PLACES AND PARADISE
THE ART OF JENNY LAWRENCE
(1960–2007)
Jenny Lawrence was born in Sydney in 1960, the second child of Max and Greta Gowland. She grew up in the New South Wales towns of Batlow and then Bathurst. After finishing school she studied ballet in Sydney, then ecology in Canberra, where she met her husband Brian. Her interest in working with textiles grew along with her two children Jack and Evelyn. In 1994 the family dropped out of school and work, and took a journey of discovery through Cape York in Queensland. Several months of living in tropical wilderness, of camping on uninhabited beaches and islands where flotsam and jetsam was the only evidence of humanity, marked the beginning of Jenny’s exploration of the concept of paradise.

After their return from paradise Jenny undertook a Visual Arts degree at the Australian National University and subsequently established her art practice. Her concern for the loss of community and environment and her interest in our desire for paradise formed major themes of her work. As an emerging artist, she was surprised by the rapid and wide recognition of her work that came at both a national and international level. Between 1998 and 2007 she exhibited sixteen of her major works in twenty-six venues across Australia and two venues in America.

Her success with communicating simple yet beautiful messages to others evolved into a desire to teach and she completed a Diploma of Education in 2006. Jenny died prematurely on 24 May 2007 at the age of forty-seven. This booklet is a tribute to Jenny’s art which, as with her life, was so rich with meaning.
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PLACES THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST
On a very icy morning in June 1994, Jenny and her family left their home in Canberra and headed north. All their essentials were packed into a Toyota HiLux four-wheel drive and while their first few stopovers were planned, the rest was just a journey, intended to cover Cape York, the Gulf of Carpentaria and Arnhem Land. They were free. Beyond Brisbane they camped only in National Parks and beyond Cairns they began to explore more and more of the side tracks. Life was slowing down. By the time they reached the northern most point of the Australian continent, the tip of Cape York, they were travelling very slowly indeed. The oasis called Punsand Bay was a perfect spot to rest for while, located on a beach just five kilometres west of the tip of Cape York.

After several weeks at Punsand Bay the family began to settle in to the tropical paradise lifestyle, and also began a lifelong friendship with locals Gary and Sue. Eventually it seemed that the time had come to get back on the road. They had an event to attend – a friend’s wedding in Arnhem Land – and a long way still to travel. But her daughter Evelyn’s unexpected bout of asthma brought some caution to their departure – they were reluctant to resume remote area travel when hospitalisation might be needed. So the first day they travelled only a few kilometres eastwards of the tip of Cape York, and camped on the coast near Albany Island. That night Jenny and Brian reviewed their maps and calculated that to reach their destination, the next few months of travel would involve stopovers of only one or at most two nights at a time. After spending weeks camped on the beach in a tropical paradise, this was inconceivable. So they made a decision - to go back to Punsand Bay and spend the rest of the year in paradise. The next morning they woke to the sound of an approaching boat – it was Gary, coming to convince them to return to paradise.

Left: Jenny’s collection of thongs from a single beach in Cape York
The next few months were truly idyllic. Jenny’s diaries bulge with the joys and wonders of a tropical paradise. Every day she did more beachcombing, more exploring, more drawing. Gary took them to uninhabited islands in the Torres Strait, with beaches untouched but for the flotsam and jetsam of the world. Jenny found the variety and sheer numbers of lost and discarded objects on these beaches both exciting and depressing. That this rubbish should wash around the world and find its way to paradise, the place where we want to be, was deeply affecting. She began to reflect on the nature of paradise and what it meant to people living in an advanced consumer society. To her, paradise was a personal place, an unreal place where there was true happiness, no waste, no crime, no blood, no death, only peace. But with no such place on earth, she wondered if there could be a co-existence of the desire for true happiness, the desire for paradise on earth, with such emphasis on materialism in modern Australian society. Was it possible to reach one through the other, to make your own paradise?

Above: Another morning’s beachcombing in Cape York
After an idyllic six months in paradise the family returned to Canberra to rejoin the so-called real world. Jenny applied for entry to the Australian National University’s School of Art, and was accepted to undertake a major in textiles. Much of the material she used for her portfolio was developed from her recent experiences in Cape York. The experiences the family shared in paradise had changed them forever, given meaning to their modern lives and defined for them the real nature of contentment.

