TENTACULAR

Eco-anxiety, climate distress, solastalgia; an ever-expanding glossary of terms have entered our lexicon to describe the kinds of grief, worry, and despair that people feel in the face of escalating natural disasters, ecological loss, and government inaction on climate change. This project aims to catalyse conversations – from small to large, both private and public – that consider how climate change affects our innermost thoughts and feelings. How can we live and act in a way that allows people *and* the planet to flourish? How can social, cultural, and psychological forces be of service (and stand witness) to our ecological selves – the interconnected meshwork that constitutes each person and the ecosystems of which they are fundamentally a part?

Tentacular is a physical expression of our creative, lateral, exploratory thinking about how to address these questions. It evolved from previous community projects using the body as a frame to understand climate emotions. The *Tentacular* body is part human, part cephalopod, part bird, part fungi, and part landscape. During a residency at The Ethics Centre, we invited close collaborators, including artists, psychologists, researchers, and Elders, to contribute to *Tentacular*. We asked each collaborator to share a story of care for place, self, and/or community in the context of the climate crisis. Many of their stories held something from all three domains – expressions of sorrow, love, hope, rage, advocacy, and connection to place.

Creative leads: Chloe Watfern and Priya Vaughan

In collaboration with: Vanessa Bartlett, Bec Blake, Katherine Boydell, Maria Cardoso Nunez, Ann Dadich, Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor, Barbara Doran, James Dunk, Emma Elder, Kathleen Evesson, Sally Gillespie, Cecily Hardy, Shannon Harvey, Beth Hill, Georgie Igoe, Jess Lewis, Edgar Liu, Diane Macdonald, Aurora Murphy, Lea Richards, Paul Rhodes, Rena Shein, Cathy Smith, Jem Stone, Susan Thompson, Cam Turnbull, Bronwyn Vaughan, Michelle Walter, Karl Watfern, Edith Watfern, Louis Watfern, Kati Watson, Shaun Watson and Christie Wilson.

MAPPING STIGMA, DISCRIMINATION, AND RESILIENCE

These body maps were created by women* facing stigma and discrimination resulting from their experiences of mental distress, disability, or refugee background. Body mapping is a creative process that involves tracing your body onto a large piece of paper or fabric and decorating this outline by drawing, painting, sewing, collaging, or writing. Produced as part of the *Women marginalised by mental health, disability, or refugee background* research project, the maps represent women's experiences of stigma and discrimination, experiences that often remain invisible and can have profound impacts on quality of life, health, employment, and access to health care. These impacts can be upsetting to talk about and hard to describe. Sometimes orthodox research methods (like filling out a survey) fail to capture such difficult-to-verbalise experiences. Body mapping offers a creative and cathartic way for participants to explore and share their stories. Each map tells a unique narrative to vividly depict its maker's ideas and life history. Collectively, the maps illustrate both the damaging effects of stigma and discrimination and the healing effects of care and compassion for our mental and physical health.

* In this project, we use 'women' as an inclusive, collective term. We welcome participation from any individual – e.g., cisgender, transgender, non-binary, or feminine-identifying etc. – who identify with the designation of woman.

The "Women marginalised by mental health, disability, or refugee background" project is led by Katherine Boydell and managed by Priya Vaughan. The project team is Yamamah Agha, Jill Bennett, Alise Blayney, Angela Dew, Ainslee Hooper, Bronwen Iferd, Julia Lappin, Caroline Lenette, Cindy Lui, Apuk Maror, Jacqui McKim, Akii Ngo, Jane Ussher, Ruth Wells, Yassmen Yahya. The project was supported by an ARC Discovery Grant (DP200100597).

STITCH IT FOR DEMENTIA

In 2021, as COVID flared up around us, a small group of carers, researchers and artists gathered online to share stories of caring for a loved one with dementia and to devise textile artworks that would somehow do their stories justice.

Stitch it for Dementia is inspired by craftivism – a 'gentle' form of protest designed to bring about positive change in the world. The term was coined by sociologist Betsy Greer in 2001 and taken up by the Craftivist Collective. As they say, "If we want our world to be more beautiful, kind and just, then our activism should be beautiful, kind and just."

Our carer craftivists express the difficulties they faced, or are facing: from stigma and isolation to a lack of support or insight from health professionals, the care sector, and society at large – all issues calling for recognition and change. And yet they also hold onto joy.

Their craft embraces the complexity of their experience – navigating relationships and roles, trying to hold all the threads together – sometimes creatively with lots of colours, sometimes tangled, knotted, frustrating and despairing, often exhausting, always a work in progress.

The "Stitch it for Dementia" project is led by Chloe Watfern, facilitated by Michele Elliot, and supported by grants from the UTS Centre for Carer's Research and the Black Dog Institute. They dedicate this project to Dr Gaynor Macdonald, whom they remember with awe and gratitude for her commitment to dementia care and advocacy.

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

Michele Elliot is a visual artist, educator and writer living and working on Dharawal Country and is the UNSW Library artist-in-residence for the exhibition *Care is a relationship*. Elliot's textile, sculpture, installation, and drawing practice involves material explorations relating to human connectivity, mapping, and memory.

