



Lara Merrett's natural dye experiments in Bendalong, Yun Country, with Joanna Fowles, 2022. Image courtesy the artist.

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Ties that Bind: Lara Merrett

Lara Merrett shares the personal stories and connections that have underwritten much of her work over the last couple of years. After major exhibitions across the country including at UQ Art museum, MCA, Artspace, Sydney, and more, *By my side walking, 2022*, is the culmination of a new phase of research and collaborations resulting in her exciting first solo exhibition at Sullivan+Strumpf.

I returned to my NSW South Coast home of Bandalong at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. I had watched the 2020 bushfires from Java Indonesia, horrified. How strange it now felt to be back home and to not know where I was. The familiar forest and coastline I once knew so well was charred, empty and in deathly silence.

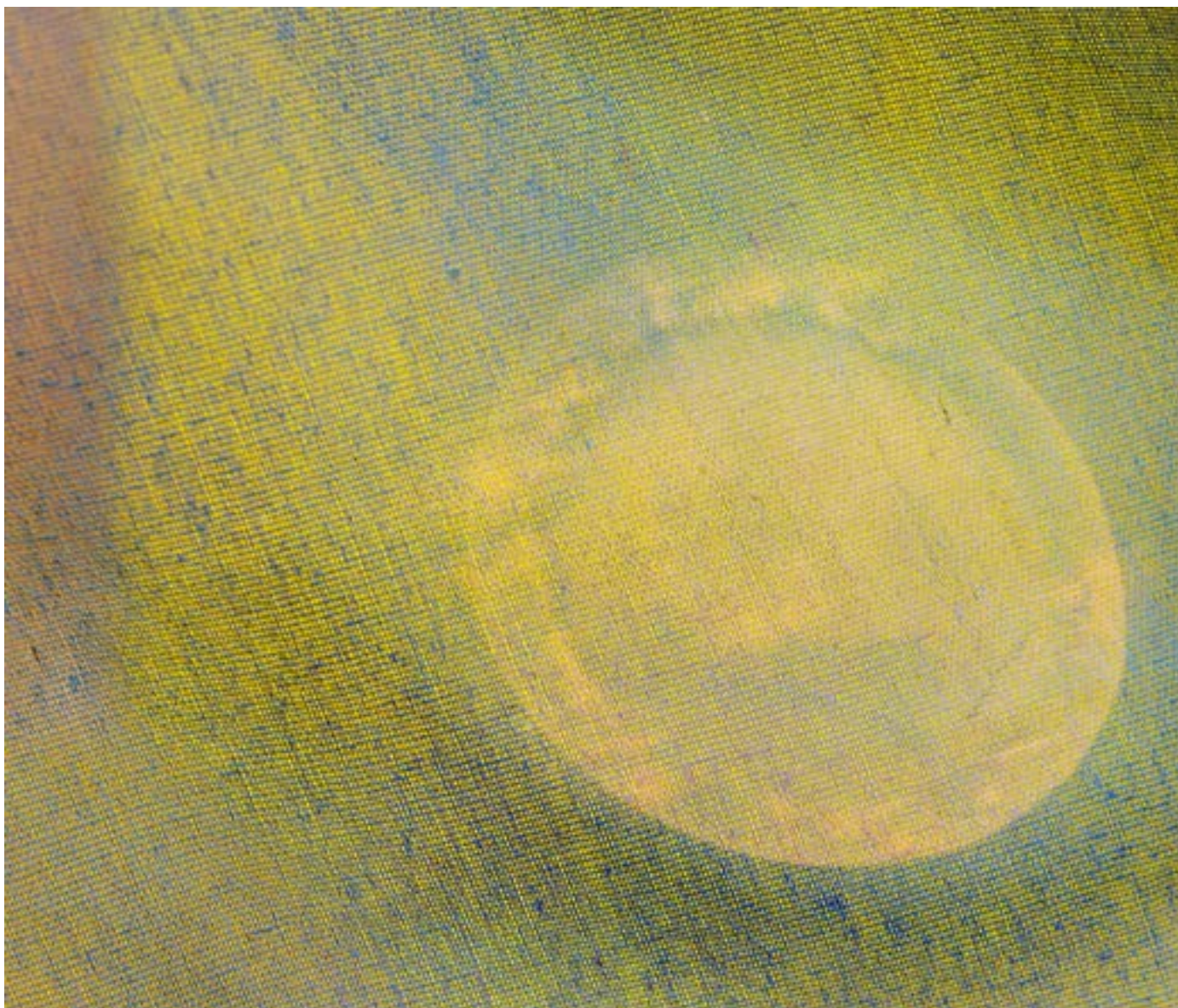
Talk in the community was that there was a parcel of unburnt bush on the edge of town about to be bulldozed for a development. These 80 acres of pristine forest would be destroyed in less than a week. 'Surely not', we thought, after everything that had happened.

Calls and texts were made, news was spreading that there was going to be a blockade early in the morning before the diggers turned up. The developers had tied fluoro pink strings around the trees that would stay. When

I turned up, all I could see was a forest of pink stringed trees. Obviously, the community had been busy. We set up yoga mats on the side of the road as walkers, cyclists, skateboarders, and prams came out in force to 'legally' protest at a 1.5 metre covid-safe distance from one another.

This is where my current body of work and recent activism all started.

