

WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

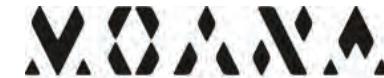
I would like to thank all the participating artists Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, Megan Christie, Valdene Buckley-Diprose, Paul Caporn, Geoff Overheu, Roderick Sprigg, Christina Chau, Francis Russell and Kate Mullen for their wonderful artworks, enthusiastic involvement and insightful discussion on the rural urban divide in Australia. It has been a pleasure to work with you all on this project and I am blown away by your interest and dedication to the projects aims of bringing rural and urban communities together. Thank you.

I would also like to thank:

Megan Christie for her support and role as artist, speaker, co-curator, decision maker and ideas generator. Abdul-Rahman Abdullah for his tireless encouragement, suggestions and wonderful design of this catalogue. Rupert Richardson for his help with the dinner events and historical narratives that permeate my work. Helen McHugh for her delicious cooking. Julia Richardson for her support and help with the dinner events. Megan Palandri, Ross Johnston, Prof. David Lindsay, Kate Mullen, Dale Buckley, Desi Litis, Andrew Purvis, Allison Archer, Leigh Robb, George Egerton-Warburton, David Collins and Josh Staple. The friends and families of the artists who supported them, helped install the work and make this event happen.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Department of Culture and The Arts, the City of Perth, Moana Project Space and Moana Coffee/Balcony Caf .

Anna Louise Richardson xxx
CURATOR / WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD



PROJECT SPACE



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Culture and the Arts**



CITY of PERTH



CITY of PERTH
WINTER ARTS
SEASON 2014



URBAN DREAMERS

A CURATOR'S VISION

Picture this, you walk into a gallery expecting your classic white cube and happen on a dinner party. In the centre of the room is a table constructed from the remains of a shearing shed built in the nineteen-thirties and still smelling of lanolin. The table is laid with a simple meal of lamb and vegetables. Twelve chairs surround the table, re-built from remnants of a past era and upholstered with hand printed rural imagery. As a guest, you are seated with an eclectic mix of people, ranging from arts professionals, lawyers, and accountants to shearers, farmers and rural characters. On the walls around you hang works that unite all these objects and people.

Like most western nations Australia has strived for greater urbanisation, and, at times, appears divorced from its rural origins; however, Australia cannot escape the rural limits that enclose and define its cities, looked upon with a kind of *Golden Summers* nostalgia. Given the right situation, people will impart stories of their holidays on an uncle's farm, their weekend trips to school mates' homes in the country, stories of helping out shearing sheep, feeding paddy lambs and running amok. That urban-dwellers hold on to a sense of the place and atmosphere of the Australian rural world reveals a sensitivity to our rural history, which in turn allows the landscape to persist as a space that bears its own distinctive identity.

Worth Its Weight In Gold brings together a diverse range of artists to explore the continued cultural connotations surrounding the mythology of rural experiences in Australia. Tied together through a common experience of rural interaction, Geoff Overheu, Megan Christie, Paul Caporn, Valdene Buckley-Diprose, Roderick Sprigg, Anna Louise Richardson and Abdul-Rahman Abdullah take on the task of depicting Australian realities derived from the historicised value that 'Australia is built on the sheep's back'. A notion represented in the quantitative examples of wool prices which surged to a 'pound for a pound' in the nineteen-fifties as a result of the post World War Two demand to provide Australian soldiers with wool for uniforms during the Korean war¹. Exploring the common thread of sheep and a relationship to the sheep industry as the first industrial exploitation of the land, these artists explore the factors that have contributed to a contemporary Western Australian identity.

To look at themes of Australian identity in a contemporary art context, the process of defining a collective identity not only implicitly draws on historical discourse, but also creates an opportunity to explore the idea of self-perception. Australia's most attractive cultural myth, the Heidelberg school and its golden idyll, represented ideas of a purely Australian nationalism portrayed in the golden sunlit landscapes of rural optimism. Symbols of nationalist mystique derived from the idyllic rural lifestyle re-emerge in these artists' works. Negotiating a landscape of overlaid historical narratives, and seeking to reconcile this Heidelbergian fiction within the context of contemporary rural industry, their work investigates alternative views of rural identity as a construct of personal history and their own engagement with the land.

In this exhibition, Australia's rural history is experienced by its audience within the historical precedent of a dinner party that takes place in a gallery setting. Using the Victorian era model of inviting people to dinner specifically to view a new artistic acquisition, this exhibition creates a forum to explore how Australian historic idealism translates within a contemporary setting. As a site of social engineering, confirming or establishing community, celebration and politicking, *Worth Its Weight In Gold* brings the imposition of rural histories into a contemporary urban landscape to celebrate and explore the social remnants of Australia's golden days of rural empire.

Our connection to a rural past has become tenuous and glorified with our attention caught by issues of animal welfare and food safety, rather than the people who lie within the rural experience. Their humanity is what underlies the mythologies surrounding Australia's golden idyll. When seated next to a shearer at this dinner party and engaged in a real life interaction, it is hard not to exchange stories and nostalgia of the country and the people you encountered there. The identification of the land as that which shapes the people who live on it evokes a nostalgic glimpse of a reconstructed past, casting the rural lifestyle as the romantic muse of all Australians.

Anna Louise Richardson's shearers represent a collective rural identity, within the strictures of historical cultural expectations of a national character. Symbolism and masculine identity politics come into play when exploring this Australian character as the archetypal 'Aussie Battler'. One of the most significant visual expressions of rural 'reality'², Tom Roberts *Shearing of the Rams*, 1889-90, exemplifies the "national culture-hero on whose characteristics Australians tended, consciously or unconsciously to model their attitude of life"³. Roberts has said that the meaning and spirit of strong masculine labour presented in his work is an expression of one time and place that becomes art for all time and all places³. From the contemporary lack of rural vocation represented in art one could argue that while national characteristics of identity may have moved on, the nostalgia for an idyllic Australian lifestyle remains in the public imagination as it was in the time of the Heidelberg School.



Pausing in your discussion, you might look up to see, just to your left, a Driza-bone clad figure with an Akubra hat on its head, frozen in an other-worldly space. Geoff Overheu's *Dreamers* quietly listen in while you discuss their character as the epitome of the rural figure. In an urban romantic dream of rural life, these figures act as mimes to whatever stories emerge from the party, a charade of the country person, ready to fill any role, yet not really existing within real space. An iconic representation of rural Australian identity, the black, faintly moving figures are reminiscent of Frederick McCubbin's proverbial bushman in *Down On His Luck*, 1889. Paying reference to the more grim realities of this golden age, McCubbin presented "the national subject in a melancholic way, sharply in contrast with the sun-drenched optimism and gaiety of spirit which animated the landscape impressions of Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton"⁴. The romantic and mythological versions of the man working on the land or in the shed in the Driza-bone and Akubra hat seem to encompass the golden dreams of the rural ideal. Comparing Richardson's representation of masculine rural vocation and Overheu's melancholic almost desperate *Dreamers*, the imposition of personal perspective and experience on national identity becomes apparent, imbuing these depictions with a cultural significance that goes beneath the object.



Musing on the physicality of rural living, you might run your hand across the table top, covering years of history, sweat, lanolin, dust, and stories in one sweep. Crafted from the bones of a shearing shed's wool sorting table, Megan Christie's dining table is imbued with history from its practical use and ancient biological history. Invested with the spirits of sheep long ago shorn the table continues the reincarnation of Australia's rural history, reflecting on the first industrial exploitation of the land in Australia: the sheep and the wool industry. Referencing a boom time that came to embody a mythologised rural ideal, Christie's furniture draws on this sense of nostalgia, looking at the implications of change in rural industries and their association with a continued social narrative around an object.

The quantitative value of the shearing shed, wool, is the golden ticket that undergoes many processes and passes through many hands, permeating it with narratives. The pervasive smell of lanolin, sheep manure, sweat and dust jointly occupy the shed environment. Sharing the corners of the shed, rust saturates the air like the spirits and stories of wool days gone. Exploring the narratives hidden within the basic materials of the shed, Valdene Buckley-Diprose's ephemeral constructions attempt to map out the histories of these materials. Portraying their many and varied physical properties, *Matter of Memory* illustrates personal narratives and stories of rural encounters from the past. Engaging the fundamental materials of a rural landscape: dirt, rust and wool in a contemporary format Buckley-Diprose encourages audiences to engage in a new perspective of the Australian landscape.

LEFT TO RIGHT / Anna Richardson, *Kim* 2013.

Image courtesy of the artist.

/ Geoff Overheu, *One Dreamer Crawling* 2014.

Image courtesy of Eva Fernandez and Turner Galleries.

/ Megan Christie, *Workshop image* 2014.

Image courtesy of the artist

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LEFT TO RIGHT / Valdene Buckley-Diprose, *Matter Of Memory* 2013.

