CONTESTING SPACE 1 WOMEN IN SPORT

JOHN CURTIN GALLERY
27 JULY – 2 SEPTEMBER 2018

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John Curtin Gallery
Curtin University, Western Australia
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We wish to acknowledge the custodians of the land on which this exhibition takes place, the Wadjuk (Perth region) people of the Nyungar nation and their Elders past, present and future.

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This document is both a record of the exhibition *Contesting Space 1: Women in Sport* and an extension of it. The framing essays—from the curators, the research team, and the gallery—make up the first section. The works exhibited in the John Curtin Gallery are described in the second section, and in the third are selected interpretations on the exhibition themes, with an emphasis on the voices and experiences of those engaging, or those who engaged, in the act of contestation.
Contesting space on the field is an important part of sports such as Australian Rules Football. It is also a significant aspect of everyday life for many women across professional and social spheres. This exhibition uses sport as a lens through which such contestation can be observed to play out in a contemporary Australian context.

Contesting Space 1: Women in Sport is an exhibition developed as a collaboration between the Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, and John Curtin Gallery. The artists, researchers and others who have contributed to this exhibition, the catalogue of written and visual works, and the program of events, have enduring interests in contestation and the experience of women in sporting arenas and other rule-based everyday settings. Such settings include digital and social media, institutions (for example the gallery and university) and public spaces.

In this exhibition visitors are invited into a reflection on the embodied experience of contesting sporting space. Kerreen Ely-Harper’s work establishes the centre for the collected works through historical reflection. In this short film, the author Jan Harper explains how, for her trail-blazing children’s book *Girls Can Do Anything*, the focus was not the sport of AFL in itself, but rather how footy sat as a metaphor for women’s participation in contemporary life. Nearly 30 years on from the publication of Harper’s book, and with the establishment of the AFLW, this exhibition enables visitors to reflect on continuing processes of social change in Australia.
This exhibition began as a group of interdisciplinary researchers coming together to produce a paper which sought to frame the context of the new AFLW. The paper explores how women in sport contest and negotiate dominant ideologies through self-representation, spatial justice and narratives of hope and resistance. Extending the conversation established in the original paper, this exhibition seeks to make new connections and provoke new conversations as the basis for future collaborations. It is, in essence, a starting point for new inquiry rather than a conclusion of work to date.

The exhibition is a novel experience for the gallery, artists and researchers alike. This exhibition and publication of works is accompanied by an evolving events program which seeks to bring together a range of audiences to reflect on current practice, and imagine future possibilities. Distinct events are being tailored to policy makers and sporting organisations, general public, researchers and artists, and school children. The aim is to continue conversations beyond the time-frame of the exhibition and in new spaces. It is hoped that capturing the direction of these diverse discussions will open new opportunities for research collaborations.
CONTESTING SPACE
MICHÈLE WILLSON, MARIAN TYE, MADISON MAGLADRY, KERREEN ELY-HARPER, AND ROBYN CREAGH

Contesting Space 1: Women in Sport arises from a foundational paper published in 2017 entitled ‘Framing the women’s AFL: contested spaces and emerging narratives of hope and opportunity for women in sport’. This paper was the result of collaboration between academics from various disciplines including built environment, internet studies, screen arts, cultural studies and social sciences. It sought to provide both a context for the women’s AFL and to resolve a dearth in the literature by focusing specifically on this new cultural moment. Our aim in the paper was to timestamp the cultural climate from which the women’s AFL emerged and to provide a basis through which future scholarship about the women’s AFL—and women’s sport more broadly—might be framed. The interdisciplinary approach was particularly significant in adding a different lens to the conversation around women in sport, and in clarifying that a multitude of voices and frameworks are crucial for the analysis of a moment in time. This is something we hope to extend through the organisation of this exhibition—which is intended to offer an alternate creative engagement to the theme of ‘contesting space’ in women’s sport, and serve as a stepping off point for further conversations with a wider audience.

In the paper ‘Framing the women’s AFL’ we explored the concept of women’s sporting sites as contested space through the analysis of traditional and social media, legal action, and popular culture representation. The paper articulated the way women in Australia have fought persistently for the right to participate in sport, but it also demonstrated that there is still work to
be done and more ground to be gained. We argued that the evolution of the AFLW performs cultural work by creating opportunity for hope and change in female sport and in Australian culture.

The first season of the AFLW in 2017 was highly successful in terms of physical attendance to games and in television ratings, but barriers remain for AFLW to be constructed as equal to the AFL. Both the inaugural season and the 2018 season were held for only eight weeks during the hottest part of the Australian summer; free-to-air television coverage was limited to channel 7Mate; players were offered only part-time work; and, while the issue of pay has been under negotiation since the league’s inception, equal pay is still far from being achieved. It is important to note that, since the publication of our paper, these issues have been addressed (if not resolved) in both traditional and social media. This suggests that the AFLW may indeed be an avenue for social change in the way women in sport are read and represented, and provides space for important conversations that interrogate naturalised assumptions about gender and sport.

Our central framework for discussing sporting sites as contested space was through the lens of socially just public space. Sport takes place in (and is constitutive of) social-space, which in turn encompasses physical space, representations of space and the lived experience of using and creating space. A socially just space communicates an effort for inclusion and recognition across these areas. For our purposes, we analysed three key spaces as sites of contestation: media, legal and popular cultural spaces. The current position of women in sport, specifically the creation of an AFLW, has been made possible because of social and cultural change. Subsequently, the AFLW has been responsible for using the momentum of these changes to demand more respect and recognition for female sporting participation.
What we hoped to achieve with the paper was to lay the groundwork for further research and to argue that, while the creation of an AFLW is ground-breaking and progressive for women in sport, there are still aspects of the league—and of women’s sport in Australia generally—that need to be contested and critiqued. The initial paper proposed some preliminary ways in which the AFLW moment can be approached, applying the framework of socially just public space to create a vocabulary that can analyse the AFLW cultural context. However, the research needs to be nuanced further to account for conflicting and emerging narratives.

*Contesting Space 1: Women in Sport*, comprising the exhibition and this accompanying catalogue of written works, is one way the concepts from our paper are gradually being developed and expanded. The emphasis, in the exhibition and catalogue, is on the current state of play; they offer a multi-faceted look through the representation of women’s sport within Australia. The glimpse they give us is, understandably, incomplete. But in the framing of parameters, and in the sharing of space, we hope to encourage important conversations around our cultural moment—that of the AFLW, and of the emergence of women’s sport into the mainstream. We also hope to find a platform from which to keep these conversations going. Beyond this exhibition, we hope to further our work by engaging with the local community, by working with schools, the women’s WAFL and other community groups, and by provoking robust discussion amongst those charged with the decision-making impacting women’s participation in sport. We hope to produce more research related specifically to social media analysis of the AFLW, which will provide insight into how the AFLW is framed and consumed from an audience level. We are also committed to critical analysis of the role of intersectional identity politics in women’s sport—how other marginalised identities, beyond gender, affect the ways in which women in sport are constructed and read.
In conclusion, there are many factors involved in the way women’s sport is constructed and viewed, including the varied performances of women’s sport (representation in the media, legal issues, etc.) and the different intersecting identity politics at play, among the players, the audience and other stakeholders: class, race, sexuality and ethnicity. Working actively to include and address a variety of backgrounds and disciplines will result in a reading of women’s sport that is intersectional and thorough. ‘Contesting space’ not only refers to the negotiation of representation and participation in the sporting context, but also to the negotiation of which voices can represent these issues, and what kinds of language should be used. While *Contesting Space I* makes no claim in this regard, its intent is to provide a forum for a wider engagement with its themes, and a wider representation of voices than those gathered in the 2017 article. The exhibition is by no means definitive in its coverage or its inclusivity of all voices, but rather acts as that prompt for future conversations around contestation in women’s sport.

