

MARION WASSENAAR AND JANICE LORD,  
WITH AN APPENDIX BY DAVE ALLEN<sup>1</sup>

## Glistens with Nectar

a landscape of small pineapples  
in the cold Southern ocean!

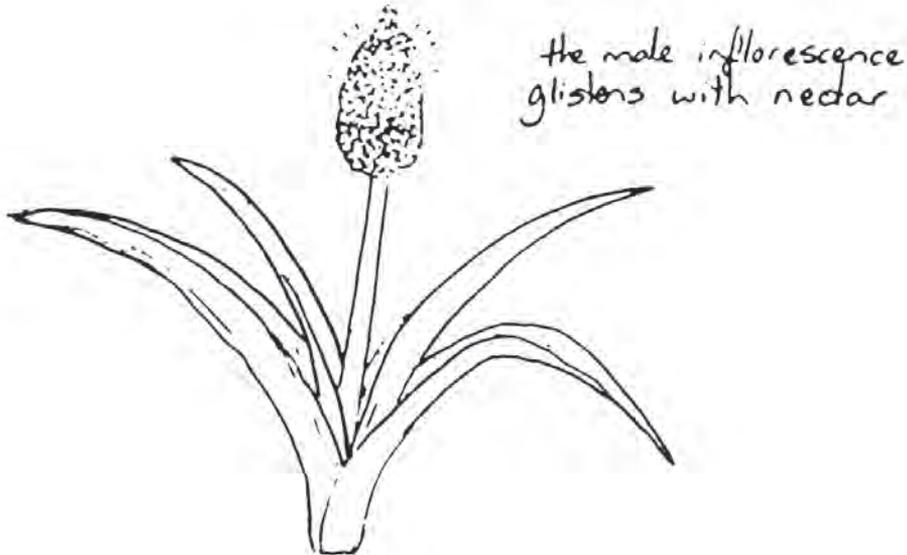
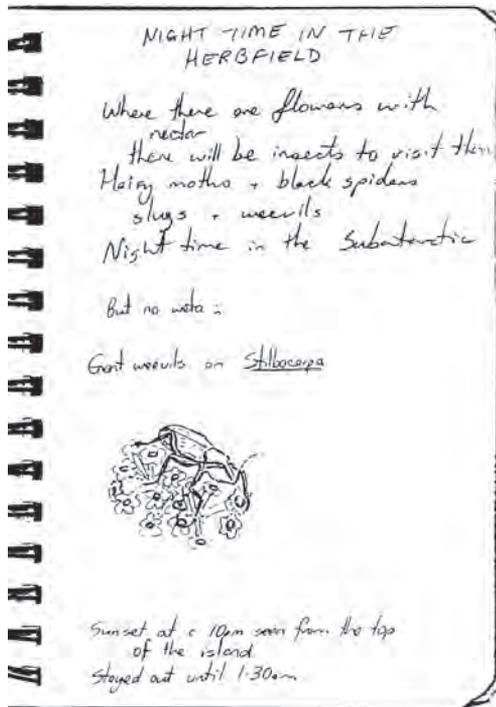


Figure 1. Sketch and excerpt from Janice Lord's Enderby Island expedition diary.

“To glisten with nectar”—to allude to the title of the artists’ book associated with this project—conjures up an image of moisture-laden, seductive abundance, like a carpet of winter snow shimmering in sunlight. However, it is not sunlight that informs this project, but the hours of darkness on the subantarctic islands. Plant evolutionary biologist Janice Lord studies the insects that visit the megaherbs endemic to this region during the night and investigates their prospects as plant pollinators.<sup>2</sup> Megaherbs, with their large leaves and brightly coloured flowers, are a group of herbaceous perennial wildflowers that have adapted to survive the extreme weather conditions on the islands. An insect of particular interest to Lord is the nocturnal Campbell Island wētā, *Notoplectron campbellensis*, belonging to the orthopteran family Rhaphidophoridae that includes the cave wētā, an insect endemic to New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

While it is generally understood that insects are attracted to plants because of their colour, as these insects come out at night the attraction is possibly related to heat. Lord's research presented the artists with a challenge through which to question the dominance of the visual—the opportunity to look beyond what the eye can see, to experience art through the sense of touch.

