

# **Future Remains**

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# Future Remains

*Future Remains* presents seven women designers and makers at the forefront of contemporary woodworking. The exhibition shares the diverse perspectives and approaches to the art of woodworking across furniture, sculpture, and jewellery, and highlights the profound skill and material understanding of these makers. Alongside an intrinsic respect for timbers' materiality, each maker presents a determination to carry forward their craft through innovative and expressive design.

Centring women woodworkers in a discipline historically dominated by men, the exhibition also makes a statement: to make visible the work of women designers and makers and build a more sustainable, equitable and inclusive future.



What can seven contemporary women makers, each working with wood, tell us about understanding this medium and its future: to thoughtfully follow a grain, to feel the tactility, to learn the required doses of care and inventiveness, to know the vast personal, ecological and collective histories within? Wood is at once a creative force, a precious resource, and a literal support in our lives.

The craft of woodworking has trickled through four generations of my family, and for me sits most memorably with my mother. With the histories of industrialism and modernism flowing into the domestic realm of furniture and home objects, and with tired arms but tender affection, we'd restore and transform various wooden items in a nexus of care, craft, resourcefulness, design, art and female relations—and it's these interrelations that are foundational to *Future Remains*.

In what is a typically male-dominated field, here are seven women makers presenting their wood-based objects with differing

and reciprocal approaches—all across conceptual, material, ecological, aesthetic and utilitarian spheres. The skill is profound, but the rendering of ideas into formal objects goes beyond skill itself; this exhibition centres the visibility of women makers in Australia, alongside the desire—the mission—to actualise a more inclusive and sustainable world.

While there is little critical history of women in Australia working with wood to draw upon, two highly established women makers who've been practicing with the material for decades are both Hobart-based: Linda Fredheim and Laura McCusker. Fredheim, a designer-maker with a three-decade practice, is presenting work with a history one wouldn't necessarily suspect: Bauhaus. While looking through a student book from the movement, Fredheim was intrigued to learn that certain colours were associated with certain forms, and this sparked an idea to create a series of wooden handbags. Evoking a refined use of geometric and industrial aesthetics, and a penchant for drawers and openings, these



Anke Kindle, Studio. Photographer: Lauren Bamford

handbags are made from wood, rubber and neoprene fabric. Produced from Tasmanian Blackwood, they are also a demonstration of resourcefulness and ingenuity, created from the scrap materials of prior projects.

Meanwhile McCusker's over two-decade practice in design and furniture making—with a renowned use of clean lines and mid-century influences—sees the artist exhibiting a dining table that's unnervingly stunning in its use of line and juxtaposition of wood grain. Beyond the utilitarian, McCusker, like each artist in this exhibition, is interested in elevating the medium of wood to draw uninterrupted attention to its qualities and form. Within this is a precise attention to specificity of wood: Tasmanian Oak might be the larger label, but McCusker notes how this is a reductive umbrella term that actually encompasses up to five different eucalypt species. Furthermore, the term oak misleadingly suggests the introduced European species—and indeed it's actually subtle varieties of eucalypt which are found in McCusker's table.

This consideration of form is likewise a characteristic of Alexandra Pontonio's flawless furniture designs. The Melbourne-based maker challenges the form of wood, while still showing a clear devotion to the medium, and is exhibiting a biplane sideboard and a bookcase. Both are produced via a clever yet harmonious use of line, with the cabinet crafted from American White Ash and Yellow Linen—the former for its lightness, the later for its richness. In particular, American Ash is important to the artist's practice: while the wood is common in many everyday objects, it has also been listed as an endangered species. This is owed to the accidental introduction of the Emerald Ash Borer Beetle into the United States, which can kill an entire Ash forest in six years—in a bid to slow infestation, some trees were prematurely felled, and these are the trees Pontonio resourcefully creates from.

What now begins to emerge across *Future Remains* is a rejection of fast furniture trends and unethical sourcing, instead favouring objects of longevity and sustainability—and



a focus on the enduring nature of wood is pivotal to Chi Yusuf's practice. A fine furniture maker based in Sydney, Yusuf takes a clear influence from mid-century modern design and envisions wood as a sculptural object. In dedication to beauty, Yusuf has crafted a vanity desk and accompanying stool in American Walnut, with a subtle use of leather and ebony—it is stylish and practical.

