

***Transform: shirts reimagined***

## **EXHIBITION CATALOGUE**

**Exhibition open 11am to 5pm Wednesday 6 to Sunday 22 October, 2023**

**BAROMETER**

13 Gurner Street, Paddington NSW 2021 p:(02) 93584968 [www.barometer.net.au](http://www.barometer.net.au)

# **Transform: shirts reimagined**

*Transform: shirts reimagined* exhibition challenged ten Sydney based artists to create a new work with a shirt, any kind of shirt or shirts.

The shirts could be old or new, white or coloured, striped or patterned, large or small, worn or torn, damaged or unused, loved or discarded, plain or frilly, lightweight or heavy, a day or night shirt, a child's, women's or men's shirt or a shirt made from silk, cotton, linen, wool.

Artists in the exhibition selected shirts that they had, they liked, were gifted, were readily available or more importantly, had a story to tell or an embedded memory to engage with.

The challenge was to transform the shirt / s into a unique art or design work - to transform, repurposed, transformed, manipulated, or recreated the existing shirt / s into a 'new' work – an artwork, a wall installation, a functional object, floor rug or a new wearable article.

At the same time, all artists have incorporated their individual concerns or interests to the project – concern for sustainability, wellbeing, repurposing, conserving materials, making do and remaking. All have transformed shirts to reimagine new and unusual outcomes.

Artists have transformed shirts by deconstructing, reconstructed, embellishing, decorating, stitching, pieced, coiling, recolouring, redyeing, overprinted, interlacing or weaving - whatever technique is appropriate to their response to the shirts challenge. All have redefined the original material value to create new, exciting, and innovative artworks.

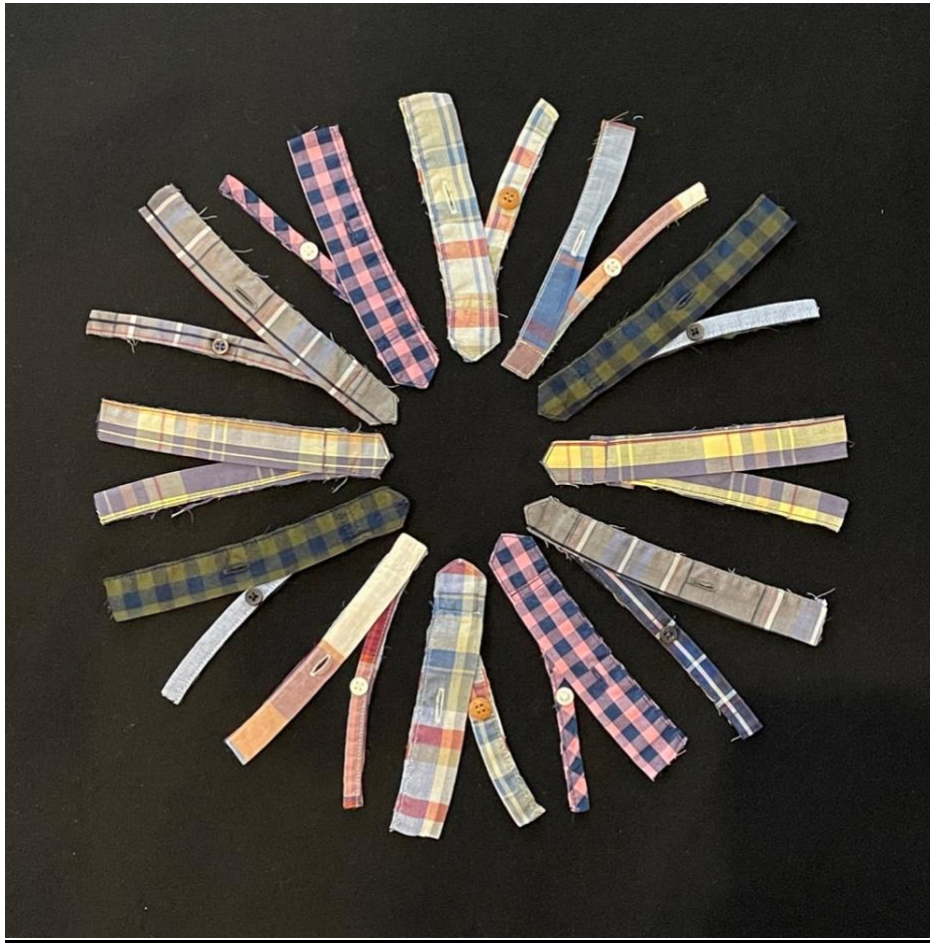
Artists: Vita Cochran, Michele Elliott, Liz Gemmell, Cecilia Heffer, Christina Newberry, Emma Peters, Barbara Rogers, Jane Theau, Liz Williamson and Melinda Young.

