openbook

Lauren Aimee Curtis
profile

Michael Kelly
feature

Max Easton
self-portrait

Kate Fullagar
essay

AUTUMN 2024

Lillian Banks of Bangarra Dance Theatre performs in *Terrain* at Sydney Opera House.
Photo by Daniel Boud

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 and present, and extends that respect to other First Nations people. We celebrate the strength and diversity of NSW Aboriginal cultures, languages and stories.

Insiders Live, Sydney Writers' Festival event at Sydney Town Hall, 2019. Photo by Jamie Williams

Contents

Features, essays and stories

Spotlight

Self-portrait

Profile

Poetry

Photo essay

Fiction

The library that made me

Regulars

Showtime!

Illustration by Rosie Handley

'Live literature' may sound contradictory, until you think of poetry readings, ticketed literary talks, and broadcasts and podcasts of literary conversations and interviews. Authors reading their own audiobooks has become de rigeur, and is something I've done myself (though I can't listen to my own voice). And, leaving the written word behind, what is storytelling unfolding on stage through dance, theatre or music if not live literature? For that matter, narratives around a dinner table or a campfire wending and finding their arc, playing their audience for laughter or tears, are surely a variety of literary performance.

Some authors wear the 'writer as performer' tag with ease, while others long to be left in peace and solitude, resolutely private, not public. Our digital age makes new demands of writers who, of course, want their books to rise above the thousands of others published each week. Constructing a social media persona is like water off a duck's back for some, the seventh circle of hell for others.

Critic and writer Thuy On's essay in this issue grapples with various iterations of authors in performative modes, including the idea of author as brand. She talked to writers, publishers and agents who challenge the idea that this is a new phenomenon.

Autumn *Openbook* also celebrates performance, particularly dance, through the superb photographs of Daniel Boud and Matthew Abbott. Performance can pop up where you least expect it; it turned out that we organised Joy Lai's photo of young writer Max Easton to be taken in the same grungy Newtown venue his band had performed in. Our feature on posters of the Nimrod Theatre, mainly those by Martin Sharp, prompts us to think of offstage performance as well.

My colleagues Daniela Baldry and Mathilde de Hauteclocque have written about two artists — Lauren Aimee Curtis and Michael Kelly respectively — who are at different stages of their careers, but both have a body of work behind them. This includes, in Kelly's case, numerous sketchbooks, which have been acquired by the Library.

Regular features fill the magazine's pages. This time, 'Take 5' presents literary birthdays, and we have an evocative poem by Erin Shiel, Eleanor Limprecht's second *Openbook* short story and a 'Behind the Shot' that features an embroidered version of an early–modern illustration from a rare book in the collection. And see if you can spot something different about our Quiz answers, perhaps while you're crunching on some potato chips.

Collection spotlights in this issue are, as ever, something to behold — bookplates, a painting of Sydney Harbour, photographs of an undercover detective and his targets. Historian Kate Fullagar's reflection on her joint biography of Bennelong and Phillip sits alongside Matthew Fishburn's account of a letter from First Fleet surgeon John White, who was not, shall we say, overly generous about his new place of residence.

Finally, the new State Librarian, Dr Caroline Butler-Bowdon, has hit the ground running, not least by writing the main book review. I know *Openbook* readers will welcome her to these pages.

Phillipa McGuinness
Editor, *Openbook*

Quiz answers page 90 **1.** Edith Head has received eight for costume design **2.** NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was founded by 12 countries in 1949 **3.** Yes, Nick is Mark's younger brother **4.** MFK Fisher **5.** The @ symbol **6.** Giant squid **7.** Rabbit **8.** Nimrod Theatre **9.** It is a geometric shape, or polygon, with infinite sides **10.** *The Lion King* **11.** (b) #BookTok is a massive subcommunity on the TikTok app **12.** Andie MacDowell **13.** An art movement that focuses on geometric shapes to express 'the supremacy of pure artistic feeling' rather than the visual depiction of objects **14.** It comes from the French '*m'aider*' meaning 'I need help' **15.** Adelaide, since 2015 **16.** Welcome Stranger **17.** Monrovia **18.** French, but Spanish is on track to overtake it **19.** A mammal from the raccoon family, indigenous to the Americas **20.** They all turn 60 in 2024

As I write this I am on day 37 as State Librarian.

It is impossible to imagine Sydney and New South Wales without its State Library. It plays both an essential role and a magical role in the life of the state. As a reader, a writer, a researcher, a curator and a consumer, I have long loved the Library. But being truly part of it, indeed leading it, is the greatest privilege of my life.

It has been both a whirlwind and a deeply centring experience so far. Since November, I've made regional visits to new libraries and established ones, met our generous donors, spent time with individual teams, got under the skin of the way we put together exhibitions, met with Australia's other State Librarians. These days have been busy, wonderful and all-consuming. But, equally, the time has been grounding because I feel like I have come home. The welcome has been more than I could have wished for.

There are many memorable moments so far but three stand out. First, my adventures underground into the stacks with Maggie Patton, Head of Collection Acquisition and Curation, discovering both the extraordinary and the ordinary in the collection — rare books, pictures, manuscripts, the Model Children's Library, early paintings of The Rocks, Shane Gould's 1976 Olympic swim bag and diary, and so much more. I am getting to know the staff and appreciate the deep expertise of our cataloguers, librarians, curators and creative producers who work hard to make sense of all this wonder for you, our public. My favourite collection moment was sharing a *Book of Hours* from 1480 in the Shakespeare Room with our growing online audience in the lead-up to Christmas. It still astounds me that I can hold such a rare book — written more than 500 years ago — in my hands, its beauty just as clear today.

The second moment was a quiet conversation I had with a librarian in the new public library in Nambucca during a recent tour of the Mid North Coast led by Library Council President, George Souris. This librarian pulled me aside and showed me a collection of books in a myriad of languages — French, Russian, Nepalese, Vietnamese — all lined up in tubs and ready to go out to citizens keen to read in their mother tongue. These are all supplied by our team in Macquarie Street. This is but one of our essential services — we proudly celebrate 50 years of the Multicultural Bulk Loan Service this year, as you can read in this issue.

The third highlight lies in the joy of observing the everyday life of the Library. I love spotting researchers deep in archival boxes of original material, conscientious high-schoolers getting a jumpstart on their fellow students before the school year begins, and someone spotted in the early evening this week, headphones on, cushions in place and settling in for an evening viewing of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. It's a diverse crowd here that reminds us that libraries are the most democratic of our public cultural institutions.

The profile and potential of libraries has soared. They are loved by young and old, and are increasingly valued as innovative public and cultural spaces. I am grateful to my predecessors, and think about them often, as I want to build on their leadership and champion the work of our loyal and creative staff, our globally significant collections, our work with First Nations people and communities, our statewide reach and international opportunities. Our value to New South Wales is both timely and of critical importance. Together we will ensure that every citizen, as well as visitors to our city, have access to this great library and its public network across the state, each a place of experience, learning, health and well-being and connection.

It's day 37 and the adventure is just beginning.

Dr Caroline Butler-Bowdon
State Librarian
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MAX EASTON

I've been sketching out a new novel for a few months now. It's been coming relatively easily, flowing from pen to paper before and after work. Last week, I dropped my pen while trying to read over what I'd written, then found that I'd stained the doona cover. I wondered if that was a good or bad omen, but failed to find symbolic meaning in the ink stain. I guess I just have to be more careful with pens ...? My co-worker talks to me while I'm daydreaming about characters in the book. I write notes in a fake work email, and send it to my personal address at the end of the day. I deal with a series of increasingly frustrating customer complaints and then go on my lunch break with my laptop to write this piece. I tell myself that I want to deliver an authentic self-portrait, but this is all feeling very middle of the road.

When I had a question in a pre-Wikipedia world, my mum used to encourage me to write letters and make phone calls. Turns out the rooster on the Corn Flakes box is there to symbolise the morning. When I mailed a letter to the band Frenzal Rhomb at 12 years old, asking about some kind of 'charge card' that was supposed to come with their CD, they replied with these words written on a napkin: 'Have some stickers and shut up.' These experiences may have informed my research process.

I learned to write on the early internet, in chat rooms, message boards and weird corners of the web that are now hard to believe ever existed. I was a big pro-wrestling fan and found a message board that ran an 'e-fed'. This was an online subculture, now lost, that is impossible to explain briefly, but more or less involved writing storylines in competition with other forum users, overseen by 'commissioners' who determined the results and wrote up the matches, published monthly in forum events modelled after wrestling pay-per-views. I found an analogue in simulated rugby league competitions where, again on a message board, you wrote your own press releases as 'coaches' for fictional rugby league teams. You submitted text files via email with your team lists and strategies to someone who supposedly ran a simulation on their computer, and then reported the results by group email each Sunday. These were vital educational experiences, but I couldn't put 'two-time digital world champion' or 'assigned as digital NSW State of Origin coach' on my CV.

After high school, I met a guy who ran a music website to scam a way into music festivals with press passes for reviewers. So I became a music writer. I wrote for him, and then, when I heard you could score free CDs and gig tickets, I wrote for the street press. It says a lot about the music press of the time that I didn't yet know what kind of music I even liked, but wrote reviews as though I did.

At some point, I discovered Sydney's DIY music community, and through punk, hardcore, experimental and garage music, found something that spoke to me. In the early 2010s this was a world that communicated through message boards too, as well as zines and blogs. Bands played in pubs and warehouses, and were vocal about the idea of anyone playing music. (I got asked by someone if I played bass because they wanted to start a band, so I lied and said I could.) My writing evolved in attempts to document the undocumented, and even though it wasn't very good, it improved because I had a reason to write that wasn't just to alleviate boredom or to pick up fringe benefits. I turned to writing historical zines about artists like Randy Newman and Butthole Surfers, then got asked to turn that series into a documentary podcast, which is another story entirely.

The thing was, that among all those writing efforts, I really wanted to write fiction. The other thing was that no one who published fiction liked what I was trying to do when I sent it to them. So I printed a zine of short stories, sold it to friends and, as a joke at my own expense, posted a copy to a publisher I liked who eventually asked if I wanted to turn the zine into a novel. Now I guess I write novels.

I'm writing this self-portrait a week after finding out that I've been funded to write a book part-time, which is great, unexpected and rare news, even though it means I can no longer stake any claim to being an 'outsider' writer. I'll finish this piece and get stuck into the next novel with a bit more focus and a little less naivety, but both those terms are relative, because you don't know what you don't know until you do.

Max Easton is a writer from Sydney. He is the creator of the zine and podcast series *Barely Human*, and the author of *The Magpie Wing*, which was longlisted for the 2022 Miles Franklin Literary Award. *Paradise Estate*, his most recent novel, was published by Giramondo in 2023.

Max Easton at MoshPit, Newtown. Photo by Joy Lai

Take 5 **LITERARY BIRTHDAYS** WORDS **Phillipa McGuinness**

Margaret Fulton
Born 1924, died 2019

If we are what we eat, Margaret Fulton remade Australia by teaching us how to cook. Chef and food writer Gay Bilson wrote that unlike professional chefs who tell us who they are, Margaret Fulton told Australians who we might be. For 50 years readers of her cookbooks and magazine columns knew that a Margaret Fulton recipe always worked.

Born in Scotland, Fulton grew up in Glen Innes, NSW, the youngest of six children. Her mother, Isabella, was her first kitchen mentor. In Sydney Fulton worked in the kitchens of the Australian Gas Light Company, teaching students to make scones and sponge cakes. Her 1968 book, *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook*, published when she was a single mother, sold more than 1.5 million copies. In *A Passionate Cook* (1998) she promised, 'Enthusiastic cooks will rise to the occasion of "What's for dinner?" and produce a wonderful meal that all will acclaim as a salute to gastronomy and good living.'

Photo by Margaret Fulton's friend Lewis Morley

Ruby Langford Ginibi
Born 1934, died 2011

Dr Ruby Langford Ginibi was born at Box Ridge Mission in Coraki, NSW, on 26 January 1934. Her Bundjalung name Ginibi — the name of a dedicated room at the Library; she also has a river-class ferry named after her — means black swan. She grew up in Bonalbo and went to high school in Casino before moving to Sydney, where she worked as a clothing machinist and edited *Churinga* (message stick), the newsletter of the Aborigines Progressive Association.

Her first book, *Don't Take Your Love to Town* — now part of UQP's First Nations Classics series — was published in 1988. Autobiographical and conversational, this bestseller showed her to be a supreme storyteller. She said that writing the book took four years and one near-nervous breakdown. Mother to nine children, in both the bush and the city she survived hardship and abandonment that might have floored lesser people. Laughter was always part of this struggle: 'Our humour always kept us going.'

Photo taken around 1994 by Maree Jenner

David Malouf
Born 1934

In 1944, a teacher at West End Primary School in Brisbane read part of *The Illiad* to a class that included a future novelist, poet, librettist, memoirist and essayist. It seems that its themes of war, masculinity, the interplay of place with the self — and of course its poetry — has informed David Malouf's literary work over the ensuing decades. As did Brisbane itself, where he grew up with a Lebanese father and English-born Sephardic Jewish mother.

Malouf's first novel, *Johnno* (1975), is a semi-autobiographical account of a boyhood in wartime Brisbane. In *An Imaginary Life* (1978), the exiled poet Ovid encounters a wild boy. *Ransom* (2009), a prose poem set during the Trojan War, puts its characters — Hector, Achilles, Priam, Hecuba — at the extremes of grief. His most recent book is the poetry collection *Earth Hour* (2014). Malouf has written that while we are in a writer's world, it is their job 'to make insiders of all of us'.

David Malouf photographed by Juno Gemes

Tom Carment

Born 1954

Sydney-born artist Tom Carment has been painting landscapes, still lifes and portraits *en plein air* since the 1970s. He has also published three books of art and words. The latest, *Womerah Lane: Lives and Landscapes* (2019), begins in the suburb where he has lived more than half his life — Darlinghurst.

Carrying a backpack full of watercolours and drawing gear, he has spent the years acting on the realisation that he 'knew from the age of 15 or 16 what I wanted to do, which was paint and write'. *Womerah Lane* was shortlisted for the Douglas Stewart Prize for Non-Fiction in 2021, when judges called it a 'humane and poetic book'. Carment has written that drawing is a way of noticing things; his work shows the vicissitudes of chance and change, of lives being lived — in houses, streets, cities, bush — in the moment.

Winter Self-Portrait, July 2000, oil on linen, by Tom Carment. Reproduced with permission of the artist

Shaun Tan

Born 1974

Reflecting on growing up in Perth, Shaun Tan has said he was attracted to stories about outer space, robots and monsters. Many children share his predilection; few become acclaimed illustrators, writers, painters and filmmakers. Tan has received numerous literary awards and honours, including a 2010 Academy Award for Best Short Film (Animated) for *The Lost Thing*. In 2007 *The Arrival* won the NSW Premier's Literary Award for Book of the Year. It is a book without words. Asserting its literary worth, Tan asked, rightly, 'How many words does something have to have before it becomes literature? Is poetry less literary than a novel?'

Tan's mother was Anglo-Irish and his father Malaysian-Chinese. Many characters in his work don't quite fit, or they struggle to belong. His books are unclassifiable — surreal, whimsical, strange, dark, fantastical, weird — and always impressive.

Shaun, 2018, acrylic and oils on canvas, 62 x 93 cm, by Nick Stathopoulos. Reproduced with permission of the artist

MICHAEL KELLY'S SKETCH BOOKS

Three people tell the story of the journey of 65 artist's sketchbooks into the Library's collection — a librarian, a life-changing friend and the artist himself.

WORDS **Mathilde de Hauteclocque, Specialist Librarian, Collection Acquisition and Curation**

In March 2023, at the suggestion of his gallerist Frances Keevil, Michael Kelly approached the Library about donating his most precious possessions — his sketchbooks. As a 66-year-old living in public housing, he expressed concern that they would simply be disposed of if something happened to him.

I was struck immediately by the volume of sketchbooks, each one numbered on its spine, the various sizes and formats all lined up on Michael's bookshelves. Inside, they were visually striking, filled with pen and pencil sketches, watercolours, his poetry, lists, memories, quotations from books he's read, and written journal entries showing everyday life, places he has lived or travelled to, people he has known. Michael started keeping sketchbooks in 1985 when he first went to art school at East Sydney Technical College, now the National Art School, and they are still a vital part of his practice. The Library now holds the first 65 of his sketchbooks, up to 2016.

Michael was born in Orange and grew up in Brisbane before coming to Sydney as a seven-year-old boy. He graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) in 1987 and has worked as an artist and teacher ever since, with 14 solo shows and appearances in numerous group exhibitions in Australia and overseas. His work is held in public and private collections.

Michael's sketchbooks form a rare documentation of an artist's career in an unbroken continuum and give extraordinary insight into creative process and developing technical skill. The books show the process of learning to draw, experimenting with different media, searching for motifs and painting sites, and documenting famous works in galleries across the world. They are a vessel for planning his own paintings and classes, recording colour palettes, and an assemblage of inspiration and influences. Over decades, they capture the communities Michael has moved in and the areas of Sydney, Melbourne and regional NSW that he has frequented, many of which have changed or disappeared over time. The sketchbooks are a remarkable historical record of those people and places.

I've worked closely with Michael on this acquisition. We've had several sessions looking at the sketchbooks in the Mitchell Reading Room, me lifting them from their new archival boxes. Michael described the experience as

Opposite: Self-portrait on the final page of Michael Kelly's sketchbook 2, 1985

one of looking at them anew, from a kind of distance, as if they belonged to someone else. They were no longer just collections of his intimate life memories, but he could see the technique and the work in them and was impressed with with what he saw.

Almost as a mirror experience, I approached the sketchbooks with an eye to their research value. But spending time with them translated into something more intimate, an opportunity to watch different blues collide in a single painting, to read palette lists of wondrous names like Flake White and Egyptian Violet, to look deeply into the etched faces of Michael's subjects and read his sepia-inked thoughts over years, to touch base with my own sense of what makes a life. It's fascinating that the transition of these sketchbooks from a private to a public space can animate different things for both artist and audience.

Of course, libraries hold so many rich intellectual resources, but sometimes the vessels of feelings and lived experience that you can see in pictorial collections can communicate as much as a carefully crafted scholarly view of the world. Libraries can validate that form of knowledge.

In her essay 'On Keeping a Notebook', Joan Didion describes people who keep notebooks as 'afflicted apparently at birth with some presentiment of loss'. Michael has told me that his sketchbooks play the same role for him, a place to capture things that may be lost. With his wonderful donation to the Library, it's a fate that won't befall his sketchbooks or their contents. Michael smiles, knowing that they've left his bookshelves to have a life of their own out in the world. They will be living objects for a long time. And when he needs to check something for a painting, he can come and visit them.

Clockwise from top left:
Michael Kelly with sketchbooks and paintings, Mitchell Reading Room, 2023

Two watercolours documenting oil paintings of Port Campbell, Victoria, including palette colours, 1998

A journal entry alongside a watercolour of Lavender Bay, Sydney, 1998

Opposite: The Footpath Library, 2008

WORDS **Sarah Garnett, founder of The Footpath Library**

I met Michael Kelly in 2005 when he visited The Footpath Library in Woolloomooloo. (I had founded The Footpath Library a couple of years beforehand.) It is an organisation that gives brand-new books to people experiencing homelessness. I still remember Michael's long, black curly hair. He was wearing a beanie and a long black coat and carrying a black journal that I learned later was his sketchbook.

I saw him select Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* from a pile of Penguin Classics and I thought, 'This is a serious reader.' We had a chat. He was very well-spoken and told me he was an artist. He showed me his sketchbook, full of drawings and sketches of people familiar to me, who came to look at books and visit the food van across the road. Some, such as Joe, who had been homeless for many years and who was largely the inspiration for starting The Footpath Library, I recognised. Michael showed me drawings in pen, pencil and watercolour of parts of the city at night, sketched from doorways and park benches. There were sketches of displaced and transient people living rough or queuing at shelters and drop-in centres, parks, train stations or at food vans. Michael reveals much about his own sensitivities as well as his experiences with mental health, displacement and homelessness. He always depicts his subjects with great tenderness.

The next week, Michael showed me some photos of his paintings. I was blown away by his talent. He started to visit The Footpath Library regularly and we would have conversations about art and books — his tastes were more highbrow than mine! Before long, he opened up to me about his life. I learned that he had recently moved to Sydney from Melbourne, where he'd been living and working for many years, in order to support his adult son, who has schizophrenia. They were living in a boarding house in Redfern.

Over the following years I heard of Michael's struggle to find places to live and work, his son's illness and his trips back and forth to Melbourne, which eventually depleted his savings. He recorded all this in his sketchbooks. In 2008, when I was in Melbourne to organise the opening of The Footpath Library there, I visited Michael's exhibition, surveying 20 years of his work at the Bundoora Homestead Gallery.

In 2009 Michael was diagnosed with achalasia, a rare illness where the oesophagus stops working. He was hungry all the time, but was unable to eat. Doctors told him he needed surgery immediately. At the time he was sleeping in his car because the building he'd been living in had been sold. With the ongoing gentrification of inner Sydney, it was becoming difficult to find cheap accommodation. I told him that he was not going back onto the street after surgery, but was coming to stay with me and my family at Bungan Beach, on Sydney's Northern Beaches. While he was recovering he would sit out on our deck and draw. He stayed for about a week. By the end of it he'd become a friend.