From the west coast of Australia comes Freemantle-based artist and designer Olive Gill-Hille. Gill-Hille brings to *Future Remains* her sculptural background, entwining abstraction with practical objects. The artist often creates with attention to the human form and uses timbers from her local context. This gives not only a site-based element to her work, but also an environmental factor—as her materials are locally sourced, they produce a low carbon footprint (a concern for many in this show). Creating a sculptural form and a coffee table, both are rendered in exquisitely crafted curves, subtly evoking not only a feminine form, but almost metaphorically evoking landscape itself. Gill-Hille has used Margaret River Fallen Salvaged Marri—sourced ethically from a dying tree on a family friend's farm.

Such concern for nature is reflected in Anke Kindle's work. A maker deeply invested in the natural environment, Kindle is the founder of studio blau., a jewellery and object design workshop based in Melbourne. With a background in furniture making, Kindle's relationships with certain environments influences her practice. Creating from woods including Tasmanian Huon Pine, River Red Gum and Buckland Walnut (each chosen for their unique histories), Kindle exhibits *The Nipple Brush Brooches*—wearable brushworks, where the brush functions as a political symbol of women's work. The wood element of the brooches highlights the material's growth rings, emphasising age and transformation over time: the brooches evoke the living quality of wood, to be worn on a living body.

This metamorphic capacity of wood—how it relates to time, death and life—is integral to Makiko Ryuji's work, a Melbourne-based woodturner and photographer whose practice draws upon her Japanese heritage. Ryuji is exhibiting a series of works, titled *LOOP*, which draw upon the Tōrō (Japanese lantern). In Buddhist cosmology the light from the Tōrō guides the souls of the deceased, with the Tōrō now commonly found in many Japanese gardens. Ryuji poetically captures this spiritual resonance in her sculptural totem pieces, which are created from red gum wood, known for its imperfections and fragility. These totems are then burned, linking to Ryuji's experience of Otakiage, a Japanese cultural burning ceremony—like a ritual bonfire—that acts as a collective rebirth. The burning also transcends human manipulation of the wood, allowing the effects of nature to deliver astonishing, blackened sculptures.

In an exhibition of deeply thoughtful objects, each maker works both within and beyond their chosen wood. Yet what lingers is the empathy each artist brings to the medium—the ethical and aesthetic care they show toward a material that's often been bent to the will of unnerving human advancement. Working in care and reciprocity with wood, these makers cause us to consider nature, sustainability and beauty in their vastness. It is a reflection of women in Australia working with wood at this time, and makes me think of my own creative relationships with women surrounding this medium—of a mother and daughter covered in saw dust on a Sunday afternoon.

### Tiarney Miekus



## /Alexsandra Pontonio

*The Biplane Sideboard is a study in 'lightness'. Referencing box kites, biplanes and objects that float, the sideboard features vertical parallel struts, lightweight fabric sails and long, horizontal planes. However, unlike its flying counterparts, the sideboard's resolve lands as a functional furniture object - a storage vessel. Made using both traditional and modern woodworking techniques, the sculptural elements of the sideboard are as tactile as they are usable, and a continuous timber grain runs from handle to leg. The American White Ash offers a shimmering, wide-grained and coarsely textured surface. Sadly, this timber is threatened by the invasive Emerald Ash Borer Beetle. Their larvae feed on the phloem (inner bark) tissues and have the potential to kill an entire forest of Ash within six years of infestation. To both protect the uninfected population of the tree and preserve timber stocks, many Ash forests have been prematurely felled. With the species' future uncertainty, I choose to preserve this felled timber in the form of furniture, admire its beauty and enjoy its working properties.*

Alexsandra Pontonio is an award-winning Naarm/Melbourne-based furniture maker and designer. She creates bespoke pieces that are contemporary in design with a sensitivity to traditional woodcraft. Working predominately with wood, her practice is underpinned by a deep respect for material; she seeks to work with timbers' intrinsic material tactility. Pontonio graduated with an Associate Degree in Design (Furniture) from RMIT University in 2015 after which she was recipient of the Future Leader's prize in Craft Victoria's 2016 Fresh! exhibition, the VIVID Design Award, and the Tait Award for Design Innovation at Fringe Furniture. Recent exhibitions include David Clark's 'At Home -Modern Australian Design', Government House, Sydney, and the Salone Satellite, Milan.



