

Conversations around the kitchen table|2021

This exhibition by Associate Professor **Cathy HENKEL** and **Sam LARA** is inspired by their feature documentary and two-part television program, *Laura's Choice*, a documentary that explores complex questions as three generations of women navigate a radical, dignified and highly controversial approach to dying.

Conversations around the kitchen table features a kitchen table where you are invited to sit and openly discuss issues around death and dying, interactive video displays, words from Laura and from the film, and quiet corners for reflection.

Spectrum Project Space

Opening: 18 March 2021 5pm - 7pm

Exhibition dates: 11 to 25 March 2021

CREAtec floor talk: 24th March 2021 12.30pm - 1.30pm

Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10:00am - 4:00pm

Documentary broadcast: Wednesday 17th and 24th March on ABC PLUS

Building 3, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

ECU Galleries



Artist Research Statement

What started as a very personal project in 2016 documenting Laura and her unorthodox attitudes to life and death has become a feature documentary and two-part television program that will premiere on ABC in March. It has also inspired this exhibition.

Laura was outspoken, feisty and 90 years old. She did not have a terminal illness. She simply wanted to be in control of the way her life would end, to be able to choose the time and place and to be allowed to go with grace and dignity. And she asked us, her daughter and granddaughter, both professional filmmakers, to make a film about it.

The film explores complex questions as three generations of women travel into uncharted territory and navigate a radical and celebratory approach to death.

While there have been films about assisted suicide over the years, Laura's story is different. She was still mobile, fully aware, and wasn't suffering from a painful or terminal illness. This raises a host of extra questions and ethical issues that are further explored through this exhibition: *Conversations Around the Kitchen Table*. The exhibition includes divergent voices and opinions on death and dying. It is designed to encourage thought and reflection on an issue that touches us all. There is also the opportunity to complete a survey aimed at gathering data on the ways we view death and dying.

When we interviewed Rabbi White for the documentary, he made the comment that the world is changed less by wars, protests and legislation than it is by conversations that happen around the kitchen table. This prompted the title for the exhibition.

Laura's parting wish was that the documentary would spark conversations around kitchen tables across the country. She wanted to provoke people to talk with their family members about how they'd like to live their final days and how they'd like to die. She challenged us to put her story and her ideas into the public arena to be discussed and debated. She also wanted to challenge the notion that death should be a sombre and traumatic experience. She wanted her final days and her death to be a moment of joyous celebration.

Laura's story is told in an ABC two-part series entitled **Laura's Choice** to be broadcast on ABC:

Episode 1 will air on **ABC TV Plus on 17th March at 8.45pm.**

Both episodes will be available on iView from this date.

Episode 2 will air on **ABC TV Plus on 24th March at 9pm.**

Please visit www.lauraschoice.org for more information and to join the discussion around Laura's *virtual* kitchen table.

Biographies

Co-Director | Sam LARA



Sam Lara has been directing short films, music videos and factual content for the past 10 years. Her directing work has been nominated at Sydney Film Festival, St Kilda Film Festival, Flickerfest International Film Festival, Cambridge Film Festival, Byron Bay Film Festival and Melbourne International Film Festival, where she was selected to participate in MIFF's 2019 Accelerator Lab. She holds a Bachelor of Film and Television from Bond University and currently serves as the West Australian chapter head of the *Australian Director's Guild*. Her feature documentary *Laura's Choice* premiered at Revelation Film Festival, winning the inaugural Innovation in Feature Documentary award, and will air on the ABC as a two-part series in 2021. See more at samlara.com | [@samlarawho](https://www.instagram.com/samlarawho)

Co-Director | Dr Cathy HENKEL



Cathy is the founding director of Virgo Productions and has worked as a documentary producer/director/ writer for the past 30 years. Her previous credits include **The Burning Season**, **Show me the Magic**, **Rise of the Eco Warriors**, a **Spike Milligan biography** and **The Man who Stole my Mother's Face**. Cathy has won numerous industry awards, including Best Feature Documentary at Tribeca Film Festival, two IF Awards and an EMMY nomination. She was awarded SPA Documentary Producer of the Year in 2009. Her latest work, **Laura's Choice**, co-directed with her daughter Sam, won the inaugural Innovation in Feature Documentary award at the WA Screen Awards in 2020.

Cathy has a PhD from Queensland University of Technology and is the Director of the WA Screen Academy at ECU.

Design Consultant | Jem HAM



Jem Ham is a Melbourne born, self-taught artist who started painting on brick walls with water at the age of four. Fascinated by the way the water marked the brick and the ability to bring to life something from within, his love for art was born. Since then, it has been a journey of self-discovery through art, fuelled by a passionate need to create. Jem's artwork has been shown in solo and group exhibitions in Australia and internationally. In 2019, he was awarded the People's Choice Award at the City of Stirling Art Award for his piece 'The April Fool – A Self Portrait'. His work has also been

featured in a number of online and print publications. Jem currently lives by the beach in Fremantle, Western Australia.
See more at jemham.com | [@theartofjemham](https://www.instagram.com/theartofjemham)

Composer | Nicolette BOAZ



Nicolette Boaz has been playing piano since the age of four as did her Russian grandmother, her mother and her 2 sisters. From funk to world music, from jazz to blues she likes to compose in different genres and mix it up. A degree in Music and Aboriginal Studies led her to score for documentaries about social justice and in particular Indigenous issues. Piano, guitar and mandolin are all her instruments of choice. She has scored for orchestras, theatre shows, music libraries and currently also works as an piano tutor.

