



about the park

8 artists : 8 views on the Canberra Nature Park



Mapies 2016, Dianna Budd, collage, 21x27cm

about the project

The project is comprised of a series of works as a response to field trips to reserves within the Canberra Nature Park. The park is little known as such, but has a unique influence on the people using these areas for recreation and conservation purposes. Each of these habitats has its own rich suite of plants and animals, so a great diversity of life can be found within an hour's drive of Parliament House.

'a city which would always be seen in relation to the hills, the sky, the clouds and the clear atmosphere which together created such a dramatic setting.' – Walter Burley Griffin (1923)¹

Some of the hills to which Griffin refers include reserves of the Canberra Nature Park. The hills and ridges of the Park bring the region's natural and cultural heritage to our attention reminding us of the significance of the area to all people.

Canberra Nature Park is a network of over 30 nature reserves around and throughout Canberra. It is a system of open spaces containing hills, ridges, river corridors and bushland. An integrated, connected system of nature reserves throughout the Canberra region; managed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service with the aim to conserve native flora, fauna and habitat. It also provides opportunity for appreciation, recreation,



education and research. Most Canberrans live within walking distance of a nature park or bushland reserve. These networks of wildlife corridors around and throughout the Canberra region hold a special place in the lives of people who live in and around Canberra.

This exhibition has a unique regional Canberra theme: about the park is an exciting creative project where eight Canberra artists visited various sites in the Canberra Nature Park to explore, discuss and document gems of natural, aesthetic, scientific, and cultural value.

The idea for the about the park project developed from conversations and field trips by a group of artists. Through talking about our experiences in the bushland reserves around Canberra and sharing sites of interest or that held a sense of connection.

Some of the artists have previous experience in field studies, working with scientists and naturalists, with resulting exhibitions of their works. It was decided by the group that the site visits and field studies used as a source for creative exploration would build a clear direction for an exhibition.

The purpose of this exhibition is to describe the reserves around Canberra to remind viewers of their importance. Our protected areas provide life-sustaining services vital for the wellbeing of our environment and society.



the work

The works began for the artists through a series of field studies; as accounts of their visits to the nature reserves within the Canberra Nature Park. These studies have linked the works allowing for a lively discourse and commentary to develop. The exhibition consists of work from eight artists, employing a range of media in a variety of approaches to the theme; each work being an individual's response to the project.

This exhibition takes a new look at the reserves in the Canberra region. The responses are a very individual take on describing these areas of urban reserve and wilderness. It communicates what it is to experience bushland surrounded by a modern environment.

Often using experimental techniques in painting, **Di Broomhall** creates works which investigate light and surface to express the wider landscape. As evident in her work *Light 1*, Broomhall is profoundly influenced by the natural environment and tests the path of light through the landscape, using her favored medium of oil paint, in a scientific way. Through her painting *Dynamic Bushland*, the shifting light's relationship within the Australian landscape creates a bold pattern that becomes a discourse on time. These topographical experience maps track the calligraphic flight of birds, the heat of the day, the activity of the bush, growth, space light and atmosphere.

This mix of suburbs and bushland encompass a diversity of landscape for native flora and fauna. The fine balance required



Dynamic Bushland 2016/17 (detail), Di Broomhall, mixed media on canvas, 100x230cm.



(Above) *Startle* 2016, Val Gee, acrylic on canvas



(Above right) *Swallow* 2016, Dianna Budd, collage, 21x27cm



(Right) *Treecreeper* 2016, Dianna Budd, collage, 21x27cm

for the conservation of the natural environment has inspired artist **Dianna Budd** to highlight Canberra's endangered species in her work. Her assemblages and collages include other more common species as found in her work *Swallow*. This species may suffer the same fate; more food for thought! This is an ongoing theme in Budd's work as shown in *Food for Thought* an allegory where 36 pie cases envelop Canberra's 36 threatened species, as listed by the *Nature Conservation Act, 2014*². The work expresses a playful quality, while carrying a strong message to conserve and protect existing natural habitats. These works are reminders that Canberrans can and should contribute to the well-being of its wild areas.