Image courtesy of the artist.

/ Paul Caporn, *Invisible Shed* 2010.

Image courtesy of the artist and Turner Galleries.

/ Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *I've Been Assured That You're Going To Heaven My Friend* 2013.

Image courtesy of the artist and Venn Gallery.



To return to the dinner party, you might turn to the person seated on your right to discover that they too have a story to tell. A story of regularly working on their grandparent's sheep farm outside Kojonup in the South West of Western Australia. A story that informs the humour and irony that characterise their experience of urban life. On the wall behind them stands a work reflecting the evolution of the rural lifestyle. The progression of urbanisation, taking rural characters and offering them a new identity built from the landscape of suburban blocks, lawns and driveways. Paul Caporn's *Invisible Shed* depicts a familiar yet uncanny image of a ghostly shed, removed from its original location on his grandparent's property, and rebuilt as a transparent form. Caporn captures the aura of the shed, de-familiarising and de-materialising it as if in a dream. This shed is not just any shed; it is a shed within a shed, a ghost and a memory. The disengagement from the rural context of this object brings into question the solidity of our new cultural landscape and its relationship with the past. When shifted it is no longer a shed and its history becomes a memory. Theodor W. Ardorno states that "museum objects acquire new meaning in a museological context"⁵, and when removed from their original use or context,

they begin to die⁵. Approaching the masculine space of the urban character, Caporn sets up a window through which to view the past in a provocative dialogue between past and present, object and viewer. The archetypal rural character has been transported into the context of the urban shed, presenting a space of production that is both local and alien and bringing into question the future of the rural character.

Continuing this dialogue between past and present through practical engagement, ordinary gestures and observations Roderick Sprigg's *Mechanical Nuisance* negotiates universal ideas about masculinity and relationships in an isolated setting. Subtle, yet strikingly beautiful Sprigg's work seems to suggest that despite the isolating and arduous work, these rural figures feel happier out in the fields than in their own homes⁶. Carrying this isolation into the unusual setting of a rural dinner party within a small trendy urban gallery, Sprigg forces his stoic reflection to engage with you. Inevitably, as with all dinner parties, politics bring to the fore the balance between comfort zones, drawing you to engage with a world beyond the familiar and domestic.





Musing on this negotiation between the domestic and industrial objects that are comfortable yet unfamiliar, you look up and notice the work on the wall in front of you. Further drawing you into a dream world, Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's sacrificial sheep looms, tied only by a complicated satin bow, anchored to the ground by a trail of ribbon. *I've Been Assured That You're Going To Heaven My Friend* re-enacts a child's experience of killing a sheep for dinner, uncovering the stories of childhood, buttressed within the walls of an urban multicultural household⁷. A faded memory of an experience, floating between personal history and a connection to Australia's rural identity, Abdullah's work is another remove from the rural context of its subject.

The final resting place of the Overheu's *Dreamers*' rural produce, *I've Been Assured That You're Going To Heaven My Friend* connects the rural and urban experience in a very visceral way. However, to recognise the past historically does not mean to recognise it the way it was⁷. Abdullah's work looks at an experience through the eyes of a child, imagining that the sheep will float away to heaven and that its poo is made of black jellybeans. Rediscovering the stories of his childhood, Abdullah has uncovered a world that sits somewhere between the reality of rural experience and the fictions of an urban childhood.

When we examine the past, we apply a golden sheen to the experiences we encounter, painting an idyllic world and blurring the not so pleasant realities into this sunlit haze. Presenting the rural experience as a nostalgic urban romance suggests that contemporary consciousness is stuck within an idealised notion of Australian identity, dating from the perceived golden years of the nineteenth century. However, this identity has been watered down over the years and filtered into an urban sensitivity to place and the historical narratives of Australia's past. Investigating rural identity from a contemporary urban standpoint, Geoff Overheu, Megan Christie, Paul Caporn, Valdene Buckley-Diprose, Roderick Sprigg, Anna Louise Richardson and Abdul-Rahman Abdullah construct dream worlds of personal engagement with the realities of rural experience. This exhibition is a contemporary survey of rural life in microcosm, connecting the land we now stand on to its productive rural history and the characters who peopled it.

Written by Anna Louise Richardson, Curator & Artist, *Worth Its Weight In Gold*.

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IN-GRAINED

If you take the time to dig deep enough, the materiality of any object will reveal to you a whisper of its origins. Whatever the medium - whether raw or processed; natural or synthetic; old or young - pausing to consider the past lives of the table you eat off, for instance, will likely transport you to a distant place, eons earlier.

Such reflection is something our society fails to do regularly, if at all, and so it exists in a state that is relatively unconscious of the stories embedded within the very matter that comprises it. Western Australian furniture designer Megan Christie acknowledges that only out of consciousness can we generate a reverence toward our natural world. She poses the question: "what was the history or significance of this piece of wood before it became the desk that you carve your initials on?" and so allows for the stories ingrained within the timber she works with to dictate the way her incarnations evolve.

Although her furniture is at once a utilitarian and aesthetic object (a binary that compels her), it is Christie's creative process that prompts an alignment with artist, more so than that of designer. With each new piece, a scrupulous process of drawing-based design and concept development preludes the woodworking phase. Like her medium, her inspiration is gathered from the natural environment and from a drive to make known the ways in which we exploit it.

An extension of this is seen in a recent work, *Lost in the Woods*. Using organically fallen wood, Christie has crafted a meticulously finished desktop that is cradled by timber legs sculpted to echo their former life as trees. Their branches have been charred to reference the fate of the masses of logged trees that, in one way or another, are reduced to embers. The desk's backing is detailed with monochrome screen-printed images of city-scapes and tiny cast copper figures of people. Their scale and juxtaposition suggests they are ignorant of the fact that their urban jungle was once old growth forest, a commodity that carries on silently sustaining them.

Christie's ecologically motivated pursuit of materials sees that all of her wood is from the 'third stage down'. She uses trees that have naturally fallen or are salvaged from development sites and ruins. Conveniently, Christie's home and studio is set upon a plot of bushy farmland where several historic buildings still stand (including the original sheep-shearing shed that now functions as a workshop) and so enables her practice to be locally and readily sourced.



The weighty task of crafting the dinner table for *Worth Its Weight In Gold* brought with it two requisites: its dimensions had to accommodate twelve whilst fitting comfortably within Moana Project Space's modest white cube. The end result is a dinner table just over three meters in length that is rendered, for the most part, from timber recycled from the sheep-shearing shed on Christie's property. And so, in a very literal sense, the surface bears the history of a long and intense working relationship with sheep and the local wool industry.

The table is as apt a symbol for the project as any. Not only is it designed to assume the centre point within both the physical exhibition and within each of the performances as the site of social exchange, it also offers an elegant conceptual bridge between these two realms; that of the fixed art display and of the ephemeral activity unfolding within it.

Written by Kate Mullen, Co-Director Moana Project Space & Independent Arts Writer.

ABOVE / Megan Christie, *Lost In The Woods* 2014.

Image courtesy of the artist.

RIGHT / Megan Christie, process images.

Images courtesy of the artist.







MEGAN CHRISTIE

Megan Christie's practice is the design and creation of fine furniture as functional art pieces. She is interested in environmentally sustainable modes of production that express her beliefs about how we respond to the use of natural materials and farm our surroundings. Her work reflects a strong belief in ecologically sound solutions, that beautiful pieces of art can be created from sustainable materials, salvaged or recycled local timber, and that pieces should be designed for longevity. She reinterprets traditional craftsmanship to express her connection to the land and environment using artistic practices not commonly associated with the production of furniture.

Christie's workshop is an old farm shearing shed. Her work is invested with the spirits of sheep long ago shorn and often incorporates some of the jarrah recycled from the wool bins. This project for *Worth Its Weight In Gold* continues the reincarnation of her sheepish past; the dining table for the long table dinner events will be inspired by, and largely made from, the old wool sorting table.

Recent group exhibitions include *Singularity* Kurb Gallery, Perth, *Align* Preston Street Art Space, Perth, *Inception*, Preston Street Art Space, Perth, and *Soup Collective Inaugural Exhibition* MRA William Street, Perth. Christie has been the recipient of various awards including the Australian Furniture of the Year Awards in 2009 and 2010. She has been published in *500 Cabinets – A showcase of Design and Craftsmanship*, Lark Books and was awarded the *Highly Commended Regional Award* at the Mandjar Art Awards-Mandurah in 2013.

www.meganchristiedesigns.com

LEFT / The shed.
Image courtesy of Megan Christie.

A STITCH IN TIME

The seeds of Valdene Buckley-Diprose's creations were sewn during her seminal years growing up as the daughter of a farmer, long before her mature age transition to full time artist. For Buckley-Diprose, revisiting both the physical and psychological sites of embedded past experience mark the beginning of a rigorous creative process: the authentic translation of memory into tangible object.

