

GLASSHOUSE PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL GALLERY



**Liam Benson**

# YOU ALREADY KNOW

5 February – 24 April 2022

# Liam Benson

It is with great pleasure that the Glasshouse Regional Gallery presents *You Already Know*, an exhibition by our 2021 Artist in Residence, Liam Benson.

This exhibition continues the Glasshouse Regional Gallery's commitment to supporting contemporary Australian artists, by providing opportunities to develop new work and present quality artistic experiences for our community and visitors to our region.

*You Already Know* is an exciting exhibition that incorporates performance, photography, video, textiles and collaboration. A sense of place and connection is at the very centre of this exhibition, as it explores how we connect to one another, how we connect as a community, and how we connect culturally.

Last year, the year that many hoped would be a year free of COVID restrictions, presented more challenges for artists and institutions than one could possibly envisage. Liam, once asked to be a part of our residency program, not only pivoted and shifted—but also opened up the way that we were able to provide connection and unpack it with our community through a series of online opportunities. These online engagements explored the idea of how we collect, remember and share important memories that shape our local identity, this digital workaround later extended into in person sessions hosted here at the Glasshouse. From these sessions came a new work titled *Visual Mapping Local Identity*, a wonderful collaboration work facilitated by Liam.

There is something really special about the relationship between a curator and an artist when they embark upon a new exhibition. With collaboration and friendship at its centre, this exhibition was a real testament to that.

I would like to sincerely thank Liam for his infectious and driven work ethic, and for creating such a stunning body of work.

I would like to thank Lizzy Marshall for her thoughtful portrayal of Liam's practice and work contained in the following essay.

## **Bridget Purtil**

Gallery Curator  
Glasshouse Regional Gallery



*“Every identity we have experienced is neither fully present, nor fully erased.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Mapping Silence**

As children, we can often struggle to make sense of the silence of a parent. The silence can fill us with fear or the silence can form a comfort.

As adults, we can gain clarity about the silence of a parent. We have grown and can appreciate the complexities of life that the silence hides.

In the passing of a parent, we further appreciate that those silences are a wealth of untold stories that we are left to piece together.

This is at the heart of understanding not only Liam Benson's works, but also the skill of his art-making process. That is, he is comfortable with others' silence. He creates a space that is safe for silence until the stories are willing to be told, unfolded, and shared. Silence and storytelling do not usually go hand in hand, however, in a safe space, one can bequeath the other. To contextualise Benson's practice

Visual Mapping engagement sessions, 2022, Glasshouse Regional Gallery, photograph by Ronnie Grammatica *You Already Know*, film location shot, filmed on Dharug Country, 2022





is to understand that he draws on others' silences through an autoethnographic process encapsulating emergent identities. This is a complex understanding that is nuanced and subtle, that maps silence to eventuate in storytelling. Whether it be his own story, his father's, or ongoing collaborative works within communities. The strength of the autoethnographic process is that the emotive experiences are as relevant as quantitative research, by analysing personal reflections to understand the cultural, political, and social. Hence, we find that there are similar experiences across communities that are often not identified through traditional research processes. Furthermore, emergent identities draw on the knowledge that we are not singular perspectives. We are a composite of continually reconciling our internal expectations, external performative actions, societal projections, and the situation at hand. How these are affirmed formulates the emergent identity – it is fragile, contested, and reframed. Consequently, Benson's artworks are compressed narratives that

remove the singular authorial voice providing an understanding of culture as more complex than a binary of insiders and outsiders.

*You Already Know* is a survey of Benson's work which maps emergent identities encapsulating newly created works, existing community works, and a geo-specific community installation arising from the artist's Glasshouse residency. Collectively these works traverse the present and attempt to recover the past. As part of his residency, Benson explored his relationship with his late father, his relationship with his emergent identity as a queer male, and community collectives. The exhibition title is ambiguous and if said by another could be accusatory and threatening. Although read in a different light it is also assertive, uncompromising, confident, and comforting. One is an external projection and the other is an internal reflection. Reconciling the internal with the external is core to the processing of our emergent identities and ultimately Benson's art.

