NO SECOND THOUGHTS

REFLECTIONS ON THE ARTEMIS WOMEN’S ART FORUM

A project by the Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery | 1 September – 8 December 2018
Reflections on Reflections

I wish I could remember who first told me about the ARTEMIS archive, held as part of the Battye Heritage Collections at the State Library of Western Australia. For an exhibition so directly about memory, it’s a cruel irony that the person who granted me the gift of this project is lost to my own. I do remember it was when I had already been working as a curator of the Cruikshenk Collection of Women’s Art for a few years, and had been asking around about feminist art made locally. Occupied with the daily minutiae of other projects, the archive’s existence lurked in the back of my mind until sometime last year when the stars of recollection and a spare afternoon aligned and I finally went to look at it. I requested the whole thing, all nine boxes and 146 folders of it, and over the course of the afternoon caught the kind of fever much theorised by archive devotees.

The archive is incredibly comprehensive, consisting of minutes for ARTEMIS meetings and for the committee meetings of other organisations that the ARTEMIS Arts Resource Officers sat on: correspondence; grant applications; the remnants of a ‘women’s art register’ containing curriculum vitae, exhibition ephemera, photographs and the occasional artwork documenting the practices of roughly 60 women; a library of photocopied feminist texts; financial ledgers; exhibition guestbooks and more. Such comprehensiveness is largely due to the skilled administration of the first ARTEMIS Arts Resource Officer, Pam Kleemann. The preservation of the archive itself in such a complete state is something of a happy accident; the documents were left in the ARTEMIS offices in Arts House in a relatively well-attended two-day forum, ‘Look Who’s Talking’, that ARTEMIS presented at the ARX 1987 festival in the newsletter of October 1987:

> “Most noted by their absence were our male counterparts (there were a total of six for the two days) and male panellists were not present for the other sessions. In an attempt to bring women and men together to exchange in considered dialogue this was sadly disappointing. However, it will not inhibit future attempts to do so.”

Note also that a substantial portion of the useful critical writing produced on the activities of ARTEMIS and even ARTEMIS or about many of the artists documented within it. Individual ignorance is by no means the same thing as historical erasure, but the image of contemporary art in Perth in the 1980s that the ARTEMIS records presented exploded many of the wisdoms I had received during a rough decade of making my own way in Perth as an artist, academic, writer and now curator of a women’s art collection - about the kinds of work made here and the kinds of subjects it was made on, and about how and why Western Australian artists became ‘organised’. Looking at the ARTEMIS archive felt to me like the discovery of a family tree I didn’t know I had.

When I visited Margot Watkins, a regular and early attendee of ARTEMIS meetings, in her studio in Toodyay, she suggested a reason for its relative invisibility today: while ARTEMIS was vital among its members, particularly its core committee members, beyond that many people just weren’t looking. Note Kleemann’s commentary on a relatively well-attended two-day forum, ‘Look Who’s Talking’, that ARTEMIS presented at the ARX 1987 festival in the newsletter of October 1987:

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Note also that a substantial portion of the useful critical writing produced on the activities of ARTEMIS and even the work of its broader membership independently of the organisation, much of it published in the magazine Praxis M, was produced by women, many of whom were active in ARTEMIS itself. Certainly, there is some legible hostility (not to be confused with considered critical appraisal of its projects, of which there was also plenty) towards the organisation and its work - which was in many instances polemically feminist, aiming to ‘raise consciousness’ about women’s struggles - but there is another form of marginalisation, insidious due to its relative invisibility: indifference.
This exhibition aims, in some small way, to address this. I should note, however, that it does not aim to be a comprehensive retrospective of the group, or of the art practices of its members, or of the Western Australian 1980s and the art that was produced in that decade. It does not intend to be a record of all feminist activity in the arts in Perth during this time, or of the concerns of all women artists - ARTEMIS membership was broad and diverse in some ways, but it does present some obvious limits of demographic.