At its core, Buckley-Diprose's work pursues the nature of memory – how it ages and shifts – is warped, reformed and reassembled with time. For *Worth Its Weight in Gold* Buckley-Diprose references an ongoing investigation into the properties of rust, as well as introduces another, fitting medium: wool, a substance rich in metaphor and meaning.

The project prompted a return to the artist's family farm in Western Australia's South West to gather the wool. Although far from the profitable market wool once was (today all wool maintenance of the farm's meat sheep barely covers its basic shearing costs), Buckley-Diprose's brother continues to operate the same farm where much of her youth was spent. It is here too that personal familial memories, as well as the arduous workload that running the farm entailed, are vividly recollected.

Once gathered, the wool is washed, combed to remove debris, spun and then plied by hand. Following this lengthy yet meditative and rhythmic process, the yarn is ready to be knitted. The resultant knitted diptych is varied in texture through use of a combination of fine and thick needles - a rustic, homemade quality so integral to the work's exploration of "the past, when things were very haphazard and you just kind of made do".

The process through which Buckley-Diprose works is as vital as her materials, for the memory itself determines the form the artwork will assume. The making becomes, in itself, a metaphor for a memory's natural course: from its formation throughout its development; the fabric and fabrication each consider how a memory can linger for decades in our subconscious – with a life force of its own that slowly, subtly distorts – only to be recalled to the fore by an unexpected trigger.

Buckley-Diprose engages her own intimacies as case study as a means of contemplating collective memory and, by association, that of collective consciousness. Her knits have been dampened, laid against a piece of

discarded corrugated iron and then glued into shape so that the pieces embody the memory of the metal that has rusted with the passing of time. The discolouring and rigid structuring of the knit ebbs the wool's suppleness and alludes to the iconic motif of rural Australia – the shearing shed.

While Buckley-Diprose's creative process references old memory, it is equally forging of new ones – indeed, her layered and lengthy process of making is essential to her work's conceptual and material integrity. The physical motions of making, as well as her relationship with the work's materiality, are as much reflective experiences as they are ones of production.

Written by Kate Mullen, Co-Director Moana Project Space & Independent Arts Writer.

RIGHT / The shearing shed.
Image courtesy of the Valdene Buckley-Diprose.







VALDENE BUCKLEY-DIPROSE

Valdene Buckley-Diprose is an emerging visual artist whose work addresses notions of memory embedded in objects and places. She works in a variety of media underpinned by printmaking processes to record changes in matter that occur over time. In developing art that seeks to communicate the transient, ephemeral qualities of memory and matter, she produces site-specific works that record the present but also reference the past. In this work, Buckley-Diprose to some extent acts as a facilitator, using the natural elements to make the marks that provide evidence of how people and matter interact in local environments.

Buckley-Diprose grew up on a wheat and sheep property near Yorketown in South Australia before her family relocated to a new farm her father had developed from virgin bush at Wellstead, on the south coast of Western Australia. The new land farm was very much a family affair and she grew up drenching, needling, mulesing, and at various times worked as a cook, roustabout and classer during shearing. It was accepted practice for her father to schedule sheep work around her school weekends and university holidays. Her siblings now farm the family properties and she visits regularly. There was a time in the late '60s when her father predicted he would be a millionaire within ten years, based on the wool prices that were then current. Sadly, wool sheep once critical to the farm income have become progressively less important. Her work for this show responds to this, utilising materials such as wool, rust, wire and iron to weave together this narrative of her history.

Buckley-Diprose has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions including *Time ... Tide* Freerange Gallery, Perth, *The Matter of Memory* Honours Exhibition, Cullity Gallery, UWA and the *Fremantle Print Awards* Moores Building, Fremantle. In 2013 she was awarded the *Mossenson Galleries Prize for Creativity* and will be exhibiting in *HATCHED 2014* at PICA.

LEFT TO RIGHT / Valdene Buckley-Diprose, *Carding, Spinning, Knitting* 2014
Images courtesy of the artist.

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT SHEEP

Worth Its Weight In Gold is a constellation of dialogical practices that are played out over the course of the exhibition at Moana Project Space. It is a culmination of multiple artists from an array of backgrounds that have come together to reflect on their relationship with rural Australia. In addition to the exhibition, the project consists of three dinner events held for the artists and guests to discuss their work, findings and polemics related to international regionalism.

It is important that *Worth Its Weight in Gold* is not one thing, one event, one object, or one person, because when reflecting on and working through contemporary understandings of the cultivated land that we live on, there is a multiplicity of conflicting experiences, stories passed down and reactions to how we do and should live in relation to the land. *Worth Its Weight in Gold* thus works more as a force of relations that nurtures the diversity of these conflicting experiences.

By unraveling these experiences, *Worth Its Weight in Gold* is an opportunity to focus on the nature of our international regionalism: building a sense of our unique locality that does not heed to the cultural canons directed by the east coast of Australia, or international capitals. Rather, providing an understanding for our rich, yet conflicting histories generated from our geographic locality. This multilateral way of thinking about the social, political and economic ties with our region gives opportunity to assess our actions and build a centre from the ground up.

So what do we talk about when we talk about sheep? At the preliminary dinner at Kalga, Anna Richardson's family farm that was once Thomas Peel's settlement, participants of *Worth Its Weight in Gold* were invited to dine in one of the vacant paddocks during dusk. There is a strong cross section of people in this community. Some grew up on farms and migrated to cities, and developed a distant, yet strong nostalgia for their rural upbringing. For some lamb was more affordable, available and economic than other livestock. A lamb selected for the family to consume for the next seven days in a routine fashion: The more perishable areas of the animal would be eaten first (brains and organs), followed by a schedule of cuts and then being creative with leftovers. One would know the day of the week by what was for lunch and dinner: Followed by a Sunday roast there would be cold meat sandwiches for lunch and minced up roast to make a Shepherd's pie on Monday night. These

memories are common to many and remind us that lamb is as much a direct source of sustenance for the body on a daily level as well as a commodity for a broader community.

By nature, dinner parties are contrived social spectacles; No matter how natural a conversation might feel while dining with friends and family they are situations that have been crafted to produce ideal social situations, within which all members are invited to actively perform. The dinner events of *Worth Its Weight in Gold* are of course no exception. The three dinner events provide a temporal space for artists and speakers discuss their processes, works and findings in relation to their connection, or disconnection, from contemporary Australian agriculture.

For some living in Perth, there is an uncanny distance between rural and urban identities. Farmed landscapes are tropes that many of us incorporate in the broader system of our identity in some form of another, and yet inevitably feel strangely disconnected from. For those of us spending most of our days in suburban, urban or light industrial areas, farming and the outback are concepts that register as being homely and un-homely at the same time. They are environments that we know, but cannot read and react to.

To consider the rural and the urban, is a simplistic binary distinction that perpetuates two cultural spheres as significant, and co-dependent elements of our nation's identity. Of course, we are aware that the landmarks that distinguish these boundaries are contrived and often changing, and yet we continue to perpetuate them: Perth's growing suburban sprawl, or short drives to cultivated national parks, guarded falls and dammed rivers each discriminate our changing relationship to what was once farming or native land. All communities, whether they are created momentarily in a relational artwork or generated in actual everyday events are as much about who they include as who they exclude.

While I am writing this I am in a small agricultural town in the Southwest – one that I now frequent every second weekend. Here, cities like Perth and Bunbury are kept at the periphery of the community. They are simply locations to enter and exit as swiftly as possible, only to get supplies that can't be sourced or made elsewhere. There is a mutual dependency between these cultural axes. While in Perth we might believe that Australia has shifted off the sheep's



back and pursued other industries, the Australian farmer continues to carry a significant cultural weight. For some reason, stories that connect us to cleared and farmed land connect us to a tradition and heritage that we find it necessary to keep at the periphery, and yet a part of our identity.

What we talk about when we talk about sheep, is really a way of unravelling some of the cultural histories that are woven through our communities - of ways of living on and interpreting the land. Consequently, a stronger understanding of a specific international regionalism is articulated, which breaks from modern cultural axes that persuade a provincial regard for Australian contemporary art. This rural/urban binary peculiarity of Australian international regionalism is established and perpetuated by contemporary communities is of course an artificial arrangement, and yet the formation of our identity bounces off and refracts from it. In effect, the distance between rural and urban tropes perpetually kept at arm's length. This distance is an established part of how we mythologise being from the lucky country. Therefore rather than seeking to diminish the uncanny relationship that we might have with the land, *Worth Its Weight in Gold* frames the strange and un-homely connection between these two communities as specific to our international regionalism.

Written by Christina Chau, Independent Arts Writer.

LEFT / Shearing Lemmington.
Image courtesy of Anna Louise Richardson.

