

The image features a botanical specimen of a thorny plant, possibly a species of rose or hawthorn, with a dense, tangled network of sharp, reddish-brown thorns. The plant is positioned on the right side of the frame. The background is a complex camouflage pattern in shades of brown, green, and tan, with irregular, blotchy shapes. The overall texture appears to be that of a printed fabric or paper.

Urpflanze street plants

Caroline Rothwell
Santos Museum of Economic Botany
Adelaide Botanic Garden
11 April to 14 September 2014



Plants and people

Überplants and *super plants* – civilizations have depended upon them for millennia. Be it wheat or rice or opium and the like, important plants have been the basis of civilisation since the Neolithic Revolution.

The need for food, fibre, medicine, dyes, arts, crafts, tools, weapons, shelter and fuel has been a driving force in our *Enquiry into plants*.¹ This formal *Enquiry* dates back to Theophrastus in classical Greece and leads us to the cultivation, stewardship, utilisation (and often exploitation) of plants.

Hosting this exhibition, *Urpflanze street plants*, in the Santos Museum of Economic Botany is significant. The gold-leaf lettering identifying the 'Museum of Economic Botany' in the Adelaide Botanic Garden provides a catalyst for an important conversation about the nature of our relationship with plants. Caroline Rothwell's work takes this discussion to other places.

The gold instantly forces our minds to think about wealth and, in the context of this Museum, we are ultimately led to consider cash crops and the Colonial implications. True as that may be, there is another layer to the origins of this Museum: the notion of the *Economy to Nature*.²

When the Museum opened in 1881, Adelaide Botanic Garden director Richard Schomburgk's supporter, Albert Molineux, described his interpretation of the Museum:

My idea is that, as every botanical exhibit in the Museum has a use and value to mankind, the word [economic] is most appropriate since they show what use can be made of various plants, and thus waste can be prevented. I do not intend to write a dissertation on the value of economy, but think it would be well were every one to study how to prevent waste and make the most of everything that comes their way. By 'studying economy' as

illustrated in this museum they may in time learn to 'live like lords'.

The Museum of Economic Botany was an Adelaide institution involved in the local issues of acclimatisation, crop trials and learning from other cultures. Its role with the Botanic Garden was to plant the Colony, suggesting crops for cultivation to meet local and future needs. Learning from other cultures was paramount.

Caroline Rothwell's work takes this conversation elsewhere. Trees constructed of black PVC — *Newton's Tree*, *Lexicon Poppy (crop)* and *Lexicon (office plant)* — clearly contradict the warmth and richness of the plant materials overflowing from within the Museum's historic cabinets. PVC seems to be the antithesis of the material culture of this space, but it is worth noting that while PVC is a product of the petrochemical industry, fossil fuels were once plants too.

Image: *Diviner*, 2013

The formal placement of *Newton's Tree* — reminiscent of the Tree of Knowledge — means that it meets the direct gaze of the 1880s bust of Sir Isaac Newton sitting atop the tall display cabinet. The busts of 'scientific men' looking down on the Museum and its visitors was Schomburgk's decorative touch — an acknowledgement that his new Museum was a place of science. But what is the cost of traditional Western science? The systematic classification of the plant world comes at a price — sometimes the collateral damage is the discarding of traditional knowledge and the wisdom of non-Western knowledge paradigms.

Rothwell's *Lexicon Poppy (crop)* could easily be the subject of its own exhibition. The use of opium dates back thousands of years; and the substance appears in the first-century AD *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides.³ The stories of opium are many, and

include the exploitation of plants; the translocation of plants; cash crops; legal and illegal trade; opium wars; and medicine and pharmacology. The dichotomy between the benefits of morphine (and codeine) and the ills of heroin is anchored by the quest for wealth (and health).

Today, the role of the Santos Museum of Economic Botany is partly that of a 'Museum of a Museum' but also, more importantly, to take the plant world as its muse and encouraging a discussion. In *Urpflanze street plants*, Caroline Rothwell has shown us the relationship between plants and people through a different lens, and it makes for a thought-provoking conversation.

