

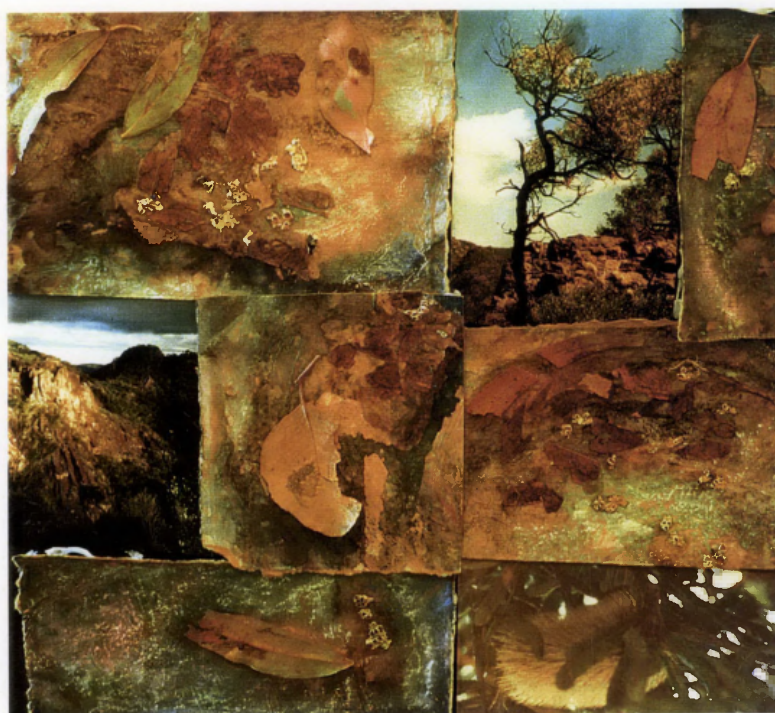
I was shocked at how our interpretation, our spoken words turned into something poetic and artistic, where I've never thought I was capable of writing in that regard. But, yeh, to actually get something solid off those words is just, such a connection, it was such a connection to what we take for granted maybe? (Jennie, August, 1999)



The body in the body
artist Jennie Hunt



And I remember she said pick one or two things and then go away and be silent for the next twenty minutes and make something. And you've got to walk over. Well, I'd better choose, and all of a sudden something says to you that it's interesting. That bit of bark, actually. It was the sort of bark I used to pick up when I was a child, because I liked it. So I picked it up, and I thought well that's a scraggy looking thing and I put it back. And I picked up some other stuff, but I came back to the scraggy looking bit of bark because it just said - look at me
(Margo, August, 1999)



detail, *Bushwalk i*

artist Sue Graham



Apartment Dwelling

artist Sue Graham



detail, *Apartment Dwelling*



detail, *Apartment Dwelling*

The lava flow epitomises the paradoxical quality of this place for me; what was once hot molten rock is now solid underfoot. Undulating in shape, it is like a strange river suspended in time and space. The ancient rock is constantly breaking up into smaller rocks, then gravel, and finally into the soil that gathers in hollows and pockets to nurture trees and wildflower bushes. Lacy filaments of lichen, like the intricate doilies my mother used to crochet, circle over its surface. Fragile yet tenacious, they are so difficult to prise off they seem to have merged with the rock itself.

(Sylvia's journal 1/6/99)

I'm stitching lava flow stones on an old silk dress which will be part of my installation about my floating self trying to anchor itself in some way in this place while still treading lightly on it; not setting down roots but creating routes as in enabling patterns of being. I envisage the dress invisibly suspended over a lacy lichen-like, doily-like pattern that I will make on the ground from lava stones.

(Sylvia, letter to Mary, 25/8/99)



Stone Lace

artist Sylvia Martin



detail, *Stone Lace*



detail, *Stone Lace*



detail, *Keeping the Home Fires Burning*

artist Sylvia Martin

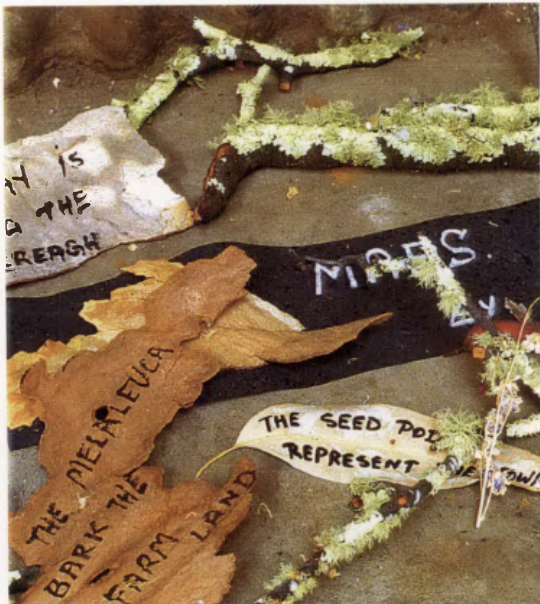
Keeping the Home Fires Burning was an installation consisting of a large cardboard screen on which a simple outline of a curved stone chimney was drawn. A series of 8 slides of sensual photographs of fleshy bark/skin and curvaceous tree limbs, suggestive of female eroticism, was projected into the semi-circular hearth of the chimney. Visitors were invited to operate the slides as they passed through the exhibition. The work was a playful evocation of lesbian desire, epitomised in the stone chimney that forms the heart and centre of the octagonal house my partner and I built in the Warrumbungles, among the angophoras and eucalyptus *rossii* that grow on our land. Many people were intrigued, but most avoided the obvious sexual connotations and made comments such as, *Oh that looks like an elephant's trunk*. One woman however, was heard giggling to her friends and saying, *I must have a dirty mind*.

