



caroline rothwell
horizon



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26 July – 28 November 2021

introduction

Caroline Rothwell's practice explores the intersection of art and science through sculpture, collaged historical prints and digital animations that invite viewers to consider our relationship with the natural environment. The title of her current exhibition, which was commissioned for Hazelhurst Arts Centre, comes from the idea of looking to the horizon – looking out from an immediate frame of reference to the infinite and considering future possibilities.

In recent years Rothwell has been making regular site visits to Kurnell in Sydney's south, the site of first encounters between Europeans and First Nations people on the east coast of Australia. This led to the development of a new body of work exhibited in *Splice* in 2019, which became the catalyst for this exhibition. The starting point is an

Untitled series (2019) of works that look to the history of Kamay (Botany Bay) and its ecology while recognising it as the first site of invasion or colonisation. In the works Rothwell has sliced into original engravings from Joseph Banks' *Florilegium*, of specimens collected at Kamay in 1770. Into each engraving she has inserted a pink tongue painted in watercolour, where its sinuous form disrupts the pages and their historical significance. The tongue is a repeated motif, weaving its way throughout the exhibition.

A central installation specially created for *Horizon* is a series of topographical forms integrated with sculptural works and found objects. *Topography 1,2,3 and 4* (2021) have developed from Rothwell's interest in looking at the infrastructure of how we exist and the interconnectedness of botanical, human and industrial systems.

Opposite:
Untitled 335 (detail) 2019
watercolour on Arches
paper collage, on Joseph
Banks *Florilegium a la
poupee* print from copper
plate engraving, Plate 335,
300gsm Somerset mould
made acid free paper

Previous page:
Blue Cabinet 2019
canvas, hydrostone,
aluminium, steel, paint,
epoxy glass



S. Parkinson del. 1770
J. F. Miller pinx. 1775

PLATE 335

J. Goldar sculps.
C.R. Rothwell 2019



Rothwell's signature sculptures feature throughout the exhibition – as the stand-alone works *Blue Cabinet* (2019), *Mother and child* (2019) and *Symbiosis (Blue Beard Orchid)* (2020/21) or integrated into the topographical forms. Appearing as if made from inflated latex, the soft and voluptuous forms are contradicted by their rigidity. They begin as canvas sculptures which then have a metal armature inserted, and the fabric forms are then cast in gypsum cement, making them solid and permanent.

Morphed plant forms feature throughout and play with notions of hybridity and beauty. The large-scale *Primal Plant* (2011–2021) is a series of digitally manipulated photographs of morphed weed species from different parts of the world including Australia, Afghanistan, UK and China. The video work *Plant Library* (2020) is a result of the early experimentation for Rothwell's recent collaboration with Google Creative Lab. The process explored using a large database of botanical illustrations (from the open source Biodiversity Heritage

Above:
Topography 2 2021
installation, mixed
media



Library) to morph different plants together to animate them and create hybrid forms. The final product of the collaboration is the *Infinite Herbarium* online program (2021), developed by Rothwell in collaboration with Google Creative Lab and recently shown at *The National 2021: New Australian Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and The Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney.

Infinite Herbarium online program on their smart phones to create their own plant morphs. The program aims to expand our experience of the vast, diverse botanical world – creating a digital reflection of the constant flux of living systems.

Carrie Kibbler
Curator

Visitors to Hazelhurst are invited to engage with the various plants in the expansive gardens and use the

Above:
Plant Library (detail) 2020
single-channel video

A weed sprouts from a drain

Chloé Wolifson

Tongues curl and snake their way through a surreal topography punctuated by plumbing fixtures, measurement devices and glossy sculpted forms. They infiltrate the installations in Caroline Rothwell's exhibition *Horizon*, weaving their way between the familiar and the abstract, morphing with the stem of a plant, or echoing the coil of a corrugated pipe.

