

Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre

Cupped Hands

Vicky Shukuroglou & Simon Cottrell

Artist-in-residence

2018

2018 artists-in-residence

Vicky Shukuroglou
Simon Cottrell

Location

Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage, Namadgi
National Park, Australian Capital Territory

Program partner (since 2006)

ACT Parks and Conservation Service

2018 Research partner

Australian National Botanic Gardens

Public program

Gudgenby Ready-Cut Cottage
open day, 21 April 2018

Exhibition

Cupped Hands, Craft ACT: Craft + Design
Centre 21 March-11 May 2019
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 region. We also acknowledge other
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
that have made Canberra their home and
we aim to respect cultural heritage, customs
and beliefs of all Indigenous peoples.

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NAMADGI – by BRUCE PASCOE for Cupped
Hands exhibition catalogue, 2019 ©

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Contents

Introduction: The Nature Of Growth. Rachael Coghlan	5
Title. Brett McNamara	7
Title. David Taylor	9
Namadgi. Bruce Pascoe	11
Cupped Hands. Vicky Shukuroglou	13
Mind. Vicky Shukuroglou and Simon Cottrell	15
Artists biographies.	17
Acknowledgments.	19



It is perhaps inevitable
that a nature-based
residency is about
growth and is growing.

The nature of growth

When I think of the Craft ACT artist-in-residence program I think of growth.

Artists grow their practice when they become cultural interpreters of the landscape and its history in Namadgi National Park during their stay at Ready-Cut Cottage in the Gudgenby Valley. Their appreciation for our surrounding environment, its stories and culture, and its history grows through the experience. Importantly, understanding and respect for the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land, not only grows but deepens.

Our 2018 artists-in-residence are no exception: Vicky Shukuroglou and Simon Cottrell undertook valuable research at the Australian National Botanic Gardens and immersed themselves in Namadgi National Park and our Indigenous heritage to, as they urge us, 'heighten compassion through strengthening connections to country'.

Craft ACT's relationship with the residency program partner, ACT Parks and Conservation, grows closer with every year. Namadgi National Park Manager Brett McNamara (who founded this residency with former Craft ACT Executive Director Barb McConchie in 2006) and Visitor Experience Manager Mel Barton have become close collaborators with Craft ACT. Their expertise is inspiring and we learn from them through every project. Their love for our region, our environment and its heritage brings a new context and a broader perspective to inform the work that we do in supporting artists, craft practitioners, designers and makers at every stage of their careers, and promoting and celebrating excellence and innovation in contemporary craft.

Our audiences who visit the Craft ACT gallery or read the catalogue, grow their understanding of the power of art to tell stories, bring new perspectives, and shed light on our world.

Given this strong base for our acclaimed residency, and increasing interest in participating, I have been delighted to grow the program over the past two years. Craft ACT now offers two residencies each year. In addition to the three-week autumn

Ready-Cut Cottage residency which leads to a group exhibition in our gallery the following year, we now offer a second residency in spring. Our spring residency is held over nine days, last year at a cottage overlooking Corin Dam. Participating artists are not required to create new work for an exhibition; however this spring residency, in just two years, has grown. In partnership with Tuggeranong Arts Centre, an exhibition of work from spring residents is presented in their gallery close to the national park which provided the inspiration.

It is perhaps inevitable that a nature-based residency is about growth and is growing. On the eve of our 50th anniversary in 2020, Craft ACT is reflecting on our history and opportunities for the future. I feel gratitude for the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and their continuing and invaluable support. Thanks to our deeply engaged 2018 artists, Vicky and Simon, writer Bruce Pascoe, and the teams at Craft ACT and the Australian National Botanic Gardens, this acclaimed residency continues to offer rich opportunities. Cupped Hands will help to grow our contribution to the contemporary craft and design sector, deepen relationships with our natural environment and honour the Indigenous heritage and connections to country.

Dr Rachael Coghlan
CEO + Artistic Director
Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre

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Brett McNamara
Manager
Namadgi National Park
ACT Parks and
Conservation Service

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Image, top: Caption along here. Photograph: Bruce Pascoe?
Image, above: Caption along here. Photograph: Bruce Pascoe?



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David Taylor
Curator
Living Collections
Australian National Botanic Gardens

**Ecti omnitate peditibus
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Namadgi

Your country wants to talk to you. It needs to talk to you. We need to listen.

A dingo observes the climbers ascending a rocky mount. It watches, ears jiggled forward, wondering. The people keep climbing and he sits on a boulder to watch. He has a reason.

As soon as he is seen he bounds off the boulder but his curiosity and need cause him to pause. They see him and wonder at his rich golden pelt, his intelligent eye, his need for conversation. He sniffs, he plays, he suggests, he proffers a wounded foot.

There is an exchange of intimacy between two entirely different creatures.

A strange, beautiful and puzzling conversation with Australia.

On the flat land below the mount, a beast is seen lounging on an emerald sward. Alone.

