

PUBLIC WORKS

Lyn Ashby, *The Light Down Here*, 2019. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection, Queensland. Purchased through the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal Fund, 2020.

Bronwyn Watson

When Lyn Ashby was growing up, he carried around a small French language dictionary in his back pocket at a time when he was “too young to know what this resource really was,” he says. “I simply loved the idea of having a book, a small portable book, available at all times that I could refer to whenever the fancy took me, that would somehow offer me insight into my present experience and, by referring to another or bigger world, translate it into something both exotic and useful.”

For Ashby, books offered both “mystery and transformation”, and given this fascination, it is perhaps not surprising his art practice would include books. His artist’s books are held in international and Australian collections such as the Victoria & Albert Museum, and Tate Britain, in London, the New York Public Library, the Vilnius Bokartas Artists Book Collection in Lithuania, the National Gallery of Australia, and state libraries in South Australia, NSW, Queensland, and Victoria. Several of his artist’s books are also in the collection of the Mackay Regional Council in north Queensland. One of those is *The Light Down Here*, from 2019, a small-edition run, printed digitally, that was inspired by Greek philosopher Plato’s treatise *The Allegory of the Cave* in *The Republic*.

Artspace Mackay director Tracey Heathwood says *The Light Down Here* is told through the story of a group of people chained inside a cave all their lives and facing a blank wall. All they can see are shadows, caused by objects out of their sight. For the prisoners, the shadows are their reality as they never suspect the existence of a wider world outside the cave.

“Plato uses this allegory to compare the effect of education and the lack of it on our nature,” Heathwood says. “In Ashby’s pages, viewers see a birds’ eye view of photographed figures who are casting shadows. From above, the viewer’s perspective is limited and, as the pages go on, figures and their shadows are more visibly manipulated by the artist.”

In 2020, *The Light Down Here* was highly commended in the Libris Awards: The Australian Artists’ Book Prize, a biennial prize held at Artspace Mackay. “We’ve been collecting Lyn’s artist’s books for some time,” Heathwood says. “This work immediately stood out among the 2020 finalists’ entries. It is an immense collage of thousands of images of people and their shadows as they go about their everyday activities. As if tracking the course of the sun over a single day, the shadows shift from one page to the next, completely transforming the human forms and inviting a new imagining of their intersecting stories.”



Materials: digital prints on Hahnemulle paper, edition 5/50
Dimensions: 33 x 24 x 1 cm (closed)