



## Arts & The Environment Panel Discussion

Full transcript

Meri Fatin: Thank you all so much for staying for this. So we've all been very, very excited to come and have this conversation. It's one of my favorites. Thank you so much to ART ON THE MOVE and to Katanning Art Gallery and particularly James Wood for having us here for this Arts and Environment Panel, which is part of IOTA (Indian Ocean Craft Triennial) 2024 and the opening of course of the *Tributaries* exhibition, which we've just seen by the incredible Tineke Van Der Eecken. I'd like to acknowledge as well as James said earlier, that we are on Noongar country, and acknowledge elders past and present. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

My name is Meri Fatin. I'm an interviewer and a facilitator and a few years ago I got really interested in climate and environment stuff and started trying to use my skills more focused on conversations around climate and environment and started an organization called WA Climate Leaders, which is really intended to inspire more ambitious action in the private sector around stepping up to the requirements of acting on the impacts of climate change.

And so these are my favorite kinds of discussions to have because it's an opportunity to meld the arts and the science, and the environment and human intent all together, which is exactly what we need to be thinking about. So this conversation is very much about how Western Australian artists or Western Australians generally are inspired by the natural landscape and about what's happening to the natural landscape and how artistic response can happen to that as well. But there's so many elements to it. I think it'll be great to talk to the people on the panel, who I'll introduce to you in a moment, but also to hear from you as we've got a chunk of time to talk about it. If you're inspired to make contributions later on, I'll definitely be inviting that. So you've met Tineke Van Der Eecken, writer, researcher, published poet, and also obviously artist and maker from Belgium now living in Walyalup (Fremantle).

And then at the end of the panel we have Dr. Mags Webster, writer, published poet from Wiltshire and Derbyshire originally via London, and then Scotland and now Walyalup (Fremantle) as well. And then we have Lynn MacLaren, City of Albany councilor, convener of community environment center and art appreciator, from Colorado via Kinjarling (Albany), Walyalup (Fremantle) and now Kinjarling again. And then Peter Hill, who is an artist, a musician, and a firefighter, born and bred in the southwest Boodjar on Wardandi Bibbulmun country, apart from the ubiquitous world tour as a young fella, as I understand. So thank you so much all of you for being here to participate in this conversation. It's been an adventure for all of us, hasn't it? Probably less of an adventure for you, Peter, than the rest of us. Not quite the trek?

Peter Hill: Oh, no, it was still a long way and through the back roads, so...

Meri Fatin: Yeah. Oh, beautiful.

Peter Hill: ...bush tracks to get here.

Meri Fatin: Beautiful. Yeah. So thank you all again for having us. Now what we've decided to do is that each panelist has three slides that they want to talk to kind of inspire what they want to share in this conversation. And so, I thought I would go to Tineke as the exhibitor of the day to talk about your three slides, first of all. And Riley is going to run that for us. Thank you so much. And we can have a chat about that and then we'll move on.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah, thanks, Meri. And this is such a fantastic opportunity for me also to really be here and take part in this conversation and have all of you to have a more in-depth conversation about what it really means to bring this type of work into a space and where it comes from, so absolutely grateful to ART ON THE MOVE to have organized it and for all of you to be here today. I've started this with the image of the horse lung as you all know it now because you've seen it in the flesh, not quite the flesh because the flesh is no longer there. But to introduce this topic was, *Tributaries* as a first of a trilogy of exhibitions and *Tributaries* is about the land, it's about our connection to the land, to its animals, to its life forms. It's about the joy of it, but also what we risk to lose if we don't look after it.

We're in the Anthropocene, which is a time, a geological time when things are changing fast, and some of these changes are vast and a result of our own actions as humans. So acknowledging all of that, there is a gaze to the land and there's a gaze to the trees and to the forests, and there's a look into the ocean. And I think this image sort of connects all three of those because it is a horse lung tree as you know it, but some people identified it as coral. Other people see it as a tree, so I think this sort of binds the tree quite nicely.

Yeah. This image is talking to art as protest and as acknowledging of protest. It's a small pendant, which you might've seen, but it's quite a small piece in the exhibition, but for me it's a very important one. It's a pendant in silver with a gold nugget, gold nugget to just show how important this is. The piece in the middle is a chip of a tuart tree that was going to be cut down in Hamilton Hill and a community rallied around this tree to save it because it didn't need to be chopped down, and it's important, there's not a lot of tuarts in our urban areas and they're important for the cockatoos because this is their source of food and habitat. So cutting down this tree was completely unnecessary.

And the developer who wanted to cut it down was stopped by the community when they heard the chainsaws, they actually had to live with the tree, in the tree, by the tree for five months to save that tree. But one Sunday morning the volunteers had gone for a shower on a Sunday morning. The developer came in with chainsaws and they severed a third of the tree...

Meri Fatin: God.

Tineke Van der Eecken: ...and the place was littered with our tears and with these chips. So at that point we thought we'd lost the tree. I picked up some of the chips and cast them in silver and thought maybe this might be all that is left of this tree. And I gave all of the volunteers, one of these chips so that they could carry it on their body to

remember the tree. Fortunately, we saved the tree and it's now registered under heritage. And the council had to change their laws. So Lynn knows the story.

Lynn MacLaren: I was there. Yeah.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yes. So that's an important little memory of that community action and how it works.

Meri Fatin: Can we stay with that for a sec?

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah.

Meri Fatin: I have questions. I'm sure everybody else does. And particularly if Lynn was there too, how were you able to stop what had been started when the chainsaws started in the tree, did you...

Tineke Van der Eecken: With bodies, people just went there and put...

Meri Fatin: Got in the way of...

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yes. Yeah.

Lynn MacLaren: And Amy Joy, it's the tree across from Amy's house?

Tineke Van der Eecken: Amanda Joy.

Lynn MacLaren: Amanda Joy. Yeah.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah.

Lynn MacLaren: So Amanda Joy contacted my office as one of the people and also the council. So I was in state parliament at the time. So we got down there. The mayor at the time also mobilized because he was trying to do his best and we recognized what the law was. We had to look into the protections. It was Western Power too, was involved.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yes, it was Western Power.

Lynn MacLaren: So Western Power wanted to put electricity to this house. Yeah. So we all just rallied around... I was asking questions in parliament and writing letters and then of course it resulted in the council increasing the protection for significant trees across Cockburn. They changed their law so that you could register a tree if it was significant and it would be protected. One of the challenges was it wasn't just entirely private property because there was an easement for Western Power. So that made it a little bit more complicated.

Meri Fatin: So it was the power of the people then, isn't it?

Lynn MacLaren: We couldn't have saved it without the people that were holding off, while all the bureaucracy was trying to cope.

Tineke Van der Eecken: The bodies were there. And it was actually a camp four or five months. Yeah.