CONTESTING THE WHITE CUBE

JANE KING

The exhibition *Contesting Space 1: Women in Sport*, and its exploration of the evolving issues concerned with women in sport, comes at a time when there is substantial critical dialogue about the role art institutions play in perpetuating gendered and other stereotypes. Emanating from, or coinciding with, the #MeToo movement has been much debate on the democratisation and decolonisation of art institutions and their collections. The most recent example being the reaction to the Baltimore Museum of Art announcing its intention to diversify its collection by acquiring more works by women artists and artists of colour, and by deaccessioning a number of valuable works by male artists including Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg.¹

This is not a new issue. Since the 1980s, Guerrilla Girls—a group of American conceptual artists—have been agitating for better representation of women artists in museums, frequently counting the number of women artists versus the number of female nudes on exhibition at major US galleries.² At the recent Australian National Conference for Museums and Galleries (Melbourne 4-8 June 2018) Kaywin Feldman from the Minneapolis Museum of Art, in her plenary presentation ‘Feminism: No Longer The F Word’, argued that this was a simplistic way of redressing the imbalance in our institutions and that a new Feminism was required to address deeply entrenched issues of gender in leadership and representation.³ So it is timely that the John Curtin Gallery hosts an exhibition which, at its premise, challenges gender stereotypes, disrupts conventional notions of ‘rules of engagement’, and contests the ‘white cube’ gallery space.

Art galleries are traditionally a space within a space, separate, climate-controlled, almost like a laboratory. They are carefully designed to eliminate the distraction of the outside world, ensuring the viewer only has eyes
for the art. They are embedded with unspoken conventions and rules of engagement too, like a place of worship or a playing field. So strong are these conventions—the white walls, reverently placed objects, the labels, the numbers, the catalogue, the opening event replete with speeches and canapés—that merely placing an object in a gallery elevates its status and imbues it with the label ‘art’. Marian Tye’s work *Hallowed Ground*, in which turf from Subiaco Oval is encased in a glass vitrine, perfectly exemplifies this act of objectification, or even deification, venerating the very ground on which thousands of matches have been played.

The role of galleries and of curators as mediator, messenger, decoder, translator and interpreter has been well examined. University art galleries have a further role to play, having ‘evolved into dynamic and sophisticated connectors between their host institutions and the wider world’. Our role is expanded to encompass the dialogue between researcher and audience. This is an important and evolving opportunity in showcasing research outcomes from a wide range of disciplines through means other than traditional published journals.

With *Contesting Space 1: Women in Sport* we have been challenged by the ideas presented and explored in staging a research-based exhibition. We have stepped back and allowed space for the researchers to play with ideas, to explore our space, and challenge our rules of play, contesting our space. It has been an exercise in trust. We have made suggestions along the way to enhance the exhibition from the first tentative enquiries, and our expertise has been warmly received.

The end result is a cohesive and engaging body of work from researchers and artists working collaboratively to explore notions of contested space through the experience of women engaged in sport. At its heart is researcher Kerreen Ely-Harper’s documentary *Girls Can Do Anything*, which explores the inspirational journey, in Jan Harper’s book of the same name, of three
football-loving girls who prove that they can play football too. Erin Coates’ tense video work *The Pact* depicts two women climbers working together to relentlessly explore every millimetre of an undefined space, testing the limits of endurance. Robyn Creagh has invaded the pitch with line markings in *Re-Code*, while Fiona Harman’s paintings evoke both possibilities and missed opportunities in her depictions of empty sporting fields. Other works explore the wide variety of experiences of women in sport.

At a deeper level this exhibition also starts a conversation about the role galleries can play in challenging gendered conventions and stereotypes, as well as the opportunities university art institutions have to engage new audiences through publicly exposing the work of our researchers.

Jane King is the Gallery Manager at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University. She has previously held positions as Head of Member Development, Artsource, Executive Director, State Library WA Foundation and Executive Officer, Museums Galleries Australia WA. She is also a practising artist, freelance curator, and co-Artistic Director of the North Midlands Project.

2. Do women still have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?, Guerrilla Girls, https://www.guerrillagirls.com/naked-through-the-ages
In thinking through the genesis of Girls Can Do Anything, I have to backtrack a little: to 2003, when I was at work developing a drama script about a young girl’s last game of Australian Rules Football, a game not for the faint-hearted in more ways than one. I had interviewed a number of girls who were forced to stop playing footy at twelve, due to the AFL’s ‘Female Participation Regulation’; it seemed like a good story—a David-and-Goliath kind of tale. Then I saw an article featuring Penny Cula-Reid, Helen Taylor, and Emily Stanyer in the Herald-Sun, and I was struck by the similarity of their stories to my screen play. Inspired and without hesitation I put aside the fictional version as I believed the real-life story to be of greater significance. The public debate that ensued in the media and the wider community, on the differences between girls and boys, was fascinating. The girls’ story seemed to touch the hearts and minds of a cross-section of Australian society, not just footy fans, and their efforts showed that every attempt at positive change is a move forward, a step towards making the status quo better for those who will come after—even if, for those who dare to make those kinds of challenges, there are no guarantees of success. The film that resulted, Even Girls Play Footy (2012), is a celebration of the achievements of three trailblazers.
From mid-2003 through to early-2004 I filmed the girls’ last junior football games, their court case, and conducted a number of interviews with them, their respective family members, friends, team mates, and coaches. My team and I also collated a large amount of archival material—newspaper, radio, news, and television footage—to be included in the film. In 2011 we returned to see how the girls were doing, and to find out how the case had impacted on their lives. We also conducted retrospective interviews with their key legal representatives, who provided an insight into the historical significance of the case—legislation was changed, enabling girls up to the age of fourteen to play in mixed competition.

On its release Even Girls Play Footy drew attention to the growing female participation in Australian Rules Football. Now, due to the AFLW, that growth continues. While the film’s focus attracts followers of the AFL, the film poses questions that are relevant to a broader audience in regard to opportunity, identity, and community—questions which linger in a post-AFLW Australia. The film offers a vision for all young people: that they have a right to participate in the game of their choice. It acknowledges, as well, the fortitude required to overcome discrimination and inequity.
Girls Can Do Anything, 2018.
Video with sound, 9:18 minutes.

“Footy’s for boys.
They win or lose.
We make a noise
With our cheers and our boos.

If we went away
They’d still make their tries.
It’s the boys that play.
We just sit with our sighs.”
Girls Can Do Anything is a postscript to Even Girls Play Footy. It is inspired by one of the many stories I encountered when making the first film—I was intrigued that a children’s book had been written nearly twenty-eight years prior telling almost the same story as the one I had begun to fictionalise, and which then took place before my eyes in the Victorian law courts. The parallel narrative of three young girls wanting to play football was uncanny. To celebrate the inaugural AFLW, and as a contribution to the exhibition, I wanted to return to the book to honour the many invisible women who have campaigned and fought for women’s rights. I wanted to acknowledge that women and girls wanting to play football is not a new idea, but an idea that has been evolving for a long time. Jan Harper and her colleagues at the Box Hill Women’s Liberation Group were trail blazers in their work on redressing sexism and gender biases in Australian children’s literature. Girls Can Do Anything is a tribute to their vision and ongoing legacy, and to their attempts to buck the status quo.

Kerreen Ely-Harper is a writer, director and screen educator with a background in theatre and television performance. A graduate of the Film & Television School and Performing Arts School at the Victorian College of Arts, Melbourne University, she has created quality live performance and screen content with a focus on devising new works, cross-art form practice, social justice and adaptation.

CSRR Research Starter Grant and MCASI Small Grant awarded to the artist.

