Julie Blyfield
panorama – jewellery and vessels
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In the late autumn of 2013 I sat and discussed the possibility of bringing a substantial exhibition of Julie Blyfield’s work to the UK with our then Creative Wales Ambassador Pamela Rawnsley. I had long been an admirer of Julie Blyfield’s work, having first become aware of the sheer exuberance and skill of her very individual practice around fifteen years ago. At her solo exhibition at The Scottish Gallery in 2002 I admired the apparent effortlessness of some of her technical resolutions, her tactile surfaces, her restrained and elegant palette of mild steel, oxidised silver and white sterling silver, and moreover, the beauty of the resolved objects.

Watching Julie’s work developing over a number of years particularly on Galerie Ra’s stand at Collect, I had always hoped to have the opportunity to bring it to Ruthin enabling a Welsh and UK audience to engage with it and enjoy it. Pamela’s Creative Wales Ambassadorship included a residency at JamFactory in Adelaide in 2012, and her creative discourse with Julie acted as a catalyst to make this happen. This is only the second time a significant body of Julie Blyfield’s work has come to the UK – the last time was 13 years ago when ‘Traces’ travelled from the JamFactory in Adelaide in 2001, on to Fingers, in Auckland, NZ and The Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the support of the Australia Council for the Arts, whose major Creative Australia grant enabled both her work and Julie herself to come to Wales, and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for enabling Julie’s residency at Ruthin Craft Centre in Wales. We are confident that Julie’s work will win her much-deserved new admirers in the UK. We also thank Elizabeth Goring for her essays that joyfully describe Julie’s work, and the environment that inspires her, with evocative authoritative panache.

It is pleasing that Ruthin’s invitation has enabled a preview once more at the JamFactory in Adelaide – and that this exhibition ‘Panorama’ will again be travelling to The Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh in early 2016. The Scottish Gallery are our partners on this exhibition; thanks to Christina Jansen and her team for their support. Finally heartfelt thanks to Julie Blyfield for making such amazing objects – objects rooted in her unique response to her source materials and realised through her eloquent mastery of her chosen materials – and especially for sharing them with us.

Philip Hughes
Director, Ruthin Craft Centre
Julie Blyfield makes jewellery, small-scale vessels and sculptural objects in her covetable wisteria-clad studio nesting in the garden of her home in Adelaide, South Australia. The setting of her studio reveals much about her. A passionate gardener, her love of plants is apparently embedded in her DNA. Her exploration of her family history revealed several earlier generations of gardeners including a great-grandfather who worked for Suttons Seeds, the revered seedsmen and suppliers of plants, bulbs and fruit bushes, a company founded in Reading in England in 1806. Blyfield's studio overlooks 'a flourishing garden of fruit trees and vegetables, as well as native and exotic plants (carefully maintained with waste water through the years of water restrictions). A succession of noisy bird life frolics and squabbles in a terracotta bird bath'.\(^1\) There could hardly be a more desirable workplace for a maker whose work is so deeply connected to the natural world.

Making is also part of her family heritage. Her father was an amateur painter who built model ships for pleasure, and ‘tinkered in the shed, repairing things instead of replacing them’.\(^2\) Her maternal grandmother’s much-loved floral embroideries on domestic linens such as tray cloths, pillowcases and doilies in their turn inspired Blyfield’s 2001–2 solo exhibition, Traces, where they found new expression re-interpreted in metal, Blyfield’s own material of choice.\(^3\) Blyfield deliberately opts to describe herself as ‘a craftsperson or jeweller / metalsmith… Never an artist though. I like the word ‘craft’ as it really explains what I do, the old-fashioned ‘chip away’ method’.\(^4\)

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4. Email correspondence, 24 June 2015
For a number of years, Blyfield has made her work in carefully titled ‘series’ – most recently, Second Nature and Twice Loved (for Gallery Funaki, Melbourne and Studio 20/17, Sydney respectively, both 2013).\(^5\) The pieces within each group are made and are intended to be seen both as individual objects in their own right and interlinked: a kind of extended family. Working in this way allows her to develop an over-arching vision for how the work is displayed (‘I feel this creates more of a presence in an exhibition setting’)\(^6\) but it equally ensures every piece has the capacity to go out into the world on its own terms.

