

Curating Feminism

A Contemporary Art and Feminism event

Presented by SCA, SLAM & the Power Institute, University of Sydney

Foreword

The *Curating Feminism* conference and exhibition have been conceived and presented by one of SCA's research clusters, Contemporary Art and Feminism, established in response to the groundswell of interest in the legacies of early feminist art and increasing recognition of the influence of feminist insights on contemporary art. Presented together with the School of Letters, Arts & Media and the Power Institute Foundation for Art and Visual Culture, these events showcase the vital relationship between creative arts and critical theory fostered by the artists, writers and thinkers undertaking research at the University of Sydney.

For the *Curating Feminism* exhibition, seven curators and artist/curators have worked closely with an artist or artist collective to explore the concept of curatorial activism, especially in the realm of gender. This decentralisation of the curatorial process is integral to the exhibition, which formulates the gallery as a creative laboratory that is open for discussion, interaction and negotiation. The accompanying conference, masterclasses and keynote lectures present additional opportunities to conceive of alternative curatorial strategies. We warmly welcome Michael Birchall from the University of Wolverhampton, and Dr Maura Reilly, founding curator of the Elizabeth Sackler Centre for feminist art at Brooklyn Museum, New York, and anticipate a compelling cultural and intellectual exchange.

I also extend my sincere appreciation to the staff and volunteers who have ensured the success of the conference and exhibition. In particular, thanks are due to Dr Jacqueline Millner, Dr Catriona Moore, and Ms Jo Holder, from the Contemporary Art & Feminism steering committee, Liam Garstang and Mikhaela Rodwell. In addition, I thank the Art Gallery of NSW, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, and everyone involved as producers, curators, exhibitors and participants.

Finally I extend a warm gesture of gratitude to Professor Jill Trehwella, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, for her continued support for internationally leading, practice-led research at Sydney College of the Arts.

Professor Colin Rhodes
Dean, Sydney College of the Arts

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Essays

Curating Feminism

JACQUELINE MILLNER



To curate is to create knowledge — not merely to represent, publish or exhibit it, but to create it. And to create knowledge is, of course, to exercise power. Feminism is always interested in power: how and in whose interests it is wielded, when is it disavowed, how can it be redistributed. And feminism is always imagining how ideas, practices and institutions that assert that they are value-free and immutable might be opened up to scrutiny and change.

The contemporary period has seen the rise of the curator's importance and visibility, part of a complex of developments that include the active deployment of the visual arts towards the ends of urban development and tourism, such as the destination museum and ever larger and more frequent arts festivals. As the audience for contemporary art has grown exponentially in recent years, so has the reach of the curator. The public's interaction with art now comes predominantly by way of the museum — in its various forms, including the virtual — rather than through art historical literature. Such circumstances heighten the need for socially responsible and responsive curating, for curatorial approaches that not only seek to represent diverse experiences but that help to create new realities.

The emergence of social practice as a major form of contemporary art in the new millennium has also demanded the reconceptualization of curating. As the artwork began to extend well beyond the confines of the museum and to consistently outgrow archival forms, so was the curator's focus re-directed from the care of objects and the creation of narratives to the nurturing of relationships — relationships between artist, work, museum, viewer, and the broader community. In some senses, such social practice with its engagement with non-artist makers, marginalized spaces and traditions, and grass-roots activism, owes a



Elizabeth Pulie, '#35 - #37 (The Female Form)', 2013, acrylic on hessian, wooden poles, 400 x 180cm each, courtesy the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney

great debt to its feminist forebears. What to some appeared ex nihilo as a fully formed new phenomenon in the 1990s ('relational aesthetics' as coined by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud) was arguably forged two decades earlier by artists, curators and writers fired up by feminist passions and informed by the feminist methods of collaboration, de-centralisation, and open-endedness. The flattening of power structures that characterise these methods was also played out in the emerging figure of the artist-curator, who dissolved the division between museum professional and artist-producer and introduced a different set of values into the whole enterprise of making and displaying art.

Social practice and feminism, with their validation of shared knowledge, participation and the importance of personal experience, resonate with the critique of predominant modes of political art by philosopher Jacques Rancière, whose re-casting of political art takes its cue in no small part from pedagogical insights. His well known *The Emancipated Spectator*¹ extends the argument of his earlier book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*² in which he challenges us to consider equality as a starting point in education rather than a destination, and urges us to channel the equal intelligence that all possess to facilitate intellectual growth in multiple directions. The feminist principles and objectives underpinning art making, art writing and the staging of exhibitions are focused on how knowledge is created and how ideas are transferred, and are hence necessarily related to pedagogical practices. This accent on how what we know can be transformed and transformative is integral to any cultural practice that calls itself political. Making connections between disparate disciplinary pursuits is also part of that politics, a perspective that conceives of the social as an integrated whole. Such trans-disciplinary thinking and action that takes on the gatekeepers of disciplinary expertise is also a key feminist strategy.

In that spirit, a forerunner to Curating Feminism was an event dedicated to considering contemporary feminist pedagogies. Transgressive Teaching — held at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, in March 2014 — took its name from the 1994 book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*³ by American cultural critic bell hooks, written in response to her own experiences as a university student and educator. Hooks recounts how the institution's assumptions about her own ignorance and the controlling power of the teachers she encountered dulled students' enthusiasm for learning and resulted overwhelmingly in teaching obedience to authority. The only class where she felt engaged was in women's studies where the power dynamics were radically different: here, the emphasis was on sharing rather than transmitting knowledge: the teachers exposed their vulnerabilities, acknowledged the students as full persons and valued their pre-existing expertise, and strove to connect what the students were learning to their overall life experience.

One of hooks' inspirations was the educator Paul Friere, author of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Fr.1968)⁴, who founded the practice of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy encourages the transformation of students from passive recipients to active knowers who see themselves as agents of social change. But it is also transformative for the teacher, who actively reflects about what and how they teach, and about how who they are affects how they teach, seeing teaching as part of a process of self-realisation. Feminist pedagogy then is critical pedagogy that positions gender and power as central issues in education. The term itself is credited to feminist art and arts education pioneer Judy Chicago in the

1980s. The authors of 'Feminist Pedagogy' distil its basic principles as: 1) a re-formation of the relationship between teacher and student; 2) empowerment; 3) building community; 4) privileging voice; 5) respecting the diversity of personal experience; and 6) challenging traditional pedagogical notions.⁵

One of the driving agents of feminist pedagogy as implied in these principles is embodiment: the assertion that, as Sarah Ahmed puts it,

Knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are actually felt on the...skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world.⁶

Which brings us to Curating Feminism. The title of this multi-faceted event is intended to beg a few questions. It deliberately does not invoke 'feminist curating', but flips the onus onto how curating as such might mobilize social change. And it intends by using the gerund to keep the options open, to imply an ongoing process that is open to experimentation and not fixated on resolution. These aspects are reiterated in the structure, which is not one thing but many: an exhibition, a conference, public keynotes, free master-classes, and a Wikipedia-thon. Curating Feminism is designed to provide multiple points of entry for participants and audience alike, opportunities not just to select work and interact with particular spaces, not just to read about and look at art, but to contribute concretely to the processes of change. It also affirms that while curating and art history are influential forms of knowledge-creation, so too is art practice, both the ways of making and the resulting object or idea. The structure of the exhibition also embraces multiplicity, dispersed decision-making and an anti-hierarchical approach, with the curatorial model of one curator: one artist intended to render the curatorial process an intimate and evenly matched negotiation. The artists and curators were granted early access to the exhibition spaces and the exhibition team to encourage an emphasis on process and to open up the 'black box' of creativity to each other and the broader community.

The curators were invited based on an open discussion among the members of the Contemporary Art and Feminism research cluster, and briefed with responding to these guiding principles however they wished, in conjunction with the artists they in turn invited. The broad range of curatorial and artistic approaches that resulted speaks to the complexity and multiplicity of the language of feminist art. From the intergenerational passing of knowledge in the Warmun community in the Kimberley, to playful takes on popular cultural interpretations of 'woman', to full throttle performance art, conceptual puzzles and satire, Curating Feminism integrates feminist method and content.

Kelly Doley melds the role of artist and curator. Her practice has blossomed in tandem with her burgeoning interest in the histories of feminist art, as part of artist collective Brown Council and as driver of the curatorial project JANIS, named in honour of Joplin, the firebrand who upended stereotypes of women in rock. Doley invited the newly formed artist collective Hissy Fit to interact with the charged spaces of SCA Galleries —buildings that once housed the working hub of a mental institution — to create new video and performance that focus on



Salote Tawale, *The princess*, 2013, inkjet print

female anger. Brigid Noone is also an artist-curator, whose curatorial role has been honed as director of Fontanelle artist-run space in Adelaide, and whose exhibition *Beyonce is a Feminist* (2013) staked a provocative claim in the terrain. The artist she works with here is the collaborative duo Soda_Jerk, whose *Dark Matter* cycle constitutes a profound analysis of how cinema structures our relationship to aging, with a particular focus on the female persona.

Laura Castagnini, who curated *Backflip: Feminism and Humour in Contemporary Art* (2013), is now based in London and has invoked the principles of postal art to engage with another ex-pat Australian, Alice Lang, currently based in Los Angeles. Lang and Castagnini conspire to traffic multiple reproductions of Lang’s body around the world, the life-like miniature vessel lodging itself in unlikely art world nooks and crannies where it becomes a comical but insistent reminder of the discomfiting truth about the position of women in that world. The comic spirit with a satirical edge continues in Elvis Richardson and Virginia Fraser’s *FEMMO*, a fantastical magazine with all too real stories on its covers, stories that also underline the tendentious value system in which women artists must work.

