

Amanda Stuart

What Lies Beneath

The process of mapping a living, breeding, female spotted-tail quoll's (*Dayrus maculatus*) unique coat within familiar objects associated with land management practices, is intended to subtly reinstate the wild animals' agency, within our collective imaginations. The personal protective garments of a farmer (Drizabone, Akubra hat) are heavily patinated with the sweat and materiality of his south west slopes property. All these intimate objects harbor a wild interior and allude to the the quoll's capacity to symbolically recolonise both the materiality and the psyche of its' displacers – here represented in human and non-human animal form (sheep).

The wall piece comprises a modified water tank and refers to several concurrent, broader narratives. A familiar sight on rural properties, the water tank is a practical receptacle for precious water supplies, crucial to our ability to survive in an increasingly drying climate. Corroded by years spent on country, this tank lid is re-imagined as a poetic object that has spent many quiet decades stargazing. Mapped onto its heavily corroded surface, in gifted white ochres, is that same spotted-tail quoll coat.

Like many native animals competing with humans for food (in this case chickens), quolls were considered pests and hunted. Empty hunting cartridges litter the tank lid, further subverting its ability to contain water, however their formation is far from random. These bullets map the constellation Canis Major - significant as it contains Sirius (the dog star), which is the brightest star in the southern night sky. HMS Sirius was also the flagship of the First Fleet that set out from Portsmouth, England in 1787 to settle New South Wales.

The constellation's presence is made all the more powerful in the light of recent research into ancient First Nations astronomy. It holds special significance for the Boorong people of north-western Victoria, and contains

an important, spotted-tail quoll story, associated with Mityan, the 'quoll' moon. The elements that constitute the charcoal moon represented in this installation, were collected from the fire grounds Wingello, Southern Highlands (Gundungarra Country) in January 2020. Wingello comes from the local language and means 'to burn.'



Image: Amanda Stuart, *What Lies Beneath*, 2020, Australian oilskin "Drizabone" coat, rubber farming gumboots, Akubra Riverina rabbit felted hat, sheep' wool felted components, lanolin, galvanised rusted sheet metal water tank lid, white ochre (gifted), used rifle cartridges, Wingello fire ground charcoal, Toyota spotlight, LED light, 4WD car battery, clothes hook. dimensions variable. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.