

THE ARTIST



HER WORK

CRUTHERS COLLECTION OF WOMEN'S ART

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery | 25 May – 7 December 2019



The Artist & Her Work

Lady Sheila Cruthers took an immediate shine to women's self-portraiture when she began collecting art in the mid-1970s. Among her first acquisitions were self-portraits by Western Australian modernists Elise Blumann and Kathleen O'Connor, and contemporary artist Mary Moore. Her son John Cruthers speculates that Lady Cruthers, the youngest of nine children born to hardworking Italian émigré parents three years prior to the onset of the Great Depression, identified with the 'self-made' independence of these women literally painting themselves into art history¹.

As the family's collection grew, this interest in self-portraiture expanded into a collection strategy Lady Cruthers referred to as 'the artist and her work' – a 'general' example of an artist's work would be acquired in addition to a self-portrait, or vice-versa depending on which was acquired first, with the two works often hung side by side in the family home. Eventually, self-portraits would occasionally be commissioned by the family from contemporary artists in whose practice they took an interest.

As the notoriety of this idiosyncratic collection grew, so did a parallel collection of newspaper and publicity photographs depicting Sir James and Lady Cruthers with their densely packed home gallery; in many of these images this hanging style features prominently. In 2007, after spending almost a decade focusing their collection specifically on women's art, the Cruthers family donated roughly 400 works to the University of Western Australia, where it is now known as the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art (CCWA). In a large-scale collection exhibition held at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery in 2012 to celebrate its new public home, the juxtaposition of 'the artist' and 'her work' returned as a central motif within a broader survey of key artists and themes. The 'artist and her work' has also been retained as a core theme for collection as part of the University's current Acquisition Policy². Today, just over 90 of almost 700 works that now comprise the CCWA are self-portraits with roughly half of these having their companion piece in the 'artist and her work' format.

Although a fascination with the lives of artists sees self-portraits often hung in conversation with their broader practice, the pursuit of this juxtaposition as both acquisition strategy and display method is unique to the CCWA. When grouped together, the discrete pairings create an interesting contradiction - the artist is united with their practice through representation of the self as art and yet also isolated from it, excised by the borders of the artwork into a state of opposition. For women artists, whose lives and identities have often been considered intrinsically linked to their artistic output, this relationship - between the self, the body and the labour it performs - can be especially fraught. How often are women (and many other groups considered 'other' to the straight male Eurocentric norm) after all, considered to be speaking 'universally', beyond the particularities of their bodies? Is such an idea still possible, or desired?

Each pairing of the 'artist' and their 'work' in this exhibition describes a unique and personal relationship between the perception and representation of the self and the inhabited world. It allows for the consideration of this juxtaposition - the 'artist', their 'work' - on mass, revealing the nuances of each pair. Throughout the exhibition, pairs of works will be exchanged, creating a shifting series of conversations across media and history and with it showcasing the scope of Lady Cruthers' vision for the collection, and its purpose.

Gemma Weston
Curator, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art.



Images t-b:

Sir James Cruthers and Lady Sheila Cruthers with a portion of their women's art collection, now the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, c 1995 © WEST AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS LIMITED
Installation view, *Look, Look Again*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, 20 October - 15 December 2012, featuring CCWA artworks displayed in the style of 'the artist and her work' by Miriam Stannage, Ruth Tuck, Jenny Watson, Mary Moore and Julie Dowling (L - R).
Photograph by Robert Frith - Acorn Photo.

