



College of Arts and Social Sciences  
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**Rebecca Mayo**

**Labours of care: Art practice and  
urban ecological restoration**

**A thesis submitted for  
the degree of the  
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## Declaration of Originality

I, *Rebecca May* ..... 30th November, 2018.. [sign and date] hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.



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## Abstract

This research reveals how an art practice built around ethics of care offers a means of enacting an ecological responsibility. As cities and their human populations continue to grow, urban creeks and green spaces are becoming increasingly important and contested. Habitat loss for non-human species increases the need to care for these places. My volunteer work as a ‘Friend of Merri Creek’ in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, prompted this practice-based research which has explored practices of care as both subject matter and method. I argue that the processual, repetitive and labour-intense nature of my practice are qualities shared by environmental restoration work. This led me to ask: What could my art practice, based in print and textiles, reveal about practices of ecological restoration and degradation at an urban creek? I have set out to explore this question by bringing Merri Creek and my art practice closer together, using the meditative and repetitive acts of walking, weeding, planting, sewing and printing with locally collected plant dye.

Through studio and field-based investigation, I have established a way to observe contemporary and historic actions that have altered the Merri Creek ecosystem. Further, through an exploration of process, repetition and labour, I have found ways to produce artworks that manifest through—and reveal—practices of care. My research culminated in three works, brought together in an installation at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, together with an exegetical text. Building and departing from feminist debates surrounding an ‘ethics of care’, I draw on the work of theorists that approach care from materialist, ecological and practice-based standpoints. If care is a way of seeing and acting in the world in which interdependency and relationships are foregrounded and the potential to take responsibility is raised, then my examination of care as practice and method of art, and its interpretation, offers a path through which to navigate an increasingly precarious world.





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Museum number MOL 35.35.2

© Museum of London  
<https://vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=94227&sos=12>

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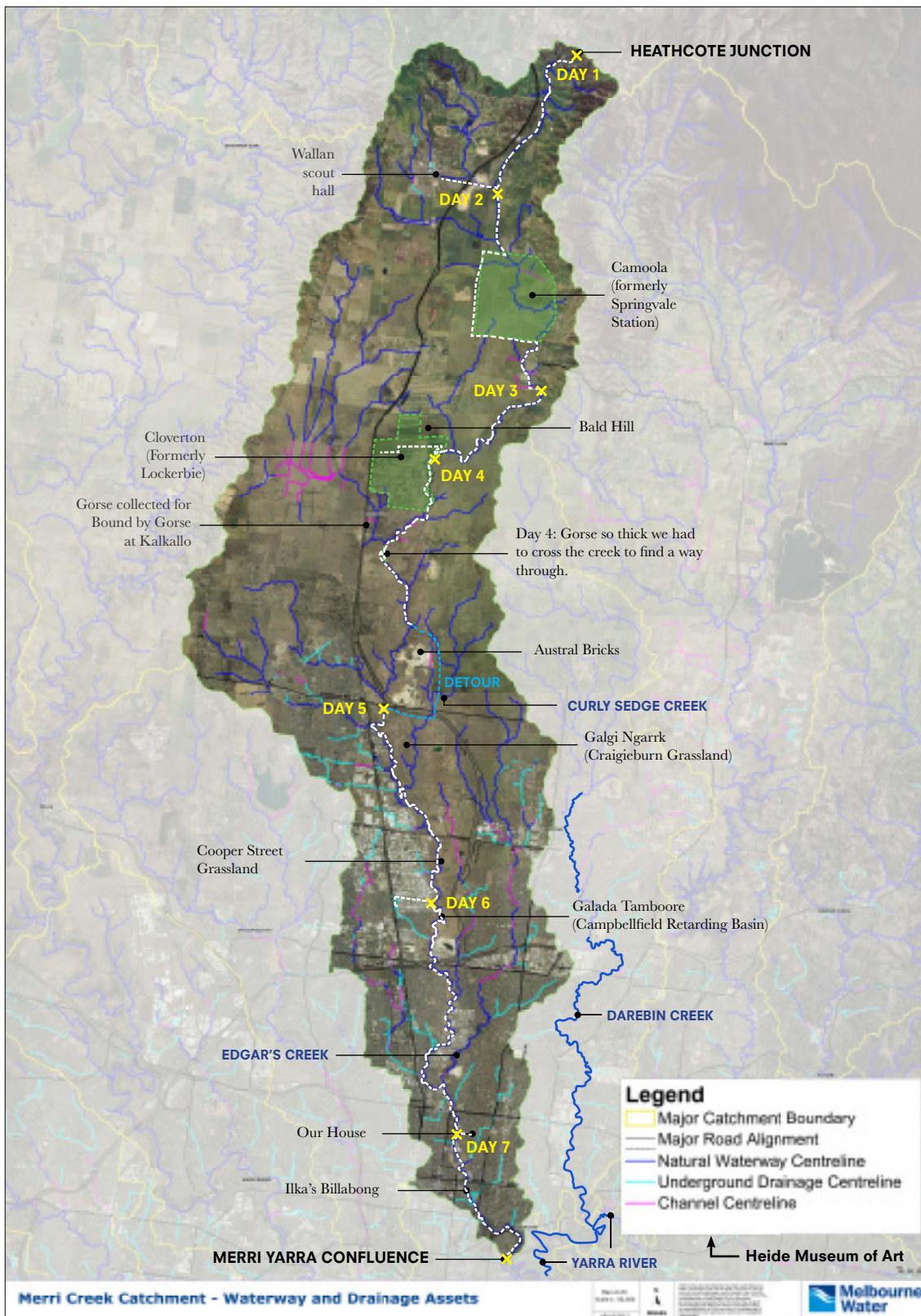
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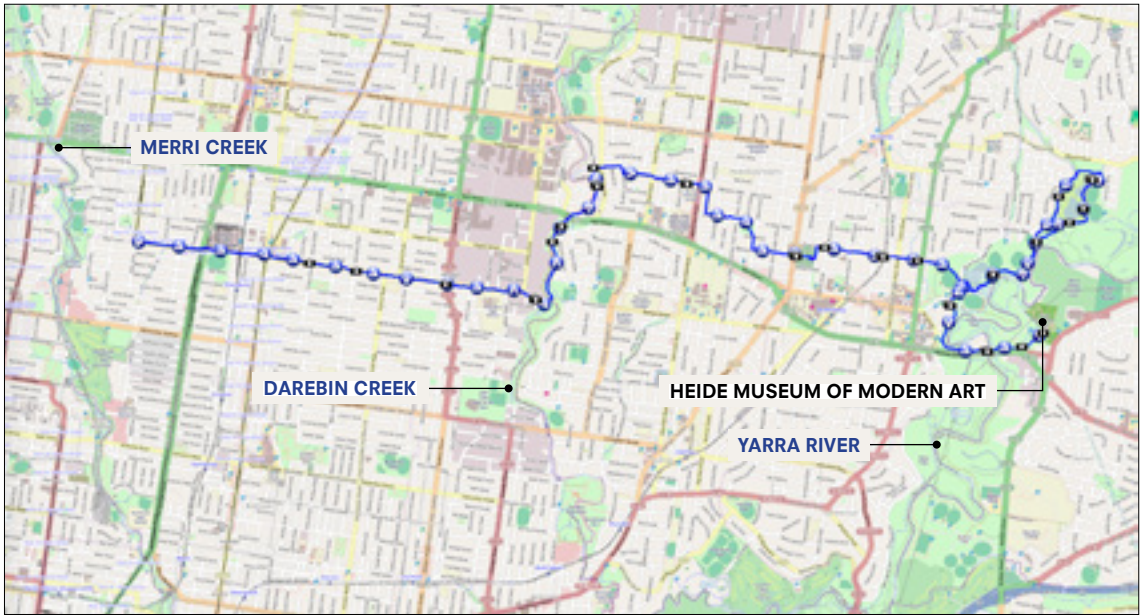
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**Map 1**  
 Merri Creek Catchment – Waterway and Drainage Assets, © Melbourne Water  
 Annotations added by the author.



**Map 2**

Walking from (home) Merri Creek to Heide  
Museum of Modern Art, 8 April 2016  
© OpenStreetMap  
Annotations added by the author.



## Introduction

Like many Australians of my generation, I grew up a stone's throw from a suburban creek. The unimaginatively named Second Creek in Adelaide trickles from the foothills, traversing backyards before it is forced underground into concrete pipes, finally spilling into the Torrens River in St Peters. The section I knew ran through a park, across the bottom of my grandmother's garden and under a road, before traversing more gardens in what amounted to a secret passage taking me directly to my best friend's house. I recall much of my childhood via memories at the creek: in flood or a summer trickle, collecting tadpoles and yabbies, building dams and playing house, rubber boots in winter and bare feet in summer. The creek weaves through my childhood; snapshot memories of family, friends and imaginary games are held together through the flow of water downstream.

As a result, urban creeks have a continuing significance in my daily life; as places in which to relax and to be with plant and animal life in the city. Moving to Melbourne as an adult, I first encountered Merri Creek along cycle routes to the city. A new place—where plastic bags decorated the trees at high water mark and dog owners ignored instructions to pick-up after their pets—I saw it first as little more than a car-free passage to work. It took me ten years to join the Friends of Merri Creek, a volunteer group who assist in its care and restoration. On reflection, this decade is a measure of the time it takes to connect with a place. It is also the time needed for restoration plantings to take hold and flourish, enabling me to witness how this important work bears fruit.

My experience of suburban creeks and their deep and quotidian significance to human and environmental wellbeing, both within and beyond their catchments, underpins this research, which emerged from the confluence of my art practice and my work with the Friends of Merri Creek. Volunteer restoration labour includes activities such as weeding, planting and litter removal. In common with my printmaking and textile studio practices, these jobs are repetitive, labour-intensive, temporal, seasonal and ongoing.

As I began to notice the shared traits between my art practice and restoration work, I became increasingly preoccupied by how habitual and intentional human

activity affected the creek. This led me to ask: What can my interdisciplinary art practice, based in print and textiles, reveal about the labour and practices of ecological restoration and degradation in an urban creek? I set out to explore how textiles, printed with natural dye made with creek plants, could contribute meaning and context to human practices at the creek. What would be communicated if the plant dye were a bridge between plants, site(s) and labour? Could plant colour perform and add meaning to my practice beyond being a visual marker of a species? How could a studio practice, intent on scrutinising the materials and traits shared with volunteer restoration work, contribute to contemporary dialogues around the pressing need to care for urban ecologies?

In answering these questions, care emerged as the central theme in my practice-led research. Its implicit presence in both restoration and studio labour led me to identify care as a vital element of ecological relations that could be made visible and deepened through my art practice. Simultaneously I wanted to investigate through my practice how labours of care might articulate the human and non-human relations at the creek. Care (or its absence) became a thread along which to navigate the complex and at times contested sites of urban ecological space. The practice-led methodology I developed in studio and field positioned care as both subject and mode of enquiry. The issue of care, referring to both its presence and its absence, became pivotal to understanding the history of the creek and its contemporary challenges.

This understanding informed my studio approaches, shifting my focus from representational frameworks to develop and observe how, by foregrounding the care already present in my studio practices, I opened the work to navigate the complexities of urban creeks. At first care emerged as an intention; to take care and pay attention to the creek, to my work and to the interactions between the two. This enabled me to link the creek's history and its contemporary materiality. In this exegesis I will explain how I developed this approach through my research, eventually conceptualising my art practice and volunteer restoration work through theories of labours of care.

By approaching my research through labours and practices and ethics of care I found a new way of working in between contemporary art and urban ecological degradation and restoration. In her book *Matters of Care* Maria Puig de la Bellacasa



proposes that care, as a practice, should underpin and inform all our actions.<sup>1</sup> By turning this proposition to my practice-led research, I am positioning care as central to how I work, make, engage with and interpret art in and beyond the studio. This framework informs and makes sense of my own research and in doing so offers new ways of reading art practices and works which engage with environmental and social concerns.

Engaging with the problem of how care manifests itself, a focus on its materialisation in everyday practice emerged as a crucial component of this research. Repetitive, labour-intense and sequential processes are ways of paying attention and taking care. From my printmaking training, my practice is deeply connected to repetitive processes and methodologies which produce reflective or contemplative states. These practices comprise sequences of actions and/or the production of multiples. In this research I use the repetitive and meditative act of walking and iterative studio labour to activate time and space in which to think through action and to produce a sense of the duration of these methods. To contextualise my interdisciplinary practice, I draw on artists who use repetitive walking and printmaking practices, and in doing so acknowledge the strong influence this training has had on my thinking. Beyond this it is most useful to position my practice in the context of artists working with or amongst urban ecologies, under the broad discipline of environmental art, and in so doing extending my reach beyond print.

Being focussed on pre-existing labours of care, this research provides a new optic through which to understand and inform art practices concerned with urban ecological sites. There are many artists working with waterways, pollution, urban plants and walking, yet, to my knowledge, none who specifically address pre-existing labours of care in urban ecological sites. Latent elements of care can be found in most urban ecological art practices. It is my intention to reframe my own practice by positioning care at its centre.

Care is implicit in the work of many artists. Lucas Ihlein, Kim Williams and Brogan Bunt's *Walking Upstream: Waterways of the Illawarra* (2014– ) make visible degraded

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, ed. Cary Wolfe, vol. 41, *Posthumanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

and neglected waterways around Wollongong, NSW. This work can be read as a performance of care. Janet Lawrence's public artwork *In the Shadow* (1999) aims to bring attention to a polluted waterway while also putting in place mechanisms to remediate the site through plantings and pollution filters. Both these practices ask audiences to pay attention and look at something marginal with fresh eyes, yet in their work I suggest care is assumed rather than elevated.

Other artists seek to reveal the role of ruderal plants in urban settings, typically focussing on introduced species as food plants. Two examples are Diego Bonetto's urban foraging and Artist as Family's permaculture lifestyle. They each merge daily practices in art and life in order to offer more sustainable ways of being. Here the care is focussed around practices which give back to humans by way of food or shelter. Ruth Johnstone's *Weed Census Project* (2015) documents locally growing ruderal plants in Fremantle, in doing so she provides an important register of maligned and ignored weedy species. Kate Gorringer-Smith's *Overwintering Project* (2017–) calls on artists to share visual interpretations of their environments to bring attention to the importance of local sites to globally migrating birds.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst my practice holds elements in common with each of these projects, this exegesis demonstrates how labours and ethics of care offer, or even insist on, a connection between action, labour, material, history and site. Feminist theorists Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher's definition of care reminds us that care is a measure of exchange applicable to most situations:

On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. The world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.<sup>3</sup>

Tronto and Fischer's definition prompts me to reflect on the possibility of care cultivating relations between things. For an artist firmly grounded in making and the

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<sup>2</sup> Kate Gorringer-Smith, <http://www.kategorringesmith.com.au/the-overwintering-project.html>. (Accessed Friday 30th March, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Joan C Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103.

physical encounter between materials and maker, the way in which the history of Merri Creek is inextricably tied to and revealed in contemporary encounters with the materiality of the site is intrinsic to this research. The Merri's history has much in common with those of many creeks; originally providing sustenance and life to the local people, the Wurundjeri, the creek was devastated by colonisation. The introduction of tanneries, brickworks, quarries and farming marked significant shifts in land care; these practices damaged water quality and species diversity. The building of suburbs, and subsequent flood mitigation measures, further shaped and controlled the creek and its environs. It was not until the 1970s that deliberate restoration and rehabilitation work began.

In addressing the role of care within these ecological relations, and how my art practice extends these relations, I focus on materiality. As well as describing the qualities of matter in the studio, I use the term materiality, in context to the creek and its environs, to refer to the complicated interactions and intra-actions of matter which make up the creek today.<sup>4</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines materiality as, “that which constitutes the ‘matter’ of something: opposed to formality; the quality of being material; material aspect or character; mere outwardness or externality.”<sup>5</sup> The creek's materiality carries residual and physical evidence of its history and treatment. Ancient scarred trees are material evidence of pre-colonial human presence. Introduced plant species suggest interventions in the indigenous ecosystems, as do fences, roads, and quarrying.

Walking, working and being at the creek constitute a way of paying attention to this material history through a corporeal and hybrid experience. The materiality of the creek is more than matter and objects; it is the intermingling of history and the present through material intra-actions. Translated to artworks, materials bring their histories with them. If, as Tronto suggests, ‘Care is both a practice and a disposition’, then it is vital that the materials used in my practice, and found at the creek, are subjected to the same careful attention and scrutiny as human-led acts.<sup>6</sup> The complexity of the creek

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Barad describes objects as emerging through intra-actions and conditions. I will return to this idea in discussion of my work during the exegesis.

<sup>5</sup> materiality, in *Oxford English Dictionary*.<http://www.oed.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/view/Entry/114928?redirectedFrom=materiality> (Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2016)

<sup>6</sup> Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 104.

site—where practices of care, materials, politics and history play out—is impossible to represent as a series of equally weighted concerns or as a singular narrative.

By turning to an approach where the materiality and actions of the human and more-than-human are attended to, my research can catch materials, actions and histories to distil details which speak to broader concerns at the creek. Thus, by framing this research in labours and processes of taking care, I steer away from modes of representational art making, turning instead to conflate the field of New Materialism with labours of care. New Materialism calls attention to non-human agency where the relations between and through matter are of primary importance. This shift is useful to artists pursuing global, political and environmental concerns and has enriched my investigation of labours of care in art practice.

The work of theorists Karen Barad and Jane Bennett has informed my methodology. I put into practice the importance of following materials and Bennett's sensorial and attentive approach to understanding the 'encounters between ontologically diverse actants' which connect and blur my studio and field practices.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, this material approach elevates the agency of the nonhuman, forcing me to take notice of stuff. Further to this, Barad suggests that knowledge and agency both emerge in the context of 'phenomena' which form the relational conditions of their possibility. Both, in this respect, are positioned as historical and processual, rather than matter being positioned as a given state that is well represented by knowledge and culture. Indeed, Barad suggests that rather than materiality and culture operating on different planes of existence, matter forms the conditions of producing knowledge, while knowledge reciprocally produces material outcomes. Coining the term 'intra-action' to underline this inextricable reciprocity, Barad states that 'agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world' that occurs in the context of these intra-relations.<sup>8</sup> Barad's explanation of the entanglement of the discursive and the material facilitates

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<sup>7</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University, 2010), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 818-19.

participation in practice-led research while also taking into account the materiality of the creek itself.

In framing my art practice and restoration work through an ethics and labour of care, I ask the question of how art might articulate the complex sites of urban ecologies and their significance to human and non-human life and activity. I respond to this question by employing and combining traditions of repetitive process-based practices with site-specific materials. I am enacting and revealing practices of care in the studio and in the field. In doing so, I show how new ways to interpret and produce artworks engaging with altered urban spaces are made possible. My research shows how the burgeoning field of art engaged with urban ecologies, if read and/or created through a framework of labours or ethics of care, has the potential to open audiences to new ways of navigating and engaging with this important field. I propose that artworks which bind site to process and matter through practices of care connect and engage people in ways that are beyond the scope of representational models of art practice.

The questions of how to use and reveal care through my art practice are examined through four projects and artworks that comprise my practice-based research. The works can be broadly divided into two groups: field-based art projects discussed in Chapters One and Two; and gallery-based projects discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Three details a pivotal point in my research where I return to making works for the gallery and Chapter Six discusses the final exhibition at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery.

In Chapter One, I discuss how care emerged in the first field-based work, *Walking the Merri* (2013) as a process of paying ‘attention’. This seven-day, durational and performative walk, taken with friend, colleague and curator, Lesley Harding, down the length of Merri Creek in Melbourne’s northern suburbs enabled me to pay sustained and close attention to the creek via my walking body. Reflecting on this I argue that walking and being with the creek over the course of a week was itself an act of care. At the same time, this close attention activated the first of Tronto’s four interconnected

phases in the process of caring for others.<sup>9</sup> Described as ‘caring about’, this initial step identifies the need for care, as well as the decision that this need be met.

As well as documenting my deepening sense of ‘caring about’ Merri Creek this chapter also examines how care and its ties to the creek’s materiality became apparent during the planning and preparation of this work. Prior to *Walking the Merri* I sought permission to cross the properties of private landowners. This process determined our route, while simultaneously revealing legal and material relationships that constitute Merri Creek today and which began to indicate how individual owners cared for their land.

In the studio I employed iterative process of printing, dyeing and sewing. The production of a series of pockets and gaiters dyed and printed with creek plants provided props for the walk. The textiles functioned as protection and vessel. Each day I wore a fresh pair of gaiters; they traced the movement between my body and site through the accrual of creek matter and sweat. I argue the use of iterative printing processes, where creek plants colour the textiles, which are further overlaid with matter collected between my moving body and the site, and the production of multiple garments, is a manifestation of care through studio and field practices. [Figs. 1 & 2]

I discuss how the contemporary turn of walking as an art practice builds on the rich tradition of walking. This return to slower, more attentive ways of being, fosters dialogue across disciplines including cultural geography, environmental science and history. These disciplines inform contemporary walking practices to produce embodied and often site-specific knowledges which I demonstrate employ and reveal practices of care.

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<sup>9</sup> Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 105.

Tronto understands practices of care through four distinct phases. These phases follow each other, starting with the moment one identifies a situation or thing in need of care (“caring about”), followed by the stage in which one assumes a responsibility for or to care (“taking care of”), thirdly the direct meeting of this need (“care-giving”) and, lastly, the way in which the recipient takes up or responds to this care (“care-receiving”). Further, Tronto has developed the term “privileged irresponsibility” to express the ability of the most advantaged in society to purchase caring services, thereby delegating the work of care-giving, and in so doing avoiding the direct responsibility of how care is practiced and received.



**Fig. 1**  
Seven pairs of gaiters ready for *Walking the Merri*, 2013  
cotton, linen, wool, hemp, screenprinting and dyeing with natural dyes collected at the Merri Creek



**Fig. 2**  
Day Three: *Walking the Merri*—gaiters and *Walking the Merri*—pockets after a day of walking between Merri Park and Lockerbie.  
Photography: Lesley Harding

Through this wayfaring method of building knowledge, I learnt about and observed how these histories, boundaries and practices shaped the materiality of the creek, and in turn my experience of walking its length.<sup>10</sup> I demonstrate how the corporeal experience of walking, working and being at the creek are ways of paying attention to this material history. Importantly, the route of our walk, directed by permissions and exclusions, mapped in real time a series of individual and collective relations inscribed in this place, while the act of walking itself brought these to my attention. Reflecting on my decision to walk downstream, I draw on Gaston Bachelard's discussion of water as carrier, a concept I return to through my exegesis to examine the material role of water in my studio practice.<sup>11</sup> Water is core to the creek's materiality and carries physical evidence of its history and treatment.

Chapter Two discusses *Tending the Merri* (2013), a work which engages directly with restoration volunteers, their labour and the sites of their care. A discussion of this work demonstrates how I use the materiality of the creek to bring attention to the labours of care present in restoration work. I created a series of garments and tents in the studio, these plant-dyed textiles were returned to the creek and worn or used by volunteers during a series of Friends of Merri Creek restoration events. [Fig. 3]

The work of volunteers enacts Tronto's second and third phases of care where she identifies 'taking care of' as individuals assuming some responsibility for an identified need to care, and 'care giving' as the direct meeting of this need. She specifies the care giving as involving physical work where there is an encounter between the object and giver of care. I argue, by returning plants to the creek site via garments worn by workers, attention is focussed on the relationship between the site of restoration and the volunteers' role in performing this care. My studio labour fixed plant colour in the garments' fibres, reinforcing connections between workers, site and restoration labour through this common material. By creating garments specifically for these events, I brought attention to the often-invisible labour of volunteers.

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Ingold, "Footprints through the Weather-World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16 (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983).





**Fig. 3**  
*Edgar's Creek community planting*, September 2013  
 high-vis-style jackets  
 calico dyed and screenprinted with weeds  
 and indigenous plants from the Merri Creek  
 catchment  
 each jacket 55 x 78 cm approx.  
 Photography: Kirsty Argyle



**Fig. 4**  
*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
 RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC  
 Installation view showing *Walking the Merri—gaiters*  
 and *Walking the Merri—pockets*  
 Photography: Andrew Barcham

Chapter Three responds to the problem of how art might contribute to extending relations and practices of care in a gallery setting. It does this by tracing a turning point in this research, prompted by an examination of how readings of *Walking the Merri* and *Tending the Merri* shifted when installed in a gallery. In different ways, each project has employed and enacted elements of care as a studio methodology to reveal practices of care on site at the creek. What happened then, when the textiles and other residues or artefacts of these works were displayed inside a gallery? Could they still enact labours of care away from the site?

Thus, a logical next step was to exhibit iterations of *Walking the Merri* and *Tending the Merri* in a gallery setting where there was the potential of a wider audience than at the creek. However, installed in a gallery, the work ceased activating the sites of human and more-than-human activity at the creek, working instead as documentary evidence of a past event (*Walking the Merri*) or as a representation of a place (*Tending the Merri*). In other words, they represented the works in the field without effecting relations of care. This realisation constituted a pivotal phase of my research, and in this chapter, I discuss how, away from the creek, operating as indexical records of past events, these works did not successfully reveal practices of care. In the process of developing these works in response to my research problem, I had found a purely representational model of interpreting and making art was insufficient as a basis for engaging with the complicated site of urban ecological restoration and degradation. Regardless, this work, once installed in the gallery, had reverted to being read in this way. [Fig. 4]

Reflecting on this problem, I propose in this chapter that it is possible to produce works for a gallery audience which enact and reflect on ethics and practices of care through an engagement with matter and site. To address this issue, I returned to theorists and practitioners writing about *New Materialism*, a growing interdisciplinary field where the agency of matter serves to undo humanist, constructivist and anthropocentric interpretations of the world. Developments in quantum physics, nanotechnology and human-technological interactions along with social, political and philosophical theories

destabilising human privilege increasingly turn our attention to the agency of matter.<sup>12</sup> Barad, a leading theorist in this field, brings the findings of quantum physics into philosophical, feminist and ecological discussions. These theories, a natural fit for artists working in dialogue with materials, allowed me to conceive of how plant matter, and my methodologies of processing it, can translate and communicate practices of care to audiences in the gallery. In paying attention to matter, an artist can reveal and implicate political and environmental relations and practices. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost support my shift towards paying attention to materiality as a way of apprehending and making sense of the complexity of the world where multiple agencies are in a constant state of becoming.<sup>13</sup>

The decision to return to conventions of making work specifically for the gallery re-framed *Walking the Merri* as fieldwork and research (while performing the act of ‘caring about’). The shift between research as artwork and fieldwork articulates one of the complexities of practice-led research, where the separation between research and findings cannot be clearly prised apart. Barbara Bolt differentiates between the artwork and the ‘work of art’ (that is, the work art does). She explains that the work that art does in a research context occurs across all phases of making as well as in its public presentation.<sup>14</sup> In the case of *Walking the Merri* the gallery installation provoked interpretations of the work which did not answer my research questions. However, as research this exhibition ‘worked’ to provide important insights into relations between performativity and representation. That is, the experience of translating *Walking the Merri* to a gallery, and the knowledge gained whilst walking, served to inform the next direction of my studio practice. This resulted in the production of two more works, created specifically for the gallery, which I will discuss in the final two chapters of this exegesis.

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Bolt, “Introduction,” in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a ‘New Materialism’ through the Arts*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 3.

<sup>13</sup> D. Coole and S. Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Coole, D. & Frost, S. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Bolt, “Beyond Solipsism in Artistic Research: The Artwork and the Work of Art,” in *Material Interventions: Applying Creative Arts Research*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 7.