What is this creature that looks most of all like a casual camel? It is an earless kangaroo. Some years ago, dingoes hatched a plan to bring down the roo but his vicious kicks gained him a reprieve as the dingoes withdrew to catch their breath. The roo lost an ear. The dingoes returned, hauling him to the ground. Once again the roo fights back, but loses the other ear. He survives. Camel headed. So this valorous earless roo becomes known as Vincent and his presence is a constant reminder of that tender balance between hunger, valour, energy and hope.

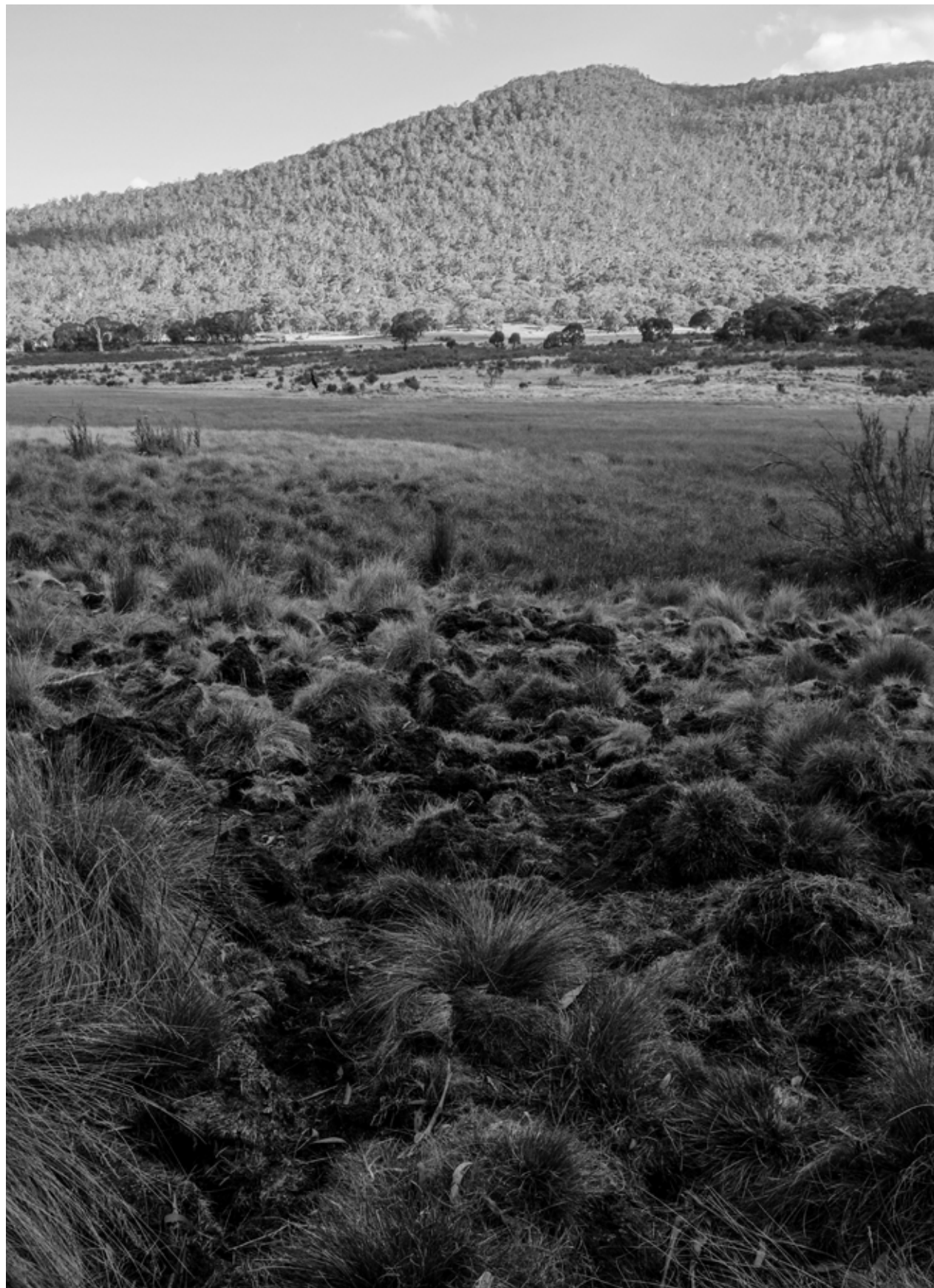
Just above the elbow flat of the river where Vincent reclines, almost always alone, a rising ridge line displays a peculiar wall of stone. Built by humans. But which ones?

Moss and lichen grow slowly, inching over centuries, creeping over aeons, so their passage across the intersections of stones speaks of centuries. Black centuries.

Elsewhere in this incredible valley, your valley, hardly visited, stone arrangements wait as puzzles do, a grandmother tree sprawls, not spectacular in height but stupendous in her embrace of the valley floor.

