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Breathing Space

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BIOGRAPHIES

LIZ JENEID, born in Sydney, with a Master of Creative Arts degree from the University of Wollongong, trained as a weaver at Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina, USA. Setting up a weaving studio in Sydney in 1978 she trained apprentices and community arts workers, and was closely involved with the Crafts Council of NSW. As an influential lecturer and senior lecturer in Textiles at the University of Wollongong from 1983 - 2003 she initiated the teaching of artists' books and was an innovative curator of the Long Gallery. Exhibiting widely in print, textile and sculptural installations, she has had artist residencies in Paris, in Greece and Scandinavia and on polar expeditions. Her work is held in national and international collections including the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, and the Art Gallery of NSW. She was made a Fellow of the University of Wollongong in 2008.

DIANA WOOD CONROY, born in Sydney (B.A. (Hons) Archaeology, University of Sydney, Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong) has parallel interests as an artist and archaeologist. She attended the British School of Archaeology in Athens and worked in museums and on excavations in Greece, Italy and England, learning tapestry weaving in London while an illustrator at the British Museum. She was co-ordinator of Tiwi Designs, Bathurst Island, Northern Territory in 1974. Since 1996 she has participated in the excavation of the Paphos theatre, Cyprus, with the University of Sydney, resulting in a book, 'Fabric of the Ancient Theatre: Excavation Journals from Cyprus' Moufflon Publishing, Nicosia, Cyprus 2007. Her tapestries and drawings have been exhibited and collected across institutions and galleries in Australia and overseas. An archaeological and postcolonial approach informs her critical writing on textiles and arts practice. She is professor of Visual Arts, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong.

STEPHEN INGHAM has had a broad and varied career as a composer, music critic and academic. Born in London, Stephen obtained Honours degrees in both Chemistry and Music at the University of York, UK with further studies at the University of Indiana and at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg. As a Lecturer in Music at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne he established and directed the Hopkins Studio for Electroacoustic and Computer Music. Widely recognised for his innovative electronic and analogue compositions that often address visual images, in 2001 and 2003 he was a guest composer at the fifth International Forum for Contemporary Piano Music in Heilbronn, Germany, and in the following year he was appointed as a guest professor in composition at the Musikhogskolan in Piteå, Sweden. Since 1993, he has lived and worked in Australia, first at the University of Melbourne and since 1998, as Associate Professor in the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong.

Images:

Diana Wood Conroy
Crossing Points: Sea and Sky, Watercolour Series, 2010
11 x 14.5cm, 70 x 150cm
Photograph by Tom Williams

Liz Jeneid
Spinifex Book, 2009
55 x 55cm open 18.25 x 18.25 x .5cm closed
Photograph by Liz Jeneid

Images cover:
Diana Wood Conroy
(detail) *All the days*, 2010
woven tapestry, 60 x 180cm. Wool, silk, linen and cotton
Photograph Rowan Conroy

Liz Jeneid
Spinifex 1, 2009
collagraph 52 x 52cm framed
Photograph by Liz Jeneid



University of Wollongong



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BREATHING SPACE
LIZ JENEID
DIANA WOOD CONROY

WOLLONGONG CITY GALLERY 13 MARCH - 25 APRIL 2010

FOREWORD

Wollongong City Gallery has great pleasure in presenting *Breathing Space* an exhibition of recent work by two of Illawarra's most senior and respected artists.

As both artists and educators Liz Jeneid and Diana Wood Conroy have influenced and inspired a generation of artists in this region and continue through their work to have a significant and positive impact on the local and regional art community.

I'd like to thank Liz and Diana for their commitment to this project and for sharing their unique perspectives on the sensory experiences of place/space and the rhythms that permeate and help define our place within them.

