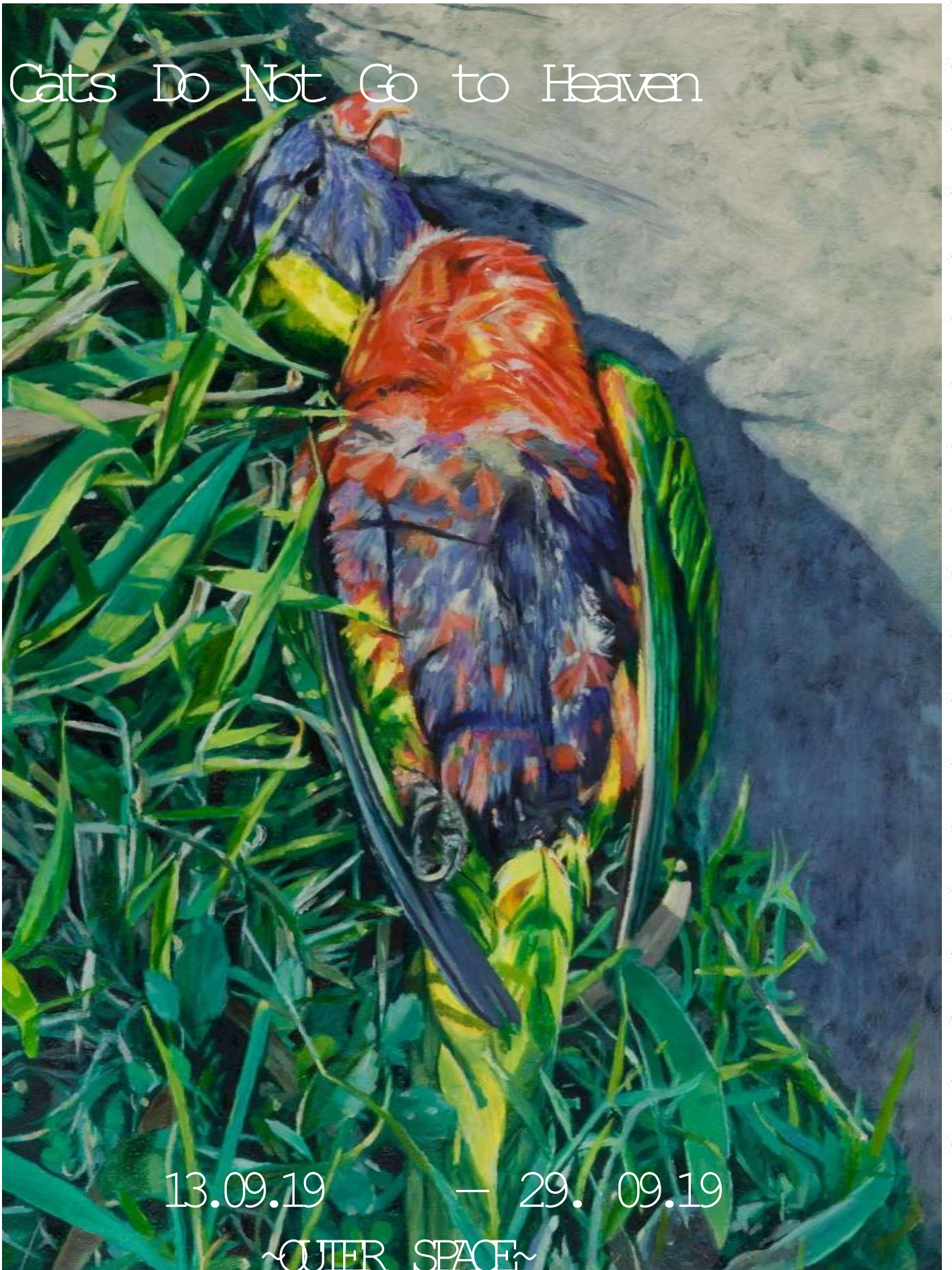


Cats Do Not Go to Heaven



13.09.19 — 29. 09.19

~OUTER SPACE~

Kate Mckay, Momento Mori, Oil on

“Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the works of Shakespeare.” G. M. Trevelyan In *Woolf* 1929

“Women do not paint very well. It’s a Fact.” Georg Baselitz 2013

All the artists in this show can go to the library unaccompanied by a man. What astounding progress in social equality since Virginia Woolf’s<sup>1</sup> eminent feminist text ‘A Room of One’s Own’ was published in 1929.

