# art of threatened species



Art of Threatened Species acknowledges the traditional custodians and ancestors of the lands this project took place on.

We pay our respects to the Dharug, Dhudhuroa, Gumbaynggirr, Gamilaroi, Wilyakali, Wiradjuri, Wavereoo and Yuin people, their land, culture and communities.

Cover: Anna Glynn Still Image *Marooned* (still from moving image) This page: Photo and artwork, Bridget Nicholson

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alison clouston & boyd tallulah cunningham cathy franzi anna glynn kelly leonard vicki luke nicola mason bridget nicholson rebecca selleck amanda stuart



Anna Glynn Still Image Marooned (detail from chiffon photomontage)

# Art has the power to shift our thinking and generate change.

In 1983 a photograph by the artist Peter Dombrovskis (1945-1996) entitled *Morning Mist, Rock Island bend, Franklin River*, 1979, was used to protest the construction of the Franklin Dam for a Hydro-electric development, which would have seen the destruction of the Franklin and Gordon rivers. The image was used by the Wilderness Society in full page newspaper advertisements together with the words: "*Could you vote for a party that would destroy this?*" It has been argued that it was this campaign and this image that swung the 1983 federal election and the new government scrapped plans for the dam. It galvanised the Wilderness Society and the Australian Greens Party, embedding them as powerful forces within Australian society and sparked a new environmental era.

This example highlights the power of images to elicit responses in ways that words may fail. When used for protest, art can influence all levels of society and contribute significant insight into an issue.

Art of Threatened Species explores threatened flora, fauna and the environments that sustain them in New South Wales through a unique collaboration between artists and scientists.

The project is a partnership between Orana Arts (OA) and the Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH) (now Department of Planning, Industry & Environment (DPIE)) and Western Plains Cultural Centre (WPCC) and sees 10 regionally-based artists working with scientists from the DPIE Saving Our Species program to produce artworks inspired by issues related to a specific species, their environments, and the impacts they face. The artists have travelled vast distances and spent countless hours researching and observing species and environments, and working closely with scientists, rangers, and community groups.

So is Art of Threatened Species a form of protest? Given the state of the planet, and the specific subjects of this project, how can it not be? The artists are using their skills to highlight an issue in such a way as to make it accessible to people who may otherwise "switch off" if the issue were only presented scientifically or politically. The intention of the artists may not be purely as protest, but also gives voice to the animal, plant or environment that is threatened. They are speaking for those who cannot speak. They may not utilise the familiar tropes of protest – text on banners, placards, etc. - but they are making visible many of the issues that affect our own existence and how we impact upon everything around us.

Each artist is fluent in their own unique visual language and uses it to explore the vast range of information pertaining to their chosen subject. The artists' role in this project is to translate facts, figures, bureaucracy, politics and emotion into artworks that express something about the species, its environment and its challenges. There is no set recipe for realising this, each has their own medium, style and work methods. They may also choose to examine only one aspect as opposed to the full gamut of issues. Yet the heart of the project is to engage with the fragile ecosystems and the beings they sustain and our irrevocable impact on them. The partnership between the artists and scientists provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and the translation of information from one form into another. Similarly the distances travelled and time spent in the environment has significantly affected the artists in terms of understanding the scope of the scientific environment as well as the context for their particular subject.

The exhibition includes a selection of works from the collection of the WPCC, which focuses on the Animal. The inclusion of these works seeks to broaden the representation of animals by artists across time as well as highlight the historical relationship between animals and extinction. The use of animal imagery to denote climate destruction has been a common artistic theme for centuries, and confirms the role that art plays in reflecting the world and our impact upon it.

The works in the exhibition present many facets of one of the most pressing issues facing humanity. The opportunity to examine the culmination of deep exchange between so many people, will hopefully go some way to shining a light on the role and importance of each living thing and its relationship to everything else.

