

# STIGMA | DISMANTLED REVEALED

Through the creative practices of seven contemporary artists, STIGMA: dismantled, revealed explores the pervasiveness of stigma and self-stigma that persists around mental health issues today.

Experimenting with different mediums and methods of examination, the artists convey moments of their personal stories. Themes of mindfulness, healing, trauma, belief and diagnosis are examined, provoking conversation, reflection and empathy.

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Thank you to our exhibition partner



## William Hawkins

Bill Hawkins' work investigates agency through the use of painting, drawing and installation. Taking inspiration from psycho analysis, his method is self-reflective as each work is treated like a symptom from which a catalyst is sought. These sparks of unconscious information surface to find their form in humorous bubbles which pop as they transcend. Because of this, Hawkins is primarily interested in a part of the work which is not present (but is present in the spirit realm), his paintings can be viewed as the remains of a prematurely abandoned performance which gift the work with its own agency.

*“I have depression. When I arrive in a state of extreme melancholy I suddenly can't speak anymore. The words which I know lose their meaning, they just become floating signifiers. Likewise, the same thing happens to everything around me, all of the signifiers stop working and I actually slightly lose control of my motor function. Not only this, but my ability to perceive the past and future dramatically decrease to the point where I can only exist about 5-10 minutes either side of the present moment. I become trapped in a broken consciousness, nothing works or alludes itself to anything outside of right now. It is like an unsettling meditation. The only way out is to accept that I am helpless do anything, I travel further into the melancholy and take a seat. Very slowly it starts to fade as my world appears to grow again.”*

## **William Hawkins**

Left:

*Morning*, 2018

acrylic on linen

138 x 122.5cm

Centre:

*Ciggies*, 2018

acrylic on linen

138 x 122.5cm

Right:

*Hair/wool*, 2018

acrylic on linen

56 x 112cm

Courtesy of the artist

## Simon Crosbie

Simon Crosbie has a lived experience of childhood trauma, suffering abuse at a Catholic boarding school. Simon's creative practice has primarily involved knitted pieces, however the artworks in this exhibition are a departure from this medium. Here the artist has included two series of works about his experiences of trauma, the Yearbook series 2018 and the Shower series 2018. In the Yearbook series, Crosbie explores the idea of appearances, and how the images presented to the public mask the truth of a person or place. Even in media depictions of trauma, it is often the place – the building and its architecture – which are shown to be representations of events, and certain visual languages are implemented to control the emotional response of the audience. The watercolour 'portraits' of the Yearbook series take on the appearance of the school yearbook album, with posed representations of students and staff. Although each figure is presented as anonymous and featureless, the students are depicted with one or two eyes (the one eye indicates a sense of innocence and lack of awareness), whilst the figures with multiple eyes represent some of the priests and faculty he encountered – a symbolic indication of their duplicity. The Shower series presents another aspect of trauma. For the artist, the showers represent the moments in time when one felt alone, unwatched and safe in peaceful solitude. In focusing on these quiet moments in between, they are the light that contrasts the shadow and are important in the process of healing; breathing room within the narrative that help piece together the whole.

*“For me as an artist and a victim of abuse, coming to terms with the effects of trauma involves a process of uncovering things that have long been hidden. The process involves trying to piece together fragments of a broken narrative. While there is an element of catharsis in my work but there is also a strong conviction that I am creating artwork that speaks to a wider community that includes other broken narratives. Taking up art again has given me a sense of purpose.*

*...I feel like I have found a way, through art, to deal with the thoughts and emotions of self-stigma.”*

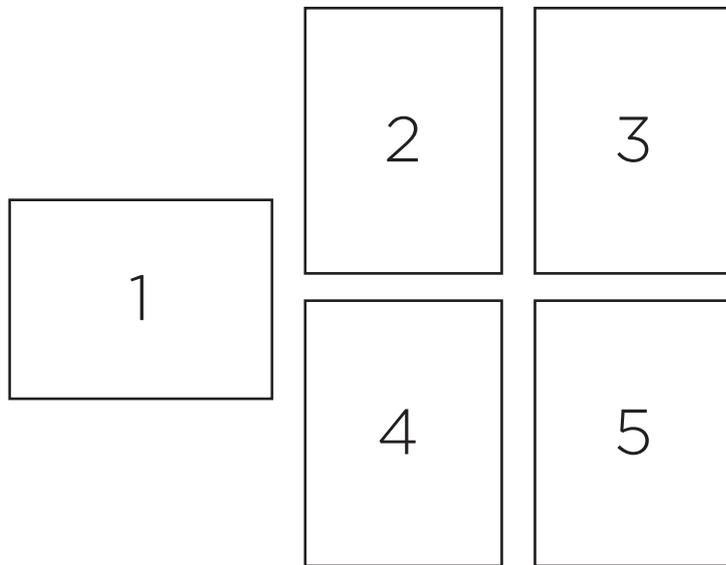
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## **Simon Crosbie**

1. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
oil on canvas  
35.5 x 27.6cm
2. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm
3. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm
4. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm
5. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm
6. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm

7. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm
8. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm
9. *Untitled (Shower series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper  
35.5 x 27.6cm

Courtesy of the artist



## **Simon Crosbie**

1. *Untitled (Yearbook series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper mouted onto card  
22.6 x 27.9cm
2. *Untitled (Yearbook series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper mouted onto card  
27.9 x 22.6cm
3. *Untitled (Yearbook series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper mouted onto card  
27.9 x 22.6cm
4. *Untitled (Yearbook series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper mouted onto card  
27.9 x 22.6cm
5. *Untitled (Yearbook series)*, 2018  
watercolour on artists' paper mouted onto card  
27.9 x 22.6cm

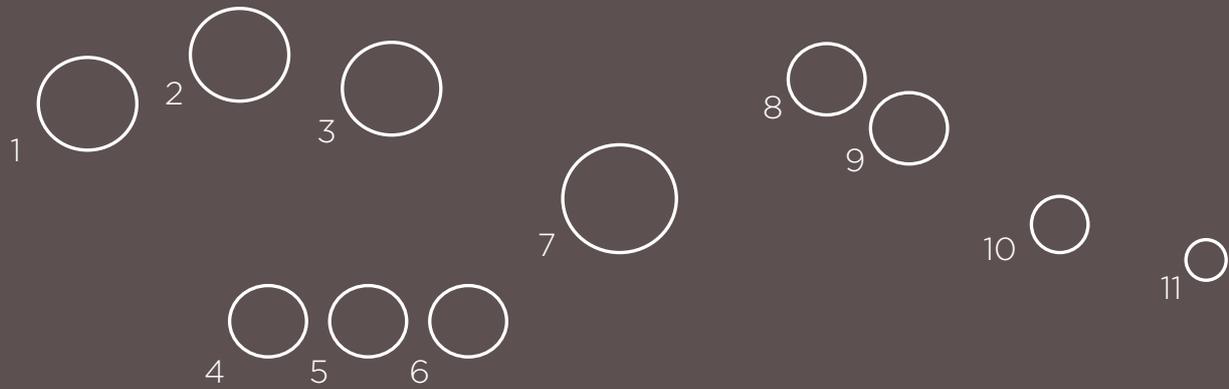
Courtesy of the artist

## Lucy Hotchin

Lucy Hotchin is an emerging textile artist, who began embroidery as a mindfulness practice. Her exploratory practice uses small hoops to depict idyllic scenes and short poems that express her thoughts and feelings at different times. In her text pieces, Lucy uses a free-form handwritten style that makes it clear to the viewer that these thoughts are personal and perhaps private, as though reading a diary. The chosen colour of the thread also adds a visual context to the meaning of the words, such as in Untitled (I have turned myself into a grain of sand) 2018, where the sandy coloured thread is not only literally descriptive, but disappears into the calico background just as individual grains disappear into the vastness of the shore.

Lucy has spent the past ten years in the mental health system battling severe depression and anxiety, and has been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). She describes her treatments as usually focused on her deficits rather than her strengths, and has experienced stigma attached to her diagnoses. The judgment associated with BPD from professionals, support workers, peers and even from herself has left her feeling as though her voice cannot, or should not, be heard.

