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Cover image: Greg Johns, *Shedding Figure II* (detail), 2007, corten steel/mild steel.

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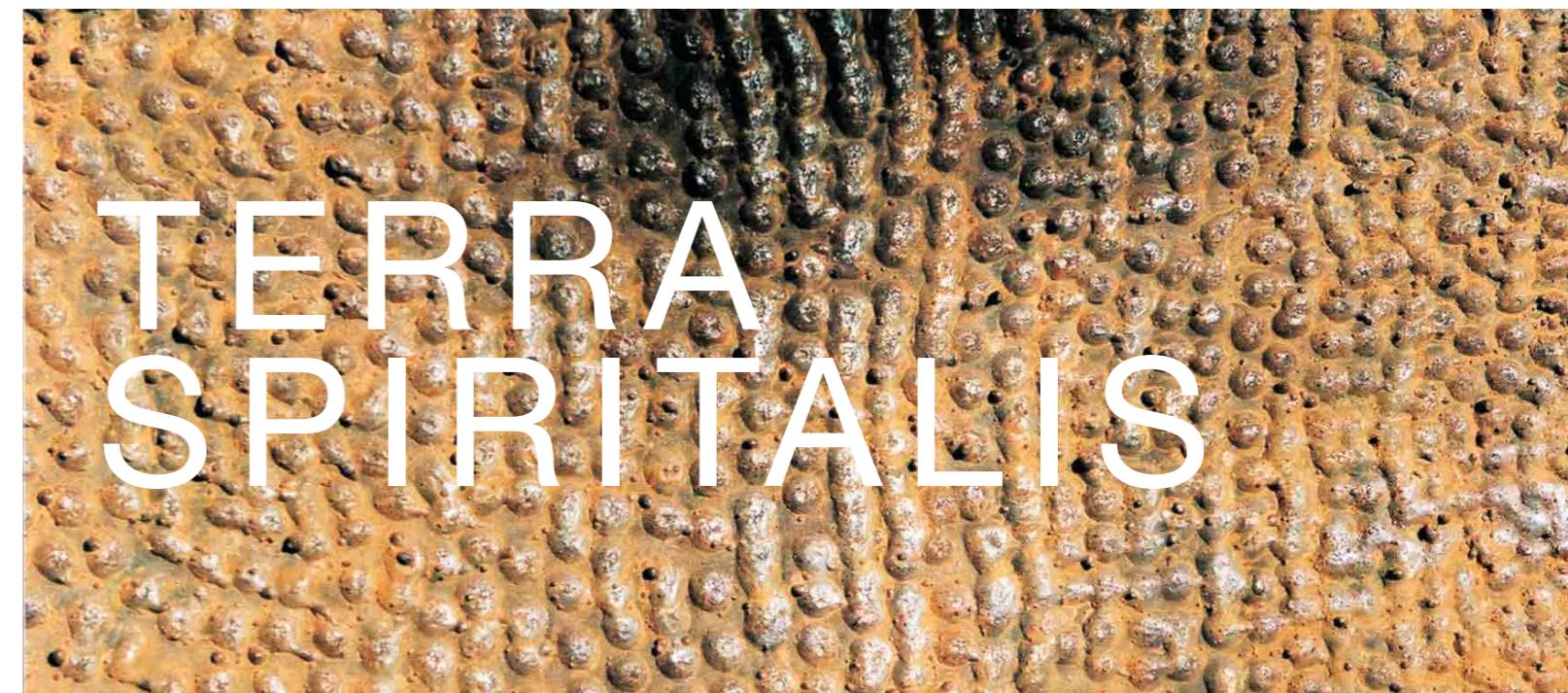
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The Regional Arts Fund is an Australian Government initiative supporting the arts in regional and remote Australia



TERRA SPIRITALIS

AN EXPLORATION OF CONTEMPORARY
CONNECTIONS TO AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPES

Kurt Brereton, Belinda Broughton, Jan Clifford,
Siv Grava, Ervin Janek, Greg Johns, Sue Kneebone,
Pamela Kouwenhoven, Rita Lindsay Jnr,
Gavin Malone, Ken Orchard, Peter Sharrock.

manifesto

It is time we started seriously questioning how we portray our connections to the land through art. For some inexplicable reason, Australian artists have failed to develop and evolve an abiding Australian landscape aesthetic that captures our felt relationships to the land. Frustratingly impressionist clichés persist and dominate our visual cultural identity. Artists such as Sydney Nolan, Fred Williams, Rosalie Gascoigne and John Olsen succeeded in briefly shocking us into an awareness of place, but they are isolated examples and remain the exceptions rather than the rule. To begin, we must discard the crutches of unquestioned European visions so that we can develop and embrace our own aesthetic that captures the spirit of this place.

