

artists in place

Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage Residency

the residencies

artists Paull McKee + Kirstie Rea

dates 16 February - 19 March + 7 April - 10 May 2009

location Namadgi National Park Canberra Australia

the installations

date 28 March - 31 May 2009

location Visitor Information Centre Namadgi National Park
Canberra Australia

the catalogue

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Venturing Past an Idea

This catalogue captures the activities of a pilot artist in residence project at the Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage located in the Namadgi National Park, Australian Capital Territory, presented by Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre and the Namadgi National Park. The pilot provided two residential periods of five weeks each to two artists, Paull McKee and Kirstie Rea. Both artists have strong contemporary craft and art based practices and both brought with them their own knowledge and experiences of this wonderful national park. The manifestations of this residency will emerge within their respective practices initially through a presentation of work immediately following their residencies, shown at the Namadgi National Park Visitors Centre, and in the long term as each artist realises new works that arise out of this experience and which will be shown in new exhibitions in the future.

The Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage is an early example of a ready-cut or prefabricated Hudson's kit home purchased and constructed by its original owner A W Bootes in the Gudgenby Valley in 1927. It later became the farm manager's home and fell into disrepair after the local government reclaimed the land for a National Park. It was through the efforts of a volunteer group, the Kosciuszko Huts Association (KHA), together with assistance and support from the ACT Government and Namadgi National Park staff, that it was restored, thereby ensuring its survival.

The Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage Residency was first mooted in 2005 at the conclusion of the project *Memories in Place: art in high country huts*. This project invited three artists Paull McKee, Joanne Searle and Daniel Maginlity to interpret the role and cultural importance of heritage and the environment, in particular three historic high country huts located in the Namadgi National Park. The resulting exhibition and temporary installations within the huts were diverse and evocative of the varied legacy of the settlers in this area. Craft ACT hosted a day long walking tour to the huts guided by the park rangers and supported by the KHA. The participants engaged with the artists' stories and viewed their works, learnt more about the huts and experienced the national park. This event was met with enthusiasm and evoked a strong demand for more activities combining art and nature. It became apparent to all involved that this unique collaborative project opened up opportunities to reach new audiences and engage with this important conservation, recreation and education precinct by building awareness and community participation.

In 2008 funding was successfully obtained for a pilot residency project through the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Council. The Council supports activities and research into water salinity, addressing emerging environmental issues, immediate risks or needs, and trialling new approaches including creative projects. It is a tribute to the NRM that it could see the merit in our proposal to enable two artists to make distinct creative responses to the landscape and take a different approach to engaging and interpreting place.

In trying to contextualise a project such as this it helps to listen to other stories. An increasing number of arts activities focus on our environment and look closely at the relationship between culture and nature. As Clive Adams, Director of the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World, UK, puts it: *Since the turn of the Millennium, world concern over environmental issues such as pollution and global warming, species depletion, new genetic technologies, AIDS, BSE and foot-and-mouth epidemics has increased. Artists, in turn, are responding by answering collective cultural needs and developing active and practical roles in environmental and social issues*¹.

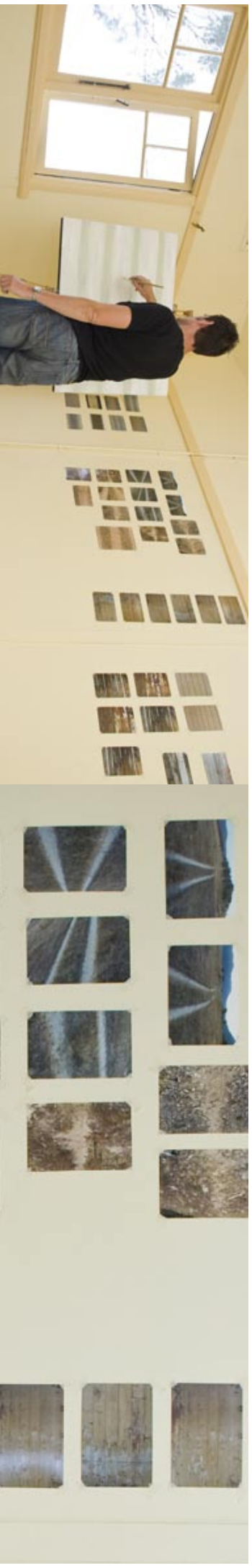
One such example is the case of Mono Lake. The former head of California's Resources Agency, Dr Huey D. Johnson, relates his story of the saving of Mono Lake, California. Amused by a group of environmentalists who took out a law suit against the powerful and wealthy city of Los Angeles to stop the city from taking the water from the streams that fed into the Mono Lake, Johnson like many others saw the legal action as a failure before it began. The environmentalist group knew they needed support and a public bike ride took place from the Los Angeles City Hall to Mono Lake, over the Sierra Mountains, where a bottle of water from an LA City Hall fountain was ceremonially poured into the diminishing lake. Yet it was not until artist Deborah Small was engaged that the lake's fortunes were changed. Johnson writes: *[Small created a ceramic brick] titled 'The Bathroom Site Project'. On one side of the brick were instructions to place the brick in the water tank of a toilet to displace and thereby conserve a portion of the water in the tank. On another side of the brick was "One brick in every Los Angeles toilet tank could save Mono Lake. Yet it is so much cheaper to destroy it"*.



