

PATRICIA PICCININI

Holding Tight and Letting Go

Ames Yavuz

Opening reception: 4 June 2026, 6-8pm

On view: 4 June - 11 July 2026

Location: Ames Yavuz, London, 31 Grosvenor Hill, London W1K 3QU

Ames Yavuz presents *Holding Tight and Letting Go*, an exhibition by Patricia Piccinini which marks the artist's first presentation with the gallery in London.

Holding Tight and Letting Go centres around the idea of kinship; how our human relationships with our family, friends, and the natural world, whether organic or artificial, intertwine. Kinship, in Piccinini's work, is never straightforward. The Australian artist has built a practice around beings that exist at the boundary between biology and imagination. Her humanoid chimeras are rendered in silicone, fibreglass, and human hair with an anatomical fidelity that is, at once, disarming yet tender. Her figures trigger something almost parental; the soft skin, the gentle eyes, the rounded proportions read, perhaps against one's better reasoning, as vulnerable.

Narratively, *Holding Tight and Letting Go* is grounded by the notion of empathy. The six works in this exhibition ask what it means to bear responsibility for the lives around us; those we have brought into the world, cared for (or even damaged), and those whom we have simply failed to recognize as worthy of care. The works themselves are informed by a myriad of memories, mythologies, and histories; Mary Shelley's mythos of creation and abandonment, the human-caused extinction of the thylacine, the Australian bushfires of 2020, a Thomas Kennington painting from 1890, Piccinini's own experience of motherhood—and yet, what the works do with this source material is transform it entirely. The references distil into a menagerie that is self-contained and anti-didactic, and the verdict of what to do with or how to feel about these creatures is very much always the viewer's own.

Holding Tight and Letting Go holds two currents in tension. On one side sits what Piccinini calls 'speculative optimism,' an image-making practice oriented towards a possible, rather than an inevitable future, in which acts of care between humans and the natural world are presented not as they are, but as they could or should be. On the other side runs an ominous, more nuanced argument: that cruelty, tragedy, and violence, much like tenderness, can also be transmitted in lieu of empathy.

It is in this fluctuation between optimism and warning that the crux of Piccinini's practice becomes most apparent. Much like her figures hold the human and the animal in an unresolved tension, the ethical subtexts of her work also deny the viewer an easy reconciliation. The discomfort and the tenderness are inseparable, as are nature versus nurture, as are human versus animal. Piccinini's work exists, and flourishes, in the irreconcilable spaces between.

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Selected Works



Patricia Piccinini, *The Couple*, 2018, Linen, silicone, hair, fibreglass, 42 x 168 x 65 cm, Edition API of 3 + 1 AP



Patricia Piccinini, *The Rescuers*, 2021, Silicone, Fibreglass, hair, clothing, washing basket, animal bandages, 158 x 68 x 95cm, Edition: 3 of 3 + 1 AP

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About the artist

Patricia Piccinini (b. 1965, Freetown, Sierra Leone) is one of Australia's most significant contemporary artists, whose practice taps into a fundamental human curiosity: who we are in the world, and how we as humans situate ourselves within our personal relationships and the natural world at large. Working both within and against the hyperrealist sculpture tradition, Piccinini has staked out territory that feels increasingly urgent. Her hybrid figures anticipate the transhumanist questions reshaping biotechnology, genetic science, and artificial intelligence: what forms will future life take, and, crucially, what might it mean to bear responsibility for the lives we create?

Piccinini is renowned for her sculptures of hybrid humanoid creatures; both human and animal, endearing and grotesque. She works meticulously with silicone, fibreglass, and human hair to render chimeric beings with soft skin and soulful eyes. Upon further inspection, animalistic features, maybe gnarled hooves, scaled limbs, or webbed extremities, become apparent. These details are rendered with an anatomical verity that pitch the work squarely into the uncanny valley—that is, the perceptual threshold at which not-quite-human likenesses trigger a sense of unease. Initially disarming, and even eliciting abjection, Piccinini's works gradually evoke a softer, almost familiar quality of tenderness.

As the artist herself has noted, "many have looked at my practice in terms of science and technology, however, for me it is just as informed by Surrealism and mythology. My work aims to shift the way that people look at the world around them and question their assumptions about the relationships they have with the world." Piccinini's works ultimately pose the question of what obligations of care and recognition we bear toward the beings, whether created, evolved, or imagined, that we share the world with.

Representing Australia at the 2003 Venice Biennale, Piccinini debuted the critically acclaimed *We are Family*, a project that transformed the pavilion into a home of the future, expressing her fascination with the relationship between what is considered natural and what is considered artificial. Other major projects include the 2016 sculpture *Graham*, in which Piccinini was commissioned by the Transport Accident Commission in collaboration with medical experts that depicted a hypothetical human body re-engineered to survive high-speed collision, which became a global media phenomenon. Piccinini has exhibited widely across major international institutions, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, and Museum MACAN, Jakarta, and has participated in numerous biennales, including Gwangju (2000), Berlin (2001), Liverpool (2002), Sydney (2002), and Chengdu (2026). Her solo survey exhibition *ComCiência*, which toured four cities across Brazil, was named the most popular contemporary art exhibition of 2016 by *The Art Newspaper*. Most recently, *Care* (Museum MACAN, 2024) and *Metamorphosis* (Kunsthil Rotterdam, 2023) have continued to extend her reach across Asia and Europe.

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About the gallery

Ames Yavuz embraces its diverse cultural background through a strong international focus and perspective. The gallery's vision is underpinned by robust curatorial practices that form the core of our program and foster intercultural discourse on a global scale.

Representing a wide range of multidisciplinary artists across continents, Ames Yavuz aims to challenge, inspire, and reclaim through art. The gallery provides a platform for transformative and compelling artistic voices who bring care and attention to the most urgent conversations of our time, and celebrates storytelling with authenticity, innovation and wit.

For further information on the artists and the works, please contact:
press@amesyavuz.com

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SINGAPORE 9 Lock Road #02-23 Singapore 108937 +65 6734 3262
SYDNEY | GADIGAL 114 Commonwealth Street, NSW 2010 Australia +61 (2) 8040 8838
LONDON 31 Grosvenor Hill, London, W1K 3QU, United Kingdom
www.amesyavuz.com

AMES YAVUZ