(Sylvia, June, 2000)



Maps

artist, Dell Stewart



detail, *Maps ii*

artist, Dell Stewart



detail, *Maps ii*

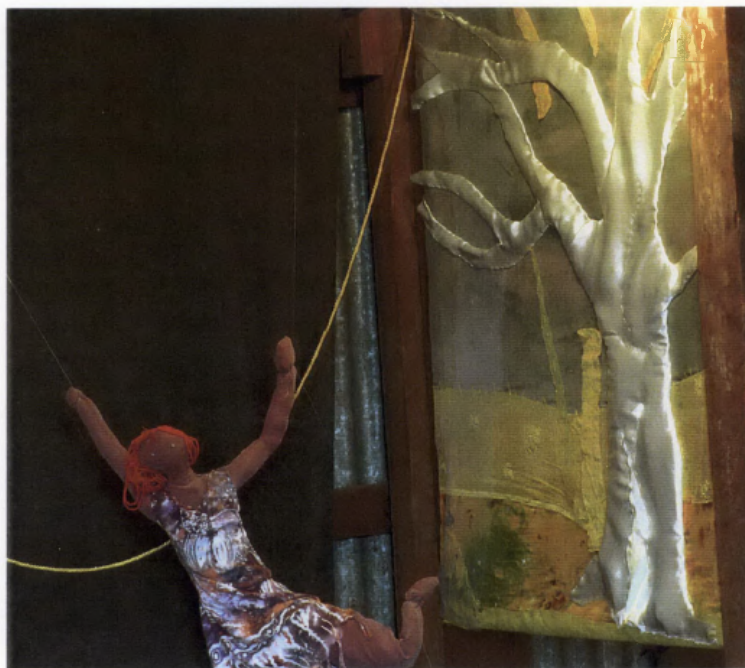
- Sue D: *The idea of being comfortable with temporariness, more than anything*
- Catherine: *And the depth of seeing. Like I would perceive things that you'd normally walk past, and be looking at textures and shapes and colours, of things that you take for granted.*
- Sue: *Just what you can use. You can't really say well I can't do it because I don't have the right materials; it's there all around you.*
- Margo: *And a walk round the park by all of us, together*
-
- Catherine: *There's such a contradiction in presenting things, because the power is so much in the fact that they are ephemeral, that they are transient. So a lot of things – that just blew me away – that you could take something so important from, you know, and then it's gone*
- Margo: *And how some of those things stay with you, really stick in your mind. Some of the most casual ones were so powerful*

Margo: *When we were asked to make paper dolls, I laughed because I haven't made paper dolls since I was about seven. But when you actually saw what happens when you start!*

Sue G: *The idea of play, that is. The idea of having your own play*

Catherine: *Challenging too*

Sue D: *Definitely. The idea of ripping limbs off, putting different things together, it was sort of shocking. So was making dolls. The idea of that ! And yet those were the things, simply because it was the last thing I would ever have dreamt of, that I ended up following.*



detail, *Light Ties*

artist Sue Davies



detail, *Light Ties*

Carolyn: *I kept thinking of the quartz and the moonlight*

Robin: *I expanded on what I'd written with Rita*

Jennie: *I woke up at two o'clock in the morning*
The whole story, I nuttered it all out
Word for word

Sue G: *I didn't have much idea what to bring*
Until I saw what everyone else had

Catherine: *The process unfolding*



Placemarks

artist, Robin King



detail, *Placemarks*



detail, *Placemarks*

This artwork is a surreal interpretation of the traditional concept of the home, picket fence and garden of sunflowers.

The home and the picket fence were dreams of mine, the desire to decorate and own as I wanted. The use of the snail was to show the need to be protected, the idea of carrying one's home on your back so as to retreat whenever danger approaches. The picket fence is the added barrier to keep out the enemy, and the need for privacy at all costs. The sunflowers show the beauty of nature and, bright and cheerful, give the appearance of normality. As we all know the snails' shells protect them no more than a home protects a person if the enemy really wants to get in.

(Carolyn, 20/10/99)



detail, *Picket Fence*

artist Carolyn O'Donnell



detail, *My Place*

artist Carolyn O'Donnell

Father,

Knowing you are no longer here, allows me at last, to express my feelings.

Did you ever know how wretched were the lives of your children, dad?
Did it never occur to you to put yourself in our place?

