

all THE
WORLD'S
MEMORIES

UNSW Galleries



Nick FitzPatrick, *Signs (Descendence)* 2025

Nick FitzPatrick
James Gatt

*Images are dangerous.*¹

Keenly aware of the influence of images, Nick FitzPatrick has developed a practice that implores us to become more discerning consumers of visual material; to be better decoders of the latent psychological and political effects planted insidiously between obfuscating layers of seductive imagery; and to question our relationship to 'truth'. Having left commercial photography and graphic design in 2020, he understands how ideologies, intentions, biases, and mistruths are embedded in the process of constructing images, as well as how they are carried and disseminated effortlessly between contexts, subsequently producing knowledge. Aptly, a recurring strategy since then has involved dissecting printed imagery into multi-panel compositions that he assembles in frames or as wall paste-ups. These form two ongoing projects titled *Document 2018–* and *Signs 2019–*, respectively.

What I read initially in these series as fragmentation, FitzPatrick beautifully describes as "chorus",² registering his printed assemblies as pluralistic, polyphonic rhizomes. Derived from the multiple, such compositions are contingent upon communion and, for *Signs*, are variably determined by installation conditions. Further, to read the overall picture, we must mentally suture the components, mindful of each sheet's contribution, thus becoming active agents in the construction of FitzPatrick's images. What is suggested through deconstruction here is that singular or total truths do not exist, and that meaning is shaped by multiplicity and interpretation.

For *Document (Swan River) 2025*, FitzPatrick divides a black-and-white photograph of the titular river across 36 A4 sheets, reifying an otherwise 'sublime' image by subjecting it to the

organisational logic of the grid, with the allure of the river's pictorial depth supplanted by a lateral composite view. A cheeky tautology is at play here that likens the seductive surface of the water to superficial readings of its image.

In *Signs (Descendence)* 2025, FitzPatrick reproduces hallelujah in Hebrew and alhamdulillah in Arabic, interjections expressing thanks or praise to God as two site-specific paste-ups that traverse entire walls, bringing his image-critique to language. Hundreds (previously close to 1,000) of digitally printed A4 sheets are assembled from piles of documents into single typographic images that become prominent yet integrated features of installation sites. These pictorial and spatiotemporal 'fields' recall the political and advertising cultures of paste-ups, as well as the file storage of archives.

At this nexus of politics, advertising, and archives sits Michel Foucault's critical musings on the relationship between power and knowledge; he writes that the two "directly imply one another; ... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations".³ We find these 'fields of knowledge' in the archive, which Foucault defines as "first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events".⁴ On the archive, Foucault writes:

Far from being that which unifies everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse, far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of preserved discourse, [the archive] is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration.⁵

Interestingly, Foucault supports his critique of power by employing the image of the panopticon, an architectural concept for a prison featuring a central tower from which guards can observe inmates without reciprocal view. Indeed, systems of knowledge and power, including archives, are as much about what isn't permitted—what we don't see and are, thus, less likely to know. For Foucault, such systems produce internalised surveillance in individuals. Produced using bold, sans-serif fonts, FitzPatrick's graphics make brutalist buildings of the Arabic and Hebrew words, establishing a tension between their 'concrete' artifice and relative etymological fluidity. Imagined as architectures—as panopticons—these pictured words speak to the ways inherited languages structure our engagements with the world, cautioning against singular fixations.

FitzPatrick's multi-panel images function as subversive fields of knowledge, establishing contingencies of truth within otherwise predetermined inheritances of information. By amplifying the process of construction, he alludes to the evolution of meaning over time. Furthermore, by deconstructing inherited cultures of communication, FitzPatrick opens fields of knowledge to differentiation and multiplicity, keeping meaning open and resistant to the dangers of hegemonic constructions.

James Gatt is a curator, writer and currently Curator, Contemporary Art at Sydney Opera House for Vivid: Lighting of the Sails, and Director, Curatorial for Circle LLC.

1. Nick FitzPatrick, in conversation with the author, 15 December 2025, Naarm/Melbourne.
2. Ibid.
3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*, Vintage Books, New York, 1995, p 27.
4. Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972, p 129.
5. Ibid.

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We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend this respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all nations of Australia.

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