

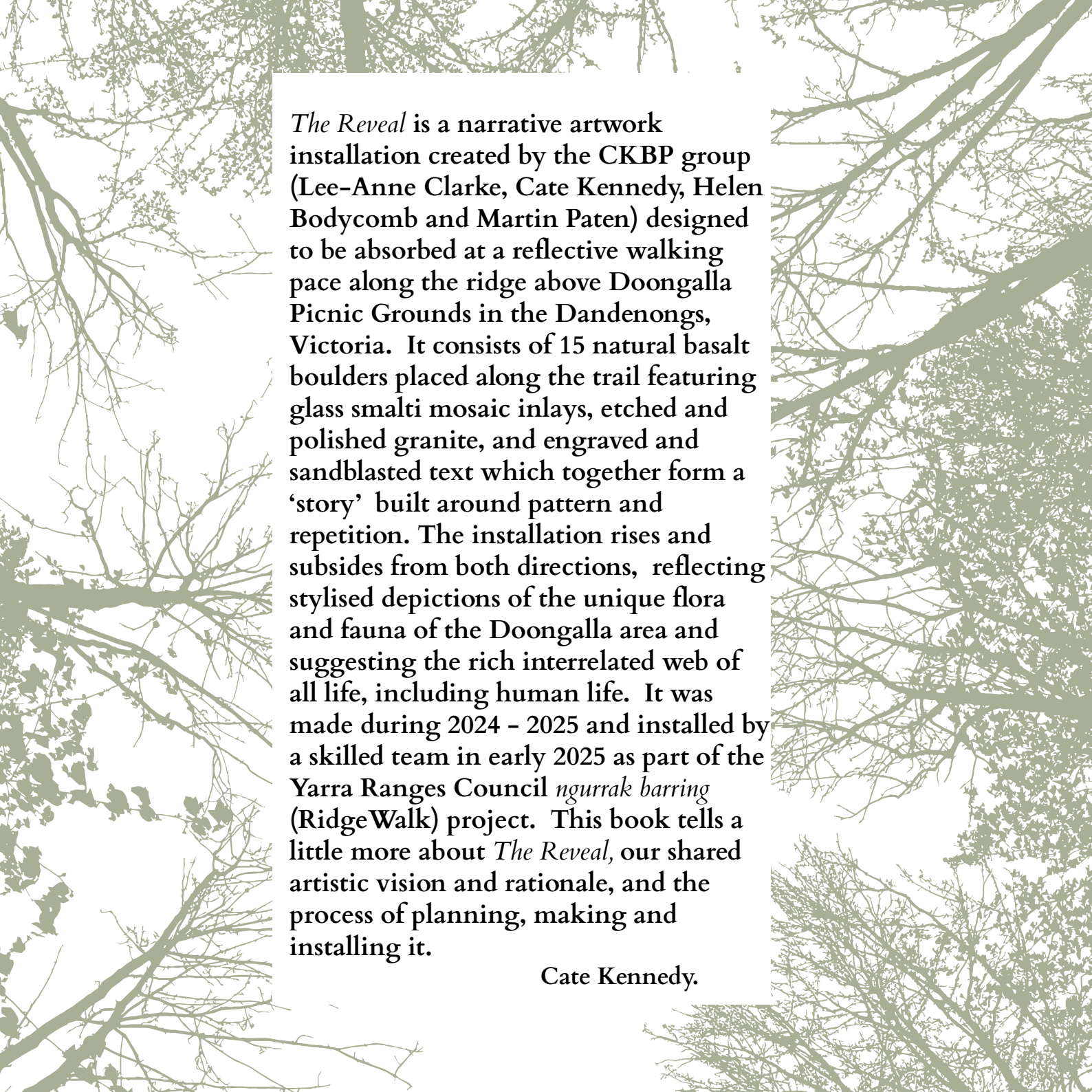
Set in stone

A FIELD GUIDE TO 'THE REVEAL'





Detail from tree fern mosaic featured in cover image, by Helen Bodycomb.



The Reveal is a narrative artwork installation created by the CKBP group (Lee-Anne Clarke, Cate Kennedy, Helen Bodycomb and Martin Paten) designed to be absorbed at a reflective walking pace along the ridge above Doongalla Picnic Grounds in the Dandenongs, Victoria. It consists of 15 natural basalt boulders placed along the trail featuring glass smalti mosaic inlays, etched and polished granite, and engraved and sandblasted text which together form a ‘story’ built around pattern and repetition. The installation rises and subsides from both directions, reflecting stylised depictions of the unique flora and fauna of the Doongalla area and suggesting the rich interrelated web of all life, including human life. It was made during 2024 - 2025 and installed by a skilled team in early 2025 as part of the Yarra Ranges Council *ngurrak barrang* (RidgeWalk) project. This book tells a little more about *The Reveal*, our shared artistic vision and rationale, and the process of planning, making and installing it.

Cate Kennedy.



concept

The Reveal came together as a vision to create an artwork that a walker in this special part of the bush could encounter, revelatory but free of didactic captioning or textual instructions on how the viewer should interpret its meaning.

Simply walking and being alive and alert to the sensory world all around us allows us to begin to notice and be fully present. This is usually pretty difficult – as existential beings our thoughts are usually swirling wildly into anywhere but the present, trying to abstractly process the bombardment of stimulus we undergo in our waking hours; our attention and focus has become a kind of currency. When we walk in a quiet place in the natural world, though, and allow ourselves to be more alive to place itself – the door to memories, feelings and associations opens, and new sensory details can be experienced with fresh attention.

“Nature abhors a vacuum,” said philosopher and naturalist Henry David Thoreau, “and if I can only walk with sufficient carelessness, I am sure to be filled.”





Dwelling in a story creates a state of mind which fosters this kind of attention too – we notice pattern as we read because we are looking for it, to make meaning and coherence out of what we are taking in. Narrative sequence – (this thing, then this thing, and because of that, THIS) – creates meaningful momentum as seemingly disparate fragments cohere and reveal themselves to be components in a meaningfully interconnected story.

