

OBNOXIOUS LADIES IN THE AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE



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EMMA BEER
ANNA DAVERN
ALEX PYE

JACQUELINE BRADLEY
LUCY FORSBERG
CAMILLE SERISIER

CURATED BY SABRINA BAKER

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Obnoxious Ladies in the Australian Landscape addresses an historical lack of female representation in exhibitions of Australian landscape art. Australian art frequently references male depictions of harsh and unforgiving lands to be conquered by Aussie heroes, or celebrated as a great untouchable beauty that leaves out women's experience altogether. Tom Roberts, Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan are household names, while great Australian female painters like Dorrit Black and Margaret Preston are overlooked and remain largely unknown. This exhibition brings together Emma Beer, Jacqueline Bradley, Anna Davern, Lucy Forsberg, Alex Pye and Camille Serisier, who take a new approach through suburbs and sad country towns, making work that is both subversive and humorous; disrupting the usual story of landscape.

Emma Beer first came to my attention with her show *Princess of the Riverina* consisting of works with titles like *bum fuck nowhere* (2014) and *dust + lust* (2014). Beer uses titles that make reference to her rural hometown of Echuca and its lingering presence in her layered, abstract compositions. The titles bring the colours of endless skies and burnt soil alive with a sense of humour so often lacking in depictions of rural Australia. In this exhibition, *I walked 780kms in 34 days* (2016) references the artist's personal experience;

a challenge she set herself on a path of self-discovery that parallels the experiences of early explorers setting out on a literal path of discovery into the unknown. When you read the title *She's my mate and my darl* (2016) you can't help but say it with a little country twang, a humorous nod to the feeling of walking into a friendly country town where everyone is part of each other's business. Beer's titles are unashamedly self-referential, placing the artist and her body in the work; leaving the audience searching for a whiff of Beer or the smell of dust on the canvas.

