

# SHEEP SHOW

EMMA BUSWELL, ERIC C, DOREEN HARRIS, DEN SCHEER,  
ALASTAIR TAYLOR AND KATRINA VIRGONA

25 JUL - 13 SEP 2020

## BIOGRAPHIES

EMMA BUSWELL is an artist, curator and designer fascinated with systems of government, economies and culture particularly in relation to constructs of place, identity and community. Her current work takes its inspiration from the maternal hand craft and knitting techniques passed down from her grandmother and mother as well as a contemplative investigation into the nature of kitsch, ephemera and national identities. Emma has previously run a variety of artist-run spaces across Perth and Fremantle, and has exhibited and curated exhibitions across Australia. She was resident at Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como, Italy in 2011 and participated in the 2015 Australia Council for the Arts Venice Biennale professional development program. She is currently the Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award Coordinator.

ERIC C is a Perth based emerging artist. Their practice explores the concept of metamorphosis in materials through the lens of Eric's familial influence of folk art inspired crafts, manifesting in a multidisciplinary process including ceramic work, patchwork, quilting and handcrafts. They graduated from North Metropolitan TAFE with an Associate Degree in Visual Art in 2017 with the Artsource Industry Ready award and exhibiting in the Hatched National Graduate Show at PICA; going on to graduate from Curtin University with a Bachelor in Fine Arts also in 2018. Eric C has exhibited and undertaken residencies in Perth and nationally.

DOREEN HARRIS is a Ngaanyatjarra elder and artist. Harris lived and worked on many of the pastoral stations of the North-eastern Goldfields region with her husband Danny. In 2018 Doreen participated in workshops facilitated by arts development consultant Tim Pearn, where she began to explore her life experiences working and living on the pastoral stations of the North-eastern Goldfields. Her paintings of station country were first exhibited at Revealed 2019 at Fremantle Art Centre. She is represented by the Laverton Outback Art Gallery.

DEN SCHEER graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from Curtin University in 2016. Her arts practice explores agricultural animal portraits as well as heritage textile techniques which utilise animal products as mechanisms for cultural conveyance. Den has exhibited both nationally and internationally, recently, she exhibited in the Abu Dubai International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX) and the Dubai International Horse Fair (DIHF). Locally, Den has participated in the Gippsland Print Award and Wheatbelt Art Prize as well as the heARTlines Children's Literature and Book Illustration Festival 2015.

ALASTAIR TAYLOR is an artist and illustrator. Originally from England where he worked as a freelance illustrator for advertising and corporate clients including Barclays Bank, The Observer, the BBC and Saatchi; Taylor relocated to Perth in 2006 where he has illustrated less and painted more, inspired by the landscape, the light and, yes, the livestock of WA. He also makes sculptures from found materials, many of which take the form of working clocks. He has exhibited extensively across Western Australia, won numerous prizes including the inaugural Robert Juniper Landscape Prize, and his work is held in public and private collections.

KATRINA VIRGONA was born in Cairns, lived in Fiji as a child, and in various locations across Australia, before settling in Perth in 1984. In her studio practice, Virgona creates 3D artworks and contemporary textile jewellery pieces, from materials including wool, wire, wood, metal, fur and human hair. Her works are informed by the physicality of anthropological fetish objects, and fashion accessories worn in the Victorian era and early 1900s. She holds Bachelor degrees in Psychology (University of New England) and Visual Arts (Curtin University), and an Associate Diploma in Visual Arts Management (North Metro TAFE). Virgona teaches at Curtin University, and facilitates independent textile workshops. She has exhibited and published locally, nationally and internationally.

## ON SHOW

Agricultural Shows have long been the venue for celebrating regional industry, as well as the community that surrounds it. Alongside the prize-winning animals or the newest equipment are the less internationally-productive pursuits such as yarn spinning demonstrations, wood chopping races, and baking competitions.

The 'Back-to-Back' competition is possibly my favourite expression of this. Teams are assembled including a sheep, shearer, spinners and knitters who work against the clock to clip the fleece from the sheep, prepare the yarn and then form it into a jumper, which once worn completes the movement of the material from sheep back to human back. Positions are defined like in a football team, highlighting each individual and skill which contributes to the final product. No longer functionally required by industry, the 'Back-to-Back' competition translates large-scale production to outcomes fashioned by individual sets of hands; born of local relationships and histories. This is the context for *Sheep Show*: a nostalgia for and relearning of skills and tradition, celebrating connections to regional areas and family relationships.