Jo Holder has for many years cultivated close relations with particular indigenous artists and artist communities in her role as director of Cross Arts, a unique project space that brings art together with grass roots activism and debate. For *Curating Feminism*, Holder invited both Warmun arts centre artists from Western Australia and the Euraba Papermakers from northern NSW, seeking the artists’ reflections on how feminism influences their work. The Warmun artists including Shirley Purdie and Kathy Ramsey, with the assistance of artist Alana Hunt, have contributed moving examples of how they use art to transmit knowledge to new generations of women facing very different challenges. Holder has also delved into the archives of the Papermakers, a renowned collective that mixes business with aesthetics in an ingenious form of cultural activism.

I have worked with Philipa Veitch, an artist who coaxes out the critical, feminist potential of minimalist sculpture, seeking to short circuit minimalism’s usual mode of operation in the same way feminism acts to jam every field of endeavour with which it is associated. The ongoing effects of Modernist values are also in the cross hairs of Elizabeth Pulie, who deploys the materials of craft hobbyists and decorative motifs to challenge the persistent gender assumptions of contemporary art discourse. Salote Tawale is more inspired by the current technologies of self-documentation and display, but brings these together with insights from early feminist performance and video in her intimate reflections on racial and gender identity.

Inspired by critical pedagogy, *Curating Feminism* seeks out different ways to negotiate the relationships between artist, curator, viewer and community. It hopes to question how common sense and conventional wisdom about art and the wider world are generated and in whose name, but also to create new knowledges through those rewired relationships. Feminism is about imagination: the power to imagine the world otherwise, the ability to recalibrate the values by which we live. *Curating Feminism* imagines how this central cultural practice might contribute to that ongoing process.

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- 1 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, London: Verso, 2011
- 2 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation*, Stanford University Press, 1991
- 3 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994
- 4 Paul Friere, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin Education, 1996
- 5 Myria W. Allen, Kandi L. Walker, and Lynne M. Webb, 'Feminist Pedagogy: Identifying Basic Principles', *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, Vol. 6 No.1 Spring 2002
- 6 Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, New York: Routledge, 2004

Feminist Curating: The First Hundred Years

CATRIONA MOORE

For over a century Australian women have curated feminist art exhibitions, affirmative actions and creative spaces (I use the term ‘feminist’ here simply to describe art actions that in some way address how we perform or project gendered identities, including ‘woman artist’).¹ In hindsight, feminist curating has been particularly generative when coupled with calls for equal opportunities for women. History also reveals that feminist exhibitions started out as big, inclusive affairs, then progressively narrowed their ambition and focus with the advent of a European-derived modernism and its (male dominated) institutional supports. Ambitions again expanded in the 1970s, and were then tailored to challenge the corseted contours of institutional postmodernism. Today, we seem to be breathing more expansively again - who knows?

The 1907 *Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work* was crowded and eclectic. The organisers aimed for inclusivity, showcasing over sixteen thousand exhibits; as art historian Joan Kerr observed, “‘Virtually every known craft and domestic art could be found in it, as well as all the fine arts.’”² Whilst not the first Australian exhibition of women’s work, it was the first to include Indigenous women’s arts, astonishingly not “exiled to a separate Anthropology annexe or inferior location in an official court, as in international or other large mixed exhibitions, but displayed beside ‘the work of highly trained self-dependent white female artisans’ and ‘the handiwork of crowned heads’ (itself a bizarre marriage).”³ Curatorial inclusivity allowed for surreal encounters between embroidery, sculpture, dilly bags and china painting. It inventively recalibrated cultural value between the traditional hierarchies of the professional and

domestic arts, promoting ‘excellence’ or ‘best practice’ whether in photography or rifle shooting. Today we would also applaud the 1907 organisers’ savvy inclusion of a model crèche – a central though invisible part of women’s working lives, which allowed huge numbers of ordinary women to participate: women as art consumers have always been an overlooked mainstay of the visual arts and crafts.

Progressive critics espoused the exhibition’s game-changing possibilities, linking women’s creative expression with social change. *The Lone Hand* trumpeted that this was “more than a show; it is of national significance, proclaiming loudly Australia’s leading place in the great phenomenon of last century – the advancement of women.... Each year a fresh range of positions in the professional and industrial world is attacked by women: each year women’s work becomes of more profound social and economic importance.”⁴ The exhibition evidenced how ‘first wave’ feminist advancement proceeded on a number of related fronts: artistic, social and economic. This and subsequent feminist exhibitions in the early twentieth century had a broad audience reach and correctly located women’s creative production along a spectrum of commercial, craft and other non-high art practices.⁵

Women Artists of Australia (1934) was also an inclusive national exhibition of work across a range of media.⁶ It was curatorially innovative and democratically curated by artists, and participants could choose what works they wished to enter. The well-known artist Thea Proctor used the occasion to promote the modernist cause by underlining women’s contribution to all that was forward-thinking at the time in her Foreword to the exhibition:

It has sometimes been said that women are incapable of imaginative creation. Great art is inventive, not imitative. The great weakness of Australian art in the past has been its lack of imagination and inventive design. Therefore it is pleasant to see an increasing number of young artists, and most of them women, who are showing imaginative qualities in their work.⁷

This exhibition helped to invent a new artistic subject - the modern woman artist. The idea was to develop the networking and exchange afforded by women’s art exhibitions, however, unfortunately, planned follow-ups (Melbourne in 1936, Adelaide in 1936, then another in Sydney) were stymied by a lack of sales (it was the Great Depression, after all).

Despite Proctor’s enthusiasm for progressive art, modernism did not automatically guarantee a New Deal for women, and all-woman exhibitions are not necessarily feminist. Margaret Preston, a participant in the 1934 exhibition, wrote the Foreword to the 1946 *Exhibition of Australian Women Painters* at the AGNSW - a narrowly focused exhibition of safe, European-derived paintings and prints by Sydney-based moderns that had been chosen by gallery director Hal Missingham. He overlooked more radical work by the artists to ensure that the exhibition meshed with the gallery collection. Kerr wryly noted that this narrowing of focus for art world acceptability accelerated in the post-war period as a “reign of terror, which continued well into the 1970s.”⁸

The 1970s women’s art movement (WAM) revived earlier curatorial challenges. WAM shows were cluttered and speculative aesthetic hot-houses that were linked to calls for equal employment opportunities, consciousness raising groups, the Women’s Art Register database, and research and teaching in art schools.⁹ Artists did most of the critical and curato-

rial work, and demarcation lines between audience, artist, critic and curator (who was, in any case, a relatively new art world professional) were deliberately blurred.¹⁰ Collectively curated projects outside the white cube sought non-art audiences. For instance, in 1975 for International Women's Year, a Women's Liberation stall at the Sydney Royal Easter Show displayed a variety of women's arts alongside cheap and accessible hand-printed T shirts, posters, badges, jewellery, ceramics and bric-a-brac, stickers and pamphlets on contraception, women's health and rape crisis centres.¹¹

The curatorial strategy behind such projects as *It's Great to be an Australian Woman*, (Hogarth Galleries Nov 1975), *Women's Work* (Experimental Art Foundation 1977), *Mother's Memories*, *Others' Memories* (UNSW/Blacktown Marketplace 1979/81), the *Daylesford Project* (Daylesford 1981), the *D'Oyley Show* (Watters 1981) and the *Lovely Motherhood Show* (Experimental Art Foundation 1981) was to promote 'an aesthetics of listening': investigating the diverse material expressions of female experience in order to generate social, cultural and political connections between women. This idea of curating alternative paradigms for creative social action, working 'out there in the public space', is echoed today in contemporary performance, relational or 'social practices'.

Inside the white cube, these often unselected shows domesticated the gallery with the mess of everyday lives, constituting loose and open-ended fieldwork on female experience. These trans-generational, multi-cultural and materially diverse shows upset the formalist tenets of late modernism, particularly modernist conceptions of linear time, cultural importation, art's proper subject matter and artistic subjectivity, along with canonical values and hierarchies such as fine arts/crafts, amateur/professional, open-ended process/finished product that had marginalized a wealth of creative work.

Mainstream critics were rightly confounded by these unconventional curatorial practices. Some pieces in *The Lovely Motherhood Show* (1981) were slammed as simply "icons of distress": "YUK", wrote Jenny Boulton in *Art Network*, "I personally couldn't help feeling that 90% of the women contributing were not cut out to have children, and in these days of abortion and birth control, I wonder why they bothered.... A bath full of dirty nappies, slogans on nappies, silk-screens on a nappy-rack."¹² Following art world complaints about the messy state of *The Women's Show* (1977), Sandy Taylor's hyperrealist soft-form sculpture lurking in a corner plastic bucket had to be removed by the end of the first week.¹³ A lost world of dripping-red tampon and body art, aroma-rama installations and cleansing performances horrified the art world and soon quietly gathered dust behind the curatorial curtain.¹⁴

Despite our continued affirmative action protests, the feminist curatorial field was narrowing. Whilst the informality of feminist aesthetics made critics squirm, its theoretical and political force helped drive the post-modernisation of the market and museum through the 1980s.¹⁵ The curator had become king, and big, international shows were still male-dominated affairs. However feminist artists gained mainstream visibility through conceptually and aesthetically sophisticated work formalizing questions of sexual, gender and cultural difference.¹⁶

Whilst feminist aesthetics were elaborated in high profile exhibitions and academic forums, what was this new buzz-word amongst our (mainly male) academic colleagues: 'post-feminism' - so easily accepted, yet rarely articulated? By the 1990s, feminist interven-

tions in the visual arts were both cutting edge and cut to ribbons. The so-called anti-feminist 'backlash' was a contradictory period for the international sisterhood.¹⁷ Some feminist artists (Kruger, Levine, Sherman) were becoming international art stars, however feminism as a term was ghettoized through negative 'F word' labelling. Conceptual, yes. Feminist, no: a successful form of artworld 'wedge' politics split the foundational tenets of feminist aesthetics into two separate worlds, leaching art's political force as a result.