Early in the project, Lord embarked on an expedition to Enderby Island in the subantarctic island archipelago, armed, at the artists' request, with a diary for notes and observations. To our surprise, the diary was returned complete with whimsical sketches and delightfully descriptive, poetic notes and analogies relating to her daily activities on the trip.



Lord's diary is a visual response to her experiences on Enderby, described through her sense of sight, often using colour as if tailored to the requirements of the visual artist. This drew attention to how much light is taken for granted and the important role of light and vision in the use of modern technologies. This in turn led the artists to consider producing a tangible work that did not rely on sight to experience it. This approach, the artists felt, would reflect Lord's research into the behaviours of the creatures she encountered and their tactile, frottage-like contact with plant life in the not-so-dead of night. They decided to produce an artist book publication that would include embossed text duplicated in Braille that would enable the audience to "read" the book through physical contact. The artists gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dave Allen and Paula Waby from Blind-Sight for the Braille production involved and the opportunity to experience the technologies involved in communication with the blind (see appendix).

Figure 2. Sketch and excerpt from Janice Lord's Enderby Island expedition diary.

The text of the book comprises a selection of descriptive terms drawn from Lord's academic journal article on the expedition,<sup>4</sup> modified to form Dada poetry:

floral arising umbels

bulge adult anonymous

autonomous

exposed mating

pre-dawn hour

anonymous<sup>5</sup>

Dada is an artistic and literary avant-garde movement that began in 1916 in Zürich, Switzerland. It arose amid the brutality of the First World War as a protest against a senseless conflict. Dada art, including poetry, embraces all things nonsensical, experimental and surreal. An online Dada poetry generator randomly created the sampling of Dada poems used in the artist book. These poems appear in both Braille and embossed text in the publication, along with a drawing from Lord's diary (Figure 3) and an illustration of an elephant as interpreted by our blind colleague, Paula Waby. The dual use of the lower case orthography of the English alphabet and the Braille text allows the content to be comprehended by both sighted and non-sighted people. Lower case type was also chosen to reduce the information required in each line of text for the translation into Braille.



Figure 3. Sketch from Janice Lord's Enderby Island expedition diary.

The work becomes “fertile” through its intertwining relationships with the outdoor environment and the natural world. The text is random yet interconnected and, like the circular rhythms of nature, can be read as a type of rhizome.<sup>6</sup> This kind of connectivity is discussed by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “The rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things. The rhizome is alliance, has no foundation and nullifies beginnings and endings. Any point can be connected to another and there are multiple, non-hierarchical entryways.”<sup>7</sup>

As a botanical term, “rhizome” implies horizontal and trans-species connections, whereas, in contrast, the arborescent model involves vertical and linear connections. Examples of rhizomatous plants are couch and the common coastal marram grass. The rhizomes on marram grass allow it to survive harsh, windswept coastal conditions and prevent erosion. This art and science collaboration—like the tenacious but not necessarily rhizomatous megaherbs of the Subantarctic islands—presents a relationship where the outcome is not seen as finite, but rather as a perpetual resource with unlimited potential to explore the unknown world around us. Carl Jung used the term rhizome to emphasise the invisible and underground nature of life:

Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. The part that appears above the ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away—an ephemeral apparition. When we think of the unending growth and decay of life and civilizations, we cannot escape the impression of absolute nullity. Yet I have never lost the sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains.<sup>8</sup>

In the opening programme in Paris for the UNESCO International Year of Light 2015, as part of the theme Light for Humanity and Culture, physicist and optics researcher Alesandro Farini gave a presentation entitled “Light, Vision and Art: an Indivisible Relationship.”<sup>9</sup> In it he quotes from Robert Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities*: “A man who wants the truth becomes a scientist, a man who wants to give free play to his subjectivity will become a writer, but what should a man do who wants something in between?” “Do something in between,” Farini responds, disputing Musil's dichotomy. “Doing science is not without free play...Doing art is not without truth. A scientist can appreciate art,

but can also see science in art; an artist can appreciate science, but can also see art in science.”

