

Bianca Hester

Lithic Bodies

Clifton School of Arts
12 October – 27 October 2024

UNSW Galleries
27 September – 24 November 2024

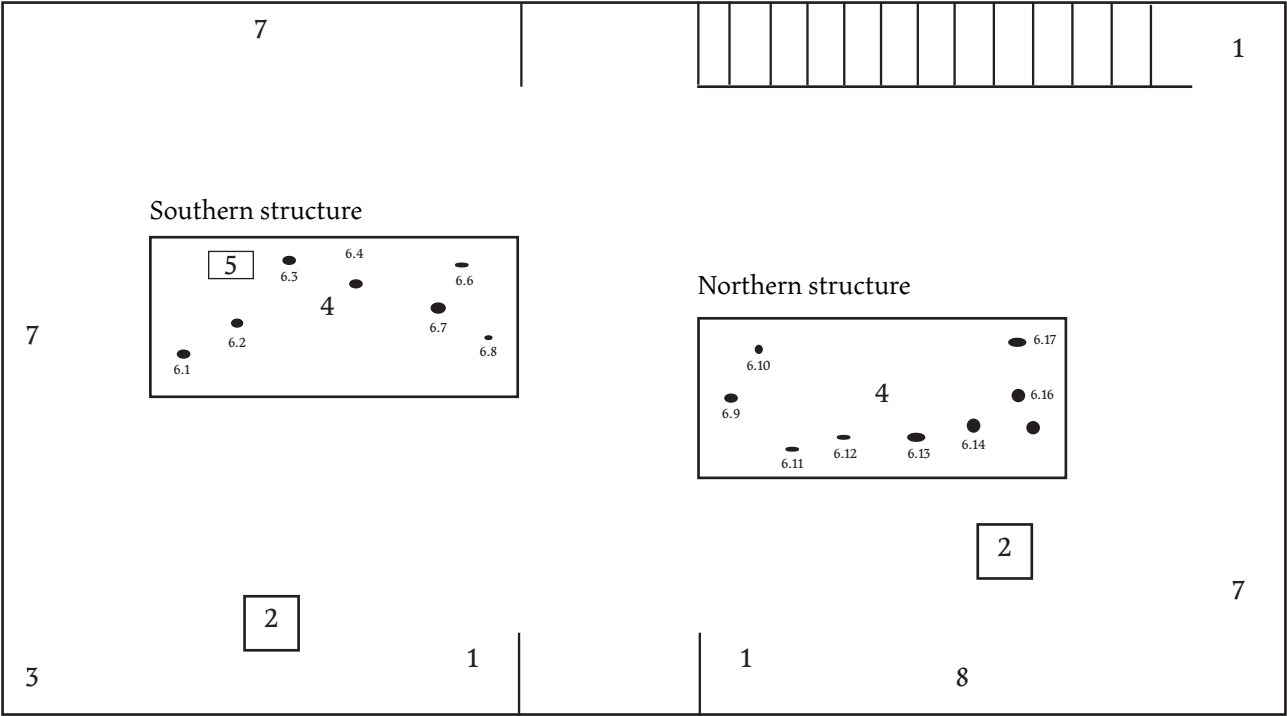
Bianca Hester's new body of work spans objects, video, text, walking, and conversation, and stems from her research on the Permian-Triassic 'extinction line' visible along the Illawarra escarpment. This line in the strata marks the greatest mass extinction event in Earth's history around 252 million years ago, and bears witness to climate change from the perspective of deep time.

In 'Lithic Bodies', this line becomes a material and conceptual loop, represented through fragmented impressions of surfaces, including fossilised leaves, coalified wood, and traces of human pollution, which reappear as bronze-cast objects, frottage screenprints, photographic images, and a vast filmic study of the extinction line. The project developed from fieldwork at multiple locations on Dharawal Country where the ocean meets the land, as well as palaeobotanical collections at the Australian Museum. Responding to the location's temporality and material entanglements which maps the flow of humans, animals, ideas, and social institutions, Hester's process also involves collaborating with specialists from the fields of social geography, geology, horticulture, and Indigenous knowledge.

