

# openbook

**The Grubby Urchins**  
library sea shanty

**Markus Zusak**  
new story

**Anchuli Felicia King**  
free to write



AUTUMN 2021

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Tool-sharpening grooves in the Cattai area, near Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River (Lyra, great-granddaughter of Darug Elder Aunty Edna Watson, playing in rock pool), photo by Joy Lai

The *Dyarubbin* exhibition at the State Library of NSW opens on 27 March 2021, see page 44

*Openbook* is designed and printed on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. The State Library of NSW offers our respect to Aboriginal Elders past, present and future, and extends that respect to other First Nations people. We celebrate the strength and diversity of NSW Aboriginal cultures, languages and stories.



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Find out why  
the world went  
mad about sea  
shanties, page 20

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### COVER

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These slogans are not condoned by either the artist or the protesters, see pages 26–29 for more.

Please note: The opinions expressed in this magazine do not represent those of the State Library of NSW



Self-portrait by Dr John Vallance

**The first issue was very warmly received. Too warmly in fact, I thought, until one reader approached me in the Mitchell foyer and complained ...**

## Welcome to *Openbook*

People — library people in particular — love to organise and classify things. It helps us make sense of the world. ‘Divide and explain’, as the ancient slogan went. Early logicians spoke of polarity and analogy as aids to thought. We grasp things by their similarity or dissimilarity to other things we know.

Human society currently appears divided into three main groups. One group intentionally gives offence, another group unintentionally gives offence and a third takes offence. Membership of the groups is fluid, which makes things even harder. Offence is seen as a bad thing and those charged with the running of institutions tend to avoid it as far as possible in the interest of a quiet life.

The result can be rather bland. When we established *Openbook* last year, it was intended as an inoculation against blandness. But what about offence?

The first issue was very warmly received. Too warmly in fact, I thought, until one reader approached me in the Mitchell foyer and complained that it was ‘relentlessly woke’, before another later the same day observed aggressively that it was ‘far too reactionary’. This cheered me greatly.

*Openbook* this time round has even more than before. Essays on freedom and its concomitants, the necessary and unnecessary limits to tolerance, how we go about protecting our fragile physical past, something musical about librarians’ maritime fantasies, a confronting visit to one of our most notorious prisons

together with a not-so-implicit challenge to reflect on what our prisons say about us, a moving story about a father called Helmut and his family who saw time fly, a piece to prepare us for the forthcoming exhibition at the Library about our great river Dyarubbin/Hawkesbury, and lots about art, books, words, poetry, models, food — good and bad. You can decide which is what.

All of this is united by association with our State Library — the place where anything is possible, offensive or not, as long as we can make sense of it. My hope is that you will be fascinated, stimulated and occasionally offended by what you read here.

We will have a ‘Letters to the Editor’ section in the next issue, so please write to us if you want to have a go yourself at classifying, dividing or explaining your irritations and enthusiasms.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I have.

**Dr John Vallance FAHA  
State Librarian**

# openbook *obsessions*



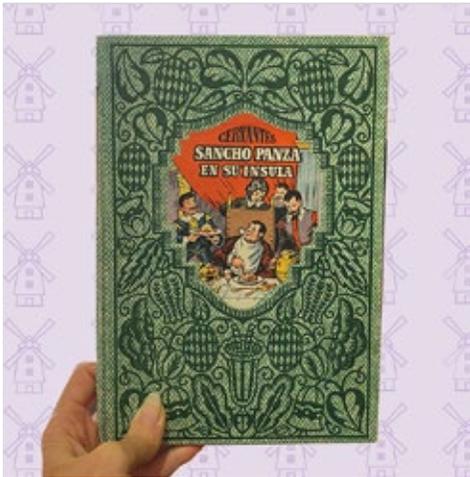
## Cite

You know you've got a serious reader at your book club when their well-read novel is riddled with post-its. At *Openbook*, we can't go past these Jane Austen-themed adhesive page flags, available at the Library Shop.



## Contemplate

*Between the Leaves* is a fabulous poetry podcast from the Victorian Women's Trust. Ellen van Neerven and Hermina Burns illuminate poems written by women and the gender diverse, as well as their own works.



## Crave

Collecting rare editions is a healthy obsession in our books! The late Dr Ben Haneman spent a lifetime gathering 1188 different versions of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and donated them to the Library in 1997.



## Celebrate

Autumn is awards season! See if your favourite book or debut author made the final cut when the Stella Prize is announced on 22 April and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards on 26 April. Watch the award ceremonies online.

## A curious beauty

Well before fashion mags were telling women how to dress their best, a curious British beauty guide from 1837 was offering some questionable advice by today's standards!

The title: *Female Beauty as Preserved and Improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress; and especially by the Adaptation, Colour and Arrangement of Dress etc.*

Cosmetics were a big no-no. The too-slender were encouraged to gain weight through idleness, long baths and eating chocolate. Readers were advised against wearing neck frills, a fashion which originated in France because, claims the author, the necks of French women were: '... long, black and skinny ... horrible cordes au cou or "stringy neck"... caused by passion, crying, shrieking, loud talking.'

It does however provide a rare and detailed study of 19th century women's health and beauty, with fascinating early colour plates showing 'before and after' transformations.

While attributed to 'Mrs' A. Walker, this book is believed to be the work of Alexander Walker (1764–1831), the author of numerous books on anatomy and physiology.





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# Anchuli Felicia King



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## A stage and screen writer considers what freedom means now.

My mother had a life plan for her two children. It was exceedingly simple and – at the risk of reinforcing stereotypes about Asian parenting – exceedingly Asian.

As she had identical twin daughters, one was going to become a doctor and the other a lawyer. But my mother wasn't going to settle there. The lawyer was going to graduate from Oxford, and the doctor would specialise as a neurosurgeon.

My sister did manage some minor rebellions. Instead of Oxford, she went to Cambridge. But by and large, as a successful international trade lawyer, she has dutifully enacted the plan.

I would have killed people as a neurosurgeon. I have fidgety hands and a short attention span. My mind often drifts to big philosophical questions at the expense of the task directly in front of me. Funnily enough, the traits that would have made me a murderous

imbecile in an operating theatre are probably what make me a decent writer.

The rigidity of my mother's plan instilled in me a kind of pathological obsession with freedom. I desired freedom in my pursuits, freedom of movement, freedom of creative expression. Ironically, her attempts to clamp down on my artistic inclinations as a child only drove me further towards becoming an artist.

Having lost my freedom of movement and pursuits this year, I took renewed solace in freedom of expression. Even though my life as a nomadic international artist had been taken away, I still had access to a borderless universe of words, stories and ideas.

This pandemic has raised so many questions for me about how we conceptualise freedom as a global society. How far should governmental power be allowed to extend in a crisis? What freedoms are we willing to give up in exchange for the ease of new technologies? Which of our freedoms come at the expense of our ecosystems?

As artists we have to ask those questions without expecting concise or reductive answers. And I think we need to defend the right for artists around

the world to be restlessly inquisitive, to ask difficult questions without fear for their safety or livelihood.

My mother grew up in a rural town in the Kanchanaburi province of Thailand. She would tell me stories of the extreme poverty she experienced as a child – how she had walked to school on scorching bitumen with bare feet because her shoes had fallen apart and she couldn't afford a new pair.

While my mother's plan for my sister and me felt oppressive when I was a child, as an adult I understand that it was intended to secure us freedom. The freedom that comes with economic security, self-assuredness, and professional success. Freedom from the oppression suffered by young women whose ambition and intellect are stifled by poverty, an oppression she never wanted us to experience. So while I've probably missed the boat on winning a Nobel Prize in Medicine or performing live brain surgery, I still think the plan has been a staggering success.

**Anchuli Felicia King is the winner of this year's Mona Brand Emerging Writer Award. Her plays, including *White Pearl* and *Golden Shield*, have been performed in Australia, the US and the UK.**



Michael Williams, 2021, photos by Joy Lai

# Turning pages

## Sydney Writers' Festival Artistic Director Michael Williams is ready for the challenges of 2021.

Michael Williams has never cared much for the limelight. There's as much value, he believes, in fading into the background as there is in taking up space. When he's hosted public conversations with the great writers and thinkers of our time, as director of Melbourne's Wheeler Centre of Books, Writing and Ideas, he has struck a delicate equilibrium between pushing a subject further and reigning himself in.

'You need the right balance of an ego to believe that you can do it, that you think it's worth people listening to you,' he says. 'And the ability to put ego aside and realise it's not about you.' He flashes a wry grin. 'The best interviewers disappear completely and then steer the guest into a personal revelation

and everyone is surprised. That is the point of the exercise. To be an enabler rather than a star.'

If you've taken a fleeting interest in literature or culture in Australia over the last decade, chances are that you've witnessed Williams in action. Here he is, speaking to Helen Garner over Zoom as part of a November 2020 *Guardian Australia* book club, the writer revealing that publishing two volumes of her diaries makes her feel like 'her guts are hanging out on a clothesline'.

There he is on stage with Colson Whitehead at the Northcote Town Hall in 2017. The Pulitzer winner admits he doesn't think he would have been good enough to write *The Underground Railroad*, his searing look at slavery and freedom in America, when he was younger. 'How do you think you would

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have got it wrong? What do you think naivete would have done to the story?' Williams asks, without missing a beat, his curiosity emboldening the audience, ratcheting up the tension.

Again, at the Athenaeum Theatre in 2018 with US novelist Jennifer Egan. 'There are a lot of thrills in this job – but the moment in which you meet *the* Jennifer Egan and she says, "Call me Jenny" – I can't go on!' he jokes, fanning his collar. Later, talk turns to the writer's late brother Graham, an artist who lived with schizophrenia. 'He is in me ... and always will be,' she says. The conversation is pure Williams. It's punctuated by lightness and humour. There's insight and catharsis, an intellectual generosity that swings in both directions.

When I meet Williams at Sydney's Old Clare Hotel, it's a week before holidays. The city is fuelled by its madcap December energy, that lurch towards unmet deadlines, year-end reunions, last-minute obligations made more urgent by the spectre of coronavirus. Williams, dressed in black, rushes in a few minutes late, a casualty of undecipherable Sydney streets and a wayward Uber. In March, he resigned from his 11-year post as director of the Wheeler Centre. In August, he was appointed the interim artistic director of the Sydney Writers' Festival, replacing Michaela McGuire, whose 2020 festival – featuring the likes of Leslie Jamison, Siri Hustvedt and Bruce Pascoe – was cancelled. A week later, the city went into lockdown.

Programming Sydney Writers' Festival during this moment is fraught with challenges. How should cultural organisations serve their audiences? How do they avoid the pitfalls of that much-maligned 'pivot to digital'?

Williams is warm and self-deprecating. But his eloquence hints at someone who believes in the power of words, the importance of choosing them carefully.

'When you put something online, it changes who can engage with it,' he says, taking a sip of his long black. 'Many organisations use the language of events to describe what happens in the digital space [but] they are not events, they are broadcasting.' He pauses. 'The things I love about an event rely on people being in the room and the chemistry between those people and the audience. The experience of turning to the person next to you.'

Williams' edition of the Sydney Writers' Festival, pandemic willing, will recreate some of this magic. It will focus almost exclusively, he says, on Australian writing. He reads 100 books a year. He's blissfully unfazed by literary snobbery.

'I read the stuff that I take pleasure in and I will rarely force myself to labour through something I don't like,' he says.

'I had a friend point out to me that I am 41 – so if you've got another 40 reading years, you've got 4000 more books to read. It concentrates the mind on how we make these choices.'

Williams admires a well-shaped sentence. 'But for me it is about story – a good story well told will always captivate me.' Programming the festival means devouring Australian literature. Helen Garner's new diary, of course. The latest Kate Grenville and Richard Flanagan ('amazing!'). He was blown away by *Collisions*, the recent short fiction anthology by Liminal, an initiative that nurtures Asian–Australian writers. When he speaks about it, his voice changes register, rises with excitement and I'm reminded, once again, that his hunger for good writing is born of a deep and real enthusiasm.

'It brings marginalised voices of Australian writers of colour to the surface but that is the least of it,' he muses. 'What's so energetic about this collection is: here are a bunch of astonishing writers who are taking risks in bold, literary ways.'

For Sophie Black, a long-time colleague and the Wheeler Centre's Head of Publishing, this perspective is typical of Williams.

'He constantly got a kick out of the smarts of the people that walked through the door at Wheeler,' says Black. 'Whether they were big-name authors, first-time writers or audience members.'

He's never afraid to aim high, Black says. She describes working alongside him as 'exhilarating'.

'Michael's natural state of being is to operate with a coffee in one hand, a book in the other and at least three new ideas in his head,' she says. 'He also doesn't take himself too seriously, despite having a giant brain that could give you a dissertation on any random book you picked off the shelf.'

Williams was born in Melbourne and grew up in the inner north suburb of Brunswick.

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‘My two sons go to the same primary school I went to and it is very weird dropping them off and picking them up from school,’ he grins.

His father was a public servant, his mother a teacher. Literature, he says, was a formative part of his childhood. ‘I read too old for my age and I was desperate for more,’ he laughs. ‘But I would hate for that to sound like a claim for precociousness.’

His family holidayed near Foster, a seaside town in country Victoria, where his grandfather would treat him to a new book from the local independent bookstore. ‘My aunts and uncles and grandparents were all great readers,’ he says. ‘Everyone on their armchairs or towels had the book they were reading. Books were what we discussed. My idea of celebrity, my idea of excitement, was all about books and writers.’

Williams enrolled to study literature at the University of Melbourne. ‘I hated it!’ he groans. ‘When I was there it was very focused on theory and you could go through many semesters of study without reading a book. Bury me in close textual analysis and I will be very happy.’

Although he switched to history, he wrote his Honours thesis on the legacy of the Miles Franklin Award. He was fascinated, he says, by the prize as an ‘ordering mechanism’ for Australian literature, a way of upholding a colonial literary vision. ‘There were relatively few writers of colour, very few women,’ he says. ‘Stories were overwhelmingly historical, rural, realist. It was something I wanted to dig into.’

He fell into a job at Text Publishing out of university, working in international rights and contracts before training as an editor. There, he edited crime writer Shane Maloney and acquired *Addition*, the debut novel from Toni Jordan.

‘It was a story about a woman who suffers from OCD and ends up being happy with her independence,’ he says. ‘[Text publisher] Michael Heyward loved it but said “I’m going to tell her that the couple should end up together.” He said, “Toni, the book has the wrong number of chapters — there are 13 letters in [the protagonist’s] name and only 12 chapters and she is an obsessive counter. It would matter to her, so it matters to us.” It was a close reading. And then he made the case for changing the ending.’

He smiles at the memory. ‘Toni rewrote it,’ he recalls, ‘the book sold to a US publisher

for a lot of money and made her career. I wasn’t capable of making that decision.’

Williams, who had worked at Text for eight years, moved to New York. In his late twenties, he interned in the office of a literary scout and lived in an ‘awful flat’ above a sandwich shop. He worked around the clock, writing reviews for *The Age* back in Australia to supplement his income, but a job in publishing eluded him.

Six months later, he came home.

When the Wheeler Centre took up residence on Little Lonsdale Street, it had been two years since Melbourne was named a UNESCO City of Literature. ‘Victoria’s bid for Melbourne was about a broad base of literary activity — independent booksellers and book clubs and libraries and zine publishers,’ says Williams. The centre’s remit, he says, was to act as a hub for this activity and deliver public programming that sparked the imagination. It opened its doors in 2010, thanks to the patronage of Lonely Planet founders Maureen and Tony Wheeler.

‘No one had asked for the Wheeler Centre,’ Williams says. ‘If you were a struggling writer who felt there weren’t enough grants or a literary organisation working on the smell of an oily rag, you might resent it. It wasn’t a given that we were going to be embraced.’

The way Chrissy Sharp tells it, Williams’ vision was clear from the beginning. Sharp, the CEO of the Sydney Writers’ Festival and the Wheeler Centre’s founding director, flew in from London to find a Director of Programming. ‘Michael was very engaging, knowledgeable and funny and when his interview was over, I walked him to the lifts and came back and announced to the panel: I WANT HIM,’ she tells me via email.

The Wheeler Centre’s opening gala, held at Melbourne Town Hall in February 2010, saw Australian literary luminaries — including David Malouf, Alex Miller and Tara June Winch — each share a story that had been handed down to them through the generations.

‘Two thousand people came out,’ he remembers, shaking his head incredulously. ‘For the first couple of years, I was crippled with anxiety that it wouldn’t work. But from day one people came out in big numbers and the numbers stayed.’

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Who attends talks at cultural institutions? Too often, participating in culture in Australia hinges on feeling entitled to spaces that have been defined by whiteness, by class, by invisible histories of power. Williams, who assumed Sharp's role in 2011, understood this from the outset. In his time as the centre's director, he oversaw events such as Debut Mondays, a weekly series that featured readings by emerging local writers. He launched *The Messenger*, a podcast that explored life as a Sudanese refugee on Manus Island in collaboration with oral history project Behind the Wire. Together with the Aesop Foundation, he conceived The Next Chapter, a mentoring scheme that gives time and funds to writers from underrepresented backgrounds, fostering their book projects.

He helped pioneer the feminist ideas festival Broadside. Over two days in November 2019, the likes of novelist Zadie Smith and essayist Jia Tolentino discussed the ways in which our brains were being colonised by the internet. Monica Lewinsky spoke about the power of reclaiming narratives. Gounpel academic Professor Aileen Moreton-Robertson, the author of *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, critiqued the Enlightenment origins of mainstream feminism. The festival, which I obsessively followed from Sydney, didn't just reflect the zeitgeist. It also pushed the cultural conversation somewhere new.

Not that Williams' directorship was entirely smooth sailing. In 2014, the centre drew criticism when a Palestinian–Australian playwright, Samah Sabawi, was dropped from a public debate. She appeared at the centre in June 2019 as part of a series called Writing in Exile.

Cultural institutions, of course, are increasingly swept up in debates about 'cancel culture'. But for Williams, this discourse focuses on the wrong questions.

'I don't believe in false balance — I believe in expertise and I want to hear from people who are knowledgeable and passionate,' he says firmly. 'The platforms we have are finite so who is worthy of being included is entirely at the prerogative of cultural organisations. There was that minor brouhaha about Brisbane Writers Festival not inviting Germaine Greer. [For me] the key question isn't "Are you being

censored?" but does programming represent filling a gap that otherwise wouldn't be filled?'

Five years ago, Williams was in the audience at the New Yorker Festival, listening to the critic Hilton Als speaking to Toni Morrison.

'It was a conversation that could only happen in that time, in that place, between those people,' he says. 'There was not a person, I'd wager, who didn't feel immensely lucky to be there.'

The best work a festival can do, he says, is belong to the place where it is. Melbourne and Sydney's literary scenes are often unnecessarily pitted against each other, I point out. 'They are very different cities, very different cultures,' he says. 'At a creative level, at the level of the writers, I'm not sure how much it matters.'

The crises of the last year has seen us take refuge in books, seek new worlds and old truths through the portal of writers' imaginations. With borders closed, I say, Australia feels further away than ever. We talk about Geoffrey Blainey's 1966 book *The Tyranny of Distance*.

'The other thing that's important about the Sydney Writers' Festival,' Williams tells me, 'is to address that slight tendency to fetishise the starry names from overseas — at the expense of being aware of the talent that is right here within reach.'

Aren't we in danger, I think privately, of looking inward rather than outward, of falling back on nationalism, of forgetting that Australian writing is both of this unceded place and part of a world beyond it?

Williams, ever the sharp interlocuter, has anticipated an answer to these questions.

'The great danger of that kind of thinking is that it presupposes a cultural monolith of creative endeavour,' he says, eyes twinkling. 'I don't think the value of listening to Australian voices is about pretending they happen in a vacuum. They are constantly in dialogue with experiences and lives elsewhere.'

**Neha Kale is a writer, journalist, critic and magazine editor based in Sydney.**

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**I** don't believe in false balance — I believe in expertise and I want to hear from people who are knowledgeable and passionate'



# Take **5** CARS

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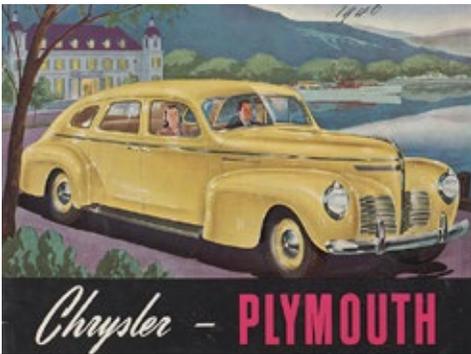
## Behind the wheel

In 1903, the Perier family posed in a De Dion-Bouton Voiturette – the first automobile imported into New South Wales – purchased three years earlier by WJC Elliott of the Austral Cycle Co for £175/10/- (\$351). Photographer Albert Perier holds the steering tiller, with his wife Jessie, daughter Pauline and son Norman aboard. The car could reach 30 km per hour but had no accelerator and reverse gear was an optional extra.



## Test drive

The first Miss Australia, Beryl Mills, in a 1926 photograph by Ted Hood, stands beside her new Studebaker President Sedan. It was one of two cars included in her prize, along with £1000 and a promotional tour of the United States. Mills' father had submitted a photograph of her in a bathing costume to the Miss Westralia contest, which she won before claiming the national title.



## Showroom ready

Stack & Co Pty Ltd was one of Sydney's largest car dealerships, with several showrooms across the city. Started in 1935 by William J (Bill) Stack, who had been General Motors Holden's NSW Sales Manager, the company became the local distributor for Holden commercial vehicles and American Chrysler, Chevrolet and Pontiac cars. Promotional brochures like this were printed by the manufacturer for distribution through dealerships.



## Parking

Car radios first became possible in the 1930s, but improvements in sound quality and affordability saw their popularity rise through the 1950s as a source of entertainment and information. This couple parked at a scenic Sydney spot was photographed by Max Dupain in 1951 to promote a brand of car radio.



## Off road

Seen here floating among the spectator craft at the start of the Sydney–Hobart yacht race in 1971, this steel-bodied car was the first commercially produced amphibious vehicle. Always an oddity, it was manufactured in Germany between 1960 and 1968, but later proved unable to satisfy both maritime and road regulations. Capable of just 8 km/h on water and 100 km/h on land, it used a Triumph Herald engine over the rear axle to power the wheels on the road, while the front wheels acted as rudders in the water.

WORDS Hannah James



# Preserving history

**A multi-million-dollar renovation means the Library's conservation lab has a state-of-the-art new home.**

Photo by Joy Lai

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Underneath the State Library of NSW's sandstone Mitchell Building is an echoing, empty space, with high windows borrowing light from the street level above. In one corner, new stainless-steel workbenches gleam, and from high, white ceilings descend moveable arms whose clinical air hints at the room's eventual use.

This space, carved out of abandoned storage areas, repurposed offices and an old plant room, is the Library's new Ainsworth Conservation Laboratory — named after Len Ainsworth AM, who funded it — still under construction when we visit. By the time you read this, the cavernous rooms will be full of scientific equipment like those fume extraction arms, priceless objects to be worked on, and the industrious conservators who carry out that work.

At one desk, Dana Kahabka will be completing many months of painstaking work on a particularly impressive piece, dating back to the mid-seventeenth century, that played a fundamental part in the story of European exploration of Australia.

'The Tasman Map is one of the most significant items in the Library's collection,' explains Jonathan London, manager of the Library's Collection Care department, and a conservator himself. It charts the course of Dutch explorer Abel Tasman's voyages around Australia in 1642 and 1644, and most of Dana's days over the past year have been spent reducing old, discoloured varnish on the surface. To finish her work before the map takes a starring role in the Library's *Mapping the Pacific* exhibition in July, she'll be using a sophisticated new piece of equipment that will soon be housed in the new lab. 'It's an XRF analyser, which means X-ray fluorescence,' she says. 'It analyses the pigments on the paper.' She hopes it will reveal secrets of the map's history that would otherwise remain hidden.

Across the room, Guy Caron (pictured) — a specialist book conservator who's worked on some of the oldest, rarest printed books in the world — will be carefully removing the binding from a medieval music manuscript that's thought to have been created between 1290 and 1310. It hails from the Italian city of Bologna, is made from vellum, or calfskin, and lays out chants for monks to sing in monasteries. 'But it's been rebound in the wrong order at some point,' says Jonathan. So, Guy will take it apart, document it, reorder it and send it to the digitisation team so its music can sing out to a new, twenty-first-century audience.

