

# Fire Country

Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre





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**Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the ACT and surrounding areas. We honour and respect their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to this country and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We aim to**

Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre  
Tues–Fri 10am–5pm  
Saturdays 12–4pm

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Cover image: Photo By Lou Cresp

# Fire Country

*Rebecca Selleck and James Taylor*

Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre  
19 May - 2 July 2022







# Fire Country

*Rebecca Selleck and James Taylor*

Rebecca and James use their practices to illuminate issues around the continuing cultural and environmental impacts of colonisation in Australia, referencing their subjective experiences to create multi-layered installation, sculptural and photographic works. Rebecca's use of domestic furniture as a device to physically engage viewers tied perfectly with James' background in carpentry and carving, as well as with their desire to create work that captures their contemporary experiences against the backdrop of Australian history which helped inform it. They use their collaborative practice to explore their colonial, Indigenous and new immigrant histories through furniture making, bronze casting and photography, reflecting on the impact of colonisation on their experience with the environment and contemporary Australian culture.

Fire Country is a furniture and photography installation addressing the physical and cultural significance of fire in Australia. It draws the burnt landscape into the domestic space, revealing its intrinsic beauty as part of key environmental mechanisms. These works are representative of our contemporary relationship with fire and potential for better engagement in the future.

Comprising a living room and dining setting, the furniture pieces are made from Australian Eucalypt timber species burnt to carbon black, sealed with animal fats, and inlaid with polished bronze casts of new leaf shoots and post-fire fungi.

The surrounding gallery hang of black and white imagery on burnt timber frames features photographs taken from various ecosystems in NSW, ACT and SA that have experienced catastrophic fires in recent years.

We live on a continent whose unique ecosystems have evolved in a symbiosis with fire. Most of the country's plants and animals rely on seasonal burns for germination, regeneration, and preservation from catastrophic fires. Emblematic of this is the Eucalypt genus, whose shoots we see emerging from burnt limbs.

Fire is always here. First Nations people learnt over millennia how to control destructive wildfires and turn them into low intensity cultural burns. These burns are distinct to each ecosystem and timed perfectly to ensure the best outcome for the germination of seeds, clearing of dead plant material for new growth, and the safety of endemic flora and fauna. Contemporary Australia lives in fear of fire. With colonisation, First Nations' knowledge of Country was overlaid with incompatible perceptions of land management. Urban sprawl, land clearing, and avoidance of fire has led to a point today where catastrophic wildfires cost lives, species, and ecosystems.

Fire Country attempts to embrace fire in Australia as a part of our collective culture. Referencing the symbiotic relationship that fire has with our continent's landscapes, the work captures the intrinsic beauty of this interplay through the iconic Eucalypt. Through this series of furniture and photography we want to offer not just sorrow for what we've lost, but also hope for our future.











# Fire Country

## EXHIBITION ESSAY

Fire Country: terrible beauty

Rebecca Selleck and James Tyler's *Fire Country*, invites the viewer into a household space, that is both deeply alluring and quietly unnerving. This sculptural and photographic installation mesmerises by channeling aspects of the material and psychological aftermath of Australia's 2019/20 black summer, into the domestic realm.

But rather than dwell on contemporary anxieties of European settler culture pyrophobia, the stark beauty of these pieces invites a deeper reflection upon contemporary human relationships with fire, on this ancient continent.

*Fire Country*,<sup>1</sup> is a carbonised ensemble of contemporary hardwood furniture, sealed with animal fats and arranged in an intimate, inward-looking spatial configuration. Laid out with the cool precision of an Ikea display show room, the bespoke, minimalist settings speak the language of capitalist power and tacit colonial conceits.

This smooth metanarrative is seared, however, by a salon hang of black and white landscape photographs. Each image refers to specific terrains located in southeast and south Australia, consumed by the recent wildfires. Both image and frame, bear scorched wounds – the memories and erasures of immolated Country. It is as if the imagery is the silent consciousness of the quotidian objects.

The photographs' testimony of the scale and force of destruction elicits a visceral sense of grief for the viewer standing in this work. It bears witness to repercussions of 200+ years of inappropriate land and fire management: just one of the many traumas enacted upon this country and its First Peoples, through colonisation.

And yet, there is discovery and surprise here. The sombre, monochromatic aesthetic is frequently interrupted by a swathe of cast bronze, organic shaped filaments, which directly reference the post fire flush of epicormic buds, leaves and fungi. They are amongst the first perceived biological responses to eucalyptus forest fires, and signal recovery.

In the wake of the fires that shook the planet, these diminutive organisms were desperately relished by the human gaze, as we grappled with the implications of unimaginable carnage. So welcome and verdant, they offered an absolute reinstatement of nature's immense capacity for renewal. Likewise, the tiny, potent, sculptural inclusions, visually, and metaphorically crackle. They rupture the still, charred furniture, emanating from its heartwood, invigorating it with the promise of new life, of hope in the darkness.

Fire Country is a disarmingly meditative spatial experience, born of deep reflection on the destruction wrought by Australia's recent wildfires. It is an installation charged with potent psychic energy, drawn deep from the incinerated forests and those that predate them.

