Bianca Hester
Lithic Bodies

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 Clifton School of Arts from 12–27 October 2024.

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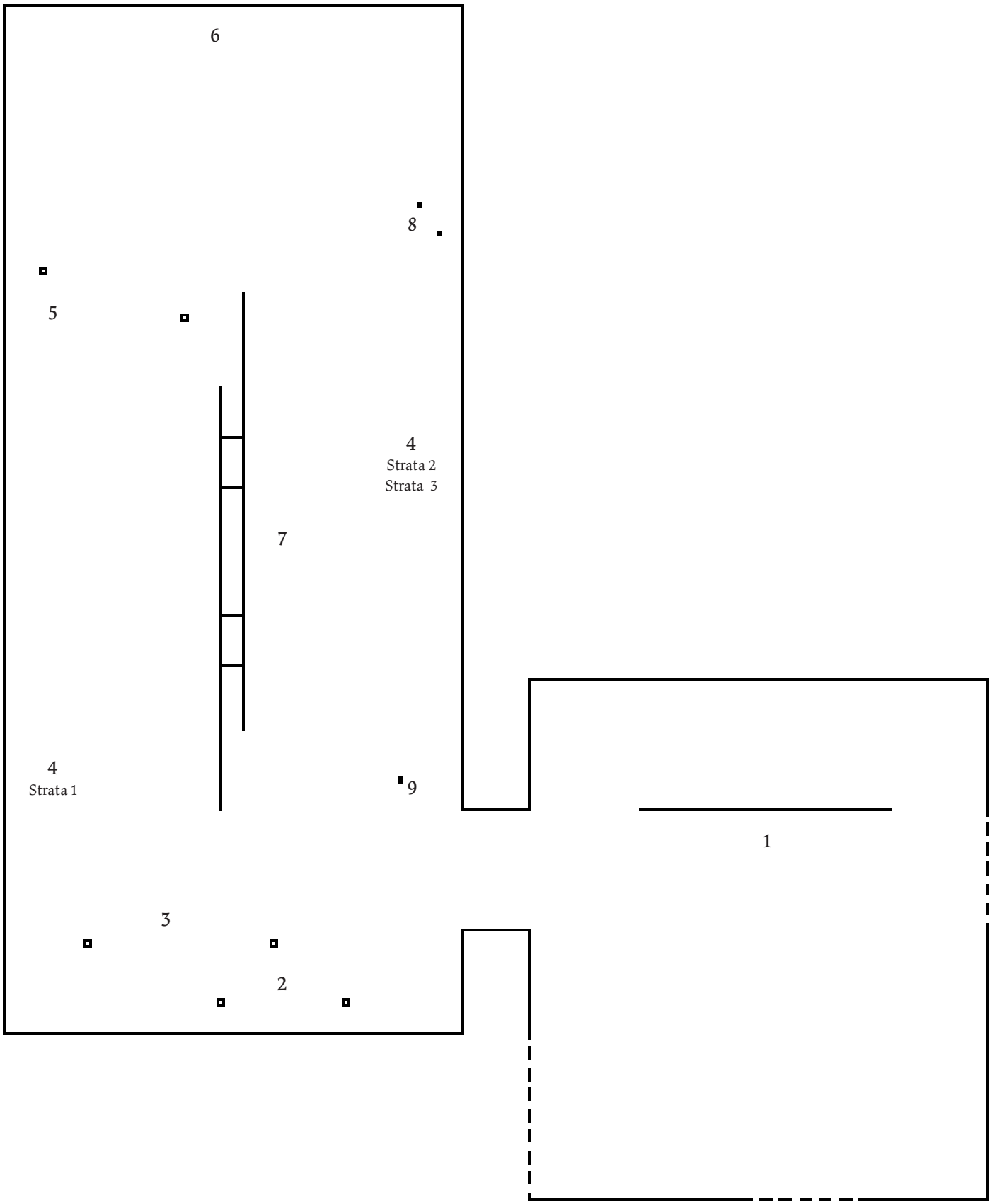
Curated by Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris


6
8
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Strata 2
Strata 3
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Strata 1
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1. Ongoing archive of residues and material afterlives 2014–24

