

Home Grown, Craft ACT by Jeremy Brown
Exhibition essay by Ashley Eriksmoen, 21 March 2022

Looking around this exhibition, there is a pattern that emerges: six angular, clean-lined stools, identical but for their diverse range of timbers, and hovering behind each stool, a delicate, precise watercolour of a botanical specimen. One is compelled to make sense of this repeating juxtaposition, to determine the connection between object and illustration. It appears to be a lesson of opposites: angular and organic; built and grown; living or non-living; solid and anchored versus translucent and floating. These meticulously rendered works of art and design are each exquisite on their own, but their full meaning is revealed in their relationships.

Artist, designer and craftsperson Jeremy Brown is responding to his deep appreciation of his hometown, Canberra, as a city of trees in his solo exhibition, Home Grown. Our bush capitol is in many ways defined by its founding history of extensive tree planting, first by Charles Weston and followed by Lindsey Prior. Weston established experimental nurseries at Yarralumla, and Prior travelled the world bringing back exotic species to test in Canberra's climate. From that legacy of over 100 years of tree planting, there are now more than 768,000 native and exotic trees on public land in the Australian Capitol Territory, more trees than people!

And as people, we benefit so much from the trees. From the cooling shade of the canopies to the cleansing of our air by their filtration, the sequestration of carbon in their wood and the boosting of mental health from biophilia, our trees make this an incredibly liveable city where landscape and architecture are entangled. But like most living creatures, trees also come to a natural end to their useful lives. Each year, about 1 % of our urban forest, around 7000 trees, will cease to thrive based on a 100-year cycle. Trees are necessarily removed, and most are destined for very low value landscaping chip or are buried in landfill.

What a sad ending for our illustrious co-inhabitants of the territory, and for the environment too. We import Maple, Oak and Ash into Australia from overseas, while we let quality timber, some of these very same species, fall to waste. Jeremy is one of a growing number of designer-makers who sees this irony, and has made it his mission in this body of work to reveal the connection between the living trees of our natural surroundings and the timber of our built environment.

Jeremy went to Gordon Smith, a local sawyer who recovers street and garden trees, mills them and dries them to produce useable timber. Jeremy started with London Plane to celebrate fond childhood memories of climbing and falling from his own backyard tree; he also selected Claret Ash, English Elm, Pin Oak, River Oak, and Silky Oak to make the stools. Enamoured by Canberra's dual legacy of Modernist buildings within an urban forest, Jeremy's trapezoidal forms and faceted legs pay tribute to late iconic Canberran architect Enrico Taglietti.

Jeremy forged a deeper personal connection to the city's landscape by tracking down living trees of the same six species to make botanical illustrations through his direct observations. These wonderful images are as fresh and elemental as the stools, giving two very different

aesthetic perspectives on our use and appreciation of each tree as it continues to benefit us through its transition from our public outdoor to our intimate indoor spaces.

I have been fortunate to see Jeremy's practice evolve from his first woodworking assignment at the ANU, where he chose to carve a pair of maraca-like rattles mimetic of Black Bean seed pods, through his honours year when he made furniture works that aimed to provide physical comfort and emotional benefit to users. Through this deceptively simple exhibition, Jeremy has demonstrated a connection between our built and natural environments and engaged in a truly sustainable practice that celebrates the trees across their full lifecycle.