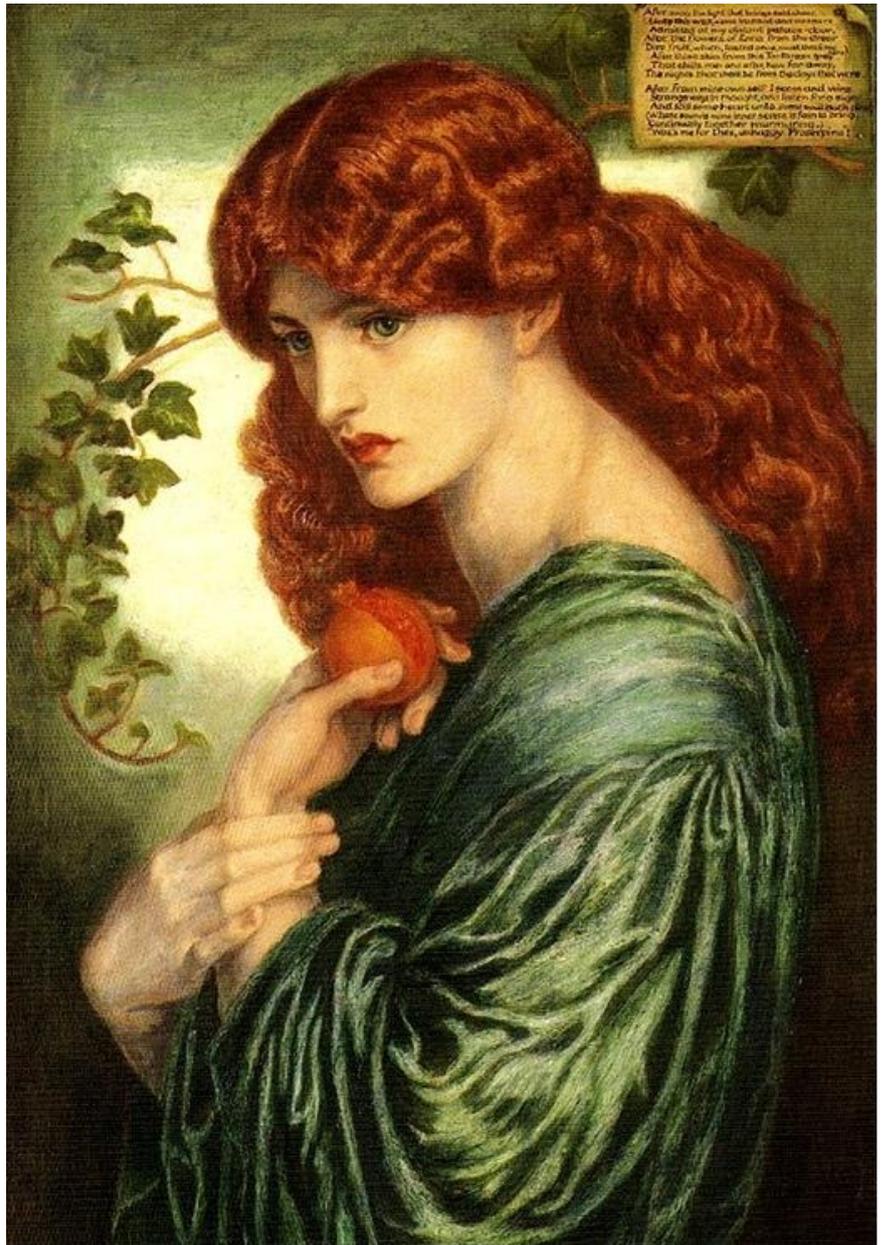


# Newsletter 21 ♦ March 2024

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Lizzie Siddal as Proserpina,  
By Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

## From the Chair With Dianne Stuart

I hope you had a very enjoyable and relaxing time over the Christmas/ New Year break and have welcomed 2024 in good health and high spirits.

James and I were walking with friends in Tasmania, so unfortunately missed our first lecture of the year, however I hear Anne Sebba provided an excellent insight into the injustice and brutal execution of Ethel Rosenberg, which generated a lively follow-up question time.

