

# Creative Message Exchange


A Visual Conversation

between Bass Coast artist Susan Hall  
(Boonwurrung/Bunurong Country)  
and Navajo printmaker Melanie Yazzie  
(Turtle Island – Colorado, USA)

Design and Editing Laura Brearley



Supported by the  
Bass Coast Shire Council



**Susan Hall** is an artist based in Inverloch, Victoria, Australia. She volunteers and curates exhibitions at the Wonthaggi ArtSpace. She paint in acrylics and oils and also works in printmaking, small sculpture and charcoal.

<https://www.susanahall.com.au/about-me>

**Melanie Yazzie** is a Navajo artist, printmaker, sculptor and painter who is the Professor of Arts Practices and Head of Printmaking at the University of Colorado.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melanie\\_Yazzie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melanie_Yazzie)

<https://www.colorado.edu/artandarthistory/melanie-yazzie>

Melanie has undertaken an Arts Residency at Monash University (Gippsland) and has visited Bass Coast. Several artists from Gippsland have visited Melanie in her home country of USA (Turtle Island) and participated in Creative Message Exchanges with her.

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# Introducing the Creative Message Exchange

## *Susan*

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 'Ocean Messages' within 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 20 prints each and sent the 20 prints to each other. The conversation has been built on a friendship developed over a number of years.



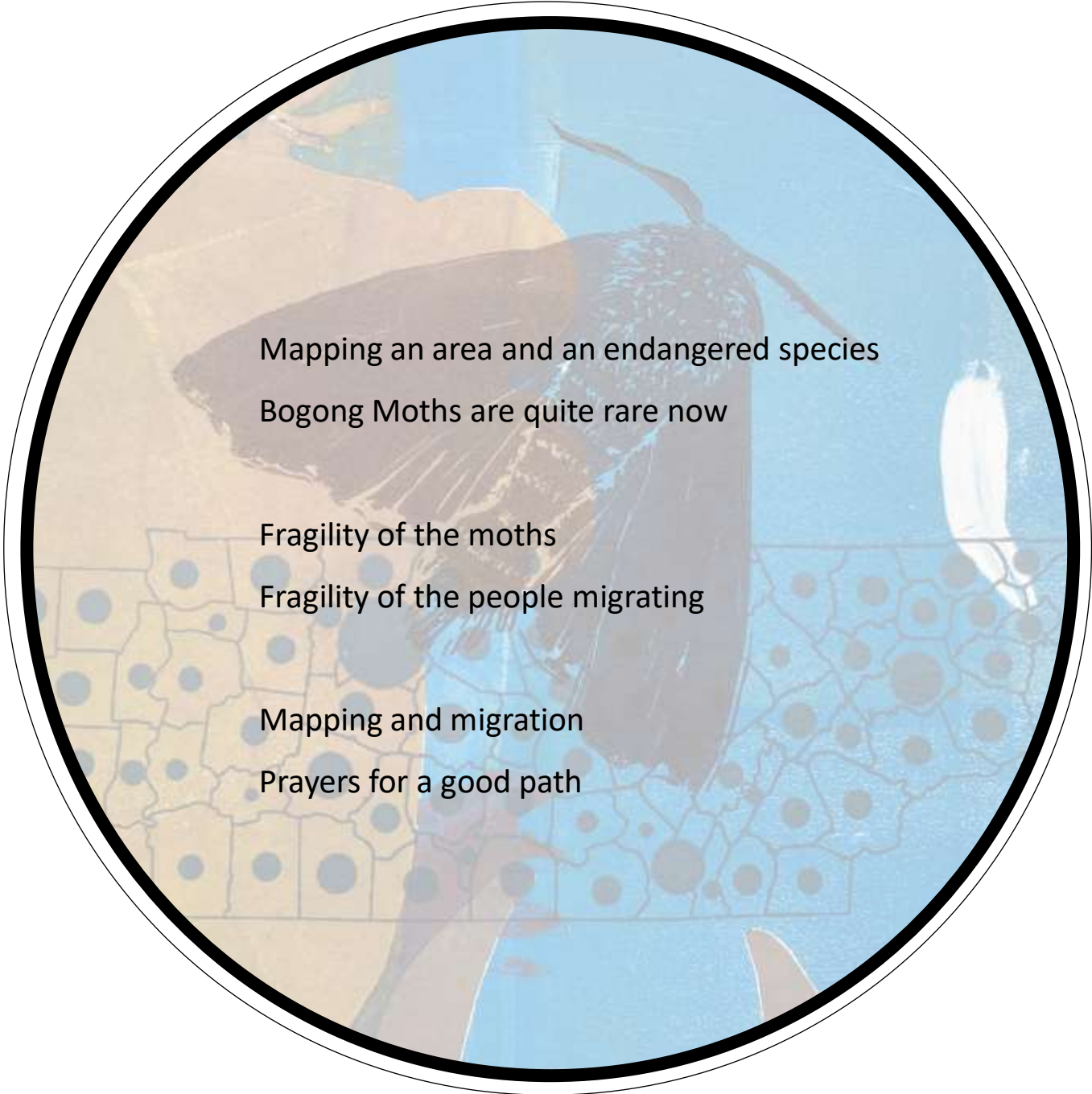
**Melanie**

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.

We both love walking outdoors. We bring the elements of nature into these circles, curving and twisting and giving hope. 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.

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.