Meri Fatin: I definitely want to come back to activism as a topic, but Tineke perhaps your last slide then if you've finished talking to that one.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah. So this slide is... The work is called *Regeneration*. And I've spoken about it in the gallery. So it is really about how life and death are part of the same cycle. And that to me, this is hope as well, that we can do this. There are a lot of challenges, but we know what life is like and we value what is here. So we also know what to protect. And knowing is also finding out. So what I find exciting about working with scientists on these corrosion castings is that I find out the story of this animal and the anatomy and all of that.

And in my most recent exhibition, I've done the casting myself in the lab on fish and a ghost shark and finding out what this ghost shark has gone through to actually be here on the table in the anatomy lab being part of a research about the impact of jet skis and of ships in the harbor when it comes up only once a year to lay its eggs in the shallow because this animal lives in the deep sea. I mean not deep sea, 150 meters deep, which is deep enough, but to come up and how much damage it is getting because of this one ascent and what it encounters there.

And not only is it damaged in its sensory system, in its hearing and its navigation, also the eggs already, the eggs it's carrying are damaged. And so the life forms of the next generation are already changed. So I think knowing about this is also helping us make change. And to me, working with this art form helps and contextualizing it in *Tributaries*, not just say have one piece, but to have a number of pieces that reference different parts of the story is a way to communicate.

Meri Fatin: Well, in fact, I hadn't realized until James has mentioned to me before that it's set out as a story, *Tributaries*. Tell us a little bit about that.

Tineke Van der Eecken: The story. Well, there's a number of prints in black and there's a number of prints in white. And I think you see the hope and the grief of both. Using dead bodies and bringing out life forms from these dead bodies. They're showing the blood vessels, showing the airways is a way to appreciate life of what remains of it and what we have to protect. On the other side, there's jewelry and precious things in precious metal, which talk about our local life forms like the marsupials, the snakes, they are really part of this land and have been here. But the biodiversity is shrinking due to climate change, due to human habitation, due to agriculture. The impact of humans on this land makes that there's less and less around. And so making them into precious metal for me is a way to hold onto them.

Meri Fatin: And I know that Peter has also used a similar thing, haven't you, with some of your art in using metal as a way of denoting the preciousness of a natural place?

Peter Hill: Yeah, I do. I suppose there's that tradition of trying to give permanence to something that's not permanent and metal is an obvious choice. It's not my greatest skill. It's one that I dabble in, but yeah.

Meri Fatin: And what did you represent with metal in your art?

Peter Hill: I've done a few of transformations of some basic tools into plantforms, and so that was a combination of wood and metal. So it's an obvious choice to use the metal because it's already included.

Meri Fatin: I was thinking of the river as well on the map of the river.

Peter Hill: Oh, okay. Oh, the one I've been doing recently? Yes. So that's a community art project that I've been working on for most of this year. It's been a very difficult child, and it's been about 40 different people, a lot of children and adults who've contributed to this project where we mapped out our local river, the Gardner River, which is just near Northcliffe, onto two boards. And then all the participants have chosen a local small organism, so like a little plant or our little animal. And trying to get them to really look at the small scale rather than the big ones that we know.

And so they've all... we burnt into the wood, these organisms. And with the river we use gold leaf to put over the river to use a very European sense of wealth or symbol of wealth, just to reinforce the idea of the preciousness and the drought that you would've encountered here, it's just as strong as we did this previous summer, was quite extreme. And we are the last little corner of WA that still gets good rainfall. And so for a lot of us locals, it was a big shock. People were caught unawares. So it was just that way of really reinforcing that precious nature of the water.

Meri Fatin: Thanks, Peter. Lynn, I think your slides are next. Are Lynn's slides next? Now, I introduced Lynn as an art appreciator, so what's really interesting about having Lynn in this conversation is that she can reflect back to us how this lands for her. And I'd love for you to talk actually, first of all about how *Tributaries* has landed for you as an art appreciator.

Lynn MacLaren: Oh, geez. So many emotions.

Meri Fatin: Yeah, so many emotions.

Lynn MacLaren: So I think I first saw the horse piece in Mundaring. Oh my god, such a powerful exhibition. And I think for me it's so many things. I always feel the grief every time I see the exhibition because I see the death and death is a finite thing and so it always touches me. It always makes me feel more strongly because that emotion of grief has been triggered. And then I see the beauty in it, I see the intricacies of life and

the fact that the lung and the veins that you see so stripped bare that makes the complexity of life so miraculous.

So every time I see *Tributaries*, and it was recently in Albany, and so every time I see it, it's a different experience. But it's mainly that juxtaposition of the intricacies of how miraculous it is that we have so many complex organisms on the planet and they're so fragile. And then the grief of loss that so much can be lost. And I think I love the way that Tineke has shared what she sees. She's able to share what she sees, but then people can buy it and wear it. And the jewelry is so stunning. And sometimes I look and I go, "That's stunning." And I go, "Oh yeah, but it's a mouse ear or something, and can I really wear that?" But yeah, so it's delightful for me that she, I don't know, makes me look at nature in a new way.

Meri Fatin: I just want to stay with that for a sec, because it's carrying a story, isn't it, when you wear a piece of your artwork? I was wondering actually about the one that you're wearing.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah, so this is part of *Concurrencies*, of the new exhibition and it's looking at water and ocean, and this is a rock. It grows under the, you know, very deep and it grows over thousands of years, and yet we see water in there. And I find that amazing to see, and this is chrysoprase in manganese, and I've juxtaposed it with a little citrine and set it in textured silver just to bring the sentiment of water and what it is like, you dive under water, you come up, you see the rocks there, and you see the surface, you see the sun coming through the water. That's what I feel when I see that, and this is what I saw when I was making it.

And making, having this jewelry which is a very, it's a commodity, jewelry is a commodity, but it is also a talking point. You know, we can have dinner and you'll ask me about it and I can tell you a story about it. It brings nature into the conversation and it's something you can cherish and it's something you can pass on. It's not something that you throw away. It's not plastic, it's something durable that can be passed on in generations. So I like all of that about it, yeah.

Meri Fatin: That's why you can wear the jewelry.

Lynn MacLaren: I am going to have another look at it.

Meri Fatin: Lynn, tell us about your first slide.

Lynn MacLaren: Oh, well, I chose this, I don't make beautiful things really, but I do appreciate the beauty in nature, and I loved your photos today. For some reason, I didn't, they're so well lit. It reminded me of when I was an exchange student here and I took my camera everywhere and took photographs. And similarly, it woke me up about nature because you're paying attention and you're taking good images. And I took them back and I shared them and I shared slides of those sand sculptures that you see with the... And it made a difference. It changed me in that then I used photography to, in my journalism, I became a photojournalist because I... And one of my things was features, going out to beautiful places in the desert and taking photographs and that thing.

This is a photograph of a Numbat, which I may or may not have taken, but I think I know that Numbat. It's in Dryandra, and if I didn't take it, it was Robert from the Project Numbat group. But I'm training advocates for nature, and I use that story of saving the numbat land in Dryandra because it was threatened by a landfill. Do you remember that? There was a landfill proposed for it, and we were able to stop that landfill and therefore reduce the predators that would be attracted to wipe out one of the two remaining populations that used to be all the way across Australia, endemic, all the way across, and now there's two populations in WA, and this was one of them.

