POTIONS AND PAINTING

BY

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POTIONS AND PAINTING

Women’s role in the Evolution of Gathering Practices and Landscape Representation in Post-Colonial Australia.

BY

Kerry Walsh
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
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(Campbelltown. Campbelltown City Council. 1966.)
(Sydney. Universal Press. 1990)
ABSTRACT

This study traces the adaptation of the traditional gathering practices of Anglo/Celtic women to the landscape of Colonial Australia, thus developing a context for contemporary land-based art practices. Traditional gathering practices became one of the important forces that influenced and shaped the work of many women artists in post colonial Australia. Interacting with the landscape on a personal level helped contextualize women’s gathering role into a contemporary theme, which linked past knowledge to present day voices.

My art work is an interpretation of this traditional gathering practice. By relating herbal knowledge to present day concerns, I am able to extend the knowledge of past generations of women gatherers into present day images. My art work is also a diary of experiments, that are concerned with preserving the dye making recipes which have been handed down for generations. These botanical experiments have enabled me to re-present herbal knowledge that took hundreds of years to glean, and to extend the use of the dyes I obtain to create my art works.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis will trace the landscape art of Australian women artists, as an extension of Anglo/Celtic women’s gathering practice, and explore its evolution from the arrival of Colonial immigrants from Britain in the late eighteenth century, to its contemporary themes today. This paper will be divided into three sections over four chapters; historical, contemporary, and my own art. I will employ three methodologies to explore these themes art history, scientific research and traditional craft practice.

Through art history I will examine original records, and research historical data, as a means of accumulating new information relating to women’s involvement with the Australian landscape. This will also include interviews as a part of my ongoing exploration of gathering as a link to the art practice of many Australian women artists. My scientific research will include testing hand extracted organic dyes for lightfastness and deterioration of shaded colour; and finally I will use the traditional craft practice of gathering herbal plants and papermaking to expand the parameters of my art. I will achieve this by employing the oral and written history of women gatherers to extend the spiritual meaning and visual intensity of my artistic practice.

Once, finding herbal plants that could be used for medicines, food supplementation, cosmetics, dyes, fragrant oils and cleaning was the main concerns of women’s gathering expertise. Over time, this knowledge gained was passed by word of mouth, cementing a bond that bound women to the natural world, through a connection with the herbal knowledge, that was at the core of their gathering traditions in Great Britain.

Historically the land provided the herbs that were necessary for day to day living. Women gathered these from their immediate landscape to nurture their families. Country people in pre-industrial England had an intimate knowledge of their environment, and the popular terminology for plants, birds, beasts and fish was more elaborate than a purely functional
consideration required. This indicated a close relationship that could also be symbolic, or literary.\(^1\)

Once in Australia, hereditary knowledge from the Northern Hemisphere could no longer be relied upon. The changed conditions forced women to find new ways of interacting with the land. This need to interact with the land resulted in the traditional Anglo/Celtic knowledge of plants, being transposed into other forms of gathering that allowed women’s traditional knowledge to continue and grow.

Botanical illustration became one of the ways where interaction with the landscape remained possible. Illustrations not only offered new botanical images for all to see, it sustained a link to the past by allowing a continuation of former interests in botanics to be explored in this new land. The botanical illustrations of artists such as Louisa Anne Meredith and Ellis Rowan exposed the fragility, vibrancy and essence of the seemingly exotic flora of the Southern Hemisphere.

The importation of herbaceous plants from Great Britain validated the continued, familiar use of herbs, as the ancient medicines most people used and relied upon.\(^2\) Using familiar herbs to cure and nourish their families in an unfamiliar land, enabled Anglo/Celtic women to modify skills, that connected gathering to everyday activities such as cooking and cleaning which had been a part of their daily lives in Britain.

Through this beginning a tangible link has been established that has helped inform and underpin many women artist’s work across the last two centuries in Australia. Through this connection a passion has been ignited that expresses the essential quality of the landscape in Australia. This thesis will illustrate this point by exploring the works of women artists such as Margaret Preston, Jane Sutherland and Joan Southern in the early

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1 Seddon, George. *Landprints.* (U.K. Cambridge University Press. 1997.) p113

2 According to Malcome Stuart, (ed) *The Encyclopedia of Herbs and Herbalism* (London. Orbis Publishing. 1979.) Modern medicine had its slow development during the 18th century, ‘the development of chemical and biochemical techniques... gradually enabled scientists to isolate and then to manufacture the chemical substances previously administered in plant form.’ P25.
20th century and Bea Maddock and Rosalie Gascoigne several decades later. I will also examine the work of contemporary Australian women artists such as Janet Laurence, Joan Brassil and Robyn Stacey, who express present day concerns using past gathering methods to inform and influence their work.

This thesis will also present my own art as an exploration of the traditional folklore which surround the practices of gathering and extraction methods that have been handed down through oral history and diaries. These fragmented recipes have become the metaphor that relocates my work to the landscape. Botanical specimens such as petals, barks and leaves, have been used to obtain the potions that colour my work. My art is an acknowledgment of the many women artists who have preceded me. Through women’s hereditary link with the natural landscape, art is shown to be at the core of a maternal nurturing that expresses the life of the landscape.

My methodology has enabled me to discover the vibrant liquid colour, that is the final form of each plant that I choose to use. I have gathered my botanical specimens from two localities, 20 degrees south at Hermannsburg in the Northern Territory, and 35.5 degrees south at Minto in N.S.W.3 These are just two locations where women from the Northern Hemisphere settled, and came to terms with the isolation and loneliness that was caused by migrating to a distant country. (plates a & b)

“The first white women to settle in Central Australia were the missionaries’ wives at Hermannsburg, 140km west of Alice Springs…following the purchase of the mission by the Inmanual Synod of the Lutheran Church, (these first women were replaced by) a new group of women (who) arrived with their missionary husbands in 1877.” 4 Among these new arrivals were Frieda Strehlow (nee Keysser), and later Ottlie (Tilly) Johannsen. Frieda brought with her a set of medicines and Lutze’s book on homeopathic medicines.5

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3 These two locations are map coordinates.
5 Strehlowjonhenry@aol.com email interview with John Strehlow in London. (Frieda’s grandson). Frieda has hundreds of diaries and letters written in German, that have not been translated to date. Information on her day to day life is limited to a few translated letters held in the Lutheran archives, and by John Strehlow. John Strehlow confirmed that Frieda wrote, “I will bring a set of medicines and Lutze’s book with me.”
The women who lived at Hermannsburg worked to reverse the high mortality rate among indigenous families. Yet these women still retained a link with their homeland, by treating people with imported homeopathic medicines, and planting exotic flora from the Northern Hemisphere.

Minto was settled in 1809, 68 years earlier than the community at Hermannsburg in the Northern Territory, and 11 years before Campbelltown was ‘layed out’ by Governor Macquarie. Two women were among the settlers to be given grants to farm land at Minto. Charlotte Driver received a grant of 100 acres (40ha) and Ann Minchin received a grant of 200 acres (80ha). By the end of 1809, 34 settlers had received grants in either Upper or Lower Minto, and several others had orders which they later ‘took up’. Governor Lachlan Macquarie remarked on his tour of the Minto District in 1815, “We found it, (Thompson’s farm at Minto) in excellent order and in a most improving flourishing state. This and Dr Townson’s farm (nearby) are by far the finest soil and best pasturaged I have yet seen in the Colony… the grounds are beautiful,” Governor Macquarie also noted.

Nurturing was an intimate part of everyday life for the women who collected and extracted the essences needed to maintain the health of their family and charges. Once separated from the plants they had always relied on, they were forced to import the varieties they needed for decoctions. As patent medicines replaced gathered herbs over the years, many women found their link with the landscape had become a fragile memory that withered, without continuing oral history and gathering practices to back it up. Some women have overcome these obstacles and still gather. This collecting may take the form of images, fragments, or the more ephemeral gathering of nature’s essence, that is displayed in the work of many women artists such as Joan Brassil and Janet Laurence. Through differing

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6 lutharch@picknowl.com.au email address. The archivist of the Lutheran archives, Lyall Kupke, confirmed that the personal diaries & letters of Frieda Strehlow were written in German and that he could not be certain of their content.

7 http://pioneerwomen.com.au/missions.htm The curator, Pauline Cockrill, verified through photographic evidence that Ottilie Johannsen planted a jacaranda tree, she gave seeds to other women and this tree is still growing outside Adelaide House, (first hospital in Central Australia.)


9 Lachlan Macquarie Journals. 1810-1822. Although Gov. Macquarie does not specifically say flowers the term grounds implies a garden. (pasturaged is Macquarie’s spelling.)
mediums, these artists exhibit their links with a hereditary past. I see the landscape as a place that nurtures both body and spirit. An ancient archive that recycles its history for everybody to discover and enjoy.
CHAPTER ONE

COLONIZATION

This chapter will outline the gathering practices of Anglo/Celtic women in Britain, and examine how migration to the Southern Hemisphere, caused old ways of interacting with the known landscape of Britain to become fragmented. Interacting with the landscape of Australia replaced the old folk lore with new options that suited the Australian landscape.

Separation

The British decision to colonize Australia, resulted in the deportation of many women from their homeland, either as convicts under the penal system of the time, or later as forced emigrants. The many free women who accompanied the soldiers, either as wives or daughters, were also a part of this relocation.

The result of colonization, was a rupture, not only in the bond these women had with their families, but also with their cultural traditions, one of which was linked to the herbal lore of the countryside. Malcolm Stuart summed up the cultural tradition of gathering when he wrote, ‘…herbs were an integral and quite clearly a necessary commodity in life…their cultivation, collection and distribution were essential to the smooth maintenance of any household.\(^1\)

Herbal knowledge was almost exclusively passed down by word of mouth, and although herbal use was common knowledge, it often fell to the women to choose and implement their use.\(^2\) Malcolm Stuart concluded, ‘We can only suppose – but none the less with every confidence – the existence of an un-official side to herbalism, a succession of ordinary men and women skilled and knowledgable about the herbs of their area and their

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2 Stuart, op. cit (for example, in the kitchen ash twigs (*Raxinus excelsior*) were used to wisk eggs, and horsetail (*Exuisetum arvense*) was used as a brush. Soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*) was used to wash delicate fabrics and lady’s bedstraw (*Galium verum*) was used in cheese making.
uses – medicinal, culinary and in the preparation of dyes, perfumes and cosmetics.

These people used their known landscape as an ancient archive that offered its contents for everyone to use. Migration to an opposite hemisphere caused the practical application of generations of oral history, to be altered dramatically.

community life in Britain

Gathering was not limited to those who lived in the country, city and town dwellers often went to the country to pick the herbs they needed. Most people knew the recipes for cooking and making herbal decoctions, and some herbalists directed poor patients to the country side to collect their own ingredients for herbal remedies. Nicholas Culpeper outlined this practice in his book *Culpepers Herbal* which was first published in English in 1649 and was still in use until the mid 1700s. Doctors and Herbalists usually maintained a herbal garden for their own use, but still purchased some of their supplies from ‘Green’ men and women, who scoured the countryside gathering herbs to sell.

