Coming to Ground by Bette Mifsud
15 June – 28 August 2009
University of Western Sydney Art Gallery

Virtual environment by Dr Hilary Rhodes
Coming to Ground by Bette Mifsud
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This exhibition features the diorama and visualizations of an environmental place-specific artwork entitled Coming to Ground, within a body of related landscape artworks that led to its conception. The exhibition is designed as a chronological installation beginning at the left hand side entrance of the upper gallery level and concluding at the lower ground floor diorama.

The full-scale artwork, proposed for Western Sydney, is to be comprised of a native garden of local endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland vegetation, a tree grove and three architectural structures of stone, steel and glass oriented to the cardinal points, surrounded by interconnected circular paths and trees. The work’s proportions are determined by Golden Section geometry. Its ground plan is a mandala with a central yantra.

Coming to Ground began its long incubation in my early life as a first generation Maltese-Australian while working family market gardens on traditional Dharug land in North Western Sydney between 1963-1981, followed by a 25-year visual art practice. Aspects of it appeared in different artworks over time, and converged during two years’ intensive practice-led creative doctorate research at the University of Western Sydney. It is informed by climate change science, eco-feminism, eco-philosophy, eco-psychology, ancient cosmologies, sacred architecture, connective aesthetics and contemporary environmental art, local native botany, local indigenous heritage and non-indigenous history. My work focused on the psychological source of anthropogenic climate change and biosphere degradation, and funneled into this artistic contribution to their remedy.

Ecopsychologists see the human psyche as an integral part of the living world. Its state is mirrored in the state of the ecosphere. Contemporary unsustainable urban landscapes largely reflect a dismembering industrialized consumer consciousness. By contrast, many ancient traditional cultural ecologies are necessarily holistic and sustainable. Coming to Ground is intended as a reconstructive environmental artwork representing a return of holistic cosmological knowledge and unifying symbolism to the Western Sydney transcultural landscape.

The mandala, while widely recognised as an Indian cultural form, is a universal idea, known by many names and embodied in numerous spiritual philosophies. It functions as an integrative device by means of transformation of consciousness (or layers of meaning). From the chaotic outer to the harmonised inner sanctum of the mandala lies a journey toward greater integration and integrity. However, this journey requires crossing a bridge between poetry and pragmatism; philosophy and practice; heaven and earth, in a yin-yang style embrace. This entails “the understanding of the inseparability of knowledge and action”; of heart and mind. (Dellios, 1996: 1–20)

The specific reconstructive purposes of this artwork are to: acknowledge the history that formed Western Sydney’s transcultural geography; symbolically embody a gathering of local diverse cultures; encourage the development of a holistic ecological consciousness in the region; create a living metaphor of positive transformations over time; present connections between, and integration of, human and non-human creativity by way of the native garden; offer a welcoming landmark and a contemplative sanctuary that is integrated within its surroundings; return endangered native woodland vegetation to the Cumberland Plain.

The title, Coming to Ground (seen at www.bette-mifsud-artist.com.au), originated in Dr Martin Thomas’s room note for the exhibition of my landscape mural, Fugitive Ground, 2002:

In crafting a tableau from frozen photographic moments, from scenes that we can behold but never possess, the artist refers to an unresolved history of territorial seizure, expressing the disconnectedness of a migrant culture which has yet to come to ground.

This ‘migrant’ disconnection is evident in a number of artworks, including my Homage to Caspar David Friedrich (2005), a digital montage of my Katoomba garden on a misty day and two trees from the painting The Avenue Middelharnis (1889) by Meyndert Hobbema. The two European trees were severed from their original culture and hover above the living native Australian landscape.

Front cover: Bette Mifsud: Coming to Ground, 2009, environmental artwork for Western Sydney, native garden, stone, steel, glass, 26 m diameter.
We culture the landscape and the landscape cultures us. A garden is more than a place to grow food or flowers. It is an ageless communion with land, soil, elements, seasons and cosmos.

In the native garden we can cultivate a sustainable grounding communion with indigenous ecologies.

**Bette Mifsud, June 2009**

**References:**
Thomas, M, 2004 “A Spatial Tapestry”, Room Note for *Fugitive Ground*, Penrith Regional Gallery and Lewers’ Bequest.

