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Bundanoon Floor to Sky  
Flinders Lane Gallery 2018

Bundanon means 'deep valley' in the language of the Wodi Wodi peoples of the Yuin nations, who as the traditional custodians of the lands, share deep spiritual connections with the fertile valley shaped by the Shoalhaven River. Empathizing with Indigenous culture, artist Arthur Boyd highlighted the human imbalance with this landscape and our ignorance to imminent ecological damage. Boyd developed a passion for environmental protectionism while he lived at Bundanon in New South Wales, where he championed the idea that 'you can't own a landscape'. And while this may be true, it is important to acknowledge that we can be part of it.

In 'Bundanon Floor to Sky' Gina Kalabishis exquisitely highlights the human connection to the landscape through her bold, immersive artworks that explore the Australian bushland with a visual poetry and scientific eroticism. Her anthropomorphism of the landscape profoundly draws us back into the natural world with deep desire and intrigue. The traces of technological glitches, the merging of seasons and the distortion of scale combine to present a dreamlike timelessness and beautiful warping of reality. Her emotive realism juxtaposes against our growing disconnect and blindness to the ecotopia of nature.

From brush kurrajong to the prehistoric burrawang, the diverse plants of Bundanon are themselves like artworks aesthetically positioned across an outdoor gallery. Their myriad of foliage and flowers presented in a rich spectrum of green and brown hues. Above them, the troposphere illuminated by the bright spotlight of the sun, flickering with the transient seasons. The ever-present human body is often subtly hinted at by Kalabishis. Bark becomes skin. Sometimes smooth and overtly sexual. Sometimes torn and discarded as if part of an autopsy conducted at the hands of a forensic scientist. The outstretched remains are left decaying back into the earth to nourish a new cycle of growth. A spiral shell that Kalabishis travelled along the winding length of the Shoalhaven River to collect, becomes the landscape's inner ear. The tiny structures of the auris interna – the cochlea, tympanic membrane and auditory ossicles – become enormously oversized to capture the warm morning songs of tiny passerine birds of the bush. Their voices resonating with a scale much larger than their diminutive selves.

An emotional undercurrent of a lost lover flows through the artist's work with a raw sexual energy. We cannot help but feel that the forests and scrublands are an absent partner we desire and want back in our lives. Kalabishis clusters native plants and flowers into anatomical ikebana arrangements, emulating lungs, heart and interconnecting vessels. Intertwining branches are lovers embraced. The mirrored lives of people and plants is direct. Flora too is alive. Plants breathe, have sex and need food. They also nourish our own emotional wellbeing. We are therefore products of our environment and our very blood and bones share the same building blocks as the leaves, bark and stems of our native flora. This is an environment where art, science and culture can deeply intertwine as we attempt to understand

our place within an existing ecology. An ecology that we often forget as the disconnect between bushland and people widens.

The wonderful legacy of Boyd's bequest of Bundanon continues with Kalabishis's beautifully emotive artworks. A gift that extends to the rich creativity that can transpire from our unique landscape and a reminder of our place in the fragile balance of life. At a time when we are becoming increasingly urbanised, Kalabishis superbly places us back in the landscape and we are left lusting for more.

Dr Ryan Jefferies