We must ask ourselves how is it that many Indigenous artists are able to leave most of their non-Indigenous peers for dead in their ability to express a profound spiritual connection to land. Nolan thought Indigenous artists were Australia's best artists, and that their art and understanding of the land could lead to new understandings of the landscape¹. Part of our problem, according to Olsen, is that "[European] possession came without understanding our sense of place"². If one does not understand a place, how can one truly connect and respond to it? All that remains is representation devoid of any real meaning.

Artists have an obligation to start knowing this place in order to help interpret and express it to their fellow Australians. There is a desperate need to imagine Australia in terms other than majestic gum trees and sweeping pastoral or desert vistas. Such works, whilst they may be beautiful to look at, can often be spiritually barren. To date, much of Australian landscape art has reflected our assumptions of land ownership and control, manifested in the surveying gaze of the artist and viewer. These relationships must be rewritten.

Terra Spiritalis, then, has as its expressed intent the desire to delve deeper into the essence of this land, past the superficial representations of countryside, so that artist and viewer can begin exploring an alternative, perhaps more faithful, connection to the spirit of place. *Terra Spiritalis* is a quest for a new visual language that is singularly Australian in grammar and vernacular, a language that steadfastly refuses the urge to collapse into sentimental, nostalgic or pastoral landscapes shaped primarily by European ways of understanding place. This is a call for a move from projecting European ideals and conventions onto 'empty' landscapes, to a recognition of the primordial spirit of this land.

It is not a call, however, to jettison all aspects of our European heritage, for that is impossible. Rather we must find a way to sharpen our sense and sensibility of those indigenous intangibles which lie behind the surfaces of the visible environment.

In this quest, the artist and viewer may learn from Indigenous cultures, as Nolan suggested, but may not plunder it. This must be above all a journey that asks us all to critically examine our connection to land, and how that connection is best expressed. It should be an expression that speaks of more than representation or beauty alone.

Moreover, the use of landscape as an all encompassing term is to be questioned. Why should it be singular? This singularity suggests homogeneity, thus denying the real complexity of our individual and collective relationships with the land. We must shun these current limitations to make way for new meanings and a more expansive future.

This quest will not be achieved quickly. Indeed, it may take many years of experimentation, false starts and hard lessons. Perseverance, courage and humility are crucial if we are to forge a sincere, lasting connection with the spirit of this land.

The twelve artists in this first *Terra Spiritalis* exhibition have been selected because of their deeply felt connections to the land. Some of them are urban-based, others are regional, and two are Indigenous. They all share a strong desire to explore new ways of expressing their individual relationships to land and country, to find a visual voice that rings true to the land's spirit within the context of contemporary Australia. For many of these artists, the pieces in this exhibition represent departures – however minor – from their usual ways of working. In the spirit of exploration, they have challenged their own connections to place with stirring effect: the works emanate a profound sense of respect for land and country. While the works may be representative of a place, they are not representations; they are connections.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my co-curators, Greg Johns and Gavin Malone, for their many and various insights and contributions to this exhibition over the past year, and to the artists for their participation and inspired works. I would like to acknowledge the support of the Rural City of Murray Bridge, with special thanks to my former team members and Tracey Curl. My thanks also extend to the exhibition's sponsors, Antelco Pty Ltd and Country Arts SA through the Regional Arts Fund, without whom this project would not have been possible.

Karen Zadra
Curator

¹ John Olsen, 'Artist's choice. Nolan and the Central Australian landscape 1949-50', in *Art & Australia*, 45:2 (2007), 212-213, p. 212.

² ibid

Kurt Brereton



Orpheus entering the mangroves 2007
oil on canvas, 300 x 200 cm

Using a combination of media Brereton creates a tension between representation and abstraction. His images grow out of each other in a non-linear rhizomatic fashion, both formally and conceptually.

Layers of information, colours, sensations of space and time are both highlighted and undermined by turn. Nothing is fixed, everything is speculative. Desire for some solid notion of place is raised then dashed with each overlay skin of signs – be they iconic palms, dream homes or idyllic beach views. We find ourselves looking through a series of illusive planes (skins and glazes) or screens.

While these image-maps deliver an immediate gestalt-like impact, they also operate on our consciousness rather like slow release fertiliser – comforting us with familiar aesthetic references, historical icons and cosy cultural myths. These images play with concepts of place, territory and landscape (real estate and art lots) that rely on fixed boundaries.