#### Kent Buchanan, Curator

## about the artists



#### alison clouston & boyd

Visual artist Alison Clouston and sound artist Boyd have collaborated for over 30 years on art works that explore our human relationship to the rest of the natural world. Their efforts to manage a patch of wild country for nature conservation have underpinned their work. Alison is represented in the collections of National, State and Regional Galleries. Boyd performs saxophone and clarinet with some of Sydney's best musicians. Shortlisted for an APRA National Art Music Award, he has composed for numerous art installations and events.



### vicki luke

Vicki Luke is an artist whose work revolves around the natural world and the human condition. She has been a practicing artist for 35 years, starting out in Graphic Design. With a specialty for illustration, she re-focused on visual arts midcareer. After studying drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpture, she began teaching these disciplines since 2002. She is a passionate collaborator who believes that everyone should have the chance to develop their creative side.



### tallulah cunningham

Tallulah Cunningham is a member of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators and holds a PhD in Natural History Illustration. She spent her youth in arid zone Australia which has invested her with a strong awareness of the importance of permanent water places and the species they support to wider ecologies. She has recently contributed botanical illustrations to "The Endemic Flora of the Hunter Region" published by CSIRO (2019), created work for the Australasian Bat Society, and produced promotional artworks for the Hunter Wetland Centre.



### nicola mason

Nic Mason is an emerging artist working in regional Australia. Within her studio practice she primarily paints, draws and sculpts. She is richly informed by her background in science. In mid- 2016 she changed her focus from working in the conservation and land management field to focus full time on her art practice. She commenced studies at the ANU, School of Art & Design, and is continuing her studies by undertaking a Fine Arts (Honours) Year at UNSW, Art & Design. She has been selected as a finalist in numerous national awards.



### cathy franzi

Dr Cathy Franzi is a visual artist engaged with ideas of nature and the environment. Through the materiality of ceramics and its possibilities for form, surface imagery and installation, she explores ways to express cultural values attributed to Australian plants, including scientific ones. Her work is underpinned by research in the botanical sciences, natural history collections and fieldwork on location. She has received numerous awards and her work is held in private and public collections across Australia.



### anna glynn

Anna Glynn is an award-winning contemporary Australian artist who draws on a diversified practice that incorporates painting, drawing, moving image, animation, sculpture, installation, writing, music and sound. Her work investigates the connection between humans and nature, land and place, the physical and the ephemeral. Nature, history, ecology and the environment are essential elements of her practice. She has been the recipient of a number of awards and commissions and is represented in collections across Australia.



### kelly leonard

Kelly Leonard an artist located in regional NSW, who works in weaving. Her work is a conceptual response to the environment. Her work is informed by New Materialism theories, which provide a context for both making and showing the work to audiences. She produces work for site specific locations which are chosen due to their fractured state from the impact of mining. She makes work in collaboration with the environment, weaving props to use in quiet gestures. She uses photography to document this process.



### bridget nicholson

Bridget Nicholson is a multimedia visual artist best known for her immersive installations. Coming to the arts late following a career in architecture, landscape and urban design, her work derives from a need to question human ecology and the making of place within this context, with particular focus on an Australian experience. Her work is process driven and evolves through conceptual engagement with ideas and materials. Bridget has exhibited across Australia in regional and city galleries and has been the recipient of a number of awards.



### rebecca selleck

Rebecca Selleck is a Canberra-based emerging artist who uses her practice to reciprocally investigate and challenge her own perceptions within a culture of conflicting truths. Her work overlays time and place to express the need for human accountability and the painful complexity of animal and environmental ethics in Australia. She completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts at the ANU School of Art & Design with First Class Honours and has exhibited across Australia and internationally.



### amanda stuart

Amanda Stuart's sculptural works invite psychic re-imaginings of old, unhealed wounds between humans and unwanted animals. Embedded in a materiality of the Australian regional landscape and its fauna, her works often refer to the social, cultural, ethical and political difficulties surrounding estranged human/animal relations within contested landscapes. Stuart has produced two major public commissions and currently lectures in the Environment Studio and Foundation workshops at ANU School of Art & Design.





