

Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress

Women Researchers' Network 2024 Annual Symposium

Wednesday, 6 November
10.00 am - 4.00 pm
State Library - Conversation Quarter



Artwork 'To the Sky with Hopes and Dreams' by Lala Zarei, First prize recipient WRN Art Competition



Welcome from the Chair of the Women Researchers' Network

As Chair of the Women Researchers' Network (WRN), it is my great privilege to welcome you to the WRN Symposium 2024, themed "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress." Held at the iconic State Library Victoria, this symposium provides a meaningful platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration in the pursuit of gender equality in academia and beyond.

Since its establishment in 2013, the WRN has been dedicated to addressing the barriers women face in research and academia. This symposium is more than an event; it serves as a critical space for dialogue, reflection, and action. By promoting representation, retention, and a supportive environment, we strive to create lasting change where women can truly thrive.

The symposium provides an opportunity to explore the broader global challenges associated with gender equality and human rights. Empowering women is not only a moral responsibility; it is essential for societal progress. Communities prosper—socially, economically, and politically—when women are empowered. Through this symposium's theme of investing in women and accelerating progress, participants are encouraged to reflect on how these efforts contribute to the broader global context.

We are honored to feature a distinguished lineup of speakers, including RMIT Chancellor Peggy O'Neal AO, a champion of diversity and inclusion within the university, and our keynote speaker, Dr. Niki Vincent, Victoria's Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner. Their leadership and insights into gender equality promise to inspire and drive meaningful conversation.

Panel sessions at the symposium explore RMIT's diversity and inclusion strategies and offer multifaceted perspectives on investing in women. These discussions are designed not only to share experiences but also to catalyze action towards creating lasting, sustainable change.

The WRN Symposium serves as a reminder of our collective responsibility to foster an environment where every individual can reach their full potential. By breaking down barriers and working together, we can expedite progress toward achieving gender equality, paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future.

Thank you for your participation, your dedication, and your passion for this vital cause.

Best wishes,
Dr Maryam (Mary) Safari

Program

Time	Activity
10.00 am - 10.15 am	Registration and Morning Tea
10.15 am - 10.35 am	Opening Remarks - Distinguished Professor Calum Drummond AO, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation and Vice-President and Dr Maryam Safari, WRN Chair
10.35 am - 11.00 am	RMIT Chancellor's Perspective - Peggy O'Neal AO
11.00 am - 12.00 pm	'Leading the way in gender equality' Keynote Speaker - Dr Niki Vincent, Victoria's Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner
12.00 pm - 1.00 pm	Networking lunch
1.00 pm - 2.00 pm	Panel 1: RMIT D&I strategies and Career Progression Chair: Prof Kay Latham // Panellists: Dist. Prof Calum Drummond, Prof Tracy Taylor, Bridgid Connors, Prof Samantha Richardson
2.00 pm - 2.15 pm	Short break
2.15 pm - 3.15 pm	Panel 2: Invest in Women. Accelerate Progress - A Multi-Perspective Discussion Chair: Prof Melanie Davern // Panellists: Prof Helana Scheepers, Prof Matt Duckham, Shelley Hewson-Munro, Prof Banita Bissoondoyal-Bheenick
3.15 pm - 3.45 pm	Afternoon tea
3.45 pm - 4.00 pm	Announcements and concluding remarks - Dr Maryam Safari, WRN Chair - Poster winners, Art Prize winners, The Chair's awards

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Speaker Biographies



Dr Maryam Safari is the Chair of the Women Researchers' Network (WRN) at RMIT University. She leads efforts to promote gender equity and support women in academia. With a strong background in her field, Dr Safari is dedicated to fostering an inclusive research culture and empowering women researchers to thrive at RMIT. Her leadership in the WRN aims to drive meaningful change and advance gender equity across the university.

Peggy O'Neal AO is the Chancellor of RMIT University and a renowned leader in both the academic and professional sectors. With a distinguished career in law and governance, Peggy is celebrated for her commitment to diversity and inclusion. She made history as the first woman to become the president of an AFL club, the Richmond Football Club, where she led the organisation to significant success. Peggy's contributions to gender equality and leadership have been widely recognised, contributing to her appointment as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO).



Dr Niki Vincent is the Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner for Victoria, dedicated to advancing gender equality in workplaces across the public sector. With extensive experience in organisational leadership and policy development, Dr Vincent has been pivotal in implementing the Gender Equality Act 2020. Her work focuses on promoting inclusive practices and dismantling barriers to gender equality. Previously, Dr Vincent served as the South Australian Commissioner for Equal Opportunity and CEO of the Leaders Institute of South Australia. Known for her passionate advocacy and strategic vision, she continues to drive meaningful change for gender equity in Australia.

Professor Kay Latham is the Dean of STEM, Diversity & Inclusion at RMIT University, with a distinguished background in materials chemistry. Her research focuses on the synthesis and characterisation of materials for energy storage and conversion. A dedicated leader, Professor Latham is committed to advancing gender equality and fostering an inclusive environment in STEM fields. She has a proven track record in research excellence, with numerous publications and leadership in high-impact projects and grants across her field.



