

# Unbind Me







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This book is for Matty Howley (1972–2017). We held each other up during our long walk through pure night. Did I ever thank you for that?

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# UNBIND ME

An installation conversation  
Sarah McEwan

Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo  
30 June – 2 September 2018



*The tangles are so tangled it can never be unravelled, 2018*  
Acrylic paint on mirrored perspex board with fabric  
50cm x 163cm

# THE MESS CREATED BY THE WORLD CONTINUALLY BECOMING

*Unbind Me* is an exhibition of feminist time travel, beginning in the Iron Age with Hesiod (c700 BCE) and continuing to our contemporary era with Elizabeth Grosz. By highlighting various voices across time, *Unbind Me* is offering an overview into how entrenched gender imbalance (and oppression more broadly) has been in our Western mind-body, and how we have enacted this en masse through practices of thought and action. Throughout history there have always been competing ideologies; within these infinite struggles, there has always been a feminist argument critiquing the patriarchal Western world, wanting change.

I think of this exhibition as an 'installation conversation' where the catalogue and artworks are enmeshed and entwined in an intra-connected web of past and present. Together, these words and images enable you to meander through the last 2700 years of Western history.

# WHY ART + PHILOSOPHY: IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR!

Philosophy may find itself the twin or sibling of art and its various practices, neither judge of nor spokesperson for art, but its equally wayward sibling, working alongside art without illuminating it or speaking for it, being provoked by art and sharing the same enticements for the emergence of innovation and invention.<sup>1</sup>

Choas, *Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, Elizabeth Grosz

Philosophy and art allow us a deeper understanding of what it means to be alive in the world. They allow us to meander along conceptual roundabouts or poignantly articulate real life concerns. Their observations and questionings can be wayward or disobedient in order to challenge the status quo; or work to do the opposite, by upholding hegemonic systems of power. At the core of both philosophy and art, as the above quote reflects, is this ever elusive search for and hopeful emergence of new understandings about the world we live in.

It makes sense that Grosz (1952) compares philosophy and art as family, both sharing similar foundations; but as we all know, families come in many different guises and the more intimately you know someone, the more you understand their intricate quirks, failings and strengths. *Unbind Me* is exploring some of the failings and strengths of key Western ideas in relation to feminism over the last 2700 years, as written by this 'extended family' of philosophers, poets, authors, historians, economists, activists and artists. The link between each 'family member' in this 'installation conversation' is their relentless search to explore what it means to be in the world or to imagine what a 'more ideal' world could look like.

Grosz has discussed in much of her writing that existence is a continual state of indeterminate forces, with an unfathomable amount of open ended becomings, or rebecomings or reconfigurings within space-time. The way we frame these forces is how we make sense of our existence.

Philosophers and artists create tangible iterations, often literally within a frame or page, that take 'shards of chaos to wrench a consistency'.<sup>2</sup> The consistency they form helps to make the randomness and chaos of our world seem ordered. Sharing common emotional and social identities, with similar casual stories, helps to connect different, but shared lived experiences.



*There is no critique-less text* (Elizabeth Grosz 2017), 2018  
Gouache and acrylic paint on board  
15cm x 40cm

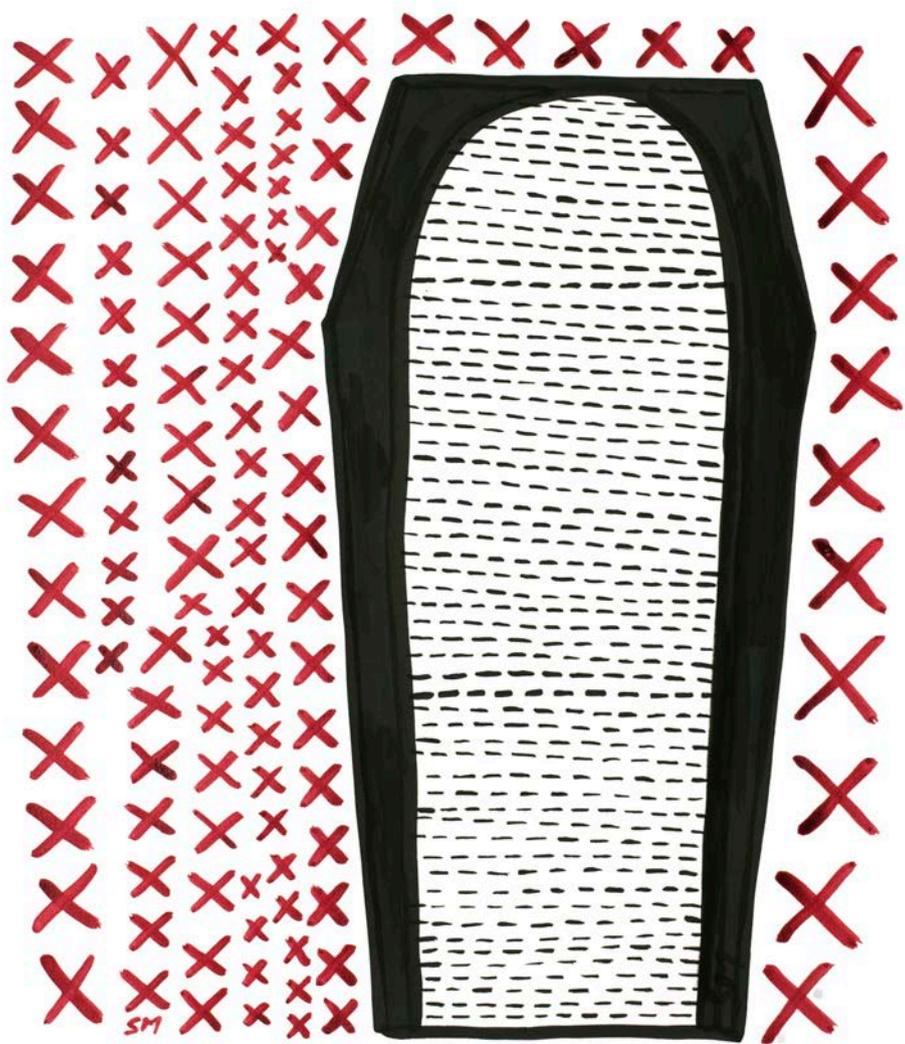


*My ideas will date, and I probably will be ridiculed, 2016/17*  
Ink and acrylic paint on fabric  
47cm x 71cm

Part 1:

# THINKING ABOUT HISTORY

*Like everyone before, I will fall into the void of history.* 2016  
Ink on paper  
35cm x 42cm



SM

# c700BCE

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**But I will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction.<sup>3</sup>**

