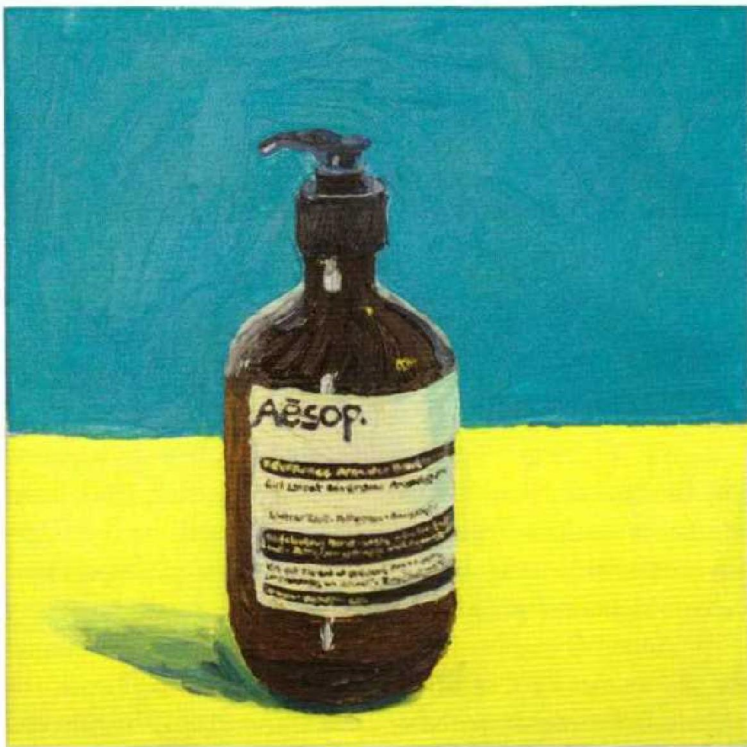


Patriotism, patriarchy and politics



Chloé Wolifson, Sydney

Left:
Brenda Samuels, *Aesop hand wash*, 2015,
oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, image courtesy the artist

Right:
Brenda Samuels, *Dill cucumbers (Polski Ogorki)*, 2015,
oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, image courtesy the artist

2015 feminism in context

Twelve months ago, museums and regional galleries around the country were gearing up to commemorate a milestone in 2015. On the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations-declared International Women's Year and the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, the Australian Government had committed AU\$4.7 million to – wait for it – the Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture Fund. Money was available for projects that 'tell the story of the Anzacs and how their sacrifice shaped our nation'.¹ The result was a proliferation of Anzac-themed exhibitions, while Commonwealth recognition of the feminist milestone took the form of a booklet and video.² Cultural institutions were left to fund International Women's Day (IWD)-themed events via existing avenues.

While all Australians should reflect on our national history, the Commonwealth's priorities, both fiscal and promotional, highlighted an ongoing tendency in our national identity and dialogue. Australia's then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott marked Anzac Day delivering a tribute at Gallipoli, while as then-Minister for Women he had spent IWD at various unrelated media opportunities with other men, where everyone present failed to mention IWD. (Two days earlier the Liberal National Party hosted an IWD lunch at a men-only club in Brisbane.) The emphasis on old-fashioned values continued in August when then-Arts Minister George Brandis stood in the National Gallery of Australia, flanked by swathes of wattle, to announce this year's upcoming summer blockbuster, a Tom Roberts survey.³

Thankfully many Australian institutions and galleries chose to mark 2015 by focusing on the work of women artists and engaging in dialogues around feminism. There were a number of politically charged exhibitions that took place in parallel to the mobilisation of the broader Australian arts community against changes to Commonwealth arts funding. Institutions around Australia honoured living and deceased women artists with solo exhibitions (though in lesser numbers than their male counterparts).

The programming of several galleries reflected a consistent engagement with feminist dialogues and the significance of the 2015 anniversaries. The University of Sydney Art Gallery hosted 'Girls at the Tin Sheds', while its sister show 'Girls at the Tin Sheds: Duplicated' took place at the University Union's Verge Gallery. Both exhibitions mined the University Art Gallery collection to celebrate the Tin Sheds' heyday during the 1970s and 1980s when women students, activists and artists utilised screenprinting facilities to create posters for social and cultural events and causes.

