Sculpture at Bathers Scholarship,

Donated by Kerry Harmanis 2020

SCULPTURE AT BATHERS
19 FEB - 07 MAR 2022
BATHERS BEACH, FREMANTLE
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Artists' Report

Recipients	Peter Dailey and Beverley Iles
Location	Atelier Mondial, Basel, Switzerland & Cerdeira, Portugal
Dates of travel	16 April – 6 July 2023

Background

A $10,000 scholarship donated by Kerry Harmanis was generously offered as part of the Sculpture at Bathers exhibition in 2020. The scholarship was competitive with Peter Dailey and Beverley Iles putting in a joint application as a result of their collaborative work *Mutable Column* which was exhibited as part of Sculpture at Bathers 2020.

We were very grateful to be offered this opportunity and understood that a residency allowed us to have a block of uninterrupted time, relatively free of distractions, that for many reasons is hard to replicate back home. We hoped the time would give us the opportunity to push through with ideas, refine and implement them. We realized that being in another place with different culture, new people and different materials gave us a chance to step outside of the usual confines and take a fresh approach to our work.

We were keen to undertake the international residency at the Atelier Mondial in Basel, Switzerland. The atelier has a long history of residency exchanges with Perth visual artists, primarily because of the artists' residency exchange run by Artsource for many years. Tony Jones, founder of Sculpture at Bathers, was one of the instigators of the Artsource residency exchange, and an advocate for the use of the established links with Atelier Mondial for the residency.

Covid 19 restrictions around international travel meant travel to the Atelier Mondial was not immediately possible; an option to undertake a residency within Australia was not taken up as the artists felt that their work was best informed by the natural science institutions and botanical gardens in the Basel region, including the site of one of the oldest botanical gardens in Europe, established at the University of Basel in 1589. Once international travel resumed, the highly sought after residency spaces at the Atelier Mondial meant that it was not feasible to undertake the residency until May 2023.

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Atelier Mondial, May 2023

While we knew on arrival we would be limited in materials and equipment, we were excited by the challenge this would present us.
We had some preliminary ideas which evolved around the herbarium in Basel along with our long standing interest in plants/seeds within our arts practice.

It was extremely valuable both conceptually and visually to do some research firsthand at the pharmaceutical museum and listen to an informative lecture by one of the curators of the museum. We were also lucky enough to be put in contact with the Director of the seed bank at Merian Gardens and have a discussion on heirloom variety preservation and collection.

We responded to the logistical challenges of an international residency by sourcing all materials from within Basel. Conceptually this worked with notions of site specificity present in both artists' works. Peter was able to source timber offcuts, second-hand inks and paints; Beverley sourced offcuts of copper and stainless steel mesh and haberdashery components. Both utilised watercolours and pens, easily available and transportable.

