



A COLLABORATION BY
Lynnette Griffiths & Marion Gaemers

FINAL CURTAIN

2 October - 15 November 2020
UMBRELLA STUDIO CONTEMPORARY ARTS

"This exhibition continues our collaborative approach using ghost net, beach rope and rubbish. We investigate how this waste is impacting our life and the environment, with manipulated suggestions toward future morphosis."

Lynnette Griffiths & Marion Gaemers



CONSIDERED COLLABORATION

VAL SCHIER

Lynnette Griffiths and Marion Gaemers met almost three decades ago when Lynnette was establishing the art centre at the new TAFE college on Thursday Island and invited Marion to conduct a Flying Arts workshop. They instantly became friends and since then their paths have merged many times as they seek to explore and represent tropical North Queensland, particularly the marine environments.

Whilst both artists are recognised for their individual art practices - Marion, a basket maker and Lynnette, a mixed media installation artist - they are also skilled teachers and facilitators. Their workshops and projects enable participants to learn techniques, share ideas and think about collaboration. Often the workshop pieces become elements in sculptures that are exhibited nationally and internationally. As artists, they get great satisfaction from inspiring others to interpret the world around them, stimulating viewers to challenge their thinking.



Lynnette and Marion's first cultural collaboration dates back to the mid-1990s when they worked with the EKKILAU craft group on Erub in the Torres Strait to create a piece for the Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture on Thursday Island. Later, when they had the opportunity to undertake a project with GhostNets Australia and Indigenous artists on the Sunshine Coast, their partnership was cemented. Dozens of people participated in workshops held at the Floating Land festival, at Noosa. In conjunction with the festival a collaborative exhibition of works by artists involved with ghost nets and Erub Arts was held at the Cooroy Butter Factory.



In 2013, Lynnette and Marion produced collaborative works in a group show "Mesh," an exhibition at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts in Townsville. Ingrid Hoffman commented (Textile Fibre Forum, Issue 111, 2013) that, "Together they share a deep respect for the makers' circle . . . ancient techniques interact with introduced materials such as the found ghost net and flotsam . . . to excite imaginative new directions."



Constantly probing and curious, they have a passion for alerting people to the degradation of the oceans. Their collaborations have produced a variety of sculptures and forms that have been exhibited in the Oceanographic Museum, Monaco; the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore; in London and on permanent display in the foyer of the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney and other Australian galleries.

The impact of climate change, the loss of habitat and destruction of marine environments is of particular concern to both artists. "The amount of plastic rubbish along the coast is increasing at a huge rate," says Lynnette. "I'm horrified that much of it is permanent." Both artists have been working in Torres Strait during the time the Bramble Cay melomys has become extinct; its demise blamed on repeated inundation of the island due to rising sea levels and severe weather events.



I have been privileged to see them operating up close: deconstructing materials, yarning and chacking over morning tea. Marion's hands are never still; I have stitched along with them, as part of the extended makers circle, contributing sardines to a couple of projects. A highlight for me has been modelling several of their pieces including the Final Curtain on the beach in front of Lynnette's house at Machans Beach. Walking bare-footed in the sand and into the gently lapping ocean at sunrise, draped in one of their exquisite pieces with the train sweeping behind me, I felt like a queen!

The title of this exhibition may have given some people the idea that Lynnette and Marion's partnership is ending but be reassured; the curtain will re-open to reveal other new and clever ideas to make us smile, think and wonder. I have no doubt that there will be many more opportunities for us to see the creative outcomes of this unusual and energetic duo.



THE FINAL CURTAIN

LYNNETTE GRIFFITHS & MARION GAEMERS

The 1981 Commonwealth Protection Act (Sea Dumping) provides protection of the environment by regulating dumping into the sea. It is under this act that permission is granted to build artificial reefs which grow new and evolving ecosystems.

Investigating the line between rightful and illegal sea dumping, menace and harmless, environmental change (both real and artificial), we make statements about life in rapidly accelerating times of change.

Shopping Trolleys: Collaboration

Shopping trolleys have become an item of rubbish commonly discarded, being pushed into our creeks and drains. No longer peacefully grazing on the roadside, these rusted, semi submerged forms are gathering and growing new life, albeit an artificial one.

Gathering the trolleys from various locations in Townsville and Cairns we looked at two issues, Sea Dumping and the creation of new reefs and life in the mangroves. Unfortunately there is so much plastic and fishing waste illegally dumped in our waterways



that maybe in the future, the only result is a reef suffocating in a bed of plastic. What is the future and is this legislation able to cope with all the rubbish that does end up in our waterways?

Estuarine Still life: Collaboration

The mangroves are an important part of the marine environment. They grow in tidal areas all around Australia, the nursery for many fish and other marine species. Unfortunately mangroves are being clogged with fishing and urban rubbish from storm water channels and large sea eddies. Estuarine Still Life creates another artificial ecosystem complete with crabs, birds, and fish.