Through this difficult period, an organized, local activist agenda was advanced more forcefully through the work of Indigenous artists and curators. Fiona Foley, Margo Neale, Banduk Marika, Hetti Perkins, Brenda Croft, Euphemia Bostock, Avril Quail and many others who matured as art professionals through the 1990s argued that issues of individual and gender identity were necessarily connected to community identity, an activist agenda, and the need to remain accessible to broad audience.

The 1995 *National Women's Art Exhibition* projects also revived feminism's two-pronged strategy of community activism and aesthetic exploration in this period of conservative government, the so-called 'culture wars' and the highly commodified 'freedom of sexual expression' of raunch-culture. Introducing the 1995 *National Women's Art Exhibition*, art historian Joan Kerr looked around asked, with a touch of irony, 'What do we see? Standard art histories with equal male-female representation being used in all schools? Fifty percent of the works on view in every part of every gallery by women?...The voluntary disbanding of women's only art registers, unions, university courses, exhibitions and publications because they have served their purpose? Well... not exactly'.¹⁸ We took notice and re-counted the stats, and changed curatorial strategy to again widen the feminist aesthetic field. The NWAE generated a welter of state, regional, local, community and archive-based projects in all media.¹⁹

The NWAE was far ahead of the game, and more radical than the prestigious, all-women Big Exhibitions that were curated around the world, some fifteen years later.²⁰ Australian curators again seized the opportunity to curate timely and topical feminist exhibitions in major state, regional and university galleries.²¹ These shows have rewritten curatorial agendas on a number of related fronts. Firstly, they set the bar high for art historical rigour.²² *Contemporary Australia: Women* at GoMA in 2012 highlighted transgenerational feminist aesthetics through conscious art historical homages, highlighting the importance of 'fixing' (or simply not forgetting) women's place in art history. *The Bakers Dozen* (University of Technology, Sydney, 2012) did the same through an inter-generational focus on modernist geometrical abstraction.

These shows also remind us that feminist experimentation has driven contemporary art, including emergent forms of visual arts interventions in participatory and networked democracy known as 'social practice'. *No Added Sugar* (Casula Powerhouse, 2012), and Brisbane's LEVEL projects echo earlier feminist attempts at community cultural engagement projects that broaden art audiences through a tried-and-true feminist aesthetic (the 'look of listening'- a model now commonly considered as the 'post-documenta 11' curatorial platform, notwithstanding its feminist predecessors). Many of the conceptual, material and practical dimensions of contemporary art have been derived from feminist practice, and this is gradually being curatorially acknowledged.

Younger artists look to these exhibitions and claim a rightful feminist heritage, drawing upon the powerful oeuvres of Tracey Moffatt, Debra Dawes, Mikaela Dwyer, Julie Rrap, Judy Watson, Anne Ferran and others to find their own work challenged and validated. Feminist curating recognises that having a history strengthens women’s practice. These recent shows celebrate the fact that feminism has been contemporary art’s most generative, transformative force, and the ‘F word’ can be art historically de-ghettoised.

Contemporary feminist exhibitions may or may not be all-woman affairs. Tightly-curated mixed gender feminist exhibitions such as Sexes (Carriageworks, 2013) curated rich historical connections between feminist and queer aesthetics.²³ An inclusive curatorial agenda today generates commonalities of interest between feminist and other activist areas like Aboriginal politics, anti-militarism, multi-culturalism, environmental justice and sexual equality.

We must also note how these recent feminist exhibitions revive art world activism. The ‘femibuster’ is a particularly smart vehicle for bringing aesthetic inquiry and arts activism together, centre-stage. This intersection interrogates the silly idea that our artworld is now ‘post-ideological’ – an idea starkly belied by both artworks and statistics. For instance, *Contemporary Australia: Women* highlighted GoMA’s weak track record on representing work by women artists.²⁴ Observers were quick to note that it is not enough to host spectacular, all-woman show every twenty or so years.

Today, feminist curators no longer face the reactionary misogyny of post-Federation cultural mandarins like Lionel Lindsay, Bernard Hall or J.S MacDonald, the equally masculinist enthusiasms of late modernism, or the mainstream critics who, mired in the ‘culture wars’ of the Howard years, could not countenance the radical inclusions of the *NWAE*. Today, however, we face a conservative political and cultural agenda that is just as clear and cruel. Not surprisingly, perhaps, today’s ‘events management’, festivalised art economy just wants to be ‘liked’ in the Facebook sense. In an art world where everything (and nothing) is ‘relevant’, feminist curating bites hard, and remains topical (writing this essay, I hear that in Blacktown in Sydney’s south west, artists and non-artists are working together on the WISH (‘women in solidarity with hijabs’) campaign through the simple taking and posting of head-covered selfies). One thing is certain: the curatorial assertion of feminist industrial, political and aesthetic questions, with their art historical lineage, arguments and activist priorities, would be loudly applauded by all those lady painters, weavers, woodworkers and china painters who came together with similar aspirations over a hundred years ago.

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1 Jones, Amelia, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003

2 Joan Kerr, 'Three Firsts', in *Past Present: The national women's art anthology*, Craftsman House, An Art & Australia book, Sydney, 1999, p.3

3 *Ibidem*

4 Cited Joan Kerr, *Op.Cit.* 1999, p.9

5 A small sample would include work shown in the annual exhibitions organized by the Sydney Society of Women Painters (1910-1934), revived as the Women's Industrial Arts Society from 1934). See Carol, Ambrus, 'Australian women artists between the wars: the unacknowledged generation', *The Ladies Picture Show: Sources on a century of Australian women artists*, Hale & Iremonger, 1984, pp.11-26, Angela Philp, 'From wallflowers to tall poppies? The Sydney Society of Women Painters 1910-1934', in *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945* (ed Maryanne Dever), Brisbane: UQP, 1994, 1-12. Note also the activities of the Women's Art Club (established 1901; later renamed the Mebourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors) in Melbourne and the Western Australian Women Painters and Applied Arts Society (1936-) See Janda Gooding, *Western Australian Art and Artists 1900-1950*, AGWA catalogue, Perth 1987.

6 Organisers were Ailsa Lee Brown, Alice Stephens, Juanita Job, Myrtle Innes and Valerie Lazarus. The exhibition was held at the Education Department Gallery in Sydney. See Geoffrey Batchen, 'Exhibition of Women Painters of Australia, Education Department Gallery, Sydney 1934' (on Eleonore Lange's sculpture *Seraph of Light*), *Heritage*, p.25, also Joan Kerr, *Op.Cit.*1999, p.4

7 Thea Proctor, Forward, *Women Artists of Australia*, 1934, cited in Joan Kerr, *Op.Cit.* 1999, p.4

8 *Ibid*, p.8

9 Pioneering examples include Jude Adams, 1975 at Alexander Mackie in Sydney and Ann Stephen 1976-78 at Preston Technical College in Melbourne. See Catriona Moore, *Indecent Exposures: Twenty Years of Australian Feminist Photography*, Allen & Unwin, 1994, pp.6-12

10 See Ian Burn, 'Is art history any use to artists?', *Dialogue: Writings in Art History*, Allen & Unwin, 1982, pp.1-14

11 'Sally', 'Women's Liberation at the Show', *Scarlet Woman*, No. 1, Sept 1975, p.26-28

12 Jenny Boulton, 'The Lovely Motherhood Show, or let no faint hearts enter here', *Art Network* # 3-4, 1981, p.10

13 Documentation of *The Women's Show*, Women's Art Movement, 1977

14 See Catriona Moore and Jo Holder, 'Forbidden Fruit', *First Draft*, Sydney: First Draft, March 1986

15 Following artist and community pressure, the Australian section of the 1979 *Biennale of Sydney* reached 50% for the first (and last) time, and the mid-1980s *Perspecta* survey of contemporary Australian art was another highpoint in best curatorial practice, achieving near-equal representation on the basis of artistic merit.

16 For instance work exhibited in pioneering feminist ARI initiatives such as First Draft, Union St and Art Unit in Sydney, along with solo shows in the progressive commercial gallery sector (in Sydney, work shown at Watters, Mori, Roslyn Oxley and Yuill Crowley galleries), and mid-decade forays in prestigious curatorial platforms like *Perspecta* (AGNSW), *Heartland* (Wollongong Regional Gallery), *150 Women* (Victoria) and *Half the Sky* (Art Gallery of South Australia).

17 See for instance, 'Backlash and Appropriation', Mira Shor, in Broude and Garrard (eds), *The Power of Feminist Art: Emergence, Impact and Triumph of the American Feminist Art Movement*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1994, pp.248-263

18 Joan Kerr, 'Introduction', *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book*, (ed Joan Kerr), Craftsman House An Art & Australia Book, 1995, p.vii

19 See 'Part C' of *Past Present: The National Women's Art Anthology*, (ed Joan Kerr and Jo Holder), Craftsman House, 1999

20 International all-woman shows include Athens 2002; Tokyo 2005; Bilbao 2007; LA 2007; NY 2007; Paris 2009; Arnhem 2009; Vienna/Warsaw 2009; Rome 2010; Reykjavik 2010.