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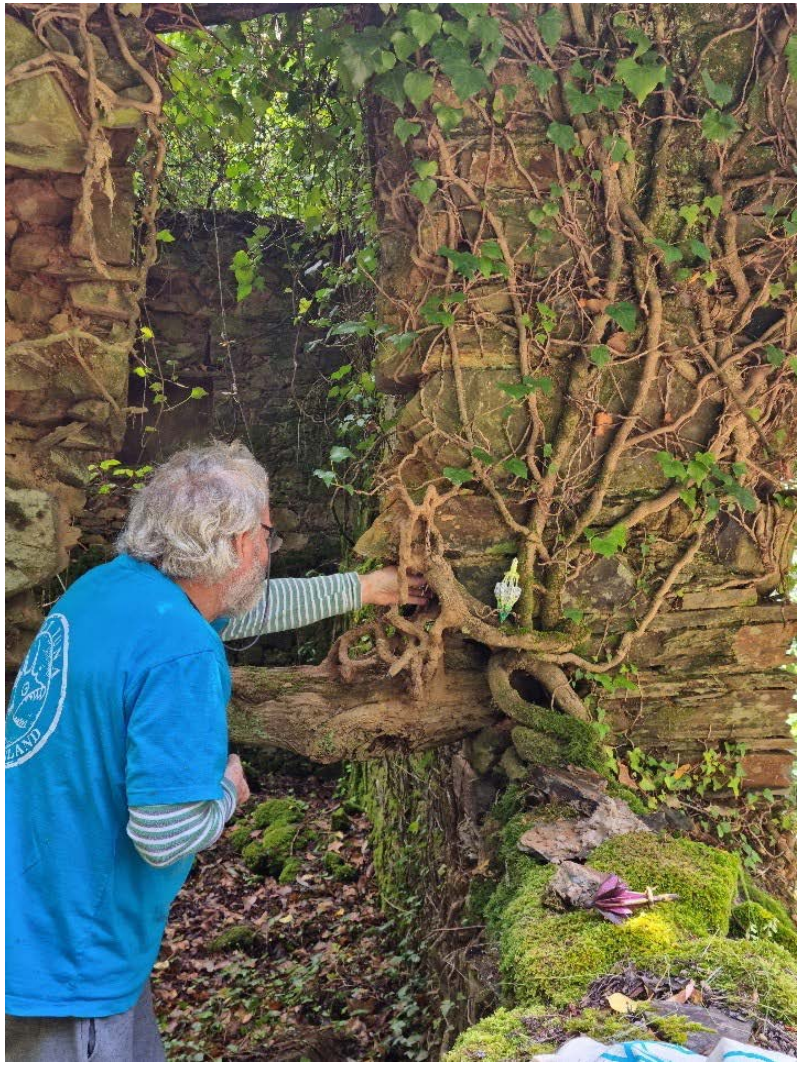
Cerdeira, Portugal, June 2023

Beverley took the opportunity to follow up the residency at Atelier Mondial with attendance at a live-in eight-day workshop in Ceramics and Nature, in the hills of Portugal at Cerdeira creative space, working with local and unfired clay in site-specific work.

Peter continued his drawing practice in what became a two-week retreat to synthesise the creative processes started in Basel. He was able to photograph some of his plant/flower/seed forms produced in Basel in a very different environment - in the forests and ruined buildings of Cerdiera.



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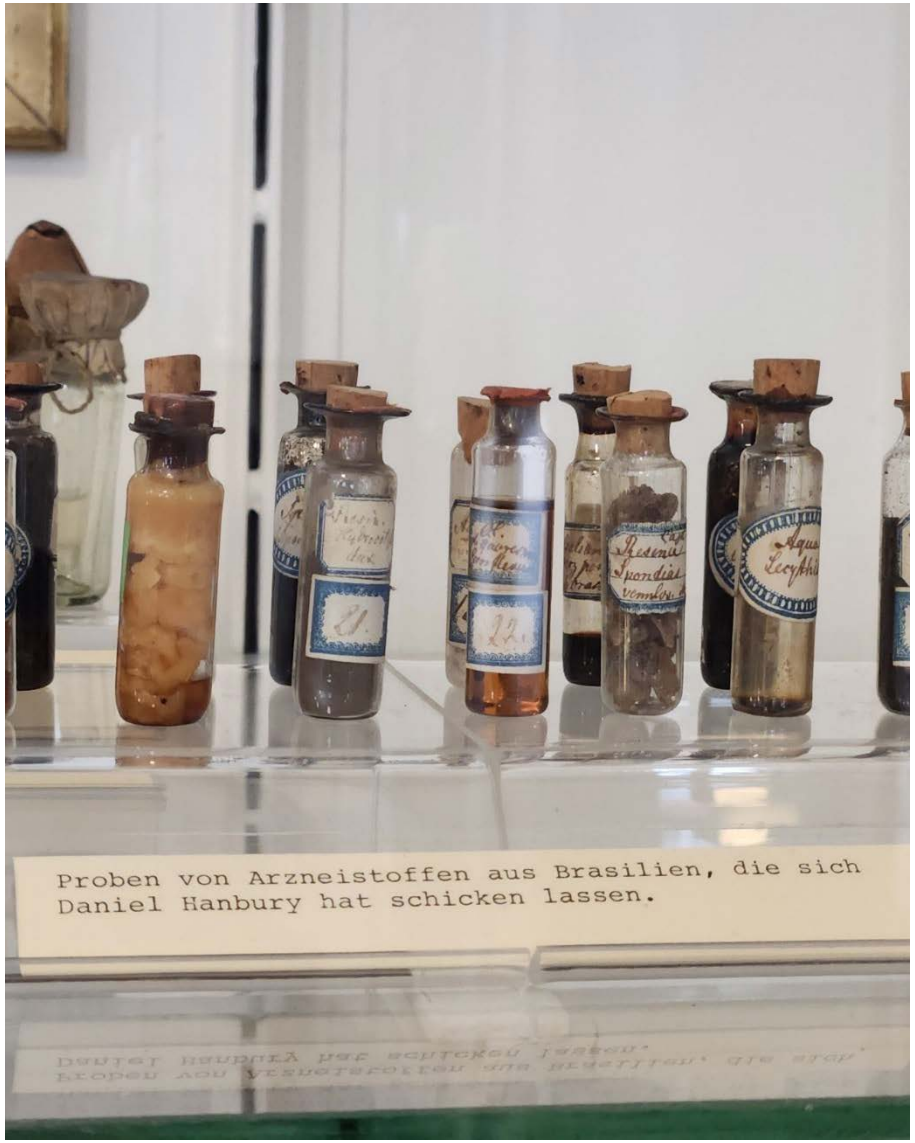
What we learnt

