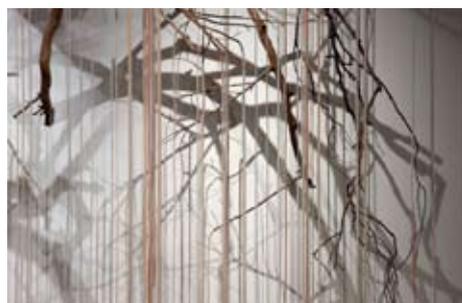
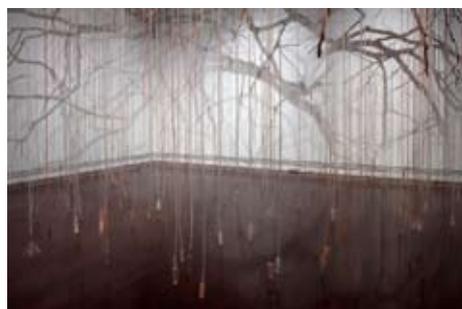


Heartshock Adelaide Biennale 2008

I am making propositions through works by creating spaces of perception that can bring us into contact with the 'life-world'. Janet Laurence



Curator's Statement_ Janet Laurence has had a long and profound engagement with the 'life-world'. Spanning a period of over twenty-five years, her practice has extended to painting, sculpture, installation, photography, architectural and landscape interventions. The major themes that have emerged in the work include: the relationship between the museum, the natural world, and notions of preservation; the exploration of hybrid landscapes, that involve a fusion of natural and urban elements; alchemy and the transformation of elements from one state to another; and the human impact on the environment. Each of these projects is bestowed with a poetic resonance. Her work is not didactic or message driven. Rather, there is a lightness of touch, a respectful distance on the natural world, and a sense of wonderment. Laurence is deeply concerned with the changes in our midst. She asks us to look, hear, feel, smell and look again at the natural world – its architecture, its cultural history, its root system, the flux of light, space and colour. And as we engage in this process, our perception will shift, ever so delicately, as we discover further layers of glaze, or discover the tiniest green leaf, or look in disbelief at signs of erosion and devastation.

It seems that much of the desolation that has currently gripped the Australian landscape is beyond healing, and yet Janet Laurence explores what it might mean to heal, albeit metaphorically, the natural environment. For the Adelaide Biennial she suspends a large dead tree upside-down in the gallery space. Elongated transparent plastic tubes that have been treated with some kind of fluid from within protrude like rain from the edges of the branches. These tubes are at once a laboratory – a space for experimentation – and a prosthetic vascular system for a 'body' that has long since expired. As a scientific metaphor, they suggest hope for a solution. As a 'natural' stand-in, these tubular stems act as a metaphorical conductor for the xylem and phloem (plant tissues that carry water, dissolved minerals and foodstuffs). Trees are of course the lungs of our cities – they exchange carbon dioxide and oxygen – and they usually live for several generations. Today, however, very old trees are dying in our cities, while the crops and fields in the outback have been transformed into vast barren expanses. Janet Laurence fuses this sense of communal loss with a search for connection with powerful life-forces. Her work alerts us to the subtle dependencies between water, life, culture and nature in our eco-system. In the face of this, we do yearn for a form of alchemy, for the power of enchantment or transformation. It seems that the only place for that sensation is the place of art. In the tradition of Joseph Beuys, and some of the Arte Povera artists from the 1960s, such as Jannis Kounellis or Mario Merz, Janet Laurence reminds us that art can act as a kind of transformation point for ideas and it can provoke its audience into a renewed awareness about our environment. Victoria Lynn.

janet laurence: artist

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