So, I just use that when I was training recently about how to protect our nature laws. So, I used my art in my professional development training.

Meri Fatin: I want to ask you about numbats particularly because you just prompted in my mind the fact that I've heard that our minister for environment and climate change calls himself the minister for numbats.

Lynn MacLaren: Ah.

Meri Fatin: Which diminishes the whole value of the work, doesn't it?

Lynn MacLaren: I think it does, yeah.

Meri Fatin: I mean, were you given grief for focusing on saving a small mammal?

Lynn MacLaren: No. No. I don't think, I mean, at one point I brought in my stuffed animal collection of-

Meri Fatin: Numbats?

Lynn MacLaren: ...marsupials.

Meri Fatin: Oh.

Lynn MacLaren: First, I was the only one in the parliament. I said, "How many of you have seen a numbat in the wild? Why is a numbat important? It's our state emblem. It's the animal that's our state emblem." I said, "Okay, who's seen one?" And I was the only one in that parliament at that time who'd actually bothered to spend time waiting until you can find a numbat.

I don't know if they'd seen them in a zoo, maybe they had, I didn't ask that question. So, I brought in my collection of chuditch and all the ones that we were debating the biodiversity bill, and I said, "This is what I'm talking about. You people who have not been into nature, can anyone name this?"

And Stephen who was there at the time, who is now the minister for numbats...oh no, he switched over to mines now...

Meri Fatin: Yes. Stephen Dawson.

Lynn MacLaren: He knew what the chuditch was, but generally they had no idea what these Australian native animals look like. And to be quite honest, they're probably those stuffed animals, though I bought them in Mundaring, probably made in China. But anyway, the point is there's a lack of appreciation in my view, amongst our decision makers. They don't get it because they haven't experienced it.

Now, if they come to the art gallery and experience it, you're getting them a little bit closer in nature. But a lot of them just haven't had the time or inclination or opportunity to go and feel what it feels like, and that matters because that drives you.

Meri Fatin: It's a key reason why this interface between art and climate change and environment is so important is to allow people to see it from a perspective that elevates their care...

Lynn MacLaren: Yes, the care factor.

Meri Fatin: ...about issues.

Lynn MacLaren: That's right. So, yeah, that's a shame. There is a general, yeah. At that time, I must admit, they do try to minimize us people who stand up for the little furry things.

Meri Fatin: They won't be minimized though. This is the trouble, isn't it? What's your next slide, Lynn?

Lynn MacLaren: Oh, this isn't little thing. This butterfly, I took on a hike in California and I sent the slide in because at the time I was...

So, I submitted this slide because this slide reminds me. I had one of those mystical experiences when you're walking through the bush or walking in nature and you feel connected. Do you get that? You feel connected? So, I saw these little butterflies and at the time I was thinking of my partner who had passed away and I thought, "Oh, that's her spirit. That's her spirit coming to visit me."

They were just so playful. The butterflies were so playful, and I took this photo of it. And when I see it it's just because I can almost see its eye. I can almost see its eye, and again, it's about the intricacies.

Meri Fatin: Intricacies.

Lynn MacLaren: That, what she said. The intricacies of nature. And also, it reminds me, I guess I love this photo because it reminds me to slow down, focus. Sometimes you just need to focus on the tiny details and then I just get more centered and I'm less frenetic. So that's why I love this.



Meri Fatin: Can I remind you that you've reminded me of a story you told me the other day about looking something in the eye, because I was asking you the story...

Lynn MacLaren: Oh, yeah, that's right.

Meri Fatin: ...I was asking you the story about how, I'm always curious about people's pivotal moment or an awakening moment of suddenly realizing why they need to do more or care more or use their skills to do something about climate or the environment, and you told me a story about looking something in the eye.

Lynn MacLaren: Yeah, I did tell that story. I don't know. So, by the way, last week I looked at a whale in the eye.

Meri Fatin: Did you?

Lynn MacLaren: I was out on one of those whale watchings, and they did this bi-op right close to the boat. And they do that to look at you. So that's another eye-to-eye animal experience. And what it does for me and the one that Meri's talking about is what catapulted me into political activism.

I was living my life quietly, it's hard to imagine, in Fremantle. I was working as a desktop publisher and I had learned about live exports through a group that had been doing some research. And I was helping them to publish little booklets like this, with the research that they had compiled.

The booklets were very powerful, powerfully written about the details of numbers that were going overseas and the high mortality rates. So, my mind was full of this concern that it was growing in Fremantle because with 6 million in sheep go through that port, and so you see them on the roads a lot. You see the trucks, the livestock trucks.

It's not one farm. They're all coming converging in. And then when the ships in, they got to fill it, so it's concentrated. One day we pulled up at the lights next to a livestock truck. One with the slats, the open slats. They're all designed differently around the world, by the way too.

But we have these slat versions and sometimes the animals can poke their legs out and get stuck. So, I was at Leach Highway and Carrington Road, Carrington Street where the cemetery is. If you look to the left, you can see Bon Scott's grave. There I was, and I looked over and I saw this sheep look me in the eye, and it was fear. It was afraid. It was scrunched up against the edge.

You could see that it was struggling to right itself. Maybe its leg was caught. But I've got that sense of fear in his experience. And not only did I know that in that moment that sheep was afraid, I knew what was going to happen to it because I had desktop published the flyer, so I knew.

It was going to spend a month maybe if it was a bad ship, crossing the equator from one season to another season. It was going to potentially, if it could find its way to the trough, it could eat and survive and get unloaded at the other end. And possibly get in the back of someone's car, or in a boot or in one of those abattoirs, that aren't regulated even as much as ours are regulated.

So, I knew in that moment, I couldn't just do the leaflets anymore, so I was motivated. I said, "Okay, I'm going to go into the next meeting." And I went to the meeting and at that time, a lot of people were just meeting and they were just very emotional, which is so beyond stressed. I was like, "Got to do something. We got to just get organized."

So that's what I did, I used my skills as a communicator and developed organizing skills. And I just said, "Right, okay, if you're stressed out, go over there and if you have ideas about what to do next, sit here." And then we just built this international movement. We've made connections with Compassionate World Farming, which you might know from the UK and all over the world and even New Zealand.

We went to New Zealand, we found out how they regulated their trade. And yeah, eventually the federal government, and this is many, many years later, I'm talking 1995. This has taken a long time. 1995, and we established the regulations. I'm saying a lot of detail because this is, you know how the live export industry operates.

An ESCAS (Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System) was created through all that process of applying scrutiny to this trade. We got rid of the ships of shame, the worst ones. And then the millionaires started building their own, started putting in ventilation, started putting vets on board. They transformed the trade over that time period. Still cannot get down the rate of suffering to an acceptable level, so that's why the federal government finally said, "We're going to stop it."

Meri Fatin: Your pivotal moments all seem to involve looking an animal in the eye. I think it's quite amazing. Tell me about your last slide then.

