

Paradise Lost

ARTISTS BOOKS Sarah Bodman reports on the compassionate and haptic nature of **Tim Mosely's** book *Kanage pholu wanda* – a book redolent of the artist's relationship to the rainforest

Kanage pholu wanda (2014) is one of three artists' books in Tim Mosely's *Archipelago of Remnant Gardens* series. It's an incredibly beautiful and poignant book, made in a variable edition of 11 that took two months of printing and another two of compiling and binding.

Early on in our discussion, Mosely references the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's term 'an insoluble tension' to describe books, and Mosely thinks that 'the tension that can't be dissolved is what gives artists' books their currency as they float between fine art and literature.' *Kanage pholu wanda* is part of Mosely's creative introduction of literal haptic touch to the reception and evaluation of artists' books. These works also explore that insoluble tension both theoretically and physically, between touch and a Western privileging of sight, intermingled with elements from his own experiences. His research to date has used 80 sheets of rainforest plywood to produce over 2,000 relief prints he has gathered into books.

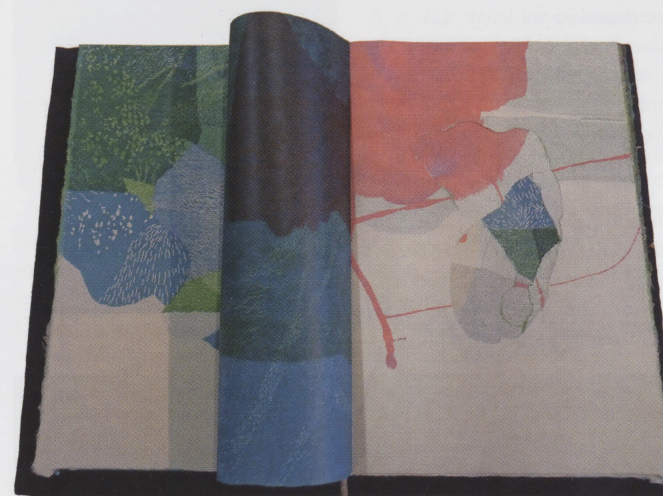
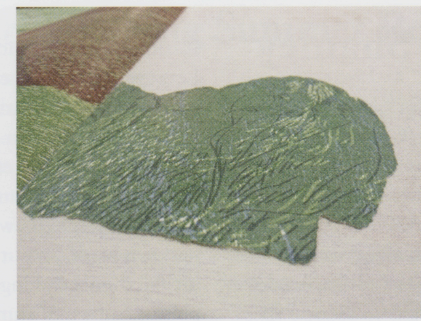
For each book he used materials for their conceptual and tactile properties: rainforest ply – so that readers will have to touch the rainforest on the covers and feel the impression of it in the relief prints; 19mm felt wraps that instantly invite and require touch to be fully appreciated; Awagami Kozo paper that is lightweight and warms in the hand, 'it can convey to the reader's touch the build up of inks through multiple printings.' Each sheet of paper has been relief printed on both sides – some with up to five layers of colour – bleeding right over the edges to ensure the reader has to touch art as they turn

each page. The paper is also light enough to be manipulated and curled in the hand, echoing the rise and fall of the landscape. To add to the insoluble tension, both oil-based and water-based inks were used.

The physical act of reading this book is like nothing I have ever experienced. You are drawn in through all of the senses, the delight of touch, the drifting of fingers over beautiful contours that traverse the pages, from lush green above, down into the clear pale blue of watery areas that literally gather depth as you work through the pages. It's the experience of a wonderful spring day in the rainforest, but then as the middle of the book is reached, a torn section sits waiting like a butterfly's wing to flicker, and as you peep behind it, there she is, Kanage pholu wanda, gazing intently and sorrowfully back out at you.

Speaking for others

Kanage pholu wanda translates in Samberigi language as 'girl of the bamboo creek'. Mosely's parents were missionaries, working in Papua New Guinea and living with the Samberigi in the small village where Mosely was born and lived until he was sent away to a mission school at the age of 8. In Samberigi culture the sharing of names is common, Mosely's Samberigi name 'boy of the bamboo creek', identifies him also by place. Kanage pholu wanda has always been within his consciousness, first as a child when she had her photograph taken with his family, and since she appeared in his work she has always come back. In this book however, she is key, the book is about her, and Mosely's relationship with their homeland. As an artwork *Kanage pholu wanda* also represents the tension that Mosely struggles with on a daily basis in both his life and work. As a child, he developed a deep relationship with the rainforest, one that will always be with him. His tacit understanding of the rainforest and the use of touch as a means of communication found no correlation in Western culture, and now as an adult he realises that he belongs fully to neither but partly to both the Samberigi who



still form part of his life today, and the city where he lives with his family in Brisbane, Australia.

Mosely describes another tension within this series of artists' books as seen through his and Kanage pholu wanda's eyes: 'I am a pink-skinned, privileged male, she is a black-skinned, non-privileged female. Kanage pholu wanda's life places her in an impossible situation, her world has gone; white, religious and western industrialization have intervened and taken over, through missionary development, logging and mining companies. Yes, the landscape is important but she is more so. In a world where the machine moves forward, nothing can go back.' Mosely's truly impossible tension is how can he, as a white, privileged man, with the choice to live wherever and do whatever he wants, possibly represent her voice? Kanage pholu wanda has no voice; no-one will listen to her. As an artist deeply influenced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Mosely feels an undoubted responsibility to use his privilege to speak for Kanage pholu wanda through this book. As indicated by the sharing of names, the Samberigi consider themselves always as part of a whole rather than individuals. The group is protected at all costs. Kanage pholu wanda's plight is the group's plight, and she is stuck in the middle, she cannot run away, or move or change anything. From living in one of the most remote places on earth without roads, she now lives in an environment ravaged by western diseases, legal and illegal logging, drug cartels, wide-scale oil drilling and mineral mining.

A close connection

The Samberigi's oral culture is full of stories told through visual language, and this series of Mosely's books follows in the same tradition with no translation needed. But the visual is only part of the experience as Mosely's books are steeped in touch, fully engaging the reader's senses through haptic reception. For the Samberigi, touch is an essential part of life, a physical connection with the rainforest

and each other – for example, holding someone's hand when in conversation. Haptic rainforest has no horizon; some tribal groups traditionally believed the tree canopy held up the sky so avoided areas of clearings. In the rainforest people locate themselves in relationship to their surrounding environment, not through maps, GPS or long location views, but by a tacit understanding of what is around them. This book is a means to discuss that touch and how we might navigate through it ourselves. There are connections with passive and active touch between elements on the pages; passive touch conveys information that doesn't change, with active touch, the reader is affected by what they are touching and affects it back. The Samberigi want their story to be told and Mosely is deeply conscious not to exploit them in speaking for Kanage pholu wanda. He wants to use his 'privileged' voice to speak for the Samberigi. Through this book they feel represented, knowing that their story is out in the world, as it is in their tradition of narration.

Mosely also quoted from Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind* during our conversation, discussing touch in relation to blindness and Christianity, he talks of 'tears that see'. Mosely shed many tears in the making of this book for Kanage pholu wanda, for him and the insoluble tension of the Samberigi's plight. And on reading it, we too should weep, as we touch the rainforest, and we are truly touched to see.

Contact

<http://silverwattlebookfoundry.blogspot.com.au>

Images

Kanage pholu wanda (2014) by Tim Mosely. Relief prints on Awagami Kozo, rainforest ply, felt, single segment case bound, 520 x 680 mm (open). Variable edition of 11