

Mandy Quadrio



Beyond Misty Histories

Constance ARI works across Country cared for by the Palawa / pakana of lutruwita,
and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country
throughout the country now called Australia,
as well as First Nations people from elsewhere, and their deep connection
to the lands, skies and waterways over which sovereignty was never ceded.

We pay our respect to all Elders;

We are grateful for their continued sharing of knowledge and Culture.

Mandy Quadrio: Beyond misty histories
28-30 January 2022

Emily Wakeling

Mandy Quadrio is a Meanjin/Brisbane-based Palawa (Trawlwoolway) artist whose masterful use of organic and inorganic materials, often combined, lead to both a tender and harsh truth-telling of the artist's story in the multi-piece installation *Beyond misty histories*.

Occupying the entire nivaluna / Hobart Town Hall Underground space, Quadrio has created a site-specific work using fine steel, in the form of mesh or even finer 'wool.' This material is a cleaning tool familiar to generations of Indigenous women who served in white Australians' households.

Quadrio's installation centres the artist's many female relatives who worked in domestic servitude. The artist chooses steel mesh because these women, ascribed the daily chores of scrubbing clean dishes and floors, lived within an Australian narrative that considered Indigenous women's skin and features

a liability best "scrubbed out." In the artist's word, the material is "enmeshed in my history."

In Quadrio's work, steel mesh is teased out and re-shaped to open up the netting. This allows viewers to literally see beyond its transparent composition, just as the artist lives beyond the heavy legacies of domestic labour and its accompanying colonial narratives characterised by erasure and denial. Suspended from the ceiling like a curtain, with nests and nooks woven throughout, the mesh at one area is pulled taut to the floor, "to anchor my stories" in the words of the artist.

At the same time as negating the mesh's function as a cleaning tool, Quadrio is also interested in the steel fibres' ability to "incise and open shared wounds." The artist includes two self-portraits emerging out of a veiled foreground of steel mesh. The wiry layer, standing in for a painful past and erasure of truth, only partially hides the face of a proud Palawa woman, looking defiantly forward.

From an Australian colonial context, the term 'black velvet' is a euphemism that fetishises Indigenous women's bodies in the eyes of white Australians, and its role in the sexual subjugation of Indigenous women is one that Quadrio's practice chooses to address through the namesake material. Her manipulation of the extremely sensuous and warm textile into unmistakably vaginal shapes cuts through any polite white pretense.

Nestled deep within the black velvet are leathery labial folds. In bull kelp (*Durvillaea potatorum*), Quadrio channels the continued ancestral practice of drying and shaping a highly valued marine fibre within her ancestral Countries, which stretch over coastal lines in northeast and eastern lutruwita / Tasmania. The artist's traditional kelp leathering technique channels a pre-colonial tradition, passed down through her maternal line. As a hardy, watertight fibre, cured kelp has served to carry water. Quadrio's kelp, meanwhile, is shaped into a vessel designed not to carry water but human life.

Together, these "shadowy fibres," to use the artist's description of her artistic materials, weave together stories of Palawa women's presence and resilience "through and beyond historic woundings."

Emily Wakeling is a Queensland-based curator and art writer at Artspace Mackay, Yuwi country.





Dried Kelp
for Mandy Quadrio

If you know kelp, you are familiar with the strength of this silent armour

that as it dries on land, cut from its cord and saline mother
it shrinks

ever better to convey water for thirsty lips, days of walking away

If you know kelp you understand that in its shrinking it bends to its own want

that kelp teaches you, not the other way around
that fingers stroke, cede, and yield power to its firming body
that we rely on kelp, not the other way around

If you are welcomed close enough, you should close your eyes and smell her:

kelp's mother, salted, pungent, heady

that the lip and opening of her is only ever a line away
that this is an island, and while there may still be coasts
she will be here after

contraction occurs without dilation for millennia

accepting to not know, to only feel the ocean's mother

and that greatest grandmothers live well beyond our years
that they nudge us like the tide
and like drying kelp, re-configure

Neika Lehman, Jan 2022



con
sta
nce

MONA  FOMA

 SUPPORTED BY
Tasmanian
Government