Canberra's forest and woodland reserves contain a natural aesthetic value. For many Canberrans the enjoyment of exploration of the outdoors has continued and evolved into a curiosity about their environment. In the work *Startle* **Val Gee** develops this phenomenon, inspired by organic textures, she explores the emotional response to the natural world. These works are an observation of the reserves on a human scale, using images and scale both far and near.

Contained in Gee's work is a blend of texture and colour, produced on her field trips to Black Mountain reserve, as she explores the connection within this ecological community. With a careful choice of subject matter Gee expands the experience of visiting the reserve into a romance of discovery. This reserve is a sanctuary for wildlife as the surrounding city expands and evolves.

The wide variety and diversity of species and ecosystems within the Canberra Nature Park provides opportunities for people to establish and continue a connection with the land.

The winding monochrome patterns found in the work of **Meelan Oh** stimulate an enchantment with the natural world. *Foliage*: the synergy of drawn patterns from specimens recorded during visits to park and reserves are evident. Oh creates her patterns from the local species of Eucalypt, Casuarina and native grasses. Despite their fragile appearance, the biology is so entwined and interdependent that they become a united growing force. This interplay of fragility and strength is especially evident in the work as the artist asks us to see nature, and feel its power and structure.

The Canberra reserves are not all original virgin bushland. Many reserves contain evidence of early hunting and farming, settlement, and mining which reveal themselves to residents who use the reserves for recreation and play.

Foliage 2017 (detail), Meelan Oh, Charcoal on paper, 76x56cm





(Above) *Day Dreaming* 2017 (detail), Sacha Nixon, Watercolor, 56x76cm

(Left) *Foliage* 2016, Meelan Oh, charcoal on paper, 76x56cm

The work on paper *Day Dreaming* by [Sacha Nixon](#) is derived from a collection of narratives inspired by growing up in rural surroundings. Nixon's memories from childhood to adulthood, past and present are intricately woven into the work to reveal a story in fine detail. The story continues in the work through use of its washes and fine lines depicting the landscape, objects and locations imbued with a sense of character, spirit and playfulness. Nixon's work shows an interest in the magic held within an environment. These works form a spatial narrative, asking the viewer to contemplate the experience of being placed in a landscape no longer constrained by time.

In the photographic work of [Julie Sabur](#), the artist uses feathers collected from local reserves. These provide a subject to examine in minute detail. The diversity of species in our bushland



(Left) *Parrot Feather 2* (detail)
2016, Julie Sabur, giclee print
30x50cm

(Right) *After Dark* 2017,
Kerry Shepherdson,
acrylic on canvas, 100x100cm



reserves require management to maintain their populations. The research undertaken to collect data assists to maintain healthy habitat in our reserves. It also records the impact of people using the bushland for research, development and recreation. In Sabur's work *Parrot Feather 2*, the recording of detail and species information, in this case birds, refers to the processes used to inspect and describe species. Maintaining a healthy habitat and diversity of species requires management and the works depict a managed state. With a playful approach Sabur uses light to probe and study form by placing feathers on a flatbed scanner in creating the work *Scanned Feathers*. The removal of materials from their original habitat alludes to the analytic processes used for scientific study. The work focuses on the interface between wilderness and managed bushland habitat – a planned use.

Increased Public access provides opportunities for intensive use and appreciation of natural environment with continued protection of habitat and conservation of species. The large

population of kangaroos in the ACT, live in a mix of reserves and urban environments. The high-density population is caused by lack of predators and abundant food supply. The increase in number of mobs is creating a hazard on roadways and loss of ecological communities through overgrazing. The work *After Dark* by **Kerry Shepherdson** contemplates the complex relationship Canberra has with its kangaroo population. The phenomenon of the increase in kangaroo numbers is particularly



(Left) *Tracery* (detail) 2016, Rosemary von Behrens, acrylic on canvas

evident in the ACT. Kangaroos are both a national icon, and in Canberra, a pest. As the dilemma of their management in ACT reserves and suburbs continues the open grassy plains of the Molonglo River, the natural habitat for kangaroo herds, are being replaced by Canberra's suburbs.

