



INSIDE ELANDS



The Lock-Up Contemporary Art Space

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INSIDE ELANDS

16 April – 30 May 2021

*An exhibition of creative responses to the Elands
counterculture through recent fieldwork, cross-tech
collaborations and works from the local archive*

FIRST GENERATION ARTISTS

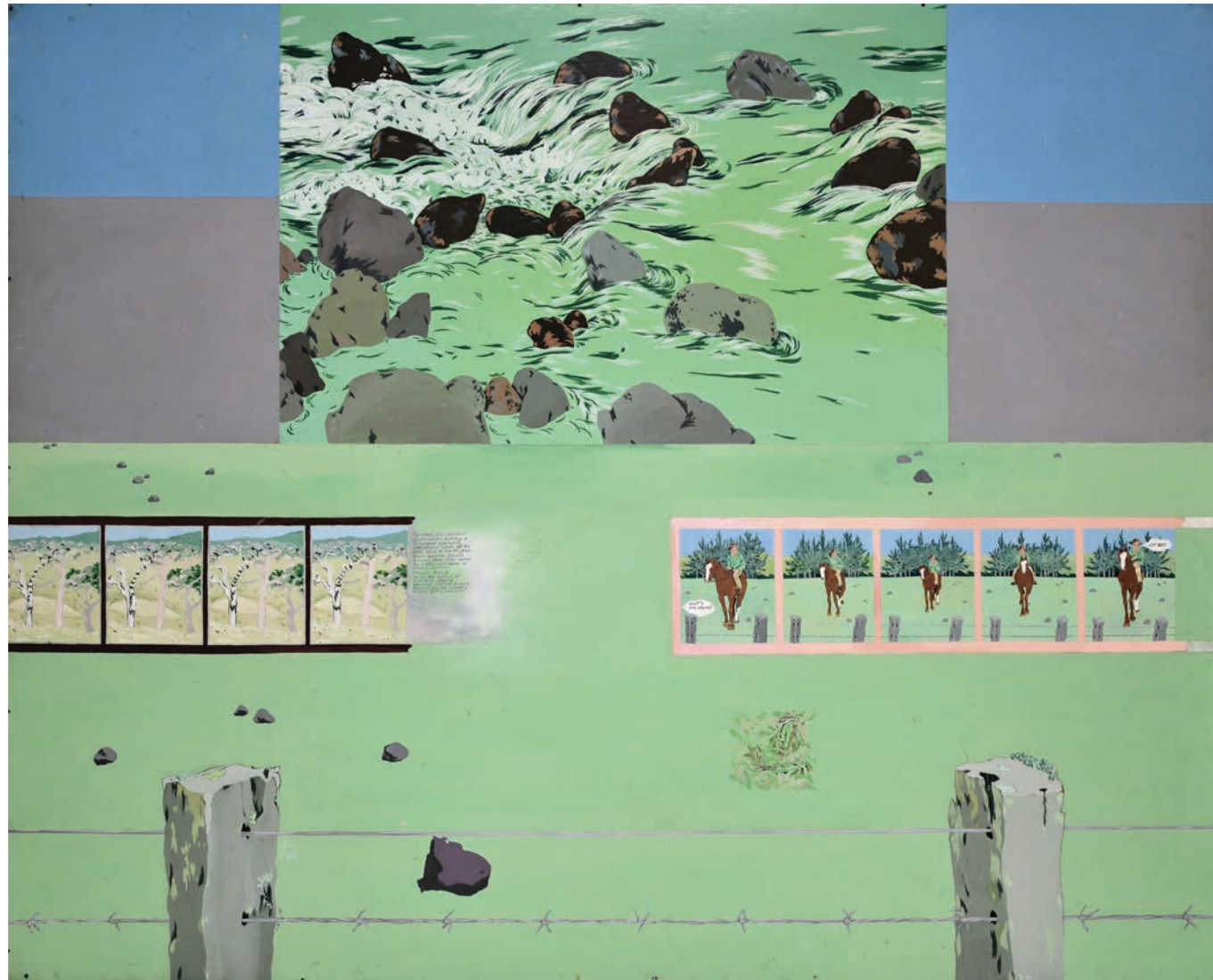
Angela Beaumont, Jenny Hooper, Suey McEnally
Russell Page, Rick Reynolds, Jen Short, Julie Slavin