ARTISTS DINNER





HOW TO BECOME A SURROGATE SHEPHERD

Roderick Sprigg's rhetoric uses iconography and themes from farming and rural Australian life as a means of subtly calling into question the stifled parts of our human psyche. This farming connection provides Sprigg with a platform for relational exchange, while also acting as metaphor to communicate universal ideas about human nature, our value systems and how we relate to one another.

Sprigg's practice draws from his own life experiences in farming sheep and wheat in the Goldfields region of Western Australia. It is there that the artist grew up, where he returned after completion of his secondary and university educations and where he continues to live and work today, both as farmer and artist.

Although drawing is his primary medium, Sprigg's practice largely encompasses relational and action-driven gestures that are motivated by a desire to directly engage people on an experiential level. Participatory action, Sprigg has observed, enables people to be made more acutely self-conscious of their conditioned values and attitudes. Enticing audience participation often poses a challenge in relational art making, Sprigg's unpretentious propositions are outcome based and community-oriented, with his playful propositions rendering his work approachable and accessible to a broad audience.

Sprigg has closely studied men and the way they relate to one another, particularly within an isolated farming context. Farmers head out to labour on the farm with little to no protective gear - brushing off malaise and physical injury as a mark of masculinity - while any show of emotional vulnerability is repressed or staunchly guarded against.

One of Sprigg's works, *Occasional Tables* (2008) exemplifies this. The project sought to connect fathers and sons through bonding over the labour of constructing a coffee table together, while speaking of the difficulty men have relating with one another on an emotional level. The proposition shed light on the difficulty we often have in actualising our intentions to 'make more time' to relate to those we consider close to us.

Sprigg has devised another participatory work for *Worth Its Weight In Gold*: an opportunity for audience members to take part in a temporary lamb adoption scheme in *The Lamb Fostering Project*. A limited edition of three orphaned lambs will be available to foster for around one year, up until their first fleece.

In registering for a lamb - essentially buying the artwork - families are in turn given the task of naming their lamb, deciding on its future home (whether to take it home or keep it on the farm), and the practices of animal husbandry applied to it, such as whether the lamb will be mulesed or not. By presenting participants with these variables, the durational artwork contemplates if and how emotional attachment alters our personal value systems.

Upon signing up, families will be presented with a small gold token as a keepsake. Approaching the end of the performance's duration, Sprigg introduces a final twist: holders must either forfeit their gold in exchange for the wool from their adopted lamb's first fleece, or hold on to their manufactured token; therefore literally forcing participants to reflect upon what they deem as 'worth its weight on gold'.

Written by Kate Mullen, Co-Director Moana Project Space & Independent Arts Writer.

RODERICK SPRIGG



Roderick Sprigg was born in Merredin in 1979 and currently lives and works in Leonora, Western Australia. He is a multi-disciplinary artist whose process and community-based art practice is often concerned with the politics of masculinity.

Sprigg's work for this project derives from his experience of many years spent on his family's wheat and sheep farm north of Mukinbudin. Because of a particular breeding strategy, coupled with animal handling and welfare applications, the farm doesn't do mulesing and often shear twice a year. Spriggs's mother is famous for often having dozens and dozens of pet lambs. Lambs are known by name and are often in regimented feeding regimes. The number of pet lambs has pushed into the high seventies at times.

Sprigg received his Bachelor of Arts (Visual Art) from Curtin University in 2006 and since graduating has exhibited in both Solo and Group shows in major galleries around Australia and Internationally. Recent achievements include: *SPACED: Art Out of Place* (Nationally Touring 2014) and being awarded *Overall Runner-Up* in the Joondalup Community Invitation Art Award in 2013.

www.rodericksprigg.com

LEFT / Roderick Sprigg, *Untitled (Shepherd)* 2014
Image courtesy of the artist.

NEXT PAGE

LEFT TO RIGHT / Roderick Sprigg, *Untitled (Study for fleece stamp)* 2014
Image courtesy of the artist.
/ Roderick Sprigg, *The Family Room* 2014
Image courtesy of the artist.





LAMB'S

HELLO



Megan Christie



Valdene Buckley-Diprose



Roderick Sprigg



Abdul-Rahman Abdullah



Anna Louise Richardson



Paul Caporn



Geoff Overheu



Lemmington

A EULOGY

Seeing the graphic three-dimensional realism with which artist Abdul-Rahman Abdullah sculpts his sheep, it's little wonder that at a young age he was exposed to two independent extremities of Australia's sheep industry – a duality encountered rarely within the scope of a suburban Perth upbringing in the 1980's. At one end, there were Abdullah's father's routine backyard slaughters of sheep as a means of providing for the family; at the other, his childhood visits to rural Western Australian sheep abattoirs (the latter brought about through his father's relationship with the small communities of Muslim abattoir workers in the south west). This was all at a time, not so very long ago, when one could simply "go to Welshpool and buy (a sheep) for five bucks".

Far from harbouring any disturbance from these formative experiences, the practice of buying the live sheep and bringing them home to be slaughtered was deemed, matter of factly, as one of basic survival - and in keeping with the family's Islamic heritage. The process was further esteemed as a bonding exercise between father and son, as well as a chance to rollick for an afternoon with a temporary pet. This transition is captured light-heartedly in Abdullah's resin and timber work *Eulogy*: a portrait of a former pet lamb, Lolly, who the family kept for an extended period of eight months before sacrificing her for their own sustenance. Fully aware of the process as a child, the artist remarks having "loved her as a pet and loved her as dinner". The transition from playmate to produce was always an accepted cycle.

Despite an often-intentional exposure of materiality, in the flesh Abdullah's forms feel almost alive. This is due in part to the vitality of the personal narratives being portrayed and in part to the realism and precision in which they've been technically rendered. For *Waiting For Dad* the artist has reproduced five skinned sheep heads wrapped in plastic and formed from tinted silicon and foam filling. The works are displayed on white shelving reminiscent of fridge racking. Ease with the subject at hand is evident in their raw explicitness.

Abdullah's religious and cultural background meant that his childhood was, in certain ways, markedly unique within urban Australia for that era. His sculptures are thus, at their heart, concerned with relaying his own child-self's impressions of his world; yet, in spirit, they reference the common experience of childhood imagination. In his attempt to record these memories and

innocent perceptions, Abdullah's work is imbued with something of the surreal and mystical.

Abdullah's intimate anecdotes speak of ways of life that are out-dated within contemporary Australian society and in throwing us back to a recent local history he illuminates, with a hint of nostalgia, a sense that it's only just rolled out of reach – indicating how rapidly industries are changing in their cutthroat pursuit of higher economy and growth.

Written by Kate Mullen, Co-Director Moana Project Space & Independent Arts Writer.







ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's practice explores definitions of cultural identity, focusing on memory, narrative and the domestic environment to access esoteric social histories within an urban Australian environment. Abdullah's interest in defining identity in experiential terms emerges from a Muslim heritage that is both seventh-generation Australian and Malay. The overlaying of divergent cultural and historical influences inform Abdullah's outlook, giving him the impetus to investigate ideas of alterity and the elusive nature of belonging.

The idea of subjective reconstruction is essential to Abdullah's practice, clarifying formative passages of personal history in ways that can be experienced by an audience. Creating a physical dialogue with the past allows him to explore some of the more opaque aspects of a Muslim upbringing in an urban environment, referencing ideas of spirituality, domesticity, multi-ethnic identity and the arcane in equal measure. Re-imagining the real becomes a process of translation; an exercise in which the passage of time plays a central role determining the resonance of the past through an imperfect lens of nostalgia, intuition and the inevitable baggage of adulthood.

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's contributions to *Worth Its Weight In Gold* offer a glimpse into the social and cultural values of sheep in terms of halal slaughtering practices experienced during his childhood in the inner suburbs of Perth. Conflating religious observation with a love of both pets and food, Abdullah invites us to experience them all on the same plate.

Attending the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, then Curtin University Abdullah graduated from art school in 2012. In 2013 he was awarded a Development Grant from the Department of Culture and the Arts, the Artstart Grant from the Australia Council and selected for the *Artsource Emerging Artist Program*. He was a finalist in the Blake Prize, Substation Prize, Fisher's Ghost Art Prize and was the West Australian recipient of the Qantas Foundation *Emerging Artist Award*. In 2014 he undertook a *JUMP Mentorship* with Sydney based artist Alex Seton. Abdullah is commercially represented by Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects (VIC) and Venn Gallery (WA).

LEFT TO RIGHT / Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Waiting For Dad* (detail) 2011

Image courtesy of the artist and Venn Gallery.

/ Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Waiting For Dad* 2011

Image courtesy of the artist and Venn Gallery.

