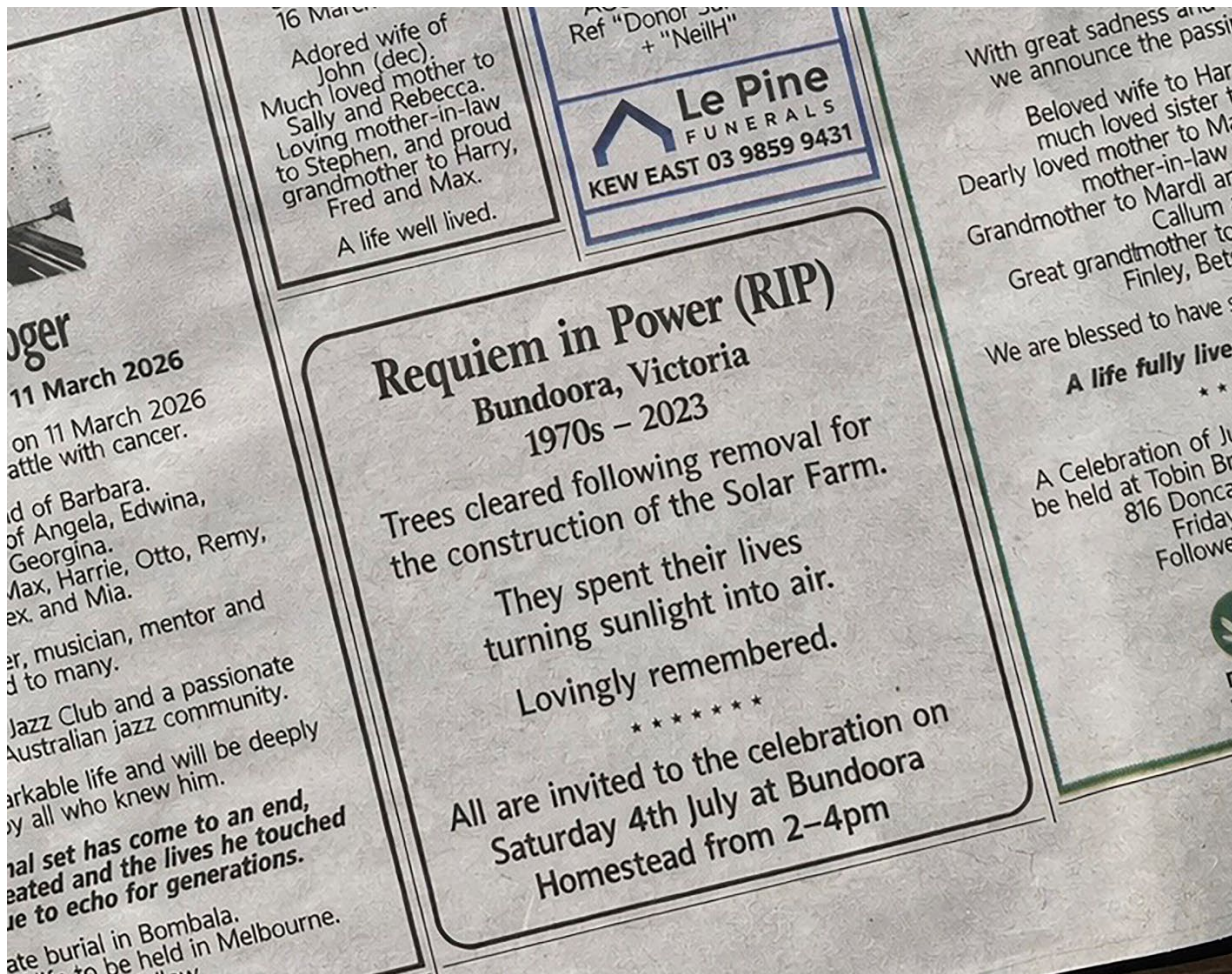


Can't see the forest for the trees



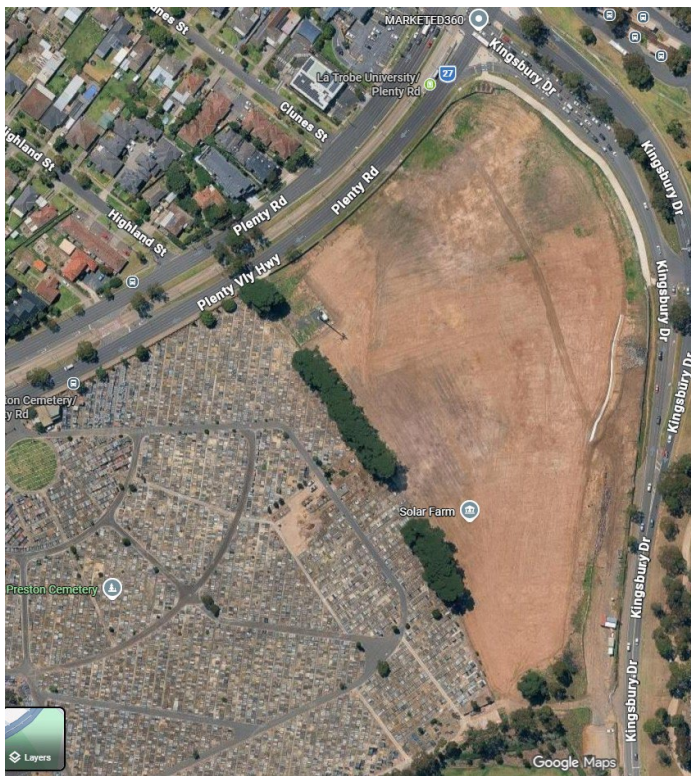
Swift Parrots, Gang-gang Cockatoos, Grey-headed Flying-foxes, Matted Flax Lillies (*Dianella amoena*).

These all find their home on La Trobe University's Bundoora campus, and its surrounds. You might imagine one of the feathers contained within the test tubes of Gabrielle Skye Nehrybecki and Olive Guardiani's *Requiem in Power (RIP)* 2026. The feathers become stagnant, removed, out of context when their environment is erased from the picture.



While driving down Plenty Road one day, I noticed the forest on the corner of Plenty Road and Kingbury Drive was completely gone. A gaping sky where the cockatoos had feasted just days earlier. Will they adapt? Will they move across the road and down the way? Will the native bees that pollinated the *Dianella amoena* find other plants to thrive on? Will the "Home of the Matildas" still see Sam Kerr with a butterfly gently balanced on her boot? Across the road, another tree taken but by natural means, etched with the words "I saw a scar tree in the Tarkine but didn't take a photo of it" – an artwork once made by Steven Rhall and Fergus Binns, now in the Darebin Art Collection as a photograph. The tree is faded though faint traces of the words still exist. It echoes these losses, these absences, the evolutions over deep time.

This exhibition, *Requiem in Power* was developed in response to the destruction of the trees on that corner to make way for a solar farm in a grand 'greening' gesture. The new "Solar Farm" sits right next to Preston Cemetery, where decades old cadavers have fertilized the soil, the run-off likely reaching the space where the trees used to sit.



What you hear is the attenuated buzz of a solar battery turned into a human-like hymn, leering towards our new futures. Created by composer and collaborator Louis Virgil Smith, *Breathing Capacitator* buzzes machine-like and sanitised, giving the surrounds an ominous feeling, using system noises to create a human-like, breathing, form.