The tongue is a potent symbol: a device of translation, of consumption, of sensuality, of greed. Disconnected from the body and absurdly long, the tongues in *Horizon* are animalistic, phallic, abject, simultaneously seducing and repelling the viewer. They first make their appearance in the series of works on paper *Untitled 335, 317, 72 and 7* (2019), which are made

using original copperplate engravings commissioned by Joseph Banks in the late 18th century to document botanical species encountered during Cook's first voyage. In this work Rothwell has literally cut into history, slicing open a portal through which the tongue, the exhibition's probing protagonist, can pass through. The muscular pink appendages wind between the delicate stems, leaves and flowers of these specimens cited by Banks long ago, but understood well before that.

Unlike other organs with their defined and discrete shapes, the tongue seems to have no logical starting point, anchored somewhere in our bodies by a root, not unlike a plant sprouting from the earth. In *Horizon*, the tongue

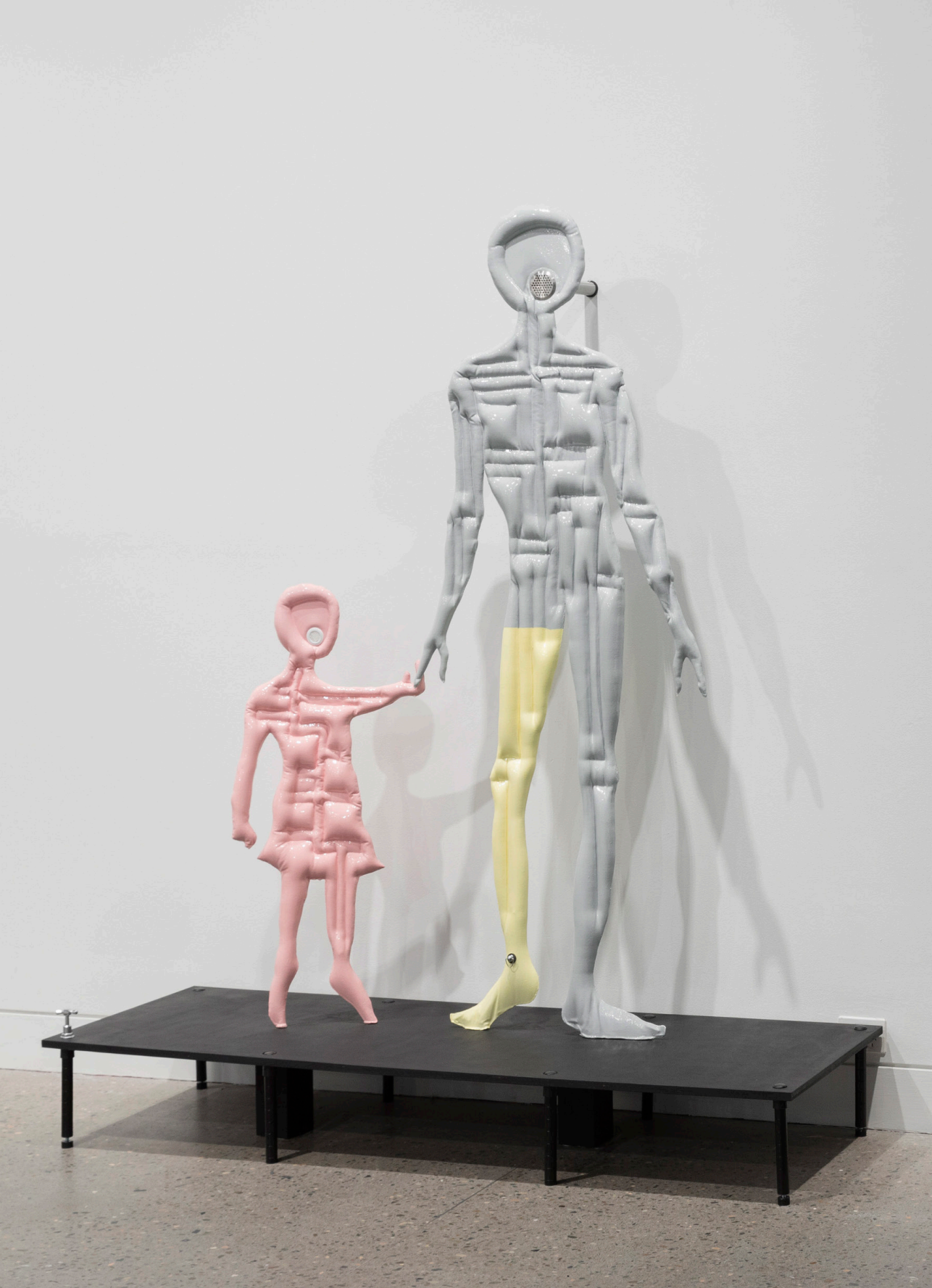


has grown like a weed, pushing beyond its usual boundaries and growing into sometimes menacing proportions. These tongues slyly lick, lazily flop, rear up like a serpent about to strike, and lurk menacingly like a scorpion's tail.

The plinth-topographies these tongues inhabit are an irregular horizon line of domestic-scaled tables and chairs slicing jaggedly through the gallery. Sculptures and found objects hang from underneath the tabletops like stalactites or wads of chewing gum stuck under a school desk, reach skyward like sun-seeking vegetation, are embedded innocuously in their surface, and languidly drape over their edges. It is an imagined cross-section of civil infrastructure – subterranean

pipes carrying water and waste in and out of sight, a system which echoes that of our own bodies. Drains are the orifices between these two worlds, and in *Topography 3* (2021) one is struggling to contain a black substance which is oozing to the surface. Like weeds, when a substance appears in the wrong place it's an apparent sign of a problem.