As a student at the School of Art, one of Jenny’s earliest works in woven monofilament was Longing, a reflection of the many hours Jenny had spent walking along the remote beaches of Cape York and the many other hours spent living away from those places. It was a comment on living in one landscape and hoping for another – longing for paradise. It was exhibited at the Australian National University’s Drill Hall Gallery in 1999.

The experience of living in a tropical paradise, at the pace of life that comes with contentment and peace, was a major influence on Jenny’s life into the future.

Left: Longing, 1999, woven monofilament, shells, 30 x 8cm
Top: A beach at Mount Adolphus Island, Cape York
Above: At the School of Art - an object out of place
Right: A Tool for City Living, 2001, carved found object, 10 x 15cm
The Australian National University’s School of Art has a Field Studies Program, developed and run by visual artist and Senior Lecturer John Reid. This award-winning program takes artists into the environment and engages with rural communities who are managing natural resources. It was on one of these Field Studies programs in 1998 that Jenny visited Towong, a small village located near the base of the Australian Alps. In Upper Towong there was a small corrugated iron hall, once a valuable facility for the community but now falling into disrepair. The hall had been a school, a church, a meeting place and a gathering point for sport and social events, including weddings and receptions. It contained many objects that were reminders of times when there was a larger population in the area. There was a trophy for bird watching, received in 1942 when part of the hall was used as a school. A piano, psalm books, overgrown tennis courts, dusty silver streamers hanging over the windows and stores of cutlery and crockery all indicating an active and full past. A generation before, rural halls like this had been the focus of the community. The hall reminded Jenny of her own childhood in the country and she was motivated by the loss of history and the decline of rural Australia as people moved away.

Jenny expressed the isolation that had come with the loss of that community through Remembering Community. She applied a technique she had developed for thermoplastics on fine material to make sculptures. She wanted to capture the memory of people and events long gone, memories that were recalled by the objects in the hall. She chose tulle to make the work, because of its association with weddings and because of the way its transparency reflected the intangible nature of memory. She moulded the tulle items by steaming them over a campfire using a billy, altering the synthetic fabric so that it would retain its shape. After completing the installation in the Towong hall, Jenny asked fellow student Luisa Abello to photograph the work. Luisa’s empathy for the work, and her use of the natural light, which made the pieces glow in the otherwise dim light, led to the stunning images that were soon to become a source of such great interest and exposure.

Right: Remembering Community, 1998, manipulated nylon tulle, in situ table, 1700 x 900cm area with variable items
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(CONT)
Jenny showed the slides from the shoot to Valerie Kirk, the head of the Textiles Workshop at the School of Art. It was Valerie’s experienced eye that saw the potential of the images. Valerie helped her select an image that best captured the meaning and intent of the work. The image has extraordinary depth of field while still showing great detail. It is possible to see the net texture of the tulle in the cups in the foreground while still identifying the objects in the background. One of Jenny’s favourite parts of the image was the cup on the far right that sits up over the edge of the table and shows the translucence of the forms. The places where the tulle overlapped and the edges of the forms caught the light emphasised the translucence in between. Smoke stains from the campfire over which she steamed the pieces are also visible.

The impact of this image of Remembering Community was far-reaching. In 2001, a postcard of the image was sponsored by the Australian National University’s School of Art and submitted to the Telos International Textile Art Postcard Competition, winning First Prize. This attracted much interest in Jenny’s work from around the world and led to Remembering Community being exhibited in Chicago at the Sculpture, Objects and Functional Art exhibition in October 2001 - a major international exhibition which attracted twenty-seven thousand visitors. The image was also used in the catalogue for the exhibition, The Material Speaks.

In the same year Jenny was invited to exhibit at Pittsburgh as part of the Fiberart International Exhibition at the Pittsburgh Centre for the Arts. For this exhibition she prepared a poignant derivative work titled Remembering Community II – Living Alone, which was described as a stand out work by reviewers.

Over subsequent months the image of Remembering Community continued to travel through the printed media, both in Australia and overseas. After being featured in the local Canberra Times newspaper in January 2001, it was featured in Elle magazine and later that year was reproduced in the magazine Textile. In March 2002 the image appeared in belle magazine. Eventually it found its way home when in May 2002 it was again featured in The Canberra Times. The breadth of this exposure reaffirmed for Jenny the value of having her work professionally photographed. Interestingly, it provided for feedback as well as exposure – Jenny met a woman who was working very hard to revitalise her rural town, who had seen the Remembering Community image and passionately told Jenny how much the work had meant to her. Conveying this much meaning to people was Jenny’s greatest satisfaction. She valued her work entirely according to its meaning, and regarded its monetary value as quite irrelevant.