When creating each group she likes to allow ‘things to flow and grow gradually, one piece or idea to the next’,\(^7\) which gives a dynamic, organic integrity to the series as a whole. Her work begins with research, during which she develops her thinking by photographing locations and small details within the location, as well as sketching and collecting – usually natural objects. These visual prompts inhabit the space around her as she works. Her next step is to create paper models, or maquettes, before she moves towards making in metal. ‘Using my scissors and small stapler I construct ideas in paper as a problem-solving exercise; it’s quick and spontaneous… I adjust and modify the scale of the designs using my photocopier and re-work into new maquettes’.\(^8\) This spontaneity lends these models an exquisite beauty in their own right as they lie grouped among her gleanings from nature and her own half-formed fabrications in her light-filled studio.

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5. Second Nature refers to ‘an acquired behaviour or trait that is so long practised as to seem innate’. Using the skills, materials and techniques that are second nature to her practice, she set out to see where the work would lead as the year progressed. Twice Loved was a collection of jewellery inspired by the historic patterns of decoration on discarded ceramic fragments and early 20th-century kimonos she photographed at the History Museum in Tokyo. She writes in the accompanying catalogue, ‘For years I have accumulated old pottery shards retrieved from diggings around the township of Silverton, north of Broken Hill in New South Wales, an area which from the mid- to late-1800s was rich in silver mines.’ The pottery represented the random survivals of the everyday wares and domestic life of colonial Australia.

6. Julie Blyfield, Panorama Process Notes, April 2015

7. Email correspondence, 24 June 2015

8. Julie Blyfield, Panorama Process Notes, April 2015
Blyfield’s favoured medium of expression is silver. This she uses in its softer pure form as well as in its stronger alloyed form, sterling silver. Her jewellery and vessels are characterised by seductive textured surfaces created using traditional silversmithing hand skills such as hammering, chasing, punching and piercing. While the eye delights in the elegant patterning that riffs on the subtle interplay of shadow and light, the sensitively handled surfaces irresistibly invite the viewer to touch. Rhythmical repetition is a key element of both her design process and her aesthetic. In 2002, a formative extended period working with the master metalsmith Frank Bauer taught her to ‘hear the sounds and to feel the rhythms’ when raising metal. It was this work with Bauer that first enabled her to expand her repertoire to include raised vessels, a form in which she rapidly made her own mark (see, for example, the exquisite small vessels in her 2003 series *Flourish*).

Blyfield’s use of colour is as distinctive a feature of her work as its texture. Its first manifestation came in 2003 during a visit to the UK as part of the innovative jewellers’ exchange programme HAT (Here and There). During a three-month residency at the Pearoom in Heckington, Lincolnshire, she used watercolours and enamel paints to add vibrant colour to a number of small silver models in response to the brightly-coloured local flowers. However, the real beginning of her exploration of polychromy on silver can be seen with *Pressed Desert Plant* series two years later, when ‘for the first time she…experimented with restrained use of enamel paint applied to the oxidised surface and sealed with silicon wax, to capture the delicate faded hues of the plants through a spectrum of rusts, red, gold and silvery grey’. More vivid colours followed, like the acid yellows, oranges and greens used to stunning effect in her *Margaret’s Pressings* series of 2006 and the *Paris Collection* brooches of 2007. Echoes of this use of colour continued into the later *Scintilla* series of 2010. It is characteristic of Blyfield’s work that each series, distinct in itself, carries a link to another. ‘I love the fact that one series can, by a process of osmosis, dissolve into a new area of investigation and research’.

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9. Sterling silver is an alloy of 925 parts of silver with 75 parts of copper
10. Stephanie Radok and Dick Richards, *Julie Blyfield* (Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2007), 16

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left: *Pressed Desert Plants* series Brooches, 2005. Oxidised sterling silver, enamel paint, wax. largest: 120x60x12mm
above: *Flourish* series Vessels and Brooch, 2003. Fine silver, oxidised copper, sterling silver, wax. Vessel: 70x60x60mm; Brooch: 60x75x20mm
bottom: *Margaret’s Pressings* Brooches, 2006. Oxidised sterling silver, enamel paint, wax. largest: 60x90x20mm
In terms of coloration, perhaps most dramatic of all is the work that appeared in the wake of the traumatising Australian bushfires of 2007. Here, within 2009’s *Natural Selection* series, echoes of scorched colour and searing heat were set against charred blacks and ashy greys, and startling glints of gold and silver recalled the fearsome sparks that fed the fires.\(^{15}\) At the same time, Blyfield continues to revel in and exploit the very special qualities of oxidised silver, its dense, dusky depths tempered by its potential to change over time with handling. While Blyfield loves to contrast the darkness of oxidised silver with colour, it works equally well set beside the glorious pure whiteness she achieves in many of her silver pieces.

