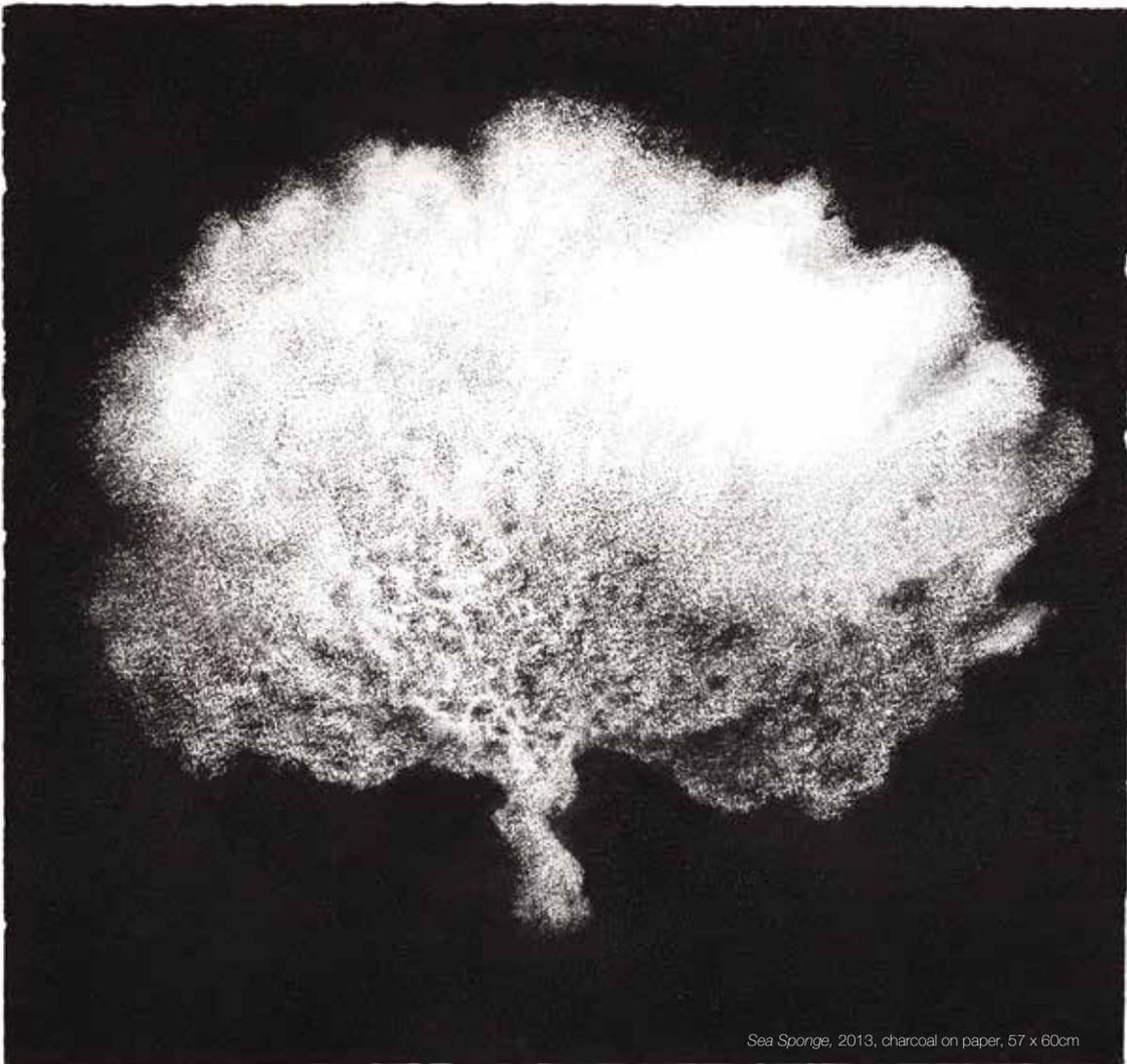




Jennifer Keeler-Milne
Education Kit:
Secondary School Resources



Sea Sponge, 2013, charcoal on paper, 57 x 60cm

A note to teachers

This education kit has been developed by the Glasshouse Port Macquarie Regional Gallery to engage Stages 4 – 6 Visual Arts students with the themes and ideas explored by Jennifer Keeler-Milne in her exhibition *Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities*. This kit presents opportunities to investigate the relationships between Keeler-Milne's work, the world and the audience through the subjective, structural and cultural frames.