1. John Cruthers, *Sheila's Sheilas: A Private Collection Goes Public*, in 'Into The Light: The Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, UWA Publishing, 2012
2. *University Policy on: Art Acquisition for the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art* at the University of Western Australia, Approved 01/07/2014, <http://www.governance.uwa.edu.au/procedures/policies>



Images l-r
Tania Ferrer, *Self Portrait*, 1985, oil on board, 41.5 x 54.5cm, CCWA 625. © Courtesy the artist
Tania Ferrer, *East River Salsa*, 1996, watercolour on card, 68 x 47cm, CCWA 626. © Courtesy the artist



Showing Ourselves

I have a tendency to question the power of portraying the self in art as a feminist practice. I recently came across a piece of writing from the 80s by Jo Spence, where she expressed regret at having exploited herself through her self-portraiture: 'the photographs served to confirm for me my record of achievements as a woman. Without any comprehension of how or why, I had turned myself into a spectacle across the years, stripping myself of any other function than to be looked at within my photographs—for such is the nature of the medium as used' (2001, 354). It was if the agency Spence wielded as an artist—the power to portray herself as a woman, through a creative process that she had complete control over—had never quite transcended the frames of representation she sought to escape: the capitalist frames of desirability and success especially. She felt this particularly keenly when she saw her work on the walls of a major institution, completely removed from the process in which she made it. She referred to the gallery as the "final resting place" (358), as if the work itself had died once it left her hands.

I feel this sense of loss quite differently as a performance artist: I learned early on that I could never really call the work "mine", that I couldn't quite claim to be its author. Most of my performances have unfolded beyond my control, in front of myself and the audience at once, as if they have a life of their own: I have a lot of respect for this now. I made my first performance artwork when I was nineteen, having spent weeks rehearsing and building an elaborate costume and set piece. Of course the performance didn't go to plan at all. I look back on the chaos rather fondly, but at the time I was devastated, even embarrassed, that I'd lost control of the reins. So much of what I had been taught about art practice involved lining up the intent with the outcome. I've since embraced the unruliness of performance, and this is perhaps why I haven't dared treat it sincerely as an avenue for self portraiture, though I'm always in the work. Performance, for me, is more about stepping outside of or away from myself than an attempt to capture and portray who I think I am.

Crucial questions for anyone who works with self portraiture in a feminist context are what the "self" means, how the individual relates to the social and back again, whether the feminist adage "the personal is political" still carries any weight, how the process of art-making is in itself a series of creative decisions that serve to construct the "self" of the portrait and how this might sit against other constructions of what femininity is or should be, whether an assertion of the feminine is useful for the feminist project and how this has been co-opted, and so on. I remain haunted, as many other women probably do, by the #MeToo movement and its implicit message that trauma is what qualifies you to

speak and be heard as a woman, that the self is the site of all struggle and that your own damage is what is meant to make you feel powerful, as opposed to our collective effort to imagine and build a better world for ourselves. We might be living in a time where the instrumentalisation and weaponisation of the feminine self is at odds with this kind of solidarity.

I do still have faith, though, in the capacity for women artists to grant themselves the agency to play with social and aesthetic codes beyond those they encounter in their day to day lives, to portray themselves as working, struggling, masquerading within and against the systems of power and representation that are oppressive, demoralising and not of their own making. Whether an individual artist can say their portrait is their own is maybe less of an issue when the more pertinent question is what the portrait becomes when it is viewed and framed by others and amongst others, a process that does not have to be one of dispossession and alienation, but the formation of a series of relationships that can then go on to be the potential nexus for solidarity.