Why the lies? Our innocence stolen from us and yet you continued.
We were too young to understand it is only now we, your children, parents and grandmothers, begin to acknowledge the horror we endured. Was it a secret? Did everyone see you for what you were or were they deceived as we, your children, were?

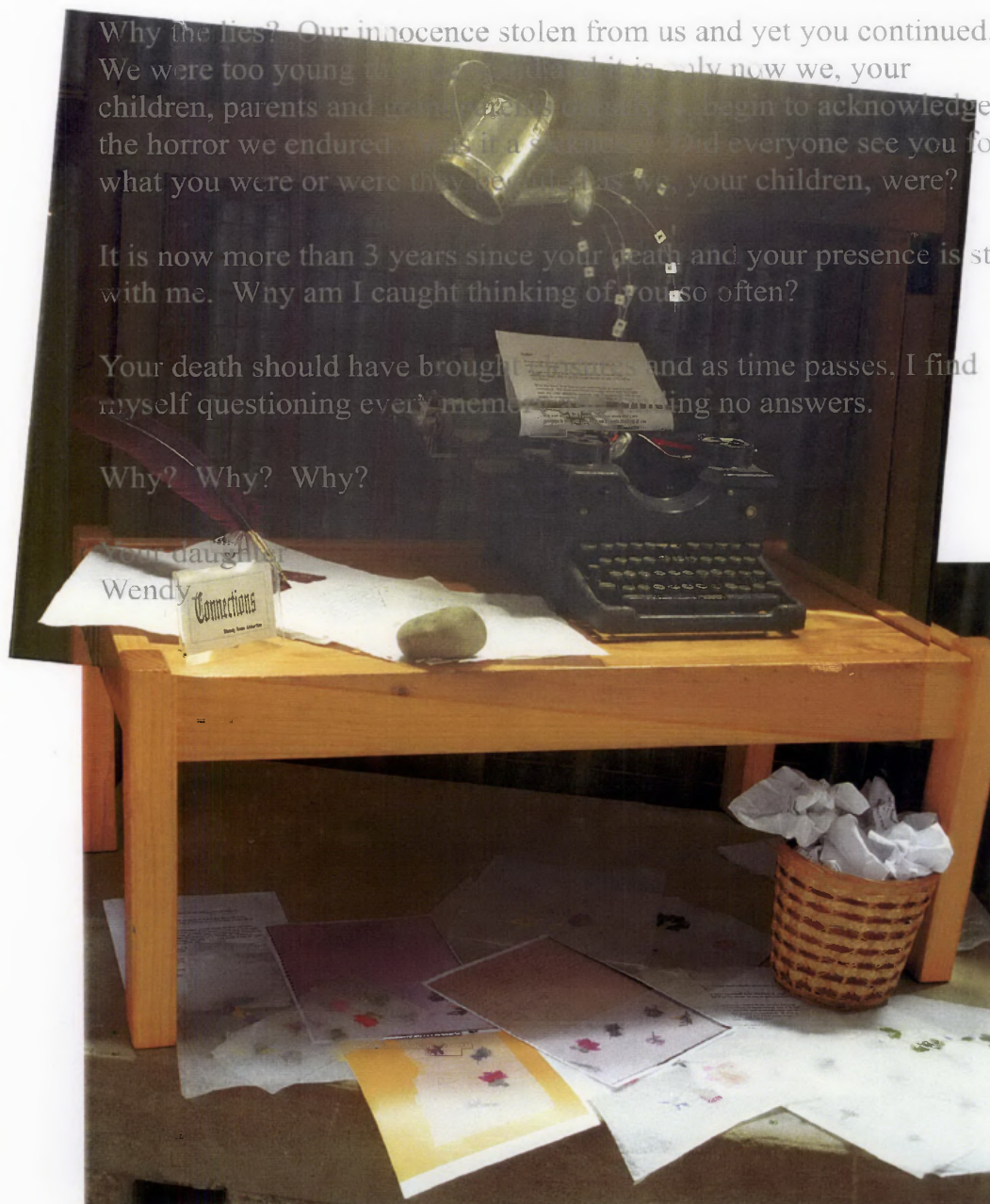
It is now more than 3 years since your death and your presence is still with me. Why am I caught thinking of you so often?

Your death should have brought closure and as time passes, I find myself questioning every memory finding no answers.

Why? Why? Why?

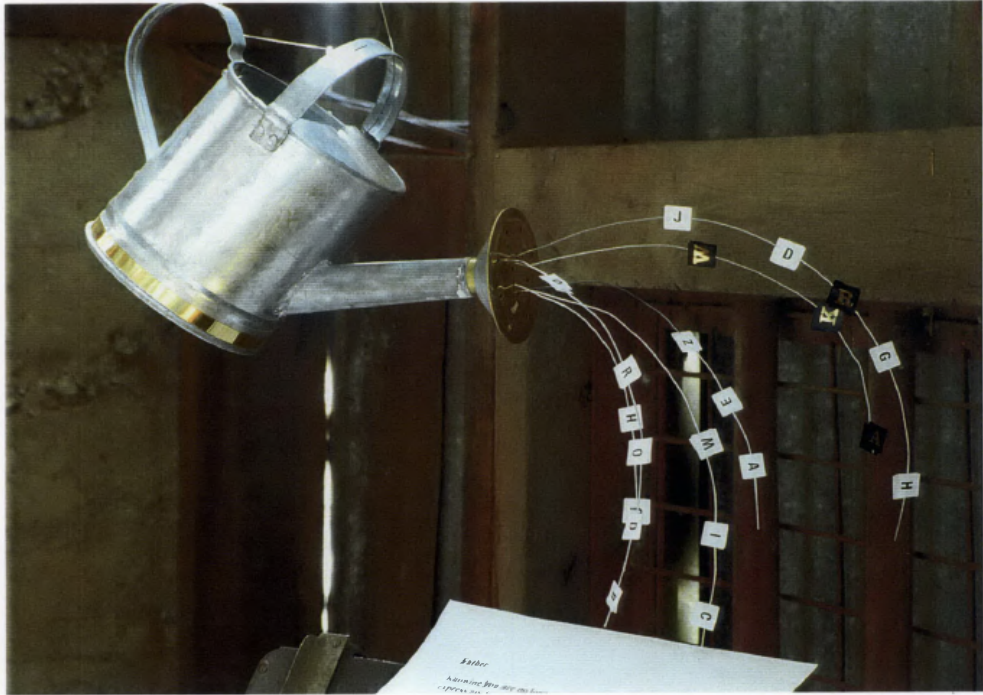
Your daughter
Wendy

Connections



Connections

artist Wendy Abberton



detail, *Connections*



detail, *Connections*



detail, *Expressions of Place*

artist Rita England



detail, *Expressions of Place*

It all started with my mother's old box camera
(Rita, October, 1999)

Walking each morning with my cats Zoe and Ruby, ambushing and tumbling over each other and generally being silly as only Siamese can. As I daren't entice them onto the busy and dangerous street, the only alternative is to trundle sixteen times around my garden.

The front garden is prolific in early summer; boysenberries, plums and mulberries carry large crops. Much jamming, stewing and freezing to do, but with a profitable result. Figs and grapes in the back garden give me the yearly task of making more jam, but not in such a rush. Figs only ripen at about four or five a day for some weeks. Mandarins are showing signs of producing a large crop; plenty of water needed. Pomegranates too.

The sensation of stepping onto this well worn pathway and the joy of the early morning atmosphere is exhilarating. I am loathe to end these walks. As well as the physical exercise, my mind is usually busy with diverse problems – how to write a short narrative by Wednesday, or what to use, acrylic, pastels or oils on my newest abstract.

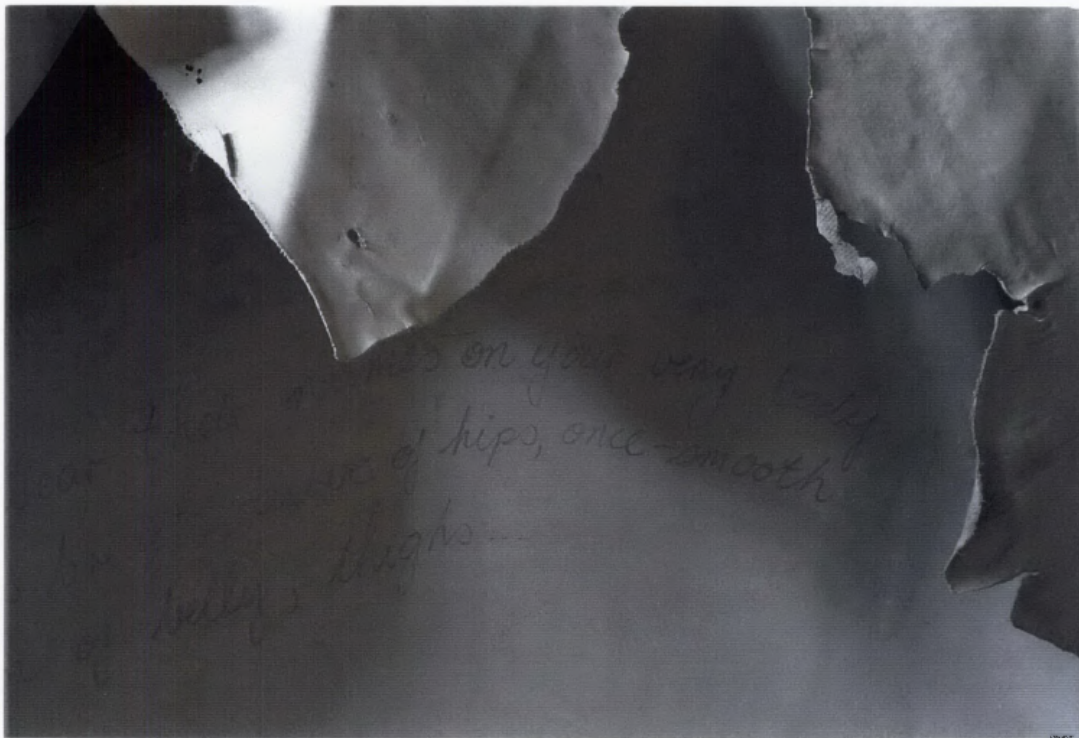
Sometimes carry a pair of secateurs with which to prune some recalcitrant, vine, bush or tree. Also must drag along a leafy branch on which Zoe and Ruby love to pounce. It is very gratifying to be able to perform all these activities when formerly I could barely walk. During the time before knees had been pronounced operable and between two total knee replacements, two walking sticks were often necessary.

(Yvonne, group journal, March 1999)



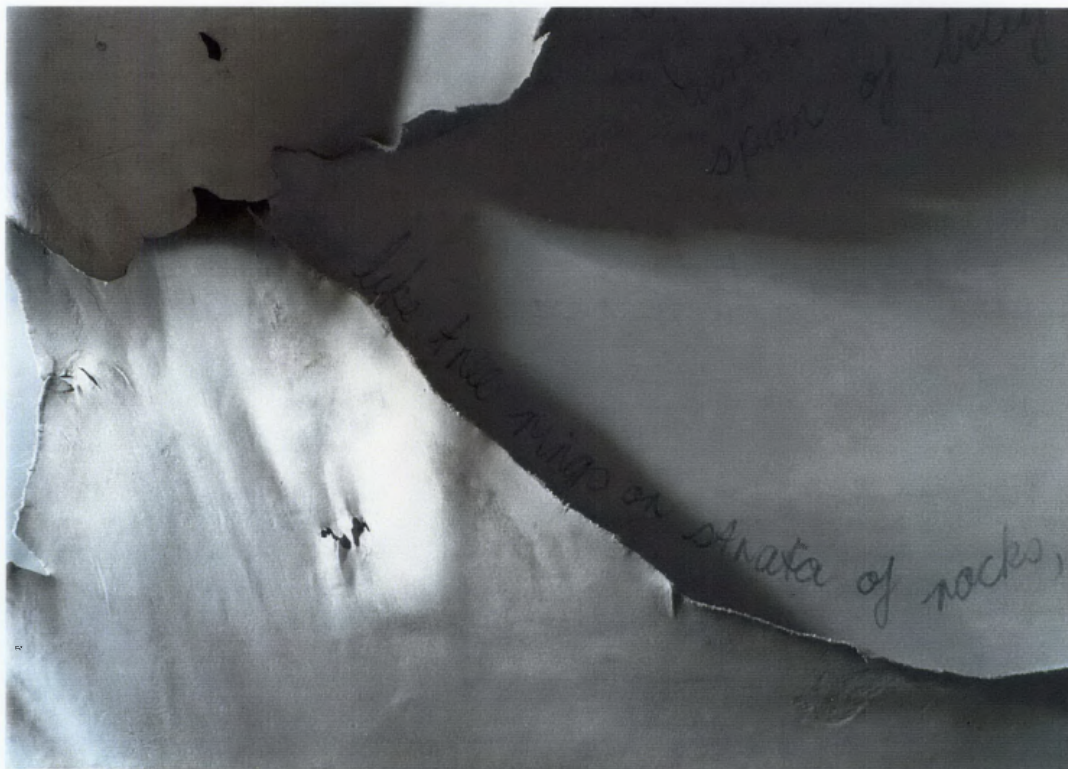
Star Trek Essays

artist, Yvonne Galvin



detail, *Stretch Marks*

artist Lynda Row



detail, *Stretch Marks*



Stretch Marks

artist Lynda Row

*You would have to have something you could touch and feel the roundness
You would have to go round it
And be able to touch it
(Lynda, April, 1999)*



Trace Elements

artist Lynda Row



details, *Trace Elements*

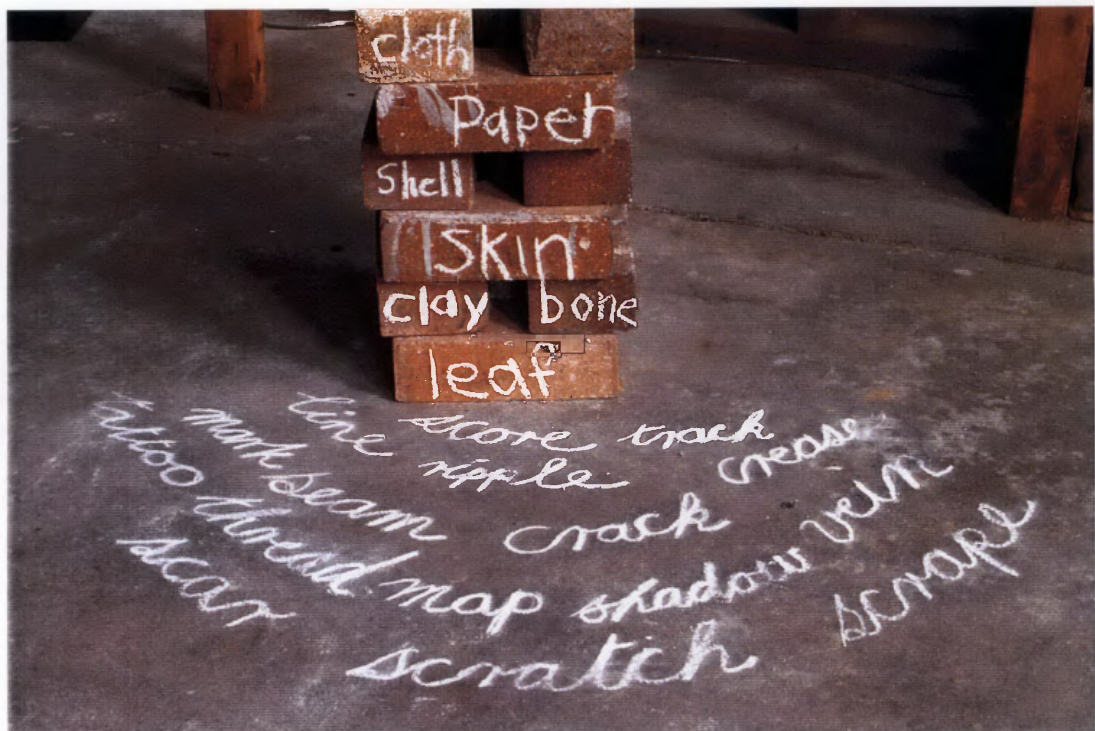


Stretch Marks

artist Mary Hutchison

My stretchmarks - the marks of the stretch I make across the space between. The stretch I make to hear your voice and speak it back to you. The stretch between my place and your place.

*Am I the gum leaf, fresh, velvety, pen soaking richly into my fabric,
am I the unwieldy bar, the dry curved leaf, the knot, the curl, the twist?
What marks do I make, what are my movements in place?
(Mary, 10/8/99)*



details, *Stretch Marks*

Performing place, self and community

One way of thinking about these two events is to see them as part of the same dialectic of performing an emplaced self and community but each with a particular emphasis. In the performance of the '*Library Night*' effective emphasis is on the way a collective vocal performance is made up by many different participants. The *exhibition* performance focuses visually on the specificity of individual productions in that dynamic.

The Library Night

The library event offers participants the opportunity to innovatively represent what has been offered in the workshops in general and towards the development of artworks in particular. It aims for a certain integrity and truthfulness because grounded in the lived experience of the project so far. It offers not a single monolithic account but a mobile one that takes account of both individual and collective shared experiences within the project, and continues to address itself back to a wider social milieu in which it is variously embedded. This milieu is more or less intimate (lovers, family, friends); more or less neighbourly, more or less formally structured (the librarian, the mayor, the tourist people, a society member and business house or two).

I understand us collectively modelling the notion of a performing/becoming self in a complex 'show and tell' – one that occupies that borderline Carter speaks of, performing the space of what can be said and what can only be acted out. What we perform is the importance of physical bodies to meaning making; the pleasures, excitements and challenges of a process of learning as embodied women. We make our presence felt, our physicality felt, insisting on it prior to offering any artworks, insisting on it as central to both the process of learning and producing an artwork. I think of this as offering an embodied potential reading/writing position for the audience. So that it becomes at the same time a learning process for them. It is a deliberate intervention – body to body, to re/embody an audience. In this way the women perform themselves simultaneously as learners and teachers; claim a space for expressing their own desires and pleasures and at the same time perform gestures of care and openness towards the other.

It is an enterprise that is collaborative, potentially messy, complex, unpredictable, risky; one that acknowledges the possibility that productive communication can emerge out of difference and misapprehension as well as recognition.

To create the space of dialogue it is necessary to make physically present the pre-semiotic space of communication where vocalisations have yet to be sheeted home to a meaning. It means drawing attention to the in-between sound of words passing back and forth between meaning and non meaning, (Carter, 1992b, 167-168).

This is to enlist voice/body/world relations that we have explored in the workshops, and while our performance does not aspire to the sound sculptures Carter works with (1992b), it does draw on similar understandings. In this performance the audience are required to orient themselves in an embodied, emplaced and relational way to make any sense. To make sense of the voices, going backwards and forwards in unpredictable ways and rhythms, stretching in a psychological as well as a physical sense to work out where this is coming from and going to, how it is placed.

Listening, the analysis of hearing, is not a panacea for a culture sick with seeing; but the binaural possibility of hearing “in the round”, of experiencing a perceptual reality that enlarges the subject even as it contains and confines him or her ... and symbolises what the eye tends to forget ... the body does not photograph the world, but filters it across permeable membranes (Carter, 1992b, 129).

Without the linear model that might come with the printed page, or the familiarity of a performance genre that offers ready made meanings, the listeners cannot avoid drawing on their own provisional embodied relationship to the specificity of this space and the others in it, to make sense. We make this unmistakeably clear in the way we seek responses following our collective piece.

The act of generating this (emplacedness) simultaneously for themselves, for each other, and for the other of the audience finds the women at the cusp of seeing themselves in the landscape. It is in the act of performing this for others, passing it on, that they come to see themselves fully in the landscape. The exhibition which follows is fully in the public domain.

The Exhibition

The recognition that such desire and energy has been generated by their Library Night performance gives critical impetus to the way the women subsequently perform the

Expressions of Place Exhibition and their individual artworks. It makes it possible for the women to conceive of not only finishing and presenting works (when for some this was still extremely daunting) but of having direct and creative input into the environment that will hold the works. We go on to produce a visual arts experience that is significantly inflected by what we have learned about materials of place, about the experiences of the lived body in place, about how we are as much performed by place and space as we perform them.

On one level this means working closely with the physical place that will house the exhibition. On another level it means considering the way the works might be culturally held, received and interacted with. Embracing the existing material qualities of the venue, including the sense of being in both a moment and a space that is transitional, there is acute awareness of the exhibition as a spatial practice. How might we inhabit this space and how might our audience be invited to inhabit it also, moving through it, engaging with it, responding physically, emotionally, imaginatively, conversationally?

Our exhibition place and the use of space is far from the usual. Rather than render a flat, white, blank surface on which to reify the works, which renders the context as background support, passive, empty – (like familiar cultural constructions of woman, body, matter) – we seek ways of having both work and ground co-present. Meaning is not seen to reside only within a two dimensional frame offering the illusion of depth, but produced with attention to milieu, in the complex way we have treated it in the workshops. Sense of place is expressed both within the works and within the exhibition through attention to surfaces as part of the interacting relationships of bodies and things in which we are all placed. But it is the spaces of women's everyday lives, the experiences of women's bodies, the subject positions these women take up that are seen to perform this here. It is not only that women's body/spaces take up a space within this larger public domain but overtly make place and space for others as well as themselves. It's a physical and emotional exchange that is offered, subject to subject. It's a way for us all to be there.

Expressions: Putting the self in the picture

Contradiction and ambiguity are strong features of many works. Different ideas about home, marriage and motherhood are raised and at the same time unsettled. Grief and loss, attachment

to land, sexual desire, themes of continuity/discontinuity and desire for change all explored. In some cases the artwork seems to capture the very moment of in betweenness, of becoming, on the cusp of change.

Jennie Hunt's installation '*Goddess Domestica*' explores the contradictions of being mother and wife. She acknowledges both the pleasures and satisfactions of 'a role I'm choosing for the time being to play' *and* the risks and losses to other aspects of self that seems to come with accepting that role, without obviously privileging one aspect over another. Although her wedding dress (which she had kept for years in pristine condition, carefully packed away) has been partly dipped in acid, shredded and torn, it is filled to overflowing with shiny luscious green apples. Despite the suggestion that her children may be eating her alive, they are nonetheless whimsical and delighting 'fairies' with their own magic. In articulating the paradoxical elements of her social environment in this way Jennie demonstrates a powerful speaking position that refutes her earlier perceptions of being only an onlooker.

Several artists examine and rework the way their experiences of place have previously been affected by separation, grief, a sense of loss or lack. For Catherine and Robin a physical return to this rural community, and to the community formed by the project, doubly marks this. Reestablishing a sense of belonging and relating to their physical environment is inextricably linked to reworking a sense of loss.

Catherine's father was a farmer and his suicide when she was a child has kept Catherine away from home with a sense of shame and exclusion. Is this the first loss on which all other subsequent ones seem to be predicated, she asks herself? Finding ways to turn this into productive underpinning, Catherine's hole/whole installation focuses on the ways a woman's work, her materials and practices might resist and refuse a logic of loss and separation. In the process she proposes and validates alternative ways of being and working in community.

Robin also explores, albeit more tentatively, her need to build herself back into the landscape and a place she can call home, after the deaths of her mother and a close friend. In 'Placemarks' she looks at the physical and emotional threads that are part of weaving herself in place. In the surfaces and textures from her material environment, her relationship to the tracks others have made before, she finds ways of acknowledging presence rather than absence, and connection rather than separation.

Wendy's work, '*Connections*', in which she writes a letter to her dead father, makes highly visible the textual environment she sees herself as embedded in. It is at once highly personal and highly theoretical. Books, words, writing, the struggles and pleasures of articulating herself within the textual, surround and form the context for the letter, just as they form the context and possibility for her existence, her sense of self. Poised between silences and speaking, father/daughter relations, Wendy's work potently holds the moment and the space between.

Earth, water, sky. In Barbara's telling of her work, 'Hanging on', clawing white bones of trees struggle for survival but are accompanied by Madonna blue sky and a pool suggestive of both soul and thirst quenching. Although death is not directly referenced, ritual and sacrifice are. I cannot help recall the unpursued story of her mother's Shirley Temple scrapbook and the stark contrast its dreams and aspirations posed against a lifetime reality of physical struggle and material poverty. What meanings can be made about and with this landscape? While Barbara points up the Catholic sensibility that has been instilled and must permeate her sense of place, it is by no means clear how problematic or otherwise that might be for her. Evoking the collisions between an ancient land and an alien farming practice, Barbara raises the question of sacrifice but leaves it to the viewer to surmise who or what is sacrificed.

