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1. *Hollow, but not empty* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist.
2. *Urban habitat (Brachychiton acerifolius)* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on paper cut. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.
3. *Co-existence (detail)* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on paper cuts. Courtesy of the artist.
4. *Silhouettes of Redlands series – Casuarina* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.
5. *Silhouettes of Redlands series – The bold and beautiful* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.
6. *Fresh air* 2010, synthetic polymer paint and pigmented ink on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.
7. *Diamonds in my eyes* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist.
8. *Silhouettes of Redlands series – Co-inhabitant (Coolhwynpin Nature Refuge)* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.
9. *Silhouettes of Redlands series – Banksia integrifolia* 2010, synthetic polymer paint on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.

Cover image:
The creek edge holds power 2010, synthetic polymer paint and pigmented ink on cotton canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.

“I reflect on and try to attribute a sense of value to native flora, by recognising the individual qualities of species.”

Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

Cnr Middle and Bloomfield Streets,
 Cleveland Q 4163

Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm

Sunday 9am – 2pm

Closed Monday 9 August

Admission free

Tel: (07) 3829 8899 or

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www.more2redlands.com.au/ArtGallery

Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland City Council, dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana



Plant-Life

An exhibition by Nicola Moss

Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

18 July – 15 August 2010

Plant-Life

An exhibition by Nicola Moss

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

from *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau

I recall reading Thoreau as an American literature student at the University of Queensland. The economy and straightforward quality of his prose humbled me then, as it does now. At the time I am not sure I understood the simplicity of his argument but as I age I think I am edging closer. Visiting the studio of artist Nicola Moss I was again reminded of Thoreau. Moss is a passionate environmentalist, whose practice melds something of traditional landscape painting themes with issues of contemporary relevance. Like Thoreau, her style is characterised by an elegant economy of means.

On the day I visited Moss' studio I happened to read an article discussing author Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, which poses the theory that many contemporary urban children are suffering nature deprivation. Louv argues that many children cannot tell the difference between simple plant and animal species, that an entire generation has become enslaved to technology, and that more worryingly, children are being taught to be wary of the outdoors, for reasons ranging from the litigious to the irrational. While Louv's argument may not be wholly original in its exhortation that humans must learn to co-exist with nature or perish, it is surely timely. We find ourselves as a society in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis on the brink of serious ecological consequences wrought by our own greed and malfeasance.



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Moss is a passionate environmentalist, whose practice melds something of traditional landscape painting themes with issues of contemporary relevance.

All of these concerns fell away however gazing out the windows of Moss' studio with their vista onto a halcyon valley of reclaimed farmland at Willowvale. The very name conjures up an arcadia and so it is for this artist whose studio practise involves an intimate observation of nature as it unfolds before her. Her carefully tended garden sits in harmony with the natural flora, vast trees and wild foliage.

Moss' artistic practice is the impetus for her environmental work with local community land care and creek monitoring groups – Redlands Bushcare Birders, Redlands Bushcare Seed Collection, Redlands Bushcare Creek Crew – which in turn feeds back into her art making, taking as its subject matter the rich wilderness of the region. *Plant – Life* brings together Moss' observations of the uniquely diverse Redlands' habitats she has come to know intimately through her work as an environmental volunteer and bird watcher, although her paintings and paper stencils are anything but dry, straight botanical studies. They meld her interest in plant and animal species with more profound issues to do with sustainability and ecological fragility, and larger philosophical issues about the nature of existence. She is perhaps exemplary of the exhortation to think globally and act locally, in this case in the Redlands.

A large map of Redland City on Moss' studio wall is marked with the sites she has explored as a volunteer and those that she is yet to investigate. The region is a surprisingly vast area seen in map format, and as Moss has learned through her active engagement, rich in diversity of species and habitat. Moss is entranced by the idea that small pockets can support such an intensity of life – so many different species of birds for example, and this has become a theme of sorts. She calls our attention to the tiny creatures, seeds and grasses, about which she has become increasingly aware, that may be found beneath the canopies of heroic trees, reminding us of the delicate state of co-existence.

Indeed, *Co-existence* 2010, is the title of a new ambitious installation that consists of a series of large-scale paper cut works. Installed in layers upon the wall, the delicate skeins of hand-coloured paper cast shadows of casuarinas, banksia cones and birds upon the gallery walls. The effect is not unlike the physical experience of being in the densely layered bush, as Moss explains:

"On several walks I have found that with each step a fresh panorama of the landscape appears, as some elements become concealed others are revealed." A veil of leaves partially obscures a filmy spider web bathed in dappled light; a striped spider is camouflaged against the stripy bark of a tree. Moss likens the work to the term 'ecological niche' used by birders to describe places where many different species of bird occupy the same geographical space because they rely on different plants and insects for survival.

Stylistically Moss' mode of working is influenced by her studies in printmaking. Her paintings are characterised by the use of silhouette forms that she lays over richly textured underpainting, the overall effect of which is reminiscent of screenprinting and Japanese woodblock printing. At times her style is almost calligraphic, as in *Hollow, but not empty* 2010, a painting that depicts the iconic bark markings of the scribbly gums that can be found throughout the Redlands. The trees she observed have been burnt out but retain their usefulness as homes for nesting birds. *Diamonds in my eyes* 2010, celebrates mature trees, making an analogy with the valuable carbon of a tree and that of a diamond, and was inspired by the artist's first job in a family run jeweller's: "I can still recall my amazement at the volume of jewellery sold. Were diamonds really rare?" Moss suggests that in the same way diamonds are coveted and traded, so might be stately trees in a not so distant future.

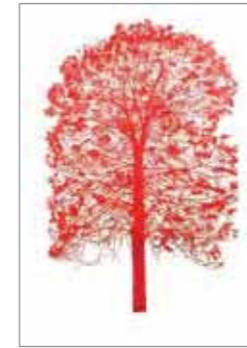
Ultimately Moss' larger project is to celebrate through her art the beauty of the natural world, in the process elegantly highlighting some of the ways in which we may keep it so. She eloquently explains, "I have found at times that people think of the 'bush' as being monotonous or boring, but I find a wonderful diversity of unique forms – small, large, beautiful and ugly. I reflect on and try to attribute a sense of value to native flora, by recognising the individual qualities of species. Nothing is superfluous in a natural environment; each plant life is unique and at the same time plays a role in the surrounding ecosystem."

Alison Kubler

June 2010

Alison Kubler is a freelance curator and writer

All quotes are from an email conversation with the artist unless otherwise stated.



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