1. The film Even Girls Play Footy (2012) can be viewed online at http://evengirlsplayfooty.com
The Pact explores elements of physical endurance and the body in space. The video operates as a double-portrait of two women—the artist and her real-life climbing partner. Set inside a dark void of indeterminable dimensions, the scale and shape of the space are defined by the movements of the women's bodies. The figures perform a tessellation of gestures as they weave in and around the dark space, forming symmetrical patterns with their movement. There is a slow centrifugal motion and mounting physical and psychological tension between the two climbers. The extreme physical exertion of their actions is visible in the straining muscles, as sheets of blood fall through the space and a sense of abstract horror slowly rises. To endure the space, and remain suspended within it, the figures are completely reliant on one another.

Erin Coates is a Perth-based artist working across film, sculptural installation and drawing. Coates' practice examines our relationship with and within the spaces we build and inhabit, focusing on the limits of our bodies and physical interaction within given environments. Her works are shown in both galleries and film festivals in Australia and abroad, and have been included in exhibitions in major Australian institutions.
Climbers: Erin Coates, Shevaun Cooley
Camera & Colourist: Sohan Ariel Hayes
Gaffer: Dion Borrett
Editing: Erin Coates, Sohan Ariel Hayes
Set construction: Dave Brophy, Dan Bourke
Hairstylist: Jenny Reardon, Salon Mark II
Costumes: Angela Ferolla
Location: filmed at Rockface Climbing Centre, Perth
RED Camera: provided by Dingbat Digital Cinema Solutions

2K video, with sound,
7:20 minutes.
Sound Composition:
Cat Hope & Decibel
SNAPCAT | THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

In medieval Europe football was an exuberant, unruly game in which one entire village pitted itself against another. Contemporary forms of football are all descended from this annual scrum in which the players—priests and seamstresses, farmers and widows—threw social mores aside and used any means necessary to get the ball into the other village’s churchyard. Despite its strict parameters and the recent addition of women to the professional league, today’s football often functions as a display of hyper-masculinity. The Beautiful Game parodies this by harking back to the sport’s wild and lawless roots, but this time placing women and non-binary people on the field, a place they have long been excluded from.

Dissecting and splicing the cultures of football and feminism, The Beautiful Game reinvents the footy pitch as a joyful and humorous space for women and non-binary people to take risks, assert themselves and fight side-by-side for a common goal.

This film documents the performance of the work in Brisbane, 2018. Participants were asked to choose their allegiance to either the north or south side of the city’s river, by signing up for the Southside Tuffs, after Brisbane Tuff—a colourful rock unique to Kangaroo Point, or the Northside Lamingtons—after the coconut-dusted cake allegedly first made for Lord and Lady Lamington at Government House.

Snapcat is a collaboration between Renae Coles and Anna Dunnill. Originally from Perth, the duo have made socially engaged, performative work together since 2014. Snapcat’s work is both political and humorous, using colour, spectacle and a DIY attitude. Their projects often take place in outdoor public spaces, investigating feminism, protest, and bravery.
The Beautiful Game, 2018
(performance documentation).
Photos: Dave Kan.
This project was presented as a part of Co-MMotion: Brisbane City Council’s Temporary Art Program 2018
Throughout their collaborative practice, Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont have explored historical uses of fascist aesthetic in propaganda, as well as the cult of the heroic Australian athlete. In *Blood Sport*, a self-portrait of the artists, they are seen as victorious and smiling while their opponents lie dead and bloodied in their wake. In their undefined triumph, their joyous expressions and immaculate grooming appear in stark contrast to their blood-smeared knees and fists, and blood-splattered sportswear.

Prompted by the phrase ‘killing off the competition’ as the only way to ensure victory, *Blood Sport* speaks to the ‘winning is everything’ mentality—where just doing your best is not enough. It pokes fun at the simplistic concepts of ‘winners’ or ‘losers,’ ‘good’ or ‘evil’, and, as the photograph depicts the artists themselves competing in a race, it offers a tongue-in-cheek comment about the competitive game that is the art-world.

Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont are multidisciplinary artists who have worked together since 2001 on a practice which encompasses photography, performance, and film. Collaboratively they have shown work at the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Center Pompidou, Paris; and the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. In 2010, they won the Basil Sellers Art Prize and in 2011 they had a 10-year retrospective of their work at the Perth Institute for Contemporary Arts. They are represented in collections including Artbank, Queensland Art Gallery, and Stadiums Queensland. Additionally, they have individual, international practices and collaborate with Thea Costantino as *Hold Your Horses*. 
FIONA HARMAN | EMPTY STANDS; LIMELIGHT

For this work I am interested in the way painting can be used to explore ideas of remembrance, imagination, and possibility in relation to sport. By painting the sporting ground at moments in-between use, or frozen in action, I contrast the seriousness of competition with the repetitive nature of practice, the disappointment of mistakes, and the parts of sporting culture that exist at the periphery of the limelight. Paying attention to the formal aspects of the sporting oval, such as the lines, artificial lights, obscured darkness, the green layer of grass, goal posts, and stands, I explore the mixed feelings and imaginings of both play and practise, winning and losing, and observation and participation.

Fiona Harman is a visual artist based in Perth, working primarily in painting and drawing. She has exhibited locally and nationally, including two solo exhibitions Reimagining the Display Home at Gallery Central (WA) and Paradise Point at Spectrum Project Space (WA). She completed a Bachelor of Fine Art with First Class Honours and a creative research PhD in the School of Architecture and Interior Architecture at Curtin University.
Empty Stands, 2018.
Oil on canvas,
150 x 100cm.

Limelight, 2018.
Oil on canvas,
142 x 113cm.
When we encounter a space for the first time, we look for cues in the environment that might indicate appropriate behaviour for the place we find ourselves in. The manners of gallery space are strictly codified, with different expectations and freedoms for those who are relative insiders or outsiders to the gallery.

Onto this already thickly coded space I have layered the line markings of indoor sports courts. These markings have their own formalised rules. But, when a game is not in play, what is their effect? Can these lines invite a re-negotiation of who are considered insiders and outsiders in the gallery space? And can a few lines re-code a space?

Dr Robyn Creagh is a lecturer in the School of Design and the Built Environment at Curtin University. She teaches across Planning and Architecture. Her research and creative practice explores the interaction of sense of place, embodied experience and built environment design.
Di Bain | Listen Up!

*Listen Up!* was conceived as a collection of interviews with women, expressed from their positions in the spaces that surround the game of Australian Rules Football. Offered only to the individual engaged with the installation, the work focuses attention on the voice, affording the listener an opportunity to frame their own take from factors put in play by the contributors.

Di Bain is a marketer and journalist with 20 years’ experience in the communications industry. As the owner of Bain Media, she has developed marketing strategies and cross-platform brand campaigns for high profile clients in government, property development, cyber security and tourism. Di’s keen interest in the social fabric of cities and how culture and design shapes communities is best illustrated by her commitment as Chair of Activate Perth.
This fragment of turf, with its embodied memories of Subiaco Oval (1908-2017), serves as a relic on which to ponder the passage of time for Australian Rules Football in Western Australia.¹

If the turf could talk it would speak of the sweat, blood and tears that have nourished its roots; reminisce on the highs and lows, wins and losses; recall the roar of the crowd, singing and sadness; highlight moments of heroism, daring, courageousness, villainy, and brutality; conjure up the aroma of chips, pies and beer, and the smell of body odour, liniment and wet clothing; recount the bruising and pounding, wear and tear to its surface, and remember, with fondness, the care of the groundkeepers assisting its recovery in the aftermath of such beatings.

This fragment of turf would make comment on the changes to its surroundings, witnessed over a hundred plus years—from humble community origins to becoming the home of football, the holy ground, for the game in WA.