One of the main advantages of the residency was to have a dedicated block of time which can be difficult to carve out of everyday life when family and work responsibilities need to be responded to. The compressed time frame means you need to be decisive about materiality and concepts, and have the time to expand these concepts during the residency period. Something about being away from the safety of home and usual peer networks gives you the courage to step outside your usual practices. Networking with international artists and discovering the breadth of their practice was another bonus; for example, we visited open studio events over the border in France with a Basel-based artist we had met. We met a number of artists who had been on a residency exchange with Perth or met Perth-based artists, thus strengthening these connections. We are still in contact with artists' groups and still receive mentoring from workshop trainers.

A consequence of being fortunate enough to be immersed in the institutions, museums and galleries of Europe was the opportunity to explore some lesser-known artists, to see a whole body of their work or to see works in real life that we had never seen in Australia. This gave a much stronger context to their overall work and gave us a broader understanding of these artists' careers. One such artist whom Peter had always admired but had only ever seen a few works in books and none in life was Kathe Kollwitz. Having discovered she had a museum in Berlin, we took a few days out of the studio and headed off on an eight-hour train trip to Berlin to visit.

The abundance of religious art, paintings and reliquaries in Europe emphasised to us the role that the Christian religion played in European society. We hadn't realised that much of the seed collection, a form of botanical colonialism, was performed or facilitated by Christian missionaries in their journeys to non-European countries. We discovered through discussions with the botanical institutions in Basel that the missionary expeditions were twofold: firstly, spread the word of Christianity but also bring back seeds and claim ownership, to do research on how they may grow under different conditions for agriculture and what their possible medicinal or economic properties might be.



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Outcomes

When we started our residency, we had no set opinion on if we would bring any work home with us. We decided to make work which could be transported back home. After having the discussions in Basel about the global movement of seeds, it seemed so appropriate to make artworks based on seeds in Basel and bring them back to Australia.

We had the opportunity to take part in an Open Studio event in the Atelier Mondial, over the course of a weekend, and show some works in progress. Atelier Mondial also publicised our works via social media. Similarly organisation and workshop participants in Cerdeira used social media to promote the activities undertaken.

Since returning to Australia we have both been active in making and exhibiting work. We have taken part in professional artist activities such as artists' talks and an open studio event to support an exhibition in our local community. Talking about, and showing, our residency work was key to the open studio event. Inspired by her raw, hand dug clay installation at Cerdeira, Beverley undertook a similar work for the Darlington Arts Festival's Sculpture on the Scarp event and won Best Sculpture First Prize. Lidia Bosevski, the Cerdeira workshop leader, provided advice for the installation.

