

# Holding

An exhibition between  
Emily McGuire and Ally McKay

A knot of thick, rough rope wrestles a pale pink cotton shirt into submission. Crisp white sheets of paper balance against one another precariously. Strands of thread hang, shadows fall, structures teeter. In Emily McGuire and Ally McKay's *Holding*, tension is palpable at every turn.

Presenting new works in this joint exhibition, McGuire and McKay's practices are united by their considered approach to materials, light and space. Both artists employ a deep sensitivity to materiality and presence within their respective broader practices. McGuire's long-standing relationship with textiles, and McKay's with paper, are each further expanded in the works displayed in *Holding*, which showcases some of the most personal work each artist has produced to date.

Grappling with concepts of potential and fulfilment, *Holding* explores the relationship between balance and tension to explore power dynamics systemic to an economy of aspiration and struggle. Reflecting on the unrelenting social, domestic and personal pressures faced in daily life through a poetics of form and action, McGuire and McKay's new works have been created in response to their lived experiences coping with stress, fatigue, ambition and surrender.

A diptych of sorts, *High performer* and *The closer I get, the smaller it seems* bookend McGuire's body of work for *Holding*. These two wing-like forms hang delicately in space, their long threads arching downwards, quivering with the movement of the air they occupy. Each is constructed from a pair of discarded shoulder pads connected to strands of thread cut to dimensions derived from McGuire's own body.

Working within these self-appointed restrictions, she reconstructs an intimate space for herself to explore the interplay between asserting and renouncing control, restraint and release.

McKay's *Failure is not an option*, made in collaboration with Thomas Oliver, inhabits the space between documentation and performance. A cinematic articulation of perseverance and frustration, in *Failure is not an option*, we observe the artist repeatedly create short-lived peaks by leaning two sheets of paper against one another. Oliver's sweeping lens captures McKay's focus and persistence as her tenuous structures inevitably collapse, their mutual support unable to withstand the slightest disruption.

An understated mound of soft, lumpy forms, *Mantra* is indeterminate but inviting, its ambiguous colours and textures demanding closer inspection. A significant departure for McGuire, this deeply personal work translates her embodied experience of affirmation into tangible form. *Mantra* provides a meditation on repetition, much like McKay's *One day at a time*, a series of twelve precisely hand-stitched and meticulously cut works on paper. Hung away from the wall, inviting the loose threads and tiny windows to cast dramatic shadows, *One day at a time* offers a contemplation on labour (seen and unseen).

Rest provides a key theme for both artists. In McGuire's *Today is going to be perfect*, the soft folds of a crumpled shirt spill out from their coarse binds, revealing and concealing bold black letters, an illegible affirmation choked out in a strong knotted tangle. McKay's *Still Standing*, *Standing Still* acts as a resolution to *Failure is not an option*, the two sheets finally balanced indefinitely, albeit precariously atop a tall, thin wooden stand. In both of these works we feel the significance of the term *Holding*; support and restriction, an action and a space.

*Text by Liam Bryan-Brown, July 2023*

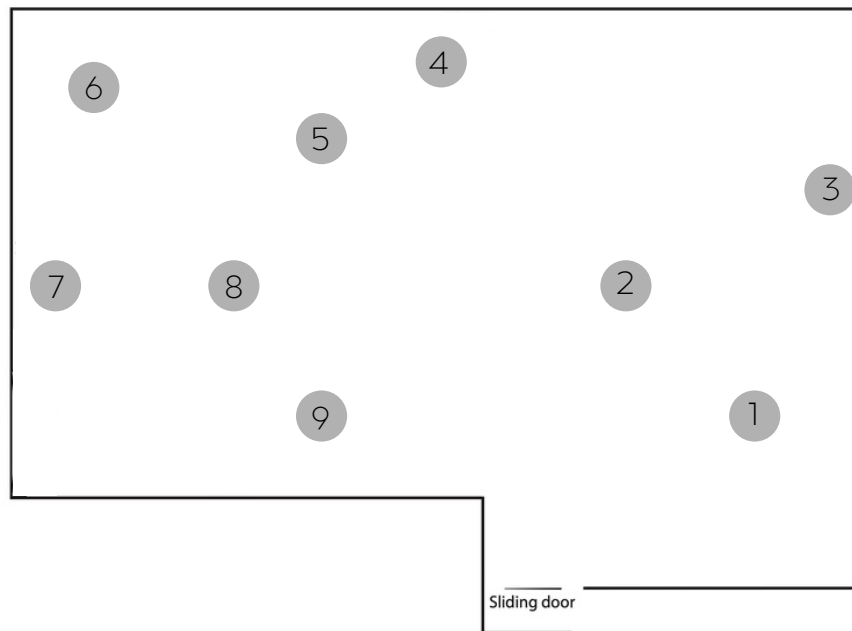
## Exhibition details

**Space:** Webb Gallery, QCA

226 Grey St, South Brisbane, 4101

**Dates:** 19 - 29 July, 2023

**Closing event:** Thu 27 Jul, from 5:30pm on site as part of QCA Thursday's



## List of works

1. **Emily McGuire**, *Today is going to be perfect* (2023)  
Found printed T-shirt, hemp rope  
690L x 120W x 130D

2. **Emily McGuire**, *High performer* (2022)  
Found shoulder pads, steel, wire, eucalyptus thread  
1520L x 350W x 55D

3. **Ally McKay**, *We all fall down* (2023)  
Paper, thread and wood wall installation  
400L x 230W x 20D

4. **Ally McKay**, *One day at a time* (2023)  
12 paper and thread grid wall based installation

5. **Ally McKay**, *Still Standing, Standing Still* (2023)  
Paper and wooden stand sculpture  
1400L x 150W x 150D

6. **Emily McGuire**, *Nothing to do, no one to be* (2023)  
Found hemp battle rope, silk satin fabric measuring two lengths of the artist's arm span  
Dimensions variable

7. **Ally McKay**, *Failure is not an option* (2023)  
Digital Video 3:26 minutes  
Filmed and Edited by Thomas Oliver

8. **Emily McGuire**, *The closer I get, the smaller it seems* (2023), found shoulder pads, steel, wire, bamboo thread  
2000L x 350W x 55D

9. **Emily McGuire**, *Mantra* (2023)  
Shredded discarded clothing, stuffing, linen, cotton thread, adhesive vinyl  
Dimensions variable