

# Impact Report 2022

Your support.  
Our stories.  
Their success.



# Contents

- 03 Message from the Associate Director
- 04 Q&A with the Chancellor
- 05 Q&A with the Vice-Chancellor and President
- 06 Last year by the numbers
- 07 RMIT appeal recap
- 08 Women in STEM
- 10 Ngarara Willim
- 12 RMIT graduate exhibition
- 14 RMIT FactLab
- 16 Opalgate Foundation
- 18 Hannah's scholarship story

## Our Mission

Aligning supporters' passions with RMIT expertise to realise the university's greatest ambitions.

## Our Vision

To power extraordinary outcomes through philanthropy that advance RMIT's reputation as a global university of technology, design and enterprise.

# Message from the Associate Director

Reflecting on this past year, I'm inspired to see how our RMIT community has persevered. 2021 brought similar pandemic-related challenges as the year before, but we continued to adapt, with hybrid environments and flexible learning still playing a large role in university life.



At RMIT, we have certainly been up to a lot ourselves. As you may know, we bid farewell to Dr Ziggy Switkowski AO and Professor Martin Bean CBE in 2021, and welcomed new leaders at the university in 2022. Chancellor Peggy O'Neal AO and Vice-Chancellor and President Alec Cameron were officially welcomed to RMIT earlier this year, and have enjoyed connecting with RMIT students, staff and the community. I am excited to see the impact they will create and how their vision will influence the future of RMIT. They have been deeply invested in learning as much as possible about how we do things at RMIT and are keen to provide their input so that we can achieve great outcomes together. The new strategy will guide the philanthropic vision for the university, and I look forward to sharing this with you soon.

Thank you once again for your generous support of RMIT University. It is incredible to see the commitment and devotion that our donor community consistently displays.

Despite the challenges of the last few years, our donor community displayed extraordinary levels of generosity, and I am so appreciative of your contributions throughout this time. Your commitment made a difference in the lives of students, academics and the broader RMIT community, at a time when many were struggling to make sense of the new world and find their way. I am extremely grateful for the unwavering support of our donors.

I am pleased to say that 2022 has turned out to be a terrific year. Students have brought life back to our campuses as in-person classes have resumed. I'm heartened to see students connecting, socialising and enjoying themselves – a big part of what the university experience is all about.

I'm delighted that we've been able to welcome our donor and alumni communities back to campus as well. I've enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with you and hear all about your experience over the last few years.

Because of you, our students, researchers and staff have felt such tremendous support and we have been able to deliver the same outstanding level of education and research that we are renowned for.

I hope you enjoy reading about the amazing impact you have created over the last year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy Harrington". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

**Amy Harrington**  
Associate Director, Philanthropy  
RMIT University

# Q&A

In 2022 RMIT University welcomed two new leaders who share a passion for education, community and place. Building on RMIT's strong reputation as a provider of practical education and opportunity for all, Peggy and Alec look ahead with optimism as the university begins its next chapter.

## Chancellor, Peggy O'Neal AO Education is an important part of the solution to many of the world's problems.



**It's been a truly remarkable journey from being a first-in-family university graduate to becoming the Chancellor of a world-renowned university. How will it impact your approach to the role you're taking on at RMIT?**

My parents recognised the value of education and the impact that it could have on people's lives, even though they could not pursue education to the extent that they would have liked.

Through much sacrifice on their part, my sister and I were able to go to university and, consequently, many opportunities have come our way.

While I never expected to have a role like Chancellor of RMIT, I am honoured that I now have the opportunity to be involved in education as I deeply appreciate how education has enriched my life.

The cornerstone of RMIT is providing quality education that is practical and pragmatic and that aligns with my approach as well.

**Why did you accept the role of Chancellor and will you continue to be a champion for women's equality now in tertiary education?**

You are right that my career has had a significant focus on the advancement of women and underrepresented groups in our society and RMIT is a place that welcomes everyone, a community that values diversity, inclusion and opportunity for all.

Education contributes to improving equality in all aspects of our world and educating women and girls (and other underrepresented groups) is one of the best things that we can do to continue making progress.

Education is an important part of the solution to many of the world's problems. The opportunity to support women as they start out on their careers is particularly meaningful and RMIT has an important role to play.

**Mental health and wellbeing have also been key focus areas for you. With COVID-19 presenting so many challenges to the well-being of students and staff, do you see mental health being a focus during your time?**

Absolutely. The pandemic brought focus to mental health but, in my view, the problems of an increasingly isolated society and lack of available support had been building pre-pandemic.

I have been impressed by what I have learned about how RMIT supported its wider community during the most difficult days of extended lockdowns. However, as we slowly come out of the worst of the pandemic, there will undoubtedly be more work for RMIT to do, and continuing to provide support to our students and staff will remain a focus.

# Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Alec Cameron

## An exceptional university in complex times.



**RMIT has a strong emphasis on research with practical outcomes, which aligns closely with your own academic and professional credentials. Is that part of what attracted you to RMIT?**

Research is a key university purpose, and certainly for a university of the standing of RMIT. At the same time, our research strategy must be appropriate to RMIT, building on our strengths and leveraging the opportunities available to us.