There is an exchange of intimacy between two entirely different creatures.

A strange, beautiful and puzzling conversation with Australia.





Caption along here. Photographs:
Vicky Shukuroglou

Ready-Cut Hut was brought here by pastoralists to mind sheep and she is a beautiful building in her modest simplicity but all about her are the tools of the world's most modest civilization. Not modest in the sense of innocence and inability, but modest in demand upon the earth, modest in the refusal to abuse, the fervent desire to care and protect, that kind of hopelessly unpopular conservatism.

This is your Namadgi. Part of your country. She wants to talk to you. And she is.

Listen for the frog near the Ready-Cut drain, watch the kangaroo puzzling over the dew drip from the shed roof, watch the swallows and hawks coursing across the marsh, become mesmerised by the truckling water searching for a course between the rocks, the wood ducks serene on the handrail of the bridge, and if you walk along the road searching for internet access look away from the glow of your device for a moment, down at your feet, because here is a real feat, the tools of a people who managed this land for 100,000 years, an aeon without thistles, foxes, sheep or barbed wire.

Look away from the glow of your device to where the sun lets her blood seep and drench where a woman seems to recline. Is she dying or living? Is she from the ground or on the ground?

This is your Namadgi, she is a mystery, a relic, a vibrant pulse in the earth, the frosty dawn jewels on the barbed wire are the pearls on the breast of a most beautiful woman.

Your country.

You can walk the valley as if it was a task but if your intention is to immerse yourself in your country you need to walk slowly and with care. Vicky and Simon have done this, observing the minutiae of this incredible world. Vicky Shukuroglou lets her camera roam, lets it rest, examine, honour, her art is to love country and allow a slow, almost forensic examination if it were not for the gentleness of respect.

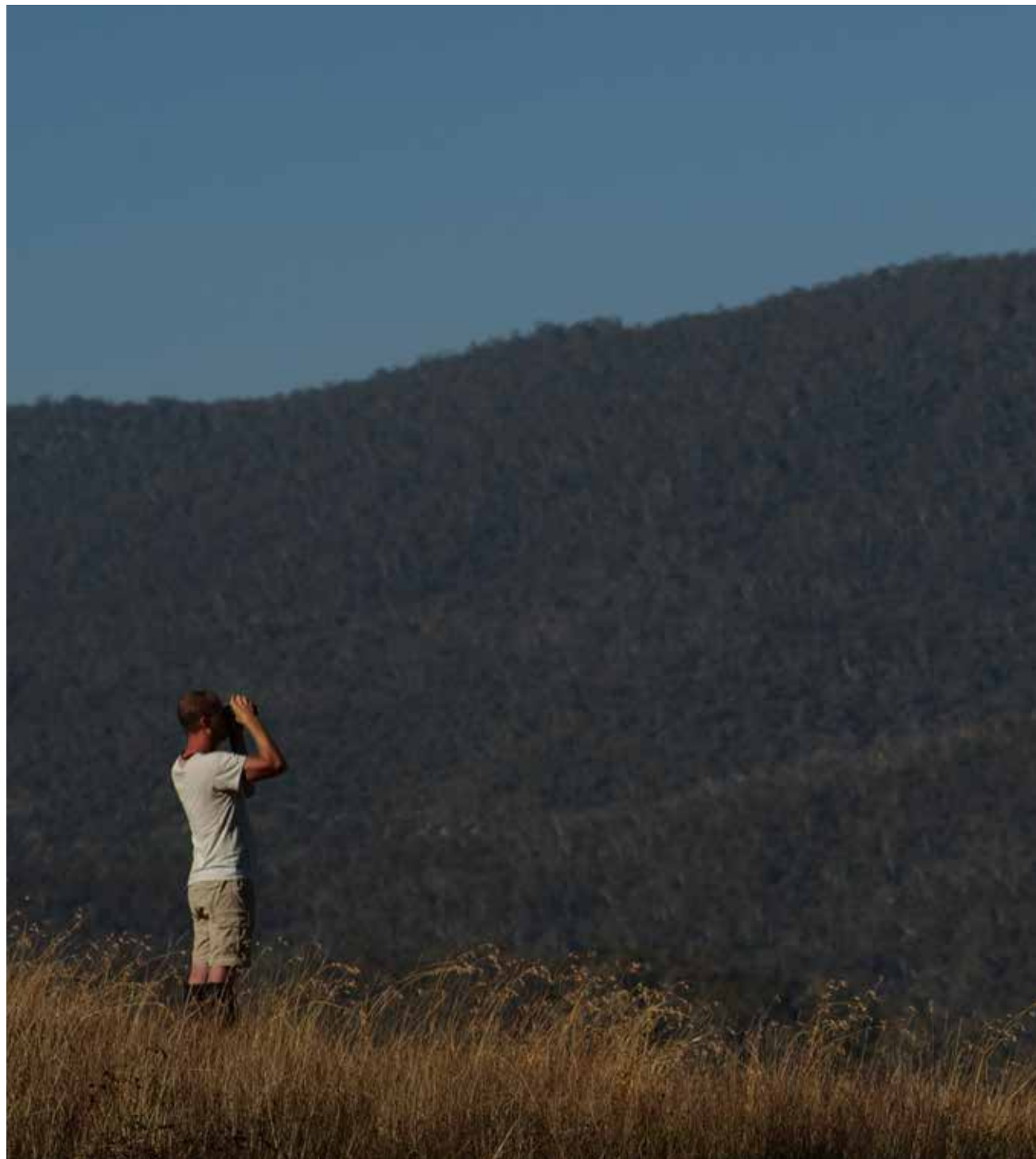
A camera can be an eye but rarely a heart. This is your invitation to enter this sacred valley, allow your breath to slow, allow your mind repose, rest in the verdure of the valley and embrace these secrets. It's your country after all. She is your responsibility.

