

ROSEMARY LAING

SWANSONGS

1 MARCH – 6 APRIL 2024

Melbourne, Australia: Tolarno Galleries is pleased to present *swansongs*, a new exhibition of photographs and sculptural assemblages by Sydney-based artist Rosemary Laing.

A swansong is a metaphor for someone's final performance, achievement or pronouncement.

But in *swansongs*, the performance is an act of self-preservation as dozens of evacuees in the form of tiny rock and shell assemblages, or 'shellworks', flee disaster in search of a place of safety.

The source of danger is indicated by the first of four photographs, *Blackbutt Road (swansong 2020)*, which shows a charred, twisted log surrounded by dead twigs, ash and dirt.

Laing took the photograph in January 2020, a short distance from her holiday home in Swanhaven, a coastal town in NSW's Shoalhaven.

"The 2019-2020 'Black Summer' bushfires that burned across the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Bega Valley regions affected more than one million hectares and impacted approximately 47 estuaries and coastal catchments," says Laing.

A further three photographs depict shellworks up close against a vivid background of landscape elements.

The images have been printed with UV ink onto 'found' supports – a retail display board, a kitchen backsplash and cardboard packaging – then varnished with wax.

Displayed on a white shelf beside each photograph is a resolute procession of shellworks.

"Eyes and heads are formed with small spiral or natural holes; weathered rocks are given shell legs; and some travel in family groups," writes Victoria Lynn in the catalogue essay.

"Like extinct animals, or strange birds, they appear determined to survive, as they follow each other along precarious shelves."

For Laing, this body of work is about “a love of, an attachment to, homeland or places of belonging ... all the memories and histories that have stemmed from that place, and the making of a kind of ‘song’ that combines the enigma of this attachment with a sadness for what has happened in this place”.

About Rosemary Laing

Born in Brisbane, Rosemary Laing studied visual art in Hobart, Brisbane and Sydney and holds a first-class Master of Fine Arts from the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

Laing began exhibiting in 1978 and has been with Tolarno Galleries since 2005, making *swansongs* her twelfth exhibition with the gallery.

She has held solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and the National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan, as well as in Denmark, Spain and the US.

Laing has also shown work at the Biennale of Sydney (2008), Venice Biennale (2007), Busan Biennale (2004) and Istanbul Biennale (1995).

Laing is represented in all major public collections in Australia as well as the Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, USA; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan; Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, Switzerland; and Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, USA.

In 2019 she received the ‘Overseas Photographer Award’ at the 35th Higashikawa Awards in Hokkaido, Japan, for photographic achievements including her series *weather* (2006), *leak* (2010) and *Buddens* (2017).