We also need to be practical about where we can be most successful in a competitive research environment. RMIT's advantage is undoubtedly our translational research and our strong partnerships with business and government.

However, while our external orientation means we will naturally lean to applied and translational research, we should still seek to accommodate all research of high quality, whether fundamental or applied. What ultimately matters in research is the quality of the work, more than where it sits on the commercialisation pathway.

**Why was RMIT the right choice for you?**

RMIT stands out for having a fantastic reputation in terms of how it's positioned as being a practical and pragmatic university. It is also well known for being a very outcomes-oriented and externally-engaged institution that plays a strong civic role.

This is a wonderful legacy to have and an incredible foundation to build on – founded on employable students, practical research and a clear civic purpose.

Given my disciplinary background in engineering and business, and given that I moved between industry and academia early in my career, I've always been opposed to the view of universities as 'ivory towers.' So RMIT feels the perfect fit for me with its clear commitment to serving students, our partners in business and government, and our communities.

**COVID-19 created unprecedented challenges for staff, students, and the university sector overall. Do you think it's changed the university sector forever in Australia?**

COVID has fundamentally changed us and fast-tracked our thinking regarding our pedagogy – in particular the role of blended learning and authentic assessments.

We're in a transition and there's an opportunity for us to rethink how education and research is undertaken at universities. We recognise the great opportunity this presents to us, and we are grabbing the opportunity to help create the future.

**What are some of the big goals you most want to achieve at RMIT?**

I believe RMIT is uniquely positioned to be an exceptional university in complex times. We need to live up to our enviable reputation for practical teaching, the outstanding employability of our students, and our highly-translational research.

These factors of our identity are particularly important as we emerge from the pandemic and seek to support our students and communities to 'build back better.' This is a vital societal role for us to play.

So, in defining the next strategic plan for RMIT, we are looking optimistically to the end of the pandemic, and raising our ambition to measure our achievement through the success of our students, our partners, and our communities.

# Last year by the numbers

## Calendar Year 2021



**\$58.2M**

in the  
Philanthropy  
Fund



**\$2.9M**

in philanthropic  
funding disbursed  
across the University



**\$3.36M**

raised to  
support the  
University



**1,232**

donations  
received



**678**

philanthropic  
scholarships  
awarded



**503**

new donors



**263**

RMIT alumni  
donors



**30**

donors making  
a regular gift

## RMIT Ranks

### 2023 QS World University Rankings



**11th**

in Australia



**190th**

globally

### 2022 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings



**3rd**

globally for  
reducing  
inequalities



**22nd**

globally overall

### 2022 QS Graduate Employability Rankings



**8th**

in Australia



**74th**

globally

### 2022 CWTS Leiden Ranking (% of top 1% publications)



**5th**

in Australia



**66th**

globally

# RMIT appeal recap

## Thank you for digging deep

There have been many times in the past two and a half years where we've been asked to dig deep – emotionally, physically and sometimes even financially.



- 1 Curatorial Officer Olympia Barron consulting with researchers. Photography by: Tom Hogan
- 2 Bowen Lane, RMIT University. Student life

This makes it all the more remarkable that, when asked to support RMIT's staff and students last year, our donors responded with such overwhelming generosity. Thanks to you, we have been able to raise much-needed funds for three key initiatives: RMIT FactLab, the digitisation of our Cultural Collections, and Equity Scholarships that support students to relieve financial stress and focus on their studies.

### RMIT Equity Scholarships

Our scholarships focus on improving educational access for students who need support the most. Scholarships are often integral to students' educational success. Last year, success rates for scholarship students were 9 percentage points higher than non-scholarship students. This difference was even more pronounced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship recipients.

I would like to thank the RMIT donor community, without whom I could have not been able to become a skilful person. I hope the donor community will continue to help people in need to achieve their dreams.

Selina, Diploma in Laboratory Technology student

### RMIT Cultural Collection Digitisation

Since its founding, RMIT has collected art, textiles, objects and research that tells the story of Melbourne's history and Australia's history. However, only 10 percent of our collection is digitised. As we head into a future where online learning is becoming increasingly relevant, it is essential that we provide our community with perpetual access and enjoyment.

Your generosity is helping this dream become a reality.

*"Thanks to your generous support, we are in the process of having approximately 800 film posters professionally digitised. These posters showcase Australia's vibrant and diverse screen history and their digitisation will preserve them while also making them more accessible to the public."* – Elizabeth Marsden, Manager Collections and Archives

### RMIT FactLab

RMIT FactLab does the vital work of combating the misinformation that undermines our common store of knowledge. Your support means RMIT FactLab can help Australians understand COVID-19 health advice, scrutinise claims made by candidates and political parties during the federal election campaign, and cut through fake news to make informed decisions.