Den Scheer's family have run a mixed sheep and cropping property for four generations - the continual cycle of farming seasons a constant. By learning the heritage techniques of hand tanning sheepskins from her Grandfather, Scheer transports cultural knowledge held within these materials into the present. The large, unnaturally perfect sphere stretched with raw sheep hides of *I loved a sunburnt country* and *There is no season* are deliberately abstracted to present the tragic effects of bushfire via materiality rather than the form of the animal. Scheer encourages consideration of the balance between regional economies and the uncontrollable realities of weather patterns which define the endless, multigenerational gamble of farming.



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The cultural value and implications of stock management are explored in the paintings by Ngaanyatjarra elder Doreen Harris. *Shearing at Edjudina Station* and *Wongi Shearing at Cosmo Newberry Station* are part of a suite of paintings that document Harris' reflections on her time spent working on stations across the North-Eastern Goldfields region with her late husband Danny, who was as a shearer and stockman. Workers, sheep, horses, dogs and wildflowers burst forth from the deep red ground of her paintings which seem nostalgic and joyful on first glance. However, there are also unsettling details present in Harris' paintings. Shifts in perspective and flecks of blood on the bright, white, newly clipped sheep honour the harshness of the environment and working conditions. Harris's paintings recognise the often invisible contributions that Indigenous Australians have made in the development of Australia's agricultural industries for generations.

Looking back at both distant and more recent histories, it can be challenging to tell myths and fantasy from hard facts. Emma Buswell's practice mines folklore and local storytelling through the medium of stitch. She looks to her maternal heritage in New Zealand where the skill of knitting has been passed down from Grandmother to Mother to artist. Buswell directs her attention to the story of 'Shrek the Sheep' who escaped domesticity living wild for six years. When the merino



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wether was recaptured, his overgrown fleece tipped the scales at 60 kilograms – enough wool to fashion twenty men's suits. Documenting the absurd celebration of this unlikely national hero via iconography adopted from international fashion houses (the largest market for merino wool); Buswell knits the story into *The Triumphs and Misadventures of Shrek the Sheep*, a wearable-tapestry boasting the exploits of this ovine hero. The cloak is accompanied by a small painting *Sheep Peesh* which collages together all the sheep figures depicted in artworks from the Te Papa Tongarewa/ Museum of New Zealand collection. Cut from the landscapes of early colonial etchings to contemporary works, the individual sheep merge to create a cloud of grey fleece, teeth, eyes and hooves – a super beast of history.

It is the tendency of humans to impart a level of anthropomorphism upon animals we live in close proximity to, projecting emotions or relationships from our own cultural lens. Finding or making connections between individuals has long been a focus for Alastair Taylor, painting richness and relationships between people who are arbitrarily grouped (by a shared name, or hometown). Observing the errant sheep heads sticking out of the trucks which barrel down the hill past Darlington, Taylor asks: Who are they? What are their personalities and emotions? What social structures do they form? These portraits in paint, plaster and wax question our understandings of relationships to, and amongst the animals we keep.

Katrina Virgona utilises the tactile and soft medium of felted wool to explore anthropological fetish objects or ornaments. This laboured and repetitive process, takes place in close proximity to the maker's body lending its self to the recording of personal stories and reflections. Virgona has created a fragmented lariat necklace, which is traditionally a single long length, worn coiled around the neck. In *Unchained*, each part of this adornment represents the individuals who make up the



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maternal lines of her extended family. The unique features of each highlighting the specific contribution that these women have made to the current moment, and the future of their family.

Craft skills taught and shared by women in a family is a common experience across history, cultures, and artists in this exhibition. It is these traditions that Eric C unpacks by adapting traditional quilt-making techniques to build a series of large textile pieces made from repurposed wool bale bags gifted from Den Scheer's family farm during a collaborative residency at Midland Junction Arts Centre in 2019. The hardy fabric is stained with lanolin and machine grease, marked with spray paint, handwriting and roughened from use. By deconstructing these functional objects, Eric C highlights histories to be re-shaped via repetitive and symmetrical quilting designs. *The Wool Bale Patchworks* speak to both the value of traditional skills as well as the opportunity for reinvention or metamorphosis offered by contemporary perspectives.

