

DEEP

DOWN

04-26 MAY 2019  
GRACE KINGSTON  
PEACOCK GALLERY &  
AUBURN ARTS STUDIO

PEACOCK GALLERY AND  
AUBURN ARTS STUDIO  
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COVER:

Grace Kingston, *Deep Down* installation view #1

ALL INTERIOR IMAGES:

Grace Kingston, *Deep Down*, 2019.

Sculpture installation with video projection and audio soundtrack, dimensions variable.

# FROM THE PEACOCK GALLERY

KRISTINA TITO:  
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Cumberland Council's Peacock Gallery is hosting artist Grace Kingston's exhibition *Deep Down* in Gallery One throughout May 2019. We would like to acknowledge that this exhibition takes place on Darug land and to pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

*Deep Down* is an immersive and sensorial work that brings a mossy micro world indoors and *nature* into a gallery space. It's a world of visual vibrations, sounds and movement gathered from the Auburn Botanic Gardens across the road. It's a constructed cosy snapshot using plush pillows of the 'natural' world outside. A space to be lounged

upon and to sit for a while in 'mossy' comfort.

A 'sensorium'!

It takes us away from our everyday happenings for just a moment and in this moment we can snuggle and reflect upon our own 'natures' and connections to the natural world.

Then, upon stepping away from this artwork, we are reminded of the intense human drive to construct spaces, to create comfort and of the desire to be held by nature. Ever increasingly though, this beautiful micro space slips away from us and a certain anxiety moves back in.

Grace's work is *Deep Down*, it's layered and perhaps its purpose is not as an 'escape', but rather an offering to go deeper into what we consider nature, both inside and outside.

Cumberland Council and the Peacock Gallery team would like to thank all the creatives and Council staff who have supported the development of *Deep Down*. In particular we would like to thank artist Grace Kingston for enabling us to see the gardens across the way, in a new light. We extend a warm invite to the Cumberland community to come into the gallery and immerse yourself in this wonderful work!

# DEEP DOWN

## LUKE LÉTOURNEAU: Narratives of Auburn Botanic Gardens

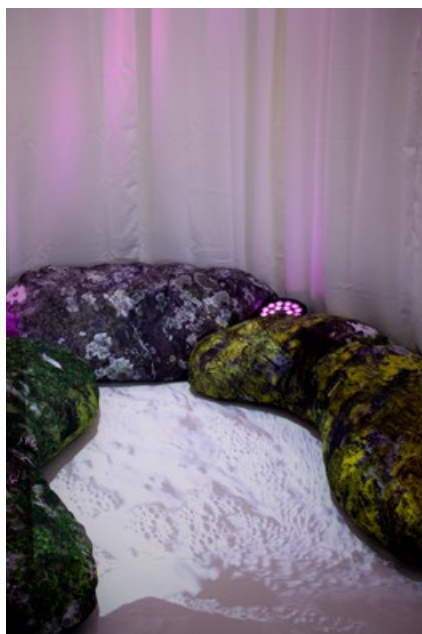
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Grace Kingston's *Deep Down* reconstructs the pleasures of nature for an art gallery audience. This installation is a contained space immersing the body in the aesthetics of the Auburn Botanic Gardens. The garden, which can be accessed just across the road from Peacock Gallery, is a heavily manicured space constructed to reflect the growing diversity of the local community. Considered together, *Deep Down* and the history of the Auburn Botanic Gardens reveal a human impulse to edit, curate and make tangible the awesome sprawl of the natural environment.

Sheathed by white curtains, *Deep Down* sits at the centre of the gallery. It is zoned off from the walls inviting audiences to journey into its habitat. Once inside, audiences find a series of plush pillows big enough for a group to luxuriate together, a floor-based video projection and a serene soundtrack. Each of these sounds and images are impressions drawn from the adjacent garden but adapted for easy comfort.

No surface or media in the installation has a single corresponding site in the adjacent garden, instead everything is a collage. To develop *Deep Down*, Kingston explored the garden and documented ponds, moss and green areas. These sounds and images are stitched together through the installation, providing the audiences a stream of pleasant compositions from the artist's experience. *Deep Down* also removes all of the inconvenient discomforts; there are no pesky biting ants, no unstable surfaces and no creeping chilly temperature. Everything included in the installation is tailored to provide a nice translation of the garden, and with a 10-minute soundtrack the audience is never even pushed too much to get a full experience of Kingston's reconstruction.





To be an audience to *Deep Down* is not an experience dissimilar to scrolling through social media images. Through the installation, Kingston is playing the part of the author editing and condensing images for her feed (the installation) and for her audience. Yet, Kingston isn't populating her feed with some faraway elsewhere natural environment, she is presenting the audience with the place just across the road. In Kingston's feed, nature is a place for a comfortable social gathering, its images are lush, colourful and consistent and when inside all you see is nature.

I do not believe that Kingston is

using her installation as an avenue to lambast social media as a space that dehumanises us and isolates us from nature, which is the easy go-to reading whenever social media and the natural environment are considered together. Instead, I believe she is doing something much more inventive in the way she is using the natural environment as raw materials to construct a narrative. In my experience, the narrative of *Deep Down* is one that projects an image of nature that is sumptuous, shared and an inviting space that we can sink into. Nature is contained and controlled for our pleasure, and to fit our comforts. It

has removed all of the nasty parts and is a total synthetic space. In *Deep Down* the natural environment is not co-existing with us, it is our companion that has been edited, curated and made tangible to fit our needs. This is a narrative that has existed before social media.

Auburn Botanic Gardens is itself constructed as a narrative space.

In 1969 initial construction began for the Botanic Gardens, based off a proposal by Eric Black, Town Planner and Chief Engineer of Auburn Municipal Council (1949-79).

The original inhabitants of this 9.5-hectare tract of land bounded by Chisholm Road and Duck River is the Darug people from the Wategora Clan and Burramattagal Clan. Prior to British settlement, this area was a vital source of food and living resources where the clan would have found abundant fish, shellfish, birds, reptiles and marsupials.

However, by the late 19th-mid 20th Century the area had been transformed through its use by heavy industry; the bank of the river had been haphazardly excavated for clay and other parts had been used for garbage disposal. By 1946

the Auburn Council established the Cumberland Planning Scheme to begin consciously zoning the land for parks and recreation spaces. On 28 February 1968 Black proposed the gardens which would begin construction the following year.

Black's proposal is said to have been inspired by a photograph of a Moreton Bay Fig as a bonsai tree which he found in a 1959 edition of the Saturday Sydney Morning Herald.<sup>1</sup> Black developed a keen interest in Japanese gardens and in the intervening years travelled to Japan, returning with postcards of images of important gardens to serve as visual references for his design. Black employed traditional Japanese garden aesthetics to overcome the high salt and clay contents of the land and to reduce urban noise so that visitors could feel as though they were totally immersed in nature. Black is even reported to have said, "once you are in the garden, you won't be able to see a house or a road. It will be so natural that it won't appear man-made".<sup>2</sup>

While Black's active interest in Japanese gardening served a practical purpose for his design, it was also employed as a strategy for reflecting the growing multiculturalism of the Council's



residents, with people from Turkish, Lebanese and Vietnamese backgrounds all making up a large part of the population in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

The Auburn Botanic Gardens is an edited and curated space constructed to reflect and invite its surrounding residents. In this way, the gardens have become a social and communal space where people can gather and be immersed in nature. The garden is also completely man-made. It has been a successful project for the council, but it's also important not to forget that the place has a history and it serves a narrative.



Grace Kingston's *Deep Down* reconstructs the aesthetic pleasure of nature to remind us of the human impulse to edit, curate and make tangible the awesome sprawl of the natural environment. By drawing images specifically from Peacock Gallery's adjacent Botanic Gardens, her installation reveals that the creation of spaces is tethered to the narration of spaces. While the local community have surely benefitted from Auburn Botanic Gardens' transformation it is still worth considering how and why it became what it is. We must understand the narratives that underpin our environments, and

we must understand the methods of editing and curation that inform these narratives, because we can never forget that we are in it too.

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1. Gavin Souter, "Japanese Hills on Duck River", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1974.

2. Gavin Souter, "Japanese Hills on Duck River".

3. Historical details for this paragraph are synthesised from *Open Field* exhibition catalogue, curated by Kon Gouriotis, 2016. The catalogue features essays by Jenny Cheeseman, "Introduction"; Lucy Stranger, "Auburn Botanic Gardens: A Brief History"; "Auburn Botanic Gardens Timeline" (author not credited); and Kon Gouriotis, "Open Field: Curatorial Essay".

# PEACOCK GALLERY & AUBURN ARTS STUDIO


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