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Beauty and Blemish

The environmental aesthetics of lichen in contemporary art practice

Master of Philosophy Research Thesis (Creative Arts)

James Cook University Australia, *Nguma-Bada* Campus, Cairns.

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Abstract

This practice-led research project focused on lichen as the primary artistic vehicle through which to explore a duality between creative contemporary art practice and the mutualistic symbiotic relationships of nature. By interrogating notions of beauty and blemish in relation to the aesthetic qualities of lichen, reciprocal philosophical research and studio practice was undertaken, incorporated through a series of artworks and exhibitions. This exegesis positions the concept of the beauty of lichen as a counterpoint of blemished surfaces within the environment. Lichen's botanical and symbiotic relationship underpinned the innovative creative strategies applied through contemporary art making practices, testing ideas of dual consciousness. New knowledge and understanding of lichen, as an often-overlooked natural form, emerges as a beautifully blemished organic form. Almost four years of research involving multiple field trips, photographically capturing and harvesting lichen growing on built environment and natural surfaces, underpinned the creative processes and research for this project.

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

Establishing Directions

There are four components that establish the direction of this introduction. This includes the exegesis outline that references brief summations accounting for each chapter. This is followed by foregrounding the research questions driving the project, stating the primary question and two subsequent sub-questions. The remainder of this chapter addresses linguistics through defining disparate terminology and use of language.

Exegesis Outline

The primary objective for this exegesis is to visually explore the disparity between notions of beautiful and blemished surfaces within the natural environment, through visual art using lichen as the central focus. The aim was to produce a contemporary body of work that fused together the visceral qualities of these oppositional counterpoints using contemporary mixed media applications. The objective was to engage an audience in an experience where they were immersed in the visual challenge of differentiating between what is considered pretty and or unattractive. Intentionally, challenging how one's interpretation can be shifted upon closer investigation and inspection. Hence, this study sought to establish new knowledge through research that interrogated notions of beauty and blemish. Philosophical views of environmental aesthetics have positioned the concept of beauty as a counterpoint of blemish. Lichen's botanical and symbiotic relationship has underpinned this practice-led research. Innovative creative strategies tested ideas of dual

consciousness to enable the development of new visual knowledge and understanding to emerge in a body of contemporary works of art.

Within the compilation of seven chapters, specific information pertaining to three primary creative arts aspects are collated. The introduction presents Chapter One where the exegesis is outlined and the established research questions for this project are addressed. The important role that language and terminology played in establishing the disparity of beauty and blemish lead the discussion in this chapter. Chapter Two, Three and Four come under the heading of situating the concepts. These are formally broken down into the Biological Context (Chapter 2) where the scientific awareness of lichen is examined, followed by the Philosophical Context (Chapter 3) positioning the aesthetic acknowledgement of environmental art and engagement. Closing with the Disciplinary Context (Chapter 4) where study and research of other key artists, both historically and within a contemporary platform (nationally and internationally) are examined. It is the practice of these artists that allowed for the development and refinement of my own arts practice. These three chapters that situate the concepts through the contexts relied on the methodology of practice-led research, followed by studio practice, which was ongoing and reciprocal.

Following on from these contexts, the third primary overarching domain, the Researcher's Creative Practice, encompasses Chapters Five, Six and Seven. These chapters do the heavy lifting in regard to delivering the methodology (Chapter 5) required to achieve set goals through both researches using mixed media research methods. This is followed by, Unfolding the Creative Process (Chapter 6) where the experimentation and application of non-traditional materials used in unconventional ways are extensively addressed. The final chapter of the Researcher's Creative Practice presents the Collective Bodies of Work (Chapter 7). From prior to commencement of this research Masters, through to the

completion of the exegesis, the journey of artist as researcher is visually presented through preliminary exhibitions to group shows, culminating in the articulation of the final exhibition, Beauty and Blemish. Drawing together the project, the conclusions and the reflections in Chapter Eight provides annotations about the process and future directions.

Research Questions

The primary objective of this exegesis is to demonstrate that the initial research questions aligned with the outcomes of the project. The following research question directed and guided the development of this exegesis throughout both arts making practice and research.

Can a body of contemporary visual art evoke surprising transformations which make the viewer reconsider the perception of beauty and blemish?

The final exhibition produced fourteen contemporary visual artworks that allowed an audience to closely examine the surface treatment using lichen through innovative materials which were surprising. Because of the contemporary choice of media, it allowed for viewers to actually consider this often-overlooked botanical object and perceive it in a creative yet surprising way. Half of the artworks in the final exhibition were sold, which benchmarks the success of creating beautiful artworks with blemished surfaces.

The following sub questions added additional layers to the research:

Can objects appear to be aesthetically beautiful and yet repulsive at the same time?

As well as; What aesthetic qualities within the natural environment either enrich or disrupt our relationship with nature?

These two additional sub questions were explored through the juxtaposition of materiality and technique and are unpacked through the paper at length in specific chapters.

The whole concept of the work in this project relies on disparity with things being at odds.

Hence, the starting point for this thesis is to unpack and analyse foundational concepts

relating to terminology. Why was this project titled, Beauty and Blemish and not Beauty and

Ugliness? Originally, the project began as, Beauty or Blemish. The 'or' was changed to 'and' because the terms were not in competition with each other, they relied on each other (Chapter 8). By pinpointing the disparity through deliberate language choices, the journey had a stable beginning from which research and practice could evolve.

Defining the Disparity

The Beauty and Blemish project, deliberately implements the poetic device of alliteration, by applying two consecutive words, starting with the same consonant. By semantically foregrounding the pairing of these terms, the relationship that occurs establishes oppositional terminology. This dichotomy aligns with the direction of this exegesis where ideas, images and objects that are created are initially perceived positively with pleasure, then upon reflection impose a negative or retractive response. Additionally, terms connecting to and relating to beauty and blemish that share opposite connotations were considered through pairing of antonyms. Ideas and examples of this include terms such as, appealing – appalling, alluring – abhorrent, divine – dreary, exquisite – execrable, gorgeous – grotesque, magnificent – mediocre, resplendent – repulsive, stunning – shocking, wonderful – woeful. Consideration of these concurrent alliterations were significant and led to ideas in the creation of artworks produced. Additionally, these associations are what linguist Mark Dingemanse identifies as ideophones. Ideophones are marked words depictive of sensory imagery found in many of the world's languages. They are noted for their special sound patterns, distinct grammatical properties, and sensory meanings. Accordingly, these words rely on repetition to create sounds and set a mood (Dingemanse, 2012). These paired terms are not symbiotic. However, each relies on their direct counterpoint for

counterbalance which directed the individual creation of specific artworks in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition.

Language and terminology

When the term beauty is investigated for antonyms the adjective ugly is most predominantly identified as presented in Figure 1. Beauty is also identified as an antonym of blemish, however, in the search for synonyms of ugly, the term blemish does not appear to have any linguistic associations. Hence, blemish is not aligned to being ugly which underpins the research for this exegesis that supports that beauty and blemish are counterpoints, unlike the oppositional ideologies of beauty and ugliness. This line of research, using natural objects to establish beautiful blemishes, is an area of knowledge not previously established or foregrounded.

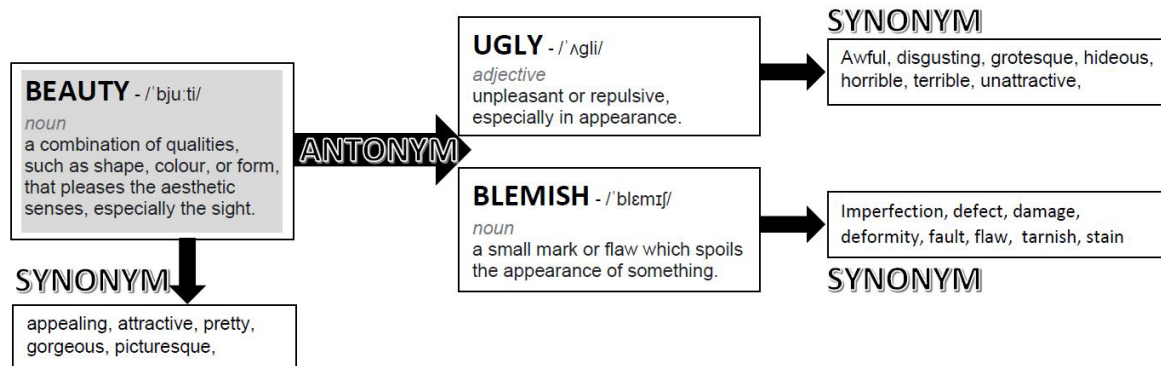


Figure 1: Synonyms and antonyms diagram of the term beauty created by Leanne Shead

Based on the terminology presented in Figure 1, the research undertaken proposed that a blemished surface, and particularly one produced in nature (through the growth of lichen), may not in fact be ugly. By extension, what is interesting to note is the idiomatic expressions, beauty mark or beauty spot. Here, both terms, mark and spot, are foremost in the definition of blemish. Hence, the quandary of interpretation occurs when lichen appears as marks and

spots on surfaces but are not necessarily deemed ugly. They can merely be perceived as surface traits which can be appealing, attractive, pretty, gorgeous and picturesque. The Cambridge Dictionary defines blemish (/ˈblɛmɪʃ/ noun) as a small mark or flaw which spoils the appearance of something, and (*verb*) to spoil the appearance or quality of something (Cambridge, 2022). This relates to lichen, which could be considered a blemish upon environmental and or man-made surfaces. Does lichen present as a mark or a flaw? Its presence and growth can be aesthetically, objectively, and subjectively considered in relation to whether it spoils the appearance of the object it covers. It may in fact beautify the surface with its unique colouration and textural qualities.



Figure 2: Cartoon by Cairns artist Greg Dwyer, 17 March, 2021. Reproduced with permission from the artist.

Interestingly, the adjective pulchritudinous, originates from the Latin term pulchritude and refers to beauty. Whilst the phonetic pronunciation sounds ugly and distasteful, it infers the exact opposite, grandiosely meaning physically beautiful. Like this term, this practice-led research culminates in an exhibition using language and artworks to establish visual congruency. Now that the project title, Beauty and Blemish, can be understood and deliberately positioned for the project, the research continues by situating beautiful and blemished concepts within three specific contexts: The Biological Context (Chapter 2), Philosophical Context (Chapter 3) and the Disciplinary Context (Chapter 4).

SITUATING CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 2

Biological Context

As a research artist, developing an understanding of the biology of lichen was an integral requirement to strengthen not only my scientific knowledge of my primary object, but to also heighten my creative avenues of production. The biological context supported artistic development of my processes.

Lichen Biology

This arts inquiry investigated how lichen can be used as an artistic and creative vehicle to challenge notions of beauty through a contemporary body of artwork. Lichen is pronounced 'like-en' or 'litchen' (to sound like kitchen) and both pronunciations are correct. Lichens are classified by their fungal partner and so belong to the fungal kingdom. Lichen is a complex lifeform but are not plants. They are a composite organism, incorporating a symbiotic relationship between a fungus, algae and sometimes a cyanobacteria (commonly known as blue-green algae). The fungus provides a protected environment for the algae or cyanobacteria, which in return, provides energy for the fungus through photosynthesis (Pike, 2018). Lichen is therefore a unique, blended organism in our midst, and they grow on every continent on Earth; on soil, and adhering to trees, dead wood, stone, and other material structures. They can be found at sea level, surviving saline conditions, and at all elevations through to alpine altitudes and climates (Lepp, 2011). This nature of facing and resisting adversity displayed by lichen, also drew me to this object as a source of inspiration.

Often overlooked for their delicate beauty and value, lichen is also a food source for wild fauna, a nesting material, fodder for domesticates, a natural dye, and a source of traditional medicine (Margulis and Barreno, 2003). They are a key indicator species, which means the presence or absence of lichen growth indicates the health of ecosystems. Lichens are also sensitive air quality indicators and highly responsive to pollution. Study on lichen growth shows that most species in temperate areas grow 0.5– 8 mm a year, but that according to sun verses shade conditions, temperatures, and substrate texture, both seasonal and annual growth variation can be large (Hale, 1973).

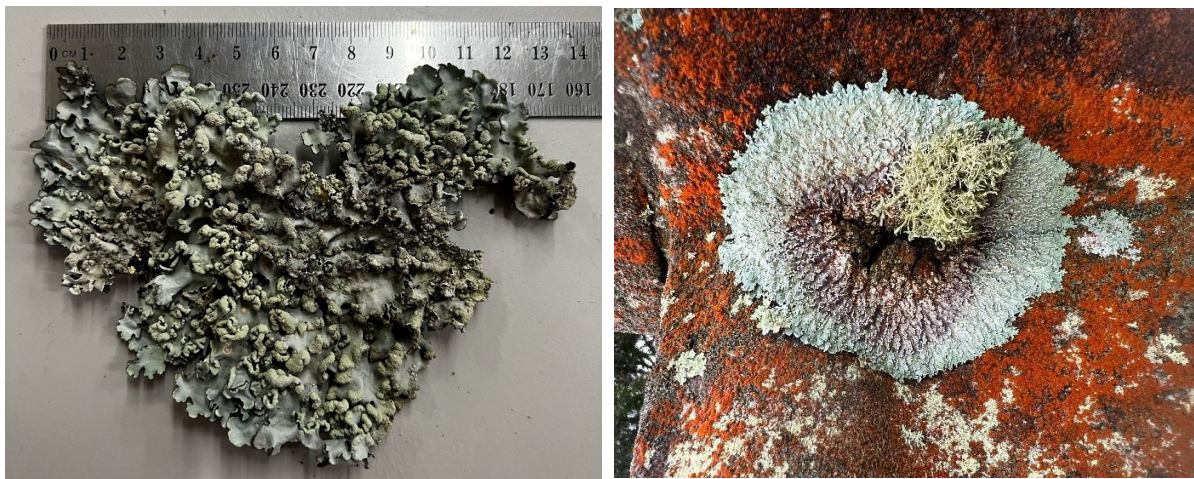


Figure 3: [LEFT] Large, harvested specimen of lichen from Sydney measuring 13cm. [RIGHT] Example of all three types of lichen. Foliose is the larger spread, grey-green specimen, fruticose is the light green shrub-like specimen and the Crustose specimen is orange. Photographed by Leanne Shead on a headstone at Eastern Suburbs, Memorial Park, Matraville, Sydney, New South Wales on 8 April 2022.

There are three distinct forms of lichen. These include the foliose (flattened leafy), fruticose (coral-like shrubby or bushy) and crustose (crusty). This project culminates in reciprocal research and studio practice based primarily on the foliose lichen by emphasising and employing its visual qualities. The foliose choice is based around two specific reasons. Firstly, its body (the thalloid) can be easily harvested from substrates having two distinguishable sides, as they attach to surfaces via fungal tissue (medulla), and an upper horizontally spreading branched body. Secondly, because of foliose lichen's aesthetic structure, which

aligns with beautiful and blemished qualities. The branched and folded surface textures are intricate, with ridges and bumps to developing leafy like lettuce lobes which are aesthetically pleasing. These non-flowering, flattened lobes were photographed, drawn, painted, cast and sculptured for the creation of bodies of contemporary artwork as discussed further in Chapter Six.

The significance of lichen being attached to surfaces as a blemish is botanically known as a biofilm, as highlighted by American lichenologist Thomas Hawkes Nash III (b.1945), in his writing, "The Environmental Role of Lichens". He asserts the major role these apparently insignificant organisms play in shaping the physical environment of our planet as biological weathering agents and therefore nutrient recyclers (Nash, 2008, p. 274). They smother surfaces to protect them and hence are a healthy form of the ecological web and have been for an estimated 400 million years, with fossil lichen from the early Devonian Period recovered in Britain (Taylor, 1995). Understanding lichen as a biofilm within the landscape is also imperative. Lichens and all biofilms share many similar physiological traits. The two are rooted in their lifestyle, where these microbes and their extracellular products attach themselves to a surface and grow in a community structure (Carr et al, 2021). Biofilms are characteristically a thin but robust layer of mucilage (adhesive solution, gum or glue) adhering to a solid surface and containing a community of bacteria and other micro-organisms. This idea of cells sticking to each other and to a surface (substrate in the presence of lichen) has transferred literally into the practical component of this study. Using paint, glue, impasto medium and resin to stick and attach photographs, drawings, lichen samples and other objects to the surface of either canvas, paper and or wood. Lichen requires a stable substrate (a base on which an organism lives) upon which to exist and grow. These can be natural surfaces and include rocks, trees and soil or man-made

structures such as glass, plastic, concrete, and metals. Both natural and man-made objects were visually interpreted in the artmaking processes of this project to expose beautiful yet blemished surfaces using biofilms.



Figure 4: TOP - [LEFT] Gluing flattened bark pieces onto wooden board. [RIGHT] Gluing lichen with bark onto a canvas corner using PVA glue. BOTTOM – [LEFT] Attaching lace doilies onto wood using PVA glue. [RIGHT] Setting lichen in resin to adhere to surface. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Lichen comes in numerous colours, relating to the photosynthetic algal element, and Nash describes the biology related to colour (Nash, 2008). Research identifies that chlorolichen is a lichen that has a green alga for its photobiont, whereas cyanolichen has a cyanobacteria for its primary photobiont and is therefore darker in colour. From a creative arts perspective, the diverse colour range exhibited by lichen was visually explored. Multiple visitations to

locations and sites (figure 22) evidences the rich varieties of colours, ranging from bright yellows, red and orange to muted green, black, silver and grey, as noted in field trips to rainforests and graveyards. Artworks were developed by colour matching hues and tones from photographs and recreated through drawing and painting mediums to capitalize on the connection and representation of lichen colouration for this project.

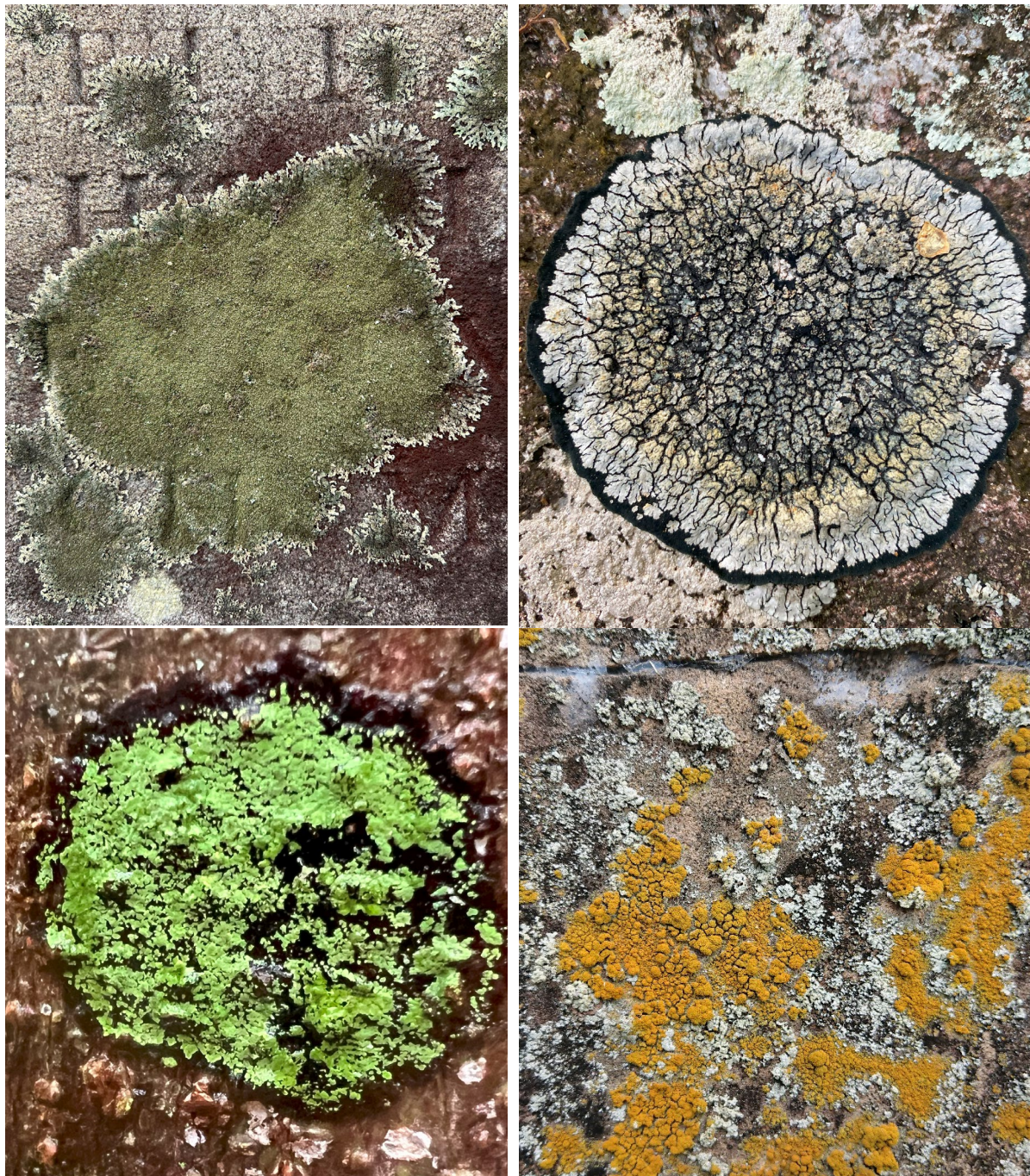


Figure 5: TOP - [LEFT] Green crustose lichen growing on a headstone in Sydney. [RIGHT] Grey with black lichen from Behana Gorge. BOTTOM – [LEFT] Bright green lichen from Atherton. [RIGHT] Orange crustose lichen on a headstone in Cairns. Photographed by Leanne Shead

Symbiotic Relationship

The additional trait and quality of lichen that underpins this project is the symbiotic relationships between fungus and the algae. Symbiosis is defined as a close, prolonged association between two or more different biological species. This relationship can be symbiotic (mutualistic), where both parties involved benefit from the interaction, or it can be parasitic, where one party benefits while the other is harmed (Brusowankin, 2022). To fully explore the correlation between beauty and blemish using lichen, the biology and ecology of lichen requires reflection. Since 1867, lichens have been thought to be a symbiosis of only fungus and algae, and the word symbiosis was specifically coined to describe lichen. During the 1800s, developments in electron microscope technology began to reveal that a bacterium was also present in all species examined, meaning lichen are better described as a mutualistic organism, with each of the three components reliant on but also offering some benefit to the others. Thomas Nash, in his publication, "Lichen Biology", identifies the multi nature of lichen as the most successful form of a mutually benefitted organism in nature (Nash, 2008). This multi layered relationship personally connects with ideas of family, their interrelationship and partnership. This links to the original concept development where after the passing of my father, visits to the cemetery serendipitously drew me to the lichen growing on headstones. After relocating to Far North Queensland in 2012, for me, the landscape change from the inner cityscape of Sydney to a tropical landform, offered a new scope of visual interest. It was within the Cairns region that the biological growth and colonization of lichen on headstones, rocks and trees, acting as a biofilm became an essential creative centre of interest, both artistically and theoretically. The landscape became the primary catalyst and was utilized to create contemporary art that strongly reflected the beauty of both urban (graveyards) and natural (rainforest) terrains.

Using the textural quality of lichen to create artworks also set up a mutualistic association, where the object and the artist worked in a symbiotic relationship. The fundamental physicality of lichen and the biological relationship examined, allowed for the paralleled relationship of the two terms, beauty and blemish. With all works in the final exhibition, Beauty and Blemish, presented in pairs. Hence, the attributes of lichen instigated the creation of contemporary art practice to present beautifully blemished surfaces as forms of art.

SITUATING CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 3

Philosophical Context

Having established the biological context of lichen, this chapter addresses the notion of its aesthetic importance through a philosophical lens. It makes connections between schools of thought about ideas of beauty and positions lichen within these parameters.

Blemished Beauty

The historical and ancient work of Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c.540 – 480 BC) and his “Unity of Opposites”, benchmarks ideas based on the interconnectedness of contrary states in life and in the world (Graham, 2007). Opposites are reality, and their interconnections are real, but that the correlative opposites are not identical to each other establishes a Heracleitean etymology which underpins the project, Beauty and Blemish. Additionally, recognised as a Kant specialist, Robert Wick’s research and study into the philosophical writings by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) based on beauty and biology as well as fine art supports this project (Wicks, 2014). Biological growth on a real object provides a compelling reminder that the object exists in a complex and dynamic environment (Sumner, 2001). Of these biological agents, lichen flora form some of the most beautiful and intricate patterns, often completely covering an exposed rock or tombstone. Robert Walker Sumner’s reference to the beauty of lichen through its pattern structure aligns with this direction. While he aims to recreate lichen using computer generated models, it is his appreciation of its beautiful and intricate shape that shares a commonality with this project. Beauty of

lichen as it appears as a blemish on surfaces in the environment benchmarked ideas for creative art.

As established in Chapter One, blemish is perceived as a small mark or flaw which spoils the appearance or quality of something, it implies flaws, defacing, and disfiguration. The term spoil lends itself to align with notions of damage as a synonym of blemish. Lichen may at first appear to blemish natural and man-made surfaces, however, can we find the beauty in its organic shape and texture? It is relevant to note that there is little direct artistic research based on identifying blemishes in the natural environment to present as artworks. Therefore, in the case of this project, the term blemish was positioned as a counterpoint of beauty and was situated within previous research based on what is perceived as unattractive or ugly.

The concept of the aesthetics of beauty has been positioned and argued extensively throughout time. However, the main schools of thought surrounding beauty have either been established subjectively or objectively, with diverse philosophical writings underpinning both perspectives. Such writings are evident as far back as ancient Athens, by the classical Greek philosopher Plato (c. 428-347 B.C.) in his *Symposium*, a philosophical text dated c. 385–370 BC. Plato established an objective approach through the theory of forms, and the beauty of particular objects in their participation in the form (Aquileana, 2015). Alternately, the western German philosopher Immanuel Kant presented his Disinterestedness approach, which subjectively changed the perspective of beauty around c.1770. Both approaches remain influential today given that each offers their own philosophical understanding of their notion of beauty. Whilst Plato and Kant established theories of beauty, it is the philosophers who followed that started defining beauty using its oppositional counterpoint (ugly), which are of interest. For this project, ugliness has not

been addressed in relation to an oppositional relationship to beauty. What was considered is the term blemish –using lichen as a visual representation—and how this naturally occurring material can be identified for its aesthetically beautiful qualities. Accordingly, the project sought to ask what considerations have been given to the relationship of beauty and blemish. What is blemish as opposed to ugly? As established by Rhett Diessner, if it is the outer which plays a prominent role in establishing beauty, then where do we position blemish when creating an artistic outer surface in visual artworks (Diessner, 2019).

Environmental Aesthetics

In scholarly terms, this project can be situated within the emerging field of environmental aesthetics. The aesthetic dimension of our experience of the natural environment is an expanding field of research. However, there is a significant gap in research surrounding beauty and blemish in the natural environment, which positioned this project as significant in presenting new studies and directions through creative arts. Researcher, Dr Emily Brady's discussions are influential regarding the distinctive theory of aesthetic appreciation of natural environments. Her work on environmental aesthetics through oppositional counterpoints of what she coins positive aesthetics value (something we admire) and negative aesthetics, align her views that ugliness is really just a variety of beauty (Brady, 2010, p. 27). Brady sets out to establish the aesthetic value of ugliness as a negative feeling against the congruent, positive aesthetic value (Brady, 2010, p. 28). This project supported the fact that there is value in negative aesthetics in nature when lichen is considered as a blemish, rather than something we can admire (Brady, 2010, p. 31). Brady's belief that aesthetic properties are relational, and response-dependant assisted to direct this project (Brady, 2010, p. 29). How does an audience react to nature? Is their response varied

and reliant upon individual aesthetic ideas of beauty and blemish (ugly)? These questions directed the established research questions. Furthermore, Brady's connections to non-aesthetic perceptual properties, such as colours, textures, forms and arrangements of elements are expressed qualities of lichen that were utilized artistically.

When Brady discusses early aesthetic theories by the likes of Aristotle and Kant (who deliberately express ideas based on the arts in relation to perceived beauty and ugliness), her arguments suggest that representational and creative aspects of artworks can render unpleasant subject matter attractive or beautiful (Brady, 2010, p. 31). It is here that ecology overtakes the aesthetic and the basis of representational qualities through art emerged using biological samples of lichen. Valuably, Brady also states that ugly (blemished) things can be new and remarkable in our experience, evoking curiosity (Brady, 2010, p. 34). It is through this experience of ugliness that we build a relationship with nature (Brady, 2010, p. 39). Creating innovative artistic works using lichen can evoke a subjective experience for an audience, making them curious as to the use and placement of lichen within contemporary works of art. Specifically, connecting to the established sub-research questions of, *Can objects appear to be aesthetically beautiful and yet repulsive at the same time?* and *What aesthetic qualities within the natural environment either enrich or disrupt our relationship with nature?* Brady presents three types of classification for ugliness: relative, inherent, and apparent (Brady, 2010, p. 36). It is within the category of apparent ugliness (a formal appreciation where things are considered in themselves, without comparison), that this project positions lichen. Finally, Brady confirms that when ugliness is mixed with fascination and curiosity, we are engaged by ugly things (Brady, 2010, p. 37). The aim of this practice-led research was to explore and heighten this notion using contemporary visual art by combining the perceived blemishing [ugliness] of lichen with perceptual qualities that are

response-dependant. Hence arousing surprising transformations within artworks. This extends environmental aesthetics and our experience of environments beyond what Brady calls a comfortable aesthetic experience (Brady, 2010, p. 39). This project’s final exhibition, Beauty and Blemish sought to capture this ideal where audiences were engaged with and comfortably connected with the lichen artworks as an experience.

To contrast the aesthetic engagement presented by Dr Emily Brady, the work of Associate Professor Allen Carlson (b.1949,) was considered in relation to nature appreciation by questioning aesthetic relevance. To appreciate nature, Carlson established eight items as noteworthy benchmarks to explore in relation to understanding environmental aesthetics. Figure 6 summarises the framework for nature appreciation by Carlson and items supporting ideas researched in this project.

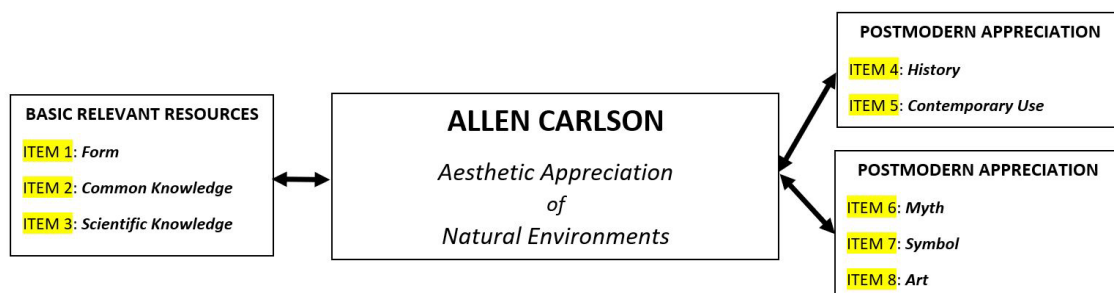


Figure 6: Nature appreciation; natural environmental model based on Carlson 2002 designed by Leanne Shead

The following review of Carlson’s framework addresses specific items in relation to the project. The first item, form approached from a formal appreciation of aesthetically moving combinations of shapes, lines and colours directly correlates as Carlson argues that lichen, naturally growing on tree and rock formations, does have a combination of aesthetically formal compositions. Texture, colour and shape are foremost functional, while also possessing an aesthetic relevance, and that their form can be appreciated in this natural

state (Carlson, 2002, p. 64). When examining Carlson's second (common knowledge) and third (science) items, he continues to assert that scientific knowledge of nature is as vital to its aesthetic appreciation as is common knowledge and is an extension of common knowledge (Carlson, 2002, p. 65). The symbiotic relationship of lichen based on algae and fungi, and the variations of lichen types, are enhanced and changed from a superficial to deeper aesthetic appreciation of lichen (nature). This supports Carlson's line of argument that scientific knowledge enriches the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature that common knowledge initiates (Carlson, 2002, p. 66). It is Carlson's eighth item, art, that bears the heaviest weighting on this research through the use of the natural environment in art. Driving my arts practice, multiple artistic platforms were employed including visual resources (of trees and rocks with lichen growth) both digitally and through mixed media, by incorporating specimens from the natural environment to become part of the art (harvesting lichen and embedding it in resin to capture and exhibit its visceral qualities).

Environmental Arts Engagement

In contrast to Carlson's position of natural science being the catalyst for aesthetic appreciation of nature in art, Spanish philosopher Professor Marta Tafalla (b.1972) repositions one's thinking by considering that works of art could teach us how to aesthetically appreciate nature. In her paper, "From Allen Carlson to Richard Long: The Arts-based Appreciation of Nature", Tafalla advocates that works of art can teach us to aesthetically appreciate that which we have not created ourselves; nature (Tafalla, 2010). To put it another way, some works of art could help us to appreciate natural objects, phenomena and particularly environments in more detail, in greater depth, and with

increased knowledge (Tafalla, 2010, p. 492). Finding value and strength by combining both Carlson's scientific and Tafalla's artistic creation approaches based on nature, loomed large to support the creation of work for this project.

In the mid-1960s, American philosopher, Arnold Berleant (b.1932) began developing a theoretical position where artworks became secondary to the appreciative experience of art. This in turn led to established notions of aesthetic engagement. Contemporary art no longer primarily appeared to rely on beauty, as traditionally benchmarked by Immanuel Kant. Kantian aesthetics, which treats aesthetic experience as the subjective appreciation of a beautiful object is rejected through Berleant's aesthetic engagement. Contemporary art achieves this through the incorporation of new materials and practices using surprising subject matter (Berleant. 2013, pg.2). In Arnold Berleant's book; *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on environmental aesthetics* (2002), multiple concepts are discussed such as experiencing environment (aesthetic perception) and appreciating environment (aesthetic value). It is this combination of experience and value which underpins environmental aesthetics. The relevance of the work of Berleant aligned with directions in this project because aesthetic engagement lends itself particularly well to the wide interest in environmental aesthetics. This is where environmental appreciation utilizing artworks exploring lichen led to studio practice. Knowing that this approach supported theoretical value in accommodating artistic innovation, and where the artworks had the capacity to illuminate the experience of appreciation. As Berleant states, it is a unified theory of the arts and the aesthetic appreciation of nature where environmental aesthetics has emerged both as a theme for artists and as a subject of aesthetic inquiry (Berleant, 2013. pg.4).

Understanding the philosophical development of ideas through the research of aesthetics, and more specifically environmental aesthetics, primarily through the work of

Brady and Carlson, allowed for the establishment of a connection to environmental arts engagement. Comprehending that the environment has the capacity to enrich our ability to creatively draw upon it as a source of visual inspiration, whether it be perceived as beautiful or blemished was a priority and part of the process. Primarily based on lichen, seeing the beauty (or blemish) within landscape was pivotal in driving ideas for the creation of work. Additionally, having an audience acknowledge this natural form in contemporary art was just as important.

SITUATING CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 4

Disciplinary Context

The term disciplinary for this chapter refers to art production, art criticism, art history and aesthetics all of which influenced the research for this project. These four arts-based discipline areas were explored through various work by artists that have either inspired and or impacted the development of my own art practice. Examining the discipline of art for this project is divided in three distinct areas. Historical traditions, followed by contemporary Australian artist practice and then the wider research of current international perspectives. It is worth noting that there were or are very few artists working directly with lichen, which supported the gap in research for this project. This ultimately allowed for the development of my own innovative and unique creative expression. Key artists and their works however, paralleled the approaches of experimentation through similar application of media and techniques. It was the artistic discipline of these artists that provided scope for my own thinking to develop into creative work.

Traditions Challenged

Using reverse chronology, one can learn from past masters who have explored blemished surfaces to coalesce against ideas of beauty. Artists, Caravaggio and Da Vinci, were starting points to represent artworks that creatively embodied or challenged the notion of beauty and blemish in visual arts through the genres of still-life and portraiture. Additionally, the specific work, *Ophelia* by Millais, underpinned the development of figurative work produced for the Symbiosis Exhibition (Chapter 7).

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571 – 1610)

Italian Baroque master, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, created his only still-life artwork, *Basket of Fruit*, in c.1596-1601. This work, at first glance initially presents a realistically fresh beautiful arrangement of flowers and fruit in a basket. It is not until closer inspection we note the blemishes in this beautiful image. The worm-eaten, insect-predated infestation, and generally less-than-perfect condition of the fruit challenges an audience through congruent visual representation, as one of the earliest accounts of an artwork that deliberately explored the blemished surface. Much has been made of the deteriorative nature of the basket's contents. The traditional still-life arrangement appears beautiful but on closer inspection it is blemished. *Basket of Fruit* is described as having links to fading beauty.



Figure 7: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *Basket of Fruit*, c.1596-1601. Oil on canvas. 46cm x 64.5cm. Ambrosian Library, Milan.

The blemishes, intentional and central to the theme, are not brought on by precipitous mishap but by nature (Potter, 2003). The idea that vanity of nature drew a comparison between notions of beauty and blemish was a permanent ideal in this project. It gave passage for me to parallel ways lichen could be augmented on surfaces and was intentional

and central to the project. Caravaggio's deliberate blemishing of the bountiful and beautiful fruit in the artwork does not render it ugly. It merely makes one take a closer inspection of the objects to appreciate the blemishes as imperfections. Hence, all works produced followed this format using deliberate blemishing to encourage closer examination.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519)

Leonardo da Vinci was a renowned Renaissance artist, who challenged notions of beauty by deliberately blemishing skin through identifying contrary notions of beauty. As seen in Figure 8, there is evidence that Da Vinci walked the streets, stalking beauty's opposite. There was a moral sense of the goodness of beauty, while physical monstrosity was the outward skin of vice (Jones, 2002). Da Vinci's studies of grotesque heads reflect his aesthetic response to this experience. While Da Vinci's practice did not overtly impact the direction of this project, the notion that he sought to find the opposite of beauty within his world directly connected to the artworks produced. The concept that people view imagery and react to it was important to the process of artworks constructed in Beauty and Blemish. The series of realistic, pen drawn self-portraits with lichen blemished deposits (Figure 30) produced for the Symbiosis Exhibition, focused on not wanting to represent portraiture beautifully.



Figure 8: Leonardo Da Vinci, (1452-1519) *Five Grotesque Heads, and Three Heads of Men in Profile*, c.1510-20. Pen and ink, red chalk on paper. 21.8cm x 15.3cm. Royal Collection Trust, England.

John Everett Millais (1829 – 1896)

British artist, Sir John Everett Millais's painting, *Ophelia* (1851-52) additionally supported ideas in the *Holding on Series*, Symbiosis Exhibition (Chapter 7, figure 64). His work depicts Ophelia, a character from William Shakespeare's play Hamlet, singing before she drowns in a river. Rather than the storyline, it is the compositional attributes of this well-known image that aligned with my work. The topographical approach of the figure against a natural setting was emulated as well as the green colour palette and organic textures. Moreover, it was the reference to lamenting that directed the connection to my work. Whilst the figure in Millais' work floats, letting go. My figure holds on, gripping onto the memories of my father's passing.



Figure 9: John Everett Millais, (1829-1896) *Ophelia*, 1851-1852. Oil on canvas. 76cm x 112cm. Tate Britain.

Jackson Pollock (1912 – 1956)

The art movement of Abstract Expressionism in the 1940's and 1950's was first documented by American painter Jackson Pollock and was coined Action painting. This technique employed the pouring and dripping of paint onto a horizontal surface. Pollock believed that art was derived from the unconscious, and he saw himself as the essential subject of his painting, judging his work and that of others on its inherent authenticity of personal expression (O'Connor, 2023). This method of loosely dribbled paint underpinned work developed from the start to the completion of artefacts. However, what shifted was the method used. This including moving from vertical surface orientation to horizontally laying the work down. Firstly using a brush to dribble paint to explicitly pouring the paint from height, directly from the container to achieve natural paint splatters as background layers.