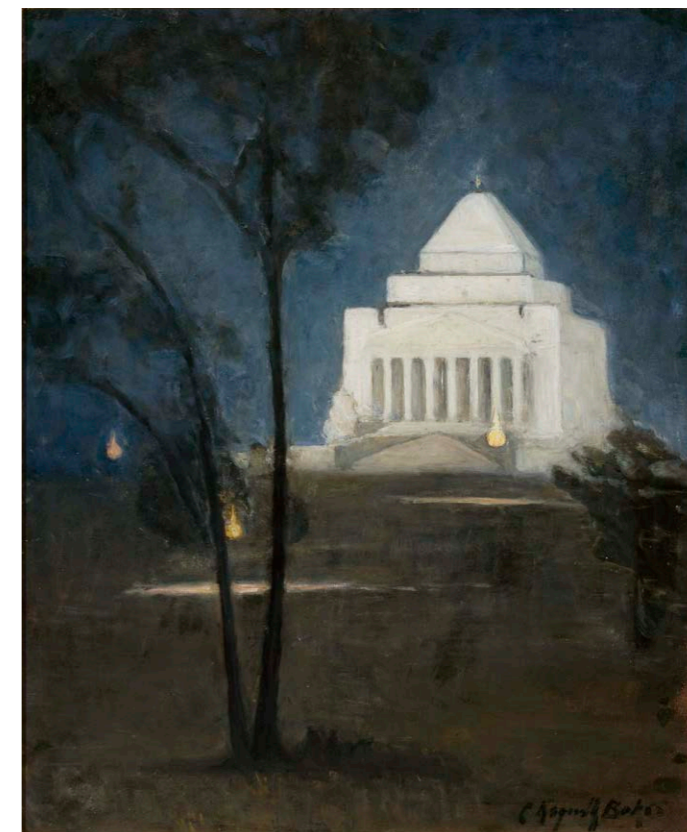
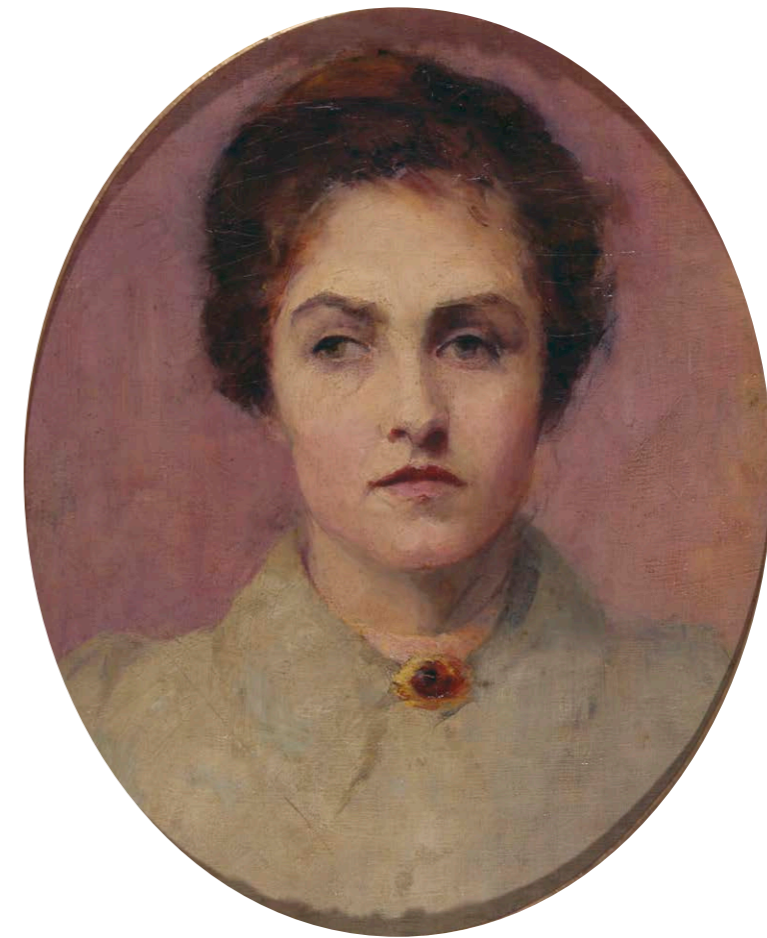
Taylor Reudavey

Taylor Reudavey (b.1994) is an artist, writer and performer based in Perth, Western Australia. She has exhibited with Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (2018), Perth Fringe Festival (2018), Geraldton Regional Art Gallery (2017), Moana Project Space (2017), The Hive Art Space (2017) and Free Range Gallery (2016). She has contributed as a writer to Cactus Journal (2017) and the Seventh Gallery Writer's Program (2018), and has written several catalogue essays for Artist Run Initiatives around Perth.

