

Devonport Regional Gallery  
presents

# *felt presence*



## Education Kit

A Contemporary Art Tasmania Touring exhibition

# EDUCATION KIT OUTLINE

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Introduction to this exhibition

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For Contemporary Art Tasmania Touring Program 2014–2015

**Cover image:** Anne Morrison, *Tho lost to sight...*, 2013, triptych, acrylic and watercolour on paper, 87 x 87cm (each, unframed)

## Introduction to this Education Kit

This education kit accompanies the exhibition *felt presence* presented by Devonport Regional Gallery and supported through the Contemporary Art Tasmania Exhibition Development Fund. The exhibition was first presented at Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport, Tasmania during the Ten Days on the Island Festival (15 March – 28 April 2013). It will tour nationally in 2014–2015.

This education kit is designed to provide teachers with a framework to approach *felt presence* as an educational resource for students in areas such as art, social studies and history. Activities are designed to assist both teachers and students by engaging in a meaningful way with the works on display, placing them in a broader cultural context and interpreting them within the exhibition as a whole.

Students in art, social studies and history classes would benefit most from attending *felt presence*, with the themes of this exhibition most suitable to students from years 4–12. Questions and activities have been designed with these student groups in mind. However, material can be adapted for use with younger age groups.

All the information about the exhibition and individual artists' works has been drawn from the *felt presence* exhibition catalogue, discussions with the curator and experience of the education program conducted during the exhibition's first display at Devonport Regional Gallery. All definitions have been taken from the Australian Oxford Dictionary. The catalogue can be obtained from the gallery or by contacting Devonport Regional Gallery on (03) 6424 82 96 or [artgallery@devonport.tas.gov.au](mailto:artgallery@devonport.tas.gov.au). Alternatively the catalogue can be downloaded from the gallery website: [http://devonportgallery.com/uploadFiles/documents/felt\\_presence\\_catalouge\\_complete.pdf](http://devonportgallery.com/uploadFiles/documents/felt_presence_catalouge_complete.pdf)

This kit contains four sections: introduction to the exhibition theme; activities to complete before visiting the exhibition; questions and information to consider during the visit; and post-visit activities. Teachers may select all or some sections of this education kit according to their requirements.

## Introduction to the Exhibition

This exhibition was developed by Devonport Regional Gallery as part of Ten Days on the Island (2013), an international arts festival hosted in Tasmania biennially.

### CURATOR

Dr Ellie Ray, Director, Devonport Regional Gallery

### ARTISTS

Tara Badcock (TAS)

Samantha Clark (Scotland, UK)

Anita Dineen (TAS)

Anne Morrison (TAS)

Irene Murphy (Ireland)

Claire Needham (VIC)

Rosemary O'Rourke (TAS)

Sharyn Woods (TAS)

### EXHIBITION THEME

Felt presence focuses on a little-discussed aspect of Australian colonial history; female convicts. The exhibition curator, Ellie Ray, was interested in the way we might let factors such as experiences, feelings, hopes and fears of convict women inform our construct of historical realities both with and without material evidence. The title 'felt presence' encompasses this theme well and helps answer a key question: what can an exhibition convey to the visitor that recorded history cannot? The choice to invite eight female artists, both Tasmanian and international, to respond to the theme by making new work, was deliberate; The aim was to bridge the past and the present in a meaningful way.



## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, female convicts, like their male counterparts, were transported to Australia from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales charged with felonies ranging from murder to stealing bread for their families to eat. Given the terrible living conditions in these countries at the time, some women committed crimes with the intention of being caught so they could be transported to Australia. The unknown future in Van Diemen's Land (as Tasmania was then known) was frightening but the known plight was unbearable. For most, however, the sense of displacement, loneliness and despair would only be heightened in a new, foreign and strange land as their treatment as second-class citizens became institutionalised.