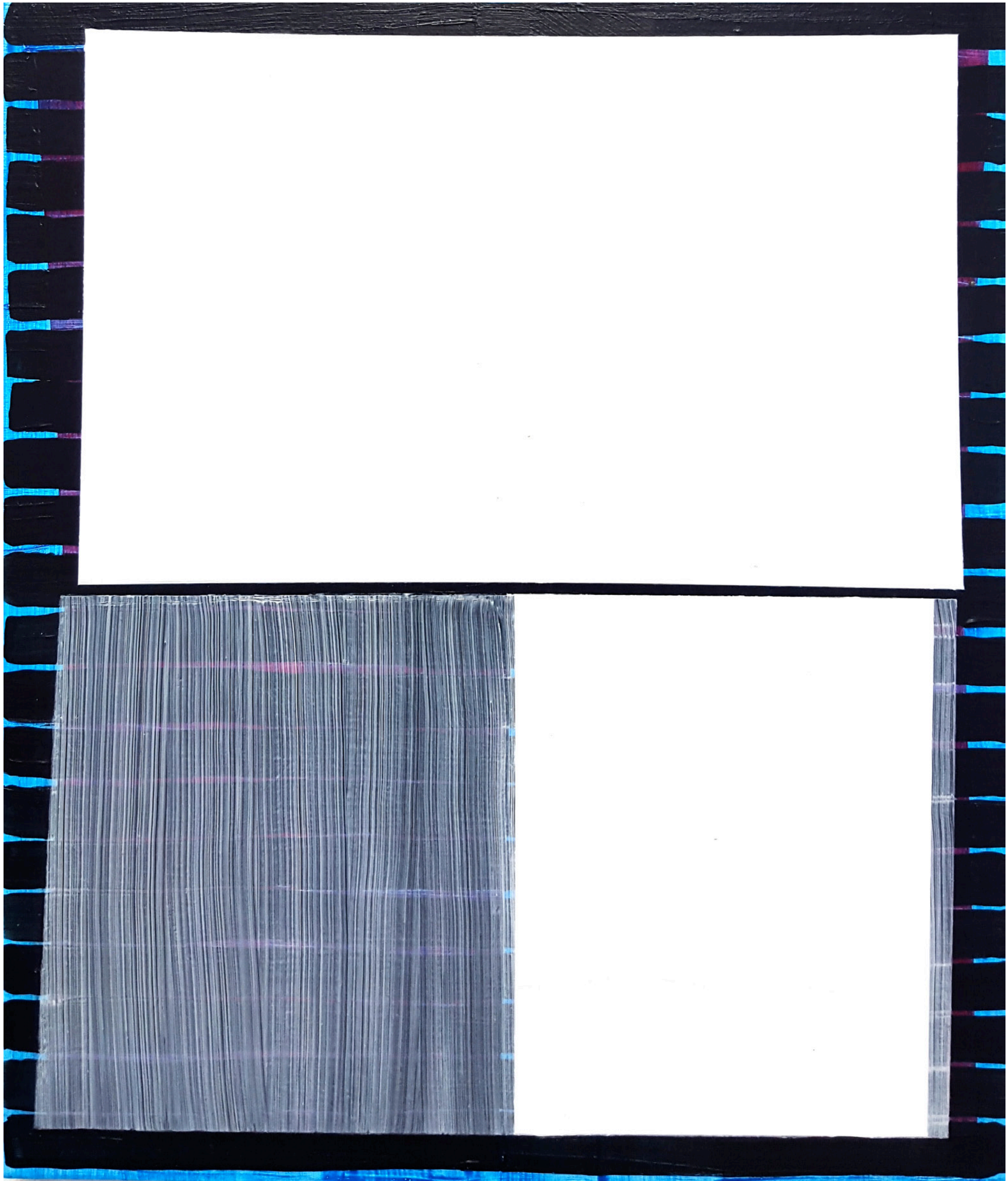
Like Beer, Lucy Forsberg uses titles to great effect with collages named *Fair suck of the Sav!* (2016) and *Janine Quick! Grab me a prawn cocktail* (2016). You know that with language like this you're in Australian territory. Her works however, aren't just one-liners. Forsberg takes a stab at colonial landscapes in her series *Yeah I'm pluggin' on... But I'm afraid we're not as tough as what we've been told we were* (2016) by Photoshopping herself artfully (or perhaps clumsily) into easily recognisable colonial images and replacing male figures with self-portraits. Appropriating images from artists including Howard Arkley and combining them with archetypal Aussie images of Holden utes, kookaburras and barbecues, Forsberg calls into question our nation's general sense of ambivalence towards environmental issues. She is concerned with the effects of urban sprawl, petrol guzzling cars and land degradation, while maintaining the attitude that this is who we are or perhaps who we think we should be. Forsberg taps into our collective memory of road-trips down endless highways and across vast tracts of land, by presenting her collages as the road signs that dot the edges of our vision.

Anna Davern has been working with Australiana for quite some time and is fascinated by the connection between national identity and landscape. For this exhibition, she has taken well-known phrases like 'I'm not racist but' and 'If you don't love it leave' and painstakingly drilled them into biscuit tin lids with images of colonial Australia. With

the addition of a string of fake pearls, she transforms the tin lids into obnoxiously large necklaces that brand their wearer with the text hanging around their neck. Alongside these pieces is *Queenie* (2015) featuring Dame Edna Everage superimposed over a vintage Melbourne skyline. Considered a national treasure, Everage has become increasingly strident in her conservative views and intolerance; and is perhaps the ideal wearer of the other two pieces. *Queenie* hangs from a long chain of oversized (polystyrene) pearls and lights up – a nod to the “bigger is better” attitude of her character and perhaps that of Australians in general.

Alex Pye, now a Sydney resident, previously lived in a country NSW town called Cumnock and is the star of *Cumnock: The Musical!* (2015). It begins with Pye watching infomercials in her underwear and smoking bong. The video then cuts to her doing doughies on a four-wheeler with heavy machinery in the background. Her work continues to switch abruptly between the two scenes before a change of pace for part two which features the artist sitting on a couch on her porch with her dogs, drinking red wine and smoking cigarettes. Part one confronts audiences with the sheer recklessness of drug taking and driving an almost out of control vehicle; while part two sees another shift in tempo with the artist pacing the porch like she’s waiting for something to disrupt the monotony of rural living. Pye captures the dullness and depression of country town experience often glossed over or traded for the horse riding cattleman, so ubiquitous in the landscape genre. Alongside this video Pye uses text to great effect in *Thanks for Nothing* (2014) rendered with foot-high steel letters painted bright orange; connecting the tedium of country life to the extreme disillusionment experienced by early explorers upon discovering the vast emptiness of Australia.

