



**APRONSTRINGS**

**FLOSSIE PEITSCH**

**EUREKA CENTRE BALLARAT**

**6 April - 15 September 2024**

# APRONSTRINGS

## FLOSSIE PEITSCH

Flossie Peitsch's *APRONSTRINGS* is an art installation formed from an arrangement of dangling blue aprons that enclose and entangle the observer. The intersecting aprons serve as a metaphor for the historical ties that bind women across time and place. An overwhelming mass of blue, referencing the Eureka Flag, specifically honours the women involved in the events surrounding the 1854 Eureka Stockade. Their stories of agitation and resistance have emerged in recent decades thanks to the dedicated work of women historians. This tribute to the unsung lives of Eureka's women anchors this installation within the Eureka Centre's interpretive context but extends this to honour women and their enduring struggle more broadly for equality and recognition.

*APRONSTRINGS* highlights the compelling yet polarising symbol of the apron – a deeply vexed representation of womanhood. Aprons are a symbol of duty, service, and self-sacrifice – the imposition of which has long featured in the social conditioning of women. Entrenched gender roles have historically contained women in the domestic realm, and the apron therefore remains an enduring emblem of gender inequality. People can feel very differently about the apron. To some, the apron evokes quaint and nostalgic memories of home, while others steadfastly consider it a symbol of oppression. Yet, others find satisfaction in irreverently reframing the apron in an act of feminist reclamation.

The apron is a soft simulation of a protective armour, yet it offers no defence against injury and no physical support of any kind. Its only purpose is to keep the body tidy and clean while cooking or undertaking other forms of domestic work. Whereas gendered male armour protects the entire body, aprons wrap around and emphasise (or conceal) the internal reproductive and sexual organs. Aprons evoke notions of decorum, modesty, and cleanliness. Wearing an apron is a gesture of 'keeping yourself nice' and could be viewed as representing the containment and concealment of a woman's sexual self and subservience to patriarchal order and control.

Like all uniforms, an apron speaks of socially prescribed roles and the hierarchies that anchor them in the maintenance of social order. In contexts where the freedom of expression and movement of women is otherwise regulated or restricted, the home has historically provided a level of independence and agency. Yet, beyond the glare of public scrutiny, there remains a persistent fear of women controlling men in the home, as reflected in the phrase, 'tied to her apron strings'. Such language is applied to equally disparage women and men who appear to share a degree of equal partnership in love and life.

*APRONSTRINGS* encourages people to write the names of women onto cardboard shipping tags and to attach them to a formation of suspended aprons. Through this simple yet profound act,

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the devotee is prompted to reflect on the lives of women of importance to them. Some honourees are famous and considered extraordinary in some way, while others are named for the guidance, nurturing and love they gave to the dedicator. Perusing the handwritten tags, the most honoured woman is ‘Mum’, alongside sisters, grandmothers, and wives. Then there are women who are considered of singular consequence: Julia Gillard, Marie Curie, Frida Kahlo et al.

Eschewing didacticism, *APRONSTRINGS* gently draws the observer into thinking about how women are named, remembered, and honoured, exposing the tendency to see women in terms of their social roles and gender attributes. This is perhaps most powerfully expressed in the prevalent binary presenting women as either nurturing mothers, loyal friends or loving wives, or as enigmatic outliers; feminist heroines forging ahead despite patriarchal constraints. However, when reading the tags, it becomes apparent there is little space for women who exist outside of this duality.

In 1949 Simon de Beauvoir wrote, “A woman is shut up in a kitchen or a boudoir, and one is surprised her horizon is limited; her wings are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly. Let a future be open to her and she will no longer be obliged to settle in the present.”<sup>1</sup> Although many things have changed since those words

were written, the stories of women are still largely found within collective narratives of the nameless and the commonplace, or alternatively through a micro-historical preoccupation with individual exceptionalism.

*APRONSTRINGS* presents a space entirely devoted to honouring women, yet it importantly provokes a reckoning with our deeply held biases about women. Small symbolic gestures may make us feel warm-hearted and kind, but is this because we are merely reassured by the certainty of our limiting conceptions of women and of gender more broadly? A relational encounter with this installation reveals that we readily celebrate women for what they give to us, but perhaps do not create space for them to speak of their own richly layered lives, in the fullness and complexity of their identities. This is the conundrum that unfolds throughout *APRONSTRINGS*.

**Anthony Camm**  
Eureka Centre Ballarat

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1. Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (1949), Translation: C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage Books, New York, 2011, p 731.



Barbara  
Alia  
Bruna  
Maly

Lila  
Lara  
Viviana  
Marta

THE WOMEN WHO  
SEWED THE ELEGANT  
TULIP BLOUSES FOR  
MILANO, 1949/2009

MUMU

Heather  
Sarah  
Angou  
Mum - Sider

Blank tag

Blank tag

Blank tag

Blank tag

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Images: Flossie Peitsch, *APRONSTRINGS* 2024  
(various installation views)

Photographs by Tim Gresham

## EUREKA CENTRE BALLARAT

102 Stawell Street South  
Eureka, Ballarat, Victoria, 3377  
AUSTRALIA

T - +61 03 5333 0333

[eurekacentreballarat.com.au](http://eurekacentreballarat.com.au)

[eurekainfo@ballarat.vic.gov.au](mailto:eurekainfo@ballarat.vic.gov.au)



Eureka Centre is a cultural facility of the City of Ballarat



Eureka Centre respectfully acknowledges the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Eureka Centre stands. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their continuing connections to Country and Culture.

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WRITER Anthony Camm | PHOTOGRAPHY Tim Gresham

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