Alongside Guy, Steve Bell, another book conservator who worked on the Library's medieval manuscripts, will be rebinding a 'fair copy' of one of James Cook's journals from the voyage of the *Endeavour* (1768–71). Named the Corner Journal, after one of its previous owners, it was copied from the original by Cook's clerk, then signed by Cook and sent back to London to preserve a record of the voyage in case the ship was lost or wrecked. Once work is complete, the Corner Journal will

become one of the Library's many treasured objects that readers can view online and, in special circumstances, in person in the Special Collections area of the Mitchell Library Reading Room.

'A lot of our original heritage material is still consulted by readers,' explains Jonathan. 'We issue maps, rare books — even three-dimensional objects. So we do a lot of work to make sure when things are transported around the building complex from the stacks to the reader and back, or from the lab to exhibitions or to the digitisation team, they survive the journey.'

As conservators like Dana, Guy and Steve work on centuries-old manuscripts at their high-tech new workstations, others will be giving just as much attention to objects that tell a story much closer to us in time. The current exhibition *Coming Out in the 70s* gathered together photos, diaries, magazines, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, badges and oral history from the 1970s to explain what it was like to live through the decade that saw Sydney's first gay rights march, its first Gay Pride Week and its first Mardi Gras parade. Once they're off display, the conservators will create new housing for the items and digitise them all.

When they're not being exhibited, the Library's treasures are kept underground — deep underground. Underneath the Library and the busy streets that surround it, a full five storeys have been dug out for storage. 'We have tens of thousands of linear metres of storage,' says Jonathan, as well as offsite storage at Moorebank. With many more exhibitions on the horizon, and new acquisitions coming in every week, the conservators are busier than ever, making the completion of the spacious new conservation lab very welcome. The lab provides increased flexibility to meet the expanding need for conservation as the Library continues to bring more of its ever-growing collection out and into public view. 'I can't believe how lucky we've been,' says Jonathan, 'because it's been a long time coming, and it's cost a significant amount of money. But it has given us a fantastic space.'

Once all the conservators are settled in and working away, and the lab's spaces are humming with life, that fantastic space will be helping secure the future of the Library's precious collection for many years to come.

**Hannah James is a writer and editor based in Sydney.**

**The Ainsworth Conservation Laboratory was made possible through an extraordinary gift to the State Library of NSW Foundation by Len Ainsworth AM. The State Library extends its thanks to Mr Ainsworth for his generous funding of this project, and to the John Lambie Foundation and the Maple-Brown Family Foundation for their support of the conservation work on the Tasman Map and the Corner Journal respectively. If you would like to support the work of the Library, please contact Susan Hunt, Director, State Library Foundation, on (02) 9273 1529 or visit us online: [sl.nsw.gov.au/give](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/give)**

WORDS Mark Dapin



Joe Hillel and Daniel Bornstein, The Grubby Urchins, photo supplied



Above right: Detail from cartoon in *Sydney Punch*, 9 June 1888

## A recent online boom in sea shanties is a welcome surprise for longtime converts.



I was strolling along St Kilda Esplanade one afternoon last autumn with the magnificently moustachioed tour guide and photographer Daniel Bornstein when Bornstein revealed to me that he was a shantyman.

I pointed to a colourful container ship gliding through Port Phillip Bay.

‘Does that make you want to go *hey ho*?’ I asked.

‘I’m a shantyman,’ he replied. ‘Everything makes me want to go *hey ho*!’

I had never heard the word ‘shantyman’ before. I had no idea that shanty singing was even a thing. I began to investigate further. Then came ‘Wellerman’.

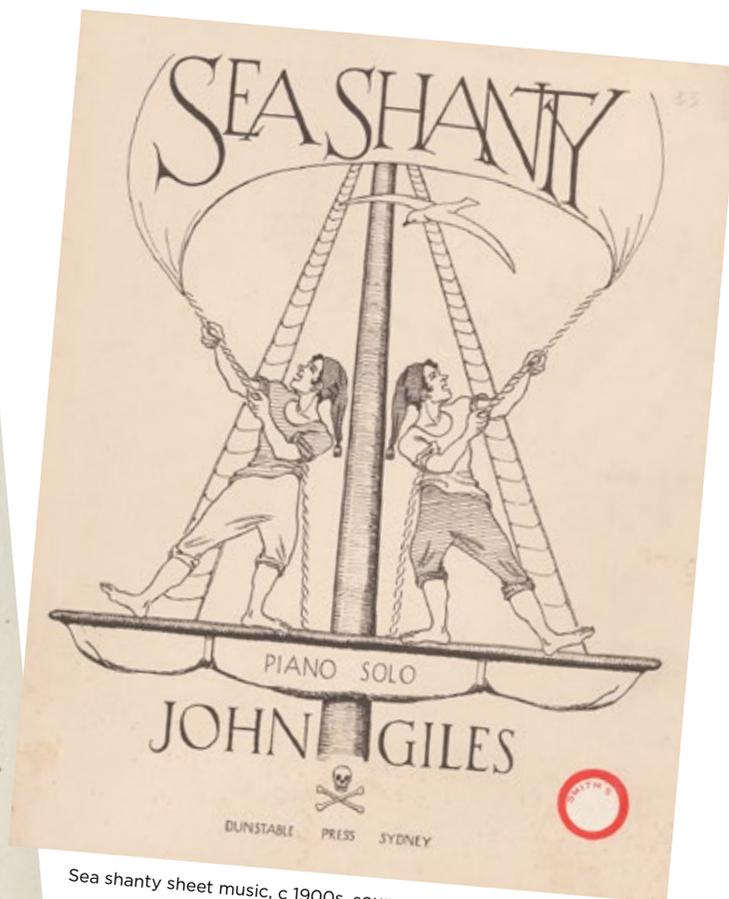
‘Soon May the Wellerman Come’, now known universally as ‘Wellerman’, is a nineteenth-century New Zealand whaling song that went viral on TikTok, a phenomenally popular social-networking service that allows any user to post their own brief musical (or non-musical) performances to every laptop, iPad and smartphone on the planet. With TikTok’s duet function, bedroom balladeers can record themselves singing along with the original artist’s — or anyone else’s — version of a song, and add depth, effects or instrumentation.

A version of ‘Wellerman’ by the little-known UK folk group The Longest Johns seemed to manifest the zeitgeist in January this year, with its mournful tale of frustrated expectation at a time when life seemed locked in stasis all over the world — except, oddly, New Zealand. It sparked thousands of tributes, imitations and augmentations. A subsequent recording of ‘Wellerman’ by Scottish folksinger and former postie Nathan Evans reached number one in the UK dance charts. A corporate neologism, ‘ShantyTok’, was coined to describe the sudden, unprecedented interest in sea shanties on social media.

It would be an understatement to suggest that the shantyquake came as something of a surprise to Australian shantymen and women, but local interest in the form had been growing steadily for some time. I spoke to Margaret Walters, a Sydney-



Illustration from *Songs of the Late Charles Dibdin*, 1864



Sea shanty sheet music, c 1900s, source: Trove

based folk singer who performs (Covid-permitting) with the long-established ensemble Forty Degrees South, which began in the 1980s as the Sydney Shanty Crew then changed its name to the Ensemble of Fat Bearded Shanty Singers.

I ask Walters if there was any initial resistance among shantymen to the involvement of the gender that was traditionally less likely to wear a beard?

‘Not really,’ she says. ‘Back in the old days, a lot of women chose not to go near shanty sessions because they were peopled by big blokes with beards and big voices, and a lot of girls with small voices didn’t particularly like that. Also, a lot of the songs could be seen to be sexist — catalogues of girls in every port and ... proclivities.’

Walters’ band — then known as the Roaring Forties — welcomed the replica First Fleet into Sydney Harbour for the 1988 bicentennial celebrations and performed regularly at the Australian National Maritime Museum (something of a haven for shanty buffs). But Walters didn’t see much new blood come into scene through the nineties and the noughties. ‘At folk festivals, we would sometimes try and avoid the word “shanty” and make sure there was just a “chorus session” towards the end of the evening,’ she says.

However, in 2014, a friend of Walters suggested they visit the Monday-night shanty session at the Dock, a Redfern small bar where a piano keyboard adheres to the ceiling and even the lowly wall-mounted moosehead sports a colourful kerchief.

‘I was totally blown away,’ says Walters, ‘because the people who were there were all under 30! Me and my mates rock along and pull up the average ages considerably.’

At the Dock, the Redfern Shanty Club belted out traditional favourites such as ‘South Australia’ and ‘The Whale’ with a vigour that had not recently been associated with the form. The club handed out song sheets and taught the tunes to newcomers each week. The very fact that there were any newcomers seemed to show this might be a sensible approach.

In Melbourne, Bornstein and Joe Hillel, the Grubby Urchins, had adopted a similar method when they came together in 2018. Although there was regular shanty singing on board the replica tall ship *Enterprize* in Port Phillip Bay, there was no longer much of a scene on land until the Grubby Urchins pioneered a shanty night at the Brothers Public House in Fitzroy. ‘The first session was a full house,’ says Bornstein, ‘and, after that, they just kept growing and growing. And we did *nothing* in terms of spreading the word. It just kind of grew itself.’



Illustration by G Cruikshank, from *Songs of the Late Charles Dibdin*, 1864, showing life between decks and the recreational singing of 'fo'c'sle shanties'

There seemed to be a large and untapped appetite for communal singing, and shanties made for ideal fodder as they were easy to learn, simple to sing and — by their origins — designed for people to join in.

Many people in shantyworld are keen to share their definition of a shanty, and to point out that 'Wellerman', technically speaking, is not one.

Classically, shanties were sung to help synchronise labour on board large ships. In the dynamic days of nineteenth-century packet runs, clipper ships offered regular, scheduled maritime mail services for the first time. Sailing ships, which were largely driven by manpower, had to work like machines.

On the heavy vessels, the biggest task was to raise an anchor that might weigh tens of tons. A small crew could only succeed using concerted, rhythmic muscle power and harmonised movement. There were long haul/long drag shanties and short haul shanties to complement various nautical duties. The ship's shantyman led the singing but played no other part in the job. He had to incorporate different songs, invent new verses, and bawl out his lungs for up to six hours at a time.

Shanty-motivated seamen worked faster and felt more involved. The singing raised their spirits. 'Having a shantyman

was an economic imperative, in a sense,' says Walters. There was a saying that 'a good shantyman was worth 10 crew'.

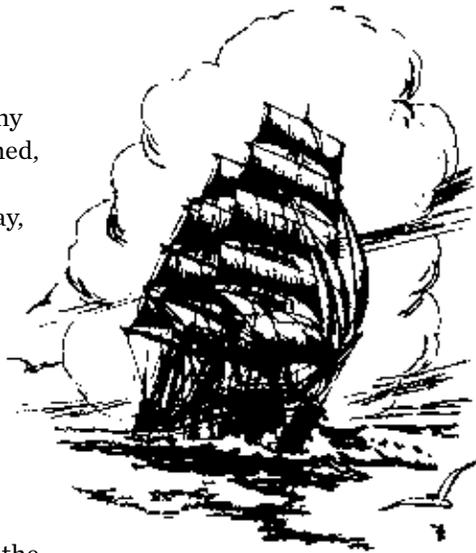
It is difficult to point to a particularly Australian shanty tradition, as merchant navies visited ports from New York to Bombay and Hong Kong to Hobart, learning and adapting local songs. Most shanties have many versions that reference different people and places. A number have quite sinister origins in songs sung on slave plantations to set the pace of cotton picking. 'Wellerman', says Bornstein, was probably written by an Australian. 'South Australia', on the other hand, probably was not.

Many of the songs regarded by laypeople as sea shanties are actually sea songs, or maritime ballads. A polite way to incorporate them into the canon is to call them 'fo'c'sle shanties', as they might have been sung on board ship by sailors in the forecabin, resting between watches.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, many shipboard tasks had become mechanised. Old sailors might still sing shanties for sentimental reasons, but there was no longer much need to chant in time to a task. Enthusiasts became concerned to preserve the songs, anticipating a disappearing form. Percy Grainger, Australia's foremost modern composer, collected sea shanties and arranged them for piano forte. He tended to

clean up the bawdier lyrics, so that many early commercial recordings are polished, stylised and sanitised, with operatic baritones and hammy harmonies. Today, however, shantymen and women tend to act rougher than they really are, rather than more refined.

‘A lot of people take on a character when they sing sea shanties,’ says Bornstein. ‘They’re very evocative words and you really feel like they come out of the great nautical age.’



When a customer walks into the bar at the Peg Leg Inn in Pyrmont, the bartender calls out, ‘Ahoy!’

Many customers respond, ‘Ahoy!’

To which the bartender replies, ‘Ahoy!’

Given a bloody-minded customer and a determined bartender, the exchange of ‘ahoy’s might go on all night.

The Peg Leg Inn is a pirate-themed pub where local band the Mutineers used to perform sea songs and shanties. Alex Gaffikin, head of interpretation and design at the Maritime Museum, plays in the Mutineers with her partner, Stephen Gapps, a curator at the museum. Like Bornstein, she treasures the arcane language of shanties.

‘In “Spanish Ladies” there’s a wonderful line, “Haul up your clugarnets!”’ says Gaffikin. ‘I have no idea what a clugarnet is, but there’s the absolute fun of singing this sort of sailing gibberish.’

‘There’s an element of play,’ says Bornstein. ‘It’s not so much that people throw on a costume and say, “I’m now Black Bart the Pirate.” When people get up, they’ll sing with a sort of accent. A lot of the time, people don’t even realise they’re doing it.’

Shanty people strive for various degrees of maritime-musical authenticity.

‘Stephen can be a bit of a purist,’ says Gaffikin. ‘He tries to get us to dress as if we were eighteenth or nineteenth century sailors. It’s actually quite hard to play instruments in a typical pirate costume. I play the guitar sometimes, and big, floppy sleeves don’t work that well.’

Not long ago the Peg Leg Inn was a brothel, where the women wore clugarnets. Probably. Its rebirth as a (pre-Covid) venue for shanties signifies a quest for an appropriate atmosphere.

Last year, the Grubby Urchins released *Futtocks in the Fo’c’sle*, an album of 25 unaccompanied sea shanties arranged in three-part harmony and recorded live on the *Enterprise*. ‘This presented an unbelievable technical challenge,’ says Bornstein. ‘The creaking of the ship was fine — we wanted a bit of that in the background — but the ship was docked underneath the Bolte Bridge, so we got more traffic noise than ship creaking

anyway. And keeping time — when the ship was keeping different time — was really difficult.’

There would seem to be solid reasons why most musicians do not board ships to record their music, just as most navies do not sail off to war in recording studios. ‘But we’re pretty happy with how it sounds,’ says Bornstein.

The tension between traditionalists and modernists has always animated debate among shanty people. Walters says she wrangled a place for the Redfern Shanty Crew on the bill at the National Folk Festival, but when they sang, ‘The folkies were all sitting at the back going, “That’s not how it goes!” and “You don’t have to teach us the words!”’

Like all the other shantymen and women, Walters loves to sing on board tall ships such as the replica *James Craig*, which is moored outside the Maritime Museum. ‘But the atmosphere was so *boring* compared to what you get up at the Dock,’ she says. ‘Up at the Dock it was so... sensuous.’

Since Covid, there have been virtually no shanty gigs (but lots of virtual shanty gigs). It would have seemed incredible only a year ago (a phrase that could be used to begin so many sentences these days ...) but group singing in closed spaces has become illegal — intermittently, at least. Shantymen and women habitually switch from the present tense to the past tense when they talk about their vocation, although the incredible success of ‘Wellerman’ suggests it has a lively future.

It also seems likely that a broader debate will open up about the lyrics and origins of certain shanties. The bawdiness that once disgusted Victorians is unlikely to offend anyone today, but racist epithets have been quietly removed from some of the rhymes. Then there is the fact that many shanties could be regarded as appropriated slave songs. ‘There’s a feeling that, if you haven’t had the cultural experience, then you wouldn’t be singing the song,’ says Walters. ‘That would cut out 90 per cent of my repertoire. I haven’t been down a coal mine. I haven’t been whaling. But I do think the stories should be told.’

If she has never been whaling or coalmining, what does she do for living?

‘I’m a librarian!’ she says, laughing.

By an extraordinary coincidence, the State Library had already commissioned the world’s first ‘library shanty’ from the Grubby Urchins. Read the lyrics on the opposite page, or ‘check out’ the State Library of NSW’s website to hear the history-making recording.

*Hi-yo, hi-yo, librar-i-o!*

**Dr Mark Dapin is an author and journalist whose history books include *The Nashos’ War, Australia Vietnam: Myth vs History* and *Jewish Anzacs*.**

# Library-o (Send 'Em Out On Loan)

A librarian's shanty

Bornstein/Hillel

$\text{♩} = 110$

Verse



When I was young, but ten and three, Hi - yo, hi - yo, li-brar-i - o Me pa - rents asked, "What trade for thee?"  
so next mor - ning I be - gan To train as a li - bra - ri - an.

4

Chorus



Send 'em out on loan. And So turn 'em, scan 'em, bin 'em, bag 'em, heave 'em out to roam - i - o!

7



Two weeks in the o - pen world be - fore they come back home - i - o! When it's back in - to the slot it's

10



to the shelves they'll go - i - o, Send 'em out on loan - i - o! Send 'em out on loan.

I dreamed that evening, as I slept  
Of where the books are neatly kept  
I dreamed of shelves ten fathoms high  
Where books from every land do lie

I dreamed of bins and stacks and shelves  
Where readers go and help their'selves  
I dreamed of books in tidy rows  
From ancient verse to modern prose

The lib'ry life is free from woes  
The chief concern is where books goes  
So growl ye may, but read ye must  
You talk too loud, your head they'll bust

If friendly staff is what ye seeks  
Bring back yer' books within two weeks  
Be warned, when on a reading spree  
Late books incur a nom'nal fee

The lib'ry trade takes stalwart guts  
For every year brings gov'ment cuts  
They say that borrh'wing books is hard  
For those without a lib'ry card

And when the lending time is through  
It's back ye'll mosey to renew  
And when the readin's good and done  
It's back to pick another one

*\*N.b., the suffix 'i-o' is sung 'aye-oh' (as if to rhyme with 'sky-oh'), in proper seafarer's tradition*



# Beyond belief

**Protecting the innocent through censorship has been a fraught and — in hindsight — sometimes comic endeavour.**

It began with a desire for protection. In the mid-1940s a Tasmanian woman saw her teenage son reading a novel and was so aghast when she read it for herself that she gave it to a friend. The friend, also aghast, took it to a meeting of a local political group of which she was general secretary. The group advised going right to the top by complaining to the minister for customs, who would get the book removed from libraries and bookstores where other teenagers might find it.

The robust and breezy Labor senator in charge of censorship in Australia was of a similar mind about the book, but was unable to act under federal law. So he told the woman to approach the man responsible for censorship in New South Wales, where the book had been published. The state's chief secretary referred the complaint to the crown solicitor, who handed the matter to police. A few weeks later, an officer of the vice squad served a summons on Angus & Robertson to answer a charge of publishing an obscene work.

At issue was *We Were the Rats*, a novel that centres on a group of Australian soldiers taking part in the heroic defence of the Libyan port of Tobruk in 1941. It was the work of military journalist Lawson Glassop, who had been so inspired by reports of the siege that he

waylaid weary diggers on leave in Cairo to pump them for colour and information.

Much of the early part of the novel was 'based on fact', said Glassop, and his characters were 'real people', faithfully portrayed. Moreover, the book was an act of service, of homage: 'The Australian infantryman is a great soldier and I have tried to make this book his saga.' Good sales were accompanied by widespread critical acclaim when the novel was published in October 1944. Responding to criticism of several ribald passages, Glassop leaned heavily on his assertion of the novel's verisimilitude: 'If people are offended their argument is with the men of the AIF, not with me.'

But the authorities' argument was with his publishers, who were brought to court a year and a half later, in April 1946, to answer the charge. At issue, according to detective-sergeant Roy Munro, were five passages that were offensive 'to delicacy and chastity'. The most critical concerned a scene in which a soldier reads aloud from a 'perv novel' — that is, erotica — to shivers of outrage and horror from his peers: 'Oh Jesus,' groans one. Says another: 'I hope that's the end.'

That Angus & Robertson was being prosecuted for the dirtiness of a passage depicting horrified reactions to erotica was but one example of the farce that followed. Another was the merciless

cross-examination of Munro by a defence counsel probing the police sergeant's ability to judge literature. Did Munro know Shakespeare's first name? No. Did he know who Byron was? Did he know of Chaucer, or Shelley? Did he even know what 'pornographic' meant?

Much as this underscored the defence's case that the police were philistines, it did nothing to sway the magistrate's mind as to the obscenity of the passages cited. Angus & Robertson was found guilty and fined £10. At the appeal in June, both prosecutor and judge agreed that the novel attained 'great heights in literary art' and was true to life. But again a guilty verdict was inescapable: the passages with the erotica were obscene and would corrupt anyone whose mind was open to immoral influences. 'I think these pages are plain filth,' said the judge, 'obscene in fact and in law.'

Glassop clung to his claim to truth and railed against the 'imbecility' of these findings. What was truly lamentable was the fact that the laws that netted *We Were the Rats* were amended by state parliament just a month before Angus & Robertson's conviction. The new exemption for 'literary works' came too late to save Glassop's novel.

In Tasmania, meanwhile, the original complainant had not budged an inch



from her view that teenagers had to be protected from the kind of material contained in *We Were the Rats*. 'I am not a prude, and do not mind calling a spade a spade,' she said. 'I know all about sex, and I think all people should know all about it — but this is beyond belief.'

The same might be said, at a distance of some 50 years, of Australia's censorship system: that it was beyond belief. 'That ever so many books could have been put on any one list, and people told that they were not to read them,' author Peter Cowan would say, 'seems to be like something out of science fiction.'

And yet for many years it was a fact of life in Australia. Books published in this country were subject to a thicket of state-based regulations and laws that could have them banned, seized and burned; books published overseas were subject to federal laws that could prevent their import on grounds that ranged from obscenity to sedition to blasphemy.

Proponents of the system saw themselves as the guardians of the Australian character and moral standards, which they thought to be threatened by the literature produced by realists, naturalists, modernists, communists, anarchists, pacifists and pornographers. Long-dead Frenchmen and Italians were equally worrying: editions of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Rabelais' *Heroic Deeds of Gargantua and Pantagrue* were banned in the 1920s. The nightmares of censors were varied but all centred on a new nation, uniquely vulnerable to threats foreign and domestic, which had to be protected.

But while censorship had enjoyed considerable public support in the early twentieth century, by the 1940s it was also becoming an object of derision and scorn. Opponents saw it as a dead hand stifling new ideas, dampening debates, and making the country culturally sterile and conservative. Successive cases weakened support for censorship and emboldened those opponents.

Censorship of the press during the Second World War led newspaper proprietors to a successful action against the Commonwealth in the High Court in 1944. The prosecution of *We Were the Rats* came hard on the heels of the farcical prosecution of Max Harris, in South Australia, for publishing the

spoof poems of 'Ern Malley'. It would be followed by the outrageously heavy-handed prosecution and temporary imprisonment of Victorian writer Robert Close, author of the novel *Love Me Sailor*: 'A man who writes a book such as he has,' said the responsible judge, 'cannot complain about being sent to jail.'

The chill such cases caused was severe. Most writers and publishers erred on the side of caution and largely steered away from contentious topics or material that might lead to a prosecution or the suppression of a work.

But the censors were always searching for new threats, and in the 1950s they found them in the proliferation of cheaply produced American-style comic books, pulp novels, and magazines for adolescents. In Queensland, in 1954, the Literature Board of Review decided to ban a swag of such magazines on grounds that titles *Real Love*, *Romance Story*, *Real Romances*, *Darling Romance*, *Popular Romance* and *New Romances* were all 'objectionable' for their intended audience of teenage women.

Appeals to the Queensland Supreme Court were fruitless, in no small part thanks to a matron from a Salvation Army girls' home who testified that the young women in her care would be 'excited' and their rehabilitation 'retarded' should they read the magazines and their tales of young love. But High Court justices Dixon, Kitto and Taylor, who considered the matter on appeal in 1956, reacted with some astonishment when they opened these magazines and began to read.