John Monteleone
Program Director

INTRODUCTION

Two artists, linked through long appreciation of the rich histories and inventive possibilities of weaving and tapestry, of coastal and inland landscapes in Australia and Europe, and of the ebbs and flows of nature and culture over time across those spaces, present new work in *Breathing Space*. Not so much collaborators as friends, colleagues, partners in various ventures and adventures, Liz Jeneid and Diana Wood Conroy have worked in dialogue with each other for over 30 years. They have shared journeys to extraordinary geographical and archaeological sites, sourced inspiration in the medium of textiles, and combined the documentary with the lyrical in their explorations. Yet each has a distinctive aesthetic and finesse and this exhibition is an opportunity to observe the delicate balance between the shared and the individual that characterises their practices.

The craft movement of the 1970s, with its return to traditional techniques such as handweaving and papermaking, intertwined with a feminist commitment to revaluing familiar and familial practices in textiles and personal narrative in art, forms the backdrop to Jeneid and Wood Conroy's work. During the 1990s, both working in the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong, they were influential in the move to create a contemporary theoretical focus for craft practice – a movement which provided a renewed sense of expansion and authority for women textile artists. Field trips and group exhibitions, often with an element of cross-cultural exchange and engagement with Aboriginal culture, became fruitful ways of working.

In 1996 Wood Conroy renewed connections with her early training and experience as a classical archaeologist, joining the University of Sydney dig at the ancient theatre at Paphos in Cyprus and sharing this opportunity with many colleagues and students. The past is a living present in Wood Conroy's work, and the scope is large: classical themes intersect with Australia's twentieth century war history, family histories and myth run side by side, and Australia's ancient culture is acknowledged in a new context. Drawing, tapestry and text converge in this remarkable body of work.

At the same time, Jeneid's expertise as a leading maker of artists' books came to the fore – the perfect medium for a world traveller. Her fine skills in observation and drawing, and in ordering series of works into the three-dimensional narrative that characterises the artist's book, are now widely acclaimed. In this exhibition, the light touch and airy spaces of the *Spinifex* and *Apostle bird* works belies a grounding in structure and form that relates to the practices of weaving and tapestry, as well as to the traditions of the travelling artist's field work and sketchbooks.

The archaic meaning of 'inspire' is to breathe life into something. Wood Conroy and Jeneid have each produced works for this exhibition which find their inspiration in breath or breathing. Wood Conroy's *Documents of Breath* poignantly records the patterns and the spaces of the dying human breath. Jeneid's *Word Midden - In Every Breath* brings to light buried and unfamiliar narratives. The vision and skill of these artists inspires in every sense.

Professor Amanda Lawson
Dean of Creative Arts
University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia

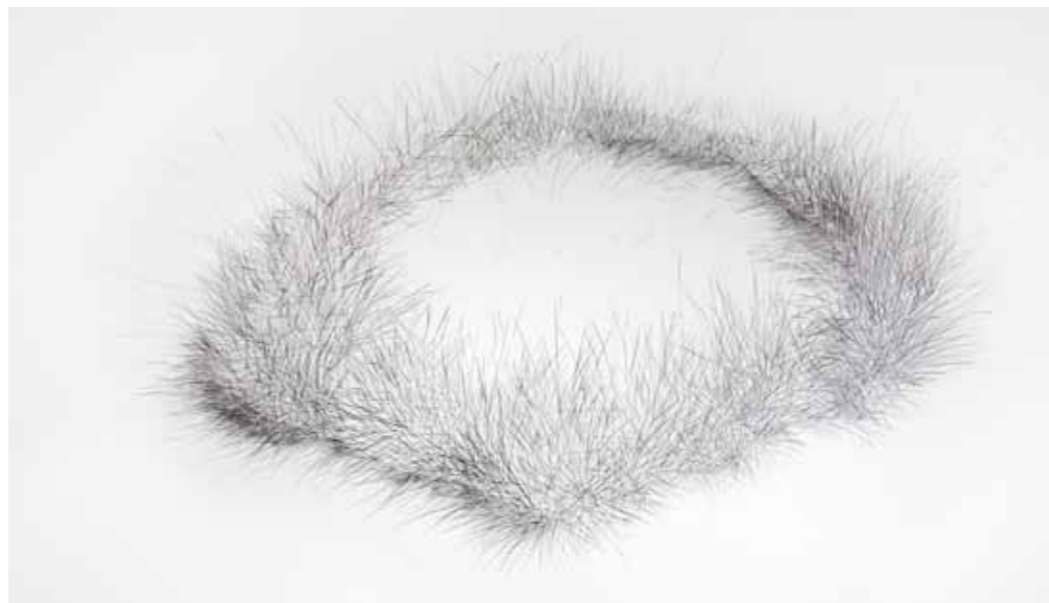


Image:

