

Sally Blake and Robert Glasser in conversation¹

Sally Blake writes ...

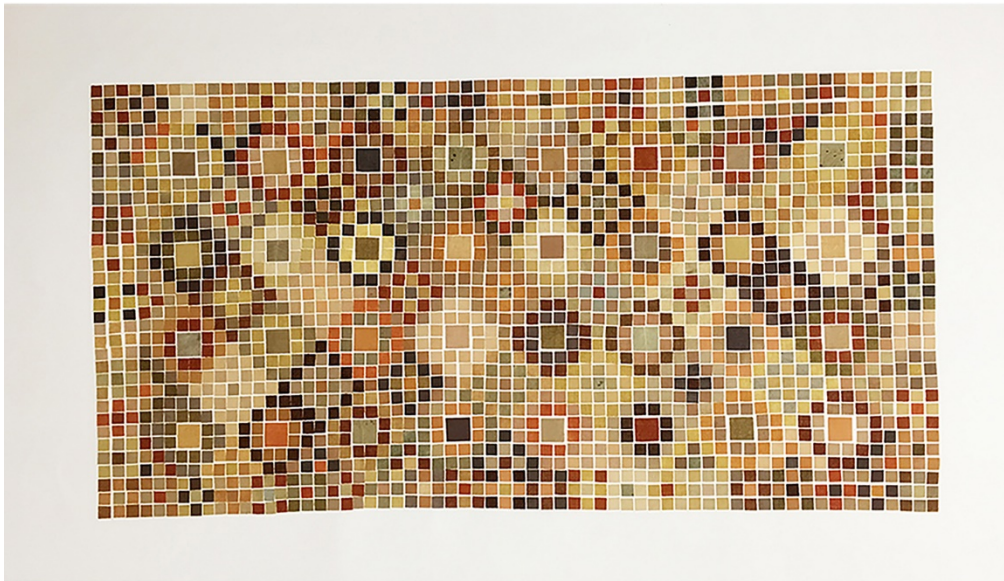


Sally Blake, *Wounded Goddess*, 2020. Ink and pen on paper. 110 x 200 cm *

Robert and I first met over 20 years ago when our girls became friends in preschool. We are both part of a larger friendship group that formed around our children. We watched the children grow, seeing them emerge as wonderful, creative young adults. We also became concerned about our children's futures as climate science established that humans were not adequately addressing the unfolding crisis. Our children face existential threats because not enough was done in those 20 years to avert the worst effects of climate change.

Through vastly different pathways (see below) Robert and I spend our working lives concerned with climate science, lack of political action and the effects these are having upon the natural world and the lives of humans. We brought our different perspectives, knowledge and ways of thinking together for a conversation in October. This conversation began with my artworks and I talked with Robert and the audience about the meaning behind each work. In response Robert combined facts and insights from climate science with stories from his working life visiting communities across the world including remote Indigenous Australia, Ethiopia and Papua New Guinea.

¹ How can the arts help to find new ways to look at climate change and find solutions? A conversation between Drs Sally Blake and Robert Glasser, hosted by the Women's Climate Congress, Canberra, October 2020.



Sally Blake, *Eucalyptus Mantle and Broken Mantle*, 2017. Eucalyptus-dyed wool, silk and linen on paper. 60 x 110 cm each

We talked about the recent bushfire season, the unravelling of nature's patterning, of the wisdom in ancient European regeneration mythology, nature's mysteries and beauty, political inaction, the burden held by the scientists, activists and others, of the great interconnected whole. And we also talked about hope and the many things that are happening now that may ensure a better future.

