

Tall Tales and Other Adventures

A University of Southern Queensland, Dogwood Crossing,
Miles and Flying Arts research project

Curated by Dr Beata Batorowicz



EXPLORING TALL STORIES, FICTIONAL WORLDS AND IDEAS OF THE FANTASTICAL IN 3D ART

FOREWORD

Dogwood Crossing, Miles is proud to once again partner with the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) to provide a hands-on gallery experience for Bachelor of Creative Arts students and recent graduates. *Tall Tales and Other Adventures* follows the successful *Curious Spaces* exhibition by USQ Spatial Construction students shown at Dogwood Crossing, Miles in 2010.

Moving beyond the university environment and presenting work to varied audiences is an important step for developing visual artists. Exhibiting within the John Mullins Memorial Art Gallery at Dogwood Crossing gives students and alumni an authentic exhibition experience within an A Class Regional Art Gallery and builds their profile as professional artists. This collaboration allows students to directly engage with non-arts audiences, share insights into their practice through gallery floor talks and gain experience, facilitating workshops for young people that address the exhibition's key themes.

Teaching and learning is mutually beneficial. Dogwood Crossing benefits from this partnership with USQ in many ways. Our Western Downs communities have the opportunity to view cutting-edge installation artwork and interact with dedicated emerging artists. This is an especially encouraging opportunity for young people in regional communities who are interested in creating pathways towards a career in the arts. *Tall Tales and Other Adventures* uses varied gallery situations to connect young artists with the wider arts industry and this proactive approach demonstrates the quality education and mentorship received through formal studies in the Creative Arts School at USQ.

Ashleigh Campbell

Cultural Development Coordinator
Western Downs Regional Council

TELL IT LIKE IT ISN'T TRUE

The magical quality of tall stories is that they can prompt audiences in finding hidden truths. Yet telling fantastical tales and stories out-of-this-world in a way that allows audiences to experience such an adventure is not easy. Some groundwork is required whereby the work of fiction needs to convey glimpses of human experience and connection to personal 'truths'. This idea of interweaving human interest within fictional works can be understood in the context of 'a willing suspension of disbelief' first referred to in the field of English Literature by the poet and aesthetic philosopher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817¹. While this concept is set within the Literary Romantic period, the general premise of its use is based on the idea of the narrator conveying a human interest and some element of truth where the reader can suspend judgment concerning the implausibility of the narrative. The emphasis on the reader as an active agent is emphasised here as stated by Vivek Meshram and Nikita P. Kamble, in their essay "Coleridge's Willing Suspension of Disbelief,"

In Coleridge's own words there is a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader. A willing suspension of disbelief means that the reader suspends the analytical function of the mind and is ready to believe what (s)he is reading².

The active role of the reader can be likened to the alert viewer, engaged in the reading of a work of art. That is, there is an art to story-telling in visual arts too.

Like the writer, the artist's agency needs to be crafted in such a way that the audience can actively engage with the work. It is therefore delightful to present *Tall Tales and Other Adventures*; a visual art project exploring fictional story-telling by interweaving artistic practice, research, education and community experiences. In particular, the project emphasises the artist as a storyteller whereby their stories become larger-than-life as they permeate the broader public sphere. In their essay, "The Artistic Practice-Research-Teaching (ART) Nexus: Translating the Information Flow," Dawn Bennett, David Wright and Diana Blom state:

¹ Vivek Meshram and Nikita P Kamble, "Coleridge's Willing Suspension of Disbelief," *International Research Journal* Vol. IV, Issue 37 (2012), 24.

² *Ibid.*, 24-5.

Artistic practice was said to communicate beyond its medium through storytelling; to be about being a public intellectual; being part of a broader tradition, drawing on other disciplines including science, psychology and philosophy; and about being part of an international community of arts practitioners. It has been described as both interactive and as collaborative.³

In this light, *Tall Tales and Other Adventures* is a significant project exploring tall stories, fictional worlds and ideas of the fantastical as a way of evoking creative engagement of 3D art in regional communities and beyond. The project brings together unique audiences through a series of partnerships between University of Southern Queensland (USQ) Visual Arts, John Mullins Memorial Art Gallery, Dogwood Crossing, Miles, Flying Arts and USQ Artsworx. As part of the USQ and Dogwood Crossing's continued working relationship, this project presents an exhibition series showcasing 3D art that 'stages' individual artist stories which are then activated by the viewer entering the gallery space. Furthermore, through the project's partnership, their stories permeate and navigate between the education and professional industry.