Liz Jeneid
Spinifex Sanctuary, 2009/10
graphite on W/C paper, 130 x 180cm
Photograph by Tom Williams

Image:

Diana Wood Conroy
Traces of the Ancient City: Inscriptions and Mosaics, 2009
graphite on rice paper and drafting film
40 x 440cm, 40 x 240cm (2 pieces), 45 x 60cm (3 pieces)
Photograph by Tom Williams



Images below

Liz Jeneid, *Spinifex I*, 2009
collagraph, 52 x 52cm framed
Photograph by Liz Jeneid

Liz Jeneid, *Spinifex II*, 2009
collagraph, 52 x 52cm framed
Photograph by Liz Jeneid

Liz Jeneid, *Spinifex III*, 2009
collagraph, 52 x 52cm framed
Photograph by Liz Jeneid



BREATHING SPACE

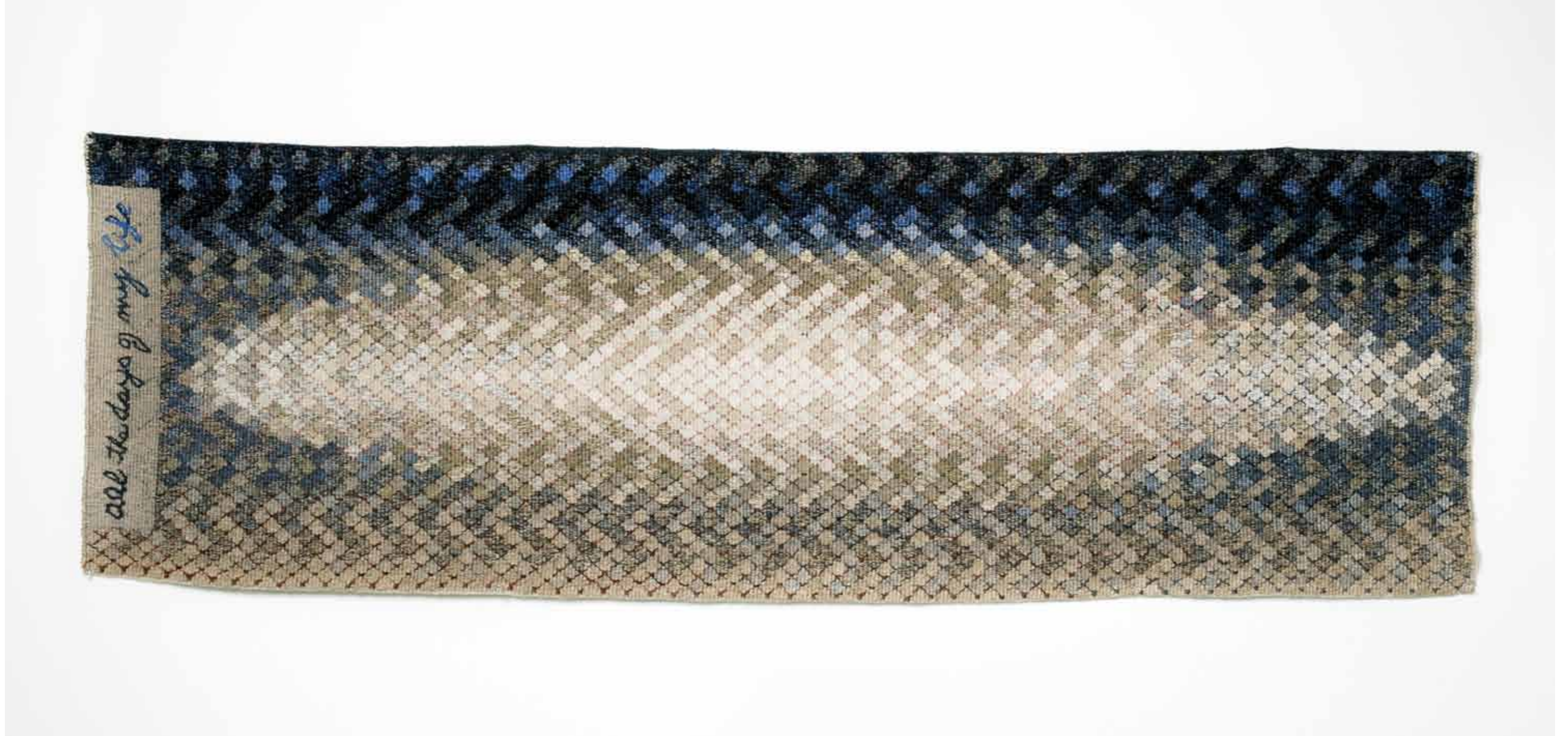
'Breathing space' is about marking time through breath. When breath stops, time stops for each individual chronology. Re-iteration, repeating with variation again and again, in and out, is the rhythm of craft, of skill in drawing and making. Re-iteration mirrors the arduous patterns of ancient textiles, ceramics, or inscriptions, patterns derived from images of feathers, scales, or leaves.

