

**Mel Dixon**  
*Measure of Biography*

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 13.03.19–06.04.19

You pick up a book. Thumb the pages open – push back the cover, flexing the typescript awake as you run your fingers along the paper grain. There on that first page, or perhaps the second or third – you encounter the biographical life of the author, bookended and paraphrased into a short series of life events. A biographical note is often the first you know of an author – or a gentle reminder of the life and times of someone you now consider familiar, a companion in life through prose. A familiarly which articulates the intrinsic intimacy of reading, of *'someone walking part of the way by your side'*<sup>1</sup> and *'what is illuminated in ourselves via the encounter with others'*<sup>2</sup>.

Like any form of biography, these excerpts of life are prone to inaccuracies and exaggerations – what life isn't? For these small summaries of a life lived are usually written by a publisher, or a critic – they are not a softened account of the author's life, but a flicker of insight held up to the flame before diving into the words that hide beneath. What these small worded verses do not delve into is the inherent messiness of life – the untidiness of living.

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Bus Projects acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.

**CREATIVE  
 VICTORIA**



<sup>1</sup> Edmund De Waal. *The White Road*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2015. 389.

<sup>2</sup> Quotation from email correspondence between the artist and Lisa Radford. 2 August 2018.

These small excerpts, these diminutive facts are not only the realm of literary greats like Woolf. In the temporal now, everyday life has been filtered out and away – filed out-of-sight so that only a highlight reel plays. An entire narrative built on a repeating serialised version of biography, the constant measure of a life – a copy of a copy, until it is emptied out. Between 1979 and 2013 – how does one measure between these reinterpreted iterations of a life? Madness in one is considered a series of breakdowns in another. In one she takes her own life, in the other she drowned herself. What happens when you open a space up between these accounts of a life and begin to measure?

Language and silence. What is unsaid. This language is dissimilar to Woolf's, it is fretted and marked by with an unkind hand of borrowed information. They write of a life not theirs, one they have never attempted to inhabit. What is kept and what is thrown away – what is written over and obscured.

Woolf writes in *To The Lighthouse*:

*'For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of—to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others... When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless.... Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by. Her horizon seemed to her limitless.'*<sup>3</sup>

Woolf speaks of distance and darkness; of the self that lies invisible to the world and limitlessness – the vast expanse that exists within us. One could read this as her own kind of biography, one which talks of the invisible, limitless depths of the self and of its innate darkness. Decisively, Woolf states in her own words that there is no exacting means to measure biography, it is a limitless horizon, an expanse that goes on for an eternity.

This culpable immeasurability is possibly the reason we search for a measure at all – and perhaps it is the paradoxical need to be made busy with a search to quantify our lives, that we have become distracted from the possibilities that this unfathomable deep could hold.

Mel Dixon, March 2019.

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Penguin, 1998. 72.

Woolf  
Solnit  
Cage  
Radford  
De Waal

*You are encouraged to perform your own measure of biography by reading the text from this pamphlet, either aloud or to yourself whilst running your hands over the river stone and porcelain sculptures.*

Stones  
Porcelain  
Pockets  
Ryōan-ji  
Silence

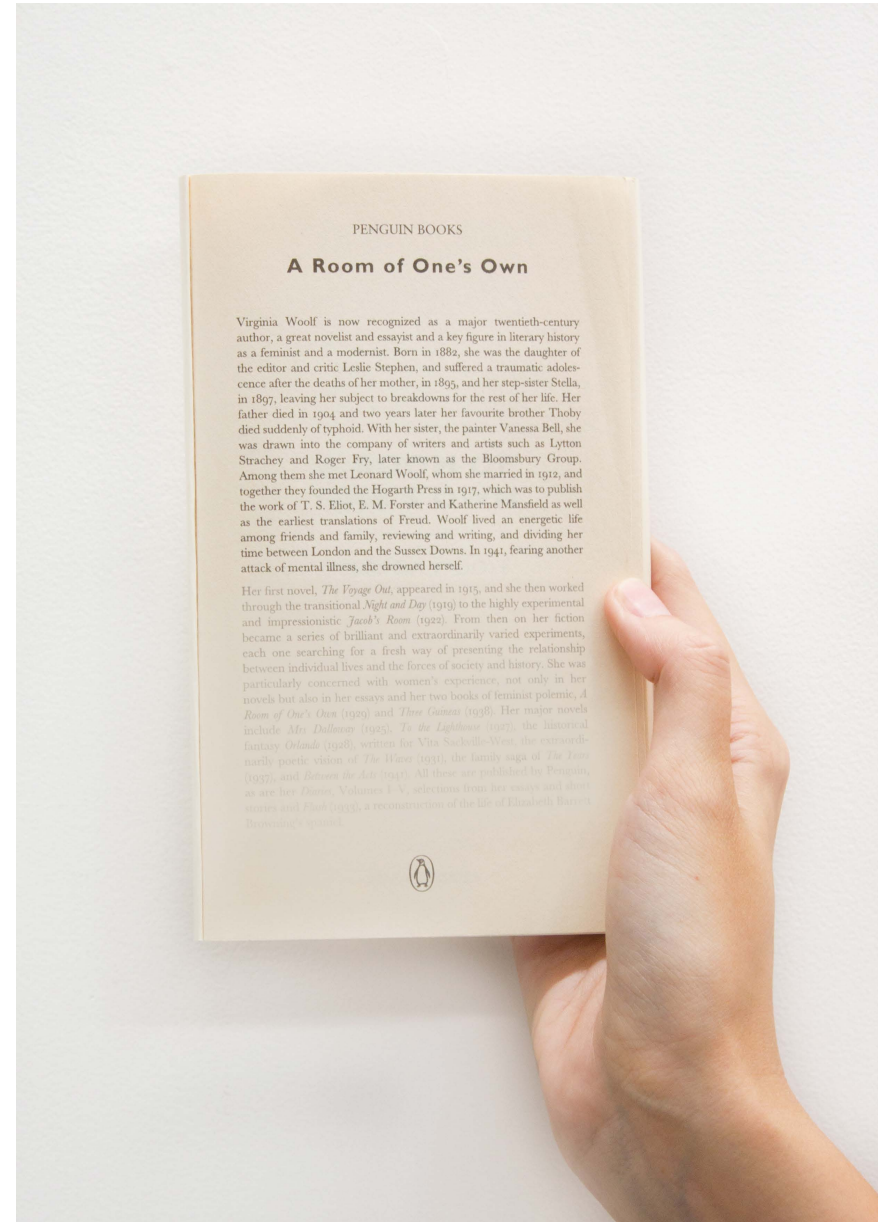
Giclée digital photographic prints, Victorian ash custom timber framing, plantation pine, porcelain, river stones, silicone.