Having listened to arguments about the flagrant obscenity and indecency of the titles, they found that their actual

## Scandalised parents and self-appointed moral guardians declared the book would ruin Australia's young, pollute the country's morality, encourage anarchism and anti-authoritarian behaviour ...

character 'proved quite unexpected'. The stories, while perhaps colourful, were nonetheless chaste and the illustrations were unprovocative. 'The theme of them all nearly is love, courtship, and marriage. Virtue never falters and right triumphs. Matrimony is the proper end and if you are not told that happiness ensues it is the constant assumption.' While judging, acerbically, that the magazines were an affront to the reader's intelligence, the High Court ruled that they could not be deemed a 'real threat' to the reader's morals – and overturned the ban. There was no need, in this case, to protect anyone.



The fight over who needed protection, and who could take responsibility for themselves, would shape the struggle against censorship over the next decade. Uproar over the ban on JD Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, in 1958, would prompt one of the most dramatic reviews of the list of banned books, and soon domestic activists were responding audaciously to the resurgence of censorship practices in the 1960s. The courage of those who published *Oz*, *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* and *Portnoy's Complaint* was never in doubt, but no fire burned hotter than that stoked in the 1970s by *The Little Red Schoolbook*.

A compilation of matter-of-fact advice for teenagers about topics including sex, drugs, alcohol and identity, this slim, pocket-sized book was the catalyst for a storm of controversy around the world. It was banned in the UK and Italy, denounced by Pope Paul VI, and caused its Greek publisher to be imprisoned.

Attracting particular ire was its assertion of the importance of choice, autonomy and responsibility: 'You are a person in your own right. In the end you're accountable only to yourself for your own actions. You don't have to play the part given you by your teachers and parents. You've got ideas of your own and usually know what you want.'

Scandalised parents and self-appointed moral guardians declared the book would ruin Australia's young, pollute the country's morality, encourage anarchism and anti-authoritarian behaviour, and thereby make the country ripe for an attack: 'There must be joy-bells ringing in the Kremlin tonight,' wrote one member of the public.

The upset and criticism were so significant that a decision on whether the book could be banned went to federal cabinet. Customs minister Don Chipp, who had begun to liberalise the censorship system since his appointment in 1969, bluntly told his colleagues in April 1972 to face reality: there were no grounds in law for a ban, which would be ineffective anyway since *The Little Red Schoolbook* was already in the community.

Colleagues grumbled unhappily at this. One minister said the book was 'dangerous'; another that it was 'ludicrous and disgusting'; Malcolm Fraser said it would 'undermine family and society'. Lamenting the 'pathetic nihilism' of the world that had allowed such a book to be created, the Queensland Literature Board of Review stepped in where the Commonwealth had hung back and banned the book.

But this was a gesture without force or meaning. As Chipp had said, the

practical point was that the book was already circulating in Australia. Activists – including members of the Queensland branch of the Communist Party of Australia – were distributing copies to schoolchildren, making a mockery of attempts to suppress the book.

The ebbing power of the censors that this episode revealed was followed by the election of the Whitlam government, which overhauled censorship practices in 1973 in favour of a system of classification, whereby foreign and local works would be effectively graded according to their content and subject to some restrictions on sale and access.

While this dramatic change saw the end of most literary censorship, though, it did not end of censorship altogether. Powers to censor remained, and instances of censorship and attempted suppression across literary works, movies, art and computer games have been regular in the night-on 50 years since, always invoked with talk of protection.

How Australia balances that desire to protect with the freedom to think, judge and speak for oneself is still at issue. The task is never ending. As the authors of the *Little Red Schoolbook* once wrote: 'Think things out for yourself and base your judgement on what you really believe.'

**Dr Patrick Mullins is the author of *Tiberius with a Telephone* (2018), which won the Douglas Stewart Prize of the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the National Biography Award. His most recent book is *The Trials of Portnoy* (2020).**

PHOTOGRAPHY Joy Lai &  
Russell Perkins

# These walls

I'm backed into a corner, pulling the camera in tightly.

My mechanical eye flexes, frames captured of a claustrophobic cell.

Bunk bed, sink, toilet, a cage for two men.  
Zoo animals get more space.

It's an oppressive 36-degree day, and we're documenting graffiti carved onto walls of 1 Wing – the 'heritage' maximum security section of Grafton Gaol. Built in 1893 to replace a gaol considered too small.

The air is still but the walls are seeping with condensation. I can hear the pulse of cicadas, a languid sound at odds with my surroundings. I'm filthy; grease and grime accumulated from years of incarceration have rubbed into my hair and clothes. I'm so grubby that later at the airport I'll set off the body scanners, with a blinking warning: 'unknown substance'.

Cell after cell it's the same. Peeling, institutional green paint scratched with ballpoint pen: 'these colours don't run', 'loyalty over royalty', 'Bundjalung Pride'.

Themes on repeat: machoism, identity, strength, loyalty, a broken-down system.

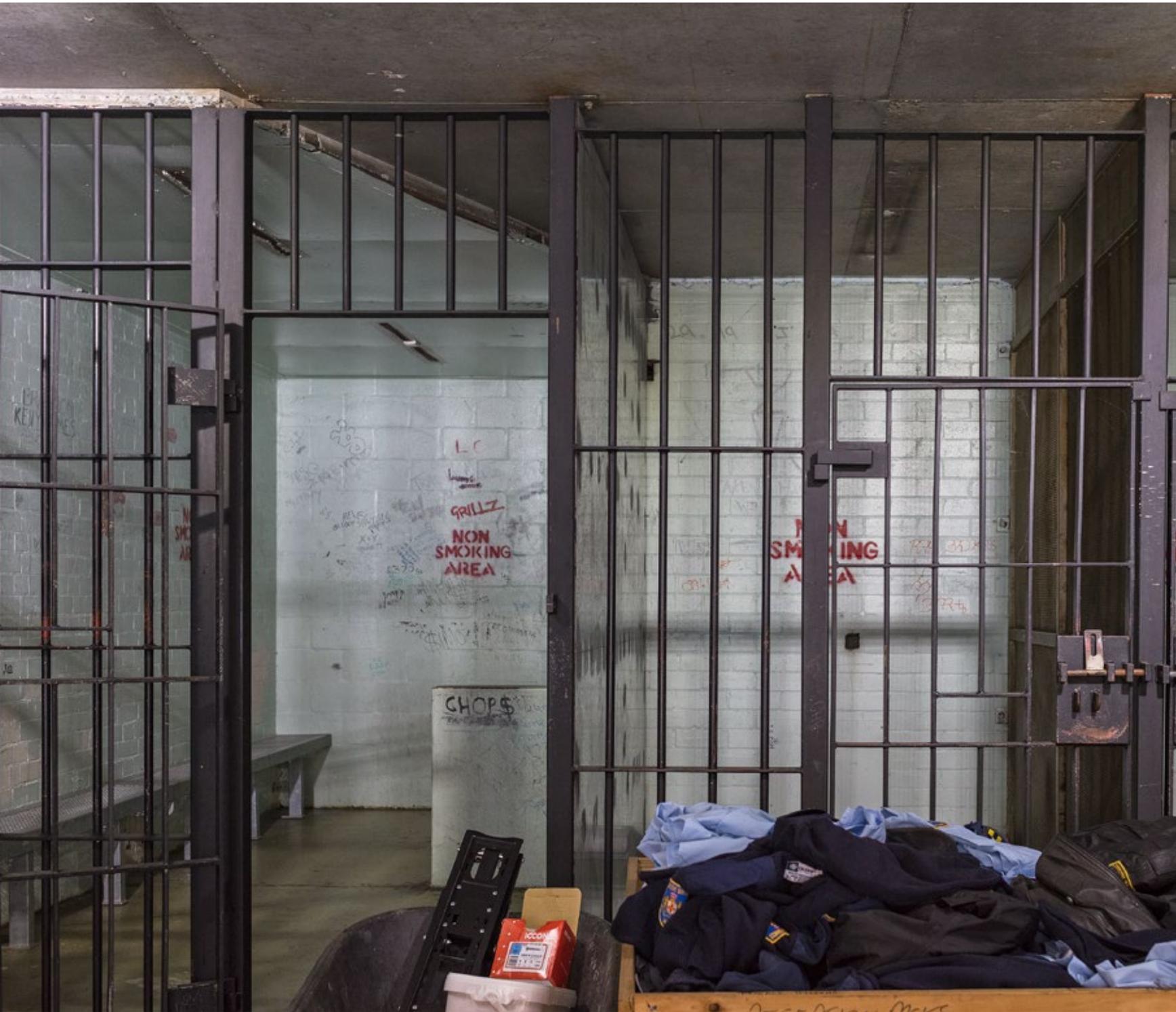
Grafton was a working gaol until July 2020, and some of the graffiti is so fresh it feels like its residents are just out on a smoko. 'Wash your hands please' and 'Black Lives Matter', more truth and consequences resounding here than in the headlines.

We're archiving the remnants of those left behind, dark and sometimes surprisingly humorous: 'Fuck I love Grafton prison said no one ever.'

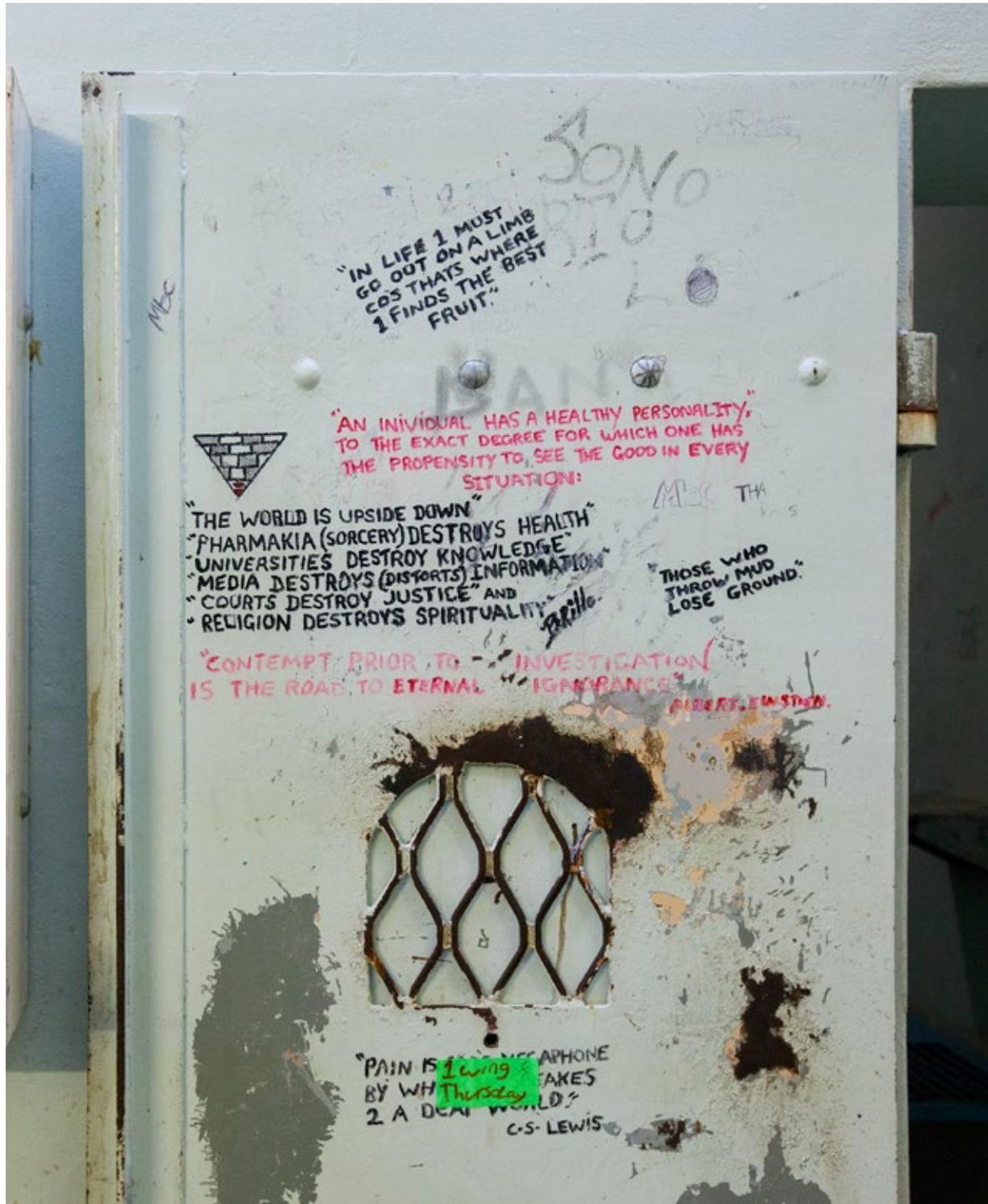
Joy Lai

Upstairs in 1 Wing, maximum security section of Grafton Gaol, built in 1893





Outdoor cells adjacent to 1 Wing, maximum security — the pile of uniforms in the foreground belonged to officers who took redundancy rather than take a job in the new privately run facility on the outskirts of town



Miscellaneous musings, graffiti inside cell door 11

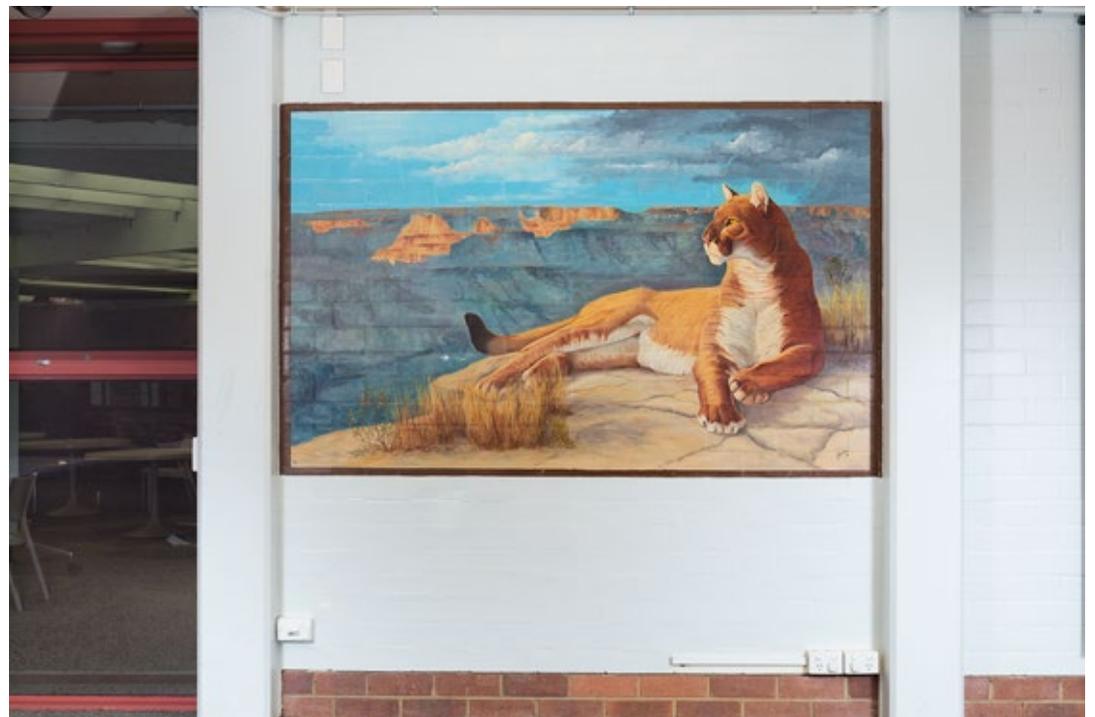


Landscape painted in Aboriginal colours, upstairs 1 Wing

**I** raised myself Ive got no body to blame but you have no clue as to the  
shit ive bein through you dont know how strong you are unil tested  
by walking through th grafton hell



Aboriginal style mural painted on Sector 1 outdoor shower and toilet block — track pants tied to the gate; cyclone wire and netting installed to prevent items being thrown to inmates from outside the gaol



Mountain lion painting in the visitors' room by the infamous long-serving prisoner Lenny Lawson — one of three murals by Lawson at Grafton Gaol

They want us to have self worth  
So they take away our self worth  
They want us to be responsible  
So they take away our responsibilities  
They want us to be a part of the community  
So they isolate us from the community  
They want us to be positive and constructive  
So they degrade us and deem us useless  
They want us to be non violent  
So they put us were violense is all around us  
They want us to be kind and loving people  
So they subject us to hatred and cruelty  
They want us to quit being the tough guy  
So they put us were the tough guy is respected  
They want us to quit hanging around crims  
So they put all the crims under one roof  
They want us to quit exploiting the pubic  
So they put us were we exploit each other  
They want us to take control of our own  
Lives and our own problems and quit being a  
Burden on society  
So they make us totally dependent on the system  
A system that was made by them a system  
That relys and depends on us failing

Fuck the system  
They make money of our  
Mistakes they say  
Crime Dosnt pay while the people that control the  
System get rich from keeping us  
locked away over petty fucking  
Crimes

Quote taken from cell 35 in maximum-security 1 Wing







Illustrations by Rosie Handley



In the Schumacher household it was legendary:

The Alarm Clock.

Or better, The Alarm Clock *Incident*.

Christmas, 1985.

Boy, it was really something, and when I say the Schumacher household, I mean *our* household, and when I say there was an incident, it was little Benny who started it. It was Benny and Frosty the Snowman. It was Rudolph and the Little Drummer Boy — and even Fred Goddamn Flintstone. All of them rampant Christmas-ruiners, right to the very last.

But what a clock it was.

See, Benny got the alarm clock for his birthday, in July of the same year.

*Rocky IV* was smashing it at the cinemas, and so were those kids from the Goondocks. How freaking good was *The Goonies*? How great were the villainous Fratellis? And I can't even talk *unmisty-eyed* about Chunk doing the *truffle shuffle*, or Data and his inventions. Who knew that Josh Brolin — playing the long-suffering older brother, Brandon — would later star in Cohen Brothers movies and be nominated for an Oscar? In *The Goonies* he rode a stolen pink tricycle through the woods. Who gives a shit about the Cohens? *The Goonies* is still his best movie.

As for *Rocky IV*, when Benny was nine, and I was eleven, we both smelled a rat when the Russians started barracking for Rocky — but we still found ways to forgive it. Suburban Sydney felt far from the Cold War. Better to remember Ivan Drago (aka Dolph Lundgren) professing, 'His jaw is made of *aiyon*.' Dolph looked really good. He was pumped to the brim with biceps, and his hair was a bright-blond flat-top. The eighties were that damn good.

But this doesn't explain what I'm here for — to tell you of Christmas Eve that year, and the incident with Benny and the clock. No, it's backdrop, purely that.

See, what we did as kids back then was ride up to Upstairs Video, and hire movies overnight. We'd watch them later that evening, then again next day in the morning. Those movies marked our summers. With Mum and Dad at work, our days were spent playing cricket outside, or riding bikes around our suburb.

Then evening came, and video time.

Then again, next day, early morning.

Our dad would be up already.

He was always up first, for work.

He'd traipse through the lounge room with tea and toast. 'Oh,' he'd mutter, '*The Jedi* again,' or '*Raiders*' for the Indiana encore.

When our dad was nine he was war-torn. He had toothaches, no food and Russians. They occupied his town. At eleven he joined a gang. They once sent a flare into the soldier camp, and he didn't stop running till the gunshots stopped. Probably a good few kilometres.

And here we were, watching videos.

The Good Life, 101.

There were four of us sandy-haired Schumacher kids.

First was Sue, then Anita, then me, and fourth was Benny.

Our mum was Helena Schumacher.

Our dad, unfortunately, named *Helmut*.

We got bagged at school for *Helmut* as a name, and were often branded *the krauts*. A kid once called me a Nazi, and I wanted to be angrier than I was. It was balanced by things we loved, though — the things that made us different. Like for us it

## WHO LEFT THE LIGHT ON?!

was Christmas Eve that mattered; Christmas Day was for suckers. We had weird words for things like *dish cloth*. Even our own kids call it a *luppy*.

Our dad built houses, our mum was a cleaner, and Dad was incredibly handsome. (Actually, years later, when we looked through photo albums, I said, 'Shit, Mum, look at Dad — he looks like Jimmy Dean!' And Mum, still lovely, but well-wrinkled by decades with our father — she'd been pretty severely *Helmutted* — looked over, grit-eyed and hardened. She said, 'Don't tell *him* that, that bastard.' Then both of us duly laughed.)

You see, all of us here had run-ins with Helmut, didn't we?

(Raise your hand if you ever copped a spray.

See? I knew it, I *knew* it!)

He yelled at us while we played football.

God, that accent commanding the sideline.

'Go, Robbie, go for the corner!

Shit, Robbie, not even trying!'

In later years, Benny broke his cheekbone in a bike fall, and first game back he tried his guts out, like always. After, when he got in Dad's Kombi, hoping for a compliment, it was, 'You missed four tackles, and they were beauties.'

He wrecked every remote control he ever laid hands on, and don't get me started on the electricity. 'WHO LEFT THE LIGHT ON IN THE BATHROOM?!' And Jesus, God almighty, I think half the street remembers when Sue had the gall to wash her hands while he was out in laundry, showering. Never interrupt a spoilt immigrant's warm shower. Freeze him and you get yelled at. Scold him and you might nearly die.

One of the worst was forcing Mum to walk all those extra miles in the mountains, up to some piece of shit hut in the distance. 'Come on, just a little *further*.' Her knee was kaput the whole year.

We all had our moments with Helmut.

But little Ben's was the ultimate, a triumph.

Every year, before the blitzkrieg of summer video, there were the top five yuletide specials. They screened on Channel Seven.

Number one was *Little Drummer Boy*. (Never mind those puppets were just, odd.) Then *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. Number three was definitely *Frosty*. (Who could forget his

'HAP-PY BIRTHDAY!!!' when the top hat brought him to life?) To be honest, it was really just a top four, because all these decades later, my memory stops at *The Flintstones Christmas* — a certified December classic.

Early in the month we already scoured the TV guide.

In years gone by, they were listed.

In '85, though, things were different.

For whatever reason, in 1985, those Christmas cartoons weren't shown.

Benny, as the youngest, and always forging towards us — always pissed off because we all went horse riding with Dad at Otford Valley while he had to sit in the car with Mum — was always first to find them. If there was a trophy in our family for *Most Keen*, that was Benny in a nutshell. Keenest to swim, keenest to run, keenest to jump from the fence into a pool, he was always catching up. I remember learning to surf, and we'd be away, near the beach, and he'd always go over and check it. He'd fly back on his bike and wake me.

'Hey, Robbie,' he'd whisper, '*Robbie!*'

Me, I was lazy, I'd grumble. 'What?'

'You comin' out, Robbie, it's *good!*'

You don't think of a hiss being cheerful, but he was surfing those waves as he spoke. In his mind he was already out there.

'How big is it?' I'd ask.

'Maybe shoulder.'

'Is the water bumpy or smooth?'

(God, I was deplorable.

Lazy. Contemptuous.)

Now he'd be really frothing.

'Smooth as a baby's backside,' he'd say.

Eventually he gave up on me, and he surfs alone to this day.

But I know, I know.

The alarm clock.

Tell us about the alarm clock!

Okay.

So, none of those Christmas cartoons had aired so far that December, and for Benny there was one conclusion. They were saving them for Christmas Eve, in the morning, even if unlisted in the program.

SHIT  
ROBBIE  
NOT  
EVEN  
TRY-  
ING!

On the night of the 23rd, he lovingly set his alarm clock — and finally now, I'll describe it:

It was white and gloriously substantial. Not like the cheap shit you get these days; it had *bulk*. Shaped like an arch, it had glow-in-the-dark hands and numbers; fluorescent green on black. To set it, you slid a ribbed segment upwards, only a few millimetres, and when it went off you just pushed it down. Simple. Beautiful. *Timeless*.

And Benny loved that clock.

It woke him up before the world, it seemed. The time he needed to catch us.

The problem, of course, was what happens now and then, when we need to rise early for work, or study for that exam — our body already knows. We wake *before* the alarm. Have you ever been standing in the shower while that sound rings out through the house?

So think of '85 now, and Benny's beautiful clock.

The era demanded décor.

Brown carpet, orange curtains.

Benny sat wide-eyed on the L-shaped couch, praying for order in the madness. I mean, come on, Christmas demanded Christmas *cartoons*, both the biblical and the ridiculous. What he got was fucking *Thunderbirds*.

But then — it's funny how worries become *real* worries, and complaints become natural disasters ... because then, right then, he realised. Several facts descended.

1. There'd be no *Little Drummer Boy* this year.
2. He'd just seen Helmut half-stumble through the hallway in his pyjamas.
3. Our dad wasn't going to work that day — his first day off in *months*, and that included weekends.
4. Helmut didn't look happy.
5. Oh, Jesus, oh shit.