*“I’m trying to learn/re-learn that my voice and experiences are valid... [Embroidery] has developed into a vessel for my voice. Something about stitching, the slowness of the process, the tactile nature of the medium, which helps me explore my voice/experiences. Stitching has opened an entirely new form of self-expression.”*



## Lucy Hotchin

1. *Untitled*, 2018  
embroidery thread on linen  
15.6cm diameter
2. *Untitled* 2018  
embroidery thread on linen  
15.6cm diameter
3. *Untitled*, 2018  
embroidery thread on linen  
16cm diameter
4. *Untitled (It is possible to diminish yourself to almost nothing)* 2018  
embroidery thread on calico  
13.5cm diameter
5. *Untitled (No one will save you)*, 2018  
embroidery thread on calico  
13.5cm diameter
6. *Untitled (Only you can save you)*, 2018

embroidery thread on calico  
13.5cm diameter

7. *Untitled (I have turned myself into a grain of sand)*, 2018

embroidery thread on calico  
16.2cm diameter

8. *Untitled (How do I take up space again)*, 2019

embroidery thread on calico  
11cm diameter

9. *Untitled (Who do you want me to be?)*, 2019

embroidery thread on calico  
11cm diameter

10. *Untitled (The knots we make)*, 2018

embroidery thread on calico  
11cm diameter

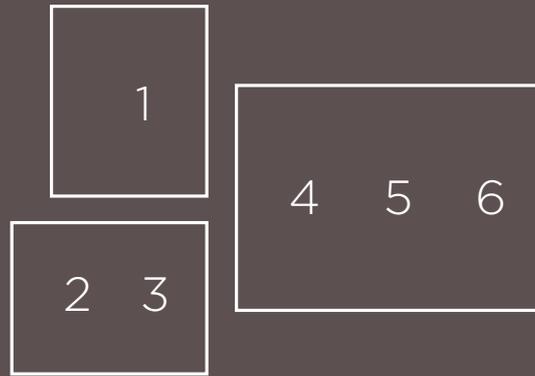
11. *Untitled (wattle)*, 2019

embroidery thread on calico  
8.7cm diameter

Courtesy of the artist

## **Kylie Steinhardt**

*“I was first diagnosed with schizophrenia in 2009 and went through a very hard time in my life for quite a number of years after the first and subsequent episodes. When I was diagnosed I thought it was a mistake but after reading and researching stories of others with the illness I came to the realisation I do have schizophrenia and my symptoms and what I was experiencing could be explained. It took me a while to accept the diagnosis and treatment also receive the right dose of treatment and supports but I am able to live a happy and fulfilling life and cope with hard times my illness can produce. I have found it can often feed my creativity and wanting to escape the world by drawing keeps me focused, calm and happy.*”



## **Kylie Steinhardt**

1. *Untitled* , 2018

pen and pencil on paper  
29.7 x 21cm

2. *Untitled* , 2018

felt tip pen on paper  
29.7 x 21cm

3. *Untitled* , 2018

felt tip pen on paper  
29.7 x 21cm

4. *Untitled* , 2018

felt tip pen on paper  
29.7 x 21cm

5. *Untitled* , 2018

felt tip pen on paper  
29.7 x 21cm

6. *Untitled* , 2018

felt tip pen on paper  
29.7 x 21cm

Courtesy of the artist

## Joanne Morgan

Joanne Morgan is an artist working with sculptural installations in the form of 3D mini-dioramas. In her work, 29 cages 2018, these dioramas depict different aspects of Joanne's thoughts, feelings and experiences, in particular her experience of treatment and chemical restraint when she was admitted to hospital in 2015 with psychosis. This experience was one of many that left her feeling unheard and stigmatized by the very people who were trained to help her. 29 cages is an open letter to the medical profession and the public - to tell her story so as to inform and drive change with how individuals are treated within the mental health system and by others. En masse, the cages are powerful, evocative pieces that - like the artist - amount to more than the sum of their parts; yet taken in one at a time, they describe each layer of complexity and experience that makes up the story of an individual.

*"... I began my 29 Cages art project as a means to cope with my social isolation. I utilised the internet to connect me to the outside world. I found 29 birdcages on Ebay and bought them. Over the months that followed, I planned and purchased materials every payday to build my cages, depicting the many ways that I have felt trapped and restrained by circumstances in life. This project built my understanding of my experiences. It gave me an alternative to the restrictive and suppressing over-medication that I had experienced so much of in the mental health system. It was my lifeline to recovery. The completion of my cages project has meant the completion of one of the most important things in my life.*

*I have always engaged with my creative process in a manner that not only allows me a voice to express what has happened to me but has given me the ability to represent myself as so much more than the sum of my experiences, fighting against the stigma of mental illness and psychological trauma."*

Joanne's cages are displayed spilling out into the space, where one must walk amongst them to fully appreciate each scene. The narrative is scattered, just as thoughts and experiences can sometimes feel disordered and chaotic.