***Work and Days*, Hesiod**

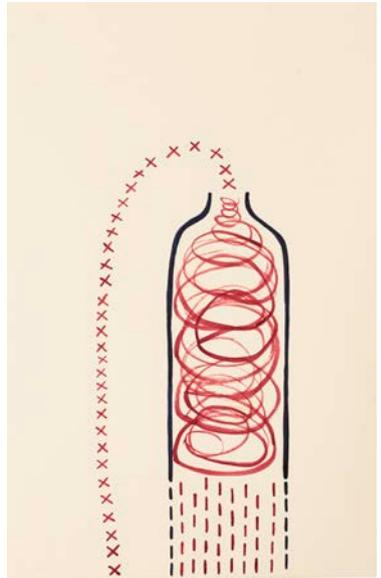
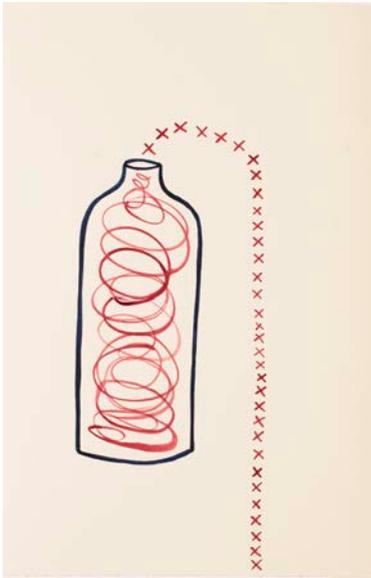
The epic poem *Work and Days* establishes the origin myth of Pandora and how woman was created. Pandora was a 'gift' to Epimetheus as punishment for Prometheus stealing fire from the gods. Each god gave Pandora a specific quality to 'plague all men who eat bread'.<sup>4</sup> The gods had their ultimate revenge when Pandora took the lid off the jar she was not meant to open, thus bringing 'sorrow and mischief' to male utopia. The gods rejoiced in their victory!

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1982) and Luce Irigaray (1930), along with countless others, have written about the dangers of this myth in confirming female oppression that works to keep women in their place and in exile from the fulfilment of themselves and their own becoming.

Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* (1949):

Lawmakers, priests, philosophers, writers and scholars have gone to great lengths to prove that women's subordinate condition was willed in heaven and profitable on earth. Religions forged by men reflect this will for domination: they found ammunition in the stories of Eve and Pandora.<sup>5</sup>

Adding to this list of 'pillars', we need to include artists, as they have been key actors in reinforcing through images, song, text and performance these secondary conditions from ancient times to the current day, through their depictions of this myth (and others like it) that work to uphold the status quo of female subjugation.



All the evils bound in a jar (*Hesiod, c700BCE*), 2018  
Ink on paper  
26cm x 38cm (2 panels)

# c425–300BCE

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**A woman must bear everything on the part of her husband, even if he should be unfortunate, or fail on account of ignorance or illness or drink, or cohabit with other women. For this error is forgiven in the case of men; for women, never. Rather, retribution is imposed. Therefore she must keep the law and not be envious. She must bear anger and stinginess, fault-finding, jealousy and abuse, and any other trait in his nature.<sup>6</sup>**

## **On the Harmonious Woman, Perictione**

*On the Harmonious Woman* was written by Perictione (c425–300BCE) to give pragmatic advice to noble women about how to live their lives. It is thought that this is the first written example of the double standards between men and women, particularly when it comes to extra-marital affairs. The full text includes how to obey parents, how to dress appropriately and how to treat slaves, all with the aim of enacting and living the principle of *harmonia* – harmony.

Perictione was a female member of the Pythagorean School in ancient Sparta, one of the most liberal academies. Harsh, powerful, patriarchal voices like Aristotle (384–322BCE) thought the Spartans were weak, and attributed part of their downfall as a society to the rights they gave women. Even in their liberalism, the reality of subordination is clear – a women's lot is bound to her husbands and her material realities depend on his decisions.

These early ideas about hierarchy, status, class and gender stretch their tentacles all the way to our contemporary era with the lives of women often mirroring the words of Perictione, if not directly, then partially. For many women across the globe their lives are still bound to men for their material existence.

It is thought that Perictione could have been Plato's mother, however the archive is inconclusive.



*Plato's Mother Knew the Game (Perictione, c425–300BCE)*, 2017  
Acrylic paint on fabric  
35cm x 64cm

# c40–60

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**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>7</sup>**

***The Holy Bible, Saint Paul, Galatians 3:28***

The idea of a single male God became a popular belief through the teachings of Jesus (c6BCE–c36) with a powerful call to freedom and utopia in his philosophies. Along with this, there were also strict rules to obey that fed into the status quo with ‘strident demands that women obey their husbands and slaves their masters’ as seen in Ephesians, Collossians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter.<sup>8</sup>

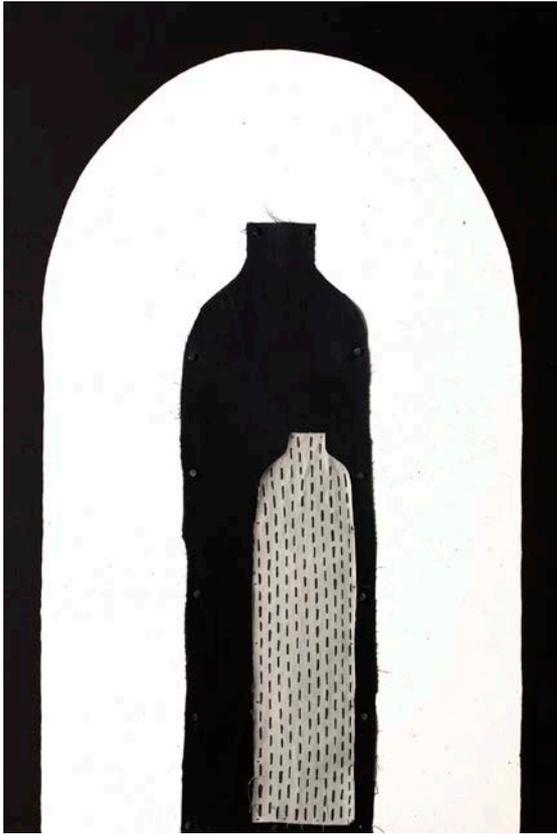
Theology scholar Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936) has said that:

Today we are becoming aware that the church of the first and early second centuries was engaged in a struggle over the status of women and slaves. All believed that the eschatological appearance of Christ, begun in the church, founded a new humanity. To what extent did this new humanity entail the dissolution of these traditional distinctions?<sup>9</sup>

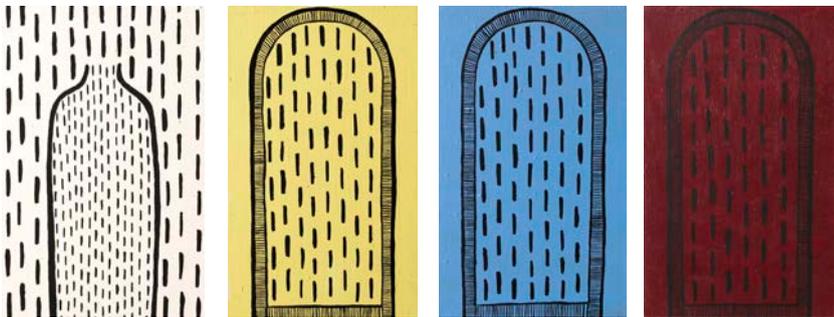
With Christianity becoming the official State religion of the Roman Empire in the 6th century, the Catholic Church brings in what Sylvia Wynter (1928) refers to as the ‘Spirit/ Flesh code’. The fall of Adam and Eve she says, sets up a division between the divine/ spirit/non–flesh clergy and the fallen/sinful/flesh delights of lay people.<sup>10</sup> The ‘Spirit’ can only be accessed by ‘pure’ men who are not permitted to marry or have intimate relationships.<sup>11</sup> This distinct separation gives religious men unquestionable power and control over lay people. Women, even nuns who devoted their lives to God and the Church, can never attain the same status as powerful religious men, as they are permanently excluded from the ‘Spirit’ side of the binary.

