

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land where the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery operates today and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Goulburn Regional Art Gallery presents...

23 june — 5 august

# Jenny Bell *Life Forms*


Curated by Anne Sanders



Image front: *Banners of Life—Bees No 1 study*, 2022. Vinyl on paper. 560 x 760mm. Image courtesy of the artist.



Goulburn Regional Art Gallery is supported by the NSW government through Create NSW

Art Trail 

## About the Art Trail

This Art Trail has been developed for the exhibition *Life Forms* by the Gallery's Education Officer, Kirsten Jeffcoat with valuable input from Gallery Administrator Trainee, Abbey Loader. Jeffcoat is an experienced Visual Arts Teacher with degrees in Education and Visual Arts with a Masters from the University of Paris VIII. She has taught at Primary, High School and Tertiary institutions including the Sorbonne University in France. Jeffcoat has worked as Education Officer at the NCA and the National Gallery of Australia and is also a practicing artist.

This educational resource includes practical and theoretical activities for all ages with suggestions for further research.

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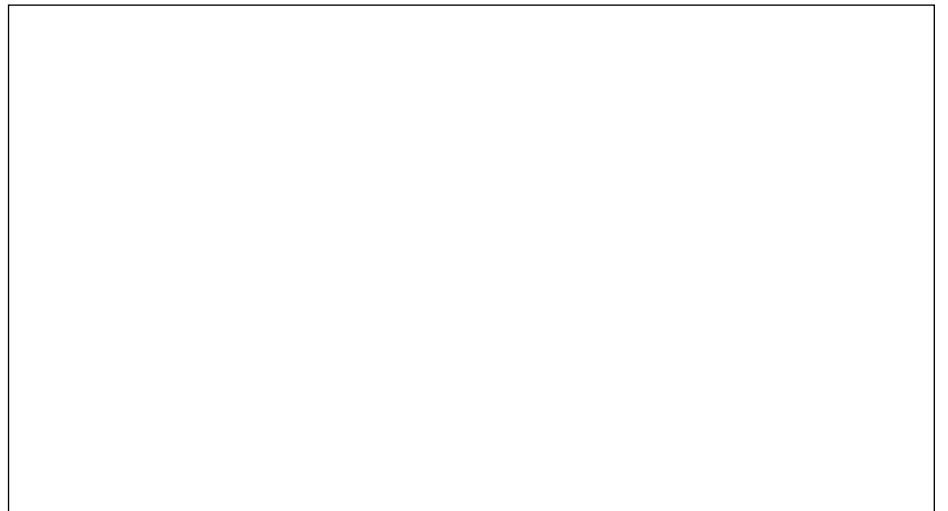
## Activity: Create your own Buttermoth!

Using the template below from Jenny Bell's *Buttermoth*, colour it in or tear up some coloured paper and bring it to life.



Look at pictures of different moths and butterflies.

Now combine the features of both butterflies and moths to create your own unique Buttermoth.



## Buttermoths 2022-23



Image: Jenny Bell, *Buttermoths* (detail), 2022-23, installation (detail), vinyl paint on hoop pine plywood.

‘Looking back at the moment a moth fluttered on my studio floor provokes me to wonder - where does the impulse to begin a new body of work begin?’

She was not the first moth to stray from her natural habitat into my interior orbit, but this time I looked at her in a way that promised to open previously closed doors.

I began drawing the moth, marvelling at the artistry that had created her, and although I knew I could not hope to match it – I soon realised that I could use it to leap into unknown creative territory. I searched out other moths, at first adhering to their shape, colour and form but found in this process only dull reflection. I kept at it and slowly the pencil, the paint and the saw showed me the way so that, just as a moth transitions from an egg to pupa and then from it’s cocoon to it’s adult self, mine made their way from a drawing to an idea, through a kind of darkness to then reveal themselves as *Buttermoths*. One creature looking at another, each on a path of transformation.’ Jenny Bell, 2023

## Jenny Bell

### *Life Forms*

Curated by Anne Sanders

Jenny Bell’s solo exhibition *Life Forms* looks at drawing, line and form as constant threads throughout the artist’s 40 year artistic practice. This exhibition follows drawing as the underpinning of all of Bell’s work; with observation, rhythms and pattern – searching informing Bell’s life as both a regenerative farmer and an artist.

