



To Move Through the Dark Night of the Soul

Caitlin Franzmann and Camila Marambio

This is an offering by which we share our transmutational encounters with the Chilean firebush and its Australian relative, the tree waratah. Our journey in distilling the flower essence of these Gondwana sister plants has been full of questions to and from our vegetal doubles: Is it possible to collectively remember how to shapeshift and live a mystic life more fully?

Is *the soul* to be found in the centre of the earth or in the scent of a flower?

How do we all die well together, or are we already dead?

If we are, how does the red colour of a flower explain the blood in our veins?

Random and dynamic, bridging gaps between physical and spiritual worlds, we have come to an understanding through a series of imaginings and intuitions that tell of fortunes, transformation and a cautioning of death.

We wrote these words *to move through the dark night of the soul* with you.

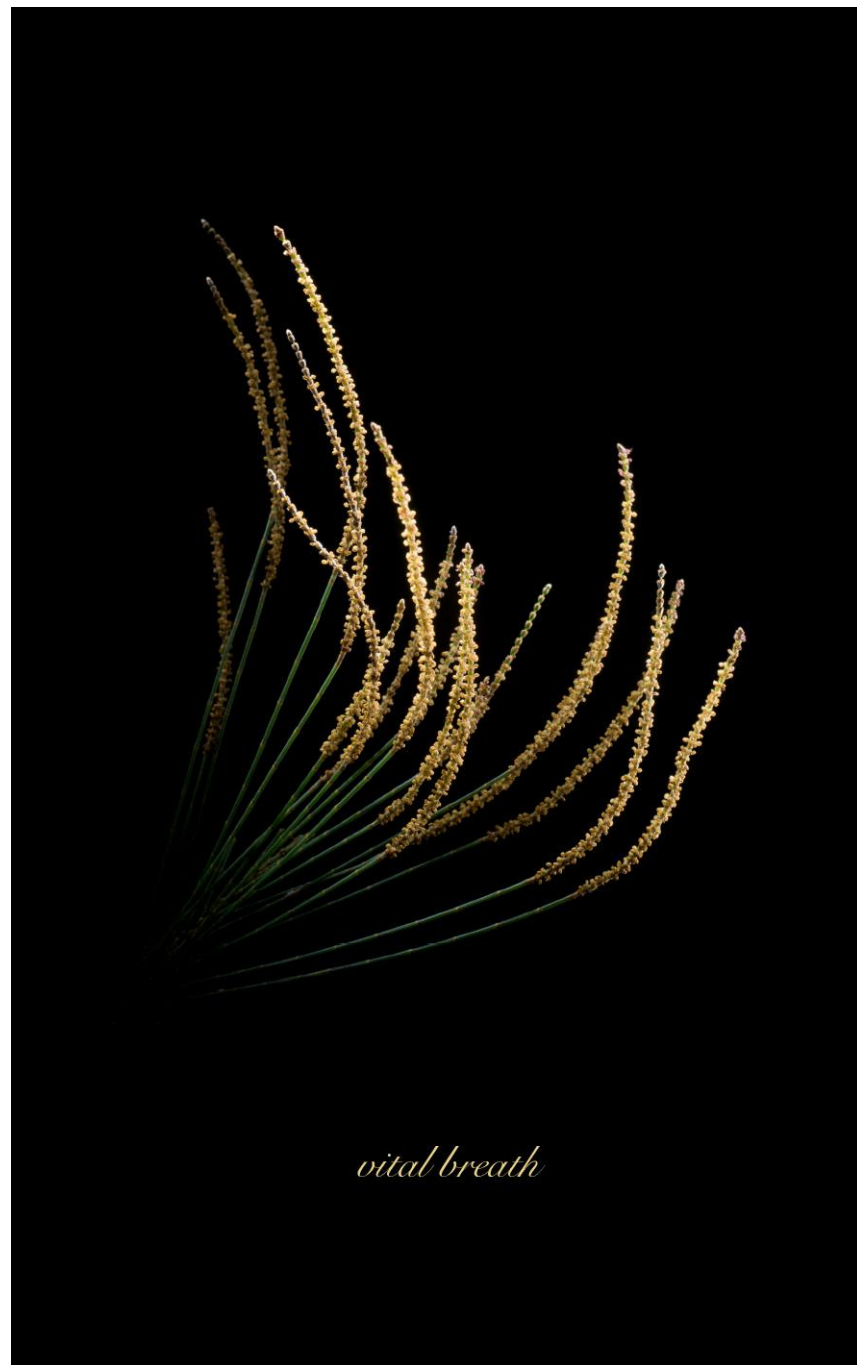
Caitlin Franzmann

Maku Kipa, 2019

Pencil and gouache on paper

93 × 60 cm

Courtesy of the artist



Caitlin Franzmann and Man Cheung
Vital Breath, a card from *Fortunes of the Forest*, 2017,
 a deck of 40 plant-based divination cards
 12 × 7.5 cm
 Courtesy of the artists

I. Beginning to End

29 June 2020

‘Will you hold my hand?’, I asked the tree waratah as I began to dream. The flower showed me how to speak the language of the honeyeater. She led me to the earth’s core. From the centre, it’s not difficult to feel a patterning of life that transforms with continental drifts and dispersal across oceans. I followed roots to a 52-million-year-old eucalypt flower at the crust of Patagonia.¹ There, I heard a whisper: ‘Change is inevitable, but you are moving too fast’.

