NGV

The Art of Writing

A collection of art inspired writing from the National Gallery of Victoria

MAGAZINE

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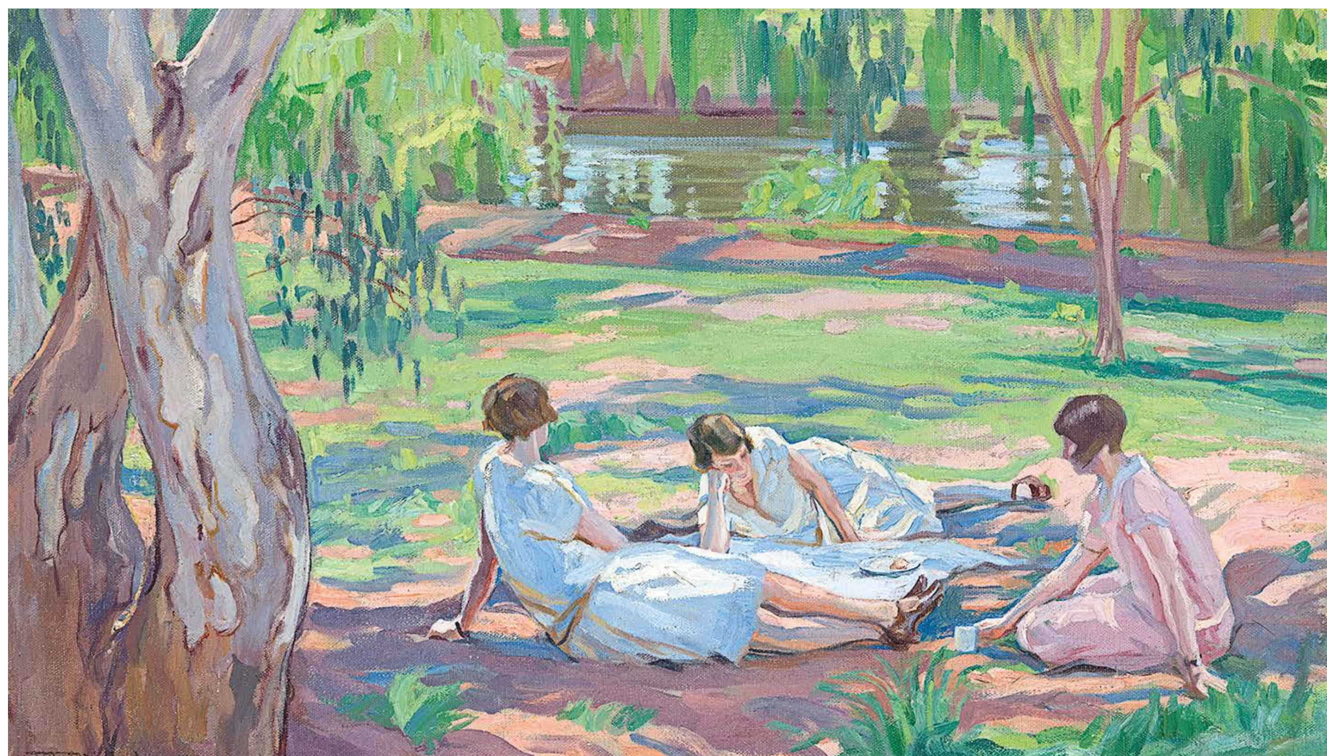

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Hilda Rix Nicholas *The Picnic* early 1920s. Private Collection, Melbourne © Bronwyn Wright

INTRODUCTION

There are many works of art and design in the NGV Collection; in fact, more than 70,000. The Collection is an encyclopaedic one, which means it spans antiquity to now, and encompasses a wide variety of artists, designers, geographies, cultures, art forms and styles. Beyond this, the NGV Collection offers myriad readings of the world: imagined worlds and worlds of fiction and the future, commentary on aspects of the world as artists have seen or experienced it, the very intimate worlds of emotion, the specific vision of artists, and insights into worlds that some of us may have never seen. For these reasons, spending time in the NGV is endlessly fascinating and always eye-opening.

The NGV also has a long history of publishing and supporting the work of Australian and international authors, through *NGV Magazine, Art Journal* and other NGV publications, learning programs for schools, as well as through major public events, such as the Melbourne Art Book Fair. Launched in 2019, The Art of Writing takes this tradition further, connecting anyone interested in developing their creative writing skills directly to the NGV Collection and all that it has to offer for creative and questioning minds. We are excited to launch the online course in 2020, guided by Australian author Cate Kennedy and La Trobe University's Head of Creative Arts and English, Dr Catherine Padmore. The Art of Writing is supported by Presenting Partner La Trobe University.

The collected texts in this special Art of Writing edition of *NGV Magazine* were published by the NGV over a number of years, in different publications. They show the different ways that a writer can approach the idea of using art or design as the seed for creative writing, from prose and poetry through to reflection and long-form narrative non-fiction. I hope that you can also find something from the NGV Collection to connect with, in your own writing journey.

Thank you,
The NGV Adult Learning Team

Indian *A domestic mishap* mid 18th century. Felton Bequest, 1980

Ron Mueck *Mass* 2016–17 (detail). National Gallery of Victoria. Felton Bequest, 2018

In Response

‘To be awakened to the impermanence of existence through art is a blessing, not a curse. It means we can’t take the life – and art – we have for granted.’

Alice Pung

John Brack *Collins St, 5p.m.* 1955.
Purchased, 1956

The artwork that changed me

Spending time with a single artwork can invite learning and transformation. Sometimes a work immediately affects you from the first viewing, or sometimes it offers an array of understandings and revelations throughout a prolonged relationship. With this in mind, we asked three Australian writers to reflect on artworks in the NGV Collection that have changed them, showing the deep personal connections and inspiration art provides.

John Brack *Collins St, 5p.m.* 1955
By Alice Pung

I first came across *Collins St, 5p.m.*, 1955, in an art history textbook: monochrome office drones trudging home in a single direction, the whole panorama reduced to the size of a small postcard. In this incarnation, John Brack's masterpiece was a single-frame cartoon with a droll punchline that was neither original or moving, an unsubtle comment about the despair of modern life. But I was fifteen, and as Bob Dylan once said: 'Ah but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now'. I had not realised that derivatives of this painting were as ubiquitous as the anonymous line of heavy-coated commuters it depicted, that *Collins St* had in half a century inspired so many copies that of course I felt like I'd seen it all before.

A decade later, I went to the NGV one Saturday and that's when I saw Brack's painting for real. The first surprise was its enormity. The faces of the glowing yellow-beige humans were larger than my own and there were at least sixteen individual faces, none of which I thought looked particularly mean, vacuous or robotic. One of the typists has a jovial glint in her eye and the man whose coat is emblazoned with the artist's signature looks to be humming with his eyes closed. I realised that the expert opinion of my year 10 art history textbook was not immutable, and that this painting was ironic, funny and deeply individualistic.

By then I had become a Collins Street worker myself. Every morning I went to an office at a predictable time and every evening I finished at 5.30 pm. Life had a sense of purpose and momentum. I wore ironed clothes that were barely creased by my work. I brought my first winter overcoat. I was in a profession where the worst physical occupational hazard I could face might be a paper cut or a coffee burn. Growing up, I was surrounded by my parents' friends and acquaintances who often had injuries from meat cleavers and jammed overlockers, who wore clothes made of polyester or industrial cotton drill. I really felt like I'd made it.

The Japanese have a word for emotions shown in public (*tatemae*) and feelings shown at home (*honne*). En masse, sure they might have emerged from similar offices, but going home, each one of Brack's people were lost in private thought about their separate existences. Many of us don't show our private selves in public anyway, so I wondered why these white-collar workers were particularly derided.

After one and a half decades of working down Collins Street, I now understand that Brack had been painting during a particular era of repressed emotion and post-war, post-traumatic stress. Replace the brown and grey with Melburnian black, add a bit of rain and the painting might still resonate today with frustrated actuaries or lawyers in high-rise offices. *Collins St 5p.m.* has been used in boardroom meetings, as well as homages to the city of Melbourne. It has been parodied by US artist Shag and incorporated into an Oscar-winning film (*The Lost Thing* by Shaun Tan). But to me, this painting will always remind me of my first office job and the sense of freedom I felt.

ALICE PUNG IS THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *UNPOLISHED GEM* (2006), *HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER* (2013) AND *LAURINDA* (2014); SHE IS ALSO THE EDITOR OF *GROWING UP ASIAN IN AUSTRALIA* (2008) AND *MY FIRST LESSON* (2016).

Joy Hester *(Untitled) (Head of a woman with hat)* 1955
By Emily Bitto

It is the year 2000, and I've just turned twenty-one. I'm living in a Brisbane share house with my best friend and her sister, completing an Arts degree at the University of Queensland. My boyfriend is studying music at the Conservatorium. We spend Friday and Saturday nights in Fortitude Valley (or 'the Valley,' as we call it) seeing indie bands at the tiny, always packed Ric's Bar. On Sunday mornings we have $4 breakfasts next door at Fatboy's (a fried egg, a sausage, a piece of toast and half an unripe tomato – no alterations!)

My boyfriend introduces me to a girl called Jackomeano, who runs the student society at 'the Con'. Their bands often play together at Ric's, and I stand at the back watching and listening, drinking Malibu and pineapple juice. Jackomeano is wildly charismatic: she survived cancer at sixteen and now lives her life at the kind of peak intensity the rest of us only pretend to aspire to. I'm somewhat obsessed with her, in a mildly confusing way, and follow her to parties and protest rallies and tarot card readings like a lost puppy. Her band is called Joy Hester Eyes.

I had studied art in high school, back in the country town I grew up in, but have never heard of Joy Hester. My knowledge of Australian art is limited to the serene landscapes of Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin. I look up Joy Hester online. The feeling the images evoke in me is both exciting and unsettling. They are mostly figurative, but liquid, non-realist and strange. *Head of a woman with hat*, 1955, is such a lonely image: the blank expanse of the face, the flat blankness of the background, the averted eyes looking more inwards than outwards; all this juxtaposed against the modest 'flounce' of the hat and hair, and the meagre frill of lace at the neckline. It seems to me poignantly sad. The style, though, is so daring in its knowing naivety. And it is Australian. And painted by a woman!

What I fall in love with in Hester's work is the sense of strangeness and melancholy that, to me, suggests an 'outsider' view of the world, a sense of not belonging that I have often felt myself, and for which art offers the only real salve. I become obsessed with Hester's own story: her relationships with Australian artists Albert Tucker and Gray Smith; her battle with Hodgkin's lymphoma; her relinquishment of her young son to be raised by John and Sunday Reed. It is through Hester that I learn about the bohemian Heide Circle and the Australian modernism that will become the first seeds of the novel I will write more than a decade later: *The Strays*. It is this work, this artist, this friend, this moment, that changes everything.

EMILY BITTO IS THE AUTHOR OF STELLA PRIZE WINNING NOVEL *THE STRAYS* (2015). SHE HAS A MASTERS IN LITERARY STUDIES AND A PHD IN CREATIVE WRITING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE.

(left) **Joy Hester** *(Untitled) (Head of a woman with hat)* 1955. Purchased, 1965
(right) **Giambattista Tiepolo** *The Banquet of Cleopatra* 1743–44. Felton Bequest, 1933

Giambattista Tiepolo *The Banquet of Cleopatra* 1743–44
By Peggy Frew

How strange that when I was asked to name a life-changing work, this one sprang to mind. I know very little about art – certainly not enough to appreciate the historical context of this painting or the skill or technique it demonstrates. But I did think that I knew my own taste. I like lively paintings – paintings with a sense of movement, with texture, dapples, depth, luminosity.

Giambattista Tiepolo's *The Banquet of Cleopatra*, 1743–44, is not one of those paintings. To me, it's a big, pompous, flat and stagy work. Everything in it is *arranged*. Its black servants and capering 'dwarf' give me the heebie-jeebies, as do its cringing dogs. And what about Cleopatra herself, who has a decidedly 'Venice 1740s' vibe, pink and white and very frilly. Wasn't she supposed to be from Egypt? And, like, 50 BC?

This painting though, laden with wrongness, shameless in its reinventions and entitlements, has popped up in the novel I am working on. A character – a young woman making a mess of her transition to adult life – recalls it from childhood visits to the NGV. It's Cleopatra's boldness that my character (who suffers from a chronic lack of courage) remembers her for.

Tiepolo's Cleopatra – when I put my politics (and the weird flat background and floating heads) aside and *look* at her – is captivating. Under that enormous skirt her legs might fall comfortably any way they like, even wide, like a man's. The angle of her head, the hand on her hip, the whole swagger-ish lean of her – how assured she is, in that circle of men. And yet she is so young! And so soft! She reminds me of the singer-songwriter Angel Olsen, contemporary queen of controlled, potently sulky drama. ('I dare you to understand,' sings Olsen, 'What makes me a woman.')

But a funny thing happens when I keep looking. I begin to see Cleopatra, more than anything else, as lonely. I see the weariness of the constant performer. I see the tremendous weight of the imperative of beauty.

But then I think: these don't belong to the original Cleopatra, the politician, the strategist, who might have been beautiful but is surely remembered for more than that. These lonely burdens are those of Tiepolo's woman, who is not really Cleopatra and who, no matter her actions, is above all else young and pretty. Then again, they're not even hers – really they're mine. They've been put on her by me. In trying to understand her I end up back inside myself.

The character in my novel looks at Tiepolo's Cleopatra and sees unattainable poise. I look and see a lonely and burdened young woman. Our views are nested, the character's inside mine, but they're not the same view. Here is Tiepolo's unintended gift: this wormhole, this specific and deep tunnel, which I enter through the portal of fiction, and which is fabricated from layers of (mis) representation and interpretation – Tiepolo's, mine, and those of my protagonist. Art is as complex as people are, I suppose, and I'm so grateful for what lives in the mysterious and surprising spaces that exist between the two.

Unpacking Tiepolo's Cleopatra
By Dr Ted Gott

While Cleopatra was born in Egypt, she was a Macedonian by bloodline and culturally Greek. For nearly three centuries, after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, Greek Macedonians ruled Egypt. There were no longer Egyptian bloodlines amongst the Pharaohs, and the Ptolemies married within their own family. When Cleopatra ruled over Alexandria, half of its one million citizens were Greek. Alexander the Great was blond haired and blue eyed. Chances are Cleopatra was as well, explaining her appearance in Tiepolo's depiction.

PEGGY FREW IS THE AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF THREE NOVELS, *HOUSE OF STICKS* (2011), *HOPE FARM* (2015) AND *ISLANDS* (2019). DR TED GOTT IS NGV SENIOR CURATOR, INTERNATIONAL ART. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE JUL–AUG 2020 ISSUE OF NGV MAGAZINE.

‘These staggering skulls cluster like carcinogenic cells writ large, roaming over rooms filled with eighteenth-century landscapes, portraits and still lifes.’

Alice Pung considers how Ron Mueck’s *Mass*, 2016–2017, generously gifted through the Felton Bequest, can sink us deep into the complex, emotional and at once beautiful and unsettling depths of being human.

BY ALICE PUNG

One of the very first symbols I recognised was the skull on the bottles of potassium cyanide that my mother used for chemically gilding and buffing gold. As an outworker jeweller, her single-woman ‘factory’ sprawled through our spare bedroom and into the garage. My father also hand-drew skulls on every ‘poisonous’ container at home, from bleach to mercurochrome solution. Some parents use fear as a way of abusive control, but my parents used it to keep us safe.

After surviving the Killing Fields of Cambodia, there was no image more terrifying to dad than the disembodied human skull. During that time, he’d been tasked with burying the dead so they would become fertiliser for the next season. These dead weren’t strangers – they were fellow workers, childhood friends, and half the family I will never meet.

Ron Mueck also said that the Killing Fields of Cambodia left indelible marks on his senses. Mueck is known for breathing life into his sculptures through their skin, with beads of sweat on the forehead of a pregnant woman, stubbly hairs on the upper lip of a sleeping head, pores on Wild Man. But there is no skin in his latest and largest work, *Mass*. These staggering skulls cluster like carcinogenic cells writ large, roaming over rooms filled with eighteenth-century landscapes, portraits and still lifes.

Skulls don’t have faces, but most of these skulls don’t even have teeth. There is nothing to distinguish one from the next unless you’re an orthopaedist or archaeologist. Yet skulls house our minds, and all five of our senses. To see that home in its vacated state, hollowed out, is to see the ultimate emptiness. To see a mass of skulls is to bear witness to the end – of a family, a clan, a civilisation. During the Pol Pot regime, ninety per cent of the nation’s artists were murdered. ‘To keep you is no gain, to kill you is no loss’, said their executioners.

If the soul rests in the whole human body – the form of the once-alive human composed of organ and skin and blood – then is a mere section of that body enough for the soul to find residence and respite? Does the soul reside in the arm? The torso? The head? These disembodied skulls terrorise us with their empty eye sockets. These skulls are voids, and these massive voids are eclipsing centuries of civilisation, telling us that art is never enough. Perhaps this is the largest ever memento mori to grace a gallery, a boulder-sized shadow over the vanities in gilt frames. Art will not bring back the dead.

We have now appropriated the skull as something kitsch, stripped it of its previous potent power to remind us of the transience of life and the vanity of the ego, made it a teenage emblem to be appropriated on earrings, approximated as Halloween decorations and printed on children’s leggings. Even memento mori paintings have devolved into cute tattoos of roses blossoming from skulls with perfectly spherical crowns.

Yet the skull has never lost its power to overwhelm in Chinese or Cambodian culture. They are stacked up behind glass, hundreds and hundreds, in the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek. One of the worst profanities with which you could curse someone is to call them a dead bone head, literally, a skull. My father doesn’t go to the gallery very often, but if he does,it is certainly not to see reminders of mortality. Surviving Cambodia was enough. When you are starving, human life is reduced to the length of a person’s digestive tract; when you are gone, it is reduced to bones.

I realised, when looking at small photographic images of *Mass*, that skulls without the lower jaw are proportioned like children, or the attributes that make children plaintive and helpless, particularly the big eyes in the centre of the round head. The skulls reminded me of my friend U. Sam Ouer, a Cambodian poet in Texas, who lost his twin baby daughters in the genocide. Ouer wrote about the night in October 1976, ‘when the moon had fully waxed, it was cold to the bone’, his wife’s labour pains began. ‘Two midwives materialised – one squatted above her abdomen and pushed, the other reached up my wife’s womb and ripped the babies out.’ They ‘choked them and wrapped them in black plastic’ before handing the babies to Ouer to bury.

Ouer had survived the Khmer Rouge by burning all his poetry and his masters thesis, obtained at the University of Iowa in the late 1960s. He’d made it out alive, still remembering how to recite Walt Whitman. I first became friends with Grandpa Ouer (as I call him) after reading his poetry in America. He’d sent it to me as a gift. I’d read countless survival memoirs and knew about the powerful art of Vann Nath, who was one of only seven survivors of the hellish Tuol Sleng prison out of 14,000 prisoners. Ouer was attempting something with his work that was more than ‘bearing witness’. He was attempting to create art, to rekindle the lost forms of Khmer poetry that had been banned by the Khmer Rouge. Ouer may not have survived the death of his twins but for his art. Art cannot bring back the dead, but it can give the living a reason to stay alive. In his poem ‘The fall of culture’, he writes:

> O, monument of Independence!
> O, library! O, books of poetry!
> I can never chant the divinely inspired poems again!
> O, quintessential words of poets!
> O, artifacts I can never touch or see again!
> …
> I’ll be nowhere,
> I’ll have no night,
> I’ll have no day anymore:
> I shall be a man without identity.

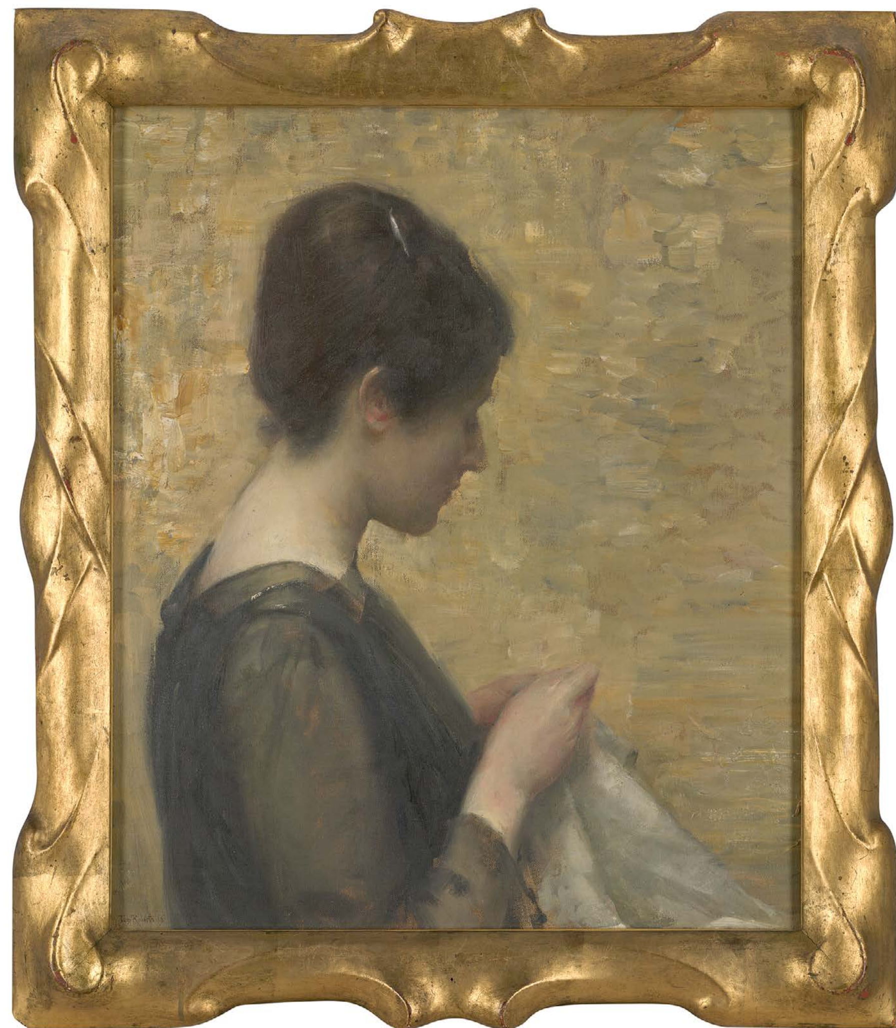
The faces in *Mass* are without identity, while the works of art on the walls of the gallery are carefully signed by the artists. For those who have been fortunate enough not to have been so closely touched by genocide, Mueck’s work reminds us that our own culture does not reign permanent, that the line between creation and complete annihilation is just a hair’s breadth. To be awakened to the impermanence of existence through art is a blessing, not a curse. It means we can’t take the life – and art – we have for granted.

ALICE PUNG IS THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *UNPOLISHED GEM*, *HER FATHER’S DAUGHTER* AND *LAURINDA*; SHE IS ALSO THE EDITOR OF *GROWING UP ASIAN IN AUSTRALIA* AND *MY FIRST LESSON*. *MASS* WAS GENEROUSLY GIFTED BY THE FELTON BEQUEST. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE MAR–APR 2018 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

Ron Mueck *Mass* 2016–17 (detail). National Gallery of Victoria. Felton Bequest, 2018

PORTRAIT PROVOCATIONS

Early twentieth century Australian portrait display at the Ian Potter Centre, NGV Australia, 2017



Partners and collaborators; star students and housemaids; artists and family men; a league of extraordinary women. Every picture tells a story and, as these short narratives attest, works made half a century ago can be contemporary in spirit and relevant to modern circumstances.

BY ELISHA BUTLER WITH REBECCA EDWARDS

Tom Roberts *Penelope* 1919. Felton Bequest, 1920
Mary Cecil Allen *Sketch: Miss Audrey Stevenson as Circe* 1930. Gift of Miss Beatrice Allen, 1972 © Mary Cecil Allen
Lina Bryans *Head of a woman (Alix Sobel)* 1943. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Eric Harding and Athol Hawke, Members, 1999 © Courtesy of the artist's estate

Tom Roberts *Penelope* 1919

A key character in this portrait is not *Penelope* (or Kitty Pring, the sitter) but Miss Lillie Williamson (Mrs Tom Roberts). While he will eventually come to stand for all things Australian, in 1919 Tom Roberts is an established, truly international artist who is instrumental in introducing key art movements and techniques to Australia from Europe. Likewise, Lillie Williamson is one of the finest frame-makers in the country. Her frames are hand-carved, intricate and finely finished, which is perhaps unsurprising considering she was born into a world of fine finishings and decorations as the daughter of a wealthy department store proprietor.

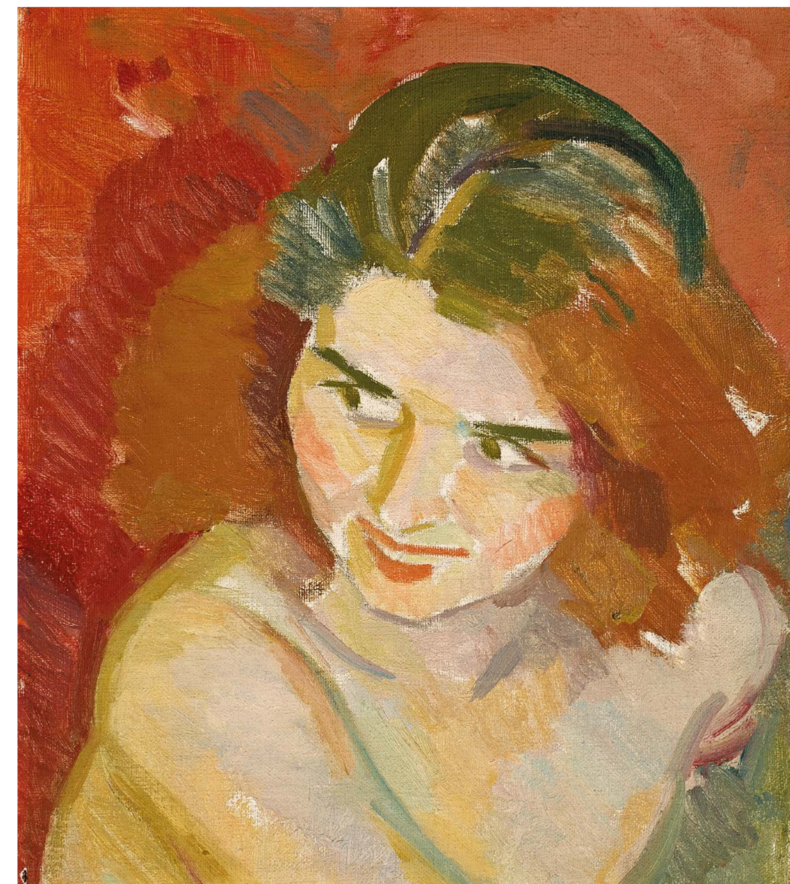
In 1886 the twenty-six-year-old Williamson embarks on a fashionable Grand Tour of Britain and Europe. She has recently met Roberts and they share letters while she travels, discussing paint brushes and London artists. Eventually they marry, in 1896, and Lillie begins to create some of the frames for his works. They move to London in the early part of the twentieth century and Williamson, who wins awards and has work purchased by royalty, is lauded for her carved timber frames as much as Roberts is for his art-making. They are true partners and collaborators.

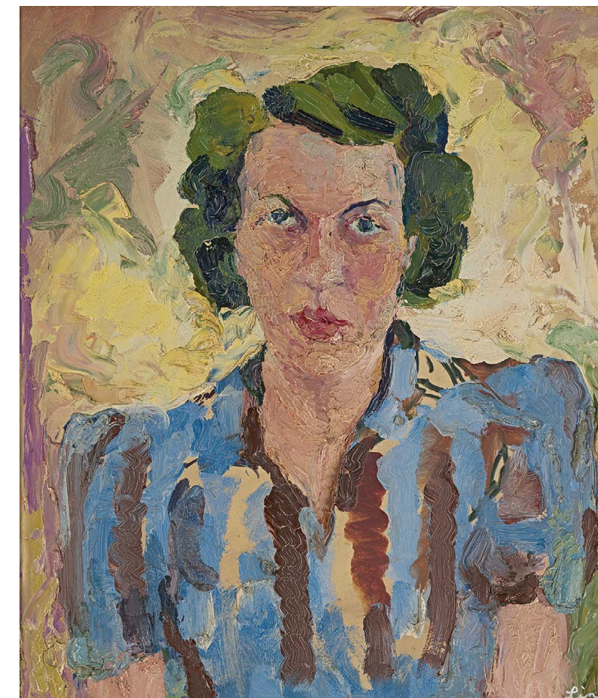
Mary Cecil Allen *Sketch: Miss Audrey Stevenson as Circe* 1930

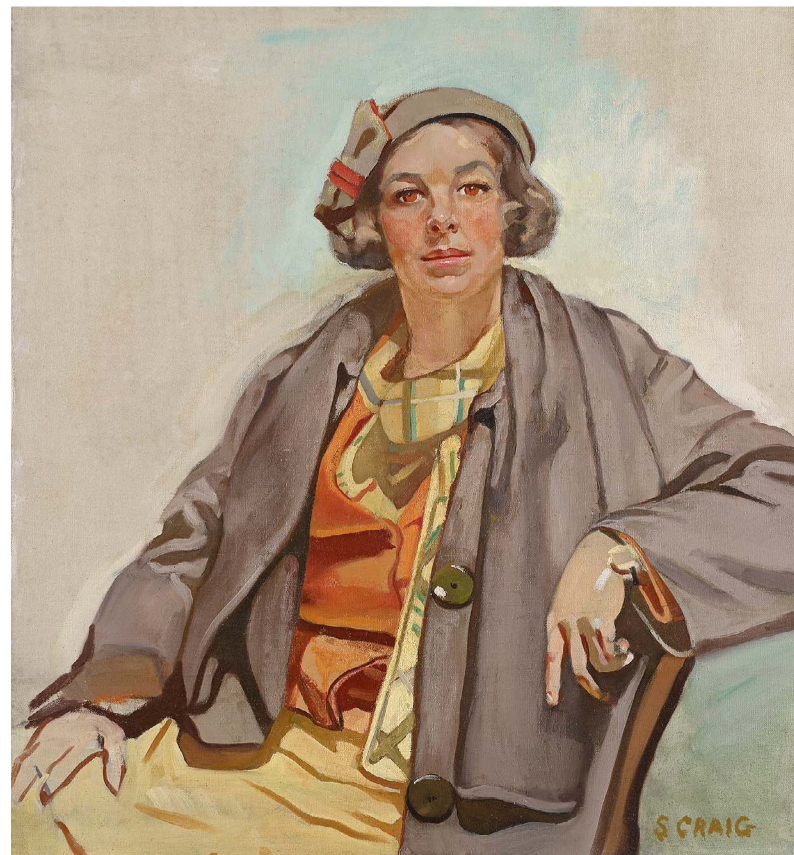
Mary Cecil Allen's sitter assumes the role of Circe – Greek goddess of potions and all things magical. A wildling, an echantress. Yet the artist, in titling this work *Miss Audrey Stevenson*, unravels the spell slightly. Still, Allen's is a world of transformation and imagination. She paints her friend Audrey in London, but the artist's heart lies in New York City. A writer, artist and art lecturer by trade, Allen has been advising culture-hungry Americans on the best European galleries. Her powers of persuasion lead to an invitation to lecture in New York, and in that city she stays, moving there permanently in 1926. Much like many Australians in New York today, Allen not only remains connected to, but also actively nurtures a network of expatriates and in 1931 presents the first exhibition of Australian artists at the Roerich Museum. The New Yorkers love the show.

Lina Bryans *Head of a woman (Alix Sobel)* 1943

Lina Bryans is energetic, entrepreneurial and highly creative. Her friends and companions include artists Sibyl Craig, Jean Sutherland, Iain MacKinnon, William Frater and members of *Meanjin* literary circle. It is 1930s Melbourne; artist's studios still populate the CBD, immigrant communities are bringing new perspectives and experiences to the city and ideas and cultures are colliding at a frenetic pace. The German-born Bryans understands this better than anyone. She moves to a lodging house at Darebin Bridge, on the rural margins of Melbourne, and something about the place must inspire her because she eventually buys the entire property, converting it into a creative community similar to nearby Heide. Everybody knows it as the 'Pink Hotel'. It is here that she begins painting portraits of her friends privately, in what comes to be a kind of album of the local Melbourne creative community. Bryan's friend Alix Sobel, an American, is not an artist but works as a therapist at the Heidelberg Military Hospital.