Tony Kanellos

Curator of the Santos Museum of Economic Botany

Notes:

1. *Enquiry into plants* or *Historia plantarum* is an ancient Greek text written by Theophrastus (the successor to Aristotle at the Lyceum). It was published in a Latin translation in the 15th and 16th centuries, and is a key text for botanists.
2. Carl Linnaeus's dissertation *The Oeconomy of Nature*, ostensibly written by his student Isaac J. Biberg in 1749.
3. Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* is a precursor to all modern pharmacopoeias. It is one of the most important herbal books in history, and was widely used until the 17th century.

Image: *Lexicon (Newton's Tree II)*, 2009 and *Tyger ii*, 2010, Bronze and 'oh so sexy candy red' auto-lacquer installation view at Tolarno Galleries





Playing God or Goethe

I've been collecting and documenting 'volunteer' plants, as my mother calls them (most people would use the term 'weeds'), from along streets and walkways since 2011. I select an area that is approximately five metres square and pull up the plants, roots and all, from that vicinity. I then record the location and the date of collection, with these details becoming part of the title for the work of art.

Caroline Rothwell's description of her process of plant collecting has much in common with the garden-variety botanist: careful removal of the sample, citation of the date and location, and even the mounting and labelling of the specimens. Rothwell's collecting, however, is neither underpinned by research (at least not of the botanical kind) nor by the desire for cultivation. Through each act of collection and collation, she is creating a new class of plant — an *überplant*. She's playing God ... or at least Goethe.

With the plants from each street location collected and amassed to form a super-weed, Rothwell is referencing Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's theory of the archetypal plant. Published in *The Metamorphosis of Plants* in 1790 Goethe imagined a system whereby the emblematic '*die urpflanze*' represented all of the possibilities for both existing and

imaginary plants. In Goethe's words:

The Primal Plant is going to be the strangest creature in the world, which Nature herself shall envy me. With this model and the key to it, it will be possible to go on forever inventing plants and know that their existence is logical; that is to say, if they do not actually exist, they could, for they are not shadowy phantoms of a vain imagination, but possess an inner necessity and truth.¹

Goethe's theories now seem to be fateful premonitions of modern-day investigations into hybridity, bio-mimicry and genetic technology. This new *über* science, with its malevolent and utopian potential, combined with Goethe's more than 200-year-old theories, have informed Rothwell's *Urpflanze street plant* series, exhibited here in the auspicious context of the Santos Museum of Economic Botany.

Image: *Urpflanze street plant*, 2014

Some of the *über* plants are ‘drawn’ in embroidery onto camouflage backgrounds, with each camouflage pattern providing the geo-political context for the place of collection. For example, Ben Quilty collected and documented weeds whilst in Tarin Kot, Afghanistan in 2011 as Australia’s official war artist. Using 171,700 stitches, the weeds collected by Quilty are recreated by Rothwell onto the Multi-Terrain Pattern (MTP) worn by Australian soldiers in the region. Military camouflage imitates the local environment, taking its cues in both colour and shape from the endemic botany.

By choosing to use camouflage (a word that’s usage originated during World War One) Rothwell alludes to the rarely considered colonisation of the natural world that occurs during war. By choosing to preserve ‘weeds’, commonly defined as plants that are out of place, she also alludes to

the territorial intrusion that occurs during war. According to Rothwell:

By matching the weeds to the military camouflage of the country in which the weeds are collected, the conversation extends into explorations of borders, colonisation, industrialisation of the environment, invasion of eco-systems etc. The works are also a painterly form that looks to the feminine art of embroidery, presented here as industrial and militarised. I see plants as paralleling how humanity travels. Where we go, they follow. Like us, they are exceptional colonisers.