Verge Gallery continued this engagement with their ambitious 'Feminist September' programming. This included the exhibition 'Feminist Ecologies', curated by Chloe Hazel-

wood, which sought to break open institutional feminism in order to allow for a diversity of intersecting voices and experiences.

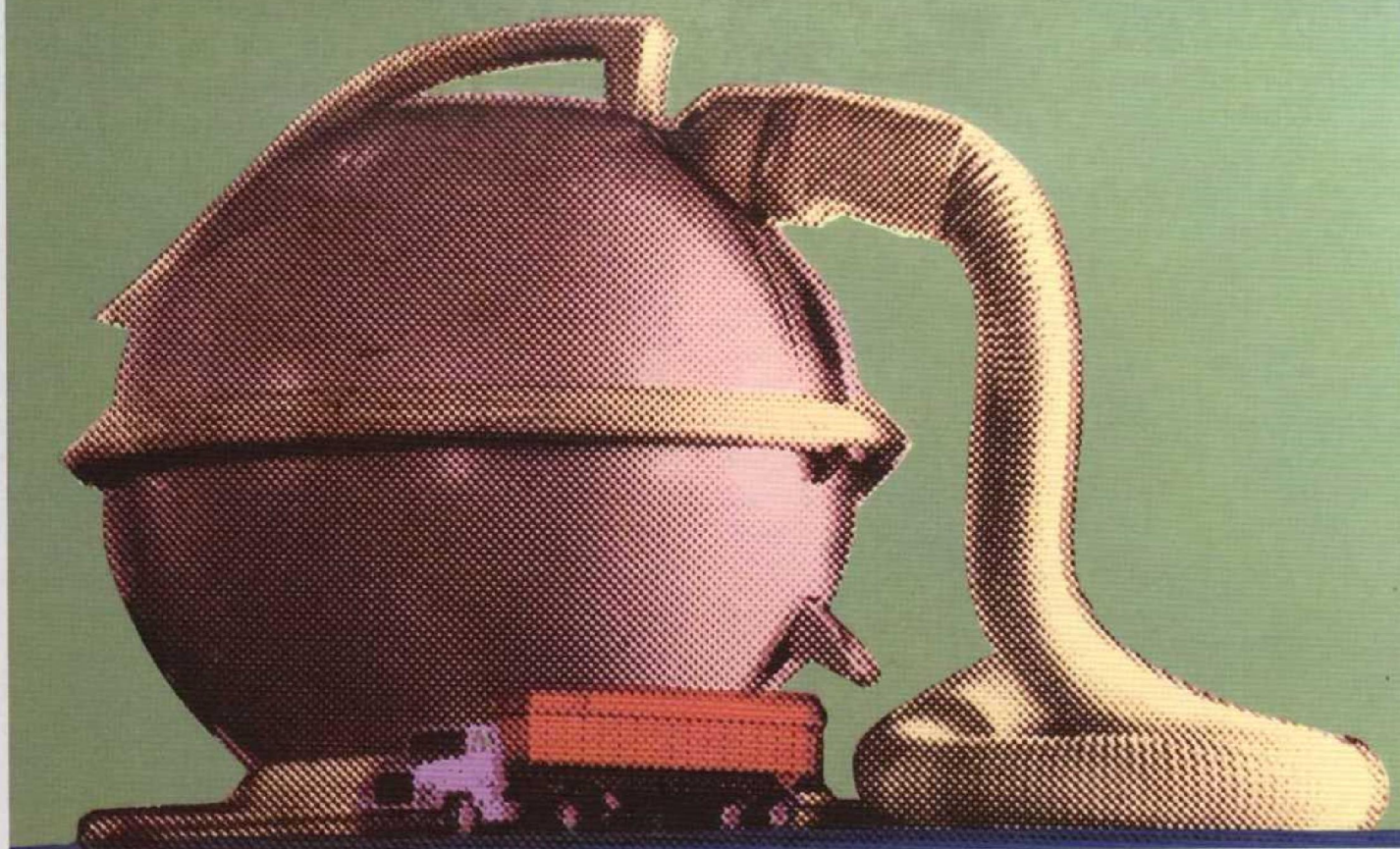
Sydney-based group Contemporary Art and Feminism coordinated the year-long project 'Future Feminist Archive', which featured exhibitions and events across New South Wales. The project sought to connect past and present ideas and experiences via an investigation of the potential of the archive. This took the form of a symposium at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), a series of exhibitions at Sydney College of the Arts, and the exhibition 'Notes Towards a Future Feminist Archive' presented by Affiliated Text at Cross Art Books, which included the work of nearly 60 women artists and writers.

