

Jane
Lawrence
After
Eden

Janet
Laurence

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Sherman
Contemporary
Art
Foundation

Sydney

Janet
Laurence

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Eden

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Preface

Gene Sherman
Chairman and Executive Director
Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation



Janet Laurence's 2012 Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF) exhibition, *After Eden*, represents a milestone in the Foundation's twelve-project, four-year history. Unlike our previous invited artists, Janet was long represented by Sherman Galleries, the large-scale commercial gallery whose twenty-one year history (1986–2007) preceded and continues to underpin SCAF's work.

Janet and I, together with Associate Director Amanda Henry – the institution's highly valued, longstanding exhibition designer and artists' helpmate and confidante – have worked together since Janet joined Sherman Galleries in 1999. Corporate projects in Qantas VIP lounges in and out of Australia, and large-scale government commissions at Sydney's Olympic Park, Changi Airport in Singapore and the Australian War Memorial in Hyde Park, London, amongst numerous others, kept a dedicated gallery staff member and Sherman Group in-house lawyer busy with contracts, currency conversions, financial hedging and staggered payment schedules. Janet's imaginative drive and creative leadership produced the goods from within her laboratory-like studio. The Sherman team documented, described and supported her endeavours in a complex symbiotic process that felt part professional and part confessional.

I first viewed Janet's work on exhibition and in the stockroom at Bill Gregory's Annandale Galleries, thereafter remaining attracted to the aesthetic delicacy and rigorous conceptual infrastructure in installations such as *Edge of the Trees* (Museum of Sydney, 1995), the permanently sited *In the Shadow* (Sydney Olympic Park, 2000), *Veiling Space: Incarnations* (Uniting Church, Paddington, 2001) and *Birdsong* (Object Gallery, 2006).

Loss, nostalgia perhaps, and a certain dreamy ennui meshed (rather than messed) with my psyche. Had the feelings aroused been sweepingly vague rather than intellectually disciplined, the work may have remained in the back of my consciousness, to be enjoyed in diverse exhibitions and publicly installed installations. This was clearly not the case.

Janet's working medicinal bar, previously partly fashioned via a number of small works, was reconceived as *Elixir* in 2003 at Echigo-Tsumari in Japan. This healing interactive installation resonated with me in an enduring way. Japan's rural hinterland was an exhilarating experience. This countryside was not a familiar environment for me and this particular area, populated mostly by the elderly and persistent generations of country folk, caught me by surprise. During the brief summer months of 2006, Janet's transformation of an existing small rural wooden storehouse in the heart of the Niigata Prefecture, Japan's often isolated snow country, allowed her long-time research into herbal remedies to reach an apotheosis. International, national and local art festival visitors

(including myself and a small number of Australian curators and artists) waited patiently on the threshold of the tiny space to be greeted, once inside, by white-clad healer-bartenders. Beverages, the recipes for which were drawn from ancient local lore, were served out of artfully arranged vials. Ingredients had been identified and then selected in the neighbouring countryside by a local amateur expert. Life seemed to pulsate and minds felt soothed as small groups of Japanese, Chinese, French, Korean and mixed European nationalities trustingly imbibed unknown liquids in this magical installation. The structure's simple walls were clad in transparent panels inscribed with mysterious names in Japanese and Roman script. Scientific documentation of botanical species, the warmth of human exchange and the world's ongoing search for health and healing all condensed into a small-scale artwork with powerful reverberations.

Janet's 2005 survey exhibition at the Australian National University's Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, represented for me another singular moment. Gallery visitors entered Janet's imaginative world, expansive in its many and varied tonalities: glasshouses, iconic architectural structures, veils of glass and perspex formalised into hedgerows in their compelling green-ness, the burnt oranges of autumnal leaves, seeds, pods, and all manner of species named and claimed as delicate, indispensable elements of a natural world. All of this was grasped in one visual conversation.

Fans became more fervent as a result of this show. Those who had believed her work devoid of angst and ugliness and lacking contemporary edge, saw, many for the first time, the work's light and logic, and the call to action inherent in her practice. They understood, as I did, that here was a visual arts forerunner, a creative precursor and a witness to the mindless destruction of our natural world. They valued the ongoing research, the far-reaching travel and the life engagement that imbues the work with authenticity, and appreciated, as did the Sherman support group, the visual sensitivity that poeticised the findings and locked the signifiers into mind and memory.

Janet's approach to living and living organisms, her instinctive and cultivated embrace of the natural world, clearly meshes with my own family's other-than-art great passion. Voiceless, our Institute for the Protection of Animals, which was founded in 2004, calls upon an increasingly sympathetic and expanded audience to show respect and compassion for sentient beings as well as for the harmonies of nature. Janet's mission and our own intertwine seamlessly. She views the world through a similar lens. She reveals, documents, describes and ultimately yearns to protect. As a visual artist her medium is non-didactic and poetic. Voiceless, too, aims to uncover, discover and lift the veil of secrecy surrounding the heedless cruelty to 'bon a manger' animals.¹

Whilst Janet's veils challenge us to enter into a dialogue with the natural world, Voiceless seeks to tear asunder the concealing membrane so as to shine a spotlight on industrialised food production. The preoccupations and goals of both scenarios overlap. The delicacy of our natural world and the dignity of all its creatures urgently need our attention. We too are part of a chain, a balanced system. Facts and fallacies must be placed in the spotlight somehow – and options reconsidered – if humanity is to persist and prosper.

In what way has my intellectual and aesthetic journey coincided with that of artist Janet Laurence? Why was she amongst the small group of twenty-seven artists carefully selected to work in partnership with the highly qualified and professional team at Sherman Galleries? For those who know me well the answer is quite clear. I trained as a researcher. I admire those whose curiosity, determination and disciplined approach opens up untold stories and differing perspectives on accepted wisdom to less adventurous members of the community. I respect long processes with mapped, yet flexible, templates – capable of transformation and adaptation – and often morphing into unexpected versions of earlier imagined scenarios.

Janet's work is based on rigorous and time-hungry research. She travels and travails; she explores and experiences; she reads, talks, delves and surveys. Most of all she traverses – often alone, sometimes uncomfortably – far-flung places, seeking specimens and species, gathering data and documentation.

I relate directly to both her methodology and to the graceful end point – the work itself – which enfolds the viewer into the anxieties and preoccupations of her world. Species are lost. Flora and fauna are driven from their natural habitats by encroaching cities and unsightly suburban sprawls. The need to record, to bear witness, to gently draw attention to the consequences of humankind's search for satisfaction, has been key to Janet's life and practice for decades. The world has caught up with her preoccupations. She has not reflected the Zeitgeist. On the contrary, the temperature of the times now echoes her lifelong quest.

To be frank, the actual content of Janet's work was not originally my foremost preoccupation. In my early adult life, humanitarian concerns loomed far larger on my horizon. Poverty in Africa and medical intervention, especially in treatable conditions, took priority where I was raised. Education, the magical morphing of life's dilemmas, dissonances and debates into art – whether literature (my first love) or visual practice (a close second) – dominated my thinking. Yet Janet's curiosity and palpable distress at unthinking compliance regarding conceived wisdom forced a serious re-evaluation on my part. The world is made up of layers of meaning. Her veiled panels, lists of herbal discoveries and references to lost natural environments have impacted thousands of gallery visitors and communities in touch with her public projects with perhaps more potency than the numerous direct commentaries on our fragile world, complete with confusing and contested statistics.

In addition, Janet's practice works at seemingly tangential but clearly overlapping levels. The built environment preoccupies her too. Architectural marvels are carefully described, thoughtfully incorporated and honoured in her idiosyncratic firmament of ideas and visualisations. She loves beautiful buildings and original solutions to public and private habitation. The interaction between a nature that nurtures and cities that stimulate, discover and frame our thinking is grist for her mill; grist that resonates far beyond her artistic practice and thinking – and it is her life's work that brought her into the Sherman Galleries fold and now into SCAF as our honoured and warmly welcomed thirteenth invited artist.

In her 2012 installation, *After Eden*, Janet references and amplifies her longstanding preoccupations. She travelled to Aceh and Szechuan Province, China, photographed animal sanctuaries and imagined the curvilinear meshed cells, representing each one in microcosm. She fossicked in the Australian Museum's cavernous entrails, alighting with specimens, excited by her finds and desperate as always to see, know and understand more. SCAF is delighted to collaborate with Janet to bring *After Eden* to a Sydney audience.

A special and heartfelt thank you to Andrew and Cathy Cameron for their fabulously timed and most welcome support. SCAF, as a result of their (unsolicited) generosity, has been able to publish the first comprehensive account of the work of Janet Laurence. As a longstanding peer- and audience-respected artist, without to date a sizable publication tracking her oeuvre, the Cameron's generosity has filled a significant gap in Australian art scholarship.

To Sam Meers and the Nelson Meers Foundation, three cheers. Their committed support for four SCAF projects means so much to us. Quite apart from the financial aspect of the partnering, we find in Sam and her family foundation like-minded philanthropists whose focus on art and education, by meshing with ours, amplifies and makes more meaningful SCAF's endeavours.

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cui et le Cuit*, Plon, Paris, 1964.



The Green in Glass
Drusilla Modjeska



The top floor of the small warehouse in inner-city Sydney where Janet Laurence works has high windows. Long gauzy curtains create irregular spaces, a system of veils cutting and altering the light as the sun tracks across the studio. In summer it is hot. There's a computer, chairs, a low sofa, many books. When I first visited, in 2002, photographs and images were pinned to the walls: columns of Japanese script, seashells and medicinal plants, holes burned in the ground by tree roots that smoulder for weeks after a bushfire, textures of seaweed and clouds, reflections in water and windows. Set up around the room were models of works in progress: diminutive glasshouses and medicinal glass gardens waiting to be built. On shelves at eye level were bottles and flasks, some thin and sinewy, others round and functional. Minerals and oxides, seeds and salts were collected in glass vitrines. Inside a small round bottle something had dried, leaving a horizon line.

On a day early in 2003, which I've come to think of as the beginning of a conversation that stretched over more than a year, she spoke of reading Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* when she was a young woman living in London, cooking by day, painting at night. Spread on the floor around us were drawings and work on paper from more than thirty years before. It was 'very washy work' she was doing then, she says, with pigments and paints in fluid states applied layer upon layer, allowing fragments from underneath to show through. She was living in Hampstead, watching the light on the ponds, figuring how to express ambivalent states of water and light. The idea came to her as she painted that the layers could separate, move away from each other, letting the eye move between them, opening a 'space within'.

Layers, waves, veils. Something had begun.

The first work that gave her scope to extend into installation came in 1981 with a solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Sydney's Central Street. *Notes from the Shore*, she said, was a 'drawing in space'. Photographs show hanging bands of waxy paper holding casuarina needles, sand mapping the floor, and, on the walls, earth drawings, small bags filled with oxide and seeds, large X-rays cut into wave-like shapes. The interplay between the constructed and the organic was, for her, like a musical score, 'a minimalist structure spilling with substance' accompanied by the counting numbers from Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*.

Years later when she was working on *The Measure of Light*, 1993, for the Queensland Art Gallery – part of her *Periodic Table* series – she envisaged an installation with quotations from *The Waves* on the wall as you entered. Putting it up, she saw that the words belonged not on the wall but as a substructure of thought,

a conceptual underpinning to the sea floor of abutting metals (zinc, stainless steel, aluminium) lit by tiny islands of humming fluorescent tubes. Salt, poured over this 'seabed', crusted onto laboratory crucibles and flasks, corroded the metals like the slow erosion of wave against rock. By the time the installation was dismantled, the salt had etched the metal plates, creating drawings that she used in her later *Salt Works*, one work growing from another in a wave-like process of lap and overlap.

In alchemy, which became for her an extended metaphor, salt is the feminine principle, the *acqua permanens* of Jung.

Ask about her art and she is likely to talk about philosophy or fiction or natural science. In the studio she moved along her bookshelves and pulled out Gaston Bachelard or W. G. Sebald. Like them, she's an investigator of space and place. Travelling with her, moving through space – even walking to the café up the street from her studio – it's the materiality of things she responds to. The quality of mind she brings to phenomena in the world is spacious and pliable. She takes in what she sees, works the metaphors, takes in the details. When I remark on this to her, she's surprised. She says she's more interested in the invisible inside the visible; if she's taken up with the details of appearance, it's because she wants to find what can be drawn out through senses other than the eye. When she goes onto a site, it's the hidden she's alert to – scent, sound, the traces of memory: qualities that might reveal a link between a place, its history and symbolic resonances. 'Aesthetics,' she says, 'began as a language of the body'; she translates the Greek *aesthetikos* as 'perceptive by feeling'.

In her studio, panels of glass and metal lean against the wall, printed or etched with types of cloud – *translucida*, *nebulosa*, *radiata* – or of herbs and medicinal plants – *birdsfoot*, *black elder*, *butterbur*, *creeping cinque-foil*. It's as if the words themselves are a kind of material, provoking half-remembered stories, body memory, forgotten ground. Quotations from fiction, philosophy and scientific writings slope across the pages of her sketchbooks in a looping hand, colliding with diagrams, edging up to drawings, disrupting tables of scientific terms. And lists of thoughts for titles.

'People underestimate titles,' she says. During the 1980s many of hers came from books: *Life is Probably Round*, 1985, from Bachelard; *From the Shadow*, 1988, from T. S. Eliot; *Elsewhere*, 1988, from Milan Kundera; and *Blindspot*, 1989, from Luce Irigaray. These titles tell a story about a moment in her formation as an artist when liminality, half-openness, the betwixt and between, had a literary nuance. And they tell another about a contiguous moment in Australian feminism when the literary and the European were in the ascendant.

Running alongside was the close attention that came from working with metals and minerals and oxides, producing the blunter, science-derived titles of the 1990s – *Memory Matter*, *Periodic Table*, *Trace Elements*, *Second Exposure*.

