

ON THE
WESTERN EDGE:



Witnessing Bluetts



On a tightrope.
Will this forest survive
the carelessness of man?

Sarah Ryan, *On a tightrope*, 2022 + haiku



Jennifer Forest, *Above looking into the tree canopy*, 2022



**photo
access**

ON THE WESTERN EDGE:

APR - NOV 2022



BLUETTS BLOCK

Witnessing Bluetts

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the urban development along Canberra's Western Edge has been relentless. As the population of Canberra grew, entire habitats and ecosystems have had to make way for newly built town centres, high-rise buildings and an ever-expanding web of roads.

On the Western Edge of the ACT lies an area called Bluetts Block. I first set foot on this land when my partner, a keen bird watcher, invited me to join her on a birding walk. Passing through two gates, we were met by a steep incline, not something that sparked joy on this first visit. The Block did not strike me immediately as the most rewarding photogenic haunt, but my love for Bluetts grew with every visit. The abundance of fungi, little kangaroo paths meandering through the Block, dead eucalypts trees standing tall inside a clearing created by their fallen branches.

Looking out towards the East from the Block, the reality of the development looms. A pair of Wedgetail Eagles flies high overhead. After this initial walk, we became frequent visitors to Bluetts discovering new facets with every visit. I remember the area adjacent to the

Block getting cleared and witnessing the trees, heath and shrubs reduced to piles of mulch behind a wall of temporary fencing. These piles of mulch hiding behind the fence appeared like sad ghosts looking back at me as I photographed them.

Over ten months, seventeen photographers led by 2022 Dahl Fellow Dr David Wong spent time exploring Bluetts Block. This group of photographers visited the site at different times of the day throughout the seasons. On each of the walks, David Wong was assisted by another specialist highlighting aspects of their practice or background in relation to this site.

The in-situ exhibition, *Along the Western Edge: Witnessing Bluetts*, was temporarily installed on the site on the first of December and is, like this publication, a culmination of the work and the passion which has driven David Wong and his disciples to raise awareness about the importance of Bluetts Block as a thriving eco-system worth protecting from development.

Wouter Van de Voorde
PhotoAccess Acting Director

(previous page)
Miriam Blackburn, *Pink Tree Silhouette*, 2022
(opposite page)
Mandii Bennett, *Colour In the Bush Capital*, 2022



BLUETTS BLOCK

DENMAN PROSPECT
SECTION 1, BLOCK 12
PINEY RIDGE
STROMLO BLOCK
402 & 403

$35^{\circ}17'57.3''S$

$149^{\circ}00'35.2''E$



Allen Bills
Angela Rymer
Bec Fassone
Bernadette Law
Fiona Hooton
Jenni Savigny
Jennifer Forest
Joel de Courcy Browne
Joshua Law
Kristiane Herrmann
Mandii Bennett
Michael James
Miriam Blackburn
Rebecca Blackburn
Sarah Ryan
Scott Ferguson
Yasmin Idriss
Yvette Morris

FOREWORD

David Wong

When I first heard about the efforts by members of the community to save Bluetts Block from the impacts of a proposed housing development, it reminded me of a similar effort by community members to protect natural and cultural heritage values threatened by the Ginninderry development. I realised that this issue of development butting up against nature and the forces of nature such as fire, is happening on many fronts and will continue as the population grows.

When the opportunity arose to partner with PhotoAccess on a community project as part of a Eucalypt Australia Dahl Fellowship, Bluetts Block seemed like an ideal subject for participants to explore. It is a contested landscape, dominated by Eucalypt woodland and forest communities, including critically endangered Box-Gum Woodland as well as over 100 plant species. It is a crucial link for animals moving through the landscape including the threatened Pink-tailed Worm-lizard, dunnarts, antechinus and the at least 138 bird species that have been recorded at the site.