This project is a two-part exhibition series launching in USQ Arts Gallery, Toowoomba, and then travelling to John Mullins Memorial Art Gallery, Dogwood Crossing, Miles, in May 2014. Featuring in this exhibition are Toowoomba's emerging artists; Maddie Barlow, Nathan Bloomfield, Glen Bowman, Catharine Callaghan, Rebekah Clissold, Brittani Collingwood, Ellie Coleman, Grace Dewar, Emily Donaldson, Dan Elborne, Emily Glover, AJ Gogas, Lauren James, Sonja Lee, Twolaks, Bridget Nicholas and Tammy Payne. While the works of these artists are diverse, what brings them together is that they are all past and present students from USQ who all carry an understanding of research within a university environment and can successfully navigate this within the professional industry. I congratulate all the artists in this high calibre exhibition.

Dr Beata Batorowicz

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³ Bennett, Dawn; Wright, David; and Blom, Diana M, "The Artistic practice-Research-Teaching (ART) Nexus: Translating the Information Flow", *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 7(2), 2010, p.3 Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol7/iss2>

ARTISTS AND THEIR WORLDS

Visual arts education has changed dramatically in the past twenty years. The rise of art-as-research has occurred in tandem with a shift in emphasis from skills and technique training to critical and contextual knowledge. This change has caused some anxiety. American art historian, James Elkins, for example, has expressed his grave reservations about the rise of visual arts practice-led research. His concerns, originally outlined in “Ten Reasons to Mistrust the New PhD in Studio Art”¹, included the idea that within the research paradigm, artists are required to be more self-reflective than they are necessarily in the professional studio setting. One possible consequence of this self-reflexivity is a complete retreat to the academy, where the artist, in pursuit of a full comprehension of his or her own practice, becomes separated from the (presumably) more ‘real’ world beyond.

These sorts of criticisms are not limited to the arts. The term ‘ivory tower’ is used to describe universities and academies of all kinds, where there is a presumption of separation from the world, but this pejorative ignores the connections that endure between these towers and other communities and networks. Even ivory towers are staffed by real people. It is also easy to forget that the ivory tower enables critical distance, and that this means more than just an ignorance of everyday realities. The critical distance of the ivory tower allows its inhabitants to reflect on life’s patterns in non-habitual ways.

There are interesting parallels between the ivory tower of the institution and the fantasy environments of creative imagination. Artists and storytellers have used the fantastical as a similar strategy of remove. When we hear a wonder-tale, we are immersed in a world that bears no resemblance to our own, but is also a direct metaphor for our condition. The fantastic allows us the distance to consider our lives as part of a pattern that endures beyond time and place, to tap into a communal wisdom about that pattern, and to imagine when and how that pattern needs to be either affirmed or subverted. As Marina Warner has noted, “the wonders that create the atmosphere of the fairy tale disrupt the apprehensible world in order to open spaces for dreaming alternatives.”²

¹ James Elkins, “Ten Reasons to Mistrust the New PhD in Studio Art,” *Art in America*, May (2007): 108-109

² Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London: Vintage, 1995), xvi

Over the past two decades socially engaged art (or social practice) has become a distinct area of interest for some artists, but increasingly, even those artists whose work is not recognizably in this camp see the importance of reinforcing links with their communities. In my experience, regional artists have a particularly acute sense of their responsibility in this regard. Regional communities deal with a broad range of challenges and artists in these communities are all too aware of their vulnerability. Pablo Helguera describes socially engaged art as expanding “the social relationship, at times promoting ideas such as empowerment, criticality, and sustainability [...]”³. These are precisely the characteristics that will strengthen regional communities and provide the core of their resilience.

While artists are not social workers, ethnographers or archaeologists, they are able to assist their communities in ways that can complement those functions. By imagining the seemingly impossible, they affirm the possibility of change and regeneration, and their tall tales can tell us new truths.