Visual imagery was rare in this time and most commonly seen in churches. Images of holy men — God, Jesus, disciples or saints, in struggle or at peace with their faith — is in stark contrast to images of Mary with child. Despite the revering of Mary as the Mother of the New Humanity, this subliminal visual cue is stating to women — the materiality of child rearing is where you belong; we will hold you sacred only when you are performing this act — further reinforcing the binary code.

Reflecting on 2000 years of Christianity, Luce Irigaray wrestles with the concept of a single male Christian God. She questions how this can be relevant to women as ‘man is able to exist because God helps him to define his gender (genre), helps him orient his finiteness by reference to the infinity’. She continues, ‘man has not allowed himself to be defined by another gender: the female.’<sup>12</sup> She states, ‘there is no woman God, no female trinity: mother, daughter, spirit.’<sup>13</sup> Man sets his own limits. Women’s limits are also set by man.



*I am performing my historical duty (Saint Paul, c.40–60), 2018*  
Acrylic paint, ash and fabric on canvas board  
50cm x 70cm



*The Female Trinity of Christine: Justice, Rectitude, Reason (Christine de Pizan, 1405), 2018*  
15cm x 25cm (4 panels)  
Ink, acrylic paint and ash on canvas board

An extraordinary thought became planted in my mind which made me wonder why on earth it was that so many men, both clerks and others, have said and continue to say and write such awful, damning things about women and their ways. I was at a loss as to how to explain it. It is not just a handful of writers who do this... It is all manner of philosophers, poets and orators too numerous to mention, who all seem to speak with one voice and are unanimous in their view that female nature is wholly given up to vice.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine de Pizan**

In 1405, Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) pens the first feminist novel, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, hundreds of years before the word feminism is conjured into existence by Charles Fourier (1772–1837) in 1837. It was a serious grappling with the state of women's lives based on her readings of past and current literature. In the book Christine is visited by three beautiful female visions; Reason, Rectitude and Justice. Throughout the book they console and teach Christine how to create an impenetrable (metaphoric) fortress to protect her and other worthy women.

Part of their consoling includes:

Now, if you turn your mind to the very highest realm of all, the realm of abstract ideas, think for a moment whether or not those philosophers whose views against women you've been citing have ever been proven wrong. In fact, they are all constantly correcting each other's opinions, as you yourself should know from reading Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where he discusses and refutes both their views and those of Plato and other philosophers. Don't forget the Doctors of the Church either, and Saint Augustine in particular, who all took issue with Aristotle himself on certain matters, even though he is considered to be the greatest of all authorities on both moral and natural philosophy. You seem to have accepted the philosophers' views as articles of faith and thus as irrefutable on every point.<sup>15</sup>

Pizan questions male authority and men's writing of the world by calling out their unjust opinions of women. Pizan writes women into history by naming and providing a snapshot into the lives of many brave and intelligent women who fought battles, led kingdoms and made decisions that contributed to the making of the world.

Then I looked carefully into what I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I still couldn't pretend that I didn't exist. I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought about doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed; whereas if I had merely stopped thinking altogether, even if everything else I had ever imagined had been true, I would have had no reason to believe that I existed. This taught me that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which doesn't need any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. Accordingly this me — this soul that makes me what I am — is entirely distinct from the body, is easier to know than the body, and would still be just what it is even if the body didn't exist.<sup>16</sup>

***Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting one's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences, René Descartes***

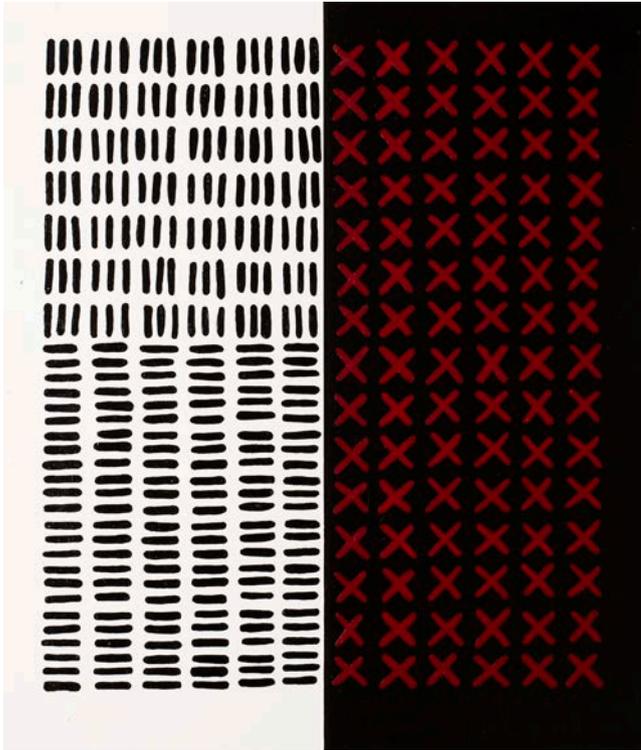
The Enlightened world that Descartes (1596–1650) lived in was a time of immense change. There were new technological developments such as the printing press, world changing scientific views from Galileo (1564–1642), religious rupturing through the Reformations, social change with the move from agrarian lifestyles to urban and capitalist living arrangements, along with European exploration that eventually led to the colonising of non-European lands to satisfy a hunger for profit.

Through his maxim, *I think, I exist*, Descartes fed into the hegemony of the Renaissance by stating that only things that can think (not feel) exist in the world. Animals do not think, and the Earth does not think; leading to a significant separation that fuels Eurocentric hierarchies through reinforcing binaries. As Grosz has stated in *Volatile Bodies* (1994):

What Descartes accomplished was not really the separation of mind from body (a separation which had already been long anticipated in Greek philosophy since the time of Plato) but the separation of soul from nature.<sup>17</sup>

Women, along with nature and animals, were placed on the 'body' side of Descartes' mind/body binary, which continued to reinforced the subordinate 'biological' make up of women that had been believed since Ancient Greece.

In 1663 all of Descartes' writings were placed on the Catholic Church's index of banned books because of the provocative concept that mind, not God, was in control of thoughts.



*Did you know what you were doing?* (René Descartes, 1637), 2017/18  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
60cm x 70cm



*I know you never thought it was a big joke* (François Poullain de la Barre, 1673), 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 20cm (2 panels)

If we were to ask any particular man what he thinks of women in general, and if he were to give an honest answer, he would probably say that they were created exclusively for us, and that their sole function is to look after young children and to take care of the household... He would go on to say that access to science, government, and state positions is closed to women because of divine providence and male wisdom, and that it would be a great joke to see a woman holding a university chair and teaching rhetoric or medicine as a professor, or striding through the streets followed by police commissioners and officers to execute justice, or pleading the case as a defence lawyer before judges, or sitting on the bench to bring down judgement, or heading a parliament, or leading an army into battle, or speaking before republics or princes as head of a diplomatic mission.<sup>18</sup>

***A Physical and Moral Discourse on the Equality of both Sexes, François Poullain de la Barre***

François Poullain de la Barre (1647–1723) in his 1673 book, *A Physical and Moral Discourse on the Equality of both Sexes* used Cartesian 'reason' to argue that thought was a different substance to the body and thus, the mind was sexless. Poullain saw that a lack of education, as well as deeply entrenched patriarchal opinions on the roles of women, were holding women back from equality.