Photographic prints on Baryta Photographique II Matt paper, mounted on di-bond aluminium composite, mesh, galvanised steel

Edition of 6

From left to right:

1.1. Body of Hawksbury sandstone exposed at a retaining wall at Canterbury Station, Bankstown line, Sydney, 2014

1.2. Encountering a thin section cut from a fossil of *Dadoxylon Farleyense*, a Permian era plant from the forests of Gondwana, in the palaeobotanical collection of the Australian Museum, 2022

1.3. Fragment of concrete embedded with coal aggregate adjacent to the location of the former Jetty Mine Bridge, servicing the Jetty colliery between 1878–1912, 2024

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

1.5. Fragment of fossilised *Glossopteris* wood (trunk), a Permian era tree which dominated the ecosystem of Gondwana 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

1.6. Remnant concrete casts, bearing the impression of barrels adjacent to the decommissioned Jetty colliery at Clifton, 2024

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

2. Registering survival at 252 million years in Gondwana 2024

Screenprint ink on 250gsm Stonehenge archival rag paper, mounted on di-bond aluminium composite.

Edition of 3

This screenprint is of a 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, Trent Walter (screenprinting, Negative Press)

3. Carbon afterlives 2024
Patinated bronze floor plates, seawater

From left to right:

3.1. Assemblage of coalified wood fragments, present at the intertidal zones between Bellambi rock platform and Clifton

3.2. 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)

4. Strata 2024

20 screenprints on 250gsm Stonehenge archival rag paper (various inks), mounted on di-bond aluminium composite, galvanised steel

From left to right:

Strata 1. Residues – anthropogenic and otherwise – across time

4.1. *Frottage* rubbing made from 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

4.2. *Frottage* rubbing made from a surface of land-slipped sandstone at the intertidal zone, while on Country with Jerrinja Yuin artist and educator Peter Hewitt. Clifton, Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

4.3. *Frottage* rubbing made from 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

4.4. *Frottage* rubbing made from the surface of the Bulli coal seam, Clifton, Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

4.5. *Frottage* rubbing made from the surface of a rusted steel barrel, a fragment of post-mine material that remains on the location of the decommissioned Jetty Mine operations that began in 1878 in Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

4.6. *Frottage* rubbing made from the surface of concrete used in 1992 to seal the mining operations established in 1878 to extract material from the Bulli coal seam exposed at the intertidal zone, Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

4.7. *Frottage* rubbing made from the surface of the extinction line, Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

Strata 2. Multiple embodied impressions from a 250 million year old silicified *Glossopteris* log situated at the intertidal zone in Scarborough NSW on Wodi Wodi Dharawal land, in 10 parts

Strata 3. Embodied impressions of a Permian era river system located in the vicinity of the silicified *Glossopteris* log in strata in 3 parts

Acknowledgements: Fieldwork consultation with 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)

5. Replaced particle for particle through water's unrelenting movement towards the lowest reaches of the ground 2024

Polymerised gypsum, reclaimed granulated blast furnace aggregate, sand, scrim, galvanised mesh

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 singular 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), Associate Professor Lizzie Muller (fieldwork support), Dr Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris (curatorial support)

6. Extinction lines 2024
Two-channel HD video with sound, 5:18 minutes, looped
Audio modified from field recordings made between 2022–24

Videography: Sammy Hawker
Sound design: Aaron Hull

7. A scatter of particles in the geologic strata adjacent to the dead-zone, 252 million years 2024

Photographic print on laminated glass, galvanised steel, rubber

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Professor Vivi Vajda for her generosity in providing access to this image, originally a light micrograph published in the paper by Vivi Vajda, Stephen McLoughlin, Chris Mays, Tracy D Frank, Christopher R Fielding, Allen Tevyaw, Veiko Lehsten, Malcolm Bocking, and Robert S Nicoll, 'End-Permian (252 Mya) Deforestation, Wildfires and Flooding—An Ancient Biotic Crisis with Lessons for the Present', Earth and Planetary Science Letters 529 (2020)

8. Fragments of plant life from both sides of the extinction boundary, summoned by the ground 2022–24

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

Represented on the gallery map as ▫

Series of patinated black bronze objects presented on vertical galvanised steel supports, from left to right:

