

Heidi Kenyon

From little things ...



The Guildhouse Collections Project

Santos Museum of Economic Botany

18 June–29 July 2018



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The Adelaide Botanic Garden is a place of inspiration and wonder. One of Adelaide's oldest cultural establishments, the Garden is also the most visited institution in the state. While most people visit the Adelaide Botanic Garden to enjoy the peace, beauty and tranquility there is an underlying seriousness in the work that's done here; be it horticulture, botany, conservation or education.

The Garden is a cultural and scientific institution and its history, like all botanic gardens since the Renaissance, has been an interaction between nature, science and art. Natural scientists have worked with botanical artists for centuries and continued to do so, even after the advent of photography, because artists have the ability to capture something that a camera lens alone cannot. When artists are given license to respond to nature, free from constraints, we see the world through another lens; one which helps us imagine and wonder.

Herein lies the joy of Heidi Kenyon's body of work created in response to her residency as part of the Guildhouse Collections Project in partnership with the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium of South Australia.

Kenyon's contemporary sculpture and installation practice is motivated by the curious complexities and stories embedded within found objects and common materials: both natural and human-made. In the studio, she employs methods of drawing out, dissecting and accentuating the inherent structures of the materials she works with to elicit narrative.

Her long-held interest in the Garden of Health at the Adelaide Botanic Garden and its role as a resource for contemplation and healing provided the impetus for her project. She believes that objects and natural materials have the potential to exist as carriers of our *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), and contain clues to be unravelled.

The body of sound and installation works she has created is informed by research focusing on the memories and knowledge held within hundreds of thousands of years of plant medicine, and respond directly to the site's history and living collection. These works extend her current interest into the nature of memory, and the memories of nature.

The Guildhouse Collections Project

The Guildhouse Collections Project with the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium of South Australia provides a rare and wonderful opportunity for an artist to delve deep into the treasures of an important state collection: to research, study and collaborate with specialist curators and produce new work for exhibition in the historic Santos Museum of Economic Botany. Home to an extensive permanent collection, much of which dates back to the original museum display 130 years ago, the Santos Museum of Economic Botany is the last of its kind in the world. Artists working with the Adelaide Botanic Garden not only have access to this valuable collection, but also the Garden's living collection, library and the Herbarium's preserved collections.

Championing the art and artists of our time while celebrating our cultural, historic and scientific heritage, the Guildhouse Collections Project provides new audience experiences while delivering long-term benefits to the artistic and career development of artists.

Guildhouse works with artists, craftspeople and designers, government and industry to build skills and knowledge. Collaboration is at the core of our programs. For over 50 years we have defined ourselves through a commitment to partnerships, adaptation and responsiveness to the changing conditions facing artists and makers. Together with our partners, we create opportunities for meaningful, sustainable careers in the creative sector.

The Collections Project is a result of true partnership and demonstrates the value of creating new and ambitious environments for artists, scientists, collections and audiences to coalesce. We extend our thanks to the Government of South Australia and The Copyright Agency Cultural Fund for their support of this initiative, and congratulate Heidi Kenyon on the insightful body of work she has created in response to her residency at the Adelaide Botanic Garden.

Emma Fey
Chief Executive Officer, Guildhouse

Tony Kanellos
Curator, Santos Museum of Economic Botany

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Heidi Kenyon primarily works with both natural and human-made objects bringing them together, twisting and remaking them to bring their stories to life. Her residency at the Adelaide Botanic Garden and Santos Museum of Economic Botany has given her the opportunity to uncover the history of this unique collection and site. Her focus is the medicinal and healing properties of plants; a story told in the Museum of Economic Botany through the river red gum, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. This tree was growing wildly across the land before the settlers moved in. One remains near the northern entrance of the Garden, a witness to hundreds of years of history and change. Beginning with these trees, Kenyon layers meaning, metaphor and experience in her installation.

