



**Sculpture in the Botanic Gardens
+ Watt Space Gallery**





Artists

Tracie Bertram Andy Devine Michael Garth Tom Ireland Kelly-Anne Lees Fiona Lee Louisa Magrics Will Maguire
Megan McCarthy Brett McMahon Edwardo Milan Vlase Nikoleski Greg Salter Kris Smith Shellie Smith Andrew Styan
Peter Tilley John Turier Patricia Wilson-Adams

Curated by Rodney Cones-Browne

Sculpture in the Botanic Gardens + Watt Space Gallery
University Galleries | Watt Space and Hunter Region Botanic Gardens
21 July - 10 September 2023



**UNIVERSITY
GALLERIES**



Nineteen artists were invited to explore, challenge and interrogate the dialogue that has long existed between architectural sculptural form and the natural environment for this exhibition at the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens. Choosing their own site within which to work among the 130 hectares nestled on the lower reaches of the Hunter River, site and its specifics are at the core of the developed work for the 2023 response to the unique forest landscape of the gardens.

The primary inspiration from the external large-scale work extends the visual narrative from the sculptures nestled in the dense natural terrain to those in the mediated gallery environment. Each artist was invited to develop interventions into the vast external spaces and these have been wrought into domestic scale sculptures as maquettes or companion pieces to the in situ works for exhibition at Watt Space Gallery.

Gilleen Shaw - Art Curator
University Galleries | University of Newcastle

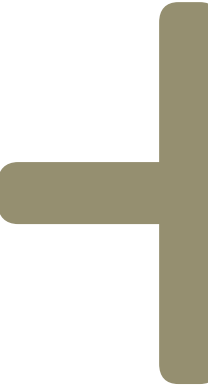
To me the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens is a magical place. A place where science and imagination come together. A place where the Hunter Valley meets the world through the various endemic and exotic plants on display. When art comes along through "Sculpture in the Gardens", this botanic landscape becomes a living gallery for the sculptures. A visit to see the art is invariably a visit to see the plants and vice versa.

As a scientist and a grandparent concerned about the changes that humanity is exponentially wreaking on the Earth's equilibrium, on the water balance, on the species devastation, I see through this wonderful embedment of art and its culture a chance to reflect on our life trajectory.

Consider this: fifteen minutes of sunlight gives the earth an equivalent amount of heat energy that is used by humankind in a year. Plants through photosynthesis and transpiration have managed this extraordinarily large input of energy from the sun for the last three hundred million years. Then came forest devastation with the Industrial Revolution and modern society. The fewer trees we have the greater amount of heat radiates and so the climate changes. Botanic Gardens are the repositories of plant genetic diversity, and it is that diversity that will provide the gene stock for coping with this changing climate into the future.

As you look at each sculpture enjoy its beauty, appreciate the thought and effort in its construction, interpret the creative thoughts and emotions of its artisan, but also feel the joy of this creation in the beauty of nature that is the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens.

Emeritus Professor Tim Roberts AM, Patron of Hunter Region Botanic Gardens
2023



Tracie Bertram

The interconnected and interdependent nature of rainforest environments strikes a chord with my own art practice, being a metaphor for the human experience and our ongoing reluctance to acknowledge our fundamental connection to the natural world.

The notorious Minoan Snake Goddess - c 1600 BCE was the catalyst for my own sculptural interpretations of the connected abundance found in the rainforest. My two works, titled the 'Bird Goddess' and 'The Mothership', aim to capture the same sense of fearless female power.

'Bird Goddess' is an Australian forest goddess who has had enough of the mortal world tearing up her territory and degrading the fabric of life. The koala on her crown symbolises the precarious state of our most iconic native animal. She is "flipping the bird" to show her anger and disgust.

'The Mothership' is a primitive rocket ship – a time travelling capsule where you can take nature with you wherever you go.

The Mothership (2023)

Recycled wood, wire, paper, cardboard, adhesive,
acrylic paint
2m x 1.2m x 1.2m



Bird Goddess (2007)

Ceramic
67cm x 25cm x 24cm

Andy Devine

The term 'House of Cards' or 'Card Castle' dates back to 17th century where a structure is built on unstable foundations or one that will disintegrate if a necessary element is removed.