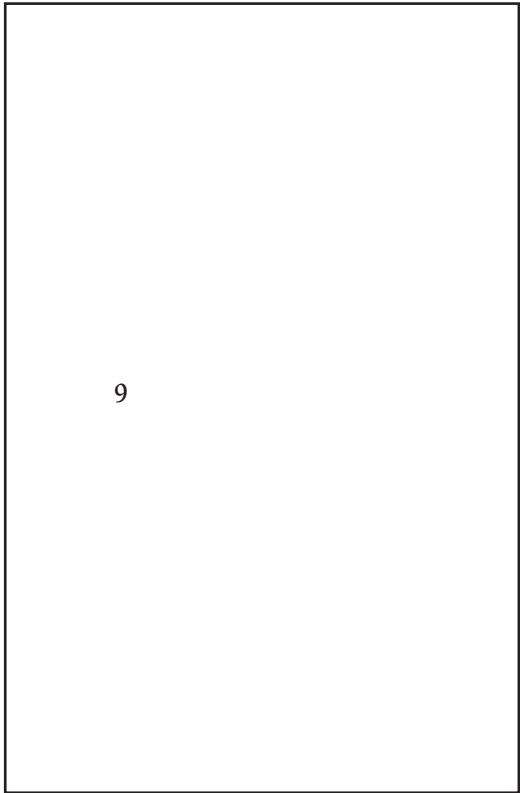
'Lithic Bodies' invites viewers to attune to the geologic underpinnings of place and recognise our indebtedness to the non-human, while also reminding us of the ongoing consequences of colonial inheritance and resource extraction. Place-based walks and panel discussions accompany the project, and a related exhibition and programming series is held at UNSW Galleries between 27 September and 24 November, 2024.

Curated by Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris

Upstairs



Downstairs



1. Ongoing archive of residues and material afterlives, 2024

Photographic prints on Baryta Photographique II Matt paper, mounted on di-bond aluminium composite. Each an edition of 6

Southern section of room from left to right:

1.1. Material conglomerate (post-mine operations), 2024

1.2. Retaining wall adjacent to the decommissioned Jetty colliery at Clifton, situated beneath the Bulli coal seam and the extinction line, 2024

Northern section of room from left to right:

1.3. Fragment of fossilised *Glossopteris* wood (trunk), a Permian era tree which dominated the Gondwanan ecosystem and from which the Illawarra coal measures were produced over millenia. Found in a railway embankments, Figtree NSW, 1988. Held in the Palaeobotanical collections of the Australian Museum, 2024

1.4. Photograph of a photograph of a *Dicroidium Callipteroides* fossil from the Triassic geological period found in the roof shales of the Bulli coal seam, encountered in the palaeobotanical collection at the Australian Museum. This now extinct plant survived the greatest mass extinction in Earth's history at the Permian-Triassic boundary and thrived in greenhouse conditions marked by exceptionally high concentrations of carbon dioxide. These conditions are expressed in the shape of the plants' small stoma (pores) in the epidermis of its stems and leaves. The stoma controls the rate of gas exchange between the body of the plant and its specific atmosphere in the process of transpiration.

The original photograph was donated to the Australian Museum by C.A Sussmilch in 1966.

Acknowledgements: Dr Matthew McCurry (NSW Senior Research Scientist and Scientific Officer, Curator, Palaeontology, Australian Museum), Dr Patrick Smith (Technical Officer, Australian Museum), Dr Tara Djokic (Scientific Officer, Palaeontology, Geosciences and Archaeology, Australian Museum), Graham McLean (Research Associate, Palaeontology, Australian Museum)

Western section of room above the stairs - presented on galvanized mesh

1.5. Remnant of Hawkesbury Sandstone, landslipped from the escarpment, adjacent the pylons beneath the Southern section of the Seacliff bridge, 2024.

"Think of a river gone. A river so immense that it's practically unthinkable. So immense that it constitutes not one, but many rivers in time, flowing for millenia. The waters carried terrestrial loads of silica from rocks formed 500–700 million years ago [9] that were rent down into billions of particles which were mobilised in the flows of a 'braided fluvial system,' [10] and/or 'river of sand' along the Eastern Gondwanan Paleocoast [11], and/or with 'periodic mega floods,' [12] and/or as a 'Triassic paleocurrent from Gondwanan Transantarctic Mountains as a dynamic fluvial megacycle.' [13] At this time, Australia was connected to Antarctica as the supercontinent of Gondwana. As the river moved, the velocity of flow diminished in an immense delta region. The mammoth tonnage of silica-rich particles suspended and transported in the currents were released here: deposited particle by particle to accumulate, compacted through the persistent action of gravity in concert with the weight of proceeding particles to collectively become 'a widespread, lithologically consistent, massive orthoquartzite' [14] or a superbody of bedrock. This process (one of so many) occurred around 230 million years ago in the mid to late Triassic period. It is now the dominant material constituting the Sydney Basin out of which myriad assemblages have been produced, by the labour of so many interlocking forces. The long extinct river haunts every particle of the basin: this fossilised floodplain.