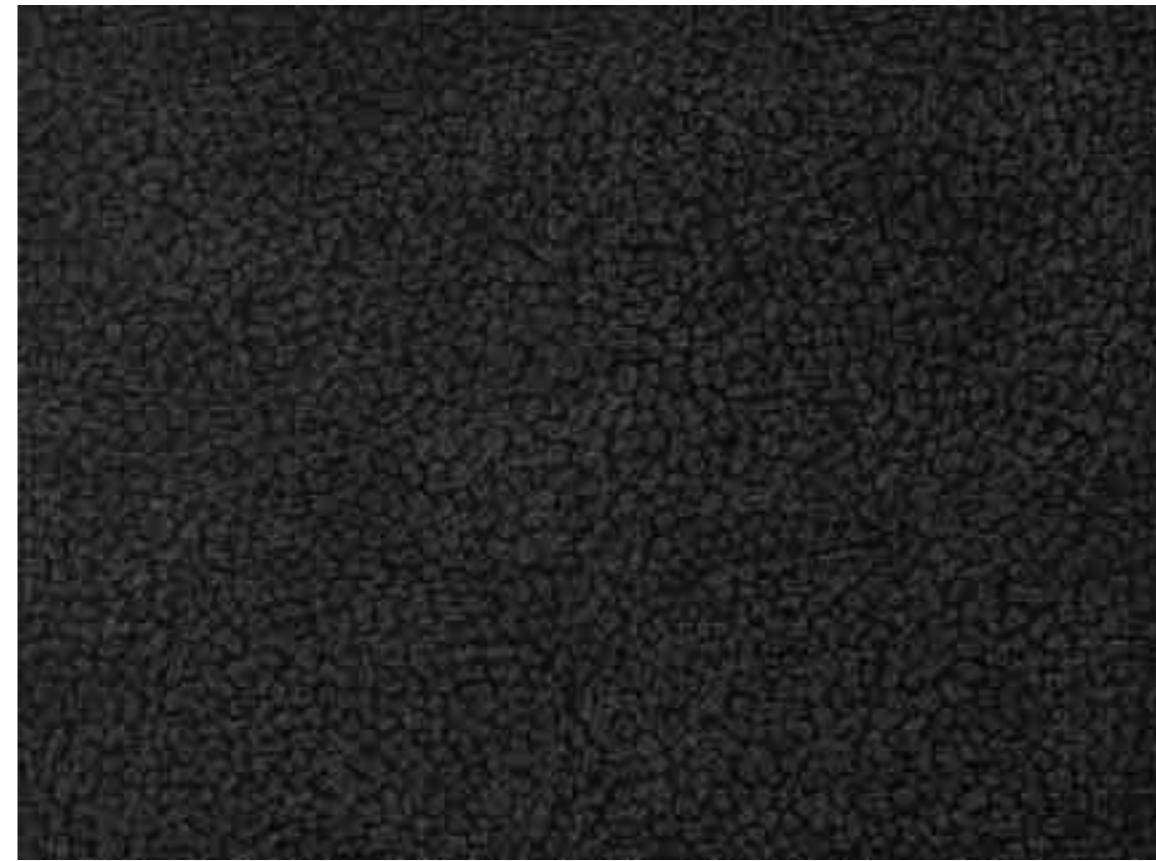
BIOGRAPHY

A mid career visual and new media artist, photographer, designer and film maker, Brereton has been exhibited at leading galleries and museums including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Arnolfini Gallery (Bristol), Art Gallery of NSW, Artspace (Sydney), Watershed (Bristol), ICA (London) and The Experimental Art Foundation (Adelaide). His work has appeared in the Sydney Perspecta, Adelaide Arts Festivals and various film festivals and international group exhibitions.

In 2007 Brereton was a finalist in the Blake Prize, Hazelhurst Prize and winner of the Thirroul Art Prize. His last major exhibition (Escarpment Series) was a joint show with Ken Orchard at the Flinders Museum Art Gallery, Adelaide in May 2007. Last solo exhibition was at Hat Hill Gallery in Blackheath in November 2007. Next solo show in Rivergarden Gallery, Denville, NJ USA in April 2008.

Currently Brereton is represented by De Havilland Gallery, Wollongong.

Belinda Broughton



soil, particular, granular (detail from Shell Hill Suite 2007)
mixed media on canvas, 75 x 100 cm

Shell Hill is an area where we camp often so that over the years I have become intimate with it. It is mallee country, quite dry mostly, and has, as its most theatrical feature, an exposed hillock of fossilized oyster shells six metres thick and five million years old. Fascinating as that is, it's the surrounding country with its intricacies and variability that moves me to make artwork. There is an ancient quality to it that is at the same time ephemeral, changing with the light, the weather and the season. The changes are shown in the detail: the shedding of bark and leaf, the animals living there, seasonal effects on the grasses and other plants, the wind, the sounds, the smells, the being in it. This suite of paintings captures some of my responses.