SECOND GENERATION ARTISTS

Alison Bennett, Juliet Lamont
Rilka Oakley, Leigh Redhead

CURATOR

Una Rey



Jenny Hooper Valley Painting 1973

Inside Outside Elands

Inside Elands was conceived for The Lock-Up as bushfires were ravaging the country, increasing a sense of urgency to document some of the hand-made houses that remain as material evidence of the dynamic counterculture which flourished in Elands. For a few decades from the late 1960s into the 1990s, the small rural community was a microcosm of the social and cultural paradigm shift across the world: a confluence of late Cold War anxiety, the sexual revolution, environmentalism, the Civil Rights and Peace movements, Feminism, and a rejection of the old Churches of Capitalism and Christianity. Even so, the nuclear family and conventional gender roles endured in Elands, while splitting up and re-partnering became a pattern. "There was a lot of love around in those days. Some might say *too much love*".ⁱ

Now it is the Ellenborough Falls which puts Elands (population 200) and the Bulga Plateau on the map, enticing drivers to climb 630 metres up onto the Great Dividing Range.ⁱⁱ The 'Falls' were also a factor in the summer of '68 when American atomic refugee Gladney Oakley (1935-2006) moved his young family to Elands, buying a failing farm adjoining the waterfall reserve. Gladney's invitation to others to drop-out, to live on the land and commune (with nature and with each other) tapped into the Age of Aquarius zeitgeist, and though his desire to lead an intentional community styled enterprise was short-lived, the plateau attracted a flow of residents from urban centres in what became a counterculture boom. Among them were artists, academics and activists: liberal, intellectual, cultural and spiritual idealists. Some stayed for decades, others for a season. A few remain. The new arrivals with their environmentalist values were in contrast to the cedar cutters who first led European intrusions into Biripi and Worimi territory in the late nineteenth century, and the millworkers, graziers and dairy farmers who followed.

Mountains, valleys and generational waves

These changing demographics were partially documented in Helen Hannah's three oral histories. *The Mountain Speaks: a Folk History of the Bulga Plateau* (1979) and *Together in this Jungle Scrub* (1981) recorded the stories of the early pioneer/settlers and their physical, social and economic challenges as tremendous forests met the axe and cross-saw. Thirty years later *A Peaceful Revolution: the Elands Alternative Community 1970-1995* (2011), chronicled the stories of the new Bulga settlers (or hippies, to use the pejorative term), by which time many had moved on or passed away. Nevertheless, the book captures the layered perspectives and shared concerns of Elands at a point in time, from innovative and low-impact handmade homes to expansive gardens, food and land co-operatives, a short-lived independent school and collective parenting. Sustained forest activism along with frequent art exhibitions, film-club nights, theatre and live music put ideals into practice and brought people together.



Juliet Lamont *BEAST* [still] 2021

Below | Alison Bennett & Julie Slavin *The Supper Room* [detail] 2021



There are challenges documenting a recent history within which one is so embedded. Speaking publicly, Hannah noted the ethical and legal implications of putting sensitive and personal tales in print, partly because marijuana cultivation, drug-use and violence had become part of the local mix, but also expressing a rectitude at odds with the reckless, utopian quasi-freedoms of her generation's youth. She suggested it was 'up to the kids' to create the next text, echoing a long-held intention of our own.

The 'kids' are now in their forties and fifties, and *Inside Elands* presents another episode in this site specific microhistory. Brought together inside The Lock-Up, each 'insider' now lives outside Elands, having graduated from the hills to work within the economic and social systems their parents once rejected. As Gen-Xers they have inherited a mixed creative legacy from their formative experiences in Elands predicated on ideals of independence, freedom and a deep mutual appreciation for insider/outsider subjectivity.ⁱⁱⁱ

Returning anywhere is shadowed by memories. It is a paradoxical game: relationships, amusements and technologies all change. So does the country itself, along with ways of seeing, using and representing it. The now historical paintings by the first wave of alternative Elands residents reflect an Australian landscape tradition of *plein-air* painting, while new works by my generation use digital media and expanded photography to render ambient motifs and memoir-narratives. The stylistic contrast from canvas to screen seems explicitly linked to the respective academies, from the training-intense studios of 1960s Sydney art schools to the interdisciplinary technologies of the 1990s university degree and the online revolution. Process aside, romanticism, wonder, nostalgia and aversion are all present to various degrees: it is easy to reveal the darker episodes and much harder to convey the majestic aura of Elands and its unique ecology.