Left: Remembering Community II – Living Alone, 2001, manipulated nylon tulle on found tray, 70 x 40cm
On graduating with Honours from the Australian National University, Jenny was fortunate in obtaining studio space through the association Australian National Capital Artists Incorporated. This non-profit organisation provides artists with affordable studio space, which Jenny shared with her friend and fellow textile artist Ann McMahon. A studio proved a far more productive and realistic workplace than the kitchen table at home. It provided space for large looms as well as much other material, but most importantly it provided a place for her to work.

Jenny described her art practice as revolving around the interrelationship between people, environment and the idea of paradise in modern western culture. One of her early works from her studio, My Own Paradise, explored how paradise fitted into a modern, western consumer culture such as Australia. She felt that paradise was offered to us every day - consumerism offering contentment through material ownership and contentment being a part of paradise. She observed a natural progression of putting the two together, of paradise being offered through materialism.

My Own Paradise was selected for exhibition at frisson, Tamworth’s Fibre Textile Biennial, and was featured on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue. The image was another of Luisa Abello’s which, as with Remembering Community, generated much interest and was extensively republished. During 2001 and 2002, frisson toured ten gallery venues in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

About My Own Paradise, Jenny said:

> Whenever I go to the shops, whenever I think I need a made thing, what is it that I really want? I’ve been to Cape York and have walked along remote but rubbish strewn beaches. I’ve marvelled at all of the stuff that washes up, so out of place, so travelled, so indicative of humanity. Many of the products of consumerism wash around the Earth and come to rest in places that are called paradise. Funny, isn’t it? The things that we’ve made and bought to take us that much closer to our idea of paradise find their resting place where we would like to be.
Jenny's skill and patience with weaving monofilament was extraordinary. Her next work, Something More, was based on her earlier work Longing, which she had produced whilst studying at the Australian National University’s School of Art. Her woven monofilament palms trees had a ghostly translucency similar to the tulle she used in Remembering Community. Something More had a collar around the base made of beads that Jenny had constructed by hand, rolling thin slivers of aluminium cut from Coca-Cola cans into tiny cylinders. This most intricate and beautiful work was based on her finding of a Coca Cola sign on a very remote beach in Cape York, washed and folded around the base of a casuarina tree by a tropical storm. She had wondered who the sign was speaking to, now that it had left the consumer culture and found its way to paradise. She wrote in her diary that there was no-one here to see it, only herself – and that she didn’t even like Coke! Something More was selected for exhibition at the National Craft Acquisition Award, held at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin during 2001.

Right: **My own paradise**, 2000, found case, silk, woven dyed monofilament, 35 x 66 x 26cm
Jenny’s next studio project was a solo exhibition called perfect future, held at the Australian National Capital Artists Gallery in 2002. In perfect future Jenny created an interpretation of what paradise would be like if some of the features of modern Australian culture were extrapolated. The work was comprised of a number of palm trees, woven from dyed monofilament, with hand-carved wooden spines that were electrically operated to lean towards the viewer as they walked by. Jenny’s neighbour Frank Murray provided the electrical knowhow for this work, cementing a close friendship between neighbours.

Top left: Something More, 2001, woven monofilament, aluminium, 30 x 15 x 15cm

Above: perfect future, 2002, mixed media including woven, dyed monofilament, carved wood spines and electrical parts, 6 x 4 x 1m

Left: A remote, unnamed beach in Cape York
About perfect future, Jenny said:

In the course of the past few years I have been to Cape York three times. The many hours spent walking along beaches finding lost and discarded things was both exciting and depressing. That this rubbish should wash around the world and find its way to paradise, the place that we want to be, was deeply affecting. I have since begun to reflect on the nature of paradise and what it means to people living in an advanced consumer society. Paradise is the place or state of being where everything is perfect and where everyone is happy. The promise of paradise is there every day. It is offered as part of the trappings of a consumer society.

In a later studio work - Common Unnatural Beauty - Jenny represented the urbanisation of the oasis and its capture in a confined space. In another reference to the palm tree as an icon of modern western culture’s view of paradise, she constructed one from plastic cups, individually tied together with monofilament.

