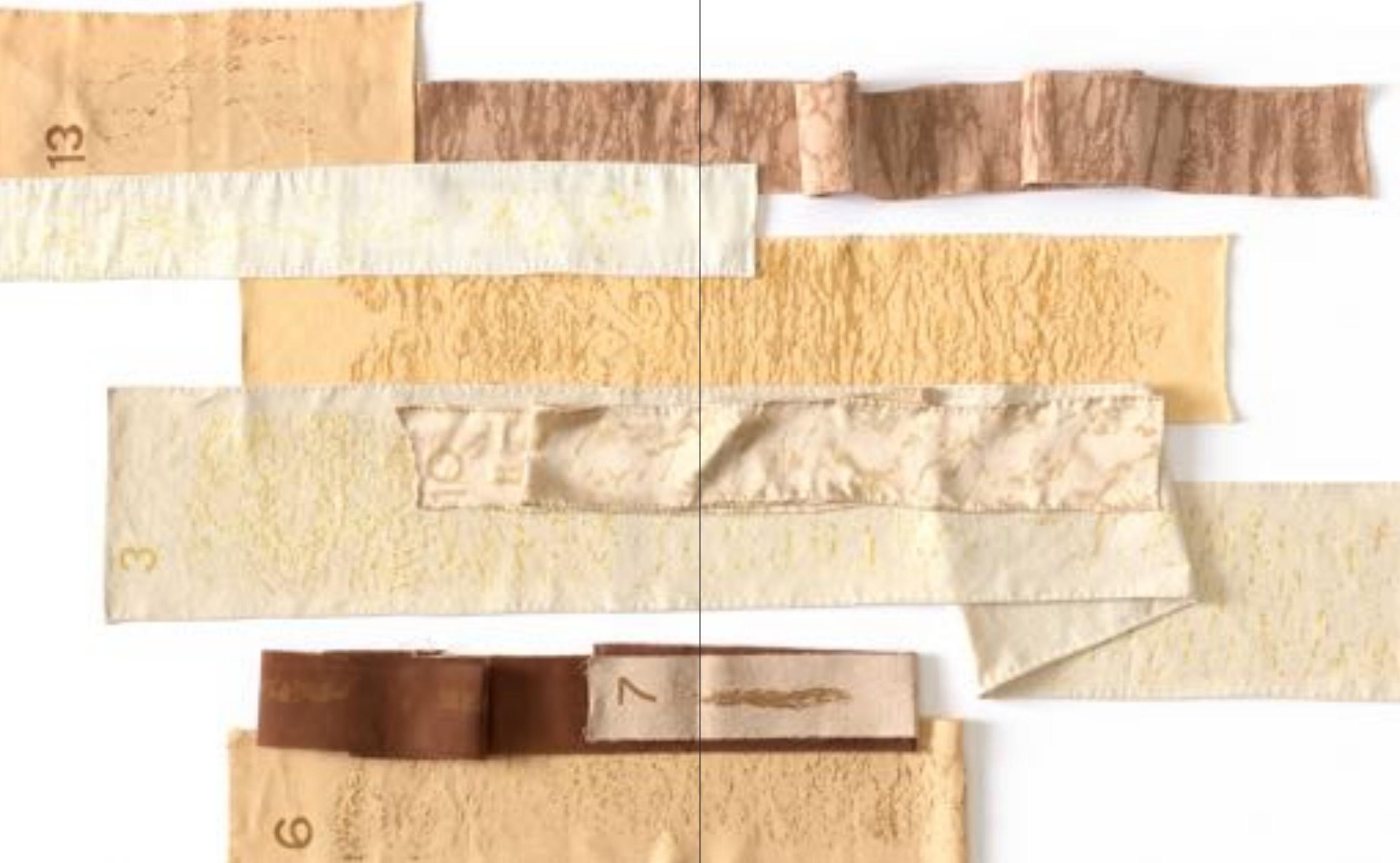


A Cure for Plant Blindness



A Cure for Plant Blindness

Plant Blindness—a term coined by James Wandersee and Elisabeth Schussler—is the ignorance of plants by human beings and their spontaneous preference for animal life. They argue this consists of failure to see, notice or give attention to the plants in one’s life, belief that plants are mere backdrops for animal life, overlooking the importance of plants to human life and misunderstanding the differing time scales of plant and animal activity.¹

When visiting Tamworth, I was struck by its beautiful street trees. Consequently, I invited Tamworth residents to identify a tree they held dear, or considered significant. I asked them to take a frottage (rubbing) around the girth of this tree; to record the species, location, date and time taken to make the frottage and to write why this tree was important or special.