In quite a different mode Sue Graham's leaf sculptures offer a joyful celebration of being in place. Focusing on universal cycles of living and dying in a very specific and intimately known bush environment, it is to a myriad of non human activities that she directs the viewer. Through her magnified view we are invited to share her curiosity and delight about some of the others with whom we share place.

Sue Davies, responding to a similar bush environment and to what she calls the 'spirit in things', surprises herself by invoking memories of childhood play and sewing with her mother. Through her doll characters, the place and self she pictures for us is part magic, part domestic and part wild, imaginative and playful. The boundaries between back yard and bush are blurred, and a single thread through the work connecting figures and parts of the landscapes might be a washing line, skipping rope, or umbilical cord.

It is literally Rita's backyard that she takes to express herself in place. It is from there that she tracks the changing of seasons and from there she can survey the world, north, south, east and

west. In a sense the world comes to her, right there - flowers, birds, storm and sun, frost and dew, sunset and sunrise. Making herself and her immediate physical environment the centre from which to reflect, Rita also combines different forms of expression that have been hitherto kept separate. Photography has remained distinct from her art practice, her painting, though she uses both to record and celebrate the unique patch of native orchids she protectively oversees. All three are present in this work, and one might read the tearing of photographs collaged with other materials as a radical reconnection.

The garden is the place Margo chooses too. A sand path on the floor, edged with succulents, 'paved' with small paintings, takes us into the larger painting – her garden suggested, abstracted, dominated by a mysterious and dark doorway which stands, compels, on the other side. Are we invited to consider going in or coming out? Or the moment, the space between? This garden seems to be about liminal space both seductive and perhaps foreboding, evoking the unknown as well as the sensual pleasures of the familiar. We step in with the crunch of sand, fleshy presence of green leaf. So domestic and close to home as it were, and yet with the potential to open into states unknown.

Whereas I understand Margo exquisitely incorporating multiple elements of place and choosing to represent them from a liminal perspective, Yvonne seems to project the viewer, the reader, quite dramatically into a strangely disembodied and place-less future. It seems like a radical rejection of here and now, this body, this place, to re work the story lines of a cult science fiction movie as her expression of place. Is it an exercise of authority and control, killing off already fictional characters or does it compel us to think about what is made absent?

A number of the group extend their body/place explorations to various expressions of body as place, place as body, raising very particularly the co-constitution of selves and place. In Sylvia's slide installation, the intertwined limbs of ancient trees are highly resonant of female form, bark wrinkles are almost indistinguishable from human flesh. With ironic comment on masculinist models of desire, domesticity and women's capacity to represent themselves in the landscape, she articulates a very passionate desiring subject in place. '*Stone Lace*', a partner piece, addresses some of the specific exchanges she sees taking place between her and her landscape. In a play between lightness and a need for groundedness, Sylvia considers not setting down roots but creating routes.

In three related pieces Carolyn uses traditional stitching and embroidery techniques in a non traditional way. Invoking assumptions about the ‘gentle and decorative arts’, she at the same time profoundly disturbs and subverts them - drawing attention to an extraordinary vulnerability and fragility in body/place relations through the image of a snail where body and home are inextricably linked.

Dell’s maps draw on both her sense of continuity with a particular environment, her second skins of home and garden and the surrounding landscape, and a desire to extend both geography and sense of self. The material papery flesh of flowers and bark, layered and interleaved in one map, talk to painted tracery of streets superimposed upon the vein structure of a leaf in another. From a deep sense of being embedded in place she suggests routes for moving beyond as well as around one’s known territory. Perhaps it is that the familiar can also become strange and new.

The marks of continuity and connection concern Lynda too. A family, a history, mapped on a female body, etched, layered, irrevocably traced in flesh and bone, is compared to the traces and histories embedded in rock, tree and environmental flesh in ‘*Stretch Marks*’. ‘*Trace Elements*’ offers a particular moment of tracing and marking, that also invites others into new and imaginative linkages, not only or necessarily visible, tangible or permanent. As well as wanting to suggest the light touch of a form floating in the landscape, this mobile piece caught up each day’s movements, of people passing by and touching, adding new and shifting patterns.

Body/place, self /other, skin, paper, stone. Wondering what her own *Stretch Marks* are, Mary takes up the question of the stretch between self and other, individual and community, and between body and landscape. Her finely pleated tissue text is based on NRMA strip roadmaps, indicating the distances she stretches herself over as she travels in her work. The concertinaed, stretching text, uplifted by wood and brick and metal, makes no bones about the self Mary would put in the picture – a self as revisable, elastic, mobile and particular as place itself.

Performing place. Performing selves. Putting selves to work in ways that are never only personal, these women are performing acts of community and place making. Making future

possibilities out of the lived realities of daily lives. Making spaces, places and practices in which other questions can be sensible. Making new things possible to be thought.