

—*Echo*
by Josephine Mead

An *echo* is defined as *the reflection of sound waves from a surface back to the listener*. As artists we are in modes of constant reflection. We experience the world, digest and examine these experiences, and then produce artworks that reflect them anew. We echo and then we transform. I've seen this sense of reflection consistently through Grace Wood's visual practice. As an artist, I feel this urge for reflection consistently within myself.

—*E*

Wood spent nine months sewing fabric images onto *Permanent Palimpsest* by hand. It is not a coincidence that she has also recently given birth to her second child. She engaged in two nine-month gestation periods simultaneously. It is hard to untangle the threads of the mother from the threads of the artist. The mother-artist becomes a body-quilt, pulled in many directions, warming multiple bodies. There are deep connections to be found between mothering and making. I've been thinking a lot about becoming a mother and how to meet my artist-self with the responsibilities of raising a child. I've been watching Wood from afar, seeing her do this brilliantly.

—*Ec*

Bundoora Homestead has had a long history of rehabilitation and bodily examination, serving as a recovery site for WW1 veterans suffering mental disorders following military service, and various mental health institutions for patients suffering from psychiatric issues. It is this period of mental rehabilitation practice that serves as visual fodder for Wood's work. She has focused on the stories and details of the patients of the repatriation hospital and the menial laborious tasks they undertook as part of their rehabilitation. Images of toys and vintage stamps that adorn the quilt reference the patients making simple toys and soaking stamps. Their labour has been transformed through Wood's labour, as each image is sewn onto the work.

—*Ech*

Other sewn panels bare images of medical tools and remind the viewer of the harsh realities of mental rehabilitation during this period, particularly for women. Women have not historically been treated well within mental health contexts and institutions. We've been labelled as hysteric, experimented on, and lobotomized. Leucotomies, a type of lobotomy, were performed regularly here. Recent counselling appointments, necessary to enter into forthcoming rounds of IVF, have made me feel like a woman under examination. It was not until the late 70s that women were first permitted to work on these grounds. Our bodies are always under microscope.

—*Echo*

Both Wood and myself share the experience of watching our Grandmother's develop Alzheimers. My aunty, my Grandmother's youngest child, has just been diagnosed with Alzheimers and the disease is progressing quickly. My uncle, a doctor, recently noted via email, *when we see her now, she has lost touch with reality. Because she cannot remember what*

*has just happened, what has just been said, what she should be doing, she will 'invent' her own reality which does not align with the reality for the rest of us. She is living in her own little world which we cannot see or hear. In itself it is **just as valid as our reality but different.*** I remember watching my Grandmother lose her ability to utilize language. Wood is experiencing the other end of the spectrum at the moment, as her children learn to turn alphabetic utterances into plausible sounds and then words. Children often imagine things that are not there as they attempt to make sense of their place in the world. Their reality is ***just as valid as our reality but different.***

———*Echo*

In the work Wood has incorporated pieces of a hand sewn tapestry, given to her by her Mum, found in her Grandmother's belongings. The tapestry had lots of rudimentary objects like animals, cars, insects, birds and balloons. Embroidered by hand, Wood's stitches are visible. This sense of the handmade connotes the possibility of both an unravelling and the creation of a memorialisation. Embroidery is a type of memorialisation that has oft been referred to as "women's work". There is an unfurling looseness to thread, that sits in contrast to the tight digitality of Wood's prior work, produced pre-children. When we were discussing the possibility of this essay, Wood sent me a photo of herself out for a walk with her bub, attempting to encourage sleep. With caring responsibilities, the structure of an artist's practice must suddenly be met with loose stiches. Wood's Grandmother passed away as she was making this work.

———*Echo*

Permanent Palimpsest is deeply layered in story and history, while being a testament to the laborious, banal and repetitive tasks necessary to be both an artist and a mother. Mothers are deeply layered in histories that abound from the maternal structures and acts of others before them, and of those to come. Women carry the cells of future ancestors in their bodies. They move through modes of reflection. They move through the echoes. There is a deep plurality to them. Artists also have these qualities. We are multifarious, deeply curious and in constant conversation with the conditions around us, with the future and with the past. These grounds carry a similar sense of messiness and overlap. Lives have intertwined to make up a quilted story of many parts. Prior patients carried stories of both medical trauma and rehabilitation. The tone of the story—whether good or bad—is at the discretion of the beholder.

Wood sent me photographs of segments of the final quilt, noting that it was hard to find a spot in the house big enough to capture its entirety. In the photographs, the fabric of the quilt was quite creased. I found myself wondering if it would be ironed flat for exhibition and hoping that it wouldn't. The crease marks—a testament to the plurality of a life and the labour of the making.
