

WOMEN'S ART REGISTER

bulletin

JULY 2020

Nº

66





WOMEN'S ART REGISTER
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FROM THE WAR COMMITTEE

Like so many arts organisations, the Women's Art Register closed its doors in early March, not long after our IWD Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon at the NGV, due to the Coronavirus restrictions. We were on a high note after such a successful event, held in partnership with Wikimedia Australia and Purlour, and in association with the NGAs sketchnamne campaign. Our first priority is the health and wellbeing of our volunteers, and our responsibility to manage the archive with care, so we were also forced to postpone a number of events we had planned from April to July: *Preserving Your Future - Legacy planning for older women artists* (part of the *Flesh After Fifty* public program); our 2020 *Artist-In-Residence* program (with Claudia Phares); a talk about Erica McGilchrist with Linda Short at University College; and the first of our *Preserve Your Story* archiving workshops. Fortunately all of these programs can be rescheduled, and will be programmed over the next 12 months. On the upside, we stayed in touch with our members through online events, including our first ever virtual AGM. We're now happy to report our archive is open, by appointment only, and we welcome enquiries, and your continued support.

EDITORIAL BULLETIN #66

Harriet Maher

Over the last few months, there has been a general and pervasive sense of uncertainty and isolation. As we have taken steps to sequester ourselves from others, collectivity, care and community have taken on renewed and poignant meaning in both the art world and the collective consciousness. Looking through this special issue of *The Bulletin*, I am reminded that these values have always been central to women's groups and the feminist movement more broadly, and now, more than ever, it is clear how powerful they can be.

In this special issue of *The Bulletin*, artists and writers from around Australia reflect on what isolation, separation, education and community look, sound and feel like, during a global pandemic that has decimated the arts ecology as we once knew it. In a rapidly changing and uncertain world, art is a tool for interrogating the situation in which we find ourselves, through humour, grief, questioning and creativity. In the same breath, the artworks capture, record and historicise the zeitgeist of the present.

In this way, *The Bulletin* is marked out as a kind of archive of the current moment, just as the Women's Art Register is one of the most important archives of women's art in Australia. By bringing together diverse voices, viewpoints and ways of making, this unique issue presents a snapshot of our "unprecedented times" (to use a ubiquitous phrase). Some artists have responded directly to the pandemic through their works and words, whilst others have utilised the time spent at home, away from the usual pressures of work and social networks, to create new pieces or to explore new ideas unrelated to the virus. Old ideas have also returned -

what does the body, particularly the marginalised body, mean in the current climate of fear and infection? How can art create a space for connection and conversation?

What will endure when our scaffolding of societal status, wealth, and tradition collapses?

The entries received by the Editorial Committee in response to this Open Call suggest that what remains

In a rapidly changing and uncertain world, art is a tool for interrogating the situation in which we find ourselves, through humour, grief, questioning and creativity.

when we are no longer physically connected is, perhaps ironically, a sense of connection. We are able to remain connected to each other through new networks of technology. We remain connected to our practice in difficult times, as it strengthens our sense of self and purpose. And we are connected to our past histories, present moments, and future trajectories through memory and archival material - including this journal itself.

As Australia and New Zealand gradually emerge from the strict lockdown measures put in place at the rise of COVID-19, we are not stepping into the same world that we knew prior to isolation. The works in this special issue of *The Bulletin* represent possible illustrations and iterations of this new world, and formulate a capsule of this surreal, challenging time of renewal.



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FROM SARS TO NCOV-2019

Denise Keele-Bedford

My first journey to China was in September 2002. My friend Lesley had invited me to go with a group to study Fengshui, in April 2003, but then contacted me to say that the journey had to be brought forward. She did not know why, but said that spirit had told her to take the group in September 2002. As it turned out, in March 2003 China closed its doors to foreigners due to the SARS epidemic.

The World Health Organisation declared the SARS outbreak contained in July 2003, at which time I was invited to attend a residency at Redgate Gallery. After four months of lockdown China was accepting foreigners again. When I arrived at the Shangrila studios in Feijiacun, the road was barricaded by a boom gate with a guard. We were the first artists to enter the studios after the reopening post SARS. I spent just under a month at the residency, working in the studios, exhibiting, meeting many artists, and engaging on many levels with all sorts of people. The Redgate Residency is a superb way for artists to experience China and the very vibrant Art Scene Beijing has to offer.