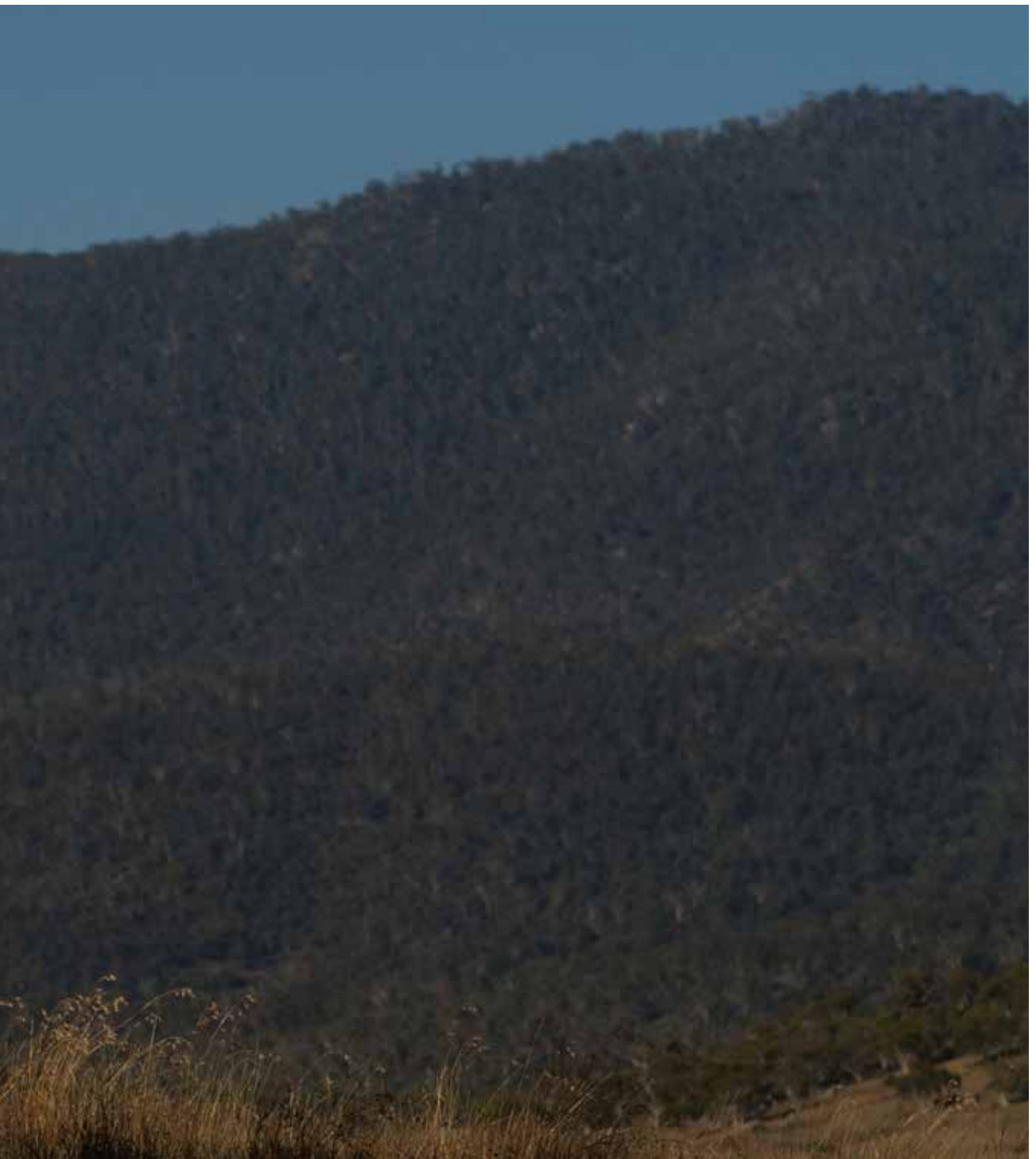
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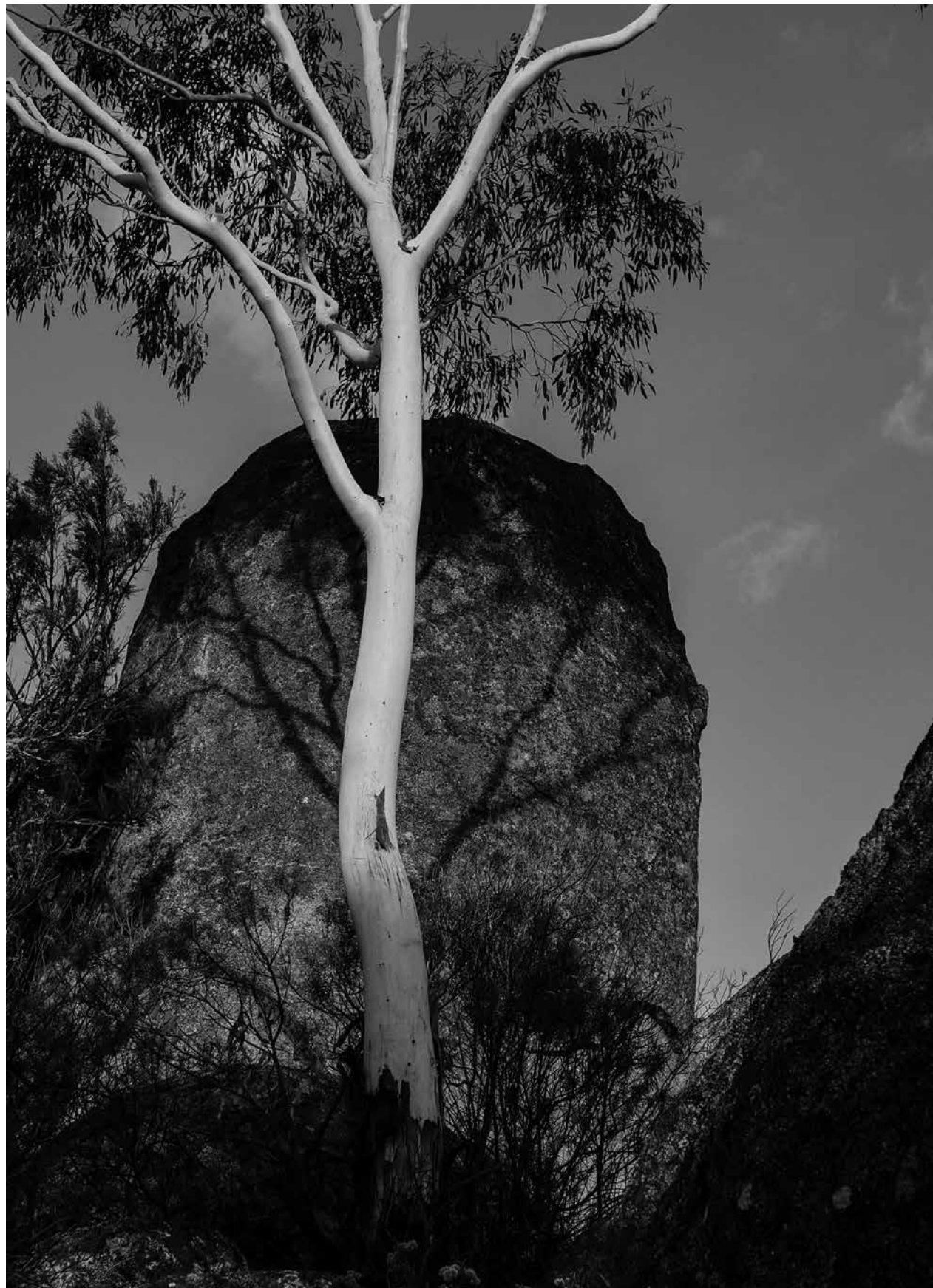


