

## Artist biographies

Anna Daučíková (1950, Slovakia) graduated from the Glass Department of the Bratislava Academy of Arts in 1978 before moving with her then lover to the Soviet Union, where she lived and worked until 1991. Her extensive painting practice and interest in photography, triggered by her encounter with feminist thought, is related to this period. Returning to Bratislava in the 1990s after the fall of communism, her artistic practice moved from studio work to performance art events, then widely organised in the Slovak art scene. In her video art, the engagement of the artist's body and bodily action projected on the screen became her main concern, through which she presented feminist and queer statements. Over the last five decades she has developed a practice that explores the concept of the 'mental body', a result of her preoccupation with what she has coined as 'in-betweenness' to express and negotiate her transgender identity. Alongside her artistic work Daučíková was a cofounder and activist in several women's NGOs and she became a spokesperson for LGBT rights in Slovakia. Her academic career includes teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

Luke Fowler (1978, Scotland) is a Scottish artist who was brought up in Glasgow by Australian and English immigrants in what he called a 'bog-standard socialist-Marxist family'. Raised on a steady diet of experimental theatre, tapes of The Rolling Stones, Fassbinder, Jarman and other staples of early Channel 4, these influences, as well as playing an unconscious part in an ongoing experiment in anti-bourgeois family structures, laid the foundations for his ongoing research into the relationship between sound, image and the spectator. Through unpacking this dynamic, his work explores the limits and conventions of biographical and documentary filmmaking, and has often been compared to the British Free Cinema of the 1950s. Working with archival footage, photography and sound, Fowler's filmic montages create portraits of intriguing, countercultural figures, including Scottish psychiatrist RD Laing and English composer Cornelius Cardew, as well as, in this exhibition, members of his own family.

Born in Perth, Gail Hastings's (1965, Australia) practice began in Melbourne at the end of the 1980s, after which she embarked on studio residencies in Paris, Los Angeles and Berlin, practised in Sydney, then returned to Melbourne in 2017. Informed by early 1960s art, her works,

which she describes as 'sculptuations', are sculptural situations that treat real space as an art medium. By correlating opposing views from outside and inside a situation, the space of that situation takes on a materiality, a thickness, as something to look at and not through. When Hastings began making and exhibiting her work in 1989 as 'installation', she often had to explain the term 'installation' as it was not, at that time, readily used. When the term quickly acquired an institutional meaning at odds with her practice, Hastings had to come up with another way to describe what she made, and 'sculptuations' was born. Having discovered how the earlier understanding of real space in art became stagnant through inadequacy too soon, Hastings continues to work through her practice and writing to dispel the misconceptions of space as an art medium so as to heighten the engaging fullness of its process instead.

Rita Keegan (1949, United States of America) is an artist and archivist living in London. Her practice combines digital animation, textiles, painting and copy art, often grappling with the elusive and enduring powers of memory, drawing on her extensive family archive: a photographic record of a Black middle-class Canadian family from the 1880s to the present day. Keegan cofounded the Brixton Art Gallery in 1982, established the Women of Colour Index (WOCI) in 1987, and was director of the African and Asian Visual Arts Archive (AAVAA) until 1994. In 2021, Keegan's archive was presented at South London Gallery, followed by a solo exhibition of her work accompanied by *Mirror reflecting darkly*, a new essay collection and archival sourcebook published by Goldsmiths Press. These activities formed part of the Rita Keegan Archive Project (2016-22) a social history and curatorial collective that sought to preserve, exhibit and share Keegan's collections. Its members included Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, Dominique Zenani Barron, Lauren Craig, Matthew Harle, Gina Nembhard and Naomi Pearce. Following the deposit of her personal papers at the Women's Art Library, Special Collections, Goldsmiths, University of London, Keegan now works collaboratively in the studio supported by Lauren Craig, Gina Nembhard and Naomi Pearce.

Thank you to Karen Annett-Thomas, Justin Balmain, Leo Coyte, Lauren Craig, Robbie Dixon, Charlie Nia Dunnery McCracken and Charlotte Rusk of the Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd. (Glasgow), Lisa Guzzardi, Anouk Hulme, Irwin Hirsh, Mitta Hirsh, Jordan Marani, Robert Milne, Sarah Newall, Gina Nembhard, Naomi Pearce, Bala Starr, Amelia Wallin and Matt Hinkley.

