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ARTS SOUTH AUSTRALIA

praxis ARTSPACE

Walkway Gallery

FRAN FEST



Cover/  
Olivia White, *Tossed Gullt Salad* (detail), 2017, oil on linen;

Insider/  
Meg Wilson, *I'm a Feminist but I'm Afraid I've Become a Cliche in Denial of a Stereotype*, 2017, digital still from single channel video, duration 1:22:05;

Amanda Radomi, *I'm a Feminist but some things are Women's business* (detail), 2017, acrylic on canvas, raffia;

Alex Pye, *Hot Parts*, 2017, digital from single channel video, duration 2:33;

Deborah Prior, *Santa Lucia* (detail), 2017, metallic and cotton thread on found bed linen

Left/  
Jacqueline Bradley, *boat race - boat jacket*, 2016, oilskin, timber, linen, steel, cars and cotton;

Chantal Henley, *Limitless* (detail), 2017, abalone, woven reeds and emu.

Graphic Design/  
Neomi Fallon

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olivia white  
alex pye  
meg wilson  
deborah prior  
amanda radomi  
chantal henley  
jacqueline bradley  
**i'm a  
feminist  
but...**



## i'm a feminist but...

curated by  
eleanor scicchitano

For a long time I had an uneasy relationship with feminism: the movement, like I was doing it wrong. That was until I was introduced to the podcast *The Guilty Feminist*. In each episode, comedians, Deborah Francis-White and Sofie Hagen explore 'our noble goals as 21st century feminists, and the hypocrisies and insecurities which undermine them'. The women open their discussion with a game, 'I'm a feminist but...' in which they confess their 'non-feminist' actions. They are humorous, confessional, and drawn from real-life experiences. This game opens a discussion and invites the audience to question their own actions and understanding. These women acknowledge the complexity of maintaining their beliefs, while navigating a society that is challenging and biased.

**I'm a Feminist but...** the exhibition brings together seven women who draw on their personal experience with feminism, and the times when this relationship is tested, stretched and exposed.

Based in Whyalla, painter Olivia White explores her relationship to the seductive imagery that fills high fashion magazines. Though she knows these images are fake and airbrushed she revels in their richness, colour and lush texture. White has torn pages from magazines, painstakingly rendering them in minute detail to create *Tossed Guilt Salad* (2017). Served on a plate, they are ready to consume, a feast of twisted, bent female bodies, draped in expensive clothing. This meal offers no sustenance, the paper and the images hold no value - to either our bodies or our souls. And yet we continue to be drawn in by them, and to feel weak when we cannot emulate them.

Alex Pye is a video and sculptural artist working with awkward, mundane and abject interpretations of female identity. *Hot Parts* (2017) is a self-portrait, with Pye herself as the central character, blurring the line between performance and reality. She moves through her house undertaking everyday tasks; using the toilet, boiling water and hanging out washing. These actions are interspersed with images of the artist being choked by her partner, a sexual act she enjoys. This work is routine, with a sense of weariness and apathy. This is everyday life. Pye presents us with a feeling of feminist-action-in-waiting, in contrast to the active call to action of women's marches. But her message is just as strong. This is a woman who is being herself, living the way she wants each day, presenting an alternative 'femininity', that is no less feminine than any other. By presenting this other activism, Pye challenges her audience to partake in a more inclusive interpretation of femininity and feminist action.

Meg Wilson also places herself in her work, or at least, a version of herself. In *I'm a Feminist but I'm Afraid I've Become a Cliché in Denial of a Stereotype* (2017) she takes on a strong, hyper-masculine persona: black Adidas tracksuit, reflective sunglasses and her hair slicked back. The video opens with Wilson in bed, her cat climbing over and around her. She then proceeds to make marmalade, a task traditionally performed by enterprising women in a domestic space. The contrast between the image and action is humorous, and jarring. Wilson explores the way in which we navigate labels, how they define us and push others to others to pigeon-hole and generalise. This is a portrait of a woman on her

way to loneliness, trying to avoid one stereotype, she moves closer to another. The multi-coloured lighting provides a feeling of being in a nightclub long after the party has ended. Wilson's home has become a theatre where she performs who she feels she should be, while avoiding the things she doesn't want to become by denying who she is. Here, the crazy cat lady meets the man-hating lesbian, the two characters producing a striking contrast and poignant portrait of the two stereotypes available to single women of a certain age.