While many of the barriers to having a creative practice that existed at the time have been dismantled through the rigorous political activism of those who came before us, it would be naïve to suggest we are (regardless of gender) free from the fetters of patriarchy. Wouldn’t that be a lark? Woolf’s text remains an unsettling and uncanny mirror to contemporary conversations surrounding certain gendered experiences. Ninety years is a long time to make such short strides. But whatever.

Cats Do Not Go to Heaven started as one very such conversation with my housemate about women finding space to make and fostering intimacy with their art practices. What are the conditions for making art? This is the question Woolf asks regarding fiction in her essay. Her answer is simple, money and a room of her own. Oh boy, I sure would like some money to make art.

The conversations I have had since, with the artists and writers involved, have happened on studio floors, carpooling from work, over glasses of wine, with cats in laps, on the phone on Sunday mornings, in fabric stores and via many many messages. I was welcomed into private spaces and private thoughts and shared a generous discourse with each maker about what this meant to me, and what it might mean to them.

I also had conversations about this show with women who weren’t directly involved; asking advice from a mentor/friend/woman I admire about fabrication techniques, visiting my best friend in her own studio and sharing a mediocre lunch, talking to co-workers who have read the book and my mum, a real cool chick with no filter, who didn’t want a daughter because she was afraid of all the terrible things that could happen to her, all the barriers her female child would face and the fear that she, my mother, would be an inadequate guide through womanhood and its apparent dreadfulness. For brevity and to her credit, my mother was right, I have experienced gendered violence and sexual assault, I have faced prejudice in the workplace as a woman, particularly as a young woman, and not just from men either, I have struggled to be taken seriously as an artist and arts professional who is outwardly feminine. Come and find me if you want to argue about that last point, I can’t wait to have you delegitimize my experiences.

Things are not the same as they were when Woolf wrote her essay, or when I was born in 1992. They aren’t even the same as they were eight years ago when a female lecturer cautioned me against having children lest I want to pursue a career in the arts. Things are better than they were. They have especially improved for cis-gendered white women - which all the artists in this show are. They even televise women’s sport on mainstream channels. And you can read the vitriolic, sexist comments that diminish the players of these sports to nothing but their appearance on the highlight clips posted to social media. “Phwoar, I wouldn’t kick her outta bed.”

Please child, be still, nobody asked for your opinion.

Prompted by ‘A Room of One’s Own’ this exhibition brings together five artists who make work whilst experiencing the world as women. That’s it, that’s what the show is. Cats Do Not Go to Heaven, features work by Savannah Jarvis, Dana Lawrie, Mary Letain, Ally McKay and Kate McKay and I really really like everyone involved.

Cats might not go to heaven, but I’m an atheist and heaven was never the goal. But, to be honest, it kind of sucks that this text is still relevant.

Caity Reynolds

---

<sup>1</sup> Woolf, Virginia. *A room of one's own and three guineas*. OUP Oxford, 1929.



*Dana*

*Lawrie, Weaving, 2017 - 2019*

Dear Caity

It's 4am. I've have an enormous week already, and it's only Wednesday. I've begun install on the next exhibition at work, I'm frantically corralling the last of the content and have a funeral to attend interstate on Friday. I really need to wash my hair. I think it's been almost eight days. Don't know when I'm fitting that in.

It makes utter sense to stay healthy and strong, to be as nourishing to the body as possible. Yet I would have to agree, there is in many women a 'hungry' one inside. But rather than hungry to be a certain size, shape, or height, rather than hungry to fit the stereotype; women are hungry for basic regard from the culture surrounding them. The 'hungry' one inside is longing to be treated respectfully, to be accepted and in the very least, to be met without stereotyping.<sup>2</sup>

I've sat down to write this literally 100 times; in only four days. Everytime I write a sentence I think about what someone else might think of it, how they might think of me by extension. It's fucking exhausting. This sense of responsibility to others could be a strength, but it just isn't in a social structure influenced by patriarchy. My empathy is a constant source of fuel to people who lack it; it is an easy vice to those who witness it. Empathy doesn't get as many mad props as intelligence. This responsibility is coupled with the crushing feeling that you haven't earned your worth to even take up space in this world, not only physically as a person, but in conversation, text, paint, history...

I've seen women insist on cleaning everything in the house before they could sit down to write... and you know it's a funny thing about housecleaning... it never comes to an end. Perfect way to stop a woman. A woman must be careful to not allow over-responsibility (or over-respectability) to steal her necessary creative rests, riffs, and raptures. She simply must put her foot down and say no to half of what she believes she "should" be doing. Art is not meant to be created in stolen moments only.

