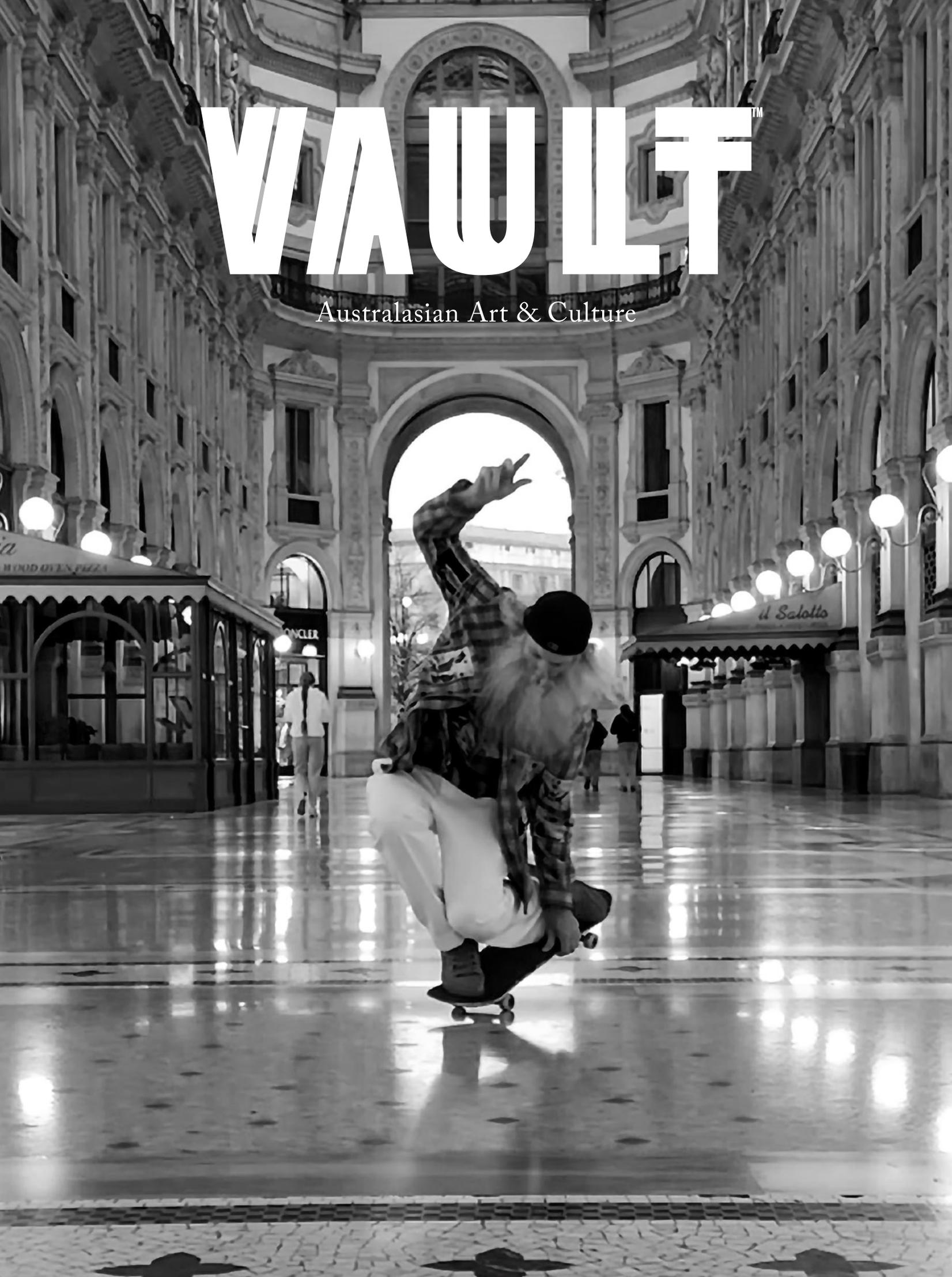


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Hany Armanious, Lottie Consalvo, Sis Cowie, Ashley Crawford,  
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# Remembering DR ASHLEY CRAWFORD

1960–2025

Dr Ashley Crawford's passing has cast a profound silence over the Australian arts community he significantly shaped for more than 4 decades. Born in Melbourne in 1960, Crawford began his career as a teenage cadet at the *Herald*, before the DIY energy of punk propelled him into independent publishing, first with *Virgin Press*, then *Tension*, and later *21•C* and *World Art*. From working in improvised bedroom offices to proper digs in New York and Amsterdam, he built magazines that treated contemporary art, music, science fiction, philosophy and pop culture as part of the same restless conversation. His editorships launched careers, collapsed hierarchies and

fundamentally rewired the possibilities of Australian art publishing.