A total of eighty-six ships transporting convicts arrived in Van Diemen's Land, taking a minimum three months, but often longer, to sail from London to Hobart. With diseases rife and conditions appalling, many died on the journeys. Those women who survived were registered and sent to female-only factories where, as their punishment, they worked without payment and had little or no belongings to their name. In all, some 25,000 women were transported from Britain, half of whom were brought to Tasmania and worked in one of five such factories producing fabric for the new colonies or looking after hospital and private laundry. The best known were the Ross Female Factory and the Cascades Female Factory.

Upon arrival, prisoners were divided into three classes. Women in third class had been convicted of murder, prostitution or pregnancy, which for the authorities at the time were crimes of equal weight. Third class inmates were condemned to break rock or produce oakum – yarn or caulking salvaged by untwisting old rope – while first class inmates (those with petty convictions) had less enduring tasks. At Ross, the inmates' age ranged from 13 years to over 50, and, regardless of their ability and strength, all were expected to undertake tasks assigned to them. First class inmates were billeted out to work in private households, where their treatment was often just as bad as in the factory. Protesting the conditions and treatment or refusing to obey authority brought punishments that ranged from solitary confinement or extra labour to having one's hair cut off.

The years spent in female factories saw these women struggle with overcrowding, terrible conditions, unimaginable hardships and intolerable heartbreak. Some were pregnant when they were imprisoned, but their newborn babies were removed and in some instances the mothers would be further punished. Once their sentences were served and they obtained a Ticket of Leave, they had little to take away with them except some skills. For the majority of former inmates, a condition of freedom was to muster and be accounted for every couple of months, while their travel arrangements were usually restricted to Tasmania, New South Wales and New Zealand.

The still-unfolding story of convicts in Australia, both women and men, is one of injustice, hardship and uncertainty. While some individual tales have come down to us, the overwhelming majority of people shipped from their home country to undertake forced labour in the new Australian colonies will continue to live on in the narratives we present. *Felt presence* provides insight into some of those stories.

### BEFORE THE VISIT

#### Note to teachers

The preceding section, 'Historical background', should be shared with students before visiting the exhibition. Questions for group exercises – ordered from easiest to hardest – should be selected by the teachers according to the levels and requirements of each individual class. It is recommended that the pre-visit exercises be done with higher year levels and that lower levels start with exercises in the gallery space itself. Each artist page can be printed and handed out to a group.

It is recommended that the catalogue essay be read after the gallery visit in order to allow students to develop their own way of looking at the exhibition. Individual artist exercises contain enough information and questions to help students through that process.

The catalogue can be obtained from the gallery or downloaded from the Devonport Regional Gallery website:

[http://devonportgallery.com/uploadFiles/documents/felt\\_presence\\_catalouge\\_complete.pdf](http://devonportgallery.com/uploadFiles/documents/felt_presence_catalouge_complete.pdf)

It is advisable that the students be acquainted with the terms in the following glossary.

#### Glossary

**MEDIA** – plural of medium, meaning the material or technique with which an artist works; for instance painting, photography, drawing.

**VAN DIEMEN'S LAND** – name for Tasmania between 1642 and 1856.

**CONVICT** – A person serving a prison sentence. Convicts were brought to Australia from Britain to serve their sentences between 1788 and 1868.

**FEMALE FACTORY** – disciplinary institutions for women convicts and offenders, simultaneously workhouses and prisons. Tasmanian female factories were in Ross, Launceston, Hobart Town, South Hobart and George Town. New South Wales Female Factories were in Parramatta (two), Bathurst, Newcastle, Port Macquarie and Moreton Bay (two). The inmates performed a wide range of work like spinning yarn, straw plaiting, factory duties, house-keeping, sewing, laundry and weaving. They operated between 1804 and 1856.

**CRIME, OR THIRD CLASS** – Convicts sentenced to the crime class undertook hard labour. After a certain portion of their sentence was served, they could be moved to the second class, as long as they were of good behaviour. When their sentence at the female factory was served they were moved to the assignable class, or first class, for assignment or hiring.

**MUSTER** – A formal gathering of troops, especially for inspection, display, or exercise. Muster-roll callouts were announced publically and regularly, with former inmates required to be present.