Scott Ferguson, *Colour In the Bush Capital*, 2022

It is part of a solitary corridor between the Murrumbidgee River and northern Canberra, linking up with other reserves such as Stony Creek Nature Reserve, Kama Nature Reserve and The Pinnacle Nature Reserve. It is juxtaposed against the surrounding mosaic of urban and agricultural landscapes. The future of the agricultural parts of this landscape are uncertain. At the time of writing, a large area on the western edge of Canberra was under 'investigation' by the ACT's planning arm.

The fact that fires threatening Canberra generally come from the west adds another dimension of complexity as climate change proceeds. On the Western Edge – Witnessing Bluetts was a different kind of investigation. Participants came together every month, over the better part of a year, to explore and photograph aspects of Bluetts Block. A range of presenters generously shared their knowledge and perspectives with the group.

Jean Casburn, the originator of the Friends of Bluetts Block guided the group around the block and spoke on





its history and importance as well as the efforts to protect it. Chris Holly encouraged people to look at the landscape at Bluetts in new ways. Con Boekel talked about the processes that influenced Bluetts over different timescales and in different parts of the landscape. Alice Wells drew attention to the small yet vital inhabitants of Bluetts – the invertebrates. Rory Gillen helped participants to photograph the site at night and Carolyn Young shared her artistic practice and photographic techniques as well as information on her body of work on Box-Gum Woodlands.

Every member of PhotoAccess assisted in some way, helping with field sessions, organising behind the scenes and producing the book and exhibition. The participants each brought their own perspectives and ideas, working together to create the final outcome: an outdoor exhibition and this publication. For me, the experience has reinforced the power of collaboration and the strength that diversity can bring to a project.

What has emerged is a reflection on a place that has become special to many. It is unique in that, had another group of participants worked on the project they would have generated a completely different body of work. We hope you enjoy this book and will find the time to also visit and enjoy Bluetts Block.





PERSPECTIVES

Jenni Savigny

Some first impressions: a patch of scrubby bush, a wooded mess, could be anywhere in Canberra. Other first impressions: Scott has a background in science and was surprised to find such a healthy ecosystem right on the edge of urban development. Joel's first impressions were visceral; the smell of the bush took him straight back to childhood. It was good to be back.

Over the course of multiple visits, Bluetts Block showed us its details, its seasons, its diversity and beauty. We turned up outside of our normal visiting hours, at dusk, a day in June that threatened snow. I visited during a thunderstorm, quietly cursing my poor timing and the tripod and umbrella I was carrying.

One day in autumn everyone became fascinated with photographing fungi, a revelation to Scott. 'It was the greatest experience watching what other people were looking at. I tend to look at the same things over and over.'

(previous page)

Yasmin Idriss, *Sunset Conversations*, 2022

(opposite page)

Angela Rymer, *Cassinia*, 2022

Chris, one of our teachers, gave each of us a white plastic 35 mm slide frame a small rectangle through which to see Bluetts. And he gave us questions: how to convey Bluetts, its complexity, its patterns of light, its own qualities and identity?

Sarah has spent a career immersed in the ecology of Australian ecosystems. 'It's a challenge to convey an ecosystem through photography. You're only taking a tiny piece of static landscape, yet what's so important are not the individual species but the interactions between them because that's what builds these complex systems. That's what enables the ecosystem to self-organise and perpetuate over many lifetimes, longer than we can even imagine as a species who hasn't been here very long.'

Sarah's biggest personal learning and discovery was about Bluetts' lichens, a little part of the ecosystem she'd never thought about before. Mandi saw passion. 'The more I went the more I saw the passion that other people were bringing to saving Bluetts. I photographed



Jean's hands because her passion is what changed my perspective. These were the hands that were nurturing Bluettts. We were privileged to spend so much time with her.'

And Dave. Bluettts was where he completed field studies for his doctorate on pink-tailed worm lizards. He showed us Bluettts with generosity, kindness and respect, asking us not to turn over rocks and disturb a vulnerable species. He identified the brilliantly-coloured spider that crossed my path. I learned about the Canberra Nature Map and the 2,617 species that have been identified at Bluettts. I will add my red-headed mouse spider: 2,618.