The exhibition is instead a formal experiment in reflection and remembering, in how contemporary art practice might relate to and build on its precedents. It takes its title, now with an extra layer of irony, from the first ARTEMIS members' exhibition held 30 years ago, in 1988, at the Film and Television Institute in Fremantle, part of the Perth Festival of that year, and it has two distinct parts. Material from the archive and from the personal collections of many former ARTEMIS members presents a fragmented survey of its activity. The presentation of this material aims to trigger memory and acknowledge action processes that occupied them in the 1980s and 1990s, practices of its members, or of the Western Australian programs, apparently bountiful cheap real estate and development, the somewhat pejorative prefix 'buzz', 'continuity', minutes and other planning meetings, words often tagged with glass droplets are culled from both ARTEMIS meeting records by producing new artworks that depart in some way from their contents. For Penny Bovell, this point was initially interested in documents in the ARTEMIS archive recording events within other visual arts organisations, she became interested in documents in the ARTEMIS archive recording committee mediations. These refocused her interest on an earlier series of works concerning personal and political boundaries and conflict and its resolution. A Pole Patch of Pink I, from 1986, is one of these works, originally exhibited in Tony Jones' The Peace Show of 1986 at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, who had acquired it for their collection.

Four artists - Penny Bovell, Jo Darbyshire, Teelah George and Taylor Readwae - have also been invited to respond to the State Library ARTEMIS records by producing new artworks that depart in some way from their contents. Two of these artists, Penny Bovell and Jo Darbyshire, were at different times between 1987 and 1989 members of the core ARTEMIS committee. Revisiting the State Library material has therefore for them been a directly personal experience, prompting a reflective review of not just each artist's time with the organisation but of the developments, repetitions and circularities of artistic practice itself. Each artist identified moments in their practice that encapsulated the key themes, motifs or processes that occupied them in the 1980s and 1990s, using these older works as a pivot point from which to view their current concerns.

For Penny Bovell, this point was initially Piece Work, a cloud of prints and drawings made around and about her domestic duties, informed by trades and Labor research. For Penny and, grappling with strategy and destabilising committee mediations. These refocused her interest on an earlier series of works concerning personal and political boundaries and conflict and its resolution. A Pole Patch of Pink I, from 1986, is one of these works, originally exhibited in Tony Jones’ The Peace Show of 1986 at the Art Gallery of Western Australia’s Courthouse Galleries. It hangs here alongside new paintings, DEVIL WINDS, and a sculptural installation, Down Pour, that incorporate motifs from over three decades of Penny’s practice - text, weather-forms such as clouds and rain, and, in a fascinating departure from more recent work, figures and faces recalling the anthropomorphism of A Pole Patch of Pink I. In Down Pour, the gaggle of falling words applied to glass droplets are culled from both ARTEMIS meeting minutes and other planning meetings, words often tagged with the somewhat pejorative prefix ‘buzz’, ‘continuity’, ‘consensus’, ‘change’. Penny instead gives them weight and form, visualising interpersonal politics - and artistic practice - as a cyclical dialogue between structure and unpredictability.

Jo Darbyshire immediately identified the large-scale Wildflowers, from 1994, as a personal point of growth and development. Wildflowers was first shown here, at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery in 1995, in the exhibition bur-ran-gur ang (count out): WOMEN and the LAW, curated by Annette Pedersen as part of both the Perth Festival and 20th anniversary celebrations of International Women’s Day. This exhibition featured both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists examining the impact of facets of Australian law - for example, laws concerning Native title, copyright or sexual harassment - on Australian women. Although it was made a few years post-ARTEMIS, Wildflowers nonetheless synthesises many of the themes that Darbyshire had been exploring throughout the 1980s and early 1990s - lesbian experience and relationships, a critical view on Australian narratives of place and landscape, and a mode of figurative painting inflected by surrealist narrative and art-historical/pop cultural quotation - into an ambitiously scaled piece. It suggests a profound ambivalence with expectations of gender, sexuality and the roles of women in white Australian culture. Flash forward in time and the past year has seen Darbyshire embark on an ongoing series of paintings...
grouped together under the title The Glorious Decline. Wildflowers is presented now alongside a painting from this series, a deep pink and green evocation of wilting flowers, organic decay, the strata of history, memory and deep feeling. Motifs echo, but this is a conversation about contrasts. Jo, and Penny too, is herself a phenomenal archivist. A visit to her studio unearthed boxes of collaged postcards about lesbian subculture made in Paris during residency at the Cite Internationale des Artes in 1993, never exhibited; collections of screen-printed political posters; new and old paintings; and a small treasure - a gold-foiled box densely packed with dark hair like a holy relic. The hair, Jo told me, is pubic hair, her own. She sent the box as a gift to fellow artist Michele Elliot in 1990, one missive

Each has produced works that examine the longevity of artistic practice and the conditions under which labour becomes valuable, visible and also gendered, forming an irreverent relationship with tradition.

