

# **What does it mean to be political in regional NSW?**

Thursday 5 November, 1pm – 2:15pm  
Wagga Wagga Art Gallery

## **Speakers**

Sarah McEwan:  
Introduction

Barbara Quayle, Cheryl Blore, Cindy Bates:  
Barka River Menindee

Holly Conroy:  
LGBTQI+ Community Awareness

Julie Montgarrett:  
The Importance of Self Education

## **Following is Sarah McEwan's introduction**

This conversation event was the second public program for the exhibition *Something to Say* held at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery for Artstate Wagga Wagga, 5–8 November 2020.

# What does it mean to be political in regional NSW?

Hi everyone, thank you so much for being here with us today.

This conversation event is the second public program for the *Something to Say* exhibition that Julie Montgarrett and myself have co-curated. The exhibition is on in the E3 artspace, open from 1-7pm today, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. We hope you have time to visit the artworks and thinking of the 14 regional artists involved.

I firstly wanted to acknowledge that we're meeting on Wiradjuri country. I know that Aunty Isobel and Uncle Stan will be officially welcoming us to Artstate later tonight. Living here, I get to witness the incredible leadership of the Wiradjuri elders. They share with us what reconciliation means and as Uncle Stan would say, how we can walk side by side with each other.



## Miss Blanks

I wanted to begin today with a quote from the Australian musician Miss Blanks who has said, “Politics is my existence!”<sup>1</sup>

*...people like to police my actions, thoughts and voice — it’s really muzzling. For so long, women of colour, especially trans women of colour, have been seen as an inconvenience and for the first time in Australian music I get to be highly visible. I get to say what I wanna say in my music, and reclaim my voice, sensuality, femininity, body, mind, energy...*<sup>2</sup>

This quote powerfully articulates the art of world making to me. This formidable presence where people can express incredibly complex ideas through their actions, imagery and voice.

History, art, social relations and care meld and intra-act to tell powerful stories. These stories in turn, make a world – from large national stories, to smaller community stories, right down to micro worlds for one. All of these different ways of creating and contributing to the world have value, where we come to understand ourselves and others more.

My name is Sarah McEwan, and I am an artist, musician, artist-curator and the Creative Producer of an artist led organisation called the Cad Factory. What motivates me is my passion for ‘ontoethics’.

<sup>1</sup> Instagram live conversation, 31 August 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://australianhiphopdirectory.com/listing/miss-blanks/> accessed on 26 September 2020

# ONTOETHICS

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Ontology - being in the world

Ethics - how you face the other

Politics - how we live together

Ontoethics is a concept developed by Australian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz that brings together 'ontology' – how you be in the world, 'ethics' – how you face the other, and 'politics' – how we live together.

Ontoethics asks, how do we share this only world we have with all life forms? And how do we 'bring about a future different from the present'?<sup>3</sup>

For Grosz, it is never enough to simply critique a problem, there must also be an action to address it. For Grosz, her action has been a long career, since the 1980s, making Western philosophy accountable to difference.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism*, Columbia University Press, p.1



**Miss Blanks**



**Elizabeth Grosz**

To bring Miss Blanks and Elizabeth Grosz into conversation, what both of them are speaking about, is reclaiming the world, and themselves, from Man with a capital M. In the West, we are haunted by Man with a capital M. Man - who has governed supreme for thousands of years, with everyone else who is not Man, in servitude to these values.

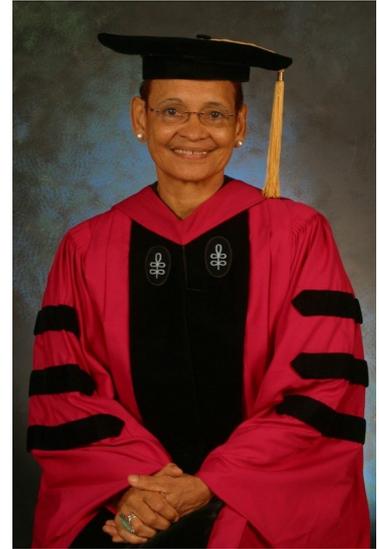
# Tertiary Education



**Bella Guerin**



**Margaret Valadian**



**Mary Ann Bin-Sallik**

As evidence of Man's legacy, did you know that it wasn't until 1883 that the first woman, Bella Guerin, completed a Bachelor of Arts at Melbourne University? Then in 1967, Margaret Valadian was the first Indigenous woman to complete a Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Queensland. The first indigenous lecturer was Djaru woman Mary Ann Bin-Sallik in 1975, who went on to become the first female Indigenous Emeritus Professor at Charles Darwin University in 2008.

# Medicine



**Dagma Berne**



**Helen Milroy**

The first female doctor in Australia was Dagma Berne who started her GP practice in Sydney in 1895. Palyku woman Helen Milroy from Perth, became the first Indigenous doctor in 1983.