The tongues in *Horizon* are out of proportion and out of place, like much of the flora found throughout the exhibition. A weed is a plant that has breached a boundary, infiltrated where it is not wanted. Foot-soldiers of colonisation, they are subject to attempts to control them. (Sometimes, weeds are eventually embraced as botanical heroes, such as in a



book Rothwell encountered featuring weeds of New Zealand, published in the 1920s, with the now-beloved silver fern adorning the cover, and the medicinally-prized manuka coming in a close second.) The series of large-scale digital prints *Primal Plant* (2011–2021) feature amalgams of weeds collected from sites around the world, from Tarinkot in Afghanistan to Pearl Beach in New South Wales. Their rich colours are smeared over a dark background like the chlorophyll of a squashed leaf, while hunched human skeletons nestle quietly among their leaves.

The impressive scale of these hybrid plants calls into question the accepted hierarchies of natural and human-made systems, and the choices and value judgements that are made when recording the world around us. The archive and the museum are ever-present themes in *Horizon*. *Blue Cabinet* (2019) is a representation of a 19th century cabinet of curiosities, and like the other sculptural elements of the show, its stuffed form recalls taxidermied specimens. The works *Plant Library* (2020) and *Infinite Herbarium* (2021), made in collaboration with Google Creative Lab, unsettle the archive by using machine learning to morph existing records of plant species into images of newly imagined species.

In *Mother and child* (2019), Rothwell further toys with the history of visual culture. While the title recalls a classical



art historical trope, the characters holding hands are a play on the ubiquitous *Caution Children Crossing* road traffic sign, with the adult figure's pose recalling a much earlier figurative representation, drawn by the 16th century anatomist Andreas Vesalius. The drain covers which take the place of mouths are a visceral reminder of the threat of respiratory issues which loom ever-present in this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, catastrophic bushfires, and unprecedented atmospheric pollution. In *Mother and child* the human body is the maker of its environmental and cultural conditions, and the sum of them.