Johnson continues: *The brick caught my interest as I looked at it on my desk each morning, and I acted by launching a series of statewide hearings on the subject. My strategy was to make LA defend its greed in public. The Los Angeles water officials had to show up at each hearing and defend their taking the water with the press there. The result was a summary document [...] and the lawsuit went our way. The court ordered LA to stop taking water from a critical stream. [...]The legal victory was the historic establishment of a Public Trust obligation to maintain wild places. [...]The astonishing part of the victory was that Natural Heritage values are a higher use than taking the stream's water for more development. The wording in the case is far-reaching and historic in future efforts to maintain the nation's wild places.*²

The arts can create dialogue to encourage new ways of thinking and in 2008 Craft ACT hosted an exhibition that did precisely this titled *Baselines: remnant grasslands of Weereewa/Lake George*. This exhibition presented the work by artists Beth Hatton and Christine James, who were responding to the history and the present of the *Willeroo* property on the shores of Weereewa. George and Erica Gundry manage this property, originally using the traditional methods that had been practiced on this site by Gundry's family for generations. When drought and other conditions took their toll, he took radical steps to save the land by employing holistic farm management. This practice has ensured that biodiversity is being reinstated and the land, as both landscape and working property, has flourished in a way that seemed impossible just a few years ago. As part of the *Baselines* exhibition, Hatton constructed art works from materials collected from the land which provided a multi-layered interpretation to the history, colonisation, and the hybridization of the landscape.





In the exhibition catalogue curator Gillian McCracken notes the impact of this work as she describes Hatton's work as re-conceiving, an act of re-thinking in her essay, "Beth Hatton has reconceived the acts of establishing baselines for accurate surveying, clearing native forest and converting indigenous grass lands to high yield arable lands. She has reconceived the implements and tools of these processes using native grass species of the area and, where significant, she has incorporated introduced species. The contrary qualities of the native grasses, their resilience through climate changes and their apparent fragility is captured by Hatton in her work to remind us of our frequently insensitive trampling of undervalued native flora. However, her work emphasises: two hundred years of grazing and development have not suppressed native grasses and indigenous birds and marsupials"³

These stories are but two of many that talk of ways in which to engage, support, protect and commonly share our mutual environment by embedding it within our culture. History shows us that the human imprint always looms large and the tensions of the past, present and future are an ongoing dialogue that has no one answer or view point. Mark Cleghorn wrote, in his essay⁴ for the *Memories in Place* project: I spoke with national park authorities about how best to interpret the lost huts [after the 2003 bushfires]. The Kosciuszko Huts Association (KHA) believes one way is rebuilding them using similar materials and methods as the original. There were also the usual suggestions such as plaques and signage-... I started looking for other ways. Paull McKee, a textile artist, came up with the idea of interpreting the values of the huts through art, with an exhibition of artwork in three huts within Namadgi National Park. So I jumped on it! [...] [I]nterpretation can be quite problematic. Everyone will have a different view. Perhaps the way it has been done through *Memories in Place* is a good way, as it has used a medium, art, that most people accept as not being anti heritage or anti environment.