*"Thanks to the support of donors like you, FactLab has been keeping Australians informed about what's really going on through the CoronaCheck newsletter. It's a weekly inoculation against the pandemic of misinformation surrounding COVID-19. Fact-checking from CoronaCheck has reached over nine million people across ABC News and Apple platforms in less than two years, and the list of subscribers continues to grow."* – Russell Skelton, Director, RMIT FactLab and RMIT ABC Fact Check

# Women in STEM

## Inspiring the next generation of women in STEM



1

1 RMIT Women in STEM Ambassadors Vera Abba, Jared Catacutan and Brynn Gilbert

2 High school students attend STEM workshop led by RMIT Women in STEM Ambassador on the City Campus

2



Did you know that women account for just one in six Australians with a Science, Technology, Engineering or Maths (STEM) qualification? Or that women still make up just 36 percent of all students enrolled in university STEM courses in Australia?

Australia is blessed with many world-class women in STEM – Tanya Munro, Elizabeth Blackburn, Megan Clark and Nalini Joshi all spring to mind – but the pipeline from early interest to fulfilling career and lifelong passion is in need of drastic improvement.

Thankfully, there are people and programs intent on ending the chronic underrepresentation of women in these fields. Made possible by the generous support of the Toyota Community Trust, *Future STEM Leaders* works with high schools in Melbourne’s western suburbs to break down stereotypes in STEM, connect students with mentors from tertiary education and industry, and inspire STEM education in high school and beyond.

*Future STEM Leaders* is based on a simple but powerful idea: connecting the women in the STEM community over multiple touchpoints. A select group of year 9 and 10 girls work with RMIT students and industry experts to develop their skills in STEM fields such as coding, trades, and advanced manufacturing. Following their immersive study and mentoring, the year 9 and 10 girls host workshops for younger students at their school. The goal is for students in middle school years to develop their leadership and domain-specific skills, while younger students spark their STEM curiosity.

RMIT has long been at the forefront of promoting women’s participation in STEM. It is the only university in Victoria that has dedicated positions for Women in STEM engagement and is a signatory to the SAGE Athena Swan Charter, which aims to remove structural barriers to gender equity and diversity in higher education and research institutions. RMIT has committed to inspiring and attracting future female STEM talent through programs such as *Future STEM Leaders*.

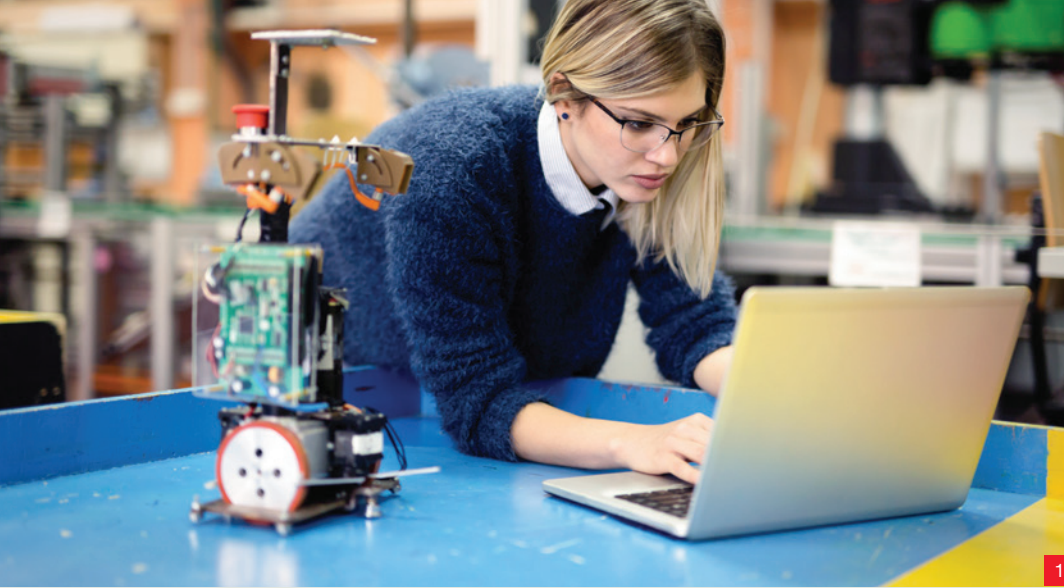
The roll-out of *Future STEM Leaders* was not without its challenges. “By limiting their engagement with school and with their peers, the pandemic really set some students back in terms of confidence and presentation skills,” says Dr Maddy Yewers, RMIT’s Women in STEM Senior Program Coordinator. However, she believes that the pandemic “also provided RMIT staff with the time and space to deepen our relationships with partner schools.”

Early results, based on surveys completed by participating students, show that the *Future STEM Leaders* program is already improving female students’ beliefs, attitudes and excitement about continuing their journey. One student from Braybrook College said she loved being able to “see even more of what STEM can be like and learn a lot more about career paths from people actually studying in the area.” It is also inspiring RMIT students like Raihana Rashid, a Women in STEM Ambassador. “When I joined, I wouldn’t talk to the person sitting next to me. Through the training and my participation in the *Future STEM Leaders* program I’ve found my voice and my confidence in myself. Now you can’t get me to stop talking! I talk on panels, lead workshops, share my STEM journey and have been coming up with new ideas for the program.”