Teelah often works with archives, and previously has responded directly to oral histories recorded by women, even if it is simply a matter of listening to them as she works so that the objects she handles are subtly shaped by the stories absorbed in their making. At the time of writing, the embroidery Teelah has been producing for the exhibition, a kind of physical metaphor for the archive itself - think of the gradual accumulation of matter, the whole composed of fragments, the marking of time - measures roughly 3.5 meters long and nearly as high. She has been working roughly 7.5 hours a day in the months preceding the exhibition: a day job. Segments of beige linen are stitched and then stitched together with various shades of white cotton accented by the occasional fleck of colour. The embroidery covers the entirety of the cloth's surface and is neither fancy nor decorative, the archetypal modes associated with embroidery as a gendered medium. This feat of duration is suspended from the gallery ceiling, associated with embroidery as a gendered medium. This is a 'durational performance' that formally began on July 14th, 2018 and will continue indefinitely. Using the conventions of the wedding ceremony, Taylor has staged a performance in which she has ostentatiously, in front of an audience, married her art practice: she will wear a ring to acknowledge this commitment until 'death do they part'. In the gallery photographs, video and artefacts - portraits, a marriage certificate, her dress and other wedding accoutrements - document and commemorate the ceremony, while a second video intimately records its 'consummation', the artist working in her studio, alone. My Endless Love/Work continues Taylor's wry critique of labour conditions for the socially marginalised, often centred on her own experience of under or unemployment and the navigation of associated bureaucratic systems. Correspondence with various unions, discussion of childcare needs and statistical analyses of affirmative action programs in the ARTEMIS archive that spoke to the legislative impact on labour as framed by gender prompted Taylor to consider what structures might have similar impact in the now. She has noted that marriage continues to be a manifestation of the contradictions and convolutions of social and legislative change. Recent events - the royal wedding and the Same Sex Marriage Postal Survey, for example - have re-framed the traditions of marriage as an expression of progressive politics, while also maintaining the monogamous family unit as a societal status quo. Connecting marriage, with its hidden domestic, administrative and emotional labours, to artistic practice, My Endless Love/Work highlights the legal obligations and unshakeable expectations hidden beneath the emotive and romantic language of love and destiny. Clichés - the happy ending, the loner artist, the labour of love - are twisted into anxious and urgent questions about the expectations and realities of work when, to use Taylor's words 'so many aspects of our lives are shaped by precarity and shrewd skepticism.'
As much as it has been an investigation of history and its making, the function of this exhibition has also been in some small way an experiment in inter-generational exchange. And, in some small way, it has worked: Jo, Penny, Teelah, Taylor and I have been occasionally able to sit down together, to visit the archive together, to talk about art and its place in our lives over dinner. Jo lends us all books from her library. I receive snail and e-mail packages full of photographs, newspaper articles, notebooks and reflections. In fact, the generosity of all of the ARTEMIS women I have met with over the course of this project, who have invited me into their homes and studios, who have trusted me with their memories and their own archives, has been educational and transformative. It is difficult to track and to quantify the social relations produced in the realisation of an exhibition, but I believe that they are as much an outcome of any project as those created between objects in a gallery space. Beyond the exhibition itself - and a pending book, Remembering ARTEMIS, that will more solidly record the history of the organisation\(^\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\) - I suspect one of the most important outcomes of this project might be the various cans of worms it has opened across the nation as the women of ARTEMIS have gone back through their own records and their memories, passed on contacts and called each other to inform them I might be in touch. I hope that the exhibition opens a few cans more. There is so much more work to do, not just in remembering ARTEMIS but many of its organisational peers and networks, like Media Space, ARX, Prais, Cine-Matrix, Craft West, and there are a host of other artists too. The well-worn metaphor stands - this is just the tip of the iceberg. But remembering is active work and it requires repetition to become memory, history, common knowledge, and repetition can be wearying, especially when applied to the preservation as common knowledge of the equal rights and value, the very status as human, of a portion of the greater community. Especially when the timeframe over which such repetition must occur stretches on indefinitely. This is where inter-generational relations become sticky, as new generations rediscover old, hard-won victories or hard-fought ideological battles to the exhaustion of those who have already fought them, as victories are quietly eroded and require recontesting, as the old methodologies for doing so don’t quite work like they used to, as new generations strive to figure it out for themselves. Not this again. Artistic tropes, themes, styles, subjects slide from obscurity back into fashion, irking those who were pleased to see the back of them or those who have simply moved on. When Teelah talked about reading for the first time in 2018 Rozsika Parker’s The Subversive Stitch, pivotal in the 1980s for framing the feminisation of embroidery as a recent and mutable social construction, there it often was - oh, this again, remember that? - a sense of surprise at either the disappearance of the text from generational consciousness, or at its return.