BIOGRAPHY

Belinda Broughton was born and raised in Western Queensland, and studied art in Toowoomba after she left school. She moved to South Australia in 1980. She has exhibited in various group exhibitions and has had eight solo or major shows beginning in 1997. Her major themes are: mark making, pattern, script and writing, nature and landscape. She works with a wide variety of media in two and three dimensions and with installation. She also writes poetry and has been published in literary journals and anthologies.

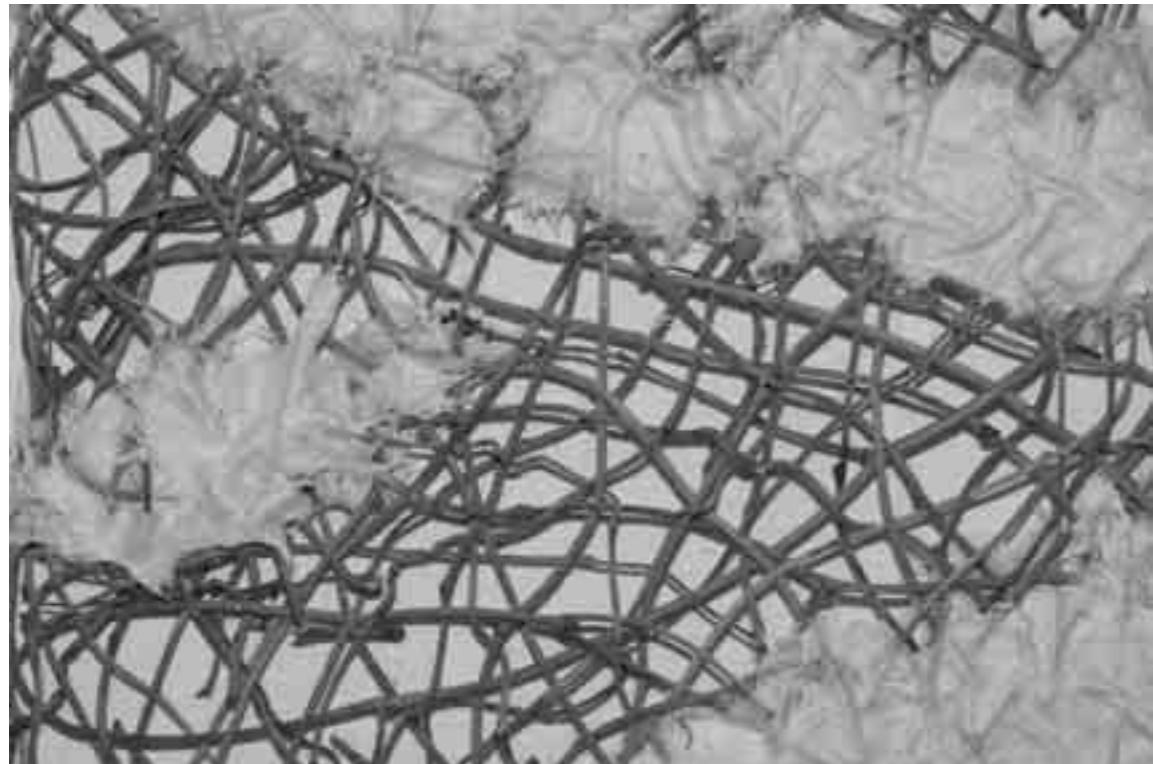
Where My Bones Grew

*I came from a place
where trees grow low,
where the rain clouds
scatter north and south
and the grasses,
empty as skeletons,
cast shadows that fidget
on earth too hot to tread.*

*Fragile beauties are birthed
with each change of light:
the hills turn blue or purple,
stars blaze from horizon to horizon,
the earth at night is as dark as memory,
in the daytime as red as my blood,
and it is my blood – the earth
where my bones grew.*

© Belinda Broughton 2007

Jan Clifford



Transmutation - artists book (detail) - work in progress
natural fibres, 260 x 34 cm

This work is about the landscape of the Palmer Hills. Today, these hills are bare with wonderful rounded rocks and stark xanthorea. The denuded hills are evidence of the farming practices of the past. One can only speculate as to the previous landscape. But we have a glimpse of the way the land itself would like to be in a property where grazing has been superseded by sculpture. The original growth is becoming more evident with time and a new character is emerging. New art forms are required to represent it.