Olive's cobalt sculptures, *Breath of the Grid*, both mimic the verticality of a tree, but additionally, the insulation used to contain electrical cables. They stand still and staunch, yet vibrate towards you. They repeat themselves in the space, mimicking the layout of a cemetery or solar farm, trying ever so hard to remain perfectly symmetrical, dislocated from the grounds on which they stand. The longer you look at them, the more they morph, making illegible the histories and contexts in which they

exist.

A fragmented forest of insulators sit within a shared logic of spacing and separation across the neighbouring sites. Panels and graves repeat into a quiet grid across the field, steady and indifferent. This gridding becomes a suspended reading of land and infrastructure, where histories are only partially legible, slipping beneath signal, breath, and surface variation, remaining unresolved and continually forming.

The plaque you see (simply titled *Plaque*) takes its language from the Cemetery next door. A memorial for the trees. The artists worked with a local monument maker to create a permanent plaque that translates the absence of the trees. It gives the co-ordinates of the farm and gently says "In Loving Memory of the trees once rooted here". The inscription N I is doubly dislocated from its original context, a remnant of its former use, possibly as a grace-stone, and equally as possible, as part of a colonial building.

The drawings framed by the large industrial aluminium sheets are made in collaboration with Nina Nervegna and Felic Gardner-Davis. The four drawings depict four topographical states of the site; when the trees and associated biodiversity thrived, when the land was cleared, when the solar panels were installed, and into the future, when a new building will dominate the space. The work is cut to the size of a solar panel.

The nexus of the exhibition sits halo-like, suspended just above a person's head. As you look up, you notice the feathers, the tree sap, charcoal, bees, beeswax, and *Coprinus comatus* (Shaggy ink cap) juice contained within glass beakers. These beakers are made with the same soda glass used in solar panels. The scale translates the size of a tree trunk found at the La Trobe solar farm, holding within it both industrial exactness, and the ecological fragments that resist this industrial form. You walk around it, you want to touch it, but it's not there. It's canonised; memorialised, revered, and feint.

May the Swift Parrot live.