About Common Unnatural Beauty, Jenny said:

Palm trees have been adopted by advertising to represent those things that we desire and aspire to; holidays, the best car, a house and everything in it, the easy life. In short: a paradise that can be purchased. However, the power to acquire and consume these things has been divorced, in our consciousness, from the natural environment. In Australia the rural food and water harvesting areas are often felt to be remote and disconnected from urban existence. It is easy to think of the city as an oasis. Here the oasis has become infused with architectural structure, integrated into the built environment, still beautiful but definitely not natural.

The stark white colour represented cleanliness: as remote from the dirt of primary production as the country is from the city. The work was exhibited at Canberra Contemporary Art Space in 2006, circled by a bed of salt to reflect land degradation as a hungry consumer waiting at the outskirts of the urban refuge.
Jenny’s first visit to the Macquarie Marshes was undertaken in 2001 as a participant in the Field Studies Program, convened by visual artist and Senior Lecturer John Reid from the Australian National University’s School of Art. Jenny was struck by how much of this part of western New South Wales had been laser levelled to grow cotton, how cattle grazed next to a nature reserve and how birds and frogs survived in a tightly controlled water regime. The Macquarie Marshes seemed beautiful, but not a paradise. She saw a relationship between this land, its cultivation, and our desire for paradise on earth.

Bountiful Land was part of the group exhibition called House of Dreams, undertaken in 2003 with fellow artists Cheryl Jobsz, Deb Faeyrglenn and Kelly de Olivera. Jenny’s ‘room’ in this shared house contained a dining room table that was a vertical representation of how the cultivated landscape is manipulated to provide the bounty for city dwellers, as well as a visual statement about our desire for true happiness – for paradise on earth. The fruit and crockery were wrapped in jackets of stitched eucalyptus leaves, sitting on a “tablecloth” of salt, in which fine traces of patterned lacework were delicately impressed.

About Bountiful Land, Jenny said:

In all cultures one of the most significant aspects of paradise is that food is unending and produced with no effort, and that living in a city can sometimes seem like this. There is an inescapable connection between people and the cultivation of the landscape. People are bound to the land. It is cleared, plowed and sown to provide food and clothing – sustenance to a distant humanity. The land is bountiful and it gives beyond sustainability, while hidden salt rises to the top of the water table.

Her next major work in response to the Macquarie Marshes was Land Charts - a series of eight panels of hand dyed silk, intricately stitched over with plants, shells and emu feathers. The materials were dyed over the campfire with local plant material, and represent a chart of the landscape, similar to the old river charts that were drawn on long rolls of fabric by the early navigators.

Right: Detail from Bountiful Land, 2003, mixed media including cardboard, gum leaves, eucalypt-dyed thread, salt, 1.4 x 1.2 x 1.2m
Sweet Brown Land, 2004, natural dyed silk and linen, plant material and emu feathers from the Macquarie Marshes, 5 x 12 x 12cm

Above right: Billabong, 2005, wool, salt, plastic cups, 1 x 1.25 x 1.5m
a standard brown paper box. The box was a unified starting point from which the dynamic range of work created in the ANCA studios could be represented. Jenny’s response was Sweet Brown Land, a box covered with a delicate skin of dyed silk and emu feathers, containing more boxes made of stitched eucalyptus leaves.

The water management issues that so affect the Macquarie Marshes were the source of Jenny’s next work, titled Billabong. The exhibition Waterworks, held at the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery in 2005, represented the role of water in our lives and our environment and the impact of its utilisation on society. Jenny’s contribution was Billabong. A shaded billabong full of clean fresh water was the image of the song of the Jolly Swagman. In Billabong Jenny lamented an unreal past, and represented the state that the swagman might find his billabong in today. She fashioned a tree stump as a vestige of the shady coolabah tree, covered with wool that had been scoured and washed with precious water, and surrounded by plastic cups full of salt. To feed and clothe consumers, land has been cleared, salt sucked up and water spent in copious amounts that are never recouped financially at the shop counter.

About Billabong, Jenny said:

The song ‘Once a Jolly Swagman’ is a central part of the Australian identity but there are conflicting messages in the song for modern Australians. The song identifies clearly with a past generation that was closer to the Australian landscape than most people are today. Most people in this country live in urban environments and many may not have even seen a billabong.

At the same time the song represents a time that is constant, when there was always water in the billabong and shade under the coolabah tree. This is the myth expressed by ‘Once a Jolly Swagman’ but it is how many city people perceive the bush.