Breathing spaces for Liz Jeneid have been places where she has been able to concentrate on her surroundings, not moving too quickly so that she can absorb images, smells, tastes and take the time to look. The fragile arid dunes of Lake Mungo in western NSW, an origin site of human life in Australia, have etched clarity into representations of place for both artists since an initial artists' gathering in 1997.¹ By scrutinising and drawing the spiny minutiae of the desert plants over years of visiting, Liz Jeneid has documented not only vegetation, birds and shapes of the western plains but also a changing awareness of the self as a space for investigation, so that the delineation between subject and object is clouded. Spinifex grass scattered over the arid dunes is composed of a myriad of barbed spines that form a circular shape in maturity, enclosing an empty centre which becomes a sanctuary for small reptiles and kangaroos, safe within the impenetrable net of spines. The emptiness is a breathing space, a place to experience the restfulness of sparseness, nothingness. Her prints and books reflect intense delight in observing rare creatures. She writes: 'Apostle birds are such humorous, cheeky, busy birds, moving in large groups - often twelve in number, which gives them their name - in and out of the shade, camouflaged in the dappled light of midday, chirring to each other.'

Looking back in time allows an understanding of such pieces in *Breathing Space*. Liz Jeneid and Diana Wood Conroy first met at a Sydney workshop in Japanese textile techniques of warp and weft face ikat weaving with Jun Tomita in 1977. Both artists were part of the exuberant re-emergence of weaving practice in the 1970s, a craft 'revolution' in Australia that highlighted not only Bauhaus ideas of 'truth to materials' but also an awareness of community, including Indigenous community, and a different response to environment. Since then, tapestry and textiles in Australia have expanded and grown in multiple directions, with individual artists of great distinction and influence. Jeneid and Wood Conroy have participated in national and international exhibitions with such artists as Kay Lawrence, Sara Lindsay, Valerie Kirk, Judy Watson and Yvonne Koolmatricie.²

The influential Polish weaver Magdalena Abakanowicz, speaking in 1977, believed that 'woven forms grow with a leisurely rhythm like creations of nature, and like them they are organic. . . .The movements of my hands correspond to the natural rhythm of my body, to my breath.'³

The aesthetic sense is implicated in breathing. The very word 'aesthesia', or aesthetics (sense perceptions) goes back to the Homeric *aiou* and *aisthou* meaning 'I perceive' as well as 'I gasp, struggle for breath', and *aesthōmai*, *aisthanomai* 'I breathe in.'⁴



Liz Jeneid perceives that the absorption of impressions happens on the in-breath, and the image-making occurs in the space of the out-breath.

