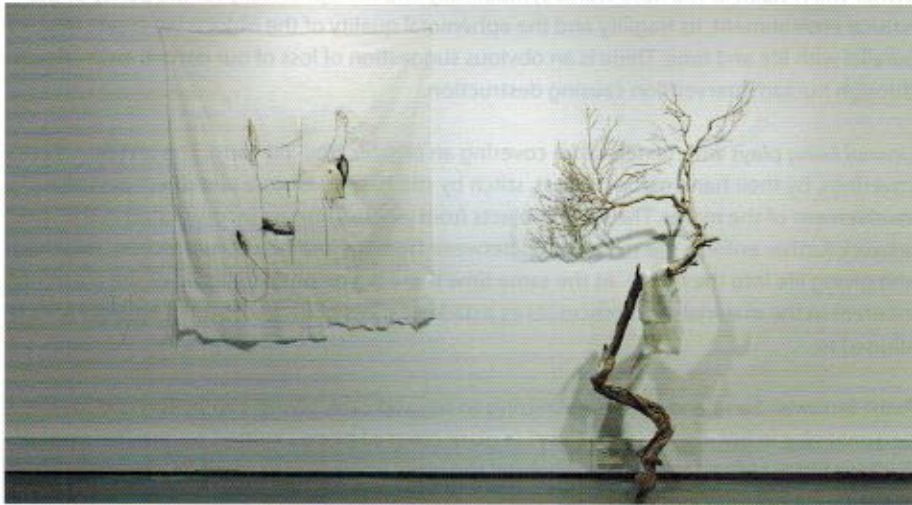


MATERIAL MATTERS

KAY S LAWRENCE

Studying part time while working as an accountant, Kay Lawrence obtained a Bachelor of Fine Art with First Class Honours in 2009, with majors in Visual Culture and Sculpture & Intermedia. She then commenced a research doctorate full time and was awarded a PhD in November 2014 from Griffith University. This was assessed with equal weighting for studio practice and her theoretical exegesis entitled *Material Matters: Contemporary Women's Work*. The research was based on a sustained exploration of the materiality of textile and digital mediums. Many of the works in this exhibition evolved from artist residencies at Geidai University, Tokyo; Red Gate Gallery in Beijing; Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, Peel Island; Crane Arts, Philadelphia; Sandavinci School of Art and Design in Aimoto Japan and Contemporary Yunnan in Kunming, China. Valerie Kirk, Head of Textiles at ANU was one of her PhD assessors and provided the following written review of the works in 'Material Matters' shown at Webb Gallery, Queensland College of Art, Brisbane in November 2014.



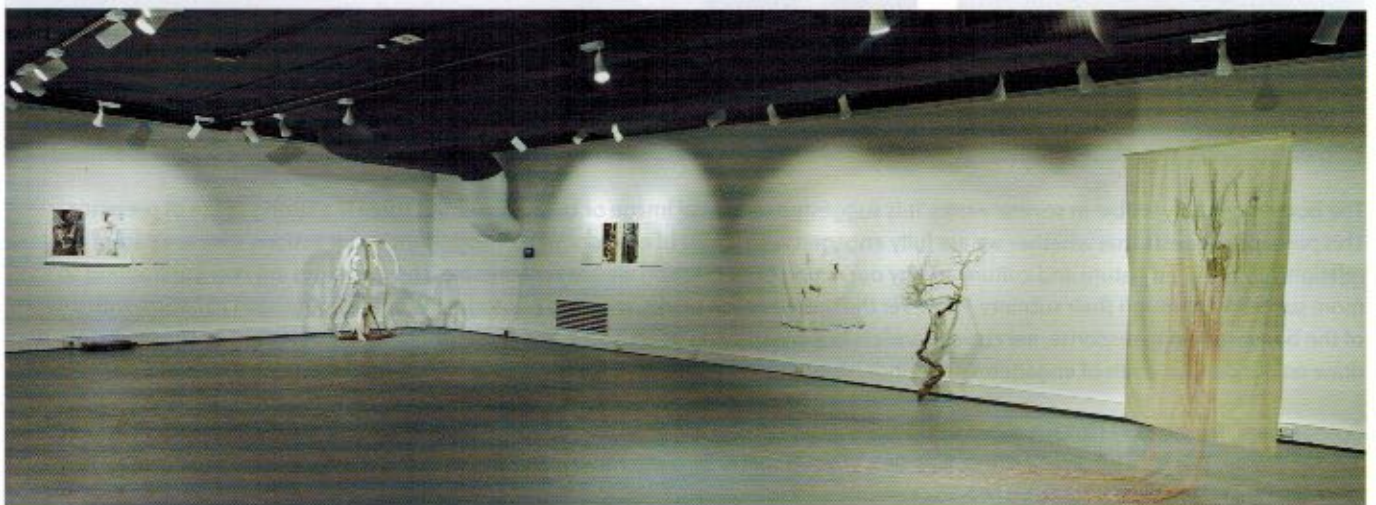
As an artist, Kay S Lawrence engages with the history of "Women's Work" and Bachelard's theory that proposed space is not merely a container of objects, but where human perception resides, and our memories inform the interpretation of space.

