

Wildflowering by Design

(Wild/flower Women IV)

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Butchulla and Indigenous women:
Karen Hall • Rose Barrowcliffe • Nai Nai Bird
Francis Blair • Jan Williams

Curated by Dr Susan Davis (OAM)

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Women's connection to nature has long been explored through art and design, for practical and aesthetic purposes. Beginning with Traditional Custodians, then the artists who documented Australia's native plants with colonial botanists, women often turned to wildflowers as subject matter and inspiration. This exhibition seeks to explore contemporary responses to our botanical and wildflower heritage with women artists creating new work across the art and design spectrum.

The exhibition speaks to the heritage of Butchulla and Indigenous women, the concerns of ground-breaking Queensland artists and environmentalists Kathleen McArthur and Vera Scarth-Johnson, and the legacy of Florence Broadhurst who was inspired to create an Australian design culture.

Artists from the Fraser Coast, Bundaberg and beyond have examined the historical legacy but then explored their own connections to local landscapes and wildflowers. They have extended their practice to create new, re-imagined works, and a dynamic exhibition experience.

Through transforming nature into art and design, artists create works and objects which can enrich our homes and lives. The works help create a 'nature culture', a broader awareness of our native 'wildflower' heritage, and fresh perspectives on our relationships with the natural world.

Dr Susan Davis (OAM)

Wild/flower Women Projects

We acknowledge the traditional Country and custodianship of the Butchulla and Kabi Peoples and recognise that this Country has always been and continues to be of cultural, spiritual, social and economic significance to them. We recognise the thousands of generations of Custodians past, present and emerging who continue their connection with, and custodianship of Country.

Galangoor djali, nara – hello and welcome!

We as Aboriginal and Islander Women introduce you to our cultural and spiritual connection with our lands, and the materials and plants which were used and worked with by our Ancestors in this Fraser Coast Region - this region originally known as the Custodial Lands of the Butchulla Peoples.

As with all First Peoples, our Butchulla women held deep knowledge of the plants which could be used for food, medicine, fibre and tool making.

Today, our Butchulla and other Indigenous Women still connect and respect these plants which surround us.

As an introduction to the *'Wildflowering by Design: Wild/Flower Women IV'* exhibition, we share with you here just some ways we as Aboriginal and Islander women continue to represent the beauty and knowledge of our people. Old ways and new, reflected with love and respect for our Ancestral lands.

We join with other 'Wild/flower Women' in walking these lands, identifying and marvelling at the beauty and structures of the many plants and flowers. As you walk upon any lands on this vast continent, respect the custodial people on whose land you wander.

Identify and enjoy your discoveries. Remember that these plants all play a part in the local ecosystem, lifecycle and sustenance of local birds and insects.

Lastly, on your journeys –

Wanya nyin yangu

Wanai Djinang djaa

Wherever you go

Leave only footprints.

Galangor nyin.

Thank you.

Karen Hall

Butchulla Advisor

Wildflowering by Design

Wild/flower Women and our wildflowering legacy

Women such as Kathleen McArthur (1915-2000) and Vera Scarth Johnson (1912-1999) we call 'Wild/flower Women'. This is not only because they loved wildflowers and the wilds of nature, but they were often fiery, 'wild' and difficult to ensure those environments were protected.

Like the wildflowers themselves, our 'Wild/flower Women' resisted being tamed and orderly. They were independent trailblazers who used all means possible, including their writings and artistry to try to inspire a love for our native wildflowers and plants. They used culture, art and design to create a consciousness of our own native flora, wanting Australians to value and respect what grew here naturally, rather than hankering for the green lawns, topiaries and cottage gardens of lands far away.

With this exhibition we celebrate the achievements of those women, who because of their love of the humble and under-appreciated, became champions and pioneers. They provided models of how to use creativity, knowledge and skills of persuasion to ensure we can still enjoy native wildflowers and ecologies today, and care about them into the future.