*"[Experiencing psychosis] was not orderly. It was disorganised and disorienting and each representation of each individual trauma seemed to reach out and touch the next until it seemed they were all one and indistinguishable. I would like the viewer of my cages to experience a true sense of what trauma-induced psychosis can look like and feel like. I would like to be able to express this experience authentically and make it accessible for everyone to relate to and connect to in the hope that through connection and accessibility change can occur in the treatment of people who experience great disconnection and inaccessibility due to psychosis."*

## Joanne Morgan

*29 cages*, 2018

mixed media

dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

1. *Blue* - It was important to me to open up the project coming from a place of complete love. This cage represents the beautiful cushioning, soft relationship that I have with my kids where I always have a lightness and a safe place to land.
2. *PTSD* - I am generation three in a four generational experience of PTSD. My grandfather, a World War I veteran, my father, a World War II veteran, myself, a survivor of complex trauma and my kids, one of whom was born with PTSD.
3. *Psychosis graveyard* - This cage is a self portrait of my psychotic experiences surrounded by darkness and medication.
4. *Married to an addict* - This cage speaks a lot about my relationship and my partner. He was a heavy addict, he was violent, he was treating and he was consuming. My idea of a white picket fence was consumed by him.
5. *The four me's* - In the midst of my recovery from trauma and mental illness, I've had periods of great respite. The drawing in this cage represents my experience of opening up week after week in an art therapy process.
6. *Brain vs mind* - This is a very complex subject matter and I'm still unsure of what to say. When I experienced chemical restraint and my brain was physically incapacitated I want to believe that my mind took flight and somewhere in there I remained.
7. *Black politics* - This cage is more about external influences, representing world politics at the time. I felt compassion in witnessing persecution as a person who has been marginalized.
8. *Stalker* - It's important to me to name what was done to me. I was stalked by a man, who installed a program on my computer that picked up all of the audio in my house for an extended period of time, I suspect around a year. He monitored everything that I said. This induced an ongoing experience of psychosis. I still feel the affects of residual paranoia.
9. *Love is the drug* - This cage is about my experience with addictive relationships. I relied on this medication as heavily as any other.
10. *Compass* - This cage is about navigating my way through the psych-system, in which my experience is reflected by the flock of birds (my peers). There is a sense of camaraderie in the psych ward.
11. *Watch* - This is a challenge to my abusers, a dare to watch me, to watch my decline, to watch my madness, to watch my destruction, to be a witness to my survival.
12. *Mama bird* - During the Black Plague doctors wore a mask (with a beak-like appearance) holding lavender or herbs inside, believing this would prevent them from

infection. The bird skull in this cage represents that mask, and the lavender protects my babies (my two sons) in my nest from being infected by trauma and violence.

13. *Self harm* - No comment intended.

14. *Resilience* - This is a self portrait of my resilience in spite of trauma and mental illness, represented by my desert surroundings. Although weathered by my experiences I remain sturdy and strong.

15. *Catastrophe* - The devastating impact of trauma.

16. "When you are *FAT* a cat eating a bat" "All people see is *FAT* a cat eating a bat"

17. *You're insane* - When you have a psychiatric illness you have a license to be fucking mad!

18. *Fish hooks* - Having a complex relationship between a mother and child, both impacted by trauma gives a feeling of uncertainty. Extending my hand toward my son, reaching in to receive a response was quite often like delving into a bag of fish hooks. Not knowing if I would be punctured.

19. *I should be out there, changing the world* - This cage is dedicated to my brother, who died of AIDS related illness in 1995. At a particular moment when I realized how catastrophically ill he had become, in that moment when he recognized that realization in me he said "I should be back out there changing the world". I carry this memory with me in all the times that I work towards changing my world, in whatever shape that may take.

20. *The inheritance of trauma*- Passing on the inheritance of trauma to my own children is a heavy weight to hold. Watching it grow and holding it close is a trauma in itself.

21. *Critical injury* - Having children is the biggest thing I've done with my life, its the footprint I leave on the Earth. To have that impacted so dramatically by violence and trauma feels like a critical injury.

22. *A single cell* - At the heart of my therapeutic experience of processing my trauma I felt so diminished and miniscule. In comparison to events and their repercussions I was unable to imagine great change. I felt so incapacitated, the most that I could manage was to focus my attention on a single cell.

23. *Thrill kill*- This cage kind of leaves me speechless. Only questions come to mind. Knowing the impact of child sexual abuse, how could you!?

24. *Hearing voices* - Sometimes my experience of hearing voices feels like an extension of self talk.

