

revisiting<sup>the</sup>  
Australian  
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Interpreting the landscape  
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*Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland*  
18 July – 15 August 2010

# Revisiting the Australian Landscape

## *Interpreting the landscape on an intimate scale*

In 2008 I attended a talk by Dianne Byrne at the State Library of Queensland (SLQ) about the John Watts necklace. I left inspired and it is from that talk that the ideas for this exhibition formed. The colonial 18ct gold John Watts necklace was created by Sydney goldsmith Christian Ludwig Qwist (1818–77) probably in the late 1860s and was acquired by SLQ in December 2006. It had belonged to pioneering Queensland pastoralist John Watts and had remained in the collection of his family until the Library acquired it. Byrne discussed the importance of the library collecting this piece with unbroken provenance, and how the necklace could be read to reveal aspects of colonial Queensland's cultural and political history.

Elements of the landscape, flora and fauna were used in colonial Australian jewellery as decorative motifs specifying the geographic and cultural location where the works were made. Elements of the Australian landscape, so strikingly different from European experience were incorporated as clear markers of the new colony. Traditional European materials, such as precious metals and gemstones, were used with imported techniques and cultural values to create emblems of pride in the new country. These early works express a sense of optimism and provide visual representations of the developing sense of identity for the new nation. They express a clear statement about the political and cultural values of the time.

The John Watts necklace illustrates this through the central medallion which includes the 'Advance Australia Arms' featuring a rising sun, an emu and a kangaroo flanking a quartered shield, an unofficial yet widely used motif at



**John Watts Necklace.** *John Oxley Library, The State Library of Queensland. Accession number: ACC 6681*

the time. According to Byrne the “Advance Australia Arms, suggest the optimism that Watts felt for the colony and the faith that he placed in its enterprises. The rising sun was a traditional symbol of power, but during the colonial period it also carried the connotation of the dawning of a new day and of a future full of promise. The images on the quartered shield celebrated the achievements of an energetic people and were derived from a variety of sources.” (Byrne 2008, p.8)

Other medallions on the necklace feature images of horses, beef cattle and sheep expressing a confidence in the pastoral use of the new land. How objects of material culture are read alters with time and context. From a post colonial perspective the necklace can now be read as expressing an assertion of European ownership and control of the land.

This exhibition looks at how the flora, fauna and landscape of Australia remain relevant motifs and inspiration for the work of contemporary jewellers. Today environmental concerns and recent reassessment of economic and related cultural values has seen the landscape again capturing the imagination of the wider population. How the landscape is viewed and used is being reassessed and revalued in all aspects of society from questioning the use of non-renewable resources to preserving natural habitats. *Revisiting the Australian Landscape: Interpreting the landscape on an intimate scale*, explores how contemporary Queensland jewellers and metalsmiths are exploring these concerns in their works using the Australian landscape as the vehicle to express ideas of political and cultural location at this time.

The exhibiting artists were selected on the basis of their existing practices. They range between emerging and established practitioners from a diversity of geographic locations. What unites them is their shared consideration of the Australian landscape in their works, focusing variously on materials or imagery to explore ideas that range from Chantelle Fisher's considerations of the void in the landscape to Ann Chadwick's symbolic representation of alienation from the natural world.

Amy Cochrane and Margot Douglas gather materials directly from the landscape they are responding to. Cochrane's *Bone Dry* series (2010) incorporates scrap tin and discarded sheep bones, elements collected from her family property in Roma. These seemingly incongruous materials are set with recycled sterling silver etched with aerial images of drought-scarred land. The *New Life Brooch* (2010), while visually disconnected, directly follows this series, featuring shards of ceramic found after recent floodwaters receded. Cochrane's works speak of the experience of rural Queensland life, the associated detritus and the extremes of weather. On the other hand Douglas' latest jewellery collection celebrates the practices of bowerbirds that have taken up residence in regenerated industrial land adjacent to her home. Douglas states "The resourcefulness of the bowerbird highlights the species' unique ability to adapt and flourish in changing circumstances. The uniquely occurring adopted habitat of the urban landscape of Townsville proves not only is the bowerbird resilient, it takes advantage of a new colour for its palette only found in urban settings — red." Similar to the bowerbird's habit of stealing items of a chosen colour, Douglas has used only materials that she could 'steal' from her workshop or local landscape.