Following the literary clues, one can grasp how her reading of French feminists and medieval alchemists might coalesce in thinking *about* matter. But it is by watching her at work, and watching the work take shape, that the extent to which she thinks *with* matter becomes clear – and what it might mean when she quotes Bachelard on 'the movements of opening and closing' being so 'frequently inverted' that we could conclude 'man (sic) is a half-open being'.¹

She marks the beginning of her contemporary work – her 'real work', she says – with *Forensic*, which was shown in *Frames of Reference*, a survey of contemporary women's art in Sydney in 1991. In keeping with the warehouse architecture of the Wharf Theatre, a grid of boxes was installed in three rows of six along a wooden wall. From a distance it appeared a complete work of texture, with

1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, Boston, US, 1969, p. 222.

light both within it and reflected onto it. Closer to, the boxes became exhibits, each containing a material: straw, ash, lead, photographs, X-rays, wood burned to bring up its grain. Move slowly along the rows and each box revealed its own world, with its own slow, disordered life within, small installations echoing Joseph Beuys. Stand back again, and the disparate parts resolved into a whole.

It was the play of paradox – architectural structure and anarchic material, chemistry and art, order and disorder – that Terence Maloon drew attention to in a 1994 article that mapped her on the critical landscape:

*Her ingenious and often extraordinarily beautiful reconciliations of chaos and order have a deliberately contentious edge. Her work compels the viewers to see and think holistically, and to accommodate 'nature' and 'the feminine' into their consideration.*²

Here was the astringent feminine. Working with matter that could be ground or granulated, liquefied or crystallised, extended her scope beyond the conundrum of self-representation that had so long impelled the project of women's art. She moved the idea of embodied time away from the narratives of the self into the material and elemental, interrogative work inviting an encounter with memory, environment and our own material nature. 'Not working on top of an existing history,' she wrote in the *Frames of Reference* catalogue, 'enables the recovery of a relationship to something radical underlying history, radical in the sense of rootedness – possibly a dissenting engagement.'³

On the ground floor of her studio, the windows are shadowed by a line of terraces across the street. In the centre of the space, long tables lit from above are laid with glass and metals onto which she drips and pours; the fluids well out, pool, spread, thin. Upstairs in the light, the studio is a space of concept and imagination; downstairs it's more akin to a laboratory. 'A laboratory for the mechanics of fluids and spills,' she says. She lifts the edge of a small thick sheet of glass to let the pigment run, holds to the light another panel where the pour has dried.



Breathing, 1991
straw bales, sound, light
5 x 5 x 3 m
installation view, *Steam*, Artists' Projects
for Australian Perspectives, The Coach
House, The Rocks, Sydney, 1991

2. Terence Maloon, 'The alchemy of Janet Laurence', *Art and Australia*, vol. 31, no. 4, winter 1994, p. 505.
3. Janet Laurence, artist statement, *Frames of Reference: Aspects of Feminism and Art*, exhibition catalogue, ArtSpace, Sydney, Australia, 1991.

In one factory, I watch as Laurence pours seeds and ash and traces of minerals in fluid resin between sheets of glass. In another we watch together as images for *The Breath We Share*, 2003,⁴ are screen-printed onto large glass panels. Two men tilt the table, press the screens, and adjust the angle to print the ghostly bare branches of the oak tree that bears the commemorative genealogy of the Myer family. The panels are cumbersome to move, but the printing is a delicate procedure, requiring skill and a steady hand. A mistake, a small misjudgement, can be disastrous. As the men work in silence, Laurence is springy and contained; when the panels are lifted off the table and carried without leaving a finger mark, she lets out her breath.

She knows her materials and she needs this knowing, honed in the downstairs studio, because when she leaves for the site much will change. Even if she pours the same fluid onto the same thickness of the same type of glass, the effect achieved in the studio is never reproduced outside. ‘Never,’ she says. Like a fingerprint, the shape of each pour is different. And so is each site: its light, its topography, its scale, its architecture. Her site research needs to be as sure as the knowledge of the materials she brings to it. Even so, there’s always an element of risk, a fine edge of tension when she’s installing a piece. Will it work in that place, in that light? Something that looks large in a studio model can shrink to insignificance. ‘It’s not possible to measure the height of the sky,’ she says.

Upstairs she talks of pliable and ambiguous spaces that can hold the memory of a place and give expression to ambiguity. Downstairs she talks of the mechanics of work that has taken her from that first installation of sand and seeds to the site-specific sculptural work that isn’t a singular object dropped into a pre-existing space, or confined to a museum, but integral to the creation of space and atmosphere: work that can stretch between art and architecture, between interior and landscape, responding to changing season and mood.

When bushfires raged through Kuring-gai Chase on the northern edge of Sydney in the summer of 1993–94, Laurence was close by at Pittwater. She was working on the concept for *Edge of the Trees*, commissioned for the forecourt of the Museum of Sydney, and executed in collaboration with Fiona Foley. Contemplating a large architectural sculpture on the site of the first Government House had her working with the idea of ‘memory held in matter’ as a way of remembering the uncertain histories of a place. ‘Just as memory participates in everything,’ she wrote, ‘everything participates in memory, drawing the world together, endorsing it with connectiveness.’⁵

The project came during the *Memory Matter* series, which included *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, 1993, for the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, the first commission that gave her a chance to work on an architectural scale, and with materials crafted outside the studio: glass, marble, wood and nickel silver. It was a turning point, she says, not only for her, but for the installation of art in Australian public architecture.

So there she was the following summer, still in that series, with smoke billowing over the ridge, reading early accounts of Sydney. The title, *Edge of the Trees*, comes from pre-historian Rhys Jones’s evocation of first contact when the ‘discoverers’, struggling through the surf towards a strange land, were ‘met on the beaches by other people looking at them from the edges of the trees’ – the Eora, for whom it was known land.⁶

At the Museum of Sydney she was working with historians, archaeologists and anthropologists who, with curator Peter Emmett, were devising a museum for post-colonial Sydney. It was easy enough to agree that such a museum

4. The Sidney Myer commemorative sculpture, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria.
5. Janet Laurence, *Element/Elemental*, MA thesis, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 1993, p. 32.
6. The title *Edge of the Trees* comes from Rhys Jones, ‘Ordering the landscape’, in I. & T. Donaldson (eds), *Seeing the First Australians*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Australia, 1985, p. 185.

should break with the old conventions of collecting, and that the context of an object and its meaning were inseparable. But in a culture of forgetting, what shape would a memorial take if it were to create a ‘poetical space’ for the layered memory of a city? How could absence be made visible?

In the forecourt of the museum, the twenty-nine pillars that make up *Edge of the Trees* rise in memory of the twenty-nine Eora clans who lived in the Sydney basin. Some of the pillars are made from local sandstone, some from steel, others are wooden beams and poles recycled from the old McWilliams warehouse, which was being demolished at the time of the commission. These great poles, with notches cut out of them, had been hewn from trees that were growing in 1788. There’s a photo of Laurence at the demolition site, sitting on the felled poles. She looks small in her baseball cap, dwarfed by the great lengths of wood. ‘I claimed them for heritage and art,’ she says. ‘It was quite a coup.’ Outside the museum they soar, solid in the ground.

Burned or carved into the poles of this now iconic work are Eora and Latin names for plants and places, the signatures of First Fleeters, fragments of text from surveyor William Dawes’s notebook; ash and bone and oyster shells are embedded in the pillars, or contained behind glass. These traces are not offered in an attempt to reconcile the elements of a contested history so much as to let the past lap into the present, mapping the fragmentary residues of matter that live on in the city; as with those painted-out layers of her earliest work, what’s hidden underneath seeps through.

‘Under conditions of modern shock,’ Laurence says, ‘we are so overdosed with images that we’re numbed. We just glance, we don’t look. Or we look but we don’t see.’ She doesn’t want to compete with a torrent of insistent images. She’d rather draw us with a question. What am I looking at? Is the fluid spilling? Is it stable? She wants us to slow, to linger. It’s only as we look, really look, with the full attention of all our senses, and without the tyranny of the clock, that something will come to meet us in that perceptual experience, something unexpected, or mysterious, or new. ‘Veiling,’ she says, can slow us into this kind of seeing, creating ‘barely perceptible shifts that encourage the eye to feel its way through space.’

What is the veil?

Is it

Still space?

Slow space?

A membrane?

The resistance?

The hesitation?

The dissolving boundary?

The connection between sensation and thought?

*A way of looking within the world rather than at it?*⁷

Fluids, skins, texts: these, too, are forms of veiling that can make us pause, arrest us into uncertainty and those ‘moments of being’, as Virginia Woolf called them, that can become lost for want of a medium to bridge the gap between perception and expression. But of the veils, Laurence says, glass is the perfect metaphorical material, ‘as it’s between a solid and a liquid and appears as both’.

As a material, glass is both heavy and fragile. The metaphorical role of her layered and intricate glass works may be to hover as they slow us into questioning

7. Janet Laurence, unpublished notes on *Veiling space*, unpublished notes, 2002.

what, and how, we see; glass may appear as veil or gossamer, membrane or fluid – but lift it and you feel the weight of the minerals that leave traces of green. The perfect metaphorical material not only has to be fixed securely but, for her, invisibly, which brings technical problems to tax the best of designers.

In 1998, she and artist-designer Jisuk Han tackled *49 Veils*, a technically complex commission for the rebuilt Central Synagogue in Sydney. Forty-nine panels of coloured glass were suspended to create four windows representing the Four Worlds of the Kabala; forty-nine veils arranged in such a way that the colours appear in flux as they change in the light. The textual significance of the Four Worlds and their colours posed one set of questions for Janet Laurence as artist; they posed a very different set for Jisuk Han as designer. The concept was for the glass, in panels of varying size, seemingly to float free. Seen from inside, the windows blaze with colour across the silence. Reflecting the colour and fluidity of the glass, the polished anodised finish of the aluminium grid that holds all in place seems invisible. It's only when you look inside the self-effacing frames that you see the racks or slots going back to support the huge panels.

In 1999 Laurence again collaborated with Han, this time on *Veil of Trees*, the installation of tall glass panels between the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Sydney's harbour. This promontory of land, between the Royal Botanic Gardens on one side and the Woolloomooloo finger wharf on the other, was once covered in forest red gums. Even before Mrs Macquarie waited at her famous 'chair' for the ships that would bring news from England, the gums were being cut down. Paintings from 1795 show a raw settlement with the skeletons of ring-barked trees unsettling the skyline. A hundred forest red gum saplings and native grasses were planted for *Veil of Trees*, as an essential part of a work of retrieval and memory. Amongst the trees, the glass panels rise, tall and elegant. Again, their moorings are invisible to the untutored eye. The glass is smoky in places, speckled with ash, memory traces of minerals and indigenous seeds. Engraved into the glass are lines of Australian poetry and prose, and the names of native trees. *Eucalyptus tereticornis*, *Eucalyptus argillacea*, *Eucalyptus*



Forensic, 1991
wood, photographs, straw, laboratory glass, lead, ash, fluorescent lights, x-rays, perspex, installation dimensions variable
installation view, *Frames of Reference: Aspects of Feminism in Art*, The Wharf, Sydney, 1991
Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased with funds provided by the Young Friends of the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 1994

intermedia, *Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*, *Acacia cowleana*, *Casuarina glauca* ... Lines from James McAuley read:

*It is your land of similes: the wattle
Scatters its pollen on the doubting heart.*⁸

In the early 1830s, Frank Stainbridge, an architect and geographer by training and a naturalist by inclination, built a magnificent glasshouse in Norfolk, England, to house the botanical specimens he'd collected from the Amazon. When it was destroyed with its contents by the winter storms of 1836, Stainbridge fell into a profound melancholy, which was dispersed only by the idea of building a replica. This next glasshouse was to be for *replica* plants: two thousand glass specimens so realistically crafted 'the humble hand's cunning craft might deceive the eye'.⁹ Stainbridge had already 'tricked the eye' with a few glass specimens in the first glasshouse, and it was said that there were some that were real in the second. It, too, was destroyed – burned to the ground in 1841 by a man who saw this flaunting of 'man-made nature' as an insult to God.

For a contemporary artist working the line of tension between the art object and the lifeworld, between loss and retrieval, it is a powerful story. It speaks both to the nineteenth-century glasshouses that fascinate Laurence as architectural achievements, and to the perils of memorialising. When she encountered Stainbridge in the catalogue to *The Greenhouse Effect*, 2003, an exhibition at London's Serpentine Gallery, she was becoming increasingly interested in working with the environment and its vulnerability to disturbance. She was pondering the question of how to approach our destructiveness, our conceit that we can dominate the world and rescue ourselves from the damage we do. 'How to get an ecological reading without being didactic,' is how she put it.

The old botanical glasshouses were built to foster plants, but behind that fostering were minds to claim and number them, to fix them in time. Laurence's photographs of beautiful European glasshouses, printed onto glass, have evolved as small layered gallery pieces. As she prefers commissions that embody themes that interest her and allow the opportunity to work with scientists – meteorologists, oceanographers, botanists – there's an accumulation of images and research material in her studio. This proliferation and overflow is a rich source for the personal lexicon of smaller works alongside her site-specific commissions, and in dialogue between them.

The effect on entering *Verdant*, 2003, at Sherman Galleries, was one of fecundity, an immersion into the living world, a blaze of green. The repeated image of a house hedge from Tasmania, its leafy texture redolent of summer, was caught in cool, smooth glass. 'Its mineral lineage appears as the green within,' she says. And yet there was an undertow – an unease at being plunged into all that green. Wherever the eye settled, the perspective was awry. With one work reflecting another, her gallery exhibitions rarely allow a fixed viewing point; there was acute focus, perfect detail, yet, at the same time – with only a slight adjustment of vision – a blur, a skin, a filmy cataract. Images bled into each other and, with glimpses of our own fugitive images, we bled into them. There was a sensation, hard to articulate, of being held within a poetic intelligence.

Beyond the green were more sombre colours, with images of architectural gardens becoming more layered, more iconic, more complexly juxtaposed. This was her first exhibition to show gallery works attached to specific places. 'It must be coming from place-making in my installations,' she says. Architectural icons from the masters of modernism, framed in ways that reflected the

8. James McAuley, 'Terra Australis', *Collected Poems, 1936–1970*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, Australia, 1971.
9. Frank Stainbridge quoted in Ralph Rugoff, 'Signs and Wonders', in *The Greenhouse Effect*, exhibition catalogue, Serpentine Gallery, London, UK, 2003.

surrounding landscape into them, spilled into each other, dissolving the solidity of their structures. The fluid pours across the glass were barely apparent, a shadow play of layer and veil over the great masculine achievements of the Barcelona Pavilion, the Kröller-Müller Museum, the Jardin des Plantes. Even Richard Serra's Corten-steel sculpture in homage to Robert Smithson at the Kröller-Müller Museum melted into a sulphuric veil, a resolution of hard into soft.