Organizers: Liz Williamson and Barbara Rogers.

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## Vita Cochran



Vita Cochran is a textile artist from Aotearoa who lives in Sydney. Her work engages with the histories of domestic craft and the traffic between the decorative arts and modernism. She often uses found materials and enjoys the richness a textile's former life can bring to new work.

### ***Assorted uses for small squares***

My local op shop is brimming with ubiquitous men's checked cotton shirts. I have carefully dissected six of them and grouped them by parts to make six works from six shirts. There's a stack of collars, a dandelion of cuff plackets, a carousel of yokes, a convivial grouping of shirt fronts and more. While an individual checked shirt can seem a mundane, even conservative clothing choice, brought together the colourful checks seem quite joyous, and the shapes of the shirt pieces playful. I also enjoy seeing the undulating curves of the pattern pieces — particularly the shirt sleeves— interact with the straight-up-and-down grid of the checked materials.

## Michele Elliot



Michele Elliot is an artist and educator living on Dharawal Country, NSW. Her art practice spans installation, textiles, drawing and sculpture and has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

A survey of her work *some kind of longing: textiles work 1995-2018* was shown at Tamworth Regional Gallery, 2018 and Ararat Regional Art Gallery, 2015. Michele will also have a major solo exhibition at Wollongong Art Gallery in June 2024.

### ***the lovers***

textile bodies sewn into being  
quiet emissaries, collaborators held in mind  
their work done, memory held in cloth  
wearing, washing, fading, fraying,  
mending, darning, folding, gathering  
stitches wind a meandering path, others follow  
maker, wearer, mender  
we embrace

## Liz Gemmell



Initially teacher trained, Liz Gemmell went on to complete a Fine Arts course which has been pivotal in her design. 1984 onwards Liz wrote five knitting books which led to teaching knitting techniques and design. A procession of courses followed in felting, shibori, and Korean Bojagi. Her current practice combines multicoloured knitting, lace knitting, felt, shibori, embroidery and patching, all textile related. Liz continues to explore and experiment with garment design - ethnic and contemporary western. Teaching textile arts at the University of Technology, Sydney for thirteen years with interactive and creative students was a highlight. Liz is currently an exhibiting member Craft NSW.

### **Revive**

*Revive* has been made from men's woven check shirts cut into patches and made up into a complex fabric. Using this complex fabric Gemmell wanted the simplest garment designs. The bias dolman T-shirt was one piece and two circles made from this fabric, made the skirt also on the bias. Buttons, buttonholes and plackets have been included to reference the original shirts.

## **Dr Cecilia Heffer**



Cecilia Heffer's practice explores contemporary lacemaking and place through the notion of the 'space in between'. Agency is given to unconventional materials integrating traditional and emerging technologies. Cecilia regularly exhibits nationally and internationally and has been awarded Australia Council Arts grants. Commissions include designing the lace curtains for the State Rooms of Government House NSW. Work has been acquired by the Powerhouse Museum Sydney, the National Gallery of Victoria, Museum Centrale Textiles, Łódź Poland, Tamworth and Wangaratta Regional Galleries. In 2023 Cecilia will be a Visiting Research Fellow at the Powerhouse Museum.

### ***Waste to Lace***

*Waste to Lace* deconstructs a shirt pattern block, focusing on the front, collar and cuffs. Archival lace patterns have been woodblock printed onto these areas traditionally reserved for decoration. A Research Fellowship at the Powerhouse Museum has informed the repurposing shirt project. All materials used are from paper waste.