I don't really make art anymore and that's a hard, emotionally charged thing for me to write and have published in context with this show. I admire all of these artists and their practices. I'm actually really jealous of all of them, because they didn't stop. Each of them has steadily continued to make work. I can't even begin anymore. I clean, I cook, I rearrange the studio...I stop. I stop myself from creating because I question my right to even make work in the first place.

As with any descent to the unconscious, there comes a time when one simply hopes for the best, pinches one's nose, and jumps into the abyss. If this were not so, we would not have needed to create the words heroine, hero, or courage.

If art history tells us anything, male artists don't seem to give a fuck, and embrace what they want to do with less concern for the thoughts of others. Their selfishness is what has led them to their great art feats and career highs. Their lucky position in society where they don't have to doubt or second guess themselves under the same levels of scrutiny and responsibility that women do. The women in this show have found a way forward, which is to keep making work. Don't stop. If something inside you compels you to make, answer by making. Creative people who don't create get sick. We're sick enough as it is.

Begin; this is how to clear the polluted river. If you're scared, scared to fail, I say begin already, fail if you must, pick yourself up, start again. If you fail again, you fail. So what? Begin again. It is not the failure that holds us back but the reluctance to begin over again that causes us to stagnate. If you're scared, so what? If you're afraid something's going to leap out and bite you, then for heaven's sake, get over it already. Let your fear leap out and bite you so you can get it over with and go on. You will get over it. The fear will pass. In this case, it is better if you meet it head-on, feel it, and get it over with, than to keep using it to avoid cleaning up the river.

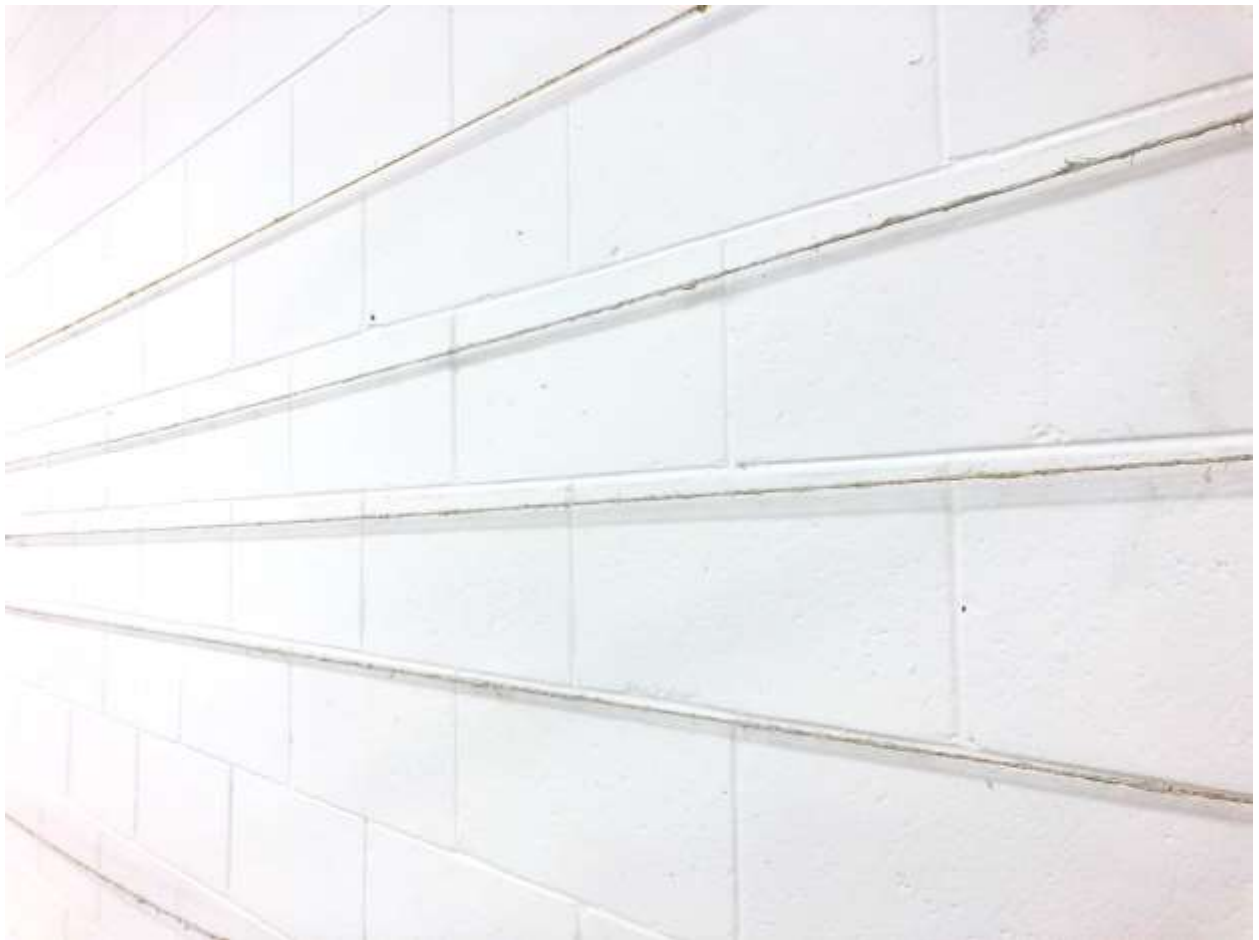
I think sometimes people really underestimate the power of the patriarchy as it exists in an insidious manner within the very psyche of those who are aware of what it is, even those who suffer under it. Begin. Be wild, reject the call that tries to reign in that sense of self, invest in each other to overcome, and for fucks sake, keep taking up space.