'When you look at something architectural,' she said of *Verdant*, 'you think of it as fixed and solid and you don't think about its life as matter and its being within the materials, its potential to become fluid and dissolve as we move within it, perceiving it.'¹⁰

pp. 66, 67

Elixir, 2003, had extended her ideas of fluidity and flux in a major installation, which is housed in a disused rice storage hut outside Matsunoyama village in Japan. The chance to make this brilliant, quirky work was due to a commission from Director Fram Kitagawa to create a permanent contribution to the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial. Kitagawa's vision for the Triennial was to extend an international dialogue between art and the natural world into 'art for the future' based on the specific environment of a remote and depressed rural area, thereby combining the regeneration of depleted communities with the revival of contemporary art – which he saw as having slowly lost 'its home and source of inspiration as the cities in which it was born and raised sickened and died'.¹¹

Echigo-Tsumari is the *Snow Country* of Kawabata's 1948 novel, in which a city intellectual misreads – as if in the reflection from a mirror – both the languid receptivity of an ageing geisha and the allure of a mountain culture that appeared miraculously intact. Fifty years later, the region had become depressed and depopulated, its distinctive culture 'swallowed up,' Kitagawa said, 'in global culture'. The textile industry had collapsed, the young had left and the old were poor; houses, sheds, fields lay abandoned.

Kitagawa's invitation to Janet Laurence, as to all the artists working with the Triennial, was to come to the snow country and make her own imaginative response to the place: its botany, its myths, its food, its cloth, its dyes, its medicines. With no precedent 'for work installed in mountain villages or terraced rice paddies', even the art critic Yusuke Nakahara – who describes the Triennial as 'one of the largest and grandest experiments in the history of contemporary art' – at first feared Kitagawa's concept was 'reckless and dangerous'.¹² Yet the artists responded, and for Laurence it was an invitation of a kind that didn't come in Australia. It did not surprise her that it came from Japan; in 1988 she had spent six months based in Tokyo and experienced for herself the integration of philosophy and aesthetics in the materials of daily living, as well as in the art and architecture she'd previously seen only in reproduction. The minimalism and grace of the Katsura Imperial Villa left an indelible mark on her. The profound experience of seeing the villa in snow, shades of white on white, connected her with the past – all the way back to Basho's frog and *The Tale of Genji*¹³ – and also forward into modernity, and a living present. She had understood then that the deep core of Japanese aesthetics could have reverberations, even in a settler society like Australia, which so easily stumbles in relating its culture to nature and its environment to art.

When, for the Triennial, she visited the area around Matsunoyama in 2002, read Kawabata, encountered temple food, and went up into the forest with botanist Seichi Oguchi, it was clear that this was the place for the botanical elixir bar she'd long had in mind.

10. Janet Laurence, unpublished notes on *Verdant*, October 2003.

11. Fram Kitagawa, 'Next, let's set the spirit alight', in *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial 2000*, exhibition catalogue, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial 2000 Executive Committee, Tokamachi City, Japan, 2000, p. 21.

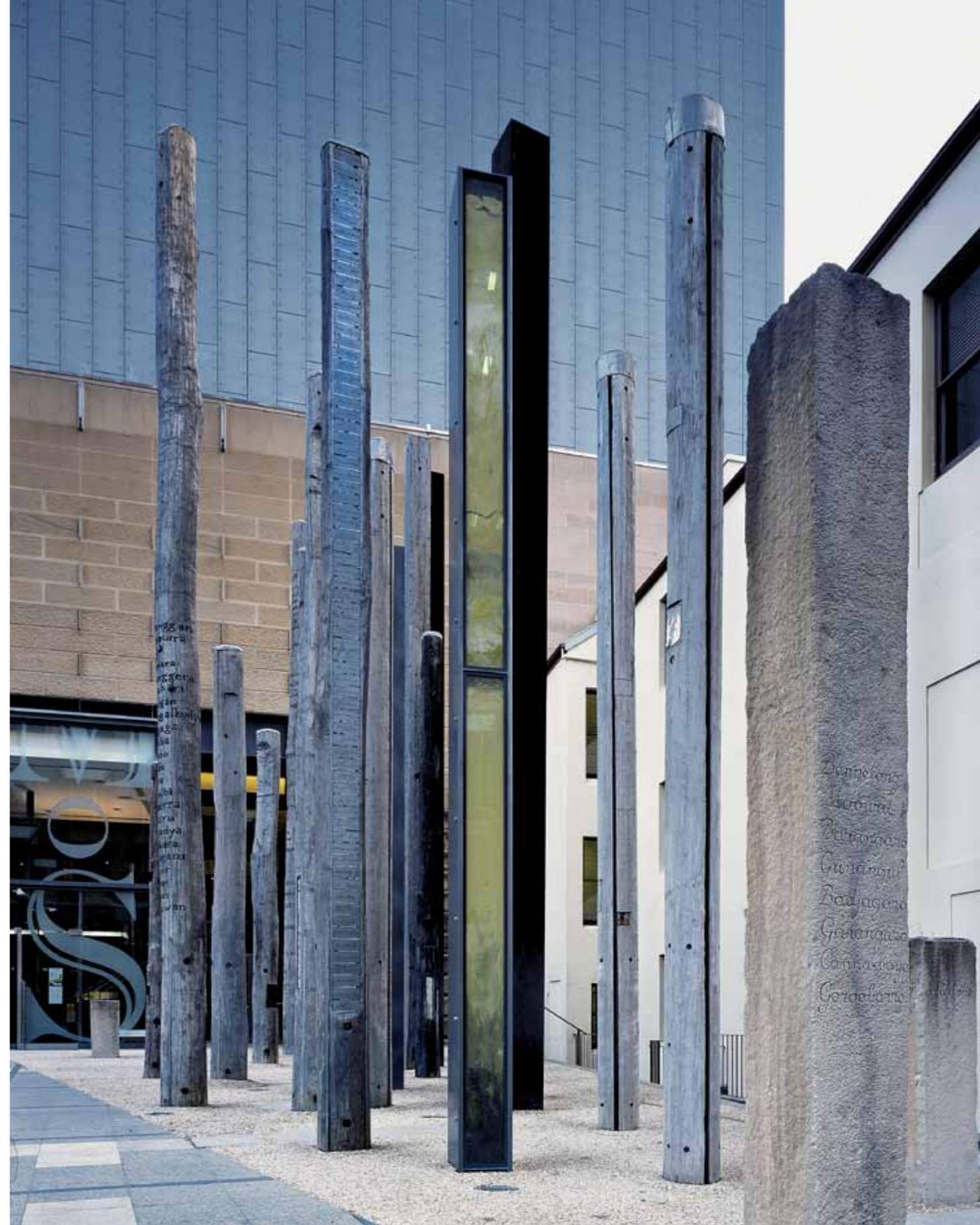
12. Yusuke Nakahara, 'Leaving the city behind: artistic energy', in *ibid*, pp. 12, 13.

13. Matsuo Basho wrote the frog haiku in 1686. *The Tale of Genji* was written by Murasaki Shikibu in the early eleventh century.

Opposite

Edge of the Trees, 1995

sandstone, wood, steel, oxides, shells, honey, bones, zinc, glass, sound, 29 pillars, dimensions variable
site-specific installation, Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House forecourt, Sydney
Collaboration with Fiona Foley, from the concept by Peter Emmett, for the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales



The wooden storage hut she chose to house *Elixir* belonged to the disused farm where Marina Abramović had created *Dream House* in 2000. In its raw state, it had a small entry room with three heavy doors that slid back to reveal a dark storage space, a ladder going up a platform under the roof and one small, high window. It was built to store the family's treasures and the rice that would sustain them over a long winter. From inside, the external door framed an expanse of sky, cypress pines, rice fields, and the mountains on the other side of the valley, which, in summer, was rice-green. She drew the valley into the space she was creating by reflecting it in clear glass, so that it is undoubtedly there and yet elusive, moving as one moves inside, or as shadows move outside, impossible to grasp, as easily absent as present.

Gaston Bachelard conceives of a dream house not in terms of ownership, the embodiment of everything that is considered convenient or desirable by other people, but as an imagined place to house the unconscious and memory. Marina Abramović's *Dream House* is a prized work, offering visitors the experience of sleeping boxes and sleeping suits, dream-enhancing magnets and mineral stones. *Elixir* is a dream house of a different order. Laurence took a dark space and worked it with light; she took rough surfaces and layered them with the smooth reflective finish of glass. She transformed the idea of rice from the inertia of storage to the potency of *shoju* elixirs. Overlapping panels of glass, printed with images of herbs and medicinal texts that cast shadows on the wall, have created a dynamic space: part apothecary's shop, part laboratory, part bar. In the centre, flasks of elixir and measuring jars set up strange reverberations from the glass of the alchemist's bench.

On a previous visit, people from neighbouring farms had taken Janet-san to gather the plants, and in her absence had steeped them in *shoju* to make the elixirs. When I arrived with her in the summer of 2003, vats of *shoju* were waiting, each marked with the name of the person who had prepared it. The liquids glowed with the colours of plum-red berries, wisteria petals, yellow bark, pale green wasabi roots, silty bulbs, blackened comfrey. On the first morning, people from the hamlet and nearby farms came out to greet her. Later, curators would arrive, an architect was there most days, and so was an interpreter who'd lived in Melbourne – a cosmopolitan influx into a village that exists for most of the year within its own routines and rituals. But with only a wisp of language, something direct happened between Janet-san and the people of the hamlet and the farmers who had collected the herbs with her. 'Artists work like rice farmers,' said an old man who came each day to check her progress.

To get time alone with her materials, Laurence went to the shed early in the morning, straight up the mountain path, and stayed on in the evening, crouched on the floor with the vulnerable glass panels balanced on small blocks. She had to pick her way carefully to make the sap-like pours of pigment and fluids. As she watched, silent, intent, there was a nervy edge to her. It was the end of the wet and there were swift squalls of rain; for days the air was heavy with moisture. With a week before the festival opened, the pours were alarmingly slow to dry. There was glass to be replaced, shelves to be moved. And the taut question of whether the elements would resolve into a unified work. The model in the studio was a long way from the edge of that steep valley. 'The bigger the trouble,' the project's architect Hiroshi Yatsua said, 'the better the success.'

In Japan, I came to see this element of risk, combined with her uncanny sensual precision, as essential to her practice. It's not always comfortable, this 'mental setting of the artist,' as Marion Milner puts it, which requires of her and



those around her 'a tolerance of something which may at moments look very like madness'.¹⁴ But it is Laurence's capacity to push to the edge of possibility and hold her nerve that allows the work conceived in the studio to resolve on site.

14. Marion Milner, *On Not Being Able to Paint*, Heinemann, London, UK, 1950, p. 164.

Critics and art historians talk of Janet Laurence working the interface between art, architecture and the environment. She talks of slowing us into an awareness of our inseparability from the living world, the ebb and flow of transitory states. I could say her work reminds us that we are matter, and that the great structures of art and architecture, seemingly so fixed, are, like us, built of substances that dissolve. But when we pause, when we hesitate and slow, when we are drawn into a space she has created, it is not the lifting of a veil on to a lost past, a threatened environment, or an iconic garden that holds us there. We are held, I think, because the traces of veiling, like mists in the hills of the snow country, let us glimpse something of that hard-to-grasp shore-like zone where the revealed lies close to the obscured, and the open to the closed.

Although she has moved a long way from her first reading of *The Waves* and those fluid pigments on a flat surface, something about states of memory as an element in the tug between matter and image, 'fact and vision', and the way the past does not separate itself from us, has stayed with her over the years, and points, still, to the future.

In the studio in 2003, when I first visited, were models for future work, among them the ghost glasshouses, not yet commissioned, that she envisages as an inversion of the nineteenth-century glasshouse, a museum of transitoriness and loss, reminding us of vanished and threatened species, their names inscribed onto veils of glass.

This is a revised version of an essay written in 2004 following a series of meetings between Drusilla Modjeska and Janet Laurence in Australia and Japan.

Unfold, 1997
Duraclear, photographs, glass,
oil, pigments
4.5 x 12 x 2 m
installation view, Project Space,
Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney, 1997

Overleaf
Veil of Trees, 1999
100 *Eucalyptus tereticornis*, glass panels,
corten steel panels, seeds, ash, LED lighting
site-specific installation, City of Sydney
Sculpture Walk, Art Gallery Road,
The Domain, Sydney
Collaboration with Jisuk Han



**Changing Topographies:
The Environmental Art of Janet Laurence**
Rachel Kent
Senior Curator
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Janet Laurence is a leading Australian artist who addresses environmental themes and concerns in her work. Taking two- and three-dimensional form, and embracing diverse materials from metal oxides and mineral spills to living plant matter, Laurence's art conjures up a world in perpetual transition.

Active as an artist since the early 1980s, Laurence has developed a practice that extends within and beyond the museum. Works increasingly spill out into the surrounding landscape, engaging with architectural and environmental discourses. From her more intimate gallery presentations to large-scale installations in public or garden spaces, and permanent installations to temporary or ephemeral displays, Laurence works across a range of locations and forms.

Light and reflection are sustained reference points for Laurence's art. From its more immediate photographic manifestations, which are transferred by the artist onto aluminium, glass and acrylic, light is explored in the layering of panels in extended sequences, to ghostly effect. Images merge in and out of one another and areas of mineral pigmentation overlap, as faint shadows are cast upon the supporting walls or floor. In some of her larger sculptural works, slender upright panels are placed side by side, in formation, against the gallery wall. In outdoor presentations they are embedded directly into the earth with native vegetation planted by the artist. In others, large suspended sheets of transparent film or fabric create a space for interaction and immersion, as well as shadow and reflection. In all of these works there is a strong sense of the aesthetic, of simplicity and pared-back elegance, which is balanced by the use of everyday substances with their messy, uncontained materiality.