2 September 2019

‘You destroy our lands, poison the planet and sow death, because you are lost. And soon it will be too late to change.’ I felt Camila’s tears as she read these words of Raoni Metuktire,² a chief of the Indigenous Brazilian Kayapó people. The Amazon forest had been burning for weeks and bushfire season had started early across northern Australia. Seated on the south bank of Maiwar (Brisbane River), we had just witnessed the suffering of a tree waratah. It was confined by concrete walls and human waste, scarlet fingers reaching for the sky. We understood the oracular qualities of flowers must be listened to. It was the tree waratah that warned of the Australian bushfires, in sync with the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon and Australia, who have been transmitters of plant knowledge for millennia and have heeded the command: ‘To live you must respect the world, the trees, the plants, the animals, the rivers and even the very earth itself. Because all of these things have spirits, all of these things are spirits, and without the spirits the Earth will die, the rain will stop and the food plants will wither and die too.’³

6 September 2019

‘How do I respect the world?’, I asked the tree waratah. She brought to us Dr C.F. (Christine) Black, a woman with flaming hair, who shared her knowledge born from her matrilineal clan, the Kombumerri people, and cultivated by her experiences of the world. When Christine encounters flowers, she understands they have their own stories. She guided us in aligning with plant knowledge while considering laws of relationality and trusting our own *feelings* and dreams. She writes of Indigenous jurisprudence and what structures an individual’s rights and responsibilities into the land. She taught us that ‘the Land is the Law’, based on cosmologies and dyadic relationships that create ‘a body of law which, in Australia’s case, “vibrates in song” and is “woven across” *Corpus Australis*’.⁴

14 December 2018

‘How do I take responsibility for my feelings and the behaviours they elicit?’, I asked Maku Kipa. Maku Kipa is Yaghan for ‘firebush woman’. We had stumbled upon a firebush tree in the mountains of Tierra del Fuego and hovered around her like hummingbirds. There, I recounted an interpretation of a story I’d just read, in which Maku Kipa was violently torn apart and made to bleed. We kissed her folds.
 ‘Is this your story?’
 She replied, ‘You each hold my story in your veins’.

What are we to do with these stories?

We turned to my oracle cards, *Fortunes of the Forest*, for a transoceanic reading. Coastal She-oak appeared with a message: ‘Listen, exhale and sing, and in doing so, change history’.

Later, Gloria Anzaldúa’s healing words moved around our circle of wounds. ‘*Conocimiento* comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding all its symptoms.’⁵ I noticed my shedding skin itch. She spoke of *ensueños*—imaginal knowings or ‘dreaming while awake’. I searched for my reptilian eye so that I might view the world and my *ensueños* simultaneously.

‘It’s there, in “green saplings pushing through the cracks”⁶... Embody the sapling. What do you see?’
 ‘Now grow roots’, Anzaldúa encourages, ‘and dislodge the foundations of your conditioning’.
 Your ‘body is a text’.⁷ Awaken it and allow a pool of imaginings to lead you to compassionate interactions.⁸

II. Common Eyes

I see through you
Feathers dawn along your back
Inside your heart a nest
Deep within the labyrinth
molten liquid ore
Dripping down the drain
the dam, broken

Pooling the pain
the womb soon dissipates
and the room is filled with light
In the centre a seed
A seed that reads like a book
You free its words with your tongue
liberating quieted undertones

From flower to mouth
the dry earth gets wet
Soaking in memory
we ask permission to exit
It cries, and you know why
Fear is not the game
Bleeding is the essence of excitement

Today, I am no longer extinct

Camila Marambio
Bleeding Rock (Papudo), 2020
Digital photograph
Courtesy of the artist



III. A Circle of Fire

I still smell of the flower I was before, millennia ago, when my orange skin was red.
'Fertility is not a given', I sniff her say.

Fire excites the seed.
Did I miss you, child?

Torn apart by taxonomy, the wrinkled rivulets are angry today.
I knew it upon waking.

I was aroused by silent screams.
'I'm bound within cells on your tongue.'

I see you shapeshifting.
Stop it and teach me how.