While the figure is not a ubiquitous feature in the works in *Horizon*, the forms, scale and gestures of Rothwell's works form a bridge to the body, a reminder that it belongs to a broader system. This is the self, turned inside-out. Orifices and limbs, respiratory and reproductive organs

Opposite:
Mother and child 2019
canvas, gypsum cement,
aluminium, steel, paint,
epoxy glass

Above:
installation of *Horizon*
including
Primal Plant 2011–2021
digital prints on canvas
Topography 3 2021
installation, mixed media

are alluded to in the symmetries of plant tendrils and the grills of drains. The surfaces of these sculptures have the texture of textile, and their fabric-like seams trace soft pillowy bulges, belying their cement-filled interiors. A multitude of art historical influences coalesce within these material explorations, from mediaeval manuscripts documenting the natural world, to decorative Baroque devices, to the dream-like juxtapositions of Surrealism. In the installation *Topography 1* (2021) a simple black chair rigidly parallels the lines of the plinth, upon which rests a softly reclining version of the same chair, rendered fleshily in a pink wax and caustic finish.

The exhibition moves between continents, between centuries, between knowledge systems. By using open rather than solid plinths Rothwell has kept lines of sight open through the gallery, reiterating the porosity of history. Indeed, *Horizon* tracks back and forth across time and space, stopping at particular moments to investigate, like a probing tongue. Raw geology sits alongside contemporary material exploration, such as in *Topography 1*, in which a spectacular gypsum crystal forms part of a sculpture of a plant form moulded from gypsum cement. 21st century carbon clouds are conjured into animated Rococo curlicues in the



video work *Carbon Emission 1* (2019). And in Rothwell's *Untitled* series based on Joseph Banks' *Florilegium* prints, the work of a contemporary artist invades the work of her colonial colleague.