21 These include the *Food For Thought* events in Melbourne's Next Wave festival (curated by Brisbane's Level collective, June 2012), which promoted the work of younger artists, while *A Different Temporality: Aspects of Australian Feminist Art Practice 1975-1985* at Monash University focused on the film theory generation (curator Dr Kyla McFarlane, 2011.) *The Baker's Dozen* at the UTS Gallery (curator Lorna Grear, 2012) was intergenerational, as was the community-based curatorial laboratory, *No Added Sugar: Engagement and Self-Determination/Australian Muslim Women Artists* at the Casula Powerhouse May-June 2012 (curator: Ruisala Bazlamit) and the GoMA blockbuster *Contemporary Australia: Women* (curator Julie Ewington, 2012). Exhibitions of our foremost private collections of women artists' work scan the generations more broadly with *Slow Burn* at the S.H. Erwin Gallery (2011) and *Look. Look Again* at the UWA Gallery (December 2012).

22 In this context, mention must also be made of Deborah Edwards and Denise Mimmocchi's beautifully curated *Sydney Moderns: Art for a New World* (AGNSW 2013)

23 For example, the recent 'Sexes' show at Carriageworks 2012/13, which included works by male artists (Curators: Deborah Kelly and Bec Dean).

24 Amelia Groom, 'some of my best friends are women', *Overland*, March 2013 (review of *Contemporary Australia: Women*)

Ngali-Ngalim-Boorroo (For the Women)

NANCY NODEA

"This painting, I'm doing behind me, is about our people, before us. You know. How they bin¹ living, in caves and in paperbark humpies and when they used to get bush food, like a boob nut - you see that boob tree standing there [in the painting] - they used to crush it and grind it. Seeds. Good eating. That's what they bin full up on, boob nut and all that. Bush tucker. Might be minyjarra [native plum] and all that. Minyjarra they used to crush it too, little bit, make it like a damper too.

That's the olden day story, before us. When I bin young we bin come the station way. We used to still go out with our people, bush. Learning us all that thing, like bush tucker and all that food, goanna everything, turkey, kangaroo, bush potato."

Gija women of Nancy Nodea's generation were born and grew up on their traditional country, albeit as it had been carved up by pastoralists who arrived in the East Kimberley in the late 1800s. Since this time, cultural and social change and seismic shifts in government policy have meant younger peoples' lives in the semi-suburban town of Warmun are radically different from their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Senior women often speak about the desire to teach their young women what they feel is important. For decades they have been working to transform these ideas and insights into action. Art has become one way of actualising the kind of connections, conversations and change that they see as necessary and urgent. These women work in ways that are often unacknowledged and overlooked by people within and outside their community. Their work has seen immense

¹ Bin is a Kriol word that tells you the speaker is referring to an action that took place in the past



Nancy Nodea, video still from Ngali-ngalim-boorroo, 2014, courtesy Warmun Art Centre

success and very deep failure. But regardless, it continues. They understand that younger Gija women face realities, dynamics and challenges that are both inextricably connected to and drastically different from those they themselves have lived through.

The paintings and videos that form *Ngali-Ngalim-Boorroo (For the Women)* are part of a diverse and ongoing project that has been developed by senior Gija women at Warmun Art Centre. Over the last year and a half these women, including Phyllis Thomas, Mabel Juli, Shirley Purdie and Shirley Drill among others, have lead a series of bush trips to different parts of Gija Country in order to share time with and teach their young women what they feel is important.

MABEL JULI

"We followed them old people, for give us good. What they talking, you know, make you good inside, la² your giningi [in your heart]. Open your heart. Makes you really good. Not here [in Warmun]. When you here la [at] home, you don't come good. You really - you know - you don't know what you do, la [in] this place. You have a lot of trouble in this place, for all the ngali [girls], you know. And we want to try take all the young woman out la bush, you know lirrarn [teach] all [of them] all that. Make them understand, and they don't want to do nothing here when they come back and making mess, humbug you know. They want to be good, just like old people. That's really good."

² The word la in Kimberley Kriol is a preposition that translates variously to mean 'in', 'at' or 'on'



Mabel Juli, video still from *Ngali-ngalim-boorroo*, 2014, courtesy Warmun Art Centre

Aboriginal women's lives on cattle stations consisted of hard, unpaid manual work in the gardens, houses and stock camps of white station managers and their families. Although it is a period that older women describe as being a product of violent displacement and characterized by brutal inequity, they also speak of it as a time of autonomy and continuity. Gija people seized opportunities to access their Country and to practice ways of being in and seeing the world that have sustained and supported Gija people for countless generations.

In the mid-1960s when the Whitlam government passed legislation demanding Aboriginal pastoral workers be awarded pay equal to that of their white counterparts, Gija people were forced to leave the stations, and rendered homeless refugees in their own Country. This period is known as the second displacement. In the following years, a very small plot of land that was not under pastoral lease - the rations depot and telegraph station of Turkey Creek - was transformed into a community for Gija people to call their own. Warmun is now one of the largest Aboriginal communities in the East Kimberley and one considered 'viable' according to criteria insisted upon by government, their arms and agencies. For this reason it has been afforded infrastructure that is shaping it into a small town with its own freedoms, pressures, constraints and complexities. This is the world which younger women have grown up, learnt to navigate and survive in.

BETTY CARRINGTON (speaking to a group of young women)

"Well, we like to teach you mob, take you mob out. And what I feel, I like to hear you fellas talk Gija language. I like to hear you fellas singing little bit of a joonba [a song and dance cycle]. Dancing joonba. That's we own culture, black fella culture. We bin born with that. I bin learn all around here, when I bin little, singing corroboree, dancing. Well I'd like to see you mob do that. And hunting. Getting bush tucker. And I like to hear you fellas jarrag [talk], Gija. That's why we have this Gija program, for you mob to rangga [listen]. You can learn. I jarrag Gija for you mob all the time at camp, all around."

It is important to understand that the energy that has created *Ngali-ngalim-boorroo* is only the latest incarnation of decades of dedicated work. In their efforts to fully take up their roles as teachers, carers, providers, healers and creators, senior women work teaching in the school, in their homes, in drug and alcohol and therapeutic programs and at the art centre using storytelling and art as tools towards these ends. They carry their responsibility to mentor and guide younger people happily and with humour but often heavily. The systems that younger women are obliged to master and move within as they negotiate school, work, accessing healthcare etc. often only admit elders as expert knowledge holders in ways that are bounded and conditional. They fall short of really seeing and honouring what it is senior Gija women know, what they do and what they have to offer their own community. In this way their authority is often undermined. *Ngali-ngalim-boorroo* has been led by these women and they have worked through difficult obstacles to continue to speak to their young people with conviction and with love.

Betty Carrington, video still from *Ngali-ngalim-boorroo*, 2014, courtesy Warmun Art Centre





Phyllis Thomas, video still from *Ngali-ngalim-boorroo*, 2014, courtesy Warmun Art Centre

PHYLLIS THOMAS

"When we bin young it bin hard for me fella, When we bin kid we used to follow old old people, and they used to make us carry our own swag, billycan, we bin always carry them. They used to give us that paper bark, mernda. We call it mernda, paper bark. Put a blanket, pillow, everything and carry them.

We'd go to another place and find billabong water. Old, old people bin always say, "Right, all you kid, you fella go. You fella go cut a tree, and get a grass and chuck 'em long one in the water." Gerlgayi-girrem, means we used to roll that spinifex. Goorndarri. Goorndarri means fish and he used to get stuck in that grass. Grab him. That kind we bin learn, me fella.

We never feel lazy with the old people. When we used to get lazy we used to get a hiding for doing that. We never follow anybody mates, we used to be self. Another one go got his family, another one go got his family. But we bin learn, go bush. We bin walk got a [on] foot. Gerlgayi³, hunting for bush tucker, that kind me-fella bin learn. We bin learn, go back work for gardiya [white people] la station. Wake up, sweep up, washing dishes, milking cow, milking nanny goat, all that sort of thing we bin learn. Carry water from a well in a bucket. We never had a pump that time, we had a well.

And never even go near young boy. They bin keep us out me fella, girl and boy. Girl for self, boy for self. Otherwise we used to get a hiding, if they used to find us talking with a young boy. We bin learn different way, hard way me fella. But this time we see 'em young girl, young boy all mixed up. But me fella, we bin have it hard way from old old people.

We never wait for anybody, we bin learn different way. Not go for one fire from another people. We used to make our own fire....

Goondarrim-boorroo, marra yarra, that mean 'go out fishing'. Or go rolling spinifex, but gardiya [white people have] got a dragging net. But we bin chuck a long long stick and get a spinifex, any kind of grass, mix it up. That's the way we bin learn, me fella."

When these senior Gija women share their knowledge of Gija language, Ngarranggarni (Dreaming), dance, song, story and of their Country, they show their magnificence, their fierce love of their place and each other, their mastery over complex knowledge and its expression. In these things they are experts; sharply insightful, capable and fleet, precise and practiced. These women have the power to change the weather, to talk to spirits, to feed hungry bellies with fat fish and sweet honey, to weave stories and sing songs that will wake up the Country, to show the way to Ngarranggarni places, to find water and the best fishing spots, to cut the right kind of wood for cooking and for making smoke that will keep mosquitoes off sleeping babies. This process draws from what they themselves were taught and fills it with their confidence in its potential to impact problems that their community shoulders and that sometimes seem intractable – drug abuse, undirected rage and depression, suicide and early death. When they are on their own country, these senior women exercise the authority handed to them by their own elders and call up their memory. They cast it out towards the future they want for their young people and for women to come.