The Guggenby Ready-Cut Cottage Residency project could be an important ongoing project that contributes to the understanding of this landscape as one of cultural significance to the city and people of Canberra. If further support for this concept can be garnered then a rich repertoire of cultural practice will be directly associated with this national park. A program of artists based for short periods of time in the park will create a fertile archive of imaginative interpretations and create an opportunity for discourse and debate and importantly provide a way to hear and view the many stories of this land. The aim above all is to explore our nature through our culture and to cherish, protect and benefit from this national park environment.

Barbara McConchie
Executive Director, Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Adams, C. 2002, *A Brief Introduction*, viewed 1 May 2009, <http://www.greenmuseum.org/generic_content.php?id=60>
- 2 Johnson, H. D. 2001, *Art, Environment and the Message in the Brick*, viewed 1 May 2009, <http://www.greenmuseum.org/generic_content.php?id=7>
- 3 McCracken, G. 2008, 'Baseline', *Baseline: remnant grassland of Weerewala/Lake George* exhibition catalogue, ACT, pp. 8-9
- 4 Cleghorn, M. 2005, 'Huts as a community asset', *Memories in Place: art in high country huts* exhibition catalogue, Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre, ACT, p. 33 & p. 36

A Museum, a Garden and an Asylum

I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people and their lands now protected within Namadgi National Park.

I recall a chapter in a book entitled 'A Natural Legacy – Ecology in Australia'¹. The chapter was 'National Parks: A Museum, a Garden and an Asylum'. The title of the chapter epitomises so much of how National Parks these days can be regarded as places away from our every day lives. The chapter commences with a quote from G. P. Marsh (1874): *...at once a museum for the instruction of the student, a garden for the recreation of the lover of nature, and an asylum where indigenous tree...plant...beast, may dwell and perpetuate their kind...* While probably relevant to the time when the quotation was written, for many in contemporary Australia, National Parks are now more likely to be largely peripheral places to visit on rare occasions to momentarily consider other realities, as in a museum. Or places to go to escape partially from our world view, but nonetheless remain within it, as in a garden. And as an asylum, a place of weirdness that is and should be locked away as a measure of managing that crazy wild world, and hence protect society from such untoward mayhem. As staff trained in ecology, we are fortunate to have insights into National Parks that open doors into warm and comforting rooms. For many, possibly most of the community, ecological awareness is limited, yet how the community relates to these ecological and historical places is highly relevant both to the community and to the appreciation and lasting protection of National Parks.

Has our understanding of National Parks or our interaction with them changed over time? While the world moves on relentlessly and yet somehow stays the same, they seem to have an existence that is the reverse of the dynamism that naturally occurs within them. Their greatest danger may be their relative inconsequence to the community at large. For, despite legislation providing their protection, and current government willingness to meet the requirements of relevant environment, conservation, heritage and planning Acts, without real and ongoing relevance to the wider community, National Parks could face a very different future to what we consider in this generation as correct and appropriate.

To engender relevance in the wider community, these very important publicly owned places need to seek greater and wider engagement with the community. National Parks have been set aside ostensibly to protect and conserve natural and cultural heritage. Ironically, in order to better guarantee their longer-term existence, engaging a broader section of the community with the Park system is required. But perhaps it is not ironic, as National Parks are entirely a construct of the community.



National Parks are currently a domain of the relatively few in the community who have managed to find a way into their meaning. They are generally poorly understood or appreciated. In negative perception, which sometimes has quite vocal currency, they are places that can wreak havoc through fire, kill people through misadventure, or house animals that destroy stock. And they are full of those horrible native plants that provide little shade and constantly drop their leaves and branches – no good at all for gardeners and suburbia. We are still to come completely to terms with our native environment. While many in the community can have a dour relationship with the native ‘bastard bush’, many others have a highly charged emotive relationship with our fauna. To me, this paradoxical relationship that continues today signals that we have an enormous way to go as a community in reaching a fuller understanding and appreciation of our place Australia, and related to that, of natural lands management.

One thing that has developed more recently is the increased recognition of the need to identify and protect Aboriginal and European cultural heritage – a move beyond a fundamental focus on natural heritage. This is a good thing, as National Parks are places for us all to contemplate the natural and evolving world as well as our human place in it. Consequently, great effort is placed on the protection of cultural heritage, including the restoration and maintenance of European huts, sheds, homesteads, cottages and associated plantings that were part of the landscape at the time of National Park gazettal. These are now publicly owned heritage sites, of equal relevance to all other elements in a National Park landscape. Hence, park management has a responsibility to respond to both the natural and cultural heritage in a way that protects both but does not compromise either.

