**Emily Floyd: The Dawn**

Emily Floyd has been a practising artist for the past fifteen years, during which she has gained acclaim for works that explore intersections between art, education and play. Drawing on a wide range of social, political and cultural reference points, her works build upon a rich history of alternative education and its relationship to twentieth-century art and design. Adopting the geometric forms and bright colours of childhood building blocks, such as those associated with Steiner education and toys designed by female artists of the German Bauhaus school of art and design, Floyd’s works suggest that contemporary art can function as an educational platform for stimulating debate about social, political and cultural ideas.

The title of this exhibition refers to the nineteenth-century women’s newspaper The Dawn: A Journal for Australian Women, reflecting Floyd’s interests in feminism and the often-overlooked contributions made to modernity by women and children. The exhibition brings together selected works from the artist’s career, including several new commissions and two dedicated children’s projects. Conceived by Floyd as manifestos which allow for ‘complexity as well as contradictions’, the selected works reflect a range of interests and ideologies encompassing social activism, design and typography, community participation and utopian thinking.

The Dawn

2014

painted aluminium; books

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, 2014

Emily Floyd’s interests in community, feminism, activism, the printed word, open access and public art come together in this newly commissioned work. Part-sculpture and part-library, this interactive work has been designed as a space for enquiry and social encounter. It provides a place for visitors to gather and explore a vast array of polemical texts sourced from Melbourne’s Victorian Trades Hall bookstore. The work’s title is drawn from *The Dawn: A Journal for Australian Women,* one the earliest feminist publications in Australia, established in 1888 by the poet and suffragette Louisa Lawson.

*\* ground floor foyer*

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WORKSHOP

2012

enamel and epoxy paint on steel

Lyon Collection, Melbourne

This monumental modular sculpture was inspired by toys designed by the German artist Alma Seidhoff-Buscher (1899–1944), who was one of the few female artists to work in the Bauhaus wood workshop. Comprised of simple building blocks in bold primary colours, Seidhoff-Buscher’s toys were designed to encourage children to build complex structures from basic elements, reflecting the Bauhaus principle of combining creative work and play. For Floyd, this little-known aspect of Bauhaus production represents a fascinating utopia generated by women and children. As she recently noted: ‘These very simple block forms were a … way of expressing an ideology’.

*\*ground floor foyer*

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A strategy to infiltrate the homes of the bourgeoisie

2005

synthetic polymer paint on composition board

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds from the   
Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2006 2006.8.a-ss

*\* level 3 foyer*

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An open space

2011

synthetic polymer paint, lacquer and epoxy paint on composition board, Wenge (*Millettia laurentii*), Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*), Sugar Pine (*Pinus lambertiana*), Huon Pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*), Ash (*Fraxinus sp*.) and Oak (*Quercus sp*.), silicone, polyvinyl chloride, steel

Private collection, Melbourne

This work reflects upon utopian ideas and relates specifically to a spatial concept devised for the Radical Ecology Conference held at the University of Melbourne in 1975, which Floyd attended as a young child. The title refers to a dedicated educational space for children that would enable a crossover between the adult world and the world of the child. The phrase also relates to Floyd’s interest in open source software and the internet as a shared space. Her playful flock of birds reinforce ideas of multiple voices and community that, for Floyd, are central to this work.

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Temple of The Female Eunuch

2007–08

pokerwork and polyurethane on wood, vinyl

Michael Buxton Collection, Melbourne

Many of Floyd’s works draw on literary and feminist historical perspectives. This work takes Germaine Greer’s bestselling feminist book *The Female Eunuch* (1970) as its basis. Floyd imaginatively re-presents this polemical textby inscribing excerpts from it onto wooden blocks using pokerwork and a folksy type redolent of this utopian era. Organic shapes and abstracted forms invoke the iconic image from John Holmes’s original cover design for the book of a woman’s torso that has become separated from her body, while circular openings that stand in for breasts recall the experimental open sculptures and pierced forms of modern British sculptor Barbara Hepworth.

