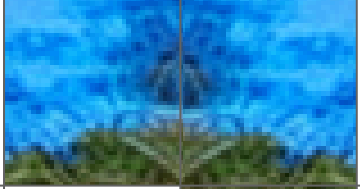
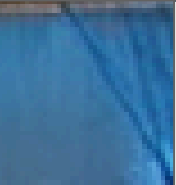


in a restless world like this is



Leonie Brialey
Anni Hagberg
Siri Hayes
Katrin Koenning
Katie Paine

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Opening: 2-4pm, 29 June 2024

Wurundjeri Country
Bundoora Homestead Art Centre

curated by Chantelle Mitchell
& Jaxon Waterhouse

On Sunday 5 November 1995, the human made world writ itself across the Merri Creek. Stormy weather in a nearby suburb unbalances a pallet stacked with containers of blue ink, destabilising it and sending them crashing to the ground, whereupon their contents leaked and leached into stormwater drains beneath the streets, following their paths into the waterway and turning it a brilliant shade of blue. This display of restlessness within the world raises questions for us, looking back upon it as we are, important ones about agency and direction. Did the ink follow the path dictated by infrastructure—directional signs, neat passages marked on maps, paths carved into the banks and beds of the creek? Or did this ink succumb to the flows, get carried away down dead-end tributaries, to eventually dissipate in the waters of the bay?

This was not the first time the creek had been imposed upon, or had the architecture of the city written into it—the act of naming, the intrusion of debris and the tired feet of travellers had all, over time, muddied the waters, so to speak. This strange co-mingling seems surreal and serendipitous and simultaneously, the result of a carefully scripted and directed sequence of events. What this seeming-accident demonstrates to us is the way in which the world has the capacity to spill and seep across these two frames, of the surreal and serendipitous, but also of the orchestrated and pre-determined. The movement of the ink arises as much from the result of an adherence to a series of directions informed by the laws of physics, the architecture of the factory yard and the network of stormwater drains lying beneath the northern suburbs of Naarm, but too, through the collusion of meteorology, gravity and town-planning. The en(t)rapturement of blue within the broader earthen-blue occurs because it had to - the world had willed it to do so, and the ink was just playing its part.

This framework provides the contextual groundwork from which In a restless world like this is emerges. Unfurling as a response to two photographs selected from Siri Hayes’ *Lyric Theatre* series (2002-2004), held within the City of Darebin collection, the exhibition invites contributions from artists Leonie Brialey, Katie Paine, Katrin Koenning and Anni Hagberg alongside new work from Siri. Those contributions tether themselves across time, matter and attention to the undercurrents and reverberations of the original *Lyric Theatre* works.

Those works, *Lyric Theatre at Merri Creek* and *Crossing the Merri*, invite engagement, encounter and reciprocity, growing more unfixed with each viewing. Through this series, a narrative flows under and amidst, a staging and setting which relies on no tangible script—aloof and intimate, these photographs invite the complicity of the viewer within the conspiracy of the image. Although staged, the works contain variations of narrative, placement and capture (identified here as capture of the lens in time and place), a slipperiness of time and space that emerges through what is the essentially ‘doubled’ waterway between these two images and the space between the image and the ‘real’. Within *Lyric Theatre at Merri Creek* and *Crossing the Merri*, we are confronted with both the real, lively and material Merri Creek as site and setting, but too, a second, mysterious and distanced construction, this gauzy creek which emerges through the theatre of the photographs themselves.

The generous and endless readability of these images elicits investigative desires, providing a dense mystery that challenges the fixity and indivisibility of past time that Charles Bernstein, in his poem from which this exhibition

draws a name, questions or, alternatively, endorses. Peering into the window of Hayes’ works, the way back becomes gleanable, a possibility of ingress through the portal of frame and mount. And here, we ask, where might we be stepping back to? Prior moments of becoming, care and ceremony? A moment of colonial violence in which the murderer John Batman claimed illegal settlement and ownership of sovereign Wurundjeri Country? Some enactment of quiet contemplation and desire? Perhaps even stepping through to the original conditions of their making, a day in which the artist set up her camera, facing the roaring green of the lush winterscape, a moment in time that feels coincidental, as though Siri had stumbled upon some private moment taking place.

