Eloquence Art Prize 2026
OUR FORESTS IN DANGER

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Henry Wolff is an artist whose expanded performance art practice moves between liveness and its traces to explore queer ecology. Although emerging in their practice, they have already built a significant career, with highlights including the 25th Biennale of Sydney, PHOTO 2022, Gertrude Street Projection Festival, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Samstag Museum of Art, and independent projects. They also have substantial art professional experience across artist development, programming, philanthropy and partnerships.

In the wounded forest

Artists:

Jill Orr, *Bleeding Trees*, 1979
Consisting of twenty-one images photographed in various Victorian landscapes, these were projected within the live performance.

Abraham Poincheval, *Pierre (Stone)*, 2017
The artist was completely entombed inside a 12-tonne limestone boulder at Palais de Tokyo for a seven day long durational performance.

I write this after around 600 mature gum trees were felled in my hometown of Adelaide's nationally heritage listed parklands.[1] This destruction highlights how forests have increasingly become vulnerable and contested sites. My presentation compares the work of Jill Orr and Abraham Poincheval to explore how performance art can reposition the human body within ecological systems[2] to reveal their fragility and expose how humans are complicit in their destruction.[3]

Although emerging from different generations and contexts, both artists challenge assumptions that nature exists separately from human experience. Instead, their practices position the body as entangled within environmental systems. In doing so, they move beyond romantic depictions of nature,[4] revealing ecological relations as embodied and psychologically lived.

Developed predominantly throughout the twentieth century, Jill Orr's performances frequently placed the body directly within the landscape, using the body, ritual, and repetition, she embodies an intimate yet uneasy relationship with the natural world. In works such as *Bleeding Trees* (1979), trees ceased to function as passive symbols of nature and instead appeared as wounded bodies[5] marked by destruction, fragility, and grief.[6] Orr's practice anticipated many contemporary ecological anxieties, revealing the landscape not as stable or eternal, but as vulnerable to human intervention and destruction. Her performances suggest that ecological damage is not external to us, but something we are implicated within.

Abraham Poincheval's performances also test the limits of coexistence between the human and more-than-human entities. Through extended acts of endurance, including living inside a taxidermised bear, inhabiting a rock (as in *Pierre (Stone)* 2017), or incubating eggs until they hatched from his own body heat: Poincheval destabilises distinctions between body, habitat, and the more-than-human.[7] His works resist ideas of human mastery over nature,[8] instead placing the body into states of dependency, discomfort, and adaptation. Nature in Poincheval's practice is not scenery to be observed, but an agential force that exceeds and reshapes the human.

Bringing these practices together, my presentation argues that ecological art increasingly asks us not simply to look at nature, but to reconsider our position within it. Both Orr and Poincheval trouble the boundaries between human and environment, revealing ecological systems as contingent, and relational.

Rather than imagining forests as distant sites to preserve from afar, these artists insist that environmental destruction is already intimate. They show that wound inflicted upon nature is ultimately one that we inflict upon ourselves.

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[1] The Adelaide Park Lands and City layout have been included on Australia's National Heritage list since 2008. In 2026, redevelopment of the North Adelaide golf course resulted in the removal of almost 600 trees. This action has sparked continued community protest. Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 'Adelaide Park Lands and City Layout', National Heritage List, 2026; Government of South Australia, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 'Environmental Management: North Adelaide Public Golf Course', 2026; Peta Jeffries and Manuel Esperon-Rodriguez, 'The Onto-Political Dilemmas of Urban Forest Governance: A Case for Indigenist Standpoint Pedagogy in EcoSocial Work Practice at the Macro Level', Australian Journal of Environmental Education, vol. 42, no. 1, 2026, pp. 318–339.

[2] Stacy Alaimo's concept of 'trans-corporeality' is one useful way for understanding the body not as separate from an environment. Alaimo, S. 'Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self', Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2010, pp. 2–4

[3] We can look to academics like Courtney B. Ryan to see how eco-performance can contest spatial separation and boundaries between humans and nonhumans. Donna Haraway's notion of multispecies 'response-ability' insists that humans cannot position themselves outside the damaged worlds they participate within. B. Ryan, C. 'Eco-Performance, Art, and Spatial Justice in the US', Routledge, New York, 2023; Haraway, D. 'Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene', Duke University Press, Durham, 2016.

[4] Timothy Morton critiques the aesthetic construction of 'nature', arguing through troubling this representation helps navigate the separations between humans and a supposedly external natural world. Morton, T. 'Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics', Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007, especially 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', pp. 79–139.

[5] In *Bleeding Trees,* Orr explicitly establishes an empathetic relationship between the human body and trees. Anne Marsh describes the works imagery as suggesting 'the bleeding of the earth', embodying wounded images of nature and body. Marsh, A. ''Jill Orr', in Know My Name', National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2020, pp. 290–291

[6] Bleeding Trees developed from Orr's concern with trees damaged through human neglect and interference. Ibid.

[7] Writing on *Pierre*, Jocelyn Moisson describes Poincheval as an artist 'in rupture with the human', whose body becomes associated with mineral and animal speeds as he attempts to escape specifically human time. Moisson, J. 'Abraham Poincheval', Critique d'art, 2017, published online 9 May 2018, doi:10.4000/critiquedart.27191

[8] Writing about Ours, in which Poincheval inhabited a taxidermied bear for thirteen days, Christelle Nicolas argues that the performance symbolically overturns an ancestral order of domination between the human predator and the consumed animal. Rather than positioning the nonhuman world as an object available for human mastery. Nicolas, C. 'Poincheval-Ours', Ostium: Open-Access Journal for Humanities, vol. 14, no. 2, 2018