Maybe, we thought, we could provoke the same curiosity and burgeoning sense of pattern in a ‘promenade’ artwork, creating a slowly unfolding narrative sequence that walkers could ponder and ‘read’ as they moved through it. To encounter these ‘made’ artworks and their accompanying fragments of text, we hoped, would rouse wonder, curiosity and a desire to follow this story being suggested.

We planned the work and its rising and falling sequence imagining a walker’s senses attentive to the living world of the forest trail’s unique flora, fauna, fungi, and leaf litter as they moved through it, coming across the artwork’s composition and amalgamation as an invitation to consider our own entangled part in a vast and beautiful web of connection.

Immersion creates attention and quiet as we quell the internal noise and allow the walking, breathing and observing to control the pace and direction of our thought processes. To be awake to it, to begin to feel embodied and grounded, alert to what it being evoked in us, is the point. Whatever our historical, botanical, cultural knowledge, something ‘dawns on us’ when we open up to this state.

Each of us involved in this project wanted to create a work which allowed the viewer to open up to this kind of receptivity – to be able to walk along, in a beautiful place, having ditched the ear buds and the iPhone which pour mediated information into our crowded brains, and just...look and listen.

There is a narrative we have tried to create in *The Reveal*, and it is a burgeoning ecological narrative that rises and subsides, like all natural processes, suggesting geological time, or a chronicle of lifeforms growing ever more complex and awe-inspiring, or whatever pattern of repetition and variation your mind encounters and pieces together as you walk along the ridge lost in your own sensory processes. It suggests that the human element of this chain of interconnected pattern is not as a pinnacle, but an inextricably-linked element in a complex web of life and interdependency.

In his essay about studying pardalotes in “Aminals Make Us Human” (ed. Leah Kaminsky and Meg Keneally, Penguin Life, pub, 2020) Professor John Woinarski sums up our human awareness of ecological interconnectedness when he writes: “Ecology is a complex network with many interwoven threads, and manipulation of one thread can have many reverberating impacts. We play with those threads at our peril.”

He underlines the fragility of these systems and our common misapprehension that we are in control of them rather than an integral, vulnerable part of them: “From a human perspective, our land is mostly familiar, comforting,” he writes. “But studying any Australian animal almost always leads to a crystallisation, a deciphering, of the destabilising manner in which we’ve contorted the ecology of this place. Purposefully, incompetently or haphazardly, we have rearranged the ecology of this land to suit our needs, and in doing so have rubbed away much that was integral to the existence of many other species.”



In *The Reveal* we too wanted to address the growing awareness of humans as an inextricable part of the interwoven networks of ecology, rather than a species in dominion.

The yarnning circle and meeting place boulder, carved with its symbolic design of concentric circles and celebrating the enduring connection to this place for the Wurundjeri traditional owners, is found in the clearing at the centre. From both directions, the elements emerge from the earth and recede back into the earth, some embedded with fossils millions of years old, or with representations of species which have survived and adapted to fire, flood, volcanic activity, heat and cold for eons. The intricate maze-like systems of mycelium are hidden underground, creating a ‘wood-wide web’ between trees and other plants. Trees scarred by fire create habitat and shelter. Hollows become nests.

When we were conceiving of the idea of boulders being placed along a track, we couldn’t help also thinking about wayfarer’s stones to guide a traveller’s way, the trail markers in remote hiking areas, and the “waymarker” stones traditionally placed at junctions and where roads diverge, marked with arrows or inscriptions. In Medieval Europe these literal ‘milestones’ were set along turnpike roads, and we still talk about passing milestones as a metaphor for achievement. In Australia, First Nations people arranged stones and boulders in patterns and shapes in areas of gatherings and ceremonial activities, and colonists memorialised shipwrecks, exploration, bushrangers and warfare with stone markers. They are already infused with their own metaphors, like the signposts and maps in unfamiliar locations marked with an arrow and the comforting phrase: “You are here.”