SHIRLEY PURDIE (speaking to a group of young women)
“Ngali-ngalim, we do this for you fellas, young young girls. Take you fellas, show you fellas bush life, hunting, dancing corroboree, any kind, singing, teaching you fellas story. That’s why we’re doing this. To learn you about the trees and explain to you mob what country means. That’s what’s important for us. We gotta keep that story going.
I’m sure you fellas will all be interested, and you can pass it on when you mob have your kids and when you mob come to be grandmother, and great-grandmother.
When I go to a waterhole, I barrayi la [speak in a special way to] Country. I talk:
Berrem noonanyge boowoorr-yoorroong-milim daam-birri. Ngoowan ganginy bimbir-rijbe ningoowoom-yoo yoowoorriyangem ngenengga daam.
‘I brought them here, people from country to the north. Don’t you mob fail to recognise them. They’re our countrymen. I am speaking to this country.’
Well my Aunty Winnie and my Dad bin learn me how to talk like that.”



Shirley Purdie, video still from Ngali-ngalim-boorroo, 2014, courtesy Warmun Art Centre

Words by Nancy Nodea, Mabel Juli, Betty Carrington, Phyllis Thomas and Shirley Purdie extracted from interviews recorded by Nancy Daylight, Margaret Joshua and Asayah Nodea in September 2014 in the Media Lab at Warmun Art Centre. Full text compiled and co-authored by Anna Crane and Alana Hunt.

Exhibition

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Kelly Doley

// Hissy Fit

The Contemporary Art and Feminism curatorial brief requested I work with and present just one artist. I, along with six other curators, were to work alongside an artist of our choice in realising their projects and be involved in the process in the lead up to the exhibition. In my experience as an artist the curator operates at a safe distance from the action but is ever controlling from the sidelines. It was this attempt at fracturing the power dynamic between curator and artist symbiotic to the chosen and the chooser that appealed to me.

I knew I wanted to work with a female performance artist. Performance is a distinct trope of feminist art and continues to be relevant to many female practitioners who utilise their bodies as material. This approach remains as pertinent contemporarily as it has been historically as women remain the eternal performers that are enduringly referred to on the terms of their image.

I also knew I wanted to work with a collective. I respect collective art makers; there is power in collectivity. It has proven to be a successful feminist methodology, both within the context of art by collapsing clichés of the genius solo artist, and politically as a way to gain traction with activist strategies.

So I chose Hissy Fit.

Hissy Fit is Jade Muratore, Emily O'Connor, and Nat Randall; an emerging Sydney based performance art collective. Their rigorous research practice into the construction of female hysteria and lack of imagery around female aggression is powerfully reframed and projected onto their own bodies. Through an at times violent form of endurance performance they dissect the image of the mad woman, the 'female out of control' permitting this 'othered' female body to exist, challenging the universal directive for women NOT to lose control.

Distinctive is Hissy Fit's approach to feminism as fundamentally queer. The bodies you see on stage/screen have a fluidity that morphs from female to monster, human to animal, violent to sexual, dominated to submissive. It is this multiplicity in the work of Hissy Fit that interests me. It offers a broader critique of hierarchical structures and promotes a feminism/s that is multi diaphanous and poly-vocal. In the context of Feminist Curating this is particularly pertinent where not only the curator/artist relationship is up for negotiation but the very definition of feminism itself.



Hissy Fit, *Heat*, production still, 2014. Photo: Hissy Fit and Kelly Doley

Elvis Richardson & Virginia Fraser

Responding to the conference title Curating Feminism, the artists have adopted a curatorial pose to collaborate on a series of magazine covers. Where other curators might select, arrange and present tangible and digital objects in galleries, the editors of FEMMO™ have organised indexical text objects on a (very big) page. FEMMO™ combines portraiture with attention-seeking headlines in a series of covers for a so-far fictional publication. FEMMO™ references a range of styles from the crowded texts of celebrity gossip

weeklies to the minimalism of authoritative international art-world glossies. FEMMO™ promises articles its producers would like to read. FEMMO™ imagines a world where feminism is central to, and informs, every topic. In particular FEMMO™ has fun with the art-world's gender biased status-quo.

The National Library of Australia declined to issue FEMMO™ with an International Standard Serial Number because it had "no content". FEMMO™ disagrees. FEMMO™ is joining the surface litter of Australian art history.

Elvis Richardson and Virginia Fraser, *FEMMO™ The ongoing issue 1*,
2014, silk screen on cotton, 140x110cm



Laura Castagnini

// Alice Lang

“Alice Lang Originals” are an ongoing series of porcelain boob mugs created from a 3D body scan of the artists’ own breasts in the style of overblown novelty mugs sourced from the internet. Each mug is hand painted to render an anatomically correct replication of the artists’ torso, complete with freckles and moles, and omits a handle: forcing the user to cup Alice Lang’s (no longer original) breasts.

For *Curating Feminism*, thirty “Alice Lang Original” mugs have been fabricated, packaged and mailed as an unsolicited “gift” to selected influential curators and gallerists in their respective hometowns (Brisbane and Melbourne) and new places of residence (Los Angeles and London), as well as the site of the exhibition (Sydney). They are announced by a letter congratulating the recipient

on receiving the mug and asking them to document their interactions with it on instagram using the hashtag #AliceLangOriginals – thus awkwardly transforming the gift into an inappropriate vessel for artist self-promotion. Initially conceived as a method to overcome the practical difficulties of the artist/curator’s participation in *Curating Feminisms* from abroad, Lang’s self-conscious performance of postage allegorizes the way artworks are transported (or “imported”) to various venues and online contexts in today’s globalised art market.

With a knowing smirk and an ironic thumbs-up, Lang’s “Alice Lang Originals” project parodies the objectification, dissemination and consumption of anonymous women’s bodies – both on and offline.

Alice Lang, *Alice Lang originals*, 2014, hand painted porcelain boob mug modelled from a 3D body scan of the artists body, approx. 13 x 7 x 12cm, courtesy the artist & Karen Woodbury Gallery.



Jo Holder //

Euraba Papermakers

Euraba is for everyone, we don't specifically see ourselves as feminist but we are a group of strong women, carving out a path for ourselves with the support of many others.

The story of Euraba is distinctive not least because it was founded by nine senior Goomeroi women from the communities of Toomelah and Boggabilla in northwestern NSW. In May 1999 the Euraba Paper Company was started in a shed at Toomelah.

Papermaking has connections to traditional culture in the process of collecting and being together to make useful things. We are harvesting fibres that were traditionally used in basket making and incorporating them into some of our papers. We are painting about traditional foods and medicines and going out in to country to collect and document these things. The Euraba leaf for example, is medicinal. We are reviving language,

relearning what has been partly lost through the mission years.

We are rewriting our history though our artwork, growing pride in our culture. Some of us look back to Goomeroi symbols in our art (there are carved trees around still). The art is a way to connect. We think the [urban, white] art world could be a bit braver! But they are watching what we are doing.

Side-by-side teaching ensures everyone feels equal, it is a mentoring process but everyone is learning together. It reflects the philosophy of Euraba showing the way, leading by example and walking alongside to help people find themselves. Like with the big fish and the river work (*Bagaay* mural 2010), everyone got their own ideas included. It looked so good when it was finished 'cause it's all a part of us, fishing is important to everyone.

We select collaborating artists for projects that can help lessen the gap between us elders and the younger

Euraba artists and papermakers, *Gaduu - Murray cod*, 2010 (detail), plant fibre and rag paper, 93 x 124cm, (8 panels, irregular overall), winner of the 2010 Parliament of New South Wales Aboriginal Art Prize. A collaborative work by Thelma Bartman, Leonie Binge, Lola Binge, Michelle Binge, Adrienne Duncan, Alin Duncan, Aunty Joy Duncan, Christine Dumas, Nerida Hinch, Marlena Hinch, Aunty Marlene Hinch, Aunty May Hinch, Garry McGrady, Leah McGrady, Tim McIntosh, Stella O'Halloran, Anita Swan and Lenice Swan. Courtesy the artists and Euraba Paper Company, image courtesy Campbelltown Arts Centre and Parliament of New South Wales. Photo: Ian Hobbs



generation. The young people see us working with fresh ideas in a new way. We are able to teach them the stories better this way. The projects can be exhausting though, with tight timeframes and budget constraints and the norms of community life. However, drawing strength from one another is something Euraba has been about all along.

There are issues of women's inequality that we see everyday: domestic violence, violence against women, lack of childcare, lack of opportunity. Some of our young girls see themselves as less because they are girls. Even with strong female role models. We need more women representing us in

positions of power. It was the women who fought to have Boobera Lagoon recognized as a place of significance and petitioned to get a health clinic at the mission. This led to getting treated water on health grounds. Strong women have led the way and made room for what we are doing with the art. Change is not monumental but it is in the right direction. Will the coming generations be feminists? If they have to be, our women have a strong history of fighting for equality.

Notes from an interview with Aunty May Hinch, Gloria Woodbridge, Aunty Joy Duncan, Marlene Hinch and Adrienne (Adi) Duncan at Boggabilla by Kate Ford (3 October 2014). Editor: Jo Holder.

Brigid Noone

// Soda_Jerk

Committed but not attached: part #2 has been developed within the broader frame of my PhD research. It belongs to a series of exhibitions that explore the artist/curator paradigm, with a particular focus on artist run spaces and independent platforms and collectives. My research proposes that these spaces operate within a modality of 'self organisation' that provides a vehicle for hybrid practice.