Poullain's ideas were before his time. It wasn't until the late 1700s that female education reform was a highly discussed topic, with various commentators like physician Benjamin Rush (1746–1813) advocating for women's education to raise good American Republican citizens, or writer Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) who argued for women to loose their manners and focus on their education and intellect to navigate their way through the world. In Australia, compulsory education did not become law until the 1870s, even then, it was loosely administered.

Australian women are only beginning to access the types of senior positions that Poullain refers to in his quote. It becomes even more complex when we consider race.

- In 1883, Bella Gruein completed a Bachelor of Arts at Melbourne University. In 1967, Margaret Valadian was the first Indigenous woman to complete a Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Queensland.
- In 1895, Dagmar Berne opened a General Practice in Macquarie Street, Sydney. In 1983, Palyku woman Helen Milroy became the first Indigenous doctor.
- In 1905, Flos Greig became a barrister, practicing in Melbourne. In 1976, Kuku Yalanji woman Pat O'Shane became the first Indigenous lawyer, then Magistrate in 1986 and Chancellor of the University of New England in 1995.
- In 1965, Dame Roma Mitchell became the Supreme Court Judge of South Australia then the Chancellor of the University of Adelaide in 1983.
- In 1975, Djaru woman Mary Ann Bin-Sallik was the first Indigenous lecturer, then the first female Indigenous Emeritus Professor at Charles Darwin University in 2008.
- In 2001, Christine Nixon became the first female police commissioner of Victoria. (In 1982, Sandra May was the first Indigenous police woman.)
- In 2001, Yamatji and Noongar woman Carol Martin was the first Indigenous woman elected to the Australian parliament in the seat of Kimberley.
- In 2010, Julia Gillard became the first female Prime Minister of Australia.
- In 2013, Julie Bishop became the first female Minister for Foreign Affairs.
- In 2013, Simone Wilke became the first female Major General in the Australian Defence Force.
- In 2016, women in the Defence Force could fight in front line combat positions.
- In 2017, Susan Kiefel became the first female Chief Justice of Australia.

# 1677

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I do not know why matter should be considered unworthy of the Divine nature...<sup>19</sup>

***The Ethics of Benedict de Spinoza: Demonstrated After the Method of Geometer and Divided Into, Benedictus de Spinoza***

Spinoza (1632–1677) was a radical philosopher and contemporary of Descartes and Poullain. Grosz has linked Spinoza to a counter philosophical line of enquiry beginning with the Stoics that believes in immanence over transcendence. In *The Incorporal* (2017) Grosz states:

Spinoza restores the connections between materiality and ideality that Cartisian (and Platonic) dualism keeps apart... he argues that the entirety of the material order expresses precisely what the entirety of the order of ideas express.<sup>20</sup>

Through immanence, instead of the Christian notion of transcendence, Spinoza speaks of a world where:

Ideas are able to come “into” mind because they are ideas of a specific body, my body. Not ideas about a body, but ideas that address and are dependent on the ways in which bodies are affected.<sup>21</sup>

This view was a dangerous proposition as it was contrary to the Church’s doctrines. Spinoza’s ideas were a precursor to contemporary thought such as Karen Barad’s ideas of intra-activity and the understanding of subjectivities through individual cultural, economic and social positions.

Spinoza tried to challenge dualist modes of philosophy in his lifetime stating that Descartes’ separation was ‘ill-defined’.<sup>22</sup>



*I know why Descartes won (Benedictus de Spinoza, 1677)*, 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 40cm

The woman will accordingly not learn geometry; she will know only so much about the principle of sufficient reason or the monads as is necessary in order to detect the salt in satirical poems which the insipid grubs of our sex have fabricated. The beauties can leave Descartes' vortices rotating forever without worrying about them... they will not fill their heads with battles nor in geography with fortresses, for it suits them just as little to reek of gunpowder as it suits men to reek of musk.<sup>23</sup>

***Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings, Immanuel Kant***

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was a real 'grub' (his words, not mine!). Kant is very clear about men only knowing and participating in the makings of the world. He ridiculed notable women scholars of his era including linguist and philosopher Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (1647–1720) and mathematician Emilie du Châtelet (1706–1749), commenting that they might as well wear beards!

Such a spiteful attack from a man in power on people who are challenging the accepted patriarchal status quo is reminiscent of current Australian 'grubs' like Andrew Bolt, Alan Jones and Eddie MaGuire, who periodically spark controversy with inflammatory opinions.

Kant's comments on the role of women in *Observations* occurred during a period when there was public discussion on women's education, mutual love and marriage partnerships. The emotive and expressive language he uses in *Observations* to discuss the binary of the sublime and beautiful reinforces the already existing status quo, only now placed within the new cultural framework and language of Romanticism.



Keep that status quo machine rolling (*Immanuel Kant, 1764*), 2018  
Ink on paper  
76cm x 29cm

# 1791

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**Woman, wake up; the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights... Enslaved man has multiplied his strength and needs recourse to yours to break his chains. Having become free, he has become unjust to his companion. Oh, women, women! When will you cease to be blind? What advantage have you received from the Revolution? A more pronounced scorn, a more marked disdain.<sup>24</sup>**

***The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizens,*  
Olympe de Gouges**

Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793) was a radical figure in the French Revolution. In 1791, she re-writes the *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens* to be inclusive of rights for women. Included is a marriage contract based on ‘equal’ partnership. Women were not equal in this era, they were not citizens, and had few rights. Their material survival relied upon a male person being central to their life.

Olympe de Gouges’ critique of this ‘freedom document’ was not well received by any political group in France. Already a target of harassment due to years of questioning systems of power through radical pamphleteering, de Gorges was sent to the guillotine in 1793 after publishing *The Three Urns, or the Welfare of the Motherland*. The pamphlet begins, ‘Everywhere I found the same men, idiots and aggressors, dupes and scoundrels; a world full of crime and error, so to speak’.<sup>25</sup> Her words are reminiscent of much radical activity that occurred before, during and after the Revolutionary period, where marginalised people were desperate for change, and literally had nothing to lose, calling out power inequities and radically embodying their politics.

In 1794, new policies came into effect banning women’s political meetings in France. Other European countries followed, adopting similar laws.