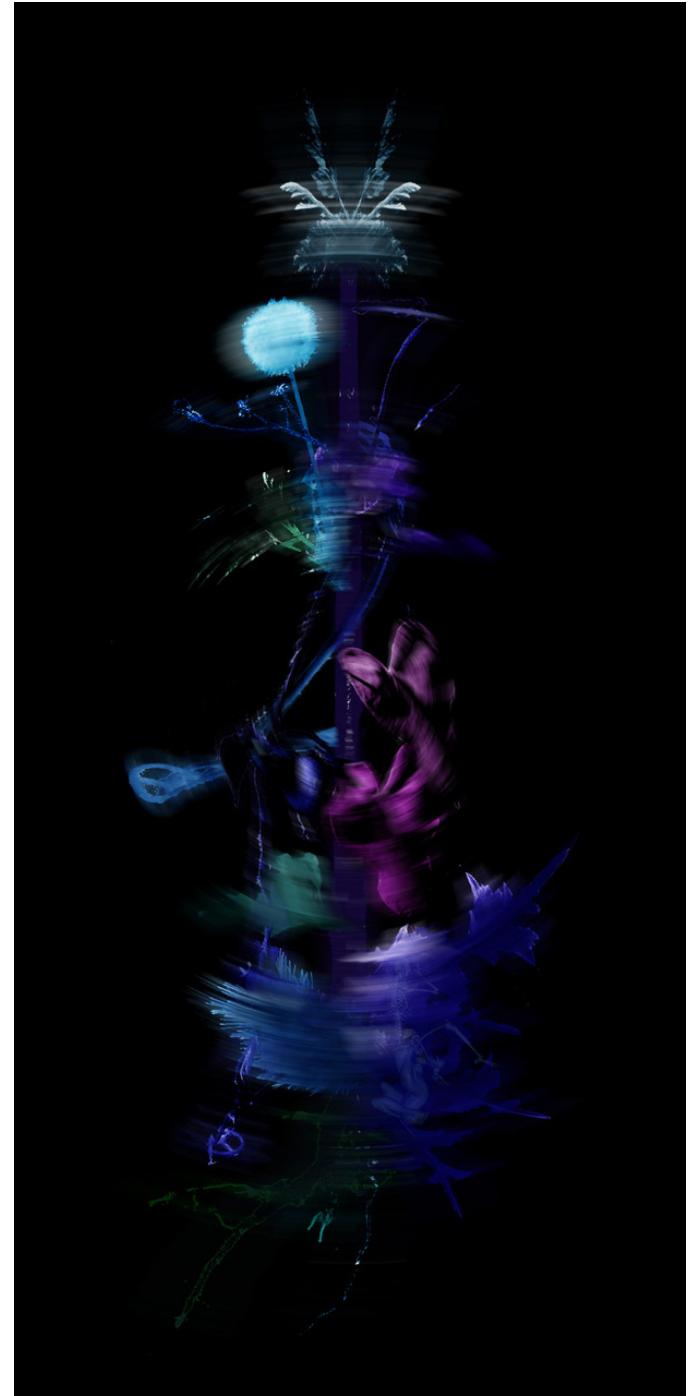
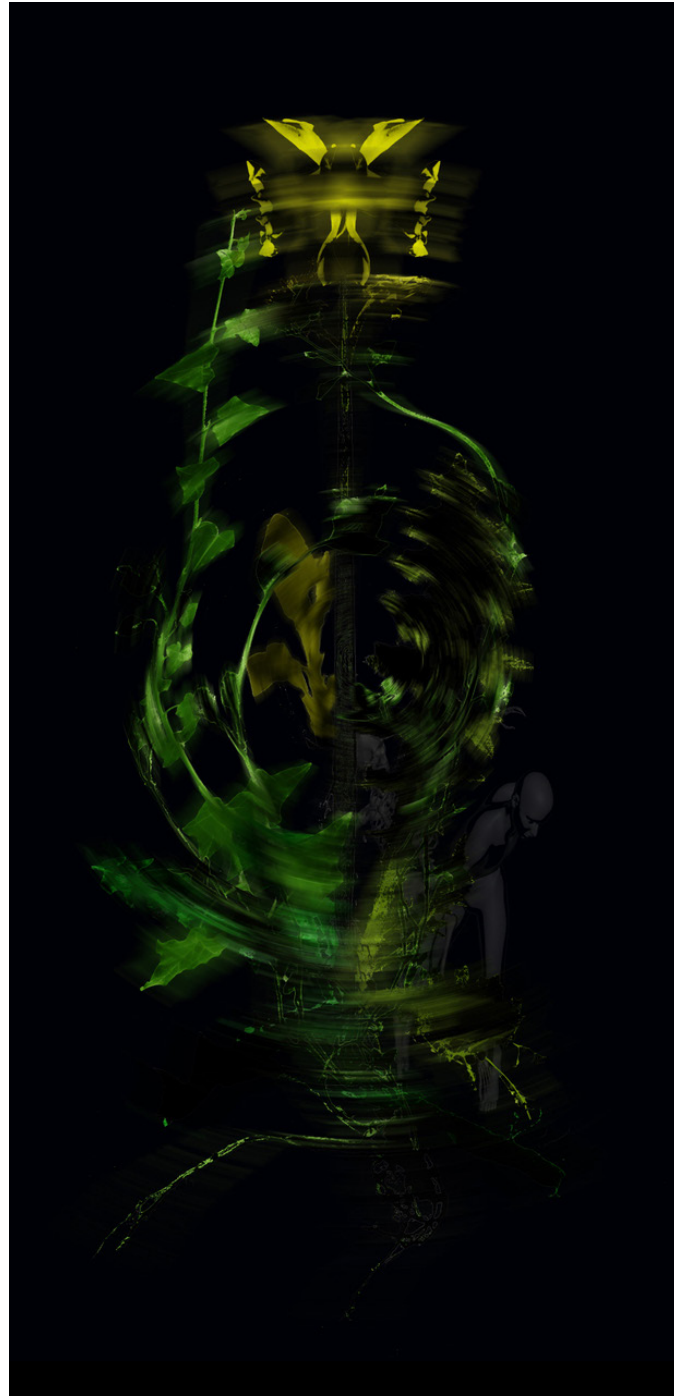
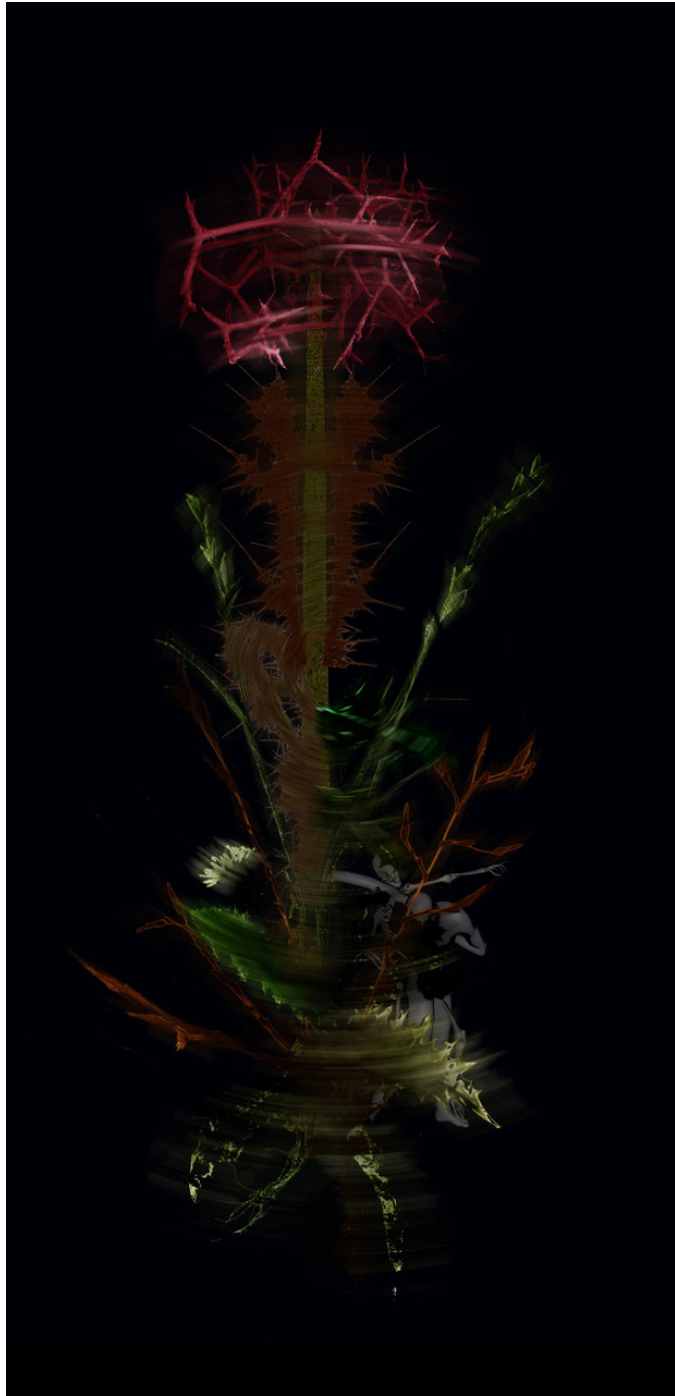
Horizon questions borders, containment and control, while moving across and between time and place. Carbon colonises the atmosphere, plants and people assert themselves in new homes, liquids flow into places where they aren't welcome. Rothwell has sliced a portal into history, and then created an infrastructure to allow ideas to travel through and across it in unexpected ways, navigating pipes, encountering witches hats and reflective lights, and consulting compasses and thermometers along the way. A weed sprouts from a drain, encircled by an inquiring tongue.