Women who lived in rural areas, could still find herbs growing wild on the edges of lanes and over fields. A lack of medical help in country towns kept gathering alive through necessity. It was through women’s role as nurturers of their families, that they were able to utilize the familiar plants that grew in their immediate vicinity. This field of expertise gave them a rapport with the landscape based on generations of tradition and knowledge. This basic use of herbal lore often differed from the male overview of the land, which generally was perceived as acres of crops, instead of patches of growth. As the breadwinner, the male was regularly away from the home working; a twelve hour shift was not uncommon in eighteenth century Britain. This left the women to tend to the every-day health issues and chores that arose.

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3 ibid p15.
5 ibid
community life in Australia

In colonial Australia the working hours may have been similar, but the botanical landscape was alien to the British eye. There were no familiar plants, to gather from the sides of the road, to supplement the diet or relieve a cough. Alienation from the known botanical landscape of the Northern Hemisphere, was as much a hardship as were the lack of water and supplies. The idea of importing favorite plant varieties from Britain, soon became the link that sustained many women in the early days of the colony.

The well-known flora of their homeland, represented familiarity in a land they did not understand. By importing their favorite plants they were able to establish a link with their past lives, and continue a form of gathering that helped sustain continuity. Philip Wagner’s comments on Australia’s colonial settlers explained the Landscape’s influence on the populace when he said, nature has a considerable direct effect on people…they can be affected deeply and diversely by the external world. Humans are always ultimately dependent upon plants. This dependence may take any one of several forms such as gathering…at its simplest level.

Using favorite plants to cure and nourish their families allowed women to use, and finally modify, old gathering practices that had been a part of their lives for centuries. Unfortunately, many practices concerned with gathering were no longer applicable in this new land. Ivy for example, sought after for preventing and curing the plague, could no longer be gathered from the stone walls of houses or churches, and had to be imported from Britain to be grown in domestic gardens if a ready supply was to be had. Old ways

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7 Henry Lawson’s short story from 1900, Water Them Geraniums. Tells the story of the hardships endured by selectors who lived days away from the nearest town and miles from their closest neighbor. The lack of Water and neighbors gradually took their toll on the hardiest of settlers.

8 Wagner, Philip. The Human Use of the Earth. (U.S.A. The Free Press. 1960.) p12

9 Potterton, David. ed. Culpeper’s Colour Herbal. (London. W. Foulsham & Co. 1983.) p104 (According to Culpeper, ivy is an enemy to the nerves and sinews, being much taken inwardly, but very helpful to them being outwardly applied… It can be found in woods twining itself around the trees, and on stone walls of houses and churches.)
of planting, gathering and receiving knowledge, had to be replaced by adapted versions that appeared right for this new land. Konrad Lorenz’s studies on behavior explained this adaptation as a symbolic way of keeping the previous behavior of their mothers and grandmothers alive under very different environmental influences.¹⁰

*herbs and herbalists*

The majority of women convicts, and the women who emigrated to Australia under the assisted passage scheme of the 1830s,¹¹ were factory workers, trades people or servants, who had little time to solve the riddles posed by the unknown flora of the Southern Hemisphere. In the early days of the colony, it was mostly the wives and daughters of the free settlers and soldiers, who had the time to work alone, or to assist botanists in the identification and portrayal of the new flora they found in Australia. One such team was Georgiana Molloy and botanist James Drummond.

From her first days in her new home on the Swan River, Georgiana Molloy began to take an interest in the vast variety of plants that grew in abundance around her. She looked at botany as a way of learning about the flora of her new homeland, and as a way of helping to combat the loneliness she felt, at being so far from her family in Britain. As a young girl Molloy was taught botanical drawing at school, and as an adult she continued this pastime.¹² She arrived in Perth in 1830, when she was eighteen, with her husband, Captain John Molloy. They lived in the Swan River settlement.

She was an enthusiastic collector of seeds, and kept extensive diaries. Molloy and Drummond were responsible for sending the newly discovered plant, the kangaroo paw

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¹¹ Fitzpatrick, Brian. *British Imperialism and Australia 1788 – 1833 An Economic History,* (London. Allen & Unwin. 1971) p361. (Towards the end of the 18ᵗʰ century, the industrial and agricultural revolution caused a dramatic change in the way people in Western countries lived and worked. Improved ideas in farming practices and the invention of labor saving devices saw the mass retrenchments of thousands of workers who now found their skills redundant. 40,000 people were employed in the cotton Mills alone, nearly a quarter of this figure were women and girls, most lost their jobs when they were replaced by machines.)
¹² (Most young girls who went school received instruction in botanical drawing) see Isaacs, Jennifer. *The Gentle Arts 200 Years of Women’s Domestic & Decorative Arts,* (Sydney. Ure Smith. 1992.)
(anigozanthos manglesii) to British Botanist David Don, for classification in 1836. The kangaroo paw eventually became Western Australia’s floral emblem;\textsuperscript{13} but she did not involve herself in the gathering of these plants, preferring instead, to import the flora that was a part of her own oral history and hereditary upbringing.\textsuperscript{14}

gathering images in a new land.

It was through botanical illustrations that Australia’s unique botanical diversity became familiar. Familiarity also originated new ways of interpreting and displaying the uniqueness of the Australian landscape. Images began to replace gathered herbage, as a singular and personal expression of the countryside. This inference was a focus, which used a philosophical acceptance of the landscape during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century in Australia.\textsuperscript{15}

Many women artists had the painterly skills to capture the exact likeness of individual plants, and it was women such as Rosa Fiveash whose work on orchids can be viewed in the Adelaide Botanical Gardens.\textsuperscript{16} Louisa Ann Meredith who depicted the Tasmanian flora, and Ellis Rowan whose paintings of wildflowers and birds, displays a visual intensity that provokes an emotional response within the viewer.\textsuperscript{17} These diverse

\textsuperscript{13} Isaacs, Jennifer. The Gentle Arts 200 years of Women’s Domestic & Decorative Arts. (Sydney. Ure Smith. 1992.) p27
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid p25 Georgiana Molloy also had a vast knowledge of the medicinal and culinary uses, of the herbs that grew ‘back home’ in Britain, and prescribed herbal remedies to those who requested herbal healing. Molloy’s letters showed she wrote regularly to England requesting rhubarb for tarts, tansy for puddings and all sorts of medicinal herbs such as marshmallow. In one of her letters to friends back in England she wrote; “I have become a famous medicine woman, patients arriving here even from the Heads, and, as I dispense gratis, my practice is likely to increase. Cuts, splinter-wounds, boils and sand blight, have been successfully treated,” she boasted
\textsuperscript{15} The pre-colonial botanical illustration of Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander, also contributed to the familiarity of Australia’s flora. See Joseph Banks’ journal. Brunton, Paul ed. The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks. (Australia. Angus & Robertson. 1998.)
\textsuperscript{16} Isaacs, Jennifer. The Gentle Arts 200 Years of Women’s Domestic & Decorative Arts. (Sydney. Ure Smith. 1992.)
\textsuperscript{17} National Library of Australia. Flower Paintings of Ellis Rowan. ( Canberra National library of Australia. 1982.) p17. (Caroline Louisa Atkinson studied ferns in intimate detail. Simeon Nelson noted the emotional content of Atkinson’s work in his essay for the 1997 Australian Perspecta Exhibition Catalogue, During the late 1800s Caroline collected many fern specimens and painted them with extreme care and delicacy. Another artist was Louisa Anne Meredith, she was an established artist before she set sail for Sydney in 1839. Her Group of Marsh Flowers painted in 1860, reflects her love of miniatures.)
botanical images depict the charm of the new flora that they found.\(^{18}\) (plates 1 & 2) These images have contributed to a contemporary interpretation that critics such as Simeon Nelson responded to in the 1997 Perspecta Exhibition Catalogue, when he described Ellis Rowan and Louisa Ann Meredith’s botanical illustrations as using visual art to interpret the natural world and to nurture the soul, instead of the body.\(^{19}\) This aesthetic nurturing re-interpreted the role of the gatherer. Presenting the flora of the landscape as the essence of an ideal, rather than the object of folk-lore and tradition.

*a cultivated garden.*

Colonial gardens in the early eighteen hundreds, were not only cultivated to assist the aesthetic nurturing of the soul through visual contentment. They provided shelter for the imported botanical flora that reminded people of the home they had left behind. Cultivated gardens became a store-house where herbs could be gathered at will, eliminating the need to wander through paddocks in search of an elusive herbaceous plant to use in a healing decoction. The herbaceous plants that people once depended on for medicines and nourishment, now became dependant on gardeners for their survival in the harsh Australian climate. Drought often caused water shortages. Many women were forced to carry heavy buckets of water from drying creek beds, in order to keep alive the delicate flowers and herbs that were mostly unsuited to the areas in which they were planted.\(^{20}\)

Although the earliest settlers were primarily concerned with establishing food crops; women also sent to England for seeds to install flowerbeds containing plants such as

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\(^{18}\) (Caroline Louisa Atkinson studied ferns in intimate detail. Simeon Nelson noted the emotional content of Atkinson’s work in his essay for the 1997 *Australian Perspecta Exhibition Catalogue*. During the late 1800s Caroline collected many fern specimens and painted them with extreme care and delicacy. Another artist was Louisa Anne Meredith, she was an established artist before she set sail for Sydney in 1839. Her *Group of Marsh Flowers* painted in 1860, reflects her love of minatures.

\(^{19}\) The Art Gallery of N.S.W *Australian Perspecta Exhibition Catalogue*. (Sydney. The Art Gallery of N.S.W. 1997) p11

roses, wallflowers, lupins, hollyhocks and geranium. However, some plants such as Scottish Thistle quickly adapted to their new home in plague proportions.  

Life in Australia was made bearable for many people because they were able to extend the known countryside of Britain into their new surrounds. Philip Wagner commented on this need for the familiar when he suggested, that being able to manipulate their environment to some extent, ‘reflects (a persons) culture, social organization, and techniques.’ Their relations with certain wild or domestic organisms allows familiarity to extend to the character of the land itself.

Domesticating the unruly landscape also acknowledged recollections, which allowed people to recreate their remembered countryside. This memory affirmed the garden as more than simply a place of refuge, where people could fill their lungs with fresh air and take in the sights and sounds of the plants and birds around them. It became a place made in the image of their memory. Towns were named after famous people and places in Britain, and posies replaced herbals as the most sought after preparation. As pioneers and explorers opened up new tracts of land this acceptance led to a deeper understanding of Australia’s flora as individual and expressive.