Lynn MacLaren: There they are, the horses. So, the horses too play a role here. So, this is that day. Were you there, Tineke?

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah. Roe 8? Yeah.

Lynn MacLaren: Beelias Wetlands had waged a campaign to try and stop the Barnett government from plowing through the wetlands in the last months of their government. In the very last months when McGowan had promised that when he came in, he wouldn't do it. And they just got their contractors and they said, "Do what you can. Do your best to get that road in," right?

So, thousands of people every day were turning up on the front line where the bulldozers were. This is the day the fences came down. This is the day we had enough people to push the fence down, go right into where the bulldozer is. Somebody locked onto the bulldozers. The mounted police were there, and yes, there was eye contact with a horse, but it was scary as, it was so scary.

But what it proved to me was, it's not just one small group of people maybe meeting in Fremantle to talk about the sheep. It is a massive community of people who care about the wetlands, who were prepared that every single day instead of going to work and school, turn up and try to protect these wetlands. This is Malvolio. So, now you go back there and it's revegetated, so that's why I like this photo, it's a win photo.

Meri Fatin: Yeah, awesome. Thank you, Lynn. Mags, you come to this from a different perspective all together, not from the perspective of an activist at all. In fact, you're a PhD in creative writing, and you are a writer and researcher and published poet, as I said. Tell me how you've come to this conversation, because you've got quite a good working relationship with Tineke, haven't you?

Mags Webster: Tineke and I met many years ago through writing, and I was aware of her practice as a maker as well. She invited me to be part of an opening performance at one of her exhibitions many years ago, which was...

Tineke Van der Eecken: 20 years ago.

Mags Webster: Gosh. Yeah, okay. 20 years ago, yeah, absolutely. So, we've known each other over this period of time, and I've been aware of the work that she's been doing, but not following it very closely, and then I was absolutely delighted when she approached me to write the catalog essay for *Concurrencies*, which is the next exhibition on from *Tributaries*, and focuses on the marine animals that she made corrosion castings from.

So, for me, as a writer, it's always a wonderful opportunity to be able to spend time with artworks and really focusing in on the detail and being very attentive to the stories that they might represent.

I think with the corrosion castings, the thing that really intrigues me, and this is perhaps connected to what I do as a writer, is these castings are showing the real interiority of a creature, of a being. They're also showing us our own interiority.

When making a poem, in a sense, that's where I'm going as well, and then it becomes externalized. So, sometimes when I look at the horse head with the vascular structures adorning it, I think of, yeah, that's a bit like a poem. We eviscerate ourselves and wear the lines on ourselves.

And, of course, it's for everybody who reads a poem to derive whatever meaning they want to derive from it. It's not the poets say so, the poems belong to all of the readers, but it's an offering in the same way it can be an exposure.

And so, I'm not an activist in any sense, but I guess, I'm an ordinary person who is fascinated by what people are doing. The lengths that the, the arguments, and the passion and the complete rightness of what people like my friends along the table are achieving.

And then some people will be in the thick of it, and some people will probably be stepping back and observing. Maybe I'm one of those, but maybe there's a benefit to that in the sense of a witness to what's going on, and as a communicator as well.

Meri Fatin: I love that and I wanted to ask you just a little bit further on where you see yourself sitting on that spectrum, because you've said quite clearly that you're not an activist, but that you do care. So, what is it that holds you back then from maybe you might call yourself an advocate rather than an activist or maybe not even that?

Because I think it's really interesting, everyone is useful on that spectrum. I think we can't all be heavy on the activist end or the opposite end, we have to scatter evenly across to be useful. But just because you said quite clearly that you are not, I'm just interested in that.

Mags Webster: Look, it's a hard question to answer. Temperamentally, I'm under the radar. I work in other ways. I don't know whether that's an adequate answer. There are things I can do in other ways.

Meri Fatin: Yes. So, in regard to poetry then I would love to hear you talk about why you find, because we know from *Concurrencies*, which I have here somewhere as well, that you write prose as well. But why is poetry your favorite medium?

Mags Webster: Because it's a challenge, but also because I realized that when I started getting into, I used to write short stories and short fiction, and then I realized that because I had some really inspiring mentors that my stories are getting shorter and shorter. I was becoming more and more focused on the language, and the rhythm, and the fascination. There was a fascination between being able to express something that in some ways was inexpressible, and could I do that as a writer? And it seemed to me that I was going back into an education, starting a complete education in language and poetry all over again. Relearning a different way of speaking, a different way of reading the world.

I think being able to work with language in a much more intimate way and intimate sense, I think that was what was happening for me with poetry.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Can I pick up on that? I love what Mags does in expanding something that you make in art to another language, a written language that is investigating, researching and exploring, and beautifully bringing that again into form.

I often feel like I don't have enough languages to explain what I'm seeing, so I use poetry as well to take something that even further. And maybe there's some point, I can read a little bit of a poem there.

Meri Fatin: Please. I was going to invite you both, so please, if you feel you'd like to.

Tineke Van der Eecken: But I want to, we're still on...

Meri Fatin: No, we'll go back to Mags. We haven't even done her slides yet.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah, okay.

Meri Fatin: Absolutely.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Perhaps you could hold up the image of the, next to the, yeah. So, in *Tributaries* here, and you can find this poem in the catalog. There's a poem that really takes this exhibition, the visuals from that in my mind away from the waterways

here and into waterways more globally. Because we are connected, we are connected with the...so, Tributum, which is Tribute.

"Tributum, a statement of gratitude. How a river flows into a greater water, lake, sea. How the worth of one pays the other. We are waterways. Our blood connects with the Aral sea, salt deserts, where ancestors fished. A shrinking womb split into three lakes, climate no longer moderated by sea. Lake Chad inland seas dry up, shore retreats from Nigeria and Niger. Fish farmers move with the lake, leave irrigation plants dry. We are waterways. Our veins swallow the breathing wetlands."

Maybe you can read the rest of the poem at your ease, but it's taking it further, which is what text can do, and that's why I was-

Meri Fatin: Yes. And reading, Mags, I know that we can't share it at the moment, reading Mags' essay in *Concurrencies* is exquisite. It's really exquisite.

Mags Webster: Thank you.

Meri Fatin: Would you like to read and tell us about your poem and read, or would you like to speak to your slides first?

Mags Webster: Shall I get the slides done? Okay. So, I've chosen this image. All of the images that I've chosen, I realize are by artists and writers who are now deceased, and that wasn't intentional.

Bill Viola was a wonderful video artist who died a little bit earlier this year. He's from the States. This video installation I first came across, I went to St. Paul's Cathedral when I was on a visit back to London and this was one of the installations there.

There was a particular reason why it should be in a place of worship, partly because a place of worship like that has the scale that something like this, this is huge. It is really, really big. But also the theme of it, Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water).

So, you can see, unfortunately, the guy with the earth coming down him is a little bit obscured. But you can see that these figures are all undergoing an ordeal of one element or another. And over the period of the video playing, you see the fire intensify, completely engulf the guy with the fire.