While silver is her primary material, for *Natural Selection* she explored new territory, using natural materials like quandong and acacia woods and quandong seeds in combination with or offset by oxidised silver. This extension of her vocabulary for interpreting the natural landscape was inspired by the twin influences of a visit to the deserts of north-eastern South Australia and a workshop on the use of natural materials led by Sandy Elverd, one of South Australia’s leading fibre artists. The appearance of gold in this series was another departure, and one which forms a link to her newest body of work, *Panorama*.

Much of Blyfield’s work is directly inspired by Australia’s botanical landscape and heritage. Botanic gardens are much-loved treasure houses: ‘I have always enjoyed seeing and working from new sources of inspiration and translating this into my own medium. I often visit the Adelaide Botanic Garden and wander through looking at plants’.\(^{16}\) Collections of botanical specimens – plants, pods and seeds – or botanical paintings provide further triggers. The Museum of Economic Botany in the Adelaide Botanic Garden is a favourite haunt. But she finds just as much to excite her imagination virtually on her own doorstep: ‘At different times of the year on my daily walks, I see changes in the environment where I live. Small things catch my eye – a leaf, a seed, seed pods piled in the street, piles of leaves, seasons, the colours, the changes. As I walk I collect and

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16. Julie Blyfield, *Panorama Process Notes*, April 2015; the following quotes are from the same source

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left: *Scintilla* series Brooches, 2010. Oxidised sterling silver, enamel paint, wax. largest: 70x80x20mm
above: *Natural Selection* Brooches, 2009. Quandong wood, paint, 22kt gold, wax. largest: 45x115x15mm
bottom: After the bush fire on Kangaroo Island, South Australia
select pieces of ephemera – it can be a small insignificant leaf’. These ephemera find their way back into her studio, to surround her while she works. But perhaps her most profound inspiration comes from the act of being physically present within the wilder areas of Australia’s natural landscape, breathing in the experience of its intense colours, vast spaces, changing light and its very particular ambience. ‘Chris and I regularly visit Morialta Falls and the Mount Lofty ranges to the east of Adelaide. Spectacular uplifted and folded rocks project as ancient geological landforms. Amazing historic Xanthorrhoea plants, gum trees, native vegetation, wild life – koalas, black cockatoos, blue wrens and the waterfall’. She captures the sights and spirit of the landscape with photography, recording memories of both the wider picture and the small details that catch her attention. Her subsequent work will draw on both as she distils the essence of her response to those wild lands.

Fragments of her personal story have shaped her acute perceptions of the world around her and make their way, explicitly or covertly, into her work. Her sense of the beauty of connection to place through the evolving changes wrought by time was fine-tuned by taking part in an archaeological excavation in Adelaide in 1992. The simple domestic finds from the site spoke powerfully to her; these random survivors of past lives directly informed four early neckpieces called *Stratigraphy of Chance.*

Working beside jewellers in ‘the remote Jewellery Museum in the village of Travassos, north-east Portugal – where the tradition of filigree is still practised by both traditional and more contemporary jewellers – gave her the evocative experience of using an ancient decorative technique linking jewellers of the present to those of a distant past, and a clear sense of her place in the chronological continuum of her craft.’

Blyfield’s work draws on a natural environment that many people in the UK may never have experienced. To British eyes, its ‘otherness’ comes from its reflections of unfamiliar plant forms, the colours of the fierce deserts – at times vivid, at others subtle, from its references to native Australian geological phenomena. Yet her work is beguilingly accessible even to those of us who may never have visited her homeland. Part of its accessibility may derive from the way she views the future.
owners of her work as a dynamic part of the whole creative process. ‘People relate to the jewellery and objects in their own way and I am happy for them to apply their own interpretation and layers of association and meaning to my work. This aspect of a piece changing hands from the maker to the new owner is something I find fascinating’.18 Perhaps significantly though, Blyfield is a first generation Australian – her parents emigrated to Australia in the early 1950s – and she feels a close ancestral pull to the UK which she has nurtured through investigating her family history. This may allow her to bridge the cultures, or at least to feel a strong connection to both. Notwithstanding the undeniably Australian aesthetic of her work (what Margot Osborne has described as the ‘spare beauty to her forms that responds to the distinctive qualities of Australia’s arid interior’)19 it has a timeless universality that touches us in a way that effortlessly transcends its origins.

While Blyfield’s work can be found in numerous Australian museum collections, during the last decade it has also been acquired by the Turnov Collection in the Czech Republic, the National Museums of Scotland, the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, the V&A Museum in London and the Indiana University Art Museum in Bloomington. However, while there have been enticing glimpses of her work in group exhibitions and at applied art fairs such as SOFA and Collect, major solo exhibitions outside Australia have been rare, especially in the UK. It is a cause for celebration by Blyfield’s many admirers in Britain that 2002’s Traces (shown at The Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh) is now to be followed by Panorama at Ruthin Craft Centre and later at The Scottish Gallery again.

