



MUNDARING ARTS CENTRE PRESENTS

OF OUR TIME - ORDINARY LIVES

LOUISE WELLS

24 NOVEMBER - 21 DECEMBER 2018

MIDLAND JUNCTION ARTS CENTRE

"Of Our Time - Ordinary Lives explores the lives of three generations of maternal women in my family.

Family stories, those incidental ones beyond the dates of significant events, are lost if not recorded. Historical events and dates of births, deaths and marriages are easy to research. However how these same events personally affected my family as they navigated changing and challenging times can only be found through inquiry.

My early experience learning about the women in my family was through the naive lens of a child. My childhood memories of my nanna's life paint her days as simple and leisurely. My mother appeared to cram a much larger workload into a strict timetable between home duties, work and study. By comparison, my own feels mashed together with few clear boundaries and little structure, but for the constant putting out of spot fires. My daughter's life I can only project.

As a mature adult I started asking the right questions and discovered that the stories of my mother and nanna were much more complicated than I had believed. I have been fortunate to have access to old family letters (some nearly eighty years old), to records, memorabilia and photos. I have also been fortunate to have access to my mother, between heartfelt

conversations and shared visits to the Midland area much in the style of Julia Zemiro's *Home Delivery*.

Often we cannot think of the right questions, or aren't interested until it is too late and, as I observed this in my friends and family, I was determined not to let the intricacies of my own family history slip away.

My left-handed nanna, who taught me how to crochet right-handed, was the eldest daughter in a large family and long considered a confirmed spinster. As far as we know she never had paid employment outside of the home. In 1941, at 37 years of age she received a marriage proposal by letter and travelled from Melbourne, Victoria to the Midland Junction train station to meet her husband-to-be, a man she had only met on a couple of occasions and with whom she would start a new life in Western Australia.

I was drawn to the precious items my mother has kept: Nan's letters (including the proposal by my grandfather); her exquisite hand embroidered and crocheted doilies; telegrams; ration cards; receipts for major purchases; the documents relating to my grandfather's early death; immunisation records; swimming certificates; and five books in the Anne of Green Gables series. I began to get a sense of her experiences - leaving a loving family in suburban

Melbourne, a few tram stops from the city, to living through Perth summers near Midland, during WWII, and the rationing of most living necessities. The only means of communication being via letters and the occasional telegram.

During my nanna's time, concepts of recycling and zero-waste were of necessity. This exhibition was created entirely from materials I already possessed: scraps from previous projects, recycled and gifted vintage fabrics, and older Op Shop finds.

2000 Miles Away uses tie linings complete with stains from washing, marks from manufacture and the remains of unpicked stitches, sewn together with recycled envelopes and overhead projector sheets. As a recreation of my nanna's hexagonal tiled floor, their conversations are blurred by distance and time.

In 1962 my nineteen-year old mother married my father and had to resign from her clerical job at the Government Railways in Perth, Western Australia. The "Marriage Bar" was still four years from its eventual repeal, requiring married women to give up their jobs in the Australian Public Service.

She found employment in a private company until I was born two years later. As time went by she worked in

many clerical roles and in her 40's followed her true passion, gaining a degree in Literature and History from UWA aged 50.

My mother's life has been marked by massive shifts in the means of communication, along with the frequency and also the access across remote distances thanks to developments in technology.

The typewriter in its many forms has been a pivotal part of my mother's life. Starting with the "clunky old Remington with round black keys" on which she learnt to type in High School, to

a bright red Olivetti Valentine portable. I remember her squeals of delight in receiving it for her birthday from my father, and when she came home perplexed having had to take a speed test on "one of these new golf ball typewriters," during a job interview. As technology has changed, her progression has continued with electric typewriters, computers, iPads and mobile phone texting.

The individual typewriter keys, unique and separate, when linked together have been the means to tell stories, write essays, apply for jobs, write letters to family and friends and, more recently, send emails and texts.

The title *Remington Keys* is taken from the typewriter brand my mother learnt to type on in high school. These keys show the structure of life, bound by society's conventions, order, and acceptance of those rules imposed upon women. My mother worked within this framework in acceptance of these societal expectations and employed these skills to create the space to explore her dreams. The work employs vintage fabrics and op shop ties in the hues with which my mother would decorate her home across the decades and the fashions she followed.

Keyboards are now less a skill in and of themselves but a means by which so many of us communicate, shop, write our thoughts and play. Textiles have changed in a similar way. They are no less present in our lives, but our relationship has changed. The traditional sewing, knitting, crocheting and embroidery skills passed down from my grandmother to my mother as important tools to make a home, have become a means of expression and exploration, when passed down to me.

Made from minute scraps leftover from my previous works, *Days* contains a timeline and travels of my own art practice. The approximately 20 000 squares, recreate the days of my life so far. As a group, they all blend together, similar though unique, frayed, complex, simple, broken, amazing and any other combination on any given day. Held on by a thread. A life in a day can go from happiness to sorrow and back.

These individual days are shown in their complexity, detail and contrasts when scaled-up in *Days Like This*. Minute details which are glossed over in the context of the whole, make up the subject matter of these individual works."

Louise Wells
Artist



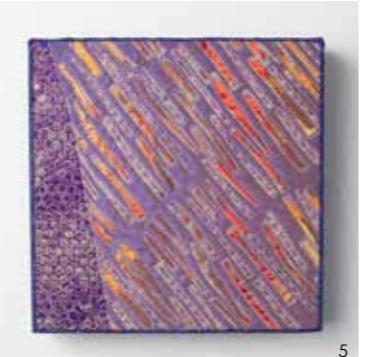
IMAGE CREDITS

1. Louise Wells, *Days Like This #9*, 2018, silks, satins, polyesters, 20 x 20 x 3.5cm
2. Louise Wells, *Days Like This #10*, 2018, silks, satins, polyesters, 20 x 20 x 3.5cm
3. Louise Wells, *Days Like This #11*, 2018, silks, satins, polyesters, 20 x 20 x 3.5cm
4. Louise Wells, *Days Like This #13*, 2018, silks, satins, polyesters, 20 x 20 x 3.5cm
5. Louise Wells, *Days Like This #14*, 2018, silks, satins, polyesters, 20 x 20 x 3.5cm
6. Louise Wells, *Remington Keys (Shift Key Right)*, 2018, vintage fabrics, business ties, 12 x 12 x 1.5cm
7. Louise Wells, *Remington Keys (4-pound sign)*, 2018, vintage fabrics, business ties, 12 x 12 x 1.5cm
8. Louise Wells, *Remington Keys (asterisk-at)*, 2018, vintage fabrics, business ties, 12 x 12 x 1.5cm
9. Louise Wells, *Remington Keys (I)*, 2018, vintage fabrics, business ties, 12 x 12 x 1.5cm
10. Louise Wells, *Remington Keys (M)*, 2018, vintage fabrics, business ties, 12 x 12 x 1.5cm
11. Louise Wells, *Remington Keys (question mark-comma)*, 2018, vintage fabrics, business ties, 12 x 12 x 1.5cm

Cover: Louise Wells, *Days* (detail), 2018, silks, satin, organza, 1010 x 100cm

Back: Louise Wells, *2000 Miles Away #1* (detail), 2018, tie facings, hand woven silk organza, overhead projector sheets, security envelopes, 61 x 91 x 3.5cm

Photography by Josh Wells





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With gratitude to my dear Mum, Dorothy Phillips. Thank you for sharing your very personal stories and having the trust in me to honour them for a public audience.

Midland **Junction Arts Centre**

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