Thank you, for always believing in me. I truly believe its in these relationships with others, where we invest in each other, love without caution and embrace our empathy that we erode the patriarchy and will see in the new world.

With love,  
Chloe Waters

---

<sup>2</sup> Italicised text is from Estes, Clarissa Pinkola, *Women who run with the wolves: Myths and stories of the wild woman archetype.* Ballantine Books, 1992.



Ally McKay, *Unyielding*, 2019

all sorrow is weighted

and i try to pull it out like

straw from a bale like

stuffing from a rag doll like

molar teeth from the root like

hemlock from a horse's mouth

all blossoming and throbbing

*Mary*

*Letain, Excerpt from  
'I'm sorry, I  
stained my  
debutante dress' 2019*



Left: Savannah Jarvis 'Dedicated Working Hours for a Bedroom Studio' 2019, oil on board. Photo by James Caswell.

Right: Savannah Jarvis 'I Said Part Company' 2019, oil on board. Photo by James Caswell.

When I was asked to write a text for the exhibition 'Cats Do Not Go To Heaven', I wondered if I had anything new to say about Virginia Woolf's seminal essay 'A Room of One's Own'. I'm not sure that I do, but I would like to talk about my thoughts anyway. I have been working for galleries for the past three years, and while I won't speak on the experience of artists, I've noticed that there are different expectations for different genders in the art industry. For example, I was hired along with a male colleague, both of us sharing similar backgrounds. Bachelor degree, honours degree, internships and involvement in running ARIs. The first time I opened my inbox there was an introductory email welcoming us both to the team. My co-worker's achievements were listed as above. Mine listed my bachelors degree and that I was 'enthusiastic'. Hmm.

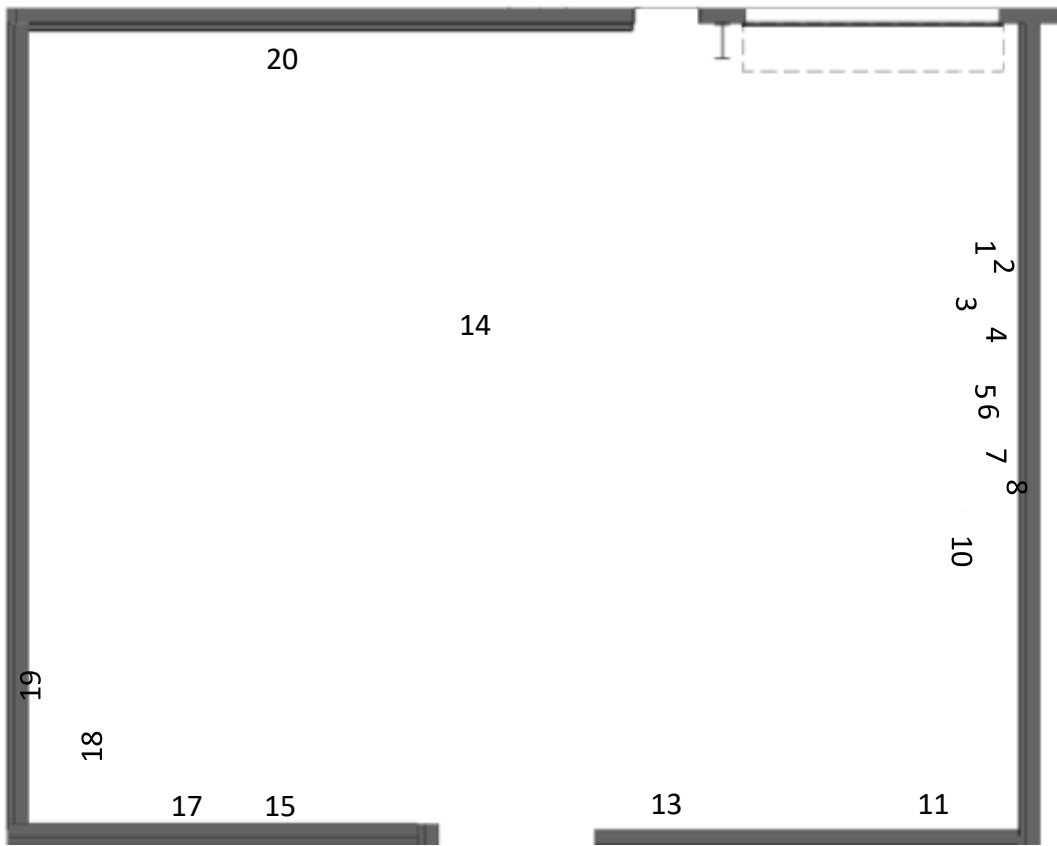
While I have only been working (for money) in the industry for a short time, I have also been working (for free) otherwise, and it's clear to me that the majority of the show is run by women. If women are the main demographic of most art degrees (60-75%), and most workplaces within the industry, how is it possible that only 30% of female artists are shown in museums and galleries? And the same percent of women in directorship for major art museums? I believe it's about expectations. It could be a combination of the typical cis and heteronormative expectations of women having children and therefore sacrificing their careers, or simply that women often do the same, or more, in their work with less recognition. Whatever prejudice, women's work doesn't seem to be as valued.