There could be a body appearing in Diana Wood Conroy's woven tapestry *All the days* which is a mosaic of alternating light and dark 'tesserae' or diamond shapes. Archaeology encouraged her obsession with fragmentary memories, overlooked histories and the tiny traces of past lives held in a thread. By rubbing the worn and battered surfaces with graphite on to fine paper, mosaic floors and carved stone inscriptions and patterns can be translated into another time and place.

In order to measure time and space, archaeology uses a grid or net, a mesh to give context to the disordered and uncertain glimpses of other ways of being in the past. This grid is a conceptual tool, a linear way of measuring place and time, but also provides a section of a moment in time mesmerised and held motionless. In the past, geometric designs were imagined as thresholds between the worlds of the living and the newly deceased, with particular colours and forms seen as capturing malign forces, and overcoming the difficulties of these liminal experiences.⁵ Liz Jeneid's installation *Word Midden - In Every Breath*, refers to a poem by the Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), (originally in Persian), and makes reference to archaeological finds that may not be familiar, but have their own history.

Image:

Diana Wood Conroy, *All the Days*, 2010
woven tapestry, wool, silk, linen, cotton
60 x 180cm

Photograph by Tom Williams



Images right:

Diana Wood Conroy, (detail), *Documents of Breath*, 2010
woven tapestry (6 units), wool, silk, linen, cotton
21 x 30cm each

Photograph by Paul Sharrad

Diana Wood Conroy, (detail), *All the Days*, 2010
woven tapestry, wool, silk, linen, cotton
60 x 180cm

Photograph by Paul Sharrad



The scholar Marcia Langton talks about the 'shock of the ancient' reverberating in postcolonial societies weary of modernist Western traditions, so that indigenous art presents a 'new' stark aesthetic force.⁶ The architect le Corbusier recorded his first sight of the Parthenon - 'It is the Acropolis that made a rebel of me... Stark, stripped, economical, violent; a clamorous outcry against a landscape of grace and terror.'⁷ A fresh consideration of the ancient can require a radical re-thinking. The 'shock of the ancient' is what Diana Wood Conroy feels working with the stony remnants of structures in Paphos, Cyprus. It is a shock too to find shadows of Greek and Latin in the etymology of Australian English. In making a flickering, densely marked and textured surface she has been influenced by Aboriginal consciousness of very ancient time, a consciousness that sees the importance of a past that is simultaneously present.⁸

The haptic qualities of surfaces are related to sound. Using electro-acoustic composition and spatialised sound diffusion, the composer Stephen Ingham, building on a previous collaboration in 'Sonic Architectures' has worked with recordings of the human breath and transformed them digitally into a layered and multi-faceted soundscape, forged into a continuous loop to produce a rich sonic texture enhancing 'Breathing Space'.⁹

Breath/not breath is a *punctum*, a point around which whole societies pivoted when one function of art was a mnemonic to recall a life despite the passing of time. All deaths are different, like all births, yet all end with the same cessation of breath. The way Diana Wood Conroy drew her father's breath as he lay in a coma in hospital may well have come from having to keep a chart of her own flow of breath as a chronic asthmatic. The pattern of breathing never seemed to her like an involuntary action but an active willed one; she comments that sometimes when struggling for breath 'it breathes me' is more relevant than 'I breathe'. She marked each breath as her father laboriously inhaled and exhaled to form an inverted V, a *lambda* shape, with long gaps between the last exhalation and the new inhalation; literally, she was 'drawing breath'. The small tapestries *Documents of Breath* record the piercing moment when breath is about to stop.

The vibrancy of craft and art in the mid twentieth century depended on forgetting and overlooking tedious histories: it was an iconoclastic moment. By contrast, according to Emily Vermeule, some artists spend their working lives as necromancers 'raising the dead in order to enter into their imagination and experience'.¹⁰ Investigating ways of resonating with almost forgotten surfaces and places through intricate processes, artists record transitions and turning points through sight, touch and sound. Jeneid and Wood Conroy, with Stephen Ingham count the breaths, draw the leaves, measure the threads, mark time, and hope to discover the breathtaking spaces known to the apostle birds.