Figure 10: Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) during action painting. (O'Connor, 2023)

Australian Perspectives

The contemporary world of art allows artists the freedom to expand upon and not only be limited by specific genres. Artists have access to a diverse platform of imagery to select to communicate their own artistic intentions. Work by the following Australian artists influenced ideas and processes in my own practice.

Patricia Piccinni (b.1965)

Examination of the contemporary work of Australian, Melbourne-based artist Patricia Piccinni, highlights her artistic intention to shock audiences with blemished surfaces and objects. In maintaining the idea of being at odds, Piccinni overtly explores blemished surfaces to subvert beauty. She is keenly interested in how contemporary ideas of nature, the natural and the artificial change our society (Arthur, 2022). While her practice stems decades through diverse platforms, she is best known for her hybrid, figurative sculptures rendered in silicone and hair (Oxley9, 2022). Piccinni's *Curious Affection Series*, from 2018, challenges conventional notions of beauty, perfection and the ideal. It invites the viewer to look beyond the strangeness of the art and sense a deeper connection (Patch, 2018). Her specific work, *Vanitas*, 2012 presents a re-creation of a traditional Flemish still-life arrangement of a vase of flowers, where the flowers are replaced with punched human hair follicles into a canvas surface. What we are meant to perceive as beautiful has been congruently transformed into a visceral almost phallic representation with orifices. Ideally designed to engage the viewer, we are either repelled or intrigued by the surface treatment. My work, *Amelioration* created for the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition (Chapter 7) were primarily based on this work by Piccinni. A still-life arrangement created using dehydrated lichen and twigs set amongst small, crocheted doilies with imitation pearls. Like Piccinni's

Vanitas, this work is stunning and considered beautiful until closer perusal of the materials used in its construction is thoroughly examined. No phallic representation is emulated, but rather the idea of a floral arrangement using non-traditional materials in unconventional ways (Chapter 6) was applied to challenge the relationship of beauty and blemish through the innovative use of media.

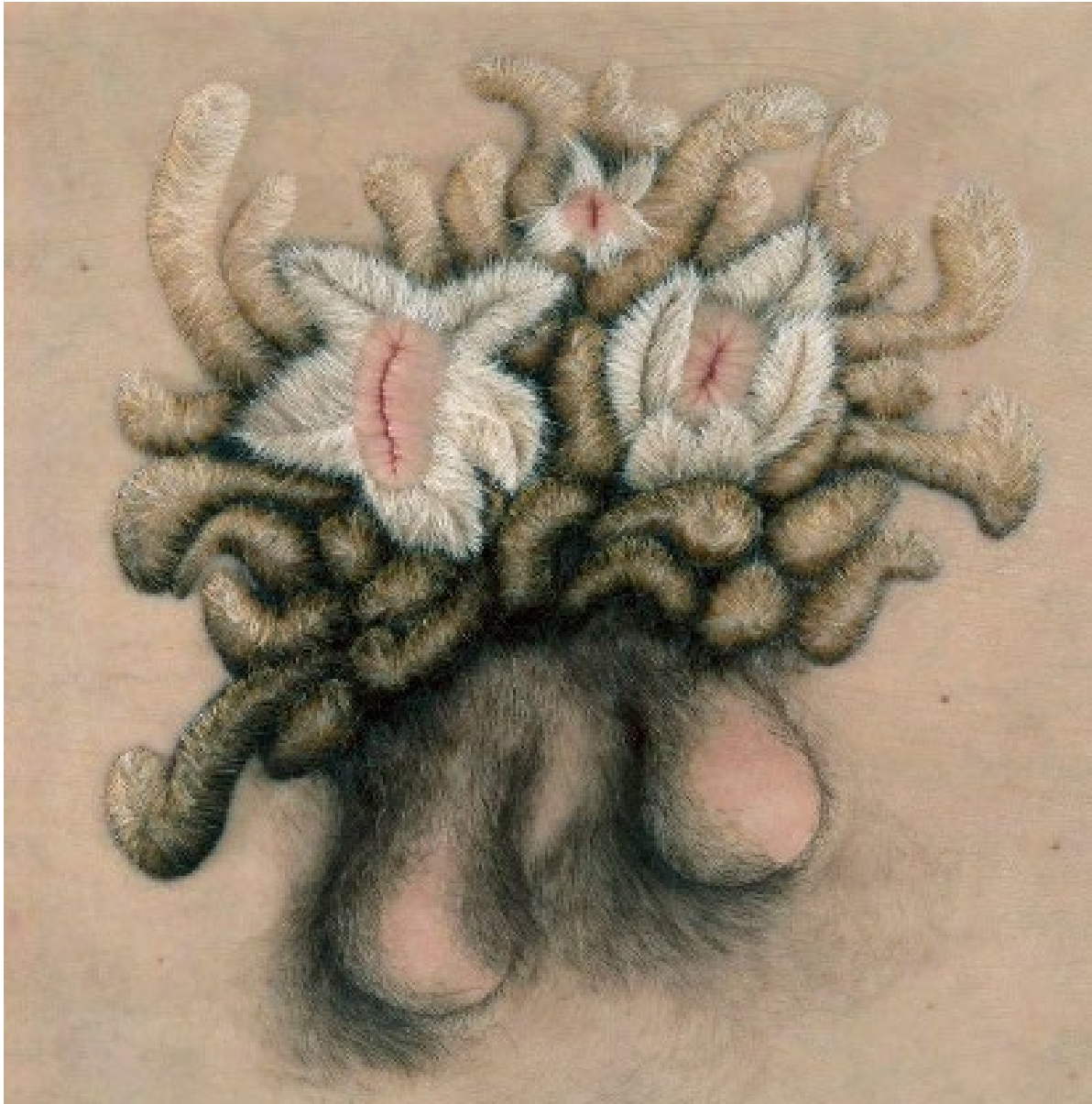


Figure 11: Patricia Piccinini, (b.1965) *Vanitas*, 2012. Silicone, fibreglass and human hair 70cm x 70cm x 7 cm. Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

In her Master's research paper, Yasmin Pol da Rosa (From grotesque to sensitive: interview with artist Patricia Piccinini), it was evident Piccinini had direct connections with disparity based on beauty (Rosa, 2021). Piccinini stated, "I could make a work which is very attractive in the same way that I could make a work which is very repulsive. However, I make a work which has got a little bit of both. So, you have beauty, which generally means something that's related to humanity, and repulsion. And they are both intentionally in there (Rosa, 2021, p. 3). It was this familiarity and strangeness that was heightened in the production of work for this project.

Additionally, Piccinini's use of silicone applied to canvas to create circular mounds in pools, layers and drippings, almost skin-like in their appearance, randomly arranged on the surface, instigated experimentation using resin to create my own beauty spots. Her spontaneous surface treatment, using a liquid that sets, aligns with experimental processes for this project. Resin replaced silicone, and similar drips, layering and pooling on surfaces occurred with intentionally embedding lichen into surfaces to deliberately blemish the works. Lichen tends to grow in round configurations, akin to circular shapes.



Figure 12: Works by Patricia Piccinini [LEFT] *Travels Near the Skin*, 2012, Silicone over linen board. 90cm x 120cm [MIDDLE] *Determined by Relative Motion*, 2012, Silicone over linen board. 90cm x 120cm [RIGHT] *Determined by Relative Motion*, 2012, Silicone over linen board. 90cm x 120cm. All private Collection.

John Wolseley (b.1938)

Using the environment as his canvas, Australian artist John Wolseley produced drawings and paintings that explore the beauty in environments that are not traditionally perceived as beautiful, but flawed: “I see myself as a hybrid mix of artist and scientist; one who tries to relate the minutiae of the natural world” (Wolseley, 2022). This duality of artist and scientist paralleled my practice-led research through lichen and art. Wolseley’s artistic practice exploits the importance of tactile involvement in capturing the landscape. Rubbings, collage and mixed media approaches all connect the paper surface with mark making. He states, “I like to think that the large works on paper on which I assemble these different drawing methods represent a kind of inventory or document about the state of the earth. I want to reveal both the energy and beauty of it” (Wolseley, 2022). It is Wolseley’s abstract documentation of the natural world which aligns with artistic exploration, even inventory (collection of lichen samples) that linked to my project. Australian art historian, Ian McLean, refers to Wolseley as an eco-artist. McLean writes that, in Wolseley’s paintings, nature is a much more quotidian and phenomenological place (McLean, 2002, p. 6). Basically, ecological art lends itself to a contemporary form of environmental art which is primarily concerned with local or global environmental situations. Visitation within local environmental areas in Far North Queensland provided source materials, both physically and visually (photographic documentation) to be documented and presented as artworks. Wolseley’s mixed media approach of incorporating found fragments of bark, lichen, leaves, feathers and insects into the fabric of his work, as well as rubbings, collaging and drawing influenced my artistic studio practice. Two specific series based on studies of lichen by Wolseley are “*The Colonizing of Lichens in Tasmania and Valdivia*”, 1996 and “*Lichens and Liverworts on leaf, Mt Kinabalu*”, 2001 (Figure 13). Wolseley’s placement and arrangement of sections was a

consideration applied in the formal construction and positioning of found fragments in my works.



Figure 13: TOP – John Wolseley (b.1938) *The Colonizing of Lichens in Tasmania and Valdivia*, 1996. watercolour, pencil, charcoal, and photocopies on 6 joined sheets 111.4cm x 233.4 cm (overall). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Australia. BOTTOM - John Wolseley, (b.1938) *Lichens and Liverworts on a Leaf, Mt Kinabalu*, 2001. Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.

Carolyn V Watson (b.1980)

Emerging Australian contemporary artist, Carolyn V Watson from Brisbane Queensland, primarily works in sculptural forms, creating images that gravitate towards the surreal and bizarre. Within this realm, she also pushes the boundaries and notions of ugliness, set against beautiful materials. Pretty beads and antique lace doilies add surface treatment to her forms. Additionally, juxtaposing an element of beauty against the blemished, often natural surfaces which often incorporates bones. I had the opportunity to work with this artist at the Peninsula Art Educators Annual Refuel workshop in Cairns, Queensland on 27 May 2023, learning about her practice. Whilst Watson utilised doilies in a sculptural format, it was her intention to use this beautiful material to incorporate fewer appealing configurations that connected to my work. Deliberating juxtaposing ideals that in this sense links to my work. The doilies were used, not only as circular metaphors for lichen, but to beautify the surface as a blemished addition. Two specific works, from Watson's *Let's Play Pretend* series, May 1-15, 2021, titled "*Mirror (a history of energies)*" and "*Spotlight*" (figure 14), both use lace doilies to blemish the surface as adornment. The sculpture brings the natural and the artificial into a disconcerting coalescence: bone and earthy porcelain are overlaid with an intricate network of lace, and bio-organic forms (a human hand, cunicular ears) take on an eerie pallor in assemblage with each other (Polson, 2021). It is this coalescent sculptural quality of surface treatment that aligns with my work, *Beauty Spots* (Chapter 7). While Watson uses the lace doilies in a fashion that mimics stretched skin over bone and mask like coverage, it is the disparity of how these beautiful lace surfaces pull towards notions of beauty as a blemished surface that connected this artist practice to my own. Allowing the natural neutral colours of the doilies over the base structure was a similar

practice employed, except my natural substrate was the raw wooden slabs as a form of assemblage.



Figure 14: [LEFT] *Mirror (a history of energies)*, (detail), 2021, glass and porcelain spheres, epoxy clay, doilies, crochet thread, porcelain hands, bone, 31 x 70 x 40 cm, courtesy Anthea Polson Art [RIGHT] *Spotlight*, 2021, glass and porcelain spheres, epoxy clay, doilies, crochet thread, sheep leather, felt, steel, foam form, bone, mirror, 75cm x 100cm x 60 cm, courtesy Anthea Polson Art.

Judy Watson (b.1959)

Judy Watson is an Australian, Waanyi multi-media artist and her specific artwork *Saltpan*, 1992 had pertinent surface creation which articulated a parallel between her practice and mine. She created artworks by laying sheets of canvas on the ground and applying pigments and water and then the colours bleed and pool to form surface treatment. Her seductive aesthetic ameliorates the potency of the grief that leaks from her imagery. “My work is often veiled with objects encoded and hidden, slowly coming to the surface” (Martin-Chew, 2020). The use of the term ameliorates piqued my curiosity and upon further research it was discovered that the meaning of the word to implied

improvement and betterment. Using language and following on from my interest in the opposite delegation of terms, the term pejoration was discovered, with both words being incorporated into titles for artworks displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. Like Watson, my pooling had to be completed by laying my surface down and keeping the pre-treated [ink spray] paper flat and horizontal until it dried. During the application process, the paper was occasionally tipped to extend some of the pooling to exaggerate the shapes in my work.



Figure 15: Judy Watson, (b.1959) *Saltpan*, 1992. Powder pigment and pastel on canvas. 180cm x 110cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Melinda Schawel (b.1970)

Working primarily with paper, I discovered the work of Melbourne-based contemporary artist Melinda Schawel. After contacting the artist, she sent me a signed copy of her catalogue from her Monograph Series. Her works on paper explore organic natural forms, not explicitly lichen, but they have an abstracted sense of their shape and texture. Her use of stippling, was a technique that flourished in my own practice. Whilst Schawel pricks her surface to create holes, mine were drawn using markers and paint.



Figure 16: TOP - Artist in studio 2020, photo by artist. BOTTOM - *Chasing Waterfalls*, 2020, ink and pencil on perforated paper. Private Collection

International Perspectives

In the search to find contemporary artists creating work based on lichen or ideas associated with the theme of beauty and blemish, an international journey was required.

Annette Arlander (b.1956)

The current work of Finnish artistic researcher Annette Arlander was an exciting international discovery. Her article “Looking at (Overlooked) Lichen: Visual Journaling as part of meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees”, from 2022 aligned with the direction of my project. Her extensive collection of visual field notes directed my compilation of photographic evidence of lichen on site. She stated, “compile the images into a series of grids that give an idea of the huge variety and beauty of lichen” (Arlander, 2022). I started to follow this directly and found it invaluable in organising my ideas for visual interpretation of lichen. Because of lichen’s diverse colour range, shape and texture, when viewed in a grid it heightens lichen’s connection to beauty. Whilst Arlander’s work does not extend to build her knowledge and understanding of lichen, (unlike my studies), it simply supported an aesthetic appreciation of their variety.

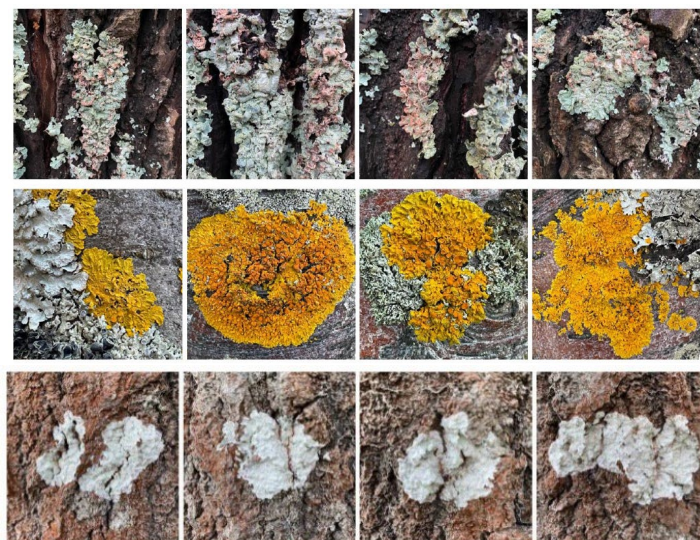


Figure 17: Annette Arlander. (b.1956), three collages of her grid formation of documented trees with lichen from the article, *Looking at (Overlooked) Lichen*, 2022.

Amanda Cobbett (b.1972)

Primarily using thread, Amanda Cobbett is a British contemporary textile artist who makes embroidered sculpture of nature, including lichen growing on branches. She is probably one of very few artists that use lichen as the primary vehicle for their creative endeavours. While Cobbett fabricates her lichen using fibre, for my practice, collecting real specimens of lichen growing on branches and displaying them in their natural state was my aesthetic approach. Like Cobbett, the beauty of how they spread on the wooden surface is considered art itself.



Figure 18: TOP - Amanda Cobbett's sculpture using thread, 2022. BOTTOM – Amanda Cobbett's sculpture of five in a Perspex case, 2022. Collection of the artist.

Kathleen Ryan (b.1984)

American, New-York based artist Kathleen Ryan, produces bodies of work that exploit surfaces using innovative materials. These render objects blemished to heighten our senses through the utilization of beautiful materials. Ryan's 2019 series, *Bad Fruit*, is a specific relevant example of how her works (sculptures of fruit) appear decayed and mould ridden. As shown in Figure 19, the sections that are deliberately made to appear blemished are in fact created by the placement of beautiful gems. These precious objects are deliberately arranged on the surface to encapsulate signs of decay as a blemished surface. The idea that Ryan plays with making the surface attractive deliberately draws in the audience. Insistent on their physicality, Ryan's sculptures recast found and handmade objects as spectacular (Ocula, 2022). Ryan's deliberate combination of disparate media and objects is intriguing. These materials are often at odds with the subjects they represent. For example, delicate, sensual grapes are rendered with heavy, utilitarian concrete; mold colonies are composed of semi-precious gemstones (Ocula, 2022). For my own practice the use of glitter, imitation pearls and rhinestones were subtle additions used to embellish surfaces.



Figure 19: Kathleen Ryan (b.1984). *Moldy Lemon*, 2019. Turquoise, amazonite, Ching Hai jade, jasper, quartz, magnesite, lapis lazuli, malachite, tree agate, sesame jasper, hematite agate, fluorite, ruby in zoisite, serpentine, marble, amethyst, obsidian, onyx, black tourmaline, bone, horn, freshwater pearl, coral, glass steel pins on coated polystyrene. 49.5cm x 72.5cm x 44cm. Collection of the artist.

Lizan Freijisen (1960 – 2024)

The international work of contemporary Dutch artist, Lizan Freijisen addressed notions of nature, deemed blemished or unattractive through her art making processes. She was a visual artist who found beauty in something most of us do not see, fungi. Whilst fungi was her surface blemish of choice, it was how she interpreted and presented it as a soft, woolly, fluffy surface that paralleled my ideas of wanting to beautify surface. She saw numerous aesthetic variants in fungi whimsical shapes with their multitude of textures and colours. "I want to draw attention to the unwanted, to transform the everyday into something of value" (Wade, 2018). She reimagined images of the things many find repulsive such as mold growth, fungi, leakages, and water stains on walls, and then crafted them into coloured carpets, wall hangers and blankets (Wade, 2018). Whilst Freijisen focused on mold, her textiles were inspired by stains. She was fascinated by fungi and our obsession to eliminate mold and moisture spots from our everyday environment (Mora, 2018). This alignment with the perception of these natural marks or blemishes being re-created to be viewed from a beautiful aesthetic strongly connects to my project. By turning moisture stains into textiles, Lizan Freijisen focused on these spots and visualized their beauty (Agency, 2022). Similarly, my bodies of work focused on lichen to visualise its beauty. Changing something perceived as ugly into products of value was Freijisen's way of recycling what is already present. Embracing imperfection is in fact a response to the over controlled society in which we live (Agency, 2022). It is interesting to note that the shapes, colours and pattern, whilst abstract, connect to natural environmental growths on surfaces.



Figure 20: Lizan Freijsen. (1960-2024) [LEFT] *Corner Carpet in Red*, 2020-2021. New Zealand wool. 90 × 45 × 45 cm. [RIGHT] *Pink Fungi Carpet*, 2021, New Zealand wool. 135 × 135 × 1 cm. Collection of artist.

The significance of this project, in relation to practice-led research, involved investigating and experimenting with contemporary art practice and creating artefacts that challenged an audience to question notions of beauty taken from our natural environment. Researching the practice of both historical and contemporary artists (nationally and internationally) has provided scope for learning. It was evident, that there is a lack of research or empirical data (both written or created) that explores the juxtaposition between beauty and blemish in visual art pertaining to lichen. My research, based on blemishes and how they are perceived as tarnishes or imperfections, particularly occurring within the natural environment is an area of focus. My work aims to build new knowledge and significance from an aesthetic viewpoint. The aforementioned discipline of the thirteen artists, and of course others not exclusively addressed in this chapter, supported my understanding and creative execution of this exegesis.

THE RESEARCHER'S CREATIVE PRACTICE

CHAPTER 5

Methodology

Different methodological approaches were considered in the early stages of this project to identify which would be the best fit. Whilst research methodology requires the identification, selection, processing and analysis of information, it was the qualities of practice-led research (as a way of gaining knowledge and understanding embodied through artefacts) that suited the purposes of this project. Also commonly referred to as arts-based inquiry, this style of research imbued.

Practice-led Research

As stated, the methodology that was the most appropriate research model for this creative arts project was practice-led research. Positioning my understanding of this methodology as a reciprocal relationship between research and creative practice, allowed for both theoretical study and studio practice to align (Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, 2009). By examining the aesthetics of beauty through contemporary visual art, reciprocal art making processes were employed. This duality of research (both philosophical and botanical) based on lichen and creative art making approaches established new knowledge based on the dichotomy of beauty and blemish as outlined in Chapter One.

My understanding is that there are five main components associated with practice-led research. These include research, the world (as inspiration), experimentation (of processes), experiences (on site), and acquiring knowledge. Each of the components

interconnect, overlap and pivot in this philosophical approach to learning. As presented in Figure 21 below, the ‘backward and forward’ relationship of the five components are anchored by observations of the world; and in this case of this project, lichen growing in places visited in Australia, primarily in Far North Queensland locations.

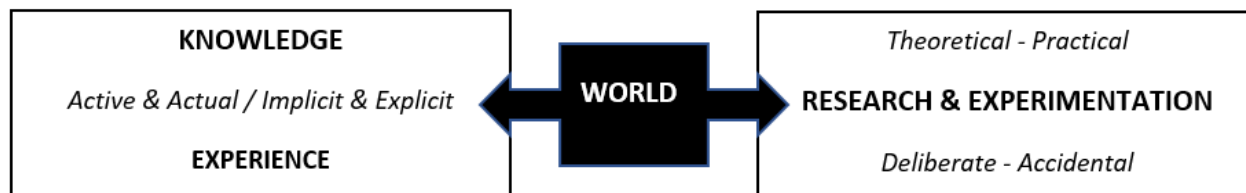


Figure 21: Practice-led research model developed by Leanne Shead displaying the backward and forward relationship of the five components.

Being made aware that methodology does not set out to provide solutions especially with practice-led research, but is about procedures and techniques, was highly relevant to the direction of this project. Processes and approaches surrounding research based on lichen was physically and artistically processed using contemporary visual art approaches. These included diverse mixed media sculptural devices through contemporary practices. This is expanded upon in Chapter Six, Unfolding the Creative Process through non-traditional materials in unconventional ways.

One established research objective for this specific project incorporated the ability to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve a new insight into it (Kothari, 2004). Over the four years of this study, (August 2020 to present), fourteen field trip visitations to multiple sites occurred. With a primary focus on lichen, photographic documentation as well as harvesting specimens of lichen growing in situ were undertaken. This allowed for a gained familiarity of lichen as a biological form, hence becoming the primary phenomenon of research. Visitation to sites allowed the collection of data and included urban locations such as cemeteries, specifically, the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery, (North Cairns), Pioneer

Memorial Park, (Matraville, Sydney, New South Wales) and Morgan Cemetery (South Australia). Additionally, natural sites and landscapes such as the Daintree Rainforest, Tablelands Region, Far North Queensland National Parks, and local Cairns locations also visually provided new insight into lichen as a documented form growing on surfaces. Allowing for a sustained familiarity of its visual qualities within both urban and rainforest biomes. Figure 22 presents a timeline that outlines the various locations utilized in the collection of data for this project. Following this is a chronological pictorial account of the fourteen different site visitations which occurred between 2020 and 2023 (and ongoing). This included three cemeteries, four National Parks, two Tablelands Regional areas, three local Cairns sites, one state location and one international location.

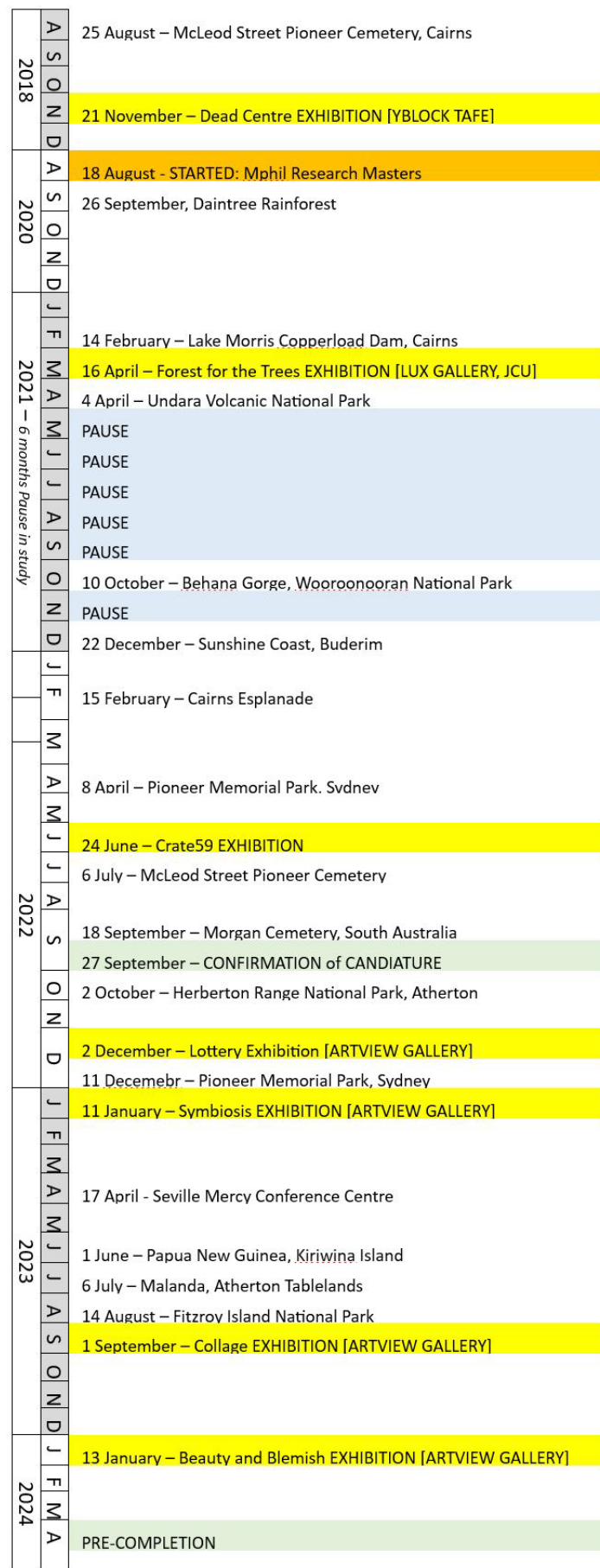


Figure 22: Timeline of the project journey including pre-research activities, exhibitions, and field trips to site. Note the inclusion of a 6 month pause in study.

The following pages indicate deliberate field trip locations and supporting photographic images documented at each site by the candidate, Leanne Shead.

**McLeod Street
Pioneer Cemetery,
Cairns**

Multiple visitations

Photographed
25 August 2018
(prior to Project)

Photographed
6 July 2022



**Daintree Rainforest,
Mossman**

Initial site visit for
the project

Photographed
26 September 2020



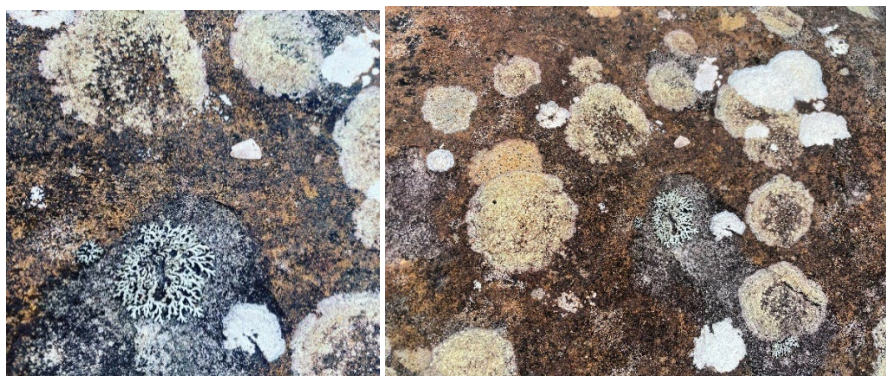
**Lake Morris,
Copperload Dam,
Cairns**

Photographed
14 February 2021



**Undara Volcanic
National Park**

Photographed
4 April 2021



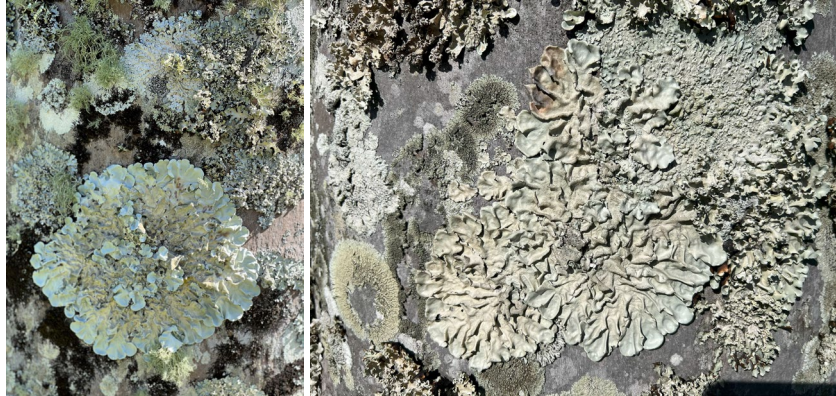
**Behana Gorge,
Wooroonooran
National Park**

Photographed,
10 October 2021



**Sunshine Coast,
Buderim**

Photographed
22 December 2021



Cairns Esplanade

Photographed,
15 February 2022



**Pioneer Memorial
Park, Sydney**

Two site visitations

Photographed
8 April 2022

Photographed
11 December 2022



**Padstow Heights,
Sydney**

Photographed
9 April 2022



**Morgan Cemetery,
South Australia**

Multiple cemetery
location in Morgan

Photographed
18 September 2022



**Herberton Range
National Park,
Tablelands Region,
Atherton**

Photographed
2 October 2022

Photographed
9 April 2023



**Seville Mercy
Conference Centre,
Earlville, Cairns**

Photographed,
17 April 2023



**Papua New Guinea,
Kiriwina Island**

Photographed,
1 June 2023



**Malanda, Atherton
Tablelands**

Photographed,
6 July 2023



**Fitzroy Island,
National Park**

Two site visitations

Photographed,
14 August 2023

Photographed,
14 January 2024



With the diversity of lichen specimens encountered during the project, new insight was achieved through experimental studio practice based on lichen samples (visual and real). Contemporary mixed media art practice allowed for artworks to push boundaries of creative surface treatment, questioning if the works could be perceived as beautiful or blemished, or both simultaneously.

Mixed Research Methods

This project applied mixed research methods, as practice-led research in creative arts is known to utilize this multi-modal approach. Such methods include qualitative research, experiential learning, and reflexive praxis. The following paragraphs address how these mixed research methods were specifically suitable for this project.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research, based on a phenomenological focus, non-numerically presents as data obtained by the researcher from first-hand experience. Extensively varied field trips offered this first-hand experience of lichen in multiple landscapes. This project relied upon this method where unstructured inquiry and approaches of collecting data (lichen) ensued. The data collection strategy or form of data types used to draw upon were primarily observation. Of the four observational types established by Brigitte Cypress, one is of participant as observer where the researcher participates in the activity at the site (Cypress, 2018). Notably, non-human sources became forms of data such as documents and records (field notes or journals), audiovisual materials (photographs and video), metaphorical visual narratives and ritual objects. Hence, the data collection methods included documenting notes by journaling experiences using a visual diary on site. Afterwards, back in the studio

this collected data, such as harvested samples of lichen, photographs and video evidence of lichen in situ were explored further. This aligns with Cypress’s unstructured, observational, qualitative research modes. My knowledge, experience and experimentation (as seen in Figure 23) of lichen has emerged through observations and interactions with the environment (world) as researcher.



Figure 23: Visual examples of qualitative research through journaling, photography and collection via harvesting. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Experiential Learning

The concept of experiential learning in practice as creative art inadvertently directed research. This project had its origins in what Barrett claims as “emotional, personal and subjective concerns; it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit and experiential knowledge” (Barrett, 2007). In 2018, the journey of lichen specific studies began through a pedagogical visual art teachers workshop titled, the Dead Centre Project. The original visitation to the McLeod Street Cemetery in Cairns developed a tacit connection between the aesthetic qualities of lichen growing on headstones and an emotional connection between my deceased father. Consequently, upon

learning through research about the symbiotic relationship of lichen, this empowered my personal and subjective concerns throughout the art making process.



Figure 24: A collage of photographic images of various lichen seen on headstones at the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery, 25 August 2018. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

This initial visit and production of a body of work based on lichen (discussed in Chapter 7) became the precursor for applying for this Research Masters course in 2020. The original motivators for these studies and the evolution of artworks were built upon a personal and emotional connection. Maternal and paternal connections become symbolically and personally aligned with the lichen. The symbiotic relationship of fungi and algae become a subjective motive and visual narrative explored in the bodies of work produced for this project. Figure 25 and Figure 26 on the following pages are two pairs of work, one from each exhibition, *Symbiosis* in 2023 and the final exhibition, *Beauty and Blemish* in 2024. The artworks focused upon personal and emotional connections with my parents using lichen as the main catalyst. The exhibition didactics have been included to demonstrate experiential learning processes.

Symbiosis Exhibition, January 2023



Leanne Shead
2023

Paternal and Maternal

Synthetic lace table runner, acrylic paint, impasto, harvested lichen set in resin, collaged photographs, pen and marker drawings on watercolour card, rhinestones, wooden dowel
3400cm x 33cm

10A	10B
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**PRICE \$600
each**

These elongated contemporary mixed media works are meant to resemble long tall rainforest trees and how lichen blemishes their surface. I have created them to pay homage to my parent.

My father, Craig Neil Mason Gronförs, and my mother Veronica Cecilia Gronförs (nee Peters) Lace was used as the foundation for a dual purpose. Firstly, my mother used multiple lace tablecloths and doylies in our family home, and I remember their intricate patterns.

Additionally, because lace is often perceived as being pretty and beautiful. Lace also reminds me of the fractal arrangement of the foliose lichen.

The lichen was harvested off headstones from the Pioneer Memorial Park, Matraville, Sydney (my place of birth), then left to naturally dry, attached to the lace and then cast in resin. There are twenty pieces of lichen on each work which is a number I work to in my work. Foliose lichen only grows 0.5mm to 1mm a year, therefore the size of some of the samples would be over one hundred years old.

Time had forgotten them as they blemished the substrate where they resided.



Figure 25: *Paternal and Maternal* artwork from the Symbiosis Exhibition, 2023 including the artwork didactic. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Beauty and Blemish Exhibition, January 2024



Leanne Shead

2024

S[MOTHER]ed Love Series

Mixed Media: Lace intaglio print, digital prints, lace and paper doilies, acrylic paint, resin cast lichen, lace tassel, markers, melaleuca wooden frame.

LEFT: ***Daughter*** 72cm x 93cm x 2.5cm

PRICE \$95

RIGHT: ***Mother*** 74cm x 90.5cm x 2.5cm

PRICE \$95

Lichen tends to smother the surface upon which it grows, aligning it with ideals of blemishing through marking the surface. Whilst the term 'smother' tends to have a negative connotation, this is not implied in these works. I link the idea of smothering with lichen as a covering more so to protect. My mother was and still is an amazing protector providing so much love.

Smother: envelop, overwhelm, surround

Figure 26: *S[Mother]ered Love Series* artwork from the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition, 2024 including the artwork didactic. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Reflexive Praxis

Primarily, this project was founded by practice-led research, considerable attention was also given to the reflexive approach of investigation. This required iterate praxis processes of thinking, reflecting and being reflexive to generate and articulate new knowledge and being a researcher who crafts procedures integral to the environments in which they operate – environments of which they are also a functioning constituent (Attia and Edge, 2017). Writers, Attia and Edge reference that “reflexivity involves a process of on-going mutual shaping between the researcher and research” (Edge, 2017) . Development involves an increase in awareness of such processes of interaction between organism and context. As researcher, the practical and theoretical work showcases a strong creative interaction by shaping lichen and the notion of beauty and blemish through this reflexive process employing deliberate and accidental experimentation. In addition to this, the work of Ross Gibson also addresses the idea of dual consciousness that needs to be activated when creative arts are used for scholarly research (Gibson, 2010). This supports the reflexive, backward and forward relationship between creation and understanding which underpinned the components stated in my practice-research model (Figure 21). Throughout this project, there has been a constant shift between knowledge and experience, then back to research and experimentation.

In summary, the project Beauty and Blemish was based on practice-led research methodology. It employed multiple research modes through experimentation and creation, as well as reflection upon the world, both physically and emotionally. The primary goal through the creation of bodies of work is to engage with the experience and gain new knowledge. Ultimately, artistic studio practice was undertaken to develop artifacts (artworks) using lichen as the primary catalyst through reciprocal academic research.

THE RESEARCHER'S CREATIVE PRACTICE

CHAPTER 6

Unfolding the Creative Process

To appreciate the creative practice and processes undertaken in this project, an understanding of what the characteristic of contemporary art implies needs to be established. Contemporary modern art is often abstract, experimental, and process based (Bloomfield, 2024). With this definition presented, the artworks created for the body of work abstractly used and creatively explored lichen. This was achieved through deliberate experimental processes employing non-traditional materials such as resin, impasto, doilies and found object (both natural and man-made). Hence, research provided scope for artistic expression that situates this exegesis as innovative, and places it in a wider community of creative practice. Additionally, contemporary modern artists often seek to challenge traditional values and conventions, and their work can be provocative and controversial (Bloomfield, 2024). Whilst artworks created throughout the project and within the final exhibition, *Beauty and Blemish* are not overtly controversial, they intentionally sought to challenge traditions and values based on the dichotomy of perceived beauty versus blemished surfaces utilising lichen.

Non-traditional Materials

The primary catalyst for this project has always been lichen and using this biological form as the main non-traditional artistic material allowed for heightened experimentation and innovative creative application. The foundational creative process started with digital

documentation using photography and videography to capture images of lichen in situ at multiple field trip locations. As established in Chapter Five over fourteen locations were visited as field trips with extensive photographic imagery of lichen documented and used in various artworks throughout the project. However, it was the ability to harvest samples of lichen that opened an opportunity for diverse manipulation in the studio. Lichen samples were explicitly and implicitly employed to highlight ideas of beauty and blemish through casting in resin and layering onto surfaces in both large and small quantities. Lichen was harvested from cemetery sites and green spaces. The three locations included the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery, the Memorial Pioneer Cemetery, and a rock wall on the main road into Malanda. You are legally allowed to remove lichen from headstones and lichen growing on headstones is often considered to be an issue and is chemically removed by local councils. Lichen growing naturally in national parks and rainforest environments that were visited were never harvested. This was to respect and not disrupt or disturb the ecological existence of lichen in these protected locations.