You already are moonlight on water.
'Taste me and you will see', she says to the hummingbird.

Black-browed islands drive me home.
Two centuries it takes to row there, unless.

She's been weaving a paddle.
The needle returns rusted earth to my skin.

'Silken-petaled hornet's nest can't you hear me knocking?'
'Shush, child. I'm watching telepathy.'

A coiled serpent encased in thorns pierces through, inscribing a note.
'Let's meet again at the centre.'

Caitlin Franzmann
Circle of Fire, 2020
Digital photograph
Courtesy of the artist

IV. Harmonise

If I am a planet
where is my core?

You appeared as a halo
guiding heat along threads
Shifting pace
seeping messages

In lava's patient breath
waiting to express

In crow's caw
stars adorning feathers

In Maku's sweet nectar
unashamed
She moves fast
and invites presence

In stained resin
fruiting from interior wounds

A blackened forest
is not dead
A knotted heart
is not broken
A bleeding crevice
is not lacking

They too are messengers
a reminder

Tend to the fire



Caitlin Franzmann
Bloodwood Sap (Upper Brookfield), 2020
Digital photograph
Courtesy of the artist

V. Ending to Begin

In the dark of the night, wrapped in covers, I search for the words to embrace, from this end, the two red flowers that bloom in the centre of this plea. Suddenly, with the precision only a martial artist can possess, Yunuen Rhi's *Flor y canto* (Flower and Song)⁹ penetrates the magnetic field of my unwieldy thoughts.

In xóchitl in cuícatl.

I sense this Nahuatl *difrasismo* is the moonlight, leading you and me back to the tree, through the thicket of poetic language gathered on these leaves.

Difrasismo is a Spanish word used to define 'a particular grammatical construction in which two separate words are paired together to form a single metaphoric unit'.¹⁰ Rhi whispers into the wind, 'This is more than a way of talking about that which should not or could not be named. *Difrasismos* are a mechanism of the Flower War (*La guerra florida*). This semantic and stylistic device, commonly employed throughout Mesoamerica, is a way to speak between the lines. It's a cultural armour that serves to conserve knowledge', she says.¹¹ When the Spaniards arrived in Nahuatl country, they hunted for and destroyed the libraries of ancestral information. The native plants were among the burned books. The wise old people inscribed messages from the dying flowers in song. *Flor y canto*. They encrypted their knowledge between wor(l)ds, trusting that, when the time was right, they would be heard by future generations.

'The harmony of the message reaches the open heart as if it were an arrow that cuts through ignorance, memory loss and pain', Rhi the healer insists.

Is your heart ready?

If so, return along the word path to the beginning. Align with *el conocimiento de las flores*. Vibrate with the scores tattooed onto each petal. Awaken the plantae memory. Share in the rites of passage.

'Tu Rabia es tu Oro', Cecilia Vicuña sings.¹²
We move through our rage and respond in chorus, 'I see you'.

When you get to a circle of fire, tend to the heat that is emanating from between sentences. Repeat these sentences out loud like a secret code you believe will unlock chemical portals. The medicine swells there.

Feverishly, the subcurrents of existence rise again.

1. Genelle Weule, 'Eucalypts: 10 Things You May Not Know about an Iconic Australian', *ABC Science*, 27 January 2018, abc.net.au/news/science/2018-01-26/eucalyptus-trees-an-iconic-australian/9330782?nw=0; accessed 6 July 2020.

2. Raoni Metuktire, 'We, the Peoples of the Amazon, Are Full of Fear. Soon You Will Be Too', *The Guardian*, 2 September 2019, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/02/amazon-destruction-earth-brazilian-kayapo-people; accessed 6 July 2020.

3. Raoni Metuktire.

4. Dr C.F. Black, *The Land Is the Source of the Law: A Dialogic Encounter with Indigenous Jurisprudence*, Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon, UK, and New York, 2011, p. 15.

5. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., and London, 2015, p. 120.

6. Anzaldúa, p. 84.

7. Anzaldúa, p. 5.

8. Anzaldúa, p. 19.

9. Yunuen Rhi, 'Viaje interno, flor y canto charla y práctica', public online lecture, Centro Rasavant, 22 June 2020, rasavant.cl; accessed 23 June 2020.

10. 'Difrasismo', *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Difrasismo; accessed 6 July 2020.

11. Rhi, 'Viaje interno'.

12. This line translates as 'Your rage is your gold'. Cecilia Vicuña, 'Kuntur Ko (Water Condor)', *Alba del Habla, Dawn of Speech*; recorded at NYU Department of Recorded Music, Tisch, 2006; released by Torn Sound, New York, 2012; distributed by Hueso Records; ceciliavicuna.com/kuntur-ko; accessed 1 October 2020.