If the turf could talk and paused to take stock, it would acknowledge that, despite a Women’s Australian Rules Football Competition being formed way back in 1915², few recollections of the women’s game being played on its surface sit within its treasure chest of memories. With this in mind, and contemplating its uncertain future, the turf, if it could talk, would hope that the next generation of grass, bred to cover the playing surface of Perth’s new cathedral for sport, is perhaps from a generation more welcoming of women’s participation, and offer up a small prayer that it be so.
Marian Tye is professor and director of the Centre for Sport and Recreation Research (CSRR). With an eclectic background as an academic, athlete, businessperson and dancer, research choreography and taking work to new audiences—such as through this *Contesting Space* 1 exhibition—is a natural extension of her life experience.

1. Acknowledgement and thanks: Turf (and all its embodied memories) lovingly extracted from Subiaco Oval by the groundkeepers, courtesy of the West Australian Football Commission.

*Hallowed Turf*, 2018.
Turf extracted from Subiaco Oval, domed terrarium, 28 x 28 cm. Photo: Mark Robertson.
The artwork is a dynamic representation of the online conversation taking place about the women’s AFL, focusing on hashtags harvested from Twitter. The hashtags, decontextualised from the tweets in which they were posted, function as a snapshot of how Twitter users consume and think about the AFLW. The tags appear and disappear on the screen in front of the viewer, evocative of the transitory nature of social media and the constantly shifting climate of cultural commentary. From mundane statements to politically charged catchphrases, this collage of hashtags offers a multitude of voices contesting digital space in the field of women’s sport.

Madison Magladry is a PhD student in the school of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University. Her thesis is concerned with the relationship between postfeminism and women’s fitness culture. Her other research interests include queer representation, fandom, and women in sport.

CSRR Research Starter Grant and MCASI Small Grant awarded to this project.
03 VOICES
All day I played away.
Plied the courts
and tallied the rounds
in my white dress
with its bright blue stripes
emblazoned round my ribs.
A flashing exoskeleton,
I worked deep into the corners.
My ride returned:
good girl good girl,
and (almost an after-thought)
how’d you go?
But where’s your partner,
lost squash buddy, twin?

We found him at last
passed out in a dumpster bin
gripping a bottle of Royal Reserve
his racquet slack beside him.
Before we yanked him out
I hugged the stripes around my ribs
as if I’d missed
the best shot of the day—
the thought of giving him a single thought
each time I took a swing.

Lucy Dougan’s books include White Clay (Giramondo) and Meanderthals (Web del Sol). Her latest book, The Guardians (Giramondo), won the 2016 Western Australian Premier’s Book Award for Poetry. She currently works as Program Director at Curtin University’s China Australia Writing Centre and for Westerly Magazine. With Tim Dolin, she is co-editor of The Collected Poems of Fay Zwicky (UWAP, 2017).
What is a girl who can kick a left foot drop kick halfway down the lane, straight onto the chest of the skinny boy from the next street, time after time after time? Or the same girl having a go at the straight kicking competition at the Parish picnic, and winning it?

I perfected a way of playing alone in the backyard, making contact with the ball a little closer to the end than when kicking for distance, and sending it straight up in the air. I could then leap for the mark, take it high above my head, or gather it close on the chest.

If my older brother was around, our challenge was to keep the ball off the ground. We’d kick to each other, keeping a score of how many times we could each kick and mark securely. Kick and mark, kick and mark. Sixty, ninety, a hundred and ten ...

I honed a vast range of skills, both alone and with others, that were never tested out on the field of play. Running at pace while bouncing the ball so that it rose just where my hands were; reading the bounce to see when the ball would come up higher when gathering it in; leaning down while running at pace to scoop up the ball with one hand. The range of kicks: punt, drop punt, stab, torpedo punt ... drop kick.

Girls played netball. Even basketball and hockey were outliers. There was definitely no girls’ football, especially in the country. I decided on hockey. As goalie, I could kick—a long clearing kick would save the day. I could charge out and intimidate forwards who were making a rush at the goal too. Both were good, but hockey was a compromise, a disappointment, because the pleasures of sport are well beyond those of contest. The bodily
satisfactions of taking a mark cleanly, kicking a ball that responds perfectly to the intention of foot and eye, the feel of leather on the hands, the gratified anticipation of ball movement are different.

That football and netball were the two main sports in southern Australia for much of the twentieth century, and that they were almost entirely gendered, tells us much about the era in which they developed, as do their rules. As forms that were codified in a similar era, netball and football could not be more distinct. They are artefacts from the nineteenth-century, revealing much about gender codes of the time. Football, while it has rules, allows players a lot of freedom. While there are set positions, there are no actual rules that would stop a player from going from one end of the field to the other to score a goal; sometimes it happens. In the 'I'd Like To See That' AFL advertising campaign from the 90s, a British rugby player says 'Yeah, I've seen Australian Rules. What rules?'

Netball, on the other hand, is all about rules. Even on a small court players are restricted, in terms of where they can go according to their position, how they move their feet while holding the ball, and how close they can get to another player. Only two out of seven players are allowed to shoot for goal and players are not supposed to touch each other. At the level of rules, the game appears to be an ideological vehicle for teaching feminine restraint. When it was codified, its founders certainly sought to make it acceptable by 'feminising' it.

Football embodies the notion of physical freedom. Unlike a rugby player, a footballer can kick or handball in any direction; unlike a soccer player, a footballer can run with the ball, touch it with either hands or feet; unlike a netballer, the footballer can use his or her body to literally knock an opponent out of the way. The space made available for the game is huge compared with a netball court. The time and money spent maintaining
football fields across the country is vast compared with the minimal effort involved in maintaining the asphalt court which, despite its propensity to cause injury, is often still used for netball. The space given over to male recreation in our culture is vast compared with that devoted to female recreation, but now we are running onto the oval too. The apparent contradiction between the requirements of athletic behaviour and sporting skills, and the discourse of femininity, is breaking down, and AFLW is a sure sign of this. I am reminded that there have always been exceptions in the history of Aussie Rules. I have a photograph of my grandmother and her sister, taken in 1919, both members of the Snowtown Women’s Football team.

Since AFLW began, I catch myself being brought up short by girls and their footballs. I see people having a kick in parks and ovals, and I suddenly notice that they are girls. Girls with mothers, girls with fathers, girls with other girls. Girls kicking.

What is a grey-haired woman, teaching her grandsons how to kick in the park? Hold the ball like this, laces up, take a step, swing your other foot through, drop the ball onto it ...

No longer a dropkick.

Mandy Treagus is Associate Professor in English and Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide, where she teaches literature, culture, and visual studies. Her publications include Empire Girls: The Colonial Heroine Comes of Age, Changing the Victorian Subject, and Anglo-American Imperialism and the Pacific: Discourses of Encounter.
Sport plays a key role in the construction of Australian cultural identity. In particular, how sport is represented in the media reveals a predominantly masculine and able-bodied cultural conception. Female athletes are either invisible or portrayed as being less important, which does little to advance their visibility in sports spaces—this is particularly marked if they are also disabled.

The dominance of men in sport-spaces has been well documented. In the last 30 years studies of the coverage of international competitions in both sport-specific newspapers and the sports pages of daily newspapers from all over the world conclude that news articles and photographs portraying female athletes—particularly when participating in masculinised sports—are fewer in both quantity and quality. For example, Crossman et al.¹, in an analysis of journal articles published in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia between 1984 and 2000, found that female athletes are depicted in only one third of all sports-related photographs, and that women involved in feminised sports such as gymnastics, swimming and skating receive more media attention than those female athletes who are engaged in more masculinised sports such as soccer, basketball, softball and hockey. Further, several studies² show that, in addition to disparities in quantity, female athletes are also portrayed differently, using different qualities, from their male counterparts—women are usually marginalised and trivialised by distorted images or language.
Similar inequalities are also seen with the portrayal of athletes with disability in the sporting media. For example, the Paralympic Games, the elite sport-space for disabled athletes, has not reached the same level of public and media interest as its able-bodied counterpart, the Olympic Games. If considered alongside the recognised gender disparities in sport outlined above, this has particularly significant consequences for both the quantity and quality of depictions of female Paralympians. In addition, our studies have highlighted another particular media distinction for this distinct group—how they are framed. Images of able-bodied female athletes mainly show
their whole body, whereas, for female athletes with disability, usually only their faces are framed. This strategy obscures the athlete’s disability from the public’s view and therefore does little to advance societal acceptance.

