Writing with the emerging exhibition
Katve-Kaisa Kontturi 2016

A wallaby once sat here ... small acts of celebration and concern.
Ecology and the Feminine.
An exhibition curated by Lyndal Jones, The Avoca Project Inc.
avocapproject.org

Preparing the house

Dusting, wiping, washing.
With sugar soap, olive oil.

Rolling carpets, rinsing sand, polishing plastic leaves, carrying the palm trees,
furniture, crockery, books, and magazines.

Upstairs, downstairs, in and out.
Between the house and it extensions, conservatory, garden, shed, yard, and studio.

Domestic chores to extend the domestic:
To make room for artful encounters.
To enable an exhibition.

An exhibition that is not about the house but emerging with it.

An exhibition that studies the three ecologies that the house is part of:
social relations, subjectivities, and environmental concerns.

A wallaby once sat here... small acts of celebration and concern.
Ecology and the feminine is an exhibition with a permeable house that does not obey the strict conventions of inside and outside.

With a house that insistently moves on the nature–culture continuum.

Prepared not to resist floods, but to let them through.
There are no screens on the windows; no poison is used.

But bees buzzing in the walls, cobwebs on the corners, a random beetle flying around.
Small acts of celebration and concern fill the permeable house and spread beyond it too, **respecting the land, working with it, bringing outside in and inside out:**

There are, among other things, **paper shreds quietly conquering the house, crossing to the garden, finding their way, everywhere.**

Nettings both inside and out. The comforting, cracking sounds of a cosy fireplace in a woodpile in the yard. Diamond shapes of different colours, patched with a paint pigment and water from the river flowing outside.

And a fragile organic chandelier made of wormwood asking to bow our heads, for the sake of nature, and art.

**Countries and skies of the travelling house**

This is on old house with a vast and varied ecological experience.

**It was made in an unknown country where Baltic pines grow under the Northern skies.**

In numbered pieces, it travelled along rivers and across oceans from Hamburg to Victoria.

It has witnessed the changing landscapes and ecosystems of several continents, rain, flood and draught, and **a variety of star patterns has sparkled above its roof.**

In Avoca, it first experienced the busyness of the gold era main street life, and then was moved and turned to face the river, where it finally became a host for national and international artists.

As we travel, we always leave something of ourselves behind. We are beyond the confines of the home, often detached from the domestic – ‘which is not good or bad, only different’. This is what the suitcase on the bed upstairs suggests.
The artist-travellers of this exhibition have their specific connections to the house. Many of them have stayed and worked here, and brought along sensations of the skies from the far North to the South, from West to East, both locally and globally.

They offer haptic feelings of:

**Dim, varying greyness, and the contrasting neon beauty of Northern lights, of Northern skies.**

**The scorching, glaring Southern sun, the white heat of Southern skies.**

And then in front of us, a red fire pollutes the purplish blue of the suburban sphere. While, in the entrance hall, the wall opens into the cloudy perfection of digital heavens.

There are ‘frost paintings’ on the windows where ice crystals rarely grow; above the staircase hangs the presence of the hot and humid rainforests of Australia’s far North, and surrounded by the fireplace: an Indigenous series of NT’s waterholes.

All under the same rubric, the ‘roof’, multiplying the ecologies of this extended house.

**Small, enduring acts of labour**

A year of shredding:

**Shredded forty years lectures.**

**Shredded selves made redundant:**

‘doctors without’...

**The shredded aesthetics of neoliberalism.**


**Postcards that arrived persistently once per year, for many years: some humorous, others serious, all replete with feminine ecologies. A feminist critique of nature and culture takes form.**

30 years of diamond shapes, of geometrical wonder and pleasure. Across the house, and with the local landscapes.
The labour of women warriors, teachers, students, water carriers.

Farm work, Craft work, Art work, Garden work.

Appreciating the beauty and work of bees. Bees that feed us, pollinating, making possible what we eat, killed by a colony collapse, commercial greed, climate change.

A shadowy funeral of furry bodies, rainbow fairy wings. All singular; none the same: ‘no two bees or pictures alike’.

Listen to the walls. The bees are still there, doing their work.

Fabrics of colonialism. Fabrics of survival.

24 striking pieces of red silk, light but dense, rich with fibre. Hanging from the structures of a high ceiling studio space, going around them, folding, draping towards the floor, the ground. Reaching it, almost.

These fabrics materialise the strong bloodlines of 24 indigenous tribes in the Bendigo region. Their stories are knotted tightly, boldly attesting to the generations of lives entangled with the country, and later with the double bind of colonialism and capitalism – the global fabric trade being one of the threads.

Constellations of mosquito netting, inside above the beds, outside over the trees, create safe havens in their environments. Mosquito nets that save lives in the areas affected by malaria – if you can afford one.

Then the question of ‘domestic’ violence: home is not a safe haven, not for all, not equally.

Nettings of culture, and nettings of nature, transparent, silky, sticky – caring, covering, catching.
Generations of ecological care and concern

From Patience, 4, who takes pleasure in arranging flowers to Simone, 51, who leans toward a helpful, friendly tree, and to Alyson, 85, who determinedly walks the country, the road, the riverbank.

There is a family of women artists of three generations, spreading across the house:

The mother shifting the world, the space, the landscape, and their perceptions through the eternal form of a geometrical diamond shape.

The daughter signposting the network coverage: connect and get happy!

The grandmother painting the extraordinary colours and textures, the variety of the Iris she breeds on her own.

And a suitcase that tells the story of women and clothing, of cloth-ecologies.

She loves the figure-hugging dress, the attention it attracts. She laughs at memories of a badly matched pattern. She travels the world, finding what she left behind, revisiting countries and climes through garments.

Attending the physicality of the space. Finding the right place, not resemblance, but an enabling relation, a vibrating connection, where the house and the work both become something more.

Not to pin, not to fasten for good. Not the bees. Not the shred. Not the country. Instead, let them express themselves, their vital, mutual entanglements.

This writing experiment took place during the two weeks preceding the exhibition. In other words, it emerged with the exhibition in the making. Most of the text was written while I stayed at the house. Thank you to the participating artists for the conversations, and for letting me participate in the installation of their work.

Dr Katve-Kaisa Kontturi is an art theorist and writer. Her work focuses on material-relational processes of art and the body, and she has a special interest in fabrics, fashion, and curating. She is currently a McKenzie Postdoctoral Fellow and co-convenor of the Matters of the Body research cluster in the Victorian College of the Arts at the University of Melbourne. She is also a founding member of the European New Materialist Network, and co-chairs its Creative Arts working group (COST IS1307)

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