# Law



**Flos Greig**



**Roma Mitchell**



**Pat O Shane**



**Susan Kiefel**

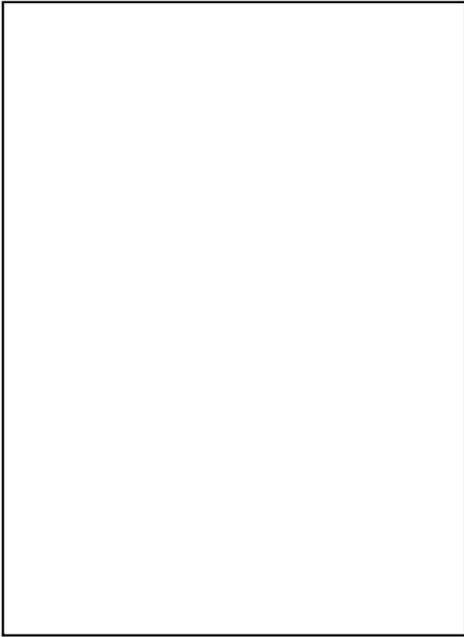
If we turn to law, in 1905, Flos Greig became the first female barrister, then in 1965 Dame Roma Mitchell became the first woman Supreme Court Judge of South Australia.

In 1976, Kuku Yalanji woman Pat O'Shane became the first Indigenous lawyer. She went on to be a Magistrate in 1986 and then Chancellor of the University of New England in 1995.

In 2017, Susan Kiefel became the first female Chief Justice of Australia.

I am sharing these statistics with you as evidence of how recent difference in governance is. It articulates how deep-rooted Man is within ruling our Western world and creating the structures, barriers and hierarchies that he invented and declared 'natural' for all of us to live by.

# Policing



**Sandra May**



**Christine Nixon**

In 1982, Sandra May was the first Indigenous policewoman. In 2001, Christine Nixon became the first female police commissioner of Victoria.

# Parliament



**Carol Martin**



**Julia Gillard**



**Julie Bishop**

In 2001, Yamatji and Noongar woman Carol Martin was the first Indigenous woman elected to the Australian parliament in the seat of Kimberley.

In 2010, Julia Gillard became the first female Prime Minister of Australia.

In 2013, Julie Bishop became the first female Minister for Foreign Affairs.

# Defence



**Simone Wilke**



**Frontline Combat Soldiers**

In 2013, Simone Wilke became the first female Major General in the Australian Defence Force.

In 2016, women in the Defence Force could fight in front line combat positions.

These statistics demonstrate the gender and race gap that exists within the systems that govern our country. Man, with a capital M, has made it very difficult for diversity of ‘power’ - how you influence people and manage resources, to occur. The gains for people who are not Man, are very recent – and most of them within living memory. To create space for these gains it is important to remember that people have literally been dying for rights through their activism, so different voices can be heard.

For me, being political is about being in service and giving deep care. A caring where you will put your life to the side to enable other people to have space. It is where you face someone and build a bridge towards understanding them, as opposed to keeping the abyss between you and them in place. It is supporting people to be the best versions of themselves. It is choosing to say no to what you witness, and strategically thinking your way around obstacles.

What I want and need in regional NSW is to see a full spectrum of genders being represented and accepted within leadership positions. And leadership being open and intersectional in its approach and delivery. There has always been difference in the world, and people have been world building alongside Man, yet Man’s leadership has led us to such a dire point, it has to be time to consider different voices in moving forward. I want and need a world like Uncle Stan Grant Senior says, where we can all walk side by side.

# Our Presenters



**Cindy Bates**  
**Barbara Quayle**  
**Cheryl Blore**



**Holly Conroy**



**Julie Montgarrett**

Today we will explore how we live together in regional NSW, often within small communities. As a group, I hope we can consider what our role is in creating the world we want and need. What do we want? What do we need? How does this align with other agendas within our communities?

We know there are many political people out there in regional NSW, in the mess, in the confusion and the anger of the world, striving for just-ness and care by considering other people. And luckily, we have some of these people here today to present!

We have Barkindji elders from Menindee, Barbara Quayle, Cheryl Blore and Cindy Bates. They are artists within *Something to Say*, who have been loudly advocating and protesting the management of the Barka River.

We have Holly Conroy, an athlete, who also visioned and brought to life the Wagga Wagga Mardi Gras, bringing LGBTQI+ rights to the forefront of our Riverina community.

And Julie Montgarrett, co-curator and an artist in *Something to Say*, who has had a thirty plus year career in tertiary education, empowering students through critical thinking and knowledge.

After the upcoming presentations, we will open up the conversation to have a broader discussion on politics, small communities and any other issues that have been raised here today. Please save your questions until this time.