

Sophie Carnell

SILENT SENTINELS

A herbarium of works in silver
focussing on the rare plants of
Lunawanna-alonnah | Bruny Island



Hadley's Orient Hotel
5 October – 5 December 2023



Euphrasia fragosa

Shy eyebright

Artist statement

lunawanna-alonah | Bruny Island, my wild island home ... an island on the edge of vastness. A microcosm and a place of duality: rugged shorelines and smoothed beaches; forested mountains and rolling hills; sodden swamps and parched paddocks; wild coast and channel calm.

A place of epic power and also of fragility.

Here exists a swathe of rare, vulnerable and endangered plants, plants that by our heavy foot have been pushed to the very edge of existence. All the specimens depicted in this silversmithed herbarium are at risk on this island.

By creating these works, illuminating these often overlooked and easily disregarded plants, I endeavour to instil a sense of awe and awakening, a search for and an embrace of knowledge. A space to question our connections to place.

Let these small sculptures take you on a journey of celebrating the beauty of the delicate plants of this incredible island, while also considering our impact on our landscape.

Biography

Sophie Carnell was born in the UK and emigrated to Australia in the early 1990s. She is a Fine Arts graduate of the University of Tasmania and has completed short courses in jewellery fabrication, though is predominantly self taught. She works primarily with ethically sourced silver often incorporating found natural and man-made elements.

Carnell has been a finalist in many prestigious awards and art prizes including the Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize, the Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize, and in 2021 won the Contemporary Wearables Award in collaboration with Sarah Rayner. Carnell has been a successful recipient of residencies, grants and scholarships across Australia.

A Silver Comma

SOPHIE CARNELL'S ISLAND HERBARIUM

by Dr Amy Jackett



"Bruny Island follows Tasmania like a comma, a space for a pause."

— Danielle Wood¹

"...now that I can no longer roam about those glorious places, all I have to do is to open my herbarium and it quickly transports me there. The pieces of plants that I gathered there are enough to remind me of the whole magnificent spectacle."

— Jean-Jacques Rousseau²

Sophie Carnell's silver herbarium transports us to Bruny Island, a small island off the coast of southern Tasmania. An island of wild, roaring shores, lively heathlands, and hidden coves.

Like the island itself, Carnell's silver herbarium entices you to stop and marvel. Endangered plants of the island are given life beyond their organic bodies in the most exquisite form.

Hand-sculpted in silver, they are made enduring by the precious medium.

These endangered plants are fascinating. We see flowers that mimic spiders; crooked seeds and jagged leaves; underwater branches with hollow sacs to capture and digest tiny animals in still water.

Many species are elusive and susceptible to trampling, tucked under Sheoaks, hiding in grasses, sitting in a swamp. With muted brown and green flowers, some require the 'the orchid eye' to be found – the eye trained to look carefully for small differences to find a secretive, indistinct flower.³ Carnell amplifies their intriguing shapes.

In her large works, every part is revealed and celebrated with travelling roots spread underneath their decorative tops, sometimes intact, other times dissected with leaves and flowers presented alongside.

Colour – so often used to attract insects – is stripped. The focus on petals once daring yellow turns to the form, to the shape and contours, curved to cup the light. Stems once russet and hairy become elongated and smoothed.

The translucent green petals of the Ruddy Greenhood become curled silver. The enlarged flower of the aptly-named Tailed Spider-orchid stands perfectly poised.

