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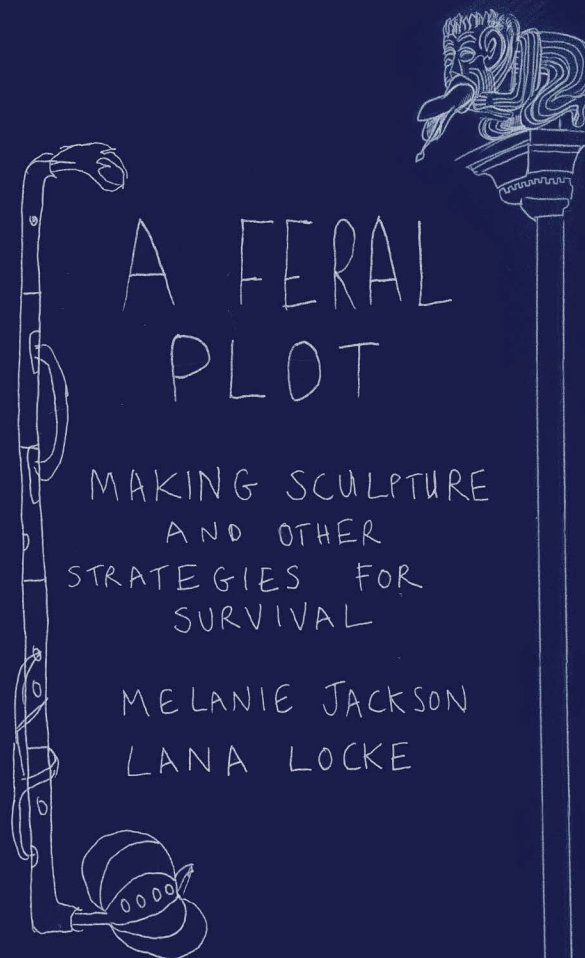
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**ARTS COUNCIL
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Melanie Jackson

A Feral Plot

Lana Locke



Conversational Starters

How do we plot a collaboration as artists that extends our ecological, material dilemmas? How will these be lived out in Camberwell Space?

Bringing practice into dialogue. Fictioning and Facting, Structure and voice. Infrastructure. Pipe works, worm holes, bore holes, cast holes. Running sytems through spaces, gnawing at their edges. The frailty of built structures. Living with the spectres of wildfire, storm and flood. New orders. New wildness.

How will the materials arrive (and leave)? Will they be made into solid art objects or dissolved at the end of the residency? What field work from other regions in the UK and beyond will come into play?

The ecological that is not always biodegradable. The counterintuitive reality that many forms of making lead to an acceleration of loss - or at least an equal gosh presence of resource extraction. Remediation. The regenerative.

Working with and reusing Stockpiled materials, e.g. precious metal that can be molten down in time of crisis. Fired clay that can be ground and reused as grog. Feral admixtures of natural and manmade materials.

Gushing Spitting Emetics Tears. Water made filthy by bodies. Chemical spill. Peeing as an act of Naturing. Re-territorialising. Immersion in water. Cold swim. Sea swim. Filth. Impossible waters. Providing water. Thirst. Natures toxicities (Salt, acid, metals, spores.)

What emotional responses come into play in the climate emergency?

Reeling between grief and fury, the panic of loss – and a refusal to be diminished. Repressing fear in order to function. Caring, not caring. Benign neglect, neglect. Over involvement. Dereliction. The joy of small acts of restoration, resilience, recuperation.

Before becoming frog, Lana Locke wrote her thesis on *The Feral, the Art Object and the Social* (2018). This explored the political promise of the feral, as a state of indeterminacy between the 'wild' and the 'civilised', in terms of ecology, radical democracy and activist art practice. Written during a time of austerity politics and public funding cuts, her interest in the feral was triggered by Kenneth Clarke's labelling as "a feral underclass" those who participated in the 2011 London Riots. Locke found kinship in feminist new materialist writing, to furrow out a liminal existence for the feral between the human and non-human, and creaturely imagining of art objects and their itinerant relation to place. In 2020, following an occurrence of interspecies jumping in the Covid 19 crisis, Locke started to become more amphibious. Her rubberised skin and snotty bodily fluids have become hard to distinguish, and she is commonly referred to as Frogphlegm (Fph).