Spotlit in the body of the building stands Kenyon's duo of works *From little things... (i)* and *(ii)*. Utilising a cabinet from the Museum, she has built a camera obscura. The name is translated from Latin as 'darkened room'. Used first in physics, science and botany to aid study, the camera obscura was soon taken up by artists. The invention of the camera and photography as we know it today followed. Kenyon has long used these devices in her practice, experimenting with image and projection. This exhibition continues her experimentation. Inside her camera she has placed a red gum sapling. Stepping under the curtain, the viewer is cut off from the outside world. As your eyes adjust to the darkness, the fragmented image begins to develop on the vintage medicine bottles. The scent of eucalyptus slowly gets stronger, and our ears pick out the sound of the tree's papery leaves rustling.

Contrasting this old technology, Kenyon uses a modern sound interface, in partnership with a red gum, to tell the human story of this site. Five years before the Garden opened in 1857, the Adelaide Lunatic Asylum was built on the land, where it remained in operation for fifty years. Next door the Royal Adelaide Hospital opened four years later. The asylum housed the mentally ill, those with intellectual disabilities, epilepsy, and unwed mothers. In the Museum, a second red gum sapling rearranges a composition written by the artist. Its electromagnetic variations trigger the sound samples, recounting the living history of the site through musical notes and fragmented whispers. In the Garden, Kenyon has identified one of the oldest living trees and repeated this process. Likely standing since before Europeans settled the area, the tree has silently witnessed it all. Kenyon has given it a voice, and invited us all to listen.

Kenyon is a master at weaving together history, metaphor and objects. Here, she draws our attention to the hidden stories of this site. These are largely forgotten, the tales of the sick and marginalised losing out in the history books to stories of men, settling and conquering. Kenyon honours this history and the lives of the women who lived here. Visitors are encouraged to take their time, to slowly and thoughtfully be reminded of these stories, and to remember those who history has forgotten.

Eleanor Scicchitano
Curator and Arts Writer



Artist statement

Health is the proper relationship between microcosm, which is [humankind], and the macrocosm, which is the universe. Disease is a disruption of this relationship.

Dr Yeshe Donden Physician to the Dalai Lama

Meaning from metaphor

The word clue etymologically stems from *clew*, literally used in the 1590s to denote 'a ball of thread or yarn' with reference to the one that Theseus, a hero from Greek mythology, used as a guide out of a labyrinth.

Like a perpetually unravelling ball of yarn, my residency at the Adelaide Botanic Garden and the Santos Museum of Economic Botany has meandered through the historic, living, and historic living collections, uncovering clues, stories and mysteries along the way. While in many ways I feel as though I have just skimmed the surface of how this experience will inform my practice, I am pleased to present a new body of work for exhibition: a cabinet of curiosities and a series of live soundscapes conceived in the studio but ultimately directed by the living collection itself.

The microcosm and the macrocosm

The therapeutic properties of plants were a starting point for my investigations as I have long been intrigued by the Garden of Health as a space for contemplation and healing. I was interested to learn that since its beginning in 1857, and until quite recently, the Adelaide Botanic Garden has been neighboured by healthcare institutions; the Adelaide Lunatic Asylum from 1852–1902, and the Royal Adelaide Hospital from 1856–2017. These pairings were not coincidental but in keeping with a long tradition; botany was considered a branch of medicine during the Renaissance, and the very first infirmaries in the Western world were established within monastic gardens.

She looks out over the walls

It was not all botany and beauty however, as within the walls of the Asylum children with intellectual disabilities, unmarried and destitute women, and people suffering with conditions such as epilepsy were incarcerated along with those considered to be insane. I feel as though the Garden views out of the tall buildings, and market gardens in the grounds, may have provided rare moments of solace in a grim place. The Garden also provided respite for countless families, patients and staff of the Royal Adelaide Hospital, and their neighbouring presence is no doubt sorely missed.



image above, preceding and following pages: *From little things... (ii)* 2018 (installation detail) - Museum cabinet, camera obscura (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis* sapling, glass lenses, vintage medicine and apothecary bottles, eucalyptus solution), acrylic mirror, fans, fabric, timber, 200 x 90 x 240 cm

The faraway nearby

From its outset the Museum of Economic Botany was established to educate settlers about the uses of introduced and native plants in household management, with a focus on minimising waste. Slowly but surely we have evolved into a society where the cheapest products available are synthetic and imported. Teeming landfills supported by a throwaway culture have replaced tens of thousands of years of the zero waste culture of our traditional custodians, the Kurna people of the Adelaide plains.