Chapter Four addresses how, considering the experience discussed above, I sought to solve the problem of how to create works for a gallery which combined the creek's materiality with labours of care. *Bound by Gorse* (*Ulex europaeus*) (2017) [Fig. 5] was the first of the works in which I sought to do this. I used papermaking methods to produce about 100 bricks made of the invasive woody weed, gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). In this work I use the materiality of gorse to explore relations between care and land use. Walking and restoring the creek provided tangible experiences of the lack of care practised by some landowners. The historic roots of ill-conceived care are visible in the landscape and, to understand this, I draw on feminist ecologist Val Plumwood's critique of the instrumentalisation of nature, which views it simply as a 'resource' to provide for humans, without reciprocity.<sup>15</sup>

Such instrumentalisation was deeply felt and present during *Walking the Merri* and was therefore a significant idea to revisit in the gallery. By working wholeheartedly with the gorse, I engage with the historic and contemporary ramifications of land practices, firstly in its planting and more recently with efforts to remove and contain this species. Bellacasa identifies "‘matters of care’ [as] a proposition to think with . . . to generate more caring relationalities."<sup>16</sup> I demonstrate that creek material, reconstituted through art making practices and used as an art material, can comprise care and the presence of care practices at urban ecological sites.

*Bound by Gorse*, and my final installation *Habitus* (2017) contemplate the temporal and material nature of labours of care and how these manifest in the finished works. To explain how practices of care and time sit together and emerge across urban ecologies, and in the shorter timeframe in my studio practice I borrow Sharon Blakey and Liz Mitchell's term 'material time' in which they describe the 'intimate interplay' between time, matter and relationships of care.<sup>17</sup> This dialectic between time and care is helpful when examining and understanding the ontological material experience of my studio practice and gallery installations. The depth of my interaction with materials will be

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<sup>15</sup> Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1992), 111.

<sup>16</sup> Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, 41, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Sharon Blakey and Liz Mitchell, "Unfolding: A Multisensorial Dialogue in 'Material Time'," *Studies in Material Thinking* 17 (2017): 12.



**Fig. 5**

*Bound by Gorse* (*Ulex europaeus*), 2017  
 gorse  
 variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
 digital print 57 x 42 cm  
*Water+Wisdom Australia: India*, 2018  
 RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, VIC  
 Photography: Mark Ashkanasy © RMIT



**Fig. 6**

*Habitus*, 2017  
*(Quiet Witness)*  
 cotton damask tablecloth, natural dyes  
 175 x 300 cm  
*(Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries)*  
 hemp, wool, natural dyes, sand  
 360 x 130 x 38 cm  
 Installation view  
 Heide III: Kerry Gardner & Andrew Myer Project  
 Gallery  
 Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, VIC  
 Photography: Matthew Stanton

discussed in detail in the final chapters where the production of the bricks (*Bound by Gorse*) and sandbags (*Habitus*) made these relations most visible.

In Chapter Five I further address how to reveal practices of care, present as subject and method, to gallery audiences. I discuss how my installation *Habitus*, created for Heide Museum of Modern Art and the 2017 Art + Climate = Change Festival, tackled this problem by framing care at locally connected sites of Merri Creek and Heide in relation to global warming. To do this, I returned to methods used in my first two projects, adapting them specifically to the gallery. [Fig. 6]

For example, I walked between Heide and Merri Creek, using the method of wayfaring to spend time in and learn about the new terrain. In doing so I enacted Tronto's initial phase of 'caring about' this expanded site. I reflected on quotidian practices and how local actions connect with the overarching problem of global warming. In addition, I returned to using locally gathered plants as textile dye. The resulting work was a wall of sandbags, dyed and printed with plant colour collected during my walks. Installed with the sandbags was a printed and dyed damask tablecloth depicting *Yingabeal*, the Wurundjeri scarred tree, estimated to be over 500 years old, still growing in the Museum's grounds. As with *Bound by Gorse*, I took advantage of the repetitive labour, in this case of printing and dyeing, to produce multiple sandbags, which collectively revealed labours of care.

I explain how the title of this installation—*Habitus*, refers to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the same name—is used as a prompt for viewers to examine our habitual practices through a framework of care. This work aimed to contextualise local care practices in a broader conversation around the complex intra-actions of matter which constitute the world. I did this by translating material evidence of my temporal, repetitive studio and sited research to the gallery. To understand the complexity of these expanded sites, I turned to cultural geographer Sarah Whatmore who suggests that a way of shifting the parameters of ethics beyond the human subject is through a

consideration of hybridity and corporeality, in doing so progressing to a more complex account of the world away from dualisms such as nature/culture.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter Six explains the rationale behind the installation of my final works at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, which will be presented in a three-person exhibition, *Walking Matters*, in June 2018. I use this speculative chapter to discuss exhibiting *Tending the Merri*, *Bound by Gorse* and *Habitus* together for the first time. I explain how I propose to rework *Tending the Merri*, to connect it more closely to labours of care.

I conclude my exegesis by reflecting on the implications of the findings of my research. This research began at the confluence of my art practice and my participation in volunteer ecological restoration work. My exegesis thereafter demonstrates how my art practice drew upon and revealed practices of care found in urban ecological restoration, walking and making. I argue that framing art practice through frameworks of care produces experiences of being in and with the work that are particularly suited to the dynamic and conflicted topic of urban ecological restoration, but that could equally translate to practices engaged with other themes. Shifting away from a solely representational method of interpreting art, I focus instead on the materiality and processes of my practice. By attending to how care plays out as subject and methodology in this material- and process-led investigation, I propose that I have formulated new ways of realising and communicating care in an art practice concerned with the restoration and degradation of urban ecological sites. I propose that this research indicates how art practices which build around ethics and practices of care offer a means of enacting an ecological responsibility. If, as I have argued, care is a way of seeing and acting in the world in which interdependency and relationships are foregrounded and the potential to take responsibility is raised, then my examination of care as a practice and method of art, and its interpretation, offers a path through which to navigate an increasingly precarious world.

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces* (London, Thousand Oaks, Spaces: SAGE Publication, 2002), 158.





# Chapter One: Walking the Merri—Care as Attention

## Preamble

In this chapter I discuss my performative artwork, *Walking the Merri* (2013), and the ways in which it revealed and performed practices of care. Conceived as an artwork, this seven-day walk from Heathcote Junction to Abbotsford, was also important fieldwork informing my subsequent research direction.<sup>19</sup> [Map 1] Walking, as a process of paying attention, offers ways of engaging with complex sites that are at once speculative and material, as Bellacasa argues ‘thinking with care’ is a practice not a theory.<sup>20</sup> Translated to art, practicing with care produces new ways of thinking through materials and processes.

Using experiences from the planning and performance of *Walking the Merri*, I will demonstrate the complexity of the creek in terms of its uses, the modes of care practised and how, in most instances, economic potential of land overrides all other values. As we walked we observed the potential wealth procured through housing, the cost and responsibility of ecological restoration and the mix of uses imposed on the land. The history of these places was apprehended through our moving bodies; the intermingling of introduced and indigenous species, the livestock and crops juxtaposed by kangaroos and wallabies, and—except for one day’s respite—the incessant hum of the Hume Freeway.

My understanding of the creek’s need for care was deepened during each stage of this project. Tronto’s phase of ‘caring about’, where the need for care is identified, and the decision to act is decided, enabled other practices of care at the creek to be observed. I show how walking is an embodied and mobile means of paying attention; as anthropologist Tim Ingold argues it is ‘a process of thinking and knowing’.<sup>21</sup> The slowed pace of walking is a performance of care—of paying attention—enhanced by the pace

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<sup>19</sup> Lesley Harding and I walked from the source of Merri Creek in Heathcote Junction, downstream to its confluence with the Yarra River (Birraung) in the inner-city suburb of Abbotsford. We were joined each day by a third walker who heightened the relations between creek fragment and whole by punctuating the seven-day walk with their presence.

<sup>20</sup> Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, “‘Nothing Comes without Its World’: Thinking with Care,” *The Sociological Review* 60, no. 2 (2012): 199.

<sup>21</sup> Ingold, “Footprints through the Weather World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing,” S121.

and proximity of body and ground. In turn this ambulant pace enabled an encounter with the creek's materiality which revealed past and present interventions at the creek. I will explain how the walk became a performance of the presence or absence of care, made visible through negotiations with owners during the planning stages. This provided a corporeal experience of the caring and instrumental relations and interventions at the creek, which informed my later works.

Paying attention to boundaries and care practices, I will discuss three aspects *Walking the Merri*: the planning and negotiation of the walk; the sewing, dyeing and printing of textile pockets and gaiters to wear as I walked; and the performative and durational act of walking and how it embodied and revealed care. In doing so I contextualise the place walking holds in my practice.

### **Preparation and permission: Beginning to care**

The Merri Creek runs for approximately 70 kilometres, much of its northern reaches privately owned. This reflects the rapid and early uptake of land by white colonists and set me the task of asking permission to cross settler-constructed boundaries. The 1881 law where riparian land 'to some 280 rivers and lakes was reserved' as Crown Land, did not apply retrospectively; land already in freehold possession remained in private hands.<sup>22</sup> By the 1880s there was significant freehold ownership throughout Victoria. The Merri Creek bears this history and *Walking the Merri* performed its legacy. There are some Crown (Parks Victoria) owned sections, but most of the creek north of Craigieburn is freehold, breaking up the beds, banks and frontages to this day.

Requesting permission to walk on private property set up an ethical framework through which walking as an act of care was made possible. By asking permission from each landowner, I was adhering to colonially introduced laws prohibiting trespass and I was seeking to observe links between permission, ownership and the individual owners' care practices. These laws reflect the rationale legitimising private property, outlined by eco-feminist Val Plumwood, in which nature is viewed as '*terra nullius* available for

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<sup>22</sup> Maddocks and The Public Land Consultancy, "Waterways—a Cadastral Taxonomy," *Terra Publica* 7, no. 5 (2007), <http://publicland.com.au/pdf/Terra%20Publica%20October%202007.pdf>.

annexation, as empty, passive and without a value or direction of its own.<sup>23</sup> The link between land and labour (established by 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, John Locke) stated that private ownership is valid where one is using the land for profit.<sup>24</sup> Vandana Shiva (cited in Plumwood) notes this instrumental relationship to nature, evident at Merri Creek, preferences profitable labour above the labours of care-giving groups.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, volunteer ecological restoration workers, who are motivated by a desire to mend, and whose labour is not typically measured in monetary terms, take up a culturally marginal position.

Walking the route determined by my negotiations with landowners was a corporeal and temporal mapping of how they exercised their legal rights. By respecting landowners' decisions as final, my detours around properties revealed instrumental as well as caring relations to land. The physical boundaries and thoroughfares imposed on the landscape as fences and roads inscribe the potential of individual profit and gain and the potential for exclusion of others. Pre-1788, Bill Gammage argues, 'People civilised all the land without fences, making farm and wilderness one.'<sup>26</sup> The land, conceived as places and sites and cultivated within a system of integrated spiritual and ecological beliefs and practices, which included social principles determining access and exclusion, was nevertheless unbounded by constructed barriers. Thus, during our wayfaring we moved within three overlapping systems: traditional Indigenous landownership with fuzzy boundaries; fences and roads; and surveyed boundaries recorded in the Lands Title Office. I propose fences and boundaries are material evidence of the histories and effects of instrumental land practices, even when used for repair.

Our largest diversion was around an historic property, *Camoola*. During the planning stage I repeatedly tried to gain access, even speaking by telephone with the

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<sup>23</sup> Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> This instrumentalist view of nature predates Locke, as this excerpt from the bible shows: Genesis 1:26 "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." *The Holy Bible (King James Version 1611)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925—1946), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Shiva cited in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 111.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, London: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 330.



**Fig. 7**

Day Two: *Wallan to Merri Park Map*

*Walking the Merri* artists' book/catalogue, page 13

Our passage is marked in green and circumnavigates *Camoola* (formerly *Springvale Station*). The creek flows through the centre of the property (marked as a white broken line).

CEO of the company which owned the land. His charm belied his definitive ‘no’. *Camoola* was an example of purely instrumental ownership. Recently purchased at the time of *Walking the Merri*, it lay within Melbourne’s Urban Growth Boundary, but had not yet been re-zoned for development.<sup>27</sup> I suspect the owner knew it was in his best interests to keep people out in case (for example) they identified an endangered species thereby compromising development opportunities. The creek meanders through the centre of this large property whilst our route took right-angled turns to circumnavigate the boundary [Fig. 7]. A fence, reinforced with an iron gate, crossed the creek where it entered *Camoola*. [Fig. 8] This material barrier evoked my failed negotiations. The closest I came to the 1880s homestead was imaginatively through Freya Mathews’ book, *Journey to the Source of the Merri* and via a photograph in the State Library of Victoria’s archive.<sup>28</sup> [Fig. 9]

Against this instrumental framework, Deborah Bird Rose writes ‘Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with.’<sup>29</sup> Walking amongst peripheral spaces of city and creek allowed me to see how a predetermined route based on courtesy and law reveals the political ramifications of ownership, boundaries and uses. The process of writing letters, cold calling and door knocking contributed to the continual reshaping of the creek environment in my imagination. Of the approximately 25 private or corporate landholders, four refused access, and another I was recommended not to approach.<sup>30</sup> In some instances, a different owner on the opposite bank provided passage, but in two key sections both sides were off-limits.

Mostly our walk was marked by the generosity of strangers who allowed us to slip through barbed wire from one property to the next. Fence lines—visible in satellite images as patchwork grids—marked the shifts in land management that we observed at ground level. On Day One we walked through small rural and peri-suburban parcels

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<sup>27</sup> “Key Facts on Melbourne’s Urban Growth Boundary,” Victorian Planning Authority, <https://vpa.vic.gov.au/greenfield/more-information/urban-growth-boundary-key-facts/>. (Accessed 8th January, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Freya Mathews, *Journey to the Source of the Merri* (Melbourne: Ginninderra Press, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*. (Canberra, ACT: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Locals informed us the owner carried a gun and was dangerous. Luckily the creek frontage of this property spanned less than 50 metres, which we easily bypassed via a road.



**Fig. 8**

Day Two: Gate and fence blocking the creek at the northern boundary of *Camoola*.

**Fig. 9**

Fred Kruger, 1831–1888

Sheep, cattle: Springvale Station, Merriang [Victoria], ca. 1880

photograph: albumen silver; 13.3 x 20.2 cm



of land. The interface between properties marked differing landcare approaches. A property choked with blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* aggregate) was almost un-navigable, while the next presented an open stretch, lightly planted with indigenous grasses. The demarcation between weeds and indigenous plants on either side of the fence reinforced recognition of the potential of humans to shape the landscape through the practice or absence of care. The ability of weeds to ignore fences, travelling via wind, water, car tyres, animals' fur and bird droppings was kept at bay by the labour of individual owners.<sup>31</sup>

## Wayfaring and Boundaries

*Walking the Merri* was performed in the spirit of wayfaring and a desire to follow the water downstream; in doing so we took one week to retrace and intersect with the footsteps of pre- and post-colonial walkers. Our passage was subjected to contemporary occupancy, materialised through the network of roads, boundaries and individual ownership. It was where our wayfaring was held in check—through the presence of built form, by the constraints of University ethics and the legalities of trespassing—that I learnt most about the creek and its histories.

I argue that, while Ingold makes explicit the difference between wayfaring or habitation and travel or occupation, it is possible for both modes to interact and occur together. He explains wayfaring as a form of inhabiting the earth where one 'participates from within in the very process of the world's continual coming into being.'<sup>32</sup> Wayfaring predates cartography and is an act of following others' footsteps, where the itinerary unfolds as one goes along. Distinct from pre-planned navigation, where a cartographic map represents the territory on which the desired course can be plotted, wayfaring instead involves a process of movement where time and place interweave.

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<sup>31</sup> R.H. Groves, Boden, R. & Lonsdale, W.M., "Jumping the Garden Fence: Invasive Garden Plants in Australia and Their Environmental and Agricultural Impacts," (Sydney: CSIRO report prepared for WWF-Australia, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2016; repr., 2016), 83.

Ingold differentiates between habitation and occupation suggesting the complex mesh of trails of habitation articulate a way of being in the world, rather than working towards arriving at a destination. Thus, he describes how imperial powers have ‘sought to occupy the inhabited world’ and in doing so have overlaid existing trails with a network of interconnecting points.<sup>33</sup> These lines of occupation, drawn onto cartographic maps, connect and divide country, ‘cutting the occupied surface into territorial blocks’.<sup>34</sup> *Walking the Merri* was performed in the interactions between occupancy/habitation and travel/wayfaring.<sup>35</sup>

As we walked, the GPS tracking app on my phone made our path visible. Reproduced in the catalogue/artists’ book made for the exhibition *Walking the Merri*, it marked our route, revealing where we travelled directly beside the creek, where landholders refused access and where impenetrable woody weeds forced us to backtrack. Rather than resulting in an incomplete walk along creek frontage, these diversions instead trace how ownership can determine access, and in doing so enact complex material relations between politics, occupation and care. [Fig. 10]

*Walking the Merri* built on and departed from a previous walk detailed in Freya Mathews’ book *Journey to the Source of the Merri*.<sup>36</sup> Mathews’ pilgrimage and my wayfaring each use walking as a method of taking care by being in and moving along Merri Creek. Her book recounts and maps a seven-day pilgrimage undertaken in 2000, in part a protest against the proposed Hume Freeway development. Starting at the Yarra three women followed the Merri to its headwaters in Heathcote Junction. Their daily experiences were contextualised by accounts and details of historically significant events and sites along the way. *Walking the Merri*, performed 13 years later, re-iterated Mathews’ expression of care, this time framed by relations between rapid urban growth and creek health.

Walking in the footsteps of others, following matter, inhabiting and wayfaring are all processes of caring for the creek through attention. Moving downstream with

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ingold’s differentiation between habitation and occupation is perfectly and distressingly examined in Raja Shehadeh’s book, *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape*, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Mathews, *Journey to the Source of the Merri*.





**Fig. 10**

Day Four: *Lockerbie to Craigieburn Map*

*Walking the Merri* artists' book / catalogue, page 21

Our passage along the creek is marked in green and shifts to red where we divert around Austral Bricks near Curly Sedge Creek.

the water retraced Mathews' footsteps backwards, staging a reiteration rather than a direct replication of her walk. By tracing the creek from its origins, I observed changes in the creek in relation to its proximity to the city. Bachelard writes of the pleasure in 'following a stream, in walking along the banks in the right direction, the way the water flows and leads life elsewhere.'<sup>37</sup> I will return to the idea of 'elsewhere', but now explain the significance of following the materiality of the creek. In her book, *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett proposes the 'value in following the scent of a nonhuman, thingly power'.<sup>38</sup> Her interpretation of Jacques Derrida's observation of the relations 'between being and following: to be (anything, anyone) is always to be following (something, someone)' explains how walking downstream, following the water, is to be in a call and response interaction with the creek's matter.<sup>39</sup> This interaction between body and place is the site from which embodied knowledges emerge.

A wayfaring method of building knowledge, of paying attention and thinking, is used across creative and scientific fields and has a long history in the study of nature and urban environments. European lineages, of which Australia's history is a part, include 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantics like William and Dorothy Wordsworth, who walked for pleasure, to compose poems and as a means of transport.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the *flâneur*, an urban and urbane wanderer, typically male, established understandings of social interactions via participation rather than observation.<sup>41</sup>

In Australia, Indigenous habitation predates European exploration by tens of thousands of years. The Aboriginal artist Loongkoonan, a Nyikina woman from the Kimberley region in the north of Western Australia, describes how walking produces knowledge and connection: 'footwalking is the only proper way to learn about country, and remember it. That is how I got to know all of the bush tucker and medicine.'<sup>42</sup> Acquisition of new knowledge is also contingent on context. For Loongkoonan

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<sup>37</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, xiii.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York, USA: Penguin, 2000), 87.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Pierce and Mary Lawhon, "Walking as Method: Toward Methodological Forthrightness and Comparability in Urban Geographical Research," *The Professional Geographer* 67, no. 4 (2015): 656.

<sup>42</sup> Emma Young, "105-Year-Old Kimberley Woman Loongkoonan Holds Her First International Art Show," *WA Today*, 17th February 2016.

walking as a child can be compared to a mobile classroom where life skills, survival and spirituality merge. *Walking the Merri* was an artist's walk focussed on understanding relations between humans and land care in an urban setting. Consequently, most useful to this research are artists using walking in urban and peri-urban environments.

Amongst the first Western artists to walk suburban space as practice were members of the Situationist International, who in the 1950s developed psychogeography along with its corresponding practice, the *dérive*. A *dérive* typically comprises three or four people setting off without a fixed destination, instead moving through space taking the 'point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.'<sup>43</sup> The Situationists were interested in how

'psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.'<sup>44</sup>

I was concerned with how a sustained and returning practice could reveal traces left by historical interventions. Unlike the Situationists, I had a predetermined route, shaped by the creek's ancient passage across volcanic plains, and, as I discovered, by recent laws and histories overlying the land. Despite being more concerned with individual experience, the Situationists opened the way for walking practice to critically engage with the politics of space, moving beyond the humanist model of the solitary walker at one with nature, and alone with their thoughts.<sup>45</sup> They also offered an alternative to the pilgrimage—where walking performs a spiritual journey, usually culminating with the arrival at a revered or holy site. Mathews presented her walk as a pilgrimage, and for one of her companions, arriving at the Source for the first time held significant meaning.<sup>46</sup> The notion of arriving somewhere for the first time was at odds with the iterative processes of planning the walk and of my studio methods.

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<sup>43</sup> Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm>.(Accessed 8th January, 2018)

<sup>44</sup> "Les Lèvres Nues #6," <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html>.(Accessed 21 June, 2014)

<sup>45</sup> Cynthia Morrison-Bell et al., *Walk on, from Richard Long to Janet Cardiff—40 Years of Art Walking* (Art Editions North, University of Sunderland, 2013), 16.

<sup>46</sup> Personal conversation with Maya Ward. September, 2012

Requesting to walk as art bewildered some land owners and agents, nevertheless if they saw our endeavour as harmless we were granted access. On Day Four we walked 19 kilometres from Lockerbie—a sheep property of several thousand acres—to the northernmost point of Parks Victoria land in Craigieburn. [Map 1] In 2010 *The Age* reported, ‘A farming family is set to make more than \$300 million after signing a deal with Stockland to sell in stages its sheep grazing property, Lockerbie.’<sup>47</sup> Unlike *Camoola*, Stockland’s development plans to house 30,000 people, a new railway station, shopping centre, five schools, early childhood and tertiary centres, a retirement village and hospital and healthcare facilities were underway.<sup>48</sup> It was too late for the identification of an endangered species to halt development. I suggest this contributed to our ease of access.<sup>49</sup>

Instrumental relations other than urban development also influenced our access to the creek. Austral Bricks quarry occupies a large section of the eastern creek frontage where the Hume Freeway crosses the creek. Their institutional protocols kept us out: no (care) time to spare for a Work, Health and Safety induction. Negotiating with Austral Bricks revealed a framework in which workers were too busy for activities outside normal business. Bellacasa argues taking ‘care time’ into account offers a site of resistance to such practices.<sup>50</sup> Further she argues that, by ‘affirming the importance of care time’, we can make time and space for ‘a range of vital practices and experiences that remain discounted, or crushed, or simply unmeasurable in the productionist ethos.’<sup>51</sup>

The owner across the creek had hung up on me when I telephoned. This diverted our passage east where some weeks earlier, a grassfire had taken hold. The flat

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<sup>47</sup> Marika Dobbin and Simon Johanson, “Melbourne Heads North to Kalkallo,” *The Age*, 8th December 2010.

<sup>48</sup> At the time of writing, the sound of earth-moving machinery near the Lockerbie site fills the air, and across the skyline wooden frames of houses are springing up. The Merri Creek Management Committee continues to lobby for an improved ecological buffer around the creek.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.stockland.com.au/residential/vic/cloverton-location.aspx> (Accessed December 7th, 2015). It is worth noting that Stocklands have changed the name of the development from Lockerbie to Cloverton, hoping to shift the association away from the 1988 PanAm plane crash in Lockerbie, Scotland but now reminding me (at least) of the weedy seeds broadcast by Hume and Hovell in 1824.

<sup>50</sup> See Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, 41, 210.

Whilst politics of care are usually discussed in context of labour, I am also referring to the agency activated through walking. Take as one example Clinton Pryor, the Wajuk, Balardung, Kija and Yulparitja man, whose ‘walk for justice’ made national headlines in 2017. <https://www.clintonswalkforjustice.org> (Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2017)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



**Fig. 11**

Day Four: New growth sprouting through the charred branches of Melaleuca, Curly Sedge Creek. (see Map 1)



**Fig. 12**

Day Four: Water ribbons (*Triglochin procerum*); Wathaurong name: Polango. An important indigenous food source: the tubers were eaten raw or cooked.



paddocks still charred black already had fresh green pick pushing through the soil. [Fig. 11] We witnessed several hundred head of kangaroos feasting on the fresh new grasses, leaping away whenever we drew near. This detour took us beside Curly Sedge Creek, a small tributary and seasonal trickle, filled with rare and beautiful curly sedge (*Carex tasmanica*). As dusk drew in we crossed the Hume Freeway and for the first time walked along a cement path (shared by pedestrians and cyclists) towards *Walker's Farm* where we spent the night.

Differing care regimes between properties continued to shape our pace and direction, the plants growing in each place producing pleasure or discomfort. Further south we walked through a small property transformed by owners who had worked closely with Merri Creek Management Committee for years. It was a pleasant surprise to see water ribbons<sup>52</sup> thriving so close to the pollution just upstream. [Fig. 12] Re-iterating the experience of the day before, the next property was untended private land, so choked with gorse (and goats) we had to back-track, cross the creek and take the western bank downstream. [Fig. 52]

## Garments

Concurrent to the logistics of the walk itself, I prepared a series of pockets and gaiters to wear each day. The pockets, traditionally tied round the waist between petticoat and skirt, were copies of an English pattern popular from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. [Fig. 13] The gaiters, also an anachronistic design, recorded the act of walking, by capturing the space between body and site in ways that photographic or textual accounts cannot. [Fig. 14] As I will discuss in Chapter Three, displayed in the gallery, they became artefacts, each pair an index connecting to an earlier time and place, rather than connecting to a practice of care.

The gaiters, printed and dyed by me with creek plants before the walk, carried within their fibres traces of previous visits and reconnaissance trips. During the walk, their plant-dyed surface was over-inscribed by marks and stains procured between body,

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<sup>52</sup> Botanical name: *Triglochin procera*, Wathaurong name: Polango. An important indigenous food source: the tubers were eaten raw or cooked. <http://museumvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/visiting/milarrri-garden/aquatic/water-ribbons/> (Accessed December 8th, 2015)



**Fig. 13**

*Embroidered pair of pockets*, late 1770  
 linen, coloured wool  
 each pocket approximately 33 x 24 cm  
 Collection: Museum of London, UK

*Embroidered pair of pockets*, early – mid 1700s  
 linen, yellow silk thread, linen and silk tape  
 each pocket approximately 41 x 25.8 cm  
 Collection: Museum of London, UK

**Fig. 14**

*Walking the Merri—gaiters*, 2013  
 Day Six (showing worn, external and internal surfaces)  
 ash, bidgee widgee seeds, hemp, wool, buttons,  
 hook and eye tape, screenprinted and dyed  
 with gorse, willow bark, periwinkle, oxalis,  
 artichoke thistle dye, red gum  
 each 48 x 40 cm



**Fig. 15**

Day Three: Merri Park to Lockerbie  
Gaiters with Bidjee Widgee, *Acaena novae-zelandiae*  
(syn. *Acaena anserinifolia*)  
Photography: Lesley Harding



action and site. As I walked, the gaiters operated as markers of return and repetition, situated in the present they carried plant colour from previous visits. [Fig. 15] In Paul Carter's discussion of explorers' journals, he argues that the literary structure of the writing belies the actual experience of the explorer, and that 'the reflective attitude the explorer and settler literature embodies has been overlooked'.<sup>53</sup> He claims that the realities of returning to town for supplies, of crisscrossing one's path or riding in circles have 'been ironed out, [and] the order of them has been linearised, subjected to a one-way imperial chronology.'<sup>54</sup> That is, the story of the explorer is melded into one authoritative voice, rather than the intermingling of multiple threads, re-tracings and encounters. My gaiters acknowledge the act of return and wayfaring, present beneath the mapped surface of our land.