Seduced by the terrible beauty of these furnishings, we are lured into urgent reflection on how this continent has been formed by and evolved with, fire. We are challenged to probe the eurocentric fear of fire that pervades the colonial imagination and psyche; the remnant glow of which fuels our phobias and failing management practices towards Australia, to date.



James Tyler and Rebecca Selleck are part of a future-thinking critical mass of young Australian artists presenting the public with contemporary scientific understandings that coalesce with existing Indigenous Australian fire-knowledge and land practices.

Fire Country is ultimately an invitation to sit with these difficult truths that underscore reality in our own homes and to see our country with renewed clarity and hope, where walking with fire <sup>2</sup>, becomes a norm towards sustainable land management and care.

Amanda Stuart,

16th May 2022

Yuin Country

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Dr Johanna Hoyne for her impeccable discussion, edits and proof reading.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.firesticks.org.au/dharrawal-yuin-ngurra/> accessed 15 May 2022





## Rebecca Selleck

Rebecca Selleck is a mid-career Canberra-based artist with a focus on interactive sculpture and installation, blending animatronics, assemblage, casting and sound. She completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts at the ANU School of Art with First Class Honours, majoring in Sculpture and Art Theory, and also holds a Bachelor of Communications, majoring in Creative Writing and Literary Studies. She uses her practice to reciprocally investigate and challenge her own perceptions within a culture of conflicting truths. Her work overlays time and place to express the need for human accountability and the painful complexity of animal and environmental ethics in Australia.

She is the recipient of multiple awards, including the prestigious Peter and Lena Karmel Anniversary Prize for best graduating student at the ANU School of Art, and has exhibited across Australia and in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Venice, Italy. She was a finalist in the inaugural 2017 Ramsay Art Prize at the Art Gallery of South Australia and in 2018 the Arte Laguna Prize in Venice, Italy; the Macquarie Art Prize; the Ravenswood Art Prize (Highly Commended); and the Churchie Art Prize. Her work is currently held in public collections at the Museum of Australian Democracy, Parkes ACT, and the Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo NSW.



## James Taylor

James Taylor's artistic practice specialises in experimental and historical photographic processes. He uses a hybrid of analogue and digital photographic techniques to create contemporary artworks that reference Australian society and history. The processes he employs are the physical manipulation of digital photographic printing, such as the manual hand-colouring of digital prints or the application of physical interventions to the surfaces of digital prints. James also uses the historical 19th century photographic process of the Becquerel Daguerreotype with the aid of modern technology to create new and contemporary Daguerreotypes. Photography was historically used to document Aboriginal culture and the European colonisation of Australia. James is interested in these unique photographic processes to re-contextualise the representation of Australian society and history.





James Tylor  
Kangaroo Island 1  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
25x25cm \$1,980



James Tylor  
Kangaroo Island 2  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
50x50cm \$3,300



James Tylor  
Kangaroo Island 3  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
50x50cm \$3,300



James Tylor  
Malula Bay 1  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
50x50cm \$3,300



James Tylor  
Mount Bold 1  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
50x50cm \$3,300



James Tylor  
Mount Bold 2  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
25x25cm \$1,980



James Tylor  
Mount Bold 3  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
25x25cm \$1,980



James Tylor  
Namadgi 1  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
100x100cm \$6,600



James Tylor  
Namadgi 2  
2022  
Burnt digital photograph on hahnemuhle paper in burnt Victorian Ash frame  
100x100cm \$6,600



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #27  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$1,100



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #28  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$700



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #29  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$550





Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #30  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$650



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #31  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$550



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #32  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$650



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #33  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$700



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #34  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$650



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #35  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$750



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #36  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$600



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #37  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$600



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #38  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$650



Rebecca Selleck  
Falling branches #39  
2022  
Bronze, burnt eucalyptus branch, sealants  
Dimensions variable  
\$650



Rebecca Selleck and James Tylor  
Fire Country Bookcase  
2022  
Burnt Victorian Ash, animal fat, bees wax,  
polished bronze, sealants  
1340x630x420mm  
\$5,500



Rebecca Selleck and James Tylor  
Fire Country Dining Table  
2022  
Burnt Victorian Ash, animal fat, bees wax,  
polished bronze, sealants  
760 x 800 x 810mm  
\$4,000



Rebecca Selleck and James Tylor  
Fire Country Dining Chair one  
2022  
Burnt Victorian Ash, animal fat, bees wax,  
polished bronze, sealants  
770 x 430 x 420mm  
\$2,500



Rebecca Selleck and James Tylor  
Fire Country Dining Chair two  
2022  
Burnt Victorian Ash, animal fat, bees wax,  
polished bronze, sealants  
760 x 430 x 440mm  
\$2,500



Rebecca Selleck and James Tylor  
Fire Country Two-Seater Lounge  
2022  
Burnt Victorian Ash, animal fat, bees wax,  
polished bronze, sealants  
720 x 550 x 1260mm  
\$4,500



Rebecca Selleck and James Tylor  
Fire Country Single Seater Lounge  
2022  
Burnt Victorian Ash, animal fat, bees wax,  
polished bronze, sealants  
720 x 550 x 730mm  
\$3,500



Rebecca Selleck and James Tylor  
Fire Country Coffee Table  
2022

Burnt Victorian Ash, animal fat, bees wax,  
polished bronze, sealants

450 x 830 x 440mm

\$2,500