



## SERA WATERS

Sera is currently working from Adelaide after having spent her childhood in Mt. Gambier. Since being awarded a Ruth Tuck Scholarship in 2006 to study hand embroidery at the Royal School of Needlework (UK), Waters' art practice has been characterised by a darkly stitched meticulousness. Her embroideries and hand-crafted sculptures examine settler colonial home-making patterns and practices, and intertwine these gaps in history with references to her own genealogical ghostscapes. In 2017 she was the recipient of the inaugural ACE Open South Australian artist commission, where she staged her solo exhibition *Domestic Arts*. Her works are held by the Cruthers collection of Women's art, Ararat Gallery TAMA, the Art Gallery of South Australia and private collections nationwide. Waters is a studio member of The Incinerator, Thebarton, lecturer at Adelaide Central School of Art, and is represented by Hugo Michell Gallery.

Growing up in Mount Gambier I had a stable, comfortable and protective family life. I remember my childhood and teenage years as being cocooned by nature and full of potential mystery: the dark soil, caves underfoot, strange creatures (like the Tantanoola Tiger), limestone and mineral-rich waterways, our 'deadly' bike-riding hill, giant holes in the ground, or being surrounded by pine forests in which all manner of things occurred. For me, there was a cocoon-like security in the rich volcanic black earth, the lush green growth, and high-water levels that I still carry deep inside of me today. This equated to survival, and by contrast I feel uneasy in desert scapes. As an adult I came to realise my understanding of this region

was a biased one based upon historical gaps, untold narratives, with only small glimpses beyond the pioneer and pastoralist history that things may have once been otherwise. I benefitted from this giving land and sensed there were other stories but had little understanding of its past. My sense of belonging there (or anywhere for that matter) is rightly unsettled, and my art operates from this ambiguous and questioning position always seeking layers and gaps.

I've since learned that my ancestors were some of the earlier settler colonists to make their home in Mount Gambier, and not long after to open a cheese factory in Tantanoola in the 1850s and 1860s. These areas had

a lot more water in them before settlers, including my ancestors, petitioned for drains to be put in to send the water out to sea to make the land easier to farm. Other ancestors, these based in Port Adelaide, had ketches and would deliver goods and building materials upon the sea all along the South Australian coastline. This undoubtedly sped up the rate of growing settlement, building, clearing and infrastructure. My practice continually asks what do I do with this knowledge? Where do I belong? How can I take responsibility for my ignorance, for theirs, for the damage that has been done, all the while acknowledging that histories are complex and messy and important to know for going into a future. Water is critical to this future which makes the south-east a region of great interest.

In my practice I turn to intergenerational and passed along textile traditions to literally grasp how my ancestors could have navigated and internalised the unsettling side of their settling. How they might have reflected the great changes they inflicted on Country, and how I have at times unwittingly carried on these colonising habits. Truth-telling is a key part of my practice. In traditions and in artefacts I search for their knowledge and evidence of their experiences (and that of their wider family) that weren't passed along with historical narratives, and I look for clues to how they survived. I also search out other ways of knowing a place, knowing its past, and then I shift these trajectories (these textile traditions) to head towards a different future where recognition and responsibility, listening and caring, are central.

My proposed response will be based upon these carefully and handmade textile traditions, as well as in the knowledge of local communities, which come to not only know a place but embody it and replicate it in their makings, in order to survive. My work will bring together the dark palette of the south-east, sculptural and homely textile forms in bodily scales (thinking of door snakes, cushions, quilts, and domestic decorative textiles) with the natural features of the South-east, such as caves, forests, limestone and water. This installation will manifest spaces and gaps of knowledge in the forms of caves, drains and holes, to point to pasts and presents that are unknown, unacknowledged, disavowed or under-scrutinised; the places where I believe more dwelling can occur

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