The real value of the act of collaboration stems from the shared knowledge and experience that sparks new ideas and offers unexpected challenges and directions. As an artist, coming to the partnership with an open mind is critical for generating new perspectives and concepts in response to scientific research. I believe that the engagement of the artists with Janice Lord, Dave Allen and Paula Waby—and indeed for all the artists and scientists involved in the project—and their participation in the Art and Light Exhibition is proof that this collaboration has achieved Farini’s aim—something in between!



Figure 4. *Glistens with Nectar*, artists’ book publication (2015), 22 pages, cloth-bound, embossing and Braille text.

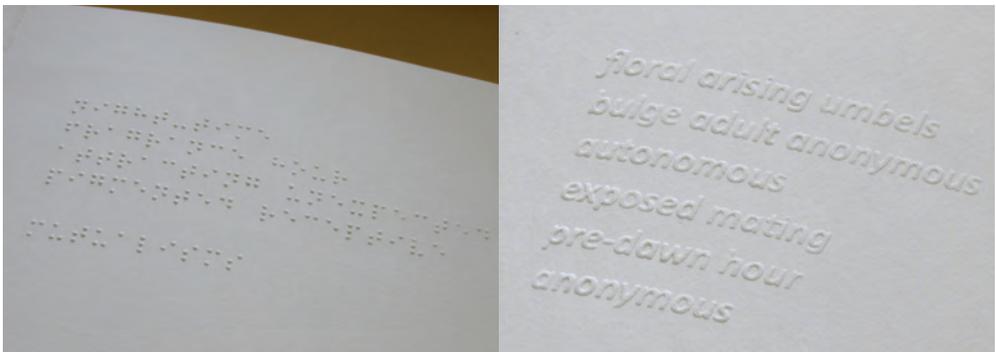


Figure 5. Pages from *Glistens with Nectar* showing one Dada poem in braille and one showing a Dada poem in embossed text.

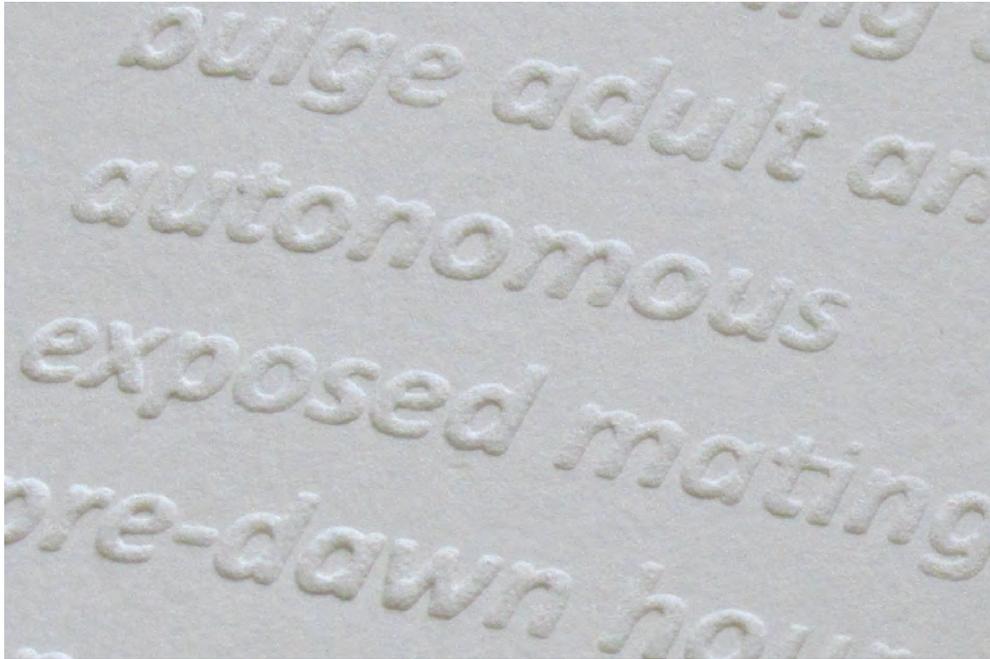


Figure 6. Book detail from *Glistens with Nectar* showing the raised surface of the embossed text.