Susie Woodhouse's *Three Vessels* (2010) are intended to be repositories for small elements collected from the landscape, such as leaves, twigs and seedpods. In Woodhouse's vision, the vessels serve a grounding function within a ritual of exchange between the curious collector and the receiver, creating a point at which to contemplate and discuss the landscape. Woodhouse is interested in how individuals engage with their immediate environment and these vessels are intended to facilitate this, creating temporary locations to display, share, observe and appreciate.

Environmental concerns have been central to Rebecca Ward's practice from when she was a student in the early 1990s. In this series of works, texture is used to evoke natural forms in precious metals, sterling silver and 22ct gold. While the brooch titles *Brushbox*, *Storm* and *Hakea* (2010) help direct the interpretation, the natural inspiration is readily apparent in the sensitive attention to texture and form. Known for her use of manufactured items that have been discarded, frequently shards of glass coupled with precious metals, for this exhibition Ward has reduced her palette of materials to metal and the sparse use of beach pebbles.

Out of concern for how their works fit within society and the wider landscape, Bibi Locke and Kate Allbon Sargeant prioritise sustainability in their practices. For example Sargeant's necklace *All the Colours Fade to One* (2009) is made from reclaimed metal and stones. The silver was recycled from out of use coins and Sargeant has consciously kept coin edge details apparent in the work as a record of their previous life. The necklace is comprised of small jewellery elements that function individually as brooches and pendants, but when joined the pieces form an eloquent representation of unity. The necklace is symbolic of how Sargeant views the inescapable interconnectedness of humans to their landscape. Locke uses only recycled metal in her work, employing sensitively rendered images of "native plants and animals with invasive or predatory introduced species." It is her intention to "highlight the plight of native flora and fauna, but also challenge the convention of representing colonised Australian identity through idealised native plants and animals." Locke's pieces are small, heavily detailed and highly tactile, and each includes moving elements that invite the viewer to engage. Closer investigation of the locket *Richmond Birdwing Butterfly / Dutchman's Pipe Vine* (2010), reveals that the toothed jaw opens, but is sprung ready to snap shut on unsuspecting fingers. The external imagery of the box depicts leaves of the introduced species Dutchman's Pipe surrounding the ghostly cut away shape of a butterfly. On internal inspection a detailed representation of the Birdwing butterfly presented with its name alludes to scientific specimens.

Animal motifs feature in Ann Chadwick's three brooches, *Power Socket with Emu*, *Power Socket with Kangaroo* and *Power Socket with Koala* (2010). Chadwick has used stylised representations of these iconic Australian animals from road signs, suggesting that for many people road signs are the closest they'll get to encountering the animals in the wild. Of course road signs also refer to the need to protect animals from human intervention in their homelands. Chadwick has used discarded aluminium drink cans to provide the colour of the animals, a subtle allusion to the impact of littering on natural habitats. The power socket refers to societal and cultural pressures that increasingly persuade us of the need for newer and more electronic gadgets, all of which are widening the chasm between the average person and engagement with landscape while simultaneously contributing to the depletion and destruction of natural resources.

The impact of mining on the landscape is of concern to many of the artists, and accordingly the use of recycled metal is increasingly considered a priority. Catherine Large's brooches, *Terrible, Sublime* (2010) and *Woundscape* (2010) capture an aerial view of open cut mining. These painterly works are beautiful in contrast to what we know of the source of their imagery: the disfiguring impact of open cut mining.