With these matters in mind, Namadji National Park worked closely with the Kosciuszko Huts Association to refurbish the Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage. It had a future as either a ruin or a heritage place of contemporary relevance and importance. The Cottage tells an important story about success, technology and development in a former but very recent pastoral time. The park managers also hoped to bring the Cottage into relevance through managed community access, to provide a new and consequential existence that respected the past through an ongoing life in its new context. Use by various but different sectors of the community was seen as a possible method.

From the point of view of the Park, *Memories in Place: art in high country huts* was a contemporary craft and arts based project designed to engage parts of the community not commonly associated with National Parks. A joint project between Namadji National Park, Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre and the Kosciuszko Huts Association, the project demonstrated the artistic inspiration that could be drawn from three heritage huts – Waterhole, Westerman’s and Brayshaw’s. The interaction between all the participants was a successful attempt to explore, discuss and relate our relationships with the natural and cultural settings of the sites from a different non-ecological perspective, common in the community. It was also hoped that the relationship of the artists with the sites would help park staff better appreciate the ways people can respond to what can commonly be viewed as a museum, garden and asylum. At the same time, breaking down the world views that can make these parks insignificant strangers.





And so, a logical next step was to use the refurbished Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage as a vehicle for further engagement, and Craft ACT was able to provide, through assistance from the Natural Resource Management Council, the artist in residence project. The two artists, Paull McKee and Kristie Rea, were provided a unique opportunity to immerse themselves, if only for a short while, in the natural and cultural heritage of the site. Through open days and school group visits, the wider community had the opportunity to find themselves in the never seen environs of Namadgi and at least glimpse something of the relevance of the National Park through the stories it has to tell as aided by the artist's interpretations. And to, at least momentarily, interact with the reality of a National Park with its ever present canvases of past, present and future, gaining a better sense of themselves in context with the possibilities not available in urban environments with their endless distractions.

No matter how the artists or the community responds to the site and the project, the National Park will have touched a wider audience, the community's Park will have gained some relevance and some memory, making these unusual and more widely community-based projects so worthwhile. We will all share a better understanding of how the community may perceive these environs, and we may gain some unexpected insights as park managers and a community, that we could consider. Because without these interactions, the National Park has every chance to remain a museum, a garden and an asylum, a place of relative inaccessibility and thus a place at longer-term risk. Through these wider interactions and our shared responses to them, we have the opportunity to re-introduce the dynamism inherent in National Parks back into the community, making them topical and relevant. As long as we are responding to National Parks, we are breathing life into their future.

While the artists glimpse into the Park for inspiration, so too we can glimpse into the artist's work. Their creative interpretations provide insight and alternate understandings about how we may relate to the very National Park we manage in perpetuity on behalf of the community.

In terms of the current artist in residence pilot, I wish to acknowledge the creative endeavours and responses of the artists Paull McKee and Kristie Rea. During the residency some comments were made and reported that have formed part of the contemplative response to the cultural and natural landscape of Namadgi by the resident artists. The aim of the residencies' creative output is however to go deeper than poorly reported words and for us to respond in turn to the interpretations that lie within the works created as a result of the residencies. Our responses may alter or enliven our perspectives. The notions and ideas that live within the craft are apolitical and amoral – they are just perceptions that we as individuals and as a community relate to natural and cultural heritage, and in contemporary life, National Parks and reserved lands management.

Bernard Morris
Ranger-In-Charge, Rural Region South

FOOTNOTE

1. Reicher, R., Lumley, D. & Dunn, I. 1979, 'National Parks: A Museum, a Garden and an Asylum' in *A Natural Legacy - Ecology in Australia*

LAND SONGS: teaching our eyes to listen

There was no way of existing in this land, or of making your way through it, unless you took into yourself, discovered on your breath, the sounds that linked up all the various parts of it and made them one. Without that you were blind, you were deaf [...]. You blundered about seeing hopes where in fact strong spirits were at work that had to be placated, and if you knew how to call them up, could be helpful. Half of what ought to have been bright and full of the breath of life, to you was shrouded in mist.

David Malouf, Remembering Babylon



Theme 1: SHORELINE

A man swims in the ocean. April light glazes the water with a soft, sapphire hue. We have stepped off the edge of high summer. I no longer need to squint him into view. His arms turn a steady rhythm, like paddle-wheels churning a shallow boat across the water. The ease, the splendour of the movement, catching the last warmth of autumn tide.