He went back to the city and was sleeping in one of the old wards at Callan Park, but when they were shut down he was forced to go back to living in his van. I felt terrible. In December 2009 Michael and I went to Housing NSW. I said, 'This man has just had surgery and is living in his car. He's been on your list for years. It is not on and I'm not leaving until you do something.' They agreed to subsidise his rent and we found a little unit in Elizabeth Bay. That was the start of a new life.

By 2013, Michael's savings from casual teaching at the National Art School and from painting sales meant he was able to visit Italy, something he'd wanted to do all his life. He returned with sketchbooks full of drawings and watercolours of all the cities and galleries he'd visited. He worked some of these sketches up into paintings and exhibited them in a gallery in East Sydney. He has made other trips to Italy and filled sketchbooks — some of the most beautiful of all his journals — with his experiences there. Not long after his trip to Italy, Michael and his son were offered a public housing unit in Woolloomooloo, not far from where we'd had our first conversations.

His sketches and paintings give his subjects, often invisible to passers-by, the importance and recognition they deserve. Now we can all appreciate Michael's enormous talent and keen eye for the ever-changing city of Sydney and the people who live here.

WORDS **Michael Kelly, artist**

Even before I started keeping the sketchbooks, when I was living in Newtown in the 1980s before I went to art school, my life was often in a state of flux. For me that's normal. When I came back to Sydney from Melbourne later, if I couldn't paint, I'd draw. My sketchbook was like my studio when I didn't have a studio. I'd always be thinking of things to paint, things I could make pictures out of. I've got an impulse to draw. I'm always doing something.

For me, it was no big deal how I was living because it would just give me more subject matter to draw from. I like moving around. I'm nosey. I'm interested in places and people. But people aren't usually happy to be portrayed. I'd become very sneaky drawing people way back when I was a student because I'd found that most people sitting in a cafe or wherever didn't want to be sketched. They don't want someone staring at them intensely. So I'd develop ways of hiding my sketchbook in another book. Sketching surreptitiously. Avoiding eye contact. People always know when you're drawing them. Someone can be sitting still in the same spot for 20 minutes, but as soon as you start sketching they'll start moving. And people get suspicious when you're staring at them. So I'd pretend I'm drawing something else when they're watching me.

When I was at art school someone said to me, 'Oh, you should keep a sketchbook.' I had a teacher who kept sketchbooks and showed them to me and I took to it. Because I've always loved drawing. So I'd get ideas for paintings, write stuff down for future work. Years later, now, I've realised these are my main work. That's the work there. It's in those sketchbooks. It's a thing on its own. They used to be a place to put ideas for future work, then they became the work itself. I only really realised that when the Library agreed to take them.

If ever I could find anything about artists' sketchbooks I would, because they were often the seeds for all an artist's work. Back when I was at art school, Van Gogh was always one of my favourite artists. One of the reasons I'd write and draw in sepia was from when I saw his sketches in his letters. He'd write his letters and he'd have these little drawings

They used to be a place to put ideas for future work, then they became the work itself.

Opposite, from left: The view from High Street, Millers Point, c 2004; sketch of the Railway Institute building, with notes on colour, 2006

The artist's tools, 1990

of paintings that he was doing to show his brother. He'd draw them in different strokes, to indicate his brush strokes. He was influenced by illustrations from the nineteenth century, the way they'd engrave or make lines. I love Van Gogh's drawings and letters. Other artists too — I'd find their sketchbooks.

In the library at VCA in Melbourne, for instance, there was a little facsimile sketchbook of John Constable's drawings. About as big as your phone. Two little books that went into a slipcase. You'd open it up and there would be these little pencil drawings with tiny figures and trees.

I've complained to Mathilde about the quality of sketchbooks that are available now. The paper is all different. I knew a guy in Melbourne, a printmaker, who used to make them for himself. He's a painter now. Peter Wegner — he won the Archibald a few years ago. He used to make his own sketchbooks, but he doesn't do it anymore.

When I got fairly settled back in 2010 in Elizabeth Bay, I thought, 'Now I can go and get my stuff.' Before that, I had been moving around a lot. For years they were in a friend's garage in Melbourne, all wrapped up. My sketchbooks survived. If all my paintings and everything else went up in flames, I'd save my sketchbooks. We had all that rain and mould. Except for some of the binding on the smaller sketchbooks, thankfully silverfish didn't get into anything. I'm so glad they're at the Library now.

Sketchbooks keep the memories alive. I've pretty much always lived on my own. I don't talk a lot as you might if you were married and having those conversations about 'when we did such and such'. My son talks even less, hardly about anything at all. So that's where my memories are. That's why I write in them a lot. Instead of sitting around talking to someone, I put it in my sketchbooks. They keep those memories alive and fresh.

I'm always looking. They're a life in progress.

A selection of Michael Kelly's sketchbooks will be on display in the Amaze gallery from 16 March.

For Michael Kelly's paintings, visit michaelkellyart.com.

View of Woolloomooloo, where Michael Kelly now lives and works, painted from the back of St Mary's Cathedral, looking across the Domain, 2006


Avon Woolloomooloo. 7/6

Lauren Aimee Curtis

WORDS **Daniela Baldry**

The Australian writer named one of *Granta*'s Best Young British Novelists.

It's a warm spring evening. Lauren Aimee Curtis is on stage at the State Library of NSW's rooftop bar reading from her novel *Strangers at the Port* (Hachette, 2023). The audience have come to the bar for Fresh Takes — the latest edition of a new event series run by the Library. Six Australian authors read from their latest book, and reflect on the writers and creators who have shaped them. The crowd is brought to a hush as Curtis reads. 'Our island began with volcanic eruptions. It had been home to the Greeks, the Carthaginians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, and who knows who else by the time we arrived ... Since the very beginning, it seems, people came to our island, settled, then fled.'

In 2023, Curtis was named one of Granta's Best Young British Novelists — a selection that the literary magazine makes every decade of 20 of the most promising British novelists under the age of 40. Previous names on the list include Kazuo Ishiguro, Salman Rushdie and Zadie Smith, but never an Australian writer. Being selected is a significant feat. It not only signals the quality of each writer's published work, but also their potential as 'one to watch'.

So, I'm surprised when Curtis first sits down with me for an interview after the Fresh Takes evening and tells me, 'I'm really happy to be doing this; I don't do things like this very often — mainly because nobody asks.' She adds that she doesn't chase publicity either, especially interviews, where she finds it's easier to lose the sense of control that she attains through her writing.

As happenstance would have it, Curtis's maternal grandmother emigrated from the same island as my own maternal grandparents — Panarea — one of seven Aeolian Islands off the coast of Sicily. The same archipelago also formed the background of Curtis's novel, which is set on the fictionalised island of 'S'.

A number of waves of emigration from the archipelago across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to a significant proportion of Aeolian Italians settling in Australia. Curtis first visited the islands in 2019 after researching their history, with the intention of writing a novel. Her time there sparked several questions: Is there a good kind of traveller? Is there such a thing as a neutral chronicler? What kind of relationship can you have with a homeland if you don't have any memories of it?

Those questions formed the basis of *Strangers at the Port*, written while she was living in Lisbon. In this, her second novel, Curtis wanted to engage with specific historical events and so the story unfolds during the phylloxera epidemic, which destroyed the vineyards and wine trade in the Aeolian Islands at the end of the nineteenth century and led to a mass migration.

Not long after Curtis arrived in Lisbon, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. Curtis recalls, 'The idea of writing a linear narrative that played on tensions concerning a mysterious affliction and who might be responsible became impossible, not to mention almost repulsive. Doubt — about the past and the possibility of a future — steadily made its way into the narrative. The story became about the feeling of being unmoored — from a place, from history, from family, from memory.'

The novel is told in three sections, each from a different character's perspective: Giulia, a young girl growing up on the island; a visiting archduke; and Giulia's older sister, Giovanna, recalling her childhood as an adult, having since migrated to Australia. The sisters communicate with a professor in the present day, often unwilling to recall childhood memories to assist with his research, and sometimes struggling to recall the past at all. Curtis says, 'I was interested in the slippery overlap between history, memory and fiction.'

The archduke is loosely based on Archduke Ludwig Salvator of Austria, an explorer and early pioneer of conservation, whose travel series, accompanied by his illustrations, was the most exhaustive work ever published on the Aeolian Islands when it was

Opposite: Lauren Aimee Curtis in the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photo by Joy Lai

Archduke Ludwig Salvator of Austria's illustration of Panarea in *Le Isole Lipari, Quarto Volume: Panaria*, edited by Pino Paino (1977)

first released in 1895. Curtis explains, 'I wanted to contrast two very different experiences of travel: one based on the pursuit of pleasure and knowledge, and one born out of necessity.'

I can't help but feel particularly attuned to a novel grappling with questions I too have long considered. Curtis and I may share a similar lineage but what is perhaps more interesting is how second- and third-generation migrants make sense of histories and places they have no memories of.

So, I ask Curtis about her childhood. I'm curious to know which books first made an impression on her. She explains that she was 'embarrassingly late to read'. In primary school, she understood enough to know that the 'blue table' she was assigned to was for the students who needed more support. She found a good solution. At night she would stack an overly ambitious pile of books up on her bedside table for her sister to read to her.

The youngest of three sisters, Curtis remembers being 'the bossy one', who sought to have control over the games they played. She adds, 'I was also quite happy to play make-believe alone — I'd just play both characters.' Curtis's memory of beginning to read and write independently is hazy, but she says that her need for creative expression was always there. 'When you're creating something as an adult, you're essentially just channelling all that "play" you did as a child with absolute freedom, in a more structured way.'

Curtis grew up in Epping, a suburb of north-west Sydney. As a teenager she was accepted as a drama student at Newtown High School of the Performing Arts. She tells me that being able to spend time in Newtown as a teenager felt like a stark contrast to the more traditional suburbia of her upbringing, where ideas about gender roles and sexuality could be particularly stifling. Newtown, a community well known as a creative hub, had an enormous impact on her. 'It set me down a completely different path,' she recalls.

At school Curtis was able to experiment with any number of creative disciplines. While she enjoyed performing, she couldn't help but feel that all the

best parts were written for men. Her instinct was to write the parts she didn't see on the stage. 'The idea of writing and directing was mostly self-serving, and then once I had a taste of control, I *really* liked it.' The first play she wrote was a series of monologues from the perspective of her drama teachers. 'I wasn't consciously trying to be provocative, and I was mortified when I realised how transparent my writing was, which does seem incredibly naive.'

In her 20s, Curtis worked for a local cinema at night, which she describes as both a 'terrible' and 'great' job, but one that fed her writing. At one point, she thought she might want to become a filmmaker. 'At work I was able to see films for free, and the Cinémathèque program introduced me to a whole world of films I didn't know existed.'

Curtis undertook her undergraduate degree in writing and cultural studies at the University of Technology Sydney. During this time she started submitting her own short stories to literary journals while also volunteering to read other writers' submissions. First, for *Gigantic* (a now defunct US journal), and later for the also defunct Australian journal *The Canary Press*. 'I found the experience of being on the reading side of things really helpful … I came to recognise what I like, what keeps me turning the pages.'

Seren Adams, of UK literary and talent agency United Agents, first got in contact with Curtis after reading some of her short stories in *Catapult*. This was at a time, Curtis recalls, when she didn't really know what an agent was. After completing her PhD at UTS, part of which involved writing a novella, Curtis adapted a smaller section of the work into her debut book, *Dolores*, published in 2019. Adams sold the publishing rights to Weidenfeld & Nicolson, and Hachette distributed the novel in Australia.

When Curtis first got the news about her *Granta* listing, she had already published *Dolores*, and was in the final editing stages of *Strangers*. She tells me her British citizenship made her eligible for consideration. 'You get so used to rejection as a writer. Not in a million years did I expect anything to come of it. I don't think it would have been a good thing if it happened before I finished my second novel — I think it would have just freaked me out. Obviously these things do give you a boost, but at the same time, they're so fickle. Sometimes all it takes is one judge responding to your work — just one advocate in the room can make the difference.'

Dolores — sometimes called a novel, sometimes a novella — follows a 16-year-old girl who arrives pregnant at a convent in Spain, where the nuns name her Dolores. An intense and atmospheric tale, told in short sections titled by month, the reader follows Dolores through her pregnancy, and back through her memories of her first sexual experiences. In her essay 'Notes on Craft' for *Granta* magazine, Curtis offers insight into her methods: 'Within those hundred or so pages went memories (conjured or imagined), images, dreams, observations, research, other books I have loved and hated, films that have lingered, bricolage from things half-written, and the weight of two-thirds of an abandoned book that came before.'

Curtis wrote what became *Dolores* in early-morning stints over one feverish summer. She relied on a ritual she had picked up while working late nights at the cinema. She would write as soon as she woke up, even if it was just for an hour. Her mornings became sacred — her 'golden period'.

I see this routine reflected in her restrained, sharp sentences. Curtis tells me a number of short, evocative works have had a big impact on her. Books by Lydia Davis, Christine Schutt, Clarice Lispector and Marguerite Duras gave Curtis the access point she needed to develop her own style. In her *Granta* essay, Curtis notes, 'Sometimes, a peculiar thing happens when writing fiction. If I were to visualise it, it would look like dominos falling over in slow motion. One word, one sound, one image leads to the next. Rhythm takes over.'

Now that Curtis has returned home to Sydney, I'm curious to know what her life looks like after the *Granta* listing. She's currently working on two novels — one has been years in the making; the other requires more research. One of the pleasures of being back home, she says, is returning to libraries. 'You lose something researching online — you miss out on the textural experience, you can't smell the paper. There is something about physically interacting with objects from the past that can be incredibly generative for a writer.'

On that memorable evening in the Library Bar, as daylight was fading, Curtis continued her reading: 'When I stood on the fishing dock as a child and looked out at the other islands in the archipelago, I was not thinking of battleships or explorers or sea monsters from mythologies. I was not thinking about what came before or what lay beyond. What can I tell you about my young life on the island? It is shrouded in the mystery of childhood itself.'

Daniela Baldry works in the Public Programs and Awards team at the State Library of NSW. She previously held positions at the Stella Prize and the Sydney Writers' Festival.

KNOW MY NAME

WORDS **Thuy On**

What happens if a writer doesn't want to become their own brand?

Most writers know that having your manuscript accepted by a publisher is merely the first step along the tortuous — sometimes torturous — path to publication. The hard work begins barely after your signature dries on the contract. The publisher's paperwork usually includes a section where you fill in your social media handles, media contacts, radio and television experience, what other books your own resembles, your favourite bookshop. All of this information contributes to sales, marketing and publicity standard operating procedure — who to send review copies to, who might write a glowing cover endorsement, which programs you might be pitched to. Your publisher must figure out how to sell you. For you, dear writer, are a product as much as your book is. A brand, to be marketed. One that will hopefully appeal to readers.

I've been working in and around the book industry for 25-odd years, not in publishing houses themselves but within their ambit: as a manuscript assessor, a literary judge and mentor, and a freelance critic for many publications. I commissioned reviews for eight years as *The Big Issue*'s Books Editor and am now Reviews Editor for ArtsHub. In 2020 and 2022 respectively, my poetry books *Turbulence* and *Decadence* were published by UWA Publishing (UWAP). So I've had experience — both objective and personal — as a critic, editor and poet.

During my time wrangling publishers, publicists and agents, as well as upcoming and established authors, I've noticed the increasing demands on writers to be performers — to develop a brand, to turn themselves into a product. We know review spaces in traditional media are shrinking; the decline is exponential, as information moves to other avenues like podcasts and BookTok. Reading itself must compete against a multitude of distractions. All of which makes the task of achieving shelf space, metaphorically and literally, even more challenging.

So, whether or not you blanch at the idea of the author as an exercise in product marketing, writers have to come to terms with the mandatory requirements of self-promotion. With this in mind, I asked some publishing industry people about the notion of writer as brand. Several of those I spoke to offered a salient reminder that the phenomenon is hardly new.

Novelist Marija Peričić, whose most recent book is *Exquisite Corpse*, points out, 'Online social media is new(ish), but not the idea of authors having to market themselves and their work. Charles Dickens and Mark Twain consciously cultivated their public author personas on tour to market their books; it was a huge part of their writing careers.'

Novelist and poet Alan Fyfe also debunks the idea that this kind of promotion is new. 'There have always been celebrity authors and space taken up by networked arrangements. I don't believe in the mythology of a past where it was easy for complex literary writing to get to the top; history is strewn with counter-examples. John Kennedy Toole was rejected by everyone, only for *A Confederacy of Dunces* to become a hugely influential work after his death in 1969.'

Literary agent Alex Adsett says that it has always been challenging for debut, mid-list or literary authors to stand out, agreeing that authors have long been tasked to do their own publicity. She adds, however, that 'having a publisher with a strong marketing plan and a great publicist is still what authors should be expecting. For non-fiction, platform matters more than ever, and it's not just

Courtesy Alamy

Author signing at Carriageworks during the Sydney Writers' Festival, 2023. Photo by Jacquie Manning

the perennial celebrity memoirs that non-celebrity writers have to deal with, but "influencer" authors who bring an audience from their online spaces.'

Adsett mentions that BookTok has been 'a gamechanger for re-engaging readers into new genres', referring particularly to rom-com and mythological fiction. Yet she despairs that 'it's hard for even the most on-trend, brand-savvy Australian author to compete with the big US-led BookTok accounts, without a US presence. Our smaller population doesn't shift the dial of the algorithm and finding more ways to promote Australian authors to that cohort of engaged readers is the question I'm trying to answer at the moment.'

Fellow agent, Sydney-based Benython Oldfield, is blunt in his assessment. 'Publishers, agents, booksellers and readers are looking more than ever to authors with name recognition: Pip Williams, Holly Ringland, Craig Silvey, Trent Dalton, Liane Moriarty, Tim Winton, Jane Harper, to name a handful. But all were unknown once. They've written books over many years that gleaned the most powerful force in publishing — word of mouth recommendations. If you look at their social media, they're not "social famous". They have followers, but not in the hundreds of thousands. So part of making an author brand is making sure your books appeal to the mainstream and are accessible to all places where books are sold: independent bookstores, discount department stores — Big W, Kmart, Target — and chains — Dymocks, QBD, Waterstones in the UK.'

Oldfield continues, 'To have followers can guarantee a signing with a publisher. But the general public are not mugs. The book has to have substance and appeal. If the hype doesn't match up, they won't come back or recommend the book to their friends and family.'

Chris Gordon is the bookseller responsible for Community Engagement and Programming at Readings in Melbourne, so she's at the front line. Gordon deals with a market saturated with new content, and readily acknowledges that authors with huge social media followings take up a lot of space in the public consciousness, inevitably ending up in prime positions on limited bookshelf space.

'Those that have had a career before writing — film stars, sports professionals and media commentators — are popular at writers' festivals and have book sales that many authors can only dream of. Julia Baird, Leigh Sales, Annabel Crabb and Clem Ford have all developed a brand beyond their written work from years of being in the public eye. Television is the greatest means still of attracting attention, closely followed by social media savvy. Take Nagi Maehashi of RecipeTin Eats and her bestselling cookbook *Dinner*.'

Nevertheless, those without a huge social media following, or at the start of their publishing careers, should take heart; Gordon doesn't think there's a need to establish a brand beyond the written work. She believes that if the writing is good, that can be enough, particularly if there's a literary prize involved. 'The importance of winning or being shortlisted can't be diminished. Sales, for example, of Evelyn Araluen's poetry collection, *Dropbear*, increased 900 per cent after she won the Stella Prize in 2022.'

Gordon optimistically touts the work of her trade. 'The role of a bookseller is crucial to the success of a writer's career. Readers are influenced by window and front-counter displays of titles in the shop, and by recommendations and conversations. The sparkle of influencers and television profiles doesn't replace a book being handed to you by an experienced bookseller.'

Angela Savage is a novelist as well as CEO of Public Libraries Victoria. She too believes good books can still break through regardless of marketing might, thanks to word of mouth. She highlights the role of librarians in this process. 'Librarians are skilled at matching readers with material — not necessarily bestsellers — that they will enjoy.'

Poet Amanda Anastasi has convened and hosted the events series Poetica at La Mama in Melbourne for over 10 years. In this time, she has discovered that 'Author identity, and/or personality, seem to be increasingly vital elements of the literary business, as well as a demand for authors to stand for something — from raw truth-telling to work that gives a voice to the previously voiceless.' Public appearances make a difference, she says. 'The poets who perform at La Mama Poetica are often surprised by the amount of books audience members purchase as a memory of the experience they've just had. Often, the reading serves as a moment of discovery, and purchasing the book is seen as the next step in the relationship with the author's work.'

Publishers I interviewed championed the value of branding, if only to promulgate recognition. Barry Scott of independent Melbourne publisher Transit Lounge offers this advice to authors. 'Presenting yourself in the best possible way should never be dismissed. It certainly doesn't hurt for writers to think about how they can market themselves and the directions they want to take with their writing, to cultivate writing and bookselling communities on social media and in person. New books come and go at a rapid rate and bookshops need to increasingly curate. It can hurt to see your book spine out on the bottom shelf while someone else has their books face out up the front. That is less likely to happen if stores have met you, or seen your Threads or X or Insta feed. So building your brand begins at a level of community connection.'