Cassytha Pubescens is a suitable medium for expressing the ethereal quality of this landscape. I have used handmade paper from natural fibres to convey the feeling of belonging to the land. The words by Bill Clifford relate to the character of the land in the past and the possible future.

BIOGRAPHY

Jan is a practicing artist from rural South Australia. She is also actively involved in teaching workshops in dyeing, papermaking and felting. Her works have been shown consistently in exhibitions. As a result of her interest in this area, she has been closely involved with the setting up of the Murray Bridge Regional Gallery to exhibit local work and bring major exhibitions to the area for the local community.

Jan's aim is to depict environmental concerns through the medium of textiles. The use of natural materials is important in her work. Silk, wool and plant fibres have visual and tactile qualities in which she can develop natural themes.

Siv Grava



The passing strange; Barkly Tablelands/ Flinders Ranges 2007
oil on canvas, dyptich 185 x 60 cm each

have made lower case

BIOGRAPHY

Siv Grava, born in 1954, gained a BA Fine Arts (Painting) from Victorian College of the Arts (1979-1981). Since then she has been a painter, focusing equally on community cultural development and studio-based arts practice. For the past 20 years she has lived in the remote communities of the Flinders Ranges, Marree, Andamooka and now Elliston. Siv exhibits regularly in Adelaide at Art Images and Melbourne with Anne Harari Art. Often a finalist in national portrait prizes, she won the Doug Moran Prize in 1992. In 2004 she was awarded a two year CCD Australia Council Fellowship.

In this field Siv has worked on numerous cross cultural projects with indigenous communities; co-ordinated the Sculpture on the Cliffs Festivals, Elliston 2002-6; worked with asylum seekers in Baxter Detention Centre; and on the Hearsay Project 2004 for the Adelaide Fringe.

In these current works I am using contrasts in visual language in a search for reality and meaning, perception and actuality. Reality to me seems entirely fluid and ephemeral. I am fascinated by the 'nebulous' vision of our universe that science describes - the blurred interface between surface and structure, matter and energy. The concept that a photon can communicate its state with another particle anywhere in the universe, anytime, instantly. Many scientists now believe that these subatomic particles are fundamentally made of information. Contrast this with the buddhist teachings of innumerable worlds, karmic visions in different dimensions - our human existence being but one.

I am intrigued when practitioners write of deep meditation leading to 'all the material phenomena around me... dissolving.' In the act of painting, the underpaint became the underlying energy and each mark became the atom, the thought, the philosophy, the perception creating a surface. Like graffiti, each mark forging a reality - slowly covering, defining and ultimately obscuring the true nature of land.

Ervin Janek



Terra Omnes Accipit 2007
plaster, sand installation, dimensions variable

For the last five years I have been working almost exclusively with nature. The work has been a participation, interaction with the environment with the aim of honouring nature, the earth, the bush and place.

“Reverence” is a record of such an interaction. It is a photograph of brass plaques that I engraved and affixed to a tree at Shell Hill near Walker’s Flat. I marked the plaques with intent to communicate on an emotional level my feelings for this tree and this place. The marks are like writing but are unintelligible. This is because words are not enough to express the reverence I feel for nature.

‘Terra Omnes Accipit’ is another interaction with nature. The title means, “the earth accepts everyone”. It is an attempt to express my feelings that I am part of the land in that I am one with the unity that is everything. There is no separation, no division between the land and me. The earth doesn’t differentiate. I have used my own face as a generic human face symbolic of humanity because in essence we are all part of the land.

BIOGRAPHY

Ervin Janek emigrated from Hungary as a refugee in 1958. He works in photography, printmaking, sculpture and installation. His earlier work was figurative and surreal but from 2003 has concentrated on interactions with nature as a basis of his work. He has had twelve solo or major shows and been included in eleven group shows

Greg Johns



Shedding Figure II (detail)



Shedding Figure II, 2007
corten steel/mild steel H. 240 x D. 36 x W. 35cm

BIOGRAPHY

Greg has been working as a full-time sculptor for 31 years exhibiting annually in solo and major group shows in Australia, New York, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. In 2006/2007 Retrospective exhibitions were held at McClelland Museum, Melbourne and The Drill Hall Gallery of The Australian National University. In 2002 a major monograph “Horizon, Greg Johns sculptures, 1977 – 2002” was published. Major commissions include, “Remembered Figures”, Ibiza, Spain, 2005; “Pattern III” Pocheon, Korea, “, 2005; “Guardian Figure”, Central Green, Singapore, 93 – 95; “Returning Column”, Palmerston, N.Z. 2007; “Origin”, Melbourne, 1999; “Swirling Mandala”, Melbourne, 2007 and “Land Mandala”, Sydney, 2007 – 2008. In 2001 he acquired 400 acres of land at Palmerston in S.A. to establish an independent sculpture landscape and address environmental issues. A further major monograph will be published in 2008 and he is currently working on an autobiographical book, “Against The Grain - With the Flow”.