“We’re very proud to support young women to imagine different futures for themselves,” says Professor Vera Ignjatović, Director of the Toyota Community Foundation. “However, the talent was there all along. It was just about helping them to realise it.”

RMIT would like to sincerely thank the Toyota Community Trust, whose generous support has made *Future STEM Leaders* possible.





1 Woman working in lab

2 Frank Halim pictured with his wife, Swan and two daughters, Fay and Lana

## The RMIT Alumnus supporting women to succeed in science

Frank Halim has been breaking barriers all his life. Born in Surabaya, Indonesia, he first arrived in Australia in 1977 and studied with 300 other boarders at an all-boys boarding school.

After receiving his degree in Chemical Engineering, Frank worked in the United States, Canada, Turkey, and Malaysia. He completed an MBA at RMIT while juggling full-time work and raising a young family. He was one of the first 20 employees of Optus and rose to senior leadership positions in the chemicals, manufacturing and telecommunications industries.

Today, with the Halim Family Scholarship for Women in Science, Frank is helping others break barriers of their own. He explains that he was motivated to establish the scholarship after many years working in industries where women remain underrepresented. “I’ve been very fortunate in my career and am always looking for ways to give back,” he says. “I felt it was important to start this scholarship to address this underrepresentation and give women the greatest chance to succeed in their studies and fields.”

There are more women studying and working in STEM than when Frank began his career. But despite that progress, women still make up just 16 percent of Australia’s STEM-skilled workforce. Frank is clear: the problem is a lack of supports and role models – not a lack of talent. “I have seen fantastic women from my alumni group achieve great success and become leaders in their industries,” he says.

Frank, who is quick to cite his wife Swandari and his daughters Lana and Fabiana as inspirations and a big part of his own success, says he knows first-hand how it feels to be a student doing it tough financially and culturally.



To me, it is very important for future generations to be invested in and lifted up. Financial background should not be a barrier.

Frank Halim, RMIT Alumnus

The Halim Family Scholarship for Women in Science is already making a meaningful impact in the lives of students. Ola, the 2022 recipient, is studying Bachelor of Science Food Technology and Nutrition at RMIT. “My future dream,” she explains, “is to be a dietitian who works in hospitals and clinics.” Receiving the Halim Family Scholarship has helped to reduce her financial stress and focus on making that dream a reality. “This scholarship helped me in paying to travel to the city and attend my classes and help me in buying materials to improve my knowledge,” she says.

For Frank, there is no better feeling than supporting women to achieve the same career success he enjoyed – and that so many have traditionally been denied. “I want to support the scholarship recipients’ hopes and dreams for the future, and hope that this scholarship can bring them one step closer into making this a reality.”

# Ngarara Willim

## Building connections, supporting community



### “My job is to elevate and amplify”: Q&A with Gary Thomas

Despite only joining RMIT in February 2022, Professor Gary Thomas is setting his sights high. “My role has a significant focus on what Reconciliation really means across the university,” says the Yui and Australian South Sea Islander man when asked to explain a typical day in his new role.

Appointed as the Pro Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Research and Engagement, Professor Thomas has a big job. But it is simple enough to understand. “It’s about making the Indigenous experience core business across our entire university – teaching, learning and delivery.” It’s an ambitious goal, but one that’s unsurprising given the significant contributions Professor Thomas has made to Indigenous education over many years.

Almost a year in, Professor Thomas is excited about what he’s seen so far.

There is incredible work being done here with Aboriginal communities, especially Victorian Aboriginal communities. An Indigenous incubator in the College of Design and Social Context is investigating how community-based research can be brought into the University as best practice.

Professor Gary Thomas

- 1 Ngarara Willim Centre Students, Staff, and Alumni gathering
- 2 Professor Gary Thomas, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Education, Research and Engagement
- 3 Students studying in the Ngarara Willim Centre

The Centre for Innovative Justice in the Koori community is practically re-imagining what a better justice system for all might look like. There are pockets of gold like that across RMIT.

Crucially, says Professor Thomas, RMIT’s leadership team is fully committed to spinning that gold so that it stretches across the entire university. “At the highest levels, people see that Indigenous goals are part of core business,” he says. “They want to get involved – and they are.” Ultimately, Professor Thomas’s vision is for RMIT to be a place where Indigenous students who desire a career can have an immersive, tailored, enjoyable experience learning interesting things and enjoying a real outcome at the end. Our business is shaping curriculums and shaping futures.

### Supporting community through the whole student cycle

“Working with our community, families and young people to progress their aspirations,” says Nicole Shanahan when asked what she loves most about her job. She’s the Senior Manager of Indigenous Student Education at RMIT, which – among other things – means she also manages the Ngarara Willim Centres, the dedicated RMIT support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. “It’s the impact our work makes on individuals,” she continues. “Working with Community and families, seeing young people grow, confront challenges, achieve their goals. That’s what makes me proud.”