*Life Forms* brings together drawings, paintings, sculptures and installations from Bell’s impressive oeuvre. The exhibition features recent breakthrough work, which emphasises graphic line, shape and colour, whilst continuing to capture the essence and vitality of the natural world.



Image: Jenny Bell portrait, photography: Jodi Shepherd Hot Shots Photography.

## Exhibition Vocabulary and Find-a-word

### Vocabulary

Charcoal, pastel, observation, forms, primary colours, vinyl, collage  
Lifeblood, land management, soil microbes, regenerative farming

### Find-a-word

Get to know a little more about the exhibition by finding some of the words listed in the find-a-word below.

ARTIST	BUTTERMOTHS	DRAWING
FARMER	SHEEP	MERINO
REGENERATIVE	HORSE	TRACTOR

R Y E U Z T R T X J M O T  
Y N V T S S G O O G O F R  
P J I J N I C S N F E L A  
I D T P H T C I A M P H C  
J K A O E R W R L E T C T  
T E R O U A M P E R M L O  
T S E V R E R H J I D M R  
E J N D R K S M C N P F V  
N G E X J J U U K O A E M  
J P G Z V J A W Z D T W G  
B X E A V L T M V E S F F  
E S R X D J U L V M X W D  
B U T T E R M O T H S Z P

## Questions

1) What art practices does Jenny Bell's art works incorporate? i.e. Drawing

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2) What is the artist's subject matter?

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3) Choose one of Jenny Bell's quotes and explain what it means to you.

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## About the Curator

The exhibition *Jenny Bell Life Forms* was curated by Anne Sanders.

Dr Anne Sanders worked as the Curatorial Researcher at the National Portrait Gallery from 2010 to 2019 and then as Project Curator at Australian Parliament House from 2019 to 2020. She received her MA and PhD in art history from the Australian National University where she has previously given guest lectures and tutored in Australian art history. Since 1990 she has worked in a number of national art organisations included Fine Arts Press (original publishers of *Art and Australia* and *Art Asia Pacific*), the Australia Council, Sherman Galleries and the National Museum of Australia. Dr Sanders is an independent curator and researcher and writes regularly about artists for art journals and magazines as well as undertaking commissioned catalogue essays.

For this exhibition at the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery Anne Sanders aimed to find the thread that linked Jenny Bell's earlier artworks to her most recent ones, with drawing underpinning all of them.

## Further research

Research the role of curators in Art Galleries and Museums.

**The Conceptual Framework** refers to the components of the art world. These four agencies are: artist, artwork, world and audience. They are used to highlight and explain all the information and ideas that consist within and about an artwork.

**Artist's practice** The practice of artists, art critics and historians includes their intentions, choices, actions, ways of working and processes. What are the artist's intentions? What conceptual choices has the artist made? What historical or social issues and what political ideas have informed this choice?

'People think artists wait to be inspired, but you actually have to keep trying until you find something.' (Jenny Bell in *Pearls* p.223-227)

Bell's inspiration has also come from other artists including Clarice Beckett and Janet Dawson. She has been guided by various writers and poets such as Philip Hodgins, Judith Wright and Tess Jaray who have helped her to make sense of the world.

Bell writes insightfully about art and artists. Her quotes throughout this exhibition provide a window into her inspiration and practice behind her artmaking.

This exhibition teaches us about an artist's impulse to create. Sometimes it comes from daily observation of the surrounding environment. Sometimes the catalyst is opportunistic—an invitation to participate in a specific project or exhibition on a subject or theme.

## Jenny Bell quotes

'Art, in all its forms, is the expression of the *spirit* – a fusion of our rational and intuitive selves. It reflects a version of ourselves back to us.' (Jenny Bell, Opening Address, National Carbon Farming Conference, 2022)

'Nature's wisdom is extraordinary and the land is asking us to make changes now. We just need to tap into what it is saying.' (Jenny Bell in *Pearls* p.223-227)

'I'd probably tell my young self to read more, think more, believe in yourself and not be frightened of failing.' (Jenny Bell in *Pearls* p.223-227)

## About the artist

b. 1960. Lives and works near Breadalbane, NSW

Jenny Bell was born and raised on a farm on the Breadalbane Plains, 22kms southwest of Goulburn. She first studied drawing and painting at Goulburn TAFE before attending East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School) and obtaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Sydney College of the Arts. Of these experiences, Jenny Bell notes that 'Art school showed me a world that the farm patriarchy had no control over – and art became an inexhaustible source of wonder' (Jenny Bell in *Pearls* p.223-227).