In its second year of operation, the Sydney artist-run initiative AirSpace Projects presented a number of exhibitions with feminist themes. Rafaela Pandolfini curated a group exhibition entitled 'A New Feminine?', endeavouring to break new ground in the area, while Miranda Samuels exhibited paintings by her mother, Brenda Samuels, in the exhibition 'Paintings by Mum'. For this curator–artist exchange, Miranda undertook a share of her mother's housework in return for the production of paintings. The show prompted questions around the experiences of women artists, including 'the emerging middle-aged female artist', and highlighted the continuing relevance and renewal of feminist strategies.

It is widely acknowledged that Lucy R. Lippard's visit to Australia in 1975 to deliver the Power Lecture at the University of Sydney was a key factor in the development of the Women's Art Movement in Australia. The feminist research project 'Sunday School', led by artists Kelly Doley and Diana Smith, marked the fortieth anniversary of this milestone by revisiting the lecture in a format that incorporated re-staging, remembering and recontextualising.

The Women's Art Register also marked 40 years in 2015, and celebrated its library of 20,000 images of work by 5000 women artists with a festival of women's artmaking. A number of exhibitions and events highlighting the project's continuing relevance took place across Melbourne, under the banner 'AS IF: 40 years and beyond', to mark the occasion. This included a reprisal of Art+Feminism's 'Wikipedia Edit-a-thon' in which contributors seek to redress the gender imbalances within the global information repository. The program took out Melbourne's Fringe Award for Best Visual Arts.

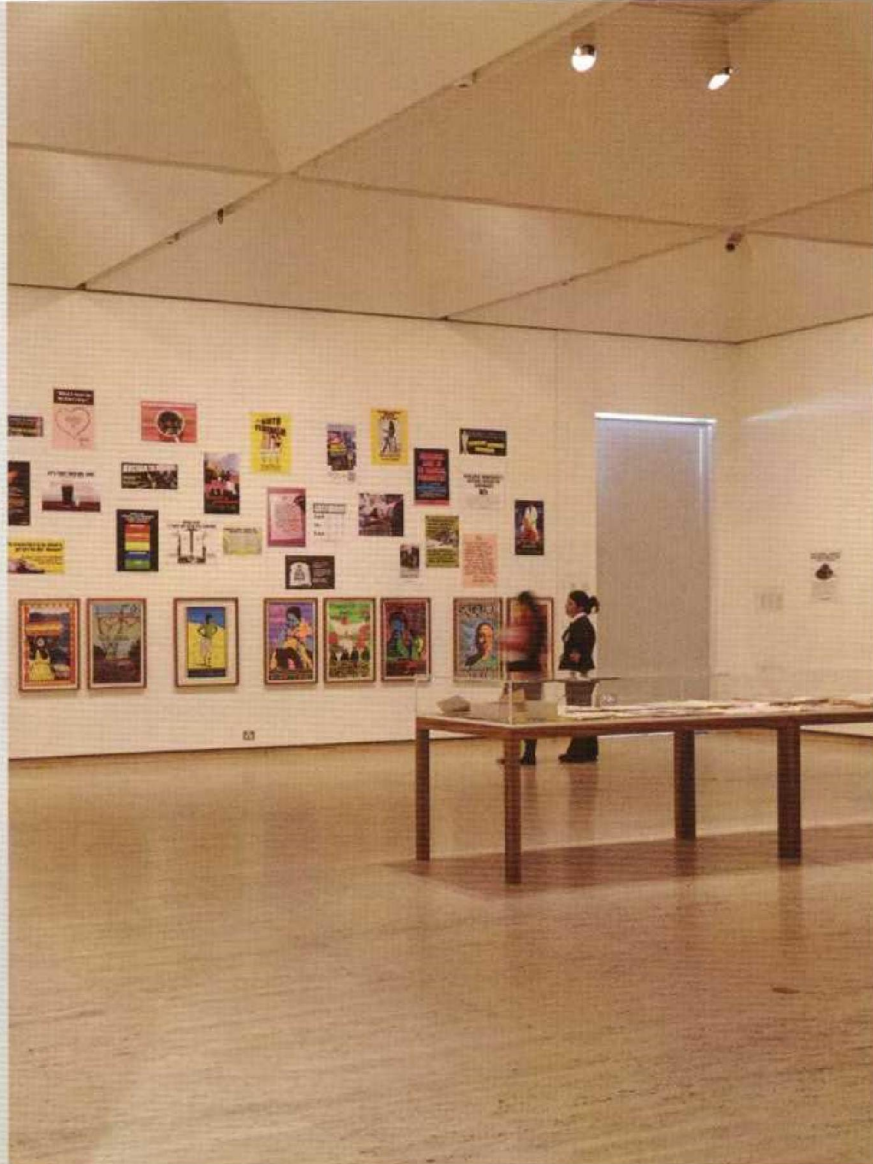
Sydney's Cross Art Projects continued its considered programming around ideas of contemporary art and politics with a number of exhibitions. This included: 'Mother to Daughter: On Art and Caring for Homelands', featuring women painters and their daughters working at Buku-



