

chapter



NOTHING dUMB

Daniel Clifford

Nothing dumb

Nothing dumb brings together two interconnected bodies of work: paintings on reclaimed Formica tables and framed works on paper positioned behind antique patterned glass. Across the exhibition, memory, inheritance and material history intersect, overlap and coexist.

I am drawn to tables because they are both objects and social spaces. They are places where relationships take shape, decisions are made and histories accumulate.

These associations are informed by my experience of adoption. My birth mother was fifteen when she became pregnant with me and, under pressure from her conservative Italian Catholic family, was sent away to give birth before I was placed for adoption. I often find myself imagining the conversations that surrounded those events. Who spoke? Who remained silent? Around what table were those decisions made? The answers are unknowable, yet the table remains a recurring point of return; a place where histories accumulate, relationships form and decisions leave their traces.

The reclaimed tabletops carry their own histories. Rather than covering these histories, the paintings are made with them. Traces of use remain visible beneath layers of paint, ink and line, allowing older and newer markings to coexist.

Googly eyes appear throughout these works. Simple, generic and slightly absurd, they introduce a deliberately reductive language into works shaped by more complex histories.

For me, the googly eyes are connected to the experience of adoption and the distance between biological inheritance and lived identity. They operate as both faces and masks, moving between intimacy and distance, recognition and uncertainty. Their humour is often a form of misdirection, softening and obscuring what sits beneath.

The framed works, collectively titled *Pane*, approach similar concerns through a different set of materials. Positioned behind antique patterned glass, they can never be encountered directly. The glass forms a thin veil between inside and outside, revealing and obscuring in equal measure. Light, reflection and distortion continually reshape what is seen, while fractured Merbau frames fail to fully contain the works they surround. Exposed edges of glass remain visible. Frame, glass and image occupy the same space without fully resolving into one another.

The title *Pane* carries several meanings at once: a pane of glass, the word *pain*, and the Italian word for bread; both a staple of everyday life and a central symbol within Catholic tradition. Like the works themselves, these associations sit alongside one another without settling into a single interpretation.

The title *nothing dumb* embraces a similar instability. On one level it carries humour and absurdity. On another, it recalls an older meaning of the word *dumb*: the inability to speak. The phrase returns me to the imagined conversations that preceded my adoption, discussions that determined my separation from my biological family and placement within another. I was the subject of those conversations, yet had no voice within them.

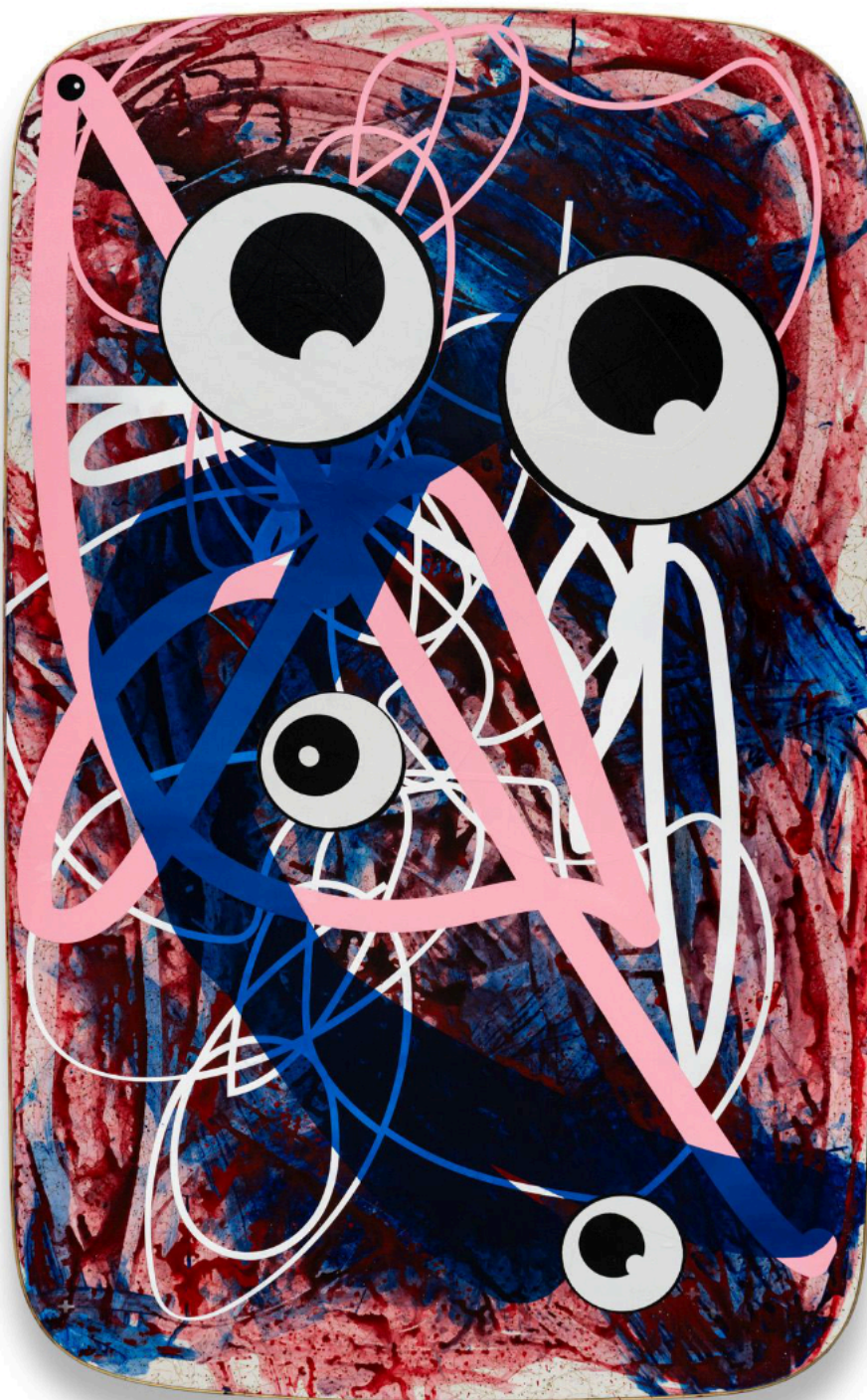
Throughout the exhibition, tables become sites of decision-making, eyes become witnesses, and glass functions as a threshold that can never be fully crossed. Together, these elements point toward a condition of proximity without participation; of being present and affected, yet never entirely inside the conversation itself.