Excerpt taken from Hester, B. *Sandstone. Lost Rocks Series, A Published Event*, Hobart, 2020. pp.17-18

Citations:

9. Tim Flannery, *The Birth of Sydney* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999), 9.
10. Gil Jones, *Wasteland, Wilderness, Wonderland: Getting to Know Sydney's Sandstone Country* (Lawson, NSW: Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, 2013), 56–58.
11. J.J.Veevers, 'Beach sand of SE Australia traced by zircons ages through Ordovician turbidites and S-type granites of the Lachlan Orogen to Africa/Antarctica: a review', *Australian Journal of Earth Sciences*, 62, no. 4, (June 2015): 385–408, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08120099.1053985>
12. PJ Conaghan and JG Jones, 'The Hawkesbury Sandstone and the Brahmaputra: a Depositional Model for Continental Sheet Sandstones', *Journal of the Geological Society of Australia* 22, no. 3 (1975): 275–283.
13. PJ Conaghan et al, 'A dynamic fluvial model for the Sydney Basin', *Journal of the Geological Society of Australia* 29, (1982): 55–70.
14. 'V The Sydney Basin,' *Journal of the Geological Society of Australia* 16, no. 1 (1 January 1969): 311–455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14400956908527968>. p.136.

2. Fragments of plant life from both sides of the extinction boundary, summoned by the ground, 2022-2024 (vertical series)

Patinated bronze with surface impressions of plant life from geologic periods including the Permian, Triassic, and Holocene, galvanised steel, neodymium magnets, concrete footings

3. Slice in living time, 2024

Enlarged photo on transparent vinyl, laminated in glass.

The photo is from a thin section cut from a fossil of *Dadoxylon Farleyense*, a Permian era plant from the forests of Gondwana, held in the palaeobotanical collection of the Australian Museum, 2022

Acknowledgements: Photograph by Dr Patrick Smith (Technical Officer, Australian Museum)

4. Replaced particle by particle through water's unrelenting movement towards the lowest reaches of the ground, 2024

Polymerised gypsum, reclaimed granulated blast furnace aggregate, sand, scrim, powdercoated steel support

The fossilised log from which this sculpture was made, was once a part of the Permian era *Glossopteris* forest community of Gondwana which existed between 299–250 million years ago, prior to the Permian-Triassic mass extinction event. Over immense time scales and through geologic processes, the biologic materiality of the *Glossopteris* forests transformed into the Illawarra coal measures. The multiple seams which comprise these coal measures are exposed in the strata of the Illawarra escarpment. They are also obscured beneath the Sydney Basin and extend to the Newcastle region, and are presently being mined for thermal coal.

The tree was washed down a river system and silicified over time, into the current fossilised formation that endures today at the intertidal zone in Clifton, NSW. It is a fully intact remnant of the Gondwanan forests. The river system which mobilised it, is also visible in fossilised form at the same location as the log.

Acknowledgements: The production of this sculpture involves ongoing fieldwork and consultation across multiple disciplines

since 2022. The support and advice of the following people is greatly appreciated: Peter Hewitt (Jerrinja Yuin educator and artist, Senior Lecturer in Aboriginal Education University of Wollongong), Uncle Peter Button (Wollongong Aboriginal Male Elder of the Year 2022, co-founding member and caretaker of the embassy at Sandon Point and the current chair of the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council), Associate Professor Solomon Buckman (School of Earth, Atmospheric and Life Sciences, University of Wollongong), Professor Guang Shi (University of Wollongong), Associate Professor Brian Jones (University Fellow, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Life Sciences, University of Wollongong), Ian Hibble (technical support with on-site casting), Izak Schoon (studio and field-work support), Anita Johnson (field-work support), Associate Professor Lizzie Muller (fieldwork support), Dr Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris (curatorial support)

5. Carbon afterlives, 2024

Patinated bronze plates, seawater

Residues of fossilised charcoal resulting from a Permian era wildfire in the *Glossopteris* forests of Gondwana

Acknowledgements: Associate Professor Brian Jones (University Fellow, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Life Sciences, University of Wollongong)

6. Fragments of plant life from both sides of the extinction boundary, summoned by the ground, 2022-2024 (horizontal series)