*Dying for Rights (Olympe de Gouges, 1791)*, 2017  
Acrylic paint and fabric on board  
8cm x 47cm

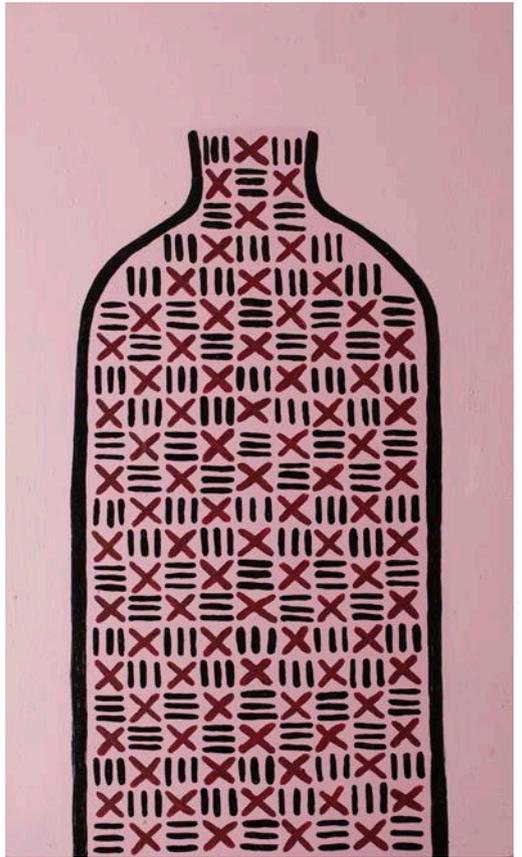
**The most valuable of all social capital is that invested in human beings and of that capital the most precious part is the result of the care and influence of the mother, so long as she retains her tender and unselfish instincts.<sup>26</sup>**

***Principles of Economics, Alfred Marshall***

Alfred Marshall (1842–1924) is considered the grandfather of modern economics. He lived with the Industrial Revolution in full swing. Marshall believed in the power of economics to responsibly study the nature of man and his everyday life in society. He considered economics to be the greatest of all the social sciences for its ability to know people.

Marshall's ideas on what it took for people to succeed in a modern economy maintained the status quo. Marshall had a very middle class opinion on women's work; they should not work outside the home, but nurture, care and educate their children to be responsible members of society so they could grow into the next generation of citizens and workers. He considered that working women could not look after their children suitably.

It is ironic then that his wife, Mary Paley Marshall (1850–1944), who he met at Cambridge University when she was a student, became the first female economics lecturer. She continued to work throughout their married life and was a much loved and popular lecturer to her female students at the various universities she taught at. Mary Paley Marshall subverted all 'respectable' Victorian conventions through her teaching and advocating for women's education. Alfred Marshall, on the other hand, was publicly against women's education — making them an intriguing family who oscillated between both sides of hegemonic and counter-narratives in their lifetimes. Their marriage survived their differing public beliefs, which seems remarkable given the personal and professional costs each of them paid to maintain their partnership.



Mothers Make Capitalism Work (*Alfred Marshall, 1890*), 2017  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
60cm x 107cm

# 1949

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**The bourgeois woman clings to the chains because she clings to her class privileges. It is drilled into her and she believes that women's liberation would weaken bourgeois society; liberated from the male, she would be condemned to work... she feels no solidarity with working-class women: she feels closer to her husband than to a woman textile worker. She makes his interests her own.<sup>27</sup>**

## **The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir**

When Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1982) released her epic study into humanity, *The Second Sex*, in 1949, it was met with hostility because it challenged the very foundations on which the Western world was built. It is worth noting that French women gained the right to vote in 1945, four years before its release. The Catholic Church placed *The Second Sex* on their index of banned books.

Simone de Beauvoir outlined that 'the real reins of the world'<sup>28</sup> have always been in the hands of men. Men have sovereignty over women and the abyss between men and women's lived experience was ever present, constructed by the way 'civilisation' was ordered. In exploring biology, psychoanalysis, socialism, history, myths, and life stages, *The Second Sex* intensely covers what it means to live as a 'woman' throughout Western history and within patriarchy.

Simone de Beauvoir links class and gender to highlight how class divides gender, and why women as an oppressed group have not come together. Working women have always subverted the middle class expectations of gender by working outside the home in order to financially survive. This contrast of values and material realities highlights the role of class and gender in shaping social, emotional and economic identities and experiences of the world.

Simone de Beauvoir concludes with the hope that one day, men and women can live as peers.



*The Chains of Class* (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949), 2018  
Ink and acrylic paint on fabric  
15cm x 42cm

# 1972

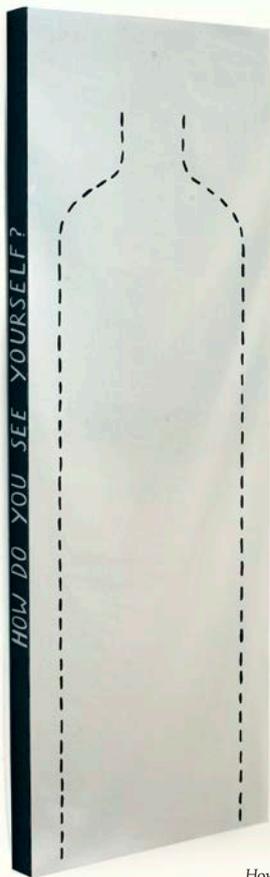
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**Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at... The surveyor of woman in herself is male; the surveyed female.<sup>29</sup>**

**Ways of Seeing, John Berger**

John Berger's TV series and book *Ways of Seeing* analysed Western visual culture starting with Renaissance paintings and ending with advertising imagery. He proposes that the invention of the camera has dramatically changed the meaning of objects and the way we see and experience them. To articulate this, he walks us through his version of visual time travel, critiquing art world structures along the way.

Berger (1926–2017) begins his story within the cultural turn towards 'Man' where the body ideals of Antiquity return to fashion. Unlike Antiquity where taut male flesh was in style, during the Renaissance female nakedness (leading to male titillation) becomes a dominant subject matter. In explaining the evolution and prevalence of the male gaze across time, Berger shares a challenging insight into patriarchal structure and how artists, through images, have worked to keep women in their place.



*How do you see yourself?* (John Berger, 1972), 2018  
Acrylic paint on mirrored perspex board  
60cm x 160cm

# 1975

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**In the same way as god created Eve to give pleasure to Adam, so did capital create the housewife to service the male worker physically, emotionally, and sexually, to raise his children, mend his socks, and patch up his ego when it is crushed by the work.<sup>30</sup>**

***Revolution at Point Zero, Silvia Federici***

The Wages for Housework movement led by Selma James (1930), Brigitte Galtier, Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1943), and Silvia Federici (1942) was a ferocious call for the invisible domestic work of women to be seen and paid for. It proposed that capitalist systems needed to value housework as an essential component within their ecology of profit making by paying for it. It directly challenged the social role assigned to women since the rise of Western 'civilisation'. The Wages for Housework movement saw housewives as workers in struggle, tired from all the cooking, smiling, loving, caring and f\*\*\*ing they had to do as part of having a family.

As a movement, they wanted radical change in attitudes towards gender roles and advocated for services to support women to live valued lives outside the home.



3000 Years of Service to the State (Silvia Federici, 1975), 2018  
Acrylic paint, ink, fabric and ash on canvas board  
30cm x 70cm

# 1987

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**We look in the mirror to please someone, rarely to interrogate the state of our body or our spirit, rarely for ourselves and in search of our becoming.<sup>31</sup>**

***Sexes and Genealogies, Luce Irigaray***

Luce Irigaray (1930) asks important questions like:

What is your relationship with the divine?

Are you living in exile from yourself?

How are you tied to patriarchy?

How do you define yourself?

Are you becoming?

Why are you not becoming?

Are you speaking as a dominant masculine subject?

How are you finding your own voice?

Irigaray's powerful call to reimagine the world is a complex navigation between enacting a self-made becoming while resisting reabsorption back into the male order that continues and perpetuates hegemonic power. She wants a new set of values where men and women can have mutual recognition.



