

Heatwave

Sue Michael, May 2021

There are noetic science researchers assuming the human heart is a complex and previously understudied **sensory** organ. The abundant neurons within the heart may have direct pathways to the brain, sharing connections to the outer world that differ from our usual sensory inputs. The heart may collect information in a way that artists may, potentially, have a profound understanding of; the subjective assessments of their worlds may encompass a well-known use of 'quiet knowing,' no less valuable as an analytical tool.

I clearly remember the January day when the white waxen figures of the dead fish carpeted the surface of the diminished Darling River, during a time of drought in 2019. Interviews and drone images supplemented my own ongoing, inner 'newsreel' of these drastic events. Within a year, the blackened skies that accompanied unprecedented Australian bushfires, hung above bodies of water and flaming forests, stretching far beyond any computer-generated, media set. A deep sense of nature's loss is still within our midst, albeit, for some, hidden and unresolved during the pandemic. During the 2020 bushfires, we were left pinned to our sofas in unaffected areas, silenced by the horror, with an environmental awareness that, for many of us, became all-embracing and a turning point in our philosophical pathways. The heart was the key sensory organ at this time, more powerful than the fleeting media feeds. The pioneers used to call summer in Australia, 'death season', and this idea was now updated in our hearts.

Opposing these negative occurrences, the artists within the *Heatwave* exhibition brought a foundation of past merciful, summer events, many on a domestic, intimate scale. Again, the heart has been used as a sensory organ when remembering those anecdotes. Summer could encapsulate some intense moments of delight, with extra shading architecture made, play in the garden sprinklers, the making of special refreshing foods and beverages, distinctive twilight activities, the rituals such as opening up of the homes to aid air circulation, eventful visits to the ocean, fresh fruit picking, and holiday adventures within the neighbourhood's social groupings. Each of the artists' families seemed to have their own adaptive social practices...that have formed a metaphorical sheet of ever-moving grace, to progress these artists, and thus the wider community.

Between these extremes lies territory that has been explored by the artists participating in *Heatwave*. Could we consider the further possibility of reciprocal relationships with the natural world... in much the same way that Gurdjieff expounded a century ago? Have we not the example led by Aboriginal Thought... that a closer and more spiritual alignment with our environment will be nourishing? Can we turn to our children with a new philosophical underpinning, that will include the consideration of the natural world in all our decisions? We seem to be at a crossroads at this time, where choices are to follow a more high-tech, weapon laden, robotic existence, with diminished plant and animal life a consequence of our human dominance, versus a return to a more simple arcadian life that somehow reverses the 'progress' required by the digital age.

Heatwave highlights the value of artists as public intellectuals, for within these gentle explorations are the traces of pathways we each may need to carefully think about. These artists have used their homed sensibilities, and their heart as a sensory organ, to produce representations of the reminders, merciful gifts, and potential pathways through this time of challenge. I have purposely not focused on specific formal attributes of each artist's work, but instead wish to highlight the ghosts of family adaptations that have been shaped by domestic environments, that are infused into artworks, and are shared, emphasized, carefully trained and trimmed, and laden with the heart's energy and gifted to others, whether they be specific researchers or enquiring minds. We need to nurture and protect those who have this uncommon ability, for it will take so many disciplines to solve the wicked problems of this world.

I have heard wiser people say that all expectations, attachments, artifice and control must be left behind before we enter 'the next world'. These West Gallery rooms have brought together works that oppose all those forces. They are reminders of Grace.