Making nature: Extinct Tasmanian plants

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Signed statement of originality

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Robyn Glade-Wright

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Abstract

The capacity of art to communicate my concern regarding the extinction of plant life in Tasmania is the subject of my investigation. Extinct plants distil and foreshadow my broader concerns for the future of all living entities. The plants that are lost due to extinction are often the silent victims of our land use practices.

Making nature: Extinct Tasmanian plants, is an installation of art works that commemorate the extinction of twenty two Tasmanian plants. The art works take the form of embroidered wreaths, funeral urns and a memorial board. My aim in creating the art work is to encourage reflection regarding the role that members of our society have played in the loss of these plants. We may unwittingly be contributing to extinction and thereby ‘making nature’ in the process.

A part of my motivation for creating this body of work has been to highlight the grief I feel when I learn that a plant species has been extinguished. My objective has been to represent the extinct plants in a manner that may elicit an experience of beauty amongst the viewers of my art. Beauty has the potential to arouse meaningful connections between the viewer and the plants, whereas, extinction eradicates that possibility and destroys the prospect of relationships between living things. Therefore, my use of beauty in the art work is subversive, because I am not seeking to provide pleasure; I have sought, instead, to generate a sense of anguish due to the loss of these plants.

My investigative work draws associations with the art of Andy Warhol, Gregory Pryor, Janet Laurence, Fiona Hall and Christian Boltanski. Significant aspects of their work are discussed in relation to issues that I have examined in my art, including extinction, beauty and loss.

Theories that examine the idea of beauty, including the reasons why it matters to us and how it affects us are explored. I argue that in the presence of beauty we can be moved to critical reflection. Such aesthetic and cognitive judgements surrounding beauty may lead to a greater awareness of the human impact on the natural environment.

The project makes a contribution to the field of visual art through the theoretical examination of beauty in the context of contemporary arts practice. This visual work makes a contribution to knowledge by testing the capacity of art to create a commemorative site for reflection about the impact of extinction in Tasmania.
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