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21 Adams, David. Ed. The Letters of Rachel Henning. (Sydney. Angus & Robertson. 1963.) p70. (Elizabeth wrote to her cousin back 'home' in Britain after she had visited her newly married sister who now lived in Bathurst. “Bathurst July 20th 1861. ...Another unlucky importation was the Scottish thistle, which a patriotic Scotch Lady near here planted in her garden and which, like most of its compatriots, took so kindly to the country that it grows everywhere.” Rachel also remarked on the sweetbriar that her friend, Mrs Ranken had planted on her property in Bathurst 20 years before (1840). “...it has spread so on her land that some of her paddocks are a mere jungle of sweetbriar. It must be lovely when in flower, but is not exactly ‘adapted to the wants’ of sheep and cattle, and it is extremely difficult to extirpate. However, I have not taken warning, but have collected some seeds to sow at Marlborough, I saw it growing wild in the bush as I came up to Bathurst, and rejoiced greatly, as it is the only approach we have in this country to wild roses.”)

22 Wagner, Philip. The Human Use of the Earth (U.S.A. The Free Press. 1960.) preface viii


24 Minto near Campbelltown was named after Lord Minto who visited the town in the eighteenth century, and Liverpool, a suburb of Sydney, was named after Liverpool in England.
CHAPTER TWO
UTOPIAN SPLendor

The previous chapter examined the gathering practices of Anglo/Celtic women in Britain. Outlining how migration to the Southern Hemisphere, caused old ways of interacting with the known landscape of Britain to be replaced by new options. These options included importing favorite herbs and the representation of Australian flora through botanical art as a way of sustaining a link with former gathering practices. This chapter will analyze the acceptance of the rural landscape as unique to life in Australia, and look at some of the women artists who depicted women’s gathering activities.

embracing the Australian landscape.

It was the acceptance of the landscape as ‘unique to life in this country'\(^1\) that caused most Australians to begin to see the worth of Australia’s natural landscape. During the late eighteen hundreds the rural landscape gained prominence through art and literature.\(^2\) Paintings such as Hans Heysen’s *Study for Approaching Storm*, *(plate 3)* and the art of members of the Heidelberg School presented an image that was both unique and acceptable to most of the Australian public. George Seddon concluded that this period was a time when, an Australian culture was constructed to ultimately embrace rural life as the core of what it was to be an Australian.\(^3\)

Arthur Streeton and David Davies’ were just two names that became synonymous with the romanticized landscape portrayed by the Heidelberg School. Arthur Streeton’s *Still Glides the Stream and Shall Forever Glide* 1889 and David Davies’ work *Moonrise,*

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\(^2\) According to Whitlock, G. & Carter, D. (1992:14, 15) The bush ethos was distinctive but not representative. Artists, particularly the writers of the Bulletin, made the bush accessible and gave it meaning for all Australians…(however,) this emphasis on the bush tradition … leaves women, Aborigines and the urban dwellers out of the picture.

Plate 3. Mc Cubbin, Frederick. *At the falling of the year*. 1886. Oil on canvas.
Templestowe 1894, (plate 4 & 5) offered images of rural Australia that pointed to what had become in most people’s minds, the ideological image of what it was to be Australian. A countryside of rivers, gums and mountains replaced flora as the essence of the landscape. These constructed images of Australia as a ‘sun-drenched country’ tapped into the newly found patriotism and pride of the Australian people as they approached Federation. The imagery of the bush and the bushman who worked the land, fed the imagination of the population as they struggled with National identity and life in the ever burgeoning cities.⁴

Women of the Heidelberg school

The spectacle of a romanticized bush setting with its emphasis on masculine labor, excluded women’s history of the landscape that had been handed down for generations. Women artists who painted with the male members of the Heidelberg School were aware of this division. Many of their paintings respond to their need to recall past traditions. Artists such as Jane Sutherland and Clara Southern, often depicted women gathering or working in gardens. Their works can be recognized as iconic examples of past gathering practices that had once been a large part of family nurturing. Jane Sutherland’s works *The mushroom gatherers 1895* and *A Cabbage Garden 1896* (plates 6 & 7) are two examples of this theme, while Clara Southern’s *An old bee farm 1900* (plate 8) depicts another aspect of women using the landscape to extend their working environment.

Writers such as Helen Topliss acknowledged the women artists who painted with the Heidelberg School as continuing the role of nurturer when she wrote, ‘The subjects treated by the women painters (of the Heidelberg School) are mostly of a domestic nature and frequently represent women at work in their backyards or in fields.’⁵ These women artists reflected their hereditary links with the land through their art. Their topics confirmed women’s role as caretakers of a gathering tradition that was still viable in the new century.

visual interpretations

Early 20th century women artists such as Margaret Preston and Nora Heysen, also depicted indigenous plants and flowers as one way of involving themselves with the landscape. Margaret Preston’s *Aboriginal Flowers 1928* (plate 9) shows her interest in Australian flora. Her approach utilized the oral history of the countryside of both Anglo/Celtic and Indigenous people, to express what was referred to by Jane Hylton in later years as ‘work which was both powerfully expressive and unique.’ Similarly, the garden provided Nora Heysen with inspiration for her still life flower and fruit paintings. (plate 10) Her work has been described by Lou Klepac in recent years as having ‘changed and evolved as a garden evolves, naturally. And she has always remained in perfect accord with her own world…Her garden, her work and her life are one.’

Margaret Preston’s conception and presentation of a distinctly Australian art, inspired Thea Proctor to declare that her paintings and woodcuts of native flowers ‘were a positive triumph…original and beautiful in design.’ The women artists who depicted familiar and indigenous flora during the early twentieth century, helped maintain the close links with the botanical landscape that had been established by earlier women artists. This link displayed a continuity that had unfurled from the first years of colonization. It was this link that offered a narrative for those contemporary women artists, who in later years followed the same concerns that contributed to a visual interpretation of the landscape as a place that still offers optimism.

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The previous chapter examined the acceptance of the pastoral landscape as ‘unique to life in this country’. Gathering in Australia was relegated to rural acres where planted areas were tended by women gardeners. Their work was depicted in the art of many women artists such as Jane Sutherland, Clara Southern, Nora Heysen and Margaret Preston, who kept the image of gathering practices alive through their paintings. This chapter will focus on the emergence of contemporary ideas that recreate the landscape as a source of imagination and scrutiny.

**exploring new ideas**

The visual interpretations of imported and indigenous flora, which was prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century gradually gave way to closer observations of the landscape. By the later part of that century women’s art had examined the landscape as a transitory state, where the ephemeral could be observed as a static quality. Now the essence of the landscape’s fleeting movements could be captured through the manipulation of shadow, sound and fluid and also through the suspension of decay. Capturing the essence of landscape and cloud in her work *Cast a Shadow* 1972, Bea Maddock observes this transitory state, when she represents the intimate passage of the cloud as it passes over people. Her work allowed the intangible to be a part of the landscape. The manifestation of moving cloud, defining little shapes which actually are people among the shadows, who are momentarily a part of the earth and sky.¹ Re-interpreting the landscape as a place where all objects contribute to the landscape’s essential quality, became a meaningful part of her work. (*plate 11 & 12*)

According to Simon Schama, creating a landscape is an intimate experience of the mind. ‘The old culture-creatures re-emerge from their lair trailing the memories of generations behind them.’ It is that very memory of gathering and responding to nature’s seasonal variances, that calls to many women artists who are now working with the more ephemeral elements of wind, shadow and the essence of plant life. Gathering takes on new meanings that record, recreate and originate the forces of nature. This approach can be seen in the works of artists such as Rosalie Gascoigne.

Rosalie Gascoigne collected saffron thistle stalks, dried salsify heads and swan feathers from the landscape to use as gathered images in her art. Her work ‘speaks in complex terms about the construction of the landscape,’ and represents many aspects of the land as observed from the air such as The Crop 1976. (plate 13) Rosalie Gascoigne identifies her art as belonging to the past, and describes the vicinity where she lived as a place where, ‘like the Druids of old,…artists (could) sing songs of their district.’

For Rosalie Gascoigne, gathering became an interruption of the final cycle of nature, where the impending decay is halted. There is now no death before renewal, gathering has stilled the final cycle. Hereditary knowledge now takes on a deeper meaning, and becomes the link between object and heaven. The fragile is presented as a new life, complementing both the ascending act of the spirit after death, and the reincarnation of an object into something more profound and meaningful. Her work, A piece to Walk Around 1982, (plate 14) expresses the fragility of life and the suspension of decay. Its grid arrangement conveys a feeling of expansiveness through its composition, while it’s use of dried stalks focuses on turning our own thoughts inwards, to wonder at the interruption to the melody of life and rebirth. Nick Waterlow described Gascoigne’s art as the transmogrification of the things that delighted her, into new and totally unexpected creations. It was also a time of self-discovery that led to her unique response to the

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4 Ibid 17
landscape’s hidden treasures. Interpreting the landscape as a part of the cycle of life, to be either hindered or embraced, became a way of reaching past iconic constraints. These new interactions became a metaphor that presented the viewer with a deeper understanding of their own lives.\(^6\)

_A response to hereditary values_

The landscape’s past is still with us today as history, in the form of botanical specimens and drawings. Robyn Stacey’s work at the Royal Botanic Garden’s Herbarium, focused on the need for past times to be remembered and revealed as relevant to the present. Her work represents the past by presenting what was once valued as worthy of collecting and preserving, as something to be valued once again. Presenting each botanical specimen as a work of art overcomes the fragility and antiquity of the subject, inspection and acceptance of this new interpretation is now invited through their depiction. (plate 17) Stacey presents the past as always travelling with us. Her work is a constant reminder of how things were, and how things may be again. Craig Judd wrote, ‘In the twenty first century the divisions of nature and human are becoming clearer but it seems that the more information we have the more the desire to question. We desire more and more detail. This desire for detail…is a feared but driving force of modernity.’\(^7\) Stacey used the past to describe the parallels between the past and the present. By gathering specimens and keeping them safe, we can understand the value others placed on the flora of the landscape, and this allows us to examine our own attitudes and desires.

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\(^6\) This observation is also revealed in the art of male artists who are able to visualize their place in the landscape. Contemporary artists such as Andy Goldsworthy (U.K), Wolfgang Laib (Germany) and John Wollesley (Australia) demonstrate through their art their ability to embrace the themes of human experience within the landscape, as a way of dealing with the emotions and responses that occur throughout life.\(^6\) Their art is charged with emotion for the site where their art takes place, and reflects their personal relationship with the land. (plates 15, 16).

\(^7\) Judd, Craig. in _Hot House Robyn Stacey._ (2001. Exhibition catalogue.) p5
This awareness also informed other Australian women artists who moved away from the landscape’s tangible surface, to explore an inner reality that was just as vibrant and forceful, as gathering images of the decay or progress of the flora and terrain of any given region.

