gallery is taller than it is wide, and wall-space is in short supply. Yet in spite of its idiosyncrasies and unconventional setting, I suspect the easiness I'm alluding to is that a WAH invitation arrives largely without rules or restrictions. Once an exhibition date has been set, on that day an artist can do more-or-less whatever they wish. They're encouraged to respond to the tiered shelving in some way, but even this is often ignored as a loose expectation. And so while the name might suggest a code of compliance, when working at WAH, there are actually no strict conditions to be met.

*Five rooms and house rules* is a Working at Heights exhibition. It feels important saying this again because at times, especially in the earliest days of planning and discussing possibilities, it seemed unlikely that it could be. Bundoorra Homestead is a building of small compromise. The heavy Victorian interiors threaten to overpower anything freshly introduced, and a strict heritage overlay adds muscle to the threat. On top of heritage restrictions, Bundoorra Homestead Art Centre is the public art gallery of the City of Darebin, and so the carefulness of Councils means even seemingly innocuous decisions need to be sieved through some bureaucratic red tape.