# Audio file

[Kate GS (MPRG).mp3](https://mornpen-my.sharepoint.com/personal/rowena_wiseman_mornpen_vic_gov_au/Documents/Transcribed%20Files/Kate%20GS%20(MPRG).mp3)

Kate – Kate Gorringe-Smith (artist)

Danny – Danny Lacy (interviewer)

# Transcript

00:00:00 Danny

Thanks for joining me today, Kate.

00:00:02 Kate

Oh lovely to be here. Thanks so much, Danny.

00:00:04 Danny

Really looking forward to having a bit of a chat today and hearing more about your amazing project which has been in the pipeline for a long time to be on show at Mornington. But do you want to start off by talking a little bit about the overarching idea behind the over wintering project?

00:00:11 Speaker 3

Dance.

00:00:19 Kate

Sure, I'd love to. So the over wintering project I started it in June in 2017.

00:00:27 Kate

And it's the third group project I've done about migratory shorebirds.

00:00:34 Kate

But this one was like the biggest. The idea behind this one is anybody can get involved in it, but the core of it is because I'm a printmaker. It was a call out to the beautiful Australian and New Zealand printmaking community an I'm very lucky to be part of the Print Council of Australia so I know what a wonderful group of people that is and how close knit and caring that group is.

00:01:00 Kate

So I put this idea out into the community to see what people would make of it, and the idea was artists were invited to go out into their own local migratory shorebird habitat and make a print in response to the habitat. It could be anything didn't have to be a bird or a migratory shorebird, although most people have done.

00:01:19 Kate

Ashore because they said.

00:01:20 Kate

Cool and they could do an edition of any size and it could be in any medium, but they send me to 28 by 28 prints from the same edition, one to sell and want to exhibit. So the ones that are sold all the money goes to Bird Life Australia for their migratory shorebird conservation projects. An the exhibited one travels around to wonderful gallery's like this if we're lucky.

00:01:45 Kate

Now.

00:01:46 Danny

And I guess the exciting thing for me is to see the way that we've installed them at morning. Turn on a huge wall, and as a huge batch it's just beautiful, isn't it?

00:01:53 Kate

Striking.

00:01:55 Kate

Yeah, it's really striking, and it's a real testament to that work that people have put in when they join the project cause it's just it's stunning thing to see that mosaic of images.

00:02:07 Danny

Yeah, and it's I guess the thing that joins them altogether is obviously the subject matter and the medium to a certain degree, but just the diversity in those sort of over 300 prints when you see them altogether like that, it's quite overwhelming really.

00:02:19 Kate

Yeah, people I've spoken to have had to sort of come back and have another look big.

00:02:23 Kate

You need time with it to really give them the attention they deserve as individual works.

00:02:29 Danny

Yeah, and I'd love to hear a little bit more as well as an extension of this project being held in morning to obviously where right next to Western Port Bay, which is a really significant important wetland.

00:02:43 Danny

I talk a little bit about that part of the project.

00:02:46 Kate

Sure, yes. As I said, the projects been going a little while and it's designed to raise awareness for migratory shorebirds, which are our most endangered group of birds. Because they do these amazing epic journeys every year, we have 36.

00:03:01 Kate

She's an. They spend most of the year on our shores from roughly October to April May, but then they do these epic migrations up. What's called the East Asian Australasian flyway.

00:03:17 Kate

Up the East Coast of Asia and then they breed. Most of them breed in the Arctic, Siberia and Alaska, and then they're up there for about six weeks. Not very long, and then they come back, and some of them fly straight across the ocean, like for days without stopping. And they do that migration every year of their adult lives. Andover, their lifetime, they will fly more miles than from the Earth to the moon.

00:03:42 Kate

An one of the places they come back to every year is Westernport, and the reason they come back to Western port is becausr migratory shorebirds love mud flats because that's where they feed. They don't have webbed feet, so they can't be swimming in the water. So they did their beeks down into the mud and they eat the little crabs and the polychaete worms and things like that and Western port. As he said, Danny is an internationally significant wetland cerams our site. So that's.

00:04:11 Kate

The international Agreement to protect wet.

00:04:14 Kate

And it's a key biodiversity area which is a criteria or a sort of a nomination for a wetland by bird Life international, it's protected by international migratory bird agreements an it's a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve as well, so it's got so many layers of importance because it's, yeah, really special special place.

00:04:33 Kate

Because it's.