Joan Brassil’s 1997 work *Where Yesterday May Be Tomorrow 1997, (plate 18)* explores the realm of perception as a time line that is constantly in a state of fluid movement. The flow of memory is constrained by the social need for change. Finally, yesterday becomes the raw material for tomorrow offering insights that seem new, but are in fact only echoes of voices from past times. *Where Yesterday may be Tomorrow* ‘makes reference to the expansion of scientific knowledge and the existence of human life in the context of the evolution of the planet, the universe, notions of time, and the cycles of nature. Through her art, Joan Brassil attempts to make sense of nature and the human experience of life in the late twentieth century…her work interconnects linear human history, and our cultural experiences of time and place.\(^8\) The landscape is presented as more than just a vista of trees, grass and soil. It is also the breeze that is felt and the light that enables us to see. It is shadow, and cloud, day and night.

Joan Brassil’s recent work *A tether of time*, also taps into that inferred element of discovery, and helps provide insight into how we manipulate the forces of nature to our will. A work of the mind, before it becomes an expression of the landscape, *A Tether of Time 2000* is a sculptural piece that works with oscillations of sound, caused by the elemental forces of the wind. It is a sculpture alive by virtue and aural connections…A wind harp that produces intermittent singing, capturing a new voice from the wind each time it passes through the harp’s structure. The surface reflects both the earth and sky on its metallic skin.\(^9\) (plate 19) Complementing past gathering traditions, the work collects the sound of the wind, allowing the listener to hear the voice of nature through is two pronged extensions. We hear the ephemeral voice of the breeze, sometimes faintly,

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Sculpture.
sometimes loud and accusing. It is like the nurturing reaction of a mother gathering her child to her breast, sometimes whispering love, sometimes critical and reprimanding.

*Defining the landscape*

Janet Laurence chose the voice of poets to express her own perception of the vitality and lyrical evolvement of the trees around Sydney harbour, in particular those gum trees whose parent radix was maturing at the time of white colonization. Her installation, *Veil of Trees* conveys to the onlooker the homage and vulnerability that is felt by many people when they are confronted with the antiquity of a particular tree. *(plate 20)* The seeds of selected gum trees are held between panels of glass. Exposed to the viewer, we see the infant gum tree waiting for water and earth to transcend its suspended existence into a flurry of new growth, while around it poets sing the praises of the tree. It is a passage of reflection, a space where memory is gathered. A reminder that gathering our past so we are able to define our place in the present, often points the way our journey may lead in the future.

Janet Laurences’ installation for the *Frames of Reference, Aspects of Feminism in Art* exhibition held at the Wharf, pier 3 Sydney in 1991, also used objects to invoke memory. *(plate 21).* Peter Emmett described her installation as ‘a gathering place in flux’. The fluid movement of the intangible gives form to the ‘lingering reflections (which become an) investigation into the nature of change.’ The work reflects the experiments of the ancient alchemist who transmutes dark into light as the day progresses. Janet Laurence seizes the intangible moment when light passes close by and, can be seen but not captured. Peter Emmett’s description of Janet Laurence’s studio reveals her link with

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10 Laurence, Janet & Han, Jisuk. Installation. *Veil of Trees.* The site is ‘the creation of a passage of reflection, a space where memory is gathered. Memory is embodied within each glass panel, traces of minerals, ash and seeds of indigenous trees are enclosed together with excerpts of Australian poetry and texts selected for their evocation of the nature of trees. Amidst the translucent glass panels a ribbon of one hundred red forest gums – *eucalyptus tereticornis* – which once forested this site have been planted, each tree grown from the seed of the original red forest gums which existed prior to European settlement. Weaving either side of the ribbon of forest and panels clumps of native grasses define the linearity of the passage engaging the visitor into along and through this site of regeneration. Installed June 1999.

nature when said, ‘(the) studio is a gathering place, (a place that) is a gathering passion, not for possessions but for possibilities.’ Janet Laurence says of her art, ‘(my) art must give the flicker of nature’s duration, the elements, the appearance of all its changes.’

My own art deals with these same issues of regeneration, conservation, history and memory. The liquid I extract from each plant contains not only new life, but also new ways of presenting past ideas. I display most of the liquid that I extract in glass bottles. 

*Petals to Potions 2002 (plate 22)* The history that flows out of each petal is one of antiquity, of knowledge passed on, revealing renewal as the primary response to cyclic death both inferred and real. Inferred death relates to gathered wisdom, lost over time but regained as memory. My art expresses the time spent in gathering as a search for past ideals put in motion by present day queries. By using the same techniques as past women gatherers I acknowledge their place as a contemporary voice repeating former knowledge as a mantra for present day concerns.

Defining the landscape as a place where the present and the past may be experienced simultaneously not only leads to self discovery, but also to an awareness of that inferred essential quality which belongs to earth and people alike. The idea that the landscape’s essence may be understood and expanded upon, has helped to substantiate women’s status as contemporary chroniclers of a place that has become an essential part of many people’s existence.

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12 Ibid pp14, 15.
13 Ibid p8
CHAPTER FOUR
VISUAL FRAGMENTS

The preceding chapter considered the gathering techniques of contemporary women artists who focus on gathering through many different aspects. Gathering the ephemeral environment acknowledges the landscape as more than just a vista of trees, grass and soil. It is also the breeze that is felt and the light that enables us to see. It is shadow and cloud, day and night. It is the past remembered and revealed through the memory of those who have moved over the land as gatherers and receivers of knowledge. This chapter explores my own work as a contemporary woman artist. It will outline my gathering practice that is integral to my creative work. I link my work to traditional and non-traditional art practices, which include collecting and displaying plant specimens, paper making and extracting dyes.

reconnecting with the past

For me, the act of gathering has resulted in an awareness of the ecological vulnerability of the landscape. I became aware of the need to preserve the balance between what is taken from nature, and what is left to reproduce by recreating traditional gathering techniques. Reconnecting with past values links me to ways of thinking, which over time have become echoes, that have to be interpreted with care if I want to understand what was once uttered. Through this connection I am aware of my ancestors, whose lives have already been lived, and the oral history of those people who are still a part of my family today. Characteristic of understanding the past, is the ability to fully immerse oneself in individual details of that time, without actually having lived in that era. I can never really know or fully understand these people or how they lived, but I can feel an awareness of their lives.
Family oral history links me to the women in my family who were also ‘gatherers’. My mother and her sisters in particular, and my grandmother, loved to wander in the bush as a young woman searching for emu eggs to decorate.\(^1\) I am also connected to this tradition through the written history, which has been handed down by women writers for mostly women readers through published diaries, letters and recipe books.\(^2\) Often fragmented, these ideas have become the folklore that binds my work to the landscape.

The landscape offers those of us who observe its rhythms and cycles a chance to experience a living herbarium. Each location within the landscape holds unique and valuable resources in the plant life that is specific to that particular locality or zone. Once it was widely known where to find the places where nurturing plants flourished. Sometimes the places were dark and damp, while other places were light and airy. Over time this awareness began to dim, and eventually lost much of its relevance. Knowledge waned, and fell into disrepute.

Widespread deforestation is one of the results of this loss of knowledge, causing the Earth and its inhabitants to suffer through a lack of fresh water and rising temperatures. A connection with the landscape needs to be re-established, and the knowledge of past gatherers, who understood the ecology of using the landscape as a resource, must be implemented, if we are to reverse this trend towards destruction. The restraint that most gatherers used when collecting the herbage that they needed to nurture their families, resulted in the continued growth of the plants that were used from year to year.

We can no longer look to science as the only way to save the future destruction of the landscape. It is only by nurturing our environment that we can hope to be nurtured in return. Interacting with past knowledge enables us to avoid repeating ecological mistakes in the future. It allows us to evaluate our own actions and be a part of the conservation history of our most valuable resource.

\(^1\) My grandparents were itinerant workers, who traveled through Queensland, N.S.W. & Victoria. The oral history of my family does not pin-point the exact location where my Grandmother found emu eggs, only that she collected them when ever she could.

\(^2\) Accounts can be found in Adams, David. ed. The Letters of Rachel Henning and The Oaks Historical Society Women’s Voices Vol. 1.
My art discloses this knowledge by using the recipes that have been handed down to extract the plant dyes that I use to help colour my work. When old knowledge is lost to technology, a part of who we are as a community, is lost too. Former ideas and discoveries must remain active within our lives, so decisions based on community welfare can move forward. A community who ignores its history relinquishes a vital part of its psyche. When I display these recipes in the form of dyes trapped between layers of perspex, or held in bottles and on paper for everyone to see and admire, I reveal the past in a way that can be understood.

I choose to gather blooms, leaves and husks that reveal bright or deep colour. It is only the brightest or deepest pigment that makes a suitable dye. I also gather seeds, pods and debris, such as fallen nests and the outer shell of many plants that are discarded as the plant matures. Like the bower bird I select anything that takes my interest. The gathering boxes that I fill display all of my ‘finds’ as a memory. (plate 23) Gathering is about keeping in touch with the earth’s rhythms and replicating them in my art. These items represent the botanical landscape and the life that depends on its continued growth and development. My work belongs to the earth, reflecting all of the seasonal shapes, colours and variations. It is my response to the natural landscape.

The plants that I use are either descended from varieties that were grown in the early days of the colony, or Australian natives. Imported plants such as scottish thistle and geraniums represent the Northern Hemisphere, and are just two of many species of plants which were imported to appease homesickness. Australian natives such as wattle and bottlebrush helped bridge the nostalgia felt by the early colonists. The fascination for Australian native plants inspired many women colonists to present their botanical discoveries through their art.

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For this project I gathered at two locations in Australia. The Northern Territory at twenty degrees south around Alice Springs and Coober Pedy, and Minto at thirty five degrees south. I collected my plants from virgin landscape such as parks that preserve native bushland, similar to Pembroke Park on the outskirts of Minto. (plate c) I also gathered specimens from the sides of the road and from gardens. These places offered me a diverse range of plants both introduced and indigenous. Many of these plants were once imported from the Northern Hemisphere, and eventually escaped from gardens through seed borne on the wind. These plants include the dandelion and hopbush. I also gather eucalyptus leaves and wattle, as well as bark to make my dyes.

The region around Alice Springs and Hermannsburg, still offers native species that would have been available to Pioneer women gatherers. One such plant is Genus *Dodonaea* (hopbush). This plant is similar to the hop plant that grows in Britain, and was used by pioneers ‘to make a satisfactory beer.’\(^4\) This is one location where I can still experience the impact of native wildflowers as they would have been encountered by early women settlers. Further south, Coober Pedy’s colour can be found not in its wildflowers and red soil, but in its glistening splinters of opal that lie in rejected heaps over the white surface of the land. Offering a contrast to the red of Uluru, Coober Pedy marks the end of my search for remnant patches of wildflowers at this location.