This linear framework, from which I am trying to break, is present in American artist Helen Mirra's works. During day-long walks, she stops seven times, to take a rubbing of a found object each hour. She describes her art practice as 'a kind of paced printmaking, made through walking. The activities are interdependent; the walking structures the printing, and the printing impels the walking.' Her practice highlights how process and context are integral to art practices and works because, as she comments, 'Direct prints are facts without much information, dependent on physical contact.'<sup>55</sup> Her small frottaged objects record singular moments. The walk between these rubbings is expressed through blank space on the linen cloth, an hour of time rather than terrain. By presenting pauses in her walks, Mirra keeps on track, moving forward in time, but without sharing a sense of what her moving body may have encountered in between. [Fig. 16]

My gaiters, clasped to my legs all day, were designed to record every brush and encounter, to trace the flow of movement and intra-action between things. The terrain and my body pressing back against each other marked the gaiters inside and out. The repetitive contact was recorded as blurred mud stains, folds and caught seeds,

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay—an Exploration of Landscape and History* (Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 173.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> <http://hmirra.net/index.php?page=info&displayinfo=bio> (Accessed March 23rd, 2017) Peter Eleey, "Dialogue, April-June, 2011," [http://www.hmirra.net/information/pdfs/EleeyMirra\\_2011.pdf](http://www.hmirra.net/information/pdfs/EleeyMirra_2011.pdf).

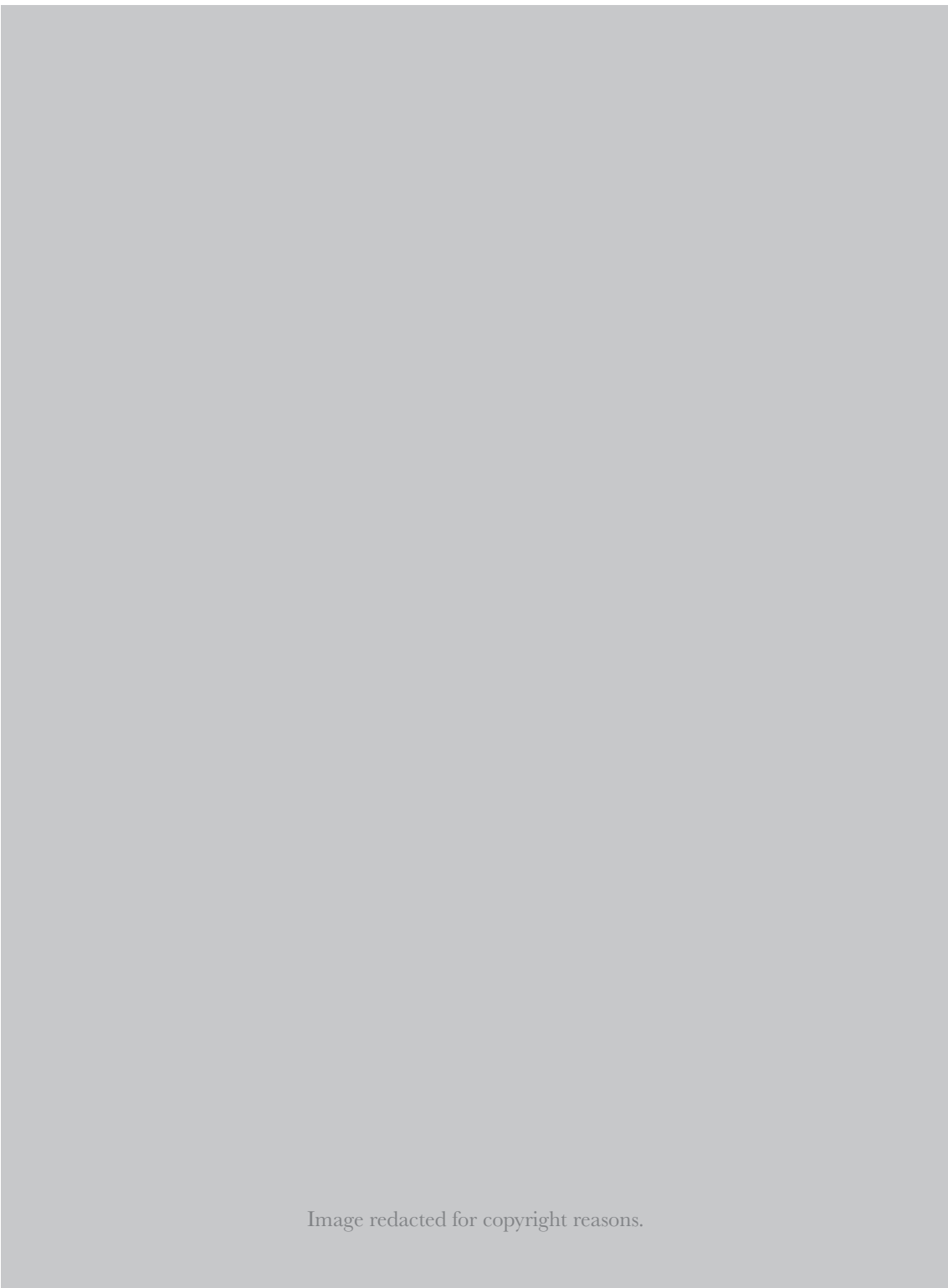


Image redacted for copyright reasons.

**Fig. 16**

Helen Mirra

*Hourly directional field recordings,*

Gravagna, 11 May 2011

oil on linen

155 x 155 cm

and through wear on heel-straps. The transition of carefully sewn plant dyed gaiters to something messier at the end of each day reminds me of Barad's statement that the 'force of culture "shapes" or "inscribes" nature but does not materially *produce* it.'<sup>56</sup>

By preparing the garments before we walked I complicated and entangled the order of inscription between the creek and my body. This contrasts with Australian artist John Wolseley who encourages 'nature' to mark and inscribe the substrates on which he later draws. He records traces of the landscape through methods such as burying, throwing or carrying paper through the bush in front of his body. Returning to the studio he responds to the accidental or non-human marks with drawing, painting and print. [Fig. 17] My careful labour-intensive studio processes set a pace and rhythm which carried through to how we walked. Rather than take an impression of the landscape as Wolseley does, I foreground and record actions and matter between walker and site. The interior and exterior of the gaiters play against each other, the heat of my body working with the site to produce folds, gathering seeds and mud and capturing the repeated movement of my body following the creek. Working onto a surface already dyed with creek plants articulated the necessity and presence of preparation and reconnaissance.

### **Time and Space for Care**

We traversed a wide variety of property types, each bearing marks of historic and contemporary land practices. Cultural geographer Doreen Massey writes, 'The identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with 'the outside''.<sup>57</sup> Massey's 'outside' is not dissimilar to Bachelard's elsewhere: that is, places are interconnected and shaped by matter, practices and other times. This is evidenced in introduced species and built structures including roads and railway tracks, which are often implemented from offices or places beyond the catchment and national boundaries.

Walking downstream recognized the central role of water in the creek's materiality by moving with it. But a creek's materiality can also be followed upstream.

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<sup>56</sup> Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," 825.

<sup>57</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994).

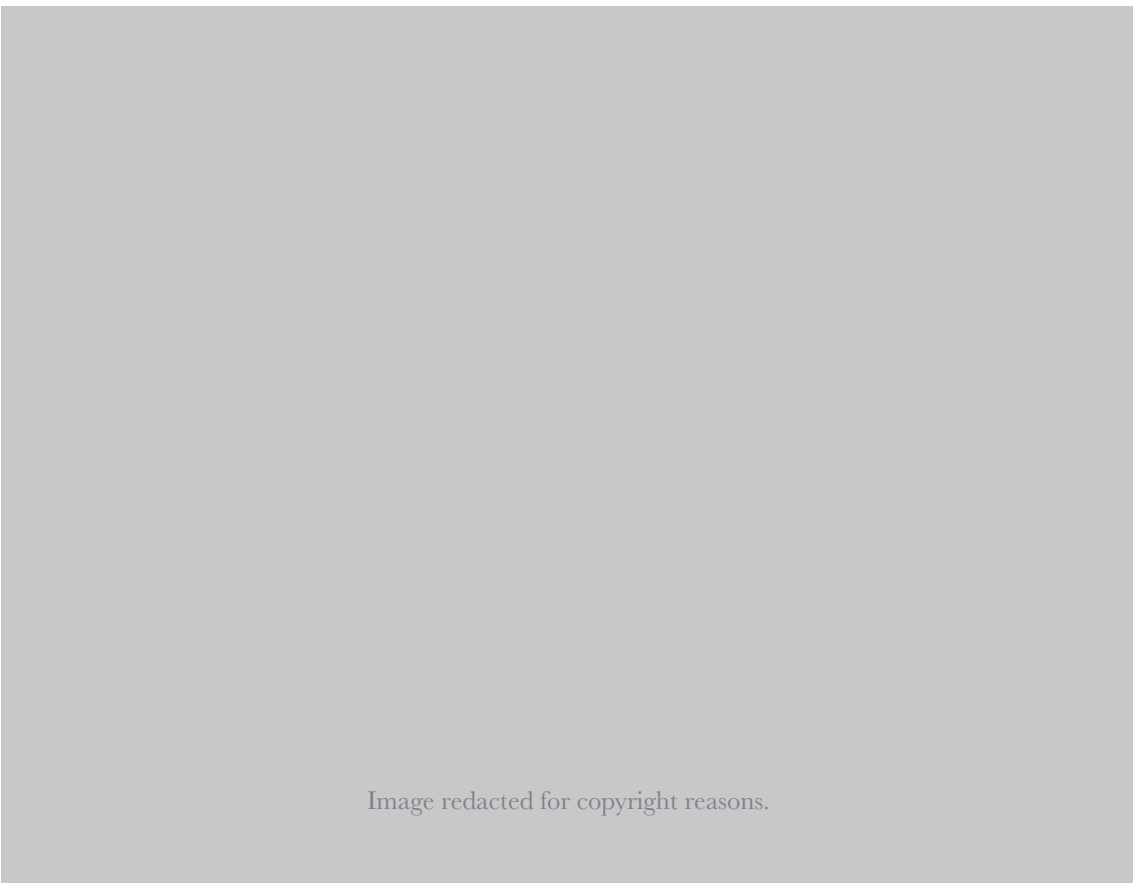


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**Fig. 17**

John Wolseley

*Murray Sunset Refugia with Ventifacts*, 2010

carbonized wood, watercolour and graphite on 15  
sheets of paper

210 x 110 cm and 14 satellite ventifacts

Ihle, Williams and Bunt's ongoing project *Walking Upstream: Waterways of the Illawarra*, (2014–) is one such example. Ihle's website outlines the premise and motivation of the project as 'resolutely local', 'to walk as far as possible upstream' and in doing so to negotiate or talk their way across private property.<sup>58</sup> They instigated a series of processes and rules which, like my project, predicted their 'trajectories [would] intersect with key aspects of the Illawarra around cultures of land use.'<sup>59</sup>

Both *Walking Upstream* and *Walking the Merri* use perambulation to experience space as a set of relations which include encounters with practices and histories of land use such as mining, land as 'property', ecological restoration and the presence of weedy species. Massey describes 'space as a cut through the myriad stories in which we are all living at any one moment.'<sup>60</sup> She suggests place can be understood as a pincushion of stories, existing together and intersecting each other. Walking allows an actualisation of this cut, the process of walking traverses and intersects other narratives, bringing them to our attention. Massey reminds us that spaces are not given, but are shaped by multiple histories. The material traces of these histories mark the creek as present legacies. [Fig. 18]

In this exegesis, I am arguing that examining practices which engage across time and place through matters of care offers additional and complementary readings to existing theoretical frameworks. Reading *Walking Upstream* through practices of care has the potential of bringing forth the care already present, but unnamed, in these artists' approach. Ihle's website positions this project in the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century avant garde practices, noting performance art theorist Claire Bishop's description of these types of 'practice as possessing a "double finality" or "double ontology"' whereby they speak to the discipline of art and to the conditions and politics of the world.<sup>61</sup> I add here, that art practices possessing a 'double ontology' are an ideal vehicle for Bellacasa's notion of care as 'a transformative ethos, . . . a living technology with vital material

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<sup>58</sup> Lucas Ihle, "Walking Upstream: Waterways of the Illawarra," <http://lucasihle.net/Walking-Upstream-Waterways-of-the-Illawarra>. (Accessed 8th January, 2018)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Doreen Massey on Space, 6th April, 2013, <https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/>. (Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

<sup>61</sup> "Walking Upstream: Waterways of the Illawarra".



**Fig. 18**

Fences, roads and railways crisscross the landscape. We walked under, over and around these boundaries during *Walking the Merri*.  
Photography: Lesley Harding and the author

implications—for human and nonhuman worlds.<sup>62</sup> That is, interpreting or producing art through an ethics of care is worthy of more attention and enquiry.

## Conclusion

The Hume Freeway's eponym and his fellow explorer Hovell were some of the many people whose footsteps our walk retraced. The framework of re-walking began in response to Mathews' pilgrimage, but included all who had trodden the creek before and since colonisation. To hold the creek's history in my imagination, and to experience the conflation of past and present through wayfaring, I came to understand the time spent and attention given as care. This research shows how practices of care, in this instance, the act of paying attention through walking, give space in which material histories can be contemplated and encountered in the present. The wayfaring intention of *Walking the Merri* was disrupted by built and legal structures of occupation, presenting the site as contested and complex. The vitality of the creek in concert with instrumental and cadastral interventions and treatments, was enacted and encountered during *Walking the Merri*. The textile garments, in particular the gaiters, used the creek's materiality to record and trace my movement downstream. The pre-printed and dyed gaiters integrated the walk with previous reconnoitring undertaken during the planning of the project.

I will save a discussion of the successes and failures of re-presenting *Walking the Merri* in the gallery for Chapter Three. I turn now to my second field-based work, *Tending the Merri* (2013–16) in which I extend my use of plant dye to explore the relations between plants, labour and care within the context of restoration volunteer work.

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<sup>62</sup> Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, 41, 67.





## Chapter Two: Tending the Merri

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained how processes of paying attention, by walking and spending time on site revealed the practice or absence of care at Merri Creek. *Tending the Merri* (2013–16) builds on this framework by looking at how care is present in my labour- and time-intensive studio processes and in the collective work of volunteer ecological restoration. I have taken up Bellacasa’s argument that care is a material practice of being in the world, the politics of which ‘exposes the importance of the work of care for creating livable and lively worlds,’ in order to examine the making of my plant-dyed textiles and their subsequent use at the creek.<sup>63</sup> I argue by using materials collected on site I am making textiles of the creek. Returning these re-worked materials to the creek during restoration activities, set up a relationship between worker, site, garment and action. This opened the possibility for participants to experience material time, in which the performative nature of their labours of care were elevated and brought to light.

I examine how returning the plant matter—present as colour in the textile jackets and tents—to the creek served to heighten the experience of restoration volunteers working on site. Through discussion of my and other artists’ work I show how plant dye describes human connection to place, time and labour. I posit that connecting plant dye practices and locally gathered materials to existing labours of ecological restoration through frameworks of care contributes new ways of thinking through and about urban ecological art practices.

In this chapter I move between describing the processes involved in making the textiles—where I assess the role of water, time and matter in my work—to discussing how the jackets and tents operated in the field. Bachelard’s suggestion that water is the ‘first auxiliary’ of material imagination offers a point of connection between water’s role at the creek and in the dye-pot.<sup>64</sup> I end with a question which I address in Chapter

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>64</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, 105.







**Fig. 19**

Opposite, clockwise: Collecting pink inner bark from a Willow about to be removed, Coburg, 2017; Harvesting gorse at Kalkallo, 2012; Pink inner bark from Willow, Coburg, 2012. Above: Gorse flowers ready for they dye pot, 2013.

Three, namely, what happens when an iteration of this sited, action-based work is installed in a gallery?

### **Cycles of transformation and reverie**

Collecting plant matter for dyeing is seasonally driven, dictated by conditions and events at the creek such as when plants are flowering or when a willow has been felled. It is time-consuming and repetitive, dependent on frequent visits, climatic turns and an active knowledge of and engagement with the creek. Likewise, restoration activities follow the seasons, Spring for weeding and Autumn for planting. Increasingly, ecologists in Australia are referring to the six Indigenous seasons which trace more nuanced shifts in weather and environment. To notice these extra seasons requires careful and deep engagement with the environment.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the work of gathering is continual, and is enhanced by deep attention and careful observation of season and place. Material is stockpiled for later, yet there is urgency to catch dye plants at the right time, to avoid waiting another year. [Fig. 19] To prepare the cloth for dyeing, I screenprinted about 70 metres of calico with mordant. [Fig. 20] Mordants are metal salts used prior to (or sometimes during) dyeing to facilitate the uptake of colour by cloth. The word mordant derives from the French *mordre*, to bite. It provides a chemical link between the cloth and the colour, encouraging the plant dye 'to bite' onto the cloth. Mordant printing enables designs and images, rather than an overall colour, to take-up plant colour during the dyeing process.

The designs I printed derived from found images such as local housing developments and indigenous species. Sewn into high-vis-style jackets and shelter tents, these designs became vehicles for plant colour as well as representational imagery. [Fig. 21] The process of gathering plants, printing calico, fixing the mordant to the cloth, and then dyeing the cloth, stretched across months. Rainwater, diverted from stormwater runoff, filled the dyebath. The harvest and use of rainwater diverts stormwater away from the creek; a simple connection between home and creek which aids catchment health. [Fig. 22]

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<sup>65</sup> Hereon I use the term 'deep' figuratively to indicate a quality of concentrated and profound experience or action.

**Fig. 20**

Screenprinting alum mordant onto calico for the shelter tents and high-vis-style jackets at Megalo Print Studio, Canberra, ACT.

**Fig. 21**

Water ribbon pattern derived from Day Four of *Walking the Merri* (see Fig 12), printed with melaleuca bark, sewn into sandbags for *Tending the Merri*, 2016  
Photography: Matthew Stanton





**Fig. 22**

Filling dye pot with rainwater via the garden hose.  
(The size of the dye pot diminished the size of the pan where dinner is cooking as I work.)

**Fig. 23**

The dye bath is ready for the mordanted cloth when steam is gently rising and it is very hot to touch.



Sometimes described as alchemy, the molecular activity in the dye pot is, in fact, rudimentary chemistry. Nevertheless, something wonderful takes place at the site where colour transfers from plant to cloth via heat, water and mordant. Bachelard described how reverie can emerge from the coming together of material, action and maker, so that the coalescence of matter affects the imagination.<sup>66</sup> In the instance of making dye, the plant material—manually harvested and prepared for the dye-pot—commences its material transformation on contact with water and heat. Gorse flowers, soaked in water overnight and then slowly brought to a high simmer, emit a mild coconut aroma. The combination of smell, steam and colour in the dyebath indicates when it is time to immerse the cloth. [Fig. 23]

Working the fabric in the dye pot one must trust the process. There is a moment of relief when the printed image begins to emerge, followed by a hum of adrenaline-filled reverie. Or, to borrow Bachelard's description of water as the 'first auxiliary' of the maker, the water first releases the colour from the plant, then holds the colour in suspension until the cloth is submerged into the dye-pot whereupon the water facilitates the transfer of colour to cloth via mordants.<sup>67</sup> This enacts a separation and then 'a binding together' of colour and material.<sup>68</sup>

A volunteer weeding a patch of native grass may also enter a state of reverie activated by the relations between labour, plant matter and site. [Fig. 24] The accumulation of time and labour revealed through the coalescing of dye, mordant and cloth as colour, makes visible the labour-intensive processes of hand-dyeing cloth. Accrual of labour is also experienced and revealed at the creek, directly during working bees, and over time as the plants flourish and grow. [Fig. 25] Walking, my studio practice and restoration labour each share a 'kind of 'fast slow' state . . . where an altered perception of time is experienced when awareness and conduct converge.'<sup>69</sup> This state of reverie, in Barad's words, occurs where there is a 'congealing of agency' where matter

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<sup>66</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Blakey and Mitchell, "Unfolding: A Multisensorial Dialogue in 'Material Time'," 06.



**Fig. 24**

*Strettle Wetland community weeding, Merri Creek, Thornbury, April 2014*  
 high-vis-style jackets, dyed and screenprinted with weeds and indigenous plants from the Merri Creek  
 each jacket 55 x 78 cm  
 Photography: David Burrows

**Fig. 25**

*Strettle Wetland community weeding, Merri Creek, Thornbury, April 2014*  
 high-vis-style jackets, shelter tents (just visible in the background)  
 calico dyed and screenprinted with weeds and indigenous plants from the Merri Creek, zinc buttons, eyelets, tope, tent poles  
 each jacket 55 x 78 cm  
 each tent quarter 200 x 200 x 280 cm



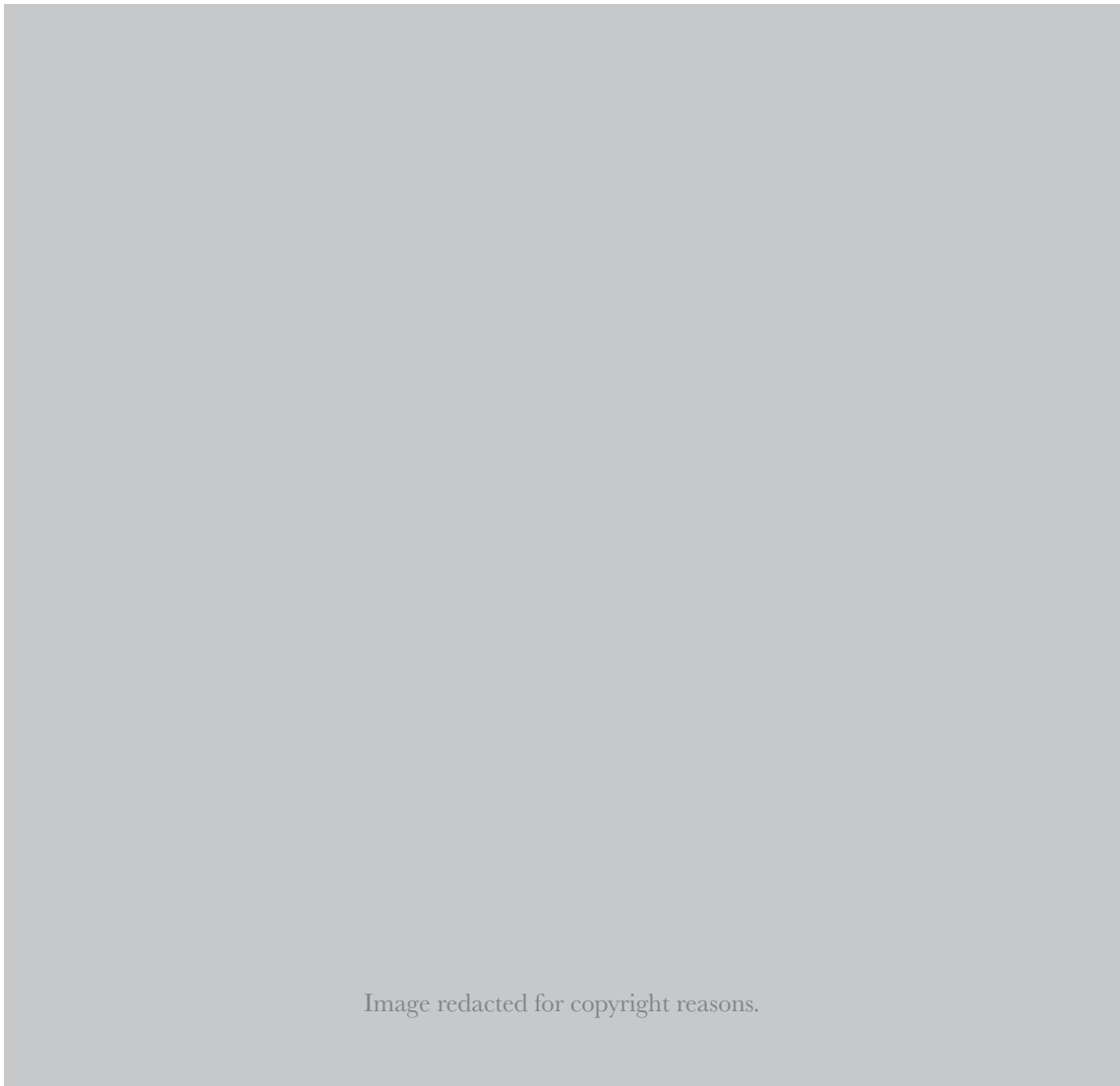


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**Fig. 26**

India Flint

*Gather*, 2016

silk, wool, eucalyptus dye

detail from the exhibition *Shibusa*

dimensions variable

transforms, through intra-action and repetition.<sup>70</sup> It is in the coming together of these elements, described by Blakey and Mitchell as material time, where practices of care and concentrated attention are made visible.<sup>71</sup>

### **Material networks and sited practice**

Using plant material from specific sites produces artwork of that place, thus *Tending the Merri* is of Merri Creek and emerged from a prolonged temporal and material engagement *with* the site. Many artists work directly with locally collected material. It is a mode of paying attention, where site and studio, and the temporal experience of each, are connected through matter. For example, textile artist, India Flint explores landscape through immersive methods such as walking and collecting. Her practice has been compared to John Wolseley's: they both work to create an experience of landscape in response to embodied encounters rather than 'through a static depiction of a scene'.<sup>72</sup> Flint uses matter collected in the environment to create wearable textiles that connect maker and wearer to the earth. She describes her practice as an immersion in and 'paying deep attention *to* the environment' through the combined collection of materials, thoughts and experiences.<sup>73</sup> [Fig. 26]

Flint's careful and sustainable practice aims to create a sense of place. In this research I am exploring place through intra-actions of matter and labour, taking my lead from art theorist Miwon Kwon, who points out that a site can be discursive, and 'is delineated as a field of knowledge . . . or cultural debate', as well as a physical place.<sup>74</sup> In *Tending the Merri*, Friends of Merri Creek volunteers, their labour and the physical space in which they practise are each sites of enquiry. My research does not seek to alter volunteer practices, rather I aim to bring forward the care embedded in this work. As such, this project is not community art, nor is it participatory practice, rather I am

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<sup>70</sup> Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," 822.

<sup>71</sup> Blakey and Mitchell, "Unfolding: A Multisensorial Dialogue in 'Material Time'," 09.

<sup>72</sup> Barbara Millward, "Shibusa: An Enthralling Connection to the Landscape.," *Textile fibre forum*, no. 127 (2017): 12.

<sup>73</sup> India Flint, <http://www.indiaflint.com/page2.htm> (Accessed January 18th, 2018)

<sup>74</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another : Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 26.



**Fig. 27**

Ilka White  
*Billabong Sash*, 2012–2013  
hand woven, double-faced cloth  
combining irregular sateen and 3/1 twill  
hemp, silk and woollen yarns  
plant dyed weft  
8.5 x 275 cm  
Photography: Kristian Laemmle-Ruff



**Fig. 28**

Ilka White  
*Days of Grass*, 2013  
wild oats, hemp thread, time  
40 strands, 75–100 cm circumference  
Photography: Kristian Laemmle-Ruff

testing how my studio processes can call attention to existing restoration practices by activating the material encounters between the matter of these sites.

Artist Ilka White has demonstrated her deep relationship to Merri Creek in the series *Billabong* (2012–13). [Figs. 27 & 28] Her practice of gathering and transforming site-specific materials attests Tronto's first phase of care where she identifies the need for care, described as "caring about". I argue that *Tending the Merri* builds on this to include Tronto's second and third phases of care in which a responsibility to care "taking care of" is assumed, followed by the direct meeting of this need via "care-giving". By bringing attention through my own practice to the labour of volunteers, I am revealing, by Tronto's measure, the act of assuming responsibility for creek health and the subsequent provision of care via working bees. Like my own, White's work is a contemplation of care through matter, skilled studio labour and site. Using plant dyes and fibres collected at Merri Creek, she has created delicate woven sashes and grass structures in a highly personal and intimate communion with place. Our practices diverge, not in our shared concern for local urban ecologies, but in the expression of labours of care. She writes, 'I have been making work in honour of the Merri Creek billabong and its delicate presence. When properly attended to, it is a place at least as wonderful as any far-flung locale I've visited.'<sup>75</sup> My research is concerned with how to express these practices of and responsibilities to care.