After spending two years living and working in Europe, Jenny Bell returned home to Breadalbane. She married a local farmer and raised a family on their Merino sheep property, 'Bohara'. In these busy years her inspiration came from the farm and the world around her. Drawing and painting *en plein air* on the back of a ute, Bell created rapid charcoal sketches that captured the essence of the subject. She became spellbound by the subjects she drew—cows, sheep, horses, farm machinery. 'I often drew in a feverish haste before the cow moved or the tractor disappeared' (Jenny Bell, by Anne Sanders, // [artistprofile.com.au/jenny-bell/](http://artistprofile.com.au/jenny-bell/)). Bell has explored these subjects in sculpture, collage and installation.

Through involvement in the local Landcare group Jenny Bell has become interested in holistic ecological farming processes and embraces regenerative farming practices. A change came in Bell's work when she was invited to be part of the 'Earth Canvas' project convened by regenerative farmer Gill Sandbrook which connects artists with regenerative farmers. Bell made the large scale work *Lifeblood* which represents some of the most important elements in farming: the nutrients and life under the soil.

Jenny Bell has been Highly Commended in the Portia Geach portrait prize, written articles for art magazines including *Art and Australia* and *Art Monthly*, and has regularly been involved in group and solo exhibitions in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and NSW regional art galleries.

## On the Farm

‘Drawing is a form of probing. And the first generic impulse to draw derives from the human need to search, to plot points, to place things and to place oneself...’ - John Berger

‘When I first sat down to draw a cow in the early 1990s, although I’d worked with cattle all my life, I didn’t know how to draw them on paper. In Berger’s words, I hadn’t mapped them, so I was discovering them for the first time and you can’t discover something twice. You might find a way in, but never again will you face the unknown with such curiosity and fearlessness... You find something that compels you to sit – a cow, shed, tractor, grave, fence. All these things cast a spell over me...’ - Jenny Bell, 2023

### Activity:

Look carefully at the series of nine pastel and charcoal drawings.

1) Name the farm animals you can see.

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2) What farming activities do you recognize?

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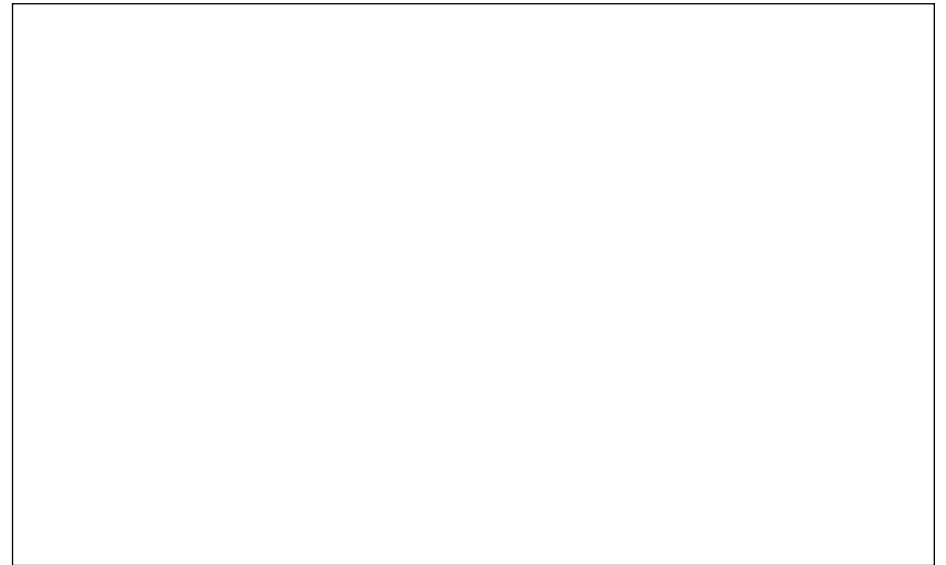
3) Are there any farm machines?

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Image opposite: Jenny Bell, pastel and charcoal drawings, installation view (detail) *Jenny Bell Lifeblood*, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, 2023. Silversalt photography.

**Activity:** Sketch below a landscape familiar to you from an unfamiliar vantage point.

For example, a birds-eye view of grass and plants from the view of a tall tree.