Most plants that I gather at Minto, were either initially imported from Britain and represent the flora that was left behind in the Northern Hemisphere, or are indigenous to the area; many native plants are similar to the species that would have been found growing by early women settlers. Minto is a very old suburb and was once the granary for the new colony before rust began to ruin the wheat crop. There are still a few old homes in the old village with remnant gardens that mostly date back to colonial times. These gardens represent to me, the pioneer gardens of the early women settlers. I have been able to gather plants, especially geraniums from these locations to make dyes. The

dandelion, Scottish thistle and fennel all initially loved by colonial settlers and imported from their homeland, still grow wild on the sides of the road, I regularly pick these to make dyes in the different seasons. (plate 24) These imported varieties in particular are reminders of colonial gardens and the work that was needed to preserve the life of loved plants.

Each passage of time brings new plants for me to gather. I am aware of the different locations in which each species grow, and as the year progresses I look for each flower or leaf to appear. I select a few plants from each patch of growth, I never take every plant, and often I remove the seeds and sprinkle them in the area. It is frequently only the petals that I use for dye making. It is important that a balance exists between what is taken and what is left behind so each species can continue to grow and propagate.

Each season offers its own colour combinations that can be mixed with mordants to enhance and prolong the dye that is extracted. My art work Four Seasons (plate 25) displays the unique colours that I extract. Each strip of paper holds the colour of the season in which it was extracted, each box is a metaphor for its own season. Spring is the colourful season. It is during this time that I can extract a wide variety of colours. Summer scorches most of the blooms and only the most hardy of flowers can endure the heat. Green, yellow and lilac are the colours of summer, and it is difficult to find any other colour about. Autumn is a diluted copy of spring and, winter is mostly brown, fawn, green and yellow, with occasionally some lilac if I can find a late blooming red rose bush. I have been lucky this year, my garden has produced several late blooming red roses which I was able to harvest before I pruned the bushes. The delicate blue iris produces a soft green stain that complements the lilac from the red rose perfectly. The colours I can make are endless, and the supply abundant.

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5 Adams, David. The Letters of Rachel Henning. (Sydney, Angus & Robertson. 1963.) Ch.1.
The majority of times I gather on my own. I keep a small basket and clippers in my car, and stop to examine any plants that I see growing on the side of the road as I pass by. The varieties vary considerably with each changing season. Friends often help me gather also. They regularly inform me when new plants appear near their homes. Unexpected discoveries are always exciting. It is a pleasure to find plants growing in an area that was presumed to be barren.

My art is an expression of the closeness that women can feel as they walk through fields together, or stroll on walking tracks through bush land parks, banded together, talking, interacting, imagining a future, reliving the past. It is a pathway to discovery, a reflection. When I gather with friends or members of my family, our contact forms a union not only with each other, but with the natural world around us as well. It is the genesis of cognition as we are confronted with the landscape’s familiarity. To image yourself as a part of nature brings an awareness of your own vulnerability. My art is a translation, not only of the essence of the plant that I have used to extract the stain, but an image of the vulnerability of everything that lives and must eventually die.

Through gathering, my art expresses the life of the landscape. I work with the fragments that I collect. Each plant I gather, whether it is a dandelion, geranium, or a sprig of wattle, holds its life force as moisture in its petals and leaves. The colour I use is extracted from the fragments of material that I collect. My selection is made based on ecological nurturing. Leaving some and choosing only what I need. When I extract a plant’s essence to make a dye, time is suspended; metamorphous occurs. I become linked to the past, and it is through that established link that I am able to perceive my place in the land. It is during this metamorphous that the plant’s energy is transformed, to become either a permanent mark on a sheet of paper, or captured in liquid and sustained in a glass jar (plate 26) or between sheets of perspex.
Method of practice

My art has evolved over time. Three years ago I began to include found objects in my work. Old timber fence palings, (plate 27) pieces of metal such as washers and nails, (plates 28 & 29) until finally I began to rub different coloured pigments that I dug up over the paper. (plates 30 & 31) I then moved on to constructing site specific works. Before I began constructing site sculptures. (plate 32) I constructed my first site sculpture in the University grounds at Bankstown campus in 2000. (plate 33) I approached Campbelltown Council and received permission to construct site sculptures in Pembroke Park, a large park on the outskirts of Minto. I began to construct two large pieces, Cyclic Circle 11 in October 2000. (plates 34 & 35,) and Cyclic Circle in November. (plate 36) It was during that time that I also constructed several soft sculptures from bark and dyed muslin, (plate 37) I left them in the bushy parts of the park, as a reminder of the many women who had gathered in the past. The sculptures disappeared over time.

The move away from the more extrinsic gathering practice of constructing site sculptures, to the more ephemeral gathering and extraction of dyes came about when I read Lady Elizabeth Eastlake’s early writings on photography. In her Journal article she wrote, “The juices of beautiful flowers were also put into requisition, and papers prepared with the colours of the Corchorus japonica, the common tenweek’s stock, the marigold, the wallflower, the poppy, the rose…(all) have been made to receive delicate though in most cases fugitive images.”7 It was this article that convinced me that I could collect dyes and still interact with the landscape on a personal level. It is this very interaction which has helped contextualize women’s past gathering roles into a contemporary theme, which links past knowledge to present day voices. These past gathering practices have become one of the forces that has influenced and shaped my work, as well as the work of many other women artists in contemporary Australia.

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Plate 35. Walsh, Kerry. *Cyclic Circle II (Detail)*. 2000. Site Sculpture.
My first introduction to extracting dyes came when I learned to spin. I began spinning when I was in my early twenties. Spinning offered me close contact with fibers that were natural and unique. I began, as most spinners do, spinning fleece. I was soon attracted to other fibers such as raw silk and flax. I then introduced small pieces of twigs and straw into the spun yarn. By combining two different elements a third is revealed. As a spinner I developed an interest in natural dyes. I gathered recipes that had been handed down to friends who were willing to pass them on to me. I began to pick flowers, leaves and barks then boiling them up, I discovered for myself what colours they made.

I do not try to control the plants that I use by rushing their growth patterns. I wait for the cycles of nature to occur, waiting helps me to recognize that I am a part of the web of the cycle. Each plant has its time, and so does the art I create. Everyone at some time interconnects with nature, we all share the same air, the same earth. It is a return to the more fundamental requirements of life. It is an alchemist’s language that uses the landscape’s natural resources as its words.

After I gather I separate the leaves and bark from the petals. I then divide the petals into their different textures, before beginning the dye extraction process. This process is different for each variety of flower. Petals from plants such as dandelions or roses are semi-transparent, these softer petals yield dye after a short soaking in boiling water with a mordant such as alum added at the beginning of the process. The thicker petals of tulips for example, or the leaves and bark of eucalyptus trees require a longer boiling process to extract their dye. Eucalyptus leaves require up to three hours boiling time to extract their liquid colour. Bark usually needs no more than one hour, especially the bark of the Albizia (silk tree) which produces a rich brown dye. Tulip petals need half an hour of boiling to extract a pale yellow from their petals regardless of their initial colour. Their stamens however, only need soaking in boiling water for fifteen minutes to produce a bright green dye.

I then place the extracted dye on either handmade paper, Japanese paper, in glass jars or between two sheets of perspex, to preserve their vitality and beauty in a form that most
people can understand and admire. Paper is a receptacle that accepts the liquid colour and holds it while the dye slowly evaporates. The pigment soaks into the paper over time, leaving traces of each individual plant as texture stains that are left behind with the dried colour. This colour is a permanent reminder of the varieties that were used in the extraction process. It is a record of their vulnerability and preciousness, and an account of my interaction with the landscape.

The dyes that I place in glass bottles are a reminder of the plants that were used in colonial gardens; they contain the memory and ambitions of the colonists. The colour contained in these bottles, not only celebrates the favourite varieties of imported plants that were a reminder of the Northern Hemisphere. They also represent the indigenous landscape that over time became accepted and loved by colonial settlers. These dyes remain preserved in glass jars for everyone to see and value, just as colonial gardens contained several chosen varieties of botanical specimens for their beauty and preciousness. The liquid in each bottle contains its own history of use, from the potion used to nurture a family, to the knowledge of gathering that was handed down from mother to daughter.

Perspex accepts the dye on its surface and holds it while the liquid slowly evaporates. Impressions of the colour are left after the evaporation process is completed. Yet these streaks of colour still contain all of the history and genealogy of the plant from which the dye was extracted. These impressions trace an unspoken understanding of our place as caretakers of the landscape. This understanding not only extends back through past ages of women gatherers, it also reaches into the future, generating hope through promised renewal. The dried flowers and leaves that I place on the surface of the drying dye, are echoes of that renewal. They are the intimate story of all life, which may be experienced through the once living plant itself. I enhance the dried dye by adding a water-based paint to improve the image I have created, which also extends the visual enjoyment of the onlooker. The paint I use connects me to the Colonial women artists who painted the likeness of many of the strange and seemingly exotic plants they found in Australia, so others could enjoy the new flora of the Great South Land. (plates 38, 39, & 40)
The sheets of perspex maintain the image created by the dye extraction process. This image is the sequel of the life cycle of the plant contained between the transparent surface. The image becomes transformed into the ethereal embodiment of the landscape as the limitations of the perspex, segregates the living landscape from the one that has been selected and transmuted. The surface creates a barrier that shields the external from the internal, causing a new awareness of the uniqueness of the natural landscape to be experienced from each viewer’s own distinct point of view.

My art also links me to those women who imported their known botanical landscape, in an endeavor to utilize their gathering skills by making potions and teas to relieve illness and alleviate discomfort. When I extract dyes from both imported varieties of plants and Australian natives, my art bridges these two groups of women. Combining their ideals and ambitions into the structure of my art allows me to recreate the past in the present, as I do this I am able to form an awareness of my natural environment, that is based on past nurturing ideas and my present day ecological concerns.

rediscovering nature

My work has become a celebration of tradition, and is bound to the Australian women artists who use that tradition to inform the present, in particular Joan Brassil, Janet Laurence and Rosalie Gascoigne. These artists respond to their environment through the use of gathered material that shapes their art and voices their concerns. These artists also interact with the landscape by combining what has been gathered into the representation of a form, that can offer an alternative view of the landscape through the use of symbols, such as Rosalie Gascoigne’s *The Crop* (1976). In the words of Robyn Stacey, ‘these images offer another way to look at the natural world and rediscover what we already have.’