Christine O'Reilly and Andrew Lowrie both address boundaries in their works. O'Reilly's work traces the subdivision that her home lot is part of, highlighting the division and subdivision of land for private ownership. The work also illustrates how the land where we live is a small part of a bigger picture. Lowrie's *Boundary Musings in Dirty White* (2010), both a bangle and small sculpture, refers to fencing of property while also suggesting lonely isolation. Lowrie's previous works have explored his search for identity, he states "I sometimes feel a sense of displacement being an Australian of European descent and that generates its own kind of loneliness and fears". *Boundary Musings in Dirty White* evokes just that, for it is a boundary and an enclosure, and when worn on the body serves as a portable reminder.

The ocean, reef and bushland have been long-term inspirations for central Queensland resident Lisa Gaze. Gaze's works for this exhibition are informed by years of observations of the natural world. Each piece seeks to capture the mesmerising qualities of water, a resource whose preciousness is increasing as we become aware of its declining supply. In the bracelet *Rock Pools* (2009), Gaze records details of water in its natural environment. She has used Cuttlefish bones to cast the components, a technique which transfers textures from the ocean animal onto the cast metal. The use of beach glass records the traces left by humans.

Chantelle Fisher's works explore an Asian appreciation of the natural world. Fisher is specifically interested in "the East Asian notion of 'the void'" and the East Asian way of thinking that values the spirit of the object over the graphic representation. Aesthetics are not her driving force rather she is interested in the space between and around things and the interplay between objects. The physical installation of her works invites quiet contemplation. Fisher states that "The context for this interest lies in Western cosmologies that have objectified the natural, using it as a tool for anthropocentric development. In this context, value systems of the West are seemingly set on an aesthetic or monetary axis, which has stripped nature of its subjectivity"

The use of the landscape as subject matter in Australian jewellery is not new but it remains a poignant and inspiring muse. What is new is how these artists at this time are referring and responding to it. The John Watts necklace reveals information about nineteenth century Australia; what will these works tell of this time in the future?

**Elizabeth Shaw**

**Curator of *Revisiting the Australian Landscape:  
Interpreting the landscape on an intimate scale***

References

Byrne, D 2008, 'The John Watts Necklace', *The State Library of Queensland Magazine*, Issue no.01 Spring. All other quotes are from artist statements supplied by the artists for this exhibition.



## Ann Chadwick

*Power Socket with Koala*

*Power Socket with Kangaroo*

*Power Socket with Emu*

*Aluminium, soft drink can and stainless steel, 2010*



## Amy Cochrane

*New Life Brooch*

*Bone Dry Series – Brooch, Ring, Pendant*

*Sterling silver and found ceramic, 2010*

*Sterling silver, scrap tin, stainless steel and bone, 2010*



## Margot Douglas

### *Ritual and Muse*

*Sterling silver, copper, plastics, seeds and pods and found materials, 2010*



## Chantelle Fisher

*Neckling Called Nature #4 (detail)*

*Brass and amethyst rondelles, 2010*



## Lisa Gaze

### *Rock Pools*

*Sterling silver and beach glass, 2009*



Catherine Large

*Woundscape*

*Terrible, Sublime*

*Sterling silver, fine silver and vitreous enamel, 2010*



## Bibi Locke

*Richmond Birdwing Butterfly/Dutchman's Pipe Vine*

*Recycled sterling silver and stainless steel, 2010*



Andrew Lowrie

*Boundary Musings in Dirty White*

*Sterling silver, 2010*



Christine O'Reilly

*Precious Lots*

*Fine silver and sterling silver, 2010*



## Kate Allbon Sargeant

### *All the Colours Fade to One*

*Reclaimed sterling silver, copper, labradorite and smoky quartz, 2009*



## Rebecca Ward

*Storm*

*Brushbox*

*Hakea*

*Sterling silver, 22ct gold and stainless steel, 2010*

*Sterling silver, 22ct gold, shibuichi and stainless steel, 2010*

*Sterling silver, 22ct gold and stainless steel, 2010*



## Susie Woodhouse

### *ree Vessels*

*Sterling silver, gilding metal, copper and leaf, 2010*

# Acknowledgements

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## **The Artists**

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