As Director of Fontanelle and an artist/curator, I have been exposed to and connected with the practices of many interesting artists and collectives. This is how I came to know Sydney based artists SODA_JERK and to recontextualise their two-channel video work *After the Rainbow* within my own expanded painting practice. Through exploring overlaps and interconnections between artistic and curatorial practice my visual vernacular has developed to include works like *Committed but not attached*, in which I am simultaneously artist and curator.

With this work I explore a dynamic that moves past meta-curation to contribute to a new visual language in the realm of the hybridised artist/curator. As works can speak to one another in a curated exhibition, the expanding field of painting here offers an opportunity for the individual works and 'characters' they hold within them a chance to do so in an intimate dialogue. As we internalize our own dialogues of fear, ageing, sorrow and love, so *Committed but not attached* internalises a curatorial gesture within an artistic practice.

As an artist/curator programming Fontanelle I am informed by a strong sense of gender equality, although my practice is instinctively bound up with being a woman who holds a feminist position. In some ways to identify and unpack this position so overtly is as unnatural as separating my gender from my identity; I cannot articulate my practice without implicitly articulating a feminist perspective.

Brigid Noone, *Committed but not attached #2*, artist/curator impression
(including SODA_JERK's, *After the Rainbow*, 2009, 2-channel digital video,
5:42 minutes) wall painting installation, 2014

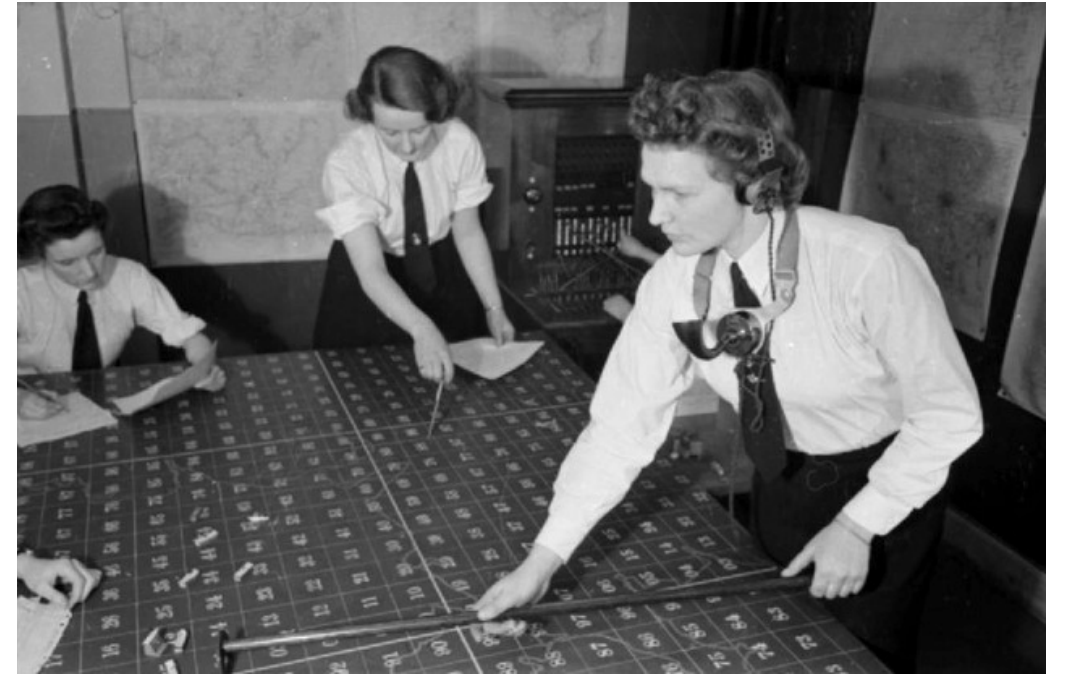


Jacqueline Millner

// Philipa Veitch

Philipa Veitch and I have been friends since we met at art school in the late 1980s. We have been integral to each other's development as art writers, educators, curators, mothers and (for her at least) artist. Early on, we developed a shared passion for Georges Bataille and his writings on inner experience and erotism, compelled by his attempts to conceive differently of the body and its relationship with the sacred. Bataille's base materialism was also one context for another shared passion: feminism, and the possibilities for art as activism. Philipa and I were two of a group of 5 students from SCA who 'intervened' in a sexist billboard in Balmain in 1993, a case that ended up before magistrate Pat O'Shane and garnered headlines around Australia, briefly focusing public attention on the representation of women in the media. Philipa's practice has become more refined and acute over the years, still fired up by her sophisticated knowledge of politics and social relations and outrage at injustice, ignorance and abuse of power, but using a formal language that owes debts to minimalism and early feminist experiments. In curating Philipa's work for this exhibition, I was interested to tease out her responses to

current political issues in the context of feminist activist approaches. As Philipa notes, 'The most successful artworks are those that perform what cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek has called a critical "short circuit", exposing the tensions within or between a particular subject or field of inquiry, while simultaneously making explicit the conditions and operations of their own production. Simply put, within the arena of modern and contemporary art production, these forms of material thinking act as a form of qualitative force multiplier, the most effective examples catalyzing novel forms of thought and production that dramatically alter our view of the existing world order and of what art is and can be'. According to Philipa, 'the work of feminists has continually acted as a critical short circuit within all fields of endeavour, and has yet to be neutered through total assimilation or commodification by the artworld or mainstream culture. Taking the form of a de-constructed military plotting table, my work *Force Multiplier* considers the power of feminist thinking within the field of contemporary art and curatorial practice, and its role in re-imagining and re-shaping a world in a state of perpetual crisis'.



The Unknown Girl Behind the Sea Battle – the work of the Women's Royal Naval Service, 1942, public domain

Jo Holder & Alana Hunt

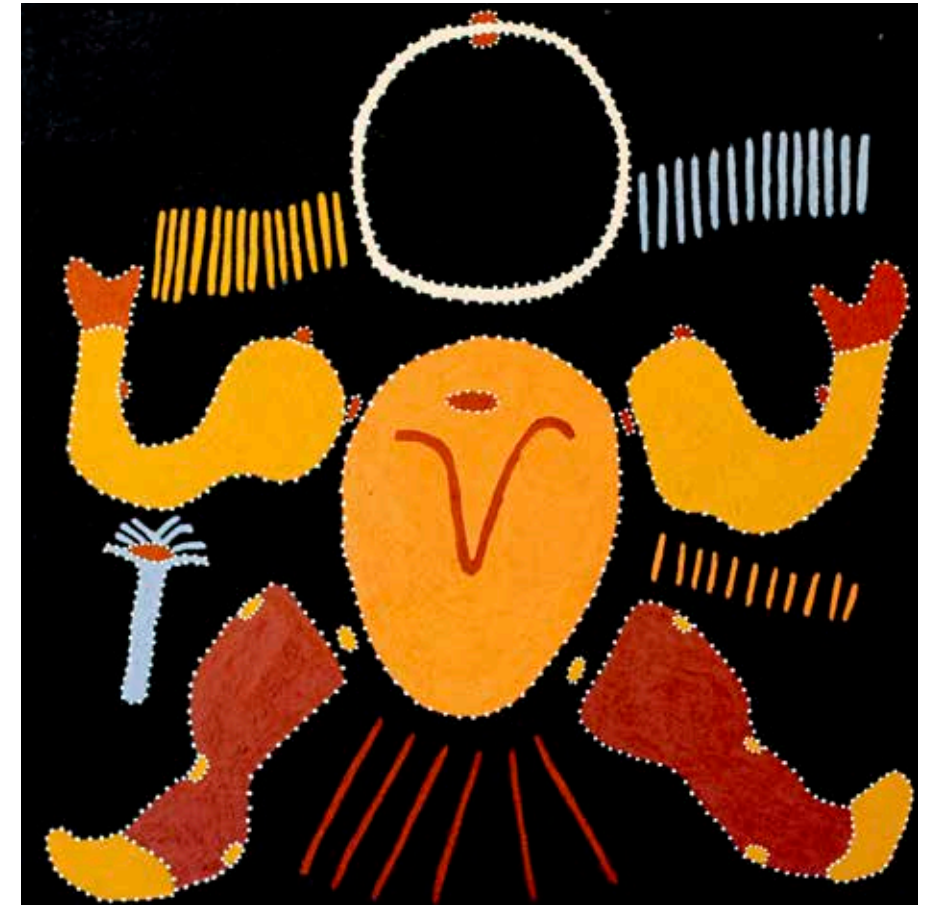
// Ngali-ngalim-boorroo

Ngali-ngalim-boorroo (For the Women) is a large and ongoing project developed by senior Gija women at Warmun Art Centre. Linked exhibitions at SCA Gallery and The Cross Art Projects represent the first year and a half of a complex and rewarding project. In a recent triumph the paintings were shown at the Warmun Art Centre Gallery to the acclaim of school children and community before leaving for Sydney.

At SCA Gallery, Shirley Purdie and Kathy Ramsey's remarkable paintings represent different generations, the established and emerging. In a video produced in the media lab at Warmun Art Centre Shirley Purdie speaks to her work offering art historical illumination to generations of Gija women to come. A second video presents the artists' ideas, actions and hopes for the project as they are often checked by reality. Contemporary Art and Feminism are humbled by the artists' generosity in sharing their insights.

The senior women who speak on the video include Mabel Juli, Shirley Purdie, Phyllis Thomas, Nancy Nodea and Betty Carrington. They talk about leading a series of bush trips to different parts of Gija Country to teach their young women knowledge and values they hope will endure. Their works are on view at The Cross Art Projects along with work by other female artists from Warmun.