The guy who's inundated with water, the woman who's suspended, and she's in wind. You can see the action of the wind really working on her. And this person at the end just gets completely covered with earth. It really intensifies, and you can't look away, because it's pretty full on, and then it reverses and everything becomes quiet again.

Everyone's interpretation is likely to be different when watching something like this, but for me, it was an intensely powerful spiritual artwork. Bill Viola tended to make artworks that would speak to some kind of Abrahamic story or biblical story. He was fascinated by poets such as John of the Cross who practiced via negativa, so negative theology.

So, not talking about God in terms of God is this, God is that, but God is not this, God is not that. So, this negation, this stripping away, this acknowledgement of language, being unable to describe something that we don't know.

For me, as a poet, that was this stripping away of language and this acknowledgement of language's inadequacy in many ways to express and yet we still try because it's what we have. The parallels with the visual art there were really strong for me, and so this work's quite meaningful.

Emily Dickinson, American poet, she died when she was 56. She wrote thousands of tiny fragments of poems and none of them were published during her lifetime. They were discovered after she died. She'd put them into a drawer. She wrote them on scraps of envelope and paper, often in pencil, usually in pencil. For me, she's an enormous inspiration. I can't say that I understand her poetry, but there is something about an art form, and visual art can do this as well, when you have to keep going back to it, you have to keep going back to it because you're still working out what your relationship is with it, what it's showing you, what it might be saying to you.

And I find that Emily Dickinson's poems are very much like this, that they're showing me something different every time I go back. And she lived a very secluded life. She chose to withdraw from society and spent a lot of time in her bedroom, which was also her writing room. But she was incredibly connected to nature, and so many of her poems are constantly referencing a creature or the ocean or gardens or sounds. Those were her materials, basically nature was one of her materials and she worked with that, so really, really inspiring and very prescient poet as well.

Meri Fatin: When we were talking earlier, you said to me, I wrote it down, "Emily Dickinson will be perplexing me until I drop dead."

Mags Webster: Yeah, she will.

Meri Fatin: Why?

Mags Webster: Because every time I think I may have decoded something that she's written, it slips away from me again. And so, I can't really say that I understand, but I can say that the attraction and the compulsion to try to unlock even a small part of her poems, and the way that she uses language, and she uses it in a very...I don't think anyone has since used language in the way that she managed to.

So, on a technical level, how does that happen? How does that happen? And then on an emotional and sort of poetic level, she's speaking to the biggest themes that we have as humans in life. And she even will write poems that sort of take you beyond the grave. They're spoken in the voice of a person who's already in the coffin, "Because I could not wait for death, he kindly stopped for me." I've probably not said, quoted that properly. And the other thing that she says that I think is very interesting, not just in the poetic sense, but in a sense of how we all maybe operate from time to time, and she said, "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant." Very clever. Very clever.

Meri Fatin: So, we've gone from video installation to poetry and finally your final slide.

Mags Webster: Yes, so this is *The Wave* by Joan Eardley, who was a Scottish artist. And sadly, I think she made it into her 40s, but then had cancer and died in the 1960s. I

mean, I could have chosen any one of her landscapes. It's passionate, it's savage, there's a lot of weather going on in this landscape.

It's the north-eastern coast of Scotland and I lived in that area for a time, and the colors and the mood and the storminess, she really, really captures it and she was well known for this incredible work, that she saw this particular stretch of the coastline and could actually capture it in these really sort of powerful and strong paintings.

Meri Fatin: So beautiful, thank you, Mags.

Mags Webster: Welcome.

Meri Fatin: And now your poem, speaking of...

Mags Webster: Yes, I would love to. I'm going to stand up because I get better breath control when I stand up.

Meri Fatin: So this is from one of your books published.

Mags Webster: This is from, yeah, one of my books, and I'm going to dedicate it to Tineke because it actually has an ocean theme to it and then I'm dedicating also to *Concurrencies* as an exhibition made from the ocean. And this poem is called *Breathing Lessons*.

I'm learning how to breathe. Underwater. Life's harsh wish makes my corpuscles bloat, blood strobes. The whole of an ocean holds me. Down here, the reefs, a temple or a church filled with isles of kelp, a slant with stained-glass shafts of sun, pale halos of Medusae. Flocks of fish kiss digits of coral, fins steadying for benediction.

I kneel to join the swaying congregations, but they blanch, shiver into vanished blue. The surface does not satisfy. I must deepen though my lungs are in denial to the rationing of air. Too long used to living in the dry. An apprentice to these depths. I cling to oxygen like clinging to God. My apparatus rattles and tips. I gulp a supplicant, my breaths blister upward, empty into light. Is this why I've come so deep to learn, instead of oxygen, belief? I unbuckle my weights, shrug from the grip of the skins. Letting go of my mask is hard, but then all the air I need rushes in.

Thank you.

Meri Fatin: Thank you, Mags. Peter, thank you so much for being patient. I want to ask you first of all, because I mentioned introducing you that you're a firefighter and this returns in your work as well.

Peter Hill: Yes.

Meri Fatin: So, would you like to talk about it while you're talking to your slides or...

Peter Hill: Yeah, I can do that. There's one slide that's relevant.

Meri Fatin: Okay.

Peter Hill: Not this slide. But this one here is relevant. So, this is an artwork I did a couple of years ago. It's part of a series of paintings and assemblages where I have used a colonial bank form, so I used one from Fremantle actually, one of the ones on East End, don't know which one it was, and a couple from the Wheatbelt. I've used that symbol as a way of building a fortress. It's like a metaphor for a national park, so like a museum approach to conservation that we put it in a glass box and the complexities of that, whether it's successful or not, in trying to hold onto time and hold how it was.

Because I live in a town that's surrounded by a forest, there was a point in the conversation I had earlier with Meri and she asked, "Was there a particular point where I decided to make some artwork dealing with climate change?" and there's never been a point with take a moment to consciously go, "I'm going to make an artwork about climate change." It's just, I'm an artist that's observing and creating artwork about life, and climate change is happening all around me.

And on that point, I've been in my local fire brigade for 20 years, and for the last 15 years it's been a very big part of my life. We had an incredibly large fire in 2015 and I went from being a hose holder to the captain, through circumstance. I didn't choose it, I just happened to be there and this fire was gigantic. Absolutely beautiful as well at the same time. We're just standing watching this atomic bomb grow in front of us and it's just entrancing, but terrifying at the same time.

And through that moment I knew more people, I got on with more people and I could be in the moment. And so, there's a part of me going, "I can't be a fire person, I'm an artist. I've been an artist for 30 years. How can I be controlling incident in the fire?" Because in our western culture for Australia, it's not done. They're separate worlds, they're over here. And so, yeah, for the last 15 years it's been a big part and it has been quite detrimental to my art career because it's taken a lot of my energy and time, and not always to the point where I could reconcile it.

