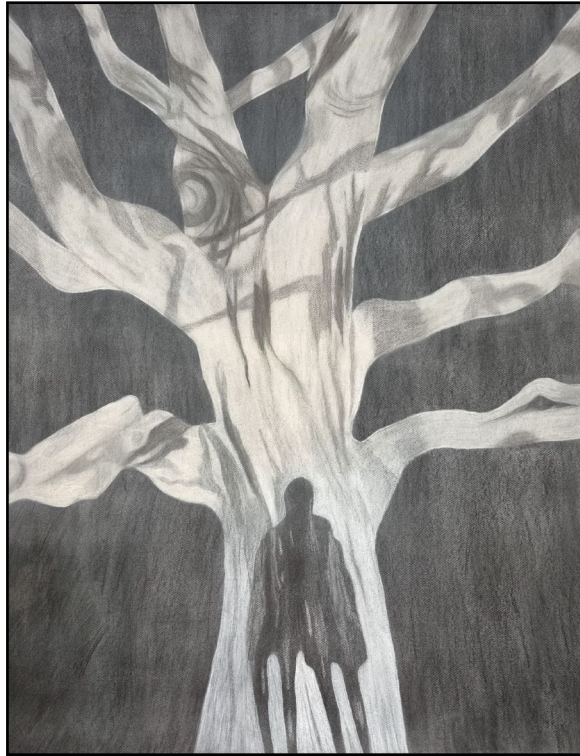


# LISTENING EARTH

Curated by Felicity Spear



**Lesley Duxbury**  
**Vicki Hallett**  
**Felicity Spear**  
**Debbie Symons**  
**Rosie Weiss**

## Listening Earth

*Fields have eyes and forests have ears and I will hear if I remain silent and listen.*

This quote is from an old Dutch proverb referenced by researcher Lev Dyakov discussing the work of Netherlandish artist Hieronymus Bosch 1450-1516, & his drawing *The Hearing Forest & the Seeing Field*. Bosch appeared to be on a surreal journey in which the themes of his work depict bizarre extremes of human behaviour & religious belief within the context of the natural world.

Consider for a moment an untouched forest. It is a refuge for the living, the wild & the sacred. In Bosch's time it symbolised everything unknown & mysterious, becoming a metaphor for the path of life. Today our understanding of the forest is less mysterious although ironically its fate remains a metaphor for the path of life. If there were an untouched forest it would be an environment where all things contribute to the web of life, sharing communications & sending & receiving information. All equally subject to the laws of entropy, to decay & regeneration combined. But does there remain such a forest now? One which has escaped the human enterprise of domesticating & rationalising the world?

Enclosed in its own particular sensory environment every form of life has access to a unique set of smells, sights, sounds & textures reflecting its own sliver of reality. If we were able to access sensory environments other than our own what kinds of interactions might be possible with other forms of life? Beyond human hearing, a cacophony of sound emissions pass all around us, linking billions of living beings in aural networks. But this sonic biodiversity, evolved over millions of years, is in decline, fading towards extinction, drowned out by the noise of humans.

Listening Earth invites us to tune in to the network, life on our planet, & listen. Consider what we are hearing, what we are not hearing, what we are communicating to other forms of life, & what they are communicating to us. Would our perceptions of Nature be more empathetic if we imagined a 'reverberation' and 'dispersion' of sensory awareness connecting all life in the biosphere?

**Felicity Spear 2023**



**Rosie Weiss:** "Silver Layered" 2023 pencil & pigmented ink on paper 380 x 285



**Vicki Hallett:** "Mmabolela – Approaching Storm Over the Bushveld" (A performance installation composition created from field recordings & live performance)

# LISTENING EARTH

August 16 / September 2

2023



Stephen McLaughlan Gallery  
Room 816 37 Swanston Street  
On the corner of Flinders Lane  
Nicholas Building Melbourne



**Lesley Duxbury:** Unlike the earth, the sky is a universal space; it is not owned & there is no dispute between humans & nature for possession. While the natural world on earth is in decline & animals clash with humans over habitat, little has changed in the sky. In these images I have merged John Constable's skies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, close to the time Australia was colonised, with my own photographs. The calls of certain common native & non-native birds punctuate the clouds. Once separated on opposite sides of the earth, these birds now exist together sharing the same skies as a network of interconnected species.

**Vicki Hallett:** Through an extensive exploration of natural sound environments I focus on creative approaches to environmental sonic recordings & the role of dedicated listening. This work was developed from a field recording trip to the bushveld of Limpopo, South Africa. I then created Mmabolela Storm, a reflective live performance. As the storm front approaches over the African bushveld, it heralds the arrival & cool relief of the wet season. The recording features amongst a variety of sounds, the voice of guide William Mosima, my voice through the clarinet, rain & thunder, various wild animals calling across the bushveld, underwater sounds & finally a chorus of frogs.

**Debbie Symons:** These works feature intimate portraits of native species housed within the Melbourne Museum's collection. My paintings utilise techniques reminiscent of early colonial documentation, exploring the subject's unique characteristics in detail. However, instead of illustrating species within the 'landscape', the portraits identify themselves as taxidermied animals, still & silent, with their collection tags, labels, or supports included in the pictorial space. Numerous species documented so richly during the colonial 'discovery' period are now registered as critically endangered in the wild. My paintings draw attention to the 'loss' that has emerged from colonialism's perceived 'gains' & the extinction crisis in which we now find ourselves.

**Rosie Weiss:** I began drawing the invasive species couch grass after the 2020 fires. It has become a symbol of potential lack of species diversity in a changing climate. 'Back to the garden' signals a universal call for help & refers to the last two lines in the chorus of Joni Mitchell's Woodstock song, 'And we've got to get ourselves, back to the garden'. I've also been working with tap roots that I find in wild places, the root often the only part of the eroded plant remaining & appearing to me as part of an ancient language, passing on a message of endurance & belief.



**Lesley Duxbury:** "The sky is for all #1" 2023 archival inkjet print with interference watercolour on paper 520 x 770



**Debbie Symons:** "Melbourne Museum C2790" 2023 oil on board 350 x 275

<<<< (far left) **Rosie Weiss:** "Angels" 2023 pencil & pigmented ink on paper 380 x 285

**Felicity Spear:** "Echo" 2023 (on cover) >>>> charcoal & pastel on paper 1500 x 1000