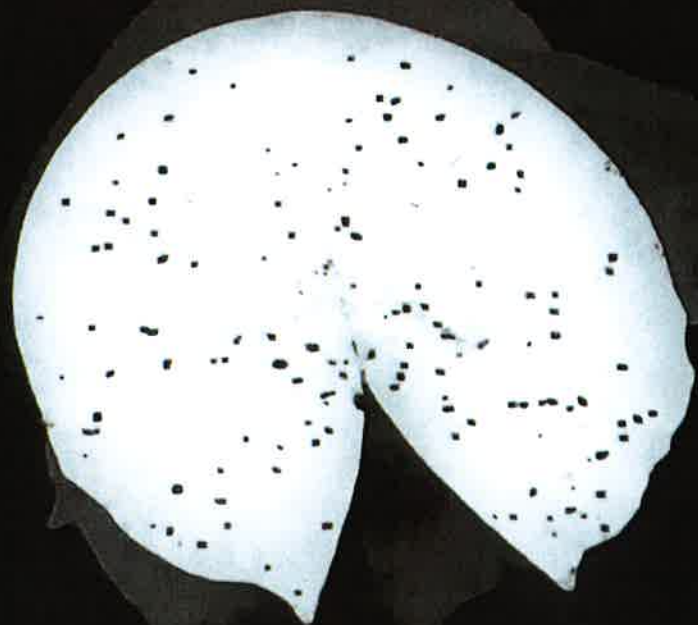


hotsprings



For Trevor



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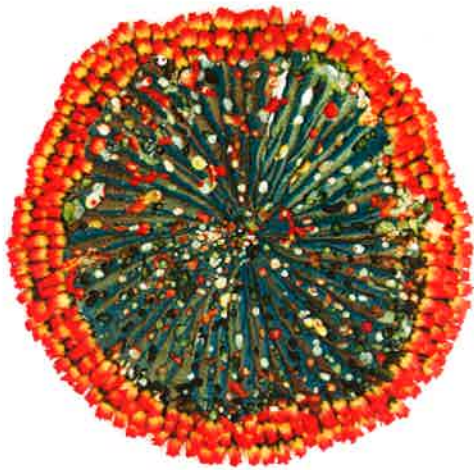
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4.22 Sarah Pirrie *Fresh Wreath 2* 2007, paper, pigments, enamel paint, assorted plastic flowers and other floristry tools, 60 (diameter) x 6 cm. Courtesy of the artist

SARAH PIRRIE

Like Clare Robertson, Sarah Pirrie has found the remnant bush-land next to Charles Darwin University a restorative site close to her place of work: 'I can walk across the Uni and I am in the mangroves ... There is something special about here – having a full-time job in the middle of scrub and bush.'⁵⁶ The elemental forces of the Top End have become central to Pirrie's art practice since her first visit in 1996 but particularly since 2006 when she secured a position at Charles Darwin University. An environment 'affiliated close to nature' where the weather governs everything provides her with zest for life and work. Passivity is not an option as the weather changes itself constantly and changes the environment.

This malleability is the reason Pirrie has chosen to work with paper. As she explains:

I have been working with paper as a practising artist for over 18 years. Paper has become the familiar for me; it has fluidity as it is a changeable material both physically and conceptually. It can be solid and liquid, hard and soft, wet and dry. It can be folded, crushed and dissolved. It can hold and cover, be dyed and printed on. As a resource, paper exists to be recycled but has a relationship with its original organic which often puts it in the front line of environmental damage.

Paper has a transformative property. It can be abused, discarded and identified as waste and with this the message or identity it holds becomes transformed. There is also a familiar tactile quality to paper that allows transformative acts. When I crush

a piece of paper I am conscious of its resistance to the act, but am equally aware of its transformation from a sheet to a ball.⁵⁷

Works such as *Fresh Wreath 2* (4.22), based on Balinese wreaths, were made for an exhibition 'Helen's Wreath', acknowledging the damage of Cyclone Helen in the region. In her art Pirrie tries to draw attention to man-made environmental damage, especially to the oceans, but is also aware of the ineluctable forces of nature. She does not like to waste materials and picked up discarded 'dots' from her wreaths as they deteriorated. To these she has added magnets and looked for opportunities to use them as 'graffiti' decorating discarded items around Darwin such as car bodies and metal structures.