For *Care is a relationship*, Elliot will facilitate a series of workshops where participants stitch their stories about giving and receiving care to contribute towards the production of *A Cloak of Care*. During her residency, she will sew and assemble the embroidered squares into a collaborative artwork that will evolve throughout the exhibition. Audiences are invited to learn, reflect, and share their experiences during the workshops and while Elliot is on-site during the residency.

Elliot writes, "a cloak is a garment that enfolds the wearer. It offers warmth and protection in its action of wrapping around. In this way, our cloak will become a physical and poetic representation of what care means to each person. We will collect these words and images to embellish the cloak and, as we sit and make together, share our experiences around the table."

Crafting Stories of Care, Diversity Festival 2023
Tuesday, 19 September, 10.00 am - 3.00 pm

Michele Elliot Artist-in-Residence
Tuesday, 26 September, 10.00 am - 3.00 pm
Tuesday, 24 October, 10.00 am - 3.00 pm
Tuesday, 7 November, 10.00 am - 3.00 pm

Crafting Care Workshop
Wednesday, 2 August, 11.00 am -1.00 pm

Crafting Care Workshop – World Alzheimer's Day
Thursday, 21 September, 12.30 pm - 2.30 pm

Crafting Care Workshop – National Carers Week
Wednesday, 18 October, 11.00 am -1.00 pm

CARE, *YEAH!*

These rosettes were made by women employed by UNSW to celebrate their caregiving labour. They are medals – self-awarded to these champions of everyday life.

Workplaces rarely recognise care labour, let alone celebrate it. Colleagues and managers often approach care obligations as problems to be solved rather than important contributions to society. Carers themselves may not even recognise the value of their caregiving work, nor the skills and knowledge they gain through caring for others. To make yourself a medal for caring is a radical act of pride in this vital and often invisible work.

These rosettes resulted from a creative workshop led by artist Michele Elliot as part of the UNSW program 3C: Career Coaching for Carers. In 2022, 3C provided career development support for 30 women (cis and trans) across UNSW, as well as research into carer experiences and evidence-based recommendations to make UNSW a more carer-friendly employer.

The 3C program, and Michele's creative workshop, encouraged women to take pride in their roles as carers. It aimed to create confidence and connection between women carers and to raise their visibility at UNSW.

3C is directed by A/Prof. Lizzie Muller and managed by Amy Kusuma. It is an initiative of the Women's Wellbeing Academy, funded by a generous donation from Emeritus Professor Richard Henry AM FRSN, SAGE and Dr Rachel Oberon. The associated research program is supported by SAGE Athena SWAN and delivered by UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre.

Facilitator: Michele Elliot

Makers: Kelsey Burton, Alicia Jacenko, Lauren McKnight, Lizzie Muller, Yuvisthi Naidoo, Cathy Thompson.

Yuvisthi Naidoo
***Circles*, 2023**
Fabric appliqué

"The concentric circles are the layers of care that we all have. I care for my parents now; they cared for me. It's not an obligation, it's the giving back of love, it's very unconditional. We're all in it together, and these circles become bigger and more powerful at different points in your life. Now I'm in the sandwich generation, but there'll come a time when I'll be the one cared for."

Lauren McKnight
***Hearts*, 2023**
Fabric appliqué

“We have lots of layers to our personhood, and there are lots of dimensions of who we are. One of those layers is that we’re carers. We have such value in our care work and value in our university work. We have all these overlapping layers of value that we bring to the world.”

Alicia Jacenko
***Lines*, 2023**
Fabric appliqué

"It started with the idea of the hum of lines. One hum is my caring responsibilities, but that is overlayed with all the other things in my brain: my job, my relationship, my other child, my family. This solid line across the top represents the polished exterior you present, which looks like you calmly and capably deal with stuff. What I would like to see, if we're talking about caring becoming recognised as a critical skill, is that some of these hums will break through that top line. That it's ok to show that I'm dealing with all this stuff."

Cathy Thompson
***World*, 2023**
Fabric appliqué

"I used the words 'I care' because I have cared, and I care about caring, and I think more people should care about caring. And I think if more people cared, then we'd have a better world and society."

Lizzie Muller
***Yeah!*, 2023**
Fabric appliqué

“My badge is like an affirmation. It represents the journey that the 3C project has taken me on: from feeling burdened and restricted by my care role to embracing its importance and the insights it has given me. I used to whisper the word care, now I can yell it!”

Kelsey Burton
***Rosie*, 2023**
Fabric appliqué

"Rosie the Riveter's unbreakable spirit is mirrored in the eyes of caregivers. Both stand as iconic symbols of unwavering strength and resilience. Just as Rosie's rally cry, "We Can Do It" was a call to action to empower and unite women, the creation of these rosettes forged solidarity amongst women caregivers, while this exhibit allows their voices to be heard.

Mirroring Rosie's relentless pursuit of equality, women caregivers stand united as beacons of empowerment and advocacy. This rosette is a heartfelt tribute to the countless women who unconditionally love and self-sacrifice to support and uplift their loved ones."