While making work that addresses cultural and environmental practices for this exhibition, Shepherdson began combining kangaroos into the landscape. Utilising the everyday symbols we use to maintain a suburban life, she combines the kangaroo herds with an urban landscape contained by fences and signage. Reality of the dilemma hit home for Shepherdson when she received a notice in her letterbox stating that access to paths on the bushland paths along the Ridge would be withheld for the

public's safety for a period of over two months. Observation and not a political view about the cull has inspired her work. Shepherdson notes the cull is explained by scientists who are concerned about ecological imbalance, to be currently the most humane method of reducing the overabundant kangaroo population.

Two small geometric works *Helter Skelter* and *Fenced In* symbolize corralling of the kangaroos, wire fencing, firearms, shots and targets. With reference to French painter Amedee Ozenfant, Shepherdson reduced the forms to flat planes of distinct colour. Overlaying, colour shadowing and simultaneous contrasting are pursued with delicate colour glazing. Moonlight, flashes and bright light in the midnight landscape allude to chaos for the ever-alert mob.

The Canberra Nature Park reserves have been especially of interest to Canberra's naturalists for its research, study and conservation. Recording the flora, fauna and habitat from field studies through art as in *Leaf Litter (A ravenous Christmas)* can play an important part in its preservation.

Field Naturalist and artist, [Rosemary von Behrens](#) interests include the environment; nature and political commentary. In her painting *Tracery* a truncated landscape where a discussion on preserving the bush is evident. The qualities of decay and growth are evident in the painterly brushstrokes von Behrens uses in her work. These trees have bark that changes with vivid colour and grows in its own wild and strong shape; each tree

individually depicting its life story in a series of insect and animal marks, scribbles, and peeling.

The theme for this exhibition about the park was subtitled *eight artists: eight views* on the Canberra Nature Park. The object was to open a clearing for discussion on the processes of growth and renewal, and recognition of these processes through the way Canberrans use their reserves and parklands.

The resulting exhibition addresses three distinct yet overlapping themes: people's connexion to the space they live in, conservation of areas of natural habitat, and the area's history. The blend of science, conservation, social and historical connect is evident through this group of artists' work, making the project and exhibition a valuable and unique experience.

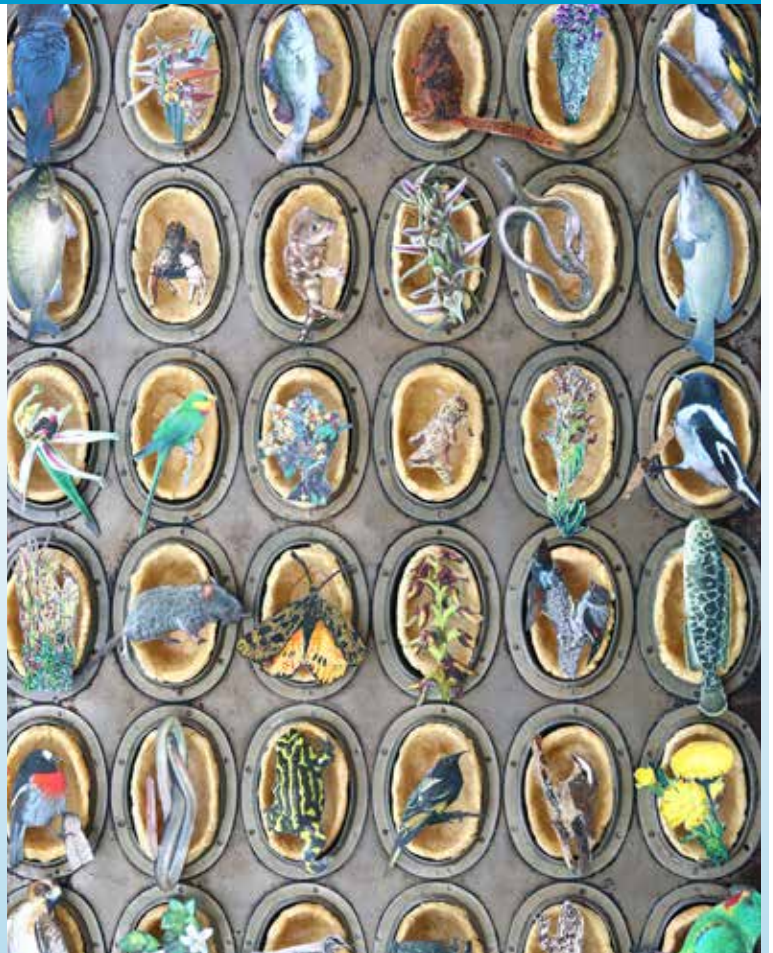
Julie Sabur

End notes

1. *Canberra Nature Park Management Plan 1999*, Department of Urban Services Conservation Series No. 14
2. *Nature Conservation Act 2014*, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, ACT Government; www.legislation.act.gov.au