Melanie Jackson has long made work relating planetary systems of circulation to the circulatory systems of buildings and bodies. Water cycles to circular economies, ur-forms and afterlives, survival against the odds, thinking in the round. Her focus has ranged over architectural pipeworks to the spectres of violence in global logistics, from giant pumpkins and dreams of plenty, to liquid crystals and the bio-technopolitics of Milk (Deeper in the Pyramid 2018/2023 in collaboration with Esther Leslie). The post-covid rescinding of hard won rights over bodily autonomy and reproductive healthcare has triggered an identification with representations of gestures of naked defiance, rebellion, pleasure and persistence. An acceptance of the leaking objected body an acceptance of vitality, the transcendence over humiliation and shame as a pathway of overcoming fear. It is currently taking the form of gargoyles, chimera, and other acts of aqueous shapeshifting.

The chemical relations between living bodies and the earth has become urgent. The dynamic between calcium as a building block for bodies (bones/shells) and the built environment (concrete/lime-stone) is a starting point here – radiating outwards to the multifarious chemical and mineral agents present in both animal and ceramic bodies.

Feedback Loops

Clay moves between a liquid and solid state indefinitely until humans or volcanoes intervene. In the presence of extreme heat it vitrifies, it becomes a glassy or amorphous solid. A piece of ceramic can survive intact for tens of thousands of years reburied in the ground – or above it if there is an infrastructure to prevent it from falling. When it is no longer wanted it can be ground and blended with fresh wet clay to add strength before it is fired again. Unfired clay blocks could be used in lieu of fired bricks in all applications in house building (other than as an outer skin) and be infinitely reused.

Sculpture as event cycles. Clay as an amphibian.

Frogs have operated as symbols of devotion, persistence, prosperity, cleansing, rainmaking : travellers between worlds as well as land and water. In Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt frogs were symbolic of vitality and persistence. Their appearance en masse from the mud and clay banks of the Nile every spring was associated with abundance and renewal. In the Tanakh this sign of plenty becomes an act of excess , a plague, an invasive swarm requiring intercession from Moses. In Christian doctrine they become associated with residual pagan and animistic practices. Their amphibious nature and proclivity for mud associated them with boundary crossing: with filth and the defiled, the bedevilled, the unclear. In the English reformation frogs become associated with Catholicism, and eventually with witchcraft. Shapeshifters. Held in both love and contempt.

Frogs and toads regularly shed their skin as they grow larger. Shedding also helps them shed parasites. They eat the skin they shed because not only because it contains nutrients and protein, but it covers their tracks from predators. Amongst their armoury of defences – false eyes, panoramic vision, toxic secretions, camouflage and colour change.

Speaking ontologically, if radicals like liquidity and conservatives like solid ground, the two mix in a muddy terrain of encounter.

Colin Perry

Becoming Frogphlegm

It wasn't long into the pandemic that Frogphlegm (Fph) began prioritising swimming in pools of water over making things in the studio. The materials Fph picks up, in short bursts out of the water, are usually scavenged from others' leftovers. (Water resistant materials are preferred.) Gleaning (Agnes Varda) from the detritus of others may lack self-determination, but, ecologically, it is a win. This cheap approach commandeers an openness to materials. The feral incorporates waste rather than rejecting it as abject, reusing material drawn from disparate environments to erupt in places they would not otherwise 'belong'.

Pikey problematics arise for Fph in adopting materials that are past their best, impure and mixed: a bag of clay discarded by a student, mislabelled and comprising of mouldy lumps of porcelain, black at centre, buff down the side, and terracotta squigled in at the bottom.

Scavenged wild clay still has mixed results, but feral admixtures of wild clay and plasticized commercial clay promise more binding formulae.

Even the glaze materials used by Fph in Ceramics at Camberwell, are recycled - by inherited virtue of the diligent care of CCW Specialist Technican, James Duck. He labels them M1, M2, M3 - M for mystery - collected as they are from the debris of the spray booth, and the mixed together colour choices of students with a more certain idea of the colour they wish to achieve. Recycled conglomerations of silt may be muddy, but so too are the ethics of glaze production.

Frogphlegm longs to swim in the brightest of blues, but that blue catches in her skin mucus in guilt residue.