I contemplate what this man is [and what am I], what he senses, what his body thinks of itself as he swims. This being-in-water, and of-the-water, the way his breath coordinates; the way his body is held by every part of the ocean [for where does the ocean end?]. I am not sure the ocean is before or behind him. He is completely in its embrace. All time is swimming with him.

He is hardly 'the man', or 'this man', or even 'someone's husband'. In this moment, his humanity is not above, or greater than, all that surrounds him. Indeed, from my cliff-top perch, he is possibly the smallest thing my eye can see, a moving paddle-wheel against a vast canvas of rock, water, sky and sun. He could be, is just [like] a fish [except, perhaps, that he laughs at a memory whilst he swims]. He is, absolutely, no lesser for this.

But, emerging from the water, he swaggers, desiccates his experience, attempts to conquer the dry world by boasting to his peers. From being borne by ocean, to being born into air [as babies are], he forgets he could [still] be bathed by the air's kiss.

It is possibly a mistake made throughout all of human time. We forget the land, the embrace of the elements, disconnect from our senses. Our seeing becomes possessive, thin, our decisions 'blind'.

There is an ad, currently on ABC 1, where a farmer outlines the mistakes made by generations of his family in the drive for productivity. Not only did his yields become erratic, but the soil itself was changed into a moody, unworkable partner ['Sunday soil']. And do we care?

Perhaps we do, even though it is not 'our' tract of land, because - as wise ones from many ancient cultures have long said - we are one with the land. Perhaps beneath our swagger we are river-flow, are still held by the air's kiss.

Amongst Australian indigenous peoples, for example, 'country' is sea, land, even air¹, and to the Navajo, "everything stands up alive"². Even the wind is holy³: it teaches, instructs, holds the world in harmonic interrelationship. For most ancient peoples [and in some religions], all terrains are sentient, have narrative, can sing [All forms and sites of life, whether human or non-human, have "consciousness, agency, morality and law"⁴]

Why might it be good to think like this?

Theme 2: INLAND

George Gundry, a third-generation farmer whose property skirts and enters Lake George, understood he lived in a kind of blindness akin to what David Malouf describes.

He'd done 'the dangerous thing' - 'fallen in love with his bloodline'. When all but a tenth of his flock contracted disease, he lost most of his stock, some of his friends, a big chunk of his identity.

He learnt a method of farming that values the soil, the country, listens and learns from watching: how grass regenerates if you don't overgraze. He had to learn to **pay attention**, **observe** [*what is there*], **accept** [*extant conditions*], and adapt decisions to the varying capability of the land.