Our 2024 lecture series offers a diverse array of topics. To quote Marion Pescud:  
*"Look forward to delving further into the visual arts, learn about interesting characters – their lives, inspirations and aspirations, and the history and culture of the time in which they lived and worked. Take a seat at the bohemian dinner table of those who introduced European cuisine to Australia – peppered with avant garde artworks, passion and a dash of scandal. Take a virtual stroll through the Oxford Botanical Gardens while considering the evolution of garden design. We have done our best to ensure there is something for everybody!"*

We will continue our affiliation with the Southern Cross Soloists and the Bangalow Chamber Music Festival, and again we will be supporting an upcoming talent via our Young Arts Programme.

We have two new faces on our committee this year, although you most surely know them from previous ArtsNational functions. Tom Trembath and Catherine White will join the other volunteer committee members serving our society in the necessary tasks of marketing, home hosting, the Young Arts Programme, lecture selection, raffle organisation, and newsletter creation. Tom will also take on the all-important role of barman.

Peter Harden will retain his position as treasurer and Diana Harden will remain secretary. As this is my fourth and last year as chair, I urge you to consider who might take over and assist in the transition.



Finally, I'd like to extend a warm welcome to our new members, and thanks to our returning members for their continued support. Our very existence relies on you.

 Dianne Stuart

## New Banner

In keeping with our new look, the new ArtsNational Northern Rivers banner was unveiled at our first lecture for the year. Marion Pescud designed the banner, while Diana Harden organised its manufacture.



Marion Pescud and Diana Harden  
with the new banner

## 2023 Committee Christmas Luncheon

Last December, Dianne and James Stuart hosted a luncheon at their beautiful rural property to celebrate another successful year for our Northern Rivers society, and to thank the 2023 committee members for their hard work.



Above: Dianne Stuart (Chair), Erica Light, Marion Pescud, Sue Anderson, Diana Harden, Peter Harden, Carole Gamble.

Absent: Chris Chaseling and Wendy Edwards.

Right: James Stuart (brilliant barman), Craig Snyder (intrepid IT man) and Diana Harden (super secretary).

☞ Marion Pescud



## Welcome Morning Tea

In late February, Dianne Stuart hosted a morning tea at her home to welcome new members to ArtsNational Northern Rivers. Seven new members were able to attend, enjoying the relaxed atmosphere and chatter with some committee members.

Dianne explained the aims of the society and our endeavours to bring art and culture to our region in a friendly and stimulating environment.

Thank you for providing a friendly reception to the new members at our first lecture. We look forward to more happy gatherings throughout the year.



Anne Sebba

## March Lecture: Artistic and Cultural Representations of Ethel Rosenberg and the Making of an American Icon

Our first lecture for the year was presented by international lecturer, Anne Sebba, who told the shocking story about the barbaric death of Ethel Rosenberg, electrocuted by the US Government in 1953 on trumped up charges of espionage.

In the hysterical anti-communist post WWII era, Ethel and her husband Julius were both put to death for conspiring with the Russians. Because Ethel was two and a half years older than Julius, it was deemed that she was the stronger of the two and had instigated the relationship with Moscow. Although she was a card-carrying communist, there was

no evidence that she was a traitor to her country. She genuinely wanted an egalitarian society, believing her sons would have a better life in a more homogenous environment. Julius however, was passing state secrets to Russia.

FBI boss Edgar J. Hoover stated that the evidence against Ethel was 'shaky at best', however he ordered her arrest as 'a lever' to extract information about her husband's activities. She remained tight-lipped, unlike her brother David who at first said she had nothing to do with the 'spy ring', but later and under government pressure, changed his story claiming that Ethel had typed up espionage papers. It was her brother's testimony that sealed Ethel's fate. The government used her as a scapegoat – to save face, and as an example to others engaged in passing state secrets.

Ethel's death was botched by an incompetent executioner who failed to secure the straps of the electric chair adequately, and did not wet them sufficiently to conduct the current. A reporter who witnessed the event, yielded to the government's assertion that she had to be electrocuted twice because of her extraordinary strength. On a news broadcast he claimed that on the second attempt, "a ghastly plume of smoke rose from her head up into the rafters". The execution divided the nation – there were those who protested, but more who saw her as a traitor responsible for the deaths of military personnel serving in North Korea.



The last photograph of Ethel and Julius together



10-year-old Michael Rosenberg comforts his younger brother, Robert, six, after a their visit to Sing Sing prison shortly before their parents' execution.