But I would argue that it’s repetition, not newness - a slow accretion made by many, not some illusory stroke of progressive illumination granted to a hero - that produces culture, that constitutes culture. Repetition doesn’t necessarily mean stasis; things can productively warp and mutate and become fresh in the re-telling. Western art, and even Western feminism, has been hung up on the original individual, the bright and new thinker who can move us endlessly forward, but this is itself an idea made solid only through its repetition by many. World-building is always a team effort, and it never stops.

Please don’t forget.

Gemma Weston
Curator, Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art

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1. ARTEMIS Newsletter, October 1987, Accessed via State Library of Western Australia, call number 709.1 ART
Anne Jeppe, Venus Con-Cave, assemblage from found materials with painted plaster cast, c. 1987. © Courtesy the artist.
LIST OF WORKS

WESTPAC GALLERY

Penny Bovell
A Pale Patch of Pink, 1986, powdered pigment on canvas, 150 x 125cm.
DEVIL VINOS, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 76cm.
DEVIL VINOS, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100cm.
DEVIL VINOS (Areoswii II), 2012/18, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120cm.
DEVIL VINOS, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120cm.
DEVIL VINOS, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 76 x 61cm.
Down Four, 2018, 60 glass vails with vinyl text, dimensions variable.
All works courtesy the artist.

Jo Darbyshire
Wildflowers, 1994, Oil on found tarpaulin with original graffiti, 198 x 280cm, Murdoch University Art Collection

Teelah George
WollPice, 2017 - 18, Thread on linen with bronze, 360 x 350cm. Courtesy the artist.

LIST OF WORKS

LADY SHEILA CRUTHERS GALLERY

Taylor Radeauwy
My Endless Love/Work, 2018 - ongoing, durational performance with cubic zirconia and rose gold ring.
My Endless Love/Work series, 2018. All works courtesy of the artist.
Wetlands, Sony Hardycam footage of performance, 14 minutes, 4 seconds, edition 1/2, filmed by Graham Mathew.
Display, table with hand embroidered satin pillow, 65 x 40 x 30 cm
Certificate, ink and coloured pencil on card, 36 x 26 cm (paper size) 
Hair, ribbon, glass pearls, cotton thread, dimensions variable
Eyes, plastic sunglasses, dimensions variable
Legs, thigh-high fishnet stockings, glass pearls, cotton thread, handwoven palm cards, dimensions variable
Hand, polyester ribbon, full, cotton thread, dimensions variable
Commemoration, hand painted bone china plate, glass pearls, rhinestones, wood stand, 23 cm diameter
Consummation, HD video, 5 minutes, 42 seconds, edition 1/2

Tania Ferrier,

Mark Bower and Underpants, 1988, Fabric print on cotton underwear with display mannequin, Courtesy the artist
Image for exhibition flea “Tania Ferrier: Angry Underwear and other Statements, ARTEMIS Gallery April 1988” c 1988, inkjet print from black and white photograph, Courtesy Tania Ferrier

