**MEDIA RELEASE**

**A living legacy for our ‘wild’ flower women!**

*‘Wild/flower Women II: Art, Environment and Activism’ Exhibition*

Caloundra Regional Gallery 3 May-17 June 2018

Co-curated by A/Prof Susan Davis, CQUniversity and independent curator Nina Shadforth

*‘Wildflowering: Women who changed the world through art’*

Anywhere Theatre performance written by A/Prof Susan Davis featuring the writing of Kathleen McArthur and Judith Wright, 19 May, 2018

The living legacy of Queensland women who have used their art and artistry to care and protect country is being featured in a new exhibition and performance as part of the ‘Wild/flower Women II: Art, Environment and Activism’ exhibition. CQUniversity’s Associate Professor Susan Davis has been researching work of two influential Australian women Kathleen McArthur and Judith Wright, two writers and artists whose creative work extended beyond their painting, writing and poetry to tackling major environmental campaigns. That research work has ‘blossomed’ into this new exhibition, a performance and other upcoming programs at Caloundra Regional Gallery opening May 2.

A shared love of the subtle beauties of Queensland’s often overlooked wildflowers led to Kathleen McArthur, Judith Wright and their families embarking on a ‘wildflowering’ expedition across the coast in 1953. Climbing to the top of Mt Tinbeerwah they looked north across the untouched plains and coastline stretching north to Double Island Point and Wide Bay and declared ‘this would make a great national park’. Their concerns about the limited knowledge of most Australian children regarding our rich natural heritage led to them forming the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ) in 1962 along with naturalist David Fleay and publisher Brian Clouston. Judith Wright served as their first President, and Kathleen McArthur was Vice-President before refocussing her efforts back on the coast to form a Caloundra Branch for the WPSQ in 1963.

Kathleen and Judith then lead one of Australia’s first major conservation battles, creating nation-wide public awareness of the existence of and special nature of the Cooloola region. Working alongside many others, such as Arthur Harrold (of the Noosa Parks Association), they embarked on a 22-year campaign which finally resulted in the gazettal of Cooloola National Park in 1975. A highlight of their Cooloola campaigning was the distribution of 100,000 protest cards right across Australia, with an estimated 15,000 of them being sent to Queensland’s then Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen. This success was even more remarkable when considering the pro-development, conservative politics of Queensland throughout that time.

The ‘Wild/flower Women II’ exhibition builds upon the first exhibition at Noosa Regional Gallery Dec 2016-17. This new exhibition features a selection of Kathleen’s beautiful wildflower paintings, many of which were based on Sunshine Coast wallum but also includes the work of four contemporary Sunshine Coast artists as well.

To profile the living legacy of the power of art to inform and inspire, contemporary artists Marvene Ash, Shannon Garson, Anne Harris and Ulrike Sturm pay homage with their own responses to our wildflowers and natural heritage.

The new works include a number of large format hand cut vinyl works by Ulrike Sturm, print-maker and CQUniversity PhD student. These works feature some of the vistas that inspired Kathleen and Judith’s ‘wildflowering’, and a work based on an image of a young Kathleen out in the field. Another innovative body of work is that by ‘plant’ artist Anne Harris, who has created a set of dresses entitled ‘Embodied Wallum’. These dresses are coloured using dyes sources from nature, and one includes a depiction of a photo of Kathleen and Judith out ‘wildflowering’ north of Lake Currimundi in the 1960s.

Co-curator Susan Davis hopes that this exhibition will inspire people to learn more about their local native plants and history but also about the stories of women and activists such as Kathleen McArthur and Judith Wright.

“We can be inspired by the courage and dedication of these women and learn so much about the challenges and determination it takes to bring about change. What I hope for with this suite of projects is that this work becomes a living legacy, highlighting the power of art to inform and inspire.”

The ‘Wild/flower Women’ exhibition is showing at the [Caloundra Regional Gallery](https://gallery.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/) from 3 May – 17 June 2018. A one-day symposium is also being held on Monday 11 June as well as a wide range of workshops and events including an [Anywhere Theatre](http://anywhere.is/listings/wildflowering/) production on Saturday 19 May. For further information about the exhibiton and ‘Wild/flower Women’ activities see [https://www.wildflowerwomen.net/](https://www.wildflowerwomen.net/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) .

This exhibition and event is being supported by CQUniversity Noosa.

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**Image credits:**

‘Embodied wallum’ Anne Harris 2018  Photo by Sam Frysteen

‘Kathleen with hat’, Ulrike Sturm 2018, illustration for free-cut vinyl installation

Sue Davis with Bettina Walter ‘Wildflowering at Girraween’

Sue Davis with Ulrike Sturm ‘Wildflowering at Emu Mountain’