Distinguished Professor Calum Drummond AO is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation and Vice-President at RMIT University. He leads RMIT's research strategy, fostering innovation and collaboration across diverse disciplines. With a strong background in materials science and chemistry, Distinguished Professor Drummond is recognised for his significant contributions to both academia and industry. His leadership has been instrumental in advancing RMIT's global research impact and promoting interdisciplinary research initiatives.

Professor Tracy Taylor is the Associate Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation, in the College of Business and Law at RMIT University. With over 30 years of experience in higher education, she is an internationally recognised scholar in sport management, focusing on diversity, inclusion, and women's leadership in sport. Professor Taylor has led numerous national and international research projects and has published over 200 peer-reviewed articles. She currently leads projects exploring women's professional team sport and careers for women in sport leadership.



Speaker Biographies



Bridgid Connors is the Chief Operating Officer at RMIT University, overseeing operations and corporate services to enhance staff and student experiences. With a background as Chief People Officer, she brings extensive experience in leadership, culture, and organisational change, holding senior roles across health, education, and government sectors.

Professor Samantha Richardson is the Associate Dean for Higher Degrees by Research at RMIT's STEM College. Her research focuses on the mechanisms of transthyretin amyloid formation, neural stem cell regulation, and thyroid hormone distribution systems. She holds a PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from the University of Melbourne.



Professor Melanie Davern is a Professor in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University. Her research focuses on population health, liveability, and community wellbeing. She leads projects that link urban planning and public health, aiming to create healthier, more liveable neighbourhoods. Professor Davern also directs the Australian Urban Observatory, a platform for visualising and translating research into policy and practice. She actively supervises PhD students in health and liveability research.

Professor Helana Scheepers is a Professor and the Academic Director of Research Training in the School of Business Law and Entrepreneurship at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia. She holds a PhD from Aalborg University, Denmark, and her research focuses on IT-based innovations, including organisational adoption of technology and social media.



Professor Matt Duckham is a Professor of Geospatial Sciences and director of the Information in Society Enabling Impact Platform at RMIT University. His research focuses on spatial computing, geographic information science, and environmental informatics. An esteemed academic, Professor Duckham has made significant contributions to the field of geospatial sciences, particularly in spatial data handling and visualisation. His work aims to improve understanding and management of spatial data in environmental and urban contexts.

Shelley Hewson-Munro is the Manager of Prevention, Masculinities, and Learning at RMIT University. She is the original designer of the Working Together with Men model, a pioneering initiative to prevent violence against women by engaging men as allies. Shelley has extensive experience in social work and community development, with expertise in gender equity, family violence prevention, and masculinities. Her feminist-informed approaches have led to the creation of unique, impactful projects that promote positive social change.



Professor Banita Bissoondoyal-Bheenick is a distinguished academic leader and Professor of Finance at RMIT University, where she also serves as the Director of Research Services and Programs in the College of Business and Law. With over 20 years of educational experience at globally reputable universities, Professor Bissoondoyal-Bheenick is an internationally recognized scholar in financial markets, investment risk, and stock market volatility.

About the Women Researchers' Network

RMIT University is committed to supporting gender equity by identifying and addressing barriers to women's inclusion and progression at the university, as it is recognised that female and female-identified academics face specific and enduring challenges. The Women Researchers' Network (WRN) was established in 2013 to enable female RMIT academic staff, HDR students and research fellows at all career stages to connect with one another.

The Objectives of the WRN are to:

- Advocate for change in gender equity policy, practice, and behaviours.
- Foster a flourishing and supportive environment for women researchers at RMIT.
- Connect the University to a wider community of practice in gender equity.

The 2024 WRN Steering Committee



Dr Maryam Safari*
(Chair)



Prof Melanie Davern*
(Deputy Chair)



Prof Sylvia Urban*



Prof Matt Duckham*



A/Prof Rita Zhang



Dr Catherine Earl



A/Prof Angel Zhong*



Dr Ruwini Edirisinghe



Dr Viktor Arity*



Dr Michael Kend*



Vindya Warnakulasooriyage*



Prof Kay Latham*

Supported by



Mat Lewis



Riaan Lourens



Amy Hall*

*Member of Annual Symposium Organising Committee 2024

WRN Art Competition 2024



1st Place
Lala Zarei
Master of Fine Art



In *To the Sky with Hopes and Dreams* I employ printmaking, collage, pottery, and ceramics to explore themes of migration, memory, and belonging. By integrating ancient Iranian pottery techniques with contemporary printmaking, I address the complexities faced by migrants, particularly women. Inspired by autoethnography and Middle Eastern ceramic archives, my art fosters understanding and unity across diverse backgrounds, celebrating both personal and collective narratives. Through my work, I aim to inspire unity and understanding, fostering a more inclusive world where diverse stories are celebrated.