Looking at the landscape, trying to understand it is a challenging, conceptual area of investigation. I believe that very few recent arrivals have represented it in a way which speaks incisively of this place. Fred Williams is one exception. This of course is not true of indigenous culture, where there is so much work which looks at this place with an informed inner vision of what seems endless variation.

We now of course do not have the landscape which was present prior to European arrival. To say that it is altered is an understatement. In this exhibition I attempt to represent two landscapes, one which now lies obscured in the main under the chequered quilt of agricultural development. In doing so two cultures overlay and two ways of seeing reveal themselves. There is a search for a contemporary vision, one which goes beyond the gaze of representation from the outside, which lays itself open to the older, interior and wiser ways of seeing this place, but does not exclude the incoming traditions. Both traditions now make up this place, to exclude either is unrealistic.

Sue Kneebone



Naturally Disturbed (detail from installation) 2008
Mixed media, approx L. 4m x H. 2m x W. 1m

Naturally Disturbed recalls the mythical sense of fear, isolation and melancholy that the remote Australian environment has instilled into European consciousness. Parlour room photos, furniture, bones, guns, and animal pelts call on us to revisit the dreams of past colonial enterprise in conquering and opening up the land for agriculture and pastoral use. Rather than idyllic scenes of pastoral achievement, the sense of interiority in these works serves to question how the ramifications of the colonial mind still manifest today in endeavours such as biotechnology which continue to push nature toward an unknown and dystopic future. People and animals from the past inhabit the photos and their absence in the present is felt in the disused furniture and bric-a-brac inhabiting the space. *Naturally Disturbed* looks at physically threading the past onto the present by connecting together psychic, material and cultural impressions to reveal our shifting relationship to the Australian natural environment.

BIOGRAPHY

Since completing her Masters of Fine Art from Victorian College of the Arts (2000) Sue Kneebone has been engaging in art installations in response to various urban and regional environments in Australia. Sue's process of working involves a particular emphasis on learning about the cultural habitat and histories of the local environment. Themes have included introduced species, narratives of human intervention, legacy of farming practices, environmental degradation, built versus natural environments and the transformation of natural materials into sites of reflection, regrowth and renewal. Sue has participated in numerous environmental art installation projects, residencies and exhibitions across Australia. She is currently a PhD candidate at the South Australian School of Art.



Bounty 2008
Goat's ears, wheat grain, jewel box, L. 15 x H. 10 x W. 10 cm

Pamela Kouwenhoven



Tank II 2008
galvanised iron, L. 360 x D. 150 x H. 1000 cm

A chance encounter some years ago with old malthoid from the bottom of discarded water tanks sparked a profound excitement in me. I have worked with this abject material since, and it continues to reveal great potential as a source material for my landscape work, its resilience offering me the opportunity to explore 'beyond the surface'. Hidden from sight and pressed over decades by the weight of water and weathered into exquisite and complex patterns, malthoid holds the memory of the earth, against which it pressed so closely and intimately over a long period of time.

The old tanks too, hold that memory of earth, as they slowly erode, crumbling with age or are crushed into submission and flattened into folds, furrows and ridges, their colours rich in rusts, soft faded greys and earth tones. The 'spirit' of the land remains firmly embedded within these iconic remnants.

BIOGRAPHY

Pamela Kouwenhoven is a South Australian artist who has consistently, and over many years, used unlikely discarded materials to construct sculptural works, assemblages and installations. Her earlier works used discarded cemetery memorabilia [taken from bins] to create works that spoke about memory and loss. More recently, works constructed entirely from decaying and shattered battery cases, relate to a breakdown of power and reckless spending of natural resources. Kouwenhoven's current work utilises discarded malthoid, a bituminous- based waterproofing material which she scrapes from the bottom of old rainwater tanks. The malthoid's long and close physical connection to the land, and its earthy appearance, make it the perfect metaphor for exploring environmental issues, such as climate change and global warming that presently loom largely over our planet.