Affirm Press publisher Martin Hughes concurs. 'You don't have to be a "brand" to succeed as an author, but your work is not going to be discovered if you're a recluse either. It's increasingly important to get out there and spruik yourself enthusiastically and energetically (or at least with charisma), engaging with readers, booksellers, librarians and everyone else in the community and business of book lovers.'

Kate Pickard is my own publisher at UWAP. Similarly, she encourages authors to maintain a social media presence and a website for visibility. She notes that there is an increasing trend of more literary and niche authors being expected to promote themselves as a brand, and makes the point that in the past mainly authors of high-selling genres were expected to do so.

It is true that having a proactive author can make a huge difference to the exposure of a book. Anna Solding, of Midnight Sun Publishing in Adelaide, recalls that a YA book she released in May 2023 was still garnering reviews and sales in December, thanks to the author's tireless social media presence, school visits and interviews. (The life of most new titles on booksellers' shelves is 90 days, after which unsold stock can be returned to the publisher.) Like her peers, Solding accepts that 'It's undeniably more difficult for small publishers to cut through and reach readers these days. However, many bloggers, podcasters and booksellers are supportive of independent publishers.'

How do authors themselves see these growing pressures to compete in the marketplace? Many I spoke to had resigned themselves to self-promotion, but as author and journalist Paul Dalgarno posits, you can put a positive spin on it. 'With four published books and a fifth in the pipeline, it's inconceivable to me that I'd not publicise my work on social media. But I like to think of it as connecting with other authors, agents, publishers, libraries and booksellers, rather than spruiking my "brand".'

Dalgarno offers a word of caution. 'You're not going to forge many relationships, or achieve many sales, if the only thing you post is BUY MY BOOK. So the trick is to be honest about who you are, the kind of things you're into and, where appropriate, what your work is about, all the while supporting as many other writers and book people as you can with likes, congratulations and commiserations. With a moderate, or even quite big, reach on social media you're never going to be able to compete with online or real-world celebrities, so it's probably better to be clear about that and keep your integrity.'

Debut novelist Nina Wan, whose book *The Albatross* was published in 2023, likewise nominates community-building over 'brand awareness'. She admits that being published changed her view of how the industry works. 'For years I've seen publication as the goal, the finish line. What else could be left to do once the book was in bookstores? The answer: selling it. I didn't fully comprehend that that was part of my job as an author.

'There's great irony that after years of solitary writing, authors must then thrust themselves into the spotlight of social media, live events, radio and television. But like it or not, this is vital in a world where attention is the greatest scarcity. For me, it's important to do it in a way that feels constructive rather than in terms of competition and sales figures.'

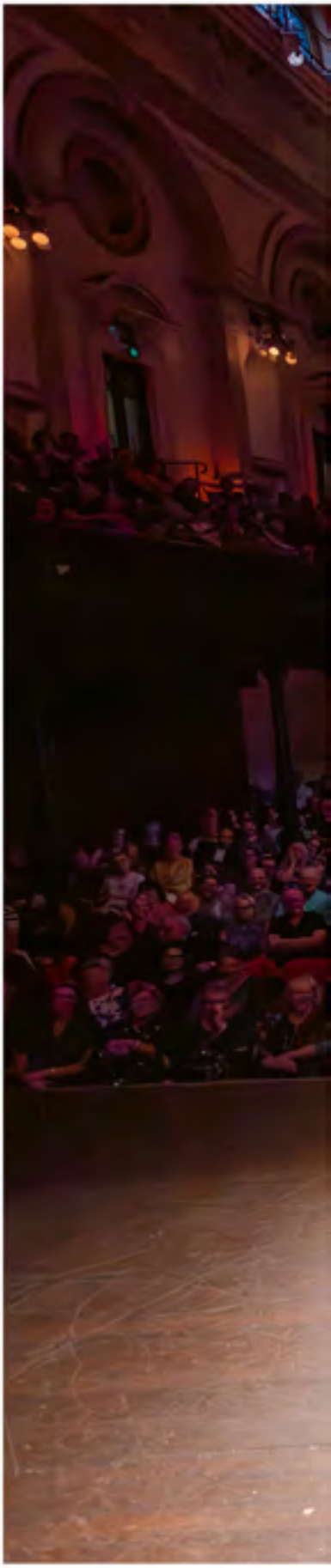
Rochelle Siemienowicz's second book, *Double Happiness*, is coming out in September 2024. She echoes the sentiments of others: 'I think developing and maintaining an "author brand" is easier to do if you remember it's all about participating in a conversation and adding value to other people's online experience, rather than just selling or broadcasting at them.'

Alan Fyfe also suggests reframing social media activity as a way of making industry friends rather than a brand-building exercise. 'Social media has made connections across the country that I might not have otherwise made. Writing is a lonely trade and these connections can make it less lonely. The socials, in moderation, are a good thing.'

In a world where the majority of Australian authors will never be bestsellers, having to jostle for attention against big brand names, Insta-celebrities with millions of followers — and their ghost-written memoirs — can be demoralising. Interviews, festival appearances, constant social media presence and bookshop signings demand a level of performance that many writers, accustomed to solitude, find hard to navigate. But eschewing the publicity circuit is not an option: how else do you ensure your name is remembered? How else to show off your printed baby so it receives the love it deserves if you don't brag about it on social media?

For better or worse, these are the realities of the contemporary literary world. But let's forgo the hand-wringing and recall that one way or another, it was always thus.

Thuy On is a Melbourne-based critic, editor and poet. Her poetry collections, *Turbulence* (2020) and *Decadence* (2022), were both published by UWA Publishing. Her poem 'Ceci n'est pas une poème!' was published in *Openbook* Winter 2022.



Sydney Writers' Festival Artistic Director Ann Mossop and bestselling guest author Richard Osman on stage at Sydney Town Hall, 2023. Photo by Jacquie Manning

On the deck at Austinmer

The teenagers stretch
out on the benches
to float in the dark's ocean
like surfers on long boards,
hands hang down to paddle.
The younger boys gambol
like puppies and occasionally
roll on their backs to focus
on the stars. The dog waits
for the possum to sprint
across the pipe from the rain
water tank and run up the pencil
cedars. You watch me. You
remark that I know so much
about the stars. I know ...
I know nothing at all.

Those pin pricks speak to us
again. The sparks. The infinite
dark. We draw patterns
between them and ...
ancient myths, islander songs,
scientific musings on black holes,
nursery rhymes. In the city
the night sky is an old backdrop
pulled out for a school play.
Faded by time and light.
Here, it is the sea spray
turned into a firework.
Firing and sprinkling us
with cool energy as it slowly
descends onto our faces
and limbs like a calming blanket,
so light we never feel its touch.
The young boys stop moving
the teenagers stop knowing
the adults forget to analyse
and the sky drifts down until
the stars are just in front
of our eyes.

We will never be like this again.

Erin Shiel

Inspired by the work of visual artist Alison Multa, *Stars*, 2005

Erin Shiel is a Sydney-based poet whose work has been published in *Mascara*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin* and *Australian Love Poems*. Her debut collection, *Girl on a Corrugated Roof*, was published by Recent Work Press in 2023.

Illustration by Rosie Handley

PHOTO ESSAY

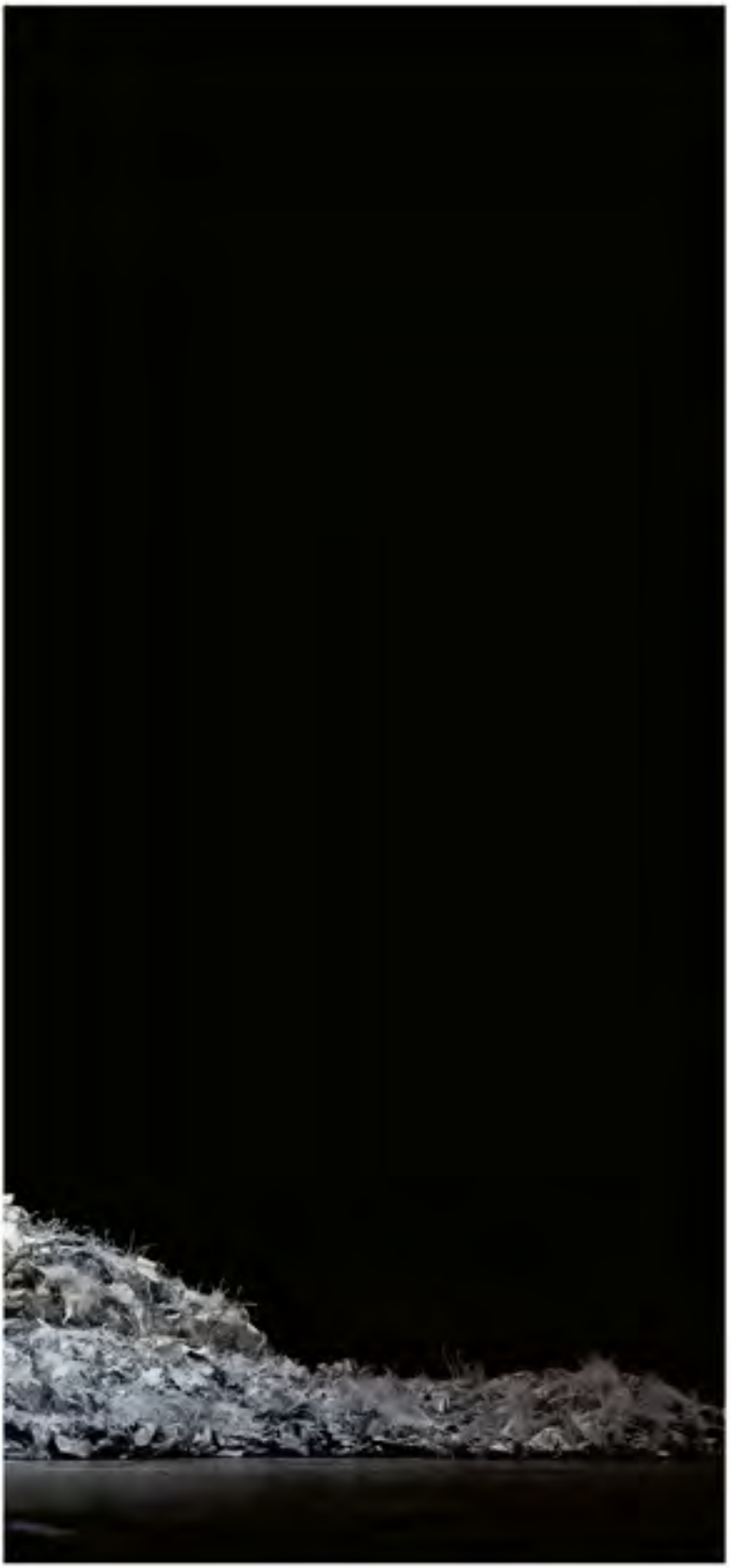
SHOWTIME!

Max McKenna performing as Jo in the musical *Jagged Little Pill* at Theatre Royal Sydney. Photo by Daniel Boud

Punk Girls. Alys Hale and Ollie Henderson performing as Tank Twin, The Flinders Hotel Darlinghurst, Sydney, April 2013.
Photo by Liz Ham

Thousands of members of Australia's Indian community attended the Qudos Bank Arena in Sydney in May 2023 to welcome Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It was his first visit in ten years and his sixth meeting with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who had visited India earlier that year. Modi received a rock-star reception at the arena, where various groups of Indian cultural dancers performed.
Photo by Matthew Abbott

Nicola Sabatino of Bangarra Dance Theatre performs in *Spirit: A Retrospective* at Barangaroo Headland, 2021. Photo by Daniel Boud

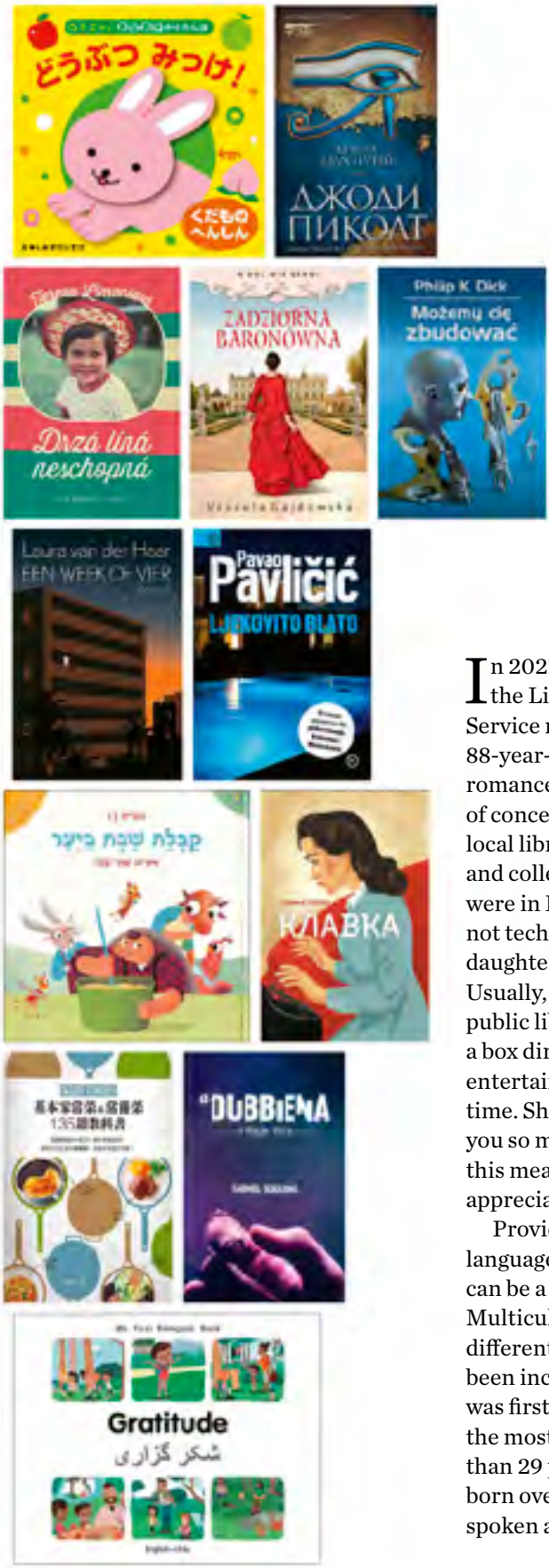


Bangarra dancer Glory Tuohy-Daniell prepares backstage before performing in *Spirit: A Retrospective* at Barangaroo Headland, 2021. Photo by Daniel Boud

This year marks 50 years of serving multicultural New South Wales with books.

BOOKS THAT SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE

WORDS **Abby Dawson**



In 2021, in the middle of a COVID lockdown, the Library's Multicultural Bulk Loan Service received a call from a woman whose 88-year-old father loved reading Mills & Boon romances in Italian. They lived in an 'area of concern' in Sydney, so not only was their local library closed, it was not offering click and collect services. Its ebook collections were in English and the gentleman was not tech savvy anyway. In desperation, his daughter contacted us to see if we could help. Usually, we only supply multicultural loans to public libraries, but we knew that if we sent a box directly it would provide comfort and entertainment for her father during a difficult time. She later wrote to us saying, 'Thank you so much, you don't know how much this means for my father and myself. Much appreciated from the bottom of my heart.'

Providing books to readers in their own languages via public libraries across NSW can be a transformative experience. The Multicultural Bulk Loan Service may have had different names over the years but has always been incredibly popular, right from when it was first launched in 1974. We live in one of the most diverse states in Australia — more than 29 per cent of the NSW population was born overseas and over 280 languages are spoken at home — so the service is crucial.

In 2021, with Charles Sturt University, we undertook research looking at the value of reading in a first language. It showed how important this is for migrants, particularly for relaxation — living and working in a second language can be mentally exhausting. Reading in a native language can be a deeply emotional experience that helps people retain a connection with their culture and enhance pride in their heritage. One of our research participants commented, 'Eight hours in my workplace speaking English all the time means when I see books in Persian it feels good. I can just calm down, not think about it.' National and state-based migrant associations seek to maintain their culture and promote the survival of their language, so access to books in their language strengthens connections. Also, for those Saturday Schools that teach community languages, access to books through local libraries is a fundamental resource.

Colleagues in public libraries to whom we supply books often tell us that their readers are amazed not only that the service exists, but that it is free. They have shared stories about individual readers, and the books they love, in languages from Czech to Japanese, Telugu to Persian. The librarian in Gilgandra, for example, told us about an older lady who was born in the Netherlands but came to Australia

as a child with her parents. One day in the library, she quietly asked if it was possible to find books in Dutch. The librarian requested large print novels in Dutch from the Library's Multicultural Bulk Loan Service and the woman was delighted to be able to read romances and family sagas in her first language.

Another librarian in Wagga Wagga told us that one of their regular Croatian-language borrowers had been struggling with cancer for some time. Reading books in Croatian and Serbian in his favourite genres — crime and suspense — helped with the difficulty of being ill. The librarian said, 'He has always been a great reader, and being able to get books in his own languages provides distraction, comfort and relief.'

Multicultural Bulk Loan Service, then and now

Languages offered in 1974 16 languages, 2300 items	Languages offered in 2024 43 languages, 69,000 items
Arabic	Arabic
Danish	Bengali
Estonian	Bulgarian
Finnish	Burmese
Greek	Chinese
Hebrew	Croatian
Hungarian	Czech
Italian	Danish
Japanese	Dutch
Maltese	Finnish
Norwegian	French
Portuguese	German
Serbo-Croatian	Greek
Spanish	Gujarati
Swedish	Hebrew
Turkish	Hindi
	Hungarian
	Indonesian
	Italian
	Japanese
	Korean
	Macedonian
	Maltese
	Nepalese
	Persian/Farsi
	Polish
	Portuguese
	Punjabi
	Russian
	Serbian
	Sinhalese
	Slovak
	Spanish
	Swedish
	Tagalog
	Tamil
	Telugu
	Thai
	Tibetan
	Turkish
	Ukrainian
	Urdu
	Vietnamese

One library customer who migrated to Australia as an adult said that reading books in Korean gives him emotional stability.

Strathfield Library in Sydney frequently requests books in Korean for that community who, when asked, say, simply, that reading books in Korean makes their lives better. Seniors in particular, for whom English can be a big barrier, say that they feel welcomed knowing they can borrow Korean books and magazines from the library and that doing so reduces feelings of isolation. One library customer who migrated to Australia as an adult said that reading books in Korean gives him emotional stability. As much as he loves his Australian life, he sometimes misses the Korean things that are a part of him. He reflected that reading is different to speaking Korean because reading boosts his Korean literacy and exposes him to information and trends back home.

A former staff member with prepacked cartons of books in different languages, ready to be sent out to public libraries across the state

As well as reflecting on the impact of the Multicultural Bulk Loan Service in the present, the service's 50th anniversary offers the opportunity to reflect on its history. In the early 1970s, responsibility for providing books in different languages lay with public libraries, which purchased their own collections in response to demand from their communities. Some purchased books in a particular language as part of the Sydney Subject Specialisation Scheme, a cooperative effort by public libraries to ensure that in-depth reference and fiction collections were available to their readers. Nevertheless, a 1972 survey of NSW public libraries by the Library Association of Australia found that the provision of foreign language collections was 'quite inadequate to meet the cultural and recreational needs of migrants'. It recommended the establishment of a centralised service.

In 1974, then State Librarian Russell Doust took the recommendation on board. That year, the Library Council's annual report noted that 'Preliminary discussions have commenced on a proposal to establish a central pool of foreign language books ... available for loan through participating libraries ... This is a service for which the Council sees a clear need and it believes that the State Library must play a significant part.' The Library had been sending boxes of reference books to country libraries to support their needs since the 1890s, but changing demographics as a result of shifting immigration policies meant that libraries were struggling to keep up with the growing demand for resources in different languages.

In 1974, the State Library launched the Foreign Language Lending Service with the stated intention of 'providing books in less common languages to all libraries, and books in common languages to those who have no way to meet local demand'. At first, public libraries could request books in 16 languages, mainly from European and Middle Eastern countries. Japanese was the only Asian language initially available. New languages were introduced each year in response to community demand, and by the mid-1980s the service provided books in over 40 languages.

These new languages reflected global events. For example, the Indo-Chinese conflicts of the 1970s meant that libraries needed books in Vietnamese and Khmer (Cambodian) to support growing refugee communities. Similarly, upheavals in Iran in the 1980s led to increased demand for books in Persian. Norwegian, Latvian and Lithuanian, the languages of waves of post-war immigrants in the 1940s and 1950s, were gradually withdrawn as demand decreased. By the early 1990s, the collections included Hindi, Indonesian, Tamil and Thai, as people from these language groups arrived in Australia for study or work. We often hear from local libraries that suddenly have a new community in town because the local abattoir or factory has recruited people with skills from a certain country.

