

LOUISE SAXTON – *Savage*

6 - 20th September 2009



Elsie Gallery, Malmsbury Victoria

LOUISE SAXTON – *Salvage*

Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia 2006

Iridescent dragonflies hover above white lotus flowers, which bloom and decay daily in the ornamental ponds outside my studio. Prayers from the local mosque are disrupted by a chorus of barking dogs and motorbikes in the morning, and by screeching monkeys and insects in the evening. A tiny bat nests on the high wall of my guest-room balcony.

The exotic garden residency at Rimbun Dahan, half an hour north of Kuala Lumpur and my home for one month in 2006, first inspired this body of work. Made from the cast-off needlework of others, it extends my ongoing interest in reclaiming the detritus of the home for art.

Elsie Gallery, Malmsbury 2009

*When Janice told me in winter that she would plant a weeping cherry tree for the spring opening of my exhibition *Salvage*, I wanted to weep and so, a new work entitled *Weep* was created. The form, like many others in this exhibition is inspired by an Asian decorative motif – in this case a 16th Century Indian window carving of a tree of life. Imagined as an inverted lung, it references both personal encounters with lung disease and the idea that trees are the 'lungs of the planet'.*

Rimbun Dahan and Elsie Gallery are both places where trees flourish and artists are valued and supported. Both properties contain within their boundaries; artist studios, a gallery, a home and an exquisite garden and it is the garden which holds all of the elements together. To spend time in both Angela and Hijjas' garden in Malaysia and Janice and Rodney's garden in Malmsbury is akin to being in a temple Garden in Japan. The same sense of devotion to the garden as an art form exists and for me the experience is deepened by a personal relationship with the gardens' owners and creators.

The thousands of salvaged needlework motifs gathered together in this exhibition form another point of connection between the garden, the home and the creative process. Being first made in and for the home, they draw largely on natural history prototypes found in the garden.

Elsie Gallery

They also create a link between the past and present. As a child, my first creative inspirations came from domestic-art objects such as these – embroidered tablecloths, crocheted doileys, and appliquéd clothing. Now fast becoming part of our throwaway culture, the hundreds of domestic linens which first held the needlework in place, were gleaned during my regular expeditions to op-shops and markets in Australia and on my few travels in Asia, or donated by friends and family. Each needle-worked motif has been carefully extracted using embroidery scissors and pinned precariously to delicate bridal tulle.

Red-Cloud, White Lotus and A Bird in the Hand #'s 1 + 2 were made for a joint exhibition, *dot-net-dot-au* (with Melbourne artist Tim Craker) which travelled to Malaysia and Singapore in 2008. *Garland, Weep, Blue Wren, Red Cloud #2 and Excise* were made in 2009 and *Blue Wren* is the first work I've made from a personal embroidery collection belonging to the friend who commissioned it.

Various negative forms which outline vulnerable and endangered animals, or the space once occupied by needlework, can be found within each work. These empty spaces signify the potential for loss in all cultures, of traditions and of species. By salvaging and reconstructing the cast off, everyday needlework of others, *Salvage* is my attempt to address this imminent sense of loss and create hope for the future.

*These thousands, remnants of other lives,
cast off from their makers -
Linen chests and charity baskets have held them,
silent, waiting
These thousands, remnants of another era,
precariously held
On a membrane of translucent threads they swarm
And you Elsie, from another time,
upon your garden walls
These salvaged remnants float free.*

Louise Saxton
September 2009