



TAMARA DEAN

Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Divided Worlds

ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NORTH TERRACE, ADELAIDE Open daily 10am–5pm artgallery.sa.gov.au



TAMARA DEAN

Artist Tamara Dean worked as a photographer for newspapers (photojournalist) prior to dedicating her time to her artistic practice which now includes photography and installation. Dean grew up in northern Sydney on a property which backed into bushland. This began a lifelong love of nature and the Australian bush, which has since proved an important source of inspiration for Dean. Her work explores the relationship between humans and the natural world and the role of instinct and ritual in our contemporary lives.

Presented in the Museum of Economic Botany (Adelaide Botanic Garden), *In Our Nature* explore humans' connection to nature. The photographs depict figures placed in natural landscapes – almost like specimens – as a means to explore their strong and important relationship between humans and nature. Photographed in the dense foliage and ponds of the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens, *In Our Nature* follows the seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter to draw attention to aging and the cycles of life.



image detail: Tamara Dean, Australia, born 1976, *Fallen willow (Salix) in Autumn*, from the series *In Our Nature*, May 2017, Mount Lofty Botanic Garden, pure pigment print on cotton rag, 120.0 x 160.0 cm; Featuring dancers from Australian Dance Theatre; Courtesy the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

image detail (cover): Tamara Dean, Australia, born 1976, *Sacred Lotus (Nelumbo nucifera) in Autumn*, from the series *In Our Nature*, May 2017, Adelaide Botanic Garden, pure pigment print on cotton rag, 153.53 x 200.0 cm; Courtesy the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

IN THE COLLECTION – SHOALING, 2015

In *Shoaling*, from her 2015 series *Instinctual*, Dean photographed her nude models in the shallow waters around Byron Bay in northern New South Wales. The image depicts a constellation of partially submerged naked human bodies which mirrors the appearance of shoaling fish (a group of fish that swim closely together). The absence of clothing makes reference to human beings' instinctive animal behaviour and connection to the natural environment. The tonal qualities of Dean's photographic works and the intense contrast between light and dark, are reminiscent of her pre-Raphaelite inspirations which include John William Waterhouse. The pre-Raphaelites formed a society of rebellious artists in 1848 amidst scientific discovery and the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Inspired by early Renaissance works, these artists were dedicated to the study of nature and created paintings with photographic realism.

FUN FACT

During the photoshoot for *Shoaling*, a woman came across the group while walking her dog and ordered everyone out of the water – apparently, bull sharks are known to inhabit the creek where the models were swimming.

RESPONDING

Investigate the pre-Raphaelites. Compare Dean's work to these artists both in terms of their technique and conceptual approach to composing an image. Research some other contemporary photographers who play with intense contrast between light and dark.



image detail: Tamara Dean, Australia, born 1976, *Shoaling*, 2015, Tallow Creek, Suffolk Park, New South Wales, inkjet print, 148.5 x 191.0 cm; Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Contemporary Collectors 2016, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © Tamara Dean

EARLY YEARS

RESPONDING

Name one thing you like about being outside with nature. Share these responses with your class.

Dean's work explores rituals in nature. A ritual is a set of actions repeated over and over again in the same way. As a class discuss the rituals, ceremonies or traditions you practice either at home or at school.

Share a special place outside that you visit. What makes this place special? Do you collect fallen leaves or look for wildlife?

Other than change in temperature, what other signs suggest the seasons are changing?

MAKING

Using natural materials, create a work of art that responds to your favourite season.



image detail: Tamara Dean, Australia, born 1976, *Juniper (Juniperus) in Winter*, from the series *In Our Nature*, 2017, Mt Lofty Botanic Garden, Adelaide, pure pigment print on cotton rag, 75 x 100 cm; Courtesy the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary

SCIENCE UNDERSTANDING: BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (YEAR 1–7)

In Our Nature provides a platform to learn more about biological sciences including the growth, survival and classification of living things. Pretend you are a scientist and Dean's photographs contain specimens that require analysis.

- Identify and classify the organisms that you can see in this environment.
- Compare *Shoaling* to one of the images in the later series *In Our Nature*. List as many different living organisms that may live in these environments.
- What differences do you notice between the natural environments in each photograph? Identify which images represent the different seasons. What evidence can you see to support your observations?
- All living things depend on each other and the environment to survive. Name a living organism that lives in one of the environments in Dean's photographs. What features and adaptations help them to survive here?

PRIMARY

RESPONDING

Visit the Adelaide or Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens. Can you locate where *In Our Nature* was created?