In much the same way as these women artists use the natural world, my art relies on my external relationship with the landscape also. This relationship takes the form of

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gathering and dye making. The dyes I produce invite the onlooker to examine their own feelings for the landscape, which might be either joy or pity. Concern for the landscape obliges me to join with those artists who can reveal through their art, our place as caretakers of the past, and guardians of the future. The landscape is not only a place where gathering can be used to instill a greater depth of understanding into its intrinsic nature. It is also a place where its transitory life can be held and admired.\(^9\)

Gathering has included me in that long line of women gatherers, who experimented with their botanical discoveries to find new uses for those plants which they used to nurture their families. Focusing on the need to preserve this knowledge and present it to a new audience as a reminder of how things were, and, how things may be again extends our own intuitive response to the preservation of the landscape as a source of inspiration and discovery. This enforced awareness enables us to recognize our own complex attitudes and desires. Presented in this new manner, the botanical landscape now becomes a metaphor for the fragility of all life. This vulnerability is at the core of our existence and is echoed in our desire to be a part of the rhythm of the landscape.

Each drop of dye that I extract possesses the retrieved knowledge of those women gatherers who collected the harvest of the landscape for hundreds of years. This knowledge is revealed through the colour that I remove from each living plant. Like a liquid manuscript the dye discloses past knowledge to be used again and again. I believe that my art links the past to the present and invites viewers to contemplate their own place in the natural landscape, and to think about how they might respond to the destruction of its natural form. Commitment not only renews interest in the landscape’s diverse bounty, it acknowledges the custodial responsibilities that go with this. (plate 41)

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\(^9\) Male artists such as Andy Goldsworthy from the UK, Wolfgang Laib from Germany, and John Wolseley from Australia, have developed ways of working with the landscape that discloses a sympathy for the natural world. Their personal relationship with the land is sanctioned by their ability to express their understanding of its vulnerability and power. However, unlike those women artists whose work is concerned with the nurturing aspects of the landscape such as Janet Laurence’s *Veil of Trees*, the emotion of their art is centered on each of their ability to reconstruct the part of the landscape that they choose to work in. The art of these male artists can be interpreted as being on the landscape, instead of from the landscape as women artists who gather often is.
CONCLUSION

Many of the women who left their homeland in the Northern Hemisphere to make a new life in the Great South Land, brought their known landscape with them not only in the tangible form of seeds and seedlings, but in their memories, folklore and recipes. Simon Schama, in discussing the role of the natural world in historical, political and aesthetic constructs said, “it is clear that inherited landscape myths and memories share two common characteristics, their surprising endurance through centuries and their power to shape institutions that we still live with.”¹ The same may be said of the gathering practices of women in colonial and contemporary Australia. They expressed their passion, their continuity and their faith in the healing power of an intimate and ongoing association with nature through their gathering and through their art practice.

Imported plants became a living memory for immigrant women in colonial Australia, that kept their homeland alive in their recollection, giving it a timeless aspect that became a metaphor for a place of perfection; a place that could be used as a blue-print in this new land. Schama speaks of myth makers, “…they were emphatically not just a motley collection of eccentrics rambling down memory lane. Each one believed that an understanding of landscape’s past traditions was a source of illumination for the present and future…they waxed passionate about their favourite places because they believed they could redeem the hollowness of contemporary life.”²

So too, for many Australian women artists their art has become a transformative medium that links past gathering practices to the present. It examines the consequences of regret for what has been lost, and presents a blue-print for the future. The hollowness of contemporary life that Schama refers to is echoed in the indifference of successive generations in Australia to their immediate natural environment. Australian women artists have responded by presenting the landscape as a place of healing and hope.

² Schama. op. cit. P17.
Since Colonial times, many women artists have depicted women at work gathering, or alone in the vastness of a timbered place. This imagery compelled the viewer to glimpse a reality that for many has always existed. In contemporary times women artists such as Joan Brassil and Robyn Stacey have produced vivid reminders of their hereditary responsibility. Through the ephemeral elements of wind, shadow and growth, these artists maintain and support the vastness of the environment for every one to experience.

I regard my own art as a celebration of memory and contemporary responsibilities. It values the natural landscape and expresses my anxiety for the wellbeing of the Australian flora, by producing a dialogue that compels concern for the fragility of botanical organisms. My work has also been enhanced by the art of other Australian women artists whose individual responses to the landscape have encouraged a greater depth of understanding in my own art. Rosalie Gascoigne’s involvement with the landscape presented me with new definitions that provoked a greater understanding regarding life cycles within the landscape. But it was the art of Robyn Stacey that addressed my concerns for our past heritage. Her work with the Royal Botanic Garden’s Herbarium produced images of plants that have been collected and preserved for over two hundred years. Specimens of native and exotic plants are stored for future reference and provide a history of what has been gathered since colonial times. Janet Laurence has also reflected on the loss of trees through urbanization, while Joan Brassil’s work explores memory and the more ephemeral elements of the wind as a gatherer of sound.

`My art is intended to guide viewers to contemplate their own place in the natural landscape, and to consider how they might respond to the destruction of its natural form. My work aims to promote an interest in nature’s diverse bounty, and acknowledge the custodial responsibilities we all have. Viewed as an archive, the natural landscape becomes an important resource that not only holds the key to the past, but also has the ability to describe the future.
The colour extraction experiments began in June 1999, and ended in November 2002. The lightfast experiments began in February 2003, and ended in August 2003. The dyed paper was exposed to any refracted light that might have reached them through windows and doorways. There was no visible signs of deterioration during that period. However, the process of the shadefast colour change, that is caused by the cycle that the dye must complete, would have begun, even though it was not visible to the naked eye for another year.

The light-fast experiments were carried out in my studio at Minto. The resulting organic colours were exposed to full sunlight from sunrise to approximately 1pm daily, through an east-facing studio window that was used to protect the pieces from rain and dew. The pieces had a full 24 hours exposure to varying degrees of full sun, shaded light and shadow for 3 months. The shaded pieces were locked in a dark storage cupboard for the full duration of the light experiments.

I used stainless steel pots and saucepans specifically for dye-making to extract the dyes. The extracted dye was then strained into sterilized brown glass bottles as an extra protection against sunlight. Muslin was used to strain all dyes, so as to avoid any contamination that might arise through the use of fine steel mesh, that is often difficult to clean after some experiments. Japanese paper was used as a receptacle for the dyes, and for ease of classification and light testing.

The lightfast quality of the dyes were tested on a scale of 1 to 4. 1 for pigments of great lightfast qualities. 2 for pigments of reliable lightfast qualities. 3 for pigments of average lightfast qualities, and 4 for pigments which are fugitive.¹

¹ These light experiments were carried out on Japanese paper, material or wool will give different results, refer to the Albury Wodonga Handweavers & Spinners Guild’s publication, The Woolgathers Handspun Pattern Book. (Albury. N.S.W. Wilkinson Printers. 1980
**MARIGOLD (orange petals)**

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated.

**HARVEST TIME:** spring, summer and autumn.

**INGREDIENTS:** 6 orange petal flower heads, (remove seeds from the center and save for re-planting), 1 cup of boiling water, ½ teaspoon alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** crush the petals in a mortar, add boiling water and mix well. Strain liquid, and add ½ teaspoon of alum; make sure the alum is dissolved.

**COLOUR MADE:** Mid green.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITIES:** 4: fugitive pigment. The colour fades to a pale green over a 4 month period.

**SHADEFAST QUALITIES:** 1: great shadefast qualities. The colour has remained stable over the 2 year period of the experiment.

**RUBBINGS:** makes an orange colour when rubbed directly onto paper.

**METHOD:** take the petals and use them as a crayon, rub directly onto the paper.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 2: reliable pigment. The colour fades slightly to a yellow/green before stabilizing.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 1: great shadefast quality. Colour has remained stable over the 2 year period of the experiment.
**CARROT TOPS** (*daucus carota*)

*WHERE TO FIND IT*: cultivated in a vegetable garden. Sometimes growing wild if it has been left to escape from the garden.

*HARVEST TIME*: in the summer, when the tops are a lush green and, before turning to seed.

*INGREDIENTS*: chop up the green foliage of 6 large carrot tops, 1 litre boiling water, alum.

Extra foliage can be added to made a slightly darker colour using no more than 300ml of water.

*EXTRACTION PROCESS*: boil tops for half an hour. Strain liquid, and add 2 teaspoons of alum; make sure the alum is dissolved.

*COLOUR MADE*: light yellow.

*LIGHTFAST QUALITIES*: 4: fugitive pigment. The colour fades away over 3 to 5 months, depending on the amount of carrot tops used.

*SHADEFAST QUALITIES*: the colour fades over a 2 year period.

*RUBBINGS*: makes a very pale green colour.

*METHOD*: take the leaves and use them as a crayon, rub directly onto the paper.

*LIGHTFAST QUALITY*: 4: fugitive pigment. Fades over a 6 month period to an off white colour.

*SHADEFAST QUALITY*: 4: fugitive pigment. Fades over a 6 month period to an off white colour.
COMFREY (Symphytum officinale)

WHERE TO FIND IT: may grow in moist fields, but mostly can only be found cultivated in gardens. Farmers sometimes grow it to add to cows feed, improves milk. Gardeners can use it in the compost heap, it speeds up the composting process.

HARVEST TIME: in summer when the leaves are their darkest.

INGREDIENTS: place approximately 20 leaves in a large saucepan. Add 3 litres of boiling water, alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: boil leaves for one hour, strain dye bath and add 2 teaspoons of alum; make sure the alum is dissolved.

COLOUR MADE: a pale yellow/green.

LIGHTFAST QUALITIES: 4: fugitive pigment. Makes a very pale colour that is sometimes hard to see on white paper.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 4: fugitive pigment

RUBBINGS: leaves are rubbed directly onto the paper to makes a mid green colour.

METHOD: take each leaf and use it as a crayon, rub directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment. Fades over 6 months until no colour is visible.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast quality. Colour has remained stable over the 2 year period of the experiment.
DAFFODIL (*narcissus pseudonarcissus*)

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated in gardens.

**HARVEST TIME:** winter.

**INGREDIENTS:** use the petals of 6 daffodils, ¾ cup of boiling water, alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** crush the petals in a mortar using a pestle, add boiling water and 1/8 teaspoon of alum while mixing. Make sure the alum is dissolved.

**COLOUR MADE:** a pale yellow

**LIGHTFAST QUALITIES:** 4: fugitive pigment. Colour disappears over a 3 month period when left in the sunlight. Caution! bulb is poisonous, can be fatal if eaten.

**SHADEFAST QUALITIES:** 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades over a 3 month period, and has disappeared within 2 years.

**RUBBINGS:** petals make a pale yellow when rubbed directly onto the paper.

**METHOD:** take each petal and use it as a crayon, rub directly onto the paper.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive pigment. Fades over a 3 month period, and has disappeared within 2 years.

**SHADEFAST QUALITIES:** 3: fugitive pigment. Colour fades over a 6 month period, until no colour is visible.
DANDELION (*taraxacum officinale*)

WHERE TO FIND IT: dandelion grows almost everywhere, especially if the area is mowed frequently.