The abstract focus expresses the ongoing fragility on our regional mineral exports across the world. Some of these minerals provide us with steel which is used in this structure for strength, texture and simplicity. There is beauty in the repetition of this industrial form. There is a sharp contrast between the structure and the beauty of the surrounding landscape. It is an ornamental folly, challenging the viewer. The perceived balance, structure and strength are ephemeral. The sculpture, like a House of Cards, will eventually collapse and succumb to environmental elements.

Card-castle 2023

63 Mild steel plates, gesso and acrylic alloy
1200cm x 1200cm x 200cm
(63 x 3mm steel plates)



Card-castle (Maquette) 2023

Mild steel
300mm x 300mm x 50mm
(63 mild steel plates)

Michael Garth

The titles of my artworks are descriptive of the two main weather systems that affect our climate.

The inspiration is derived from many trips to the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens at various times of the year and how the bush adjusts to each season - hence the vastly different works.

El Niño 2023

Bronze, Australian red cedar and reclaimed lenses
200cm x 500cm x 700cm



La Niña 2023

Timber
75cm x 40cm x 80cm

Tom Ireland

Technology is becoming an increasingly intrusive part of our lives, with AI just adding to our entwinement.

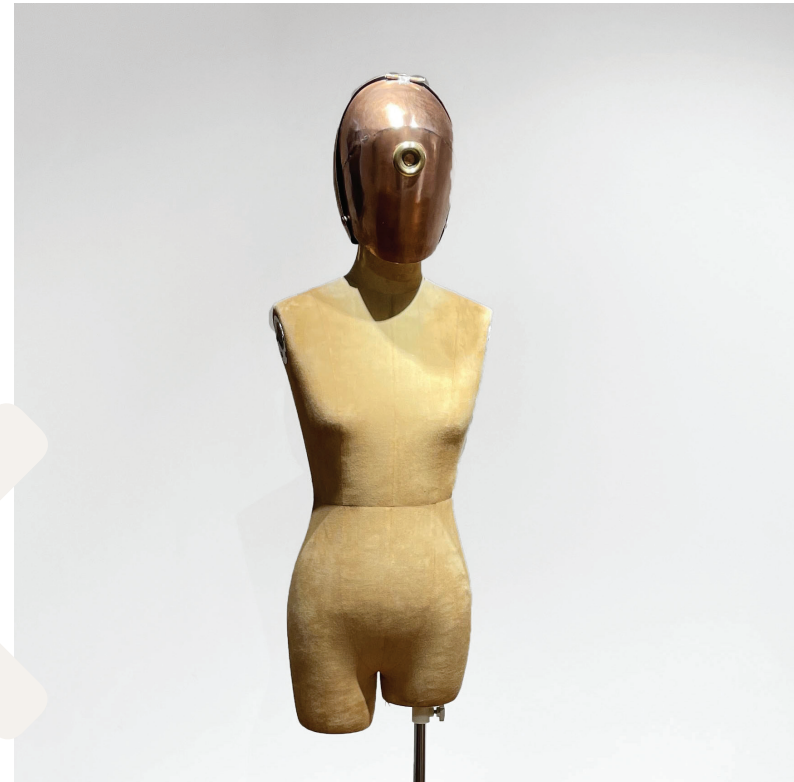
The faceless, shiny alien lurking in the forest of our natural world, is being represented by, just that, my botanical gardens installation. It could not be more incongruous with the beautiful surrounds of the forest floor.

The Schandmaske, or shame mask, is an atrocious relic from the Middle Ages that was used to lock onto a gossips or noisy persons head (predominantly female). It only fell out of fashion in the 17th century.

Technology, social media mostly, has us locking our heads into our own Schandmaskes.

Shiny Overlords 2023

Hand beaten aluminium sheet on aluminium frame
300cm x 120cm x 120 cm



Schandmaske 2023

Aluminium, copper and fabric mannequin
60cm x 30cm x 30cm

Kelly-Anne Lees

'Seed PTY LTD' is the synthesis of thought and concern about GMO food and our food supply. What would a GMO seed look like enlarged beyond the microscopic, threatening to engulf nature?

'Germination 2.0' is the unrecognisable shoot springing forth. How will the plant that results be pollinated and who will pollinate it?