Oh, yes — it hit him pretty hard, from the throat, to the lungs, to the scabs on his scrawny legs. Fear and abject anxiety, as he mouthed the words, to himself:

The alarm clock.

I forgot to switch off my alarm clock!

It was too late now for everything.

He had the perfect horrific vantage point, as our father walked Ivan-the-Terrible-like, into our small shared bedroom.

(*Okay — an important note:*

In the thirty-five years beyond this episode, Benny *still*

reproaches me, for being asleep in bed, on the other side of our room. 'You!' He points that youngest-of-us finger. 'You!' He shakes his mocking head, the hair gone darkish brown now, but his smile still open wide. 'Just once, you lazy bastard, you could have woken up and turned the alarm off — but no! You were snoring your useless arse off!' And he's right. Even when we re-watched all those videos, he always came and woke me.)

All he could do was sit now, and wait for the car crash to happen.

His feet began to sweat.

Dad studied the clock in his palm.

For a moment it looked quite innocent — I mean, what kind of grown man doesn't know how to switch off a bloody alarm clock?!

But then the seconds bled out like dying men.

There'd be something cartoonish here yet.

You wanted something special, and biblical?

Well — our dad gave up on wondering, and smashed the clock to the floor. Then, very casually, he wandered on back to bed.

Sitting in shock and awe, Benny was now permanently glued. Or sticky-taped down, at the least.

He completely believed what he'd seen.

The best part was how the clock didn't shatter spectacularly, but jigsawed into seventeen pieces.

Later on it was pronounced unfixable.

But there was still some ticking ahead of us.

As Benny was about to stand, our mum appeared in the lounge room. She was in her summer dressing gown — pink with patterns of frangipanis. She didn't look at Benny.

Not good, he thought, at all.

See, Helena's one of those people. She's glorious and trim and gregarious. She worked hard and loves stories and people. Her laughter is warm, it's generous. She agrees with what people say to her. She's a mother, a talker and diplomat.

But that morning?



Not a word, not a nod, not an anything.  
She was war in a nightie and dressing gown.  
Her blonde-fuelled hair near ignited.  
The back door opened and slammed.

Benny didn't know how many times he said *Oh, shit* that morning – all in the time it took our mum to smash the mugs Dad was giving her for Christmas. They were *rustic* or *country*, or some bullshit, and she'd dispatched them out in the garage, still in the plastic bag.

On her return, she stalked the kitchen, then straight back through the lounge room. On her way past what we now call the *Russian Dolls of Miniature Side Tables* (there was a bigger one, a medium one, a tiny one), she picked up the board game on top. It was a rip-off of *Monopoly*, called *Careers* – and us kids were all big fans of it, and so was our mum, that morning.

Still not a word was spoken as she picked up the oblong box, and made her way towards her bedroom, where Dad was now blissfully slumbering.

You bastard, she thought, you *bastard*, and proceeded to smash him right across the face with the entire *Careers* board game, over and over again. Even as he shocked awake, almost drowning, thrashing at sea, she kept going. Her voice was the pitch of an angel, on her way to the bottom of hell.

Finally, Benny jumped up.

He made it into the hallway, where Anita brushed past him in a blur, trying to pull Mum off Dad, the board game long since thrown at him, and her heavy old jewellery box, too. (If she'd got him in the head it would have killed him.)

Fake money was floating from the ceiling.

From the corner of his eye, while the storm raged on, Benny saw something amazing – well, amazing and truly troubling. It could only mean sheer catastrophe, because there, to his left, in the hallway, Sue and I were *hugging* each other, and that had never happened before, at least not in Benny's lifetime.

Oh, shit, he thought again. This is a total disaster – and all of it's all my fault.

But what happens in the wake of moments like these?

Our mum just went to work.

Benny was crying in the garage, above those broken mugs.

As for our dad, Helmut Schumacher, there was still some gold to come. It's always a thing with families, I think. There's *always* more story to come.

First was something we knew about the man, of a particular gift for self-melancholy – where he'd perform the greatest tantrum, but then *you* had to feel sorry for *him*.

Mid-morning, he sat in our bedroom, against my bed on the floor.

The alarm clock pieces were unsolvable, and he sat there, dejected, depressed. He was constantly fat-then-slim our dad, and this was a typical fat stage, which made the dejection worse. The sense of observing the pathetic. He sat between those mismatched beds, muttering his swollen mantra. 'I'm such a bastard, such a bastard ...'

And who was sitting next to him?

Of course, it could only be Benny.

It's a favourite comical moment of mine:

The kid consoling the dad.

He sat there quietly answering. 'Nah, you're all right, Dad ... You're not that bad ...'

He was holding the face of the wreck in his lap, watching the bright-lit clock hands.

And so – should that be the end?

The forlornness of boy, clock and man?

No.

For there was *still* more patheticness ahead!

See, once the self-loathing wore off (and it wore off fast with our dad) Helmut soon had a plan – for at heart he was really quite generous. He took little Benny to the shops. He would buy him, of course, a new clock. But it was nothing like the first one. There were none left of those on Earth.

What they bought was a pale comparison:

Greyish, and meek, but passable.

Next, though, came the clincher, where Helmut positively outdid himself. On a whim he entered Granny May's, full of stationery and inappropriate birthday cards, and placards to inspire your desk. To us, he was the only man alive who could smash his son's alarm clock on the morning of Christmas Eve, and see fit to buy a present for *himself*. At some point I'm sure he imagined showing it proudly to Helena. A small triangular placard, to remind him:



KEEP YOUR TEMPER. NO ONE ELSE WANTS IT.  
Ridiculous.

Even Benny was noncommittal on that one, shrugging his shoulders sadly, knowing it wouldn't fix Christmas. It would only breed more contempt.

At the end of the day, new alarm clock in hand, Benny sat in our room.

Around 4 pm, when Mum came in, he was on the edge of his bed, not game enough to really show her. (The new clock hands didn't glow, by the way, they were shit.) Even when she looked down, passing judgement on the clock, he could sense her body still burning.

The rest of us all were blue-eyed, like Dad, but Benny's were brown, like Helena's. (I'm not sure why that's important, but it is. As youngest it tied them tightly, maybe, like she was the gift in *him*.)

I don't know anymore if he cried that afternoon, but I recall things going like this:

'I'm sorry I ruined Christmas, Mum.'

'You didn't ruin anything.'

Then the longest of longest pauses.

'So, um —', he said. 'Hey, um, Mum ...'

It took all of his nine-year-old nerve. 'So, um, are ...' He swallowed. 'Are you gonna leave Dad?' His tremble of voice between them. 'Are you going to get divorced, and leave him?'

And our mum, Helena Schumacher — the toughest woman I know, who swears with a German accent, always playful and smart and gregarious — she put her hand down on his head.

She smiled but was then dead serious.

Enchanted by Christmas fury.

She could have said so many things, like, 'Don't be silly, son, these things happen, it'll blow over, it'll be okay.'

But she didn't.

This was not quite *Rocky IV*, or those Goonie kids saving their neighbourhood.

She told him, 'I don't know.'

And me, I don't know either, why I'm telling you all this now, with Helmut, now ashes, behind me. Maybe seventeen million pieces.

I loved growing up how we did.

Love you, Dad, you old prick.



Markus Zusak is an award-winning author of six books including *Bridge of Clay*, *The Book Thief* and *The Messenger*.



# Following the river

Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River, from above Sackville Reach

WORDS Marika Duczynski  
PHOTOGRAPHY Joy Lai

## **I**t's time to tell a deeper and more truthful story about Darug Country.

I'm standing on the banks of Wianamatta, or South Creek, with Darug knowledge-holders, artists and educators Jasmine Seymour, Leanne Watson and Rhiannon Wright. Together with my colleagues Avryl Whitnall, Joy Lai, and videographer Bill Code, we're here filming for an exhibition we're putting together on Darug stories of Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River.

We raise our voices to talk to one another against the noisy traffic heading in and out of Windsor on the Fitzroy Bridge. Leanne tells us that Wianamatta was an important pathway and resource for Darug people, running north some 70 km from Oran Park through some of Sydney's driest, hottest Country before eventually joining with Dyarubbin. I try to follow its long line with my eyes but it curves out of view almost immediately, the closest bend thickly obscured by shrubs and weeds.

Behind us is the old toll house built at Green Hills (later renamed Windsor) by Andrew Thompson, one of the early colony's most celebrated figures. A convict who became a wealthy landowner, chief constable and magistrate, Thompson is remembered as something of a hero for saving settlers from the floods of 1806 and 1809. He died a year later from complications of a respiratory infection he had sustained in the second flood.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie had these deeds inscribed on Thompson's tombstone and named Thompson Square, in the centre of Windsor, in his honour. When the story of Thompson as the exemplary emancipist is told, even today, one detail is usually omitted.

Thompson led a party of settlers that massacred Darug people at a camp at Yarramundi, about 20 km west of Windsor, in 1805. In this reprisal for the killing of three settlers, seven, eight, or possibly more Darug ancestors were killed, including leader and cross-cultural spokesman Yaragowhy.

This well-documented event is not so much a secret as a rarely mentioned blight on the shining narrative of Thompson's life and legacy. That he would have overseen, facilitated or been aware of other violent crimes against Darug people as chief constable and magistrate further complicates how he might be remembered. Jasmine, Leanne and Rhiannon believe the failure to confront the darkest aspects of colonial history in this region contributes to the continued erasure of Darug people who have lived along this part of Dyarubbin for millennia.

Bulyayorang is the name Darug people still use for the land over which Windsor was built. On a high point above the river — where Thompson Square is now — was a corroboree ground.



Dugga (brush forest) Country, Cattai

The information publicly available about Windsor makes little mention of this history, but gives ample information about the site's colonial foundations, promoting the heritage value of its Georgian buildings, and even recounting the time when it was known as Bell Post Square and hosted convict floggings. That a special place for the Darug people was co-opted for this purpose is unquestioned. Heritage sites across the Hawkesbury River region focus almost exclusively on colonial history, Leanne tells us, and don't reflect Darug people's history or culture.

I'm reminded of an 1809 painting of the area by surveyor George William Evans — *The Settlement on the Green Hills, Hawksburgh River N.S.Wales* — which depicts the small but prosperous-looking settlement that would come to be known as Windsor. The watercolour painting has deteriorated over time: its once-green hills have darkened in some places and faded in others; the blue river and sky are now grey. The muted palette lends an even greater sense of calm in the colony than the painting originally intended. It belies the unease that must have been felt in the region at the time of brutal frontier wars. This is Evans' reflection of the settlement as it would like to

see itself, of course, a vision legitimised by denying Aboriginal sovereignty and custodianship of the very same place.

It's well known that Dyarubbin's fertile flood plains became prized agricultural land, the 'food bowl' that was crucial to the early colony's survival. But taking land along the river for farming and settlement came at a great cost, increasingly cutting Darug people off from their most vital resource.

Every year when the maize ripened, Darug people would come and take the produce of their Country. Some settlers shared it with them; others shot at them. Warfare broke out when Darug warriors — men and women — fought to defend not only their lands and livelihoods, but also their culture, spirituality and sense of being. This identity was — and still is — intrinsically connected to the river.

Following the river, we drive about 15 km north-east to Cattai. Even today, pockets remain of the plentiful resources traditionally used by Darug people. Jasmine and Leanne collect spinach-like Warrigal greens, native raspberry and wombat berry vine as well as sandpaper fig, which was used to sharpen tools, and native geranium, a poultice for arthritis.



Tool-sharpening grooves at spring-fed rock pools in Marramarra National Park

The site has even greater significance, as Jasmine and Leanne believe Cattai marks the beginning of an important part of Darug lore. It's here that the landscape changes from alluvial river flats to sandstone Country. Rock engravings on the biggest bends of the river tell the story of the Great Eel, the creation ancestor spirit.

We heard that some of the engravings have been destroyed, and we could see that the places where traditional foods and resources can be found are rife with invasive weeds and rubbish, with tyre marks churning up the earth. Jasmine and Leanne call this wirri ngura: bad Country, sick Country. The resilience of the plants is remarkable.

Further north-east, we visit healthy Country at Marramarra National Park, where a rock art cave is protected by a steel barrier. We spend almost all our time here looking up, our eyes running over the beautiful ochre paintings of echidnas, turtles, tiger quolls and ancestor beings. The paintings suggest the cave was a significant site.

On the lip of a waterhole above the cave — one of several — are axe grinding grooves. Jasmine, Leanne and Rhiannon believe the circular motif repeated on the cave's interior walls,

joined by one continuous line, may represent the surrounding waterholes — plentiful across the whole area — which then connect with creeks lined with yet more special sites.

This abundance and interconnectedness is reflected in the name of nearby Maroota, which means 'the place of many springs'. Keeping the waterholes and creeks healthy and flowing in such hot and dry Country would have been critical for the ancestors taking care of this place. Today, farming and sand-mining upstream threaten this complex network of waterways.

In 2017 historian Grace Karskens came across a list of Aboriginal placenames along Dyarubbin compiled by Reverend John McGarvie, a Presbyterian minister, in 1829. Titled 'Native Names of Places on the Hawkesbury', this manuscript at the State Library of NSW lists six pages of placenames in the order of their location along the river. The list became the basis of the project 'The Real Secret River, Dyarubbin' — conceived in collaboration with Jasmine, Leanne, Rhiannon and Darug woman Erin Wilkins — which won the Library's Coral Thomas Fellowship for 2018–19.

As most of the placenames on McGarvie's list had been lost, as Aboriginal languages were systematically diminished over



Wowawme rock shelf, Sackville Reach on Dyarubbin (Lyra, great-granddaughter of Darug Elder Aunty Edna Watson, in foreground)

time, one of the project's aims is to map and return the names to their river locations. It is hoped that this will encourage wider usage and understanding of their meanings. Concurrent exhibitions at the Library and at Hawkesbury Regional Gallery will be among the ways these placenames and their stories are shared with Aboriginal people and brought to diverse audiences.

On our next weekend of filming we travel to a place of enormous spiritual significance for Darug people: one of the resting sites of Gurangatty, the Great Eel ancestor creation spirit, in one of the deepest parts of Dyarubbin. Even with the cicadas' endless droning, it's peaceful sitting on a ridge high above the river. Jasmine, Leanne, Rhiannon and Erin tell us that the water swirling on the water's surface is symbolic of the Great Eel, which is connected to water, whirlpools and flood power.

Further downstream is Dorumbolooa, which means 'zone of the rainbow' or 'path of the rainbow'. Further still, at Wowawme, another placename on McGarvie's list, Gurangatty is said to keep watch from a steep rock shelf. ('Waway' means 'serpent spirit' and mii is 'eye' according to Professor Karskens and linguist Dr Jim Wafer, who has been working on the Real Secret River,

Dyarubbin project). Jasmine says Wowawme connects the Great Eel to stories of the Rainbow Serpent across the continent.

Our last day of filming is at Shaws Creek Aboriginal Place in Yellomundee Regional Park. An important meeting, fishing and camping place, the site is a traditional river pathway through to the Blue Mountains. We've arrived at the same time as an Aboriginal dance troupe, which is also filming here.

Erin tells us that Aboriginal people from all over Sydney still gather here to socialise and continue the cultural practices of firestick farming, cultural burning and dance. When we ask her what she'd like people to take away from the *Dyarubbin* exhibition, she looks at the camera and says: 'We are still here. This always was, *this always is*, and this always will be Darug Country.' She's right, and there's no better place, and no better way, to say it.

**Marika Duczynski (Gamilaraay),  
Indigenous Engagement project officer**

***Dyarubbin* is a free exhibition in the State Library's galleries from 27 March 2021 to 13 March 2022.**

**W**e need to care for Country, it needs to have fire, it needs to clean up all of these areas because then the wildfires come through and just destroy whole habitats. We need to look after our water sources to feed all of the animals that still live here ... and it's really important, the Darug people *are still here*, we need to be able to visit our sites, care for our sites and hold ceremony at our sites.

— Leanne Watson



# On Country

Jasmine Seymour, Rhiannon Wright, Leanne Watson

## **Darug women Jasmine Seymour, Rhiannon Wright and Leanne Watson spoke together at the Canoelands spring-fed rock pool site at Marramarra National Park.**

**JS:** Maroota is very, very special ... this is like a super-highway almost of knowledge and great spiritual significance as well, but also of practical significance because this is water, this is what you need to survive, this is *the* most prized possession we have ...

**RW:** You could imagine the struggle between the two people with fresh water being such a needed resource ...

**JS:** People wouldn't have left this very easily, would they? This would have been one of the last places that they wanted to leave, they would have protected this really with everything they had ...

**RW:** Out here still we're taking from this Country there are sand mines and market gardeners and yet our water sources are still so important ...

**RW:** You also need to give back to Country, that's what our people would have done here, we would have given back, we would have taken care of it ...

WORDS Elizabeth Fortescue

# What about the sheilas?



*Ita grew up in a family of extroverts. She became one of the most recognisable personalities in the country dispensing no nonsense wholesome good advice in all forms of the media. She is also my cousin ...*

— Peter Kingston

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**P**eter Kingston couldn't please everyone in his artist's book *Sheilas*, but the result is a special piece of work.

ABC chief Ita Buttrose is family, so she's in. Wendy Whiteley's a mate and neighbour of 50 years' standing, so she's definitely there. The late Margaret Thorsborne, who campaigned to save the dugongs of Hinchinbrook, is evoked by her very absence on her rainforest veranda. And former Governor-General Quentin Bryce, a friend who sportingly dressed up as the Phantom's girlfriend to open an art exhibition about the comic strip hero, simply couldn't be left out.

These are just some of the 27 extraordinary portraits of prominent women in a new artist's book by Peter Kingston, the Lavender Bay painter, draughtsman, printmaker and sculptor whose work the State Library of NSW has been collecting since the 1980s.

Kingston, whose aesthetic often tends towards the vernacular, titled the book *Sheilas* and has generously given it to the Library. The loose-leaf portraits it contains are so fresh they were still drying on racks in the conservation department while I was writing this article. Kingston believes *Sheilas* is the best of the artist's books he has produced since he embraced this tactile and beguiling art form many decades ago. Apart from the artist's proof he retained, there are no other copies of this book, which makes the gift particularly special.

Now that the prints are dried, it's a magical experience to open the work's custom-made wooden box and browse through the pages nestled securely inside. The portraits are linocut prints



Peter Kingston, photo by Toby Zerna, News Corp

in Sakura inks on Iwaki Mulberry paper. Kingston hand-finished the prints with a forefinger dipped in the inks. Each portrait is separated by a sturdy piece of tracing paper which records an anecdote or quotation related to the portrait subject. 'Art is the only survivor' is the aphorism accompanying architect Penelope Seidler's portrait. Although Seidler isn't keen on the portrait, it's one of Kingston's favourites.

'She didn't like it at all. She probably thinks she looks tough. I just think she looks strong, you know?' says Kingston.

Wendy Whiteley, Kingston's next-door neighbour, didn't like her portrait either. So Kingston gallantly withdrew it from the book and did another one, depicting Whiteley training a hose on her award-winning Secret Garden below her house on the hill above Lavender Bay.

'She didn't like the first one I did of her, so this is the other one



*I met the very charming department queen June Dally Watkins in her flat in Old South Head Road a few months before she died in 2019. She was my hero ...*



*I saw Rosaleen Norton only once deep in conversation downstairs in a Darlinghurst coffee shop. The surrounding walls were covered in her paintings of covers and signs of the occult.*

which I haven't even shown her — which I won't,' says Kingston.

The inscription on businesswoman June Dally-Watkins' portrait reads like a newspaper headline: 'Gregory Peck kissed me for the first time at the Bocca della Verita during the filming of Roman Holiday.' Famously, the Sydney department queen met Peck in Rome when he and Audrey Hepburn were making the 1953 film. Eager to know more, Kingston sought out Miss Dally (as generations of modelling students called her) at her flat in Sydney's eastern suburbs. It was in the months before Miss Dally's death in February 2020.

'She was in reduced circumstances,' says Kingston. 'But she had all her

couture from the 1940s and 50s all stacked in the living room.'

Miss Dally had been 'a bit of a hero' to Kingston since she went door to door in Watsons Bay, trying to find anyone who had seen her employee Caroline Byrne before Byrne's body was discovered at the foot of a cliff at The Gap in 1995.

All the women in *Sheilas* are strong and inspirational, says Kingston. Not all are wildly famous. Those at the more boutique end of the spectrum include Margaret Ramard, who runs the Trust Cafe at the SH Ervin Gallery on Sydney's Observatory Hill. 'She is a tyrant, but it's a big act,' he wrote. 'She is one of the reasons people turn up to order her real food.'

In the same category is Noreen Hennessy, who played the Wurlitzer organ at the Prince Edward picture theatre in Castlereagh Street, Sydney, during the 1940s, 50s and 60s.

Other women Kingston selected to portray in *Sheilas* were cartoonist Victoria Roberts ('She lives in Mexico and she contributes to *The New Yorker*'), Lady Sonia McMahon ('She made headlines around the world when she wore an extremely revealing gown chosen by her husband Sir Billy to a dinner hosted by President Nixon at the White House'), 'tiny, dynamic' Indigenous artist Rosie Napurrurla Tasman, who is represented by a reproduction of her etching *Seed Dreaming*, artist Elisabeth



*Wendy Whiteley has been a good friend and next door neighbour since the early 1970s when she, husband Brett and daughter Arkie moved in with two small dogs Sense and Reason ... he created a magnificent garden from a messy wilderness.*



*Robyn is a Diva ... When I asked her to sit for a lino portrait for SHEILAS she immediately became Lady Macbeth and delivered her lines in fluent Italian.*

Cummings, and actor and old friend Robyn Nevin as Lady Macbeth.

And then there's the late artist Kerrie Lester, who was hung in the Archibald Prize many times but never won. 'She was in it 15 or 17 times. Why didn't they give it to her? Mean, isn't it? I mean, it was probably one of her greatest disappointments in life,' Kingston says.

Ita Buttrose, a powerful force in Australian broadcast media and publishing, happens to be Kingston's cousin and was part of 'the gang' at Parsley Bay, where Kingston grew up in the 1940s and 50s. Buttrose's portrait is accompanied by the lyrics to the eponymous song Cold Chisel wrote for her. 'If she ever gives a talk,

they always blast it out before she comes on the stage,' says Kingston.

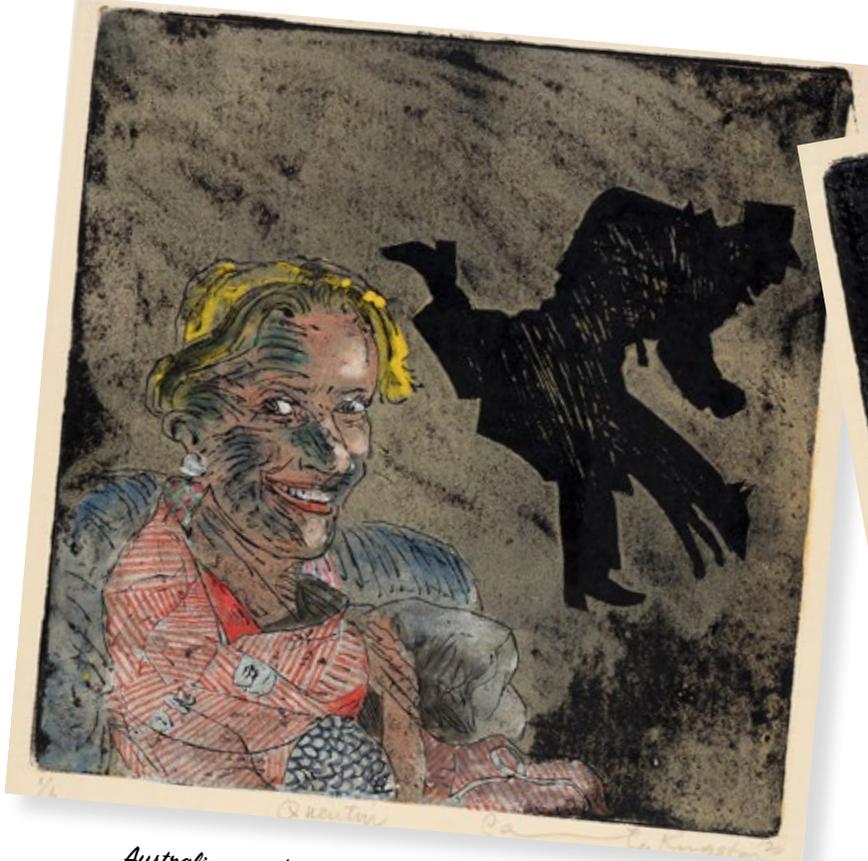
Getting her lips right was the key to capturing Buttrose's likeness, says Kingston. Buttrose hadn't taken to an earlier version of the portrait, but a subsequent one passed muster. 'She said, "Go to the head of the class, cousin".'