To the Sky with Hopes and Dreams
Print on ceramic 35 x 35 x 45cm

3rd Place
Liang Xiao
PhD (Art)



Weapon merges the forms of a black iron pan and a book, challenging traditional perceptions of gender roles and knowledge. This piece prominently features a slogan on its front and names of influential female scholars—Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Marie Curie—on its sides. “More Than a Kitchen” disrupts the conventional view of the kitchen as a space solely for women’s domestic roles, advocating for a broader recognition of women’s potential and achievements beyond traditional confines. This inscription underscores the transformative journey from domesticity to empowerment and equality. “More Than Knowledge” shifts the focus from the superficial role of books to their profound impact in reshaping women’s lives and intellectual landscapes. It asserts the essential role of knowledge in advancing gender equality and fostering diverse perspectives in research and academia. “It’s a Weapon” redefines the power of tools and knowledge, symbolizing their capacity to instigate change and challenge entrenched systems. This phrase elevates the concept of intellectual and practical tools as instruments of resistance and transformation, reinforcing the notion that knowledge and creativity are pivotal in the struggle for equality. *Weapon* is not just a physical object but a statement on the dynamic interplay between gender, knowledge, and empowerment, inviting viewers to reconsider and engage with these themes in a new light.

Weapon
Metal, iron pan, book section 20 x 30 x 3cm



Commendation
Larissa Linnell
Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) Ceramics



This work reflects on traditional gender norms as represented by heavily used and household objects. These recall touch and repeated use, and relate to my grandmother’s unseen domestic labour and an internalised life. They act as signifiers of aspects of social and family dynamics, their forms eroded. The presentation aims to speak to the centrality of maternal roles in the making of a home, as a subject of reflection and attention. Labour that is assumed or invisible is made tangible through the action of repeated touch, asking that these contributions are not sidelined in an understanding of social history

Erosion
Porcelain Kettle 40cm x 20cm x 15cm Cord 30cm x 30cm x 6cm



2nd Place
Maryam Attar Bashi Aj Bisheh
Master of Fine Art



This work deeply reflects my experiences as a woman living under the oppressive regime in Iran. It portrays a woman enduring life’s harshness—pain and suffering—while still resisting and fighting for her existence. Incorporating elements from both my homeland, Iran, and my new home, Australia, I have used native plants like eucalyptus leaves and bottlebrush flowers, which are native to both countries, to symbolize the experience of diaspora and displacement. Inspired by the Persian “Gol o Morgh” style, I replaced the nightingale with the kookaburra, the marigold with the bottlebrush, and used eucalyptus leaves to symbolize healing.

Defiant
mixed media on paper 114cm x 150cm

Commendation
Emma Ballinger
Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) printmaking



This artwork is a collage of cyanotype experimentations exploring alternative photographic processes through a printmaker’s lens. Inspired by the work of Anna Atkins, I created, through trial and error, seaweed cyanotype printing for which Atkins is now renowned for. The work is made as she used the medium in the 1800s and current modern day Cyanotype technology using photos of ephemeral sea foam. Her book of “British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions” published in 1843, was a groundbreaking contribution to botanical records, but more so for the development of modern-day photography. In her time, her scientific contributions were disregarded due to gender bias in the scientific field, and botanical cataloguing was dismissed as “women’s work” - a similar story for many female scientists and artists throughout history. Her book is now acknowledged as not only the first collection of Cyanotype photographs to be made, but the first book of photographs in the origin of photography. Today Anna Atkins’ contribution to the botanical, scientific and artistic communities is more well known, and inspired this artwork tribute.

Seaside Tribute
Photographic and organic Cyanotype, washi paper collage 30 x 30 cm

Commendation
Olivia Summerhayes
Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) Drawing



Through the theme of places, I explore placemaking as homemaking, interrogating notions of “women’s work” and unpaid domestic labour. By superimposing found imagery from vintage home magazines and “handyman” guides, the collage parallels the unpaid labour of homemaking with male-dominated labour industries. This juxtaposition highlights the systemic undervaluation and condescension of women’s labour not only in the home but institutionally—within art, health, care sectors, and other women-dominated industries. Moreover the machine-sewn thread intervention pays homage to second-wave Feminist artists and their struggle to legitimise women’s art. In this way, I examine a woman’s “place” across domestic, industrial, and institutional contexts.

Solley’s Handyman Guide to Homemaking
vinyl, inkjet on paper 137 cm x 150 cm



Acknowledgements

The WRN would like to thank Dr Vittoria Di Stefano (Lecturer, School of Art, RMIT University) and Dr Fleur Summers (Senior Lecturer and Studio Coordinator, School of Art, RMIT University) for their involvement in the 2024 WRN Art competition.

We are also grateful to Professor Swee Mak, Associate Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Capability) and Professor of Innovation, for his invaluable support throughout 2024.

Thank you for joining us!

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WRN website:

<https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/our-research/women-researchers-network>

Staff page [login required]:

<https://www.rmit.edu.au/staff/research/women-researchers-network>