In 1974, a bulk loan meant a prepacked box of 30 books — 10 adult fiction titles, 10 adult non-fiction titles and 10 children's books — sent out to a library on request. Collections were stored in boxes and distributed this way until the late 1980s, when the books were unpacked from their boxes and arranged on the shelves in the Library's stacks. Now Library staff processing a loan request browse the full collection of a particular language that is available on the shelves and customise loans to what customers want, whether it be books by a particular author, or a subject or genre.

When the service started, the Library had funding to purchase around 2300 books in 16 languages. Annual reports during the first few years regularly mentioned 'strong demand' and 'the need for more funding' to purchase collections. Usage grew steadily and there were often waiting lists for particular languages. It could be hard to source some books, and staff kept track of books requested in languages that we did not hold, which informed collection development. We also loaned books to the Department of Corrective Services, and although this paused

Adult fiction and children's books are the most sought after ...

at some point, loans in a range of languages to temporary remand inmates at Silverwater Correctional Complex were reinstated in 2022.

In 1984, the service was renamed the Community Language Lending Service in line with a recommendation from the Ethnic Affairs Commission, and in 1988 it became the Multicultural Service. Today the Multicultural Bulk Loan Service holds almost 70,000 items in 43 languages — adult fiction, non-fiction and children's books — for public libraries to borrow. Books are purchased from specialist suppliers, including some imported from booksellers overseas, often in the country of origin. Wherever possible, we purchase translations of Australian books. For example, we have Eddie Jaku's 2020 memoir *The Happiest Man on Earth* available in five languages. Adult fiction and children's books are the most sought after, which underlines the general demand for recreational reading.

Adult non-fiction varies and includes everything from cookbooks to self-help, religion, history, biographies, science, health, politics and society. One borrower asked if we could purchase Prince Harry's memoir *Spare* in Greek. We were able to oblige.

Demand for children's and young adult books has grown significantly, particularly bilingual books. One Korean parent said that she borrows Korean books and her son borrows English books from the library but that she enjoyed reading Korean picture books with him when he was a child. He is growing up as an Australian, surrounded by Australian culture, and she wanted to give him an opportunity to experience Korean culture. Korean picture books reinforced their emotional and cultural bond. And of course the Harry Potter books are available in quite a few languages.

Many public libraries now provide their own collections in languages spoken by a substantial number of readers in their community. But they will often supplement these with books from the Library collections. This is particularly true for metropolitan Sydney, given the diverse population mix. Blacktown City Libraries have their own collections in 30 languages, but with over 165 language groups in their area, they rely on the Multicultural Bulk Loan Service to support those languages they can't.

Wagga Wagga City Library is another unique case. A regional settlement area for refugees for over 20 years, Wagga Wagga now has over 98 community language groups and has drawn on the Library's collections to support them. In 2022–23, Wagga Wagga borrowed books in 20 languages, including Italian, German, Chinese, Persian as well as books for an emerging Tibetan community. Staff highlight the delight families experience in being able to access picture books and junior fiction in their own language.

New languages are always being introduced. The Indian community is now the second-largest migrant group in Australia. In 2022, Telugu became the State Library's seventh Indian-language collection, its development supported by the Telugu community. Some users have reported that reading books from the collection made them feel nostalgic for home. One reader, Pidaparthy Karthikeya Sharma, said, 'I love Blacktown

Top 10 loans by language, 2022–2023

French*
Spanish
Italian
Russian
German
Japanese
Chinese**
Polish
Arabic
Greek

* French has been the most popular for many years but Spanish is on track to overtake it.

** Chinese remains in the Top 10, despite many public libraries having their own collections.

New languages are always being introduced.

Library as it has multicultural books and especially Telugu books, which make me feel like it's my home. It helps me to learn my mother tongue.'

In 2011, members of the Nepalese community approached the Library about setting up a collection. Our Nepalese collection, the first in Australia, was officially launched in 2014. And in 2023 we launched the first Tibetan collection in Australia, a collaboration with the Tibetan community and Northern Beaches Libraries in Sydney. Dee Why Library now hosts much of the collection to support one of the largest Tibetan communities in Australia.

We constantly audit collections to ensure they meet the needs of the changing NSW community. Collections are set up or withdrawn based on community demand. The availability of books in a particular language, and reliable suppliers, are also important to ensure a collection is sustainable. Knowing what our culturally and linguistically diverse clients need is fundamental, so we collect data from public library staff, directly from communities and through government reports.

A few years back, the Ukrainian collection was marked for review because usage was low. Fortunately, this review was not enacted because since then the war in Ukraine has meant demand for this collection has skyrocketed. We have purchased additional books so are able to supply requests from libraries all over the state where those fleeing the war have been taken in.

The service is managed by a dedicated team, some with their own migrant experiences. Recently retired multicultural consultant Oriana Acevedo, who was born in Chile, started at the State Library in 1998 and her impact was immediate. She overhauled the collections, removing old and out of date books, and set about buying new books every year. She prioritised promoting the service, which saw a big increase in loans. In the 1990s, records for the books were added to the Library catalogue, replacing the manual card catalogue, but languages using characters, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic-based script and Cyrillic text, were transliterated, which people couldn't really read. During Oriana's time books began to be catalogued with the title and author fields in the vernacular script so people can search in their own language. She also drove the creation of the dedicated Multicultural Unit in 2011, which saw turnaround time for loans improve from up to a month, to dispatch within one to two days.

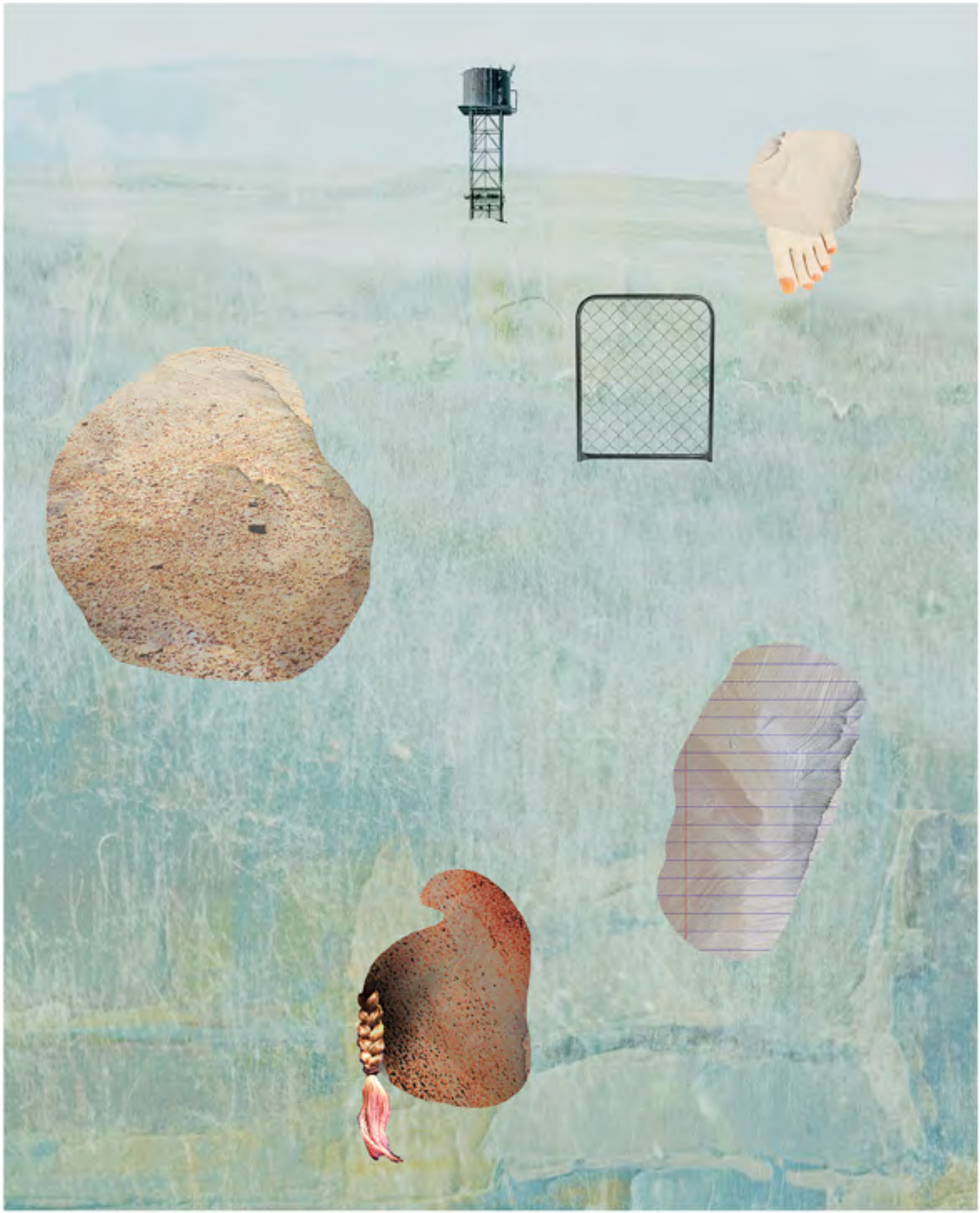
Current service coordinator Joanna Goh, originally from Singapore, says, 'I know firsthand how difficult it can be to assimilate to living in a new country. While having English as my first language helped me navigate the administrative hurdles, it did not fully remove the sense of homesickness and isolation of being apart from family, friends and a culture I grew up in. For migrants who do not have a good grasp of the English language, the transition can be many times harder. Our bulk loan service aims to provide the connection to the migrant community with their roots and the preservation of their language and culture.'

Collections are at the core of the work of libraries, which are some of the only spaces in society where people can go for free. Everyone should have access to information and culture that meets their needs, regardless of their background. It is powerful for people to be able to see themselves in such spaces and stories, and it is at the heart of giving a sense of belonging. We have been committed to making this possible since 1974.

Abby Dawson is a Specialist Services Librarian in the Public Library Services branch and managed the Library's Multicultural Bulk Loan Service for nine years.

Languages removed from the collection over the years

Armenian
Estonian
Khmer (now held at Fairfield Library)
Kurdish
Latvian
Lithuanian
Norwegian
Romanian
Slovenian
Welsh



WORDS **Eleanor Limprecht**

LIKE ANIMALS

'No one knew she was going to show up,' Jade said later to Meg at school. Dad was in the stables feeding the horses. Jade was washing up the breakfast dishes and Jasmine was watering the garden. Their mornings were clockwork, like all the kids who lived on properties. Dad did the feeding in the morning if they did it after school. It helped now that they'd got rid of the sheep, but still there were always more jobs than hours in the day.

'Does she look different?' Meg asked and Jade straightaway hated the question. Because her mother still didn't look a thing like the other mums with their dowdy blouses and wide hips, their bunions and blow-dried bobs. Her mum was not as tall as she remembered, and her hair was streaked with grey, but she still had this intensity: like she could see beneath your skin.

'Older,' Jade said, 'haggard.' It wasn't true, and Meg could probably see as much herself, but the bell was ringing and Jade had Business Studies and Meg had Art so they went their separate ways, down the hallways smelling of Lynx and Ariana Grande perfume.

'Girls,' was the first thing her mum said. She'd stepped out of the car — a plush shiny-looking car, a city car — and not even shut the driver's side door yet. She was standing there at the gate at the bottom of the house paddock in grass that had grown too long because the mower was rooted. Jade and Jasmine were by the veranda, the hose at Jasmine's feet still running, water threatening to pool around their school shoes.

'So you've decided to come back,' Jasmine said, then noticed the water and went to turn the hose off at the tap. It had been a dry spring.

Jade just stood there dumb, all the words she had stored up for her mother these past two years, all of the insults and sadness and fury, caught somewhere between her ribs.

Meanwhile Gemma shut the car door, opened the gate and walked part way up the path towards the house, approaching her daughters like two unbroken horses. Wary. No sudden movements.

'I'm sorry, girls. You know I was sick.'

Jade looked down at her mother's feet clad in sandals, with their flat soles and baubled trim. Her mother's pedicured feet, the toenails a perfect shade of peach. She willed those feet to step in the puddled mud — the garden-hose water which had now mixed with sandy dirt.

'Sick of us?' Jade finally managed to say, and she felt Jasmine's approval beside her. 'Sick of being a mum?'

But the words were only just out when their father drove up in the farm ute. Out in a single movement, the hay all stuck to his shirt, he looked so much older than she did, Jade thought, then hated herself for thinking that. But she couldn't stop seeing what was on his face. The bare hope.

In Business Studies she opened her notebook and watched pages of notes on the blue-lined paper swim. She snapped her hair elastic on her inner wrist, against the skin. Her father's bare hope was like the ram when the ewes were on heat: the ugliness of his grey woolly scrotum dangling between his legs, the way the ewes would stand still for him, despite the desperation of his need.

So much she wished she'd never seen.

* * *

Illustrations by Rosie Handley

It had taken a while for Jasmine to find her mum since she didn't go by her married name. She didn't have social media. Jasmine eventually found traces of her in other people's posts. She knew she'd gone back to Melbourne. She knew that before moving to the bush her mother used to dance. Ballet. Eventually Jasmine found her teaching at a school for little toddlers. Twinkle Toes, would you believe. There was a Facebook page with photographs of all the teachers, and there she was. Not smiling. Gemma Gordon. She had returned to her maiden name.

Jasmine sent a DM to the woman whose school it was, and said she was Gemma's daughter, trying to get in touch. She lied, saying something about a family emergency.

A normal mum would have then got in touch, emailed or called, asked a few questions before showing up unannounced to the husband and daughters she hadn't seen or spoken to in two years. But Jasmine's mum was clearly anything but normal. Here's the thing though: when she did drive up, what Jasmine felt was relief. A big rush of it, taking her shoulders down from beside her ears.

Inside the house they sat in a weird kind of purgatory. Talking about the weather, the traffic from Melbourne, the ten hours it had taken her — driving through the night — to reach them. Jasmine made a fresh pot of tea and Jade went to get her schoolbag. Dad had gone to have a shower. And probably catch his breath. His hands were shaking; he kept looking towards the doorway.

'What was the emergency, Jas?' Mum said, taking a sip of her tea like this was still her mug, her family, her house.

'Don't say anything, okay? I didn't tell them.'

Her mum put up her hands. 'Okay, okay. I tried to contact you, you know. Your dad didn't want it though. He thought it made things harder for you girls.'

'What's harder than being abandoned?' Jasmine asked.

Her mum put her hands to her face then, slender fingers stacked with rings. The other words Jasmine wanted to say would have to wait.

Jade stomped back in the room and dumped her bag by the front door. 'Look,' she said. 'You made our poor mummy cry. What did she ever do to you?'

'I'm not here to make excuses,' Gemma said, wiping her cheeks with the backs of her hands. 'I'm here to see if there is anything I can do now. Going forward.'

'Give Dad a lift to work,' Jade said. 'Jasmine and I will be late for school.'

* * *

Ben came out of the shower with his cheeks hot from the embarrassment of her. Here again. Surely everyone would know already. She would've stopped at the Caltex to get petrol or use the loo, she would have driven past neighbours on the way in, the girls would tell their friends at school. Soon the whole town would be talking. Soon what he'd worked to shield the girls from these last two years would be thrown right back at them.

'So,' he said, switching the kettle back on to boil and getting a fresh mug out of the cupboard, 'why are you here, Gemma? Why now?'

He was trying not to look at her. Half the problem for him was always how she looked. Even during her worst times he could brush it over because she was still beautiful — at least on the outside. Like a sunset during a bushfire.

'How are the girls?' she asked, ignoring his question. 'They look so grown up. I just can't believe ...' Her voice broke then and she went to get some paper towel from beside the sink. She folded it into quarters and dabbed beneath her eyes.

'They're good. Jasmine is good as gold, doing all the jobs, cooking dinner, always responsible. Jade has a bit of a wild streak I've got to watch out for. I think there's a lot she doesn't tell me.'

'Like you then. Secretive.'

The kettle clicked off and he took it to the pot of tea on the table. Inside, there were just stewed leaves at the bottom, and he filled it with freshly boiled water. Jasmine had put the little jug of milk out, the blue and white one that was part of the wedding china from his aunt and uncle in Brisbane. So many of those dishes had chipped and broken over the years. They were meant to keep them pristine, but Gemma had always said she didn't believe in saving your nice for special occasions. It was part of what attracted him to her in the beginning, the way she did things differently to everyone else around. The way she didn't worry about fitting in.

'I'm sorry Ben. I know you felt like you had to keep them safe. But I'm better now. I am. I want to be in their lives.'

Ben looked at her across the worn kitchen table, the stacks of bills and receipts at one end, the manual for the mower that needed new blades, the vet bills and insurance, the fencing and feed and super and taxes. He needed to text the boss at work, let him know he'd be in late. Behind her, the sun came in through the picture window, so he could see the little frizzy bits of her hair which stood on

end, the fuzz from her jumper glowing. The light stretched across the battered table, towards him.

'That will be up to the girls, I suppose.'

Gemma nodded, her mouth tight. He'd never been able to say what she wanted to hear, that much he knew. It was part of why she left, she'd had it up to here, she'd said, and laid her pointer finger like a salute across her brow. That was the year the lambs were killed by wild dogs, bits of their carcasses scattered across the paddocks, the rest of the flock terrified.

He knew she needed help but didn't know how to give it. All he knew was how to work harder, longer hours, how to provide, how to flay himself to succeed.

Ben poured his tea, offering her the pot, but she shook her head. How could you know someone so intimately, and also, not at all?

'What have you been doing?'

'After I got out of the hospital? Teaching dance. Looking after Mum. Her dementia's much worse. But last month, I got her a place in a facility. It wasn't safe anymore, having her at home. She's forgotten I left you and the girls, so that makes things easier between us.'

Ben smiled in spite of himself. Her mum had always loved him, she'd rung him up when Gemma left, raging at her spoiled daughter, wondering if she'd made some mistake raising her to be so headstrong.

'I thought it's time I came back. Get a place nearby and help. I can't be back here, not after everything, but I can be close.'

Ben shook his head. Behind his eyes throbbed. The everything made him feel sick in the pit of his stomach. That knowing that he'd fucked it up, with the not-telling. 'We've been fine,' he said, 'without you. Jasmine will go off on a gap year next year. Jade will do what Jade does best — whatever she wants. The only person you'd be doing this for is yourself.'

He watched to see if she would flinch. She did. And then he hated himself anew.

* * *

What frightened her was the immensity of it: the immensity of small things.

Gemma had been a good mother. She did the necessary and the auxiliary: crafts and reading, helping with homework, dance classes the next town over, pony club, swimming lessons at the town pool since before they could even walk. She made healthy homemade meals and morning teas, she did not let them have soft drink or eat lollies except on special occasions. She drove the girls thousands of kilometres: to the dentist for their teeth, the optometrist for their eyes, the hairdresser when they needed a trim and the doctor when they were feeling crook.

But it could happen at any time. The restlessness. The suffocation. The feeling was like grains of sand in her eyes; it prickled under her skin, crawled like spiders on her scalp, but she sat with it. Breathed through it. Shut her eyes against the sun, so her skin warmed, her thoughts calmed, her days continued.

'Let's make a cake,' she would say, the promise of sweetness. And the girls would stop bickering. Or sometimes she would leave them, just for a little while, and walk to the horses in their paddocks. Lay her face against a solid flank, a quiver, the smell of dust and grass. Animal skin.

But that year, the year the wild dogs came, the feeling grew so strong she could not bake or walk it away. Like a bat in the house it woke her at night, banging frail papery wings against the glass windowpanes. Let me out, she wanted to scream. And when it happened, she knew it was the end of pretending. She had to go away. And every day she was away — though the girls were like an ache in her chest, the pain of missing them palpable — returning became harder to imagine.

'Why did you stay away?' Ben asked. Gemma looked at him. The years of work were in the lines on his face, the freckles on his arms, the back of his neck a permanent dark red — even in the winter.

'To hold the three of you together,' she said.

Ben rubbed his face. His hands were so much bigger than hers, it was one of the things that drew her to him when they met. The way their bodies could be so different and fit together so well. She reached across and covered his hand with her own.

Outside the sun was wattle-yellow on the veranda steps. Gemma thought of when the girls were small and Jasmine brought nits home from school. The morning she spent out on the steps combing her hair, crushing the tiny eggs against her thumbnail in the warmth. There were a few whole lice, the bugs black and slimy with conditioner, squirming as she pulled them loose from a jungle of hair, drowned them in tea tree oil. Jasmine had cried at first with horror and fury but then calmed and sat still humming, as Gemma combed and combed: every strand, every egg, the antiseptic smell of tea tree in their nostrils. Everything else — the horses, lessons, laundry, lunch — forgotten. For a few hours she had felt capable of what the world asked of her.

For a few hours she was enough.