A 2010 exhibition 'Be Careful How You Develop' was a walk-in installation held at the old Wesleyan Church venue in the Botanic Gardens (4.23). Pirrie manufactured 'vegetation' from paper and suspended it so 'it looked a bit like flesh hanging in an abattoir'.⁵⁸ As well as the basic elements, Pirrie gathered fishing remnants from Shoal Bay recycle depot and ocean beaches outside of Darwin. Hand held work lights were hung from the church's internal steel structure and magnets concealed in paper were also used to attach forms to each other and to the metal interior (walls, ceiling, structural frame) of the church.⁵⁹ Of this work Pirrie stated:

Made from paper this artwork is fragile and constantly at the mercy of the elements; if it is too humid the work will become limp and heavy; if it is too exposed to light it will fade. This artwork's condition is one of flux. Like Nature it cannot be fixed, explicable and controlled.

'Be Careful How You Develop' is a concerned wish for all to consider and reconsider our engagement with marine life. To be mindful of how we progress or develop is to be conscious of the contradiction of such a notion.⁶⁰

The lure of elemental flux, which brought Pirrie to Darwin, has transformed her art practice such that she is dedicated to exploring the environment, drawing attention to it and releasing its potential. As well she tests the capacity of her ideas and art materials to analyse, criticise and celebrate its dynamics. Her concentration on marine life and the oceans reminds us that all life emerged from a primal pond and is honed still by the elements.

* * *

Seasonal changes to the land and its inhabitants – earthly or spiritual – can be profound in the Top End. Indigenous artists have learnt over eons how to integrate these changes with life, ceremony and visual art. For non-Indigenous artists the power of the climatic variations of the Top End has lent a different kind of inspiration, seducing them to stay and work towards a different kind of contemporary art, reflecting these powerful experiences.

right:

4.23 Sarah Pirrie *Be Careful How You Develop* 2010, cotton rag paper dyed with Dylon fabric dyes, rare earth magnets, recycled wire, meat hooks, fishing remnants. Installation, Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Gardens, Darwin, NT. Courtesy of the artist



Notes:

1. Ernest Giles, *Australia Twice Traversed*. London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Fivington, 1889, p.113.
2. Marr Grounds and Paul Pholeros, *Sculpture at the Top Ends*. Adelaide, SA, Experimental Art Foundation, 1977, no pagination.
3. Therese Kenyon, *Under a Hot Tin Roof*. Sydney, NSW, Power Publications, 1995, p.1.
4. Marr Grounds, letter to Daena Murray, 3 October 2001, MAGNT file.
5. Grounds and Pholeros, op. cit.
6. *ibid.*
7. Wendy Stavrianos, interview with Daena Murray, Harcourt, Vic, September 1999. Unless indicated otherwise the information in this profile is from this source.
8. She traces this tendency to an early memory of seeing the folds in her body as if they were folds in the landscape.
9. Wendy Stavrianos, 'Reflections of Darwin', artist's statement. Bungendore, NSW, 1978, MAGNT files.
10. Laura Murray Cree, *Wendy Stavrianos*. Roseville East, NSW, Craftsman House, 1996, p.9.
11. *ibid.*, p.10.
12. Pauline Petrus, 'Wendy Stavrianos interviewed by Pauline Petrus', *Lip*, 1978-79, Carlton, Vic, Women in the Visual Arts Collective, p.42.
13. *ibid.*
14. Stavrianos, interview 1999, op. cit.
15. Murray Cree, op. cit., p.9.
16. This was also the year Marawili won the 'Best Bark' section in the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award.
17. www.anmm.gov.au. Accessed 28 January 2010.
18. <http://www.anu.edu.au/culture/abstractions/artists/dm>. Accessed 31 Jul, 2009.
19. Howard Morphy, *Becoming Art: Exploring Cross-cultural Categories*. Sydney, NSW, UNSW Press, 2008, p.103.
20. Complete story, supplied by; Buku-Larrnga; Mulka Centre archives, Yirrkala, NT. Accessed August 2009.
21. Luke Taylor 'Painted Energy: John Mawurndjul and the Negotiation of Aesthetics in Kuniŋku Bark Painting', in Claus Volkenandt and Christian Kaufmann (eds) *Between Indigenous Australia and Europe: John Mawurndjul*. Canberra, ACT, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2009, p.32 ff.
22. Margie West (ed), *Transitions*, exhibition catalogue. Darwin, NT, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, 2000. p.84.