Perhaps no part of RMIT breaks more barriers than Ngarara Willim. Its staff support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the entire student cycle. They build relationships with prospective students before they’ve applied to study at RMIT. They lead the Indigenous Access Program to support future students through the application, scholarship, accommodation and enrolment process. When they make it to RMIT as students, Ngarara Willim assists with orientation, academic support and cultural and social engagement.

The connection doesn't end when a student graduates. "We work closely with our Deadly Alumni," explains Nicole. "Keeping our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates connected to campus through further education, employment opportunities and supporting current students as mentors and as tutors." Providing such a comprehensive service for RMIT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially through a global pandemic, has its challenges. But the Ngarara Willim team is determined to support its community and young people to engage and succeed in their aspirations.



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### Enabling excellence: The Scholarships Supporting RMIT's Indigenous Students

Supporting Indigenous students means creating a culture and a learning environment that enables them to feel comfortable and perform to their potential. By providing financial support and enabling students to excel academically, scholarships are a vital part of this support ecosystem.

Two RMIT scholarship programs have a great deal to teach us about the diversity of the Indigenous student experience at RMIT. The first is the Calleo Indigenous Scholarship, an initiative of the Calleo Indigenous Community Fund (CICF) established by Calleo Group, a contracting and recruitment business that specialises in providing skilled labour. This scholarship supports Indigenous students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a preference given to those students enrolled in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) degrees.

Although it's still early days, progress has been very encouraging to date.

The Calleo Indigenous Scholarship program was just such a natural fit. RMIT and Calleo have a shared interest in preparing people for meaningful employment. It's been a fabulous collaboration so far.

Michael Smith, Development Advisor at the CICF

The second initiative is supported by the Estate of Gerard Driesen, an ardent supporter and collector of Aboriginal art and generous donor to RMIT. Following Mr Driesen's passing in April 2017, contact was established between his estate and the university.

"That's how the two scholarships came to be," remembers Graeme Seymour, the Executor and Trustee of the Driesen Estate. The Gerard Driesen Indigenous Scholarship Programs commenced in 2020. The first is the Gerard Driesen Scholarship to Support Indigenous Students. The second – fittingly, given Mr Driesen's love of Aboriginal art – is the Gerard Driesen Indigenous Master of Photography Scholarship, which provides an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Master of Photography student with the financial support they need to focus on their artistic endeavours.

"It's a fitting tribute to Gerard's life," says Mr Seymour. "I know he'd be so proud of the great students these scholarships are helping."

### Support Across Generations

The Melbourne Holocaust Museum (MHM) commemorates the survival and recovery of our Jewish communities despite the unspeakable atrocities of the 20th century. Today, the MHM also supports a prize in memory of the great William Cooper, a Yorta Yorta man and human rights activist who, in December 1938, led a protest at the German consulate in Melbourne condemning the treatment of Jews under Nazi rule.

The Melbourne Holocaust Museum & Wilson Family Prize, created in William Cooper's honour, is awarded each year to an academically outstanding First Nations student.

Last year's prize recipient is Simone Bremen. Simone is a proud Bindal and Kaanju woman and an active member of the Ngarara Willim community. She began her Bachelor of Social Work at RMIT and, through both her studies and her work, dedicates herself to helping people in need. "I work in a needle and syringe program, supporting marginalised, disadvantaged people." For Simone, studying social work was a way of reinforcing her lived experience with formally recognised skills in order to better help people.

For the Wilson family, the prize is the perfect way to honour the memory of William Cooper. "It is an honour to be able to recognise William Cooper and the collective effort of the Australian Aborigines League, who despite their own marginalisation and denial of even the most basic rights on their own land, were able to deeply empathise, take action and fight for the rights of the Jewish People," they said. "Being able to provide student prizes in William Cooper's name feels like one small way of continuing his legacy of empathy and solidarity between the two communities."

We are inspired by Simone and grateful to the Melbourne Holocaust Museum and the Wilson Family for their support.

# RMIT graduate exhibition

## Showcases art inspired by adversity

Art is often shaped by adversity. That was the context behind the 2021 RMIT School of Art Graduate Show, a celebration of the work created by graduating RMIT Art and Photography students throughout another challenging year.

The exhibition showcased innovative contemporary work from over 290 graduates working in different disciplines and media. An online gallery presents individual graduate pages, as well as projects designed for this online format, including images, videos, 3D models and Virtual Reality spaces and galleries.

The show celebrates the talent of RMIT's graduating art students while also recognising their perseverance. Creating the exhibited works required overcoming the significant challenges imposed by Melbourne's COVID-19 lockdowns, including limited access to facilities, teachers, and resources.

The online exhibition also acknowledges the expertise, care and commitment of our academic and professional staff who supported our students throughout their studies.