* * *

After the wild dogs came, Ben laid the baits down by the old dry creek bed. Gemma had been against poisoning them from the beginning, but she didn't understand how these packs of dogs got — how every farmer was at risk from the threat to livestock. In the end he did it and he didn't tell her. He never meant for her to come across the aftermath. The girls were at school, thank god, but Gemma heard the cries from down the dry creek bed. She found the dog there — a nursing mother — and the den full of pups. How long had they been trying to suckle their dead mother? Gemma took them, the tiny pink things, back to the house wrapped in her jumper. She tried to save them, but it was no use. One by one they succumbed to the poison, convulsed, frothed at the mouth and died. Gemma had to rid the house of their small corpses before the girls came home from school. She put them into a Coles plastic bag and took it down to the bins at the highway, which council wouldn't collect until Tuesday week. She had to clean up the mess of it. It was their mother who killed them, and in the weeks that followed she stopped understanding that it wasn't somehow her.

When she left they were all away, at work and school. She did not write a letter. She told him later that there was no way that she could explain what it was she was afraid she might do.

* * *

Driving home from school that afternoon, Jasmine waited while Jade got out and opened the gate, steely-eyed, her skinny legs pale from under the school uniform skirt. Jasmine wished she had her sister's capacity for fury. The trees on the road swayed in a hot wind. Jasmine wished she had never asked her mother to come. She was certain that at the bottom of the driveway, at the gate to the house paddock, they would see the car was gone.

How do you survive being left twice? Jasmine thought of the bin alive with maggots, the pong of death, the fragments she understood and the questions she never bothered asking.

Jasmine thought about how, once she was gone, she would not spend a moment looking back.

* * *

Jade had a space between her two front teeth which her mother used to say gave her personality, a small gap that she worried with her tongue when she was thinking. It wasn't worth the orthodontist fees, her dad said, two years of braces for teeth that were otherwise straight. She felt the space as they drove down to the house, Jasmine expressionless beside her, and there was her mother's car unmoved since morning. Jasmine parked beside it. They were both silent getting out of the car, bending slowly to get their backpacks from the back, shutting the doors without the usual slamming. Jade's tongue was jammed hard against that space as she opened the door to the house. They weren't in the kitchen or the living room, maybe they would be in the stables, Jasmine was saying, but just then the two of them came from Dad's bedroom, their faces flushed. Their eyes elsewhere.

'Does this mean you're staying?' Jade blurted.

'We'll see.' Gemma said, looking at her now, smiling so Jade could see her mum's crooked incisor, so sharp it stabbed her heart.

Jade was disgusted, elated, and she couldn't stop staring at them. They were like teenagers.

Like animals.

Eleanor Limprecht's most recent novel *The Coast* was published by Allen & Unwin in 2022 and she is the author of *What Was Left* (2013), *Long Bay* (2015) and *The Passengers* (2018). Her short story 'Bendalong' was published in the Summer 2021 issue of *Openbook*.


NIMROD IQs
413/1000
2-12-82

FEATURE

POSTERS OF THE NIMROD THEATRE

WORDS **Michael O'Shea**

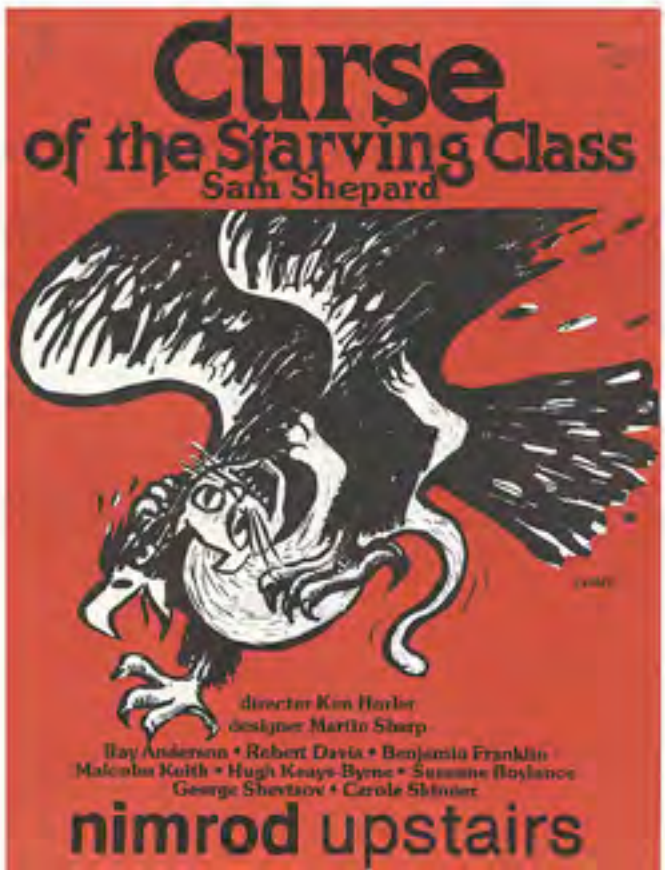
Founded in 1970, a small theatre company in Sydney had posters that were as lively and progressive as its performances.

In the late 1960s, after two decades of conservative government, Sydney was experiencing a countercultural shift. Australia was dealing with its participation in the Vietnam War, sparks of trade union unrest and general disillusionment with the lack of political and social change. The elitist and provincial attitudes of the Australian Establishment created perfect conditions for an alternative swell. A group of restless writers, performers and artists — many of whom would go on to become household names — agitated for change.

The influential and notorious *OZ* magazine was an integral part of this cultural shift. Started in 1963 by publisher Richard Walsh, writer Richard Neville and artist Martin Sharp — as students at the University of Sydney, University of NSW and the National Art School respectively — *OZ* pushed the boundaries of social commentary and taste. As Walsh noted in a 2006 article for *The Australian*, 'Like lots of young people, we wanted to take the place by the scruff of the neck and change it.' Australia's conservative landscape prompted some university alumni to decide that 'swinging' London offered the best hope for having their voices heard. As well as the *OZ* team, this exodus included Sydney University Dramatic Society (SUDS) alumni John Bell and Ken Horler.

Like many of their contemporaries, they found this international experience pivotal and invaluable. On their return, Horler approached Bell about creating an alternative theatre company that would disrupt the traditional scene and showcase contemporary Australian playwrights, actors and directors. In 1970, they leased an old stable in Darlinghurst in inner-city Sydney. With their acting friends, Bell and Horler set about converting 10 Nimrod Street into a 150-seat venue. The Nimrod Theatre was born.

Opposite: Poster for *Nimrod 10*, 1980 (printed 1982), 10th anniversary poster, screenprint, by Martin Sharp



The Nimrod set out to speak to — and about — modern Australia. Young, brash and fun, it produced plays that were fresh and relevant. It staged many ground-breaking Australian plays, including David Williamson's early works *The Removalists* and *The Club*; Nick Enright and Terence Clarke's musical comedy *The Venetian Twins*; Thomas Keneally's *Bullie's House*; and Alma De Groen's first play, *The Sweatproof Boy*. It brought a new set of writers, directors and actors to national attention, creating a wave that would form the future of Australian theatre.

The spontaneous and direct form of the graphics used in the Nimrod's promotional posters mirrored the energy of the writing and the themes that the plays explored. The artists who worked with Nimrod shared a cultural world and moved in the same small Sydney circles.

Around that time, a number of artists' collectives, including the Earthworks Poster Collective at Sydney University, were producing politicised artworks. These drew attention to the social injustices that were part of the lingering 'White Australia' immigration policy, as well as the ongoing oppression of Indigenous people and the burgeoning struggle for women's liberation. These collectives embodied a visual movement that was springing up in print studios across Australia and whose posters were populating inner-city telegraph poles and walls. The Nimrod posters used similar vibrant techniques with deliberately unrefined illustrations and typography, and their varied styles became a defining artistic feature of this emerging counterculture.

Nimrod's wide-ranging poster styles came in ever-changing sizes. There were no guidelines to follow or corporate identity to adhere to. This freedom gave the posters a freshness and life; it's their rawness and spontaneity that connects them. Artistic director and actor John Bell said, 'In our early days our programming was deliberately startling, so that people never knew what to expect of us next.' The posters reflected this.

The Nimrod posters were mainly printed as simple – often black and white – offset-litho or screen-prints. The Pop Art movement made screen-printing, a traditionally commercial medium, relevant as an art form. Screen-printing was an effective way to produce multiple inexpensive copies. For students and activists, it provided a means of immediate mass expression and created a modern visual language.

From top:
Poster for *The Venetian Twins*, 1981, screenprint, by Martin Sharp
Poster for *Curse of the Starving Class*, 1978, screenprint, by Martin Sharp

Poster typography was either hand drawn or applied using lettering transfer systems like Letraset, which was sold in sheets at art shops and local newsagents. The simple methods used were dependent on the preference of the artist or designer involved.

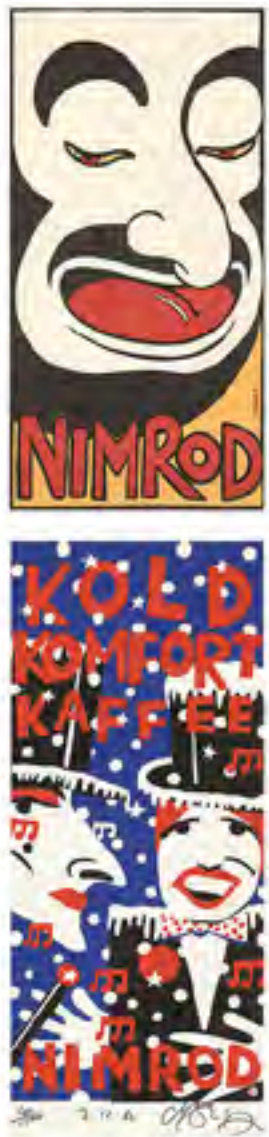
A range of designers, printmakers and artists produced posters for Nimrod, each with a unique style: Janet Dawson, Tony McGillick, Kevin Brooks, Silvia Jansons, Sally Toone, Anny Evason and Brett Whiteley. But the artist who produced what are now seen as Nimrod's most iconic posters was *OZ* magazine art director Martin Sharp. Sharp had gone to the UK with Richard Neville and revived the magazine in London but left prior to the infamous obscenity court case. His Pop Art aesthetic became one of the defining visual elements of the psychedelic era. His album cover for Cream's *Disraeli Gears* and his *Mister Tambourine Man* poster for Bob Dylan ended up on many late-1960s bedroom walls.

When Sharp arrived back in Sydney in 1970, his work was in demand. His association with Nimrod began in 1973 and, arguably, gave the theatre more than it gave him. Sharp's alternative sensibilities and unique graphic style created posters that became synonymous with Nimrod and all it stood for. As with many of the artists associated with the theatre, he also designed some of the stage sets and costumes. His iconic image of Roy Rene's famously irreverent 1930s vaudeville character, the larrikin Mo McCackie — for the 1978 play Y*oung Mo* — became Nimrod's unofficial logo. Martin Sharp explained the process in an interview with the National Portrait Gallery. 'I was asked to do a poster by Richard Wherrett for a Nimrod Theatre production of *Portrait of Young Mo* something, something, a very, very long title. And it was so much in the title you couldn't even fit it on the poster, so I decided just do a picture of Mo and title it Nimrod, and it spoke for itself.' In 1982, Nimrod began selling Sharp's posters in screen-printed editions of 1000 to raise funds for the theatre. They are now highly sought after. Sharp saw his role as 'trying to tidy up and sort things out, and I think art is just about tidying up, really. And to tidy up you've got to make a mess, you know?'

In 1973, as the Nimrod's success grew, the company embarked on a shrewd campaign, involving Rupert Murdoch and Gough Whitlam among others, to fund a new home. It worked. The company created a larger, purpose-built theatre on a former tomato sauce factory site in Surry Hills, which they moved into in June 1974, 'still rough enough to encourage the revolution, but comfortable enough not to frighten the bourgeoisie', as critic Jeremy Eccles put it. The new space (known today as the Belvoir Street Theatre) had venues upstairs and downstairs, the lower level being home to more experimental theatre. At this time, the Nimrod was thriving. It was the beginning of a five-year golden period of home-grown, socially informed performance, and arresting poster art.

By 1979 it seemed some of Nimrod's freshness and energy was starting to wane. The established theatre company in Sydney, The Old Tote, had dissolved. The Nimrod believed it was best positioned to take its place and become the city's main theatre company. The New South Wales Government had other ideas, however, and financed the creation of the Sydney Theatre Company. Nimrod's John Bell, Ken Horler and Richard Wherrett all applied to be its first artistic director. Wherrett got the job. This period also saw Horler ousted from the company he had started. Some of the magic on stage was also beginning to fade. Meanwhile, the burgeoning Sydney Theatre Company went from strength to strength.

In 1984, the Nimrod sold its Surry Hills theatre and moved to the larger Seymour Centre Theatre, connected to the University of Sydney. Despite staging more ambitious productions of the classics, revenue declined. The move back to



From top:
Poster for *Young Mo*, 1978, screenprint, by Martin Sharp

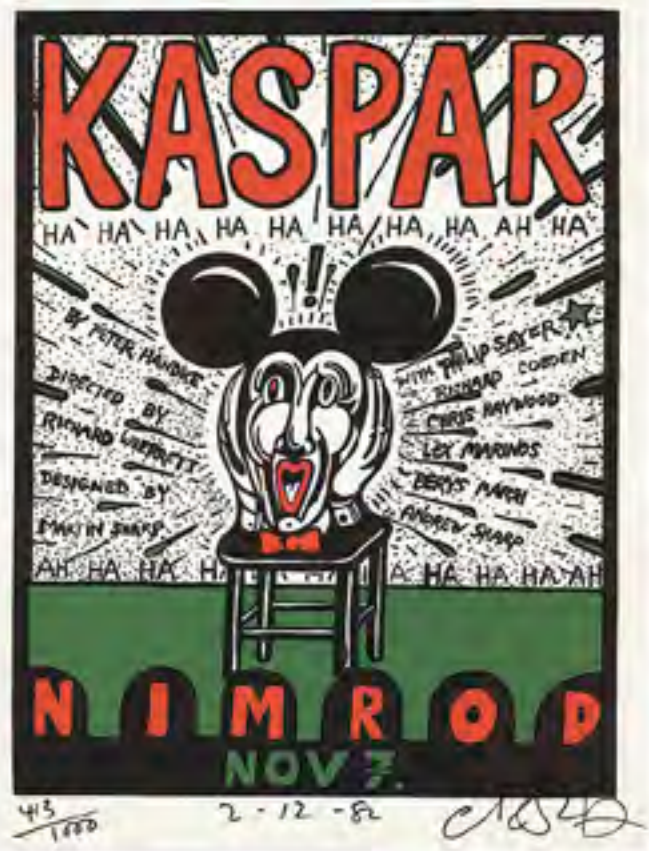
Poster for *Kold Komfort Kaffee*, 1979 (printed 1982), screenprint, by Martin Sharp

the university where it had all started proved to be the end — the Nimrod Theatre folded in 1988. Like many of the alternative artistic collectives that sprang up in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the issues that prompted its existence had evolved and changed. The once-radical student founders were now the established artists who controlled contemporary Australian theatre.

Across its 18 years, Nimrod produced more than 100 new Australian plays. The original venue in Nimrod Street, Darlinghurst, is now called The Stables and is home to the equally progressive Griffin Theatre Company, celebrating its 45th year in 2024, which produces new Australian plays with an emphasis on Indigenous playwrights and stories. The Griffin is in the process of finalising the funding to renovate the space, little changed since the Nimrod days.

Nimrod poster art is being discovered by a new generation of artists and designers looking to embrace printmaking and harness the power of socially relevant graphics. Exhibitions like the 2019 National Art School's *Paper Tigers: Posters from Sydney's Long 70s* showcase this unique period, and the art that defined it. The Nimrod posters are a key part of a recognisable 1970s and 1980s aesthetic, and an important part of the Library's collections. Today, art and graphics students in Australia and beyond are reconnecting with traditional craft and discovering the simple immediacy of printmaking. This supports the rebirth of counterculture zines and street art. The Nimrod posters serve as a timely reminder of the powerful role art can play in speaking to, and for, a generation.

Michael O'Shea is a Sydney-born designer, writer and lecturer at the University of Edinburgh.



Top right: Poster for *Kaspar*, 1973 (printed 1982), screenprint, by Martin Sharp

Bottom right: Poster for *Ginge's Last Stand?*, 1975 (printed 1982), screenprint, by Martin Sharp

Opposite: Poster for *The Roy Murphy Show* and *Custom and Excise*, 1971, offset lithography, by Tony McGillick

NIMROD STREET THEATRE

★ PRESENTS ★

2 FOR THE PRICE OF 1

by ALEX BUZO

DIRECTED BY:- RICHARD WHERRETT

by JACK HIBBERD

DIRECTED BY:- KEN HORLER

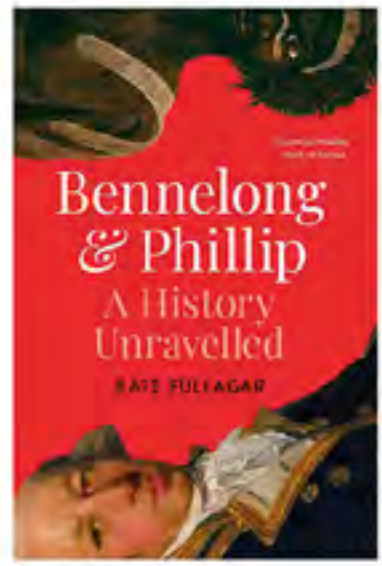
8 p.m. mon.-sat. July 1st.

BOOKINGS: D.J.s, MITCHELLS OR THEATRE 31-3754

Bennelong and Phillip

Portrait of Bennilong; a native of New Holland, who after experiencing for two years the Luxuries of England, returned to his own Country and resumed all his savage Habits.

WORDS **Kate Fullagar**



When a book about a historical failed conciliation appears in the same month that Australia rejected the Voice referendum, the author's approach of reversing through history becomes more relevant than ever.

Defeated. It bothered me, the choice of word the Australian Broadcasting Commission used when announcing the result of the Voice referendum. Dragons are defeated. Demons. Enemies. What happened on 14 October 2023 was, instead, a rejection. Indigenous leaders, supported by an unprecedented majority of First Nations people, had offered an invitation to Australia to recognise the prior and continuing existence of its Indigenous population through the constitutional enshrinement of an Indigenous advisory body to parliament. Three out of every five Australians voted no.

My book about Wangal negotiator Bennelong and inaugural colonial governor Phillip — figures often thought to be Australia's founding conciliators — had come out ten days earlier. I never expected the two events to converge. I had assumed that the referendum would occur earlier than it did and that my book would appear afterwards. I had miscalculated the acuity of the Albanese government to capitalise on its election victory, as well as the efficiency of Simon & Schuster's publishing team. The publication of *Bennelong & Phillip: A History Unravelled* thus gave me a small, unforeseen window in which to help advocate a 'Yes' vote by explaining that the events described in my book began — and shaped — the fundamental inequality that we were now being asked to consider.

The efforts of Bennelong to secure recognition and peace for the Yiyura (Eora) — the first Indigenous people to face Britain's New South Wales colony — resembled those of Indigenous leaders today, who were demanding the same in the 21st-century settler-nation. The failure of Phillip to achieve a formal agreement between his colony and the Yiyura people has haunted the whole history of settler presence from his time to ours. That failure partly produced the unacknowledged dispossession, the untold violence and the ingrained discrimination that modern Australia continues to reckon with.

By early October 2023, the polls already told me that my efforts would be futile. Indeed, given Australia's long history of settlers confronting Indigenous priority, I should have known that any radical form of recognition was unlikely. Then again, one of the major points of *Bennelong & Phillip* was to try to think beyond inevitabilities; to try to regain a sense of the contingency — of the multiple possibilities — that surrounded Bennelong and Phillip's fateful relationship. No nation has ever achieved significant change by dealing only with what was likely. History is a crucial discipline not

Portrait of Bennilong, 180?, hand-coloured engraving, based on a sketch by WW (William Waterhouse). The title of the work continues: 'a native of New Holland, who after experiencing for two years the Luxuries of England, returned to his own Country and resumed all his savage Habits.'

because it teaches us about what *will* happen, but because it illuminates a vision of what *could* happen.

I tried to reinject this sense of contingency into the well-worn story of Australia's colonial foundation by narrating *Bennelong & Phillip* entirely in reverse. The book begins in the present and then trips backwards through the various posthumous memorialisations of the two men from our time back to theirs. It then details their funerals, deaths, final years and last battles, before narrating the year they spent together in London in 1793. Next, it covers the short period of détente between the settlers and the Yiyura from 1793 to 1790, their complicated agreement to confer as equals in 1790, before moving on to — or back to — their much more complicated meeting as captor and captive in 1789. The final chapters discuss the momentous decisions that led up to their initial meeting in Sydney Cove on Yiyura land, the men's earlier years, their births and, finally, their origins in blood and place.

Such a method suited the arguments I wanted to make about both men: primarily, to upturn their usual images in public consciousness. Phillip has mostly been seen as a benevolent, indeed 'enlightened' founding father of a modern, progressive nation. Opening the story with Phillip ensconced back in Britain, however, sets the scene for a new interpretation: we see that his first love was always the advancement of a conservative British Empire. In Phillip's latter years this took the reactionary form of defending Britain against the democratic forces of the French Revolution; it also meant serving in Britain's navy to consolidate imperial power in India and the Americas.