Lisa Slade

Project Curator

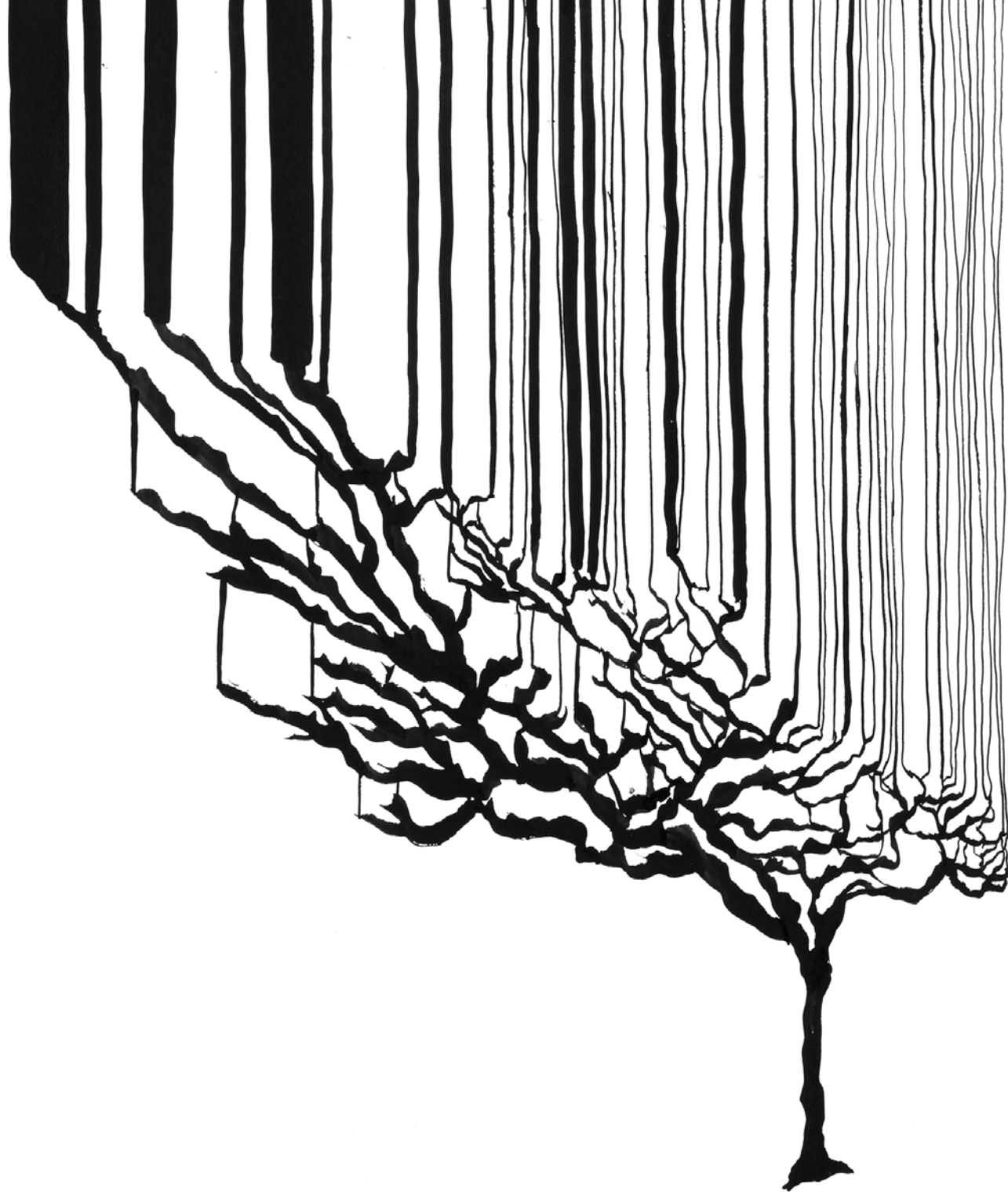
Art Gallery of South Australia

Notes:

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey: 1786–1788*, translated by W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer, New York, 1968, pp. 305–6.

Image: *Urpflanze street plant #2*, 2011 (Crystal Avenue, Pearl Beach, Australia, 5.3.2011)





List of works

1. **Lexicon (Newton's Tree II)**, 2009
hand-cut UV stable structural PVC
280 x 300cm

2. **Urpflanze street plant #2**, 2011
(Crystal Avenue, Pearl Beach,
Australia, 5.3.2011)
embroidery thread on stretched
Australian military desert
DPM (Disruptive Pattern
Material), 194841 stitches
100 x 80 x 2cm

3. **Urpflanze street plant #4**, 2011
(Pilgrim's Way, Guildford,
England, 19.4.2011)
embroidery thread on stretched
British military desert DPM (Disruptive
Pattern Material), 195063 stitches
100 x 80 x 2cm

