

# Nature as a sensual entity

Twelve artists from around Australia explore sensual forms in nature in an exhibition which both attracts and repels viewers.



Visitors to *Sensual Nature* at Fremantle Arts Centre can expect to be simultaneously drawn to the works in the show and confronted by them. Signage outside the main gallery warns visitors of the nudity contained beyond the seductive, semi-transparent white fabric covering the main gallery's doors and windows. Inside this effects an intimate, glowing light permeating the window and door spaces, manifesting the sense of being cocooned from the outside world. The atmosphere of sensuality continues in the artworks, as artists from around Australia explore the human predilection to perceive seductive shapes, symbols and metaphors within nature.

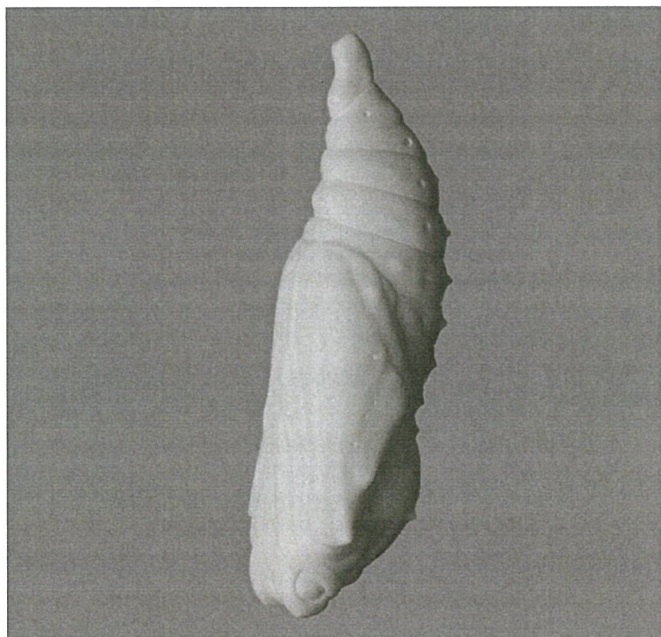
◆ *Sensual Nature* artist Lia McKnight with Fremantle Arts Centre Curator Ric Spencer. Photo Lyn DiCiero.

And nature, lest we forget, also includes the human body. Andrew Nicholls (WA) reminds us of this fact with an ephemeral drawing, executed directly onto the gallery walls, of a life-size male nude. Complementing this is Nicholls' *Tom with Desert Pea*, a recycled Wembley Ware plate upon which he has depicted, via a decal transfer, a male nude in a surreal, erotic encounter: his open-mouth accepting an 'erect' Desert Pea flower and stem.

Originally conceived by WA artist Lia McKnight as a solo exhibition, after discussing the concept with Fremantle Arts Centre curator Ric Spencer, the exhibition widened to include twelve artists from around Australia. "Ric could see it as a bigger show, and it's fantastic to be exhibiting with such great artists. We really worked on it together - in the sense of selecting artists, and envisaging the works in the space - but Ric, of course, has put in the hard yards."

Spencer says like any project over a year in the making, curating the exhibition was an organic process. "The strong point of the show is how artists are informed by nature as a starting point, and through a cycle of artistic processes, come back to a relationship with nature, but with changes of ideas." McKnight agrees. "There's an inherent respect for nature as a starting point across all the works, which then take a

◆ *Untitled*, 2016, white marble and sterling silver, 23 x 10 x 8cms by Tané Andrews. Photo Anna Pogossova.