## alison clouston & boyd

Mirrityana – out in the sunlight

Mirrityana is a Paakintji word for "out on the sunlight", chosen as the species name for a dragon lizard new to science, Ctenophorus mirrityana. Following leads from our assigned scientist Marc Irvin, we explored its story – the long and complex process of scientific validation, those intricate measurements of toes and jaws and forearms, the genetic profiling, the stunning photography identifying its distinct scale patterning. We researched its habitat and the threat it faces from invasive goats. With the survey team, we went into the field, seeking out Mirrityana along predefined transects, logging their numbers and features, photographing them where we could.

Today Paakintji people care for Mirrityana country in a joint management scheme with the National Parks & Wildlife Service at Mutawintji. Thousands of years of artworks that accumulate on the rocks here are testimony to the long connection of Aboriginal people and the myriad species they have shared this country with. Lizards appear often in the petroglyphs and paintings.

For every disappearance of a species or ecological community, we see a concomitant loss of human languages and cultures – the stories, the petroglyphs, the songs and ceremonies that for millennia enlarged our connection to all the rest of nature. Ecological art can be a rescue attempt, a salvage of species by poetics, and vice versa, reminding us of what we stand to lose if we fail.

This has been a wonderful process, full of extraordinarily dedicated people brought together by this tiny, exquisite reptile. We admire the science and scientists. We honour the Traditional Elders, past present and future, on whose land we have worked.

This project was assisted by a grant from Create NSW, an agency of the New South Wales Government and supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian State and Territory Governments. The program is administered by the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA).



## tallulah cunningham

#### Fragile Ground

Too little care, too little fore-thought, to little action, too much human encroachment, too many weeds, too deep a furrow of erosion; it all leads to too little water downstream in drought, too much water going downstream in flood, and the loss of one interwoven tapestry of biodiversity that will lead to the unravelling of others.

Swamps and wetlands are delicate systems that not only support their own biota but are vital to everywhere that the water filtering through them reaches. The Blue Mountains swamps are unique, forming slopes and valleys that, when healthy, slowly drained snowmelt and rain into streams that keep rivers flowing during the dry seasons. Giant dragonflies, an endemic swamp skink and several plant species are found nowhere else.

Tallulah

But these locations are attractive to humans too – for development, for recreation, and for underground resources. The damage that has been done through a lack of understanding or care in the past is, fortunately, in many places, being rehabilitated. But it cannot return to what it once was.

I have been fortunate to be shown both impacted and healthy swamps by individuals who are passionate about protecting them. My artwork shows a comparison of these two sides of the spectrum and with some of the impacts that you, the viewer, can help mitigate and repair.



## cathy franzi

#### In our Hands

The opportunity to research three orchid species for the Art of Threatened Species project has been fascinating. This included going out into the field with the Senior Threatened Species Officer to view wild sites where remnant populations still exist or may still exist, and translocation sites where cultivated species are reintroduced into the wild to build up fragmented numbers. Great effort is being undertaken to understand their needs and to prevent them tipping over the brink into extinction.

My artwork responds to the beauty of the orchids themselves, to historical and current threats to their survival and scientific research undertaken to preserve them into the future. I have chosen porcelain to reference the orchids, for its fine quality and cream colour reminiscent of vellum. Lines are incised into soft wheel thrown forms with a sharp blade and then filled with ceramic ink. After an initial firing each work is sanded to remove excess ink and giving a smooth polish. In the final firing I use glaze to hint at each flower colour. A grey speckled clay references the impact of human intervention with words selected from historical sources, current scientific literature and the popular press.







## anna glynn

#### Marooned

*Marooned* is a compelling, intimate, thematic installation by Australian artist Anna Glynn, inspired by the unique Mt Kaputar Snail and Slug Threatened Ecological Community. Working in an interdisciplinary team with biologist Peter Dalmazzo atop Mt Kaputar, the two explored the epic landscape, experiencing roiling storms, gale force winds, hail, swirling mist and bright sunshine to capture the overwhelming environment in video, time-lapse, photo and audio field recordings. The disciplines of art and science combined to examine more closely this wondrous ecosystem which includes the hero species, a giant pink slug that occurs nowhere else in the world.