Opposite:
Topography 3 2021
installation, mixed media

Above (installation from left):
Walking (detail) 2020
wood, pressed plants, paint, resin
Carbon Emission 1 2019
single channel digital video







from left:
Primal Plant: Tarinkot, southern Afghanistan
Primal Plant: London, England
Primal Plant: Beijing, China

Primal Plant series
2011 – 2021
digital prints on canvas





Watch the video [here](#)

list of works

Blue Cabinet
2019
canvas, hydrostone,
aluminium, steel, paint, epoxy
glass
175 x 102 x 5 cm

Carbon Emission 1
2019
single channel digital video,
2.17min loop
edition 8 + 1 A/P

Mother and child
2019
canvas, gypsum cement,
aluminium, steel, paint, epoxy
glass
207 x 180 x 60 cm

Plant Library
2020
single-channel video, 1min
loop
in collaboration with Google
Creative Lab

Primal Plant series:
Beijing, China
Compton, England
London, England
Pearl Beach, New South Wales,
Australia
Pilgrims' Way, England
Tarinkot, southern Afghanistan
2011 – 2021
digital print on canvas
287 x 136 cm each

Symbiosis (Bluebeard Orchid)
2020/21
canvas, gypsum cement,
aluminium, steel, paint, epoxy
glass
208 x 60 x 60 cm

Topography 1
2021
installation, mixed media
194 x 284 x 208 cm

Topography 2
2021
installation, mixed media
191 x 232 x 112 cm

Topography 3
2021
installation, mixed media
237 x 225 x 225 cm

Topography 4
2021
installation, mixed media
217 x 351 x 281 cm

Untitled 7
2019
watercolour on Arches paper
collage, on Joseph Banks
Florilegium a la poupee print
from copper plate engraving,
Plate 7, 300gsm
Somerset mould made acid
free paper
76 x 59 x 3 cm

Untitled 72
2019
watercolour on Arches paper
collage, on Joseph Banks
Florilegium a la poupee print
from copper plate engraving,
Plate 72, 300gsm Somerset
mould made acid free paper
76 x 59 x 3 cm

Untitled 317
2019
watercolour on Arches paper
collage, on Joseph Banks
Florilegium a la poupee print
from copper plate engraving,
Plate 317, 300gsm Somerset
mould made acid free paper
76 x 59 x 3 cm

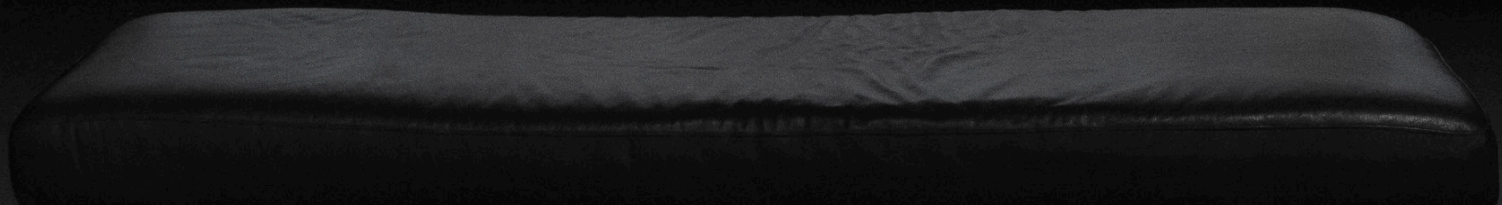
Untitled 335
2019
watercolour on Arches paper
collage, on Joseph Banks
Florilegium a la poupee print
from copper plate engraving,
Plate 335, 300gsm Somerset
mould made acid free paper
76 x 59 x 3 cm

Walking
2020
wood, pressed plants, paint,
resin
218 x 18 x 2.5 cm

Infinite Herbarium
2021
online digital program
in collaboration with Google
Creative Lab

[g.co/infiniteherbarium](https://www.g.co/infiniteherbarium)







acknowledgements

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Caroline Rothwell is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

roslynoxley9.com.au
tolarnogalleries.com
carolinerothwell.com

Hazelhurst Arts Centre would like to thank the artist for developing this insightful and fascinating exhibition for our visitors.

Hazelhurst Arts Centre acknowledges the Dharawal speaking people, traditional custodians of the land on which Hazelhurst stands, and pays respects to elders past, present and emerging.

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Caroline Rothwell Horizon

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Curated by Carrie Kibbler

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Videography: Constantine Productions

Hazelhurst
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