We hope to develop our works to date into a cohesive body of work, potentially to be exhibited as part of a Sculpture at Bathers event in the future. Regardless of whether we get to exhibit these works in Perth, we remain immensely grateful for the time and opportunity to undertake the residency and further develop our careers.

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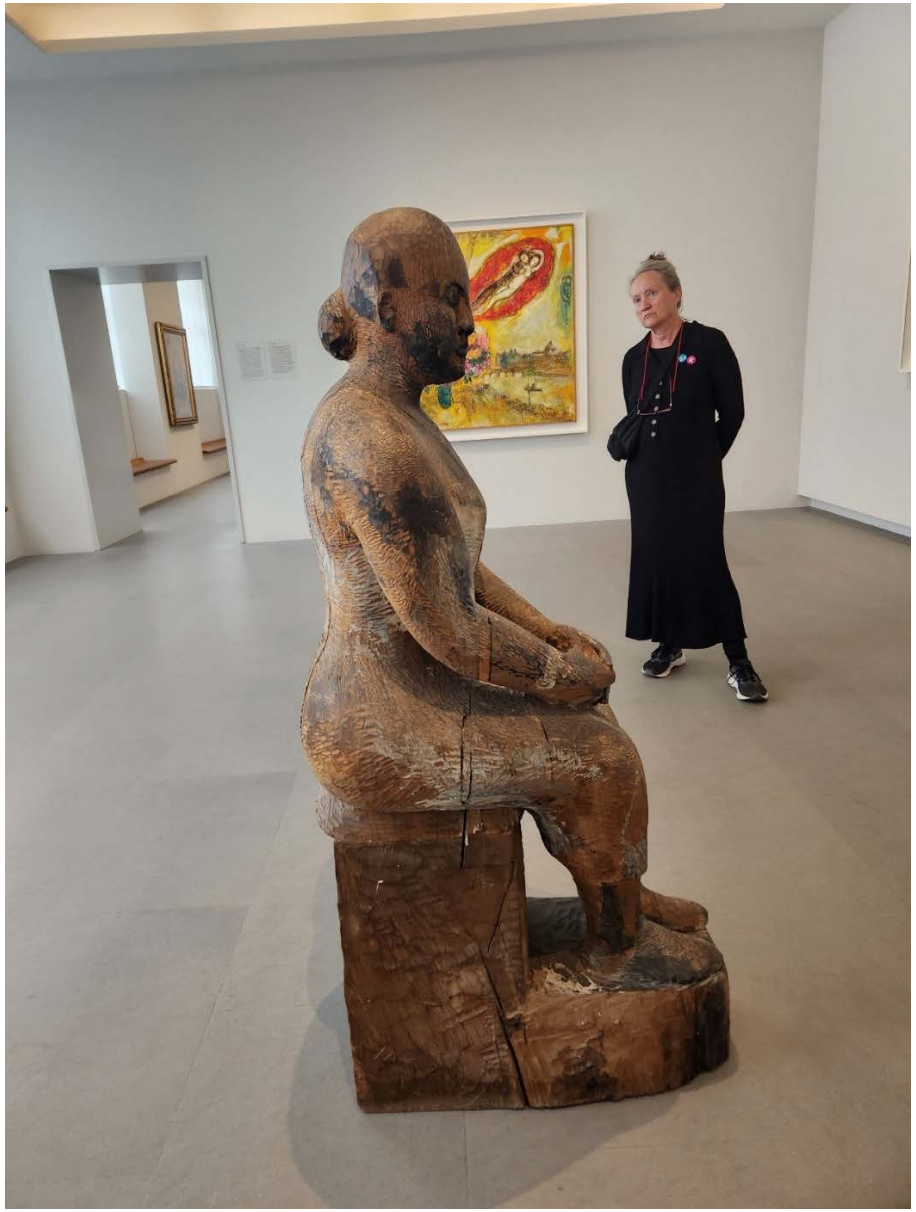