The act of taking a rubbing from a significant tree meant each participant spent time with a tree. The contact between human and plant is recorded with crayon on paper. Rough or smooth, patterned or chaotic, the tree markings are a collaboration between person and plant. The rubbings were made in the Tamworth region, and then posted to me in Melbourne.

Using screenprinting and natural dyeing techniques, I reproduced a 1:1 scale textile of each frottage. Each Tamworth specimen is dyed with the bark or leaves of a relative growing far away. Specimens of the species were found in Melbourne, Canberra, Maslin Beach and Goolwa (South Australia). Taking a rubbing in one location, and reproducing the rubbing with dye of the same species growing elsewhere, enacted connections between sites, people and plants. It recorded personal connections to specific trees, and how we connect with, and need, the more-than-human world. The following pages record the stories of the trees and their human friends. The participants in this project have collaborated with me and the trees, revealing that not all humans suffer Plant Blindness.

¹ Hall, Matthew. *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany. Religion and the Environment.* Albany, New York: SUNY, 2011, p.5.

RUBBING BY Vonny Taynton

DATE 13th May 2017, 2.20 – 2.50pm

DYE *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* (Mugga Ironbark), Thornbury, Victoria

SIGNIFICANCE *I believe it is reasonable to refer to the tree at hand as “TREE”. Tree is my bus stop, situated as it is at a place where the Hannafords bus can safely & comfortably stop to pick up and set down...and “pick-up” it does on my working days and my volunteering days.*

Tree provides shelter from the 8am searing summer sun that burns into my neck and the back of my bare legs. I am surprised sometimes in Autumn that I need it still. Tree reminds me very occasionally of the sadness of “Seven Little Australians” and its cautionary tale of the “widow maker”. I do not stand under the tree after heavy rain & wind.

Tree is community-minded/musical/artistic.

Often tree can be optically magical. When I position myself “just so” I can negate all “negative” space between tree’s siblings and create a potentially infinite reproduction of “trees”—nothing by the potential of a “wall” of “tree”.

Footnote: I believe no ants were harmed in the making of this frottage.



02

RUBBING BY Sally Newall
DATE 16th June 2017
SPECIES *Grevillea robusta* (Silky Oak)
DYE Seed pods, Preston & Coburg, Victoria



03

RUBBING BY Joanne Stead
DATE 14th May 2017, 12:45pm
LOCATION South Tamworth
SPECIES *Jacaranda mimosifolia* (Jacaranda)
DYE Leaves and small branches, East Brunswick, Victoria
SIGNIFICANCE *This well-established Jacaranda is in our backyard. I don't know the age of the tree, but our house is a 1950s/1960s weatherboard typical to the area, and the tree is much taller than the house. The Jacaranda is a beautiful & much loved shade tree in our garden & the magpies love it too. The kids have created an artwork that sits at the bottom of the tree & we have solar fairy lights also wrapped around the trunk. The tree itself has one main trunk and several offshoots, the main trunk's bark has a much rougher and deeper texture than the other ones, so we rubbed from both to show the difference.*



04

RUBBING BY Justin Miller
 DATE 27th April 2017, 2.30pm
 LOCATION Calala Water Treatment Plant, Tamworth
 SPECIES *Angophora subvelutina* (Broad-leaved Apple)
 CIRCUMFERENCE 151cm
 DYE unable to source this species outside arboreta in Melbourne, Adelaide or Canberra



05

RUBBING BY Jonathon Mann
 DATE 27th March 2017, 8.15am
 LOCATION Tamworth Regional Council Botanic Gardens, Piper St, Tamworth
 SPECIES *Eucalyptus maculata* (Spotted Gum)
 CIRCUMFERENCE 84cm
 DYE Spotted Gum leaves collected near Merri Creek, Coburg, Victoria
 SIGNIFICANCE *The first shade trees planted at the Tamworth & District Model Engineers Mini Rail site. Trees planted in late 2009.*



06

RUBBING BY Jonathon Mann
DATE 27th March 2017, 8.40am
LOCATION Tamworth Regional Council Botanic Gardens,
Piper St, Tamworth
SPECIES *Eucalyptus albens* (White Box)
CIRCUMFERENCE 112cm
DYE White box bark, Australian National University, Acton, ACT
SIGNIFICANCE *Native to Australia. White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum
Grassy Woodland is a critically endangered ecological community.*



07

RUBBING BY Sally Newell
SPECIES (*Lagerstroemia indica*) Crepe Myrtle
DYE Bark and small branches, collected in Northcote, Victoria



RUBBING BY Eloise Newall
DATE 16th July 2017, 1.30pm
LOCATION Bligh St, Tamworth—my parents' house
DYE *Eucalyptus torquata* (Coral Gum) leaves, Maslin Beach, SA
SIGNIFICANCE *I spent countless hours in this tree as a child, climbing as high as I could. I remember peering into the neighbours' yards and chatting with the children next door. Mostly though, I'd go up there to read.*