While parts of the Bulga burned in November 2019 and some buildings were destroyed, much greater destruction was avoided. The Oxygen Farm Reserve with its wall of moist rainforest was a plausible defence system against the encroaching firefront, along with unofficial guerrilla firefighter's efforts. Some claimed good luck or good karma saved the village. Faith and ideology aside, the fires off the back of an extreme drought that killed whole ridges of bush brought a renewed sense of self-reliance to the fore, reinforcing the values of off-grid, sustainable, survivalist codes and the mutual cooperation so emblematic of the Elands origin story.

The artists in *Inside Elands* always intended to make site visits for creative fieldwork, to take photographs, record sound and shoot film, to track down historic art works in the local archives; to swim in the headwaters of the Falls and explore the casual ruins of remembered dwellings. But accessing the 'bush idyll' of Elands requires planning and accommodating weather at the best of times. Then the 2020 coronavirus lockdown hit, followed by heavy flooding in early 2021. With 'insiders' across three states the hope of collective fieldwork remained remote. This necessitated experimental, cross-media collaborations and some more primitive, rookie-tech-approaches than would otherwise have been applied, but they serviced the ideas well and ironically, enhanced the intimacy of what has been a timely reconnection among peers.



Rick Reynolds
Ellenborough Falls
after rain
c.1998

Opposite |
Suey McEnally
Threat or rescue,
Blue Knob c.1998



For all their different inspirations and experiences of Elands, each flowerchild (to use the poetic term) has sustained feelings for the arresting local landscape, now shaped by a deeper historical conscience. These wild paradise gardens and steep waterfall forests offered strategic retreats for Indigenous Australians before nineteenth century frontier wars razed the precise locations of sacred sites, dancing grounds and graves. *Together in this Jungle Scrub* recounts a story of what would now be called a massacre of Aboriginal people in the Ellenborough Valley.^{iv} More recent grievances involve some individuals who disgraced the ethos of love, self-respect and parental trust, and we acknowledge and empathise with those of our tribe who were ill-treated. These are some of the spectral edges to the radiant montages of Elands and its inner and outer reaches: it remains a site of manifold layers with different meanings to different people, both past and present, inside and outside Elands.

Dr Una Rey is an artist, writer, curator and lecturer in creative arts at The University of Newcastle.



Julie Slavin *Storm coming, Bulga village* 1990

ⁱ This is an appropriation, but I owe the quote to Mick Tuck, speaking at Helmuth Aimann's funeral in 2002. This was the first big gathering of the Elands community for many years. Tuck lived in Elands in the 1970s and 80s, becoming Lord Mayor of Taree where he died playing a charitable tennis match in 2003.

ⁱⁱ Bulga is derived from an Aboriginal word for high mountain/river country, and by extension waterfall country, and/or waterfall. The Ellenborough River was named by explorer John Oxley in 1818 after Lord Ellenborough, Chief Justice of England.

ⁱⁱⁱ The artists involved offer only a partial reflection of the 150+ kids who spent formative years in and around Elands over those decades.

^{iv} Helen Hannah, *Together in this Jungle Scrub: a Folk History of the Comboyne Plateau* (Glenwarrin: Self-Published, 1981), 1. The circumstances described match the terms of the University of Newcastle's Centre for 21st Century Humanities' Colonial Frontier Massacres Map project led by Lyndall Ryan. See <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php>



Angela Beaumont *Duncan's Mill* 1979

Overleaf

Left | Jen Short *Untitled* [detail] 1989

Right | Russell Page *Rockfall* c1985



Alison Bennett
Recalling Inside Elands

Interiority is the feeling of being inside, enclosed by a space, the feeling of the body enclosed by walls and a roof, the views to the outside world and the ambient sounds filtered and resonant within the room. It encompasses the psychological relationship with shelter, the feelings of protection and constraint. Interiority also has social dimensions that relate to what it feels like to be inside a group, a culture.

As a child I would entertain myself by imagining rooms. A crawl space here, a cushion there, populated with animal companions. As an adult I realised that this capacity to inhabit interior spaces in my mind's eye was fed by exposure to a culture of building as a process of evolving cubby houses, incomplete, idiosyncratic, between emergence and entropy, between creativity and decay. I adored these spaces, their care and ingenuity. They were living structures in an ongoing process of making, responding to needs in negotiation with limited available resources.

These ideas generated new work for *Inside Elands*, however the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that we had to develop alternative approaches to fieldwork. Whilst I was locked down in Melbourne, Una Rey sent photographs of the Food Co-op. Working with this set of images, I was able to render a 3D point cloud via photogrammetry, a photographic application that builds models from the shifts in data points read from overlapping photographs. The process of making these works evolved in a way that expanded the project. From a process initially conceived as a singular private encounter between myself and the site with my camera, the works developed as an engaged distributed collaboration with Una Rey, Julie Slavin and Chris Sheed. Each collaborator sent photographs, video and sound files, working together to visit sites and test fieldwork methods. This approach led to an unexpected sense of shared ownership, an enriched expanded encounter not only with these unique enclosures but the intertwined relationships that occupied these inner worlds located in the clouds, the stillness and mist of the plateau and valley.