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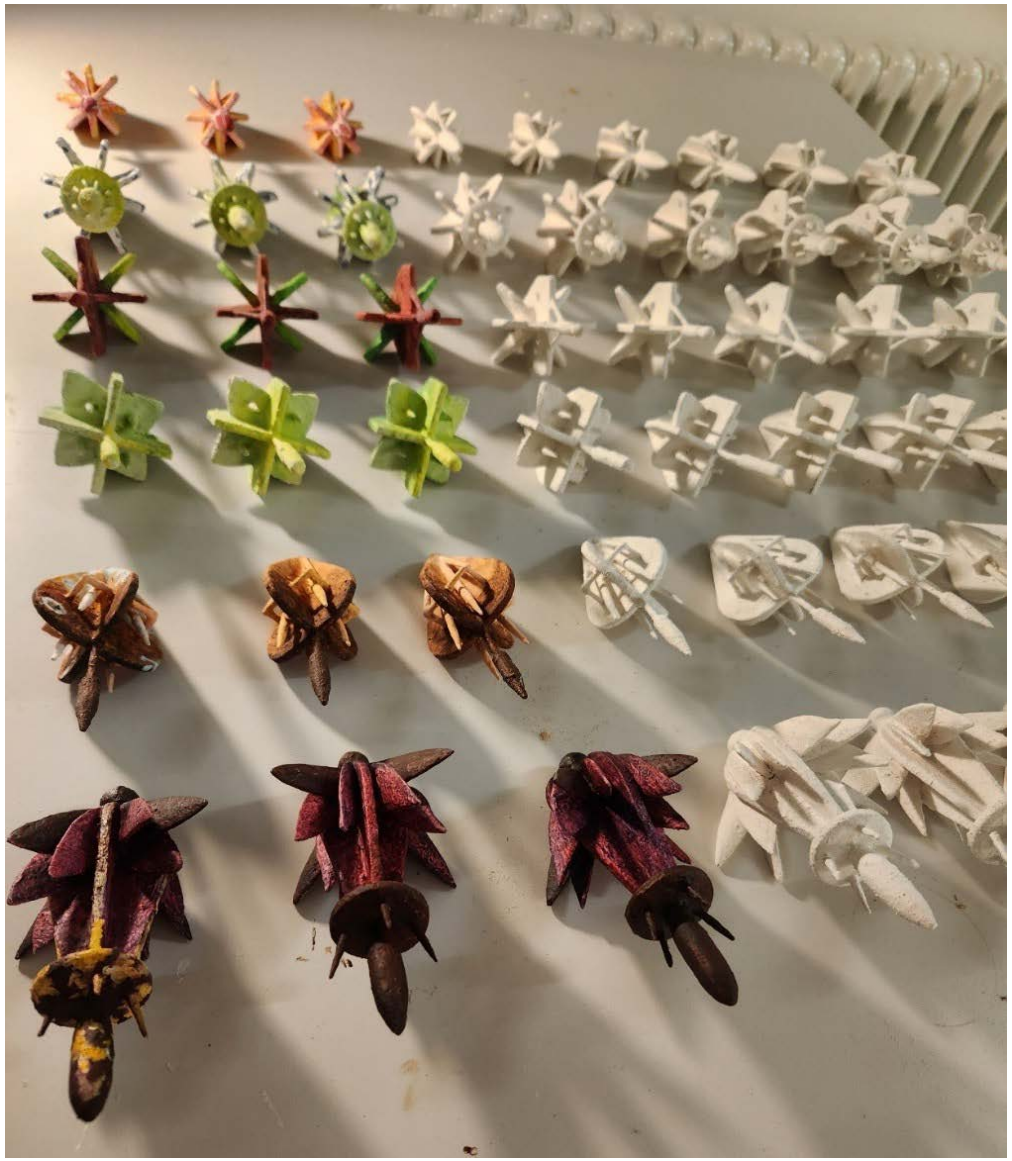
Peter Dailey's work

My sculptural work is made up of six sets of timber based constructions in three components (54 in total): seeds that represent medicine, food, and trade.

I envisaged treating the surface of these seeds to emulate the three categories' mentioned above. The agricultural seeds have surface treatment to look somewhat realistic. I imagine these being presented in some form of cases, but possibly put in seed bags, on return to home studio. The pharmaceutical category will probably remain white and possibly sitting on white plastic medicine containers. The religious set of seeds are to reference the role the missionaries played on the spread of seeds and new food resources from various colonized cultures. I envisage this set of seeds to be painted with religious references, red, violet and gold leaf on them.