I was saying at lunchtime that fires tend to, from my observation, they've attracted a few negative individuals, that they're there to respond to put fire out, and they're always imagining apocalypse, the end of the world. It's this sort of negative approach. But then, the artist is about putting energy into the world to create, to make. And so, sometimes it can be very challenging to try and balance those two characters in the same body.

So, two years ago I found a great young guy who's only 20 to reluctantly take on the role as the captain. And so, I've been able to have a little bit more time to make art. And so, because of it, a lot of those experiences have come into my art. And also, in a way of trying to balance out the despair and the destruction with the beauty, and to not fall into this sense that the fire is always destructive and despair, that there's always beauty, no matter how terrible the moment is, there's always beauty as well.

Because a lot of my more community-based projects, when I work with children, I just find that they're inheriting this problem that's so massive and if we're only focusing on the despair and the trouble that it's causing, then I think it's too much. It's too much for them. There still needs to be the appreciation of the beauty that's all around us just everywhere.



Meri Fatin: Do you want to go forward or back on the next one, Peter?

Peter Hill: I'll go back. Go back to those ones. So, this was a community art project that I did also a couple of years ago. So, as a little backstory, Meri mentioned earlier, I was born in Manjimup, which is west of here, a couple of hours. Plays a very similar role as Katanning, as sort of the center of a region. My extended family are all in Manjimup.

And did the usual, leave the small town, go to Perth, started in Perth, then wanted to go to somewhere bigger, so I went overseas and spent time and had a very pivotal moment. Went across Asia through to England, found myself in the Midlands of England, desperate to go and see a forest. I've been a forest dweller just my whole life, and I found one on a map and I got public transport and I walked for hours to find this forest and it was a pine plantation and I was devastated. It was a bit of a Paul Hogan moment. It was like, "That's not a forest, I'll show you a forest." And so, that's when I knew I had to go home.

And since then I've felt like I'm going against the flow a little bit is that most of my contemporaries from high school who went into professions, a lot of them ended up in Melbourne or Sydney, whereas I'm in the hometown almost, so about 40 minutes away from my hometown, but I think it's really important for us, for all of the towns, Katanning, that someone stays and takes on that local knowledge and holds that local knowledge, even though it can be tricky at times.

And this sculpture here is on a sculpture walk that's in forest that's in the edge of our town. When they gazetted our town, they went, "Right, this is Northcliffe, we're going to do this bit of town here, that's where Northcliffe will grow when it gets bigger." And it never did, it got smaller. And so, there's this patch of amazing bush right there in town, right on the edge of town. And so, when we first, or early years of my wife and I living in Northcliffe, we were involved with the Forest Protest Movement, and it was hugely divisive and I was very reluctant to take a position because all my family live in the area, and I come from a very conservative family.

At the time my mum's brother was the Shire President and the spokesperson for the timber industry, so for me to take a position was difficult. I was a reluctant activist, to go back to talking about being an activist. But we did get involved, and through that time there was these events that popped up in the forest where either Forest Alliance would organize it, where artists would come down, we'd put together installations in the forest as a way of just trying to get public knowledge of what's going on because otherwise it was all direct action, it was all this very angry kind of chaining up and living in tree platforms, so it was a way of trying to come at it from a different angle.

And that's when a small group of us who were artists and environmentalists who lived in the area thought, "Wouldn't it be good to do this all the time, not just when we're at the front line?" So, 20 years later we have a sculpture walk in that forest that I described that's in town, and we have all these amazing artworks that are in there. And so, for us, it is a way of trying to get visitors to come do the walk, and by the time they've done something, a kilometer, by the time they've done it, they slowed right down and they're just taking in the artworks, but nature just as much. And so, we're using the art just as a way to slow people down and get that appreciation and love for our environment.

Peter Hill: Yes, yes, so it has been a long journey, so this is on that trail, and this is a therapeutic one for me because I worked with primary school and high school students from the entire region, from Walpole, Northcliffe, Pemberton, Manjimup and Bridgetown. And so, my old primary school, I got to take kids from there and it was a way of, these are primary school students, they're not children who like art, they're just students. A lot of the boys were kind of like "I like footy and fishing", so it was about trying to get them in, and not only into creating, but thinking about all of the life forms that live and share the environment with us.

So I found this was a really good way that I could get all the kids into thinking about what lives in the forest. We are here, but what else lives here? And so, we used that house symbol. Yeah, used the symbol as a way in. And the kids were like, "Well, what if they don't use them?" And I said, "It doesn't matter. It's about you recognizing that you are not the only one in here." So, I found it rewarding. Just in the primary school alone, I think I nearly had 200, and this is only a small section, it's a large installation, nearly 200 students involved, and it was just a really good way to get those local kids who don't have, most of them don't have access to any art, access to art and appreciation of what they've got, so that they don't take as long as I did to appreciate what they're living with, what they're being brought up with.

This was, I put this one in as an example to, it also touches on a comment from our lunch, the conundrum of when your making artworks, and while I was exhibiting in galleries in Melbourne and selling artworks, it got to a point where I felt like "I'm just making more stuff" you know, for wealthy people. So, I got the wobbles up on that, so that's always there, there's always the sense of "What's going to happen to this? I'm just making something else, we've got so much stuff already". When you're making an installation and its only lasting for a very short period of time, that's an even bigger problem for me. It's only up for two weeks? What are you going to do then? So, that was my challenge when I applied to be part of *Sculpture by the Sea* in this year, when this was exhibited. I wanted to do an installation. I didn't want to make a nice shiny thing that someone could buy, but I wanted to make sure that I wasn't just left with this thing.

So, this previous year I've been building a new studio and office for my wife, so this, all this has gone straight into the studio. So I thought "Right I've got this idea, I'd like to make an artwork that's a metaphor for working with nature, so this wall was made to fit and follow the branch. It was this beautiful branch that came out and snaked kind of horizontally and I mapped it all out and built this wall so its under the pathway of the branch, without touching it all, so trying to be a metaphor to working with nature, what you've got, rather than fighting against it or imposing.

Yeah, so the clincher for me was, "Yeah, right, okay, so that's the materials I can use for my studio." And so yeah, it got taken down, I took it home and then only about six months ago it got all dismantled and put into the walls of the new building.

Meri Fatin: That's fantastic. Thank you so much. I think rather than talking about wrapped trees that we can't see, what is your Instagram handle, because people can go and have a look at your Instagram?

Peter Hill: Peter Hill Artist.

Meri Fatin: Peter Hill Artist. So, one of the things that you raise that I think is super interesting, because I talked to Mags about this as well, was when you were talking about the importance of local knowledge and people staying, is that you are actually the only person on the panel who is from here. And Mags, do you remember what you said to me about the way your friend had described learning...

Mags Webster: Yeah, learning a second landscape?

Meri Fatin: So, I'd love to hear you talk about that, learning this second landscape because Tineke, in your address out there, you were rapturous about what we have in Western Australia, for example. Tell us about the contrast, I guess is what I'm interested in, the contrast between here and where else you've been in the world, and remind us of why it's so special and why you want to tell that story through your art.

