

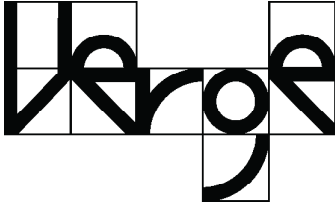
**'STILL LIFE FROM A DISTANT MEMORY'
RUTH JU-SHIH LI
CURATED BY CON GERAKARIS**

**24 May - 23 June
Opening Thursday 1 June, 6pm-8pm**

Forever elusive and ceaselessly unbending, time is the greatest medium that builds and weathers our existence. We have boxed this intangible temporal flow into seconds and years to understand its slippery nature, given identity in the face of a clock. Ruth Ju-shih Li's *Still Life from a Distant Memory* employs time to delve into the process of healing by charting the progression of decay. Li's amalgamated botanical sculptures are crafted from raw clay, wax, and bamboo, clinically manipulated through a delicately laborious practice. Of equal importance are the four elements - air, earth, fire, and water - which create and destroy in impartial chaos. Assembled both in her studio and on-site, Ruth bravely hands her ephemeral artwork to the forces of nature as gravity and time leave their scarring marks.

Anchoring the exhibition is *Florilegium* (2023), an ethereally carved wax sculpture sitting upon a Chinese rosewood plant stand. Composed of imagined botany drawn from Australian and foreign flora, Li subverts the symbolic lexicon of flowers to introduce an idiosyncratic visual language. Nestled within the petals and buds hides a root system of wicks, set alight in a considered act of destruction. Where initially the work aesthetically betrayed its intrinsic materiality, once lit the meticulous bouquet alchemises fire and air to melt, drip and solidify again. *Florilegium* begins life as an otherworldly bloom, an imagined entity that wanes over the course of the exhibition, reducing to an unrecognisable spectre of crystalline stalactites.

Haunting this centrepiece is Li's iterative raw clay and porcelain installation *Still Life from a Distant Memory* (2020-ongoing), a series of suspended earthen clusters further exploring the artist's ethereal floral ecology. Unglazed and unfired, the clay sculptures revel in their monochromatic palette, absorbing light and air to cast intricate shadows. Aerial roots form a dendritic commune between the hanging blossoms, a symbiotic relationship living and breathing together as the elements tighten their suffocating grasp. Echoing the decay of *Florilegium*, the damp earth withers and cracks returning to dust and leaving the trace of a floating memory - a bittersweet celebration of the beautiful experiences encountered across a lifetime.

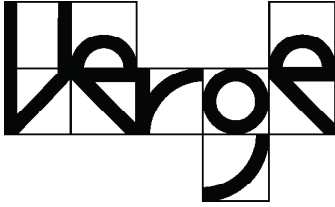


Sprouting from an assuming corner, *Bamboo Study IV* (2023) unfurls as an examination of tension and release. A fresh cut bamboo culm droops under the weight of an earthenware bloom, frozen in an equilibrium of rigid fluidity. Li once more tests the natural resilience of her organic materials existing in transmuted state by artistic intervention. In time, the parched bamboo succumbs to gravity and snaps at the base of its wall mount, the green exodermis eroded into an arid brown hue. *Bamboo Study IV* visualises the splendid chaos that creates life, a perfect storm of wild chemistry into which all living matter is born and passes on into the next stage of life.

Accompanying Ruth Ju-shih Li's sculptural installations are a soundscape and movement performance work by Megan Alice Clune and Niki Verrall respectively. Made in collaboration with Li, Clune and Verrall's works expand upon the ephemerality of time, life, and decay. Emanating throughout the exhibition, Clune's sound artwork is a lithe piano sketch filtered through electronic manipulation. The composer warps the natural sonic envelope of the piano's hammered plonk to soften the acoustic timbre into an impressionistic wash. As the piece progresses, we hear Clune's lyrical playing stretch and decompose in real time that swells into an electroacoustic biomass of reverberating feedback. Verrall's performance is choreographically informed by Li's laborious practice. Li's endlessly tactile sculpting, moulding and carving are referenced in Verrall's movements, and they navigate the physicality of *Still Life from a Distant Memory*. Taking cues from the artistic destruction of *Florilegium*, Verrall's body converses with the intangible energies emerging from the installation. Their performance occurs just once throughout the exhibition period as a flickering manifestation of wordless discourse.

Still Life from a Distant Memory expounds in aesthetic and conceptual beauty. The refined fanciful florilegia of Ruth Ju-shih Li's ephemeral installations are an unwavering visual cornucopia of haunting elegance. Building upon the rich tradition of time-based art, Li introduces an artful consideration of natural materials, unafraid to allow the whims of time to degrade her unprotected earthenware and wax. Informed by the artist's lived experiences in coming to terms with loss, this exhibition daringly embraces the passage of time as a nonpartisan collaborator. Almost through mutual understanding, Ruth Li employs time as a fundamental material, respectfully appreciative of our moment of life, quietly celebrating the beauty of it all.

Con Gerakaris
Curator



List of works

Clockwise

*Florilegium, 2023-Ongoing, wax, cotton twine, essential oil, flame, dimensions variable.
\$8,900 + Installation*

*Still Life from a Distant Memory - a Winter Study Before Dawn, 2020-Ongoing, raw clay, raw porcelain, cotton twine, acrylic, stainless steel, wire, dimensions variable.
Price may vary, please enquire for more information.*

*Bamboo Study IV, 2023, raw clay, raw porcelain, bamboo, acrylic, custom holder,
dimensions variable.
\$5000 + Installation*

Not Exhibited

*Duet I, 2023, wax, cotton twine, found object, dimensions variable.
\$2,200*

Ruth Ju-shih Li and Con Gerakaris would like to thank Megan Alice Clune, Niki Verrall, Tesha Malott and the entire Verge Gallery team, Charlotte Le Brocque and Angela Li.

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation upon which this exhibition takes place and the Bidjigal and Wallumedegal people of the Dharug nation, the lands upon which we live and work. We pay our respects to elders past and present and understand sovereignty was never ceded. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.