Figure 27: [LEFT] Original first harvest of lichen from Cairns, McLeod Street Cemetery. September, 2020. [RIGHT] Two separate harvestings occurred in Sydney, Memorial Pioneer Cemetery in 2022, April then December 2022. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 28: [LEFT] Foliose lichen harvested 8 April 2022. Sydney, [RIGHT] Harvesting foliose lichen from a concrete headstone using a flat blade 11 December 2022. Sydney. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 29: [LEFT] Malanda Harvest from the rock wall, 6 July 2023, [RIGHT] Showing the size of the lichen harvested from Malanda. These lichen samples were used in the artwork, *Amelioration*, in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Lichen is easier to remove from its substrate after it becomes wet. Harvesting during and or after it has rained was the ultimate time to collect samples. When damp or wet, it can be easily peeled from the surface. Otherwise, a long sharp blade is required to carefully splice the lichen from the surface. This was tedious and often damaged the lichen and a full harvested sample was a challenge to obtain in dry conditions. Harvested lichen samples were additionally used in the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery photoshoot that was taken by local photographer Mara Turner on the 6 July 2022. Self-portrait style photographs were documented on site for later use as a visual reference for images for the drawing component of a series of works in the Symbiosis Exhibition. Pieces of harvested lichen were strategically placed as blemished marks on the body and face and over ninety photographs were captured with various arrangements of the harvested lichen as seen in Figure 30.

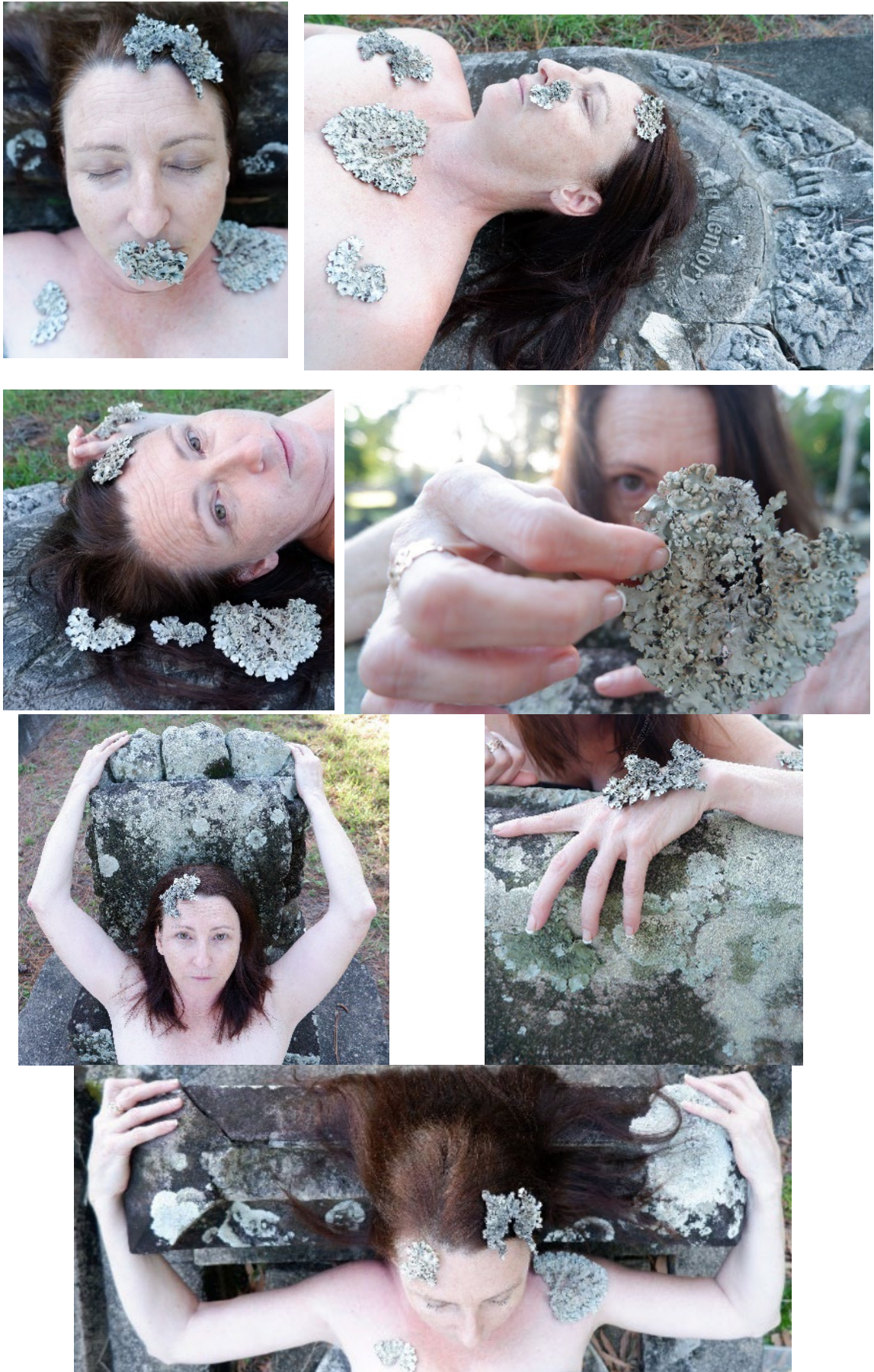


Figure 30: The seven photographs above are a selection of photos taken at the McLeod Street Cemetery and used for final drawing artworks for the Symbiosis Exhibition, January 2023. Photographed by Mara Turner

Resin

Whilst one would consider resin to be a modern non-traditional art material, original natural forms of resin have been around for centuries. Nature's resin, otherwise known as amber, is produced by trees and fossilizes to create a hard, transparent slab (Young, 2022). This quaint connection between trees producing amber and trees also being one of the primary substrates for lichen was serendipitous in regard to this project. Additionally, amber has been used for hundreds of years as decorative ornaments or pieces of jewellery. This connects directly to the two series of earrings created for both the Symbiosis and Beauty and Blemish Exhibitions. Resin was explored in the first instance through earring creations and hence then allowed for the generation of further possibilities. Initially using craft-based resin, a switch was made to an industrial quantity to meet the supply and volume required for the artworks. Epoxy resin is a runny material which gradually hardens (when the hardening agent is added) to a solid plastic as a chemical reaction between its components takes place (Young, 2022). Differentiated applications of resin that emerged during the creating process and after the initial casting in silicone moulds, included pouring mixed resin directly over harvested lichen. This made the lichen durable, but it was challenging to maintain the spread of resin. Therefore, resin use shifted to contained application, though finding a mould that easily released the resin once it hardened was difficult. Similarly, finding a suitable shaped mould to create semi-circular discs for my intended beauty spots idea. Accidentally, I came across a small white paint palette from an art supply company. These were the perfect size and material to create the resin half spheres and subsequently over one hundred resin cast spots were created for use in several artworks. This process was lengthy as the cure rate for resin is 24 hours. Using only two paint palette trays slowed down the production rate but allowed for careful consideration of selected lichen pieces cast. The

lichen needed to be broken into smaller pieces and placed face down into the wet resin. A heat gun was applied to gently blow over the poured resin in the moulds to assist in the removal of air bubbles. What was noteworthy was that an unexpected positive outcome occurred with as the resin changed the colour of the lichen to a golden lustre. This emphasised the idea of beauty and blemish as being precious.

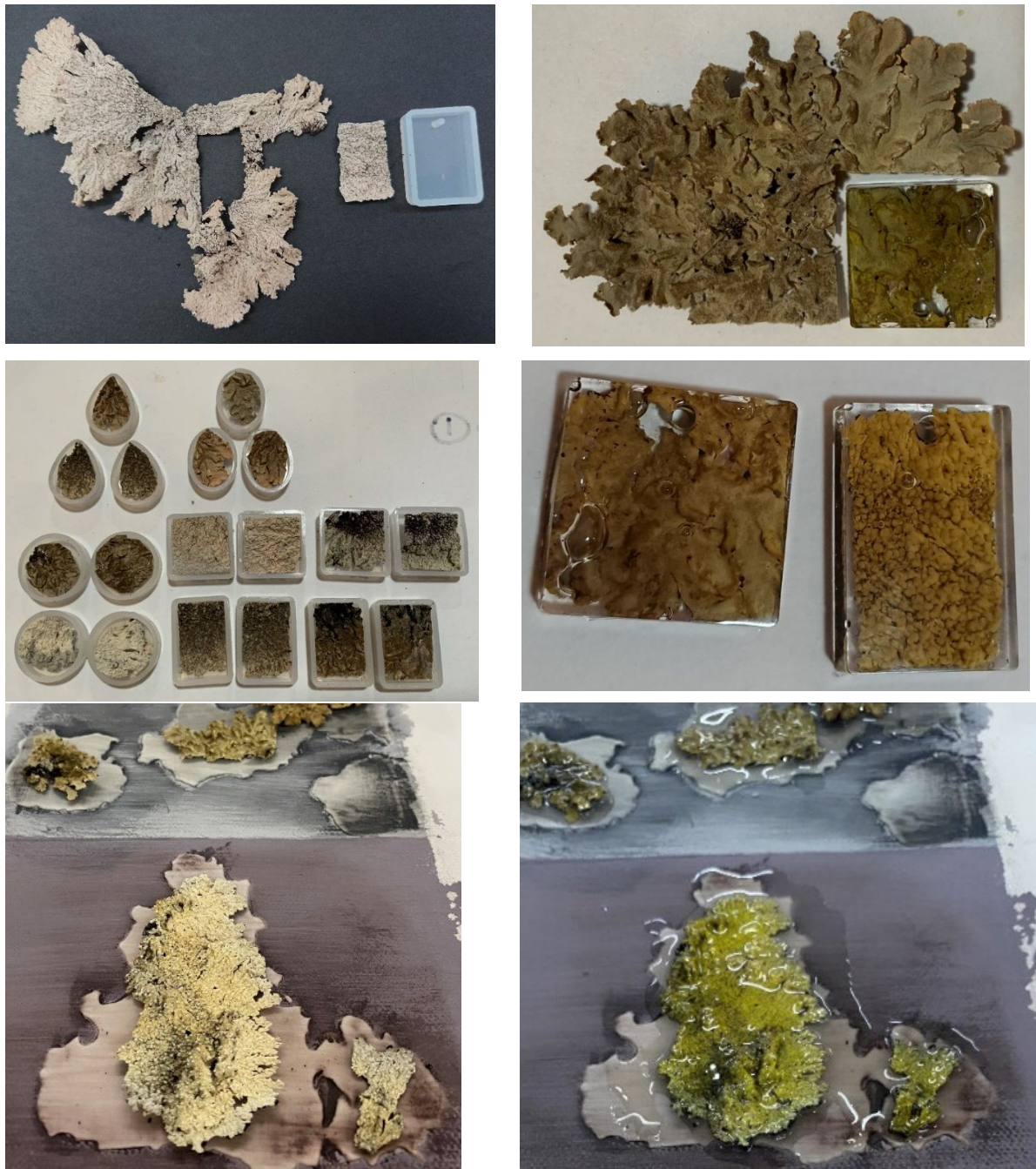


Figure 31: TOP - [LEFT] First trial of cutting lichen to fit in the mold. [RIGHT] Section of lichen cast in resin mold. MIDDLE - [LEFT] Lichen cut to fit variable earring molds in September 2020. [RIGHT] First resin trials, with bubbles. BOTTOM – [LEFT] Lichen before resin pour [RIGHT] Lichen after resin pour showing the colour change. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 32: TOP - [LEFT] Setting resin in a shallow space to contain the application to avoid overrun and spread. [RIGHT] Completed artwork using resin pour in specific spaces, artwork created for Crate59 Exhibition, June 2022. MIDDLE - [LEFT] Using earring moulds to cast small cicada exoskeletons for the *Resin-ate* artwork, Lux Gallery, 2022. [RIGHT] Changing resin to a larger quantity and trialling casting using the white palettes to create beauty spots. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Detail of beauty spots, half domes spheres containing small pieces of lichen. [RIGHT] Using a heat gun to remove excess air bubbles in the resin prior to setting. Note lichen is placed upside down. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Impasto

Impasto was employed in the original works for the preliminary exhibition, *Forest for the Trees*, at the Lux Gallery, 2021 at James Cook University. Strong, successful outcomes using impasto to emulate lichen was then continued into artworks for both the *Symbiosis and Beauty and Blemish* Exhibitions. Its ability to be moulded as a smooth paste and then set rigidly allowed for other art methods to emerge. Originally the application process utilised a wide brush. It was later discovered that using a palette knife made for a more suitable tool. This allowed for a thicker layer to sit within the photographic templates, leaving a deliberate ridge line as a silhouette shape mimicking lichen. Once set, acrylic paint was wiped over the impasto to remove any stark white markings and blend the raised hardened lichen-shapes with the colour palette of the surface of the artworks. A final experiment included the use of a plastic stencil, where impasto was applied and then the stencil was peeled back to create the overall textured surface in the *Camouflage* series.



Figure 33: [LEFT] Initial use of a wide brush to evenly apply the impasto using the photographic stencil. [RIGHT] Using a palette knife to smear an even layer of impasto into the surfaces of artworks became a more efficient process. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 34: TOP - [LEFT] After it was set, paint was pulled and wiped over the impasto resin shapes. [RIGHT] Use of a stencil to provided tree like surface patterns to canvas and then paint was dry brushed over to tone down the stark white surface. BOTTOM [LEFT] Re-using photographic stencils to apply resin. [RIGHT] Before and after image of the placement of photographic stencils, then showing the arrangement of the white impasto markings. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Found Object

A contemporary approach to the creation of artworks for this project required the inclusion of found objects. Some objects were deliberately sourced as were man-made structures and included frames and display vessels, lace, haberdashery and clocks. In contrast, organic natural objects were heavily employed across artworks to communicate an environmental connection between lichen and contemporary art practices. As previously stated, lichen was the primary found object, whilst other materials included cicada exoskeleton, twigs, shedded tree bark and wood from trees (milled to size).



Figure 35: [LEFT to RIGHT] Marketplace was a platform used to source additionally suitable materials such as doilies and an antique clock with the clock on the right discovered at a local opportunity shop. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

As seen in Figure 35 above, doilies and clocks were sourced from both Marketplace and opportunity shops for artworks intended for the final exhibition, Beauty and Blemish. Inspiring treasures can be sought and found at local opportunity shops. It was at a Lifeline store that a small, antique, domed-glass frame was purchased. This instigated further research about bubble glass and using Marketplace, two larger scale (almost matching) vintage frames were found.



Figure 36: TOP - [LEFT] Original small vintage bubble glass frame discovered at the Op Shop, 24 June 2020. [RIGHT] Completed artwork for the Collage Exhibition, 2023. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Two larger vintage bubble glass frames sourced between 2022-2023 on market place. [RIGHT] Completed artworks using the frames for the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition 2024. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Doilies

In the development of artefacts for this contemporary body of work, doilies became a material of choice, deliberate on multiple levels. English writer on art, in particular lace, Fanny Bury Palliser (1805-1878) established a connection between lace and beauty. “Of all beautiful objects for personal decoration, there is scarcely one which appeals more to the imagination than lace” (Palliser, 1878, p. 179). After the creation of an initial experimental work, *Beauty Beholds the Spread*, (for the secondary visual art teacher’s exhibition, *The Lottery*, 2022) additional artistic techniques were explored, and changes were considered then applied for future lace work. This work combined photographs, drawings, lichen, paint and resin poured on top of a synthetic table runner. Issues associated with this original work included, an overall insipid colouration using mis-matched paint colours. This was paired with selected coloured markers which created a visual disconnect and were haphazardly applied. Bleeding and degeneration of the blind contour drawn lines after the application of resin was disappointing. This said, there were elements within the work considered to be strengths, including the use of close-up photographs of lichen from field trips, the incorporation of dehydrated lichen samples, and painting the exterior border of the lace white after the original colour dribbling. This assisted in emphasising the central panel of detail and this was applied for future work whilst inconsistent areas were avoided or changed. *Paternal and Maternal (figure 25)*, created for Symbiosis Exhibition, 2023, continued to utilize synthetic lace runners for personal decoration and employed artistic imagination in their lichen embellished surface treatment. In line with practice-led research models of emotional connections, my mother used lace doily table runners to cover furniture in my childhood home. These circular, patterned discs that formed these tablecloths connect memories of this place with comfort and love towards my mother.



Figure 37: Examples of my mother's doily tablecloths on furniture in my family home in Sydney, 2023. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 38: [Left] First time a synthetic lace-doily table runner was used for the artwork *Beauty Beholds the Spread*, The Lottery Exhibition 2022. [MIDDLE] Lace doily table runner used in the Symbiosis Exhibition, *Paternal and Maternal* artwork, 2023. [RIGHT] Paper doily, paint covered doily and embossed doily in *S[Mother]ered Love*, artwork, Beauty and Blemish Exhibition, 2024. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Embellishments

After viewing the work of First Nations artists, Kaylene Whiskey (b.1976) and Danie Mellor (b.1971), where these two contemporary artists included kitsch, bling-like embellishments to their work. It was decided that incorporating items such as rhinestones, glitter, haberdashery beads and patches would provide an unexpected way to bring beauty to a blemished surface.

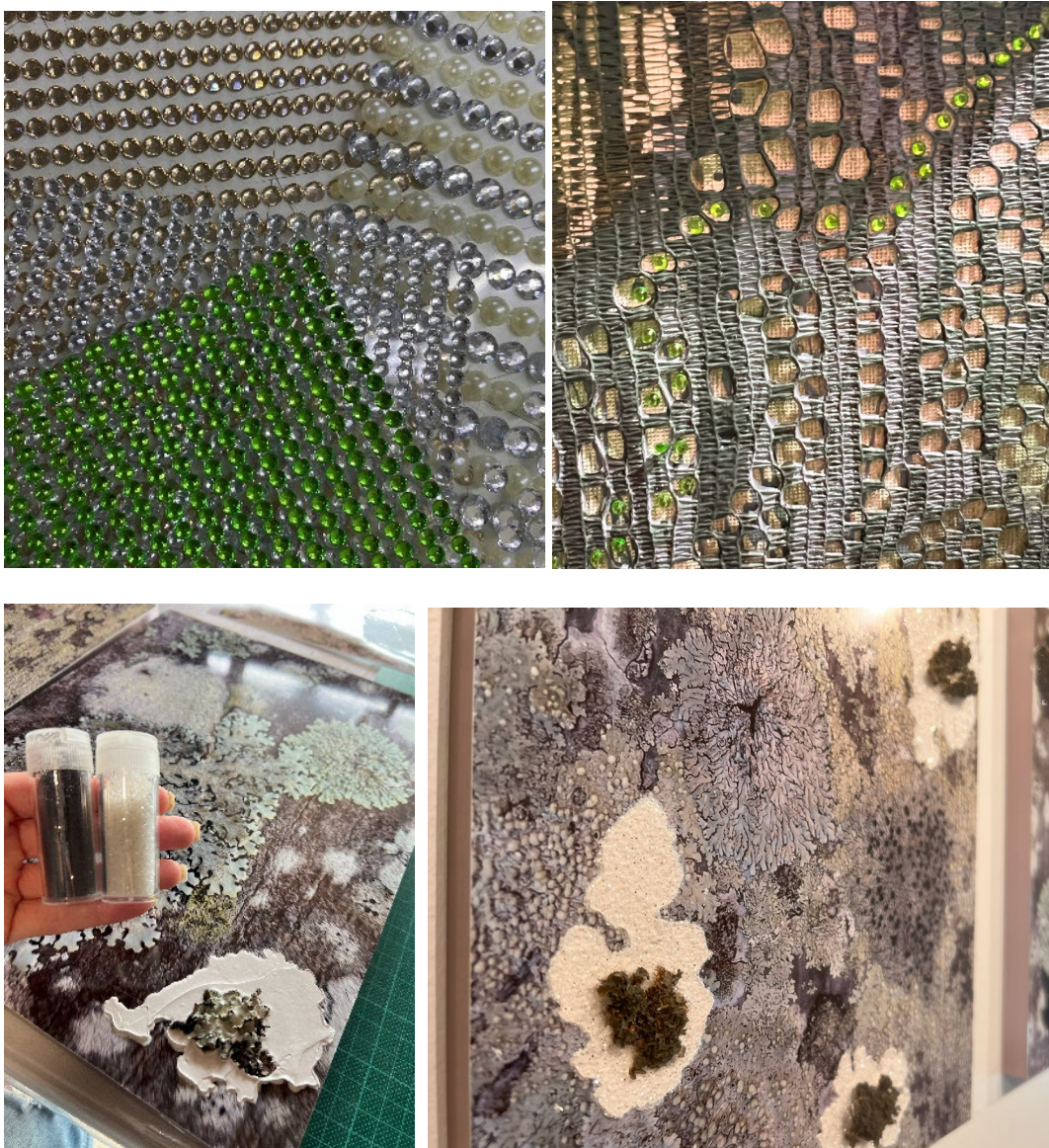


Figure 39: TOP - [LEFT] Sheets of imitation rhinestones used as a beauty blemish on artworks. [RIGHT] Green rhinestones applied like a trail in the *Tracking Beauty Series*, Beauty and Blemish Exhibition 2024. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Black and white glitter used to sprinkle on wet impasto for photo block artworks. [RIGHT] White glitter blemishing the surface of the artwork *Precious Beauty Series*, Beauty and Blemish Exhibition 2024. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Found Object: Natural and Organic

Utilizing organic materials and objects from nature was a deliberate art making practice. Cicada exoskeletons were the first organic objects used (after lichen as the primary source). During the field trip to Lake Morris, February 2021, we canoed to a secluded location up a creek. At site, the sound of the cicadas screeching was deafening. This added to the experience at site, hence for the preliminary body of work at the Lux Gallery, *Resinate* was produced. The initial casting of tiny cicada exoskeletons (collected from my home) were embedded in resin and suspended from a branch also found at site. Later in the project, larger cicadas were included in the artwork *Camouflage*, which was displayed in both the Collage Exhibition and the final event, Beauty and Blemish.



Figure 40: [LEFT] Small Cicada exoskeletons cast in resin and suspended from a branch for the artwork *Resinate*, 2021. [RIGHT] Large cicada exoskeleton glued to the canvas surface for the artwork *Camouflage*, 2023 and 2024. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Twigs with lichen adhered and also decorticated bark from trees were another natural resource included in the contemporary creation of artworks. Notably, collected from the ground from National Park areas in the Far North region. It is also pertinent to note that additional twigs were collected and donated.



Figure 41: TOP - [LEFT] A variety of lichen, twigs and moss collected from local areas. [RIGHT] The selection process of deciding what twigs and lichen pieces to use in the creation of *Beauty Biomes*, *Beauty* and *Blemish* Exhibition. BOTTOM – Base made by turning wood on a lathe (by my husband) for the glass-domed cloches. A router drill was used to create holes in the base to glue in the various sized twigs. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Using wood in various modes also provided a consistent throughline in relation to connecting lichen with trees. Lychee trees were removed from our property and the limbs and branches that contained crustose lichen were collected. Nine sections were crafted to create hanging armatures for the nine long artworks developed for Forest for the Trees Exhibition, 2021.



Figure 42: [LEFT] Limbs cut from a lychee tree with crustiose lichen. [RIGHT] specially shaped ends of lychee tree branches designed to attach the long paper artworks, created for the preliminary exhibition at the Lux Gallery, JCU, 2021. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

In my studio, whilst my husband was cutting some pine using the table saw, I noticed that there were some thin, long offcuts of timber produced. These were collected, saved, and used in artworks to attach sliced photographs strips upon. This created a slight height difference on the artworks as an additional blemished surfaces exploration.



Figure 43: [LEFT] Strips of pine offcuts collected to be used for artworks. [RIGHT] Adding strips to canvas and then layering with photographic images to add height and levels on the surface. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 44: TOP - [LEFT] Slabs offcuts of Melaleuca available to choose for the Beauty Spots artworks. [RIGHT] Two selected slabs put through the thicknesser to smooth the surface. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

The *Beauty Spot* artworks produced for the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition (Chapter 7) were fabricated from the large *Melaleuca* tree we had removed from our premises in 2022. The slabs had been seasoned and the wooden grain of the tree surface, after it had been passed through the thicknesser (Figure 106) was stunningly beautiful. A decision was made to not paint or add impasto, but simply add doilies with the resin cast beauty spots. This simplistic approach heightened the idea of a beautiful surface that was blemished.

In summary, it was the combination of specific non-traditional materials such as lichen, resin, impasto and objects (man-made and natural) that allowed for innovative experimentation of surface to be creatively explored through contemporary art practice. The application of each went through different iterations through unsuccessful or challenging implications. This processes of trial and error is common place and allows a research artist the scope to eliminate or re-invent the material to serve an aesthetic purpose.

Unconventional Ways

The term 'ways' refers to different techniques and more specifically for this project included common practices such as photography, painting and drawing. However, the differentiation and innovative approaches using each of these three traditional mediums was explored through practice-led research (Chapter 5). Each was manipulated in innovative ways to allow the work produced to address the research question established in Chapter One; *Can a body of contemporary visual art evoke surprising transformations which make the viewer reconsider the perception of beauty and blemish?*

This surprising transformation evolved through the application of unconventional art practices using contemporary art mediums.

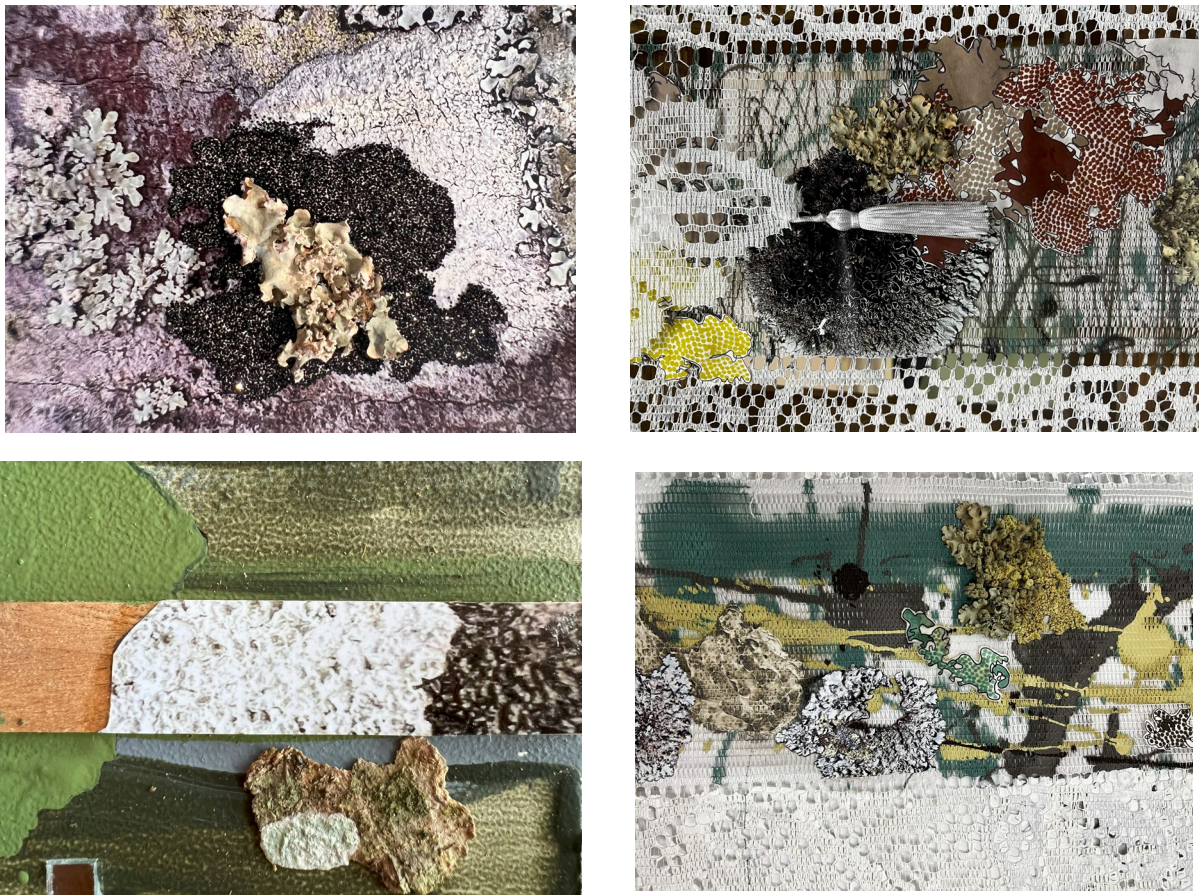


Figure 45: TOP - [LEFT] Lichen set in impasto with glitter. [RIGHT] Drawing combined with paint drips, lichen and photography. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Detail of paint on board with wooden strips, photography and bark. [RIGHT] Detail of lace runner with paint dribbles, photographs, harvested lichen and hand drawn paperwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Photography

Photography is recognised as a conventional visual art practice and for some artworks, pure photographic representation of lichen was included in its original artistic state. Images were digitally printed onto photo blocks so they became their own stand-alone artworks. This included the *Morgan Series*, cemetery photographs in the Symbiosis Exhibition, 2023 and the *Sydney Pioneer Memorial Cemetery Series*, in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition, 2024. Works *Metallic Beauty*, were professionally printed on blocks that added a metallic filter to the image, which heighten the imagery to present a lustre that beautified the blemished surface.



Figure 46: [LEFT] A sample of lichen growing on a headstone at Morgan, South Australia. [RIGHT] A sample of the Sydney Series, displaying all three types of lichen growing on a headstone. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Whilst photography was maintained as the original starting point for the development of all creative works throughout the project, it was the way photography was manipulated, deconstructed, and then reconstructed that made its representation unconventional. Beginning with the initial field trip to the Daintree Rainforest in September 2020, over a two-day period, photography allowed for the iteration of visual resources of

lichen. (Noting, that no physical lichen was harvested from this site). Over one hundred photographic images were printed on 6cm x 4cm size photographic paper. Using scissors, the lichen images were tediously cut out. It was not until the lichen shapes were cut out that it was realised that the remaining photographic offcut could be used as a stencil. Therefore, both parts of the photograph were employed in the production of artworks. The lichen images were adhered to surfaces and in this case the stencils were used to apply impasto and paint.



Figure 47: TOP - Cut out lichen shapes arranged and grouped into colours and shapes from the original lichen photographs taken on site in September 2020 from the Daintree Rainforest. BOTTOM - stencils created as a byproduct which were used in multiple artworks throughout the project. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

The other main photographic approach used included images taken at the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery by local photographer Mara Turner of myself in situ. These photos were used to produce drawing works for the Symbiosis Exhibition, 2023.



Figure 48: TOP - Proof sheets of images from the self-portrait photoshoot at the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery. BOTTOM – Continuous line drawing from a photographic image for the Symbiosis Exhibition, 2023. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Photographic Stencils - Ink

In November 2021, I attended a workshop held by local artist John Eaton where inks were sprayed onto surfaces using simple stencils. This was an ideal opportunity for me to experiment with my photographic cut out stencils in this workshop. I laid them down in various places, sprayed a layer, then added more layers, changing the ink colour, then repeating another layer until enough colouration, similar to that of lichen was achieved. This camouflage style outcome was well-received, as the link between tree surface covered in lichen was emulated through this non-conventional practice of ink application. Blemishing the surface of the card was later used in the creation of work for the final Beauty and Blemish Exhibition.



Figure 49: These six images above show the various stages of the layering of ink straying over the photographic stencils to create a camouflage, lichen inspired pattern. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

It was later discovered that the ink was not steadfast, which allowed for additional water and brush work to dissolve the surface to emulate soft lichen shapes as a background.



Figure 50: The five images above show the process of using the ink sprayed card to add water marks using photographic stencils for the background of the *Amelioration Series* artworks. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

The final application applied with the photographic images included slicing them into strips. These images were printed in larger scale to allow for greater length. The strips were glued onto canvas surfaces as well as wooden pine off cut strips to create different surface levels as a blemished addition.

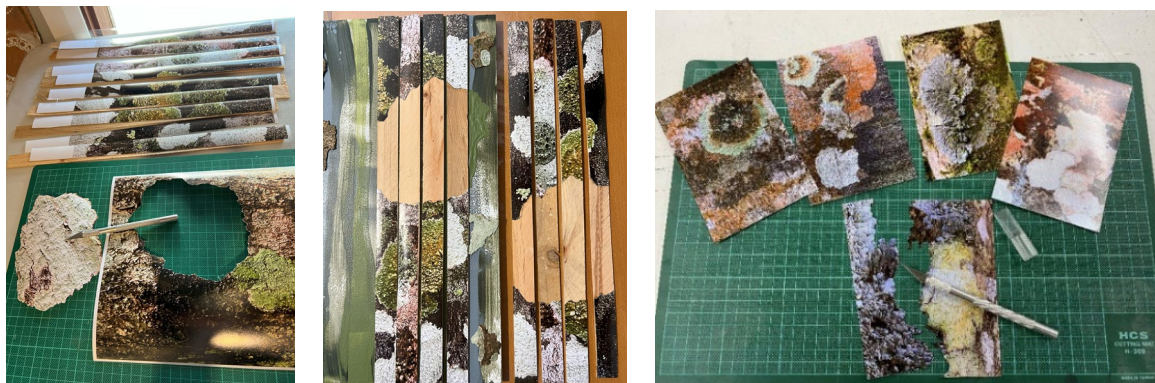


Figure 51: The three images above show the various cutting processes used to manipulate the original photographs taken from site. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Painting

Like photography, painting is a common traditional process. What made the use of this medium unique within my practice was the type of paint selected and the way it was applied. Acrylic house paint was sourced from a hardware store. House paint was selected as it has a denser viscosity and ability to leave drips and lines if applied thickly. This runny consistency became a repeated practice across many artworks. Dribbling the paint in layers from a height allowed for a semi-controlled, yet naturally organic surface treatment. Considering the notorious non-traditional painting methods of American abstract expressionist artist Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), his famous drip-paintings of the 1940's were influential in the foundational layer of these works (Chapter 4). Like Pollock, paint was flung (not on canvas) on the lace runners, poured and hurled to create roiling vortexes of colour and line.

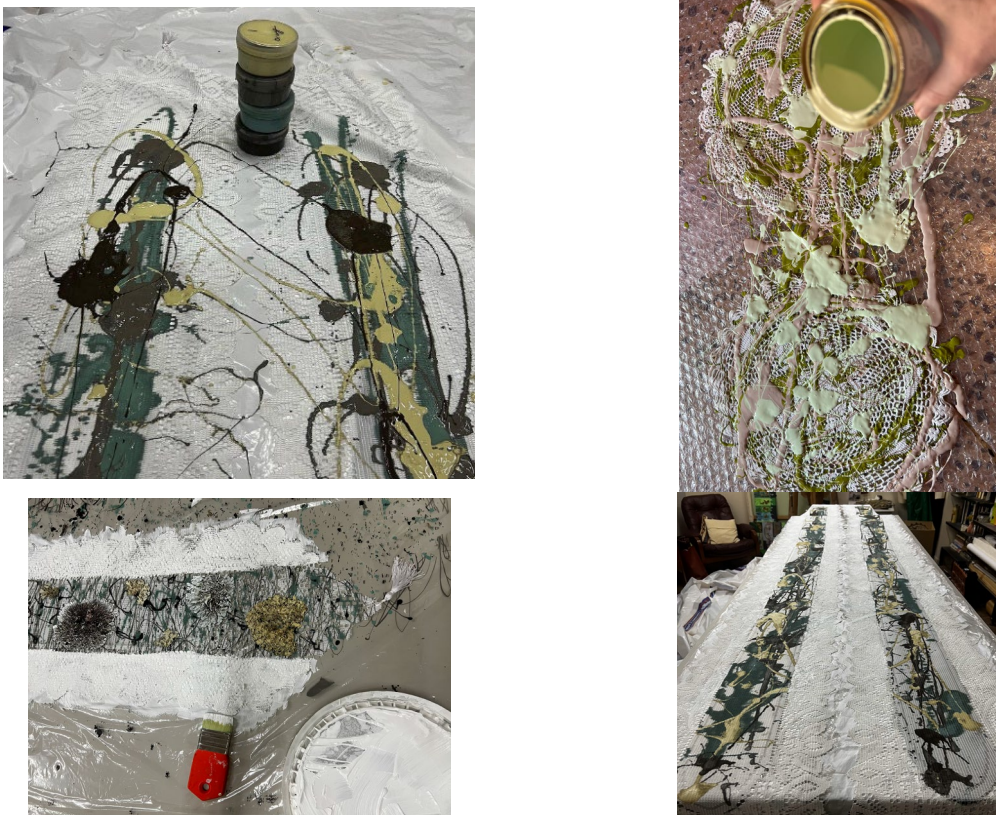


Figure 52: TOP - [LEFT] Dribbling and splashing paint onto lace doilies in layers. [RIGHT] paint dripped onto a doily. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Using white gesso to block out the paint marks on the sides of the lace table runner. [RIGHT] Long table runners after the paint application and whitening of the sides to create central panels. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

What became apparent during the development of the project was a shift in colour saturation and hues. The preliminary work produced for the Forest for the Trees Exhibition at the Lux Gallery used quite strong and intense colours. The colour range moving forward became muted and less vibrant for the proceeding Symbiosis Exhibition. Colours then shifted again with primarily greens and greys being implemented for the works produced in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. This gradation in colour and reduction in a range of colours made the project appear visually succinct and cohesive for the final body of work.

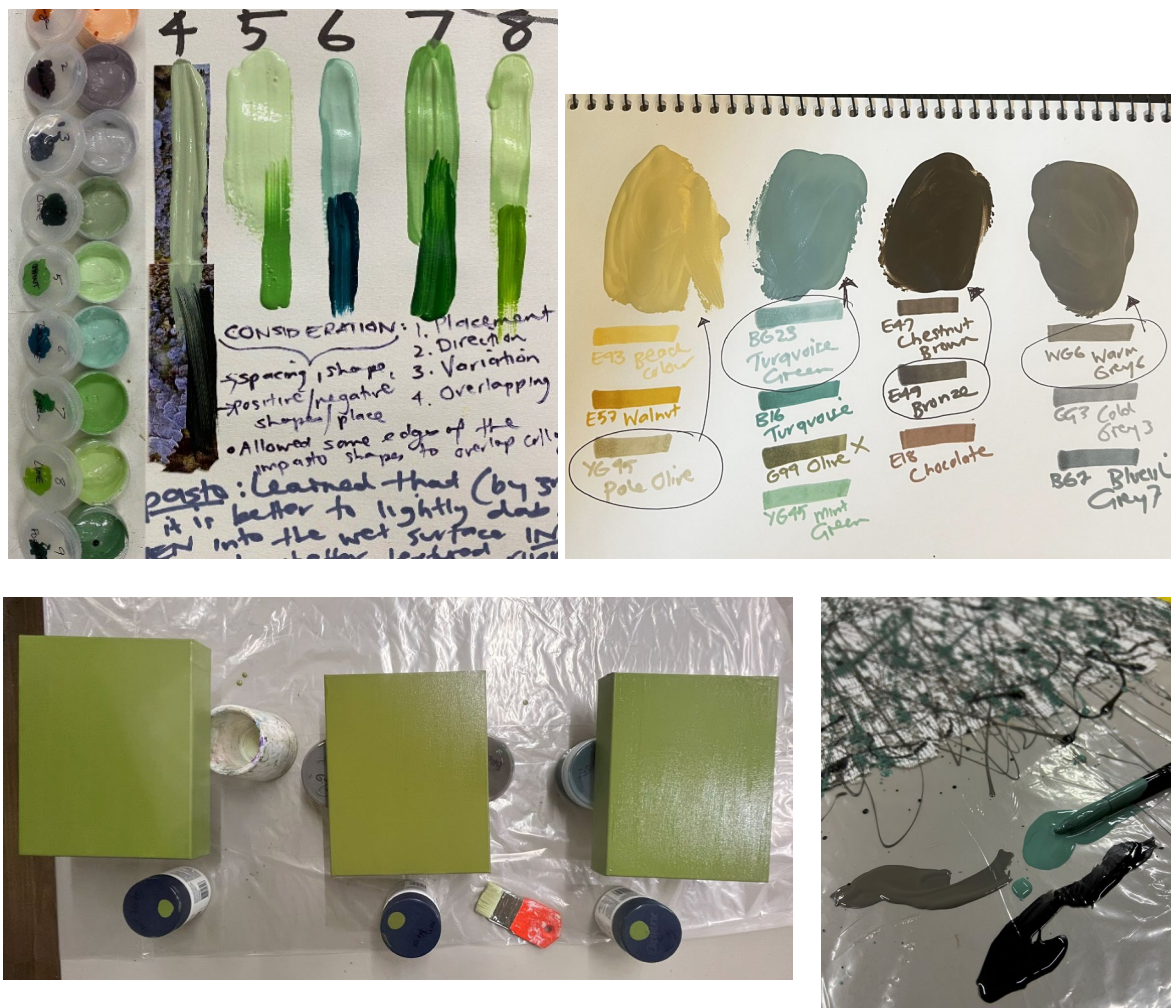


Figure 53: TOP - [LEFT] The original nine colours used for the Forest for the Trees artworks. [RIGHT] The four colours implemented for the Symbiosis Exhibition. BOTTOM – [LEFT] Greens and greys used for work in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. [RIGHT] Three coloured paints applied for the Symbiosis Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Drawing

It is commonplace for artwork designs to begin with an initial drawing stage. What delineates this project from traditional drawing was the method and techniques applied for specific drawing processes. The two main drawing devices employed in this project included the use of black biro (pen ink) and coloured copic marker pens. Both had their own specific application and were used separately to establish specific mark making on the surfaces of the works. All drawings involved black pen employing continuous line drawing. Once the drawing process begun the biro did not leave the surface. The motion of back tracking, overlapping, and moving the pen forward and backwards to add depth and tone was applied. Additionally, a lightbox was used to allow the original photographic image to appear through the paper so that this tracking motion using a continuous line could be achieved. This was tedious and time consuming but provided the sketchy surface treatment required for the three portrait artworks produced for the Symbiosis Exhibition.