Dr Courtney Pedersen

Senior Lecturer

Visual Arts Queensland University of Technology

³ Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: a materials and techniques handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 13-14

SMALL TALES BECOME TALL TALES

Art is commonly understood to be a reflection of, or comment on, or alternative to, the collective culture it is presented in. It is argued to be a place for examining the concepts of culture and to play a significant role in the presentation and development of cultures. However, what happens when that culture is ignored, demeaned or even refused because it is perceived as having little worth? For artists and arts audiences living and working in regional Australia, this is a scenario all too familiar. Per Henningsgaard asserts regionality "...is understood to mean a space on the edges of something greater..."¹. It is in tension with metropolitan Australia where the dominant political, social and economic activities are seen to take place.² It seems that to be part of a regional community is to be part of something different, and lesser than, to those residing in the cities. *Tall Tales and Other Adventures* inverts this perception by presenting 'larger than life' narratives to strategically override the stereotypes and limitations of 'regional' as the periphery.

This celebration of storytelling unites visual and performing artists in collaboration to express the fantastical and the everyday through different media. The interdisciplinary approach teases out the connections and intersections of practice to bring the variety of regional tales into being. The creative collective strengthens the work through the process of peer review and shared experience. Janet McDonald explains "...it is exactly the geographical lack of direct access into the larger institutional galleries and commercial arts dealers...that begets a desire to work together with peers to support and show artistic works."³ Henningsgaard builds on this statement to suggest that the power of the regions more broadly is "...draw(ing) strength from...diversity (and) from the collective sense of belonging enjoyed by residents as a result of living outside the cultural centres."⁴

¹ Per Henningsgaard, "Regional Literature and 'The Liminal': Exploring the Spaces In-Between National and International Literatures" in *Limina: Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies, Special Edition 2007: On the Beach*, 2007:18.

² Margaret Lynn, "Communities, Regions, States: Accountabilities and Contradictions" in *New Regionalism in Australia*, England: Ashgate, 2005:183.

³ Janet McDonald, "Artist-Run Initiatives as Liminal Incubatory Arts Practice" in *Creative Communities: Regional Inclusion and the Arts*, England: Intellect (in press).

⁴ Per Henningsgaard, "Regional Literature and 'The Liminal': Exploring the Spaces In-Between National and International Literatures" in *Limina: Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies, Special Edition 2007: On the Beach*, 2007:18.

Investment in regional artists and art in the regions is vital to inform and grow culture and make evident the meaningful lives of those residing in non-metropolitan Australia. Evidence such as this affirms community and fosters resilience and commitment. The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) invests in regional artists and arts in the regions through exhibitions like *Tall Tales and Other Adventures*. USQ is a regional university with a strong understanding of the people, contexts, issues, and aspirations of the community it is a part of. USQ knows the potential and the capacity that comes from learning and engagement, so is well placed to play an enabling role in the expansion of culture. A Regional Universities Network report (2013) asserts,

The capacity of (regional) universities to play this role not only comes from their academic expertise in relevant fields and the other resources they are able to apply... The development of strong collaborative networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings, are essential in enabling regional communities to self-organise, manage change, realise their potential and lead their own development. In this context, collaboration is utilised as a powerful tool for creating new knowledge and fostering innovation.⁵

USQ furthers its outreach by partnering with like-minded arts organisations such as Flying Arts and the John Mullins Art Memorial Gallery at Dogwood Crossing, Miles, to ensure diverse audiences living along the SE/SW Queensland corridor have opportunity to engage with *Tall Tales and Other Adventures*. By doing so, many will experience what it is to live and to love regional Australia.

Dr Rebecca Scollen

Manager

USQ Artsworx

University of Southern Queensland

⁵ Regional Universities Network (2013) Regional Universities Network: Engaging with regions, building a stronger nation, Vol. 1, p7.