It appears that we are not the first to sense the existence of a doubled river, or a parallel waterway. In 1915, a Mr Richard Fiddes Brown, President of the Northcote South Ratepayers Association, announced at a meeting that he had evidence that “a substantial subterranean water channel of incalculable value to Northcote and surrounding districts for improving the Merri Creek for swimming baths, lakes and uses too innumerable to mention” was present beneath the surface of Northcote and the Merri Creek. This subterranean river was given form in an early planning document, in a diagram titled PROPOSAL TO TAP IT. This grossly interventionist marker of possible action reveals much about the relationship between waterways, landscape and attempts to corral. It also, however, is a clue that gives shape to the tethers that tie the multiple worlds of the Merri together across place, in locating the mysterious underground river as being a precursor to the stormwater drains of 1995 and today. Recognising the presence of these tethers within temporal frames also, we begin to see the flowing of the underground river and the movement of the ink into the river as being one action that unfolds across eight decades—the appearance of discreteness merely an illusion!

The desire to solve the subterranean mystery is inextricably linked to the desire for growth, and to ‘build up’ the human environment above ground. Each additional strut, pipe and arm of the scaffolds that would aid this ascent, however, weakens the whole—wobbling, shifting in the sky. In the language of construction, “double staging” recognises the limits of vertical growth without firm support. As a solution, only one platform is built, atop of which is constructed another—the double—and with it comes the ability to ascend. It is important to note, however, that within the frame of this exhibition, this ascension is also a descension, the movement between the worlds orlds of the Merri Creek. We might think of the double stage as a representation of practicality and firm footing for ascendant explorations. The endless stages that follow speak then to the increasingly speculative nature of this exhibition’s framework-rooted in place but prone to wobbliness.

This recognition of stages and staging is endorsed by the theatre of the *Lyric Theatre* series, extending to capture staging as a component of practice that exists in the framework and the frames and works of the exhibition. These works are directed in some manner by the initial series, and the creation of Lyric Theatre at Merri Creek and Crossing the Merri provides the initial stage from, and upon, which In a restless world like this is performs. Looking upon the works that comprise In a restless world then, we begin to sense the different worlds they inhabit but too, the tethers that link them back to Siri’s initial series. These tethers relate to different dimensions of the (seemingly) discrete works, being temporal, affective,

architectural, mediumistic and so on, with these dimensions then determining the set of directions each of these worlds operates within. In short, these links create preconditions that shape the movement of each world, but endorse and facilitate our passage between and across them.

In this multiplicitous site of contemplation comes the question of how we might discern association from coincidence within the frame of this exhibition and the many linkages between the works—obvious in the networks and undercurrents from which this exhibition came about—but also those chance moments, or those yet to come to light, in the traversal across and between practice and making. Here the question surrounding what structures or qualities govern or inform the possibilities of traversal between world emerges. We imagine the artists in the exhibition witnessing or participating in some similar drama to the figures captured in Siri’s photographs, a drama that entangles the human and more-than-human in exploration of time, matter and being. This drama is one that gives form to those multiple tracks, many traces, the indivisible pathway, following the directions they outlay.

One such track might lead us to recomposition and intervention. Bringing together works comprised of (and perhaps, more aptly, composed with) discarded fibres and building materials, Anni fuses heat with slip and clay, engaging with architectures of place and ecologies of interaction. Our initial conversations with Anni revealed an undercurrent, a chance association between the exhibition’s premise and the submergence of past work in the waters of the Maribryngong. The world(s) inhabited, created and reflected across multiple streams of this exhibition are distilled in a materialist consideration running through *Every particle of dust* (2024)— “[I’ll] show you all alive The World, when every particle of dust breathes forth it’s joy,” William Blake, quoted by the artist. A construction made from discarded louvres invites every particle of dust to rest, and be viewed with material and vital reverence. In a series of slip cast coconut fibres, discarded materials used to shore up embankments, the artist invited considerations of worlds, possibilities enfolded in living with and enmeshing with matter, assimilated in relational frameworks.

