

Between Two Sites

**Burrinja Cultural Centre
May 27th - 1st July 2023**

**Anne McCallum
Madelynne Cornish
Sarah Lynch
Shannon Collis
Lesley Duxbury
Sarah Edwards
Amias Hanley**

**Curated by
Madelynne Cornish
and Sarah Lynch**

Exhibition Catalogue



Burrinja Cultural Centre
351 Glenfern Rd Upwey
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burrinja.org.au

Gallery Hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 10 - 4pm

This exhibition is audio described by Vitae Veritas

 between-two-sites.com

We acknowledge the Bidhawal, Dhudhuroa, Gunai–Kurnai and Nindi–Ngudjam Ngarigu Monero and Wurundjeri peoples, the traditional custodians of the lands that these residencies, fieldwork and exhibition have taken place on.

Between Two Sites essay by Prudence Gibson

Artists tend to find connections in unlikely places. Even at high altitudes. Artists are more likely to notice droplets of dew on a spiderweb, the winking eye of a honeyeater, the leaf-rustle of a pesky wild rat or the spongy squelch of ombrotrophic bog-water. This is because the artist, like the naturalist observer, has an increased capacity to witness, condense and then reflect. Artists and naturalists often share a precise watching and listening, in order to see the pattern, the narrative, even the meaning.

The seven artists (women and non-binary) in an exhibition *Between Two Sites* showing at the Burrinja Cultural Centre in Upwey, near the Dandenong ranges, are both naturalists and artists. They were all artists-in-residence at the Bogong Centre for Sound Culture situated in the Alpine Shire of north-east Victoria. They all immersed themselves in the environment of Bogong but also at additional sites - the Kiewa Valley, Falls Creek, Dinner Plain, Nug Nug and the Yarra Ranges. This is an interesting premise for a body of work because it begs the question of whether we humans are shaped by our first experience of place. In other words, does our principle 'knowing' of place inform, complement or even challenge subsequent human-nature relations. Or instead, is there a simmering up of time, from the deep earth, at every place artists visit: a low steeping simmer of each concentrated visit?

The place where these particular artists all began their thinking for this exhibition – the Bogong alpine area – is anything but deep or low. It is Alpine country, where we connect with air and rain, clouds and wind. In Australia, most places carry a pre-colonial and colonial cultural memory that are heavy with brutal histories. There is evidence of violence done to First Nations peoples, that followed tens of thousands of years of Indigenous liveliness - agriculture, meetings, ritual. There is the memory of white settler journeys to explore, and conquer, the heights of the 'new land.' Think of artist Eugene Von Guerard and scientist Georg Von Neumeyer who journeyed to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko in 1862. They explored and recorded, they carried heavy barometric, magnetic and seismic measurement equipment, they endured rat infestations, food shortages and endless privations whilst travelling in their tent-wagons to explore the Alpine heights.

But what happens when the past, even a colonial past, is no longer accessible in any form? What are we to do when our forests are logged, our Indigenous peoples removed, our biodiversity damaged, our terraforms changed by hydro schemes? We can no longer retreat to sentimental memories, whipped up into a colonial frenzy of imperial striving and nationalism. The rate of human-acted change is there for all to see. So, how can humans make sense of those devastating changes?

Art has the capacity to show audiences what has been obscured. These seven artists are working with scale and constructs of ecological mastery. Madelynne Cornish is a 'daily' observer who works with sound, stillness and duration to capture the potency of the anthropocentric devastation of agriculture and development. Her honeyeater is trapped, imprisoned by the obscene changes to the natural world but it is also free, released from the real into the digital space. Sarah Lynch dons the cap of the 'citizen scientist' to photographically track dieback and boring beetle infestations of the great and ghostly snow gums. The artist's and the trees' space above the snow line can survive invasion, weather-change onslaughts, by soaring above the slow violence. Anne McCallum sculpts her way around found natural objects (thread and string) and weaves her way through remote alpine spaces. She disrupts and re-interprets concepts of abandonment, economic betrayal and environmental justice, in order to show us the hidden Alpine shire and Yarra Ranges.



