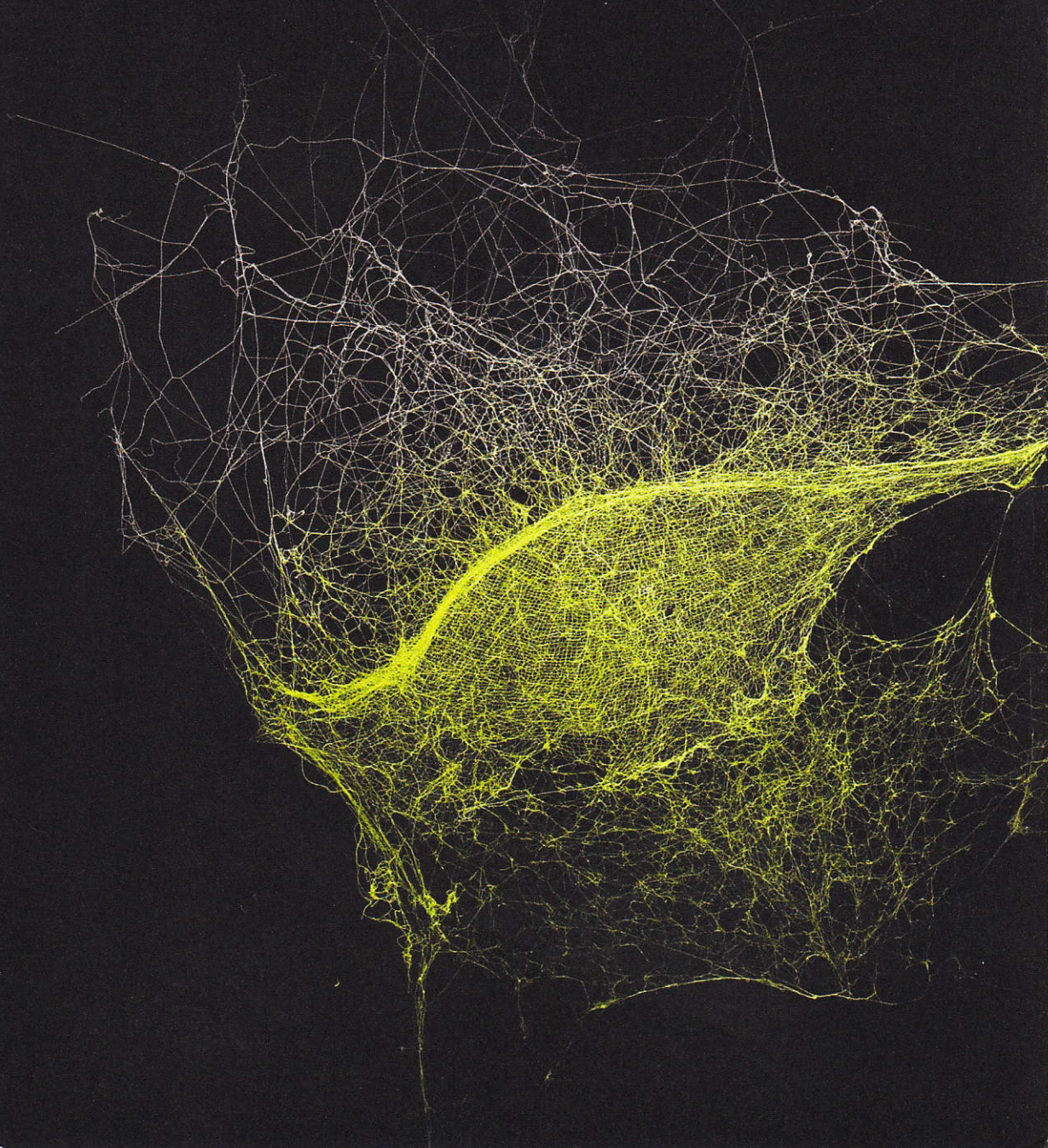


UN-ACCLIMATISED



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Catherine Bennetts-Cash

MAN AND NATURE MY ASS. *Human progression and other modernist myths* 2011 by Clare Milledge reads as a blunt response to our present state of environmental distress. Painted in capital letters on glass over hessian, the work is raw both linguistically and materially. It registers an artist's protest at humanity's inability to reach a balanced and sustainable relationship with nature. It wryly pinpoints the schism between society and nature, a point of tension, even crisis, at the forefront of social, political and creative consciousness.

This awkward juncture between society and nature is the focus of *Un-acclimatised*. Based on works from the Monash University Collection, *Un-acclimatised* examines modes through which contemporary Australian artists express their connection to, and concern for, the natural environment. The works reflect a sense of uncertainty, disjuncture, vulnerability and nostalgia as they explore both the affinities and estrangement that exist in the nature-culture contract.

Our incursion upon the natural environment is immediately apparent on the fringe of cities where new residential developments embody the ever-encroaching suburban sprawl. In Rosemary Laing's *Prowse* 2010, the timber frame of a house is planted upside down amongst a stand of majestic gums. As if dropped from the sky, this structure is clearly out of place. If the scene might once have been painted as the idealised pastoral, as in the landscapes of Hans Heyesen or the Heidelberg School, *Prowse* suggests a shift to a new Australian identity and lifestyle, as another tract of farm land disappears.

