

Introduction

It is with great pleasure that the Glasshouse Regional Gallery presents *Foliate* by renowned textile artist Meredith Woolnough. This exquisite exhibition continues the Glasshouse Regional Gallery's commitment to supporting contemporary Australian artists to develop new work and presenting quality artistic experiences for our community.

In March 2017 Woolnough spent a week at the Glasshouse collecting and foraging for gum leaf specimens, and experimenting with textile forms by creating extraordinarily intricate leaf embroideries. The residency provided Woolnough with time to develop the works inspired by the collected specimens featured in the sublimely beautiful *Foliate* exhibition.

The splendour of the natural environment provides inspiration for Woolnough. In the exhibition *Foliate* Woolnough captures the fragile elegance and robust beauty of the natural environment. Her intricate embroideries trace and capture the contours and delicate internal structures of the collected natural specimens. The works are presented in shadow boxes and act like contemporary wunderkamers (Renaissance rooms of wonder), preserving this cherished collection of natural objects.

I would like to sincerely thank Meredith Woolnough for sharing her astonishingly beautiful body of work. It was a pleasure to get to know Meredith during the residency and through the development of this exhibition and catalogue. I would also like to thank Louise Martin-Chew for her poetic and insightful essay that provides a context for Woolnough's work.

Niomi Sands
Gallery Curator

Foliate

Trees have their own language, booming from the bole, singing in their sap, sighing on the wind – most of the time we're just not listening.

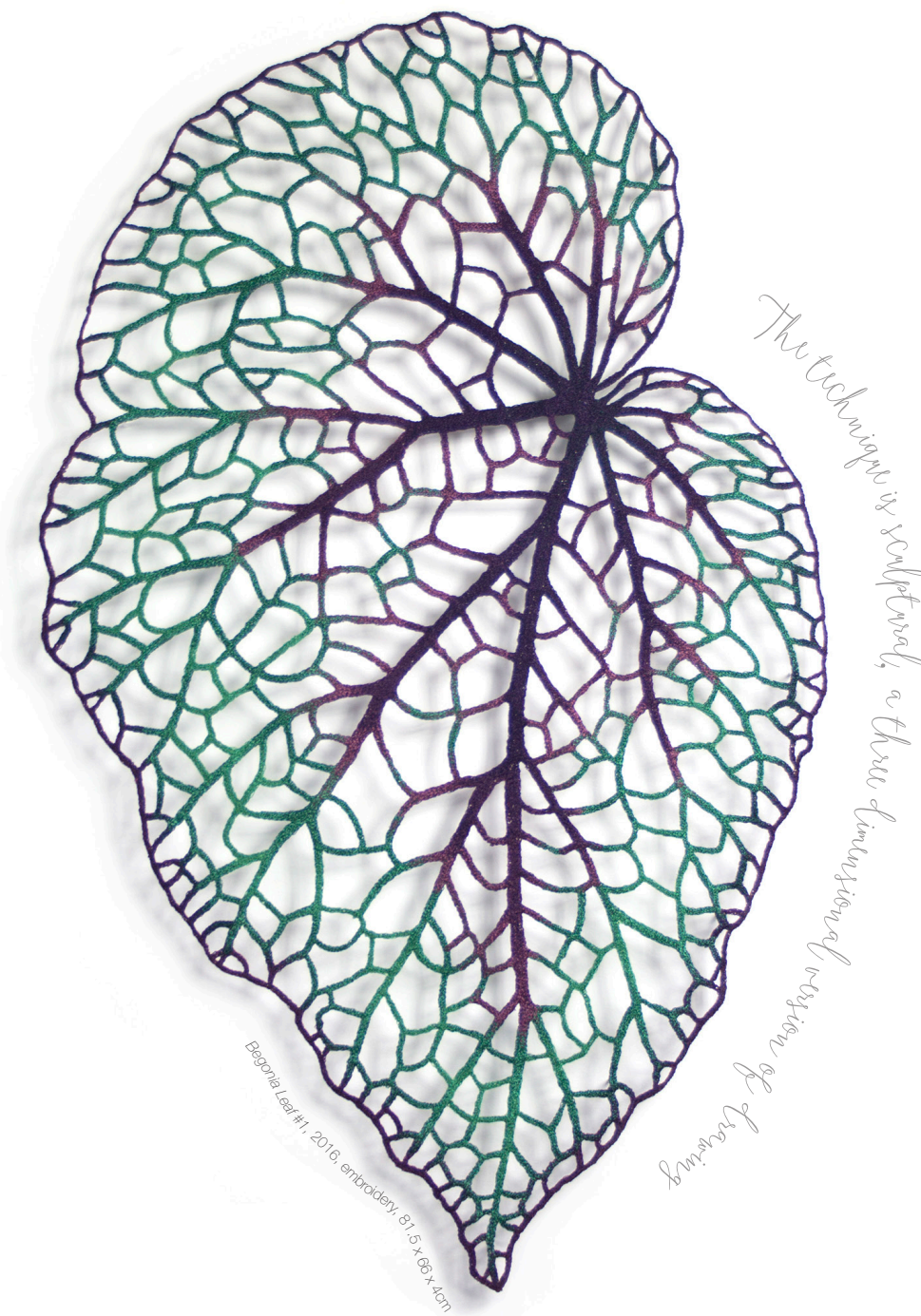
Inga Simpson, *Understory*, Hachette Australia, 2017: xv.