In reality we have a rural environment that is deeply affected by the growing demands of the urban environment that make no allowances the extremities of the Australian climate.
In 1986 Jenny had visited Lake Mungo National Park with her husband Brian, son Jack and friend Neil Reckord. As Australia’s first World Heritage site, the ancient landscapes and remarkable human history left a strong impression of open space and timelessness. It was not until April 2005 that Jenny returned to Lake Mungo, as a participant in the Field Studies Program convened by visual artist and Senior Lecturer John Reid, from the Australian National University’s School of Art.

The ancient dry bed of Lake Mungo, formed over thousands of years of wind and water erosion, includes in its recent history more than a century of sheep grazing, represented by the relicts of recent settlers in this timeless landscape. Jenny found Lake Mungo, with its long history of human occupation, a rich source of material. The historic Mungo Woolshed and its sheep yards reflect the lives and endeavours of the Chinese labourers who constructed them in the late 1860’s. The Woolshed was built of locally harvested White Cypress Pine logs, trimmed at each end and dropped down vertical slots on either side of the pillars. Despite their obvious craftsmanship, the Chinese labourers remain as just a label, with few insights into their history, their lives or their relationship with their environment.

Jenny’s work Silk Road to Lake Mungo: A Memory for the 19th Century Chinese Labourers explored this relationship. About the work, Jenny said:

“There is a duality in Australia that is unique. Most of us live in cities but we idealise the country so that it is accepted as a part of our personal and national identity. I seek to engage with the country to reflect the relationship of the people who have lived there with their environment.

To produce this work, Jenny made natural dyes from saltbush, peppercorn and butterbush plants, to dye silk and wool. She then shaped bowls of silk using the thermoplasting technique she had used to steam into shape the tulle objects in her earlier work Remembering Community, but in this case she supported the fabric with delicate stitching using dyed wool. The method has its origins in the Japanese practice of shibori, in which silk is shaped by pleating, stitching and steaming.

Right: The historic Mungo Woolshed

Far right: Silk Road to Lake Mungo: A Memory for the 19th Century Chinese Labourers, 2005, natural dyed silk and wool, monofilament, rice, wood, 3 pieces 10 x 12 x 12cm
Silk Road to Lake Mungo is a memory of the customs of the Chinese and the influence of their environment as they travelled through the Mungo landscape. It was exhibited in Wet River Dry Lake, a collection of works from the artists participating in the Field Studies program, in Wentworth during October 2005.

The Lake Mungo visit was the fourth Field Studies trip that Jenny had undertaken in eight years and she felt fortunate to have had these opportunities. Lake Mungo was yet another place of inspiration and Jenny’s response to such places was an overriding aspect of her practice, highly instrumental in the development of her discourse.
1960–1970
Jenny was born in February 1960 at the St Margaret's Hospital for Women in Sydney, the second child for Max & Greta, a little sister for Grahame and later a big sister for Brent. Max and Greta relocated to Batlow and settled on a farm in the West Batlow area. Jenny loved the freedom of her early life on the farm. The free-ranging chickens were her sisters, and Curls the lamb was her favourite pet. It was here, amongst the sheep, cattle, horses and orchards that she developed her love of the environment.

In 1965, Max’s work took the family to Bathurst, where Jenny attended the South Bathurst and Bathurst Public Schools.

1971–1978
Jenny spent her secondary years at the Bathurst High School. She became heavily involved in dance, training in Highland and Ballet. On completing high school she spent a year studying ballet at the Margaret Walker School of Dance in Sydney.

1979–1982
1979 saw Jenny commence full-time study at the Canberra College of Advanced Education, now the University of Canberra. She was passionate about her studies and majored in Applied Ecology, graduating in 1981. During this time she built lifelong friendships with like-minded people who cared about the environment. She also met her future husband Brian. After graduating she commenced work, initially in a laboratory specialising in aquatic science.
1983–1986
In February 1983 Jenny and Brian married in the garden of Miss Trails house in Bathurst, a National Trust property originally built in 1845. They holidayed in Queensland before settling in Canberra and purchasing a home. Jenny joined the ACT Public Service in order to gain access to jobs in environmental science. Before long she was working in the ACT Parks and Conservation Service Wildlife Research Unit, based initially at the Lake Ecology Laboratory at Kingston. In January 1986 Jenny became a mum with the birth of her beloved son Jack.

1987–1988
Jenny returned to work as a ranger at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. She greatly enjoyed showing school groups around the Reserve and guiding the night-time spotlight walks. She found particular satisfaction in sharing the wonders of the natural environment with the public and especially with school children – communicating meaningful and important messages about the environment. In September 1988 her beautiful daughter Evelyn was born – an unexpected home birth!