The layering of objects and imagery is characteristic of Laurence's art. The use of systems – boxes, rows and grids – and methods of classification expands, moreover, on notions of minimal and conceptual art, while drawing upon scientific precedents. A taxonomic impulse is revealed in Laurence's careful collecting and documentation of natural materials – ash, soil, wax, minerals and pigments, lead, fur, vegetation – and their highly formal, sequential presentation. In this sense the works illuminate the delicate balance between order and disorder, method and chaos. Described by the artist as 'materials of substance', their inherent density is counterbalanced by the strategic use of transparency and light. This push and pull between states – solid and liquid, dark and light, opaque and transparent – creates a sense of tension in Laurence's art. It also suggests a coming together of the mineral, elemental and animal realms; and our own place within this kaleidoscopic world.

p. 49 The physical relationship of the artwork to the scale of the human body is central to an understanding of Laurence's sculptural installations of the 1980s and 1990s. Increasingly architectural in their realisation, and involving the input of engineers and other consultants, public commissions such as *Edge of the Trees*, 1995, at the Museum of Sydney, in collaboration with Fiona Foley, have brought Laurence's practice into the public domain. Other installation works, conceived both for public and gallery spaces, have similarly invited viewers to move around and through their forms, becoming 'as one' with them. In *Unfold*, 1997, a work consisting of suspended Duratrans sheets and large glass panels, shadows and reflections flicker back and forth as viewers pass along the corridor space between the glass and softly swaying transparencies of taxidermic animals from the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien.

p. 51 The human body becomes literally enmeshed within the haunting imagery of the work; and the work itself comes literally to life. She says, 'It is in this transparent, reflective space, where the body becomes entwined into space and time, where we see our reflection ghosted through the material/immateriality of glass. We merge into the surrounding architecture and landscape as a play on the virtual.'¹

1. Artist's unpublished notes, 2002.

pp. 56, 57 The notion of materiality, and the transformation from one physical state to another, has been a recurrent feature of Laurence's art to date. From her early alchemical works, which explored the transformative properties of mineral and elemental substances, to her more recent works, which focus on landscape, she has examined the ways in which nature and culture interact. To this aim, Laurence has spent considerable time researching and documenting the recesses of the natural history museum with its long, silent corridors of taxidermic animals under wraps and inventories of lost species. The natural history museum became central for Laurence's practice during the 1990s, epitomising the collecting and cataloguing impulses of nineteenth-century Europe and its colonies, including Australia. Combining knowledge and wonder, science and the imagination, it is in many ways an apt metaphor for her distinctive approach to artmaking. This fascination was illustrated in the 2000 exhibition *Muses* at The Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, the subsequent



Muses: Into Light, 2000
natural science specimens from Melbourne Museum, Duraclears on acrylic, voile installation view, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, Victoria, 2000

In the Shadow, 2000
fog, casuarina forest, bulrushes, resin,
stainless steel, text
wands 2–9 m
site-specific installation, Olympic Park,
Homebush Bay, Sydney



site-specific display *Stilled Lives* at the Melbourne Museum in 2000, and *Fugitive in Light* for the 2002 Adelaide Festival exhibition, *Eden and the Apple of Sodom*, at the University of South Australia Art Museum. In these projects Laurence accessed the vast collections of Museum Victoria to create object-filled vitrines and diorama-like installations that gently questioned the taxonomies separating matter into discrete categories rather than acknowledging their essential interrelationship. Taxidermic animals were displayed under semitransparent veils, their museum stillage intact, alongside rows of bird skins with their browning, aged museum identification tags. Reflecting the collecting imperative of the museum, they equally reminded viewers of time's passing and the imminent mortality that resides within us all.

The idea of transformation is also extended in Laurence's work to embrace the perceptual realm: works not only evoke physical transitions and their traces, but 'memory traces' also.² As much of Laurence's recent practice requires viewers to engage with it physically, it also demands that time be slowed, even momentarily. She says, 'It is about making a space that is experiential and therefore perceptual. But it is also a space in which one lingers, so that in that duration, one's memory can begin to be activated.' Noting the relationship between memory and physical place, she concludes, 'In our globalised world we live in a state of placelessness; we're everywhere and nowhere ... I want my spaces to have a sense of place.'³ Laurence has sought to express, from her earliest works to the present day, the intimate connections that bind all matter. From micro to macro, and from natural to constructed environments, she suggests that our place in the living world is multilayered – 'whether that be a micro, biological or chemical connection through matter, or the more psychological one through memory but using matter very much as a material that connects us through the medium into our memory'.⁴

Fascinated by the natural world and its human incursions, Laurence's research has taken her to diverse locations across Europe and Asia. As well as her continued research in natural history museums, she has documented the ornamental gardens, hedgerows and nineteenth-century glasshouses of Northern Europe, using their extravagant forms as the basis for her ghostly, layered photographs and most recent three-dimensional scale models. She has also actively researched the medicinal properties of plants in both eastern and western cultures, creating imaginative glassed spaces for curative tonics to be served to visitors. In one manifestation, Laurence realised an 'elixir bar' as part of the 2003 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial in Japan. For this work she converted a traditional timber storage house into a curative space filled with slender glass vials, white-coated laboratory attendants, and an array of plant-based remedial elixirs available for tasting. Part apothecary and part botanical museum, *Elixir* suggested a means through which to reconnect contemporary urban society with its natural origins – in effect, a means of healing an increasing estrangement.

In many of these works language is invoked in the form of written text, with its dual descriptive and evocative functions. Elemental, mineral and plant names, scientific and medicinal terminologies, are transcribed across the surface of the works and embedded within their imagery. From arcane alchemical references to lists of endangered flora and fauna, the words resonate with meaning. Of writing's spatial and temporal associations, Susan Stewart has noted: 'Writing gives us a device for inscribing space, for inscribing nature ... Writing serves to caption the world, defining and commenting on the configurations we choose to textualise. If writing is an imitation of speech, it is so as a "script", as a marking of speech in space which can be taken up through time in varying context.'⁵ Laurence's use of text extends the museological or classificatory impulse inherent in her work, while giving it an elegiac, memorial quality through time.

2. In this regard the writings of Henri Bergson are central to Laurence's work. She referenced Bergson in her Masters studies at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney, in 1993.
3. Artist's unpublished notes, 2002.
4. Ibid.
5. Susan Stewart, 'On description and the book', in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Duke University Press, Durham, US, p. 31.

Collaboration forms an increasingly significant aspect of Laurence's art from the early 1990s to the present. Working as an artist within a wider organisational structure, alongside environmental scientists, architects and landscape architects, Laurence has produced major public works in Australia and abroad, several of which extend on the 'memorial' theme inherent in so much of her wider practice. In 1993 Laurence created one of her first major collaborative commissions, *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, for the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, with architectural firm Tonkin Zulaikha Greer. A permanent installation of monumental scale, it is extended by Laurence's 2003 memorial work for the *Australian War Memorial* in Hyde Park, London, also produced with Tonkin Zulaikha Greer. Other collaborative projects have included *49 Veils*, 1998, a major installation of overlain, coloured glass panels for the windows of the Central Synagogue in Bondi, Sydney, with artist Jisuk Han, and *Veil of Trees*, 1999, for the Sydney Sculpture Walk, adjacent to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, also with Jisuk Han. Seen by the artist as an expanding aspect of her practice, these collaborative projects create ways to work across professional boundaries, while giving rise to fresh opportunities for research and community engagement.

Since the late 1990s, Laurence has increasingly examined the darker aspects of human activity in the land and its devastating impact. From wide-scale deforestation and land degradation to diminishing species and rising water tables, these works suggest a world that is slowly changing for the worse. Laurence has maintained a personal commitment to environmental politics since the 1980s. Increasingly politicised, her artworks of the later 1990s have also engaged in a dialogue that has taken shape in both Australia and the wider world. In these works the fragile balance in which all natural things exist together, and the consequences of human activity driven by greed and profit, are laid bare.

Environmental phenomena and processes are articulated in projects such as *Picture the Dark Face of the River*, 1999, created for the Department of Environment in Canberra, *In the Shadow*, 2000, at Homebush Bay, and *Waterveil*, 2006, a major work for Melbourne City Council's green building, 'CH2'. In these large public installations, the artist examines scientific research into cloud formations and water remediation strategies. While extending her ongoing exploration of transitional states – in this case, liquid, solid and vaporous – these works also point to the wastage and depletion of our most precious natural resource, and recall environmentalist David Suzuki's prediction that the next world war will be fought over water, not politics or religion. Subsequent works have become more explicit in their call to arms, including her newest bodies of work, which explore deforestation in Tasmania and Central America; for example, the *Crimes against the Landscape* series, 2007–10.

Many of Laurence's exhibited works, from the late 1990s onwards, comprise Duraclear images upon layered acrylic panels. Their surfaces are blurred and stained by encrustations of mineral pigmentation that have been poured by the artist and allowed to dry. Photographs taken by Laurence – at the Brion Cemetery in Treviso, Italy; the Kröller-Müller Museum and its vast sculpture gardens at Hoge Veluwe National Park, The Netherlands; the Jewish Museum and Potsdam Gardens, Berlin; and the spectacular nineteenth-century glasshouses at Kew Gardens, London – all recall a time past with its residual traces of humanity, triumph and loss. References to memory and the fugitive, or transient, figure in Laurence's evocative titling of these works, and her small-scale model *Ghost Glasshouse*, realised as a prototype sculptural installation in 2004, conjure up a melancholic space for the preservation and study of lost species. In many of these works the ornamental garden, with its manicured



lawns and tall, severe hedgerows – or the modern museum garden with its minimalist sculptural incursions – is counterpoised with the autumnal spill of richly coloured leaves and the tangle of denuded branches. A space in which the human hand and unruly nature compete for supremacy, the garden is presented in unnaturally saturated greens and reds as well as ghostly, shadowed greys and whites.

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Laurence's 2005 works include *Cellular Gardens (Where Breathing Begins)*, a series of glass vials mounted on slender metal stands interconnected by metal tubing. Inserted within the vials are small green outbursts of living plant matter, cultivated by the artist as specimens for nurture and preservation: a gesture of hope in the face of widespread environmental devastation. *Cellular Gardens* was originally juxtaposed with a 'curtain' of overlapping Duratrans sheets featuring ghosted negative prints of black and white images taken by the artist in the Mexican jungle.⁶ In these images, which are part of the *Selva Veils* series, 2004–05, Laurence literally 'veiled' the trees with white muslin before documenting them. Viewing these works in context with the verdant colouration of her earlier works is akin to entering a memorial site, the glass vials functioning like modern-day reliquaries.

Extending these themes is Laurence's installation for the 2010 Biennale of Sydney: a purpose-built glasshouse in the city's Royal Botanic Gardens, in which viewers could encounter images and objects relating to the vital care and support of plant life in today's environmentally challenged world. Glass vials and beakers, plastic tubing and delicate gauze casings created a sense of urgency – of life in peril – and suggested that our relationship to the natural world requires redress. Entitled *Waiting – A Medicinal Garden for Ailing Plants*, Laurence's Biennale installation combined themes of science and medicine, fragility and ecological awareness for the twenty-first century. Significantly, Laurence has described her Biennale installation as 'creating a space of revival and resuscitation', one which 'amplifies and imagines invisible processes and the psychological state of plants'.⁷ While implicating us in the plight of the plants, the glasshouse equally allowed for remedy and sustenance.

pp. 89–97

Other recent works have revisited the animal world and the precarious balance in which all things are held: animal, human and plant. Among them, the two-screen video installation *Vanishing*, 2009, shown in the *2009 Clemenger Art Award*

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6. *Cellular Gardens (Where Breathing Begins)*, 2005 and *Translucent Darkness Ghosting*, 2005, from the *Selva Veils* series, were exhibited together in *Janet Laurence: A Survey Exhibition*, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, 2005.

7. Artist's statement, <www.janetlaurence.com>, viewed 23 January 2012.



Above and opposite
Fugitive in Light, 2002
 photographs, Duraclear, glass, acrylic, voile, oil, oxides, ash,
 marblo, natural science specimens, projected images
 installation view, *Eden and the Apple of Sodom*, Adelaide
 Festival, University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide



at the National Gallery of Victoria and then at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art,⁸ depicted endangered mammals from around the world through abstract visual imagery – a rippling flank, a paw or snout, thick fur – and the eerie, slow sound of the animals' breath in repose. Strangely human, their inhalations and exhalations brought home the innate closeness which we often forget, or even deny, in our hierarchical relationship to the animal world. Laurence says, 'The sound of the breathing shifts and changes but creates a slow rhythm that connects to our own breath.'⁹ *Vanishing* was made during a three-month artistic residency at Sydney's Taronga Zoo and it carries a personal association for the artist whose elderly father was dying at the time of its creation. Laurence has described the tangle of medical tubing in which he lay at the hospital, hovering between life and death, and the fragility of all life held in the balance.¹⁰

8. *Vanishing* was shown in the environmental survey exhibition *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2010.

9. Artist's statement, <www.janetlaurence.com>, viewed 23 January 2012.

10. See Rachel Kent, 'Janet Laurence', in *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2010, p. 114.

In 2012, Laurence presents a major new installation for Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF), a culmination of the themes that have driven her recent work and exploration of the interrelationship between all living matter. Focusing on environmental fragility, the plight of animals and our relationship to them, this ambitious work comprises a series of curved, semitransparent structures within the gallery space, some of which can be entered and others looked into by gallery visitors. Presented as eight large cylinders in mesh and gauze and suspended from the gallery ceiling, they hover just above the floor and suggest self-contained units or unique bio-habitats dedicated to both living and extinct animal life. A sense of discovery and wonder – of the Renaissance Wunderkammer or 'cabinet of curiosities' – is ever-present in the work, and reflects the artist's travel and research in the historical museums of Europe. In the centre of the gallery a delicate mesh cylinder houses a ring of taxidermic birds, attached to life-support tubing, upon a floating platform; and below it is a cluster of white barn owls and white calciferous powder suggestive of alchemical transformation.