Taylor is a full-time PhD candidate at Curtin University's School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry and is a recipient of the Research Training Program Stipend Scholarship. She is conducting practice-led research into larrikinism as a potential vehicle for Marxist-feminist politics.

References

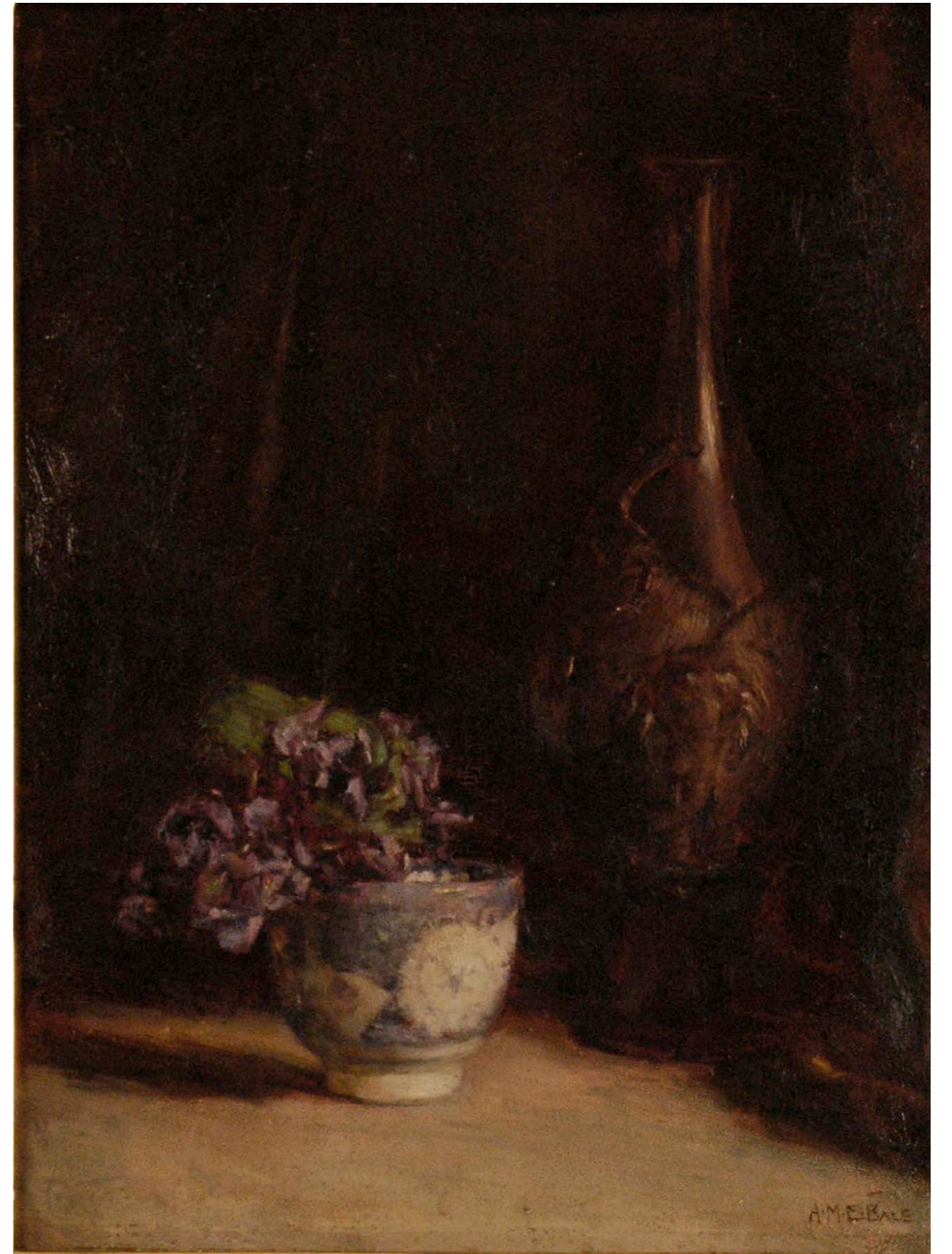
Spence, Jo. 2001. "Beyond the Family Album (1980)." In *Feminism—Art—Theory*, edited by Hilary Robinson, 352-360. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.