As the Mundaring Arts Centre galleries vibrate with the daily movement of industry rumbling past the building on the back of semi-trailer trucks, awareness is constantly drawn to distribution lines that stretch across the globe. To counterbalance this vastness, the artists contributing to *Sheep Show* have woven together local folklore, traditional skills and personal relationships to celebrate of the community culture that surrounds agricultural activity.

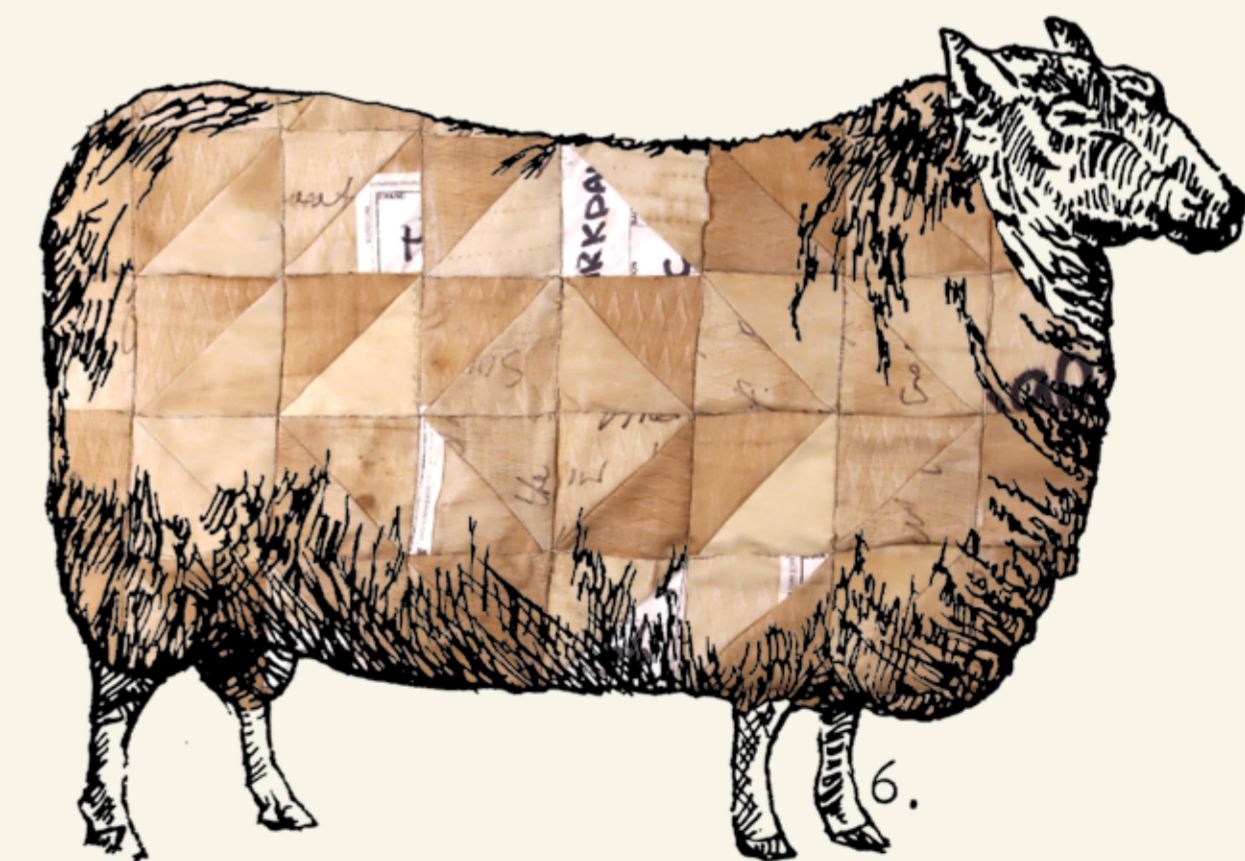
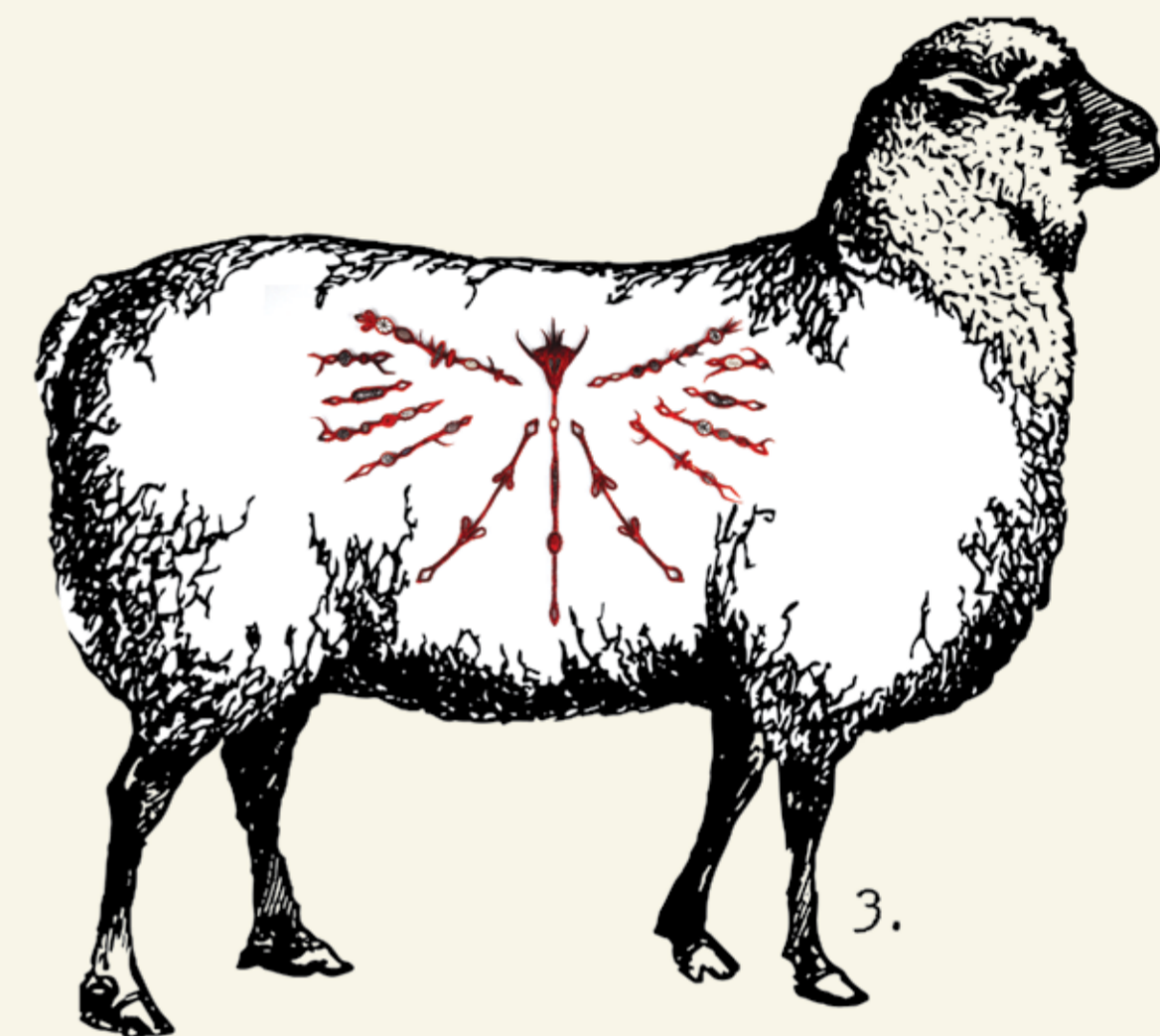
Melissa McGrath  
Curator



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# SHEEP SHOW

MUNDARING ARTS CENTRE | 25 JULY - 13 SEPTEMBER 2020



1. Doreen Harris, *Shearing at Edjudina Station (detail)*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 85 x 150 cm. 2. Den Scheer, *There is no season (detail)*, 2019, stretched sheep skin, 70cm diameter. 3. Katrina Virgona, *Unchained*, 2020, felted wool, silk and thread, dimensions variable. Photograph by Ben Joel. 4. Alastair Taylor, *Eight percent (detail)*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 76 x 91 cm. 5. Emma Buswell, *The Triumphs and Misadventures of Shrek The Sheep (detail)*, 2020, wool yarn, metallic thread, hand knitted cardigan, dimensions variable. 6. Eric C, *Wool Bale Patchwork (detail)*, 2019, found wool bale material quilted, 100 x 100 cm. Photograph by Gary Parris.

## IMAGES

Cover: Alastair Taylor, *Eight percent* (detail), 2020, acrylic on canvas, 76 x 91 cm.

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4. Katrina Virgona, *Unchained*, 2020, felted wool, silk and thread, dimensions variable. Photograph by Ben Joel.



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