Tamara Dean was a photojournalist before becoming a fine art photographer. What is the difference between a fine art image and one that appears in a newspaper?

Imagine removing your shoes and stepping inside one of Dean's photographs. What would this environment feel like underfoot? What might this place smell like? What sounds would you hear?

MAKING

Write a Haiku poem or creative prose writing piece about your favourite time spent outside with nature.

In Our Nature follows the seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter to respond to aging and the cycles of life. Create a series of photographs, animation or video work that celebrates the lifecycle of an insect or plant.



image detail: Installation view 2018 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: *Divided Worlds* featuring works by Tamara Dean, Santos Museum of Economic Botany, Adelaide.

SECONDARY

RESPONDING

Investigate the locations where Tamara Dean has staged her photographs throughout Australia. Other than being in a natural environment, what qualities do these sites have in common? Suggest a place where Dean might consider for the location of her next photographic series.

Light is the most important element for a photographer. Compare Dean's work with that of Bill Henson, Anne Ferran or Justine Varga – all in the Gallery's collection. Compare the artists' use or manipulation of light in their practice.

Dean has been inspired by female photographers Sally Mann, Mary Ellen Mark and Carol Jerrems. Investigate these artists and compare their photographic works. What do you think appeals most to Dean about these artists' images?



image detail: Tamara Dean, born 1976, Sydney, *Elephant ear (Alocasia odora) in Autumn* from the series *In our nature*, 2017, pure pigment print on cotton rag, 150 x 200cm; Courtesy of the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary. This work was made in April 2017 in the Adelaide Botanic Garden.

WORKING WITH TAMARA DEAN

By Joanna Kitto

In my curatorial role at the Samstag Museum of Art, I was Tamara's assistant, helping prepare the models and set up the shoots: then, during a moment of inspiration by the artist, I became a subject in *Elephant ear (Alocasia odora) in Autumn*.

Tamara has a keen interest in the natural cycles of life, death and the seasons. For her series *In Our Nature*, she gathered individuals across a wide range of ages and backgrounds. Most of us had never modelled before. Tamara placed us in the natural world – in the water and among the trees and shrubberies of Adelaide's botanic gardens and parks. We were encouraged to step off the walking paths and beyond the barriers in the botanic gardens, into the lotus pond and across the soft ground of the Conservatory's 'forest' floor. We inhabited nature and became tangled in the foliage, invited by the artist to move through it and then sit still among it.

The seasons were Tamara's real muses. She chose our locations by exploring the gardens making links between the plants and the body. Tamara finds the places she wants to shoot in, brings in her models and directs us through something that she is determining herself, shifting direction suddenly if the light changes. The shoots took place at dusk. We would wait quietly until the 'golden hour' when the sun begins to set and everything is bathed in an amber glow. Then we would step in. Tamara has a disarming quality that made us trust her and her vision entirely despite our inexperience as photographic subjects. We would often forget the taboo of nakedness as the experience reminded us of our connection to the environment around us.

SECONDARY (continued)

MAKING

Think about your favourite place in nature. Create a sensory experience of this space by collating textures, sounds and aromas.

Dean spends months planning a photograph which includes concepts, props, models, location and of course light. Create a series of photographic works captured at dusk (golden hour).

Today we live in an era where nearly everyone has a camera with them 24 hours a day. This allows us to capture thousands of candid or spontaneous images, sometimes with little consideration of composition and light. Create a photograph that requires you to use models and natural light. Plan your image thoroughly including concept and composition. Dean finds the directing of her subjects to be the most challenging skill. Explain why you think Dean finds this challenging. What new skills did you develop when planning and shooting your image?

RESOURCES

Artist Profile – Tamara Dean

<http://bit.ly/2n3sRVD>

Australian Financial Review – Photographer Tamara Dean

<http://bit.ly/2G97cUX>

In Daily – Off the Wall: Alive in nature

<http://bit.ly/2F3M0y8>

Tamara Dean

<http://bit.ly/2DWC3mJ>

TATE – Pre-Raphaelite

<http://bit.ly/2Druq6M>

AUDIO/VIDEO

Melanie Tait interview with Tamara Dean,

Here and Now – Audio

<http://ab.co/2DYTnHO>

Tamara Dean – Here and Now - Video

<http://bit.ly/2ruYuNg>

Tamara Dean – Inside the Photographer's Studio - Video

<http://bit.ly/2DuqPF9>

The Gallery's Learning programs are supported by the Department for Education and Child Development.



image detail: Installation view 2018 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Divided Worlds featuring works by Tamara Dean, Santos Museum of Economic Botany, Adelaide.