APPENDIX:  
THE PROCESS OF INCLUDING BRAILLE TEXT IN THE PROJECT

**Dave Allen**

The Braille text included in the artist book was embossed using a 25-year-old Juliet classic embosser manufactured by Enabling Technologies, driven by a PC using the Duxbury Braille translation software produced by Duxbury Systems.

The actual production time was quite short, requiring only a few seconds per page, but this was only achieved after a lot of preparatory work had been completed.

We elected to produce the text in uncontracted Braille, as the passages of material were short, requiring only half a dozen lines each. Uncontracted Braille is most commonly used and accessible to all Braille readers. (Contracted Braille, on the other hand, can be compared to shorthand or likened to txt language.)

Along with consideration of the amount of space required for the text, trials of various paper types were carried out. We found that we would need to use an embosser that could accommodate suitable paper with a width of 15 inches (381 mm). Following a review of embosser hardware, it became clear that none of the embossers on the market could accommodate our requirements. Fortunately, Blind-Sight still uses an embosser that is no longer manufactured and that could accommodate the requirements for the project.

Finally, we carried out trials to ascertain where the Braille text would be positioned on each page. The results were used to inform the Duxbury Braille translation software.

## CONTRIBUTORS' PROFILES

**Marion Wassenaar** holds an MFA from the Dunedin School of Art. She specialises in print practices, with a research interest that focuses on the collision between humans and their environment, either through social justice or ecological concerns. She currently lectures in the Print Studio at the Dunedin School of Art.

**Dr Janice Lord** is a senior lecturer in the Botany Department at Otago University. She is a plant evolutionary biologist with interests in plant reproductive strategies and traditional uses of plants by Māori.

**David Allen** holds an Amateur Extra Class license from the US Federal Communications Commission and has over 20 years' experience teaching blind people how to use their computers, mobile phones and electronic notetakers. He has been blind since early childhood and worked for a number of blindness organisations and consumer groups before launching *Blind-Sight* with **Paula Waby** in 2013.

1. A collaboration between scientist Janice Lord, artists Kiri Mitchell and Marion Wassenaar, together with Dave Allen and Paula Waby from *Blind-Sight* for the Art and Light Exhibition, H.D. Skinner Annex, Otago Museum, Dunedin, 15-30 August 2015.
2. J.M. Lord, L. Huggins, L.M. Little and V.R. Tomlinson, "Floral Biology and Flower Visitors on Subantarctic Campbell Island," *New Zealand Journal of Botany*, 51:3 (2013), 168-80.
3. See <http://www.nhc.net.nz/index/insects-new-zealand/weta/weta.htm>. [23 October, 2015]
4. Lord, et al: 2013.
5. Dada poem generated by the Dada Poem Generator, <http://www.poemofquotes.com/tools/dada.php>.
6. Rhizome. Noun, *Botany*. 1. a rootlike subterranean stem, commonly horizontal in position, that usually produces roots below and sends up shoots progressively from the upper surface, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rhizome>. [14 September, 2015]
7. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988) 23.
8. C.G. Jung, "Prologue," *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Collins, 1967) 18.
9. Alesandro Farini, "Light, Vision and Art: an Indivisible Relationship," a presentation delivered during the opening ceremony of the International Year of Light 2015, 19-20 January 2015, at UNESCO HQ in Paris. See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bK9oka\\_Rlvs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bK9oka_Rlvs). [14 September, 2015]