Figure 54: [LEFT] Looking at photographs on the laptop to create blind contour continuous line lichen designs on Forest for the Trees artwork. [RIGHT] Using colour matched markers to fill in the pen lichen drawing in both block colour then applying stippling. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Continuous line drawing has been an ongoing style of practice and began in 2018 with the Dead Centre Project. From here, it developed to become the primary drawing style and was incorporated into the preliminary artworks of the nine tall trees created for the Forest for the Trees Exhibition. The difference in these works was the co-application of blind contour drawing. This process involves looking at photographs of lichen on the laptop, then drawing the outline and shape of lichen onto paper using pen, without looking at what is being drawn. This blind contour approach, coupled with continuous line allowed for a linear, semi-abstract representation of lichen for the art making processes and continued from the beginning to the end of this project. With a need to want to include colour, copic markers were added to the drawing practice. These were selected for their permanent and deliberate mark making capabilities. Colours were purchased that matched paint samples. Two specific drawing processes were applied using the markers and included, blind contour continuous lines, filling in areas with block colour and the introduction of stippling. Stippling is the application of concentrated dots to form texture and intensified areas of colour and tone.



Figure 55: TOP - [LEFT] Colour selections of copic markers to match paint colours. [RIGHT] Pen and marker application on paper to create blind contour continuous lines and stippling. MIDDLE - [LEFT] Combination of pen lichen shapes then filled with coloured marker using block colour and stippling. [RIGHT] Cutting out the drawings to add to artworks. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Using markers to create stippling patterns that mimic lichen silhouettes. [RIGHT] Colour matching markers to paint hues to create a stippled patterned surface. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

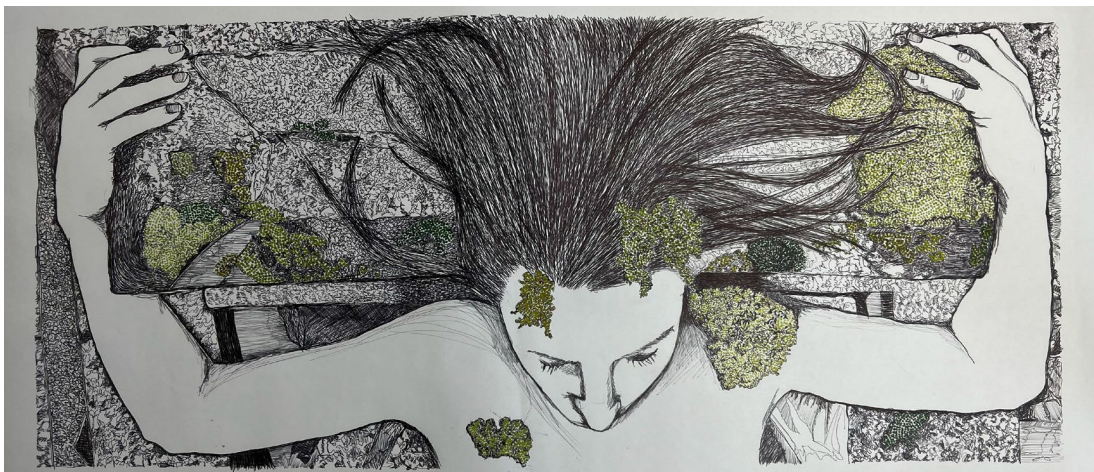
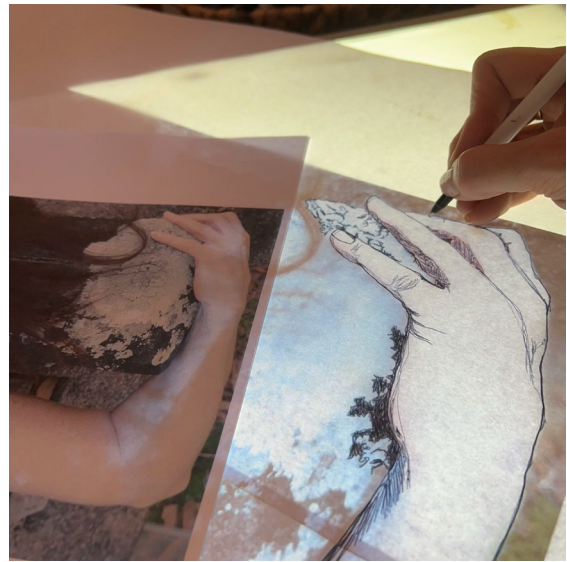


Figure 56: TOP - [LEFT] Continuous line drawing and referring to the original photographic image. [RIGHT] Using a lightbox to allow for correct proportion whilst continuous line drawing. Middle – [LEFT] Detail of continuous line drawing using black pen. [RIGHT] Following the photographic image and using the lightbox
 BOTTOM - Completed horizontal drawing displayed in the headstone frame for the *Holding On Series*, showing both black pen drawing and coloured marker stippling on lichen sections. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Framing

Prior to the formal commencement of this research masters, creative ideas connecting to lichen were established in 2018 through the aforementioned, Dead Centre Project. Initial observations of lichen on headstones fostered the idea of beauty and blemish. Focusing on the headstones, ideas emerged to create headstone like frames to display completed artworks. Hence, imitation, headstone shaped frames were constructed. With assistance from my husband in regard to the manual construction, designs were drawn up and using timber, we initially created three different headstone frames. Two were vertical and one horizontal. Design wise, the frames allowed for a flat image to be slid into the back of the frame. The wooden frames had to be lined with villa board, a product used in bathrooms to stop water permeating through to the substrate. On top of this, a concrete render was applied to emulate the stone-like surface of headstones. They were quite heavy, about fifteen kilograms each and large D-rings were required to ensure they were able to support their weight when hung for display. Originally, adding lichen textures and shapes to the exterior of the frames was considered. However, this idea was discarded as the frames themselves became strong visual artworks in their own right. All three frames were used for the Symbiosis Exhibition and contained three drawings. For the final exhibition, only the two vertical frames were used and the original drawings were replaced with two large scale photographs to align with the idea of pairs. Creating headstone frames to emphasise the artworks was an innovative approach to display. The frames became just as important as the artworks and together they strengthened the conceptuality of ideas represented in both exhibitions.



Figure 57: Both images show the shaping of lychee tree branches for display holders for the Daintree Series, 2021. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 58: TOP - These four images show the creation stages of the headstone inspired frames for artworks and include a wooden frame, covered with waterproof villaboard, followed by adding cement render to create headstone inspired surfaces. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Drawing from the Symbiosis Exhibition displayed in a concrete frame. [RIGHT] Photograph from the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition displayed in the same frame. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Bark

A final creative approach to practice included the addition of bark. Trees were a consistent object and theme artistically intertwined in various works throughout the project. Large sheets of Melaleuca bark were collected and then glued onto primed canvas for the final artwork series, *Beauty Skin*. Using bark as a natural surface texture to work over with paint and embellish with items, highlighted an unconventional approach to contemporary art practice.



Figure 59: TOP - Selecting the compositional layout to attach the bark to the canvas with PVA glue. BOTTOM - Stretching the canvas onto a frame after the bark was glued and dried. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

To summarise this chapter, the culmination of multiple non-traditional art methods and materials in combination with diverse techniques and processes allowed for experimental devices to be explored to enable the production of artwork development and resolution. Always beginning with photography, then followed by different painting, drawing, mixed media and sculptural approaches, allowed for contemporary art practice to emerge. Combining these mediums has allowed for me to develop and established my own personalised art practice. This includes the drawing style of combining blind contour with continuous line, using both pen and marker. These with the other unconventional methods of paint dripping, impasto layering, photographic collage and specific colour palette choices, will certainly become a mainstay within my practice moving forward.

THE RESEARCHER'S CREATIVE PRACTICE

CHAPTER 7

Collective Bodies of Work

This chapter outlines the practical creative journey of this project from the initial beginnings prior to the commencement of the Research Masters, to the final solo exhibition of work in the form of artefacts for this exegesis. The process has been divided in three specific domains. Domain One, Two and Three. An extensive written account of Domain One (Preliminary Exhibitions – Appendix A) and Domain Two (Group Shows – Appendix B) are provided in the appendix, which includes thorough documentation of the complete processes for each specific exhibition across these two domains. Therefore, the first two domains discussed in this chapter will be presented as summaries, explaining aspects of how both the preliminary and group shows provided learning opportunities that influenced or benefitted work produced for the final exhibition. It is the experimentation of practice within these shows that allowed for the refinement and resolution of materials, techniques and processes that were evidenced in the final show. The account of the solo exhibition is therefore given priority in this chapter. It is presented as a thorough account of all fourteen artworks with elaborations about their intent and purpose. These works artistically addressed the original research question; *Can a body of contemporary visual art evoke surprising transformations which make the viewer reconsider the perception of beauty and blemish?*

Domain One: Preliminary Exhibitions

There were two specific artistic events prior to the commencement of this Research Masters that became prerequisites to support the direction of the project. The first included the *Dead Centre Project*, November 2018, at Y Block TAFE Queensland, Cairns and the second was the Forest for the Trees Exhibition at the Lux Gallery, James Cook University in April 2021. From these humble, experimental beginnings, lichen and contemporary art was solidified. As mentioned, a comprehensive analysis of both of these exhibitions is provided in the appendix. Below is a summary of the main attributes these two preliminary opportunities provided as learning platforms that were further employed or encapsulated in the Beauty and Blemish exhibition.

Dead Centre Project: 21 November 2018. Y-Block TAFE Queensland, Cairns.

It was here that I connected with lichen for the first time. The wet, humid environment in Cairns was the perfect place for this primal organism to flourish. I photographed, videoed and drew it initially. Additionally, I created frottage rubbings of the headstones, scrapped off lichen samples and noted its diversity of colour, shape, texture and form. The scientific ideal of a symbiotic relationship was founded as I discovered the close and long-term biological interaction between two different natural organisms. The knowledge about substrates evolved as an important underlying substance or layer which was included in all future work produced. This initial experience was where I connected with lichen both as a biological form and also on a personal level. It provided a platform for the awakening of my practice and the beginning of the Masters of Philosophy (Creative Arts). Materiality choices were formed, with photography and drawing as a mainstay, whilst the inclusion and experimentation with wax was eliminated and replaced with casting ideas using resin. Additionally, video was not employed again but used at site for documentation purposes

only. This body of work not only established my interest in lichen but also the confidence within my abilities as an artist. I had no idea during the construction of this body of work that it would lead me to the beginning of a Research Masters, from which my own practice would commence two years later with James Cook University.



Figure 60: TOP - The original collective body of work produced for the Dead Centre Exhibition, Y-Block, TAFE Queensland, November 2018. BOTTOM - The video projection as part of the body of work. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Forest for the Trees Exhibition: 16 April 2021. Lux Gallery, James Cook University, Cairns.

Forest for the Trees, was the beginning of ideas associated with the creative research higher degree thesis (the creative work and the exegesis). I began the Masters degree in August 2020 with a field trip to the Daintree Rainforest, and eight months later produced a small body of work to support my Confirmation of Candidature. These works were a strong start to what was to evolve over the next few years. Upon viewing this original work compared to the final works there are distinct differences, including the refinement of the colour palette as a priority. However, it was the use of lengthy and multi layered surfaces that became a permanent fixture of my practice. Additionally, harvested lichen made its first appearance. Moving from just photographic and drawn representations of lichen to now embedding lichen into the work surface. Resin was also introduced to replace wax experimentation. This exhibition was successful in establishing my direction to pursue my studies as approved in my Confirmation of Candidature.



Figure 61: Three artworks created for the Forest for the Trees Exhibition, Lux Gallery, James Cook University, April 2021. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Domain Two: Group Exhibitions

Following on from these preliminary opportunities, there were other exhibitions made available for me to explore and test the currency of work being created for the project. These following four group shows are unpacked for their impact upon final directions exploited in artwork created for Beauty and Blemish. As stated, a comprehensive analysis of each of the four exhibitions listed below are included in the appendix (Appendix B.)

In-between Exhibition: 24 June 2022. crate59, 59 Sheridan Street, Cairns

This was the first time I had decided to exhibit work in Cairns and considering it only had to be a single artwork, this was a comfortable transition into the world of local artists. Using previous experimentation that followed Forest for the Trees, which was incomplete and abandoned, I integrated and juxtaposed elements of this work. It felt contrived with its rigid geometric shapes and harsh colours and too controlled. But what I learnt from this experience was that it was actually part of the process to leave works and then revisit and appropriate them at a later, more suitable time. This was a concept that, as an emerging artist, I was able to reflect upon and consider in further work.



Figure 62: [LEFT] In-Between Exhibition flyer. [RIGHT] *Symbiotic Substrate* artwork submitted for the In-Between Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

The Lottery Exhibition: 2 December 2022. Artview Gallery, Bayview Heights, Cairns

This fortuitous opportunity expanded my creative thinking. I began to consider lace and link it to doilies, which in turn, paralleled lichen structures. The artwork created for The Lottery contained the basic elements of layering, copied from the Daintree Series (Forest for the Trees), but emphasised lace as an aesthetic surface, moving away from paper and canvas. It was this connection between lace as a concept of beauty that projected my work in a completely different direction. Problem solving and adaptation was required as problems with material arose. Bleeding of mark-making from the resin, inferior photographic printing and again, too many colours continued to be an issue. On a positive note, it helped refine my choices and processes moving forward.

The LOTTERY

1 - 17 December 2022

OPENING NIGHT
Friday 2 December 2022
4.30pm

Kathy **ALMOND**
Rose **BACHELOR**
Ricky **BERESFORD**
Blake **BERMINGHAM**
Susan **BISHOP**
Emma **BRYANT**
Jessica **DUFFY**
Jane **HERAGHTY**
David **MARSDEN**
Holly **MERVYN-JONES**
MIDAVIAU
Mark **MISIC**
Fiona **MUSGROVE**
Renee **NSENGIMANA**
Nada **PETRASEVIC**
Sandi **STEFFENSEN**
Leanne SHEAD
Mara **TURNER**
Raina **WII**
Clyde **WILLIAMS**
Amanda **WOLF**

Oxlades Thank you for Oxlades contribution of sponsorship for this exhibition

A showcase of our region's visual art educators' talents, who amidst their hectic teaching regime have found time to do what they ultimately love most, making art. Members of the Peninsula Arts Education Association over twenty local Cairns Visual Art teachers attended a 'lottery' draw back in March. The initial process randomly allocated a 'blank surface' upon which to let their creative ideas emerge. Nine months later they have produced an artwork reflective of their individual and innovative art practice.
Leanne Shead – Curator

Artview Gallery Shop 1/220 Toogood Road, Bayview Heights
Monday: Friday 6.30am - 12.30pm & Saturday: 7am - 1pm, Sunday 8am - 12pm

Artview GALLERY



Figure 63: [LEFT] Lottery Exhibition promotional flyer. [RIGHT] *Beauty Beholds the Spread*, artwork installed for The Lottery Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Symbiosis Exhibition: 11 January 2023. Artview Gallery, Bayview Heights, Cairns.

I instigated the opportunity by inviting two other local artists (who additionally explored lichen in their art making practices) to have this exhibition as a mid-candidature signpost. The artists and I shared a connection, appreciation, and interest in lichen as an artistic platform for creative expression. The three of us formed our own artistic Symbiosis. This was my first opportunity to create a body of contemporary visual art addressing my project, Beauty and Blemish. Four sets of work were included, displaying a photographic series of lichen on headstones was a deliberate decision as this was the foundational approach of all art making. This exhibition expressed my ability to connect dual ideas. Most works were strongly represented with my ideas of lichen, and rainforests and family connections emerged. However, the portraits drawings were not aligning with my abstracted visual direction and were not revisited moving forward. The concrete headstone frames however were ideal and appeared again in the final exhibition in a different manner. This was also the first opportunity for me to present an artist talk about my work and the transcript is provided as Appendix C. Delivering a public presentation about my practice and exploration of the topic helped solidify my intentions and understanding of my work as a research artist.



Figure 64: [LEFT] Exhibition flyer for the Symbiosis Exhibition. [RIGHT] Installation of the Symbiosis Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Collage Exhibition: 1 September 2023. Artview Gallery, Bayview Heights, Cairns

The Collage Exhibition was the true testing of the waters per say, with sample works and actual artworks created and designated for the final exhibition, pre-shown for their analysis by an audience. Two of the three works were included in the final show and the colour palette had finally been resolved. It was also here that diverse layering of surface was solidified. I was currently working on multiple works at once in preparation for Beauty and Blemish in four months' time. These works successfully beautified a blemished surface and were visually congruent through their aesthetic appeal. It was the miniature bubble-glass framed work that stood out as the perfect representation of beauty and blemish. Using the frame (found object) instigated the search for other found objects, such as clocks that would be incorporated in future work. These works also created a pathway for the inclusion of twigs and other natural matter that hinted at surface blemish. It was all starting to come together both visually and physically.

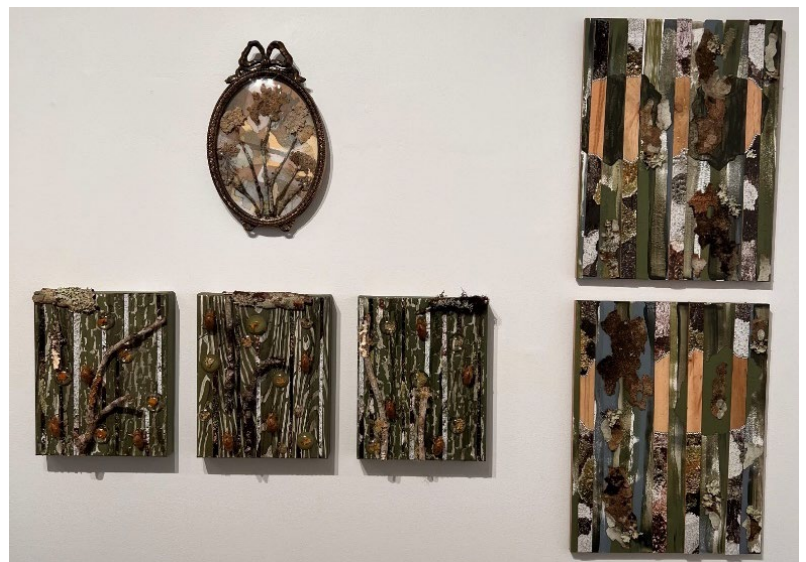


Figure 65: [LEFT] Exhibition flyer for the Collage Exhibition. [RIGHT] The three works included in the Collage Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Domain Three: Final Exhibition – Beauty and Blemish

After six prior artistic opportunities and avenues over three and a half years, this exegesis culminates in the production of the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition, which was held on the 13 January 2024 at Artview Gallery, Bayview Heights, Cairns. The exhibition included curatorial devices such as the development of promotional material and advertising.

Fourteen artworks were displayed and deliberately curated chronologically around the three walls of the gallery. The fourth wall displayed visual diary documentation of the complete journey. The exhibition was opened by JCU representative Professor Stewart Lockie from the Cairns Institute and a transcript of this talk is listed in the appendix (Appendix D).

Additionally, Dr Emma Rehn led an In-conversation evening and this transcript can be read in Appendix E. The exhibition ran for three weeks, with six of the fourteen artworks being sold.

The following pages address each of the artworks included in the exhibition in order of display.



Leanne Shead

Beauty and Blemish

Leanne Shead is a local Visual Art teacher at St Monica's College who is currently completing her Masters in Philosophy [Creative Arts] at James Cook University. Her project is titled *Beauty and Blemish* and this exhibition is the culmination of her four years part-time study to complete his degree. Originally from Sydney, she graduated from the Australian Catholic University with a Bachelor of Education, majoring in Visual Art. Her involvement with visual art education in Queensland with the QCAA is substantial. In the past few years, she has begun her journey as a practicing artist and has exhibited at local galleries.

After arriving in Cairns in 2012 and being immersed in this tropical landscape I discovered a newfound love and appreciation for lichen. I met Professor Robyn Glade-Wright who I thank for starting me on this journey. She encouraged me to apply for a Research Masters through JCU and without her I would not be where I am today. Merging from educator to artist has been a lifelong dream and Robyn has taught me to push through my 'imposter syndrome' and embrace uncertainty artistically. It has not been an easy journey working fulltime, owning a gallery and trying to complete a Masters' degree. Giving up often crossed my mind. I thank Professor Ryan Daniels for believing in me. This final exhibition is not only for me but dedicated to him. My botanical love and learning of lichen has also been supported by Professor Cassandra Rowe and I thank her for her diligence and professionalism to help me academically. Lichen has a symbiotic relationship and through my art I aimed to create artefacts that present it beautifully, whilst reflecting components of my life. All works are in pairs to represent a symbiotic relationship. I feel I have made others more aware of the beauty of this often-overlooked organism. I want an audience to enjoy the beautifully blemished mixed media contemporary artworks I have created for this project.

Figure 66: Didactic for artist Leanne Shead displayed at the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

BEAUTY & BLEMISH



Detail: *Ameliation: Meliaration (Maternal)*, 2023
Antique glass-domed frames, ink, rehydrated harvested lichen, dollies, pearls, twigs

10 - 27 January 2024

OPENING NIGHT
Friday 12 January
6pm

Officially launched by
Distinguished Professor
Stewart Lockie from
The Cairns Institute
James Cook University

Evening in conversation
Wednesday 24 January
6pm

Hosted by
Dr Emma Rehn & Dr Mirani Litster
From JCU

Solo Exhibition
LEANNE SHEAD

This exhibition presents my four year journey working towards a Masters in Philosophy (Creative Arts) degree at James Cook University. It culminates in a collection of contemporary artworks, driven by practice-led research based on my research question:

To what extent can a body of contemporary visual art evoke surprising transformations, which make us consider the perception of beauty and blemish?

Presented in pairs, and using diverse contemporary mixed media methods, lichen was incorporated as the primary catalyst to explore the aesthetic duality of 'beauty and blemish'.

Lichen is embedded in each artwork, reflecting a symbiotic relationship, both botanically and personally. Each unique artefact initially appears aesthetically beautiful, however, on closer inspection, this notion is challenged through coalesced blemished surfaces.

Curated by Leanne Shead



Artview Gallery Shop 1/220 Toogood Road, Bayview Heights
Monday to Saturday 6.30am till 12pm



Figure 67: Promotional flyer for the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition, solo show.



Figure 68: TOP – Panoramic view of the installation of the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. [MIDDLE] Fourth wall displaying the visual diary documentation of the processes. BOTTOM – guests at the opening night of the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition with artist Leanne Shead in black on the right. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

The following fourteen artworks were included in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition:

1. **Malanda Rock** – Found object collected from a rock wall in Malanda
2. **Timeless Beauty Clock Series** – Two recycled vintage clocks
3. **Amelioration Series** – Antique bubble frames with harvested lichen
4. **Beauty Biomes Series** – Two glass cloches containing collected lichen on twigs
5. **Tracking Beauty Series** – canvas and mixed media works based on the Atherton tablelands
6. **Camouflage Series** – Canvas mixed media works revisiting cicada exoskeletons
7. **Decorticating: Beauty Pieces Series** – Layers of bark, lichen, photography with painting
8. **Headstones Series** – Large digital prints on rag paper mounted in rendered frames
9. **Blemished Beauty Series** – Set of four small photo blocks, Sydney and Cairns cemeteries
10. **Precious Beauty Series** – Photo blocks printed using metallic lustre, embellished with glitter
11. **Beauty Light Series** – Doilies and cast resin with back lighting, mixed media
12. **S[Mother]ered Love Series** – Pair of intaglio printed doilies and mixed media
13. **Beauty Spot Series** – Two milled slabs of Melaleuca tree, doilies and resin cast lichen.
14. **Skin Deep Beauty Series** – Melaleuca bark stretched on canvas

1. Malanda Rock

The first object in the exhibition was the only single artwork in the show. It was a rock that had lichen attached to the surface. This rock was collected from Malanda, and it had fallen off the rock wall. It was included on a long table lace doily to mark the beginning of the journey. Links to prehistoric times and lichen's humble existence were intimated with this inclusion. The rock also represents the last place lichen was harvested for this show.



Figure 69: [LEFT] *Malanda Rock*, artwork in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. This rock was collected from Malanda during a lichen harvest. [RIGHT - top] Didactic for this artwork. [RIGHT – bottom] Detail of rock showing lichen growth. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

2. Timeless Beauty Clock Series



2

 Artist

Leanne Shead

2024

Timeless Beauty Clock Series

Mixed media: Glass domed antique clock embellished with dehydrated lichen, digital print, bark and moss

LEFT: **Domed Glass Clock** 13.5cm x13.5cm x6.5cm **PRICE \$65**

Mixed media: Shadow box clock embellished with digital print, dehydrated lichen, marker drawing

RIGHT: **Shadow Box Clock** 13cm x 32cm x 5cm **PRICE \$50**

Time plays an integral role in the existence of lichen. Lichen is regarded as one of the oldest living species with fossil research of lichen-forming fungi to vascular plant fossils dating to 425 million years ago. Additionally, lichen grow very slowly, some less than 1mm per year and can take many years to establish. Using antique clocks as a metaphor, these works pay tribute to the timelessness of lichen and honour its slow pace. Its ability to slow down time, not be rushed or stressed, just to tick away and grow.

Timeless: so good or beautiful that it cannot be affected by changes

Figure 70: TOP – *Timeless Beauty* artwork in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Detail of clock faces including lichen mixed media. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

How timeless is lichen? These two works appropriate a found object [clock] to metaphorically emphasise the relation between time and Lichen. This can be analysed through two different aspects. Firstly, considering its evolution as one of the oldest living species and then secondly, the slow rate [time consuming] at which lichen grows. It has been determined that lichen-forming fungi first evolved about 250 million years ago as one

of the earliest colonisers of land (Klein, 2019) Using clocks as creative vehicle linking to lichen and time allowed for references to ideas such as the grandfather clock, which in turn inspired the research of the Father of Lichen. Examining branches of biology, we understand that phycology is the study of algae and mycology is the study of fungi. The father of Phycology was originally Aristotle (383 – 322 BC) during the 4th century. However, British biologist Felix Eugene Fritsch (1879-1954) was notably regarded for ranking and classifying algae. In 1858, German microbiologist, Heinrich Anton de Bary (1831-1888) became the founding father of plant pathology as well as the founder of modern mycology. Knowing that lichen has a symbiotic relationship between algae (provides the food) and fungi (provides shelter), the botanical reference to the study of lichen is coined Lichenology. Lichen taxonomy was established by Swedish botanist, Erik Acharius (1757-1819). Acharius described many new species and arranged them in forty distinct genera. He created the first rational system for lichens and has been called the father of Lichenology (Wedin, 2014). These clock artworks pay homage to the scientific forefathers of lichen, whilst metaphorically acknowledging their place in time.

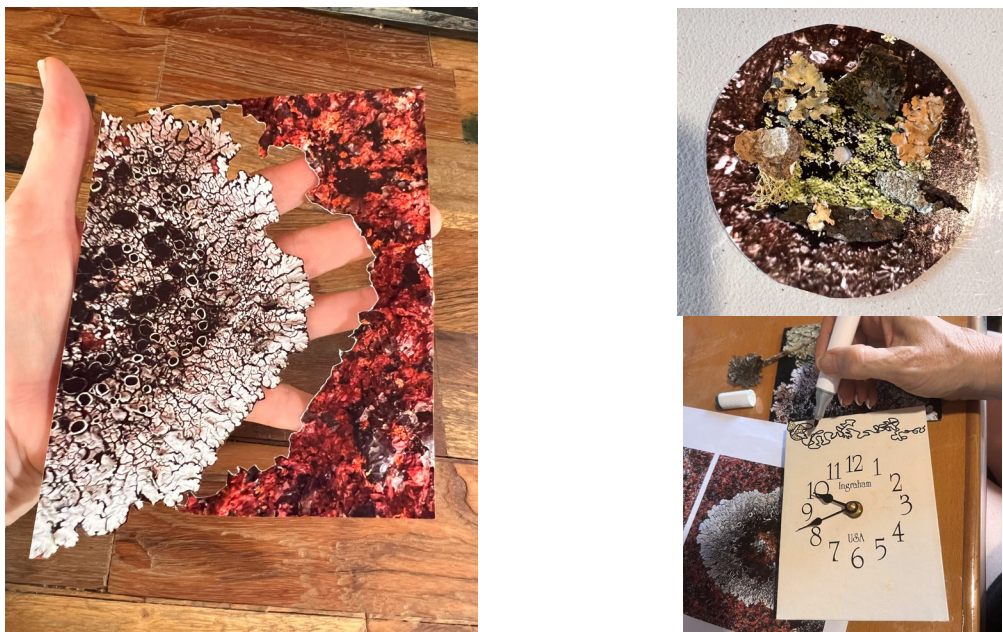
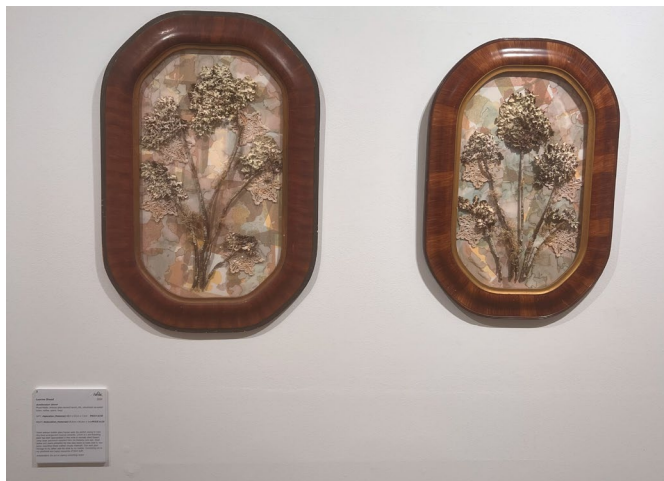


Figure 71: [LEFT] Photograph used for the clock background. [RIGHT - top] Surface treatment using lichen. [RIGHT – bottom] Marker drawing onto clock face. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

3. Amelioration Series



3

Leanne Shead 2024

Amelioration Series
Mixed Media: Antique glass-domed frames, Ink, rehydrated harvested lichen, doilies, pearls, twigs

LEFT: *Pejoration [Paternal]* 43cm x 62cm x 2.5cm **PRICE \$150**

RIGHT: *Melioration [Maternal]* 38.5cm x 56.5cm x 2cm **PRICE \$125**

These antique bubble glass frames were the perfect casing to crate this floral arrangement inspired artworks. Lichen is a non-flowering plant has been appropriated in this work to recreate dried flowers using large specimens collected from the Malanda rock wall. Small doilies and pearls embellish the tree twig stems to make links to how lichen resembles these crafted circular materials. One work pays homage to my father and the other to my mother. Connecting me to my childhood and happy memories of them both.

Amelioration: the act of making something better



Figure 72: TOP - [LEFT] *Amelioration Series* in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. BOTTOM – [LEFT] *Pejoration (Paternal)* artwork [RIGHT] *Melioration (maternal)* artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Practice-led research consistently underpinned the processes of this work through making (experiment and create), documenting (visual diary, samples, photos), and researching artists that produce work that either aligns with and or influences my own directions. Retaining the notion of Beauty and Blemish, this work is paired using dichotomy.

This was a deliberate decision to connect with the idea of one work being reflective of beauty, and the other work being considered blemished. It also reflects the symbiotic partnership of lichen, with fungus as the dominant partner (father figure) and algae as the food provider (mother figure). The titles for this work use antonyms based on the verb ameliorate. Beauty is presented through the feminine frame *Meliorate (Maternal)* and blemish as the masculine frame *Pejoration (Paternal)*. *Meliorate* is defined as making or becoming better, an improvement. While *pejoration* implies a change for the worse, such as depreciation. Some consider the growth of lichen on surfaces a change for the worse and a natural depreciation of the surface. Overall, the appearance of lichen on surfaces can be viewed as an amelioration, nature's way of making something better. Lichen improves the environment as an indicator of pollution.

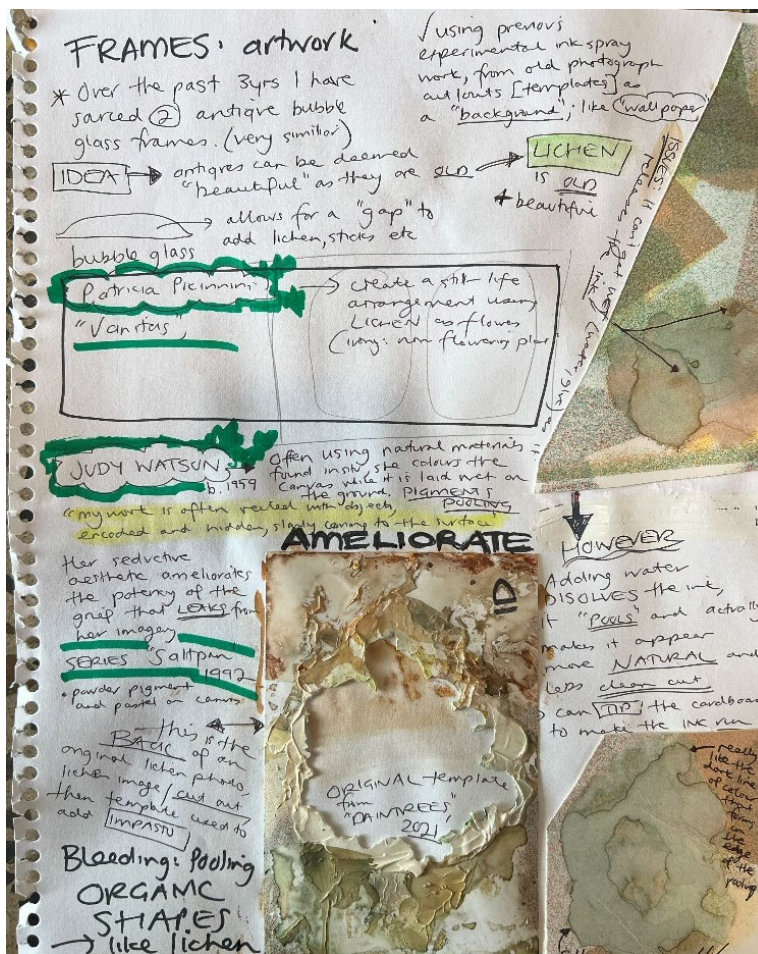


Figure 73: Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Amelioration*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 1: Antique Bubble Glass Frames

The antique frames were sourced about two years ago with the deliberate intent of being used in the final body of work. An original smaller frame was found at a local second-hand shop, with convex bubble glass which inspired the idea to source larger versions.



Figure 74: [LEFT] Original small bubble glass frame sourced from the Op shop that inspired artwork directions. [MIDDLE] Side view showing the convex shape of the bubble glass. [RIGHT] Two larger antique bubble glass frames sourced from Sydney by my mother on Marketplace. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

My mother helped source two similar antique bubble glass frames on Marketplace in Sydney. Both have similar wooden frames that resemble trees, linking them to the rainforests where lichen grows. One is slightly smaller to represent my mother, the other slightly larger to represent my father. Allocating a larger size for males and a reduced size for females was an ideation learnt at school whilst studying Egyptian art and their hierarchy of scale. The male figure was always represented taller or larger than the female figure. The intention was to create a posy of lichen to resemble a floral arrangement. Thus, challenging the visual convention and reference of fresh, bright, pretty flowers. My version presents shrivelled, dull grey-green hues of harvested lichen. Large lichen samples were sourced from a field trip to Malanda in the Tablelands region from a rock wall containing huge specimens. Due to recent rainfall, they were easily removed by hand, left to hydrate and then compositionally arranged within the two artwork frames. They were paired with twigs containing lichen to emulate the idea of stems upon which the lichen sat like flowers.



Figure 75: [LEFT] Malanda, rock wall where large specimens of lichen were harvested, dried and then used in the artwork, 6 July 2023. [MIDDLE] Holding a large single piece of lichen from site. [RIGHT] Sample of large lichen growing on the rock wall surface prior to harvesting. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 2: Watercolour Background

The background artwork was originally created on 13 November 2021 during a workshop with local artist John Eaton. I used the photographs I had previously cut out for the *Forest for the Trees Series*, (JCU, April 2021) and layered them at different stages, whilst I added various ink colours using spray bottles. This was applied to card stock which was dense and not affected by water. However, the ink sat on top of the card stock and did not penetrate the support. At the time, it was not known that this was to become beneficial in the use of this experimental artwork in the creation of *Amelioration*.



Figure 76: [LEFT] Using Tintex Toucan technical drawing inks in spray bottles, mists of spray to layer over pre-existing templates created from photographs of lichen that had been cut out. [MIDDLE] The process of spraying, drying then rearranging to create a layered, almost camouflaged surface. [RIGHT] Workshop learning spraying techniques with artist John Eaton at Artview Gallery on 13 November, 2021. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

There was something visually intriguing about the layered shapes that emerged but I was not sure what I needed to do with the experimental sheet so I just kept it. In mid 2023 I decided to use this as the background for both *Amelioration* artworks and this took me on a journey that visually resolved the surface. Whilst using PVA to glue down a sample piece, the wetness of the glue made the ink spray run. This accidental dissolving of the material became the perfect resolution for my making. Using a brush and water, I added droplets to watch how the surface reacted and was pleasantly surprised by the way it bled and pooled. Once dry, the pools not only resembled organic lichen shapes, but they had a darker, thin silhouetted line that outline the dissolved shape. It softened the surface and changed it from looking manufactured, sharp and artificial, to something more natural and organic. Using the original photographic templates of the previously cut out lichen images, I placed these on top of the original surface and individually dissolved specific sections one at a time. The pooling and drying process was slow but effective and achieved the shadowy, softened surface treatment reminiscent of lichen growing on trees or rock surfaces.



Figure 77: The four images above show the various stages followed for the creation of the background surface for the *Amelioration Series*, for the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 3: Oshibana Lichen Arrangements

The idea was to create a still-life arrangement, similar to dehydrated flowers in an attempt to parallel the idea of preservation as a wall ornament in the style of Oshibana. This art and craft of pressing flowers to preserve their beauty reaches back to 16th century Japan, where it supposedly taught Samurai warriors the importance of patience, concentration and living in harmony with nature. Oshibana means to paint a picture with natural elements. The making of an oshibana takes a lot of time and creativity.



Figure 78: [LEFT] Detail of *Pejoration* artwork showing branches, lichen and lace doily. [RIGHT] Detail of *Melioration* artwork with lichen and lace doily, embellished with an imitation pearl. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

4. Beauty Biomes Series



4



Leanne Shead

2024

Beauty Biomes Series

Mixed Media: Wooden base, glass cloche, twigs, lichen, antique lace

LEFT: ***Dome #1*** 13cm x 24cm x 13cm

PRICE \$50

RIGHT: ***Dome #2*** 13cm x 24cm x 13cm

PRICE \$50

The idea of creating tiny worlds using collected twigs from sites connects to the idea of preserving lichen both physically and emotionally. Seeking a way to visually capture the experiences of walking within landscape, seeing lichen growing on trees is encased in this glass memory. Using glass also links to the notion of the fragility of this ecosystem and the vital role it plays within the environment. I love that the rainforest is my home where I can constantly admire the beauty of lichen as it blemishes trees.

Biome: an area classified according to the species that live in that location

Figure 79: TOP – Paired artworks, *Beauty Domes* on antique lace doily in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Sideview detail looking through both biome artworks. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.


Lichen plays a vital part within the ecosystem of our environment. These works reflect the idea that we need to preserve and conserve these often-overlooked organisms. Collected twigs with lichen attached was sorted and selected to create a mini lichen world inside the glass cloches. Whilst simplistic in approach the message is visually established using contemporary assemblage.



Figure 80: TOP - [LEFT] Planning vertical twigs for the construction of Beauty Biomes. [RIGHT] Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Beauty Biomes*. BOTTOM - [LEFT] sorting and organising the lichen and twigs. [RIGHT] final selection of lichen and twigs for each biome. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

5. Tracking Beauty Series



5 
2024

Leanne Shead

Tracking Beauty Series
Mixed Media: Canvas, lace runner, wooden twig, digital print, acrylic paint, lichen, impasto, markers, rhinestones

LEFT: **Track #6** 40.5cm x 50cm x 5.5cm **PRICE \$65**

RIGHT: **Track #13** 40.5cm x 50cm x 5.5cm **PRICE \$65**

As a new mountain bike rider, I was able to use this leisure experience to track and connect to lichen in the landscape up in the tablelands. Whilst riding with friends [Katie & Troy] at the Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park, the lichen on the boulders and trees I cycled past heightened this immersion for me. I often stopped to photograph and collect samples during my ride. The green rhinestone lines in this work emulates two specific tracks captured on my Strava. One particular ride ended in a crash on Trail 6 from Trail 13 where the lichen I had collected for his work was stored in my backpack. True to lichen's form, it survived this adversity, more so than myself.

Tracking: the act or process of following something or someone

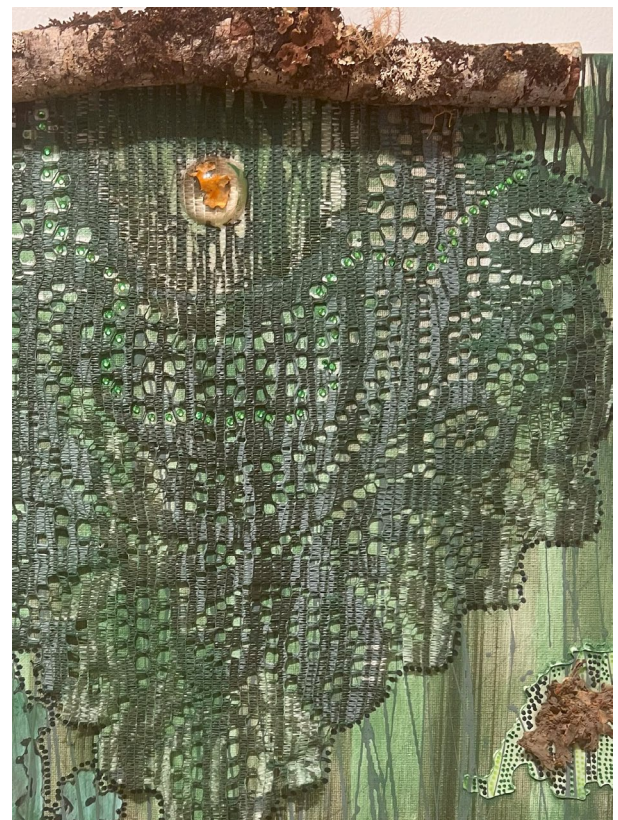


Figure 81: TOP -[LEFT] *Tracking Beauty* artworks in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. BOTTOM – [LEFT and RIGHT] Details of *Tracking Beauty* artworks. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

This series was one of the most challenging trying to balance the surface treatment through different approaches. The lichen twigs were found at site and during transportation, were involved in an accident in my backpack. The struggle with this work to achieve the aesthetic planned was often fraught with redevelopment and unexpected trial and error.

Colour, tone and texture through the combination of painted surface required drawn marks to help tie it into the collection. It would be fair to say this series is the least favourite and one I almost did not include in the final show.

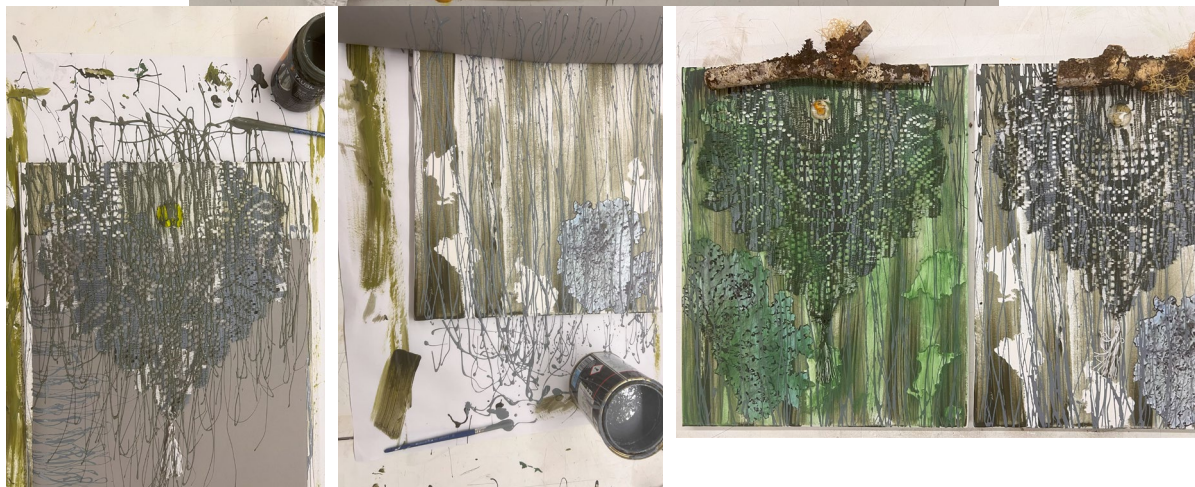
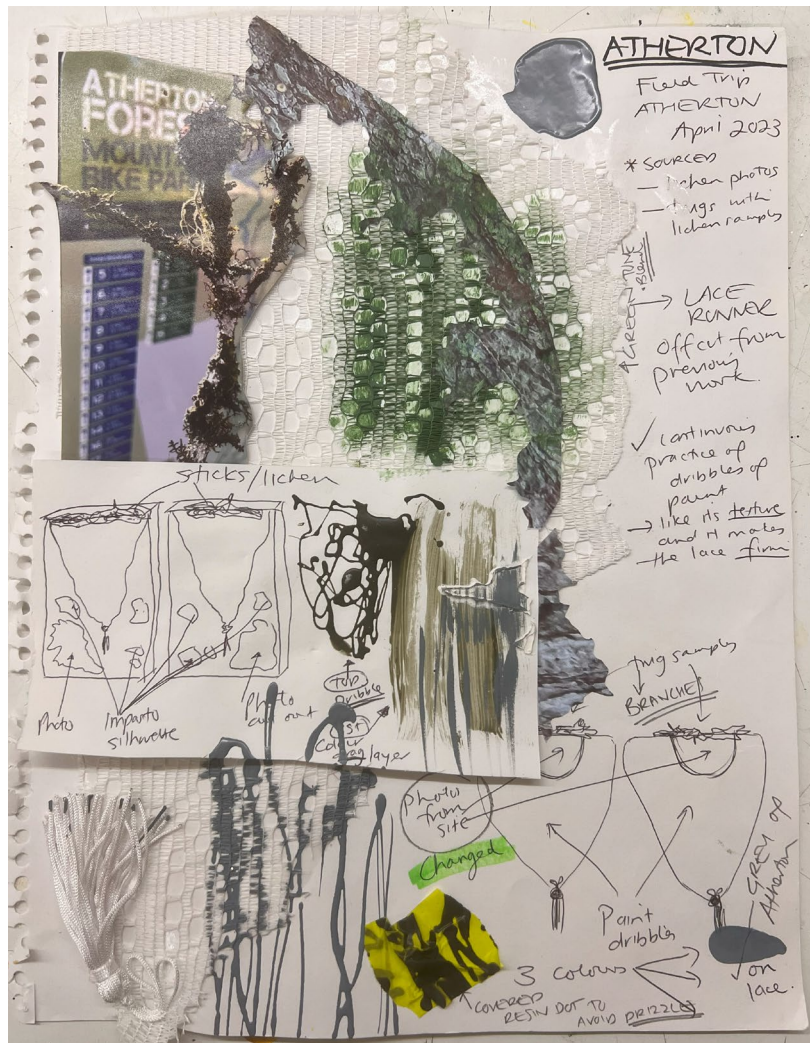


Figure 82: TOP – Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Tracking Beauty*. BOTTOM – Four images showing the paint colour experiments and processes to create surface treatment for *Tracking Beauty*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

6. Camouflage Series



6

Artview
ARTISTS

Leanne Shead

2024

Camouflage Series

Mixed Media: Acrylic on canvas, digital photo strips, lichen set in resin, twigs, impasto, cicada exoskeletons

LEFT: *Camouflage #1* 20cm x 25cm x 5cm

PRICE \$60

RIGHT: *Camouflage #2* 20cm x 25cm x 5cm

PRICE \$60

These works stem from a visit to Copperload Dam where we hired kayaks and paddled to a secluded creek and discovered a waterfall. I took photographs and videoed the water running over the rocks that were smothered with fructose lichen, untouched. The also video captured the intense sound of the cicadas squawking. Aptly title *Camouflage*, the lichen sprawled on the rocks at this site was like camouflage, patches of circular shapes that blemished the rocks in beautiful patterns amongst the tree lined rainforest. The white impasto mimics the white water rushing through and past the rocks while the cicadas called.

Camouflage: to blend in with their surroundings

Figure 83: TOP - [LEFT] *Camouflage Series* artworks displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. BOTTOM [LEFT] Detail of *Camouflage Series* showing diverse surface treatment including cicada exoskeleton. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Ironically, this series is one of my favourites. Not only were the stages of creation enjoyable, but the overall aesthetic highlights my objective of creating a beautifully blemished surface. So engaged in the process, a visual diary page was not completed as the work simply evolved. As noted earlier, originally there were three panels and for the solo show have only a pair were included in the final exhibition. The base application of impasto over the top of a new colour palette of three olive greens was now hitting the hues reminiscent of rainforest lichen. Three stencils were trialled to produce tree texture; however, one was ineffective and scrapped off.

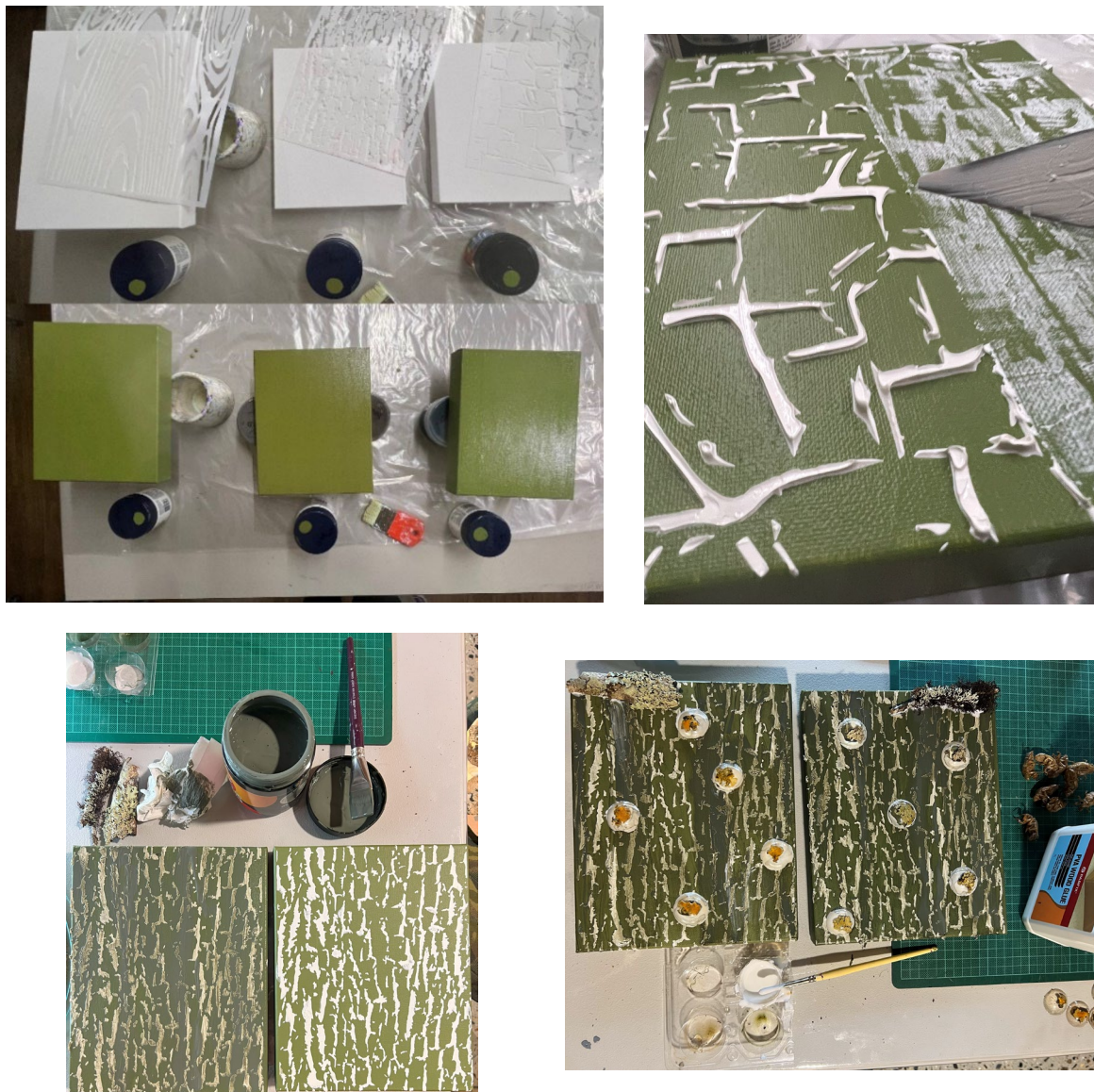


Figure 84: TOP - [LEFT] Three stencils and three greens hues painted for the base. [RIGHT] Ineffective stencil of impasto scrapped off. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Toning the white impasto with grey paint. [RIGHT] Adding the resin cast beauty spots using PVA glue. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

7. Decorticating: Beauty Pieces Series



7

ArtView
ARTISTS

2024

Leanne Shead

Decorticating: Beauty Pieces Series

Mixed media: acrylic paint, wooden strips, bark with lichen, digital prints, rhinestones

LEFT: *Series #1* 30cm x 39.5cm x 1.5cm

PRICE \$65

RIGHT: *Series #2* 30cm x 39.5cm x 1.5cm

PRICE \$65

During this project my main focus has been based on lichen growing on trees and rocks. These works reflect the notion of how lichen grows on trees in particular and when the trees shed their bark through decoration, how the lichen continues to cling to the surface. I thank my friend Tammi for bringing me her collected bark samples containing fructose lichen for the creation of this work. The deliberate use of vertical lines using strips of my own digital photographs and wood, parallels the visual nature of trees in the rainforest.

Decorticating: stripped of its bark

Figure 85: TOP – *Decorticating Series* artworks displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Detail of *Beauty Pieces #1*, showing surface layering and treatment. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

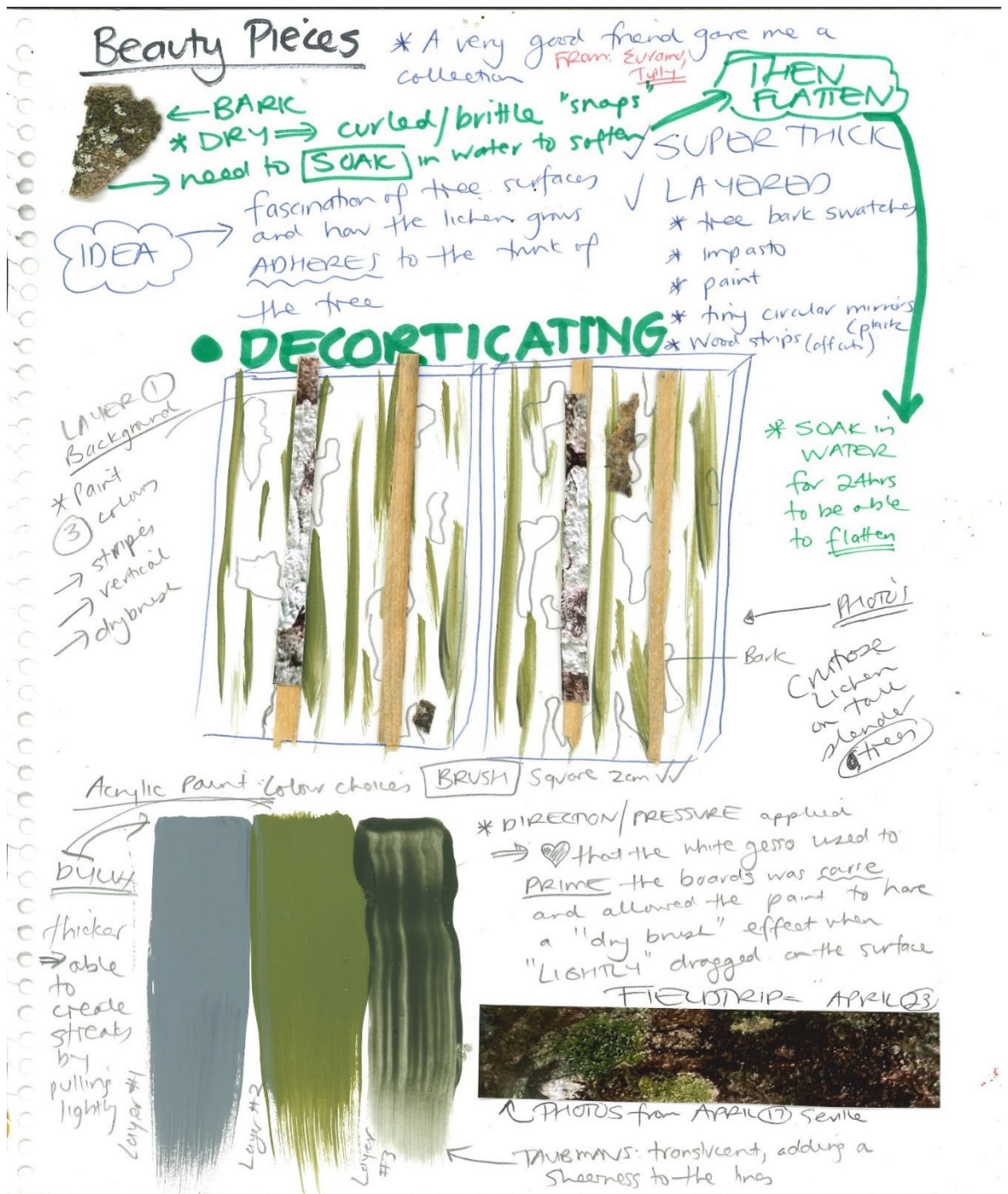


Figure 86: Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Decortication*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

This work focuses on tree surfaces and how lichen grows, adheres, and smothers the exterior trunks of trees, known as the bark. From a botanical perspective, it can be observed that lichen tends to be seen on the bark of older or stressed trees as the surface may become more brittle with cracks and have uneven surfaces, permitting lichens to attach themselves more readily. Research on trees and bark by New Jersey Agricultural

Experimental Station, (Rutgers, United States of America) finds that the growth of lichen on tree bark depends more on the physical surface of the bark than on the kind of tree. Young trees in general have a smoother bark that tends to attract crustose lichen species. As trees get older, the bark usually develops uneven broken surfaces that permit the foliose and fruticose lichens attach to the tree. (Daniel, 2013). Whilst previous work has involved foliose (leaf like) lichen due to its ability to be easily harvested, my interest and inability to harvest crustose lichen due to its flat, crumbly nature was resolved through the collection of lichen samples on the bark. My friend visited Euramo, 143km South of Cairns in a wet region near Tully and collected pieces of bark. The bark had shed and she found pieces that had sloughed off with the crustose lichen still attached. Not only were the pieces utilized in this mixed media artwork, but it allowed me to draw upon a photographic series taken earlier in the year of crustose lichen growing on tall slender trees. Upon further research, I discovered that the term used to describe this shedding or sloughing of bark was in fact known as decortication. Maintaining my focus on working in pairs, this work uses primed wooden board, because a durable surface was required to glue and press the bark pieces onto, firmly and flatly. Layering continued to be the artmaking process, drawing on acrylic paint as the base, layered with lichen encrusted bark, shaved wooden strips, digital prints cut into slithers and silhouettes created from templates of lichen images.

Layer 1: Acrylic paint

Only three specific colours were included in this diptych, a grey, muted green and olive. Two of the acrylic paints were Dulux and were thick and opaque, whilst the olive colour was from Taubman's and was thin and translucent, almost like a glaze. This worked well when layering the three hues on top of the primed board. The gesso when originally applied to seal the board was rolled which left a coarse and uneven surface. This allowed the paint to sit and

drag across the surface. I deliberately used a 25mm square brush and applied the paint in long vertical lines with slight undulation. Applying each stroke slowly and with differing pressure allowed me to play with the surface treatment. Letting the gesso grab or resist the colour to create a scumbling and dry brush effect in some areas. The thicker colours were applied first, followed by the thinner paint, adding a connective layer.



Figure 87: [LEFT] Detail of pulled dry brush paint on gesso board for *Decortication Series* artwork. [RIGHT] Three colours applied in layers for the background of both *Beauty Pieces* artworks. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 2: Lichen Bark pieces

Sourced by a friend from Echo Creek at Euramo this location is bounded by the north by the Tully River and to the south by the Murray River, and forms part of the Djilgarin Conservation Park. The fragmented peeling bark containing remnants of various lichen, in particular, crustose lichen had started to slough. She collected them for me from the ground and I let them dry before knowing what I was going to do with them. Unfortunately, once they dried, they curled and became brittle. This required a process of rehydration by soaking them in water so they became soft enough to be placed between weight and pressed to dry flat. This process was time consuming but necessary so the pieces could be securely attached for the

construction of the artwork. Once flattened (and still moist) segments were adhered to the two painted panels using PVA glue. A large wooden weight was re-applied then left to dry and set. Only a few pieces of lichen bark could be attached as a single time, so this process was arduous and time consuming. All bark pieces were required to be attached before the wooden photographic strips were attached so that pressure could be applied to an even surface.



Figure 88: [LEFT] Collected bark pieces. [MIDDLE] Shows the curl of the bark due to drying. [RIGHT] Raw pieces of decorticated bark collected from Tully after being dried and flattened between heavy pieces of wood. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 3: Digital prints and wooden strips

In April 2023 I attended a conference which included a local rainforest walk. During this field trip I captured images of crustose lichen growing on the tall slender trees. Images were collated into a collage to document the best images. At this initial stage, these photographs were documented I was not sure where and how they would fall into the body of work. I decided to incorporate two images from this series within the work as a visual reference to the surface treatment. Additionally, I had previously collected long, thin wood trimming from palette wood that was cut using a table saw. I kept these for future inclusion in a work. They were used in this work due to their wood grain patterns to metaphorically link to the

idea of representing trees. The large photographs were cut into thin slices to match the width of the wooden strips and then attached to provide depth and layering. A third image was used to create a template of the silhouette of the lichen. This template was placed over the wooden strips and outlined to create a central organic shape on each of the four strips of wood.



Figure 89: TOP -[LEFT] Printed photographs each 9 x 12 inches on gloss paper. [RIGHT] Photographic prints cut up into strips and glued onto thin wooden strips. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Thin wooden strips collected to use in artworks. [MIDDLE] Eight selected wooden strip, four for each panel. [RIGHT] Digital prints, sliced and adhered to the wooden strips, including a lichen template shape. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

The notion of an exterior shedding its surface brings to mind ideas of a blemished surface, something we discard. The beauty however is found on what remains attached to the blemished pieces of bark. The organic and natural remnants of crustose lichen. This work appropriates the lichen bark pieces, once decorticated. Combining paint, photography, lichen bark and mirrors reflect on the beauty of this rainforest blemish that grows on trees.

8. Headstone Series



8



Leanne Shead

2023 - 2024

Headstone Series

Digital print, concrete rendered frame

LEFT: ***Starting Place, I Remember the Past***

85cm x 97.5cm x 9.5cm

PRICE \$180

RIGHT: ***Resting Place, I Wonder About the Future***

76.5cm x 95cm x 9.5cm

PRICE \$150

The concrete headstone-shaped frames for these works were originally created for the *Symbiosis Exhibition* in January 2023, for the works titled *Holding On*. The significance of these frames marks the beginning of my journey in this project. My art practice focusing on lichen was instigated by the *Dead Centre Project* I co-developed with the PAEA at the Cairns McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery in 2018. It was here that multiple connections formed for me emotionally, mentally, and creatively. The left image is taken in Sydney, my place of birth and the right image is taken in Cairns, possibly my final place of rest. The growth of the lichen on the headstones is strikingly beautiful while blemishing the headstones.

Headstone: lasting marker of remembrance after a person dies



Figure 90: TOP – *Headstone Series* displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. BOTTOM – [LEFT] Detail of *Starting Place, I Remember the Past* artwork. [RIGHT - top] Didactic for this artwork. [RIGHT – bottom] Detail of *Resting Place, I Wonder About the Future* artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Headstones for graves serve as a physical marker of a person life and death (Monuments, 2023). The works in this photographic series mark my journey from my beginnings in Sydney, New South Wales, to my current location in Cairns, Queensland. Additionally, these works reflect the original starting point for the connection to this project, relating to Lichen. In 2018, my first field trip attending a visual art teachers' workshop to the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery in Cairns, instigated my love and connection to lichen. Acknowledged as a beautiful blemish upon a surface. I was personally drawn to the lichen that grew and silently smothered the headstones, which in turn allowed for an instant emotional connection to the passing of my father. As previously stated, the Forest for the Trees, body of work paid homage to my father, reflecting back to the original emergence of work in the Dead Centre Project. The images selected for this series were drawn from the first photoshoot undertaken in 2018 where textured surfaces of lichen growing on headstones was the primary objective and the last field trip to Sydney. Both cemeteries were historical landmarks connected to my places of residence. These artworks respect my original starting point, using photography as the primary medium, also reusing the concrete headstone frames created for the previous Symbiosis Exhibition. For the final exhibition, it was important to bring together my foundational practice and represent journey through location to complete the story of Beauty and Blemish.

9. Blemished Beauty Series

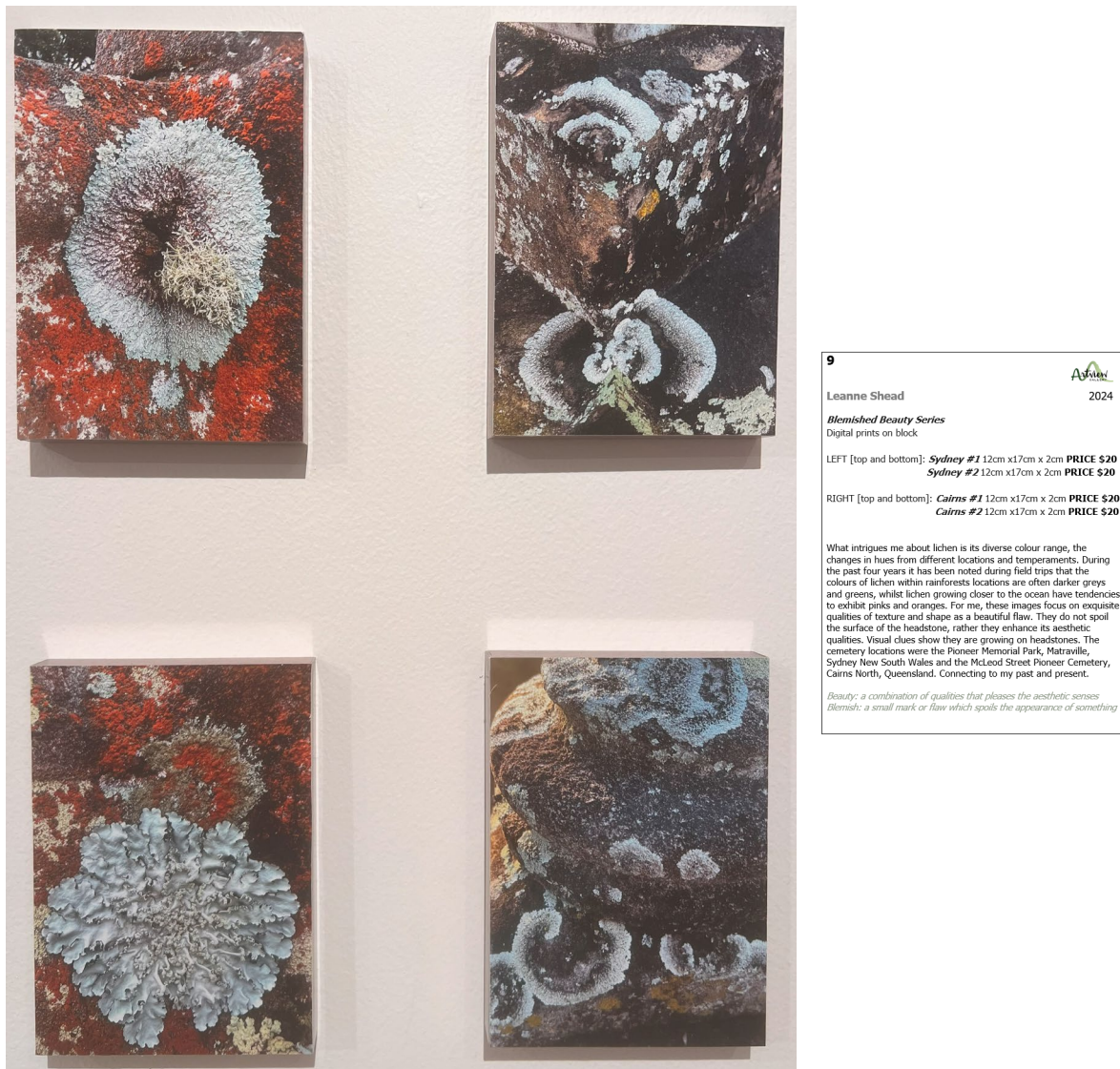


Figure 91: [LEFT] *Precious Beauty Series* displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

These four photo blocks in Figure 91 reflect location and my place of origin against my current location. Both are from a cemetery, the left orange images were captured in Sydney, while the right grey pair were taken in Cairns. Crevices of headstones, smothered with multiple lichen types were presented as a digital acknowledge of my humble beginning in this research project. Coincidentally, how it all started and then ended (this exegesis) with lichen growing on headstones.

10. Precious Beauty Series



10

Artview
ARTISTS

Leanne Shead

2024

Precious Beauty Series

Mixed media: metallic lustre digital prints on block, harvested dehydrated lichen, impasto, glitter

LEFT: **White** 27cm x 35cm x 2cm

PRICE \$35

RIGHT: **Black** 27cm x 35cm x 2cm

PRICE \$35

We often associated beautiful things with shiny objects and in particular metals such as gold or silver. These images were taken at the Cairns Marina where I noticed lichen growing on the side of the palm trees. The silvery colour drew my attention and make me consider the notion of precious metal. A series of photographs were taken, with two included in this series where the shape and texture of the lichen structures were highlighted through the printing process using metallic surface treatment.

Precious: of great value, not to be wasted or treated carelessly

Figure 92: TOP – *Precious Beauty* artworks displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. MIDDLE - [LEFT] Detail of *White* artwork. [RIGHT] Detail of *Black* artwork. BOTTOM - Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

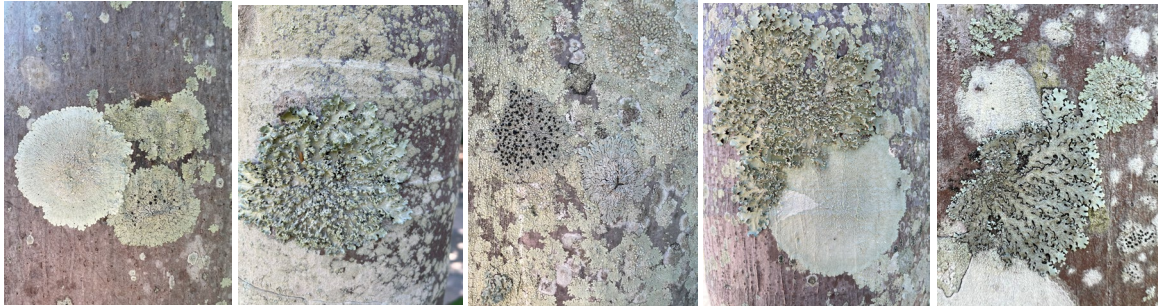


Figure 93: Five original images taken on the 16 August, Cairns Marina as inspiration for the *Precious Beauty* Series. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

There is something magical about the lustre that grey green lichen displays. These works stem from a field trip returning from Fitzroy Island in mid-August, where whilst at the Cairns Marina, I noticed the greyish fruticose and foliose lichen that adorned the tall slender palm trees. A series of photographic images were completed with the five images in Figure 93 being the strongest of the collections. Two were selected, in line with the pairing idea and black and white glitter was employed as the embellishment. Black and white is known for its dichotomy, juxtaposition and oppositional traits and playfully suited the surface treatment for these works. Images four and five were selected for this paired artwork due to the variation of lichen species and hues of green grey that would be best suited to the printing manipulation processes. These images were printed on blocks using a process called metallic lustre. This heightened the surface treatment and provided a visual emphasis on the concept of a beautified blemished surface. Previous works have implemented diamantes as kitsch connotations to heighten the conceptuality of beauty through a bling-blemished surface. These works explored a new application using black and white glitter. Glitter may be perceived as a craft application, but actually pays homage to black and white photography. The glitter also parallels the metallic accentuated surface of the digital print. My practice of using harvested, de-hydrated lichen sections was continued and imbedded in the wet impasto template application (established in the beginning processes). The glitter was

applied topically to the wet impasto and left to dry before being removed. Again, this process was time consuming as only one section could be completed at a single time.

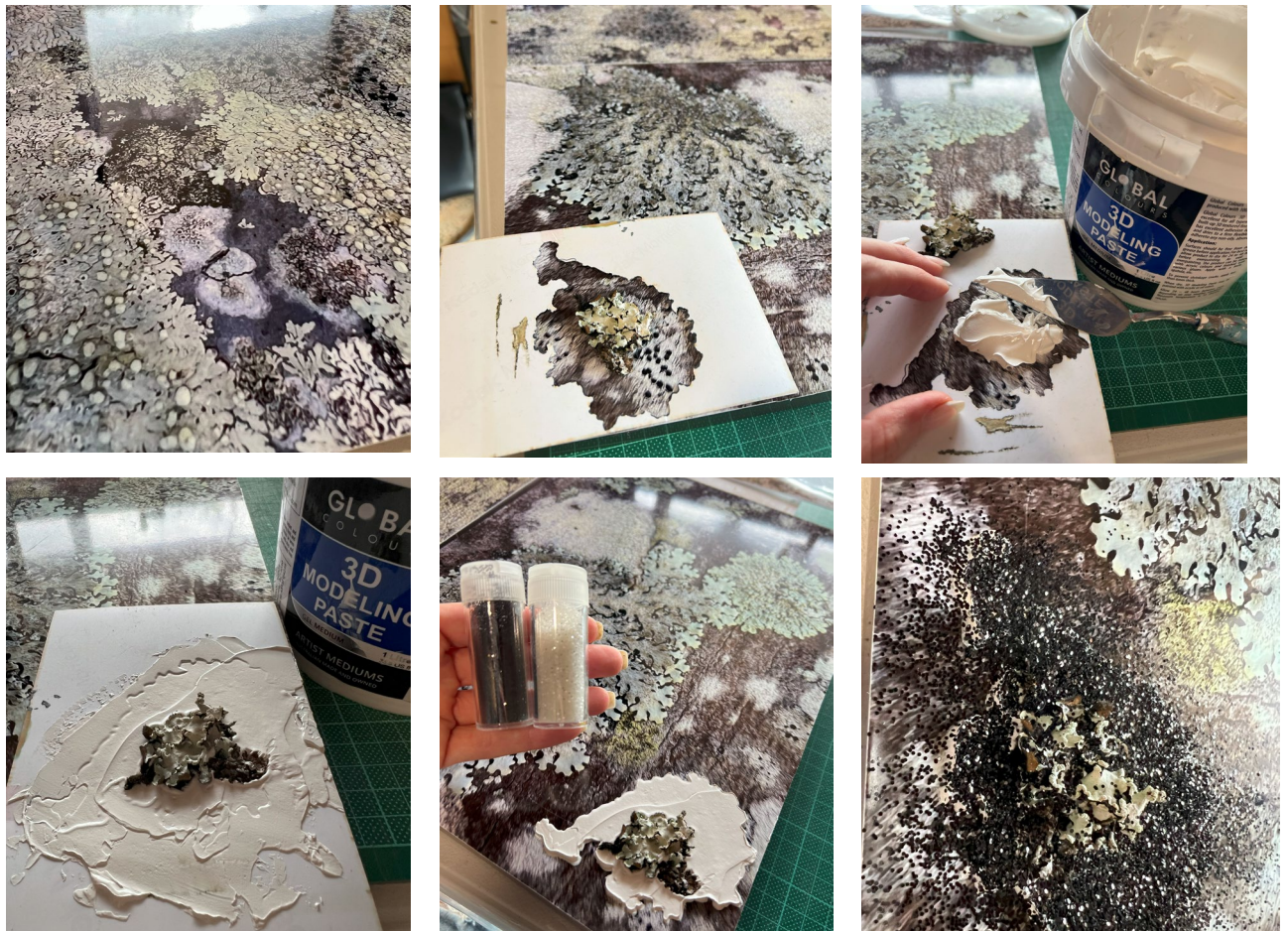
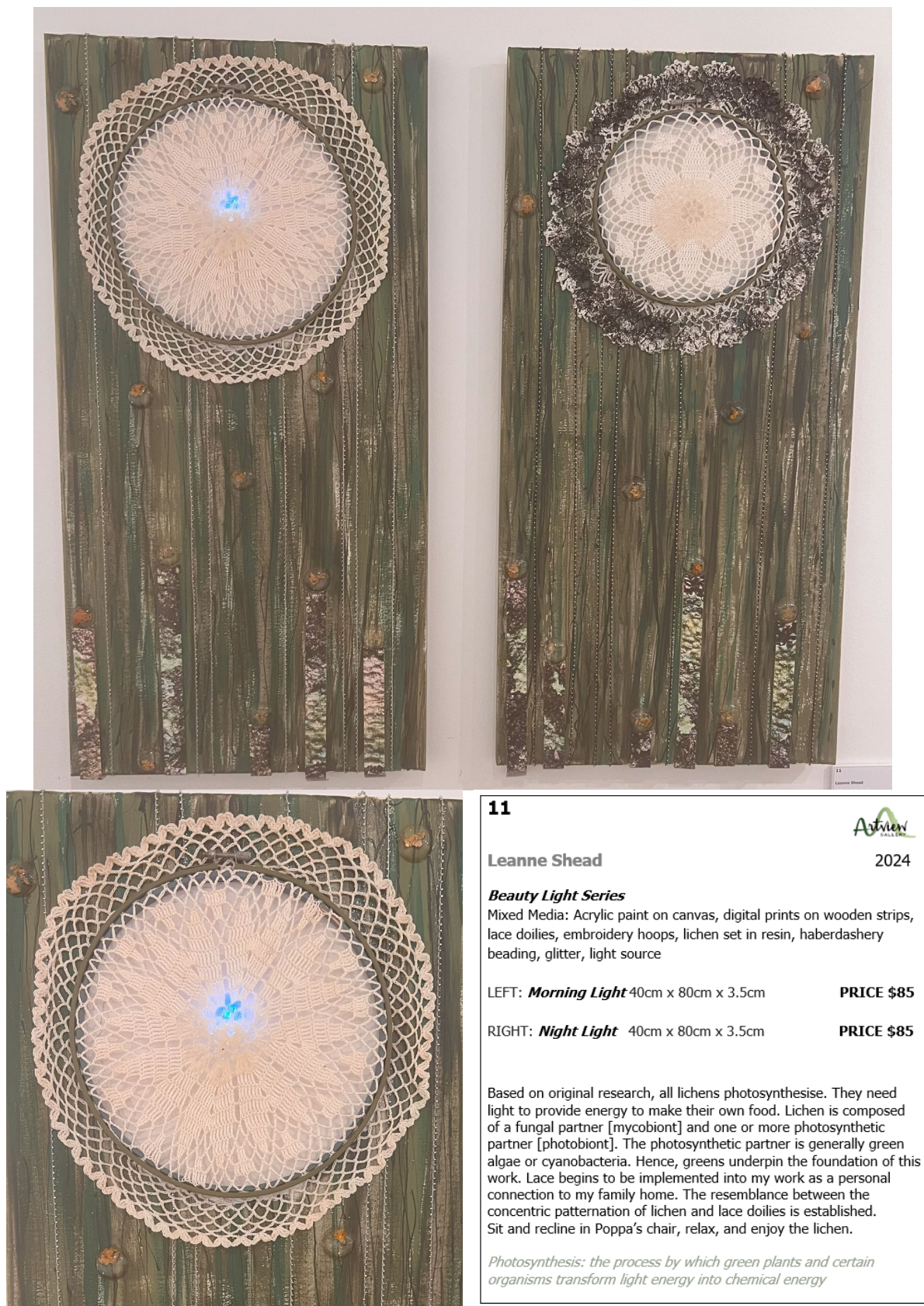


Figure 94: TOP - [LEFT] Metallic lustre of the photo block print. [MIDDLE] Selecting areas for impasto application. [RIGHT] Adding impasto using a palette knife. BOTTOM – [LEFT] Embedding harvested lichen into the wet impasto. [MIDDLE] black and white glitter used in the artworks. [RIGHT] Black glitter sprinkled in the wet impasto to set. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

There were some sections of the original photograph that were slightly out of focus and covering these areas with impasto, lichen and glitter was an alternative way of eliminating this issue, whilst maintaining my visual practice using these mixed media methods.

