

Small but very old shrub - newly
succumbed - still with matted
tiny twigs not yet blown away

aculums scattered everywhere. The
main of the Twisted Neck face Turban
ells. The Pacific gulls swoop up with the
ells in their beaks and then from a
height drop them onto the rocks smashing
in to get the shell fish. I think to see the
fish

Several tiny walks over the rocky cliff
until I found three remaining
Scaevola flowers

face - shell ants spiders - grasshopper
inga - rocks

NIKULINSKY NATURALLY

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY

25 May — 17 August 2019



Why would a dried white
the cliff? Perhaps came to
seaweed with a twisted N.
carried up by a Pacific

Snaking about the sand like a broken comb sitting
on aerial roots. Wind blows away sand under the plant
like a looping dark comb on the white sand. Many many years
each loop a new season



NIKULINSKY NATURALLY

Philippa Nikulinsky is an artist who interrogates the extraordinary ecology of Western Australia, always with a respect for and commitment to the disciplines of botany and science, but with her primary focus on the intrinsic artistic intent of recording what she sees.

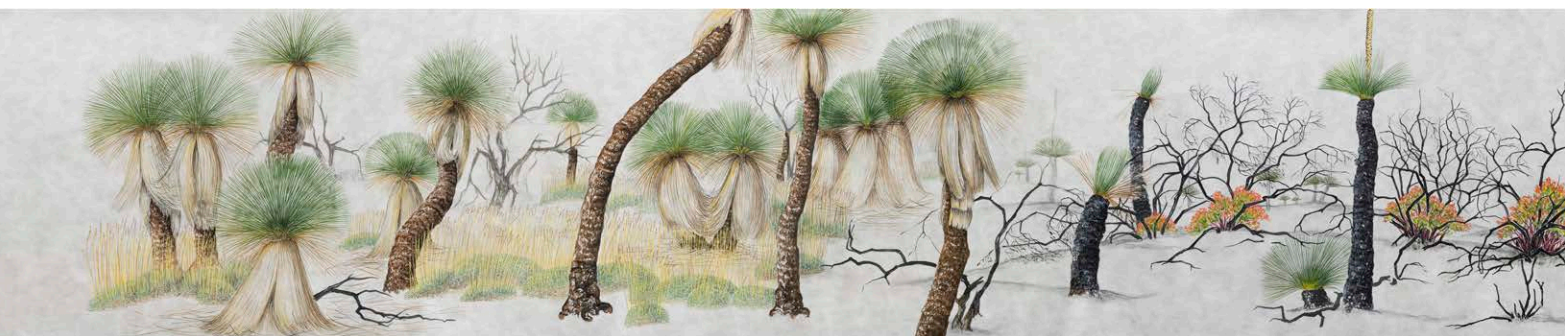
Like numerous artists before her, she navigates the sensitive pathway between art and science determined to keep true to both as disciplines with their own rules, guidelines, and determinants, while simultaneously acknowledging her focus can weave back and forth across those ever permeable boundaries. Nikulinsky combines illustrative techniques with interpretive ability to create works that both denote while simultaneously maintaining a healthy injection of personal vision and artistry.

Across many decades Nikulinsky's publishing record in books like *Soul of the Desert*, *Life on the rocks*, *Flowering Plants of the Eastern Goldfields* and *Cape Arid*, exemplifies this approach. It is her modus operandi to travel to particular locations and embed herself in that place to search out and then record the essence of the place. 'Being in the bush is my soul food, walking, looking and absorbing, I love the bush particularly what I call "Red Earth Country"'. Once on

location, 'Drawing is my first priority,' she explains, 'the visual over the scientific,' though of course the crucial requirements of recording soon come into play.

Nikulinsky's career trajectory has been steep, though it has not been without considerable effort and many hours of research on field trips into the often less than hospitable conditions of the harsh Australian landscape. It was that level of dedication, greatly aided by the support of her husband Alex, that has enabled her to develop her unique approach to painting and recording the ecosystems of this extraordinary global biodiversity hotspot on the western half of the Australian continent.

One guiding principle that has remained at the centre of her practice and which has continued to shape her fieldwork has been the importance of documenting the life-cycle of plants and their symbiosis with other flora and fauna. The slow period of gestation, the detailed studies of various elements and the acknowledgment of the orthodoxy of botanical illustration were fused during the rigorous field research and in the hours back in the studio with her commitment to creating a comprehensible, visually coherent and engaging artwork.





