



# Apprehension

Leigh Schoenheimer

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REDLAND ART GALLERY,  
RPAC MEZZANINE

Redland Art Gallery acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands, waters and seas where we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.

Apprehension is an exhibition of recent multi-panelled paintings by Leigh Schoenheimer that are based on her research into flora and fauna of south-east Queensland and northern New South Wales, including elements that are both endangered and endemic, native and invasive. These bring together the artist's longstanding interest in painting as a way of seeing - an interplay of image and idea explored through iterations of realism, abstraction and text - with her unease about the impact of colonisation on the local natural environment. Schoenheimer's portmanteau, 'apprehension', encapsulates these dual concerns and their relationship: a method used to apprehend, in the form of painting as a mode of perception and understanding, is used to express apprehension, in the form of ecologically-minded anxiety.

Apprehension includes selections from two separate, though complementary, series of works. *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History* is concerned with vulnerable and endangered species, including the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly, Glossy Black Cockatoo and Far Eastern Curlew. Each of the three panels

of the paintings accumulates representations objects and texts that construct a narrative around the species, its history, its entanglement with humans and its uncertain future.

In contrast, invasive plant species, and their far-reaching effects on native ecosystems, are the subject of *Still-Scape: Tweed Weeds*, another series of paintings. Whilst, as the title indicates, the Tweed coast is the focus, similar cultivated landscapes are everywhere: seemingly serene yet packed with invasive species. The adjacent panels combine sweeping impressionist landscapes with delicate, still-life renderings of the weeds, alongside text, taken from keyboard commands that alludes to both a desire for a quick fix, and to the bureaucratic violence inseparable from this unfolding eco-disaster.

The juxtaposition of elements across both series emphasises the parameters of our interaction with this place, filtered through signs and symbols and constructed ideals of beauty, nature and human exceptionalism.

KYLE WEISE



### **AN UNNATURAL HISTORY**

As a whole the works presented in *An Unnatural History* tap into the historical role of art as social commentary and activism, raising questions; sometimes uncomfortable ones. The presentation of carefully researched, scientific information is filtered through an aesthetic lens, resulting in works that are at once beautiful and thought provoking.

The works featured in this exhibition set up environmental narratives while simultaneously exploring ideas about the making of meaning through images.

### **ARTIST'S STATEMENT**

In this collection of triptychs, I focus my attention upon endangered species found in South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Each of these narrative works begins with a traditionally painted still life arrangement featuring objects collected for their relevance to the story, along with painstakingly sourced flora. Employing three distinct styles, each triptych alludes to an endangered species, its habitat and threats to its survival. Clip-art illustrations appropriated from Google, as well as text panels referring to common names and taxonomies further elaborate upon the content.

A study in semiotics, these decorative works invite a decoding of visual language and ideas. Logical connections between the stylistically diverse images are achieved through the use of shared imagery, and carefully calibrated colour harmonies.

## ***The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Far Eastern Curlew***

In this expanded still life, the story of the critically endangered Far Eastern Curlew unfolds across three stylistically diverse panels. A variety of threats along their 20,000 km annual migration route has mortally impacted numbers. These threats, habitats and nomenclature are all referred to either explicitly or metaphorically in this work.

The Far Eastern Curlew is one of many migratory shore birds which find their way to the intertidal waterways in South East Queensland, (including those local to Redland City), after their breeding season in Russia. Only stopping once or twice en route from Russia, they feed on tiny, coastal marine creatures in order to regain lost body condition after brutal, marathon flights lasting many consecutive days. Coastal development along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (a highway for birds) has caused the destruction of vital feeding grounds. Consequently, their

numbers have dropped by 80% in recent years. Since the 1950s, more than 50 percent of China's intertidal shorebird habitats along the Yellow Sea coast have been dredged and filled, as rapid economic development fueled a boom in tidal flat reclamation. Tragically, the Far Eastern Curlew is also hunted in Russia each summer, leading to further reduction in numbers. Here in Australia, coastal development and our recreational use of shore areas add to the threats posed to this species which now commonly die of starvation, on the wing.

Australia provides feeding grounds for approximately 75 percent of the world's population of this, the largest of the shorebirds, and as such, we have a particular responsibility to protect our coastal wetlands for them.



***The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History -  
The Glossy Black #1 and #2***

These two expanded, still life paintings address the plight of Queensland's threatened Glossy Black Cockatoos, (*Calyptorhynchus lathami lathami*), alluding to this species habitat, diet, threats to its survival and its common name.