**Unscramble the Words** Unscramble the following words related to Jenny Bell’s pastel and charcoal drawings in her *Life Forms* exhibition.

rtctrao      -----

wsco      -----

rraoptti      -----

ohesr      -----

arm      -----

cngifen      -----

tpa      -----

## Lake George



Image: Installation view Jenny Bell: Life Forms, featuring Jenny Bell's Lake George, 2010, gouache on paper cut-outs mounted on gator board, courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Silversalt Photography

'It had not occurred to me to try to make a work about Lake George – too big, too impressive, too unknowable to me. But when I was thrown in, I found a language for it...I sensed I needed a new way to deal with it... Being taken to an unfamiliar vantage point on private land and seeing something I thought I was fairly familiar with from a completely different angle, Lake George excited me from that moment. I sat down to work and I did not lift my head, analyse or pause for several hours, while I raced to get that impression onto the paper. I knew I had had a good day. This opportunity had come at the end of a long run of working in oils and the work with scissors and gouache just burst out of me.'

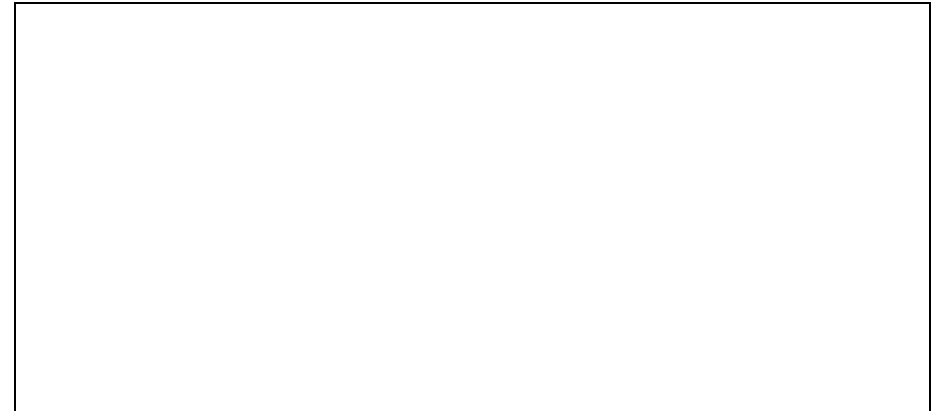
- Jenny Bell, 2023

## Drawing

Describe a farm animal, machine or activity that you have seen.

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Do a drawing of it from memory or observation.



## Lifeblood



“*Earth Canvas* invited me to make a work that reflected Anna and Michael Coughlan’s farm, *Mt Narra Narra*, near Holbrook in southern NSW, as part of a project celebrating regenerative farming through art. It sounded simple enough but I did not find it so. Although I have spent decades depicting the land where I have lived most of my life, I knew I could not just transfer the intensity of that experience to a new farm.

I also knew I had an opportunity to take inspiration from the Coughlan’s courage to jump into the unknown. They placed their trust in nature’s abundant capacities and I had to learn to do the same.

I began to imagine the world beneath the hills and quickly realised I had stumbled on what set this farm apart from it’s neighbours. In the manner of a magpie attentive to the underground presence of a worm, the drawings came in a moment of revelation.

This gave me the stimulus I needed: to look, *not* at the surface but inside, underneath and out there and to use colour and form *not* to reflect the visible but to conjure the hidden forces – the *lifeblood* of this farm and our world.” - Jenny Bell, 2023

**Activity:** Have you ever looked through a microscope? Imagine what you would see if you were looking at a sample of soil from your garden under a microscope.

1) Draw shapes and forms that you can imagine might be seen under the microscope. 2) Discover a microscopically small worm which lives under the soil called a ‘Nematode’ by watching the following video online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuHznsI8al>

**Colour, Tone and Form** are important elements of design.

Look at the large work called *Lifeblood*, 2019.

Colours have different tonal values and an effective composition or design is created when an artist places light shapes next to dark ones.

Which colour combinations stand out the most to you? Which colour combinations do you feel create the most striking contrast i.e. black and white, red and yellow, blue and black ?



Look at the negative as well as the positive spaces in this artwork.

**Activity:** Cut out different shapes in various colours and glue them onto a coloured piece of paper to create a striking composition.



Image 1: Jenny Bell, *Lifeblood*, 2019, Lefranc & Bourgeois flashe vinyl paint on hoop pine plywood. Comprised of 15 individual panels 1820 x 7735 x 35mm (approx.) Courtesy of the artist and Australian Galleries. Image 2 detail of *Lifeblood*.