Pedagogy remains an important component of art practice in Warmun today. The Warmun Art Movement emerged with the Two-Way educational focus at the local school in the late 1970s. Painting and digital media not only express beliefs, opinions, stories, feelings and histories, but they capture them for future generations to come. These ways of sharing and learning are at the heart of *Ngali-ngalim-boorroo* as it continues today.



Shirley Purdie, *'Garajbebirri Woolmooj-Woolmoojgarri Yarrurn - When We Twitch In Our Bodies'*, 2014, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Image courtesy Warmun Art Centre

Curators & Artists

LAURA CASTAGNINI is a curator and writer whose research interests include feminist art histories and their current articulations, as well as the politics of representation presented in photography, performance and video art. Recent curatorial projects include *Backflip: Feminism and Humour* in Contemporary Art at Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts in 2013, which included a lecture by the Guerrilla Girls in Melbourne; *Memory Screens*, co-curated with Eugenia Lim and presented by Channels Festival at ACMI in 2013; *Come a Little Closer* at Screenspace in 2012; *This is Not A Love Song*, co-curated with Anna Pappas at Anna Pappas Gallery in 2012; and *Re/Gendered* at Platform Artists Group Inc. in 2010. Laura recently completed a Master of Arts (Art History) at the University of Melbourne and now works at *Frieze* magazine in London.

KELLY DOLEY is a contemporary artist, curator and researcher. Her practice takes a socially engaged, thematic and interdisciplinary approach that has recently turned to exploring the history, relevance and agency of feminism. She has served on the board of Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney (2008-2009) and was co-founder of Sydney lounge-room gallery Cosmic Battle For Your Heart (2009-2011) with Mitch Cairns and Agatha Gothe Snape. In 2013 she launched JANIS, a pilot exhibition, publishing and talks project dedicated to promoting women in the arts. Since 2007 Doley has worked collaboratively making video and performance art with all-female collective Brown Council. She holds a Master of Fine Arts from University of Sydney (2011) as well as a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) from UNSW (2006).

VIRGINIA FRASER is an artist, writer, editor and occasional curator who lives in Melbourne. Her art practice began in the early 1980s with photography, small gauge film and sound work and now also includes video, installation and drawing. Her solo and collaborative work has been shown widely in Australia and overseas.

She originally trained as a journalist on a daily newspaper and has worked in a variety of print and broadcast media including two business publications, and at ABC Radio National as a news producer and executive producer of an arts program.

She has a BA in Media Arts with a double major in film and photography from Phillip Institute of Technology and an MFA by research from the VCA. In 2010 she was a fellow at the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra researching women as technicians, entrepreneurs and producers in the first two decades of Australian film, a continuing project.

AUNTY MAY HINCH was born in Moree in 1946. She is one of the founding members of The Euraba Paper Company and continues to work as a beater operator in the mill. She is a driving force behind the organisation and keeper of the vision that genuine employment will strengthen the community and provide opportunities for the younger generation. She has given many artist talks in regional galleries and to schools about her artwork and as a representative of Euraba, sharing the message of hope and self-determination. May enjoys helping young people learn how to operate the beaters, make paper, pulp painting and Goomeroi tradition.

HISSEY FIT is a collaboration between emerging artists Jade Muratore, Emily O'Connor and Nat Randall, who make work across video and performance. Their work investigates the notion of the deviant woman, a transgressive character symbolic of an unapologetic breed of feminism. Hissy Fit were recipients of the Stephen Cummins Bequest Residency Program at Performance Space in 2013. They presented a durational performance piece and video work titled *Episode* as part of the Mardi Gras Festival performance program *Day For Night* at Carriageworks, and a performance lecture, *She's Lost Control*, as part of Canberra's *You Are Here* festival in March. In May 2014 Hissy Fit completed a three week residency with Bundanon Trust for the development of their first major work, *I might blow up someday* to be presented with Performance Space in October 2015.

JO HOLDER is the director of The Cross Art Projects in Sydney. Her curatorial projects are known for a pluralistic presentation about our cultural past and present. She was director of SH Ervin Gallery, National Trust, Sydney (1997-1999) and co-director, Mori Gallery, Sydney (1984-92). She is co-author of *Human Scale in Architecture*. *George Molnar's Sydney* (Thames and Hudson, 2003) and co-editor with Joan Kerr of *Past Present an anthology on the National Women's Art Project* (Art and Australia Books, 1997). She edited *Photofile* (Australian Centre for Photography, 1994-1996), co-ordinated the National Women's Art Exhibition comprising simultaneous exhibitions in over 147 galleries, museums and libraries in 1995, and writes and edits for contemporary art journals with an interest in contemporary biennales. She is co-convenor of the research cluster Contemporary Art and Feminism.

ALANA HUNT began working with Warmun Art Centre in the remote East Kimberley region of Western Australia in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 flood. Prior to this Alana lived in New Delhi for three years, initially on a residency with the Sarai Program and later completing her Masters from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Much of her work has come about through long conversations – listening to and speaking – with the sounds and currents that emanate from Indian occupied Kashmir including the lo-fi tactical media intervention *Paper txt msgs from Kashmir* (2009-2011) and the participatory memorial *Cups of nun chai* (2010-2014). The dual contexts of South Asia and Australia continually teach Alana about the contemporary legacies of colonisation, the ambivalent nature of modernity and the fabric of community.

ALICE LANG was born in Byron Bay, Australia and is currently completing an MFA at California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles. Her cross-disciplinary art practice generates social and interactive spaces that explore how objects achieve public and personal meaning through the politics of their material. Lang completed her Honours in Visual Arts at QUT in Brisbane in 2004 and has completed residencies in Canada, New York and Los Angeles. She has been the recipient of awards such as the Queensland Art Gallery Melville Haysom Scholarship (2009), Australia Council New Work Grant (2012), Lord Mayors Emerging Artist Fellowship (2012) and the Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship for Emerging Artists. She is also a founding co-director of LEVEL artist-run-initiative (Brisbane, Australia).

JACQUELINE MILLNER is Associate Dean Research at Sydney College of the Arts (SCA), University of Sydney, where she also lectures on contemporary art theory and history. She has published widely on

contemporary Australian and international art in key anthologies, journals and catalogues of national and international institutions. Her books include *Conceptual Beauty: Perspectives on Australian Contemporary Art* (2010, Artspace, Sydney) and (with Jennifer Barrett), *Australian Artists in the Contemporary Museum* (2014, Ashgate, London). She is co-convenor of the research cluster Contemporary Art and Feminism..

BRIGID NOONE is currently the Director of Fontanelle Gallery & Studios in Adelaide, Australia, and her professional practice spans painting and installation, teaching and curatorial work. Noone was selected by the Australia Council for the Arts to work as an emerging curator for the Australian presentations at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009) and in 2012 was awarded a National Association for the Visual Arts, Curator Mentorship Initiative grant. Her Australian group exhibitions include painting (*as one*) (2010), Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide and *Imagining Interiors*, Jam Factory, Adelaide. Noone began lecturing at the University of South Australia in 2007 and Adelaide Central School of Art in 2011, and has co-founded several cultural spaces and initiatives in Adelaide: The Institute Studio (2003), FELTspace (2008), Renew Adelaide (2010), and Fontanelle Gallery and Studios (2012). Brigid is currently undertaking a PhD at the University of South Australia.

ELIZABETH PULIE was born in Sydney in 1968 and has been exhibiting her work since 1989, which is represented in collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and the Daimler Foundation, New York. In 2002 and 2003 she ran Front Room, an artist run space in the front room of her house, and from 2002 to 2005 she wrote, edited and published the magazine *Lives of the Artists*. She

is currently undertaking her PhD at Sydney College of the Arts, researching the end of art in relation to contemporary art practice. Pulie is represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery in Sydney and Neon Parc in Melbourne.

SHIRLEY PURDIE has been painting for more than twenty years and is an artist of significance and seniority. Her cultural knowledge and artistic skill complement each other to produce a painting practice that holds great strength - characterized by a bold use of richly textured ochre. Shirley is also a prominent leader in Warmun community and an incisive cross-cultural communicator, and is inspired by more senior Warmun artists including her late mother, the great Madigan Thomas, Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie. Much of her work explores colonial incursions onto country as well as spirituality and the relationship between Gija conceptions of Ngarranggarni (Dreaming) and Catholicism. In 2007 Shirley was awarded the Blake Prize for Religious Art for her major work Stations of the Cross. Shirley is presently working on a major exhibition and publication of great cultural and ecological value, documenting through painting and in Gija language the plants and trees of her country

KATHY RAMSEY is one of Warmun Art Centre's most acclaimed and renowned emerging artists. Having only started painting in 2013, Kathy has already been included in numerous group exhibitions across Australia and internationally. Of her work Kathy says, "I only just started painting in 2013. I just like to join in and to be sharing a part of my country. My mother (artist Mona Ramsey) and my grandfather (acclaimed artist Timmy Timms), they always told us what this place means, what the names are, those Ngarranggarni (Dreaming) stories. Now, with this painting, I'll be the one to tell them to my kids. I'm the mother

of three sons, but I lost my oldest son in 2008. He was real strong in corroborree, but my other sons, they pick it up too. They went to school in Warmun, and I worked in the childcare centre and cleaning and bits like that. Now I'm painting all the time".