None of Kingston's subjects in *Sheilas* has been intentionally flattered. It's more that the portraits seek to uncover the essence of the sitter. Interestingly, when Kingston did a linocut of Queen Elizabeth II to include in the artist's book, he uncovered the essence of someone else. Kingston thought the finished product looked more like Sydney actor Gerry Connolly doing his satirical

stage portrayal of the monarch than the Queen herself. 'I was going to have that as Gerry Connolly as the Queen,' he says.

When it came to his portrait of Julia Gillard, Kingston was stirred to the kind of righteous indignation that propelled him to campaign for the preservation of Luna Park, May Gibbs' former home Nutcote, Sydney Harbour's quaint wooden ferries, and the finger wharves which jut into Sydney Harbour opposite his gorgeously ramshackle home with its downstairs studio.

Gillard's tracing paper inscription recites a litany of sexist verbal attacks endured by her when she was prime minister. Her shock and revulsion culminated in her stinging 'misogyny



*Australia once had a female Prime Minister, Governor General and Governor all at the same time. Quentin Bryce was a very steady hand as our Governor General and we became friends as she used to stroll past my house.*



*Kerrie is an artist who always stitches her name backwards. She has been a finalist in the Archibald Prize fifteen times but never won.*

speech' to Parliament in 2012. 'It was so mean what they wrote about Julia Gillard because she had the temerity to be Prime Minister,' says Kingston.

One of the *Sheilas* portraits is reserved for Jan Cork, a friend of Kingston's since they met in the 1960s. Cork is shown at the helm of Kingston's half-cabin fishing smack, the MV *Anytime*, which bobs on a mooring in Lavender Bay when Kingston is not using it as a mobile studio.

It seems appropriate that the Library will count *Sheilas* as part of its Kingston collection, because it was Jerelynn Brown, manager of the Library's collection strategy and development, who inadvertently caused the artist's book to be made.

In about mid-2018, the Library acquired two artist's books from Kingston titled *Blokes* and *Gents*, with sitters including photographer Jon Lewis, artists William Dobell, Garry Shead, Euan Macleod and Alan Jones, cartoonist Bruce Petty, and artist and former Art Gallery of NSW curator Hendrik Kolenberg.

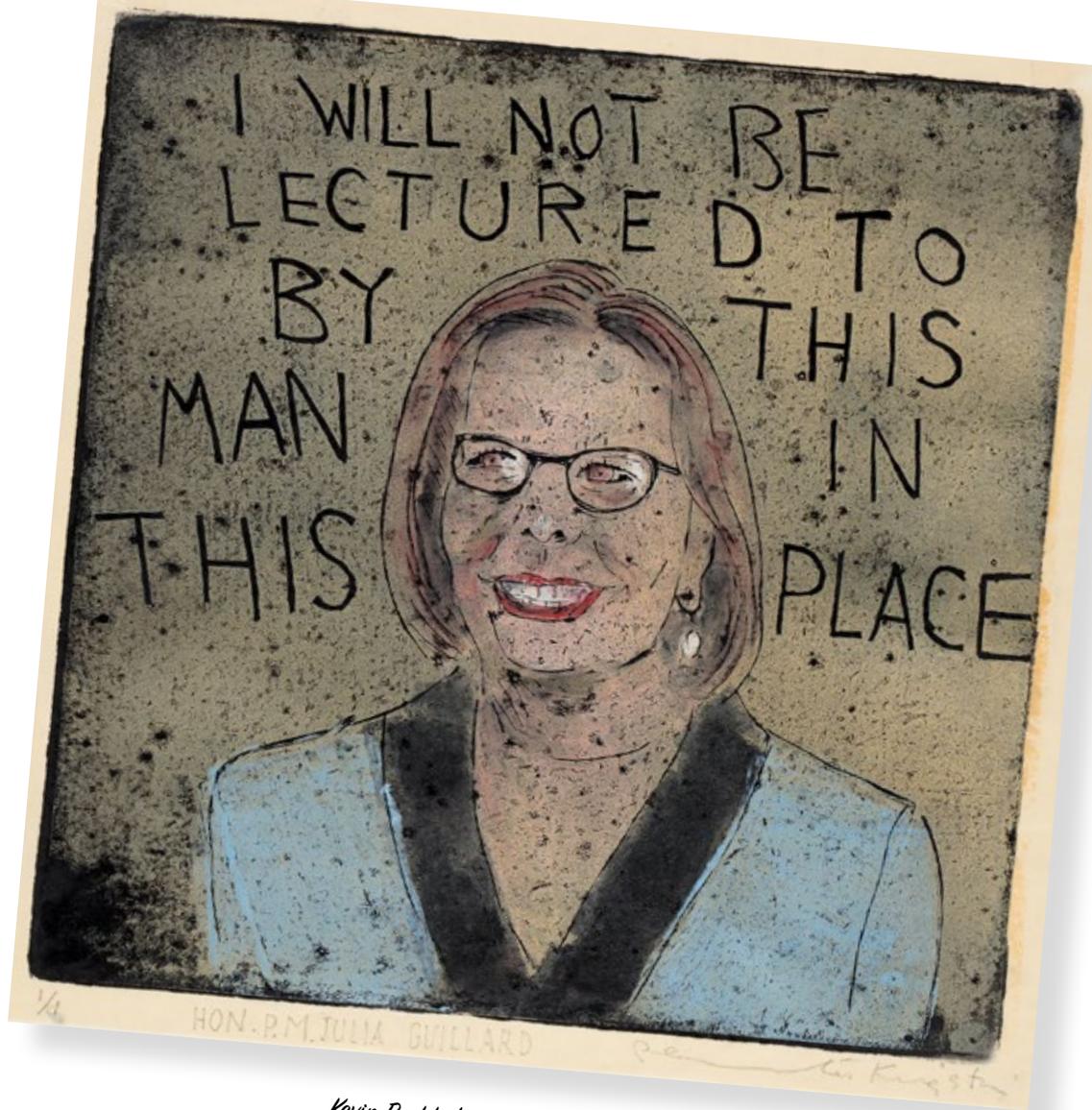
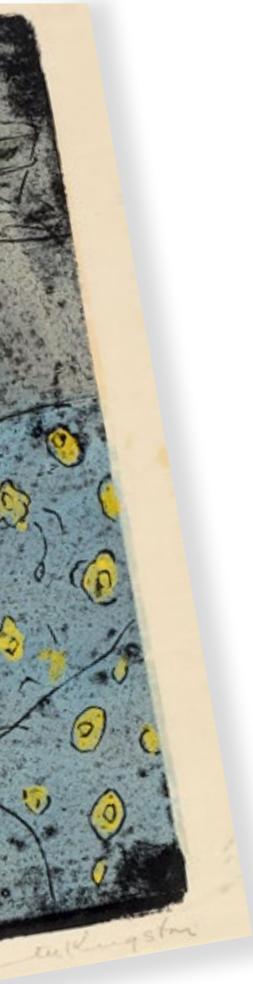
'I said, "Peter, this is all very well, but what about the sheilas?";' Brown remembers. It was really a bit of gentle ribbing. But Kingston took up the challenge.

Kingston is a perfect fit for the Library with his eye for heritage and the historic, and his environmental and built history campaigns that have worked their

way into his art. After all, the Library's remit is to document the changing face of Sydney and New South Wales. And that's exactly what Kingston has done.

'We have most of his artist's books and documentary work,' Brown says. 'We have an extensive collection of his etchings and prints. Some of the material is held uniquely by the Library. Peter is an iconic and renowned New South Wales artist – I would say Australian, as well.'

The Library holds about 20 artist's books by Kingston including *Rain*, 2018 (inspired by the artist's trip to stay with Margaret Thorsborne and help her campaign to protect the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area), *Sydney Deckie*, 2018 (featuring Sydney Harbour and its



*Kevin Rudd chose Quentin Bryce to be Governor General. When I asked Quentin what she thought of Julia she replied 'You couldn't help but like her'.*

ferries), A–Z, from about 1989 (in which Kingston used humour to confront his battle with agoraphobia), and *Mackerel Beach: A Winter's Tale*, 2014, (featuring fairy penguins and Carinya, Pittwater's lovely 'frangipani house').

The Library also has many of Kingston's hand-coloured etchings, including *Southerly Buster*, 1985, *Busy Bondi*, 1985, *Pooling*, 1985, *May Gibbs' Studio at Nutcote*, 1989, *Death of the Regent Theatre Sydney*, 1989, and *The Elephant House* [Taronga Zoological Park], 1984.

*Sheilas* is the latest in a long line of Kingston's work to enter the collection, and Brown is tickled that Kingston thought to dedicate this

important artwork to her. 'Credit where credit's due,' Kingston says simply.

*Sheilas* now takes its permanent place at the Library and is currently on display in its Amaze Gallery.

**Elizabeth Fortescue is Arts Editor for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph*.**

**Peter Kingston's *Sheilas* will be on display in the State Library's Amaze Gallery from 20 March to 13 June 2021.**

# Words across cities



Rebecca Starford, 2021, photos by Jason Zambelli

**The theme of friendship and betrayal took this writer and editor from her non-fiction debut to her first novel.**

The impression I have after long conversations with Rebecca Starford is of a preternaturally wise woman who's worked in the world of words and writing her whole life. Still in her 30s, she already knows every stage of a book's life, from first draft to author tour. She is friends with every curve of the ampersand, editing and shaping the lines of her own and others. She can trace the twists and turns of stories with her fingertips, regardless of whether they're fiction or non-fiction.

Starting out with a creative writing undergraduate degree, Starford learned the ropes of magazines and reviewing at *Australian Book Review* before working for two different publishing houses. As one of the founders and now Publishing Director and CEO of the online literary magazine and writing community *Kill Your Darlings*, she provides the scaffolding and support for those still climbing the publishing ranks. Her own literary debut was a memoir, *Bad Behaviour*, published in 2015, and her second book, the novel *The Imitator*, has just been released.

We catch up on either side of her submitting her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Queensland, where she's also a keen teacher. All I can think is: what lucky, lucky students.

'When I was at school I knew I wanted to work in a field related to literature,' Starford tells me. 'Both my parents are teachers, so I sort of grew up in a house where I really valued learning and felt that an education was just so important. When I was coming towards the end of my degree I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I just knew that I loved books. I just loved literature more than anything else, ever.'

This was in Melbourne, where she was living in the first years of her 20s. She went on to do Honours and 'started writing little pieces here and there', including some 'really bad poems'.

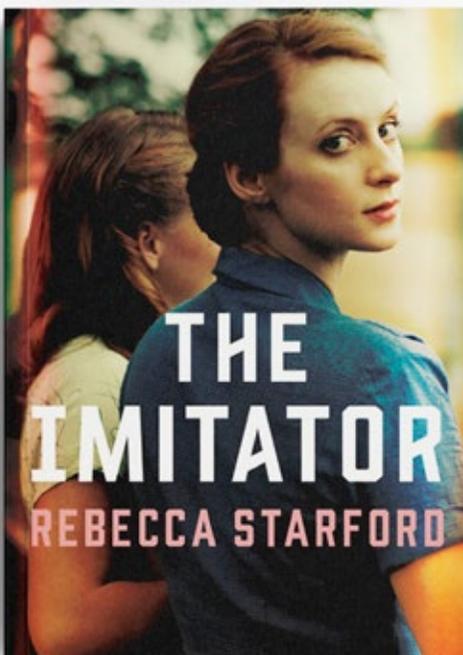
Volunteering for a small independent poetry press on campus, she learned 'basically, how books get made'.

While she didn't know anything about 'the publishing industry', she started 'to build a sense of it' at *Australian Book Review*, where she landed an internship in 2002. 'It was really at *ABR* that I began to develop an interest in being an editor. Not necessarily of magazine content, but of book editing. That was where I really thought I'd like to go.' The position turned into an ongoing role as Assistant Editor.

Her time at *ABR* was also where she forged what would turn into a fated friendship with the writer Hannah Kent. 'When I met Hannah and we became friends, we decided to sort of begin something together. That was really, you know, that was a life changing moment as well.'

That 'something' they started recently celebrated its 10-year anniversary. The first edition of the quarterly literary journal *Kill Your Darlings* was published in 2010, and the years since then have seen it grow into a multi-faceted, nationwide hub for writers. The magazine runs mentoring programs, competitions, commissions all manner of online content and publishes an annual short fiction collection.

The pivot from print to digital came in 2015 when the editors realised that all of their growth had been online and saw they had an advantage in the Australian market where few other publications had managed to establish digital audiences. Now they offer manuscript assessments, workshops and professional opportunities — basically a one-stop-shop for writers on the up. 'A training ground,' Starford calls it, and a 'community'. Kent's success with *Burial Rites* and her other writing work meant she left the staff of *KYD* a few years ago, but she still runs workshops and stays involved. As CEO, Starford now employs



a small team of publishers and editors, and gives regular, properly paid work to an assortment of freelancers and interns.

*ABR* was where her enduring love of the review form blossomed, too. 'I don't get a lot of time to do that at the moment, but I do love it. It's sad to think of how, even though we talk a lot about books in Australia, the review form is kind of under siege.' We're discussing the unique challenges of independent literary magazines in Australia and the shrinking puddles of funding for literature.

Starford doesn't just lament this situation for herself. She speaks passionately about 'stepping stones' that many new and emerging writers take in their careers. 'The community around literary magazines does play a really important role in a writer's development,' she explains. 'You can chart a kind of pathway that some writers take where they start publishing and writing for particular magazines, and they're moving towards being noticed by editors, and getting book deals.'

She's seen previously unpublished emerging writers cut their teeth at *KYD* and go on to secure publishing deals. 'It's like that clarity, the sharpening of your focus that comes through working through that process, writing a piece, having deadlines, being edited, starting to kind of get a sense of the professionalising of your own craft.'

Small organisations like *Kill Your Darlings* are absolutely critical to Australia's writing industry ecology. And Starford knows, having been on both sides, that 'editors do look. They're looking around for new talent. That's the thing that will always remain the same — that people are always hunting for new books and new writers. Sometimes it feels like we've sort of seen everything and read everything, but there is always new stuff to be found around the edges.'

Starford started writing her memoir, *Bad Behaviour*, when she was working

as associate publisher at Affirm Press, where she spent about five years building up their lists. 'By that stage, I was sort of thinking, okay, maybe I'd like to start a writing project. I didn't really make a conscious decision to write fiction or non-fiction. I wanted to explore these events, sort of personally, and understand how they shaped me. So it became important that it was non-fiction and was me there on the page, rather than a fictionalised self.'

From Affirm she moved to Text Publishing in 2013, where she worked as an editor, and it was while she was there that *Bad Behaviour* was published, providing yet another learning curve in the world of writing. The memoir follows Starford's experiences for a year at a boarding school, and is searingly honest in its portrayal of how cruel young people can be. She had begun researching and writing about bullying in a more critical, academic sense, but she put that approach to one side and committed entirely to memoir. 'The funny thing is, I never really imagined myself writing something so deeply personal, because there's so much in there that's really difficult to talk about. You know, particularly about my family as well, but it was kind of a compulsion, I think, to sort of get it out of my system.'

When the book came out things didn't get easier for her. 'It wasn't really a cathartic feeling,' she says. 'It was actually an emotional roller coaster ride, where you do have a lot of pride, but you're also horrified, terrified, and paranoid.' To have published very personal content, and for other people to read it and create their own picture of you, can be unnerving. In its exploration of bullying, the book shows Starford both on the giving and receiving end. One of her friends said to her, 'You were such a fucking little bitch, weren't you?' She says, 'That's still hurtful to me' and talks about the

'weird' relationship a writer has to 'the story and to your own self and the text'.

While at Text, with her first book coming out and *Kill Your Darlings* growing, the struggle to find time for her own writing got tricky. 'Being so involved in the writing world, juggling so many things at once was kind of impossible for me. I think you can do it up to a certain age.' When I ask her what age, she laughs. 'I would say maybe about 30? Writing *Bad Behaviour* required me to kind of get up at five o'clock in the morning, every day, and work every weekend for a year and a half. And, you know, that's okay to do for a period of time. But it's not really sustainable and it does make you unhappy. Something's got to give. So come 2016 that's when I left Text.' That was when Starford and her partner went travelling for a while before resettling in Brisbane.

When Starford explains it, the jump from boarding school and bullying to Second World War espionage for her new novel is not so much of a leap. 'When I came to the end of *Bad Behaviour*, and to the end of that publishing experience, I was interested a lot in what betrayal meant. A lot of the conversations I was having with people were about how I'd betrayed these girls by writing about them, or betrayed my family. And I guess, to an extent, you feel like maybe you've betrayed yourself by revealing secrets about yourself.'

All this sat simmering, and she grew more fascinated with what betrayal is, and what betrayal might mean. 'I have always been interested in World War Two. And the segue was my wondering, what are the psychological conditions that make the betrayal, or the ability to adapt and pretend, more of an asset?' A lot of what happened to Starford at school was born of a kind of uneasiness around class and feeling like an outsider, and she thinks these concerns will go on interesting her. '*Bad Behaviour* is a



book about friendship and betrayal, and that's essentially what *The Imitator* is about as well; a young woman trying to find belonging in the wrong places.'

The protagonist in *The Imitator*, Evelyn, is 'loosely based' on a real woman recruited by MI5 during the Second World War, and Starford's commitment to researching the London of that era shines through without overwhelming the characters or the plot. 'I got the kernel of the idea about the story from when I read a piece in a newspaper once about this woman who was in her very late 80s when she died, and it was only after her death that her family found out that she'd been a spy during the war.' Women's participation in espionage has been erased, Starford says, 'not only from the history, but from our cultural imaginations' as

well. 'And it made me think, well, how many other women kind of were out there doing this sort of thing?'

Although the move from non-fiction to fiction was not a particularly seismic shift, she does say fiction was a little more challenging for her. 'I don't really care for those distinctions. If I think about form too much, I find it really inhibiting ... You sort of begin one project and you start another, but the threads of it kind of still work their way through.'

Years helping other writers get their books into the best possible shape have obviously sharpened Starford's own skills. She's too modest to suggest this, instead speaking about lessons she's learned about editing, patience and commitment. 'I think it teaches you that your work will always be improved.

And that all writing is rewriting. Right? You just have to have faith in the process.'

It seems almost silly to ask her if she considered any other careers or callings. 'If I wasn't working with words, I don't know what I would want to do.' Sometimes, it seems, people are doing precisely what they should be. She clearly still loves literature more than anything else, ever.

**Bri Lee is the author of the award-winning *Eggshell Skull* and the essay *Beauty*. She hosts the monthly B List book club at the State Library of NSW.**



# A lonelier planet?

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**A** different kind of travel tale can be found amid the pandemic, if you know where to look.

Nowhere. That's where I've been recently. Over the past 10 years I've typically escaped to 20 or more countries each year, but for most of this year I haven't even left Victoria. On 18 March 2020 I arrived back in Australia from Yemen – fortunately, an interesting place – and had to go into self-administered quarantine. A few days later and I would have been ushered into one of the state government's death hotels.

Remarkably, even within Victoria's tightly prescribed lockdown, I managed to do some travel. At the beginning I explored the Yarra River and discovered how little I really knew about the waterway that flows past the bottom of my garden. Why had I never stumbled upon the Pontville Homestead in Templestowe? In fact, why does this remarkable 1846 survivor of Melbourne's early colonial history get so little attention? And what a surprise to encounter kangaroos so close to the centre of Melbourne.

WORDS **Tony Wheeler**

Then, when the lockdown became severe, I downloaded the map showing the 5 km radius of my circumscribed world and rode my bicycle carefully around the periphery, discovering interesting little escapes even within that tiny realm. All of Kew Billabong's busy birdlife lay within my legal zone, but only half the Australian Grand Prix circuit.

Even at home, Zoom kept me travelling. I spoke at literature and travel conferences in cities from London to Istanbul, and in Leh in Ladakh (who knew there was a Ladakh Literature Festival?). And I wrote for a number of travel-related publications, where there's been a lot of interest in what our post-pandemic travel world might be like.

With time to spare, I finally got around to sorting through half a lifetime of travel photographs — the real film variety — throwing thousands away and sending thousands more off to be digitally scanned.

Tracking down the location of a statue of the early twentieth-century revolutionary Sun Yat-sen I'd photographed in San Francisco's Chinatown led me to a statue of the Chinese hero in Melbourne's Chinatown. And thinking about statues took me into our current enthusiasm for cancel culture. Researching the story of a statue in the centre of Dublin, I learned it had been removed only days earlier because it represented an Egyptian slave girl. Then, after a few weeks, it was discovered that she probably wasn't a slave after all, so she was heading back to her plinth.

My tightly constrained explorations of Melbourne may have introduced me to parts of the city I'd overlooked, but I soon discovered the pandemic introduced me to other aspects of the culture I'd missed out on. I'd always said that to be part of Melbourne you needed a school and a football team; and since I arrived in the city well past

my school days, and I failed to develop an enthusiasm for footy, I was never going to be a real part of Melbourne.

Suddenly, the school backstory simply could not be ignored. The newspaper letter pages and the radio call-ins were saturated with frustrated school prefects, desperate to tell us to behave ourselves, wash our hands, keep our distance, wear our masks, shut up and pull our weight. I may have missed out on the Melbourne school experience when I was school age, but there was absolutely no way of avoiding it now.

## **I** s someone out there right now, wandering remote corners of the world avoiding lockdowns, quarantines and closed borders?

So how were my friends elsewhere in the world coping with their own pandemic lockdowns? In dramatically different ways, it turned out. An avid traveller from Hong Kong appeared to have glided through the pandemic as if nothing was happening: walking in the 'wet and muddy Chilterns' in England, enjoying much better weather for his Italian Dolomites stroll, all well in Portugal, followed by 'a great week in the sunny Peloponnese'. The only interruption seemed to be that each time he returned to Hong Kong, he had to go into another two weeks of home isolation. Now, however, the government was threatening mandatory hotel isolation, and he wasn't so enthusiastic about that.

Meanwhile, in Tonga, another friend reported that the entire Pacific nation had completely dodged the virus bullet: Case 1 had yet to turn up. On the other hand, Aircraft 1 was unlikely to arrive

before July 2021, which was doing nothing for his tourist business.

In Bangkok, a friend who had tired of watching the student protests rented a house on an island in the Andaman Sea, near the border with Myanmar. He intended to sit back and wait things out. He reported that many other foreigners stuck in South-East Asia had retreated to Kampot in Cambodia.

When I asked an Israeli friend why his country had done everything so well and then so badly, he gave me a quick lesson in its assorted divisions. In July, I turned to Armenian friends to ask why they'd gone so wrong when neighbouring Georgia seemed to be doing everything right. Residual Stalinism, they suggested (Joe was born there) — not unlike Daniel Andrews and Victoria I mused, and wearing masks from Day 1. Then by early December, as Armenia finally began to get things under control, Georgia shot off the charts as if to remind us we should never assume Covid-19 is stamped out.

Will some adventurous traveller emerge — post-pandemic — with the great travel tale? Is someone out there right now, wandering remote corners of the world avoiding lockdowns, quarantines and closed borders? Perhaps they're traversing the Himalayas, or exploring some little-touristed jungle. Maybe they're not even moving around, simply hanging out on a forgotten Pacific island, waiting for the first flight in a year? Or hiding away in an overlooked corner of the far-flung archipelago of Indonesia? Maybe they're in India, in Nepal or even in New Zealand, where reportedly there are lots of Brazilians who should have gone home long ago. Whatever they write about it, I'll certainly buy a copy.

**Tony Wheeler AO is a travel writer and entrepreneur, and co-founder of the Lonely Planet guidebook company.**

## Instructions before forgetting

No birdsong nor alarm could pull me  
from the murmurations. I rise late,  
rubbing my hard edges against  
the surface of day. Even the softest light

grows a husk over static matter.

My love has gone to work, leaving  
a bowl of figs in his place. Today's promise:  
a walk around the block,

a phone call with my grandmother,  
whose hair follicles shiver from chemo.  
Language returns to the morning —  
praise the cherry tomatoes

I blacken on the stove.  
Praise the cells that die and regenerate  
to weave a new skin. I thank my Maker  
for a body that forgets itself.

I come to remember —  
there is no lover nor fig  
to mark the end of an hour.  
The ones I love are deep

in the tangle, untouched for months.  
I must crawl into the wet labyrinth  
of vine, my ear pressed against the earth,  
listening until it is safe to follow.