ARTISTS

Maddie Barlow in collaboration with Rebekah Clissold

Peta Berghofer

Rebecca Borninkhof

Nathan Bloomfield in collaboration with Bridget Nicholas

Glen Bowman

Catharine Callaghan

Rebekah Clissold

Ellie Coleman

Brittani Collingwood

Grace Dewar

Emily Donaldson

Dan Elborne

Emily Glover

AJ Gogas

Lauren James

Sonja Lee

Twolaks

Tammy Payne

MADDIE BARLOW IN COLLABORATION
WITH REBEKAH CLISSOLD



Entomos

2012

Liquid latex, glass jars, water, pins, plaster

Dimensions variable

Photo: Grace Yu



Untitled (detail)

2013

Twine

Dimensions variable

Photo: Peta Berghofer

REBECCA BORNINKHOF



The Running Stitch

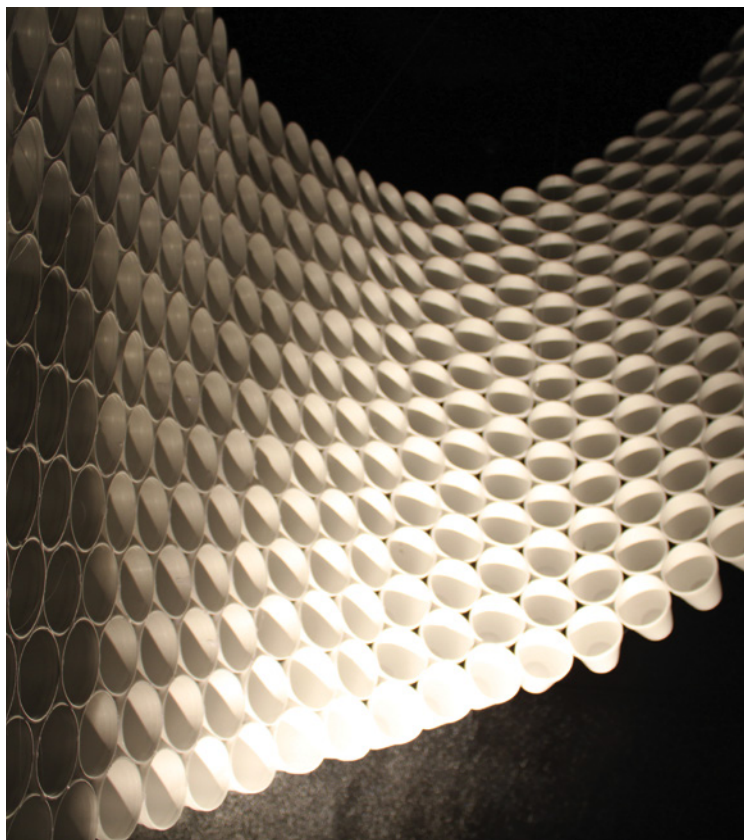
2012

Tissue, thread, buttons

Dimensions variable

Photo: Rebecca Borninkhof

NATHAN BLOOMFIELD IN COLLABORATION
WITH BRIDGET NICHOLAS



A Slight Chill (detail)

2013

Styrofoam cups

Dimensions variable

Photo: Nathan Bloomfield

GLEN BOWMAN



Fragmented Illusion #4 (detail)

2013

Acrylic on MDF

Dimensions variable

Photo: Glen Bowman

CATHARINE CALLAGHAN



Evolving Enigma Experiments (detail)

2013-2014

Cotton crocheted forms, wire, ceramic beads

Dimensions variable

Photo: Grace Yu

REBEKAH CLISSOLD



Here We Come

2013

Plastic found Objects, spray paint, glass

Dimension variable

Photo credit: Grace Yu



Hair Nest (detail)

2013

Hair, crocheted wool

810mm x length 210mm x height 140mm width x 3 Boxes

Photo: Grace Yu

BRITTANI COLLINGWOOD



From Inside

2013

Mixed fabric, thread

Dimensions variable

Photo: Grace Yu



'Conversations with' part one (false ceiling, installation view)

2012

6m x 5m x .5m

Polystyrene, light

Photo: Nerida Tupas

EMILY DONALDSON



A Weary Closing

2013

Wood

Dimensions variable

Photo: David Martinelli



Containment (detail)