She boils the heartwood to restore her daughter's spirit

Although I cannot come close to understanding the deep spiritual connection Aboriginal people have with this land I wanted to begin a conversation with native flora, starting with the river red gum, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. A very old specimen resides in the Adelaide Botanic Garden, not far from Fig Tree Avenue. It is likely a remnant of the original vegetation of this area. My installation uses two river red gum saplings to pay homage to this tree who has witnessed so much, yet speaks so gently. Dwelling inside a cabinet from the Museum, a number of intimate camera obscuras made with a sapling, convex lenses, glass medicine bottles and eucalyptus solution signify stories about this therapeutically potent plant. Outside, its sister tells tales and generates songs; electromagnetic variations between the surface of the sapling's leaves and its roots are translated through a device that uses a musical instrument digital interface to generate sound.

These sound works are a new direction for my practice, and have transpired as a result of this residency. I feel privileged to have been able to participate in The Collections Project for this reason, and many others. I have no doubt the memories of nature and the nature of memory—the experienced, remembered and imagined—will influence my practice for years to come.

Heidi Kenyon Artist in Residence
The Guildhouse Collections Project
Santos Museum of Economic Botany

June 2018

I would like to thank the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium of South Australia and Guildhouse, in particular; Tony Kanellos (Curator, Santos Museum of Economic Botany), Paul Winter (Curator, Garden of Health), Peta Mount (Artist Services Manager, Guildhouse) and Emma Fey (Chief Executive Officer, Guildhouse).

I would also like to pay my respects to the late ceramicist Liz Williams who was sadly unable to complete her Collections Project commission. Her interest in the lotus flowers of the Adelaide Botanic Garden resonate with my curiosity in the magic found in murky places. Indeed, the final line prefacing the conclusion of my Masters thesis in 2015 was:
The imagined gives birth to the real... out of the slippery mud grows the lotus.



