

of foreboding is reflected in the subdued colours, skull necklace, the landscape flowing across the head and the symbolic cross shapes in the foreground, which represent dead flowers or birds.

In late 2015, life took a sudden downward turn for Cheryl, her husband and the local community. On 25 November, a bushfire broke out in the Pinery area in the lower mid-north of South Australia. Despite the open landscape, there had been higher than average temperatures in late October, then rainfall in early November followed by a dry spell leading up the imminent harvest of wheat; this had created a high fuel load across the arable farmland. Winds of 50–60 kilometres per hour (31–37 mph) fanned the flames and a fast-moving bushfire developed. A wind change created a 50km fire-front and this fierce fire was over in less than a day the fire destroyed 82,600 hectares of land; two people lost their lives and ninety were hospitalised, five with critical injuries; ninety-one houses were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, and 388 non-residential structures were completely destroyed. Their farm at Mallala was destroyed. To add to the trials and tribulations of the people living in the Pinery area, the following winter, weeks of heavy rains and a couple of severe storms caused flooding and further damage.

Cheryl's constant drive to work kicked in immediately. The night of the devastating bushfire, she sat down to draw the impact of the nightmarish events, later using these drawings as references as she stitched a machine embroidered work, *Night of the Fire*.

Following the Pinery bushfire, the landscape in the area was left dry, bare and blackened, the slightest breeze raising dust clouds that could be seen from far off, looking ominously like smoke from new bushfires. This imagery was reflected in many of the stitched artworks that Cheryl produced over the next few months, her familiar figures appearing against a blackened landscape with open, barren fields and black skeletons of trees bare of leaves. The bright colours in her work were replaced with browns, golds, and blacks; the colourful finery of exotic birds was replaced by the ominous-looking black crows, always in threes.

Nevertheless, Cheryl says of her next exhibition following the bushfire: "I didn't want it to be a dark exhibition. We ended up getting a place at Goolwa [a coastal



▲ *Everything is Different*, 2015, 71 x 51 cm, free embroidery on canvas. Photo by John Marshman.



▲ *Brand New Day*, 2016, 51 x 91 cm, free embroidery, collage & handmade cords on canvas. Photo by John Marshman.