Credits: Luke Diaz, pattern blocks and construction and the Tharangini Studio, Bangalore for lace woodblocks.



## Christina Newberry



Christina Newberry's art practice has a history of working with sustainability. She sources recycled clothing/materials and objects which are then transformed into new and innovative forms by utilising skills such as deconstruction/reconstruction, assemblage and hand-embroidery.

### ***Pleats Play***

Play and experimentation is foremost in Newberry's approach to transformation.

Her love of pleats with its sculptural qualities, inspired her to take a plain pleated shirt and skirt, and transform them into an elaborate sculptural shirt.

Created through reversible inversion, gathering and boning, with zero cutting, the original shirt and skirt retain an ability to completely return back to their original forms.

## Emma Peters



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Emma Peters (she/her) is a circular textile designer, researcher, and educator, working on Bidjigal and Gadigal land. Emma's textile practice considers our relationship with material culture - specifically sustainability, narrative, and connection. Since working as a commercial textile designer, Emma has been awarded a Master of Design, published research, exhibited as a solo artist, and is a founding member of the *Circular Textile Lab*. Currently, Emma is an Associate Lecturer and PhD candidate at UNSW, examining circular pathways for bedlinen waste.

### ***Between Rupture and Repair I-IX***

A Victorian-era night shirt and mourning brooch provide a provocation to consider the significance of historic textiles, their value, and the transitional spaces they occupy.

The nightshirt is captured in a state of disrepair, a fate uncertain. The mourning brooch, an artefact of Australian queer history made from the hair of Ms Drysdale and Ms Newcomb, points to the mnemonic potential of textiles.



## Barbara Rogers



In a process of adding and subtracting, masking and revealing, textile artist and designer, Barbara Rogers, incorporates innovative *shibori* techniques with other traditional resist-dye processes in her unique artworks to create subtly varied patterns and rhythms that work in harmony with the cloth. She has gained international acclaim for her work which has been exhibited in Australia and internationally. Barbara is a Sydney based textile artist who completed Dress Design at the National Art School and worked in the fashion industry for many years. She now works in shibori, an ancient Japanese resist dye technique and participated in the last nine World Shibori Symposia.

### ***Collected shirts***

Salvaging and repurposing cotton shirts. Some are personal and finding a new life. Reworking, dyeing, discharge stitch and resist techniques, patching, decorative hand stitching, folding and unfolding become defining characteristics. There is so much to explore, adding value and history and craft, making a collection of one-of-a-kind shirts.

## Dr Jane Theau



Jane Theau is a visual artist, community art facilitator, curator and President of Textiles Sydney (an organization she founded in 2020). Her practice is multi-disciplinary, encompassing sculpture, installation, and performance, and her medium of choice is textiles. Jane has a BAppSc from UTS, a Master of International Affairs from Columbia University, and a PhD from ANU.

### ***White Collar***

This shirt travelled to and from the city on the bus every day for years. Like its fellow commuters, it's starting to look a little frazzled around the collar and cuffs and a little tired, like its new wearer.

### ***Second Hands***

I bought this hand-sewn lace jacket in a Vinnie's store many years ago. I thought it beautiful and tried to wear it many times, but it was never comfortable. In its second life this shirt now has lace hands, and I have added to its length by creating lace that matches the embroidery on the original fabric.

## Liz Williamson



Liz Williamson is a weaver, textile artist, curator and academic living on Gadigal and Wangal lands of the Eora nation in the Inner West of Sydney. At the heart of her practice is an interest in designs created at the loom, with recent weavings referencing the tradition of woven rag rugs and the idea of 'making do' with readily available materials. With a practice spanning 40 years, she is still fascinated with the process and potential of interlacing threads on her loom. Williamson is an Honorary Associate Professor, UNSW, Sydney.

