

## Listening Earth – wall texts

### Lesley Duxbury

Unlike the earth, the sky is a universal space; it is not owned and there is no dispute between humans and nature for possession. To date it has not been divided into territorial zones. While the natural world on earth is in decline and animals clash with humans over habitat, little has changed in the sky over centuries. Clouds come and go across space and time and have been a concern of both scientists and artists. Although several other species need the sky, it is predominantly the domain of birds. Until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and except for a few migrating birds, Australian skies were the preserve of Australian birds. However, since colonisation they have been joined by a number of newcomers who arrived with, predominantly English immigrants. In these images I have merged images of John Constable's skies from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, close to the time Australia was colonised, with my own photographs of the sky. The calls of certain common native and 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

*Mmabolela Storm* – A performance installation composition created from field recordings and live performance. Image -*Approaching storm over the bushveld*

The storm front approaches and looms over the African bushveld. We are riding on the back of an open jeep, racing back to the safety and protection of the homestead. This storm is the first of the season, heralding the arrival and cool relief of the wet season. Our local guide William Mosima, a voice recalling generations of knowledge, tells us of the legends of the Mabolet site, the origin of 'Mother Speak' and the loss of a Chief's daughter to a crocodile. Tragedy emanates from this landscape. I look out across the rocky parched earth dotted with thorny acacia trees and reflect on the shared stories about local people attacked and killed by lions. The lion and the human, apex predators pitted against each other.

But hydrophone recordings also reveal a world hidden within this sonic wonderland. A clarinet joins us. It is an active participant, the voice of the field recordist immersed in this world. Rhythmic resonating pulses of stone on stone resound on a water trough found on one of the homesteads. High boundary fences provide safety and property delineation, but now they chime and writhe in response to wind and human interaction. A family group of Baboons call across the bushveld while Hippopotamus snort as they bathe in the river nearby. As the storm eases, a chorus of hundreds of frogs sing from within the waterhole. It is a moment of rapture as we stand within this choir, sonically massaged by their reverberating calls. Footsteps sound a retreat; it is time to let nature savour the wet relief and enjoy the feast of the erupting insects.

### Felicity Spear

While recognising that a complete grasp of natural phenomena is beyond the full range of our senses, only to be discovered further by remote sensing, my projects attempt to visualize, imagine or decode humans' interaction with the physical world, and the way these might interact to reflect relationships between worlds: the natural and constructed, and the human and non-human. We are witnessing a growing sense of pathos as we observe, influence and imagine the natural world and our relationship with it. My four diverse works: *Echo*, (charcoal and pastel drawing), *A Long Overdue Conversation*, (inkjet print/photograph of recent local cultural/cold burn), *One Thundering*

*Downpour*, (inkjet print/photograph of early spring rain) and *Resonance*, (oil painting), are intended to stimulate our audio-awareness and our potential for sense experience while also suggesting the ambiguities and connections that exist in the world and which we perceive and mentally construct. *Listening Earth* invites us to tune in to the network, life on our planet, and listen. Consider what we are hearing, what we are not hearing, what we are communicating to other forms of life, and 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 ?

Debbie Symons is a multi-disciplinary Australian artist whose practice emerged out of a concern with species loss and environmental changes. Her works explore humanity's complicated relationship with the natural environment, the dynamics of the global political economy, and consumer culture's effects, teasing out the links between colonialism, globalisation, and species demise. Symons' new body of works features intimate portraits of native species housed within the Melbourne Museum's collection. Her paintings utilise techniques reminiscent of early colonial documentation, with images exploring the subject's unique characteristics. However, instead of illustrating species within the 'landscape', the portraits identify themselves as taxidermied animals with their collection tags, labels, or polystyrene supports included in the pictorial space. Void of the trimmings documented in the works of 18th-century artists John Gould, Edward Lear, George Kearsley Shaw, and Helena Forde, Symons presents the viewer with a still and silent portrait. Numerous species documented so richly during the colonial 'discovery' period are now registered as critically endangered in the wild. Her works draw attention to the 'loss' that has emerged from colonialism's perceived 'gains' and the extinction crisis we now find ourselves in.

#### Rosie Weiss

*Back to the garden* 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'. Usually my drawings are prompted by collecting plant remnants that are worn down to their essential structures, however during the COVID lockdowns I had to look closer to home and began working with the invasive species couch grass, bending and tying it into shapes as it dried. The emergent forms became linguistic in nature, and *Back to the garden* signals a universal call for help. This 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'. After witnessing areas affected by the 2020 Victorian bushfires, I wondered what might colonise the silent hillsides, and invasive couch became a symbol of a potential lack of species diversity in a changing climate. I've been drawing taproots, intrigued by the feeling I'm eavesdropping and amazed by the strength and vitality of the roots themselves — often the only part of the plant still intact when I come across them. A particular spot on the ocean cliffs of Mornington Peninsula is so wild that plants must survive under extreme conditions, and their eroded remnants appear to me as part of an ancient language. When working with them I feel they are passing on some kind of message, perhaps one of endurance and belief.