Mapping an area and an endangered species

Bogong Moths are quite rare now

Fragility of the moths

Fragility of the people migrating

Mapping and migration

Prayers for a good path





Animals, landscape and canyon land colours

The four lines are about counting

The number four is significant

The seasons and the four directions

And then there is the counting of tribal groups

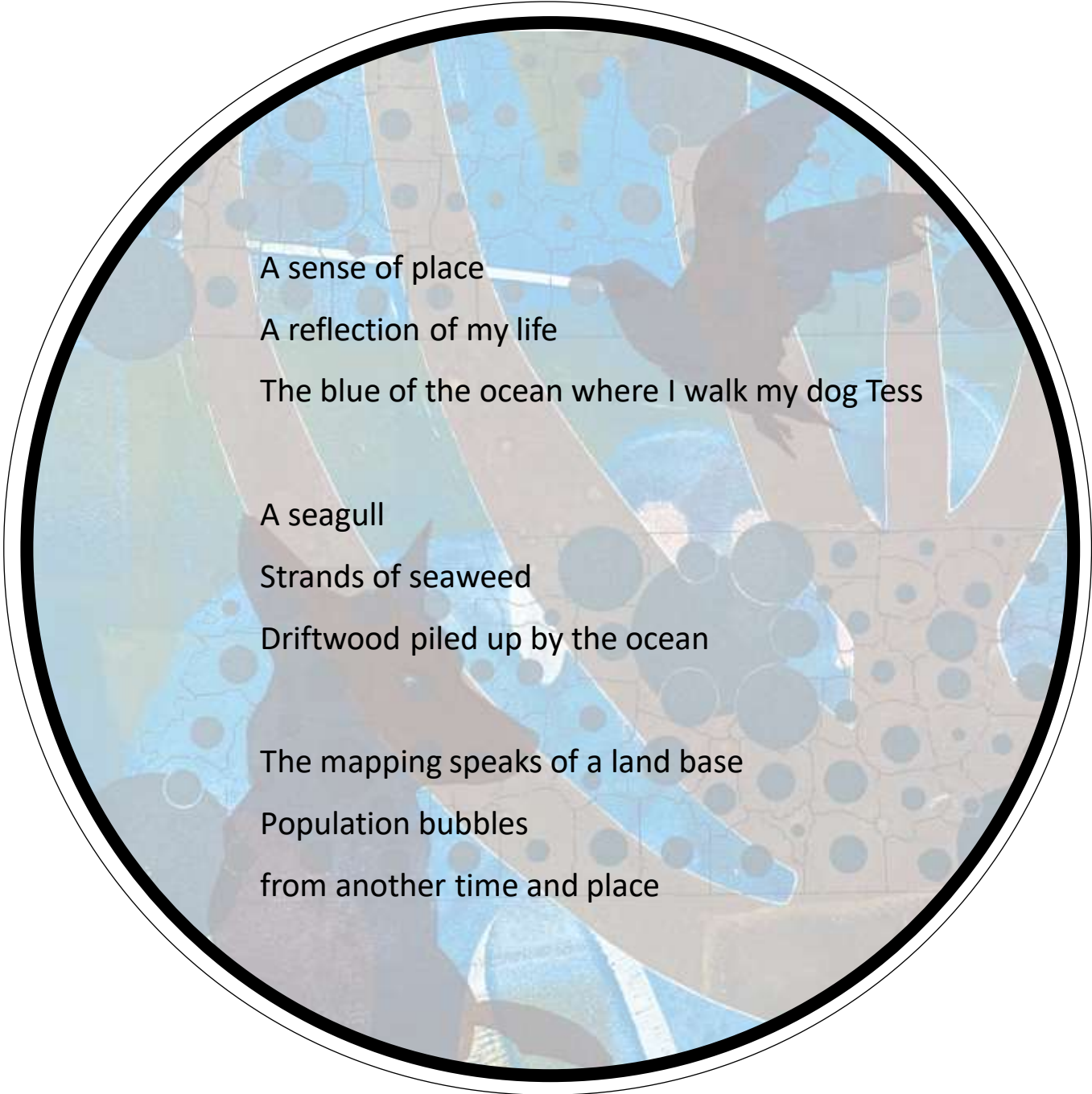
Tracking how many native people are in a tribe