Seeing Phillip this way reminds us that the establishment of New South Wales in 1788 was less the start of a separate liberal nation than the effect of an escalating, oppressive superpower. Seeing Australian foundation as such provokes reconsideration of when, exactly, the country might be said to have decolonised? How much of the imperial past has carried through to the present?

If Bennelong stands for anything in Australian history, perhaps it should not be tragedy but, instead, mutable political agency.

Bennelong, meanwhile, has been seen as an important but tragic figure. While his skills as a mediator with the newcomers have been celebrated over centuries, he is usually thought to have ended up a lost man, caught between two worlds, never to belong properly to either. For too long Bennelong has served as a morality tale about the fate of Aboriginal people under colonial regimes. Sometimes regarded as apt, at other times regrettable, it is a fate that almost always has been considered certain. My book, however, starts with details about Bennelong's last 17 years of life. So often these years have been compressed into a grim little line about alcohol and loss but, in reality, they were filled with customary battles, seasonal ceremonies, new wives, new friends and new children.

Beginning with a busy Bennelong surrounded by loving kin changes the way we read about his far briefer time spent negotiating with Phillip. We freshly understand him as a man who, in various ways over his lifetime, chose to protect his culture from intrusion. In later years he chose to do so by forsaking the colonists; earlier, he thought that engagement was the wiser course of action. If Bennelong stands for anything in Australian history, perhaps it should not be tragedy but, instead, mutable political agency. For having a complex yet consistently Indigenous-centred worldview. As a man who, in his own eyes, survived both his colonial travails and his sullied reputation.

Captain Arthur Phillip, 1787, oil, by Francis Wheatley

Telling a whole history in reverse was harder than I imagined. I worried about my use of tense. My editor worried about narrative suspense. We all worried about logic and clarity. The editing process thus took longer than usual — a good half-year, whereas I had expected it would take only a couple of months. We added a few aids for readers: a forwards timeline, short summaries at the start of each chapter, discussions sprinkled throughout about the benefits of the method at different points in the story. After reading some novels with reverse narration, such as Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, I decided to include a caveat that my emphasis was on 'plotting key events in roughly reverse order rather than on making time itself run backwards'. The word 'roughly' referred to the fact that each event contained forwards momentum. For example, I described Bennelong's two-day initiation into manhood in a forwards manner, but situated it after his first meeting with Phillip and before a discussion of his childhood.

I submitted the first draft of the book to my publisher in October 2022. Anthony Albanese's Labor government had come to power five months earlier. On election day, Albanese had placed at the top of his agenda his party's full commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which called for a First Nations Voice to parliament. I expected the referendum to be called any day, assuming that Labor would exploit the majority support that the initiative carried then. At the end of 2022 I believed that *Bennelong & Phillip* would appear in a changed, hopeful era characterised by interest in political negotiation and historical learning. Such a sequence would fit the ideal scenario imagined by the Uluru Statement: first, a legal Voice; then, and only because of the Voice, a forum for Treaty and a space for Truth.

Throughout the writing of the book I was of course conscious of my status as a non-Indigenous scholar. Being a historian of empire makes me especially aware of the ways that settler scholars have, for centuries, perpetuated colonial dominance by making Indigenous people their 'special subjects'. Seemingly innocent endeavours to study Indigenous culture have too readily dictated the parameters for knowledge about them. They have also silenced Indigenous airtime in the ensuing debates and become yet another form of control and authority over the colonised.

This problem, though, is not easily solved. Vacating the field risks leaving Indigenous history vulnerable, yet again, to displacement from the core of Australia's understanding about its past. The challenge of truth-telling for non-Indigenous historians is to integrate the presence of Indigenous actors more thoroughly, not less so, into our accounts of what has made us who we are. Consultation with Indigenous descendants helps to avoid the most egregious instances of talking-over and agenda-setting.

In the case of Bennelong, no direct descendants appear to exist. In their place, however, I talked with Indigenous knowledge-holders from both Bennelong's harbour region and elsewhere, learning about what the man meant to them, their families, and their aspirations for future understandings of the truth.

Naturally, each person had different and sometimes conflicting views. A significant example involved the decision to use the word Yiyura to define the Aboriginal people of today's Sydney Harbour. The Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation (DCAC) advised that Yiyura was better than Sydney's commonly used Eora to talk about the dozen or so clans that fringed the harbour shores in the eighteenth century. This suggestion aligned with what I'd read in the eyewitness accounts, which often included two separate vowel sounds in the word, not one, and frequently spelt 'E' as 'Yee'. Even so, I sensed that the DCAC preferred I not use the term at all, since technically it means 'the people from here', which is how Bennelong's countrymen described themselves to the colonists when asked, 'Who are you?' As such, Yiyura, even while perhaps more accurate than Eora, still carries a lot of illogical colonial baggage. Other Aboriginal scholars, however, objected to using the broader term Darug to describe the roughly 30 clans who spoke the Darug language around the harbour in Bennelong's day, because no one identified themselves then in linguistic terms. My choice to go with Yiyura possibly managed to annoy everyone, but it was made in good faith and with the full expectation that it will — like all artefacts of history — one day seem archaic.

I did the bulk of my research under tricky pandemic conditions, though prior digitisation efforts in the Anglo world — especially of eighteenth-century sources — helped enormously. In between lockdowns I was delighted to see key touchstones for the story of Bennelong and Phillip in the State Library of NSW, including the original sketch made of Bennelong in London in 1793 and portraits that have been alleged to be of a young Phillip and his first wife, Charlott, painted in 1764.

That said, I had been thinking and learning about Bennelong and Phillip for 20 years before I wrote about them, and since 2018 had contemplated the pros and cons of reversing their joint story. In 2017, the Uluru Statement prompted me to imagine the story's recovery as a contribution to truth-telling. Since around 2001, when I had embarked on my doctoral dissertation about eighteenth-century Indigenous–settler relationships (and in which Bennelong and Phillip played walk-on parts), I had come to see them as grossly misunderstood figures not only in Australian history, but in imperial and global histories as well.

In 2000, we witnessed the extraordinary People's Walk for Reconciliation, when a quarter of a million Australians walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge to signal their support for Indigenous equality. Many assumed that this moment would trigger rolling reforms in Australian society and culture. They thought that the now irrefutable recognition of Indigenous disadvantage since 1788 would have to result in structural changes.

Turned out, the goodwill of 2000 faltered quickly. Now, again, the momentum for a Voice in 2023 has faltered. While Indigenous leaders reconsider their tactics — just as Bennelong did after Phillip's failures — non-Indigenous Australians have another chance to ponder the unravelling implications of all we have inherited from the first settlers. The history of the relationship of Bennelong and Phillip reveals much about deep national wounds, obstacles and imperatives.

Professor Kate Fullagar FAHA is Professor of History at Australian Catholic University. Her book *The Warrior, the Voyager, and the Artist: Three Lives in the Age of Empire*, published by Yale University Press in 2020, won the 2021 Douglas Stewart Literary Prize for Non-Fiction, the 2020 NSW Premier's Prize for General History and was shortlisted for the James Tait Black Biography Prize in the UK in 2021. *Bennelong & Phillip: A History Unravelled* was published by Simon & Schuster in 2023.

Taking of Colbee & Benalon. 25 Novr 1789, by William Bradley, from his journal 'A Voyage to New South Wales', c 1802

Having experienced a very favorable voyage from England we arrived at Botany Bay on the 20th of January last where we expected to lay a foundation for a Colony but I am sorry to say the Country for several miles round the bay does not afford a spot large enough for a Cabbage Garden fit for Cultivation the bay itself is beautifull & Capacious but open to the South East winds which prevail there at a certain season it is surrounded with Rocks and Hills & Woods all which are Covered so thick as you can possibly imagine with trees & underwood you may easily suppose our disappointment was great in not meeting with a more eligible spot for a Settlement however during our detention his Excellency the Governor explored the Coast to the northward & in a few days returned with the pleasing account of having discovered the finest harbor in the World viz Port Jackson so named by Capt Cooke on the following morning we quitted Botany bay with pleasure & anchored in this Cove Harbour in the Evening of the same day.

Port Jackson is without doubt the finest Harbour in the known World it extends three Miles into the Country forms a beautiful Cove on each side with deep water everywhere for Ships of the largest size then Sidney Cove which is the Seat of Government then to the Entrance of the Harbour, the Country all round the Shores is similar to that of Botany bay only more Rocky some few

WORDS **Matthew Fishburn**

The transcription and digitisation of Sir Joseph Banks's papers has revealed something of the private life of John White, First Fleet surgeon.

One of the central figures of the First Fleet was chief surgeon John White. He was a well-connected and skilful medical practitioner who lived at the hospital on the western shores of Warrane (Sydney Cove) for more than six years, longer than many among the senior staff originally sent out to Botany Bay. The strain of his work was relentless, especially after the arrival of the appalling Second Fleet, when more than 500 seriously ill convicts overwhelmed his small prefab and timber hospital complex.

By 1792, White was pleading to be relieved. When he was finally allowed home on leave two years later, he never seriously contemplated returning. He left behind his de facto partner, the Second Fleet convict Rachel Turner, although he always recognised their son Andrew Douglas White, who was born in 1793 and went to school in England. He joined the British Army with his father's support, later fighting at Waterloo.

In Sydney, White clearly took consolation in his many rambles in the bush, not least because he was determined to collect almost industrial quantities of the local flora and fauna for his patrons in England. An enormous part of this project involved him supervising the creation of hundreds of watercolours in his private studio. This was a major undertaking: the hard-worked convict artist Thomas Watling, pressed into his service after he arrived in late 1792, was disheartened by the workload, reviling White as 'a very mercenary sordid person'.

White's dedication to collecting did lead directly to one of the most important First Fleet accounts, his *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (1790). Illustrated with plates by Sarah Stone and others, the book is a landmark work of Australian natural history, especially its exquisite hand-coloured edition. By turns wry and haughty, it recounts his voyage out and the first ten months of the settlement, somewhat edited and cleaned up before publication in London. None of the original manuscripts have survived.

The loss of most of White's papers makes it all the more remarkable that a transcript of one of his letters has been hidden in plain sight for more than a century in the Library's Sir Joseph Banks Papers. This letter has hitherto been catalogued

Above: Miniature portrait of Surgeon-General John White, 1792, by Thomas Watling. Courtesy National Museum of Australia

Opposite, background: John White's letter dated 17 November 1788, transcribed by Joseph Banks. Note the dramatic underlining. From Sir Joseph Banks Papers, 1767–1822. Series 35.05

Inset: Illustration by Sarah Stone from John White's *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (detail)

as an 'extract' from White's published *Journal*, but it is very clearly a private letter to an unknown recipient dated Sydney, 18 November 1788, transcribed by Banks in his unruly hand.

The letter has a markedly bitter and downcast tone quite unlike anything in his *Journal*. It starts with a scathing comment on how the proposed site of the settlement at Botany Bay had proven to be completely uninhabitable — a barren landscape with not even a 'spot large enough for a Cabbage Garden fit for Cultivation'. White adds his opinion that Port Jackson, while admittedly a beautiful harbour, had a difficult ground for ships. Supplies were scarce or inferior, the situation too remote, rations short.

More alarmingly for a medical man, the fresh water supply was doubtful. White described it as little more than overflow from the 'swamps' to the south of the settlement and therefore the source of 'many complaints such as dysenteries & worms,' which, by inference, White must have had to treat in his makeshift hospital. All of this, he continued in one of the most significant passages, was taking place against the backdrop of tenacious and violent resistance from the local tribes, who 'have murthered several of the convicts & one Marine besides wounding many more'.

This was the unvarnished opinion of a senior figure in government and is a trenchant denunciation of the whole project. It was White's opinion that every 'gentleman', barring two or three, sincerely wished that 'the expedition may be recalled'.

The tone is so frank that it must have been written to someone on whom White thought he could rely for discretion. Whomever the recipient was, White would likely not have thanked them for forwarding it to Banks, who was not a tremendous enthusiast for blunt criticism from his social

inferiors. Banks certainly kept a wary eye on him, and although he subscribed for a copy of White's book (now held in the British Library), it is clear that he was keeping the surgeon at arm's length.

The letter can now also be compared with another rediscovery, a letter White wrote the very next day, 19 November 1788, to the philosopher and prison reformer Jeremy Bentham. Recently transcribed for the Bentham Papers at University College London, this letter dramatically confirms White's strident dislike for the colony, writing, 'as this is only for your private reading, I will freely tell you that I have been from one extreme of North America to the other, through all the West India Islands on the Mosquito Shore and other parts of the Spanish Main, and in the course of my peregrinations I never saw so unpromising miserable a Country as this is.'

White's privately expressed pessimism would have a significant echo in a much later letter he sent to another contact in London, which was so explosive it was printed in one of the opposition newspapers. Dated from Sydney, 17 April 1790, it proves that White's opinion only hardened as the privations of life in the colony after the wreck of the *Sirius* really took hold. He was living, he said, in 'a country and place so forbidden and so hateful, as only to merit execrations and curses'. Once again, Banks took a cutting for his archive.

Taken together, the letters show that in private, White was vitriolic about the settlement from the very beginning; little wonder that he had no hope of ever publishing his long-mooted second book.

Matthew Fishburn is a Sydney-based writer and rare book dealer.

Fullest early view of the hospital complex where John White lived. *View of Sydney Cove*, 1794, possibly by Thomas Watling

Inset: Illustration by Sarah Stone from John White's *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (detail)

WORDS **Lee Kofman**

The library that made me

Until I turned 13 and my hormones kicked in, and I discovered boys and such libidinal ambitions as art, my wettest dream for my adult future was to become a librarian.

The roots of that dream were planted in the soil of Odessa — then a part of the Soviet empire — where I spent my childhood. Like everywhere in the Soviet Union, Odessa's residential buildings were old and crumbly to the point of danger, or new and grey-rectangular ugly. Public spaces, however, were palatial, to gaslight the citizens into believing that, as our ubiquitous placards said, we were living in paradise on earth. My local library was no different. High ceilings, polished parquet floors, a chandelier or two. I'd go to the nearby clinic to receive injections or do check-ups — I was a sickly child, afflicted by more conditions than is feasible to describe here. Afterwards, as a treat, I would stay in the library for hours, often instead of going to school.

The library's ordered, serene glamour, with its self-contained patrons deep in books, and librarians quietly hovering around like fairy godmothers, stood in stark contrast to my chaotic homelife. There my baby brothers screamed, KGB officers lurked around surveilling my parents' dissident activities, and the daily stresses of poverty abounded. The library — unlike my home or school, where children were fond of calling me 'dirty Jew' — was my city of refuge. I walked its exotic streets, living alternate lives. I was a milady in a lice-ridden pretty wig, partaking in court intrigues as recounted by Alexandre Dumas. I was a wolf roaming the Canadian wilderness, courtesy of Jack London. I was whoever I wished to be but not a frail, timid, Jewish kid.

My choices for escape were abundant in a country where books were a natural habitat of the mind in the absence of other entertainment, and on account of their state-driven affordability. In the Soviet Union, even truck drivers habitually referred to Tolstoy. (I actually preferred their references to those of my teachers, who often divorced the texts from irony and stripped them down to bare Tolstoyan moralism.) However, the Soviet Union popularised books selectively — Tolstoy and Australia's own communist Katharine Susannah Prichard were in; George Orwell and Solzhenitsyn were banned. Much of the available literature was state-sponsored propaganda. The library's children's section was overridden with tales about Lenin as a child or adult; no matter his age, on the page the halo of sainthood hovered above him. And there were various versions of the defining Soviet children's story, that of another saint, Pavlik Morozov. Pavlik attained sacred status at the dawn of the revolution by dobbing in his *kulak* (wealthy peasant) father to the Red Army for hiding some wheat to avoid its confiscation. The father got shot. The son got canonised. Young readers were served his story endlessly — as an exemplary tale.

But I, the child of dissidents, who refused to join the ranks of pioneers at my school (this surely didn't help my non-existent popularity), brought a critical eye to the library's shelves. Plus, I had some privileges. To get more time away from school and home, I began volunteering in the library. I spent days breathing in the papery aroma of returned books while restoring them to their rightful places — the only *tikkun* (a correction of the world, in Judaism) that I felt I was able to make. In return, I could borrow as many books as I liked, including from the adult sections. It was there that the world opened up for me — Dumas, the humanism of Chekhov, naughty, sensual Guy de Maupassant ... I was learning to think for myself. And to dare.

My existence became so enmeshed with written words that it felt only natural to eventually start jotting down my own stories too. Just like the library, just like reading, writing afforded me an alternative space in which to fulfil my wishes for a freer, brighter life. But in my younger years I was still too shy to think of myself as a writer, so instead I dreamt of becoming a librarian.

In later years, after I turned teenager and my family was finally permitted to migrate to Israel, even after the hormones shook me upside down, I continued to visit libraries. But the brighter the lipsticks I now used became, the more my love affair with libraries paled. The fondness remained, but not the intensity of need. My dream was now to be a writer. And yet this dream, and its eventual realisation, might not have happened without those classics I once devoured in the grandeur of Odessa's library. Those books must be shimmering somewhere in the depths of my subconscious, like chandeliers. Because whatever I write, I am still discoursing with Chekhov. Whatever I write, I am still wearing a lice-ridden pretty wig.

Lee Kofman is a Melbourne-based author, writing mentor and teacher. Her books include *The Writer Laid Bare* (2022), *Imperfect* (2019) and *The Dangerous Bride* (2014).

Photo by Tizia May

The chips!

Chipped potatoes or potato straws

Peel and slice potatoes to desired dimensions. Use deep pan or saucepan, which should be about half full of cooking oil, pure beef dripping or a mixture of both. On no account use mutton fat. Heat oil until blue smoke arises before putting in the chips. Take care for they will boil over if too many are put in at once. When the chips float to the surface they are cooked.

Photo by Joy Lai

WORDS **Alice Tonkinson**

Who knows who we have to thank for first discovering that a potato could be sliced into almost-translucent rounds and then fried. We do know that Australia was introduced to the potato chip in 1931, or the potato crisp as they were initially called. Having established a business in the United Kingdom, Frank Smith — along with associate George Ensor — set up the Smith's Potato Crisps factory on Hutchinson Street, Surry Hills, equipped with 20 gas-fired cooking pots. Crisps were hand-packed into greaseproof bags and sold with a sachet of salt known as a 'twist' — in those days it was the consumer's job to apply seasoning.

Smith's Crisps were first marketed as a nutritious snack, suitable for any diet. This, allegedly, was thanks to them being cooked in pure vegetable oil, so that any fattening starch was extracted, leaving only complete nourishment. By the time I was growing up some 60 years later, supermarket shelves jostled with different brands and (pre-seasoned) flavours and no one was under any illusions about the health properties of chips.

My childhood delight at finding a miniature packet of chips inside my lunchbox has never quite left me. I feel it now when someone returns from the bar with a round of drinks and some chips bought on impulse to be shared, its foil packet ripped apart to make a platter for this perfect banquet. I am not silent about this love and once lamented to a friend that a favourite flavour of my youth — Kettle's Honey-baked Ham — had been discontinued. Two years later my friend returned from a holiday with a surprise souvenir for me, M&S Honey Roast Ham, an identically flavoured English equivalent. It remains one of the most thoughtful and precious gifts I've ever received.

The only time I have ever had reason to question my enduring affection for chips was when I read *The Gastronomical Me* by American food writer MFK Fisher, first published in 1943. It was a complete revelation to me. Using food as the lens for memoir, Fisher traces her childhood in America, her move to Europe in her early 20s, two marriages and widowhood. Food is never discussed frivolously but as a great signifier of who we are and how we connect to the people around us. It gives voice to our emotional lives.

Two paragraphs in particular got under my skin. Fisher describes travelling with her first husband through Strasbourg, France, in the early 1930s. Seated in large leather armchairs in a taproom beneath a restaurant, the couple are served a bowl of chips:

> not the uniformly thin uniformly golden ones that come out of waxed bags here at home, but light and dark, thick and paper-thin, fried in real butter and then salted casually …
>
> They were so good that I ate them with the kind of slow sensuous concentration that pregnant women are supposed to feel for chocolate-cake-at-three-in-the-morning. I suppose I should be ashamed to admit that I drank two or three glasses of red port in the same strange orgy of enjoyment. It seems impossible, but the fact remains that it was one of the keenest gastronomic moments of my life.

I had only ever known uniform ultra-processed chips and became haunted by what I might be missing out on. So I set out to determine if, 90 years later in Sydney, I could recreate the chips Fisher ate in Strasbourg. In the Library's cookbook collection I found just what I was looking for: *50 New Ways to Cook Potatoes*, a booklet produced in 1944 by the Potato Marketing Board of Tasmania. This versatile recipe could be used for crisps, matchstick fries or thick-cut hot chips.

Unsure about which type of potato to use, I did a bit of extra research. In her 1995 book *Potatoes: The Australian Kitchen*, Barbara Beckett identifies the sebago as a suitable frying potato. I used a mandoline at its finest setting to slice some. Beckett recommends soaking the slices in water and thoroughly drying them before frying to remove some of the starch, advice I also adhered to. I used a large stockpot filled to about halfway with vegetable oil (a nod to those early Smith's Crisps) and 250 grams of salted butter. My chips floated to the surface immediately so this, clearly, was no indication that they were cooked. I waited until they started turning golden and removed them with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels. Then I placed them in a bowl and did my best to sprinkle them 'casually' with flakes of sea salt.

