

Ross Annels and Dr Tamsin Kerr

Memory Keepers, Map Makers, and Material Thinkers: the Sustained Offerings of Craft Objects

URL link: www.rossannels.com

This presentation draws upon the landscape memoir work of intellectual Tamsin Kerr and the eco-regionalism of fine furniture designer/maker, Ross Annels. It brings together an emerging body of theory around the arts and environment from Australia with a contemporary place-based craft practice. Becoming more native to place is a deeper eco-regionalism, both multi-cultural and more-than-human, that remembers the past and shapes our future. This is how natural materials think, exposing the language of place.

The cultural amnesia generated by the excess of meaningless stuff is reflected in the consequent state of the world. We live in the rubbish of our throw-away mentality. The practice of craft changes how we live in the world, reconnects us with nature through the materials we use, offers a slower appreciation of things, and models non-mediated creative activity. But craft objects also have a deeper, educative role; they act as everyday symbolic teachers of a more materially aware world. They hold the memory of elders within the framework of ceremonial time, collapsing past, present, and future with slow observance. They are maps of cultural emotion, taking the measure of each eco-regional community. And they shape intellectual thinking in their making and their presence.

Paul Carter in his book *Material Thinking* suggests our best ideas may evolve through manual and material practice. The making of craft objects and their consequent everyday use might teach us to think more deeply about our eco-regional places and elicit new ideas. One such example is Ross' chair, *Gnutheru*. In attempting to express the complicated white/ Indigenous relationships across his ecoregion, Ross found that the local silky oak (or Australian lacewood) chair became teacher. The object showed the power of true reconciliation, of cross-cultural connection to country. In its crafting and its material thinking, the chair has captured the landscape memoir. Through both its darkness and its light, *Gnutheru* points the way to a deeper, more embedded, love of place, accessible to all. Likewise, Ross' table, *Ripples in Country* reflects the landscape that he inhabits and begins to express this love in a craft object used in the domestic everyday.

This is the potential and the potency of both artisan and natural resource: to teach the memory of elders, to map out more sustainable lifestyles, and to speak the material's voice. Here is how we might use the everyday of craft objects to reconnect with an expanded conception of the world. By adding the depth of cross-cultural understandings of environment and place, we live a richer connection to country. Craft draws down our gaze to more human scale change, uplifting regional identity along with (self)sustainable cultural models. Herein lies the power of craft.