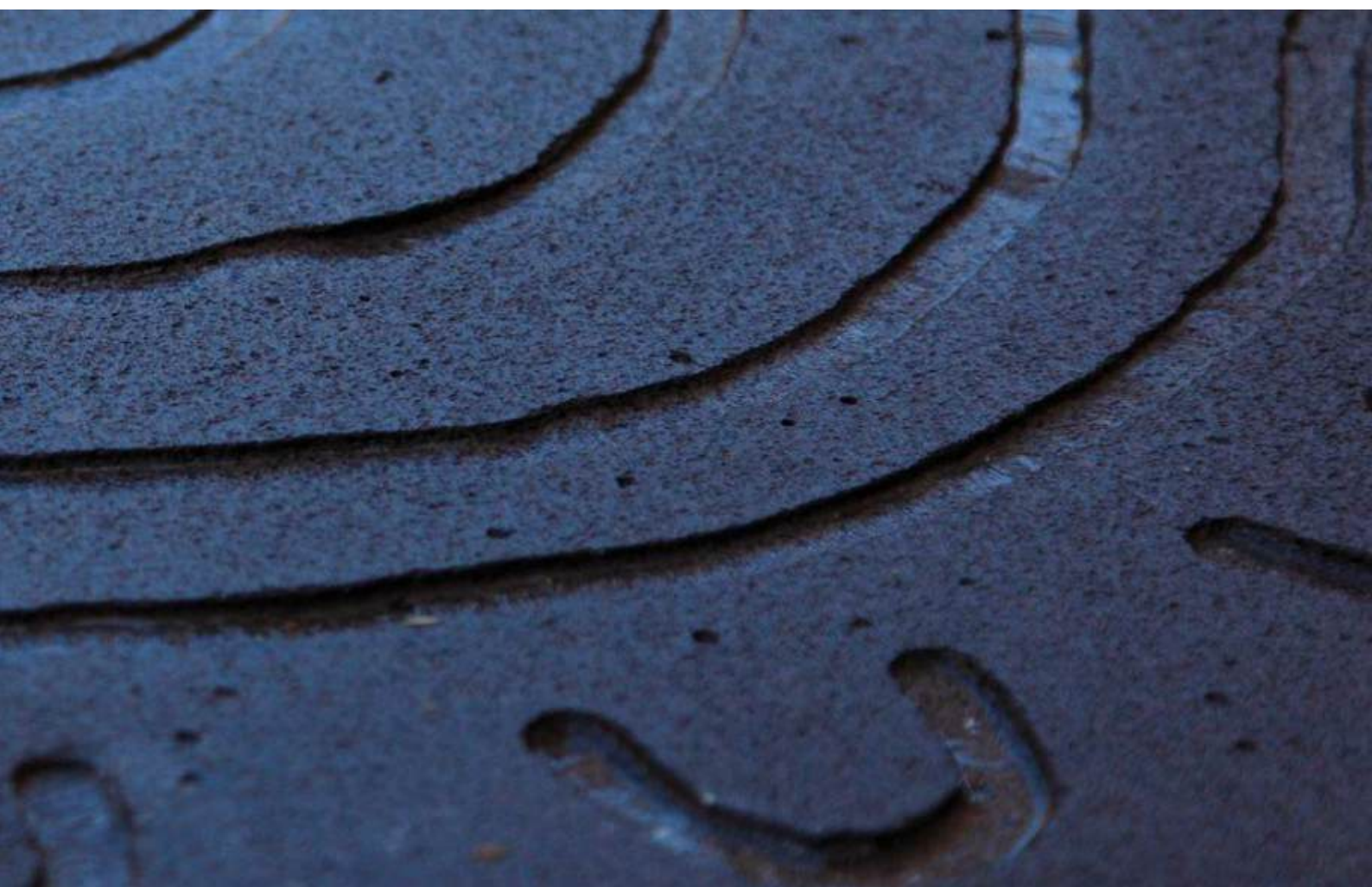


Above: Aunty Lee-Anne and Helen onsite, photographed via drone by Martin, as Cate meanders the track listening to birds.



An early 'mud map' version of where we discussed the work might be placed on the track and within the clearing to create a sense of narrative pattern and meaning.

Aunty Lee-Anne Clarke's involvement was instrumental in meeting with Wurundjeri cultural advisors to allow us to respectfully learn more about Wurundjeri Country, language, cultural knowledge and what might be expressed in this artwork. Cultural approval for extraction of basalt for use at the Doongalla site was granted by Dja Dja Wurrung representatives after consultations between Aunty Lee-Anne and Dja Dja Wurrung cultural advisor Caleb Dunolly-Lee, working with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. Language approval and spelling of Aboriginal names was finalised, and Helen worked with landscape designer Loretta Childs to choose rocks and, later, to advise on site placement, accompanied by a Parks Victoria arborist to ensure soil and tree health was not compromised by the installation process.



Our concept – and our deep wish for your experience – was one of dawning pleasure and recognition of these patterns, whichever direction the viewer walks from. We wanted this careful narrative placement to echo burgeoning comprehension; not a passive phenomenon, but a mind going walking, seeing resonances in an engraved depiction of spreading, expanding mycelium which echoes the delicate pattern of a feathery lyrebird's tail, or the curling shell of the fossilised ammonite, or the unfurling fiddlehead of a fern. We didn't want the experience to be didactic, or captioned with directions for correct interpretation, pressing flat any possibility of delight and discovery.

In place of captions, then, there are fragments of poems and Aboriginal names for birds and butterflies, and in place of living flora, fauna, and insects, there are etched surfaces of polished and inlaid black granite, embedded fossils reminding us that time is geological, and tiny fragments of smalti glass assembled with love and skill into mosaic forms which humbly attempt to honour and mirror their stunning counterparts in the natural world.



These artful representations of this beautiful and particular place are ‘set in stone’ – although of course this title is paradoxical, since nature is in constant flux, ever-changing and adapting. Nothing in life is set in stone in terms of unyielding certainty – that, too, is what nature patiently reveals to us. We hope these artworks provoke delight and inspiration.

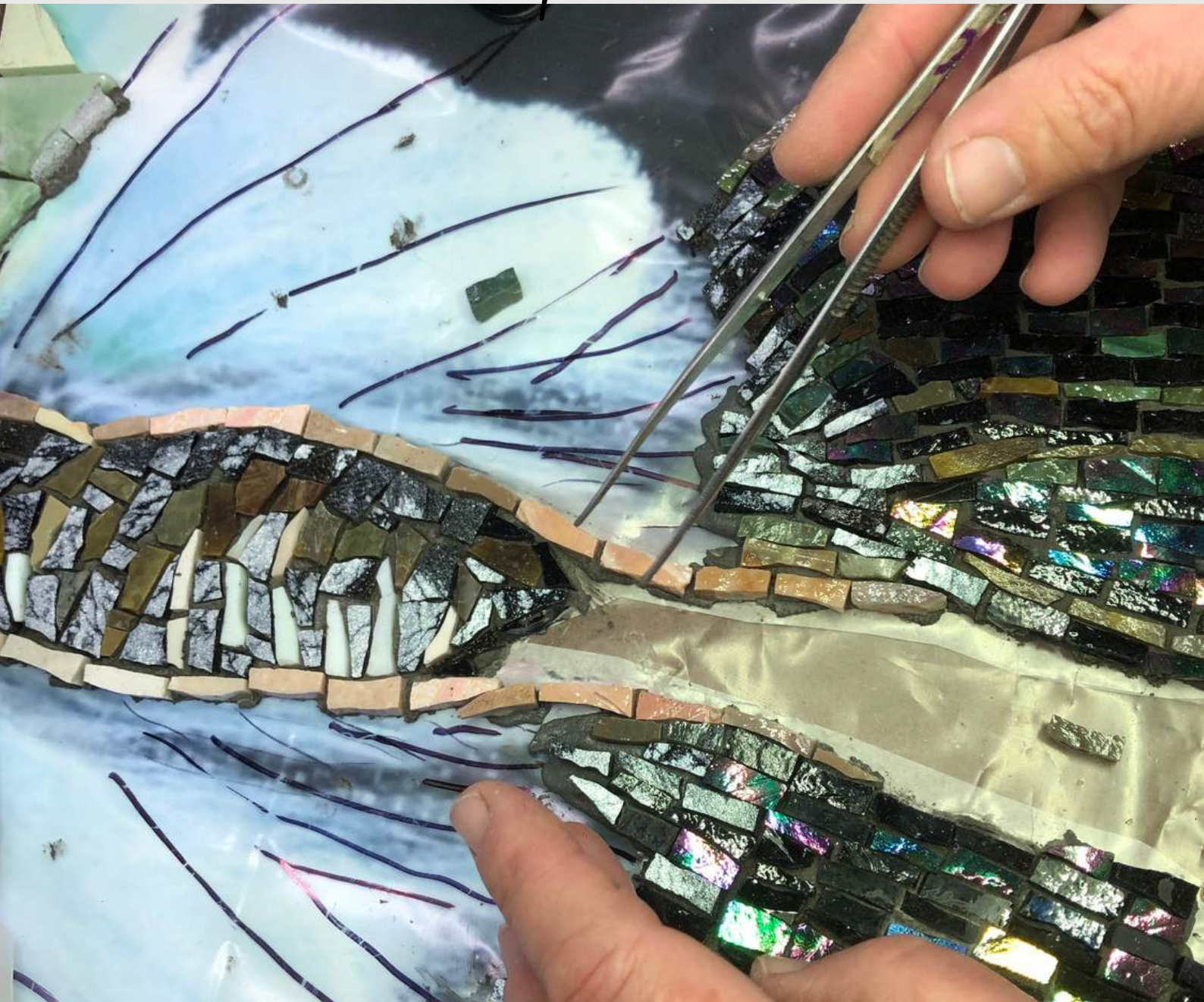
For real inspiration, though, look up. Look around. Breathe it in. Walk as lightly as you can into this humming burgeoning ecosystem – its whispering eucalypts, its wheeling eagles, its patient, microscopic tendrils of growth and decay, the endless expansion of a web that weaves you into its pattern.