Over the course of his life, Crawford authored seminal monographs, contributed widely to national newspapers, conducted curatorial projects across institutions, co-founded the NotFair art fair, and secured a PhD, later published as *Dark Gnosis: Religious Imaging in Millennialist America* (2018). While his reach was international, his commitment to the local was unwavering. Crawford believed, fiercely and without hesitation, that Australian art belonged in a global orbit.

*VAULT* counts itself among the many beneficiaries of that belief. In the magazine's earliest years, Crawford

stepped in as a vital supporter and contributor, offering writing, guidance, and the confidence of a steady hand as the publication was defining its voice. His generosity, editorial precision, and enthusiasm helped shape *VAULT*'s foundations, and his influence continues to echo through our pages.

Crawford was more than a critic or editor, he was a connector, mentor and believer. He forged friendships across generations, turned lunches into salons, backed artists long before institutions caught up, and carried an infectious confidence that ideas mattered. We honour his legacy through the memories of the artists, collaborators and friends who knew the spark he carried into every room.

## Tributes

### MAX DELANY

Ashley was the editor of the legendary journals *Virgin Press* and *Tension*, produced in the heyday of independent publishing, post-punk and DIY culture, as well as *World Art*, *21•C*, and *Photofile*. He was the author of numerous books and monographs, including *Dark Gnosis: Religious Imaging in Millennialist America*, which grew from his late-life PhD – having studiously avoided the academy for decades. Instead, he kept the company of artists, writing tirelessly, championing their work with rare generosity, and was a deeply loyal friend.

The range of voices Ashley brought together was extraordinary, as were the cover designs and layouts developed with his editorial and design companions Ray Edgar and Terry Hogan. From Australians such as Ted Colless, Adrian Martin, Catherine Lumby, McKenzie Wark and Stelarc to international critical and counter-cultural luminaries including Kathy Acker, Jean Baudrillard, Greil Marcus, Sadie Plant, William Burroughs and – reflecting his sci-fi and cyberpunk predilections – JG Ballard, William Gibson, and Donna Haraway, his outlook was international, and his passions intrepid and eclectic, spanning pop culture, cinema, literature, music and new media.

Ashley gave me my first opportunity to be published in the pages of *Tension*. We also curated 2 exhibitions together: *Loaded* at Michael Wardell's gallery at 13 Verity Street in 1990 and, with Pat Hoppe,

a fundraising exhibition for Greenpeace at Linden New Art in St Kilda later that year. His commitment to environmental causes continued. In 2002, he organised an art expedition to Woomera with Friends of the Earth to oppose the proposed nuclear waste dump. As Karan Hayman has noted, a successful fundraising exhibition followed, and the dump was stopped. It was one of many epic road trips, expeditions and artist camps on Country that Ashley undertook with artist friends and Indigenous communities.

Ashley's fondness for fires and barbecues has been warmly remembered. I recall the rapid unfurling of ideas around the backyard fire at his home, which doubled as the *Tension* office, accompanied by much joviality, The Pogues on repeat, and the sing-alongs, most memorably Michael Wardell singing *Little Matty Groves*, which we eventually learned by heart.

The epitaph 'larrikin intellect' (as noted by NotFair organisers, and later echoed in Ray Edgar's obituary in the *Age*, January 1, 2026) captures Ashley well. He began as a cadet at the *Herald*, where writers filed by lunchtime and then decamped to the pub, a routine he continued to observe with gusto. From new journalistic beginnings, he established an inspiring local and international constellation and built a resolutely independent, self-directed vocation that made an immeasurable contribution over decades. He is dearly missed.

### DR SAM LEACH

Ash Crawford was, quite literally, the reason I have a career. He was a mentor in the most practical sense: he wrote about my work, advised on opportunities, warned me about the traps of the art world, suggested the right books, introduced me to gallerists and important artists, and invited me into the conversation. He was always up for a chat, especially over lunches that always involved plenty of laughs, some improbable anecdotes, and a healthy amount of industry gossip.