Of the earth

The colours of nature, the pigments of the earth, the hues that may be extracted, the materials harvested and transformed.

Within this exhibition you can see old knowledges and women's arts and crafts revisited, revived and reimagined.

You can see natural inks and colours,

Marks and materials from the earth,

Experimentation with what may be extracted from nature,

Dying, weaving, printing, sprinkling, painting,

Works forged to honour the earth, with consideration of sustainability, of treading lightly,

‘Wildflowering in the Wallum’

‘Wildflowering’ is a term coined by Kathleen McArthur and Judith Wright and involves walking, observing, learning, documenting, creating and sharing these experiences with others.

Kathleen McArthur defined and described going wildflowering as meaning:

...different things to different people. There are those who, with magnifying glass before their eyes, looking every inch the scientist, count stamens, measure hairs, pigeon-hole all the definitive features neatly in order and scoff at common names. Others bring with them an artistic inclination, noting the colours and shapes and shadows in the intimate and in the general landscape. Then there are those precious few who find poetry in a Helmut Orchid “leaning its ear to the ground”; see Irises as “lilac butterflies” and a fox in a Yellow Doubletail ...

There are as many different ways to approach the “art of seeing” as there are people who think and feel and one way is as worthy as any other to make of it an enjoyably sensuous experience... (McArthur, *Australian Wildflowers* 52-3)

The term ‘wallum’ has been adopted to describe the heathland country of South-East Queensland.

The word ‘wallum’ is generally acknowledged as having been adopted from Aboriginal language. Kathleen McArthur shared such in her first book:

For those readers unfamiliar with the name, Wallum is the usually flat, badly drained, sandy country of the coast. It is an Aboriginal word some say applied to all species of *Banksia*, and others say to *Banksia aemula*. The Wallum, being up to the present practically useless for commercial purposes provides our best wildflower shows... (McArthur 1959) p. 2

The name ‘wallum’ is used to describe heathland in South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales, as well as coastal islands such as K’Gari (Fraser Island), Minjerribah (North Stradbroke) and Mulgumpin (Moreton Island). It is characterised by low-lying plant forms, hardy, prickly plants which are able to withstand wind, salt and sun. There are different types of wallum, mainly the dry heath and wet heath, but also wallum woodland which may also transition into other types of forest and woodland.

Fires, fibres and resilience

Respect for fire and burning has a long history for First Nations' peoples and plays an important role in the lifecycle of many plants within the wallum and the bush.

A number of our artists were drawn to document and reflect upon how the bush responds and regenerates. This was brought home all too readily after fires that ravaged many regions in 2019.

Those impacts and the ideas of resilience and regeneration have been explored by some of our artists through fabric, fibres, ceramics and fashion. They reflect the stark remnants of the scorched landscape and the wondrous revival of the wallum post devastation.

A number of works feature collaborations with other artists and crafts people - quilters, textile and leather artists. This highlights the value of collaboration, and how sharing experiences can be a source of inspiration but also can sustain our creativity and wellbeing.

Wildflowering into the world of design

The artists involved in this exhibition were invited to explore our botanical and wildflower heritage, to engage with the local landscapes, but express such through new forms and media.

Together and independently we walked and went wildflowering, discovered what grew where, what was interesting, unusual, unique to the region.

Through transforming nature into art and design, the artists each responded through creating works and objects which can also enrich our homes and lives.

They capture aspects of those experiences directly and indirectly, inviting you into the landscapes, and introducing you to plants and flowers encountered across the Bundaberg and Fraser Coast regions. They also share something of their emotional and personal connections, their histories and heritage.

Fabric design and printing have been explored across the spectrum of analogue to digital practice. The different perspectives of the wallum experience are shared through the wide shot pan across the landscape, which cleverly references a wallpaper design heritage, with digital works providing the 'pop' of colour and discovery. Across the spectrum of work we see images of nature refashioned in unique and startling ways.

The works continues the mission of past 'wild/flower women', inviting you to look, learn, love, care and perhaps be inspired to create!