Patinated bronze with surface impressions of plant life from geologic periods including the Permian, Triassic, and Holocene, galvanised steel, neodymium magnets, concrete footing

Represented on the gallery map as 

Series of patinated black bronze objects presented on steel structure on the Southern side of the gallery space (left to right)

6.1. Impression of Hawkesbury Sandstone, Tallawoladah/The Rocks, Gadigal Land, Sydney

6.2. Impression of a coalified wood fragment present at the Bellambi rock platform of the Permian era Pheasants Nest Formation, part of the Illawarra Coal Measures, Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.3. Impression of *Schizoneura Gondwanensis* leaves paired with impression of coalified wood present at the intertidal zone at Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.4. Impression of a footprint of *Dicynodontipus Bellambiensis* (natural mould) found in situ in the Bellambi Colliery paired with impression of coalified wood present at the intertidal zone at Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.5. Impression of a fragment of coalified wood present at the Bellambi rock platform of the Permian era Pheasants Nest Formation, part of the Illawarra Coal Measures, on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.6. Impression of the Tongarra coal seam present at the intertidal zone in Austinmer, part of the Illawarra Coal Measures, on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.7. Impression of the bark of a Coastal Banksia tree, washed down the embankment at the Scarborough-Wombarra SLSC during the floods in the Illawarra in April 2024, paired with impression of a fossil of *Neocalamites* (Lower Triassic, Newcastle area, NSW, 1930)

6.8. Impression of a *Glossopteris* leaf fossil found in the artist's garden in 2019, on Permian era ground in West Wollongong, paired with the impression of the Bulli coal seam, at the intertidal zone in Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

Series of patinated black bronze objects presented on steel structure on the Northern side of the gallery space (left to right)

6.9. Impressions of *Schizoneura Gondwanensis* (Lower Triassic, Birthday Shaft, Balmain, 1902) paired with *Glossopteris* leaf fossils (Upper Permian, NSW, n.d.)

6.10. Impressions of *Kurtzia Cacheutensis complex* (Middle Permian, Coalmine Quarry Nymboida NSW, 2010) paired with *Austroglossa Walkomii* (Late Permian, Upper Illawarra Coal Measures, NSW, n.d.)

6.11. Impression of a fragment of coalified wood present at the rock falls at the intertidal zone in Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.12. Impression of a fragment of coalified wood present at the Bellambi rock platform of the Permian era Pheasants Nest Formation, part of the Illawarra Coal Measures, on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.13. Impression of *Equisetalean* stems (Lower Triassic, Narabeen Group, North of Newport Beach, NSW, 1979)

6.14. Impression of Hawkesbury Sandstone, Tallawoladah/The Rocks, Gadigal Land, Sydney

6.15. Impression of *Equisetalean* stems (Lower Triassic, Narabeen Group, South of Turimetta Beach, NSW, 1979) paired with bark from a Coastal Banksia tree, washed down the embankment at the Scarborough-Wombarra SLSC during the floods in the Illawarra in April 2024

6.16. Impression of *Glossopteris* leaf fossils (Upper Permian, Newcastle, 1898), paired with impression of shale from 'the dead zone' extinction boundary present at the intertidal zone, Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal land

6.17. Impression of *Equisetalean* stems (Lower Triassic, Narabeen Group, South of Turrimetta beach, NSW, 1979) paired with an impression of a fragment of coalified wood present at the Bellambi rock platform of the Permian era Pheasants Nest Formation, part of the Illawarra Coal Measures, on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

6.18. Impressions of *Schizoneura Gondwanensis* (Lower Triassic, Birthday Shaft, Balmain, 1902) paired with impression from the Bulli coal seam (Permian era), present at the intertidal zone, Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal land

Acknowledgements: Peter Hewitt (Jerrinja Yuin educator and artist, Senior Lecturer in Aboriginal Education at University of Wollongong), Uncle Peter Button (Wollongong Aboriginal Male Elder of the Year 2022, co-founding member and caretaker of the embassy at Sandon Point and the current chair of the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council), Dr Matthew McCurry (NSW Senior Research Scientist and Scientific Officer, Curator, Palaeontology, Australian Museum), Dr Patrick Smith (Technical Officer, Australian Museum), Dr Tara Djokic (Scientific Officer, Palaeontology, Geosciences and Archaeology, Australian Museum), Graham McLean (Research Associate, Palaeontology, Australian Museum), Izak Schoon (Research Assistant)

7. Strata series, 2024

4 screenprints on 110gsm Shiramine archival paper (various inks), mounted on galvanised steel, neodymium magnets