4. **Urpflanze street plant #5**, 2011
(The Street, Compton,
England, 10.4.11)
embroidery thread on stretched
British woodland DPM (Disruptive
Pattern Material), 192170 stitches
100 x 80 x 2cm
5. **Urpflanze street plant #6**, 2014
(Tarin Kot, Camp Holland, Diesel
Farm Road, Afghanistan, collected
by Ben Quilty, 28.10.2011)
embroidery thread on stretched
Multicam MTP (Multi Terrain
Pattern), 171700 stitches
100 x 80 x 2cm

6. **Diviner**, 2013
Britannia metal, thread,
Multicam camouflage, wood
62 x 70 x 10cm

7. **Lexicon Poppy (crop)**, 2009
hand-cut UV-stable structural PVC
300 x 100cm

8. **Trophic Cascade**, 2010/14
enamel paint on powder-coated
Britannia metal and Swarovski crystals
71 x 24 x 13cm

9. **Lexicon (office plant)**, 2009
hand-cut UV-stable, structural PVC
300 x 100cm

10. **Urpflanze street plant**, 2014
(Dome Road, Dorrigo, NSW, 7.1.14)
plant material on paper
42 x 30cm
11. **Urpflanze street plant**, 2014
(Lyrebird Lane car park, Dorrigo
National Park, NSW, 7.1.14)
plant material on paper
42 x 30cm

12. **Urpflanze street plant**, 2014
(Dorrigo National Park, NSW, 7.1.14)
plant material on paper
42 x 30cm

13. **Specimen**, 2014
Car exhaust emission (1969
Chrysler Valiant) and binder
medium on archival paper

14. **Newton's Tree**, 2009
series i-v, ink on archival paper
42 x 59.3cm

*All images courtesy the artist and
Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne.
Photos: Jenni Carter (except Newton's
Tree II and Tyger ii by Christian
Capurro and Diviner by Saul Steed)*

Image: *Newton's Tree*, 2009 series i-v



Caroline Rothwell

Rothwell's sculpture and installations explore elements of the natural world (both real and imagined) and the unintended consequences of human interventions into landscapes and ecosystems. Her world coagulates the real, the extinct, the impossible and the evolving into extraordinary life forms.

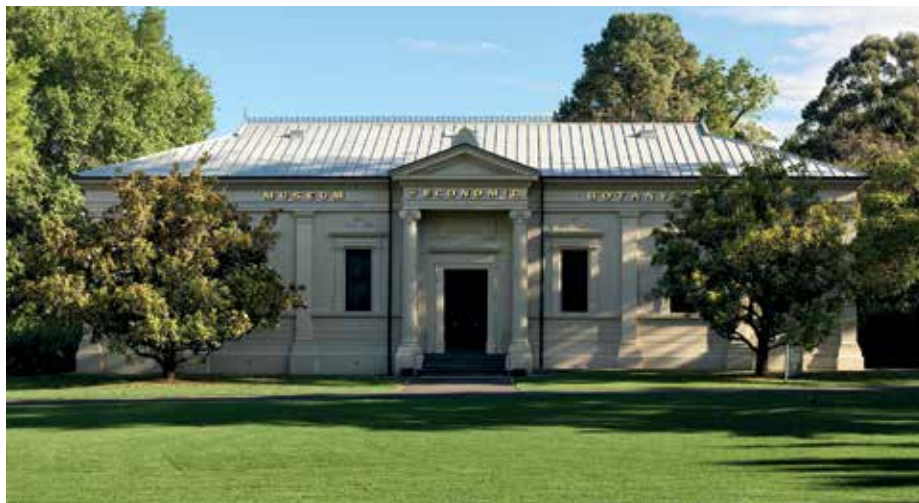
Rothwell employs materials such as PVC, metals, embroidery, car exhaust emissions and translates them into objects via a series of unconventional processes: molten metal is cast into fabric waste-moulds; PVC is cut into large paintings; nylon is sewn and inflated to create anthropomorphic monuments; car exhaust emissions become delicate paintings.

2014 Projects include: *Dark Heart* at Art Gallery of South Australia; OMI International Artists residency, New York; solo show at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery. Previous projects include; City of Sydney commission of bronze *Youngsters*; *Murray/Darling Vista* installation at Shepparton Art Museum; an installation of bronze sculptures and PVC drawings at The Economist Plaza, London commissioned by the Contemporary Art Society.