However, this traditional state of play began to change during the 2012 London Paralympic Games, due to what we describe as spectacularisation, or increased commercial television interest in screening this particular event to attract a wider audience. Our comparative study of Australian and Brazilian newspaper images of Paralympians competing at these games shows that a significant number of these photographs depicted the athletes’ whole body, or at least from their waist up. However, while this tendency was marked in the Brazilian media, it was less so in Australian newspapers, where 51% of images analysed still did not depict the athlete’s disability. Additionally, both countries continued to focus on the endeavours of male athletes.

However, the media landscape is changing. Today athletes can control their own media images via social media. Unlike the mainstream media, Instagram, for example, gives researchers the opportunity to study how disabled female athletes document their own Paralympic experiences via hashtags and visual imagery. One example of this is Ellie Cole, an Australian female wheelchair basketballer and swimmer. Competing in swimming events, she received four gold and two bronze medals at the 2012 London Paralympic Games; in Rio in 2016 she received two gold, three silver and one bronze. Cole is a lower limb amputee, and the Australian media tends to portray her exclusively from the waist up, therefore obscuring her disability; this limited and static framing was apparent in our aforementioned 2012 study. There was only one image of Cole—in the Sydney Morning Herald—and she was not engaged in any sort of action nor athletic pose (see image 1).
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Ever wanted to know what it’s like to race at a Paralympic final and be 0.02 seconds from a gold medal? 🏊‍♀️ 🏊‍♀️. Check out my latest blog post from Rio: elliecole.com.au/blog #Blog #Swimming #Racing #Rio #Paralympics #Olympics #Athlete

Image 2: Ellie Cole Instagram post September 12, 2016. Photo: Bob Martin for OIS/IOC.

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However, by 2016 Cole had begun to control her own images via her Instagram account, resulting in a marked difference in how she depicts herself (see images 2 and 3) to the ways in which she has been depicted in the media. Cole included 23 images in her 21 posts about the 2016 Paralympics Games; she portrayed herself in 100% of these images (56.5% are of just her while 43.5% depict Cole with another person and 87% of the photos include female athletes). Significantly, all of the images represent her in a Paralympic context—35% show her in her uniform and engaging in action and, of these, 80% present her in competition, with 20% illustrating training sessions. Of the 26% depicting her in her uniform but not participating in sport, 83% include the medal or podium, therefore firmly locating her within the elite level of Paralympic sport. In addition, Cole’s whole body is visible in most (87%) of her Instagram photos—52% are of the waist up and 9% are from the knee up.

In conclusion, the traditional masculine dominance of elite sports has generated a long history of women’s struggle to be included in sport-spaces in relation to both quantity and quality of coverage. Women with disability—and the events in which they participate—experience double discrimination. For example, female disabled athletes are depicted in the media in images that obscure or neutralise their disability, or in stationary poses which do not represent the athleticism of their sport—that is if they are depicted at all. However, some female athletes, such as Paralympian Ellie Cole, are re-writing their own media stories using Instagram. Coles’ coverage of the 2016 Paralympic Games represents a female-intensive, disability-focused sport-space that does not attempt to neutralise nor obscure the disabled female athlete’s body, nor their sporting success.
Tatiane Hilgemberg is an Assistant Professor in Communication and a researcher at Roraima Federal University/Brazil. She received her doctorate in Communication from State University of Rio de Janeiro, and Masters in Communication Science at Porto University. She started research Paralympic Games and media in her early years as an undergraduate student.

Associate Professor Katie Ellis is Senior Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Centre for Culture and Technology in Internet Studies and Mass Communications at Curtin University. She has published 10 books addressing aspects of disability and the media and is series editor of Routledge Research in Disability and Media Studies.

About ten years ago my mother asked me to select and photocopy some newspaper clippings about her father’s sister—Dorothy Hope (born Schlesinger)—that were included in an old family scrapbook focused, for the most part, on the tennis career of my mother’s father, 1920s Australian Davis Cup player Richard Emil (Bob) Schlesinger. The scrapbook had been started about 1914 by my grandfather’s mother, then taken over by her daughter-in-law, my maternal grandmother, in whose possession it later thrived as a source of engagingly embellished tales of 1920s sporting glamour for eager-eared grandchildren, most notably myself.

In many ways, my grandfather’s was an exemplary narrative of Australian sporting life in the amateur-only era of the 1920s: winner of various state singles and doubles titles, two times Davis Cup representative, two-times runner up in singles in the Australian championship (today’s Australian Open); a successful four-decade career at Spaulding, the sporting goods company, a regular ongoing gig as a tennis writer for various Melbourne newspapers, and, finally, a 1968 obituary replete with tributes from greats like his one-time doubles partner and friend Harry Hopman.

In many ways, but perhaps not in all: Bob’s innate good nature, a Melbourne Grammar education, and his emigre grandfather’s willingness to assimilate in the 1850s, may have eased the anomaly of bearing a Middle European Jewish surname in an era of Anglo hegemony, and into a sport that, even in contemporary Australia, has had its difficulties in accommodating the ethnic and racial difference of young players—think Goolagong, Philippoussis, even Kyrgios now. But it was another contest over sporting space, that between genders, which sent me rifling for scrapbook cuttings about a long-deceased great aunt whom I had never met. One of Dorothy’s granddaughters on the
east coast, having found no insights amongst the items of her late father (Dorothy’s only child), and knowing next to nothing of her grandmother’s sporting story, had asked through a mutual relative if we might be able to find something amidst Bob’s memorabilia.

Fortunately, my great grandmother’s scrapbooking had not been gender blind. It had in fact started as a record of the tennis successes of Miss Dorothy Schlesinger, 5 years older than Bob and a representative of the Victorian women’s team, as well as a successful competitor in sundry other tournaments in Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia in the years 1914-1920.

Dorothy Schlesinger (second from left) and team, April 1915. Newspaper clipping in family scrapbook. Photo by author.
At an early stage of the scrapbook though, Dorothy begins to fade. Clippings announce her 1920 engagement and later her wedding to a farmer and returned digger. Around the same time (and page) a clipping from 1920 cements 20-year-old Bob’s scrapbook takeover in the guise of the ‘the Malvern colt’. A possible brief mixed doubles appearance by the siblings in 1924’s Australian championships is not documented in the scrapbook and remains unverified.

Arguably the scrapbook, in its promising start, sudden silence and domestic retreat, also traces a typical parallel (or perhaps sibling) narrative of Australian sporting life in the period—that of women. Of course, not all women were privileged enough to play a largely middle-class sport like tennis, and not all who competed at a high level retired, when married, from competition immediately. A good many however did, particularly when children arrived and if, like Dorothy, their husbands were far from encouraging. This last personal insight I owe to early scrapbook discussions with my grandmother, and to subsequent speculations by my mother and one of her female cousins.

