***Convergence***

On a winter morning in July, a well-noted fortnight of rain over Perth lifted. The mild sunshine brought on a sudden, modest wanderlust in printmaker Melanie McKee. She determined to be, presently, amidst the damp, mid-year greening of the bush. With her husband, dogs and camera, McKee followed dashboard GPS prompts to a gravel car park, skirted some eerie railway surveillance cameras, and crossed a footbridge to where the park opened into a superlative ether of light and sensation.

Water glittered and gurgled. The air seemed temperate, suffused with almost-tactile light and stippled with Sunday noises: the *pock* of bocce played on dry grass, the hollow scrape of a landing kayak, hissing sausages, pebbles grumbling underfoot. It was the sort of day you can’t wait to remember, even while standing in it.

Bells Rapids Park lies on the perimeter of Perth, Western Australia, where the flat metropolis is encircled by the Darling Scarp, or The Hills. It’s a dualistic colloquialism: being ‘in the hills somewhere’ means far away, but travelling ‘to the hills and back’ is a breezy day out. For McKee, this was the minimum distance required to access undeveloped bushland and that most delightful sensation of being in an interlude.

Nearby, acting on a similar climactic opportunity, Monika Lukowska pulled into Lesmurdie Falls in Mundy Regional Park. Signposts graded the difficulty of various trails. Nobody was around. Trepidation stirred. Was it warm enough for Dugites? Did anybody know where she was going? Lukowska pressed forward into thickets of Marri and Jarrah. Worry dissipated with each step, giving way to curiosity, then appreciation, then ease.

Walking engages our sensory appetites. The forward movement of the body feeds the eye, with a cascade of approaching observations. At first we notice colour, sky, elevation. With more walking, these broad strokes erupt into a cacophony of finer details: gutters of fluorescent Sourgrass, Magpies warbling, white foam cycling in the rapids, the brassy, lemon-and-oil scent of Eucalypt sap, the graphite gloss of a Skink’s back, the tannic clarity of the river, its flickering Pinnaroo fish. One can exhale one’s usual cares. Walking rinses you.

Back in the studio, McKee and Lukowska began a process of purposeful remembering and layering. They talked, compared photographs, found the maps and the right words, prepared printing screens. They worked through concepts like ‘semblance’, ‘atmosphere’, ‘making place’ and ‘cadence’. Sharing their experiences, little shapes began to appear: rivers sluiced both sites; one’s on a hill, the other in a valley; one lay beside a commercial railway; the other beneath aeroplanes descending into Perth International. These thoughts were narrative eddies, poetic patterns that didn’t bear messages in themselves, but testified to a state of being awake and available to one’s surroundings.

Lukowska and McKee were not endeavouring, after historic landscape tradition, to ‘authentically’ translate site into image. Rather, they looked to begin a relationship with place: two parks heralding the greater entity of Perth. This is because McKee and Lukowska are coming at this project from the same direction, which is to say, from two different places outside of Australia. McKee was born in Zimbabwe and moved to Perth with her family in 2001. Lukowska relocated from Poland. Both artists put down roots in Perth alongside their partners, studying and working in its sprawling, coastal suburbs. Their collaboration arises from a mutual commitment to remembrance and exploration, in a long, ongoing transition between feeling at home in one place and feeling at home in another.

Pruned from McKee and Lukowska’s approach are any typical plots of landscape art: there have no ecological or political agenda; they don’t seek archetypal or revolutionary experiences; nor do they acknowledge the possibility of an endpoint, of completely knowing a place. Their activities – walking, documenting, research, discussion – are both autobiographical and artistic. This open, attitudinal methodology helps them unite everywhere they remember with new experiences and place making efforts, in one continuous biography.

All this collaborative thinking and feeling is manifest in *Convergence*. Its layers tell of the slipperiness and compounding of memory. Its wayfinding symbols map out the principles and poetics of visiting, for future forays. The print’s saturation refers both to Perth’s azure sky and iron-red earth and the amplification of these trips in each artist’s memory. If *Convergence* makes you linger on some past, sun-soaked day in the countryside, it is because this work gives you permission to celebrate any modest or light-hearted endeavour to take yourself away from routine and into a full and open encounter with place.

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