Tineke Van der Eecken: I mean, I come from a very flat country. There's only clay and sand in Belgium, and you can cycle. You never have to go uphill because there are no hills, it's just flat and we like it that way. And some of the land has been claimed over water because people wanted more land, so it's a very different physical area. I always felt the skies are low and it feels a bit claustrophobic, so I actually really wanted to venture out.

And I've lived in Burundi and in Africa, and I lived and worked in Zambia for eight years, so before coming to Australia I'd actually sort of met nature in many different forms. And I mean the Eastern, Central Africa, Southern Africa is just amazing, the nature there, and I fell in love with nature in a way that I hadn't fallen in love with nature in my own country. And I think I took that love for my own country. And I think I took that love for nature with a hunger when we left Africa, and then, ended here, because my husband, a geologist, wanted to do his PhD here and he was invited to be part of a team. So, we arrived in Perth, and everything I knew was irrelevant. And there was something... there was a completely new country, and I sensed it was going to overwhelm me, so I just had to learn it and, yeah, learning a new landscape, and do it step by step.

The children were small when we arrived, and we did a lot of camping, we've been...I always had the feeling, I don't need to see the rest of Australia, Western Australia is quite enough. But just learn it bit by bit, and there's so much variation in it, and the layers of it, the landscape, the waters, the sky, the trees. So, I'm learning a different language, but it's only one of a number of languages I've been trying to appreciate. But this is a big one.

Meri Fatin: Yeah. Is that how you felt Mags, the contrast, when you came here?

Mags Webster: Oh, gosh, it was...Yeah. I think I'm still grappling with it. I'm still getting used to it.

I grew up a country kid, and the vernacular of the names that we gave for trees there is so deeply-ingrained in me that, if you take some of my skin off, you'll find oak underneath. You won't find eucalyptus. You're never going to find that.

I feel like I'm, every day, still trying to understand where it is that I am. And I've been really lucky with some of the work that I've done, I've been able to spend quite a bit of time in the Pilbara. In some ways, when you're in a space like Karijini, or on the coast up around by Dampier, that's when the... I'm struggling for words. Hey, what a good poet I am.

The enormity, in so many different ways, the enormity, it's not just the scale of the landscape, the scale of the horizon, the intensity of the light. What happens to it when the sun goes down, and these escarpments are sort of, they go into a different color altogether. I don't think I'm ever going to be able to get used to that, really.

And I'm cool, I'm cool about that, because, hopefully, it's going to keep me looking and paying attention and marveling at this place that I, right from when I was in primary school and we had to draw maps freehand, I don't know whether anybody ever had to do that back in the day. We had atlases, back in the day. And Australia was the first country I had to draw. And from then on, I don't know what happened, but it was like fascination with Australia.

Never dreamed I'd ever be able to come to live here, let alone, be a citizen here. Weird how life...Be careful what you wish for, you know? Weird how life turns out, and here I am and, yeah, I don't know, if that's not destiny, I don't know what is, really.

Meri Fatin: Yeah.

Mags Webster: This is my home. I don't know that I belong here, but it's my home, it's my choice. It's given me so many incredible opportunities and so many incredible encounters with amazing people, doing amazing things that, yeah, the UK is, it's there, and as I say, it's oak underneath the skin, but, yeah, I've been really lucky to have a different experience.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah.

Meri Fatin: And Lynn, because you were really impacted by, we sort of talked about this, but not properly earlier on, because you came to Albany as an exchange student age 16.

Lynn MacLaren: Yeah.

Meri Fatin: Which is when you had the camera, and you would...yeah. But it really profoundly affected you, didn't it?

Lynn MacLaren: Yeah. Yeah. I had that moment in life where you do get that sense of belonging, and I was...Eerily, it was the rock right behind where I live now. It was so weird, but I was very blessed to have a rotary club that took me out, and it gave me lots of different experiences. There was some that really enjoyed wildflowers, so I went out and learned about wildflowers.

I learned...they sent me up to the Pilbara. They were just great, 12 months of just magic. But the experience that changed me, and the why I'm here today, is I was

walking in the bush and there was a granite outcrop surrounded by the trees of Albany. So, it's quite a mixture of trees. The palette is, the granite is gray, and then, the wood of the trees, all these different browns. And then, you get all these different greens, and then, you get this beautiful blue of the water, because you're up high enough to see out to King George Sound.

And then, the sky was just so, and the quality of light in the southern hemisphere is different from the northern hemisphere. And as soon as you...it's just like, what's going on? It's like you're in a sci-fi movie.

Mags Webster: Yeah.

Lynn MacLaren: Because the light is different.

Speaker 5 (Audience): So, is it darker, is it light? What is it?

Lynn MacLaren: It's just a different quality of color. It's a bluer, I think. Is it bluer, or greener or...

Peter Hill: It's sharper. Sharper.

Lynn MacLaren: Someone who understands color.

Mags Webster: It's sharper. It's almost like a sort of cartoon quality, it's almost a little bit unbelievable.

Lynn MacLaren: Hyperized. Hyperized.

Peter Hill: Yeah.

Mags Webster: You kind of almost like you feel like you can reach out and touch it. Whereas, in the northern hemisphere, there is a...well, it's... not being gray.

Lynn MacLaren: The soft... Yeah.

Peter Hill: It's soft.

Lynn MacLaren: Softer.

Mags Webster: It is softer.

Lynn MacLaren: So, anyway, the quality of life...Anyway, I had that sense, and I did feel I belonged. I felt this was my place, and I was at home. And then, I had to go home of course, after that, because I was 16. And I went home and I was like, okay, I'm back. It's not quite right here.

Mags Webster: Yeah.

Lynn MacLaren: And I was in a desert, a Southern California desert, the Mojave Desert. Couldn't be any different. Nowhere near water, and very light colored sand, mountains, blue mountain. So, the palette was totally different, it was like tan and soft blue. It wasn't the richness of the southwest.

So, anyway, I had that sense of belonging and I knew I had to come back. And it took me a couple of years before I figured out how, and came back. And then, I get stuck in Perth, because all my friends my age were in Perth, and jobs were in Perth at that time. Albany was still a really small country town, there wasn't a place for a young adult really, I couldn't find a way to get back.

But when I was, a couple of years ago, I got back there. And now, I live in Albany and I feel I belong, and I'm trying to give back. And that's why I'm serving on council if they'll keep me. So, I'm trying to just give back to this...I don't understand the connection, but I think it's Meneng, it is a thing about the...I felt it and I'm blessed to have felt it. Because I grew up in an Air Force family, and we moved every four years. So, I know how to appreciate where you are, but I didn't ever feel that sense of belonging.

Meri Fatin: Oh, it's so beautiful.

Speaker 5 (Audience): It's funny, I've gotten the opposite, really. I mean, I came out when I was about eight or nine, even nine, from Poland. And the few times I've been back, I just love the skies. I almost feel that's my home, rather than Australia. Although I've been very happy here. So, it's interesting.

Meri Fatin: Yeah, it's interesting to explore, isn't it?