**Eunice Andrada**

Eunice Andrada is a poet and educator whose debut collection *Flood Damages* won the Anne Elder Award and was a finalist in the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and the Dame Mary Gilmore Award. She is a judge of the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry in the 2021 NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

Illustration by EM Mierisch





Shell necklace made for Marjorie Barnard by Jean Devanny, 1946

WORDS Sarah Morley

# Gifts from the sea

**The timeless appeal of shells has seen them preserved in many ways over the centuries.**

When we walk along the beach, many of us are mesmerised by the array of shells tossed up by the whims of waves. This chance release of treasure from the ocean can activate an almost absent-minded process of collecting, assessing and discarding in a quest for the perfect shell.

Throughout history, seashells have been used for adornment and in ceremonies, collected for science, prized by collectors, and treasured as ornaments. With their infinite variety of shapes, sizes, textures

and colours, they are the subject of countless guidebooks and catalogues, and often feature in art and design.

For millennia, Aboriginal people have used shells in initiations and other rituals, for fishhooks and other tools, and as adornments to indicate social status. Evidence also suggests that Aboriginal people in Western Australia used shells in their trade with neighbours.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, shells were considered highly desirable 'curiosities' throughout Europe. They were depicted in the woodcuts of early printed books such as *Ortus Sanitatis*, a natural history encyclopedia published in Germany in 1491.

Over the next two centuries, collectors were gripped by a madness for shells, fed by European voyages of discovery and colonial trade. In this Age of

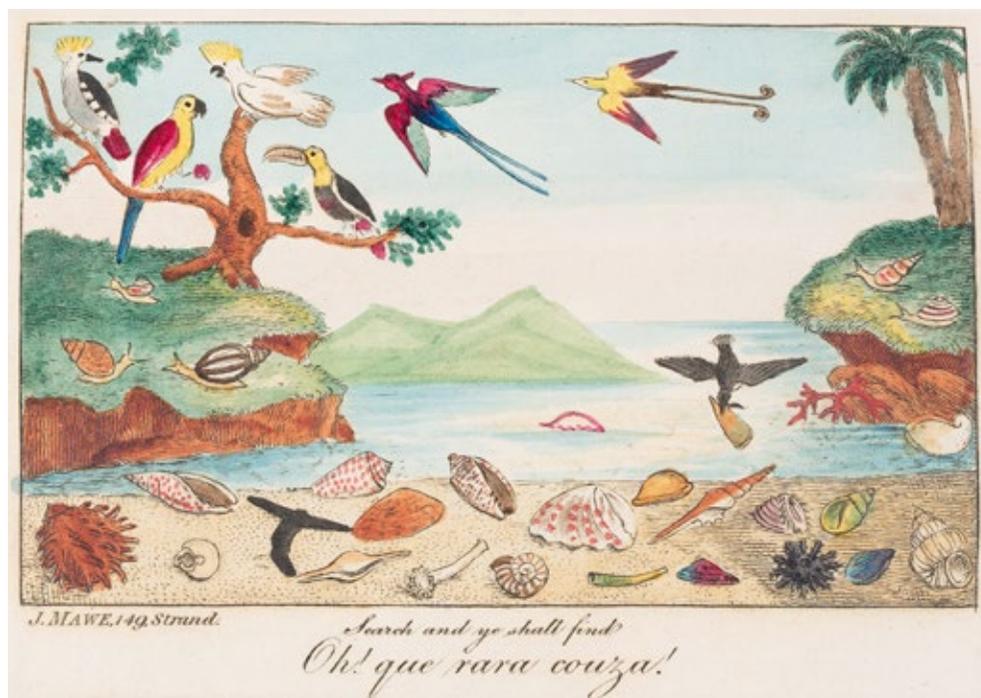
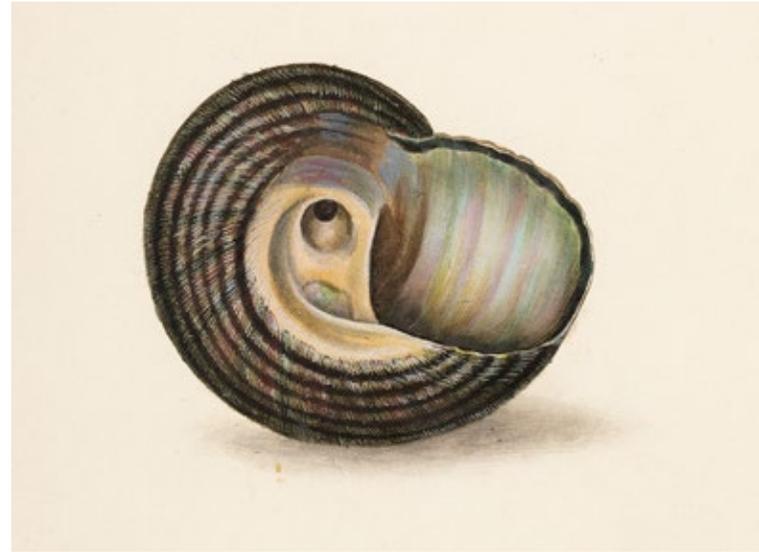


Illustration from *The Voyager's Companion or Shell Collector's Pilot*, 1825, by J Mawe



Clava Maculata – Pulo Condore, Fimbriatum – Falkland Islands, Helix Staminea – New Zealand, details from *The Universal Conchologist*, 1784, by Thomas Martyn



Enlightenment, the open exchange of ideas, information and objects was encouraged. Shells were among the natural history specimens brought back to Europe by ships' crews — including scientists or naturalists on voyages — and sold to dealers and collectors.

When rivals France and Britain sent expeditions to chart the southern coastline of New Holland, as the Dutch had named the Australian continent, the British were first to complete the task. '[I]f we had not been kept so long picking up shells and catching butterflies ...' French naval officer Louis de Freycinet later told Matthew Flinders, 'you would not have discovered the south coast before us.'

This obsession with shells was referred to by philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau as conchylomania (from 'concha', the Latin word for shellfish). It was a condition shared by many wealthy collectors and members of the European aristocracy, who displayed their precious spoils in cabinets of curiosity.

Well-heeled natural history enthusiasts also supported the eighteenth century's explosion of exquisitely illustrated books, which included books on conchology. The State Library of NSW recently acquired

a lavish first edition of Thomas Martyn's *The Universal Conchologist*. Published in London in 1784, its two volumes contain 80 illustrations drawn by Martyn and engraved and hand-coloured by a series of young men he trained as natural history artists.

Martyn purchased many of the shells featured in the book from the crews of the *Resolution* and *Discovery* on James Cook's third voyage. Also represented are shells belonging to the Duchess of Portland, a renowned collector, to naval officer and governor John Hunter and to Scottish physician George Fordyce. Ultimately, many of these natural history collections were dispersed at auction and some specimens found their way into museums where they could be consulted by scientists, artists, designers and engineers.

In 1804 British mineralogist John Mawe published *A Short Treatise on Natural History*, which would go into several editions and eventually became the *Shell Collector's Pilot*, the world's first shell collecting guide. The book provides directions on where to find the finest shells, together with advice on cleaning and packing them.

The only recorded copy of Mawe's first edition is held in the Library. At the front of the third and fourth editions, a striking hand-coloured engraving shows a flock of birds — including a sulphur-crested cockatoo — above a beach strewn with brightly coloured shells and coral. Captioned 'Search and ye shall find', the drawing was intended 'to tempt the traveler, and rouse his mind to contemplate on the beauties of the deep'.

As well as a symbol of nature's beauty, shells can be used to preserve a memory of a person, place or moment in time. Made into artworks or jewellery, they become a tangible connection to the past and have the power to elicit strong emotions.

'I have got a new madness,' the English artist Mary Delaney wrote to her sister in 1734. 'I am running wild after shells ... the beauty of shells is as infinite as flowers.' Delaney, who was best known for her paper botanical collages, added shellwork — which had first appeared in the previous century — to her range of arts and crafts. She often stayed with her friend the Duchess of Portland, a skilled conchologist, field collector, patron of shell books, and owner of one of the largest shell collections in the world.



**S**hells have a sensuality about them that also attracts artists and collectors. They are often seen as symbols of fertility and sexuality ...

Shellwork became a popular craft for women in the Victorian era, not least in the Australian colonies. From the late 1800s, the Aboriginal women of La Perouse made a variety of shellwork objects such as heart-shaped boxes and baskets, which were often displayed at agricultural shows and fairs, and sold as souvenirs to visiting tourists. The techniques were perfected through the generations to create works of symbolic significance.

Bidjigal elder and artist Esme Timbery carries on the work of her great-grandmother Queen Emma Timbery and the La Perouse community. Her delicate works of art — including jewellery boxes, slippers and models of the Sydney Harbour Bridge — can be found in many private and public collections. In 2018 Timbery made a shellwork model of the La Perouse Mission Church for the Library's exhibition *Sydney Elders: Continuing Aboriginal Stories*. 'Our lives revolved around that little church,' Timbery recalled. 'We were there all the time. It was like a second home to us.'

In November 1946 Jean Devanny sent her friend and fellow Australian writer Marjorie Barnard a necklace made from shells she had painstakingly collected

while working with noted naturalist Dr Hugo Flecker in North Queensland. Devanny spent the last two decades of her life there, writing books and articles and collecting coral and shells for Flecker's North Queensland Naturalists' Club.

'It has taken me four years to collect sufficient shells to make up this necklace!' she wrote to Barnard. '[T]hey are so difficult to thread, I only bothered about it because I wanted to give you something unique to suit your own lovely character.'

Two weeks later Marjorie responded, 'The necklace came today and it is very beautiful but it isn't that that moves me so deeply. So much care and time went into its making that no one would do it except for love, something that cannot be bought and is rarely given.' Marjorie kept the necklace until her death 40 years later, and it was given to the Library by her friend Vera Murdoch in 1989.

In addition to jewellery, shells have been used in interior design, including for the exuberant motifs of the rococo period that began in France in the 1730s. The geometry of shells almost seems architectural, which may have been part of their attraction for Australian photographer Max Dupain. Along with his photographs of modernist

buildings, Dupain's photographic archive at the Library contains many images of shells, some artfully arranged and others in their natural environment.

Shells have a sensuality about them that also attracts artists and collectors. They are often seen as symbols of fertility and sexuality — their smooth rounded bumps can resemble a pregnant belly; the spiral of a periwinkle shell can look like the breast of a woman. Shell openings have been said to resemble female genitalia, particularly the long mouth of a cowrie shell.

Nowadays, of course, the ethics of shell collecting is a consideration, not least because they house living creatures. But they remain as desirable today as they were thousands of years ago. People still stroll along the beach fondling prized selections in their fingers before either returning them to the sea or slipping them into a pocket for safekeeping. The calming effect of collecting shells makes this a pastime that will endure as long as there are shells to collect.

**Sarah Morley, curator**



*Cynthia candace*  
Painted Lady.

Detail from an album of water colours, c 1848, attributed to Charlotte Atkinson

WORDS Kate Forsyth

# Finding Charlotte

**Two writers' search for their mysterious and talented forebear was full of archival riches.**

People often ask why writing is so important to me. But like anything to do with human desire, it's hard to explain in a soundbite. Writing makes me happy. Writing helps me think, understand and express myself. Writing is almost as natural and necessary to me as breathing.

And writing is in my blood. I come from a long line of writers, stretching back hundreds of years. And that family history sparked one of the most joyous yet challenging books I have ever written.

When I was a child, my brother, sister and I were told stories full of romance, drama and tragedy about our great-great-great-great-grandmother Charlotte Waring Atkinson, who wrote the first children's book published in Australia.

Charlotte was born in London in 1796 to a wealthy family that traced its lineage back to William de Warenne, a Norman knight who fought at the side of William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. According to family myth, he was rewarded with a title, vast swathes of English land, and the hand of the king's daughter in marriage.

Charlotte's father lost his wealth when she was still a girl, and she had to go out to work as a governess at the age of 15.

When I came across a published letter by Charlotte Brontë in which she describes the governess's life of 'inexpressible misery', I felt so sorry for my ancestor who may have suffered the same loneliness, humiliation and unkindness.

When she was 30, Charlotte applied for a job in far-off Sydney to teach the children of pastoralist and politician Hannibal Macarthur. Twenty-four other governesses applied – I imagine them sitting in a row, with their high-necked blouses, long skirts and neat button-up boots, hands folded primly in their laps – but only Charlotte was willing to risk the danger of a long voyage to that mysterious land 'down under'. 'Though I must travel first-class,' she told them.

When Charlotte was on board *The Cumberland*, ready to set sail from London, a handsome young gentleman came aboard and tipped his hat to her. His name was James Atkinson, and it was love at first sight. Within three weeks, they were engaged to be married.

According to family lore, James proposed to her after a great storm at sea. Charlotte was almost washed overboard, and her fiancé saved her then wrapped her in his plaid cloak to keep her warm. *So romantic!* we used to sigh as children.

After Charlotte and James were married, he built her a beautiful sandstone house named Oldbury, near Sutton Forest in the Southern Highlands. They were very happy, and had four children in quick succession:



Top: Kate Forsyth, photo by Joy Lai

Above: Self-portrait of Charlotte Waring Atkinson, c 1842–46

Charlotte Elizabeth, Jane Emily, James John and Caroline Louisa, who was called by her second name. When Louisa was still only a newborn, her father James died suddenly from typhoid, and Charlotte was left a young widow, struggling to run a vast property worked mostly by convicts.

In January 1836 Charlotte rode out with her overseer George Barton to check on her flocks near the forest of Belanglo. They were attacked by bushrangers, and Barton was viciously flogged. We do not know what the bushrangers did to Charlotte. But considering one of them was John Lynch, known as the Berrima Axe Murderer, we fear the worst.



View at Oldbury, c 1826, by Charlotte Atkinson

Three weeks after the attack was reported in the *Sydney Herald*, Charlotte made what turned out to be the worst mistake of her life. She married Barton.

He proved to be a violent drunkard, and three-and-a-half years later Charlotte fled Oldbury with her four children. They took only what could be carried by a few bullocks and rode on horseback through the almost impenetrable gorges

of the Shoalhaven River and — eventually — to safety in Sydney.

One of the first things Charlotte did was apply to the police for protection against George Barton, chilling proof that he had been physically violent during their marriage. With no income at all, she applied to the courts for the proceeds from Oldbury, as laid out in James Atkinson's will. 'Her situation is extremely distressing,' her solicitor

wrote. 'She assures me she and the Children are literally starving.'

In retaliation for her 'imprudent' marriage to Barton, the trustees of the will declared she was not a 'fit and proper person to be the Guardian of the Infants'. They applied to the courts to have the children given into the guardianship of a stranger. It didn't matter who, as long as it was a man.

## The journal confirmed several family stories, including the account of our French noble blood, which made us laugh because we'd believed the story had been glamorised!

At enormous emotional and financial cost, Charlotte fought the case all the way to the NSW Supreme Court. At one point, she was charged with contempt of court for her impertinence. Finally, on 9 July 1841, Chief Justice Sir James Dowling found emphatically in her favour. He ruled that 'it would require a state of urgent circumstances to induce the Court to deprive [the children] of that maternal care and tenderness, which none but a mother can bestow'.

It was a resounding victory, both for Charlotte and for the rights of Australian women.

Five months later, just a week before Christmas, *A Mother's Offering to Her Children by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales* was published. Charlotte had struggled through almost impossible obstacles to become Australia's first children's author.

When my sister Belinda Murrell and I grew up to become writers, people would say, 'You should write a book about Charlotte!' And as the 180th anniversary of the publication of *A Mother's Offering* drew closer, we signed a contract for an intimate biography/memoir.

We began our research at the State Library of NSW, where the Mitchell Library collection holds one of the best archives of Atkinson-related material in the world. Among its treasures is a memoir by Charlotte's youngest daughter Louisa Atkinson, the first Australian-born female novelist, journalist and botanist. It confirmed several family stories, including the account of our French noble blood, which made us laugh because we'd believed the story had been glamorised!

It was moving to read our great-great-great-great-aunt's handwritten life story, written for her newborn daughter. Sadly, her reminiscences finish halfway through a sentence. Two weeks after her daughter's birth, Louisa looked out the window and saw her husband's riderless horse gallop into the yard. Imagining the worst, she had a heart attack and dropped dead. When her husband limped home later, he found her lifeless body beside the baby's cradle.

In the archive we also found the tiny Bible given to Charlotte's son James John at his christening, along with old photographs of Oldbury and family portraits by the young Atkinsons.

An album of watercolour drawings from around 1848 is attributed to Charlotte's daughter Jane Emily Atkinson, with a comment in the catalogue that it was unclear whether Jane was 'the artist of these drawings or merely the owner of the album'. The album's donor had written that the sketchbook was a 'a gift to Emily / not her work / certain ... by her brother'.

We knew that Charlotte's son James John was only 16 at that time and were not expecting anything very special when we ordered up the drawings. But what we discovered was the greatest treasure of all. The handwritten annotation by Charlotte's great-granddaughter Janet Cosh had been misread, and actually said, 'a gift to Emily /not her work / certainly by her mother'.

The age-spotted pages were filled with exquisite family portraits by Charlotte Waring Atkinson, including a self-portrait of the artist wrapped in a plaid cloak just like

the one she wore in the romantic story of her courtship with James.

Belinda and I had been intrigued by contemporary references to Charlotte having published 'several useful works for children', and her biographer Marcie Muir had left a note in the National Library of Australia mentioning a 'very entertaining & instructive little work for children entitled P.P.'s Tales'. We came across an illustrated chapbook published in London in 1832 titled *Amusing and Instructive Stories by Peter Prattle*, which is set in Australia and was reprinted with additional stories in 1842.

When I looked at both editions in the Mitchell Library Reading Room, I soon realised it was highly likely that they were by Charlotte. As well as many parallels in style, theme and language, one story features two girls keen on botany named Caroline and Louisa, the given names of Charlotte's daughter who became a noted botanist. If Charlotte wrote under the pseudonym 'Peter Prattle', then she is the author and illustrator of some of the first children's stories set in Australia, as well as the author of Australia's first children's book.

The search for Charlotte had many heart-wrenching, perplexing and thrilling moments. It was wonderful to finally bring our ancestor out of the realm of family stories and share her extraordinary life.

**Novelist Kate Forsyth was the Library's 2019 Nancy Keesing Fellow, and is the co-author with Belinda Murrell of *Searching for Charlotte: The Fascinating Story of Australia's First Children's Author* (NLA Publishing, 2020).**

WORDS Jess Scully

# In favour of bad art

Let's raise a glass to what some would call 'bad art'.

The sages, poets and thinkers through the ages are all aligned in adoration of mastery in artistry. I've no argument with them: but I'd like to humbly raise a glass and offer a few words in defence of bad art. I'm not talking about the over-eager, under-skilled nun botching a fresco kind of bad art: I'm singing the praises of the bad art that makes good art possible, and socially focused art that looks nothing like the stuff you see on gallery walls.

For starters, you don't get good art without the bad: British artist David Shrigley OBE once told me he threw out more than 90 per cent of the work he made. All those scrunched up attempts on the studio floor are an essential part of the process. Often, artists produce prolifically, take risks and try new things, rethink, rework, and then cut back critically. As viewers we only see the distillation of an artist's practice, but to get to the good stuff, they need to be able to take risks, make mistakes and, yes, even to make bad art. The edit is often where a discerning eye comes in to sort through the chaff and find the wheat, and curators and gallerists can play a big role in helping artists make the cut.

Secondly, art that's experimental and of the moment today may end up looking less than fresh — even *bad* — a few years later.

Looking at the history of electronic art (that blurry catch-all genre that was called 'new media' for much longer than it was new), I find myself less than impressed. Work that was once considered cutting edge is now outdated and, well, *bad*. From the perspective of 2021 it falls into the 'my kid could do that in 20 minutes on Minecraft' basket, and both the technical chops and intellectual pursuit can seem basic and clumsy.

But we've got to cut those video and tech art pioneers some slack: being the avant-garde means you're out in front



Jess Scully, photo by Juliet Taylor

clearing the path with DIY, pushing technology to work in ways previously unimaginable; looking backwards, we lose the context. The grandfather of tech art, Nam June Paik, was visionary in his day, and yet his assemblages and videos increasingly look more like ancient relics than totems of the future. The transgressive digital art of Hito Steyerl pushed boundaries, but her explorations of digital identity and privacy in the 2010s may be passé sooner than we'd think.

The net art experiments of today may be destined for the same fate: there's some extraordinarily creative stuff happening on TikTok right now, but it probably won't age well. The tools of tech art practice have evolved much faster in the last 50 years than the oils available to the classical masters may have changed in 500. So, as we assess our more recent art history, we're going to be looking back onto some embarrassing examples from the 1990s and early 2000s of what looks like bad art. But we need that bad art: experimentation and forays into the unknown are the only way to break new ground.

My third argument in favour of bad art is one that asks us to value the process over the outcome. The art I really love isn't as fixated on aesthetic excellence as it is on the experience for participants or on social change: it really is about the journey rather than the destination. The work that inspires me most is participatory, collaborative, socially focused practice — it takes a lot of different forms, from community cultural development to social sculpture. It's art that prioritises the growth and connections made by the participants, and challenges and changes the status quo, rather than necessarily being focused on expertise or aesthetic qualities.

This is work that has bigger goals than beauty, though the outcomes can be beautiful. If you value technical mastery or aesthetics, you might think it's bad art, but for me, it does



what great art should do: it transforms the way you see the world, it reveals stories and unlocks possibilities.

Sometimes this work can look like architectural practice, such as in the case of the UK's Assemble Studio, which was awarded the Turner Prize for its work supporting the community of Liverpool's Granby Four Streets neighbourhood in reclaiming homes left derelict by bad policy. It can look like property development, as in the work of US artist Theaster Gates who has restored creative infrastructure on the South Side of Chicago. Gates trained as an urban planner and practised as a ceramicist and sculptor before he decided to mould neighbourhoods. He trains people to rebuild their places, using music and creativity to heal and to show what's possible when generous civic spaces are given back to communities who've had them torn away. In Australia, Big hArt have combined art and social justice in transformative projects that span years, embedded deep in communities, but often their work looks more like legal advocacy, gardening, theatre or education.

For me, there's much to admire in the unconventional, the experimental and the ambitious work that some might not see as art, or consider to be bad art. And remember that botched holy fresco? When Sister Giménez's clumsy repainting of *Ecce Homo* became a meme, it also turned into a tourist attraction, drawing thousands of visitors to her town of Borja in Spain. Bad art was the wellspring of a river of tourist dollars for the village: proving beauty and talent aren't the only paths to art glory.

**Jess Scully is Deputy Lord Mayor of Sydney. She is a Councillor, a public art curator and writer. Her first book *Glimpses of Utopia* was published in 2020.**



Above: The attempted restoration by Cecilia Giménez of the fresco *Ecce Homo* by Elías García Martínez, source: Cesar Manso/AFP/Getty Images

Above left: *Ecce Homo* by Elías García Martínez, source: epdlp.com

WORDS Christopher Allen

# What makes bad art bad?

**We tend to agree on the ranking of most kinds of art.**

All cultures know the difference between good and bad examples of their arts and crafts, from dance and singing to textiles and ceramics.

This kind of discrimination has nothing to do with sophisticated theorisation, academic institutions or complex markets. Tribal peoples can see perfectly well that one artist is better than another, and it is as clear to John Mawurndjul, for example, as it is to his community and to anyone who cares to look carefully, that he is the finest living exponent of traditional Aboriginal bark painting.

On the whole we too tend to agree on the ranking of most kinds of art. There is a general and enduring consensus about quality in all genres of music, for example, only temporarily distorted by the effects of fashion. The same is true of cinema, literature and even most of the art and architecture of the past; and yet the contemporary situation of the visual arts, and particularly painting, is uniquely anomalous.

If someone tells us that their mother plays the piano or that their cousin is learning an instrument at the conservatorium, we tend to assume that these individuals must be more or less competent. But if someone tells us their mother is a painter or their cousin is studying art at a tertiary institution or is having an exhibition, our instinctive reaction is exactly the opposite: we know all too well that the work in question is likely to be either amateurish, ideological or modish. We pray that our friend will not open his iPhone and force us to murmur in a non-committal way as he scrolls through a succession of saccharine, ugly or merely futile images.

