

Climate change has declared itself in Australia through catastrophic droughts and fires. There is profound heartache as we contemplate the incalculable losses of life and habitat, instant extinctions, a shifting sense of safety as we wonder if this is the new normal. Horror at the vast losses of forested landscapes.

There is palpable anger about the lack of wisdom and action from those that hold power. Rage that scientists and firefighters have told us what will happen, yet their warnings have gone unheeded.

There is also an upswelling of compassion and support for people and communities who have lost family and homes, for the animals who have died, and for those still suffering. There is a deep sense of gratitude for the firefighters who have worked so hard to protect what they can.

Hope has also sprung up. Hope that the grief and anger, compassion and gratitude can be harnessed with wisdom, so the necessary environmental, social and economic changes will be made to avoid worsening effects of climate change.

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In *The Ancient Gaze* the patterning which connects humans with the natural world- cycles of death, renewal and regeneration, and patterns of an interconnected whole are explored through paper and textile-based media. The ancient wisdom embodied in European Palaeolithic and Neolithic figurines is brought into conversation with contemporary environmental concerns. Concerns which arise when humans view and treat the natural world as separate and other than themselves.

The exhibition begins with a human-scale drawing of the Venus of Dolni Vestonice. Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas determined the 30000-year-old Venus to be one of many figurines that represent the Mother Goddess. The generative bodies of these figurines hold within them cycles of death and renewal in nature and in humans, cycles that have been maintained from their time to ours. The Mother Goddess is both fertile, a nurturer of life, and the wielder of the destructive powers of nature, reminding us to live within nature's laws.

The original Dolni Vestonice figurine is 11 cm high and can be held in the hand. Drawn at human-scale *The Ancient One* meets the eye of the viewer, and they, her gaze. Tears stream from her eyes, perhaps a divine source of water or perhaps a lament for what she sees. Perhaps tears for human-induced climate change that threatens the cyclic patterns she embodies.

*The Ancient One* oversees the exhibition where artworks and stitched quotes explore the existential threat of climate change, risks to the connective and cyclic patterning and the deep emotions being experienced. A tension is held between hope and despair. The quotes bring the thinking and feeling wisdom of scientists, poets, firefighters, activists and philosophers into the exhibition space, creating a conversation with the artworks.

A life-size drawing of Greta Thunberg brings attention to younger and future generations, their demands and fears and hopes. It is surely for them, and all life on earth, that we must act with compassion and intelligence to avert further changes in the climate.