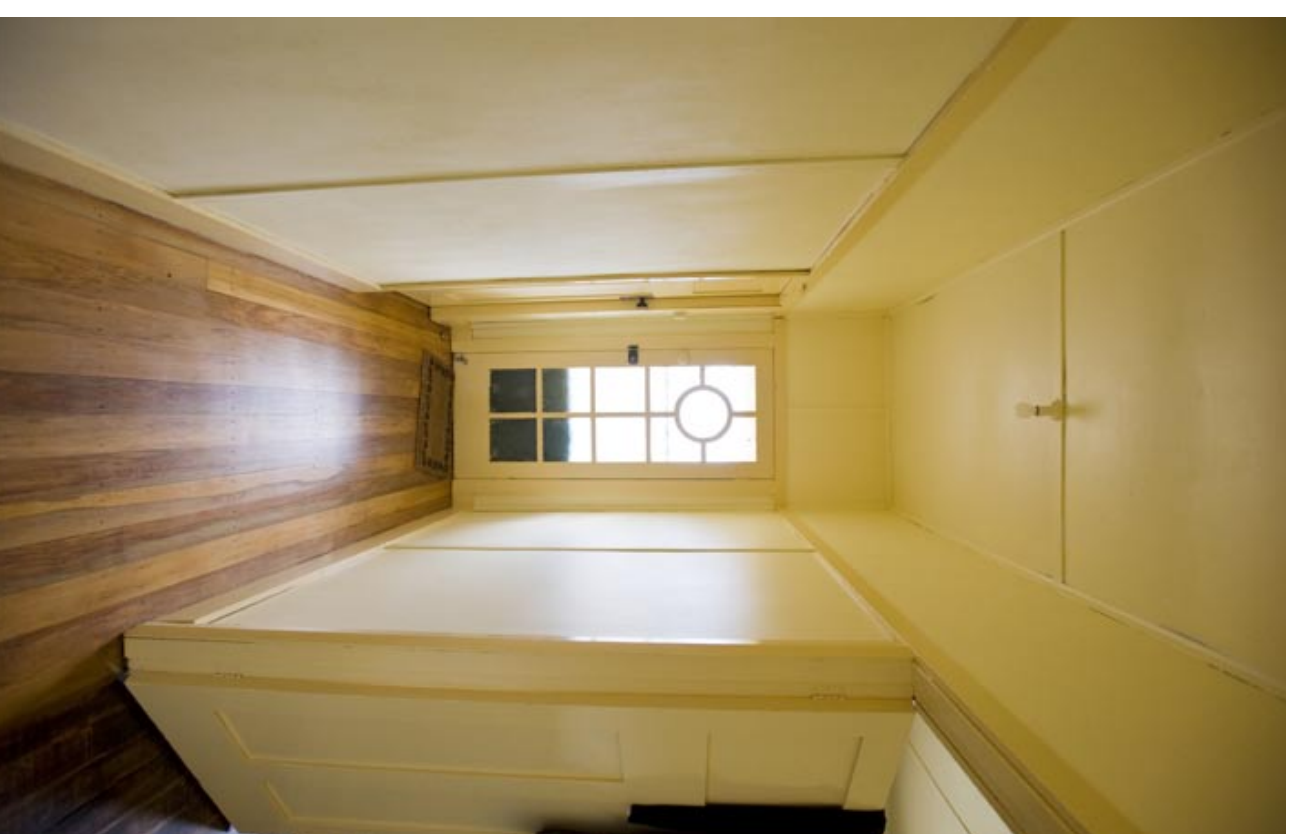
Farming for him became a *process*, not an outcome. One day, his daughter Charlotte recognised the word 'drought'. Like a fey child in a fairy tale, she asked, "What if there is no such thing?" What if, as with words for snow in Icelandic, or seasons in Arnhem Land, some languages simply cannot match the full variation of experience in front of our eyes?

I have danced Gundry's land, in the midst of the 'great drought' of 2004, when the Lake seemed bone dry. Yet in my state of altered perception - an artist's contract to listen, mirror, talk to and reflect what is there - the land changed my ears and eyes, sang of water and longevity. There was only a problem if I longed for something else. *Need limits perception*.

But, as Gundry and his family discovered, through crisis and re-orientation, there are other ways of looking.

Artists who research and work in response to landscape have a way of looking which senses the world with thoroughness, with discipline, in respect of the seen and unseen worlds. They are practiced at 'not yet knowing', asking questions of themselves, presuming there is more than the eye can see; researching, thinking, waiting, dreaming, looking again. Listening to whispers and intuitions. Looking deep, remaining open. Tracing the paths of worms, dingoes, vagabonds, the flights of birds. Not [yet] knowing their next move. *Artists ask their skills to meet what their eyes can see*. This perceptual versatility leaves them flexible, *response-able* [able to respond].

This is one of the reasons why artist-in-residency programmes, such as this one currently run by Craft ACT at the Guggenby cottage, is so valuable. It is less that the artists [who might make art anyway] get studio space to make work; but it is an opportunity for artists, land managers, park rangers, visitors, policy advisors, to touch base with [re]cover? a very specific dialogue with country, culture, heritage, and land.



Theme 3: SPEAKING/LISTENING

Paul McKee, a textile artist, sits on the veranda of the Gudgenby cottage.

He is aware of the multiple stories that reside in and of the land directly in front of him: the struggle of settler farmers, the anguished history of the Aborigines. The cottage is an urban 'ready-cut' erected in a cleared farm landscape. In the grasses, the brittle soils, the tracks of uncleared bush beyond, amongst the carcasses of sheep killed by drought or kangaroo by dingo, there are voices from several, related and unrelated, pasts.

One could easily become overwhelmed by the complex histories of this site. With whom do one's sympathies lie? Which owners, or trespassers, were right or wrong, what guilts should we feel?