00:04:33 Kate

00:04:36 Speaker 3

00:04:37 Danny

And Luckily, just recently we can't not mention. I guess there's a GL development or proposal an I guess the risk that that would have on that environment, and Luckily the state government overturned that proposal, which was a big win for the local community, I think.

00:04:43 Kate

Yeah.

00:04:50 Kate

Fantastic, absolutely fantastic. Yeah that was amazing and it was the timing of the exhibition. Of course it was supposed to happen last year, but of course you know with covert it was postponed and so it's been quite amazing to have the exhibition.

00:05:07 Kate

During the period when that ruling was actually handed down and I'm just so thankful for so many, many reasons that it was against the development, but also because it meant that the exhibition could stay a celebration rather than a.

00:05:24 Kate

Requiem, which would have been terrible.

00:05:26 Danny

Yeah.

00:05:27 Kate

Yeah.

00:05:28 Danny

The other really fantastic element of the exhibition at morning Tunne the contemporary projects which there's quite a few artists making work in response to this idea, can you sort introduced that element of the project?

00:05:41 Kate

Sure. So in the exhibitions that I've curated personally, as well as the beautiful over wintering project print portfolio I've tried to gather together artists that I either know or have heard of who I thought would be able to engage with the idea.

00:06:02 Kate

And so we've got about 20 curated artists in this one, I think, and I think it's 12 of them have made work specifically in response to the Western port environment, including Dominic White from Balloch Arts on the Peninsula here, and he's done this wonderful hoodie suit. So it's the hooded plover is our most endangered non migratory bird resident, so a lot of you will probably have been on beaches.

00:06:29 Kate

In the summer with signage and people, put up ropes and is often people you know. Watching to say, could you please, you know, keep your dogs away, that'll be for the hooded covers coz they just nest on the beach and they're so easy to miss their nest and to trample their eggs all their young and he's done this amazing life sized Wicker and kelp suit that he actually put on and ran around on the Flinders Beach so that he could embody what it was like to be this little bird. So anyway, it's a wonderful piece.

00:07:00 Kate

So the work features photographs of his performance and the actual weakest suit. The hoodie empathy suit. So that's just one example of how the artists have come in, and they've tried to find knew an innovative and beautiful ways to, I guess, give people ways to respond to the environment and to notice things in the environment that they might otherwise not have known about or not have thought about in an emotional way.

00:07:27 Danny

Yeah, and I think the real strength of the exhibition like.

00:07:30 Danny

As in the rich textures, that sort of overlapping between the work. So you mentioned Dominic's work, but also heathers work, which is this sort of quite amazing installation of plants in the Gallery and obviously even people that Liz Walker her beautiful wings just which look real when you stand back, but then you get up close and they're actually made out of metal.

00:07:38 Speaker 3

Yeah.

00:07:45 Speaker 3

Yes.

00:07:50 Kate

Yeah, that's a beautiful work and I found it really interesting coz of course I gave the artists the brief or an it was supported by a grant from Creative Victoria. So thanks.

00:08:00 Kate

Creative Victoria could pay most of my artists, which is a wonderful thing to do. But yeah, this sort of the synergies between things. I think the playing with scale and also just bringing things into the Gallery like the plants. But here the histamine has done the plant installation, but Beverly Meldrum's piece where she's brought in works from the actual beach, so.

00:08:23 Kate

Bringing those things into the Gallery recontextualises the man makes people think. I think differently about them, which is really beautiful.

00:08:31 Danny

Yeah, and there's a number of completely different mediums used, as well as video work. This Hank's beautiful wooden sculptures. So there's a lot of diversity in the media, which I think gives you quite a lot to look at, and it's really quite thought provoking.

00:08:38 Speaker 3

Yeah.

00:08:43 Kate

Yes.

00:08:45 Kate

Yeah, and its multi sensory cause you've got Byron skull and soundscape and you've got the beautiful video by Catherine Vesely and the wonderful.

00:08:55 Kate

Other wonderful video, but which is an animation by Simeon Lisowski who is actually a German scientist whose animated the tracking data from a number of birds that have travelled from Westernport up the highway, fly away and back again. And so there's these little red dots that you see moving in just to think of them being these tiny little fragile feathered bodies travelling these vast distances. Coz it's an animation of the globe and these little birds traversing it. It's just amazing.

00:09:26 Danny

Barnes works quite fascinating. It's obviously.