He once invited me on a trip across northern Australia, China and Tibet that was, without hyperbole, life-changing. Our group included Tony Lloyd, Ben Armstrong, and curator Steve Eland, along with Chinese artists Wu Daxin, Cang Xin, and Shi Jinsong. While the rest of us ran around villages seeking sites and taking photos, Ash would plant himself in the local bar. With his journalistic bent, he would end up learning more about those places and their people than anyone else in the group.

As a writer, Ash was a force. His output was prodigious, yet his prose was lucid, compelling and accessible. He had a knack for expressing complex concepts clearly, always bringing the reader to the art. When he wrote about my work, he noticed things other critics missed, drawing connections even I wasn't consciously aware of.



Images courtesy of Tony Lloyd



He was forthright about his likes and dislikes, and if he thought you were presenting weak work, he would tell you. But his underlying setting was one of immense generosity. He built a deep rapport with artists because he actually took the time to talk to us. His reviews and essays didn't feel like clinical observations; they felt like a continuation of a wide-ranging, colourful conversation.

Ash did all of this, not just for me but for countless others, because he genuinely loved art and the people who make it. In that spirit, Ash, Tony Lloyd and I started NotFair, a curated survey show styled as an alternative to the traditional art fair. He was instrumental in turning that project from a whimsical idea into an underground institution, driven by his lifelong mission: bringing art that people need to see to those who need to see it.

He brought Melbourne artists into a global conversation and made sure we felt like we belonged there. He was a singular figure in our community, and his absence is a massive, quiet void.

### STEVE COX

Ashley had suggested several times that he wanted to write an article about my work. We finally agreed on a time, and he came to my house one afternoon in order to have a look at some of my recent pictures. He cast his eye around the paintings and drawings, and I sat down, ready to answer any questions. Instead, he regaled me with a dozen

ornate stories in which he was, quite rightly, the hero. Eventually, I asked him if he had any questions about my work, which might help with his article. "Oh, no," he replied, "I think I'm ok with all that... Let's go to the pub." As it turned out, Ashley was correct, he was ok with all that. His article was sparkling and erudite and peppered with insightful observations that I hadn't thought about. Ashley always understood, perhaps more than many, the importance of social engagement in the pursuit of serious art interrogations. This always gave his work a warm humanity. His journalistic gifts were enviable. His support for artists was wonderful. His thirst for life was seemingly inexhaustible.

Farewell, Ashley, I miss you. Safe journey, mate.

### GARETH SANSOM

I first met Ashley Crawford in 1985, when he was curating an exhibition in the gardens at ACCA. I delivered a work to him when he was living in a small house in South Yarra. He answered the door in pyjamas, looking somewhat dishevelled and smoking a cigarette. There was no conversation – he accepted the work, bid me farewell, and closed the door. It turns out I was only in the show because someone told him I should be.

Years later, when I was painting full-time, Ashley took a keen interest in my work, and during the 1990s and 2000s, wrote about every exhibition;

he interviewed me many times. His insights were astute and unique.

During those years, our long lunches at The Flying Duck and the Railway Hotel became legendary.

Ashley also hosted famous barbecues in the botanical backyard of his parents' Hampton home.

I next saw him in the flesh in 2017 when I judged a NotFair exhibition. His last writing about my work was a brilliant, definitive essay for my NGV retrospective exhibition catalogue in 2017.

We continued to correspond via email on matters far and wide, always with wit and wisdom. He rocked the art world, and I miss his presence.

### BRIE TRENERRY

I met Ash in 2006 at one of the legendary lunches he presided over, this one coinciding with an early solo show of mine. He told me he wasn't a fan of video, but that he loved this work. We hit it off immediately. He wrote about the exhibition and became a generous mentor and friend. Over the next 20 years, that relationship solidified into a bond that felt unbreakable.

In the weeks leading up to his passing, hours were spent together tracing and debating the juxtaposition of Blake Butler's *Search Atlas* (2009) with the irreverent chaos of *South Park's* Gen X libertarian take on Trump; Stephen Colbert's wit celebrated over lunch, while Ash worked on what would

*“Writing, for him, was never ornamental. It was survival. A way of naming the world when comfort had burned off, and only truth was left standing.”*

— JEREMY KIBEL

become his final literary critique, Mark Z Danielewski’s *Tom’s Crossing* (2025). In that piece, he referred to Stephen King’s review, a nod to the recursive loop he seemed to inhabit. The last book he was reading before he passed was King’s *11/22/63* (published 2011) – a novel of time, return and repeating patterns.

