

Lauren Berkowitz

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The last four months have forced many cities in Australia to slow down, due to restrictions from Covid 19. Personally, it has been a time of transition and reflection. During this prolonged lockdown, I have spent many hours walking with my daughter through our neighbourhood, observing the rhythms of the natural world and the shift from Winter to Spring. I have felt privileged to be able to spend this precious time together during her final year at school as she will soon move on to college.

Professionally, this year I was honoured to participate in the National 2021: New Australian Art, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. The exhibition opened in March and sadly closed two months prematurely in June because of the shutdown in Sydney. I am also currently in an exhibition at The Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, which is celebrating 60 years of its collection. This three-part show opened in July with a huge celebration and closed the next day as Melbourne went into lockdown, where we remained until late October. All documentation has moved online. Both exhibitions are significant, and it is heartbreaking for me and the other artists to have them closed to the public.

My work has taken on a greater presence through social media, having a second life and reaching a larger audience. However, I feel this diminishes the physical and spatial qualities and the special connection one has with the artworks. I am fortunate to have had a steady stream of work preparing Zoom talks for teachers, curators, and artists. My focus has been on the development of new artworks, together with proposals for exhibitions and residencies for 2022.

My artworks are preoccupied with the symbolism and poetry of materials along with themes of regeneration. *Plastic Topographies*, (2018-2021), featured a vast collection of recycled plastic post-consumer waste and hanging plants, creating a utopian and dystopian ecosphere. These artworks were the culmination of experiencing urban and natural landscapes in New York and Sydney whilst doing residencies and looking at recycling strategies as a process of renewal. In *Fragile Ecologies*, (2019-2021) plastic lids were stockpiled from community networks and gleaned from local beaches. The focus was

on cyclical forms related to ancient traditions, the natural world and the cosmos, together with more recent philosophies around circular economies. These artworks were steeped in the fantastical imagery of the Kabbalistic myth of creation, with replicating vessels and cellular structures appearing as seeds of potentiality. Ironically the salvaged plastic matter also suggested the destruction and rehabilitation of delicate ecosystems.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has forced us to adapt and radically change the way we live. It has taught us to decelerate and reflect upon our future on this planet. I hope that collectively and individually we can embrace the Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam, the idea of repair of the broken world through small gestures.



Fragile Ecologies, Lauren Berkowitz, 2020-21 | Photo: Anna Kučera

Lauren Berkowitz

Born in Australia, 1965, lives and works in Melbourne. Berkowitz has exhibited across institutional and commercial spaces in Australia and abroad. Her work has been included in exhibitions and publications, themed around the environment and sustainability. Lyrically she explores and reclaims materials, transforming them through light, volume and space. Berkowitz's work is documented in "Sculpture Today", (Phaidon, 2007) and "Art and Ecology Now", (Thames and Hudson, 2014)