23. Taylor, op. cit., p.39.
24. *ibid.*, p.41.
25. Caroline Rannersberger, artist's statement for exhibition, 'Unselling Country', Darwin, NT, Charles Darwin University, 2010.
26. Caroline Rannersberger, interview with Daena Murray, Darwin, NT, 14 August 2010. Unless indicated otherwise the information in this profile is from this source.
27. Caroline Rannersberger in Nicolas Rothwell, catalogue essay for exhibition, 'Landscapes of Delight and Disquiet', Sydney, NSW, Thirtyseven Degrees Gallery, 2008. No pagination.
28. Rannersberger spent 12 years in Europe in the 1970s and 80s connecting with her German heritage.
29. Rannersberger, interview, op. cit.
30. Rothwell, op. cit.
31. Rannersberger, artist's statement, 2010, op. cit.
32. *ibid.*
33. *ibid.*
34. Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre archives, Yirrkala, NT, Accessed August 2009. Unless indicated otherwise the information in this profile is from this source.
35. Eighty of these are now in the Australian National Maritime Museum collection, Sydney.
36. See www.nntl.gov.au/News-and-Communications.
37. Wukun Wanambi, quoted by Buku-Larrngay Mulka on: www.raffartspace.com.au/nyumi_wanambi
38. Margie West, 'Mixing of the Waters' in *TOGART 2006 Contemporary Art Exhibition*, Felicity Green (ed), Darwin, NT, Top End Arts Marketing, 2006, p.13.
39. *ibid.*
40. Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre archives, Yirrkala, NT, Accessed August 2009.
41. *ibid.*
42. Wukun Wanambi, *TOGART Contemporary Art Award*, Felicity Green, (ed), Darwin, NT, The Toga Group, 2007, p.36.
43. www.warlu.com
44. See Chapter 1. The full account of the Yuendumu Doors Project can be found in Warlukurlangu Artists, *Yuendumu Doors: Kuruwarni*, Canberra, ACT, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1987.
45. www.aboriginalartnews.com.au, Accessed 5 September 2009.
46. www.antar.org.au, Accessed 21 January 2011.
47. www.aaia.com.au/paddysims.htm, Accessed 7 May 2009.
48. www.warlu.com, Accessed 10 January 2011.
49. Christian Clare Robertson, interview with Daena Murray, Darwin, NT, 21 August 2009. Unless stated otherwise the information in this profile is from this source.
50. The full text of the catalogue essay by Daena Murray for this exhibition can be found at: www.ccrobertson.com/ELP/essay
51. Christian Clare Robertson, diary, 29 May 1994, Darwin, NT.
52. Christian Clare Robertson, diary, 13 February 1995, Darwin, NT.
53. Robertson interview, 2009, op. cit.
54. Statement in *Upon This Site-Darwin*, www.ccrobertson.com/uts_dnrw/uts_drw_text.htm, Accessed 13 June 2010.
55. *ibid.*
56. Sarah Pirrie, interview with Daena Murray, Darwin, NT, 16 August 2010. Unless indicated otherwise, information in this profile is from this source.
57. Sarah Pirrie, artist's statement, *TOGART Contemporary Art Award*, Felicity Green (ed), Darwin, NT, The TOGA Group, 2010, p.34.
58. Pirrie interview, op. cit.
59. Sarah Pirrie, Email correspondence, 24 January 2010.
60. Sarah Pirrie, artist's statement, 'Be Careful How You Dvelop' Exhibition, Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Gardens Darwin, NT, 2010.