Camille Serisier’s work addresses several issues such as European colonisation and the ongoing fantasy that it hasn’t been a cause for environmental degradation. She



EMMA BEER *She's My Mate and My Darl*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 70cm



EMMA BEER / *I Fell in Love with a Fucking Rainbow Chaser*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 85cm x 90cm

also looks at the way aboriginal and female contributions to landscape art have been overlooked in favour of their male counterparts. *The Wonderful Land of Oz* (2014) is a series of *tableaux vivants* or photographs of hand painted sets activated by a costumed performer. These explore her interest in the complex environmental, spiritual, political and personal issues that are tangled up with the landscape and its inhabitants. Serisier's photographs adopt a storybook aesthetic using paper sets painted in pastels to present pristine vistas and idyllic locations. These absurd constructions sit in stark contrast to the violent history that is tied to the lands represented. The storybook look of the work parallels the artists' own naïve encounters with her environment, but also suggest the Australian mythology that silences the unpalatable history that is never far from the surface.

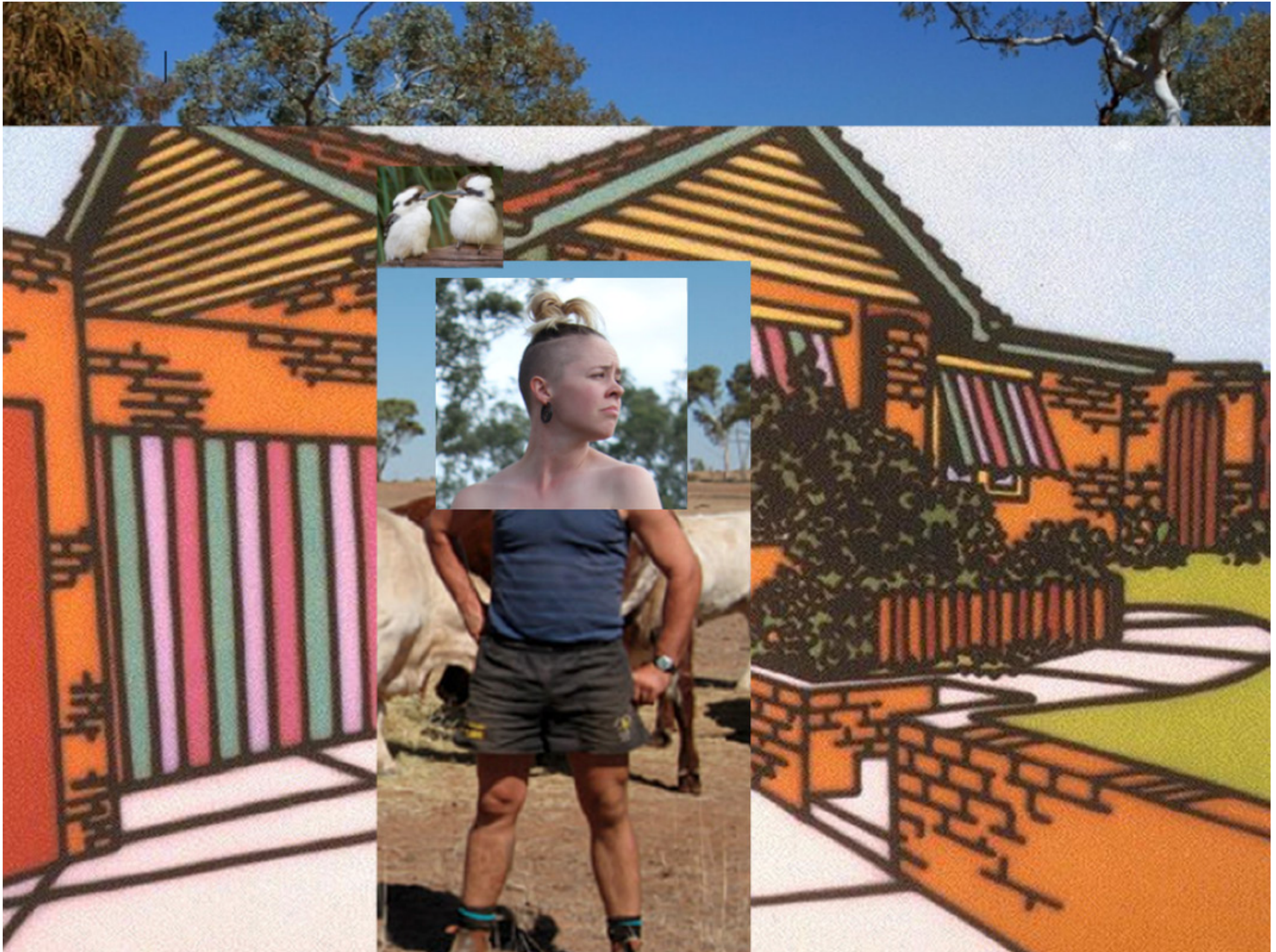
Jacqueline Bradley, like Serisier has an interest in the complex link between identity and place and how each shapes the other. Bradley makes objects from clothing, tools, rocks, branches and the stuff that accumulates at the bottom of ladies handbags. Her works in this exhibition are objects and equipment that imply extraordinary functions which enable Bradley to adapt and negotiate the outdoor environment. Bradley makes sculptures that seem like the obvious solution to problems she has encountered in the landscape. Her *Dredging Jacket* (2015) for example, is a woman's tweed wool jacket with a long circle of gridded wire trailing behind – showing it belongs to the land while simultaneously separating the wearer from it. The jacket is a response to her experience of swimming in Canberra's man-made lake, where her togs became filled with lake grunge. The *Dredging Jacket* accumulates detritus and hampers Bradley's movement as she wades through the water. There is a constant to-ing and fro-ing in Bradley's work, as she wishes to be at home in the landscape whilst also being completely unsettled by the unknown.

Women depict landscapes differently to men; whether focussing on its destruction, like Mandy Martin, its sensuality, as we find with Jessie Traill and Grace Cossington-Smith, or Rosalie Gascoigne's meditations on beauty and intimate detail. *Obnoxious Ladies in the Australian Landscape* adds some new and subversive voices to the mix. These artists are having a serious dig at tradition. Unsatisfied with the version of Australia already represented, they are carving out their alternative. Australian's don't just live on farms and in country towns, but in cities and suburbs; and these landscapes are as valid for exploration as any other. Perhaps our ideas of what Australia should look like narrows our field of vision as far as landscape art is concerned, but the artists in this exhibition are changing those perceptions and staking their claim on new territory.

Sabrina Baker,
May 2016



LUCY FORSBERG *Down on Her Luck*, 2016, digital print, 42cm x 29.7cm



LUCY FORSBERG *How About Some Tuna Bake?*, 2016, digital print, 42cm x 29.7cm



ANNA DAVERN *Queenie* (detail), 2015, Breast Plate: reworked biscuit tin, styrofoam pearls, LED light, 130cm x 120cm x 7cm



ALEX PYE *Cumnock: The Musical! Part One* (video still), 2015, HD video, 4'11"



CAMILLE SERISIER *Ken Done It*, 2014, photographic print, 120cm x 165cm



CAMILLE SERISIER *Land Down Under*, 2014, photographic print, 120cm x 165cm



JACQUELINE BRADLEY *Slingshot Thimble*, 2016, stick, thimble and rubber bands, 16cm x 8cm x 4cm



JACQUELINE BRADLEY *Dredging Jacket*, 2015, woolen tweed, plastic, silk, fencing wire, brass tube, wood, muslin, card, PVA and wood glue,
150cm x 130cm x 200cm

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CATALOGUE BY ALEXANDER BOYNES

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