Leaf Litter (A ravenous Christmas) 2017, Rosemary von Behrens, acrylic on canvas





Food for Thought 2016, Dianna Budd, assemblage, 20x30cm

the artists

Di Broomhall

I have an academic background including an MA Vis from CSU, extensive ceramics research into atmospheric lustre glazes, and studied Sanskrit and Tibetan Thangka painting in Kathmandu.

In early spring 2016 we spent an afternoon exploring the Aranda Bushlands. The painting *Dynamic Bushland* is about that experience. As a painter of colour and light I have endeavoured to build up sensations reminiscent of being in the bush.

I have used strong juxtaposed colours with raw energetic shapes and gestures to create afterimages and chromatic vibrations as a reminder of the complexity and diversity of the bushlands. Using reds for the earth and pure strong colours for growth, air, water, sky, movement, flight sound and sensation I have explored space form depth and rhythm to make these dynamic action paintings about the park.

From the ridges and the lookouts translucent and opaque light become the subject of my two small paintings, *Light1* and *Light 2*.

Di Broomhall, Studio #18 M16Artspace di.broomhall@gmail.com

Dianna Budd

I feel privileged to live and work in Canberra, our bush capital where the many nature reserves and open spaces are places of discovery, reflection and inspiration for my work. Environmental biodiversity is critically important as there are



Light 1 and Light 2 2016, Di Broomhall, oil on canvas, 20x30cm

many species in our region that are threatened with extinction. I like to paint in oil; however mixed media collage and assemblage often dictate a way to express issues surrounding biodiversity. The combination of textures in hand-made paper: its many layers formed by the emulsion of cloth particles; plant and other imaginative inclusions; colour variations; using straight and torn edges with pastels, pencil and/or ink – as in the process of layering paint in more traditional art forms.

My interest in nature has been expressed in two of the three children's books I have illustrated over the past two years.

I wish to thank Ben Leeson for constructing my recycled timber Insect House and Paperworks Inc for sharing the processes involved in making hand-made paper used in my collages. My collages are all on archival and acid free, non-warping board in frameless gallery standard perspex.

Val Gee

With a current focus on both painting and printmaking my time is divided between working from my studio at M16 Art Space, and the Megalo Print Studio and Gallery. My art is inspired from organic sources and the emotional response to images as they present themselves. Inspiration can come from a glimpse or immersion into a subject, with intuitive response and imagination shaping the final imagery. I use a variety of painting techniques and colour, and experiment with materials



Startle (detail) 2016, Val Gee, acrylic on canvas, 20x30cm

and format to create impact. Printmaking adds a further dimension to my practice and I enjoy the transformation of ideas from painting to print.

For this exhibition my work reflects on the importance of the Canberra Nature Park to our community. My enjoyment of the exploration of these spaces has inspired these works. While in our modern lives we seek out the extraordinary, often it is the simple things we find in nature that gives us pleasure. Protecting these spaces and advocating for their success is in our hands. I have developed moments of observed magic from my field trips into works that will encourage the exploration of and support for these wonderful spaces.

I have been exhibiting in Canberra since 2007, my work is held in private collections and includes paintings, print media, collage and mixed media.



Foliage 2017 (detail), Meelan Oh, Charcoal on paper, 76(W) x 56(H)

Meelan Oh

My studies in print media and drawing at the School of Art, ANU has been a direction throughout my career. After graduating with honours in 2006, I won the Belconnen Art Gallery Exhibition Award and Megalo Artist Residency Award for Emerging Artists Support Scheme (2006).

