

## Acknowledgements

Kirsty Argyle, Mark Brooks, Libby Chow, Caroline Durré,  
Lisa Gorton, Zoe Phillips, Dave Watson, Dave, Aphra and  
Romola.



## PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM

BUILDING 94: 23-27 CARDIGAN STREET, CARLTON

Managed by the RMIT School of Art  
**CURATOR/COORDINATOR** Stephen Gallagher  
**ADMINISTRATOR/WEB DESIGN** Andrew Tetzlaff **GRAPHIC DESIGN** Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison  
**EMAIL** schoolofartgalleries@rmit.edu.au **WEB** www.schoolofartgalleries.dsc.rmit.edu.au  
**TELEPHONE** +61 3 9925 4971 **GALLERY OPENING HOURS** Monday – Friday 10.00am to 5.00pm



Left to Right  
Marian Crawford  
*bloodshot*, 2010  
Etching and gouache on cut paper, thread  
76 x 56 cm  
  
Marian Crawford  
*stop on red*, 2010  
Etching and gouache on cut paper, thread  
76 x 56 cm  
  
Marian Crawford  
*the crowd*, 2010  
Etching on cut paper, thread  
76 x 56 cm  
  
Marian Crawford  
*doubles*, 2010  
Etching on cut paper, thread  
76 x 56 cm



## PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM



## Regeneration

MARIAN CRAWFORD  
REBECCA MAYO

Essay by DR CAROLINE DURRÉ  
Poetry by LISA GORTON  
In collaboration with PROF DAVID M WATSON

FRIDAY 2 JULY TO THURSDAY 22 JULY 2010  
**OPENING** THURSDAY 1 JULY 5-7PM  
**FLOOR TALK** THURSDAY 8 JULY 1-1.30PM

## Regeneration

*This will be a regenerative activity; it will be a therapy for all of the problems we are standing before... I think the tree is an element of regeneration which in itself is a concept of time.*  
Joseph Beuys 7000 Oaks 1982

## Seed

*Regeneration* grows out of two artists' engagement with the critical relationships between human culture and natural systems. Rebecca Mayo and Marian Crawford share a deep concern for the ways that natural science, social science, ecology and art can illuminate each other. Both artists find that plant forms and images are fertile ground for speculation; both try to visualise and express non-hierarchical models – the rhizome, the web or net, the parasite, cyclical time – overlooked in the relentless drive to produce and consume that characterises the contemporary relationship with the natural world.

## Germination

A sticky mistletoe seed, perhaps spread by a bird, has put suckers into a host tree, and now a tangle of interlaced branches has germinated from this 'haustorium'. Mayo proposes that family history can be re-imagined as 'family mistletoe' rather than 'family tree'. In this inversion, female members of the family are to patrilineal, hierarchical genealogy as the subtle parasitism of the mistletoe is to the infected tree.

Plants germinate in a boundless profusion of forms. This abundance, and in particular the extravagant distinctness

of Australian endemics, is Crawford's source material. Her specimens include rare and threatened species held in the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne, where Australian collections dating to 1853 are stored and studied. As visual investigator the artist records minutiae of plant structure, with a deeply rooted desire to pay homage to their disregarded beauty.

## Flowering

Recent research suggests that, rather than killing its host, mistletoe co-exists in a relationship of 'non-destructive consumption'. They are 'keystone plants... whose impact on their community or ecosystem is disproportionately large relative to their abundance.'<sup>1</sup> This fascinating plant is being rehabilitated, from destroyer of forests to an indicator of diverse and healthy ecosystems.

Crawford works from the principle that things examined closely, whether by scientist or artist, will blossom with knowledge and beauty. Her hanging discs mimic the eye of the telescope or the lens of the microscope. Her miniaturist observations, of etchings hand-coloured with gouache, are sewn together in complex interlocking designs that are rooted in the biodiversity that they celebrate.

## Fruiting

Just as the life-affirming activities of women are rarely celebrated in the family archives, so the mistletoe plant benefits the forest, its fruit and flowers feeding insects and birds, its tangled branches sheltering nesting animals. Mayo pays homage to six

female members of her family line, dating back to the 1830s, each represented by a model who wears a recreated garment. Each dress has a subtle quirk, distinguishing these women whose fruitful improvisation kept their families clothed and clean and fed and nursed.

With threads inherited from her mother's sewing basket, Crawford weaves many microscopic observations into intricate strata held in tension and suspension. Multiplicity is essential to biodiversity; she models the scattered remnants of plant communities, the forests, grasslands and heathlands that were Australia's inheritance.

## Harvest

Mayo has harvested the chemical constituents of mistletoe leaves as dyes and silkscreen inks, generating colours from burnt orange to acid green. These have been used to dye the garments of her ancestors in the female line, using motifs drawn from the structure of the mistletoe flowers and leaves.

Discs of paper hang like ripe fruit, ready for harvest, in Crawford's *Black sun*. They turn in the breeze, betraying subtle, invisible movements of air, modelling a living system in a state of constant change. They wax and wane like the moon; their shadows double this rhythm. This sensuous abundance celebrates the natural world in all its particularity and fragility.

## Decay and regeneration

Mayo's mistletoe branches are swaddled in recycled wool, in a tender act of mourning and remembrance for the female lineage

that sustains her. In Crawford's wall works, white space is a reminder of gaps in knowledge, a negative space that can never be replenished if species and ecosystems are extinct.

Leaves, twigs and fruits fall as leaf litter to accumulate on the forest floor, a seedbed for regeneration. Each organic molecule cycles through its expression as a living thing, at the end of its span to return to fertile decay; so the work of Rebecca Mayo and Marian Crawford resonates as an image of plant ecologies and human societies in complex relationships of interdependence.

## Dr Caroline Durré

Melbourne artist and lecturer in the Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University.  
<http://carolinedurre.com>

<sup>1</sup> D M Watson. (2009) 'Parasitic plants as facilitators: more Dryad than Dracula?' *Journal of Ecology* 97:1151–9

Left to Right  
Rebecca Mayo  
*Henrietta 1851–1921*, 2009  
UV ink on ply (shirt: screenprinted and dyed with mistletoe dye on silk and hemp, Irish lace, velvet ribbon)  
640 x 480 x 19 mm

Rebecca Mayo  
*Clarice 1890–1957*, 2010  
UV ink on ply (dress: screenprinted and dyed with mistletoe dye on cotton and linen)  
640 x 480 x 19 mm

Rebecca Mayo  
*Janet 1915–1995*, 2010  
UV ink on ply  
640 x 480 x 19 mm



## Mistletoe

for Rebecca Mayo

A subtler haunting, as mistletoe subdues its leaf to the host, possessed by what it feeds on – Still its lopsided chandelier flourishes on the stricken branch where self-defeating pride, dignity's withdrawn sad smile, furnish no room. Upon necessity's crooked vaulting – that drawn-out bewilderment called making do – it offers up its ripe berry, its indigestible seed.

## Lisa Gorton