This kit has been designed to accompany Keeler-Milne's exhibition as a post-visit resource. Its activities are grouped into three themes: A cabinet of curiosities, Beauty and Mystery, and The Natural World. These can be explored in any order, and as a series or individually. Teacher's notes for this kit can be found at the back of this booklet.

Jennifer Keeler-Milne: Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities

Jennifer Keeler-Milne is an Australian artist living and working in Sydney. A painter and draughtswoman, Keeler-Milne has been preoccupied with drawing natural forms since 1999, when a large cloud drawing she created was chosen as a finalist for the Dobel Prize for Drawing at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

In *Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities*, Keeler-Milne has created over a hundred charcoal drawings of natural specimens collected from the ground, the sea and the air. Intrigued by age-old practices of collecting, classifying and admiring nature, Keeler-Milne has created her own version of the Renaissance cabinet of curiosities, or wunderkammer, using the gallery space as a 'two-dimensional cabinet' for her drawn specimens. Like the wunderkammer collectors before her, Keeler-Milne's sensitively and beautifully drawn collection evokes the beauty and mystery of nature.

➤ Discuss

- In what kinds of places are objects collected and categorised today?
Write a list of as many of these places as you can think of, and the types of objects collected there.
- Why do you think people are so interested in gathering and arranging objects?

Emerging in sixteenth century Europe during a period known as the Renaissance, cabinets of curiosities, or wunderkammer, were cabinets or rooms displaying collections of rare and unusual objects. Reflecting a time of increased exploration and trade, these objects were gathered from around the world and beautifully arranged into sites of wonder and entertainment by their wealthy collectors.

“the blanks left through limits in our knowledge can be filled by the imagination and one can be left with ... a sense of wonder at the world”

– Anne Ryan, *Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities* exhibition catalogue



Image: Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities, from Museum Wormianum, 1655
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Musei_Wormiani_Historia.jpg

These collections contained both natural and artificial objects, ranging from preserved animals and skeletons, plants and minerals, to antiques and religious relics. They also included faked objects or those believed to possess magical properties. A mixture of science and art, cabinets of curiosities are considered by many to be a forerunner of the modern museum, and seen as an attempt to understand the world from which their objects came.

Activity: Curious Worlds

Suggested Stages: 4 - 6

While cabinets of curiosities worked as a way to gain a greater understanding of the world, they also revealed what remained unknown, with collectors often speculating about the magical or mysterious elements of objects in their collections.

What could a particular object tell you about the world it has come from? What mysteries or magic might it reveal? Use drawing and creative writing to imaginatively explore the curious worlds from which objects come from.

> Resources

- Assortment of unusual natural objects (e.g. corals, shells, nuts, leaves, feathers, etc.)
- Pencils and art paper
- Writing materials/computer

> Investigate & Make:

1. Select a natural object to create a drawing of. Study your object - write a list or create a mind map exploring the character and features of this object, and what they might tell you about the world it came from. Rely on your imagination to fill the gaps in your knowledge! Some questions to guide you might include:
 - What is your object? Does it have a scientific name?
 - What does it look like? What interesting features does it have?
 - Where did it come from?
 - Where has it travelled on its journey to you?
 - Is it one of a kind or are there others like it?
 - How old is it?
 - Does it have any special properties or powers?
2. Create a drawing of your object. Experiment with ways of emphasising the unusual or interesting features of the object in the way that you draw it.
3. Using the notes from your study, compose a piece of creative writing that explores the imagined world your object came from, and speculates about the magic or mystery surrounding your object.

> Reflect:

- Share your story with others without revealing which drawing it belongs with. Can they guess which object your story is about? Are there any similarities between the different worlds the group has imagined?
- Living in a time that came before modern scientific knowledge influenced the wunderkammer collectors' interests in the wonderful, magic or curious. What is the value of imagination or speculation in today's world?



Activity: Peculiar Connections

Suggested Stages: 5 - 6

Renaissance wunderkammer collectors blurred the boundaries between art and science, creating new meanings through the peculiar and beautiful ways they arranged and categorised objects. Construct and draw a still life inspired by the wunderkammer, exploring the new meanings that can be created by making unexpected connections between objects.