My works are predominantly paper cut and drawing, I use these media to create sculptural installations and work on paper. I am fascinated by the way light shapes form, and creates depth and shadow. I make drawing and objects in response to this fascination.

The eyes to see nature, heart to feel its beauty and mind to mesmerise. Through the process of making, one enters into a state of tranquillity and feels a sense of here and now. A variety of music and artistic tastes, serve as inspiration for my work.

Sacha Nixon

While growing up in Country NSW in a town named Burra, 30 minutes from Canberra, I graduated from the ANU in 1998 studying Visual Arts with a focus on Printmaking. As part of my study I went on exchange to Japan where my keen interest in Japanese culture and art developed.

My artistic practice draws on experiences from the past and present using objects to depict an imaginary narrative within the frame of the paper. Being influenced by artist such Jorg Schmeisser, Akira Yamaguchi and kimono artist Ichiku Kubota, these artists all have a sense of timelessness in technique and subject matter which I aspire to.

While visiting Red Rock Gorge, Kambah Pool reserve, I found inspiration for my work *Day Dreaming*.

The park is a personal place, defined by the people who inhabit the space. It is a place to contemplate, relax, exercise and breathe. The characters are at play in the park.



Day Dreaming 2017 (detail), Sacha Nixon, Watercolor,



Feather in Specimen Jar (detail)
2016, Julie Sabur, giclee print,
25x17cm

Julie Sabur

Inspired by rural Australia my work records the landscape; ranging from bushland habitats and its wildlife, to developed areas such as roads, paddocks, and buildings. Using photography as a starting point, I choose the best media to explore my ideas further; print, pastel or paint. Producing works on paper in my investigations of structural forms, my works explore patterns in detail found in either nature or the urban environment.

I have been an exhibiting artist based in Canberra for the past 16 years; with exhibitions at Tuggeranong Arts Centre, M16 artspace and ANCA. I am currently expanding my horizons through study at the University of Newcastle.

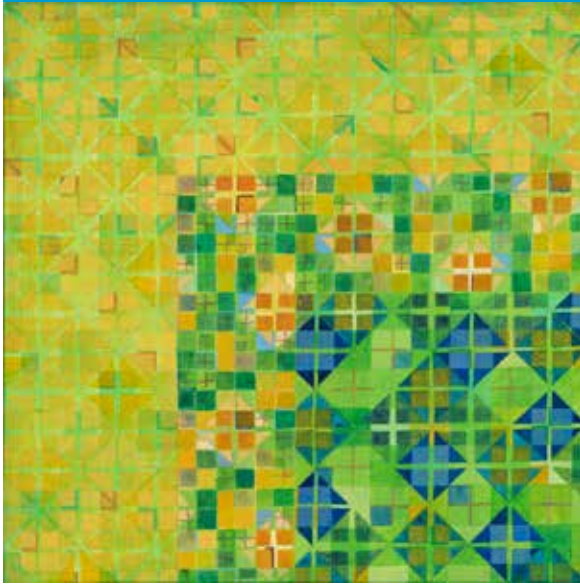
Kerry Shepherdson

I conduct a studio practice at M16 Artspace.

My art work at times addresses my interest in cultural and environmental practices which I have pursued since graduation in numerous field studies with the ANU Environment studio and a Canberra Museum and Gallery pilot artist residency at Lanyon Heritage precinct. My field work has been shown in Borneo and Peru, and was selected for academic publication.

Primarily I have pursued my fascination with mathematical patterns that underlie all forms of growth and the cycle of life in nature. I continue to explore abstraction through the development of geometric patterning and visual haptics related to colour fields, tone and form. I have had three solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions and collaborations. I co-manage and co-curate Chutespace, a mini contemporary art gallery at M16Artspace.

After completing my Bachelor of Arts with Hons, I went on to complete a Master of Philosophy at the ANU School of Art.



(Above) *Fenced In* 2016, Kerry Shepherdson acrylic on canvas, 46 x 46cm
(photography Brenton McGeackie)



(Left) *Leaf Litter (A ravenous Christmas)* 2017, Rosemary von Behrens, acrylic on canvas, 20x30cm (detail)

Rosemary von Behrens

After retiring from teaching I completed a Bachelor of Arts (Visual) 2005 at the ANU School of Art in Canberra and a Master of Art Design and Environment 2008 at UTAS in Hobart. I am a member of the Strathnairn Arts Association, the Artists Society of Canberra and ASOC Contemporary Art workshop. My work has been published in the book *Bridges* 2006, and *Cycles: The Revolution of the Chrysalis*, 2009.