*Am I pleasing or becoming?* (Luce Irigaray, 1987), 2018  
Acrylic paint on mirrored perspex board  
60cm x 110cm

# 1991

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**Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting – the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.<sup>32</sup>**

## ***Theory as Liberatory Practice, bell hooks***

*Theory as Liberatory Practice* is a call for self actualisation through engaging with the social practice of theory. hooks (1992) discusses the power of naming things and how this can assist in revolutionary struggles, especially for black women and women of colour.

hooks outlines that theory has created a purposeful gap between itself and practice, as a strategy to maintain an intellectual hierarchy. To be inclusive and break down this barrier, hooks has made the political decision to write in an accessible style to reach a wider audience.

In a testament to the success of this approach, hooks outlines letters she has received from African American men in prison who have been reading her books to understand how patriarchy has affected their own self architecture. This affirmation reminds hooks that in speaking to diverse audiences, feminist theory can harness radical social change.



*I am still not saying anything* (bell hooks, 1991), 2017/18  
Gouache, acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
60cm x 77cm

# 1993

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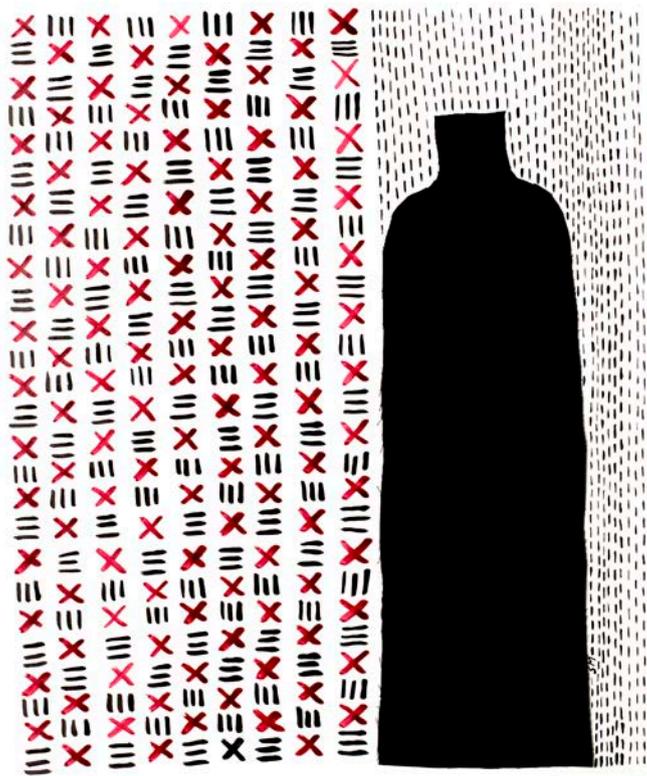
**The view of the other as inessential is the master's perspective. The master's view is set up as universal, and it is part of the mechanism of backgrounding that it never occurs to him that there might be other perspectives from which he is background.**<sup>33</sup>

***Feminism and the Mastery of Nature, Val Plumwood***

As an environmental philosopher, Val Plumwood (1939–2008) spent her life trying to return nature's soul back into the Western imagination. This enormous task was a lifetime of work outlining the injustices of land exploitation, enmeshed in a feminist critique on how dualisms provided the platform for this to occur.

*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* is a monumental effort to this life cause of writing and righting historical wrongs. Plumwood outlines in great detail how the dominant side of the binary has had such a devastating and harmful affect on the world. She reminds us to resist the master story that keeps us in bondage and that has the potential to subsume us whole. Plumwood suggests we can shift this structure when we decolonise ourselves from the infinite tangles of the dualist stronghold and make a purposeful change in how we inhabit the Earth to remake the mould and explore different stories.

To demonstrate the depth of Plumwood's connection to the non-human world, she took the name of the mountain that she lived on and with, Plumwood.



*I am in the background-foreground/background/denial* (Val Plumwood, 1993), 2016  
Ink and fabric on paper  
55cm x 65cm

# 1998

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**I think people come up with a lot of expectations that I'm supposed to wave the magic wand and prepare these magical formulas that will teach white women how to be non-racist and how to accept us as women.<sup>34</sup>**

### *Sister Girl*, Jackie Huggins

*Sister Girl* by Bidjara and Birri Gubba Juru activist and historian Jackie Huggins (1956) is a lived account of the destruction European colonial regimes of power have had on First Nations people of Australia.

In grappling with the 'racist mythology'<sup>35</sup> that has been embedded into white Australian's imaginations due to its colonial past, Huggins discusses how these myths have been upheld over time and the consequences they have had for Aboriginal people since 1788.

In sharing stories of her mother Rita's life, an incredibly powerful reality is called into focus as well as the layers of historical deficit that have been created through systematic brutality and the Stolen Generation:

Like other Aboriginal women, Rita was denied her own maternity while forced to wash, change babies' nappies and play with her white employer's children. Painful insult indeed.<sup>36</sup>

This cruelty of parents being denied their children stems from white Australians thinking they are the 'supreme race'<sup>37</sup> and needing to control the lives of First Peoples with a long-term strategy of cultural eradication.

As a feminist, Huggins speaks of the enormous gap between the lives of black and white women and demands that white feminist women think about their historical prejudices — on their own — without Aboriginal women being their maids to guide them through this process.<sup>38</sup>



Changing the Colonial Discourse (Jackie Huggins, 1998), 2018  
Ink and acrylic paint on fabric  
13cm x 57cm

# 2007

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**The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook, or an acknowledgement; we never leave it and it never leaves us behind.<sup>39</sup>**

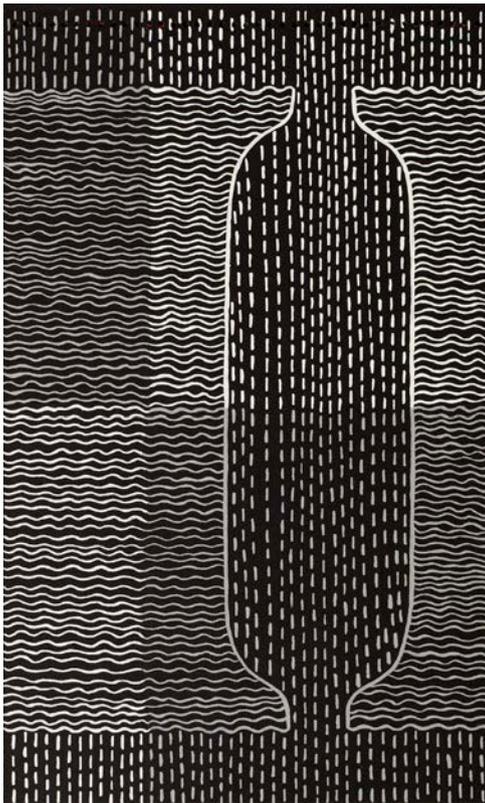
***Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning, Karen Barad***

Karen Barad (1956) reminds us of how entangled the past is with our contemporary lives. This ‘installation conversation’ is a testament to how the past doesn’t leave us, we are affected by its historical layers whether we are aware of it, or not.

This seemingly simple quote goes to the heart of Barad’s complex philosophies. Time, like everything else, cannot be fixed because ‘boundaries do not sit still’.<sup>40</sup> This lack of rigid structure challenges fixed Western hierarchies.