Caption along here. Photograph: Vicky Shukuroglou





Caption along here. Photograph: Vicky Shukuroglou



Cupped Hands

I give her my attention, she becomes my guardian.

Or she always was.

Her liver seems apparent and is the shape I seek in late light.

He says he mustn't look too closely.

The valleys extend further than a day's walk, their curves I cannot fully retain in my mind.

I question the use of a map – thief of instinct and sensing – and contemplate the value of remaining subtly conscious of trust in one self while walking, and the significance of complete trust in country.

These words are mistaken in their act of separating me and country, and the danger is to cause us all to be lost.

NAMADGI

The accent is on the first 'a'.

NGUNAWAL

The accent is on the u, pronounced 'oo'. The g is almost silent.

Wings buffet the screen and in my half sleep I recognise the hawkmoth has returned. Now I know the back door also offers night shelter for a swallow. This explains the droppings scattered, the density indicating its roost. No nest. These are abundant in the shed which frames the relentless water drip. I often walk in that direction seeking the thrill of seeing the young kangaroo, spindly dark arms dangling just as they do, peering in its crook-neck way, investigating that drip.

On the lower slopes stretching away from her liver, Cassinia is well established and rains plumes of disintegrating flowers. They abrade my nostrils and push into every crease of my clothing, into the tiniest slits of scratched skin. A bird of prey moves above the trees. Larger than a sparrowhawk? Smaller than a wedge tail. Pale colouring from below, perhaps some mottling or banding? Or leaves and light? Safe in the dense vegetation, a group of small birds gathers. I stop to watch and again wonder if this is a reciprocal curiosity as more and more fly in.

I observe the contour I want to follow, assessing openings in the vegetation. Small gullies, some thick with weeds, others bulging with swaying tussocks. Briar rose, thistle, fleabane, and pig diggings are probably the worst of the lot, protruding and dipping as jagged skeletons and graves of the recent past.

In the distance, kangaroos give shape to the land as their jump disappears from view, into the groin of a small hill. Among them are Vinnie Van, Curlytail, and the mad young Circle Maker. Every dawn opens my search for their distinct bodies, and mostly my heart rests.