Diana Wood Conroy and Liz Jeneid, 2010

- ¹ *Lake Mungo Revisited* Goulburn Regional Gallery, touring four states, 2000-2001. Essays by Lesley Head, Jennifer Lamb and Diana Wood Conroy. University of Wollongong and Goulburn Regional Gallery 2000.
- ² Exhibitions with both Liz Jeneid and Diana Wood Conroy include; *Crossing Borders: Contemporary Australian Textile Art* (Curated by Sue Rowley) University of Wollongong 1995, touring USA: *Below the Surface* Goulburn Regional Gallery (curated by Jennifer Lamb and Sue Rowley) 1996, *Origins and Perspectives: Australian Textile Art*, Lodz, Poland (curated Glenda King) Craft Australia 1998; *Lake Mungo Re-visited* (curated Jennifer Lamb) Goulburn Regional Gallery, touring three states 2000-2001. *Searching for Asphodels: Artists in the Mediterranean*; Exhibition of artists books and watercolours. Art Gallery of NSW Library, Sydney 2008. *Shapes of Longing: Artists returning to the Mediterranean*: Charles Hewitt Gallery Sydney 2009.
- ³ Magdalena Abakanowic. Exhibition catalogue Malmö, Konst Halle, Sweden. 1977, 35.
- ⁴ James Hillman. 'The Practice of Beauty' in *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a new aesthetics* Bill Bleakley (ed) Allworth Press New York 1998. 270.
- ⁵ Dusan Boric 'Apotropism and the Temporality of Colours' in Andrew Jones and Gavin MacGregor (eds) *Colouring the past: the significance of colour in archaeological research*. Berg, New York, 2002. 27
- ⁶ Marcia Langton 'Papunya and sacred geography' in *Aboriginal Religions in Australia*: Max Charlesworth, Françoise Dussart, Howard Morphy (eds) Aldershot, Hants., England c.2005, 137.
- ⁷ Fourth meeting of the CIAM, 1933, cited by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre: *Classical Architecture, The Poetics of Order*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. USA, 1988, 1.
- ⁸ Documented in the catalogue of the exhibition *Floating Life: Contemporary Aboriginal Fibre Art* (curated Diane Moon) Queensland Art Gallery 2009.
- ⁹ Diana Wood Conroy 'The Sonic Architectures project: mapping the ancient theatre in image and sound' in *The Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools Research Report 2007/08*. University of NSW 2008, 18-19. (Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery, University of Wollongong 2006).
- ¹⁰ Emily Vermeule *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*. Sather Classical lectures vol. 42 University of California Press, Berkeley 1981, 4.



Images:

Liz Jeneid

West of the Divide 1-4

ink and wash

77 x 57cm unframed

Photographs by Tom Williams

Image:

Liz Jeneid

(detail) *Word Midden - In Every Breath*, 2010

soil, wax, metal tray, 215 x 46 x 3cm, floor piece

Photograph by Susan Barnett

STEPHEN INGHAM

Notes on the Composition for *Breathing Space*

PRANAYAMA - Surround sound electro-acoustic music for the human voice.

Students of yoga will almost certainly be familiar with the Sanskrit terms *prana* (life - force; specifically 'breath') and *ayama* (to suspend or restrain). The concept of *pranayama* is thus perhaps most widely understood as 'breath control', as commonly practised in the context of the hatha and raja yoga disciplines.

Believed to be beneficial in treating a wide range of stress-related disorders, the four-stage process of controlled breathing provides a starting point for my electro-acoustic *étude*.

Movement 1: PURAKA (Inhalation)

Movement 2: ABHYANTARA KUMBHAKA (Retention - internal)

Movement 3: RECHAKA (Exhalation)

Movement 4: BAHIR KUMBHAKA (Retention - external)