McKee sees his task is to hold all these questions, but to solve none of them. To be present to the land is to be aware of *all* these things, not to compare or compete, but to retain an eye and ear for what *is*. McKee also proudly honours his own heritage as a boy from the Irish immigrant working-class. This is working in a spirit which historian Peter Read would call a 'belonging in parallel'⁶ with all the complex histories.

McKee initiated the first joint Craft ACT/Namadji project, *Memories in Place: art in high country huts*, in 2005. His exhibit featured a dark velvet blanket spread over the floor of a shepherd's hut, stitched with the luminous outline of a lone chair and bed. To enter the tiny room, the visitor had to walk over the blanket, and thus the [re-imagined] vestiges of his life.

The installation paid tribute to the shepherd's loneliness, his resilience, his 'making do'. But notably, he is not heroised. The outlines of chair and bed trace one ghost of many in a long line. Trackers would find similar 'evidence' of older ghosts, other lives, outside in the ground. No one is superior, no other asked to disappear. This too is in a spirit of equivalence.

My story too will move and change and pass on. It is as if I never sat, do not sit, here. Yet, like the whole of nature, we exist, we grow, we make, we move on.



Like a carpet-seller, McKee lays out for me some of his many other textiles: scraps of old suits tacked onto remnants of sackings, threads and linings showing through a tear; fragments of old coats reversed to show their sweat. These pieces too both conceal and reveal the silent life [labour, comforts and discomforts] of bodies long gone.

This making apparent of the invisible is a special role. We could think about what delicate relationships co-exist within any ecosystem, at any historical time - especially the ones which can't tell their own tales. Creatures who are too small, too slow, or simply don't speak English. The 'making visible' that such craft achieves is a very special skill.

And it's a task that, with humility, each of us is equal to.





RITORNELLO [Theme 1 returns]

At the edge of the ocean, I open my throat and sing that space, my voice opens within it and though of course it is my voice, threaded with modes resonant from my past[s], yet in some sense, the song is already there. It is the landscape singing me, me singing him, the swimmer dancing the sea.

Theme 4: SYNAESTHESIA ["I need to find the sound to match the form I see"]

Kristie Rea is a glass artist. Even though her medium is not supple like cloth, her work is in some sense too about a weaving of light, movement, and histories through space and time.

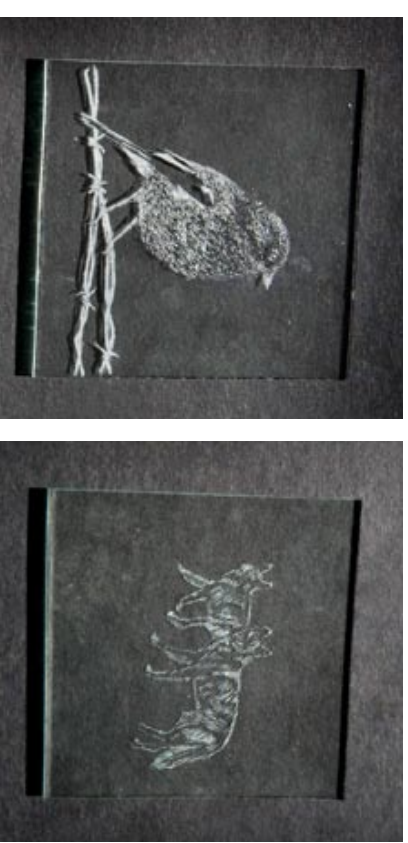
In her works, colour, shape, and form become active participles - synecdoches of complex activities.

In her eulogy to the Camberra bushfires [e.g., *Early Light*, *Last Light*, *Scent of Light*, 2004], the action of regrowth becomes colour. Rea streaks opaque, dark panels with thin blues, ochres and translucent greens, capturing the stunned survival of sky and soil, and the tender shoots of regenerating trees. In a series based on rakes and hoes, objects curve from a metallic weightiness through to translucent tips [e.g., *Fine Line II*, 2002]. Angled lights shadow [change, mark] the ground with the surprise of rainbows - graceful [as farming tools can be], but also a poignant index of the tool's brute capacity to change topography. The objects reflect some very complex land use histories.

In the Presence of Blue [2009] shows cylinders of iridescent blue attached to or folding through tracts of steel, capturing the transition from weightiness [inside] to liminal experience [the threshold]. Space, like breath, visible as it is absorbed and moves the interior of the body, silent, yet the medium by which we share the thought of birds.