**List of Works** (Works may be purchased directly from the artist, contact: (02) 4782 3151)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Size cm</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Price $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Harbour shards, Sea Level prop.</td>
<td></td>
<td>(in vitrine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Landmarks Watermarks 1</em></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Colour photograph</td>
<td>109 x 127</td>
<td>unique</td>
<td>1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Landmarks Watermarks 2</em></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Colour photograph</td>
<td>109 x 127</td>
<td>unique</td>
<td>NFS</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Symbolon</em></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Colour photograph clay vessel</td>
<td>109 x 127</td>
<td>unique</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Homage to Caspar David Friedrich</em></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Pigment print on canvas</td>
<td>120 x 76</td>
<td>3 of 5</td>
<td>2,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Look Out 1 (Echo Point)</em></td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Pigment print framed</td>
<td>95 x 130</td>
<td>3 of 5</td>
<td>2,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Untitled (shift)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Pigment print framed</td>
<td>54 x 85</td>
<td>1 of 5</td>
<td>900</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Fugitive Ground (small copy)</em></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Pigment print mounted on polycarbonate and face laminated</td>
<td>34 x 700</td>
<td>3 of 4</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Threshold</em> (installation maquette)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Transparencies on clear acrylic, wood</td>
<td>20 x 29 x 30</td>
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<td>NFS</td>
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**Lower Gallery**

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<th>Size cm</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Price $</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td><em>Human Nature</em></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Digital print framed</td>
<td>60 x 70</td>
<td>1 of 5</td>
<td>1,100</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td><em>Green House Effect</em></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Digital print framed</td>
<td>55 x 97</td>
<td>1 of 5</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td><em>Cathedral</em></td>
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<td>148 x 100</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td><em>Coming to Ground</em> (diorama)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>mixed media</td>
<td>85 x 160</td>
<td>unique</td>
<td>POA</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td><em>Coming to Ground</em> working pic*</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>98 x 37</td>
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<td><em>Coming to Ground</em> working pic*</td>
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<td>Digital print</td>
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This exhibition was supported by the University of Western Sydney Art Collection, Office of University Engagement.
Bette Mifsud  Born: Sydney, Australia

Education:
2007-10  University of Western Sydney,
Doctorate of Creative Arts scholar.
1996  University of NSW College Fine Arts, Master of Fine Arts
(First Class Honours).
1982-84  Sydney College of the Arts, Bachelor of Visual Arts.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:
2009  Place and Time, Event Horizon Gallery, Katoomba NSW
2005  Fugitive Ground, Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney.
2004  Fugitive Ground, Penrith Regional Gallery & Lewers Bequest, Sydney.
2001  The Living Room, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne.
1996  Landmarks Watermarks, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.
After Life, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.
Landmarks Watermarks II, National Museum of Fine Art, Malta.
1990  Mute, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.
1988/89  Hallucinations and Other Facts, Artspace, Sydney; Contemporary Art Centre of S.A.

Selected Group Exhibitions:
2006  Olive Cotton Photographic Portrait Award, Tweed River Gallery
Australian Photographic Portrait Prize, Art Gallery of NSW.
Josephine Ulrick & Win Schubert Photography Award, Gold Coast City Gallery.
2005  Olive Cotton Photographic Portrait Award, Tweed River Gallery, NSW
The Phoenix Prize for Spiritual Art, Canberra School of Art Gallery, ANU.
Western Front, Blacktown Arts Centre, NSW.
2004  Australian Photographic Portrait Award, Art Gallery of NSW,
UR in E.U, Herman Black Gallery, University of Sydney.
2003  Hazelhurst Art Award for Art on Paper, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery.
1999  KunstRAI International Art Fair, Amsterdam.
1998  Alice Prize Araluen Centre for Arts and Entertainment, Alice Springs.
1996  Monash University Art Prize Exhibition, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne.
1990  Tokyo Connection, Heineken Village, Tokyo.
1988  Site of Execution, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.
1985  The Lady Fairfax Prize photography exhibition, Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Selected Bibliography:
2004  M. Thomas, “A Spatial Tapestry”, Penrith Regional Gallery, Room Note.
1996  B. Mifsud, Unseen, MFA thesis, University of NSW COFA.
1995  Z. Stanhope, Journal of Contemporary Visual Art (Globe), Vol 1/1,
Photopgnic Papers Continuum, 6.
1988  A. Weston, Review, Broadsheet, Contemporary Arts Centre
of S.A., February issue.
1986  J. McDonald, Sydney Morning Herald, 21 February; Various Artists Ltd publication.

Art Industry/Education Appointments:
2004-06  Teacher in Photography University of Sydney Union.
1998-04  Lecturer in Visual Arts, University of Western Sydney.
1999-  Teacher in Fine Arts (Photography) Western Sydney Institute, Nepean,
1991-96  Lecturer in Photography,University of Sydney.
1998  Assistant Curator, Open Museum Sculpture Walk, City of Sydney.
1989  Administrator, Artspace, Sydney.
1985-88  Administrator, Assistant Curator, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.

Awards
2007  Australian Post Graduate Award
2006  Marketing Grant, National Association for Visual Arts.
2003  Hazelhurst Art Award, Major Prize.
2002  Inaugural NSW Ministry for the Arts Western Sydney Artist Fellowship.
1997  Blue Mountains Art Prize1997 (Photography).
1989  Project Grant, Australian Network for Art and Technology.
1988  Australia Council Tokyo Studio Residency,

Collections
Art Bank, Art Gallery of NSW, National Museum of Fine Art Malta,