Meredith Woolnough's exhibition was inspired by her week-long Glasshouse residency in March 2017. "Foliate" means "shaped like a leaf" which is what Meredith Woolnough created, in embroidery, a crystallisation of her time over this period. Yet it also records her listening to and within the forest, and to its disposable elements, the leaves that she found.

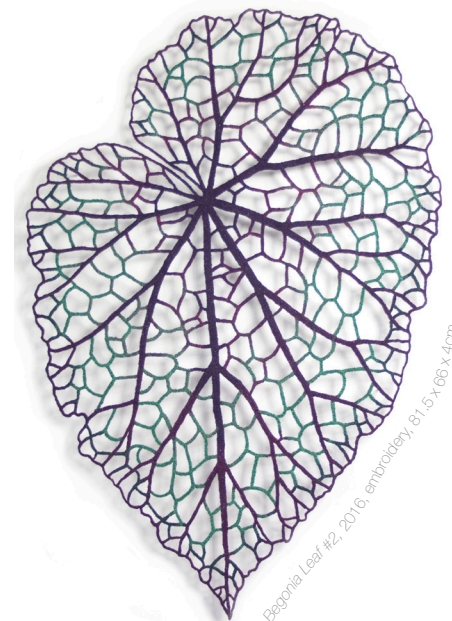
Leaves fall from Eucalyptus trees during the renewal phase of autumn, but also during drought, when the forest becomes discernibly thinner and trees naturally defoliate, as an act of self-preservation. Woolnough set out on the first day of her residency to gather specimens, which she finds invariably enriches her art practice. "I ended up in a place where a lot of beautiful Eucalyptus leaves were on the ground. They were in natural subtle colours, dry, and became my reference points for the week." In their colour, shape, fronds and variation, she finds leaves have a structure that renders them "more interesting than flowers".



Leaf Line #1, 2017, embroidery, 43.5 x 156.5 x 4cm



Begonia Leaf #1, 2016, embroidery, 81.5 x 68 x 4cm



Begonia Leaf #2, 2016, embroidery, 81.5 x 68 x 4cm

Her recreation of these leaves, using synthetic fibres, is delicate yet robust, the stitched veins and elements recording, preserving and replicating, rendering their natural fragility in more permanent media. Their sculptural aspect is enhanced by the way they are framed, casting beautiful shadows, which are as important as the works themselves. They are presented in glass boxes like botanical specimens, and evoke Woolnough's post-graduate training as a natural history illustrator. The most ambitious of these are the major Leaf Line #1 and Leaf Line #2 (2017) which recreate a series of leaves in a graduation of their natural hues across the wall, lined up like a horizon line as they never would have been on the forest floor, to describe subtle variations in colour.

Other pieces in the exhibition were made in the twelve months leading up to residency with leaves from Begonia and Caladium plants.

Woolnough, now resident in Newcastle, trained at the College of Fine Arts in Sydney, majoring in textiles. She found the embroidery technique during her honours year, describing it as a "way of drawing using a sewing machine. You move a base fabric around under the needle with your hand. The base I work onto is water soluble. When I am finished I wash away the supporting fabric." The technique is sculptural, a three dimensional version of drawing. While she spent some years working as a high school teacher, Woolnough's move to Newcastle meant that she found the only degree that now exists in the world in natural history illustration. "It is the bridge between science and art", she says, "I found my people!"

The ability of leaves to allow us to remember the "sigh upon the wind" is conjured here – Woolnough captures them as a visual and stilled vignette of the forest.

Louise Martin-Chew

"It is the bridge between science and art" ... "I found my people!"



Mauve Eucalyptus Leaf, 2016, embroidery, 93 x 93 x 4cm

Biography

Lives and works in Newcastle, NSW.

Meredith Woolnough is an internationally acclaimed, award-winning artist from Newcastle, Australia. Her work is held in public, private and corporate collections worldwide.

Meredith Woolnough's elegant embroidered tracers capture the delicate beauty of nature in knotted embroidery threads. Through a delicate system of tiny stitches she creates intricate and complex openwork compositions that are then carefully pinned in shadow boxes, just like preserved specimens.

The work maps the frameworks of the various veining systems found in nature to create work that explores the balance, harmony and connectivity of life on Earth. Inspired by the patterns, structures and shapes found in plants, coral, cells and shells Woolnough's embroideries represent both the robust beauty and elegant fragility of life.