*Tending the Merri* arose from my participation in restoration and my desire to express the intra- and interactions between worker and matter. By conflating the quiet practice of planting and weeding with gathering, processing and dyeing cloth, I position my work in direct dialogue with human ecological degradation and restoration at the creek. Ruth Johnstone also observes urban ecologies by working directly with colour from local plants, but like White, I suggest she does this via encounter and observation rather than participation or field-based labour. Her project, *Common Garden: house to studio, Fitzroy* (2014–2016) uses plant colour to document introduced species she collects when walking to work. Our practices share the repetitive labours of printing with local plant collection during daily walks. [Fig. 29]

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<sup>75</sup> <http://ilkawhite.com.au/portfolio/billabong-2/#1> Accessed June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

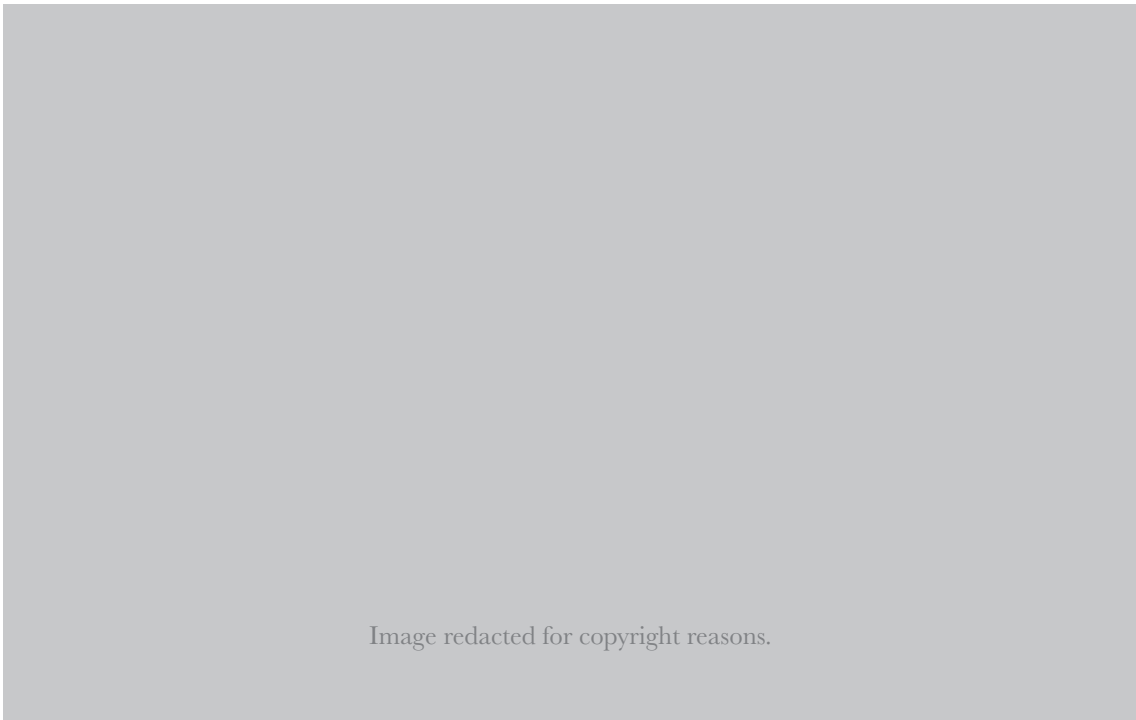


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**Fig. 29**

Ruth Johnstone  
*Common Garden: house to studio, Fitzroy*, 2014–2016  
unbound book: relief print, plant pigment and  
letterpress  
Installation view  
Photography: Tobias Titz © RMIT

**Fig. 30**

Ellie Irons  
Left: *Urban Meadow Transect (May–October, Bushwick, Brooklyn)*, 2015  
pencil and plant pigments from nineteen  
spontaneous plant species on paper  
17.3 x 12.5 cm  
Right: *Feral Hues and Herbicides (Bushwick, Brooklyn)*, 2015  
pencil and plant pigments from 23  
spontaneous plants on paper  
17.3 x 12.5 cm

I use dye methods which unite multiple plants in the dye pot. This distances the plant form from the textile outcome, reducing it to molecules of colour. On the other hand, Johnstone takes an impression of one plant at a time using etching press, mordant, paper and pressure. Johnstone's 'weeds' collected from pavement cracks and other liminal yet public spaces, unpick debates around the value and origin of introduced species. She adds to the trace of plant pigment with relief printing and letterpress. The resulting unbound book is a meditation on current and evolving ecologies in urban settings and the cultural values placed on plants. Johnstone draws directly on the tradition of botanical specimens, recording a representational (and material) image of each plant. The more indirect process I employ resists the overt indexical representation used by Johnstone, and in doing so refers more closely to the elemental nature of matter.

In *Tending the Merri* I focus attention on the intra-actions at the creek by following matter through water, rather than remaining faithful to plant form or its representation. Water and mordants assist this process, just as they do for American artist, Ellie Irons, who uses a traditional 18<sup>th</sup> century British process to make watercolour pigment from locally gathered weeds. Using her local plant colour palette, she documents species growing in her home suburb of Bushwick mapping the movement of these same species across continents over time. [Fig. 30] If read through matters of care, both our practices demonstrate how so-called weed species, perceived as either insignificant or problematic, can be useful and productive, as artworks and in Irons' case, environmentally. Iterating my point about Johnstone's practice, I suggest Irons' practice is centred on observation rather than labours of restoration or care.

My plan to return plant matter to the creek via textiles functioned to connect worker, site and labour through the common matter of creek plants, present in the textile fibres and handled by volunteer planters and weeders. Still in the studio, I sewed dyed lengths of calico cloth into eight reversible quarter tents,<sup>76</sup> indigenous plant dye on one side and an introduced species on the other. Each quarter tent works individually

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<sup>76</sup> In this instance the term quarter tent is used to describe a tarpaulin or garment which can be buttoned together with others to provide shelter. Four quarters will button into a pyramid shaped tent. Typically used by the military, it offers a range of individual and group shelters where each tarpaulin is designed to be carried by one person.



**Fig. 31**

*Tending the Merri* —quarter tent worn as a poncho;  
studio tests, 2013.

calico dyed and screen printed with indigenous  
and exotic plants of the Merri Creek, zinc  
buttons, eyelets

Top: Gorse flowers

Bottom: Melaleuca Bark



Image redacted for copyright reasons.

**Fig. 32**

Lucy and Jorg Orta (Studio Orta)

*Connector Mobile Village I*, 2000–2001

aluminium coated polyester, reversible Solden Lycra, open cell  
polyurethane, silkscreen print, zips

570 x 700 cm (variable dimensions)



as a poncho, or they can be buttoned together to provide shelter for a group. [Fig. 31] Garments for one or many have precedents in contemporary art, notably Lucy Orta's *Collective Wear 1998* which provided tents for groups of people where detachable armatures suggested individual use was also possible. [Fig. 32] Tents intersect art and activism; during the Occupy movement<sup>77</sup> designers and artists donated their expertise designing DIY shelters using cheap readily available materials. Where Orta's shelters might be used by any group in need, my plant-dyed tents relate explicitly to the sites of Merri Creek, restoration labour and the weed and indigenous species impregnated in the cloth and handled onsite by volunteers.

### **Visible restoration**

Oxalis (soursob *Oxalis pes-caprae*), a common weed in Melbourne, gives a fluorescent, yet fugitive, yellow dye that discharges other dyes and overrides mordants.<sup>78</sup> [Fig. 33] Its behaviour as a dye mimics its invasive and persistent growth patterns along the creek, where its tiny bulbs spread through disturbed soil. I used oxalis-dyed cotton to sew high-visibility stripes onto jackets made from the remaining calico. High-vis clothing is worn by an increasingly broad cross-section of the working and leisure population. At the creek this includes council workers, utility employees, bush crews and Merri Creek Management Committee staff, but not volunteer restoration workers. Artist Joan Ross suggests high-vis is the new 'camo', indeed she uses fluorescent yellow in her practice to comment on how high-vis is colonizing our land, a visual marker of society's paranoia surrounding safety.<sup>79</sup>

My plant-dyed vests nod to the prevalence of high-vis clothing, while providing volunteers with an alternative garment whose palette blends with and compliments, rather than jumps from, the field. These matching garments blend into the landscape

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<sup>77</sup> The Occupy movement grew out of the Occupy Wall Street protests that began on September 17, 2011. The central focus of this movement was economic inequality worldwide, how this relates to social inequality. In particular it raised questions around the role of corporations and their undue influence on government. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy\\_Wall\\_Street#%22We\\_are\\_the\\_99%22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Wall_Street#%22We_are_the_99%22) (Accessed November 3rd, 2018).

<sup>78</sup> Fugitive dyes are the opposite of fast dyes. Fading typically occurs with UV exposure, but can also be effected by washing. The oxalis strips, washed between restoration events, faded from bright fluorescent yellow to a muted lemon during the project.

<sup>79</sup> Joan Ross, "Post Colonial Fluorescence" (College of Fine Arts UNSW, 2012), 10.



**Fig. 33**

Clockwise: Romy preparing Oxalis flowers for dye; dye pot; oxalis test samples on cotton, hemp, linen and silk, 2012.

and quietly focus attention towards the time and patience necessary to effect long-term creek health. Like domestic chores, the labour involved in restoration work goes largely unremarked.<sup>80</sup> Mostly we notice its absence in piles of dirty dishes or a creek choked with weeds. Conversely, when plantings become mature the years of patient tending are camouflaged by people imagining these places as having always been this way, as natural. It is easy to forget that from colonisation until the 1970s, the creek was little more than a drain.

In the field, restoration volunteers are connected to the creek through the act of tending to its plants. The high-vis-style jackets provide another link between our working bodies and the matter of the creek. The dyed calico, sewn into jackets, was a skin of sorts. [Fig. 34] The cloth, protective and porous, connected volunteers to each other and the site through the matching garments. Mindy Yan Miller writes:

Clothing is like our bodies, it acts like a skin to protect us. Its fragility shows upon our own. The labour involved in textile production is not a mark left for perpetuity. It is simply caring for existence for being in the present.<sup>81</sup>

The four-way link between local dye colour, worker(s), the labour of weeding or planting and creek site activated by the garments has the potential to produce material time. Blakey and Mitchell describe material time, where care is practised and experienced through action and matter, as a site of contemplation and flow. Their own experience of this way of being was activated by unfolding a cot sheet, together, in a museum archive. They draw on Barad's notion of the making of space-time, which she argues is produced through the continual flow of matter where, 'relations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusions are reconfigured.'<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Maintenance work*, 1969–1980 arose out of a desire for the artist to make domestic and so-called menial caring labour visible. She did this through a refusal to compartmentalise her life into different categories, instead performing her daily acts of care as art. <http://www.ima.org.au/mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-art-works-1969-1980/> (Accessed 12th February, 2018)

<sup>81</sup> Miller, Mindy Yan. "I Fell Asleep." *Harbour: The Journal of Art and the Everyday* no. 3 (1991), p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> Blakey and Mitchell, "Unfolding: A Multisensorial Dialogue in 'Material Time'," 011.

Urban restoration is slow. The physical labour, like gardening, requires patience and a long-term view. It is, as Tronto would assert, undertaken by people who have identified their complicity and responsibility in the creek's need for care, and as a result they are participating in the physical labour necessary to administer this care. Inherent in restoration are repeat visits to sites, slow-paced handwork and a sense of personal and collective connection through shared labour. Similarly, my studio practices start with seasonally dictated plant collection for dye; subsequent studio processes depend on repetitive sequences of tasks to progress the work. After months of working between studio and creek, ironing seams, finishing edges and sewing several hundred button-holes, I was ready to take the textiles to restoration events.

The tents (installed near our working bees) and jackets (worn by volunteers) were used at four separate events. Ecologist William Jordan argues, 'restoration offers a way to bring the human community together and to strengthen the relationship between human and nonhuman nature.'<sup>83</sup> At Merri Creek volunteers, under the guidance of professionals, focus on rehabilitation and maintenance. Since colonisation, the creek has been degraded by industry, farming, building and increased population. Contemporary aspirations for creek health acknowledge these changes and understand the impossibility of returning sites to a pre-colonial state. This is echoed by my use of indigenous and introduced plants. The vision for these sites (at its best) is accommodation of the many interests of human and non-human life, such as dogs and their walkers, sport, endangered and persisting indigenous and culturally valued introduced plants.

Thus, to care for the creek is complex and fraught: as Tronto asks, how is care received?<sup>84</sup> Volunteers find solace by settling into repetitive tasks located in the present that attempt to make good past actions and prepare for an unpredictable future. I made wearable textiles that are of the creek, and which express the everyday repetitive nature of ongoing care for the Merri through the slow, labour intensive methods employed in my studio. Just as the many repetitive steps involved in textile dyeing, printing and garment construction facilitate a temporal engagement with matter, so too does the

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<sup>83</sup> William R. Jordan, *The Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2012), 16.

<sup>84</sup> Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 109.



**Fig. 34**

*Edgar's Creek community planting, September 2013 showing*

*Tending the Merri—high-vis-style jackets, 2013  
calico dyed and screenprinted with weeds  
and indigenous plants from the Merri  
Creek catchment*

*each jacket 55 x 78 cm*

*Photography: Kirsty Argyle*



collective work of restoration volunteers. In this research I have used these common traits to combine the practices of ecological restoration and textile production.

Blakey and Mitchell propose that matter, combined with action, can produce a kind of ‘molecular dissolution, a mixing of body and environment.’<sup>85</sup> This encounter with matter can be experienced by restoration workers on site as they work with plants and earth. But perhaps more literally, dissolution occurs in the dye bath, recorded as colour in the fibres of my textiles, where there is a ‘congealing of agency’ and matter is transformed, through intra-action and repetition.<sup>86</sup> [Figs. 23 & 24] Blakey and Mitchell emphasise it is the gesture, the performative action, rather than the result, that is important and that generates the conflation of body and matter. They call this material (or care) time. My work proposes that material time collects in objects and is visible through the material traces of labour, time and process.

Restoration volunteers, committed to looking after the creek, do care about results, just as I care how my finished artworks appear, but equally it is the intention of care and attention in their labour which matters. By wearing my jackets, which brought attention to the matter of the creek, some noted they were able to view their practice as more valued, more collective, and more connected to the site than usual. This increased level of paying attention and self-awareness was only verbalised during working bees by one or two participants. However, I argue that such embodied or kinaesthetic experiences are felt before they are understood and therefore may have been experienced by other volunteers.

### **Contemplating material time**

Reflecting on the difference between working bees with and without my garments revealed how they worked on site. The performative nature of participants deciding which jacket to wear formalised the start time and duration of the event. Wearing a jacket positioned the volunteer in relation to site and labour, allowing each person to connect to others and to view their work from the outside. Such self-awareness

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 08.

<sup>86</sup> Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” 822.

heightened the experience of the worker, setting up conditions more likely to produce what Blakey and Mitchell describe as ‘material time’ where action and matter come together and activate reverie.

The textiles connected to the site, restoration work and people in two ways. Firstly, elements of plant species, removed or cared for at restoration events were visible as colour in the cloth’s fibres. Reintroducing the plants to the creek via the dyed cloth amounted to a coalescing of place and action, or to adapt Barad’s term, to a site of intra-action. Worn by restoration volunteers or set-up near their activities during working bees the textiles were a material connection between site, labour, worker and plants.

Secondly, my textile production shared qualities with practices of restoration. The time spent removing weeds is analogous to the time spent harvesting dye plants; restoration work and the production of natural dyes have seasonally determined rhythms and work flow; both practices are labour intensive, take time and require ongoing attention. Constructing garments specifically to be worn at creek events established these parallels and comparisons. Deleuze describes the interrelations of sensation, contemplation and creation by explaining how:

Plotinus defined all things as contemplations, not only people and animals but plants, the earth, and rocks. These are not Ideas that we contemplate through concepts but the elements of matter that we contemplate through sensation. The plant contemplates by contracting the elements from which it originates—light, carbon, and the salts—and it fills itself with colors and odors that in each case qualify its variety, its composition: it is sensation in itself.<sup>87</sup>

I liken the extraction of colour from plant to a contemplation of the plant’s building blocks, that is, of its materiality and history at the creek. If, as Deleuze suggests, the plant contemplates its elements, produced through intra-actions between sun, soil and water, my own reversal of this contemplation is the undoing and distilling of its elements.<sup>88</sup> This produces new colours, not always indicative of the colours the plant

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<sup>87</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy? / Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. (1994), 212.

<sup>88</sup> In fact, Deleuze does not mention Plotinus’ failure to include water as a central element in plant life. As discussed in this exegesis, water is central to the creek, my studio practice and of course, to life on earth.

reveals while living. This elemental character or ‘contemplation’, visible as colour, is transferred via printing and dyeing to the textiles. Worn by restoration workers, the garments imbued with elemental colour, are both a material and metaphorical manifestation of weed removal and renewal.

### **Framing repetitive practices**

My tents, installed at the creek for the duration of our restoration activities, provided a temporary ‘territorialisation’ of the site. By positioning a human-scaled structure in the landscape, we restoration volunteers situated ourselves in relation to this structure, allowing us to imagine our work emerging as a staged or choreographed activity, one in which we could apprehend the performative nature of our labour. The possibility to take down and re-erect the tent, over and over again in multiple settings, echoes the repetitive nature of both restoration and studio practice.

The eight reversible quarter tents were installed as a single tent or as a pair of tents near our work sites. They became a visual marker at our sites of restoration, temporarily positioning our labour in relation to a site at the creek. [Fig. 35] In *Chaos, Territory, Art*, Elizabeth Grosz discusses Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of the frame, a position that suggests, ‘with no frame or boundary there can be no territory’.<sup>89</sup> Whilst this first appears to be a discussion of the bounds of a two-dimensional artwork, Grosz goes on to break down the frame further; a partition (a wall or screen), that, ‘projected downward, generates the smoothness of a floor, that “rarefies” and smooths over the surface of the earth, creating a first (human) territorialisation.’<sup>90</sup> The horizontal space allows for the emergence of performance, or, in Deleuze’s words, increases the probability of ‘choreography’ and ‘athletics’.<sup>91</sup> The tents worked as props to the choreography of restoration work, to focus on our labour as valuable and worthy of attention beyond the confines of our small group.

Like the jackets, the plant-dyed tents highlighted relations between people, labour and plants. Restoration workers hope their care giving is well received; that the plants

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<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth A Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*





**Fig. 35**

*Galgi Ngarrk (Cooper St Grassland) gorse mop-up,*  
 November 2013 showing  
*Tending the Merri—high-vis-style jackets,* 2013 and  
*Tending the Merri—quarter tents,* 2013  
 calico dyed and screenprinted with weeds  
 and indigenous plants from the Merri Creek  
 catchment, zinc buttons, eyelets, rope, tent poles  
 each jacket 55 x 78 cm  
 each tent quarter 200 x 200 x 280 cm  
 Photography: David Burrows

**Fig. 36**

*Galgi Ngarrk (Cooper St Grassland) gorse mop-up,*  
 November 2013 showing  
*Tending the Merri—high-vis-style jackets,* 2013 and  
*Tending the Merri—quarter tents,* 2013  
 calico dyed and screenprinted with weeds  
 and indigenous plants from the Merri Creek  
 catchment, zinc buttons, eyelets, rope, tent poles  
 each jacket 55 x 78 cm  
 each tent quarter 200 x 200 x 280 cm  
 Photography: David Burrows

removed enable others to flourish. Orta's textile shelters and garments are also created in response to an identified need for care, in her case to social and humanitarian issues such as homelessness and survival arising from natural disasters. She uses the collective iterations of her garment design to open the possibilities of building awareness around a group's plight, initially within the group itself, and later bringing these concerns into a broader context via exhibition and public performance. Through the collaborative process of making, her garments fulfil a material role, connecting her own 'way of being on earth' with the ways of being of people she encounters through her practice.<sup>92</sup> Her modular wearable textile shelters link bodies to each other and the 'garment delimits the surroundings of the body and marks out a territory', or in other words, the potential of a safe place.<sup>93</sup> *Tending the Merri* pays attention to the labours of care present in restoration work. Rather than focusing on a safe place my work concentrates on how repeated, ongoing attention is critical to sustaining urban ecologies.

Like the circus tent, which appears and disappears overnight, my tents are ephemeral, marking action, not territory. The plant-dyed tents, removed from the restoration site, become folded cloth, and the site itself is marked by our work, but not by our architecture. This approach is an act of care; our work tends without leaving scars or built forms on the land. Installed at Galgi Ngarrk (Cooper Street Grassland) [Map 1] the skies and remnant grassland dwarfed the tents. Stray gorse plants awaiting removal led us far from the tents. Our distant view revealed them as tiny fluttering brooches pinned to the earth. [Fig. 36] Yet even at this greater distance, their temporary presence marked and activated our work, allowing us to stand back and observe ourselves in action.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have used connections between my studio and restoration practices to bring forward the central role of labours of care in both spaces. Creating textiles using creek plants, I have made objects that are of the creek. Cycling these materials back to the creek on the bodies of restoration workers highlighted relationships between the many sites of this enquiry. These sites include worker, creek, garments, plants and

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<sup>92</sup> Lucy Orta and Pierre Restany, *Process of Transformation: Lucy Orta* (Jean Michel Place, 1998), 16.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

labour. I suggest this made the experience of material time available to volunteers while they performed their work. Further, I propose the textiles themselves carried residues of this material (or care) time.

Thus, *Tending the Merri* is a work that brings attention to existing practices of restoration through repetitive and immersive methods of working common to my studio and the creek. In the next chapter I take up the problem of how a later iteration of this work, presented in the gallery, communicated a representation of the creek and its matter, rather than an experience of the interactions and intra-actions between worker, site and matter.



## Chapter Three: The Limits to Representation— Action, Process, Materiality

### Introduction

In the previous chapters I discussed the ways in which *Walking the Merri* (2013), and *Tending the Merri* (2013–2016) performed as live events on site, arguing practices of care emerged as both subject and method of the work. I will now turn to an examination of how installing iterations of these works in a gallery significantly altered their reception and meaning. The move into the gallery opened the work to new and broader audiences, yet, in doing so it failed to communicate the ways in which process and matter were experienced, and how they brought attention to practices of care in the field.

The installation *Walking the Merri* (2014) operated as documentation, prompting indexical relations between exhibits and audience. Likewise, the quarter tents used during *Tending the Merri* restoration activities became representations of the creek's materiality where the dyed cloth stood in for the creek rather than communicating our volunteer restoration activities. This shift towards representation, distanced audiences from the complex relations between material and action performed on site and in my studio. It led me to consider how I might create works for the gallery which engaged with and communicated the complex sites and interactions of urban ecological restoration.

I will begin by discussing each artwork separately, focussing on the shift from performativity to representation which occurred when installed in a gallery. Then I will explain how a framework of representation delimited the ways in which the creek's complexity could be explored. That is, by presenting residues, documentation and objects from the field-based works, I set up indexical relations of representation between viewer and event via the objects. These readings obscured how matters of care had emerged through restoration labour, walking and art making. In matter and space-time, I had held the complexity of urban and peri-urban ecologically significant sites, allowing them to unfold through my studio and sited practice. Lastly, I will foreground the approach and method I took in the last two works, *Bound by Gorse* (2017) and *Habitus* (2017) to resolve my research question. I will address each of these installations in the subsequent chapters.



**Fig. 37**  
*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC  
Installation view  
Photography: Andrew Barcham



**Fig. 38**  
*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC  
Installation view  
Photography: Andrew Barcham



**Fig. 39**

Ilka White

*Billabong Sash*, 2012–13

hand woven, double-faced cloth  
combining irregular sateen and 3/1 twill

hemp, silk and woollen yarns

plant dyed weft

8.5 x 275 cm

*Walking the Merri*, 2014

RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC

Photography: Andrew Barcham



**Fig. 40**

Anna Topalidou

*Trickle, Stream, Creek: Water from Three Merri Creek*

*Sites*, 2014

lithograph

52.5 x 83.5 cm

*Walking the Merri*, 2014

RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC

Photography: Andrew Barcham



**Fig. 41**

Roseanne Bartley

*from the series My Shadow Wears (Merri Creek)*,

2013

digital print, wooden support

59.4 x 42 cm (each)

*Walking the Merri*, 2014

RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC

Photography: Andrew Barcham





**Fig. 42**

*Walking the Merri—gaiters*, 2013  
 cotton, linen, wool, hemp, screenprinting and  
 dyeing with natural dyes collected at the Merri  
 Creek  
*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
 RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC  
 Installation view  
 Photography: Andrew Barcham

**Fig. 43**

*Walking the Merri—pockets*, 2013, *Walking  
 the Merri—gaiters*, 2013 and artists' book/catalogue  
 cotton, linen, wool, hemp, screenprinting and  
 dyeing with natural dyes collected at the Merri  
 Creek  
*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
 RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC  
 Installation view  
 Photography: Andrew Barcham



## The Performativity of Matter

In this research, performativity can be traced through the material residues produced by actions between things, that is, by paying attention to and following matter. Language theorist J.L. Austin defines performative speech as utterances which constitute an action.<sup>94</sup> This theory, where words work beyond description and instead act to change a social reality, forms the basis for understanding how performativity acts in a range of art practices.

I use performance studies academic Philip Auslander's proposition that 'the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such', not to argue whether my practice constitutes performance art, but to suggest that a performative approach to practice—of paying attention to the interactions of making and doing—is central to my goal of working beyond pure representation.<sup>95</sup> For Auslander it is the framing of the work, rather than the presence of an audience which positions it as performance art. My intention is to translate the performance of care laden actions—present in my studio practices and in embodied processes—such as walking and weeding, into the materiality of my finished objects.

I regard *Walking the Merri* and *Tending the Merri* as performative rather than performance art. Although arguments could be made for or against positioning these works as performance art—because they were documented, and they lacked a live audience—what I am concerned with is how these works allowed me to pay close attention to what each project was doing in relation to the creek. In the case of *Tending the Merri* I am augmenting a pre-existing event, rather than creating a completely new one. I am highlighting the performativity of creek restoration through my art practice, rather than hijacking the collective work of Friends of Merri Creek and re-naming it art.

Installed at RMIT Project Space in March 2014, *Walking the Merri* centred on the seven-day walk undertaken in 2013. Project Space is a rectangular gallery, 7 x 12 metres long. Its seven-metre street frontage is floor to ceiling glass. [Fig. 37] Entry to

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<sup>94</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006): 5.



**Fig. 44**

*Merri Creek catchment map*, 2014

digital print on silk, silk samples and thread, dyed  
with Merri Creek weeds

138 x 235 cm

*Walking the Merri*, 2014

RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC

Installation view

Photography: Andrew Barcham

**Fig. 45**

*Day Two: Walking the Merri—gaiters and Walking the*

*Merri—pockets* before a day of walking between  
Merri Park and Lockerbie.

Photography: Lesley Harding



the gallery is at the rear, inside the building. [Fig. 38] The group exhibition, curated by Lesley Harding who also contributed diary entries to the artist book/catalogue, included artistic responses from each additional walker: poems by Tony Birch [Appendix 1], original music by Caroline Henbest<sup>96</sup>, textiles by Ilka White, lithographs created with creek water specimens by Anna Topalidou and photographic work by Roseanne Bartley. [Figs. 39–41] It is beyond the scope of this exegesis to discuss each of my fellow rambler's artworks. Suffice to say, each artist responded to a discrete stretch of creek and to the day they walked with us, with new works produced after the event.

This contrasted with my artefacts, which were made prior to the walk. Individually the gaiters represented each day of the walk, and collectively they represented the 70 kilometre length of creek and one week of walking. My gaiters and pockets were laid out, like specimens, on two long trestle tables running parallel to the length of the gallery. [Figs. 42 & 43] A digitally printed silk map of the catchment hung on the short wall facing the street at the back of the gallery. Plant dyed silk cloth samples were stitched along edges of the map and our daily route was embroidered with seven different plant-dyed threads. [Fig. 44]

Each component of my installation: gaiters and pockets, map and book, presented an iteration and record of the walk. In the artist book, the gaiters were photographically documented before and after the walk, their pristine state at the beginning of the day contrasting with their worn and puckered surface after a day accruing creek matter and my body heat. [Figs. 45 & 15] Each pair of gaiters represented one day of walking downstream. Seven pairs, laid out like animal skins, connected viewers materially to our passage downstream. The 18th and 19th century-influenced design of the textiles, transformed by the encounter between my walking body and the creek, provoked a sense of the past, of something out of reach. Off the body and away from the creek, they no longer articulated actions of taking care in the present.