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An alternative history of public art

2014

digital slideshow projection, looped

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Anna Schwartz, Melbourne

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**Louisa LAWSON** editor and publisher

Australia 1848–1920

The Dawn: a journal for Australian Women

volume 1, issue 1, edited and published by Louisa Lawson (Dora Falconer),   
Sydney, 15 May 1888

1888

letterpress on paper

State Library of New South Wales, Sydney

The Dawn: A Journal for Australian Womenwas one the earliest feminist newspapers in Australia, established in Sydney in 1888 by the poet, suffragette and enterprising businesswoman Louisa Lawson. Her pen-name was Dora Falconer, and she is also remembered as the mother of renowned writer Henry Lawson. A rare example of early feminist publishing, The Dawn advocated for women’s rights, childcare and social reform, providing an important platform for the suffragette movement. Lawson owned and managed the newspaper and press, employing an all-female staff of editors and printers. Despite its recent digitisation by the Australian National Library, The Dawn remains little-known to this day.

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Steiner rainbow

2006

epoxy paint on composition board

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Gift of the artist through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2011.

Donated through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program 2011.175a-i

In much of her work, Emily Floyd draws upon a rich history of early childhood education and its relationship to twentieth-century art and design. She often adopts the geometric forms and bright colours of building blocks associated with Steiner Waldorf education, or the toys designed by women artists of the German Bauhaus school of art and design. These historical references intersect with Floyd’s own childhood: both her father and grandmother were toymakers. Floyd pays homage to these influences in this work, a scaled-up 1:10 version of the classic stacking toy associated with Steiner education, designed to stimulate learning through imaginative open-ended play.

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Rainbow Alliance

2014

digital slideshow projection, looped

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Anna Schwartz, Melbourne

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New ways of thinking

2006

composition board, Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*), Huon Pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*), synthetic polymer paint, lacquer, found objects

Michael Buxton Collection, Melbourne

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Art School: Is art useful as a therapeutic tool? Discuss this   
idea in relation to a community based mural project of your choice

2004

plywood, Huon Pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*), synthetic polymer paint,   
chalk, linseed oil, beeswax, lacquer

Private collection, Melbourne

This small sculpture belongs to the Art School series of sculptures Emily Floyd made in 2004 in response to a series of essay topics set for her by a well-known Melbourne academic. After each topic was set, Floyd made her sculptural response. Likening the artistic process to a form of education (in this case equating her sculpture with homework), this series continued Floyd’s investigation of the themes of education, labour and knowledge – ideas that remain central to her art today.

**For kids**

Emily Floyd once asked a teacher to challenge her with a set of questions – a bit like homework or a school project. Most homework is usually completed in an exercise book, but Emily answered the teacher’s questions by making art. This sculpture is one of her answers.

Have you ever built or made something for homework that you are proud of?

Permaculture crossed with feminist science fiction

2008

polyurethane and synthetic polymer paint on wood, wood, vinyl

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Purchased 2009. The Queensland Government's   
Gallery of Modern Art Acquisitions Fund 2009.002.001-207

In this work Emily Floyd combines excerpts from an influential Australian guide to permaculture with fragments from feminist science fiction novels by Ursula Le Guin and Doris Lessing. While the cross-pollination of ideologies at first seems unlikely, common ground can be found in their shared utopian concerns. Floyd made this work during a period of increased global interest in feminist art, seeing a way of contributing an antipodean inflection to the discourse with this and other related works, such as Temple of the Female Eunuch, 2007–08, which can be seen in the adjacent room.

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It's time (Again)

Permaculture one

A little community

Permaculture two

Its time (Again)

A bird like that never dies

All that false instruction

Design science

Pattern understanding

The problem is the solution

2008

set of 9 etchings, with relief etching, aquatint and lithograph, ed. 1/15

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008 2008.562.a-l

Emily Floyd’s experimentation with typography and the graphic potential of text is evident in these prints which take various political, literary, cinematic and sustainability reference points from 1970s Australia as their basis. The texts Floyd quotes relate to feminism, the sexual revolution, Indigenous rights, the environment and political change – social issues that are still pertinent today. They include Gough Whitlam’s historic policy speech for the Australian Labor Party (1972), Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch (1970) and dialogue from the film Storm Boy (1975).

Radical Ecology

2014

digital slideshow projection, looped

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Anna Schwartz, Melbourne

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In the before time

2001

wood, synthetic polymer paint

Private collection, Melbourne

Early in her career, Emily Floyd made a number of works informed by classic literary and cinematic texts. This work takes Stanley Kubrick’s cult science-fiction film 2001: A Space Odyssey(1968) as its starting point. In Floyd’s re-creation of the film’s opening scene, in which a troop of apes encounter a mysterious black monolith, Kubrick’s primates are replaced by a proliferation of wooden rabbits, some with chalk instead of teeth. Recalling a schoolroom setting, Floyd’s rendition playfully introduces ideas that form important subtexts in Kubrick’s film, such as the imposition of knowledge and power and encounters between authority and community.

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All Day Workshop

Herrnhut commune

Structure and silence of the cognitariat

Social insects

Linux for beginners

2012

colour lithographs, ed. 12/20

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2013 2013.561.1-4

Emily Floyd often designs her own fonts, influenced by the avant-garde experimental typography of Dada, Bauhaus and Constructivist artists. In particular, the revolutionary spirt and graphic appeal of the poster designs of Russian Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko inspired her when making these prints. In these works, bold geometric type spells out each work’s title while serving as a commanding pictorial device. This suite of prints reflects Floyd’s interests in ideas of community and utopian thinking: each relates to a kind of collective organisation – from beekeeping to Australia’s first utopian community, Herrnhut Commune, established in Victoria in 1852.

It's because I talk too much that I do nothing

2002

powder-coated steel, stained wood

Private collection, Melbourne

A number Emily Floyd’s installations draw on texts from the Western literary canon. Here excerpts from Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s epic novel Crime and Punishment (1866) appear in hand-carved letters and converge around wooden onion domes that represent the city of St Petersburg, the novel’s setting. By approaching text as a material form that can be constructed or deconstructed, Floyd alludes to the subjectivity of language and questions the authority of master narratives. In formal terms, this work recalls the ‘scatter-art’ of 1960s process-based art, reflecting the teachings in the sculpture department at Melbourne’s RMIT University where Floyd studied in the 1990s.

**For kids**

The words you can see spelt out on the ground in this work are from the book Crime and Punishment. Emily Floyd wanted to break this classic novel down into its smallest parts – words and letters.

Reading a big book requires a big effort, but Emily is reminding us that even the longest novel is just lots of words, which can mean different things to different people.

What is the longest book you’ve ever read?

The outsider

2005

polyurethane on wood, synthetic polymer paint, lacquer

Lyon Collection, Lyon Foundation, Melbourne

This work takes Albert Camus’s novel The Outsider(1942) as its starting point. In Emily Floyd’s interpretation of this famous existentialist text, sentences from the novel suggest the coastline and urban centre of Algiers (the setting of the book) through a mass of toy-like building blocks. In some instances precise phrases from the novel are evident, while at other times words collapse into indecipherable piles. By presenting language in a material form, Floyd invites active participation from the viewer in the construction of meaning.

**For kids**

In this work, Emily Floyd has taken the novel The Outsider and broken it down into words and letters. They are not in neat lines like they would be in a book, and only some of the story is told here. This means that we have to find our own meaning in the words and put a story together in our minds.

Read the words that you can see – what do you think the story is about?

A Human Scale

2014–15

opaque synthetic polymer resin, dibond, aluminium, bronze, LEDs

5 Martin Place Public Art Project, Sydney

Commissioned by Dexus CPA Trust Pty Ltd and Cbus Property for the 5 Martin Place Trust

With this major new commission, Emily Floyd investigates the potential of public art to activate urban space. The work’s title is drawn from the community-based campaigns that emerged in response to the development of housing commission buildings in Melbourne and Sydney in the 1960s. A Human Scale has been commissioned for a specific site in Sydney’s Martin Place that was demolished during this time of urban transition, when activists argued for a return to convivial urban design of human proportions, with the focus on local context. With this work Floyd aims to restore a sense of community to the urban environment.