You are here, the invisible map says, inviting you to orient yourself and find your place to connect as you wander, senses alert and meaning gleaned along the way. Everything breathes, everything expands, everything grows, dies, recedes, leaves its mark, returns to the earth. Even us. We’re in there, too.

Let it sing in praise of itself, this miraculous burgeoning natural world. Let it explode with blazing chlorophyll green into the light, the seed nourished by ash and carbon putting out a tendril, like a cautious idea, ready for rain.



in process





Natural History Museum

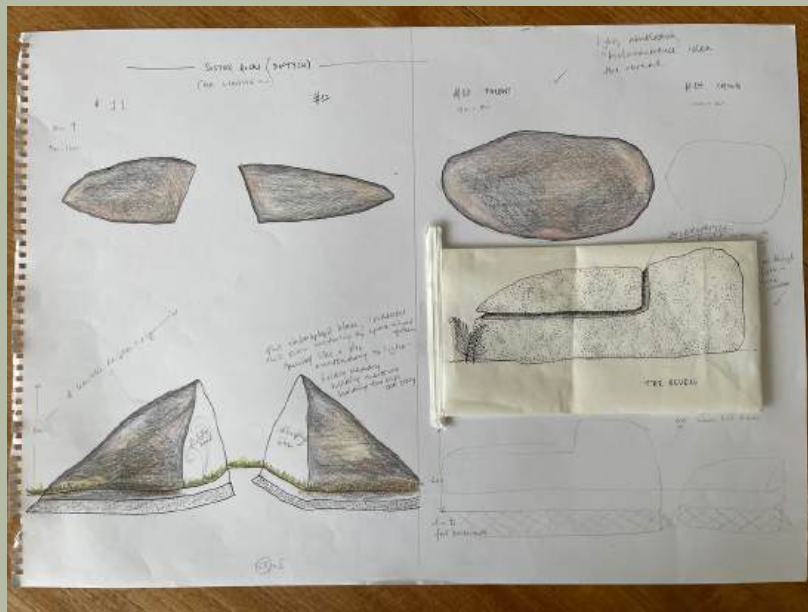
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The team sought advice from respected geologist David Horner and Glenn Guest, Co-director of Pyrenees Quarries, to decide on the most appropriate stone to use for the project. Basalt sourced from Moorlort Plains, west of Castlemaine, was chosen for its high density, excavated rather than blasted from the ground so that no unseen flaws which may have caused breakage when cut were concealed. Aesthetically, the stone revealed its own subtle vesicular aeration marks and evidence of its internal geological history once it was cut, and we incorporated these features when we could for placement of text and inlays.