> Resources:

- Assortment of natural and artificial objects
- Area to set up a still life
- Additional tools for arranging still life (e.g. blue tak, lighting)
- Art paper and drawing tools

> Investigate & Make:

1. Gather a collection of natural and artificial objects from your surrounding environment that you find interesting or intriguing.
2. Experiment with different ways of arranging your objects, considering the following questions as a guide:
 - What unexpected connections can you make between objects?
 - How can you arrange these objects in an aesthetically pleasing way?
 - What new meanings can be created in the ways you position and present your objects? For example, adding lighting, placing particular objects together or apart, or manipulating objects (e.g. attaching objects together).
3. Create a drawing of your still life.

> Reflect:

- What new or unexpected meanings did you create through the objects in your arrangement? How were these meanings created?
- Imagine someone views your drawing in a hundred years' time. What would they learn about your interests, beliefs or the society you belong to?

“Cabinets were ... a source of wonder and entertainment. Objects within them were arranged with an artist’s eye, driven as much by aesthetics as the scientific and spiritual beliefs of their collectors.”

– Anne Ryan, *Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities* exhibition catalogue.



➤ Discuss

- What makes something mysterious?
- Why might the subjects in Keeler-Milne's work be described as mysterious despite the audience knowing what they are?

Beauty and mystery are repeated themes in Keeler-Milne's practice. Like the wunderkammer collectors of the Renaissance, her drawings focus on an aesthetic rather than scientific representation of nature. Created with subtle materials and techniques, and displayed without reference to common or scientific names or classifications, Keeler-Milne's collection of drawings recall and evoke a fascination with the mystery, wonder and beauty of nature.

Activity: Seeing the Unseen

Suggested Stages: 4 - 6

The practice of drawing objects from nature is often associated with scientific study, where accuracy and realism are essential. Follow Keeler-Milne into a close examination of the natural world and explore the ways techniques and materials can be used to evoke the unseen in nature.

➤ Resources:

- Natural objects (e.g. shells, sea urchins, rocks, pinecones, feathers, etc.)
- Images of scientific illustrations of one or more of the specimens in Keeler-Milne's drawings
- Black and white paper
- Black and white pencils or pastels and erasers



30 Corals, 2014 – 2015, charcoal on paper, 19 x 19cm (detail)

> Investigate & Make

1. Examine and compare one of Keeler-Milne's drawings with a botanical or scientific illustration of the same specimen.
 - What words would you use to describe these drawings and the memories or feelings they evoke?
Create a list of words for each set of drawings.
 - Compare the lists. How does each artist's use of materials and techniques contribute to the differences between them and the ways they make you feel?
2. Explore ways to evoke mood by experimenting with different mark making techniques and materials. Consider the following questions as a guide:
 - How would a joyful mark look different to a sorrowful one?
 - How could using a hard or soft line change the mood of a work?
 - How could you suggest the texture of an object through line and tone?
 - How could contrast and tone create a sense of mystery or curiosity?
3. Select an object to draw. Consider and make a note of any memories or moods it brings to mind, or particular emotional qualities you think it possesses. Applying what you explored in your experiments, create a drawing of this object that evokes these elements.

"[Keeler-Milne's] drawings of natural objects evoke mood, sensation and memory, brought to light with great sensitivity and insight. They are not botanical or natural history studies in the traditional sense, but rather poetic evocations of the beauty and variety of nature."

– Anne Ryan, 2016, *Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities* exhibition catalogue.

> Reflect:

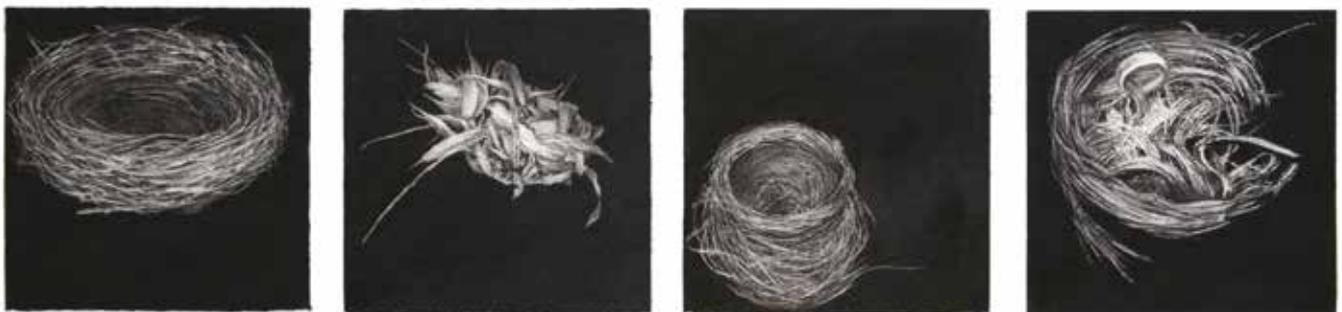
- Examine each other's drawings and describe the kinds of moods they suggest. Does your audience identify the elements or moods you intended to evoke, or does it bring other feelings or memories to their minds?
- What do you think it is about the particular techniques Keeler-Milne has used that cause them to evoke mood, sensation or memory?
- What has exploring Keeler-Milne's works taught you about the relationship between artwork and audience?