Rita Lindsay Jnr



Ninkowi um prangwithe wanyil ruwe (Mother of water & Land)
sketch for lino print, 29 x 26 cm

The lino print illustrates that both the land and waters are a living body. The woman represents Mother Earth and her significance to the land, waters. She is central to the survival of all living things, which must be respected, protected, managed and preserved by the traditional custodians, the Ngarrindjeri people, as it is our responsibility and birthright. The woman and the surrounding waters have been portrayed in white, as this particular colour signifies the cultural and spiritual link between past and present.

The circular designs represent the 18 Laklinyera, clan groups that constitute the Ngarrindjeri Nation. The circles also depict people camping, travelling and living along the river and surrounding areas to Lake Alexandrina, Lake Albert, the Coorong, and Murray Mouth to the Southern Ocean.

The lines instantly signify that this land belongs to the original traditional owners, the Ngarrindjeri people. The lines state continuity, the history that is engrained into this land and waters. The lines also signify the knowledge that has been passed down through the generations to ensure the continuation of our laws, traditional practices, creation stories, etc. All of which are vital for caring for our country, caring for Ninkowi Ruwe (Mother Earth).

BIOGRAPHY

I am a Ngarrindjeri woman from Meningie. I was born 1989. The media I work in is Lino printing. Carving is a traditional Ngarrindjeri practice and I have taken the traditional ways and have applied this practice in a contemporary form. In my senior years of schooling, I studied Art and was introduced to the art of Lino printing. Recently, my artwork featured in the 2007 Our Mob exhibition at the Adelaide Festival Centre, alongside other South Australian artists from remote areas. Throughout my designs I express spiritual and cultural connections to our lands, waters and spirit world, Christianity and Australia's history through the eyes of a young Aboriginal person.

Gavin Malone



Brukunga (H2 SO4), and Ochre Cove (Fe2 O3) 2008, work in progress
river redgum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) sawdust, oxide and mixed media on
hardboard, 91.5 x 61 cm

This work is a return to a series of paintings Aspects of Landscape and The Manufacturing of Culture, concepts spanning a period of 16 years. Through that lapse of time my concerns though remain fundamentally the same. How do we engage, mediate, represent or express the bio-physical stuff? For me all landscapes are manufactured in one way or another by culture. We codify meaning culturally and linguistically to describe, explain and justify.

These works draw on Western codes, conventions and symbols for representing biophysical stuff but with a shift. They include the materials of place, sand and River Red gum sawdust. Rather than paint the majestic Red gum, this is an exploratory way of incorporating an essence of red gum, not only as an aesthetic, but as bio physical entity. Many cultures, particularly Australian Indigenous cultures, have utilised materials of place for their own inherent qualities and not just as a representational media. An irony that the gums cleared from the former landscape now express the farmer landscape.

BIOGRAPHY

Gavin is an Adelaide artist, teacher and writer who has maintained a practice related to ecological and cultural sustainability since the early 1990s. His recent work explores this through connections to the indigenous nature of place, particularly by the use of indigenous materials. He has participated in over seventy exhibitions throughout Australia much of the work being in non gallery spaces: the streets, the bush, the cliffs, the natural history museum, the cultural centre. His practice incorporates public space art and design and he has been involved in several innovative projects, permanent and temporary. He has worked extensively with the Kaurna community and has travelled throughout Australia, particularly remote regions, to assist in developing an understanding of the Australian landscape, psyche and stories of place. He is currently a Doctoral candidate at Flinders University.