GLASSHOUSE REGIONAL GALLERY

Foliate: Meredith Woolnough on show 4 August to 10 September 2017

Niomi Sands: Gallery Curator

Bridget Purtil & Anne-Marie McWhirter: Gallery Assistant

Marie Taylor: Graphic Design | Olive Communications Pty Ltd: Catalogue Printing

Niomi Sands, Louise Martin-Chew, Meredith Woolnough: Text Copyright

Meredith Woolnough: Image Copyright

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List of Works

Leaf Line #1, 2017, embroidery, 43.5 x 156.5 x 4cm

Leaf Line #2, 2017, embroidery, 43.5 x 156.5 x 4cm

Mauve Eucalyptus Leaf, 2016, embroidery, 93 x 93 x 4cm

Begonia Leaf #1, 2016, embroidery, 81.5 x 66 x 4cm

Begonia Leaf #2, 2016, embroidery, 81.5 x 66 x 4cm

Caladium Leaf, 2016, embroidery, 81.5 x 66 x 4cm

All works framed and courtesy of the artist.

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Cnr Clarence & Hay Streets
Port Macquarie
02 6581 8888
info@glasshouse.org.au
glasshouse.org.au

GALLERY OPENING HOURS
Tue - Fri: 10am - 5pm
Sat - Sun: 10am - 4pm
Public Holidays: 10am - 4pm



A facility of Port
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Create NSW
Arts, Screen & Culture

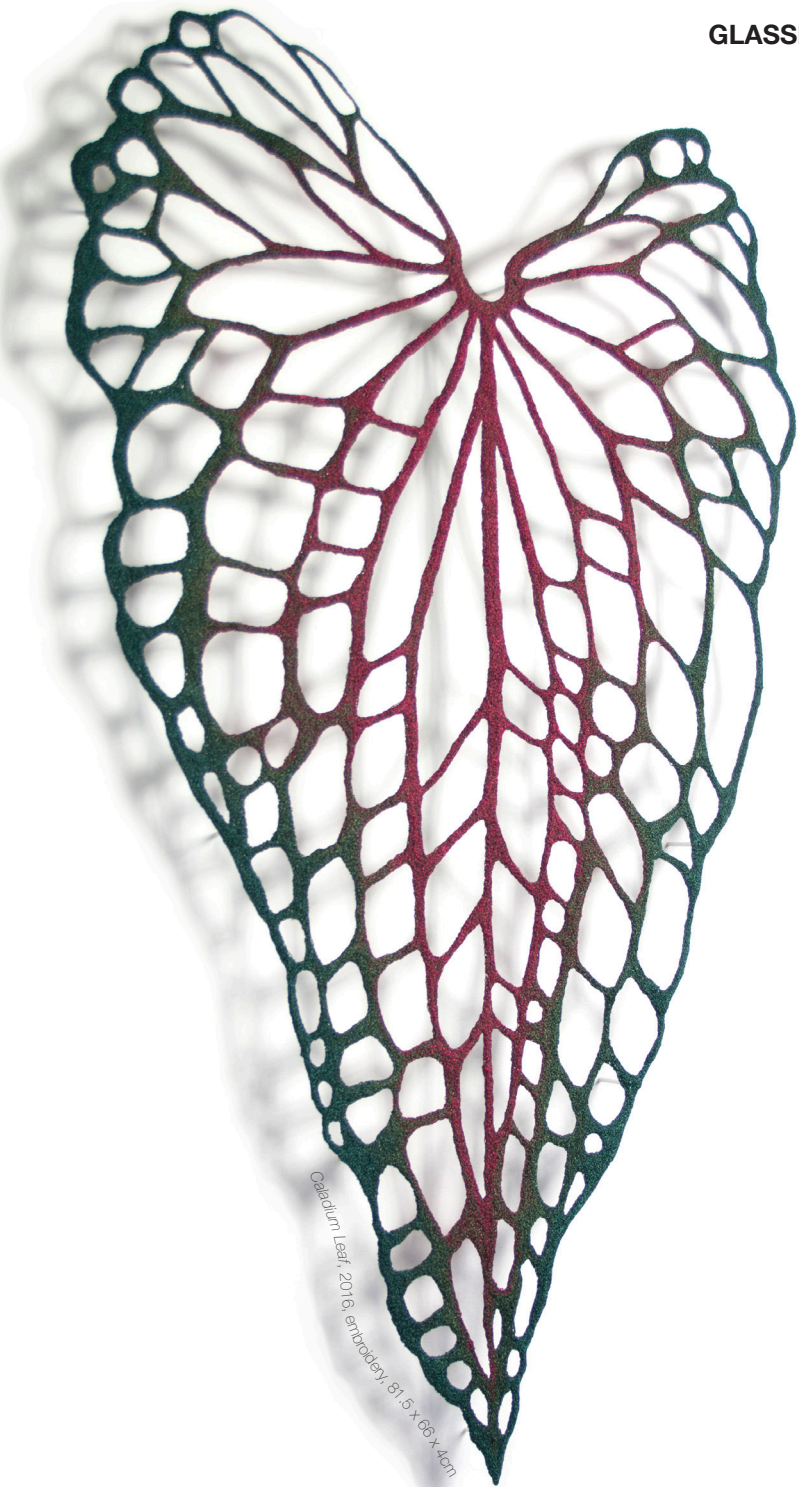
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Australian Solar Timbers
Natural Connection



FAMILY



Caladium Leaf, 2016, embroidery, 81.5 x 66 x 4cm

Meredith Woolnough:

Foliate

On view 4 August - 10 September 2017