Ash was a fearless facilitator of ambitious projects, someone who instinctively brought people together. His intellectual generosity and humour turned every exchange into a collision of ideas, a curated montage of obsessions. Just a month after his passing, his absence remains visceral and raw. Yet, even in absence, he occupies the spaces we traced together: a presence looping back through pages, discussions and fleeting moments that will stay with me forever.

The bookshelf was the beating heart of Ash’s home, ever in flux; he exposed cavities, made precise orthodontic adjustments, performed the occasional root canal as ideas germinated, cross-pollinated, and evolved. It was a vast mind map, its connections animated by his photographic memory and formidable recall.

Less than a month ago, I was lying in Ash’s treasured swag, watched over by a human skull affectionately named George. Bobo Ash, our conversations will never be over. This is just the beginning. *I’ll see you again in 25 years.*

### JEREMY KIBEL

Since the invention of the mobile phone, Ashley would text me one line, one word: “Pub?”

With Ashley, lunch had a rhythm. He would sit down, catch the waiter’s eye, it was simple, and it was sure. Then the lunch session could commence. A deluge of beer, red wine and yarns.

I first met Ashley at Karen Lovegrove art gallery on Chapel Street, Prahran. I was 19, still slightly naive, still thinking talent alone might save you in the creative game. I was pulled into a loose, volatile

social orbit of writers, painters, actors, teachers and fast talkers. It felt less like an introduction and more like a Marquis de Sade circus, a baptism by fire, where intellect came sharp, personalities bruised, and no one pretended to be harmless. Ashley was open and welcoming. He became a friend.

Ashley and I first connected over a shared reverence for great writers. We talked about dystopian worlds and science fiction futures, about imagined collapses that felt uncomfortably close to home. Those conversations always inevitably drifted towards the scorched interiors and moral desolation of Cormac McCarthy and the gonzo journalist Hunter S Thompson.

McCarthy’s landscapes mattered to Ashley. The emptiness. The heat. The way language stripped back until only necessity remained. It mirrored something he recognised, or perhaps something he feared. Writing, for him, was never ornamental. It was survival. A way of naming the world when comfort had burned off, and only truth was left standing. It was the only way he managed to carve out a living.

Our discourse over 3 decades was intense and fractious. We had numerous debates about the validity of painters, writers, and practitioners, usually tempered by litres of alcohol and cigarettes. Conversations rarely stayed on the surface. They splintered quickly into ethics, aesthetics, excess, failure and blow-ups.

When I started *VAULT* with Simon Hayman and Yasmin Nguyen in 2012, I illogically chose Ashley as the inaugural principal editor based on his history as the writer/editor for *Tension* magazine and *World Art*. What I failed to fully account for was hierarchy. Ashley did not appreciate the fact that I was now in charge of calling the shots. We had numerous arguments about anything and everything imaginable. It was not the first

time we had collaborated professionally. In 2010, at my then-new location on Stephenson Street in Cremorne, I supported Ashley alongside his friend Sam Leach and Tony Lloyd. Together, they were part of NotFair, a platform committed to emerging and under-represented artists. Its ethos mirrored my own. I let NotFair use the space before I did. It was an act of faith, and perhaps of loyalty. The doors opened to their energy first, and one of the artists smashed a hole in my newly erected wall.

Ashley was a genuine supporter when I first opened Blockprojects in the Block Arcade. I remember telling him that an old friend, Steve Asquith, returning from a decade abroad working in New York and London for Gagolian, along with a friend, Yasmin, who had experience working in the cutthroat fashion industry, was about to open a commercial gallery that would carry the sensibility of an artist-run space. It was an idea shaped by conviction rather than caution, supporting emerging artists alongside overlooked and quietly great mid-career artists who, for no good reason, fell out of favour with curators, art directors and critics. Ashley responded immediately, not with measured advice but with enthusiasm. He understood the impulse instinctively. He spoke about the importance of holding space for artists who did not fit neatly into trends or timelines, and about resisting the pressure to flatten complexity for the sake of market comfort. He liked the idea of the revolutionary system right to the end. Never being corralled by people or rules. That was Ashley.

I would like to finish on one of Ashley’s favourite quotes from the dystopian sci-fi cinematic masterpiece we both loved, *Blade Runner* (1982).

“All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain.”

RIP Ash. ♣