I think that most people would agree that men are taken more seriously. If you have lived life as someone who isn't a cis man, you would have noticed that men are seen as ambitious, listened to, and seldom criticized in the same way women/femme/NB folk are. At least as a cis woman, I feel as though I am expected to accomplish with 'humility' (meekness). Women are expected to do work, while men are expected to achieve. I think as the general population becomes more aware of intersectional feminism, this format is being challenged. We all recognise that minorities need more of a platform and more representation. We've known this for a long time. Woolf's essay comes down to these same issues - women needing a room to write in and money. Or, a space to do work and for their labor to be valued.

Kat Campbell

---

<sup>3</sup> Nmwa.org. (2019). *Get the Facts | National Museum of Women in the Arts*. [online] Available at: <https://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts> [Accessed 9 Sep. 2019].



1	Savannah	Jarvis,	Arrive	Late,	Leave	Early	(2019),	Oil	on	Board	\$280	
2	Savannah	Jarvis,	No	Vacancy	(2019),	Oil	on	Board			\$280	
3	Savannah	Jarvis,	Sit	Down	Young	Lady	(2019),	Oil	on	Board	\$310	
4	Savannah	Jarvis,	Stop	Clown	Volunteering		(2019),	Oil	on	Board	\$310	
5	Savannah	Jarvis,	I	Said	Part	Company	(2019),	Oil	on		\$310	
6	Savannah	Jarvis,	Dedicated	Working	Hours	for	a	Bedroom			\$310	
7	Savannah	Jarvis,	Three	Quarter	for	Muster	Mark!	(2019),	Oil	on	NFS	
8	Savannah	Jarvis,	Abhorrent	Behaviour		Learned	from	Pistachio			\$130	
9	Savannah	Jarvis,	Sorry	I	Need	to	Wake	Up	In	My	\$310	
10	Savannah	Jarvis,	Are	You	Kidding	Me	Man?	(2019),	Oil	on	\$280	
11	Dana	Lawrie,	Pink	Weave	(2017)	plaster	cast	of	hand	weaving	and	\$200
12	Dana	Lawrie,	Weaving	(2017	-	19)						\$700
13	Dana	Lawre,	Creeping									\$350
14	Mary	Letain,	I'm	sorry,	I	stained	my	debutante	dress	(2019)		
15	Kate	Mckay,	Companions	(2018)	Oil	on	board					Contact Artist
16	Kate	Mckay,	Momento	Mori	(2018)	Oil	on	board				Contact Artist
17	Kate	Mckay,	Floral	Gaze	(2018)	Oil	on	board				Contact Artist
18	Kate	Mckay,	Attention-seeking	seahorse	(2018)	Oil	on	board				Contact Artist
19	Kate	Mckay,	Phantom	(2018)	Oil	on	board					Contact Artist