From left to right:

7.1. Assemblage of frottage impressions developed from a Permian era river system located in the vicinity of the silicified *Glossopteris* log (see purple sculptural cast on the steel supports as reference)

7.2. Assemblage of frottage impressions developed from a Permian era river system located in the vicinity of the silicified *Glossopteris* log (see purple sculptural cast on the steel supports as reference)

7.3. Assemblage of frottage impressions developed from:

A 250 million year old silicified *Glossopteris* log situated at the intertidal zone in Scarborough NSW on Wodi Wodi Dharawal land

A Permian era river system located in the vicinity of the same silicified *Glossopteris* log

Anthropogenic residues found on location in the vicinity of the extinction boundary line present beneath the Seacliff bridge on Wodi Wod Dharawal land

7.4. Assemblage of frottage impressions including surfaces from:

The Bulli coalseam (Clifton);

A former bolt-hole embedded within a sandstone pier used to hold the 'transit circle' telescope from 1877. This was employed to determine absolute coordinates of the stars' 'correct time' according to an imperial logic, and establish the Sydney meridian (Sydney Observatory, Observatory Hill, Gadigal Land, Sydney);

The surface of the extinction line, Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land;

Coalified *Glossopteris* fragments present at Bellambi point. At low tide the coalified and silicified remains of a now-extinct *Glossopteris* forest yields to the efforts of embodied vision. A scatter of tree logs, stumps, branches, wood, charcoal, and foliage fragments is revealed across an expanse of the Pheasant's Nest Formation, at the base of the Illawarra Coal Measures. Bellambi rock platform on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land, late Permian era, 250 million years

Acknowledgements: Fieldwork consultation with Uncle Peter Button (Wollongong Aboriginal Male Elder of the Year 2022, co-founding member and caretaker of the embassy at Sandon Point and the current chair of the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land

Council), Peter Hewitt (Jerrinja Yuin educator and artist, Senior Lecturer in Aboriginal Education, University of Wollongong), screenprinting made with technical assistance from Trent Walter (Negative Press), graphic design assistance from Paul Mylecharane (Public Office)

8. Present registrations

Local beeswax rendered from the 2023-2024 season. Dimensions variable.

9. Extinction lines 2024

Two-channel HD video with sound, 5:18 minutes, looped. Audio modified from field recordings made between 2022–24, blast furnace slag from the smelting operations at the Port Kembla steelworks, transparent coloured vinyl, cast bronze sculpture.

Videography: Sammy Hawker

Sound design: Aaron Hull

AV installation: Gotaro Uematsu

10. Dust of these Domains 2020–ongoing

Script for a performance iterated over time
A4 print as PDF on demand

Performed by Bianca Hester, Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris and Astrid Lorange at UNSW Galleries, Paddington

11.00am–12.00pm Friday 8 November 2024

11.00am–12.00pm Friday 15 November 2024

A set of seventeen patinated bronze performance objects from the series *Fragments of plant life from both sides of the extinction boundary, summoned by the ground 2022–24* will be mobilised during these performance-readings. These objects are developed from impressions of the various geologies listed above and will only be presented during performances.

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A parallel exhibition and public programming series is presented at UNSW Galleries between 27 September - 24 November 2024.

A percentage of profits from future sale of the works in this exhibition will be donated to an Indigenous led non-government organisation.

Bianca Hester wishes to acknowledge collaboration, guidance, and contributions from the following people over the duration of this project:

Project and public programs curator: Dr Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris (independent curator, writer, lecturer UNSW Sydney)

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Geologic consultation: Dr Solomon Buckman (School of Earth, Atmospheric, and Life Sciences, University of Wollongong); Dr Brian Jones (University Fellow, School of Earth, Atmospheric, and Life Sciences, University of Wollongong); Dr Megan Williams (School of Earth, Atmospheric, and Life Sciences, University of Wollongong); Dr Tara Djokic (Scientific Officer, Palaeontology, Geosciences and Archaeology, Australian Museum); Geologic consultation and scientific photography: Dr Patrick Smith (Technical Officer, Australian Museum); Access to the palaeobotanical collection, Australian Museum: Dr Matthew McCurry (NSW Senior Research Scientist and Scientific Officer, Curator, Palaeontology, Australian Museum); Research assistance: Dr Graham McLean (Research Associate, Palaeontology, Australian Museum); Access and permission to reproduce light micrographs: Professor Vivi Vajda (Head of Palaeobiology, Swedish Museum of Natural History)

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