

### Art resonates wool industry messages and challenges

A multi-faceted art exhibition capable of transporting Australian wool industry stories to the heart of New York or London is being mounted in the Sheep and Wool Pavilion at this year's Brisbane Ekka.

*The Art of Sheep* exhibition curated by artist and woolgrower's daughter Libby Woodhams is informed by her family links to the industry and reflects her belief that art can convey essential messages by indirect and unconventional channels.

In recognition of art's potential to act as a conduit between city and country, this edgy and informative exhibition includes a range of artistic work including paintings, textile art, steel sculpture and wool embroidery – each with a story board to put it in context.

"My belief is that *The Art of Sheep* will be enjoyable in the first instance, and then make its viewers think about the issues of the sheep and wool industry because the primary function of art is to communicate thoughts, views, and emotions," Libby said.

"I'm bringing together the work of 16 talented visual artists from around the regions to convey images and messages about the wool industry. People learn from stories which express the pleasure, pain, gain and strain involved with wresting a living from the bush and against the elements."

Libby's research for this exhibition has revealed a love of sheep, wool and rural landscapes that is often left unspoken.

"We've forgotten that the arts came into being to help people and communities have a greater chance of surviving and flourishing in the face of adversity and change."

Libby believes that art can open up discussion about the health of rural people, the uses of technology, the environment and biodiversity. It can ask questions about how economic imperatives can impact adversely on human beings, questions about pleasure, pride and the achievement many have in their rural products.

"This exhibition has been designed so that it is the art works themselves that do the 'opening up'. It is like an upside down biography of an industry because industries are ultimately about people."

Artists include: feltmaker Wendy Bailye (Brisbane), textile artist Julianne Donnar (Blackall), painter Jenny Durack (Clifton), steel sculptors Charlotte Drake Brockman & Fran Wachtel (Murrundi), painter Rachael Flynn (Mudgee), wool embroiderer Sandra Gray (Texas), painter Margaret Haselwood (Brisbane), painter Jim Moll (Benalla), watercolour artist Christine Porter (Lismore), painter Rob Simcocks (Stanthorpe), artist Tom Spence (Stanthorpe), painter Annabel Tully (Quilpie), painter Heather Wehl (Blackall), painter Teri Welles (Stanthorpe), painter Libby Woodhams (Brisbane), steel sculptor Bert Yardley (Brisbane).

*The Art of Sheep* is being supported by Arts Queensland and AgForce Queensland and will be officially opened by Associate Professor Suzi Vaughan, Head of Fashion at Queensland University of Technology, at 6pm on Tuesday August 9 in the Sheep and Wool Pavilion, Building 9, Alexandria St, Bowen Hills.

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