Mags Webster: It's interesting.

Meri Fatin: Perfectly-timed, because I was just going to invite everyone to see if there was anything that anyone would like to contribute or ask in the time that we have left. I have tons more questions, but-

Speaker 6 (Audience): The experience for me is, we came out when I was five years old. And I love the place. This is just, and this is home. If I ever go overseas, I can't wait to get back.

Meri Fatin: Where did you come from?

Speaker 6 (Audience): England, from Lincolnshire. And even traveling over east, that flight coming home and getting off the plane and knowing that I'm back here, there's something very different about the state than the rest of the country. It's just...And funnily enough, not really had much of a wish to go home to England, because this is my home now. That's where I was born, that's where most of my family are, but this is where I live, and this is where my heart is.

Meri Fatin: There's something magic about, when you get off or even when you are landing in Perth, at Perth airport, and the amount of sky there is all of a sudden, it's quite remarkable, isn't it?

Speaker 6 (Audience): Yeah. And I call the skies here, sometimes, they're like Simpson skies. It's that blue with the clouds, and it's something that exists here. And when you were talking about that cartoon feel, that's exactly what it is.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Oh, the Simpsons.

Mags Webster: Yeah. Yeah.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Is that an Australian artist?

Mags Webster: Yeah.

Speaker 6 (Audience): No, no, no. Simpsons, the artist.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah. I get it. I got it. I got it.

Speaker 7 (Audience): So, as an Indigenous person, if I got you guys an artist, if I was looking at creating an art group, what would all of you do if I invited you to paint your vision of connection to country?

Meri Fatin: Oh.

Peter Hill: I'd...

Speaker 7 (Audience): Yeah. It's a possibility, but I have, well, we are going start in women's art particularly to have that healing space with women at some point. So, maybe, that's invitation for people to think about. Even if you do it at home, what is your connection to country?

Meri Fatin: Yeah. Nice. Can you talk about your connection to country?

Speaker 7 (Audience): It's very, very long. Pretty much, I was a foster kid, six of months age and grew up in Busselton. My foster family are English. Through variety of reasons, I moved down here to live with family, and we kind of have, let's say an internal clash because of how I've grown up.

So, this is my first four months properly down on country. I was born in Gnowangerup, and yeah, I'm just loving it down here. There are places like...I'm staying out with very good friends in Broomehill, and yeah, I just took the dogs out, saw the white gums and that was it. Yeah, because Broomehill is really close to Gnowangerup, which is like 10 more kilometres, or 20 more kilometres which is where I was born, and I'm painting stuff that I would never have painted, and I think it's because I'm down in the country, a place to where I was born.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Interesting.

Speaker 6 (Audience): It's interesting you talk about connection to country, because when I was looking at moving down here, I would come through Williams, and then I'd take the turn off and go out through the road to Piesseville. And there was a section of road, and there was rocky outcrops with trees on top. And I just felt this great sense of connection.

And I was playing around on Google one day and I went back to look at Lincolnshire. And I was looking at photos and I suddenly went, oh, that's, actually, almost the same formations from where I come from that are here. And it's so funny that I ended up here, because it's a connection here that belongs to my homeland as well. Does that make sense?

Speaker 7 (Audience): Yeah.

Speaker 6 (Audience): Yeah. It really blew me away when I first figured it out. I was like mm, okay, wasn't what I expected.

Speaker 4 (Audience): It's funny. My connection is in the bush. I wasn't born anywhere near the bush. I was born in Sydney. And definitely, when I go home...I say go home to Sydney, that's where all my extended family are. And I don't get over there very often, because various reasons. But when I go back and connect with the family, that's a lovely thing, but that's different to my connection to the land. So I've been in WA since I was eight, and someone said that...was it you that said your dad was in the Air force? So you moved around? My dad was in the army, so we have the same experience.

So, trying to find a connection when you're being moved around is really, really hard. And I found that I was always a square pin trying to be fitted into a round hole. And where I fitted well was in the bush. So, I'm always out walking the land and I'm always caring for kangaroos, or whatever. That's just my thing.

But that's where I heal, it's about a healing thing, there's no conflict. And there's a connection that only positive comes from it. It doesn't involve money, it doesn't involve ownership. It's just a spiritual thing, I think. And most of my artwork that I would do, somehow, connects to the land.

But it's not my land, land I feel privileged to be able to walk on. And I think that there's an innate sense of looking after it for me, so I think that drives the activism. I don't know if I'm an activist, but I probably am. I don't classify myself, but I'm not backwards and coming forwards either, in terms of those sorts of issues.

Peter Hill: I think that being in the bush when you're out walking, for me, I find that it's much easier to expand your sense of time, so that you're thinking beyond your life. That you can think long in the past and in the future.

It's slowing down time enough to get out of the trap that we get caught in, thinking about today and next week, and this short-term kind of thinking. Whereas, thinking in generations and generations of people.



Meri Fatin: Yeah. How interesting that a panel discussion about art and the environment is dovetailed into a conversation about belonging and connection to country.

Speaker 6 (Audience): Well, it's all part of the circle, isn't it? It is all connected. We're all connected.

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah. And even though most of us in this room are, actually, people who've migrated from somewhere else, it's that respect and awareness that it's not the country that we have cared for all these years, and our ancestors may not have done the right thing to it, but to be aware, now, today, on how best we walk here and how we learn from it, and how we have conversations. And maybe, respectfully make artwork that honors it. Yeah.

Meri Fatin: Thank you, Tineke. I wondered whether you would like to say anything by way of wrapping up the conversation and inviting people to your workshop tomorrow before we finish today.

Tineke Van der Eecken: I think for, all over the world, in every culture, people sit down and make, and tell and share stories, and are not afraid to show their vulnerabilities in that. I love sitting down and making with people. So, I invite everyone who hasn't booked yet, there's still place. It's like there's a capacity number. But to make...I'm inviting people to crochet with copper wire.

And the lovely thing about, this is kind of recycled copper wire. It's the end of a coil that's been used for rewiring engines. You can find those kind of wirings and rewirings and recycle some copper wire and start making there. But it's really lovely to create things that you find on your walks. And this is how I make a lot of art, just walking and finding things.

And maybe, there's something that speaks to you and that you want to wear on your body, or you want to gift it to somebody and you make it wearable in copper wire. So, that's what we're doing in *Wearable Treasures*.

Meri Fatin: That's tomorrow morning?

Tineke Van der Eecken: Yeah. That's tomorrow at 10:00. Yes. Two hours. Yeah.

Meri Fatin: Thank you all so much for this conversation, and thanks everyone for sticking around for it, and for Riley for being the most incredible AV person, and James for making this an incredible exhibition.

Please, thank Dr. Mags Webster, Peter Hill, Tineke Van der Eecken and Lynn MacLaren.

Tineke Van der Eecken: And may I thank you, Meri...

Meri Fatin: Oh, thank you very much.

Tineke Van der Eecken: ...for facilitating...

Meri Fatin: Thank you.