Laurence's SCAF exhibition is entitled *After Eden* – a poignant reference to a past era of natural diversity and fecundity, and its decline in the wake of human supremacy and zealous industrialisation. Laurence observes, 'We talk about climate



Opposite

The Breath We Share, 2003
glass, steel, ceramic-fired screen-print,
silver birch trees
3.5 x 2.5 x 1 m
Commissioned with funds provided by
the Sidney Myer Fund and Board of
Management, Bendigo Art Gallery
Collection: Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

Australian War Memorial, 2003
engraved granite, bronze, water
length 55 m
Hyde Park Corner, London, UK
Collaboration with Tonkin Zulaikha
Greer Architects



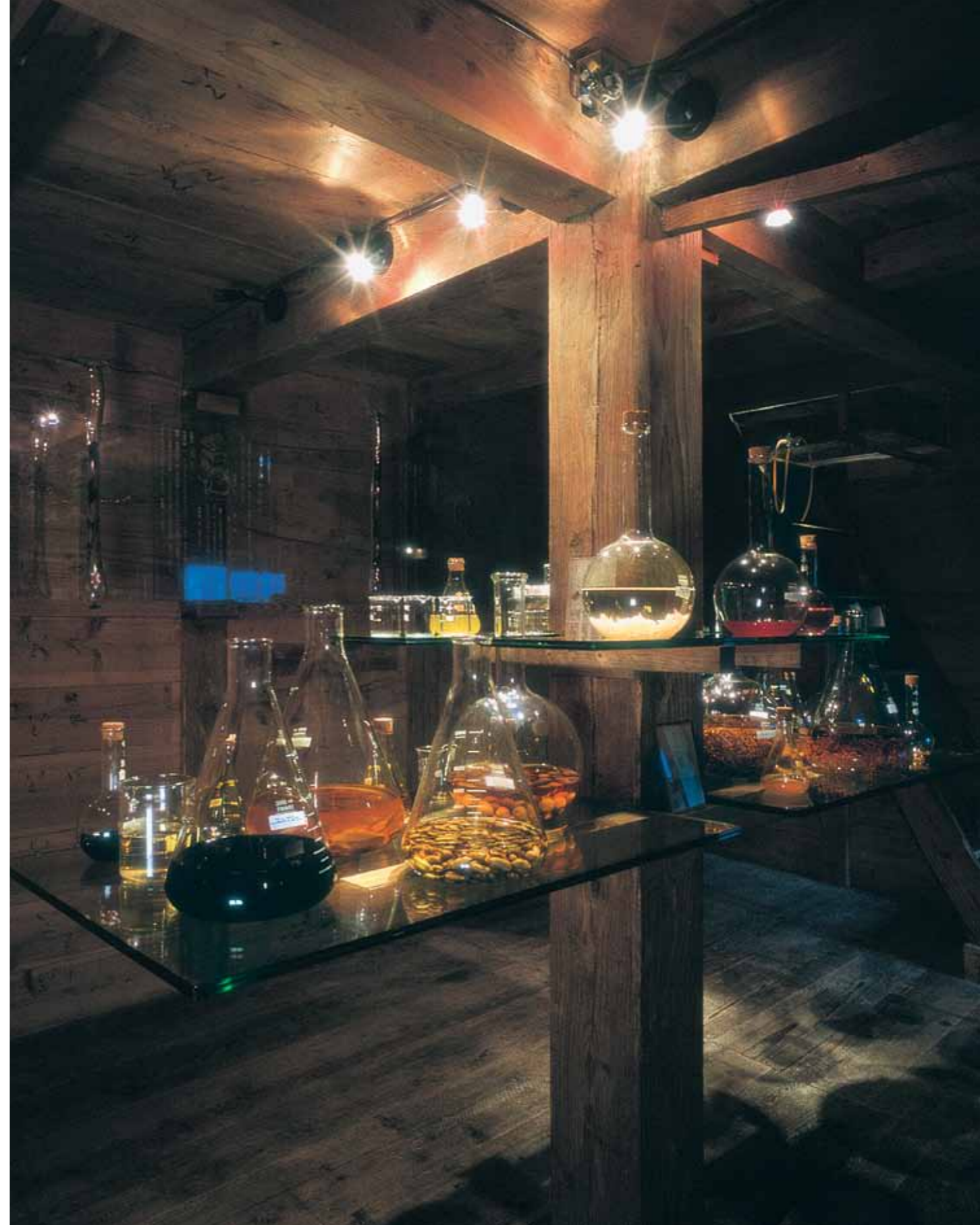
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change, but we live in an age of mass extinctions and the loss of bio habitats.¹¹ Citing the 2000 exhibition *Muses* as an early precursor to the current work, with its veiled animals and memorial sensibility, she asks, ‘What is the plight of animals and their loss of habitat? I want to create a sense of empathy, of our connection to animals, which are so completely threatened.’¹² Laurence travelled extensively in 2011, spending time in Southeast Asia and China; and it is from an Indonesian elephant sanctuary, remnants of untouched forest in Aceh and a Panda conservation centre in Sichuan, that she derives significant source material for her exhibition. Presented as photographic and film footage, alongside taxidermic animals from the Australian Museum and dioramas housing objects and materials drawn from the natural and medicinal world, they offer reprieve and nurture – the hope for a better future. Avoiding sentimentality, they instead provide care and attention where it is urgently needed.

In a 2005 address to Sydney audiences, David Suzuki spoke of his mentor Rachel Carson and her groundbreaking book *Silent Spring* (1962), which drew international attention to the effect of chemical pesticides on the environment. Arguing that ‘In the real world, everything is connected to everything else’, Suzuki voiced grave concern about the ways in which humans exploit, deplete and pollute the land.¹³ Laurence’s art reasserts this profound sense of interconnection between all things, organic and inorganic. Focusing on the relationship between built and natural environments, and increasingly active in her portrayal of the deleterious effects of human activity upon the land, she imbues her recent works with an ecological agenda. These works suggest that our fragile ecological balance needs urgent redressing for future generations. They also propose, as Rachel Carson did in 1954, that ‘The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.’¹⁴

Above and opposite
Elixir, 2003
 wooden traditional house, screen-printed
 glass panel, paint, blown-glass vials, plant
 extracts, schocu, laboratory glass
 site-specific permanent installation,
 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Japan, 2003

11. Janet Laurence in conversation with the author, January 2012.
12. Janet Laurence in conversation with the author, October 2011.
13. David Suzuki in conversation with Peter Garrett for the 2005 Sydney Writers’ Festival, Sydney Town Hall, 27 May 2005.
14. Quoted by biographer Linda Lear at <www.rachelcarson.org>, viewed 23 January 2012.





Cellular Gardens (Where Breathing Begins), 2005
stainless steel, mild steel, acrylic, blown glass, rainforest plants, dimensions variable
Collection: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, purchased 2005

Translucent Darkness Ghosting, 2005
from the *Selva Veils* series
Duraclear, photographs, acrylic
installation view, *Janet Laurence: A Survey Exhibition*, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, 2005



In Stance of Memory, 2005
12 panels: Duraclear on shinkolite, oxides and ash in oil,
rusted steel
1 x 6 x 0.1 m
Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased with funds provided by the Contemporary Collection
Benefactors with assistance from additional donors 2006

DSM: I want to ask you about the genesis of this installation. I'm interested in the idea of the artist curating their own exhibition. How did you approach this new project, with respect to its specific components and its relationship to your earlier works?

JL: I think most artists, even in terms of selecting what they're going to show, have a role in curating their own exhibitions. As an installation artist I've always either curated my shows or at least been involved, as often this curatorial process happens during the installation; there is a pulling together of the relationships between the works, and between the works and the space as a whole. It's how I've always worked; gathering material I've found, made or kept, and combining it with other elements to form a whole. For me the real challenge of curating a space is how to make these disparate elements resonate and speak to each other. However, I really like – in fact prefer – working with a curator and using that dialogue to draw out the unexpected – that more objective view is good when you work so much from the inside.

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After Eden follows on from previous works, such as *Waiting – A Medicinal Garden for Ailing Plants* and *In Memory of Nature*, both 2010,¹ in that it houses a variety of elements that express the theme of habitat loss and species extinction. The opportunity to create a totally enmeshed environment that the viewer is within, and to design the way in which the viewer enters the space were, for me, very important elements. I wanted each cellular structure with its semitransparent veils/membrane to reveal specific components or particular stories in ways that allow the viewer to experience the spatial relationships and to create connections.

After Eden isn't a campaign for animal rights but I do want it to be a powerful voice for animals by bringing people into their world, allowing them for a moment to consider, to empathise with, their emotional and physical wellbeing. It's this empathetic recognition that animals can and do feel that should inform our discussions and our actions on their behalf.

As part of your research for *After Eden* you and I spent a morning in the wet and dry storerooms of the Australian Museum looking at all manner of wondrous and exotic objects, from partially articulated skeletons to foetal specimens in spirits. Drawing on Francis Bacon's (*Gesta Grayorum*, 1594) description of 'a goodly, huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine has made rare in stuff, form or motion; whatsoever singularity, chance and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever

1. *Waiting – A Medicinal Garden for Ailing Plants*, 2010, was exhibited in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, as part of the 2010 17th Biennale of Sydney: *The Beauty of Distance – Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age*. *In Memory of Nature*, 2010, was exhibited at BREENSPACE, Sydney, in 2010, and at Glasshouse Regional Gallery, Port Macquarie, NSW, in 2011; it will be exhibited at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in 2012.

Nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included',² is *After Eden* in part a contemporary interpretation of the Wunderkammer – the traditional cabinet of curiosities?

I think perhaps that my works do play on a contemporary version of a Wunderkammer; however, times have changed and we now see these collections from nature very differently. I've always been interested in natural history cabinets and the tiny special interest museums, such as the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in Paris and the Vavilov Institute seed bank in St Petersburg, and so many others I have visited and researched. I was very conscious of this relationship as I developed my recent works.

Waiting sat within Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens. I imagined it almost as a strange cabinet of glassy wonder, echoing the great and wondrous botanical glasshouses and the Crystal Palace (that was once on that site). They have formed the basis for many of my works, referencing the marvel, conquest and exploitation of nature. On the other hand, *Waiting* was also based on research in the hidden plant pathology wing in the gardens. Of course, there is now a need for regenerating research and repair and *Waiting* was in fact a sanatorium for ailing plants. This healing, caring aspect is also important in *After Eden*.

The other fascinating thing about the Wunderkammern is that they were microcosms of natural history, a factual or fictional representation of the greater world, and the more you explore this the more fascinating and ever-revealing it is. Objects were often packed tightly together in the Wunderkammer, which varied in scale from a cabinet of curiosities to a total museum. One of the most exciting I've ever seen is the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, a jam-packed collection of anthropological and archaeological artefacts. It's the intensity of that massing of things that gives it such presence. However, I've designed *After Eden* to be a more open space that you wander through, inviting a more dreamlike relationship between things.

Books play an important role in your life. You've cited influences from W.G. Sebald to Roland Barthes and Gaston Bachelard. Many of your artwork titles have in fact been inspired by books – for example, *Only the Marshes are Fecund*, 1990, from André Gide, *From the Shadow*, 1988, from T.S. Eliot and *Life Is Probably Round*, 1984, from Gaston Bachelard. Which writers and books were your influences for *After Eden*?

It's really hard to say because I've been reading around this subject for years. I've read a lot of specific research by writers such as Peter Singer, environmental writers such as Tim Flannery, people who have written about our relationship as settlers to this land, such as Richard Flanagan, and nature writers like Barry Lopez. However, so much feeds into our work – fiction and poetry as well. In fact, in *Veil of Trees*, 1999, I incorporated poetry by wonderful Australian poets about the life of trees. I'm influenced by the mood of writers like Sebald, who was very much concerned with memory, loss of memory and decay. His book, *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), is quite often a voice in my head. I'm interested in how you hold these threads together; the memory of various writings occur during the working process, but I guess it's more a memory of the image or mood we've created from them – it's certainly not a case of reproducing images from them. However, a crucial book for me in researching this exhibition was *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (2011) by Deborah Bird Rose. The cornerstone for her book is the endangered dingo and the threat to its future. It's beautiful, poetic, compelling writing, as well as being well researched. Her words have a great profundity to them and she boldly confronts our relationship to other animals and our role as predators.

2. Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*, Vintage Books, New York, US, 1996, p. 76.



*Love in the time of extinctions, therefore, calls forth another set of questions. Who are we, as a species? How to find our way into the Earth system? What ethics call to us? How to find our way into new stories to guide us, now that so much is changing? How to invigorate love and action in ways that are generous, knowledgeable, and life-affirming?*³

3. Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, Virginia, US, 2011, p. 2.

Wild Dog Dreaming influenced me to incorporate the dingo into the exhibition to illustrate the likely fate of countless other animal and plant native species. I read that a New South Wales initiative to conserve existing dingo populations is being undertaken under the limitations of an Act that will classify them, state-wide, as a pest requiring eradication. This current attitude is similar to the one that managed so rapidly to extinguish the thylacine in Tasmania, whose loss is now creating a myth of longing. I contacted Deborah early on to ask if I could introduce her writings in some way into *After Eden*. It seemed apt as she writes with empathy, love and compassion and I wanted to create an installation that dealt with extinction, the plight of animals – their loss of habitats.

You've said that the political context in which you produce a work is as significant as the site for which it's created, or the materials it's created with. I'm thinking here of the site-specific *Edge of the Trees* commissioned in 1994 by the Museum of Sydney. What political issues speak to you today? Do you see your art as a vehicle for social and political change? And does the artist as citizen, as is argued by controversial Nobel Laureate Harold Pinter in his published lecture *Art, Truth and Politics*, have a 'crucial obligation' to 'define the real truth of our lives and our societies'? As Pinter warns, 'If such

Botanical Residues (Clouded Memory), 2006
Duraclear, shinkolite acrylic, aluminium, oil, pigment
1 x 2.3 m
Private collection



Carbon and Planting, 2006
from the *Landscape and Residues* series
Duracler, shinkolite acrylic, aluminium,
oil, pigment
3 x 1 m
Private collection



Carbon Vein, 2006
from the *Landscape and Residues* series
Duracler, shinkolite acrylic, aluminium,
oil, pigment
3 x 1 m
Private collection

a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us – the dignity of man.⁴

4. Harold Pinter, *Art, Truth and Politics*, The Nobel Foundation, Stockholm, Sweden, 2005, p. 12.

For me, our relationship as human beings with the natural environment, and our relationship to the rest of the planet, is the crucial issue. We depend on the biosphere for everything; its destruction lies at the core of key humanitarian problems such as poverty, famine, drought and hunger. It's about what we're doing to the planet and about who wins and who loses. It's about the nature of man and how we as humans have impacted on this earth. The plundering of resources, the desecration of forests, the damming of rivers has contributed to extinction, changes to climatic conditions, desertification, and the displacement of populations. The influence of man on earth in recent centuries is so huge it constitutes a new geological era – the Anthropocene. I think we need a whole new paradigm that defines how we live on this earth, how we live ethically faced with human nature and its pursuits of incredible individual greed. How are we to live in any genuinely sustainable way?