Glynn has created '*Marooned*' as her response; an installation, reinforcing current universal ecological discussions through the ephemeral gualities of moving image and diaphanous attributes of textile elements in the form of photomontage on chiffon: semitransparent, transient and, as nature is, delicate and fragile. She has hyper-coloured all the elements of the environment in this antipodean wonderland, using vibrant hues pulsating in pink and green in homage to the most notable creature, the astounding giant, pink slug which is the only element that Glynn has left in its natural colour. The moving image work travels across the landscape, a rapid time-lapse vignette superimposed over more intimate elements panning through the landscape, inundated moss and lichens, flowers, fauna, macro and micro. The vibrant pair of large-scale chiffon works display a reimagined landscape in which pink kangaroos adorned with flowers echo the hue of the slugs and a feral fox with floral eyes peruses this elevated kingdom.

*'Marooned'* has just returned from its premiere at MONA - The Museum of New Art in Estonia. The work was appreciated for its poignancy in addressing nature, ecology, history and environment, embracing art as a way to pursue meaningful conversations and exchanges.

## kelly leonard

Bird Hide

The rupture occurred without comment

People began circulating images of the bird in a nostalgic desire to return to what was lost. The few remaining birds tried to hide on the edges, fringe dwellers, hunted down by telephoto lenses, the images circulated as proof of existence. The bird's song started to crackle, distorted through a filter of infrequent broadcast. The bird haunted the Landscape and our longing for a time already past. The people began producing extinction souvenirs as currency, in the words of Mark Fisher 'as anticipation shaping current behaviour'.

A tiny flock was spotted holed up near the bird capital, setting the twitchers a flutter and attracting more traffic to the site. The people began to use 3-D printers to create tiny harnesses to hold transmitters to data mine the flight of the birds over winter. Mapping the last great mystery they called it. By tracking one flight path, the people continued blindly to miss seeing the entanglements with other species. The birds had learnt new behaviours and refused to fit the radio transmitters to their feather and bone frames. In passing the Allee threshold, their message was already lost to the people.

Hiding in the shadows, the birds became increasingly anxious.

Their collective mental state was blamed on a lack of resilience to adapt to changed circumstances.







## vicki luke

Sloane's Froglet Ocularium

The Sloane's Froglet is a tiny creature with grey patchy markings that lives in shallow water, dams and drains in isolated patches of Eastern Australia. Not a flashy character, mundane to the untrained eye, this little froglet embodies the plight of threatened species throughout Australia. Competing needs, lack of awareness, environmental damage, climate change; the list goes on. This is not new.

Rachel Carson the renowned environmentalist warned us in the 1960s in "Silent Spring". 'The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe around us, the less taste we have for its destruction.'

She poetically wrote 'Some of nature's most exquisite handiwork is on a miniature scale, as everyone knows who has applied a magnifying glass to a snowflake.''

We are all connected and should be respected.

As the poet Elizabeth Barret Browning wrote 'Earth's crammed with heaven ..... but only he who sees takes off his shoes'

## nicola mason

*Bilby, (bilbi)rocking and waiting* Brush Tailed Rock Wallaby Series

In my art practice I am exploring painting and drawing as a symbolic vehicle for contemplating issues of environmental loss and hope. Here, I consider our engagement with and impact on the natural world.

I am interested in the possibilities of enticing new ways of thinking through connection and engagement with art. I am optimistic about ongoing learning and creating work that enables meaning to resonate over time and place.

Within the Art of Threatened Species project, a collaboration between Orana Arts, Inc. and the Office of Environment and Heritage, I have been investigating the threatened brush-tailed rock-wallaby.

For this project I have worked with the Office of Environment and Heritage officer Dr Deborah Ashworth, who manages recovery projects for this wallaby. My research upon the brush-tail rock-wallaby has taken me into the field, joining specialist staff in monitoring this species at the brush-tailed rock-wallaby population site at Jenolan Caves. I have spent time behind the scenes at the Australian Museum, and I have anchored this research with my background in the conservation and land management field.