But what opportunities were available anyway? During her peak playing years Dorothy could not have entered the national singles, doubles or mixed titles, as the Australian championships were men only until 1922. Whilst the Davis Cup had for some time allowed men’s teams the opportunity for all expenses paid international team travel, prestige, and opportunities en route to enter other overseas tournaments, a women’s international team competition did not exist in the 20s and wouldn’t until the Federation Cup began in 1963. It is by no means a coincidence that it was in that very year that Margaret Smith (later Court) became the first Australian woman to win the Wimbledon singles title, a latecomer to a veritable parade of Australian men who had triumphed in singles at the Championships over many previous decades.
The recent filmic focus on the struggles for equity in pay and space (whether on court or in media coverage) by activist-players like Billie Jean King and others in the immediate post-1968 professional era of the game are timely, informative and cleverly crafted representations that have re-ignited interest in women’s tennis’ heroic ‘battle of the sexes’. Yet it remains important also to address the erasure from public—and family—memory of early players like Dorothy and her teammates, striding out to compete for their State with determination and skill despite their impractically long skirts and limited major competition opportunities. Just as the care package of photocopied cuttings that my mother and I sent a decade ago to Dorothy’s granddaughter provided, or so we were told, some welcome insights into a grandmother’s sporting life, so too this little offering may, hopefully, do the same for those whose path it crosses.

Deborah Hunn is a lecturer in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University, Western Australia, and currently coordinates the School’s Creative Writing Major. Her research and creative production—including academic essays, short stories, creative nonfiction and reviews—has been published in a range of journals and edited collections.
There is a long history of women in sport being perceived as 'lesbians', because sport has traditionally been constructed as masculine. That is, even if they were heterosexual, female athletes were seen as butch 'muscle molls'—this was intended as an insult, a way of policing women’s involvement in masculine spaces. Ironically, this stereotyping has led to women’s sport being constructed as a kind of safe space for queer women. Come play women’s soccer—people might think you’re gay, but that’s okay when you already are!

This assumption has become naturalised to the point where a queer woman can be captain of an AFLW team without a single pop news piece about it. I can’t imagine that kind of laid-back attitude if the male captain of an AFL team was queer.

But, sitting in the stands of the new Optus Stadium and watching the first AFLW match to be held there, I look at the players—many of whom I know are queer—and I wonder how they feel about the commentators calling them 'ladies'. Beyond queer sexuality and its relative acceptance in women’s sport, I wonder if any of them identify as agender, genderqueer or nonbinary. What do they think when the commentators call them 'ladies' or 'girls', or even 'women'? Are they angry, frustrated? Have they decided that being given this opportunity to play the sport they love is worth being lumped in with gender roles to which they may not subscribe? While queerness is more acceptable in mainstream culture, identifying outside the gender binary is not as well-understood or even known. Openly identifying as gay, bisexual or lesbian is mostly well-received—asking someone to use they/them pronouns for you, however, is somehow unreasonable. Nonbinary players themselves may even be hesitant to come out for fear of confronting this ignorance.
The intersections of my feminist, queer, and nonbinary identity have led me to have an ambiguous reaction to the term ‘ladies’ or ‘girls’ or even ‘women’s sport’. Ladies and girls specifically are loaded with overt generalisations about women as feminine or infantile, but even using the term ‘women’ seems to rely on the binary category of gender roles, and works to erase identities which do not fit that system. Of course, I feel like a nitpicker—isn’t it enough to have an officially recognised form of an iconic Australian sport that is finally available for women? But even affixing ‘women’s’ to ‘AFL’ acknowledges how ‘AFL’ asserts that the masculine is the norm. ‘Women’s AFL’ both makes the distinction clear and subverts this assertion. As a feminist, I know that terms like ‘women’s sport’ are important to reveal and name the invisible strategies of patriarchy. As a queer, nonbinary person, I wish the commentators would at least stop calling these athletes ‘ladies’.

Madison Magladry is a PhD student in the school of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University. Her thesis is concerned with the relationship between postfeminism and women’s fitness culture. Her other research interests include queer representation, fandom, and women in sport.
'That’s a nice sport for a young girl,’ she says. ‘You’re a lucky one!’

She stands in my mother’s veterinary clinic and smiles down at me. She is wearing a lurid pink cardigan. On the examination table, her obese sausage-dog pants and whines. The dog has a pink collar and lead. I hold a wad of paper towel and a spray bottle of pink disinfectant. My mother holds a stethoscope to the dog’s chest. My job is to clean the table after each patient has been seen. I am ready. I am efficient in my role. My mother has trained me to be. I am not terribly interested in her small talk. My mother raises an eyebrow at me, even as she listens intently to the dog.

‘Yes,’ I reply, grudgingly.

‘I always wanted a pony when I was growing up,’ she says. ‘I would have loved looking after a pony.’

I had said 'horses’, as in 'I ride horses’. In actuality, I do ride a pony, but the distinction rankles. ‘Yes,’ I reply again.

‘Well,’ my mother says, 'his heart is fine. But he is showing some anterior abdominal pain. I am a little worried that he may have pancreatitis.’

The woman nods, eyes wide. My mother continues with the prognosis. I wait for her to finish, for the dog to be taken down, for my mother to send her off, and turn to the computer and start typing up her history, which is my cue for the table.
My mother teaches us to ride, the same way she teaches us to clean her examination table, to work late, and to take joy in our work. The clinic is her own. If you want something, she teaches us, you work for it, you train for it. Weekends, my mother, my sister and I take the horses out to Pony Club and competitions, while my brother and father race go-karts. We come home on Sunday evenings, all of us differently sweaty, dirty and happy, to compare our various successes and tribulations over fish and chips from the local General Store. The trophies my brother wins karting are invariably bigger, more trophy-like than those my sister and I win with the horses. We come home with faux-satin ribbons, occasionally with hay bags or lead ropes as prizes. Once, my sister wins $20 and a bag of feed. My brother wins large wooden and plastic trophies, actual trophies, with gold or silver and the name of the race engraved on the front.

‘The karting club has more money,’ my mother tells us. ‘That’s all. And the prize doesn’t matter anyway.’

There is one competition every year where we have a chance to win trophies like my brother does, a teams event which qualifies us for the state championships. We train harder for this one than any of the others. We win twice. One year it is too far to travel, but the second time my mother decides we can stretch to it. When we arrive at the State Equestrian Centre, I’m uninspired by the trophy display. Even here, even at the states, there is only one trophy between the four people on the team. It’s smaller than the ones my brother brings home on any average weekend.
I decide I want to be a stockman. I fall in love with romanticised stories of colonial frontiers, 'The Man from Snowy River' and Norah of Billabong. Norah never lets being a girl hold her back. I go through a phase of riding everywhere bareback in emulation of her 'natural ease on a horse', which culminates abruptly when I come off riding bareback out in the forest and break my jaw. My mother is there. She leaves me with my sister, semi-conscious on the side of the road, to ride hell-for-leather home, get the car, drive back out and pick me up. My friends ask me later:

'If it was so bad, why didn’t she call an ambulance?'

'We were out in the bush,' I say. 'No mobile service, and anyway, an ambulance wouldn’t have gotten through.' This is an exaggeration, but it is closer to romantic to imagine the need for a four-wheel drive. And a mad dash with a horse is a much better story. I have something new to tell the clients in my mother’s clinic, while waiting to clean the table. Oh yes, a nice sport for a young girl, I think, smug, describing how I bled from one ear.

My mother buys me an autobiography, Gillian Rolton’s—the first time I have ever read of someone’s real life. I am mildly alarmed by her childhood, which features exploits riding bareback to which I have already proved myself unequal. But I am enthralled by her Olympic eventing career. I no longer want to be a stockman. I daydream of the prestige and perfection of the international stage. In 1992, I read, Rolton was The First Woman to Win an
Equestrian Olympic Medal, and it impresses me no end. She had to travel to England and beat all the men to get on the team. Funny, I think, how it’s a nice sport for young girls, but it’s men who get to compete on the national team. They win gold. In 1996 she makes the team again, and again is the only woman. She falls in the early stages of the cross country. She gets back on with broken ribs and a broken collar-bone. She falls again at the water and adds a punctured lung to the rest. Once again, she gets back on and she makes it through to the end of the course. They take her off to the hospital, and she refuses painkillers in case one of the other team-members fails to finish and they need her to ride in the show jumping the next day. The team wins gold. I decide I haven’t the courage for eventing. I daydream instead of dressage. My friends at school are sceptical.