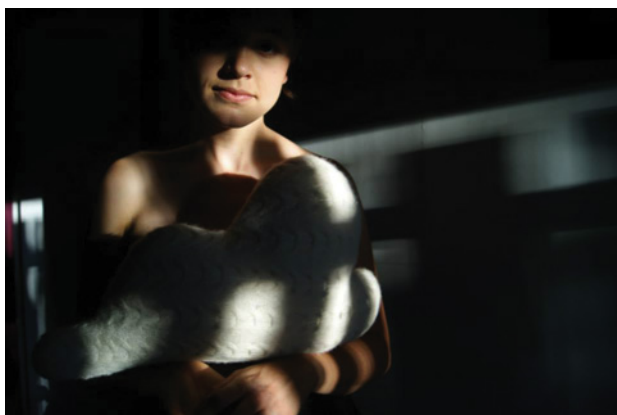
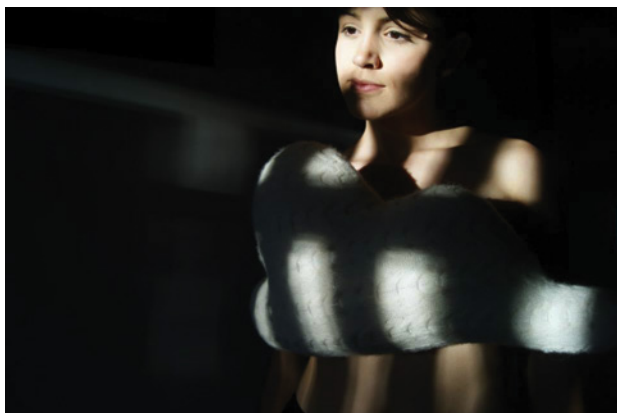
2013

