



SPECIMEN

WAGGA WAGGA BEACH

MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER

ILLUMINATE FESTIVAL 15-16 APRIL 2017

SPECIMEN: WAGGA WAGGA

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Viewing the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection, thousands of specimens of Australian fauna, their body parts preserved in fluid, and boxes of bones, is a somewhat ethereal experience, despite its practical scientific origin and purpose.

Items such as dismembered heads, spinal cord, brains, eyeballs, foetuses and more, are easily recognisable. Then there are the more abstract slithers and slices--an echidna's oesophagus, a kangaroo's gall bladder--which look like objects of fantasy, recalling images of opera singers, strange lands and ghost like creatures.

So what does it mean to look upon these specimens? What connection do we feel as humans? Australian environmental philosopher Val Plumwood suggests that our current environmental crises are the result of a western worldview that proclaims human beings as radically different from and separated from nature. So with that in mind, what is our relation to these specimens, preserved for so long in jars of toxic formaldehyde?

Animals equal food source, companionship, sport for hunting, subjects to study in documentaries. As specimens, their purpose was to benefit medical advancement through Comparative Anatomy--the comparison of different tissue, bone, muscular systems of animals--in order to learn and develop new treatments and advances in healing for human bodies.

In the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection, the most renowned of these advancements rose from the study of the koala shoulder specimen. Thought to be stronger than the human shoulder, the structure of the specimen became central to advancing healing techniques for shoulder injuries in humans.

This artwork takes objects from the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection from the National Museum of Australia and projects them back onto the landscape. These specimens have very little recorded information about their origins, such as where or how they were collected. They are objects frozen in time, species that have been heavily impacted upon by human endeavour. By returning them to the landscape are we able to gain any greater understanding about our connection to our natural environment and the specimens themselves?

**On the banks of the gently flowing
Murrumbidgee River
You are the animal
You are the spark
You are the pollution
You are the sinking boat
You are the tear
You are the injustice
You are the celebration
You are the observation
You are the reaction
You are the doubt
You are the inaction
You are the fog
You are the specimen**