Elizabeth Goring
Edinburgh, 2015

18. Email correspondence, 24 June 2015
… they looked down on strange and beautiful things, and held their breath and let it go in deep sighs, and said ‘Oh!’ and ‘Ah!’ until it was long past dinner-time… The carpet was sailing along over rocks and rivers and trees… [it] laid itself out on a southern shore that was sunny and no mistake, as Robert remarked… Between the green, green slope and the blue, blue sea lay a stretch of sand that looked like a carpet of jewelled cloth of gold, for it was not greyish as our northern sand is, but yellow and changing – opal-coloured like sunshine and rainbows.

E. Nesbit, *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904)

*Panorama*, Julie Blyfield’s latest ‘series’, brings together a range of pieces – from jewellery to small-scale objects – that reflect her responses to South Australia, the place she calls home. Through these, she focuses attention on the individual details that together give this place its unique character: its flora, its geology, its colours and textures, the random survivals that mark the traces of human interaction with the land.

From the start, she set out to create what she calls a ‘landscape of works’, a concept largely drawn from perceptions of the landscapes of real life. Each item in the series, whether a brooch or a vessel, forms a vital element of the whole. Blyfield has a clear vision of how this ‘landscape of works’ will appear when it is displayed. ‘When first seeing the exhibition in my head I imagine the viewer’s eye will ‘travel’ across the group of pieces as a long, sweeping view. I imagine that someone could then physically move into the space to look at and engage with the work in more detail, and in a more intimate way’.¹ Viewing the series in its entirety is like looking down from a magic carpet upon a ‘carpet of jewelled cloth’ stretching out ahead.

¹ Email correspondence, 24 June 2015

*Lake* Brooches, Pendant and Neckpiece, 2015. Oxidised sterling silver, enamel paint, wax, cord. largest Brooch: 100x80x15mm; Neckpiece (detail): 90x70x10mm
Words are important to Blyfield and she names her exhibitions with care, seeking to encapsulate a complex creative journey within a carefully considered one- or two-word title. Of *Scintilla*, the title of her 2010 series, for example, she felt the word conveyed ‘something soft, open and light… a freshness similar to the environment from where the ideas emerged’. The sound of the title also mattered: ‘When spoken [Scintilla] sounds soft and delicate’. *Panorama*’s title arrived when she was already deeply immersed in making its content. The word unites two ancient Greek words: *pan* (all or every; including or relating to all parts) and *horama* (view). Defined as ‘an extensive, unbroken view, as of a landscape, in all directions’, its use in the context of Blyfield’s exhibition suggests both a physical and a metaphorical overview. ‘I wanted to make a long ‘landscape’ of jewellery and objects that said something about the place where Chris [her partner] and I live – the space, the distances and the largeness of this land… When we travel to some of the state’s remote locations there is a real sense of vastness, space, light and openness, and I wanted this to be reflected in the title of the work. ‘Panorama’ seemed really apt. I see a Panorama as something you step into and observe, and then notice the details once the place becomes familiar’.

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3. This and the following quote are from email correspondence, 24 June 2015
physical landscape it references: ‘As a jeweller, I recognise that, though ‘my world’ is small-scale, detailed and intimate, this in itself contrasts with the vastness I have mentioned. So I guess I am creating a micro Panorama!’

The word also reflects Blyfield’s customary working processes. ‘I wanted to use a single word for the title which has other associations as well. When I work, I nearly always take photographs in different places or of small details within a location before I start… I collect images together and pin them up in the studio to remind me of the places and the details within the landscape… Maybe I am making my own Panorama?’

Like all Blyfield’s projects, Panorama began with a period of research. This took her from museums and townscapes to the wilder more remote landscapes in her home state. ‘I visited historic towns in the north of South Australia, such as Terowie, where I documented the old buildings, and museum collections of early colonial Australian domestic ware.’

Another important museum visit, this one outside the state, was to the Powerhouse in Sydney to see the flower watercolours of Ellis Rowan and the architectural floral designs of Lucien Henry.
Immersive field trips into the natural landscape included a visit to ‘the far east of South Australia, to Yunta Springs, in the area of Olary, with its approximately 20,000-year-old Aboriginal rock engravings on rust-red outcrops set in spectacular landscapes of spinifex bush’.6 This trip brought back memories of an inspirational visit she and Chris made in the 1980s. Chris’s aunt, Margaret Nobbs, spent many years in the Yunta Springs area documenting its sites, petroglyphs and rock paintings. Her work made a significant contribution to the dating of these unimaginably ancient traces of the human past. Nobbs systematically recorded the designs she found. ‘…circles, half-circles, dots, grooves, radiating lines, spirals, animal forms, bird and human tracks, U-forms, concentric circles, straight lines, nets, webs and many indescribable forms… Julie’s observations of both European and Aboriginal cultures embedded in those landscapes provided formative input to the aesthetic vocabulary of her conceptual and design language’.7

Back in her studio, Blyfield worked on Panorama surrounded by photographs, sketches and found objects, the fruits of her research, providing physical reminders of the array of colours, textures and forms filed away in her mind. Her images show how she approaches the considerable challenge of responding to and recording vast landscapes. She homes in on small areas of interest, zooming in further to capture a detail, then panning out to reconnect that detail with its wider context. This will be reflected in the way she will display the work.

Once she starts the process of making, the work generates its own internal cohesion as individual pieces begin to grow out of other pieces and build relationships between themselves. It is Blyfield’s sensitive systematic journey from immersive research to realisation, from topography to object, that helps explain the remarkable capacity of her work to convey the colours and textures, the distinctive ‘feel’ of South Australia. Each piece carries a sense of its origins within its genetic makeup.

6. Julie Blyfield, Panorama Process Notes, April 2015
7. Stephanie Radok and Dick Richards, Julie Blyfield, 8
When the photographs and sketches have been made, and the experiments with paper models completed, Blyfield decides if an individual piece is to be a brooch, a neckpiece or a vessel and what direction it will take – though ‘there is always an element of the unexpected due to the way I make work’. It is at this point she picks up her silversmithing tools. Most of her work is made from pure or sterling silver. ‘I love the malleability of silver, its ability to be turned and twisted on itself’. She takes pleasure in ‘the way the metal ‘moves and shifts in unpredictable ways to create the organic forms’. For Panorama, Blyfield employed a metalworking technique newly acquired through her participation in a Korean metal craft workshop supported by the Australia-Korea Foundation at the JamFactory. Here she learnt the traditional Korean skill of joi-jil, or jogeum, from master engraver Sung Joon Cho and his assistant Kenny Son – a process in which an engraving tool and hammer are used to make marks on sheet metal to create a graphic ‘feathered line’ image or drawing. Blyfield used this special tool on many of the pieces in Panorama, characteristically adapting the traditional Korean process to her own needs.
The work is ‘all hand-chased and hand-raised. It’s time-consuming to make and taxing on the body. I like to pace myself and take time to make each piece. I am quite disciplined, working every weekday, and I usually work 7 hours a day’.11 Blyfield made 53 new pieces for Panorama, representing an enormous investment of work and time. Thirteen of the 53 pieces are small vessels: 2 cups and 11 containers. The majority (40 items) are items of jewellery: 2 pairs of earrings, 9 neckpieces, 2 pendants, 25 brooches and 2 cuffs. When creating a piece of jewellery the needs of its eventual wearer are very much in her thoughts. ‘I am always mindful of the fact that I am a jeweller… I am conscious that I am making something for a person…to be worn on the body, held in the hand or worn around the neck’.12 The work in Panorama, including the vessels and containers, is deliberately ‘intimate and modest in scale… this ‘intimacy’ contrasts to the vastness of the Australian landscape’.13

The ‘landscape’ of Panorama derives its distinctive character from the visual and conceptual relationships between the groups of objects that are Blyfield’s creative responses to the features that inspired them: rock formations, trees, plants and flowers, the detritus of human occupation of the land.
The *Strata* group comprises three oxidised silver brooches, each constructed from a handful of lenticular folded units subtly interconnected with wire. The arrangement of the interleaved units seems haphazard, as if they had been gathered in the hand and then set down, but this is far from being the case. Their ultimate form was carefully pre-ordained through preparatory sketches and paper maquettes. The outlines of the three brooches are quite distinct from each other due to the different directions in which their units lie: elegant variations on a theme. The brooches were inspired by the rocky outcrops at Yunta Springs, where stacks of rocks lie wedged up against each other, petrified in the layers in which they were flung by powerful forces in the remote past. The dense darkness of the brooches’ visible surfaces are lightly and randomly textured with smooth ripples and bubbles that suggest the once-molten state of solid rock. Their hidden backs are coloured rust red with enamel paint to echo the colour of the rocks that inspired them. Blyfield’s use of wire to link the individual units of each brooch is a method she used previously for the clustered leaf and twig brooches of her *Pressed Desert Plant* and *Margaret’s Pressings* series and as ‘stitches’ in her *Embroidery Collection*; this discreet and simple technique allows the creation of ever more complex layered three-dimensional pieces.
The jagged outlines of the *Strata* brooches stand in stark contrast to the fluid whirlpools of the *Rockface* group. Five oval brooches of white sterling silver, their forms are again variations on a theme. Their spirals draw the eye down towards the central vortex at their hearts, inviting the finger to caress their curves and edges. One has a largely closed centre; the other four have openings that, in wear, will offer glimpses through to the underlying fabric. All five ripple with movement, their shape-shifting outlines and sumptuously textured surfaces recalling unravelling basketry or wet ceramic collapsing on the wheel. The finely segmented snaky lines of decoration tracing the lines of the curves are familiar from some of Blyfield’s earlier work, most recently in 2013’s *Second Nature.*

