



Sharpening our senses

Felicity Sturgiss spoke at the exhibition opening

Cecile asked me to say a few words tonight as an Environmental Scientist. For me, the links between environmental science and art are inextricable. Both are propelled by love (of some description or another) and curiosity.

It is also impossible for me to decouple my love of the river, the bush, and the ancient owls of the earth, from an ongoing lifelong existential crisis.

To me, to sharpen your senses to perceive the wonder of the intricate balances and complex waves of flowering and seeding grasslands, of eucalypts, acacias, bursarias, lillies, melaleucas, mistletoes; across the seasons, and their feeding of an equally diverse range of woodland birds, insects, mammals, reptiles ... to open up to this perception of beauty is to also face the grief of what has been lost, what is still under threat, and to decide whether you are willing to act in its defence, and what is, in fact, effective.

Sharpening the senses means seeing the ignorance of indiscriminate land clearing, the struggle of the voiceless, the thousand cuts, the lack of love, the lack of intimacy that some people predators making these decisions have with the land they are affecting. The lack of responsibility taken. You see the bounty you rejoiced in glimpsing becoming suddenly rare, left having to struggle to survive.

The value in feeling that pain, and of offering a response, like the divine works in this exhibition, is that this expression is vital to building the momentum of love and inspiration that we all need to turn this ship around.

The Shoalhaven River is so special. In part, a scattering of un-farmable rocky gorges act as wildlife and ecosystem

refuges. In part it's the magic of the upland swamps, bringing clean water down from the catchment, housing microbial secrets and mammal kingdoms in their misty midst. It's Monga — feeding the Mongarlowe and its cool clean protected waters.

Facts. Australia is home to 86 animal species considered critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Not much of a home anymore.

The most recent report from the IPCC, the intergovernmental panel on Climate Change, gives us just 12 years to keep global warming at a maximum of 1.5 degrees.

These statistics do not really hit home do they — not in they way learning of the premature death of a loved one would.

We need to be in love with this country and the animals and plants that animate it, to be moved and motivated to act.

Art and activism together are powerful in building that deep connection.

I want to share something with you that an elder from Wagonga country shared with me and a group of others on the Murrumbidgee river recently. He said:

"Welcome, you are all Marmajun (sp. uncertain). You are people. And country needs people. The language of this country, you're welcome to it. Now, you have a cultural responsibility to look after it."



[THIS PAGE] FELICITY STURGISS AT THE ALTENBURG, DJAADJAWAN DANCERS, HOOLA-HOOPER, MEN DANCERS. [OPPOSITE] OPENING CEREMONY AUDIENCE AT RYRIE PARK, MEN DANCERS, NOEL BUTLER, UNCLE MAX HARRISON AND MARIA BAKAS-BOOKER, TRENT ARKLEY SMITH AND RACHAEL JOHNSTON PLAY AT THE EXHIBITION OPENING, DJAADJAWAN DANCERS, MERRIE HAMILTON AND VERA SAPOV ON FRIDAY NIGHT, JOHNNY HUCKLE.



From the Feedback forms:

"Blew my mind - especially the Aboriginal speakers." (re the Food Health and Healing Land session)

"It is a fabulous festival. It was like SLOW FOOD. Stop/enjoy/digest. Stop, listen, sigh!! Stop/talk feel, a fantastic gentle time with a powerful healing message."

"Great diverse program of events."

"Very moving and inspiring."