As part of this exhibition, prizes are awarded to students for their outstanding work. The BDS Sculpture Prize is a prize that is funded by staff donors at RMIT, showing their generosity to students not only in the form of teaching but also financially. For Professor David Forrest, Professor of Music Education and a donor to the BDS Prize, it was rewarding to see the amazing work produced by the exhibiting students. "I'd like to sincerely congratulate Chloe Tizzard, Maya Grkow and Bonnie Lee on receiving the BDS Sculpture Prize, and also congratulate and thank every student and staff member who helped make the 2021 School of Art Graduate Show possible", he said.

These pages profile three exhibiting artists. Their work, along with the other RMIT School of Art Graduate Show participants, can be viewed online at <https://www.artgradfest.rmit.edu.au/>.



### Jack McLain

Name of work/s:  
**Hall of Shadows**

Media:  
**wet plate photography**

I'm a member of a Special Forces community. The Brereton Report (which examined war crimes allegedly committed by the Australian Defence Force during the War in Afghanistan) was released and I was shocked by how little coverage it received. People kind of shrugged.

The three works that make up Hall of Shadows include a series of 15 wet plate collodion tintypes of toy soldiers mounted and framed in a grid (Hall of Shadows), a series of digital images on newsprint of plastic figures overlaid onto images of redacted pages from The Brereton Report (It's Only The News), and a series of handcrafted albumen prints made from digital photographs I created while deployed in Afghanistan, overlaid with redacted pages from The Brereton Report (The Memory of Dust). "It's Only the News' was exhibited at The Shrine of Remembrance from August to November 2022 with more than 30,000 people viewing the work."

- 1 Hall of Shadows by Jack McLain
- 2 Finding Children of Compost by Clara Chan
- 3 Wavering Radiant Series by Dustin Voggenreiter

## Clara Chan

Name of work/s:  
**Finding Children of Compost**

Media:  
**sculpture/installation (textiles)**

Residing on a damaged planet while environmental degradation and ecological disasters prevail, this project seeks to inspire curious and open thinking.

Clara Chan

The objectives of this project are far from offering antidotes or solutions to the ethical and ecological crises we face, but to facilitate constructive public discourse in order to find hope, care and empathy in the broken world. As Rosi Braidotti says, “despair is not a project; affirmation is.”



3



## Dustin Voggenreiter

Name of work/s:  
**Wavering Radiant series**

Media: **painting/installation (timber, adhesive, vinyl wrap)**

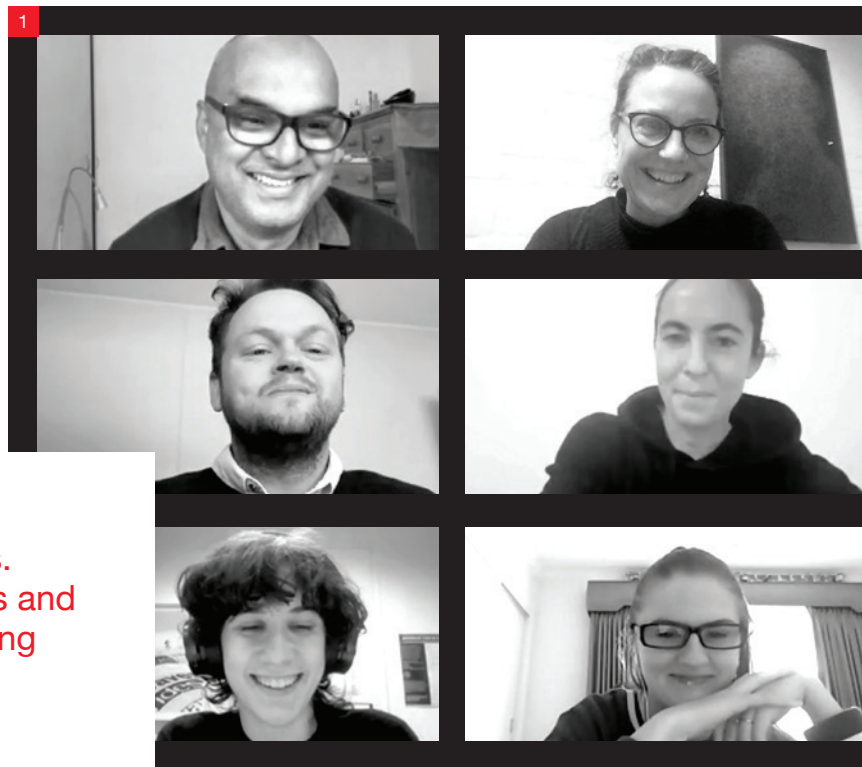
This work was created during Melbourne’s extended COVID-19 lockdown in my living room and then transported into the studio space in Building 49 when the lockdown lifted. I was fortunate enough to have a Bunnings Trade pass, and my job allowed me to leave home, so it was possible for me to create art during this period.

I was able to exhibit my work in a professional light for the first time. Interacting with the public and other students as they inhabited the same space as my artworks was a helpful experience, as it allowed me to see my work in new ways, and hear varied explanations and understandings of what my artwork was about.

Dustin Voggenreiter

# RMIT FactLab

## Sorting fact from fiction



Fake news. Disinformation and misinformation. Non-core promises. However you label them, false facts and narratives harm us all by undermining the shared and trusted knowledge that underpins our democracy.