Over a year the passion rubbed off. Joel took his kids and talked to them about the importance of having a nature corridor for the animals and insects and the way suburbia is encroaching on Bluettts. He plans to keep going back to the block. So is Angela, with her Wednesday walking group.

'To have it taken away would be a travesty,' says Yvette. She grew up in Melbourne lived in Sydney, and then moved to Canberra five years ago. 'What's wonderful about this city is how it loves its green spaces. Humans need houses to live in but we need to find ways to do this and preserve precious green spaces at the same time.'



Jenni Savigny, *The Edge*, 2022





Capture and burn.
Stop waging war on the forests,
making the oxygen we breathe.

Sarah Ryan, *Capture and burn*, 2022 + haiku
(opposite page) Yasmin Idriss, *Sunset from the path*, 2022





Yvette Morris, *Termite mound*, 2022
(opposite page) Fiona Hooton, *Scribbly moth tracing*, 2022





Allen Bills, *Peaceful Regeneration*, 2022

Allen Bills, *Thornbill posing*, 2022

(opposite page) Yvette Morris, *Coral fungi*, 2022







Mandii Bennett, *At Night*, 2022

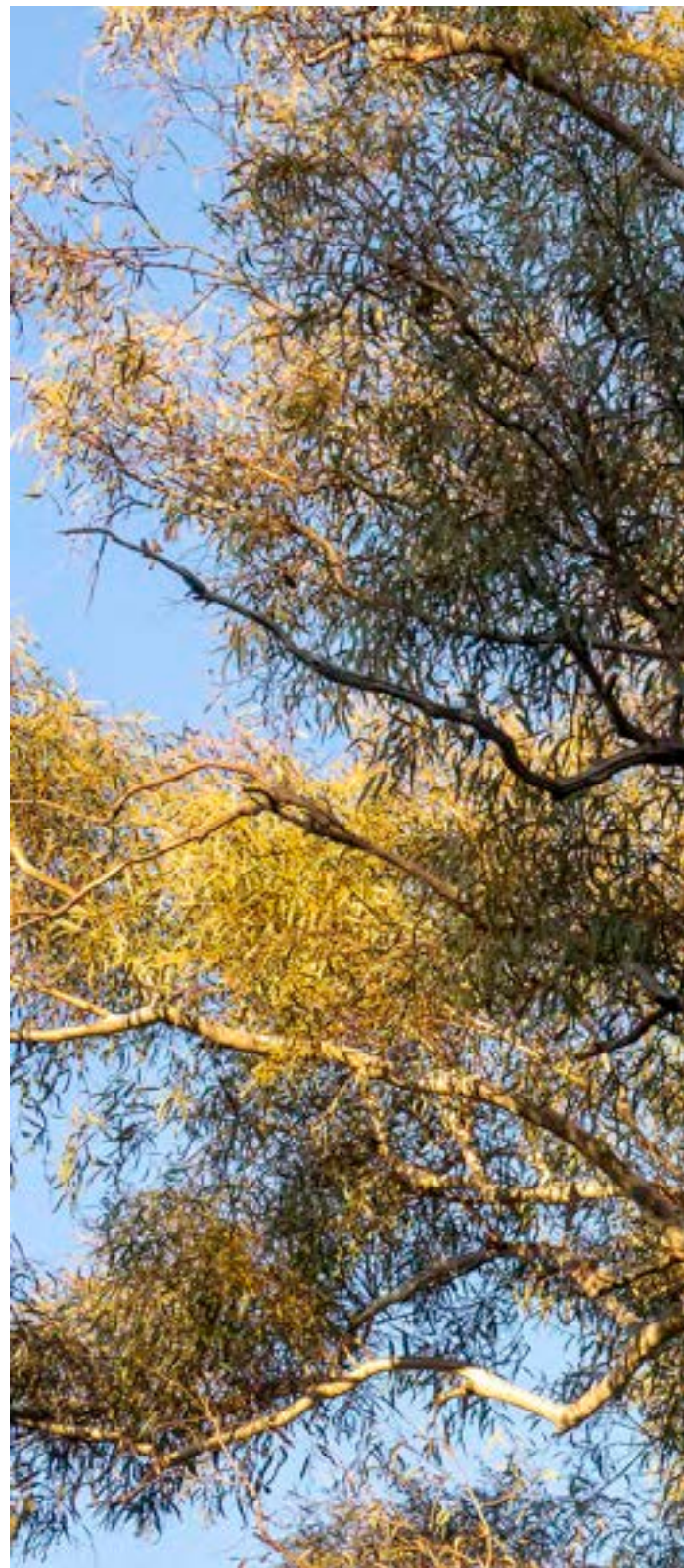


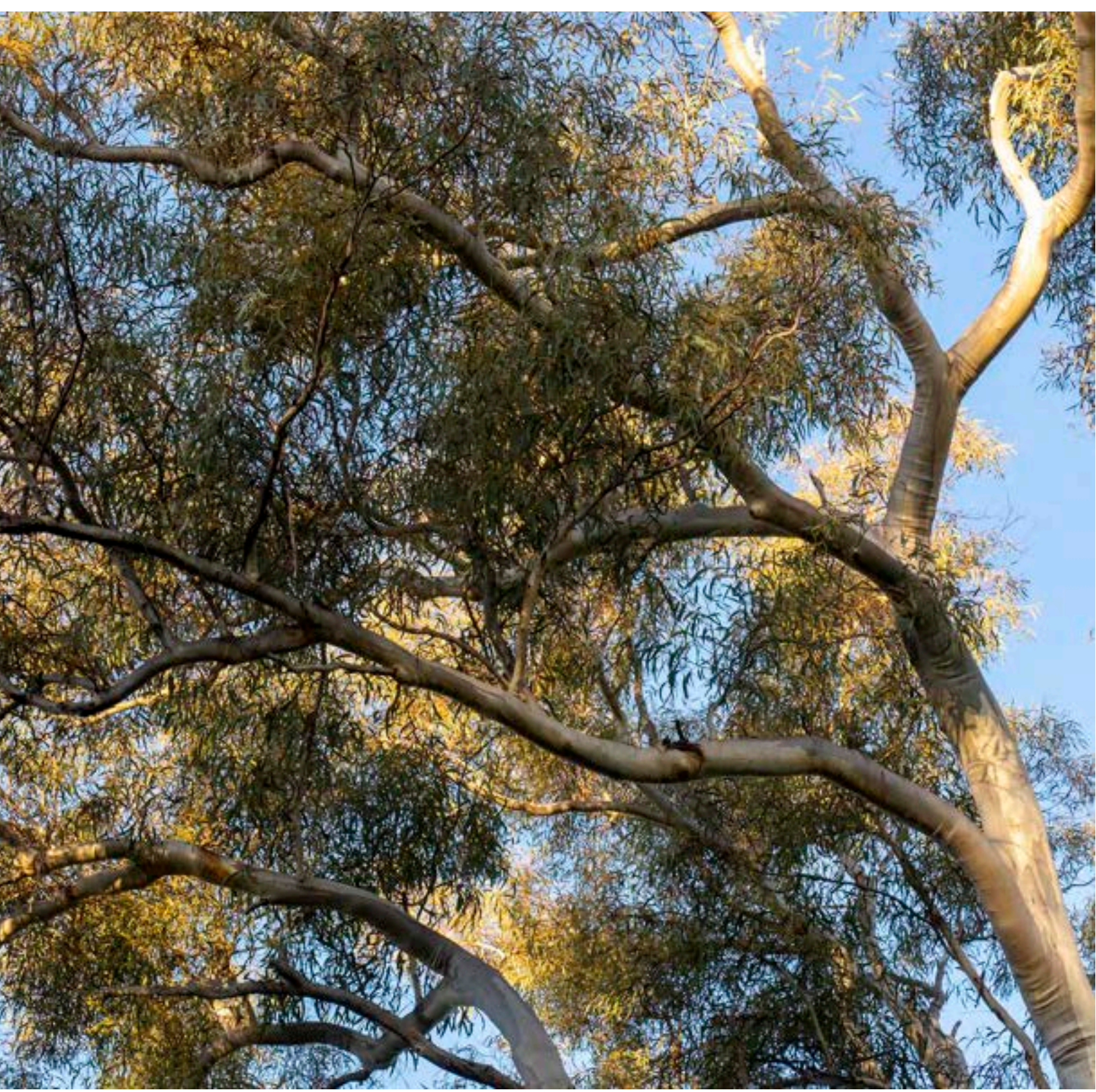
Angela Rymer, *Breakfast*, 2022
Mandii Bennett, *Skeleton*, 2022