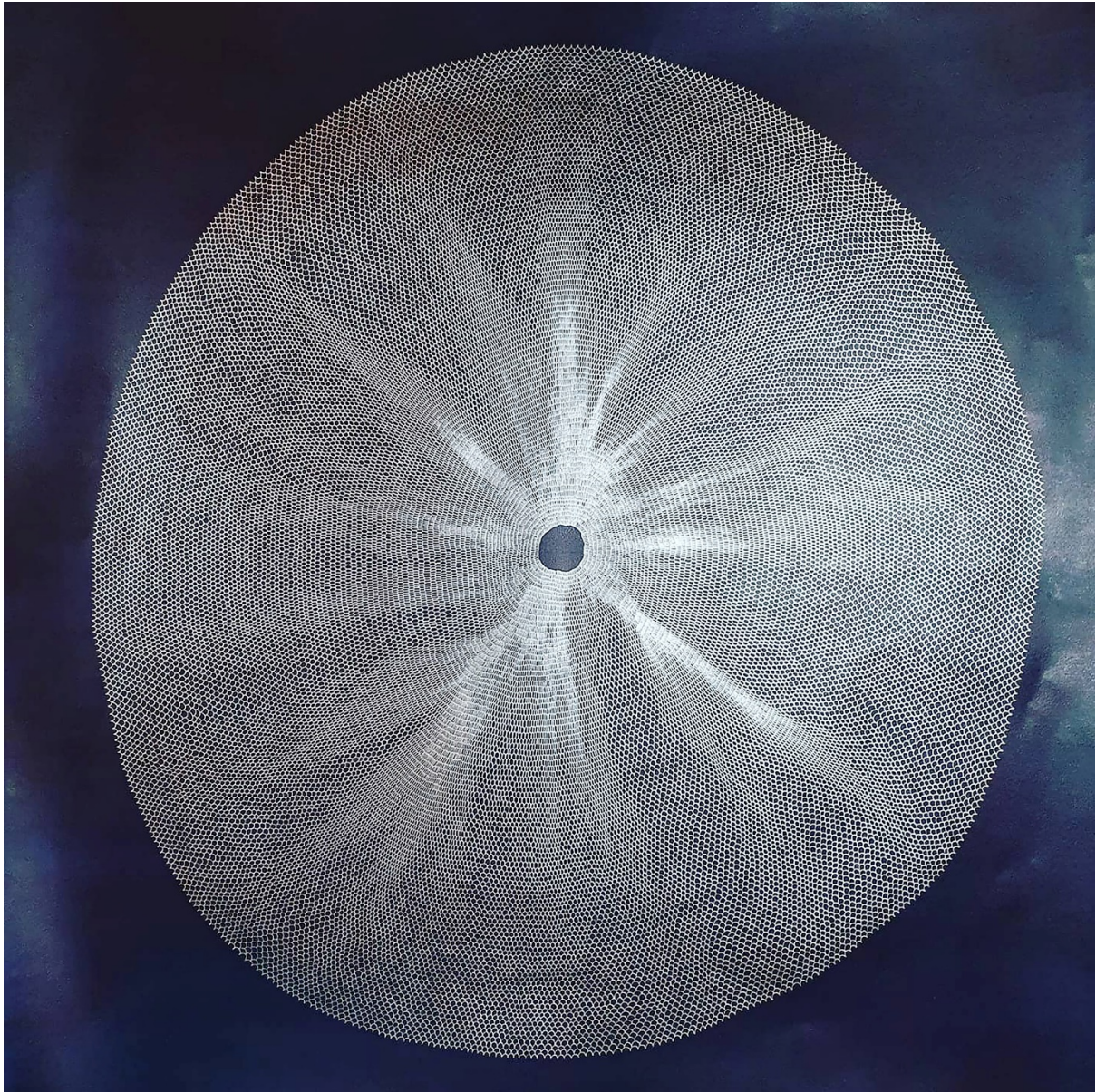
The audience responded positively to the conversation. By combining art and science and thinking and feeling we were able to create a more wholistic view about climate science and the impacts it has upon individuals, society and the natural world. A few points really stood out for me. As Robert told stories, he is a wonderful storyteller, the audience was completely engaged. He noticed that telling the stories was relevant and

absorbed people's attention more fully than facts alone. Stories are a way of taking people along with you, of taking them on a journey they will remember. In a similar way the artworks provoked and encouraged our conversation.



Sally Blake, *Despair* (detail), 2020. Pencil on paper. 180 x 70 cm

We talked between us and with the audience about empathy. I had drawn *Despair* as I thought about the work that people like Robert do, the quiet dignity I observe in him and others who have seen great suffering. They face the scientific reality while those with power fail to act. Empathy and trust emerged from the audience's questions and conversations as essential ingredients if we are to find a way forward.



Sally Blake, *The Sacred Thought*, 2020. Ink and pen on paper, 108 x 108 cm

We ended the conversation by responding to *The Sacred Thought*. About this work I have written, 'the idea that all life is held and connected within a vast, entangling mesh feels sacred to me. To be held in something infinite, to be an infinitesimally small part of the whole feels sacred to me. The centre remains open, alive with infinite possibility.' In response Robert talked about some of the many positive things that are happening to avert the worst effects of climate change.

Our little pre-schoolers are now 26. Rhiannon, Robert's daughter has a degree in visual arts and is now completing a master's degree in art therapy. My daughter Kiara works as an emergency nurse and has started a second degree in psychology. Both love the natural world and care deeply about their fellow humans and their suffering. Robert is

also a mentor for my son Josh whose whole working life has been devoted to action on climate change.

Dr Sally Blake is a Canberra-based visual artist. In her contemporary drawings and textiles, cyclic patterning and the interconnected whole are explored, as well as the consequences of their undoing. She feels deeply about disconnections in human understanding of the natural world which result in environmental crises. In turn she contemplates the effect of the climate crisis upon humans, examining art's purposeful role in bringing attention to, and examining significant environmental and social issues. She was previously a paediatric nurse and midwife and was a founding committee member of Indigo Foundation, a community development organisation.

Sally's website- www.sallyblake.com

Dr Robert Glasser has over 30 years of experience as a practitioner, advocate and policymaker in the areas of climate change, sustainable development and disaster response. He is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI). He was previously the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Head of the United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and Secretary General of CARE International. He has published on several topics, including climate change and disaster risk, peace and conflict, and humanitarian and development policy.

Further details of Roberts extensive international career are here:

<https://www.aspi.org.au/bio/robert-glasser>