Seed PTY LTD

Welded corten steel
170cm x 170cm x 170cm



Germination 2.0

Welded corten steel
128cm x 50cm x 48cm

Fiona Lee

My series of monolithic concrete trees serves as a stark commentary on the precarious relationship between human progress and the fragility of our natural world.

I have depicted the eerie remnants of what once thrived, the cold and unforgiving surfaces embodying the industrial dominance and humanity's relentless exploitation of our forests which has driven our ecosystems to the brink of collapse.

Amidst the gloom, however, there is a glimmer of hope. Embedded within the hardened exteriors are remnants of nature, fragments of resilient life struggling to endure. These details are also showcased in my indoor wall piece, 'Residual Traces: Imprints of Fire and Form' which is made from the burnt pine formwork I used to create the concrete casts.

Both of these works beckon viewers to question the cost of progress and our responsibility in safeguarding the delicate balance of our ecosystems.

***The Last Stand* 2023**

Cast concrete

Tall 180cm x 20cm x 20cm

Medium 120cm x 30cm x 30cm

Cuboid 60cm x 30cm x 40cm

Cube 25cm x 25cm x 25cm



***Residual Traces: Imprints of Fire and Form* 2023**

Recycled pine

118cm x 118cm

Louisa Magrics

My two crochet artworks explore the geometry of a cube and the contrast of colour. The 'Pink Web' installation in the Hunter Botanic Gardens utilises the geometry of a cube for its outer structure and features pink, yellow and purple hues, while the 'Twisted Infinity' sculpture at Watt Space has these colours inverted and uses a cubic form in the centre.

Both works explore the potential of using soft materials as a way to build intricate shapes and forms. By combining these pieces, I aim to create a dialogue between form and colour, underpinned by the use of both mathematics and yarn as a structural element.

Pink Web 2023
Crochet, acrylic yarn
300cm x 300cm x 300cm



Twisted Infinity 2023
Crochet, cotton and acrylic yarn
45cm x 30cm x 30cm

Will Maguire

'Drooping Blocks' focuses on the quiet energy of matter.

The intent is to open us up to the particulars of Kantian Beauty - a sense of 'disinterested satisfaction'. The disinterest is a form of mental side-stepping - placing to one side our context of needs and uses, and through the vitality of matter allowing its place in the world to connect you aesthetically.

I want you to be disinterested. To view these material posturings, not only seeing where they sit with you, but seeing them anew - as practically nothing and vitally present.

Scale is the main difference between the works. Scale in relation to the human. I suspect what is shifting is the content of our active disinterest - what, as it were, needs to be put aside to see the works for themselves. As I write, the large work is incomplete so I will be as disinterested as any to see it in place.

Drooping Block (outside) 2023
Forged steel and old eucalypt
200cm x 35cm x 100cm



Drooping Blocks (5 pieces) 2023
Forged steel and old eucalypt
54cm high x variable

Megan McCarthy

What's important to the artist in these works is the contrast between the materials used - cotton lace and fabric combined with cement fondu. Another layer of meaning is added when these man-made materials are placed into the natural world. In this case, the intention of the artist is irrelevant - it is the viewers interpretation that matters.

You are invited to write a 'viewers statement' in the book provided at the gallery creating a conversation between artist, object and audience.

