

Tamara Henderson  
Green in the  
Grooves  
6 Oct/30 Dec

Tamara Henderson (b. 1982, New Brunswick, Canada) draws our attention to the often-unappreciated earth beneath our feet and the fundamental ground of life on this planet. Focused on earthworm ecology and the processes of decay and transformation in compost soil, *Green in the Grooves* takes us on a journey through Henderson's practice, from experiments made in her studio and garden in Australia to a major new film commission, a series of 12 paintings, a sound installation and sculptures in ceramic, glass, bronze and textiles.

The exhibition's title speaks to the vital energy that flows through the infinite channels of life, from mossy crevices between stones, to the inner light harnessed in Trataka meditation, Reiki, Kriya and Kundalini—alignment practice that have informed the new series of paintings in Gallery One.

The works harness technologies and natural processes that span a vast historical period, from soil formation to ceramic, bronze and glass production. Drawing attention to these processes, Henderson's project reveals humanity's involvement in global patterns of decomposition, regeneration and metamorphosis, and how such interactions can accelerate or destabilise natural cycles.

In an age saturated by the digital, Henderson's work brings us back into materials—to the analogue and hand-made, to process and experimentation.

Her sculptures, films and paintings ask the viewer to be open in their encounter with them, allowing the everyday to shape-shift into the unfamiliar by virtue of experimentation, curiosity, and the human capacity to explore the unknown through the imagination.

*Green in the Grooves* was produced with Oliver Bancroft, Ezgi Bayazit, Loz Chalk, Julia Dunne, Charlie Knox, Aude Levère, Isabel Ogden, Dan Riley, Jake Tilbury, Australian Bronze, Canberra Glassworks and Chris Harford Ceramics and made possible through the generous support of Arts Council England, Henry Moore Foundation, High Commission of Canada in the United Kingdom, Canada Council for the Arts and Arts ACT (Canberra). Henderson is represented by Rodeo London | Piraeus and PALAS, Sydney, Australia.



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# Gallery Spaces

## Central Space

Henderson has conceived of this first space as the seed room for the entire exhibition. A series of automatic drawings titled *True Leaves* relates to the emergence of a plant's specific appearance in secondary leaves that follow the earlier tissues it creates to photosynthesise—to 'eat' enough light to develop into its true form. Henderson's exhibition has grown from the concerns she explored in these early experimental drawings: the growth cycle of plants from soil and seed to propagation, germination, and returning again to the soil through decomposition.

The chandelier is structured around a central spine or axis, marked by pit-fired ceramic beads and white cabbage moths sculpted in glass. Ascending through energetic centres, it includes copper eyes at the base—signifying a gaze cast to the soil, the ground of being—and an anchor symbolising the Director. The character of the Director appears in various guises throughout the exhibition, conjuring a world into being. Sometimes they are imagined as a magician or wizard, sometimes as an all-seeing eye. The five blown glass question marks suggest their busy mind asking: who; what; where; when; why?

## Gallery One

In a new film shot on 16mm and presented inside a semi-circular screening space made of Cobb bricks and fabric, Henderson takes us on a journey through her creative process, from early experiments with composting to the emergence of the four central archetypes, personified as characters that structure the exhibition: The Director, Light, The Gardener, and Sound. The film charts the formation of the sculptures that are installed in the gallery—from glass blowing, to ceramic firing and bronze casting.

The paintings, costumes and sculptures are arranged schematically according to the four archetypes, each with its own material signature, language and structure. Moving clockwise from the entrance, the first three paintings relate to The Director. They are self-portraits and depict the artist in a Reiki healing session with four amphibious characters invoked as guardians or ancestors marking the cardinal directions of North, South, East and West. Imbued with a seemingly hermetic symbolism, the central figure depicts two worms coiled in inverted question marks around a central spine. This 'soil character' embodies the vital energy reaching down beneath the ground and growing upwards as

a plant, relating the earthly realm to the source of light in the vast cosmos through a theory of similarity—the body understood as a reflection of the universe.

The next three paintings relates to the principle of Light, which in Henderson's cosmology is concerned with the sun, moon and shadow, a transformative energy and source of visionary insight. The paintings are made as an extension of the artist's body and mind following Trataka meditation which focuses on a candle flame for an extended duration. The textiles used in the Light character's costume have been printed with a heliotype process—masking areas of the fabric then exposing it to the sun, allowing patterns to emerge in the negative space.

The copper-framed paintings enter the realm of the Gardener—a disciple of the soil, the microscopic, nurturing growth, it casts a reverent gaze downward. Its symbol is the eye.

Sound is the domain of the worm; the project's protagonist who navigates underground in darkness, sensing the world through vibration. The last three paintings in this gallery relate to the Sound character and are made with soil applied directly to the canvas.

Incense made with extracts of verbena, lavender, eucalyptus and wattle, described as 'botanical travellers' by the artist, is being burnt in the gallery, releasing these aromas into the atmosphere.

## Gallery Two

Henderson focuses our attention on the primordial intersection of life above and beneath the Earth's surface and in this gallery she brings our senses into contact with a world that is usually hidden: compost soil and earthworm activity—the core subject of the exhibition. By positioning contact mics inside a composting vessel, we can listen to a live audio feed of worms tunnelling through organic matter, eating food scraps and transforming them into fertile soil and 'worm juice', a powerful fertiliser harvested and stored in glass bottles shaped like coiled worms. This installation centres the art of chemical transformation happening unnoticed in the flesh of the earth: in the complex and regenerative systems that sustain terrestrial life.

## Artist's Studio

The exhibition comes full cycle to a restaging of the artist's studio in Australia—a laboratory, a place of material and conceptual investigation. In it, her experiments, ideas and processes are revealed, including an installation of light filters that relate to the eye—masking and shaping the passage of light through twenty six different frames (one for each letter of the alphabet). Interested in how the things that populate the world give us our words, and how vision tethers us to objects beyond our reach, Henderson interrogates the

relationship between vision, language and consciousness. A series of body maps convey an elemental kinship between the body and the planet. Using a map of Canberra as the basis, the collages extend to prints of the artist's hands and feet, and bespoke jewellery celebrating the wild intelligence of the body and its relationship with the living land. The floor is produced with reclaimed hosepipe as an automatic drawing; working in free association Henderson allows unconscious processes to surface in serpentine,

or worm-like patterns. A series of Bronze-cast wizards, an embodiment of the Director character, are housed in individual eucalyptus boxes and fabric 'coats', with hand-made incense sticks. These multiples reveal the sequential and systematic aspect of the artist's production—a practice that is grounded in the substance of the terrestrial world while retaining a capacity to conjure a vision of the world implicating all forms of life in an animistic cosmology.

## List of works

- 1 *The Director's Anchor, 2023*  
Steel anchor, soda glass  
blown question marks,  
ceramic beads, copper,  
soda lime white cabbage  
glass moths, patina copper  
eyes
- 2 From left to right  
*True Leaves, No. 1-4, 2023*  
Ink pen on hahnemuhle  
paper
- 3 *Green in the Grooves, 2023*  
16mm film transferred to  
digital, 27 minutes  
Music Dan Riley; editing  
Oliver Bancroft
- 4 *A shape wakes up from a  
spell of repose, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas,  
paperclay, pigment, steel  
mesh, ply-wood
- 5 *From deep in a dream  
admiring the rose, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas,  
paperclay, pigment, steel  
mesh, ply-wood
- 6 *It tries to stretch and finds it  
has no toes, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas,  
paperclay, pigment, steel  
mesh, ply-wood
- 7 *It fell asleep as eye but now  
a nose, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas,  
paperclay, pigment, steel  
mesh, ply-wood
- 8 *What is this volume? I can  
not see the room, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas,  
wax, pigment, steel mesh,  
ply-wood

- 9 *It reeks of sunlight, something other than a tomb, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas, paperclay, pigment, steel mesh, ply-wood
- 10 *One drop in three could ride out on a broom, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas, copper, steel mesh, ply-wood
- 11 *A floral trance now realities perfume, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas, copper, steel mesh, ply-wood
- 12 *Saw a shadow laying on a bank, 2023*  
Acrylic paint on canvas, copper, steel mesh, ply-wood
- 13 *It asked mouthlessly, where did my body go, 2023*  
Soil and varnish on canvas, paperclay, pigment, steel mesh, ply-wood
- 14 *I turned to see if anything had sank, 2023*  
Soil and varnish on canvas, paperclay, pigment, steel mesh, ply-wood
- 15 *And back again to say I do not know, 2023*  
Soil and varnish on canvas, paperclay, pigment, steel mesh, ply-wood
- 16 *It all depends when the scene commences, 2023*  
Silk, cotton
- 17 *Director, Pit-fired Ceramic Wizard, 2023*  
Ceramic
- 18 *A slug chewed holes in the plots pretenses, 2023*  
Dyed cotton, EMF fabric
- 19 *Light, Trataka Flower, 2023*  
Glass
- 20 *Gardener Bronze, 2023*  
Bronze
- 21 *Too comfortable was the script of non-senses, 2023*  
Dyed cotton, plastic and cotton mesh fabric
- 22 *Sound, Worm Juice Bottle, 2023*  
Glass
- 23 *Stretching time after all is what a tense is, 2023*  
Waxed cotton, mud cloth
- 24 *Worm Affair, 2023*  
Compost, earthworms, compost bin, microphones, wood, Genelec speakers, (live audio-feed from compost to sound gateways)
- 25 *The Gardener's Bar, 2023*  
Mixed Media  
(contents listed opposite)  
Music: Dan Riley

## *The Gardener's Bar* Contents

**Director, located front left on entry:**

Director's Suspenders  
Bronze

Two Wizards  
Ceramic

Eucalyptus Glasses  
Sterling silver frame, embedded  
eucalyptus skeleton leaves in resin

Director's Watch  
Glass micro-mosaic, silver

Five Bronze Wizards in  
Eucalyptus Boxes  
Eucalyptus Incense, eucalyptus textile  
protective

Director's Body Map

Ceramic Bead Ring  
Sterling silver and bronze

Director Four Eyes

Character Ring  
Sterling silver and enamel

Ceramic Bead Pendant  
Ceramic bead and sterling silver

Ceramic Wizard

**Sound, located back left on entry:**

Earthworm Cross Section  
Slide on wax

Sound Body Map

Worm Ring  
Sterling silver  
Three Glass Worm Juice Bottles

Worm Symbol Model for Glass Bottle in  
plasticine

**Back Wall:**

Alphabet Eyes  
Various materials

**Light, located back right on entry:**

Light Body Map

Capersnail Ring

Alphabet charm bracelet on chain of  
sterling silver. Amozanite/apple, brass  
butterfly, copper chain, dirt in a sterling  
silver and glass bottle, eggshell and clay  
egg, green glass bead, hand in sterling  
silver, indigo powder in sterling silver and  
glass bottle, jade ring and sterling silver  
chain, kyanite key, lead, moon mirror, nose  
in sterling silver, "O", pyrite puzzle piece,  
quartz question mark, brass snail, turtle  
in sterling silver and marcasite, urchin in  
sterling silver, velvet vase in sterling silver,  
"W" brass, zebra locket in sterling silver

Five Trataka Candle Flowers

**Gardener, located front right on entry:**

Gardener's Glasses  
Sterling silver frame with polarised handout  
lenses, pearl, seed in brass

