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Introduction

Throughout history, humanity has demonstrated an immense drive and capacity to achieve. But our insatiable urge to produce and consume has brought about a rupture with the interconnected forces of existence that are central to our being.

Chapter one of this research paper will confront this rupture by reflecting on the ancient Buddhist metaphor of interconnectedness as described in *The Indra’s Net*, in conjunction with Leslie Paul Thiele’s book *Indra’s Net and the Midas Touch*, in order to navigate the essence of being. Using this as a starting point, I will then suggest possibilities for a new phase of positive and creative changes towards more aware and sustainable living.

The ethos of sustainable transformation is the concern of many practitioners in the art world. For example, art critics Maja and Reuben Fowkes, in their multiple writings, have recognised that art is capable of embracing the idea of sustainability. And curator Nicolas Bourriaud, in his manifesto for the fourth Tate Britain Triennial *Altermodern*, declared that contemporary art is coming to an end, and a new modernity has arrived. This new search to re-connect and co-exist with nature has opened the door to two key concepts in art:

- **Ethical Art**, where ethical methods and techniques must be used in the creation of sustainable art projects, and
- **Environmental Art**, where viewers experience nature’s profound dynamism through participatory and transformative art projects.

In exploring the meaning and differences of these two methodologies, this paper will examine Australian artist Lyndal Jones’ *Avoca Project* as a collaborative model for Ethical Art and Olafur Eliasson’s *Weather Project* as an example of Environmental Art.

These new collaborative models have broken down the barriers in the way art is seen and perceived by the public. Today, art is not just about complex and costly objects; it is also concerned with creating interactive opportunities in which viewers can engage in meaningful experiences. This topic will be further discussed through Alain de Botton and John Armstrong’s book, *Art as Therapy*. 
In the process of renewing our interconnectedness through creative transformation, mythology plays a pivotal role because storytelling and myths take us back to the very essence of existence. Accordingly, the poem *La Loba* by Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés, which explores the invisible line between life and death, will be integrated into this project. Estés’ poem will also serve as a reference point to the works of artists who have influenced both my research and studio practice.

Chapter two discusses the artistic influences of Cai Guo-Qiang, Zhang Huan and Shinji Turner-Yamamoto.

The paper will examine Cai Guo-Qiang’s first Australian solo exhibition titled *Falling Back to Earth*, an interactive experience where the artist invited visitors to reconnect with nature.

This paper will also look at Zhang Huan’s strong social, political and cultural convictions which took him on a journey of self-discovery. He enacted confronting performances, in which he used his own body. This was in stark contrast to his later work, a meditative and philosophical stage in which ash became not only his chosen material to explore life’s ephemeral journey, but also the spark for him to reconnect with himself.

Shinji Turner-Yamamoto’s philosophical inspiration for the *Global Tree Project* was inspired by lines from Mircea Eliade’s prose, and by his strong belief in rituals that venerate the intangible forces of the universe. In this work he combined biomaterials and man-made structures, evoking a sense of mutuality between the natural and manufactured worlds.

Chapter three will discuss my studio practice; materials used, philosophical content, exhibitions and public response, as follows:

- why organic matter and interactive art
- how the artistic work and philosophical approach of Cai Guo-Qiang, Zhang Huan and Shinji Turner-Yamamoto, lead me to the use of ash, dust particles, bones, leaf litter and kombucha bacteria to develop interactive projects. By using the term ‘interactive’ I do not refer to ‘electronic art’, but rather to the process of engaging viewers in participatory experiences of discovery.
For example in *Global Veins*, viewers are encouraged to walk across a cosmos of threads to experience contemplation. With *Buzzing Nymphs*, the camouflage quality surprises and engages viewers to observe and integrate with others. In *WE*, the viewer experiences a journey to the moon, by walking through and looking up, discovering a canopy of ephemeral light and geometric forms.

- How my final artwork titled *We* evolved from the Aztec’s ancient tradition of papermaking *Papel Amate* and Kombucha printing methods. This work developed in three stages:
  1. *Impact8* International Printmaking Conference Academic Poster exhibition,
  2. Research Title Development,
  3. Venice Residency

Finally, the totality of this paper will serve as a philosophical basis and support for my journey of learning and discovery, which is reflected in the creative work undertaken and submitted as part of this Masters of Fine Arts research.
The Sphere of Life.

“All things that are in the world are linked together, one way or the other. Not a single thing comes into being without some relationship to every other thing.”

Keiji Nishitani¹

From the beginning of the universe, the fundamental principle of existence has been interconnection. Humans are an intrinsic part of this system. We cannot step outside of the laws of nature; we are not supreme. Although we can change the course of rivers and destroy mountains and forests in search of economic prosperity, we do this at our peril. In the pursuit of prosperity, we endanger the precious interconnection central to our being.

The Indra’s Net story talks of the universe as an infinite net, with each node of the net joined by a unique jewel. Each jewel reflects other jewels that are part of the net, and the consequent reflections create infinite gleams. No jewel can exist independently. Each one owes its existence to a network, within which each one contributes.

The Indra’s Net is a metaphor for our co-existence with other elements of the universe. Humans are an intrinsic part of this net of mutuality. We represent an infinitesimal part of this very complex network but, ironically, our actions are weakening this vital connectivity. Leslie Paul Thiele assertively envisages this reality not only as an unparalleled crisis² but also as an unprecedented opportunity³ for change, adding that such transformation would require a truly cooperative global response.⁴ The type of collaborative response envisaged by Thiele requires humans to step back in order to move forward. In my understanding, that would mean actively nurturing the ethical and moral values that once formed an integral part of our grandparents’ and their grandparents’ and even their great-great grandparents’ way of living, in particular their foresight, tolerance and wisdom reflected in a sense of respect.

¹ Keiji Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
There are signs we are learning from past, misjudged decisions such as the uncontrolled introduction of pesticides containing DDT in 1934, in the aftermath of which author Rachael Carson reminded us that “we are a vulnerable part of the natural world subject to the same damage as the rest of the ecosystem.” This particular case touches on the law of unintended consequences - for every action we take, there will be a broader outcome within the net of life. Adopting a conscious stand, which acknowledges this fact, will generate radical and positive changes based on the self-realization that the actions we take today create an effect tomorrow. While some people deny this complex truth, others are taking on board the imperative to work with, and not in opposition to, nature. This attitude and the search for emergent ideas around sustainability are evidence of the human desire to heal, adapt, reconnect and, consequently, to evolve.

There are many creative responses to this crisis, and the art world covers a vast spectrum for artists to explore. However, the artists that I am more interested in are those who draw out the relationship between humanity and nature, as well as those who highlight the urgency of sustainable action and reaction. The present global environmental challenges have created universal concerns. The work of many artists reflects these concerns, embracing positive changes that will lead present and future generations to understand, respect and revalue the way we live.

Curators and art historians Maja and Reuben Fowkes, have focused their attention on art and ecology through the Translocal Institute of Contemporary Art (http://www.translocal.org/). In 2006 they organised an international Symposium on Sustainability and Contemporary Art at the Central European University Budapest, an innovative event at that time. The symposium brought together contemporary artists, environmental scientists and ecological activists to discuss ways in which creative and sustainable options could co-exist.

This collaborative model has been embraced around the world. For instance, the Australian artist Lyndal Jones has been developing a collective initiative titled The Avoca Project, based in rural Victoria Australia.