These investigations have lead me to my still life works where I have played with objects and their reflections and shadows, mark making, repetition and considered compositional elements. Narrative and symbolism are central to much of my work including these works stemming from this project.





## bridget nicholson

#### Momentos, Dreamings

I have a group of three birds within the shorebirds category they are: the Pied Oystercatcher, the Little Tern and the Beach Stone-curlew. These birds dwell on the shifting sands, where water meets land, fishing in the ocean, roosting on the beach to sleep and breed. I spent time at Old Bar and Harrington in NSW when there was a colony of Little Terns laying their eggs on the beach. I was collecting data with volunteers who record eggs laid, time of hatching, if they have been smashed, taken etc... Spending time surrounded by the eggs, the birds flying in and around, tracking through the markings on the sand, just sitting and watching for hours. Time disappeared, I was in another world and one that I did not want to leave. A world so subtle and gentle that it is hard to hold.

I never saw the Beach Stone-curlew, the story was that there had been a pair but a carcass had been seen on the beach and sightings of a single bird were shaky. I sought a 'real' bird at the museum where everything is in boxes, clearly labelled and kept safe.

In works presented for this exhibition I have grappled with two notions; one being the desire to hold onto memories, to capture and put in a box for safe keeping those things which are special. The other is how we as humans may form and maintain our connection to species that are so 'invisible', how we can appreciate the fragility of a shared habitat. One where what we want from the place and how we use the place (beach) is so at odds with how the birds need and use the place/ habitat. To me both their beauty and their importance to human life lies in this seeming fragility.





## rebecca selleck

The fox and the bristlebird

Since I was a small child, I've been entranced by the inconsistent relationships humans have with other animals. We can easily empathise with them on the one hand, but disengage on the other: denying them agency and treating them as objects. I use my ongoing practice to investigate and challenge my own perceptions within this culture of conflicting truths. My work overlays time and place to express the need for human accountability and the painful complexity of animal and environmental ethics in Australia.

Since colonisation, we have lost an overwhelming amount of unique plant and animal life. This is a continuing trend as whole species become collateral in the churning gears of perpetual economic growth. Resources are extracted, housing developments expanded, and ecosystems wiped clean for introduced species to turn us a profit. There are so many mistakes that remain unchecked. So much that goes unseen and unheard.

I can't help but feel connected to the Eastern Bristlebird. This impossibly shy, seemingly unremarkable little brown bird has just a few geographically separate areas of habitat along the east coast left. They don't fly, but dart through the cover of their heathland homes wiggling their tail feathers and calling to each other once a year to try and find a mate. Their immediate threats are clear: predation from foxes and feral cats, uncontrolled fires, and encroaching development. But when it comes down to it, we are their biggest threat. I hope that this work can express the historically complex situation surrounding this inconspicuous bird, the ethical struggles, and the wider scale of human accountability.

I'm so grateful to Dr. David Bain for his generosity and kindness on this project and for all he and his co-workers do to protect our endemic species.



#### Anything but Barren

Anything but Barren, is a celebration of the Spottedtail Quoll's enduring presence - a complex, fascinating carnivorous marsupial that plays a crucial ecological role and is deserving of our deepest wonderment and respect.

Known to the Southern Highlands Gundungurra people as Mirrangan, the Spotted-tail Quoll (Dasyurus maculatus) played a major role in shaping Country, according to local creation stories. This elusive native predator, with characteristic white spotted coat, once flourished across eastern Australia. However, since colonisation severe habitat loss and competition from humans (and foxes, another introduced species) has determined its current status as threatened.



Thanks to OEH Senior Team Leader James Dawson and dedicated team, I was supremely privileged to spend time in QuoII Country, during late autumn fauna surveys, at one of its four remaining strongholds (Barren Grounds Nature Reserve/Budaroo National Park). The irony of this Reserve's historic name, Barren Grounds, can't be ignored. It alludes to values inherent in the white coloniser mind, which considered such Country useless at least for farming purposes. By contemplating these issues using a visual art material language, I focus on the Quolls' resilience and ability to be present, despite all odds. In the installation, I subtly intervene with familiar regional objects that quote historic white settler values, which remain at the heart of current ecological and cultural dilemmas. In so doing, I re-instate the Spotted-tail Quoll's deeper connection to Country and appeal to the collective human psyche to re-imagine its future.



