

Creative Message Exchange – Susan Hall and Melanie Yazzie

A Creative Message Exchange is taking place between children, artists, conservationists and First Nation Elders in Bass Coast (Boonwurrung/Bunurong Country) and Turtle Island (Canada/USA). The Exchange is an invitation to connect with the Living World and to recognise ourselves as part of it, locally and globally. Messages are in the form of artworks, poetic text, songs, photographs and short films.

The Creative Message Exchange is part of 'For Our Future', an Eco Arts project designed to inspire environmental stewardship in the context of climate change and biodiversity loss. The project is being supported financially by the Bass Coast Shire Council and the Phillip Island Conservation Society (PICS).

One of the Lead Artists in the 'For Our Future' project is Inverloch artist and printmaker Susan Hall. Susan is a friend of Melanie Yazzie, a Navajo artist who is the Professor of Arts Practices and Head of Printmaking at the University of Colorado. Susan and Melanie are creative collaborators and have been active in international print exchanges over many years.

In Susan's words: 'A Creative Message Exchange shows what it's like to make an offer and for someone else to respond. Underneath it is trust and generosity. At the core of it is love. You just need a starting point, an opening message to begin the communication and connection. Melanie and I make conversation pieces. Melanie sends work to me which includes her stories and I respond to that with what is happening in my life. Melanie and I are on the same wavelength. When I first heard about the Eco Arts project 'For Our Future', I told Melanie about it. I said we could do conversations from afar and Melanie said 'OK. Let's start right now'. So we did. We created twenty prints each and sent the twenty prints to each other.'

In Melanie's words: 'What the collaboration has revealed to me is that Susan sees the world that I do. She sees all the beauty that is in nature, and she brings that into her work. It is so easy to respond to her work with my imagery because she creates this layer of hope and beauty with her acknowledgement of the land. She has such a beautiful delicate way of bringing nature into the work. She takes me to the land and I feel her. Her work helps me feel the landscape. I feel the connection. There is magic in this work. Susan has a way of responding to my images with her colours and layering. It elevates the imagery to another level. It adds a sense of awe. Susan's ways of thinking about colour, about time, about migration and honouring plants are things that I try and do within my work. When I am doing that in the landscape, it heals the part of me that

is broken, and that is trying to live in this world that we are in. I feel that Susan and I are trying to bring beauty back into our souls, into our minds and into everything. The shapes are ambiguous. You don't know if you're looking at a waterway or a tree. It can be both. And anyone can come, anybody can come to the circle. I feel that is how Nature comes across in these pieces.'

In a recent Zoom meeting with the three of us, Susan and Melanie described each of their forty collaborative prints and, with their permission, I distilled their words into poetic text. Their visual conversation and the poetic text generated from their artworks will form part of an exhibition taking place at Wonthaggi ArtSpace in August and September. Here's a taste ...



This is the dawn and the circle of sun
From the leaves and grasses from my garden
I send a prayer
A seagull flies over the landscape
And takes my prayer to the Ancestors
From down in the bushes
Up it goes



Driftwood and trees
Seagulls flying in an afternoon sunset
Shearwaters on the clifftops of Cape Woolamai
Flying on the wind
Bringing stories from the other side of the world



I feel the colours in these pieces
Marking the passing of time
Corn yellow shapes rise up
Animals interact with seedpods
That's how things pollinate and grow
Everything has a role to play
There is beauty in that

Messages from the Exchange will be displayed at exhibitions in Myli Libraries in Bass Coast (June 2023), Wonthaggi ArtSpace (August – September 2023) and the Cowes Cultural and Community Centre (October 2023).