Before asking how this situation has come about, we should first consider what it means to be bad; and as bad is primarily the absence of good, we need to start with what makes art good. If we look at what is appreciated in all times



Christopher Allen, photo by Joy Lai and Bruce York

and places, it is first of all things that are well-made, that are executed with skill, mastery and refinement. But behind these objective or formal properties is something more important and more intangible: the expression of awareness, both of human experience and of a world of nature or being that transcends human preoccupations. Such qualities of perception and insight are what we call beauty or truth in art.

Conversely, bad art is characterised in the first instance by clumsiness, incompetence and obtuseness. But beyond these formal deficiencies, once again, lie far deeper problems. Instead of awareness, intuition and consciousness, we find their false and mendacious antitheses: self-absorption, illusion, clichés, empty stylistic effects, kitsch, ideological posturing, meretricious appeal or sensationalism, modishness and fashion.

What then is the connection between skill and mastery in the handling of a medium and the deeper qualities of awareness and insight that we most value in art? Here too the case of music is instructive: not even a teenager imagines he can express himself with a guitar unless he first learns to play it. You can't pretend to play the piano or the violin; as a result, even amateur musicians are often impressive performers. The situation in the visual arts and particularly in painting is the opposite: people with sub-standard levels of ability are regularly accepted and exhibited as professionals.

Or consider filmmaking: the highest level of proficiency and professionalism is expected in every one of the myriad skills and crafts that go into the collective effort, from costume, design or script to lighting, cinematography and editing. And this is also true of new technologies in art: no-one is interested in poorly-produced video art, still less in digital media: the work of Angela Mesiti or Daniel Crooks is meticulously produced to the highest standard. And this is not because technical mastery is an end

in itself: it is because it becomes the instrument or vehicle of deeper imaginative expression, just as it is only technique and practice that allow a pianist to play with expression and feeling.

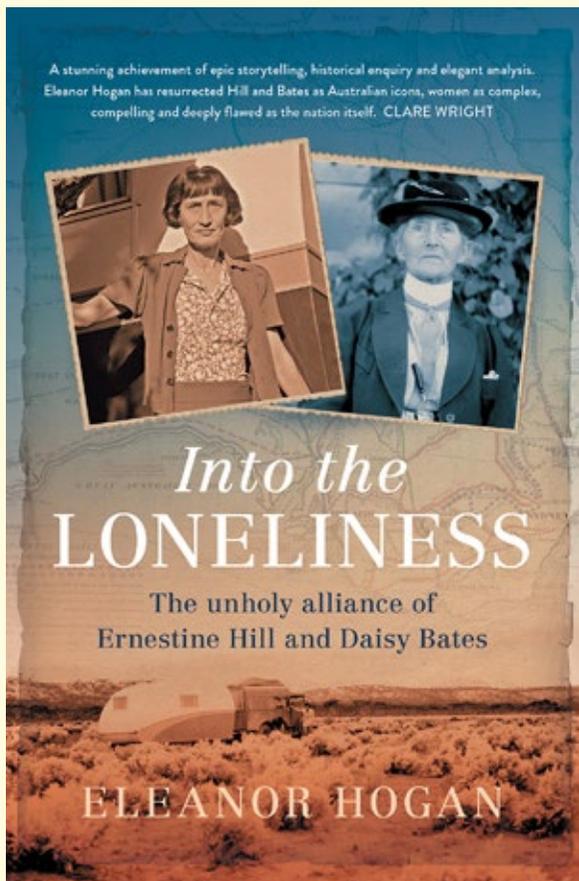
It is possible for the concern for technique to become stifling, as we sometimes see in contemporary musical performance, and as we witnessed in certain late academic painters as they struggled to outgun the nascent art of photography. This is what led to the original revolt against academic technique among modernists which, though understandable at the time, perversely led to a progressive decline in teaching standards and a breakdown in the transmission of the art of painting throughout the twentieth century.

Awareness and insight can also be expressed with a minimum of apparent technique, as we see in Zen painting: but the seeming casualness of the gesture is only made possible by years of practice, by deep familiarity with the media, by long-established tradition, and above all by absolute mental presence, care and a kind of selfless devotion. And it is the lack of all this that makes bad art. Without mastery, there can be no freedom, without refinement no subtlety, without care, attention and humility, no insight or depth.

**Dr Christopher Allen is an Australian art historian, critic and teacher. He is a member of the Library Council of NSW.**



*Ngalyod*, 2012, by John Mawurndjui, courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art



# Into the Loneliness: The unholy alliance of Ernestine Hill and Daisy Bates

by Eleanor Hogan

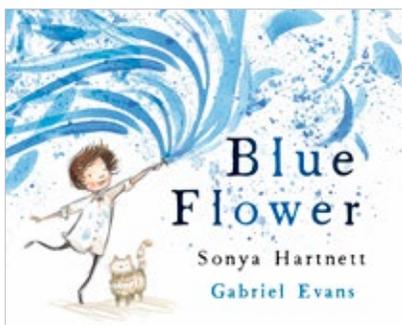
NewSouth Publishing

I read, sitting comfortably in one of Eleanor Hogan's 'coast-clinging capitals' with their 'house-hemmed horizons', far away in time, geography and mindset from the people and landscapes she so immediately conjures.

*Into the Loneliness*, Hogan's biographical work, explores the complex and changeable relationship between journalist Ernestine Hill and amateur ethnologist Daisy Bates, and their relationship with Indigenous Australia.

Though at times speculative, the work rests on meticulous research, interweaving the stories of three wandering women: Hill, Bates and Hogan herself. Its sophisticated structure, with interconnected narratives, allows a dialogue between individuals, between the past and present, and with our shifting understandings of Australia.

Bates' interest in Indigenous Australians was piqued by an allegation of atrocities. She went to investigate and commenced her life's work,



**Blue Flower**  
by Sonya Hartnett  
Puffin (Penguin)

Unlike *Blue Flower's* hesitant young protagonist, the concern that I might be wrong has never stopped me from speaking up

(possibly to my detriment!) Now, as the parent of a young child who could sometimes be described as dangerously confident, I wondered if Sonya Hartnett's latest picture book would resonate during storytime. But we both enjoyed this tender reminder that sometimes just being yourself can be an act of bravery. Gabriel Evans' stunning illustrations — especially Piccolo the cat confidante — were also appreciated.

**Golda Mitchell**



**Pushing Back**  
by John Kinsella  
Transit Lounge

The prolific John Kinsella, now the author of over 40 books and countless collaborations, returns with another collection of stories that distils Australia in all its mad and mundane minutiae. Whether it's the perfectly captured interiority of couples, the isolated terror of being

chased by a red car with violent intent, or a Kafkaesque tale of home invasion, Kinsella has managed to peel away the facade of the everyday with almost otherworldly insight. Kinsella covers the emotional spectrum in a set of tales that are equal parts wryly funny, heartbreaking and enigmatic.

**Richard Gray**

All books available from the Library Shop: [sl.nsw.gov.au/shop](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/shop)

recording the languages and culture of the Aboriginal peoples she encountered. She soon established the first of the isolated camps for which she became renowned: at Eucla on the southern rim of the Nullarbor Plain and later near Yalata at Ooldea, a permanent soak on the trans-Australian railway. It was here, in 1932, that Hill sought her out.

For Hill, 'the little Dresden figure [Bates dressed in the Victorian manner] and the moving tent were a surprise in the primeval scene, *a question mark*'. She soon coaxed Bates to Adelaide to collaborate on a newspaper series, later published as *The Passing of the Aborigines*, a local and international bestseller.

But the Adelaide sojourn was short-lived, and the women roamed for the rest of their lives.

They shared a loneliness as a consequence of past relationships — they had both chosen unconventional pathways. Bates' clandestine bigamy and

Hill's affair and child out of marriage led them to be circumspect in an attempt to avoid social censure. By living outside marriage, they each made a precariously independent livelihood through writing.

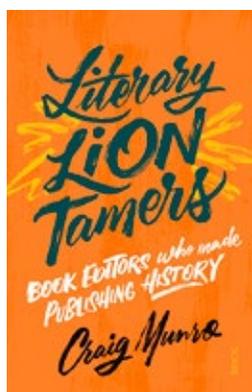
These remarkable women also shared the loneliness of the remote places they chose to study. Hill styled herself a 'hobohebian', her lifestyle a romantic echo of the archetypal swagman's. And while Bates continued to dress austere in her high-collared shirts, long skirts and gloves, Hill enjoyed the freedom afforded by her 'Oxford bags' and was happily mistaken for a swagman on her journeys. Hogan pursues them both across the 'great wide spaces' of Australia's interior, alone in her campervan, chasing the questions posed by their lives. It is layered storytelling: personal, poetic and compelling.

Bates and Hill espoused a vision of Australia that is often discomfiting to modern readers: Bates, driven to document a race she saw as passing

away, and Hill, loyal to the pastoralist ideal, believing it could accommodate both Aboriginal and settler interests. Through their articles and books, they influenced popular understandings of race and identity; Bates is still seen by some as the 'great-great-grandmother of that welfare mob'. Hogan directly engages with these uncomfortable legacies, her graceful, self-reflective analysis exposing the impact of these depictions on Indigenous people and policy today.

In exploring the questions posed by Bates and Hill, *Into the Loneliness* reveals the complexity of these two women: racist and patronising, curious and intelligent, sentimental and contrary, audacious and flawed.

**Olwen Pryke**



## Literary Lion Tamers

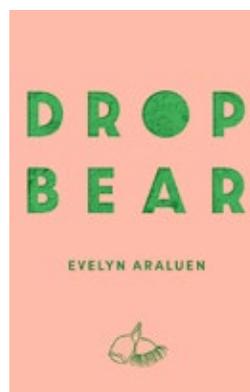
by Craig Munro

Scribe

As someone with a great love of books, who works as an editor, I was drawn to Craig Munro's tales of Australia's literary greats and the editors who worked with them. *Literary Lion Tamers* starts from the late 1800s, with stories spanning over 100 years. It's tempting to focus only on the excitement of

producing now-famous works, but the book also shows how challenging these larger-than-life personalities could be. I loved the glimpses of the remarkable Angus & Robertson editor Beatrice Davis, managing her authors with style and grace. Her description of editing as 'invisible mending', often quoted, is still a touchstone for many editors. It's hard not to feel envious of the glamorous literary soirees.

**Cathy Hammer**



## Dropbear

by Evelyn Araluen

UQP

Evelyn Araluen's *Dropbear* is a vital debut, using a combination of poetry and essay it deftly unpicks the net of colonialism and enacts an ardent remembrance of lives lost and cultures dismantled. Its searching intellectualism and keenly adventurous sense of form

are underscored by a burning emotional core. These pages are filled with history, family, love, and the generational inheritance of loss; lines of incisive lyrical beauty inscribe a lived experience with tenderness and excoriating realism. In this collection Araluen has truly created a space in which it is possible to 'speak the aftermath of history'.

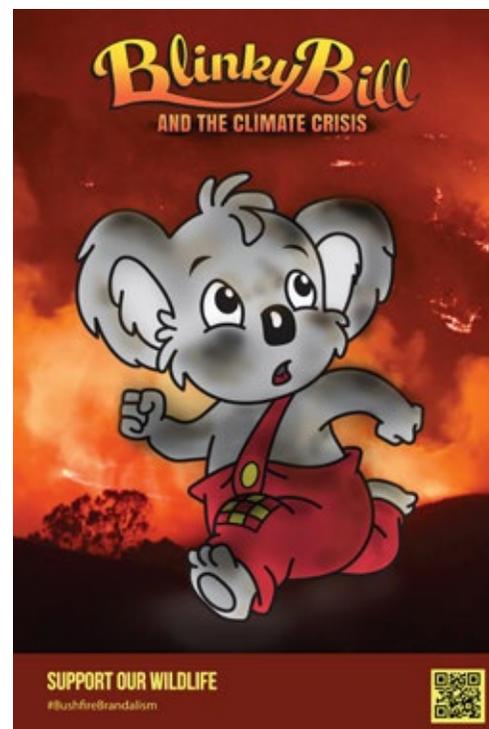
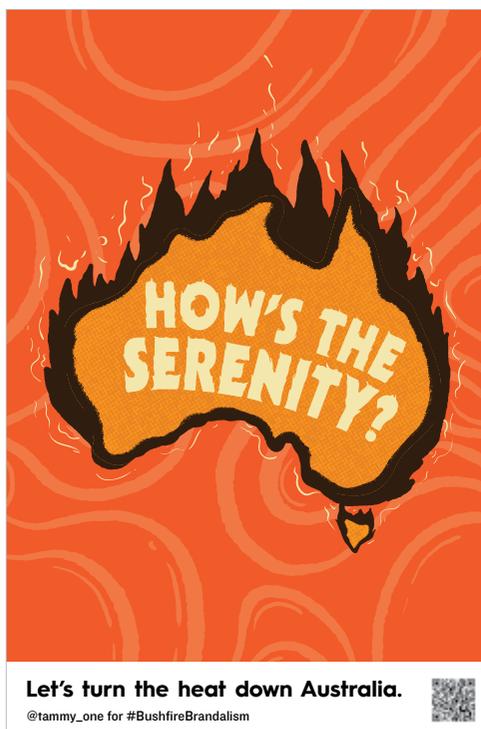
**Rico Craig**

## Miles & miles



A 'who's who' of Australian writers can be found on these shelves. When *My Brilliant Career* author Stella Maria Miles Franklin died in 1954, her bequest to establish a literary prize was a surprise to many. But its intent was clear: to honour a novel 'of the highest literary merit' each year that presents 'Australian Life in any of its phases'. Patrick White was the first winner in 1957 for *Voss*, and Thea Astley and Tim Winton have each been honoured four times. Every entry has ended up in the State Library's affectionately named Miles Franklin Room. The 2021 winner will be announced in July.

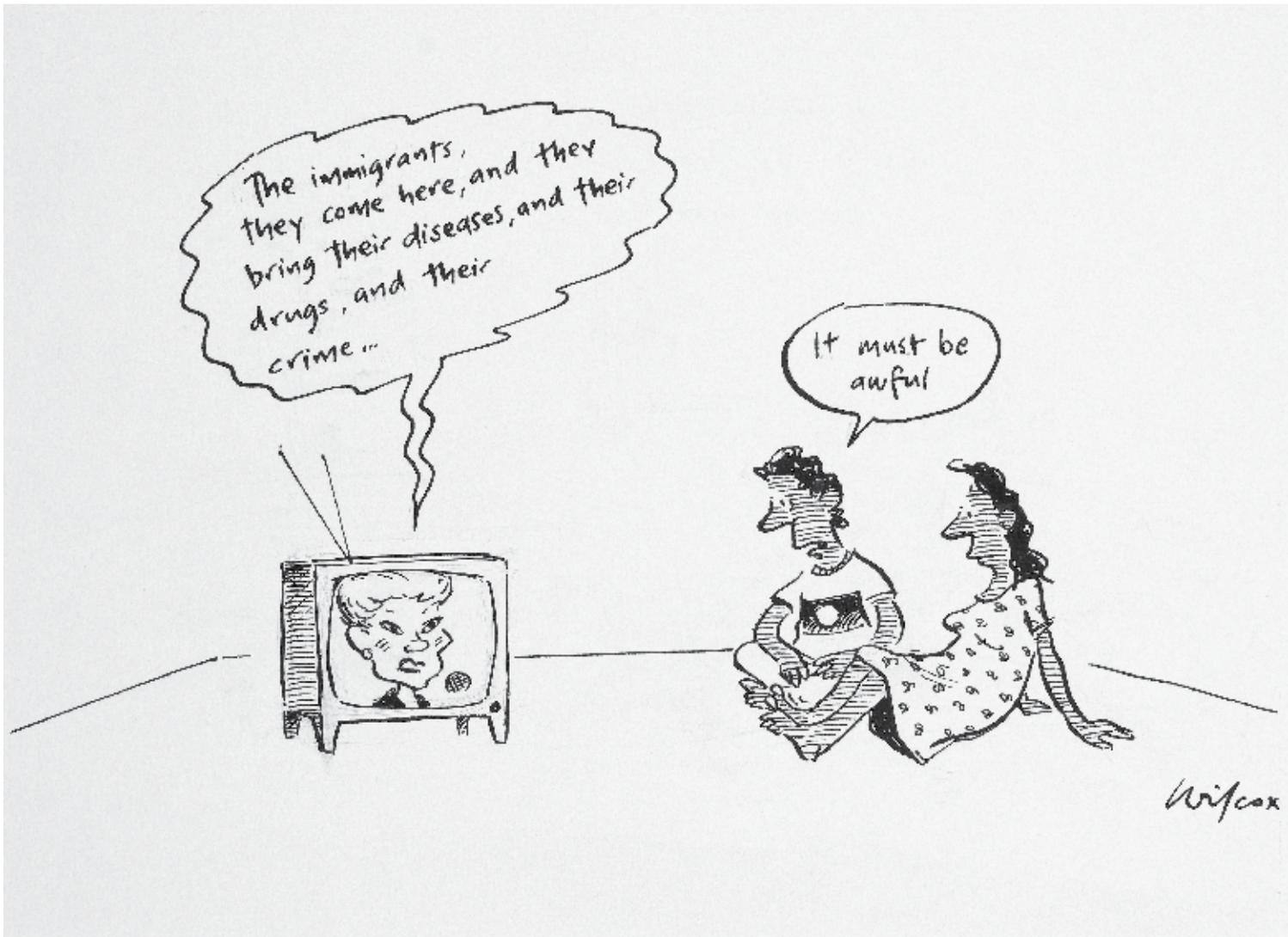
## Brandalism



In February 2020 large graphic posters started to appear across Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, replacing advertisements at bus stops and in public spaces. #BushfireBrandalism was the work of 41 artists intending to draw attention to and provoke debate about the climate crisis in Australia. 'As a collective group of Australian artists,' the group stated, 'we have been driven to reclaim public advertising space with posters speaking to the Australian government's inaction on climate change and the devastating bushfires.' A QR code on each poster linked to the artist's bushfire charity of choice. The State Library of NSW acquired 40 posters as a record of the campaign.

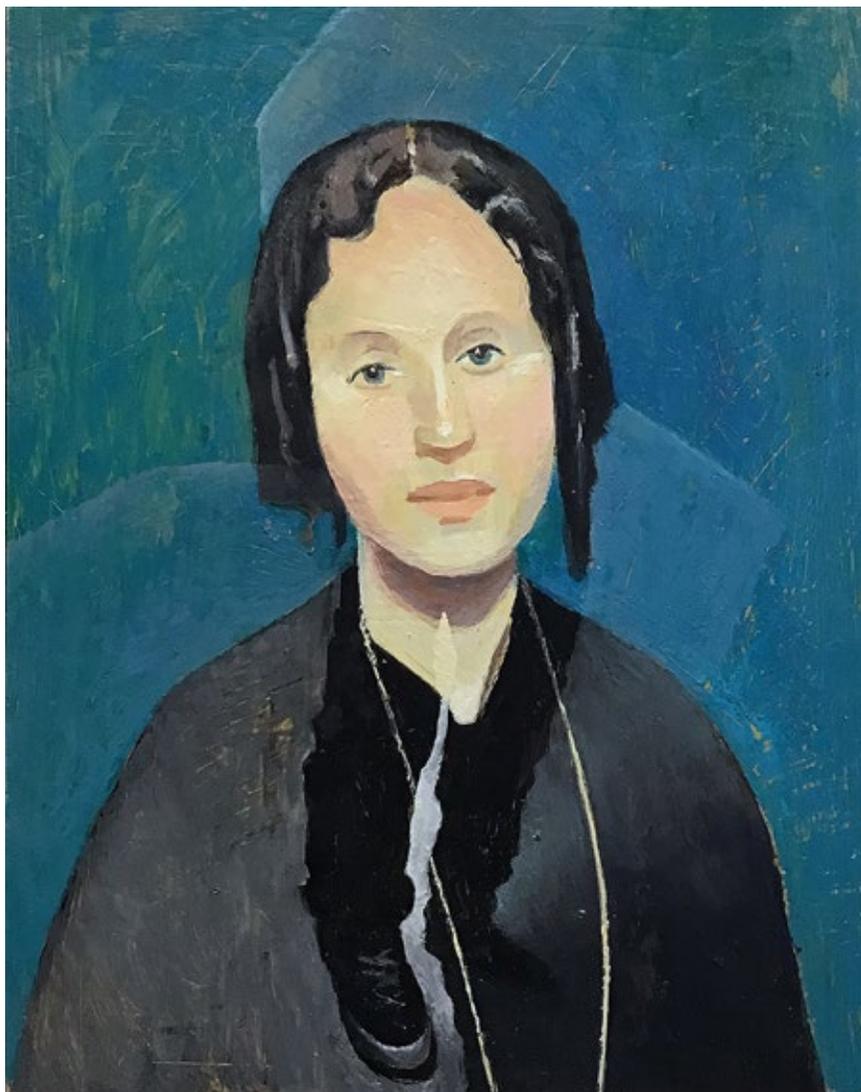
*Caramello Dodo*, 2020, by Kirsten Browning  
*How's the Serenity?*, 2020, by Thomas Bell  
*Blinky Burns*, 2020, by Ling

## Please explain



Early in her career, cartoonist Cathy Wilcox drew her daily takes on politics with a pen on paper. These days, she uses an iPad to produce searing commentaries that are full of dark humour. Wilcox drew this cartoon of Pauline Hanson espousing racist views on television for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in July 1997. A year earlier, Hanson had delivered her maiden speech in parliament, notoriously warning that the country was being ‘swamped by Asians’. Despite being a quarter of a century old, the image hasn’t lost its bite — not only are Hanson’s views ridiculed, but Australia’s treatment of our First Nations people and the impact of colonialisation are neatly conveyed.

## Fake truths



It was the rarely seen paintings and quirky objects that Sydney-based artist Hadyn Wilson became fascinated with during his recent residency at the State Library of NSW. A canvas bag full of cowrie shells, a snakeskin, a logbook written in seal blood, light-sensitive or incomplete portraits out of public view in the underground pictures store. As the Library's fifth artist-in-residence, Wilson researched the artists, the subjects and the objects before making real and imagined connections between them. His resulting artworks, the associated objects and intriguing accompanying stories form a mini-exhibition – *An Historical Novel* – in the Library's Amaze Gallery from 20 March to 13 June 2021.

*From the collection - Lady Clarinda Parkes, 2020, by Hadyn Wilson*

# Model maker

Photo by Joy Lai



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## **P**eter urgently needed plans for a timber model he was working on. But it was May 2020, and the Library was closed.

Although the Library couldn't accept visitors during last year's lockdown, staff were on hand to help. When Peter phoned the Library to try to find plans for a buggy wagon, he was put through to librarian Kathi Spinks. Kathi located a copy of Michael Stringer's *Australian Horse Drawn Vehicles*, photocopied several pages, and popped them in the mail. 'Thanks for your help and going beyond the call of duty,' wrote Peter in a handwritten thank you letter. 'I sing the praises of the State and Mitchell Library.'

The 'buggy wagon' was Peter's 20th handmade model. When he retired two and a half decades ago at 57, after a long and successful career in the timber industry, he took his knowledge and tools off to the 'trial and error school' of model making. He had a vast collection of recycled timber pieces to work with — Australian red cedar from under people's houses, English oak and Kauri pine salvaged from furniture left on the street, beech and Huon pine carried home on public transport from boat and wood shows.

Peter set up a workshop in the back bedroom of this house and began work on the *Cutty Sark*, a fast and famous clipper. He softened the wooden planks with boiling water and looked at rigging for hours on the docks at Port Macquarie and Darling Harbour before attempting to make it himself. He estimates that the finished model took him 500 hours. He went on to build 14 more models of working ships and boats before turning his attention to horse drawn sulkeys, coaches and wagons. Peter is not connected to the internet ('I'm still on smoke signals, my dear!'), so when plans

are not available from museums or companies, he uses the Library to research and plot his course.

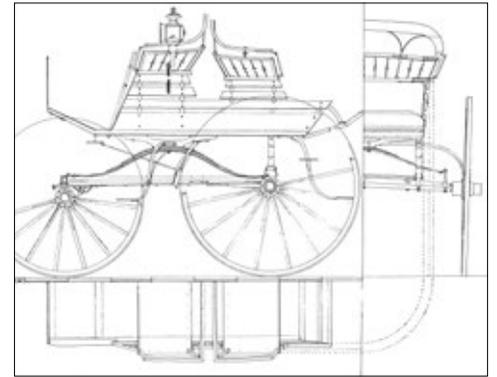
'Making models is a meditation,' he says. He sets himself a daily task and doesn't stop until he has achieved it. 'When you make something with your hands, you lose yourself.' But Peter's descriptions of his experiences in the Library suggest that the activity has also been about finding himself.