Keeping track and counting

A colonial way of thinking







A sense of place

A reflection of my life

The blue of the ocean where I walk my dog Tess

A seagull

Strands of seaweed


Driftwood piled up by the ocean

The mapping speaks of a land base

Population bubbles

from another time and place





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





Weaving tool

Helping hands coming down from above

Ancestors reaching out

Reassuring

Across the oceans  
of distance and time



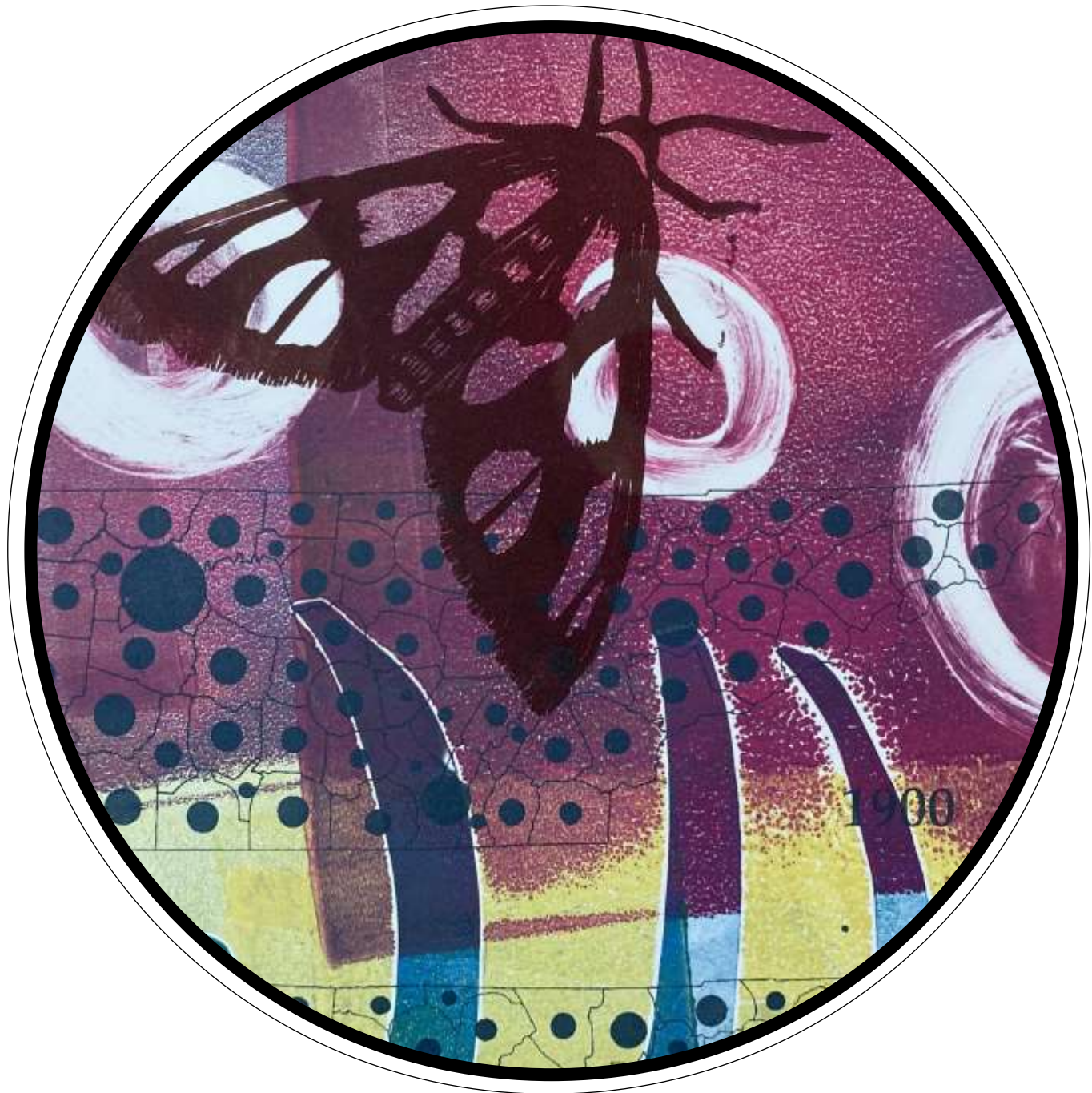


Bird and landscape

Movement and migration

A tiger moth from Gippsland







Colours of the sunset

The circle of the sun

Marking the passage of time

Moving through the sky

Round and round

Turning points

of time and connection





Tess on the water's edge

Looking at birds and grasses

Shearwater birds

Kangaroo grasses

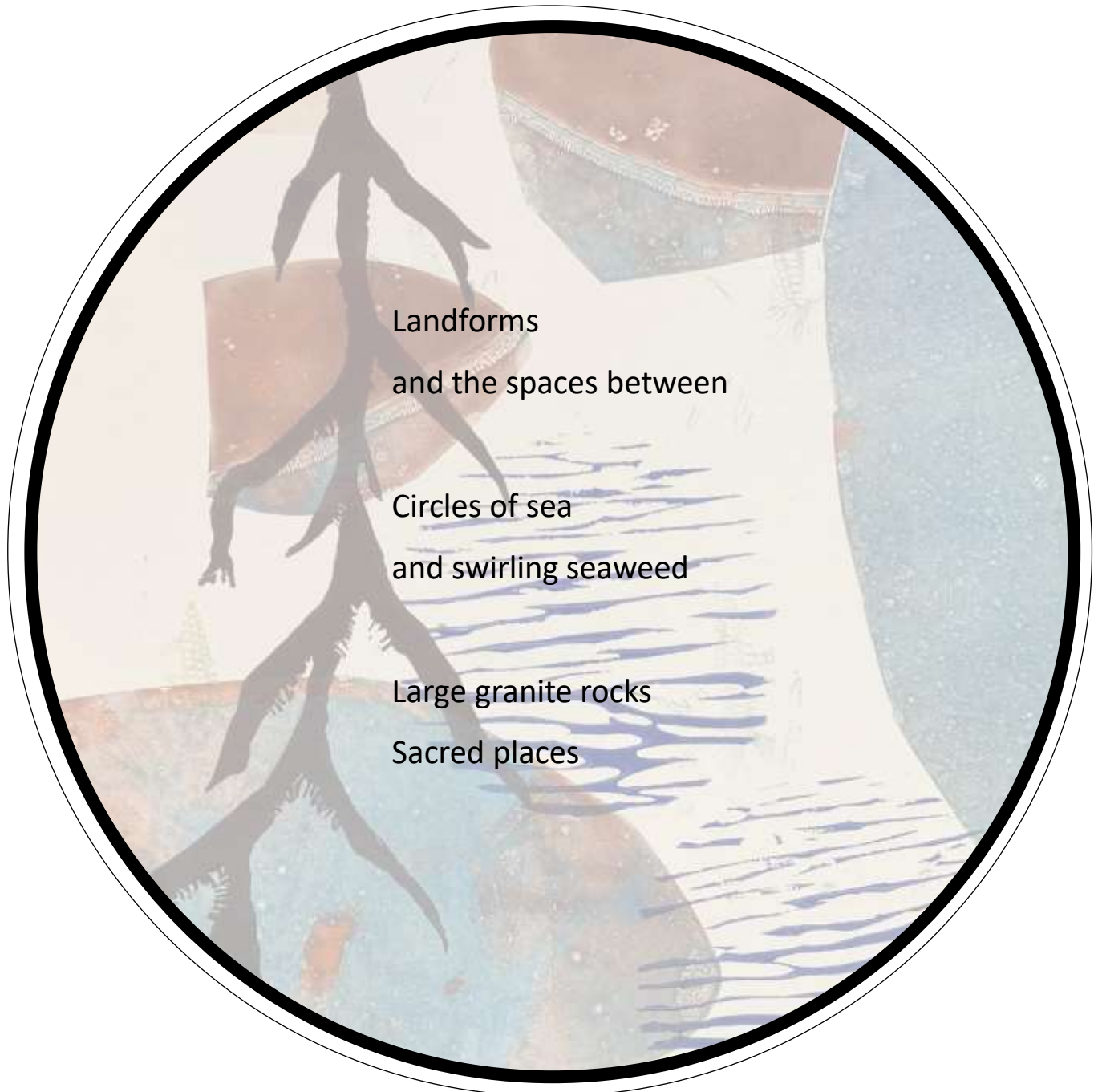
Water colours

Backbone in the desert

Rain and water

Keeping us whole





Landforms  
and the spaces between

Circles of sea  
and swirling seaweed

Large granite rocks  
Sacred places





The blue of water  
Patterns in the sand  
Weaving  
Spiralling  
The sea connecting us all

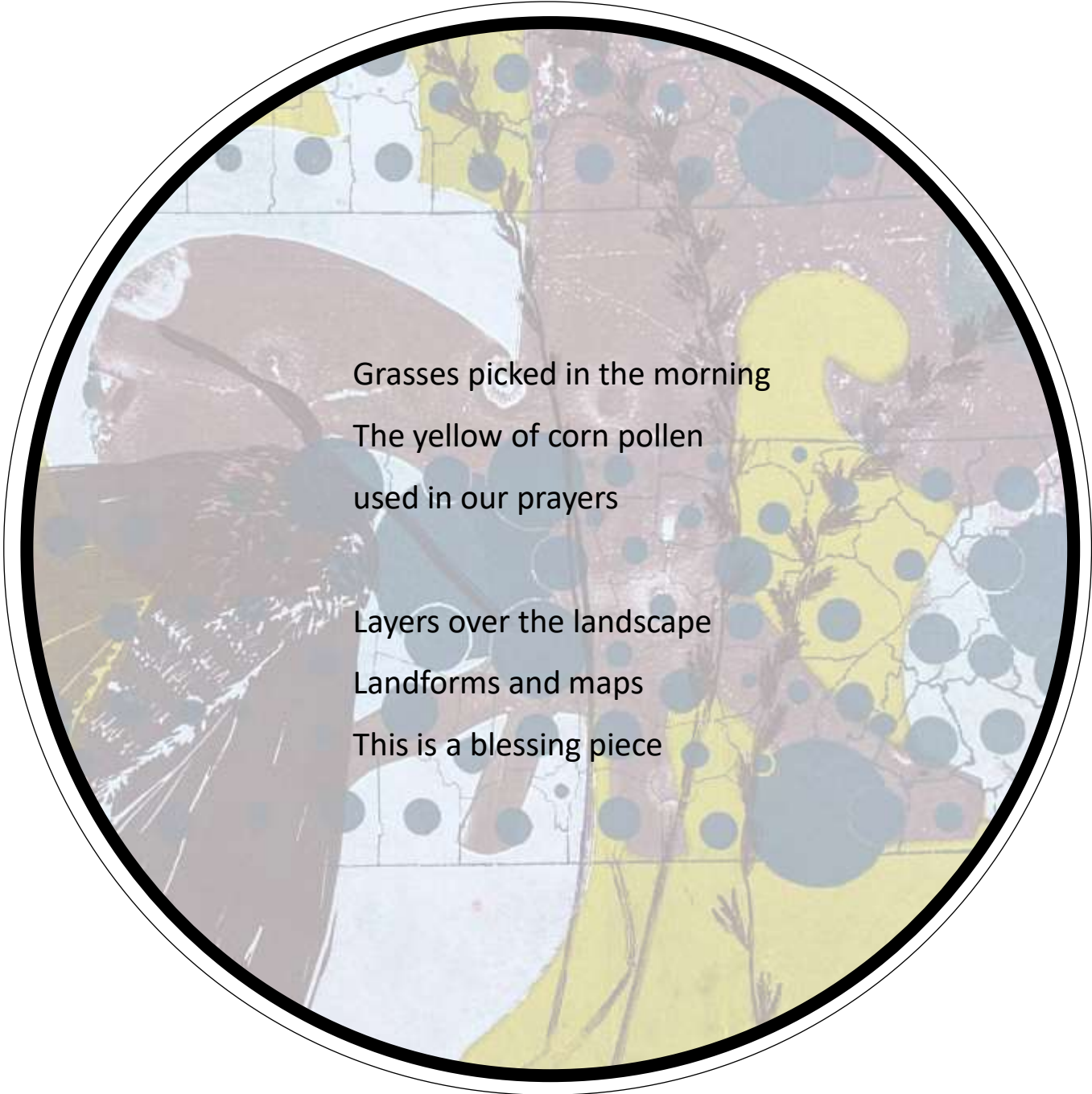






Weaving together  
Rock formations  
Landscapes  
Landforms  
Seagull flying across the sea  
into the image






Grasses picked in the morning  
The yellow of corn pollen  
used in our prayers

Layers over the landscape  
Landforms and maps  
This is a blessing piece



A circular frame containing a composite image. At the top, a seagull is shown in flight against a bright, hazy sky. Below the seagull, there are various elements: a large, detailed leaf with prominent veins, a stalk of grass, and a dark, textured bush. The bottom portion of the image features a pattern of overlapping circles and lines, resembling a microscopic view of plant cells or a stylized ground texture. The overall color palette is muted, with soft blues, greens, and browns.