The natural world inspires me. I am as enamoured by the landscape and an individual tree as by the minutiae discovered on or about that tree - the birds, insects and animals which call it home: the bark, colours, defining shapes of limbs, leaves, flowers, fruit, insect and animal impacts. I am equally fascinated by deforestation as depicted by the lines left by chain-saws on tree stumps. Not only is the inner life of the tree unveiled, but this human activity also contributes to and exposes the planet to climate change. Nature is an interconnected whole which supports all life on earth. We are an integral part of nature and ignore it at our peril.

Acknowledgements

The about the park project group would like to thank Ian Fraser for delivering the exhibition's opening address and for supporting our project.

Exhibition curated by Julie Sabur.



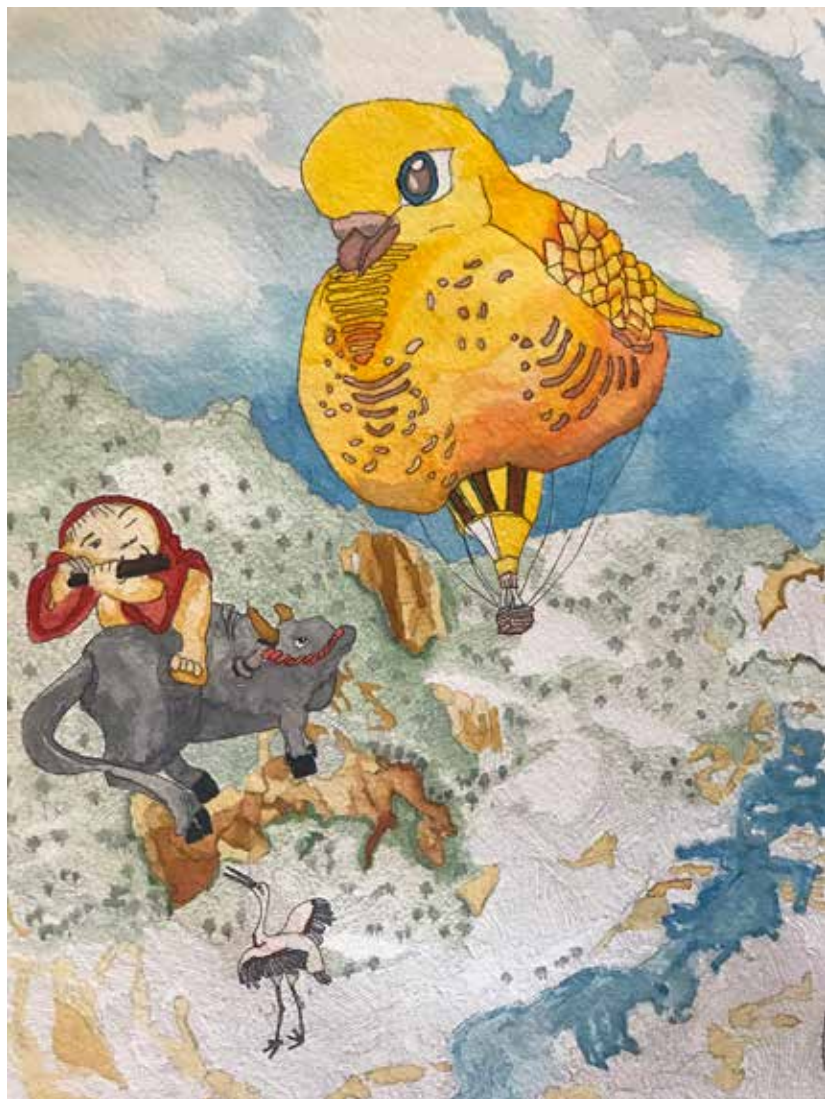
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Day Dreaming 2017 (detail), Sacha Nixon, Watercolor, 56x76cm