Within Katrin’s multidirectional and generously abstruse photography emerges a quality of the gauzy narrative, a sense that these images are stills taken from some curious film of yesteryear; a magic trick captured in the frame, occurring somewhere off in the background, behind the action. The selected works from Katrin’s series *the kids are in trouble* tether, tie and tangle across the space of the exhibition, bringing to attention the subtle linkages that bind the worlds of these works together. In their refutation of categorical distinctions, the shared prominence given to, say, the human subject and the scratched depiction of the human form, or the perfect curves of white ducks and the entanglement of the vines, Katrin’s images give generously to the possibilities of subjecthood. This subjecthood is not only that of the legs are captured mid step, but encompass the fibres of the white lace skirt and the wind which lifts them aloft, the erasure poem of the scratched figure on board, the choir of caught fish glimmering in light, or the ducks—of which so much could be said, but very little suffices.

From Katie’s photographic compositions emerge a choral arrangement, blending a polyphony of human and more than human voices into the singular, and broadcast within the exhibition space. A broadening occurs through the infrastructure supporting the many layers of these works

and the building that houses them; both clad in the same green, these supports hold up many layered narratives across time. The building through its complex history, and Katie’s works through an engagement with complex overlapping representation of health, wellbeing and treatment—Tarkovsky meets Bosch, torn pages from medical journals interspersed with the artist’s own observations, and less perceptible but significant documentation of the Katie’s sincere and speculative fabulations. In the yellowed town of the subtitle, text enters the image frame, and gives form to a narrative which flows across and between the photographs, a narrative which might reach beyond the Homestead’s windows, or the banks of the creek.

The quotidian entangles with practices of observation across media in Leonie’s reflections with the creek. In our early thinkings of what this exhibition might be, we pulled at the threads of our shared associations, in which we thought of the Merri as a flowing bounded but connective site, and one in which Leonie was present. Perhaps this is through the mediation of our small screens; amidst the broader lockdowns we recalled Leonie’s presence at the Merri as tied to observation, to traversing the small radii of the local, and a durational care that unfolds through attention. Here, we feel the power of attention tied to markers of the day, as the sun ripples and shifts in the sky, or the camera turns upon some babble of the creek, or stony utterance. Common across our apprehension of Leonie’s work across media, from song-making, collaboration, conversation, pencil and paper, is an incisive clarity, a distillation of a mass of feeling into pencil strokes or the flicker of the film reel—a continued divisibility from which meaning is underscored.

If Leonie’s work has its basis in the sustained witnessing and recollection of the Merri, we might imagine Siri’s photograms as a process of cataloguing and recreation. Drawn from engagement with place, we make approximations and equivocations with the atmospheric sky, the night sky, the X-rayed contents of a bag, a plastic lilo. We marvel over the trash, and what happens to it when separated out into discrete categories and taxonomies. Or the necessary attention given to plant matter, patterns of time and seasons, the wings of moths and shells of beetles — and ripples throughout not only qualities of light and refraction, but the relationship with the artist’s body in the darkened room in which these works are formed. There is a strange archaeology taking place—a revelation occurring within the frame, wherein clues as to the lives that have been transected somehow by the waterway, and the many lives of the waterway itself, are illuminated. That plastic gathered after being discarded; whose was the hand that it left? The excited child, the anxious pensioner, the despondent lover? It is all three and neither at the same time, a conduit through which the flow of time, the flow of matter and the flow of feeling are all channelled, a sign of the restlessness that troubles and reaffirms the world.

It is within this restless world, Bernstein wrote, that the way back might become indivisible. In the context of this exhibition, we begin to see that the way back is no longer divisible, or sensible, from the way forward. Together, these artists and their works are feeling out the edges of the world(s) they inhabit, in a manner similar to the way blue ink adapts to the conditions of the container within which it is held. As the works interweave and (something) with each other, we see the soak and the seep, a diffusion—and amidst this, the faintest hint of blue—some vestige of the worlds nested within each other.