(Doctors wearing Tania Ferrier’s Angry Underwear, New York circa 1990), inkjet print from black and white photograph, Courtesy Tania Ferrier

Michèle Elliot,
Poster design for Burning Down the House, 605 FM Radio, 1990, Gouache and pencil on archival paper, 42.3 x 30 cm (image size)

CCWA 1915, Crucifers Collection of Women’s Art, The University of Western Australia
ARTEMIS Newsletters, 1987 - 1990, collections of Robyn Taylor, Margot Watkins and Pam Kleemann

Documentation of Anne Jappe, “Birth of Venus, assemblage from found material”, 1981, 1988, Silver gelatin photograph, 20.5 x 25cm (paper size), Courtesy Anne Jappe
(post for “ARTEMIS Exhibits No Second Thoughts”), 1988, laminated poster, 41.6 x 29.5cm, Courtesy Anne Jappe

Exhibition catalogue for “Double Exposure”, 1990, featuring cover image by Marjorie Bussey

(Booklet: ‘A UNION FOR ARTISTS? About the Artworks Award & About the Statements’, ARTEMIS Gallery April 1989)

Praxis M

(Shark Bra and Underpants)

(Exhibition catalogue for ‘Double Exposure’, 1990, featuring cover image by Marjorie Bussey)

LADY SHEILA CRUTHERS GALLERY
CURATOR’S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gemma Weston, Curator of the Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art, would like to thank Penny Bovell, Jo Darbyshire, Teelah George, and Taylor Reudavey for their careful and complex responses to the exhibition brief, and for opening their homes, studios and archives. Thanks also to Mark Stewart, curator of the Murdoch University Art Collection and the team at the State Library of Western Australia, especially Kate Gregory, Adrian Bowen, Blindy Wilson, Barbara Patinson and all of the very patient staff at the info desk on Level 3. My sincerest gratitude to former members of ARTEMIS for their time, reflections and contributions of material the legendary Pam Kleemann, Rosalind Paterson Drake-Brockman, Annette Seeman, Melissa Harpley, Nola Farman, Robyn Taylor, Margot Watkins, Michele Elliot, Kath Letch, Anne Jeppe, Nola Farman, Shirley Gleave, Valerie Tring, Jo Purser, Jane Siddall, Terti-ann White, Jacqueline Reid, Linda Rawlings and Tania Ferrier. Sincere apologies to those I could not find, or did not have adequate time to consult. Thanks always to all of the staff of the UWA Cultural Precinct - particularly Sally Quinn, Lee Kinsella, Clare McFatlane and Anthony Kelly and endlessly Kate Hamersley - and to UWA Chief Cultural Officer Professor Ted Snell for his unequivocal support of this project.

Thanks are also due to Gary Dufour, Curatorial Advisor to the Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art and John Cruthers, Chair of SHEILA A Foundation for Women in Visual Art for their generous support. The core mission of the Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art is to promote Australian women’s art and women artists by way of exhibition, research, teaching and publication, and through this to bring ‘into the light’ women throughout Australian art history whom might otherwise remain in the margins. Without the existence of the collection at the University, the impetus it provides to publicly reconsider Australian art and the vehicle it offers for preserving and celebrating the art of Australian women, this project would never have come into fruition.

And, thanks of course to whoever alerted me to the ARTEMIS archive’s existence: you don’t know what you’ve done.

The Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art (CCWA) is the only public collection focused specifically on women’s art in Australia. The foundation of the CCWA was a substantial gift of artworks made to the University of Western Australia in 2007 by Sir James and Lady Sheila Cruthers. The Cruthers family began collecting women’s art in the 1970s, focusing primarily on portraiture and self-portraiture and isolating key areas such as still life, abstraction, early post-modernism and second-wave feminism. The CCWA includes works from the 1890s to the present day in a variety of media and continues to expand through focused acquisition and generous donation, aiming to contribute to and challenge dialogues about Australian women’s art through exhibition, teaching, research and publication.

The CCWA is a registered Deductible Gift Recipient and may receive donations of artworks through the Cultural Gifts Program, facilitated by the Australian Government’s Department of Communication and the Arts.

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