00:09:29 Danny

As a sound work, very hard to take like images of it because there's just a series of small little speakers attached to the lighting track, but that sort of imbues the whole space with this beautiful soundscape which add. Yeah, yeah, which is really lovely.

00:09:41 Kate

Yeah, it ties it all together, yeah?

00:09:45 Kate

It is and it's lovely 'cause it moves through the Gallery 'cause it's as he say. He uses those tiny little speakers and I think it probably takes people awhile to realise that it's a work and not just you hearing the birds from somewhere outside. So that's really lovely so.

00:09:58 Danny

Yeah.

00:10:00 Kate

Sneaky sneaks up on you that one.

00:10:02 Danny

Yeah I want to ask you a little bit about pretty over wintering.

00:10:07 Danny

Because I guess it's taken such a big chunk of your recent life and in so much energy, which is just fantastic. Well, a couple of things that really inspired that project. Like if you think back to the work that you're making before the over wintering, what was it that led you on that journey? Was there one thing or is?

00:10:08 Kate

What was that?

00:10:14 Danny

What?

00:10:14 Danny

00:10:25 Kate

It yeah, so I've been working even in my own practise with migratory shorebirds for about a decade now.

00:10:31 Kate

Seriously obsessed and nerdy? Obviously an what led me to migratory shorebirds was my own sort of story. We'd spent three years as a family living in England because of my husband's work an we came back. The timing that brought us back when we came back was because my father passed away in Australia. But Mum and Dad were from England originally and moved to Australia in the 60s in the year.

00:11:00 Kate

I was born and coming back and being with Mum. It made me realise that probably like many immigrants, she'd never really changed her idea of home from England. And with Dad gone, that just was all the more apparent. 'cause I guess he was actually her home more than any country and sort of that coupled with our own move back, which was much harder coming back than it was going, which I was not expecting.

00:11:23 Kate

It was much harder.

00:11:23 Kate

00:11:28 Kate

It might be reflected upon journeys of migrants and refugees who are not in nearly as privileged position as we were with a home to come back to, and doing it for work because we wanted to. Rather than, you know, for all the other tumultuous reasons people move around the globe. So I was looking for a metaphor for that, and I used to work for Bird Life Australia many years ago in the 90s.

00:11:53 Kate

So I knew about these birds an just the fact that they have that tug every year. They never settle there.

00:12:00 Kate

Always drawn from one hemisphere to the other. Made me think very much of my mother. She can't leave Australia because she has her children and grandchildren here, but.

00:12:09 Kate

The family she does have left in London. In fact, she can't even go back to London because the London she would want to go back to doesn't exist anymore. So yeah, the birds are.

00:12:20 Kate

Reflect that restlessness, I think, but they're also really, really inspiring, because they're just so little. And they do that journey every year. The smallest of them. The rednecks tent weighs as much as a timtam and still does that journey. It's 25,000 kilometres every year of their adult life.

00:12:39 Kate

00:12:40 Kate

So I know.

00:12:40 Danny

It's pretty amazing, isn't it? Like in terms of that endurance and the risk associated with like flying that far?

00:12:44 Kate

Yet.

00:12:45 Kate

Yeah, and when you think of like you can do is kind of a Google Maps thing, but it's of the weather and then you think that there's all the terrestrial issues of development and hunting and dogs and cats and foxes etc. But then there's the weather they have to traverse that to cyclones and typhoons and.

00:13:03 Kate

So there's a sort of they they have the weight of metaphor these little birds, because you know they can embody human migration, and that search for home. And that search for safety really beautifully indelicately. But they themselves, as creatures are fascinating as well. So that's I don't see myself stopping anytime too soon. I'm afraid. It just draws me in.

00:13:28 Danny

The more I learn, no, that's great and I wanted to ask you about. I guess you're printmaking background and what drew you to printmaking? What inspired you to sort of.

00:13:35 Speaker 3

Haha.

00:13:37 Danny

Get involved.

00:13:37 Kate

I've got a good story for that.

00:13:40 Kate

So I was really lucky this school I went to. I happened to be at the same school as.

00:13:45 Kate

Fred Williams is daughters, and while I was studying at the school very, very sadly. Fred died very young and he passed away while I was at the school. But the thing that was great for me was.

00:13:59 Kate

His widow donated his press to my school, so I learned achieve.

