



# BIOSPHERE

*a sense of belonging*

Curated by Felicity Spear

**Debbie Symons** – *Sing Notes*: Sing communicates the disaster unfolding within many tropical environments through an emotive exploration of loss and wonder and encourages reflection on notions of home and what becomes of species when their habitats are forever lost. Humankind's removal of wild spaces is a significant element in what scientists are calling the sixth mass extinction event currently occurring across the globe. Sing explores home through handwoven nests created from the oil palm fronds, a deliberate act to draw attention to deforestation and monoculture, with palm oil plantations accounting for 10% of permanent global cropland. Sing is a significant new work created in response to Symons' 2018 Labverde residency in Manaus, State of Amazonia, Brazil. **Sing** – installation detail >



**Harry Nankin** – *Moths, Snow and Fire*: Bogong Moths (*Agrotis infusa*) are a 'keystone' species critical to and dependent upon a rare upland ecosystem likely doomed by anthropogenic climate change. An estimated four billion once migrated from the hot inland plains to the cool of the mountains each year. Pre-invasion they were feasted upon by local clans each summer. Alone among invertebrates the moths navigate by celestial optical cues and an internal magnetic compass. These moth shadows were recorded directly on film without a camera at night outside their aestivation cave at The Horn, Mount Buffalo during the summer of 2011-12: over the 'black summer' of 2019-20 the area was obliterated by bushfire. The moth imagery is accompanied by recent pictures of that burnt zone and a vista of a snow and Snowgum covered escarpment made around 1985, when the high country still felt largely wild, intact and safe. **After the Fire, 2021**. Seven Inkjet prints reiterating iPhone snaps of the post-bushfire exclusion zone around The Horn, Mount Buffalo in spring 2020. Each print, image 250 x 360 >



**Rosie Weiss** – *Skull, Couch Grass and Fire*: In early 2020 I visited the fire grounds of East Gippsland and collected burnt plant remnants, many of which have since disintegrated due to the intensity of the fires. The work 'Do you still love me? Asked the earth' is a response to that experience. It was overwhelming to find areas of regeneration followed by places where no thing stirred, places of absolute silence, without a single green shoot, insect or bird. This has led me to make a series of couch grass works, wondering what plant could endure and regenerate if we continue to ignore climate change warnings, (as couch is so widespread in both the Northern & Southern Hemispheres). I imagined the humble couch as the last lonely green shoots in a lost Biosphere, a monosphere of couch. I placed these five works in a cross formation, perhaps not as a religious cross but maybe as band-aids, or as a medical sign – **'Do you still love me? Asked the earth'** 2020 Pencil, Chinese & Pigmented Inks on Arches 566 x 760 >



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Gracia Haby &  
Louise Jennison

Harry Nankin

Felicity Spear

Debbie Symons

Rosie Weiss

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Sept/Oct 2021

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



**Felicity Spear** – (cover image): A beautiful moth fell from the eucalypts to rest for a time on my studio steps. Wings dark as night, dusted coal black, shadow and portent of its fate. "This is coal. Don't be afraid!" said the man. Recall - 2019. Temperatures exceed records, fire danger levels 'catastrophic', life turns to ash. Those who opened themselves to the science, the folly of burning fossil fuels, filled with a sense of foreboding. Reflecting the Moon's light myriad creatures disturbed the water's surface. The ebb and flow of lunar attraction, mirroring time and life itself. Forecast - 2030 NASA . A flip in a natural moon cycle, climate changes, warming seas, littoral floods, coastline retreats, rapid, dramatic. Water, mediator between life and death. Living in the oceans and waterways, micro-algae, ancient in origin, indicators of change, intricately patterned diatoms, coated in silicon. Giving back oxygen to the Earth. The air we breathe from algae made of glass. Inhale...exhale. *Darkness falls, (after Melanodes anthracitaria)* 2020-21 (detail) 1250 x 1750 charcoal and conté on archival paper. >>> over:

**Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison** – There were once trees growing under the roads. There are still creeks flowing beneath the directional pathways we've imposed. Patches of green remain, here and there. Pieces of what was, though dimmer, diminished. A jigsaw forest that hints at what could have been, should have been, and echoes the sprung rhythm words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, "After-comers cannot guess the beauty been". Elevation gain 243 m; length of loop 6.7 km. The green patch on the map had looked sizable, but it turned out to be less so. Ringed by roads that flatten the ancient connections of nature's web beneath the value systems of efficiency, profit, and ownership: the remaining forest. One continuous tract of land no more, the small, remaining forest holds on. I walk to peel back the roads and see what's beneath, what the world looks like from a different vantage point.... Excerpt and detail (below) from the artists' book *Something reverberated* (2021).



**Enveloping the enormous mass of our planet is the Biosphere**, a razor thin membrane supporting all life. Also called the ecosphere, it is the world-wide sum of all ecosystems. Essentially we are organisms within these systems, absolutely dependent on, and interdependent with other organisms. The interplay of the climatic system and biological diversity determine the effectiveness and resilience of this shield, the Earth's biosphere, air, land, and water. Considering ourselves rulers of the biosphere however, we humans believe we are entitled to do anything to the rest of life that we wish.

Cumulative human culture has now become a significant global force, imposing an unprecedented impact on the operation of the Earth system. So much so that the current geological era has been proposed as the Anthropocene. Our planet's 7.6 billion people represent just 0.01% of all living things, but since the dawn of civilisation humanity has caused the loss of 83% of all wild mammals and half of the plants. As human activity scales down Earth's ecosystems and life becomes progressively less biodiverse, the biosphere becomes less resilient to changing circumstances and more difficult to maintain. It is in the self-interest of humanity to avoid pushing ecosystems or the entire Earth system across tipping points.

Nature's surfaces are seductive. But beneath them lies a deep sense of pathos revealed in the destructive power of humanity. The artists represented in *Biosphere - a sense of belonging*, reflect on the wonder, complexity and the interconnected diversity of life within the biosphere. They reflect on the unfolding tragedy revealed in the fragility of life forms, indicators of ominous changes within ecosystems. They invite us to think about our sense of belonging within the natural world and the role which empathy might play in the future. Examples of empathy in other animals would suggest a long evolutionary history leading to this capacity in humans. The challenge of maintaining the resilience of the biosphere in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond relies on our understanding that we are all connected. We belong to the biosphere. It does not belong to us.

**Felicity Spear 2021**