After the last few years, I knew I wanted to make a body of works about the Manyana and Bandalong communities, where I live, their resilience and how this has been written through experiences of hardship. My communities, and collaboration in general, are incredibly important to me, so I wanted to make a body of work which was dedicated to this—to embark on research about local histories



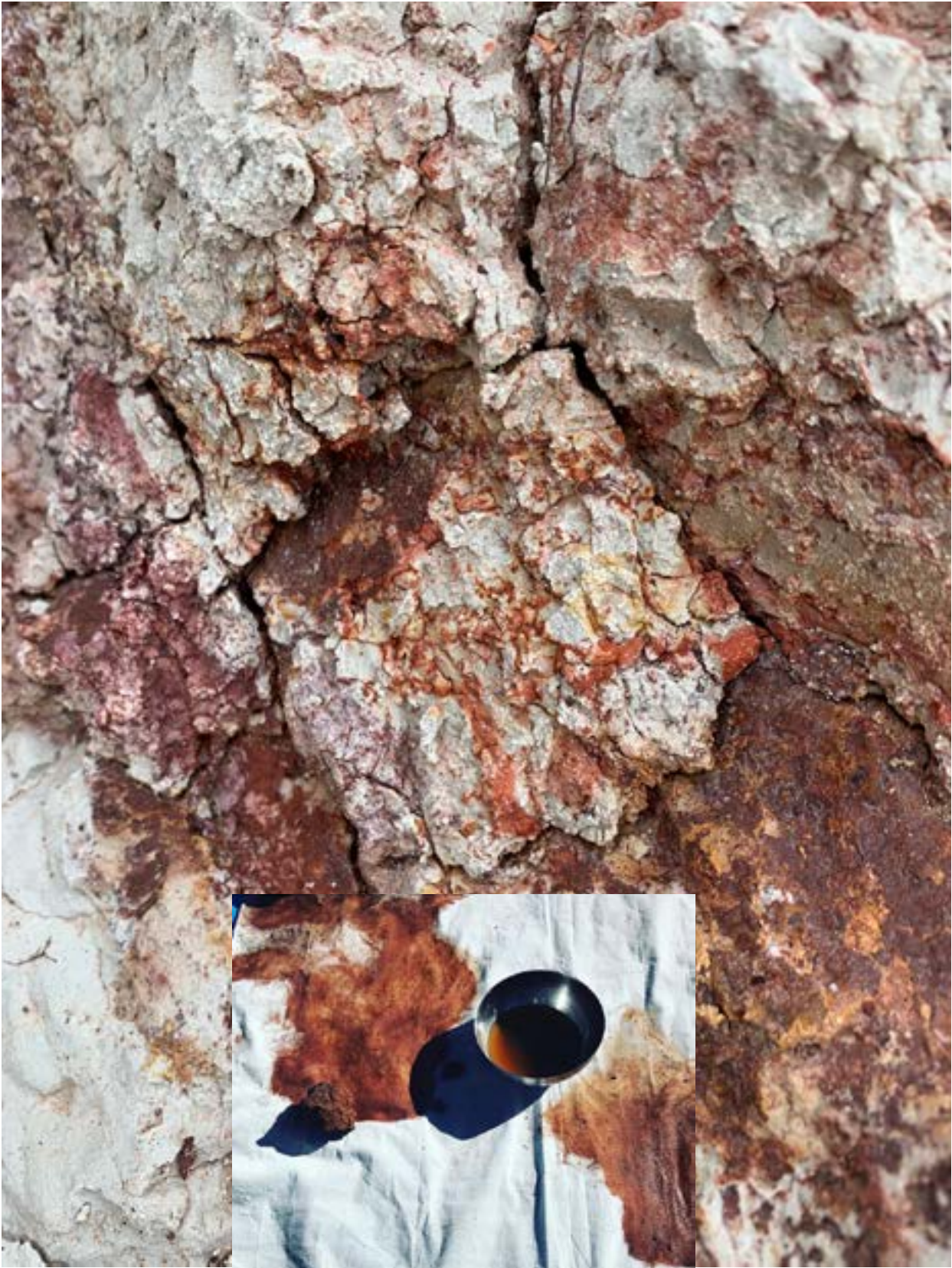
Lara Merrett, Work-in-progress (detail), 2022.
Image courtesy the artist.



Bendalong, Yuin Country, 2022. Image courtesy the artist.



Lara Merrett's natural dye experiments in Bendalong, Yuin Country, 2022. Image courtesy the artist.



Lara Merrett's natural dye experiments in Bendalong, Yuin Country, 2022. Image courtesy the artist.

of survival and resilience that hold incredible value, reverberating as they do beyond their local borders and speaking to a universal human condition.

By my side walking, 2022, is a series of 'readable' paintings. Composed of both stretched and sculpturally folded or suspended linen canvas, these fabrics are tactile and tender, requiring physical viewer interaction to be 'read'. My creative and Manyana (Yuin Country) communities were collaborative participants in their making, imbuing them with their stories and knowledges as a means of coming together, to share, to recover.

In the gallery, the paintings will be arranged and mounted using walls, floors and suspension encouraging a free, fluid and non-linear engagement. The works are intertextual and bring together not only the communities with whom I work but also the different areas of my practice. I hope that by bringing people into contact with the works and each other, they become physically immersed in the stories told within.

Bringing together community to paint, recount decisive actions and strategies, to share knowledges about the land and the ongoing protection needed in the surrounds of the Conjola National Park, and to reiterate these stories in the space of the gallery, is a really powerful thing—art is not only able to bring communities together but can actually create communities which might not have existed before.

Lara Merrett

EXHIBITION: LARA MERRETT, *BY MY SIDE WALKING*, 29 SEP – 15 OCT, 2022

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