Colin Colahan *Dr John Dale* 1934

He looks debonair, even quietly flamboyant, with his merlot coat closed around a loosely buttoned shirt, fine pen and pipe jutting form his mouth. But he is also a person of action, and ethics. England-born Dr John Dale is a medical officer to the City of Melbourne. In 1934, like many other cities, the relatively young Melbourne is straining under the weight of the Depression and the looming Second World War. This envirionment is not unfamiliar to the medical practioiner: in England Dr Dale had worked as a medical officer servicing ecoomically depressed communities. He wastes no time in Melbourne. Supported by his Montessori-trained wife, Dr Dale oversees the building of new infant health and pre-school centres, including community kindergartens, and provides free milk and vegetables to children via ground-breaking new schemes.

Sybil Craig *Nancy Guest* c. 1934

Sybil Craig, her eye for detail already honed through her childhood in a 'suburban bohemian household', is twenty-three when accepted into the National Gallery of Victoria Art School. Craig is hungry to learn: she has come from private tutelage with John Shirlow and will later pursue further education at Melbourne Technical College. She is at the National Gallery School for seven years and in this time connects with other creative, ambitious, curious women, including Nancy Guest. Guest, like Craig, is an exemplary student. Guest is awarded the National Gallery Travelling Scholarship in 1926 and immediately joins a league of extraordinary women: between 1908 and 1932 the scholarship is won exclusively by female artists.

Later, the artists' paths diverge. Craig becomes an official war artist, establishes a studio, exhibits, co-founds the New Melbourne Art Club, contributes to the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors with friends such as Lina Bryans and settles with her young family at Canadian Bay on the Mornington Peninsula. Guest's trajectory is not as clear. She travels for her scholarship and exhibits with the Victorian Artists Society when she returns, but later works as a housemaid. Years later the work that won Guest the scholarship – *The fortune teller* – is found in the residence she serviced, in a shed alongside machinery and discarded paraphernalia.

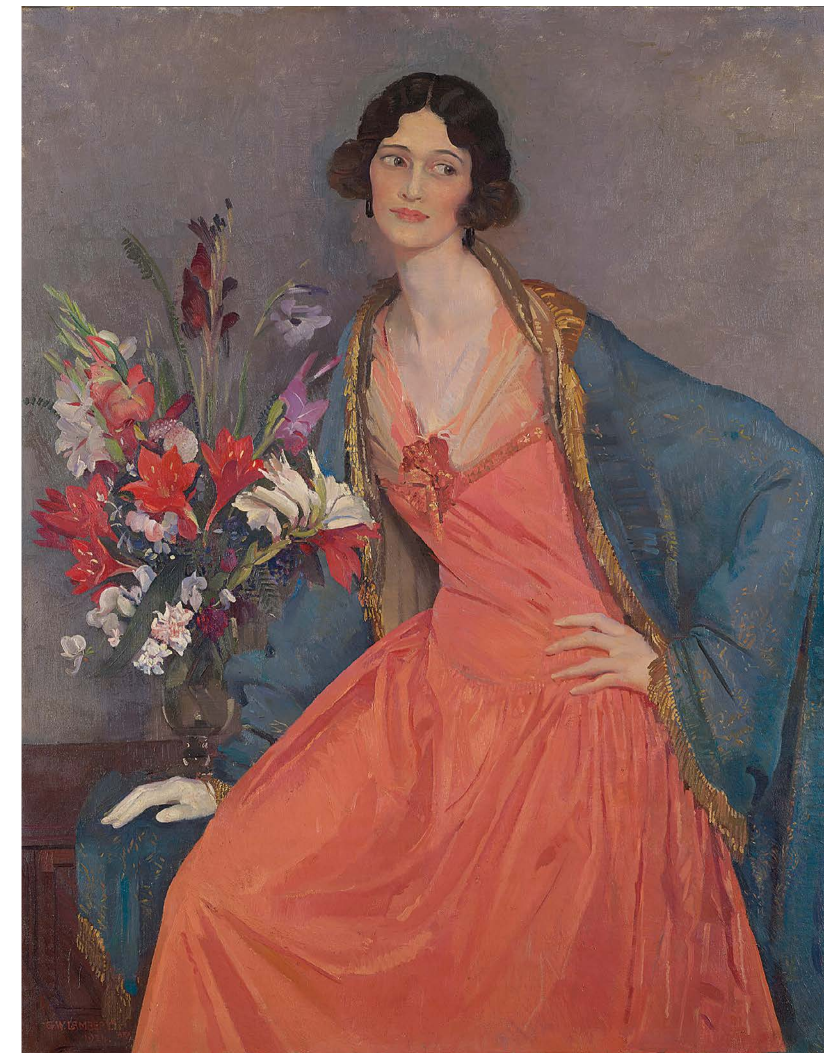
Colin Colahan *Dr John Dale* 1934. Felton Bequest, 1934 © The Estate of Colin Colahan
Sybil Craig *Nancy Guest* c. 1934. Gift from the Estate of Sybil Craig, 1990 © Estate of Sybil Craig
George W. Lambert *A sergeant of the Light Horse* 1920. Felton Bequest, 1921
George W. Lambert *Hera* 1924. Felton Bequest, 1925

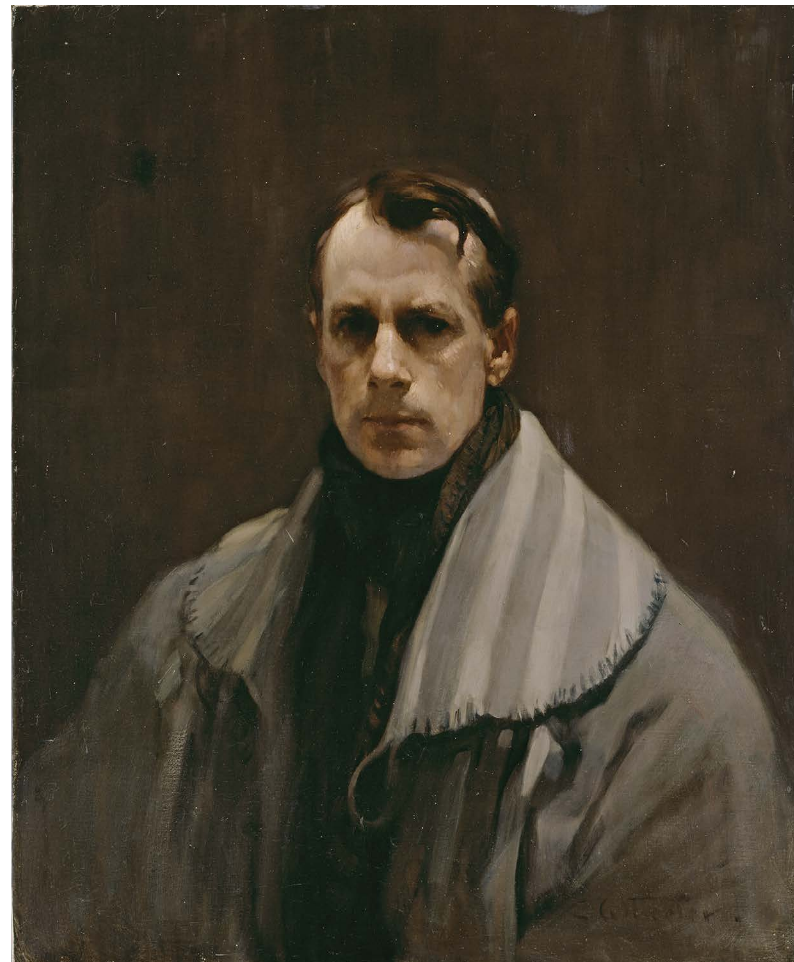
George W. Lambert *A sergeant of the Light Horse* 1920

When artist George W. Lambert meets Harry Ivers they are in the city of Jasmine, Damascus. It is 1919, and the world is deep in the throes of the Great War. Lambert has been an official war artist since 1917. Already lean from war, the handsome Ivers is a sergeant with the 1st Signal Squadron, employed as a map maker for the War Records Section in Palestine, when he sits for this portrait. The two men remain in contact, and later Lambert employs the Australian as his assistant in London, where they work together until 1920. Back in Australia, the Great War has ravaged the population; of the 416, 809 Australians who enlisted, 59,258 died and 226,073 were wounded. All were volunteers. Australia's population was five million.

George W. Lambert *Hera* 1924

Sydney, 1925: in a world that seems far beyond but still traumatically close to the scenes he experienced as a war artist, George Lambert paints *Hera*. Fresh, elegant and posing with fashionable gladioli, Hera Roberts is more than an almond-eyed pretty face – she is a committed painter, illustrator and designer. Thoroughly modern, Roberts is already making a stylish name for herself for her bold, contemporary cover designs for *The Home Journal*. She is also well-connected: her cousin is artist Thea Procter, later to become one of the most respected names in Australian modernism, and Roberts is the companion of publisher Sydney Ure Smith. Lambert is not ignorant of these nuances and tells his wife Amy ahead of painting her, 'I am having a shot at a portrait of the beautiful Thea Procter cousin one Hera Roberts tomorrow and this most expensive luxury may help to set me on my … feet'.[1]





Agnes Goodsir *The letter* 1926

Agnes Goodsir is a country girl before she paints this portrait of her companion, Rachel Dunn. She is born in Portland, on the remote coastal fringe of Western Victoria. Her immediate world is churning seas bound by yellow plains and rocky outcrops, but other worlds beckon this proactive young woman. She moves inland to the post-goldrush heartland of Bendigo and studies art at the Bendigo School of Mines and Industries. In 1899 Goodsir leaves for Paris, selling her own works of art to finance the multi-month passage to life in a gloriously bohemian city.

She is glad she made the jump. Goodsir is consumed by Parisian life, and it seems Paris is enraptured with the girl from Bendigo: she quickly carves a reputation for her still-life painting and portraits. Sitters include Leo Tolstoy and Benito Mussolini. In 1926, the same year she paints *The letter*, Goodsir is only the second Australian women to become a member of the Salon Nationale des Beaux-Arts. She dies in Paris, leaving her legacy of works of art to Miss Dunn.

Charles Wheeler *Self portrait* c. 1921

'A portrait isn't purely a matter of painting a likeness. You try as well to portray the sitter's character. If you are a good craftsman and have anything inside you, this also will show out in the finished picture, exactly as your individuality shows in your hand-writing.'[2]

——— CHARLES WHEELER

Agnes Goodsir *The letter* 1926. Bequest of the artist, 1947
Charles Wheeler *Self portrait* c. 1921. Felton Bequest, 1922 © Estate of Charles Wheeler

Max Martin *Portrait group* 1922

Max Martin poses with his young wife and child in a carefully considered composition. Martin is shown as the family man, the urbane patriarch with his arms resting just authoritively enough to assert his leadership of the family – his wife's attention dutifully on their child, his attention focused on the bigger world around them. But he wants us to know that he is no ordinary family man. He is a man ahead of the vanguard, with his flamboyant tam-o'-shanter, velvet coat and that nonchalant cigarette. He is deliberately unconventional, even in this family portrait. Perhaps it runs in the genes; Martin's little one, with her assertive red socks and direct gaze, embodies something of her father. The same year Martin paints this portait he exhibits it, at London's prestigeous Royal Academy. He is thirty-five and the family portrait makes his career. The work is the sensation of the exhibition.

Jean Sutherland *Miss Erskine* 1926

Jean Sutherland, whose family interests lie in soap making and real estate, and which harbours a strong tradition of artistic talent, is a member of the National Gallery School Travelling Scholarship's female alumni from 1908 to 1932, a period when only women were winning the award. She wins in 1923 with her painting *The new recipe*. She makes the most of her travels, enrolling at the Royal Academy School when she disembarks in London. The foggy city is good for Sutherland: she produces her portrait of Miss Erskine while there, and it is accepted for display at the Royal Academy's Annual Exhibition in the spring of 1926. When Sutherland returns to Australia in late 1927 she continues to paint, and later befriends fellow painters Lina Bryans and Sybil Craig through the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors.

ELISHA BUTTLER IS NGV AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT MANAGER. REBECCA EDWARDS WAS NGV ASSISTANT CURATOR, AUSTRALIAN PAINTING, SCULPTURE, AND DECORATIVE ARTS TO 1980 (IN 2017). THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE JAN–FEB 2017 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

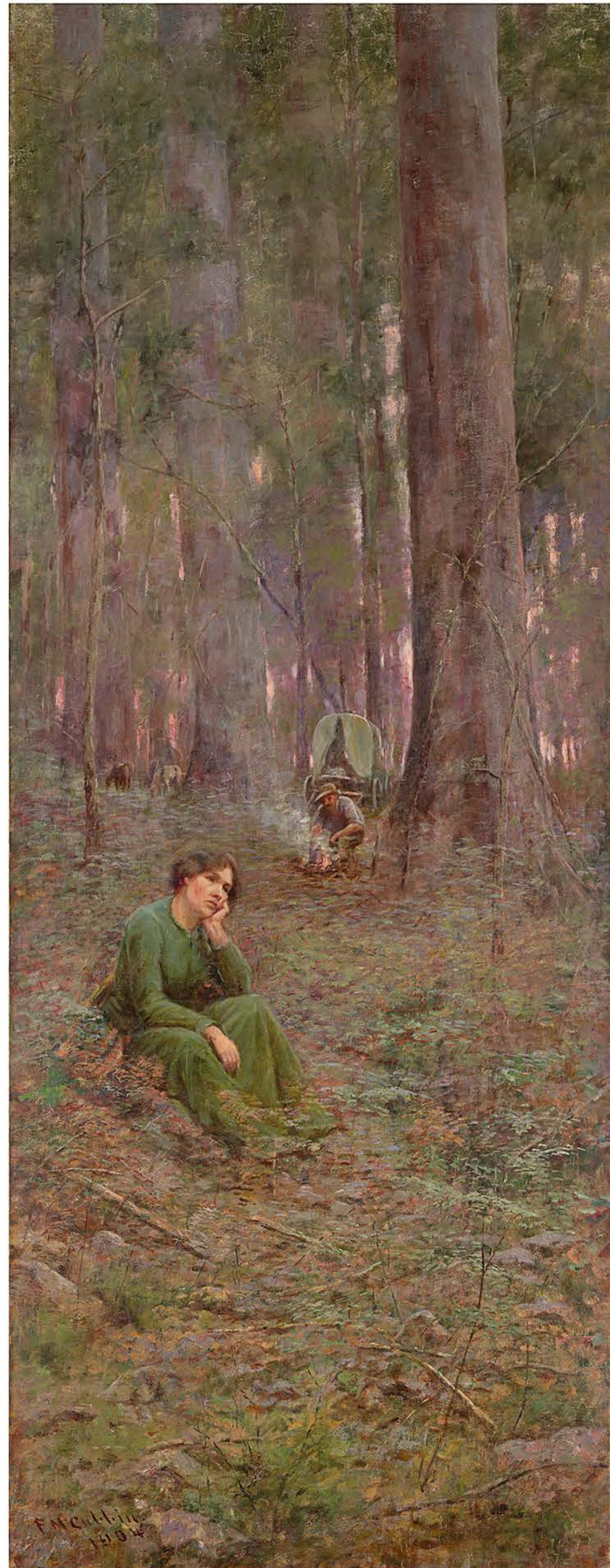
Max Martin *Portrait group* 1922. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE, Honorary Life Benefactor, 1995 © Veronica Martin
Jean Sutherland *Miss Erskine* 1926. Purchased, 1979 © Jean Sutherland Estate

Grace Cossington Smith *The Bridge in-curve* 1930. Presented by the National Gallery Society of Victoria, 1967

Fiction and Poetry

‘As soon as the Melbourne suburbs melted away, men appeared like trees, edging the roads, gray, thin, dusty, with seek work signs slung around their necks, or huddled beside dry creeks under hessian scraps.’

Emma Ashmere



Frederick McCubbin *The pioneer* 1904

By Sophie Gerhard

Although Frederick McCubbin did not reveal a narrative behind his works, firsthand testimonies of early pioneers have survived, helping us to understand the challenges of life in nineteenth-century Australia. This creative response, based on historical accounts, considers the woman's experience in McCubbin's iconic painting.

Is this life as I had expected? The life promised? I was eager for a move. New scenery, a new way of life. Yet while our hardships in the colony continue, our toils persist. As my husband grows tired by manual labour, the necessity for me to provide, to dedicate myself to homemaking, grows stronger. I must ensure our survival. Keep us fed. Keep us clothed. The great distance from my kin, who once provided me comfort, causes me heartache, and my body feels the effects of two years on the land. There is seldom a child born who keeps its health through the blistering summer, and freezing winter. This is my greatest fear. Yet, although we appear victims of misfortune, today we are blessed with health. And we must take each day anew. In imagination I can picture a splendid city, towering over the hills. I am sure it will one day be reality. But will I be here to witness its growth?

SOPHIE GERHARD IS NGV ASSISTANT CURATOR, AUSTRALIAN PAINTING, SCULPTURE, AND DECORATIVE ARTS TO 1980. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE MAY–JUN 2020 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

Frederick McCubbin *The pioneer* 1904.
Felton Bequest, 1906

NERI OXMAN

Writers Bella Li and Lucy Van were invited to consider and respond in poetry or prose to a death mask by American-Israeli architect and designer Neri Oxman. The work – *Mask 1, Series 1*, 2016 – is from Oxman's *Vespers* series. The works take the traditional custom of making death masks into new territory, through computer modelling software and 3D printing, creating masks that look very much alive. We begin by introducing Oxman's work.

BY BELLA LI AND LUCY VAN

About the work

Neri Oxman has been awarded ambitious titles such as 'Revolutionary Mind' (*Seed* magazine, 2008) and 'Cultural Leader' (World Economic Forum, 2016). This is perhaps not surprising considering the complex array of disciplines her work spans, including computational design, digital fabrication, materials science and synthetic biology. What may be more surprising are the ways in which Oxman bring to life these disciplines through her creative work. Acquired through the generosity of very supportive donors, and presented at NGV Triennial, Oxman, who leads the Material Ecology research arm at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), presents works from her Vespers series, designed by her in collaboration with MIT's Mediated Matter Group as part a collection called *The New Ancient*.

The masks, including *Mask 1, Series 1*, appear at first viewing neither as traditional death masks nor as the product of high-tech design and fabrication. Yet they embody both. Oxman and her team created each mask using a Stratasys Objet500 Connex3 multi-material 3D printer, which prints 3D forms by depositing coloured polymer droplets in layers. The result is richly and intricately coloured and finely, almost impossibly, detailed work with repeating line and patterns that one could get lost in. The works look alive; they look like living, breathing organisms. It is because of this that these masks are so beguiling – in their synthesis of the ancient and the utterly modern, and also in the suggested interplay of death and life.

Death masks are a long-held tradition in many cultures. In some communities, the mask would be moulded to the face of the deceased in the process of making it, so that the unique contours and structure of the person's face could be retained and remembered, like a memento mori. Speaking about the Vespers series, Oxman said in a 2016 interview with Heidi Legg, 'We were intrigued by the idea of exploring an ancient and long-forgotten product and giving it new meaning through the lens of design, science and technology'.

The series builds on Oxman's ongoing interest in history, mythology, tradition and the depths of human connection and emotion, an interest she assuages through the most cutting-edge technologies and uniquely collaborative approaches to design, manufacture and science.

LUCY VAN IS A MELBOURNE-BASED WRITER, AN EDITOR FOR CORDITE POETRY REVIEW AND A POST-DOCTORAL RESEARCHER IN THE ENGLISH AND THEATRE STUDIES PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE. BELLA LI IS A MELBOURNE-BASED POET, ARTIST AND THE AUTHOR OF *ARGOSY* (VAGABOND PRESS, 2017). THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE JAN–FEB 2018 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

Neri Oxman (designer) **Mediated Matter Group, Cambridge, Massachusetts** (designer) **Stratasys Ltd, Eden Prairie, Minnesota** (manufacturer) *Vespers, Series 1, Mask 1* 2016. Purchased with funds donated by an anonymous donor, 2018 © Neri Oxman, courtesy Mediated Matter Group, Cambridge, Massachusetts

CANTICLES

BY LUCY VAN

People used to say that life is too short
do you think that
as life expectancy changes

People will start to say
life is about the right amount of time
and then no one will say anything?
(Leo)

Magnificat anima mea Dominum
(Luke)

The front room is cut with Midas
I'm looking at my what do you call him now
my Midas pulling the microscope under the magnifying glass
listening to the withdrawal of rites inventing the fabric
at least the thing that spoke was close clothes a clothed idol
I'm laughing am I but it isn't that funny

I'm funny and we're in my house
and now it is ours his and now it is his house and
houses teach everything about where a body goes
and here we go and face each other and speech is
the face's eventual ritual – wave and fall and oh my gosh
you didn't know oh my god this makes me sad

Not sad this time makes bells and watches
clean beige carpet which is arcadia mhm
the carpet is a garden structurally speaking
iterable moments – everyone has a room like this
I'm calling I'm ordering parts stranded by that desire
sidestepping now dropping hands full of ice

Now stranded on the living room floor
someone asks is death neoanachronism? goddamit you
comedian
I wonder – what time is it in Denver?
well – what time is it in Denver?
its main outlines easy to get a hold of and clean
the line magnifying nothing I know nothing about D

Maybe one maybe two sleeps ah ah right right one sleep
maybe this suffering resemblance just lines
regurgitates sleeps in the front room folds
clothes a new regime the insurgent poet says
there's something in the lamp is there something in
oh the lamp is the mask facing out

The mask is a lamp going out on a limb the only way
you can transform the beam you go on the lam I'm going out
and here we go passing as is my custom out and about to stop
at houses
clock the dancefloor canticles twist at the edge
love bells and watch clocks – and my hands on your face
are clothes hung there in their alterations

I put my hand on your face it vanishes
a corset for your *infinite adjectives*
Denver Brussels Nairobi now
boarding now departing now arriving now
make me three times reflect five times
attack by light and lay flat and speak low

If you hear me fold under the lamp under the hazel tree
into a blind room if you look closely round the eyes they loop
clothes are hung tear and flash at the last moment glimpse
and is it
a flash a kind of momentary ending bound together
in that guise as quick as you can a clank clank of metal
a cheek almost near enough in charge as before

VESPERS (I,I)

BY BELLA LI

Evening falls O bloody sea
I
There was a dream he had dreamt at dusk. Low tide receding,
sun of the afternoon beating incessantly down upon the
surface of the water. The yellow of rape blossoms, green
of young grass. All shaken with a pale grief. And in the ruins
of ancient castles, in the skies above he saw the sinking of
clustered stars. Blazing towards strange images. The winter
of 1945 had been a persistent one. Ice still glittered under
the starlight. In the glittering starlight, he could look across
sere fields to the basin in which the city lay extended. Traces
of dark fog rising from the gorges (an unfamiliar station, an
unfamiliar street). What we call evil is. She had turned her head
and was looking out the window into the unfamiliar street.
As though she were a pale woman, looking for the first time.
I
From my bed, where I passed in a kind of deep, I heard
news of the destruction of H—. Let the curve in our diagram
correspond to the temperature, M. Pearce's Star. Herculis.
Aurigae. The cool evening falling headlong into the tide.
From our eyes we watched the sky turn crimson, the sun
went down—there in the centre of the basin in which the
city lay. Lapsed again into invisibility. Again the machinery of
deception had begun to work within me. From my bed I saw
our generals in the fields, faces down. *I shall be born again*
three times. And grasp the sword in my hand. To account for
the radiation of the stars, early spectroscopists believed—
but there is a straight line that does not pass through the
origin. Perhaps I will not be understood, at the familiar hour,
in the dusk when the bell sounds, but for the account of this
straight line: my legs carried me running toward something
that in any case was not—whatever it was, it was not.

The fearful days were beginning. I passed through the long
shadow.

NOTES

The epigraph is from Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War* (1913–1916), translated by Anne Hyde Greet, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2004.

Phrases were sourced from the following texts: James Jeans, *Astronomy and Cosmology*, Dover Publications, New York, 1961; Kumiko Kakehashi, *So Sad to Fall in Battle: An Account of War*, Presidio Press, New York, 2007; Yukio Mishima, *Confessions of a Mask*, translated by Meredith Weatherby, New Directions, New York, 1958

The Sketchers

Art inspires life, life inspires art, and creativity inspires creativity. Especially for *NGV Magazine,* novelist and author Emma Ashmere responds to Grace Cossington Smith's 1930 work *The Bridge in-curve*, with a piece of short fiction.

BY EMMA ASHMERE

Theodora wanted to see the Harbour Bridge before the arches met. It was the only time to sketch it, she said. She'd take her brother's car and …

'Take?', I said. 'Or borrow?'

She'd ventured north on a similar jaunt in '26, and supposed we'd need a week.

'A week. Each way', I said. 'At least.'

'It's because of your parents,', she said. 'Isn't it?'

I began to make a list – to prove it was not. 'Map, cheese, bread, wine, Middlemarch.'

'Sketchbook', Theodora added, 'pencils, paints.

As soon as the Melbourne suburbs melted away, men appeared like trees, edging the roads, gray, thin, dusty, with seek work signs slung around their necks, or huddled beside dry creeks under hessian scraps. I clung to the map, my bird's-eye view, unable to look at the men, at the hunger, the desperation in their eyes, not knowing if it was better or worse to stare instead at the haze of paddocks, or laugh as we skidded into another pothole.

We stood in salted winds on ocean cliffs. Theodora shouted over the thumping surf, 'Ultramarine, cobalt, cerulean'. Some days after lunch, we dozed briefly in the clicking stillness of ferns. Once we woke to find a lyrebird parading its tail of lace. At night we lay awake to the cough and gulp of plumbing in beer-brown hotels.

Sydney's inky late-night flicker. Neither of us spoke as the ferry chugged beside the bridge's ghosted silhouette. We then nosed towards my Lavender Bay aunt, who was peeved at the lateness of the hour. Theodora eased open the curtains, crept out to the balcony and declared it a front-row seat.

All night she leapt up, as if willing the sun to banish the moon and drag its chariot across the sky. I stayed in bed, seeking surety, solace and perspective in myth. I'd lost count how many times the newspapermen invoked the Colossus when waxing on about the spectacle of the bridge, and imagined him lumbering down from his pillars, wading from Rhodes to our antipodean harbour, capsizing ferries, politicians, hopes.

I woke to a dawn chorus. Not the tympani tram-clang rattle of Swanston Street, rather an industrial orchestra tuning up. I wondered if my parents knew I was here. The bridge had found its form since my exit to Melbourne three years before. Had they? Had I? Additions, losses, accusations, denials, abandoning the falsified ledgers of my life – the price of independence.

The sun flared bronze. The vanished houses and gouged sandstone now erupted with pylons, cables, two competing metal claws. The creeping cranes perched, daring each other to pirouette. Men climbed, knelt, danced across the weave of steel high above the ruffled harbour silk.

I discovered Theodora hoeing into breakfast under the radiant eye of my aunt, who seemed transformed by the sting of burnt toast, an appetite for argument, her cheeks redder than her prized geraniums.

'But is it art?', she said, waving a breadknife. 'I suppose you both rush to see exhibitions denounced by the critics as "Modernist Again. Dodging True Art". Last week I read …'

I didn't say – yes, dear aunt, we've all read. Even a world away in Melbourne, or in Europe, where people like Theodora and me dreamt of taking refuge in antiquity, modernity, anonymity, despite walls crashing, and suns setting on empires.

Theodora shrugged, kept ploughing through her bacon and eggs. I hurried away to dress. By the time I came back, Theodora was gone.

I followed her down towards the clamour of the harbour until I saw her stop, and scramble up a slope towards a woman, an artist, a sketchbook on her lap, her face shaded by a sunhat.

I looked back at my aunt's house. My mother and father were on the balcony. Perhaps it was the changed scale of the world or the morning's luminosity, but they looked smaller and greyer than I remembered.

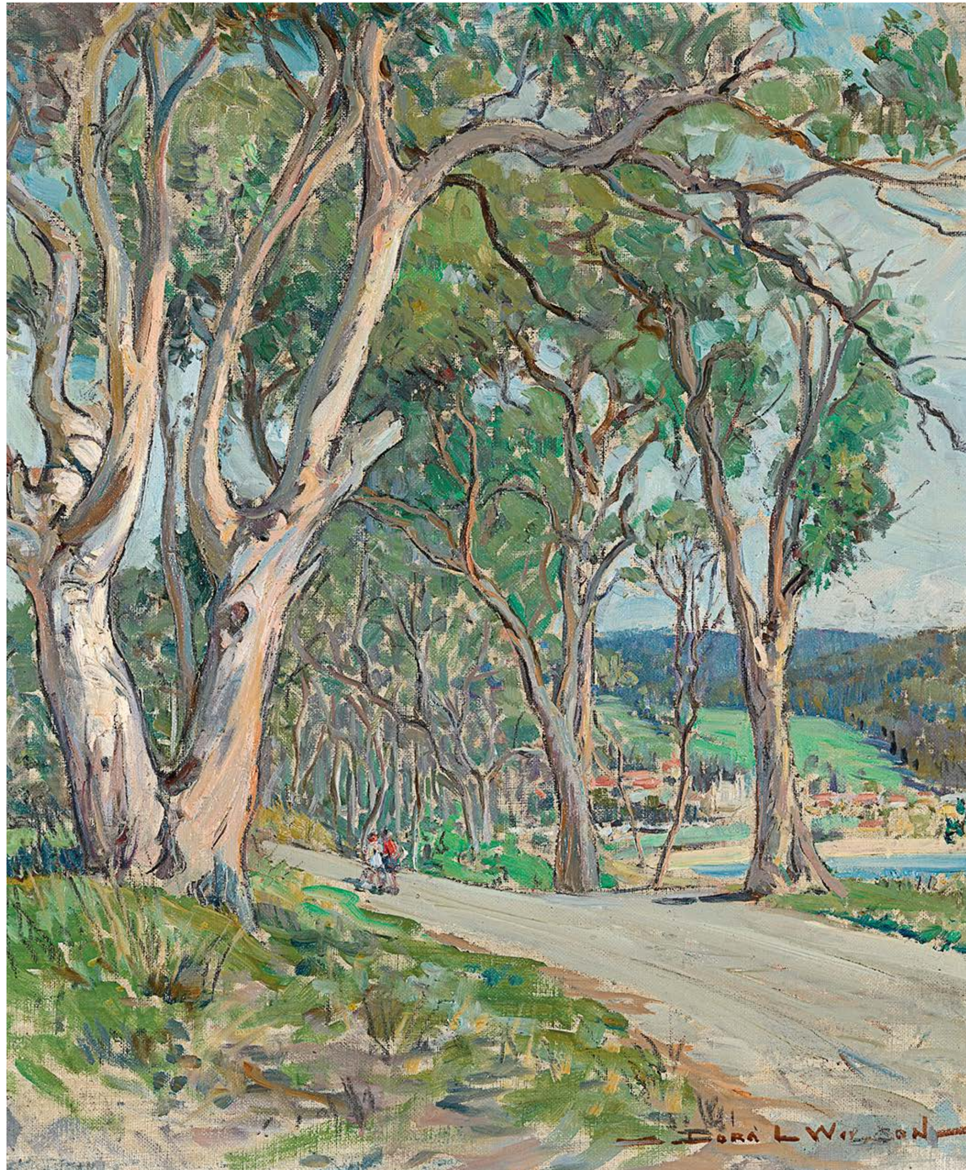
Theodora shielded her eyes as the artist waved her pencil across the sky.

When she finally strode back to me, she was elated, silent. For a moment we stared up, as if at some shared vision hovering between the forceful, graceful curves – a splintered halo of light and possibility.

EMMA ASHMERE'S SHORT STORIES HAVE BEEN SHORTLISTED FOR VARIOUS COMPETITIONS AND PUBLISHED WIDELY. HER DEBUT NOVEL *THE FLOATING GARDEN* WAS SHORTLISTED FOR THE 2016 SMALL PRESS NETWORK MUBA PRIZE. HER NEW SHORT STORY COLLECTION *DREAMS THEY FORGOT* WILL BE PUBLISHED IN SEPTEMBER 2020 BY WAKEFIELD PRESS.
THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE SEP–OCT 2017 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

Grace Cossington Smith *The Bridge in-curve* 1930. Presented by the National Gallery Society of Victoria, 1967

FLASH FICTION



Much can be said in 200 words or less. In a collaboration with the Melbourne Writers Festival 2019, *NGV Magazine* invited four Australian writers to compose micro-texts in response to works on display in the *Modern Australian Women* exhibition at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. The results are a blend of flash fiction, cultural commentary and micro-memoir, and connect Australian women working in contemporary creative arts with their counterparts working more than seventy years earlier, with surprising common ground between then and now.