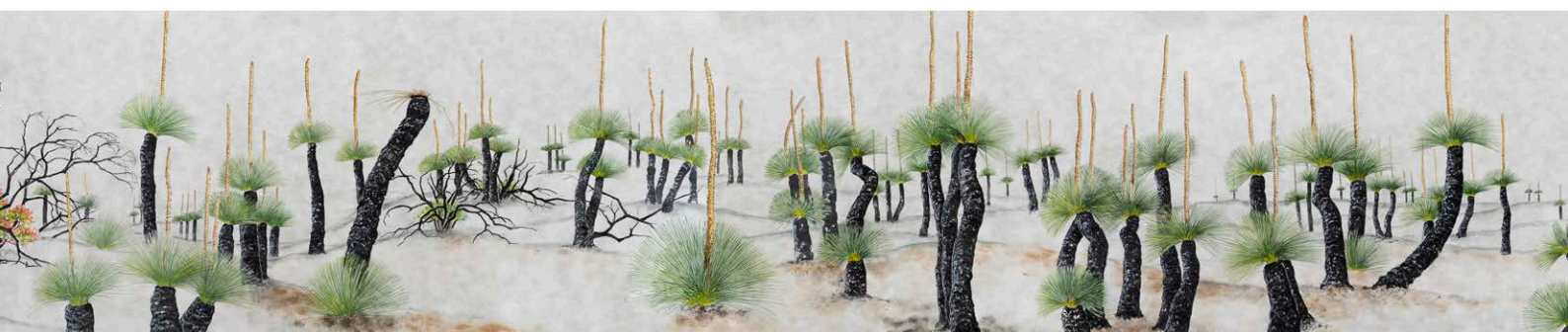
While the inspiration for making work is always the main catalyst for Nikulinsky, commercial opportunities cannot be ignored, and she embraced every one that came her way. With business partner Maggie Edmunds she created a business, Nikulinsky Naturally², and since then her work has adorned wine labels, fruit labels, tea towels, cards, posters and porcelain cups, and plates. From 1995 to 2005 she was commissioned by the Director of Australian Fine China, the domestic arm of Bristle, to design decals of Australian plants and animals for use on dinnerware. Later, when Australian Fine China began to outsource the work and ceased to employ local artisans, she switched to Stoneage Ceramics, also based in Perth. In addition, from 1990 to 2006 she had another regular outlet for her work on the covers of the quarterly magazine *Landscape*, published by the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management.

However, awe in the face of nature remains the primary stimulus to making new works and finding innovative solutions to document the extraordinary. The site of a murmuration of budgerigars at Mt Clare Station in the Shire of Meekatharra, 780 kilometers northeast from Perth, was the spark that led to a recent story roll. The spectacular cloud of green birds as they weave and pulse through the sky, each creature moving in response to its neighbours, occurs after rain as the

birds seek out partners and food sources, and it created an indelible memory for Nikulinsky. Determined to find a way to visualise it, she experimented with various possibilities until the idea of assembling multiple printed birds, cut out by her grand-daughter and herself and placing them on an extended roll of paper, achieved the result she was seeking.

It is this constant innovation and experimentation that makes her such a significant contributor to the visual culture of Western Australia, and it is her unique merging of the two strands of her practice that gives her work its particular contemporary relevance. From her earliest works recording the botanical treasures of the biodiverse hotspots around Western Australia to the recent experimental scroll drawings and hanging scrolls that provide a panoramic scoping of the landscape and its embedded foliage, she has always been concerned with mastering the technical accomplishments of picture making.

As a consequence, she has created compelling and engaging images that also provide detailed information on the life-cycle of plants and their interdependence within the living web of their ecosystem. This body of work constitutes an outstanding contribution to the visual culture of Australia. Informed by the long history of artistic engagement





with the unique ecologies of this land, and reflecting contemporary concerns and aspirations about the nature of visual arts practice, Philippa Nikulinsky represents a bridge between multifarious ways of understanding the world and traditional and contemporary modes of its representation.

Ted Snell
Curator
April 2019

1. P.Nikulinsky, unpublished notes for a talk 'Plants, Paintings, Colour' at the Biodiversity Conservation Centre on 13 September 2018.
2. The business continues, now operating as studio Nikulinsky, under the management of her daughter-in-law Angela.

Images left to right top:

Eucalyptus sweetmaniana, 2011, watercolour & pencil on Arches hot press paper, 68 x 100cm

Banksia tricuspid, 2017, watercolour, pencil & gouache on Arches hot press paper, 68 x 100cm

Mistletoe Bird, 2014, pencil & watercolour on Arches hot press paper, 68 x 100cm

Eucalyptus woodwardii, 2016-2017, watercolour, pencil & gouache on Arches hot press paper, 200 x 68cm

Image below:

Xanthoraea thorntonii Before and After the Fire, 2017-2018, pencil & watercolour on Kozo paper, 42 x 700cm





Eucalyptus woodwardii
lemon-flowered mallee



Long dead and turning white in the
salty wind and glaring sun - still
clinging tenaciously held with
the tangle of roots lying exposed by the
southern gale.

A severe storm several years
ago Shearwaters dead on the ledge
This one was over an ant's nest
or cat up onto the cliff



CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ted Snell would like to thank Philippa Nikulinsky for the time and commitment she has given to this exhibition. Thanks also to Angela Nikulinsky, Kingsley Dixon and Hans Lambers for their contribution to this project. We are grateful for the support from the Western Australian Government through the Department of Local Government, Sport and Creative Industries. I also acknowledge the expertise and hard work of the extraordinary team at the Cultural Precinct.

ARTIST'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Ted Snell and his amazing team. Special thanks to Angela and Andrei Nikulinsky for their skill across many fields of production and to Simon Cowling for his skill and care digitising and printing my work. Thank you to Professors Dawn Freshwater, Ted Snell, Hans Lambers and Kingsley Dixon. I feel your textual contributions to the monograph have validated the work I've been doing for my whole life.

Published by the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at The University of Western Australia, 2019.
All rights reserved. ISBN 978-1-925793-14-7

Cover image: *Windblown Cliff Top Shoal Cape Story Roll* (detail), 2015-2016, watercolour, gouache & pigment ink on rice paper, 66 x 275cm



LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY
OPEN TUES - SAT 11AM - 5PM
FREE ADMISSION
Facebook Twitter Instagram @LWAGallery

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA, Australia 6009
P +61 (0)8 6488 3707 W lwag.uwa.edu.au
CRICOS Provider Code: 00126G



Department of
**Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries**



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**