

C A R A P A C E

“The night Max wore his wolf suit

And made mischief of one kind

And another

His mother called him WILD THING

And Max said I’LL EAT YOU UP”

Maurice Sendak,

Where The Wild Things Are (1963)

Jane Griblin’s art is a silent avalanche of the primitive. Her works feel old, worn and of another era: it has elements that recall early printing techniques and line work influenced by the patterning of veinscapes and root networks. Her colours always seem derived from nature; tree sap and blood, crushed herbal tints and dank earthy darkneses. The subject matter is always evoking older times, whether the realities of hard living history, or people who live in the liminal at the far edges of society, or more symbolic ideas where the boundaries between the worlds of the human and the animal have looser boundaries, and strange hybridity appears: lycanthropes and chimeras. They are creatures of myth and terror, but also shy, wild, miracles.

I was out walking the other day, picking the kids up from school. We do this every Wednesday: a few kilometres along a picturesque road, the same one we live on, in a sea-side suburb. It’s busy enough but not ridiculous, and the pathway is wide, winding past houses and thinning but present bushland on one side, paddocks inhabited with horses on the other side.

Something happened.

Two car loads of P-platers were having a drag. Engines revving in overdrive, clearly speeding, having a laugh, taking risks, and then one car took a massive risk: the immortality of adolescence was pushed into the thrill of overtaking on the straight, and there was oncoming traffic.

I watched in distant terror. Cars can explode like rotten fruit, spilling soft human bodies, grinding, dragging, screaming.

Not today.

I’m relieved and angry at the speeding cars.

That’s how young people die, leaving their terrified, devastated parents to a lifetime of mourning, an endless gaping void of what might have been. Children are supposed to outlive their parents, but it’s not always the case, and all that is left is bleakness, endless interior monologues of lost potential and shuddering sadness. To never hold your child again: what is this howling, red raw absence? I explain it to the kids, aware of how much my chest tightened. Speed leads to death on quiet country roads.

In his classic children’s book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, Maurice Sendak, hits upon something utterly crucial about the imagination of children: it’s feral. It is teeth and claws and hunger, growling and screeching. Children are wild – not uncontrolled, but not civilised, and the great tragedy of learning is, possibly, that we teach children how to function at the expense of their more primal nature. They need to do it to function in society, and manners are useful things, but there’s an exchange, and something goes. Well, perhaps it does not so much go as become tame: vestiges remain.

We fear for children as a brutal and uncertain future bear down upon us all. What will become of our babies? Will they make it through the blender of adolescence? What will they know? Will there be much nature left?

It's a worry.

Every year in Australia, it is estimated that some ten million animals are killed on our roads. This is a tremendous amount of lost life, and it is brutally, tragically awful. Get out of town just a little bit, head to the mountains or to the beach, and you'll see carnage. You'll see a lot of dead marsupials, and those are the ones that died instantly, rather than the ones who crawled into the Bushes to suffer.

Wild things. Beautiful, cherished, fragile.

The unique fauna of Tasmania is precious and unique, and each unnecessary accident is a small but discernible tragedy.

Jane Giblin, as an artist, is somewhat feral. Her art has about it a roughness, and unkemptness, born of the direct, almost abrupt manner in which she makes her marks: lines with the immediacy of scratches that come together into beautiful, strange, gorgeous images. The subject matter mixes images of animals and people in swirling personal intuition of mythology and folk wisdom: here are fragments of story and anecdote, mixed with striking images of people, animals' birds, twisted modules of fur and flesh collected and gleaned from a catalogue of despair.

Jane has a large collection of images of roadkill. This catalogue of gore forms a complex, bloody constellation born of the artist's journeys around Tasmania: a map of random, pointless death. Each catalogued individual connects to the next, to all the others: the individual ends come to mean so much, much more in concert with all the others: a vastness emerges. A labyrinth of abrupt, pointless finality.

It's horrible.

Monsters. Lycanthropes of flesh and metal. An interaction of cars. Road kill. Children. Decaying fur, eye sockets feasted on by crows, coloured by bruising and decay from a dull rainbow of disintegration.

With this collection, Carapace, Jane Giblin reveals a savage world where the reality of death of animals is symbolised and brought to life with a series of images of children. We value these babies, our babies, without question while a tsunami of violent death happens daily. Jane has created a language of symbols and images from this intense investigation and documentation of roadkill, mixing these images with renderings of children: fusing the precious with the forgotten or ignored, these are the carapaces of the exhibition title: effectively cloaking her images of life with an enveloping shroud of decay, masking the cherubim with blight, rot and extinction, she seeks to lift a veil of dissociation, of wilful ignorance. The images are deeply sad yet infused with that peculiar beauty Jane specialises in: raw, rough-hewn truths of the hard parts of life.

Jane Giblin's work delves into this space of love and loss, seeing the natural world as beyond precious, filled with savage wonder and re-creates the web of connections as hybrids, chimeras, creatures of myth that are born of urgent, desperate reality.

"Andrew Harper is an artist, writer, critic and curator based in Southern Tasmania. He regularly writes about art in Tas Weekend, and his writing has appeared in numerous publications including Island Magazine, RealTime, Runway, ArtLink, eyeline, Artist Profile and online at The Review Board. Andrew has an interest in haunted art, experimental sound, performance, and art from the edges of culture and society. "