(left) **Dora Wilson** *Old gum tree, Lorne* 1930. Private Collection, Melbourne
(right) **Grace Seccombe** *Bookends* 1933. Private Collection, Melbourne © the artist's estate

Dora Wilson *Old gum tree, Lorne* 1930
By Emilie Zoey Baker

Staring at that print on the wall
the split in the gumtree seemed kind
like thigh scissors
or confident fingers that count to two
human arms singing Hallelujah.
Fingers spread waiting for the tingle of prayer.
A cradle for a bird or a water bath for babies.

When your house has cruel words tucked under the wallpaper
or black sentences that stick like menthol cigarette smoke
you tend to hide in the paintings.
I'd make myself so small I could be an ant on the trunk
willing myself into the fork beside the road
making the gum my entire world.
Meeting birds and becoming jealous they knew nothing of my grandmother.

This place where the breeze stood still and the leaves knew my name
where grass was added like slap bass.
I didn't acknowledge the figures, painted in as an afterthought.
I'd forgotten how to travel like that
how to make my skin the same as an oil blue sky
till I saw you again.

Grace Seccombe *Bookends* 1933
By Alice Pung

When I was twelve I was given a ceramic koala on a lumpy stump, with eyes painted a little higher than its sockets; not priceless but a five-dollar Kris Kringle present. My mother nonetheless kept it in a glass display cabinet with our other treasures:

- two porcelain infants dressed as bride and groom, kissing;
- a plastic Eiffel Tower;
- a 1988 bicentennial coin.

My koala was the indigent cousin of Grace Seccombe's book-ends, but I'd like to think that if they had met, we wouldn't have treated them differently. They would've stood beneath the same glass ceiling, among valuables others have sometimes regarded as a woman's tacky decoration, not art.

Seccombe's kookaburras, kingfishers and galahs graced many homes: she sold her fauna in Prouds jewellers and Grace Bros, as well as the Taronga Zoo gift shop.

Her creatures have personality. Each koala face is different: one looks pleased and festively plump, the other smug like a cadre that has over-feasted at a state supper. If my dollar-store koala had made it through the doors to join the party, I'm sure Seccombe's duo would have embraced him as a beloved drunk uncle, such is the delightful democratic generosity of her art.

Hilda Rix Nicholas *The Picnic* 1925.
Private Collection, Melbourne © Bronwyn Wright

Hilda Rix Nicholas *The Picnic* 1925
By Susi Fox

Ellen swats at a mosquito. 'Did you hear me, Dorothy?'

'I'm sorry.' Dorothy stares at the silky surface of the Yarra. 'I think Max is going to propose this weekend, is all. Mother told me he askedFather for my hand.'

Ellen squeals. With the tip of my finger, I trace circles into the sandy ground.

Dorothy continues, 'Mother says I should accept. And I don't seem to have a good reason to refuse.' A eucalyptus breeze from the opposite bank exposes the triangle of hair at her neck's nape.

'You could come to Paris with me,' I say all at once. 'You could share my studio; complete your sketches.'

Speckled sunlight dances on Dorothy's cheeks.

'I suppose in the evenings we could walk the banks of the Seine and go to jazz clubs,' she says.

'Max wouldn't like that.' Ellen crumples a mosquito against her calf.

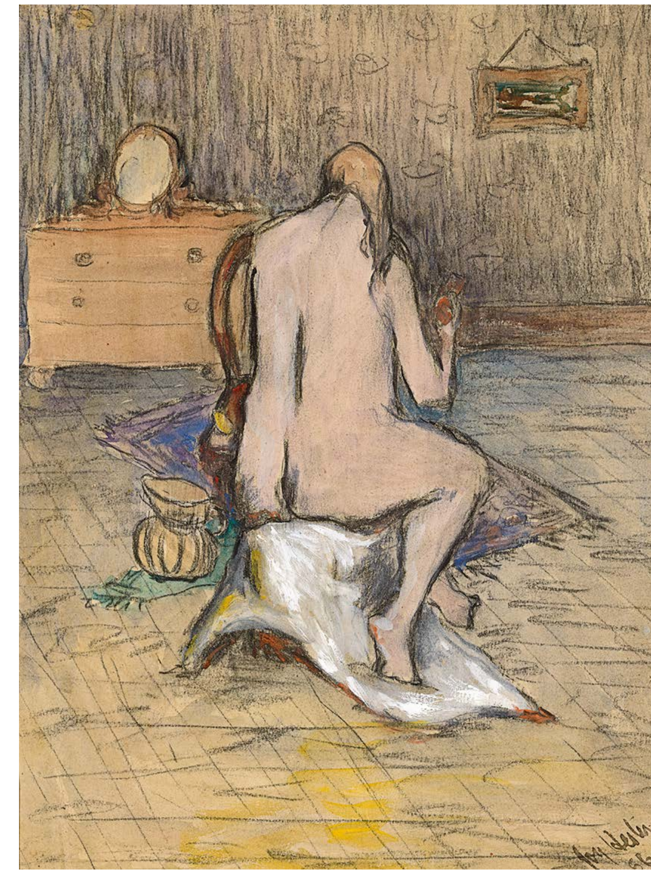
With a swoop of my hand, I flatten the patterned ground.

'I understand if you can't take up my offer.'

'Nonsense. It's settled. I'll come to Paris with you,' Dorothy says. 'It's my chance to complete my sketches.'

The river runs silent beside us. I dust my fingertips clear of sand.

'Paris it is, then. Everything else will have to wait.'



Joy Hester *Seated nude* 1956. Private Collection, Melbourne © Joy Hester Estate/ Copyright Agency, Australia

Joy Hester *Seated Nude* 1956
By Kathy Lette

Do women have to be naked to get into a gallery? It's a question first posed by N.Y. anarchist group The Guerilla Girls in 1989 after discovering that less than 5% of artists in the Modern Art sections were women, but 85 per cent of the nudes – female.

The one painting in this fem-tastic collection which depicts a naked woman is not making an exhibition of herself for the male gaze. Joy Hester's *Seated Nude* is oblivious to our presence and immune from the need to please.

We all know that beauty goes in one era and out the other. In the days of Rubens and Botticelli, to be a socialite, you needed cellulite. In 2018, skinniness is inniness. (Where do today's models keep their internal organs? In their handbags?)

But our earthy, Seated Nude defies all patriarchal conventions. Her broad, strong back and sturdy stance exude independence. This is a woman at ease in her skin – a woman's woman.

This empowering painting has given me acute portrait envy. I actually have the perfect outfit for a nude sitting – although at my age, it may need a little ironing. But if I were Hester's *Seated Nude*, I wouldn't bloody well care.

EMILIE ZOEY BAKER IS AN AWARD-WINNING AUSTRALIAN POET, EDUCATOR, SLAM NERD AND SPOKEN-WORD PERFORMER. ALICE PUNG IS THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *UNPOLISHED GEM* (2006), *HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER* (2013) AND *LAURINDA* (2014); SHE IS ALSO THE EDITOR OF *GROWING UP ASIAN IN AUSTRALIA* (2008) AND *MY FIRST LESSON* (2016). SUSI FOX IS A WRITER AND GP IN REGIONAL VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA. KATHY LETTE IS AN AUSTRALIAN-BRITISH AUTHOR OF ELEVEN BESTSELLING NOVELS, INCLUDING *PUBERTY BLUES* (1979). THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE JAN–FEB 2019 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

A domestic mishap

Award-winning Australian author and playwright Suneeta Peres da Costa shares her creative response to the mid eighteenth-century painting *A domestic mishap*.

BY SUNEETA PERES DA COSTA

Soon they will be here, and what will I tell them? That it was an accident? How, looking at his prone body, eyes still and docile as a slain deer's, I wanted to take him, one last time, in my arms? How lately, coming home from hunts with the young maharaja, I had found him sporting bruises? That he had been liable to falls and when I had wanted to tend to him or call a healer, he had turned upon me and called me Dakan?

Perhaps it was it our destiny, although the astrologers had predicted differently. Yet what do the astrologers, those old men chewing paan, paunches rolling out of their *paijama*, really know of marriage? To them a wife is one who passes quietly behind the curtains, her wedding bangles tinkling; one who attends with tea and sweetmeats while he counts out the day's takings at dusk; one who, eyes lowered, comes to bed as soon as he calls her, never putting a toe, or toe ring, wrong.

I went to see a *yogi*. I beseeched him to alleviate the burning sensation of *sindoor*, the strangulating effect of the *mangalasutra*. His answer: some well-worn verses of the *Vedas*. I asked, shall I leave my husband? And he stared into the abyss before whispering the name of my unborn child, *Aasha*. A girl. His feet were as gnarled and thwarted as his counsel. I wanted to remove my shoes and become

a mendicant myself then. I wanted to run, barefoot, to the Aravalli mountains. I would subsist as a Banjara on forest fruits and nuts. I could take up the hunt, too, why not? Women must also learn to defend themselves.

The neighbour, a newlywed, was here earlier with a bowl of stewed fruit and soaked almonds. Apparently eating more *mung daal* would improve *shukra dhatu* and, thereby, my chances of conceiving. You see, she believes in the power of Ayurveda, and who am I too disabuse her? Her *bhajans* are getting better,

I said, changing the subject, for I hear her practising earnestly every morning. She is still youthful, beautiful. Vain as she is naive, the *saptapadi* is still a recent memory. Her eyebrows were two perfectly plucked scimitars as she reported that the young maharaja had killed a herd of elephants overnight, two of them mere calves! What a hero!

Because we are women, because we are wives, because our fathers-in-law have died fighting the Mughals, I suspect she thinks we share a *dharma*? She confided she would rather drown herself than suffer the shame of not conceiving. And I imagined myself then, like Mira Bai, floating peacefully on Lake Pichola. One young widow here refused to commit *sati* upon the death of her husband, a man thrice her age … but then she went mad anyway, tormented by her in-laws. As for my in-laws, will they believe me, a girl plucked out of the countryside and brought into marriage with one of the court's most admired kinsmen? Their only son? Will they try to pass off glasses of poison as nectar, or gift baskets of flowers concealing snakes?

All I have is the evidence of ashes now devoured by Agni. All I have is an imperial secret. Birth and death, it's all the same. And in between, what? *Samsara*? I was just a girl when news came that the young maharaja was born. We were told to pray for him, for he was sickly. Some speculated he would not survive childhood let alone be fit to inherit the throne. I was just a girl, tending cattle, until the crops failed, and my father feared we would starve. God had not been kind to my father, only giving him girls and taking his wife from him in childbirth. How I loved my younger sisters. We would walk into the fields to collect the long, dry grasses as the moon rose ahead of us and the owlets hooted in the surrounding trees. I did not think of learning the vina or how to do *bargad puja* or of leaving them. I did not think I would be married, carried off into the city at night and into the home of a Rajput kinsman.

My husband was a stranger, but from his mother's recipe I learned how to make *chhena malpua*. I learned to dress up to please him; I learned just how to serve him. I grew to know what it was he wanted; that is, what he wanted of my body. In this regard, I gave him everything I had, only failing after a time to comply with this demand: to bear him a child, and a cherished son particularly. When I did not fall pregnant, my in-laws believed I was barren and branded me so. When I undressed and lay down at night it was not desire but Kali that came to consume us, to eat husband and wife alive. I do not believe you can really love someone you fear. To do so, you must stop loving yourself.

Perhaps my hair will be shorn and they will bring a sari of white muslin. They will escort me to the ashram to make me beg for alms. They will remind me of Manu's Law: 'Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife … If a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven'. They may accuse me of being a devotee of Mira Bai and I will not deny it. I will say Lord Krishna could not allow a woman to be so dishonoured and defiled. I will think of Mira Bai, making love to Krishna. I will show them my own injuries.

I will say, I obeyed my husband, but he drew away from me, focussing on his career. Our love gradually grew as diseased as my father's fields. He rose up the ranks and forged a close bond with the young maharaja. Late at night the maharaja would call on us, waking up the neighbourhood with his entourage. They would pretend to have important business to discuss and go to hunt wild boar, yet we all knew they were out terrorising the temple dancers. And later they would terrorise me. He had grown up, grown strong, grown to be a good shot, the young tyrant … I obeyed my husband, and he in turn obeyed the orders of the maharaja. What had I been cooking for my husband? I had cooked mung daal to improve his *shukra dhatu*. After all, it was my *bhakti marga*.

SUNEETA PERES DA COSTA IS AN ACCLAIMED AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR BEST KNOWN FOR HER TRAGICOMIC NOVEL, *HOMEWORK* (1999) AND A NOVELLA, *SAUDADE* (2018). THIS ESSAY WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *VISIONS OF PARADISE: INDIAN COURT PAINTINGS*, PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA IN 2018.

Indian *A domestic mishap* mid 18th century.
Felton Bequest, 1980

Japanese *The Asahi weekly edition 3 November* 1935. Purchased with funds donated by Maureen Morrisey Bequest, 2018

Narrative Non-Fiction

> ‘They cut their long black hair, symbolic of a traditional Japanese woman’s beauty. They removed their conservative kimonos, the very clothes that defined the upper class, and put on vibrant kimono designs and Western dresses that gave lightness to their steps.’
>
> Mariko Nagai

Woolgathering

Flecks and fleece. On the nourishment of taking notice, again.

Melencolia I, a 1514 engraving by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer, offers a sixteenth-century interpretation of daydreaming, showing a melancholic, brooding figure lost in thought. But for many creative people, including writer Alice Bishop, daydreaming is all about finding solace in life's everyday details. Colours, slowing down and daydreaming are necessary to reconnect with ourselves, and to make sense of the world around us.

BY ALICE BISHOP

'And I wandered among them, through thistle and thorn, with no task more exceptional than to rescue a fleeting thought, as a tuft of wool, from the comb of the wind.'

—— PATTI SMITH

'Woolgathering' was a sixteenth-century term for the trade of collecting loose tufts of wool caught on thorns and fences by passing sheep. Later, it became a phrase that embodied daydreaming. The word's association with dreaming and aloofness can be traced back to the reputation of woolgatherers for having trivial livelihoods that 'necessitated much wandering and little purpose'.[1] But maybe there's a lesson in this old profession, especially during the increasing uncertainty of 2020. Daydreaming is barely prioritised in modern city living, but studies repeatedly show that regular sessions of wandering and wondering can build connection between people and their surroundings, and scaffold our senses of self.[2]

Research has shown that we daydream less as we age, yet that our brains are more active when we let our minds wander, sharpening them as essential, lifelong tools. Whether it's simply noticing the sun-faded signage of your local cafe, or walking the city streets at dusk observing the recently bushfire-tainted, lavender glow of Melbourne's city sky, or the telling new quiet in once-bustling places because of COVID-19, taking notice can be pleasurable, calming and educational. Sometimes all three.

In a culture obsessed with efficiency, taking notice can be both nourishing and political, especially amid changes to the environment and the white-noise panic of the unprecedented health and economic fears of 2020, when our days often seem shortened by constantly sharing, forwarding and following on all kinds of screens. But this distraction can be dangerous. As Jenny Odell asks in her recent book, *How to do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, 'What does it mean to construct digital worlds while the actual world is crumbling before our eyes?'[3]

The marmalade-gold of winter sun hitting the bathroom tiles, an evening magpie learning to warble from a powerline outside – despite the clag of rushed traffic below – these are the smaller moments we so often miss; details that can anchor us in time and place. French painter Pierre Bonnard has good advice for us all, whether writers, baristas, petrol station attendants or bar workers (all jobs I've been lucky to have): '[The artist] spends a great deal of time doing nothing but looking – both around him and inside him'. Maybe it's the soft neon hum of a shop's street light, or the smell of fruit toast cooking for a customer, or the new shape of a sentence, colour or word: taking notice and slowing down makes us all feel more connected and at ease. The South Australian government even released a recent mental health and wellbeing campaign titled 'Take Notice', which encouraged 'forest bathing', looking up at the night sky and noticing the breeze.

Mint-greens and rusty mustards, mauves and oatmeal blues: the turn of the twentieth-century domestic settings of artists such as Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Mary Cassatt or Pierre Bonnard and his fellow artist and long-term partner Marthe de Méligny are anything but greyscale. A crumbling Thornbury apartment could never have as many colours in the walls and curtains as there are in a bathroom painting by one of these artists. If you look up from my bath you won't see peacock teals or terracotta tiles, pale pinks or shimmering anything. But if you can be still enough, there is colour to be found in the detail: cardboard-coloured towels and walls thick with a shade of paint that could only be classified as 'sand' or 'dove'; maybe 'vanilla' or 'crème'. Even the quieter details of ordinary bathrooms, if

properly noticed, can bring us back to the moment. These are the daily pleasures we take for granted, the reassurances of colour showing us that in any setting, whether a simple bathroom, an empty coffee shop or busy street, a Northcote garden or a friend's kitchen, there are stories waiting.

There is a comforting recognition, and hope, in art about the everyday. Modern realist short-story writers like Lucia Berlin, Richard Ford and Tony Birch show this through deceptively simple and finely crafted observations. Whether it's captured conversations in the late-night coin laundries of West Texas for Berlin, the sharp smell of liquor-on-breath in the ordinary bars of Montana for Ford, or the hum of working-class streets and kitchens in Carlton and Collingwood in 1960s Melbourne for Birch, the most affecting literature, art or music comes from the ordinary: from snapshots of our domestic lives that highlight broader loves, struggles, inequalities and joys.

Another artist who powerfully paints the everyday is Melbourne-based Prudence Flint. Her pastel-lit women, often shown thinking in bathrooms, bedrooms or kitchens, are illuminated in a deceptively simple, geometric and unique style. 'All my best ideas for paintings come from actual places and moments in life that trigger some unexpected feeling,'[4] Flint comments. The pink-hued paintings of contemplative women bathing and showering in her *Bedsit* series of 2018 remind me of my own ordinary apartment setting: of my own bath and my relatively new love of it – of finally knowing my body enough to now sit still with it, in it. Grounding myself in details lets me be still enough to notice the lilac polish of my toes poking through the cheap Radox bath bubbles. There's something freeing in feeling the weight of my tall body lighten in the water. These moments, like stray streaks of cloud-like fleece found strung along fences, keep me going. Hopefully, in these moments we can set aside the loneliness we humans sometimes find in always having to be looking: for something new, something bigger, better and *more*.

'There is also the knowledge that things often happen beneath the surface of these deceptively calm settings.'

——— ALICE BISHOP

For me, like most people who have felt the constant crackle of anxiety – and there are so many – thinking about your senses pulls you back into the present. Whether in the pads of your fingers sensing the pulse of your heart in your wrist, the continuity of your breath, or the steady blue of the sky, your body and the world goes on, even when the white-noise distractions of bills, work deadlines, myki top-ups and mindlessly shovelled muesli before work feel like too much.

In a recent City of Melbourne report, over half of the adult population of Greater Melbourne (54.4 per cent) felt they have a poor work-life balance, 42.8 per cent reported feeling time pressure, and 28.3 per cent reported getting inadequate sleep (less than seven hours per weekday).[5] Furthermore, a growing body of research[6] suggests that exposure to sunshine, colour and greenery improves both mental health and learning capacity, immediately and over time, by reducing stress and encouraging individuals to actively take notice. Trees and plants boost our attention spans by calming the nervous system and creating a state believed to be ideal for learning. By contrast, screens, whether on an iPhone, a TV or an Apple watch, deplete attention by pushing up stress-based alertness.[7] Considering I accumulate an average of 3 hours and 59 minutes of screen time on an off-work day, I really need this reminder to look up, take notice and be present, again.

To woolgather is to meander or wander about in quiet calm, but the term also sparks memories of Patti Smith's 2012 book *Woolgathering*, in which her daydreams are knitted into misty but muscular writing. There is a quiet power to Smith's sketch-like memoir. Her careful use of the detail of daily living – her written imagery of coffee-cup rings on placemats, fresh linen, paper prints and dusty golds – brings you back to yourself, to the world, where again, taking notice is an act of defiance. As American poet Eileen Myles writes:

> I hope you like your work, I hope there's mystery and poetry in your life, not even poems, but patterns. I hope you can see them. Often these patterns will wake you up, and you will know that you are alive, again and again.[8]

If you close your eyes under fluorescent bathroom lights or while turning your face to the sun you might see patterns (or phosphenes, as I recently learnt they are called) appear and colours bloom through the closed lids.

Although everything has changed this year, also, not much has. There is still the knowledge that things often happen beneath the surface of deceptively calm settings. The colour of the sky might remain blue above a pandemic, and across a whole area of a country burned into colourlessness, green shoots stoically appear. It is colour that lets us know that yes, things go on, whether or not we are ready for them to.

Changes to the weather, colour and birdlife, as Odell notes in *How to do Nothing*, can be essential in acknowledging the climate emergency: 'There is a kind of nothing that's necessary for, at the end of the day, doing something,' she writes.[9] While technology can offer us important scientific insights and essential information, maybe the changes in our landscape caused by the climate emergency – perhaps the lilac of a smoke-heavy sky, or a bushfire-blood moon – are the details and colours we need to see, in person, in order to finally take the urgent action that's needed. It's often art, too, that encourages us to step back, to look out, and to look up.

I've spent the last decade looking back on the colours of the 2009 Victorian bushfires in my latest book – the rained-on-rust hues of burnt-out cars, petrol-shiny remains and the shimmery silvers of melted tyre rims. For me, it was the recolouring of a desiccated landscape and colour-prompted storytelling that helped me make semi-sense of an event that was, as it certainly felt at the time, senseless.

Instead of remembering the colourless Cormac McCarthyesque scene we returned home to find on Black Saturday, I was able to (much later) look at the damage in a different way. The following excerpt came out of standing in the place where our house used to be, just weeks after bushfire:

> People think it takes away everything, but the colours were unlike anything I've ever seen: greys stronger than railway steel, blue-black charcoals and oranges like tangerines – baked rust by dashboard sun.[10]

The good parts were also heightened by colour and detail: the birds hidden in the tacky print of a borrowed couch, the first green wattle shoots in our garden after ash. These are small, domestic stories that link to ones much bigger than us. Threads of connection, travelling between the daily and bigger commentary on the world, are what I've always loved – and strived towards – through literature and broader art.

Etymologists, or word historians, can't pinpoint the exact time woolgathering became an unfavourable word, but it's suggested the shift happened before the seventeenth century. From this time, it began to appear in phrases like 'my mind went a-woolgathering'.[11] In modern terms it might be translated to 'I blanked' or 'zoned out'. The term, as negatively hinted at here, makes me think of hours wasted down Instagram black holes, or the likely accumulated weeks – months even – I've spent checking and refreshing Twitter on autopilot.

It has likewise been recorded that woolgathering became a derogatory term as these collectors of stray fleece grew a reputation, whether accurate or not, for wandering aimlessly in their poorly paid efforts to retrieve lost wool across wide areas of freezing, rocky and muddy farmland. In terms of sixteenth-century life, to be a woolgatherer was likely not a widely respected career option.

The modern version of that classic stereotype might be today's construction worker – extremely hardworking but sometimes assumed to be taking extra 'smokos' or slacking off. Artists, writers, photographers and other creative workers are also sometimes seen to be meandering aimlessly or indulging in unproductive, absent-minded daydreaming.

When thinking about woolgathering – about patience and storytelling, daydreaming and art (and all things sheep) – the ancient Greek myth of the Golden Fleece might also come to mind. The origins of this famous story of a golden-woolled, winged ram stem from daily practices and routines. In fifth-century BCE in Georgia, east of the Black Sea, communities used sheep fleeces to collect flecks of gold from water flowing through their land from upstream. Wool would be carefully stretched over wooden frames and lowered into the stream to catch the valuable metal. These fleeces would then be gathered and hung in trees to dry before the gold was shaken or combed out.

If there is a more fitting metaphor for the flecks of value to be found in the fleece and dreams of our everyday lives, I'd be surprised.

Productivity. It's a word that haunts so many of us, whether measured in KPIs (Key Performance Indicators); Facebook likes and shares; retweets and various 'outputs'; or whether or not you've started a family, been promoted, got married or signed up for a mortgage by the age of 30, 35 or 40 – depending on who you're talking to. Productivity isn't always a bad thing, but our modern obsession with it is. As Odell comments: 'In a world where our value is determined by our productivity, many of us find our every last minute captured, optimised, or appropriated as a financial resource by the technologies we use daily'.[12]

Behind the smokescreen of always having to be busy, we're left with little time to really think. It is art, anchored in the often-missed details of the everyday, which offers us shelter from this.

Prudence Flint's paintings of peach-skinned women surrounded by millennial pinks and oatmeal blues may seem too *lovely* at first glance, but sit with the domestic interiors she depicts – the bathrooms and kitchens, the windowsills – and you're made to look up and out, to take notice of the pleasures and just-submerged complexities of ordinary scenes. These hidden complexities can be seen in the women bathing or showering, eating and driving – their crackling inner lives bubbling just below each calm, sugary surface. In *Blue cotton dress*, 2017, a young woman daydreams on her bed, to me emblematic of a life in COVID-19 lockdown. For those of us privileged enough to have more time to think and dream come new worries, hopes, fears and dreams.

There is something very timely about taking notice of what's happening out our windows and beyond our screens: changes to skies and foliage and place. With climate change threatening us more than ever, we should be listening to nature. In *How to do Nothing*, Odell writes about her new-found appreciation of birdwatching, and how taking notice of shifts in populations has helped her understand the urgency of the climate emergency: 'If more people identified with non-human communities around them in that way, then climate change might be felt and talked about in a different way,' she says.[13]

Think back on your life in colour. Maybe it's the honeyed hues of first love, before the hangover. Maybe it's the colours of the hangover itself: the sun-yellow yolks of that festival egg sandwich, or Sunday dusk and lights flickering across the city as the night folds in. What if being more present was the beginning of the solution to the huge mess we've ended up in?

But back, as always, to Patti Smith. In a review of *Woolgathering* for the *Guardian*, critic Helen Zaltzman writes:

> Capturing moments of her adult life, Smith pares down her prose to a state of vivid impressionism, so enigmatic that even ordinary acts – preparing mint tea, nodding off while sewing – take on spiritual weight.[14]

Smith's devotion to the ethereal is anchored in the everyday. In her work, the ceremony of morning coffee is almost spiritual; small, everyday things have stories and histories which flow out behind them.

Look at a Pierre Bonnard painting of a windowsill, a Patti Smith photo of black coffee or a Prudence Flint print of a woman gently lighting her stove, and let yourself first float and then be nudged, even if gently, by something nostalgic – maybe for a life you've lived, never had, or one day hope to. Whether you are 13, 36 or 93, there is a grounding in everyday scenes, along with a quiet assuredness that our ordinary days hold so much wonder.

We all need to be reminded to take time to experience, to let ourselves think of the bigger picture and to relish in colours and sensations again. With the world rapidly warming and with so much else suddenly shifting in 2020, it is all of our responsibility to take stock: notice the terracotta trace of bushfire smoke across the sky; slow down our endless obsession with rushing and consuming and sit with the colours of quiet from this new, often frightening, frontier. In these times we have the freedom to woolgather: to plot and hope, reset, learn and dream.

As Smith writes, 'I was not at all sure what a woolgatherer was but it sounded a worthy calling and seemed a good job for me.'[15]

I agree.

ALICE BISHOP IS A WRITER FROM CHRISTMAS HILLS, VICTORIA. HER DEBUT BOOK, A SHORT STORY COLLECTION, IS CALLED *A CONSTANT HUM*. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE MAY–JUN 2020 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

(p. 42) **Albrecht Dürer** *Melencolia I* 1514 (detail) Felton Bequest, 1956

A Silent and Invisible Conversation

'Prose, as it is absorbed and internalised by a reader, is surprisingly similar to visual art.' In this meditation on the close relationship between art and audience; book and reader, author Cate Kennedy plays in the infinitely open spaces where the page, the prose, the frame or the form ends, and encounters magic and transformation.

BY CATE KENNEDY

When I was in my early twenties, like so many Australians, I did some extended travelling in Europe. I didn't take a camera; instead I collected hundreds of postcards of paintings and artworks I loved in the many galleries I visited. I'm a bit embarrassed to admit – in these days of rigorous Marie Kondo decluttering – that I still have several hundred of them, stacked in an old suitcase, ready to be drawn out at random and studied again some day. I still have many of my childhood books, too – complete with my loopy seven-year-old signature, and I can see where I've laboriously traced images, or copied hands and faces, from the illustrations I pored over for hours. After long years of upping stakes and moving house, these postcards and books are solid companions now, and I'm not going to be throwing them away as clutter. Like all artefacts, they're charged with something ineffable and hard to articulate, to do with use and memory and meaning.

I picked up a copy of the book not long ago which had been my very first 'reader' at school. The moment I turned to the first page it was like swinging open a vault. I experienced that strange, vertiginous sensation that swamps us when we touch an artefact that has become deeply inscribed in our early memory. Fifty years ago (!) I was checked off on a roll and told to sit down at a tiny desk, where I would learn to read. Miss Cresp, who taught prep at Laverton Primary School that year, handed me this same book, published by the Department of Education in the early 1950s. The Department sure got their money's worth out of those books, since they were still in general use in the early 1970s, which means two generations of Australian schoolkids learned to read with them.

If you were in primary school during those decades, you will no doubt recall the 'Playmates' series and the spookily well-behaved John and Betty (*'John is big. He can help father. He can dig with his spade. Betty is big, too. She can help mother. She can water the garden with her little can'*) their pets Fluff and Scottie, and their robotically polite little friends Peter and Ann. (*'Betty likes to play with Ann. 'Let us skip,' says Betty. John likes to play with Peter. 'Let us have a slide,' says John. 'Up you go, Peter. I can slide after you.' 'Let us go for a walk,' says John. 'Yes,' says Peter. They go to the pond to see the ducks. 'Let us feed the ducks with my bun,' says John. 'This is fun,' says Peter. 'Yes,' says John.*)

The moment I re-read these lines, every year that has passed in my life since the age of five slips away, and I am transported back to that classroom, with Miss Cresp in her miniskirt, paging through this worn Scotch-taped book, spelling out those phrases. The room smells of chalk and sandwiches in vinyl schoolbags and cardboard Globite cases. Two kids who are always as obedient as John and Betty themselves – our 'monitors' – are studiously punching the foil tops in our recess milk bottles up the front of the classroom, and I am thinking that the kids in this book live on some other planet, where boys feed ducks buns instead of lobbing bits of brick at them, where they address each other saying 'let us' instead of 'jawanna' (as in 'jawanna go on the slide?'), where Betty has a pram and a doll and John has a drum and a truck, and they play nicely with Baby.

I haven't told Miss Cresp, but I've already taught myself to read, too impatient to understand how those marks on the page became sounds and stories to wait. I power through John and Betty in five minutes. But she doesn't care. She tells me – the first of many crushing announcements by teachers – that this will be my reader *for the rest of the term*.

Eternity stretches away before me in a wasteland of ducks, prams, skipping ropes and brown sandals. Something dutiful in me wants to believe there's more to this book than meets the eye, because an adult has given it to me and, after all, adults hold the keys to the kingdom. There must be some secret to absorb beyond this boring repetitive android chanting, I am thinking, and I'm looking for it, suspended in my own bookish daydream. On one page I suddenly notice that Betty's shadow,

as she pretends to be a bird, is actually a bird. 'John can hop!' declares the text, and, as he hops, his shadow is actually a rabbit's. Even at five years old, I'm so desperate to see the point of the exercise that this tiny, simple thing seems instantly elevated to the significance of a Zen koan. It's like the artist has drawn a visual gag just for me, a wink, a small private joke.

'Underneath those words and images it was like an invisible, silent conversation was going on, built out of suggestive space, and a leap of faith.'

—— CATE KENNEDY

I gaze hard at the children on the orange cover – silhouettes of John and Betty with their dogs striding purposefully off in opposite directions. Where are they going? What is happening off the edge of the book? And what's going on between the borders of the pages, inside? What are the children pointing at, that I can't see?

Now, fifty years later, I am struck afresh with the dizzying sensation of sharp visceral recognition at this precise recalled moment of discovery. The illustrations leap out at me as fresh and intact as ever, full of their secret messages and hidden narratives I had wished, yearned and imagined into being. I recall exactly how it had felt to be seized with the idea, at five, that the author and the artist were giving me the equivalent of a secret handshake, that there was something to be found between the lines; a small secret reward for those looking beyond the surface.

Underneath those words and images it was as if an invisible, silent conversation was going on, built out of suggestive space, and a leap of faith. As an adult I've written across many genres – poetry, fiction, memoir, essay – but this desire is always the starting point: how to give someone else the jolt of surprise and recognition something has given me? What form is going to best serve this revelatory moment of connection, shared through the prism of language? What is our silent, invisible 'conversation' about?