Cobalt production for glaze pigment is unregulated, and ethical issues in its mining are extensive, including child labour and abuse +.

+ Sovacool, Benjamin K. "When Subterranean Slavery Supports Sustainability Transitions? Power, Patriarchy, and Child Labor in Artisanal Congolese Cobalt Mining." *The Extractive Industries and Society* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 271–93.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ei.2020.11.018>.

Interim pools

It was after Frogphlegm's parents stopped chlorinating their backyard swimming pool in Queensland that Fph noticed other creatures coming to populate the pool: green tree frogs, cane toads, swarms of mosquitoes. However, Fph's family was not connected to the town water supply, and her father decided to clear out the pool to use it as rainwater reservoir to supplement the bore water, running dry and rusting orange in the weeks with little rainfall. He props up DIY drain pipes from the house to the pool, stretching a web of fly netting over it in some effort to keep out insects - though mosquito larvae still get through. In the fight for survival in extreme weather, Fph and other amphibians have to go elsewhere to keep their skin wet.

Camberwell Space appears something like a fishbowl, sunken from the street with full glass frontage. Fph hoped the sloping pavement would feed the the space with water, but building improvements have included rigorous drainage at the boundaries. She employs surreptitious tactics to wedge open windows, allowing small amounts of rain to seep in, and constructs a micro-thin straw made of bamboo to suck up puddles and funnel them inside. At first this only amounts to shallow splashes of grimy backwash, but incrementally each storm erodes the window pane further, to reveal astonishingly soft, shoddy concrete, that crumbles and allows in the full deluge. When the annual Autumn flood overwhelms the drains in Peckham Road, a full pool is formed in the space, and human and non-human species take refuge here.

Preservatives

Bivalve molluscs filter and clean wide swathes of water. All are intersex at some stage of their lives, some showing cycles of sex reversal throughout their life trajectory. Hormones and complex environmental factors influence whether an oyster decides to transition or cycle through gameteogenesis. Oysters are reef builders, building architectural structures for the living on the bodies of the dead in an accretive generational stack. As marine organisms including corals, molluscs, and foraminifera die, their shells and skeletons settle on the ocean floor. Over millennia, these accumulate and lithify into limestone. Limestone is excavated to make concrete, which is now the most abundant material produced in human history.

One of the primary defenses of the oyster is nacre, secreted by the epithelial cells of its soft tissue mantle. It is continuously deposited onto the inner surface of the shell, forming a complex structure that presents to the eye as an iridescent layer known as mother-of-pearl. The layers of nacre (calcium carbonate interspersed with the silk like proteins conchiolin) smooth the shell's surface and help defend the soft tissues against parasites and foreign bodies. Cultured pearls for the jewellery industry are grown in captive Pintada oysters by introducing a piece of mantle tissue, or a bead of shell from a 'donor' oyster into the mantle or gonads of a host oyster – whereby it gets coated in successive of nacre as an act of self defence. The pearl making process is called *encystation*.

It turns out that the bivalvia ability to purify water is due to a sophisticated continuous interaction between the highly diversified immune system and its dynamic microbiota from which we have much yet to learn. It is subject to a host of new studies including in a recent Royal Society special issue *Sculpting the Microbiome*. I have a roach gland, a gland gone feral. It pumps out too much Parathyroid Hormone PTH – tricking the brain into leeching calcium from bones and making them weak. I have an armature of stainless steel plates in my ankle for retaining structural integrity. Calcium out of place becomes a threat, a plaque, a toxin. The gland must be carved out.

Indiscriminate dredgers have scraped many oyster beds and habitat bare. Reefing restoration projects offer Ph neutral concrete structures onto the ocean floor – as stand-ins for their own ancestral piles.

Tests indicate that recorded sounds of a healthy populated reef attract infant oysters to these ersatz developments when they are seeking habitat. Shellcrete – a form of lime concrete is made from shugged and discarded oyster shells as a continuation of ancestral body/home building.

Now there is a scarcity of oysters, this formerly prolific food of the working class diet has been elevated to top table.

Oysters can live in brackish water and have tolerances for influxes of fresh and salt water, but there are no frogs at sea, salt is toxic to them. Saltwater crocodiles evolved from amphibians 30-50 million years ago and can tolerate land, salt and freshwater. They dont have gills but can slow their heart-beats down to 2-3 beats per minute - giving them up to an hour immersed in salt water. They have the strongest bite of any living creature. Their jaw muscles so strong they feel like bone to the touch.

