

**Maurice O' Riordan, Editor Art Monthly Australia**

There's three words that come to mind in thinking about this exhibition; the first one is commitment. Firstly, there's the idea of commitment to a collaboration, or as Claudine and Tijn have described it, their artistic marriage. After three children, this show being the third in their series of collaborative exhibitions, I have overheard talk of a divorce not through any irreconcilable differences but simply because all good things must come to an end. I am hoping though and feel sure that this marriage will live in on various ways.

As a collaboration, the whole as ever is greater than the sum of its parts. Here we have a cross-pollination of like-minded artists whose work, quite different from each other's in technique and materiality, shares an abstract visual language which is committed to the natural world, a language which gains greater force, tension and clarity through the collaborative presence. What does this shared language speak or say exactly? Many things, of course, and yet at a deeper level and because it is a visual language, it is not about meaning in a literal sense. The works' physical manifestation and initial apprehension by our visual senses is meaning enough, in and of itself, without recourse to verbal description. The works appeal to our capacity to dwell in the space or spaces between image, thought and word; the exhibition in fact necessarily nurtures this capacity which we all have as humans but which is endangered by all the hot air and hubbub of contemporary life. Notice how Claudine and Tijn avoid muddying the clarity of their visual language with the spare titles of their works: either Untitled or just Work 2, Work 19, Work 25, for example, or, as with Tijn's sculptural installations simply named after its primary source material: *Rubus alceifolius* (or raspberry vine/bramble).

There is commitment also in the general sense which all artists must have if their work is to see the light of day, but here in 'Seed to Seed' commitment is also about the process-based and intuitive foundation of their practice. You can't be half-hearted about that otherwise the seed will surely go to ruin and the resulting work might then just appear well-intended and clever but essentially hollow. And hollow is definitely not one of the three words this exhibition brings to mind.

The second word, oddly enough, is 'special'. Again, in the generic sense, we would all like to think that our own creations are special and unique, even though the idea of the word itself, like 'special needs', more often seems like a put-down or mark of inferiority. But there is something essentially special and distinctive about this collaborative undertaking. I've seen many collaborations which don't really work, where despite what the artists say about how well they worked together, and how synchronous their approach— even when collaboration means actually working together on a single work — they, the artists, haven't really moved or shared an inch. That's not to say that Claudine and Tijn have tailored each other's practice to arrive at a common voice. Their artistic voices here do remain consistent and special in their individual uniqueness, while we can also point to the ways their practice has changed because of this collaboration. For Tijn's more ephemeral-based practice, for example, it has led to the introduction and exploration of works on paper, the works in this exhibition which utilise 'plant pigment' or 'growth remnants' although 'utilise' is perhaps not

the best description for the material process and natural agency directing, indeed co-authoring these works. For Claudine, it has meant new inspiration in sourcing and responding to plant material, and in a few cases drawing on some of Tijn's own organic 'cast-offs' as subject matter.

Special, as a derivation of 'species', also hints at the botanical impulse and framework for this exhibition, just as it alerts us to the shared cultural and geographic specificities of these two artists: both born and raised in northern European countries, both migrating to Australia in their adult years, and both making a life and home for themselves in the tropics of Far North Queensland.

And the third word, finally, is 'rub' which in a way takes its cue from the very name of this venue, KickArts, which I presume is a play on the term 'kick-ass', and I'm sure many of you here tonight would agree that that's precisely what KickArts has been doing in its 20 years of operation: challenging boundaries and preconceptions through showing kick-ass works of contemporary art, including the work of Claudine and Tijn. While theirs is rendered with far more subtlety than a direct 'kick' to our senses and sensibilities, the work has come about through very real and physical rigour: from the rubbing, sanded-back layering of Claudine's acrylic on canvas immersions, to Tijn's travails in the field, gathering his plant materials, in some cases rubbing them directly onto paper, and of course the blood and pain of rubbing against the intact thorns for his monolithic sculptural installation.

Artists, people, rub up against each other. Here in 'Seed to Seed' it is a gentle play of rub, convergence as well as singular conviction. I am reminded of Hamlet's famous soliloquy:

To die — to sleep.  
To sleep — perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub!  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil.  
Must give us pause.

In Claudine and Tijn's approach to the natural world and visual abstraction, human agency — this mortal coil — is not so much erased as elided. We are drawn to consider our miniscule place as part of the natural world, as part of a wider, deeper cosmos. Which, as Ingrid Hoffmann's exhibition catalogue essay concludes, in appreciating the quietude of 'Seed to Seed', must or should give us pause.

Two seeds — two artists, one exhibition, three words — commitment, special and rub — formed from 20 letters in KickArt's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

It is with much pride and humility that I declare this exhibition open.