Papers released after her brother's death convinced more people to view her execution as a grave miscarriage of justice – as a government sacrificing its morality by pandering to whipped up hysteria against the Russians and their development of atomic weapons.

Writers and artists are still protesting against the US government's killing of Ethel Rosenberg, and its wilful insistence that she was guilty when they were aware she was not. Even Edgar J. Hoover appealed to Eisenhower to issue a stay of execution, but the President was afraid that he'd be perceived as being 'soft' on communism. After Ethel's execution, the government spitefully tried to thwart her two sons from being adopted, preferring they be institutionalised to prevent them from claiming that their parents were martyrs.

Poems, books and countless essays have been written about Ethel's death, and artists have made political statements with visions of electric chairs and events that depicted the sham trial. Anne Sebba screened some of these poignant works which illustrated the depth of feelings over the event. Anne's lecture was thoroughly researched, professionally presented, and well received.

## March Post Lecture Gathering

Following our first lecture of the year, members and guests gathered to enjoy a chat and light refreshments





Post Lecture Supper



March Raffle

Congratulations to the winners. The first raffle prize was won by Sue Craig who received the book *Ethel Rosenberg: the Short Life and Great Betrayal of an American Wife and Mother*, signed by the author, Anne Sebba.

*The Book of Daniel* by E. L. Doctorow, a semi-historical novel is loosely based on the lives, trial and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, was won by Andrew Dingjan

Left: Winners Andrew Dingjan and Sue Craig with author and lecturer, Anne Sebba (centre)

## The New Yarrila Arts and Museum, Coffs Harbour

Last December, Helen Revis (a member of ArtsNational Northern Rivers) and I joined the Friends of the Lismore Regional Gallery on a bus excursion to the Yarrila Arts and Museum (YAM) in Coffs Harbour. YAM is located in the central business district, within the new City of Coffs Harbour building. Yarrila is a Gumbaynggir word meaning to brighten or illuminate. The Gumbaynggir people are the traditional custodians of the Coffs Harbour area.



Helen Revis



Yarrila Place

The complex, named 'Yarrila Place', was fully funded by Coffs Harbour City Council to the tune of \$82,000,000. There was no federal or state government funding, other than \$500,000 from the State Library of NSW Public Library Infrastructure Grant. The lead architect on the project was former Coffs Harbour local, Matthew Blair, who now resides in London. The building is amazing – comprising an unusual façade of green bricks, an internal atrium and interesting sculptures in the outdoor areas.

On arrival, our group was met by the Cultural Services Team Leader in the forecourt of the building where she provided an information session about the unique aspect of the facility. She explained that it housed the City of Coffs Harbour administration and customer service departments, the Harry Bailey Memorial Library, the Yarrila Arts

and Museum, and The Workshop, a vibrant space providing opportunities for people to engage in art-making and creativity. The location of these entities in the one civic complex has increased attendances at both the Library and YAM.

We were then treated to a tour of the new museum and gallery by the Senior Curator, followed by a viewing of the Australian Geographic Nature Photographer of the Year (courtesy of the South Australian Museum), and the STILL National Still Life Awards 2023. STILL is a biennial acquisitive award for still life artworks across all mediums.

I highly recommend a visit to Yarrila Place. For those passing through Coffs Harbour, perhaps a visit to Yarrila could be combined with attendance at one of ArtsNational Coffs Coast's lectures.



For more information:

- Yarrila Place Complex [www.bvn.com.au/project/yarrila-place](http://www.bvn.com.au/project/yarrila-place)
- Yarrila Arts and Museum [yarrilaartsandmuseum.com.au](http://yarrilaartsandmuseum.com.au).
- ArtsNational Coffs Harbour [www.artsnational.au/societies/coffs-coast/](http://www.artsnational.au/societies/coffs-coast/)

 Annie Abbink  
Chair, ArtsNational Patricia Robertson Fund  
Member, ArtsNational Northern Rivers

## Lizzie Siddal: Tragic Darling of the Pre-Raphaelites



*'Elizabeth Siddal', Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1852*

Born in Central London in 1829, Elizabeth Eleanor (Lizzie) Siddal was employed in a millinery shop when she met Walter Deverell, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a secret society made up of seven artists and writers. Deverell gushingly described her as 'magnificently tall, with a lovely figure, and a face of the most delicate and finished modelling ... she has grey eyes, and her hair is like dazzling copper, and shimmers with lustre'.