Lawrence uses art, textiles and photography to talk about personal experiences, interaction with environment and people. Her 2014 exhibition, *Material Matters* demonstrated her interdisciplinary approach to art practice with strong and engaging material qualities in all the works. She questions the forms of the objects and environments that surround us, blurring the boundaries between known and unknown, physical and spiritual, old and new technologies.

Found objects, hand-made textiles and digital photography are presented as individual artworks or come together as installations.

Entering the gallery I see a quiet installation in a neutral palette – disparate mediums with organic qualities, a sense of open-endedness (no beginning and no end), movement suggested through line, form and fleeting image. There is a strong sense of orchestration of objects/installations within the gallery and as I move through the space I experience different relationships from looking closely, having an overall visual sense and experiencing the tactile nature of the work.

There is a pared back quality with references to illusive aspects of light and shadow, figure in motion and growth of natural forms. This demonstrates Lawrence's concerns with fractures and dislocations of time/space continuum and the fragile and ephemeral nature of both life and time. She has the ability to work beyond the first most obvious visual forms to develop a more personal and refined approach to these themes which is suggestive rather than overtly stated. ▶





The three photographs *Bound* capture the body in motion – merging with the environment through light/reflection/shadow but also standing out and separate through the contrast of organic, flowing, wrapped and twisted fabric and the structure of the building/geometric shadow forms. The fabric suggests a formal or oriental robe, but is ambiguous in its type of clothing suggesting non-specific cultural or historical dress. The photographs are intriguing in their sense of mystery around time, space and the body and invite the viewer to question and look further.

(Wo) mangrove most closely reflects the topics of environment and “women’s work” (the history of women’s involvement in handicraft, needlework in particular). It is a minimal combination of two objects – the driftwood and a simple piece of white knitting. The knit looks like a scarf that has been lost, picked up and hung on a tree in the hope that the owner will reclaim it. The fibre works symbolically and metaphorically for the purity of the natural environment, its fragility and the ephemeral quality of the objects we create in parallel with life and time. There is an obvious suggestion of loss of our natural environment through human intervention causing destruction.

Liminal Being plays with textile tubes covering an organic tree-like form. The textile coverings, by their hand made process, stitch by stitch, suggest care and direct personal involvement of the maker. The found objects from wood/furniture incorporated in the artwork further enforce the relationship between humans and nature, protection, recycling and giving life into the future. At the same time there is a recontextualising of the meanings inherent in the materials and processes as a darker aspect of degradation of environment is alluded to.

Artist Bronwen Sandland also used knitting to suggest care, giving, protection and personalising in her work “House Cosy”, (a giant cover of pieced knitted squares for a public housing block of flats) but also highlighted the problematic issues of urban planning, government housing and social policy

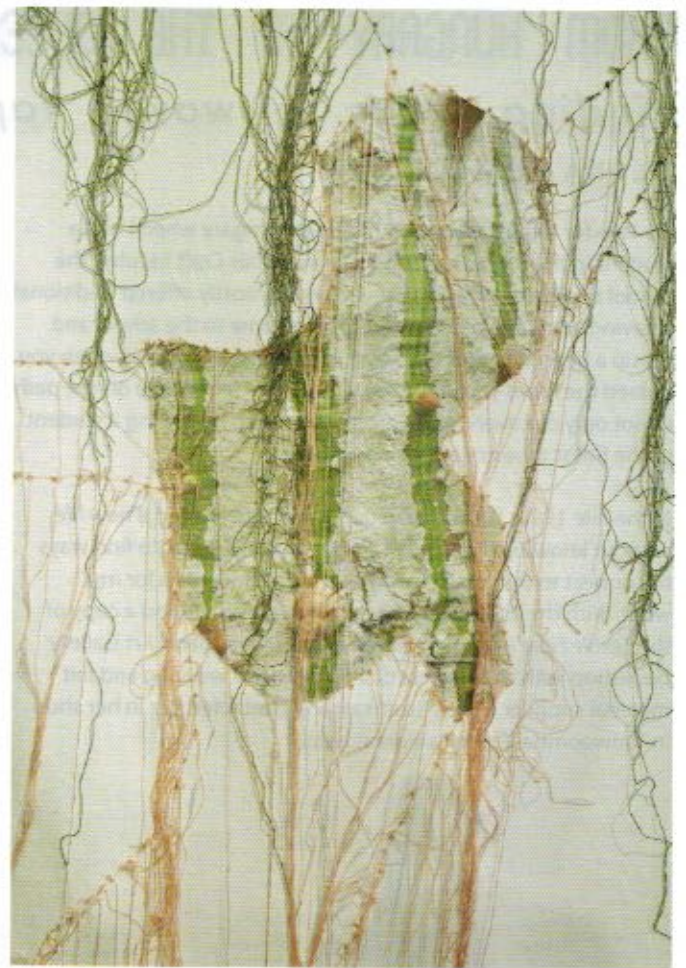
<http://www.artlink.com.au/articles/2438/bronwen-sandland-housecosy/>

More recently the “yarn bombing” movement led by Magda Sayeg confronted the idea of passive “women’s work” through active political and social disruption. The works produced were tactile and colourful eliciting an immediate warm and fuzzy response but questioning gender issues in relation to public space, material possessions and communal urban spaces.