Rather than moving toward resolution, the works accept uncertainty as a generative condition. They hold together what can be known, remembered and imagined, acknowledging that some forms of understanding emerge not through certainty, but through living alongside ambiguity.

Daniel Clifford

2026





A Perfectly Successful Failure of Communication, 2026

repurposed Formica table, acrylic ink, acrylic paint, 2pak clear coat

122 × 76 × 4 cm



There Was Nothing Wrong With The System, which was the Problem, 2026

repurposed Formica table, acrylic ink, acrylic paint, 2pak clear coat

120 × 120 × 4 cm



The Successful Integration of Incompatible Systems, 2026

repurposed Formica table, acrylic ink, acrylic paint, 2pak clear coat

90 × 150 × 4 cm



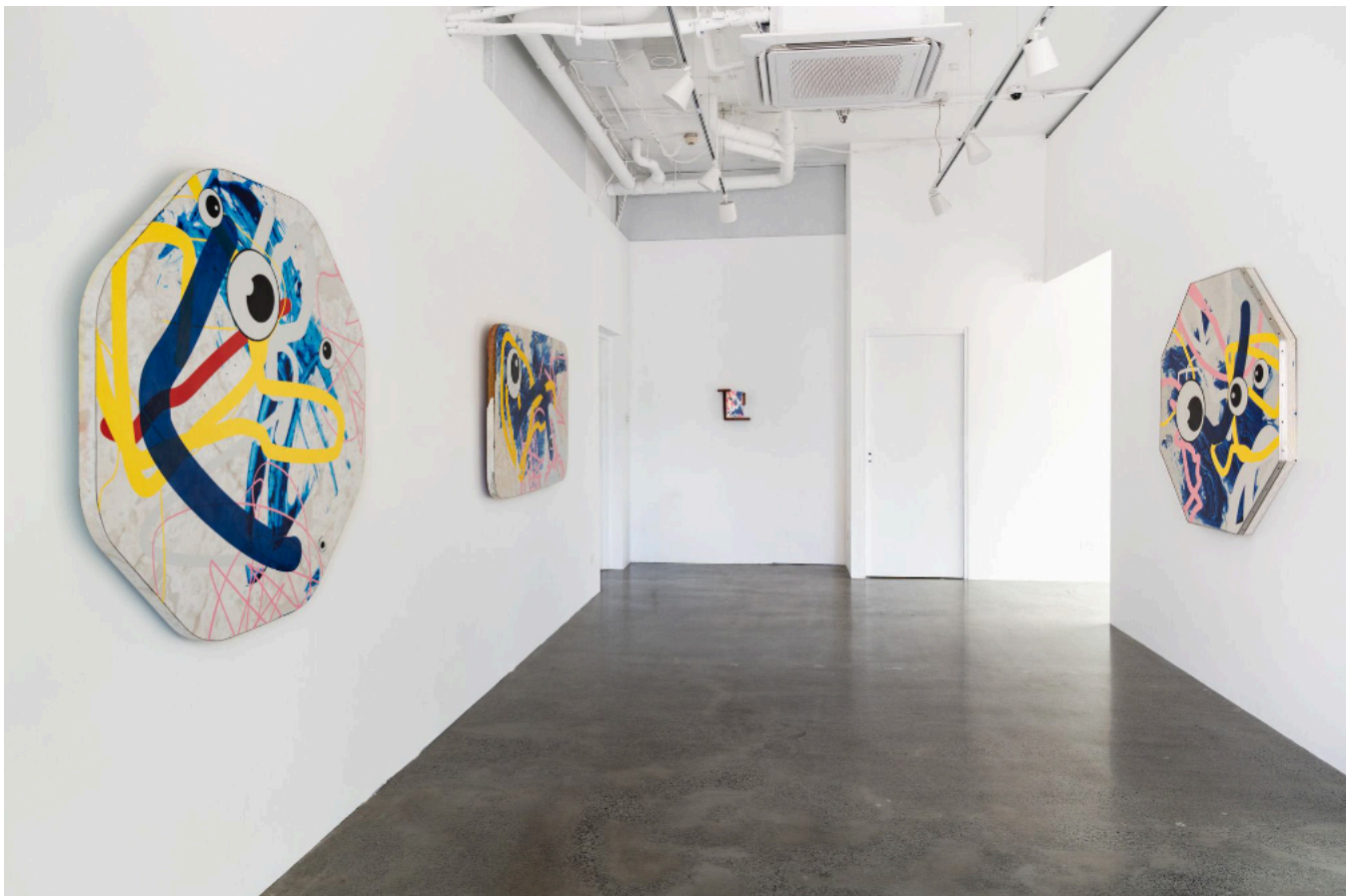
Mutual Incomprehension, Successfully Maintained, 2026

