

# That's your bloomin' lot

**Judy Rogers**

Survey of botanical inspired works 2016-2024.  
Contemporary watercolours and mixed media paintings.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries botanical painting came to be seen either as a drawing-room skill or as an increasingly professionalized aide to the modern science of botany. Flower paintings created for science or commerce did not fit 19<sup>th</sup> century critics' ideal of high art. With the dominance of abstract expressionism and other 20<sup>th</sup> century art movements, the genre suffered what seemed an irreversible fall from favour.

One might assume botanic art is rendered obsolete by photography. However, a botanical painting can accurately capture the very smallest detail of a species and combine fruit, flowers, seeds, roots, seasonal and dying foliage together in a single highly-detailed composition which would be impossible to accomplish in a single photograph. The botanical painting is where science meets art – but maybe that's too simplistic. The botanical artist shares the capacity for intense observation and an understanding of design in nature with the botanist or scientist but must have the technical skill to depict the plant in a way that goes beyond a mere record. The human hand, eye and knowledge produce a unique work that is both informative and a thing of beauty – and at times with an element of surprise.

Rogers' works in this sense don't want to serve science, but inspire the senses, and evoke the emotional and intellectual responses we call art. From childhood Rogers had a love affair with botanical art. Engagement with the past can inspire a re-interpretation of old techniques and helps render her subject within contemporary aesthetics. Like in her portrait painting practice, she develops a close relationship with her chosen subject. Despite the paintings' need for botanical and scientific accuracy, there is large portion of artistic interpretation and creativity in her works. In the best of botanical art, like all good portraiture, the personality of both the plant and the artist gleams through.

### Roger's motivations:

*"I want viewers to witness my botanical paintings as something akin to a cabinet of curiosities.*

*I choose to depict plants from my own surrounding, thus making my work more personal. I convey some of my excitement of the close study of structure, texture, colour and scale of the individual plants. I prefer painting living flora - I don't want to bring cuttings into the studio and rearrange them to mimic life, which constitutes for most botanical artists "painting from life". The outcome looks like an open casket funeral to me. I am using extensive photographic references to paint and I know some aspects of my work suffer because of that, but I have the actual plant nearby and I can go back and observe more.*

*I concentrate on the individual plant and choose compositional elements to give back most of the structure of the individual plant and convey the "drama" – the feelings I have walking by the plant at the same time."*



### **After the fire**

*"I remember how quickly the little wood was engulfed by the last fire."*

In this circular panel installation what is not visible is as important as what you can see. Death is an essential part of the circle of life."

**Mixed media on board, 4 panel installation,**

Candlestick banksia (*Banksia attenuata*). Research work for artwork with the same title exhibited at the G20 International Art Exchange Exhibition, Hanzou China 2016.



### Awe

*“The draw of my home country is as strong as my accent, but I have no regrets about starting a new life here. I live in the suburbs and even the usual dog walk can introduce me to something new. This painting is of my local bushland. After all this time, I look at this country with the wide open eyes of a child and try to soak up all the sunshine, wonders and new things my adopted country so generously provides.”*

**Mixed media on board,**

Eucalyptus lehmannii, Bushy Yate. Research work for artwork with the same title exhibited at 18th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh, Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka 2018.



### **Art Forms in Nature**

In this series the paintings capture the delicate nature of the plants and intensity of the light surrounding them. Rogers often revisits her subjects and when she does, she rekindles the deep connection she felt working on the paintings.

*This series is referencing 'Art Forms in Nature: The Prints of Ernst Haeckel' (originally published in 1899). Scientific illustration in general, and Ernest Haeckel (1834-1919) publications particularly, had a significant effect on her from early childhood.*

**Watercolour on paper,**  
Ongoing series from 2019.



### **Botanical bestiary**

Botanical Bestiary shows elegant icons of insects composed out of the vegetation. She has built insects from the plants they live on and eat, and the same plants uses them as pollinators, as they are dependent on each other's well-being. Local insects are created with plants that can be found in gardens, parks, verges and forests of Dwellingup. The works are meant to amuse, but they also symbolize the abundance of creation.