Image: *Trophic Cascade*, 2010/14
Image opposite: *Urpflanze street plant #5*, 2011
(The Street, Compton, England, 10.4.2011)



Biographical Notes					
Education					
1997-1998 Hunter College, City University of New York/ University of Auckland, MFA, sculpture					
1990-1993 Camberwell College of Arts, University of Arts London, BA Hons					
Selected solo exhibitions					
2014 <i>Urpflanze Street Plants</i> , Museum of Economy Botany, Adelaide Botanical Gardens					
2013 <i>The Pulse of Time</i> (with Chiharu Shiota), Future Perfect, Singapore					
2012 <i>Borderlands</i> , Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne <i>Murray/Darling Vista</i> , The Drawing Wall, Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria					
2011 <i>10 degrees east</i> , Grantpirrie Gallery, Sydney <i>Caroline Rothwell</i> , India Art Summit, Grantpirrie Gallery, New Delhi					
2010 <i>Transmutationism</i> , Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne					
2009 <i>Dispersed</i> , The Economist Plaza, London presented by Contemporary Art Society, London <i>Slamina</i> , Maddox Arts, London <i>Exotopos</i> , Grantpirrie Gallery, Sydney					
2008 <i>Blowback</i> , Artspace, Sydney <i>Blowback</i> , Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne					
2007 <i>The Law of Unintended Consequences</i> , Grantpirrie Gallery, Sydney					
2005 <i>New Worlds</i> , Grantpirrie Gallery, Sydney <i>Into the Woods</i> Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland					
2003/4 <i>Elsewhere</i> Djanogly Art Gallery, Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham, UK					
2002 <i>Migrations</i> Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland					
2000 <i>Psychodiagnostics</i> , Hanging Space, London <i>Orchis 4</i> , Richard Walls Gallery, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin					
Selected Commissions					
2012/13 City Spaces, City of Sydney: <i>Youngsters</i> Central Park, Sydney: <i>Symbiosis</i>					
2012 City of Sydney, Albion Place: <i>Watling’s Tree</i>					
2009 Hong Kong International Art Fair artist’s project: <i>Man of Exotopos</i>					
2008 Artspace, Sydney: <i>Crop Seed (poppy)</i> , donated multiple					
2007 Deutsche Bank, <i>Sydney: Milky Silkpod</i> Ferrier Hodgson, Grosvenor Place: <i>Tessellated & Birdland</i>					
2004 Auckland City: <i>Tree</i>					
2002 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa: <i>Shadows</i>					
Selected Group Exhibitions					
2014 <i>2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art /Dark Heart</i> , Art Gallery of South Australia <i>Conflict</i> , University of Queensland Art Museum <i>The Gathering II</i> , sculpture survey, Wangaratta Art Gallery, Victoria <i>Art Basel Hong Kong</i> , Tolarno Galleries					
2013 <i>Australia, Contemporary Voices</i> , Fine Art Society, London <i>Sydney Contemporary</i> , Starkwhite, Auckland <i>NEW 2013: Selected recent acquisitions</i> , University of Queensland Art Museum <i>Woollahra Sculpture Prize</i> , finalist, Sydney <i>Fleurieu Art Prize</i> , finalist, Adelaide <i>Burying Time</i> , Breenspace, Sydney <i>Collectors Space</i> , CASS, Artmonth, Sydney <i>Tall Tales</i> , Shepparton Art Museum					
2012 <i>The Blake Prize</i> , touring: S H Ervin Gallery, Sydney; Delmar Gallery Ashfield; Australian Jewish Museum, Melbourne; Cessnock Regional Gallery <i>Artists in Residence</i> (Brook Andrew, Mikala Dwyer, Caroline Rothwell), Central Park, Sydney <i>Panorama: are we there yet</i> , Casula Powerhouse, Liverpool, NSW <i>Silver</i> , Wangaratta Art Gallery, Victoria <i>Double Vision</i> , McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Victoria					
2011 <i>PlatForm</i> , Agnew’s Gallery, London <i>ARTHK10</i> , Tolarno Galleries, Hong Kong International Art Fair <i>No Place to Hide</i> , Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney <i>Un-natural</i> , Redlands Public Art Gallery, Queensland <i>The LoveArt Collection</i> , Casula Powerhouse, Liverpool, NSW					