The gaiters and pockets had become traces or memory depositories of a past event. Writing about the relationship between memory and index in contemporary

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<sup>96</sup> <http://www.merricreekwalk.com/> (available on SoundCloud)

art, Joan Gibbons neatly explains US philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's analysis of representation. Relevant to the representation of *Walking the Merri* at Project Space is Peirce's deduction that an index is genuine if it has an existential relation to the object.<sup>97</sup> Gibbons further explains:

The indexical sign may involve abstraction or, indeed, may be heavily mimetic, but it is distinguished by the fact that the signifier retains at least something of the existential 'having been there' of that which is signified.<sup>98</sup>

The use of trace and index is a powerful means to explore memory, loss and time passed. It can provoke nostalgia for performance art events which persist only through memory, documentation and representation. In 2014, I visited *Aktionistinnen*, a survey of 1970s Austrian feminist performance artists, including Valie Export and her contemporaries at Kunsthalle Krems, Austria.<sup>99</sup> Much of the textual content was in German, so I paid perforce closer attention to the objects and artefacts displayed in glass cabinets, on plinths or hung on the wall. The props provided a material connection to past events and persons through evidence of wear and handling on their surface. These objects, once lively participants in politically charged performance art, spoke of a time and place I could never inhabit. Thus, I experienced a sense of nostalgia and loss for something that had occurred on another continent, perhaps before I was born.

Similarly, installing the residual objects from *Walking the Merri* inside the gallery presented the audience with a series of objects, which to draw on Rosalind Krauss' 1970s essay *Notes on the Index*, provided indexical traces of our walk. Krauss argues movement (in her case dance, in my case walking) can shift from the symbolic to the indexical. She explains the index can be 'that type of sign which arises as the physical manifestation of a cause, of which traces, imprints, and clues are examples.'<sup>100</sup> The textiles, worn on my body during *Walking the Merri*, connected viewers to a past event

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<sup>97</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings. Vol. 2, 1893-1913* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 274.

<sup>98</sup> Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 30.

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.forum-frohner.at/de> (Accessed December 12, 2017; website archive unavailable)

<sup>100</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2," *October* 4, no. Autumn (1977): 65.

through the marks produced between my body and the creek. The textiles and their marks were an indexical sign of a past event.

Through the physical manifestation of my moving body encountering the creek, the surfaces of the gaiters were marked and stained by this encounter. As visitors stopped to look, they would also observe a further indexical relationship in the traces of colour from the earlier creek visits and studio production of printed plant colour. In this sense, the trace and residue are layered, melding studio making with the act of walking. Roland Barthes reminds us how indexical traces provide ‘spatial immediacy’ with ‘temporal anteriority.’ This paradox activated by the direct material connexion to the encounter of walker and creek, pushes the event into the past, and with it, what Barthes describes as a sense of ‘having-been-there’.<sup>101</sup>

The textiles, laid out in sequence, were read not only as a group of objects, but more powerfully as a narrative built through their juxtaposition and sequence. Walter Benjamin explains how film creates meaning through the relationship of each new frame to its preceding pictures.<sup>102</sup> This builds on his argument that captions (or other context making signs) supplement the image. Laying the gaiters and pockets out as a series of seven pairs, (representing seven days) produced a narrative which ‘supplemented’ and contextualised the gaiters and pockets as part of something durational and in the past. The sense that the gaiters could be read as a series of frames, where each are a caption to the preceding and the next pair, worked to present an iteration of *Walking the Merri* where movement was inferred, not just because gaiters are for legs, but also through building a narrative flow.

The sequential layout of the textiles presented with the artists’ book/catalogue and the silk catchment map became a representation of a past event or actions. The strength of this reading, activated through the combination of documentation and indexical relations, served to maintain a temporal distance between gallery visitors and the act of walking the creek. The artists’ book/catalogue displayed at one end of one of

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<sup>101</sup> Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 47.

<sup>102</sup> Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt and Harry Zohn *Illuminations* (New York, Schocken Books, 2007), 226.



**Fig. 46**

*Tending the Merri—quarter tents*, 2013–2016  
calico dyed and screen printed with indigenous  
and exotic plants of the Merri Creek, zinc buttons,  
eyelets, hemp rope, tent poles  
variable dimensions  
*Out of the Matrix*, 2016  
RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, VIC  
Installation view  
Photography: Matthew Stanton



Image redacted for  
copyright reasons.

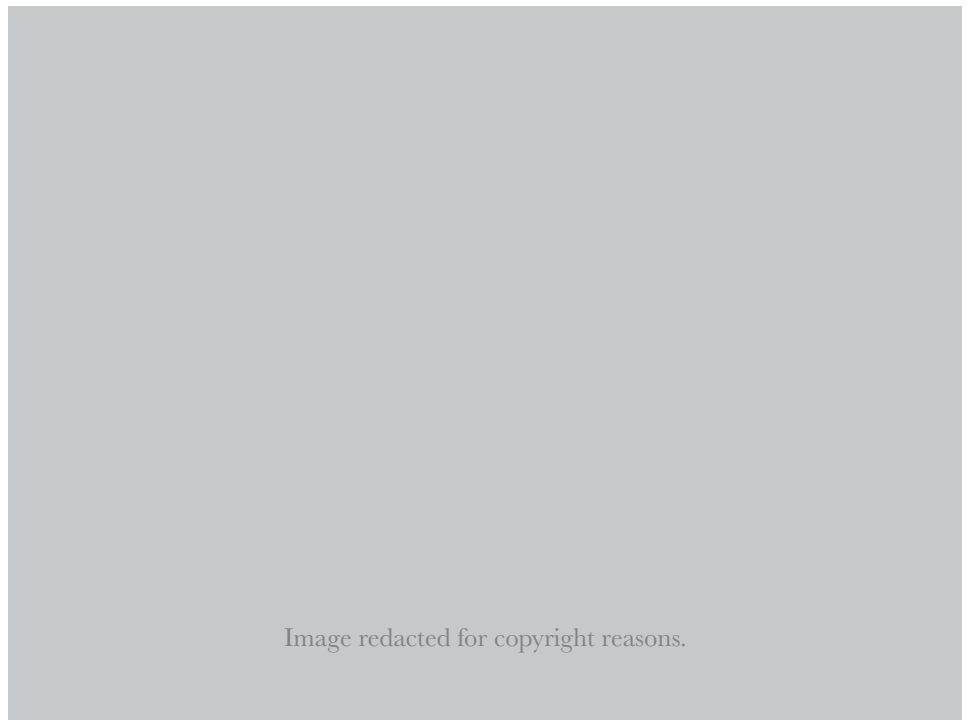


Image redacted for copyright reasons.

**Fig. 47**

Robert Smithson  
*A Non-site (Franklin, New Jersey)*, 1968  
painted wooden bins, limestone, gelatin silver  
prints and typescript on paper with graphite and  
transfer letters, and mounted on mat board  
Bins installed: 41.9 × 208.9 × 261.6 cm; framed:  
103.5 × 78.1 × 2.5 cm; sheet: 101.3 × 75.9 cm  
Photography © MCA Chicago

**Fig. 48**

Francesco Clemente  
*Encampment*, 2012–2014  
Carriageworks, Sydney, NSW  
30 July – 9 October 2016  
Installation view  
Photography: Rebecca Mayo

the trestle tables, contained diarised entries of each day, snapshots (with captions) of points of interest from each day as well as before and after photographs of each pair of gaiters.

Amelia Jones convincingly argues that photographic documentation is an authentic way of experiencing performance art after the fact. In many instances I would agree. For example, a work important to this research, which I have only experienced through documentation (despite its re-enactment in Melbourne in 2014)<sup>103</sup> is Bonita Ely's *Murray River Punch* (1981). Jones notes 'while the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of . . . watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical "truth" of the performance.'<sup>104</sup> Thus, while I can only imagine the aroma of *Murray River Punch* wafting across Rundle Mall, Adelaide, I can examine the documentation of this work, to see how Ely effectively makes visible and uses the schism between domestic practices of care and the environment. Despite agreeing with Jones, in the instance of *Walking the Merri*, I posit that regardless of how much audiences enjoyed the traces and documentation in the gallery, they could not find a way through the feelings provoked by the work's indexical presentation to locate the presence and importance of care in this body of work.

### **Re-siting the Merri**

The second work I will discuss is *Tending the Merri* (2014–2016) which was exhibited at RMIT Gallery in *Out of the Matrix*, curated by Richard Harding in 2016.<sup>105</sup> The exhibition brought together contemporary artists who employ print-based practices in the expanded field. As such the exhibition included artists working across a broad array of concerns, ideas and media. My work was installed in a room with other print-based artists who variously engaged with urban plant ecologies, water and rock climbing. In discussion with Harding, I chose to install the quarter tents, buttoned together and strung up in the space, in such a way that they responded to the internal architecture of the gallery. Thus, I produced an iteration of *Tending the Merri* which paid attention to the

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<sup>103</sup> <https://bonitaely.com/murray-river-punch-2014/> (Accessed April 2, 2018)

<sup>104</sup> Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997): 11.

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.rmit.edu.au/events/all-events/exhibitions/2016/may/out-of-the-matrix> (Accessed December 12, 2017)



notion of tent as shelter and protection. For this structure to work and hold up inside a gallery I sewed a series of sandbags, also dyed and printed with creek plants. The small sandbags replaced tent pegs and provided support to the guy ropes and tent poles, which in turn held up the quarter tents. [Figs. 46 & 21]

Inside the gallery and away from the creek and the activities of volunteer restoration work, the quarter tents became a representation of my artistic engagement with the creek, as well as indicating shelter and protection. The colours of the plant dyes, fixed within the fibres of the calico, depicted abstracted cityscapes, illustrations of creek plants and sometimes they simply stained and discoloured the surface of the tents. An attentive observer would have noticed some missing buttons, and the occasional repair where the tents had been damaged during creek events. The quarter tents were installed to cascade down from the ceiling, where one point was fixed with rope to a horizontal beam running across the room.

The indexical relationship between quarter tents and restoration work was less pronounced than between the gaiters and my moving body in the gallery iteration of *Walking the Merri*. I propose this is because the tents had not recorded repetitive bodily actions at the creek. Instead they were a place marker at restoration activities, defining the site of our labour and adding a human scale to the remnant grassland situated in the northern parts of the Merri catchment. [Figs. 35 & 36] In addition, I did not include supplementary text or photographs. The wall panel included title, materials (including all plant species used for dye) and dimensions. This was the only reference point beyond the work itself with which to contextualise its meaning. Within the gallery, the quarter tents folded and draped, referring to the intimate enclosure of a tent within the grand scale of the gallery's high ceilings. That is, their human scale was adjusted to the grandeur of RMIT Gallery, rather than to the urban and grassland creek setting.

To make sense of how *Tending the Merri* transposed the creek site into the gallery I have explored Robert Smithson's proposition of the non-site, where matter from one site is composed or arranged in the gallery so that it represents the site and refers to the space-time between site and non-site. The materiality of the plant dyes, collected at the creek, and fused with the cloth fibres were a manifestation of this concept. Smithson's legacy includes his use of photographs and maps in dialogue with the material brought

into the gallery from a chosen site. [Fig. 47] He described his interior earthworks as ‘three-dimensional logical picture[s]’ that were both abstract and representative of ‘an actual site’.<sup>106</sup> I will return to a discussion of the relationship between Smithson’s two- and three-dimensional documentation of sites as one point of departure for my final works in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

The gallery iteration of *Tending the Merri*, produced a spatial and material representation of Merri Creek. The tent-like structure lent reference to outdoor open space and provisional or temporary shelter. In 2016 I visited Carriageworks in Sydney to experience and view Italian artist, Francesco Clemente’s exhibition *Encampment*. The work comprised six tents, their insides painted by Clemente, and the outsides printed and embroidered by highly skilled Rajasthani artisans. Colourful, rectangular and vast in size, they took one year to construct, indicating the quality and level of skilled craftwork involved. This timeframe also indicated the vast numbers of artisans who must have worked long hours to complete this work in one year. [Fig. 48]

The detailed and vibrant energy of Clemente’s tents contrasts with my own quieter, smaller works, each stage of my making process a one-person job. Clemente says his tents follow a narrative sequence—the making and unmaking of an identity.<sup>107</sup> All tents share the possibility of doing and undoing, putting up and taking down, their provisional nature suggestive of change and displacement but also of a lightness of foot. In the gallery, in quite different ways, Clemente’s enormous colourful tents, and my relatively small softly coloured quarter tents, both hold a sense of provisional physical protection within the space.

The forms of my quarter tents, imbued with colour from plant matter, represent Merri Creek. The labour and time invested in dyeing, printing and sewing the tents could be deduced by audiences if they read the wall panel. However, readings of *Tending the Merri* at RMIT Gallery did not communicate the complex relations of care

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<sup>106</sup> Robert Smithson, “A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites,” <https://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm> (Accessed 15th December, 2017)

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.blainsouthern.com/media/tents-exhibition> (Accessed 15th December, 2017)

performed between my working body and materials at the studio and creek, nor the labours of care practiced by volunteer restoration workers.

The activation of creek matter, via the plant dyed garments and tents worn and inhabited by restoration workers is addressed fully in Chapter Two. However, it is worth visiting Kristine Stiles interpretation of Allan Kaprow's *Activities* to articulate how his participants, like the volunteer workers at the creek wearing plant dyed jackets while they worked, 'were obliged to examine the nature of their antics while being occupied as subjects doing something.'<sup>108</sup> This sense of self-awareness, of paying closer attention to what we were doing at the creek, through the addition of textile props and clothing connected to the site through materials and labour, strengthened the performative nature of our work. That is, volunteer workers appeared to actively pay attention to their work when it was framed by my art objects. The connection of body to site through the plant dyed textiles prompted the workers to pay attention to themselves and their practice in situ. *Tending the Merri* performed at the creek, took its lead from the labour of restoration volunteers. However, the gallery iteration did not include a visible or indexical trace of the workers. Instead the tents installed in the gallery opened conversations around architectural space and site versus non-site.

## **Conclusion**

In the field, both works were produced through modalities of taking care. *Tending the Merri* revealed the labours of care present in my studio practice and in the work of volunteers at the creek, while *Walking the Merri* paid attention and accelerated my 'caring about' the creek. This framework and methodology which engages with and performs through care, has uncovered new ways of understanding my practice. This approach, where the primary focus is on practices of care, coupled with site-specific material engagement, contributes to the body of practice-led knowledge. And yet, in re-situating iterations of this work inside the gallery the labours and practices of care, central to my enquiry, were limited. The gallery iterations veiled the important link between action and matter; instead the works operated as documentation of past events and

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<sup>108</sup> Kristine Stiles, "Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 283.

representations of elsewhere. The indexical traces evoked a sense of loss and nostalgia, which, while interesting and well received, were not the intention of this research.

In testing iterations of these performative works inside the gallery, I was able to compare how *Walking the Merri* and *Tending the Merri* operated in each location. My assessment, that care was central to the practice and materiality of restoration and studio labour, was clarified during this process. In part, this was due to the ways in which indexical and representational readings in the gallery overrode the presence and importance of care to this research. This finding directed my inquiry towards establishing ways in which practices of care could be communicated to audiences away from the site.

In the following chapters I discuss my final works, *Bound by Gorse* (2017) and *Habitus* (2017) both of which use methodologies of care and which were created specifically for gallery installation. My proposition was that by concentrating on making works for the gallery where I focus on ‘following’ materials and processes I could produce work which prompts embodied, material and ontological experiences in the viewer that operate beyond the representational or indexical. This approach allowed me to foreground care as practice and subject. By taking care and focussing on the quotidian and temporal labours of repetitive making in combination with site-specific materials a sense of care can be activated through material time in the gallery.



**Fig. 49**

*Bound by Gorse* (Ulex europaeus), 2017

gorse

variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)

digital print 57 x 42 cm

Counihan Gallery, Brunswick, VIC

Installation view

Photography: Garth Henderson



**Fig. 50**

Site of cleared gorse, Kalkallo, October 2016

digital print

57 x 42 cm

## Chapter Four: Bricks and Prickles—Mutable Edges and Fixed Boundaries

### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the first of my gallery works *Bound by Gorse* (*Ulex europaeus*), (2017) which responded to the material and legal negotiations I experienced during and before our seven-day walk, and to my participation in gorse removal with Friends of Merri Creek. I found property owner's decisions on whether to allow us access across their land correlated with how they practiced care. In addition, absence of landowner care manifested in our physical encounter with gorse (an invasive woody weed) which at times completely obstructed our passage. I use the framework of care to examine both the making and presentation of this work, paying especial attention to the materiality of gorse and my use of repetition and reproducible forms.

*Bound by Gorse* is a curved wall of about 100 bricks made entirely of gorse collected from one site in the Merri Creek catchment. To produce the bricks I adapted papermaking techniques, processing and reconstituting the gorse fibres into reproducible forms. [Fig. 49] I used the materiality of the gorse to bring forward a sense of the care practices and ownership boundaries at the creek. In this chapter will explain how the labour-intensive paper making process employs repetitive labour to produce multiple bricks. In turn this articulates time and process through matter. I propose this expression of material time can also be understood as a labour of care.<sup>109</sup> These methods, manifest in the reproducibility of the bricks, carried the experience of careful labour into the gallery.

In the gallery, an A3 photograph shows the small area of land we cleared to gather the raw material for this work. To view the photograph closely, visitors must move inside the space defined by the bricks. The physical site of collection, shown in the photograph, provides context to the bricks' materiality. [Fig. 50] To consider the relations between photo and form, I extrapolate on Robert Smithson's proposition of

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<sup>109</sup> Blakey and Mitchell, "Unfolding: A Multisensorial Dialogue in 'Material Time'," 6.





**Fig. 51**

The first herbarium record of *Ulex europaeus* L. (Gorse) in Australia; collected at Studley Park, Melbourne in 1884 by Felix Reader Royal Botanic Gardens, VIC



site and non-site, fixing it against Kwon's contemporary positioning of site as discursive and mobile. Thus, I explore gorse as both subject and site in this work.

### **Gorse in Australia: History and Work**

I foreground the making of *Bound by Gorse* with Bellacasa's suggestion that "'matters of care' [are] a proposition to think with . . . to generate more caring relationalities'.<sup>110</sup> Practising with care, as a part of the thinking and making process, is implicit to my studio labour. By taking up care as a proposition for action, I am making explicit the role care can play in our understanding and encounters with life. At the same time, I am reflecting on how care or its absence, encountered at the creek, either as present-day activities or historical practices evidenced in the creek's current materiality, can be communicated through the physical matter of gorse.

In describing the process of making the bricks, I demonstrate how 'matters of care' conflate with labours of care. In doing so, I examine how the process of fashioning the gorse into bricks as part of a wall reverses the expansion of gorse as an invasive weed, by containing it and remaking it as a boundary maker in the gallery. The bricks also refer to the immensity of the labour-intense process of gorse removal. The relatively tiny area we cleared to make the bricks translated to months of studio work to make the bricks. Using the whole plant, not just the yellow dye flowers, was an opportunity to engage fully with gorse's materiality and volume.

Before discussing my studio processes, I will outline the introduction of gorse to Australia to provide historical context to this work. I will also show how reflecting on *Walking the Merri* and *Tending the Merri* as field work informed my approach to *Bound by Gorse*. Gorse was introduced to Australia as a hedge plant in the early 1800s and is now a Weed of National Significance.<sup>111</sup> It naturalised rapidly, creating impenetrable prickly masses which are havens to other introduced species such as rabbit and fox. The first herbarium record of *Ulex europaeus* in Australia was collected at Studley Park, not far from

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<sup>110</sup> Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, 41, 66.

<sup>111</sup> "Weed Management Guide: Gorse—*Ulex Europaeus*," in *Weeds of National Significance*, ed. CRC Weed Management (Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage), 2.

Merri Creek in 1884. This specimen is material evidence of its naturalisation. [Fig. 51] In under 100 years gorse had spread beyond its planned hedgerows into the landscape.

In 1898 Mark Twain described his approach to Ballarat by train: ‘great green expanses of rolling pasture-land, bisected by eye-contenting hedges of commingled new-gold and old-gold gorse.’<sup>112</sup> For Twain the gorse in flower offered familiarity and connection to places he knew; today this legacy is tackled by governments, community groups and the Victorian Gorse Taskforce.<sup>113</sup> Gorse persists along northern sections of the Merri. Its prickly-like leaves, seed viability of 30 years and deep root system together contribute to its ability to thrive in areas of low rainfall. It is a bushfire hazard due to its high flammability. Gorse spreads quickly, especially along waterways: its prolific seed pods can burst open, ejecting seeds up to five metres.<sup>114</sup>

The decision to return to conventions of making work specifically for the gallery re-framed *Walking the Merri* as fieldwork and research. This shift from artwork to research articulates one of the complexities of practice-led research, where research process and findings cannot be clearly prised apart, their boundary being diffuse. Barbara Bolt’s differentiation between artwork and the ‘work of art’ is useful here. The artwork is the production; in my research this includes a walk, performative events, and lastly, two installations presented in different iterations and contexts within a gallery. For the researcher the ‘work of art’—that is, the work art does during and after its production—can be apprehended through research activities which include fieldwork, historic research and the process of making in the studio. Bolt reminds us this work, which can be visible in the final artwork, is additional to effects which play out for the artist and her field as well as ‘effects that the artwork may generate in the world.’<sup>115</sup>

In consequence, establishing a clear division between the artwork and the work it is doing is not an achievable goal. However, by self-consciously asking, ‘what is the work

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<sup>112</sup> Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey around the World*, (Gutenberg, 1897), [http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2895?msg=welcome\\_stranger#ch18](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2895?msg=welcome_stranger#ch18).(Chapter XXIV)

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au> (Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

<sup>114</sup> “Weed Management Guide: Gorse—*Ulex Europaeus*,” 1.

<sup>115</sup> Bolt, Barbara. “Beyond Solipsism in Artistic Research: The Artwork and the Work of Art,” in *Material Interventions: Applying Creative Arts Research*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 30.



**Fig. 52**

Day Four: Lesley Harding heading downstream, just before the gorse became impenetrable and we had to backtrack.

**Fig. 53**

Ray Radford directs volunteers into position for the 'after' photograph at the end of our working bee at Galgi Ngarrk (Cooper St Grassland), 24 November 2013.

of *Walking the Merri*?, I enabled a deeper reflection and space in which to pay attention to the knowledges emerging from my research. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Walking the Merri* worked very differently in the gallery when compared to its emergence at the creek. The combination of the performance and its later translation to a gallery, *worked* to inform the direction of my studio practice and my conviction to create works for a gallery audience. The material contact with gorse at the creek—during restoration working bees and *Walking the Merri*—and my encounters with the built forms of fences and roads led me to work with the whole gorse plant.

### **Physical encounters with Gorse**

On Day Four of the *Walking the Merri*, the gorse was impenetrable on the east bank, so that we were forced to back-track and find a route on the opposite side. Landowners are legally responsible for clearing and reducing gorse on private property, but there are areas along the creek where gorse flourishes unchecked. On these sections of private land gorse grows above head height as far as the eye can see. Passages shaped by foxes or goats were impossible for us to navigate without excruciating head to toe prickling. This volume of gorse indicated the absence of care by landowners just as it shaped and redirected our route. [Fig. 52]

Public land in the northern reaches of the creek has undergone more consistent gorse management. This includes the iterative labour highlighted in *Tending the Merri*, where volunteers, working in pairs, cut the gorse bushes at the base and quickly paint herbicide directly onto the remaining stump. This work is labour-intensive and extremely satisfying. Before and after photographs document its scope. [Fig. 53] Gorse eradication is combined with planting and establishing indigenous prickly species, such as *Acacia paradoxa*. This ensures small birds have protective habitat during the transition away from gorse. To protect biodiversity, it is deemed necessary to kill gorse plants.

Thus, the process of making *Bound by Gorse* performed the work of clearing a weed of National Significance. By working intensely with this woody weed, I produced a wall's worth of bricks wherein repetitive labour and gorse's materiality combine and refer to the complicated histories of gorse and landownership in Victoria. US artist Patterson Clark's description of his own practice, which uses cleared invasive species as art material, serves to explain how *Bound by Gorse* is also 'an environmental gesture





**Fig. 54**  
Gorse brick press  
Aphra making bricks from gorse pulp,  
January 2017.

that highlights some of the inherent value in these abundant but unwanted plants.<sup>116</sup> By reworking the plant into something useful I acknowledge how an ethics of care is informed by context and conditions that are never universal. To make space and give life to indigenous plant species, it can be necessary to kill ‘invasive’ species such as gorse.

### **Brick work and the work of bricks**

The production and exhibition of the gorse bricks brings together creek experiences, activities and histories such as navigating fences, the presence of introduced species and their management, the construction of new housing estates and historic and contemporary quarrying of the creek. The wholesale extraction of matter from the creek, where companies and individual miners quarried for sand, clay (bricks) and basalt (buildings and roads) began in the mid-1800s and embodies an instrumental rather than nurturing or reciprocal relationship with the creek.<sup>117</sup> The extant walls of Pentridge Prison show the proximity of extraction and creation; the bricks are an object and metaphor of this history. As Frost and Coole argue, the shift towards paying attention to matter, offers a way through the complexity of the world, stating that:

In distinction from some recent examples of constructivism, new materialists emphasize the productivity and resilience of matter. Their wager is to give materiality its due, alert to the myriad ways in which matter is both self-constituting and invested with—and reconfigured by—intersubjective interventions that have their own quotient of materiality.<sup>118</sup>

Papermaking offered a way to use the whole plant, to replicate—through care rather than instrumentalism—the extraction of matter at the creek. Drawing upon the expertise of the Victorian Papermakers,<sup>119</sup> I began to test how the woody fibres of gorse and its prickly leaves could be processed through papermaking methods. I recalled my grandmother’s briquette maker, used to reconstitute newspapers into faux blocks of wood as fuel for her fire. As with all methods of making I am drawn to, papermaking is labour-intensive and process-driven. The cellulose fibres cooked and beaten undergo

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<sup>116</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=355&v=PoCHYyQ6sKE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=355&v=PoCHYyQ6sKE) (Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2018)

<sup>117</sup> <http://heritage.darebinlibraries.vic.gov.au/article/285> (Accessed 6th April, 2018)

<sup>118</sup> Coole and Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” 7.

<sup>119</sup> <http://papermakers.org.au/> (Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2016)



**Fig. 55**

Brick moulds used to create indentations on each brick, known as *frogs*. These *frogs* imprinted postcodes on the top surface of each brick.



**Fig. 56**

Robbie Rowlands operating the chipper at Kalkallo, October 2016.



**Fig. 57**

Gorse bricks drying in our garage, January 2017.





transformation via the repetitive and methodical actions between human, machine, water, caustic soda and gorse. These ‘phenomena’ or conditions reduced the volume of gorse without completely transforming its prickly materiality. Making enough pulp to create one brick was manageable, whereas upscaling production to create a wall of bricks required several cubic metres of gorse and a well-planned production process.

I searched online for briquette makers, and discovered an array of custom built, ‘amped up’ versions of my grandmother’s manual press. In consultation, a friend built me a brick press. A two-tonne car jack provided the necessary pressure to produce relatively consistent bricks. [Fig. 54] The indented impression and maker’s mark found on the top surface of bricks is called a ‘frog’. I sculpted a series of moulds, bearing postcodes from within the catchment, including 3101 which located the first gorse herbarium specimen collected in Australia, in 1884. [Fig. 55] Four-digit postcodes, identifiable to Australian audiences, traced the spread of gorse through the catchment since colonisation.