**Watercolour on paper,**  
Research residency Dwellingup 2021

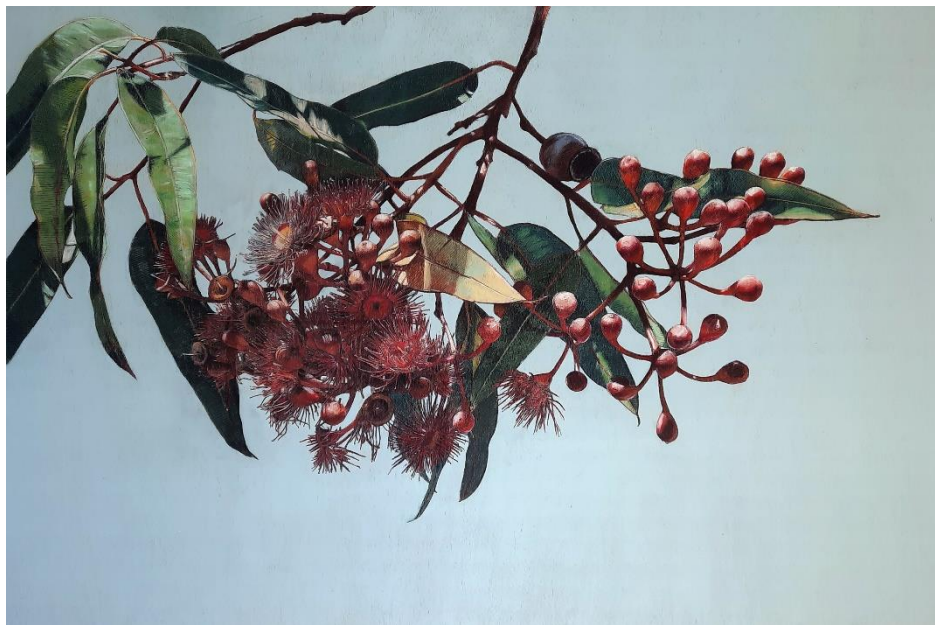


### **Attraction series**

Close ups of pollination: To attract the right pollinator flowering plants go to a great effort to develop the right size, shape, colour and scent.

The works praise the enchanted cacophony available to us when we take the time to truly interact with nature and remind us at the same time of its bounty and unnerving fragility.

**Watercolour on paper,**



### **Proximity**

*"I came to Australia from an unfamiliar European background against which everything in the landscape still seems fresh, new and exciting and so different from the land I grew up. Therefore, I approach my adopted country with the spirit of passionate wonder."*

This artwork is a manifestation of her experience walking trails, immersed in strong light in bushland, getting close-up and truly involved. For her the plants are important to distinguish and to identify the land she is experiencing.

**Mixed media on board,**

Research work for the City of Melville botanical commission 2021.





### **Verse**

*“As verses of a poem this series of paintings is describing my reverence of nature and the moving time. I am lionizing Western Australian plants in arrangements of Baroque and Rococo paintings of floral abundance. The background patterns are created by floating ink (suminagashi). Traditionally suminagashi printed paper was used to write poetry in Japan and it is well suited for the rich poetic nature of its subjects: banksias eucalypts, hakeas and all the exotic bunch.”*

### **Watercolour on paper,**

The series was developed for Floribunda 2022 Exhibition. The ink pattern is formed by the reverberation of the water surface and thus it is a snapshot of the time the print was made. It captured the resonance of her studio during the time she was working on the series. The botanical subjects were researched at the same time and painted on the print. In a way she was recording the period from the invitation to the exhibition.



### **Dizzy**

Walking in springtime the floor of the bush is covered by a large variety of small flowers. She had to train her eyes to spot the differences. She walked the tracks in both directions at different times of the day to catch individual flowers in different lighting or just try to find them again in the changing environment.