## Citational choices

25 October 2022 to 5 February 2023  
La Trobe Art Institute, Bendigo



With works by Anna Daučíková,  
Luke Fowler, Gail Hastings, Rita Keegan and pieces  
from the Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection

Curated by Isabelle Sully  
Exhibition design by Maud Vervenne

*Citational choices* is an exhibition that began from an invitation to work with the Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection. Donated to La Trobe University in collector Etta Hirsh's name after her passing, the collection is an intensely eclectic and unwieldy array of Australian ceramics produced between the late 1960s and the 1990s. The unwieldiness is a product of the simple fact that the collection is undoubtedly huge, a testament to the enthusiasm with which Hirsh collected, and the social impulse underpinning many of the acquisitions. What first struck me when engaging with the collection was Hirsh's insistence that the functionality of the works still be maintained, that upon purchase they wouldn't be rendered static, preserved to last the test of time. As curator Alana O'Brien wrote when she curated a survey exhibition of the collection in 2010:

Although it might break her heart for a ceramic piece to be destroyed, Etta was philosophical about it. Not using the pots and plates was out of the question. As functional domestic ware, use of these objects was central to their purpose, and was continued despite the danger of loss.<sup>1</sup>

This is evidenced by the chips to surfaces that can be found on a number of pieces, as well as photographic documentation and oral testimony that depict the many dinners Etta and her husband Emmanuel Hirsh hosted, the ceramic pieces holding court.

After learning of the spirit with which Etta collected, it became important to find a way to retain this, to functionalise the collection again, though in a different way, now that the pieces are in the custodianship of La Trobe Art Institute and no longer able to be regularly handled given the requirements of museum conservation. At the centre of this 're-functionalisation' is an attempt to read the collection as an instance of biography, one that has within it various personal histories that don't often make it onto the record. The exhibition's title, *Citational choices*, acts as a warning and a prompt, born from an awareness that what gets recorded is still, ultimately, a result of choice (whether spawned by agendas that deem certain objects and stories more valuable than others, or a result of a material impossibility: you simply can't keep and archive everything). It also nods to a particular type of information: the supporting matter of footnotes and credit lines, of ancillary anecdotes and tidbits, the kind of knowledge that might also evade immediate attention and which, therefore, slips through the cracks. As a way to interrogate this further, this exhibition brings together a number of contemporary artists who focus on personal archives and histories, as well as spatial considerations and institutional structures, setting their work in relation to pieces from the Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection.

It was Luke Fowler who initially prompted this train of thought around the function of the personal collection. In two of his films



included in the exhibition, *Mum's cards* (2019) and *For Dan* (2021), originally shot in 16 mm, Fowler depicts the personal histories underpinning acts of collecting, highlighting the multifaceted definition at the heart of inheritance. This is particularly so when it comes to the intergenerational transfer of personal and family history, something similarly embodied by Etta Hirsh's collection and her children's ongoing management of what remains of it—both administratively as well as personally, their own experiences and emotions wound up in a collection they grew up alongside.

In *Mum's cards* (2019), Fowler unpacks a personal collection of his mother's, a retired sociologist whose house is full of boxes of handwritten index cards. In doing so, her archive is opened up through the stories that each card coaxes to the surface, her inscriptions of meticulously organised information piling up to present a portrait of a woman seeking to understand the role of culture in society. A companion piece to *Mum's cards*, *For Dan* (2021) chronicles Fowler's father's relationship to his friend Dan through the lens of their written correspondence, informally narrated via a string of recollections by the friend in question, radical university lecturer Dan O'Neil, as he and Fowler go through the personal archive together in Brisbane some two decades after the passing of Fowler's father. In unraveling the nuances of self-actualisation within a friendship that lasted many years, the film also documents the political landscape of Queensland in the early 1960s, with the pair's formative period at university being a focal point throughout. Importantly, a university is also the site within which this exhibition takes place.

Additionally to Fowler, there is the work of artist and personal archiver Rita Keegan, who, during our first meeting, commented, 'There is this misconception that artists aren't people, that we live a rarefied life. As women artists, we worked from home.' After saying this Keegan mentions Hannah Höch's canonical work *Cut with a kitchen knife*, the Dadaist collage made from her kitchen table in 1919. It's a moment of intersecting citations, given that this particular work was one of the first works presented to me as a young art history student, or, rather, one of the only works that I still remember being presented to me. This distinction is important within the context of an exhibition about personal memory, experience and inscription as it relates to the formality of 'official' record-making.

Alongside a film on her home archive and a collection of actual materials held within it—spanning ephemera from her long career as an artist as well as administrative documents, exhibition posters, survey forms and correspondence from her time working at the Women's Art Slide Library, the Women of Colour Index (which she founded) and the British Arts Council—she has also produced a new photograph for the exhibition, taken in collaboration with the three women who currently support Keegan in the studio—Lauren Craig, Gina Nembhard and Naomi Pearce. While large in scale, the photograph doesn't seek to be grand in content. Instead, it attempts to simply document Keegan's writing dresser as 'a site of process', registering 'how we live and negotiate our space' while also navigating the material repercussions of moving, communicating and accessing an archive, particularly one of personal import. Both times we meet, Keegan mentions that her ancestors are present atop the dresser, standing alert in various photographic frames; the repetition is a clear warning to not forget. In a short blurb that accompanies Keegan's perhaps most known works, a series of copy art collages first produced in the 1980s, she writes, 'In this series I use the images of my Grandmothers, my Mother, my Father and myself (child and adult) These images are layered, overlapping three generations, past and present, making one... Ancestors I know and the ones I don't are all within.' Keegan's practice stands formed by a network of multigenerational kinship relations, persisting as an ode to the elusive and enduring powers of memory and the archives that contain it.