To make paper, plant fibres are cut, cooked in an alkaline solution and then washed and beaten before undergoing moulding and drying. Cutting gorse by hand was incredibly slow. It took three hours to cut and prepare enough gorse to make a handful of bricks, excluding the process of heating and pulping the fibres. Considering this, I hired a chipper and went with a friend to Kalkallo, a site in the Merri catchment where gorse dominates the landscape. We found an acre block completely covered with gorse, the infestation spilling onto the adjoining roadside. In a couple of hours, we had chipped two cubic metres of gorse, clearing a meagre 25 square metres of land. [Fig. 56]

For the next five months, with the help of one of my children, I gradually processed the chipped gorse. Starting with the heating process, I simmered the gorse in caustic soda solution. The strong alkali breaks down the cellulose fibres, softening them so they are easily moulded. I reused the alkali solution, scooping out the fibres and adding more caustic and water as necessary. Next, I washed the alkaline residue from the fibres. Buckets of fibre were then pulped either by hand with a mallet, or with an electric blender. Finally, the blended pulp was scooped into the brick press on top of the frog mould. Each brick was compressed for 20 minutes, producing approximately three bricks per hour, excluding the time taken to make the pulp. [Fig. 57]

We eventually compressed the gorse to approximately one quarter of its original volume. This condensing of material, compared to the expansive practice of dyeing cloth with colour, was, at the time of production, very disheartening. My sense of futility was amplified by the sum of bricks appearing inconsequential compared to the volume of chipped gorse I began with. The pile of gorse was slow to reduce, and the work of boiling, pulping and moulding was at times quite disgusting. Nevertheless, if care is measured as attention, and material time, then the hours of labour spent chipping, boiling, washing, pulping and finally pressing 20 litres of pulp into a single brick were a process and conjuration of care. The rows of wet bricks, turned each day to ensure even drying, were a visual line-up of hours and hours of time and labour.

### **Situating Gorse**

The source of my primary material (gorse) and its history in Australia as an introduced species and invasive weed are central to the reading of my work. The gorse, collected from the Merri catchment, is both 'site' and material. Taking Kwon's argument that site is more than a physical location, the site of gorse proved to be material, political and historical, representing the entanglement and potential of site as many things all at once. For example, uncleared gorse represents a legacy of colonial history, the acclimatisation movement (who brought flora and fauna to Australia to create, amongst other things, a sense of home) and of contemporary farming practices and challenges. It can reveal landowner neglect, flaunted environmental laws and through physical encounter it can produce extreme pain.<sup>120</sup> When cleared and managed it can exemplify a politics of care and attention. And when, with the maker's hands and tools, a wall of bricks is produced, the gorse collected at Kalkallo represents the convergence and entanglement of a multiplicity of sites and places, processed through labours of care. [Appendix iv & v]

Aleks Danko's *Trick Brick* (1973) is a series of over 200 clay bricks, cast by the artist in plaster moulds. Both Danko and I sourced a volume of material from which we produced bricks until the raw material was used up. His bricks, created from a

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<sup>120</sup> Even in its own habitat gorse's prickles are feared. Winnie-the-Pooh confuses gorse bush with Ambush explaining the six days it took to remove gorse prickles, amounted to not much less than an ambush anyway. A A Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), 1926; repr., 1974), 108-9.

lump of clay delivered to his studio, took two months to create. Both projects use the multiple to articulate time, work and volume. Both employ handmade, mass-production manufacturing and repetitive methods. Danko cast each brick in a plaster mould before kiln firing. In 1973, he exhibited the bricks at Watters Gallery in Sydney. Beside the heap of bricks, he installed refuse and equipment that had gathered in his studio during production. Photographs documenting the studio and gallery prior to and during installation, and included in the exhibition, reveal Danko's wish to communicate the interplay between sites of production and exhibition.<sup>121</sup>

Danko's 'site' is the politics of artistic labour, thus, any clay, any studio and any gallery can potentiate his ideas. My 'site' is the gorse and the material history it carries. The relationship between gorse, catchment and contemporary restoration is central to my research. Therefore, collecting gorse from within the catchment contributed to how the work is understood. The labour and time invested in *Bound by Gorse* required stamina and persistence. For every bucket of pulp we processed there seemed to always be more. The labour of producing gorse bricks echoed, at a domestic scale, the unending task of containing gorse across Victoria. The arduous, prickly and smelly task of processing the gorse shares some attributes with the physically demanding work of gorse clearing. Each brick, coming together to form the wall, represented several hours of studio labour.

As multiples, and via their stacked presentation, the bricks embody repetitive practices, likewise gorse eradication requires years of returning to re-perform removal activities. Care is inherent in both brick making and gorse clearing by virtue of the persistence required for each task. The hostile nature of gorse and its unfathomable reach test the workers and their dedication to the creek in ways that weeding annuals and planting indigenous species do not. Rather than thinking, as Danko may have, 'How many bricks can I make from this volume of material in this timeframe?', I was instead confronted by the anomaly of a garage full of gorse (we had to park our car in the street for five months) and its relationship to the tiny cleared patch amongst hectares of gorse infestation at Kalkallo.

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<sup>121</sup> Megan Robson, "Aleks Danko: I Had an Idea (Online)." *Art Monthly Australia* 281, no. July (2015): 28.

## A wall inside the gallery

*Bound by Gorse* created a division or barrier in the gallery. This connected to the experience of walking the creek in two ways. Installed at Counihan Gallery in Melbourne as part of *Flow* (curated by Heather Hesterman for Art + Climate = Change) the wall was positioned near the entry into the second gallery space. [Appendix iv] Allowing for wheelchair and pram access, the wall nevertheless presented itself as a barrier into the second room, forcing viewers to move left when entering the space. The experience of being directed through space by a fixed object echoed the innumerable fences and boundaries navigated during *Walking the Merri*. It particularly related to the properties we circumnavigated because owners denied entry. The gentle curve of the wall allowed viewers to stand within the space delimited by the wall (rather than simply on one side or the other). The curved structure activated the physical experience of boundaries and internal and external space without creating an enclosed or inaccessible space.

*Bound by Gorse* activates the gallery space through the coming together of gorse, bricks and wall. Barad's new materialism, where 'the so-called subject, the so-called instrument, and the so-called object of research are always already entangled,' situates the viewer in relation to the work whereby the entanglement of brick, gorse, wall, viewer and the labour embedded in the bricks intra-act to produce readings which are embedded with material time and care.<sup>122</sup> Spiros Panigirakis proposes several contemporary Melbourne artists use walls to create 'relations with bodies and discursive fields, embedding an understanding of power that consists of multiple and intersecting institutional bodies'.<sup>123</sup> He is referring to practices like Bianca Hester's, where props and interventions in the gallery space facilitate physical interactions between audience, the installation's materiality and the space. While *Bound by Gorse* is not a work that specifically allows audiences to touch or move the bricks, the materiality of the coarse, prickly bricks invites (or provokes) the desire for a haptic encounter with the wall.

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<sup>122</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, (University of Michigan Library: Open Humanities Press, 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11515701.0001.001.15>.

<sup>123</sup> Spiros Panigirakis, "It's All Wall: A Recent History of the Wall in Contemporary Art Practice," *Un Magazine* 6, no. 1 (2012): 8.

Counterpoint to the gorse bricks is the digital print depicting the site where we gathered and chipped gorse. Pinned to the gallery wall within the curve of the brick structure, the print reproduces a snapshot taken at Kalkallo, as we admired the aftermath of our chipping. [Fig. 50]. In this image, the site and residue of our labour is documented. I chose this image because just visible at the far edge of the cleared patch of gorse are a rusty wire fence and weatherworn wooden post. By chance almost, my snapshot records a fence emerging from overgrown gorse, made visible by our morning's work. In this image the histories of past and present caring practices (visible as fences and escaped and cleared gorse) come together and offer a reference point for the viewer.

Bellacasa and others suggest care needs to be assessed in context to each situation; this image, with its decrepit fence and gorse monoculture, hints at the complexity of understanding practices of care across time and place. Robert Smithson proposed the terms 'site' and 'non-site' to create connections between a physical place outside the gallery and its representation in the gallery. Smithson described the earth he relocated into the gallery as a 'three dimensional picture', and when combined with maps or photos of the outdoor site he considered this array of materials the non-site.<sup>124</sup> In her 1991 book about Smithson's practice, Eugenie Tsai explains the importance of the map or photograph in making his non-site complete, in that they 'point to a specific site' offering an indexical connection to the earth and its site of collection.<sup>125</sup>

To think through how material taken from the creek and repurposed in the studio works in the gallery space I have brought Smithson's idea of the non-site alongside Kwon's more contemporary analysis of site as discursive, expansive and interconnected. That is, the gorse as a site of enquiry activates a range of historic and contemporary responses for audiences. But if we still return to the site of my gorse harvest, as Smithson might have, through the connection of the bricks and the photograph to a physical location, we loop back to a physical location that holds many stories and histories in its grasp. Massey's research explains place as mobile, relational

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<sup>124</sup> Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites". <https://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm> (Accessed 15th December, 2017)

<sup>125</sup> Eugenie Tsai, *Robert Smithson Unearthed: Drawings, Collages, Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 36.

and like a pincushion of stories intersecting and merging.<sup>126</sup> In this context Smithson's non-site becomes a starting point from which to expand and reflect on what has produced particular histories or conditions.

Situated in a discourse reaching well beyond the 'white cube', incorporating ecological restoration, invasive weed migration and land ownership, *Bound by Gorse* installed at Counihan Gallery garnered strong responses from people who had worked to clear gorse. During the exhibition, a Central Victorian landowner emailed me, compelled to write because the work moved him. He had spent eight years eradicating gorse from the creek running through his property. He described the gorse as 'sinister' and his removal as a 'battle'.<sup>127</sup> Artist Diego Bonetto contests the use of negative language when speaking of introduced plant species, arguing shared negative language towards human migrants and introduced plant species favoured by non-Anglo residents reflects Australian xenophobia.<sup>128</sup> The emotive language used by the Central Victorian landowner represents the extent of his own durational labour and commitment to clearing his creek. In turn he recognised a similar labour of care in the production of *Bound by Gorse*. Some weed species are environmentally benign, while a plant such as gorse, left unchecked, can wreak huge environmental and agricultural damage. The complexity of urban ecologies is attested in the relevance and usefulness of Bonetto and my own practice, a reminder again of the importance of context and relations in establishing ethical and caring frameworks. In Bonetto's practice care plays out in his knowledge and use of ruderal edible plants and his efforts to share this knowledge for the common good, and indeed, to reframe discourse around indigenous and introduced species.<sup>129</sup>

A second example of reading *Bound by Gorse* through prior embodied knowledge, was demonstrated by *Imprint* editor Andrew Stephens. He visited my studio during brick production when half the gorse was unprocessed. He too had cleared gorse from his land in Central Victoria. Conceptual explanation was unnecessary; rather, the ideas

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<sup>126</sup> Doreen Massey on Space. <http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/> (Accessed 6th April, 2018)

<sup>127</sup> Personal email correspondence 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2017.

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.diegobonetto.com/> (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2017)

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



**Fig. 58**  
Dominic Redfern  
*Weeding*, 2015  
3 screen video installation,  
dimensions variable  
Video stills

were communicated through the materiality of the gorse, the bricks, the mound of chipped gorse and Stephens' lived experience. Both Stephens and the gallery visitor encountered *Bound by Gorse* through their own experience of the plant in the landscape. Their knowledge of the labour of removal, the intensity of its prickly leaves and its enduring seed bank informed their reading of the work, raising in both instances the emotional and embattled experience of working to eradicate it.

Another locally motivated work positioning gorse as its central protagonist, is Dominic Redfern's three-screen video installation *Weeding* (2015). This meditative and beautifully filmed video documents the artist clearing gorse along a section of Canadian Creek in the Victorian Goldfields. The three screens shift between this footage and close-up shots of gorse flowers and seedpods. [Fig. 58] Redfern's motivation and research, like my own, reflect on the role of gorse as a hedge plant and invasive species. His work 'allegorises and evokes early encroachments by non-indigenous people, plants, and animals' in Victoria.<sup>130</sup> Where our work diverges is in the material examination of gorse itself. Redfern's almost slow-motion footage of himself, clad in white shirt, lifting and moving gorse plants on his own, and then returning to paint the stump with herbicide, is a romanticised rendition of the physicality of gorse clearing, typically performed by a team. Redfern's use of close-up footage to reveal the beauty of the gorse plant compels the viewer to consider how so-called weed-infested places can still provoke wonder and connection to place. Conversely, *Bound by Gorse* investigates the labour of clearing, not through representation and allegory, but through a direct engagement with the material and materiality of gorse. Re-formed as building blocks, labour is embedded in each brick. In the gallery, the bricks extend out from the gallery wall, nearby a photograph of the small area of gorse we cleared to make the bricks, reveals a fence line long buried by prickly gorse. The small area of cleared land is a reminder of the immensity of the task of gorse control.

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<sup>130</sup> <http://www.dominicredfern.net/Weeding> (Accessed March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017)



## Conclusion

The process of making the gorse bricks was repetitive, reproducible and, much of the time, quite unpleasant, seemingly endless and physically demanding. This married with the experience of clearing gorse, where containment is gradual, time consuming, hard work and long-lasting. Consequently, making the bricks while meditative and reflective is also physically exhausting and unpleasant, as is gorse eradication at the creek. In echoing this gruelling labour, my studio practice connects to my experience of gorse removal, and to the serious work of gorse clearing described by the Victorian Gorse Taskforce. By making a wall of bricks, especially for installation within a gallery, I addressed key experiences arising from and between *Walking the Merri* and my work as a restoration volunteer. The installation of a wall that served to both corral, direct and contain gallery audiences, provided an encounter that articulated the material experience prior to and during the walk, of property boundaries, exclusions and access. Its manufacture, using the multiple, addressed the manual and repetitive labour required and embedded in practices of care, and as such carried within each brick traces of material time. Such processual and repetitive methods are used in my final work, *Habitus* (2017) discussed in the next chapter.



**Fig. 59**

*Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries*, 2017

hemp, wool, natural dyes, sand

360 x 130 x 38 cm

Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 60**

*Quiet Witness*, 2017

cotton damask tablecloth, natural dyes

175 x 300 cm

Photography: Matthew Stanton

## Chapter Five: Habitus

### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the development of *Habitus* (2017), the second work I created for a gallery. In this work, my locally situated practices of care are cast against the global problem of climate change. I demonstrate the ways in which methods and practices established in the earlier works remain useful to this research, especially as a means of activating and making visible practices of care to a gallery audience. I discuss my return to walking to gather information about the expanded geographical site connecting Heide Museum of Modern Art and the Merri catchment and in doing so activate Tronto's phase of 'caring about' a place. I explain how my decision to revisit plant dye and mordant printing allowed me to take advantage of fundamental printmaking characteristics. These included its repetitive, iterative and processual qualities, which elucidated relations between time, labour and care in my practice. Locally collected plant colour determined my palette: thus, I consider this work as being produced between me and matter. I draw upon cultural geographers, Whatmore and Massey, who have helped make sense of my messy encounters with matter in the studio and the field. How they use space-time and the expression of the agency of matter as hybrid and corporeal has helped me draw out relations between my studio making and these expanded sites for a gallery audience.

### Local practices and elsewhere

*Habitus*, created for Heide Museum of Modern Art and the 2017 Art + Climate = Change Festival, aimed to reveal practices of care to a gallery audience through the transformation of materials collected onsite. Building on *Bound by Gorse*, this installation used relations between image, object and matter to create dialogue and context between sites of labour and place. As discussed in the previous chapter, this builds on Smithson's non-site and Kwon's more recent discussions of sited practices.

*Habitus* consisted of two works: *Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries* (2017) a freestanding wall comprised of printed and plant dyed sandbags and *Quiet Witness* (2017) a damask tablecloth printed and dyed with acorns collected at Heide. [Figs. 59 & 60] A snapshot of *Yingabeal*, a Wurundjeri scarred tree living in Heide's grounds,



**Fig. 61**

Clockwise:

Heide kitchen garden, July 2016

Preparing acorns for the dye bath, February 2017

Sandbags prior to filling, January 2017

was printed in section onto one face of each sandbag. Many dye plants were used to colour the bags, which produced a fragmented and multi-coloured image. The complete photograph appeared as a dark single-colour image on cloth. On entering the space, one encountered a chest-high wall of sandbags running across the room. *Quiet Witness* was pinned to the opposite wall beyond *Porous Borders*. It was only upon entering the space and walking between the two works that the full colour and image printed on the sandbags became visible. Audience members were able to move around the room and view the work from within, or at a distance.

The purpose of this work was to consider local care practices and how they connect to global concerns such as climate change. As such, it was important to conceptualise Heide as part of a bigger system and network of relations. From the beginning I imagined Heide, not as a singular plot of land, but as a place connected to many other places through its history and its contemporary role as an art museum within large grounds now surrounded by urban development.

The attention I paid to plants on site continued in the studio, where introduced and indigenous species were transformed to colour in the dye pot. Working with locally collected plants—following their matter through my studio processes—focussed my attention on the physical site. [Fig. 61] At the same time, these plants activated connections and relations to elsewhere; their geographic origins and trajectories to and from Melbourne mirrored in the material intra-actions between plant, mordant, water, cloth and heat. The transformation of plant matter to colours across the sandbags materialised my studio interactions with the plants, which in turn echoed relations between human and plants in land use and care across the Merri and Darebin Creek catchments.

*Habitus* was a direct response to the Heide property and its geographical and physical connection to the Merri catchment and to frontline responses to extreme weather events such as floods. I used the material of plants to make visible and pay attention to my space-time experience of these places. Massey reminds us that it is not possible to go back in space-time, because places (and you) are always changing:

‘You can’t hold places still. What you *can* do is meet up with others, catch up with where another’s history has got to ‘now’, but where that ‘now’ (more rigorously,

that ‘here and now’, that *hic et nunc*) is itself constituted by nothing more than – precisely – that meeting-up (again).’<sup>131</sup>

The title, *Habitus*, derives from Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory which argues the relationships between collective cultural norms and personal histories shape, and are shaped by, our present actions. Bourdieu suggests our cultural and personal histories are embodied in our postures, practices and how we move, which is closely tied to our mental habits and the so-called intuitive responses to situations.<sup>132</sup> He makes clear that habitus constitutes, ‘structured structures, generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices . . . [and] are also structuring structures,’ which determine the same actions good or bad depending on the context.<sup>133</sup> For example, how one behaves at an Australian Football League (AFL) game may not translate as appropriate for the theatre. Nevertheless, individual actions can, over time, evolve and shift the parameters of acceptable behaviour at a cultural level; Nicky Winmar’s singular gesture of lifting his shirt and pointing to his skin during an AFL game in 1993 produced changes across the sport and ‘a United Nations conference was told how Winmar’s action should be a catalyst for action against racism in all its forms.’<sup>134</sup>

In taking Bourdieu’s term ‘habitus’ as the title of my installation, I am adopting his theory to see how the practices of care present in our daily lives are encultured and learnt. Individuals and societal groups practice care within a habitus of socially constructed conditions, in turn these actions adapt and evolve in relation to changing conditions and structures, and in doing so shape our individual and collective futures. This installation sought to make visible the care and attention present in my studio making and the ways in which these practices bring attention to Bellacasa’s suggestion that, ‘Caring . . . is a speculative affective mode that encourages intervention in what things could be.’<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 125.

<sup>132</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Physical Space, Social Space and Habitus,” in *Vilhelm Aubert Memorial Lecture* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 1995), 16.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>134</sup> Michael Gordon, “The Day Nicky Winmar Drew the Line,” *The Age* 2013. <https://www.theage.com.au/sport/afl/the-day-nicky-winmar-drew-the-line-20130416-2hydd.html> (Accessed March 5th, 2017)

<sup>135</sup> Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, 41, 66.





**Fig. 62**

Clockwise: Photos taken between Merri Creek  
and Bulleen, 8 April 2016

Dundas St, Thornbury

Stormwater draining into Darebin Creek

*Indigofera australis* near Darebin Creek

Drains and fences, Heidelberg



## Walking/Wayfaring

To re-orient myself at this expanded site, I returned to walking as a practice of paying attention. Walking to and from Heide, and spending many hours wandering the grounds, was a process of engaging closely, over the course of a year, with the materiality of the site. This process provided space in which to reflect on and notice changes and interventions at the site, which amounted to the beginning of caring about this expanded site. This deep engagement through walking effected Tronto's first two phases of practicing care. The first, 'caring about' was activated through my engagement with the site over an extended period. As discussed in Chapter One, 'caring about' precedes the second phase of care: 'taking care of'. In this second phase the potential care-giver identifies a need for care and settles on a resolution that this need be met. The production of *Habitus* and my focus on communicating care through the presentation of this work in the gallery, was a process of 'caring about' and 'taking care of' this expanded site.

Walking allowed me to come some way towards experiencing the porosity and heterogenous nature of this local site. Massey writes that, '[the] identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple.'<sup>136</sup> That is, social interrelations extend beyond the immediate vicinity of place to include the global within the local. She explains how space-time is constituted through 'one view of a place . . . a particular articulation of those relations . . . a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings'.<sup>137</sup> Walking allowed me to observe the plants, terrain and built environment between the Merri and Heide and to notice how much of this place comes from elsewhere. [Fig. 62]

I used the slow pace of walking to activate a temporal and spatial experience of place, where the moving body can notice the history and presence of a site through its materiality.<sup>138</sup> I returned to wayfaring, discussed in Chapter One, to focus on what is revealed through the embodied process of walking. Wayfaring between the Merri

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<sup>136</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 5.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (London New York Routledge, 2011), 38.

and Heide, I could experience what 15 kilometres felt like, temporally and spatially, in ways that were impossible inside a car. Embodied, seasonal and wayfaring movement expressed, through material intra-actions, the haptic encounter of looking and being with care. Walking linked me to the Merri Creek, Heide and the places between.

My research is concerned with getting amongst a place; not with looking out over a site, nor to create a record or representation of myself in a set location. Instead, I use methods of walking, collecting, feeling and looking, to experience and pay attention to the materiality of place and what this might reveal. In his analysis of walking and moving as a form of knowing, Ingold differentiates between expert and novice, noting the former as having ‘more representations . . . packed inside the head—but a greater sensitivity to cues in the environment’.<sup>139</sup> He is suggesting knowledges are built through interactions with, and in response to, a place, and that this includes the ground beneath our feet, as well as the weather swirling around our bodies. Such knowledge and expertise accumulate over time and constitute the building blocks of attention and care.

Walking between waterways, despite the grid of roads and buildings, provoked me to try and imagine space-times prior to white settlement. As Massey suggests, one can’t fold back to previous space-times without disregarding the experiences of more recent histories.<sup>140</sup> As I walked to Heide with my daughter, traces of these histories rose up to greet us. Where possible, we followed waterways, but much of our 16.7 kilometre journey threaded along suburban streets. Our walk connected and contextualised the Merri Catchment to its neighbouring Darebin Creek Catchment, both of which lie within the larger Yarra Catchment. From Darebin Creek, we walked to the restored Banyule Flats and Swamp just north of Heide, before looping back across the Yarra to our destination. [Map 2] Many of the suburbs in these catchments are built on swamps and wetlands. Beneath pristine gardens and homes lie layers of rubble and junk, built up to support and hold suburban homes. The modernist home, Heide II, is built on the cusp of the Yarra’s 100-year flood level. As the effects of climate change increase,

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<sup>139</sup> Ingold, “Footprints through the Weather-World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing,” S134.

<sup>140</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 255.

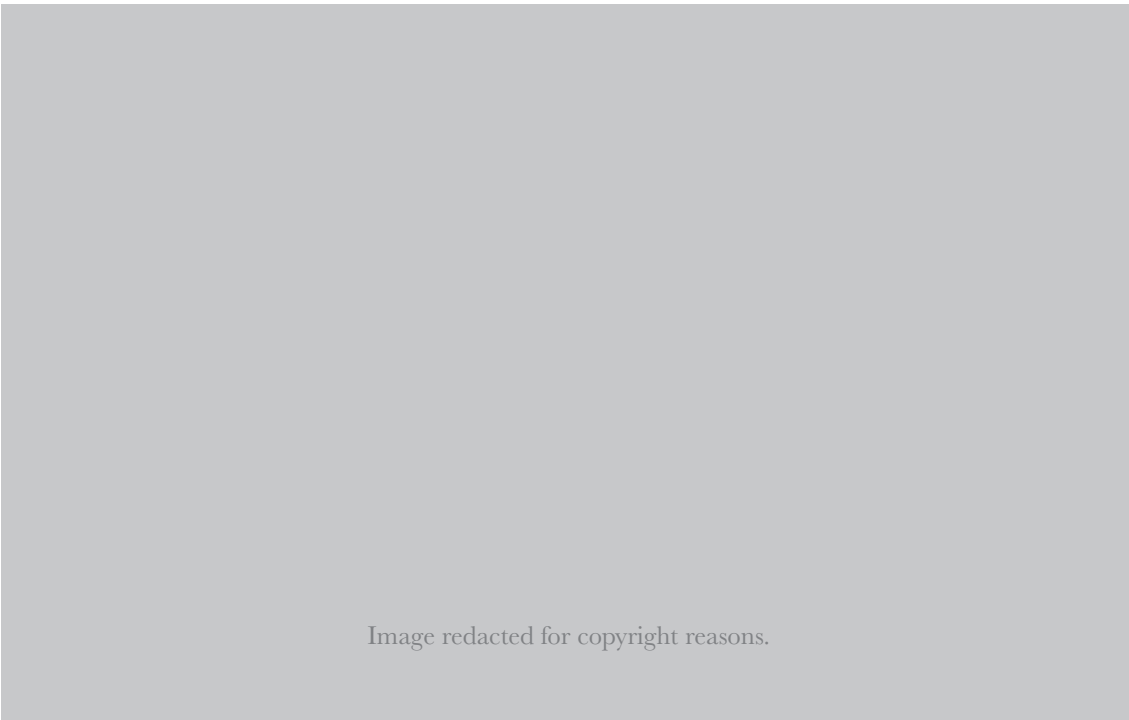


Image redacted for copyright reasons.

**Fig. 63**  
The view from each direction looking through the window between my studio and home.

**Fig. 64**  
Nobuho Nagasawa  
*Where Are You Going? Where Are You From?*, 1993  
sandbags, barbed wire, hourglass  
457.2 x 2500 x 457.2 cm  
Royal Garden of the Prague Castle, Prague, The Czech Republic  
© the artist and Asian American Arts Centre

perhaps these hidden wetlands will resurface in ways other than the imaginary, requiring material solutions.

## **Sandbags**

The decision to make a sandbag wall was driven by my research questions of how to articulate practices of care, or the need for care, in urban green spaces and how this connects to the extreme weather events associated with global warming. Typically, sandbags have been used by artists concerned with issues of war, refugees and human-to-human conflict. They conjure images of war, shelter and protection but in Australia they are also deeply associated in popular memory with natural disaster. Increasingly, sandbags are being used to protect buildings from flooding during extreme weather events. During the year in which I researched and created this work, sandbags were frequently mentioned in the news.<sup>141</sup>

As with the bricks which formed *Bound by Gorse*, the use of individual sandbags to create one wall used the multiple to reveal care to an audience through evidence of studio practices which were time-consuming, labour-intensive and repetitive. Each bag is individually printed and dyed with plants I collected over the year spent making this work. In addition to making the bags, the labour of filling them was undertaken alone; it was slow, reflective and physical. Thousands of bags are needed for a real emergency, and this requires collective and cooperative labour of many. *Habitus*, produced mostly on my own, describes a process of ‘caring about’ enacted by one person.

I used sandbags to frame the work in dialogue with the physical effects of climate change. Locally, the rise in severity and frequency of flood events in urban settings is in part due to the increase in hard surfaces (roads, cemented paths and creek beds). The intensity of storm water run-off into urban waterways results in rapid rise and subsequent decline of water levels in Melbourne waterways during flood events.<sup>142</sup>

Sandbags offer the scope to demarcate a boundary or wall within the gallery space while

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<sup>141</sup> In October 2016, the RAAF flew 60,000 (empty) sandbags to South Australia to assist with the flash flooding of the Gawler and Wakefield rivers, north of Adelaide. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-02/sa-weather-conditions-ease-overnight-but-more-rain-coming/7895762> (Accessed March 7th, 2018)

<sup>142</sup> Stephanie Chalkley-Rhoden, “Melbourne Water Supply Could Be under Threat within a Decade, Water Authority Says,” Australian Broadcast Commission, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-23/melbourne-water-supply-could-be-under-threat-within-a-decade/8735400>.