*Dr Alison Bennett is an artist
working in expanded photography
and an academic at RMIT
University School of Art*

Opposite | Alison Bennett & Una Rey *The Barn* [detail] 2021



JULIET LAMONT

A love letter to survival

Elands. 'I live in a place called Elands,' I remember boasting as a grubby barefooted hippy kid. Even telling other people that name made me feel like I was from another planet. *Elands.* Something about the way that it sat on your tongue when you spoke it. Like a secret only half ready to come out. Somewhere strange and magical and high up in the clouds. Full of weird creatures. The wilds. A world of its own. But Elands also shared some of the magical spirit we'd known briefly in the intentional community of Findhorn, northern Scotland, before my family emigrated to Australia.

In the 1970s and '80s while our counterculture parents were wrestling with their own complicated dynamics and the lure of new ways of being, us hippy kids were gifted a childhood that was as wide and open as the mountain sky. I don't really remember ever being inside. Or even going to school. No mobile phones. No 'Hey Hey It's Saturday'. No white bread. Our education came from the lessons of nature, its beauty and brutality. Learning to read the river. Testing our mettle by jumping over the Ellenborough where it narrows at the top of the Falls. Dogs perished there. There was a suicide, there was an accident. But we kept going back to the edge. Thundering through the sweep of the valley till we fell, dizzy and drunk, midnight bareback horse rides, eating chapatis and powdered milk at the kids' house. Falling asleep stoned, under clapped out Holdens, while the adults danced up the sun and sunk the full moon.

With freedom came the search for boundaries. And with the light came the dark. *BEAST* is a work that explores this charged childhood space of abuse and intimacy. Violence and tenderness. But mostly it's a work about resilience. It's a love letter to survival.

Juliet Lamont is an award-winning filmmaker and activist.





RILKA OAKLEY

Bridging the past

As a child *Elands* meant Dad. It meant the river, swimming for hours, exploring the riverbank. Watching the river passing under the bridge. *Elands* meant frost on winter mornings and hot summer days. It meant eating blackberries and drinking rainwater; it meant leeches and snakes and watching the sunset; it meant a fire at night, a boiling chip-heated bath.

Arriving at *Elands* was slow: the highway, stopping for supplies, the dirt road winding up the mountain with its sheer drop to one side. Reaching the *Bulga* meant we were close. But only when we got to the bridge had we truly arrived. The bridge meant we were home. The river itself was a fluid boundary, crystalline on hot days, but also something to be wary of. In flood it was like a placid beast claiming control, covering the bridge and keeping us in or out. *The Bridge* is my way of making peace with my feelings of connection and loss around the place that was my first home, formative but no longer mine. I am lucky to be able to return and swim in the river and walk up the hill through the forest.

Chop wood, carry water is a reflection on my dad who spent his life coming to terms with being human. He reduced his impact on the planet by being minimal in everything he did. He consumed little. He didn't participate in fads. He rarely bought new clothes, wearing a uniform of blue cotton. He ate a spartan vegetarian diet. He walked unless there was a need for the Land Rover. He bought food in bulk. He worked hard at reducing his karma. The need to 'chop wood' and 'carry water', metaphorically speaking, is part of being human, whatever the individual journey. Back to basics. Preparing a meal by first chopping kindling. Or collecting water and starting a fire every time you want tea. This work also reflects on the beginnings of *Elands*. Dad's searching. Maps. Aerial photos of the land. And his thoughts. Letters to his family in the USA. Warnings. Musings.

Rilka Oakley is an artist and curator at Blue Mountains City Art Gallery in Katoomba whose practice explores photographic archives, family and memory.

LEIGH REDHEAD

Whose noir?

Ten years ago, I read a novel that was partly set in the 1970s, in an alternative community in rural NSW. Having grown up in Elands, I was eager to see the Australian version of the 'hippy' experience finally fictionalised. However, the scenes set in the alternative community were disappointing. Most of the characters seemed to live a utopian existence of blissful spirituality and endless drumming circles. They shared everything and cared for each other as well as the environment. When one of the characters transgressed from this ideal and was violent towards a woman, he was quickly banished, and idyllic equilibrium was restored.