The lithic genesis of the *Rockface* brooches lies in the curious holes present in the limestone cliffs on the coast at d’Estrees Bay on the south coast of Kangaroo Island. From a distance, their scooped-out shapes in the rock face look ‘eerily like faces’. Blyfield was drawn by the beauty of these holes as seen in the sunlight of early morning, a beauty reflected here in the whiteness of the metal.
The whiteness of *Salt bed* brooch recalls the dry baking heat of its source. Areas of salt pans lie within the extraordinary landscapes of the Simpson Desert, a vast arid region of central Australia located mainly in the Northern Territory and overlapping into Queensland and South Australia. The finely chased surface of this brooch has a long lineage traceable back through several series of Blyfield’s work from as early as 2002 (*Florescence*).

Given Blyfield’s love of all things botanical, it is hardly surprising that flora provide the most numerous and widest-ranging sources of inspiration for the Panorama pieces. The Silky Oak is a tree in Blyfield’s local neighbourhood. Her description of it bears eloquent witness to her wonder at natural forms and her awe at their evolution: ‘The delicate seed pod is formed in two halves, like a small container or vessel. The individual seed pods protrude around the central stem and they are a deep and rich red, purple, brown colour with contrasting darker tone inside each seed case. There is a fine stamen at the end of each small pod case, and this soft curving stamen gently protrudes out as a delicate line 5cm in length. The pods mass at the end of the tree’s branches and form in clumps. The small brown seed pod casings are beautiful in both their simplicity and complexity. They show a rhythm, pattern and repetition in the form and colour. The flowers are a striking yellow ochre colour and form a mass of fine stamens in clusters hanging ‘heavily’ at the end of the tree’s branches. They glisten in the early morning light’. 14

Her response to this much-loved tree finds form in the two *Silky Oak* neckpieces and three brooches. Each necklace consists of fifteen double-sided ‘seed pods’ of oxidised silver, left open down one side of their long axis to offer tantalising glimpses into their dark interiors. An integral protrusion at the end of each pod, curved over, creates an organic link to the next when strung, allowing the pods movement while remaining interconnected: an elegant solution drawn from the natural seed pods themselves. A series of long silver beads threaded beyond the
pod elements enables the neckpieces to lie comfortably on the wearer’s neck, while the simple hook and loop fastening mechanism retains the natural theme. Movement of the necklace in wear emits evocative echoes of the hollow sounds of seed pods knocking against each other in the breeze. The three brooches in the Silky Oak family extend the group’s dusky palette: one is of oxidised silver, while the other two are white. The brooch pods, gathered together like the ‘clumps’ at the end of the tree’s branches, are delicately textured with fine grid patterns.

The Street pods and Street seed neckpieces were inspired by fallen pods on the ground in Blyfield’s neighbourhood. The ‘piles of pods... have a snake-like quality as they form mounds in the street’. Street seed necklace, largely made of dark oxidised silver, has an eye-catching smaller pod element made from bi-metal, a thin layer of 22 carat gold fused to sterling silver sheet. Gold has occasionally appeared in Blyfield’s work in the past – for example, as tiny highlights in the Natural Selection series of 2009, and in two pieces in 2013’s Second Nature – but its scarcity stands out. ‘I have always wanted to make some pieces with gold but the costs are an issue. I like the fact that I can oxidise the silver and this contrasts beautifully with the rich gold. I can texture it, chase it and use it in the same way as sterling silver’. Sunray necklace and earrings, made principally of bi-metal, therefore mark a significant development in her material range. These pieces were inspired by warm sunlight on clumps of spinifex seen at Yunta Springs in the Olary region east of South Australia.