**For kids**

This sculpture was made for a particular place in Sydney. Artists often think about the location for a work when they plan what it will look like and how it will make people feel.

Think of a place where you spend lots of time. If you were creating a work of art for that place, what would it look like and how would it make people feel when they are there?

Ruth and Maurie Crow Archive

Emily Floyd has made this display using material from the Ruth and Maurie Crow Archive, held in the Special Collections room of Victoria University Library, Melbourne. During fifty years of political and social activism in Melbourne, Ruth Crow A. M. (1916–1999) and Maurie Crow (1915–1988) resourced several generations of urban campaigners. Their collection of printed material and working papers, which they viewed as tools for learning, or as a ‘Living Library’, constitutes an important basis for understanding the wide variety of causes with which they were associated. Growing up in Melbourne, Floyd participated in children’s workshops designed by Ruth Crow that aimed to foster collective action and a sense of common purpose. For the artist, The Crow Collection offers an opportunity to consider how the past might inform the present, and the future.

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Concrete to Abstract

2014

synthetic polymer paint on existing walls

Collection of the artist, courtesy of Anna Schwartz, Melbourne

The colourful geometric murals of Bauhaus designer Herbert Bayer (1900–1985) inspired Emily Floyd to create this wall painting. The title refers to a Montessori education concept that describes the moment a child is introduced to a concrete material that embodies an abstract idea, such as size or colour. Floyd plays with this theory by basing the ‘abstract’ design of her wall painting on a ‘concrete’ example, in this case graphic design from the cover of the City of Melbourne Strategy Plan (1985)*,* a document from the Crow archive that Floyd also references in the prints series Solve your personal problems socially, 2014.

**Solve your personal problems socially**

2014

colour screenprints

printed by Trent Walter, Negative Press, Melbourne

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, 2014

Here Emily Floyd explores local histories of feminism, community and childcare in a new suite of prints based on research into the archive of the social and political activist Ruth Crow (1916–1999). Crow’s interests in community welfare, communism and urban planning in Melbourne are reflected in the manifestos and pamphlets that Floyd has used as her source material. Enlarged, abstracted and saturated with colour, these archival forms are transformed by Floyd into compelling new images. The title is taken directly from a slogan devised by Crow that she believed was a necessary principle for the ‘successful long-term functioning of collectives’.

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Small Press

2014

seagrass matting, plywood, powder-coated steel,   
typewriter, paper, stamps, scissors

Commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria with support from   
Tim Fairfax AC and Gina Fairfax and the Truby & Florence Williams Charitable Trust, 2014

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**Emily FLOYD**

born Australia 1972

**Mary FEATHERSTON** designer

born England 1943, arrived Australia 1953

Word farm

2014

composition board, wood, transparent synthetic polymer resin,   
synthetic polymer paint

Commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria with support from   
Tim Fairfax AC and Gina Fairfax and the Truby & Florence Williams Charitable Trust, 2014

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**Word Farm**

*Word Farm* is a large-scale installation created by artist Emily Floyd in collaboration with designer Mary Featherston which represents their long-term mutual interest in progressive education. While Featherston creates spaces in schools and is inspired by the Reggio Emilia educational project, Floyd views the spatial arrangements found in learning environments as a highly advanced form of ‘expanded sculpture’. Through a design process based on careful observation, documentation and student feedback, Featherston and Floyd worked with children from Princes Hill Primary School, Melbourne, to develop this space.

*Word Farm* invites open-ended engagement and the boundless potential of free play. Children suggested that their parents would need somewhere to sit while they played, and with this in mind Featherston has designed a modular social seating arrangement – named *Schist Nest* – that is at once a minimal sculpture and *agora*, or gathering space.

This exhibition for children and families was made possible by the generous support of Tim Fairfax AC and Gina Fairfax.

The NGVforKIDS program is supported by a grant from the Truby and Florence Williams Charitable Trust. This grant provides crucial encouragement to the corporate and philanthropic community to support children’s programming at NGV.