

Between sky and peaks

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Entertainment

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Project curator and artist Dr Gretel Taylor said the experience with the other artists was beautiful.
(Tanya Steele).

By Tanya Steele

Winter will see themes of collaboration, connection and being in place expressed through art for a two-month exhibition at Burrinja Gallery in Upwey.

After a special residency collaboration, the BodyPlaceProject will present 'ngurrak-al marram-u / body of the mountain' to the public with the exhibition launching on 24 May, along with some exciting workshops planned to go with it.

Curated by Dr Gretel Taylor, the exhibition presents the works of a diverse group of eight artists who have shared practice and perspective as they considered the connection between humans and the land while using visual, sound and performance art to express their experiences.

Dr Taylor said the project was about the artists walking together and observing what happened over time by being together and walking on Country from their very different perspectives.

“We all wanted to just immerse in sharing practice about place – so it’s really about that,” she said.

The place-responsive art and performance exhibition was produced in collaboration with artists Gülsen Özer and Mandy Nicholson and the exhibition features works from Aarti Jadu, Rebecca Murray, Mandy Nicholson, Jill Orr, Gülsen Özer, Laki Sideris, Gretel Taylor, and Tammy Wong Hulbert.

“Jill Orr is really a legend of Australian performance art,” said Dr Taylor.

Led by Wurundjeri Traditional Custodian Mandy Nicholson, Dr Taylor said the group stayed in a house in the forest a few nights last year and walked through the Corhanwarrabul (the Dandenongs), as a ‘mobile residency’.

“It’s each artist’s particular response to the close-range experience of interacting with the forest over time,” she said.

“We even came out here at nighttime.”

The mobile residency was the first planned for more to come, and the artists collaborated throughout it using an array of mediums from movement activities to cyanotype sun printing, drawing and photography.

Dr Taylor described the experience as beautiful and said the artist had a really great time sharing practice and having a go at doing different artists’ activities.

“ There was lots of sharing of each other’s methods, as well as evolving a shared discourse about place-responsive practice during the residency,” said Dr Taylor.

“We did artistic experiments with performance and photography, which was really cool in the forest at night under the supermoon.”

The experience leading to ngurrak-al marram-u / body of the mountain had a broad focus at the time, zooming out to examine the relationship between humans and the environment globally.

As the group moved through the forest, ‘feeling the slopes of the mountain in their legs’, Dr Taylor said they were treating their relationships to this place as a microcosm for how humans can relate to the environment, on a much bigger scale.

Dr Taylor said the collective of artists followed the route of the much-anticipated ngurrak barring track.

“It’s connecting lots of different paths through the Dandenongs, and there’s public art being installed and there’s cultural acknowledgement as well, through the signage,” she said.

“It’s going to be really exciting.”

For her own artwork for the exhibition, Dr Taylor spent a whole 12 hours in the forest, recording her movements in one area.

“This was improvising and being present physically in one site in the forest over the course of a whole day,” said Dr Taylor.

“Sometimes I’m dancing and sometimes I’m eating a muesli bar throughout the 12 hours,” she said.

Dr Taylor said her durational performance for video was about being present and seeing how the different textures, sounds and movements affected her movement, such as the sounds of birds and her interaction with the textures of bark.

“It was quite an uncomfortable patch of forest, in a way,” she said.

“The experience was really beautiful, profound, and also a struggle.”

The exhibition will open on Saturday 24 May from 3 to 5pm, and will include performances by the Djirri Djirri dancers and Jill Orr,

In June, the gallery will also offer workshops for all ages and an international panel discussion to accompany the project.

ngurrak-al marram-u / body of the mountain will be on show at Burrinja Cultural Centre for two months at Wurundjeri Country, 351 Glenfern Rd, Upwey.