

Leith Maguire

Florescence

10 – 28 October 2023

Jan Murphy Gallery is excited to present our third exhibition with Protégé artist Leith Maguire.

“Drawing is the way I explore my surrounds and understand my place in them. As I’ve grown older and begun to delve into and understand my own queerness and shifting gender identity, I have continued to examine the intertwined relationships between the human and natural worlds. I am beginning to reframe my creative practice through the critical lenses of common worlds (which is concerned with relationality and the more-than-human world) and queer ecology (which aims to disrupt binary, heterosexist and colonial narratives about the natural world and its inhabitants).

I am slowly unlearning the concept of the act of making being an outcome focussed practice - and instead exploring it as a process of becoming with place and identity. Of making and creativity as inseparable from the everyday, and as a means of calling me into connection with previously unknowable and unexplored spaces in my inner and outer worlds.

In these works, monochrome layers of loose ink wash and detailed line work accentuate the tension between positive and negative space - figure and landscape enmesh and entwine, with bodies simultaneously present, absent and blossoming within the compositions. Flesh, plant, and earth are laid bare, and as one. In making these works, I was prompted not only to look at, but also to listen deeply to myself and my surroundings. I invite the viewer to do the same.” – Leith Maguire, 2023

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Leith graduated from the Queensland College of Art in 2007. They completed a Master of Cultural Materials Conservation in 2014, and a Master of Teaching in 2022. Leith worked as a Weaver Intern at the Australian Tapestry Workshop from 2016-2018. They have been awarded the Hill End Artist Residency (2013) and the Heather Blair Award, Cairns (2010). Their work is held in several collections including the Cairns Regional Gallery, The University of Queensland Art Collection, Somerville House and the Kedumba Collection of Australian Drawings. Leith currently lives in Naarm (Melbourne), where they work as an artist and early childhood teacher.

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Artist's friend's statement by Josephine Rowe

When we exist in full embodiment of our true selves, how does this influence our attention, our capacity for noticing? In being wholly at home in oneself—without the need to conceal, or appease, or to defend the boundary lines of singularity—the self goes quiet, stands open and unguarded. Susceptible, receptive to the possibility that we do not begin and end in our physical bodies, or even at the thresholds of emotional and intellectual perception.

But perhaps these thresholds, these shifting liminalities, are a place to speak from.

The images in *Florescence*, while communicated in visual, tactile language, are as much works of deep listening, inviting the same of a viewer. Attunement to what sound ecologists call the geophony, the biophony; the aural composition of an environment, from the elements that found and shape it—the sound of the earth, of rain and all bodies of water, stones tumbled by rivers or clattered by waves, wind speaking through trees and sashaying grasslands, the rumblings of rock shifted by deluge or seismic activity, even the minute shufflings of soil parted by growth new and ancient—to the confluence of all (non-human) living organisms that coexist and communicate within it.

The bursting of bud into bloom, for instance (if inaudible to our ears). I think of the soft dewy pucker of the tiny sealed purses of fuchsias, pressed between fingers when small—though that flowering was hastened, impatient meddling (linked, in my own sensory archive, to the stirring of a nascent awareness of sexuality.)

In listening and wondering into the layers of these six works, I've returned to the conversations we began this time last year, long distance—autumn where I was, springtime here with you. The reemergence of Art after a dry, fallow spell, sweep of ink over a toothy sheet of cotton rag, locating and enacting the creative process in the everyday, through hands in the soil, fingers in sunwarmed cat's fur. Our exchanges were of fry thoughts spurred by fish ladders, tiny determined elvers striving upstream, Gaelic spinning songs and contemporary spirituals, wandering mangroves, process philosophy and Becoming as a continuous state, sans destination, the body crying out for full immersion, and maybe the only consistent home is one's body, the enduring desire for other homes, for relationality with our more than human kin, the inky vessel in A small boat awaiting tide and signal.

We were both testing the waters, contemplating new intimacies, the risky possibility of knowing, of becoming knowable. Braving that. The calendula (little calendar) just coming into bloom in your front garden. Which brings us to now, one year on, and the fruition of *Florescence* —the potent, kinetic tension of hands reaching, enfolding in Multi-Love, in cahoots with the densely clustered, outstretching stars of the sandpaper vine.

In these images I hear, too, the words of Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad, in her poem 'Another Birth'—

I will plant my hands in the garden
 I will grow, I know I know I know
 and swallows will lay eggs
 in the hollows of my ink-stained hands
 How grateful I am, to be meeting you in these littoral zones,

Josephine Rowe