Peter grew up in Sydney's Bankstown during the Second World War and the early post-war years. He describes 'a tough childhood' in which clothes coupons were the only way to put school shoes on his feet. 'We used to say if you had toilet paper, a car and a phone, you were rich!'

An introverted kid, Peter's pleasures were the weekends and holidays spent in his mother's tarred paper cabin at Bonnie Vale in the Royal National Park. There he swam, fished and made things. He joined Bankstown Library as a 12-year-old, borrowing books to acquire all sorts of knowledge for tinkering. His mother had a unique way of describing her son's compulsive curiosity: 'You'd like to know the ins and outs of a duck's bum!'

Fifteen years ago, that curiosity brought him through the doors of the State Library. 'I was passing by one day and decided to pop my head through those magnificent doors.' Peter recalls seeing the book-lined galleries of the Mitchell Library Reading Room and thinking, 'Look at all this knowledge in here. It's almost overwhelming.' He quickly overcame his awe, and has been 'haunting the place ever since'. 'I left school at 14,' he says. 'I always want to be a better person, to educate myself all the time.'

Peter did extensive research on life during the Great Depression. He was driven by 'an interest in people, how people fared during those times, how they were treated — swagmen, Indigenous Australians, images of poverty. The poor will always be with you.'



Detail of 'Two-seated Buggy Wagon' from *Australian Horse Drawn Vehicles*, 1980, by Michael Stringer

One of his favourite photographs from the Library's collection features an elderly swagman in the early 1900s, his swag on one shoulder, meeting the camera's gaze. 'There but for the grace of God go I. Life is the lot you get and how you work with it,' he says, adding 'those experiences are all here in the Library.' Peter has found knowledge and inspiration for his models in the Library, but also a place that stokes his innate empathy and compassion. 'Some people just haven't got it,' he remarks. 'For me, the more I looked at history, the more I felt.'

At 82, Peter begins each new day with a swim at one of the beaches or ocean pools of northern Sydney. And he meditates. Recently, he's been back in the Library putting together plans for a 'drop front phaeton' using three different books in the Mitchell collection. He explains that a phaeton is an open carriage of the early nineteenth century, another working vehicle forgotten by time.

While he's sharing definitions, he smiles warmly and adds, 'Do you know the word apricate? It means to bask in the warmth of the sun.' Every now and then Peter allows himself a moment to bask in the satisfaction of looking at his models and all that they hold of the past. 'They are like my family. I built them myself.'

**Mathilde de Hauteclocque,**  
library assistant

# How to make a book shoe

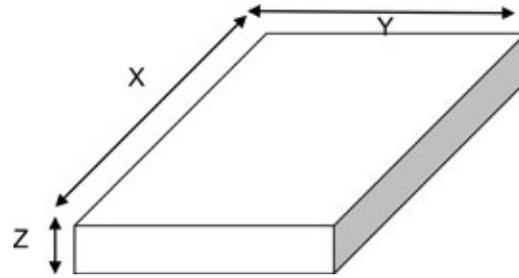


Did you know that a book can wear a shoe? A book shoe is an easy way to protect your most precious books from damage and make it easy to put in and take out of your bookshelf. Here's how you can make your own.

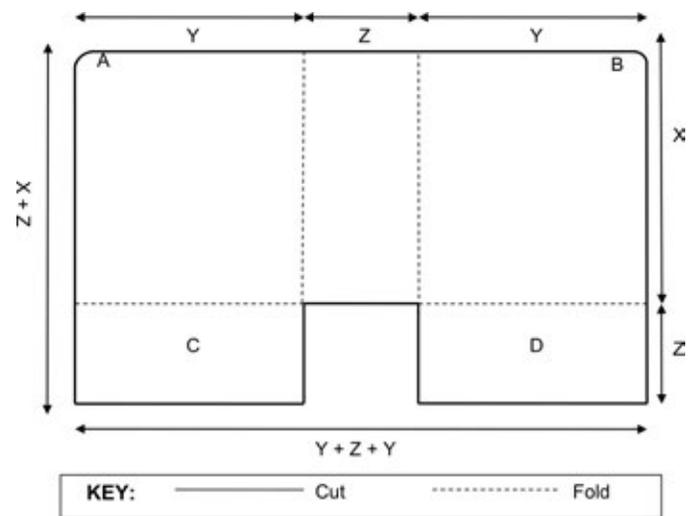
## You will need:

- sheet of heavyweight acid-free card (300gsm or higher)
- stanley knife
- ruler (thick safety ruler for cutting)
- pencil
- something to score the fold (bookbinders use a bone folder, but you can use the back of a cutlery knife)
- PVA adhesive (or EVA, which is safest for your books)
- glue brush

- 1 Measure height (X), width (Y) and depth (Z) of the book(s) as per the diagram below, adding 2mm to each measurement.



- 2 Insert these onto the diagram.



- 3 Copy this pattern onto the card.
- 4 Cut the outline using the Stanley knife and ruler.
- 5 Use the back of a blunt knife (or bone folder if you have one) to score the lines and fold.
- 6 Check the book fits.
- 7 Paint adhesive to the underside of flap C and stick to the top of flap D, weigh and allow to dry.
- 8 Put the book in its new book shoe and put them both in your favourite bookshelf.





Photo by Joy Lai

# Sunderland gingerbread nuts

## Ingredients

- 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound of treacle<sup>1</sup>
- 1 pound of moist sugar<sup>2</sup>
- 1 pound of butter
- 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound of flour
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of ground ginger
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of allspice
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of coriander seeds

## Method

Let the allspice, coriander seeds, and ginger be freshly ground; put them into a basin, with the flour and sugar, and mix these ingredients well together; warm the treacle and butter together; then with a spoon work it into the flour until the whole forms a nice smooth paste.

Drop the mixture from the spoon on to a piece of buttered paper, and bake in rather a slow oven from 20 minutes to  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour. A little candied lemon-peel mixed with the above is an improvement, and a great authority in culinary matters suggests the addition of a little cayenne pepper in gingerbread. Whether it is advisable to use this latter ingredient or not, we leave our readers to decide.

## Time

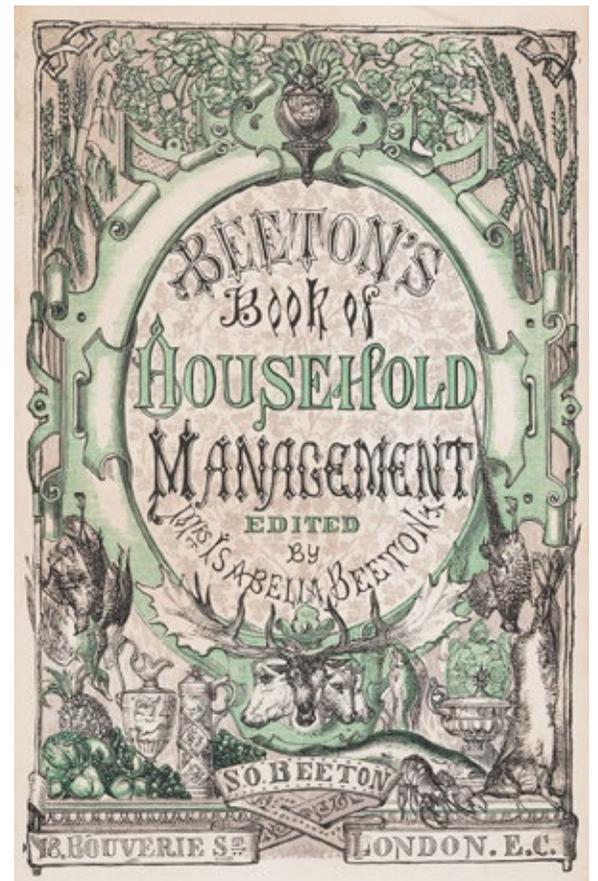
20 minutes to  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour.

## Cost

Average cost, 1 shilling to 1 shilling and 4 pennies per pound. Seasonable at any time.

<sup>1</sup> The most common forms of treacle are golden syrup and molasses.

<sup>2</sup> 'Moist sugar' is an antiquated term for unrefined or partially refined sugar.



From *The Book of Household Management*, 1861, by Isabella Beeton

## Notes from the cook

*'An excellent recipe' – who could resist?*

*When I started to weigh these ingredients out, I realised it was in industrial quantities. I halved the amounts listed and it still used almost a whole jar each of the spices, so the next batch was a quarter of the recipe size and it made around 25 biscuits. Thank goodness for digital scales that weigh in both pounds/ounces and grams!*

*'Let the allspice, ginger and coriander seeds be freshly ground' – I bought fresh jars; I didn't add the candied lemon peel, but the slightly scathing tone of the comment about cayenne pepper prompted me to try it! Having been too generous with cayenne pepper before, I was cautious and added only half a teaspoonful.*

*The result, after baking at 140 degrees for 25 mins, is a tray of quite good chewy dense gingery biscuits. They leave a bit of a warm glow in your mouth after eating, which I quite liked! They don't spread out during baking so you can roll them into a ball and flatten them for a more regular shape if you prefer. I pressed mine with an egg slice to give them a decorative finish with the parallel lines.*

**CONVERSIONS: Pound = 500 grams Ounce = 30 grams**

# Dennis Altman

Gay rights activist and academic  
Dennis Altman visits the  
State Library's exhibition  
*Coming Out in the 70s*.

## WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST REACTION TO THE EXHIBITION?

I loved the fact that its title, *Coming Out in the 70s*, is shared with an anthology of my early writings, published by the small Sydney publisher Wild and Woolley in 1979. The book was launched at a now defunct gay sauna in the city, which may have been the only time many people — including my mother — found themselves in a gay sex venue.

## THE EXHIBITION FEATURES YOUR FIRST BOOK: HOW DID YOU COME TO WRITE IT?

*Homosexual: Oppression & Liberation* grew out of my time living in New York in 1970–71, which meant I was not in Sydney for the foundation meeting of the first Australian gay rights organisation, CAMP. I'd become involved in the first gay liberation newspaper in New York, *Come Out!*, and from there the idea of a book took shape.

## AS A YOUNG AUSTRALIAN, WHAT WAS YOUR PATH TO PUBLISHING THE BOOK IN NEW YORK IN 1971?

Finding a publisher was difficult; mainstream publishers were still very wary of any serious discussion of homosexuality. Through my friend, Australian rock journalist Lillian Roxon, I met Harris Dienstfrey and soon had both a publisher and, gulp, even a literary agent. Unfortunately, the publishers Outerbridge and Dienstfrey collapsed within a few years, but my book became an Avon paperback and was taken up in Australia by Richard Walsh, then publisher at Angus & Robertson.

## HOW DO YOU REFLECT ON THAT TIME NOW?

I've returned to the themes of that book several times since, most notably in my *The End of the Homosexual?* (UQP 2013). But I'm conscious of how the luck of writing an early book on gay liberation, and the resulting television and media exposure, shaped much of my later career. The 1970s was a time of

political and cultural ferment, of sexual experimentation and intense friendships; if I have a criticism of the exhibition it's the absence of images of the explosion of sexual liaisons and sites that I remember from Sydney in the decade.

## CAN LOVE, LOSS AND POLITICS EVER BE SEPARATED?

It's a fascinating question that echoes the 1970s slogan, *the personal is the political*. I'm tempted to respond with that Facebook meme: it's complicated. But it would require a novel to fully answer, and my one attempt at a novel, *The Comfort of Men*, was not a great success. The major relationship of my life was with Anthony Smith, whom I met in the early days of the AIDS epidemic, and who died eight years ago of lung cancer. He was younger than me, which made his death all the more difficult.



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**WHAT CAN TODAY'S QUEER MOVEMENT LEARN FROM 1970S GAY LIBERATION?**

There are some legacies from the gay liberation period that are worth recalling: above all, the insistence that our liberation was connected with the call for a more just society for everyone — intersectionality, before the term was coined. Coming out is important, but it is insufficient as the basis for an ethical political stance; I feel no political allegiance with those openly gay members of parliament who support our ongoing torture of asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus. And while diversity — racial, gender, sexuality, class — is clearly important, it's not a sufficient basis for a political stance.

---

**WHAT ARE THE NEXT IMPORTANT STEPS?**

Early gay liberation got some things badly wrong. We assumed that transgender desires would decline as social attitudes to sex and gender changed, but clearly this has not happened. Trans activists challenge the basic assumptions of our social arrangements more radically than the early gay movement, and gender politics have become deeply fraught. We need to distinguish between those people who express active hostility, often including real violence, towards trans folk, and people who are struggling to understand how others experience their bodies in ways for which western society makes little space.

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**AND WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?**

That's a risky question for someone in their later seventies. But I have always written about politics more broadly than sexuality, and next year have a small book coming out called *The Strange Persistence of Monarchies*. It was sparked by the recognition that constitutional monarchies are significant in both Europe and Asia — as well as in our own rather bizarre constitutional set up — and has been a fun lockdown project to work on.

**The free exhibition *Coming Out in the 70s* is in the State Library's galleries until 30 May and also online.**

## The divine Dante

**Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.**

— Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, 1320

The great Italian poet Dante Alighieri died in Ravenna, in northern Italy, in 1321. Seven hundred years later, the literary world is joining Italy in commemorating the life of a writer who is considered the father of the Italian language because he chose to write in vernacular Tuscan rather than Latin.

Written in the first person, Dante's masterpiece *The Divine Comedy* — completed in the year before his death — follows the narrator's progress through the three realms of the afterlife: hell, purgatory and finally paradise. In the nine circles of hell he finds adulterous lovers buffeted by the winds of passion, eternally clasping each other, and thieves with their hands cut off, their bodies entwined with serpents. As he descends from circle to circle, the sinners become increasingly spiteful, murderous and traitorous. Finally, at the centre of the earth, Satan takes each of the greatest sinners in one of his three mouths and eats them.

Throughout the work's 100 sections, or cantos, Dante's commentary on human traits and failings — on love, jealousy, greed, theft and the politics of his day — can easily be related to our world today. His ability to evoke an

almost universal story has ensured the enduring popularity of his writing.

Dante's work has also profoundly influenced artists, inspiring Botticelli and Blake, Delacroix, Dalí and Doré. His ideas and imagery have found their way into films, novels, music, mobile apps and video games.

Among many English translations, Australian author and critic Clive

James' version was published in 2013.

He described *The Divine Comedy* as a poem of almost unparalleled power — 'a vast act of illumination'.

You can join the Library's Dante commemorations, in partnership with the University of Sydney, which include events and displays throughout the year. See our website for details.

**Maggie Patton**



Title page from *Dante con l'espositione ...* 1564, by Francesco Sansovino

*The Vision of Hell*, 1868, by Dante Alighieri, illustrated by Gustave Doré



*View of Fernhill House, Mulgoa, New South Wales, 1874, by Margaret D Martin*

## Trash or treasure?

That gaudily framed gem you rescued from the tip 20 years ago could be a collectable piece of Australian art.

Search for valuable clues with Art Index, a new website offering the most comprehensive account of 19th century Australian art exhibited here between 1847 and 1900. It lists over 18,494 works by 2304 artists from 98 exhibition catalogues. You can find records of paintings, sculptures,

prints, stained glass and more than 150 other now-forgotten arts and crafts.

‘You can search ownership details, prices, provenance and more, and start to build a promising story around a family heirloom or a potentially “priceless” painting or sculpture you’ve picked up from a garage sale,’ says Mitchell Librarian and paintings expert Richard Neville.

Created by the State Library’s DX Lab, following 20 years’ indexing work

by Library volunteers, the website features a series of data visualisations which allow you to explore the types, volumes and prices of art created in 19th century Australia.

‘It was great to explore work done by women artists, in particular in genres you rarely see anymore, like flower modelling and wax medallions,’ said the DX Lab’s Paula Bray.

## Storytime on wheels

The wheels on the storytime bus will happily continue to turn this year for the children at Kookaburra Early Learning in the Northern Rivers region. When Covid-19 put a stop to their thrice weekly library visit in March last year, Richmond-Upper Clarence Regional Library’s Tamara Patino (pictured) suggested taking storytime and other fun activities on the road using the centre’s bus. ‘I would take library books for the children to read and share, puppets to interact and play with, and we would have a shared storytime within the bus,’ says Tamara. ‘I created checklists with landmarks, things from nature, traffic signs to be looking for while we were driving along – it encouraged lots of communication between the children.’



## New fellowship for First Nations creatives

A new \$30,000 fellowship will provide a First Nations artist a unique opportunity to create their art by working with the collection of the State Library of NSW. The Aboriginal Creative Fellowship, presented in partnership with Create NSW, will see a visual or multimedia work, installation or dance piece conceived and publicly exhibited or performed later this year. According to Damien Webb, the Library’s Manager of Indigenous Engagement, ‘It is vital that First Nations voices and stories continue to challenge and inform our collections, and balance the colonial narratives still overwhelmingly present within them.’ The successful fellow will commence in April.

## 20 questions

- 1 What is Shakespeare's shortest play?
- 2 Which pioneering Australian female pilot was known as the 'Angel of the Outback'?  
a. Nancy Ellis b. Nancy Bird c. Nancy Drew
- 3 What Sydney cultural institution was the original home of the Sydney Writers' Festival?
- 4 A common piece of advice given to writers is to 'Kill your \_\_\_\_\_'.  
a. Honeybuns b. Sweethearts c. Darlings
- 5 What has been named 'Australia's 2020 word of the year' by the Australian National Dictionary Centre?
- 6 Who wrote the first children's book published in Australia?  
a. Charlotte Wood b. Charlotte Waring Atkinson c. Charlotte Brontë
- 7 Which heritage-listed prison in NSW has recently closed after 127 years in operation?
- 8 Who was the first singer/songwriter to win a Nobel Prize for Literature?
- 9 Which book by Tara June Winch won Book of the Year, Christina Stead Prize for Fiction and People's Choice Award at the 2020 NSW Premier's Literary Award?
- 10 Cold Chisel wrote a song in 1980 about which Australian female media icon?  
a. Deborah Hutton b. Ita Buttrose c. Nene King
- 11 Italian literary giant, philosopher and political thinker Dante Alighieri died 700 years ago this year. True or false?
- 12 Dante's epic poem *The Divine Comedy* is divided into three sections — Hell, Purgatory and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 13 Name the horse who represents the working class in George Orwell's 1945 novel *Animal Farm*?
- 14 The iconic b&w images *Sunbaker*, *Meat Queue* and *Bondi, 1939* were captured by which Australian photographer?
- 15 Dyarubbin is the Aboriginal name for which river in western Sydney?
- 16 In what month is Library & Information Week held?
- 17 How many minutes are there in a day?
- 18 What is the highest mountain in Australia?
- 19 A version of which nineteenth century New Zealand whaling song recently went viral on TikTok?  
a. Kellerman b. Sellerman c. Wellerman d. Vellerman
- 20 A haiku poem comprises how many lines?



Find the answers to this quiz at the bottom of page 6.



## A magazine about books, libraries, art & ideas

In each issue we'll bring you stories that are inspiring, thought-provoking and surprising. We'll be working with established and emerging writers covering literature, art, photography, history, science, architecture, popular culture and topical issues. Our library insiders will take you behind the scenes to reveal weird and wonderful finds.

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## Events

11  
MARMarkus Zusak  
by Hugh Stewart**Reflections**

Nicole Abadee hosts a fascinating three-part literary series with some of Australia's most acclaimed writers: Robert Drewe (11 March), Anna Funder (25 March) and Markus Zusak (8 April). \$30 per talk for Library Friends. Become a Friend: [sl.nsw.gov.au/friends](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/friends)

**25 MAR womxn United**

In memory of Sydney's first lesbian bar, Ruby Red's, the Library will be transformed into a celebration of dyke and femme energy for womxn and their guests. \$20, \$15 conc. [sl.nsw.gov.au/salon-series](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/salon-series)

**30 MAR Art for adult beginners**

will introduce you to the basics of drawing and other artmaking techniques. Art educator Andrea Sturgeon (pictured) will help inspire your creativity using paintings from the Library's collection. Free [sl.nsw.gov.au/learning](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/learning)



## Exhibitions

27  
MAR**Dyarubbin (the Hawkesbury river)**

is a long, winding and ancient river. Darug women Leanne Watson, Jasmine Seymour, Erin Wilkins and Rhiannon Wright share their culture and stories of special sites from this beautiful and haunting place in the exhibition, *Dyarubbin*. Free, 27 March to 13 March 2022

*Yellamundi*, c 2010, by Aunty Edna Watson

## Elsewhere

**Between friends**

Explore the intimate friendship between former lovers, artists Margaret Coen and Norman Lindsay through personal letters, photographs and original artwork. Norman Lindsay Gallery, 1 April to July. [nationaltrust.org.au](http://nationaltrust.org.au)

**John Murray Art Gallery**

View the vivid and quirky photo-realistic artwork of renowned outback artist John Murray, as well as the creative photo artistry of Viki Murray. [johnmurrayart.com.au](http://johnmurrayart.com.au)



*Budgie Smugglers*, 2009, by John Murray

# 22 APR

**B List book club** host Bri Lee will be in conversation with Emily Maguire about her latest book *Love Objects*. A heart-wrenching novel about love and family, betrayal and forgiveness, and the things we do to fill our empty spaces. \$15

**Max Dupain was born on 22 April 1911.** The revered Australian photographer is best-known for the iconic image, *The Sunbaker*, 1937 and his striking photographs of Australia's modernist architecture often became more famous than the buildings themselves. The State Library holds more than 25,000 negatives of his more personal and exhibition work from the 1930s to 1950s.



On this day

Olivia Bright, 66, a transgender and Wiradjuri woman, and former showgirl, has lived on level 13 of the Daniel Solander building since 1991. Waterloo social housing estate, 17 July 2020. Photo by Louise Kennerley



## SMH Photos1440

Come and examine our lives in pictures in this extraordinary 10-year retrospective of work by *Sydney Morning Herald* photographers. Free exhibition, until 25 April

## World Press Photo 2021

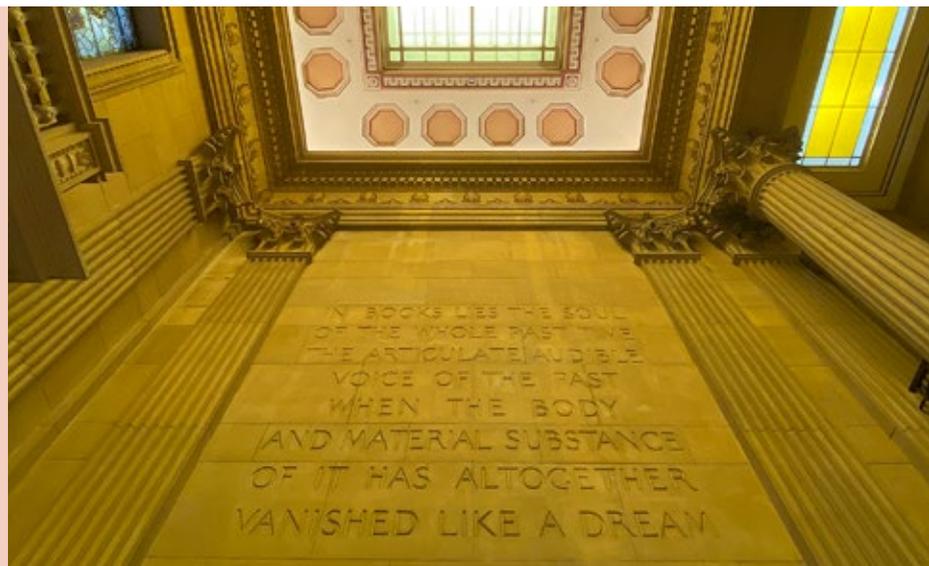
View over 150 powerful and evocative images and photo series selected from the 2021 World Press Photo Contest. The winners will be announced on 15 April. Free exhibition, 15 May to 13 June

Don't miss

## World Book Day

Hear from a line-up of passionate high-profile readers as they talk about the best and worst books of all time. Find out which books are worthy of the top shelf and which ones should never have seen the light of day. Register for the online event: [sl.nsw.gov.au/whats-on](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/whats-on)

# 23 APR



Save the date



When I was young, but ten and three

***Hi-yo, hi-yo, librar-i-o***

Me parents asked, ‘What trade for thee?’

***Send ’em out on loan***

And so, next morning, I began

***Hi-yo, hi-yo, librar-i-o***

To train as a librarian

***Send ’em out on loan***



‘Library-o’, a librarian’s shanty, by the Grubby Urchins