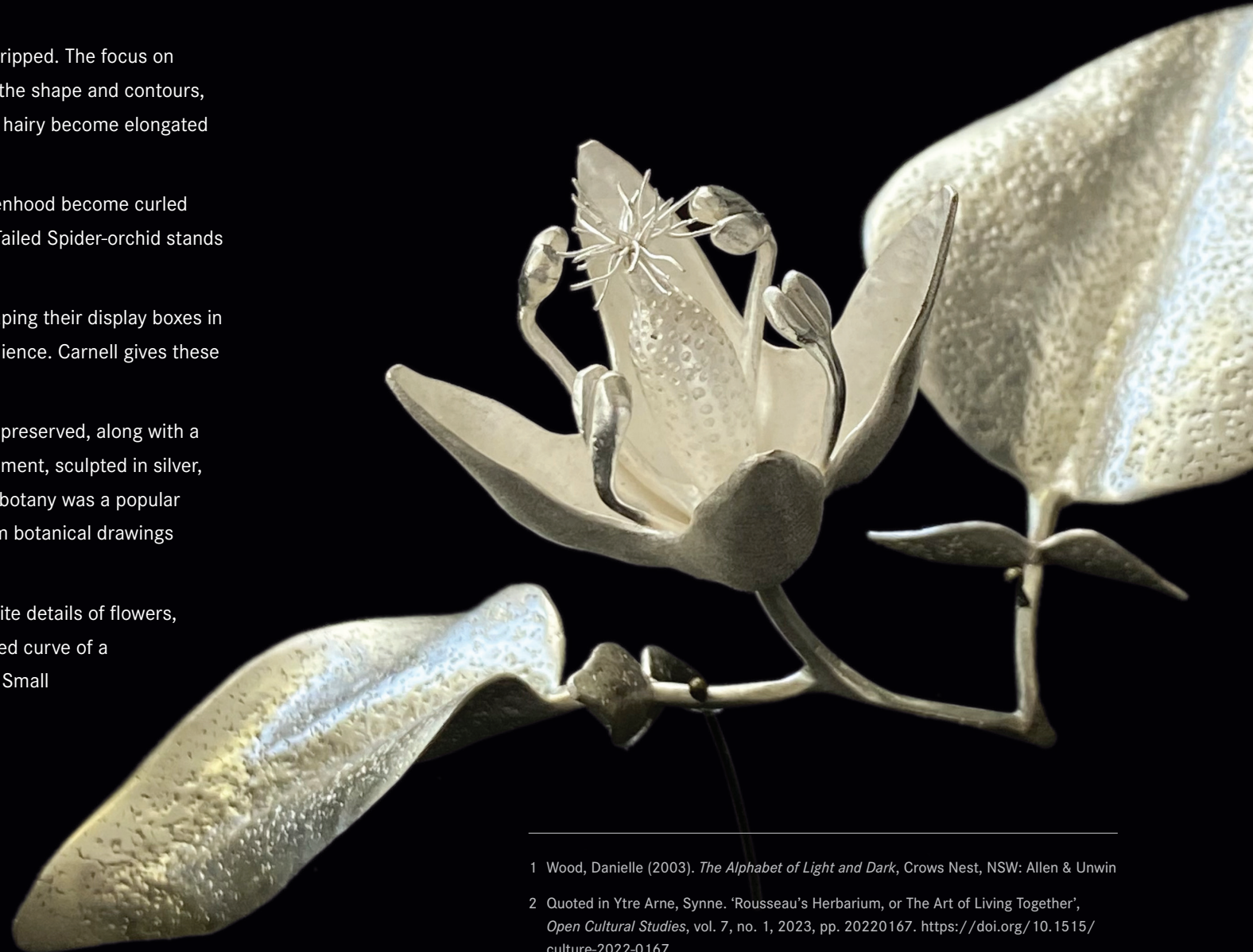
Look closely and you'll see parts of plants escaping their display boxes in some works, piercing through in a show of resilience. Carnell gives these endangered plants agency. They will persist.

In an oval Victorian glass dome, *Spur Velleia* is preserved, along with a butterfly, just landed on a leaf. A silent, still moment, sculpted in silver, held in glass. This work takes us back to when botany was a popular pastime. Carnell's silver plants are created from botanical drawings of this time.

The mini specimen box works showcase exquisite details of flowers, grasses, fruit, seed pods and leaves: the rounded curve of a Mountain Sedge seed; the unusual bend of the Small Bentgrass seed; the bobblelike fruit of the Tall Cheeseberry; the serrated edge of the Leafy Fireweed, among others.

As silver jewels, each plant is eternalised.

Carnell describes this exhibition as her love song to Bruny Island. Her devotion resonates throughout her unique silver herbarium.



1 Wood, Danielle (2003). *The Alphabet of Light and Dark*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin

2 Quoted in Ytre Arne, Synne. 'Rousseau's Herbarium, or The Art of Living Together', *Open Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2023, pp. 20220167. <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2022-0167>

3 Jobe, Keely in Rawson, Jane (ed.) and Ben Walter (ed.) 2021, *Breathing Space: Reflections and projections on nature in Tasmania*, Hobart, TAS: Tasmanian Land Conservancy

Acknowledgements

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My profound respect and appreciation to the Nuenonne of lunawanna-alonah for their enduring care, connection and nurture of this beautiful land.

In memory and gratitude to Gleewyn and Dan Sprod.

Sophie Carnell is exclusively represented by
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I donate a percentage of my sales to the Tasmanian Land Conservancy, to help them in their incredible work preserving the biodiversity of lutruwita | Tasmania.



The TLC is a not-for-profit organisation that protects nature on private land, both on its own reserves and in partnership with landholders. Through science and community, TLC inspires and empowers people to contribute to nature conservation in Tasmania.