It used to be that a single, definitive “truth” was beamed from news desks to the nation every morning and evening. Social media has corrupted that model. Bypassing traditional gatekeepers has enabled an amazing diversity of new voices and ideas.

But not every new voice can be trusted. The age of abundant information is also the age of abundant disinformation.

There is an antidote: rigorous, independent fact-checking, combined with cutting-edge analysis of how misleading information is seeded and spreads. That’s why, in early 2017, RMIT and the ABC teamed up to establish RMIT ABC Fact Check. Four years later, RMIT FactLab was born as a national research hub dedicated to countering online disinformation and misinformation and tracking the impact of new technologies on how we consume news.

In the words of its Director Russell Skelton, RMIT FactLab “brings together the best of quality journalism and academic research” to strengthen our understanding of how unfiltered information circulates unchecked on social media. A Walkley award-winning writer, reporter and experienced editor, few are better placed than Russell to meet the challenge. “Our original, multidisciplinary research, undertaken in collaboration with some of the world’s leading experts, helps us fulfil our mission of countering disinformation to inform the national conversation and strengthen our democracy,” he says.

The past two years have demonstrated the importance of the work done by RMIT FactLab – as well as RMIT ABC Fact Check, which scrutinises claims made by public figures. “There’s no question,” according to Russell, “that COVID-19 accelerated the circulation of misinformation on social media. People were anxious, stuck at home, and searching online for answers.” The pandemic created conditions ripe for exploitation by malicious actors.

Enter CoronaCheck, a newsletter created by RMIT FactLab to produce near-real-time fact-checking about COVID-19 claims that had taken hold online, disrupting public health policies. This year, CoronaCheck evolved into the CheckMate newsletter investigating election issues, climate change, and the pandemic.

In a ground-breaking project undertaken for the 2022 Australian Election, FactLab launched the Mosaic Project in collaboration with the Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas. It utilised cutting-edge social media monitoring techniques to trace and debunk false and malicious posts as they circulated throughout the campaign. The Mosaic Project debunked claims during the campaign, not after votes had been cast. It also analysed and exposed disinformation campaigns and researched the successful online strategies adopted by the Teal independents.

# CheckMate

Your inoculation against misinformation



RMIT FactLab's dispatches throughout the campaign were sent to more than 31,000 subscribers, many of whom are also financial supporters. In addition, the research was made freely available to all media on the FactLab website. Content from the project published on ABC News platforms reached an audience of millions.

So important is the work of RMIT FactLab, that Russell wants to share it as widely as possible. "We want journalists, researchers, students and tech companies to engage with us and benefit from our work," he says.

He is committed to helping the next generation of journalists, especially those in emerging democracies and disadvantaged groups, to identify and combat misinformation. Aided by funding from the International Fact-Checking Network, RMIT FactLab has trained more than a dozen reporters from the Indo-Pacific region and has partnered with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on a program working with young people in Cambodia. It plans to expand its training in future.



- 1 The Mosaic Project team
- 2 Russell Skelton, RMIT FactLab Director



**\$77,031**

**FactLab Appeals  
Funds Raised**



**1,121**

**FactLab Gifts  
Received**



**826**

**FactLab Donors**



**22**

**FactLab  
Recurring Gifts**

RMIT FactLab could not do its work without the support of its more than 800 donors. Every donation you have made helps ensure that RMIT FactLab has the resources it needs to fight fake news, train the next generation of journalists, and protect our democracy.

Russell Skelton, RMIT FactLab Director

# Opalgate Foundation

## Supporting innovative new research



An RMIT research project will investigate the potential of Traditional Chinese Medicine to benefit people living with HIV.



If untreated, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) weakens the immune system to the point where the body struggles to fight off even mild infections, and AIDS develops as a result. Although antiretroviral medicines that prevent the onset of AIDS in people living with HIV (PLHIV) and public education to prevent community transmission have turned HIV into a manageable health condition, it still affects up to 30,000 Australians.

HIV increases the risks of chronic inflammation. Evidence suggests that HIV-related inflammation also increases the risk of conditions such as cardiovascular disease faced by PLHIV. Attempts to reduce inflammation in PLHIV using conventional medicines have not yet been as successful as hoped. More research is therefore needed.

Enter this exciting project, made possible by the Opalgate Foundation, a philanthropic family organisation that empowers communities in fields such as education and healthcare. Opalgate is providing funding to support a four-year research project to investigate the potential of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) compounds to lower inflammation-related cardiovascular risk among PLHIV.

For Catherine Law of Opalgate, RMIT was the obvious choice of partner.

RMIT is an innovative university well known for its excellence in research and practical solutions to global health issues. Additionally, it's regarded as a leader in the development of TCM education in Australia.

Catherine Law, Opalgate



This research, which will be undertaken by RMIT PhD student Wan-Jung Cheng, supervised by Professor Tony Zhang and Associate Professor Anthony Jaworowski, will further investigate the effects of TCM on managing HIV-related inflammation that predict cardiovascular risk in PLHIV. This will, in turn, allow for further study of the impact of TCM on inflammation, the course of the disease itself, and on cardiovascular disease.