## / **Anke** Kindle

*The Nipple Brush Brooches is a series of wearable brushworks that explore the preciousness of timber and the notion of the brush as a political object symbolising women's work. The timbers for this series were carefully selected for their embodiment of climate and story, as well as their working properties on the lathe. Huon Pine is a slow growing timber found in the wettest parts of Tasmania and features tight growth rings depicting each season. Exploited by early settlers and shipped to England as building material, it is now as rare and precious as gold. Macrocarpa was planted in paddocks by the early settlers as shelter for livestock and has been coined the 'poor man's Huon'. It displays a unique texture akin to skin. River Red Gum lines the banks of the Murray River and features heartwood as red as blood. The piece I have used was saved from a demolition site and displays nail holes like wounds. The Buckland Walnut came from an orchard plantation left behind in a valley, forgotten by the spoils of the gold rush. It's surface ripples and glimmers like water. Each timber section tells its own story, a story as precious as jewels.*

Anke Kindle is a German-born jeweller and object designer based in Naarm/Melbourne. Through her practice, she explores the meaning and stories of inanimate objects, particularly rituals and objects within the domestic realm. Having grown up in Germany's Black Forest, her contemporary wearables and commissioned pieces are steeped in European craft tradition. Kindle has researched ideas and methodologies that cross boundaries between fine art, craft, sculpture, and design, and has completed a Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) in Furniture Design at the University of Tasmania, 2001, and an Advanced Diploma in Jewellery Design at Melbourne Polytechnic, 2019.

*Nipple Brush Brooches* 2021, River Red Gum, Huon Pine, Macrocarpa, Buckland Walnut, sterling silver, white horsehair, dimensions variable. Photographer: Sarah Weston



## / **Chi** Yusuf

*The Daily Rituals table and stool is dedicated to sitting in the presence of oneself and confidently asserting one's place in the world. Taking the form of a vanity table, a furniture piece traditionally used by women, the piece celebrates the breaking of traditional expectations placed upon a woman's hands; the soft curves of echoed circles are contrasted by a sharp waterfall edge, and structurally reinforced by the compartment that holds things closest to our heart. Made from American Walnut, the installation features mitre joinery with an ebony inlay. Black leather lines the drawers and the legs have been hand-turned on the lathe. The matching leather upholstered stool mirrors the anatomy of the table.*

Chi Yusuf is a fine furniture maker based in Warrang/Sydney. Yusuf creates bespoke pieces that harmonise precision joinery with intuitively hand-shaped timber. Taking strong cues from mid-century modern design, she combines simple functionality with elements of sculptural expression to create enduring pieces. After exploring careers across the design sector, her heart has found its home covered in sawdust and her hands crafting

objects that elevate our everyday experiences. Yusuf is a graduate of the Sturt School for Wood and was recipient of the 'Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre's 2020 Emerging Artist Award'. She recently exhibited in Craft ACT's 'Emerging Contemporaries' exhibition and 'HOME:MADE' as part of Design Canberra.

*Daily Rituals* 2021, American Walnut, leather and ebony, dimensions variable. Photographer: Chi Yusuf





## / **Laura McCusker**

*My furniture is designed to be taken for granted. To be loved and neglected in a familiar way. Form follows function, but there is delight in the detail and materiality. There is a concrete overpass along the highway at Cornelian Bay that I pass every day on my way to work. It is beautiful and yet I suspect I am the only one who notices. In Overpass, the simplicity of form belies the complexity of the structure. The top is held in place and braced against the subframe by the edge detail which acts as dovetail. The tapered legs locate the top and lock it in on the horizontal plane. The natural, seasonal movement of timber has been allowed for with the express join that runs through the centre. This also visually 'lightens' the table as glimpses of light and shade dynamically play along the negative space as you move around the table. The result is a table that looks simple and light, and yet is self-supporting and stable.*

Laura McCusker is an award-winning furniture designer and maker based in Nipaluna/Hobart. Her designs are recognisable by their clean aesthetic and mid-century influences. With a practice spanning over 20 years, McCusker has a

pragmatic and creative approach to problem-solving, and is known for her technical skill and precision. She is well established both locally and internationally and is represented in US, UK, and European collections. Recent commissions include the Hobart City Council, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and MONA. Art collector and businessman, David Walsh describes McCusker as his 'furniture designer of choice'. McCusker is an educator and strong advocate for the visual art, design, and contemporary craft sector in Tasmania. She has exhibited nationally and currently has work in the Australian Design Centre's touring exhibition, 'Obsessed: Compelled to make'.