I'm interested in how scientific information can be communicated through art. Alchemy can be a metaphorical language I can play with in my work. My art is political in that it reveals often invisible or hidden facts and secrets of a site, quietly, not in an overt, activist manner. I think you have to allow the viewer to enter and engage with the work, to have their own thoughts. I see this communication like an osmotic process, as a shift from a perceptual experiential sensory relationship to a gradual receptiveness to the space and the content of the work. I'm interested in creating time enough to see that there is something to tell. I guess it's the same with any work of any art form – how to bring one into its being.

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For instance, *In the Shadow*, 2000, a work commissioned for Olympic Park in Sydney, seemingly celebrates a constructed beauty in nature in a post-industrial site but has an undercurrent of toxicity and man-made poisoning that is revealed in the work. Art has always incorporated politics in varying ways. It's great to have a site that can offer a relevant political stance for an artist; it is very different to the dialogue within the museum. It enables me to address in my practice these issues that concern me in my everyday life so there is no separation between my work and my life. I have made many trips to remarkable threatened environments, such as the Tarkine and the shockingly deforested Styx Valley – both in Tasmania – enabling an inside view that has resulted in major works: *Crimes against the Landscape*, 2007–10, and *Tarkine (For a World in Need of Wilderness)*, 2011.

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It's interesting and engaging for me to make work from what I really care about in the world.

Are you asking your audience, the viewer, to make ethical decisions; to make a connection between what has meaning for you and what is important to them?

In the case of this exhibition I want the audience to feel empathy, to feel concerned for the plight of all animals facing cruelty and extinction. We are all implicated in this loss and everything from the clothes we wear to the food we eat impacts upon the world. I hope that as people walk through the installation, they engage with the images, films, drawings and specimens, sensing a presence, recognising a relationship between themselves and the animals. But it's difficult with this subject – how do you do that without being sentimental or didactic? After all, it is an artwork – it must take us other places too.

*You could turn the whole world into a pile of ashes through sacrifice, but as you kill your fellow Earth creatures, you make yourself and the whole world more lonely, more empty, than when you started.*⁵

J.G. Ballard said, ‘People want to save the whale and the seal because they know that sooner or later the human being is probably going to be next on the list.’⁶ While *After Eden* openly addresses the tragic decimation of species, loss of habitat and resultant destruction of ecosystems, do you believe there is some truth in Ballard’s statement? Does climate change politics, as it is argued today, focus on our own interests and on maintaining our current standard of living at the expense of other species?

That’s certainly one school of thought but I think an enormous number of people simply don’t care or just presume that we’ll be able to fix it. They live in myopic denial about the severity of what’s happening in the world and refuse to imagine that the human race, let alone all the other species, may face extinction. What disappoints me is how the climate change and sustainability debate revolves around economics and growth, ignoring the lifeworld and the interconnection of everything. There’s never any real, serious political discussion, let alone vision, about how we are going to live globally and sustainably. It’s totally hijacked by the influence of the already powerful groups securing their positions, preventing the necessary changes.

You have been described as an environmental artist and in 2006 you were awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study overseas developments in environmental art. What do you understand by the limitations and challenges of this term, which is used concurrently with ‘eco-art’, ‘ecological art’, ‘land art’ or ‘green art’ but can also be used to define artists who manipulate and alter the landscape’?

There are so many different interpretations and definitions of the term. Can you call someone an environmental artist just because they’re painting a landscape? Perhaps environmental art is a transformation from the observations of landscape into revealing what we see and know now. It becomes art that can contribute to an environmental dialogue. Artists like Christo and the Earthworks artists (such as Richard Long and Michael Heizer) were pioneers in this field in that their works are made out of the matter of the landscape. I’ve always been interested in Robert Smithson’s language of the earth’s materials and processes, but it is Joseph Beuys’s *7000 Oaks*, 1982-87,⁷ that was the really politically powerful piece that I see as the beginning of a green art movement and as something that is ongoing.

I’m interested in your mention of the Earthworks artists because the appearance of land art in the late 1960s can be located as a response by a generation of artists, mostly in their late twenties, to the heightened political activism of the period and the emerging environmental movements.

Many of those artists brought political concerns and a new language into art; beyond the consumable object, such ambitious projects allowed the earth itself to enter into artistic practice – and of course it was consumed! But I think it’s exciting that there is now a more contemporary approach to the concept of environmental art and I think we are dealing with it in a more integrated way, in which people and the environment are one and the landscape is no longer the object.

It’s one of the very important issues that contemporary art is embracing but no-one wants to be pigeonholed as a particular type of artist; it’s hoped that

5. Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, Virginia, United States, p. 41.

6. Jeremy Lewis and J. G. Ballard, ‘An interview with J. G. Ballard’, *Mississippi Review*, vol. 20, nos. 1-2, 1991, pp. 27-40.

7. *7000 Oaks* was begun in 1982 at Documenta 7, Kassel, Germany. Beuys’s project involved planting 7000 trees in Kassel. Each tree was accompanied by a columnar basalt stone.

Opposite
Birdsong, 2006
bird specimens, acrylic ring, sound
audio by Ross Gibson in collaboration
with Jane and Philip Ulman
installation view, Object Gallery,
Sydney, 2006





Rape of the Styx, 2006
from the *Crimes against the Landscape* series
DuraClear, shinkolite acrylic, mirror,
glass, ash, oil, pigment
4 x 0.6 m
Collection: Museum Kunstwerk,
Eberdingen, Germany

Forensic Sublime, 2008
from the *Crimes against the Landscape* series
DuraClear, shinkolite, mirror, oil, pigment
1 x 4.55 m
Collection: McClelland Gallery+Sculpture
Park, Langwarrin, Victoria. Purchased
with assistance from The Robert Salzer
Foundation and The Fornari Bequest, 2009

one's work can be seen in other ways as well. On the other hand, being called an environmental artist can locate you, giving you a sense of connection with other artists and groups working in the same field or with similar objectives. Strangely, it can also provide us with a degree of credibility in the eyes of non-artistic communities, such as the sciences, and allow access to places and information.

You mention Christo as being a pioneer, and his wrapping of the cliffs of Sydney's Little Bay in 1969 is today seen as a triumph, but at the time local conservationists staged a protest, arguing that the work was ecologically irresponsible and adversely affected the local environment. In 2010 Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Over the River* project in Southern Colorado was subject to a formal Environmental Impact Statement. Does the environmental artist have a responsibility to produce art using sustainable methods?

Fortunately, it couldn't happen today. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's early installations explored form through revelation and concealment and new ways of seeing familiar landscapes, and certainly their work has attracted controversy and the ire of community and conservation groups over the years, which has contributed to giving the environment a voice. I think it is important for an artist to consider how their practice impacts upon the environment and this awareness is increasing, gradually shifting the language of some art.

Are you conscious of your own environmental footprint?

I risk seeming hypocritical because what you do to achieve your objectives is often contrary to what you believe in. Naturally, when you work you become very aware of the materials you're using. I am encouraged by the amount of research and exploration going on in the field of industrial science towards the development of more environmentally sound products and there are increasingly greater options available for artists, like myself, who would prefer to work with sustainable materials. On the other hand, I am working on some really ecological projects, learning a huge range of languages and possibilities from nature and science. It really is working with nature, which I find very absorbing in the same way as I find I get lost within the process of painting and drawing.

I am interested in the rituals of remembering and the relationship between the arts and cultural memory. Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Lê, who exhibited here at Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation in 2011, is an obsessive scavenger of historical fact and his artistic practice serves as a monument to remembering.⁸ Your work, too, investigates space and time and the shift between perception and memory; for example, *In Stance of Memory, 2005*, and *Veiling Space: Incarnations, 2001*. How do you frame memory in your work and practice? What form does memory take in *After Eden*?

I'm intrigued by how memory works when you are interacting with and making work. Very early on in my practice I realised I wasn't interested in arriving at a *fast* image, seen quickly. I was much more interested in a felt, bodily experience, which enables one to enter into a work and engage with it over time. It led me into making installations of component parts that you moved through, or layered images that invite the eye and the body to move through. I think the initial sensory experience can transform – in a way thicken and embody – itself in your memory.

In Stance of Memory takes the garden of the Jewish Museum in Berlin – the Hoffmanngarten – and juxtaposes materiality and illusion. Photographic images

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⁸ Zoe Butt, 'Archiving fear in the struggle against forgetfulness', in *Dinh Q. Lê: Ensure*, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney, Australia, 2011, p. 53.

Heartshock, 2008
silicon tubing, glass vials, pigmented
fluids, tree branch
7 x 4 x 5 m
installation view, *Handle With Care: 2008*
Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art
Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2008



emerge and disperse and bleed away. The garden is already a layered space – its aesthetic and natural qualities often veil its symbolic meanings or reveal them as reflective spaces. I consistently returned to the garden as an immersive and symbolic space for my concerns combining the exploration of memory and the memorial.

Garden spaces are constructed and natural, they grow and die and bloom again, creating a sense of dissolve and collapse. They are spaces of transformation in the way memory shifts and recreates itself and persists. Their past is always in the present.

In *After Eden* I've tried to create a *slow* space, using rounded, swollen forms to house the various groups of objects and images including film, which is mainly slowed down and in negative. Veiling enables one to look through the work rather than at it, and to experience the space. Generally, the veil in my work takes many forms. It's really like a membrane or a physical spill between layers of images, materials or objects with varying degrees of transparency and viscosity. It alters what and how we see. It creates ambiguity; it takes away certainty.

In my early works, such as the *Memory Matter* series, 1997, the *Periodic Table* series, 1994, or *The Unconscious and the Molecular*, 1995, I explored the relationship between matter and materials. Can matter hold memory? Does it have memory of its being? How can materials house memory and become symbolic and cultural? This was all caught up with the ideas of the French philosophers Bergson, Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray – these thoughts have lingered with me.

I gradually started working with transparent materials such as glass to find a way to reveal the activity of matter, like a glass slide in the lab. These materials enable a sense of transience – the light creates degrees of visibility and interacts with the work.

Stephen Greenblatt, in his essay 'Resonance and Wonder',⁹ writes that objects have a power to stop you in your tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness and to evoke exalted attention. Do you feel that the specimens that you use in *After Eden* have a resonance and embody memory?

9. In *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*, Routledge, London, UK, 1990, p. 161.



Above, opposite and overleaf
Vanishing, 2009
2-screen video with sound
duration 9 min (on loop)
transparent tulle veils, 3 m in height from floor
detail and installation view, 2009 *Clemenger Contemporary Art Award*, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne, 2009–10



I think nothing really exists outside a relationship with something else – how it is seen and how it is focused upon. Objects can radiate energy, evoke memory and become invisible. I think of the museum specimens of native animals and birds in *After Eden* as having the power to be transformed from their dark storage invisibility to become a tangible symbol of what isn't there, and of what we are losing. These specimens exist somewhere between the living and dead.

Strangely, when I was working with the larger mounted animals in the *Muses* exhibition, 2000,¹⁰ I kept forgetting they were dead and found myself talking to them and being very caring of them. I'd ask them, 'What have you been doing all night?' Wild animals are normally unapproachable but working with these specimens offered me an opportunity to really engage with them in a way that I find endlessly fascinating. They have this incredible presence and yet they're dead. I'm intrigued by the tiny space between life and death when the concept is infinite.

'Veiling', 'transparency', 'translucency' and 'ephemeral' are words that are often used to describe your work, suggesting shifting states or fluid spaces.¹¹ *After Eden* presents enmeshed environments and transient zones within the conventional environs of the gallery. How do you reconcile the more formal attributes of structure and architectural form with notions of impermanence, flux and the temporal aspects of your work?

It can be a conundrum to make an artwork about the organic world in the natural environment without framing it in some way, as the landscape absorbs it. It can disappear! I have always been interested in how architecture houses and frames nature and gives it form and visibility. Like a Zen garden, the pebbles, the gravel and the moss work within the strict formation, precisely because they've been given a defined space and a geometry. I work with the matter of nature by framing it architecturally, and this is one of the reasons Japan has always interested me. I think that's what Japanese gardens and architecture really do – frame nature to enable focus on the specific spaces and objects within.

In *After Eden* I've pared back the structure that houses the elements to enable something more floating and seemingly weightless. I'm trying to lose the more formal, architectural framework and although that can make the work seemingly less structured, it also makes it seem more ephemeral.

What has brought about this shift?

It's probably my preoccupation to focus more on the ecological, as is so much of what I'm reading, doing and looking at. It's a more intense view of things that are happening in nature, the fascination of invisible biochemical processes and how they connect to a larger whole; perhaps art that is less egocentric and more biocentric.

It doesn't take away from the fact that I'm excited by interesting architecture and I love the dialogue between nature and architecture. I have created many works referencing architecture, including layers that bleed away the structure in varying ways, like *Space Dissolving*, 2002, from the *Verdant* series, based on the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion in Barcelona.

One of my earliest works, *Seed Seam Field*, 1992, was a series of leaking seams, the nature outside disrupting the very formal interior, reclaiming architecture and dissolving structural boundaries. These ideas have continued in other works, such as *Less Stable Elements*, 1996, which bleeds the forest outside into the gallery, via a series of leaning elements.

10. *Muses*, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia, 2000.

11. Jane Devery in *2009 Clemenger Contemporary Art Award*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, 2009.

***After Eden* has as its central premise the 'healing of the system', with an underlying message of hope. Are you optimistic about the future?**

It's really hard to believe the environment can be healed within the present system. There are extraordinary gestures of care, though, and in *After Eden* I'm revealing an aspect of this. As research I've visited animal sanctuaries, including the Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie, New South Wales, and the Chengdu Panda Base in China, and I've spent time at the Fauna & Flora International elephant base in Aceh, Sumatra, where they work and teach the local community to live in a sustainable way with the total environment. There is so much good work and goodwill but the problem in the end is that you can only go as far as the politics of the day and the global corporate world allows. On the one hand, there is intense concern and numerous programs of conservation of threatened species; on the other hand, there is the total destruction and loss of the wild, of the habitats they need – as all of us do – for a healthy relationship with the planet. Education and care is so important. Perhaps I can only show a pathos and expose a tenderness.

If we would hear the call of those who are slipping out of life forever. There we might encounter a narrative emerging from extinctions, a level of blood that connects us.¹²

12. Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, Virginia, US, p. 146.