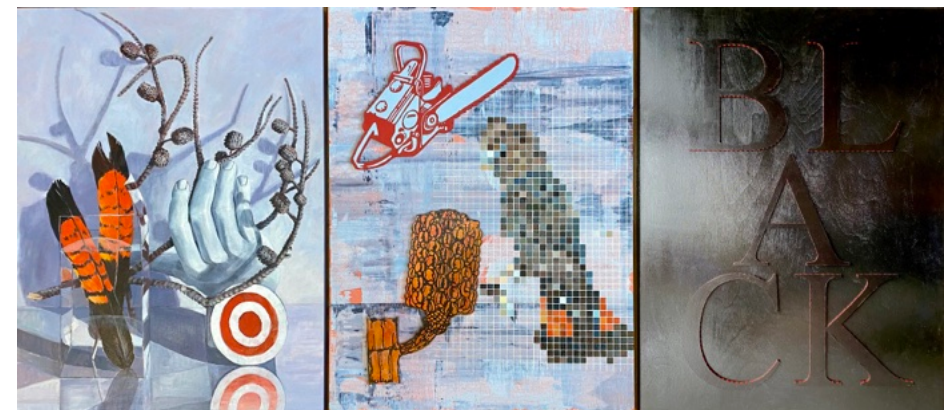
Many references are made to this notoriously fussy eater's preferred diet of *Casuarina* (swamp oak) seeds. Urban expansion has resulted in the clearing of many *Casuarina* forests from the eastern Queensland, causing habitat fragmentation and reduction of essential feeding corridors.

The red and black edges used in a graphic representation of the cockatoo as well as some of the letterforms, make reference to the dramatically striped tail feathers of the female bird. These feathers are also featured as literal descriptions in both still life paintings.

The shiny text panels in each work riff on the species common

name, 'glossily' reflecting the light. Due to the way in which light hits the word 'GLOSSY' and also the shallowness of the patterned edges of the word 'BLACK', the text in each of these works slips in and out of view as the viewer walks past - much like the Glossy Black cockatoo.

The Glossy Black is one of the more threatened species of cockatoo in Australia and is listed as 'vulnerable' under Queensland and New South Wales legislation.



## *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Richmond Birdwing Butterfly*

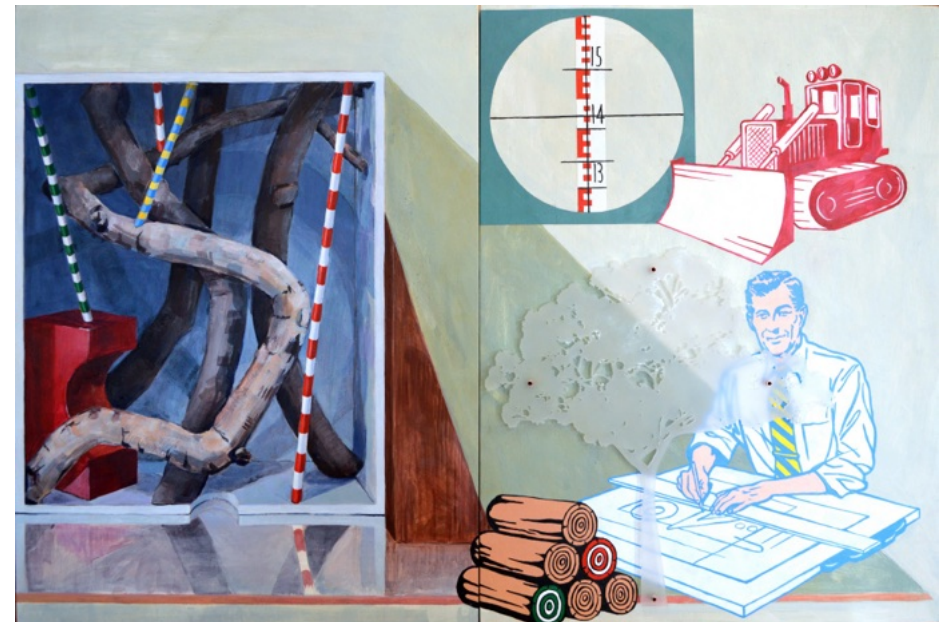
This triptych recounts the tale of the threatened Richmond Birdwing butterfly, endemic to South East Queensland. Imperiled by urban expansion and host-plant confusion between the Richmond Birdwing vine and the invasive and poisonous Dutchman's Pipe, introduced to our landscapes in the 1800's, it has teetered on the brink of survival for many years.

Decades of effort to eradicate the deadly weed, replant host-vine corridors and promote awareness of this beautiful insect, have seen numbers improve, but we must not become complacent. The creature, its habitat, threats to its survival and its taxonomy are all referenced in this conceptually expanded still life.



## *The Meaning of (Still) Life: Urban Forest*

A contained 'forest' shows signs of intrusion by the built environment, while a draftsman happily plans the next phase of development. With the surveyor's sight, and bulldozer at the ready, a ghostly gum-tree hovers, as a reminder of what might be at stake..