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Lost Antiquities: Marion Gaemers

These works are inspired by ceramic pots viewed in the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore. Entire pots encrusted with corals show how the ocean claims objects and how museums retrieve items from shipwrecks and display them as treasures. Today the ocean is absorbing so much more manmade rubbish, which is mostly plastic in origin, ropes and fishing nets. These vessels encrusted with recreated corals, continue the cycle of rubbish and then back to a heightened state of value - treasure.



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Aquatic Museum: Collaboration

In Australia, most specimens for live aquarium display are sourced from the waters of the Great Barrier Reef - a protected and licenced World Heritage area of international significance for biodiversity and conservation. However, globally, two thirds of aquarium species are collected from Asian waters; approximately 20-24 million individuals are collected each year worldwide with Australia accounting for a very small percentage. This begs the question: what legislation do other countries have in place? Should we look at alternatives to live tanks?

A guide to the Qld Marine Aquarium Fish Fishery and the Queensland Coral Fishery, 2009.



Bait Ball: Lynnette Griffiths

Sardines create bait balls as a defensive mechanism (safety in numbers), however many predators including humans have developed sophisticated countermeasures to hunt and collect, seriously undermining the defensive value of the clustering mentality. Standing within the installation, the viewer is asked to create their own magnified perception of this phenomenon and imagine the impact of super-sized commercial fishing practices on the plight of the humble sardine. Without a collective approach to ocean conservation, what might happen to species such as these?

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Malcolm (the altered state of) Melomy: Lynnette Griffiths

Like treasures from the deep museums also preserve and revere extinct animals. One of Marion's fish was deconstructed and reinvented as a fanciful extinct melomy, reinforcing the practice of illusion drawing that propelled Durer's woodcut of the Rhinocervs into prominence. The Bramble Cay Melomy, a little native rat (size 16.5cm) has largely gone unnoticed as it made its way from endangered to being declared extinct in 2016. The only mammal endemic to the reef, the Australian government officially recognised this in 2019 and acknowledged the event as the first extinction of a mammal species due to anthropogenic climate change.

National Geographic February 20, 2019, Brian Clark Howard



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The Final Curtain: Collaboration

In this work, stitched swirls, whirlpools and matted shapes depict the strata of marine life.

The different habitats and creatures affected by the plastic waste are trapped within the curtain's landscape. Plastic, net and rope, are breaking down and forming a layer over the ocean's surface. Initially this layer was sheer like our curtain, but now in some parts it is a blackout curtain covering the surface and preventing light and oxygen entering the water.

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COLLABORATION AND STUDIO SPACES .

We are often asked: How does our collaboration work, when one lives in Cairns and the other in Townsville - 400 kms apart? Our reply: It does! Possibly it is the separation that keeps it alive, creating diversity in our approaches. This enables us to change and grow our individual ideas, then come together and share, often coming up with the same idea separately.

One of us will have an idea and we brainstorm it (often on the phone) perhaps starting with an object like the shopping trolleys. We discuss how we can use a found piece both conceptually and physically. Our projects can also start with an idea, like the way that plastic is invading and covering the oceans. This is how the curtain started. Lynnette worked on her bits in Cairns and Marion in Townsville, then back in Cairns we stitched it all together redefining some of the design elements. The work never finishes: the end becomes a new and exciting beginning.



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TEXTS

Catalogue essay by Val Schier

All other text by Lynnette Griffiths & Marion Gaemers

IMAGES

All photographs by Lynnette Griffiths

- 1** Workshop at TARNANTHI Adelaide, 2017
2 Discussing *Ancient Marinere* at Strand Ephemera, 2017
3 Marion and Lynnette with the work which led on from *Mesh - Supersize Bling* at Kick Arts Cairns, 2014 **4** Ghost net and rope on Chili Beach, Tangaroa Blue, 2019 **5** Val wearing *Final Curtain* 2020 **6** *Sea Dump*, Collaboration, 2020 **7** *Soldier Crabs*, Lynnette Griffiths, 2019 **8** Graham Ward retrieving a shopping trolley. **9** *Estuarine Still Life*, Collaboration, 2020
10 Re-Cycle, Marion Gaemers, 2020 **11** Vessel from the shipwreck TANG, Singapore **12** *Lost Antiquities*, Marion Gaemers, 2019 **13** *Aquatic Museum*, Collaboration, Below the Tide Line QAGOMA, 2019. **14** *Reef Rambler*, Collaboration, 2019 **15** *Bait Ball*, Lynnette Griffiths, JGM Gallery London, 2019
16 Malcolm Melomy, Lynnette Griffiths, 2020 **17** *Final Curtain* (detail), Collaboration, 2020 **18** At work in Lynnette's studio, Cairns 19 Marion's studio, Townsville.

Cover: Val wearing a reef fantasy at Machans Beach, 2019

Inside cover: The install gang at Reclaim Beach, Townsville, 2020

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