MEET THE SHEARERS

Anna Louise Richardson was raised, resides and works from an expansive plot of farmland that supports one of the closest operating farms in proximity to metropolitan Perth. Growing up here, tucked away on the edge of urbanism, elicited a close involvement with the tasks of routine farm keeping – partaking in the commotion of shearing time, for one (as a child she remembers her grandma providing the workers with morning tea, or ‘smoko’ and jumping in the wool press with her sister). The artist attributes this experience as a major impetus behind the realisation of *The Shearers*.

After working remotely within Aboriginal communities in northern and central Australia, and inspired by the Aboriginal culture and connection to land, Richardson’s practice undertook a broad exploration of navigating the Australian landscape’s diversity and vastness. However, in recognising that “it’s really fraught, in a way, to try and explore someone else’s understanding of the land”, she has since localised the focus of her artwork and now embraces the perspective of her own reality.

Within this acknowledgement, Richardson has allowed personal themes to surface organically in her work: her ethical standpoints, for instance, and the family politics, decision-making and compromise that comes with shared resources. Therefore, both the human and animal characters found on her farm and within the surrounding local community have come to play leading roles within her work.

Accessing these authentic characters can pose a challenge, as, with any functioning rural practice, organisations are skeptical of outsiders looking in. Richardson states her “way of getting in to that conversation is through relationships with people who are part of the ethos (she) believes in”. To initiate this project, she tracked down Kim, an ex-shearer who worked on the artist’s farm over a decade earlier. Despite Kim’s rough, heavily tattooed veneer, Richardson’s photographic portrait of him betrays a warm and gentle nature. To Kim, “the fate of shearing looks grim”, and so he’s chosen to “get out of the game where the average age is over 40”.

The Shearers – a series of full length, realistically proportioned portraits of the members of a local shearing team – mark a shift to human portraiture for Richardson, who, up until recently, predominantly used imagery of animals and landscape to engage themes of human industry and connectivity to

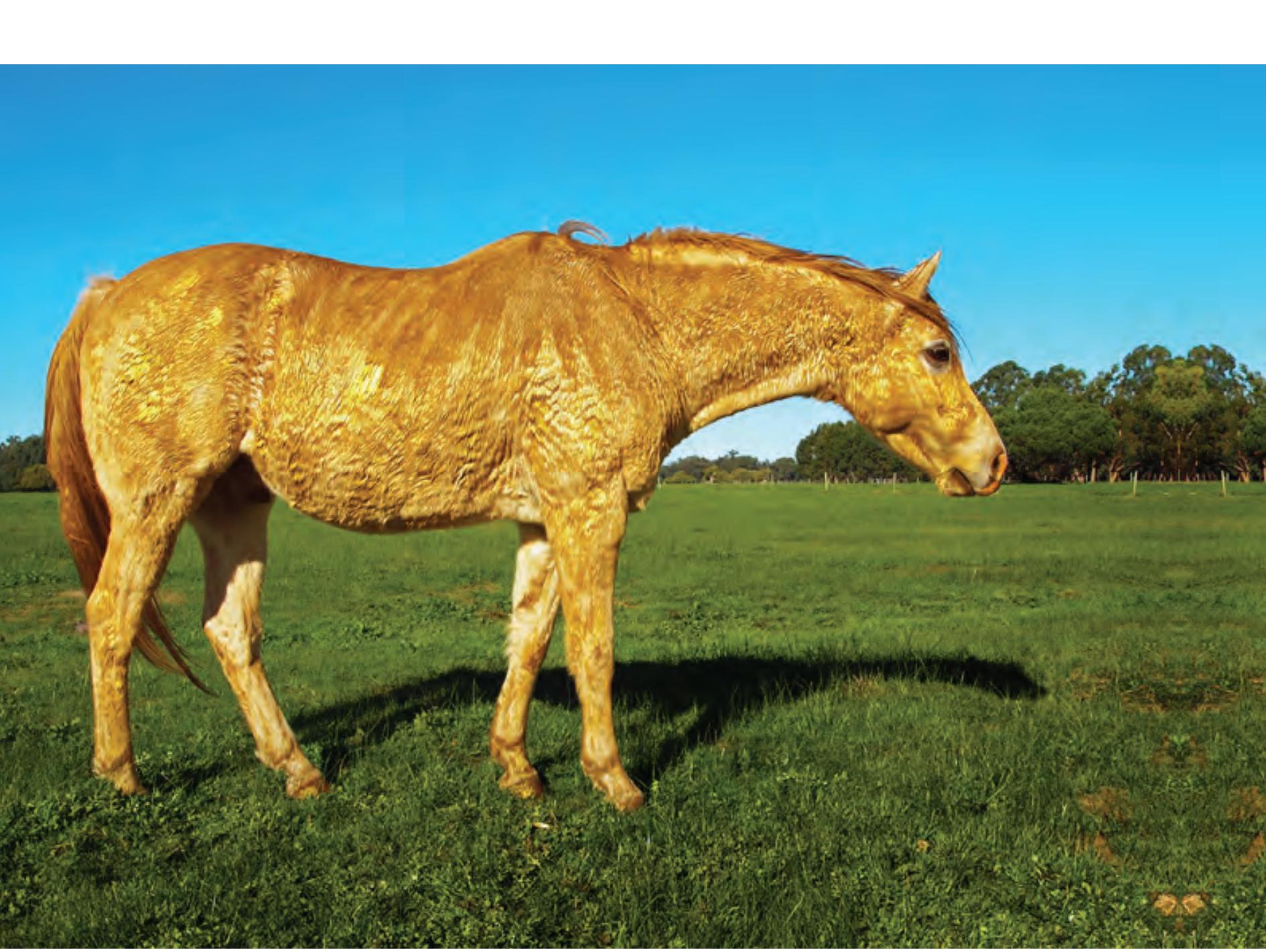
environment. Supported by raw cement fibreboard backings, each one of the characters’ faces and hands has been meticulously articulated in black conte; the details of their attire blocked out by black gesso and exposed fibreboard. A monochromatic scheme accentuates the stories relayed through their facial expressions, weathered hands and awkward stances. Richardson’s line and tone have animated something of the essence of each one of these working-class, humble men who were captured one morning during ‘smoko’ at a neighbouring sheep exporter.

In seeking out those exceptional, unexceptional individuals as subjects – those who would ordinarily avoid any form of publicity – Richardson considers that, perhaps more important than the end product itself, is the negotiation that takes place in the lead up to the image being taken, as well as the exchange that unfolds between artist and subject.

Written by Kate Mullen, Co-Director Moana Project Space & Independent Arts Writer.

ABOVE RIGHT / Anna Louise Richardson, *The Shearers* 2013
Image courtesy of the artist.
RIGHT / Anna Louise Richardson, *The Shearers* 2013 (details)
Images courtesy of the artist.







ANNA LOUISE RICHARDSON

Anna Richardson is an emerging West Australian contemporary artist whose practice focuses on rural identity in a modern Australian environment. Working primarily in painting, drawing and installation, her approach draws on figurative depictions and personal narratives that expose her set of beliefs and discusses our relationships with animals, the land and the fundamentals of life. Richardson's practice seeks to reconcile a relationship with the environment through an underlying sense of the practical realities of a farming lifestyle.

Her work in this show draws on her childhood experience of shearing. Shearers are a deeply imbedded part of Australia's history; with most images of shearers focusing on the work they do. Her work is based on the shearer at rest, having 'smoko', with the focus on the shearers themselves, their hands and faces. The works look at shearing in a nostalgic vein and explore the people behind this iconic masculine vocation.

Recent projects include a solo exhibition *As I see it* Kurb Gallery, Perth, *Curtin Degree Show*, Curtin University, Perth, *Inception*, Preston Street Art Space, Perth, and participating in the *Proximity Festival LAB*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth. She has been selected for *25 under 25*, an exhibition of 25 of Western Australia's most talented young artists under the age of 25 to be held at the Moores Building, Fremantle in April 2014.

Richardson is currently undertaking a Masters of Cultural Material Conservation and aims to have a three-fold practice of artist, curator and conservator.

www.annalouiserichardson.com

LEFT / Anna Louise Richardson, *Golden Horse* 2013
Image courtesy of the artist.

