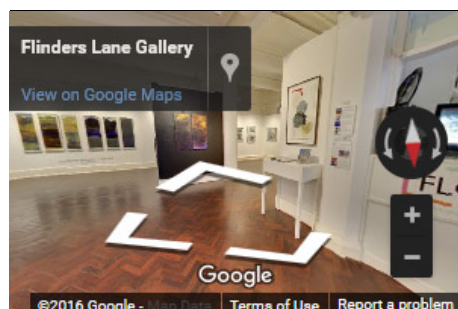
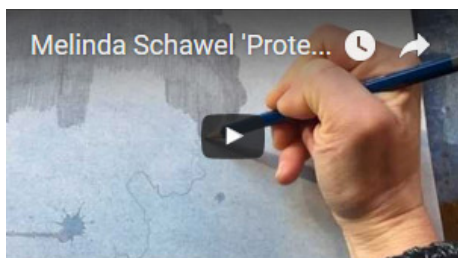
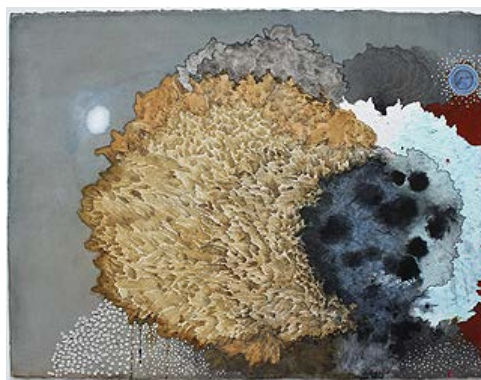



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## EXHIBITIONS Melinda Schawel *Protected* 19th July 2016 - 6th August 2016



In line with previous series in which I explore themes of vulnerability and the delicate balance between control & unpredictability, my latest body of work entitled *Protected* was inspired by a recent trip to the South Island of New Zealand where I came across the extraordinary handiwork of the nursery web spider. True to its name, this rather large, furry creature builds intricate web tents, wrapped tautly across the tips of various shrubs to serve as protective nurseries for her newborn. There is a perverse sort of beauty in these webs in that while they protect the vulnerable baby spiders, they also appear to be suffocating the plant life trapped within. The similarity in what we do as humans - wrapping those closest to us in a protective cocoon without necessarily acknowledging the effect we have on our changing environment - really resonated and as



Melinda Schawel  
*All Is Not As It Seems* 2016  
 ink & pencil on torn & perforated paper  
 58cm x 78cm, 73 x 91cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Ensnconced* 2016  
 ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
 58cm x 78cm, 73 x 91cm framed

a result, thoughts about self preservation, fragility and the interconnectedness of things also permeate these works. Schawel 2016.

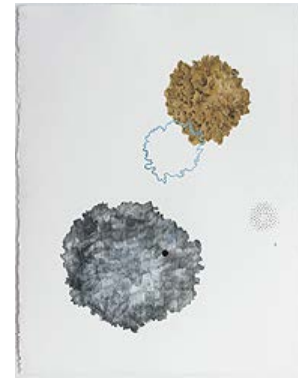
The recent floods in Tasmania caused an unexpected response from its arachnid population. Deprived of their earth-based sanctuaries and food supply, spiders in their millions enveloped whole forests with their webs creating a Christo-like phenomenon of web-shrouded canopies hovering above the raging waters. In their desperation for survival, they inadvertently created a vision of weird gothic majesty, ethereal, fragile and breathtaking to behold. Earlier this year, whilst traveling through the South Island of New Zealand, Melinda Schawel encountered a similar sight though on a far more intimate scale. For miles around, bushes appeared to be wearing cotton gloves on their extremities, scattered and fluttering like the whitecaps on a windswept lake. These revealed themselves to be the work of the Nursery Web spider who weaves these enclosures as protection for their young, not as a trap for the unwary.

For an artist who holds the sanctity and safety of her family close to her soul, these natural responses to external forces struck a resonant chord. Having spent many years travelling, Schawel and her husband have now built a bushland sanctuary in outer Melbourne, raising their children in one protective nest rather than moving them all around the world. This solid base has also allowed Schawel an extended period of steady focus resulting in artworks of great depth, skill and contemplation. At the same time, the incipient dangers of the outside world are still ever present, courtesy of the artist's keen interest in podcasts dealing with the best and worst that humanity can offer.

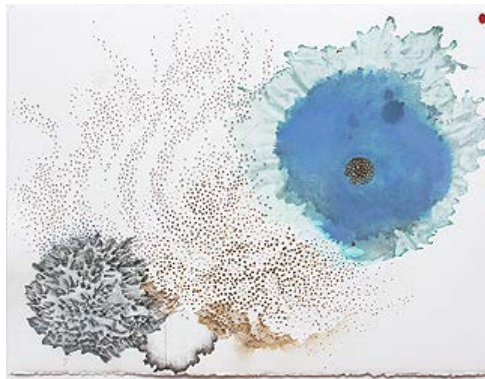
It can be grim – no question of that – but like all fearful experiences, darkness is usually followed by some semblance of light. In Schawel's case, her trepidation stimulates distinctive and extraordinarily nuanced mark-making which become mediations on the nature of paper as much as they are concerned with Nature itself. Her current technique is one born of accident (the unexpected tearing of an over-worked surface during an earlier project) but once an accident is saved within an artwork, it should more accurately be described as editing. For such a gently pliable surface as paper, Schawel employs some surprisingly tough love via drills, scalpels and sanding. She starts with an extremely thick 640-gram weight paper which allows her to cut and peel distinct ridges and valleys resulting in a low bas-relief surface. Inks and fluid acrylics are painted onto the torn surfaces and also poured then dispersed into organic shapes using plastic sheets. The resultant pigment passages are either opaque and glossy or diluted and washed, ghostlike tracers that recall the spiders' webs of their original inspiration. There is an inevitable association with nests (Schawel's protective instincts at play) but also of undersea creatures, sponges, urchins and the like. This is not so surprising as she also expresses delight at the patterns formed on inter-tidal beach zones by the discarded balls of sand left by Sand Bubbler crabs. These forms find their own way into the artist's work through clustered drill holes resembling celestial star maps. Travelers have used stars for millennia to guide them to sanctuary and in these works,