Slip cast recycled clay, raw glazed

Dimensions variable

Photo: Dan Elborne

EMILY GLOVER



Cloud Walker

2013

Soft sculpture installation

Dimensions variable

Photo: Holly Smith



In All Your Glory

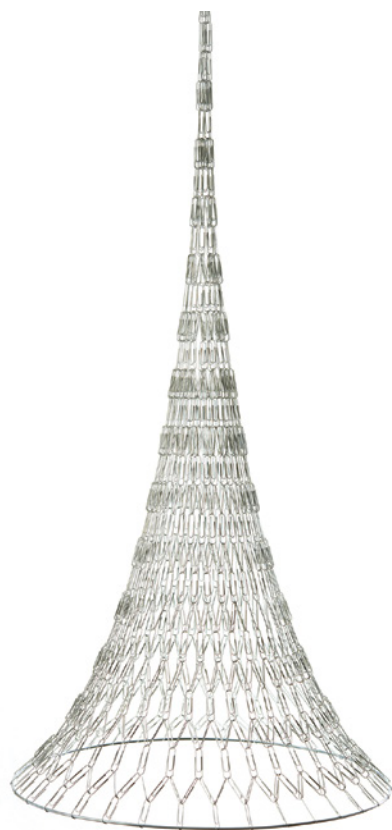
2012

French-knitted forms and wooden stands

Dimensions variable

Photo: Cindy Laine

LAUREN JAMES



More Than The Sum Of Its Parts

2013

Paperclips and metal

Dimensions variable

Photo: Grace Yu



Fragments II

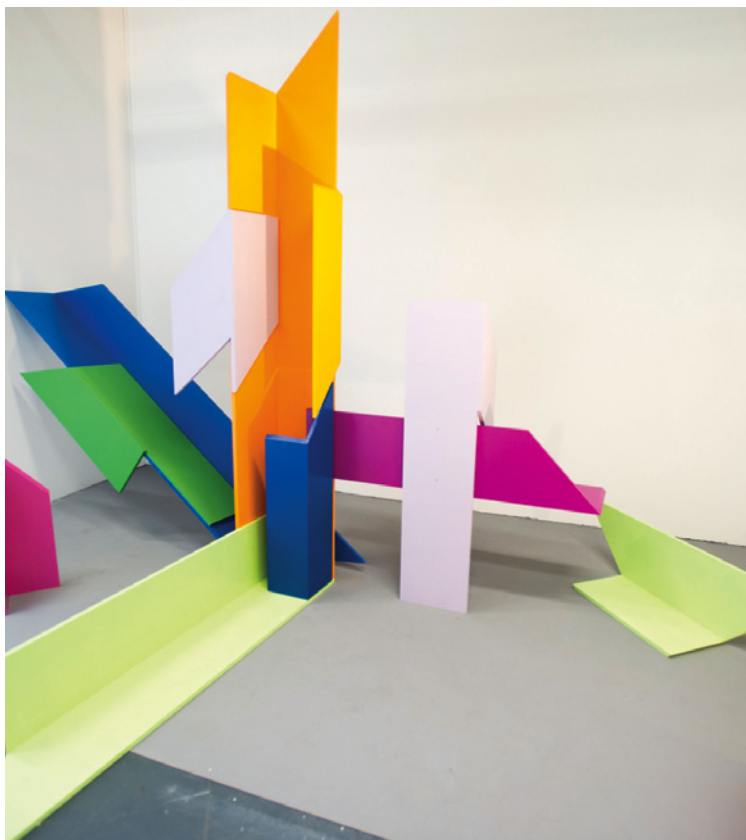
2012

3 acetate cubes, led lights, data projectors

Dimensions variable

Photo: Grace Yu

TWOLAKS



Glyph (detail)

2013

MDF, acrylic

Dimensions variable

Photo: Grace Yu

TAMMY PAYNE



Wolf pack

2013

Print on canvas

Dimensions variable

Photo: Tammy Payne

TALL TALES AND TRUE ADVENTURES

Students in the Bachelor of Creative Arts share a community and understanding of one central aspect of creative arts: storytelling and the use of narrative. All arts tell stories that liberate words from pages and bring them to life in conceptual ways: poetry into music, scripts into performances, technical knowledge of materials into presentational images that thrill, scar and amaze. What this exhibition does will intrigue you, it will invite you to see how we construct new ways to tell a tale and deconstruct old tales to reveal new truths and honesties.

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) has been training visual artists for over 40 years. The Bachelor of Creative Arts provides fertile ground of emerging artists to wrestle with skills, ideas, practices and the manifestations of these into 3D phenomena. Uniquely, because artists live all in the one geographical place on the Toowoomba Campus – the design-winning A block – Visual Arts students rub shoulders with Theatre, Music and Media students. They share ideas, admire each others' work and see the cross-disciplinary potential of their possible collaborations.

What binds all creative disciplines together are stories, and good research is also about good storytelling where we invite the reader/audience into what Homi Bhabha articulates in *The Location of Culture* as a 'third-space'; neither here nor there, but somewhere in-between, a place of uncertainty where one must ground oneself into the grist of potential. Very brave indeed to ask young artists to lose site of the shore/sure and put their faith in their abilities to tell stories through their chosen artistic media. Tall tales they might be, but stories always mythologise and make metaphors even as the ideas are explored, the instrument is being tuned, or the body warms up. What students learn in the Bachelor of Creative Arts is to work from the most fundamental raw materials to shape their impulses, rework it, recast it, reflect upon it, until what emerges is an artwork that transforms understanding and knowledge. Artistic products stand alone, they have been articulated by the hands of the artist, but a good story must engage that vital ingredient of the audience and allows them to also to be invested in the meaning-making; to see the metaphors that connect themselves to the art. What might have started as a tall tale finds a path to and from a true

adventure both for the making artist and the receiving audience/reader. All of these factors are imbedded in our learning and teaching practices throughout each year of the Bachelor of Creative Arts. Students share the space with professional artists and lecturers who are invested in enabling emerging artists to connect with their audiences in new and exciting ways.

Our graduates are resilient people: good collaborators, savvy networkers, socially connected and intellectually vibrant. But these are not magically obtained powers; students work for them in a regional context where they work with other graduates and local artists to tap into the rich seam of Artist-Run Initiatives and hybrid arts collectives that reside in Toowoomba. These enclaves manifest a regional resilience that defies any need to be 'metropolitan' to have efficacy or significance. Because of these home-grown, collectively nourished artistic endeavours, USQ has a vibrant set of Visual Arts post-graduates who move interstate, overseas and also stay locally and continue to mentor undergraduates into making innovative platforms for the delivery and evaluation of arts in the region. Our graduates benefit from our key partnership with such organisations as Flying Arts Alliance, which is intricately woven into the arts and well-being of regional Queenslanders. In short, our adventures and stories to be told are forever adapting, innovating and delivering to ensure the creative nourishment of our communities.

Associate Professor Janet McDonald

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USQ Artsworx

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OFFICIAL OPENING 5PM, TUESDAY 4 MARCH

Part 2: Dogwood Crossing, Miles 30 May–22 July 2014

OFFICIAL OPENING 6PM, FRIDAY 30 MAY

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