OF COMMUNAL LACUNA

As it appears to be the case that admonishments of perth¹, and especially those admonishments that arise from out of perth itself, are something to be merely taken for granted², it should come as little surprise that within contemporary situation³ one does not hear such admonishments followed by the question: what is it that one addresses when asking “what is wrong with perth?” Or, phrased differently, whose perth is referred to when images of banality, the parochial, and the generally underwhelming and mediocre, are evoked so as to reveal the being of a place? While it is conventional to posit the singular being of a place, the consideration of this line of questioning could potentially open us up to a certain uneasiness regarding the very notion of community. If such questioning were to be taken seriously, surely it would be vital to take into account the philosophical observation — and one that has emerged in a significant way in the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy — that community is not merely some present object waiting to be studied or discussed, but, rather, something that is always already embedded in the speaker who speaks — regardless of whether or not that speaker address the topic of community explicitly, or at all. If such an observation were to be taken into account, the problem of how a discussion and questioning of community, and, more specifically, the popular dismissal and critique of a community, should proceed, given that the reduction of a community to an “object” — and an object that one can “get both hands around” — appears untenable. For Nancy, a thinker who takes the questioning of “community” or “being-with” as fundamental to the very project of philosophy itself⁴, this aforementioned questioning appears to emerge out of a crisis in and of community itself — a crisis that brings the necessity of thinking community to the fore. Indeed, and as Marie-Eve Morin indicates in her text *Jean-Luc Nancy*, much of Nancy’s project in his work *The Inoperative Community* is to trace the emergence of the conventional discussion of community as manifesting from out of an intellectual tradition that views the crisis of the preclusion of true community as being a symptom of the emergence of modern capitalist societies (74-5). Morin relays that, for the post-Romantic thinking of community — as exemplified by a figure like the German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies — community is understood in terms of its opposition to “civil-society” or “associations,” insofar as the two sets of terms are posited as being mutually exclusive:

[for Tönnies] whereas society relates separated individuals on the basis of rational calculation and self-interest, and thus allows these separated individuals to live peacefully beside one another, community fosters a feeling of belongingness, familiarity, and intimacy that joins its members together. On the one side, there is unity on the basis of agreement and contract, on the other of understanding and sympathy

(Jean-Luc Nancy, 74).

Accordingly, much of Nancy’s major work, including his texts *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*, appears to have emerged out of respective crises that bring community as such into question — these crises being the dead-ends of communist totalitarianism and capitalist individualism, and the humanist lamentation of the flight of meaning from the world. That the world seems to have lost its meaning — as appears in the guise of modern “progress,” from out of which we are spurred forth seemingly without reason or why — and that the utopian dream of communism’s harmonising of humanity with its nature⁵ ended in totalitarianism, presents the necessity for Nancy to question community as such. Accordingly, if the symptoms of a crisis regarding community can be taken as the means for organising the questioning of community as such, what crisis can we attempt to grasp in order to begin questioning our own community and the popular admonishments of it⁶?

Given the context of the publication of this essay, it is perhaps appropriate to begin by looking at the symptoms that have arisen locally over the last few years that perhaps indicate a crisis at the level of perth’s artistic community. What then are these symptoms? Since 2012 a host of well-established private art galleries have been forced to close across Western Australia due to continual financial pressure (“Boom Times But Not Culturally As Galleries Shut”, n.p.); courses within the humanities or the “liberal arts” have come under threat of closure at our universities, and, accordingly, it appears that the perennial marginalising of critical and creative discourse within Western Australia has been unaffected by the now years of activity that preceded the sedimentary state of the “boom”. At times, it appears obstinately true that Western Australia will remain culturally barren — especially when compared to its eastern states counterparts. As Perth based writer Ramon Glazov has commented, Western Australia’s “depressing grotesquerie” — the fact that W.A. is more renowned for its “endless supply of serial killing tales, small-town

hatred and supernatural horror" than a healthy arts scene — is most likely so intractable because being "larger than Greenland and every administrative region in Siberia excepting Yakutia" there simply "aren't enough yuppies in the world to gentrify an area that size" ("Blood Sucking Death Porn Dykes Do Western Australia", n.p.). However, for many, these symptoms of crisis are to be understood, not in geographical terms, but rather in terms that are reminiscent of Tönnies' opposing of civil-society and community. For example, it appears to be the case that, for perth-based academic, artist, and gallerist, David Bromfield, the present situation — which could be approached in terms of these aforementioned symptoms, without being limited to them — demands that artists "participate in the evolution of an active and supportive creative community" ("Where Have all the Artists Gone?", n.p.). Indeed, Bromfield has argued that,

contrary to common belief the overall participation of visual artists in 'art networks' and the art community in Perth and WA has been dropping steadily since the early 1990s despite the apparent recent revival of artist run organisations and the grotesquely exploitative increase in the number of Fine Arts graduates. The shit hit the fan in the mid-nineties when most artists lost their confidence ("Where Have all the Artists Gone?", n.p.).

Much of Bromfield's argument rests on the distinction between an authentic creative community, one that is based around a certain kinship and a shared sense of the relation between art and emancipation, on the one hand, and the increasingly hegemonic and pernicious ideology of "managerialism," on the other. Managerialism, a term Bromfield borrowed from the Australian artist David Pledger, shares much with the post-Romantic conception of "civil society." Like civil-society, managerialism is critiqued by those whom see it as precluding the emergence of community by way of the former's privileging of notions of utility and instrumental reason. However, contra this view both civil society and neo-liberal "managerialism" are praised by others whom view community, which is grounded in sympathy and feeling, as being fundamentally irrational and lacking in purpose. Indeed, Pledger states in his paper "Revaluing the Artist in the New World Order," that "managerialism sees itself as the antidote to chaos, irrationality, disorder, and incompleteness". It would appear then that, like the advocates of civil society, those whom advocate the managerialist model do so in the attempt to avoid the irrationality and incompleteness that is understood to be at the heart of community.

The negativity of incompleteness or absence, as that which cannot be put to work and that appears to disrupt every order, seems to be opposed to both the rationalism of civil society and the sympathy or feeling of community. This exclusion of incompleteness, as is found in the oppositional pairings of civil society and community, or managerialism and the "authentic" artistic-community, appears thoroughly problematic, insofar as these supposedly mutually exclusive terms appear to be united by their functioning to attempt to exclude absence. Indeed, and as Morin claims, it is for this reason that Nancy rejects the framing of such an opposition, and, instead, argues that these notions appear instead to be two sides of the same coin (Jean-Luc Nancy, 74). In fact, Nancy will go further than merely suggesting that there is an implicit relation between the logics of civil society and community. Nancy argues that any and all appeals made to community that emerge from a nostalgia for what "came before" the rationalism of civil society are misguided insofar as they miss the moment of the latter's emergence. Nancy argues that community, "far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us* [...] in the wake of society" (*The Inoperative Community*, 11). What came before community, Nancy argues, was potentially as unrelated to the post-Romantic notion of community as is the rationalist and economically driven civil-society or association. Therefore, the nostalgia for a "better" or "simpler" time where a true sense of kinship held a people together in immanence must be, for Nancy, rejected as wholeheartedly as the rationalist injunction to formalise life into privatized economic relations. Indeed, since Nancy views both the post-Romantic nostalgia for community and the rationalist arguments for civil-society as both emerging from out of an incapacity to adequately approach the problem of incompleteness, loss, and absence, it is to the very notion of lacuna that Nancy turns in order to develop an articulation of community that escapes both the logic of instrumental reason and Romantic nostalgia. For Nancy, it is the very experience of a lack of immanence between individuals, or, put differently, the lack of "communion," that functions as the condition for the possibility of community itself. Accordingly, for Nancy, the true commonality that is shared amongst any group of concrete individuals is the experience of the absence of communion itself. Moreover, it is this commonality expressed through an experience of absence that creates the very possibility for individuals to "come together." We are a community then only in the sense that we do not have communion. Or, as Nancy puts it,

what this community has lost — the immanence and the intimacy of a communion — is lost only in the sense that such a loss is constitutive of ‘community’ itself. It is not a loss: on the contrary, immanence, if it were to come about, would instantly suppress community or communication, as such (*The Inoperative Community*, 12).

For Nancy, true immanence, in the sense of a sensibility shared by all, would only bring about the impossibility of community and communication, insofar as that which is immanent to itself has nothing beyond itself to make contact with. Moreover, without such a point of difference a community could not even know or articulate itself.

Perhaps then, for a figure like Bromfield, the answer to the question “what is wrong with perth?” would be formulated by way of indicating the absence of an artistic-community proper — the absence of a shared artistic sensibility caused by the increasing profusion of “managerialism.” However, *pace* Bromfield, and following Nancy’s argument, it would appear to be the case that the only sensibility that is truly shared amongst concrete individuals is this sense of loss or absence. Since artists, just as all concrete individuals, lack any immanence to one another — whether this lack of immanence is understood in terms of the absence of a mono-aesthetic or a singular praxis — there is always the possibility for this shared experience of absence to become communal. That some artists, or art-institutions, act in seemingly romantic and utopian ways, whilst others work towards the realisation of rationalised goals, should not be understood as a problem that needs to be resolved. According to Nancy, such an approach to community, one that would posit the existence of a perfect point of immanence between all individuals, would not only be seemingly impossible, but also deeply undesirable. Rather than emerging out of the elimination of difference, community emerges out of the production of a space of singular plurality from which a prior “being-with” — whether understood in terms of “being-with-others,” “being-with-the-world,” or “being-with-myself” — can be recognised. Indeed, and to paraphrase the quote from Hölderlin that is found at the beginning of Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural*, it would appear to be the lack of immanence to oneself, whether we are addressing an artist or otherwise, that creates the need to share the burden of life with others⁷. Hence, surely there can be no answer to the question “what is wrong with perth?” since perth cannot be understood to have any singular being. Instead, perth would always already be simultaneously of the order of singularity and plurality —

i.e., “singular plural.” This does not mean that injustice should be merely overlooked, nor that disenchantment should be simply ignored. Instead, the lesson that Nancy has to teach us regarding community is that whatever we feel belongs to us — that which we feel entitled to judge, dismiss, or critique — is always already shared. Rather than attempting to reproduce any one set of values that would “correct” our present situation, we should instead look to open a communal space for possible alternatives by way of acknowledging that none of us alone can hold any answer.