I'm also interested in what would now come under references to food security, provenance, but this may be another body of work.



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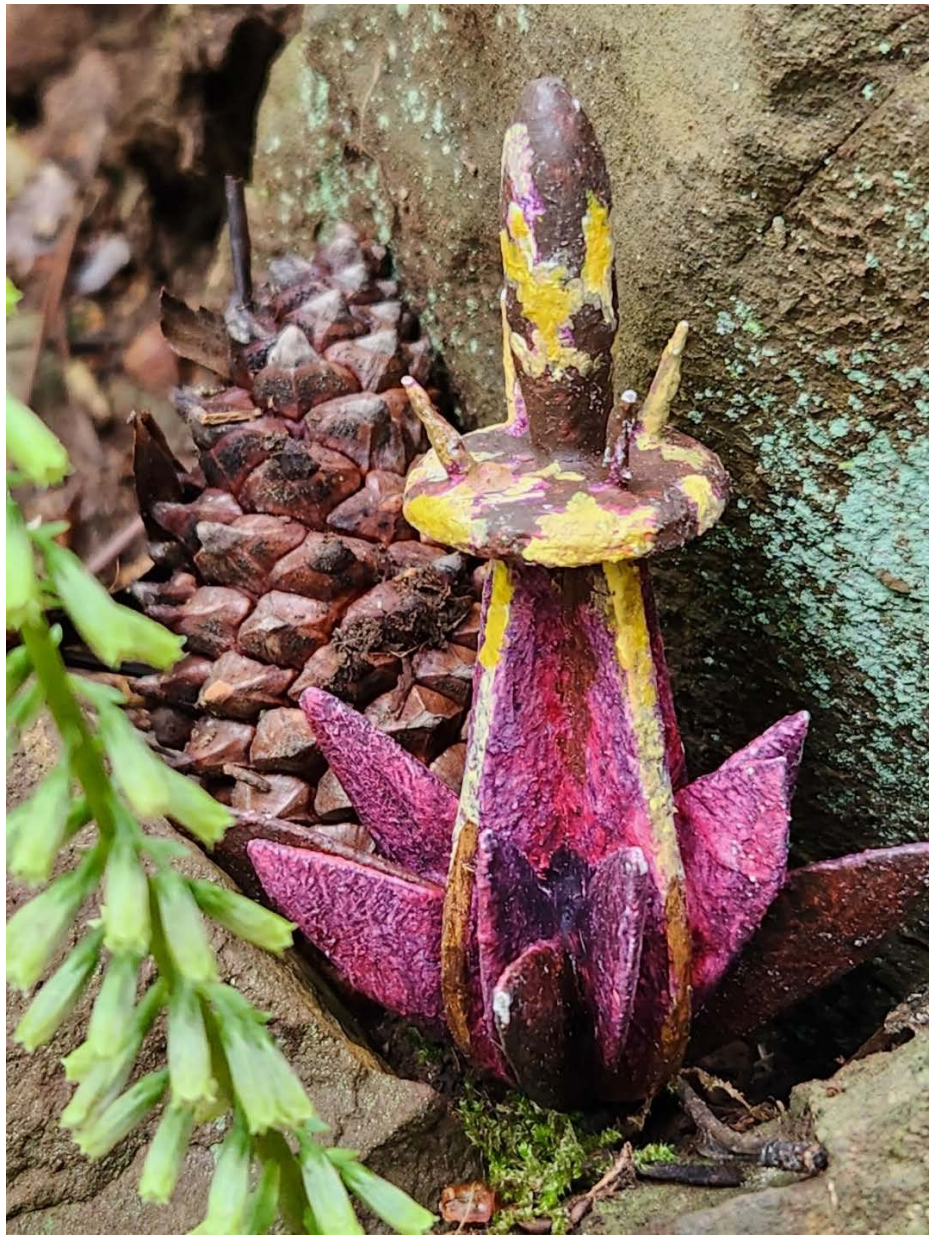