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5 Linda Lear, “The Life and Legacy of Rachel Carson,” Linda Lear Centre for Special Collection and Archives (rachaelcarson@conncoll.edu, http://www.rachelcarson.org/).
Jones is engaging with national and international artists, scholars and climate change experts, to produce a series of educational exhibitions, films, concerts, performances and conferences, aiming to find practical solutions in response to global warming.

These cross-institutional initiatives have broadened the artistic sphere. French curator Nicolas Bourriaud, in his manifesto for the fourth Tate Britain Triennial, *Altermodern* in 2009, suggested that a new modernity is emerging, declaring that postmodernism is coming to an end, and we are experiencing the emergence of a global altermodernity. This controversial manifesto acknowledged the ways in which artists today are exploring innovative methods to represent the challenge of our globalized culture.

These new types of representations have created a place and space for sustainable art. Maja and Reuben Fowkes recognized two main ways in which artists are currently approaching sustainability and art:

1. Ethical Art.
2. Environmental Art.

**1. Ethical Art:**

This approach critiques unsustainability and offers imaginative ideas to achieve sustainability. This is achieved by dealing with the ethical aspects of artistic productions in terms of working with humans, animals, types of materials and the pollution levels the work will produce. The main focus centres on the ethical aspect of the project rather than its aesthetic values.

In the *Avoca Project*, Jones and her collaborators have been focusing on an existing structure, *Watford House*, imported from Germany in 1850 during the gold rush period. In this long-term research, which began in 2005 and will continue until 2015, the dwelling has been portrayed as an immigrant and the land as a site of climate change and response.

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9 Ibid.
10 Fowkes et al., "In Conversation with Maja and Reuben Fowkes."
As such, the building and site become witnesses to and survivors of drastic climate changes. During the last nine years, Jones’ collective Avoca Project has become one connected world, incorporating a number of innovative ideas, such as:

- **Mending the House**
  This on-going project involved the collaboration of more than thirty volunteers and tradespeople to prevent the house from undergoing further dilapidation. The process began in 2005 and has been documented in a series of numerous small-scale artworks that will later be assembled as a much larger artwork.

- **Portraits from the Swiss House**
  This is a series of written stories and video works about the house and its site. The main aspect of this project has been the inspection of the house by heritage architect Professor Miles Lewis and his nomination of it as one of only three such houses left in the world. In 2009 the Watford House was declared to be historically significant and added to the Victorian Heritage register.\(^{12}\)

- **On Poetry and Weather**
  The Avoca region has been strongly affected by the drought. This challenge has opened the door to a number of creative and transformative sustainable solutions such as:

  1. the construction of a 90,000 litre underground water tank guided by Simon Pockley to make the site water self-sufficient;
  2. a *poetic sound indicator of water use*\(^{13}\) which has been connected throughout the house;
  3. the collaboration between artists Mel Ogden and Lyndal Jones to reinforce water collection and flood alleviation. The plan consisted of *construction of walls, embankments, and the use of rocks, gravel, indigenous plants and weeds*, \(^{14}\) and
  4. the creation of a *poetic indicator of power as a series of light works that change with power use*.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Ibid.
\(^{15}\) Ibid.
• **Field day**

To commemorate the opening of the house-as-working-image on April 2007, a symposium featuring environmental and heritage experts took place. The keynote speaker was Natural Sequence farmer, Peter Andrews. Advice on further sustainability measures to be carried out within the project was provided to all present, and

• **Garden of Fire and Water**

This garden has been created as a place of cultural integration to recognize the significant contribution of thousands of Chinese people who have been part of the Avoca area since the 1850’s. It also offers the community a place to integrate with nature.

With these sustainability initiatives, the *Avoca Project* team has taken the local community on a very personal journey of constant observation of how the land and existing house are responding to environmental challenges. The team has also drawn attention to a meaningful historical layering of content and the invaluable architectural legacy of the Swiss house. It has also made the community aware of water and electricity usage. There are numerous other benefits and lessons to be learned during the development of the project. However until now the team and local community have been able to consider the cause and effect of their daily and future actions. This conscious process has developed meaningful ways of communication, cooperation and integration, values that have become the project’s vital principles.

---

Avoca's ‘Small Town Transformation’ begins with the creation of a garden that recognises the current silence around the significant contribution of thousands of Chinese people who have been part of this area since the 1850’s.

The Garden of Fire and Water will thus become an ongoing reminder of our shared history, enriching our sense of place with a sustainable town garden. It will also create future possibilities by providing a lasting place for community cultural activities and a space for relaxation, contemplation and reflection, thus transforming how we might live together in the town and how we might welcome visitors.

Official Opening and Celebration
11.30 for 12 pm
Cambridge St, Avoca at the garden

Opening of the gate Mr Russell Jack AM,
Golden Dragon Museum, Bendigo

Unveiling the scholar rock
Ms Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

To be followed by an afternoon featuring music in the garden with guided tours by artist Lindy Lee, designer Mel Ogden, soil expert Martin Wynne and artistic director Lyndal Jones. Evening entertainment with fireworks, from 8.00pm.

RSVP: 26th September, 2014
avocachinesegarden@gmail.com

Fig 1.
Garden of Water and Fire
Lindy Lee, Mel Ogden, Lyndal Jones and Martin Wynne
https://avocachinesegarden.files.wordpress.com
2014
Fig. 2
The Avoca Project
Lyndal Jones
https://ecoartscotland.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/wp_20140309_18_03_55_smart.jpg
2005 - 2015
2. Environmental Art:

This concept focuses on the creation of artworks that will engage viewers in a meaningful perception of nature. However the production of the work is not necessarily sustainable. In 2003, Danish artist Ólafur Eliasson created a site-specific installation titled The Weather Project, for the Tate Modern in London, UK. This installation consisted of a semicircular reflective panel that was back-lit by approximately 200 yellow mono-frequency lamps. The panel was displayed at the far end of the Turbine Hall. Hanging from the ceiling were aluminum frames covered with mirror foil, creating a reflective illusion of infinite space. A thin layer of artificial mist covered the room. As a result, the solid structure of the Turbine Hall evaporated into a deep, misty solar space. As part of the project, Eliasson distributed a questionnaire to the Tate Modern staff. The following were among the questions:

- has a weather phenomenon ever changed the course of your life dramatically?
- do you think tolerance to other individuals is proportional to the weather?
- do you think the idea of the weather in our society is based on nature or culture?

The answers were displayed as simple statements in magazines, taxis and on the Internet, to promote the event in lieu of photographs. The following statement became the exhibition’s brochure cover:


Fig 3
The Weather Project Exhibition brochure cover
Ólafur Eliasson

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17 Alain de Botton, John Armstrong, and Life School of, Art as Therapy (London: Phaidon, 2013), 158.
Eliasson’s promotional strategy *encouraged a critical form of self-awareness*¹⁹ about the way humans perceive nature and their position within the world. Paradoxically, *The Weather Project*’s technology contradicted Eliasson’s questioning. For instance, is the artwork’s production affecting the weather? How much electricity was consumed during its manufacture, installation and exhibition? Is the financial investment of this large-scale artwork justifiable? Are these large-scale installations logistically sustainable?

Such dilemmas often generate public controversy. Perhaps there is no definite answer. But then, what is art for?