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





Everything coexists

All in a delicate balance

Everything has its special place and plays its role

We collect the corn pollen for prayers

I add the yellow colour to works

To speak about prayer and specialness







Large image of a little bird

Our human population is exploding

The animals need to be seen in a large format  
so we recognise that the world also belongs to them





Seedpods and plants

Interacting with landforms

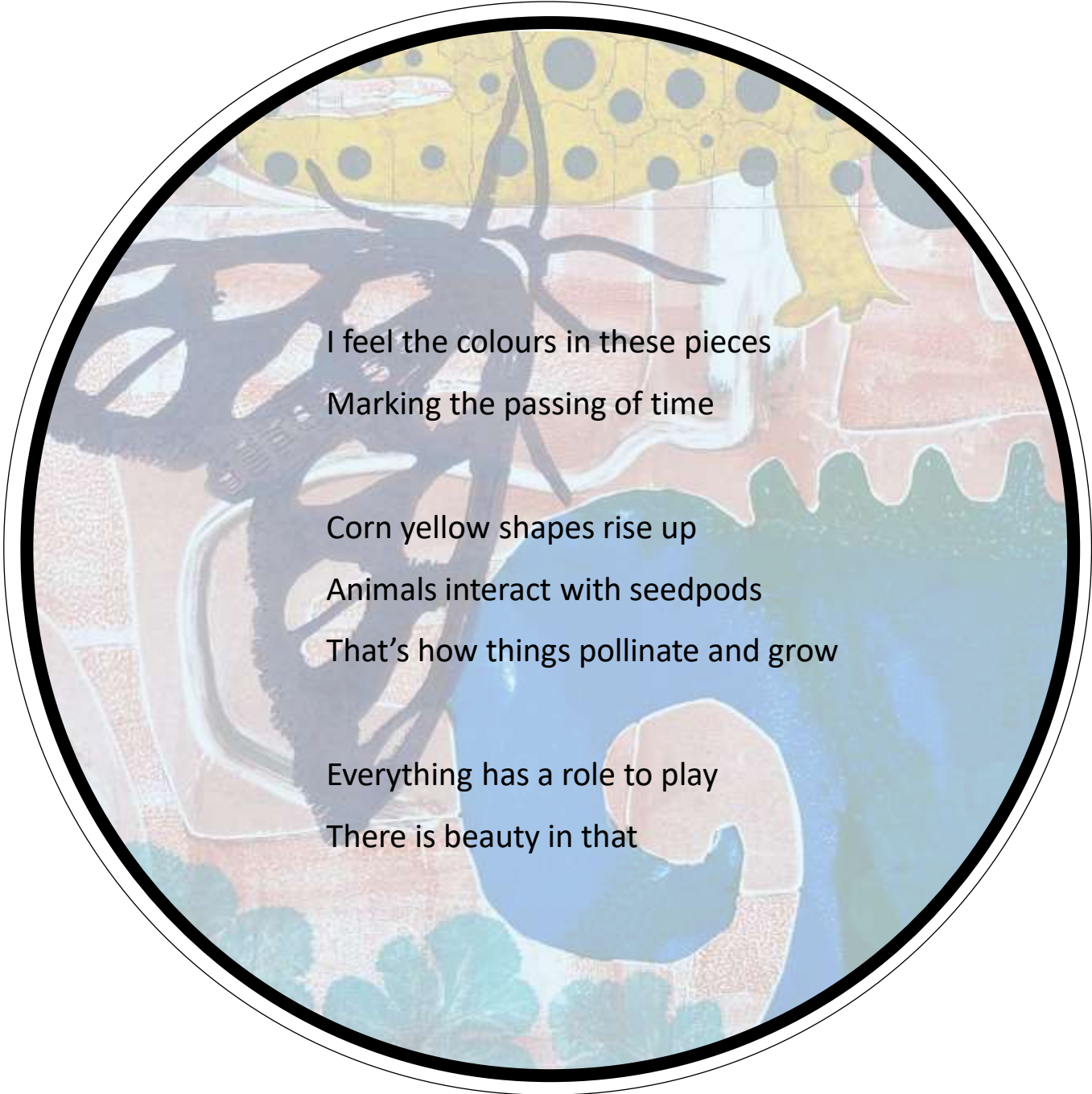
Creating a larger landscape

Seagulls below

Shearwaters up high

with further to fly



A circular collage of nature-themed illustrations. At the top, a yellow butterfly with blue spots is shown. Below it, a white bird is perched on a branch. To the left, a dark silhouette of a tree with long, thin branches is visible. In the bottom right, a blue snail is depicted. The background is a mix of soft colors like pink, orange, and green, with some abstract shapes. The entire scene is enclosed in a double-lined circular border.