The body is not fully visible in several works. It is suggested by partial image or by shadows, but there is a strong sense of presence. This perhaps suggests that whether we are fully engaged with issues of environment or cognisant in our actions – we are part of the relationship between nature and culture and by our action or non-action we are accountable. The messages are non-confronting so more successful through their subtlety. However the more explicit works, showing photographs of the figure seen in nature with images of the body worked in response, are clever parallels but unsatisfying as artworks. The message is clear in an instant so the work does not draw on our deeper levels of engagement or understanding.

Opposite page, *Re/cology #1* (2012) is shown with *(Wo)mangrove* (2014) – and on its own. Bottom of page, Webb Gallery installation view. Photo credits: Joachim Froese. This page left, *Bound* (2014), each 94 x 57cm. At right is *Separation Anxiety* 55 x 84cm – both works comprise of digital images on photorag, Photo credits: Kay S Lawrence.



Although some images are cropped and framed in particular ways there is a sense that the borders are merely part of the medium... the edge of a photograph, the sides of a screen.... In most cases the images could extend beyond the edges as threads spill over the raw edge of the cloth; organic forms could continue to grow beyond the point reached in the work presented. These qualities relate to aspects of the natural world and perhaps the ongoing and never-ending nature of environmental problems.

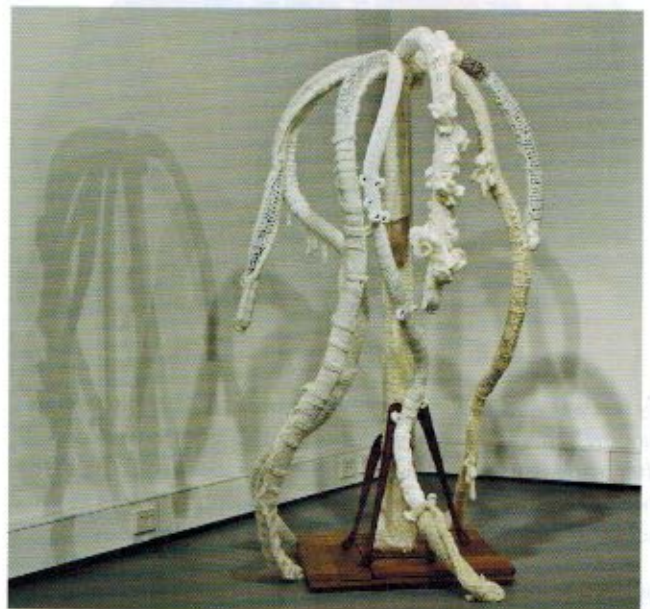
Throughout the work there are fragile qualities of fine silk threads, tiny branches on the found tree form, unidentifiable sounds, fleeting moving images. These qualities accentuate the themes in the work and the personal interpretation. They create tensions and questions about what is real and tangible and what could be a parallel world that operates without physical shape or form just beyond our perceptions.

Quietly working on a level of suggestion with a sense of time, rhythm, repetition, investment and ongoing dialogue, Lawrence's work encourages engagement. It is an optimistic personal view set up against more dominant, aggressive, wealth-producing ideals. But art is about presenting alternatives and making people stop and think through presenting different points of view. Kay S Lawrence searches for the transformative elements among the ordinary and technologically sophisticated materials and techniques. She creates reflections on the contemporary world around her, embodying her experiences. The work touches us individually, changes our perspectives and builds strength in alternative ways of thinking about more inter-related relationships between us and our environment. □

Valerie Kirk, Head of Textiles, ANU School of Art

Kay S Lawrence has had an active history of exhibiting both within Australia and internationally. During April of this year she commenced a residency at ANU, Canberra. Her overseas residencies will soon include Iceland (Aug/Sept 2015).

<http://www.kaylawrence.net/portfolio/material-matters/>
www.kaylawrence.net



Top of page, *Engagement With #2* (2011-2014), with detail: digital image on cotton, cotton embroidery; 230 x 120 x 203cm. Above, *Liminal Being* (2014): wood, metal, Styrofoam, rubber, wire, wool, cotton, acrylic yarns, light, shadows; 205 x 105 x 105cm. Knitting, crochet, sewing. Photo credits: Joachim Froese.