Ouse  
Pacific  
Maranoa  
Merri  
Thames

On the opening night March 13th and the closing day April 6th, the exhibition will feature a performance of measuring by Lauren Brown.



Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*  
(Panther, London, 1979)



Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*  
(Penguin, Australia, 2013)

Virginia Woolf was born in 1882, the third of four children. Most of her early education was provided at home by her parents, enthusiastic but unaccomplished teachers.

Following the death of her father in 1904 (her mother had died in 1895), and her second serious mental breakdown, Virginia's first publication, an unsigned review, was printed in *The Guardian* and in 1905 she began a connection with *The Times Literary Supplement* which was to last almost to the end of her life. During the years leading up to the First World War, Virginia lived in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, where she soon became an active and prominent member of the famous literary group which was subsequently known as the 'Bloomsbury Circle', including among her friend men like Lytton Strachey and Leonard Woolf, whom she agreed to marry in 1912.

In March 1915 *The Voyage Out*, Virginia Woolf's first novel, was published to enthusiastic acclaim. In 1917 Virginia and Leonard Woolf founded the Hogarth Press which was later to publish most of Virginia's major works as well as works by other contemporary literary talents.

Recurring bouts of madness plagued both her childhood and married life and in March 1941 Virginia Woolf took her life. By the time of her death, she has won a foremost and enduring place in English letters.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*  
(Panther, London, 1979)

Penguin Books

### A Room of One's Own

Virginia Woolf is now recognized as a major twentieth-century author, a great novelist and essayist and a key figure in literary history as a feminist and a modernist. Born in 1882, she was the daughter of the editor and critic Leslie Stephen, and suffered a traumatic adolescence after the deaths of her mother, in 1895, and her step-sister Stella, in 1897, leaving her subject to breakdowns for the rest of her life. Her father died in 1904 and two years later her favourite brother Thoby died suddenly of typhoid. With her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, she was drawn into the company of writers and artists such as Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry, later known as the Bloomsbury Group. Among them she met Leonard Woolf, whom she married in 1912, and together they founded the Hogarth Press in 1917, which was to publish the work of T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster and Katherine Mansfield as well as the earliest translations of Freud. Woolf lived an energetic life among friends and family, reviewing and writing, and dividing her time between London and the Sussex Downs. In 1941, fearing another attack of mental illness, she drowned herself.

Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, appeared in 1915, and she then worked through the transitional *Night and Day* (1919) to the highly experimental and impressionistic *Jacob's Room* (1922). From then on her fiction became a series of brilliant and extraordinarily varied experiments, each one searching for a fresh way of presenting the relationship between individual lives and the forces of society and history. She was particularly concerned with women's experience, not only in her novels but also in her essays and her two books of feminist polemic, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three*

*Guineas* (1938). Her major novels include *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the historical fantasy *Orlando* (1928), written for Vita Sackville-West, the extraordinarily poetic vision of *The Waves* (1931), the family saga of *The Years* (1937), and *Between the Acts* (1941). All these are published by Penguin, as are her Diaries, Volumes I-V, and selections from her essays and short stories and *Flush* (1933), a reconstruction of the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel.

*Measure of Biography* is a spatial work based on two biographical notes written 30 years apart on the life of Virginia Woolf, highlighting the ways that time erases and reconstructs biography. The work consists of actions, reading, tactile frequency, sound, movement and pressure. It raises questions surrounding the use of biography over time as a constructed and illusionary assemblage of mythology and memory; and how this changes our relationship between ourselves and the world.

This is a practice of speculative feeling - measuring what can exist beyond perception or the mind's imaginativeness, is the empathic nature of biography. A fusion of self and story, of telling and listening; of inhalation and exhalation. With the use of ready-made and handmade sculpture, photographic images, text and performance, the work aims to highlight the texture of biographical writings when compared and contrasted throughout time.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*  
(Penguin, Australia, 2013)

**Mel Dixon** is a Melbourne-based artist and writer interested in how the psychological paradoxes of self, feelings and memory interact and exist within space and perceived emotional constructs. Her art practice investigates and examines the psychological paradoxes of the self, memory and psychogeography. Through the creation of built environments, installation, sculpture and photographic images she looks to challenge how materiality is liminal in both action and response. Her practice incorporates extensive research into psychosocial experience of transitional spaces, architecture and emotive culture; revisiting themes of childhood experience, transitional objects and how objects and spaces can hold memory and inform experience.

Mel graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Art in 2017 and BFA Honours in 2018 from the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne. Her recent shows include *My imaginary Friend was a Feeling*, Kings ARI in 2016, *TOYS 'R' US*, Second Space Projects in 2017 and *New Perspectives*, Crowther Contemporary in 2018.



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