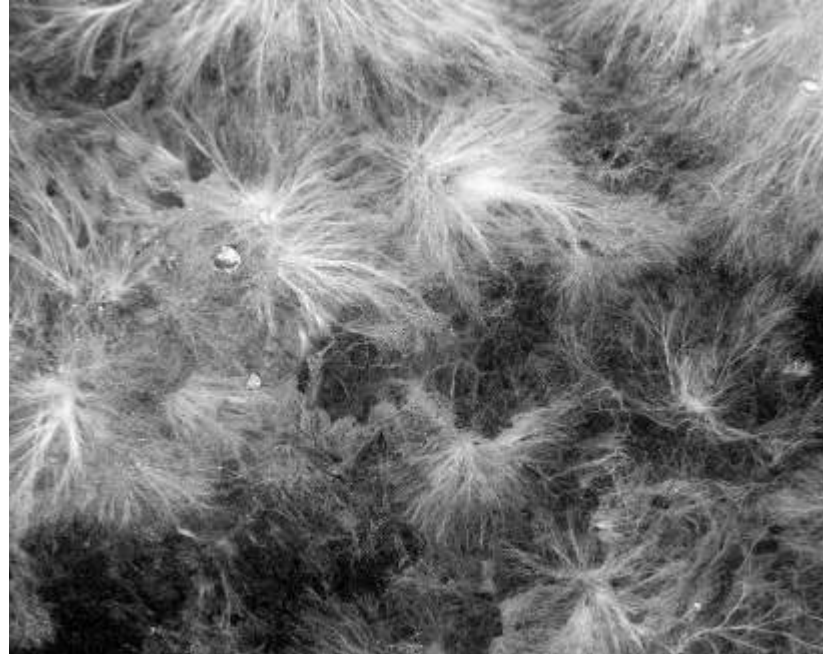


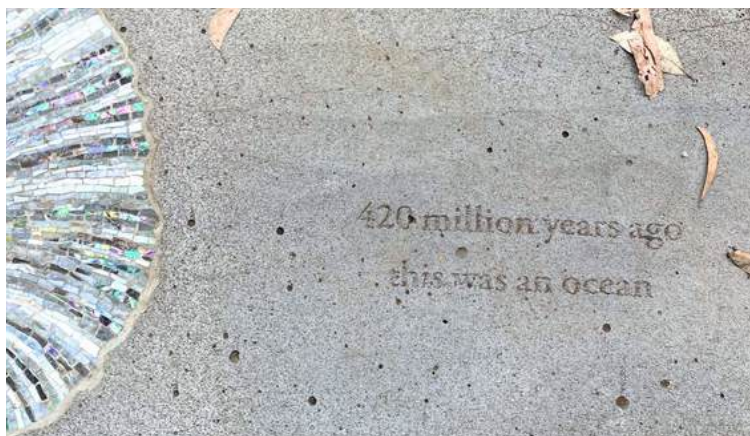


what to include?

A key concept in our installation was always to be mycological webs and flora, along with representations of the ancient fossils of the marine organisms found at Cave Hill, dating back to the Silurian period over 400 million years ago. We explored different ferns, fossils, feathers, fronds, brachiopoda, lilydalensis, fungi and the unique fauna endemic to the area, So much makes up the vast interconnected web we wanted to suggest in the work, but mycelium was a perfect symbol.

mycelium in a petri dish (*below left*)
our design for the project (*below right*)
the image stipple-engraved into polished black granite and set into basalt (*right*)





The process of rendering, in glass smalti mosaic, the beautiful pearlescent lustre of the brachiopod, which is accompanied on the final artwork by a few words referencing a long-ago ocean.





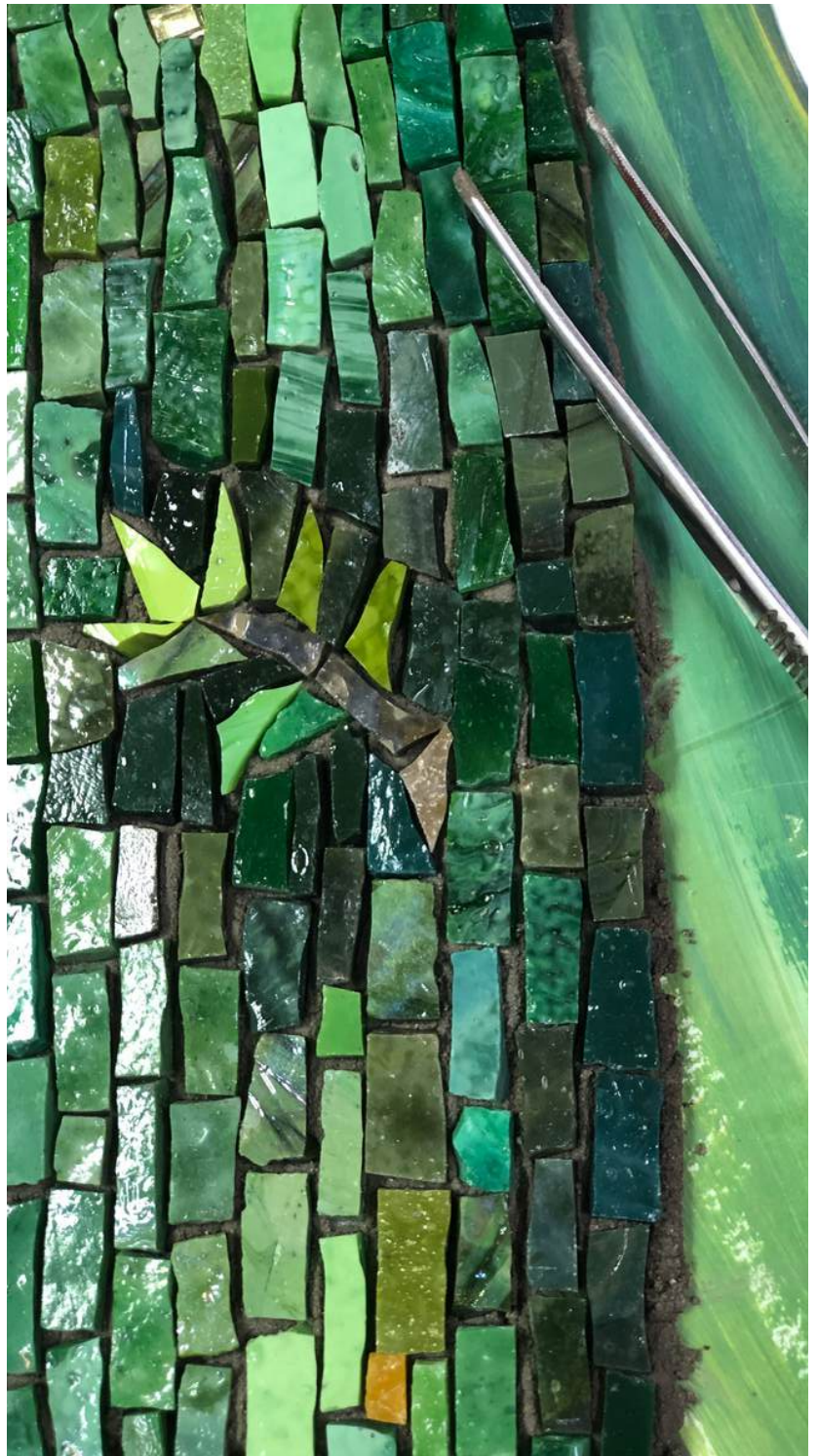
The fossil and ammonite inlaid into the boulders of *The Reveal* were evidence of life existing over four million years ago, but, amazingly, ferns have been flourishing on the earth since long before hardwood trees and flowers, in fact long before the dinosaurs – and the earliest Australian fern fossil is dated at 340 million years old. The new growth of the magnificent tree ferns in this area was a food source for Aboriginal people, who harvested the fiddleheads without killing the tree fern itself. Again, in thinking of the ecological web of life seeming to evolve as the viewer progressively encounters the sequence and placement of the artworks, we wanted to highlight ferns; a species that seems so fragile and vulnerable, yet with a toughness and resilience that has survived eons. An uncurling fern frond stretching towards the light always puts me in mind of a human hand reaching upwards towards growth and warmth, so the poem facing the fern mosaic echoes a phrase from poet Yehuda Amichai: “Even a fist / was once an open palm with fingers”.