No straight lines here!
Curves and angles weave
myriad chances for life.

Sarah Ryan, *No straight lines here*, 2022 + haiku







Yasmin Idriss, *Breeze*, 2022

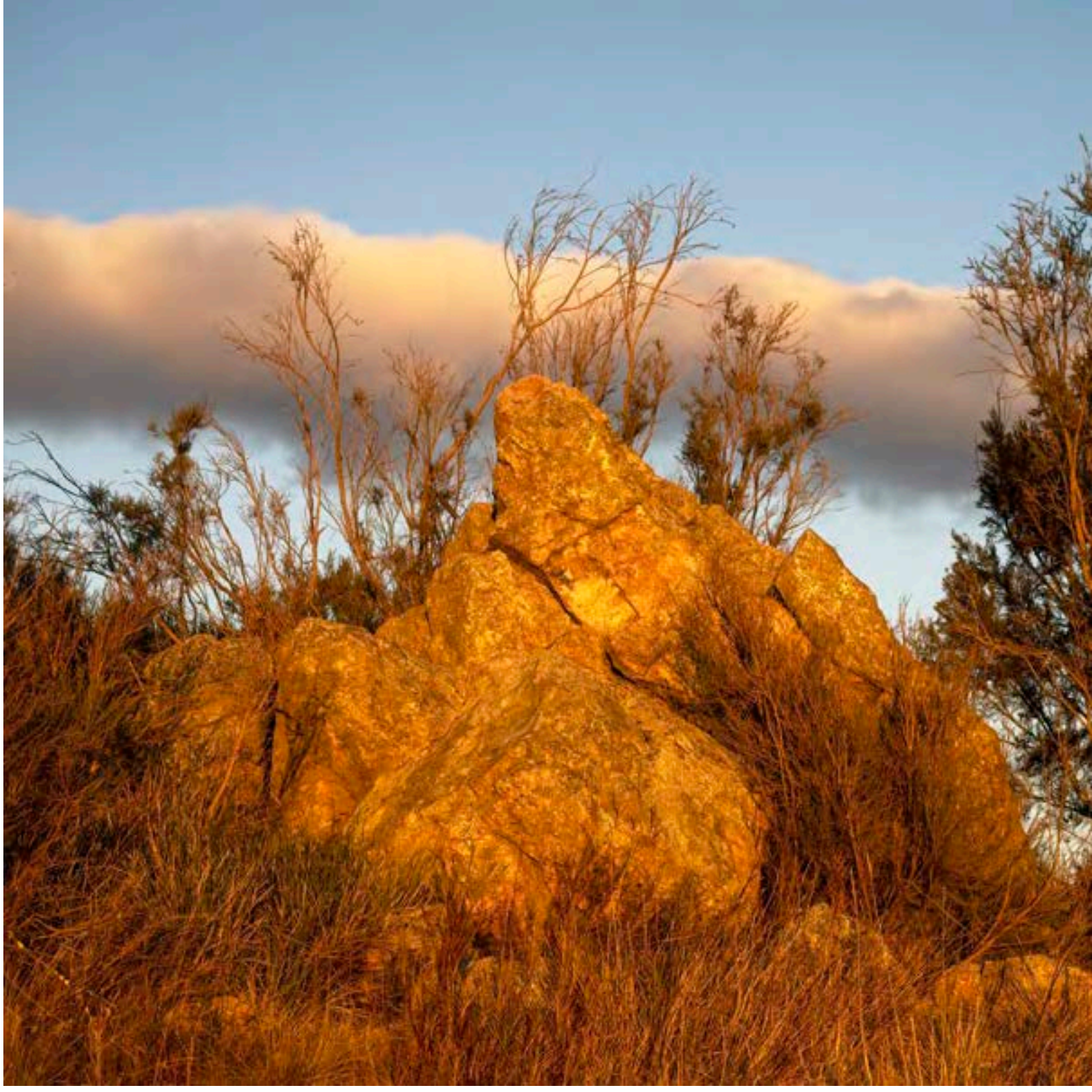


