





THE 2015 SOLO COMMISSION

# HUNT NATURE BIRTH

TARA BADCOCK

DEVONPORT  
REGIONAL  
GALLERY



*The Midwife*, 2015 (work in progress, detail)

## THE 2015 SOLO COMMISSION

In 2014, Tara Badcock was selected as the recipient of the Devonport Regional Gallery's 2015 Solo Commission. Since its inception in 2004, the Solo Commission has supported an early to mid-career Tasmanian artist to create a new body of work for exhibition at the Gallery. The Commission provides financial and mentoring support, which assists artists at a crucial stage in their careers to experiment and progress new ideas.

Tara Badcock lives in the small town of Chudleigh, 60 kilometres south of Devonport. While much of her art practice has evolved around creating saleable pieces for her small business, PARIS+TASMANIA, she has continued to refine her contemporary soft sculptures within a conceptual framework focused on feminine issues. The choice of fabrics plays a crucial role in the fusion of concepts and design, creating unique objects for contemplative viewing. Over the past twelve months Badcock has used the Solo Commission to test the boundaries of her practice and complete a body of work that is commensurate with her role as both practicing artist and parent of two small children. The Devonport Regional Gallery congratulates Badcock on the calibre of work presented in this year's Solo Commission.

Ellie Ray  
Director

## HUNT NATURE BIRTH

For over 15 years, Tara Badcock has pursued a multifaceted career exploring the boundaries between art, design and fashion with her label PARIS+TASMANIA, and making conceptual art that examines the legacies of Europe and its traditions of femininity. Using antique fabrics and embroidery as her primary media, Badcock's work reflects an abiding interest in European histories of white, colonial femininity. She explores the tensions between our connection to domestic objects and rituals, and the sense of displaced home and self that underpins many a colonial woman's narrative. In *Hunt Nature Birth*, such themes continue to inform Badcock's approach to technique and concept, but they take on new dimensions in relation to her personal narrative as an artist and the impact of motherhood on her practice. Such expansion of concepts focuses the tensions in her work around the celebrated rituals of pregnancy and birth, and the conflicts of maternal subjectivity.

Since the 1970s, the female body has been a primary focus for artists exploring the meaning of feminine subjectivity and experience. Reclaiming the body has been a particular concern for women challenging ideals of womanhood within patriarchal traditions, and a means through which to establish their own voices and identities. Within these contexts, the maternal body has its own place as something to be re-thought

beyond the dominant ideals of Christianity's Virgin Mother or the homogenising practices of Western medicine. In many fields of thought and practice, the maternal body has been critically reinscribed with the nuances of women's own experiences.

In her transformation of the literal histories of biological objects through metaphor and stitch, the works in this exhibition powerfully convey Badcock's exploration into this field. Based in the traditions of embroidery and soft sculpture, her works bear the weight of the history of women's maternal role, coupled with an exploratory energy that reworks this history through experiment. Her personal maternal experiences infuse the works with a strength and conviction akin to the pregnancies that define it, an insistence on growth and fulfilment, and a tenderness that allows for moments of contemplation or stillness.

On one level the exhibition title, *Hunt Nature Birth*, evokes a rite of passage associated with becoming both a mother and an artist. It is suggestive of Badcock's pursuit of a career and vision as an artist, her navigation of the biological terrain of maternity, its impact on her sense of self, and the culmination of these relationships in birth, with all its attendant joys and difficulties. On another level, the title suggests an overlapping of the three concepts that speaks of a process of coming

to terms with or working through the material and psychological relationships entailed in becoming a mother, and the impact of these on subjectivity and, consequently, on making. In her crocheted capillaries - veins of bound cloth, upholstered pelvic cradles and bonnets of lace-like thoughts - it is not just the metaphors of the body that drive the works, but the indices of the mind.

On a metaphorical level, Badcock's objects navigate a suspended space between two objects and a constant attempt to balance two worlds, two entities. Their umbilical threads bind states of tension and release and mark a passage from the containment of pregnancy to the vast field of motherhood; indeed the ages of womanhood across the lifespan. Such a space does not differentiate between beginnings and endings, but allows for mutual bonds between processes such as germination and inheritance. Badcock's juxtaposition of antique fabrics and forms that evoke new life creates a sense of time suspended, like the sentinel hovering between a past and future self, an emblem of lost sexual innocence and a portent of broken waters.

Many elements in Badcock's works celebrate the parameters of the maternal form through the pain of separation or loss evidenced in her displaced biological forms. A sense of the unravelling of identity that motherhood can bring is also apparent. Her intricately stitched

and crocheted pieces suggest a microscopic attention to detail, as though the self were a specimen under the clinical gaze, evincing the moment when a woman's body is suddenly not her own. Rendered through the formal and symbolic languages of the vessel, the membrane and fluidity, the works evoke maternity's uncontrollable elements and the attempt to measure their force and flow. They describe the conflicts of the 'great expectations' of pregnancy as an experience envisioned to be fulfilled by birth, and the uncertainty of telling exactly how that birth will eventuate, of where the thread will end.