Shannon Collis' sonically resonant video deepens sensory experiences of the old hydro scheme. It unnerves the viewer with its slow intensity and is also a reminder of the power of water, even when it is inert. Amias Hanely's Junction Re-Sonant sound work at the Bogong Dam incorporates repetition, iteration and scale to mimic vast and distributed electro-magnetism. Their eco-transmission, verging on artificial biology are their toolkit. Likewise, Sarah Edwards' cast natural history specimens are a reference to alchemical experiments and the original wunderkammers, imperialist collections of objects from faraway places. Her cast pieces cite C19th Blaschka glass models of nature meant as educational tools but emerging as tiny fake masterpieces. Lesley Duxbury adds a printmaker's play to the intrigue of the miniature through her incorporation of Claude mirrors, small convex black mirrors used by travelling artists and explorers to see the landscapes in palatable size.

All seven artists have worked alongside the grassy sedges, the leaning snow gums. They have been accompanied by the squawk of ducks on the hydro dam, the low moan of the she-oaks that sound a warning that the human touch is too much, because it has been androcentric and it has lacked care. As eco-feminist theorist Val Plumwood explains in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, one of the most common forms of denial of women and nature is backgrounding and instrumentalising. This refers to the removal of women and the natural world to the distance, as inert but useful, so that male action can be performed. Plumwood warns against rejecting the close association of women with nature, she warns against seeing women-nature associations as the failure of humanism, because to consequently remove women from nature results in further human isolation from nature. It perpetuates a violent and continued progression of exclusion. In describing who undertakes these kinds of exclusions and devaluing, Plumwood refers to the "white, largely male elite". She calls it the master model.

As a group of seven women and non-binary artists, the group is critiquing an androcentric past, where human hubris is presented as colonial and neo-colonial male mastery. The vegetal turn, in response, is a global trend of returning to nature – trees, bees, beetles, birds, plants, snow – to find new human to non-human alliances. This work is not an allegory. This work is not sentimental. It is not metaphorical.

Nor even an aestheticizing of nature. The vegetal turn works to re-perceive the natural world around us via immersion and narrative. In scholar Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, he summarises the loss as being "able to articulate the discourse of violent land loss to a deeper narrative of territorial theft, as perpetrated first by British colonialists and later by their neocolonial legateses."

Further, in our human perceptions and re-presentations of nature, there are also the Edenic narratives to unfurl, Judeo-Christian assumptions to unravel. The revelation that humans were ejected from the Garden of Eden by an evil slithering serpent, cast out forever, is a story that lingers on lips. Non-Indigenous humans have, ever since that eviction, been trying to tame the natural world, to return to Eden. But the exquisite construct of Eden eludes us all.

It has become difficult to relate to our natural wilderness environs, as they are no longer natural, they are no longer wild. They have become broken and damaged, changed and afforded new terraforms. Yet, we yearn to connect, still. We want, more than anything, to submit to the greatest forces of the earth that we know are there. Perhaps decolonising our knowledge about ecologies requires a first step of discarding old tales, discarding the master model and starting with a deeper and more immersed experience of nature. This is not an uprooting of Plumwood's master theory. Instead, it is an enactment of survivalism. For many of us, it is only through art and narrative that we can endure.



B–CSC

The Bogong Centre for Sound Culture [B–CSC] is an independent regional cultural initiative situated in the Alpine Shire within the foothills of Victoria’s Alpine National Park. The B–CSC supports projects focusing on the alpine environment, sustainable energy; climate change; and fieldwork. It foregrounds experimentation, the development of new ideas and site-specific projects. In addition, it supports emerging and diverse artists and curators by producing forums to present their work.

For more information about the B–CSC go to bogongsound.com.au

Prudence Gibson is an Environmental Aesthetics scholar at the University of NSW and author of *The Plant Thieves* 2023, *The Plant Contract* 2018, *Janet Laurence: The Pharmacy of Plants* 2015 and *The Rapture of Death* 2010.

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Inner cover: Lesley Duxbury, *Look Both Ways*, 2021

Centre Spread: Shannon Collis, *Kiewa*, video still, 2021

Last Spread: Sarah Lynch, *Above the Snow Line*, 2023

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