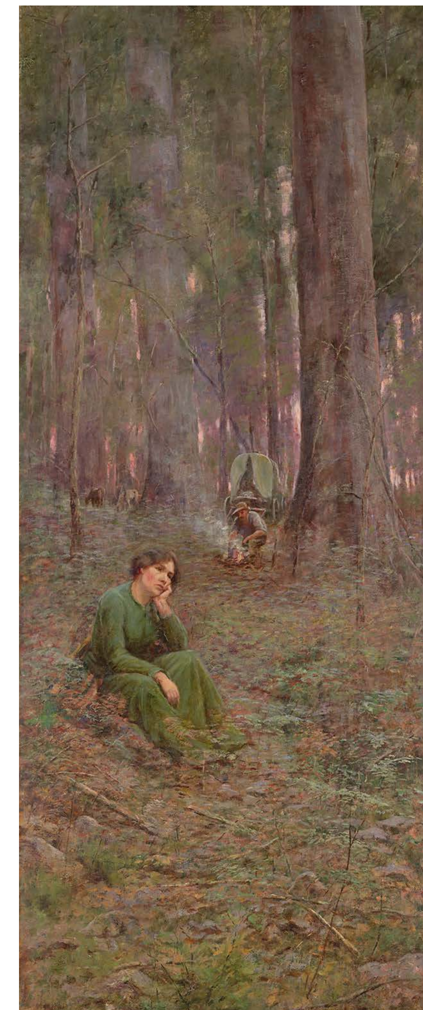
Prose, as it is absorbed and internalised by a reader, is surprisingly similar to visual art. There is detail, and dimension, and a kind of careful scenic staging which is not always discernible via the casual scan but which rewards deep reading. Objects, settings and patterning are all put to use. Even the way prose is formatted on the page is designed to give the reader breathing space, to feel entirely immersed in the blow-by-blow trajectory of the narrative as it unfolds in an imagined temporal dimension.

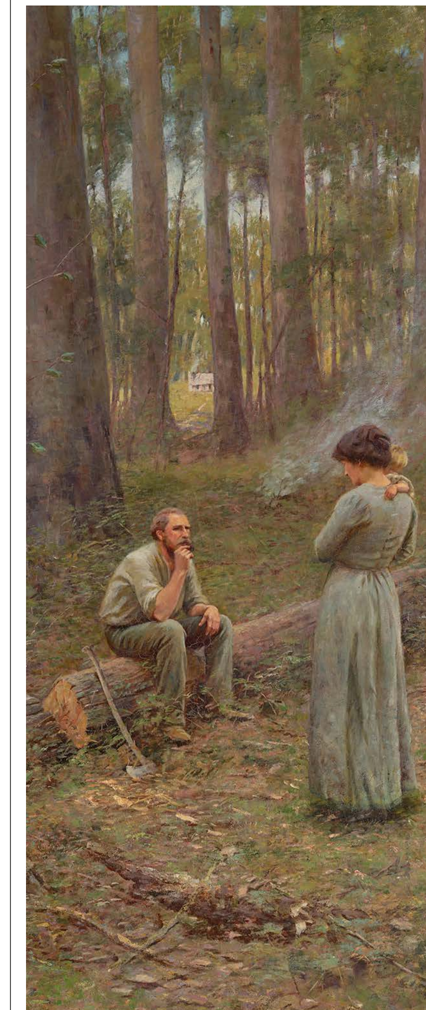
I often think about a story in terms of its parameters, and authorial decisions made about where those parameters are placed in order to create a dynamic emotional experience for the reader. I feel myself shaping a frame, directing and modulating a reader's attention. Inside that frame is everything they need, and everything outside it can be trimmed away, and left implicit.

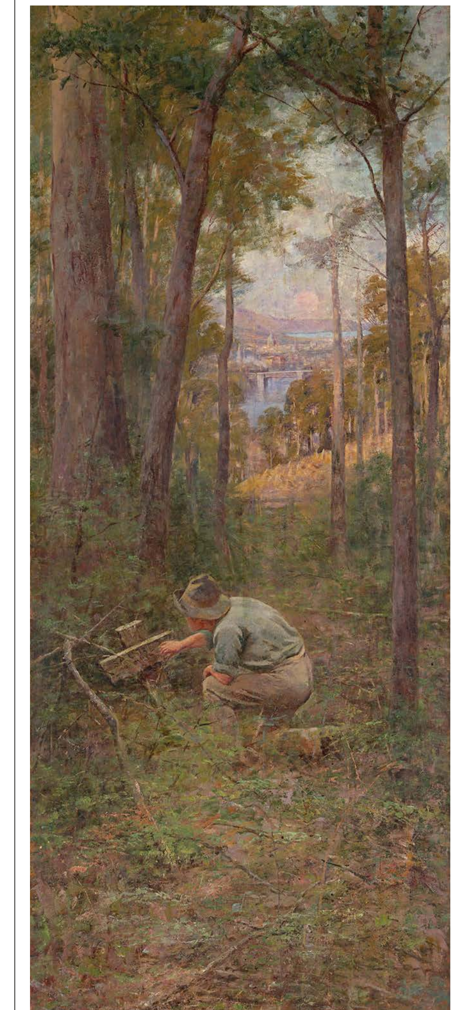
As a child, my family visited the city together rarely, although my mother brought me to Collins Street once in a while to have eye tests with an optometrist and be fitted with new, ever-uglier glasses. These visits generally involved having pupil-dilating eyedrops put in my eyes, so for a few hours after each optometrist visit I stumbled along behind my mother in a blurry world of painful overwhelming dazzle. Through this squinting glare I beheld my childhood Melbourne: the steep incline of Collins Street, the David Jones Food Hall, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, the cenotaph and occasionally the National Gallery of Victoria itself on St Kilda Road.

Once my whole family visited the Gallery together. The memory of the day has stayed with me because we happened upon an exhibition which was, for me at seven or eight years old, transformative. The drawings in the show seemed diffident, even careless – big confident sketches in crayon, to my memory; faces rendered with the loosest and barest of strokes. Everything seemed to clear and solidify around my field of vision as I gazed at those drawings. They were by Pablo Picasso. I'd tried to draw faces, eyes, hands and horses myself, so I knew how effortlessly, uncannily brilliant these were. I lingered, doing another circuit, marvelling.

Nobody else in my family seemed to find the drawings that interesting or arresting, though, and they got bored waiting for me out in the Gallery foyer, and came into the exhibition to find me, making a joke of it.







I was burning up with something as I came back out, something dilated and lit up and restless. How could they talk, now, about heading over to the floral clock, or buying an ice cream? Why was my dad concerned with getting back to the car to beat the traffic home? How could they possibly have failed to be mesmerised by *that*?

During those eye tests, my small head clenched into a big metal contraption, I'd been instructed to keep my gaze fixed on a series of small illuminated letters and icons as the optometrist fitted slides of different calibrations into the eyepieces, saying: 'Better now? Clearer? How about now? Clearer?' until suddenly the right combination was found, the correct lens slid into place, and everything sharpened at last into bright, clear blinking focus.

Stepping out into the Gallery foyer that day, I was aware of a similar sensation. The stained glass in the Leonard French ceiling was dazzlingly rich, the water coursing down the front windows created a whole new streaming abstract landscape of the world outside. Something had shifted in me, and it was something unexplainable to my parents and my sister; it was a secret, private realisation I nursed to myself.

On school excursions to the NGV after that, I was always dawdling, trying to break away from the group, hoping for a chance to gaze at paintings alone. I didn't want to comment on them, or write down my responses to comprehension questions on the excursion worksheets. I wanted to feel, again, that transfixing moment of silent communion with an artist, empty of judgement or even discernment. I'm sure you know the state of mind I'm talking about. It feels like a waking dream; someone else's dream they have dreamed for you which you are invited to step into; to imagine and infer what is under the surface, what is beyond the frame.

Frederick McCubbin's triptych *The pioneer*, 1904, was an artwork I always returned to during those excursions. It wasn't just the technical prowess of the painting – although McCubbin rendered eucalypt forests, light, leaf litter and smoke like nobody else – it was his device of creating a clear, nuanced narrative through the three works which appealed to me. There were no

explanatory notes to make this interpretative process didactic or reductive, just the three paintings, displayed with their internal storyline presented as visual snapshots, caught in time.

You don't so much view the triptych as fall into it. The forest is gradually cleared, the trees are felled and a house is built, a child is born and grows, the city emerges like a shimmering mirage on a distant horizon. The woman's face looks lost and despondent in the first panel, but we only have her erect, dignified posture and her husband's uptilted listening face to gauge her emotional state in the second. Within this suggestive space bloom our own internal stories and inferences and impressions. How are we able to step so effortlessly between the frames, and create this coherent narrative continuity out of what we are not being shown? Whose grave is it in the third frame, and who is the man kneeling by it? Is it the disheartened man from the artist's other work, *Down on his luck*, 1889 (Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth), or the adult son depicted as a baby in the second panel, tending or praying at the grave of one of his parents? Is it even the same place? It echoes the landscape and position of the grave in McCubbin's earlier painting *A bush burial*, 1890 (Geelong Gallery, Geelong). Is the man the original pioneer, and does the grave belong to the wife or the child?

In my experience, we don't stand empty before a work of art for long, especially not one where a narrative 'throughline' is signalled so deliberately. We can't help but try to intuit what is behind the intentional shape of the framed 'moments' the artist is showing us, and the more we enter this liminal, imagined space, the more memorable this narrative and its subtextual possibilities become to us.

The process of 'story-making' is participatory. It's exactly how good narrative prose works, too, as we immerse ourselves in the vivid dream of reading. *I'm showing you*, says the artist, *this, then this, and because of that, this*. A bird in a shadow of a child outstretched, pretending to fly, or a hand cupping a chin, a hand clinging to a mother's neck, a hand touching a bush grave. Beginning, middle and end, conception, growth and death. And we somehow care about these painterly representations on canvas, or invented characters summoned to the page, as though they are real people, humanised and honoured by the invisible connections and empathic re-visioning that we ourselves have provided. The transformation – its epiphany and emotional charge – becomes our own.

Look closely, says the artist as we gaze on what they have rendered. *Clearer? Clearer? How about this?*

'Within this suggestive space bloom our own internal stories and inferences and impressions. How are we able to step so effortlessly between the frames, and create this coherent narrative continuity out of what we are not being shown?'

—— CATE KENNEDY

CATE KENNEDY IS AN AUSTRALIAN NOVELIST, SHORT STORY AUTHOR, POET AND ESSAYIST. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE SEP–OCT 2019 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

FROM THE AUTHOR: MANY YEARS AFTER MY VISIT TO THE PICASSO EXHIBITION, I WROTE THIS POEM THINKING ABOUT THE WINDOW WE HAVE, AS CHILDREN, TO FEEL THE TRANSFORMATIVE JOLT OF ART, AND HOW IT NEVER REALLY LEAVES US. FROM *THE TASTE OF RIVER WATER: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS*, PUBLISHED BY SCRIBE PUBLICATIONS, 2011.

Frederick McCubbin
The pioneer (detail) 1904
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1906

Picasso's portrait of a young woman

BY CATE KENNEDY

A trip to the city. A family wanders past the floral clock
when a light rain
drives them inside the art gallery.

Her sister wants to look at the stained glass windows in the foyer
and run her fingers along the mesmerising water
streaming down the plate glass.
Her mother browses in the foyer shop for gift cards.
Desultory, they follow the crowds through the exhibit doors
filling in time until the weather clears.

In the first gallery they come across a retrospective of drawings
by Picasso, recently dead and deified,
the dizzying output of a loose, utterly confident pencil.
Her mother whispers to her father
that they hardly seem worth framing.
The child stares through the shifting bodies of milling adults
at Picasso's portrait of a young woman.

As her family makes a cursory circuit around the bulls and battles
she looks at the eyes, the two u-shapes making irises
the five eyelashes stalks of crayon, pure and precise,
the mouth swept in a bow in four strokes
the whole face a single flourish of careless joy.

Something closes in her throat, then opens.
A hand somewhere
sweeps a piercing, unerring line through her chest.

The rain has stopped.
Her sister and parents return, promising a visit to the donut van
before they go to the car.
As they walk out she cannot name the change, the dislocation.
It is as if the lozenges of light in those foyer windows
have been reassembled, the blood beats in her head
as though newly transfused, these people strangers
speaking a dulled and muffled language.

Those eyes under their winged brows, grave and perfect,
watch everything with their luminous compassion.
They have seen before what they see now;
a child, suddenly subdued,
something inside swept raw and newly secretive
judging now, silently
what must be kept hidden to survive;
the vigilant camouflage of thorn bushes
the grim survey lines of loneliness it will require.

REBELS:

The Life-changing Women's Movement Behind a Prison Medal

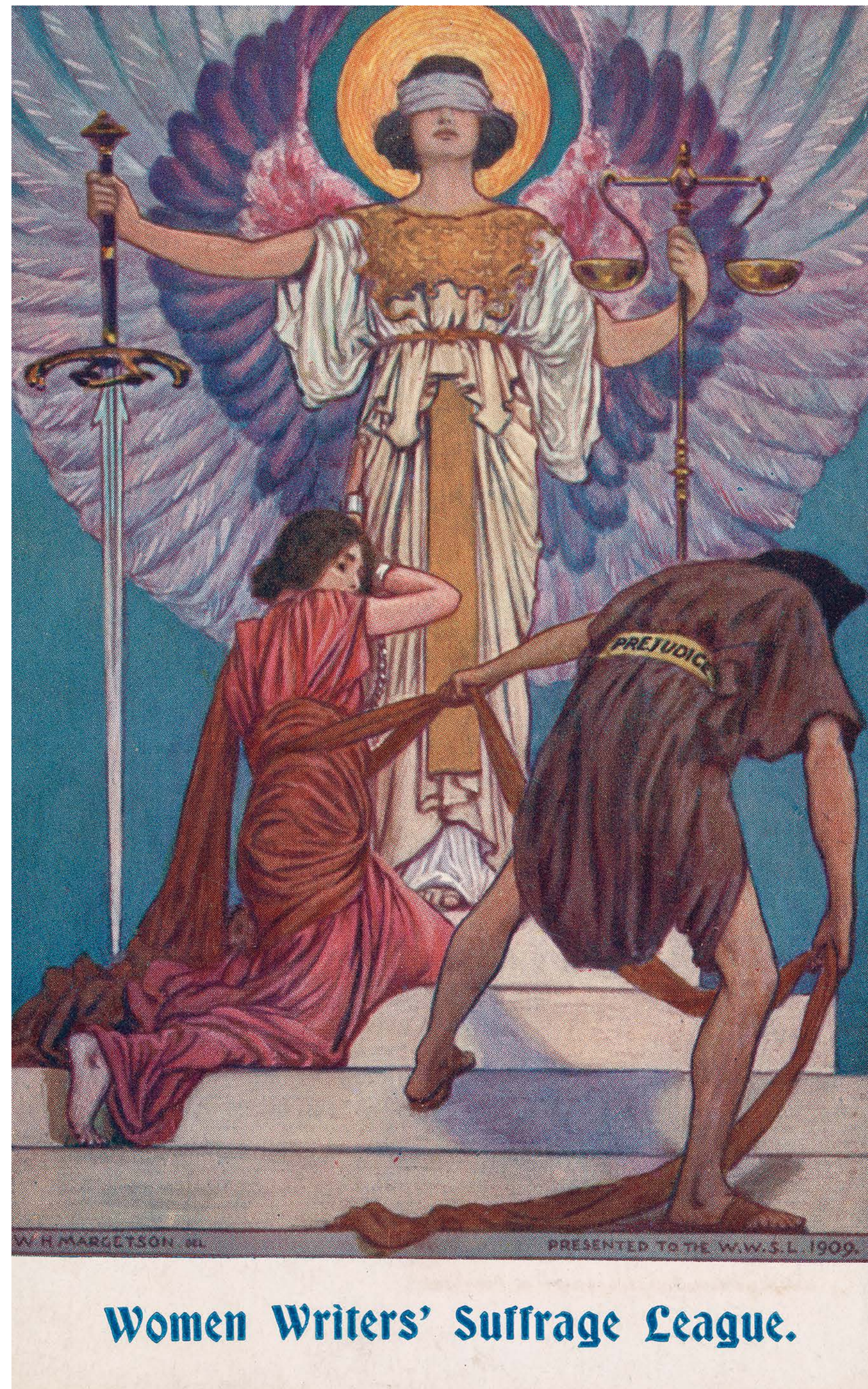
Through a range of works in the NGV Collection connected to women's suffrage, the acquisition of which has been made possible through the generous support of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and the Campbell-Pretty Family, we investigate the events and people behind one of the biggest global activist movements.

BY DR MARIA QUIRK

In the early hours of Monday 10 June 1913, Clara Giveen, a 26-year-old woman of 'independent means', and Kitty Marion, a music-hall actress, were spotted on Kew Road in the genteel west London suburb of Richmond by a passing police constable. The constable questioned the pair on their reasons for being out so late. 'I am an artist', Kitty replied, 'and often keep late hours'. Following Clara and Kitty to a semi-detached Edwardian townhouse on West Park Road, the constable called for backup. Both women were known to police as militant suffragettes. Earlier that morning, several fires had been deliberately lit in the surrounding district, including one at Hurst Park Racecourse, where the suffrage campaigner Emily Wilding Davison had been trampled to death by the king's horse just hours before. Suspecting Clara and Kitty's involvement in the crime, police entered the West Park Road house to find Clara lying in bed, fully dressed, and reading a copy of Suffragette magazine. Both women were arrested for loitering with intent to commit a crime. A day later, they were charged with arson.

Clara Giveen joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), Emmeline Pankhurst's militant suffrage organisation, in November 1910. She was described by Kitty as a 'beautiful blonde' from a good family, who was inspired to join the WSPU after witnessing the events of Black Friday – a suffrage march on the Houses of Parliament during which women were subject to brutal police violence. Historian Fern Riddell speculates that Clara joined Kitty in a WSPU sub-group named The Hot Young Things. Founded in 1907, The Hot Young Things was made up of unmarried suffragettes willing to undertake 'danger duty' – extreme militant action. If true, this suggests that Clara was among the most radical and aggressive of all suffragettes active in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Clara had already been arrested three times by the night of the Hurst Park fire. In late 1910, she was one of 160 women arrested during a suffragette demonstration, but was



discharged without trial. A year later, in November 1911, Clara served five days in prison for breaking the windows of a local government office. Just a few months after being released, Clara took part in another window-smashing campaign, this time on Regent Street, and received a four-month sentence at Winson Green prison in Birmingham. Winson Green was one of the first prisons to perform forcible feeding on suffragettes like Clara, who undertook hunger strikes while incarcerated. Clara was weak when she was released from the prison in mid 1912.

Just over twelve months later, Clara and Kitty were back in court on trial for setting fire to the Hurst Park Racecourse grandstand, causing damage valued at an estimated £13,000. Dubbed by the papers as the 'female fire friends', both women were found guilty and sentenced to three years penal servitude. When the judge pronounced the verdict, suffragettes in the court gallery shouted the campaign's watchwords: 'No surrender!' They were ejected from the court singing the suffrage battle song, 'March On'. 'We have not had a fair trial', Clara declared. 'We have not been tried by our peers. Women never will receive justice until women as well as men are on juries'. The prisoners were taken to their cells shouting, 'We shall fight and we shall win!'

Sometime between serving her first prison sentence in 1911 and her final stay at Holloway Prison in 1913, Clara was awarded one of the highest honours bestowed by the suffrage campaign: a Holloway brooch. Wrought in silver and green, white and purple enamel, the Holloway brooch was designed by suffragette and artist Sylvia Pankhurst in 1909 in the shape of a portcullis, representing the House of Commons. Described in the WSPU newspaper as their 'Victoria Cross', Holloway brooches were proudly worn by their recipients as visible markers of their bravery and commitment, and as a means to inspire others to similar personal sacrifice. A public, visual representation of suffragettes' courage, the Holloway brooch was an important part of the suffrage campaign's strategy to embed themselves into the nation's public consciousness and visual culture.

The women's suffrage movement in the United Kingdom was not just a momentous event in political history; it was also a turning point in the history of popular design, propaganda and dress. From the mid nineteenth century until 1928, when universal female suffrage was granted, numerous suffrage societies were established to campaign for women's right to vote using both peaceful and militaristic tactics. Designers and artists played an important role is popularising and disseminating the suffrage message. They designed and produced jewellery, accessories, ceramics, banners, printed ephemera and other artistic products,

using distinct colour schemes, logos and graphics to raise awareness of the cause and build their political advantage. In doing so, suffrage designers created the first modern, 'branded' political campaign of the visual age.

Mary Lowndes, founder of the Artists' Suffrage League, declared, 'Who takes the eye takes all'. Visual images defined the suffrage movement, from the purple, green and white sashes worn by the WSPU, to the 'Votes for Women' posters designed by Hilda Dallas and distributed in their thousands around London and beyond. Suffrage organisations drew on the talents of a new generation of women artists and designers who had benefited from the opening up of art education to women in the late nineteenth century, and built on a long tradition of middle-class female fundraising and 'craftivism'. Capitalising on new technologies in printing and distribution, suffrage organisations developed one of the most distinctive and dynamic visual identities of the twentieth century.

The British suffrage campaign was a rare instance where art and politics converged in a deliberate and strategic way. Art and design were not tangential to the campaign; they were central to it. The beginnings of the suffrage movement in the nineteenth century coincided with a wave of collective agitation from women artists, who campaigned for access to life study and entry into established art societies and schools. For artists like Barbara Bodichon, Emily Mary Osborn and Anna Mary Howitt, petitioning for women's access to the Royal Academy art schools went hand in hand with the fight for the vote, women's legal reform and property rights. Among this close-knit network of feminist artists, a culture of 'matronage' emerged; Bodichon, Howitt and others painted portraits of each other and other feminists that visually represented their courage, ambition and intellect. Portraiture that blended the personal with the political remained an important part of the suffrage movement's visual culture and messaging into twentieth century.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, high-profile professional artists such as Louise Jopling, Annie Swynnerton and Susan Isabel Dacre took an active role in the suffrage campaign, supporting the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (acronym NUWSS, a non-militant organisation led by Millicent Fawcett), the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage and other proto-feminist causes such as the dress reform movement. Of the 2000 signatories of the 1889 Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage, almost 100 came from women artists. Women's art societies in London and around the country were meeting places for suffragists, and also promoted women's professional advancement through art classes and exhibition spaces. When the campaign for women's suffrage accelerated in the first years of the twentieth century, it was no surprise that artists became key players.

A turning point in the relationship between artists and the suffrage movement came with the founding of the Artists' Suffrage League and the Suffrage Atelier, organisations that merged artistic, political and professional interests. Founded by Arts and Crafts stained-glass artist Mary Lowndes in 1907, the Artists' Suffrage League aimed to 'further the cause of women's enfranchisement … by bringing in an attractive manner before the public eye the long-continued demand for the vote'. The League, made up of professional artists, worked with the NUWSS. Some of their earliest products were displayed at the NUWSS procession of June 1908, during which 10,000 people marched on parliament to demonstrate their determination for the vote to the newly instated prime minister, Herbert Asquith. The League designed and made eighty embroidered banners for the march, which constituted the 'most beautiful art exhibition of the year'.

The choice of medium was no accident. Political marches were antithetical to conventional standards and expectations of female behaviour.

'Sometime between serving her first prison sentence in 1911 and her final stay at Holloway Prison in 1913, Clara was awarded one of the highest honours bestowed by the suffrage campaign: a Holloway brooch.'

—— MARIA QUIRK

One of the key goals of the procession – and of the NUWSS more broadly – was to demonstrate the dignity and 'womanliness' of the suffrage campaign, as a means to prove that they 'deserved' enfranchisement. The well-organised, orderly and beautifully outfitted marchers were a firm riposte to anti-suffragists' claims that the movement was hysterical, shrieking and crazed. Embroidery was the art form most closely associated with traditional definitions of femininity and with the private sphere of the home. By harnessing a medium that epitomised women's domesticity and using it for political ends, the Artists' Suffrage League helped forge a new visual language of femininity, and define a new role for women in society. Creating embroidered banners was time-consuming compared to making placards or signs, but Mary Lowndes was convinced that their association with religious processions and noble

revolutions would spark bystanders' fervour and loyalty. She explained to *The Englishwoman* magazine, 'A banner is a thing to float in the wind, to flicker in the breeze, to flirt its colours for your pleasure, to half show and half conceal a device you long to unravel: you do not want to read it, you want to worship it'.

The symbolism of the League's embroidered banners was not lost on the press of the day. James Douglas of the *Morning Leader* declared that the procession was 'more stately and more splendid and more beautiful than any procession I ever saw. When men march … they carry huge banners with ugly paintings … the colours are violently crude … [the women] have revived the pomp and glory of the procession. They have recreated the beauty of blown silk and tossing embroidery'. *The Daily News* reported that the women's 'bravery, their admirable organisation and their skilful use of beautiful and decorative banners, impressed a crowd which obviously came prepared to laugh'.

Just days after the NUWSS Arts and Crafts–inspired banners captured the public's imagination, an even larger suffrage march defined the 'suffrage look' for years to come. The Women's Social and Political Union had broken away from the NUWSS in 1903. Tightly controlled by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, the WSPU advocated for direct action and civil disobedience. Their members were pejoratively deemed 'suffragettes' in 1906, a term the WSPU claimed as their own, and which came to denote their militancy. It was the WSPU's treasurer, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, who recognised the importance of colour, symbols and iconography to mainstreaming the suffrage cause. In the lead-up to the June 1908 'Women's Sunday' rally, Pethick-Lawrence selected the colours white (for purity), purple (for royalty, freedom and dignity) and green (for hope) to represent the WSPU. Writing of the colour scheme in the WSPU's weekly newspaper Votes for Women, Pethick-Lawrence declared:

> You may think that this is a small and trivial matter. But there is no action and no service that can be considered as small or trivial in this movement. I wish I could impress on every mind as deeply as I feel myself the importance of popularising the colours in every way open to us. If every individual woman in this union would do her part, the colours would become the reigning fashion. And strange as it may seem, nothing would so help to popularise the Women's Social and Political Union.

Pethick-Lawrence rightly believed that the WSPU colours would become synonymous with the suffrage cause and make suffragettes immediately identifiable to onlookers. Participants in the 1908 rally were instructed to wear a pale or white dress, a sash in white, purple and green, and purple and green accessories. The effect was remarkable. Heeding Pethick-Lawrence's advice that 'the effect will be very much lost unless the colours are carried out in the dress of every woman', the 300,000 marchers formed an 'extraordinary scene'. *The Times* reported: 'Each group marched under a banner of its own and each woman walking in the procession wore the purple, white and green either in the favours pinned to the breast, or in the trimmings of the hat, in belt ribbons or in shoulder sashes; many of the ladies wore costumes designed in an arrangement of purple, white and green'.

As art historian Lisa Tickner explains, the genius of the WSPU colours was the universality of their application. Following the branding triumph of Women's Sunday, anything rendered in purple, white and green became a symbol of suffrage advocacy. Prime minister Herbert Asquith remained unmoved by the suffrage campaign, but retailers quickly recognised the potential profitability of the suffrage brand and the middle-class female dollar behind it. Within a month, businesses ranging from Selfridges and Liberty to florists and button-makers were advertising their branded wares to suffrage supporters. There was tricolour underwear and corsets, stockings and garters, suffrage-branded tea, and boots made for 'suffragette wear'. The WSPU was keen for its supporters to patronise these companies and a regular column on fashion appeared in the WSPU newspaper Votes for Women, which endorsed specific purveyors who advertised in their pages. There was no concern about mixing politics, fashion and consumerism. 'All good suffragists must realise that in giving their custom to the suffragists advertising in *Votes for Women* they are very materially helping the cause'. Fine jewellery from designers such as Mappin & Webb made the colours even more desirable, and reinforced that suffrage women valued elegance and femininity. Long before today's era of feminist T-shirts designed by the likes of by Maria Grazia-Chuiri for Dior, the WSPU made the suffrage cause fashionable.

The success of the WSPU's visual identity was due in part to the fact that it had an artist as one of its leaders. Sylvia Pankhurst's twin passions were art and the rights of working women. Influenced by the work of William Morris and Walter Crane as a child, Pankhurst won a studentship to the Manchester School of Art and then a scholarship at the Royal College of Art (RCA) in 1904. Her interest in women's equality permeated her artistic studies. Noting that the distribution of scholarships at the RCA was weighted towards male students, she persuaded the Labour politician Keir Hardie to raise the issue in parliament. The answer was unsatisfactory – three out of sixteen scholarships were allocated to women and the school would not consider any change – but the inequalities Pankhurst witnessed led to a lifelong interest in the welfare of young artists.

As her mother and sister intensified their campaigning, Pankhurst felt torn between her career as an artist and her vocation as an activist. 'The idea of giving up the artist's life', she wrote, 'laying aside the beloved pigments and brushes, to wear out one's life on the platform and the chair at the street corner was a prospect too tragically grey and barren to endure'. On the other hand, Pankhurst's belief in socialist and collectivist ideals made a career creating art for the wealthy middle classes unappealing. In 1906, Pankhurst devoted herself full time to the suffrage cause. She largely abandoned the representational social realism that had characterised her art to that point, and embraced artistic labour as a vehicle of political change.

Among Pankhurst's earliest and most enduring contributions to the suffrage movement was its logo, 'the angel of freedom'. Conceived in 1908, the design may have been inspired by her travels in Venice, where she had spent two years studying Renaissance frescoes. Standing on tiptoe, Pankhurst's winged angel sounds a curved trumpet and unfurls a banner reading 'freedom', heralding the dawn of a new era. In the background sit prison bars and the WPSU letters, wrapped in flowers and prison chains. A symbolic representation of the WSPU's ideals, the angel of freedom became a ubiquitous feature on suffrage merchandise over the following few years. It was reproduced on the cover of the inaugural issue of *Votes for Women*, pressed onto tin badges and featured on a commemorative thirteen-piece tea service, commissioned to sell at the 1909 Women's Exhibition. Once again, the suffrage campaign melded traditional symbols of feminine domesticity with a radical political agenda; one of the WSPU banners Sylvia designed featured the provocative slogan, 'rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God'.

When Sylvia Pankhurst designed the Holloway brooch in 1909, she was drawing on personal experience. She was sent to jail for the first time in late 1906. As the WSPU grew more militant in the following years, Sylvia was imprisoned and subjected to force-feeding on several occasions, until she left the WSPU to pursue more peaceful tactics in 1913. The Holloway brooch and the Hunger Strike Medal, also introduced in 1909, were modelled on traditional military honours. Many prominent suffragettes, including Emmeline Pankhurst, wore their brooches in official, widely distributed photographs. They were conceived as a reward for recipients' bravery and loyalty, but they were also meant as a public symbol of women's endurance. The medals, along with many other aspects of the suffrage campaign, were not just designed to win the vote; they were designed to change the conversation about women.

What did the suffrage movement achieve? The eventual granting of women's right to vote in England in 1918 and 1928 was not a neat conclusion or culmination of their campaign; it was linked instead to women's contribution in the First World War. Where the suffrage movement really effected change was in broadening the ideological and discursive meaning of 'woman' as an identity. By using art and design to create a strongly defined visual aesthetic for both themselves and their campaign, suffragists and suffragettes did not just cause a political spectacle, they made a spectacle out of themselves. In doing so, they moved women – and the idea of 'womanly' behaviour – decisively into the modern era, a time when many different definitions and representations of femininity could co-exist at once. Their brand was daringly conceived, brilliantly stage-managed and strategically crafted to achieve its dreamed-for outcome: a new, glorious dawn of thundering freedoms.

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(previous) **W. H. Margetson (designer), Women Writers' Suffrage League, London (publisher)** *Women Writers' Suffrage League Postcard* 1909 (detail). Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and the Campbell-Pretty Family, 2019
(above) **Women's Social and Political Union, London (manufacturer), Toye & Co., London (maker)** *Medal for Valour awarded to Grace Chappalow* 1909. Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and the Campbell-Pretty Family, 2019

Raising the Flag

By Meg Slater

Black and orange is a symbol of solidarity with all these brave souls that had to wear life vests to cross the sea to look for safety in a new country. Since I had to wear one, I have a personal engagement with these life-vests, and these two colors.[1]

——— Yara Said

Looking beyond the market-driven focus of traditional design methods, social design centres on inclusion and prioritising the needs of disadvantaged groups of people. It does so by using design to effect social change within a community, through direct engagement with that community. Designing in this way – with collective and social outcomes in mind rather than commercial objectives – results in 'design without walls'[2] and the production of objects that both serve the needs of, and give voice to, diverse groups of people. An example of social design has recently entered the permanent collection of the NGV – *Refugee flag*, 2016, designed by Syrian-born, Amsterdam-based artist Yara Said. In creating this object, Said chose to reference the design format of a widely recognised symbol of national identity, the flag, to create a new symbol for a marginalised community with no geographical borders.