***What have we done?* 2023**
Fabric and cement fondu
60cm x 40cm x 40cm



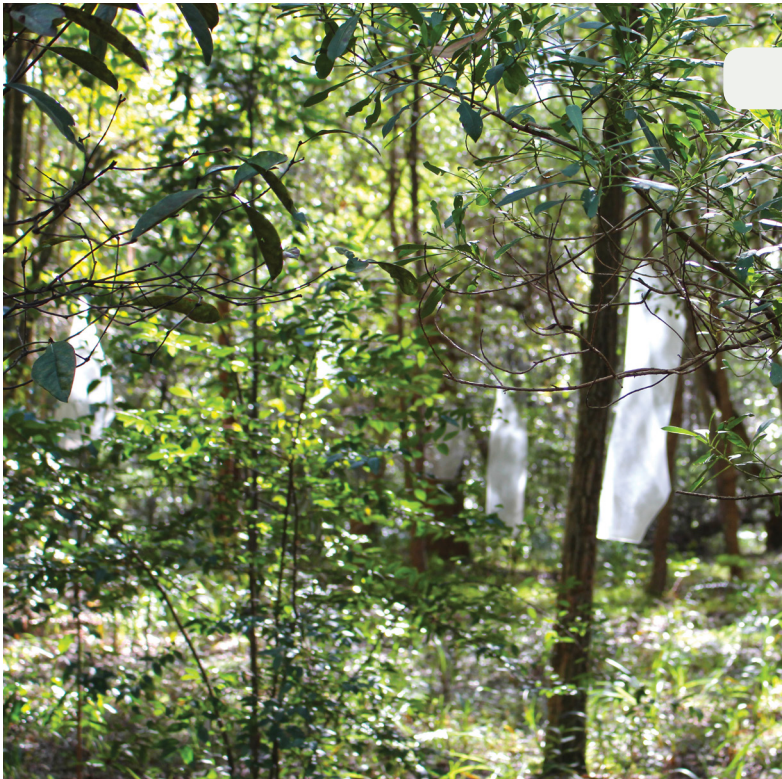
***What have we done? II* 2023**
Fabric and cement fondu
80cm x 40cm x 40cm

Brett McMahon

The opportunity to show two works in concurrent, but diametrically opposed spaces is a unique creative challenge. Each piece is in local conversation with its immediate surroundings, and in dialogue with its partner.

'Ghosts' is a multi-piece work that invokes past inhabitants of the forest. Part body, part spirit - they are designed to float in the landscape, reacting to wind and rain. 'Last Standing' by contrast, is a singular, quiet and still work that stands like the remnant of a long forgotten structure.

Ghosts 2021-23
Sanded, heat formed acrylic
Dimensions variable



Last Standing 2023
Carved river wood, gravel, wood
30cm x 40cm x 240cm

Edwardo Milan

The smaller work is an assemblage of elements, put together over time, that I make and swap around until the combination feels right. The playing. The doing. The making.

This method results in surprises and manifestations that keep me excited about art making.

I wanted to produce a large work for the gardens that was in part, ephemeral in its materiality, and connected to ideas of transience, place, and reflect the personal.

The work came about after visiting the site and wanting to make a bold, engaging, and roguish artwork that had an aesthetic relationship to the maquette. It is made from materials that will break down over time and the work will change and respond to its placement in the gardens.

The maquette explores the idea on a smaller scale, a personal reflection, an intimate artwork that explores the idea of losing my mind.

Losing my mind 2023
Mixed media
190cm x 95cm x 140cm



Losing my mind 2023
Mixed media
30cm x 20cm x 14cm

Vlase Nikoleski

Both sculptures stem from ecological and environmental issues resulting from human activity and climate change. They are also the result of my love of manipulating conventional sculpture materials and stretching their expressive boundaries. The work is poetic and the interpretation is multifaceted.

In 'Fish out of Water', the essential qualities of fish are recombined in vertical landscapes. Our interactions with fish and sea life are usually accompanied by the absence of water. This sculpture is positive in spirit and invites you to make your own interpretation.

'Shoal for Dinner' is a sculpture of fish on a dinner plate which evokes the movement of boundless fish swimming together in the ocean but now bound by the dinner plate. Seemingly boundless fish in the ocean have become finite through human intervention.

Fish out of Water 2018

Bronze, stainless steel and sandstone
254cm x 88cm x 88cm



Shoal for Dinner 2021

Cast bronze
51cm x 26.5cm x 27cm

Greg Salter

These two works are inspired by trips to visit my wife's family in Taiwan where I saw large river stones carved with faces and other features. Historically, these 'guardians' are represented in many different cultures, like the Tiki and Easter Island figures. 'Bolder' and 'Amputree' are my own spin on this symbolism in steel.

Bolder 2023

Steel

1200cm x 1200cm x 200cm



Amputree 2023

Steel

60cm x 50cm x 35cm

Kris Smith

Rather than casting light in an interior space, this modified domestic standing lamp placed in a bush setting (and replicated in a gallery setting) is itself being illuminated. Constantly changing natural light is not only 'lighting the light' but is also being focussed on a translucent textured acrylic screen placed within the lampshade.

This inverted image of a scene is typical of a 'camera obscura', a term first coined in 1604 AD to describe an object of this nature. Using such devices allowed artists to trace an accurate image of the perspective and structure of a complicated scene.

Currently, many of our observations of the world are mediated by digital screens. The image on the screen in this object is not the result of a digital translation or transmission: the viewer must place themselves in the natural environment of the object in order to witness the scene 'live'.

***Standing lamp with analogue live-stream obscura
image. V1. 2023***

Painted steel, sandblasted acrylic and lens
149cm x 70cm x 70cm



***Standing lamp with analogue live-stream obscura
image. V2. 2023***

Painted steel, sandblasted acrylic and lens
149cm x 75cm x 75cm

Shellie Smith

My creative practice focuses on the reawakening of dormant practice. By looking into archives, working with knowledge holders and through the recreation of objects, I can reconnect with my Awabakal heritage and contribute back to my Community.

These two works explore the dichotomy of the permanence and impermanence of object and cultural practice. Through the reawakening of traditional weaving methods, much can be learned about material, place, technique and self. The non-tangible aspects of making and sharing knowledge is captured in the semi-permanence of the organic material - lomandra. Casting the perishable aspects of this practice in bronze creates a permanent artefact that captures the form, but not the intent or the knowledge embedded in the making.

Poroongkul (impermanence) 2023

Bronze, stone

50cm x 30cm x 18cm



Poroongkul (permanence) 2023

Lomandra, aluminium, stone

50cm x 30cm x 18cm

Andrew Styan

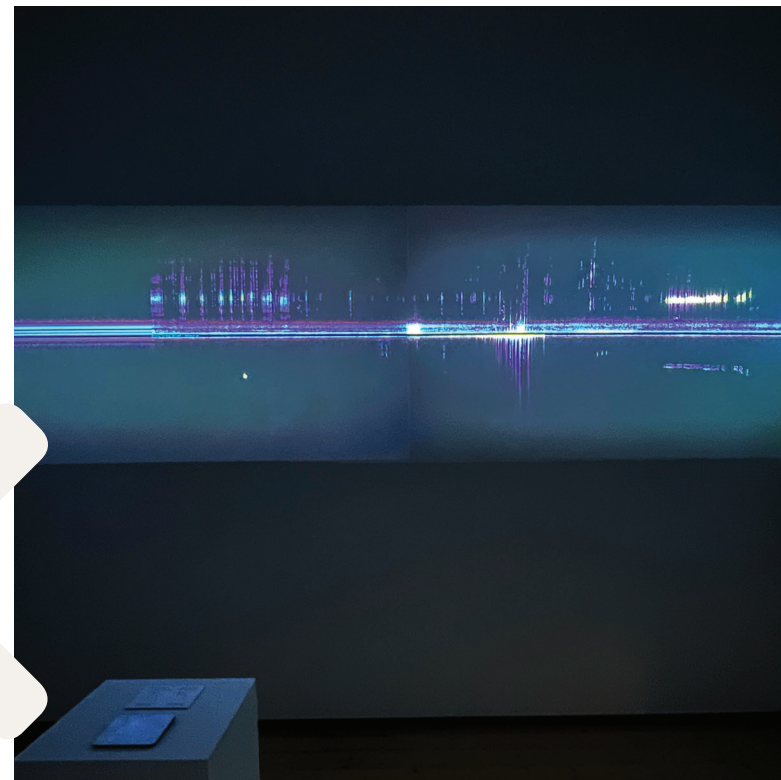
We rely on our senses to experience the world yet much of the world is hidden from us.

Just below the surface of any body of water is a world we do not ordinarily hear, see, feel or smell. This work expands our sensory experience to below the surface of Newcastle's wetlands, creeks, lake and harbour. The sounds above and below the surface that distinguish these locations remind us of the complex social, physical and biological systems in which we exist.

At the botanic gardens site, immersed in the visible and audible environment, we can listen to a recording of the sounds below. In the gallery installation, detached from their environments, we can explore many locations while immersed in a rich data visualisation of the sounds alone.

Credits: This research is towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art and is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship. Recording equipment made available by the University of Newcastle, School of Humanities, Creative Industries and Social Sciences.

Soundings: above and below (online) 2023
QR codes and online audio



Soundings: above and below (visualiser) 2023
Interactive audio-visual installation

Peter Tilley

The mirror-polished surface of an object can transform that object into an apparently immaterial two-dimensional substance and merge that object into its surroundings, rendering the form indistinct, and reducing the boundary of certainty.

In these two pieces, I have employed the earlier (that is, prior to silvered glass mirrors) - semantic ambiguity between reflection and shadow to create work that subverts the basic properties of a shadow or silhouette by turning them into mirrored surfaces.

The reflection of images, surroundings and viewers within the mirrored surface will contract, expand or even disappear according to the viewer's position, allowing for a meaning that a reflection is not a reality, or possibly it might also mean that everything is subjective.

Each in the Other 2023

Polished and painted chrome plated steel
Variable dimensions



One and Two 2023

Painted aluminium, polished chrome plated steel
and painted timber
46cm x 18.5cm x 40cm

John Turier

'Terra Nullius' is a work that postures four questions about the concept of ownership, land, scale and time. The work is constructed like a 3D skeletal line drawing from steel wire timber and linen thread - designed to float in the landscape.

'The Descent' is a bronze sculputre based on a drawn caricature that appeared in Hornet magazine (1871) ridiculing Charles Darwin for his publications of The Origin of Species and later book The Descent of Man.

These two works are loosely connected by time overlaps, the enlightenment and colonialism.

Terra Nullius 2023
Steel, timber and linen thread
240cm x 25cm x 25cm



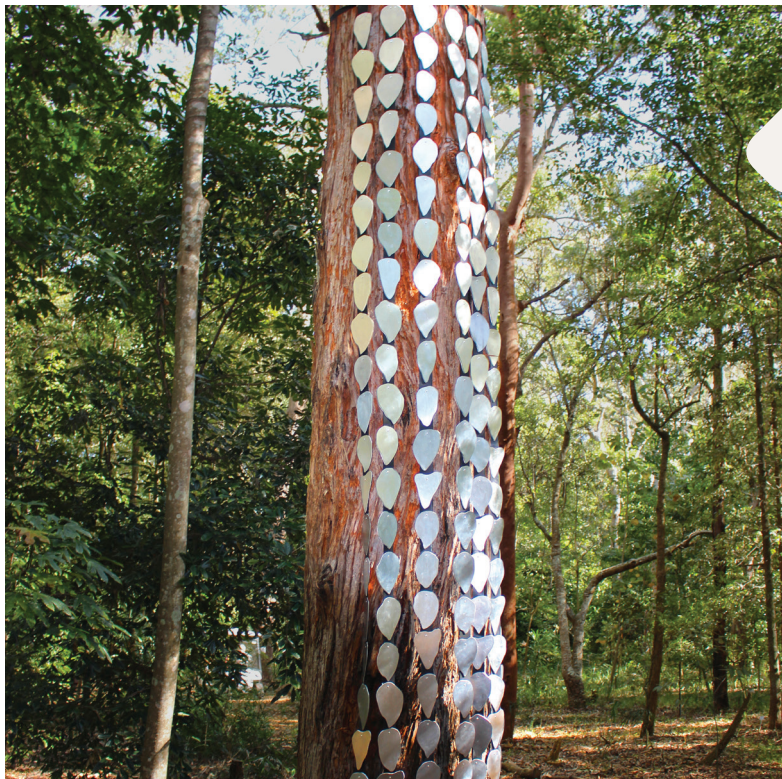
The Descent 2023
Bronze, timber, leather and linen thread
58cm x 28cm x 21cm

Patricia Wilson-Adams

My work expresses a deep sense of loss – loss of many close to me, loss of place and a loss of environment. This is apparent in both works exhibited, where I have used form and the materiality of my work to extend the metaphor.

I work within a framework of Post Minimalism in that my work is not didactic, but is reductive, unisistent and without angst or irony. My work is considered to be in Lucy Lippard's sense "eccentric abstraction". More generally, my work focuses on issues surrounding the environment, cultural landscapes and land usage. I work and research within the philosophical framework of Ecophenomenology, which implies a re-examination of our relationship to our environment and the steps that we undertake in making reparation.

More than a litre of tears 2023
Aluminium, snakeskin plastic
350cm height x variable



ne sonne plus 2023
Porcelain, hardwood, aluminium
Dimensions variable