Perhaps then, perth, and the communities that co-articulate it — those communities that are externally intimate to it — should be seen as a series of encircling spaces from out of which the oppositions of “rural” and “urban,” “development” and “conservation,” “art” and “management,” can be approached as points of confluence and being-with, and not as intractable points of separation. Moreover, I have hope that such a process of unbinding is always already occurring, even if it is poorly acknowledge or not acknowledge at all. Indeed, is it not because we lack each other or that we are not immanent to one another that we can come together over a meal?

Written by Francis Russell, Independent Arts Writer.



- 1) Against common practice, and for reasons that will hopefully become clear, the proper noun "perth" has not been capitalized throughout this essay.
 - 2) Take, as an illustration, the kinds of questions one most commonly hears others, or oneself, ask of travelers to perth on an initial meeting — i.e. "why did you come here?" Indeed, the phrasing of this question becomes even more striking when compared to the kinds of questions one receives when speaking to natives of other cities — including those within Australia — such as "How are you finding London?" or "What brings you to Sydney?" Indeed, given that those whom are "native" to perth display such a predilection for self-admonishment, one could perhaps be forgiven for risking a reading of such phenomena that could revealing an overpowering injunction from the "Big Other," insofar as one must at all times remind the Big Other, by way of one's comments to those who do not live in perth that, one's happening to live in perth does not necessitate a kind of love for perth born out of extreme naiveté — i.e. that one's perspective is not overdetermined by happening to live, and potentially being born in, the "world's largest country town."
 - 3) A situation that cannot be clarified by this paper, as the latter is merely an attempt to create a certain "reopening" of this situation, however small.
 - 4) As Nancy states in *Being Singular Plural*, "philosophy is, in sum, the thinking of being-with; because of this, it is also thinking-with as such" (31).
 - 5) Consider the quote from Marx that Nancy includes as an epigraph to *Being Singular Plural*: "since human nature is the true community of men, those who produce thereby affirm their nature, human community, and social being which, rather than an abstract, general power in opposition to the isolated individual, is the being of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness. To say that a man is alienated from himself is to say that the society of this alienated man is the caricature of his real community" (1).
 - 6) Admonishments that, as opposed to creating the impetus for a questioning of community, of what community is and from where it emerges, more often than not appear to merely cause the further sedimentation of prejudices on the topic.
 - 7) "It is good to rely upon others. For no one can bear this life alone" (1).
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DRESSING THE TRUTH

An action is taking place, framed within a cool and imminent shadowiness. One can make out two forms: the deliberate movements of a muddily rendered male figure, the other soft and fleshy pink, less intelligible. The small screen beckons viewers in to investigate and, closer up, the interior of a shed is discernable, its bluey aluminium walls and wooden framework partly illuminated by a singular light source. One can deduce from the rudimentary lighting and the sparse industrial milieu that the broader environment here is one of reasonable isolation.

In keeping with the vintage home video aesthetic, the grainy, underexposed footage could be taken to be an early 1980's home made production, one the artist dug up from old family archives. But despite appearances, the film was shot earlier this year at artist Paul Caporn's family property near Darkan, a desolate southwest Western Australian farming landscape. It is, technically speaking, a home video: Caporn has captured his uncle performing the 'dressing' of a carcass: the common and age-old farmer's task of slaughtering, skinning and gutting a sheep.

We enter on the scene to find the body already dead and hanging by its hind legs, ready for the essential dressing processes of the de-skinning – the removal of the woolly and fleshy layers, then the guts – and the draining of blood. As the action becomes apparent, those unaccustomed to rural living may find the practical brutality confronting, even abject.

Amid the graphic imagery, the film rings with intimacy. Indeed, this is its vital quality: the small-scale eliciting a one-on-one viewing capacity, which drives this sense further home. The intimacy goes beyond one's awareness that this is Caporn's uncle at work, while his nephew and young great-nephews look on as flies on the wall. If we dig deeper, we learn that, since Caporn's boyhood some decades earlier, he has witnessed this very uncle practicing this ritual countless times. The visual ambiguity of the film's production era is homage to this personal, recursive history.

The humility and familiarity with which Caporn has treated the subject suggests that this is no exceptional experience, but the bloody commonplace reality that exists behind our roaring meat trades. In its simplicity the image possesses a potency that is capable of etching a lasting impression into a viewer's mind and, whether consciously or not, it is one that will linger and perhaps resurface upon mealtime.

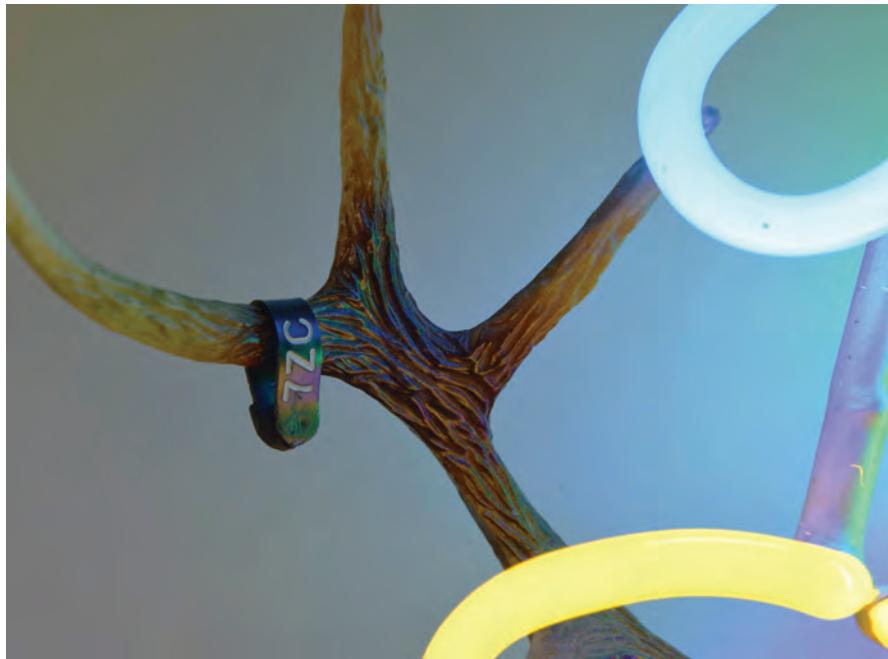
Caporn's experience has informed a view that there exist a few base commonalities between the condition of a farmer and that of an artist: both act as primary producer, creating and submitting the product and its value into the market place yet reaping only second-handed remuneration. Likewise, both are at the mercy of a government that systemically deprives them of power and of control over the laws that shape their livelihoods. In focusing on the farmer, silently at work, Caporn is subtly critiquing his own position as an artist.