Exhibition Guide

The Kitchen Table

We encourage you to sit down at the kitchen table and have a conversation about death and dying; with your friends, with your family, or with strangers in the room.

We have provided 2 sets of cards for you to use. One set contains prompt questions to get you going. You may ask them of yourself, or of a group. The second set is to help you identify what's important to you. You are asked to choose your top 10 preferences and line them up in the order of most importance. This can be done independently, or you can discuss results with partners or friends. Please feel free to take photos of any of the cards to think on later, or to share with others.

There is also a survey you can complete to assist with research in this area.

We have created an online version of Laura's Kitchen Table, which we invite you to participate in. Please share your thoughts, questions, and anything else that has come up for you at www.lauraschoice.org. You can also fill out the survey via the website.

The Final Bow

Laura, a theatre actress in her youth, takes her final bow. This private theatre performance was organized by her granddaughter Sam two months before her death. It was a special, shared experience that allowed Sam to see her grandmother perform before she died, and allowed Laura to say farewell to her beloved years on the stage.

The Music

The music playing in the front area of the exhibition features compositions by Nicolette Boaz from the soundtrack of the film *Laura's Choice*. Mozart's Piano Concerto 21 is also in rotation, which is the last piece of music Laura listened to before she died.

The Video Displays

The video displays feature interviews with some of the people who appear in *Laura's Choice*. They represent a diverse range of opinions, and we hope they prompt discussion and contribute to your understanding and conversations around death and dying.

“No Shrinking Violet”

Laura's use of social media was unique for a 90 year old. Her farewell Facebook post went viral, and she loved discussing philosophy and politics on the platform. We invite you to take photos and videos throughout the gallery and share them on social media with the tag #LaurasChoice.

Laura's Living Room

Step into Laura's living room to hear her discuss her Manifesto – a document she wrote outlining her reasons why she believed she should have the right to choose when she dies.

Also playing as part of this video display is a short trailer for her documentary *Laura's Choice*.

The Clock

Laura travelled to Basel, Switzerland in 2019, and on the 19th December at 2.49pm she self-injected a drug and passed away peacefully with her daughter and granddaughter by her side.

Knowing the exact date and time you will die is, for many, a strange and uncomfortable thought. For Laura, it was comforting and empowering.

The Kitchen Cabinet

“When people get the drugs, they can put them in the cupboard, lock them away. They have a shelf life of 25 years, so they know they have this option. And it's incredibly reassuring to people. You can see the anxiety and worry drain away. We would argue that having access to those drugs extends life”.
Philip Nitschke

There has long been discussion amongst Exit International members around the option of being given the life-ending drugs to store away in your kitchen cupboard until you choose to use them. This is incredibly confronting for some people. Philip Nitschke argues that research has shown it actually results in people living longer, because they feel they have a greater sense of control. It is not currently legal anywhere in Australia to possess these drugs.

The Suitcases

The legislation permitting assisted voluntary dying in Australia is restricted to those who have a terminal illness. It is not available to those who are not ill. For this reason, Laura, her daughter, and her granddaughter had to travel to Switzerland. For a 90 year old, a 30 hour international journey is not an easy one. Laura would have preferred to have died at her home, in Australia.

The Photographs

- 1 **Pioneer**, 2019, 35mm film photograph printed on vinyl.
- 2 **The joy amongst the dark**, 2019, 35mm film photograph printed on vinyl.
- 3 **Preparations**, 2019, 35mm film photograph printed on vinyl.
- 4 **We are such stuff as dreams are made on**, 2019, 35mm film photograph printed on vinyl
- 5 **Let the show begin**, 2019, 35mm film photograph printed on vinyl.
- 6 **I'm no shrinking violet**, 2019, 35mm film photograph printed on vinyl.
- 7 **Final curtain call**, 2019, 35mm film photograph printed on vinyl.

Interviews

- 1 **Medical Perspectives:**

Dr Nick CARR



Nick is a GP working in St Kilda, Victoria, and honorary clinical senior lecturer in the Department of General Practice at The University of Melbourne. He did his medical training at Cambridge University and in London before moving to Melbourne in 1988. Nick is also a writer and broadcaster, and has published a book for first time fathers. He appears regularly on radio and television. He is a Board member of Dying with Dignity Victoria and has been actively involved with providing Voluntary Assisted Dying care to patients since the Act commenced in June 2019.

Dr Andrew DEAN



Andrew trained initially in Liverpool in the UK and obtained his membership of the College of Physicians (UK) in 1998. After immigrating to Australia, he continued his training in internal medicine and palliative care at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in Perth and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney, becoming a fellow of the Royal Australian College of Physicians in 1993. On returning to Perth, Andrew established the palliative care service at SCGH and St John of God Hospital Subiaco (SJOGS). He is currently head of the Department of Medical Oncology at SJOGS and a highly valued consultant with GenesisCare in Joondalup.

2 Spiritual Perspectives

Rabbi WHITE



Rabbi White serves as the spiritual leader of the Shul, Chabad WA. After years of study in Israel and receiving Rabbinic ordination from renowned world rabbis, he moved to Perth with his wife. Rabbi White enjoys discussing Jewish thought and ideology.

Zouber SAYED



Zouber Sayed is the Public Relations Officer for the Islamic Council of Western Australia (ICWA), one of the oldest and government recognized religious councils in Western Australia. It was established in 1976 and incorporated as a State Council for Islamic affairs in 1977. The objectives of the Council are to render religious service to the Muslims of Western Australia and promote and maintain unity and friendship amongst Muslims and other communities within and outside of Western Australia.

David MICHIE



David Michie is a Tibetan Buddhist, meditation teacher, and keynote speaker on the benefits of mindfulness. He is the internationally best-selling author of *The Dalai Lama's Cat* series, as well as spiritual thrillers such as *The Magician of Lhasa* and *The Secret Mantra*, and several non-fiction titles including *Buddhism for Busy People* and *Hurry Up and Meditate*. His books have been translated into 30 different languages and are available in over 50 countries. David is passionate about the benefits of reconnecting to nature. In 2015 he established Mindful Safaris to his homeland of Africa, combining journeys to unexplored places, outer and inner.

3 Legal Perspectives

Dr Meredith BLAKE



Meredith Blake is Associate Professor at the University of Western Australia and was Associate Dean from 2012-2014. She has taught and researched in the areas of medical law and criminal law for over 15 years, with an emphasis on the law and ethics of end-of-life decision making, consent to health care treatment and elder law. Meredith began her academic career at King's College, University of London, after working at the Crown Law Department in Perth. She regularly presents to health care professionals and the general public on ethical and legal issues arising in the practice of health care.

4 Community Perspectives 1

Brian TUCKER



Brian Tucker is a respected Aboriginal Leader and Elder from the Niyaparli/Banjima Groups in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia. He is the Managing Director of Karlayura, a fully Aboriginal owned company providing services and employment opportunities in the Pilbara Region. The Karlayura Group exists to get 'family' back on country, preserve Aboriginal cultural traditions and develop strong and self-sustaining communities. When an Aboriginal person dies – family come together at the residential town of the deceased as a mark of respect. This is known as "Sorry Business" and "Sad or Bad News". Each tribal group have their own cultural practises, languages, ceremony and a different view on caring for a person at the end stage of life

5 Community Perspectives 2

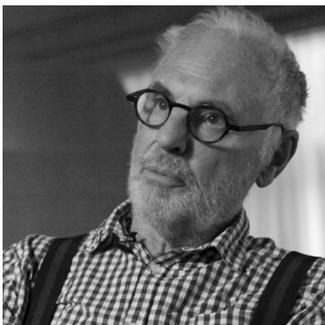
Zenith VIRAGO



Zenith is a respected elder, pioneer and expert in the field of holistic death, dying and ceremony. She has 20 years' experience in providing comfort, information and guidance to assist people through the natural and sacred inner and outer journey as we come to the end of our lives. She is often referred to as a Deathwalker and has created a deathstyle which compliments any lifestyle with a meaningful and appropriate approach that encourages participation by the person dying, as well as their family and friends. Zenith has lived in Byron Bay for over 30 years. She is a public speaker and author of *Intimacy of death and Dying* (Allen & Unwin 2009)

6 Community Perspectives 3

Dr Philip NITSCHKE

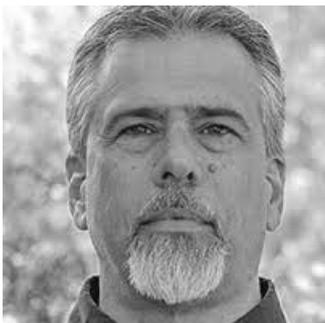


In 1996, Dr Philip Nitschke became the first physician in the world to administer a legal, lethal voluntary injection to four terminally ill patients under the Northern Territory's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*. Philip is the founder Exit International and author of the *Peaceful Pill Handbook*. In 2019 at Venice Design, Philip unveiled a new 3D-printed euthanasia device called the 'Sarco', that provides a peaceful, dignified death at the time of a person's choosing. Sarco will be used in Switzerland in 2021

Philip lives with his partner Fiona Stewart and their dog Hennie in Amsterdam.

The Survey

Dr Eyal GRINGART



Dr Eyal Gringart is a social psychologist with a research background in the social and cultural determinants of behaviour, health, psychology and gerontology. He is the Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of Psychology, and International Programs within the School of Arts and Humanities at ECU.

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Links

Web: www.lauraschoice.org
FB & Instagram: @lauraschoicefilm