

**Artist statements**

## ***FOREST: The Last Stand***

**Karena Goldfinch –**

**a. *Rubicon,***

**b. *Greater Glider,***

**c. *Tree***

My work invites us to pause and appreciate our place within nature. I have spent the last 11 years involved in groups and campaigns to protect and conserve Victoria's native forests, bearing witness to the tragic loss of big old trees, wildlife and biodiversity.

My inspiration comes from nature, its fragility, its strength and our hand upon it.

The Rubicon State Forest, like other locations in the Central Highlands of Victoria have been subjected to industrial scale logging for many years now. This image was created during the first visit to this site for me. I was shocked to find what seemed to be an endless stretch of continuous clearfell logging. Google earth reveals coupes that stretch end to end for 15 kilometres.

I'm the lead artist in 'The Great Tree Project' a community project creating a life size Mountain Ash tree. It has been handsewn into sections and lies on the ground inviting viewers to respond to the urgent need to protect the iconic and threatened forests of Victoria. It's a contested space in the FOREST these days and the issue becomes more urgent as climate change induced bushfires increase the threat to wildlife.

**Rod Gray - *Brattlings***

A lot of my artwork reflects on forest fires and the havoc they wreak. This work 'brattlings' is a grave meditation about introduced stands of plant species and how combined with clear-felling and back-burn operations what we have created is a dangerously stealthy form of ongoing colonialism. This overpopulation in the forest floor, changing canopy and disturbing/drying soil clearly increases wildfire risks and thereby the challenges we face in a dramatically changing climate.

The word 'brattlings' is a Northamptonshire term for piles of fallen/cut timbers. I found this term strangely calming and disturbing at the same time. The introduced species and eucalypt overpopulation we see in clear-felled coupes combined with climate change result in such a dramatic shift in the characteristics of fire as we saw so tragically in Victoria in 2009 and 2019-20.

Melbourne Artist Rod Gray (he/him) has Scottish and Danish seafaring ancestors. Since discovering a great grandfather who was a shipwright building paddle steamers on the Murray River Gray has been deeply focussed on creating works that explore connections, responsibilities and traces of influence in his intuitions and tactile painting practice pertaining to trees, fire, and the night.

Gray graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art Painting from VCA/Melbourne University in 1991

Gray was awarded a fellowship at The Australian Print Workshop in 1997 where he exhibited from a suite of more than 300 monotype prints created in the six month Ron Burke fellowship.

Gray curated two group exhibitions in 2011 based on the concept of a 21st Century Wunderkammer which analysed the three founding categorisations of art galleries and museums, Natura, Artefacta (the cultural) and the Scientifica from a 21st century perspective.

The power and vulnerabilities of the natural world and its' real and imagined phenomenology recurs in his creative output. The poetics and harsh realities of fire, its' expressive capacities, and traumatic resonance has overtaken his works since residencies at Mildura's The Art Vault in 2013-14.

Exhibiting in group and solo shows since 1992 in Melbourne and in the UK, Gray has works in the National Gallery of Australia and many private collections. Gray continues to work in his studio in Clifton Hill where he produces paintings, works on paper and painted objects.

### **Pia Johnson – *Road to Nowhere***

The Wombat State Forest was one of the major areas affected by the June 2021 Victorian storms. As *The Age*<sup>1</sup> reported, it was 'like hell on earth: the night the trees fell from the sky'. Trees develop root systems to withstand winds from typical directions, yet what occurred in the storms, were winds from atypical directions leading to them to be uprooted or 'windthrown'. This was a prediction about climate change made by arboriculture experts over 30 years ago coming to fruition.

*Road to Nowhere* portrays the result of salvage logging of fallen trees from the storms that is currently happening in parts in the Wombat State Forest.

Pia Johnson is a photographer and visual artist, whose practice emerged out of a concern with issues of cultural identity and difference, stemming from her mixed background of Chinese and Italian-Australian descent. These themes have underpinned her interest in memory, cultural spaces and performance to investigate notions of belonging and otherness. Her recent research explores our connection with domestic and natural landscapes in relation to mobility and migration studies and responding to the climate crisis.

Pia has exhibited throughout Australia, USA, China, Japan and Mexico. She has been a finalist in many photography awards including the National Photographic Portrait Prize, Ravenswood Australian Women's Art Prize, Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award, PCP's Iris Award, Maggie Diaz Photography Prize for Women, Martin Kantor Photographic Portrait Prize and Northern Beaches Environmental Art and Design Award. Her work is collected in private and public collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Bendigo Art Gallery, City of Yarra and more.

Pia holds a Bachelor of Creative Arts from University of Melbourne and has a Doctorate in Fine Arts from RMIT University, where she is a lecturer and the Program Manager of the Master of Photography program.

[www.piajohnson.com](http://www.piajohnson.com)

**Steven Kuitert – *Leadbeater's Possum*** Steve Kuitert is a wildlife photographer from the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria who specialises in capturing images of rare and hard to find animals, the majority of which are nocturnal. While many of his images are intended for research and scientific purposes, he sometimes manages to capture animals in their true beautiful form. When Steven is not spending his nights in the forest, he can be found scuba diving, modifying camera equipment or at the local wildlife shelter. He believes that the three keys to wildlife photography are learning about our flora and fauna, patience and developing new and non-invasive ways of using camera equipment.

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### **Lucille Martin - *Toolangi- A Stitch in time***

**Lucille Martin** is a contemporary Australian artist with an established professional career in multi-disciplinary work, community development, higher education and policy advocacy. In a career spanning 30 years, her work is fundamentally Photo based imagery, Textile and object Installation. Lucille has created works for solo, group & curatorial exhibitions, commissions and residencies in Australia and O/S. Her work is peer awarded with four Australia Council Grants, including the Australia Council International Tokyo Residency- 1994-95, a Department of Culture and Arts Western Australian Premiers Fellowship and 3 Project development grants 2018-22.

Lucille is passionate about the flora and fauna of the Australian landscape and environmental issues. She has resided between Perth, WA to Sydney, Byron Bay and Melbourne throughout her career with significant time in Country NSW regenerating and reforesting 36 Acres of once depleted pastural land, linking wildlife corridors and providing habitat for the return of local species.

In her most recent exhibition in 2022 titled 'Right Fire', at Linden New Art, Melbourne, Lucille was welcomed by the local custodians while Artist in Resident at Bundanon Trust and invited to Photographically document and observe fire initiatives being re-introduced into the landscape. These initiatives were in preparation for the First National Indigenous Fire workshop held outside of Cape York, and part of the 10th National Indigenous Workshop on Gumea Dharawal Country, South Coast NSW. Further award residencies include Bundanon Trust AIR 2018, 2019, 2021, UTAS-School of Arts, The Wilderness Gallery- Cradle Mountain-St Claire National Park, Tasmania, Vancouver Arts Centre AIR Award, Albany and FAC, WA. These programs have underpinned new bodies of work responding to loss of flora and fauna, land clearing to Climate Crisis and fire ravaged landscape

### **Sarah McConnell - *Remnant***

'Remnant' is a collection of 5 plates I made in 2018 of sites I've visited in Victoria that have been threatened or impacted by logging.

The first three images are all situated in far East Gippsland, in one of the most bio-diverse forests in Victoria. This was an area that had been developing as an unusual crossover of warm and cool temperate rainforest since Gondwanan times. After a five-year-long community campaign, culminating in a blockade, Kuark was finally protected by the Victorian Government from logging in 2018. Tragically, Kuark and even the rainforest gullies at Larissa Lane burned in the unprecedented 2019/20 bushfires only a year later, and with repeated and more severe bushfires, this area may never properly recover. The Errinundra Plateau is now one of the last remaining intact areas of forest that escaped untouched.

The last two images are both taken from the forests of Warburton in Victoria's Central Highlands, where logging has decimated the landscape. The last image, 'Stump' was drawn from the first logged coupe I'd ever witnessed at the very beginning of my involvement in forest campaigning in 2012. Pre-logging wildlife surveys are required to be conducted by VicForests and DELWP (Department of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning) before any logging commences, to map out buffer zones for some endangered species. These surveys have historically been conducted poorly, too late, under inappropriate conditions or not at all. As a result, the job of finding and mapping endangered species to gain protection falls to the public and citizen scientist groups. Currently, an injunction is in place protecting every proposed logging coupe where a Greater Glider has been detected.

Sarah McConnell is an artist, cartoonist and environmental activist living and working on Wurundjeri country. She has been published in Meanjin and Going Down Swinging and has spent several years as Program Coordinator at the Sustainable Living Foundation. Sarah completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Drawing at the Victorian College of Art in 2011, and the Sustainability Leadership Fellowship program at the Centre for Sustainability Leadership in 2014. She has previously taught drawing at LaTrobe College of Art and Design and currently sits on the Committee of [CLIMARTE](#).

As a member of [5 Press](#), a group of five artists brought together by an appreciation for handmade books and printmaking, she has participated in several book fairs in Australia and internationally, and has work included in several major collections, including the National Library of Australia and State Library of Victoria. Sarah has also spent the last 10 years involved in groups and campaigns that aim to bring about the end of native forest logging in Victoria, through direct action, political campaigning, and community engagement

### **Julian Meehan – *Untitled #1 #2 #3***

Destruction of the pristine wilderness of the Toolangi Forest and the associated climate change damage as a result of logging is pain felt by Angel like figures of the Climate Guardians.

Julian Meehan is a Melbourne based editorial photographer specializing in portraits of environmental activists and political figures.

### **Jill Redwood - *cartoons***

Jill has been speaking out for animals and the environment since she was a kid. She started cartooning in the 90s to try a new campaign strategy of satirising the planet-wreckers and exposing their propaganda. Everyone loves a cartoon, but the logging industry hates it - they can't respond to their misinformation being lampooned.

Jill has lived in the EG forests on a self-sufficient small holding for 45 years, witnessed untold losses of nature, been threatened, intimidated, and attacked in various ways to try and silence her voice. It hasn't worked.

### **Sarah Rees –**

#### ***a. Montane ferns***

#### ***b. Mosses adorning Myrtle Beech trees on Wurundjeri Country.***

#### ***C. Wattles and rainforest rising above a layer of Hardwater Ferns on Wurundjeri country***

Sarah Rees works as a consultant in media, knowledge brokering and philanthropy. She has lived and worked in the forests of Victoria for more than 25 years. Sarah specializes in drone photography and macro photography and is also a film maker.

Sarah has two decades of experience in the environment sector, with over six years' experience on boards overseeing forest standards and fifteen years on boards of non-government environmental organizations. She has a strong presence on many key social media platforms associated with forest conservation and the protection of Australian forests and biodiversity.

**Lisa Roberts - Gipps Land, the Colonial Project**

Gunnai Kurnai Country: Where the water comes from. These are the catchments of the Buchan River, the Snowy River, the Swifts Creek, the Tambo River, the Mitchell River and the Gipps Land Lakes. This country is not fragile, it was doing just fine until the colony came along.

A coupe is a specific area of forest identified for logging operations under VicForests Timber Release Plans. Despite the ecological catastrophe of the 2019-20 Summer bushfires which burnt through 1.25 million hectares of forest in East Gippsland VicForests has not revised its logging plans, in fact two additional Timber Release Plans were approved by the Board of the state-owned company in July and December 2020. More than 550 coupes and 20,000 hectares of forest including key unburnt refuges are scheduled for logging in East Gippsland.

Lisa Roberts grew up in remote East Gippsland, Gunnai Kurnai Country, completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Media Art at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW Sydney in 1995. She returned to East Gippsland in 1997. Lisa documents and responds photographically, bearing witness to a visible crisis unfolding around Gippsland's rivers, lakes and forests. She collaborates with other local artists working in dance, performance and words. Her work is a critique of the colonial project and ongoing natural resource extraction in Gippsland. She is part of flying fox recovery and heat event response at the Bairnsdale Flying fox colony and campaigns for protection of wildlife and forests from logging and burning, through art practice, media and awareness raising campaigns, citizen science and forest monitoring.

**Dr Chris Taylor -**

***a. Looking towards Mt Torbreck on Taungurung Country.***

***b. Snow Gum standing tall on a ridgeline on Taungurung Country.***

***c. Old Growth Mountain Ash tree with snow and lichens on Gunaikurnai Country***

Chris Taylor is a Research Fellow at the Fenner School of Environment and Society. He is also a keen hiker and photographer with a passion for the unique forests of Victoria. Chris has published many studies on these forests, including key studies of fire, logging history and biodiversity, and completed his PhD on Forest Certification in 2012. He seeks to capture and share his own sublime experience of the landscape through his photography- the sense of feeling so insignificant amid the grandeur and age of this land, yet also elevated by being in the forest. He has held numerous exhibitions of his photographs.

## Melbourne University Early Learning Centre

- a. ***We are Almost Still Here***
- b. ***Hanging by a Thread***
- c. ***Leaf Poems***
- d. ***Watchful Sooty Owls***

These sculptural installations in ceramic and threads were created by a group of preschool children from the University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre in Abbotsford this year.

The children engaged in deep exploration of endangered species of Toolangi Forest through stories, songs, science, poetry, music and sculpture. Their work was influenced by several indigenous artists as well as art works exploring the natural world.

The children were encouraged to think in positive and creative ways to help promote and care for the environment.

The ELC's connection with Toolangi Forest was forged in 2015 when all the children advocated for the endangered Leadbeater's Possum and sent a letter to Parliament, stating their concern and offering solutions to this extinction crisis. The letter was read out in Parliament, resulting in a huge exhibition and fundraising for the forest.

Each generation of children inherits this knowledge and extends it further through immersive creative art experiences and activism.

Every child brings wishes for the animals' survival through creating with hands and poetry. A breath of life into clay brings the creatures into existence saying 'look what we have in our forests'.

This exhibition offered the children an opportunity to take a stand for the forest and its creatures in an ever-changing world environment in which preservation is urgent.

*"The Indigenous Australians told me not only how children need land, but also how land needs children, to hear their voices and their laughter in order to know that it is not abandoned."* (Griffiths, 2013)



This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body, and the City of Yarra