1989–1993
As much as she loved her work at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, the sacrifice of leaving her children every day to go to work became too much for Jenny and she resigned. She then actively volunteered in many capacities during Jack and Evelyn’s attendance at playgroup, pre-school and primary school. She was involved in nursing mothers, playgroup and the local pre-school, working on committees, in canteens, at fundraisers – she was one of those many parents who work tirelessly for their community all the way through the school years.

Jenny also found a great deal of pleasure coaching and umpiring T-Ball and Softball teams and managing soccer teams. Throughout this time she continued playing soccer herself. She also found time to undertake a garment production course at the Canberra Institute of Technology, pursuing her interest in making children’s clothes. Each month she held a stall at the Hall Art and Craft Markets, one of the largest hand-made, home-produced markets in Australia, where her patchwork children’s clothing was always in great demand.
1994
This was a year of escape to the paradise of Cape York, of true freedom. Jenny and her family ran away to Cape York in 1994, and nearly didn’t come back. Months of camping in tropical paradises left an indelible mark on their lives as they wandered tropical beaches and rainforests, immersed themselves in the wonder of pristine natural environments - and while doing so, changed their lives. Jenny filled her soul with inspiration and beauty from this wonderful place, and set a new course in her life.

1995–1999
The experience of Cape York had reset the family’s priorities to the more important things in life, and 1995 was a year of coming back to terms with a modern culture that now seemed rather curious.

1996 saw Jenny return to full-time study, majoring in textiles at the Australian National University’s School of Art. It was a roller coaster ride of experiences that were challenging and inspiring, destructive and uplifting. As with all of her tertiary studies, she invested a significant amount of her time and energy in her studies, often worrying about the impact it was having on herself and her family. She revelled in the creative release that came from formal art study. Her confidence in the art world flourished and the experiences she had of different places she travelled to during this time were a highlight, particularly through John Reid’s award-winning Field Studies programs.

During this period, the call of paradise proved too strong to resist and in both 1996 and 1999 Jenny and her family flew back to Cape York for holidays with their dear friends Gary and Sue.

Right: Jenny busts out another performance of her character Julia Lemonfresh in Canberra City. Julia could clean her way to domestic paradise in just minutes.
After graduating with Honours from the School of Art Jenny commenced work as a practicing artist in 2000 in her studio in Dickson, Canberra. An overriding aspect of her practice was a response to place. In 2000 Jenny produced My Own Paradise for Tamworth’s Fibre Textile Biennale, an exhibition which toured around Australia. At the same time, Jenny worked on Something More, which was selected for exhibition at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

In October 2001, Jenny’s work Remembering Community was exhibited at the Sculpture, Objects and Functional Art exhibition in Chicago. In the same year she prepared Remembering Community II – Living Alone, for the Fiberart International Exhibition at the Pittsburgh Centre for the Arts. The logistics of remaking and shipping these works overseas were demanding, with much time spent steaming tulle into shape and constructing cardboard moulds for each of the delicate crockery and cutlery items.

In 2002 Jenny ran a workshop in the Macquarie Marshes on dying fabrics using plant materials, and on the same trip, as a visiting artist she assisted Carinda Public School students with their watertank mural of the Macquarie Marshes.

Despite the full-time workload of her art practice, Jenny made time to continue her contribution to school and community, including the construction of many ornate samurai warrior costumes for Lyneham High School’s winning entry in the 2002 Rock Eisteddfod.

In 2003, her son Jack spent the year in Thailand through the intercultural student exchange organisation AFS, prompting Jenny’s involvement with AFS’s North Canberra Group, initially as Hosting Coordinator, with responsibility for finding suitable families for overseas students and for the welfare of the students while they lived with those families.

In 2004 Jenny continued her volunteer work for the student exchange organisation AFS, chairing their North Canberra Group. During that same year the Lawrence family hosted an Icelandic student, Ragnheidur Einarsdottir, or Ragga. Ragga became a much loved member of the family, sharing many wonderful experiences of Australia.

Jenny took part and full time positions as a relief School Assistant with the ACT Department of Education and Training. She assisted in the Science faculty of Kaleen High School for the 2004 and 2005 school years. At Dickson College she worked in the Foundations for Independence Program with special needs students, as well as in the library and the front office. She also worked in the Science preparation rooms of Copeland College and Ginninderra District High School.