11. Beauty Light



11

Artview
GALLERY

Leanne Shead

2024

Beauty Light Series

Mixed Media: Acrylic paint on canvas, digital prints on wooden strips, lace doilies, embroidery hoops, lichen set in resin, haberdashery beading, glitter, light source

LEFT: **Morning Light** 40cm x 80cm x 3.5cm

PRICE \$85

RIGHT: **Night Light** 40cm x 80cm x 3.5cm

PRICE \$85

Based on original research, all lichens photosynthesise. They need light to provide energy to make their own food. Lichen is composed of a fungal partner [mycobiont] and one or more photosynthetic partner [photobiont]. The photosynthetic partner is generally green algae or cyanobacteria. Hence, greens underpin the foundation of this work. Lace begins to be implemented into my work as a personal connection to my family home. The resemblance between the concentric patternation of lichen and lace doilies is established. Sit and recline in Poppa's chair, relax, and enjoy the lichen.

Photosynthesis: the process by which green plants and certain organisms transform light energy into chemical energy

Figure 95: TOP – *Beauty Light* artworks displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Detail of *Morning Light* artwork showing the light source in the centre of the clear resin. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

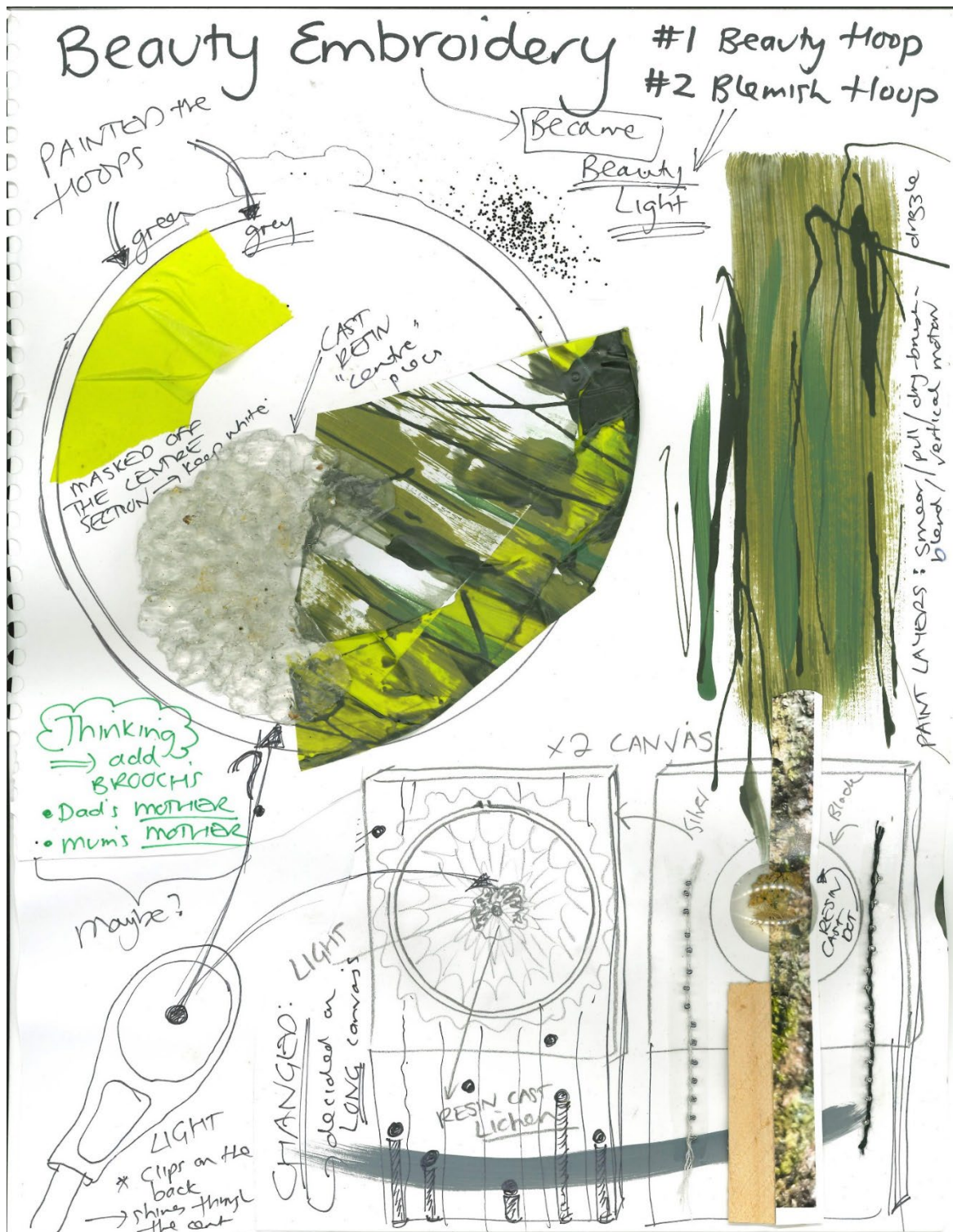


Figure 96: Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Beauty Light*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

The central clear resin lichen was created previously and this work was the ideal structure to implement the idea of shining light through the resin to create a connection with lichen requiring photosynthesis to grow. Long thin canvases were employed to recreate tree length

and other previously applied surface treatment was experimented with. Doilies starched on hoops create a strong concentric circle motif. Paint colours were limited to greens and greys and photography on wooden strips were added. Note the working titles for this work in the planning stages changed during the making process.



Figure 97: TOP - [LEFT] Original experimentaion shining a light through the clear cast resin lichen. [RIGHT] Selection of large circular doilies for each artwork. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Layers of paint application and masking off doily areas to keep it white. [RIGHT] Wooden strips and photos added as the final layer. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

12. S[Mother]ered Love Series



12



Leanne Shead

2024

S[MOTHER]ed Love Series

Mixed Media: Lace intaglio print, digital prints, lace and paper doilies, acrylic paint, resin cast lichen, lace tassel, markers, melaleuca wooden frame

LEFT: *Daughter* 72cm x 93cm x 2.5cm

PRICE \$95

RIGHT: *Mother* 74cm x 90.5cm x 2.5cm

PRICE \$95

Lichen tends to smother the surface upon which it grows, aligning it with ideals of blemishing through marking the surface. Whilst the term 'smother' tends to have a negative connotation, this is not implied in these works. I link the idea of smothering with lichen as a covering more so to protect. My mother was and still is an amazing protector providing so much love.

Smother: envelop, overwhelm, surround



Figure 98: TOP - [LEFT] S[Mother]ered Love series displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. BOTTOM – [LEFT] Detail of *Daughter* artwork. [RIGHT] Detail of *Mother* artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

When viewing lichen, we often describe its appearance as smothering the surface. Referring to the specific inference of the term smother, it notably contains the term mother. This semantic interplay allowed me to make another physical and personal connection between lichen and my family. Additionally, this artwork draws together multiple practices from previous preliminary experimental work from the Symbiosis Exhibition. Layering was an integral part of the compositional stages of these works and began with the fabric doily creating an intaglio print on a substrate. The same doily was then manipulated with acrylic paint drip application. The centre was removed and paired with paper doilies. Digital prints of lichen were collaged as well as cast resin lichen spots. Tassels were removed from the previous artwork, *Paternal Maternal*, 2023, a tribute to my father and mother. This specifically creates a connection between my mother and myself. The final surface treatment was the addition of tiny, hand-drawn coloured dots, also previously explored but deliberately accentuated in this work. Originally, this work was going to be titled, *Laced with Beauty*. However, as it developed a stronger and deliberate connection was made between the idea of a smothered covered surface and the link to my mother. Hence, the title evolved and became *S[MOTHER]ered Love*. Again, the planning was based on pairing work and was developed at the same time as *Beauty Spots*. I wanted a distinct connection between both works, so the framing for this work was created using melaleuca wood slab offcuts and incorporated resin cast lichen to visually link both artworks in display.

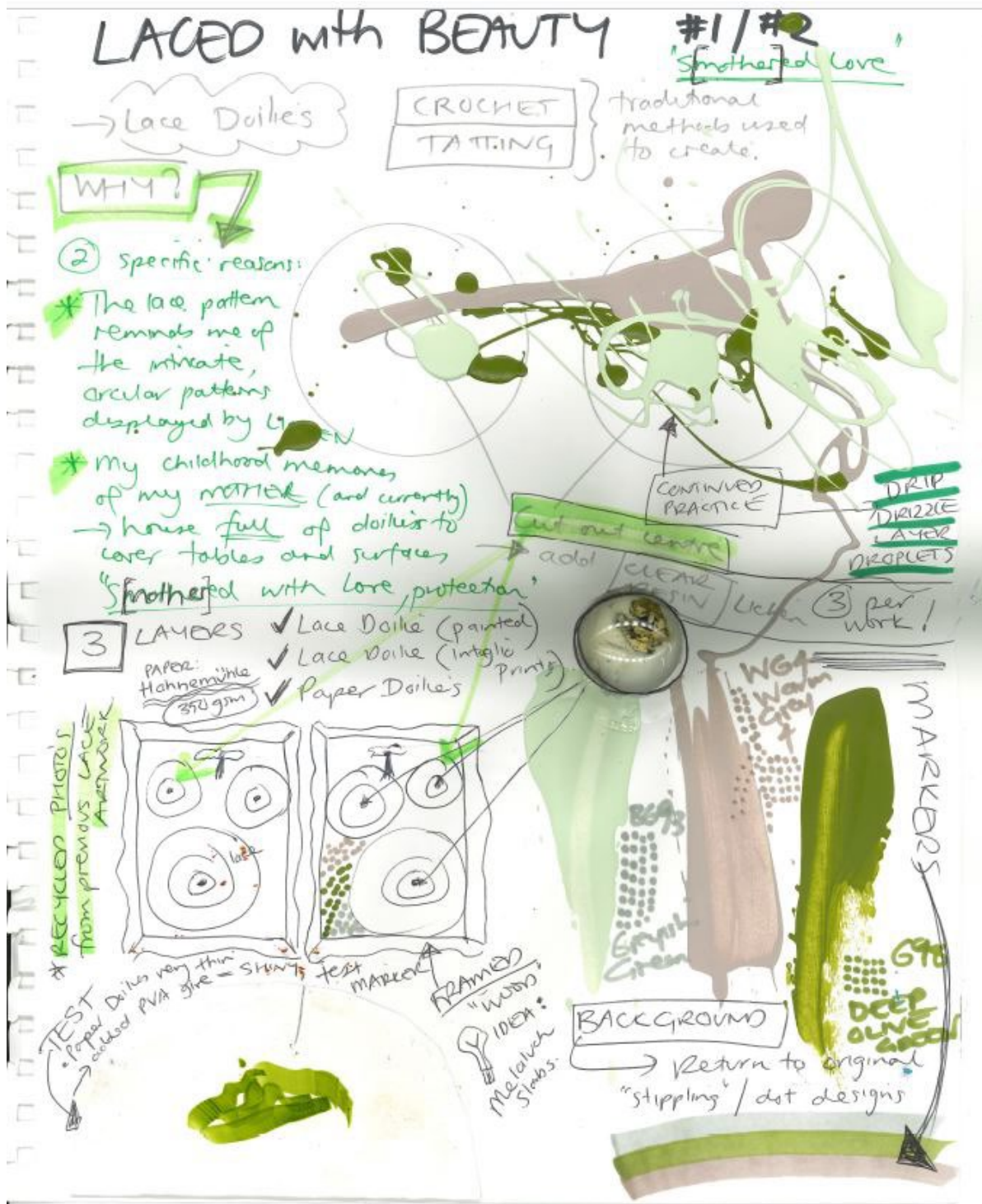


Figure 99: Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Smothered Love*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

1. *Doily - Intaglio Print and Paint Application*

My childhood and current memories of my family home include the visual use of doilies by my mother to cover furniture. Making the connection between my admiration of the beauty of lichen covering surfaces was subconsciously connected to the support, love, and comfortability I experienced growing up. Metaphorically, the way my mother used these lace tablecloths and doilies to protect and nurture our home can be paralleled with the way lichen covers and protects natural exterior surfaces. Hence this pair of works explicitly connects with the love and care received from my mother, whilst linking it to the beautiful, patterned designs of doilies that reflect my love of both her and lichen. A perfect pairing. The use of a printing press and the process of intaglio printing was employed to create embossed patterns of the doilies onto paper to be used as the support, and for this purpose, the substrate. Intaglio printing requires running dampened paper through a press to allow the texture of the object being printed to be transferred into the surface of the paper. Hahnemuhle 300gsm etching paper was used for its thickness and ability to support the weight of the additional collaged items in these works. To stop the doily from sticking to the dampened paper under the pressure of the press, a thin sheet of plastic wrap was laid over the fabric doily. Adjusting the pressure allowed for a strong embossed print of the two selected doilies to be created. Several smaller experimental versions were also created and used in the additional work *Beauty Light*.



Figure 100: [LEFT] Two large circular doilies selected for the *S[Mother]ered Love* artworks. [RIGHT] Embossed print of the large doily using a printing press showing; layers of paper doilies and the clear resin cast lichen. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

2. *Paint Pour Layering*

After the doily embossing was completed, the doilies used in this process were embellished with acrylic paint. The same process of spilling, dripping, drizzling, dribbling, and splashing wet paint directly from its container was applied from a height to achieve a random colouration of surface. This philosophical approach to art making aligns with ideas and processes expressed in my work. The paint was allowed to create unconscious marks and layers for my personal expression of a smothered surface. The paint was almost allowed to form its own patterns and direction of movement. The drying process was slow and the doilies needed to be lifted and rotated several times to avoid sticking to the plastic floor coverings. The paint acted as a hardening agent, making the fabric doilies stiff and firm which assisted with the application onto the embossed printed paper. The smaller of the two doilies reflects myself and the larger version is representative of my mother. I used identical artmaking practices on both works as I wanted there to be a close representation of my mother and our relationship.

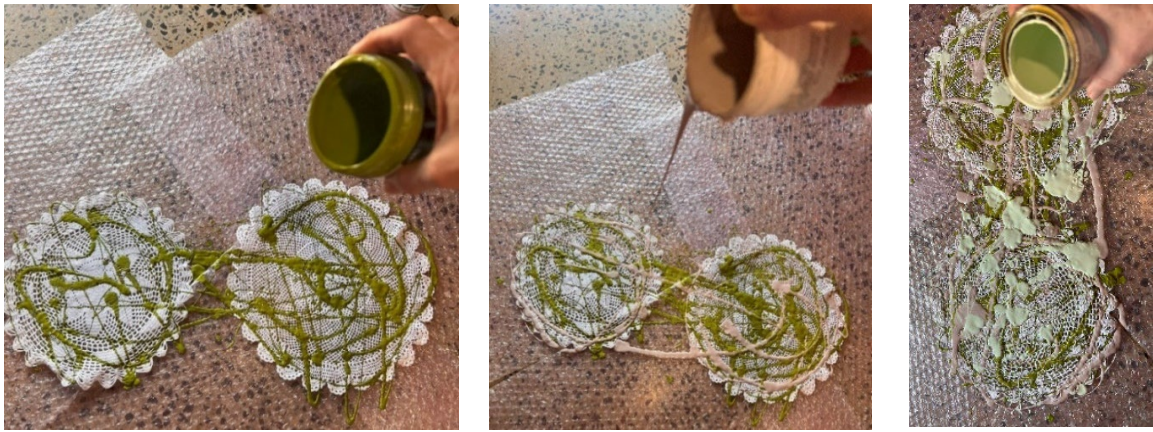


Figure 101: [LEFT] First colour paint pour over doilies. [MIDDLE] Second colour paint pour. [RIGHT] Third and final colour paint pour over the doilies for *S[Mother]ered Love Series*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

3. Layering

Once the two primary layers were completed (the embossed paper and painted doilies) it was time to assemble the additional layers. Smaller embossed imprints of fabric doilies were cut out and then layered onto white paper doilies. The thin quality of the paper doilies, coupled with their whiteness added a soft layer to the work. Two specific digital prints from previous fieldtrips were selected and trimmed to use on the stacked layers. Cast resin lichen spots centred each of the circular layers.



Figure 102: [LEFT] Layering process using painted doilies, embossed prints, paper doilies, photographs and cast resin lichen spots. [RIGHT] The perimeter of the embossed paper and fabric doilies were outlined with markers to set an exterior boundary. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

4. Drawing – Markers

My usual practice of blind contour and continuous line work was not overtly presented in this work. However, previous drawing styles employed such as stippling (concentrated dots) was used. I wanted to use this surface treatment around the doilies and their prints to balance the work against the colour introduced through the paint.



Figure 103: [LEFT] Drawing initial lichen curved outlines as a series of stippled dots. [MIDDLE] Three specific coloured markers selected to match the paint colours. [RIGHT] Completed stippled dots using markers up to the doily edges. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

13. Beauty Spots



13



Leanne Shead

2024

Beauty Spots Series

Lichen cast in resin and antique lace doilies attached to Melaleuca tree slabs

LEFT: **Beauty Spot #1** 24.5cm x 153.5cm x 2.5cm **PRICE \$125**

RIGHT: **Beauty Spot #12** 22cm x 154cm x 2.5 **PRICE \$125**

When I look at lichen, I make a connection to lace doilies. The way they both stem from the centre in a circular fashion as well as their pretty, floral, filigree like pattern and textures. Additionally, when I was growing up my mother had lace tablecloths and doilies covering furniture in our home. This innate connection between my love for my mother and my love for lichen was a perfect pairing. Using a slab cut from a tree [from our own home] aligns with previous work *Forest for the Trees*, (2021) where long, slender tree trunk were created as an initial experimental body of work. Interestingly, in Christianity, a beauty mark is a symbol of God's unconditional love and protection.

Beauty spot: a small, dark mark on a woman's face that is considered to make her look more attractive

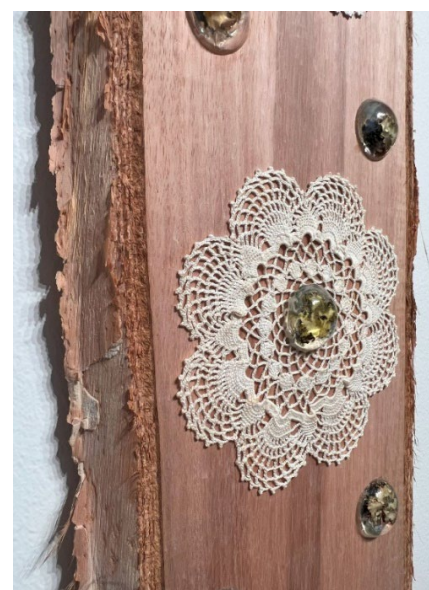


Figure 104: [LEFT] *Beauty Spots* artwork displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. [RIGHT - top] Didactic for this artwork. [RIGHT – middle] Detail of *Beauty Spot #1* artwork. [RIGHT – bottom] Detail of *Beauty Spot #2* Artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

As discussed in Chapter One, the idiomatic expression, *beauty mark* or *beauty spot*, indirectly relates to the term blemish. Lichen often appears as marks and spots on surfaces, they are not necessarily deemed ugly, but most certainly can be perceived as blemishes. In 16th century France, beauty marks were called Mouches, meaning flies and in 18th century Europe, beauty spots were adopted to cover smallpox marks scars (Paul, 2023). Lichen that grows naturally on surfaces can be perceived as beauty spots in nature. Like the way they adorned the faces of women and men, lichen grows in patches on surfaces and can be appealing, attractive, pretty, gorgeous, and picturesque. Works in the series, *Beauty Spots*, emerged from my direct observation of long tree trunks being the substrate for lichen. This basal attachment of lichen occurs through two modes: rhizines or holdfast. Rhizines are fungal filaments that extend from the medulla and attach the lichen to its substrate. Whilst the holdfast mode is an extension of the lichen thallus through a central peg (USDA, n.d.) The second mode is typical for foliose lichen, and the primary lichen used in this work. Foliose lichens are also referred to as umbilicate lichens as the central holdfast is like an umbilical cord. Hence, the resin cast foliose lichen used in *Beauty Spots* is centrally placed on each doily. Other lichen spots are then randomly positioned for their beautification of the surface. Analysis of this artwork will be explored through its main three components, the wooden substrate, resin cast lichen specimens and the antique lace doilies.



Figure 105: [LEFT] Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Beauty Spots*. [RIGHT] Melaleuca Tree on our property used in this artwork that was felled and slabbed 22 January 2022. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 1: Wooden Substrate

As forementioned, the two main surfaces that this project focuses upon relating to lichen representation is trees and rocks. *Beauty Spots*, uses trees as its primary communication of visual ideas. The wooden slabs were sourced from my own property and makes a personal connection to the work. We were required to remove a large Melaleuca Paperbark Tree from our residence in January 2022, it was felled, slabbed and left to season. During this process, offcut slabs were collected. Ironically, this tree's surface is such that lichen does not attach or grow on its truck. However, its wood was perfect to artistically create this artwork. The two slabs used were originally connected as one piece and you can see how they have been butterflyed open. They were passed through a thicknesser to clean up the surface and reveal their natural wooden grains to heighten the connection with trees.



Figure 106: [LEFT] Thicknesser machine used to pass through the wooden slab. [MIDDLE] Raw surface prior to being passed through the thicknesser. [RIGHT] Wooden slabs after being processed through the thicknesser. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 2: Antique Lace Doilies

My contemporary art practice is always driven by creating works that have a duality between both material and personal relevance. The use of lace in multiple works in this projects bodies of work were deliberately selected to connect not only with my perception of lichen appearance, but also to my childhood memories. Growing up, my mother used doilies and lace tablecloths to cover furniture and surfaces, as did my grandmother (Figure 37). To this day, my mother continues to admire the aesthetic qualities of this traditional craft. This was unpacked in relation to the specific artwork series, *S[Mother]ered Love* (Figure 98). Lichen, specifically foliose and crustose, have this beautiful spherical shape that radiates from the centre. The shapes and textures are delicate and patterned. It is these characteristics that drew me to make a parallel between lichen and doilies. Lichen ages and grows slowly, and the time it takes to craft tatting and crocheting to create different types of laces such as doilies both visually and physically connects.



Figure 107: [LEFT] Combination of Foliose and Crustose lichen. Image taken: Sydney, December 2022. [RIGHT] Detail of my mother's lace tablecloth from my family home. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

It must be noted that tatting and crocheting are quite different handicrafts. Tatting, derived from the art of knotting is over 500 years old. Whereas, crochet is a much newer craft, thought to have been practiced as early as 1800 (Charltonpark, 2010). Most of my doilies are crocheted with a few tatting versions. Originally, I wanted to use impasto to create lace doily impressions on the wooden surface. However, multiple experimentation did not achieve the desired surface treatment. It appeared thick, clunky and was abandoned. I used cloth doilies, synthetic doilies and paper doilies by adding glue to make them stiffer but each method did not achieve the desired effect. I considered painting paper doilies to add but this also was not resolved to my liking so colour was eliminated from the process. It was through these experiences that I decided to keep the natural surface and look of the work simple.



Figure 108: [LEFT] Practicing impasto lace imprinting on a wooden slab. [MIDDLE] Undesirable effect using impasto to create prints of the doilies. [RIGHT] Experimentation using painting on paper doilies which was discarded. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

I had a few of my mothers' doilies but required more, hence I searched online through Marketplace to purchase small, antique doilies of various neutrals, patterns, and sizes. They needed to be small enough to fit within the maximum width of 20cm. Playing with the composition of and final arrangement of the doilies was decided and then using PVA glue,

each doily was individually attached. The resin cast lichen was also glued onto the centre of each doily and randomly around the doilies onto the wooden slab.



Figure 109: [LEFT] Deciding which doily to apply, paper or lace. [MIDDLE] Placement and sizing of doilies on the wooden slabs. [RIGHT] Adhering doilies to the wooden slab. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 110: In the studio, leaving the artwork horizontal to dry it flat after attaching the doilies and resin cast lichen spots. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Layer 3: Resin Cast Lichen

Foliose lichen was used for the resin casts as it can be easily harvested from its substrate.

The lichen used in this work came from multiple locations during different field trips over the past few years. This allowed for diverse colours and ranges of foliose specimens to be applied. This also ensured that the lichen was dried naturally. As established, this contemporary artwork references the growth of lichen on trees and acknowledges its association as a beautiful blemish, spot and mark. It does so by paralleling the idea of round

blemishes through circular shapes. These round resin spots, presented as blemishes, look beautiful with their range of textures and colours. Each containing a small, suspended specimen of harvested, preserved, and dehydrated foliose lichen. Whilst my beauty spots are not irregular in shape, like the naturally occurring marks of lichen on the trees, the idea of them being different colours and textures is captured in each resin spot. The lichen needed to be trimmed to size to fit within the small tray. It was inverted into the resin so that the lichen side was revealed when removed from the tray. A heat gun was used after the initial resin pour and immersion of lichen to remove excess air bubbles. When set, they were released out of the tray using a scalpel. The first experiment was unsuccessful as a small dribble of resin was coated on the lichen pieces. To capture the full appeal of the spots, the tray needed to be completely filled to create the volume.



Figure 111: [LEFT] Resin casting using a tray with lichen facing downwards also allowed for a shiny surface. [RIGHT] Details of lichen resin beauty spots. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Simplistic in aesthetic, *Beauty Spots* visually speaks to the duality of personal reflection and links to lichen. The connotation of lace doilies and its timeless beauty mimics the textural designs of foliose lichen as an artistic vehicle. The delicate casted resin spots capture the idea of how lichen grows randomly in patches on surfaces, beautifully blemishing its substrate. Being able to source and use locally milled wood adds a strong personal connection to the work. Hung as a pair, again associates with my practice of producing works in duplicate to reference my relationship with my parents and lichens symbiotic connection.

14. Skin Deep Beauty



14

Artivien
GALLERY

Leanne Shead

2024

Skin Deep Beauty Series

Canvas, acrylic paint, impasto, recycled lichen, antique doilies, haberdashery embellishments.

LEFT: ***Skin Deep #1*** 41cm x 81cm x 4cm

PRICE \$95

RIGHT: ***Skin Deep #2*** 41cm x 81cm x 4cm

PRICE \$95

Playing with the phrase, *Beauty is only skin deep*. this work continues the use of the melaleuca tree using its bark as a form of skin for personification purposes. Ironically, lichen does not tend to attach itself to paperbark, but this material was used as it personally connected to my art making processes. After researching the history of doilies, I learned that there were two types of this craft, crocheted and tatting. I thank my friend Di Mason for sourcing me an antique version of each to apply to the work.

Doily: a small ornamental mat

Crochet: using yarn to make up a textured fabric by means of a hooked needle

Tatting: a kind of knotted lace made by hand with a small shuttle

Figure 112: TOP – *Skin Deep Beauty* artwork displayed in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Detail of *Skin Deep Beauty* artwork [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

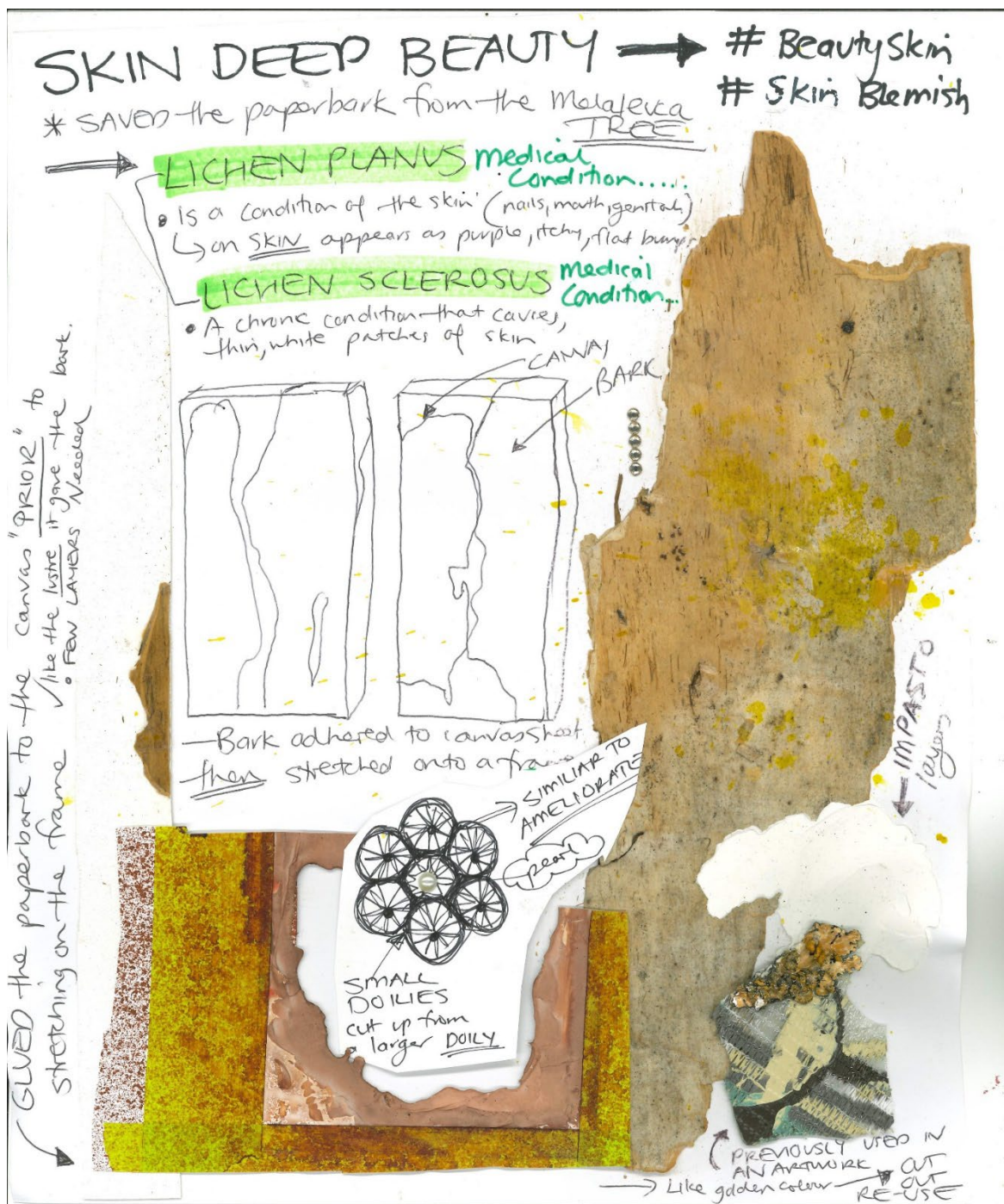


Figure 113: Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Skin Deep Beauty*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

As the final work created for the solo show, it merged ideas from the previous work, *Beauty Spots*, using the bark from the exterior of the tree. The idea of skin and beauty combined in a work aligned with ideas of blemishing. At this late stage of the process, all harvested lichen had been consumed and the resin cast lichen for this work was repurposed from the *Paternal Artwork* from the Symbiosis Exhibition. It was challenging to cut out the lichen from

the resin so impasto was used to set these lichen swatches in assist in hiding the previous painted lace runner. Wanting to revisit the ink spraying, a photographic template was created but the texture of the spray on the bark was not successful and this idea was abandoned.



Figure 114: TOP - [LEFT] Pre-used resin cast lichen from Symbiosis Exhibition were recycled. [RIGHT] Cut outs of lichen used in the *Paternal* artwork. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Setting the recycled lichen in impasto. [RIGHT] Trialling ink spray which was not continued. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

In summary, during the commencement of this research Masters there has been multiple opportunities for the exhibition of artefacts to support the development of my own approaches. The journey taken to establish, refine and build capacity through practice-led research as an artist through philosophy and artmaking has evolved into the creation of this final exegesis. With the established research question, “Can a body of contemporary visual art evoke transformations which make the viewer reconsider perceptions of beauty and blemish?”, the fourteen works creatively and visually reflected the inquiry. The artworks formed a strong body of contemporary work using unusual, unconventional and innovative application of materials and techniques. Viewers appeared intrigued and stated at the exhibition that they were surprised at the clever way lichen was utilized and explored. Through lichen, audiences were able to engage in this beautiful structure and not only see it as a blemish that exhibits in nature. They appreciated the aesthetic qualities that exist within the natural environment, and for some, for the first time were able to contemplate how lichen enriches their relationship with nature. The artworks allowed for viewers to contemplate the additional research question, about objects appearing to be aesthetically beautiful and yet repulsive at the same time. Considering, lichen taken from headstones made into earrings for people to wear allowed them to admire the aesthetics while understanding its nonconventional manner.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER 8

Discussion

To draw conclusions for the findings of this exegesis, an honest and self-reflective dialogue is required to analyse the overall processes and journey of this Research Masters. Additionally, ensuring that the research question, “Can a body of contemporary visual art evoke transformations which make the viewer reconsider perceptions of beauty and blemish?”, is answered.

Reflection

The learning process of this research project has enabled me to establish a wider understanding and development of new knowledge in relation to the philosophy of creative arts as a research artist. On reflection, the depth of research required to complete this exegesis has been fundamentally important to provide scope and relevance for the project. By reviewing each chapter and benchmarking relevant outcomes of each, a reflective journey outlines challenges and surprises can be determined. Reflecting upon the project also offers the opportunity to consider how I could have approached my research differently. Playing with terms, especially those in direct opposition and using alliteration has always been primary, both academically and artistically. Chapter One allowed for this playful recognition of phonetics to be explored. The title for the project was originally Beauty or Blemish, and once research began, it was changed to Beauty and Blemish. It was determined that or implied they were not at odds with each, so and was more suitable as they simply

required each other. Knowing that ugliness was not underpinning the blemished role of lichen was also clearly established as a starting point. The strength of the project is built upon the disparity of language applied. Using oppositional terminology for titles from the original work to the completion of artefacts in the final exhibition was a mainstay and provided continual direction.

The most rewarding component of this research was to learn new scientific knowledge about lichen. Writing Chapter Two, based on lichen biology and its symbiotic relation, heavily underpinned the creative ideas in this project. It was exciting to learn about lichen, to understand its origins and biological structure. Without delving deeply into the botanical elements of this often-over-looked organism, my work would not have had visual strength. Ideas about biofilm and applying these to art making practices, and harvesting samples and using these natural forms within artworks was visually satisfying because I had a newfound knowledge and appreciation of them.

Being able to then extend myself beyond the biology to learn about lichen through environmental aesthetics, which occurred in Chapter Three, in particular the pertinent work of philosopher Emily Brady, widened my scope of learning. Environmental arts engagement was an area of philosophy I was not aware of and it excited me to learn that this was exactly an area of research I was implementing within my own practice. Additionally, the work of Arnold Berleant was powerful in establishing arts engagement ideals and both philosophers will continue to concrete ideas for my study.

Knowing that art does not occur in a vacuum drove my research in Chapter Four. Looking at the work of other artists, finding similarities whether it be thematically or through materiality, was a process that every artist should follow. It was challenging to find artists working directly with lichen and discovering international artists was one avenue I pursued. I

made contact via email correspondence with specific artist researchers. I had correspondence with Finnish artist Annette Arlander, who is currently a visiting researcher at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, in September 2022. Her work looked at trees rather than lichen (see email conversation in Appendix F). Knowing that my work using lichen was unique, especially within an Australian contemporary community art practice was also exciting. Foregrounding lichen within innovative realms is now my objective and something I aim to continue.

Now that I understand the notion of methodology and how it impacts my process, Chapter Five was one of the earliest research modes I undertook. To be honest, it was not until halfway through this project that I fully understood and appreciated my connections to practice-led research as my methodology. Additionally, in 2022 I attended online learning programs through the University of Sydney; CREATE Centre Higher Degree and Early Career Research Seminar Series, which provided further understanding of HDR in relation to creative arts practice. I found these sessions highly valuable in assisting me with clarity and affirmation that creative arts practice was a methodological approach in its own right. One domain that I could have researched further was expressivism and cognitivism. Because of the emotional nature of my work, linking lichen to family, greater understanding of these philosophical devices could have strengthened my research.

