

Review: Wendy Teakel's *Remnants* and Noelene Lucas's *Entanglement* address climate change in different ways

By Sasha Grishin

May 30 2022 - 12:00am



Wendy Teakel, *Poor Things*, 2021. Picture: Brenton McGeachie

Wendy Teakel: *Remnants*. Canberra Contemporary Art Space, 44 Queen Elizabeth Terrace, Parkes. Until June 12, 2022. ccas.com.au.

Canberra Contemporary Art Space has one of the most scenic locations of any gallery in Canberra, looking out onto Lake Burley Griffin and positioned between the National Gallery and the National Library. It is a most appropriate location for an exhibition that deals with our threatened and constantly changing natural environment.

Wendy Teakel, a local artist who for about a decade was the head of the sculpture workshop at the ANU School of Art, presents a complex installation consisting of eight individual pieces that in various ways comment on a particular environment.

Her co-exhibitor, occupying the back space of the gallery, Noelene Lucas, is a Sydney-based artist who for 20 years was the head of the Sculpture Department at the University of Western Sydney, and she presents a multi-screen video installation with a bird song soundtrack.

Her work comments on paths to extinction and the chemical pollution that threatens to choke the world.

Teakel is an artist of the land. Figuratively and literally, you can smell the soil and toil in her art - there is a transparency of means as she redeploys discarded farm tools, iron guttering, fencing wire, branches and grasses to create new realities.

The Australian sculptor John Davis (1936-1999) was one of the pioneers of process-based land art that lyrically explored landscape and ecology.

Teakel, in some ways, carries the torch that Davis lit and she employs the materials that surround her to explore the changes in the environment on the rural outskirts of Canberra where she lives.

One is seduced by Teakel's inventive wit, where she uses garden hoses to form an armature from which sprout the grasses of the paddock.

In one of her remarkable creations, *Poor Things*, 2021, old rusting garden forks for handles have tangled branches whose joints are held together in an unlikely manner with bandages.

It is simple, lyrical, and effective as it seems to comment about an environment behaving poorly.



Wendy Teakel, *Regret*. Picture: Brenton McGeachie

There is also a touch of the absurd in most of her pieces. In *Regret*, 2021, for example, an old chair has plants sprouting from it as it stands within a tray of gumnuts and is crowned by an old, rusted bow saw.

The intriguing quality of Teakel's art is its apparent simplicity of means that conceals a free-flowing complexity of possible associative meanings.

There is a concern for the environment with the prevailing threat from the saw over wood, yet each viewer will respond differently and create their own network of associations.

Teakel's paintings, where the paint does battle with the scorch marks from the poker, evoke the sensation of struggle with drought and the passing seasons. Rusted fence wire, old fence posts, grass and weeds bear witness to a harsh environment and about something cyclical about the passage of time.

It is a portrait of country by someone who relates a lived experience and relates it with a sense of lyricism allowing the elements of nature to speak with their own voice.

In contrast, Lucas's video installation appears technically accomplished but also quite prescriptive.

We are presented with moving images of nature that we are invited to contemplate and then scrolling texts spelling out the conclusions that we should be drawing from the displays concerning the extinction of species, global warming and the extreme pollution that is threatening the planet.

The exhibitions by Teakel and Lucas focus our attention on the omnipresent threat of climate change.