Top:
Sheona White, *Hoover Constellation (Cargo Cult)*, 1980,
colour screenprint on paper, 39 x 39cm,
produced at Tin Sheds University of Sydney, Lucifoil Collective;
collection of the artist

Opposite:
See you at the barricades, exhibition view,
Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Sydney, 2015,
including the Guerrilla Girls' *Portfolio Compleat*, 1985–2012;
photo: Felicity Jenkins, AGNSW

SEE YOU AT THE BARRICADES



Larrnggay Mulka Centre at Yirrkala in the Top End; 'My Sisters and Other Ghosts', curated by Jasmin Stephens and featuring early-career artists from Singapore and Bangkok; and 'Dear Minister For Women', by artists Mish Meijers and Tricky Walsh. The latter harnessed the hashtag #dearministerforwomen as an outlet for frustration as well as a curatorial archiving tool.

As Tony Abbott departed the prime ministership in September, along with the position of Minister for Women that he had so insisted on holding, Michaelia Cash, formerly Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, was elevated to the full ministerial role (along with two of her female colleagues this brought the number of women in cabinet to five out of 21). Within days Cash was standing alongside freshly minted Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to announce that the new cabinet's first action was to endorse a AU\$100 million women's safety package. Turnbull sought to shift the national conversation, saying: 'We as leaders, as a government must make it – and we will make it – a clear national objective of ours to ensure that Australia is more respecting of women.'⁴

On the occasion of 'See you at the barricades', an exhibition investigating dissident aesthetics, the AGNSW acquired

the Guerrilla Girls' *Portfolio Compleat* (1985–2012), a series of nearly 100 posters by the legendary anonymous collective. Here's hoping the messages contained therein serve to hold our public institutions – and officials – to account in 2016.

1. Australian Government, 'Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture Fund', www.anzaccentenary.gov.au; see www.anzaccentenary.gov.au/get-involved/anzac-centenary-arts-and-culture-fund, accessed 1 October 2015.

2. Australian Government, 'International Women's Day 2015', www.dfat.gov.au, 8 March 2015; see www.dfat.gov.au/news/news/Pages/international-womens-day-2015.aspx, accessed 1 October 2015.

3. Andrew Taylor, 'Patriotic fervour engulfs the National Gallery of Australia as it attempts to leave scandal behind,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 August 2015; see www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/patriotic-fervour-engulfs-the-national-gallery-of-australia-as-it-attempts-to-leave-scandal-behind-20150819-gj2p0y.html, accessed 1 October 2015.

4. Anna Henderson and Francis Keany, 'Chris Brown: Government flags ban on R 'n' B star as PM Malcolm Turnbull unveils \$100 million package to fight domestic violence', www.abc.net.au, 25 September 2015; see www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-24/make-it-unaustralian-to-disrespect-women-turnbull-100-million-du/6800330, accessed 1 October 2015.



Sunday School (Kelly Doley and Diana Smith), *The Lucy R. Lippard Lecture*, live performance, Artspace, Sydney, 26 July 2015; image courtesy the artists; photo: Kate Blackmore