After almost four years of research and being quite meticulous with the visual documentation of all my processes, it was a time-consuming task to collate data for Chapter Six, albeit the most satisfying. However, focusing on non-traditional materials using unconventional techniques, it was obvious that my evidence revealed diverse experimentation. It was astonishing to actually comprehend how much work I had achieved

during the complete journey. This was a positive chapter to write as it revealed successes, challenges and divergent pathways of my practice.

Penultimately, coming to Chapter Seven, is where all the hard work and collective ideas were articulated through the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. I was pleased and satisfied with the fourteen artworks displayed in this show. They were beautiful images and objects, that also allowed an audience to reflect on their construction, whilst acknowledging their blemished surface. Confidently, the body of work addressed my original research question, “Can a body of contemporary visual art evoke transformations which make the viewer reconsider perceptions of beauty and blemish?”, by presenting surprising surface treatment that was able to make an audience reconsider their perceptions of beauty and blemish.

Obviously, as the artist, I felt confident about my work, but what I found surprising about my final exhibition was the positive feedback I received from people who attended. Non-artists, who simply loved the work. I received a message post exhibition; *Hi Leanne, just wanted to say how much I enjoyed your exhibition. I wore my new earrings to work today and told lots of people about them and your work! So cool! Congratulation's! I saw this meme today and thought of you, (Meme: Embrace imposter syndrome. Revel in the fact you have fooled everyone. You are a Trickster Goddess) only you haven't fooled anyone – your work is awesome and so clever!! You should be so proud. (See appendix H for text message). I finally felt like I had achieved my goal, creating a body of work through research based on lichen.*

One of the most important lessons I have learned from this process is that this (Masters of Philosophy, Creative Arts) is only the beginning. Prior to engagement in this course, I saw myself only as an art educator, teaching visual art. It was not until I was involved in the redevelopment of the visual arts syllabi with the Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority and being part of the co-authorship with Cambridge University Press to publish,

the textbook *Creative Inquiry*, that I realised I had the capacity to formally study my vocation at a Masters level. Self-belief that I was capable of postgraduate study ensued. Additionally, the structure we had designed for the Senior Visual Art course in Queensland paralleled practice-led research, with reciprocal learning centred around both making and responding. The correlation between what I was teaching in my profession and what I was studying went hand in hand. This empowered both my secondary teaching and tertiary study and provided momentum. It would have been preferable to complete this Master's degree fulltime, and if I had my time over again, I would select to engage in this mode of study. Part-time study was very challenging, balancing this between fulltime work and other personal professional commitments (owning and running an art gallery) was at times exhausting. Momentum for my study was impacted by several external factors over the duration of the course. Beginning my study during the Covid-19 pandemic in August 2020 was always going to present challenges of the unknown. Additionally, changing jobs from one school to another added pressure and in 2021, a six-month leave of absence was approved to support my current challenges. On my return, I also had changes to both my primary and secondary advisors, which in hindsight was highly beneficial. My new primary advisor was less demanding and more understanding of my part-time commitment as well as providing knowledge of processes for creative arts practice. My new secondary advisor, brought to the table a scientific knowledge that empowered my study of lichen, as well as being extremely thorough. This balance within my advisory team I contribute to my ability to gain momentum and push forward to achieve the end goal of completion. I am extremely thankful for their support and belief in my project.

As a final reflection, consideration of all processes has afforded me broader insights through the combination of both art and science. Specifically, new knowledge about the

botanical anatomy of lichen through research provided unexpected directions using art materials that I had not before prefaced in my practice. Lichen's ecosystemic role of symbiosis and capabilities as a biofilm (in particular) allowed me to see my world through an environmental lens that supported creative pathways. The notion of wanting myself and others (audience) to reconsider and observe this often-overlooked object extended my intention for an audience. Surprisingly, the emergence of connections to family through lichen and art began as a subtle influence that gained momentum and actually played quite a pertinent role in my art making as I moved closer to completing the body of work.

Originally, prompted by cemetery visitations, the loss of my father was only considered, however this then transitioned to explore lace as a visual connection to lichen and enabled a beautiful female connection to my mother to bloom. Due to its mutualistic (relying on each other) symbiotic traits, lichen became the metaphor for familial connotations. Family relationships are not always perfect and beautiful, they can at times be blemished by disagreement and discord. The dichotomy of lichen through beauty and blemish was opened up through family connections and relationships, blending together, symbiotically through the artworks produced. It took my examination of lichen to appreciate the internal and external workings of my relationship with my parents to honour their beautiful and unwavering love, even when occasionally blemished by our actions. Lichen actually became the co-creator for my direction of exploring it literally and then non-literally through subjective analysis. Whilst my research did not push beyond the aesthetics of lichen to explore social or planetary crisis, this could be something that further interrogation could push towards. Being comfortable in knowing that currently, my work addresses the duality of lichen biologically and philosophically through family connections has achieved my end goals for this project.

My work as a research artist, focusing on lichen will continue, as this is now my artistic tool of trade and it will persist within my arts practice. I have already been approached by two local artists for inclusion in a group show this coming September at the Tablelands Regional Art Gallery. The exhibition, *Scrubscape*, developed from a field trip in April this year (where all three artists travelled to Malanda), involved an immersion in the terrain and instigated ideas for the pending show. As established in my practice, work starts with photography and harvested lichen samples. A new practice included frottage, the technique and process of taking rubbings from an uneven surface (hopefully blemished ones) using soft drawing mediums such as graphite, charcoal and chalks emerged. I am not ready to extend beyond my chosen focus of lichen but am open to new pathways I can create with this object. The exact visual outcomes will not be predetermined, which is something I have learnt through this whole process. Start with a loose idea and let the artwork emerge. Embrace uncertainty and be comfortable in not knowing exactly what the final outcome will deliver. Accept that some works will not form part of the final selection, so be prepared to make more works that you need and the ones that do not make the cut, store away for another opportunity.

Definitely, greater confidence in my ability to be a research artist has allowed my work to present new knowledge and filled a gap in current research, based on my field of study in creative arts. New knowledge that allowed for an intrinsic connection to family through a humble yet pertinent little species, the lichen.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Chapter Seven – Collective Bodies of work: Full notes for Preliminary Exhibitions

Preliminary Exhibitions

Dead Centre Project: *21 November 2018. Y Block TAFE Queensland, Cairns.*

It is noteworthy to preamble the Dead Centre Project by explaining how a cemetery became an integral site for artistic practice. In 2018, I was one of six visual arts teachers selected in Queensland by the QCAA (Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority) to form an expert writing team. We were responsible for the redevelopment of the General Visual Art syllabus to align with other states for ATAR purposes. As a writer for this project, the syllabus was created using a Practice-led research model of inquiry. Students were to research, develop, reflect and resolve as a means of artistic practice. An authentic experience, in the form of a stimulus as site was a pertinent component. As teachers prepared to implement this new syllabus in 2019, the PAEA (Peninsula Art Educators Association) of which I was the President, decided that best practice was for the teacher to become students to trial this practical approach. Hence, we coordinated 25 Visual Art teachers from Far North Queensland to undertake the challenge and the Dead Centre Project emerged. Working with two local artists [Theo Tremblay and Lenore Howard] on site to develop ideas for a body of work.



Figure 115: [LEFT] Local artist Theo Tremblay workshop for Dead Centre Project. [MIDDLE] Local artist Lenore Howard workshop for Dead Centre Project. [RIGHT] Promotional poster for the Dead Centre Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

It was here that I connected with lichen for the first time. The wet, humid environment in Cairns was the perfect place for this primal organism to flourish. I photographed and videoed it, draw it, created frottage rubbings of the headstones, scrapped off samples and noted its diversity of colour, shape, texture and form. For the group exhibition held at TAFE. I employed four different mediums. Four photographs, two of lichen and two of headstones printed on translucent paper, two black biro drawings, a wax sculpture from castings of the headstones (which was a failure) and a looped video projection documenting the lichen blemishing the base of the concrete headstones. I did not individually title each work and learned to do this moving forward. The works presented as a cluster and the didactic for this collective body of work, titled Symbiotic Substrate is stated below.

Symbiotic Substrate

Symbiotic relationship – close and long-term biological interaction between two different biological organisms

Substrate – an underlying substance or layer

When one passes, a symbol is to place flowers on the grave, when the people stop coming, the flowers are gone, but the non-flowering lichen remains. A constant covering, keeping the soul warm.

When we look closely, we can see the true surface and start to appreciate how nature interacts with us. Covering, smothering, enveloping, and creeping over surfaces with its organic shapes and textures, natural hues, and designs. We are intrigued and want to touch, connect but its appeal is haunting. Lichen grows whilst the dead lie, the daily visitor that keeps company, occupying niches and substrates in shallow recesses and alcoves

This experience was where I connected with lichen both as a biological form and also on a personal level. Pondering on the lost of my father in Sydney and finding solace in this space provided a psychological and philosophical link between my artistic intentions and direction. Whilst the artworks

were humble and underdeveloped using techniques and skills, lichen became the prime motivator. Research began and the symbiotic relationship between lichen, myself, my family, and my art emerged. After sharing this initial experience with Associate Professor Robyn Glade-Wright at JCU, she encouraged me to apply for the research master's program. My previous experience in syllabus writing, followed by co-writing a textbook with Cambridge University, for senior Visual Art students in Queensland, [Creative Inquiry] provided a platform for the awakening of my practice and beginning of the Masters of Philosophy (Creative Arts). I applied and was successfully approved and started in August 2020 (During Covid19).



Figure 116: [TOP] The collective body of work produced from Dead Centre Project Exhibition. [MIDDLE – left] One of the two photographs and drawings produced for the body of work. [MIDDLE – right] Photographs of headstones, photoshopped to remove the background, printed on translucent paper. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Projection of the looped video showing various textures and colours of lichen sprawling over headstones at the McLeod Street Pioneer Century. [RIGHT] Artist Leanne Shead standing in front of the projected artwork to show scale. Photographed by Leanne Shead and David Marsden.

Forest for the Trees Exhibition: 16 April 2021. Lux Gallery, James Cook University, Cairns.

After attending an online workshop with Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien on the 26 November 2020, they presented the seminar, From Research to Realisation. Webb discussed the stages of creative practice research, covering creative work as research: Ways of doing research, ways of knowledge. Brien unpacked the ideas associated with the creative research higher degree thesis: the creative work and the exegesis. This online professional development opportunity (online due to Covid19) was invaluable in providing me a starting point. They spoke of and encouraged the creation of a preliminary body of work to present at the confirmation of candidature stage. Hence, Forest for the Trees was developed.



Figure 117: Three artworks created for the *Forest for the Trees* Exhibition, Lux Gallery, James Cook University, April 2021. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

At this stage of my research, Associate Professor Robyn Galde-Wright was my primary advisor and Dr Kristie Giselsson was my secondary advisor. From commencing this project in August 2020, eight months later this preliminary body of work was completed. A primary field trip was taken in September 2020 to the Daintree Rainforest where

photographic documentation of lichen was recorded. Lichen samples were previously harvested from prior visitations to the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery and a field trip to Lake Morris, inspired the use of cicada exoskeletons.



Figure 118: Artist Leanne Shead and Associate Professor Robyn Glade-Wright at the launch of the exhibition at the Lux Gallery, 2021. Photographed by Veronica Gronfors.

The three experimental artworks were designed to initiate ideas and creative processes for research. They were not originally designed to be fully developed artworks in their own right, merely playful experimentation of thought process about how to explore lichen using contemporary art practices. Before the making practice begins, ideas are always mapped out using a visual diary to provide direction and decision-making processes. This includes research and reflection. This was the first time I allocated individual titles to each artwork produced and included:

1. **Daintree's Series** – Nine paper collaged mixed media works suspended from lychee tree
2. **Poetic Epigram** – canvas mixed media experimental work exploring colour and lichen set in resin
3. **Resin-ate** – relief sculpture installation with cicada exoskeleton cast in resin



Leanne Shead

Daintrees - #1 - #9

150cm x 270cm

Acrylic, digital prints, impasto, marker, rhinestones, lychee tree on paper

Luxgallery

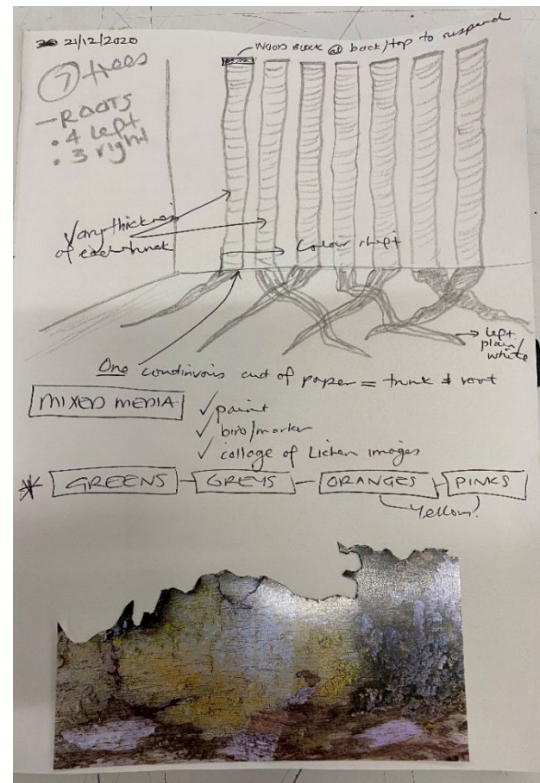
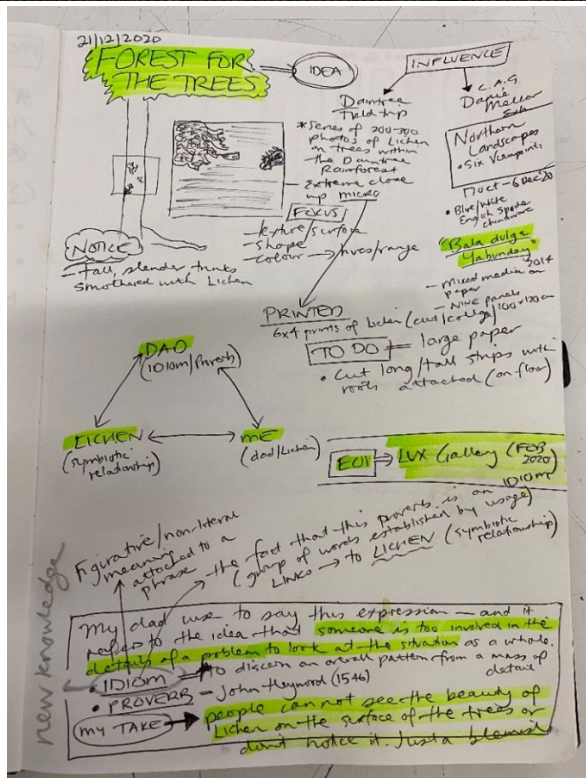


Figure 119: TOP - [LEFT] Installation of the nine mixed media artworks for *Daintree Series* artworks. [RIGHT] Didactic for this artwork. BOTTOM - [LEFT & RIGHT] Visual diary research, experimentation, planning, documentation, progress and development of the artwork *Daintree Series*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

1. Daintree Series

The nine, long tree-like mixed media paperworks that formed the Daintree series was the first experimentation for the project. Nine different colours were selected and nine layers of surface treatment was employed. The trees were cut from a long roll of paper with deliberate undulating curves to mimic the shape of tree trunks. The paper was left long and trimmed to curl to represent the buttress roots of the trees observed in the rainforest. The layers, in order were: Initial dry brush dragging, dribbling and splattering of the green base colour, the addition of twenty cut out lichen photographs (taken in the Daintree Rainforest) to colour match the chosen hues for each tree. Third layer was the application of the impasto lichen silhouettes, created from the cut-out lichen photographs. Paint was then dragged over the set impasto and wiped back for tonal effect. The sixth layer took the longest period of time applying hand drawn black pen to each two-metre-long work. Direct observation of lichen images on the laptop were drawn using blind contour continuous line techniques. Following this, coloured markers in two tones of colour were added to the continuous line lichen drawings. Two stylistic approaches were explored, block colour in one section and stippled dots in another area. To heighten the idea of a beautified blemished surface, small imitation rhinestones were added to sections of the impasto and photographic lichen to bling the surface. The ninth and final layer was the application of a sealer. The long paper trees were attached to lychee tree blocks for installation.



Figure 120: Details of four of the *Daintree Series* artworks showing surface treatment using mixed media.



Figure 121: TOP – [LEFT] The long paper roll cartridge paper used to create the paper trees. [MIDDLE] Flattening the paper roll out to draw tree designs. [RIGHT] Starting to slice the trees out using a blade. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Paper trees with tapered curls to represent roots. [RIGHT] First two layers, the initial green base paint using smearing, flicking and ribbling, then adhering the cut out lichen photographs in colour ranges. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

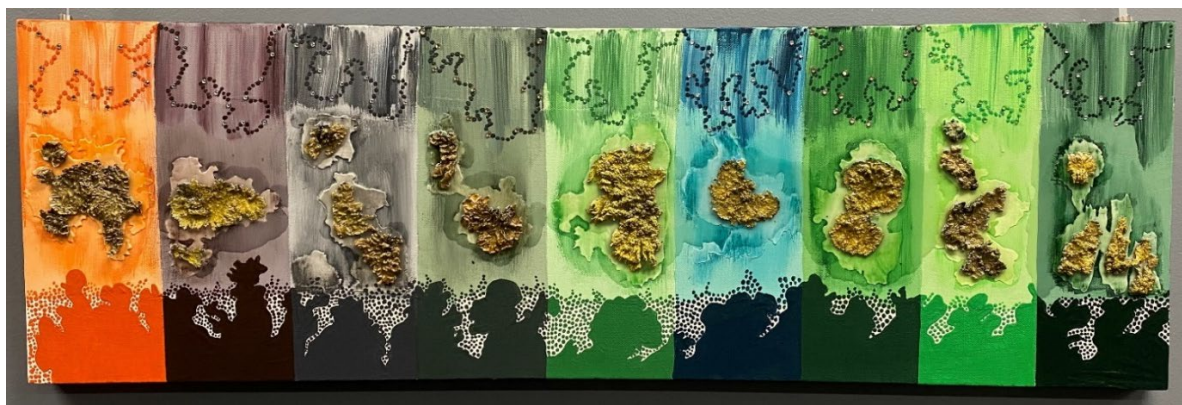
For the first iteration of combining photography, drawing and painting to create lichen inspired contemporary artwork, these works achieved the anticipated aesthetic. As an installation sculpture using mixed media the work established my practice as an artist. On reflection, the decision to create lengthy surfaces was an idea that continued into further work. The colour palette needed refinement using less variety of colours.



Figure 122: TOP - [LEFT] Colouring matching paint to lichen images. [RIGHT] Detail of paint and lichen collaged photographs. MIDDLE - [LEFT] Using pen and markers to add the drawing layer. [RIGHT] Paint applied to impasto lichen shapes. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Paper trees attached to lychee wood for hanging. [MIDDLE] melaleuca tree stumps used for display. [RIGHT] Construction of the lychee hangers. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

2. Poetic Epigram

The creation of the second work, *Poetic Epigram* highlighted that this colour choice was intense and needed to be more subtle and subdued. This work did however initiate the inclusion of harvested lichen samples and the application of resin set over the top was creatively successful. Paint was applied using hard edge techniques and also stippled to align with design motifs established in the *Daintrees Series*. *Poetic Epigram* served as an experimental platform including all the main components that encompass my technique and style. Paint application, impasto in the shapes of lichen, harvested lichen in resin and embellishment using rhinestone. All combining and connecting to emphasise the beauty of lichen through a blemished surface as contemporary art practice.



Leanne Shead

Poetic Epigram

90cm x 28cm x 3cm

Acrylic on canvas, impasto, lichen, resin,
rhinestones

Luxgallery



Figure 123: TOP [LEFT] Artwork *Poetic Epigram* created as an experimental work combining all facets of my practice. BOTTOM [LEFT] The didactic label for this work. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 124: TOP [LEFT] Stretching canvas as a long substrate was required [RIGHT] Photograph templates used to apply the impasto impressions as the base layer. BOTTOM [LEFT] Detail of paint base, impasto silhouette and lichen set in resin [RIGHT] Hand painting block areas to match each of the nine different colours used in the series. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

3. Resin-ate

The third work in the *Forest for the Trees* Exhibition, *Resin-ate* was the initial incorporation of using natural found objects. The wooden branch was collected during a rainforest walk and the tiny cicada exoskeletons were sourced from home. Whilst cicadas are not lichen, they were part of the experience at Lake Morris where lichen was photographed and videos. It was in the videos that the screeching sound of the cicadas added to the experience and were then included in this preliminary exhibition of experimental work. This work was visually the weakest idea in this series with the fishing line continuously tangling, hence this suspension idea was not employed again.



Leanne Shead

Resin-ate

25cm x 50cm x 3cm

Assemblage sculpture, rainforest branch, cicada exoskeletons, resin, fishing line

Luxgallery 

Figure 125: [LEFT] Resin-ate artwork displayed [RIGHT] The didactic for the Resin-ate artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Overall, this preliminary body of work provided foundational contemporary art practice that was continued into future work. It allowed for successful ideas to be fostered and lesser ideas to be removed. It served a purpose for Confirmation of Candidature and was a strong start to what was to evolve over the next few years.

Appendix B

Chapter Seven – Collective Bodies of work: Full notes for Group Exhibitions

Group Exhibitions

To support the development of work for the project, as stated, four opportunities for exhibition of my work in group shows occurred between 2021 and 2023. The first two were singular artworks displayed with multiple other local artists. The *Symbiosis Exhibition*, was a group show I organised to showcase the development of work as a mid-candidature milestone. The final group show allowed for me to test the boundaries of my current practice prior to the final exhibition. Smaller works were created and then elaborated upon. All served different purposes, some eliminating my imposter syndrome and others heightening my ability to meet deadlines and create strong visual art.

In-between Exhibition: 24 June 2022. *crate59, 59 Sheridan Street, Cairns.*

Post *Forest for the Trees*, I started a new series of work using four geometric wooden panels. The direction for this work came after listening to, *Stuff to Blow Your Mind Podcast*, *Night of the Lichen-thropes* by Joe McCormick and Robert Lamb [Posted 10 September 2020, duration 47 minutes] in November 2020. In particular, they mentioned and discussed (5:25 minutes) how American poet Jane Hirshfield (b.1953) who wrote “For the Lobaria, Usnea, Witches Hair, Map Lichen, Beard Lichen, Ground Lichen, Shield Lichen”, in 2010. It was intended that the words from this poem would be integrated into the four panels; however, the juxtaposition of the rigid geometric shapes against the organic lichen was visually battling each other. It was too contrived, controlled and lacked organic connection and the decision was made to discarded the progress of the work. It was not until April 2022, that it was revisited. It already had lichen set in resin and only needed to be cut up and reassembled. The singular work, *Symbiotic Substrate* was created to fit the criteria of

the work being 50cm x 50cm for the In-Between Exhibition. The half completed four panels became one by combining the four colour palettes and this inadvertently was the starting point for the consideration of reducing the hues in my practice. Learning that it was part of the process to leave works and then revisit and re-appropriate them was a concept that, as an emerging artist, I was able to reflect upon and consider in further work.



Figure 126: TOP [LEFT] In-Between Exhibition flyer [RIGHT] Symbiotic Substrate artwork submitted for the exhibition MIDDLE [LEFT] Planning to incorporate the poem by Jane Hirshfield [RIGHT] Original four geometric panels and then each one completed in a different colour – grey, olive, lime, green BOTTOM - [LEFT] Visual diary documentation of the process [RIGHT] large lichen samples set in resin in each panel. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Lottery Exhibition: 2 December 2022. Artview Gallery, Bayview Heights, Cairns.

As part of the executive team for the Peninsula Art Educators Association, it was voiced by our members that as 'teachers' they are often not afforded the opportunity to create their own work and develop their practice. In collaboration with Artview Gallery, the idea of 'The Lottery' Exhibition was established in 2022. Visual Art teachers attended the gallery in March, they were given a number and then a Duchamp style bicycle wheel was spun to randomly allocate attendees blank artworks surfaces. It was during the inclusion of this process that I was designated a synthetic lace table runner. Artist had nine months to create an artwork of any description with their allocated material for display in the inaugural Lottery Exhibition. This fortuitous opportunity expanded my creative thinking. I began to consider lace and link it to doilies, which in turn, paralleled lichen structures. *Beauty Beholds the Spread*, was created using the previous practice of paint dribbling, however a subdued and restricted colour palette was applied. Paint was flicked over the lace runner, then the sides were repainted white to emphasis the middle panel. Photographs of lichen were cut out and attached, harvested lichen from Sydney's Pioneer Memorial cemetery was attached with resin pour. Continuous blind contour drawings using black biro and markers were created, cut out and adhered. A surprising transformation that occurred was the shadow that was cast onto the wall behind the artwork when it was suspended. Again, the colour was still not balanced, and the overuse of markers needed to be pulled back if this process was to be continued. There was also an issue with the photographs. Unable to print them professionally, they were printed using a retail store and these were of inferior printing quality. When the resin seeped onto the coating of the photographs, it dissolved the printing ink. These had to be removed and replaced. Additionally, the resin also made some of the black pen and coloured marker's bleed and run. Resin application was used sparingly and in

controlled application to set the harvested lichen samples. Whilst the creation of this artwork presented multiple challenges and hurdles, this was well-received as it allowed for problem-solving. for the future long, lace artworks to be more explicitly resolved.

The LOTTERY

1 - 17 December 2022

OPENING NIGHT
Friday 2 December 2022
4.30pm

Kathy **ALMOND**
Rose **BACHELOR**
Ricky **BERESFORD**
Blake **BERMINGHAM**
Susan **BISHOP**
Emma **BRYANT**
Jessica **DUFFY**
Jane **HERAGHTY**
David **MARSDEN**
Holly **MERVYN-JONES**
MIDAVIAU
Mark **MISIC**
Fiona **MUSGROVE**
Renee **NSENGIMANA**
Nada **PETRASEVIC**
Sandi **STEFFENSEN**
Leanne **SHEAD** ✓
Mara **TURNER**
Raina **WII**
Clyde **WILLIAMS**
Amanda **WOLF**

Oxlades Thank you for Oxlades contribution of sponsorship for this exhibition.

A showcase of our region's visual art educators' talents, who amidst their hectic teaching regimens have found time to do what they ultimately love most, making art. Members of the Peninsula Arts Education Association, over twenty local Cairns Visual Art teachers attended a 'lottery' draw back in March. The initial process randomly allocated a 'blank surface' upon which to let their creative ideas emerge. Nine months later they have produced an artwork reflective of their individual and innovative art practice.
Leanne Shead - Curator

Artnow Gallery Shop, 1/228 Toogood Road, Bayview Heights
Monday, Friday, 9:30am - 12:30pm & Saturday, 9am - 12pm, Sunday 10am - 12pm



5

Leanne Shead 2022
Beauty Beholds the Spread
Mixed media – synthetic table runner, marker, pen, lichen, resin
40cm x 60cm **\$200**

Just like a beautiful spread of food, -- shared by family and friends on a table -- the conversations and memories of these occasions are held close to my heart. Lichen that grows our final resting place -- spreading over surface -- represent the final memories of this shared table experience.



Figure 127: TOP [LEFT] Lottery Exhibition promotional flyer [RIGHT] Didactic for Beauty Beholds the Spread BOTTOM [LEFT] Artist with artwork at exhibition opening 2nd December 2022 [RIGHT] Installed artwork for The Lottery. Photographed by Leanne Shead and Paul Sachse.

Symbiosis Exhibition: *11 January 2023. Artview Gallery, Bayview Heights, Cairns.*

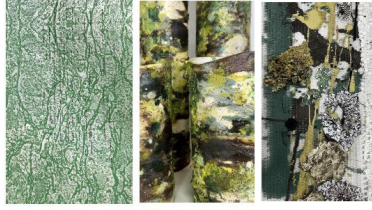
After conversations with local printmaker Nicole Bryar-Parker and ceramicist Kim Nolan, we discovered that through our own distinctive art practice we all shared a connection, appreciation, and interest in lichen as an artistic platform for creative expression. I invited both artists to produce artworks for a group show as part of my mid-candidature milestone. We each had nine metres of gallery space to develop a body of work for display. This was my first opportunity to create contemporary visual art addressing my project, *Beauty and Blemish*. The exhibition had a launch evening and also an In-Conversation evening where each artist discussed their artworks and practice specific to this show.

The transcript of my talk can be found in Chapter Eight.

Four groups of work were developed and each will be discussed including processes and development.

1. **Morgan Lichen Series** – seven digital prints on photo blocks
2. **Holding On Series** – three drawings in rendered headstone frames
3. **Paternal and Maternal** – two mixed media installations
4. **Lichen Resin Earrings** – series of twelve resin cast lichen earrings

SYMBIOSIS



Nicola BRYARS-PARKER

Kim NOLAN

Leanne SHEAD

13 January – 25 February
2023

OPENING NIGHT
Friday 13 January
6pm

IN CONVERSATION - Artist Talks

Nicola's screen-printed immersion through installation
Kim's ceramic journey of surface experimentation
Leanne's connection between beauty and blemish
Saturday 11 February
5pm

When three local artists share the same passion for the natural environment through their artistic practice, it is only fitting for them to come together – symbiotically. Each artist shares their love, beauty, and visually creative approach towards one of our oldest surface creatures, the humble lichen. Lichen-forming fungi first evolved about 230 million years ago and as a miniature plant-like organism, it is often overlooked. These valuable bio-indicators of pollution provide important ecosystem services. Through printmaking, ceramics and mixed media, this show explores the texture and beautiful surface qualities of lichen through contemporary art practice.



Artview Gallery, Shop 1/220 Toppool Road, Bayside Heights
Monday to Friday 9:30am to 5:30pm, Saturday 10am to 12pm, Sunday 11am to 12pm



Figure 128: TOP [LEFT] Exhibition flyer for the Symbiosis Exhibition [RIGHT] Three artists in the Symbiosis Exhibition, left Kim Nolan, middle Nicola Bryars-Parker and right Leanne Shead at opening night

Leanne Shead



Leanne has spent the most part of the last thirty years educating high school students in Visual Art. As a graduate of the Australian Catholic University her primary consideration has previously always been based around the pedagogy of Visual Arts. Roles such as syllabus writing for the Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority [QCAA], sessional tutoring at James Cook University [JCU], executive team roles as part of the Peninsula Art Educators Association [PAEA], publishing a textbook for Cambridge University Press and serving as a member for the Cairns RADF Committee. In 2020, Leanne embarked on a journey that was always considered a secondary ambition, to be an exhibiting artist. Overcoming imposter syndrome, learning to embrace uncertainty, and undertaking a Masters in Philosophy in Creative Arts at JCU gave her the courage and passion to reach her goal – to be an artist

– It only took 50 years...

This exhibition is where I feel I am finally starting to find my 'practice'. The how and why I love and use lichen as the primary catalyst for my art making. As a young child I have always loved natural textures, things begging to be touched in nature. Looking and seeing beauty in blemishes.

Lichen became a tactile obsession once I moved to Far North Queensland in 2012. In 2018, after developing the Dead Centre Project with the PAEA, the link between lichen, the passing of my father, and the rainforest, symbiotically merged. This trigger in me a compulsion to focus on this tiny organism. To want to share and make others notice these little things and appreciate their beauty. For me, there is something obscure –albeit fascinating– about finding the beauty in objects that appear as blemishes. Lichen metaphorically speaks about life, death and existence on several platforms.

Discovering that both Nicola and Kim also found lichen to be stunningly interesting and unique led to the creation of this trio show. I thank them for creating this exhibition with me and bringing to light the diverse and creative ways that nature inspires us. Inclusion in this exhibition forms part of my pre-competition for my Master's degree and has provided much insight for my practice-led research.

Leanne Shead (candidate), acknowledges the support of the Australian Government's Research Training Program Scholarship.



Figure 129: TOP - The didactic for the Symbiosis exhibition includes a biography and exhibition outline. BOTTOM Opening night for the Symbiosis Exhibition at Artview Gallery. Photographed by Leanne Shead and Paul Sachse.

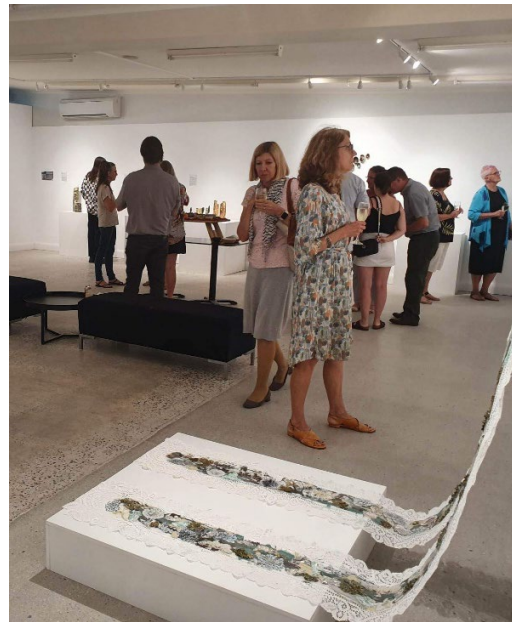
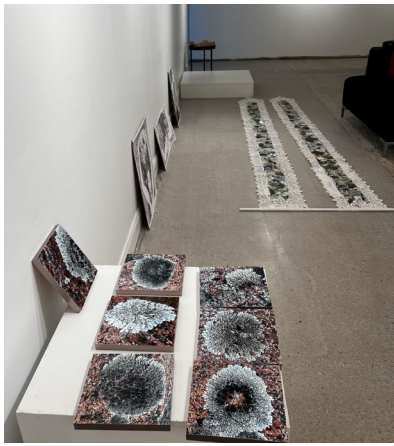


Figure 130: TOP - [LEFT] Curating artworks for hanging prior to the exhibition. [LEFT] Exhibition installed
MIDDLE - [LEFT] In conversation discussing the artworks in the show. [RIGHT] Discussing the lace runner
artworks. BOTTOM - [LEFT] In conversation evening explaining the shift in practice from previous work to
current work [RIGHT] Opening night with people viewing my artworks. Photographed by Paul Sachse

1. Morgan Lichen Series

In September 2021, whilst travelling to South Australia for a family reunion, multiple visitations to several cemeteries in the Morgan Region took place as field trips. The lichen that was growing on the red granite headstones was extensive and specific to this region, being mostly grey and black. Due the isolation, these headstones had not been touched for many years and the lichen had on some occasions taken over the surface. Seven images were selected for the Morgan Series that were captured on the red granite. The large, foliose lichen highlighted the rippled texture of this species through strong neutral tones. Five of the seven artworks were sold and were attributed to the ideal representation of a beautiful blemish surface. The inclusion of a pure photographic series was a deliberate decision as this was the foundational approach of all art making.

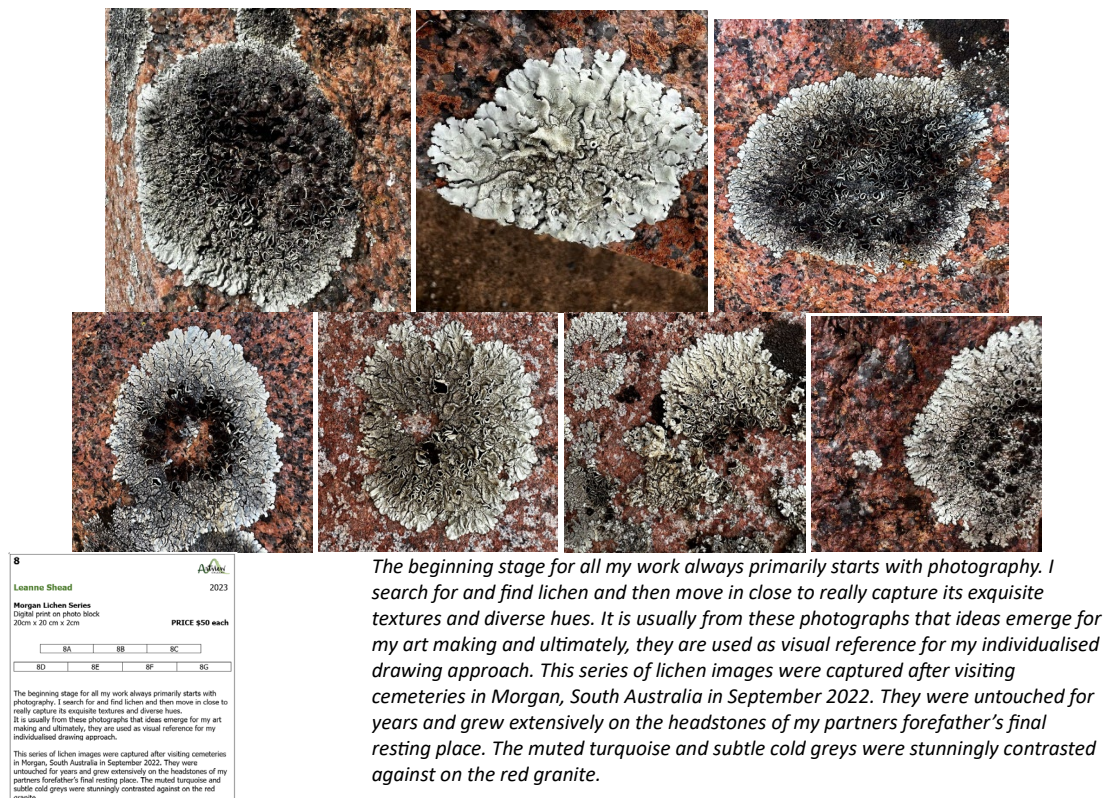


Figure 131: TOP, MIDDLE – Photoblock images of all seven artworks for the Morgan Series
 BOTTOM – [LEFT] Morgan Series didactic [RIGHT] Didactic explanation for Morgan Series.
 Photographed by Leanne Sheard.

2. Holding On Series

The drawings created for this series included self-portraiture as a means of connecting dual ideas of lichen growing on headstones and the passing of my father. The creation of these continuous line drawings was time consuming due to their scale, but therapeutic in their process. As aforementioned in Chapter Six, from a photoshoot, three images were selected, drawn and then encased in handmade rendered frames. As each work was completed the process became more refined. The choice of paper should have been denser as the ink caused areas of the paper to warp. Whilst these images worked for the purpose of this series, I decided not to continue with drawing as a major media choice for the final exhibition. This idea was too literal and whilst the lichen did appear as blemishes on my body, the visual narrative relating to beauty and blemish was not overtly communicated. The frames were constructed for multiuse and a decision was made during this show that they would be re-used in the final exhibition, but possibly using video or photography. Furthermore, only the two vertical frames would be included to follow a new direction of presenting artworks in pairs.



9

Leanne Shead 2023

Holding on Series
Black pen and coloured marker on paper

drawing only
framed **PRICE \$175 each**
PRICE \$700 each

9A
Holding on I Remember the Past
Drawing – 64cm x 60cm
Framed – 85cm x 98cm x 10cm

9B
Holding on I Consider the Present
Drawing – 80cm x 39cm
Framed – 106cm x 71cm x 10cm

9C
Holding on I Wonder About the Future
Drawing –
Framed – 76cm x 95cm x 10cm

My art practice focusing on lichen was instigated by the *Dead Centre Project* I co-developed with the PAEA at the Cairns McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery in 2018. It was here that multiple connections formed for me emotionally, mentally, and creatively. I returned to this site in 2022 with photographer Mara Turner and completed a photoshoot that included myself in various positions on and around the headstones. From this, the drawings were created, all continuous line using black biro and using coloured markers to accentuate the blemishes on the lichen. These works remind me of my past, present and future.

