

## Sarah Walker—Her small white hands (Wall commission #2)

Through her multi-disciplinary practice, Sarah Walker explores contemporary responses to death, disaster, and catastrophe. Text, language, and dark humour form the basis of works in which she creates speculative fictions that employ the element of surprise to prompt conversations about difficult subjects.

In this wall commission, Walker responds to the Gallery's most iconic work, Frederick McCubbin's *A bush burial* (1890): one of the artist's great 'pioneering' paintings in which the hardships of settlers living on the land culminate in a scene of mourners gathered beside an anonymous grave. In this and other paintings from the period—such as *On the wallaby track* (1896) and *The pioneer* (1904)—McCubbin engaged his wife Annie (who he married in March 1889) as the central model.

Walker creates an imaginary dialogue between the artist and subject that captures the intimacy of the newly married couple and their collaboration on the composition. An internal monologue runs concurrently in which Annie's thoughts foretell the tragedy that awaits the pair: the accidental death of their infant daughter Mary in late 1894, after falling from her pram and striking her head on cobblestones.

Annie's internal monologue is executed by Walker in invisible ink: legible only with the use of a UV torch. The gaps in the flow of visible text—occupied by 'invisible' text—allude to absences and speculate on what is often left unsaid. This 'transparency' that Walker introduces is echoed in the translucent cloth on the cart in McCubbin's composition, thought to represent the threshold between worldly existence and the afterlife and linked to his interest in Spiritualism. In inviting visitors to activate text via torchlight, Walker draws us more deeply into the fictional narrative, eliciting consideration of our own experiences of, and responses to, loss and absence.

Please note: the narrative explores themes that visitors may find confronting.  
Please return torch after use.

Supported through Creative Victoria's  
COVID-19 Strategic Investment Fund



Frederick McCubbin  
*A bush burial* 1890  
oil on canvas  
Geelong Gallery  
Purchased by public subscription, 1900