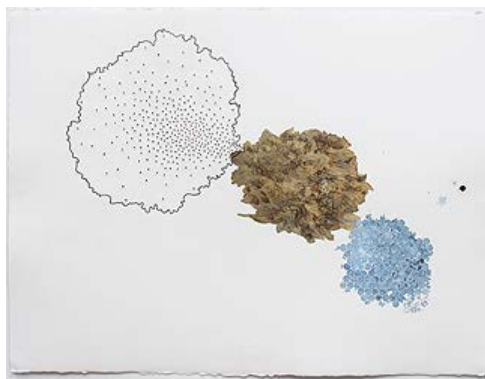
Melinda Schawel  
*What's Left* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
78cm x 58cm, 92 x 72cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Follow* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
78cm x 58cm, 92 x 72cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Haven* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
58cm x 78cm, 73 x 91cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Follow II* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
58cm x 78cm, 73 x 91cm framed

it is easy to recognise that Schawel now is doing the same.'

**Catalogue Essay by Andrew Gaynor 2016**

Born in Illinois, USA, Melinda Schawel received a BA in Fine Art and Communication from the University of California Santa Barbara in 1993 and a Postgraduate Degree in Printmaking from RMIT, Melbourne in 1996. She has exhibited regularly since 1995 and has been selected for a number of prestigious commissions including the Westin Hotel and the Park Hyatt.

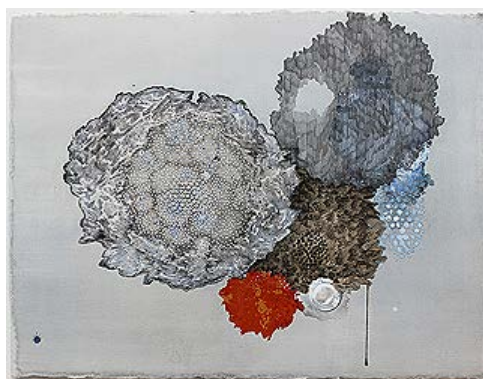
Shawel was a finalist in the 2016, 2015 and 2013 Nillumbik Prize, and the Fisher's Ghost Art Award in 2015 and 2012. She recently undertook a residency at the Art Vault in Mildura, and her work is held in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, Artbank, Crown Casino, Geelong Regional Gallery and the Royal Museum of Fine Art in Antwerp, Belgium.

[MELINDA SCHAWEL PROFILE](#)  
[DOWNLOAD BIO / CV \(PDF\)](#)

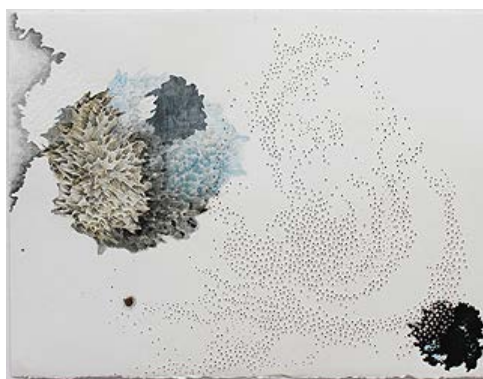
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Melinda Schawel  
*Light As A Feather* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
58cm x 78cm, 73 x 91cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Refuge* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
58cm x 78cm, 73 x 91cm framed

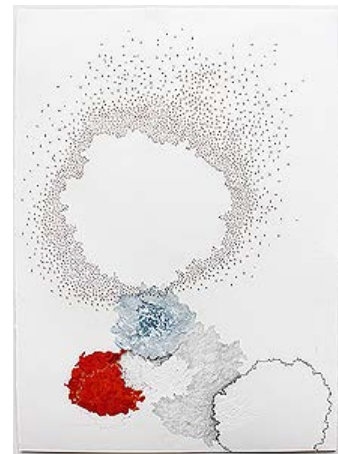


Melinda Schawel  
*Retreat* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
58cm x 78cm, 73 x 91cm framed





Melinda Schawel  
*Restraint* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
104cm x 75cm, 120 x 89cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Letting Go* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
104cm x 75cm, 120 x 89cm framed



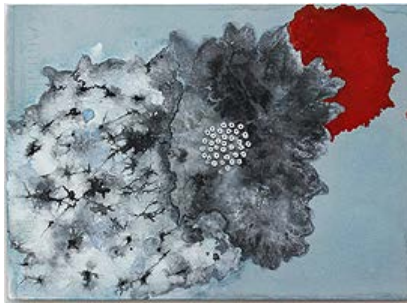
Melinda Schawel  
*Release II* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
76cm x 40cm, 91 x 54cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Small Cluster V* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
38cm x 57cm, 53 x 72cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Sanctuary* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
75cm x 104cm, 91 x 120cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Bloom* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
28cm x 38cm, 46 x 56cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Bloom II* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
28cm x 38cm, 46 x 56cm framed



Melinda Schawel  
*Flourish* 2016  
ink & pencil on torn and perforated paper  
36cm x 35cm, 55 x 52.5cm framed

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