Barad suggests that we can be *in* the world and *of* the world, not existing as separate entities from it. Since everything that exists has its own agency, we can meet other things with our own porous structures of self, and converse without domination.

This shift requires us to let go of engrained Western master structures and start performing (doing) new languages and actions.



*The past matters* (Karen Barad, 2007), 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on board  
40cm x 70cm

**By the incorporeal, I mean the direction or trajectory that orients a movement of concepts or thoughts, that constitutes the possibility of a process of understanding, that enables the creation of a philosophy or a work of art as an emergence from and an entwinement with a material order, planets, stars, constellations, nebulae, and so on, beyond us, and a world of objects, things, processes, and events that constitute materiality on earth, with the emergence and evolution of life in its growing complexity.<sup>41</sup>**

***The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism, Elizabeth Grosz***

*The Incorporeal* by Elizabeth Grosz (1952) outlines a philosophy in which binaries do not explain the properties of the world. Grosz takes us on incorporeal time travel to demonstrate that since the Stoics (c300BCE) there has been a counter to dualist thought, offering an alternative to the status quo.

*The Incorporeal* gives us an *ontoethics* – what it means to live in the real world, how we relate to the entire world (human, organic and inorganic) and how we make it different from the past. Grosz builds on the history of ‘incorporeal’ philosophy by combining ethics (the way we face the other) and politics (how we live together), to offer us a non-hierarchical way of living in the only world we have, through immanence and the incorporeal.

Elizabeth Grosz makes philosophy accountable to difference.

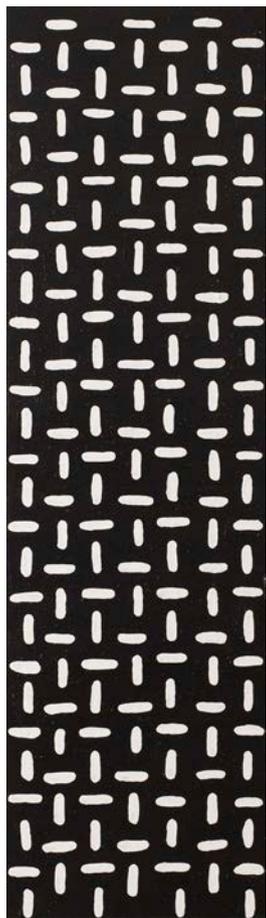


*I am incorporeal* (Elizabeth Grosz, 2017), 2017/18  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board with fabric  
40cm x 145cm

Part 2:

# TALKING BACK TO HISTORY

*lekta substance fate GOD power immanence incorporeal (Elizabeth Grosz, 2017), 2017*  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
30cm x 107cm



# THE ABYSS

In voyaging through this version of feminist time travel, the most striking thing I find is a want for change – to live in this world without a gaping abyss between ourselves and others.

But the abyss between people is an aspect of *living in this world*. This is made clear through the time travel presented in Part 1. Hesiod, Decartes, Kant and Marshall are working to maintain the divide, while Pizan, Spinoza, Poullain, de Beauvoir, Berger, Irigaray, Federici, hooks, Plumwood, Huggins, Barad and Grosz are outlining why the divide is there, how it became so monumental, and offering ways to move beyond it.

I find myself continually asking: How do I manage the abyss in my own world? How do I meet life in a way that isn't feeding into it?

My motivation in creating *Unbind Me* is to have a conversation, an 'installation conversation'. I hope to generate open and calm discussion about the past, how it lives on today, how it has affected our self architecture, and what we can do individually and collectively to manage it.

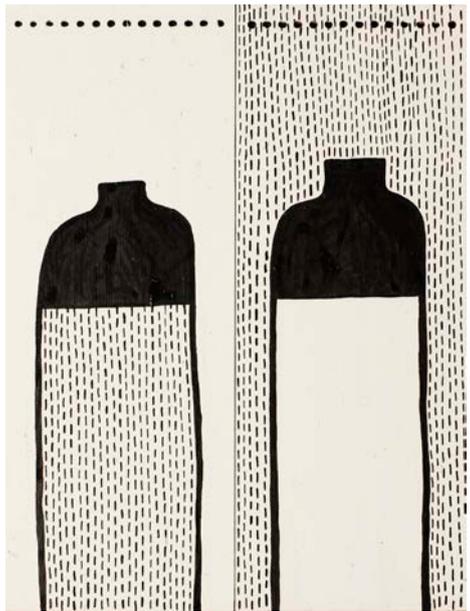


*I want a new subjectivity, 2018*  
Acrylic paint on fabric  
83cm x 90cm

# AN ARTS PRACTICE ALWAYS GOING BACK TO THE DARKNESS

The imagery that is seen in *Unbind Me* is a long-term obsession in exploring how to present existential thoughts and bodies together. Never-ending patterns of thoughts and feelings are presented in, on and around bodies who are floating in what Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) would call ‘pure depth’. Pure depth, or night, or darkness, in a phenomenological sense, is a space to take a break from being yourself. You can recoup, be anonymous and make sense of your time in the world intra-acting with people and things. As Gayle Salamon has said, needing to withdraw is the ‘twin of relating to people and opening out’.<sup>42</sup>

Our social and self identities are intimately tied to these thoughts, feelings and body we inhabit. All of these things manifest into our own realities and shape how we experience the world and perform within it. In creating imagery that moves beyond traditional portraiture, I’m interested in what happens when we see material-discursive selves who are made of more than beautiful flesh, and who contemplate themselves in silence and solitude about how they live in the world.



*You can never escape yourself*, 2017  
Ink, acrylic paint and ash on board  
30cm x 40cm



"so beyond nothingness, what is there?" (Lala Rukh), 2017/18  
Acrylic paint, ash and fabric on canvas board  
30cm x 57cm



*I long for night. I long to recline, 2018*  
Acrylic paint, ash, canvas board, board, fabric  
40cm x 90cm

Part 3:

HONOURING ARTIST  
CHANGE MAKERS

# THE TRUTH TELLERS

The truth tellers are contemporary artists. They look directly into the eyes of people, institutions and histories that have shaped our world. No matter how much it hurts, they continue on through the heartache, through the doubt, through the tropes, through the obstacles, to tell us their truth in words and images. Unlike Simone de Beauvoir's 'patriarchal pillars' who hold onto their power, these 'contemporary pillars' are change makers through their continued action of challenging hegemonic power. They are participating in an ever-continuing line of counter-narrative radicals working for the good of their community by making artworks that share lived experience and complex viewpoints. They are working to unbind history.

These are my truth tellers — that I look towards — who share their power, skills and resources with others.

# FAY CLAYTON 1946

## What Really Happened In Australia

Fay Clayton is a Wiradjuri Elder with paintings in national and private collections. Clayton has created one of the most haunting, emotional and heart sinking artworks dealing with the historically brutal practice of the Australian government 'legally' taking (stealing) children from Aboriginal parents.

*End of the Line* (2012) is a black and white painting depicting train tracks leading to Cootamundra Girls Home, where many young girls were taken, trained and placed as domestic servants against their will. Throughout the painting, ghosts wander lost, representing parents in turmoil searching for their children. As an active member of the Healing Foundation, Clayton graciously shares her story to make sure this account of Australian history is known, along with supporting and advocating for people who are part of the Stolen Generation.