Yasmin Idriss, *Swaying in the Breeze*, 2022



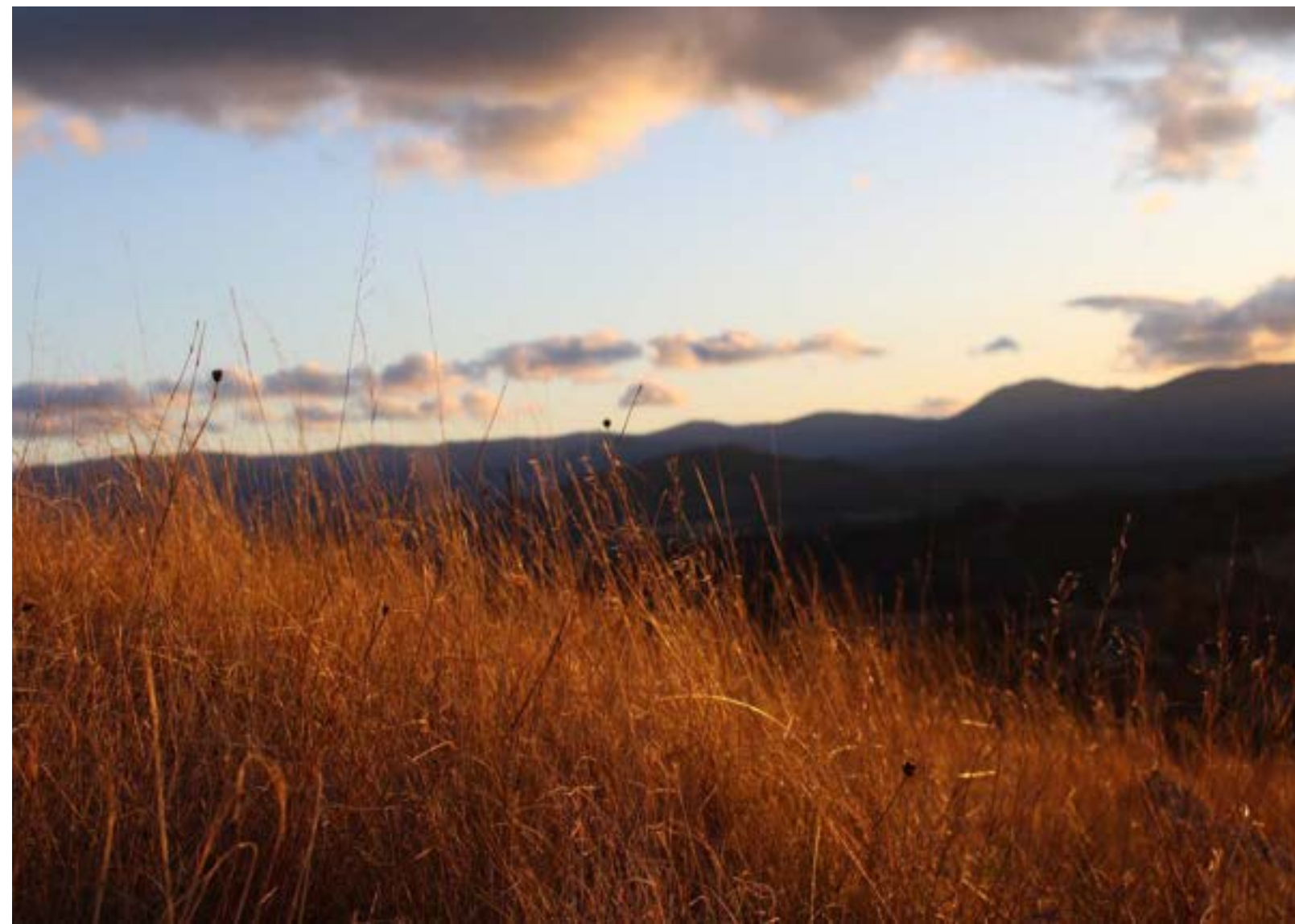
Bec Fassone, *Untitled*, 2022







(opposite page) Allen Bills, *Englightening*, 2022
Mandii Bennett, *Bluetts Top*, 2022



