

## Floating land-Rising Seas Symposium at Lake Cootharaba, Boreen Point, Noosa, 2009

### Word-Strings:

My concept was to create strings of words to reference our written culture - language that would recall and re-float history. I hoped to overlay 'word strings' across the lake and the land and decided to cut letters from plywood and string them together to form phrases, that might float in the lake and possibly, if I found a suitable site, use others suspended among nearby trees, like ladders of thought.

I spend some time selecting the text, assembling phrases that alluded to past and present loss, combined with references about environmental neglect and concern for the planet, about global warming, the plunder of the oceans, rising seas, endangered coral reefs and storm wreckage. My husband Mike accompanied me to the Symposium. Before leaving New Zealand we had made a complete alphabet of plywood templates that we used for cutting the 200 or more characters needed to write the words.

I hoped to acknowledge and allude to past histories of the site, the Aboriginal and Colonial history of the area around Lake Cootharaba and Boreen Point and the 'word strings' seemed to be a way I could float these impressions about the location. I also became aware my challenge was to make this work without negativity.

At the beginning of the Symposium, the Artists walked along the inland shore of Lake Cootharaba to select sites for our proposed artworks. Most Artists had chosen their sites when I came across an area that offered me the layers of possibility for the complexity I hoped to achieve in this work.

It was an area where I could create an environment by the placement of each 'word string' and where visitors would discover each work as they were led from one to the next.

The space was lush with flowering paper bark trees; stone slabs of lichen covered granite and tangled tree roots that travelled like veins over the rock surfaces and into the waters edge. The area was rich with bird life, dappled light and a place of calmness. I could listen to the unfamiliar bird calls and watch the birds' patterns of movement through the space while I visualised the integration and placement of the installation.

There was also a large commemorative stone with a bronze plaque that had been placed some years earlier, a memorial to the well documented life of Eliza Frazer. The plaque acknowledged one side of the story.

Mike and I had spent the first couple of days working outside, sheltering from the rain, before happily we were moved with our power tools, into the unused Fire Station. There we jig-sawed, burnt, stained, assembled and finally strung the words together. Several students from my one day workshop returned during the week to help with this process.

The installation became a kind of outdoor room of text, contained by water lapping at the lake edge, roots of the paper bark trees, the overhead canopy of trees that led inland, platforms of rocks and occasionally by the 'word strings'. Shadows of words were cast over the lichen covered rocks, onto the water and into the mossy crevasses, some text floated in the lake and others were suspended between the trunks of the paper bark trees.

The phrases we placed between land and lake:

*Hidden Currents, Lament, Tides of History, Floating Syllables, Endangered Ocean, Cradle of Life, Ocean Roar, Bleached Coral, Salt Tears, King Tide, Migration, Drifting Wreckage and Celestial Navigation.*

*Hidden Currents*, the first 'word string' on the land, referred not only to the bronze statement about Eliza Frazer but to past unspoken histories, the hidden currents within communities and to the deep hidden currents that mingle beneath oceans.

During the installation when the string word '*Lament*' was suspended, a rare sea eagle landed in the paper bark tree above. It seemed an auspicious sign as the eagle appeared to rest and observe our installation.

Over the next few days pelicans, canoes and launches came and went and whip birds could be heard in the early mornings. A storm brought winds and heavy rain that drenched and straightened the dangling word strings correcting their placement as they dripped ground-wards.

Virginia King  
July 2009

*Lament will join the flotilla protest, against the building of the proposed Dam on Dala, the Gubbi Gubbi name for the Mary River.*