

Naomi Blacklock &  
Anastasia Booth  
*Common Scold*

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**CREATIVE  
VICTORIA**



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Naomi Blacklock &  
Anastasia Booth  
Curated by  
Amy-Clare McCarthy  
and Kieran Swann  
*Common Scold*  
17.1.18–10.2.18

The scold's bridle was a steel cage locked on the heads of women paraded through the streets of England, Scotland, and Wales in the 1500's. Made of heavy steel, often adorned with twisted horns, and grotesque, exaggerated facial features, and with a steel tab that filled and lacerated the mouth, they were a brutal and effective form of social control for women considered 'public nuisances' - tied to ropes and dragged through crowds of their friends and neighbours. Heavy and painful, they were simultaneously humiliation and torture device for those deemed to gossip, nag, or simply talk too much...or, as many such women were, those declared witches by the Church.

Here assuming the roles of 'common scolds', artists Naomi Blacklock and Anastasia Booth draw on the history of these devices in their first collaborative performance. Uniting their shared research into the representations of women outside patriarchal norms, the archetype of the

witch, and agency, rebellion, and power dynamics, this project is the first entwining of their sonic and installation practices. Reimagined in handcrafted leather, the scold's bridles are here weighted by chains that loop and bind the artists in performance. While their voices are suppressed, the artists subvert any enforced silence with a ritual, one that dismantles their bridles and harnesses, leaving the devices 'bound' in a ritual circle created through embrace (at least temporarily) of the mantle of 'witch'.

The ritual performed, the costuming worn and materials used in *Common Scold* follows from interests in their individual practices. Anastasia Booth's work is founded on an exploration of female sexual agency, through work that has manifested as leather costuming and apparatus alluding to fetish and BDSM culture, representations of mythological women through performance and costume, and contemporary reinterpretations of aesthetic devices that have framed imaging of women in history such as constellations.

Naomi Blacklock's practice centres on the power of the female voice. Recent works particularly evoke the figure of the witch - through embodiment in performance; through exhibition and deployment of instruments and objects considered the domain of the witch; and most importantly through the wielding of the voice and the female scream. This sonic empowerment wells up from within Blacklock's body out of

meditative performances; drawn in through careful processes within ritual spaces, the audience bears witness to a woman with full access to her voice, who gains power through the use of it, and whose articulation is feared by her (assumed) opponents or victims.

*Common Scold* is borne out of a studio process which brings their combined practices to bear. In performance, it evokes new questions and tensions for each artist. Bound and gagged, the agency of the figures is initially in question; their silence seems enforced and debilitating. Yet within these strictures, a new and collaborative empowerment is forged. Their chains simultaneously restrict and unite them. Silence is subverted through a manipulation of their space and the devices of their imprisonment. A feeling of unseen, growing power begins to inhabit the space through their slow and precise labour.

The performance ends with the ritual circle closed, the scold's bridles removed, and the artists withdrawn. We are left with ghostly remnants. The looping sound echoes the binding of the bridles and their histories over and over again. Both the labour of the bound artists and the act of the removal of the masks plays and replays ad nauseum; overcoming powerlessness is labour that has to be constantly repeated.

Amy-Clare McCarthy & Kieran Swann



**Naomi Blacklock** is a Brisbane based artist who has exhibited both nationally and internationally. Working primarily with sound installation, text works and performance, her artworks involve an exploration and examination of mythologies regarding the witch archetype and harmful histories of gender and cultural identity. She is PhD Candidate and Co-director of Brisbane's ARI, CLUTCH Collective.

**Anastasia Booth's** artwork has been exhibited nationally, including projects at the University of Queensland Art Museum (Brisbane), Australian Experimental Art Foundation (Adelaide), Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney), Screen Space (Melbourne), Boxcopy Contemporary Artspace (2015) and was artist in residence at Metro Arts (2017). She has been a recipient of the Dorothy Birt Memorial Prize (2016) and an Australian Postgraduate Award (2014). In 2017 Anastasia received her Doctorate of Philosophy from Queensland University of Technology for her thesis *Playing with Me: Feminine Perspectives in Fetishism and Contemporary Art*.

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This is the curatorial collaboration of Amy-Clare McCarthy and Kieran Swann. We create moments of connection; between artists, audiences, communities, individuals. We do this by supporting contemporary artists to make ambitious new work; explore the possibilities of new contexts; foster exchange; and embrace shared experiences. We value generosity, vitality, and the compelling, and working with artists and audiences to fold our understanding of what is possible into new shapes.

**McCarthy-Swann Projects** have exhibited NETHERWORLDS at Firstdraft Gallery, The Walls, and Seventh Gallery; and Light/Air, a pairing of work for public space, in partnership with Brisbane City

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