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





Lines of migration

Air movements

Two friends in a circle







A tree

A moving waterway

A bird in the landscape





Tess sitting amongst the grasses

Part of a landform

A protector and a companion

The honouring of a living being



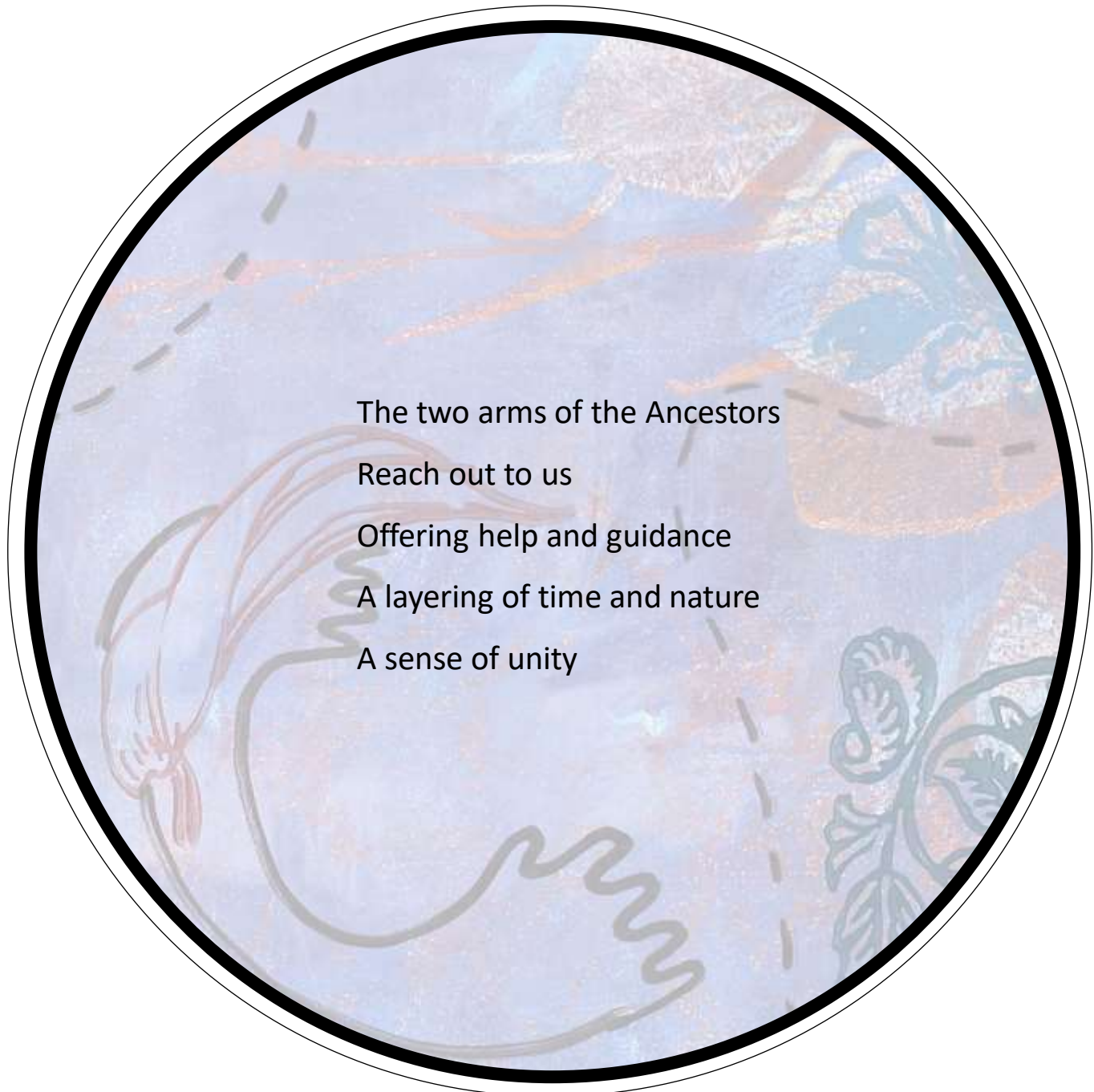


This is the image of a matriarch

A woman who is singing

Sending out song and prayers across the ocean  
with the movement of her hands






The two arms of the Ancestors  
Reach out to us  
Offering help and guidance  
A layering of time and nature  
A sense of unity





A circular collage of nature-themed illustrations. The background is a soft, warm-toned wash. Overlaid on this are various botanical and animal sketches. On the left, there are large, light-colored leaves and a tall, thin plant stem. In the center, there are more leaves and a small, dark, wavy shape. On the right, there is a cluster of dark, detailed flowers on a stem. At the bottom center, there is a small, dark silhouette of a deer or antelope. The entire scene is framed by a thick black border.