Image redacted for copyright reasons.

**Fig. 65**

Dan Peterman

*Civilian Defense*, 2007

1000 sandbags, domestic fabrics, sand

Van Abbe Museum, The Netherlands

also referring to the holding back of water. As Harding wrote in her catalogue essay for the exhibition, ‘the sandbags operate as an impenetrable barrier, but their shifts in colour and intensity also suggest a cross-section of the earth underfoot, and layers of history.’<sup>143</sup> Sandbag walls, like my shelter tents, are temporary structures. They are issued when other options are exhausted, a last resort when time is running out.

Dyeing, making and filling sandbags requires many hours of labour. In my project the labour and scale were constrained by physical space and domestic commitments. My studio shares a wall and internal sash window with our kitchen and living area. The physical division between work and home, made porous by the window, is often more conceptual than material. Art work creeps into home and school projects into studio. [Fig. 63] Initially I tested the sandbag wall in our living space because the studio was too small. Our domestic activities—as repetitive as the production of the bags themselves—flowed around the low wall. As sand leaked onto the floor and more strata of colours were built, the *work of art* was informed by and merged with the caring labours of the home, just as dye pots share the cooktop with dinner.

Positioned within our living space, the sandbag wall emerged through and with the daily labours of care practised in the home. Barbara Bolt’s proposal that practice-led research conflates the work art does with the artwork itself is further complicated in my research by the site(s) in which the collective labour and artwork emerge.<sup>144</sup> My method of producing art work in and amongst my full participation in family life provoked a sense of urgency where I felt pulled between the desire to make art and the need to take care of my domestic responsibilities. To navigate these tensions my art practice has been built around modes of working that serve to operate as a continuum between the two. Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ Manifesto for maintenance art (1969) is arguably the quintessential merger of art and care work. Prompted by becoming a parent, she has consistently actioned her declaration, ‘Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday

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<sup>143</sup> <https://www.heide.com.au/exhibitions/rebecca-mayo-habitus> p.7 (Accessed September 30th, 2017)

<sup>144</sup> Barbara Bolt, “Beyond Solipsism in Artistic Research: The Artwork and the Work of Art,” in *Material Interventions: Applying Creative Arts Research*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 7.

things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.<sup>145</sup> My own approach builds relations between the care found in my art practice, and what this shares with domestic work.

For example, the shared characteristics between cooking and dyeing or sewing and mending. These comparisons translate to ecological care more broadly, where fire (to heat a dye-pot) and mending link to processes of weeding, pruning and planting.

Donna Haraway reminds us that life is messy and complicated, arguing that the processes of ‘making-with’, where ‘scientists, artists, ordinary members of communities, and non-human beings become enfolded in each other’s projects, in each other’s lives’, activate relationships and dependencies which demonstrate the need for care.<sup>146</sup> Such interrelations are visible in my practice at the site(s) of artistic production and labour between studio, home and creek. This occurs in the labour imbued in the domestic that I share across generations of my own family, and alongside fellow restoration workers at Merri Creek, as well as at the molecular level in the dye-pot where more-than-human matter merges and makes with human labours of care. This way of working aligns with Freya Mathews’ suggestion that ‘all activities involve some kind of exchange with world, and each exchange with world presents an opportunity for dialogue’.<sup>147</sup> She suggests, modernist (materialist) culture has produced an overarching instrumental relation to the world, arguing for a return to panpsychist values (where interactions with matter produce a conversation). Further she suggests, by refocussing on the activities we perform across each day of life we can pay attention to this exchange as important ‘opportunities for communicative encounter with world.’<sup>148</sup> The example of my art practice, integrated with caring for our creek and emerging through and with domestic daily practices, connects with the feminist art practices established by artists such as Laderman Ukeles.

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<sup>145</sup> <https://www.arnolfini.org.uk/blog/manifesto-for-maintenance-art-1969> (Accessed November, 1, 2018)

<sup>146</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 71-72.

<sup>147</sup> Freya Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture*, Suny Series in Environmental Philosophy and Ethics (State University of New York Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.



It is more typical for artists to use sandbags at a scale equivalent to emergency situations rather than working domestic spaces. For example, Nobuho Nagasawa's sandbag structure *Where Are You Going? Where Are You From?* (1993), is an 250 cm, 100 tonne sandbag and barbed wire bridge. [Fig. 64] The sandbags form a reconstructed local 12<sup>th</sup> century bridge in Prague and are a metaphor for political and geographical conflict.<sup>149</sup> These sandbags represent boundaries and edges which serve as the physical barriers between nation states, but which are also conduits through which power and communication play.<sup>150</sup> Whilst labour—necessary to fill thousands of bags—is present on a grand scale, I suggest Nagasawa's work is focussed on how borders delimit or enable opportunity rather than notions of care. The local nature, sole worker and domestic space of my practice constrained my wall to about one tonne.

Sandbags are symbolic of care and protection, of keeping rising water out or away from the inside of a building. My sandbag wall, as its title *Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries* (2017), suggests, uses plant dyes to disrupt the surety of a sandbag divide. The plant dyed surface of the cloth, a material manifestation of something less fixed and more like a membrane, is suggestive of the ways in which plants' movement is independent of built structures and boundaries. As a metaphor for care, it speaks of 'too little too late'.

Melbourne-based artist Rushdi Anwar's sandbag structure *Art, Like Morality, Consists In Drawing The Line Somewhere... Is It?* (2017) also uses the solidity of a wall of sandbags to articulate a border. The wall, filled in-situ on a beach, comprises a wooden frame around which hessian sandbags are stacked several metres high. Towards the top of the wall a slim horizontal gap frames a view out to sea; a site line through which to search for boats on the horizon. Anwar's work raises ethical questions of care in the context of the Australian Government's obsession with 'border protection'. For Anwar, the potential for porosity of edges is less important than articulating how care is practiced differently depending on which side of the wall you belong.

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<sup>149</sup> [https://review.ucsc.edu/summer.98/site\\_specific.html](https://review.ucsc.edu/summer.98/site_specific.html) (Accessed March 5, 2018)

<sup>150</sup> [http://www.artnet.com/usernet/awc/awc\\_workdetail.asp?aid=424644402&gid=424644402&cid=103811&wid=424645801&page=11](http://www.artnet.com/usernet/awc/awc_workdetail.asp?aid=424644402&gid=424644402&cid=103811&wid=424645801&page=11) (Accessed October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017)

Dan Peterman's installations *Civilian Defense* (2007) and *Civilian Defense (grounded flight)* (2015) bring sandbags into the gallery, to create a space for dialogue between local and global issues. Where I employ site-specific plant dye, Peterman uses colourful domestic fabrics as an entry point for visitors to engage with the 'provisional architecture of temporary checkpoints, military bunkers, flood control walls, and other "emergency" installations.'<sup>151</sup> In his 2007 work, the sandbags are arranged to form a large, low circular enclosure with an entrance gap. [Fig. 65] Photographic documentation of this work on the Van Abbe Museum Collection's website reveals a space in which people are invited to enter for conversations and workshops.<sup>152</sup> As such, Peterman's work personalises the connection between people, their domestic space and the broader social or political situations at hand. To different ends, we each use the quality and colour of the fabric to situate our work within particular contexts.

The watery and printed surface of my sandbags, taken up with plant colour, expresses the material intra-actions of my studio practice and fieldwork, making visible both the plant matter collected as I walked, and the studio labour involved in revealing it. The plant colour is a visible material manifestation of what Barad describes as:

This ongoing flow of agency through which 'part' of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another 'part' of the world and through which local causal structures, boundaries, and properties are stabilized and destabilized does not take place in space and time but in the making of spacetime itself.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, *Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries* uses local plant colour and the labour of its transformation to connect the work in the gallery to the physical sites outside. This material interpretation is built on my own space-time experience, and in doing so forges a conversation centred on care and attention while also referring to edges, boundaries and intersections.

In the studio I work with plant matter collected on site; it participates in and directs my studio processes and decisions, not just as something I manipulate, but as

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<sup>151</sup> <http://www.danpeterman.com/2012/05/civilian-defense.html> (Accessed, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

<sup>152</sup> "Van Abbe Museum: Collection," <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/details/collection/?lookup%5B1673%5D%5Bfilter%5D%5B0%5D=id%3AC6916>. (Accessed, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

<sup>153</sup> Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," 817.

material I respond to and which is prominent in the finished works. These plants play diverse roles in our local ecologies, such as providing habitat for other species, as invasive weeds from elsewhere (usually brought by humans), but also as more-than-human interlocutors in the complex discussion of urban ecology and care. Using plant colour is an effort to map ‘affective relations between heterogeneous bodies’ to understand how expressions of hybridity and corporeality interrupt the solely human view of things.<sup>154</sup>

My studio labour together with the plants produced a wide range of colours. The intensity and quality of these colours depended on relations between my process, water quality, seasonal variations and the plants themselves. Acknowledging the agency of the non-human in my studio process is not about relinquishing responsibility for my own role in the process (of art making and care), but is rather, an attempt at decentring the human and elevating the non-human participants in my work. Bellacasa is in favour of this move, arguing that, ‘thinking from the universes of everyday care can help to disrupt the dualistic tale of all humans *versus* all nonhumans that obscures less perceptible ways in which insurgent post-humanist relations are made possible.’<sup>155</sup> She is arguing for relations of care, that may already exist between different species and things, to be valued and paid attention to. I propose that the potential to care for others, or to demonstrate the need for care, is an act of opposition in our current socio-political climate. In decentring the human, we might find ways of being that move beyond the instrumental and develop and nurture existing reciprocal inter and intra-actions.

### **Yingabeal and Heide’s locale**

In this section I discuss how I worked with Heide’s grounds and the plants growing there to think with care in the gallery installation. I have explained how walking to and from the site allowed me to apprehend Heide in relation to elsewhere. Time spent in Heide’s grounds gave me a sense of the ‘fabric and character’ of the site, which is generated through ‘a nexus of energies of all manner of inhabitants on the move.’<sup>156</sup> Frequent visits to the site, gathering plants to test for dye, and chatting with

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<sup>154</sup> Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces*, 166.

<sup>155</sup> Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, 41, 217.

<sup>156</sup> Sarah Whatmore and Steve Hinchcliffe, “Ecological Landscapes,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry, Oxford Handbooks in Archaeology (2012), 16.

**Fig. 66**

Kangaroo fillets cooking on the gas burner beside the pot preparing gorse fibre for bricks.



**Fig. 67**

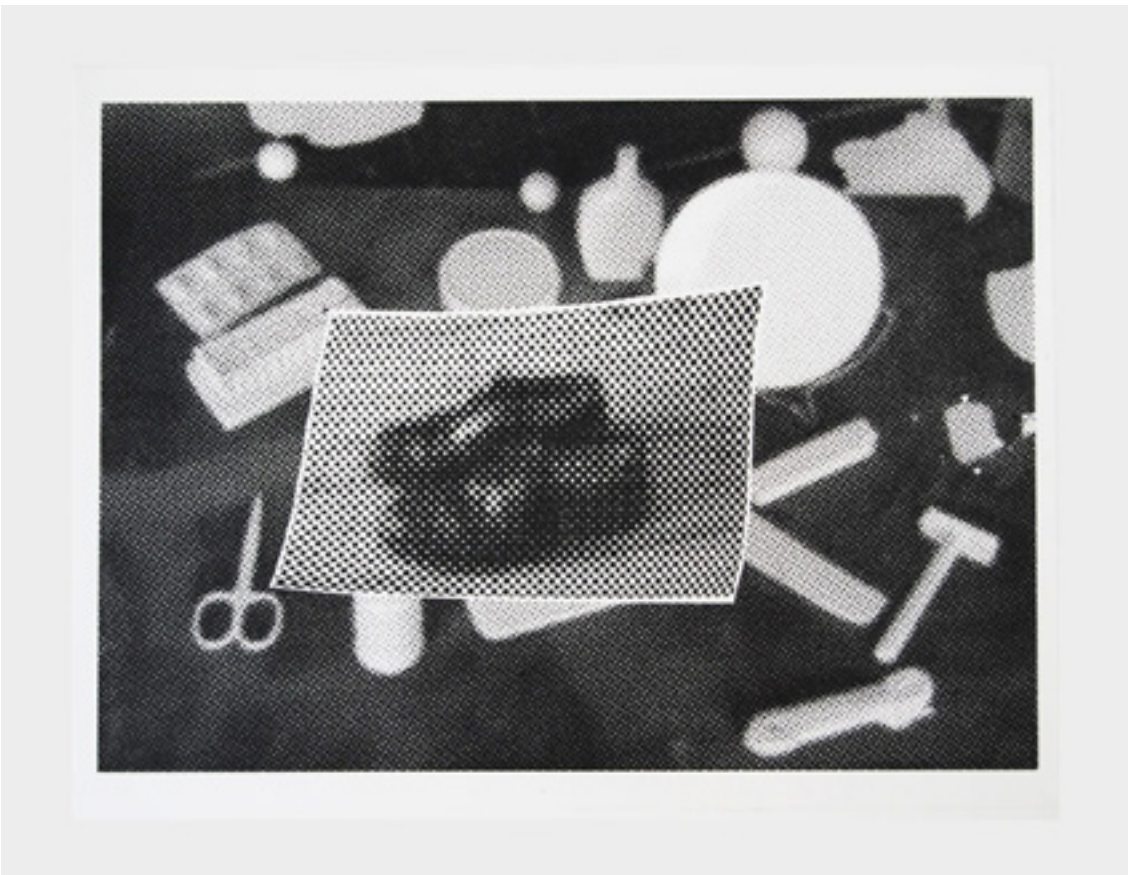
Paul Coldwell

*Passing Thoughts – Shoes*, 2014

etching

edition: 5

30 x 40 cm



Dugald Noyes, Heide's Head Gardener, positioned me as a visitor amongst the many nonhuman inhabitants.

Most notable and poignant is *Yingabeal*, a River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) named in 2013 by the Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Bill Nicholson. This scarred tree stands on the crest of the hill between carpark and museum and is estimated to be at least 500 years old. Its presence at the site is evidence and symbol of Wurundjeri's continued connection to country. Today it provides nesting hollows to many pairs of native birds and a colony of introduced honey bees (*Apis mellifera*). Situated high above the Yarra, *Yingabeal* is a living and active witness to pre-white invasion times and to the rapid transformation of the site over the last 250 years. For these reasons I chose to carry the materiality of the site, as plant dye in textiles, through an image of *Yingabeal*.

The plant dyes locate Heide in relation to distant places; they are material evidence of the flow and movement of human and nonhuman species around the world. This flow within and between sites, determined by complex political, social and material relations, defines a singular site as unfixed and connected to elsewhere.<sup>157</sup> The indigenous, weedy and cultivated plants all speak of global interactions and connections. Each plant holds a story of migration, colonisation or continuity. Nearly a century has passed since seeds were smuggled into Australia for Sunday Reed to plant.<sup>158</sup> Today, Australia's strict bio-security laws reflect how past introduction of ornamental plants, such as Paterson's Curse (*Echium plantagineum*), have produced serious invasive weeds. Nevertheless, the ethics of care or personal motivation for introducing plants from 'home' or elsewhere cannot be judged entirely via the privilege of hindsight. Today visitors enjoy Heide's established exotic shade trees in summer and the restaurant harvests produce grown in the kitchen garden.

*Yingabeal* is a material and living link between past, present and future at Heide.<sup>159</sup> Along with the Yarra, and the land itself, it is a key pre-colonial constant on

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<sup>157</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 169.

<sup>158</sup> Lesley Harding and Kendrah Morgan, *Sunday's Garden: Growing Heide* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, An Imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Ltd in association with the Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 132.

<sup>159</sup> <https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/aboriginal-culture/yingabeal-indigenous-geography-at-heide/what-is-a-scarred-tree/> (Accessed September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017)



**Fig. 68**

*Quiet Witness*, 2017  
 detail of work in progress  
 acorn dye, iron post mordant, cotton damask  
 tablecloth

**Fig. 69**

*Yingabeal*, June 2016  
 Heide Museum of Modern Art

**Fig. 70**

*Habitus*, 2017  
 Heide III: Kerry Gardner & Andrew Myer Project  
 Gallery  
 Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, VIC  
 Installation view showing unprinted face of  
 sandbags  
 Photography: Matthew Stanton

site. It requires specialist care from Heide's head gardener Dugald Noyes; possums are excluded, because, according to Noyes, they don't know when to stop eating.<sup>160</sup> The tree guard around its girth is a reminder that this ecosystem is disturbed, requiring new methods of human intervention to maintain and care for *Yingabeal*. Used in my installation, this tree represents a reciprocity of care, through its provision of shelter to other nonhumans and its own need to be cared for.

## **Dyeing and printing**

I now turn to my use of plant dye in conjunction with screenprinted mordants as a way of combining the materiality and imagery of the site. I explain how the repetition and process inherent to printing reveals labours of care present in my studio making and to the time I spent with the site(s). The use of plant dye collected in and around the Heide site connect this work directly to the local environment and to the histories of the plants growing there. Processing cloth in dye pots on my kitchen stove, often while cooking dinner on a neighbouring gas ring, linked the process of making directly to my domestic labours of care. [Figs. 22 & 66]

To produce *Porous Borders/Impermeable Boundaries* (2017) I used an alum mordant mixture to print sections of the halftone photograph onto hemp cloth. These cloth pieces were then dyed with a range of colours sourced from plants collected on and between Heide and Merri Creek over twelve months. This duration allowed me to access colours across all seasons. Despite this, a sense of urgency filled the project; the exhibition deadline meant there was only one cycle of seasons in which to collect plant material for this work. I collected indigenous and introduced species, including *Indigofera australis*, a native indigo traditionally used to catch fish. The chemical in the leaves which produces blue dye was used by Indigenous people to de-oxygenate water, temporarily slowing fish down so they could be easily scooped from the water.<sup>161</sup> The *Indigofera australis* contributed soft blues hues to the largely earthy and yellow palette of the sandbags.

A digital snapshot of *Yingabeal*, recorded on my phone, became the central image for the two works comprising *Habitus*. To recreate the photograph as a large scale

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<sup>160</sup> Personal conversation with Dugald Noyes when visiting Heide grounds, 2016.

<sup>161</sup> "Aboriginal Heritage Trail," ed. Australian National University (ANU Heritage), 12.



screenprint I needed to apply a halftone screen to preserve the tonal values of the image. Redundant to digital printing, where colour is transferred directly onto paper via jets or laser, the halftone in contemporary print language speaks of the recent past. It is used variously to provoke historical, technological or nostalgic reactions. In the case of UK printmaker Paul Coldwell, the halftone is both ‘a device across the surface and a screen through which to look through.’<sup>162</sup> [Fig. 67] It disrupts the surface of an image and at the same time preserves its tonal readability.

I used this double trait of the halftone to untangle but also entwine the history of plant movement and associated practices of care at the Heide site. I selectively applied different sized halftones to the digital photograph. This manipulation produced the effect of a collaged or cobbled together image. The act of fragmenting my photograph with differing sized and angled dots began a process of complicating the visual continuity of my snapshot of *Yingabeal*. If I borrow Coldwell’s terminology of screen and surface, then my manipulation of the image with different sized halftones can be read as multiple screens within one surface, which in turn suggests different temporalities. The final flattened digital file reproduced *Yingabeal* with the finest halftone, rendering this ancient tree as the only recognisable plant in the picture. Multiple screens, represented by a range of larger halftones, made the species of the other plants unidentifiable. [Fig. 68]

Coldwell explains how digital printing technologies are, by nature, fully reversible. He argues there is a safety in being able to save every iteration of a digital file. On the other hand, traditional printmaking ‘was based on technologies that could only go forward and where gesture was tied to time, materiality and the physical characteristics of the artist.’<sup>163</sup> By employing digital and traditional print-based practices within single works I ravel the reversible nature of the digital print with the forward movement of traditional print practices. I further relinquish control (or share agency) with natural dye processes where pH, time of year, weather conditions and the site of plant collection present variables beyond my absolute control. The backwards and

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<sup>162</sup> Paul Coldwell, “Between Digital and Physical: Some Thoughts on Digital Printmaking,” *Journal of the New Media Caucus* 04, no. 02 (2008): 5.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

**Fig. 71**

Quiet Witness, 2017

Detail showing damask pattern merging with the printed halftone.

**Fig. 72**

My mother and me pinning the Velcro seal into the sandbags, January 2017.





**Fig. 73**  
Filling the sandbags at Artery studio,  
Northcote (when our living room got too  
small), February 2017.



**Fig. 74**  
Printing *Quiet Witness* at my neighbour's PACK &  
SEND business, December 2016.

forwards of digital possibilities interrupted by traditional processes, echo the complex halts and flows of plant movement globally and locally.

Attributing the reversibility of the digital to artist Peter Kennard, Coldwell explains it as a kind of ‘permanent present’ where each iteration can be saved or revisited via the file’s history.<sup>164</sup> Working the image of *Yingabeal* through digitally processed files and anachronistic printing and dyeing techniques disrupts Kennard’s ‘permanent present’ fixing the printed image by way of acorn dye collected at Heide in the fibres of the tablecloth. The acorn dye further connects with Heide’s history via the large but more recently planted oaks. Combined with an iron mordant the acorns gave forth a dark, almost black dye for *Quiet Witness*.

The relationship between the matter of acorn, the image of *Yingabeal* and the process of creating this work where agency produced between my labour and the materials of dyestuff, mordant, water and cloth, articulate the complex historic and contemporary relations and inter-/intra-actions between matter at Heide. Prior to becoming an art museum, Heide was a home with kitchen garden, dairy and extensive grounds extending down to the Yarra River. Today the kitchen garden provides fresh produce to the museum’s restaurant while established European trees are a living legacy of John and Sunday Reid’s efforts to plant an arboretum. The use of local acorns and repurposed domestic textiles forms material connections between the site, its history and the places from which the oaks came.

*Yingabeal* lives and sustains life at Heide today, its age and stature offering a material and temporal link to the history of the site. It connects our past to our present, hence its powerful symbolic and material capacity to speak of Wurundjeri’s continuing connection to and caring for country. And, more broadly, to the tenacity of life on earth. [Fig. 69]

## **Installation**

Installing *Habitus* at Heide Project Space was the final test in translating care to the gallery. *Quiet Witness* and *Porous Borders/Impermeable Boundaries* (2017) were installed

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 8.

facing one another to create the installation *Habitus*. Over sixty sandbags, printed and dyed with plants collected during walks and visits, were stacked diagonally across the thoroughfare-like room.

On entering the space from the foyer, one first saw the unprinted side of the sandbags, stained rather than dyed with the plant colours. [Fig. 70] Beyond this wall the repurposed damask tablecloth, printed and dyed with oak and iron, hangs on the wall, clearly displaying the halftone representation of *Yingabeal*. Secured across the top edge in three places, the cloth gently moved in response to the air-conditioning system in the gallery. Up close the woven damask pattern emerged from and merged with the dyed halftone dots. [Fig. 71] By presenting a domestic textile in the gallery space, I was making a material connection to the history of Heide as a home. The labours of care performed through my studio practice and fieldwork supported the sense of domestic, repetitive attention present in my textiles and in the history of Heide's grounds.

Viewers could walk between the sandbags and the wall work. In this location they could see the printed face of the sandbags. The image of *Yingabeal*, printed in sections on each sandbag, fragmented and multi-coloured, was no longer presenting as a 'single screen'. The curved surface of the sandbags, installed according to their colour not their image broke the logic of the print. In theory if arranged correctly a single image would emerge from the sandbags. The range of dyes produced a fragmented image disguising the overall print. This layering of colour produced a strata effect: like layers of history or time. The colour from the various plants, could be conceived as a mapping of the coming and going and complex proliferation and reduction of plant species since colonisation.

Installed in the gallery, the relationship between *Quiet Witness* and *Porous Borders / Impermeable Boundaries* follows the logic of *Bound by Gorse*, where a photo-based image is positioned in dialogue with a constructed wall. The language of Smithson's site and non-site was more obvious in the earlier work, due to the singular material of gorse and the direct use of a digital photograph. Nevertheless, reading *Habitus* as a conversation between a two-dimensional wall work and a three-dimensional sandbag wall provides viewers with an image of an actual place (depicted on the tablecloth) from which to navigate and contextualise the sandbags. [Figs. 72 & 73]

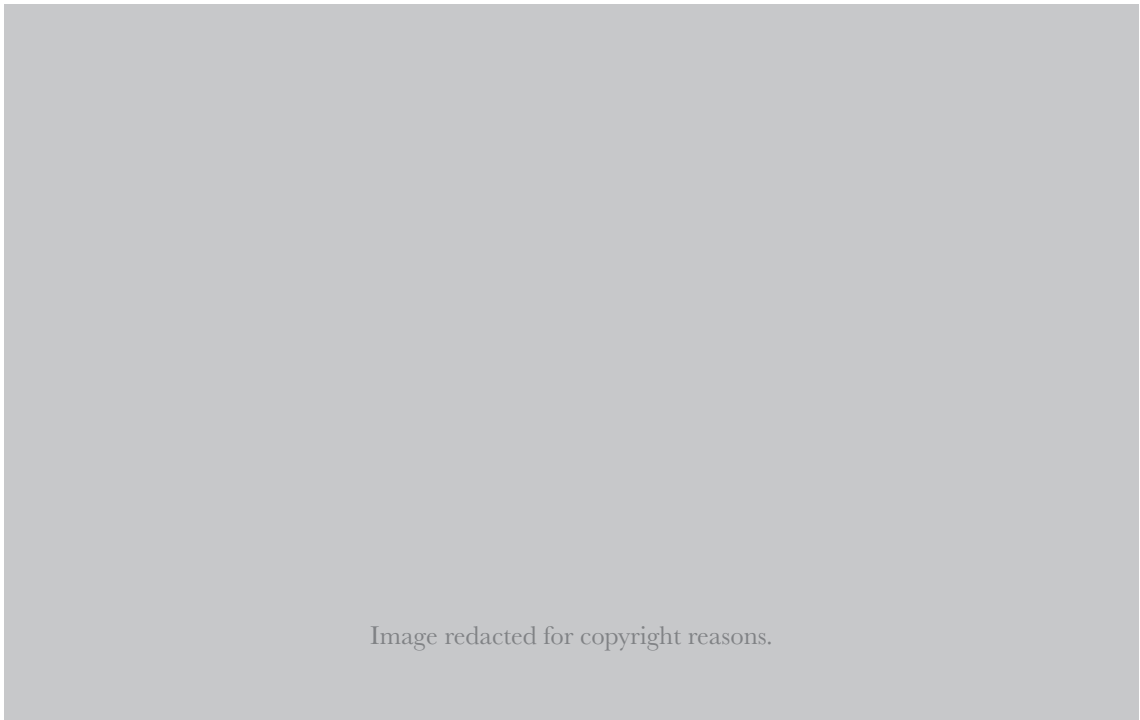


Image redacted for copyright reasons.

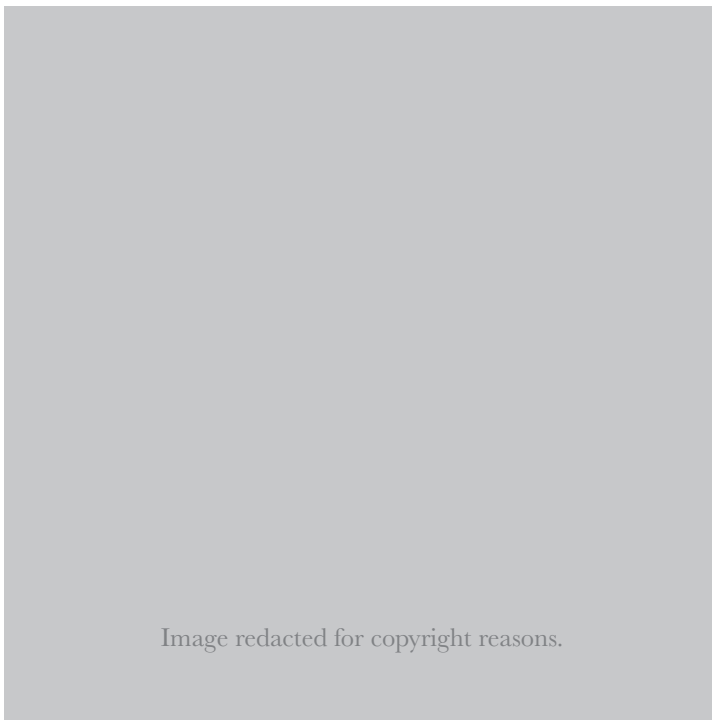


Image redacted for copyright reasons.