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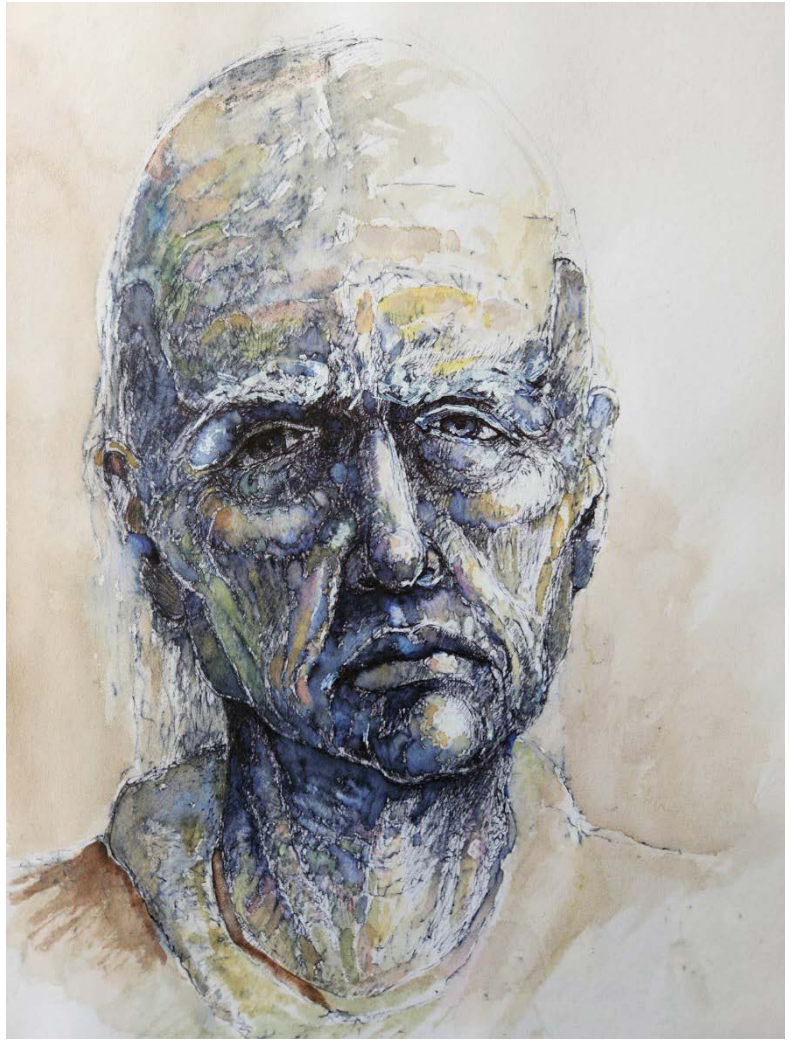
I decided to do a set of 50 basic head studies with the limited materials I had with me; pen and ink and a small set of watercolours. These are not the materials I would usually use, but I was so moved by Kathe Kollwitz's work, it seemed appropriate to be experimental with a small range of materials, which is one of the reasons to limit the subject matter to simple head studies. All of her work evolves around the human condition, so again, head studies worked. The head studies would be informed by the images I saw during our museum visits.

I want to use these 50 images to be reimaged with materials and techniques not available to me in Basel. These will be another 50 images in woodblock prints, etchings, paintings and charcoals. I wanted the head studies to be of the "bit players" in the paintings and the more obscure marble/wood/ plaster sculptures. I will end up with 100 head studies, all the same size.

I want to exhibit them as two sets of 50 works, side by side.



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Beverley Iles' work

Working with ideas of botanical collections, economic botany and botanical colonialism, my works visually explore ideas around seeds, seed collection and processing.
Using copper and stainless steel mesh as textiles, stitched with zips, sometimes stuffed with cotton waste, and sometimes empty, the objects allude to hermaphroditic plant reproduction, and tease out concepts of emptiness, fertility, extinction and resilience.

Drawings of abstract micro landscapes and stitch works on jute sacking representing trade routes complement the soft sculptures.

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