

Strong artists leave graphic mark

Sasha Grishin

LINDA Dening, Kim Mahood, Sally Simpson and Wendy Teakel: *Staying with the trouble*. Belconnen Arts Centre. Until May 14, 2023. belcoarts.com.au.

Traditionally, drawing was the foundation for art practice in the Western European tradition at least since the 15th century Renaissance. In the 20th century this tradition came under challenge, initially from photography, and subsequently through various digital means. Conceptually and physically, there is a huge difference between a drawn image - a physical mark made by hand - and a snapped image, something that is recorded mechanically. One is not necessarily inferior to the other, but they are different and in art practice this difference is frequently ignored.

By the late 20th century, many mainstream art schools ceased to teach life drawing, that is, drawing from the model, and in some instances questioned the need for drawing or, for that matter, the validity of painting. Photoshop was seen as the new panacea in artmaking - images being developed on a computer screen and produced on a printer with the artist tapping the necessary instructions.

Students going to art schools in the 2020s at times encountered teachers who had themselves never learned to draw or to paint or mould or carve and had a reliance on digital technologies. Students, in some instances, expressed annoyance at being taught Photoshop, something with which they had grown up with since primary school, and demanded skill-based instruction.

What is refreshing about *Staying with the trouble* is that all four artists - mature women artists with close links to Canberra - excel at the art of drawing. Each approaches drawing from a different and personal perspective, both conceptually and in the physical act of execution.

Wendy Teakel, best known as a sculptor, tackles drawing in a very hands-on physical manner and is quick to surrender to chance



Kim Mahood, *Tanami Salt Lake Country*, 2023. Picture supplied

and lucky accidents. In her large, impressive drawing *Tender shoots - at last!* she allows the various deposits of soot and pokerwork, together with the more conventional art materials including acrylic, conte and charcoal to create a powerful and memorable pattern on very thick Lanaquarrelle cotton rag water-colour paper. It is a drawing with enormous tactile properties suggesting a landscape that we could inhabit with our imagination. It is a tough, struggling landscape that seems to speak of our place and of our time.

Kim Mahood, the wonderful writer and intellectual, is based in Wamboin on the outskirts of Canberra and was a frequent exhibitor back in the days of the Helen

Maxwell Gallery. Mahood spent much of her youth living in the red outback, so that when she draws it, she draws like a local and not as a visitor.

Her majestic ink and pastel drawing *Tanami Salt Lake Country* spreads across four sheets of paper and over two metres and breathes of the place. She achieves that difficult balance between the sense of sprawling vastness of the outback and, at the same time, the sense of preciousness of detail. It is a gorgeous piece into which one wants to dissolve.

Linda Dening, now based in Braidwood, in her drawing *Weaving Landscape Diamond Firetrail Nest* - a large detailed

charcoal drawing on rich Arches paper - recreates a whole ecosystem that is precious and fragile. There is an obsessive preoccupation with detail and as the eye starts to unravel the separate shapes and textures, a whole magical microcosm is revealed.

Sally Simpson lives on the edge of Canberra and has a reputation for her drawings and bone sculptures. The work that she has selected is around an aquatic theme of a figure suspended in water. *Out of My Depth*, a large charcoal drawing on drafting film, has a lovely slippery quality of being and disappearing into a vastness.

The exhibition has four strong women artists leaving their graphic mark.