Inspired by the beautiful compassion and understanding for a quiet father, Liam has stitched fragments of memories into autoethnographic artworks that formulate identity: his fathers, his own, and broader community members. The exhibition was inspired by the untold stories relating to Benson's father's tattoos. For the young Benson Sr., these tattoos were pictorial references to an early career as a radar operator on the HSMAS Otway that mapped his place within the submariner community. When tracing the photographic references the artist noted that the tattoos are present then later surgically erased. Outside of the military career, the tattoos were not conducive to the 1970s socially acceptable norms. This presence and erasure become a metaphor for Benson's exhibition for exploring the complexities of emergent identities.

Silence for a young male making sense of his queerness within regional Australia was both a cover and compliance for the artist. Not a unique experience for members of the



*Chorus*, 2021–2022, sequins, seed beads, cotton, organza, tulle, 180 x 140cm



LGBTQI+ community coming of age. For the artist, *You Already Know* encompasses the inherent knowledge that he already knew his queer identity without a physical community to mirror or provide affirmation but as he explains “you think it and feel it.”<sup>2</sup> *You Already Know* was the brave internal reflection and validation for the coming of age artist and becomes a mantra for the exhibition.

Over the expanse of his multi-discipline practice, Benson’s art has naturally gravitated to the ubiquitous splendour of queer visibility through the use of sequins. Sequins and queerness have a strong history which is metaphorical as much for their visibility as it is for obscuring view. Queerness is an ambiguous term that never quite satisfies societies’ need for clear definitions of identity. The shifting dynamics of play of light through sequins are the perfect medium for carrying the idea of queerness and emergent identities. Sequins simultaneously attract the eye and can equally repel as they draw attention to the very artificiality of socially constructed

norms. Identity as an emergent process shifts and oscillates just as the light encountering sequins moves. We are never wholly in view, we are never wholly one thing or not. No person is a summation of their past.

The use of sequins to highlight and celebrate the historically marginalised queer culture is expanded through Benson’s works within the exhibition to be inclusive of other marginalised and silent voices. That he shares this space with others to be inclusive of the stitching of stories we begin to understand the complexities of contemporary society. Stitching as an accumulation of knowledge and connection: to be seen and to be heard, thus breaking the silences. In this way, Benson’s practice is both process and product, grounding meaning that is accessible and evocative which deepens our capacity to empathise.

Within his residency, Benson returned to the history of his father’s tattoos for a community call-out. And with all the best

of socially engaged practices, there can be no premeditation on the responses. When connecting with this community, Benson found that whilst tattoos may have been the collective calling, what resulted was a community of emerging identities all as unique as the individuals themselves, but collective in the locale. This process of shared experiences depicted through the exhibition installation revealed that the local area is home to recent residents who are forming a connection to this place. In a recent conversation with the artist, he explained that many people had moved internationally and are looking for a sense of place through a local identity.

The thread of silences and untold stories provides the foundation for Benson’s work: his practice for interweaving past, present and future may be disjointed, non-chronological, conflicted and ambiguous, but it is also affirming, inclusive, and furthering our understanding of contemporary society.

### Lizzy Marshall

Independent Curator, Writer, Educator

<sup>1</sup> IMPRESSIONS OF GRANDMOTHER An Autoethnographic Portrait CAROL RAMBO, University of Memphis, Impressions\_of\_GrandmotherAn\_Autoethnographic\_Port.pdf, retrieved 3 January, 2022

<sup>2</sup> L Benson interviewed by author, Sydney, 12 January, 2022



# Biography

Liam Benson is a multi-disciplinary artist whose practice incorporates performance, photography, video and textiles. Benson's work explores identity and culture as a living dualistic process which is both informed by and challenges historical, political, and social consciousness and the representation of this exchange through iconography. Liam's practice is

informed by working collaboratively with diverse communities through an ongoing conversation about how culture, sub-culture and identity interrelate and evolve. Liam Benson's works are held in significant public and private collections including The MCA Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia, Artbank and Western Sydney University.



