

Glasshouse Regional Gallery | 11 August — 9 October 2011

A photograph of several dried lotus seed pods (receptacles) with long, dark, slender stems, displayed in a glass case. The pods are dark brown to black, with some showing the characteristic hole pattern. The stems are arranged in a cluster, with some crossing each other. The background is a blurred view of other dried botanical specimens in the gallery.

# In Memory of Nature

Janet Laurence

## Foreword

The Mid North Coast of NSW is about being absorbed in nature whether it be the coastal and estuarine waterways or the verdant and luxuriant landscape. Many residents would suggest the environment is what creates the strong draw of the region. Presenting an exhibition relating to nature and positioning it within the new architecture of the Glasshouse may elicit a different response from the local audience as it would from a metro bound viewer.

Regional audiences often have a different relationship to the environment and many views vary according to whether and how the environment drives their form of employment and lifestyle. Whatever your position and your views on the environment *In Memory Of Nature* will intrigue and beguile.

Janet Laurence has the ability to capture the sublime and present it in juxtaposition with a gentle edge of political inquiry or current environmental debate. The calm and sensuousness of the elements contained in her work create an elevated pleasure more heightened by the stark and manmade Gallery environment.

Rapidly gaining a strong national and international reputation, Janet Laurence stands to be an icon in the ranks of Australian Artists. The Glasshouse is delighted to have this opportunity to exhibit *In Memory of Nature* and to present not only an exhibition of such seductive beauty but which also elicits responses regarding vital issues about our environment.

It is with great thanks to Janet Laurence that we can enjoy this enchanting exhibition.

Sharni Lloyd, Glasshouse Regional Gallery Director

## Janet Laurence

For several decades Janet Laurence has been making art that reveals a deep affinity with the natural world. Fascinated with the substances, systems and processes of transformation that occur within nature, she has been making works that are grounded in the idea that all living things are interconnected: a concept she refers to as the 'life-world'. Since she began exhibiting in the early 1980s, her works have continued to play out this idea through a series of connecting themes including alchemical transformations and biological processes; memory, history and perception; and increasingly, the human impact on the natural world, conservation, regeneration and environmental loss. From temporary ephemeral installations to large-scale public artworks, her works have encompassed a range of media and formats including painting, photography, sculpture and installation, and museological and architectural interventions.

Combining a material and conceptual interest in natural substances and their potential for transformation, Laurence has often incorporated elements drawn directly from nature such as minerals, carbon, oxides, ochres, straw, ash, wax, seeds, and a diverse range of species of animals and plants in her works. The systems, structures and sites that contain nature such as natural history museums, botanical gardens, glasshouses and scientific laboratories, have also formed ongoing points of reference. Tensions between nature and culture have always been present in Laurence's works, but her position on this relationship is not always clear. Rather, her works reinforce her understanding of the 'interconnectedness' of things, expressed through her inclusive process of material accumulation and layering whereby a diverse range of substances, surfaces, textures and images come into play. In many of her works, photographic images reproduced onto glass or other translucent materials form an important part of this process. Inherently fugitive and suggestive of memories, they are often combined with traces of substances or spillages of fluids to form part of the coalescence of matter that characterises her work. The veiling and layering of images, surfaces, shadows and reflections that has become a defining feature of her work emanates a strong poetic resonance. Evocative of cycles of growth, transformation and decay, but also processes of recollection and perception, they suggest shifting states, transitional zones or spaces for reflection.

The combined strength and poetry of Laurence's art emerges from her capacity to distil her deeply felt experiences of the natural environment and implicate us to share in her concerns. In a time of unprecedented environmental change, her works suggests that art has a transformative power to address some of these most urgent issues, encouraging us to reflect on the preciousness of our environment and our own position within it.

Jane Devery

Extract from essay for Clemenger Prize NGV 2009





## Biography

Janet Laurence lives and works in Sydney. From 1996–2005, Laurence was a Trustee of the Art Gallery of NSW and has been a Visiting Fellow at COFA UNSW for the past four years. She has also been a recipient of the Rockefeller and Churchill fellowships. Laurence exhibits widely and has an impressive record of representation in important group international exhibitions, including *In the balance: art for a changing world*, MCA, 2010; *Beauty of Distance: 17th Biennale of Sydney*, 2009; *Clemenger Contemporary Art Award*, NGV 2009; *Handle with care*, Adelaide Biennale, AGSA, 2008.

Her most recent solo exhibitions include: *What can a garden be?*, BREENSPACE, Sydney, 2010; *Janet Laurence*, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne, 2008; *Greenhouse*, BildKultur Gallery, Stuttgart, Germany, 2007; *Birdsong*, Object, Sydney, 2006; *A survey exhibition*, ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra; *Muses*, Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2000; *Unfold*, AGNSW, Sydney, 1997; and *The measure of Light*, QAG, Brisbane, 1993.

Well known for her public commissions and architectural collaborations, Janet has completed significant national and international projects, including CH2 Building, Melbourne City Council, 2006; Echigo-Tsumari, Japan; *The Australian War Memorial* (in collaboration with TZG architects), Hyde Park, London 2003; *In the Shadow*, Sydney Olympic Park, 2000; and *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1993.

Image Credits: Janet Laurence, *The Memory of Nature*, 2010, acrylic, scientific glass, dried plants, seeds, sulphur, salt, amethyst, taxidermied owls, shellac, tulle, wood, burnt bones, hand-blown glass, oil paint, mirrors, 180 x 160 x 350 cm, (details), courtesy of the artist and BREENSPACE, Sydney. Photo: Jamie North

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### Glasshouse Regional Gallery

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