

Natural Detection

An exhibition giving fallen branches new life.



Ross Potter. Photography: Jessica Wyld



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BROADSHEET

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Artist Ross Potter wakes up at 3am to arrive at his studio at PS Art Space early. There's a heater and a blanket waiting. He's working on a six-metre-long sketch that covers the length of one of the walls, so he needs to be comfortable.

People don't usually pay much attention to twigs, but with Potter's photographic precision a twig is amplified to the size of a large branch. You can't help but move closer to inspect its details.

After years of sketching with graphite, the Fremantle-based artist views the world in textures, shapes and contrasts of black and white. His practice strikes a balance between precision and creative flow.

"It's all about observation. If you look at something long enough you'll see something different," says Potter. "I try to mimic characteristics, but the artistic chaos is in how you capture a subject's essence."

Originally from Brisbane, Potter arrived in Perth in 2007. He fell hard for Fremantle's heritage buildings and soon became known for his architectural illustrations. Since his first solo exhibition, *The Free Antiques Campaign* in 2012, Potter's work has been of a much smaller scale.

The large-scale twig sketch, the star of Potter's coming exhibition, *WOOD*, was inspired by a present from his two-year-old nephew.

"My nephew posted me this little stick because he felt it was gift-worthy," says Potter. "Then everything just fit. For adults to appreciate the stick as my nephew did, it needed to be bigger."

Potter has no idea how he'll get this drawing from his studio to the exhibition space downstairs. Sourcing the paper proved difficult. He can't find anyone willing to frame it. Figuring out how to actually draw the twig comfortably was challenging. But difficulties like this are a sign of how his practice has grown.

"My career before PSAS was a sad little man in the lounge room that had no social interaction," says Potter. "Planting myself into a community of influential artists like Tom Mueller – artists who know how to make projects happen – I started thinking larger scale."

Just as he's fascinated by the changing nature of Fremantle's buildings, Potter is equally interested in exploring the way decay changes the texture of wood.

"I guess this is a complement to the graphite," he says. "When you draw something in a cold, gritty medium it becomes frozen in its last moment."

Working on the exhibition has also changed Potter's own attitudes with the environment.

"If I'm going to make a statement about the natural world, I need to be more sustainable," he says. "I've been sticking my pencils together so I can keep using the nubs, and I haven't bought new timbers to make my backing boards. I'm not trying to make a big statement, but I want to see how much I can re-use."

Potter has always wanted to tell stories, and believes his subjects have their own

tale to tell. While the pieces in *WOOD* reference the destruction of the natural world, Potter wants his take-home message to be a positive one.

“There are little things we can appreciate,” he says. “We just have to look.”

WOOD opens at PS Art Space, 22 Pakenham Street, Fremantle on October 16 and runs until October 30. The exhibition runs Tuesday to Saturday from 11am–4pm.