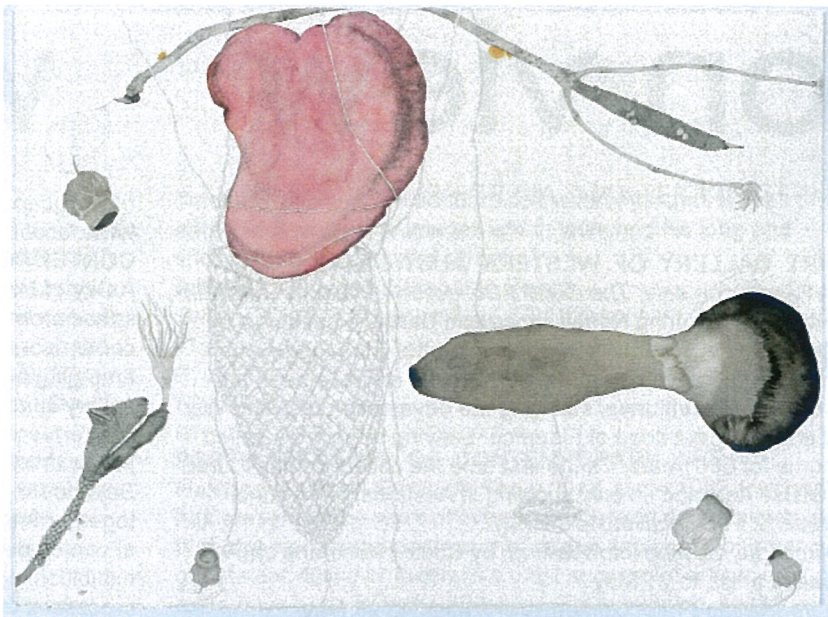




◆ *Filum*, 2017, ink, graphite and pencil on paper, 56 x 76cms by Lia McKnight. Photo Eva Fernandez.

variety of directions. There are also under-currents of eroticism and dark humour.”

McKnight’s own work in the show is a result of ongoing field research in natural environments around Fremantle. “I collect things, take photographs as reference material, and expand my work from there. The process is driven by a stream-of-consciousness technique. I like the idea of something being familiar, but almost being like a weird, creepy dream. And there’s a connection to ink stains as a way of delving into the psyche. There’s also the idea that forms, such as fungi, can be grotesque or sinister, and at the same time beautiful.”



Danger is also part of nature. Sarah Elson (WA) cast orchid petals in recycled silver and gold, forming a vertebrae-like work replete with protective spikes so often found in nature, and Juz Kitson (NSW) presents a mini universe of the wild, consisting of boar tusks, a wild goat hide, merino wool, rabbit fur, a fox pelt, porcelain and blown glass. At once repelling, yet beautiful, the imposing and exquisite work recalls rituals, culture and customs, dance and drama.


Miik Green takes the micro world of science to macro size in his *xylem series*. The works on aluminium are the result of chemical reactions within layers of paint, and draw on cell-staining techniques and the processes involved in biological pigmentation - where colour can be used to detect abnormalities or infection. Spencer says there’s a high degree of skill involved in the works. “He uses about 15 components which all react differently, so there’s a knowledge of how they will react.”

Other artists in the show include Tané Andrews (NSW), Penny Evans (NSW), Julia Robinson (SA), Nalda Searles (WA), Holly Story (WA), Heather B Swann (ACT/TAS) and Angela Valamanesh (SA).

Spencer says we have a strange relationship with nature: “We’re drawn to its wild, untamed beauty but at the same time we all want manicured lawns. The works in the show will likely seduce and repel viewers, much like nature as a whole.”

*Sensual Nature* is on show at Fremantle Arts Centre until 20 May.

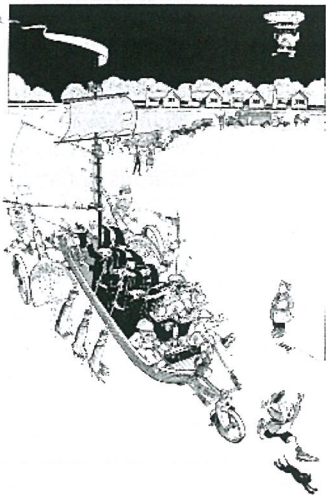
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