25. *Hallucination* - My psychosis consisted of hallucinations. I shifted from one hallucination to the next. The cogs of my mind connected each hallucination and enveloped me deeply into my detached reality in which I couldn't be reached.

26. *Ivy* - This cage is a reflection on how religion has suffocated my relationships and restricted me to the pursuit of unrealistic images of who I wanted to be and who who I wanted to be loved by.

27. *Processing* - With this cage I wanted to talk about my most recent experience with psychosis. I believe if I had been allowed to process that experience without such intense medical intervention I would have been able to listen to my voices, interpret them with my own voice and make sense of what happened to me with a great deal of less trauma. If I had been counselled therapeutically instead of being restrained and medicated, I would have had a healthier experience. I chose the painting with the foetus, skull and claws to represent my stripped bare self being reborn into an environment surrounded by dirt and organic matter. Growing strong and fierce through trauma.

28. *Fight flight freeze* - This cage is representative of the three stages of being: fight, flight and freeze. When presented with a threat I have relied on my ability to take flight in any wounded state and save myself. This is an art of behaviour that I've perfected. Another response I have perfected is the freeze response. It is the freeze response that was responsible for my catatonia after being stalked, which triggered my eight year experience of agrophobia and social isolation, whereby I was restricted to one dark room with no contact to the outside world.

29. *Religion* - In this cage I draw the three most prominent religious experiences from my own, my brothers and my sons. My world view at times had been corrupted by the influence that the church has had on my life. After witnessing my brothers traumatic death from AIDS in the mid 90s and watching a young gay man die uneasily and shamefully in fear that there was no place for him in heaven, I turned my back bitterly on religion. My other great religious influence is that of my son, in the face of trauma it has been his source of peace and solace. Through my love of him I continue to learn to ease my bitterness and value peoples' rights to their own philosophy.

## **Cornelia Selover**

Cornelia began making art as part of her recovery program following her hospitalization with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) resulting from the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires. In her early works on paper, Cornelia created her imagery by following a meticulous set of rules, which gave her the ability to focus solely on the task at hand, rather than the task in her mind: suicide.

*“After leaving hospital I began YEARS of gentle recovering, the most part of which I spent alone, painting. Gradually I moved into the world, but the studio is still the place that feels safest for me and is essential for my daily mental health. I resisted seeking help... for two reasons: 1) I didn’t realize [what] was happening to me and 2) I was deeply embarrassed to have declined from an overachieving business owner/pilot/horsewoman to a person who could not choose which sock to put on -or in fact whether to PUT ON a sock. It has been my art practice that has saved me in a million ways.”*

Cornelia’s new work, while much larger and more colourful, still follows a very particular method, which gives her a concrete deadline and sense of purpose, which are both supportive of her mental wellbeing. The vast fields of vibrant colour in *The complex heaven of a broken mind #1 2018* have a sense of looseness and fluidity across the five panels, although they are still defined by lines or areas of negative space that draws the viewer’s gaze across, down and around the plane in a gentle, guiding manner.

About this new work Cornelia says, *“I realised that the big painting is a celebration of moving away from the grasp of anxiety and depression and the stigma of admitting one is suffering, to a place of explosive openness. In the freedom of the way it created itself, and the way it looks it is the embodiment of acceptance. The opposite of stigma.”*

## **Cornelia Selover**

Top Left:

*Untitled*, 2013 (from the series *I wish you were dead*)

ink on paper

29.5 x 42cm

Bottom left:

*Untitled (1 day, 1 week, 1 month, 1 year, 1 life, there)*, 2013

(from the series *I wish you were dead*)

ink on paper

29.5 x 42cm

Right:

*The complex heaven of a broken mind #1*, 2018

oil on board

270 x 600cm

Courtesy of the artist

## **Artist in Residence**

### **Jessie Brooks-Dowsett**

*“Stigma, whether it’s overt or self-perpetuated, serves to isolate people and confine them to their individual experience.*

*Art acts as a conduit, allowing us to begin a conversation before we have the words to describe what is going on; it acts as a communication device, anchoring us in the current moment, bringing us back to our bodies and allowing space for the gravity of what we are experiencing to be expressed and eventually shared, Re-connecting us.*

*I’m asking what is mental illness? And what is wellness?*

*Are they two opposing concepts or flexible terms that sit at either end on a continuum that we all inhabit, and are frequently moving along in a bidirectional way?*

*Can we create room for us to accept the possibility that this thing we call illness may just be a part of our human experience... A form of experiencing that sits at the extremes of the human condition?”*