RUBBING BY Lynken Dickson
DATE 27th April 2017, 3pm
LOCATION Tamworth, NSW
SPECIES *Eucalyptus torquata* (Coral Gum)
DYE Leaves, Maslin Beach, SA



IO

RUBBING BY Janelle Armstrong

LOCATION *Warramundi* Property of Armstrong Family, Warral

SPECIES *Eucalyptus maculata* (Spotted Gum)

DYE Spotted Gum leaves collected near Merri Creek,
Coburg, Victoria

SIGNIFICANCE *This is a special tree to our family, planted by Emily, Kate and Gary about 34 years ago and now majestically greeting us every day as we approach our home. From little things, big things grow—trees and children.*



II

RUBBING BY Jonathan Mann

DATE 27th June 2017, 7:50pm

LOCATION Tamworth Regional Council Botanic Gardens, Piper St,
Tamworth, NSW

SPECIES *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* (Mugga Ironbark)

CIRCUMFERENCE 72 cm

DYE Bark collected from a street tree in Brunswick, Victoria

SIGNIFICANCE *This particular species was one of the first selection of trees planted at this site in 1998.*



I2

RUBBING BY Ruby Newall

DATE 16th June 2017, 2pm

LOCATION My house, Goonoo Goonoo Rd

SPECIES *Citrus × paradisi* (Grapefruit)

DYE Grapefruit leaves collected in the artist's garden,
Preston, Victoria

SIGNIFICANCE *This grapefruit tree at my house gives me fruit for tasty juices.*



I3

RUBBING BY Alex de Ferranti

DATE 16th June 2017, 1.40pm

DYE *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (River Red Gum) bark, collected at
Heide Museum of Modern Art

SIGNIFICANCE *I love the shade the tree gives us on the pool in the middle
of summer.*



I4

RUBBING BY Sally Newall
SPECIES Ornamental Pear
DYE Leaves and bark collected from a street tree, *Pyrus ussuriensis*
(Manchurian Pear), Northcote, Victoria



I5

RUBBING BY Janelle and Gary Armstrong
SPECIES *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* (Mugga Ironbark)
DYE Bark, collected from a Brunswick street tree
SIGNIFICANCE *This rubbing comes from an iron bark in our house yard. The tree has been dropping limbs in recent storms and so its days are numbered. We'll have to remove it before it falls on sheds or worse still, people. Taking a rubbing is a nice farewell gesture—nothing lasts forever. The landscape and outlook will be very different without this very tall tree of 20+ years.*



I6

RUBBING BY Jody Blackwell
DATE 20th June 2017
SPECIES *Eucalyptus melliodora* (Yellow Box)
DYE leaves collected in Reservoir, Victoria



I7

RUBBING BY Janelle Armstrong
SPECIES *Jacaranda mimosifolia* (Jacaranda)
DYE Leaves and small branches, Northcote, Victoria
SIGNIFICANCE *Jacaranda* which is not so "at home" in our location but persists, flowers and brings us pleasure.



RUBBING BY Jack Turner

DATE 13th August 2017

LOCATION Adjacent to Dungowan Creek, *Wandandian*,
Ogunbil, NSW

SPECIES *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (River Red Gum)

DYE Merri Creek, Melbourne

SIGNIFICANCE *This tree was one of 1000 tube stock trees planted by my mum and dad (Alison McKenzie and Glen Turner) in Spring 2002. Unfortunately almost one third of the trees they planted were lost due to drought. The remaining trees are thriving and providing a protected habitat for an array of birdlife, as well as providing stability to the creek bank in times of flood.*



RUBBING BY Alexandra Turner

DATE 13th August 2017

LOCATION Adjacent to Dungowan Creek, *Wandandian*,
Ogunbil, NSW

SPECIES *Casuarina cunninghamiana* (River Oak)

DYE Leaves collected at Goolwa, South Australia

SIGNIFICANCE *This tree is located on the bank of the Dungowan Creek which runs through our property, "Wandandian". We spend a lot of time in and around the creek, especially during the summer months. It was Glen's favourite place to relax.*



RUBBING BY Alison McKenzie
 DATE 12th August 2017
 LOCATION Wandandian, Ogunbil, NSW
 SPECIES *Jacaranda mimosifolia* (Jacaranda)
 DYE Seed pod and small branches collected,
 West Preston, Victoria

SIGNIFICANCE *This tree was planted 9th August, 2014, following the memorial service for my partner Glen Turner. I wanted a tree that would be shady and colourful, one that I could see from my bedroom window.*

Whilst the Jacaranda is not native to Australia, the name is of special significance. We call it the "Jack & Alexandra" tree, after my and Glen's children. The tree is a gathering point for friends and family when they visit, a place to sit and share stories about Glen.