*Going Home*, 2019. Digital Image on adhesive vinyl. 500x333cm  
Photographed by Ross Waldron. Image photographed on Dharug Country

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# List of works

## New Works

Socially engaged textile collaboration, *Visual Mapping Local Identity*, 2021–2022  
tulle, organza, chiffon, pins, beads, cotton, sequins. Facilitated by Liam Benson, a socially engaged textile collaboration.

*Chorus*, 2021–2022  
sequins, seed beads, cotton, organza, tulle.  
180 x 140cm

*Residual Ballad*, 2021–2022  
sequins, seed beads, cotton, organza, tulle.  
180 x 140cm

*You Already Know – Follow*, 2021–2022  
*You Already Know – Echo*, 2021–2022  
dual screen video. Duration 3:37. Camera and sound recording by Craig Bender and Vera Hong. Filmed on Dharug Country.

*Solus Embraced*, 2020–2022  
metallic thread, sequins, seed beads, cotton, organza, tulle. 210 x 140cm

*Both (Thoughts and Prayers Series)*, 2022  
glass seed and bugle beads, sequins, cotton, organza, bamboo embroidery hoop, crystal diamantes. 8.5cm diameter.

*Grace (Thoughts and Prayers Series)*, 2022  
glass seed and bugle beads, sequins, cotton, organza, bamboo embroidery hoop, crystal diamantes. 11.5cm diameter.

## Existing works

*Colonial Burn Line*, 2020  
sequins, seed beads, glass beads, bugle beads, cotton thread, organza. 150 x 120cm

*Deliquescent Jack*, 2020  
sequins, glass beads, acrylic beads, cotton thread, organza. 90 x 51cm

*Going Home*, 2019  
digital image. 500 x 333cm  
Photographed by Ross Waldron. Image photographed on Dharug Country

Community Participatory Embroidery, *Thoughts and Prayers*, 2015–2018  
Facilitated by Liam Benson.  
glass and acrylic seed beads, bugle beads, sequins, cotton, tulle. 280cm x 300cm

*I Think About You All The Time*, 2017  
glass beads, seed beads, gemstones, cotton, fishing wire, ribbon. 180 x 164cm

*Memory (Thoughts and Prayers Series)*, 2017  
glass seed and bugle beads, sequins, cotton, organza, bamboo embroidery hoop, crystal diamantes. 16.5cm diameter.

*New (Thoughts and Prayers Series)*, 2017  
glass seed and bugle beads, sequins, cotton, organza, bamboo embroidery hoop, crystal diamantes. 8.5cm diameter.

*I Know (Thoughts and Prayers Series)*, 2017  
glass seed and bugle beads, sequins, cotton, organza, bamboo embroidery hoop, crystal diamantes. 11cm diameter.

*Same (Thoughts and Prayers Series)*, 2017  
glass seed and bugle beads, sequins, cotton, organza, bamboo embroidery hoop, crystal diamantes. 11.5cm diameter.

All images courtesy of the artist | [www.liambenson.net](http://www.liambenson.net)

## GLASSHOUSE PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL GALLERY

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### YOU ALREADY KNOW: LIAM BENSON

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Cover image: *You Already Know, Echo*, detail, 2021-2022

We acknowledge the collaboration process that has been shared across Dharug and Birpai Country.

Special thanks to the Glasshouse team for all their efforts and collaborations to make this exhibition successful.

A Glasshouse Gallery Initiative.

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### GALLERY OPENING HOURS

Mondays: Closed | Tuesday - Friday: 10am - 4pm |  
Saturday & Sunday: 10am - 2pm



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