



## TEELAH GEORGE

Born 1984, Perth  
Lives and works in Perth

*The hygienic butcher (Ted Scot)*, 2012  
Oil and enamel on board, 39.5 x 29 cm  
Courtesy the artist and OK Gallery, Perth  
Photograph Bo Wong

The accretion of history, memory and visual art forms the conceptual foundation of Teelah George's work. Through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing painting, drawing, installation, sculpture and textiles, she examines the fraught relationship between narrative and representation, and excavates the parallel ambiguities that embed both historical record and visual art. Informed by research and archival material, George's art responds to 'the fissures and negative spaces within memory and record to form connections and raise questions about contemporary narrative and the complexities of identity'.<sup>1</sup>

A graduate of Perth's Curtin University, George has participated in group exhibitions and residencies both locally and internationally. Her first Australian solo exhibition, 'Meatworks Mens Qrtrs', was held in 2013 at OK Gallery, Perth. The series by the same name was created while she was in residence at Fremantle Arts Centre, and it mines the experiences of George's grandfather, who worked at an abattoir near coastal Wyndham in the early 1900s. Drawing from archival photographs, familial history and Ken Mellowship's memoir, *Wyndham: With a Ton of Salt* (2004), the artist translates the vernacular of her patriarchal heritage into semi-fictional portraits, prints and sculptural installations. The 'Ugliest Man Competition' series, for example, depicts abattoir workers as imagined from the abstract clichés in Mellowship's book. The rawness of George's brushwork, rendering blurred and disfigured faces in smears of subdued colour, conveys a sense of hurriedness to record a melting memory. For George, the layering of paint operates in much the same way as an archive – built over time, and capable of both revealing and concealing.

With artwork titles such as *The hygienic butcher (Ted Scot)*, 2012, and *Len (the Horse) Philips*, 2013 – real nicknames from Mellowship's memoir – the works have a redemptive quality, the words becoming mnemonic traces of a time long gone. George explained her use: *It was rough, dark, but humorous. I became obsessed with how the language seemed to embrace the negative space of memory. It was the departure point for how I developed the work, and I became familiar with the characters and stories through the nicknames and phrases.*<sup>2</sup>

Another piece in the series, colloquially titled *Shit on a stick, piss in a cup*, 2013, is also transcribed directly from Mellowship's dialect. With one wall-supported and two freestanding sculptures, the installation brings together papier-mâché, ceramic, aluminium foil, ink and enamel, its title giving form to a Wyndham family's description of dinner. Here again the artist presents an abstracted vision

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— JASMIN STEPHENS

of the past that evinces the layering of history and the development of mythologies.

For George's next solo exhibition, at Venn Gallery, Perth, she is currently engaging with the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art (Australia's largest specialist collection of women's art, housed at the University of Western Australia) in a similar manner to how she approached her grandfather's archive. George's particular interest in the Cruthers Collection lies in its transition from a private collection with domestic beginnings to a public resource, and how this impacts the interpretation of an archive and the (re)construction of history. E.W.

Solo exhibition, Venn Gallery, Perth, July 2014; group exhibition, Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide, October 2014.

<sup>1</sup> Teelah George quote from Soya 365 Qantas Spirit of Youth Awards, <http://www.soya.com.au/entrant/teelah/>.

<sup>2</sup> Quote taken from email correspondence with the author, February 2014.