Images t-b:

Christina Asquith Baker, *Self Portrait*, c. 1890s, oil on canvas, 45 x 36cm

Christina Asquith Baker, *Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne*, c. 1922, oil on canvas, 75 x 62.5cm



Images l-r

A.M.E. Bale, *Self Portrait*, c. 1906, oil on board, 48 x 34.8 cm, CCWA 752

A.M.E. Bale, *Bronze Vase with Flowers*, oil on canvas, 43 x 32.5 cm, CCWA 140

LIST OF WORKS

Artworks in the *The Artist and Her Work* will be changed frequently. The following is a full list of all works exhibited over the duration of the exhibition - not all of these works will be on view at any given time and repeated viewing is recommended. Please refer to the artwork labels in the exhibition space for more information.

Christina Asquith Baker (1869-1955)

Self Portrait, c. 1890s, oil on canvas, 45 x 36cm, CCWA 293
Shrine of Remembrance. Melbourne, c. 1922, Oil on canvas, 75 x 62.5cm, CCWA 753

A.M.E. Bale (1875 - 1955)

Self Portrait, 1906-07, watercolour, 12.6 x 9.2 cm (oval), CCWA 178
Bronze Vase With Flowers, n.d., oil on canvas, 43 x 32.5cm, CCWA 140

Elise Blumann (1897 - 1990)

Self Portrait, 1937, oil on canvas, 52.5 x 62.5cm, CCWA 37
Discussion On A Rooftop, 1950, oil on board, 55 x 44.5cm, CCWA 496

Dora Chapman (1911 - 1995)

Self Portrait in Roll Neck Sweater, c. 1940s, charcoal on paper, 48.5 x 31cm, CCWA 763
Girl With a Long Nose, 1970, screenprint ed 3/42, 38 x 28cm, CCWA 742

Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984)

Self Portrait, 1945, Pencil and coloured pencil, 27 x 22.1cm, CCWA 442
Dawn Landing, 1944, oil on pulpboard, 69.5 x 54.3 cm, CCWA 250

Grace Crowley (1890 – 1979)

[Self Portrait with Garden Rake], 1962, pencil, 77 x 57 cm, CCWA 632
[Abstract Painting], c. 1950, oil on cardboard, 46.5 x 59.5cm, CCWA 272

Destiny Deacon (1957 -)

Me and Virginia's doll (Me and Carol), 1997/2004, lightjet print from Polaroid, 100 x 80cm, CCWA 940
Da doo run run, 2009, inkjet print from digital image on archival paper, 86 x 66cm, CCWA 939

Stella Dilger (1900 - 1992)

Self Portrait, late 1950s, mixed media, 31 x 23.5 cm
Untitled (Group), c. 1960s, oil on board, 55 x 79.5cm

Julie Dowling (1969 -)

The Storm in Me, 1999, mixed media, 38 x 58cm, CCWA 767
Wudjula Yorgah (White Woman), 2005, Acrylic and red ochre on canvas, 120 x 100, CCWA 821

Elizabeth Durack (1915 - 2000)

Self Portrait, 1968, pencil on paper, 26 x 24cm
Ord River Venus, 1947, oil on canvas, 134 x 94cm

Tania Ferrier (1958 -)

Self Portrait, 1985, oil on board, 41.5 x 54.5cm, CCWA 625
East River Salsa, 1996, watercolour on card, 68 x 47cm, CCWA 626

Indra Geidans (1963 -)

Self Portrait, 1996, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 40.5cm, CCWA 612
Green Dress, 2002, oil on canvas, 70 x 95.5cm, CCWA 729

Sheila Hawkins (1906 - 1999)