The Pre-Raphaelite group, formed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1849, also included William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais – all students at London's Royal Academy. They apparently agreed with Deverell's excited enthusiasm for Lizzie's looks, because she became a model for each of them, featuring in their most famous works.

While too thin to fit the conventional concept of beauty, Lizzie possessed an ethereal quality that suited the Pre-Raphaelite agenda of Arthurian and Medieval themes featuring real, rather than idealised classical figures. Due to the success of the paintings in which she appeared Lizzie helped change the public perception of beauty.

Mrs Siddal agreed to her daughter becoming a model – which society considered just a short step away from prostitution – only after Deverell sent his own very respectable mother in her grand carriage to champion his cause.

Lizzie not only looked delicate – she was. Some historians believe she suffered from Tuberculosis, while others insist that she had a stomach complaint. She was melancholic, frequently bed ridden and always in pain – eventually becoming addicted to laudanum.

While modelling for John Everett Maillais' painting of 'Ophelia', the artist insisted that Lizzie float in a bathtub to portray the drowning Ophelia. Millais put oil lamps under the tub to warm the water, however on one occasion, the lamps went out, the water became icy cold. Lizzie contracted pneumonia. Her furious father held Millais responsible and, under threat of legal action, the artist was forced to pay the doctor's bills.



*Detail from 'Ophelia', John Everett Millais, 1851–52*



In addition to an art model, Lizzie became a poet and an artist in her own right. Rossetti was teaching her to paint, when art critic John Ruskin saw her work in 1854, and proclaimed her a 'genius'. He provided her with an annual stipend of £150 to continue painting. In 1857, she was the only woman to exhibit at the Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition in London, where one of her paintings, 'Clerk Saunders', was bought by an influential US collector.

Rossetti met Lizzie in 1849 and she quickly became his muse and main model. Rossetti was jealous and by 1852 they were engaged and he insisted that she forego modelling for others. Rossetti was obsessed with Lizzie and it is estimated that he produced hundreds of drawings, paintings and poems devoted to her. However, he would not marry her!

*Left: 'Clerk Saunders', Lizzie Siddal, 1857.*

Despite encouragement from Ruskin, Rossetti resisted matrimony. Possibly because Lizzie was from a working-class family and mocked by his sisters, perhaps because of her ill health and addiction, maybe because of financial reasons, or a selfish reluctance to give up his other lovers. Although he adored Lizzie, he was a serial philanderer.

After ten years of disappointment and suspicion leading to depression, Lizzie had had enough. She felt that Rossetti and Ruskin were controlling her life, so she forfeited Ruskin's annuity, left London and enrolled in the Sheffield School of Art. Rossetti made a few sporadic visits, however letters from London revealed his continuing affairs with other women, so Lizzie ended the relationship in 1858.

Lizzie's health declined further and in 1860 she became dangerously ill. Her family contacted Ruskin, who in turn told Rossetti. When he heard the news he rushed to her side with a marriage licence in his pocket, and they were married. Still very weak, Lizzie had to be carried to the church,



A Rossetti drawing of Siddal, 1852

Lizzie became pregnant during their long honeymoon in Paris. She was delighted at the prospect of motherhood, but couldn't give up the laudanum, and in 1861 she gave birth to a stillborn daughter. She became engulfed in a deep depression, mourning the loss of her child and convinced that Rossetti had resumed his philandering (although his friends insisted it was not so). She became pregnant again, and her depression was exacerbated by anxiety. The marriage was suffering.

On 10 February 1862, the couple dined with a friend, then Rossetti settled Lizzie before heading off to teach a night class at the Working Men's College. He noticed there was a half-full bottle of laudanum by the bed, however on his return the bottle was empty and Lizzie was unresponsive. The first attending doctor advised that he was unable to save her, so Rossetti sent for another three medics! She died at 7:20am the following morning, aged just 32.

The coroner ruled Lizzie's death as accidental, however rumours suggest that Rossetti found a suicide note and destroyed it to avoid scandal and ensure his wife could have a Christian burial. She was laid to rest in the Rossetti family plot, so one can assume that she was finally accepted by her husband's relatives.