A sunset feeling

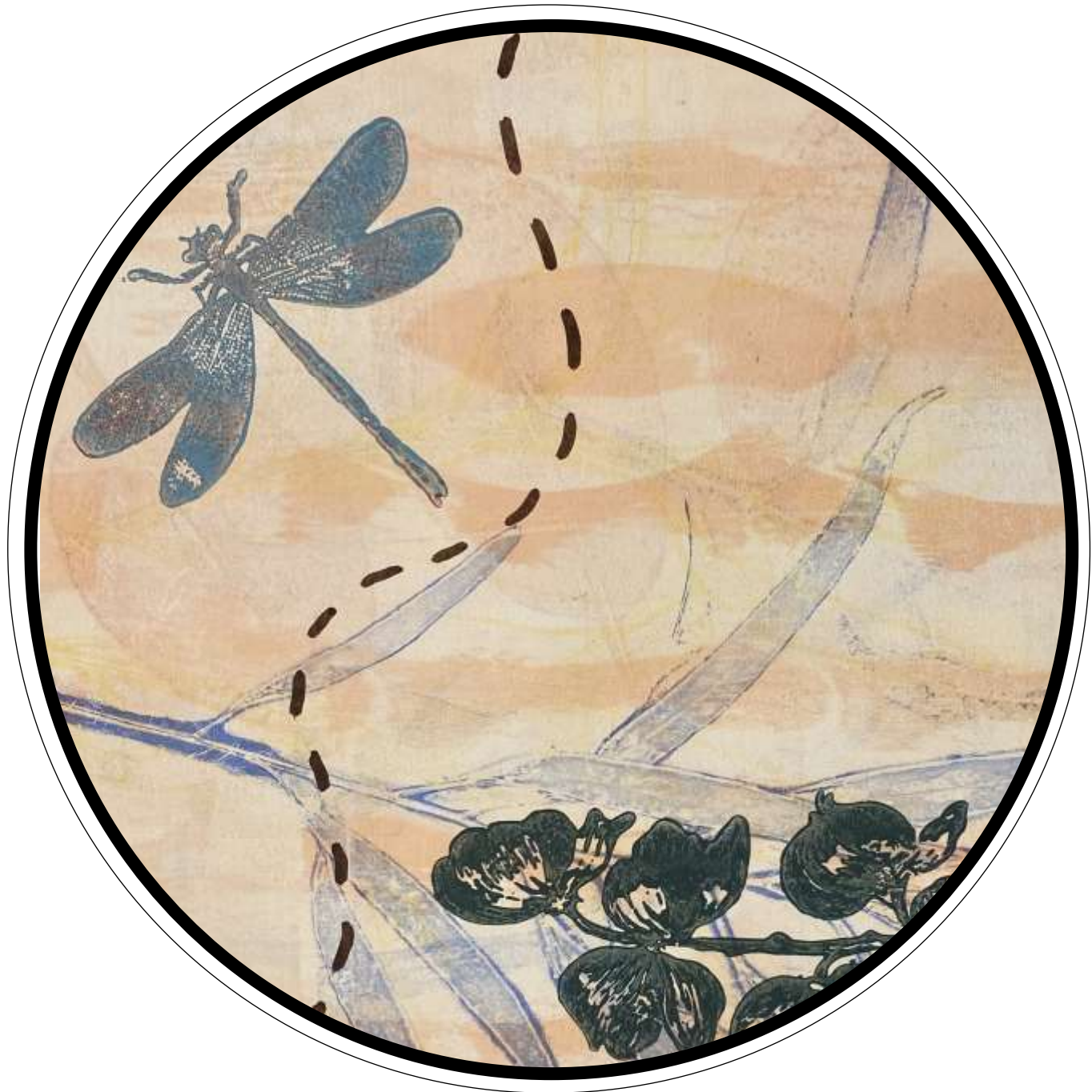
Different elements of nature

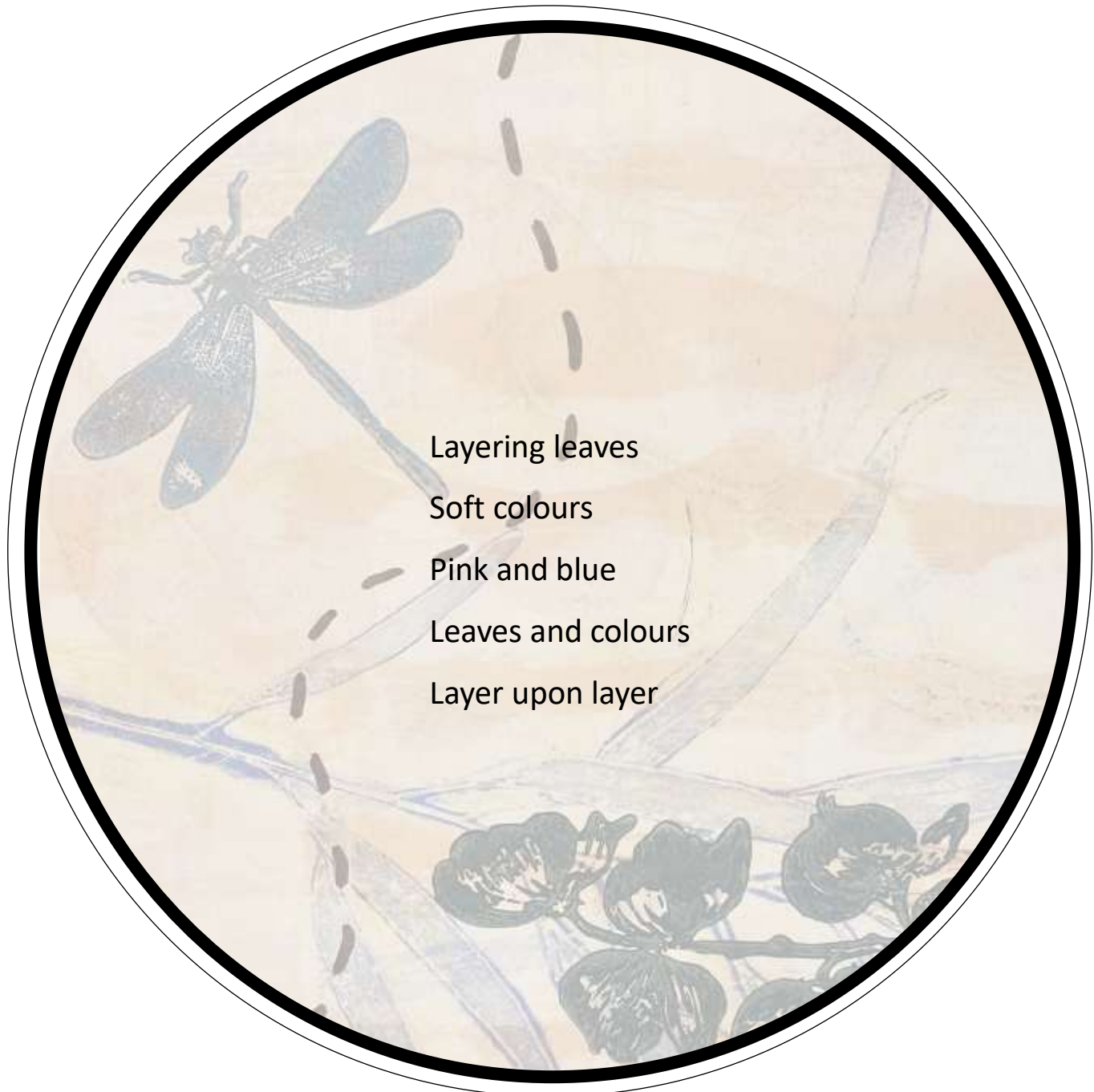
Coming together

Nature living within us

A Spirit Circle

Sending the healing out





Layering leaves

Soft colours

Pink and blue

Leaves and colours

Layer upon layer






A power piece  
With elements of strength

Sheep representing food  
and the wool for weaving rugs

A desert feeling  
Like an afternoon stroll outdoors





Coyote Fox, running through there with the beetle  
Rhythms of life in the circles

Coyote Fox, he is a trickster  
Any time he shows up, he's going to teach us something







Lines of connection

Water and currents bringing hope

Guiding lines showing us the way

Connecting us with each other


The chicken brings eggs

and is a friend in the environment

Waking us up in the morning

Calling out the day




The background of the text is a circular artwork. It features a hand reaching out from the right side, touching a bird perched on a branch. The bird is rendered in a light, sketchy style. In the upper left, there is a blue, swirling shape that resembles a bird or a cloud. The overall color palette is muted, with earthy tones and soft blues.

The desert is calling me in this piece  
My hand is reaching out to touch the desert  
My bird friend is there with me

Susan is lightly blessing us with her plant images  
Touching within the Circle  
There is healing happening here



A circular collage of Australian natural elements. The background is a light blue wash. Overlaid are various elements: yellow wattle leaves, a dark kangaroo silhouette, a red fern-like plant, and several dark, curved shapes resembling a snake or a stylized animal. The entire collage is framed by a thick black border.

This one is about texture

Wattle leaves and yarn for weaving

The plants and animals of place

Wattle is the national floral emblem of Australia

The leaves from Australia

Give voice to an Acknowledgement of the Land





A Guardian Angel


A beautiful green that feels like Spring

Grevillea leaves

A sense of seasons and cycles  
and being cared for by Ancestors  
and the Spirits of the Land







Little branches of coral  
For Navajo people, coral is very valuable  
A gift of respect and recognition  
that you have reached a point of maturity  
There's a great sense of honouring here