00:14:04 Kate

On Fred Williams is press now. That doesn't make someone a printmaker. Nothing will will it really so anyway. So I did printmaking in HCS it was in there.

00:14:14 Kate

Stays and always loved the process and then did a different degree and then just gradually came back to it. So actually I did a.

00:14:22 Kate

BA in printmaking at RMIT. While I was actually working for BirdLife Australia, so my first prints that I did sort of properly I guess were also bird related yeah?

00:14:35 Danny

Well, it's nice to have the two running in parallel I guess. Yeah yeah.

00:14:38 Kate

Yeah, yeah, and it's been lovely 'cause the print community is very much well. It's very similar in a way to the bird community like it's close knit people are very passionate about what they do. People love to share information.

00:14:50 Kate

They both very very generous communities. Yeah, so it's a real privilege to be able to work with both the communities in fact.

00:14:57 Danny

And I guess it's part of the overwintering project, Westernport you've been involved in a number of talks and workshops, but the online workshop that you did for us was an eco printing workshop, which was really fascinating. Notice talk a little bit about that process behind the eco printing.

00:15:07 Kate

I think you on.

00:15:10 Kate

So that's knew. That's sort of grown up with.

00:15:13 Kate

This particular project, because the project is so much about place.

00:15:18 Kate

It's really for me at least the over wintering project is about ideas of home and if we could extend their idea about home to include that habitat that we discovered through the birds, then you know if you could champion it in the same way you look after your own little Patch of turf, then a lot of problems would be solved, just as the good people of Western port, you know have discovered you can win these fights. So when I started making work for the over wintering project and I chose Westernport as my site because we holiday here.

00:15:48 Kate

In the summer at Phillip Island, but also my husbands family has a long history in Association with Phillip.

00:15:54 Kate

Island.

00:15:55 Kate

And a friend introduced me to India. Flint's eco printing process. And she's the guru of Eco printing. She does a lot with paper, but I think mainly fabrics. I devoured her books and yeah, and I've been experimenting over past sort of four or five years with eco printing as a way to really embed your image in your habitat. Because you use, you can use sort of vegetation materials and I collected seaweeds and other plant materials very carefully and responsibly.

00:16:26 Speaker 3

00:16:26 Kate

From around the western port environment and use them to make the patterns on the paper in my piece, yeah.

00:16:33 Danny

00:16:33 Kate

And it's really fun too. Very cheap. You have a cauldron, takes blonde.

00:16:38 Danny

Obviously you're not going to be stopping this project anytime soon. What are the plans coming up for over wintering?

00:16:46 Kate

So the way the project is structured, I don't have to be in charge of exhibitions, thank goodness, and the good people of Britain, the printmakers, in Adelaide, they've got a wonderful exhibition coming up and over wintering project exhibition coming up that opens on June the 5th.

00:17:02 Kate

At Signal Point Gallery in Google, which is right near the Coorong, another very significant shorebird habitat. After that, the prints themselves, so the portfolio won't be part of that, but there heading to Tasmania.

00:17:16 Kate

And I've got some irons in the fire in WA and another one in South Australia, so it's just sort of sometimes things come to me, and sometimes I'll try and set things running an more and more the birding community as well is sort of saying this would be a good place for a project. Yeah, so I'll just follow it and see where it goes.

00:17:39 Danny

And finally, we always ask this question at the end of our interviews. What advice do you have a sort of up and coming artists in their practise?

00:17:47 Kate

I would say don't give up. I would say play the long game. The arts are fraught with.

00:17:53 Kate

Criticism and disappointment. You lent a lot of competitions, and you'll get knocked back. And it doesn't mean your work is bad at all.

00:18:01 Kate

And I think just be true to yourself as well. You look at other people and you'll think damn, I wish I could do that. But probably what you're not thinking is people are looking at your work and going damn, I wish I could do that because everybody's work is identifiable Y unique and your job, I think, is to hone.

00:18:24 Kate

What is unique about your own work and follow your own visions. Then don't worry if you don't know what that is yet either. Just do what you love and things will fall into place. You know as you go for.

00:18:38 Danny

00:18:39 Danny

Beautiful well thanks so much for bringing the over wintering project down to the MPRG. It's been great to work with you over a number of years in the delivery of the exhibition and project, so thanks so much.

00:18:49 Kate

Oh, thank you. It's just a dream having it here. It's such a beautiful Gallery Danny and it's been lovely working with you and the wonderful staff here, so thank you.