**Fig. 75**

Sean Connelly  
*A Small Area of Land (Kaka'ako Earth Room)*, 2013  
32,000 pounds of volcanic soil and coral sand  
ii Gallery, Honolulu, USA

**Fig. 76**

Sean Connelly  
*A Small Area of Land (Kaka'ako Earth Room)*, 2013  
32,000 pounds of volcanic soil and coral sand  
ii Gallery, Honolulu, USA



The presentation of multiple components making up a singular work indicates repetitive and labour intense processes. Each bag—printed, dyed, sewn and then filled with sand—emerged alongside my existing household routines. The sandbags and dyed tablecloth were produced within quotidian rhythms and interruptions, which I propose implicate labours of care through the time and persistence manifested in the materiality of the cloth. These labours of care, practiced in domestic and local spaces between people and things, are, as Haraway points out, a process of ‘join[ing] forces to reconstitute refuges.’ She acknowledges how this process does not replace grieving for all that is lost, but rather a positioning of feminism’s role and capabilities to set the scene for ‘multispecies ecojustice’ through exercising ‘leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species’.<sup>165</sup>

In my practice, the iterative qualities of screenprinting allude to the processual and continuing nature of labours of care. Conversely, Andy Warhol’s banks of repeated prints describe and materialise the depersonalisation of images via mass production. In his time, screenprinting was a mainstay of commercial image dissemination; however, today it is no longer a form of mass production. Such shifts from widespread use to commercial redundancy, are described by Elizabeth Skadden as processes becoming ‘dead mediums’.<sup>166</sup> The transition from commercial ubiquity, to ‘dead medium’ reignites artists’ interest and ways of thinking through a process.<sup>167</sup> As commercial screenprinting is replaced by digital technologies and print free modes of image dissemination, artists begin to exploit the new meanings and contexts made available in this shift.<sup>168</sup> [Fig. 74]

In my practice, I use print processes that have moved to the margins of commercial use, to speak of slower, handmade methods which in turn communicate care, time and labour. Rather than outsourcing the processes of printing and dyeing, I integrate this time-consuming labour into my daily life. It is possible to follow my labour

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<sup>165</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 101.

<sup>166</sup> Elizabeth Skadden, “Collapsing New Buildings” (Rhode Island School of Design, 2009), 27.

<sup>167</sup> Tacita Dean’s use of 16mm film is an important example of an artist activating a ‘dead medium’.

<sup>168</sup> Rebecca Mayo, “Good Texts: The Tracing of Printmaking and Grief through Actor-Network-Theory,” in *Intersections and Counterpoints, Proceedings of Impact 7, an International Multi-Disciplinary Printmaking Conference*, ed. Luke Morgan (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2013).



through the transformation of plant matter to dye, which in turn traces my encounters with the ‘fabric and character’ making up the site today.<sup>169</sup>

The strata of colour in the sandbag wall trace—through plant colour and the accompanying processes used to produce plant dyed textiles—the penetrable and interactive spaces between Heide and the Darebin and Merri catchments. The labour involved in producing this work articulates a sustained commitment and engagement with the site. The boundaries recorded on maps by people and laws influence the ways in which people navigate and care for this place. They form the structures and rules around which the more-than-human (and humans) navigate. Sean Connelly’s installation *A Small Area of Land (Kaka’ako Earth Room)* (2013) similarly works with layers of colour and locally sourced materials to describe sited ecological issues connected to land care practices. [Fig. 75] The work was a response to Walter de Maria’s *New York Earth Room* (1977), which comprises 120 tonnes of dirt filling a room of 335 square metres.

Connelly’s concern for contemporary ecological and land use practices affecting Hawai’i prompted this work.<sup>170</sup> As in many countries, urban development occurs across the most fertile food producing areas of the islands. A framework inside the gallery was rammed with nearly one and a half tonnes of volcanic soil and coral sand. On removing the frame, layers of soil were revealed. [Fig. 76] Documentation of the exhibition shows a mass of earth in subtly shifting layers of colour, which, over the duration of the exhibition gradually dried, flaked and eroded.<sup>171</sup> The title of Connelly’s installation, *A Small Area of Land*, locates the work in context to developments that came hand in hand with capitalism, colonialism and practices of care. Similarly, the strata visible in *Habitus* are constructed from local products which form a material record of the attention I have paid to the site and its history.

## Conclusion

I produced the installation *Habitus* by employing practices of care in my studio and the

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<sup>169</sup> Whatmore and Hinchcliffe, “Ecological Landscapes,” 16.

<sup>170</sup> <http://www.interislandterminal.org/exhibitions/previous/a-small-area-of-land-kakaako-earth-room/> (Accessed October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017)

<sup>171</sup> Geoff Manaugh to BLDGBLOG, 2013, <http://www.bldgblog.com/2013/04/earth-prism/>. (Accessed April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

field. These local practices included walking and working with plant matter to produce dyes for textile screenprinting, each of which were a process of paying attention and caring about this place. By responding to the plants' palette, rather than working to a predetermined range of colours, I actively sought to make visible the material intra-actions in my studio to open a discussion between my experiences on site, my working process and the final installation.

My use of repetition in the studio and in the finished sandbag wall and wall hanging, was a method through which I could translate the temporal, labour intensive practices of the studio to the finished work, thereby activating relations between care, labour and time. As Harding wrote in the exhibition catalogue, 'Mayo's project responds . . . to the quotidian rhythms of Heide and its seasons. Her processes and materials step in time with the cyclical and local nature of plant dyeing while at the same time pacing to greater temporal and global patterns through the distributed origins of the property's vegetation.'<sup>172</sup> The sandbags, in conjunction with *Yingabeal* and locally collected plant colour, aimed to contextualise local care practices in a broader conversation around the complex intra-actions of matter which constitute the world, by translating to the gallery material evidence of my temporal, repetitive studio and sited research.

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<sup>172</sup> Lesley Harding, *Rebecca Mayo: Habitus*, (Heide Museum of Modern Art: issue, 2017), [https://issue.com/heidemuseumofmodernart/docs/513.rebeccamayocatalogue\\_final](https://issue.com/heidemuseumofmodernart/docs/513.rebeccamayocatalogue_final). 10. (Accessed September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017)

## Chapter Six: Installation at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery

### Introduction

This chapter acts as a conclusion to this exegesis while also explaining my rationale for presenting the outcomes of my research at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. The final iteration of the work for examination constitutes the resolution of my research which asked, what contribution can my print- and textile-based art practice make to contemporary art and urban ecological restoration? Exploring this question through practice-based research in the field and studio I revealed labours of care as central to this enquiry. I identified the need to foreground ethics and practices of care, as an intention in the studio, and as a way of understanding how we engage with the world. Finding ways of revealing care as subject and method, via object-based works exhibited in a gallery was the final problem this research aimed to solve. Thus, conclusions drawn from this exhibition serve as reflections on how I addressed these problems.

Through my materially-focussed exploration of process, repetition and labour, I found ways to produce artworks that manifest through—and reveal—practices of care. The size of Wagga Wagga Art Gallery will enable me to present *Tending the Merri*, *Bound by Gorse* and *Habitus* together, as three separate installations, for the first time. These works imply performative actions of care using multiples, the evidence of repetitious and labour-intensive processes in the finished works, and in my deep engagement with matter collected and reworked from specific sites. While each is a discrete installation, the material and processual relations which manifest as practices of care through ‘material time’ are shared by all and will provide scope for dialogue and connections between them.

I will be presenting my research as part of a three-person exhibition, *Walking Matters*, showing at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery between June and August, 2018.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> As well as the opportunity to exhibit alongside peers who explore local ecological sites through walking and object-based outcomes, the decision for my examination to take place at Wagga instead of the ANU School of Art & Design Gallery was made for logistical reasons. Having the examination in Wagga reduced the number of times I would need to fill and empty the 70 sandbags which in turn will reduce the amount of sand I need to recycle after the exhibition.



Image redacted for copyright reasons.

**Fig. 77**

Ann Hamilton  
tropos, 1993–1994  
translucent industrial glass windows, gravel topped  
with concrete, horsehair, table, chair, electric  
burin, books, recorded voice, audiotape, audiotape  
player, speakers  
Photography: Thibault Jeanson

*Walking Matters* will include work by Antonia Aitken and Kirstie Rea. The title arose from our deep engagements with materials and process; it brings attention to the importance of walking as a form of embodied knowledge production in each of our respective practices. As Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst have explained, walking, like talking, is something most people do before they know that is what they are doing; moving through space, and articulating what that space might be, is central to being human.<sup>174</sup> Methodologies of walking, as a means of examining, being with, and getting to know sites of ecological or historic interest, connect our practices. Aitken's practice seeks to articulate an embodied engagement with place expressed through walking, drawing, printmaking, digital fabrication, sound and video.<sup>175</sup> Rea uses walking to gather experiences of specific places, which she translates in the studio through the similarly physical and grounded practices of working with glass.<sup>176</sup>

## **Context**

Next, I will discuss the context of exhibiting the work at Wagga, away from Melbourne where it was made. In doing so, I will focus on how I intend the work to operate in this final exhibition, rather than speculate on specific gallery layout. I predict subtle changes to the presentation of *Bound by Gorse* and *Habitus* in response to the gallery and the other artists' work. An iteration of *Tending the Merri* will respond to issues and constraints which arose from previous presentations of this work, which I reflected upon in Chapter Three.

As set out throughout this exegesis, my practice is firmly located in physical and geographic locations as well as sites of action and labour. I argue that the connection to place, articulated through my sustained connection to Merri Creek, speaks to universal concerns and experiences occurring locally across the globe. In addition, every so-called local place is connected to other places far away. Thus, the issues I address through my locally sited practice have broader significance which ramify beyond the specific places in which they originate. For example, *Bound by Gorse* was included in the exhibition

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<sup>174</sup> Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, "Introduction," in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, ed. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 1.

<sup>175</sup> <https://www.antonიაaitken.com> (Accessed 18 March, 2018)

<sup>176</sup> Mark Bayly, *Kirstie Rea: The Land, a 20 Year Survey*, ed. Canberra Museum + Gallery (Canberra: Canberra Museum + Gallery, 2017), 10.

*Water + Wisdom: Australia and India* at RMIT Gallery.<sup>177</sup> The international scope of this exhibition was grounded in art practices firmly positioned in artists' local environments. These locally situated practices served to connect individual experience and concern to broader global discussions, connecting people's experiences across space and time.

Showing work about Merri Creek, a much-loved waterway in Melbourne, might guarantee an engaged and receptive local audience. Its rich history before and since colonisation serves to connect people to the creek corridor in many ways. What can I expect this work to communicate when it was created through and in response to caring for a place 450 kilometres away? I contend that my works, which use woody weeds, plant dyes, sandbags and photographs of volunteer restoration workers, will resonate with local concerns in Wagga, and indeed with local ecological challenges globally. Environmental issues exacerbated by urban growth and global warming affect both regional and urban locations.<sup>178</sup> Broadly speaking, water quality, flooding and invasive species contribute to problems which communities across the world seek to address at community, local council and state government levels through Landcare, friends groups, community education and government policy.<sup>179</sup>

### **Installation and negotiation**

I now turn my attention to the effects and experiences I aim to create for the visitor while reiterating that specific descriptions referring to gallery layout are provisional and speculative. Nevertheless, initial conversations with Aitken and Rea regarding gallery layout suggest our shared curiosity in the connections that will inevitably arise between our work. At the same time, we value the need for each artist's work to operate cohesively in the space.

With these conditions in mind it is my intention to use the many viewing points facilitated in installation practice to provoke a process of wayfaring within the gallery.

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<sup>177</sup> <https://www.rmit.edu.au/events/all-events/exhibitions/2017/december/water> (Accessed March 18, 2018)

<sup>178</sup> Wagga Wagga's population is approximately one tenth of the population of Melbourne. On average 453 people inhabit every square kilometre of Melbourne, much denser than Wagga's 13 people per square kilometre. <http://www.population.net.au/cities/> (Accessed March 21, 2018)

<sup>179</sup> <https://www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/city-of-wagga-wagga/environment/urban-salinity2> (Accessed March 18, 2018)

Bishop writes how installation art both activates and decentres viewers as subjects. The many positions a viewer can assume in relation to a work ‘ . . . are seen to subvert the Renaissance perspective model because they deny the viewer any one ideal place from which to survey the work’.<sup>180</sup> I propose to install the works so that the viewers, as if wayfaring, move through the gallery space allowing their direction to unfold in response to and with the works. As Ingold suggests, wayfaring is a process of participation where one’s focus is not on the destination, but rather on the process of becoming with the world.<sup>181</sup> The process of wayfaring during *Walking the Merri* was interrupted by landowners denying access to some stretches of the creek. Likewise, in the gallery, the objects comprising each of my works will corral and divert viewers’ passage and flow through the space and between my installations.

### **Flow, Matter and Repetition**

As well as breaking up the gallery space, the materiality of the plant dyed textiles and gorse bricks connect directly to the sites of my research. These include the physical sites of urban ecology, the act of restoration labour, the species planted or removed from these sites and the practice or absence of care in these places (and in my studio). Using materials to infer or activate connections between site or action is a common practice in contemporary art. On the subject of Ann Hamilton’s *tropos* (1994), an installation which includes a horsehair pelt covering 464.5 square metres of a former factory space, Susan Stewart writes, ‘[t]he horsehair here is synecdochal to the material animal; consequently, sewing the hair is synecdochal to animal death.’<sup>182</sup> [Fig. 77] Likewise, the gesture of reconstituting plants collected on site as dye colour or bricks is synecdochal to the labours of caring for urban ecologies through restoration or gardening practices.

Translating this re-worked material to the gallery is a transforming of matter, time and labour. As I have argued in this exegesis, the residues (or evidence of agency) produced through intra-action of matter are a way of revealing material-time, which in turn reveals labours of care to a viewer. The collected material, transformed through

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<sup>180</sup> Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 13.

<sup>181</sup> Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, 83-85.

<sup>182</sup> Susan Stewart, *The Open Studio: Essays on Art and Aesthetics* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 225.



labour-intensive processes in the studio into multiple, reproducible components (quarter tents, bricks and sandbags) installed at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery provide a rhythm and flow between and within each of the works. I propose this direct contact to the materiality of the creek will articulate histories of care through reference to the built forms I encountered as I walked and worked in and amongst these sites.

Care is expressed through the accumulated labour within the materiality and multiple nature of each art work. In the case of *Bound by Gorse* labours of care manifest in the gorse bricks, pulped, compressed and stamped with a postcode on each brick's top surface. For *Habitus*, repetition is evident in the printed surface of the damask tablecloth, and in its fragmented translation to the sandbags. The labour embedded in the cloth of each sandbag, and in the act of filling them, will accumulate across the entire installation. Similarly, the quarter tents, buttoned together, form one work from multiple components. The tents become an accrual of labour, not just because there are many repeating parts, but also in the hours of labour embedded in the cloth: gathering plants, preparing dye, printing, dyeing and finally sewing each reversible tent.

As discussed in Chapter Three, *Tending the Merri*, installed at RMIT Gallery, re-materialised the creek in the gallery without connecting viewers directly to the importance of care in this research. As I have explored in the previous two chapters, one solution to this problem was to contextualise each object-based work with a two-dimensional image. The photographic image of the patch of cleared gorse at Kalkallo, which accompanies the wall in *Bound by Gorse* implies the performative act of gorse removal. [Fig. 49] Rather than including images of the chipping process, I have depicted the absence of gorse at the site. The small cleared area within a vast sea of gorse will re-materialise as a wall in the gallery.

Smithson's tactic, where object and documentation form a 'non-site' in the gallery is tested with *Tending the Merri* for the first time at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. In this new iteration I will include photographs of *Friends of Merri Creek* activities with the quarter tents. I propose that bringing together documentation of volunteer labour with creek matter (held as colour within the textiles) will make visible labours of care at the creek. *Tending the Merri* is a flexible and dynamic work, the tents can be buttoned and strung up in many different configurations. In this installation I am working to reconnect

the textiles directly to practices of care. Previous iterations successfully connected creek to gallery through indexical relations between plant colour and site. However, without the photographic documentation of volunteers onsite, my research question was not clearly addressed. That is, the tents worked as an object, but not as the translation of site of human action and care.

The new iteration of *Tending the Merri* brings this work in line with *Habitus* and *Bound by Gorse*, object-based works specifically conceived for a gallery. Plant matter, labour and site will be highlighted in the gallery through the relationship between photographs of workers wearing plant-dyed high-vis-style jackets and the textiles made of and from these sites. Thus, *Tending the Merri* will operate in similar ways to *Bound by Gorse* and *Habitus*. Objects, comprised of multiples made with local matter, when coupled with visual documentation of the same site, generate labour-rich objects which in turn, carry evidence of practices of care.

*Bound by Gorse* and *Habitus* will more closely follow their previous iterations, considering the gallery layout, and my intention to allude to the navigation of boundaries and space through the act of wayfaring. That is, each respective wall may be extended and lowered to better redirect and corral viewers through the space. The relationships between image and object, discussed in Chapters Four and Five, will be maintained in this iteration.

## **Conclusion**

Viewed collectively across the gallery the multiple elements within each work will form repeating structural forms across the space. The installation will reflect the gradual movement of my research from the immediate environment of my local creek through to the global implications of local care practices. *Tending the Merri* refers to restoration events in my suburb, and further north up the creek. *Bound by Gorse* refers to the northernmost reaches of the creek where woody weeds are most prevalent. *Habitus* extends beyond Merri Creek catchment and situates local ecological concerns in a global context. Arriving at this final work one also encounters the oldest plant depicted in this work, *Yingabeal*, the Wurundjeri scarred tree, a pixelated image, which serves to ground my research in the deeper histories of these sites. Installed together at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, these works use repetition and multiples to reflect the complex and contested

sites which this research has examined, including the discursive sites of practices and materialisations of care.

In writing this text I have established the role of care—as practice, intention and ethic—to be central to my practice-based research. By bringing care forward, as a primary concern and action, I have developed ways of paying attention in the field and studio. These methods, which insist on carefully following matter, were already present in my practice (and in the practices of many artists) but, like care-work in society and the home, had been marginalised and thereby implicitly devalued. In making visible, through working with and re-working matter, practices of care in studio and field, this research has found new ways of articulating the important sites of urban ecological restoration and degradation through art practice. The conflation of art and life, investigated through feminist performance practices, has been adapted in this research to attend to the care relations between human and non-human lives. This research has culminated in the presentation of object-based installations, which follow matter through site and studio to gallery.

This practice-based research has laid the groundwork to extend practices of care, not only as a studio-based ethics and framework for making, but also as a way of reading and engaging with art practices more broadly. The scope for care to be a way of seeing and acting in the world, where relationships, interdependency and the need to support and hold are the primary concern, raises the potential for individual and collective responsibility to be harnessed and to clear pathways for human and non-human lives to co-exist and grow in increasingly fragile times.

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## Appendices

### Appendix i)

Tony Birch — poems written in response to Day Six: Walking the Merri, 2013

#### MERRI

Walking the creek we can think about the rubbish  
and our footsteps and wading through weeds, and we can  
talk about children and husbands and wives, and  
what is lost that can never be recovered, and what  
we have that will never be lost, and we can chat about  
football and why we love it and why we hate it, we can  
talk about art, sing songs and compose poems in  
our heads, and we can moan about the politics of others,  
and the glory of our own — which amounts to nothing, really —  
and we can meet with people on the pathway, killing  
snakes and necking rabbits and loving their hardy dogs  
and their kids in tow. We can sit down and share our lunch  
and talk more about the kids — our only hope — and we can worry  
over the ‘environment’, and meet the people setting fire  
to the land in the hope of saving it, and we can say goodbye  
to each other in the late afternoon sun, knowing that we have  
to do something while never understanding what that something might be.  
And at the end of the day, when the stars come out,  
not giving up on us, their sparkling rhythm the only gift we need,  
all we can do, all we can ever do, you, me and the kids and the dogs, is  
breath in and breath out — again

#### MAP

water follows time  
fence follows line  
sunlight ebbs

& the wind sounds  
crackle & spark  
in skirts of grass

## CREEK

we were the children  
robbed of music  
water, air & blood

the creek  
a barb-wired heart  
beats for us

### Appendix ii)

*Walking the Merri*

RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, VIC

Building 94, 23–27 Cardigan St, Carlton

21 March – 17 April 2014

Rebecca Mayo with Roseanne Bartley, Tony Birch (Writer), Caroline Henbest (Musician/ Composer), Anna Topalidou, and Ilka White

Curator: Lesley Harding

Essays by Lesley Duxbury and Lesley Harding

<https://www.intersect.rmit.edu.au/-ps-/walking-the-merri/>

**Fig. 78**



*Walking the Merri—pockets, 2014*

seven collecting pockets for seven days

cotton, linen, wool, hemp, screenprinting and dyeing with natural dyes  
collected at the Merri Creek (oxalis, willow, gorse, periwinkle, broom)

Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 79**



*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, VIC  
Installation view  
Photography: Andrew Barcham

**Fig. 80**



*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, VIC  
Installation view  
Photography: Andrew Barcham

**Fig. 81**



*Walking the Merri*, 2014  
RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, VIC  
Installation view  
Photography: Andrew Barcham

### **Appendix iii)**

*Out of the Matrix*  
RMIT Gallery  
Swanston St, Melbourne  
6 May – 11 June 2016  
Jazmina Cininas, Marian Crawford, Lesley Duxbury, Andrew Gunnell,  
Richard Harding, Bridget Hillebrand, Clare Humphries, Ruth Johnstone,  
Andrew Keall, Rebecca Mayo, Performprint, Jonas Ropponen, Andrew  
Tetzlaff, Andrew Weatherill, Deborah Williams  
Curator: Dr Richard Harding  
<https://www.rmit.edu.au/events/all-events/exhibitions/2016/may/out-of-the-matri>



**Fig. 82**



*Tending the Merri—quarter tents*, 2013–2016

calico dyed and screen printed with indigenous and exotic plants of the Merri Creek, zinc buttons, eyelets, hemp rope, tent poles

variable dimensions

Installation view

Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 83**



*Tending the Merri—quarter tents*, 2013–2016

calico dyed and screen printed with indigenous and exotic plants of the Merri Creek, zinc buttons, eyelets, hemp rope, tent poles

variable dimensions

Installation view

Photography: Matthew Stanton

## **Appendix iv)**

*Flow*

Counihan Gallery

Art+Climate=Change Festival

233 Sydney Rd, Brunswick

21 April – 21 May, 2017

Colleen Boyle, Clara Brack, Garth Henderson, Heather Hesterman, Bridget Hillebrand, Penelope Hunt, Rebecca Mayo, Harry Nankin, Jen Rae, Dominic Redfern, Cameron Robbins, Sarah Tomasetti, Maurizio Toscano

**Fig. 84**



*Bound by Gorse* (Ulex europaeus), 2017 (detail)  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 85**



*Bound by Gorse* (Ulex europaeus), 2017 (detail)  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
Photography: Garth Henderson

**Fig. 86**



*Bound by Gorse* (Ulex europaeus), 2017 (detail)  
gorse variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
Photography: Garth Henderson

**Fig. 87**



*Bound by Gorse* (Ulex europaeus), 2017 (detail)  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
digital print 57 x 42 cm  
(Clara Brack's photographs installed on facing wall)  
Photography: Garth Henderson

**Fig. 88**



*Bound by Gorse* (Ulex europaeus), 2017 (detail)  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
digital print 57 x 42 cm  
Photography: Garth Henderson

## **Appendix v)**

*Water + Wisdom Australia: India*

RMIT Gallery

Swanston St, Melbourne

1 December, 2017 – 10 March 2018

Curator: Suzanne Davies

This exhibition creatively explores practices of customary water management. Drawing on extensive research by experts from India and Australia, the exhibition presents a poetic dimension on ancient wisdom regarding water management in both continents, as seen through the work of visual artists,

creative writers and researchers who have incorporated these issues into their work.  
<https://www.rmit.edu.au/events/all-events/exhibitions/2017/december/water>

**Fig. 89**



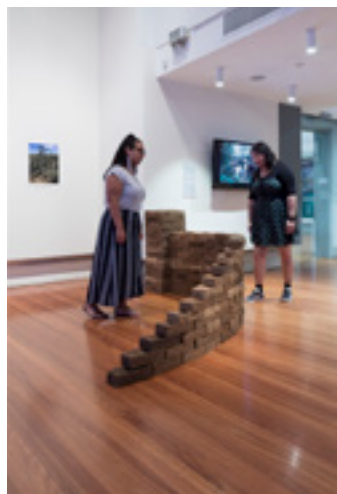
*Bound by Gorse (Ulex europaeus)*, 2017 (detail)  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
Photography: Mark Ashkanasy © RMIT

**Fig. 90**



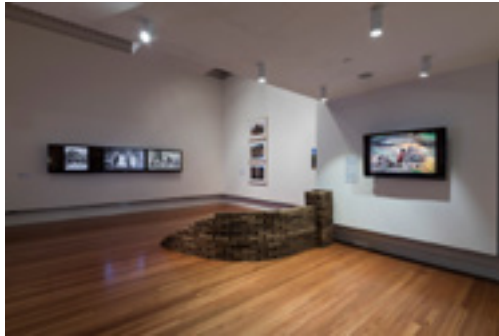
*Bound by Gorse (Ulex europaeus)*, 2017 (detail)  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
Photography: Mark Ashkanasy © RMIT

**Fig. 91**



*Bound by Gorse (Ulex europaeus)*, 2017  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
digital print 57 x 42 cm  
Installation view  
Photography: Mark Ashkanasy © RMIT

**Fig. 92**



*Bound by Gorse (Ulex europaeus)*, 2017  
gorse  
variable dimensions (90 x 250 cm approx.)  
digital print 57 x 42 cm  
Photography: Mark Ashkanasy © RMIT

## Appendix vi)

### *Habitus*

Heide III: Kerry Gardner & Andrew Myer Project Gallery

Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, VIC

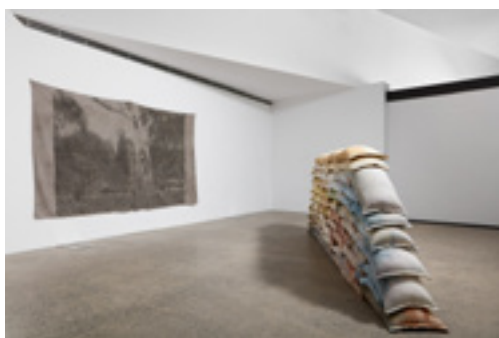
4 March – 18 June 2017

Curator: Lesley Harding

<https://www.heide.com.au/exhibitions/rebecca-mayo-habitus>

[https://issuu.com/heidemuseumofmodernart/docs/513.rebeccamayo\\_catalogue\\_final](https://issuu.com/heidemuseumofmodernart/docs/513.rebeccamayo_catalogue_final)

**Fig. 93**



*Habitus*, 2017  
Installation view  
Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 94**



*Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries*, 2017  
hemp, wool, natural dyes, sand  
360 x 130 x 38 cm  
Installation view  
Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 95**



*Habitus*, 2017  
Heide III: Kerry Gardner & Andrew Myer Project Gallery  
Installation view  
Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 96**



*Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries*, 2017 (detail)  
hemp, wool, natural dyes, sand  
360 x 130 x 38 cm  
Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 97**



*Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries*, 2017 (detail)  
hemp, wool, natural dyes, sand  
360 x 130 x 38 cm  
Photography: Matthew Stanton

**Fig. 98**



*Porous Borders, Impermeable Boundaries*, 2017 (detail)  
hemp, wool, natural dyes, sand  
360 x 130 x 38 cm  
Photography: Matthew Stanton