Within its expansive scene of domestic, historical and biological references, *Hunt Nature Birth* gives us a sense of Badcock laying out the cloth, surveying the lie of the maternal landscape, and assessing its creases and stains - unpicking, mending and resetting its parameters. All these objects belong together, inhabiting the space like a family, an assembled inheritance of bones and threads tracing the myriad processes of her becoming. Amidst the competing forces of fertility and legacy that define the maternal experience, she asks us to bear witness to the artist as her own midwife, attending her own transformation.







*Germination #2*, 2015



*Germination #1, 2015*



*Cradle of Life #3*, 2015



*The Index of Her Mind #4, 2015*



*The Index of Her Mind #6, 2015*



*The Midwife*, 2015 (work in progress, detail)



*Balancing Act*, 2015 (detail)



*Inheritance*, 2015



*Great Expectations*, 2015 (detail)

## BIOGRAPHY

Tara Badcock is an Australian Textile artist based in the NW of Tasmania. Badcock gained a Bachelor of Fine Art with First Class Honours from the University of Tasmania in 1997. Since then she has gone on to exhibit widely both locally and internationally. She has been the recipient of several grants and after completing a series of residencies in and around Paris, Badcock created her design identity Paris+Tasmania.

Themes of beauty and utility, cultural identity, social and collective memory and personal experience form the basis of her work. Badcock was one of eight female artists recently represented in the Devonport Regional Gallery touring exhibition Felt Presence, managed by Contemporary Art Tasmania (CAT). Her work is held in private and public collections including the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Unesco's Permanent Collection, Paris.



*Marsupial Mummy*, 2015  
(modelled by the artist)

## WOMAN TO MAN

The eyeless labourer in the night,  
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,  
builds for its resurrection day—  
silent and swift and deep from sight  
foresees the unimagined light.

This is no child with a child's face;  
This has no name to name it by:  
yet you and I have known it well.  
This is our hunter and our chase,  
The third who lay in our embrace.

This is the strength that your arm knows,  
the arc of flesh that is my breast,  
the precise crystals of our eyes.  
This is the blood's wild tree that grows  
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made;  
This is the question and reply;  
The blind head butting at the dark,  
the blaze of light along the blade.  
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

Judith Wright, Collected Poems, HarperCollins.  
Reproduced with the permission of the  
Judith Wright Estate.

## LIST OF WORKS

### *Cradle of Life #3*, 2015

PVC plastic, textiles, apple tree branch and fruit, steel, wood, paint, dandelion tea, string and thread.  
60 x 40 cm

### *The Index of Her Mind (6 bonnets)*, 2015

Wood, wool, silk, linen, staples, glue, lace, embroidery, cotton thread, string, rope.  
40 x 45 cm

### *Inheritance*, 2015

Silk, cotton, linen, string, thread, nails, paint.  
40 x 30 cm (approx.)

### *Balancing Act*, 2015

Steel, paint, linen, cotton, silk, rayon, hessian, crotched string, rope and wood pulley.  
2.5 x 2 x 1 m

### *The Midwife*, 2015

Taxidermy albino pademelon, polyester thread, gelatin, paint.  
1.2 x 0.6 m

### *Sentinel*, 2015

Cast iron single bed, glass drops, cotton and linen with feather stuffing cushion, silk/linen organza, wire, cotton thread.  
2.5 x 2 x 1 m

### *Great Expectations*, 2015 (detail)

(Work in progress), linen, cotton, silk, glass, string, mixed media.  
1 x 1.1 m

### *Marsupial Mummy*, 2015

Found patchwork quilt and linen nightdress, silk, linen, wool, thread.  
Displayed as sculpture and as a projection with vintage magic lantern.  
Dimensions variable

### *Germination #1 to #5 (5 egg sculptures)*, 2015

Emu eggs, chicken eggs, found lace, jute string, silk, cotton, thread, mother of pearl, glass beads, glue, paint.  
Dimensions variable

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The artist expresses her undying gratitude to the following people:

Rainier Howe for the design and construction work on *Balancing Act* and the *Cradle of Life* series and all-round daily moral support. Claire Badcock for the wedding dress for *Sentinel*, the mammoth patchwork for *Balancing Act* and crochet lessons. Drew Badcock for the perfect wood blocks for *The Index of Her Mind*; Rose-Mary Pritchard for her unfailingly wonderful sewing help on lots of things. Eliza Burke for her sensitive and beautiful essay and Ellie Ray for this exhibition opportunity and her ongoing support and professionalism.

The artist wishes to dedicate this exhibition to her children Félix and Isola, without whom the artworks would not have evolved.

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HUNT NATURE BIRTH will tour to  
The Barn, Rosny Farm cultural centre,  
Clarence City Council in 2016.

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