this chlorophyll blaze, iridescent
this slow unfurling
of spore-hinged green
opening like a fist
surrendering to light

holding moisture
holding steady
holding the old, old story





Fern mosaic being made in Helen's studio



The superb lyrebird

The author Douglas Adams once expressed his fascination for the durability and tenaciousness of stories surviving through cultures and eras by saying that stories were like sharks – they’d evolved eons ago and then been around for an incredibly long time without much change simply because they were just exceptionally good at being sharks.

You could probably say that lyrebirds are still around because they are exceptionally good at being lyrebirds, too. Fossil records show that lyrebirds have gone about their business on earth for an astonishing fifteen million years. That’s extraordinary not just because it shows such a tenacity for survival, but because their enduring presence seems so remarkable – they need such minute particulars in terms of habitat and conditions, and they are so encroached upon. Their existence seems so fragile now, and yet they have clung on. It’s a memorable moment if you’re ever lucky enough to hear, from some nearby gully, a lyrebird unleashing a flood of sound into the forest. Poet Dick Long once described his love for the area with the couplet:

“And let me hear the lyrebird’s luscious notes
thieving the ballads from its neighbour’s throats”.

Luscious is the word. The iconic Superb Lyrebird is a remarkable mimic of everything it has heard and absorbed – not just the calls of other birds such as eagles, cockatoos and whipbirds, but the drone of distant traffic, sirens and car alarms, camera shutters and engines, animal sounds....everything. Like a maestro, it remixes all that it has heard into a new unique arrangement, selects elements of its own original songs added for courtship and territorial reasons, and sings, in breeding season, for hours every day. Once the performance space has been carefully scratched clear, the extraordinary quivering tail feathers are fanned over the body and head, the lyrebird seems to dance a little, then... opens its throat, and out pours a symphony fifteen million years in the making.

Buln Buln, the local Aboriginal name for the superb lyrebird, is carved into the side of this boulder etched with this poem written in tribute to this amazing performer.

SUPERB

the gold album
on which a single artist
plays everything
arranges everything
and sings everything

even his shivering tail
is an instrument
for the whole ensemble;
a cascading chorus
out of that one small,
miraculous throat



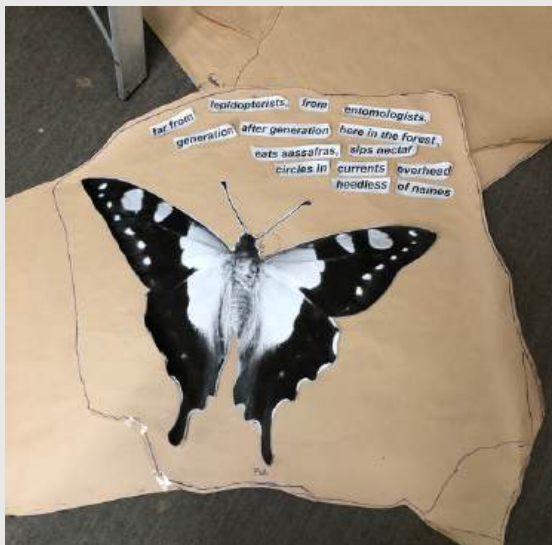


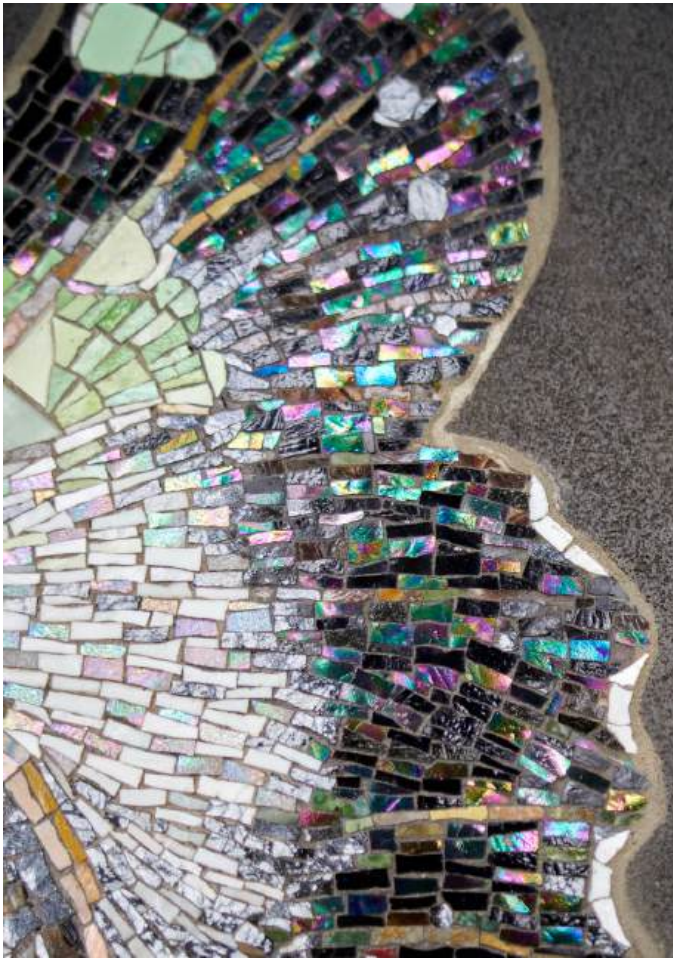
Left, detail from the original lyrebird photograph by David Paul, and *(right)* a close-up of the incredibly detailed etching onto polished black granite produced from this image. *Below*, the lyrebird boulder with inset at Pyrenees Quarries.