In my tiny kitchen on a summer afternoon, I couldn't quite stomach the three glasses of port that Fisher consumed with her chips. I opted for a very cold gin martini instead. Truly, I slipped into the trance-like state Fisher described, eating one chip after the other until there were barely any left. But was this one of the keenest gastronomic moments of my life? No. As delicious as they were, they couldn't ever surpass that packet of M&S Honey Roast Ham. But I think Fisher herself would have appreciated this.


EX LIBRIS
Ella Dwyer

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WORDS **Alice Tonkinson**

The bookplates of Ella Dwyer

For nearly as long as books have been printed, bookplates have accompanied them. In fifteenth-century Europe, books were precious, luxurious items, and these small printed paper labels affixed to the inside front cover or front flyleaf served to indicate who the book's owner was. Bookplates are also known by the Latin term *ex libris*, which translates as 'from the books of'.

As bookplates are custom-made items that identify a particular person's property, it is not surprising that over the centuries the engravers and artists who have designed bookplates have been notably creative. A bookplate might express an owner's status and identity by depicting their hobbies, values, profession or achievements through a variety of visual symbols. It might show their home, a favourite landscape or even a beloved pet. Thus they are not only miniature works of art but can be miniature biographies too. While it is possible to appreciate their technical proficiency, if there are no records explaining their subject matter and symbolism it can be hard to truly grasp their meaning.

Hobart-born, Sydney-based artist Ella Dwyer (1887–1979) was renowned as one of Australia's most talented bookplate designers. Her bookplates were admired for her dreamy compositions and the gossamer lightness of her etchings. Though her work has appeared in publications and exhibitions in Australia and overseas, little has been written about her life and career. A recent project to organise and rehouse the Library's collection of the Dwyer Family Papers has shed light on her artistic practice and the stories behind her bookplates.

The Dwyer family was evidently a creative one. George Lovell Dwyer, her father, was a music critic and journalist. Her sister Vera, to whom she would remain close throughout her life, was

Ella Dwyer's own bookplate (opposite and above right), and the plate (above left) from which it was printed, 1935

Above, from left: Frida Linz's bookplate, 1931, by Ella Dwyer

David H Graham's bookplate, 1950, by Ella Dwyer

Johannes Carl Andersen's bookplate, 1941, by Ella Dwyer

Opposite: Tinted portrait of Ella Dwyer, from the Dwyer Family Papers

a novelist. To pursue her interest in art, Dwyer trained in etching under artist Sydney Long. Decades later in a letter written to Mitchell Librarian Suzanne Mourot, she would recall, 'He was a wonderful teacher in that he was so unrestrictive and from the first gave one such confidence in one's own ability.' Long, who is best remembered for his Art Nouveau–style paintings of the Australian bush, was also a talented bookplate designer. Perhaps it was he who introduced Dwyer to creating what would become her speciality.

Dwyer worked from a studio equipped with a printing press in her home in Roseville on Sydney's North Shore. Typically, her etchings were made on copper plates, and many of these became the property of the individual who had requested the bookplate. She would print a limited number of artist proof editions, heating the plate and hand-wiping it for each proof, before relinquishing the plate.

Dwyer often sought to create a harmony between the bookplate and the genre of book it was going to be affixed to. For Frida Linz, for example, who enjoyed reading folklore and fairy tales, Dwyer depicted a dryad surrounded by birds, a scene that symbolised the companionship that books bring to a reader.

Reading through Dwyer's correspondence, it's clear that most of her bookplates were more than transactional commissions. She developed deep friendships with many of the people she created bookplates for. In 1950, after visiting New Zealand marine biologist David H Graham, Dwyer designed a plate for him that reflected his passion for Wedgwood. She included a remarque, a small meaningful detail on the margin, which is removed from the plate entirely after a small number of prints have been made. For Graham's bookplate it was a cup and saucer, in remembrance of a cup of tea they shared.

Dwyer also had a deep friendship with Johannes Carl Andersen, poet and inaugural librarian of the Alexander Turnbull Library. Andersen sent her letters that included photographs of his garden and pressed petals, enclosed in envelopes embellished with cut-out images of flowers. Dwyer created a bookplate for him that captured his love of poetry and flora.

It features a musical line from a sixteenth-century poem written on the pages of an open book that is nestled in a garden bed: 'I pipe of plants, I sing of summer flowers.'

In appreciation of the imaginative quality of the bookplates she created, Andersen once told Dwyer that her inspiration must come from secluding herself in a bower of irises. Dwyer responded by etching a tiny bower on metal, that showed a figure reading under the shade of towering iris flowers. It was a testament to friendship, creativity and the companionship of books.

Ella Dwyer's bookplates, printing plates, photographs and family papers are held by the State Library of NSW. A selection of her work is on display in the Library's Amaze Gallery from 16 March.

Alice Tonkinson is a Librarian in Acquisition Curation and Collection.


OURS TO MAINTAIN.
8 HOURS
LABOR
ADVANCE AUSTRALIA
RECREATION
REST

WORDS **Sean Scalmer**

THE 'SACRED GIFT OF TIME'

The quest to strike a balance between work and life is not new.

'Too tired after work to do anything but fall asleep … Treated as nothing but a machine: ever working, resting never … Deprived of freedom … Expected to keep on until one's oils and machinery run dry, and you stop forever.'

The phrase 'work–life balance' emerged in the late 1990s. In 2001 Prime Minister John Howard defined the push and pull between work and family life as a 'barbeque stopper'. The language may be novel, but the quest to rebalance work and life has a long history. The title of this article, and the quote above, are taken from speeches, letters and essays from the nineteenth century.

The battle over working time has a venerable and fascinating history. Rediscovering that history through the collections of the State Library of NSW — as I did as the Library's most recent Coral Thomas Fellow — provides unexpected insights into the persistence of this major social problem and the ways Australians have sought to solve it. It also offers clues as to possible futures.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, Australians vigorously sought a fair day's work and a fair day's pay. The existence of a campaign for an eight-hour day is well known and rightly celebrated. But the breadth of that movement is not widely understood.

Famously, Melbourne stonemasons achieved an eight-hour day in 1856. This was a victory shared by members of the local building trades — bricklayers, carpenters, and so on — but it extended beyond them only with difficulty. Some tradesmen, such as coachmakers, won the eight-hour standard only to lose it later. Others lacked the industrial or political power to win their demand. On the cusp of the 1870s, the president of the National Short Hours League admitted that he was 'sorry that the movement had not progressed more'.

The Eight Hours Banner of the Labor Council of NSW. The prominence of the three 'eights' (Labor, Recreation and Rest) is striking, as are the nationalist symbols. Courtesy of Unions NSW


THE
EIGHT-HOUR DEMONSTRATION COMMITTEE
Will Celebrate The
29TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE
Eight-Hour System,
IN NEW SOUTH WALES,
On MONDAY, 6th OCT., 1884,
BY A
GRAND PROCESSION OF THE VARIOUS SOCIETIES
PARRAMATTA PARK,
The Best and Most Extensive Pleasure Grounds in the Colony.
THE HON. THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
ART UNION DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZES.
Running, Walking Go-as-you-please, Hurdle Racing, Jumping, Bicycle Racing, Quoiting, Cricket, Football, &c. &c.
DANCING in the two Spacious Pavilions with Good Music and Competent M.C.'s
Toys will be distributed among the Children on a new principle.
Trains will leave Redfern Station every 15 minutes from 9.15 a.m. until 12.30 p.m.,
Returning at 3.30 p.m. every 15 minutes until 7 o'clock.
AN ABUNDANCE OF HOT AND COLD WATER SUPPLIED.
FARES:
TWO SHILLINGS (2/-) RETURN.
WILLIAM FERRIER, Secretary.

An advertisement for an Eight-Hour System celebration in Sydney, 1884. Note the extensive range of planned activities: a procession, sports, dancing, and art union prizes. Courtesy of Unions NSW

The annual 'eight-hour day' march provides an index of the movement's interrupted growth, because trade union members were only permitted to join the procession once they had achieved the eight-hour standard. In 1856, members of eight trade unions joined the Melbourne march; in 1859 there were 11; and in 1875, numbers had grown to 17. The campaign won greater success from this point onwards: in 1885, 34 unions marched, and by 1891, 60 unions had secured an eight-hour day. Close observers suggested at the time that around three-quarters of the workforce were employed under the standard.

Melbourne was unquestionably the vanguard of the movement — elsewhere the progress was much slower. A strike to win an eight-hour day for Sydney ironworkers in 1861, for example, failed spectacularly, seriously retarding the campaign for the next decade. As late as 1883, only 10 trade societies took part in Sydney's eight-hour day celebrations. Adelaide was little more advanced, with 14 unions on the march in that same year, while in Brisbane only 400 labourers and mechanics joined in the annual procession at this time. Perth lagged further behind: the first public meeting to establish an Eight Hours Association was not organised until 1886.

As this uneven advance implies, victories were won with difficulty and only through committed and creative struggle. Workers formed new unions to push for the eight-hour day. They also formed broader industrial and political organisations to cooperate and support each other and advance the campaign: a succession of Eight Hours, Shorter Hours, and Early Closing Associations, Trades Hall and Eight Hours Anniversary Committees. These organisations proclaimed their intention to work no more than eight hours and acted on that commitment, sometimes undertaking strikes to enforce their demands.

Much of the campaign went beyond strictly industrial action. Workers launched widespread efforts to convince their fellow citizens that eight hours should be a universal standard. They expressed their views through letters to the editor, poems, songs, speeches, pamphlets, banners and essays. They explained that they sought an eight-hour day not as a privilege, but as a human right. They argued that excessive hours robbed them of their humanity. They contended that if liberated from work they would, for the first time, have an opportunity to fully explore the possibilities of a rounded human existence: learning and self-education, participation in self-government, the cultivation of rich relations with family and friends. This was, as one unionist explained, the 'sacred gift of time'. It promised a new mode of life, a new dignity.

... by 1891, 60 unions had secured an eight-hour day. Close observers suggested at the time that around three-quarters of the workforce were employed under the standard.

Annual eight-hour day marches formed a central element of this cultural struggle. On this date, those who enjoyed the standard refused to continue with their work. They gathered to celebrate their victories and rededicate themselves to the cause. Through public celebrations of their victory, unionists affirmed their deep attachment to the standard. By arresting the usual rhythms of city life, they demonstrated the power of uniting and the possibility of opposing the dictates of employers. The day began with a procession of unionists, massed into the ranks of their chosen trades. They bore banners that depicted the skills of their calling and the value of their labours. At the termination of the procession they gathered for a carnival or fete with a sports program, musical performances, theatre, sideshow stalls, rides, banqueting and dancing into the night. This day of celebration itself demonstrated the joys of life beyond work. It drew thousands, and later tens of thousands, onto colonial streets.

Direct political campaigning reinforced the message. Advocates of reduced hours held large public meetings and debates. They organised petition drives and led deputations to government. They intervened in election campaigns and extracted promises, demanded commissions of inquiry into industries associated with longer hours and pressured governments to take action. In response, politicians in several colonies repeatedly presented 'eight hours' bills to parliament.

This strategy was not immediately successful: no law mandating an eight-hour day across the economy passed until the early twentieth century. But relentless pressure forced governments to pass legislation limiting hours for certain industries — such as mining, and shop work — and certain workers, including female and younger workers. Such pressure also forced municipal and shire councils, and departments of colonial governments, to implement an eight-hour day for nearly all of their employees. This was often extended to private employers contracted to deliver work for governments, such as the builders of roads and rail. Step-by-step, the standard spread across occupations and areas. Each gain imposed greater political and industrial pressure on those outliers yet to implement an eight-hour day. It also demonstrated that employers could afford to concede workers' claims.

The campaign claimed universality, but remained sharply defined by race and gender. Eight hours was upraised as a 'white' standard and a means of racial differentiation. White campaigners explicitly associated Chinese workers with longer hours, although they exaggerated the extremity of their working conditions. They made no effort to support the campaigns of Chinese workers, but presented them as a threat and promoted the stamping and boycotting of Chinese-made goods. At a celebratory eight-hour banquet in Melbourne in 1888, the Chair answered the 'leading toast' with a warning: 'There was one thing — and only one thing — which threatened to subvert the eight hours principle, and that was the presence of the Mongolian amongst us.'

Racism extended to Pacific Islanders and First Nations peoples as well. Members celebrated the expulsion of Pacific Islanders from Australia so as to ensure white labour in the sugar industry. This became a theme of early-twentieth-century processions, when sugar workers and confectioners dressed in all white, held white milk pails and distributed

white lollies. The trade union movement showed no interest in the conditions faced by Aboriginal workers. Its propaganda tended to mock and humiliate Aboriginal people, presenting them as backward and incapable of productive labour. It would take many decades for these matters to be addressed, and for the eight-hour day campaign to lose its connection with white workers and the White Australia policy.

Though clearly racially discriminatory, the movement did not overtly discriminate against female employees. It supported the strike action of female unionists, such as Melbourne's tailoresses. It also campaigned for legislation to protect female factory workers.

Notwithstanding these important efforts, the movement's fundamental understanding of work and life reflected a masculinist worldview. Its famed slogan imagined 'Eight Hours Labour, Eight Hours Recreation, Eight Hours Rest'. The mathematics of this implied that once paid work for an employer had been completed, there was no need for further exertion. It was as if household labour did not exist: no meals to prepare, houses to clean, children to raise or elders needing care.

Those colonial newspapers that survive show that this failure to consider domestic labour is not a recent revelation that we have imposed on an earlier time. On the contrary, the point was made by women during the nineteenth century whenever they gained access to the public sphere. In an 1861 speech, reformer Caroline Chisholm explained that the long hours worked in shops were a direct reflection of the unequal labours of the home. While the husband expected his wife to care for children, tend the house and cook the tea, she would only have time to do the shopping after he was fed. Relief for the shop worker could therefore only be secured by a reconsideration of the domestic sphere. She said, 'The Early Closing Movement should be made the home question.'

In November 1890, writer and activist Louisa Lawson made this point more strongly in an editorial, 'The Strike Question', in her feminist newspaper *The Dawn*. She pointed out that:

> The wife's hours of work have no limit. All day the house and at night the children. There is no woman's eight-hour demonstration ... the wife has no time to think of her own life and development, she has no money to spend ...
>
> If men demanding rights and liberties would grant the same to their wives, and demand as much for all women, we might begin to flatter ourselves on our civilisation. But this men do not do, and as for women, they have no unions, no organisers, no speakers, no meeting halls, and no newspapers to represent their claims publicly and justly.

Her words echo across the decades. Though the struggle for the eight-hour day helped to win male employees the 'sacred gift of time', it did not confront the problem of household labour, the caring work that gives us life. Women of the nineteenth century did not win freedom from the realm of work. Contemporary tensions around the work–life balance, as well as extensive statistical research, show that most women still suffer from this inequity.

The history of the struggle over working time shows how collective campaigns might reshape the world of work and win a greater freedom for all. This battle is far from complete. Perhaps the next focus will be the four-day week?

Sean Scalmer is Professor of Australian History at the University of Melbourne. His book *On the Stump: Campaign Oratory and Democracy in the United States, Britain, and Australia* won the General Prize in the 2018 NSW Premier's History Awards. He was the Library's 2022–23 Coral Thomas Fellow.

The Eight-Hour Day procession in Sydney, 1909. These typically drew tens of thousands to the city streets. Courtesy of Unions NSW

ARTICLE

WORDS **Megan Hicks**
ILLUSTRATION **Astred Hicks**

The book we are reading does not remain still in our hands. After turning the right page over so that it becomes the left page we shift the book slightly upwards. Upwards, yes.

Claire-Louise Bennett, *Checkout 19* (2021)

Reading a novel is a highly physical activity. The way the reader holds their body. The way they hold the book. How they perch their glasses. Mouth the words. Lick their fingers. Turn the page. Even more animated are the readers of books with writing *and* graphics.

There are the dabblers and dippers, the skippers and hoppers, and those who forge a path directly from front cover to back. Hands-on cookbook readers mark their place with floury fingers. Armchair gardeners smooth the glossy pages, the better to adore herbaceous borders. Lifestyle seekers catch aspirational snatches between their mundane daily obligations. Little readers scramble back again and again to their favourite passages and pictures. Hungry teens devour chunks of words and food simultaneously. Questing students seek out treasures in their textbooks and flag them with sticky notes. Little do any of these readers realise that their actions are guided by the unseen intervention of the book's designer.

The book designer operates in a milieu constrained by strict coordinates, recto and verso, right and left. In this 'rectoverse' there is no even-handedness. The right-hand page is mighty, the left is the lesser, bound by publishing conventions. Even with the oddness of its numbering, dominant recto lays claim to covers, title pages, chapter openers and dog ears. The right-hand side beckons the eye when a book is opened. It is the field where text and graphics compete for the upper hand.

What's more, the rectoverse is riddled with arcane publishing zombies that can cramp — or challenge — a book designer's style. Widows, orphans, front matter, body matter, running heads and bleeds, along with gutters, margins and the more involved mysteries of typography. But the greatest obstacles and incentives to the designer's creativity are commercial imperatives, that is, the deadline and budget set by the publisher.

Into this gridded rectoverse the book designer brings more than the manuscript. She bears a remit to connect author, illustrator and reader. Her imagination tingles with possibilities. She sees herself as matchmaker, tour guide and conductor, charged with presenting the author and illustrator in the best possible way and poised to lead the reader on a dance of discovery.

The first step in this dance is the cover. This is the lure she fashions to attract the right readers, to intrigue them with concepts without divulging contents. Temptation without too much revelation. Once they are drawn inside, she carries them on a cadenced flow of text, graphics and spaces. Perhaps the dance will be a wedding waltz, where the reader is serenely conjoined with author. Or a polka where she lets them choose their own path, leaping or lingering. It all depends on the content.

Equipped with trusty design principles and wielding them with familiarity and panache, the book designer steers the reader's eye around the page with subtle visual hierarchies. She recognises patterns in the author's work and realises those rhythms with reinforcement or counterpoint, headings and sidebars, clusters of typeface, precision-placed graphics and spaces where readers can pause for a breather. She sets the mood with colour. Dark blues and dreamy creams for classy contemplation, the fiery end of the spectrum for heightened emotions. Whether the style is restrained or crazy, the book must be readable, the reader never exhausted but exhilarated.

None of this is mere decoration. The book designer's prowess has contributed to the creative content of the book. She has augmented the author's and illustrator's offerings and shaped them for the rectoverse.

Astred Hicks is a book designer and illustrator who has won a swag of awards. She is rightly proud of her role as a conduit of ideas and knowledge from author to reader.

Megan Hicks is a researcher who usually writes about urban culture. She peruses the streets, reads what she walks over, and doesn't always keep to the left.

NEGOTIATING THE RECTOVERSE

A designer reveals what's going on when she transforms a manuscript into a book.

SPOTLIGHT

WORDS **Geoff Barker**

Uncovering Sydney's first undercover detective is not easy.

THE SHADOW

'Trailing along behind in his dilapidated motorcycle. Fahy noted that over and over again, night after night, they would turn down blind streets, stop suddenly and wait. Had he not been equally alert Fahy would have been detected, but he never allowed himself to relax for an instant on their trail. He knew the dead-end streets better than his quarry.'

This excerpt is from *The Shadow*, a 1954 book that described the career of Francis Maurice Fahy. Known as Frank, Fahy was Sydney's first undercover policeman. Written by crime journalist Vince Kelly, *The Shadow* was a compendium of articles he had published in *The Sun* newspaper the year before, but the stories dated back to 1919 when Fahy worked as a probationary constable. That year, Fahy was transferred to the Sydney Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB) to work undercover. For the next 30 years, only his direct supervisor William John MacKay — plus a few others — knew his real identity. Even members of NSW Parliament were not informed. This anonymity kept him safe, but meant his extraordinary stories remained unknown until Kelly published his series of articles in 1954.

The Sydney underworld of the 1920s that Fahy infiltrated was dominated by criminals such as William 'Mad Dog' Moxley, who was later hanged for a brutal double murder in 1932, Phillip 'Jeffs' Davis, a gunman and dope peddler, Frank 'Razor Jack' Hayes, an enforcer, and Joseph 'Squizzy' Taylor, gangster and gunman. Sydney's top mobsters also included two women. In 1919, Kate Leigh was released from Long Bay gaol, and although Fahy was never able to arrest her, he kept her sly-grog shops under surveillance on numerous occasions. The other woman was Tilly Devine who, in 1925, cut the throat of salesman Sidney Cork, who had dared to challenge her authority.

Fahy's impact in his new role was immediate. In October 1919, police were tipped off about a suspicious couple who had recently arrived on board an overseas liner and booked themselves into the suite of rooms usually reserved for the prime minister at the Grosvenor, a well-known hotel of the day. For three weeks, Fahy trailed them on his beaten-up motorcycle. He eventually thwarted 22-year-old Canadian, Cameron Bean, from conducting an armed robbery at a bank in Coogee. The other half of the couple, an unnamed woman, was caught in the hotel with bags packed ready for their escape. Bean was sentenced to three years in prison, after which he was deported. His partner was not charged.