One of the strongest ceramic substrates– salt glazed stoneware – was used to build the vast network of Victorian sewer pipes that took the shit from under our feet and cholera away from cities. Concreted tunnels likewise her-aided the new wave of architectural modernity. Salt is an excellent glazing agent but it coats the entire kiln and slowly dissolves it, as well as emitting chlorine gases. Yet fired this briny medium is durable and resistant to frost and atmospheric corrosion and impervious to moisture, UV radiation, and thermal fluctuations. Ceramic tiles and sculptures create a fire resistant surface something we so urgently need to remind ourselves of in the wake of the flammable cladding disasters of the twenty first century and rising heat.

Placenta

In the aftermath of the shock Conservative Party General Election victory, a pregnant-still-human-Fph performed Bad Mummy (2015) with a humongous, oversized, sculpture of a placenta made of salt dough, fighting via sculptural act against a series of archive recordings of interviews with Margaret Thatcher. Fph kneaded the 30-kilo ball into globular shape, but the plaited dough umbilical cord did not attach properly to Fph's exposed pregnant tummy button as planned and quickly fell off. Acting out the role of agonistic 'active' matter, individuating foetus+ and embryonic mother inheriting a Thatcherist narrative - Fph proceeded to throw the salt dough in handful after handful at the walls, the ceiling, through the windows, whilst the audience scattered and Thatcher's tannoy continued. It is a lesser known tactic to rebuff the words of politicians with an uncooked bakers dozen. The attack on the walls of the white cube in this instance also had echoes of institutional critique of the normative exhibition convention, serving an ideological function in institutional disguise.++

Forever the hoarder, Fph kept remnants of the salt dough splatter stored in boxes from studio to home, until such time as they attracted mice, feasting and shitting on the solidified crusts, unperturbed by the 1: 3 salt ratio.

+Kristeva, Julia, Melanie Klein, New York: Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2001.

++Kwon, Miwon. One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2004.

Helen Chadwick's *Piss Flowers* (1991-1992) sit white, pristine and pretty on grassy carpet in Tate Modern (2024-25), but the grimy process pieces and documentation exhibited at Leeds Art Gallery (2025) provide intriguing insight into the works in action. Bodily liquids in movement spray into snow at different intensities that subvert the yonic and phallic of the gendered bodies that spout, as they transfer hot urine into frozen flakes. The shape formed in interaction with the outside environment becomes a new means of distribution of the gendered performance, bodily matter cleaned away. Still Fph stays with the dirty-pure exhilaration and titillation of urinating in the snow.

DO NOT ATTEMPT to direct burnout salt dough. EXPLOSION of SALT in the kiln. Starter kit for sough dough, this is better use of flour. Can we justify using foodstuff as art in afood crisis? Can we justify not using foodstuff as art in a waste crisis?

Re-marking territory

Scent marking signposts sources of food or shelter, sexual availability, presence, time. Territory is also marked and unmarked by animals using scent and urine. Slink communicates, something might be recommended by pissing on the ground. If it is on fire, urine might dampen the flames and mark land use anew.

One place animals have taken up prominent residence is on the internet, and social media, where they proliferate in reels and memes. The meme invents imitation pulchres. Online we see animals categorised in every way. Feral and domestic, wild and extinct, laboratory and farned, invasive and engineered, actual and mythical in an extraordinary abundance and variety that brings us closer to them once more, as their habitat recedes.

As AI algorithms are trained on all the text and all the images its programmers can trawl and scrape. It tries to assemble the sum of human knowledge and representation as an unwittingly commons. AI image generators share alchemical qualities of the kiln and the furnace – attempting to transmute not only what is made but anything that can be imagined. Likewise, it draws heavily on power and throws out ferocious heat through its servers and heatrains. It's global annual water consumption is projected to reach between 4.2 billion and 6.6 billion cubic meters by 2027.

Molten metals

Non-linguistic messages for the future might be smuggled in materials to keep them safe.