Jenny also served on the board of Australian National Capital Artists Incorporated for three years and was the Chair of the Board throughout 2004. She successfully encouraged the organisation to focus on planning for the future and this groundwork led to a successful grant application and the employment of a Gallery Development Officer.
2006
Jenny commenced her Diploma of Education with a level of certainty and enthusiasm that was inspirational. She could tell quite early in the course that teaching would be an extremely rewarding and enjoyable endeavour. She worked tirelessly and achieved the highest grades, but was quite uninterested in her results. The reward for her was the learning, the satisfaction of teaching, and the prospect of commencing a career for which she had such passion. As part of her training she taught year 11 students at Canberra College, greatly enjoying her contribution to releasing the talent of her students.

Jenny still found time for a major exhibition during her busy study timetable in 2006 – a solo exhibit at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space of her striking work Common Unnatural Beauty. She also contributed a work to the exhibition Process: Inspiration to Presentation, the 2006 Tenants Show of the Australian National Capital Artists association. Her contribution was a pin board of mixed media that detailed her creative journey in making Common Unnatural Beauty.

During 2006, the Lawrence family hosted a Spanish exchange student, Candy Manas-Aguilar, who became a cherished part of their family over the next year.

In late 2006 Jenny graduated with Honours and was interviewed and ranked as an Outstanding candidate by the ACT’s Department of Education. In December she was diagnosed with cancer and in the face of an uncertain treatment schedule, was forced to put on hold the job offers that began to flow following the release of her ranking.

2007
As the pace of 2006 subsided and the gravity of her illness emerged, Jenny resumed her fitness program and began to concentrate on her next work. The long walks she took up Mount Majura with her friends gave her great respite and peace. Her dog Bruno got fitter by the week. She carefully arranged her time to be with her family as much as possible. She reduced her original concept for her next work from a large and detailed installation to a beautifully detailed drawing, and on 19 May completed What Pretty Plague for submission to the Climate Changing Climate exhibition at the Goulburn Regional Gallery. Just five days later she passed away gracefully at home.
The 2007 Climate Changing Climate exhibition was a collaboration between artists and scientists that sought to provide a context for discussion about climate change and to evoke feelings and emotions in the community on this important issue. Jenny’s work had for some time been reflecting the disparity between nature and culture, and the cost to the environment of our never-ending quest for a better lifestyle. If environmental damage were to continue unchecked, eventually only nature’s hardiest species would survive. Jenny wondered how far climate change would go and how it might affect our everyday lives. Her response was What Pretty Plague, a drawing - really a protest poster - of nature’s survivor, cockroaches. Her drawings of them were based on observation and informed by scientific methodology. In every way the insects conflict with their printed textile patterning. The garish green and white floral pattern is a parody of nature. She posed the question to viewers:

What Pretty Plague? If it’s not cockroaches that will be the plague, what will be the unforeseen result of messing too much with nature? The mass production of industrial society feeds an insatiable appetite for a better lifestyle, but it manufactures plagues of our own making that will affect us everywhere in our lives.

Jenny never wasted time reflecting on her illness. Instead she found contentment in reflecting on her life and her achievements, and the enormous pride she had in her children Jack and Evelyn and their achievements. She had written in her diary:

“Every mark I make counts. To live is to make a mark.”

Above: Detail from What Pretty Plague, 2007, coloured and graphite pencil on paper, 77cm x 58cm
EXHIBITIONS

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2006 Common Unnatural Beauty, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra Aus
2002 perfect future, Australian National Capital Artists Gallery, Canberra Aus
2002 Remembering Community, Stephanie Burns Fine Art, Canberra Aus