It was a dizzying task.

**Watercolour on board,**

Research residency Melville, Wireless Hill Park, 2022.



### **On the brink**

*"I think the artist's message which illuminates biodiversity's stunning variety on its most grand and intimate scale is more important than ever: exploration, observation, and documentation. I am drawing attention to some of the local endangered species. I want to heighten public awareness about the current condition of life and environmental distress."*

### **Oil on board**

Lambertia orbifolia and Banksia anatonna



### **Verdure**

Verdure series is her account of physical and emotional relations to an individual plant she visits frequently. The painting is a short story she wants to tell of its recent vigorous flowering time. The painted leaves and flowers are exploding up the picture plane, bursting in colour and overflowing the bounds of the frame.

Everything is on the move and buzzing.

**Mixed media on board**



### **Walk with me**

The rays of sun through the canopy point out random plants. The sun patch defines the sampler, gives its composition and elevates it out of the surrounding, like a theatre spotlight. Randomly selected subjects drive the process, the outcome is a snapshot of the walk, the time and the place.

The technique is quick; black ink catches the shadows on paper and a limited palette of pigments added later hint at the colours.

**Mixed media on board**



### **Language of Flowers**

Australian natives aren't listed in floriography, the secret language of many cultures. If they were, then her subject's five petals could have illustrated the five crucifixion wounds of Christ. Its colour could be associated with luxury and a lasting love, dignity, pride, intuition and success.

You might have guessed her choice of pigments wasn't informed by all this. She chose to paint this very small clump of flowers with certain colours to communicate a moment in time; to say that:  
"I felt peace and sadness when I saw them".

**Oil on board**



### **Quaint Dirt**

Botanicals and minibeasts evoke ornate formality.  
The unique flare of grace and symmetry fluidly maintains order and structure, aiming  
to elevate the common to worthy of admiration and preservation.

**Art and Craft Red. Mixed media on board**

## Extract from Jeremy Blank's opening words for Judy Rogers 'Walk With Me' Exhibition Gallows Gallery. 24 March 2024

When an artist embarks on a series of work they commit to an adventure and a relationship with their subject matter. I have had the privilege to follow Judy's artistic progress for almost two decades. In that time Judy has approached her subject matter with directness, sensitivity and a focused tenacity. Judy's works grace many private and public collections and are easily recognised through their compositional directness, seeming simplicity, and clarity.

Judy's eight-year commitment exploring botanical works represent a bold move for a contemporary artist working in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Australia. We live in a time of re-appraisal, revision, extremism and conservatism; a time where we can ask Alexa or Google to generate an image for us to project upon our walls or from our screens. A time where the virtual, the fantastic and superheroes are available to us all 24/7, where we are bombarded by imagery we can no longer trust. So, why does an accomplished artist take on botanical subject matter? I know that Judy has an answer for that, and the questions she has asked and her findings surround us here tonight. To notice the way light falls upon a patch of bushland, branch, or flower is a simple thing for anyone to experience. How we reflect upon the nature that surrounds us is another key element. Many of us rekindled our connection with nature through the prescribed, recommended and solitary exercise programs recommended during the lockdowns and border closures of 2020 to 2022. Those moments of reconnection with nature can ignite and inspire us to look further into the natural world where, through close observation, we see that the complexities and brilliance of nature remain, despite our worst excesses. They are inspirational motifs for us all to reflect upon, celebrate or regret. Whether from a scientific, social, spiritual or pagan perspective the natural world is central to any interpretation or imagining.

The lands of botanical artworks are heavily populated and ploughed fields. Judy Rogers' contribution to the discipline is worth celebrating for its creative sophistication and subtle playfulness. They are memorable, sensitive and celebratory works from where and when we live. A good definition of what art is.

**Jeremy Blank is the Artistic Director and General Manager of Victoria Park Centre of Arts and a practicing artist.**