

## Rationale

*'Beyond Matter'* started as a collaborative project to explore approaches to the anti-matter, the nonmaterial, and the spiritual within nature. These approaches were relevant to our concerns with the world's avalanche of consumable disposable items, plastic in the oceans, the escalating human restlessness and then Covid-19. While these issues looked like signs of a society's long attachment to material things to the point of objectifying nature, they suggested we had lost a connection to nature.

Spirituality is a subject I was already researching and found convincing theories of metaphysical forces and their impact on every form of life. Scientists were formulating compelling ideas on the advantages of taking a spiritual approach to science instead of a material one. I was also intrigued by the strength of creative spaces that are physical, mental and emotional, to the extent that they are also spiritual.

I came across Animism: a millenary way of relating to the world and the things and beings that populate it as if they had some form of consciousness. Indigenous people from all the Americas, the Pacific Islands and Australia believe in a sentient landscape where they perform rituals that stimulate enchantment and mindfulness in participants. The significant find was that the beliefs of Animism and their cultural practices fostered respect, honour, empathy and love for nature.

Fundamental questions emerged from investigating Animism and its practice: Would there be a possibility for a radical re-start, re-imagine, reconsider our relationship with nature? Can experiences with art still be used as conduits of higher consciousness and, as rituals, change people's way of thinking and acting?

Alyson Bell, a visual artist from Avalon, was on the south coast of NSW in early 2020 in the aftermath of a vast and unrelenting bush fire that consumed part of NSW in late 2019. Bell filmed the burned forests as she saw it, but, back in her studio, she realised she had witnessed not only the heart-wrenching devastation of bushfire but also a strange and surreal beauty. Bell's video work required a long process of watching those tree's vertical lines slipping by, merging, separating and mesmerising the artist until she felt completely immersed in the very essence of nature's rhythm.

Bell and I met at her studio in January 2020 when she showed me the event's footage. Covid -19 broke up in Wuhan a few weeks after this meeting I had with Bell. The alarming, fast and scary face of the virus was developing against a ghastly livestock market background. In the following couple of months, the world was in lockdown and silent.

Hirofumi Uchino, a Japanese artist, based in Australia, heard about the project and approached us. I wanted sound-work and rhythm to complete the project's visual work, and Uchino's sound-work had the characteristics of centuries-old Japanese culture with a hybrid diaspora's contemporaneity. The industrial sounds and metal work he created for this project focus on the consciousness of things. For Uchino, the natural and non-organic metal's symbology, accompanied with a sound, renders the possibility of a metaphysical dimension.

Victoria Lobregat is an artist based on the Central Coast of NSW, with whom I had many discussions about immateriality. Lobregat's practice often explores semiotics from her cultural background, although her oeuvre is expansive and includes three-dimensional assemblage tinged with psychedelia. The fantastical sculptural works she created for '*Beyond Matter*' invite viewers to reconsider space, volume, imagination and reality, and perceive the spirit in nature.

We were around the middle of the year 2020, standstill by the pandemic, and the project was slowly taking shape. However, I needed something magical, and, like magic, I heard that Myra Wizer, a Brazilian artist based in Avalon, uses alchemy to make her artworks. Wizer's practice focuses on the salvage and potential of discarded materials to transform into imaginary, mysterious creatures and landscapes using collage, layering, mix-media and chance under the guidance of a personal inner force, a non-physical muscle.

The work of Fiona Adie, a visual artist from Paddington, possesses an emotional characteristic. Adie's practice translates a love relationship she has with nature by observing the constant never-ending dialogue between all that exists in the world and universe and presenting it exuberantly on the canvas. Adie paints flowers, trees, rivers, forests as if they were part of her intimate space if they were her offsprings or other family members who offer comfort. For '*Beyond Matter*', the artist immersed herself in the sacredness of the sunrise, the wisdom of the trees, the power of thunder and lightning, which describe the unpredictable, the unavoidable, the movement in nature that, like love, makes us all feel alive.

Life would not be possible without water, and Marisa Pasiecznik Ross, a visual artist from St.Ives, has been exploring the fluidity, omnipresence and cultural significance of the element water from the beginning of her artistic career. Ross worked a deep blue colour on a repurposed acrylic panel, the medium she used deliberately. For the last few years, her work's visual narrative has investigated the presence of plastic in the ocean and what it means to the latter's existence and consequently ours.

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