Over the course of his career, Fahy was instrumental in solving several high-profile cases. In 1926, after three weeks of tailing three men who Fahy nicknamed The King, Shorty and Foxey, he prevented an operation by an international gang of safe breakers. In 1932 he exposed an international ring that had flooded Australia with thousands of high-quality counterfeit shillings manufactured overseas and distributed through a local Sydney businessman, Kwong Khi Tseng.

While undercover, Fahy disguised himself as a ragged drifter, unshaven and unwashed, and slept on wharves and in dosshouses, where he befriended — and then followed — suspected criminals. He also made full use of an old motorcycle that had a sidecar with a special muffler for trailing cars at night. The sidecar's modified metal top had a sign that read 'Scissors Ground, Lawnmowers Repaired' and served not only as a hiding place for Fahy, but small holes bored in its side allowed him to observe and take photos of his targets.

In November 1954 after Kelly published his book, the *West Australian* newspaper announced Fahy's retirement and stated he was going to live quietly in a respectable suburb. Presumably the lack of a specific location sought to prevent any possible acts of vengeance by the many criminals he had helped convict.

One criticism of Kelly's book was that while Fahy's exploits made for great reading, the detective himself was 'elusive, unrealised, only half-seen against the background of darkness and intrigue in which he moved'. This remains the case to this day, although Fahy's work is preserved in his battered old personal scrapbook, which is filled with photographs and news cuttings that reflect the city's criminal underworld. It was presented to the Library by Fahy's daughter Joyce Cardinaels in 2001.

Geoff Barker, Senior Curator, Collection Access and Curation

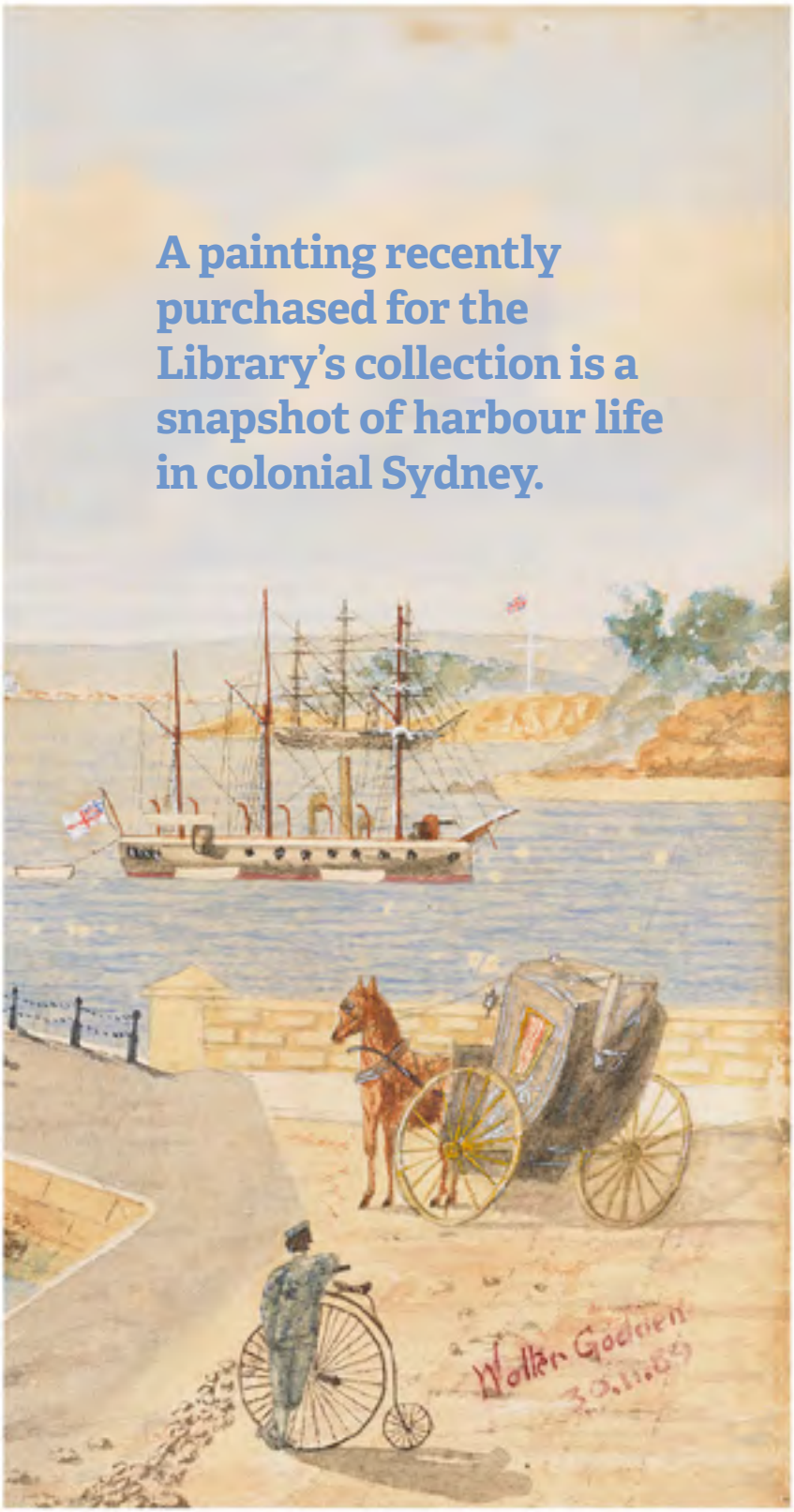
Opposite, from left: Mugshots of notorious armed robber and serial escapee Darcy Dugan; Female criminals photographed for the Sydney CIB, 1940–1951. Both from 'Policeman's Scrapbook', 1920–1952

Above: Policeman Frank Fahy in his undercover working clothes, c 1930, from 'Policeman's Scrapbook', 1920–1952

SYDNEY HARBOUR, 1889

WORDS **Elise Edmonds**

A painting recently purchased for the Library's collection is a snapshot of harbour life in colonial Sydney.



Sydney Harbour, 1889 by Walter Godden

Walter Godden's watercolour on paper depicts a bustling Sydney Harbour on 30 November 1889. Its focal point is the Man O' War Steps at Farm Cove, where a group of Sydneysiders observe the boat traffic from the wharf. Perhaps they are welcoming new arrivals, or farewelling those leaving Sydney — gentlemen and ladies, a family group, a naval officer and a dog. To the right — its rider dismounted — is that innovation in leisure and transport, the penny-farthing bicycle. Bicycles first arrived in the colonies in the 1870s and inspired great enthusiasm for cycling. A decade later, the Sydney Bicycle Club was formed and cyclists competed in races in front of thousands of spectators.

Not only is the painting a lively visual description of Sydney's social and sporting life, it illustrates the significance of the Man O' War Steps jetty, which was the point of arrival and departure for ships' crews, passengers and supplies. Built in 1810, the jetty was initially used by Governor Macquarie as a private wharf. However, it soon became the landing and embarkation place for crews of the Royal Navy and, later, the Royal Australian Navy, as well as merchant naval vessels. Indeed, several of the large ships in the foreground fly the white ensign, indicating that they are ships of the Royal Navy allocated to the Australia Station for maritime defence.

Artist Walter Godden (1861–1901) was a draughtsman, mining surveyor and sketcher. We do not know how long he resided in Sydney, but by 1895 he was living on the other side of the country, employed by the Western Australian Department of Public Works in Perth. He went on to work in the burgeoning mining industry — in 1897 he was a draughtsman in Coolgardie and later lived in Kalgoorlie, where he worked as a mining surveyor.

The artist's viewpoint suggests that he positioned himself at Fort Macquarie, Bennelong Point. This square stone fortress with a two-storey tower was demolished in 1901 to make way for the Fort Macquarie Tram Depot. The Man O' War Steps still stand but are somewhat overshadowed by that twentieth-century icon, the Sydney Opera House.

Elise Edmonds is Coordinator, Pictorial Collections, in Collection Acquisition and Curation.

WORDS **Adria Castellucci**

Not so useless books

My Library and Information Management course was designed for a digital world. Boolean searching and relational databases dominated the curriculum; the only time paper books were mentioned was in a subject on children's and youth literature. To ground myself in the physical, I practised freehand embroidery between classes and on my commute.

During the final semester of my studies, I stumbled across an exhibition of English embroidery at the National Gallery of Victoria. I wandered past cases full of intricate needlework, the thread still sturdy and vibrant after decades tucked away in linen cabinets and dusty storerooms. The exhibition was the first time I had ever encountered traditional hand embroidery presented as artwork. Seeing these sophisticated textiles up close and curated, I realised that they were as legitimate an art form as any of the paintings on the walls. And yet, caption after caption bore the authorial statement 'creator unknown'. The textiles had been dismissed as mere women's work for centuries, and the names of the embroidery artists had been lost to time. Only women from the richest and most renowned families were, sometimes, given the courtesy of attribution.

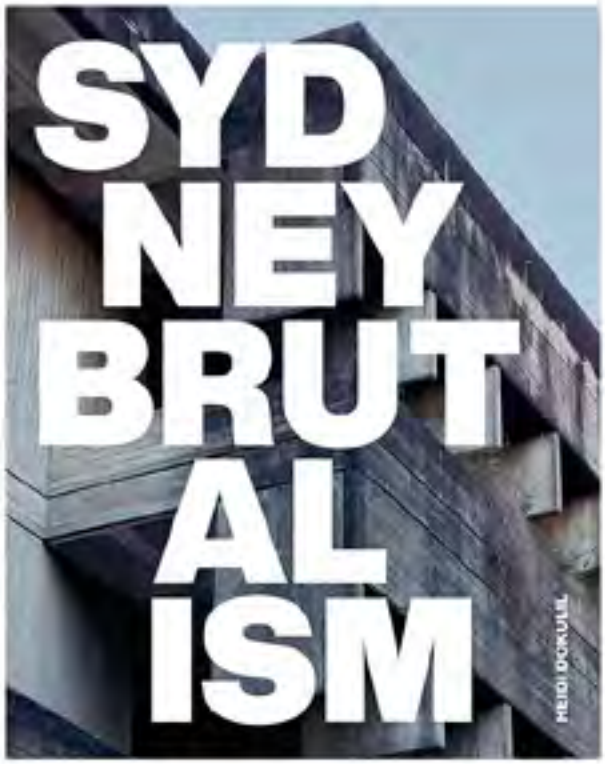
I was reminded of these 'creators unknown' when I first began working with rare books in the Australian Museum Research Library in 2016. My digitally focused degree had not prepared me for the sense of awe I felt when handling a centuries-old book for the first time, the product of so many creators. The labour that went into the pre-industrial book printing trade was immense. Lost are the names of the workers who collected the fibres and mulched the pulp to create paper, the apprentice printers who laid the typeset and ink, or the journeyman craftsmen who assisted in carving the wooden blocks for the illustrations. Only the authors' and master printers' names are captured on the title page.

As I spent more time studying early modern woodcuts, my affinity for them grew. With a few carefully placed nicks in a wooden block, a universe of expression and dimension could be added to an image. The stark black ink on laid paper drew a remarkable visual parallel to dark cotton thread on natural, unbleached calico. I decided to try and recreate these images myself with a needle and thread.

My desire to recreate woodcuts in embroidery came from a place of play and curiosity. Several years on, it has evolved into an ongoing artistic practice. Each time I reimagine these illustrations as textile artworks, I strive to honour the creators who came before me and legitimise the artistry of both mediums. As a librarian, an artist, and a bibliophile, I hope I do these unknown creators justice.

Adria Castellucci is a Team Leader in Reader Services. Her exhibition *Verbatim* was held last year at Disorder Gallery in Darlinghurst.

'De inutilibus libris' (The useless books), a woodblock illustration from *Stultifera Nauis* or *Ship of Fooles,* by Sebastian Brant, printed in London in 1570 by John Cawood, with Adria Castellucci's embroidery of the same work (foreground)



Sydney Brutalism

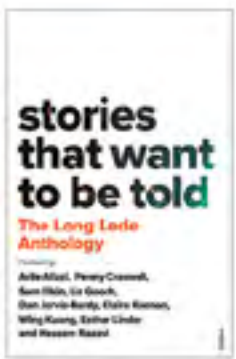
by Heidi Dokulil

NewSouth Publishing

Brutalism is something of a buzzword in today's world, thanks in part to the campaign to save the Sirius public housing complex, opened in 1980 in The Rocks, from demolition. Even the UTS Tower in Broadway has been rehabilitated from being an object of scorn to one held with some affection. Heidi Dokulil's *Sydney Brutalism* is a timely, thorough survey of Brutalism's many architectural manifestations in our city, and the controversies surrounding them.

Handsomely illustrated, the book gains much from its many interviews with architects, advocates, campaigners and critics who have shaped Sydney over the most recent decades. These verbal records add detail, perspective and experience, ensuring that this vital architectural history is not lost. *Sydney Brutalism* is a book for our times too, with a great set of references to other books as well as organisations, blogs, films and the best social media contributors on the topic.

Brutalism was not always a feel-good subject; although the term was coined during the 1950s, it only came into common use in the 1980s, initially as a pejorative. Brutalism's heyday in Sydney was during the 1960s and 1970s when it became the default design language of a building boom that encompassed universities, schools, libraries, residential colleges, technical



Stories That Want To Be Told

The Long Lede anthology

by The Long Lede Initiative

Vintage

Carefully crafted long-form journalism is in many ways an act of redemption by an industry that is chaotic, commercial and not as uniformly idealistic as it could be. This collection, a collaboration between the Judith Neilson Institute, Penguin Random House and the Copyright Agency, offers nine excellent examples of the form, each introduced by the writer's mentor. My only quibble is its embrace of gravitas. There is a subtle undertone suggesting that long-form journalism is terribly difficult and, as a creative practice, more unrewarding than other ways of writing. (There are surely worse things to do while living on toothpaste and cheap coffee.)

The most fascinating aspect of this volume is the way it highlights the intersectionality of the pressing issues that face us: consumption, crime, equality, faith (or not), refugees, sexual consent, sport and the symbolism of the everyday — cups, in this case. The pieces are intensely personal and relevant. Note the names of the contributors; our media landscape will be a better place with them in it.

Rachel Franks

The Hummingbird Project

by Kate Mildenhall

Scribner

This ambitious, mind-bending novel covers four time spans, each with resolute female characters. It begins in 1930s Melbourne with Peggy, working at the Footscray meatworks and flirting with slaughterman Jack. In COVID-era Melbourne, Hilda is stuck in an under-staffed, locked-down nursing home, grabbing at memories from her earlier life as a scientist. La works alongside robots in 2031 Footscray, in an Amazon-like warehouse servicing mass consumption. Furthest away is Maz in 2181, travelling through an unrecognisable landscape, diving for fragments of plastic and metal left by previous humans in the drowned world below.

The Yarra River runs through each period, and connections between these disparate characters and their seemingly dissimilar realities emerge gradually. The implications for our future environment and existence are sobering, with flickers of hope. It is a credit to Mildenhall's skilful wielding of the four worlds that I could not pick a favourite — all are mesmerising.

Jane Gibian

colleges, public housing, office and apartment towers, carparks, churches and houses. The NSW Government Architect's Office, at a peak of talent and productivity, was responsible for much of this; most of these buildings are still in use. Yet the many award citations and other forms of praise heaped on many of these structures never included the 'B-word'; instead, they referred to what was by then known in mainstream public architecture as 'modern' or 'contemporary'.

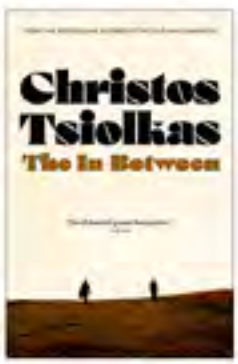
Le Corbusier himself may have come up with the word with his description '*béton brut*', but he never used the term — nor did the architects who created what we now call Brutal. The much-missed architectural historian Jean-Louis Cohen dismissed Brutalism as an Anglophone concept, 'literally a superficial phenomenon, predominantly concerned with surfaces'. Yet for all the semantic slipperiness of the term, Brutalism becomes much more if viewed as a synonym for the materials, function and structure that animate so much architecture of the 1960s and 1970s.

Sydney Brutalism correctly includes the post-war 'Sydney School' of cottage architecture, a formative influence on the larger statements made by many later designers. Dokulil also highlights Dante Bini's 'Binishells' and Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House, which is normally viewed with too much reverence for generic inclusion in a volume like this. The book's many photos and descriptions of the buildings' interiors are a welcome addition as so many are memorable and inviting yet often ignored in the rush to judge uncompromising exteriors.

The book showcases some of my favourite places and spaces in Sydney that through the quality of their architecture transcend time. I'm thinking of the 1967 Harry and Penelope Seidler Killara House by Harry Seidler, Andrew Andersons' 1972 Captain Cook extension to the Art Gallery of NSW, and the 1967 Polish War Memorial Chapel in Marayong by Michael Dysart that are a joy to visit.

The fracturing of the Modernist consensus in the 1980s saw the term Brutalism — used primarily as a criticism rather than a definition — enter popular discourse for the first time beyond the architectural cognoscenti. Yet, as *Sydney Brutalism* documents, a new generation of architects working in this style has emerged, exemplified by Angelo Candalepas's Punchbowl Mosque. As some treasures are lost, new ones emerge. Brutalism will be with us for some time yet.

Caroline Butler-Bowdon



The In-Between

by Christos Tsiolkas

Allen & Unwin

In Christos Tsiolkas's latest novel *The In-Between*, middle-aged men Perry and Ivan are embarking on a relationship, the scars of the past still fresh in their minds. Memories intrude and threaten to scupper their potential happiness.

The story Tsiolkas tells is an unhurried one, taking place — as the title suggests — across in-between moments in Ivan's and Perry's lives. These are characters who live in the dim aftershock of misfortune, for whom the worst has already happened. This book is a deeply moving story of the capacity to love, and specifically, to give love.

Perhaps the barest glimpse of this book's heart can be found in its acknowledgements, that time-worn and ever-true declaration, 'I love you.'

Callum McLean

Gunflower

by Laura Jean McKay

Scribe

Following on from the success of 2020's *The Animals in That Country*, Laura Jean McKay's new collection of short stories is haunting, visceral and not for the faint-hearted. In fact, I would recommend that anyone who has experienced pregnancy loss think twice before reading some of the stories, in particular the title story and 'Nine Days'.

The vivid scenes created by McKay quickly capture your attention. A few stories are only a page or two in length and make her creativity and skill in transporting the reader even more evident. Of all the stories, I liked 'Smoko' the best. It's a tale that follows a supermarket deli worker proudly defending her rights. A seemingly simple premise, it is quirky and nuanced, revealing details along the way like layers of an onion.

In this original, brave and sometimes unusual collection, McKay's prose stands out, each word so carefully chosen and impactful that it reads like a series of linguistic feats.

Sara Fishwick

20 questions

1. Which woman has received the most Academy Awards?
2. Which international organisation celebrates its 75th anniversary on 4 April?
3. Are Mark Seymour from Australian band Hunters & Collectors and Nick Seymour from Australian–New Zealand band Crowded House related?
4. Name the American food writer who inspired the potato chips — consumed with a martini — featured in this issue.
5. What is variously known as a cinnamon roll (Swedish), little duck (Greek), meow sign (Finnish) and moon's ear (Kazakh)?
6. Which living creature has the largest eyes?
7. What does author Paulo Coelho's surname mean in Portuguese?
8. What was the name of the pioneering theatre for which Martin Sharp designed many posters?
9. *Apeirogon* is the title of a novel by Colum McCann. What does it mean?
10. Which Disney animation is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*?
11. Which of these is an influential social media platform for books?
    (a) TitlePage (b) BookTok (c) BookTalk (d) BookShelf
12. Which famous Hollywood actor is the mother of Margaret Qualley from the Netflix miniseries *Maid* (2021) and the recent movie *Poor Things*?
13. What is Suprematism?
14. What is the origin of 'Mayday' as the internationally recognised signal for distress?
15. What is Australia's only designated UNESCO City of Music?
16. A nugget of gold, considered by most authorities to be the biggest ever at a gross weight of 78 kg, was found at Moliagul, Victoria, in 1869 by John Deason and Richard Oates. What name was it given?
17. What is the capital city of Liberia?
18. Books in which language are the most requested from the Library's Multicultural Bulk Loan Service?
19. What is a coati and where would you find one?
20. What do Michelle Obama, Keanu Reeves, Courtney Love, Prince Edward and Russell Crowe have in common?

Find the answers to this quiz on page 6.

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See what's on at the Library when the full festival program is announced!

Artist Michael Kelly in his home.
Photo by Joy Lai

The Margaret Fulton Cookbook was published in 1968, and it took me and my publisher by surprise and the book trade by storm. Paul Hamlyn thought he was being optimistic with a first print run of thirty thousand for a first-time author. It quickly increased to forty, fifty, and then sixty thousand as orders for it poured in ... My life was to change forever.

Margaret Fulton — who would have turned 100 this year —in *I Sang for My Supper: Memories of a Food Writer*. Her cookbook eventually sold 1.5 million copies.

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