Here I am late January 2020, GOSH!!!! Nearly seventeen years later and about to leave Beijing due to concerns regarding the Coronavirus. As of today, there are nearly 2,000 confirmed cases and 50 people dead, twelve Hubei Province cities locked down affecting some 62.8 million people - many people caught travelling for the great Chinese New Year migration - airports and public transport at a standstill and stores being emptied of food without replacement.

On 24th President Xi Jinping declares that it is a grave situation and two new hospitals are currently being built in Wuhan to cater for the casualties, and places of large gatherings cannot be accessed such as the Chinese New Year Temple Fairs, Imperial Palace, Shanghai Disneyland, and a section of the Great Wall. I am currently staying at a friend's apartment where I have internet access and a grand view across the city from the 25th floor. My friend Anne Hastie and I have isolated ourselves, keeping a store of the necessities like beer and pasta. As I look across the cityscape the 'haze' impinges us and the AQI reading of 170 recom-

mends masks, staying indoors and no outdoor activities. We are waiting for wind, as is usual in Beijing.

I have today decided that it is time for me to depart. As an asthmatic and a disposition towards Bronchial issues it is wise to leave. As I write Anne tells me that Beijing has stopped all tourist groups and buses from coming into the city. My ticket is booked and paid for to depart on Wednesday; I am sorry to leave a place that has been good to me for the past seventeen years. In this year of the rat I quietly feel like the rat deserting a metaphorically sinking ship.

Written on Sunday 26th as I watch the night lights brighten an otherwise grey sky.

You can read more about this journey in the Changing Directions blog.

Post Script:

I managed to travel to Hong Kong, and leave from there on Wednesday 29, just before travel to and from the mainland was restricted. Wisely Anne has decided to also abandon her time in China and leave on Monday. I sent emails and messages to family and friends advising that I am well. My dear sister Carol replied to say "Thank God, I was so worried about you." Friends and family made contact to check on my travel progress with Karin in Hong Kong ringing on Thursday morning to check that all was going smoothly. It is not always known to me the impact across many countries and people of the lifestyle that I choose to live, it spreads widely. One does not simply move through this life as a single entity a life has tendrils that reach far out into the ethers of others' lives, that link us inextricably. It is now 3.5 hours until my arrival in Melbourne, I am zooming above the clouds, speeding through the blue-ness of space in a plane that has no spare seats and an aura of calmness seems to hover within.



A Heartbroken Mask

SU YANG

This is a mask.

This is a cloth face mask.

This is a mask that helped me prevent seasonal flu on tram and subway.

This is a mask that used to keep me warm when I ride a bicycle in winter.

This is a mask that was brought by my partner from China when he visited me in Australia.

This mask was the symbolisation of care, health, and love.

However, one day it is suddenly stigmatized as if it is a virus.

It becomes the excuse for the racists and xenophobes to expound their hatred.

People of colour are having anxiety about wearing masks. Some Asian people are targeted as scapegoats.

Some Asian people are discouraged to wear it and expose themselves to the virus because they try to fit in the "dominant culture."

The heart of the mask is broken.

Arrogance and prejudice should not have been and cannot be universal.

True freedom and human rights will mean all of us can experience the world with respect.

10 APRIL 2020

WOMEN'S ART REGISTER

bulletin

The Women's Art Register is Australia's living archive of women's art practice (cis, non-binary and trans inclusive) and a national, artist-run and not-for-profit community and resource.

Assessed as a Collection of National Significance through the Heritage Collections Council in 2009, this unique archive houses the images, catalogues, posters and ephemera of over 5000 Australian and International artists.

Since 1975 the Women's Art Register has provided an inclusive, independent platform for research, education, advocacy and support for its members and the Arts, Education and GLAM sectors, enhancing the status of women artists and addressing issues of equity, professional practice and cultural heritage.

We welcome new members, research enquiries and your support.

Supported by the City of Yarra



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