### ***Woven from shirts series***

The *Woven from shirts* series repurposes shirts worn by the weaver and her husband. Plain coloured, embroidered or striped shirts made from various fibres, all loved and worn, their materiality enhanced by the human experiences. With time the shirts became the wrong size, fit or faded and discarded but saved waiting a new purpose. Reweaving has transformed and redefined their material value adding a new layer to their embedded stories.

## Materials

**Woven from eight shirts:** handwoven with a warp of mixed threads including wool terylene, cotton, cotton polyester, mercerised cotton, spun polyester.

Wefts includes black cotton threads plus strips cut from eight shirts before weaving - a Simona black silk shirt; an Indian cotton kurta dyed with natural indigo purchased in Mumbai, India; a Nicola Waite faded black cotton shirt; Tony's work faded cotton navy shirt; a Nicola Waite grey polyester shirt; a purple Pakistani embroidered cotton polyester kurta purchased in Lahore in 2004; a shirt made from fabric hand woven and dyed in indigo by Women Weave in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh in Central India and made into a shirt by Champion tailors in Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat, India; and a purple synthetic fabric shirt made by a dressmaker in Leichhardt, Sydney.

**Woven from nine shirts:** handwoven with a warp of mixed threads including wool terylene, cotton, cotton polyester, mercerised cotton, spun polyester.

Wefts include black cotton threads plus strips cut from nine shirts before weaving - Tony's work faded cotton navy shirt; a Nicola Waite grey polyester shirt; a Country Road brown linen shirt; a Country Road red brown linen shirt; a pink silk shirt made from Cambodian silk woven with ikat patterning; a purple Pakistani embroidered cotton polyester kurta purchased in Lahore in 2004; a Simona black silk shirt; an Indian grey silk shirt with machine stitched *Kantha* like running stitching with white and black threads purchased in Mumbai, India; and a shirt made from fabric hand woven and dyed in indigo by Women Weave in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh in Central India and made into a shirt by Champion tailors in Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat, India.

**Woven from five green shirts:** handwoven with a warp of mixed threads including wool terylene, cotton, cotton polyester, mercerised cotton, spun polyester.

Wefts include black cotton threads plus strips cut from five shirts before weaving – a well-worn Simona long linen shirt; a loved silk shirt by Sarah CrowEST handprinted in metallic colours with both placement and screen prints; two worn and faded Indian shirts made from handwoven silk and hand block printed with natural dyes; and one Indian shirt made in Kutch, Gujarat from silk with hand stitched *Shibori* patterning and hand block printed in natural dyes.

## Melinda Young



Melinda Young is a visual artist and craftsperson living and making on Dharawal Country, NSW. She has a Master of Visual Arts from Sydney College of the Arts and is currently undertaking a cross-disciplinary PhD in Human Geography and Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong. Melinda's practice has always been concerned with the re-use and re-working of materials; these materials carry their own stories, bringing an existing narrative to the work. With this comes pre-existing connections with viewers, wearers and frequently with herself as the maker - these associations can be drawn on (or subverted) in the creation of new meaning and new work. She is drawn to projects that challenge her making, gently steering it in new directions.

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### ***Ghost Neckpiece (Yungnulgra & Barkindji Country).***

This work is part of ongoing research into the narratives inherent in collected post-colonial debris; rusted artefacts are stained onto the shirt in a necklace arrangement, the layers of colour leached during the process reflects sites where the human and non-human coalesce, where the manufactured object is in the process of being reclaimed by Country. The touch of



a body has the potential to stain the shirt further, transforming it through wear, thus becoming part of the trace-history of the original objects. The shirt's buttons are cast in silver from Cumbi Cumbi / Pittosporum Angustifolium, collected from the same place as the rusted artefacts.

### ***Held Daily Vessels***

The blue 'Chesty Bonds' singlet is a trope of 'true blue Aussie' masculinity and workwear, to wear them as a woman has always felt like a small push against the status quo of gendered garments. This work reluctantly deconstructs two of my own well-worn and loved 'Chesty Bonds' singlets. Finally disintegrating after more than a decade of rotational daily wear, they have been re-made into a group of coiled vessels, repurposed for a new life of use. A transformation of the garments from holding to being held.