Contrasting the hyper-masculinity of Meg Wilson's work, Deborah Prior uses traditionally feminine hues, pale pink, soft green, and stitching techniques typically associated with women's work. She has pulled apart a blanket, rearranging the squares to read a firm NO before stitching it back together. The material is soft, and downy, clearly it has been used before. The re-constituted blanket is wonky, the squares not quite lining up after being stretched through use and wear. Women are required to soften what we say, an outright 'no' labeling us aggressive, bossy and uncooperative. Like this NO, it must be a soft statement, a watered-down response so as not to appear as a challenge. Prior's use of a blanket draws attention to the domestic space, the home being the site of many of these struggles and conflicts. The blanket is out of kilter, there are holes and the lines aren't straight, reflecting the subtle changes that women make in order to maintain peace.

Amanda Radomi's work *I'm a feminist but some things are Women's business* (2017) questions the relationship between her feminism and the separation of Men's and Women's business in Aboriginal culture, which has been labeled sexist by some. As an Aboriginal artist she questions the right of Aboriginal women to decide whether they are respected within their traditional cultural life. On a brightly patterned background lies a pregnant woman, her belly created using traditional weaving techniques. Women's bodies are highly discussed and contested, treated as a battleground by the morally righteous. The choices women make around pregnancy and having children are never without social comment, with numerous people weighing in with opinions where they are generally unwanted, and often assuming knowledge about the wants and needs of the women in question. Not all women can have children, and not all women want to, though many people feel that they can comment on these choices and situations. Radomi questions ownership of not only one's own physical body, and the right to make choices about how it is used but also ownership and acknowledgement of her cultural heritage. The image of this pregnant woman, and the title firmly stating that her body is her business, demands that her choice and authority over her own body is respected, as is her place in her culture.

Chantale Henley is a Nughri, Mununjali woman, of British heritage. Her work in **I'm a Feminist but...** explores Indigenous feminism, recognising the role of pre-colonial cultural relationships, and the threat that colonial feminism presents to these bonds. *Limitless* (2017) consists of five abalone shells, collected and gifted over many years. They are woven together, the backs blackened to show that they have passed through a fire and been cleansed. The neckpiece is a tribute, dedicated to a male cultural leader



who has lead and taught Henley for many years. This work reinforces the importance of these relationships in Henley's cultural life, and their contribution to a balanced understanding of culture. This is a somewhat defiant action, Henley chooses who she acknowledges and how, rather than defining her feminism by the rules of another culture.

Canberra-based artist Jacqueline Bradley takes a personal approach to feminism in her works *boat race - boat jacket* (2016) and *boat race - oar jacket* (2016). These wearable items, one jacket fitted with oars, and the other a boat, are cumbersome and make movement hard. Bradley works with the environment outside her home, as a vehicle to examine our behavior. She is torn between a need to be outdoors, physical and healthy, and the overwhelming urge to return home where she is safe and warm. These items draw on the familiar feeling of one's head challenging the wants of one's heart. The feeling of being torn between how we know we should behave, and how we feel like behaving. There is a push and pull in this work, between keeping the artist safe, and allowing freedom to move and experience the world around her. These pieces speak to the need for protection and safety, while being allowed to explore and move safely through new environments.

The works presented in **I'm a Feminist but...** are deeply personal, teasing out issues that these women face on a daily basis. At the same time, they speak to many experiences, highlighting challenges that are faced by women around the world. They are at times confessional, confronting and contradictory. They challenge us to rethink how we interact, and how we speak about and connect with a movement on a personal level. This version of feminism is gritty, cracked and questions representation. It allows for weakness and indecision, it gives us consolation when we reach a hurdle and falter. It removes the burden of perfection, of being beyond reproach and allows for nuance often not expressed in manifestos. This was a movement and a discussion in which I felt welcome, and understood.

<sup>1</sup>The *Guilty Feminist*, podcast, Deborah Francis-White and Sofie Hagen.