Completely adept at taking on institutions that wield normative forms of power, Anna Daučíková is also unashamedly informed by the value of her lived experience, a personal history that takes a guiding role within her practice, particularly the period of time during which she lived under surveillance in the former Soviet Union. In *Academy of the Arts* (1988), the series of photographs included in this exhibition, Daučíková rightly takes up her position atop a plinth built into the side of the Academy of Arts building in Prague, a position traditionally reserved for the male greats, not an unknown young queer artist. Sardonicly freezing intermittently in statuesque poses of esteem, she mocks the performance of monumentalism while pouring water from one glass cup to another—an object that also reappears in a series of photographs titled *Family album* (1998/2017), which depict scenes from Soviet family life, where the glasses, arranged in different configuration, sarcastically echo the

hierarchical organisation of the family structure by standing in as mother, father and child. In speaking of biography, Daučíková was once a student of the glass department at the University of Bratislava, where she explored the material and its then masculine usage within an art history of hard-edge abstraction as a way to explore her own gender identity. Eventually, she went on to be a professor herself, and was for a long time the only woman teaching at the Academy.

In *Portrait of a woman with institution: Hanna Hacker with University of Vienna*, one of a series of films that position various women in relation to the institutions they inhabit, Daučíková plots sociologist Hannah Hacker's relationship to the University of Vienna, where she was teaching at the time. Instead of the mocking glee present in the photographs, the film depicts Hacker in her prime, lecturing to a group of young students in the gender studies department, students later depicted attending a protest at the front of the university building. Her significance as someone empowering other women is interspersed with footage of high-heeled figures occasionally strutting through the tiled hallways of the grand building, her defiant comfort within this context prevailing over a history that has excluded her, one evidenced in a series of theoretical citations that punctuate the film.

'Unwieldy' was an adjective I used to describe the ceramics collection at the beginning of this text, a descriptor that prompted my interest in Gail Hastings' work, or rather, what she terms her 'sculptural situations'. The material reality of archiving is often a spatial consideration, not just actually in physical space—how do you organise everything and where do you keep it?—but also conceptually—how do you give form to these abstract and often invisible connections and correlations?

In a background text on a work from 2003 titled *Plans*, Hastings describes learning of minimalism as a young art student in Melbourne, which compelled her to shift from sketching portraits of fellow tram travellers each day on her way to art college to recording their overheard conversations instead. On this she writes, 'In so doing, I noticed something odd. Often the two conversing would discuss different subjects, with the replies of each somehow bolstering an illusion of the subjects being the same. An invisible third participant who made each statement an appropriate prop for the other's imagination, it seemed, kept an interrelation between the conversers in momentum. Mission: to activate and make apparent this third participant in a work of art.'<sup>2</sup>

For her contribution to the exhibition, Hastings has drawn on this previous work and produced the sculptural situation *Afternoon tea at 4 pm*. As the title suggests, at 4 pm each day the exhibition is open, staff will wheel out a tea trolley not unlike one seen in Hastings' earlier 2003 work, and serve tea to visitors present in the gallery. Poured from a ceramic teapot into a ceramic teacup, Hastings' *Afternoon tea at 4 pm* will activate the ceramics in the Etta Hirsh Collection now sitting static, enacting their past use as implements at the centre of social interaction. What is important here is the tea trolley's incompleteness—it is 'missing' a central piece—which draws attention to space itself. As such, the work's material space is this third participant Hastings speaks of, made visible, here, in conversation over a cup of tea.

In bringing pieces from the Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection in conversation with works by contemporary artists, the aim was to put the collection to use—just as Etta Hirsh had always intended for it. In doing so, what is presented here are various artistic approaches towards reading the collection, any collection, as an instance of biography and, furthermore, engaging with the organisational and institutional parameters that govern what is preserved. The different institutions that contain and record memory and knowledge—the family, the university, the museum and the state—are all present in different and overlapping ways throughout the exhibition. In the personal biographies that inform the making of all of the works by the artists, we see a different way of writing history: one opposed to the fact-driven impulse of administrative record making, and instead, to quote Naomi Pearce, one 'written in the spirit of feminist tradition that values lived experience as direct, reliable and illustrative data.'<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the collection of ceramics from which this all began, the lasting conclusion is the affirmation in materiality as something that can and does carry this trace.  
—Isabelle Sully

1 Alana O'Brien, 'Based on interviews with Manny Hirsh', in *FORMED: Selected works from the Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection* (Melbourne: La Trobe University Museum of Art, 2010), 12.

2 Gail Hastings, *PLANS: a sculptural situation by Gail Hastings*, exhibition brochure (Bulleen: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2003).

3 Naomi Pearce, 'Part one: skeletal argument,' in *Every contact leaves a trace: a forensic feminist investigation into women administrators, gentrification and the artist studio*, PhD diss. (University of Edinburgh, 2021), 55.