### works from the western plains cultural centre collection



## the collection

1. John Reid

Performance for 25 Passing Vehicles 1989 gelatin silver photographic print on paper with mat & text Acc. no. 1995\_004\_OBJ

2. Penny Byrne Not a Glimmer of Hope 2010 altered resin Polar Bear, epoxy resin, epoxy putty, acrylic paints, Absolut Vodka Special Edition 'Glimmer' bottle Acc. no. 2011\_015\_OBJ

3. Rew Hanks *Krefft's Chair* 2012 linocut on paper Purchased with funds provided by the Friends of Western Plains Cultural Centre Inc. Acc. no. 2014\_002\_OBJ

4. Joseph McGlennon *Thylacine Study Number 2* 2013 Giclee print on archival Hahnemühle Fine Art Paper Purchased with funds provided by the Friends of Western Plains Cultural Centre Inc. Acc. no. 2014\_001\_1\_OBJ

5. Scott Trevelyan Bees stare at him 2014 photopolymer print Gift of the Artist Acc. no. 2015 037 OBJ

6. Vee Thornbury *Early Daies* 1998 linocut print on paper Acc. no. 1998\_007\_OBJ

7. Steven Giese *The foundling* 1993 lithographic print on paper Collection WPCC, gift of the artist Acc. no. 1995\_002\_OBJ

8. Beverley Veasey Habitat #12 2008 lightjet print Purchased with funds donated by the Friends of Western Plains Cultural Centre Inc. Acc. no. 2008\_004\_3\_OBJ

All works collection Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo.







5. Scott Trevelyan

6. Vee Thornbury



7. Steven Giese



8. Beverly Veasey



4. Joseph McGlennon



## threatened species locations



NSW Aboriginal Lands Council Map



## acknowledgements

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- Katherine Howard Senior Project Officer/Saving our Species NSW National Parks
- Geoff Robertson South West /Senior Threatened
  Species Officer/ Biodiversity and Conservation Division
- Dr Deborah Ashworth Hunter Central Coast/ Senior Threatened Species Officer Biodiversity and Conservation Division
- Dr David Bain- Threatened Species Officer/ Biodiversity and Conservation Division
- Jakki Trenbath Greater Sydney/ Community Engagement & Communications Officer /Saving our Species/ Biodiversity and Conservation Division
- David Hunter South West/ Senior Threatened Species Officer/ Biodiversity and Conservation Division
- Helen Waudby South West/ Project Officer Threatened Species/ Saving our Species/ Biodiversity and Conservation Division
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- Alicia Leggett Executive Director
- Michelle Hall Director Strategy and Development
- Andrew Glassop Director Western Plains Cultural Centre (August 2019)
- Jessica Moore Cultural Development Coordinator, Dubbo Regional Council
- Kent Buchanan Exhibition and Curator Officer, Dubbo Regional Council Additions
- Dr Greg Pritchard Project Lead (2018)
- Shelby Russo Volles Project Support
- Phil Aitken, Education Officer Dubbo Regional Council

#### Community

- Mutawintji Board of Management and Traditional
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- Manning Regional Art Gallery
- Michael Hensen Blue Mountains City Council
- Ian Baird Giant Dragonfly Specialist
- Gerry Swan/Herpetologist & amp; author and Lyndy Marshall /ecologist
- Jeremy Smith Guardian and documenter of the birds
- Faye Collier
- Kerry MacAulay
- Yvette and Peter Hugill

Design Rachel Williams Printed by Hero Print on 100% recylced paper





#### **Art of Threatened Species**

A Partnership between Orana Arts and Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, using the arts to increase awareness of threatened species and activate engagement in environmental issues within NSW.

Art of Threatened Species is the artistic outcome generated through the creative dialogue and collaboration between Artists, Scientist and Species.

#### WESTERN PLAINS CULTURAL CENTRE











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