Mark Tweedie
Birthday Blues

18 November – 12 December 2026

Sifting through thousands of photographs for source material throughout my painting practice, I have instinctively singled out birthday imagery. The quintessential birthday photograph captures someone blowing out the candles on their cake, usually with friends or family looking on. In this transfixing tradition, time appears to stand still, as though you could hear a pin drop. It is both a universal rite of passage and a symbolic moment of possibility. I always wonder what the person wished for and whether that wish ever came true.

Birthday Blues embodies the recurring feelings, moods and expectations I associate with birthdays. At its core, this body of work is connected by a deep nostalgia for the past, yet also an underlying sense of discomfort. I have always coveted the love and care that goes into birthday celebrations, but in hindsight, I have tended to avoid my own.

I have no memory of my birthdays, from childhood until only more recent years. This is unusual, as I am the one member of my family who remembers almost everything, from the types of plants growing in our garden forty years ago to my brother once falling out of our bunk bed in the middle of the night. Our ability to seemingly forget, through childhood amnesia or selective memory, equally fascinates and puzzles me. Making this body of work has brought a heightened awareness of memory's significance and impact. These paintings are as much about what is apparent as what is absent.

In an attempt to substitute these missing memories, I turned to my family's photo albums, lovingly compiled by my mother, alongside her original copy of *The Australian Women's Weekly Children's Birthday Cake Book*, complete with handwritten notes. Our photo albums were anchored around birthdays, mostly capturing fun-filled parties with neighbourhood kids and elaborate homemade cakes loaded with artificial colours and flavourings.

Home photography, and the treasured albums that preserved these moments, came to an end when my family split in half when I was five years old.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Mark Tweedie (b. 1982, Perth) has been an exhibiting artist since 2012. He has been a finalist in numerous major art prizes including the Darling Portrait Prize, National Portrait Gallery (2024), Sunshine Coast Art Prize (2022) and John Stringer Prize (2020) and the Blake Prize (2018). He is a four-time finalist in the Kilgour Prize (2014, 2017, 2018, 2021) and in 2016 he was named as the inaugural winner of the Tony Fini Foundation Artist Prize at the Art Gallery of Western Australia's Black Swan Prize (now The Lester Prize). Tweedie has undertaken several significant regional residencies in Western Australia including to Esperance and the Pilbara region. His works have been collected by City of Bunbury Art Collection, St John of God Health Care Art Collection, Perth and significant private collections.