*The Truth Tellers (Fay Clayton 1946)*, 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# LALA RUKH (1948–2017)

## **A Life of Activism Against the Unholy Trinity: Men, Money and Morality**

Lala Rukh was an artist, a brazen feminist activist assisting in the establishment of the Women's Action Forum and pioneering academic for thirty years, developing courses at the National Art School in Lahore, Pakistan. Her feminist political life has been remarkable in effecting change through her protests, policy work, poster art and consciousness raising.

Rukh's art practice is quiet and meditative, using poetic minimalist strategies of reducing line and deconstructing text in her drawings, photographs and prints. This stillness and capturing of nothingness is in sharp contrast to her very public activist career. There has been a resurgence of interest in her artworks, with recent inclusion in major international art exhibitions.



*The Truth Tellers (Lala Rukh 1948–2017)*, 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# KATH WITHERS 1948

## **Fierce Generosity**

Kath Withers is a Wiradjuri Elder creating paintings and fibre-based artworks that are in major Australian and private collections. She has received many accolades for her art making. Withers runs a studio and gallery space that supports cultural knowledge and sharing through regular weaving workshops in Wagga Wagga.

Withers is committed to creating social change through art making. For many years she has instigated and run successful art programs for Aboriginal inmates and their families at Juneee Correctional Centre. A deep care for community is evident in everything that Withers does.



*The Truth Tellers* (Kath Withers 1948), 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# LORRAINE TYE 1950

## **Sharing Stories and Ways of Life**

Lorraine Tye is a Wiradjuri Elder who has artworks in major Australian collections and sits on various boards. Her artworks speak of Wiradjuri women's stories, incorporating installation, video or intricate weavings across a variety of scales, from miniature to large and immersive.

This generous sharing of stories allows for people of different backgrounds living on Wiradjuri country to understand traditional stories and ways of life. Tye's artworks act as a cultural bridge between divided and contested histories by allowing an entry point into important and ancient understandings of place.



*The Truth Tellers* (Lorraine Tye 1950), 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# GAIL MANDERSON 1952

## Language is the Key

Gail Manderson is a Wiradjuri Elder and weaver with artworks held in a number of major collections in Australia and America. Manderson creates baskets as artworks and also as learning tools; regularly teaching primary school students in Wagga Wagga Wiradjuri language through tactile means with words woven onto baskets. Manderson has developed fun ways to engage students in learning language.

Manderson supports her community by caring for Aboriginal people who are taken into police custody in Wagga Wagga through her cultural liaison role, as well as supporting young people who are at risk and need immediate care and guidance. Manderson gives her time, love and care to her community.



*The Truth Tellers* (Gail Manderson 1952), 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# JULIE MONTGARRETT 1955

## **Fraught Facts and Carrier Bag Stories**

Julie Montgarrett's haptic art practice spans textile, drawing and installation in complex and nuanced ways that draw you into another world. This world is just as chaotic and fraught as the one we live in, except the hard truths have been turned into thoughtful observations and beautiful objects with unfinished stories that go in and out of focus.

Montgarrett's unwavering commitment to feminism and social justice spans over thirty years of international activism, curation and artistic adventures, all the while maintaining an academic career with a commitment to supporting students and communities by shaping lives through contemporary art and working towards changing attitudes on the personal level through political artworks.



*The Truth Tellers (Julie Montgarrett 1955), 2018*  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# CHRISTINE DEAN 1963

## Queer Abstraction

Christine Dean is an artist who works to disrupt the tradition of hard edge abstraction painting by using pastel hues as a humorous twist to diffuse the masculinity of the tradition. She often uses relief text or objects as a means of complicating the flat, two dimensional picture plane.

In an important series of artworks, Dean shares the lives of notable Kings Cross figures from the 1950s onwards as a way of painting these histories into our contemporary consciousness and giving insights into a time when acts of expression that ran against strict gender dichotomies were criminal offences. These paintings remember and remind us of the remarkable people who have pushed for radical social change in regards to sexuality and gender in Australia.

Dean has exhibited paintings in major Australian galleries for the past thirty years and has worked as an academic for over twenty-five years across every Sydney art school developing current and future contemporary artists and designers.



*The Truth Tellers* (Christine Dean 1963), 2018  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# VIC McEWAN 1972

## **Always Materiality: Fog, Hospitals, Landscapes, Trauma**

I should disclose that Vic McEwan is my closest friend, collaborator, co-parent, band mate and husband. We spend our lives supporting each other to be our best selves in an infinitely entangled knot. We both have a similar (respectfully) rebellious streak that drives us to do what we do.

McEwan's international arts practice is diverse, ranging from sound, installation, and performance, to large-scale outdoor projections, playing infrastructure, directing, producing and curating. The difficult materiality of life is at the forefront in the artworks he creates. His work is the embodiment of the cultural turn towards new materialism, where objects, people and places have active agency and are embraced as collaborators. This intra-activity is ever present and makes for exciting and unexpected results.

Since 2004, McEwan has been supporting artists and musicians in their practice through the Cad Factory. By providing space, opportunities, income and support, this generous commitment to people builds creative communities and fosters care, nurturing open conversations to progress personal and cultural knowledge.



*The Truth Tellers (Vic McEwan 1972), 2018*  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

# JACKO MEYERS 1982

## **Community, Friends and Pop Culture**

Jacko Meyers is an artist and performer who is deeply committed to her community of Wagga Wagga and loves bringing friends together through her exhibitions and performances. Meyers works each week in the supported studio the Art Factory where she creates quirky paintings, drawings and performances about pop culture, Australian TV soapies, her family and friends.

Meyers is a visible leader, having been featured in documentaries and short films, along with performing in experimental site-specific artworks, traditional theatre plays, and holding numerous group and solo exhibitions. Meyers was an Ambassador for Don't Dis My Ability. Through her continual energy, zest and enthusiasm for people, she leads by example of what an inclusive world looks like.



*The Truth Tellers (Jacko Meyers 1982), 2018*  
Acrylic paint and ash on canvas board  
40cm x 200cm

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Sarah McEwan  
1979



Sarah McEwan is a Birrego based artist working across painting, textile, installation, text, and video that plays with representation informed by the feminist and new materialist philosophy of how to make the present world different from the past.

As a musician, Sarah has played drums in bands for over 15 years and toured through Australia, Europe and China, having released music independently and through the labels Half a Cow and Laughing Outlaw.

Sarah is the Creative Producer of the Cad Factory, an artist-led organisation creating an international program of new, immersive and experimental work guided by authentic exchange, ethical principles, people and place.

As an advocate for an inclusive art world, Sarah collaborated with Leanne Dyer and Riverina Community College to establish a supported studio in Wagga Wagga that has been running since 2016.

Sarah has contributed artworks to over 30 exhibitions in the Riverina, Albury, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Townsville and New York, along with curating over 20 exhibitions from underground warehouses to regional galleries.

Sarah is one of the 2017/18 Create NSW Regional Fellowship recipients, allowing her to undertake research at Duke University (USA), the Women's Centre for Creative Work (USA), as well as a residency at Bundanon Trust to develop work for three exhibitions that extend her critique on the historical position of women over the last 3000 years.