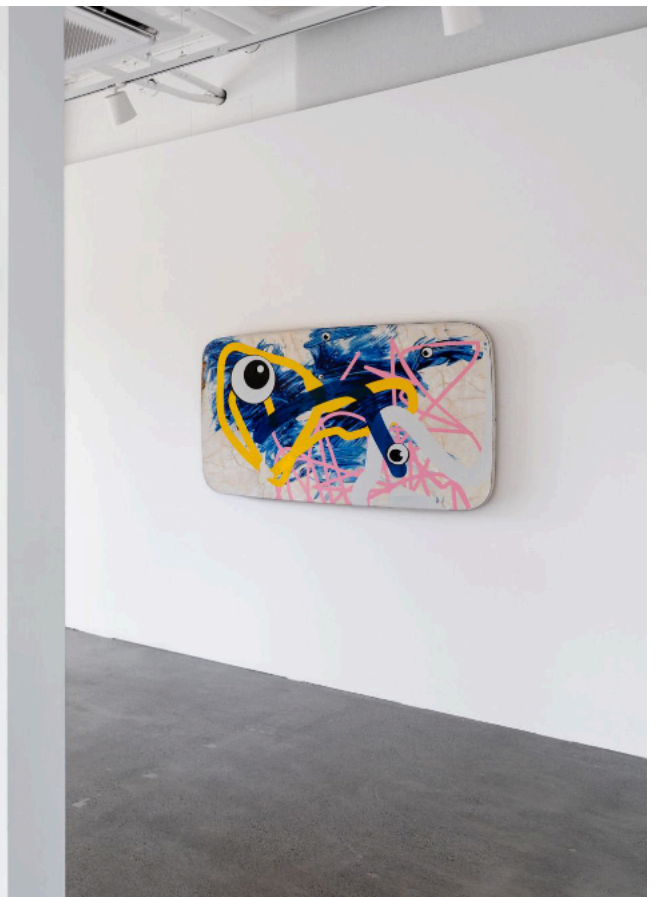
repurposed Formica table, acrylic ink, acrylic paint, 2pak clear coat
120 × 120 × 7 cm



Pane (1 - 27), 2026

Merbau, repurposed textured glass, acrylic paint, gold and silver leaf on colourfix paper
each approx. 26–32 × 20–26 × 6 cm









Daniel is a Brisbane based artist working across installation, sculpture and site-responsive practice.

Moving between gallery and public contexts, his work engages the social, cultural and material conditions shaping urban and non-urban environments.

His work, often utilising familiar materials, focuses on moments of transition and instability, where structures appear provisional, displaced or on the verge of collapse.

A subtle tragicomic sensibility runs through his practice, where humour and unease sit side by side, revealing tensions and quiet absurdities with everyday experience.

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