Jennifer Forest, *Golden Hour Grass*, 2022



Bernadette Law, *Mini at Bluetts*, 2022
Yvette Morris, *Native grasses*, 2022





Joel de Courcy Browne, *Funghi*, 2022



Rebecca Blackburn, *Pale yellow fungi*, 2022

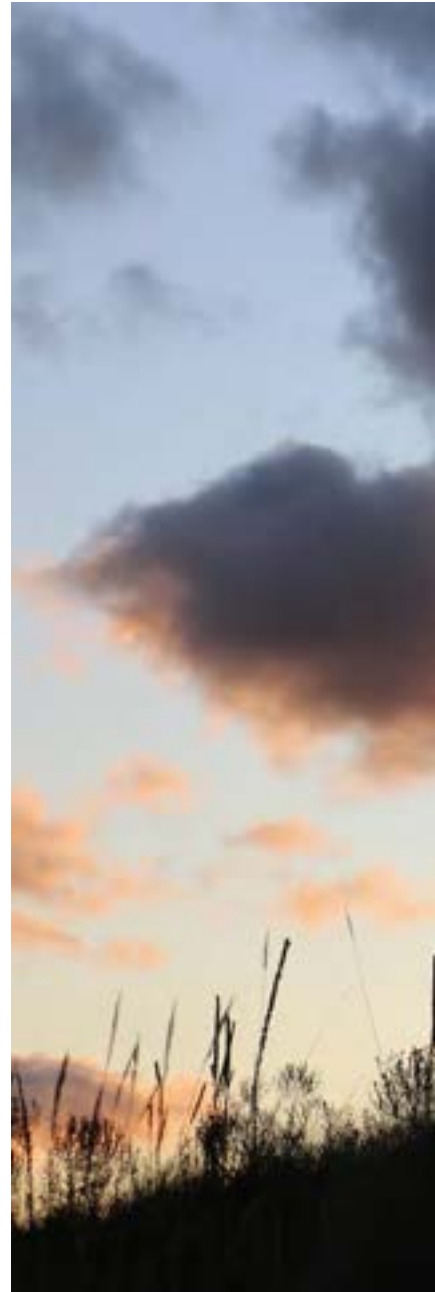


Rebecca Blackburn, *Bubble funghi*, 2022



Miriam Blackburn, *Native white flower*, 2022
Angela Rymer, *Breezy*, 2022

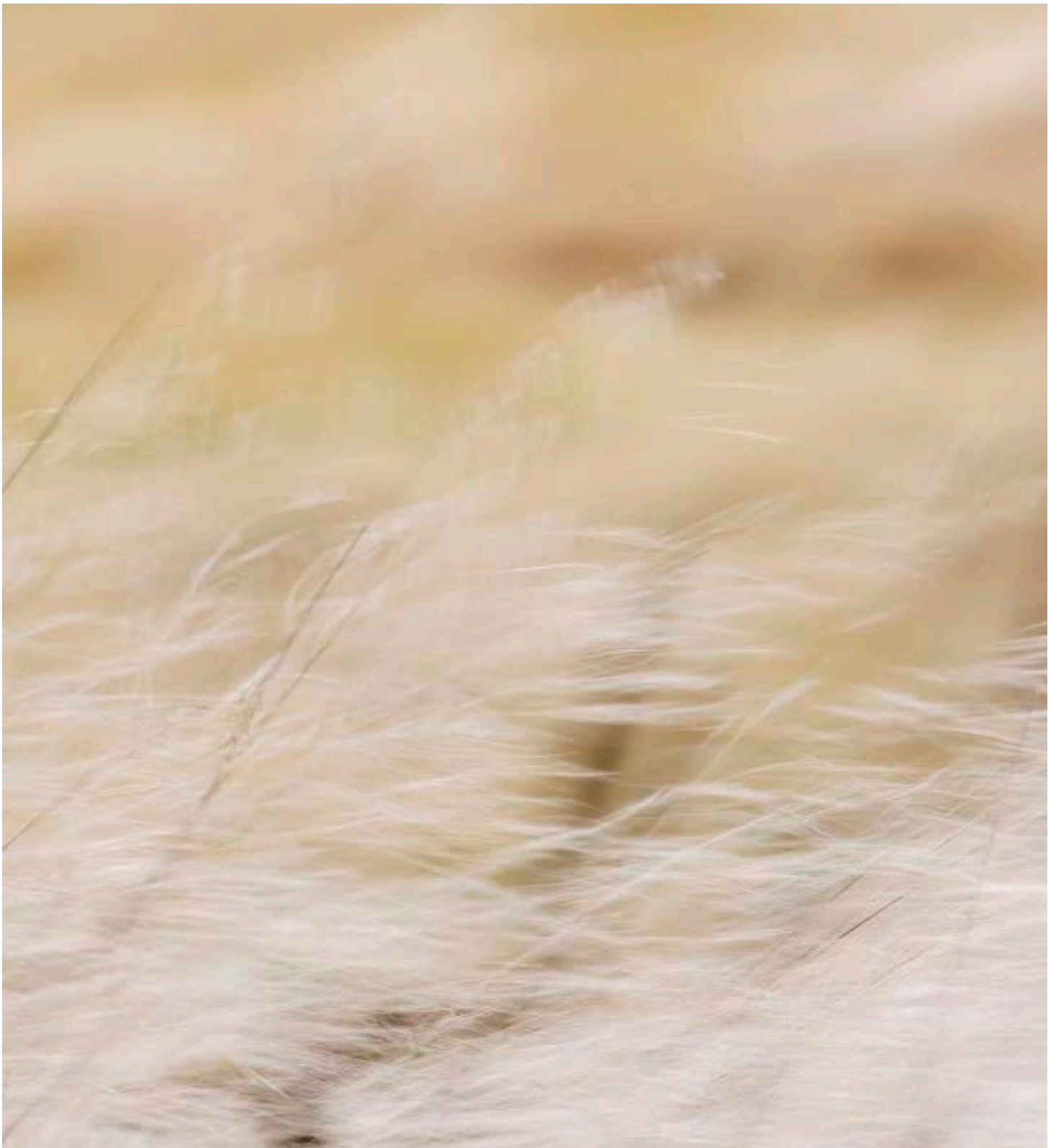




Kristiane Herrmann, *Capturing the moment*, 2022



Angela Rymer, *A glow*, 2022





(opposite page) Allen Bills, *Moving*, 2022
Kistiane Herrmann, *Dusk*, 2022







(previous page) Jenni Savigny, *Sunset*, 2022
Yvette Morris, *Blue Finger orchid*, 2022
(opposite page) Mandii Bennett, *Hands that Nurture Bluetts*, 2022









(previous page) Allen Bills, *Kookaburra*, 2022
Yasmin Idriss, *Golden hour at Bluetts*, 2022
(opposite page) Miriam Blackburn, *Two Orchids*, 2022



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