We must think about the beloved quail. Plump bird breasts, shaped like cupped hands, try to remain hidden. Three of them slap off the ground, scatter and regroup. There's a small depression near where they take off, some bare earth, perhaps a tussock slightly pressed at the base, and some other nudges that suggest shelter. Home? How tenuous, among the thump and power of kangaroo quarters and brilliant raptor eyes.

...

Captions along here.
Photographs: Vicky
Shukuroglou

I am asked if I have noticed the grooves and curvatures, if I understand something of their time. I am gently jostled about seeing the angles and crowding of stone, the pulled droop of a limb, the firm turn shaped by tempered force and tying. This conversation is constant and keeps me seeking. My reply is confident on icy mornings, when I feel the warmth of the stone and its thin edge, its bulbs and concentric waves, the fineness of its grain. My reply ensures it is not enough for me to just walk on. We are all in terrible debt. I think of the old people, and what their minds would turn to. I think of their humanity, of mine, of yours. I think of what it means to tread on this earth so used to the pressings of soft feet, of the human animal, of every other animal moving across her surface and deep in her watery hollows. I wonder if this yearning for dance and song, from every limb and every chord, is really also hers, or is it only mine?

Everywhere we walk the ground has been deeply cared for, and not so long ago.

Everywhere we sit, another has sat. Singing, grieving, loving, eating, grinding, feeding, talking, washing, laughing, cutting, making.

Beneath our feet, beneath the roads, beneath our houses, lie stones handled by strong and dexterous hands, lie remnants of common meals.

These shapes you might never see, even though they face you.

Signatures of time and learnings shared, of love and resolved dispute, merge and disappear if we are not slow enough to see.

Does your intimacy reveal the difference between frosty valleys naturally bearing no trees, and those whose trees were taken without consent?

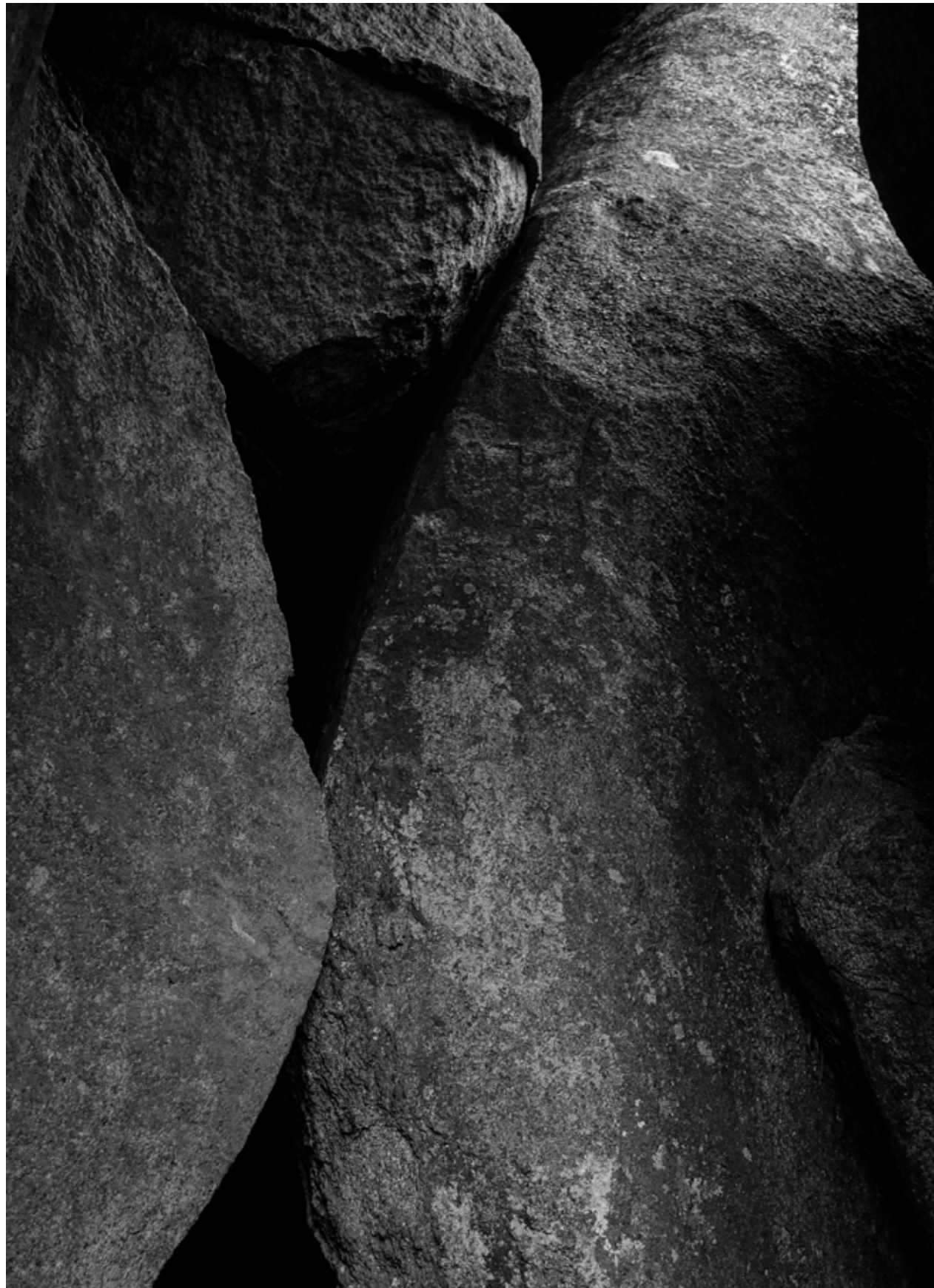
Do we acknowledge absence when we see it, and does it change our thought?