This was a far cry from the real-life community that I knew. While there were many positive aspects to the alternative lifestyle in the 1970s and early 1980s, such as social freedom, creativity, environmental and political action, self-sufficiency, sustainability and a close-knit community – there was also a negative side. Personality clashes and relationship breakdowns were widespread, as was drug abuse, untreated mental illness, domestic violence and incidents of child sexual abuse and neglect.

After a decade of writing detective novels with happy (feminist, Marxist) endings, I was keen to create a noir novel in the tradition of Patricia Highsmith, James M Cain, Jim Thompson, and, more recently, Vikki Hendricks, Megan Abbott and Scott Smith. Noir fiction does not usually mimic the stylistic elements of noir film ('40s detectives, venetian blinds, rainswept, neon lit streets) but it does share thematic preoccupations: fate, unbelonging, obsession, moral transgression, self-destruction, and the eventual fall into the abyss. The so-called 'good guys' lose and the sociopath wins.

I decided that an Australian alternative community in the 1980s, when the bad behaviour increased along with the price of marijuana, was the perfect setting for a rural noir novel in which the community ends up mirroring the corrupt urban (yuppie) society they escaped from, descending into greed, paranoia, violence, drug abuse, sexual exploitation and murder. As Kyle, one of the characters in my forthcoming novel *Cleave for me* puts it: "For a bunch of so-called hippies, there wasn't a hell of a lot of peace and love around."

Dr Leigh Redhead is the author of the award-winning Simone Kirsch crime series.

Opposite | Leigh Redhead *Cleave for me* [book trailer still] 2021

ROCK OF AGES...



CLEAVE FOR ME



COMPLETE LIST OF WORKS

FIRST GENERATION ARTISTS

Angela Beaumont

Duncan's Mill 1979
acrylic on canvas
67.5 x 72.5

-

River in the valley c1979
acrylic on canvas
76.5 x 92.5

-

Elands in winter (Myola) c1990
acrylic on canvas
77.5 x 93

Jenny Hooper

Valley painting 1973
enamel on board
84 x 105.5

-

Landscape 1983
acrylic on board
87 x 122

-

Waterfall pool in flood 1991
acrylic on board
62.5 x 93.2

Suey McEnnally

Threat or rescue, Blue Knob c1998
oil pastel on cotton rag paper
78 x 97
private collection

-

Elands hillside c1998
oil pastel on cotton rag paper
75 x 85
collection: Greg Hall & Susie Russell

Russell Page

Rockfall c1985
oil on canvas
111 x 129.5

-

Split tree c1985
oil on canvas
122 x 119

Rick Reynolds

Riverbend, Ellenborough Valley 1997
oil on canvas
54 x 79.5

-

Ellenborough Falls after rain c1998
oil on canvas
91.5 x 66

-

The Falls banner / stageset c1990
acrylic on cotton sheet
220 x 510 (irreg.)

Jen Short

Untitled 1989
acrylic on canvas
89.5 x 134.5

-

Black cockatoos c1990
acrylic on cardboard, string, bush
sticks, 5 pieces each 50 x 53 irreg.
courtesy of the artist's estate

Julie Slavin

Storm coming, Bulga village 1990
oil on canvas
54 x 80

SECOND GENERATION ARTISTS

Alison Bennett & Una Rey

Elands Food Co-op 2020
photogrammetry point cloud



-

The Barn 2021
photogrammetry point cloud,



-

Alison Bennett & Julie Slavin

The Supper Room 2021
photogrammetry point cloud



-

The Doyles Studio 2021
photogrammetry point cloud



-

Alison Bennett & Chris Sheed

The Falls 2021
photogrammetry model



Juliet Lamont

BEAST 2021
video, 6 mins
cinematography:
Josh Raymond & Bonnie Faulkner

Rilka Oakley

The Bridge 2021
video, repurposed wood
dimensions variable
video editor:
Ramana Dienes-Browning

-

Chop wood, carry water 2021
archival photos, milking bucket,
firewood, video
dimensions variable

Leigh Redhead

Cleave for me 2021
video 3 mins
(book trailer in graphic novel style)
video editor:
Tony Redhead

Una Rey

*The Falls, Sunday morning,
7 March '21* 2021
photographic print

*All works courtesy of the artists unless
otherwise stated*



Rilka Oakley *Chop wood, carry water* [detail] 2021

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We pay our deepest respects to the Biripi and Worimi people whose country we love in and around Elands, and we acknowledge the Awabakal and Worimi custodians of the land where The Lock-Up now stands.