> Debate

Suggested Stage: 6

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"

Are some things objectively beautiful? Or is beauty a matter of perspective? These questions have long been debated by philosophers, with a particular focus on the beauty found in nature and art. Stage your own debate of the above quotation in groups, supporting your arguments with research into ideas of beauty in nature and art.



8 Nests, charcoal on paper, four works x 22 x 33cm, four works x 33 x 33cm

> Discuss

- How do you think the ways people look at and think about the environment has changed since the Renaissance?
- How could Keeler-Milne's drawings be seen as reflecting nature's frailty in the face of threat? What kinds of threats do you think she could be referring to?

Jennifer Keeler-Milne has been creating works concerned with the natural world for over a decade. Exploring a range of objects across a variety of sites, Keeler-Milne's works bring to light the beauty and wonder of nature, while also reminding her audience of the threats it faces.

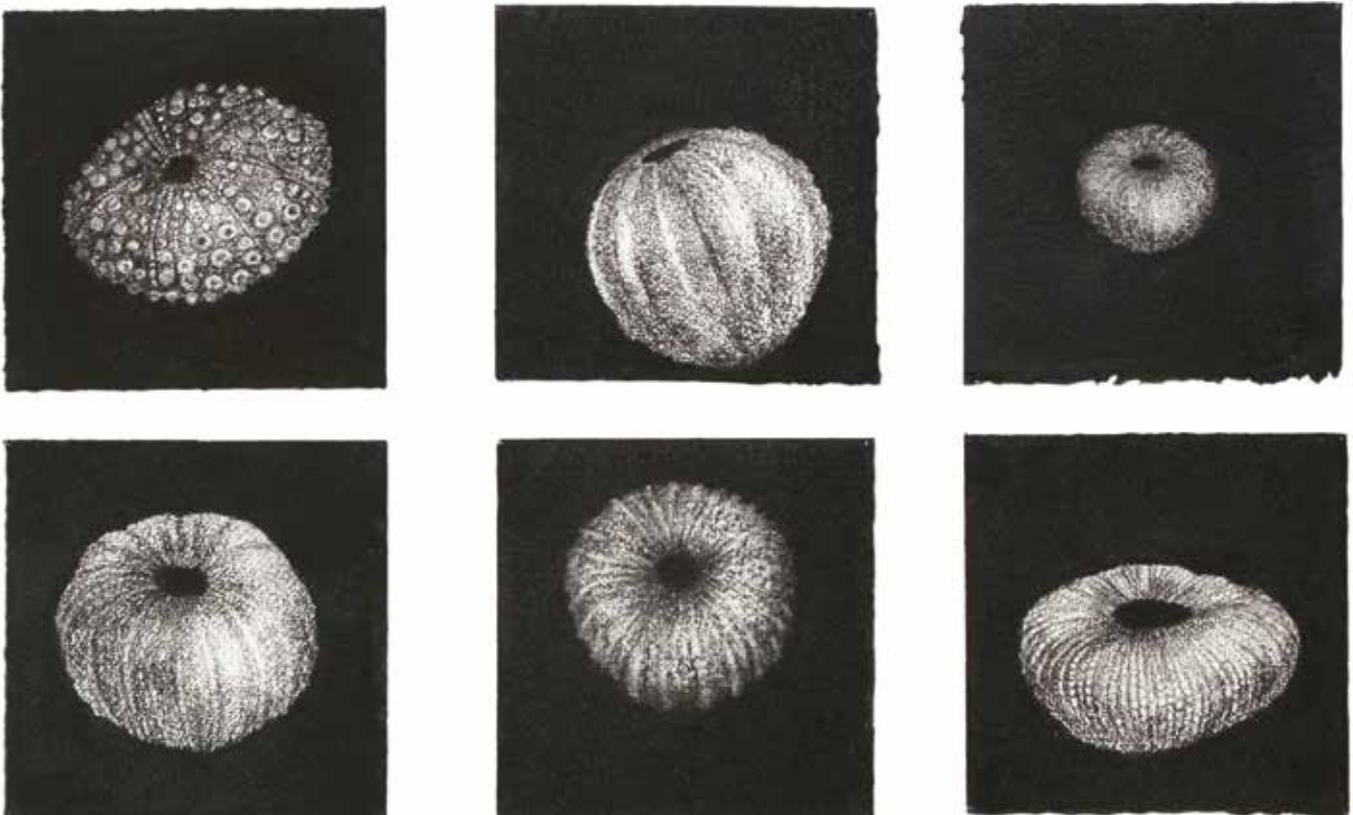
Activity: Making from Nature

Suggested Stages: 4 - 6

Jennifer Keeler-Milne creates artworks that respond to the natural environment using materials that have origins in nature: willow charcoal and hand-made paper. Discover ways of using objects and materials from nature to create an artwork that responds to the environment.

> Resources:

- Available and appropriate natural materials
- Other art materials and equipment as needed
- Internet access



15 *Urchins*, 2013 – 2015, charcoal on paper, 18 x 18cm (detail)

> Investigate & Make:

1. Research the works of artists who use materials from the natural world (e.g. Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Long, Hossein Valamanesh, Vicki West, Janet Lawrence, Ken and Julia Yonetani). How do these artists use natural materials in their works? What kinds of ideas do they explore through their use of materials?
2. Research and explore your natural environment to develop your response. What stands out about it? Does it face any kinds of threats? What kinds of relationships do people have with it?
3. Collect a range of materials from your environment, being careful not to disturb fragile areas or wildlife. Experiment with different ways of using these materials (e.g. creating assemblages or sculptures from objects, using objects as drawing or painting tools, incorporating photography).
4. Drawing from research and experimentation, create an artwork from your materials accompanied by a short statement explaining how it responds to the natural environment.

“Creating and exhibiting drawings of organic forms not only documents and celebrates them as part of our natural world but also inherently brings awareness to their fragility and vulnerability in a climate of threat and change.”

– Jennifer Keeler-Milne, 2016, *Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities* exhibition catalogue

> Reflect:

- Did you find the process of working with nature limiting or freeing? Why?
- Do you think it is the responsibility of an artist to draw attention to environmental or social issues? Why or why not?

Extended Response:

Suggested Stage: 6

The ideas behind the wunderkammer have been explored by numerous writers and artists since its emergence in the Renaissance. For contemporary artists, such as Jennifer Keeler-Milne, Fiona Hall and Janet Lawrence, these references are often related to a concern for the natural world.

Research and compare the ways Jennifer Keeler-Milne, Fiona Hall and Janet Lawrence make reference to the wunderkammer. How do these artists use these references to comment on environmental issues? Include references to relevant artworks to support your discussion.



Jennifer Keeler-Milne: Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities

Education Kit – Teacher's Notes

These notes provide a brief guide to this education kit. It is anticipated activities will be adapted according to context and students' needs.

A cabinet of curiosities

This theme explores the idea of the 'cabinet of curiosities' or wunderkammer as the conceptual basis of Keeler-Milne's exhibition.

Opening questions

These questions are designed to encourage students to consider the idea of collecting, categorising, and possessing objects as a human interest. Encourage students to consider both public collections such as book, film or music libraries, museums or art galleries, as well as the private spaces in which personal collections are kept. Internet sites such as Youtube and Wikipedia might also be considered.

Curious Worlds

Activity Suggested Stages: 4 - 5

The unusual ways wunderkammer collectors arranged and considered objects often revealed their misunderstandings about the world, reflecting an era that predated modern science. In this drawing and writing activity, students take on the role of the Renaissance wunderkammer collector as they imaginatively speculate about the properties and origins of unusual natural objects. *Curious Worlds* could be used as a stand-alone activity or integrated into extended artmaking as an idea-generation technique.

The final discussion question can be used to explore and debate a range of ideas and questions. Some suggestions include:

- What would the world look like without imagination and speculation? Would current technologies still exist?
- Does our access to instant answers via the internet enhance or hinder imagination?

Peculiar Connections

Activity Suggested Stages: 5 - 6

Inspired by the artistic rather than scientific ways wunderkammer collectors arranged their objects, this still life activity encourages students to consider new ways of looking at and exploring the meanings that can be created by objects. It can be undertaken individually or as a group, with students collaborating to arrange a still life.

Encourage students to consider the associations they have with objects, or that objects might have with each other, as they explore ways to create new connections between them. A consideration of elements such as colour, balance and contrast might also be revised as students construct and draw their composition.

Beauty and Mystery

Opening Questions

These questions are intended to provide an introductory consideration of the ways artists can evoke a subjective response, creating mystery where there may usually be none. Encourage students to think about the techniques and materials Keeler-Milne has used to do this.

Seeing the Unseen Suggested Stages: 4 - 6

This activity provides an opportunity for students to consider relationships between techniques, materials and audience response. Through a comparison of Keeler-Milne's work with scientific illustrations, students will explore ways of representing both likeness and essence as they practice creating emotionally evocative drawings.

As students examine and compare Keeler-Milne's work with the scientific illustrations and explore their own mark-making, encourage them to consider the techniques and materials Keeler-Milne has used to produce her drawings, including her use of:

- Delicate materials (willow charcoal and hand-made paper)
- Monochrome
- Positive and negative space
- Contrast
- Soft lines rather than hard edges
- Subtle marks and tone to suggest texture

This activity could be extended by having students produce a series of drawings, creating their own collection of drawn specimens. Alternatively, students could work collaboratively to gather and arrange each of their drawings onto a wall or large roll of paper to create a collective two-dimensional wunderkammer.

In the reflection, students might consider the ways expressive methods of representation relate to the felt, rather than seen, experiences of the world to evoke powerful emotional responses in an audience. This could also relate to discussions on the role of the imagination in creating connections between artworks, artists and audiences.

Debate: Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Suggested Stage: 6

This debate engages students in a discussion about aesthetics as they question the idea of beauty as objective. Students can draw on the ideas of beauty, nature and emotion as explored in Keeler-Milne's work, as well as undertaking further research. Possible questions to consider in this debate could include:

- What is beauty?
- What evidence is there that people can/cannot agree on what is beautiful?
- Is it a part of human nature to find the natural world beautiful?
- What makes a work of art beautiful? Are certain elements of art inherently pleasing to humans (e.g. balance, order, colour)?
- Is art that represents nature inherently beautiful?

The Natural World

Opening Questions

These questions are intended to prompt students to consider the role of nature in art, as both a source of emotional response and as a way to draw attention to environmental concerns. Encourage students to identify the connection between Keeler-Milne's subtle and repetitive representation of nature and the fragility of the environment.

Making from Nature Suggested Stages: 4 - 6

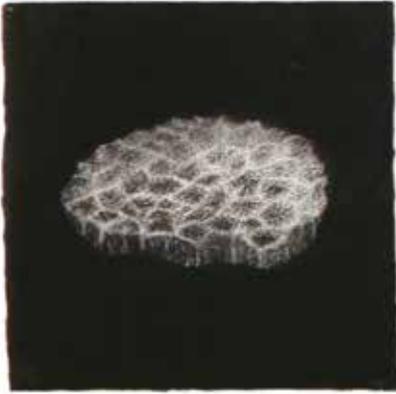
This activity highlights and expands on Keeler-Milne's use of natural materials in her creation of works that focus on nature. In *Making from Nature*, students can use natural materials to comment about environmental issues, providing an opportunity to consider artmaking through the cultural frame. Their artworks may respond in other ways and it should be noted to students that not all artists who work with natural materials do so as a form of environmental activism, including some of those who have been suggested for research.

Extended Response Suggested Stage: 6

This extended response brings together the ideas and themes in *Drawn to a cabinet of curiosities*, as explored through this education kit.

Encourage students to consider what they have learnt about the wunderkammer through previous activities, and how these ideas are used by each artist. Some suggested themes to explore include:

- Collecting, displaying and possessing
- The natural and the artificial
- Blurring the lines between science and art
- Beauty and mystery



30 Corals, 2014-2015, charcoal on paper, 19 x 19cm (detail)



GLASSHOUSE PORT MACQUARIE

GLASSHOUSE PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL GALLERY

Cnr Clarence & Hay Streets, Port Macquarie NSW 2444

Contact

call: 02 6581 8888
email: info@glasshouse.org.au
web: glasshouse.org.au

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