Alain de Botton and John Armstrong’s book, *Art as Therapy*, centres on finding the purpose of art. They deduce that art is a *tool* that can help us to deal with the frailties of our mind.²⁰ As art is an expression that enables us to explore our thoughts, feelings and fears, this tool has the power to unleash our creative imagination.

However, to develop this power in directions that can help us to heal our relationship with the natural world, there are three aspects to consider: the consciousness about sustainability, the need to understand ways in which human beings can use their creative imagination and, finally, the benefits to humans from this creative approach. From this perspective, can the *Weather Project* influence a positive human transformation? Can it help us to heal our fragile relationship with the natural world?

*The Weather Project* demonstrated how artists and art institutions are moving away from creating and exhibiting conventional pictorial representations of nature and are starting to produce global opportunities for *participatory art*²¹ – a concept that, according to Botton and Armstrong, is *just beginning to be understood and its consequences examined*.²² In *The Weather Project*, the artist and the institution went beyond their creator and educator roles to become “integrators”, in the sense that one cannot occur without the other. The result: Art+Public=1.

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²⁰ de Botton, Armstrong, and School of, *Art as Therapy*, 4,5,7.
²¹ Ibid., 159.
²² Ibid.
This approach of mutuality moves away from the conventional “silent, do not touch” white box museum model, into social spaces of exploratory interaction. Elíasson transcended the limitations of creating aesthetic objects to provide participatory experiences of nature’s phenomena. Through this experiential process, the artist is shaping a creative social transformation. Consequently, *The Weather Project* reaffirms Botton and Armstrong’s view that art can help us to live better lives.

This was demonstrated in the way the floor and ceiling at the Turbine Hall became extensions of the work, creating a seemingly celestial space, which allowed viewers to step away from the busy routine of a congested city and enter an ethereal place, to contemplate the intangible force of unity surrounding the complex system of the universe. During the course of the exhibition the power of this interactive installation continued to be evident in the way hundreds of viewers embraced one another. This contemplative experience was described by one of the viewers “as I laid there looking up into the ceiling, I could see friends doing synchronized movements, couples kissing, children waving and occasionally you would get strangers interacting with each other across the room I witnessed this and I can’t think of a better measure of a successful in an art installation, than its ability to make the audience “feel”. I felt truly alive when lying there and it somehow restored my faith in human kindness and ability to get on, across the usual boundaries like race, nationality, class etc. I always returned to the office with renewed energy levels.”

This public stage of celebration and contemplation opened the door for viewers to become part of intense celestial experiences. The relationship between the installation and viewers brought forward the intrinsic nature of interconnectedness. What Elíasson initiated with this installation is an awakening process, which touches on the force of being, echoing Isaac Newton’s profound view of the universe.

“This most elegant structure of Sun and Planets could arise only from the wisdom and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. And if the fixed stars are the centres of the similar systems, all these are under the same dominion: This Being rules all things not as the soul of the world but as the Lord of the Universe. He is omnipresent and in him all things are contained and moved, and that without resistance since this Being is not corporeal and is not resisted by body.”

---

24 de Botton, Armstrong, and School of, *Art as Therapy*, 158.
Fig 4.
The Weather Project
Olafur Eliasson
http://www.panoramio.com/photo/20436087
2005
Storytelling, Myths and Ritual

““Myths” means a “true story” and beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant.”

Mircea Eliade.26

The cyclical condition of humans life has brought times of deep spiritual disconnection. That is why the power of storytelling, myths and rituals is vital in healing our bond with nature. They allow us to see a particular dimension of who we are, an aspect that is invisible to us in the everyday world. For this reason, returning to the stories and myths of our forefathers will add a deeper spiritual meaning to our lives.

Myths give us a sense of belonging; they shape our cultural identities. Through their narrative lines we are able to know how the cosmos originated, how we are connected to the natural world and why humans are mortal. Myths even allow us to travel across life and death.

By retelling myths, humans break the barrier of their own imagination, reaching the world of invisible and divine manifestations of gods and archetypes that mirror a deeper aspect of our psyche. These subliminal perceptions need to be projected outwards and, although we cannot see them, we can feel the effect they make on us. Among these archetypes are divine and astral beings, gods and goddesses, muses, goddesses of knowledge and art in Greek mythology, wise men and healers. One example is the Madonna, a significant figure in Catholic and Orthodox religion.

In art, myths and storytelling have the power to stimulate our creative imagination, allowing us to open our souls to the greatness of being. We see that we are an integral part of the fabric of the universe, in which each one of us has a place. Myths give us stories that allow us to access our unconscious mind, to open creative paths to co-evolve with nature.

One of these powerful stories is La Loba (Wolf Woman) by Clarissa Pinkola Estés. In this story, Estés explores the mysterious power of intuition and connection in life and death.


There is an old woman who lives in a hidden place
that everyone knows in his or her souls but few have ever seen.

She is circumspect, often hairy, always fat, and specially wishes
to evade most company. She is both a crower and a cackler,
generally having more animal sounds than human ones.

I might say she lives among the rotten granite slopes in Tarahumara Indian Territory. Or that she is buried outside Phoenix near a well. Perhaps she will be seen traveling south to Monte Alban in a burnout car with the back window shot out. Or maybe she will be spotted standing by the highway near el Paso, or riding shotgun with truckers to Morelia, Mexico, or walking to market above Oaxaca with strangely formed boughs of firewood on her back. She calls herself by many names: La Huesera, Bone Woman, La Trapera, The Gatherer; and La Loba, Wolf Woman.

The sole work of La Loba is the collection of bones. She collects and preserves especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world. Her cave is filled with the bones of all manner of desert creatures: the deer, the rattlesnake, and the crow. But her specialty is wolves. She creeps and crawls and sifts through the montañas, mountains and arroyos, dry riverbeds, looking for wolf bones, and when she has assembled an entire skeleton, when the last bone is in place and the beautiful white sculpture of the creature is laid out before her, she sits by the fire and thinks about what song she will sing.

And when she is sure, she stands over the creature, raises her arms over it, and sings out. That is when the rib bones and leg bones of the wolf begin to flesh out and the creature becomes furred. La Loba sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being; its tail curls upward, shaggy and strong. And La Loba sings more and the wolf creature begins to breathe. And still La Loba sings so deeply that the floor of the desert shakes, and as she sings, the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away down the canyon.

Somewhere in its running, whether by the speed of its running, or by the splashing its way into a river, or by way of a ray of sunlight or moonlight hitting it right in the side, the wolf is suddenly transformed into a laughing woman who runs free toward the horizon.²⁸

Estés’ moral tale tells of a deep and metaphorical journey into the intangible forces of life, the power to believe, to hope and to dream. The wolf woman’s devotion to collect each bone has enabled her to become one with nature. On one hand, *La Huesera* embodies the wisdom of woman and motherhood, the ability to love, to be compassionate, to let go of materiality and to be protective. On the other hand the wolf epitomizes freedom, intelligence and intuition. The unification of these two mortal creatures represents self-realization and the capacity to connect with the forces of mystery and enchantment in the natural world.

*La Huesera’s* mystical wisdom has opened a path into a world of silence, contemplation and ritual. It is from this philosophical and spiritual perspective that the core of my research project will develop. For this reason I have studied artists Cai Guo-Qiang, Zhang Huan and Shinji Turner-Yamamoto, as their artistic work revolves around myths and rituals evoking the fragile line woven between life and death. This will be further discussed in chapter two. This narrative also inspired the creation of the *Global Veins* installation, a project that I will explain in chapter three.

![Global Veins installation](image)

*Fig 5.*

*Global Veins, detail 1*

Gloria Bohorquez

Wool, feathers, animal bones and cochineal

Dimensions variable

Photo by Gloria Bohorquez

2013
The artistic power of Cai Guo-Qiag, Zhang Huan and Shinji Turner-Yamamoto’s concentrate on the creation of outdoor and site-specific installations where the laws and elements of nature become the artists’ selected media. These artists have devoted their time and innovative energy to create works that mirror the greatness of the natural world.

The foundation on Cai’s work rests on his childhood fascinations with nature, globalization and Eastern philosophy. Zhang Huan’s work traverses Buddhism, Chinese history and the limits of physical endurance. Turner-Yamamoto’s artworks often include myths and rituals to honour life’s cycle, birth, death and renewal, concepts that are very closely linked to his Japanese spiritual heritage.

**Cai Guo-Qiang** (B 1957, China, lives in NY)

Cai Guo-Qiang engages viewers in a physical and psychological experience allowing them to be part of a bigger picture called the Universe. His artistic work is constantly exploring contemporary social issues, for instance the Berlin Wall ignited the creation of *Head On*. The Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin first commissioned Cai to create this work for an exhibition in 2006. It depicts a pack of 99 wolves undertaking a strenuous leap, straight into a glass barrier. Inevitably, their beaten and twisted bodies begin to tumble to the ground, but surprisingly they recover their strength and set themselves on the same mission over and over again.

Seeing *Head On*, at Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art. (QAGOMA), in Brisbane, I was able to unify the power of Estés evocative lines with Cai’s allegorical creativity. While this installation was inspired by Berlin’s unsettled past, the wolves’ metaphorical presence can also represent our contemporary global society. This was the sensation I experienced walking around the gallery space, observing the audience discovering the wolves’ strong expressions, contemplating their agility and grace. A mood of curiosity and integration permeated the room like an unearthly spell.

Cai’s figurative journey led audience members to see themselves through the eyes of each wolf, to experience their sorrows, fears and dreams. In Estés poem, the wolf

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31 Guo-Qiang, "Cai Guo-Qiang".
personifies freedom, intelligence and intuition. For Cai, wolves symbolise *bravery and ferocity*, though the wolves carry on repeating this ferocious yet courageous act to destroy the barrier. Does this repetitive action become a vicious circle? Is this vicious circle referring to humans’ inability to learn from their mistakes? Or, on the contrary, are the wolves engaged in a heroic and intuitive action against a mighty obstacle that only the unification of forces will enable them to conquer?

Fig 6.
*Head On 2006*
Cai Guo-Qiang
Wolves: gauze, resin and painted hide
Installed dimension variable
Cai Guo-Qiang *Falling Back to Earth* Exhibition Catalogue page 126

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Cai’s first Australian solo exhibition in Brisbane, titled *Falling Back to Earth*, narrates humans’ relationship with the environment and consequently the challenges we face now and into the future. The works were exhibited along the first level of the gallery and consisted of four main installations titled *Heritage, Eucalyptus, Head On* and *Tea Pavilion*. Each work was displayed in a separate gallery, allowing sufficient space for each installation to flourish. This made for a reflective and creative ambiance where adults and children could participate in the work.

A harmonious mood surrounded the vast rectangular shape of the gallery space. Its walls and floor were coloured to match the warm white sand of North Stradbroke. In the centre of the room, 99 replicas of animals from around the world were peacefully surrounding a calm, crystal-blue waterhole from where they were alleviating their thirst. There were no frontiers, distress or agony. Kangaroos were side by side with giraffes and camels; panda bears were in unison with zebras, lions, brown bears, tigers and so on.

For some visitors, the installation may have appeared to be too literal and somewhat kitsch. However, in this utopian paradise, Cai wisely introduced a layering of symbolic meaning. Firstly the number of animals – Cai often uses 9 and 99 in his work. *Nine represents “Long-Lasting” in Chinese numerology, while 99 suggests for the artist something that is not complete.* Secondly there was a constant drip falling from the ceiling, altering the serenity of the reservoir. And thirdly, the reflection of the animals’ bodies on the water created a double or mirror image. This suggested a binary relationship between life and death, chaos and order, creation and destruction. Such seemingly paradoxical connections raise many questions about the state of our planet and the future that our younger generations will inherit.

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34 ibid
Heritage
Cai Guo-Qiang
99 life-sized replicas of animals
Animals: polystyrene, gauze, resin and hide
Installed with artificial waterhole: water, sand and drip mechanism
4780cm (L) x 2300cm (W) (Installed, approx.)
Cai Guo-Qiang Falling Back to Earth Exhibition Catalogue pages 18-19
2013
Our constant need to build new communities and industries often involves destroying forests. Hence, one by one, native species have become endangered or subjugated to the demanding nature of humans. This was the story of a majestic 31.5 metres Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*). Relocating this sublime tree in the gallery corridor was Cai’s mission for this installation titled *Eucalyptus*. The crisp white walls sheltering this Australian native gum highlighted its subtle warm browns and creams, its rich textures and the intricate shapes of its trunk and branches. In this way, Cai intuitively invited visitors to walk through, to immerse themselves in the tree’s past, present and future life. Paper and pencils were supplied for the audience to participate by proposing ideas about the future of the tree. Adults and children were deeply connected with the tree whilst contemplating their suggestions. However, far beyond deconstructing the tree, Cai intended to allow the audience to think about the interconnection that impacts upon all living species and consequently, the repercussion of our actions. Feeling the tree’s spiritual presence in the gallery space, one can only hope that the habitual way for future generations to view these placid giants will not be limited to their inclusion as rare museum objects. Rather, this is an opportunity to draw attention to the important role trees play in nature, by standing strong, supported by their own roots and existing in the habitats to which they are endemic.
The *Tea Pavilion*, located at the end of the gallery at the River Room, invited viewers to drink *The Guan Yin*\(^{35}\) tea from Cai’s home province of Fujian. This event included a series of Chinese tea ceremonies, rituals which encouraged *harmony with nature.\(^{36}\) In this way the exhibition reached a contemplative culmination. This place led me to reflect on how the exhibition was characterized by the juxtaposition of opposites, for instance *Heritage* was surrounded by a peaceful mood, however there was a constant water drop disturbing the waterhole. In *Eucalyptus*, the giant tree once gave shelter and fed many species, but today its life was terminated to give way to progress. The wolves in *Head On*, although sagacious creatures, kept repeating the same mistake. These contradictory actions not only reveal Cai’s interest in the *energies of chaos and contradiction.\(^{37}\) They also touch on the nature of humanity that is simultaneously destructive and creative. By mounting this exhibition, Cai invited the audience to stop, think and reconnect, or in other words, to *Fall Back to Earth.*

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\(^{35}\) BDEA / BuddhaNet, "Avalokitesvara (Guanyin),” Buddha Dharma Education Association and Buddhanet, http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/guanyin.htm.

\(^{36}\) Guo-Qiang, *Cai Guo-Qiang: Falling Back to Earth*, 52.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 49.
**Zhang Huan** (B1965, China)

Zhang’s artistic journey reflects his complex identity, shaped by his childhood connection to nature, his Buddhist devotion and the political unrest of China’s Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square massacre.

These contrasting circumstances influenced Zhang’s artistic vision, as he said: “if I want to do something of my work whatever it is my choice is not to follow rules but to work recklessly. Only when I refuse to follow the rules do I feel free that I can leave systems behind. Only when I’m reckless can I have my own voice and language. When people quarrel or fight, I believe they show how they really are.”

These words mirrored his need to break through the manipulation of a systematised and dictatorial political and cultural regime.

This rage - in chorus with Zao Wou-Ki’s statement referring to artists in the 1980s, which said *painting is not about the object you’re painting but rather about using the object as a vehicle to express your spiritual side or inner thoughts* – unleashed Zhang’s inner force. He moved from creating traditional paintings to using his own body as the medium to explore notions of origin and identity. Zhang said: “the body is the only direct way through which I come to know society and society comes to know me. The body is the proof of identity. The body is language.”

Zhang was not afraid to put his body under extreme situations of pain or discomfort to get his messages across. In 1998 he moved to New York after the Chinese government closed the Beijing East Village art collective, a performance group where Zhang was one of the integral members. This change led him to experience a sense of vulnerability and displacement, which was expressed in his performance, *Wind and Water*, at PS1 Contemporary Art Centre for the exhibition *New Chinese Art: Inside Out*. For *Wind and Water*, he lay naked on a bed of ice for ten minutes, encircled by nine *pure-bred American dogs*, that were tied around the bed. This performance echoes the divergence of the East and West: the “inferior” race in the land of “superiority”.

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39 Ibid., 16.
For more than ten years, Zhang subjected his body to extreme physical performances, aiming to move away from physical pain and psychological pressure to arrive at a point where mind, body and spirit connected. From that state of mind, he was able to relate to the outside world, and only then was he free to endure the confronting social isolation of an immigrant and to clear his vision from the sense of darkness that was implied by China’s political tyranny.

This process allowed him to move back to his country in 2005. This time he was able to connect with his own roots, and thereby find a new direction for his work. While visiting the Longhua Temple in Shanghai to burn incense before Buddha, Zhang described his visit thus: “the temple floor was covered with ash, which leaked from the giant incense burner. Seeing this image of ash conjured a feeling inside of me: It was a beautiful material and it moved me greatly. These ash remains speak to the fulfillment of millions of hopes, dreams and blessings. It was here that I finally discovered the ingredient I had been looking for to pave the way for new work.”

These experiences marked a very significant phase where Zhang transitioned from his confrontational and physical endurance performances into a meditative and ceremonial artistic period. For Zhang, ash represents a turning point in life, a moment to reunite with himself. As he wrote: “for me incense ash is not ash; nor is it any kind of material.

It’s a collective soul, memory and prayer.” In many ways, leaving China to migrate to New York, then later returning to his native country, infused his spirit with a sense of belonging and a new appreciation for his culture.

Zhang became a Buddhist lay disciple. As he explained: “Buddhist law makes me more tolerant, quiet and peaceful, and helps me gain a deeper understanding of unpredictability and cause-and-effect.” This new vision of unpredictability has been beautifully explored in his monumental ash sculpture installation titled Berlin Buddha. It consists of a four-metre aluminium Buddha, within which Zhang cast a second Buddha figure of dry ash.

These two Buddhas facing each other established a dialogue of impermanence and permanence between the aluminium man-made structure and the compacted ash sculpture that slowly disintegrated over a period of three months.

Quoting Zhang: “What I want to express in Berlin Buddha is that life is about living, aging, illness and death, and it’s a cycle of birth and rebirth. I believe that when Berlin Buddha collapses numerous souls will fly to the East.” For me this statement not only describes his intention for Berlin Buddha, but also echoes his artistic and spiritual journey.

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44 Dziewior, Goldberg, and Storr, Zhang Huan, 127.
46 Ibid., 132.
Fig 11
_Berlin Ash Buddha_
Zhang Huan
Compacted ash and aluminium
2007
Shinji Turner-Yamamoto (B 1965 Japan, lives in USA)

Shinji Turner-Yamamoto first saw himself as a collector of objects from nature rather than as an artist. His drive to collect natural objects such as rocks, leaves, twigs and dust particles reflects his intuitive vision of the world. His cognitive individuality echoes La Loba’s desire to collect, protect and bring back to life, through a series of rituals, what is in danger of being lost to the world. This divine power beyond human comprehension, otherwise know as ganz andare, is the focal point of Turner-Yamamoto’s Global Tree Project. This project was strongly influenced by Mircea Eliade’s quote, “If we and the plant come from the same uterus, we are twins. We didn’t die from separation, as do some conjoined twins, but, somehow we need to be together with them.” Turner-Yamamoto recognises that the bond between the natural and man-made worlds has been ruptured. His intention in the Global Tree Project is to heal our wound from this separation, and reopen our connection with trees to be whole, and to have a new vision through them. The project consists of site-specific installations, sculptures and paintings made from natural elements and displayed in different abandoned temples around the world. At first, viewers can think of these installations as something irrelevant; a little mountain of dust, or a collection of small rocks or dead trees displayed in large and isolated places. But from a deeper perspective, Turner-Yamamoto has strategically placed these natural objects in neglected religious sites to suggest a correlation between the material and the spiritual worlds. The project comprises eight installations Hanging Garden, Disappearances, Disappearances: An Eternal Journey, Twinned Constellation/Star Nest, Sleeping Tree, Petals of the Universe, Secret Garden and Aqua: Omphalos.

From the series, I focused on two installations exhibited at Cincinnati, Ohio, titled Hanging Garden and Disappearances. Each complements the other. By exhibiting Disappearances at the Contemporary Art Centre and Hanging Garden at the Holy Cross Church, the artist intended to transform the museum into a temple and the abandoned church into a gallery space.

47 Turner-Yamamoto, Shinji Turne-Yamamoto: Global Tree Poject, 43.
48 Estés, Women Who Run with the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman.
51 Ibid., 31.
52 Ibid., 9.
53 Ibid., 33.
While observing the temple ruins, Turner-Yamamoto encountered accidental landscapes\textsuperscript{54} reminiscent of Japanese stone art appreciation, suiseki.\textsuperscript{55} This tradition consists of stone arrangements, often displayed in wooden trays. The stones’ unique forms suggest the totality of the Universe in its randomness and interconnectedness.\textsuperscript{56} This practice inspired the artist to transform discarded man-made structures into pieces suggestive of sacred manifestation. Turner-Yamamoto used gold and silver leaf with fragments of plaster from the church’s ceiling and walls to create a series of gilded sculptures forming a linear constellation,\textsuperscript{57} signifying a transcendent presence. He also transformed the plaster into dust particles to reflect the impermanent condition of life. In this way, Disappearances began.

To situate these suggestive pieces, the artist transformed the long, corridor-like gallery into a sacred place. To signify this transformation, the gilt sculptures were suspended along the hallway. Three columns resembling religious structures along the length of the gallery appeared to be framing the sculptures. The soft light illuminating the artworks created a sense of divine order. The dust installations were located at the end of the corridor. This was also the place where Turner-Yamamoto knelt down, encircled by a fine white powder, then slowly spread the powder in a calculated rhythmic manner,\textsuperscript{58} while incantations from the band Amiina were played. This was a private ritual to honor the Cosmos – the part of the natural world associated with the divine.\textsuperscript{59}

The artist’s approach reflects a deeper understanding of nature’s cycles, a sense of compassion and spirituality. These aspects are strongly connected to his cultural and religious background.
Fig 12
Disappearances
Shinji Turner–Yamamoto
2010
http://globaltreeproject.org/hanging_garden.html
Trees offer shelter and sustain numerous creatures. They also provide oxygen, a vital element of existence. Mircea Eliade, referring to trees in mythology, wrote: “The cosmos was imagined in the form of a gigantic tree; the mode of being of the cosmos, and first of all its capacity for endless regeneration, are symbolically expressed by the life of the tree. In *Hanging Garden*, the roots of a living, deciduous birch tree remained supported by a dead birch. Once again death gives way to life, like autumn leaves in their yellow, orange and red vestments preparing to depart as winter approaches, giving back their nutrients to the tree. Similarly, by locating *Hanging Garden* at the heart of the abandoned church, a place that used to be a space of sacred congregation becomes a place of artistic contemplation. To venerate this rebirth, the traditional rituals of *consecration and deconsecration* were conducted by the incantations of Sri Lankan and Japanese monks.

The instinctual way in which Turner-Yamamoto incorporated trees and transformed man-made structures, connecting them via a series of rituals, elevated *Hanging Garden* and *Disappearance* to a level where the quotidian and sacred realms transcended into one, becoming empty of *a separate self*. As with the *Indra’s Net* metaphor, neither the man-made structure of the church, nor the natural form of the tree, can exist on its own. Each one of them is made of both realms – the man-made and the natural – therefore they *co-exist*. This principle also reflects Turner-Yamamoto’s religious, philosophical and cultural heritage of Buddhism and *Japan’s indigenous religious cosmology of Shinto*. The philosophical core of both Buddhism and Shinto flows across meditative rituals where mind, body and soul strongly connect into one with the force of the Universe.

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60 Ibid., 25.
Fig 13
Hanging Garden
Shinji Turner-Yamamoto
2010
http://globaltreeproject.org/hanging_garden.html
Why Organic Matter and Interactive Art

In the heart of organic matter such as bones, bacteria, feathers, ash and dust, there is a sense of purpose and a transcendent stage between life and death. Ironically these elements are easily overlooked in our busy daily life. More than just “objects”, they constitute the rhizome of existence. Their intrinsic philosophical values connect us with concepts of vulnerability and impermanence. They have their own path and are therefore not absolutely controllable. From an artistic perspective, I do not seek to control or transform these biomaterials but rather to observe and become aware of the way nature evolves.

For instance, the deafening calls of cicadas make us aware of their presence. However, their life cycle is full of surprising moments. Cicadas spend most of their life as underground nymphs (seven to fifteen years). When they reach sexual maturity, they emerge at the surface. Then, dangling from a leaf or branch, the cicada struggles from the top of its nymph’s vestment, develops its wings and flies away to mate. It lays its eggs, and then dies.

One day I encountered these abandoned nymphs shells everywhere around my garden. Delicate bodies with transparent wings, I began to collect them and within a few weeks I had collected about 300 nymphs and cicadas. My constant searching opened the door to a camouflaged world of majestic natural beauty, where insects revealed their colourful, unusual and graceful body shapes, dry leaves shone like stars in the midst of nature’s debris, bones exposed their intricate forms where a universe of form and textures just waiting to be exposed.

To honour their presence in our interconnected world, I had been focusing my attention on creating works that invite audiences to *inter-be and co-exist*63 with the work. By this I mean via them interacting with the work, viewers experience how the invisible can become visible and the irrelevant become relevant, through their experience the work becomes complete. The development of these interactive installations has taken a period of two years. During that time a series of experimentations resulted in *Global Veins*, *Buzzing Nymphs* and *WE*.

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Global Veins

I had been gathering fish, rabbit and chicken bones for over a year, collecting and cleaning them, focused my attention on the detail of each small bone. Through this close examination, I perceived how every single piece is beautifully sculpted by nature to perfectly connect into a structure that will protect and support a creature.

![Image: Bone collection](Fig 14)

Bone collection
Photo by Gloria Bohorquez
2013 – 2014

This analysis took me back to Estés’ story, in particular to the following line: *The sole work of La Loba is the collection of bones. She collects and preserves especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world.* La Loba’s action to collect and protect those bones from being lost inspired the creation of my first installation *Global Veins.*

This work has been developed in two different stages. Initially looking for ways to connect the bones into a thread that captured the sense of intimacy between life and death, I hand-wove a red thread of a hundred metres long. Bones were entwined in this long necklace, in the centre of which was a nest made from feathers. At that stage the vision was to continue weaving the thread until it was long enough to envelop a room or to form a gigantic sphere or to extend the thread as far as it could be seen. I saw this work as a piece in constant evolution; therefore my intention was not to define its form or size. In July 2013, *Global Veins* was selected as a finalist for the North Sydney Art Prize *Towards 2020,* and exhibited at the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability.

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64 Estés, Women Who Run with the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman, 23.
Fig 15
*Global Veins*, stage I
Gloria Bohorquez
Wool, feathers, bones and cotton thread
Photo by Gloria Bohorquez
2013
At the end of semester two in 2013, I presented this work to the curator of SCA Gallery, Nicholas Tsoutas. From our discussion a new vision for *Global Veins* crystalized, and in February 2014 I was invited to participate in an SCA Gallery exhibition, which included the following projects: *From a Near Future, Noviadi Angkasapura, Structures and Global Veins*.

To prepare for the exhibition, a second stage for *Global Veins* developed. The vision was to transform the long necklace into multiple threads, interlacing bones, cicadas’ shells, feathers and leaf litter. The challenge to produce over 2km of hand-crocheted thread, sufficient to fill a 13m (L) x 4.6m (W) x 4m (H), gallery space was significant. Having experienced and seen viewers interacting with Cai Guo-Qiang’s installations at GOMA, I was happy to embrace the opportunity to create a large-scale work.
For over a month I worked day and night to put the installation together. The collection and preparation of biomaterials took place in the first three semesters of my research. As I developed the work the following questions emerged: how could I prevent the threads from tangling? How to store, preserve and transport them? By individually wrapping each thread on bamboo skewers then inserting them onto polystyrene boxes, I found the answer to these questions. Once the work was completed the next challenge was to attach those threads to the ceiling? I looked at the option of hiring a scaffold, but since this was logistically far too complex, I decided on the practical option of a mobile platform ladder. Using this for access, I individually suspended 578 threads from the gallery ceiling. The artwork took 10 days to install.

Fig 17
*Global Veins*,
SCA Gallery, installation process
Photos by Gloria Bohorquez
2014
During *Global Veins* exhibition at SCA, I observed viewers interacting with the work, and these were some of the reactions:

- the fear of crossing the line to walk through the installation, to explore and connect. This behaviour makes strong references to the perception of the ‘white box’ museum model. This is an exciting moment in art, because the challenge to destroy that psychological barrier is an opportunity for artists to delve into creating interactive projects;
- once the viewers crossed the line, their initial reaction was the desire to bring their children;
- looking at children walking through the threads, there was a sense of curiosity and concentration revealed in their expressions;
- a message from a dear friend and author:
  "Dear girl, you’ll know best how to describe its goals, but it’s both intricate and vast, it speaks of the biological miracle in the midst of which we live, and the linear dimensions, the space it requires to exist, attach a poem in that tradition:

  There a cicada, pollinating blossom with its dusty tongue
  is the one movement to catch the eye here,
  where the surge to begin life is so dense
  to be uncountable in the space
  occupied by a river stone, or beneath this fallen leaf"
  
  John Bryson

I am humbled by these emotive responses. My intention with *Global Veins* at this stage was to offer viewers a passage to walk through the dense forest of threads, to contemplate the diverse beauty and fragility entwining the existence of all living forms within the Universe.

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Fig 18
_Global Veins_
Gloria Bohorquez
Children’s reactions
Photos by above left by Ingrid Hawke,
Above right and below by Gloria Bohorquez
2014
Fig 19
*Global Veins*, detail stage II
Photo by Gloria Bohorquez
2014
Fig 20
Global Veins, stage II
Gloria Bohorquez
Photo by Gloria Bohorquez
2014
**Buzzing Nymphs**

Dragonflies are agile and diaphanous creatures – one minute you see them and the next they are mystery. Their elegant forms, fascinating colours and fine wing structures keep challenging my mind. How to depict these forest nymphs?

At the beginning of my MFA research in 2013, I created 85 little creatures. However, they were heavy and over-done structures, more like toys. In one of my meetings with Dr Lindy Lee, it was suggested I focus on the movement and sound of the wings rather than the detail of the structures. This challenge kept me observing the dragonflies constantly at dawn and dusk. Finally I desired to detach the wings that were forming part of the little creatures which I had made.
Then I began to connect these light wire mesh structures to tree branches. After that, unpredictable curiosities began to occur. For the first four days, I discovered some wings were twisted on the ground among leaf litter. Close by were distinctive white feathers. Day by day I collected the radiant white feathers and put the wings back in the tree branches. Four days were enough time for the inquisitive cockatoos to realize that these wings were not actually soft and delicious insects. But for me, it was a great compliment.
While photographing the wings, an effect created by the reflection of light over the wings gave the appearance of constant motion. When the wind changed, an extra dimension was added and I started to sense that each set of wings had its own life. It was like listening to the buzz of the dragonflies’ wings.
The hot, dry and windy days passed by until, one morning, a vigorous rain arrived to play its chords on the tin roof of our little house. Later that morning, I started to document the hand-made wings, discovering a poetic language created by the interaction between the wing structure enveloped by the raindrops and shiny green leaves. At that time I realized why it was impossible for me to depict the beauty and fragility of the dragonflies’ wings. I was controlling and copying, two actions that are completely opposite to nature’s spontaneous interconnection. At that instant I understood that – far beyond recreating the wings – by surrendering to the moment and allowing the rain, wind and sunlight to interact with the wire mesh structure, an ephemeral experience evoking a sense of fragility unfolded.
Six months later, *Buzzing Nymphs* was selected as a finalist for *Sculpture At Sawmillers* at McMahons Point (8–16 March 2014). While installing the wings around an oak tree in autumn leaf, I became aware of how camouflaged the wings were compared to the other sculptures in the exhibition. Most works comprised heavy and compact structures, sharp edges and bright colours, which were very obvious for the visitors to view around the reserve.
At that point I started to search for ways to make my installation more evident, by inviting viewers to spray water at the wings, by putting a red arrow next to the number that was allocated to the piece and by increasing the number of wings from 400 to 550.

This installation process took two days. During the second day, while placing the wings around the tree, I started to notice different reactions from the people passing. Initially a woman passed me without making any eye contact. A few seconds later I heard a voice saying “Ahh, I can see it now”. I looked back to find the woman looking at me with a smile on her face. She told me, “I was wondering what you were doing there and I thought, maybe she is gardening... but now I can see little wings all around the tree. How special!” Later, three people were passing by and looked around with great uncertainty. Suddenly one of them pointed at one of the branches and said, “look I can see one little butterfly!” Eventually they realized there were many, everywhere. From those spontaneous reactions I concluded that the strength of Buzzing Nymphs was not about making the installation obvious to the public, but rather in allowing them to discover the multitude and by so doing, share their experience with others.

After the exhibition I received an email from one of the spectators which said: I saw your art recently at Sawmillers and also enjoyed your website focusing on your appreciation of nature. I thought you might like Art Toppling Tobacco, a competition/project that seeks the resources of art to do damage to the tobacco industry (http://www.arttopplingtobacco.com.au/). These words reflected on Botton and Armstrong’s discourse of seeing art as a tool to help improve the way we live. I feel greatly motivated to continue developing my work towards finding ways to inspire and perhaps help others.
Fig 26
Buzzing Nymphs
Gloria Bohorquez
Sculpture at Sawmillers McMahons Point
Photos by Stephen Burns
2014
WE

My final work titled *WE* evolved from the exploration of ancient processes of papermaking and a sustainable mono-printing method developed from kombucha bacterium.

The process of papermaking has been based on the Aztec’s *Papel Amate*, it consists of pounding natural fibres together with water, pressing them to remove the excess water and finally leaving the paper to dry for several days.

While searching for sustainable printing techniques, I learned about kombucha an effervescent tea produced by a symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeast known as *SCOBY*. By studying its properties, I developed a series of works on paper titled *WE*. Artist Viviane Le Courtois has been exploring Kombucha as an art material since 1995; in 2004 Courtois’ invented a non-toxic process using kombucha to create etching plates. Although Viviane’s monochromatic kombucha etchings are powerful and tactile compositions, I felt that creating an etching plate from this bacterium contradicts natures potential for constant change, as the end result becomes an image that can be printed over and over again and therefore controlled. My purpose was to move away from capturing and controlling the bacterium’s image on an etching plate, by using the dry film of kombucha as the direct source to print from. This mono-printing process involves growing and dehydrating the bacterium. To cultivate Kombucha culture, mix a litre of boiling water, 80 grams of raw sugar and 2 grams of green tea. Leave it to cool overnight. Once the mix reaches room temperature, pass it through a strainer and transfer it to a large glass container. Add 200 ml of apple vinegar and a kombucha mother, covering the top with a dry cloth and hold it with an elastic band. Store it in a dry and fresh place at about 18 degrees Celsius. The mix will take from 7 to 15 days to ferment, allowing bacteria to reproduce and grow while taking the shape of the container where it was placed. For my experiment I selected a variety of thin and thick bacteria and exposed them to the sun for about 4 days. When dry some of them seemed like paper and others like elastic skin with apple aroma. The films were then inked and transferred directly onto different handmade papers. Once the printing process was finished I used cooking oil to clean the mold. Please note, this instructions, are for the purpose to cultivate kombucha only printing. Do not follow these instructions for drinking consult further advice.

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Fig 27
Above Kombucha culture, centre kombuche mother, below kombucha dehydrated
Photo by: Gloria Bohorquez
2013
WE Development

The evolution of WE took place in three phases:

- *Impact8* International Printing Conference Poster Exhibition,
- Research Title Development;
- Venice Residency.

**Impact8 International Printing Conference Poster Exhibition.**

![Image of kombucha mono-prints](image)

The first results were three finely detailed kombucha mono-prints. These works were selected to be exhibited as an academic poster for the *Impact8* International Printing Conference, *Borders & Crossings: The Artist as explorer*. Dundee Scotland, 28th August – 1st September 2013. Presenting my research as an academic poster led me to engage with other artists and academics who share similar visions. An example is American artist Suzanne Anker who founded in 2011 a Bio-Art Laboratory at the School of Visual Arts, New York (SVA). *A place where scientific tools and techniques are applied*[^1] to develop sustainable art methods such as a painting palette made from bacteria.

Fig 29
WE Academic Poster
Gloria Bohorquez
Impact8 International Printing Conference Dundee Scotland 2013
Photo by Gloria Bohorquez

is an exploration into the sense of wonder and fragility of the natural world.

A complex world where all living creatures are intertwined into a thread of diversity and sublime energy.

As our point of origin and final destination, nature possesses a power and grace easily overlooked.

This investigation seeks to find sustainable ways to create handmade papers based on the Aztec’s papel amatle technique, consisting of pounding natural fibres together.

And to explore the properties of kombucha fungus to develop non-toxic printing methods.
Research Title Development

In the early stage of my research, while observing the overflowing details contained in each kombucha monoprint, I was transported to contemplate the vastness of the Universe and so I titled the thesis as follows:

X, YOU, HE, SHE, IT

WE

My intention with this name was to describe the net of mutuality to which we belong. Later in May 2013, while developing the poster for Impact8 this name became too complex. Then I focused on the word WE, consequently the poster and thesis were titled WE. Although the word is simple and strong, I feel this name did not capture the meaning of the research in its totality, there was something missing. While exploring Cai Guo–Qiang’s exhibition Falling Back to Earth, specifically the mirror image created by the reflection of animals, in Heritage, something triggered my imagination. This double image permitted me to understand how within the last two generations there has been a movement away from WE to ME.

ME

It was then that Cai’s mirror image allowed me to understand the essence of my research question, which is based on the nature of our relationship to the world, and so the titled arrived.
Venice Residency

The very essence of our existence is to be born from dust and to return to it. This principle takes me back to my primary school time. My teacher used to take her students to church on Ash Wednesday. One by one, all the girls obediently formed a line waiting for the priest to draw a cross on our foreheads with his cold and wet finger covered in ash, while reciting, *Dust you are and dust you will become*. Reflecting on this childhood memory and exploring Zhang Huan’s ash paintings, and personal journey. I began to collage kombucha monoprints, ash and corn hand made papers. This resulted in a series of three works. A house like form has been introduced on each work, through this process I intended to immerse my identity into a journey of transformation and integration to become part of the cycles and seasons that constantly occur in the evolution of nature.

Fig 30
WE series, stage I
Gloria Bohorquez
kombucha monoprints and mixed media on hand made corn paper and Kozo Japanese paper
Above panel 26cmx120cm, centre a below panels 70cmx120cm each
2013
Discussing these works with Dr Lee, we agree to continue this process on a much larger scale. I then produced a series of four collages, due to the different weight of the papers in contrast with the burned areas, the work become very fragile and started to disintegrate. I began to find ways to make them stronger.
In February 2014, while at a Residency in Venice Printmaking Studio I planned to push this series further, to go out to the margin, to break the rules, to open new options away from their original size of 100x65cm each. I fused the series onto a Fabriano paper scroll of 1.5m (W) x10m (L). At this point, the work seemed to be a disjointed central image with a heavy formal white frame around it.

On my return to Sydney the next step was to break the frame, to reach this goal, I draw by hand circles of different sizes on corn, or cabbage tree palm papers and collaged them on top of the existing work.
Then I introduced holes of different dimensions and shapes, by burning the paper with a soldering iron. In this way I aimed to give the work a sense of unity.
Due to its large-scale I was only able to visualize the entire image just a day before the installation, as while working in my studio I was only able to unfold 5 metres of the work at any one time. Although this situation concerned me greatly, in many ways it was an ideal experience, as it encouraged me to trust my instinct to allow the work to evolve freely. The final image, suggested a cosmological conversation of interconnectivity.

The vision for its installation, was to suspend it from the ceiling, letting the paper hang freely suggesting a canopy like form, allowing viewers to walk around and to look up, to discover the works’ multiple layers of textures, forms and subtle warm colours. Lights shone through the various holes and pin pricks of light rays were projected on the walls and floor evoking the stars on a clear night in full moon.
Fig 37
WE installation
Gloria Bohorquez
SCA Gallery Graduation Show 2014
Photo By: Ian Hobbs
WE Installation
Gloria Bohorquez
Kombucha monoprint collage on fabriano and corn hand made paper 10m (L) X 1.5 M (W)
SCA Gallery Graduate Show 2014
Photo by: Ian Hobbs
Conclusion
Nature has imbued my life, from a childhood in the Cordillera of Colombia to adulthood on the steep sandstone cliffs among the spotted gums of the Ku-ring-gai Chase. Here my everyday life develops around weather cycles; low and high tides. These aspects have made me aware of our interconnectivity, therefore the cause and effect of our actions. So here my MFA research began. This journey opened my soul to the contemplation of the close symbiotic relationship of all living forms within the universe. That is why the *Indra’s Net* metaphor and Paul Leslie Thiele’s Book *The Indras Net and the Midas Touch* marked the point of departure for my research. The poem *La Loba* and Mircea Eliade’s philosophy guided me to a world of fantasy and supernatural power to explore the intangible forces entwining life and death. To reinforce this vision, I studied artists whose works encouraged sustainability or evoked a sense of mystical powers. These were: Lyndal Jones’ *Avoca Project*, a sustainable model from which local and international communities can learn to develop alternative ways to live in harmony with nature; Ólafur Eliasson’s *Weather Project* – a transformative and interactive installation where viewers experienced the intangible and celestial power of the universe; Cai Guo-Qiang’s large-scale installations invite viewers to reconnect with nature; Zhang Huan’s art – a journey of self-discovery and personal transformation and Shinji Turner-Yamamoto’s *Tree Project*, integrates rituals, trees and religious sites to create installations suggesting a sacred-like aura.

For me their artworks inspire a sense of poetry in the way they use biomaterials, philosophy and rituals. This led me to develop an ethos of sustainable and ethical techniques to create large-scale installations where the interaction of viewers is fundamental to complete the artwork. My main objective is to invite reciprocity from the audience. For example in *Global Veins* as viewers walk through the forest of threads – an innocent discovery of a feather, a bone, an insect led to surprise, then recognition, then an assumption of some knowledge, some acquisition of the meaning and spirit of the natural. *Buzzing Nymphs* a multitude of camouflaged wings installed around tree branches and dense grasses, invited viewers to interact with others, as they discovered these little creatures all fusing with rain, wind and sun. *WE*, reflects the vibrant diversity of the universe, by suspending the work from the ceiling, viewers were able to walk through a canopy of circular forms reflecting lights in different directions to experience a sense of universal dynamism. These installations explored a childhood happiness of discovery.
To conclude my MFA research has been a physical and meditative journey, to collect, collage and transform in order to create. In many ways this process reflects the journey of life in which we search, struggle and learn in order to evolve.
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