8.1. Impressions of *Phyllotheca* stems (Permian, Minmi coal mine, NSW, n.d.) paired with coalified and silicified wood fragments present at the Bellambi rock platform of the Permian era Pheasants Nest Formation, part of the Illawarra Coal Measures, Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

8.2. 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

8.3. Impression of *Cylomeia Giant Club Moss* (Triassic, Bellambi Colliery, NSW, 1980) paired with an impression of *Paraschizoneura Jonesii (stem)*(Triassic, Turimetta Head, NSW, 2004)

8.4. Impression of the Bulli coal seam present at the intertidal zone at Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land, paired with *Cylomeia Undulata* (Lower Triassic, Bulli roof shales, NSW, 1981)

8.5. Impression of coalified wood present at the intertidal zone at Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land, paired with *Neocalamites Carrere* (Lower Triassic, Newcastle, 1930)

8.6. 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

8.7. 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

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

8.9. Impressions of *Glossopteris Browniana* (Permian, Werri Creek, NSW, n.d.) paired with impressions 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

8.10. Impressions of *Glossopteris indica* (roots) (Late Permian, Coalcliff, 1978) paired with impressions from the Bulli coal seam present at the intertidal zone at Clifton, on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

8.11. Impression of a *Glossopteris* leaf fossil found in the artist's garden in 2019, on Permian era ground in West Wollongong, on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

8.12. Impression of the Tongara coal seam present at Austinmer beach on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land, paired with impressions of *Glossopteris* leaf fossils (Upper Permian, Flagstaff Hill Newcastle, NSW, n.d.)

8.13. Impression of *Glossopteris* leaf fossils (Upper Permian, Newcastle, NSW, 1898) paired with *Taeniopteris Wianamattae* (Lower Triassic, Warriewood, NSW, 1975)

8.14. Negative impression of an articulated coalified branch present in the rockfalls at the intertidal zone at Clifton, on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

8.15. Impression of *Equisetalean* stems (Lower Triassic, Narrabeen Group, South of Turrimetta Beach, NSW, 1979)

Patinated black bronze objects on horizontal galvanised steel supports on the gallery pillars, from left to right:

8.16. Impression of *Glossopteris* leaf fossils (Upper Permian, Newcastle, 1898) paired with impressions 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

8.17. Impression of *Noeggerathiopsis* (Permian, Mt Kembla/Djembla) paired with impressions of *Glossopteris* stems (Coalcliff, n.d)

8.18. Impression of *Sphenobaiera Densinerua complex* (Middle Triassic, Coalmine Quarry Nymboida, NSW, 2010) paired with *Neocalamites Horensis* (Triassic, Manly, 1931)

8.19. Impressions 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 paired with *Austroglossa Walkomii* (Late Permian, Upper Illawarra Coal Measures, n.d.)

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

8.21. Impressions of *Schizoneura Gondwanensis* (Lower Triassic, Birthday Shaft, Balmain, 1902) paired with 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

8.22. Impressions of *Sphenobaiera Sectina* (Middle Triassic, Coalmine Quarry, Nymboida, 2010) paired with impressions of a tiny fragment of the 'deadzone' present at the extinction boundary line, Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dharawal Land

8.23. Impression of *Sphenobaiera stormbergensis* (Ginko) leaves (Middle Triassic, Nymboida, Coalmine Quarry, n.d) paired with drop stones present in the Clifton sandstone at the intertidal zone, Clifton on Wodi Wodi Dhawawal 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)

9. 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

11.00am–12.00pm Friday 18 October 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 the Clifton School of Arts between 12–27 October 2024.

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

The artist wishes to acknowledge the UNSW Galleries install team Justin Henderson, Mark Booth, Gotaro Uematsu, Jono Bolitho, Jamie Kraussman, and Catherine Woolley for her steadfast curatorial support and generous project management; Dr Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris for long-term, joyful curatorial engagement across the parallel project locations; Peter Hewitt for ongoing cultural consultation, mentorship, and fieldwork support; and Uncle Peter Button for cultural consultation and engagement. Additional project collaborators and extended acknowledgements are listed in the accompanying publication booklet.

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