Surprisingly, Lizzie's story does not end here, and what happened next elevated the melancholic woman to a gothic cult figure. Rossetti had interred his poems with Lizzie, however after seven years he decided to retrieve them. It should be noted that by now, some of his acquaintances considered him 'insane'.



'Beata Beatrix', Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1863

Stealthily on an autumn night in 1869, Lizzie's coffin was exhumed. Highgate Cemetery was unlit, so a large fire was built so the grave robbers could see what they were doing by the light of the flames. The plan was master-minded by Rossetti's friend and self-appointed agent, Charles Augustus Howell, who later reported that Lizzie was 'beautifully preserved' and that her hair had grown to fill the coffin with a brilliant copper glow which shone in the firelight. It was this testimony that conceived the myth that 'Lizzie remains undead'.

The poems were published in 1870 to great acclaim, which added to the legend of Lizzie Siddal. Even after death she inspired Rossetti. He reused her designs and continued to paint her portrait, the most famous post-death portrait being 'Beata Beatrix' completed one year after she passed away.

During Lizzie's career as an artist from 1852 to 1861, she produced more than a hundred works – sketches, watercolours and oils. Unpublished during her lifetime, her poetry was dark, often dwelling on the themes of lost love, or the impossibility of true love.

However, Lizzie is most remembered for being the original supermodel, for changing the perception of beauty personified, and for the sad insecurities she suffered during her short lifetime.

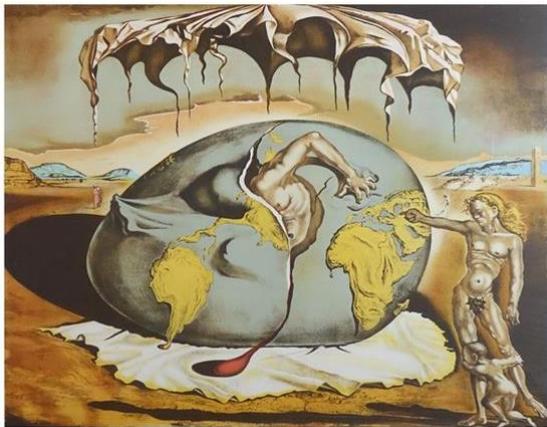
## Salvador Dali

I recently read *Wifedom*, Anna Funder's book about writer George Orwell, and how abysmally he treated his wife. The author had very definite ideas about the duality of 'decency' – of how a person's personality failures should be distinct from their work. In his opinion, he should be lauded for his writing while his appalling behaviour toward his wife should be ignored. He named Dickens, Shakespeare and Dali as those who should be revered for their creative output while their cruel misdeeds toward their wives should be dismissed.



Salvador Dali

As Salvador Dali features quite heavily in our new ArtsNational publicity material, I thought I'd check this out further. Orwell was disgusted by Dali's 'necrophiliac urges and his fascination with excrement', and the sadistic treatment toward his wife. (Don't throw stones, Orwell!!)



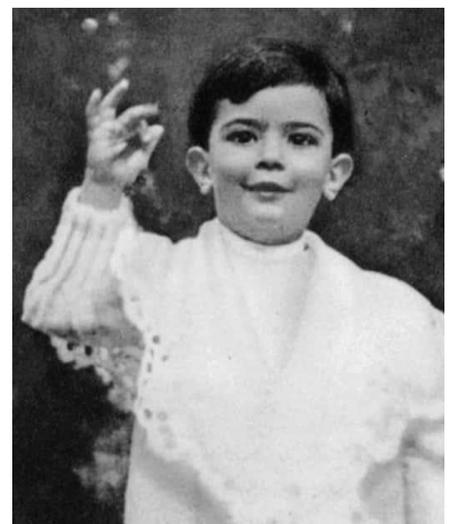
*Geopoliticus: child watching the birth of the new man*  
Salvador Dali, 1943

Dali was an innovative showman. He produced paintings, sculpture, fashion, advertisements, books, and film. His painting progressed from traditional realism to cubism, then to the surrealism for which he became most famous. His moustache grew longer as his reputation for outrageous behaviour grew deeper. He said that he dreamt of Adolf Hitler as a woman, claiming that the dictator 'turned him on'. In 1934, his fellow European surrealists officially expelled Dalí from their group because of his fascination with Hitler.