I hear the ducks before they bustle in, arranging themselves on the bridge. I wait for the cockatoos who, at this time of day, in this mood of light, blaze the sunset on the underside of their wings. They dip and turn and flare their crests, readying for the night. Their flight path, how long has it been so? And that poised flock of yellow tails, hundreds of valleys and plains from here, what drives their path above lanes of cars and trucks?



My skin stiffens at the prevalence of tangled heritage. In days to come a small parched strap of marsupial hangs from one of the barbs, as though we need to remind ourselves. Some fur retains its gentle frizz among the matted parts now inseparable from blood and dust. What is my role here, in this land, strewn with criss-crossing obstacles lying waiting, laden with various teeth?

We visit some months later and feel relief seeing the sign above the washing tubs has survived. Please leave all buckets upturned. I think back to the lizard's sheen and punctuated pattern, its urgent need to escape. In wondering how long it would have taken for it to die with hard plastic beneath its body, I feel grateful for loving looking.





Mind

Since early childhood we have both been closely observing the 'natural world', with a strong sense of being a part of 'nature', not separate to it. For the last 25 years we have walked thousands of kilometres together, learning through intimate experience of this remarkable and ancient land. To delve deeper we've needed to be open-minded and question all that we do not understand. We must also question what we think we understand. Curiosity and care are vital here. They are the antidote to assumption or superficial opinion. This is the ethos which guides our work.

In many ways a project like Cupped Hands has been waiting at our core, and we are grateful for the opportunities this residency enables. Through our collaboration we seek to awaken the senses to the infinite complexity of ecosystems within which humans have evolved. By inviting hearts and minds to become deeply immersed in these relationships, we aim to reignite curiosity and reverence for our earth. We hope to heighten compassion through strengthening connections to country.

We have long known that the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) is a place of rigorous research, not just an enchanting and biodiverse garden. During our residency, the more we looked the more we learnt, the more we acknowledged how much there is to know. The more we learnt the more deeply we understood its complexity. We experienced the ANBG's generous spirit, and we continue to be enthralled by the aspirations of the many people involved. Walk into the offices, the cryptogam, herbarium, nursery, or seed bank, and you will discover people working with fervent commitment and collaboration, through careful observation and gentle response. You may meet people who have been working on one rare species for 25 years, rebuilding its genetic strength that has diminished under recent human presence; people who collaborate with similar institutions across the world aiming to understand and preserve the earth's biodiversity; people who record the provenance of every individual plant on the 40 hectare site. Bear in mind you won't see a larger living collection of Australian plants. At the ANBG you will also find a remarkable range of volunteers, who, in understanding the significance of the work, find the will to contribute their care, time and energy. They weed the gardens, walk with visitors to unveil the fine layers of botanical complexity, and lovingly gather and clean thousands of seeds for the security and rehabilitation of our country. Australia, you have a treasure here.

Let's consider that Australia has more known endemic species than any other country.