The high temperatures required of both kiln and furnace utilise energy, traditionally drawn from fossil fuels. Yet stone, ceramics, and metals have greater resistance to fire and flood. Stockpiled metal sculptures can be molten down in time of crisis.

A conglomeration of waste vegetable oil is put to re-use by Steve Coles and Nicole Schmitz in Coles Castings in rural Dorset to fire their furnace – an innovative approach extended to Arizona, Edinburgh. Frogphlegm collects pieces for environmental scavenger to direct burnout into metal. Some of this plant matter rifts on the oil that fires the furnace – sunflowers, sweetcorn. Fph also brings palm frons, which traveled with her in her suitcase from Australia. Yet they become too precious to burn outright, and Fph takes them home to paint with wax instead. The wax itself is borne of crude petroleum oil, a blend of paraffin and mycrocrysaline being optimum for flexibility and strength in preparing 'lost wax' models and their system of connecting spues of wax. When the wax is melted out 'lost' these will form empty pipe lines: 'runners' for the molten metal to feed into the sculpture; 'risers' to allow it to circulate the molten metal and heat to ventilate back towards the surface.

Press, 2003.

+ Kelley, Mike, "Urban Gothic," in *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism*, 2–13. Cambridge: London: MIT

Might these pipes be sunken in the ground or sea to accommodate real creatures, that make habited through them? Can art be permitted right to remain, with no other function? What value must it attract, taste that endures, burden of custodianship implied for the future? Might there be a collection and redistribution of art objects on death of the artist, allowing dispersal of remaining pieces, and absolving collectors and descendants of responsibility?

the ongoing storage?

At some point, does making sculpture lose it's purpose? How do we justify

unity of the studio's curation.

Yet if a work was bought from the studio, he would replace it to keep the

According to Center Pompidou, Brancusi stopped creating sculptures for the

the frequent use of holes prevent them having use as vase or as chimney. As pipes, they are not functional conduits, rather they followed out space in between other places, or the non-functional realm of the aesthetic described by Mike

foistering salty weeds.

Clay iterations of seeweed bones start to circulate through and around the cylinders, creating more watery environments: ineffective drain pipes now

to Constantin Brancusi, ee Cummings.

vertical, undoing its phallic rise upwards, cutting at the knees any aspirations

Fph starts making tall, stacking cylinders of clay as housing for creaturely vegetables: knobolly gourds and sweetcorn cobs piercing and spitting the

Undoing meliness: Tower to chimney to pipe

am learning about permaculture to compost more than symbolically.

Guentia gardening, seed bombing, seed sharing become new imperatives. I

patients and licences. Bad Magic Beans.

Four companies now control 60 per cent of the worlds seed trade through

are pursued and recommended, spliced and recoded into a new working class.

In its wake. The actions of forces, chemical and genetic, microbial and cellular

might generate or the bioremediation of the depletion or exhaustion caused

Like science speculation offers a proprietary claim over future life forms it

The pumpkin becomes gargantuan when fertilised and watered into monster

plentiful indigenous fruit.

crossing - the ember turns into a candle and jumps into the pumpkin, that

uses a vegetable - a turnip hollowed out and containing a burning ember to

yield great riches. That other Jack, Shiny Jack or Jack O' the Lantern,

We have always dreamed of redemption and looked to the vegetal world

Fph's children are given two pumpkins for Halloween, and she adopts another

that has been dumped in the road. The voluminous spheres like pregnant

for dreaming wombs are tempting to cut open, but remain overdue, complete unto

themselves, stored in the studio for weeks. Eventually, by Christmas, the

the bruised flesh beneath. They evoke Fph's skin burnt in the extreme heat,

the blistered skin separate as it gets wet.

empathis are as common as Dragon slayers in contemporary film and fiction.

Gargoyles – these fuctional guttural monsters diverting water from

buildings, are all about the hole, spurring from gaping mouths human, animal,

and monsters may well have contributed to belief in demons and dragons

edge of experience, creatures that may re-appear at any time. It may have

undiscovered the emergence of their consequent in narratives in the popular

prototypes for human cartoons repelie with quins, grimaces, rictus grins

Rebellious Monsters

Pump-making-kin

BIG CHANGE

A Feral Plot

Making Sculpture and Other Strategies for Survival

Melanie Jackson
Lana Locke

A Blueprint for Camberwell Space

2025