

# Flesh after Fifty: Changing images of older women in Art

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# Why?

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- Women over 50 are one of the fastest growing population groups
- Most are in paid employment and also do the great majority of unpaid work
  - Caring for families across generations
- All will experience menopause – visible marker of ageing
- Despite their central role, women over 50 are rarely seen
  - Bodies of women over 50 are invisible



Image courtesy of Sam Jinks

# Why?

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- Ageism is a powerful social determinant of health
- World Health Organisation (2021) and United Nations (2023) reported
- 90% hold gender biases
- >50% hold ageist attitudes
- Together, older women risk gendered ageism



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(Mikton et al 2021, Zarocostas 2023)



# Body image and breast screening

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- 67% of screen age women in Australia are overweight or obese ([www.abs.com](http://www.abs.com))
- Obesity increases breast cancer risk
- Overweight/obesity increases women's reluctance to attend breast screening



Image courtesy of Peter Wegener

Lack of representation reinforces negative stereotypes and reduces self-esteem



Image courtesy of Niki Koutouzis



What could we do?

Image courtesy of Maree Clarke



# What?

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- Funded by Creative Victoria and philanthropy we commissioned 10 new artworks about “older women”
- Exhibition ran for 6 weeks in Melbourne in 2021
  - Painting
  - Sculpture
  - Video
  - Photography

## **Flesh after Fifty**

**Changing images of older women in Art**



Appealing merchandise





# Great success

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25,000 visitors to the Melbourne exhibition

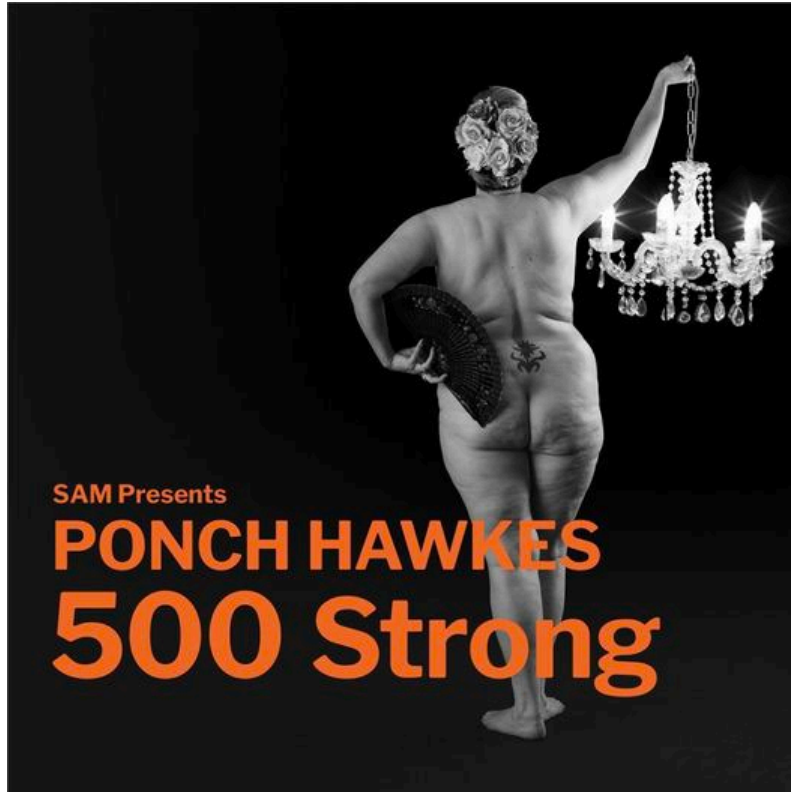


## 'Reclaiming women's bodies from shame': a photographic illumination of ageing

Over 12 months, Ponch Hawkes has shot more than 400 nude women over 50 to fix a pervasive problem: 'We don't know what the bodies of older women actually look like'

**The Guardian**  
A decade of making a difference

Mon 8 Mar 2021 13.36  
AEDT



500 Strong on tour: 50,000 people saw the exhibition  
in Shepperton, Geelong and Horsham

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Not everything made it on tour



500 Strong in the Lancet (March 2024)

Images courtesy of Ponch Hawkes



# **in my prime**

## celebrating older women

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First dedicated online resource for older women's health





This time in colour

**in my prime**  
celebrating older women

Images courtesy of Ponch Hawkes



Using positive images to  
improve mammographic  
screening participation

# Increasing screening Participation: The BreastScreen*Plus* Project



## Aim:

Evaluate a novel intervention targeting obesity-related barriers to mammographic screening participation within the BreastScreen WA program



Stakeholder  
Consultant  
Group



Promotional  
video



Service  
Delivery  
Staff  
training



## Outcomes:

Improved mammogram experience  
Significant increases in rescreening rates  
A validated intervention



## Impact:

Better breast cancer outcomes due to early detection – in WA and potentially across Australia



# BreastScreen*Plus*

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- Targeting obesity-related barriers to mammographic screening
    - Physical discomfort, access to screening, competing demands, low-perceived risk, cultural and linguistic barriers, body image and shame
    - Radiographer: mechanical problems which may cause frustration with larger bodies
  - Co-design and evaluate novel interventions to increase participation in breast screening
    - Particularly women in larger bodies
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Image courtesy of Ponch Hawkes

## The Intervention

Two components:

- Information for BreastScreen clients about mammography with visual images of diverse bodies
- One-day training workshop for BreastScreen service delivery staff

# Evaluation

Primary outcome: Rescreening rates

Secondary outcome: Survey of staff  
and patients pre and post intervention



Image courtesy of Ponch Hawkes

# Investigator Team

## Chief Investigators:

- Jennifer Stone, cancer epidemiologist, University of Western Australia
- Martha Hickey, OBGYN, Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne
- Kate McBride, qualitative researcher, University of Western Sydney
- Carolyn Madeley, Chief Radiographer, BreastScreen WA

## Associate Investigators:

- Liz Wylie, Medical Director, BreastScreen WA
- Ann White, community representative
- Sam Hogan, PhD candidate

## Radiographer Consultant:

- Liz Stewart, BreastScreen VIC





Image courtesy of Ponch Hawkes

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## Summary

- Most older women in Australia are overweight or obese
- Many experience body shame which may be increased by
  - Lack of representation
  - Negative responses of others to their bodies (e.g. Breastscreen)
- Positive representation through art may help
- Better experiences at Breastscreen may help retain women in the program



Image courtesy of Ponch Hawkes

# Thank you

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