Soft muted colours

Spring rain

Bringing hope

Birds sing in the Spring

New beginnings

and a sense of awe

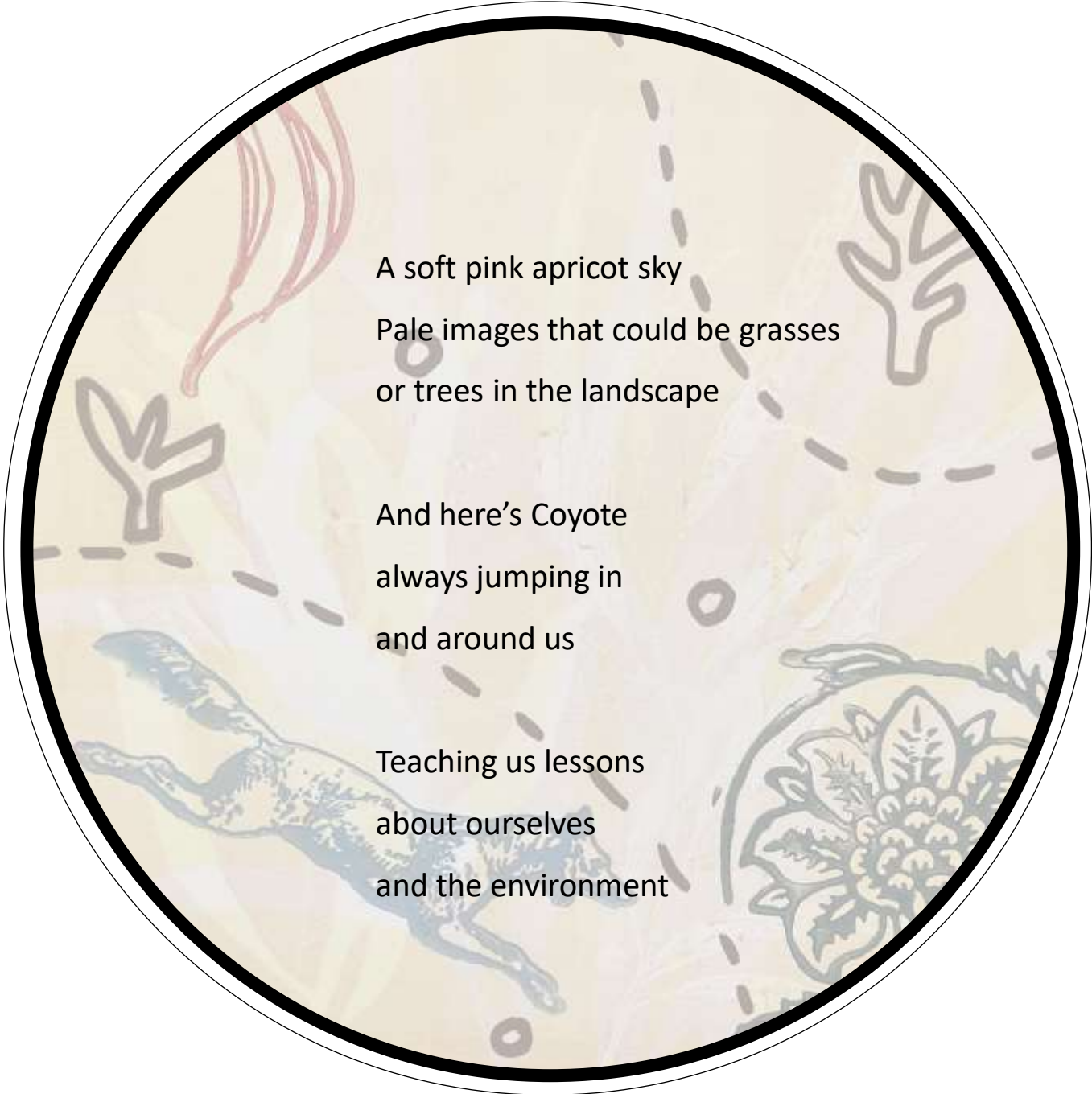




The muted grey that comes in Winter  
It looks like it could snow

The sheep, the bird, the coral  
and their capacity to sustain





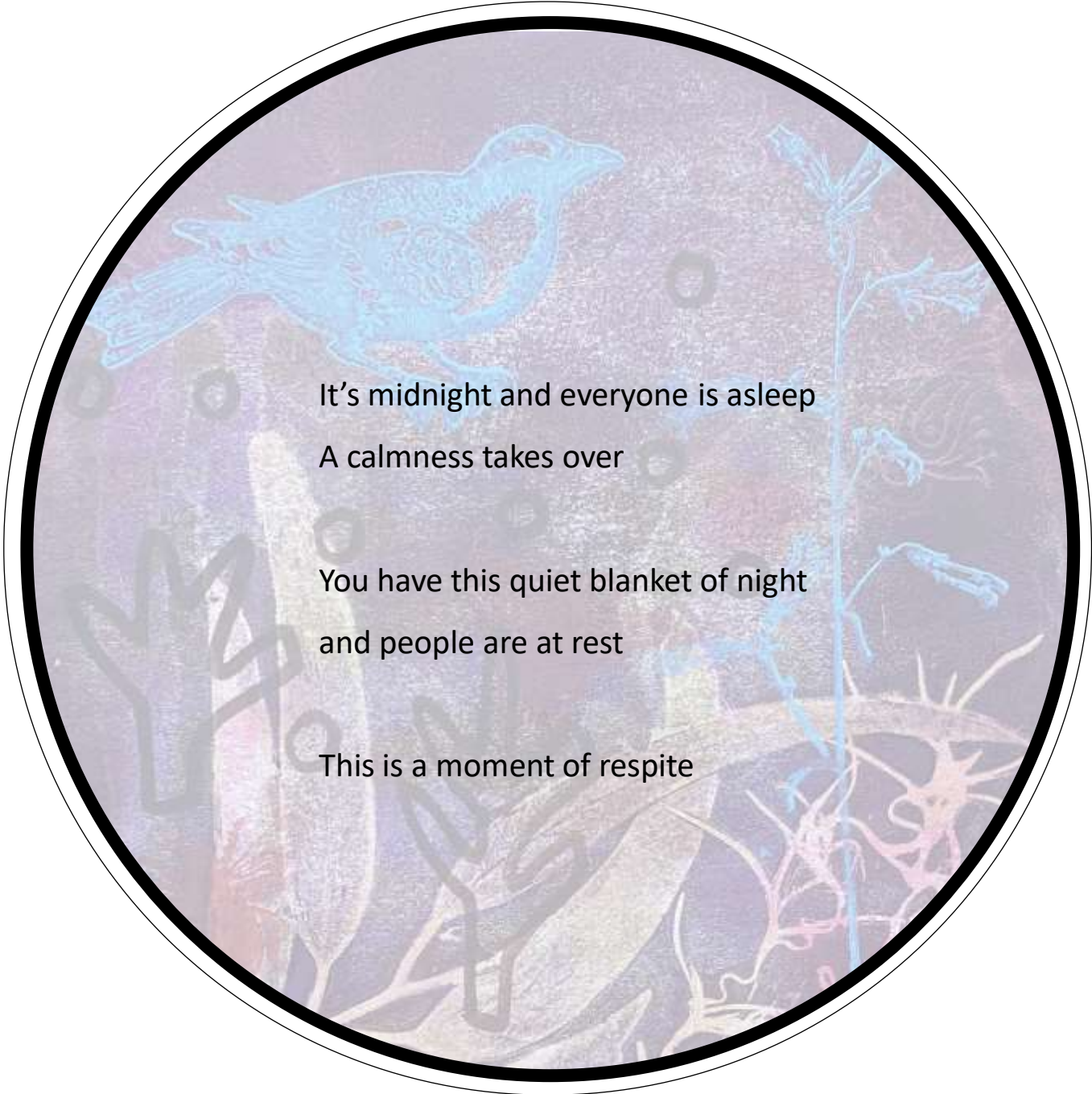
A soft pink apricot sky  
Pale images that could be grasses  
or trees in the landscape