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Waiting – A Medicinal Garden for Ailing Plants, 2010
transparent mesh, mirror, oil, acrylic, scientific glass vessels,
plants (living and dried), tulle, blown glass, silicon tubing,
minerals, crystals, seeds, water
5 x 5 x 3 m
installation view, *The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival
in a Precarious Age: 18th Biennale of Sydney*, Royal Botanic
Gardens, Sydney, 2010











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What Can a Garden Be?, 2010
acrylic, glass, gel crystals, plants,
taxidermic owl, mirror, salt, oil, tubing,
blown glass, scientific and float glass,
DuraClear, steel brackets
dimensions variable
installation view, BREENSPACE,
Sydney, 2010







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In Memory of Nature, 2010

acrylic, scientific glass, dried plants, seeds, sulphur, salt,
amethyst, owl specimens, shellac, tulle, wood, burnt bones,
hand-blown glass, oil paint, mirrors
dimensions variable
installation view, BREENSPACE, Sydney, 2010





Artist Selected Biography



1947 Born Sydney, Australia
 2008–ongoing Visiting Fellow, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney
 2007–09 Member, Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, Sydney
 1996–2005 Trustee, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
 1993 Master of Fine Art, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney
 1977–81 Studied in Australia, Italy and US

 Lives and works in Sydney, Australia

Solo Exhibitions
 2012 *After Eden*, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney
 2011 *In Memory of Nature*, Glasshouse Regional Gallery, Port Macquarie, NSW
 2010 *What Can a Garden Be?*, BREENSPACE, Sydney
 2009 *Things that Disappear*, Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide
 2008 *Crimes against the Landscape*, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne
Landscapes and Residues, Jan Marton Art, Brisbane
Reflections on a Green World, Dusseldorf Gallery, Perth
 2007 *Greenhouse*, bildkultur galerie, Stüttgart, Germany
Botanical Residues/Ishaemic Land, Sherman Galleries, Sydney
 2006 *Birdsong*, Object Gallery, Sydney
 2005 *Greenhouse*, Sherman Galleries, Sydney
Janet Laurence: A Survey Exhibition, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra
 2004 *Verdant Works*, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne
 2002 *Ferment, Faculty of Art & Design Gallery*, Monash University, Melbourne
 2001 *Veiling Space: Incarnations*, Uniting Church, Paddington, Sydney
 2000 *Muses*, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
 1998 *Unfold*, Gallery APA, Nagoya, Japan
 1997 *Unfold*, Project Space, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
 1996 *States of Matter*, Michael Milburn Gallery, Brisbane
Less Stable Elements, University Gallery, Newcastle, NSW
 1995 *pH Series*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
 1994 *Lunami Gallery*, Tokyo, Japan
Alchemical Works, Gallery APA, Nagoya, Japan
 1993 *Alchemical Works*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton, New Zealand
The Measure of Light, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
 1992 *Janet Laurence*, Claybrooke Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
 1991 *Rare*, Seibu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
 1989 *Blindspot*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney
Pier and Ocean, City Gallery, Melbourne
 1988 *From the Shadow*, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Canberra
 1987 *The Blind Spot on an Old Dream of Symmetry*, Milburn + Arte, Brisbane
Meiosis, United Artists Gallery, Melbourne
 1986 *Spells of Origin*, Wollongong Regional Gallery, Wollongong, NSW
 1985 *Janet Laurence*, Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney
Life is Probably Round, Artspace, Sydney
 1983 *Toiana*, Adelaide Festival of Arts Gallery, Adelaide
The Madonna in the Stone Has a Memory, University Art Gallery, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
Memories in the Stone, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide

1982 *Janet Laurence*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Recollections, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Qld
 1981 *Notes from the Shore*, I.C.A. Central Street, Sydney

Group Exhibitions
 2012 *Life in Your Hands: Art from Solastalgia*, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Booragul, NSW
Drawing Out, University of Arts, London, UK
Resistance, Fine Art Society, London, UK
 2011 *Found/Lost*, China Arts Projects, Osage Gallery, Beijing, China
 Hong Kong International Art Fair, Artist Project (*Resuscitation: Garden for an Ailing Planet*), Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong
 2011 *The Pulse*, Herman Teirlinckhuis, Gemeentelijk Museum en Galerie Beersel, Beersel, Belgium
Naturstrücke, Haus Hasenbergsteige, Stüttgart, Germany
 2010 *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Nature Interrupted: Contemporary Australian Sculpture, Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland, Qld
A Generosity of Spirit: Recent Australian Women's Art from the QUT Art Collection, Samstag Museum, SA (QUT Art Museum touring exhibition)
Outside In, McClelland Gallery+Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Vic
17th Biennale of Sydney: The Beauty of Distance – Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney
 2009 *2009 Clemenger Contemporary Art Award*, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne
Darwin's Bastards, Verge Gallery, University of Sydney, Sydney
The Museum Effect, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Booragul, NSW
A Natural World, Glen Eira City Council Gallery, Melbourne
 2008 *HEAT*, RMIT University Gallery, Melbourne
Handle With Care: 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Parallel Universe, Artificial Land, Arnhem, the Netherlands
Abundant Australia: 11th Venice Architecture Biennale, Australian Pavilion, Venice, Italy
Recovering Lives, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra
 2007 *Systems of Nature*, Lawrence Wilson Gallery, University of Western Australia, Perth
 2006 *We are Australians Too*, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Sydney
A New Focus on Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
New Acquisitions 2006, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
 2005 *After Nature*, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Booragul, NSW
 2004 *Echigo-Tsumari Triennial*, Japan, permanent installation (*Elixir*)
 2002 *Points of View: Works from the University of Technology Sydney Collection*, UTS Gallery, Sydney
Eden and the Apple of Sodom, Adelaide Festival, University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide
 2001 *The Art of Transformation, Metis 2001*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Intersections of Art and Science, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales, Sydney
 2000 *Kabbala*, Jewish Museum of Melbourne, Melbourne
 1999 *Home and Away*, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, NZ
Pets, Preys and Predators, Mosman Art Gallery and Cultural Centre, Sydney (touring to NSW regional galleries)
Cinderella's Gems: Art and the Intellectual Missile (touring to Qld, NSW and Vic)
 1998 *The Infinite Space: Woman, Minimalism and the Sculptural Object*, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
 1997 *Australian Perspecta 1997: Between Art and Nature*, S.H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust Centre, Sydney
Immenseite, in conjunction with Documenta X, Kassel, Germany
 1996 *Spirit and Place*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Systems End, OXY Gallery, Osaka, Japan; Hakone Open Air Museum, Hakone, Japan; Dong Ah Gallery, Seoul, Korea
Shelfworks, Ammandale Galleries, Sydney
 1993 *Poetics of Immanence*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney (touring regional galleries in SA)

1992 *9th Biennale of Sydney: The Boundary Rider*, Bond Stores, Sydney
In Black and White, Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney, Sydney
Synthesis, Art + Architecture Collaboration, Bond Stores, Sydney
Mangaret Stewart Endowment, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Above the Lake, Beneath the Sky, Benalla Art Gallery, Benalla, Vic
 1991 *Frames of Reference: Aspects of Feminism in Art*, The Wharf, Sydney
Steam, Artists' Projects for Australian Perspecta 1991, The Coach House, The Rocks, Sydney
 1990 *Tokyo Connection*, Heineken Village Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Abstraction, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Lunami Gallery, Australia-Japan exchange, Tokyo, Japan
 1988 *200 Years of Australian Drawing*, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra
Intimate Drawing, Coventry Gallery, Sydney
The Great Australian Exhibition, Bicentennial Travelling Exhibition, NSW
 1987 *Abstract*, King Street Gallery, Newtown, Sydney
 1986 *Vessels of Meaning*, Scholarie Arts Council Gallery, New York, US
Australijana – Contemporary Australian Painting, National Gallery of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Yugoslavia
 1985 *A Contemporary Australian Art*, Warwick Arts Trust, London, UK
Isolaustalia, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice, Italy
Australian Perspecta 1985, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
 1984 *Surface and Image*, Crafts Council Gallery, Sydney; Penrith Regional Gallery & the Lewers Bequest, Emu Plains, NSW
 1983 *A.U.S.T.R.A.L.L.I.A.*, ZONA, Florence, Italy

Selected Awards
 2010 Alumni Award for the Arts, University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts, Sydney
 2008–ongoing Visiting Fellow, University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts, Sydney
 2006 Churchill Fellowship
 2000 McGeorge Fellowship, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
 1999 National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) Award for Art in the Built Environment, Australia, for *49 Veils*
 1996–98 Australia Council Fellowship
 1997 Rockefeller Foundation (residency), Bellagio, Italy
 1996 Alice Prize, Alice Springs, NT
 1995 Royal Australian Institute of Architects 'Lloyd Rees Award for Urban Design' for First Government House Place, Sydney, in collaboration with Fiona Foley and Denton Corker Marshall Architects
 1994 Kedumba Drawing Award, Wentworth Falls, NSW
 Lake Macquarie Art Prize, NSW
 Pring Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
 1986 Woollahra-Waverley Art Prize, Sydney
 1982 Gold Coast City Art Purchase Award, Qld

Public Commissions
 2011 *Tarkine (For a World in Need of Wilderness)*, Macquarie Bank, London, UK
 2010 *In Your Verdant View*, The Hyde, Sydney
Ghost, Lake Macquarie Gallery, NSW
 2008 *The Sound of Green*, Department of Forestry, Canberra
 2007 *The Memory of Lived Spaces*, Changi T3 Airport Terminal, Singapore
 2006 *Waterveil*, CH2 Building for Melbourne City Council, Melbourne
 2004 *Verdant Veil*, Changi Airport, Singapore
 2003 *The Breath We Share*, Sidney Myer Commemorative Sculpture, Bendigo Art Gallery, Vic
Australian War Memorial, Hyde Park, London, UK, collaboration with Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects
Elixir, permanent installation for Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Japan
 2002 *Translucidus*, Qantas Lounge, Sydney International Airport, Sydney
 2001 *Ciphers: Stations of the Cross*, Australian Catholic University Chapel, Melbourne, collaboration with Julie Rrap

2000 *Stilled Lives*, collection showcases, permanent display, Melbourne Museum
In the Shadow, Olympic Park, Homebush Bay, Sydney
 1999 *Picture the Dark Face of the River*, Department of Environment, Canberra
Veil of Trees, Sydney Sculpture Walk, Art Gallery Road, The Domain, Sydney, collaboration with Jisuk Han
 1998 *49 Veils*, windows for the Central Synagogue, Bondi, Sydney, collaboration with Jisuk Han
 1995 *Chronicle I-IV*, Herald and Weekly Times Building, Southbank, Melbourne
Edge of the Trees, Museum of Sydney, Sydney, sculptural installation, collaboration with Fiona Foley
 1993 *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, collaboration with Tonkin Zulaikha Architects

Collections
 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
 Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
 Artbank, Australia
 Australian War Memorial, Canberra
 Chartwell Collection, Auckland, NZ
 Commonwealth Law Court, Brisbane
 Griffith University Collection, Brisbane
 Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Booragul, NSW
 Macquarie Bank Collection, Melbourne
 Museum Kunstwerk, Eberdingen, Germany
 Maitland Regional Art Gallery, NSW
 Moree Plains Gallery, NSW
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 New Parliament House Collection, Canberra
 Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
 Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
 Seibu Collection, Tokyo, Japan
 Supreme Court of Queensland, Brisbane
 University of New England, Northern Rivers, NSW
 University of New South Wales, Sydney
 University of Newcastle, NSW
 University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane
 University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba Campus, Qld
 University of Technology, Sydney
 University of Western Australia, Perth
 World Bank Collection, Washington, US
 Regional and university gallery collections
 Private and corporate collections worldwide

Janet Laurence is represented by
 Arc One Gallery, Melbourne
 bildkultur galerie, Stüttgart, Germany
 BREENSPACE, Sydney
 Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong
 Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
 Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide
 Jan Marton Art, Brisbane

Artist Selected Bibliography

2000 Dysart, D. (ed.), *Edge of the Trees: A Sculptural Installation by Janet Laurence and Fiona Foley*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney

Kent, R., 'Janet Laurence: transpiration', in *Transpiration*, exhibition catalogue, Sherman Galleries, Sydney

1998 Tawa, M., *49 Veils: Windows in the New Central Synagogue*, Central Synagogue, Waste Publishing, Sydney

1997 Best, S., 'Unfolding', in *Unfold*, exhibition catalogue, Level 2, AGNSW Contemporary Projects, Sydney

Hart, D., 'Temple of earth memories', in *Australian Perspecta 1997: Between Art and Nature*, exhibition catalogue, S.H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust Centre, Sydney

1995 Johnson, A., *The Unconscious and the Molecular*, exhibition catalogue, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

1994 Maloon, T., *Janet Laurence: Periodic Table Works*, Potstill Press, Sydney

1993 Seaman, B., 'Lines of thought', in *Janet Laurence: The Measure of Light*, exhibition catalogue, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

1992 Kirby, S., *Sightlines: Women Art and Feminist Perspectives in Australia*, Craftsman House, Sydney

1991 Bond, A., 'Janet Laurence', in *Janet Laurence*, exhibition catalogue, Seibu Gallery, Tokyo

Carcenac, B., *Steam: Artists' Projects for Australian Perspecta 1991*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Laurence, J., 'Artist's statement', *Frames of Reference: Aspects of Feminism in Art*, The Wharf, Sydney

1990 Lynn, V., 'Abstraction', *Abstraction*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

1989 Brauer, F., 'The language of installation: Janet Laurence', in *Blindspot*, exhibition catalogue, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales, Sydney

1988 Emmett, P., *Janet Laurence*, Craftsman House, Sydney

Haynes, P., 'From the shadow', in *From the Shadow*, exhibition catalogue, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Canberra

1987 Maloon, T., 'Meiosis', in *Meiosis*, exhibition catalogue, United Artists Gallery, Melbourne

1985 Blackall, J., 'The essential remains', in *Toiana*, Adelaide Festival of Arts Gallery, Adelaide

Macdonald, J., 'Life is probably round', in *Life is Probably Round*, exhibition catalogue, Artspace, Sydney

Prunster, U., 'Souvenirs from the maidens of Thrace', in *Perspecta Survey of Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Selected Articles/Reviews

2011 Periz, I., 'Waiting: A Medicinal Garden for Ailing Plants', *Antennae*, issue 18, Autumn

Serisier, G., 'Photosynthesis, artist profile: Janet Laurence', *Art Market Report*, issue 39

2010 Fenner, F., 'A hospital for plants: the healing art of Janet Laurence', *Art & Australia*, vol. 48, no. 1

Fenner, F., 'Biennial: so far away, and yet so near', *Art in America*, September

Gardiner, S., 'Ministering to a fragile planet', *Artnews*, Spring

McGillick, P., 'The art of reflection', *Habitus*, issue 6, January–March

McKenzie, J., 'A letter from Sydney', *Studio International Magazine*, July

2009 Periz, I., 'Collector's dossier: Janet Laurence', *Art Collector*, September

2008 Murray Cree, L., 'Poetry and alchemy', *Art World*, vol. 4

2006 Geczy, A., 'Janet Laurence: a survey exhibition at the Drill Hall', *Eyeline*, March

Laurence, J., 'Art and ecology', in Chris Healy & Stephen Muecke (eds), *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 12

2005 Geissler, M., 'Principles of uncertainty', *Craft Arts International*, no. 65

Taylor, J., 'Artist + Environment: Janet Laurence and the healing of place', *Art and Architecture*, S-Lab Space Laboratory for Architectural Research and Design, Images Publishing Group, Mulgrave, Vic

2004 Lombardo, F., 'Verdant works', *Artichoke*, vol. 2, no. 8

Martin, C., 'Under English skies: The Australian War Memorial in London', *Art and Australia*, vol. 42, no. 1, spring

Books and Catalogues

2012 *Janet Laurence: After Eden*, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney

Helmrich, M., 'Janet Laurence: Silent witness', in *NEWo2: Selected Recent Acquisitions*, The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane

McKenzie, J., *Contemporary Australian Drawing*, Meta senta and Macmillan Australia, Melbourne

2011 Devery, J., 'Janet Laurence', in *In Memory of Nature*, exhibition catalogue, Glasshouse Gallery, Port Macquarie, NSW

2010 Blanc, N. & Ramos, J., *Ecoplastics: Art et Environnement*, Manuella Éditions, Paris, France

Kent, R., 'Janet Laurence', in *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Periz, I., 'What makes a garden', in *What Can a Garden Be?*, exhibition catalogue, BREENSPACE, Sydney

2008 Heathcote, C., McCaughey, P. & Thomas, S., *Encounters with Australian Modern Art*, Macmillan Art Publishing, Melbourne

Lynn, V., 'Janet Laurence: the life-world', in F. Fenner (ed.), *Handle with Care: 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Oates, A., 'Janet Laurence: Recovering lives - resuscitating landscape', in N. Sever & C. Turner (eds), *Recovering Lives*, exhibition catalogue, Australian National University, Canberra

2006 Bond, A., 'Janet Laurence', in *Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection Handbook*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Bruce, C., 'Silent spring: The visual art of Janet Laurence', *Greenhouse*, exhibition catalogue, Jan Manton Gallery, Brisbane

2005 Coucaud, S., 'Janet Laurence: the glasshouse effect', in *Janet Laurence*, exhibition catalogue, Sherman Galleries, Sydney

Kent, R., 'Changing topographies: the environmental art of Janet Laurence' and M. Tawa, 'Verdant green', in *Janet Laurence: A Survey Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra

Rendell, J., *Art to Architecture: A Place Between*, IB Tauris, London, UK and New York, US

2003 Meskimmom, M., *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*, Routledge, London, UK and New York, US

2002 Alexander, G., 'Janet Laurence and the unquiet museum', in *Eden & the Apple of Sodom*, exhibition catalogue, University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide

Bond, A., 'Eclecticism: through the distorting lens of distance', in *Points of View: University of Technology Sydney Art Collection*, exhibition catalogue, UTS, Sydney

Murray Cree, L., *Awesome! Australian Art for Contemporary Kids*, Craftsman House, Sydney

Parr, A., 'Ferment: Janet Laurence', in *Ferment*, exhibition catalogue, Faculty of Art & Design Gallery, Monash University, Melbourne

2001 Geczy, A. & Genocchio, B. (eds), *What is Installation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Installation Art*, Power Publications, Sydney

Hart, D., 'The art of transformation', in *Metis 2001: Wasted - Exhibitions of Science and Art*, National Science Week, May 2001, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Laurence J. & Pattenden, R., *Veiling Space*, exhibition catalogue, Eastside Arts, Sydney, 2001

2003 Laurence, J., 'Space and memory: a meditation on memorials and monuments', *Architecture Australia*, vol. 92, no. 5, September–October

Walker, P., 'Australian War Memorial', *Architecture Australia*, vol. 92, no. 5, September–October

BT Bijitsu Techo (magazine), September

2002 Mendelsohn, J., 'Janet Laurence at Sherman Galleries', *tema celeste*, May–June

Parr, A., 'Veiling space', *Architectural Review*, autumn

2001 Fenner, F., 'Report from Sydney II: ground work', *Art in America*, no. 5, May

2000 McGillick, P., 'Material matters: the art of Janet Laurence', *Monument*, December 1999 – January 2000

McGowan, T., 'Public art and the Sydney Olympics', *Sculpture* (US), July–August

2000 Best, S., 'Immersion and distraction: the environmental works of Janet Laurence', *Art and Australia*, vol. 38, no. 1, spring

Martin, C., 'Review of Ian Potter Museum exhibition', *The Lancet* (UK)

1999 McGowan, T., '3 Australian women exploring the landscape', *Sculpture* (US), September

1998 Ward, P., 'A touch of glass', *Design and Architecture*, October

1997 Genocchio, B., 'Postcards from the edge', *Third Text*, July

McGillick, P., 'Unfold', *Monument*, 21 November

Ostwald, M., '(Re)-membering Janet Laurence's work', *Transition* (University of Newcastle)

Selenitch, A., 'Memory matter', *Ume Magazine*, April

2006 Takami, A., 'Compounding Australian identity', *Bijutu-Techo*, August

1995 Nimmo, A., 'Art in the public realm: Edge of the Trees', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 85, November

1994 Kent, P., 'Opening the tomb: Tomb of the Unknown Soldier', *Photofile*, November

Maloon, T., 'The alchemy of Janet Laurence', *Art and Australia*, vol. 31, no. 4, winter

1990 *BT Bijitsu Techo* (magazine), vol. 42, no. 627, August

1989 Allen, C., 'Art and nature', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 20, May

Haynes, P., 'Impressions: Janet Laurence', *Art and Australia*, vol. 26, no. 4, winter

Milson, V., 'Artists in the forest', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 22, July

1987 Brauer, F., 'From the one into the other', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 33, July

Selected Media

ABC TV, 'Kaldor Family Collection', *Art Nation*, interviewed by Andrew Frost, 3 June 2011

ABC TV, 'Art for a Changing World', *Art Nation*, interviewed by Fenella Kernebone, 3 September 2010

The Life World, a film by Richard Mordaunt, Coolamon Films, 2005

ABC TV, 'In Conversation: Janet Laurence', *Sunday Afternoon*, interviewed by Andrew Mackenzie, 20 June 2004

ABC TV, 'Janet Laurence: Muses – The Artist in the Museum, The Ian Potter Museum of Art', *The Arts Show*, 13 August 2000

ABC TV, 'Janet Laurence', *In Conversation*, interviewed by Andrea Stretton, 10 August 2000

Faces of the Museum (film), Museum of Sydney, April 1994

ABC TV, 'Tomb of the Unknown Soldier', *ABC Review*, November 1993

SBS TV, 'Synthesis: Artist/Architect Collaboration', *SBS Eat Carpet*, August 1993

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- Nina's Arc Wildlife Sanctuary, Northern Territory
- School of the Environment, Science Faculty, University of Technology, Sydney
- Sydney University Veterinary Teaching Hospital

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Contributors



Dr Gene Sherman AM is Chairman and Executive Director of Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation. She has a specialised knowledge of art, literary theory and French and English literature and spent seventeen years teaching, researching and lecturing at secondary and tertiary levels. As Director of Sherman Galleries (1986–2007) she organised up to twenty-two exhibitions annually, including regional and national touring exhibitions within Australia, and international touring exhibitions through the Asia-Pacific region. Gene and Brian Sherman have previously sponsored a Master of Fine Arts Administration student at the College of Fine Arts, The University of New South Wales (1997–2007), a studio at Bundanon and a contemporary Australian art-research room at the Schaeffer Fine Arts Library, The University of Sydney. Dr Sherman is currently Deputy Chair of the National Portrait Gallery Board, Canberra; a member of the Art & Australia Advisory Board, the International Association of Art Critics and the Tate Asia-Pacific Acquisitions Committee; and an Asialink Asia Literacy Ambassador, a role that involves inspiring young people to become Asia literate and thus expand their career and life opportunities. She regularly lectures to a wide range of institutions on topics such as gallery management, the art of collecting, philanthropy, private foundations, Australian and Asian contemporary artists, and contemporary Japanese fashion. Dr Sherman was awarded the *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Government (2003) and a Doctorate of Letters *honoris causa* by The University of Sydney (2008). She was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2010 for her cultural philanthropy and her support of emerging and established artists.



Drusilla Modjeska is a writer and critic whose prize-winning books include *Poppy* (1990), *The Orchard* (1994) and *Stravinsky's Lunch* (1999). Her novel *The Mountain* will be published by Random House Australia in May 2012. She lives in Sydney.



Rachel Kent is Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney. She has presented exhibitions in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada, and speaks and publishes widely on contemporary art and curatorial practice. She has worked with leading contemporary Australian and international artists including James Angus, Lee Bul, Olafur Eliasson, Tim Hawkinson, Susan Norrie, Mike Parr, Patricia Piccinini, Shahzia Sikander, Ed Ruscha and Ricky Swallow. She holds a postgraduate diploma in art curatorship from the University of Melbourne. Recently, Rachel has curated a major survey exhibition and book with Prestel Publishing on Yinka Shonibare MBE, which travelled to the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (2009–10); and she developed a solo exhibition and new commission by Runa Islam in partnership with the Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal, Canada (2010–11). Most recently she has curated *Marking Time*, a major thematic exhibition to launch the reopening of the MCA in March 2012.



Dolla S. Merrillees is General Manager – Artistic and Educational Programmes, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation. Previously she worked as Director – Visual Arts, Museums and Galleries NSW, where she initiated and oversaw *Leading from the Edge: 2005 National Public Galleries Summit*, and as Exhibition Manager for the 2000 and 2002 Biennales of Sydney. As Assistant Curator, Decorative Arts and Design at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, and Curator of Contemporary Craft at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, she contributed to projects such as *4 + 1.5 Contemporary Australian Designs*, 1999, *Contemporary Australian Craft*, 1998, and *Alvar Aalto: Points of Contact*, 1996. She is the recipient of two Ian Potter Foundation Cultural Grants (1997; 2001) and over the course of her career has provided specialist advice to the not-for-profit sector on strategic planning, exhibition development and tours, programming and fundraising. She has written extensively for print and online media. Recent writing projects include *The Woodcutter's Wife*, 2007 and 'Memento mori (remember that you must die)' in *Hair: Trunk Series*, 2009. She is currently working on her forthcoming book.

Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation



Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF) was established in April 2008 as a not-for-profit organisation to champion research, education and exhibitions of significant and innovative contemporary art from Australia, the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East. SCAF works closely with artists in commissioning new work and developing exhibitions that energise and respond to the gallery's four-part complex comprising a large exhibition area, mini 'out-site' space, versatile theatre annexe and Zen garden. Extensive projects are developed through partnerships with public art institutions at a regional, state and national level while broad public engagement with contemporary art is fostered through publishing and forum programmes. In addition, Sherman Visual Arts Residency (SVAR), located directly across the road from the gallery, offers a supportive environment and accommodation for visiting artists, filmmakers, architects, writers, curators and scholars. The experience of developing Sherman Galleries (1986–2007) as a respected commercial and educational enterprise within the international art world underpins the Foundation at both a conceptual and practical level. Dr Gene Sherman AM, SCAF Chairman and Executive Director, has drawn on her extensive international networks to establish the Foundation, and initiates and guides its activities in collaboration with an advisory board of respected peers: Andrew Cameron, Doug Hall AM, John Kaldor AM, Akira Nakayama, Tomoko Nakayama, Dr Claire Roberts and Michael Whitworth. SCAF is a member of CIMAM, the International Committee of ICOM for Museums and Collections of Modern Art.

Previous Exhibitions

Ai Weiwei: Under Construction
1 May – 26 July 2008
Presented in partnership with Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney

Jonathan Jones: Untitled (The Tyranny of Distance)
14 August – 11 October 2008

Jitish Kallat: Aquasaurus
25 October – 20 December 2008

The View from Elsewhere
19 March – 13 June 2009
Presented in partnership with the Queensland Art Gallery/ Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa / SANAA
3 July – 26 September 2009

Chanwei Tsai: Water, Earth and Air
23 October – 19 December 2009

Fiona Tan: Coming Home
19 March – 12 June 2010
Presented in association with the National Art School, Sydney

Brook Andrew: The Cell
9 July – 18 September 2010
Presented in association with the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
On tour to IMA, 25 September – 20 November 2010;
MONA FOMA, Hobart, 14 – 20 January 2011;
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, NZ,
12 March – 6 June 2011; PICA, Perth, 9 July – 21 August 2011

Contemporary Art for Contemporary Kids
8 October – 18 December 2010
Presented in partnership with the Queensland Art Gallery/ Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

Yang Fudong: No Snow on the Broken Bridge
18 March – 4 June 2011
On tour to IMA, Brisbane, 2 July – 13 August 2011

Dinh Q. Lê: Erasure
8 July – 10 September 2011

Tokujin Yoshioka: Waterfall
7 October – 17 December 2011

Janet Laurence: After Eden
Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation
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After Eden, 2012

hanging gauze, glass vials Duraclear, acrylic, oil, pigments, wood, steel, minerals, crystal, plants (living, artificial and dried), Chinese medicine plants, ash, salt, carbon, silicon tubing, specimens from the Australian Museum and the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, projected images

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Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation
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Associate Director Amanda Henry
General Manager – Artistic and Educational Programmes
Dolla S. Merrillees
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