**TICKET OF LEAVE** – After serving a portion of their sentence and being of good behaviour, a convict could apply for a Ticket of Leave. This allowed them to work for anyone they chose, but the choice often restricted them to a particular police district. This ticket was the first step towards freedom.

## Class Exercises Before the Visit

### HISTORY AND IDENTITY

- Think about the ways in which the past and history have had an impact on our present. Discuss, in your group, two or three situations where you see this to be the case in our everyday life.

### ART

- How can art help us understand the past? In groups, discuss a previous visit to a gallery or a museum and how seeing art and museum objects might have expanded your knowledge of a particular theme.

### THEMES

- What do the words 'felt presence' mean to you? Think very carefully about each word and then about both together. What images come to mind?
- There are a number of subthemes in the exhibition, but before you get there, think about these three ideas: *materiality*, *symbolism* and *labour*. What do you take each one of these to mean? Come up with two examples of each and think about them while you visit the exhibition.

## DURING THE VISIT

### General exhibition exercises

- Look around the exhibition and identify as many different media as you can.
- Look around the exhibition and pick two works by two different artists that you think are similar. What in your mind connects them together?
- Now consider the three ideas of materiality, symbolism and labour that you thought about before your visit and the two examples of each that you named. Can you identify the works that you think display these qualities? List as many as you can, but think carefully about why you are making that decision – for instance, some works might be more 'symbolic' than others and some might fall into more than one subtheme. Discuss them in your group and write down your response.

### Individual artist exercises

The pages that follow have individual artist exercises to be done in the exhibition space.

# Tara Badcock

Tara Badcock is a Tasmanian-based artist who is interested in the stories of convict women after they left female factories. Her works in the exhibition are an attempt to make us think about their material possessions, the hardships after their release and possible futures for these women. Despite being allowed to have no personal possessions, or very few depending on the class of inmate, prisoners would manage to acquire items by trading among themselves. They had buttons, trinkets and coins, as well as rare commodities like tea, and useful ones like pins, thread and cloth. With these items they would have their own small collection, guarding it closely.



*Hoard (Savings and Chattels)*, 2013, two wrapping cloths and precious items, dimensions variable

## Consider...

- How many objects can you name in the work *Hoard*?
- Do you feel like these items might belong to you? If you had them what would you do with them? What might they have meant to the women in a female factory in 1840?
- Have a look at Badcock's photograph *Trousseau* in the exhibition – is the female figure free? Why? Why not? Identify some aspect of the work that helps you come to that conclusion and share that with your group.
- How do you think the artist is trying to make us think about freedom – either literally or through metaphor/association/symbols?
- What does Ticket of Leave mean? Thinking about that definition, how do the balloon and the portable garden fit with that definition?

## Samantha Clark

Samantha Clark lives in Leith, Scotland, where ships carrying Scottish female convicts departed for London, then to Australia. In Clark's research she found that before departing from Leith the female convicts received from local Quaker women thread, cloth and 100 needles to practise stitching and quilting on their journey in order to gain skills by which they may support themselves when released from servitude.



Wake, 2013, diptych, paper, needle-holes, 77 x 224cm (detail)

### Consider...

- Study carefully how this work is made – what does the process of making it say about how the artist uses historical facts? What is of primary importance to the artist?
- Imagine you can touch the work – do you think that might change the way you interpret it?
- This piece is called *Wake* and comprises two sheets of paper that mirror each other – what do you think 'wake' might refer to here? How many definitions can you find and what do you think each of them might symbolise in the current context of the exhibition as a whole? What might it symbolise within this work specifically?
- Does the lack of colour on the page add to the depth, or power, of the work? Why or why not? Think about empty spaces, white walls and blank pages and come up with words to describe your emotional response to them.



# Anita Dineen

Tasmanian artist Anita Dineen's ancestor Rose Ann Burns came to Van Diemen's Land on the ship Sea Queen in 1845. She served seven years at the Ross Female Factory, after which she married and had 11 children. Dineen engraved a number of precious items with words used in the ship's logs – which recorded little of each convict's identity other than their physical description, crime and time to be served.