And here's Coyote  
always jumping in  
and around us

Teaching us lessons  
about ourselves  
and the environment







It's midnight and everyone is asleep

A calmness takes over

You have this quiet blanket of night  
and people are at rest

This is a moment of respite





There is something  
about the power of purple  
that gives a sense of calmness

Little Tess is there guarding us

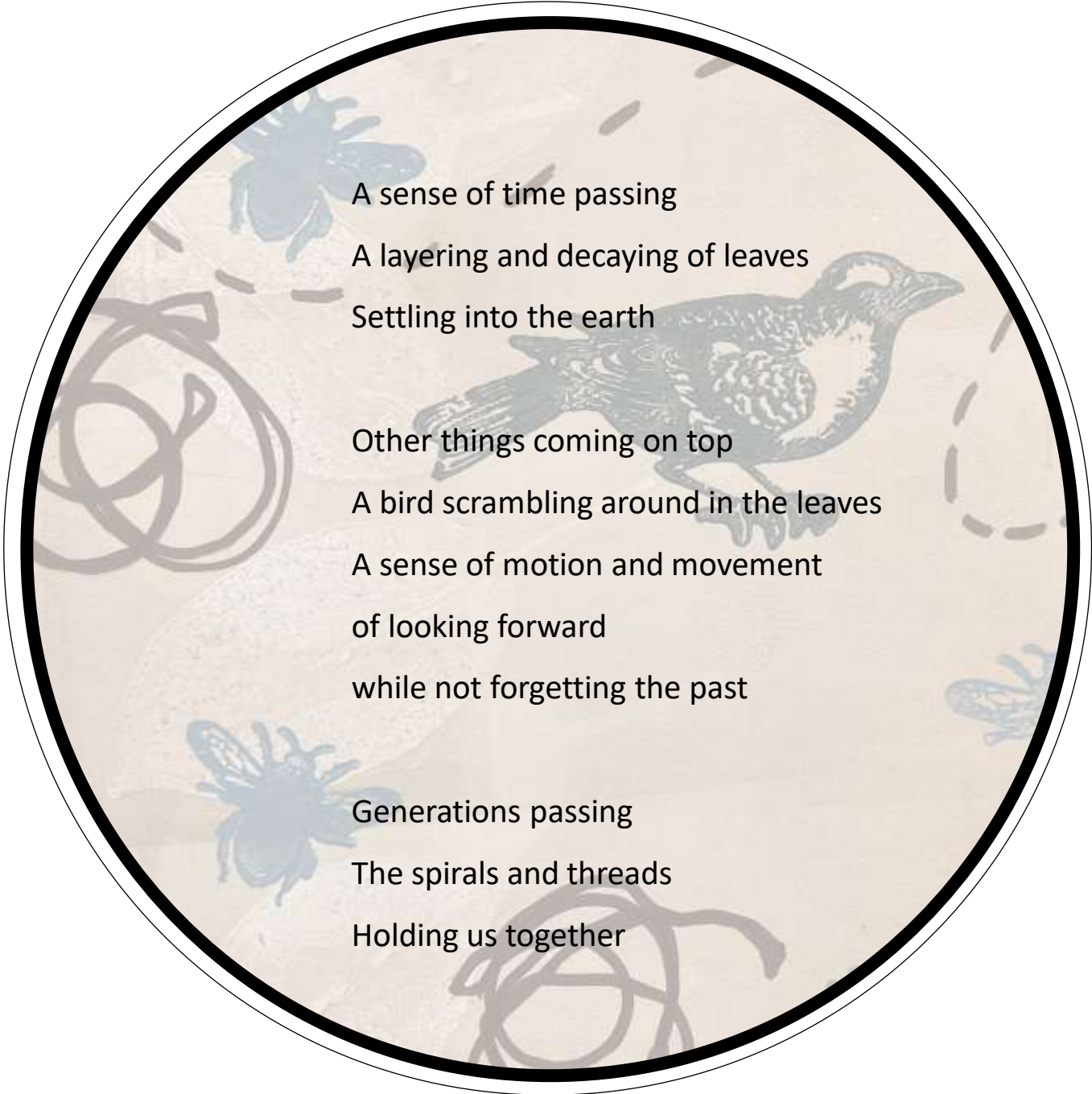




Three leaves floating

A sheep wandering  
through the landscape





A sense of time passing

A layering and decaying of leaves

Settling into the earth

Other things coming on top

A bird scrambling around in the leaves

A sense of motion and movement

of looking forward

while not forgetting the past

Generations passing

The spirals and threads

Holding us together







A sunny day

Colours and patterns

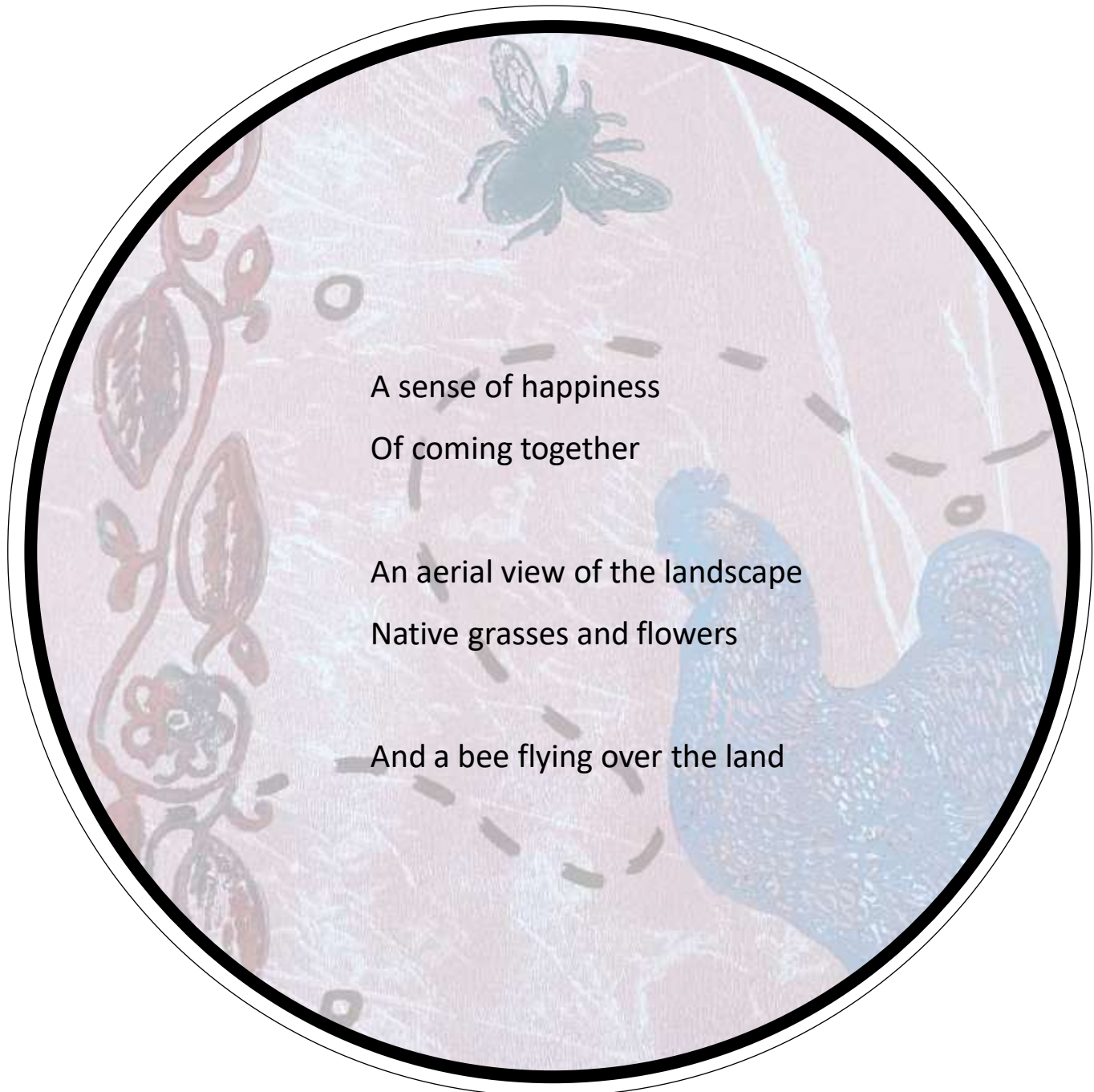
A firm grevillea leaf

Strong

Like a backbone

A tree of life





A sense of happiness  
Of coming together

An aerial view of the landscape  
Native grasses and flowers

And a bee flying over the land

***Laura***

**What has been revealed about your connection to place through your Visual Communication?**

***Melanie***

I think for me, it shows the strength of the sisterhood and how we as two women are speaking through our work. There is a real sense of trust and we gain strength from each other. We trust that the other is going to respond to the work in the way that we have done. It's the two of us and also your addition of framing them. I see that it is a three-way connection here.

***Susan***

I love Melanie. I feel we have a never-ending friendship. Laura has made these images that we have created into circles which are never-ending. That's how I see this collaboration. It's just wonderful.

***Laura***

**There is a strong sense in these images of the people who have walked this place before you. What have these images stirred in you about that sense of proximity to the Ancestors?**

***Susan***

Melanie and I have discussed our grandmothers at length. My grandmother taught me how to sew and knit and create things but unfortunately she died on my 12th birthday and I've never got over it. It is so interesting to talk to other people about their Ancestors and what they've taught them, and what has become of the teachings and how that has manifested in their lives.

***Melanie***

I feel that both of our grandmothers were really creative and lit that creative spirit in both of us. It's genetic and we carry our grandmothers within us. Even though they are not around, they are ever present with us. That has been a huge connector between the two of us. We were taught by our grandmothers, and that connects us to our Ancestors as well. It gives us strength and wisdom in the work we are making and it is beautiful.



**Laura**

**What has this collaboration revealed to you about your sense of connection with the Living World?**

**Melanie**

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.

I feel that is how Nature comes across in these pieces.

**Susan**

I can see images of Melanie's Country in her work - those beautiful, big, tall landforms in Arizona and New Mexico where she grew up. I have always seen beauty in landscape and beauty in Nature.

I started painting and looking at the landscape in my early thirties.

I used to go out painting and trying to create something on paper of what I was seeing.

You can't beat Nature. It is so beautiful.



For further information about the Eco Arts project 'For Our Future' ...

<https://picsvictoria.org.au/for-our-future/>

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