Weaving the Grand Ocean

Upcoming Events

29 September Queer Pride: Closing Symposium & Celebration
4 October First Thursdays, Carol McGregor
6 October Book Launch, Ryan Presley: Prosperity

Institute of Modern Art
420 Brunswick Street | Brisbane QLD 4005, Australia | ima.org.au | ima@ima.org.au

Opening Hours
Tuesday–Saturday 11am–6pm | First Thursday of the month 11am–9pm

The Commute

22 September–22 December 2018

The Commute is supported by the W.A. and has received assistance from the Australia Council for the Arts, Australian Government through the Australian Cultural Diplomacy Grants Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Creative New Zealand, Canada Council for the Arts, Queensland Government through Arts Queensland, and Queensland Government through Arts Queensland in partnership with Brisbane City Council. The IMA is a member of Contemporary Art Organisations Australia.
a deer hide in the water. The women share stories of learning and teaching together on the land, enacting and demonstrating the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer.

For Wyss, media arts and ethnobotany have, in her words, …always worked side by side and are intertwined in beautiful ways. They both address natural world stories, beliefs and ideologies. In ethnobotany, you look at how plants are used for foods, medicines or utilities, and how they grow and can be collected. All of that work in collecting is a very similar process to collecting our stories, where we have to go out and work from the ground up to get our stories and inspirations for what we create, whether it’s something traditional or whether it’s non-linear. However we tell our stories, there is always that connection.¹

Shíkhée Wílkáchíhem Nexw’laj’yuł (To Explore, To Travel by Canoe) (2018) is a woven ceremonial cape made for an ocean-going traveler; in this case, Wyss’ daughter. A traditional cedar canoe that first Nations along the Northwest Coast of Turtle Island use to traverse the waters is the weaving’s central motif. The warp of the weaving is comprised entirely of red cedar bark while the weft consists of bands made from twisted coconut hull fibre, wool and lau hala (pandanus leaf) materials gathered between Skíwey wíḵoš and Hawaiian territories. The cape’s matrix, the material ground or support structure of the weaving results from Wyss’s cultural knowledge, which is situated in her home territory, enabling her to integrate materials from other territories she is connected with by way of relationality and protocol.

Similarly, Wyss has created an apothecary of salves and tinctures made from plant medicines gathered in Coast Salish, Kānaka Maoli, The Greater Brisbane Aboriginal territories, pointing to the resonances between these landscapes and knowledges. In Brisbane, The Commute co-curator Fréja Carmichael introduced Wyss to a traditional owner of these lands, Geeththa (Danny Doyle), exchanging gifts of plant medicines and knowledge with one another. To be a guest is to honour the responsibility to learn and to go gently, and Wyss’s apothecary is a gesture of respect toward this.

Wyss’s ongoing work and her project for The Commute positions Indigenous knowledge, plant medicines and weaving as technologies comparable with VR and other forms of digital media. VR is an effective platform for the transfer of Indigenous knowledge because of its capacity to transport users into other environments, into realities determined by Indigenous visions of our own futurity.

In tandem with this, Wyss’s mentorship as an emerging weaver and her extensive training in ethnobotany clarifies the millennia of study, research and expertise that has gone into the creation of these objects and practices. As Cree Métis media artist Cheryl L’Hirondelle has written, “to be truly free and self-governing, we must also acknowledge and be aware of our pre-contact ingenuity as inventors and technologists—experts in new media and avant-garde innovation.”² In weaving together materials, knowledges and experiences from across the Great Ocean, Wyss affirms this past while navigating into the future.


² Ibid.