The sound of sky, the action of travelling, hold weight equal to the solidity of things'. At Gudgenby, in view of kangaroos and boulders in the near distance [both uncannily alike in their qualities of presence and stillness], Rea turns from sky, to ground: she imagines ribbons of steel-anchored green fall and return [peering down a crevice], another ribbon folding back on itself [the bushwalker setting out, coming home].

Such work makes sense [and is useful, *helpful*] because colour, movement, size, depth of field, converge in the brain of any conscious being. *And we become our ways of looking*. The brain is, in fact, synaesthetic [brings together senses, makes correlations between one input and another] and there is a special richness when there is confluence with memories. Sadly, even as late as the mid-twentieth Century, synaesthesia [in Western medicine] was still considered a disease.



Theme 5: PASSIVE vs. ACTIVE LOOKING

Mckee and Rea both spent 5 weeks living, thinking, and making art in a cottage located less than 5km from some ancient rock-paintings at Yankee Hat. The Namadgi brochure exhorts us 'not to touch' the rock art - and rightly so, as the pigments are fragile. But this instruction in some ways deflects from the real value of what the art [all art] represents - how we *interact* with it.

All things are subject to weathering by time; our bodies, our art, our land; heritage, preservation and conservation can only slow the process. But, as currently under debate in collaborative Land Management Plans, protecting sites [in general] from human use goes against indigenous understandings of both culture and landscape, and is perhaps counterintuitive for the rest of us.⁵ For Indigenous Australians, the Dreaming is a present participle, a re-creative act. Dreaming laws rely on being re-told in relation to present circumstance. This makes humans *participant observers*⁶ in a cultural landscape where "continued aboriginal action and labour is necessary for the life of the countryside"⁷. It is a deeply co-responsive existence.

Art relies on our similar co-responsiveness, and artists themselves - particularly ones working in relation to landscape - generate their work in a condition of **vulnerable authority** that lets them give [at the very least, of their attention] as they receive.

You feel that these details of the inner life of the country are always there, just waiting for the person with the right kind of vision to make them apparent to you. [Ian Green⁸]

There is no act of nature that is not an act of reciprocation. Tree gives to soil and air; air gives to us. These are acts of deep and generous relationship [what Gundry in his own practices has come to call 'enlightened self-interest'].

This openness, this empowered vulnerability, opens us to the possibility that we can perhaps reconstitute stories which have been silent for some time [Country can be 'reinscribed... dreamings rediscovered in revelation'⁹] - a hopefulness that perhaps can counter our collective guilts, losses, fearful detachments.

So, what are the new songs for the future? How deeply will our songs be heard - by others, each other, by the land?

Theme 6: THE FINAL ACT

I visit Mckee towards the end of his residency. He opens the door to the workshop. There are photos and sketches tacked to the wall, and a selection of colour-field paintings that take my breath away. Stabs of colours stripe each canvas, dark alternating with light, a vision as through a hut revealing dancing ribbons of light. Through the stabs come light, and hope. My inner and outer spaces combine.

One of the beauties of art is that it allows us to remember our continuously [re]creative, our capacities, our skills, our magnificence. All the more joyous too if it's an opportunity to celebrate how skilled and magnificent are all the places and beings with which we co-create and co-exist.

Most people would no longer question our interdependence with land, water, soil, all of the earth's beings.

We need them; they need us. But we have to learn how to listen.

Zsuzsanna [Zsuzsi] Soboslay
writer, performer, maker; Canberra ACT

The writer wishes to thank Kristie Rea, Paul Mckee, George Gundry, and my family, for whom it is imperative I listen.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Rose, D. B. 1999, p.177
- 2 River Junction Curly, *The Blessingway*, Ref. McNeley, J. K. 1997, p.28
- 3 McNeley, J. K. 1997
- 4 Rose, D. B. 1999, p.178
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All Other Photos: Creative Image Photography

This project is presented by Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre in association with Namadgi National Park, with assistance from the Australian Government's National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.



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Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre is the peak industry body for contemporary craft and design in the Canberra region. Supported by the ACT Government and the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.

Craft ACT is a member of ACDC, Australian Craft Design Centres.



Supported by the ACT Government



Photography Creative Image Photography
Editing and Graphic Design Diana Hare
Printing Goanna Print

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