

MARTIN JOHN LEE

Artist Statement

*"I'm Captain Moonlite, and I'm afraid of no one!"**

Bushrangers hold a special place in the Australian colonial narrative: they are heroes, villains, icons, and romantic myths. The novelist Peter Carey observed that when we think of Australia's most famous bushranger Ned Kelly, the majority of us know some of the factual history of his life, but where there are gaps we "invent and make-up stories".

Kelly was a contemporary of Andrew George Scott (1842-1880), the bushranger known as 'Captain Moonlite'. In 1869 Scott was serving as an Anglican lay preacher, when it is alleged that, under the Captain Moonlite pseudonym, he robbed the Mount Egerton Bank. He evaded arrest for a number of years but was arrested in Sydney in 1872 and sent back to Victoria, where he was sentenced to hard labour in HM Prison Pentridge.

After his release from prison, Scott attempted to live a respectable life, but due to his criminal record, struggled to find employment. So, in 1879 he gathered a gang of young men and took to bushranging in north east Victoria. During a shootout with police at Wantabadgery Station near Wagga Wagga in NSW, one gang member, James Nesbitt, was fatally shot. Scott was captured and in Sydney he was hanged for his crimes.

Birds do, bees do it, even bearded Australian bushrangers do it.

There has been much interest in the life of Captain Moonlite in recent years, and especially in his relationship with James Nesbitt. Based on eyewitness accounts of Scott's anguish at Nesbitt's death, and his later prison correspondence, it's clear the two men were lovers. When Scott went to the gallows, he wore a ring fashioned from a lock of Nesbitt's hair, and his final wish was "...to be buried beside my beloved James Nesbitt, the man with whom I was united by every tie which could bind human friendship, we were one in hopes, in heart and soul and this unity lasted until he died in my arms."

*"So, you're Captain Moonlite? Well, you aren't what I expected you to be..."**

The Captain Moonlite that I depict is indeed my hero, my villain, my icon, and my romantic myth. He embodies bushranger folklore and yet mocks it. *Moonlite makes Camp* reimagines the enigmatic life of Andrew George Scott. The scenarios portrayed in these images blur the lines between historical fact and fiction, weaving in contemporary queer references and deliberate distortions. These works playfully explore and propose a historical narrative that is as truthful as I, the queer storyteller, decide it should be.

**Quotes are from the 1940s radio drama series 'Rogues Gallery', produced by Dorothy Crawford and written by Rex Rientis. The series recounted "the shameful lives of famous scoundrels". Captain Moonlite was the subject of the series' first episode.*

Curriculum Vitae

Education

- 2019 Master of Contemporary Art, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne
- 2017 Graduate Certificate in Visual Art, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne
- 2007 Bachelor of Applied Science, Honours, University of Ballarat
- 1992 Bachelor of Art (Ceramic Design), Monash University, Melbourne

Solo exhibitions

- 2022 *PERFECTION*, Brunswick Temporary, Brunswick
- 2022 *Self(ie) Pride*, Phee Broadway, Castlemaine; Goldfields Centre, Maryborough; and Dudley House, Bendigo, as part of Melbourne Pride
- 2021 *RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW (coming soon)*, Wide Open Road Art, Castlemaine
- 2021 *PLAY ON*, Camp Reserve, Castlemaine
- 2021 *An Ode to Bushrangers and Buggery*, The Vault, Arts Hub, Bendigo

Selected group exhibitions

- 2025 *On The Run*, at We're Serious, Let's Play, Radical Fields Harvest Day, Glenlyon
- 2025 *Midsumma and Australia Post Art Award (Finalist)*, No Vacancy Gallery, Melbourne
- 2025 *SOULS*, Midsumma Festival, SOL Gallery, Fitzroy
- 2024 *Art Prize 2024*, Hue & Cry Gallery, Geelong
- 2024 *No Vacancy Annual Group Show*, No Vacancy Gallery, Melbourne
- 2024 *The Robots are Coming*, curated by Ivan Sun, Dudley House, Bendigo
- 2024 *SEX*, curated by Natham Sims, SOL Gallery, Fitzroy
- 2024 *Queer Country*, curated by Natham Sims, Dudley House, Bendigo
- 2024 *Moonlite*, at We're Serious, Let's Play, Radical Fields Harvest Day, Glenlyon
- 2022 *Midsumma and Australia Post Art Award (Finalist)*, No Vacancy Gallery, Melbourne.
- 2022 *ILFORD CCP Salon*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Fitzroy, Victoria.
- 2021 *Midsumma and Australia Post Art Award (Finalist)*, No Vacancy Gallery, Melbourne
- 2021 *Contemporary AF*, Mission to Seafarers, Victoria Docklands, Melbourne
- 2020 *Bulleke-bek Brunswick International Screen Marathon*, GalleryGallery Inc, Brunswick
- 2018 *Whatever Doesn't Works*, curated by Dr. Masato Takasaka, Assembly Point Guild, Melbourne
- 2018 *Embodied Materialities*, curated by Dr. Kate Just, Assembly Point Guild, Melbourne
- 2017 *The Readymade*, CASPA Gallery, Castlemaine
- 2017 *Parameters/Framework*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne

Publications

- 2025 *Queer today, gone tomorrow* – Queries Journal No.2, edited by Helen Back, <https://www.queriesjournal.com>
- 2024 *Out-Side: Queer Words and Art from Regional Victoria* – Edited by Michael Earp. Published by Q-lit: Victoria's Queer Festival of Words
- 2024 *Big Book of Queer Bendigo* – Edited by John Richards. Published by Bendigo Queer Arts Festival Inc.
- 2021 *Where art meets... footy!* – Midland Express, Tuesday March 30, cover story by Eve Lamb

Miscellaneous

- 2022 *Still Life With Pansy*, 94.9 MainFm host of queer art community radio show (ongoing)
- 2022 *Cover art for 'Riptide'*, Issue 6 of 'Tales from Outer Suburbia' by Thomas Vowles
- 2022 *Cover art for 'Suburban Angel'*, Issue 4 of Tales from Outer Suburbia by Thomas Vowles
- 2021 *Melbourne International Film Festival*, PLAY ON, Festival Hub, Theatre Royal, Castlemaine
- 2020 *Album artwork for 'Smythesdale'*, an online EP release by Wally Gunn
- 2019 *Majlis Encouragement Award*, VCA Graduate Show.
- 2018 *Insert-Self-Here (ISH)*, Co-curator of Queer Arts, Ideas & Activism program, Castlemaine