HARVEST TIME: in the mornings, whenever you see the flower blooming. The petals close up around noon.

INGREDIENTS: 50 dandelion flower heads, 2 litres of boiling water, alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: boil the flower heads in the water for ½ hour. Add 1 teaspoon of alum. Make sure the alum is dissolved.

COLOUR MADE: yellow ochre

LIGHTFASTNESS: 4: fugitive pigment. Fades over a 3 month period, and has disappeared within 2 years.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: 4 fugitive pigment. Colour fades to off white over a 1 year period.

RUBBINGS: summer flower heads are rubbed directly onto the paper to make a bright yellow stain. (Autumn flower heads make a paler colour.)

METHOD: take each flower head and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment, fades over a 6 month period to a pale yellow ochre.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast quality. Colour has remained stable over the 2 year period of the experiment.
COTTON (SCOTTISH) THISTLE (onopordum acanthium)

WHERE TO FIND IT: grows as a weed in most gardens and verges.

HARVEST TIME: when the leaves are mature and the flower is in bloom.

INGREDIENTS: place approximately 10 leaves in a large saucepan, and cover with 1 litre of boiling water, alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: boil for 1 hour. Add 1 teaspoon of alum to dye bath. Use directly onto paper.

COLOUR MADE: very pale green

LIGHTFAST QUALITIES: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades within 3 months to off white.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades within 3 months to off white.

RUBBINGS: leaves and stalks are rubbed directly onto the paper to make a bright green stain. The purple flower makes a purple/gray stain. Wear gloves the scottish thistle has thorns.

METHOD: take each flower head, leaf or stalk and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment. The colour of both the flower and stem faded and disappeared when exposed to the sun.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: (stem), great shadefast quality. Colour has remained stable over the 2 year period of the experiment.

4: (flower head), fugitive pigment. Colour faded over a 6 month period.
FENNEL (foeniculum vulgare)

WHERE TO FIND IT: on the side of the road and in paddocks.

HARVEST TIME: spring, summer and autumn.

INGREDIENTS: place 6 leaves and stalks in a saucepan, and cover with 2 litres of boiling water, alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: boil the stalks and leaves for one hour.

COLOUR MADE: a very dark green to black.

LIGHTFAST QUALITIES: 2: reliable pigment. Changes colour over time from dark green/black to dark green.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 2: reliable pigment. Changes colour over time from dark green/black to dark green.

RUBBINGS: leaves may be rubbed directly onto paper to make a mid green stain.

METHOD: take each stem with leaves, and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITIES: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades over a 3 month period.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 2: reliable pigment. Colour has remained stable over the 6 month period of the experiment.
CARNATION  (red)
WHERE TO FIND IT:  in cultivated gardens.
HARVEST TIME: spring.
INGREDIENTS: place the petals of 6 carnations in a mortar, and 1 cup of boiling water, alum.
EXTRACTION PROCESS: crush petals and add 1 cup of boiling water. Continue crushing and mixing the ingredients using a pestle. Add 1/8 teaspoon of alum and mix until the water absorbs the dye from the petals, and the alum has dissolved.
COLOUR MADE: makes a dark pink.
LIGHTFAST QUALITIES: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades to a very pale, almost transparent pink, except for places where the petals have been left while the paper dries. The outline of the petal retains the original dark pink colour.
SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast qualities. Colour has remained stable over the 2 year period of the experiment.
RUBBINGS: petals may be rubbed directly onto paper to make a bright pink stain.
METHOD: take each petal and use it as a crayon, rub directly onto the paper.
LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades over a 3 month period and disappears.
SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast qualities. Colour has remained stable over the 6 month period of the experiment.
FOXGLOVE (*digitalis purpurea*)

*WHERE TO FIND IT:* cultivated gardens.

*HARVEST TIME:* late spring, early summer. Pick blossoms late at night or before sunrise because they wilt in the heat of the day.

*INGREDIENTS:* take the petals from the flower heads on one stalk. Boiling water, alum.

*EXTRACTION PROCESS:* crush the petals in a mortar, then cover the petals with 1 cup of boiling water, add 1/8 teaspoon of alum and mix all of the ingredients with a pestle, making sure the alum is dissolved.

*COLOUR MADE:* a pale pink or mauve depending on plant.

*LIGHTFAST QUALITY:* n/t: not tested due to lack of availability of plant. Caution! Be careful foxglove is toxic, and can be fatal. Wear gloves, and a mask. Do not let the dye run into a cut you might have.

*SHADEFAST QUALITY:* plant not available to test.

Note: The foxglove did not come up this year, due to any number of environmental considerations which could have been the mild winter, or the fact that less water was used on the garden due to the water restrictions. I placed the original dye I obtained from this plant in bottles as a part of a display. The white spirit I used to hinder the growth of fungi in the dye, now prevents me from using this dye for light experiments.
**HOLLY (ilex aquifolium)**

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated gardens.

**HARVEST TIME:** leaves can be picked all the year round.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** boil the leaves for half an hour.

**COLOUR MADE:** mid green.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades over 2 months to no visible colour.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive colour. Colour fades over 6 months to no visible colour.

**RUBBINGS:** leaves do not leave any trace of colour when rubbed.

Caution! The red berries of the holly are poisonous. They do not make a dye. Do not use them, be careful if you pick them.
LAVENDER (*l. officinalis*)

WHERE TO FIND IT: Cultivated gardens.

HARVEST TIME: Spring for the flowers, leaves anytime.

INGREDIENTS: The flower heads of 10 stalks, 500ml of boiling water, alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: Boil the leaves and flower heads for fifteen minutes, then added ½ teaspoon of alum.

COLOUR MADE: No visible colour was extracted.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: n/t: Not tested due to lack of colour extracted.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: n/t.

RUBBINGS: Rubbings were unsuccessful, no colour was extracted.
**MULBERRY TREE** (*morus nigra*)

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated garden.

**HARVEST TIME:** late spring and early summer for leaves.

**INGREDIENTS:** 20 mulberry leaves, 2 litres of water, 1 teaspoon of alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** boil leaves for half an hour, and add 1 teaspoon of alum.

**COLOUR MADE:** makes a rich green colour in spring summer. Winter leaves make a bright canary yellow.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive pigment. Spring/summer dye fades in sunlight to pale green. Winter dye fades to a pale brown.

**RUBBINGS:** leaves produce a green stain that fades over time.

**METHOD:** use each leaf to use as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

**COLOUR MADE:** dark purple, (mulberries), green (leaves).

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY** 3: average pigment that fades over a 6 month period to a mid green.

**SHADEFAST QUALITIES:** 2: leaves make a reliable pigment, which fades slightly and then stabilizes over a 3 month period.
**TOADSTOOLS (agaricus campestris)**

**WHERE TO FIND THEM:** in paddocks where ever there is decaying material, especially horse or cattle manure.

**HARVEST TIME:** after rain.

**INGREDIENTS:** a handful of toadstools, how many will depend on the size of the toadstools. 1 cup of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** place toadstools in a saucepan, boil for 15 minutes, add alum.

**COLOUR MADE:** brown

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive pigment. Colour disappears when exposed to sunlight.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 1: great lightfast qualities. Colour has remained stable over the 2 year period of the experiment.

**RUBBINGS:** no colour was extracted from the rubbings.
**BROWN ONION SKINS** *(allium cepa)*

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated gardens.

**HARVEST TIME:** summer, but can be purchased in shops anytime.

**INGREDIENTS:** 500 grams of dried brown onion skins. 3 litres of boiling water. Add an extra 500 grams of dried onion skins to the 3 litres of water for an even brighter colour. The more skins you add the brighter the colour made.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** place skins in a saucepan and boil for half an hour. Brown onion skins are colour fast so there is no need to add alum.

**COLOUR MADE:** light brown. Extra onion skins will make yellow to orange.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 2: reliable pigment. Fades slightly but retains its colour.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 1: great shadefast quality. Holds its colour in the shade.

**RUBBINGS:** no colour was extracted from the rubbings.
POPPY yellow and pink (papaver rhoeas)
WHERE TO FIND IT: cultivated gardens.
HARVEST TIME: winter and early spring.
INGREDIENTS: the flower heads of 6 poppies, 1 cup of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum.
EXTRACTION PROCESS: crush petals using a mortar and pestle, add alum and the boiling water, mix to a pulp.
COLOUR MADE: pale orange/pink.
LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades to a very pale pink.
SHADEFAST QUALITY: 1: great shadefast qualities. The colour has remained stable for the 2 year period of the experiment.
RUBBINGS: yellow petals were rubbed directly onto the paper to make a yellow stain.
METHOD: take each petal and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.
LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 3: average pigment, fades to a pale transparent yellow when exposed to sunlight.
SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast qualities. The colour has remained stable for the 6 month period of the experiment.
POPPY (flanders red) (*papaver rhoeas*)

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** Cultivated gardens.

**HARVEST TIME:** Winter and spring.

**INGREDIENTS:** The flower heads of 6 red poppies, 1 cup of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** Crush petals using a mortar and pestle, add alum and the boiling water, mix to a pulp.

**COLOUR MADE:** Mauve to purple.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades to a very pale off white/pink.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 1: great shadefast qualities. The colour has remained stable for the 2 year period of the experiment.

**RUBBINGS:** none could be taken.

Note: The flanders poppy did not come up this year, due to any number of environmental considerations which could have been the mild winter, or the fact that less water was used on the garden due to the water restrictions.
ROSE (avon), red petals

WHERE TO FIND IT: cultivated garden.

HARVEST TIME: late spring, summer and autumn.

INGREDIENTS: 250 grams of red rose petals, 2 cups of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: crush the petals of the red roses using a mortar and pestle. Add 2 cups of boiling water, and the alum. Make sure the alum is dissolved.

COLOUR MADE: bright mauve.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: 3: average pigment. The colour changes in the shade from lilac to gray, and then stabilizes over a 1 year period.

RUBBINGS: The petals are rubbed directly onto the paper to make a purple stain.

METHOD: Take each petal and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 1: great pigment, changes colour to a dark blue, but the changed colour remains stable.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast qualities. The rubbings have retained their colour throughout the 6 month period of the experiments.
WALNUT shells only (*juglans regia*)

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated in a garden or from a shop.

**HARVEST TIME:** summer.

**INGREDIENTS:** 500 grams of walnut shells, 2 litres of boiling water, 2 teaspoons of alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** Shell walnuts, and place the empty shells in a pot with the boiling water. Boil for 1 hour, add alum and mix until the alum is dissolved.