The Garden of Health

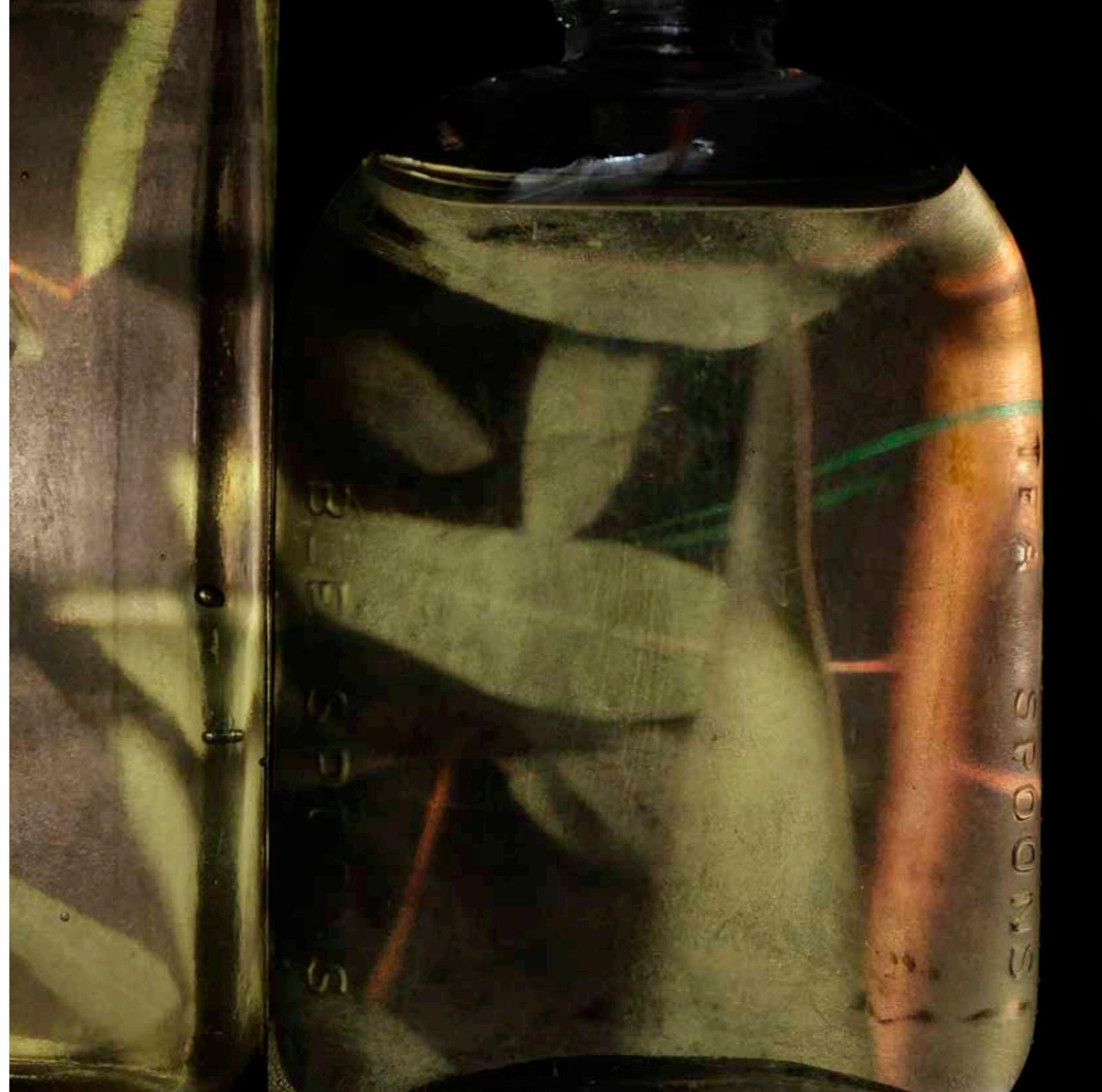
Botanic gardens as we know them today have their origins in the physic gardens of Renaissance Italy. These gardens were created for the academic enquiry into plants and for teaching physicians about plant-based medicine. The first botanic gardens were those of Pisa, Padua and Florence. Padua is the oldest botanic garden (on its original site) established in 1545 by the Most Serene Republic of Venice.ⁱ The years that followed saw the establishment of medicinal gardens spread to universities and apothecaries throughout Western Europe. The role of the institutions of botanic gardens and the universities was to further the work of the likes of Theophrastus, Dioscorides and Hippocrates.ⁱⁱ

Adelaide's Garden of Health was created in 2011 to remind us of the connections between people, plants and wellbeing. The Garden also stands as an acknowledgement of the important role of botanic gardens in the development of modern medicine. However, the story of medicine is much richer than Western medicine alone or focussing on Europe in Classical times, the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The Garden of Health illustrates the medicinal knowledge (practiced for thousands of years) of many cultures across the globe. As one would expect, the Garden of Health highlights the stories of the traditional medicinal practices of Aboriginal people of the Kurna lands and beyond. This story continues on a journey through the New World (North and South America), Africa, India, China and the Middle East.

As a result, the Garden of Health features more than 2,000 plants, many planted for the first time, focussing on the specific but rich themes of medicine and healing. Some of the species planted in the Garden of Health have been used by humans since the Stone Age, while others are still used in modern medicine. We soon realise that all cultures have used plants for healing, treating illness and injury and promoting wellbeing, reminding us of our dependence on the plant world.

ⁱ Padua is the oldest Botanic Garden still on its original site. Pisa was established in 1544 but was relocated twice before finding a permanent site in 1591. Florence was established in December 1545.

ⁱⁱ Theophrastus (371 – 287 BCE) is regarded as the 'Father of Botany' and the author of *Enquiry into Plants* or *Historia Plantarum*; Hippocrates (460–370 BCE) the 'Father of Medicine' and Dioscorides (40–90 AD) was a botanist, physician and pharmacologist and author of *De Materia Medica*.





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*I'll take you to a place
Where your breath escapes from your lips and becomes a cloud,
and the trees talk quietly amongst themselves...*

Heidi Kenyon, 2007

The Collections Project is presented as a partnership between
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of South Australia

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Catalogue

Tony Kanellos and Emma Fey

Text

Emma Fey, Tony Kanellos,
Heidi Kenyon and Eleanor Scicchitano

Photography

Grant Hancock

Design

Catherine Buddle



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