The idea for a refugee flag began with a conversation. In 2015, Brazilian-born, New York–based art director Caro Rebello, along with copywriter Artur Lipori, founded the Refugee Nation with help from Amnesty International. Soon after, they approached Said to design a flag to represent the estimated seventy million people across the globe who are forcibly displaced.[3] They also commissioned Syrian-born, Istanbul-based composer Moutaz Arian to write an anthem.

Rebello and Lipori established the Refugee Nation as a non-profit group operating with the support of volunteers and various humanitarian organisations.[4] It was set up shortly after the first team of refugee athletes was accepted to compete in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Rebello and Lipori seized the opportunity to produce a flag and anthem with which the team, officially called Team Refugee Olympic Athletes (Team ROA) by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), could identify. Rebello has reflected on the broader purpose of the flag:'[W]e felt that we needed to do something to give them an identity, a flag to call their own. Not just for the refugee athletes, but for all the refugees around the world'.[5]

Rebello and Lipori were conscious of the significance of flags and anthems as

Gilbert Baker *Rainbow flag* 1978 (designed); 2018 (manufactured). Purchased NGV Foundation, 2018
© The Gilbert Baker Estate

Ben Quilty *High tide mark* 2016 (detail).
The John McCaughey Memorial Prize Trust, 2016 © Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno Galleries

symbols of national pride and identity, particularly during major international sporting events. Drawing parallels with the creation of Gilbert Baker's *Rainbow flag*, 1978, also recently acquired by the NGV, Rebello and Lipori chose to engage members of the community they sought to represent. They also borrowed from the language of nation building to highlight the stateless condition of displaced people across the globe.

Said was approached by Rebello and Lipori through a website called 'I'm not a refugee. I'm a ____', which connects refugees with work opportunities. She had written for the website and it wasn't long until Rebello and Lipori were in touch. After an introductory Skype call, Said read up on vexillography (the practice of designing flags), and opted for a simple approach: 'I read that a flag should look like a six-year-old kid designed it. That a six-year-old can draw it'.[6]

In her simple yet distinctive design of a bright orange flag with a single black stripe, Said referenced the life jackets many refugees wear while making dangerous sea crossings to escape persecution or conflict in their home countries. Said has also acknowledged her personal connection to the flag's design: after war broke out in Syria in 2011, and shortly after she graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Damascus University in 2014, Said was forced to embark on an almost year-long journey to Amsterdam that took her through nine countries and countless refugee camps.[7] She wore an orange life jacket while she crossed the ocean by boat to find safety in the Netherlands.

The refugee flag's connection to its source is further strengthened through the production process. To make the flags, refugees living in Amsterdam collaborate with Makers Unite, a non-profit organisation that connects local designers with refugees to co-design sustainable products made from upcycled materials. The makers produce the flags by repurposing life jackets found discarded along the Greek coast and once worn by migrants entering the country by sea.

The design and materiality of the refugee flag speak to a specific refugee experience: the wearing of a life jacket while crossing the ocean to escape the conditions in a refugee's home country. While the flag does not visually represent the experience of refugees who have crossed borders by land rather than sea, or those who are internally displaced and face encampment, this does not diminish the flag's global message of empowerment and acceptance of all refugees. This message is achieved through the flag's reference to a symbol, the life jacket, now synonymous with today's global refugee crisis.

Australian artist Ben Quilty also acknowledges the visual impact and universal message of the life jacket in his 2016 painting *High tide mark*[8] (NGV Collection). This powerful work depicts, against a stark grey background, one of the life jackets Quilty encountered among a wall of thousands left behind by Syrian refugees on the shores of a beach in Lesbos. Like Said, Quilty sees the life jacket as a marker of the resilience of the 'ocean of humans that have moved across those waters' in search of safety.[9]

Although Said's flag was not formally acknowledged by the IOC as Team ROA's national flag, it was embraced by the athletes who competed under it at the Rio Olympics despite its unofficial status, and by the crowds who cheered them on. Beyond the Olympic Games, recognition of the flag as a symbol of the identity and human rights of refugees around the world has continued to grow. At the 2016 One Young World Summit in Canada, The Refugee Nation was among a list of countries announced and applauded during the opening ceremony. The flag was carried in the larger procession of national flags by One Young Nation ambassador, and Eritean refugee, Meron Yemane Semedar. The flag has also been collected and prominently displayed by major museums, including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, MoMA in New York, and now the NGV. Through its unique design and exposure, the refugee flag is now widely considered a symbol of solidarity both for and with the world's refugee community.

The refugee flag's creation process, and its embracement and continued use, illustrates why objects such as flags are important examples of social design. Like the rainbow flag, it was conceived by and for members of a marginalised community, but has also been accepted and celebrated by people and organisations outside the community it represents. Through acquisition, collection and display of flags such as the refugee and rainbow flags, public museums, including the NGV, honour these important milestones in social design and demonstrate the potential for individuals and communities to effect social change on a global scale.

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Moga: The Audacity of Being a Modern Girl

Japan in 1920s and 1930s was a time when traditional art and aesthetics merged with European life and culture. The result was a pulsating era of Japanese modernism and the creation of Asian Art Deco architecture, paintings, prints, design and fashion. Investigating the socially liberated status of young Japanese women known as *moga* (modern girls), a 2020 exhibition at NGV, *Japanese Modernism*, includes two major works by young contemporary female creators of the era. These women changed tradition by seeking financial and emotional independence and adopting Western fashion styles and behaviours.

BY MARIKO NAGAI

Taniguchi Fumie *Preparing to go out (Yosoō hitobito)* 1935. Purchased with funds from the Estate of Kevin and Eunice McDonald and NGV Foundation, 2019

They cut their long black hair, symbolic of a traditional Japanese woman's beauty. They removed their conservative kimonos, the very clothes that defined the upper class, and put on vibrant kimono designs and Western dresses that gave lightness to their steps. These girls took it all in and made it all their own: bobbed hair, knee-length dresses, stockings, painted eyebrows and dark rouge. All of the things their mothers would disapprove of and maybe, they thought, all the things that some boys would frown upon, but who cared about those boys anyway?

In the 1930s, they strutted down the streets of Tokyo, Osaka and Kobe, arm in arm, without chaperones, defiantly, boldly, as if they owned the streets – no, they owned the entire city and its future. They flirted with boys and men and sometimes other girls, they ignored hisses from the old, they danced and danced until their feet hurt in their pumps, but they could have danced even more if they hadn't had to go to work the next day. They drank. They smoked. They held on tight to boys, swaying their bodies languidly to the music. The media loved to hate them, calling them 'loose' and 'immoral' and 'independent'.

A modern girl, *moga*, laughed at people bound to tradition; she laughed at conventions and modesty; she laughed at being bound to men (like their mothers and some of their friends were), working from sunrise to sunset, all for their families. This was the time of the Taisho and early Showa democracy; a liberalism movement coinciding with the reign of Emperor Taisho between 1912 and 1926, and the young Emperor Showa up to the late 1930s. Following the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 and 1905, and after the First World War of 1914 to 1918, Japan became an international entity rivalling the West. Just as Japan was audacious, so were these girls.

Japan during the interwar period was a complicated space where modernity clashed with the deeply rooted *Ie seido* (the ideal Japanese family structure, as determined by law). *Moga* girls walked the sunny streets of Ginza in Tokyo, while factory girls in Gunma and Nagano worked ten-hour shifts reeling silk in humid windowless factory rooms for the good of the nation, their fingers red and

(left to right) **Itō Shinsui** *Freshly-washed hair (Arai Gami)* 1936. Purchased with funds donated by Allan Myers AO and Maria Myers AO, 2015
Japanese *The Asahi weekly edition 3 November* 1935. Purchased with funds donated by Maureen Morrisey Bequest, 2018
Negishi Ayako *Waiting for makeup* 1938. Purchased with funds donated by Jennifer and Brian Tymms, 2018
Itō Shinsui *Early spring (Shensun): Manners of Showa women (Showa bijin fuzoka)* 1931. Lillian Ernestine Lobb Bequest, 2008

senseless from scalding water. It was also a time when politicians lived in fear of assassination attempts, when anarchists and socialists shared the same temporal and intellectual space with nationalists and imperialists, and when Tokyo lay in waste from the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and, as quickly as the city was destroyed, began to rebuild itself with buildings seemingly reappearing overnight.

From this landscape emerged Taniguchi Fumie, a young artist, creator of the work *Preparing to go out* (*Yosoou hitobito*), 1935, which was brought into the NGV Collection with funds from the Estate of Kevin and Eunuce McDonald and NGV Foundation in 2019. Taniguchi was a graduate of the prestigious Joshibi University of Art and Design, Tokyo, an all-female art school established in 1900 that sought 'to empower the self-reliance of women through the arts' and 'to improve the social status of women'.[1] In some sense, Joshibi encouraged girls to be *bad*, to have agency over themselves. Taniguchi was a rising star, collecting major art awards in the 1930s, becoming somewhat of a darling of the art world. Her other works from this period, such as *Farming woman*, 1932; *Inside the car*, 1933; and *Obi*, 1935 (private collection), also feature empowered women (though not necessarily *moga*), who often stand, their eyes averted to something outside of the frame, as if they are looking at their possible future, readying themselves for the next movement. In the artist's own words:

> Girls I know who are so full of life and so masculine; they've all spurned the outdated common-sense and try to live their lives in a new way … [They are] unique artists born out of the fearful time period of today.[2]

In *Preparing to go out*, Taniguchi presents six *moga* girls, four of them standing and two sitting. They are full of life and are not dictated by the male gaze, but by their own stance, as if to say, 'This is who we are. We are audacious. We are artists of our own lives'. There is no artificiality in their postures. They are in repose. They are there. Simple as that. This is also reflected in Negishi Ayako's work *Waiting for makeup*, 1938, which was acquired through the generous support of Jennifer and Brian Tymms. The work on paper features two young women dressed in Western-style clothing and sporting popular 1930s hairstyles made famous by French hair stylist, Marcel Grateau. Taniguchi and Negishi completed these works during a time when Japan, and the rest of the world, were becoming increasingly nationalistic and militaristic. In 1938, the Japanese government would encourage women to wear *kokubo-fuku* (national uniform), meaning that luxuriant women's fashions were replaced with more functional clothing in line with an increasing nationalistic culture of austerity. Kimonos with bright colours of light yellow, pink and blue, and created from luxurious fabrics such as silk and laces would appear less frequently on the streets, as Japan became increasingly involved in a war in China. Women's lives were no longer theirs but part of the nation, intimately bound to the war effort.

In a few years' time, the *moga* parties, independence, agency, defiance, art and uniqueness would all but disappear. Taniguchi, herself, would be taken by nationalistic fever, founding the Women Artists' Volunteer Corps (Joryu Bijutsuka Houkoutai) in 1943, her works – and other artist's works such as Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita – reflecting the militarism of the time. Though she tried to regain her artistic fame after the war, it never reached the brilliance of the interwar period, and when she divorced her husband and moved to the US to remarry to a Japanese-American man in 1955[3], she disappeared from the art world altogether. *Moga*, like Fumie herself, emerged from a particular landscape of a historical moment, and then disappeared. For now, though, here they are: women as the subjects of their own lives, fully themselves.

MARIKO NAGAI IS A JAPANESE-BORN POET AND AUTHOR. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE JAN–FEB 2020 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

Agnes Goodsir *The letter* 1926. Bequest of the artist, 1947

Biography and Social Context

‘Unlike many artists of her generation who offered subtle suggestions and ciphers, Agnes Goodsir put her queerness in plain sight.’

Dr Angela Hesson

Hans HEYSEN Nora

Hans Heysen's luminous depictions of the Australian landscape are testament to the life of an artist who had a rare and subtle relationship with nature. An early conservationist who viewed trees as individuals, Hans found solace in the natural world during times of uncertainty and trauma. His daughter, Nora, was similarly sensitive to the rhythms of life and had an impressive aptitude for capturing human emotion and domestic detail. She was also a highly-acclaimed painter of still life, was the first woman to win the Archibald Prize, and the first female Australian war artist.

BY DR ANGELA HESSON

(p. 68) **Hans Heysen** *Mystic morn* 1904 (detail) Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide Elder Bequest Fund 1904 © C Heysen
(p. 69) **Nora Heysen** *Ruth* 1933 (detail) Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide South Australian Government Grant 1934 © Lou Klepac
(p. 70) **Hans Heysen** *Sewing (The artist's wife)* 1913 The Cedars, Hahndorf The Hans Heysen Estate © C Heysen
(p. 71) **Hans Heysen** *Droving into the light* 1914–21 Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth Gift of Mr W H Vincent, 1922 © C Heysen

Born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1877, to Maria Heysen and Louis Heysen, Hans and his family moved to Australia in 1884. Though the family settled in Adelaide, from a young age Hans visited Hahndorf, a small town in the Adelaide Hills that was an important centre of German immigration. In 1892, aged fourteen, Hans left school and was apprenticed to Cowell Brothers, a sawmilling and hardware business. He began to draw seriously in his spare time, buying art materials with his wages. In 1893 he enrolled at James Ashton's Norwood Art School, where he swiftly established a reputation as an unusually talented pupil. In 1899 Hans was awarded an informal scholarship by four Adelaide businessowners to further his education in Europe. The experience was, in all ways, formative: Hans received formal instruction of a standard unavailable in Australia at that time, while also being exposed to the rich and varied history of European art. After three years of study in Paris, he travelled to the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands.

His frames of artistic reference expanded exponentially, and when Hans returned to Adelaide in 1903 it was with a new confidence and ambition. Within a year, he set up his own studio, won the Wynne Prize for *Mystic morn*, 1904, and married Selma (Sallie) Bartels. Sallie composed the title for Hans's prize-winning, Symbolist-inspired painting, and would do the same for many others. Her love for Hans was, from the outset, connected to his work as an artist. The story goes that she had declared, upon viewing his *Meadowsweet, Scotland*, 1904, in a South Australian exhibition, that she was going to marry the man who had painted it. And she did, having first engineered their acquaintance by enrolling as his student. While Hans was notably lacking in family connections, Sallie was not. Her father was the mayor of Adelaide, and she socialised widely with the city's most fashionable and prosperous families, many of whom would go on to become key patrons for Hans.

In November 1908 Hans and Sallie Heysen moved to a rented cottage in Hahndorf, and in the same year, an enormously successful exhibition of Hans's work was held in Melbourne, aided by E. Phillips Fox and opened by Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin. Nora was born in 1911, the fourth of Sallie and Hans's eight children, and the only one among them who would go on to pursue an artistic career. In 1912, the year after Nora's birth, the Heysens purchased an expansive country property in Hahndorf called The Cedars, which they furnished in the Arts and Crafts style. When Hans was ultimately able to build his own studio, it was rustically vernacular without, and luminous within, with long, geometrically paned windows evoking the work of Scottish Arts and Crafts designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The garden was planted with fragrant bourbon roses, lilacs and irises.

Although their property was surrounded by farmland and was ostensibly suitable for farming, the Heysens chose not to. Instead, they allowed it to gently return to nature.

Hans referred to 'meeting' trees. He also mourned their loss. In 1937 he wrote to Nora, 'that lovely old white Gum I have painted so often at Woodside has gone. It felt like losing an old friend'. This sensibility lends a curious ambivalence to heroic images of rural labour such as *Hauling timber*, 1911. Accounts of Hans paying local councils the price of the timber so they would not cut down his favourite eucalypts were widely reported during his lifetime, and what was once perceived as an endearing mark of eccentricity is today identifiable as a progressive conservationist impulse.

RUTH

In 1933, Nora Heysen produced a series of portraits biblically titled *Ruth*, after the Book of Ruth. The subject (pictured on page 21) was not, in fact, named Ruth at all – her name was Ronda Paech. She was a local farm worker who also delivered the family's groceries. Nora was struck by Ronda's strong features, and Sallie Heysen commissioned her to sit for her daughter.

There was something personally therapeutic, too, in Hans's approach to landscape. In 1926, following the trauma of the First World War and the sudden and tragically premature death of his daughter Lilian from meningitis, he ventured for the first time to the Flinders Ranges. He would return ten times, mainly to the Aroona and Arkaba areas, where he made sketches and watercolours, some of which were later developed into oils. In this ancient place of monumental rocks and trees scarred by time and drought, Hans found, it seems, a kind of comfort in the rough continuity of nature. It was also during this time that he discovered a new palette – the gentle modulations of his Hahndorf landscapes are replaced by something more contrasting. The influence of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cézanne is manifested in the Flinders landscapes – particularly striking are the effects of geometric simplification, as Hans himself described, 'the beautiful balance of the pyramid and the circle'.

Just as Hans's work emblematised the notion of 'knowing' nature through the study of landscape, so Nora knew nature through flowers and through people. Although she was not directly taught to paint by her father, Nora observed his work and accompanied him on painting trips from an early age. As a young artist, she drew many of her father's favourite subjects, and her pencil studies of eucalypts are almost indistinguishable from his. In 1926, at the age of fourteen, she enrolled at the North Adelaide School of Fine Arts, where she studied full-time for five years. Following the sale of her first painting in 1930, Nora began to paint in a converted shed at The Cedars, and over the next three years her works were acquired by major art collections around Australia. While Hans's work remained influential, Nora began to move subtly in other directions. Speaking towards the end of her life, Nora declared, 'My nature didn't lend itself to this quick watercolour painting. I wanted to model things and get things in the round'. The tendency to treat each element in a composition individually is particularly marked in early works such as *Petunias*, 1930, provoking some gentle critique from Hans, who questioned the approach of 'each flower being seen somewhat separately'. Yet this willingness to privilege the detail over the cohesive whole is arguably a mark of Nora's engagement with modernism, and a point of differentiation between father and daughter.

'Just as Hans's work emblematised the notion of "knowing" nature through the study of landscape, so Nora knew nature through flowers and through people.'

——— DR ANGELA HESSON

The year before she departed for a period of study in England, Nora mounted her first solo exhibition in Adelaide at the Royal South Australia Society of Arts. The exhibition sold out, and Nora won the Society's Melrose Prize for Portraiture for a self-portrait at her easel. In the same year, she produced three portraits biblically titled *Ruth*. In the pure, clearly delineated features of her sitter and the luminous hues of the sky behind, these paintings evoke the work of the nineteenth-century Nazarene painters – polished and technically proficient, but with a slightly paradoxical air of gentle naivety. In 1934, following a nine-month family tour of Germany and the United Kingdom, Nora arrived in London and enrolled in classes at the Central School of Art. She was joined in London by her close friend, West Australian sculptor Everton Stokes, who would become an important figure in Nora's life, in Europe and after, as a fellow artist, travel companion, and artistic subject. The following four years was a period of tremendous excitement and evolution for Nora, who wrote home to her parents in 1936, 'I want to paint people, homely interiors, skies and trees and water and all that is living and vibrating around me ... I feel freer and surer of myself, and I know what I want'.

In 1938, soon after returning to Australia from Europe, Nora departed Hahndorf for Sydney – then the centre of arts publishing in Australia. There

she was introduced to the Netherlands' consul and his wife, Madame Elink Schuurman, whose portrait she painted and entered in the Archibald Prize, the highest honour in Australian portraiture. Nora's surprise upon winning was clear – she was swimming in Rushcutters Bay when the announcement was made and arrived home to discover photographers on her doorstep. Ever the advocate of humility, Hans wryly advised his daughter against 'getting a swollen head'.

When war was declared in 1939, Nora wrote home of her frustration at her powerlessness in the face of such destruction. In 1943, the possibility of becoming a war artist emerged, and she expressed immediate enthusiasm. She was the first woman to receive the appointment and, predictably, her treatment differed substantially from that of her male counterparts. She was assigned to document medical and research units around Australia, and subsequently at Finschhafen in New Guinea. Nora's portraiture during this time bears all the marks of her great sensitivity as an artist and humanist and arguably little in the way of explicit patriotism. She was under no illusions about the glories of battle – three years earlier she had declared her 'bitter resentment against the futility and the horror of war'. Her drawings of invalids and wounded soldiers are among her most delicate and sensitive from this period, demonstrating her emotional connection to her subjects, as well as her technical facility as a draftsperson.

It was also in New Guinea that Nora met and fell in love with Dr Robert Black, a highly regarded specialist in tropical diseases. He was amusing, handsome and married, although the marriage was by that time in a state of instability. After the war, Nora followed Robert to Liverpool and, following Black's protracted divorce proceedings, the couple married in 1953 and purchased The Chalet in Hunters Hill, Sydney, where Nora would live until her death half a century later. Although the marriage was ultimately to disintegrate, it was a pivotal experience in Nora's life, the more so for the great independence and strength required to foster an unconventional romance in a period of considerable conservatism.

The Heysens were a family characterised by a combination of progressive impulses and traditional instincts. 'I'm not a feminist!', Nora is said to have called after an interviewer, and the quotation, for better or worse, has gone down as one of her most famous. Yet, to look back at Nora's life is to witness an extraordinary case-study in women's independence. Most of her adult life was spent living alone. Although she received financial assistance from her family in times of difficulty, she succeeded, for the most part, in supporting herself with her art. She travelled widely, and often alone, at a time when it was generally perceived as unsafe for a woman to do so. All things considered, Nora's relationship to feminism was perhaps more a question of semantics than politics or philosophy.

After the mid-century success of her Archibald win and wartime commission, Nora fell into relative obscurity. She continued to paint and entered the Archibald several more times, but was uninterested in self-promotion and made no attempt to maintain a public identity. In part as a consequence of her failing eyesight, her painting style changed later in life. She began to work in pastels, and in a high-key palette. She painted friends' children, animals, fruit and flowers from her garden – subjects full of symbolic and literal light. In remaining productive long into old age, Nora continued a family tradition. Hans painted and drew almost until his death in 1968 at the age of ninety, although increasing infirmity made excursions into nature, so crucial to his practice, increasingly difficult.

The Heysen family corresponded throughout their lives and their letters offer rare insight into Hans and Nora's working methods, inspirations and thoughts on the key artistic debates of their time. It was an artistic inheritance that brought its share of frustrations. Nora was a skilled and imaginative artist, yet she remained troubled throughout her life by the possibility that her reputation might be dependent upon her father's. In a 1962 interview she declared, 'I don't know if I exist in my own right'. Yet the relationship was characterised, overwhelmingly, by a sense of gratitude, inspiration and love. The frequency of Hans and Nora's correspondence attests to a bond as pleasurable as it was productive. Their shared love of nature, manifest in Hans's powerfully evocative, softly modulated landscapes and Nora's meticulous, reverent studies of flowers, formed an additional bond between them. In 1945, encamped with a medical unit in New Guinea and suffering dermatitis and exhaustion, Nora mused in a letter to her parents, 'You will be welcoming the first signs of Spring. How remote all that sweet freshness seems', before signing off with her customary farewell, 'My love to all at home'.

DR ANGELA HESSON IS NGV CURATOR, AUSTRALIAN PAINTING, SCULPTURE AND DECORATIVE ARTS TO 1980. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE MAR–APR 2015 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

(p. 73) **Nora Heysen** *Petunias* 1930. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney Purchased, 1930
(p. 74) **Nora Heysen** *Pathologist titrating sera (Captain Robert Black)* 1944

The paper boy 1888

Florence Ada Fuller is an artist scarcely recognised today. However, as illustrated in *The paper boy*, 1888, a recent gift to the NGV by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, Fuller was a highly gifted portrait painter who had an innate ability to capture the qualities of her sitter with great naturalism. This depiction of an unknown child approximately twelve years of age celebrates the talent of an under-acknowledged artist and recalls a history of adolescent workers active in Melbourne during the time Australia prepared to celebrate its centenary.

BY MICHAEL VARCOE-COCKS

Florence Fuller was born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in 1867 and, at an early age, immigrated with her family to Melbourne. Her parents encouraged artistic pursuits and two of her sisters, Amy and Christie, became singers of note. By the age of thirteen Fuller had commenced painting lessons with the Impressionist Jane Sutherland and briefly attended the National Gallery School, but the tutor that influenced her the most was her uncle Robert Dowling. In early 1884, Dowling had returned to Australia as the country's most distinguished living artist following a successful twenty-seven years working abroad. His international standing and association with leading artists of the time made him a senior figure in Melbourne's artistic circle and the city's most sought-after portraitist. Dowling employed his niece as a governess and made available to her the large and highly fashionable studio on Collins Street, Melbourne, which he adorned with exotic furnishings collected from the time he spent in Egypt. Throughout her life, Fuller was plagued by 'very delicate health'[1] and at times was unable to sustain work but prospered from the benefit of her uncle's support and guidance.

In early 1886, Dowling suddenly passed away in England, where he was visiting. In need of new circumstances, Fuller opened her own modest studio at Planet Chambers at the top of Collins Street, a popular address with artists including her neighbour the French-trained Monsieur De la Crouée who Fuller credited as being a lasting influence. Success at the Melbourne exhibitions began to follow; first, was her portrait of Dowling and then a posthumous collaboration with her uncle when she completed his unfinished portrait of Lady Elizabeth Loch, wife of the Governor of Victoria.

Fuller went on to exhibit four works at the inaugural Victorian Artists Society (VAS) exhibition in May 1888 held at the National Gallery, where she was awarded the prize for 'Best portrait in oil'. Unfortunately, the lack of historical descriptions or a continuous provenance has meant that the title of this recent work to enter the NGV Collection is undocumented. However, a likely possibility is that it is number twenty-three from the VAS catalogue, *The Herald Boy,* which *The Age* declared a 'capital study of a street boy'.[2] Before joining the NGV Collection the painting was owned for nearly a century by a family who referred to the work as *The paper boy* and this remains the title.

Between 1888 and 1889, Fuller produced a group of portraits that addressed the theme of disadvantaged children; *The paper boy* is an early example of this. Most of the works were painted in a sentimental genre style and illustrated in tragic settings, but this delicate study is a dignified portrayal that subtly alludes to the hardship of the sitter's circumstances. His rough-cut hair, avoidant stare and heavy clothing purposely invoke a sympathetic response. The weathered face of boyish features are modelled with small square brushwork, vigorous and direct in application, qualities that Fuller attributed to the influence of De la Crouée.

Newspaper boys were a prominent part of Melbourne street life. In the late-nineteenth century they were enlisted from the vast disadvantaged and neglected youth who were a by-product of

the rapid economic and urban expansion of the post gold rush era. Papers were purchased at 8 pence per dozen and then sold as individual issues for minor profit. Working the busy Melbourne streets until late in the night meant the children were open to exploitation and criminal influences. Most boys were under the age of fifteen with no education certificates or alternate options. Some supported single mothers, their siblings or survived independently in an attempt to avoid reform schools. Others were parentless, but not necessarily orphaned, and either slept on the streets or when able, stayed at boarding houses, such as the Model Lodging House located in King Street. This establishment alone supported over 53,000 lodgers in the first half of 1888.

The increasing concern for the plight of aimless and unattended children led to the formation of the Herald Boys' Try-Excelsior Classes – first established informally in Fitzroy by a Mr William Groom and separately in Toorak by Mr William Foster, who would become the Try movement's figurehead. The classes provided temporary relief and motivational activities for the boys in a controlled social environment. These attempts at social reform were in part prompted by the death of Major-General Charles George Gordon whose passing created an outpouring of public grief and memorial activities to acknowledge his support for disadvantaged youth of London. In 1885 Foster added a dedicated Try-Excelsior Class for the Melbourne Herald boys; he was motivated by concerns over the perils of temptation that boys experienced during idle times while waiting for the evening editions.[3] The class headquarters were initially located in Little Collins Street in the same block as Fuller's studio and close to Treasury Gardens where a Memorial statue of Gordon was soon erected and remains today. A small entrance fee was requested and although an evening lecture was given, the class primarily functioned as a club with the boys electing their own council. Donated reading material, games and gymnasium equipment attempted to stimulate the adolescent workers and encourage a path to self-improvement. A reporter visiting the Herald boys' class described them as 'hungry ragged little mortals with bare elbows, many barefooted and clothes either too big or too small'.[4] An earlier visit to a Try class also noted '… many wore a loosely-tied comforter or pocket-handkerchief around their collarless necks'[5], the same as worn by the sitter in Fuller's painting.

The boys started a fund that meant penniless members could still attend class and later a system to provide relief income for the boys in times of illness. By 1887 there were 200 members of the Herald boys' class, which was later renamed the Newsboy Try-Excelsior Class.[6] In the same year, the Neglected Children's Act of 1887 authorised the detainment of vagrant or neglected children, which placed additional pressure on the Try-Excelsior movement. Fortunately, the refining influences of the classes were soon publicly celebrated and admiration peaked when the Herald boys reciprocated the public's support by hosting concerts to raise funds for affected families and orphaned children from Australia's worst mining accident at the Mount Kembla Mine in Bulli, New South Wales. In return, the financial support allowed for the construction of a new facility called The Gordon Institute, built to feed, bath and, in part, house the unfortunate urchins of 'Marvellous Melbourne'; the founding stone was laid, while Fuller's *Herald boy* was being exhibited at the VAS.

'This delicate study is a dignified portrayal that subtly alludes to the hardship of the sitter's circumstances. His rough-cut hair, avoidant stare and heavy clothing purposely invoke a sympathetic response.'

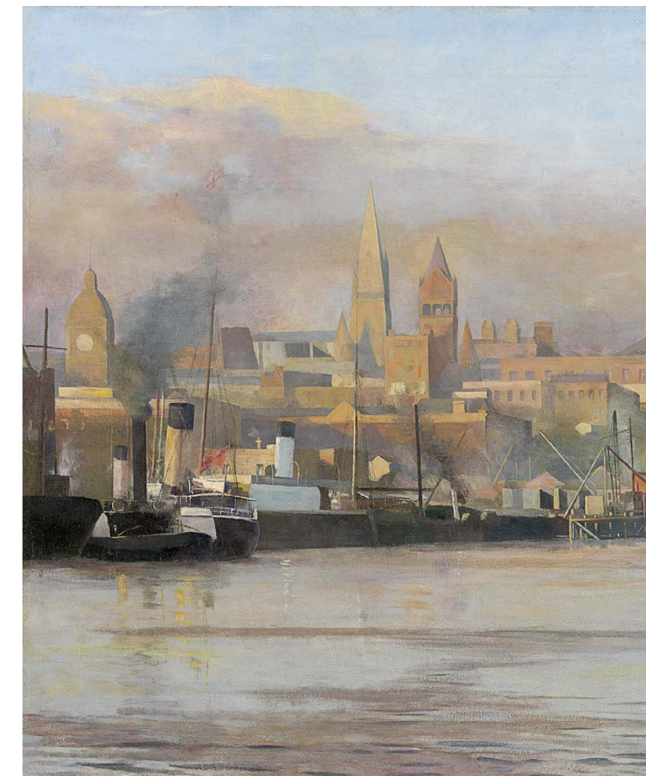
——— MICHAEL VARCOE-COCKS

Fuller continued to receive portrait commissions and produced narrative compositions, landscapes and still lifes to ongoing acclaim. In 1896 her success enabled a chance for international travel, returning first to her birthplace of South Africa and a year later to study in Paris and London. For several years she lived in lean circumstances and would exhibit at both the Salon, Paris, and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, with favourable mentions in the press. By 1904 she had established herself in Western Australia and became heavily devoted to the Theosophical Society – an eastern-influenced religious movement formed in the late-nineteenth century. Fuller would relocate to the Society's headquarters in Adyar, India, and later resided at their Mosman residence in Sydney while her professional practice somewhat sidelined. Health continued to be a problem, limiting her output and, to a degree, her career until eventually she required permanent institutional care where she spent the final two decades of her life. She passed away, having chosen not to marry, but pursuing a life much travelled, eventful and self-determined through her own means.

This beautiful portrait is a rare example of Florence Fuller's early Melbourne work and a significant institutional acquisition of an important female artist. The morally minded Fuller purposely chose a sitter who could offer no payment other than the image of his circumstance. We know nothing of the child other than he was born without privilege, was motivated to work and presented himself as best he was able – in his white neck comforter. In 1888 the path of this Newspaper boy and Florence Fuller probably crossed only momentarily. The painting survives as an important reference to the social diversity in Melbourne's past.

MICHAEL VARCOE-COCKS IS NGV HEAD OF CONSERVATION. *THE PAPER BOY* WAS ACQUIRED THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF KRYSTYNA CAMPBELL-PRETTY AM AND FAMILY. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE JAN–FEB 2020 EDITION OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

(previous) **Florence Fuller** *The paper boy*
1888. Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020
(right) **Frederick McCubbin** *Melbourne 1888*
1888. Gift of Mr Hugh McCubbin, 1960



Marvellous Melbourne

'Marvellous Melbourne' was a city of miraculous growth in the 1880s. The Melbourne Stock Exchange passed the £2 million mark, the population almost doubled between 1880 and 1888 and, for a time, Melbourne was the world's second largest city after London although had higher property prices. Land speculation naturally boomed as the suburbs increasingly expanded with new railway lines providing affordability options for the quarter-acre block. The city centre was populated by skyscrapers as high as twelve stories, and elaborate banks, theatres and private mansions pushed industry outwards. Melbourne was known to have more decorative cast iron than any other city in the world.