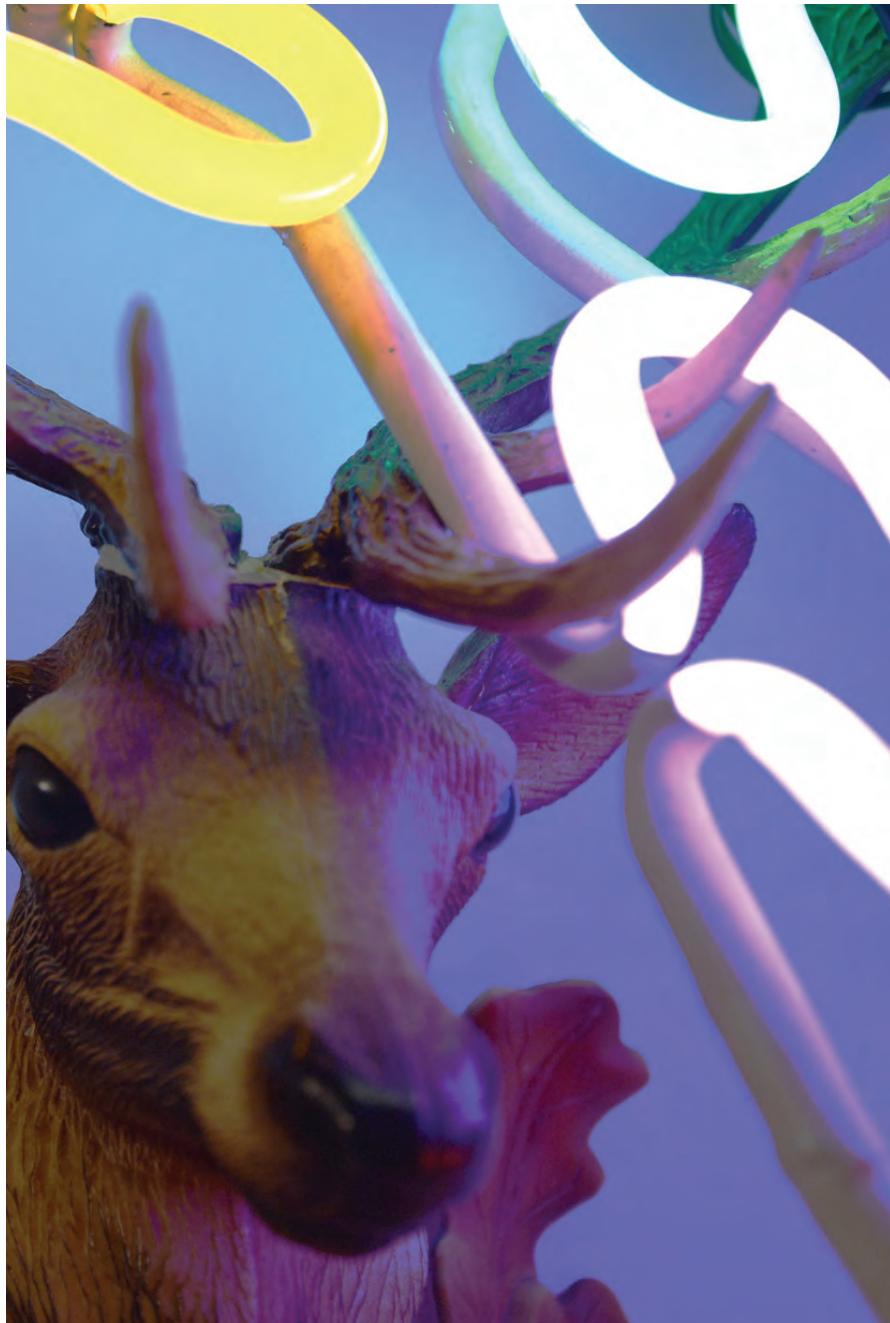
The film's explicit detailing of a universal yet largely unseen working process continues a longstanding trend in his practice: the exposure of unglamorous production processes that, for the most part, take place inside the workman's shed. His collapsed scissor lift installation, for instance, reveals something of the process behind art-installation from within the display space itself. Underlying all of the artist's attempts to lay bare these industries is a deep rooted and ongoing search for the acknowledgement of truth, or to expose a broader reality.

Written by Kate Mullen, Co-Director Moana Project Space & Independent Arts Writer.



LEFT / Paul Caporn, *Incident With A Memory* 2014
Image courtesy of the artist and Turner Galleries.





PAUL CAPORN

Paul Caporn's work often engages with ideas that circulate notions of industry and science. Dealing with technologies in what is often a low-tech manner; describing the relationships between people, memory, time, space and places. This is often negotiated through an uncanny sensibility, where familiar domestic or industrial objects are brought together in a way that feels both comfortable and unfamiliar.

His work in this show connects with his family history and relationship with his uncle, who continues to run the family farm in Darkan, near Kojonup, Western Australia. Struggling between the forces of nature and finance his uncle lives an isolated existence negotiating a battle between historical and contemporary farming practices.

Caporn has exhibited nationally and internationally in over 40 group and 9 solo exhibitions, making art primarily in the realms of sculpture, animation, video and installation.

Recent group exhibitions include *Impacted* at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and *Now and Then*, at Curtin University in 2013. In 2014 he will undertake a six month arts residency in Basel, Switzerland, through Artsource and the Christoph Merian Foundation Switzerland.

He has been the recipient of various grants from Department of Culture and the Arts WA, including a Visual Arts Craft Strategy Mid-Career Fellowship in 2008. Currently he is working towards an exhibition at John Curtin Gallery for which he received an Australia Council development grant for in 2013.

www.paulcaporn.com

ALL / Paul Caporn, *Incident With A Memory (detail)* 2014
Image courtesy of the artist and Turner Galleries.

KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE

Geoff Overheu's sculptures evoke the oft-reticent farmer's voice – an utterly iconic Australian figure whose romanticised presence within today's collective consciousness has been shaped and bolstered by artists since before our federation. Bush ballads by Lawson and Paterson and classic pictorial impressions of rural life by artists like Roberts and McCubbin are at the heart of this persistent sentimental mythos surrounding the Australian farmer, but it remains exceptionally rare for farmers themselves to articulate their own story within the public realm. Overheu explains that this is because, quite simply, they've got better things to do. There is no time for self-reflection or expression when fires and droughts are to be contended with and flocks mulesed and shorn. There are few Australian artists better placed than Overheu to speak on behalf of this decidedly silent figure within contemporary art - prior to his status as a full-time artist, Overheu lived the life of a farmer for twenty-five years.

No matter how time poor farming left him (he recalls, matter-of-factly, having worked for eight years without a holiday because "that's just what you did"), art had always held an allure for Overheu, and the eventual transition to artist was one that came naturally. His practice draws abundantly from his former life farming in Western Australia's Central Wheatbelt and Lower West: the narratives of isolation, camaraderie and of battling with the elements. Technically too, Overheu owes his comfort with most industrial materials and machinery to the physicality of his farming years, as well as it founding his process-driven approach to art making. Whether eyeing one of his resin kangaroo busts, a deflated cow cast in plastic or a miniature appropriation of Botticelli's *Venus* in bronze, Overheu's technical confidence is as clear as day.

Only in recent years has the human form entered the artist's trajectory. His poetic interpretations of the farmer, the *Dreamers* or *Virtuous Peasants*, are geared to brave the weather in uniforms of Driza-Bone jackets and Akubra hats. The figures of steel, plastic and sand are affixed with animatronic elements that render in them the subtlest movement, detected by viewers as an unnerving glitch from the corner of the eye. This causes one to question whether these sculptures, uncannily real in dimensions and detail, are in fact living statues, and the installation a performance. Hauntingly silent yet piercing in presence, the *Dreamers* embody solemnity and stoicism.

Originating as autobiographical incarnations, these works came to speak on behalf of farmers across Australia and, not surprisingly, have struck a definite chord with those in the business on which they are based: "there was one guy in Geraldton who was standing in front of these two *Dreamers* hugging, and he was weeping", Overheu recollects, "That was a pretty powerful moment for me. He was an older farmer and it just resonated... Another guy from Donnybrook rang up and said, "Yeah, that's right", and that was it. He got it".

Overheu's sculptures are conceived and produced from his Gingin property, where the artist keeps a flock of wild sheep as 'pets', for old times' sake.

Written by Kate Mullen, Co-Director Moana Project Space & Independent Arts Writer.







GEOFF OVERHEU

Geoff Overheu is a sculptor and installation artist, whose interest is in the romanticisation of the rural landscape.

Overheu grew up on a wheat and sheep farm in the Central Wheatbelt, 250 kilometres north of Perth. Depending on the vagaries of the season he ran 4000 - 6000 head of sheep in a self-replacing flock. He was a wool classer, crutcher, muleser and has been known to shear the odd sheep.

He has recently had a solo shows at Geraldton Regional Art Gallery and Bunbury Regional Art Gallery. As well as having work in Strand Ephemera in Townsville at the Perc Tucker Gallery, and the Adelaide at the Festival Hall as part of the Adelaide Fringe Festival.

Overheu will be spending April, May and June, 2014 in a Residency in Beijing, China in conjunction with the Red Gate Gallery, looking at farmers and the urban/rural divide in China.

www.geoffoverheu.com

LEFT TO RIGHT / Geoff Overheu, *Untitled I, II, III* 2014
Images courtesy of the artist and Turner Galleries.

WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

First published on the occasion of the exhibition *Worth Its Weight In Gold*,
Moana Project Space, Perth.
12 May – 14 June, 2014.

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Curator: Anna Louise Richardson
Title: Worth Its Weight In Gold
ISBN: 978-0-646-92072-6
Catalogue Design: Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Cover image: David Collins www.davidcharlescollins.com
Printed by PICTON PRESS, Perth.
1st edition of 100 copies.

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Worth Its Weight In Gold is assisted by The Department of Culture and The Arts and City of Perth.