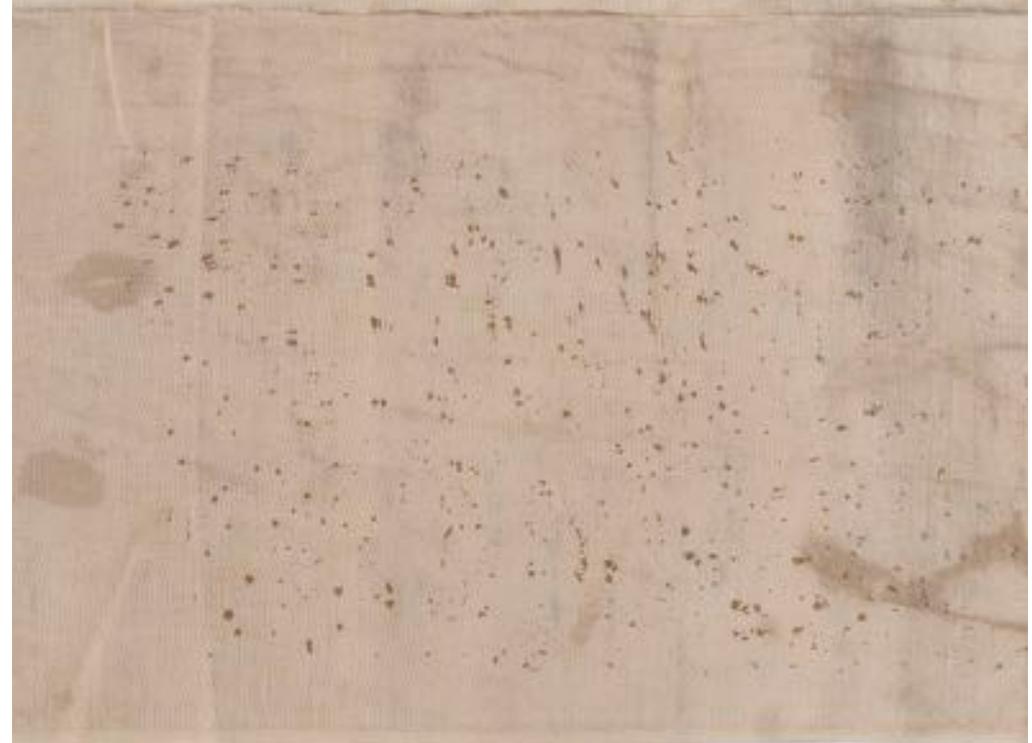


RUBBING BY Emma Stilts
 The Oldest Tree I Know
 CIRCUMFERENCE 8 people
 DYE *Eucalyptus microcarpa* (Grey Box) collected in
 Fawkner, Victoria

SIGNIFICANCE *When I was a child, we would visit my cousins most Sundays. We would run to the creek next to my nana's and play in the water and swing. The big old gum tree provided shade for us, and a great spot to tie the rope off.*

My father played in the same spot, when he was a child. And now my children do too. It is a most peaceful, meaningful place for me.

The big old gum tree takes 8 people to give it a hug. Its trunk is enormous and tells a story. Parts of the bark are missing, whether intentionally removed, it is hard to discern. The tree has made a protest in these parts with the trunk creating many small spikes evenly distributed and quite sharp.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the people of Tamworth and surrounds who took time out to make a rubbing of a tree they love. Their names are listed with their stories on the preceding pages. I opened the parcels with anticipation as they arrived from Tamworth and was moved by the breadth of stories shared with the rubbings. They trace the everyday, memorials and multiple generations, reminding us that trees live longer than we do. Relationships between plants and humans may have frayed since the industrial revolution, but these testimonies reveal them as vital to life, meaning and place.

Thank you also to Eloise Newell who posted all the rubbings to me in Melbourne. I am grateful to plant collectors Kirsty Argyle, Chris de Rosa and Margaret Mayo who went out of their way to find leaves and bark for the dye pots, you saved me many hours. Curator of Tamworth Textile Triennial, Glenn Barkley and Director of Tamworth Regional Gallery, Bridget Gurthrie have supported the production of this work, thank you both. Many thanks to Anna Topalidou for another thoughtful and elegant book design. And as always, I must raise a glass to my family, who continually tolerate leaves, bark and dye pots dominating our domestic landscape.

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SNAPSHOTS Provided by participants

DESIGN Anna Topalidou

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