The phones rang, with Melbourne being the host of the first telephone exchange in the country, and the streets now glowed at night under the electric lights and the cable trams ferrying people from to one coffee palace to the next. A rich city needed rich taste and in 1888 the Royal Exhibition Building hosted the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition showcasing artistic, scientist and industrial progress to around two million visitors. Notable National Gallery acquisitions in 1888 include G. F. Watts *Alfred Tennyson*, 1858, Lawrence Alma-Tadema *The vintage festival*, 1871, and J. M. W. Turner *Dunstanburgh Castle, north-east coast of Northumberland, sunrise after a squally night*, 1798 – all of which are currently on display on Level 2 at NGV International.

EVA ZEISEL

Playful Search for Beauty

Eva Zeisel, born in Hungary in 1906, was designing visually and conceptually progressive ceramics for leading manufacturers in Germany and Russia by the time she was twenty-six years old. Arrest, solitary confinement and the threat of persecution did not hold back this designer, whose 'useful' objects are as contemporary now as when they were first made.

BY AMANDA DUNSMORE

Eva Zeisel led a prodigious life as one of the most successful industrial designers of the twentieth century. She was a tremendous force, living until the age of 105, and continuing to design until the last few months of her life. Over a career that spanned eighty-five years she produced hundreds of designs across the fields of ceramics, glass, metalwork, plastics, furniture, lighting and textiles and worked for manufacturers across Europe, Russia, the United States, Mexico, Japan and India.

Zeisel is best-known for her ceramics and pioneered design in the field of accessibly priced, mass-produced tableware aimed at the burgeoning middle class of the postwar period. She received numerous international awards and accolades throughout her career and was awarded honorary doctorates from the Royal College of Art, London (1988), the Parsons School of Design, New York City (1991), the University of Craft and Design, Budapest (2004) and the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island (2005). Zeisel was the first female designer to feature in a solo exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, New York – *New Shapes in Modern China: Designed by Eva Zeisel* (1946). This was a remarkable achievement given that she had only migrated to the United States eight years earlier, having fled the German annexation of Vienna.

She was also forging her career at a time when women were expected to marry and become full-time mothers. Zeisel was married with two young children, yet she managed to juggle her family commitments with her emerging career (often working in tough, largely male-dominated commercial environments) through the great support of her mother and her sheer tenacity and, at times, obstinacy. This was particularly evident when she was trying to defend her vision of how a piece should be made, advertised and exhibited.

Nevertheless, despite her long list of achievements and awards, what ultimately defines Eva Zeisel's career and sets her work apart from that of all other designers is its sensuous beauty, humour and gentle humanity. Zeisel was a humanitarian and constantly spoke of her desire for objects to nurture the person that held them. She talked of 'soul contact' through her tableware and believed that her responsibility as a designer was to go beyond the application of rational thought in the design process and enhance the more subliminal and emotional dimensions of a design. Her approach to evoking these intangible qualities was through playfulness and beauty. The search for beauty in the everyday was a constant thread throughout Zeisel's life.

Eva Amalia Stricker was born in Budapest in 1906 to a wealthy Jewish family. 'Mad about art', in her words, and keen to become a painter, she studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest but went on to become an apprentice potter, at the encouragement of her mother, in order to have a trade that would give her a living. 'Ladies didn't pot when I started', she said, 'but my mother let me do it anyway'. She became the first woman to be trained through the Guild of Chimney Sweeps, Oven Makers, Roof Tilers, Well Diggers and Potters. She learnt all aspects of potting, from the refining of the raw clay, to the hand building and throwing of pots, to the glazing, drying and firing of them. This training with the wet raw clay stayed with Zeisel throughout her career and even when working on mass production projects many years later, she made a point of feeling and handling the clay that would be used to form her

designs. The design historian Tanya Harrod has commented that her greatness as a designer was based, in part, 'on her profound tacit knowledge of clay'.

After graduating as a journeyman (a trades or craftsperson who has completed an apprenticeship) potter, Zeisel began working as a designer in the Kispester-Granit manufactory in Budapest. Two years later she took up the role as designer for the Schramberger Majolikafabrik in Germany, a firm which specialised in mass-produced domestic wares and employed around 350 workers. Undaunted by the fact that she had none of the necessary drafting skills, she begged a friend for a day's intense tuition and worked at the factory for the next two years, successfully creating many playful geometric designs for dinnerware, tea sets and vases. An example of these designs held within the NGV Collection, *Gobelin 8, tea service*, c. 1929, is pictured (left) and was generously supported by Merv Keehn and Sue Harlow. In 1930, Zeisel moved to Berlin to design for the Carstens factories, but two years later she went to Russia to experience the new artistic and social movements, along with many other idealistic young artists and intellectuals. As an experienced industrial designer, Zeisel was offered a position assisting in the modernisation of the ceramic industry. She travelled to many parts of Russia in order to understand and coordinate efforts to create a central manufactory that would make products for the homes of ordinary Russians. Her efforts were recognised, and she was soon transferred to the Lomonosov factory in Leningrad (the former Imperial Porcelain Factory). This in turn led to her appointment as artistic director for the state-run Porcelain and Glass Industries, with specific responsibility for designing objects for mass production. In 1936, however, Zeisel was caught up in one of the Stalinist purges, falsely accused of plotting against the leader. She was imprisoned in the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) prison for sixteen months, spending most of that time in solitary confinement, before being unexpectedly released and put on a train to Vienna. By this time she was extremely fragile, emotionally and physically, and the deep scars of this experience remained with her for the rest her life. She talked of seeing colour differently after emerging from solitary confinement and the inhumane treatment that she received only served to heighten her humanist sensibilities. As a result of the rise of anti-Semitism, Zeisel fled to England on one of the last trains out at the time of the Anschluss (German annexation). Months later, in 1938, she migrated to the United States with her husband; they settled permanently in New York.

Only a year after arriving in New York, Zeisel began teaching industrial design at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, undaunted by the fact that she had never taught before. Her curriculum focused on the fundamental principles of good design, foremost of which was functionality. Teapots had to pour well, no drips were tolerated, neither could they be too heavy once full; handles also had to be firmly luted on and be substantial and open enough in design to be comfortable. Yet she did not subscribe to the modernist mantra of form following function, arguing that 'for every use and for every production process, there are innumerable equally attractive solutions'. Zeisel liked to describe herself as a 'modernist with a small m'. She found Modernism too patronising and didactic in its narrow definitions of 'good design', which she believed limited variety and choice. For Zeisel, Modernism and its products offered neither 'amusement nor beauty' and failed to establish emotional connections between the object and user. Thus, unlike other teachers at the time, Zeisel stood apart in her emphasis on the importance of designing forms that expressed emotion. For her it was critically important that functional wares offered the user pleasure and delight. Ultimately, all of Eva Zeisel successes were guided by the very simple yet fundamental truth that, as she put it, 'beautiful things make people happy'.

'Ladies didn't pot when I started', she said, 'but my mother let me do it anyway.' She became the first woman to be trained through the Guild of Chimney Sweeps, Oven Makers, Roof Tilers, Well Diggers and Potters. She learnt all the aspects of potting, from the refining of the raw clay, to the hand building and throwing of pots, to the glazing, drying and firing of them.'

——— AMANDA DUNSMORE

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(pp. 80–1) Eva Zeisel. Photo: TalismanPHOTO
(p. 82) **Eva Zeisel** (designer), **Schramberger Majolikafabrik, Schramberg** (manufacturer) *Gobelin 8, tea service* c. 1929. Purchased with funds donated by Merv Keehn and Sue Harlow, 2017

Gooey Images and Glossy Nihilism

By Maggie Finch

Authenticity of Emotions

In 2009 Darren Sylvester took a research field trip to Beijing World Park. Containing over 100 recon-structions of landmarks from around the world, the theme park, set within cultivated gardens and divided by 'oceans', is a space of condensed architecture, space, history and time. Visitors to the Park can traverse over forty countries, via architectural replicas, and essentially 'see the world' in a single day.

The 2004 film *The World*, directed by Jia Zhangke, was set almost entirely within the Beijing World Park.[1] In one scene, a security guard is seen taking some men around the Park: he stops to point out the 'Manhattan' across the water, and its reproduction of the famed skyline, telling them, 'America has lost her twin towers, but we still have ours'. The men murmur and laugh, gently. He continues to point out several other nearby 'sights' – the Eiffel Tower, London's Big Ben, Notre Dame de Paris. However, the camera remains fixed ahead; it does not pan to reveal them. As the men talk and share a cigarette, the scene of the constructed New York frames their banter. It is the presence of the scaled-down towers that grabs your attention and holds it fast – a curious, tormenting and absurd simulacrum.

Sylvester was particularly keen to visit this version of Manhattan after seeing this evocation in *The World*. He wanted to test his own response to seeing the towers, as a question of authenticity. Would his experience feel as though it was a trip back in time and space, to a pre-9/11 Big Apple, even with knowledge of its simulation? Would the known trickery of the Park still allow for an emotional reaction beyond mere recognition of the attempted verisimilitude of the site?

The answers varied. The inescapable visual recall of the fate of the real towers precipitated a genuine sense of 'sad reflection' for Sylvester when standing in front of their Chinese duplicates, leading him to conclude that 'in certain circumstances, an object's veracity did not matter if there was a strong emotional response in the viewer'.[2] However, his feelings towards the Park's set of towers was also predicated on not having ever seen the originals – he'd seen them in countless movies, TV shows and news reports, of course, but never 'in the flesh'. The sites he actually knew (such as the Sydney Opera House) were less evocative, his memory of the originals overwhelming the illusion of the replicas.

Sylvester also recalled a strange redemption of the otherwise under-whelming experiences of seeing certain sites at the Park that occurred through the process of photographing them, and looking at those images when home. The reduction onto film, of a replica of a three-dimensional structure, back to a two-dimensional photographic record, was more satisfying to him, in terms of evoking 'the real thing', than the physical experience of visiting the fake versions.[3]

This process – of questioning the authenticity of emotions, dreams and desires, invoked by something in the real world, which are filtered back through re-creation or replication – is at the heart of all that Darren Sylvester does.

Gooey Images

Darren Sylvester is an image-maker. Everything he creates is the result of a detailed process of planning and research before construction. His works are handmade, and take time. They often involve the building of sets in a studio, smoke and mirrors, and the employment of friends or models as actors. Sylvester's practice is controlled, multidisciplinary, autodidactic and constantly evolving. It represents a detailed knowledge of and interest in, and possible reappraisal of, consum-er-ism today, and responds to the relationships that exist with marketing, advertising, cinema, popular music, fashion and, perhaps most significantly, each other.

Hopes and dreams, middle-class conundrums, the tedium and banality of work, loss and longing, love and romance, fear of death – these are subjects that appear time and time again in Sylvester's so-called 'modern-day fabrications'. Aspects of his work appropriate well-known products as 'readymades', as a way of looking at the ways we live with – and are shaped by – branding. Like multiple open tabs in a web browser, which is Sylvester's set-up for conducting research at his computer each day, his work draws on a multitude of sources, and is built upon a highly organised and sequential set of references and information, from one iconic moment in pop culture to its concealed origin; from one broken relationship to its promise of new love.

From around 1998 to 2009, Sylvester primarily produced narrative-based studio photography, as well as occa-sional installation and video work. Since that time, his work has expanded into a wide range of media, including sculpture and the production of music albums, and has moved beyond personal narratives to include re-crea-tions or simulations of real-world events. Photography, however, remains a constant in his practice. Sylvester explains the process for his earlier photographic tableaux, the self-de-scribed 'encased miniature dramas' that tended to explore issues of emotions and relationships, conformity and individuality, which originated with written texts and culminated with studio set-ups:

> Early photographs came through writing short fictional, autobio-graphical stories, usually no more than 500 words, less than a page and never edited, just written and saved quickly. The key of them was to try and provoke some kind of line that could be interesting for a working title.
>
> Once I found a line that was mysteri-ous and interesting to me I looked for, or imagined, an image that could sit along-side. The image and title didn't necessarily go together, they just had to click for me, and the idea was to create an experience of vision and word that created something dif-ferent from, say, documentary photography.
>
> Once an image was decided upon I would, by myself or with assistants and friends, build a set in studio. I'd always call them 'B-grade sets' as it's bits of wood propped up, cardboard, paint, liquid nails, recycled things from earlier shoots and op-shop finds put together quickly, and then to create a mood lots of lights are used to light the set. Each photo-graph is lit with around ten to twenty light sources with different coloured gels and then a touch of smoke machine, which gels it all together. I don't care for technical colour temperature as some lights are daylight temperature, some are tungsten and some fluorescent, creating a mix in the studio.[4]

Sylvester is also consistent in his use of positive film to produce his lush, saturated photographs. The scale of the transparencies imposes a consistent set of parameters and scale for his prints:

> I've always shot on film, except once, and in that case I didn't like the look of digital, it was too clean and detailed. When I build these 'B-grade sets' the digital cameras bring out the faults too easily; they don't act as 'gooey' as film, so I went straight back.[5]

The construction of sets, and Sylvester's specific directorial role, places an extra intensity on the 'actors' within the melodramas:

As everything is built in studio to fit the camera frame, everything stays in the same place and I'm just shooting the same photo over and over, with the only changes being the expression in the actor's face or slight lighting changes.

Then because of this repetition some-thing strange happens: with the actors being forced to do the same expression for around an hour it means these posed fig-ures often look unnatu-ral. It's not a fashion shoot where there is variety and movement; this is about being posed and staying still, like smiling for an hour, for instance. They become as still as the set around them, act-ing out the same expression. This combined with scenes often surrounded by brands and products creates an off-kilter advertising style where everything is brightly lit and there is this saturated fantasy, but also a sense of disappointment and emptiness.[6]

This strange stillness permeates the photograph of the three girls sharing a meal of KFC and Pepsi in *If all we have is each other, that's ok*, 2003, a celebrated early image, generously funded by Loti Smorgon for Contemporary Australian Photography. At first glance, the photograph could have been snapped at a local suburban branch, catching the girls mid-gossip, hanging out together during the after-school rush. But weird details emerge: the blush that rises in the cheeks of the girl at the left; the 'coldness' of the food, which looks to have been sitting there so long that the warmth and steam has dissipated; the perfectly even lighting; the glances between the girls, which have a seemingly genuine affection but which are tinged with tiredness and despera-tion. The scene also seems unlikely to be able to live up to the epic sentiment of the title – the beautiful intimacy otherwise alluded to seems doomed to fail – we know that, almost inevitably, with the passing of time, the girls will drift apart. The uncanny atmosphere of the photograph comes from the duration of the shoot (Sylvester took around sixty photos during the session), and his directions to the girls, which involved asking them 'to be happy all the time, and then be even happier'.[7] The attempt to recreate the experience of having fun with friends, and the inevitably fleeting feeling that, at least in that moment, everything is OK, results in a strange verisimilitude common to Sylvester's photographs.

Performative fiction, and the directorial role, has a long legacy in photography.8 The French photographer Hippolyte *Bayard's Le Noyé (Self-portrait as a drowned man)*, 1840 (Société française de photographie, Paris), is an amazing example from the early years of photography – a staged portrait of Bayard himself, playing the role of a disconsolate inventor forced to commit an anonymous suicide.9 With his body propped up amid the studio tableau, the image of his fake, self-induced death

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—— MAGGIE FINCH

challenged the belief that a photograph was not a construction, and that it could not lie. This tradition has endured – from the tableaux vivants of Julia Margaret Cameron in the 1860s and 1870s, to Cindy Sherman's fictional film stills and Jeff Wall's constructed 'dioramas' from the 1970s, and Amalia Ulman's staged Instagram project in the 2010s.

In the vein of the Bayard self-portrait is Sylvester's *Your first love is your last love*, 2005, the similarly disconsolate and constructed portrait of the teenage boy sitting at a table in a suburban, middle-class lounge room amid the detritus of a Subway meal, digesting both the fast food and the contents of the handwritten letter that he holds. The empty wrappers and fatalistic title universalise his experience – those intense feelings of desperation and longing all mixed in with the temporary satisfaction sold to us by the quick-fix meal.

Or there is the young woman in *Just death is true*, 2006, who balances a phone handset to her ear, all the while careful not to disturb her cosmetic face mask, those common home treatments aimed at prolonging youth and beauty. She calmly listens to a conversation that we will never be privy to, but imagine that we are.

That photographs such as these originated from a short story that was reduced to one line, or some key words, and an accompanying image that somehow related to the sentiment of the words, demonstrates the crucial relationship between text and images that exists across much of Sylvester's work.[10] They often evoke a narrative and create quietly suspenseful imagery, into which the viewer can insert their own preface, and predict a conclusion.[11] Some of Sylvester's earliest works, such as *One day will be our last day together*, 1998, overlaid the words across the photograph itself. Soon after, those words came to exist just as the accompanying title – distinctive, descriptive captions which curator Natasha Bullock has said 'lend universality to personal experiences by transforming the particular into metaphysical statements, sometimes truisms, about life and living'.[12] The titles speak to an imagined audience that seeks emotional guidance, and remain crucial to understanding Sylvester's works:

> The titles were always designed to be all-inclusive/populist, like a pop song in the sense names are rarely used and instead it's only I, Me, You, Us, They. For example a love song is how 'You' and 'I' become 'Us' by the end and a sad song asks how the 'Us' became 'You', 'Me' and 'I'. Also by using this rule with titles it makes it personal however keeps it general, creating an aphoristic feel-ing around the title.[13]

The connection to the format of a song – its ability to take you on a short-lived but intense emotional journey – is an overt reference for Sylvester. And like the best pop, which can be immediately felt and understood, his work is simultaneously simple and complex and seeks out deep emotional responses:

> I want the work to act like a pop song. The meaning should be simple and universal. It should be about an emotional life common to everyone. It could bring back memories, make you think again, re-evaluate where you are. I try and make it true and be obvious, much like a Carpenters song that, on the right occasion, breaks your heart.[14]

Corporate Synergy

Since 2003, consumer items, including brands, logos and technologies, have appeared consistently in Sylvester's work – as products used within sets, or as influences in the concept or construction of a work. Computer mice are cast in bronze in *Dead mice*, 2005; soft-drink cups and takeaway containers appear alongside dejected characters in works such as *My baby message me*, 2006 and *Don't call it love if they don't love you*, 2006 (pp. 18–19). *In Don't substitute a life to satisfy mine*, 200, a box of Cheerios cereal balances on the lap of a young woman, almost like an intermediary character in the midst of the intense dynamic playing out; the colour palette for a make-up line by Clinique was used as the perfectly pre-mixed colours of the painting *I care for you*, 2007.[15]

In the performative video work *If I only do one good thing in life, this is it*, 2006, filmed at the Ikea store in Richmond, Victoria, Sylvester dons an Ikea sales outfit and is seen purchasing soft-serve ice creams from the kiosk behind the checkout, handing them out to customers once they make their purchases.[16] The aim was to create a mutual act of kindness, in a sense a 'corporate synergy'. *What happens will happen*, 2010, is a series of large-scale portraits of teenage actors whose earnest faces are painted with various slogans and logos – designs which were taken from documentation of real events and transformed into these stylised studio fabrications of protest. Sylvester's teenagers present what he describes as a 'skewed idea of wanting to be politically involved yet self-consciously desiring to be cool and socially influenced at the same time'.[17] Recently, Sylvester has released several limited-edition works that compound the idea of art and commercial product: plush towels embroidered with texts taken from his script for the sit-com-length video, *Me*, 2013, co-written with Anthony Carew, and clear plastic and leather handbags printed with floating American $100 bills – literal money bags.

Sylvester explains the use of branding very frankly, as a matter-of-fact reality of contemporary life in Western society:

> The first time I used brands was in 2003 with *If all we have is each other, that's OK* and the next was actually another art work shot the same day, *Philip and Morris*, where two men smoke cigarettes at a kitchen table. These came about through writing the short stories to create titles and often the stories contained brands or products and then when taking photos I'd end up not including them because it seemed crass, or too much like advertising. However, it seemed unnatural as brands and products are inescapable in life, they're around me as I sit here. I can see brands in my line of sight right now – Fuji, Xerox, Sennheiser, Mac, Yamaha. So I began including them.[18]

A common analysis of Sylvester's use of brands since early in his practice is that it is a critique of consumerism, consumption and advertising.19 The recurring compositional tropes in Sylvester's works, and the seductive tension they emit, certainly seem to play with traditions of advertising photography – consider academic David Bate's analysis of such commercial imagery:

> Objects do not fulfil desire, they only temporarily subjugate it. Successful advertising understands this domain of social fantasy. Clever advertising knows how to occupy the empty space in individuals with the dis-course of a product and how to tap into, even exploit, personal, moral and social anxieties – all the concerns that already circulate in any culture and between individuals.[20]

Or, consider art critic and academic Rosalind Krauss's astute reading of Irving Penn's photographic advertisements for Clinique. She sees them as playing a dual role that is pseudo-documentary and fuel for dreams, with the images

> posing as pictures of reality, marked by a straightforwardness that proclaims the sup-posed objectivity of the image. But they are, instead, the reality that is being projected by an advertising company, by a given product's imperative to instill certain desires, certain notions of need, in the potential consumer.[21]

While Sylvester is undoubtedly interested in the construction of a polished vision of reality, he maintains that his work is neither ironic nor a critique of consumerism. In his view, it is about taking and using things from his everyday reality – the work is a non-reversing mirror, of sorts.

> We buy things, we want things and we're influenced by things. I can't believe there's not more brands and products in art work … The brands in my practice have a two-way conversation between work and viewer, of identification and recognition, and so I felt to make this work generally the brands in my work are all well known to the largest group of viewers.[22]

There is a tension evident in his practice though: as he says, 'the works often look more like post-advertising. It's about what happens when you buy something and nothing changes'.[23] He is interested in those moments between the promises made and the delivery by universal multinationals.

Academic Daniel Palmer has written that while 'not exactly a "critique of consumerism"', Sylvester's 'depictions of a wholly self-absorbed social class remain an implicit critique', and his 'uneasy combination of advertis-ing-style imagery and Pop existential-ism is an outcome of the culture of individualised intimacy under neolib-eral capitalism'. [24]

Sylvester's photographic technique certainly has the appearance of still-life advertising photography, and brings to mind Rosalind Krauss's notion of the camera as a 'projective tool'.[25] It confuses the parameters of documentary photography, and instead might be seen as 'more real' than real. His work attempts to be honest and realistic about our desires, in the midst of the implicit (but, in Sylvester's eyes, not necessarily insidious) effect of consumerist trends.

While cognisant of the disappointment that exists (between promises and reality), Sylvester's sincere fictions are observational: they present an image of how, in contemporary urban life, we are steeped in materials associated with branding and consumerist dreams, and of how they do not exist entirely outside of us, but are intertwined with our lives and embedded in our psyches. But, equally, those ideas are not totalising; beyond that experience, the characters in his works (and therefore, us) continue to dream of more than just products. They, and we, desire love and intimacy. And Sylvester's insistence on making these scenes by hand inevitably allows the individual back into the otherwise strangely homogenised experiences. These aspects within Sylvester's work – the recognition of branding saturation; the yearning revealed *through* products; the constant desire for more; the handmade – afford a sustained tension and irreducible ambiguity.

Glossy Nihilism

The use of readymades and brands, and the high-end aesthetic 'polish' that Sylvester aims for in all of his work, naturally aligns his practice to the sensibilities and legacies of Pop Art. Two direct influences that Sylvester cites are Jeff Koons, particularly his reproduction of everyday and advertising objects, through the employment of high-end craftsmanship to create seamless finishes; and Tom Sachs, who uses sculpture and bricolage to synthesise icons and brands from popular cul-ture. In the vein of this hand-sculpted pop, it was a natural progression for Sylvester to introduce sculpture and installation works into his practice from the mid 2000s onwards and, eventually, to pursue music.

In typically autodidactic style, in 2008 Sylvester wrote, performed and produced an album of pop songs. The eponymous release was created over a four-month period, in which the artist purchased musical instruments and recording equipment, and taught himself to sing, play guitar and drums, record and mix.26 The album followed his visual art aesthetic, being a heavily layered production that was at once nostalgic, romantic, emotional and droll. A second album, *Off by Heart*, was released in 2013, and *Touch a Tombstone* in 2018. This most recent production is studded with soaring saxophone solos, heavy Moog and layered synths, and filled with songs relating to the loss of work, job security and anxiety about love. Sylvester has spoken of the relationship of his albums (and their

accompanying graphics and album design) to the creation of his sculptural works or photographic sets – each must be built from scratch in the studio, layered up and etched back. He loves the all-encompassing process spanning conception to construction that is required to create pop albums, or pop art for that matter – with the understanding that 'at the end of this, it's going to be a product'.[27]

Beyond pop, Sylvester has spoken of desiring an atmosphere of 'glossy nihilism' in his work. The phrase originated during the exhibition planning for this show; Sylvester explains:

> I mentioned nihilism because most people pictured in a photograph are either looking for meaning in life and can't find it or are alone with what they've got, like branded products, which ultimately rings hollow … Combining this idea of nihilism with glossy is probably because the photographic imag-ery is never sugar-coated with movement or atmosphere. There's no hiding in shadows, just clarity, accuracy and a hardness which is then carried over into sculpture – being polished bronzes or high-end fabrications. The truth is often cold so the works should give this too.[28]

It is a searing description of the pressing existential feelings around the often-desperate pursuit and heartache of love, and impending death, that exist throughout his visual art and music – all wrapped up neatly within a lustrous, high-end package. The duration of Sylvester's practice corresponds with the new social order that has emerged at the end of the twentieth century, particularly the introduction and rise of personal computers, the internet and social media, and simultaneous fears about its infiltration and the rise of 'networked individualism'. Like a reincarnation of the 'fashionable despair' and decadence of fin-de-siècle aesthetic concerns, Sylvester's tableau photographs, with their predetermined technical parameters which result in an intense 'stillness', can be seen as constructions of dreams and social conditions that are impossible to attain but, despite the alienating effects of the contemporary social experience, are still organised around a sense of shared utopian belief.

An extraordinary example of Sylvester's decadent atmospheres was the dancefloor installation *For You*, 2013, a commission for the *Melbourne Now* exhibition at the NGV. A corridor lined with highly reflective gold panelling led visitors into a darkened room pulsating with a 1970s disco-style floor of illuminated panels. The panels were colour-matched to the Yves Saint Laurent eye, lipstick and foundation ranges of the season, and were carefully programmed by the artist to flash in varying formal configurations (squares of blushes, rectangles of eyeshadows, and so on), to the beat of the soundtrack composed especially for the work.[29] The surrounding walls and faux ceiling were also highly reflective, and acted as a mirror. Usually carried in a purse or handbag, and designed for portable luxury, this make-up compact was different: visitors found themselves confronted with an 'inhabitable' luxury. The artist's intention was entirely sincere – everything about the space was conceived to make the audience want to participate and to feel good – it was, literally, 'for you'.

Saturated Fantasies

Art historian Antje Krause-Wahl has written that magazines

> do not get read as if they were books, instead they are viewed by restless glances that flit from one page to the next. This form of reception is one which in his *Arcades Project* Walter Benjamin attributes specifically to consumers. The French etymology of the word 'magazine' highlights the links between the store [*magasin*] and the magazine.[30]

When reviewing Darren Sylvester's work from 1998 to today, I was reflecting on the ways in which his practice exists as a *gesamtkunstwerk* of designed images and objects which have an intense visual or aural presence, and can be read like a magazine – as a space of fantasy and constructed dreams that you can enter at your own pace.[31] Sylvester's work produces saturated atmospheres that are immedi-ate and immersive. Their connection to popular culture and branding means they have a visual legibility that is immediately relatable. They are sentimental and inexact – and the line between reality and fiction is always intentionally illusory.

With its haunting and ambiguous re-creations, self-absorbed and cool cast of characters, high production values, and constant interrogation into questions of the authenticity of emotion, Sylvester's work acts as a reflection of life, and also, always, a portal into something else, something more.

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(pp. 84–5) **Darren Sylvester** *If all we have is each other, that's ok* 2003; dated 2004; printed 2004. Purchased through funds arranged by Loti Smorgon for Contemporary Australian Photography, 2004 © Darren Sylvester
(right) **Darren Sylvester** *What happens will happen #3* 2010. Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2015 © Darren Sylvester

‘Some Piece of Beauty’: The work of Agnes Goodsir

By Dr Angela Hesson

Rachel Dunn was an exceptionally good model. Expressive and versatile, she embodied and entwined the roles of ‘new woman’, androgyne, flapper and femme fatale. Her eyes, the focus of many portraits, were remarked upon for their intensity, and their particular shade of blue, either icy or enticing, according to interpretation. The ‘secret’, if there was such a thing, to Dunn’s compelling on-canvas presence lay, perhaps, in the fact that she wasn’t a professional model at all – she was Agnes Goodsir’s partner of more than twenty years – her confidante, lover and muse, and the inspiration for the artist’s greatest work.

Unlike many artists of her generation who offered subtle suggestions and ciphers, Agnes Goodsir put her queerness in plain sight. Dunn, or ‘Cherry’ as she was known to Goodsir and their circle, was a constant presence in the artist’s work. Reading, smoking, taking tea, or at ease in her nightgown or striped pyjamas, Dunn’s image is marked at once by a sense of sensual intimacy and of domesticity, even cosiness. Yet Goodsir’s Australian critics, entrenched as they were in conventional assumptions around recognisable markers of ‘deviance’, were seemingly blind to what was before them. ‘Her work is beautifully sane’, wrote the critic for *The Australasian,*

> and effects achieved with the simplicity that only spiritual insight and masterly technique can supply. There are many feminine studies in the collection … forming a galaxy of beautiful, and even more beautiful women, doing feminine things – taking morning tea, posing before a mirror, reading, wearing blue hats or Chinese shawls, or being prettily emblematic of “Summer”. Strangely enough, nearly all these young people are decidedly pensive.[1]

The mention of sanity is significant not only because allegations of insanity were commonly levelled against abstract artists in this period (and it is likely within this discourse that the comment is intended), but also because insanity was the dominant framework within which same-sex female desire was understood among conservative commentators.[2] The unwitting irony of the latter point is considerable, given that the ‘galaxy’ to which the above critic enthusiastically refers was in fact a veritable pantheon of Sapphic modernism, legible in the context of the remarkable flourishing of queer culture in Paris in the interwar years. The pensiveness, too, is present, but more nuanced than the writer perhaps understands. Goodsir’s subjects are knowing, her works characterised by a compelling mingling of surface decoration and underlying meaning.

Agnes Goodsir was born in Portland, Victoria in 1864. She was one of eleven children born to Elizabeth Archer (nee Tomlins) and David James Cook Goodsir, Commissioner of Customs. The family was comfort-ably middle class, with the means to educate their children and the inclination, uncommon at the time, to provide their daughters with the same opportunities as their sons. Drawn to painting from a young age, Goodsir received an initial education in the arts from Arthur T. Woodward at the Bendigo School of Mines and Industries. From the outset, Goodsir was praised for her composition and technique, and her proficiency in oils. She produced a large number of still lifes and interiors; however, her area of greatest interest, and that which was to attract the highest accolades, was portraiture. Woodward, like most art teachers of his generation, believed that a period of European study was essential in the development of any aspirant artist and so, following his advice, Goodsir planned her departure. In 1899 several of her works were raffled in Bendigo to partially finance her study in Europe.

She was thirty-six and already an accomplished painter when she ventured to Paris for the first time. There, she attended the Académie Delécluse, the Académie Julian, the Académie Colarossi and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. The Australian press subsequently reported with pride on her European successes:

> [F]rom the outset, when she studied in the class of Julian, her outstanding ability was recognised, and she won silver medals for portraits and nudes before her student days were over. In 1922 she had four pictures accepted at the Paris Salon, and in 1923 three of her works were hung on the line, one of them being chosen for reproduction in the Salon catalogue. In London her pictures have been hung many times at the Royal Academy and other exhibitions, and she has painted portraits of many famous men and women.[3]

As her reputation grew, so too did the standing of her sitters. They included Leo Tolstoy, Ellen Terry, A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson, Bertrand Russell, Dame Eadith Walker, Katharine Goodson, Countess Pinci and Italian leader Benito Mussolini (whose portrait is lost). From 1912, Goodsir moved back and forth between Paris and London, where she exhib-ited at the Royal Academy and the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours, and advanced her reputation as a successful society portraitist.