Self Portrait, c. 1945, oil on brown card, 37 x 29cm, CCWA 829
Piping, c. 1960s, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 51cm, CCWA 830

Jacqueline Hick (1919 - 2004)

Self Portrait, c. 1952, oil on plywood, 53 x 45.6cm, CCWA 704
The Departure, c. 1950, oil on board, 35 x 45cm, CCWA 911

Eveline Kotai (1950 -)

Self Portrait, 1991 - 2010, oil, nylon thread, linen, 70 x 52.5 cm, CCWA 922
in the line, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 147 x 147 cm, CCWA 826

Fiona MacDonald (1956 -)

Myself As The Daughter Of The Este Family (Self Portrait), 1987, photo offset print collage, 59 x 49 cm, CCWA 441
Joan Kerr and Mary Edwards heritage 2, 2004, interwoven photographic paper, 51 x 37.5cm, CCWA 867

Ann Newmarch (1945 -)

Drawing Of Ann No 13, 1994, pencil and crayon, 54.5 x 36.5cm, CCWA 572
For John Lennon & My Two Sons, 1981, Screenprint ed. 4/40, two parts 91 x 65cm each, CCWA 567

Kathleen O'Connor (1876 -1968)

Self Portrait, c. 1928, oil on board, 64 x 49cm, CCWA 36
Still Life, c. 1948, oil on canvas, 65 x 54cm, CCWA 197

Barbara Robertson (1921 - 2011)

Self Portrait, 1951, oil on board, 55 x 39.5cm, CCWA 706
The Means, 1982, oil and acrylic on hardboard, 66.5 x 90.5cm, CCWA 1982

Sangeeta Sandrasegar (1977 -)

Untitled (Self Portrait as Prudence), 2009, felt, sequins, glass beads, cotton, 88 x 60cm, CCWA 893
Ifrit Kashkash, 2002, paper cutout, 148.3 x 105cm (frame size), CCWA 733

Miriam Stannage (1939 - 2016)

Self portrait, 1978, charcoal and photographic collage, 56 x 76 cm, CCWA 592
Still Life, 1974, acrylic and objects on canvas, 147.3 x 147.3cm, CCWA 87

Sera Waters (1979 -)

Self in Stitches, 2012, handmade clay beads, lace, string, hand dyed linen, cotton, beads, sequins, 70 x 55cm, CCWA 936
Flee to Haven, 2009, 2 elements, wool, crewel, thread, velvet, yellow trim, cotton fabric, stuffing, dimensions variable, CCWA 896a



Sir James and Lady Sheila Cruthers with artworks from their collection, circa 2007 © WEST AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gemma Weston, Curator of the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, would like to thank Taylor Reudavey for her always sharp reflections on the representation of women in the arts, and all of the staff of the UWA Cultural Precinct Special thanks to Gary Dufour, Curatorial Advisor to the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art and Ted Snell, Chief Cultural Officer at the University of Western Australia. Gratitude always to John Cruthers and Sheila A Foundation for Women in Visual Art for supporting the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art at the University of Western Australia.

The Cruthers Collection of Women's Art (CCWA) is the only public collection focused specifically on women's art in Australia. The foundation of the CCWA was a substantial gift of artworks made to the University of Western Australia in 2007 by Sir James and Lady Sheila Cruthers. The Cruthers family began collecting women's art in the 1970s, focusing primarily on portraiture and self-portraiture and isolating key areas such as still life, abstraction, early post-modernism and second-wave feminism. The CCWA includes works from the 1890s to the present day in a variety of media and continues to expand through focused acquisition and generous donation, aiming to contribute to and challenge dialogues about Australian women's art through exhibition, teaching, research and publication.

The CCWA is a registered Deductible Gift Recipient and may receive donations of artworks through the Cultural Gifts Program, facilitated by the Australian Government's Department of Communication and the Arts.

Published by Cruthers Collection of Women's Art at The University of Western Australia, 2019. All rights reserved. ISBN -978-1-925793-16-1



CULTURAL PRECINCT

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