The plant that inspired the Spinifex group of two neckpieces, a pair of earrings and five containers forms a deceptively soft rounded bush. Its domed clumps liberally pepper the desert landscape masquerading as gentle ground cover, but in reality this tough, resilient plant is composed of masses of nasty spikes. Blyfield is attracted by the simplicity of its green ‘cushion’ shapes set against the vivid red earth, especially striking in the early morning or late afternoon light.

15. Notes accompanying reference images, April 2015
16. Made by Reactive Metals Studio Inc
17. Email correspondence, 1 July 2015
While the two neckpieces, one of oxidised silver, the other of white silver, reflect the dramatic sight of spinifex bushes in light and shade, their textured surfaces are far more pleasing to the touch. The five small lidded containers of oxidised silver, with their undulating contours and irregular forms, recall the effect of spinifex bushes in the moonlight. The surfaces of the softly gleaming hummocks on their lids appear smoothly benign; here, it is their background that bears the richest texturing.

Blyfield’s repertoire of vessel forms expanded to include lidded containers in the *Second Nature* series of 2013, where the lids were formed by groupings of three-dimensional leaf elements. The lids of the containers in *Panorama* reveal their function more explicitly, and five have evolved handles for lifting. One of these is *Quandong* container, inspired by a tree that grew in Blyfield’s garden for 17 years before it died in 2014. ‘I loved our native Quandong tree, with its droopy branches that grew in all directions; the coarse dark bark, the long thin waxy leaves and the wonderful bright red Quandong fruit that hung from the branches like Christmas balls in springtime… The leaf is simple and unassuming and forms a lovely all over pattern when used in repetition. In selecting just one leaf for the ground it became the pattern for the surface
of the small lidded container'. The simple strap-loop handle rests against the lid, held in place by tiny wire loops. The surfaces of the container, lid and handle are all decorated with the jojil engraving technique she learnt from the Korean master engraver Sung Joon Cho.

The other four handled containers are Stick and Gum trunks, both made in white sterling silver, and two of the three comprising the Split tank group. Blyfield encountered tanks and rainwater storage in the Australian landscape, eloquent witnesses to the vital need to conserve water to ensure the viability of human occupation of these harsh regions. The Split tank containers are poignantly decorated with patterns ‘taken from photographs I shot of dead plants in the desert… collections of sticks’: their surfaces now bear the permanent reminder of the consequences of drought. ‘Water is an issue for all Australians. We have three tanks to collect water for the garden. It’s such a classic icon of Australia, so I decided to make reference to ‘precious’ tanks and containers’. Many disused and rusted corrugated iron tanks litter the landscape, the rust ‘decoration’ itself recalling the action of water; their state of dilapidation is reflected in the form of the handleless Split tank container.
Blyfield’s newly acquired *joi-jil* technique appears on many of the pieces in *Panorama*, a ‘signature’ decoration for the series. *Fringed Violet* neckpiece, for example, uses this graphic form of decoration to reference details of an Ellis Rowan watercolour from the collection she saw at the Powerhouse Museum. She also used Master Cho’s special engraving tool on the seven *Lens view* brooches to focus in on details from her photographs of plants, tree trunks, leaves and coastal weeds. ‘Some of the lines are infilled with paint and then the surface colour removed as in etching. I made many sketches with black pen on architectural paper before finalising the last seven for the brooches’.20

Blyfield’s *Panorama* takes us from vast arid deserts to piles of leaves on the street, from dramatic rock forms and dead white salt pans to grass seeds and the veins on a leaf, through moonlit nights to the warm light of the sun, the rustling of seed pods in the breeze to the rattling of abandoned rain tanks. The awesome vastness of wild landscapes telescopes into microscopic glimpses of natural wonders. Like the young magic carpet riders of E Nesbit’s Edwardian children’s novel, we may gaze on ‘strange and beautiful things’, hold our breath ‘and say ‘Oh! and Ah!’ until long past dinner-time’…

**Elizabeth Goring**
**Edinburgh, 2015**

20. Notes accompanying reference images, April 2015

above: *Fringed Violet* Neckpiece (detail) 2015. Sterling silver, oxidised sterling silver, wax, cable. 270x250x6mm
right: *Lens view* Brooches, 2015. Sterling silver, oxidised sterling silver, enamel paint, wax. largest: 60x67x10mm
Panorama and the UK

Panorama, Julie Blyfield’s new collection of work, owes its presence in the UK to the fortuitous meeting of two formidably creative artists, each beacons of excellence in silversmithing and jewellery in their respective homelands.