That means approximately 87% of Australia's mammals, 45% of birds, 86% of vascular plants, 93% of reptiles and 94% of amphibians are found NOWHERE ELSE ON EARTH.¹ Can we ignore these facts in our every day? Whose responsibility is it to ensure the vitality of the earth that sustains all life? There are valleys, fens, peaks, rivers and grasslands of Namadgi National Park replete with ancient signs of care and attention. We can see

the evidence in the soils that are alive and held together; in the abundance of Kangaroo grass which was — and may be once again — a staple food for people; and in the ease with which we can walk, our only fair hurdles being rocks, steep slopes, waterways. But we can also see recent scars that need healing.

While at Namadgi, our long daily meanderings presented questions that we could not easily answer. We thought about the ANBG, and the individuals working hard to understand species, what is required for their right to exist, and about whose responsibility it is to ensure that the decline of ecosystems is stopped. We contemplated the Gudgenby area described as 'a highly manipulated landscape'² and wondered what we would be leaving behind in traces of our presence. We hoped very little. As we walked, we wondered about whose hearts must ache for the land that is no longer abundant with cultivated lilies and grasses, tubers and grains, which fed and were nurtured by the rhythms of a peaceful land. We wondered about the knowledge held in the land, in the careful placement of rocks that could corral free roaming kangaroos for an efficient hunt, and how these rocks are just natural rock-fall at a quick glance. *Panicum decompositum* was also a vital grain for Australia's Indigenous people across vast tracts of land. Today we see it in the warm months, piled up against verandahs, blowing across roads, and teetering in wire fences. We wondered about restraint, and the breadth of its meaning.

We are curious humans who recognise our capacity for change-making. In working with others we trust in their capacity for the same, and know that every new perspective gained can reveal more about ourselves, our fellow humans, and our earth and the life she sustains.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics website. Published 04/06/2010. Australian Biodiversity <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1301.0Feature+Article12009%E2%80%939310>

2 National Capital Development Commission. Sites of significance in the ACT (vol. 9), National Capital Planning Authority, Canberra, Australia. ISBN 0642154031. 1988

Artist biographies

Simon Cottrell completed a BA of Fine Arts in Gold and Silversmithing with Honours at RMIT University in 1996, where he also completed a Masters of Arts Research in 2010. He set up his first studio in Melbourne in 1998, focussing predominantly on limited production jewellery works, using industrial waste materials. During this time he began to develop more complex one-off pieces. Due to the international attention that these one-off works began to attract, they quickly became his primary studio practice. These works have been exhibited in over 150 exhibitions, locally and internationally.

From 2001-2011 he was Associate Lecturer in Metals and Jewellery at the School of Art Design and Architecture, Monash University, Melbourne, and lecturer in Gold and Silversmithing at RMIT University. Since relocating his studio to Canberra in 2012, he has been a lecturer and researcher in the Jewellery and Object Workshop, School of Art and Design, at ANU. He is regularly invited to present lectures and workshops across Europe, USA, Canada, Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

His works are held in major public collections, including Die Neue Sammlung, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany; Museum Českého Ráje, Turnov, Czech Republic; E'space Solidor, Ville de Cagnes-Sur-Mer, France; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; National Contemporary Jewellery Collection, Griffith Regional Art Gallery, Griffith; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; McMillan Collection, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne.

Vicky Shukuroglou is a multidisciplinary artist and researcher who dedicates herself to deepening her understanding of the earth through careful observation and hands-on care of country, all of which guide and drive her creative process. In doing so, she hopes to rouse your heart's attention. Prior to, and since completing her Master of Arts in 2009, she has worked in collaboration with writers, musicians, scientists, Indigenous communities, and young people. Vicky has developed creative pedagogies that stimulate participants' sense of possibility, capacity, and motivation to learn and meaningfully engage with their world. National and international residencies, exhibitions, conferences and workshops contribute to the progression of her creative practice. This is a dynamic aspect of her work as an artist continually learning and responding. In her commitment to shifting perceptions and bringing the powerful work of young people to the attention of 'grown-ups', all sorts of remarkable projects have evolved. Vicky has worked in partnership with, and been supported by, various organisations including UNESCO, Sanskriti Kendra (India), Instituto Sacatar (Brazil), World Crafts Council, Salaam Baalak (India), Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, City of Melbourne, Arts Victoria, Fed Square, schools and universities.

Caption along here. Photograph: Vicky Shukuroglou





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Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre

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This land is used to being loved, is used to being given attention.

We honour the traditional custodians whose presence on country has been gentle and nurturing. Ways of being that have evolved over 100,000 years have much to teach everyone when the priority and result is a thriving ecosystem.

We would like to thank all those who have supported us along the way — your time, knowledge, and generosity of spirit is precious to us. You know who you are, and we are grateful.

Craft ACT Logo

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Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre

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Monday to Friday 9 am - 5 pm

Craft ACT gallery hours

Tuesday to Friday 10 am - 5 pm
Saturday 12 - 4 pm