The main formulations used in this project will be designed based on the most recent systematic review about the effects and safety of Chinese herbal medicine on inflammatory biomarkers in cardiovascular disease. Since similar mechanisms influence cardiovascular risk in older people as well as PLHIV, the knowledge gained through this project may also prove applicable to future investigations of the diseases of normal ageing.

“Opalgate is excited to partner in research that emphasises the integration of Chinese and Western medical sciences,” says Catherine. “Hopefully this research will benefit all of society in the future.”

This innovative project will bring together Western and Chinese medical practices in an effort to solve a pressing public health issue. We congratulate Wan-Jung on being the selected candidate and thank the Opalgate Foundation for supporting this exciting research.



3



- 1 RMIT PhD student Wan-Jung Cheng, who is undertaking the research project
- 2 This project will use advanced immunological approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of TCM in reducing inflammation in PLHIV
- 3 RMIT Building 223 at the Bundoora Campus, where this research project is based
- 4 RMIT PhD student Wan-Jung Cheng with supervisors Professor Tony Zhang (middle) and Associate Professor Anthony Jaworowski (left)



4

# Hannah's scholarship story

Hannah Rutherford received a scholarship to help with her studies. Here is her story.

- 1 Hannah Rutherford, George Alexander Scholar 2021
- 2 Hannah Rutherford mingling with other student scholars at RMIT's Scholarship Celebration Evening



My name's Hannah, and I'm in my 3rd year of a Bachelor of Environment and Society. I decided to do this degree because I love exploring beautiful natural environments and learning about how we can take better care of people and the planet.

I heard about RMIT's scholarship program through my student email, and I felt compelled to apply and give the process a red-hot go. When I got the email confirming that I'd received the scholarship, I was over the moon. It was incredibly humbling and rewarding. Receiving this scholarship at the start of 2021 felt like meaningful recognition for staying involved in my community during a difficult lockdown period, while still maintaining strong academic results.

When COVID struck again in 2021 and we faced more lockdowns, my scholarship supported me to upgrade my laptop to one that could tackle online learning. And as three quarters of my university experience has taken place online, this laptop proved to be a necessary and timely investment for many an online class, academic research report and banana bread recipe blog!

Beyond the financial support, receiving a scholarship has connected me with a network of peers, providing opportunities for friendship, personal and professional development. And getting back on campus this year to connect in person has been a delight.

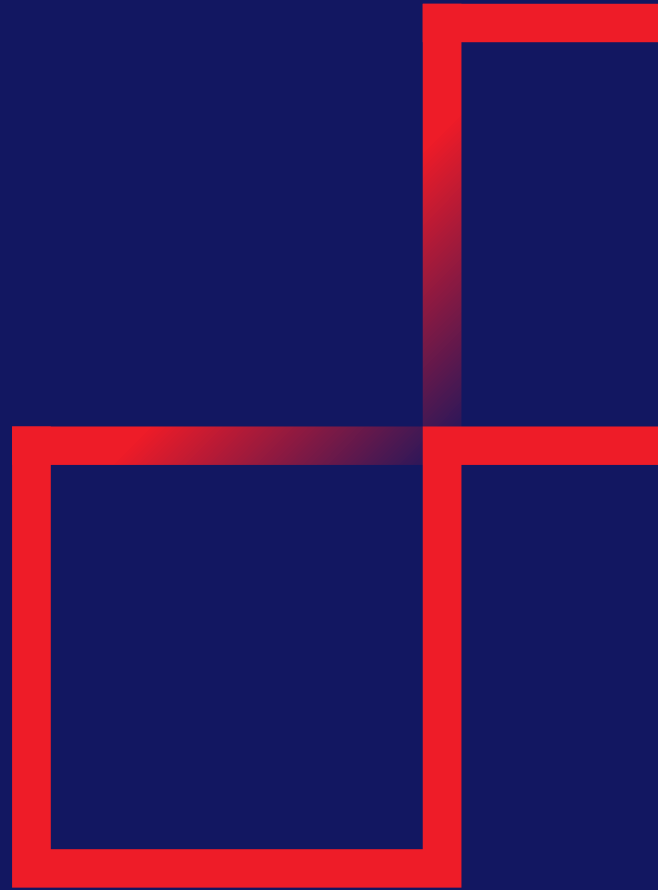
I would love to extend my gratitude to RMIT's donor community for uplifting my voice and bolstering my educational, personal and professional pursuits.

Thank you.

The scholarship has allowed me to invest more in my education, my community and in my future. As a young woman in the era of COVID-19 and increasing climate change, the improved financial security has been so valuable.

Hannah Rutherford, RMIT scholarship recipient





**RMIT Philanthropy**

GPO Box 2476  
Melbourne VIC 3001 Australia  
+61 3 9925 5220

[giving@rmit.edu.au](mailto:giving@rmit.edu.au)