Dali and his wife travelled to the United States where he continued his controversial ways. Returning to Europe eight years later, he was still the consummate showman. He arrived at an event in Paris in a Rolls-Royce stuffed with cauliflowers, and he gifted actress Mia Farrow a dead mouse in a hand-painted bottle. His work took on the more kitsch commercial quality of pop art. In his later years he became known more as a cultural icon than serious artist, but today he is acknowledged as being an eccentric genius.

What of Dalí the man? Salvador Domingo Felipe Jacinto Dalí i Domènech, Marquis of Dalí de Púbol, was born into a middle-class family in Catalonia, Spain in 1904. He believed that he was the reincarnation of his brother, also named Salvador, who had died exactly nine months before his birth. His childhood was plagued with rage and disturbing behaviours. He admitted that he once bit the head off a bat, and claimed that he was drawn, but did not succumb, to necrophilia. He would throw himself down the stairs, explaining 'the pain was insignificant – the pleasure was immense'.

Dali was expelled from school after refusing to take a history exam and declaring, "I am infinitely more intelligent than these three professors." His attire and mannerisms became as flamboyant as his attitude.



Dali – the very strange child



*Dali and Gala, 1939*

His mother died when he was 16, and while his father supported his creative talent, he could not tolerate his son's disregard for social norms. He barred Dalí from the family home after the artist wrote 'Sometimes I Spit with Pleasure on the Portrait of My Mother,' on one of his drawings.

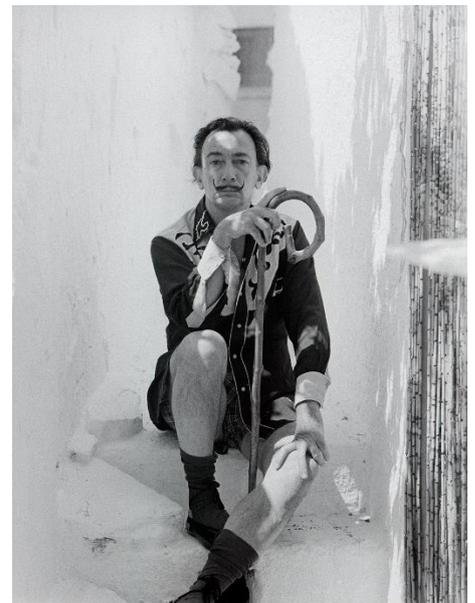
In his mid-20s, Dalí fell in love with Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova (known as Gala), who left her husband surrealist writer Paul Éluard, to marry him in 1934. Though 10 years older than Dalí, Gala served as his secretary, muse and life-long companion.

The couple never had children, and during the marriage, they both had affairs. Dalí also had erotic attachments to men. He was known to be fascinated with perversity and sadomasochism. Despite Dalí's claims of impotency, he and Gala hosted weekly orgies in their home which was littered with sex toys. He set Gala up with other men. It has been written that voyeurism provided his gratification as he had a phobia about genitalia, which was thought to have been triggered by his father showing him photographs of advanced cases of venereal diseases as part of his sex instruction.

Gala developed dementia, and from 1971 onward she would withdraw periodically to her Gothic castle in Púbol, Spain and allow Dalí to visit only by invitation. She gave him amphetamines that damaged his nervous system, thus effectively ending his painting career. Gala died at age 87 and was buried at the Púbol castle, Dalí lived there for the remaining seven years of his life.

In 2017, after Dalí had been interred for 23 years, his body was exhumed (with moustache still intact) after a woman claimed that she was his biological daughter with legal rights to part of his estate. DNA tests refuted the claim.

While I, and I suspect most others have always been aware of Dalí's eccentricity, delving into his dark side has been quite a revelation. Funder would blame patriarchy for the deviations (men do what they want, when they want), while Orwell held Dalí's 'indecent self' responsible.



 Marion Pescud

*The ever-flamboyant Salvador Dalí*



## New Curator at Lismore Regional Gallery

This month, the Lismore Regional Gallery has appointed Ineke Dane as its new curator. She comes with award-winning experience, having worked extensively around the world. Her expertise is grounded at the nexus of art and architecture, with a background in contemporary art theory, law, policy, photography and journalism.

*Left: Curator, Ineke Dane*