*Precious*, 2013, Ross sandstone, platinum silver, 30 x 20cm



*A Shiny Coin*, 2013, recycled pocket watch, stainless steel and sterling silver, 65 x 50mm

## Consider...

- The rock in *Precious* is sandstone from the Ross Female Factory. Who would have broken rock in this establishment?
- Look at the pendant in *Precious* – how is it made? Do you think it might have been worn with pride or hidden away?
- Did these items belong to Rose Anne Burns? If so, what do you think she would have felt every time she used them? Can you think of an object in your own life that reminds you of an event every time you see it? How do you feel when you think about it?
- How do you think the artist is trying to connect with her ancestor? Why do you think this might be important? If you were to connect with your history and ancestors, what would you do, make or write?

# Anne Morrison

In the nineteenth century, tokens of love were frequently exchanged between lovers, just as they are today. The tokens that Anne Morrison found were unique and specific to convicts in Australia. It was against the law to deface or damage the image of the king, yet many chose to protest the cruel punishments and transportation by the state by defacing the monarch's image on coins and personalising them. Many were inscribed for departing lovers or family members to be cherished as keepsakes of the departed ones.



*Tho lost to sight...*, 2013, triptych, acrylic and watercolour on paper, 87 x 87cm (each, unframed)

## Consider...

- Why do you think the first two works have awkward shapes and writing?
- Have a close look at the colours and method used to paint these works – what effect does the artist achieve?
- Thinking about the size of a coin and the size of the artist's work, describe what you believe the artist wanted to achieve by changing the scale?
- Anne Morrison is originally from Scotland. Consider how she might have approached and combined the idea of the love tokens, departure and moving to Australia.
- These tokens were made for one person only, not meant to be viewed by anyone else. How might the role of the artist making these works, and the contemporary viewer seeing them, change the meaning of the original tokens?



# Irene Murphy

Irish artist Irene Murphy approaches the theme of female convicts from a personal angle. Looking at the list of convicts from West Cork, where she lives, she searched for women with her mother's, grandmother's and great-grandmother's names and their surname Murphy. Stripped of personality and history in the penal logbooks, the women were reduced to a name, their crime, brief physical description and a list of possessions removed from them. Murphy decided that the real history is sometimes more about what is not said, recorded and kept. She attempted a connection with this history by focusing on that which is not recorded.



*Potential Space*, 2013, mixed media, dimensions variable, in two parts

## Consider...

- Look at Murphy's work *Potential Spaces* and focus on three objects in the installation. Why did you pick them? What drew you to them? Did they remind you of a memory, a sensation, feeling, smell, touch that you were familiar with? If so, think about how these come to influence our experience of art generally.
- Why do you think the artist used photographs as well as objects? What is the difference between the two?
- If you had to use the objects and photographs to tell your story, what would you select and how would you present it?
- If convict women could make their own installation what would it contain? What kind of personal history or mark do you think convict women might have been able to leave behind?
- Murphy observes: 'Memory is the domain of the individual, memory possesses a dimension of the experiential that is absent from the notion of history and the past'. If we take 'experiential' to mean 'what is experienced', what do you think the artist means when she says it is absent from history? If it is absent, has she tried to bring it back? If so, how has she done this? And if so, do you think she has incorporated this idea into her work *Potential Space* successfully? Why? Why not?

# Claire Needham

Photographer Claire Needham was interested in how the newly arrived convict women would have experienced a landscape vastly different from the one they were used to in British cities.