ELVIS RICHARDSON is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice explores modes of recognition and memorialisation through the re-valuing of 'found' and obsolete personal and mass-produced cultural materials. Her installation, sculptural and video works are about story telling through the traces of peoples lives. Richardson was awarded a Samstag Scholarship in 2000, completing an MFA at Columbia University in New York in 2002. Her work has been exhibited in many key Australian contemporary art spaces and she has been actively engaged as an artist/director/writer/curator in numerous artist run initiatives, most recently DEATH BE KIND, a bespoke gallery and program of curated exhibitions about art and death. Richardson is the author of CoUNTess, an online research project that engages with the current state of contemporary art practice and provides an essential tool for understanding the arts in Australia.

SODA_JERK is a 2-person art collective that works with sampled material to construct rogue histories and counter-mythologies. Taking the form of video installations and lecture performances, their archival image practice is situated at the interzone of experimental film, documentary and speculative fiction.

SALOTE TAWALE explores the identity of the individual in collective systems, drawing upon personal experiences of race, ethnicity and gender growing up in suburban Australia. Employing photography, video, installation and live performance in her work, Tawale is heavily

influenced by the feminist video artists from the 1970s. Community development is also a large part of her practice; she recently produced a youth workshop program and exhibition, *Pattern and Portraiture*, for the Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival 2014 and co-curated *Out of sequence*, a video exhibition for the same festival with Jacob Tolo. She has developed and delivered workshops for council and community programs such as the Rotary Snap Hop Youth Arts Project (supported by the CCP) and several youth workshops for the City of Melbourne at Signal, Art Play and Campbelltown Art Centre. Tawale has lectured and tutored at Monash and Deakin Universities and is currently undertaking a Master of Fine Art at the University of Sydney.

PHILIPA VEITCH'S practice explores the hypermatrix of natural, social and psychic phenomena that constitute our subjective experience of modernity. Her artworks employ a range of practices and forms including film, sound, drawing and installation. She has curated more than a dozen exhibitions, including *Marineland*, *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, *Petrol*, and *Comfort*, and was co-director of Firstdraft (1996-1997) and Loose projects (2006-2007). She has undertaken a number of residencies including the Asialink Visual Arts Residency (Beijing), and videomicroscopy and scanning electron microscopy residencies at The University of Sydney and The Australian Museum. Her short films have screened nationally and internationally in events such as Experimenta (Melbourne), Impakt Festival (Utrecht), Image Forum (Tokyo), and the European Media Art Festival (Osnabruck). Selected recent exhibitions and projects include *No Signal* (I.C.A.N), Dark Arts (Marrickville Garage), *Easy Listening* (West Space) and *Look This Way* (UTS Gallery).

Program

Thursday 23 October to Sunday 26 October

Exhibition, masterclasses, conference & Wikithon

HOW CAN CURATING BE A PRACTICE OF ACTIVISM, ESPECIALLY IN THE REALM OF GENDER? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FEMINIST CURATOR, OR TO ADOPT A FEMINIST CURATORIAL METHOD? HOW DOES AN EMPHASIS ON PROCESS, COLLABORATION AND NEGOTIATION HELP US IMAGINE FEMINIST CURATING?

THURSDAY 23 OCT

6PM

Keynote Address // Michael Birchall

ACTIVISM & ART: FOR THE DE-PROLETARIANIZED PETTY BOURGEOISIE

SCA Auditorium

Michael Birchall is a Berlin based curator, writer and the co-publisher of On Curating (www.on-curating.org), a journal devoted to curatorial practice, published by Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), where he lectures in the postgraduate program in curating. Birchall is a recognised innovator in the field of activist curating, with particular interest in curating as social practice. He writes for contemporary art magazines such as Freize, Frieze d/e and C-Magazine. Birchall will be critically analysing recent exhibitions and art practices that have responded to the protests and demonstrations that have recently taken place across North America and Europe, fundamentally as a resistance to neo-liberalism. Considering examples such as EVA International (2012), the 7th Berlin Biennial and Documenta 13 that reflect overt and covert political ideas, Birchall asks, are these contributing to Hal Foster's theory of the neo-avant-garde? Foster's use of the term has entered a working alliance with the widespread rise of new forms of sociability and praxis in art since the mid-1990s. Beyond this, activism has begun to operate as a testing ground for various social interventions, transformative actions and participatory collaborations, both in and outside of institutions.

7PM

Exhibition Opening

CURATING FEMINISM

SCA Galleries

To be opened by Verity Firth, Labor candidate for Balmain and former State Minister for Women, Education and Training, and the Environment.

Seven curators, in choosing and then working with their artists, were asked to explore the following questions and attempt to develop strategies that bring fresh insights into these pressing issues: What might curatorial activism look like, especially in the realm of gender? What does it mean to be a feminist curator, or to adopt a feminist curatorial method? *Curating Feminism* addresses ideas around the ethics of collaboration between artist and curator to facilitate the logistics of the laboratory-style approach. It adopts the curatorial model of one curator, one artist/artist collective as a deliberate strategy to decentralize the curatorial process. It includes a long installation period to give the curators and artists the rare chance to work in the galleries as a process space, and to explore ideas of activism/feminism in the making/curatorial process as much as in the finished work. *Curating Feminism* envisages the gallery as a creative and expansive space for discussion and interaction, both in the making and exhibition of the works.

CURATORS // ARTISTS

Kelly Doley // Hissy Fit

Elvis Richardson & Virginia Fraser

Laura Castagnini // Alice Lang

Jo Holder // Euraba Papermakers

Brigid Noone // Soda_Jerk

Jacqueline Millner // Philipa Veitch

Jo Holder & Alana Hunt // Ngali-ngalim-boorroo (For the Women)

FRIDAY 24 OCT

10AM - 12PM

CURATING
MASTERCLASSES

Sydney College of the Arts

- 1 / Feminist Killjoy or Happy Humanist?
Maura Reilly
- 2 / Curating in Times of Crisis: Immaterial
Labour and the Rise of the Entrepreneur
Michael Birchall
- 3 / 'Girl Genius': Redressing Gender Imbalance
Tess Allas & Miranda Samuels.

6PM

Keynote address // Maura Reilly
CURATORIAL ACTIVISM:
TOWARDS AN ETHICS
OF CURATING
AGNSW, Domain Theatre

Dr Maura Reilly, founding curator of Elizabeth Sackler Centre for feminist art at Brooklyn Museum, NY, and co-curator with iconic feminist art historian Linda Nochlin of Global Feminisms, major international exhibition of feminist contemporary art at Brooklyn Museum 2007. Dr Reilly will be speaking on curatorial activism, a term she has coined to describe the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principal aim of ensuring that large constituencies of people are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art. It is a practice that commits itself to counter-hegemonic initiatives that give voice to those who have been historically silenced and, as such, focuses largely on work produced by women, artists of colour, non-Europeans, and/or queer artists. In her keynote, Dr Reilly examines current art world statistics with a careful eye toward sex-race ratios, and posits several strategies that might be employed by activists to address these disparities. She will make reference to the upcoming exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW Pop to Popism where one of the curatorial objectives has been redressing the gender imbalance in the canon. Her lecture includes a conversation with Linda Nochlin where the two analyse developments in curating feminism since Nochlin's famous 1971 call to arms. Dr Reilly's lecture is sponsored by the Power Institute.

SATURDAY 25 OCT

10AM - 4PM

CURATING FEMINISM
CONFERENCE

Sydney College of the Arts

PANEL 1 Curating feminism:
Speaking to the exhibition

Chair // Catriona Moore, Art History and Film Studies, University of Sydney

- ▶ Co-Directors of LEVEL (Courtney Coombs, Caitlin Franzmann, Rachael Haynes, Anita Holtsclaw, Alice Lang, Courtney Pedersen)
- ▶ Kelly Doley, artist/curator
- ▶ Elvis Richardson, artist/curator
- ▶ Brigid Noone, curator

PANEL 2 Curating public space

Chair // Jacqueline Millner, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney

- ▶ Bianca Hester, artist and postdoctoral research fellow, SCA
- ▶ Jo Holder, Director, Cross Arts Projects
- ▶ Sophia Kouyoumdjian, Director, Parramatta Artists Studio
- ▶ Gillian Fuller, Design and Art Australia Online (DAAO)

PANEL 3 Curating regionalism

Chair // Jo Holder, Director Cross Arts Projects

- ▶ Beth Jackson, Bimblebox, Far North Queensland
- ▶ Meryl Ryan, Lake Macquarie Regional Gallery, NSW
- ▶ Jasmin Stephens, freelance curator
- ▶ Alana Hunt, Warmun Arts Centre, Western Australia

SUNDAY 26 OCT

11AM - 4PM

CONTEMPORARY ART
& FEMINISM
WIKIPEDIA-EDIT-A-THON

The National Centre for Creative Learning,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Wikipedia's gender trouble is well documented. In a 2010 survey it was revealed that less than 13% of its contributors identify as female. The practical effect of this disparity is clear—with more articles on notable women missing when compared to Encyclopaedia Britannica—Wikipedia is clearly skewed. This represents a huge inequality in an increasingly important repository of shared knowledge. Join us at the MCA for an all day communal updating of Wikipedia entries on subjects related to contemporary art and feminism. We will provide tutorials for the beginner Wikipedian and reference materials from the MCA library. Bring your laptop, power cord and ideas for entries that need updating or creation.

At 12pm there will be a floor talk by Brown Council about their work in the MCA collection and at 1pm Senior Curator Natasha Bullock will discuss women artists in the collection

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CONFERENCE CONVENORS

Jo Holder, Dr Jacqueline Millner, Dr Catriona Moore

PROJECT TEAM

Liam Garstang, Mikhaela Rodwell

HOSTED BY

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