2010 <i>Your Move</i> , Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria (travelling) <i>Lexicon</i> , 5 person alumni show, Camberwell College of Arts, London <i>ARTHK10</i> , Grantpirrie Gallery, Hong Kong International Art Fair <i>Cathy Temin and Caroline Rothwell, New Sculpture</i> , Newcastle Art Gallery <i>McClelland Sculpture Survey</i> , McClelland Sculpture Park, Victoria					
2009 <i>New 2009: Selected Recent Acquisitions</i> , University of Queensland Art Museum <i>Darwin’s Bastards</i> , Verge Gallery, University of Sydney <i>Cass Sculpture Foundation</i> , Goodwood Sculpture Park, England <i>Nature ID</i> , Jan Manton Gallery, Brisbane <i>We are unsuitable for framing</i> , Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand					
2008 <i>Summer Show</i> , Maddox Arts, London <i>Neo-goth/back in black</i> , University of Queensland Art Museum <i>Wastestate</i> , Bearspace, London <i>Cardoso, Quilty, Rothwell & Zavros</i> , Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide <i>The Dream Festival</i> , Yarra River, Melbourne					
2007 <i>2007 – The Year in Art</i> , SH Ervin Gallery, Sydney <i>New Nature</i> : Govett Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand <i>Arc Biennial</i> , Brisbane <i>Bloodlines: Art and the horse</i> , Hawkesbury Regional Gallery (travelling) <i>Poor Yorick</i> , Riverway Arts Centre, Townsville <i>Unreal-esque</i> , GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney <i>Footnote: Off the Edge</i> , Malaysian publication					
2006 <i>Terminus</i> : First Fleet Park, Circular Quay, Sydney <i>Random Access</i> , McClelland Sculpture Park & Gallery, Victoria					
2005 <i>Material Girls and Boys</i> , Deloittes Head Office, Sydney <i>CCB Exhibition & Auction</i> , Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney					
2004 <i>Shift/break</i> , Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth					
2003 <i>3D Chicago</i> , Navy Pier, Chicago, USA, <i>Wonderland</i> Artspace, Auckland					
2002 <i>Scape Art + Industry Biennial</i> Christchurch <i>Changing Spaces - Sculpture Now</i> Wellington International Arts Festival <i>Memos for a New Millennium</i> Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland					
2001 <i>Interior Horizons: Art on the verge of Architecture and Design</i> , Te Tuhi Gallery, Manukau <i>The Contingency of Vision</i> , Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland <i>Off the Wall</i> , Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa <i>Bloom</i> , Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland <i>Adrift</i> , Conical Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne <i>Prospect 2001: New Art New Zealand</i> , City Gallery, Wellington <i>Colour</i> , Queen Street Studio Gallery, Belfast (travelling) <i>Wall Drawings: John Reynolds & Caroline Rothwell</i> , Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland					
2000 <i>Measure of Strangeness</i> , Artspace, Auckland					
Residencies					
2014 Art OMI International Artists residency, New York					
2008 Artspace, Sydney					
2005 Artist in Residence, Margaret Whitlam Studio, Bondi Public School, Sydney					
2003 Universitas 21 Inaugural Cultural Residency, artist in residence, Nottingham University					
Public Collections					
Art Gallery of South Australia					
Art Gallery of New South Wales					
Shepparton Art Museum					
University of Queensland Art Museum					
City of Sydney					
Auckland City					
State Library of Victoria					
Lyons Housemuseum					
Deutschebank					
Ferrier Hodgson					
Artbank					
Ministry of Internal Affairs, NZ					
Auckland University					
Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand					
Chartwell Trust					
James Wallace Trust					
Auckland City Art Gallery					



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Cover image: detail from **Urpflanze street plant #6**, 2014 (Tarin Kot, Camp Holland, Diesel Farm Road, Afghanistan, collected by Ben Quilty, 28.10.2011) embroidery thread on stretched Multicam MTP (Multi Terrain Pattern), 171700 stitches, 100 x 80 x 2cm



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