

Symbolic Nature

Symbolic Nature is an installation that explores how images, objects, and cultural signs accumulate meaning over time, and how those meanings shift, dissolve, or are reactivated in the present. Across this body of work, using experimental methods of mark making, collage, sculpture and assemblage, I draw on romanticised historical images of Aboriginal people from my own Wiradjuri Nation and neighbouring Nations, re-presenting them within layered visual environments that question the authority and permanence of such representations. These images are not simply reproduced; they are disrupted, reframed, and transformed through new symbolic interventions.

Materially and conceptually, the works also carry deeply personal elements. I incorporate feathers from the Australian magpie—my Wiradjuri totem embodied to me by my grandmother, the bird that is always looking over her—as well as feathers from the Wedge-Tail Eagle and Rosella birds, and echidna quills. These are not decorative inclusions; they hold cultural, familial, and spiritual significance, grounding the works in lived relationships to Country, lineage, and knowledge systems. Through their presence, the artworks extend beyond image into embodied connection.

Central to this process is the idea of holding ceremony within the artwork and the exhibition space itself. For me, holding ceremony is about both active and passive ritual, a way of acknowledging that objects, images, and cultural signs carry relationships—to people, to Country, and to memory—and that those who enter the exhibition space are also implicated within this field of relation. Many of the artworks enclose or embed small cultural objects such as a kelp carrier, beaded jewellery, brass vessels, echidna quills, and ochre. These materials, often gifted by friends and family, carry personal and communal significance. Their placement within the layers activates the artworks as carriers of responsibility and connection, suggesting that artworks can hold traces of kinship, exchange, and obligation.

Some works are veiled through layered surfaces of imagery, where forms are partially obscured, only to be revealed slowly or under particular conditions. Objects are embedded within these strata, sometimes visible, sometimes concealed. This gesture is intentional. It speaks to the understanding that not everything is revealed at all times—that some knowledge, some ceremonies, and some symbolic actions are held, protected, or only activated in specific contexts or moments. There is an ethics to visibility here: a refusal of total disclosure, and an insistence on timing, care, and respect.

I introduce my own visions of symbolic nature into these layers of historical and personal materials: floating eyes, listening ears, celestial forms, and other references to spiritual iconography and surrealist imagery. These elements operate as metaphors for witnessing, listening, and perception, but they also deliberately destabilise the scene. They create a space where reality and imagination intertwine—where metaphor, dream, and memory intersect with the historical archive.

Symbolic Nature proposes a series of questions: what do these inherited images, signs, and objects mean today? What do they reveal or conceal? And how might new symbolic forms disrupt the authority of the past while opening other ways of seeing, and of healing? The resulting compositions form a complex visual web where the romanticised archive meets contemporary intervention, and where representation itself becomes uncertain, contested, and generative.

In this sense, *Symbolic Nature* is both an artistic method and a conceptual proposition. It suggests that symbols—whether cultural, spiritual, or invented—remain active agents in how we imagine identity, history, and belonging. Mixing metaphor and iconography, reality and imagination, the installation attempts to hold multiple meanings at once, inviting viewers to move through a meditative space of healing where the symbolic, the ceremonial, and the speculative coexist.

EXHIBITION TEXT

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