

# ARTIST PROFILE

A portrait of Teelah George, a woman with long, wavy brown hair and blue eyes, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. She is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some draped fabric.

*Yhonnie*  
**SCARCE**

*Timothy*  
**COOK**

*Alex*  
**SETON**

*Nicole*  
**ELLIS**

*Newell*  
**HARRY**

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# TEELAH GEORGE

*by Elli Walsh*

# Joshua YELDHAM

## Compassion and conviction on the boundary of change

Story **ELEANOR ZECCHIN**

JOSHUA YELDHAM SPEAKS OF A 'BOUNDARY OF CHANGE', A DYNAMIC SPACE IN WHICH TRANSFORMATION IS MADE MANIFEST, AND WHERE SADNESS, HOPE AND RENEWAL DANCE TOGETHER. FOR YEARS YELDHAM HAS LOVINGLY AND RITUALISTICALLY PLACED INTERVENTIONS PHYSICALLY WITHIN THE LANDSCAPE FROM WHICH THEY WERE CONCEPTUALLY BORN, THROUGH SCULPTURE, PHOTOGRAPHY, PAINTING AND FILM.

A recent catastrophic bushfire season followed by a pandemic saw a renewed focus within Australia in which compassion and conviction visibly moved large parts of society towards nature and regeneration. The reality, of course, is that these complex traumas and destruction are not new for many. Recently a noticeable and somewhat unique connection has been made through an almost simultaneous global awareness of the precarious nature of humanity and the environment; proving a potent archive for many as a vehicle for positive change.

Change, healing and renewal have always been at the core of Joshua Yeldham's practice. It is in a new body of work, 'Providence' at Arthouse Gallery, that shows the grit with which Yeldham continues to pursue transformation. He weaves together a contrast of environments from the Ute Tribe's snowy Rocky Mountains of Colorado, the remoteness of Lord Howe Island to the parched, beloved Deerubbin Country-Hawkesbury River. An amalgam of imagery maps his ongoing enthusiasm for cathartic adventure. The eye motif reoccurs throughout the works with the artist's signature owl totem and Aspen tree connecting the duality of how, as he says, 'the eye sees fragility and prosperity simultaneously.'

The late Joseph Campbell wrote, 'In the West, we have the idea of a conflict between good and evil, and so we are asked to stand for

good against evil. We do not have a religion like almost everyone else in the world, putting us in accord with nature ... But in the East, the whole sphere of the universe is the womb of the Goddess, and the deities and all names and forms are within her bounds.'

Through the learning of Eastern cultures, ritual and endless material experimentation, Yeldham seeks to conjure the protective care of nature as a spiritual power. Extensive study of comparative mythology and spirituality has for a long time influenced his life philosophy. To quote, 'I build root systems and root foundations to try to bend my life, sometimes easily and sometimes in a difficult space, towards what is light.'

Acknowledging loss and longing with an active pursuit of resonance and renewal, Yeldham expands upon his hand carved, photographic pigment prints, amongst many other technical pursuits. Paintings with musical instruments embedded and the addition of sandcast stone provide a playground for the senses. This use of myriad medium and process allows for a deeply layered conceptual inquiry, encompassing both literal, imaginative and metaphorical narrative. While Yeldham still explores his extensive background of film through his practice, he says that 'Painting symbolises a positivity and light that I see in nature, giving me a knowledge, wellbeing and protectiveness that words can't always give.'







03



04

Philosophically, Yeldham looks to move towards a spiritual light by tapping into universal mythology and has, over many years, created his own way to navigate life. While he wanders alone in the environment for days at a time, he is far from a solo traveller. In constant dialogue with nature, he bestows reverence onto both living and 'dead' forms, challenging the value we may ordinarily place on 'inanimate' objects. He adorns owls, rocks, rivers and trees to share with us his desire to become one with nature.

Traversing many environments on his boat and by foot, he works in rain, amongst salt grass swamps and the popping and clicking of mud crabs, painting in accord with the tide. At times he leaves works in caves to rest and converse with nature alone until he returns; and as the weather dictates, works may be partially made outside and then returned to his boat for resolution.

Handmade thick paper and board provide rich physical repositories into which drills and belt sanders are pushed and prodded. These machines create the tap-tapping sound that Yeldham notes as morphing into the call of the Heron – his local bird. Rhythm, vibration and meditation synchronise, affording him a 'collapse in time' in which immense detail is crafted. He moves towards a sense of this boundary of change through tuning into the kinetic, humming, sonic sound which he connects to the mantra – a gift, Yeldham acknowledges, from India since a young boy having learnt Transcendental Meditation. He notes that without the practice of presence, the intensity of intricate work could not be sustained.

Akin to a metaphorical dig in which an archaeologist seeks new knowledge from past times, Yeldham commits acts of destruction

through the carving of wood and paper. Almost ironic in its violence of noise and mess; he uncovers and brings to light the potential for positive change. Delicate pattern-making cultivates beauty as the ornamental quality expands, optically 'netting' the subject; metaphorically stitching these images of loss and longing together as a form of healing.

Yeldham speaks of creating his own 'theatre for life' which confirms his enthusiasm for a hybrid practice. The poetic use of embedded musical instruments performs for the viewer, through layered aesthetic and sensory experience. The title piece of his latest series, *Providence* (2020), contains two simple strings akin to an African kora along with the iconography of a young, courageous girl (Yeldham's daughter Indigo) with her owl companion standing firm and strong, ready to protect the scorched landscape behind her. She holds a determined stance with her lily pod fan and snake. Yeldham says of the young girl, that by strumming the owl 'you can strum the marriage between her alliance with her own individuality, her own unified field, so she is connected to her landscape and therefore her reliance on the owl to be a gatekeeper into that landscape.'

A solitary and majestic mangrove features in *Resonance – Morning Bay* (2019). This tree sits within Guringai Country – Morning Bay, Pittwater – and has been lovingly painted by Yeldham for over fifteen years, seen in three Wynne prizes and the 2013 Archibald.

01 Joshua Yeldham in his Sydney studio, 2020, photograph Jo Yeldham

02 *Angophora – Yeomans Bay*, 2020, acrylic and cane on carved board, 204 x 152 cm

03 *Boobook*, 2020, acrylic on carved paper, 200 x 200 cm

04 *Resonance – Morning Bay*, 2019, hand carved pigment print on cotton paper, cane, string, 207.5 x 207.5 cm (framed)



Initially begun as a series of nine works made over ten years, this eighth rendition was captured on his phone and enlarged to a grainy two metre print; carved and dressed with strings representative of the care and protection felt strongly by Yeldham and his family. After a neighbouring tree blew down in the storm, he was driven to show compassion and support through this visual scaffold of strings. Inspired by bonsai seen in Japan, he wanted to reference the challenge of being with nature – the supportive thread stabilising the growing limbs. Directed towards the root system, the placement of strings references his human presence and practice within this local environment. This work asks us to reflect on our relationship with nature and consider how far we intervene in order to protect, or step back allowing nature to be itself, even throughout acts of destruction. The countless leaves, hand-carved and illuminated, connect to his experience of the Japanese cherry blossom. Down the strings, the ritualistic painting of acrylic speaks to the energy and care bestowed upon this tree; ornamentation placing it within an accessible reading of the sacred. It shows strength in nature, along with Yeldham's sincere curiosity about how he, and we, might all adventure along the boundary of change through this world with compassion. ▣

[@joshuayeldham](https://www.instagram.com/joshuayeldham)  
[joshuayeldham.com.au](http://joshuayeldham.com.au)

## EXHIBITIONS

Providence  
 3 to 21 November 2020  
 Arthouse Gallery, Sydney

Providence: Sydney Contemporary  
 9 to 12 September 2021  
 Carriageworks, Sydney

05 *Aspen Tree I*, 2020, unique hand carved pigment print, 130 x 195 cm

06 *Providence*, 2020, acrylic and cane on hand carved board, 201 x 245 cm

Courtesy the artist, Arthouse Gallery, Sydney and Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne