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Figure 132: TOP - [LEFT] Installation view of the *Holding On* series, Symbiosis Exhibition. [RIGHT] Didactic for *Holding on Series*. BOTTOM – Didactic explanation for *Holding on Series*. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 133: TOP – *Holding on I Remember the Past* artwork. BOTTOM – Detail. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 134: TOP – *Holding On I Consider the Present* Artwork. BOTTOM – Detail. Photographed by Leanne Shead.




Figure 135: TOP – *Holding on I Wonder About the Future* artwork. BOTTOM – Detail. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

3. Paternal and Maternal

The strongest connection to my practice evolved with the creation of these works. Finally, my ideas of lichen, and rainforests and family connections had merged into a contemporary mixed media work. The pairing, length, shadows, colour and texture beautifully blemished the surface.



10

 2023

Leanne Shead

Paternal and Maternal
 Synthetic lace table runner, acrylic paint, impasto, harvested lichen set in resin, collaged photographs, pen and marker drawings on watercolour card, rhinestones, wooden dowel
 3400cm x 33cm

10A	10B	PRICE \$600 each
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These elongated contemporary mixed media works are meant to resemble long tall rainforest trees and how lichen blemishes their surface. I have created them to pay homage to my parent. My father, Craig Neil Mason Gronförs, and my mother Veronica Cecilia Gronförs (nee Peters)

Lace was used as the foundation for a dual purpose. Firstly, my mother used multiple lace tablecloths and doilies in our family home, and I remember their intricate patterns. Additionally, because lace is often perceived as being pretty and beautiful. Lace also reminds me of the fractal arrangement of the foliose lichen.

The lichen was harvested off headstones from the Pioneer Memorial Park, Matraville, Sydney (my place of birth), then left to naturally dry, attached to the lace and then cast in resin. There are twenty pieces of lichen on each work which is a number I work to in my work.

Foliose lichen only grows 0.5mm to 1mm a year, therefore the size of some of the samples would be over one hundred years old. Time had forgotten them as they blemished the substrate where they resided.

These elongated contemporary mixed media works are meant to resemble long tall rainforest trees and how lichen blemishes their surface. I have created them to pay homage to my parent. My father, Craig Neil Mason Gronförs, and my mother Veronica Cecilia Gronförs (nee Peters) Lace was used as the foundation for a dual purpose. Firstly, my mother used multiple lace tablecloths and doilies in our family home, and I remember their intricate patterns. Additionally, because lace is often perceived as being pretty and beautiful. Lace also reminds me of the fractal arrangement of the foliose lichen. The lichen was harvested off headstones from the Pioneer Memorial Park, Matraville, Sydney (my place of birth), then left to naturally dry, attached to the lace and then cast in resin. There are twenty pieces of lichen on each work which is a number I work to in my work. Foliose lichen only grows 0.5mm to 1mm a year, therefore the size of some of the samples would be over one hundred years old. Time had forgotten them as they blemished the substrate where they resided.

Figure 136: [LEFT] Gallery installation of Paternal Maternal artwork [RIGHT] Didactic and explanation for the artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Learning from experiences in previous artworks, different art approaches were applied to move closer to a refined practice. The production of these works commenced in December 2022 and took a month to complete. Instead of a single lace runner, three were joined together to create 3.4-metre-long narrow works to emulate the idea of tall rainforest trees. Instead of dribbling paint over the lace, it was placed on the floor and the paint was poured from a height to create larger splash marks. Colour was reduced to four, brown, grey, green and beige and each was spilled over the surface, wet on wet. White gesso paint was re-applied to the sides of both lace runners to highlight the central panels.

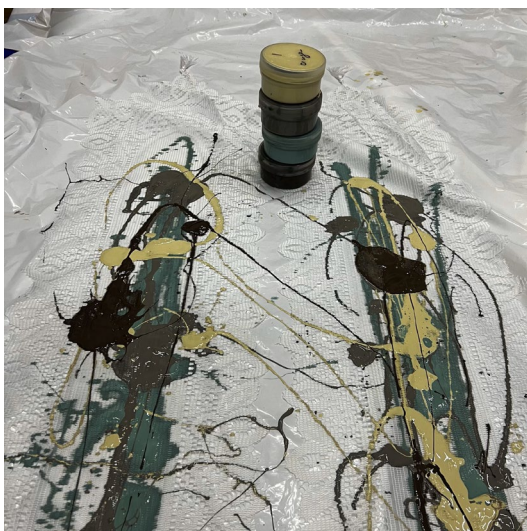
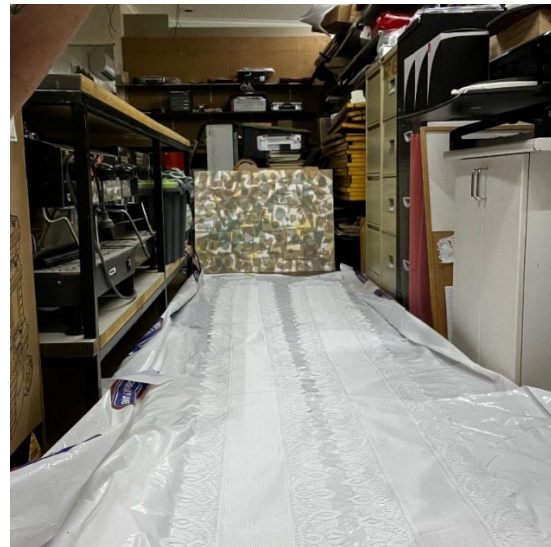
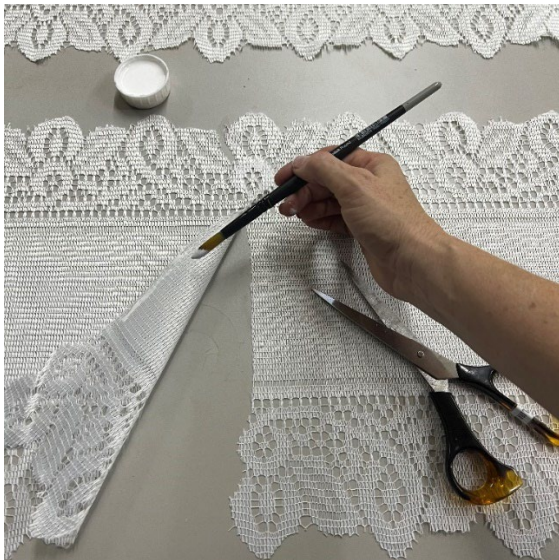


Figure 137: TOP - [LEFT] Joining lace runners together to create length [RIGHT] Laying the runners on the ground, ready for the paint pouring from a height. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Four colour paint pour in large splashes and dribs [RIGHT] white paint applied to the sides to emphasize the central panels. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

A second harvest of lichen from Sydney was required for the larger quantity required for surface treatment for both works. The drawn lichen paper shapes continued the blind contour method, with twenty for each colour created. Colour matching of markers to paint was closely aligned. Impasto lichen silhouettes were added and the resin was poured over the lichen to make it durable.

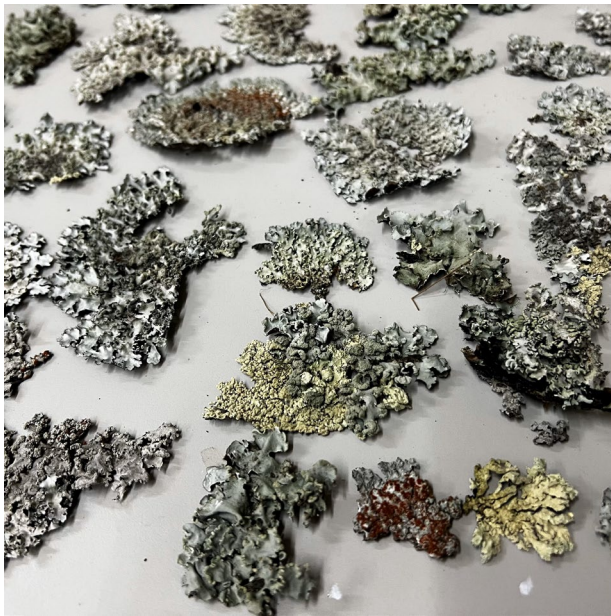
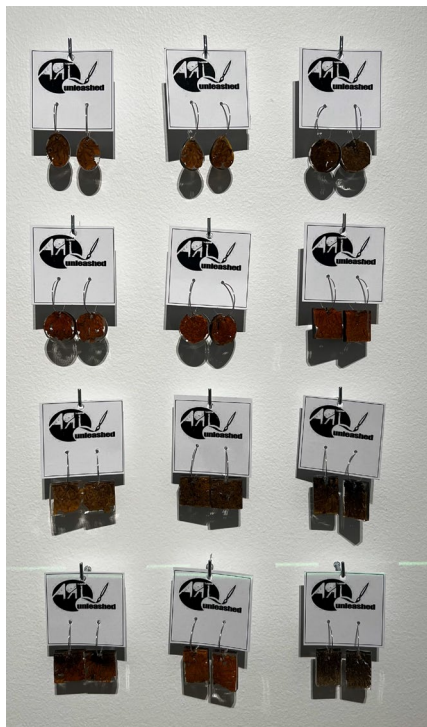


Figure 138: TOP - [LEFT] Harvested lichen from Sydney [RIGHT] Eighty hand-drawn lichen shapes using pen and coloured marker. BOTTOM -[LEFT] Using photo stencils to apply the impasto [RIGHT] Surface detail – paint, lichen in resin, photos, drawings. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

4. Resin Earrings

From the beginning of this project, casting lichen in resin was always at the forefront of my direction as the original idea. These set of twelve lichen earrings were created well-prior to the group show back in December 2020, and I had saved them for this exhibition debut. If successful (which they were, selling ten) I would create a different series, specific to the final show. The fact that the lichen turns a beautiful golden colour and as earrings have a gorgeous appeal is opposed to their state of origin. Harvest from headstones in a local ceremony. This dichotomy of beauty set against a once consider unappealing blemished growth targets the central theme of my work. Contemporary art that challenges an audience's perception of beauty and blemish.



11

Artview
GALLERY

2023

Leanne Shead

Lichen Resin Earrings

Lichen, resin, silver
Size variable

PRICE \$30 each

Initial experimentation with lichen and resin led to the development of these quirky, one-of-a-kind, limited series of twelve earrings created from locally harvested lichen in Cairns.

The idea that we would wear them as an item of beauty until closer inspection reveals the nature of their substance.

Lichen which once grew on headstones is now beautifully displayed to adorn.

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Lichen which once grew on headstones is now beautifully displayed to adorn.

Figure 139: [LEFT] Twelve earrings in the Symbiosis Exhibition [RIGHT] Lichen Earring didactic and explanation for the artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.



Figure 140: TOP – Diary planning for the creation of the resin earrings back in December 2020 showing the complete process. BOTTOM [LEFT] Detail of the earrings displayed in the Symbiosis Exhibition [RIGHT] Sample display of the lichen resin earrings. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Now with this first body of work completed, there was twelve months of artmaking ahead to determine my final direction for visual artworks required for the solo exhibition. I had faced many challenges with materials and techniques, overcome issues relating to media manipulation and refined processes that best suited my practice. This solo show served its purpose in building my capacity to create innovative work.

Collage Exhibition: 1 September 2023. Artview Gallery, Bayview Heights, Cairns.

With the unique combination of diverse materials forming part of my art practice, it is fair to say that my mixed media works align with the definition of collage or even assemblage styles. For this purpose, I was invited to join a group show with twelve other artists who all worked within a collage format. This was an excellent opportunity to showcase some of my current work pending the solo show. From the six pieces included, four were retained and adapted for the final exhibition.

The three specific pieces created for the Collage Exhibition were:

1. **Beauty Bouquet** – single work, using an antique bubble glass frame
2. **Beauty Pieces I and Beauty Pieces II** – paired artwork using mixed media on board
3. **Camouflage Series, I II III** – a triptych work on canvas using layered mixed media approaches.

COLLAGED



Jason **BACHELOR**
John **EATON**
Lynda **GREGG**
Jane **HERAGHTY**
Roland **NANCARROW**
Glen **O'MALLEY**
Sue **O'MALLEY**
Hannah **PARKER**
Paul **SACHSE**
Leanne **SHEAD**
Ian **TUNBRIDGE**
Yvonne **WERNER**

**1 Sept – 14 October
2023**

OPENING NIGHT
*Friday 1 September
6pm*

When artists start assembling different forms together in layers and stages, they use their creativity to create a new whole. The twelve artists in this show have used diverse 2D and 3D media to explore individual visual narratives. Collaging remnants of their world through an artistic lens.
Leanne Shead – Curator

Artview Gallery Shop 1/220 Toogood Road, Bayview Heights
Monday to Saturday 6.30am - 12.00pm



Figure 141: TOP - [LEFT] Exhibition flyer for the Collage Exhibition [RIGHT] Leanne Shead at opening night in front of her artworks. Photographed by Paul Sachse.



Leanne Shead

As a Visual Art educator for almost thirty years, till her master's degree at James Cook University, Leanne started her career as an emerging artist. She has previously exhibited at Artview Gallery in a trio show showcasing her practice formally. She will be holding a solo show at the start of next year culminating in the graduation of her Masters in Philosophy. Creative co-owner of Artview Gallery, she is keen to exhibit local artists, providing a platform for the community.

'Liking Lichen' is my practice, and this aligns perfectly with this exhibition as I am primarily a mixed media artist. Maintaining my focus of 'beauty and blemish', I continue to abstractly document the environment and how lichen crawls and covers diverse surfaces. The textural qualities of using paint, photography, wax, impasto, and harvested lichen samples allows me to combine them in a way that 'collages' them together artistically.



Figure 141: TOP - Didactic about the artist Leanne Shead for the Collage Exhibition. BOTTOM – Display of artworks included in the Collage Exhibition. Photographed by Leanne Shead and Paul Sachse.

1. Beauty Bouquet

This vintage frame was discovered at a local opportunity shop and with its bubble glass (curved glass) construction was an ideal item to create lichen inspired flower arrangements. This work inspired the purchase of larger bubble glass frames for the final exhibition and was a strong experimental work for planning how to create the lichen floral arrangement. The addition of imitation pearls heighten the idea of beautifying a blemished surface.



17

Leanne Shead

Beauty Bouquet

Antique frame, ink, lichen, twigs, pearl beads
18cm x 28cm x 3cm

Artview
GALLERY

2023

PRICE \$150



Figure 142: TOP [LEFT] Final artwork displayed [RIGHT] Didactic and detail of Beauty Bouquet BOTTOM [LEFT] The original frame as found at the Op shop [MIDDLE] Detail of Beauty Bouquet [RIGHT] Composing the twigs and lichen on the background. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

2. Beauty Pieces I and Beauty Pieces II

The creation of this work allowed for diverse approaches to surface manipulation. The substrate required was wooden panel, rather than canvas and this allowed for the materials that were attached to be pressed flat. This paired work was included in the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition and will be unpacked in detail later in the chapter.

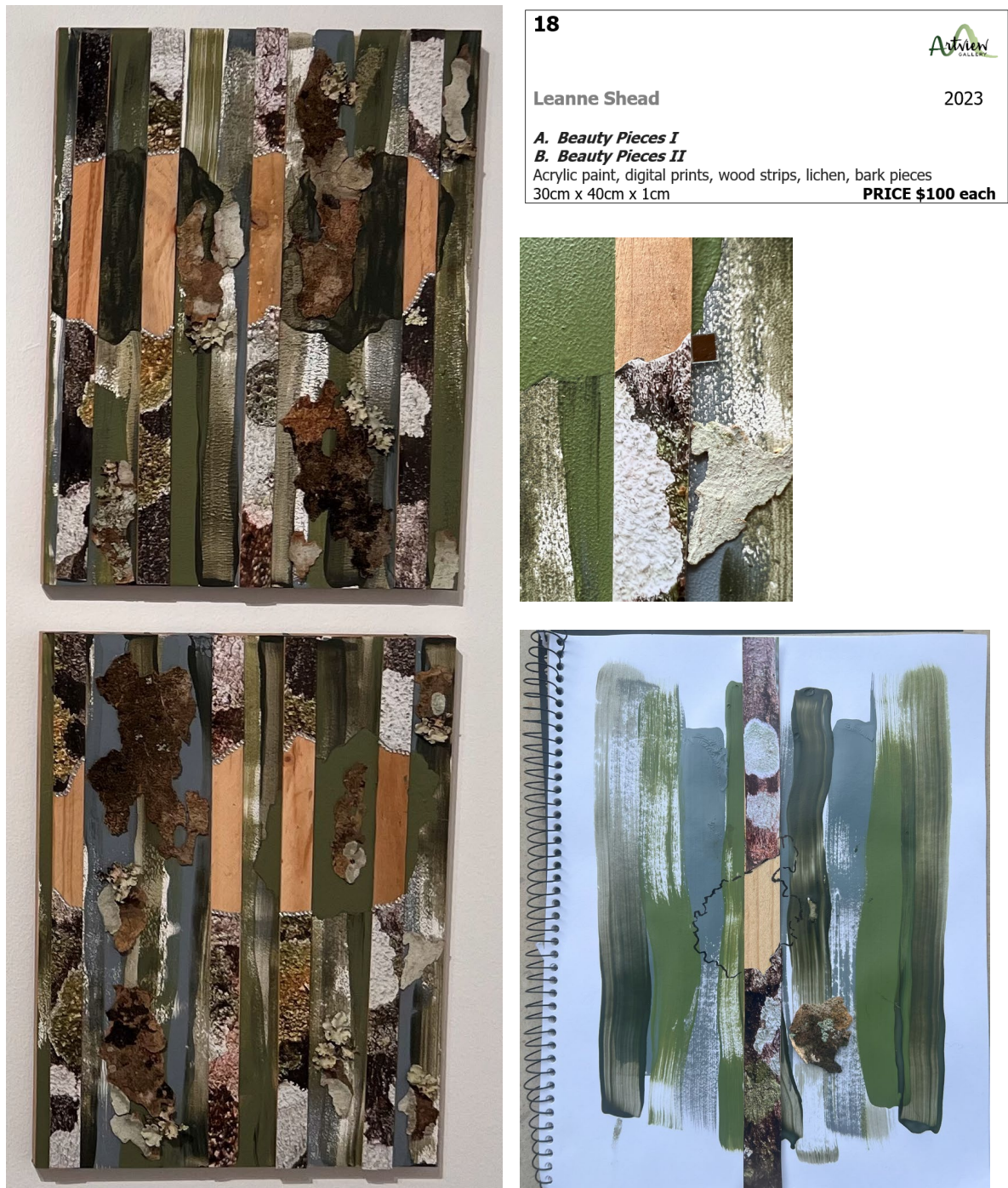


Figure 143: TOP - [LEFT] Two artworks displayed vertically for the collage exhibition. [RIGHT] The didactic for the artwork Beauty Pieces. BOTTOM - [LEFT] Detail of Beauty Pieces [RIGHT] experimental planning for the creation of Beauty Pieces. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

3. Camouflage Series, I II III

These three experimental works used two different plastic stencil patterns that emulated tree bark as the foundational surface. Only the two similar impasto stencils works were carried through to the final exhibition and the processes for construction will be elaborated upon later in the chapter.



19



Leanne Shead

2023

Camouflage Series I, II, III

A B C

Acrylic on canvas, digital photo strips, lichen, resin, cicada exoskeletons
20cm x 25cm x 5cm

PRICE \$125 each



Figure 144: TOP – Three artworks displayed in the Collage Exhibition. BOTTOM [LEFT] First panel in the Camouflage Series [RIGHT] The didactic for the Camouflage artworks and a detail of the artwork. Photographed by Leanne Shead.

Appendix C

Transcript of Artist Talk for Symbiosis Exhibition

Leanne Shead (transcript)

Artist Talk

Saturday 11 February 2023

Symbiosis Exhibition

Welcome everybody and thank you for taking the time to come on this Saturday afternoon.

My name is Leanne Shead, and I am part of the trio exhibition of Symbiosis with Kim Nolan and Nicola Bryars Parker.

A year ago, I asked the girls if they would be interested in doing an exhibition with me because of our interest and our connected interest in Lichen. I was needing to create some art making in relation to my Master's degree I am completing at JCU and I thought it would be less scary if I had a group show where I could sort of put my foot in the water.

I've been a visual art teacher for almost 30 years, 29 years this year, and I sort of feel like I have hidden behind this pedagogy. I have been a very good facilitator for 30 years and completing my Masters is an opportunity for me to actually step up and say I want to be an artist and I am really enjoying the journey thus far. As I said, the girls also have an interest in lichen and it is something that has possessed my life for about the last 18 months, almost 2 years. So how did I become so intrigued with Lichen? It began when I moved to Far North Queensland, but really, I need to go back a little bit, actually to give greater perspective, even as a small child I noticed little things and special things in nature. I loved insects, I loved shadows on the ground. I loved clouds that made formations. I did a VIA character values test online test and one of my top three values is the appreciation of beauty and nature. I can just be walking along and look at something. I want to stop, and I want to see the

texture. So, I guess that moving into lichen is a perfect transition for me because it's this little minute things that's been around for thousands and thousands of years. People just don't recognise it, now a lot of my friends do and they send me photos. Everyone's photographing lichen and giving me samples, which is excellent. I even had a friend when she went to an Ireland send me a recipe where someone put it in some soup. So, my interest began from my move to Far North Queensland in 2012. As an educator I was involved in writing a syllabus for Queensland and part of that syllabus required the students to have what's called an authentic experience. As part of the PAEA we decided (that I was on the executive team) that we would use the McLeod Street cemetery as our stimulus and so we had to go as teachers. There was 25 of us and we had to pretend that we were students as a stimulus and what did we see here and all these ideas, and for me straightaway it was the lichen, so I videoed it. I took samples of it, and I made it. I made a couple artworks, some drawings, and that was it. I was besotted. I was connected to it, like I just wanted to find it everywhere to the point that I think Paul was sick of stopping every time I need to stop and take photographs of it. I had Robyn Glade Wright from JCU contact me and say the opportunity was possibly there for me to do my masters, so I decided that I was ready. I had been thinking about it for some time. When the timing was right, and I was ready. Robyn gave me the confidence to be able to jump into these feet first. It has been a very up-and-down journey for me. I have had some personal issues in my life that have impacted the journey thus far. But I think I have had the strength of support behind me and encouragement to believe that I can do this. I made a commitment, and I've also had a change in advisor. Professor Ryan Daniels and my second advisor Cassandra Rowe have come on board and have been absolutely 100% supportive. So, I thank them for doing that for me as well. So, when I went to the McLeod Street cemetery and started this lichen

project, it was a personal connection. I noticed the girls [artists] before me also talked about the connection to family and memories. My father passed away and so there was this connection, when I used to always go to the cemetery in Sydney to visit dad.



Figure 145: Artist Leanne Shead discussing her artworks in the Symbiosis Exhibition. Photographed by Paul Sachse.

Robyn taught me to embrace the uncertainty, so that is what I did and what I have presented here in the show. If you have had of asked me if this is what I would have put up on the walls 18 months ago it would have been a definite no. My ideas keep changing. It just keeps emerging to the point that in one years' time I will have my final exhibition and I have already been thinking about the changes that will be made and how that will (I guess) grow and be diversified from where we are today. I might just quickly talk about the photography, as Kim [Nolan] said, she takes a stack of photos, well so do I. That is always my starting point. I use those photos to do drawings, to do blind contour drawings and to appreciate their beauty. My Master's project is called Beauty and blemish. I believe Lichen is absolutely

beautiful and you can see that in these first photos here from the series that I took when I was in South Australia. We went on a trip down there and this is from a place that is very barren in South Australia called Morgan. These are actually taken on the headstones of Paul's [partner] forefathers. We found headstones from five generations ago. This one is from Rudolph Sachse and Paul's grandmothers. The lichen is so thick because it was such a remote Community area that we were in. These [lichen] were pretty much as big as you can see them on the wall. Lichen grows very slowly, about .5 of a millimetre to 1.0 millimetre a year so when you look at something like these, [artworks] they are hundreds of years old. This one photo shows the extensive growth of the Lichen on the whole side, and this is red granite. It was just smothered in this really black and grey which we don't get here and Far North Queensland. Hence why I wanted to include it as part of my three sections. I just think I really find these engaging because of their textures. They sort of stem from the middle, and they grow outwards from there. I did do a photo shoot at McLeod Street cemetery. I had one of my friends, she is a photographer, Mara Turner do the shoot for me, these are images of myself. [artworks]. I am going to be honest. I am not in love with the drawings, but I really like the concept These are continuous line drawing, so once I start, I don't stop and I remember where I end. If you have a really close look at them there was experimentation of using the biro to try to recreate that gritty grey background and then using pops of colour in their using marker to try and get them to come out. The little bits of lichen on my head, then on my body are actual real samples that were in the photographs and I do like them. I think I am more in love with the frames and just like Nicola will you know I asked Paul to create these for me. They are quite heavy; they are almost 15 kg is 20 kg but what I do love about.

The very first artwork that I made was in response to the Dead Centre Project [2018], which was a project with 25 teachers. I used headstones so I went back and found those photos from 2018 and I did draw upon the shapes. I plan to go back to the McLeod Street cemetery and draw some of those beautiful headstone shapes. They are quite amazing, and I aim to create some tall, freestanding forms. Paul will assist with these, again using rendered in concrete and I think I will really love them. I haven't decided yet where I think I might move in regard to what goes in the centre of the images. They slide in and slide out, so I'm not sure what will happen with them. We may see them return but with a different image. The lacework was something that did emerge in the last six months of my practice, and I guess part of my Masters is my practice-led methodology. My practice will lead my research and what that means is that I make things but then I research things about it. They sort of go hand-in-hand, you're making and responding at the same time. I made a smaller version of this lace work as part of a Lottery Exhibition program which included 22 visual art teachers in Far North Queensland. Each was given a random surface and one of mine was this lace doily. Using three, these were joined together to make them quite long. Because, like Kim I wanted to have this idea of these long trees. My first in-depth engagement with lichen was also in the rainforest [Cape Tribulation 2019]. Paul and I went on a three-day expedition up to up to Cape Tribulation. As we went to the ocean we were getting yellows and pinks and oranges, and as we went deeper into the rainforest, they were coming greys towards blacks. The shift in colour is amazing and Nicola when you held up your colour swatches, I resonated with that because the diversity of colour is absolutely extreme.

Looking at my earlier work [showed artworks] to begin my masters. I did a little show in the Lux Gallery at JCU. I had three pieces in there and I've got some to show you today. This was the first lichen work and it's actually not an artwork. It's more like a colour study if you like.

This is the first time I included lichen in my work. Real samples of lichen because that's something I really want to work with. I wanted to use Resin to imbed. I have made some little Resin earrings, where I sourced the lichen from the McLeod Street cemetery. These were the colours that I started to work with. I also made nine trees that hung down the wall and this was my introduction to my continuous line drawings for my conceptually relating to layering. These don't have lichen samples in them, but what came out of that process. I had probably 300-400 photographs of lichen that I cut out. I then realised after I cut them out, that they made the most amazing templates, and so I used the other side to place impasto to create a imitated, raised lichen texture. This is the smallest of the nine trees [held up artwork sample], the other trees are out the back. I then used some panels to create a colour palette. This colour study shows that the colours are really intense and I'm really glad that I made a decision to rethink my colour choices. These were too bright and you'll notice that the series behind me is more muted. I actually made a conscious decision to only choose four colours. These four colours appear in the long lacework and also in the work behind me. They work really well in the gallery, opposite Nicola's work too. I am glad you [Nicola] spoke about knowing the colours of lichen. Once you start making lichen colours you don't know if that's working and that's just part of that creative process. So, the lace work was created for a few reasons. The first one is my mother. Her whole house, the house I grew up in my whole life is covered with lace tablecloths over everything. I even bought her a lace tablecloth when I went to Europe in 1994. I bought this for her from Venice. She recently told me that she still has it in the cupboard, so it is almost 30 years old. She has never used it. I said she can give it back to me if she wants but she won't part with it so that's okay. I might get it one day. The reason for lace has a double meaning, a duality relating to my mum and connection to my family growing up. Lace does remind me of

lichen, with its delicacy. It also has this sort of frilly fringe, and it has this beauty and that's what my project is looking at. Questioning, does lichen blemish surface. I believe it does, however blemish doesn't mean that it's ugly. It just means that it's like a spot or mark and it is beautiful in its own way and it's overlooked. We don't notice it. So, moving forward I want to continue with my doily lace works. I want to experiment further using a mold I made. It is really hard to get samples of lichen because it is so delicate is so soft. I can pass this around [passed around the mold]. This is a mold that's been made using a silicone product but before I could make the mold, I had to spray it with some PVA glue in water spray it let it dry. I think I put about 10 coats on there before we cast it. I then used Resin to make the little moulds. An artist friend of mine suggested using light behind them and it looks really amazing. I don't think I can do that now to show you but I do want to. I've been to the op shop. I want to continue using doilies. Kim's inspired me with her collection on the wall and I would similarly like to have the doilies do the same thing, because they resemble and appear like lichen surface. I am also going to make a chandelier and all the little crystals in the chandelier will be cast and each have a little piece of lichen inside them. Because you look at it and think it is beautiful chandelier and then when you get closer, you want to have this sort of recoiling. It will be people's reactions that I want. I have been in the gallery space and watched people go over to these works in particular and they sort of look at them, when they get close some of them sort of pull away because they actually realise, they're real pieces of lichen that are up embedded in Resin art in them. So that is basically a summary of what we have in this exhibition. I wanted to showcase my photography which is always the starting point. Then played with drawing. I like them but I think that they don't really connect as much as I need them too. To further my studies in relation to blemish I

think I can do something different but really want to maintain the concrete framing and obviously I think the lacework ties in beautifully and I am loving the colour scheme.

So, thank you

Appendix D

Transcript: Launch of the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition January 13, 2024, at Artview gallery

Starts with Paul Sachse, owner of Artview Gallery, passing the opening over to artist

00: 13 to 03:16 [3 minutes]

Leanne Shead: Speaks

Awesome, thank you for coming and before we begin, this is unusual because normally I introduce the artists at their exhibitions and to introduce my own, is a little bit unusual but thank you for being here. Paul and I obviously own Arview Gallery and I would like to introduce you to Professor Stewart Lockie [I am so nervous; Omg I could talk underwater] Professor Stewart Lockie is here on behalf as a representative from JCU. Four years ago, I met Robyn Glade-Wright, I was a friend of Robyn Glade-Wright who was an Asscoaute Professor at JCU and she told me about this Research Masters in Philosophy at JCU that we could do. She said, 'they are increasing all the prices and you should apply now, and you will get a fellowship', and I did and I am really thankful for that. I thank the QCAA for giving me the opportunity to work with them and also publishing a book for Queensland because that allowed me, because I was a published author to apply for a research masters. Which took the pressure off as I didn't work to coursework, and I have been doing it part time while running a gallery and getting a new job at my amazing school at St Monica's. It has been a massive journey. Robyn then retired and then long service leave and I had to get a new advisor, and that advisor was Professor Ryan Daniels who unfortunately can't be here this afternoon as he has a new job in Sydney as a Professor, because unfortunately JCU had to restructure and the Creative Arts program at JCU is no longer running. I can finish, I am getting over the line. When I contacted JCU and asked them about this evenings proceeding

to launch my final show, so tonight what you see is the work that culminates in what I have been studying for the last four years, in relation to lichen being an absolutely beautiful object that does blemish surfaces. And there is going to be an evening in conversation where my second advisor Cassie Rowe [NOTE: Cassie was unavailable and Dr Rehn conducted the talk] will lead as a scientist, she will lead that conversation. So, if you want to know more about the work, then that's when what will happen. It won't happen tonight as I don't want to bore you. [that was the wrong thing to say, but anyway]. That's going to be a really engaging conversation about why I did things and where the botanical underpinning of the works and the philosophy of why I produced the products I produced this evening. So there have been a few people involved in and I really thank JCU for asking Professor Lockie to speak this evening as there is a little bit of a connection there as well as his wife is an artist, and I have worked with Mahar Gorospe-Lockie and she is an amazing artist in her own right as well. So, thank you for being here and I will pass over to professor to open the proceedings. Thank you.



Figure 146: [LEFT] Professor Stewart Lockie, Cairns Institute, opening the exhibition. [RIGHT] Artist, Leanne Shead talking at the launch. Photographed by Paul Sachse.

03:17 – 08:58 [6 minutes]

Professor Stewart Lockie: Speaks

Thanks Leanne, good evening, everyone, it's nice to be introduced now as my wife's husband, it's a good sign. [audience laughs]. [Leanne – I'm so sorry I'm so nervous]

No, her artistic style has been rising for some time, and I am sure she would enjoy, while she looks after our sick son, hearing that that I am now referred to her as her partner, rather than the other way around. I do want to stress the other way round though, because one of the things that strikes me about these sometimes-antiquated rituals of institutions like universities is that they are often about demonstrating respect. And the reason that Leanne's college, the College of Arts, Society and Education put a call out to see if any senior staff were available, was not normally on the off chance that a senior staff members partner was arts based trained, but because this is a really important milestone, and it warrants recognition, a research Masters or of Masters of Philosophy, in most of the disciplines is relatively a straight forward piece, we expect people to demonstrate a significant capacity for original research, and we would expect to see them producing research that publishable in international scientific literature. A creative practice based PHD, introduces some interesting challenges. Not to suggest the others are not without their challenge. But a creative practice PHD, must involve the creative act, involves some element of creative production, could be an exhibition as we see here, or could be a book, or some sort of collaboration with community groups, could be a performance or many things. But it must also contain a significant scholarly component, and we see a little bit of a snippet [Professor points to visual diary pages displayed] that informs this exhibition in the studies that Leanne has included. But, will also be presenting an exegetical work, a reflection on the process, not just what she's done, but what she means and the way she has engaged with it

philosophically and academically. She will present that to the university in a thesis. So it really is a significant piece of work, and I think that Leanne deserves our congratulations. As the senior representative of JCU, I will absolutely take no responsibility for any restructuring. But I will congratulate you on behalf of the university.

As an individual, I'm a sociologist, a social scientist doing work on environmental policies, so the focus of my research is very much the way in people and the non-human members of our community interact. Some of my favourite creatures are those which defy easy categorisation. Like corals, are corals geological or is it biological, If its biological, which is the animal? Is it the coral, is it the symbionce? Why do we call the symbionce – symbionce as if they are not as important as coral? And lichen also defies easy description. It's a fungus mixed with bacteria and something else, (Leanne adds – cyanobacteria) yeah and all of that. We do have some science teachers here, and I'm sure they can fill us in. In this idea of, Beauty and Blemish, Leanne's playing with, implies some frivolity, though I am sure there is some playfulness there as well. And there is a rigor in the way in which Leanne is exploring the different ways in which we interact with the things within our broader biotic community. The ways in which we appreciate them aesthetically. I love that idea of blemish, as something that really troubles, that easy polarization between beauty and ugliness. And I should be careful not to reflect too much in case I start setting off thought trains, but the reflection that is going on at the moment, but, it does strike me that in the particularly polarized world in which we live at the moment, anybody who with rigor, but also thoughtfulness, and creatively and joy can trouble these easy distinctions, and stress the importance of relatedness, I think is making a really positive contribution. So, I will leave it there, again congratulations Leanne on behalf of the University and the Cairns Institute.

And I guess back to you. And everyone,

09:00 – 11:01 (2minutes)

Leanne Shead: Speaks to close

Thank you for that and I really appreciate it and I am going to talk about my work in length at the In conversation evening if you are available or interested in that. But there are a few people I do want to thank. I want to thank Paul for putting up with me, because it has been a big journey. Tears and crying and 'I'm not doing this anymore, and I'm dropping out'. It very tough, it's tough to do and balance that life skill, but at the end of the day the art was there and there were certain people, and I don't think they realise how much they touched my life. And Tammi, thank you, there is a lot of artworks in here that you comes from you. And Di, and Katie, and there are parts of my life where I can appreciate and lichen and I can connect it to my life. And unfortunately, I lost my dad when he was 61 and dad chair is at the back of the room and you are probably wondering why that chairs there, so dads here with me to watch what's going on here tonight because he was a massive instigator in doing what you believe. I did suffer from imposter syndrome, where I can't do this, I'm an art teacher, I teach art I don't do art, and it has taken this journey and Robyn was a big part of that as well. Where she said to me, 'You need to embrace uncertainty'. Well, hopefully I have done that, and realised that when I have started an artwork, and said to someone a bit earlier that if you have of asked me two three years ago, what would have been on the walls, none of this would have been here. And so it becomes a journey, and that's what arts about, tis about realising that. And I am hoping that when I finish my 60,000-word exegesis, that it will all be in there, and published for you to read and then I can just make art! Because that is what I want to do. So, thank you very much for coming Professor, I really appreciate it (shales hands with Professor Stewart Lockie) and thank you all for coming as well. The works are for sale and I have priced them to sell them to re-home them. I know they are not

everyone's cup of tea because they do dela with that idea of beauty and blemish. Not ugly, because we are not doing that. The linguistics of that, thank you for coming.

Appendix E

Notes: From the In-Conversation Evening presented by Dr Emma Rehn, Wednesday 24

January 2024



Figure 147: Artist Leanne Shead with Dr Emma Rehn at the conclusion of the In-conversation evening for the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition. Photographed by Paul Sachse.

- Cassie as both our supervisors, my research background, here to discuss the science side of things. Lichen is a symbiotic relationship, a composite organism – we didn't know that until the late 1800s. Science likes questions, and observations (e.g., ~7% of the world's land surface covered by lichen) Science likes tests: lichen can survive the vacuum of space!
- Ecologically: pioneer species after disturbance, not picky about real estate

- Links to my fields – lichenometry. But also, long timescales – long life, slow growth
- Also relevant to my field: history of human use (food, dyes, some medicine)
- It's everywhere, so can be overlooked unless useful or damaging (chemical weathering is fine in the bush, but people notice on Mount Rushmore)
- The way we perceive things matters. It affects how we treat them and what we value. For science, it affects what we study, and *which studies get funded*, because science is done by people
- Art and science can connect and interact in a lot of ways, but one of the critical ones is communicating in ways that science can't, and going beyond science
- Art can explore how we see things, can evoke specific emotions, and can explore what we value and what that says about us
- Art can make ideas accessible and approachable, while science can often be intimidating, and it can inspire changes in behaviour at a deeper level than science (such as the list of lichen facts I just gave you)
- This is *really* important for environmental science – we're facing major challenges spanning local to global, including climate change, and people can easily be overwhelmed and end up disengaged. Bombarding them with more facts and research will probably only make that worse
- Quote from Cassie: "what Leanne has done for ecology is highlight the important role of something that is probably overlooked or not noticed by many, including the intricate, connective nature of how things work in ecosystems – that each and every piece of the environment is there for a reason and is beautiful. I like the way she has attempted to intertwine themes such as symbiosis, family, and time, what we may or may not regard as "pretty", and how biased we are in favouring things that are "pretty" including the

environment, whether that's pretty flowers, cute animals, or nature as long as it's neat and tidy. In the audience at the gallery, just how many of you thought you would be thinking about ecological and conservation science issues while looking at art?"

- Maybe some of the lichen facts I've mentioned will stick with you, maybe not. But I think what will stay with you, maybe even just at the back of your mind, will be how Leanne's artworks make you feel. And after you leave here, that might be what changes how you see the world around you

Appendix F

Email: Conversation with artist Annette Arlander.

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Appendix G

Screen shots of message from a viewer who came to the Beauty and Blemish Exhibition

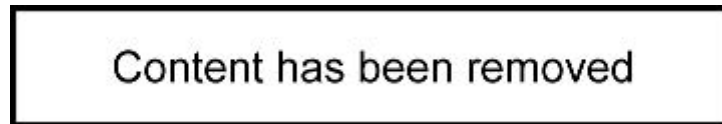


Figure 148: [LEFT] Meme about Imposter syndrome. [RIGHT] Message post exhibition opening