‘Is that the one where you go round in circles? The prancy one?’ Sylvia has never been near my horses. She is allergic. She fails to see the subtlety of dressage, something which fills me both with frustration and a simmering superiority.

‘I’d like to see you try,’ I say.

‘No thanks,’ she replies, ‘horses smell.’ And that is the end of it. The girls at school all play netball. The boys at school all play football. There are a handful of students who ride, and I hate being beaten by them when I come up against them in competition. When any of us win, the school adds our achievements somewhere deep in the newsletter. The football team gets a weekly update on the front page.
Gillian Rolton dies. She makes the morning news. I cry, sitting in front of the television with a plate of toast in my lap. My husband laughs at me. I haven’t owned my own horse in years, though I still ride when I can. Rolton dies in Adelaide, of endometrial cancer, still organising the Adelaide International Horse Trials from her hospital room. I think of my mother, coming home tired and smelling of the clinic. I think of my mother teaching us how to love our work. I think of her teaching me to dress a hoof abscess, and her driving me to teams practice once a week after school, and her riding home flat-chat with me left bleeding out in the forest. I think of her eyebrow when clients in her consultation room asked stupid questions, as she examined their obese dogs on the table. I finish my toast and go to work. At odd moments, I daydream of dressage.

Catherine Noske is a lecturer in Creative Writing and editor of *Westerly Magazine* at the University of Western Australia. Her work has been awarded the A.D. Hope Prize, the Elyne Mitchell Prize for Rural Women Writers, and shortlisted for the Dorothy Hewett Award.
SUE SUMMERS | ELSIE BANËR: TWENTIETH CENTURY AUSTRALIAN CROQUET CHAMPION

Elsie Banër was one of Australia’s leading croquet players from 1935-1965. She was born in 1900, lived in Melbourne, Victoria, began to play croquet in the early 1930s, and represented the Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club.

Elsie was celebrated by her peers as 'a natural' and 'a delight to watch' with ongoing references to her 'brilliant and unprecedented success', 'outstanding play', and 'marvellous performance', plus a wide acknowledgement of her 'determination, pluck and vigour' and her 'long and distinguished record'.

Her ability to master the game in an exceptionally short time was unique: she started to play in 1933, won the Metropolitan C Grade Championship in 1935, the prestigious Australia-wide English Silver Medal (B Grade) in 1936, and then participated in her first national English Gold Medal Competition in 1937, which was described by the Melbourne Argus as 'the champion of champions event'. Her rise from a C Grade to an A Grade player in the space of just two to three years was acknowledged as a 'unique record in the croquet world'—one that also raised the profile of those around her:

Dear Mrs Banër,

I am getting tired of congratulating you, it’s becoming a habit. I must give you bouquets without flattery, for your nerve, grit and continued application has rewarded you with not only a medal, but the plaudits of the club and the respect of croquet players everywhere. Officially and unofficially I thank you and again congratulate you for putting Ringwood on the map.

Claude Skelton, Hon Sec, Ringwood Bowling Club.
12 December 1934
Elsie Banër's successes continued for the next three decades as she represented Victoria in croquet tournaments in New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania. Throughout that time there were hundreds of newspaper items outlining her weekly play and her successes, in the Melbourne *Argus*, the *Age*, *Sporting Globe*, *Croquet Gazette*, and numerous interstate newspapers including the *West Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Adelaide Advertiser*, and Queensland's *Courier Mail*.³
The game of croquet originated in Ireland, was introduced to England in the early 1850s, and shortly after was brought to Victoria by upper class English settlers. Special lawns were established on larger properties in Melbourne and in country towns, and no garden party was seen to be complete without a game of croquet. Knowledge of the game spread rapidly, and, by the turn of the century, croquet was increasingly adopted by the general public—men and women alike. Clubs quickly spread across metropolitan and country areas, the laws were codified and tightened up, and croquet evolved into a skilled and complex game.4

The increasing popularity of croquet in the early 20th century was due, in part, to the impact it had on women’s day-to-day lives: meeting friends on the lawn proved far more lively and sociable than the established practice of receiving friends at home.5 Elsie also blossomed and flourished as croquet offered her far more opportunities and possibilities than a life largely tied to the home. According to her daughter: 'She really was famous. When she first began to play she was still quite young, attractive, good looking, with an outgoing personality, and she was absolutely brilliant at her game. She was a natural'.6 Further, Elsie actively involved herself in the Club she represented, as she took on the roles of President, Secretary, and Treasurer; she was also a mentor to up-and-coming players up to the 1970s.

It is very clear that croquet was a sport taken seriously, its popularity demonstrated by the thousands of newspaper articles dedicated to the game for a significant portion of the 20th century. Valued for its precision and strategy, it was described as the most scientific of all lawn games—a cross between billiards and chess.7 Elsie, for example, perfected the art of a jump shot: she would quietly assess the field, and as she made play her ball would travel some distance across the lawn before it would rise up—or jump over—an opponent’s ball and then continue along its path to pass through the hoop.
Well after the death of Elsie Banër in 1983, the popularity of croquet began to wane and this impacted negatively on an understanding, or appreciation, of the considerable skills that underpin the game. When Elsie’s family attempted to have her contribution formally acknowledged in Victoria in the late 1990s, the response was polite but dismissive. In 2016, however, Elsie Banër’s collection of official correspondence, trophies, photos, medals and croquet mallet was offered to Museum Victoria along with detailed documentation of her personal life and sporting successes. The curator at Museum Victoria was quick to acknowledge Elsie’s ‘amazing career as a champion croquet player’ describing the collection as a ‘wonderful story, particularly that of a female sporting champion over a long period of time’. This response is one positive expression of a changing attitude towards women in sport, as the Museum took on the collection as a special project, exploring, through the lens of Elsie Banër’s successes, the history of croquet in Victoria over the past 160 years.

Progress has been made!

Dr Sue Summers was Managing Editor of Black Swan Press at Curtin University from 2007-2017. Formerly an anthropologist and broadcast journalist, Sue is now completing a number of research projects—with a view to publication—amidst a busy post-retirement life.
Elsie Banér (second from right) and team following another success in Tasmania in 1958. Photo from author’s family collection.

1. The first mention of her name was in the Melbourne Argus on 13 October 1933.
3. It is impossible to do a detailed count of newspaper items in the National Library of Australia’s Trove database. A search for ‘Elsie Baner’ yields one result, yet ‘Mrs Baner’ as a phrase together with ‘croquet’ as a key word, leads to hundreds of results. There are also several results under ‘Mrs F. [Fred] Baner’ as a phrase together with ‘croquet’ as a key word. Unfortunately, such a search also picks up on Mrs Ban, Banning, banner, bane, ban, and hundreds of other miscellaneous items and typos which further complicate an accurate assessment.  
5. ibid.  
I landed a job at the Age newspaper in Melbourne after writing for two years at Leader Newspapers, a Rupert Murdoch suburban news company.

I was intensely passionate about women’s sport and I wanted to be a champion of the cause for women becoming recognised as genuine athletes. In that era, male journalists weren’t that interested in women’s sport. Their main interests were AFL, cricket and horse racing.

At the Age I started reporting on softball and netball. My first back page was about a softballer. The picture took up most of the broadsheet page and the only reason it was placed there was because it was a sensational photo and it ran on a Tuesday. The story itself was a simple colour profile. However, it was great to land that back page in 1992, even if getting another proved difficult as AFL and cricket dominated the pages. You just accept it and get used to it—I felt that way because I was lucky to have a job.

But I was determined to write on AFL and it was very competitive, so I crossed to the Sunday Herald Sun with the hope I would someday write about footy. I was lucky in that I was given a full page on women’s sport at the Sunday Herald Sun, which was supported by advertising. This has not happened for a long time in the Sunday papers.