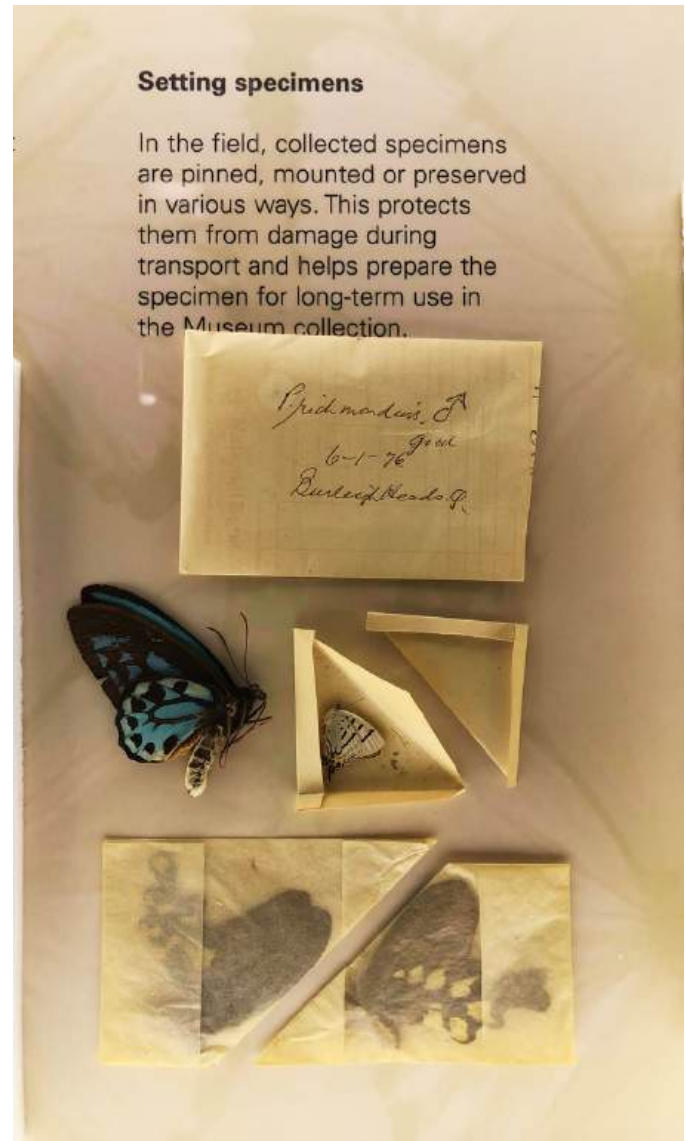
There were several endemic butterflies from this area we considered including in this project, and researching the Macleay's Swallowtail took me on a deep dive into the extraordinary insect collection, now numbering over half a million specimens, of Alexander Macleay. Macleay brought his extensive collection with him from the U.K. in 1826, and it is now so large it is housed in its own Macleay Museum. While there's a colonist and explorer impulse in this country for naming things after oneself, and while the butterfly is known by different names bestowed by different people (from *ballam ballam* to *graphium macleayanus*) I find it exhilarating to think of wild species existing for thousands of years independent of naming, taxonomies and classifying, alive and heedless. The green in the wings of the butterfly inset into the *ballam ballam* boulder is the same vivid shade as the 'chlorophyll blaze' of the fern, with the poem about being free of names curving above it.

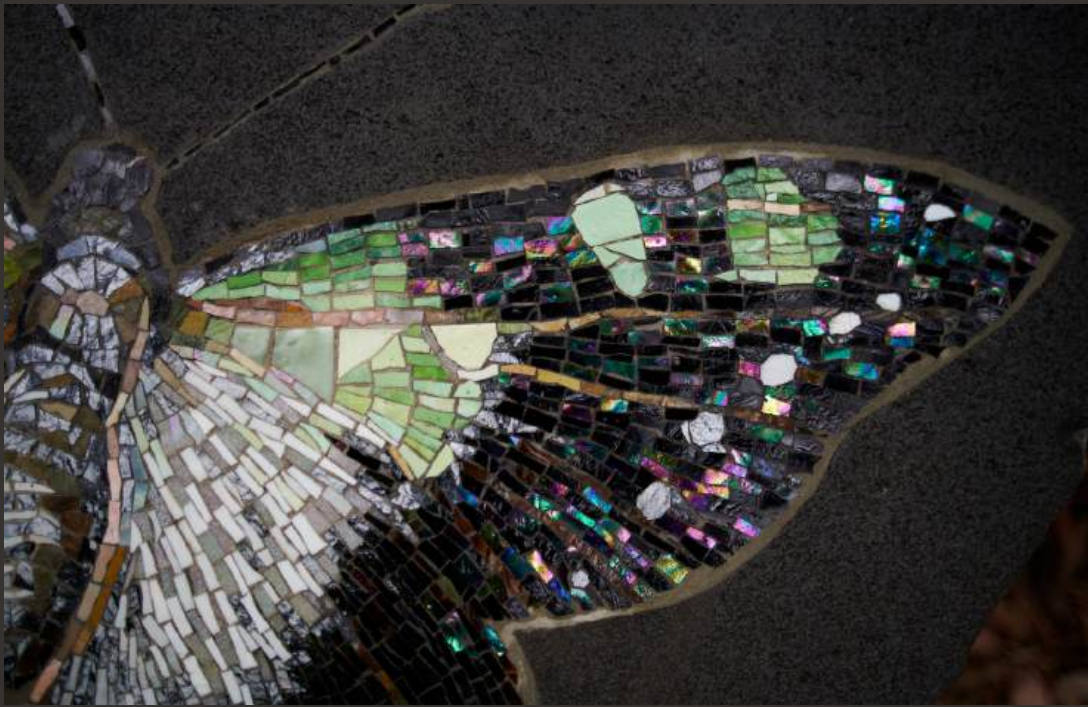






above: detail of smalti glass mosaic work in Ballam Ballam as part of *The Reveal*,
right: butterflies preserved in the collection at the Melbourne Museum.





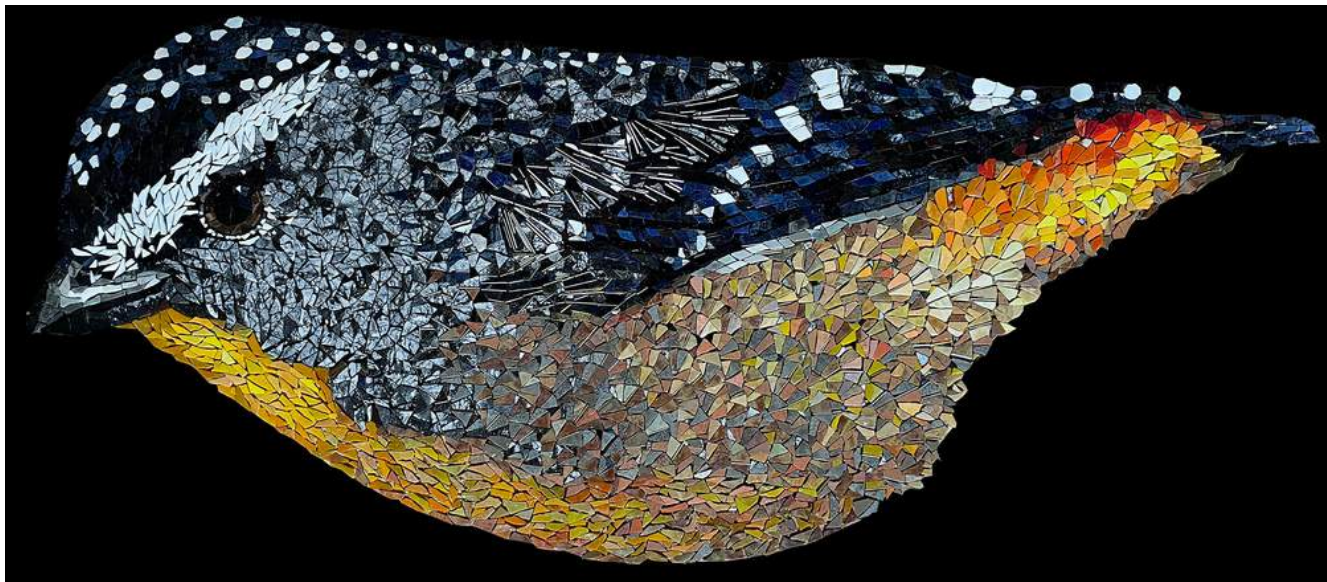
this chorus sings
in praise of itself
sings its warnings
and delight

the claw that clears
the dancing ground
the nest inside
the eroded wall
the feather, floating,
remnant of flight

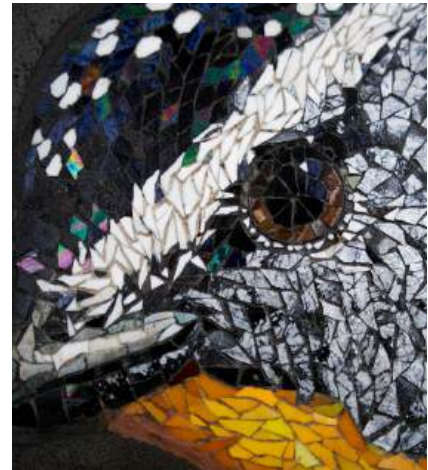
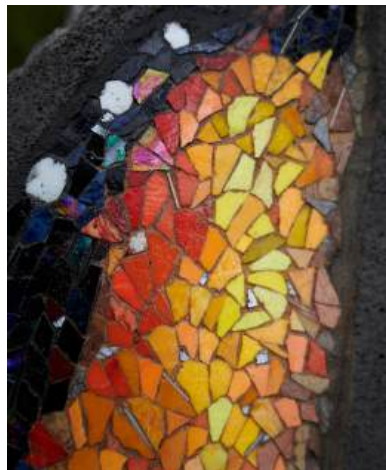


the 'nest inside the eroded wall' tunnelled
by pardalotes on the ridge track...

the real thing....



...and the artwork. We were all committed to the idea of featuring the spotted pardalote in *The Reveal*; a tiny shy jewel of a bird endemic to this area - catching sight of one rewards the patient and observant. The real bird is a miraculously-decorated work of art in itself, but Helen's mosaic representation is a virtuosic technical achievement of intricacy and beauty. We love the thought of a walker encountering it there on the track, assembled fragment by fragment. Art imitates life, and honours it: kaleidoscopic, glittering like an optical illusion, an invitation to stop and marvel.







with the artwork complete, now came a massive logistical operation!



in place 





Transporting and placing these fifteen boulders, some of them massive, all of them precious, required a lot of logistics, a lot of liaison, a lot of expertise, care and skill. The team had a few focussed days in the forest with heavy machinery, rakes and spades, hard hats and a plan.

In beautiful mist and bursts of sunshine, the stones of *The Reveal* were lifted and laid in place along the ridge track and in the clearing.





After months of creation in the studio and stonemasons' quarry, this final stage required its own preparation and precision.





*below: the massive 'yarning circle' boulder
being lifted from the crane;
below left, Loretta gets everything right.*







Left: the lyrebird boulder in situ, flanked on two sides by text.





a window, a deep still pond, a dark mirror,
a portal reflecting trees and sky.



*Above: smoko,
above right: text to read while listening
to birdsong,
below right: a tired but happy team.*



Helen contemplates
the *ballam ballam*
boulder's mosaic
and poem after the
installation of *The
Reveal*.

Doongalla Forest,
March, 2025.





THE REVEAL

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HELEN BODYCOMB – Artist
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AUNTY LEE-ANNE CLARKE
(Kirrae Whurrong) – Cultural Advisor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

MARTIN PATEN – Project Manager
LORETTA CHILDS – Landscape Designer
MATT BOYLE – Technical Coordination
& Installation

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