**COLOUR MADE:** A deep brown.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 2: reliable pigment. Fades to 1 shade lighter, but stabilizes over a 3 month period.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 1: great shadefast quality. The dye has retained its colour throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

**RUBBINGS:** no colour can be rubbed from the shells.
BARK from the eucalyptus microtheca

WHERE TO FIND IT: throughout Australia where temperatures range from 50 to -5

HARVEST TIME: any season.

INGREDIENTS: approximately 1 kilo of bark, 2 litres of boiling water, 2 teaspoons of alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: Boil for three hours. Add the alum during the boiling process, make sure the alum is dissolved. Strain and pour dye over paper.

COLOUR MADE: Brown.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 3: average pigment. Fades 2 shades lighter in sunlight but retains its colour.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: 1: great shadefast qualities. The dye has retained its colour throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

RUBBINGS: no colour can be rubbed from the bark.
**RED ONION SKINS** *(spanish onions)*

**WHERE TO FIND IT**: in a cultivated garden or from a shop.

**HARVEST TIME**: winter, but can be purchased anytime throughout the year.

**INGREDIENTS**: 250 grams red onion skins, 1 litre of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum. 1 teaspoon of cream of tartar can also be added, but not used in this experiment.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS**: boil skins for twenty minutes, strain and add alum.

**COLOUR MADE**: green, when alum is added to dye bath, deep red when alum and cream of tartar is added to dye bath. (The cream of tartar increases the density of the dye and leaves a thick, textured stain on the paper.)

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY**: 3: average pigment. Fades 2 shades lighter in sunlight but retains its colour quality.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY**: 1: great shadefast qualities. The dye has retained its colour throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

**RUBBINGS**: no colour can be rubbed from the skins.
AFRICAN DAISY
WHERE TO FIND IT: cultivated in gardens.

HARVEST TIME: spring.

INGREDIENTS: the petals of 6 flower heads, 1 cup of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: Crush petals using a mortar and pestle, add the boiling water. Mix the ingredients and strain. Add the alum to the dye bath, make sure the alum is dissolved.

COLOUR MADE: blue.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 3: average pigment. Fades 2 shades lighter when exposed to sunlight but retains its colour quality in a paler form.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: 1: great shadefast qualities. The dye has retained its colour throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

RUBBINGS: the blue petals of the daisy were rubbed directly onto the paper to make a deep blue stain.

METHOD: Take each petal and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 3: average pigment, fades to a light brown stain with blue streaks over a 6 month period.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 2: reliable pigment. Colour faded to a mid blue over a 6 month period.
NASTURTIIUM. (tropaeolum speciosum)

WHERE TO FIND IT: cultivated in gardens and sometimes on the side of the road when it has escaped from gardens.

HARVEST TIME: all seasons except winter.

INGREDIENTS: 6 scarlet flower heads, 1 cup of boiling water and ½ teaspoon of alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: Crush the petals using a mortar and pestle, add the boiling water, and mix thoroughly. Add the alum, and make sure that it is dissolved.

COLOUR MADE: deep orange.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment. Fades when exposed to sunlight.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: 2: reliable pigment. Colour fades 1 shade lighter over a 3 month period, then stabilizes and has retained its colour quality throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

RUBBINGS: The petals are rubbed directly onto the paper to make an orange stain with red undertones.

METHOD: Take each petal and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment, fades a pale pink/brown stain over a 6 month period.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast qualities. The rubbings have retained their colour quality throughout the 6 month period of the experiments.
GERANIUM. (pelargonium)

WHERE TO FIND IT: cultivated in gardens.

HARVEST TIME: spring and autumn.

INGREDIENTS: 9 flower heads, 1 cup of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: crush the brightest and darkest petals using a mortar and pestle, add the boiling water and mix pulp thoroughly. Strain and add alum.

COLOUR MADE: lilac to mauve depending on the hue of the petals used.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 3: average pigment. Fades 2 shades lighter when exposed to sunlight, then stabilizes and retains its colour quality.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: 2: reliable pigment. Fades 1 shade lighter. The dyes have retained their colour quality throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

RUBBINGS: the petals are rubbed directly onto the paper to make a crimson stain.

METHOD: take each petal and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 3: average pigment, fades to a pale lilac stain over a 6 month period and then stabilizes.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast qualities. The rubbings have retained their colour quality throughout the 6 month period of the experiments.
CAMELLIA (*japonica*)

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated in gardens.

**HARVEST TIME:** spring and autumn.

**INGREDIENTS:** 4 red flower heads, 1 cup of boiling water, ½ teaspoon of alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** Crush the brightest and darkest petals using a mortar and pestle, add the boiling water and mix pulp thoroughly. Strain and add alum.

**COLOUR MADE:** starts as lilac then changes to light brown.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 3: average pigment. Fades 2 shades lighter to a very light brown when exposed to sunlight, then stabilizes and retains its colour quality.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 2: reliable pigment. Fades 1 shade lighter. The dyes have retained their colour quality throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

**RUBBINGS:** the petals are rubbed directly onto the paper to make a lilac stain which changes to brown over a 4 hour period.

**METHOD:** take each petal and use it as a crayon to rub the colour directly onto the paper.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive pigment, fades to a light brown stain over a 6 month period.

**SHADEFAST QUALITIES:** 1: great shadefast qualities. The rubbings have retained their colour quality throughout the 6 month period of the experiments.
**GRASS (buffalo)**

**WHERE TO FIND IT:** cultivated as a lawn.

**HARVEST TIME:** any season.

**INGREDIENTS:** cut a handful of grass, 1 cup of boiling water, \( \frac{1}{2} \) teaspoon of alum.

**EXTRACTION PROCESS:** put the grass in a saucepan and add the boiling water. Mix the pulp thoroughly, strain and add the alum.

**COLOUR MADE:** mid yellow.

**LIGHTFAST QUALITY:** 4: fugitive pigment. Fades away over a 4 month period.

**SHADEFAST QUALITY:** 3: average pigment. Fades 2 shades lighter. The dyes have retained their colour quality throughout the 2 year period of the experiments.

**RUBBINGS:** no colour is made from the rubbings.
GARDEN IRIS, blue (iris germanica)

WHERE TO FIND IT: in cultivated gardens

HARVEST TIME: winter

INGREDIENTS: place the petals of 6 blue iris in a mortar, and 1 cup of boiling water, alum.

EXTRACTION PROCESS: crush petals and add one cup of boiling water. Continue crushing and mixing the ingredients using a pestle. Add one eighth of a tea-spoon of alum and mix until the water absorbs the dye from the petals, and the alum has dissolved.

COLOUR MADE: makes a deep green dye. The dye goes onto the paper blue and over a few hours turns to green.

LIGHTFAST QUALITIES: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades to a very pale, almost transparent green, except for places where the petals have been left while the paper dries. The outline of the petals retain the original green colour.

SHADEFAST QUALITIES: 1: great shadefast qualities. Colour has remained stable over the two year period of the experiment.

RUBBINGS: petals may be rubbed directly onto paper to make a mid-green stain.

METHOD: take each petal and use it as a crayon, rub directly onto the paper.

LIGHTFAST QUALITY: 4: fugitive pigment. Colour fades over a three month period and disappears.

SHADEFAST QUALITY: 1: great shadefast qualities. Colour has remained stable over the six month period of the experiment.
There is a widespread belief that because plants are part of nature, they are harmless. Nothing is further from the truth. Plants can be either useful or harmful – even poisonous – and everything depends on the preparation and the dose.\(^2\) Plants have wonderful colours and perfumes, but you have to be careful when handling any plant that you cannot identify.

Herbs have natural curative properties. The most important herbal extracts are known as alkaloids. Alkaloids contain nitrogen and in quantity are poisonous if ingested, although some are more poisonous than others. Those that are commonly known as toxic are, morphine from the white poppy, strychnine from the nut of an East Indian tree, quinine from the bark of the South American cinchona tree and, nicotine from the tobacco plant.\(^3\)

One more word of advice; different species of plants sometimes look so much alike that it is possible to pick poisonous plants instead of the ones you think you are picking. It is best to buy dried versions from the Health Food Store if you want to make teas or potions. If you prefer to try the fresh herb for yourself, buy it from a Plant Nursery, or plant seeds from the packet.

Other herbs are less toxic, but can still be deadly in large quantities; here is a list of a few herbs that you should be careful when using. Natural plants, due to their tiny molecular structure, plant essences and many aroma chemicals can enter the skin and find their way into the bloodstream and body fluids. It is a worry that a number of potentially hazardous essential oils are readily available to the public. Hopefully, this list will help out anyone who wants to try and use plants in their daily lives.

Almond, Bitter, contains prussic acid (cyanide!)
Aniseed. Toxic in large quantities.
Basil, (Exotic), highly toxic to the skin.


Camphor, Brown or Yellow, is a carcinogenic, not to be confused with white camphor which is safe in low concentration.

Cumin, photo-toxic. The oil may cause dermatitis if applied to the skin shortly before exposure to sunlight.

Hyssop, may induce epileptic fits in prone subjects.

Narcissus, not recommended for home use as the scent may cause headaches and vomiting.

Oregano, powerful skin and mucous membrane irritant.

Pennyroyal, highly toxic. Used as an insecticide.

Sage, Common, toxic, However, Spanish Sage is considered to be safer for home use. Clary Sage is non toxic.

Tansy, toxic.

Tarragon, possible carcinogen.

Wormwood, toxic. Belladonna is a strong hallucinogenic. Witches were once said to use it as one of the main ingredients in a potion, which enabled them to ride on their broomsticks.

Ranunculus, better known as buttercups have a caustic sap. The juice from the crushed stems are acrid, and have been known to raise blisters on the skin.

Some Australian plants such as wild indigo (Tephrosia purpurea) to name just one of several species, were used by Aboriginals to stupefy and even poison fish. Toxins in the plant material used included alkaloids, saponins and tannins. Although some are toxic to people, the amount absorbed by the fish were insufficient to affect their edibility. The plant material was thoroughly pounded so that the toxic material would be released more readily. The material was then thrown into the water and after a wait of from half an hour to a few days, the fish were collected.

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5 Rose, J. Herbs & Things. (1979. Grosset & Dunlap. New York.) Here is a whimsical recipe for a potion, to ride on a broomstick: ‘Make an ointment from the leaves of belladonna, stramonium, monkshood, and celery seeds. Mix all ingredients together except for the celery seeds. (keep the celery seeds until later). Add to it one toad and boil until the toad’s flesh has fallen off the bones. Strain and rub the ointment on the body, under the armpits, on the forehead, and on your broom. Eat the celery seeds so that you won’t get dizzy when flying about on your broom.’ P259.

Even decorative plants can be harmful. The best course of action is to be very careful of any plant you are handling, and never let small children crush or suck any plants. I do not want to put anyone off using plants, many are beneficial and a lot more are edible, you just have to be sure which ones you are handling.
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