Ken Orchard



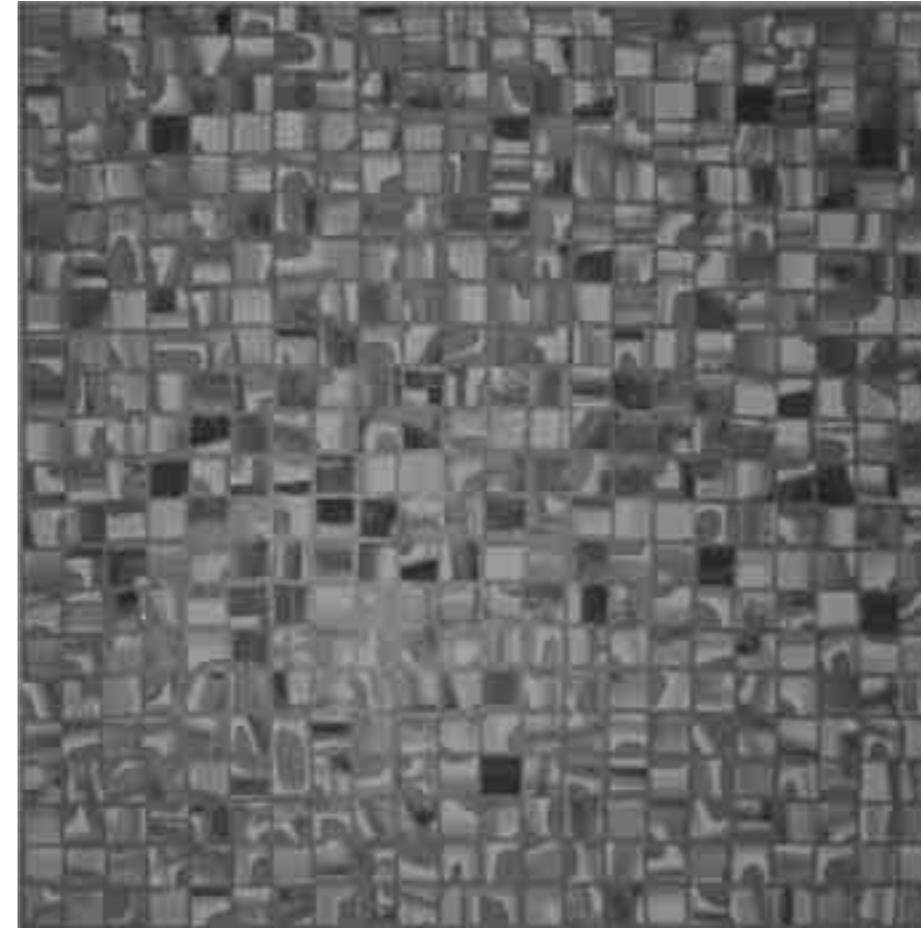
Cloud over Red Jack's orchard, Hill End 2007
ink on paper, 70 x 151 cm

This selection of drawings is a thematic supplement to a larger body of work made in October 2007 while undertaking a Residency at Haefliger Cottage, Hill End, in New South Wales. Over four weeks I worked at a number of historically significant localities associated with the 1851 Ophir gold rush. During the final week I discovered a strong sense of being "in place" while working on a plot of land known locally as Red Jack's orchard, not far from the Cottage. Here a ragged fence bounded an area dotted with antique fruit trees. Over days the work moved quickly from dip pen, to drafting pen, to brush and ink, each tool demanding an increase in scale and an ever more generalized method of mark making. The final constellation drawings were made in almost complete darkness in the hour before midnight on my last night in Hill End.

BIOGRAPHY

Ken Orchard is a distinguished graduate of the South Australian School of Art and the Sydney College of the Arts and has staged numerous solo and group exhibitions since 1987. His work has been included in significant exhibitions in Australia, Britain, South Africa and New Zealand, and in 2003-4 he toured a comprehensive survey exhibition to UTS:Gallery, Sydney, and Artspace Mackay, Queensland, following its tour of regional South Australia. Recent awards include the Fleming Muntz Prize, (Albury, 2002); Heysen Prize categories, (Hahndorf, 2003, 2006, 2007); Jacaranda Drawing Award (Grafton, 2004); and the 2006 inaugural Fleurieu Water Prize (SA). His works are held in national, state and regional collections, and in 2009 he will stage a major landscape exhibition (with photographer Ed Douglas) at the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.

Peter Sharrock



Owned 2007
acrylic, paper, yellow ochre and varnish on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

Owned is about how the consumer market in today's society as land ownership is now the new form of land rights. Once the land was considered a vital part of society. Something to be shared and a sacred part of life. Hinted around the world in earlier cultures with the ideas of homeland and mother land. Yet now is an object to be taken and owned as a symbol of prosperity.

My work is a mixture of contemporary urban life and upbringing with a connection to the land. I work with expressions of identity, both personal and with my cultural heritage. I also work with the idea of relationships between the landscapes we live in and the people we share it with. The interaction we have through everyday life.

My work for this project is based on these ideas. Today's society is filled with the ideas of consumerism when it comes to land. How can you benefit from the experience of ownership?

Everyone wants a piece of the cash flow it can provide through ownership of property. The idea or importance of belonging is now becoming an object of sales and profit. The consideration of the lands as vitally important to being a part of people and life, is lost. Yet traditionally the land or earth was a sacred element between the people and it. The ideas of homeland meaning you are a part of it.

BIOGRAPHY

Peter is an Aboriginal artist of Arrente descent. He holds BA in Visual Arts and Applied Design. Known primarily for working with ochre and natural pigments, he works mainly within the practices of Earth Art/Land Art. His work explores issues of identity, both personal and cultural heritage. Peter exhibited in the Our Urban Mob 2007 exhibition at Tandanya, and has also exhibited in Romania and Wales (UK), with artworks represented in private collections in Australia, Wales, Romania, and England.