In 2012, the Welsh artist Pamela Rawnsley received a major Creative Wales Ambassador Award from the Arts Council of Wales to research and develop a significant new body of work. This enabled her to take up an artist residency at the JamFactory in Adelaide, where Rawnsley and Blyfield met and formed a friendship. Rawnsley visited Blyfield’s beautiful garden studio, and they walked together at Blyfield’s treasured Morialta Falls discussing the state of jewellery and the wider world of crafts. An indirect outcome of this was the invitation from Ruthin Craft Centre in North Wales for Blyfield to have a major solo exhibition there. Blyfield’s national arts funding agency, the Australia Council, responded with a Creative Australia Grant, supporting a significant period of time to research and make new work, and allowing her to make the return journey to Rawnsley’s home country. This should have marked the happy completion of a transglobal cultural circle.

Sadly, Rawnsley died in May 2014 as the result of a sudden and untreatable brain tumour. She would have taken enormous delight in the work in Panorama: the two artists shared a common language of creative expression. As Rawnsley’s husband, Matthew Tomalin, writes on her website, adapting Rawnsley’s own words, ‘Her studio looked out directly at the landscape which was so influential in her work… A continuous preoccupation was landscape in all its moods, big spaces with tiny details… This was not landscape as rural idyll, but a place bearing evidence of continuous layers of survival… Her expressive vessel forms in silver, designed to stand alone or in groups, were complemented by small collections of jewellery that expressed the drawn line’.

By enabling Wales and Australia to share the results of Blyfield’s superb new collection of work, Panorama stands tribute to Rawnsley’s triumphant fulfilment of her role as a Creative Wales Ambassador.
Biography

Born Melbourne, Australia, 1957

Studio Maylands, Adelaide, Australia

Training
2002 Residency with Frank Bauer learning metal raising
1984–87 South Australian College of the Arts and Education (Associate Diploma of Jewellery Making and Silversmithing), Adelaide
1976–78 Torrens College of Advanced Education, Diploma in Teaching (Secondary Fine Art), Adelaide

Solo exhibitions
2015 Panorama Preview, JamFactory, Adelaide; Ruthin Craft Centre, Ruthin, Wales, UK; The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK (February 2016)
2013 Second nature Gallery Funaki, Melbourne
Twice Loved Studio 20/17, Waterloo, Sydney, Australia
2010 Julie Blyfield: Contemporary Jewellery & Objects Survey 1990-2010. FORM Gallery, Perth, Australia
2009 Natural Selection Gallery Funaki, Melbourne
2007 Julie Blyfield, Sylvie Vandenhoucke, Agnes Millerand Galerie Hélène, Porée, Paris, France (major body of work, shown alongside two other artists)
2003 Flourish Gallery Funaki, Melbourne
2002 Traces The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh (with Lynn Kelly) Traces Fingers Contemporary Jewellery, Auckland, New Zealand (with Lynn Kelly)
2001 Traces JamFactory, Adelaide (with Lynn Kelly)

Awards
2014–16 Creative Australia Grant, Australia Council for the Arts international solo exhibition, Ruthin Craft Centre, The Scottish Gallery
2011 Overall First Prize, The Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize, South Australian Museum, Adelaide

Collections
Aberdeen Art Galleries and Museums, Aberdeen, Scotland, UK; Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, Adelaide; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia; The Arts Centre Melbourne, Australia; Griffith Regional Art Gallery, Griffith, Australia; Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, Indiana, USA; Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK; The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia; South Australian Museum, Adelaide; Turnov Collection, Czech Republic; Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, Toowoomba, Australia; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

Monograph publications
Dr. Elizabeth Goring and Philip Hughes, Julie Blyfield: Panorama (Ruthin Craft Centre, Wales, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, 2015)
Stephanie Radok and Dick Richards, Julie Blyfield (Wakefield Press, Kent Town, Australia, 2007)

Spinifex Neckpiece, 2015. Sterling silver. 195x170x10mm
Spinifex shadow Neckpiece, 2015. Oxidised sterling silver, wax. 310x210x10mm
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Dr Elizabeth Goring was Curator of Modern Jewellery at the National Museums of Scotland for more than 20 years. She is currently an independent curator, writer and consultant.

front cover: Stick, Quandong, Gum trunks Containers, 2015. Oxidised sterling silver, sterling silver, wax. largest: 75x70x55mm
back cover: Silky Oak Brooches, 2015. Sterling silver, oxidised silver, wax. largest: 80x50x24mm
page 3: Quandong Container, 2015. Oxidised sterling silver, wax. 75x70x55mm
below: Eucalyptus Brooch, 2015. Oxidised sterling silver, wax. 100x80x15mm