*#7 Terra Australia Ignota, Out After Hours, 'Terra Australia Ignota' Series, digital photograph, 40 x 50cm*

## Consider...

- We sometimes forget that for early settlers star constellations were entirely unknown, as were the flora and fauna they encountered. What would the convict women have imagined while looking at the night sky? Think about a time when you travelled outside of your surrounds – what was different? What was the same? Think about the smells, colours and sounds. How did they make you feel?
- Needham presents a series of photographs – how is this medium different from the others in this exhibition? What do photographs tell us that drawings or paintings can't?
- How would you describe the mood of these photographs? What about the subject matter?
- There are no people in these images. Why do you think the artist chose not to include women or people? Do you think she successfully conveys a narrative or meaning using 'absence'?
- Consider the colours, composition and contrast in these photographs. What is the artist focusing on the most? Why do you think she considers this particular way of representing her idea to be effective? Do you agree?

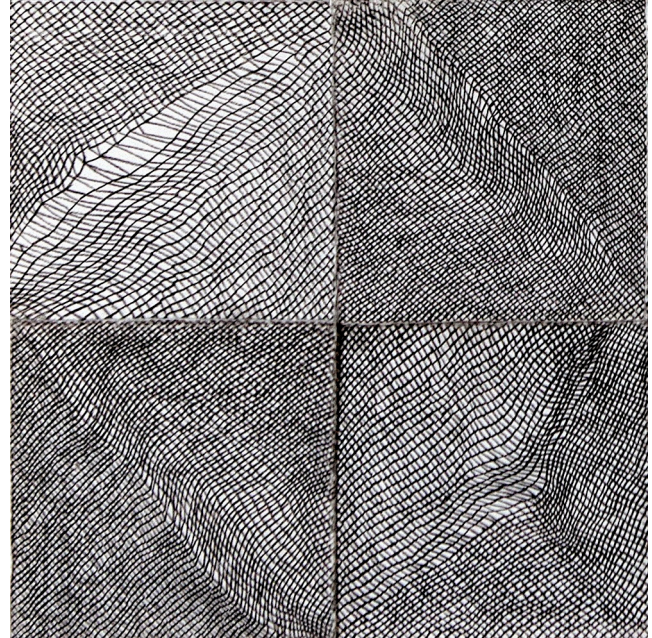


# Rosemary O'Rourke

Rosemary O'Rourke is a Tasmanian artist interested in the process of drawing, on both a small and a large scale.



*Cloth for Margaret Fitzgerald 1*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 9 panels, 75 x 75cm overall, photograph Matthew Newton



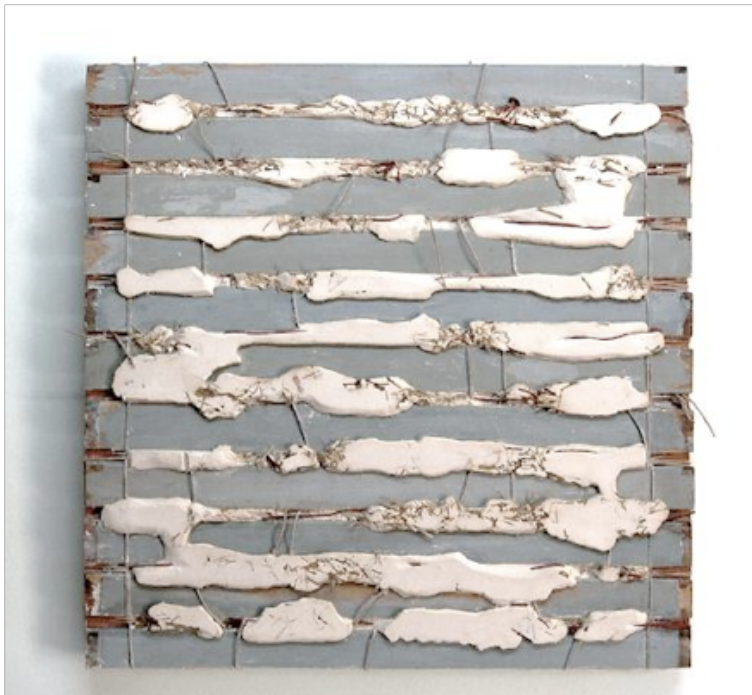
*Cloth for Margaret Fitzgerald 2*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 36 panels, 60 x 60cm overall (detail), photograph Matthew Newton

## Consider...

- Have a good look at these two works by Rosemary O'Rourke – where do you think the artist begins her drawing?
- What techniques and materials does she use in making these? How is paper used in this work? Is the fact that these are drawings significant?
- Think about the shapes and patterns in the two works. What can you identify? What are some words that can be associated with these patterns? Consider these and how they might help you think about the works' meanings.
- Think about the title of these two works. Who do you think Margaret Fitzgerald was and what do you think the artist might have been trying to achieve by making this work? How are the past and the present brought together in these two drawings?