Gardener's Body Map

Moth Earrings  
Sterling silver and glass micro-mosaic

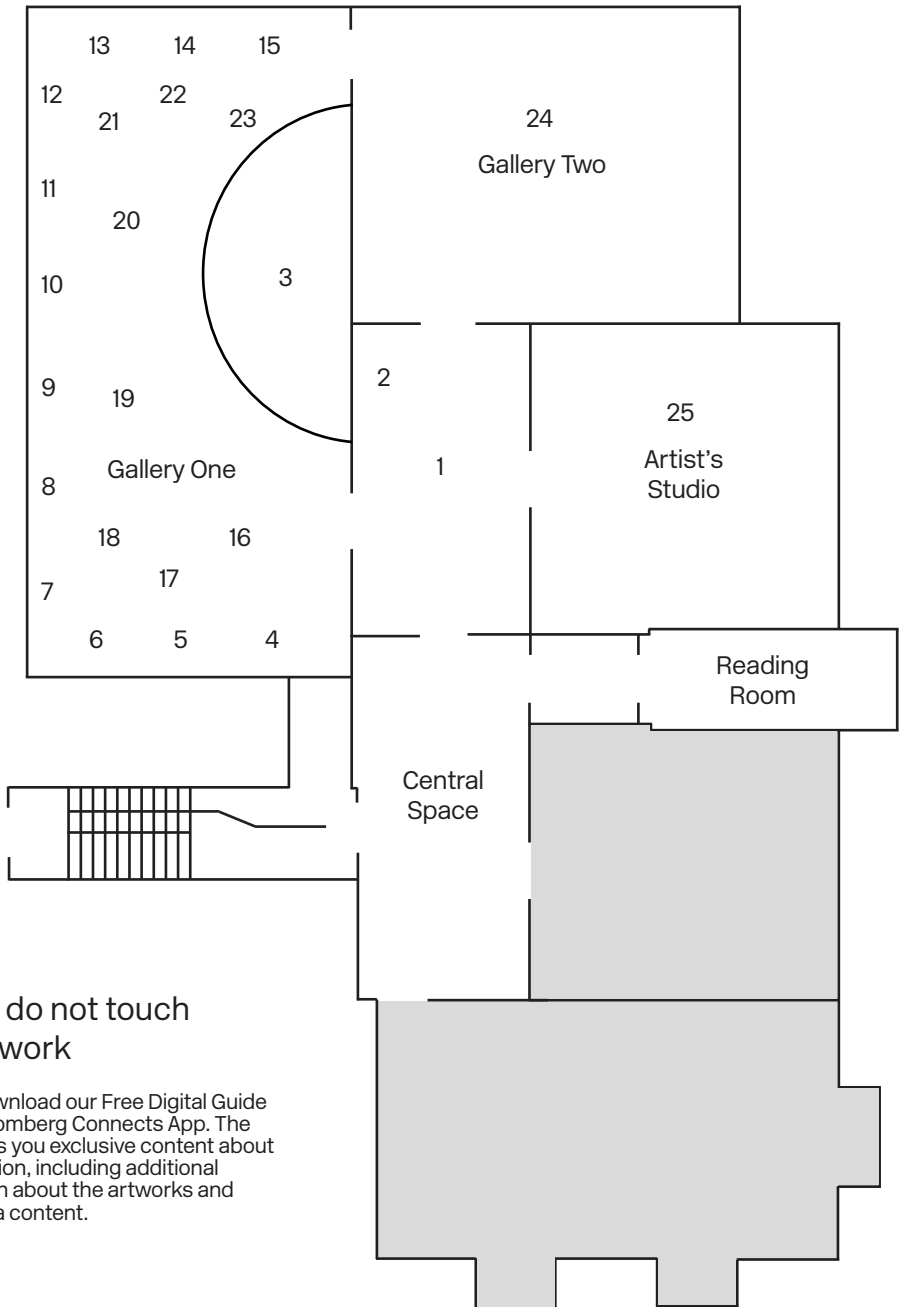
Gardener  
Bronze

**Floor:**

Recycled garden hose

All works courtesy of the artist and  
Rodeo London | Piraeus.

Costumes made in collaboration with  
Aude Levère.



Please do not touch  
the artwork

Please download our Free Digital Guide on the Bloomberg Connects App. The guide gives you exclusive content about the exhibition, including additional information about the artworks and multimedia content.

Camden Art Centre  
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London NW3