It was during her time in London that she became friends with Bernard Roelvink and his American wife Rachel. The two women shared a love of art and music, and friendship soon developed into love. Rachel subsequently divorced Roelvink and her name reverted to Mrs Rachel Dunn, with the nickname ‘Cherry’ used among friends. The precise circumstances surrounding the end of Cherry’s marriage are not docu-mented; however, the split was seemingly an amicable one – a portrait of Cherry by Goodsir was later given to Bernard Roelvink as a memento.4 Cherry swiftly became Goodsir’s companion, lover and the prevailing subject of later works. By 1910, the two were entertaining (and probably living) together in London. A report in *The Australasian* noted that ‘Miss Agnes Noyes Goodsir, with Miss Rachel Dunn, a well-known pianist, gave an at home last Sunday evening, at her studio, in St John’s Wood’.[5] It was around this time that Goodsir began to specialise in portraits d’intérieurs, a style popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which female sitters were depicted at leisure in richly furnished interiors.[6] Cherry was the subject of many of these luxuriant, evocative compositions.

After several years together, the couple moved permanently to Paris in 1921, and settled at 18 rue de l’Odéon in the Latin Quarter. In addition to the city’s obvious artistic attractions, Paris in the 1920s was a place of freedom and possibility for lesbian and bisexual women. Back in London, queer artists and writers were still subject to widespread condemnation and oppressive censorship laws. In the year that Goodsir and Dunn moved to Paris, the British Lord high chancellor and Earl of Birkenhead opposed a bill that would have criminalised lesbianism on the grounds that such a bill might, in effect, give innocent women unwholesome ideas: ‘[O]f every thousand women’, he declared, ‘999 have never even heard a whisper of these practices’.[7] In 1928, Radclyffe Hall’s seminal lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* spurred widespread moral outrage and provoked an extraordinary proclamation from James Douglas, editor of the *Sunday Express*: ‘I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel. Poison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul’. The novel was subsequently banned in England.[8] Paris, by contrast, offered opportunities for publication, performance, and exhibition of queer works, as well as a thriving community of artists and intellectuals.

In Paris, Goodsir and Dunn counted many of the period’s most celebrated

and notorious women among their neighbours. Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier, who each ran bookshops in rue de l'Odéon – Shakespeare and Company and La Maison des Amis des Livres, respectively – cohabited happily until Monnier's death in 1955. Gertrude Stein, the writer, art collector and patron, and her life partner, Alice B. Toklas, lived in the Rue de Fleurus, just off the Luxembourg Gardens. Natalie Clifford Barney, with her catalogue of lovers including the poet Renée Vivien and painter Romaine Brooks, held her salon at 20 rue Jacob in the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Cherry and Agnes frequented many of the cafes and bistros that were the hubs of bohemian and intellectual life, and their circles included other celebrated expatriate artists and writers including Pablo Picasso, James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway.

Goodsir's reputation grew swiftly in Paris. Her work was exhibited at the New Salon, the Salon des Indépendants, and the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts. In 1926 she was the third Australian to be elected to the Salon des Beaux Arts (after Rupert Bunny and Bessie Davidson), assuring her place among the significant catalogue of Australian artists who effectively 'came of age' in Europe. The years following the First World War had seen a large-scale European exodus of Australian artists, all committed to participating in the extraordinary artistic and intellectual mixing pot that was modernist Paris. Painters, including Stella Bowen and Max Meldrum (both of whom Goodsir encountered), were drawn there by the dual appeal of traditional academic training and Left Bank bohemianism. Others, like Margaret Preston and Grace Crowley, were influenced by emergent developments in abstraction and subsequently brought these influences back with them when they returned to Australia. Like her compatriots, Goodsir was certainly abreast of the shifting directions of modern art – a 1927 interview reported:

> The foremost Parisian artist of to-day, continued Miss Goodsir, was a Spaniard named Picasso, who had begun as a cubist, but had broken away from the impressionistic school, which only painted the surface of its subject without delving into the meaning beneath.[9]

Yet tellingly, this stylistic radicalism left no marks upon Goodsir's own painting. For all that her subject matter was, to a knowing viewer, both subversive and modern, Goodsir's artistic vocabulary was never that of the outsider. Goodsir's portrayal of her unconventional relationship in such comparatively conventional painterly language was, in and of itself, both innovative and subtly dissonant. Her works were pretty. They were marketable. They could slip unobtrusively into a bourgeois interior, the inhabitants of which might be entirely unaware of the stories contained within them.

The letter, painted in 1926, was characteristically devoid of abstract tendencies. Cherry's costume was delicate, traditional, the black lace shawl suggestive of feminine mourning rituals. The backdrop of delicate harmonious pastels offers a further note of softness. Cherry's pale blue eyes, which seem to borrow their shade from the Chinese side, porcelain vase at her are the only surprising note. The title is evocative, too, reminiscent of sentimental Victorian genre painting with its feminine cast of widows, martyrs and wronged lovers. The work is in many ways emblematic of Goodsir's uniquely nuanced, decorative brand of Sapphism, clearly legible to those in her own circle, but apparently indecipherable to conservative critics who might have seen more emphatically queer work censored.

In 1927, *The letter* was included in Goodsir's highly publicised Australian exhibition tour. Following a lengthy voyage to Australia, she exhibited at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney and the Fine Art Society's Gallery in Melbourne. Critics singled out the portrait for praise: '"The Letter", a portrait of a lady in black, with equally dark headdress, is another admirable painting; here again there is plenty of character and definite purpose'.[10] Another noted: '[O]ne of the best works in the exhibitions is The Letter, a portrait study of a lady draped in black lace, treated with a refined simplicity and a well-balanced consideration of tone'.[11]

The irony in much of Goodsir's positive critical reception was that several of her Australian critics praised primarily her perceived traditionalism. 'Her work has dignity and sincerity of purpose', wrote Dorothy Paul for *The Daily Mail*. 'Her pictures display modern methods of technique, without following any of the extreme modernist schools.' Even implicitly Sapphic content was either naively or wilfully overlooked; the same article noted: '"Early Morning Tea" is another charming study … the green of a bead necklace makes a fine colour note against the softly-tinted bedclothes and flesh'.[12]

Where markers of a less conventional femininity were present, as in *The Parisienne*, c.1924 or A type of the *Latin Quarter*, c.1926, (private collection), both of which featured Cherry in masculine attire with closely cropped hair, they did not elicit comment – dismissed perhaps as indicators of general modernity or cosmopolitanism, rather than of any more specific and worrisome sexual identity.

Goodsir, for her part, was outspokenly dismissive of Australian critical opinion where art was concerned: 'I don't know how Australians will like my work … or whether they will like it at all. It's entirely French, you see'.[13] That she saw Frenchness and Australianness as inherently incompatible is telling; her prolonged absence from Australia is readily framed within the context of the conservative attitudes of a country that her contemporary Stella Bowen once titled a 'queer little backwater of intellectual timidity'.[14]

Goodsir's adoption of French identity was seemingly both aesthetic and philosophical:

> My work is of the modern French school … and it may not be liked here. The new note is one of light, and it demonstrates the effects which can be gained by it as opposed to the more

Agnes Goodsir *The letter* 1926. Bequest of the artist, 1947

Agnes Goodsir *(Woman reading)* c. 1915.
Presented through the NGV Foundation by John and Suzanne Playfoot, Governor, 2001

> sombre tones of the old masters. The modern French art is altogether different from impressionism for it seeks to portray more than a passing phase. There is a real depth behind it, and the hope to enshrine some piece of beauty … forever.[15]

Goodsir died in Paris in 1939. She was buried at the Cimetière parisien de Bagneux, and when Cherry died in 1950 she was buried at Agnes's side. Cherry is the primary reason that Australian audiences are afforded the opportunity to appreciate Goodsir's work at all. The sole beneficiary of Goodsir's estate and evidently aware of the associated responsibility of assuring her partner's legacy, she made the decision to send many works back to Australian galleries, as well as to Goodsir's family in Australia. Acknowledging the paintings' potentially sensitive nature at a dangerous time in Europe, she instructed the recipients 'have them stored until things change and they can be exhibited … or to people who will love them, they could be given'.[16]

Yet sadly, after the brief accolades of her 1927 tour, Goodsir received little recognition in her homeland. Despite Cherry's best efforts, she was largely forgotten after her death, mentioned only occasionally and perfunctorily in catalogues of Australian women artists.[17] The revival of interest in Goodsir in the late 1990s is largely attributable to the work of Karen Quinlan, (then curator at Bendigo Art Gallery, now Director at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra) who became fascinated with the artist following a meeting with a member of Goodsir's family.

In preparing the first Goodsir retrospective, Quinlan travelled to Paris to further her research, visiting Goodsir and Cherry's former apartment at 18 rue de l'Odéon, and making a pilgrimage to their shared grave. Upon her return, Quinlan curated *In a Picture Land Over the Sea* (1998) at the Bendigo Art Gallery, the most complete exhibition of Goodsir's work to date, which effectively introduced the then little-known painter to a contemporary audience. The gallery also initiated the Agnes Goodsir Travelling Scholarship, which provides funding for Australian artists to travel to Paris for a three-month period, thereby emulating Goodsir's own creative journey.

With their beguiling fusion of technical proficiency, imagination and sensitivity, Goodsir's paintings reflect the discipline of the artist's education, and the richness of her emotional life. Her kaleidoscopic queerness is at once exquisite and ordinary – it resists tendencies of 'othering' as surely as it celebrates the enduring love between the artist and her muse. It is the queerness of leisurely weekend breakfasts and evenings spent reading in each other's company, of shared ideas and shared time. When the artist spoke of her desire to 'enshrine some piece of beauty', she anticipated with considerable astuteness the effect of her legacy: Goodsir's portraits of Cherry exist both as documents of an extraordinary place and time, and as relics of a love affair as splendid as it was profound.

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Keith Haring *Untitled* 1984. Presented by the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, Victoria, 2017
© Keith Haring Foundation

Kool and Blak

By Myles Russell-Cook

In 1947, Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz Fernández coined the term 'transculturation' to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures.[1] Transculturation encompasses more than transition from one culture to another; it does not consist merely of acquiring another culture or losing or uprooting a previous culture. Rather, it combines these concepts and includes the idea of the consequent creation of new, hybridised forms of culture. When cultures collide, some things survive, some things are lost and some new things are created. But unlike the collision of cultures that followed Lieutenant James Cook's landing at Botany Bay, Australia, which devastated Aboriginal ways of being, transcultural interactions are not inherently colonial and destructive.

This essay explores the unexpected connections between the work of Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat in 1980s New York and the art of some contemporary Australian and Aboriginal artists. At first glance, Aboriginal Australia and the art being produced in New York City in the 1980s appear to be entirely unrelated – situated in separate hemispheres and emerging from different cultures and histories. However, New York street art and contemporary Aboriginal art are both firmly part of today's art world, but also maintain strong links to ceremonies, performances and experiences that originate outside the art world and which, historically, have gone unrecognised or been known only to a few.

The first Aboriginal artists to gain recognition by the contemporary art world and market, from 1971 to 1972, were a group of senior Anmatyerre, Pintupi, Warlpiri, and Luritja men working at Papunya in the Western Desert. These artists took designs and motifs that were ephemeral – painted onto bodies, objects and the ground – and rendered them permanent (and saleable) on composition board. The radical act of transferring restricted ceremonial designs onto composition board sparked a shift in perception; what had previously been con-sidered material culture was now recognised as art.[2] In a similar way, Haring and Basquiat found success within the gallery system by rendering permanent the ephemeral designs and motifs of New York street art and nightlife; specifically, the Black and Queer experience of these. What had previ-ously been considered public vandalism or nightlife entertainment was now recognised as art. Both of these traditions, then, are a way of capturing and making permanent an energy and a rhythm that had previously only existed for a short time, on dilapidated walls or ceremonial ground.

Arguably because of these similarities, there have been a number of instances over recent decades where these two traditions have been explicitly connected. Several art-ists in Australia, for whom their Aboriginality has been a central aspect of their work, have directly engaged with either Haring or Basquiat in their practices, while Haring and Basquiat both engaged with First Nations stories in their work. With this in mind, it is difficult to view the work of Basquiat and Haring and not think about the issue of cultural

appropriation. Communications scholar Richard Rogers broadly defines cul-tural appropriation as ‘the use of a culture’s symbols, artefacts, genres, rituals, or tech-nologies by members of another culture’.3 He goes on to identify four distinct types of cultural appropriation: cultural exchange, cultural dominance, cultural exploitation and transculturation. Each of these catego-ries relates to the nature of power relations between the groups involved.

Moreover, Rogers asserts that not all instances of cultural appropriation are inherently colonial and destructive – in the right circumstances, they can be recipro-cal and productive. Using Rogers’s categories, I contend that the connections between Aboriginal Australian artistic practices and the work of Basquiat and Haring are, on the whole, reciprocal and productive, involving both transculturation and cultural exchange.

Despite a relative lack of reciprocity at the time, the fact that in recent years a number of Indigenous artists have been and continue to be inspired by Haring and Basquiat sug-gests that in the long run there has been an equitable and recipro-cal cultural exchange between these two groups. Furthermore, the particular relationship between Haring and Basquiat and artists such as Gordon Bennett and Reko Rennie is evidence of Aboriginal peoples’ cosmopolitan and international curiosity, and their intrepid exploration of ideas from across cultures.

Keith Haring

In 1969, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acquired from Nelson A. Rockefel-ler one of the largest collections of so-called ‘primitive art’. Haring could not have been unaware of the public attention received by First Nations art in New York in the years after that acquisition. At the same time as the Met was bringing First Nations art to the foreground in an art museum context, Haring was doing a similar thing on the street. It is well known that Haring drew inspiration from a number of First Nations, Black and non-Western artistic practices. His personal library contained numerous reference books on First Nations art, including at least three volumes on Aboriginal art. He was familiar with urban Black and Brown communities through his personal relationships, collabo-rating with several Black and Brown artists, models and dancers, and had a number of Black and Puerto Rican boyfriends.

Haring’s immediately identifiable visual style centres on the human body reduced to a singular, linear shape: flat, graphic

and in many instances so stylised that it is rendered essentially raceless. However, Haring’s choice to colour some figures solidly, and significantly as black, reinforces that his figures, despite being

stylised, are racially charged. Nearly all of Haring’s human figures are depicted in motion, swept up in the ecstasy of dance, surrounded by small dashes of move-ment; the artist imbued them with a vibrating intensity and dynamism. Despite the lack of physical signifiers of race in these stylised elemental figures, the particular dance styles Haring depicted usually honoured urban Black or First Nations traditions. These included breakdancing, which ultimately can be traced back to dance practices in the ancient kingdom of Kongo in Central Africa (present-day Angola / Democratic Republic of the Congo), and the Brazilian dance capoeira, based on a martial art developed by African slaves, which can also be traced back to the Kongo. (For a more detailed analysis of the tribal influences on Haring’s work, see Robert Farris Thompson’s illuminating essay ‘Requiem for the Degas of the B-boys, Keith Haring’.)[4]

In February 1984 Haring made his first and only visit to Australia, travelling to Melbourne/Naarm, the lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri. While in Melbourne, Haring participated in a number of artistic performances and projects in which he collaborated with the radical expressionists of Roar Studios, together with Howard Arkley, Juan Davila, Robert Jacks and others. Roar Studios was one of Melbourne’s earliest artist-run studios, and the participating artists were known for painting in a ‘raw’ and ‘primi-tive’ style. As well as executing a mural in Johnston Street, Collingwood, and painting onto the NGV’s glass facade (known as the Waterwall[5]), Haring restaged one of his iconic New York performances for one of Australia’s largest community events, Melbourne’s Moomba Festival. Run by the City of Melbourne, Moomba takes place over four days and includes several community and sports events, as well as discos and parades.

Haring also produced a poster containing the word ‘Moomba’, which emerged from his interest in the origin of the word. The name ‘Moomba’ was originally suggested to the festival’s white founding committee members by Bill Onus, the Yorta Yorta president of the Aborigines Advancement League.
The founding committee members were told that the word means ‘Let’s get together and have some fun’, when in fact it derives from a south-eastern Aboriginal term for ‘buttocks’.[6] As Margo Neale has pointed out when dis-cussing the Moomba festival in her biography of Lin Onus, ‘encased in the ironies of black humour, a new and surreptitious form of activism is released’.7 Haring’s poster, a car-toon line drawing of three men engaging in anal sex, situated below the word ‘Moomba’, was his way of engaging with a subversive, playful and ironic display of public activism by Melbourne’s Aboriginal people. Haring recognised the

‘Unlike Haring, Basquiat never came to Australia. However, in 1984 he produced a work that fuses references from First Nations cultures across the world. The painting, typical of Basquiat’s style, is a dense mashup of images, words, symbols and gestural daubs of colour. In the top left corner, the words ‘Aboriginal Generative ©’ appear above a drawing of a woman squatting in childbirth.’

——— MYLES RUSSELL-COOK

need to protest in code, and so was able to participate in a very particular form of Melbourne Aboriginal humour.

Haring’s performance at Moomba extends this exploration of the links between his own queer urban New York experience and the Melbourne Aboriginal communities he was engaging with. Footage of the Moomba dance performance is available as part of a 1984 documentary on Haring’s time in Australia called *Babies, Snakes and Barking Dogs: Keith Haring in Australia,* a clip of which is available online.[8] The clip features a number of male performers, one of whom is naked but for a jockstrap and entirely painted in Haring’s designs. He is surrounded by a group of racially ambiguous dancers wearing Haring-designed hats and T-shirts. At the start the announcer says: ‘Up next, rap dancing by Isolation; radio by Kenny Scharf; body jockstrap, hats and T-shirts by Keith Haring’. The raw sexuality of the main dancer is amplified by the ghetto-blaster and rap music.

Haring first encountered this combination of queerness, sexuality and party music, energised by Black and Hispanic beats, at the Paradise Garage club in New York, where people of all sexualities and cultural identities would congregate, brought together by art, love, sex and music. By bringing this New York vibe to the Moomba Festival, Haring staged a kind of contemporary corroboree that resonated with both the queer and Koorie communities. In this way, Haring’s Moomba performance can be interpreted as a way of emphasising what is shared between First Nations – specifically Koorie – communities and queer communities: the belief that art is deeply entwined with everyday life and the environment in which one lives, and that dance and the painted body are important communal forms of expression, ceremony and resistance.

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Like Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat was drawn to the intersection of dance, music, performance and visual art. Basquiat’s iconography, as well as his political stance, was often informed by his Puerto Rican and Haitian heritage. Evident in his work was a fascination with and critique of racism, colonialism and capitalism, and a commitment to social justice. Again, similar to Haring, Basquiat’s personal library reveals some of his sources and reference points. Basquiat’s main source of inspiration was *Gray’s Anatomy*; his mother had given him a copy while he was in hospital at age seven. However, two other important texts for Basquiat’s practice were Burchard Brentjes’s *African Rock Art* (1969) and Robert Farris Thompson’s *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (1984). He is also known to have attended the exhibition *‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, both in 1984 at MoMA and when it travelled to the Dallas Museum of Art in 1985. Reflecting his fascination with First Nations material culture, Basquiat’s work incorporates references to rock art, fertility idols and masks from multiple non-Western traditions.

Unlike Haring, Basquiat never came to Australia. However, in 1984 he produced a work that fuses references from First Nations cultures across the world. The painting, typical of Basquiat’s style, is a dense mashup of images, words, symbols and gestural daubs of colour. In the top left corner, the words ‘Aboriginal Generative ©’ appear above a drawing of a woman squatting in childbirth. The basis of Basquiat’s drawing is an Aztec figurine housed at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington DC. There is nothing to link this image directly with Australia except that in another of Basquiat’s works, *Sienna* 1984, the same drawing of the birthing statue is

juxtaposed with the words ‘kangaroo woman that makes the rain’. Perhaps most interesting, however, is the way in which Basquiat establishes this image of birth and generation as being within a dense web of references to other First Nations cultures. Among his references to advertising, globalisation and capitalism, and schematic bodies reminiscent of rock art and fertility idols, there are a number of words and phrases taken from First Nations ancestral stories. Many indigenous Anishinaabe peoples in what is known today as Canada tell stories about a being called Manibozho, sometimes spelt Nanabozho. Manibozho is referenced three times in Basquiat’s painting, with the text ‘Manibozho’, ‘Great Hare’ and ‘Sun God/Trickster’.[9] The story references the creation of humanity by a shapeshifting sun deity who often takes the form of a hare. Basquiat simplifies and conflates the com-plex stories associated with this ancestral being who has many names, can take on many forms and exists in multiple planes of reality. Above the references to Manibozho/Nanabozho is the phrase ‘The Apple of Sodom’. This refers to a milkweed native to the Dead Sea, which was said to have grown on the site of the destroyed Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. As well as being a symbol of creation emerging from destruction, the Sodom apple is also a symbol of trickery and deception, since it resembles an apple but, when bitten, contains only dry, fibrous seeds.

These pre-colonial figures and references invite us to think about creation emerging from destruction, through the figure of the trickster. The trickster can be found in First Nations cultures across the world. For the people of the Kulin nation in south-east Australia – the Djadja Wurrung, Taungurong, Wathaurong, Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung – creation stories centre on two ancestral figures: Bunjil the Eagle and his brother Waa the Crow. The trickster, which might be Waa the Crow, Reynard the Fox, Manibozho the Great Hare, or more recent iterations such as Brer Rabbit, Bugs Bunny or Doctor Who, is invariably a figure representing the use of cunning, creativity and intellect, often marshalling these fac-ulties against forces with superior physical or brute strength. The figure of the trickster has been taken up by African-American writer Henry Louis Gates Jr, in his concept of ‘Signifyin’. This theory responds to activist and poet Audre Lorde’s powerful statement about the struggle of African Americans living within colonial structures, that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’. Henry Louis Gates Jr invokes Western African Yoruba trickster stories about the ‘signifying monkey’, who fools the lion by using his own words against him, reversing the lion’s status as king of the jungle. Gates uses these trickster stories to argue that the master’s tools *can* dismantle the master’s house when used in a clever, cunning and creative way.

One could argue that this is precisely what Basquiat is himself doing in this painting. Like the shapeshifting trickster god or the Sodom apple, Basquiat is creating something new out of the ruins of history, bringing together fragments of First Nations cultures, symbols of global neo-colonial capitalism, and images of generation and birth to create something new. Basquiat’s sampling, remixing and hybridising of different cultures exemplifies what Ortiz refers to as the transcultural: the new things that arise from the resilience and cleverness manifested by First Nations and colonised peoples in order to subvert and resist colonial structures.

Just as Basquiat referenced First Nations stories in his work, his work has gone on to be referenced in the work of Australian artist Gordon Bennett, who in the late 1990s produced his *Notes to Basquiat* series. Bennett’s provocative paintings highlight the interconnected and globalised experience of the black body under colonialism and capitalism. Bennett’s connection to Basquiat extends beyond this series, with the artist citing several parallels between their lives in a public letter addressed to Basquiat after his death.[10] In this published artist’s statement, Bennett openly celebrated the similarities between his own work and Basquiat’s, and also referenced their shared love for jazz and rap music. In his letter to Basquiat, Bennett described the trans cultural motivations behind his Notes to Basquiat series, saying he intended to ‘highlight the similarities and cross-connections of our shared experience as human beings living in separate worlds that each seek to exclude, objectify and dehumanise the black body and person’. It is also worth noting that during his life Bennett actively resisted his work being characterised within the context of contemporary Aboriginal art. To his mind, Bennett’s work, despite often concentrating on exploring aspects of his Aboriginality, was far more akin to the work of international contemporary artists whose art engaged with, but was not defined by, their race.

Kamilaroi artist Reko Rennie also celebrates the similarities between his work and that of both Haring and Basquiat, employing his own recurring crown motif as a reference to Basquiat, as well as a sign of Aboriginal sovereignty. Rennie has also specifically named Haring as an influence;[11] Rennie’s own roots are in street art. These artists smash the stereotype that Aboriginal art derives only from an artist’s relationship to Country, and reinforces that Aboriginal artists, whether they are working on Country or in city-based studios, have been, and continue to be, some of the greatest agents of radical change in contemporary art.

These connections between cultures are often discussed solely in terms of exploitation, dominance and power differentials. As demonstrated in this essay, however, people from different cultures can connect in productive and reciprocal ways. Identity politics often focuses on the idea that it is impossible to ever know another person’s experience, but through connections like these we are reminded of our shared humanity, and that there are a great many similarities in our experiences that unite us.

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(p. 100 and p. 101) Keith Haring painting the NGV Waterwall, Melbourne, 1984 © Estate of Keith Haring. Photo: © Geoffrey Burke

Rei Kawakubo: reframing fashion

By Danielle Whitfield

Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons is one of the most visionary and influential designers working today. For nearly five decades, she has defied convention to redefine fashion. Her designs have subverted garment shape and function, reframed ideas of beauty, and proposed a new relationship between body and dress. In her endeavour to make clothes that 'did not exist before',[1] Kawakubo has deconstructed the vocabulary of clothing in order to create it afresh.

Collecting Comme examines the radical concepts and design methods that have informed Kawakubo's practice since 1981, the year she first presented in Paris. Featuring more than sixty-five examples drawn from the NGV's significant Comme des Garçons holdings, generously gifted to the Gallery by Takamasa Takahashi, and supported by additional loans from his archive, the exhibition highlights key collections and recurrent themes in Kawakubo's work. The designs of two of her protégés, Junya Watanabe and Tao Kurihara, also feature. Testament to Takahashi's profound appreciation of, and emotional connection to, Kawakubo's work, *Collecting Comme* foregrounds Kawakubo's powerfully original contribution to contemporary fashion.

Comme des Garçons, Tokyo (fashion house) **Rei Kawakubo** (designer) *Top* 1996 *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection, spring–summer 1997. Purchased, NGV Supporters of Fashion and Textiles, 2018. *Skirt* 1996 (detail) *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection, spring–summer 1997. Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015 © Comme des Garçons

‘Many of Kawakubo’s collections also interrogated gender. In particular, she rethought the sexual politics of dress by deconstructing tailoring through processes of dissection and collage.’

——— DANIELLE WHITFIELD

Starting from zero

> I never intended to start a revolution. I only came to Paris with the intention of showing what I thought was strong and beautiful. It just so happened that my notion was different from everybody else’s.[2]
> — Rei Kawakubo

Establishing her label in 1969, and showing in Tokyo since 1975, Rei Kawakubo debuted in Paris in April 1981. Before a small audience at the InterContinental Hotel, Kawakubo presented a collection of oversized and asymmetrical garments alongside fellow Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto. In 1978, Kawakubo had resolved to create something new by focusing on materials. Using contrasting textures, fabrics and cotton quilting insertions, she created a new and more voluminous look, different from her previous work. The collection, for autumn–winter 1978–79, was a turning point, as the first created using original textiles.[3] By the following year, Kawakubo had extended this desire to ‘start from zero’ conceptually to ‘do things that have not been done before’4 and her 1981 collection was evidence of this maturing and rule-breaking new aesthetic.

Kawakubo’s runway collections of the following year – *Holes*, autumn–winter 1982–83, and *Patchworks and X*, spring–summer 1983 – were even more revolutionary. Presented on the official ready-to-wear schedule before press and buyers, the two collections featured garments that were purposely distressed and unfinished, and predominantly black. *Holes* included Kawakubo’s infamous hole- and dropped-stitch *Sweater*, created by deliberately configuring the knitting machines to produce this effect, while *Patchworks and ×* featured patches dyed with different shades of black ink (made from charcoal normally used for Japanese calligraphy), alongside exposed seams, intentionally frayed edges and incomplete forms. In an era of body-conscious design and glamour, Kawakubo’s clothes were an affront. Critics called the look ‘apocalyptic’ or worse,[5] while others admired the qualities of ‘newness, strangeness, inventiveness and surprisingly fresh thinking for communicating strength and elegance’.[6]

Kawakubo’s work challenged the conventions of Western fashion. Instead of being symmetrical and fitting perfectly, her garments enveloped and concealed. They also incorporated Japanese aesthetic principles; among them, wabi-sabi (a respect for humble materials, the patina of age, irregularity and imperfection), as well as the concepts of *mu* (emptiness) and *ma* (space).[7] Her approach proposed a new way of thinking about clothes and what they might signify. However, to this day, Kawakubo has resisted any fixed explanation of what her collections may mean.

Exploring the nuances of black through texture and dye, the collections Kawakubo designed in the 1980s highlighted her experimental approach to construction and form. Collectively, *Gloves, Skirts, Quilted Big Coats*, autumn–winter 1983–84; *Twist, Silk + Jersey, Knits* (Patchworks), autumn–winter 1984–85; *Bias Cutting*, spring–summer 1986; and *Bonding* autumn–winter 1986–87, reveal early iterations of approaches to pattern-making that she has revisited throughout her career. Twelve years apart, the Bonding, autumn–winter 1986–87, and *Fusion*, autumn–winter 1998–99, collections are variables in a career-length exploration of ‘expressions of [the] unfinished, imbalance, fusion and elimination’.[8] The unorthodox contours, achieved using innovative fabric treatments and asymmetrical pattern pieces, do not conform to the natural body.

Rather than flattering, Kawakubo’s clothes questioned the idea of dressing for display. Her exaggerated silhouettes and volumes hid, rather than revealed the female figure. Reframing the meaning of clothes, she stated:

> They are for modern, working women. Women who do not need to assure their happiness by looking sexy to men, by emphasising their figures, but who attract them with their minds.[9]

Assertive campaign imagery shot by photographers Kazumi Kurigami, Peter Lindbergh and Deborah Turbeville echoed this declaration.

Chic punk

Throughout the 1990s, Kawakubo’s work continued to examine existing ideas of fashion. She contested definitions of beauty and taste, experimented with atypical fabrics and deconstructed notions about gender and women’s social roles. In 1994, Kawakubo’s *Metamorphosis* collection, autumn–winter 1994–95, made use of abject boiled woollens, shrunk after construction into ill-fitting sweaters, military-inspired greatcoats and despoiled work wear.[10] The following year, she abandoned grunge to consider its alternative: an ‘extreme sweetness [… so cloying as to be …] almost overpowering’.[11] A slightly unsettling collection, *Sweeter than Sweet*, autumn–winter 1995–96, saw Kawakubo juxtapose Peter Pan collars, feminine frills, flowers, tulle and pastels with silhouettes that prevented any movement of the arms.

Around the same time, Kawakubo also introduced punk elements into her work. Collections such as *Chic Punk*, autumn–winter 1991–92, *Transformed Glamour*, autumn–winter 1999–2000, and *Hard and Forceful (Energy)*, autumn–winter 2000–2001, were a bricolage of material provocations. Employing tartan, fishnet and leather, zips and bondage straps, and transparent PVC, Kawakubo refashioned femininity into something far more transgressive. Equally pointed was the *Beyond Taboo* collection, autumn–winter 2001–02. Subversive in tone, it transformed elements of 1950s-style foundation wear into outerwear. On the runway, the effect was one of dishevelment with dresses that were a fusion of brightly coloured satin corsetry, transparent chiffon and lace. Similar tactics were present in Bad Taste, autumn–winter 2008–09, which appropriated clichéd fetish elements such as satin underwear, black lace, bondage-style straps and garter-belt frills.

Many of Kawakubo’s collections also interrogated gender. In particular, she rethought the sexual politics of dress by deconstructing tailoring through processes of dissection and collage. In her *Transcending Gender* collection, spring–summer 1995, Kawakubo fused ‘feminine’ decoration with ‘masculine’ suiting to create new hybrid garment forms. These included lapel scarves, ruffled waistcoat ‘dresses’ and apron-style waistcoat ‘fronts’ with non-functional hanging sleeves. Incongruous garment forms were also a feature of the collections *Dark Romance, Witch*, autumn–winter 2004–05 and *Adult Delinquent*, spring–summer 2010. The former combined asymmetrical jackets with misshapen frills, oversized sleeves and explosions of tulle, while the latter comprised garments formed from pinstripe, brocade and sequin shoulder pad segments.

Bodies and dresses

Despite such provocations, Kawakubo’s *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection, spring–summer 1997, remains one of her most radical statements. Widely referred to as the ‘lumps and bumps’ collection, the runway show featured outfits stuffed with oddly-shaped pillows of polyurethane. Detractors compared these silhouettes to pregnancy or tumours while others read the collection as a feminist parody. Kawakubo herself was typically enigmatic. Yet, implicit in the work was a refusal to see the physical body as a limitation. According to Kawakubo, clothing could be the body and the body could be clothing.

Since then, Kawakubo has continued to redraw the contours of the fashionable body with collections that blur boundaries and amplify proportions. Her *Inside Decoration* collection, autumn–winter 2010–11, incorporated removable pillows into the linings of garments creating bulges and sculptural form. On the runway, five dresses with giant incisions appeared to have burst apart, oozing protrusions and whorls of dacron wadding – a precursor to further experimentation with abstract form.