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2007 Climate Changing Climate, Goulburn Regional Gallery, Goulburn Aus What Pretty Plague
2006 Process: Inspiration to Presentation, ANCA Gallery, Canberra Aus and Boroondara Aus Pinboard
2005 Wet River Dry Lake, Wentworth and other locations Aus Silk Road to Lake Mungo
2005 Water Works, Goulburn Regional Gallery, Goulburn Aus Billabong
2004 Box, ANCA Gallery, Canberra Aus Sweet Brown land
2003 House of Dreams, ANCA Gallery, Canberra Aus Bountiful Land
2003 Ceremonial Vessels, Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Art, Canberra Aus Gum Leaves
2003 Uncharted Waters, Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Art, Canberra Aus Land Charts
2002 Salt/Water, various locations, Corowa, Dubbo Regional Gallery Aus Land Charts
2002 Macquarie Marshes, Quambone Aus Land Charts
2002 ANCA Tenants Exhibition, ANCA Gallery, Canberra Aus Land Charts
2001 Mine is Bigger Than His, Stephanie Burns Fine Art, Canberra Aus Cup and Saucer
2001 Salt, Murray Darling Basin Commission, Canberra Aus (Print of Remembering Community)
2001 Fiberart International 2001, Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pittsburgh USA Remembering Community II - Living Alone
2001 Australian Textile Art: The Material Speaks, Craft Australia exhibition, SOFA, Chicago USA Remembering Community
2001 20th National Craft Acquisition Award Exhibition, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin Aus Something More
2000 14th Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial- frisson, Tamworth City Gallery, touring My Own Paradise
1999 Julia Lemonfresh Eats Out with ACME- performance, Festival of Contemporary Art, Canberra Aus (Julia’s Costume, Case and Trophy)
1999 50 Years Now. Field Studies in the Snowy Mountains, Cabramurra Aus Remembering Community
1998 Presiding Officer’s Acquisitive Craft Prize Exhibition, Parliament House, Canberra Aus Remembering Community II - Living Alone
1998 City of Hobart Art Prize Exhibition, Carnegie Gallery, Hobart Aus Remembering Community

Awards
2001 Telos International Textile Art Postcard Competition, First Prize for postcard of ‘Remembering Community’
1999 Object Magazine Student Prize finalist
1998 City of Hobart Art Prize Finalist
CATALOGUE

**What Pretty Plague**, 2007
coloured and graphite pencil on paper
77 x 58cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p24)

**Pinboard**, 2006
pinboard and diaries with attached papers and plastic
2 x 3m
Collection: Lawrence Estate

**Common Unnatural Beauty**, 2006
plastic cups, monofilament, salt
3 x 1.5 x 0.5m
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p12)

**Silk Road to Lake Mungo: A Memory for the 19th Century Chinese Labourers**, 2005
natural dyed silk and wool, monofilament, rice, wood
10 x 12 x 12cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p18)

**Billabong**, 2005
wool, salt, plastic cups
1 x 1.25 x 1.5m
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p16)

**Sweet Brown Land**, 2004
natural dyed silk and linen, plant material, emu feathers
5 x 12 x 12cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p15)

**Bountiful Land**, 2003
mixed media including cardboard, gum leaves, eucalypt-dyed thread, salt
1.4 x 1.2 x 1.2m
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p14,28)

**perfect future**, 2002
mixed media including woven, dyed monofilament, carved wood spines and electrical parts
6 x 4 x 1m. Wreath - aluminium can, 40 x 40cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p11)

**Land Charts for Macquarie Marshes**, 2002
Silks hand dyed with plants from the Marshes, linen, wool, plants, emu feathers, shells, plant material
8 panels of 83 x 15cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p30)

**Something More**, 2001
woven nylon, aluminium can
30 x 15 x 15cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p11)

**Remembering Community II – Living Alone**, 2001
manipulated nylon tulle on found tray
70 x 40cm tray with variable items
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p7)
**My Own Paradise,** 2000
Mixed media including found case, silk, woven dyed monofilament
35 x 66 x 26cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p10)

**Julia Lemonfresh,** 1999
costume, case and trophy variable
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p21)

**Longing,** 1999
woven monofilament, shells
30 x 8cm
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p3)

**Remembering Community,** 1998
manipulated nylon tulle, in situ table
1700 x 900cm area with variable items
Collection: Lawrence Estate (p6)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The content of this book draws heavily from Jenny’s diaries and artist statements. The photographers of Jenny’s work primarily include Luisa Abello and Derek Ross, and the quality and sensitivity of their work is gratefully acknowledged.

This book was prepared by Jenny’s family – her husband Brian, son Jack and daughter Evelyn. Design by Brayden Dykes.

Right: A constructed paradise

Far right: Detail from Land Charts for Macquarie Marshes, 2002, silks hand dyed with plants from the Marshes, linen, wool, plants, emu feathers, shells, plant material, 8 panels of 83 x 15cm
This book depicts the art of Jenny Lawrence, a scientist, artist and teacher whose work centred on the environment and the idea of paradise. Through her art and her teaching, Jenny reflected the importance of the natural and social environment to the paradise that we all seek.

The book includes photographs and stories from her work and family life that reveal her experiences and inspirations. It brings together for the first time a significant collection of images of her work.