## Sharon Woods

Although horse hair was a primary material used for reinforcing plaster in building construction in the nineteenth century, female hair was also used for such a purpose when horse hair was unavailable. Cutting off women's hair was inherited from the British penal system as the most severe punishment. With short hair, one was a marked woman, having no prospects of marrying or getting employment once she left the factory – until, of course, she was 'presentable' again (with long hair), which, in some cases might have been a few years. In this way, the punishment went on after the time was served. So hated was this punishment that in 1833 it incited a riot among the inmates in a factory in New South Wales.



*Between the Strands*, 2013, wood, plaster, copper, straw, string, four panels, 50 x 50cm each (detail)

### Consider...

- What materials has Woods used in constructing her work? Why might she have used these particular materials?
- Look at the composition of all the works together. Do you see any patterns? If so, what do these suggest to you? Do they evoke any emotions for you? What are some of the words you would use to describe these works?
- Think about how the artist made these works – what processes did she have to think about and how long would it have taken? Do you think time is another element in this work? If so, how?

### AFTER THE VISIT

Download and read the catalogue essay by the curator, Ellie Ray.

Thinking about the essay and the exhibition visit, consider the following:

1. What words would you use to describe being displaced and sent to a foreign place?
2. If you were to make a work of art about female convicts, what would you make and where would you start?
3. Considering composition, the way in which it was made and how it communicated with you, the viewer, what was your favourite work in the exhibition and why?
4. Think about the title of the exhibition – is it effective in capturing your experience of the works?
5. Recalling some of the words that you have learnt, or that have come to your mind while you were visiting the exhibition, and considering the works, write a 3 to 4 line poem or creative piece about the women in female factories.
6. Consider what the curator was initially interested in: 'what an exhibition can bring to the viewer that a recorded history is unable to convey'. What do you think was the most effective aspect of the exhibition and do you feel that you understood the topic of female convicts and female factories in a way that is separate from reading about them in books? If so, how?
7. Write a short, 200-word review of the exhibition. Consider links between works, the theme, subthemes, the processes and media in making the works, research and the way the works are placed in the gallery. What is effective? What could be done differently? Would you recommend to others to visit the exhibition?



## RESOURCES

This section lists external resources which will assist in further research and projects on the topic of female convicts and themes covered in the exhibition.

### **Female Convicts Research Centre**

[www.femaleconvicts.org.au/](http://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/)

### **Australian History**

[www.australianhistory.org/convicts](http://www.australianhistory.org/convicts)

### **Australian History Timeline**

[www.aushistorytimeline.com/](http://www.aushistorytimeline.com/)

### **National Archives of Australia**

[www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

[www.naa.gov.au/collection/publications/papers-and-podcasts/social-history/women-transported.aspx](http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/publications/papers-and-podcasts/social-history/women-transported.aspx)

### **Van Diemen's Land**

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/29213910>

### **Search Ancestry, Australian Convict Collection**

<http://search.ancestry.com.au/search/group/auconvicts>

### **Love Tokens**

<http://love-tokens.nma.gov.au/>

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*felt presence* is a Contemporary Art Tasmania Touring exhibition initiated by Devonport Regional Gallery.

This exhibition is supported by the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy, an initiative of the Australian Government and the State and Territory Governments.

Contemporary Art Tasmania is supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its principal arts funding body, and by the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments, and is assisted through Arts Tasmania by the Minister for the Arts.