## STILL-SCAPES

### ARTIST'S STATEMENT

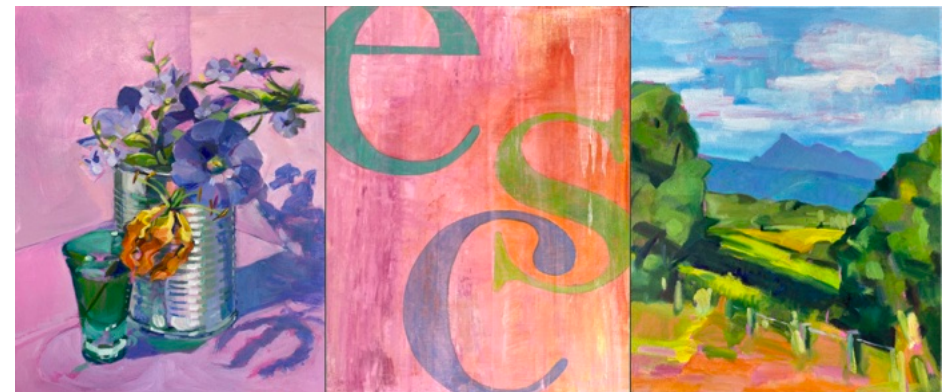
The making of *Still-Scapes* commenced during my artist's residency at the Tweed Regional Gallery (NSW) in January 2022.

The Tweed Regional Gallery is located high on a hill south of Murwillumbah and takes in panoramic views across the verdant Tweed Valley to Woolumbin/Mt Warning. While in residence, I sipped my morning coffee each day blissfully soaking up those views, before going on a daily bicycle ride down through the valley. In amongst the landscape, it became evident that the roadsides and beyond were populated by camphor laurel trees and a proliferation of low growing, flowering weeds - a truth not seen from a distance. The idea for 'Still-Scapes' was born from this realisation.

This series of expanded still life paintings features arrangements of pretty weeds picked from the district's roadsides. Each still life painting is set opposite

a landscape describing part of the local environs. Words appropriated from the computer keyboard (control, escape, return, save as, etc) take on a variety of new meanings when inserted between these micro and macro views of the area. The various readings suggested by the text elements create shifts in understanding.

While some of the weed species portrayed here are specific to the Tweed Valley, many others depicted in these still life works have become naturalised throughout Australia. If invasive enough, these weeds ultimately cause the collapse of local ecosystems, which are in part responsible for the mass extinction process that is currently underway in Australia. Since completing the *Tweed-Weeds Still-Scapes*, I have begun looking at the invasive weeds in my local Brisbane area - Toohey Forest. Different place, same story...





## A NOTE ON INVASIVE WEEDS

“Weeds have been a problem in Australia since prickly pear first engulfed large tracts of land in the nineteenth century, forcing many farmers from their properties. Since then the list of invasive alien plants in Australia has grown to more than 2700, a figure that climbs by about 20 new species every year.

Weeds can be as destructive as land clearing – displacing and threatening native species and transforming ecosystems. Invasive pasture grasses that kill trees by fuelling fires can be especially destructive.

A NSW study found that almost half of that state’s threatened species and the majority of endangered ecological communities are threatened by weed invasion.

Sadly, despite their threat, most invasive plants in Australia are not regulated and continue to be planted and introduced to new areas.”

(Reference from: [www.invasives.org.au/our-work/weeds/](http://www.invasives.org.au/our-work/weeds/))





## List of Images

Cover: Leigh Schoenheimer, *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Glossy Black #1 (Detail)*, 2022. Acrylic on Ply, 61x137cm.

p.2: Leigh Schoenheimer, *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Far Eastern Curlew (Detail)*, 2022. Acrylic and laser cut board on plywood, 61x137cm.

p.5: Leigh Schoenheimer, *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Far Eastern Curlew*, 2022. Acrylic and laser cut board on plywood, 61x137cm.

p.7: Leigh Schoenheimer, *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Glossy Black #1*, 2022. Acrylic on Ply, 61x137cm; Leigh Schoenheimer, *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Glossy Black #2*, 2022. Acrylic on Ply, 61x137cm.

p.8: Leigh Schoenheimer, *The Meaning of (Still) Life: An Unnatural History - The Richmond Birdwing Butterfly*, 2022. Acrylic on Plywood with laser cut plywood shapes, 61x137cm.

p.9: Leigh Schoenheimer, *The Meaning of (Still) Life: Urban Forest*, 2021. Acrylic on plywood with laser cut acrylic, 41x61cm.

p.11: Leigh Schoenheimer, *Still-Scape: Tweed Weeds #8 – ALT*, 2022. Acrylic and oil on plywood, 26x62cm. Leigh Schoenheimer, *Still-Scape: Tweed Weeds #3 – ESC*, 2022. Acrylic and oil on plywood, 26x62cm.

p.12: Leigh Schoenheimer, *Still-Scape: Tweed Weeds #4 – Return*, 2022. Acrylic and oil on plywood, 40x92cm; Leigh Schoenheimer, *Still-Scape: Tweed Weeds #5 – Shift*, 2022. Acrylic and oil on plywood, 40x92cm.



# REDLAND ART GALLERY

*Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland City Council, dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana*