

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Dirty Women

---

by Elizabeth Bennett

---

EXTRACT

© 2006 Elizabeth Bennett



This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre  
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia  
email [admin@ozscript.org](mailto:admin@ozscript.org)  
[www.ozscript.org](http://www.ozscript.org)  
ph +61 3 6223 4675  
fax +61 3 6223 4678

## Characters

**Louise Bayle: 60 - 70, female.** Artist, feisty, determined and stubborn. Has been an artist for 36 years. Bird-like, alert, sharp, bright and rude. Stands very upright, as if trying to make herself taller. Dresses in very neat, colourful clothes.

**Scope: 25, male.** Street artist, urban warrior. Graffiti writer. Wears hoodies and jeans that are falling down. Has wild hair. Becomes rising young contemporary artist with tight black jeans, leather satchel, fashionable glasses - and wild hair.

**Meridee Graham: 40 - 45, female.** Louise's daughter. Has only just reconciled with her mother after a gap of over thirty years. Meridee believes in the power and beauty of the market. An uptight, buttoned-up economist, dedicated to the market with a passion that turns dangerous. Believes that art is a commodity like anything else. Wants to tame her mother and make her profitable. Over-groomed. Precise. Neat. Handbag and shoes match. Nail polish. Looks sewn into her clothes.

**Vi Pritchard: 25 - 30, female.** Vi is the ghost of an artist who died in the madness of the mid-1970s. Along with Louise Bayle and Sarah Porter, Vi was one of the (fictional) group of artists known as 'The Dirty Women'. Vi is dead, but is still feisty and anarchic. Mischievous and has a strong sense of fun and showmanship. Has to switch quickly between a variety of roles.

**Sarah Porter: 25 - 30, female.** Ghost of Sarah. Died 1976. One of the original group of three feminist women artists known as 'The Dirty Women'. Dead, but full of life. Irreverent, feisty, anarchic, mischievous and has a strong sense of fun and showmanship. The list-maker. The organised one of the trio. Also plays a variety of roles.

All characters remain on stage throughout the play. When they are not in a scene, or when they exit a scene, they sit in a row to one side of the stage. Each character has a magazine they can read when they are sidelined. Meridee has *Australian Art Collector*; Scope has a black and white graphic Zine; Sarah has a 1970s issue of *Oz*; Vi has a 1970s issue of *Private Eye* and Louise has *The Monthly*. Occasionally, when they interrupt a scene without fully entering it, they do so from the sideline, over the top of their magazines.

All characters, 1970s feminist ghosts, Dirty Women and graff artists in this play are purely fictional.

## **Note**

Sarah Porter and Vi Pritchard are Everywoman Artist. They are primarily Sarah and Vi, the two other (deceased) members of the feminist art group known as 'The Dirty Women', but they are also clowns, showpeople and magicians.

They subvert scenes.

They make messes, as 'The Dirty Women' did in the 1970s.

They step over boundaries and become other people - other women artists and other characters.

They create havoc; they create art installations - some of which are homages to specific women artists, some of which are all their own.

They create spectacle.

Sarah and Vi's voices are 'treated' in some way, given reverb perhaps, or processed, very slightly, through an electric guitar.

They're from a different place (the 70s: a strange mixture of heaven and hell).

Vi and Sarah are dressed in very basic 1970s style gear: tank tops, jeans, leggings.

**Setting:** In an unnamed city square there's a hideous, massive public art structure, known as 'the Monument'. The Monument is basically a very large, very black wall with a high ledge running around the top of it.

There's a silhouette of the Monument on a screen at the back of the stage. Big black shape, squashed in at the top.

**L.B.** is standing with her back to the audience, looking up at the shape on the screen. She turns around.

**L.B:** What was I thinking when I made that?

Sculpture is all about defining your limits - I did well.

Killing myself...

It shows.

*(turns to take another look at the Monument)* People round here call it 'the Monument'. It's a magnet for graffiti writers. It's a blot on the park, an obstruction. It's a weapon of mass depression - in other words - a very successful bit of public art.

Everyone hates it, he said.

I know.

Really hates it.

I said I know.

**SCOPE:** A wave hitting a rock. A train hitting a bus. Total. Sudden. Bam! A window shattering. Five thousand pieces. Destruction can be beautiful. And every piece of glass a dagger that can kill. Red, green, black. Fat black paint. Black for text, always black for text, man. And the text for today is: 'If looks could kill - we'd bloody paint looks!' *(laughs)* A rocket on fire. But not going up into empty space. Going here *(points to his head)*. In your face. Stopping you in your tracks.

Don't expect to like me. That's not what I'm here for.

**L.B:** I asked him to paint me something. On the side of the Monument.

**SCOPE:** *(spraying text)* 'Life doesn't last. Art doesn't last. It doesn't matter.'

**L.B:** He liked that. It was a quote from Eva Hesse. I asked him to sign it...

**SCOPE:** My name's Scope. I'm not signing another fucker's name.

**L.B:** Then something else happened. A car went past. Twice. Then it stopped. Someone leaned out.

**VI:** Hey! You just did that?

**SCOPE:** No, man!

**VI:** What's it for?

**SCOPE:** Your pleasure.

**VI:** I'm calling the cops...

**SCOPE:** You must be desperate for company, man!

**L.B:** Then I took him home. *(beat)* I find vandalism very inspiring.

*L.B. waits for reaction from Meridee. There is none. Meridee is in spotlight, frozen and impassive.*

*Look at her. Still waiting for money to make sense of history.*

**MERIDEE:** In the economy there's a sense of things moving, rolling forwards like a train on parallel tracks. People are making things, wishing things made, paying other people to make things. And every thirty years, in the market, a pattern restores the order in what you may have thought was chaos...

*Music fades up: a well-known song from the 1970s. Perhaps George Harrison's 'Here Comes the Sun'.*

*Vi and Sarah move their chairs centre stage so that they are sitting facing the audience. They are in their bus. Vi is driving.*

*The silhouette starts to revolve. Colours replace the dark shape and it becomes a circle, an artist's colour wheel. Then the colours blur and it becomes a psychedelic landscape seen from a 1951 Leyland Titan bus.*

*Music fades down as Sarah starts to speak.*

**SARAH:** *(writing in notebook)* January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1976...

**VI:** Twenty-nine degrees at 10.30 am.

**SARAH:** Driving from Mullumbimbi to Kiama, trying to keep ourselves awake.