Yet nature continues to find its way through the suburban barrier. *Cat's cradle* 2004 and *Scene 3* 2003 by Siri Hayes depict the Merri Creek which runs through Melbourne's inner suburbs. The figures appear diminutive in their surrounds, reminiscent of sublime Romantic landscapes. However, these works are also unsettling. Evidently contemporary, the environment is overgrown with European grasses and trees entangled with rubbish.

Universal love / unconditional regard 2 1995-1996 by Geoff Lowe examines our experience of place

from a global perspective, and the relationship between ecologies, faith and community. A representation of Earth linking directly to the hole in the ozone layer presides over the landscape. Several dispersed objects convey a strong sense of disconnection. A double neck guitar, amplifier, camera and two figures having sex appear as carnivalesque motifs. The Virgin Mary with arms extended in petitionary prayer appears throughout the scene. One can imagine the communal experience of nature and music as Lowe comments on the collective capacity of communities to create environmental awareness, and the global implications of a failure to do so.

Showing an affinity with the natural world, *Starfish* 2004 by Roy Wiggan is one of a series of dance wands called *ilma* which represent a vocabulary of stylised emblems. Although traditionally made with natural materials, Wiggan has constructed the work using paint on plywood and brightly coloured acrylic yarn. Cotton-wool, employed as a substitute for the sacred material of bird down, speaks of the ethereal. The fragile materiality and celebratory colour honour the delicacy and vulnerability of the elements – of land and sea – that the work represents.

Sandra Selig's suite of fifteen drawings titled *Universes* 2007 similarly speaks of ethereal forces. The artist has captured spider webs and carefully imposed them onto black paper with enamel paint. The webs are modest in scale yet complex in form, robust yet fragile. They evoke links between the natural and technological worlds. The title also suggests that these works might be understood as analogous to larger networks. Encompassing the macro and micro, and cycles of existence and decay, they reveal the complexity, beauty and transience of the natural world.

The works in *Un-acclimatised* invite feelings of wonderment at the intricacy of nature and concern for the environmental imbalance that we must address. They hold a sense of both connection and alienation as they engage with the uncertainty of how humanity and nature will travel into the future.



Above

Rosemary Laing

Prowse 2010

type C photograph

83.0 x 157.5 cm

Siri Hayes

Cat's cradle 2004

type C photograph

112.0 x 142.0 cm

Opposite left

Geoff Lowe

Universal love / unconditional regard 2 1995-1996

synthetic polymer paint on linen
182.0 x 244.0 cm

Opposite right

Roy Wiggan

Starfish 2004

synthetic polymer paint on
plywood and cotton-wool
88.0 x 88.0 cm

List of works

All works from the Monash University Collection unless otherwise stated.

Lydia Balbal Gjinabalyi / Wugubalyi

Martakulu 2010
acrylic on linen
171.0 x 205.0 cm
Purchased 2010

Siri Hayes

Cat's cradle 2004
type C photograph
112.0 x 142.0 cm
Purchased 2005
Scene 3 2003
type C photograph
112.0 x 142.0 cm
Purchased 2005

Rosemary Laing

Prowse 2010
type C photograph
83.0 x 157.5 cm
Purchased 2011

Geoff Lowe

Universal love / unconditional regard 2 1995-1996
synthetic polymer paint on linen
182.0 x 244.0 cm
Purchased 2005

Clare Milledge

Human progression and other modernist myths 2011
oil on glass, hessian, frame
94.0 x 75.0 cm
Private collection
Sublime solar anus 2011
oil on glass, frame
94.0 x 75.0 cm
Private collection

James Morrison

The island 2001
oil on linen
100.0 x 100.0 cm
Purchased 2002

Susan Norrie

Natural disasters (one) 1995
cibachrome photograph
171.0 x 142.0 cm
Purchased 1995
Natural disasters (two) 1995
lacquered custom board
20.0 x 220.5 x 10.0 cm
Purchased 1995
Natural disasters (three) 1995
lacquered timber
91.5 x 122.0 x 18.0 cm
Purchased 1995
Natural disasters (four) 1995
synthetic polymer paint and resin on canvas
50.0 x 38.0 cm
Purchased 1995
Natural disasters (five) 1995
synthetic polymer paint and resin on canvas
240.0 x 180.0 cm
Purchased 1995

Sandra Selig

Universes 2007
spider silk, enamel and fixative on paper
each 42.0 x 29.5cm
Purchased 2008

Blair Trethowan

Change 2005
neon tubing, electrical components
40.0 x 220.0 cm
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Wendy Foard and Peter Bate in memory of Blair Trethowan 2009

Roy Wiggan

Starfish 2004
synthetic polymer paint on plywood and cotton-wool
88.0 x 88.0 cm
Purchased 2005



Un-acclimatised

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Monash University Gippsland Campus
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Cover

Sandra Selig

Universes (detail) 2007

spider silk, enamel and fixative on paper
42.0 x 29.5 cm