Beginning in September 2013 with the *Not Making Clothing* collection, spring–summer 2014, Kawakubo commenced a ten season–long examination of ‘wearable objects for the body’ that sought to ‘break the idea of clothes’.[12] Bypassing or sometimes eliminating function, the clothes in these collections were oversized and unorthodox in shape, and hard to decipher. They included inverse cage crinolines, childish play clothes, and inflated silhouettes conceived of with little regard for the figure.

Even more uncompromising was Kawakubo’s *MONSTER* collection, autumn–winter 2014–15, which featured knotted, twisted and plaited, and woven tubular appendages in murky shades of woollen knit. Kawakubo described *MONSTER* as a reaction to the

> craziness of humanity, the fear we all have, the feeling of going beyond common sense … expressed by something extremely big … that could be ugly or beautiful. In other words, a desire to question the established standards of beauty.[13]

Symbolism was also at the heart of *Blood and Roses*, spring–summer 2015, which used rose motifs and an all-red palette to reference violence and struggle.

Abstract excellence

Throughout her career, Kawakubo’s work has ignored function, played with scale and offered multiple possibilities for use. She has repositioned fastenings and openings, recast tailoring traditions and introduced the unexpected. In 2010, her *No Theme (Multiple Personalities, Psychological Fear)* collection, spring–summer 2011, featured conjoined jackets, coats with additional sleeves, skirts that became upside-down jackets, and blazers made from multiple blazers, joined at centre back seam. Unsurprisingly, such polymorphous approaches to creation are the product of idiosyncratic working methods. For Kawakubo, a collection might begin with an abstract phrase, a photograph or a crumpled wad of paper.[14] As she does not sketch or sew, it is up to her team of pattern-makers to interpret her concepts as best they can and to work creatively to achieve a solution, even if the idea is to ‘start with something perfect and go backwards’.[15]

Kawakubo’s challenge is often technical, arising from self-imposed design constraints: *Extreme Embellishment (Adornment)*,

spring–summer 2003, sought to create garments without the use of applied embellishments. Pattern pieces were extended into lengths that were then knotted, plaited or bunched into rosettes to create texture and movement.16 Kawakubo's *Square* collection, autumn–winter 2003–04, featured works created from single pieces of square fabric, while the *Abstract Excellence* collection, spring–summer 2004, focused on a single skirt reconfigured in thirty-four different ways through varying seam placements. In *2 Dimensions*, autumn–winter 2012–13, Kawakubo's pattern-makers worked only with flat planes of fabric, irrespective of shaping techniques such as darts, to realise a series of cartoonish dresses.

Despite this, some of Kawakubo's most poetic collections have arisen from intuitive processes. For *Crush*, spring–summer 2013, Kawakubo 'built up' garments by laying a panel of stiff bonded cotton flat on a table and then folding it back on itself in every possible direction before oversewing. Presented on the runway in black and white versions, the collection belied a purity of expression that celebrated the individual over the mass produced. Perhaps also a metaphor for process, the final garments appeared to mimic dressmakers' toiles, used by dressmakers to test designs.

Junya Watanabe and Tao Kurihara

Ideas of legacy and lineage present in the work of two of Kawakubo's protégés, Junya Watanabe and Tao Kurihara.[17] Encouraged by Kawakubo to establish their own labels under the umbrella of Comme des Garçons, both show an inherited conceptual sensibility that plays out in the technical execution of their collections.

Junya Watanabe joined Comme des Garçons as a skilful pattern-cutter after graduating from Bunka Fashion College, Tokyo, in 1984. In 1992, he launched his own label and the following year made his runway debut in Paris. Today Watanabe's designs are celebrated for their exceptional cutting and innovative fabric treatments, and draw inspiration from futuristic fabrics, streetwear, denim, sportswear, uniforms and fashion history.

While Watanabe is more 'pragmatic' than Kawakubo, his designs still push the boundaries of conventional design. Watanabe has previously stated that he looks for 'strings of ideas'[18] before working with his pattern-makers to create garments for each collection.

Typical of Watanabe's work is the interrogation of a single material across an entire collection. In *Elegant Down*, autumn–winter 2009–10, he played with the volume and lightness of quilted nylon, presenting a series of black puffer dresses, jackets and skirts with gold chain link fastenings. For *Anti, Anarchy and Army*, autumn–winter 2006–07, Watanabe pieced and patched together army fatigues and green lace into dresses and ensembles that made features of zips, rivets, snap fastenings and illogical openings.

Tao Kurihara joined Comme des Garçons in 1998 after studying fashion design at Central Saint Martins, London. Under the mentorship of Kawakubo she launched her own label in 2005, debuting in Paris in March that year and presenting annually until 2010. Similar to Kawakubo's, Kurihara's process often relies on intuition. As Kurihara stated in 2009:

> I start with a new technique, something which manipulates fabric in a way that I've never done before which begs me to explore what kind of clothing I can make.[19]

For her second-last runway show in spring–summer 2010, Kurihara presented a condensed collection of dresses that were created by knotting and twisting only. Handcrafted but with a punk aesthetic, dresses were constructed from woven strips of diaphanous floral fabric and showed the potential of self-imposed design limitations.

Kurihara's ultra-feminine and delicate aesthetic is evident in many of her collections, which have variously re-worked lingerie, overdyed bedcovers and handkerchiefs, and employed materials such as lace, tulle, paper and ribbon. Similar to Kawakubo, her collections recalibrate the familiar tropes of femininity in experimental ways. Outfits from the *Decoration Accident* collection, autumn–winter 2009–10, for example, highlight Kurihara's interest in overblown embellishment by using intricate smocked ribbon work, billowing flounces, oversized bows, ruffles and folkloric prints.

In 1987, *Vogue* predicted that Rei Kawakubo would be recognised 'as the woman who will lead fashion into the twenty-first century.[20] Today her work remains some of the most profound on the runway, as she continues to redefine the possibilities of dress. Kawakubo's radical and uncompromising approach has changed what we expect of fashion. In giving precedence to conceptual ideas as well as processes, she has achieved creative and commercial success and has influenced younger generations of designers internationally.

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Comme des Garçons, Tokyo (fashion house) **Rei Kawakubo** (designer) *Dress* 1993 (detail) *Eccentric collection*, spring–summer 1994. Gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019 © Comme des Garçons

Creative Process

> ‘Ceramics can be unforgiving; melts, explosions and warping can be undesirable, however, for me creativity lies in harnessing the chaos and unpredictability.’
>
> James Lemon

James Lemon takes us through his creative process

Although experimental ceramicist and artist James Lemon grew up in Wellington, New Zealand, he is at home in his bright and colourful studio in Northcote, Melbourne. Lemon talks through the process behind *Slump stool #1*, 2019, his first furniture piece and a recent addition to the NGV Collection.

BY JAMES LEMON

(above and opposite) James Lemon in his studio. Northcote, Melbourne, November, 2019. Photo: Selina Ou

The process involves consistent steps, but the malleability of clay and the extreme heat of the kiln means that each finished stool in the series is unique.

I wanted to give the clay some agency. I like to see twists, tensions and cracks.

I celebrate colour and texture through the gestural and expressive painting with glaze.

I am drawn to design objects that elicit a physical, visceral response. Fired ceramic is an unusual material for furniture; its rigid and unforgiving properties are not expected to create the comfort expected in a seat. A clay chair is unexpected, it can freak people out. It's assumed to be uncomfortable before you even sit on it.

Clay undergoes a change of state when subjected to the kiln's high temperatures. Put simply, it goes from liquid to solid. As the materials turn molten, they move in less predictable ways. Harnessing this unpredictability is risky, but exciting. The melting process created the shape of the seat in *Slump Stool #1*. This kind of warping is usually undesirable. Imagine if a plate warped in a similar way! It would be rendered functionless. Originally, I intended the stools to be side or occasional tables. The shape and form of the object asserted itself and the stools were born.

Working with larger scale pieces is also a physical challenge, a challenge that is both creatively and physically enjoyable. *Slump stool #1* was made from around 15 kg of stoneware clay and glaze. I started with making the base quite roughly on a wheel. I wanted to give the clay some agency. I like to see twists, tensions and cracks. The seat component was then made from a block of clay, which I tossed and stretched, similar to the way pizza bases are stretched. I fired these two pieces separately first and then again, using glaze to secure them together.

The process involves consistent steps, but the malleability of clay and the extreme heat of the kiln means that each finished stool in the series is unique. The forms vary, and the glaze finish reflects how I'm feeling. The colours and thickness of the glaze application is intuitive. I celebrate colour and texture through the gestural and expressive painting with glaze.

Audiences generally have a set of expectations regarding the ways ceramic objects are and should be finished. In many instances, they expect the surfaces to be glossy, uniform and clean. Ceramics are generally expected to be solid and certain. I like to play with those expectations. The surface of *Slump Stool #1* has a plasticity and fluidity that defies its solidity.

When I sit at the wheel, I usually have an intended outcome in mind, even if the form is variable. This is particularly the case when I make my functional wares (bowls, cups and vases). However, I am also inclined to be led by the materials, this is the agency of the clay. The process of working with clay is immersive and tactile. I like to indulge in that. This is how the slump stools came into fruition.

My practice is all about embracing a complex amalgam of fear, risk and intuition. Ceramics can be unforgiving; melts, explosions and warping can be undesirable, however, for me creativity lies in harnessing the chaos and unpredictability. This process is uncomfortable and emotionally taxing; however, it is also what keeps me interested.

Working with varying quantities of glaze in experimental and unorthodox ways has produced some interesting, and some catastrophic, results. For example, when making *Slump Stool #1*, I used glaze as a structural component. This simply meant that the seat and the body (made in separate parts) were fused together permanently, only by glaze. This iteration of glaze as a structural, rather than decorative component, is a direction that enthrals me. Recently I applied an excessive amount of glaze to a form. When I opened the kiln after the firing, the glaze had entirely peeled away from the surface. I deduced that the moisture in the glaze oversaturated the porous ceramic body to which it was applied. It was jarring and messy. It was like skin being shed by a reptile. The likeness of this surface to supple, shedding skin evoked a visceral response. I felt intense physical discomfort and fascination as a sharp, glass-like material (glaze) seemed corporeal and fragile.

JAMES LEMON IS A NEW ZEALAND–BORN ARTIST LIVING AND WORKING IN NORTHCOTE, MELBOURNE.
THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE JAN–FEB 2020 ISSUE OF *NGV MAGAZINE*.

(opposite) James Lemon in his studio. Northcote, Melbourne, November, 2019. Photo: Selina Ou
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© Courtesy of the artist's estate

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© Estate of Charles Wheeler

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Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE, Honorary Life Benefactor, 1995
© Veronica Martin

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Purchased with funds donated by an anonymous donor, 2018
© Neri Oxman and members of The Mediated Matter Group

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Private Collection, Melbourne
© Joy Hester Estate/Copyright Agency, Australia

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Purchased NGV Foundation, 2018
© The Gilbert Baker Estate

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© Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno Galleries

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© Estate of Taniguchi Fumie

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44.0 × 28.8 cm (sheet)
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Purchased with funds donated by Allan Myers AO and Maria Myers AO, 2015
© Estate of Itō Shinsui

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Purchased with funds donated by Jennifer and Brian Tymms, 2018

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Pathologist titrating sera (Captain Robert Black) 1944
oil on composition board
58 cm × 51.7 cm × 4 cm
Australian War Memorial, Canberra

p. 77
Florence Fuller
The paper boy 1888
oil on canvas
59.0 × 45.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Australia
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

p. 79
Frederick McCubbin
Melbourne 1888 1888
oil on canvas
120.5 × 102.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Mr Hugh McCubbin, 1960

p. 82
Eva Zeisel (designer)
Schramberger Majolikafabrik, Schramberg (manufacturer)
Gobelin 8, tea service c. 1929
earthenware
(a-b) 13.3 × 24.1 × 16.2 cm (overall) (teapot) (c) 6.7 × 14.4 × 10.2 cm (milk jug) (d-e) 9.8 × 16.2 × 12.0 cm (overall) (sugar box) (f-g) 6.2 × 16.8 cm diameter (overall) (cup and saucer) (h-i) 6.2 × 16.8 cm diameter (overall) (cup and saucer) (j-k) 6.2 × 16.8 cm diameter (overall) (cup and saucer) (l) 5.8 × 12.2 × 10.4 cm (cup)
(m) 5.8 × 12.2 × 10.4 cm (cup)
(n) 5.8 × 12.2 × 10.4 cm (cup)
(o) 2.1 × 19.5 cm diameter (side plate)
(p) 2.1 × 19.5 cm diameter (side plate)
(q) 2.1 × 19.5 cm diameter (side plate)
(r) 2.1 × 19.5 cm diameter (side plate)
(s) 2.1 × 19.5 cm diameter (side plate)
(t) 2.1 × 19.5 cm diameter (side plate)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by Merv Keehn and Sue Harlow, 2017

p. 84–6
Darren Sylvester
If all we have is each other, that's ok 2003; dated 2004; printed 2004
colour digital photograph
90.0 × 119.7 cm (image)
100.0 × 129.7 cm (sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through funds arranged by Loti Smorgon for Contemporary Australian Photography, 2004
© Darren Sylvester

p. 91
Darren Sylvester
What happens will happen #3 2010
inkjet print
120.0 × 90.0 cm (image and sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2015
© Darren Sylvester

p. 95
Agnes Goodsir
The letter 1926
oil on canvas
81.0 × 65.3 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Bequest of the artist, 1947

p. 96
Agnes Goodsir
(Woman reading) c. 1915
oil on canvas
71.0 × 91.5 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through the NGV Foundation by John and Suzanne Playfoot, Governor, 2001

p. 98
Keith Haring
Untitled 1984
synthetic polymer paint on wood and metal
65.2 × 71.7 cm irreg. (variable)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented by the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, Victoria, 2017
© Keith Haring Foundation

p. 104
Comme des Garçons, Tokyo
(fashion house)
Rei Kawakubo (designer)
Top 1996
Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body collection, spring–summer 1997
nylon, polyurethane
102.5 cm (centre back) 25.0 cm (waist, flat)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, NGV Supporters of Fashion and Textiles, 2018.
© Comme des Garçons

Comme des Garçons, Tokyo
(fashion house)
Rei Kawakubo (designer)
Skirt 1996 (detail)
Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body collection, spring–summer 1997
nylon, polyurethane
60.5 cm (centre back) 42.5 cm (waist, flat)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015
© Comme des Garçons

p. 109
Comme des Garçons, Tokyo (fashion house)
Rei Kawakubo (designer)
Dress 1993 (detail)
Eccentric collection, spring–summer 1994
polyester, cupro, elastic
139.0 cm (centre back) 40.0 cm (waist, flat)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019
© Comme des Garçons

p. 110
James Lemon
Slump stool #1 2019
stoneware
42.2 × 43.0 × 40.2 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2019
© James Lemon

p. 115
James Lemon
Slump stool #1 2019
stoneware
42.2 × 43.0 × 40.2 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2019
© James Lemon

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END NOTES

pp. 14–21
Portrait Provocations

1. George Lambert to Amy Lambert, 1924
2. Charles Wheeler, *Age*, Melbourne,1 September 1962

pp. 40–5
Woolgathering

1. Anatoly Liberman, 'The last piece of wool: the Oxford etymologist goes woolgathering,' *Oxford University Press Blog*, Oxford University Press, 8 Nov. 2017, <https://blog.oup.com/2017/11/woolgathering-word-origins>, accessed 11 March 2020.
2. Ferris Jabr, 'Why walking helps us think,' *The New Yorker*, 3 Sep. 2014, <www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/walking-helps-us-think>, accessed 24 Mar. 2020.
3. Jenny Odell, *How to do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, Schwartz Publishing, Melbourne, 2019, p. xiv (introduction).
4. Rebecca Fulleylove, 'Artist Prudence Flint paints "powerful and mysterious" female protagonists in oil', *It's Nice That*, 4 July 2017, <www.itsnicethat.com/articles/prudence-flint-art-040717>, accessed 29 Mar. 2020.
5. City of Melbourne, *Urban Health and Wellbeing Profile*, City of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2016, p. 21.
6. Jennifer S. Doxey and Tina Marie Waliczek, 'Greening university classrooms: adding plants increases student satisfaction', *ScienceDaily*, 6 Sep. 2009, <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/09/090903163947.htm>, accessed 11 Mar. 2020.
7. Ginni Harrison, 'Stress and anxiety in the digital age: the dark side of technology', updated 1 Mar. 2019, *OpenLearn*, <www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/mental-health/managing-stress-and-anxiety-the-digital-age-the-dark-side-technology>, accessed 9 Nov. 2019.
8. Elizabeth Bachner, 'The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays in Art by Eileen Myles', Aug. 2009, <www.bookslut.com/nonfiction/2009_08_014912.php>, accessed 26 Mar. 2020.
9. Odell, p. 22.
10. Alice Bishop, *A Constant Hum*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2019, p. 127.
11. Liberman.
12. Odell, p. ix (introduction).
13. Ellie Shechet, 'How to do nothing: the new guide to refocusing on the real world', 2. Apr 2019, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/apr/02/jenny-odell-how-to-do-nothing-attention>, accessed 8 Mar. 2020.
14. Helen Zaltzman, 'Woolgathering by Patti Smith – review', 13 May 2012, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/13/woolgathering-patti-smith-review>, accessed 11 Mar. 2020.
15. Patti Smith, *Woolgathering*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2012, p. 11.

pp. 58–61
Raising the Flag

1. Claudia Banz, 'Design without walls', in *Social Design: Participation and Empowerment*, Lars Müller Publishers, Zurich, 2018, p. 120.
2. ibid. pp. 88–94.
3. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, 'Figures at a glance', published 2019, https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/figures-at-a-glance.html, accessed 4 Aug. 2019.
4. The Refugee Nation operates in collaboration with a group of refugees and, in addition to Amnesty International, is supported by FilmAid, Makers Unite and U-able. For more information about the project and its supporters, see The Refugee Nation's website: http://www.therefugeenation.com/, accessed 3 Aug. 2019.
5. Art Director's Club, 'Caro Rebello: The Refugee Nation', ADC Blog, 9 Aug. 2016, http://adcglobal.org/caro-rebello-the-refugee-nation/, accessed 1 Aug. 2019.
6. Yara Said, interviewed by Chris Bahara in 'Yara Said: the artist in exile', *Citizens of Humanity*, https://mag.citizensofhumanity.com/blog/2017/02/24/yara-said-artist-exile/, accessed 12 Nov. 2019.
7. Yara Said, interviewed by Chris Bahara.
8. Quilty's *High tide mark* was acquired by the NGV in 2016 (acc. 2016.416) through The John McCaughey Memorial Prize Trust.
9. Ben Quilty, interviewed by Elisha Buttler in 'Interview with Ben Quilty', in *NGV Triennial*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2017, p. 38.

pp. 62–5
Moga: The audacity of being a modern girl

1. Joshibi University of Art and Design, Joshibi University of Art and Design, <https://www.joshibi.ac.jp/english>, accessed 29 Nov. 2019.
2. Taniguchi Fumie, 'About women's beauty', *Kuni*, 14 Mar. 1938, pp. 42–3.
3. Megumi Kitahara, 'Modern to Dento ni Ikita Nihongaka Taniguchi Fumiko' ('Living Between Modernity and Tradition: Fumie Taniguchi, a Japanese Painter (1910–2001)'), *Machikaneyamaronso*, Osaka University, 48 Mar. 2015, pp. 1–25.

pp. 76–9
The paper boy 1888

1. 'Miscellaneous', *The Herald*, 5 Mar. 1891, p. 4.
2. 'The Victorian Society of Artists' Exhibition', *The Age*, 30 Apr. 1888, p. 6.
3. 'Our Melbourne Letter', *The Horsham Times*, 2 Oct. 1885, p. 3.
4. 'An evening among the Newsboys', *The Herald*, 4 Jul. 1887, p. 4
5. 'Boys in the Slums', *Weekly Times*, 18 Oct. 1884, p. 4.
6. 'Newsboys' Try-Excelsior Class,' *The Herald*, 25 Jun. 1887, p. 4

pp. 86–93
Gooey Images and Glossy Nihilism

1. As film critic Roger Ebert summarised, The World is 'a movie about people doing boring and badly paid work day after day while being required to look happy'. Roger Ebert, 'The World', 28 July 2005, *RogerEbert.com*, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-world-2005>, accessed 1 Feb. 2018.
2. Darren Sylvester, 'Authenticity and the Recreation of Experience', unpublished thesis submitted for BA Honours Arts (Fine Arts), The University of Melbourne, 2010, p. 38.
3. ibid. p. 39.
4. Maggie Finch, email interview with Darren Sylvester, NGV Artist File, 22 Jan. 2018.
5. ibid. As Sylvester notes, 'I've always shot with a Hasselblad camera and always with transparency (positive slide film), which gives greater colour saturation and fine detail; however, it's harder to use than a negative so you have to be more sure of what you're doing as the range for correct exposure is much smaller than a negative. And in the last few years I've sometimes used a larger (4 × 5-inch) format camera to produce larger photo-graphs. When shooting on a Hasselblad I always shoot five rolls of film a photo, so this equals sixty shots and with large format around twenty because it takes a bit longer to use and time wise everyone fades after an hour or so'.
6. ibid. This direction is reminiscent of film director Robert Bresson, and his 'endless repetition' of takes in the hope of revealing something closer to a 'truth'. See Alex Barrett, 'Where to begin with Robert Bresson', 23 Sep. 2016, *BFI*, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/where-begin-robert-bresson>, accessed 12 Feb. 2018.
7. Darren Sylvester, in conversation with Kate Rhodes, in Kate Rhodes, *Remote Control: Contemporary Photomedia*, National Gallery of Victoria, Mel-bourne, 2005, p. 28.
8. For further discussion of the 'directorial mode', see 'The directorial mode: notes towards a definition', in A. D. Coleman, *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings*, 1968–1978, Oxford University Press, New York, 1979. Originally published in *Artforum*, Sep. 1976.
9. Bayard's self-portrait was created as an act of protest; he considered that his technical achievements in developing a photographic process had been over-looked by the French government and public as being one of the first 'inventions' of photography, in favour of the daguerreotype the preceding year.
10. In early exhibitions, Darren Sylvester occasionally published the short stories as texts accompanying his exhibition catalogues, in lieu of a curatorial interpretation of his works.
11. Daniel Palmer characterises Sylvester's works as 'image-texts'. See Daniel Palmer, 'Darren Sylvester: in step with the real world', *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*, no. 2, 2008, p. 104.
12. Natasha Bullock in sullivan+strumpf (eds), *Darren Sylvester: We Can Love Since We Know We Can Lose Love*, sullivan+strumpf, Sydney, 2005.
13. Finch interview with Sylvester.
14. Darren Sylvester in Rhodes, p. 29.
15. As Sylvester has noted, the selection of colours was presumed to 'automatically look good as they had been market tested and trialled … they acted like mirrors and because the colour was designed to look good on people, you did too, so the title was just that, me caring for you'. Darren Sylvester artist statement, NGV Artist File.
16. Darren Sylvester appears just occasionally in his work – his physical appearance is rarely signified or titled explicitly (exceptions being the eponymous first album, and the use of the personal pronoun in the titling of *I was the last in the Carpenters' garden*, 2008). The moment of recognition of the artist as actor is reminiscent of a film director playing a cameo in their own film, and the notion of the 'auteur' in cinema as one who is the major creative force behind a production.
17. Darren Sylvester artist statement, NGV Artist File.
18. Finch interview with Sylvester.
19. Blair French, for example, wrote that Sylvester's staged images suggest 'modes of fundamental alienation, whether it be in terms of the functioning of corporate "culture", our relationship with forms of technology … or the staging of interpersonal relationships in terms of mannered disconnection or mutual allegiance to brands and shared rituals of consumption'. See Blair French, *Out of Time: Essays Between Photography and Art*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, 2006, p. 39.
20. David Bate, Photography: The Key Concepts, Berg, Oxford, 2009, p. 116.
21. Rosalind Krauss, 'A note on photography and the simulacral', *October*, vol. 31, Winter 1984, p. 65.
22. Darren Sylvester in Rhodes, p. 29.
23. Finch interview with Sylvester.
24. Palmer, p. 104.
25. Krauss, p. 56.
26. The album was exhibited first in the exhibition *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*, 2008, at Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, Bris-bane, before being picked up for com-mercial release through Unstable Ape and Remote Control Records in 2009.
27. Woody McDonald, interview with Darren Sylvester, *Skull Cave*, Triple R radio, 3 March 2018.
28. Finch interview with Sylvester.
29. Sylvester worked with Yves Saint Laurent, Melbourne, to source and match the products to the RGB colours required for translation into the dance-floor tiles. The unique soundtrack was written, performed and produced by Darren Sylvester, Conrad Standish of the band Standish/Carlyon and James Cecil of Super Melody.
30. Antje Krause-Wahl, 'Page by page: fashion and photograph in the magazine', in Gwen Allen (ed.), *The Magazine: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel

Gallery, London, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2016, p. 114.

31. In addition to Sylvester's multidiscipli-nary art practice, he lectures in Fine Arts (previously at RMIT University, currently at the Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne), and undertakes private graphic design work, which has included designing the covers of numerous albums for Melbourne bands and singers such as Jessica Says, Geoffrey O'Connor, Beaches and Totally Mild.

pp. 94–9
'Some piece of beauty': The work of Agnes Goodsir

1. 'Miss Agnes Goodsir's art', *The Australasian*, 9 July 1927, p. 46.
2. Male homosexuality, by contrast, was defined in terms or criminality, with offences prosecuted accordingly, most notoriously in the case of the 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde for 'gross indecency'.
3. 'The art of Miss Agnes Goodsir', *The Sydney Mail*, 23 Feb. 1927, p. 28.
4. The work, *Le vase bleu*, 1916, is sadly now lost. See Karen Quinlan, *In a Picture Land Over the Sea: Agnes Goodsir 1864–1939*, Bendigo Art Gallery, Bendigo, 1998, p. 48.
5. 'Australians abroad' *The Australasian*, 19 Nov. 1910, p. 50.
6. See Peter Di Sciascio, 'Australian lesbian artists of the early twentieth century', in Yorick Smaal & Graham Willett, *Out Here: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives VI*, Monash University Publishing, Melbourne, 2011, <http://books.publishing.monash.edu/apps/bookworm/view/Out+Here%3A+Gay+and+Lesbian+Perspectives+VI/126/oh110009.xhtml>, accessed 16 Sep. 2019.
7. Quoted and discussed in Laura L. *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001, p. 132–6.
8. An excellent account of the controversy surrounding the trial is given in Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, Doubleday, New York, 1999.
9. 'Miss Agnes Goodsir', *The Age*, 15 Feb. 1927, p. 5.
10. 'Art exhibition: Miss Good sir's paintings', The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 June 1927, p. 12.
11. 'Art notes: Miss Goodsir's exhibits', *The Age*, 18 May 1927, p. 13.
12. Dorothy Paul, 'The art of Agnes Goodsir', *The Sydney Mail*, 6 July 1927, p. 3.
13. Agnes Goodsir, quoted in 'An artist's stories: Miss Agnes Goodsir', The Register, Tuesday 5 Feb. 1927, p. 5.
14. Cited in 'Self portrait, c. 1934 by Stella Bowen,' *National Portrait Gallery*, Australian Government, <https://www.portrait.gov.au/portraits/2003.18/self-portrait>, accessed 16 Aug. 2019.
15. Agnes Goodsir, quoted in 'Australian artist in Paris: Agnes Goodsir', *The Advertiser*, 15 Feb. 1927, p. 19.
16. Rachel Dunn, letter to Elsie Lorimer, c. 1939, quoted in Quinlan, p. 64.
17. These include Janine Burke, *Australian Women Artists 1840–1940*, Greenhouse Publications Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1980; Mary Eagle, *Australian Modern Painting, Between the Wars* 1914–1939, Bay Books, Sydney, 1990; Jeanette Hoorn (ed.), *Strange Women: Essays in Art and Gender*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994. For a more extensive list see Quinlan, p. 73.

pp. 100–5
Kool & Blak

1. Fernando Ortiz Fernández, *Cuban Counter point: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1995.
2. Judith Ryan, 'From Bark to Neon: Indi genous Art from the NGV Collection', 18 Oct. 2018, NGV, Victorian Government, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/black-to-the-future-indigenous-artists-work-forwards/>, accessed 13 Feb. 2019.
3. R. A. Rogers, 'From cultural exchange to transculturation: a review and reconceptualization of cultural appropriation', *Communication Theory*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 474–503.
4. Robert Farris Thompson, 'Requiem for the Degas of the B-boys, Keith Haring', *Artforum*, May 1990, <https://www.artforum.com/print/199005/requiem-for-the-degas-of-the-b-boys-keith-haring-34080>, accessed 1 Feb. 2019.
5. Ted Gott, 'Fragile memories: Keith Haring and the Water Window Mural at the National Gallery of Victoria', 2 June 2014, *NGV*, Victorian Govern-ment, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/fragile-memories-keith-haring-and-the- water-window-mural-at-the-national-gallery- of-victoria/>, accessed 24 July 2019.
6. Andrew Montana, *Primitive and Pop: Keith Haring's Australia 1984*, Arcadia, Melbourne, 2017, p. 89.
7. Margo Neale, 'Renegotiating tradition: urban Aboriginal art', in Sylvia Kleinert & Margo Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2000, p. 266.
8. Vimeo, 'Keith Haring: Moomba Festival fashion parade, Melbourne, 1984', *Vimeo.com*, <https://vimeo.com/44861051>, accessed 24 July 2019.
9. A. F. Chamberlain, 'Nanibozhu amongst the Otchipwe, Mississagas, and other Algonkian tribes', *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 4, no. 14, Jul.–Sep., 1891, pp. 193–213.
10. 'Five things to know about Gordon Bennett', Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/five-things-know-gordon-bennett>, accessed 30 July 2019.
11. 'Reko Rennie speaking on … the influence of Keith Haring', Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/ 44858849>, accessed 30 July 2019.

pp. 106–11
Rei Kawakubo: reframing fashion

1. Eleanor Gibson, 'Comme des Garçons is nothing about clothes says Rei Kawakubo', 9 May 2009, *Dezeen*, Dezeen Limited, <www.dezeen.com/2019/05/09/rei-kawakubo-comme-des-garcons-interview>, accessed 6 June 2019.
2. Andrew Bolton, *Rei Kawakubo Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2018, p. 42.
3. Mariko Nishitani, *Theory of Relativity in Comme des Garçons*, Filmart Co. Ltd, Japan, 2012, pp. 346–7.
4. Bernadine Morris, 'From Japan, new faces, new shapes', *The New York Times*, 14 December 1982, p. 10.
5. Some of the press dubbed the collection 'Hiroshima's revenge'. See Judith Thurman, 'The misfit', *The New Yorker*, 4 July 2005, p. 20.
6. C. Donovan, 'Fashion view: much ado about the Japanese', *The New York Times Magazine*, 31 July 1983, p. 134.
7. Writers who have eloquently elaborated on these concepts in relation to Kawakubo's work include Akiko Fukai et al., *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion*, Merrell Publishers, London, 2010, pp.13–22, and Bolton, p. 42.
8. Bolton, p. 50.
9. Karen Van Godtsenhoven, Miren Arzalluz & Kaat Debo (eds), *Fashion Game Changers: Reinventing the 20th Century Silhouette*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, London, 2016, p. 229.
10. This fabric innovation has been recognised as a characteristic of Japanese fashion design, as referenced in Bonnie English, *Japanese Fashion Designers, The Work and Influence of Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo*, Bloomsbury, London, 2018, p. 74.
11. Laird Borelli-Persson, 'Fall 1995 Ready-to-wear, Comme des Garçons', 16 March 1995, *Vogue*, Condé Nast, <www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-1995-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>, accessed 9 July 2019.
12. 'Rei Kawakubo's creative manifesto', 13 October 2013, *The Business of Fashion*, <www.businessoffashion.com/articles/bof-exclusive/rei-kawakubo-comme-des-garcons>, accessed 27 May 2019.
13. Borelli-Persson, accessed 9 July 2019.
14. For a full discussion of Rei Kawakubo's working methods, see Dejan Sudjic, *Rei Kawakubo and Comme des Garçons, Rizzoli*, New York, 1990, pp. 16–35.
15. Bolton, p. 54.
16. Borelli-Persson, accessed 9 July 2019.
17. Other designers to be given their own labels include Fumito Ganyon (in 2007) and Kei Ninomiya (in 2012).
18. Alexander Fury, 'Junya Wantanabe, one of fashion's foremost thinkers', 17 October 2016, *The New York Times Style Magazine*, The New York Times Company, <www.nytimes.com/2016/10/17/t-magazine/junya-watanabe-interview.html>, accessed 1 May 2017.
19. Akiko Fukai et al., p. 138.
20. Elsa Klensch, 'Another world of style: Rei Kawakubo', *Vogue*, Aug. 1987, p. 307.