When the boss was on holidays, I contributed AFL stories. It wasn’t well received. I was told I couldn’t write on AFL because I couldn’t get into the changerooms. That made me extremely determined to get in. So I asked the Australian if I could write AFL for them—and I kept in touch until I was
assigned a game. At my first match, in 1994, I was pushed away—roughly—from the changerooms. This was blokes’ turf after all. I was eventually allowed in the Hawthorn rooms, with some help from blokes in the boys’ club. They backed me.

For four years I was in and out of changerooms as a journalist for the *Australian*, and, during that era, the environment was difficult and unfriendly for female journalists. It was uncomfortable and I always felt like I was treading on the blokes’ turf. At the Whitten Oval, in Footscray, I was forced to stand a metre from the wall, facing it, while naked footballers walked through the changerooms. One day, a footballer screamed: 'Ahhhhh, there's a girl! Ahhhhhhhhhhh!' He screamed out loud, mocking my presence. I was often the only woman in the press box, and, while I spoke to the guys, I focused on my work and didn’t really fit in. The press box was blokes’ turf and it wasn’t a place that felt comfortable. After seven years of academic study, my mindset was different to a typical sports journalist and I felt academia might be a better calling in the long term. I would later return to academia to reach my potential as a lecturer and academic.

After having a baby—and trying to feed my son around sports matches—I decided to return to the *Leader*. Family-friendly hours were great and I loved the change to general news, without having to worry about the changeroom issues. I lost my interest in AFL because reporting it proved difficult. After all, I was treading on blokes’ turf. There was a time I wrote NBL basketball, when it was at its peak in Australia. Female journalists were treated well by NBL media—and there was an interview room, like there is at AFL games today. Today’s era is much improved, as the AFL has become more professional with every aspect of the game, including how it caters for journalists.
I wrote general news and sport for several years while raising my children. I returned to the *Herald Sun* in 2007. As a digital sports editor, I was one of a few ladies who worked in sport. At one stage, I was the only female on the sports desk. It’s an isolating feeling, as most conversations are geared towards the interests of men. So you become one of the boys. I later moved to news again, in a more senior digital role, and I felt happier. The gender balance was there on the news desk. The lesson I learned while working in sport is that you can’t fight it, you make the most of it. To fit in with the boys, you become one of them—and absorb the tensions, the differences of opinion and forget about the colourful language and banter. I just focused on doing the best job possible—and being professional.

I also learned the best place for women’s sport is at community level. It is easier to cover women’s sport in community newspapers and on community radio, as there is a larger audience that does not rely on huge companies and products for significant airtime. The internet is solving a lot of problems with women’s sport coverage, as more stories can be published on news websites. Newspapers previously had a finite number of pages, but digital space is endless and, therefore, helping female athletes get the exposure they deserve.

The recent boom in AFLW coverage has been unprecedented and a breath of fresh air. The AFL is leading the way with this cultural change and there is plenty of good work being done behind the scenes, as corporate partners generously support the growth of this new development in women’s football.
Before the AFLW was formed, there was a cultural issue with women’s sports coverage. There is still much work to be done, but changes to the coverage have been embraced by editors and it is something I did not foresee happening in this country. The AFL has been the instigator of change, but, happily, other sports have followed suit, including cricket and soccer. However, there is not a lot of money at grassroots women’s sport. Coverage of up-and-coming athletes can be successfully achieved through community newspapers. These local papers run Sports Stars, and if an athlete is nominated they will most likely get a run. The best way to manage women’s sport at grassroots level is through the internet, social media websites and building a culture of social engagement. This is the way of the future.

Julie Tullberg teaches digital journalism in Monash University’s School of Media, Film and Journalism. Julie enjoyed a career at News Corp for more than 20 years. Julie was formerly a Herald Sun digital editor in news and sport. A qualified educator, Julie has taught journalism since 2006 at News Corp and Monash.
GERA WOLTJER | C R O S S I N G

A large body of my artwork uses the public swimming pool as a subject. My Pool Works are derived from my experience and connection as a lap swimmer with this water environment, what I see from the side of the pool before I start my training, and what I see, while swimming, through my goggles. In contrast to swimming laps in the Netherlands, my country of birth, in Australia, I often have a whole swimming lane for myself—sometimes even the entire pool. This makes the experience of swimming completely different.

My training sessions of 2x2000 metres per week have become a kind of ritual which makes me physically and mentally strong. While swimming I experience strength, perseverance, and a ‘long breath’. The rhythm of going up and down the pool, the swimming stroke, and my breathing work meditatively. These components allow me to rise above myself. Swimming is a metaphor for life in many ways.

The translation from swimming to work of art is—just like swimming—a lengthy process. I make considered and deliberate choices in deciding which medium would best communicate the concept I want to display and push this theme conceptually and materially to create my art. Pool Works will include eight exhibitions with the title C R O S S I N G, held between 2015 and 2023. The number of each subsequent exhibition changes until number eight is reached, which is equal to the number of lanes in a standard competition pool. For every exhibition I add new work and adapt old works to the new exhibition space, in order to transform each space into a conceptual pool.
Cross Lap #2, 2014.

Untitled (Deken #1), 2015.

Caroline Forsberg, an arts writer in Perth, wrote an essay for the first exhibition, *C R O S S I N G 1*, at Nyisztor Studio in Melville 2015. This is a shortened version of the text:


As a body of water changes its course, its twists and turns causing ripples to spread out and create new interactions in its space, so too have Gera Woltjer’s past artistic influences permeated her current body of work. Gera is stimulated creatively by the concept of communal swimming pools. She endeavours to recreate and capture the fluidity and nature of the water in a swimming pool, an environment she visits regularly to do swim workouts. She relishes the rules, the tiled grids, the lane markings, the turning tee, and the movements of the swimmers, which change the visuals of the grids and lines. Gera states ‘I move so often that I do not know sometimes where my home is. I thought wherever I go if I go to the pool . . . a pool is a pool. It does not matter where you are, pools seem to be the same in most parts of the world.’ Gera’s current body of work is informed by her interest in the geometric aesthetics of communal pools, the use of form and line within the confines of structure, and the concept of fluidity. Gera has pushed this theme conceptually and materially with the new photographic and video works.
Meditative calm and order is demonstrated in Gera’s piece, ‘Untitled (Deken #1)’. The title is derived from the Dutch word for ‘blanket’. The scale of this digital print work, when shown, is 1:10 of a typical short course metre pool and Gera has crafted it with heavy-duty vinyl reutilised from recycled inflatable pools. Here, we see Gera herself take on a powerful position, and—as she is the figure that is photographed in the piece—you could argue that this is a self-portrait. Gera is imbued with a sense of movement, of agency as she performs the butterfly stroke through the pool. Her body renders itself with the same appearance as the ‘Ts’, which mark the supposed ends of the pool. It could appear to some viewers that there is no end; the pool could continue on, the artist could swim into nothingness. This tension introduces a sense of controlled chaos to the piece; however, it does not threaten to overwhelm the sense of calm. Gera is frozen in this position, yet she still manages to convey her action, her movement so visually successfully. The same could be said for the artistic output Gera has created and achieved for this body of Pool Works. It demonstrates her artistic evolution, through her use of new media and materials. Gera is marking her own lines now, as she has pushed, challenged and propelled herself to her own personal marked finish line.

Gera Woltjer is a Perth based multi-disciplined artist whose practice focuses on exploring the materiality of her concept and the chosen medium, aiming to observe and articulate aspects of the human condition, identity, and the complexity of patterns that occur naturally in the world around us.
ABOUT CSRR

Initiated in 2009 as a collaboration of Curtin University and the Department of Sport and Recreation WA (now Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries) CSRR is an independent advocacy and research centre that generates applied research and provokes new thinking in, for and through sport and recreation.

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