## / **Linda Fredheim**

*There is something special about opening a box, case, cabinet, or drawer and discovering what's hidden inside. I am fascinated by how we use these objects to create a sense of order. The designs for these five handbags were inspired by the form and colour exercises undertaken by students in the Bauhaus introductory course. I envisaged a series of strong, geometric objects each with a minimalist and industrial feel, and chose materials not typically used for bags – Tasmanian Blackwood offcuts, rubber and colourful neoprene fabric. I started the designs at my bench using just a ruler, protractor, compass, and pencil to make a series of cardboard and paper prototypes. Slowly, through trial and error, I refined the shapes and mechanisms, balancing the need for functionality against my desire for a visually simple form.*

Linda Fredheim is an established furniture maker and designer based in Nipaluna/Hobart. Working predominantly with timber, she is interested in the function, form and associations of storage and collecting, and is particularly intrigued by Japanese Tansu and European Campaign furniture. "I aim to

design and make furniture pieces that have a quiet presence, objects that don't demand attention, but invite interaction...that ask to be opened and explored.' Fredheim graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Design in Wood) from the University of Tasmania in 1992. She has exhibited widely and undertakes both furniture commissions, collaborative projects with other artists and small production runs of bespoke packaging. Fredheim shares her studio workshop in North-Hobart with partner, Stuart Houghton.



## / **Makiko** Ryujin

*LOOP is a series of wood-turned sculptures inspired by Tōrō; traditional Japanese lanterns found in Buddhist temples. The light of the Tōrō was thought to illuminate paths and guide the souls of the deceased towards peace. Significant to the lantern was its structure and the embodiment of the five elements of Buddhist cosmology: chi (earth), sui (water), ka (fire), fū (air) and kū (void or spirit). Together the segments expressed the idea that after death our physical bodies would return to their elemental form. Nowadays, most Tōrō are used as decorative objects in Japanese gardens, and although they may no longer guide souls, they continue to carry a spiritual presence and encourage reflection. In this series, I have used the lathe and fire to transform discarded timbers and give them new meanings - a sculptural reincarnation - reflecting on cyclical themes of time, space, death, and life.*

Makiko Ryujin is a Naarm/Melbourne-based artist and woodturner working with discarded timber to create sculptural objects, vessels, installations, and lighting. Her practice is informed by her Japanese heritage and draws on the cultural burning ritual, 'Otakiage'

- a tradition she observed as a child. The ceremony is rich in symbolism and acts as a collective demarcation of time with the opportunity for plans to be reborn. For the artist, including this burning element in her practice allows her to work alongside and embrace fire's transformative nature. 'The fire assists the wood in transcending beyond what an artist can do and pulls nature back into the creative process.' Ryujin completed a Bachelor of Fine Art (Photography) at RMIT before studying woodworking with mentor Carl Lutz. Ryujin has exhibited locally and internationally and is found in both public and private collections. Ryujin recently collaborated with Michael Gittings on a piece commissioned by the NGV and presented in the 2021 Triennial exhibition.

*LOOP* (detail) 2021, River Red Gum, dimensions variable. Photographer: Makiko Ryujin



## / **Olive** Gill-Hille

*The Kilcarnup Coffee Table is sculpted from fallen Marri trees salvaged from farms in the Margaret River region in Western Australia. The table is significant to place in both material and form; Marri is a eucalyptus exclusive to the South-West region of Australia, while the object's silhouette references surrounding geography and landforms. Working with Marri in its unruly, solid-state is physically involving and specialised woodcarving tools and techniques were used to manipulate and sculpt the material. The coffee tables' form suggests the Margaret River coastline and the striking limestone rock formations found along Kilcarnup beach - a location of personal sentimental value and a source of creative inspiration. A significant aspect of my practice involves working with local timbers that enable me to minimise my carbon footprint, and take a stand against deforestation of old-growth forests*

Olive Gill-Hille is a Boorloo/Perth-based multidisciplinary artist and designer. Working with ethically sourced solid timber, she creates both functional and sculptural pieces that are distinctively expressive in form. Gill-Hille seeks to transform furniture's

perceived static nature by creating engaging and experimental works that draw reference from the natural environment and the human figure. Gill-Hille holds a Bachelor of Fine Art (Sculpture) from the Victorian College of the Arts and an Associate Degree in Design (Furniture), RMIT. She works out of her studio workshop in Fremantle, WA and is exclusively represented by Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney. Gill-Hille has exhibited nationally and has an upcoming solo exhibition in 2021.

*Kilcarnup Coffee Table* 2021, salvaged fallen Margaret River Marri, 1200 × 600 × 450 mm approx. Photographer: Olive Gill-Hille



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